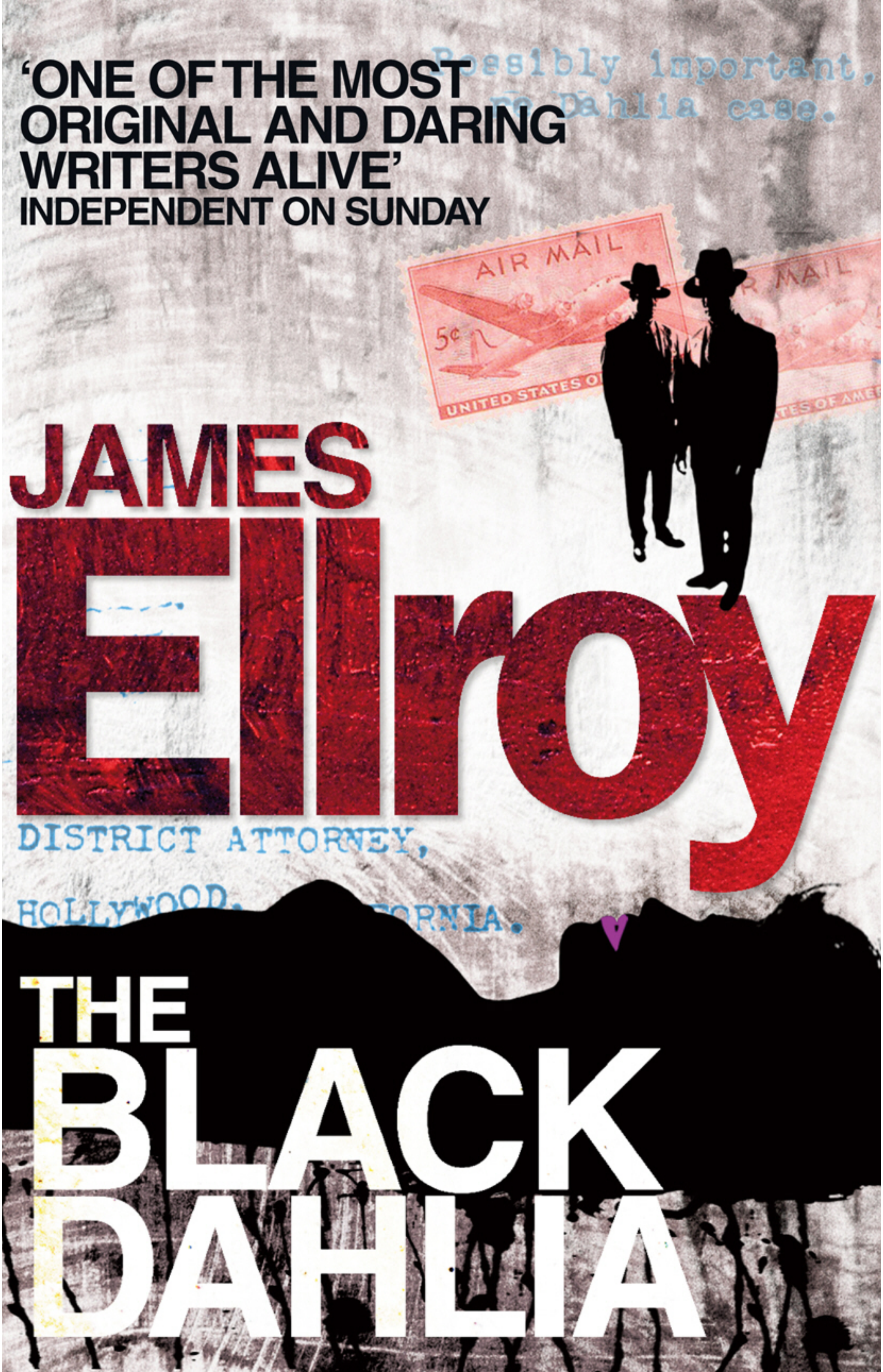
'ONE OF THE MOST ORIGINAL AND DARING WRITERS ALIVE'
INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY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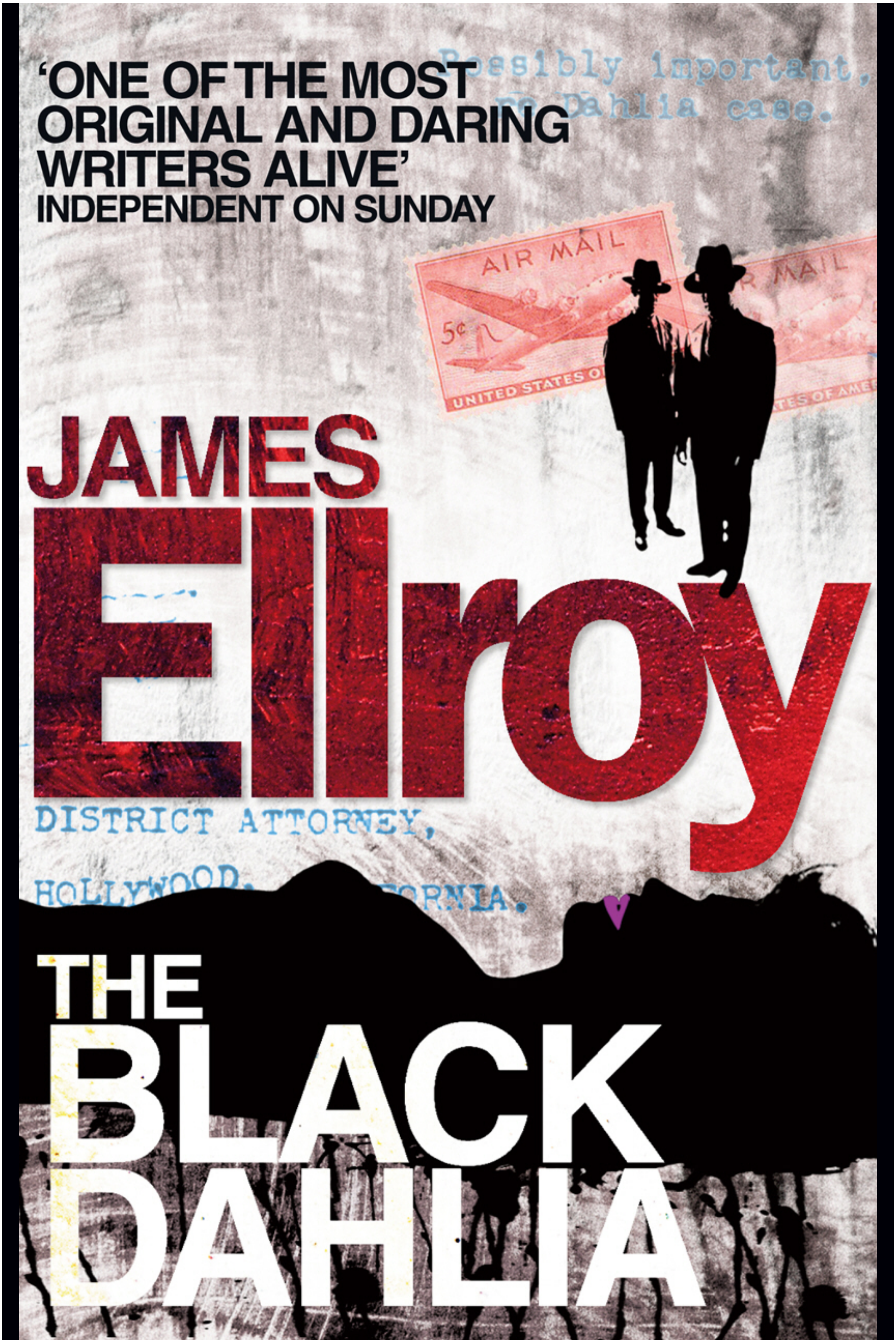
HOLLYWOOD, ... FORNIA.

JAMES
Ellroy

THE BLACK DAHLIA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About the Book

Los Angeles, 15th January 1947: a beautiful young woman walked into the night and met her horrific destiny.

Five days later, her tortured body was found drained of blood and cut in half. The newspapers called her 'The Black Dahlia'. Two cops are caught up in the investigation and embark on a hellish journey that takes them to the core of the dead girl's twisted life.

About the Author

James Ellroy was born in Los Angeles in 1948. He is the author of the acclaimed ‘LA Quartet’: *The Black Dahlia, The Big Nowhere, LA Confidential* and *White Jazz*. His most recent novel, *Blood’s a Rover*, completes the magisterial ‘Underworld USA Trilogy’ – the first two volumes of which (*American Tabloid and The Cold Six Thousand*) were both *Sunday Times* bestsellers.

ALSO BY JAMES ELLROY

THE UNDERWORLD U.S.A. TRILOGY

American Tabloid
The Cold Six Thousand
Blood's a Rover

THE L.A. QUARTET

The Black Dahlia
The Big Nowhere
L.A. Confidential
White Jazz

MEMOIR

My Dark Places
The Hilliker Curse

SHORT STORIES

Hollywood Nocturnes

JOURNALISM/SHORT FICTION

Crime Wave
Destination: Morgue!

EARLY NOVELS

Brown's Requiem
Clandestine
Blood on the Moon
Because the Night
Suicide Hill
Killer on the Road

The Black Dahlia

JAMES ELLROY

WINDMILL BOOKS

To
Geneva Hilliker Ellroy
1915–1958

Mother:
Twenty-nine Years Later,
This Valediction in Blood

Now I fold you down, my drunkard, my navigator,
My first lost keeper, to love or look at later.

—Anne Sexton

Prologue

I never knew her in life. She exists for me through others, in evidence of the ways her death drove them. Working backward, seeking only facts, I reconstructed her as a sad little girl and a whore, at best a could-have-been – a tag that might equally apply to me. I wish I could have granted her an anonymous end, relegated her to a few terse words on a homicide dick's summary report, carbon to the coroner's office, more paperwork to take her to potter's field. The only thing wrong with the wish is that she wouldn't have wanted it that way. As brutal as the facts were, she would have wanted all of them known. And since I owe her a great deal and am the only one who does know the entire story, I have undertaken the writing of this memoir.

But before the Dahlia there was the partnership, and before that there was the war and military regulations and maneuvers at Central Division, reminding us that cops were also soldiers, even though we were a whole lot less popular than the ones battling the Germans and Japs. After duty every day, patrolmen were subjected to participation in air raid drills, blackout drills and fire evacuation drills that had us standing at attention on Los Angeles Street, hoping for a Messerschmitt attack to make us feel less like fools. Daywatch roll call featured alphabetical formations, and shortly after graduating the Academy in August of '42, that was where I met Lee.

I already knew him by reputation, and had our respective records down pat: Lee Blanchard, 43–4–2 as a heavyweight, formerly a regular attraction at the Hollywood Legion Stadium; and me: Bucky Bleichert, light-heavy, 36–0–0, once ranked tenth by *Ring* magazine, probably because Nat Fleisher was amused by the way I taunted opponents with my big buck teeth. The statistics didn't tell the whole story, though. Blanchard hit hard, taking six to give one, a classic headhunter; I danced and counterpunched and hooked to the liver, always keeping my guard up, afraid that catching too many head shots would ruin my looks worse than my teeth already had. Stylewise, Lee and I were like oil and water, and every time our shoulders brushed at roll call, I would wonder: who would win?

For close to a year we measured each other. We never talked boxing or police work, limiting our conversation to a few words about the weather. Physically, we looked as antithetical as two big men could: Blanchard was blond and ruddy, six feet tall and huge in the chest and shoulders, with stunted bowlegs and the beginning of a hard, distended gut; I was pale and dark-haired, all lanky muscularity at 6 foot 3. Who would win?

I finally quit trying to predict a winner. But other cops had taken up the question, and during that first year at Central I heard dozens of opinions: Blanchard by early KO; Bleichert by decision; Blanchard stopped/stopping on cuts – everything but Bleichert by knockout.

When I was out of eye shot, I heard whispers of our non-ring stories: Lee coming on the LAPD, assured of rapid promotion for fighting private smokers attended by the high brass and their political buddies, cracking the Boulevard-Citizens bank heist back in '39 and falling in love with one of the heisters' girlfriends, blowing a certain transfer to the Detective Bureau when the skirt moved in with him – *in violation of departmental regs on shack jobs* – and begged him to quit boxing. The Blanchard rumors hit me like little feint-jabs, and I wondered how true they were. The bits of my own story felt like body blows, because they were 100 percent straight dope:

Dwight Bleichert joining the Department in flight from tougher main events, threatened with expulsion from the Academy when his father's German-American Bund membership came to light, pressured into snitching the Japanese guys he grew up with to the Alien Squad in order to secure his LAPD appointment. Not asked to fight smokers, because he wasn't a knockout puncher.

Blanchard and Bleichert: a hero and a snitch.

Remembering Sam Murakami and Hideo Ashida manacled en route to Manzanar made it easy to simplify the two of us – at first. Then we went into action side by side, and my early notions about Lee – and myself – went blooey.

It was early June of '43. The week before, sailors had brawled with zoot suit wearing Mexicans at the Lick Pier in Venice. Rumor had it that one of the gobs lost an eye. Skirmishing broke out inland: navy personnel from the Chavez Ravine naval base versus pachucos in Alpine and Palo Verde. Word hit the papers that the zooters were packing Nazi regalia along with their switchblades, and hundreds of in-uniform soldiers, sailors and marines descended on downtown LA, armed with two-by-fours and baseball bats. An equal number of pachucos were supposed to be forming by the Brew 102 Brewery in Boyle Heights, supplied with similar weaponry. Every Central Division patrolman was called in to duty, then issued a World War I tin hat and an oversize billy club known as a nigger knocker.

At dusk, we were driven to the battleground in personnel carriers borrowed from the army, and given one order: restore order. Our service revolvers had been taken from us at the station; the brass did not want .38's falling into the hands of reet pleat, stuff cuff, drape shape, Argentine ducktail Mexican gangsters. When I jumped out of the carrier at Evergreen and Wabash holding only a three-pound stick with a friction-taped handle, I got ten times as frightened as I had ever been in the ring, and not because chaos was coming down from all sides.

I was terrified because the good guys were really the bad guys.

Sailors were kicking in windows all along Evergreen; marines in dress blues were systematically smashing streetlights, giving themselves more and more darkness to work in. Eschewing inter-service rivalry, soldiers and jarheads overturned cars parked in front of a bodega while navy youths in skivvies and white bell-bottoms truncheoned the shit out of an outnumbered bunch of zooters on the sidewalk next door. At the periphery of the action I could see knots of my fellow officers hobnobbing with Shore Patrol goons and MPs.

I don't know how long I stood there, numbed, wondering what to do. Finally I looked down Wabash toward 1st Street, saw small houses, trees and no pachucos, cops or blood-hungry GIs. Before I knew what I was doing, I ran there full speed. I would have kept running until I dropped, but a high-pitched laugh issuing from a front porch stopped me dead.

I walked toward the sound. A high-pitched voice called out, 'You're the second young copper to take a powder from the commotion. I don't blame you. Kinda hard to tell who to put the cuffs on, ain't it?'

I stood on the porch and looked at the old man. He said, 'Radio says cabdrivers been makin' runs to the USO up in Hollywood, then bringin' the sailor boys down here. KFI called it a naval assault, been playin' "Anchors Aweigh" every hour on the half hour. I saw some gyrenes down the street. You think this is what you call an amphibious attack?'

'I don't know what it is, but I'm going back.'

'You ain't the only one turned tail, you know. 'Nuther big fella came runnin' this way pronto.'

Pops was starting to look like a wily version of my father.

'There's some pachucos who need their order restored.'

'Think it's that simple, laddy?'

'I'll make it that simple.'

The old man cackled with delight. I stepped off the porch and headed back to duty, tapping the knocker against my leg. The streetlights were now all dead; it was almost impossible to distinguish zooters from GIs. Knowing that gave me an easy way out of my dilemma, and I got ready to charge. Then I heard '*Bleichert!*' Behind me, and knew who the other runner had been.

I ran back. There was Lee Blanchard. 'The Southland's good but not great white hope,' facing down three marines in dress blues and a pachuco in a full-drape zoot suit. He had them cornered in the center walkway of a ratty bungalow court and was holding them off with parries from his nigger knocker. The jarheads were taking roundhouse swipes at him with their two-by-fours, missing as Blanchard moved sideways and back and forth on the balls of his feet. The pachuco fondled the religious medals around his neck, looking bewildered.

'Bleichert code three!'

I waded in, jabbing with my stick, the weapon hitting shiny brass buttons and campaign ribbons. I caught clumsy truncheon blows on my arms and shoulders and pressed forward so the marines would be denied swinging room. It was like being in a clinch with an octopus, and no referee or three-minute bell, and on instinct I dropped my baton, lowered my head and started winging body punches, making contact with soft gabardine mid-sections. Then I heard, 'Bleichert step back!'

I did, and there was Lee Blanchard, the nigger knocker held high above his head. The marines, dazed, froze; the club descended: once, twice, three times, clean shots to the shoulders. When the trio was reduced to a dress blue rubble heap, Blanchard said, 'To the halls of Tripoli, shitbirds,' and turned to the pachuco. 'Hola, Tomas.'

I shook my head and stretched. My arms and back ached; my right knuckles throbbed. Blanchard was cuffing the zooter, and all I could think to say was, 'What was that all about?'

Blanchard smiled. 'Forgive my bad manners. Officer Bucky Bleichert, may I present Señor Tomas Dos Santos, the subject of an all-points fugitive warrant for manslaughter committed during the commission of a Class B Felony. Tomas snatched a purse off a hairbag on 6th and Alvarado, she keeled of a heart attack and croaked, Tomas dropped the purse, ran like hell. Left a big fat juicy set of prints on the purse, eyeball witnesses to boot.' Blanchard nudged the man. 'Habla Ingles, Tomas?'

Dos Santos shook his head no; Blanchard shook his head sadly. 'He's dead meat. Manslaughter Two's a gas chamber jolt for spics. Hepcat here's about six weeks away from the Big Adios.'

I heard shots coming from the direction of Evergreen and Wabash. Standing on my toes, I saw flames shooting out of a row of broken windows, crackling into blue and white flak when they hit streetcar wires and phone lines. I looked down at the marines, and one of them gave me the finger. I said, 'I hope those guys didn't get your badge number.'

'Fuck them sideways if they did.'

I pointed to a clump of palm trees igniting into fireballs. 'We'll never be able to get him booked tonight. You ran down here to roust them? You thought—'

Blanchard silenced me with a playful jab that stopped just short of my badge. 'I ran down here because I knew there wasn't a goddamn thing I could do about restoring order, and if I just stood around I might have gotten killed. Sound familiar?'

I laughed. 'Yeah. Then you—'

'Then I saw the shitbirds chasing hepcat, who looked suspiciously like the subject of felony warrant number four eleven dash forty-three. They cornered me here, and I saw you walking back looking to get hurt, so I thought I'd let you get hurt for a reason. Sound reasonable?'

'It worked.'

Two of the marines had managed to get to their feet, and were helping the other one up. When they started for the sidewalk three abreast, Tomas Dos Santos sent a hard right foot at the biggest of the three asses. The fat PFC it belonged to turned to face his attacker; I stepped forward. Surrendering their East LA campaign, the three hobbled out to the street, gunshots and flaming palm trees. Blanchard ruffled Dos Santos' hair. 'You cute little shit, you're a dead man. Come on, Bleichert, let's find a place to sit this thing out.'

We found a house with a stack of daily papers on the porch a few blocks away and broke in. There were two fifths of Cutty Sark in the kitchen cupboard, and Blanchard switched the cuffs from Dos Santos' wrists to his ankles so he could have his hands free to booze. By the time I made ham sandwiches and highballs, the pachuco had killed half the jug and was belting 'Cielito Lindo' and a Mex rendition of 'Chattanooga Choo Choo.' An hour later the bottle was dead and Tomas was passed out. I lifted him onto the couch and threw a quilt over him, and Blanchard said, 'He's my ninth hard felon for 1943. He'll be sucking gas inside of six weeks, and I'll be working Northeast or Central Warrants inside of three years.'

His certainty rankled me. 'Ixnay. You're too young, you haven't made sergeant, you're shacking with a woman, you lost your high brass buddies when you quit fighting smokers and you haven't done a plains-clothes tour. You—'

I stopped when Blanchard grinned, then walked to the living room window and looked out. 'Fires over on Michigan and Soto. Pretty.'

'Pretty?'

'Yeah, pretty. You know a lot about me, Bleichert.'

'People talk about you.'

'They talk about you, too.'

'What do they say?'

'That your old man's some sort of Nazi drool case. That you ratted off your best friend to the feds to get on the Department. That you padded your record fighting built-up middle-weights.'

The words hung in the air like a three-count indictment. 'Is that it?'

Blanchard turned to face me. 'No. They say you never chase cooze and they say you think you can take me.'

I took the challenge. 'All those things are true.'

'Yeah? So was what you heard about me. Except I'm on the Sergeants List, I'm transferring to Highland Park Vice in August and there's a Jewboy Deputy DA who wets his pants for boxers. He's promised me the next Warrants spot he can wangle.'

'I'm impressed.'

'Yeah? You want to hear something even more impressive?'

'Hit me.'

'My first twenty knockouts were stumblebums hand-picked by my manager. My girlfriend saw you fight at the Olympic and said you'd be handsome if you got your teeth fixed, and maybe you *could* take me.'

I couldn't tell if the man was looking for a brawl then and there or a friend; if he was testing me or taunting me or pumping me for information. I pointed to Tomas Dos Santos, twitching in his booze sleep. ‘What about the Mex?’

‘We’ll take him in tomorrow morning.’

‘You’ll take him in.’

‘The collar’s half yours.’

‘Thanks, but no thanks.’

‘Okay, partner.’

‘I’m not your partner.’

‘Maybe someday.’

‘Maybe never, Blanchard. Maybe you work Warrants and pull in repos and serve papers for the shysters downtown, maybe I put in my twenty, take my pension and get a soft job somewhere.’

‘You could go on the feds. I know you’ve got pals on the Alien Squad.’

‘Don’t push me on that.’

Blanchard looked out the window again. ‘Pretty. Make a good picture postcard. “Dear Mom, wish you were here at the colorful East LA race riot.”’

Tomas Dos Santos stirred, mumbling. ‘Inez? Inez? Qué? Inez?’ Blanchard walked to a hall closet and found an old wool overcoat and tossed it on top of him. The added warmth seemed to calm him down; the mumbles died off. Blanchard said, ‘Cherchez la femme. Huh, Bucky?’

‘What?’

‘Look for a woman. Even with a snootful of juice, old Tomas can’t let Inez go. I’ll lay you ten to one that when he hits the gas chamber she’ll be right there with him.’

‘Maybe he’ll cop a plea. Fifteen to life, out in twenty.’

‘No. He’s a dead man. Cherchez la femme, Bucky. Remember that.’

I walked through the house looking for a place to sleep, finally settling on a downstairs bedroom with a lumpy bed way too short for my legs. Lying down, I listening to sirens and gunshots in the distance. Gradually I dozed off, and dreamed of my own few and far between women.

By the morning the riot had cooled off, leaving the sky hung with soot and the streets littered with broken liquor bottles and discarded two-by fours and baseball bats. Blanchard called Hollenbeck Station for a black-and-white to transport his ninth hard felon of 1943 to the Hall of Justice jail, and Tomas Dos Santos wept when the patrolmen took him away from us. Blanchard and I shook hands on the sidewalk and walked separate routes downtown, him to the DA’s office to write up his report on the capture of his purse snatcher, me to Central Station and another tour of duty.

The LA City Council outlawed the wearing of the zoot suit, and Blanchard and I went back to the polite conversation at roll call. And everything he stated with such rankling certainty that night in the empty house came true.

Blanchard was promoted to Sergeant and transferred to Highland Park Vice early in August, and Tomas Dos Santos went to the gas chamber a week later. Three years passed, and I continued to work a radio car beat in Central Division. Then one morning I looked at the transfer promotion board and saw at the top of the list: Blanchard, Leland C., Sergeant; Highland Park Vice to Central Warrants, effective 9/15/46.

And, of course, we became partners. Looking back, I know that the man possessed no gift of prophecy; he simply worked to assure his own future, while I skated uncertainly toward mine. It was his flat-voiced ‘Cherchez la femme’ that still haunts me. Because our partnership was nothing but a bungling road to the Dahlia. And in the end, she was to own the two of us completely.

1

Fire and Ice

CHAPTER ONE

The road to the partnership began without my knowing it, and it was a revival of the Blanchard-Bleichert fight brouhaha that brought me the word.

I was coming off a long tour of duty spent in a speed trap on Bunker Hill, preying on traffic violators. My ticket book was full and my brain was numb from eight hours of following my eyes across the intersection of 2nd and Beaudry. Walking through the Central muster room and a crowd of blues waiting to hear the P.M. crime sheet, I almost missed Johnny Vogel's. 'They ain't fought in years, and Horrall outlawed smokers, so I don't think that's it. My dad's thick with the Jewboy, and he says he'd try for Joe Louis if he was white.'

Then Tom Joslin elbowed me. 'They're talking about you, Bleichert.'

I looked over at Vogel, standing a few yards away, talking to another cop. 'Hit me, Tommy.'

Joslin smiled. 'You know Lee Blanchard?'

'The Pope know Jesus?'

'Ha! He's working Central Warrants.'

'Tell me something I don't know.'

'How's this? Blanchard's partner's topping out his twenty. Nobody thought he'd pull the pin, but he's gonna. The Warrants boss is this felony court DA, Ellis Loew. He got Blanchard his appointment, now he's looking for a bright boy to take over the partner's spot. Word is he creams for fighters and wants you. Vogel's old man's in the Detective Bureau. He's simpatico with Loew and pushing for his kid to get the job. Frankly, I don't think either of you got the qualifications. Me, on the other hand …'

I tingled, but still managed to come up with a crack to show Joslin I didn't care. 'Your teeth are too small. No good for biting in the clinches. Lots of clinches working Warrants.'

But I did care.

That night I sat on the steps outside my apartment and looked at the garage that held my heavy bag and speed bag, my scrapbook of press clippings, fight programs and publicity stills. I thought about being good but not really good, about keeping my weight down when I could have put on an extra ten pounds and fought heavyweight, about fighting tortilla-stuffed Mexican middleweights at the Eagle Rock Legion Hall where my old man went to his Bund meetings. Light heavyweight was a no-man's-land division, and early on I pegged it as being tailor-made for me. I could dance on my toes all night at 175 pounds, I could hook accurately to the body from way outside and only a bulldozer could work in off my left jab.

But there were no light heavyweight bulldozers, because any hungry fighter pushing 175 slopped up spuds until he made heavyweight, even if he sacrificed half his speed and most of his punch. Light heavyweight was safe. Light heavyweight was guaranteed fifty-dollar purses without getting hurt. Light heavyweight was plugs in the *Times* from Braven Dyer, adulation from the old man and his Jew-baiting cronies and being a big cheese as long as I didn't leave Glassell Park and Lincoln Heights. It was going as far as I could as a natural – without having to test my guts.

Then Ronnie Cordero came along.

He was a Mex middleweight out of El Monte, fast, with knockout power in both hands and a crablike defense, guard high, elbows pressed to his sides to deflect body blows. Only nineteen, he had huge bones for his weight, with the growth potential to jump him up two divisions to heavyweight and the big money. He racked up a string of fourteen straight early-round KOs at the Olympic, blitzing all the top LA middles. Still growing and anxious to jack up the quality of his opponents, Cordero issued me a challenge through the *Herald* sports page.

I knew that he would eat me alive. I knew that losing to a taco bender would ruin my local celebrity. I knew that running from the fight would hurt me, but fighting it would kill me. I started looking for a place to run to. The army, navy and marines looked good, then Pearl Harbor got bombed and made them look great. Then the old man had a stroke, lost his job and pension and started sucking baby food through a straw. I got a hardship deferment and joined the Los Angeles Police Department.

I saw where my thoughts were going. FBI goons were asking me if I considered myself a German or an American, and would I be willing to prove my patriotism by helping them out. I fought what was next by concentrating on my landlady's cat stalking a bluejay across the garage roof. When he pounced, I admitted to myself how bad I wanted Johnny Vogel's rumor to be true.

Warrants was local celebrity as a cop. Warrants was plainclothes without a coat and tie, romance and a mileage per diem on your civilian car. Warrants was going after the real bad guys and not rousting winos and wienie waggers in front of the Midnight Mission. Warrants was working in the DA's office with one foot in the Detective Bureau, and late dinners with Mayor Bowron when he was waxing effusive and wanted to hear war stories.

Thinking about it started to hurt. I went down to the garage and hit the speed bag until my arms cramped.

Over the next few weeks I worked a radio car beat near the northern border of the division. I was breaking in a fat-mouthed rookie named Sidwell, a kid just off a three-year MP stint in the Canal Zone. He hung on my every word with the slavish tenacity of a lapdog, and was so enamored of civilian police work that he took to sticking around the station after our end of tour, bullshitting with the jailers, snapping towels at the wanted posters in the locker room, generally creating a nuisance until someone told him to go home.

He had no sense of decorum, and would talk to anybody about anything. I was one of his favorite subjects, and he passed station house scuttlebutt straight back to me.

I discounted most of the rumors: Chief Horrall was going to start up an interdivisional boxing team, and was shooting me Warrants to assure that I signed on along with Blanchard; Ellis Loew, the felony court comer, was supposed to have won a bundle betting on me before the war and was now handing me a belated reward; Horrall had rescinded his order banning smokers, and some high brass string puller wanted me happy so he could line his pockets betting on me. Those tales sounded too farfetched, although I knew boxing was somehow behind my front-runner status. What I credited was that the Warrants opening was narrowing down to either Johnny Vogel or me.

Vogel had a father working Central dicks; I was a padded 36–0–0 in the no-man's-land division five years before. Knowing the only way to compete with nepotism was to make the weight, I punched bags, skipped meals and skipped rope until I was a nice, safe light heavyweight again. Then I waited.

CHAPTER TWO

I was a week at the 175-pound limit, tired of training and dreaming every night of steaks, chili burgers and coconut cream pies. My hopes for the Warrants job had waned to the point where I would have sold them down the river for pork chops at the Pacific Dining Car, and the neighbor who looked after the old man for a double sawbuck a month had called me to say that he was acting up again, taking BB potshots at the neighborhood dogs and blowing his Social Security check on girlie magazines and model airplanes. It was reaching the point where I would have to *do* something about him, and every toothless geezer I saw on the beat hit my eyes as a gargoyle version of Crazy Dolph Bleichert. I was watching one stagger across 3rd and Hill when I got the radio call that changed my life forever.

'11-A–23, call the station. Repeat: 11-A–23, call the station.'

Sidwell nudged me. 'We got a call, Bucky.'

'Roger it.'

'The dispatcher said to call the station.'

I hung a left and parked, then pointed to the call box on the corner. 'Use the gamewell. The little key next to your handcuffs.'

Sidwell obeyed, trotting back to the cruiser moments later, looking grave. 'You're supposed to report to the Chief of Detectives immediately,' he said.

My first thoughts were of the old man. I leadfooted the six blocks to City Hall and turned the black-and-white over to Sidwell, then took the elevator up to Chief Thad Green's fourth-floor offices. A secretary admitted me to the Chief's inner sanctum, and sitting in matched leather chairs were Lee Blanchard, more high brass than I had ever seen in one place and a spider-thin man in a three-piece tweed suit.

The secretary said, 'Officer Bleichert,' and left me standing there, aware that my uniform hung on my depleted body like a tent. Then Blanchard, wearing cord slacks and a maroon letterman's jacket, got to his feet and played MC.

'Gentlemen, Bucky Bleichert. Bucky, left to right in uniform, we have Inspector Malloy, Inspector Stensland and Chief Green. The gentleman in mufti is Deputy DA Ellis Loew.'

I nodded, and Thad Green pointed me to an empty chair facing the assembly. I settled into it; Stensland handed me a sheaf of papers. 'Read this, Officer. It's Braven Dyer's editorial for this coming Saturday's *Times*.'

The top page was dated 10/14/46, with a block printed title – 'Fire and Ice Among LA's Finest' – directly below it. Below that, the typed text began:

> Before the war, the City of the Angels was graved with two local fighters, born and raised a scant five miles apart, pugilists with styles as different as fire and ice. Lee Blanchard was a bowlegged windmill of a leather slinger, and sparks covered the ringside seats when he threw punches. Bucky Bleichert entered the ring so cool and collected that it was easy to believe he was immune to sweat. He could dance on his toes better than Bojangles Robinson, and his rapier jabs peppered his opponents' faces until they looked like the steak tartare at Mike Lyman's Grill. Both men were poets: Blanchard the poet of brute strength, Bleichert the counter

> poet of speed and guile. Collectively they won 79 bouts and lost only four. In the ring as in the table of elements, fire and ice are tough to beat.
>
> Mr. Fire and Mr. Ice never fought each other. Divisional boundaries kept them apart. But a sense of duty brought them together in spirit, and both men joined the Los Angeles Police Department and continued fighting out of the ring – this time in the war against crime. Blanchard cracked the baffling Boulevard-Citizens bank robbery case in 1939, and captured thrill-killer Tomas Dos Santos; Bleichert served with distinction during the '43 Zoot Suit Wars. And now they are both officers in Central Division: Mr. Fire, 32, a sergeant in the prestigious Warrants Squad; Mr. Ice, 29, a patrolman working a dangerous beat in downtown LA. I recently asked both Fire and Ice why they gave up their best ring years to become cops. Their responses are indicative of the fine men they are:
>
> Sergeant Blanchard: 'A fighter's career doesn't last forever, but the satisfaction of serving your community does.'
>
> Officer Bleichert: 'I wanted to fight more dangerous opponents, namely criminals and Communists.'
>
> Lee Blanchard and Bucky Bleichert made great sacrifices to serve their city, and on Election Day, November 5, Los Angeles voters are going to be asked to do the same thing – vote in a five-million-dollar bond proposal to upgrade the LAPD's equipment and provide for an 8 percent pay rise for all personnel. Keep in mind the examples of Mr. Fire and Mr. Ice. Vote 'Yes' on Proposition B on Election Day.

Finishing, I handed the pages back to Inspector Stensland. He started to speak, but Thad Green shushed him with a hand on his shoulder. 'Tell us what you thought of it, Officer. Be candid.'

I swallowed to keep my voice steady. 'It's subtle.'

Stensland flushed, Green and Malloy grinned, Blanchard hooted outright. Ellis Loew said, 'Proposition B is going to lose hands down, but there's a chance to reintroduce it in the off-year election next spring. What we had in—'

Green said, 'Ellis, please,' and turned his attention to me. 'One of the reasons the bond is going to fail is that the public is less than pleased with the service we've been giving them. We were shorthanded during the war, and some of the men we hired to remedy that turned out to be rotten apples and made us look bad. Also, we're top-heavy with rookies since the war ended, and a lot of good men have retired. Two station houses need to be rebuilt and we need to offer higher starting salaries to attract better men. All this takes money, and the voters aren't going to give it to us in November.'

I was beginning to get the picture. Malloy said, 'It was your idea, counselor. You tell him.'

Loew said, 'I'm laying dollars to doughnuts we can pass the proposal in the '47 Special. But we need to drum up enthusiasm for the Department to do it. We need to build up morale within the Department, and we need to impress the voters with the quality of our men. Wholesome white boxers are a big draw, Bleichert. You know that.'

I looked at Blanchard. 'You and me, huh?'

Blanchard winked. 'Fire and Ice. Tell him the rest of it, Ellis.'

Loew winced at his first name, then continued. 'A ten-round bout three weeks from now at the Academy gym. Braven Dyer is a close personal friend of mine, and he'll be building it up in his column. Tickets will go for two dollars apiece, with half allotted for policemen and their families, half for civilians. The gate goes to the police charity program. From there we build up an interdivisional boxing team. All good wholesome white boys. The team members get one duty day off a week to teach underprivileged kids the art of self-defense. Publicity all the way, straight to the '47 Special Election.'

All eyes were on me now. I held my breath, waiting for the offer of the Warrants spot. When no one said a word, I glanced sidelong at Blanchard. His upper body looked brutally powerful, but his stomach had gone to flab and I was younger, taller and probably a whole lot faster. Before I could give myself reasons to back down, I said, 'I'm in.'

The brass gave my decision a round of applause; Ellis Loew smiled, exposing teeth that looked like they belonged on a baby shark. 'The date is October 29, a week before the election,' he said. 'And both of you will have unlimited use of the Academy gym for training. Ten rounds is a lot to ask of men as inactive as you two have been, but anything else would look sissy. Don't you agree?'

Blanchard snorted, 'Or communistic'; Loew shot him a shark-tooth grimace. I said, 'Yes, sir,' and Inspector Malloy raised a camera, chirping, 'Watch the birdie, son.'

I stood up and smiled without parting my lips; a flashbulb popped. I saw stars and got a back pounding, and when the camaraderie stopped and my vision cleared, Ellis Loew was standing in front of me, saying, 'I'm betting on great things from you. And if I don't miss my bet, I expect we'll be colleagues soon.'

I thought, You're a subtle bastard, but said, 'Yes, sir.' Loew gave me a limp handshake and walked away. I rubbed the last of the stars out of my eyes and saw that the room was empty.

I took the elevator down to street level, thinking of tasty ways to regain the weight I had lost. Blanchard probably weighed 200, and if I came in at my safe old 175 against him he would wear me down every time he managed to get inside. I was trying to decide between the Pantry and Little Joe's when I hit the parking lot and saw my adversary in the flesh – talking to a woman blowing smoke rings up at a picture postcard sky.

I went over. Blanchard was leaning against an unmarked cruiser, gesturing at the woman, still intent on her rings, putting them out three and four at a time. She was in profile as I approached, head tilted up, back arched, one hand on the cruiser's door for support. Auburn hair in a pageboy cut brushed her shoulders and long, thin neck; the fit of her Eisenhower jacket and wool skirt told me she was thin all over.

Blanchard caught sight of me and nudged her. Letting out a lungful of smoke, she turned. Up close, I saw a strong-pretty face, all mismatched parts: high forehead that made her hairdo look incongruous, crooked nose, full lips and big black-brown eyes.

Blanchard made the introductions. 'Kay, this is Bucky Bleichert. Bucky, Kay Lake.'

The woman ground out her cigarette. I said, 'Hello,' wondering if this was the girlfriend that Blanchard met at the Boulevard-Citizens robbery trial. She didn't play as a heister's quail, even if she had been shacking with a cop for years.

Her voice had a slight prairie twang. 'I saw you box several times, You won.'

'I always won. Are you a fight fan?'

Kay Lake shook her head. 'Lee used to drag me. I was taking art classes back before the war, so I brought my sketch pad and drew the boxers.'

Blanchard put an arm around her shoulders. 'Made me quit fighting smokers. Said she didn't want me doing the vegetable shuffle.' He went into an imitation of a punch-drunk fighter sparring, and Kay Lake flinched away from him. Blanchard shot a quick look at her, then fired off some left jabs and right crossed at the air. The punches were telegraphed, and in my mind I countered a one-two at his jaw and midsection.

I said, ‘I’ll try not to hurt you.’

Kay smoldered at the remark; Blanchard grinned. ‘It took weeks to talk her into letting me do it. I promised her a new car if she didn’t pout too much.’

‘Don’t make any bets you can’t cover.’

Blanchard laughed, then moved into a side-by-side drape with Kay. I said, ‘Who thought this thing up?’

‘Ellis Loew. He got me Warrants, then my partner put in his papers and Loew started thinking about you to replace him. He got Braven Dyer to write that Fire and Ice horseshit, then he took the whole pie to Horrall. He never would have gone for it, but all the polls said the bond issue was heading for the deep six, so he said okay.’

‘And he’s got money on me? And if I win I get Warrants?’

‘Something like that. The DA himself don’t like the idea, thinks the two of us wouldn’t work as partners. But he’s going along – Horrall and Thad Green convinced him. Personally, I almost hope you do win. If you don’t, I get Johnny Vogel. He’s fat, he farts, his breath stinks and his daddy’s the biggest nosebleed in Central dicks, always running errands for the Jewboy. Besides -’

I tapped Blanchard’s chest with a soft forefinger. ‘What’s in it for you?’

‘Betting works both ways. My girl’s got a taste for nice things, and I can’t afford to let her down. Right, babe?’

Kay said, ‘Keep talking about me in the third person. It sends me.’

Blanchard put up his hands in mock surrender; Kay’s dark eyes burned. Curious about the woman, I said, ‘What do you think about the whole thing, Miss Lake?’

Now her eyes danced. ‘For aesthetic reasons, I hope you both look good with your shirts off. For moral reasons, I hope the Los Angeles Police Department gets ridiculed for perpetrating this farce. For financial reasons, I hope Lee wins.’

Blanchard laughed and slapped the hood of the cruiser; I forgot vanity and smiled with my mouth open. Kay Lake stared me straight in the eye, and for the first time – strangely but surely – I sense that Mr. Fire and I were becoming friends. Sticking out my hand, I said, ‘Luck short of winning’; Lee grabbed it and said, ‘The same.’

Kay took in the two of us with a look that said we were idiot children. I tipped my hat to her, then started to walk away. Kay called out ‘Dwight,’ and I wondered how she knew my real name. When I turned around, she said, ‘You’d be very handsome if you got your teeth fixed.’

CHAPTER THREE

The fight became the rage of the Department, then LA, and the Academy gym was sold out within twenty-four hours of Braven Dyer's announcement of it in the *Times* sports page. The 77th Street lieutenant tapped as official LAPD oddsmaker installed Blanchard as an early 3 to 1 favorite, while the real bookie line had Mr. Fire favored by knockout at 2½ to 1 and decision by 5 to 3. Interdepartmental betting was rampant, and wager pools were set up at all station houses. Dyer and Morrie Ryskind of the *Mirror* fed the craze in their columns, and a KMPC disc jockey composed a ditty called the 'Fire and Ice Tango.' Backed by a combo, a sultry soprano warbled, 'Fire and Ice ain't sugar and spice; four hundred pounds tradin' leather, that sure ain't nice. But Mr. Fire light my torch and Mr. Ice cool my brow, to me that's all-night service with a capital wow!'

I was a local celebrity again.

At roll call I watched betting markers change hands and got attaboys from cops I had never met before; Fat Johnny Vogel gave me the evil eye every time he passed me in the locker room. Sidwell, ever the rumor monger, said that two night-watch blues had bet their cars, and the station commander, Captain Harwell, was holding the pink slips until after the fight. The dicks in Administrative Vice had suspended their bookie shakedowns because Mickey Cohen was taking in ten grand a day in markers and was kicking back 5 percent to the advertising agency employment by the city in its effort to pass the bond issue. Harry Cohn, Mr. Big at Columbia Pictures, had put down a bundle on me to win by decision, and if I delivered I got a hot weekend with Rita Hayworth.

None of it made sense, but all of it felt good, and I kept myself from going crazy by training harder than I ever had before.

At end of watch each day I headed straight for the gym and *worked*. Ignoring Blanchard and his brownnosing entourage and the off-duty cops who hovered around me, I hit the heavy bag, left jab – right cross – left hook, five minuted at a crack, on my toes the whole time; I sparred with my old pal Pete Lutkins and rolled sets at the speed bag until sweat blinded me and my arms turned to rubber. I skipped rope and ran through the Elysian Park hills with two-pound weights strapped to my ankles, jabbing at tree limbs and bushes, outracing the trash can dogs who prowled there. At home, I gorged myself on liver, porterhouse steak and spinach and fell asleep before I could get out of my clothes.

Then, with the fight nine days away, I saw the old man and decided to take a dive for the money.

The occasion was my once-a-month visit, and I drove out to Lincoln Heights feeling guilty that I hadn't shown up since I got the word that he was acting crazy again. I brought gifts to assuage that guilt: canned goodies scrounged from the markets on my beat and confiscated girlie mags. Pulling up in front of the house, I saw that they wouldn't be enough.

The old man was sitting on the porch, swigging from a bottle of cough syrup. He had his BB pistol in one hand, absently taking shots at a formation of balsa wood airplanes lined up on the lawn. I parked, then walked over to him. His clothes were flecked with vomit and his bones protruded underneath them, poking out like they were joined to him at all the wrong angles. His breath stank, his eyes were yellow and filmy and the skin I could see underneath his crust white beard was flush with broken veins. I reached down to help him to his feet; he swatted my hands, jabbering, ‘Scheisskopf! Kleine Scheisskopf!’

I pulled the old man up into a standing position. He dropped the BB pistol and Expectolar pint and said, ‘Guten Tag, Dwight,’ like he had just seen me the day before.

I brushed tears from my eyes. ‘Speak English, Papa.’

The old man grabbed the crook of his right elbow and shook his fist at me in a slapdash fungoo. ‘Englisch Scheisser! Churchill Scheisser! Amerikanisch Juden Scheisser!’

I left him on the porch and checked out the house. The living room was littered with model airplane parts and open cans of beans with flies buzzing around them; the bedroom was wallpapered with cheesecake pics, most of them upside down. The bathroom stank of stale urine and the kitchen featured three cats snouting around in half-empty tunafish cans They hissed at me as I approached; I threw a chair at them and went back to my father.

He was leaning on the porch rail, fingering his beard. Afraid he would topple over, I held his arm; afraid I would start to cry for real, I said, ‘Say something, Papa. Make me mad. Tell me how you managed to fuck up the house so bad in a month.’

My father tried to pull free. I held on tighter, then loosened my grip, afraid of snapping the bone like a twig. He said, ‘Du, Dwight? Du?’ and I knew he’d had another stroke and lost his memory of English again. I searched my own memory for phrases in German and came up empty. As a boy I’d hated the man so much that I made myself forget the language he’d taught me.

‘Wo ist Greta? Wo, mutti?’

I put my arms around the old man. ‘Mama’s dead. You were too cheap to buy her bootleg, so she got some raisinjack from the niggers in the Flats. It was rubbing alcohol, Papa. She went blind. You put her in the hospital, and she jumped off the roof.’

‘Greta!’

I held him harder. ‘Sssh. It was fourteen years ago, Papa. A long time.’

The old man tried to push me away; I shoved him into the porch stanchion and pinned him there. His lips curled to shout invective, then his face went blank, and I knew he couldn’t come up with the words. I shut my eyes and found words for him: ‘Do you know what you cost me, you fuck? I could have gone to the cops clean, but they found out my father was a fucking subversive. They made me snitch off Sammy and Ashidas, and Sammy died at Manzanar. I know you only joined the Bund to bullshit and chase snatch, but you should have known better, because I didn’t.’

I opened my eyes and found them dry; my father’s eyes were expressionless. I eased off his shoulders and said, ‘You couldn’t have known better, and the snitch jacket’s all on me. But you were a cheap stingy fuck. You killed Mama, and that’s yours.’

I got an idea how to end the whole mess. ‘You go rest now, Papa. I’ll take care of you.’

That afternoon I watched Lee Blanchard train. His regimen was four-minute rounds with lanky light heavys borrowed from the Main Street Gym, and his style was total assault. He crouched when he moved forward, always feinting with his upper body; his jab was surprisingly good. He wasn't the headhunter or sitting duck I expected, and when he hooked to the breadbasket I could feel the punches twenty yards away. For the money he was no sure thing, and money was the fight now.

So money made it a tank job.

I drove home and called up the retired postman who kept an eye on my father, offering him a C-note if he cleaned up the house and stuck to the old man like glue until after the fight. He agreed, and I called an old Academy classmate working Hollywood Vice and asked him for the names of some bookies. Thinking I wanted to bet on myself, he gave me the numbers of two independents, one with Mickey Cohen and one with the Jack Dragna mob. The indies and the Cohen book had Blanchard a straight two to one favorite, but the Dragna line was even money, Bleichert or Blanchard, the new odds coming from scouting reports that said I looked fast and strong. I could double every dollar I put in.

In the morning I called in sick, and the daywatch boss bought it because I was a local celebrity and Captain Harwell wouldn't want him rattling my cage. With work out of the way, I liquidated my savings account, cashed in my Treasury bonds and took out a bank loan for two grand, using my almost new '46 Chevy ragtop as collateral. From the bank, it was just a short ride out to Lincoln Heights and a talk with Pete Lutkins. He agreed to do what I wanted, and two hours later he called me with the results.

The Dragna bookie I had sent him to had taken his money on Blanchard by late-round knockout, offering him two to one odds against. If I took my dive in rounds eight through ten, my net would be $8,640 – enough to maintain the old man in a class rest home for at least two or three years. I had traded Warrants for a close-out on bad old debts, with the late-round stipulation just enough of a risk to keep me from feeling too much like a coward. It was a tradeoff that someone was going to help me pay for, and that someone was Lee Blanchard.

With seven days left before the fight, I ate myself up to 192, increased the distance on my roadwork and upped my heavy bag stints to six minutes. Duane Fisk, the officer assigned as my trainer and second, warned me about overtraining, but I ignored him and kept pushing up until forty-eight hours before the bout. Then I decelerated to light calisthenics and studied my opponent.

From the back of the gym I watched Blanchard spar in the center ring. I looked for flaws in his basic attack and gauged his reactions when his sparring partners got cute. I saw that in clinches his elbows were tucked in to deflect body shots, leaving him open for jarring little uppercuts that would bring up his guard and set him up for counter hooks to the ribs. I saw that his best punch, the right cross, was always telegraphed with two half steps to the left and a head feint. I saw that on the ropes he was deadly, that he could keep lighter opponents pinned there with elbow steers alternated with short body blows. Moving closer, I saw eyebrow scar tissue that I would have to avoid in order to prevent a stoppage on cuts. That rankled, but a long scar running down the left side of his ribcage looked like a juicy place to throw him a lot of hurt.

'At least he looks good with his shirt off.'

I turned to face the words. Kay Lake was staring at me; out of the corner of my eye I saw Blanchard, resting on his stool, staring at us. 'Where's your sketch pad?' I asked.

Kay waved at Blanchard; he blew her a kiss with two gloved hands. The bell rang, and he and his partner moved toward each other popping jabs. 'I gave that up,' Kay said. ‘I wasn’t very good, so I changed my major.’

‘To what?’

‘To pre-med, then psychology, then English lit, then history.’

‘I like a woman who knows what she wants.’

Kay smiled. ‘So do I, but I don’t know any. What do *you* want?’

I eyeballed the gym. Thirty or forty spectators were seated in folding chairs around the center ring, most of them off-duty cops and reporters, most of them smoking. A dissipating haze hung over the ring, and the spotlight shining down from the ceiling gave it a sulfurous glow. All eyes were on Blanchard and his punchy, and all the shouts and catcalls were for him – but without me getting ready to avenge old business none of it meant a thing. ‘I’m part of this. That’s what I want.’

Kay shook her head. ‘You quit boxing five years ago. It’s not your life anymore.’

The woman’s aggressiveness was making me itchy. I blurted, ‘And your boyfriend’s a never-was just like me, and you were some sort of gang skirt before he picked you up. You—’

Kay Lake stopped me by laughing. ‘Have you been reading my press clippings?’

‘No. You been reading mine?’

‘Yes.’

I didn’t have a retort for *that*. ‘Why’d Lee quit fighting? Why’d he join the Department?’

‘Catching criminals gives him a sense of order. Do you have a girlfriend?’

‘I’m saving myself for Rita Hayworth. Do you flirt with a lot of cops, or am I a special case?’

Shouts rose from the crowd. I glanced over and saw Blanchard’s sparring partner hit the canvas. Johnny Vogel climbed into the ring and popped out his mouthpiece; the punchy expelled a long jet of blood. When I turned to Kay she was pale, hunching into her Ike jacket. I said, ‘Tomorrow night’ll be worse. You should stay home.’

Kay shuddered. ‘No. It’s a big moment for Lee.’

‘He told you to come?’

‘No. He would never do that.’

‘The sensitive type, huh?’

Kay dug in her pockets for cigarettes and matches, then lit up. ‘Yes. Like you, but without the chip on the shoulder.’

I felt myself go red. ‘You’re always there for each other? thick and thin and all that?’

‘We try.’

‘Then why aren’t you married? Shacking’s against the regs, and if the brass decided to get snotty they could nail Lee for it.’

Kay blew rings at the floor, then looked up at me. ‘We can’t.’

‘Why not? You’ve been shacked for years. He quit fighting smokers for you. He lets you flirt with other men. Sounds like an ace deal to me.’

More shouts echoed. Glancing sidelong, I saw Blanchard pounding a new punchy. I countered the shots, duking the stale gym air. After a few seconds I saw what I was doing and stopped. Kay flipped her cigarette in the direction of the ring and said, ‘I have to go now. Good luck, Dwight.’

Only the old man called me that. ‘You didn’t answer my questions.’

Kay said, ‘Lee and I don’t sleep together,’ then walked away before I could do anything but stare.

I hung around the gym for another hour or so. Toward dusk, reporters and cameramen started arriving, making straight for center ring, Blanchard and his boring knockdowns of glass-chinned pugs. Kay Lake's exit line stayed with me, along with flashes of her laughing and smiling and turning sad at the drop of a hat. When I heard a newshound yell, 'Hey! There's Bleichert!' I exited, running out to the parking lot and my twice-mortgaged Chevy. Pulling away, I realized I had no place to go and nothing I wanted to do except satisfy my curiosity about a woman who was coming on like gangbusters and a big load of grief.

So I drove downtown to read her press clippings.

The clerk at the *Herald* morgue, impressed with my badge, led me to a reading table. I told him I was interested in the Boulevard-Citizens bank robbery and the trial of the captured robber, and that I thought the date was sometime early in '39 for the heist, maybe fall of the same year for the legal proceedings. He left me sitting there and returned ten minutes later with two large, leather-bound scrapbooks. Newspaper pages were glued to heavy black cardboard sheets, arranged chronologically, and I flipped from February 1 to February 12 before I found what I wanted.

On February 11, 1939 a four-man gang hijacked an armored car on a quiet Hollywood side street. Using a downed motor-cycle as a diversion, the robbers overpowered the guard who left the car to investigate the accident. Putting a knife to his throat, they forced the other two guards still inside the car to let them in. Once inside, they chloroformed and trussed all three men and substituted six bags filled with phone book scraps and slugs for six bags filled with cash.

One robber drove the armored car to downtown Hollywood; the other three changed into uniforms identical to the ones the guards wore. The three in uniform walked in the door of Boulevard-Citizens Savings & Loan on Yucca and Ivar, carrying the sacks of paper and slugs, and the manager opened the vault for them. One of the robbers sapped the manager; the other two grabbed sacks of real money and headed for the door. By this time, the driver had entered the bank, and had rounded up the tellers. He herded them into the vault and sapped them, then shut the door and locked it. All four robbers were back on the sidewalk when a Hollywood Division patrol car, alerted by a bank-to-station alarm, arrived. The officers ordered the two heisters to halt; they opened fire; the cops fired back. Two robbers were killed and two escaped – with four bags filled with unmarked fifties and C-notes.

When I saw no mention of Blanchard or Kay Lake, I skimmed a week of page one and two accounts of the LAPD investigation.

The dead heisters were identified as Chick Geyer and Max Ottens, San Francisco muscle with no known LA associates. Eyeball witnesses at the bank could identify the two escapers from mug shots or provide adequate descriptions of them – their guard hats were pulled low and both wore lacquered sunglasses. There were no witnesses at the hijack scene, and the chloroformed guards had been overpowered before they got good looks at their attackers.

The heist went from page two and three to the scandal columns. Bevo Means featured it for three days running, milking the angle that the Bugsy Siegel mob was chasing the escaped heisters because one of the armored car's stops was the Bug Man's haberdashery front. Siegel had sworn to find them, even though it was the bank's money that the two got away with – not his.

Means' columns got further and further afield, and I turned pages until I hit the February 28 headline: 'Tip from Ex-Boxer Cop Cracks Bloody Bank Robbery.'

The account was loaded with praise for Mr. Fire, but was short on facts. Officer Leland C. Blanchard, 25, a Los Angeles policeman attached to Central Division and a former ‘popular fixture’ at the Hollywood Legion Stadium, questioned his ‘fight game acquaintances’ and ‘informants’ and got tips that Robert ‘Bobby’ De Witt was the brains behind the Boulevard-Citizens job. Blanchard relayed the tip to Hollywood Division detectives, and they raided De Witt’s Venice Beach house. They found stashes of marijuana, guard uniforms and money bags from Boulevard-Citizens Savings & Loan. De Witt protested his innocence, and was arrested and charged with two counts of Armed Robbery One, five counts of Aggravated Assault, one count of Grand Theft Auto, and one count of Harboring Felonious Drugs. He was held without bail – and there was still no mention of Kay Lake.

Tiring of cops and robbers, I kept flipping pages. De Witt, a. San Berdoo native with three pimping priors, kept yelping that the Siegel mob or the police had framed him: the mob because he sometimes ran cooze in Siegel territory, the cops because they needed a patsy for the Boulevard-Citizen job. He had no alibi for the day of the heist, and said he didn’t know Chick Geyer, Max Ottens or the still-at-large fourth man. He went to trial, and the jury didn’t believe him. He was convicted on all counts, and drew a ten-to-life jolt at San Quentin.

Kay finally appeared in a June 21 human interest piece titled ‘Gang Girl Falls In Love – With Cop! Going Straight? To Altar?’ Beside the story there were photographs of her and Lee Blanchard, along with a mug shot of Bobby De Witt, a hatchet-faced guy sporting a greasy pompadour. The piece started with a recounting of the Boulevard-Citizens job and Blanchard’s part in solving it, then segued to sugar:

> … and at the time of the robbery, De Witt was providing shelter for an impressionable young girl. Katherine Lake, 19, came west from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, in 1936, not seeking Hollywood stardom, but seeking a college education. What she got was a degree in the college of criminal hard knocks.
>
> ‘I fell in with Bobby because I had no place to go,’ ‘Kay’ Lake told *Herald Express* reporter Aggie Underwood. ‘It was still the Depression, and jobs were scarce. I used to take walks near this awful boarding-house where I had a cot, and that was how I met Bobby. He gave me my own room at his house, and he said he’d enroll me at Valley J.C. if I kept the house clean. He didn’t do that, and I got more than I bargained for.’
>
> Kay thought Bobby De Witt was a musician, but he was really a dope peddler and procuror. ‘At first he was nice to me,’ Kay said. ‘Then he made me drink laudanum and stay home all day to answer the telephone. After that it got worse.’
>
> Kay Lake declined to state how it ‘got worse,’ and she was not surprised when police arrested De Witt for his part in the bloody February 11 robbery. She found lodging at a career girl’s residence in Culver City, and when called by the prosecution to testify at De Witt’s trial, she did – even though she was terrified of her former ‘benefactor.’
>
> ‘It was my duty,’ she said. ‘And of course at the trial I met Lee.’
>
> Lee Blanchard and Kay Lake fell in love. ‘As soon as I saw her I knew she was the girl for me,’ Officer Blanchard told crime scribe Bevo Means. ‘She has that waiflike beauty I’m a sucker for. She’s had a rough life, but now I’m going to set it straight.’
>
> Lee Blanchard is no stranger to tragedy himself. When he was 14, his 9-year-old sister disappeared, never to be seen again. ‘I think that’s why I quit fighting and became a policeman,’ he said. ‘Catching criminals gives me a sense of order.’
>
> So out of tragedy, a love story has begun. But where will it end? Kay Lake says: ‘The important things now are my education and Lee. Happy days are here again.’

And with Big Lee Blanchard on Kay's case, it looks like they're here to stay.

I closed the scrapbook. Except for the kid sister, none of it surprised me. But all of it made me think of big wrong moves: Blanchard blowing the juice from his glory case by refusing to fight smokers; a little girl obviously snuffed and dumped somewhere like garbage; Kay Lake shacking on both sides of the law. Opening the book again, I stared at the Kay of seven years before. Even at nineteen she looked way too smart to speak the words Bevo Means put in her mouth. And seeing her portrayed as naive made me angry.

I gave the scrapbooks back to the clerk and walked out of the Hearst building wondering what I'd been looking for, knowing it was more than just evidence to prove Kay's come-on was legit. Driving around aimlessly, killing time so I'd be exhausted and able to sleep through to the afternoon, it hit me: with the old man taken care of and Warrants dead, Kay Lake and Lee Blanchard were the only interesting prospects in my future, and I needed to know them past wisecracks, insinuations and the fight.

I stopped at a steak joint on Los Feliz and wolfed a king-size porterhouse, spinach and hash browns, then cruised Hollywood Boulevard and the Strip. None of the movie marquees looked inviting, and the clubs on Sunset looked too rich for a flash-in-the-pan celebrity. At Doheny the long stretch of neon ended, and I headed up into the hills. Mulholland was rife with motorcycle bulls in speed traps, and I resisted the urge to leadfoot to the beach.

Finally I got tired of driving like a law-abiding citizen and pulled over to the embankment. Movie searchlights out of Westwood Village strafed the sky just above me; I watched them swivel and pick out low cloud formations. Following the lights was hypnotic, and I let the act numb me. Cars racing by on Mulholland hardly dented my numbness, and when the lights went off I checked my watch and saw that it was past midnight.

Stretching, I looked down at the few house lights still glowing and thought of Kay Lake. Reading between the lines of the newspaper piece, I saw her servicing Bobby De Witt and his friends, maybe selling it for him, a heister's hausfrau jacked on laudanum. It read true, but ugly, like I was betraying the sparks between us. Kay's exit line started coming on as true, and I wondered how Blanchard could live with her without possessing her completely.

The house lights went off one by one, and I was alone. A cold wind blew down from the hills; I shivered and got the answer.

You come off a winning fight. Sweat-drenched, tasting blood, high as the stars, still wanting to *go*. The handbooks who made money on you bring you a girl. A pro, a semipro, an amateur tasting her own blood. You do it in the dressing room, or in a backseat too cramped for your legs, and sometimes you kick the side windows out. When you walk outside after it, people mob you and swarm to touch you, and you go high as the stars again. It becomes another part of the game, the eleventh round of a ten-round fight. And when you go back to an ordinary life, it's just a weakness, a loss. As long as he'd been away from the game, Blanchard had to know it, had to want to keep his love for Kay separate from that.

I got in the car and headed home, wondering if I would ever tell Kay that I didn't have a woman because sex tasted like blood and resin and suture scrub to me.

CHAPTER FOUR

We left our dressing rooms simultaneously, at the sound of a warning bell. Pushing out the door, I was an adrenaline live wire. I had chewed a big steak two hours before, swallowing the juice and spitting out the meat, and I could smell animal blood in my sweat. Dancing on my toes, I moved toward my corner through the most incredible fight mob I had ever seen.

The gym was packed to more than capacity, the spectators crammed together in narrow wooden chairs and bleachers. Every human being seemed to be shouting, and people in the aisle seats plucked at my robe and urged me to kill. The side rings had been removed; the center ring was bathed in a perfect square of hot yellow light. Grabbing the bottom rope, I hoisted myself into it.

The referee, an old foot beat hack from Central night-watch, was talking to Jimmy Lennon, on one-night leave from his announcer's gig at the Olympic; at ringside I saw Stan Kenton huddled with Misty June Christy, Mickey Cohen, Mayor Bowron, Ray Milland and a shit-load of high brass in civvies. Kenton waved at me; I yelled 'Artistry in rhythm!' at him. He laughed, and I bared my buck choppers at the crowd, who roared their approval. The roars grew to a crescendo; I turned around and saw that Blanchard had entered the ring.

Mr. Fire bowed in my direction; I saluted him with a barrage of short punches. Duane Fisk steered me to my stool; I took off my robe and leaned against the turnbuckle with my arms draped over the top rope. Blanchard moved into a similar position; we locked eyes. Jimmy Lennon waved the ref to a neutral corner, and the ring mike slinked down from a pole attached to the ceiling lights. Lennon grabbed it and shouted above the roar: 'Ladies and gentlemen, policemen and supporters of LA's finest, it is time for the Fire and Ice tango!'

The crowd went batshit, howling and stomping. Lennon waited until they quieted down to a buzz, then crooned: 'Tonight we have ten rounds of boxing in the heavyweight division. In the white corner, wearing white trunks, a Los Angeles policeman with a professional record of forty-three wins, four losses and two draws. Weighing two hundred and three and one half pounds, ladies and gentlemen, Big Lee Blanchard!'

Blanchard slipped off his robe, kissed his gloves and bowed in all four directions. Lennon let the spectators go nuts for a few moments, then made his amplified voice rise above it all: 'And in the black corner, weighing one ninety-one, a Los Angeles policeman, undefeated with thirty-six straight pro wins – Tricky Bucky Bleichert!'

I soaked up my last hurrah, memorizing the faces at ringside, pretending I wasn't going to dive. The noise in the gym leveled off; I walked to the center of the ring. Blanchard approached; the ref mumbled words that I didn't hear; Mr. Fire and I touched gloves. I got scared shitless and moved back to my corner; Fisk slipped my mouthpiece in. Then the bell rang, and it was all over and just starting.

Blanchard charged. I met him in the middle of the ring, popping double jabs as he went into a crouch and stood in front of me weaving his head. The jabs missed, and I kept moving left, making no move to counter, hoping to sucker him into a right hand lead.

His first punch was a looping left hook to the body. I saw it coming and stepped inside, connecting with a short left cross to the head. Blanchard's hook grazed my back, it was one of the most powerful missed punches I'd ever taken. His right hand was low, and I brought in a short uppercut. It landed cleanly, and while Blanchard covered up I banged a one-two to his rib cage. Backpedaling before he could clinch or go to the body himself, I caught a left hand on the neck. It shook me, and I got up on my toes and started circling.

Blanchard stalked me. I stayed out of reach, peppering his always moving head with jabs, connecting more than half the time, reminding myself to hit low, so I wouldn't open up his scarred eyebrows. Moving from a crouch, Blanchard winged body hooks; I stepped back and countered them with on-target combinations. After a minute or so I had his feints and my jabs sychronized, and when his head snapped I dug in short right hooks to the ribs.

I danced, circled and threw punches in flurries. Blanchard stalked and looked for openings to land the big one. The round was winding down, and I realized that ceiling light glare and crowd smoke had distorted my ring bearings – I couldn't see the ropes. On reflex, I looked over my shoulder. Turning back, I caught the big one flush on the side of the head.

I staggered into the white corner turnbuckle; Blanchard was all over me. My head rang and my ears buzzed like Jap Zeros were dive-bombing inside them. I put up my hands to protect my face; Blanchard slammed pulverizing left-right hooks at my arms to bring them down. My head started clearing, and I leaped out and grabbed Mr. Fire in a bear hug clinch, holding him with all my juice, getting stronger each second as I stagger-pushed the two of us across the ring. Finally the ref intervened and yelled 'Break!' I still held on, and he had to pry us apart.

I backpedaled, the dizziness and ear buzzing gone. Blanchard came at me flat-footed, wide open. I feinted with my left, and Big Lee stepped straight into a perfect overhand right. He hit the canvas flat on his ass.

I don't know who was more shocked. Blanchard sat there slack-jawed, taking the ref's count; I moved to a neutral corner. Blanchard was on his feet at seven, and this time I charged. Mr. Fire was dug in, feet planted wide apart, ready to kill or die. We were almost within swinging distance when the ref stepped between us and shouted, 'The bell! The bell!'

I walked back to my corner. Duane Fisk removed my mouthpiece and doused me with a wet towel; I looked out at the fans, on their feet applauding. Every face I saw told me what *I* now knew: that I could cancel Blanchard's ticket plain and simple. And for a split second I thought that every voice was screaming for me not to throw the fight.

Fisk turned me around and popped in my mouthpiece, hissing, 'Don't mix it up with him! Stay outside! Work off the jab!'

The bell rang. Fisk stepped out of the ring; Blanchard made a beeline for me. His stance was straight up now, and he threw a series of jabs that stopped just short of the money, moving in a step at a time, measuring me for a big right cross. I stayed on my toes and flicked doubled-up jabs from too far out to hurt, trying to set up a rhythm that would lull Blanchard into leaving his body open.

Most of my shots hit; Blanchard kept pressing. I banged a right to his ribs; he leaped in with a counter-right to mine. At close range, we threw body shots two handed; with no swinging room, the blows were nothing more than arm action, and Blanchard kept his chin dug into his collarbone, obviously wise to my inside uppercuts.

We stayed in close, landing only glancing blows to the arms and shoulders. I felt Blanchard's superior strength through all of it, but made no move to get out, wanting to put some hurt on him before I got back on my bicycle. I was settling into serious trench warfare when Mr. Fire got as cute as Mr. Ice at his cutest.

In the middle of a body exchange, Blanchard took one simple step backward and shot a hard left to my lower gut. The blow stung, and I backed up, getting ready to dance. I felt the ropes and brought up my guard, but before I could move sideways and away, a left-right caught me in the kidneys. My guard came down, and a Blanchard left hook connected with my chin.

I bounced off the ropes and hit the canvas on my knees. shock waves pulsed from my jaw to my brain; I caught a jiggly picture of the referee restraining Blanchard, pointing to a neutral corner. I got up on one knee and grabbed the bottom rope, then lost my balance and flopped on my stomach. Blanchard had reached a neutral turnbuckle, and being prone took the jiggle out of my vision. I sucked in deep breaths; the new air eased the crackling feeling in my head. The ref came back and started counting, and at six I tried my legs. My knees buckled a little, but I was able to stand steady. Blanchard was blowing glove kisses to the fans, and I began hyperventilating so hard that my mouthpiece almost popped out. At eight the referee wiped my gloves on his shirt and gave Blanchard the signal to fight.

I felt out of control with anger, like a humiliated child. Blanchard came at me loose-limbed, his gloves open, like I wasn't worth a closed fist. I met him head-on, throwing a mock-woozy jab as he got into firing range. Blanchard slipped the punch easily – just like he was supposed to. He loaded up a huge right cross to finish me, and while he was rearing back I pounded a full-force counter-right at his nose. His head snapped; I followed through with a left hook to the body. Mr. Fire's guard fell; I stepped inside with a short uppercut. The bell rang just as he staggered into the ropes.

The crowd was chanting, 'Buck-kee! Buck-kee! Buck-kee!' as I weaved to my corner. I spat out my mouthpiece and gasped for air; I looked out at the fans and knew that all bets were off, that I was going to pound Blanchard into dog meat and milk Warrants for every process and repo dollar I could get my hands on, put the old man in a home with *that* money and have the whole enchilada.

Duane Fisk shouted: 'Box him! Box him!' The high brass judges at ringside grinned at me; I flashed them the buck-toothed Bucky Bleichert salute in return. Fisk shoved a bottle of water at my mouth, I guzzled and spat in the pail. He popped an ammonia cap under my nose and replaced my mouthpiece – then the bell rang.

Now it was straight cautious business – my specialty.

For the next four rounds I danced, feinted and jabbed from the outside, utilizing my reach advantage, never letting Blanchard tie me up or get me on the ropes. I concentrated on one target – his scarred eyebrows – and flicked, flicked, flicked my left glove at them. If the jab landed solidly and Blanchard's arms raised in reflex, I stepped inside and right-hooked to the breadbasket. Half the time Blanchard was able to counter to *my* body, and each shot that landed took a little bounce off my legs, a little *oomph* off my wind. By the end of the sixth round Blanchard's eyebrows were a gashed ridge of blood and my sides were welted from trunk line to rib cage. And we were both running out of steam.

Round seven was trench warfare fought by two exhausted warriors. I tried to stay outside and work the jab; Blanchard kept his gloves high to wipe the blood out of his eyes and protect his cuts from further ripping. Every time I stepped in, firing a one-two at his gloves and gut, he nailed me to the solar plexus.

The fight had turned into a second-to-second war. Waiting for the eighth stanza, I saw that my welts were dotted with pinpoints of blood; the shouts of 'Buck-kee! Buck-kee!' hurt my ears. Across the ring, Blanchard's trainer was swabbing his eyebrows with a styptic pencil and applying tiny adhesive bandages to the flaps of skin hanging loose. I slumped on my stool and let Duane Fisk feed me water and knead my shoulders, staring at Mr. Fire the whole sixty seconds, making him look like the old man so I'd have the hate juice to top out the next nine minutes.

The bell sounded. I moved toward the center of the ring on wobbly legs. Blanchard, back in a crouch, came at me. His legs were trembling just like mine, and I saw that his cuts were closed.

I fired off a weak jab. Blanchard caught it coming in and still kept coming, muzzling my glove out of the way as my dead legs refused to backpedal. I felt the laces rip open his eyebrows; my gut caved in just as I saw Blanchard's face streaming with blood. My knees buckled; I spat my mouthpiece, toppled backward and hit the ropes. A right hand bomb was arching toward me. It looked like it was launched from miles and miles away, and I knew I'd have time to counter. I put all my hate into my own right and shot it straight at the bloody target in front of me. I felt the unmistakable crunch of nose cartilage, then everything went black and hot yellow. I looked up at blinding light and felt myself being lifted; Duane Fisk and Jimmy Lennon materialized beside me, holding my arms. I spat blood and the words 'I won'; Lennon said, 'Not tonight, laddie. You lost – eighth-round KO.'

When it all sank in, I laughed and pulled my arms free. The last thing I thought of before passing out was that I had cut the old man loose – and *clean*.

I got ten days off from duty – at the insistence of the doctor who examined me after the fight. My ribs were bruised, my jaw was swollen to twice its normal size and the punch that did me in loosened six of my teeth. The croaker told me later that Blanchard's nose was broken, and that his cuts required twenty-six stitches. On the basis of damage inflicted, the fight was a draw.

Pete Lutkins collected my winnings, and together we scouted rest homes until we found one that looked fit for human habitation – the King David Villa, a block off the Miracle Mile. For two grand a year and fifty a month deducted from his Social Security check, the old man would have his own room, three squares and plenty of 'group activities.' Most of the oldsters at the home were Jewish, and it pleased me that the crazy Kraut was going to be spending the rest of his life in an enemy camp. Pete and I installed him there, and when we left he was fungooing the head nurse and ogling a colored girl making up beds.

After that I stuck to my apartment, reading and listening to jazz on the radio, slopping up ice cream and soup, the only food I could handle. I felt content in knowing I had played as hard as I could – winning half the apples in the process.

The phone rang constantly; since I knew it had to be reporters or cops offering condolences, I never answered. I didn't listen to sports broadcasts and I didn't read the newspapers. I wanted a clean break with local celebrity, and holing up was the only way to accomplish it.

My wounds were healing, and after a week I was itchy to go back on duty. I took to spending afternoons on the back steps, watching my landlady's cat stalk birds. Chico was eyeing a perched bluejay when I heard a reedy voice call out, 'Ain't you bored yet?'

I looked down. Lee Blanchard was standing at the foot of the steps. His eyebrows were laced with stitches and his nose was flattened and purple. I laughed and said, ‘Getting there.’

Blanchard hooked his thumbs in his belt. ‘Wanta work Warrants with me?’

‘*What?*’

‘You heard me. Captain Harwell’s been calling to tell you, only you were fucking hibernating.’

I was tingling. ‘But I lost. Ellis Loew said –’

‘Fuck what Ellis Loew said. Don’t you read the papers? The bond issue passed yesterday, probably because we gave the voters such a good show. Horrall told Loew that Johnny Vogel was out, that you were his man. You want the job?’

I walked down the steps and stuck out my hand. Blanchard shook it and winked.

So the partnership began.

CHAPTER FIVE

Central Division Warrants was on the sixth floor of City Hall, situated between the LAPD's Homicide Bureau and the Criminal Division of the DA's Office – a partitioned-off space with two desks facing each other, two file cabinets spilling folders and a map of the County of Los Angeles covering the window. There was a pebbled glass door lettered with DEPUTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY ELLIS LOEW separating the cubicle from the Warrants boss and DA Buron Fitts – his boss – and nothing separating it from the Homicide dicks' bullpen, a huge room with rows of desks and corkboard walls hung with crime reports, wanted posters and miscellaneous memoranda. The more battered of the two desks in Warrants had a plate reading SERGEANT L. C. BLANCHARD. The desk facing it had to be mine, and I slumped into the chair picturing OFFICER D. W. BLEICHERT etched on wood next to the phone.

I was alone, the only one on the sixth floor. It was just after 7:00 A.M., and I had driven to my first day's duty early, in order to savor my plainclothes debut. Captain Harwell had called to say that I was to report to my new assignment on Monday morning, November 17, at 8:00, and that the day would begin with attending the reading of the felony summary for the previous week, which was mandatory for all LAPD personnel and Criminal Division DA's. Lee Blanchard and Ellis Loew would be briefing me on the job itself later, and after that it would be the pursuit of fugitive warrantees.

The sixth floor housed the Department's elite divisions: Homicide, Administrative Vice, Robbery and Bunco, along with Central Warrants and the Central Detective Squad. It was the domain of specialist cops, cops with political juice and up-and-comers, and it was my home now. I was wearing my best sports jacket and slacks combo, my service revolver hung from a brand-new shoulder rig. Every man on the Force owed me for the 8 per cent pay raise that came with the passage of Proposition 5. My departmental juice was just starting. I felt ready for anything.

Except rehashing the fight. At 7:40 the bullpen started filling up with officers grumbling about hangovers, Monday mornings in general and Bucky Bleichert, dancemaster turned puncher, the new kid on the block. I stayed out of sight in the cubicle until I heard them filing into the hall. When the pen fell silent, I walked down to a door marked DETECTIVES' MUSTER ROOM. Opening it, I got a standing ovation.

It was applause military style, the forty or so plainclothesmen standing by their chairs, clapping in unison. Looking toward the front of the room, I saw a blackboard with '8%!!!' chalked on it. Lee Blanchard was next to the board, standing beside a pale fat man with the air of high brass. I sighted in on Mr. Fire. He grinned, the fat man moved to a lectern and banged on it with his knuckles. The claps trailed off; the men sat down. I found a chair at the back of the room and settled into it; the fat man rapped the lectern a last time.

'Officer Bleichert, the men of Central Dicks, Homicide, Ad Vice, Bunco, et cetera,' he said. 'You already know Sergeant Blanchard and Mr. Loew, and I'm Captain Jack Tierney. You and Lee are the white men of the hour, so I hope you enjoyed your ovation, because you won't get another one until you retire.'

Everyone laughed. Tierney rapped the podium and spoke into an attached mike. ‘Enough horseshit. This is the felony summary for the week ending November 14, 1946. Pay close attention, it’s a doozy.

‘First off, three liquor store stickups, on the nights of 11/10, 11/12 and 11/13, all within ten blocks on Jefferson in University Division. Two teenaged Caucasians with sawed-offs and the heebie-jeebies, obviously hopheads. The University dicks have got no leads, and the squad boss there wants a Robbery team on it full-time. Lieutenant Ruley, see me at 0900 on this, and all you men put out the word to your snitches – hophead-heister is a bad MO.

‘Moving east, we’ve got freelance prosties working the restaurant bars in Chinatown. They’re servicing their johns in parked cars, lowballing the girls Mickey Cohen’s been running there. Misdemeanor stuff so far, but Mickey C. doesn’t like it and the Chinks don’t like it because Mickey’s girls use the hot sheet flops on Alameda – all Chink owned. Sooner or later we’re looking at grief, so I want the restaurant owners pacified and forty-eight-hour detentions on every Chinatown whore we can grab. Captain Harwell’s detaching a dozen night-watch blues for a sweep later in the week, and I want the Ad Vice whore files gone through and mug shots and rap sheets pulled for every independent hooker known to work Central. I want two men from Central dicks in on this, with Ad Vice supervising. Lieutenant Pringle, see me at 0915.’

Tierney paused and stretched; I looked around the room and saw that most of the officers were writing in notebooks. I was cursing myself for not bringing one when the captain slammed the lectern with two flattened palms. ‘Here’s a collar and would please old Captain Jack no end. I’m talking about the Bunker Hill house burglaries Sergeants Vogel and Koenig have been working on. Fritzie, Bill, have you read the SID memo on it?’

Two men sitting side by side a few rows up from me called out, ‘No, Cap’ and ‘Nossir.’ I got a good profile look at the older of them – the spitting image of Fat Johnny Vogel, only fatter.

Tierney said, ‘I suggest you read it immediately after this briefing. For the benefit of you men not directly involved in the investigation, the print boys found a set of latents at the last break-in, right near the silverware cupboard. They belonged to a white male named Coleman Walter Maynard, age 31, two sodomy priors. A surefire degenerate baby raper.

‘County Parole’s got no line on him. He was living at a transient hotel on 14th and Bonnie Brae, but he hot-footed around the time the burglaries started. Highland Park’s got four sodomy unsolveds, all little boys around eight years old. Maybe it’s Maynard and maybe it isn’t, but between them and the B&Es we could fix him up with a nice one-way to Q. Fritzie, Bill, what else are you working on?’

Bill Koenig hunched over his notebook; Fritz Vogel cleared his throat and said, ‘We’ve been working the downtown hotels. We collared a couple of key thieves and rousted some pick-pockets.’

Tierney tapped the podium with one heavy knuckle. ‘Fritzie, were the key thieves Jerry Katzenbach and Mike Purdy?’

Vogel squirmed in his chair. ‘Yessir.’

‘Fritzie, did they snitch each other off?’

‘Ah … yessir.’

Tierney rolled his eyes up to heaven. ‘Let me enlighten those of you not familiar with Jerry and Mike. They’re homos, and they live with Jerry’s mother in a cozy little love nest in Eagle Rock. They’ve been bedmates since God was a pup, but every once in a while they have spats and get the urge to chase jailhouse chicken, and one rats the other off. Then the other reciprocates and they both draw a county jolt. They stool on the gangs while they're in stir, pork nancy boys and get sentence reductions for their snitch duty. This has been going on since Mae West was a virgin. Fritzie, what *else* have you been working on?'

There was a rumble of laughter throughout the room. Bill Koenig started to get up, twisting his head to see who the laughers were. Fritz Vogel pulled him back down by his coat sleeve, then said, 'Sir, we've also been doing some work for Mr. Loew. Bringing in witnesses for him.'

Tierney's pale face was working toward beet red. 'Fritzie, I am the commander of Central Detectives, not Mr. Loew. Sergeant Blanchard and Officer Bleichert work for Mr. Loew, you and Sergeant Koenig do not. So drop what you're doing for Mr. Loew, leave the pickpockets alone and bring in Coleman Walter Maynard before he rapes any more little boys, would you please? There's a memo on his known associates on the squadroom bulletin board, and I suggest all officers acquaint themselves with it. Maynard a lamster now, and he might be holing up with one of them.'

I saw Lee Blanchard leave the muster room by a side exit. Tierney leafed through some papers on the lectern and said, 'Here's one that Chief Green thinks you should know about. Over the past three weeks someone's been tossing chopped-up dead cats into the cemeteries off Santa Monica and Gower. Hollywood Division's taken a half dozen reports on it. According to Lieutenant Davis at 77th Street, that's a calling card of nigger youth gangs. Most of the cats have been dumped on Thursday nights, and the Hollywood roller rink's open to shines on Thursdays, so maybe there's something to that. Ask around, talk to your informants and relay anything pertinent to Sergeant Hollander at Hollywood dicks. Now the homicides. Russ?'

A tall, gray-haired man in an immaculate double-breasted suit took the podium; Captain Jack plopped into the nearest available chair. The tall man carried himself with an authority that was more like a judge or hotshot lawyer than a cop; he reminded me of the smooth Lutheran preacher who palled around with the old man until the Bund went on the subversive list. The officer sitting next to me whispered, 'Lieutenant Millard. Number two in Homicide, but the real boss. A real piece of velvet.' I nodded and listened to the lieutenant speak in a velvet-smooth voice:

'… and the coroner ruled the Russo-Nickerson job murder-suicide. The Bureau is handling the hit-and-run on Pico and Figueroa on 11/10, and we located the vehicle, a '39 La Salle sedan, abandoned. It's registered to a male Mexican named Luis Cruz, age 42, of 1349 Alta Loma Vista in South Pasadena. Cruz is a two-time loser with a Folsom jacket – both falls Robbery One. He's long gone, and his wife claims the La Salle was stolen in September. She says it was snatched by Cruz's cousin Armando Villareal, age 39, who's also missing. Harry Sears and I took the initial squeal on this one, and eyeball witnesses said there were two male mexicans in the car. Have you got anything else, Harry?'

A squat, disheveled man stood up, turned around and faced the room. He swallowed a few times, then stammered, 'C-C-C-Cruz's wife is sc-screwing the c-c-c-cousin. The c-c-c-car was never reported st-stolen, and the neighbors s-say the wife wants the c-cousin's parole violated so C-C-Cruz won't find out about them.'

Harry Sears sat down abruptly. Millard smiled at him and said, 'Thanks, partner. Gentlemen, Cruz and Villareal are now state parole absconders and priority fugitives. APBs and absconder warrants have been issued. And here's the punch line: both of these guys are boozehounds, with over a hundred plain drunks between them. Hit-and-run drunks are a damn menace, so let's get them. Captain?'

Tierney stood up and shouted, ‘Dismissed!’ Cops swarmed me, offering hands and back slaps and chucks under the chin. I soaked it in until the muster room cleared and Ellis Loew approached, fiddling with the Phi Beta Kappa key dangling from his vest.

‘You shouldn’t have slugged with him,’ he said, twirling the key. ‘You were ahead on all three cards.’

I held the DA’s stare. ‘Proposition 5 passed, Mr. Loew.’

‘Yes, it did. But some patrons of yours lost money. Play it smarter here, Officer. Don’t blow this opportunity like you did the fight.’

‘You ready, canvasback?’

Blanchard’s voice saved me. I went with him before I did something to blow it then and there.

We headed south in Blanchard’s civilian car, a ’40 Ford coupe with a contraband two-way under the dashboard. Lee rambled on about the job while I looked out at the downtown LA street scene.

‘… mostly we go after priority warrantees, but sometimes we chase down material witnesses for Loew. Not too often – he’s usually got Fritzie Vogel running his errands, with Bill Koenig along for muscle. Shitbirds, both of them. Anyway, we get slack periods sometimes, and we’re supposed to go by the other station houses and check the squadrooms for their priority stuff – warrants filed in the regional courts. Every LAPD station has two men working Warrants, but they spend most of their time catching squeals, so we’re supposed to help out. Sometimes, like today, you hear something at the felony summary or get something hot off the bulletin board. If it’s *really* slow, you can serve papers for the Department 92 shysters. Three bucks a throw, chump change. The real moolah’s in repos. I’ve got delinquent lists from H. J. Caruso Dodge and Yeakel Brothers Olds, all the nigger stiffs the credit agents are too pansy to move on. Any questions, partner?’

I resisted the urge to ask. ‘Why aren’t you screwing Kay Lake?’ and ‘While we’re on the subject, what’s the story on her?’

‘Yeah. Why’d you quit fighting and join the Department? And don’t tell me it was because your kid sister disappeared and catching criminals gives you a sense of order. I’ve heard that one twice, and I don’t buy it.’

Lee kept his eyes on traffic. ‘You got any sisters? Kid relatives you really care about?’

I shook my head. ‘My family’s dead.’

‘So’s Laurie. I figured it out when I was fifteen. Mom and Dad kept spending money on handbills and detectives, but I knew she was a snuff job. I kept picturing her growing up. Prom queen, straight A’s, her own family. It used to hurt like a bastard, so I pictured her growing up wrong. You know, like a floozy. It was actually comforting, but it felt like I was shitting on her.’

I said, ‘Look, I’m sorry.’

Lee gave me a gentle elbow. ‘Don’t be, because you’re right. I quit fighting and joined the cops because Benny Siegel was putting the heat on me. He bought out my contract and scared off my manager, and he promised me a shot at Joe Louis if I took two dives for him. I said no and joined the Department because the Jew syndicate boys have got a rule against killing cops. I was scared shitless that he’d kill me anyway, so when I heard that the Boulevard-Citizens heisters took some of Benny’s money along with the bank’s, I shook down stoolies until I got Bobby De Witt on a platter. I gave Benny first crack at him. His number two man talked him out of a snuff, so I took the dope to Hollywood dicks. Benny's my pal now. Gives me tips on the ponies all the time. Next question?'

I decided not to push for information on Kay. Checking out the street, I saw that downtown had given way to blocks of small, unkempt houses. The Bugsy Siegel story stayed with me; I was running with it when Lee slowed the car and pulled to the curb.

I blurted, 'What the hell'; Lee said, 'This one's for my own personal satisfaction. You remember the baby raper on the felony sheet?'

'Sure.'

'Tierney said there's four sodomy unsolveds in Highland Park, right?'

'Right.'

'And he mentioned that there was a memo on the rape-o's KAs?'

'Sure. What—'

'Bucky, I read that memo and recognized the name of a fence – Bruno Albanese. He works out of a Mex restaurant in Highland Park. I called Highland Park dicks and got the addresses on the assaults, and two of them were within a half mile of the joint where the fence hangs out. This is his house, and R&I says he's got a shitload of unpaid traffic tickets, bench warrants issued. You want a diagram of the rest of it?'

I got out of the car and walked across a weedy front yard strewn with dog turds. Lee caught up with me at the porch and rang the bell; furious barks issued from inside the house.

The door opened, held to the frame by a chain. The barks grew to a crescendo; through the crack I glimpsed a slatternly woman. I shouted, 'Police officers!' Lee wedged his foot into the space between the doorjamb and runner; I reached inside and twisted the chain off. Lee pushed the door open, and the woman ran out onto the porch. I stepped inside the house, wondering about the dog. I was eyeballing a seedy living room when a big brown mastiff leaped at me, his jaws wide open. I fumbled for my piece – and the beast started licking my face.

We stood there, the dog's front paws resting on my shoulders like we were doing the Lindy Hop. A big tongue lapped at me, and the woman yelped, 'Be nice, Hacksaw! Be nice!'

I grabbed the dog's legs and lowered him to the floor; he promptly turned his attention to my crotch. Lee was talking to the slattern, showing her a mug shot strip. She was shaking her head no, hands on hips, the picture of an irate citizen. With Hacksaw at my heels, I joined them.

Lee said, 'Mrs. Albanese, this man's the senior officer. Would you tell him what you just told me?'

The slattern shook her fists; Hacksaw explored Lee's crotch. I said, 'Where's your husband, lady? We don't have all day.'

'I told him and I'll tell you! Bruno's paid his debt to society! He doesn't fraternize with criminals and I don't know any Coleman what's his name! He's a businessman! His parole officer made him quit hanging out at that Mexican place two weeks ago, and I don't know where he is! Hacksaw, be nice!'

I looked at the real senior officer, now stagger-dancing with a two-hundred-pound dog. 'Lady, your husband's a known fence with outstanding traffic warrants. I've got a hot merchandise list in the car, and if you don't tell me where he is, I'll turn your house upside down until I find something dirty. Then I'll arrest *you* for receiving stolen goods. What's it gonna be?'

The slattern beat her fists into her legs; Lee wrestled Hacksaw down to all fours and said, 'Some people don't respond to civility. Mrs. Albanese, do you know what

Russian roulette is?'

The woman pouted, 'I'm not dumb and Bruno's paid his debt to society!' Lee pulled a .38 snubnose out of his back waistband, checked the cylinder and snapped it shut. 'There's one bullet in this gun. You feeling lucky, Hacksaw?'

Hacksaw said, 'Woof'; the woman said, 'You wouldn't dare.' Lee put the .38 to the dog's temple and pulled the trigger. The hammer clicked on an empty chamber; the woman gasped and started turning pale; Lee said, 'Five to go. Prepare for doggie heaven, Hacksaw.'

Lee squeezed the trigger a second time; I held in belly laughs when the hammer clicked again and Hacksaw licked his balls, bored over the whole thing. Mrs. Albanese was praying fervently with her eyes shut. Lee said, 'Time to meet your maker, doggy'; the woman blurted, 'No no no no no! Bruno's tending bar in Silverlake! The Buena Vista on Vendome! Please leave my baby alone!'

Lee showed me the .38's empty cylinder, and we walked back to the car with Hacksaw's happy barks echoing behind us. I laughed all the way to Silverlake.

The Buena Vista was a bar and grill shaped like a Spanish rancho – whitewashed adobe walls and turrets festooned with christmas lights six weeks before the holiday. The interior was cool, all dark wood. There was a long oak bar just off the entrance foyer, with a man behind it polishing glasses. Lee flashed his shield at him and said, 'Bruno Albanese?' The man pointed to the back of the restaurant, lowering his eyes.

The rear of the grill was narrow, with Leatherette booths and dim lighting. Wolfish eating noises led us to the last booth – the only one occupied. A thin, swarthy man was hunched over a plate piled high with beans, chili and huevos rancheros, shoveling the slop in like it was his last meal on earth.

Lee rapped on the table. 'Police officers. Are you Bruno Albanese?'

The man looked up and said, 'Who, me?'

Lee slid into the booth and pointed to the religious tapestry on the wall. 'No, the kid in the manger. Let's make this fast, so I don't have to watch you eat. You've got outstanding warrants, but me and my partner like your dog, so we're not taking you in. Ain't that nice of us?'

Bruno Albanese belched, then said, 'You mean you want some skinny?'

Lee said, 'Whiz kid,' and smoothed the Maynard mug shot strip on the table. 'He cornholes little boys. We know he sells to you, and we don't care. Where is he?'

Albanese looked at the strip and burped. 'I never seen this guy before. Somebody steered you wrong.'

Lee looked at me and sighed. He said, 'Some people don't respond to civility,' then grabbed Bruno Albanese by the scruff of the neck and smashed his head face first into the plate of goo. Bruno sucked in grease through his mouth, nose and eyeballs, flapping his arms and banging his legs under the table. Lee held him there, intoning, 'Bruno Albanese was a good man. He was a good husband and a good father to his son Hacksaw. He wasn't very cooperative with the police, but who expects perfection? Partner, can you give me a reason to spare this shitbird's life?'

Albanese was making gurgling sounds; blood was leaking into his huevos rancheros. 'Have mercy,' I said. 'Even fences deserve a better last supper.'

Lee said, 'Well put,' and let go of Albanese's head. He came up for air bleeding and gasping, wiping a whole Mexican cookbook off his face. When he got breath he wheezed out, 'The Versailles Apartments on 6th and Saint Andrews room 803 and please don't give me a rat jacket!'

Lee said, 'Bon appetit, Bruno'; I said, 'You're good.' We ran out of the restaurant and highballed it code three to 6th and Saint Andrews.

The mail slots in the Versailles lobby listed a Maynard Coleman in Apartment 803. We rode the elevator up to the eighth floor and rang the buzzer; I put my ear to the door and heard nothing. Lee took a ring of skeleton keys from his pocket and worked them into the lock until one hit and the mechanism gave with a sharp click.

We entered a hot, dark little room. Lee flicked on the overhead light, illuminating a Murphy bed covered with stuffed animals – teddy bears, pandas and tigers. The crib stank of sweat and some medicinal odor I couldn't place. I wrinkled my nose, and Lee placed it for me. 'Vaseline with cortisone. The homos use it for ass lube. I was gonna turn Maynard over to Captain Jack personally, but now I'm gonna let Vogel and Koenig have him first.'

I moved to the bed and examined the animals; they all had ringlets of soft children's hair taped between their legs. Shivering, I looked at Lee. He was pale, his features contorted by facial tics. Our eyes met, and we silently left the room and took the elevator downstairs. On the sidewalk, I said, 'What now?'

Lee's voice was shaky. 'Find a phone booth and call the DMV. Give them Maynard's alias and this address and ask if they've processed any pink slips on it the past month or so. If they have, get a vehicle description and a license number. I'll meet you at the car.'

I ran to the corner, found a pay phone and dialed the DMV police information line. A clerk answered, 'Who's requesting?'

'Officer Bleichert, LAPD badge 1611. Auto purchase information, Maynard Coleman or Coleman Maynard, 643 South Saint Andrews, LA. Probably recent.'

'Gotcha – one minute.'

I waited, notebook and pen in hand, thinking of the stuffed animals. A good five minutes later, 'Officer, it's a positive,' jarred me.

'Shoot.'

'De Soto sedan, 1938, dark green, license B as in boy, V as in Victor, 1–4–3–2 Repeat, B as in boy—'

I wrote it down, hung up and ran back to the car. Lee was scrutinizing an LA street atlas, jotting notes. I said. 'Got him.'

Lee closed the atlas. 'He's probably a school prowler. There were elementary schools near the Highland Park jobs, and there's a half dozen of them around here. I radioed the Hollywood and Wilshire desks and told them what we've got. Patrol cars are gonna stop by the schools and put out the skinny on Maynard. What's the DMV got?'

I pointed to my notesheet; Lee grabbed the radio mike and switched on the outgoing dial. Static fired up, then the two-way went dead. Lee said, 'Fuck it, let's roll.'

We cruised elementary schools in Hollywood and the Wilshire District. Lee drove, I scanned curbs and school yards for green De Sotos and loiterers. We stopped once at a gamewell phone, and Lee called Wilshire and Hollywood stations with the DMV dope, getting assurances that it would be relayed to every radio car, every watch.

During those hours we hardly spoke a word. Lee gripped the wheel with white-knuckled fingers, slow lane crawling. The only time his expression changed was when we pulled over to check out kids at play. Then his eyes clouded and his hands shook, and I thought he would either weep or explode.

But he just kept staring, and the simple act of moving back into traffic seemed to calm him. It was as if he knew exactly how far to let himself go as a man before getting back to strict cop business.

Shortly after 3:00 we headed south on Van Ness, a run by Van Ness Avenue Elementary. We were a block away, going by the Polar Palace, when green De Soto BV 1432 passed us in the opposite direction and pulled into the parking lot in front of the rink.

I said, 'We've got him. Polar Palace.'

Lee hung a U-turn and drew to the curb directly across the street from the lot. Maynard was locking the De Soto, eyeing a group of kids skipping toward the entrance with skates slung over their shoulders. 'Come on,' I said.

Lee said, 'You take him, I might lose my temper. Make sure the kids are out of the way, and if he pulls any hinky moves, kill him.'

Solo plainclothes rousts were strictly against the book. 'You're crazy. This is a—'

Lee shoved me out the door. 'Go get him, goddamnit! This is Warrants, not a fucking classroom! Go get him!'

I dodged traffic across Van Ness to the parking lot, catching sight of Maynard entering the Polar Palace in the middle of a big throng of children. I sprinted to the front door and opened it, telling myself to go smooth and slow.

Cold air stunned me; harsh light reflecting off the ice rink stung my eyes. Shielding them, I looked around and saw papier mâché fjords and a snack stand shaped like an igloo. There were a few kids twirling on the ice, and a group of them oohing and aahing at a giant taxidermied polar bear standing on its hind legs by a side exit. There was not an adult in the joint. Then it hit me: check the men's room.

A sign pointed me to the basement. I was halfway down the stairs when Maynard started up them, a little stuffed rabbit in his hands. The stench of room 803 came back; just as he was about to pass me, I said, 'Police officer, you're under arrest,' and drew my .38.

The rape-o threw up his hands; the rabbit went flying. I shoved him into the wall, frisked him and cuffed his hands behind his back. Blood pounded in my head as I pushed him up the stairs; I felt something pummeling my legs. 'You leave my daddy alone! Leave my daddy alone!'

The assailant was a little boy in short pants and a sailor's jumper. It took me half a second to make him as the rape-o's kid – their resemblance was bone deep. The boy attached himself to my belt and kept bawling, 'Leave my daddy alone'; the father kept bawling for time to say good-bye and get a babysitter; I kept moving, up the stairs and through the Polar Palace, my gun at the rape-o's head, my other hand pushing him forward, the kid dragging behind me, yowling and punching with all his might. A crowd had formed; I shouted, 'Police officer!' until they separated and gave me a shot at the door. An old geezer opened it for me, blurting, 'Hey! ain't you Bucky Bleichert?'

I gasped, 'Grab the kid and call for a matron'; the junior tornado was yanked off my back. I saw Lee's Ford in the parking lot, shoved Maynard all the way to it and into the backseat. Lee hit the horn and peeled; the rape-o mumbled Jesus mumbo jumbo. I kept wondering why the horn blare couldn't drown out the little boy's shrieks for his daddy.

We dropped Maynard off at the Hall of Justice jail, and Lee phoned Fritz Vogel at Central squadroom, telling him the rape-o was in custody and ready to be interrogated on the Bunker Hill burglaries. Then it was back to City Hall, a call to notify Highland Park dicks of Maynard's arrest and a call to Hollywood Juvie to ease my conscience on the kid. The matron I talked to told me that Billy Maynard was there, waiting for his mother, Coleman Maynard's ex-wife, a car hop with six hooking convictions. He was still bawling for his daddy, and I hung up wishing I hadn't called.

Three hours of report writing followed. I wrote the arresting officer's summary longhand; Lee typed it up, omitting mention of our break-in at Coleman Maynard's apartment. Ellis Loew hovered around the cubicle as we worked, muttering, 'Great collar' and 'I'll kill them in court with the kid angle.'

We finished our paperwork at 7:00. Lee made a check mark in the air and said, 'Chalk another one up for Laurie Blanchard. You hungry, partner?'

I stood up and stretched, food suddenly a great idea. Then I saw Fritz Vogel and Bill Koenig approaching the cubicle. Lee whispered, 'Make nice, they've got juice with Loew.'

Up close, the two resembled gone-to-seed refugees from the LA Rams' middle line. Vogel was tall and fat, with a huge flat head that grew straight out of his shirt collar and the palest blue eyes I'd ever seen; Koenig was plain huge, topping my six foot three by a couple of inches, his linebacker's body just starting to go soft. He had a broad, flattened nose, jug ears, a crooked jaw and tiny chipped teeth. He looked stupid, Vogel looked shrewd, they both looked mean.

Koenig giggled. 'He confessed. The kiddie porks and the burglaries. Fritzie says we're all gonna get commendations.' He stuck out his hand. 'Good fight you gave blondie.'

I shook the big fist, noticing fresh blood on Koenig's right shirt cuff. I said, 'Thanks, Sarge,' then extended my hand to Fritz Vogel. He took it for a split second, bored into me with coldly furious eyes and dropped it like it was a hot turd.

Lee slapped my back. 'Bucky's aces. Smarts *and* cojoñes. You talked to Ellis about the confession?'

Vogel said, 'He's Ellis to lieutenants and up.'

Lee laughed. 'I'm a privileged character. Besides, you call him kike and Jewboy behind his back, so what do you care?'

Vogel flushed; Koenig looked around with his mouth open. When he turned, I saw blood spatters on his shirtfront. Vogel said, 'Come on Billy'; Koenig dutifully followed him back to the squadroom.

'Make nice, huh?'

Lee shrugged. 'Shitbirds. If they weren't cops they'd be in Atascadero. Do as I say, not as I do, partner. They're afraid of me, and you're just a rookie here.'

I racked my brain for a snappy reply. Then Harry Sears, looking twice as sloppy as he did in the morning, poked his head in the doorway. 'I heard something I thought you should know, Lee.' The words were spoken without a trace of a stutter; I smelled liquor on the man's breath.

Lee said, 'Shoot'; Sears said, 'I was over at County Parole, and the supervisor told me Bobby De Witt just got an 'A' number. He'll be paroled to LA around the middle of January. Just thought you should know.'

Sears nodded at me and took off. I looked at Lee, who was twitching like he did up in room 803 of the Versailles. I said, 'Partner—'

Lee managed a smile. 'Let's get ourselves some chow. Kay's making pot roast, and she said I should bring you home.'

I tagged along for the woman and was astounded by the pad: a beige Deco-streamline house a quarter mile north of the Sunset Strip. Going in the door, Lee said, ‘Don’t mention De Witt; it’ll upset Kay.’ I nodded and took in a living room straight out of a movie set.

The wainscoting was polished mahogany, the furniture was Danish Modern – gleaming blond wood in a half dozen shades. There were wall prints representing hotshot twentieth-century artists, and carpets embroidered with modernistic designs, mist-hung skyscrapers or tall trees in a forest or the spires of some German Expressionist factory. A dining area adjoined the living room, and the table held fresh flowers and chafing dishes leaking the aroma of good eats. I said, ‘Not bad on a cop’s pay. You taking a few bribes, partner?’

Lee laughed. ‘My fight stash. Hey babe, you here?’

Kay Lake walked in from the kitchen, wearing a floral dress that matched the tulips on the table. She took my hand and said, ‘Hello, Dwight.’ I felt like a punk kid crashing the junior prom.

‘Hello, Kay.’

With a squeeze she dropped my hand, ending the longest shake in history. ‘You and Leland partners. It makes you want to believe in fairy tales, doesn’t it?’

I looked around for Lee, and saw that he’d disappeared. ‘No. I’m the realistic type.’

‘I’m not.’

‘I can tell.’

‘I’ve had enough reality to last me a lifetime.’

‘I know.’

‘Who told you?’

‘The LA *Herald Express*.’

Kay laughed. ‘Then you did read my press clippings. Come to any conclusions?’

‘Yeah. Fairy tales don’t work out.’

Kay winked like Lee; I got the feeling that she was the one who taught him. ‘That’s why you have to turn them into reality. Leland! Dinnertime!’

Lee reappeared, and we sat down to eat; Kay cracked a bottle of champagne and poured. When our glasses were full, she said, ‘To fairy tales.’ We drank, Kay refilled, Lee said, ‘To Bond Issue B.’ The second dose of bubbly tickled my nose and made me laugh; I proposed, ‘To the Bleichert-Blanchard rematch at the Polo Grounds, a bigger gate than Louis and Schmeling.’

Lee said, ‘To the second Blanchard victory’; Kay said, ‘To a draw and no gore.’ We drank, and killed the bottle, and Kay retrieved another from the kitchen, popping the cork and hitting Lee in the chest. When our goblets were full, I caught my first blast of the juice and blurted, ‘To us.’ Lee and Kay looked at me in something like slow motion, and I saw that our free hands were all resting a few inches apart on the tabletop. Kay noticed me notice and winked; Lee said, ‘That’s where I learned how.’ Our hands moved together into a sort of triad, and we toasted ‘To us’ in unison.

Opponents, then partners, then friends. And with the friendship came Kay, never getting between us, but always filling in our lives outside the job with style and grace.

That fall of ’46, we went everywhere together. When we went to the movies, Kay took the middle seat and grabbed both our hands during the scary parts; when we spent big band Friday evenings at the Malibu Rendezvous, she alternated dances with the two of us and always tossed a coin to see who got the last slow number. Lee never expressed an ounce of jealousy, and Kay’s come-on subsided into a low simmer. It was there every time our shoulders brushed, every time a radio jingle or a funny billboard or a word from Lee hit us the same way and our eyes met instantaneously. The quieter it got, the more available I knew Kay was – and the more I wanted her. But I let it all ride, not because it would have destroyed my partnership with Lee, but because it would have upset the perfection of the three of us.

After tours of duty, Lee and I would go to the house and find Kay reading, underlining passages in books with a yellow crayon. She'd cook dinner for the three of us, and sometimes Lee would take off to run Mulholland on his motorcycle. Then we talked.

We always spoke around Lee, as if discussing the brute center of the three of us without him present was a cheat. Kay talked about the six years of college and two master's degrees that Lee had bankrolled with his fight stash and how her work as a substitute teacher was perfect for the 'overeducated dilettante' she'd become; I talked about growing up Kraut in Lincoln Heights. We never spoke of my snitching for the Alien Squad or her life with Bobby De Witt. We both sensed the other's general story, but neither of us wanted details. I had the upper hand there: the Ashida brothers and Sam Murakami were long gone and dead, but Bobby De Witt was a month away from LA parole – and I could tell Kay was afraid of his return.

If Lee was frightened, he never showed it past that moment when Harry Sears gave him the word, and it never hindered him during our best hours together – the ones spent working Warrants. That fall I learned what police work really was, and Lee was my teacher.

From mid-November through the New Year we captured a total of eleven hard felons, eighteen traffic warrantees and three parole and probation absconders. Our rousts of suspicious loiterers got us an additional half dozen arrests, all of them for narcotics violations. We worked from Ellis Loew's direct orders, the felony sheet and squadroom scuttlebutt, filtered through Lee's instincts. His techniques were sometimes cautious and roundabout and sometimes brutal, but he was always gentle with children, and when he went strong-arm to get information, it was because it was the only way to grab results.

So we became a 'good guy-bad guy' interrogation team; Mr. Fire the black hat, Mr. Ice the white. Our boxing reputations gave us an added edge of respect on the street, and when Lee rabbit-punched for information and I interceded on the punchee's behalf, it got us what we wanted.

The partnership wasn't perfect. When we worked twenty-four-hour tours, Lee would shake down hopheads for Benzedrine tablets and swallow handfuls to stay alert; then every negro roustee became 'Sambo,' every white man 'Shitbird,' every Mexican 'Pancho.' All his rawness came out, destroying his considerable finesse, and twice I had to hold him back for real when he got carried away with his black-hat role.

But it was a small price to pay for what I was learning. Under Lee's tutelage I got good fast, and I wasn't the only one who knew it. Even though he'd dropped half a grand on the fight, Ellis Loew warmed to me when Lee and I brought in a string of felons he was drooling to prosecute, and Fritz Vogel, who hated me for snatching Warrants from his son, reluctantly admitted to him that I was an ace cop.

And, surprisingly, my local celebrity lingered long enough to do me some extra good. Lee was a favored repo man with H.J. Caruso, the auto dealer with the famous radio ads, and when the job was slow we prowled for delinquent cars in Watts and Compton. When we found one, Lee would kick in the driver's side window and hot-wire the sled, and I would stand guard. Then we'd run a two-car convoy to Caruso's lot on Figueroa, and H.J. would slip us a double sawbuck apiece. We gabbed cops and robbers and fight stuff with him, and afterward he kicked back a good bottle of bourbon, that Lee always kicked back to Harry Sears to keep us greased up with good tips from Homicide.

Sometimes we joined H. J. for the Wednesday night fights at the Olympic. He had a specially constructed ringside booth that kept us protected when the mexicans in the top tier tossed coins and beer cups full of piss down at the ring, and Jimmy Lennon introduced us during the prefight ceremonies. Benny Siegel stopped by the booth occasionally, and he and Lee would go off to talk. Lee always came back looking slightly scared. The man he'd once defied was the most powerful gangster on the West Coast, known to be vindictive, with a hair-trigger temper. But Lee usually got track tips – and the horses Siegel gave him usually won.

So that fall went. The old man got a pass from the rest home at Christmas, and I brought him to dinner at the house. He had recovered pretty well from his stroke, but he still had no memory of English, and rambled on in German. Kay fed him turkey and goose and Lee listened to his Kraut monologues all night, interjecting, 'You tell 'em, pop' and 'Crazy, man' whenever he paused for breath. When I dropped him back at the home, he gave me the fungoo sign and managed to walk in under his own steam.

On New Year's Eve, we drove down to Balboa Island to catch Stan Kenton's band. We danced in 1947, high on champagne, and Kay flipped coins to see who got last dance and first kiss when midnight hit. Lee won the dance, and I watched them swirl across the floor to 'Perfidia,' feeling awe for the way they had changed my life. Then it was midnight, the band fired up, and I didn't know how to play it.

Kay took the problem away, kissing me softly on the lips, whispering, 'I love you, Dwight.' A fat woman grabbed me and blew a noisemaker in my face before I could return the words.

We drove home on Pacific Coast Highway, part of a long stream of horn-honking revelers. When we got to the house, my car wouldn't start, so I made myself a bed on the couch and promptly passed out from too much booze. Sometime toward dawn, I woke up to strange sounds muffling through the walls. I perked my ears to identify them, picking out sobs followed by Kay's voice, softer and lower than I had ever heard it. The sobbing got worse – trailing into whimpers. I pulled the pillow over my head and forced myself back to sleep.

CHAPTER SIX

I dozed through most of the lackluster January 10 felony summary, coming awake when Captain Jack barked, ‘That’s it. Lieutenant Millard, Sergeant Sears, Sergeant Blanchard and Officer Bleichert, go to Mr. Loew’s office immediately. Dismissed!’

I walked down the corridor to Ellis Loew’s inner sanctum. Lee, Russ Millard and Harry Sears were already there, milling around Loew’s desk, examining a stack of morning *Heralds*.

Lee winked and handed me a copy, folded over to the local section. I saw a piece titled, ‘Criminal Division DA to Try for Boss’s Job in ’48 Republican Primary?’ read three paragraphs lauding Ellis Loew and his concern for the citizens of Los Angeles and tossed the paper on the desk before I threw up. Lee said, ‘Here comes the man now. Hey Ellis, you going into politics? Say “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Let’s see how you sound.’

Lee’s FDR imitation got a laugh all around; even Loew chuckled as he handed out rap sheet carbons with mug shot strips attached. ‘Here’s the gentleman we all have to fear. Read those and find out why.’

I read the sheet. It detailed the criminal career of Raymond Douglas ‘Junior’ Nash, white male, born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1908. Nash’s convictions went back to 1926, and included Texas State Prison jolts for statutory rape, armed robbery, first degree mayhem and felonious assault. There were five California charges filed against him: three armed robbery warrants from up north in Oakland County and two 1944 LA papers – first degree statch rape and felony contributing to the delinquency of a minor. The rap sheet ended with notations from the San Francisco PD Intelligence Squad, stating that Nash was suspected of a dozen Bay Area stickups and was rumored to be one of the outside men behind the May ’46 Alcatraz crash-out attempt. Finishing, I checked out the mug shots. Junior Nash looked like a typical inbred Okie shitkicker: long bony head, thin lips, beady eyes and ears that could have belonged to Dumbo.

I glanced at the other men. Loew was reading about himself in the *Herald*; Millard and Sears were still on the sheets, poker-faced. Lee said, ‘Give us the good news, Ellis. He’s in LA and acting uppity, right?’

Loew fiddled with his Phi Beta Kappa key. ‘Eyewitnesses have made him for two market stickups in Leimert Park over the weekend, which is why he wasn’t in the felony summary. He pistol-whipped an old lady during the second robbery, and she died an hour ago at Good Samaritan.’

Harry Sears stammered, ‘Kn-kn-known as-s-sociates?’

Loew shook his head. ‘Captain Tierney talked to the SFPD this morning. They said Nash is a lone wolf type. Apparently he was recruited for his part in the Alcatraz thing, but that’s an exception. What I—’

Russ Millard raised his hand. ‘Is there a common denominator in Nash’s sex beefs?’

‘I was getting to that,’ Loew said. ‘Nash apparently likes Negro girls. Young ones, still in their teens. All of his sex offense complainants have been colored.’

Lee motioned me toward the door. ‘We’ll hit University Station, read the dick’s report and take it from there. My bet is that Nash is holing up somewhere in Leimert Park. It’s white, but there’s shines from Manchester on south. Lots of places to prowl for poontang.’

Millard and Sears got up to leave. Loew walked up to Lee and said, ‘Try to avoid killing him, Sergeant. He richly deserves it, but try anyway.’

Lee flashed his patented demon grin. ‘I’ll try, sir. But you be sure to kill him in court. The voters want boys like Junior fried, makes them feel safe at night.’

Our first stop was University Station. The squadron boss showed us the Robbery reports and told us not to waste our time canvassing the area near the two markets, that Millard and Sears were doing it, concentrating on getting a better description of Nash’s car, believed to be a postwar white sedan. Captain Jack had called University with word on Nash’s poontang penchant, and three plainclothes Vice officers had been dispatched to check out southside whorehouses specializing in young colored girls. Newton Street and 77th Street divisions, almost entirely colored, would be sending night-watch radio cars by juke joints and playgrounds where Negro youths congregated, eyeballing for Nash and telling the kids to watch out.

There was nothing *we* could do but cruise the area on the chance that Nash was still around and put out the word to Lee’s stoolies. We decided on a long Leimert Park tour and took off.

The district’s main drag was Crenshaw Boulevard. Broad, running north all the way to Wilshire and south to Baldwin Hills, it spelled ‘postwar boom’ like a neon sign. Every block from Jefferson to Leimert was lined with dilapidated, once grand houses being torn down, their facades replaced by giant billboards advertising department stores, jumbo shopping centers, kiddie parks and movie theaters. Completion dates ranging from Christmas ’47 to early ’49 were promised, and it hit me that by 1950 this part of LA would be unrecognizable. Driving east, we passed vacant lot after vacant lot that would probably soon spawn houses, then block after block of prewar adobe bungalows distinguished only by their color and the condition of their front lawns. Southbound, old wood frame houses took over, getting more and more unkempt.

And no one resembling Junior Nash was on the street; and every late model white sedan we saw was either driven by a woman or squarejohn type.

Nearing Santa Barbara and Vermont, Lee broke our long silence. ‘This grand tour stuff is the shits. I’m calling in some favors.’

He pulled into a filling station, got out and hit the pay phone; I listened to calls on the two-way. I was at it for ten minutes or so when Lee came back, pale and sweating. ‘I got a tip. A snitch of mine says Nash is shacking with some poon in a crib near Slauson and Hoover.’

I shut the radio off. ‘It’s all colored down there. You think—’

‘I think we fucking roll.’

We took Vermont to Slauson, then headed east, passing storefront churches and hair-straightening parlors, vacant lots and liquor stores with no names – only neon signs blinking L-I-Q-U-O-R at one in the afternoon. Hanging a right turn on Hoover, Lee slowed the car and started scanning tenement stoops. We passed a group of three Negro men and an older white guy lounging on the steps of a particularly seedy dump; I saw the four make us as cops. Lee said, ‘Hopheads. Nash is supposed to run with jigs, so let’s shake them. If they’re dirty we’ll squeeze for an address on him.’

I nodded; Lee ground the car to a halt in the middle of the street. We got out and walked over; the four stuck their hands in their pockets and shuffled their feet, the dance routine of rousted hoodlums everywhere. I said, 'Police. Kiss the wall nice and slow.' They moved into a search position, hands above their heads, palms on the building wall, feet back, legs spread.

Lee took the two on the right; the white guy muttered, 'What the – Blanchard?'

Lee said, 'Shut it, shitbird,' and started frisking him. I patted down the Negro in the middle first, running my hands along the arms of his suit coat, then dipping into his pockets. My left hand pulled out a pack of Luckys and a Zippo lighter; my right a bunch of marijuana cigarettes. I said, 'Reefers' and dropped them to the pavement, then gave Lee a quick sidelong glance. The zoot suit Negro beside him reached toward his waistband; light gleamed on metal as his hand came away. I shouted. 'Partner!' and pulled my .38.

The white man swung around; Lee shot him twice in the face point blank. The zooter got a shiv free just as I extended my gun. I fired, he dropped the knife, grabbed his neck and slammed into the wall. Wheeling, I saw the jig at the end fumbling at the front of his trousers and shot him three times. He flew backward; I heard '*Bucky duck!*' Hitting the cement, I got a topsy-turvy view of Lee and the last Negro drawing on each other from a couple of feet apart. Lee's three shots cut him down just as he managed to aim a tiny derringer. He fell dead, half his skull blown off.

I stood up, looked at the four bodies and blood-covered sidewalk, stumbled to the curb and vomited into the gutter until my chest ached. I heard sirens approaching, pinned my badge to my jacket front, then turned around. Lee was pulling out the stiffs' pockets, tossing shivs and reefers onto the sidewalk, away from the pools of blood. He walked over, and I was hoping he'd have a wisecrack to calm me down. He didn't; he was bawling like a baby.

It took the rest of the afternoon to put ten seconds down on paper.

We wrote out our reports at 77th Street Station, and were questioned by the team of Homicide dicks who investigated all officer-involved shootings. They told us that the three Negroes – Willie Walker Brown, Caswell Pritchford and Cato Early – were known grasshoppers, and that the white man – Baxter Fitch – took two strong-arm falls back in the late '20s. Since all four men were armed and harboring marijuana, they assured us that there would be no Grand Jury hearing.

I took the questioning calmly; Lee took it rough, shivering and muttering that he'd rousted Baxter Fitch for loitering a bunch of times when he worked Highland Park, and he sort of liked the guy. I stuck close to him at the station, then steered him out to his car through a throng of reporters hurling questions.

When we got to the house, Kay was standing on the front porch; one look at her gaunt face told me she already knew. She ran to Lee and embraced him, whispering, 'Oh baby, oh babe.' I watched them, then noticed a newspaper on the railing.

I picked it up. It was a bulldog edition of the *Mirror*, featuring a banner headline: 'Boxer Cops in Gun Battle! Four Crooks Dead!!' Below were publicity stills of Fire and Ice crouched in gloves and trunks, along with mug shots of the dead men. I read a jazzed-up account of the shoot-out and a replay of October's fight, then heard Lee shout: 'You'll never understand, so just leave me fucking alone!'

Lee took off running, around the driveway to the garage, Kay right behind him. I stood on the porch, amazed at the soft center in the toughest son of a bitch I'd ever known. I heard Lee's motorcycle starting up; seconds later he peeled out on it, screeching into a hard right turn, undoubtedly heading for a brutal run at

Mulholland.

Kay came back just as the cycle noise died in the distance. Taking her hands, I said, ‘He’ll get over it. He knew one of the guys, so that made it worse. But he’ll get over it.’

Kay looked at me strangely. ‘You’re very calm.’

‘It was them or us. You look after Lee tomorrow. We’re off-duty, but when we go back we’re going after a real beast.’

‘And you look after him, too. Bobby De Witt gets out in a week or so, and he swore at his trial to kill Lee and the other men who arrested him. Lee’s scared, and I know Bobby. He’s as bad as they come.’

I put my arms around Kay and held her. ‘Ssssh. Fire and Ice are on the job, so rest easy.’

Kay shook herself free. ‘You don’t know Bobby. You don’t know the things he made me do.’

I brushed a lock of hair away from her eyes. ‘Yes, I do, and I don’t care. I mean I do care, but—’

Kay said, ‘I know what you mean,’ and pushed me away. I let her go, knowing if I pursued it she’d tell me a shitload of things I didn’t want to hear. The front door slammed, and I sat down on the steps, glad to be alone to sort things out.

Four months ago, I was a radio car hack going nowhere. Now I was a Warrants detective instrumental in passing a million-dollar bond issue, with a double shine killing on my record. Next month I would be thirty years old with five years on the job, eligible to take the Sergeant’s Exam. If I passed it, then played my cards right, I could be detective lieutenant before I was thirty-five, and that was just the beginning.

I started to get itchy, so I went inside and puttered around the living room, thumbing through magazines, checking out the bookshelves for something to read. Then I heard the sound of water drumming hard, coming from the rear of the house. I walked back, seeing the wide-open bathroom door, feeling the steam, knowing it was all for me.

Kay was standing nude under the shower. Her expression stayed fixed in no expression at all, even when our eyes met. I took in her body, from freckled breasts with dark nipples to wide hips and flat stomach, then she pirouetted for me. I saw old knife scars crisscrossing her backside from thighs to spine, choked back tremors and walked away wishing she hadn’t showed me on the day I killed two men.

2

39th and Norton

CHAPTER SEVEN

The phone woke me up early Wednesday morning, cutting off a dream featuring Tuesday's *Daily News* headline – 'Fire and Ice Cops KO Negro Thugs' – and a beautiful blonde with Kay's body. Figuring it was the newshounds who'd been pestering me since the shoot-out, I fumbled the receiver onto the nightstand and dived back to slumberland. Then I heard, 'Rise and shine, partner!' and picked it up.

'Yeah, Lee.'

'You know what day this is?'

'The fifteenth. Payday. You called me up at six A.M. to—' I stopped when I caught an edge of nervous glee in Lee's voice. 'Are you okay?'

'I'm swell. I ran Mulholland at a hundred ten, played house with Kay all day yesterday. Now I'm bored. Feel like doing some police work?'

'Keep going.'

'I just talked to a snitch who owes me big. He says Junior Nash has got a fuck pad – a garage on Coliseum and Norton, in back of a green apartment building. Race you there? Loser buys the beer at the fights tonight?'

New headlines danced in front of my eyes. I said, 'You're on,' hung up and dressed in record time, then ran out to my car and gunned it the eight or nine miles to Leimert Park. And Lee was already there, leaning against his Ford, parked at the curb in front of the only structure on a huge block of vacant lots – a puke-green bungalow court with a two-story shack at the rear.

I pulled up behind him and got out. Lee winked and said, 'You lost.'

I said, 'You cheated.'

He laughed. 'You're right, I called from a pay phone. Reporters been bothering you?'

I gave my partner a slow eyeballing. He seemed relaxed but itchy underneath, with his old jocular front back in place. 'I holed up. You?'

'Bevo Means came by, asked me how it felt. I told him I wouldn't want it for a steady diet.'

I pointed to the courtyard. 'You talk to any of the tenants? Check for Nash's car?'

Lee said, 'No vehicle, but I talked to the manager. He's been renting Nash that shack in the back. He's used it a couple of times to entertain poon, but the manager hasn't seen him in a week or so.'

'You shake it?'

'No, waiting for you.'

I drew my .38 and pressed it to my leg; Lee winked and aped me, and we walked through the courtyard to the shack. Both floors had flimsy-looking wooden doors, with rickety steps leading to the second story. Lee tried the bottom door; it creaked open. We pressed ourselves to the wall on opposite sides of it, then I wheeled and entered, my gun arm extended.

No sound, no movement, only cobwebs and a wood floor strewn with yellowed newspapers and bald tires. I backed out; Lee took the lead up the steps, walking on his toes. At the landing, he gave the doorknob a jiggle, shook his head no and kicked the door in, clean off its hinges.

I ran up the stairs; Lee moved inside gun first. At the top, I saw him reholstering his piece. He said, ‘Okie trash,’ and made a gesture that took in the whole room. I stepped over the door and nodded my head in agreement.

The crib reeked of rotgut wine. A bed fashioned from two folded-out car seats took up most of the floor space; it was covered with upholstery stuffing and used rubbers. Empty muscatel short dogs were piled in corners, and the one window was streaked with cobwebs and dirt. The stench got to me, so I walked over and opened the window. Looking out, I saw a group of uniformed cops and men in civilian clothes standing on the sidewalk on Norton, about halfway down the block on 29th Street. All of them were staring at something in the weeds of a vacant lot; two black-and-whites and an unmarked cruiser were marked at the curb. I said, ‘Lee, come here.’

Lee stuck his head out the window and squinted. ‘I think I see Millard and Sears. They were supposed to be catching squeals today, so maybe—’

I ran out of the pad, down the steps and around the corner to Norton, Lee at my heels. Seeing a coroner’s wagon and a photo car screech to a halt, I sprinted. Harry Sears was knocking back a drink in full view of a half dozen officers; I glimpsed horror in his eyes. The photo men had moved into the lot and were fanning out, pointing their cameras at the ground. I elbowed my way past a pair of patrolmen and saw what it was all about.

It was the nude, mutilated body of a young woman, cut in half at the waist. The bottom half lay in the weeds a few feet away from the top, legs wide open. A large triangle had been gouged out of the left thigh, and there was a long, wide cut running from the bisection point down to the top of the pubic hair. The flaps of skin beside the gash were pulled back; there were no organs inside. The top half was worse: the breasts were dotted with cigarette burns, the right one hanging loose, attached to the torso only by shreds of skin; the left one slashed around the nipple. The cuts went all the way down to the bone, but the worst of the worst was the girl’s face. It was one huge purpled bruise, the nose crushed deep into the facial cavity, the mouth cut ear to ear into a smile that leered up at you, somehow mocking the rest of the brutality inflicted. I knew I would carry that smile with me to my grave.

Looking up, I felt cold all over; my breath came in spurts. Shoulders and arms brushed me and I heard a jumble of voices: ‘There’s not a goddamned drop of blood—’ ‘This is *the* worst crime on a woman I’ve seen in my sixteen years—’ ‘He tied her down. Look, you can see the rope burns on her ankles—’ Then a long, shrill whistle sounded.

The dozen or so men quit jabbering and looked at Russ Millard. He said calmly, ‘Before it gets out of hand, let’s put the kibosh on something. If this homicide gets a lot of publicity, we’re going to get a lot of confessions. That girl was disemboweled. We need information to eliminate the loonies with, and that’s it. Don’t tell *anyone*. Don’t tell your wives, don’t tell your girlfriends, don’t tell any other officers. Harry?’

Harry Sears said, ‘Yeah, Russ,’ palming his flask so the boss wouldn’t see it. Millard caught the act and rolled his eyes in disgust. ‘No reporters are to view the body. You photo men, take your pictures *now*. You coroner’s men, put a sheet over the body when they finish. You patrolmen, stake up a crime scene perimeter from the street all the way to six feet in back of the body. Any reporter who tries to cross it, you arrest immediately. When the lab men get here to examine the body, you move the reporters over to the opposite side of the street. Harry, you call Lieutenant Haskins at University Station and tell him to send over every man he can spare for canvassing.'

Millard glanced around and noticed me. 'Bleichert, what are you doing here? Is Blanchard here, too?'

Lee was squatting beside the stiff, writing in a pocket notebook. Pointing north, I said. 'Junior Nash is renting a garage in back of that building over there. We were shaking it down when we saw the hubbub.'

'Was there blood on the premises?'

'No. That isn't Nash, Lieutenant.'

'We'll let the lab men be the judge of that. Harry!'

Sears was sitting in a black-and-white, talking into a radio mike. Hearing his name, he yelled, 'Yeah, Russ!'

'Harry, when the lab men get here have them go up to that green building on the corner and test the garage for blood and latent prints. Then I want the street sealed —'

Millard stopped when he saw cars swinging onto Norton, beelining for the commotion; I glanced down at the corpse. The photo techs were still snapping pictures from all angles; Lee was still jotting in his notebook. The men milling around on the sidewalk kept looking at the stiff, then averting their eyes. On the street, reporters and camera jockeys were pouring out of cars, Harry Sears and a cordon of blues standing at the ready to hold them back. I got itchy to stare, and gave the girl a detailed eyeing.

Her legs were spread for sex, and from the way the knees buckled I could tell that they were broken; her jet-black hair was free of matted blood, like the killer had given her a shampoo before he dumped her. That awful death leer came on like the final brutality – it was cracked teeth poking out of ulcerated flesh that forced me to look away.

I found Lee on the sidewalk, helping string up crime scene ropes. He stared through me, like all he could see was the ghosts in the air. I said, 'Junior Nash, remember?'

Lee's gaze zeroed in on me. 'He didn't do this. He's trash, but he didn't do this.'

Noise rose from the street as more reporters arrived and a line of blues linked arms to restrain them. I shouted to make myself heard: 'He beat an old woman to death! He's our priority warrantee!'

Lee grabbed my arms and squeezed them numb. 'This is our priority, and we're staying! I'm senior, and I say so!' The words rumbled over the scene, causing heads to turn in our direction. I pulled my arms free and snapped to who Lee's ghost was.

'Okay, partner.'

Over the next hour, 39th and Norton filled up with police vehicles, reporters and a big crowd of rubberneckers. The body was removed on two sheet-covered stretchers; in the back of the meat wagon a lab team rolled the dead girl's prints before hauling her downtown to the morgue. Harry Sears gave the press a handout that Russ Millard composed, the straight dope of everything except the gutting of the stiff. Sears drove to City Hall to check the records of the Missing Persons Bureau, and Millard stayed behind to direct the investigation.

Lab technicians were dispatched to prowl the lot for possible murder weapons and women's clothing; another forensic team was sent to check for latents and bloodstains at Junior Nash's fuck pad. Then Millard counted cop heads. There were four men directing traffic and keeping civilian ghouls in line, twelve bluesuits and five plainclothesmen, Lee and me. Millard dug a street atlas out of his cruiser and divided the entire Leimert Park area into foot beats, then assigned each man his territory and mandatory questions to be asked of every person in every house, apartment and store: Have you heard female screams at any time over the past forty-eight hours? Have you seen anyone discarding or incinerating women's clothing? Have you noticed any suspicious cars or people loitering in the area? Have *you* passed by Norton Avenue between 39th and Coliseum Streets during the past twenty-four hours, and if so, did you notice anyone in the vacant lots?

I was assigned Olmsted Avenue, three blocks east of Norton, from Coliseum south to Leimert Boulevard; Lee was given the stores and building sites on Crenshaw, from 39th north to Jefferson. We made plans to meet at the Olympic at 8:00 and split up; I started pounding pavement.

I walked, rang doorbells and asked questions, getting negative answers, writing down the addresses where no one was at home, so that the second wave of canvassing cops would have the numbers to work from. I talked to sherry-sneaking housewives and bratty little kids; to pensioners and on-leave servicemen, even an off-duty cop who worked West LA Division. I threw in questions of Junior Nash and the late model white sedan and showed around his mug shots. All I got was a big fat zero; at 7:00 I walked back to my car disgusted by what I'd blundered into.

Lee's car was gone, and forensic arclights were being set up at 39th and Norton. I drove to the Olympic hoping for a good series of bouts to take the bad taste of the day out of my mouth.

H.J. Caruso had left tickets for us at the front turnstile, along with a note saying he had a hot date and wouldn't be showing up. Lee's ticket was still in the envelope; I grabbed mine and headed for H.J.'s box. The first prelim of an all-bantamweight card had already started, and I settled in to watch and wait for Lee.

The two tiny Mex warriors put on a good fight, and the crowd ate it up. Coins rained down from the top tier; shouts in Spanish and English filled the arena. After four rounds I knew that Lee wasn't going to show; the bantys, both cut bad, made me think of the butchered girl. I got up and left, knowing exactly where Lee was.

I drove back to 39th and Norton. The entire lot was lit up by arclights – as bright as day. Lee was standing just inside the crime scene rope. The night had turned cold; he was hunched into his letterman's jacket as he watched the lab techs poke around in the weeds.

I walked over. Lee saw me coming and did a quick draw, shooting me with finger pistols, his thumbs the hammers. It was a routine he pulled when he was jacked up on Benzedrine.

'You were supposed to meet me. Remember?'

Arclight glow gave Lee's raw nerved face a blue-white cast. 'I said this was priority. Remember that?'

Looking off in the distance, I saw other vacant lots illuminated. 'It's priority for the Bureau, maybe. Just like Junior Nash is priority for us.'

Lee shook his head. 'Partner, this is *big*. Horrall and Thad Green were down here a couple of hours ago. Jack Tierney's been detached to Homicide to run the investigation, with Russ Millard backstopping. You want my opinion?'

'Shoot.'

'It's a showcase. A nice white girl gets snuffed, the Department goes all out to get the killer to show the voters that passing the bond issue got them a bulldog police force.'

'Maybe she wasn't such a nice girl. Maybe that old lady that Nash killed was somebody's loving granny. Maybe you're taking this thing too personal, and maybe we let the Bureau handle it and get back to our job before Junior kills somebody else.'

Lee balled his fists. 'You got any other maybes?'

I stepped forward. 'Maybe you're afraid of Bobby De Witt getting out. Maybe you're too proud to ask me for help to scare him away from the woman we both care for. Maybe we let the Bureau chalk up that dead girl for Laurie Blanchard.'

Lee uncoiled his fists and turned away: I watched him rock on his heels, hoping he'd be fighting mad or wisecracking or anything but hurt when I finally saw his face. *I* made fists, then shouted: 'Talk to me, goddamnit! We're partners! We killed four fucking men together, now you pull this shit on me!'

Lee turned around. He flashed his patented demon grin, but it came off nervous and sad, used up. His voice was raspy, stretched thin.

'I used to watchdog Laurie when she played. I was a scrapper, and all the other kids were afraid of me. I had a lot of girlfriends – you know, kiddie romance stuff. The girls used to tease me about Laurie, go on about how much time I spent with her, like she was my real sweetheart.

'See, I doted on her. She was pretty and she was a trouper.

'Dad used to talk about getting Laurie ballet lessons and piano lessons and singing lessons. I was gonna work goon squad at Firestone Tire like him, and Laurie was gonna be an artiste. It was just talk, but I was a kid, and it was real to me.

'Anyway, right around the time she disappeared, Dad was talking up this lesson stuff a lot, and it made me mad at Laurie. I started ditching her when she went to play after school. There was this wild girl who'd moved into the neighborhood. She was a roundheels, and she used to get tanked on bathtub and put out for all the boys. I was dicking her when Laurie got snatched, when I should have been protecting my sister.'

I reached for my partner's arm to tell him I understood; Lee pushed my hand away. 'Don't tell me you understand, because I'll tell you what makes it bad. Laurie got snuffed. Some degenerate strangled her or chopped her up. And when she died, I was thinking ugly things about her. About how I hated her because Dad thought she was a princess and I was a thug. I pictured my own sister cut up like that stiff this morning, and I laughed about it while I was with that floozy, screwing her and drinking her father's booze.'

Lee took a deep breath and pointed to the ground a few yards away. A separate, inside perimeter had been staked, the two halves of the body marked in quicklime. I stared at the outline of the spread legs; Lee said, 'I'm gonna get him. With you or without you, I'm gonna get him.'

I dredged up a ghost of a smile. 'See you at the Hall tomorrow.'

'With you or without you.'

I said, 'I heard you,' and walked back to my car. Hitting the ignition, I saw another empty lot a block to the north light up.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The first thing I saw when I walked into the squadroom the next morning was Harry Sears reading the *Herald* headline: ‘Hunt Werewolf’s Den in Torture Slaying!!!’; the second thing I saw was a chain of five men – two derelicts, two squarejohn types and one in county jail demins, manacled to a bench. Harry put his paper down stammering. ‘C-c-confessors. S-s-said they s-sliced the girl.’ I nodded, hearing screams coming from the interrogation room.

A moment later, Bill Koenig led a doubled-over fat man out the door, announcing to the bullpen at large, ‘He didn’t do it.’ A couple of officers clapped satirically at their desks; a half dozen looked away, disgusted.

Koenig shoved the fat man out to the corridor. I asked Harry, ‘Where’s Lee?’

Harry pointed to Ellis Loew’s office. ‘W-with Loew. R-r-reporters, too.’

I walked over and peered through the crack in the doorway. Ellis Loew was standing in back of his desk, playing to a score of newshounds. Lee was seated at the DA’s side, dressed in his only suit. He looked tired – but nowhere near as edgy as he did last night.

Loew was sternly enunciating, ‘… and the heinous nature of the killing deems it imperative that we make every effort to catch this fiend as soon as possible. A number of specially trained officers, including Mr. Fire and his partner Mr. Ice, have been detached from their regular duties to aid in the investigation, and with men like them on the job, I think we can expect positive results soon. Moreover …’

I couldn’t hear for the pounding of blood in my head. I started to nudge the door open; Lee saw me, bowed to Loew and exited the office. He dogged me back to the Warrants cubicle; I wheeled around. ‘You got us detached, right?’

Lee put restraining hands on my chest. ‘Let’s take this slow and easy, okay? First off, I gave Ellis a memo. It said we got verified dope Nash blew our jurisdiction.’

‘Are you fucking crazy!’

‘Sssh. Listen, it was just to grease the skids. The APB on Nash still stands, the fuck pad is being staked out, every southside cop is out to cancel the bastard’s ticket. I’m gonna stay at the pad tonight myself. I’ve got binoculars, and I figure between them and the arclights I’ll be able to catch the plates on the cars that cruise down Norton. Maybe the killer’s gonna drive by to gloat. I’ll get all the license numbers, and check them against the DMV and R&I.’

I sighed. ‘Jesus, Lee.’

‘Partner, all I want is a week on the girl. Nash is covered, and if he doesn’t get collared by then, we go back to him as our priority warrantee.’

‘He’s too dangerous to let go. You know that.’

‘Partner, *he’s covered*. Now don’t tell me you don’t want to build on your shine killings. Don’t tell me you don’t know that the dead girl is a better piece of pie than Junior Nash.’

I saw more Fire and Ice headlines. ‘One week, Lee. No more.’

Lee winked. ‘Copacetic.’

Captain Jack’s voice came over the intercom: ‘Gentlemen, everybody to the muster room. Now.'

I grabbed my notebook and walked through the bullpen. The ranks of the confessors had swollen, the new ones cuffed to radiators and heating pipes. Bill Koenig was slapping an old guy demanding to talk to Mayor Bowron; Fritzie Vogel was taking down names on a clipboard. The muster room was SRO, packed with Central and Bureau men and a shitload of plainclothes cops I'd never seen before. Captain Jack and Russ Millard were at the front, standing beside a floor microphone. Tierney tapped the mike, cleared his throat and spoke:

'Gentlemen, this is a general briefing on the 187 in Leimert Park. I'm sure you've all read the papers and you all know it's a damn rough piece of work. It's also a damn big piece of work. The mayor's office has gotten a lot of calls, we've gotten a lot of calls, the City Council has gotten a lot of calls and Chief Horrall has gotten personal calls from a lot of people we want to keep happy. This werewolf stuff in the papers is going to get us a lot more calls, so let's get going on it.

'We'll start with the chain of command. I'm supervising, Lieutenant Millard is exec, Sergeant Sears is the runner between divisions. Deputy DA Loew is liaison to the press and civilian authorities, and the following officers are detached to Central Homicide, effective 1/16/47: Sergeant Anders, Detective Arcola, Sergeant Blanchard, Officer Bleichert, Sergeant Cavanaugh, Detective Ellison, Detective Grimes, Sergeant Koenig, Detective Liggett, Detective Navarette, Sergeant Pratt, Detective J. Smith, Detective W. Smith, Sergeant Vogel. You men see Lieutenant Millard after this briefing. Russ, they're all yours.'

I got out my pen, giving the man next to me a gentle elbow to get more writing room. Every cop around me was doing the same thing; you could feel their attention rivet to the front of the room.

Millard spoke in his courtroom lawyer's voice: 'Yesterday, seven A.M., Norton Avenue between 39th and Coliseum. A dead girl, naked, cut in half, right off the sidewalk in a vacant lot. Obviously tortured, but I'll hold off on that until I talk to the autopsy surgeon – Doc Newbarr's doing the job this afternoon at Queen of Angels. No reporters – there's some details we don't want them to know.

'The area has been thoroughly canvassed once – no leads so far. There was no blood where we found the body; the girl was obviously killed somewhere else and dumped in the lot. There's a number of vacant lots in the area, and they're being searched for weapons and bloodstains. An armed robbery – homicide suspect named Raymond Douglas Nash was renting a garage down the street – the place was checked for prints and bloodstains. The lab boys got zero, and Nash is not a suspect on the girl.

'There's no ID on her yet, no matchup to anyone in the Missing persons files. Her prints have been teletyped, so we should get some kind of report soon. An anonymous call to University Station started it all, by the way. The officer who caught the squeal said it was a hysterical woman walking her little girl to school. The woman didn't give her name and hung up, and I think we can eliminate her as a suspect.'

Millard switched to a patient, professorial tone. 'Until the body is ID'd, the investigation has to be centered on 39th and Norton, and the next step is recanvassing the area.'

A big collective groan rose. Millard scowled and said, 'University Station will be the command post, and there'll be clerks there to type up and collate the field officers' reports. Clerical officers will be working up summary reports and evidence indexes. They'll be posted on the squadroom board at University, with carbons distributed to all LAPD and sheriff's divisions. You men here from other squads are to take what you hear at this briefing back to your station houses, put it on every crime sheet, every watch. Any information you get from patrolmen, you phone in to Central Homicide, extension 411. Now, I've got lists of recanvassing addresses for everyone but Bleichert and Blanchard. Bucky, Lee, take the same areas as yesterday. You men from other divisions, stand by; the rest of you men that Captain Tierney detached, see me now. That's it!'

I jockeyed out the door and took service stairs down to the parking lot, wanting to avoid Lee and put some distance between him and my okay on the Nash memo. The sky had turned dark gray, and all the way to Leimert Park I thought of thunderstorms obliterating leads in the vacant lots, washing the sliced girl investigation and Lee's grief over his little sister into the sewer until the gutters overflowed and Junior Nash popped his head out, begging to be arrested. As I parked my car, the clouds started to break up; soon I was canvassing with the sun beating down – and a new string of negative answers kiboshed my fantasies.

I asked the same questions I asked the day before, stressing Nash even harder. But this time it was different. Cops were combing the area, writing down the license numbers of parked cars and dragging sewers for women's clothing – and the locals had listened to the radio and read the papers.

One sherry-breathing hairbag held out a plastic crucifix and asked me if it would keep the werewolf away; an old geezer wearing skivvies and a clerical collar told me the dead girl was God's sacrifice because Leimert Park voted Democrat in the '46 Congressional. A little boy showed me a movie pinup of Lon Chaney, Jr. as the wolfman and said that the vacant lot at 39th and Norton was the launching pad for his rocket ship, and a boxing fan who recognized me from the Blanchard fight asked me for my autograph, then told me straight-faced that his neighbor's bassett hound was the killer, and would I please shoot the cocksucker? The sane nos I got were as boring as the nut answers were fanciful, and I started to feel like the straight man in a monstrous comedy routine.

At 1:30 I finished and walked back to my car, thinking about lunch and checking in at University Station. There was a piece of paper stuck under the wiper blades – a sheet of Thad Green's personal stationery, with 'Official Police Witness – admit this officer to autopsy of Jane Doe #031, 2:00 P.M., 1/16/47' typed in the middle of the page. Green's signature was scrawled at the bottom – and it looked suspiciously like the writing of Sergeant Leland C. Blanchard. Laughing against my will, I drove to Queen of Angels Hospital.

The corridors were crowded with nun-nurses and oldsters on gurneys. I showed an elderly sister my badge and inquired after the autopsy; she crossed herself and led me down the hall, pointing to a double-doored entranceway marked PATHOLOGY. I walked up to the patrolman standing guard and flashed my invitation; he snapped to attention and swung the doors open, and I entered a small cold room, all antiseptic white, a long metal table in the middle. Two sheet-covered objects lay on top of it. I sat down on a bench facing the slab, shivering at the thought of seeing the girl's death smile again.

The double doors opened a few seconds later. A tall old man smoking a cigar came in, along with a nun carrying a steno pad. Russ Millard, Harry Sears and Lee followed them, the Homicide exec shaking his head. 'You and Blanchard keep turning up like bad pennies. Doc, can *we* smoke?'

The old man took a scalpel from his back pocket and wiped it on his trouser leg. 'Sure. Won't bother the girl any, she's in dreamland for keeps. Sister Margaret, help me get that sheet off, will you?'

Lee sat down on the bench beside me; Millard and Sears lit cigarettes, then dug out pens and notebooks. Lee yawned, and asked me, 'Get anything this morning?'

I saw that his Benzedrine juice was all but dead. 'Yeah. A wolfman killer from Mars did the snuff. Buck Rogers is chasing him in his spaceship, and you should go home and sleep.'

Lee yawned again. 'Later. My best tip was the Nazis. A guy told me he saw Hitler in a bar on 39th and Crenshaw. Oh Jesus, Bucky.'

Lee lowered his eyes; I looked at the autopsy slab. The dead girl was uncovered, her head lolling in our direction. I stared at my shoes while the doctor rambled on in medicalese:

'On gross pathology, we have a female Caucasian. Muscle tone indicates her age is between sixteen and thirty. The cadaver is presented in two halves, with bisection at the level of the umbilicus. On the upper half: the head is intact, with massive depressed skull fractures, facial features significantly obscured by massive ecchymoses, hematomas and edema. Downward displacement of nasal cartilage. Through-and-through laceration from both mouth corners across masseter muscles, extending through temporal mandibula joints upward to both earlobes. No visible signs of neck bruises. Multiple lacerations on anterior thorax, concentrated on both breasts. Cigarette burns on both breasts. Right breast almost completely severed from thorax. Inspection of upper half abdominal cavity reveals no free-flowing blood. Intestines, stomach, liver and spleen removed.'

The doctor took an audible breath; I looked up and watched him puff on his cigar. The steno nun caught up with her note taking and Millard and Sears eyeballed the stiff deadpan while Lee stared at the floor, wiping sweat from his brow. The doc felt both breasts, then said, 'Lack of hypertrophy indicates no pregnancy at time of death.' He grabbed his scalpel and started poking around inside the bottom half of the corpse. I shut my eyes and listened.

'Inspection of the lower half of the cadaver reveals a midline longitudinal incision extending from the umbilicus to the symphysis pubis. Mesentery, uterus, ovaries and rectum removed, multiple lacerations on both posterior and anterior cavity walls. Large triangular gouge on left thigh. Sister, help me turn her over.'

I heard the doors open; a voice called out, 'Lieutenant!' I opened my eyes to see Millard getting up and the doctor and nun wrestling the stiff onto its stomach. When it was backside up, the doctor lifted the ankles and flexed the legs. 'Both legs broken at the knee, and healing, light lash marks on the upper back and shoulders. Ligature marks on both ankles. Sister, hand me a speculum and swab.'

Millard came back and handed Sears a piece of paper. He read it and nudged Lee. The doctor and nun turned the bottom half of the body over, spreading the legs wide. My stomach flip-flopped; Lee said, 'Bingo.' He stared at a teletype sheet while the doc droned on about lack of vaginal abrasions and the presence of old semen. The coldness in his voice made me angry; I grabbed the sheet and read: 'Russ – she's Elizabeth Ann Short, DOB 7/29/24, Medford, Mass. Feds ID'd the prints – she was arrested in Santa Barbara 9/43. Background check in progress. Report back to Hall following autopsy. Call in all available field officers. – J.T.'

The doctor said, 'That's it on preliminary postmortem. Later on I'll have some more specifics, and I'll run some toxicological tests.' He draped both halves of Elizabeth Ann Short and added, 'Questions?' the nun headed for the door clutching her steno pad.

Millard said, 'Can you give us a reconstruction?'

‘Pending the test results, sure. Here’s what she wasn’t: she wasn’t pregnant, she wasn’t raped, but she had had voluntary intercourse sometime during the past week or so. She took what you might call a gentle whipping within the past week; the last marks on her back are older than the cuts on her front side. Here’s what I think happened. I think she was tied down and tortured with a knife for a minimum of thirty-six to forty-eight hours. I think her legs were broken with a smooth, rounded instrument like a baseball bat while she was still alive. I think she either got beaten to death with something like a baseball bat, or she choked to death on her blood from the mouth wound. After she was dead, she was cut in half with a butcher knife or something resembling it, and the killer went in after her internal organs with something like a penknife. After *that*, he drained the blood from the body and washed it clean, my guess is in a bathtub. We took some blood samples from the kidneys, and in a few days we’ll be able to tell you if she had any dope or liquor in her system.’

Lee said, ‘Doc, did this guy know anything about medicine or anatomy? Why’d he go after that inside stuff?’

The doctor examined his cigar butt. ‘You tell me. The top-half organs he could have pulled out easily. The bottom organs he hacked with a knife to get at, like that was what interested him. He could have had medical training, but then again he could have had veterinary training, or taxidermist’s training, or biological training, or he could have taken Physiology 104 in the LA city school system or my Pathology for Beginners class at UCLA. You tell me. I’ll tell you what you’ve got for sure: she was dead six to eight hours before you found her, and she was killed someplace secluded that had running water. Harry, has this girl got a name yet?’

Sears tried to answer, but his mouth just fluttered. Millard put a hand on his shoulder and said, ‘Elizabeth Short.’

The doctor saluted heaven with his cigar. ‘God love you, Elizabeth. Russell, when you get the son of a bitch who did this to her, give him a kick in the balls and tell him it’s from Frederick D. Newbarr, M.D. Now all of you get out of here. I’ve got a date with a jumper suicide in ten minutes.’

Walking out of the elevator, I heard Ellis Loew’s voice, an octave louder and deeper than normal, echoing down the corridor. I caught ‘Vivisection of a lovely young woman,’ ‘Werewolf psychopath’ and ‘My political aspirations are subservient to my desire to see justice done.’ Opening a connecting door into the Homicide pen, I saw the Republican bright boy emoting into radio mikes while a recording crew stood by. He was wearing an American Legion poppy on his lapel – probably purchased from the wino legionnaire who slept in the Hall of Records parking lot – a man he had once vigorously prosecuted for vagrancy.

The bullpen was taken over by ham antics, so I walked across the hall to Tierney’s office. Lee, Russ Millard, Harry Sears and two old-timer cops I hardly knew – Dick Cavanaugh and Vern Smith – were huddled around Captain Jack’s desk, examining a piece of paper the boss was holding up.

I looked over Harry’s shoulder. Three mug shots of a showstopper brunette were taped to the page, with three-close-up face photos of the corpse at 39th and Norton affixed next to them. The slashed-mouth smile jumped out at me; Captain Jack said, ‘The mugs are from the Santa Barbara PD. They popped the Short girl in September ’43 for underaged drinking, sent her home to her mother in Massachusetts. Boston PD contacted her an hour ago. She’s flying out to ID the stiff tomorrow. The Boston cops are doing a background check back east, and all Bureau days off are cancelled.

Anybody complains, I point to those pictures. What did Doc Newbarr say, Russ?'

Millard said, 'Tortured for two days. Cause of death the mouth wound or the head bashing. No rape. Internal organs removed. Dead six to eight hours before the body was dumped in the lot. What else have we got on her?'

Tierney checked some papers on his desk. 'Except for the juvie roust, no other record. Four sisters, parents divorced, worked in the Camp Cooke PX during the war. The father's here in LA. What's next?'

I was the only one who blinked when the big boss asked number two for advice. Millard said, 'I want to recanvass Leimert Park with the mugs. Me, Harry and two other men. Then I want to go to University Station, read reports and answer calls. Has Loew given the press a look at the mugs?'

Tierney nodded. 'Yeah, and Bevo Means told me the father sold the *Times and* the *Herald* some old portrait pictures of the girl. She'll be front page on the evening editions.'

Millard barked, 'Damn,' the only word of profanity anyone ever heard him use. Seething, he said, 'They'll be coming out of the woodwork to greet her. Has the father been questioned?'

Tierney shook his head and consulted some memo slips. 'Cleo Short, 10206 South Kingsley, Wilshire District. I had an officer call him and tell him to stay put, that we'd be sending some men by to talk to him. Russ, you think the strange-o's will fall in love with this one?'

'How many confessions so far?'

'Eighteen.'

'Double that by morning, more if Loew got the press excited with his purple prose.'

'I would say I got them motivated, Lieutenant. And I would say my prose fit the crime.'

Ellis Loew was standing in the doorway, Fritz Vogel and Bill Koenig behind him. Millard locked eyes with the radio ham. 'Too much publicity is a hindrance, Ellis. If you were a policeman you'd know that.'

Loew flushed and reached for his Phi Beta Kappa key. 'I'm a ranking civilian-police liaison officer, specially deputized by the City of Los Angeles.'

Millard smiled. 'You're a civilian, counselor.'

Loew bristled, then turned to Tierney. 'Captain, have you sent men to talk to the victim's father?'

Captain Jack said, 'Not yet, Ellis. Soon.'

'How about Vogel and Koenig? They'll get us what we need to know.'

Tierney looked up at Millard. The lieutenant gave an almost imperceptible head shake; Captain Jack said, 'Aah, Ellis, in big homicide jobs the whip assigns the men. Aah, Russ, who do you think should go?'

Millard scrutinized Cavanaugh and Smith, me trying to look inconspicuous and Lee yawning, slouched against the wall. He said, 'Bleichert, Blanchard, you bad pennies question Miss Short's father. Bring your report to University Station tomorrow morning.'

Loew's hands jerked his Phi Beta key clean off its chain; it fell to the floor. Bill Koenig squeezed in the doorway and picked it up; Loew about-faced into the hall. Vogel glared at Millard, then followed him. Harry Sears, breathing Old Grand Dad, said, 'He sends a few niggers to the gas chamber and it goes to his head.'

Vern Smith said, 'The niggers must have confessed.'

Dick Cavanaugh said, 'With Fritzie and Bill they all confess.'

Russ Millard said, ‘Shit-brained, grandstanding son of a bitch.’

We took separate cars to the Wilshire District, rendezvousing in front of 1020½ South Kingsley at dusk. It was a garage apartment, shack sized, at the rear of a big Victorian house. Lights were burning inside; Lee, yawning, said, ‘Good guy – bad guy,’ and rang the buzzer.

A skinny man in his fifties opened the door and said, ‘Cops, huh?’ He had dark hair and pale eyes similar to the girl in the mug shots, but that was it for familial resemblance. Elizabeth Short was a knockout; he looked like a knockout victim: bony frame in baggy brown trousers and a soiled undershirt, moles all over his shoulders, seamed face pitted with acne scars. Pointing us inside, he said, ‘I got an alibi, just in case you think I did it. Tighter than a crab’s ass, and that is *air* tight.’

Mr. White Hat to the hilt, I said, ‘I’m Detective Bleichert, Mr. Short. This is my partner Sergeant Blanchard. We’d like to express our condolences for the loss of your daughter.’

Cleo Short slammed the door. ‘I read the papers, I know who you are. Neither one of you would have lasted one round with Gentleman Jim Jeffries. And as far as your condolences go, I say *c’est la vie*. Betty called the tune, so she had to pay the piper. Nothing’s free in this life. You want to hear my alibi?’

I sat down on a threadbare sofa and eyeballed the room. The walls were lined floor to ceiling with shelves spilling dime novels; there was the couch, one wooden chair and nothing else. Lee got out his notebook. ‘Since you’re so anxious to tell us, shoot.’

Short slumped into the chair and ground the legs into the floor, like an animal pawing the dirt. ‘I was Johnny on the spot at my job from Tuesday the fourteenth at two P.M. to five P.M. Wednesday the fifteenth. Twenty-seven straight hours, time and a half for the last seventeen. I’m a refrigerator repairman, the best in the west. I work at Frost King Appliances, 4831 South Berendo. My boss’s name is Mike Mazmanian. You call him. He’ll alibi me up tighter than a popcorn fart, and that is *air* tight.’

Lee yawned and wrote it down; Cleo Short crossed his arms over his bony chest, daring us to make something of it. I said, ‘When was the last time you saw your daughter, Mr. Short?’

‘Betty came west in the spring of ’43. Stars in her eyes and hanky-panky on her mind. I hadn’t seen her since I left that dried-up old ginch of a wife of mine in Charles-town, Mass., on March 1, 1930 A.D. and never looked back. But Betty wrote me and said she needed a flop, so I—’

Lee interrupted: ‘Cut the travelogue, pop. When was the last time you saw Elizabeth?’

I said, ‘Back off, partner. The man is cooperating. Go on, Mr. Short.’

Cleo Short dug in with his chair, glaring at Lee. ‘Before punchy here got wise, I was gonna tell you that I reached into my own savings and sent Betty a C-note to come west on, then I promised her three squares and a five-spot a week mad money if she kept the house tidy. A generous offer, if you want my opinion. But Betty had other things on her mind. She was a lousy housekeeper, so I gave her the boot on June 2, 1943 A.D., and I ain’t seen her since.’

I wrote the information down, then asked, ‘Did you know she was in LA recently?’

Cleo Short quit glaring at Lee and glared at me. ‘No.’

‘Did she have any enemies that you knew of?’

‘Just herself.’

Lee said, ‘No cute answers, Pops.’

I whispered, ‘Let him talk,’ then said out loud, ‘Where did Elizabeth go when she left here in June of ’43?’

Short jabbed a finger at Lee. ‘You tell your pal he calls me Pops I call him stumblebum! Tell him disrespect’s a two-way street! Tell him I repaired Chief CB Horrall’s Maytag 821 model myself, and I mean *air* tight!’

Lee walked into the bathroom; I saw him chasing a handful of pills with sink water. I put on my calmest white hat voice: ‘Mr. Short, where did Elizabeth go in June of ’43?’

Short said, ‘that palooka lays a hand on me, I’ll fix his wagon *air* tight.’

‘I’m sure you will. Would you ans—’

‘Betty moved up to Santa Barbara, got a job at the Camp Cooke PX. She sent me a postcard in July. It said some soldier beat her up bad. That was the last I ever heard from her.’

‘Did the card mention the soldier’s name?’

‘No.’

‘Did it mention the names of any of her friends up at Camp Cooke?’

‘No.’

‘Any boyfriends?’

‘Hah!’

I put my pen down. ‘Why “hah”?’

The old man laughed so hard that I thought his chicken chest would explode. Lee walked out of the bathroom; I gave him a sign to ease off. He nodded and sat down next to me; we waited for Short to laugh himself out. When he was down to a dry chortle, I said, ‘Tell me about Betty and men.’

Short giggled. ‘She liked them and they liked her. Betty believed in quantity before quality, and I don’t think she was too good at saying no, unlike her mother.’

‘Be specific,’ I said. ‘Names, dates, descriptions.’

‘You musta caught too many in the ring, Sonny, ’cause your seabag’s leaky. Einstein couldn’t remember the names of all Betty’s boyfriends, and my name ain’t Albert.’

‘Give us the names you do remember.’

Short hooked his thumbs in his belt and rocked in the chair like a cut-rate cock of the walk. ‘Betty was man crazy, soldier crazy. She went for lounge lizards and anything white in a uniform. When she was supposed to be keeping house for me she was out prowling Hollywood Boulevard, cadging drinks off servicemen. When she was staying here this place was like a branch of the USO.’

Lee said, ‘Are you calling your own daughter a tramp?’

Short shrugged. ‘I’ve got five daughters. One bad apple ain’t so bad.’

Lee’s anger was oozing out of him; I put a restraining hand on his arm and could almost feel his blood buzzing. ‘what about names, Mr. Short?’

‘Tom, Dick, Harry. Those punks took one look at Cleo Short and amscrayed with Betty pronto. That’s as specific as I can get. You look for anything not too ugly in a uniform, you won’t go wrong.’

I flipped to a fresh notebook page. ‘What about employment? Was Betty holding down a job when she stayed here?’

The old man shouted: ‘Betty’s job was working for me! She said she was looking for movie work, but that was a lie! All she wanted to do was parade the Boulevard in those black getups of hers and chase men! She ruined my bathtub dying her stuff black, then she took off before I could dock the damage out of her wages! Prowling the streets like a black widow spider, no wonder she got hurt! It’s her mother’s fault, not mine! No-cunt shanty Irish bitch! Not my fault!'

Lee drew a hard finger across his throat; we walked out to the street, leaving Cleo Short screaming at his four walls. Lee said, 'Jesus fuck'; I sighed. 'Yeah,' thinking of the fact that we'd just been handed the entire U.S. armed forces as suspects.

I dug in my pockets for a coin. 'Toss you for who writes it up?'

Lee said, 'You do it, okay? I want to stick at Junior Nash's pad and get some license numbers.'

'Try and get some sleep, too.'

'I will.'

'No, you won't.'

'I can't shit a shitter. Look, will you go over to the house and keep Kay company? She's been worried about me, and I don't want her to be alone.'

I thought of what I'd said at 39th and Norton last night – that statement of what all three of us knew but never talked about, that move forward that only Kay had the guts to take. 'Sure, Lee.'

I found Kay in her usual weeknight posture – reading on the living room couch. She didn't look up when I walked in, she just blew a lazy smoke ring and said, 'Hi, Dwight.'

I took a chair across the coffee table from her. 'How'd you know it was me?'

Kay circled a passage in the book. 'Lee stomps, you tread cautiously.'

I laughed. 'It's symbolic, but don't tell anybody.'

Kay stubbed out her cigarette and put the book down. 'You sound worried.'

I said, 'Lee's all bent out of shape on the dead girl. He got us detached to work the investigation when we should be going after a priority warrantee, and he's taking Benzedrine and starting to go a little squirrely. Has he told you about her?'

Kay nodded. 'A little.'

'Have you read the papers?'

'I've avoided them.'

'Well, the girl is being played up as the hottest number since the atom bomb. There's a hundred men working a single homicide, Ellis Loew's looking to get fat off of it, Lee's cuckoo on the subject—'

Kay disarmed my tirade with a smile. 'And *you* were front page news on Monday, but you're stale bread today. And you want to go after your big bad robber man and get yourself another headline.'

'Touché, but that's only part of it.'

'I know. Once you got the headline, you'd hide out and not read the papers.'

I sighed. 'Jesus, I wish you weren't so much smarter than me.'

'And I wish you weren't so cautious and complicated. Dwight, what is going to happen with us?'

'The three of us?'

'No, *us*.'

I looked around the living room, all wood and leather and Deco chromium. There was a glass-fronted mahogany cabinet; it was filled with Kay's cashmere sweaters, all the shades of the rainbow at forty dollars a pop. The woman herself, South Dakota white trash molded by a cop's love, sat across from me, and for once I said exactly what was on my mind. 'You'd never leave him. You'd never leave this. Maybe if you did, maybe if Lee and I were quits as partners, maybe then we'd have a chance together. But you'd never give it all up.'

Kay took her time lighting a cigarette. Exhaling a breath of smoke, she said, 'You know what he's done for me?'

I said, 'And for me.'

Kay tilted her head back and eyed the ceiling, brushed stucco with mahogany wainscoting. Blowing smoke rings, she said, 'I had such a schoolgirl crush on you. Bobby De Witt and Lee used to drag me to the fights. I brought my sketch pad so I wouldn't feel like one of those awful women buttering up their men by pretending they liked it. What I liked was you. The way you made fun of yourself with your teeth, the way you covered up so you wouldn't get hit. Then you joined the Department, and Lee told me how he heard you informed on those Japanese friends of yours. I didn't hate you for it, it just made you seem more real to me. The zoot suit thing, too. You were my storybook hero, only the stories were real, little bits and pieces here and there. Then the fight came along, and even though I hated the idea of it I told Lee to go ahead, because it seemed to mean the three of us were meant to be.'

I thought of a dozen things to say, all of them true, and just about the two of us. But I couldn't and ran to Lee for cover. 'I don't want you to worry about Bobby De Witt. When he gets out, I'll lean on him. Hard. He'll never come near you or Lee.'

Kay took her eyes off the ceiling and fixed me with a strange look, hard but sad underneath. 'I've given up worrying about Bobby, Lee can handle him.'

'I think Lee's afraid of him.'

'He is. But I think it's because he knows so much about me, and Lee's afraid he'll let everyone know. Not that anyone cares.'

'I care. And if I lean on De Witt, he'll be lucky to talk at all.'

Kay stood up. 'For a man with an up-for-grabs heart, you are such a hardcase. I'm going to bed. Good night, Dwight.'

When I heard a Schubert quartet coming from Kay's bedroom, I took pen and paper from the stationery cupboard and wrote out my report on the questioning of Elizabeth Short's father. I included mention of his 'air tight' alibi, his account of the girl's behavior when she lived with him in '43, the beating she got from a Camp Cooke soldier and her parade of nameless boyfriends. Padding the report with unnecessary details kept my mind most of the way off Kay, and when I finished I made myself two ham sandwiches, chased them with a glass of milk and fell asleep on the couch.

My dreams were mug shot flashes of recent bad guys, Ellis Loew representing the right side of the law with felony numbers stenciled across his chest. Betty Short joined him in black and white, full face and left profile views. Then all the faces dissolved into LAPD report forms rolling out endlessly as I tried to jot down information on Junior Nash's whereabouts in the blank spaces. I woke up with a headache, knowing I was in for a very long day.

It was dawn. I walked out to the porch and picked up the morning *Herald*. The headline was 'Hunt Boyfriends in Torture Killing,' a portrait photo of Elizabeth Short centered directly below it. It was captioned, 'The Black Dahlia,' followed by, 'Authorities today were searching into the love life of 22-year-old Elizabeth Short, victim of the "Werewolf Murder," whose romances had changed her, according to friends, from an innocent girl to a black-clad, man-crazy delinquent known as the Black Dahlia.'

I felt Kay beside me. She grabbed the paper, skimming the front page giving a slight shudder. Handing it back, she asked, 'Will all this be over soon?'

I flipped through the front section. Elizabeth Short took up six whole pages, most of the ink portraying her as a slinky femme fatale in a tight black dress. 'No,' I said.

CHAPTER NINE

Reporters were surrounding University Station. The parking lot was packed and the curb was lined with radio trucks, so I double-parked, stuck 'Official Police Vehicle' signs under my wiper blades and pushed through the cordon of newshounds, ducking my head to avoid being recognized. It didn't work; I heard 'Buck-kee!' and 'Bleichert,' then hands grabbed at me. My jacket pocket was ripped loose, and I shoved myself the rest of the way inside.

The entrance hall was filled with daywatch blues going on duty; a connecting door opened up into a bustling squadroom. Cots lined the walls; I saw Lee passed out on one of them, sheets of newspaper covering his legs. Phones were ringing at desks all around me, and my headache came back, the pounding twice as bad. Ellis Loew was tacking slips of paper to a bulletin board; I tapped him hard on the shoulder.

He turned around. I said, 'I want out of this circus. I'm a Warrants officer, not a Homicide dick, and I've got priority fugitives. I want to get un-detached. *Now*.'

Loew hissed, 'No. You work for me, and I want you on the Short case. That's final, absolute and irrevocable. And I'll brook no prima donna demands from you, Officer. Do you understand?'

'Ellis, goddamnit!'

'You get stripes on your sleeve before you call me that, Bleichert. Until then it's Mr Loew. Now go read Millard's summary report.'

I stormed over to the rear of the squadroom. Russ Millard was asleep in a chair, his legs propped up on the desk in front of him. Four typed sheets of paper were tacked to the corkboard wall a few feet away. I read:

First Summary Report
187 P.C., Vict: Short, Elizabeth Ann, W.F.
D.O.B. 7/29/24. Filed 1/17/47 0600 Hrs.

Gentlemen—

Here's the 1st summary on E. Short, D.O.D. 1/15/47, 39th and Norton, Leimert Park.

1. 33 phony or probable phony confessions so far. Obviously innocent confessors have been released, incoherent and seriously imbalanced being held at City Jail awaiting alibi checks and sanity hearings. Known deviates being questioned by Dr De River, consulting psychiatrist, with Det. Div. backup. Nothing solid yet.

2. Results of prlim. post mort. and follow-up: vict. choked to death on ear to ear knife slash thru mouth. No alcohol or narcotics in blood at time of death. (For det. see case file 14–187–47)

3. Boston P.D. doing background check on E. Short, family and old boyfriends and their whereabouts at time of murder. Father (C. Short) has valid alibi – he is eliminated as suspect.

4. Camp Cooke C.I.D. is checking out reports of beating E. Short received from soldier when he worked at P.X. in 9/43. E. Short arrested for underaged drinking in 9/43, C.I.D. says soldiers she was arrested with are all overseas, thus eliminated as suspects.

5. Sewers being dragged citywide for E. Short's clothing. All women's clothing found will be analyzed at Central Crime Lab. (See crime lab sum. rpts. for det.)

6. Citywide field interrogation rpts. 1/12/47 – 1/15/47 collated and read. One follow-up: Hollywood woman called in complaint about shouts of 'weird sounding gibberish' in H.W. Hills nights of 1/13 and 1/14. Result of follow-up: put off as party revelers making noise. Field officers: disregard this occurrence.

7. From verified phone tips: E. Short lived most of 12/46 in San Diego, at home of Mrs Elvera French. Vict. met Mrs French's daughter, Dorothy, at movie theater where Dorothy worked, told (unverified) story about being abandoned by husband. Frenches took her in, and E. Short told them conflicting stories: she was widow of air corps major; pregnant by navy pilot; engaged to army flyer. Vict. had many dates with different men during her stay at French house. (See 14–187–47 interviews for det.)

XXXXX8. *E. Short left French house on 1/9/47 in company of man she called 'Red.' (Desc. as: W.M., 25–30, tall, 'handsome', 170–180, red hair, blue eyes.) 'Red' allegedly salesman. Drives a pre-war Dodge sedan with Huntington Park tags. Vehicle cross-check initiated. A.P.B. issued on 'Red'.*

9. Verified info: Val Gordon (W.F.) Riverside, Calif., called in, said she is sister of deceased air corps major Matt Gordon. Said: E. Short wrote to her and her parents in Fall of '46, shortly after Maj. Gordon died in plane crash. Lied about being Gordon's fiancee, requested $ from them. Parents, Miss Gordon, denied request.

10. Trunk belonging to E. Short located at Railway Express office, downtown L.A. (R.E. clerk saw vict's name and picture in papers, recalled her storing trunk in late 11/46). Trunk being gone over. Carbons of 100's of love letters to various men (mostly servicemen) found, and (many fewer) mash notes written to her. Also, many photos of E. Short with servicemen in trunk. Letters being read, names and descriptions of men being collated.

11. Verified phone info: former Air Corps Lt. J.G. Fickling called from Mobile, Ala. when he saw E. Short's name and picture in Mobile papers. Said he and vict. had 'brief affair' in Boston in late '43, and 'she had about 10 other boyfriends on line at all times.' Fickling had verified alibi for time of murder. Eliminated as suspect, also denies ever having been engaged to E. Short.

12. Numerous tips being phoned in to all L.A.P.D. and Sheriff's divisions. Crank-sounding dismissed, others routed to applicable area squadrooms thru Cent. Homicide. All tips being cross-filed.

XXXXXX13. *Address verified info: E. Short lived at these addresses in 1946. (Names following addresses are of caller or verified residents of same address. All but Linda Martin verified by D.M.V. records)*

13-A–1611 N. Orange Dr., Hollywood. (Harold Costa, Donald Leyes, Marjorie Graham) 6024 Carlos Ave., Hollywood. 1842 N. Cherokee, Hollywood (Linda Martin, *Sheryl Saddon) 53 Linden, Long Beach.*

14. *Results of SID findings in Leimert Park vact lots: no woman's clothing found, numerous knives and knife blades found, all too rusted to be murder weapon. No blood found.*

15. *Results of Leimert Park canvasing (with mugs of E. Short): zero (all sightings obvious crank stuff.)*

In conclusion: I believe all investigatory efforts should be centered around questionings of E. Short's known associates, particularly her numerous boyfriends. Sergeant Sears and I will be going to San Diego to question her K.A.'s there. Between the APB on 'Red' and the L.A. K.A. questionings we should get salient information.

Russell A. Millard, Ltd.,
Badge 493, Central Homicide

I turned around to find Millard watching me. He said, 'Off the top of your head, what do you think?'

I fingered my ripped pocket. 'Is she worth it, Lieutenant?'

Millard smiled; I noticed that rumpled clothes and a razor stubble didn't dent his aura of class. 'I think so. Your partner thinks so.'

'Lee's chasing bogeymen, Lieutenant.'

'You can call me Russ, you know.'

'Okay, Russ.'

'What did you and Blanchard get from the father?'

I handed Millard my report. 'Nothing specific, just more dope on the girl as a tramp. What's with this Black Dahlia stuff?'

Millard slapped the arms of his chair. 'We can thank Bevo Means for that. He went down to Long Beach and talked to the desk clerk at the hotel where the girl stayed last summer. The clerk told him Betty Short always wore tight black dresses. Bevo thought of that movie with Alan Ladd, *The Blue Dahlia*, and took it from there. I figure the image is good for at least another dozen confessions a day. As Harry says when he's had a few, "Hollywood will fuck you when no one else will." You're a smart bad penny, Bucky. What do you think?'

'I think I want to go back to Warrants. Will you grease it with Loew?'

Millard shook his head. 'No. Will you answer my question?'

I choked down the urge to smash or beg. 'She said yes or no to the wrong guy, at the wrong time, at the wrong place. And since she's had more rubber burned on her than the San Berdoo Highway, and doesn't know how to tell the truth, I'd say that finding that wrong guy is going to be a hell of a job.'

Millard stood up and stretched. 'Bright penny, you go up to Hollywood Station and meet Bill Koenig, then you two go question the tenants at the Hollywood addresses on my summary. Stress the boyfriend angle. Keep Koenig on a tight leash if you can, and you write the report, because Billy's practically illiterate. Report back here when you're finished.'

My headache going migraine, I obeyed. The last thing I heard before hitting the street was a group of cops chortling over Betty Short's love letters.

I picked up Koenig at Hollywood Station and drove with him to the Carlos Avenue address. Parking in front of 6024, I said, 'You're ranking, Sarge. How do you want to play this?'

Koenig cleared his throat loudly, then swallowed the wad of phlegm he brought up. 'Fritzie does the talking, but he's home sick. How about you talk, I stand backup?' He opened his jacket to show me a leather sap stuck into the waistband. 'You think it's a muscle job?'

I said, 'Talk job,' and got out of the car. There was an old lady sitting on the porch of 6024, a three-story brown clapboard house with a ROOMS FOR RENT sign staked on the lawn. She saw me walking over, closed her bible and said, 'I'm sorry, young man, but I only rent to career girls with references.'

I flashed my shield. 'We're police officers, ma'am. We came to talk to you about Betty Short.'

The old woman said, 'I knew her as Beth,' then shot a look at Koenig, standing on the lawn surreptitiously picking his nose.

I said, 'He's looking for clues.'

The woman snorted, 'He won't find them inside that big beak of his. Who killed Beth Short, Officer?'

I got out pen and notepad. 'That's what we're here to find out. Could I have your name, please?'

'I'm Miss Loretta Janeway. I called the police when I heard Beth's name on the radio.'

'Miss Janeway, when did Elizabeth Short live at this address?'

'I checked my records right after I heard that news broadcast. Beth stayed in my third-floor right-rear room from last September fourteenth to October nineteenth.'

'Was she referred to you?'

'No. I remember it very well, because Beth was such a pretty girl. She knocked on the door and said she was walking up Gower when she saw my sign. She said she was an aspiring actress and needed an inexpensive room until she got her big break. I said I'd heard that one before, and told her she'd do well to lose that awful Boston accent of hers. Well, Beth just smiled and said, "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party" with no accent at all. Then she said, "See! See how I take direction! She was so eager to please that I rented her the room, even though my policy is not to rent to movie types.'

I wrote the pertinent info down, then asked, 'Was Beth a good tenant?'

Miss Janeway shook her head. 'God rest her soul, but she was an awful tenant, and she made me regret bending my policy on movie picture types. She was always late on her rent, always hocking her jewelry for food money and trying to get me to let her pay by the day instead of the week. A dollar a day she wanted to pay! Can you imagine how much space my ledgers would take up if I let all my tenants do that?'

'Did Beth socialize with the other tenants?'

'Good lord, no. The third-floor right-rear room has got private steps, so Beth didn't have to come in through the front door like the other girls, and she never attended any of the coffee klatches I put on for the girls after church on Sunday. Beth *never* went to church herself, and she told me, "Girls are good for chitchat once in a blue moon, but give me boys any day."'

'Here's my most important question, Miss Janeway. Did Beth have any boyfriends while she was living here?'

The old woman picked up the Bible and hugged it to herself. 'Officer, if they'd come in the front door like the other girls' beaus, I would have seen them. I don't want to blaspheme the dead, so let's just say I heard lots of footsteps on Beth's stairs at the most ungodly hours.'

'Did Beth ever mention any enemies? Anybody she was afraid of?'

'No.'

'When was the last time you saw her?'

'Late October, the day she moved out. She said, "I've found more simpatico digs" in her best California girl voice.'

'Did she say where she was moving to?'

Miss Janeway said 'No,' then leaned toward me confidingly and pointed to Koenig, loping back to the car tugging at his crotch. 'You should talk to that man about his hygiene. Frankly, it's disgusting.'

I said, 'Thank you, Miss Janeway,' walked to the car and got in behind the wheel.

Koenig grunted, 'What did the cooze say about me?'

'She said you're cute.'

'Yeah?'

'Yeah.'

'What else did she say?'

'That a man like you could make her feel young again.'

'Yeah?'

'Yeah. I told her to forget it, that you're married.'

'I ain't married.'

'I know.'

'Then why'd you tell her that?'

I pulled out into traffic. 'You want her sending you mash notes at the Bureau?'

'Oh, I get it. What did she say about Fritzie?'

'Does she know Fritzie?'

Koenig looked at me like *I* was mentally defective. 'Lots of people talk about Fritzie behind his back.'

'What do they say?'

'Lies.'

'What kind of lies?'

'Bad lies.'

'For instance?'

'Lies like he got the syph fucking hooers when he worked Ad Vice. Like he got docked off a month from duty to take the mercury cure. Like he got bounced to Central dicks for it. Bad lies, even worse stuff than that.'

Chills were tickling my spine. I turned onto Cherokee and said, 'Such as?'

Koenig slid closer to me. 'You pumping me, Bleichert? You looking for bad things to say about Fritzie?'

'No. Just curious.'

'Curiosity killed the kitty cat. You remember that.'

'I will. What did you get on the Sergeant's Exam, Bill?'

'I don't know.'

'What?'

'Fritzie took it for me. Remember the kitty cat, Bleichert. I don't want nobody saying nothing bad about my partner.'

1842, a big stucco apartment house, came into view. I pulled over and parked, muttered, 'Talk job,' then headed straight for the lobby.

A wall directory listed S. Saddon and nine other names – but no Linda Martin – in apartment 604. I took the elevator up to the sixth floor, walked down a hallway smelling faintly of marijuana and rapped on the door. Big band music died out, the door opened and a youngish woman in a sparkly Egyptian outfit was standing there, holding a papier mâché headdress. She said, ‘Are you the driver from RKO?’

I said, ‘Police.’ The door shut in my face. I heard a toilet flushing; the girl returned a moment later, and I walked into the apartment uninvited. The living room was high-ceilinged and arched; sloppily made-up bunk beds lined the walls. Suitcases, valises and steamer trunks were spilling out of an open closet door, and a linoleum table was wedged diagonally against a set of bunks without mattresses. The table was covered with cosmetics and vanity mirrors; the cracked wood floor beside it was dusted with spilled rouge and face powder.

The girl said, ‘Is this about those jaywalking tickets I forgot to pay? Listen, I’ve got three days on *Curse of the Mummy’s Tomb* at RKO, and when I get paid I’ll send you a check. Is that all right?’

I said, ‘This is about Elizabeth Short, Miss—’

The girl put out a big stage groan. ‘Saddon. Sheryl with a Y-L Saddon. Listen, I talked to a policeman on the phone this morning. Sergeant something or other with a bad stutter. He asked me nine thousand questions about Betty and her nine thousand boyfriends, and I told him nine thousand times that lots of girls bunk here and date lots of guys, and most of them are fly-by-nights. I told him that Betty lived here from early November to early December, that she paid a dollar a day just like the rest of us, and I didn’t remember the names of any of her dates. So can I go now? The extra tuck’s due any minute, and I need this job.’

Sheryl Saddon was out of breath and sweating from her metallic costume. I pointed to a bunk bed. ‘Sit down and answer my questions, or I’ll roust you for the reefers you flushed down the toilet.’

The three-day Cleopatra obeyed, giving me a look that would have withered Julius Caesar. I said, ‘First question. Does a Linda Martin live here?’

Sheryl Saddon grabbed a pack of Old Golds off the bunk and lit up. ‘I told Sergeant Stutter already. Betty mentioned Linda Martin a couple of times. She roomed at Betty’s other place, the one over on De Longpre and Orange. And you need evidence to arrest someone, you know.’

I took out my pen and notebook. ‘What about Betty’s enemies? Threats of violence against her?’

‘Betty’s trouble wasn’t enemies, it was too many friends, if you follow my drift. Get it? Friends like in *boy*friends?’

‘Smart girl. Any of them ever threaten her?’

‘Not that I know of. Listen, can we hurry this up?’

‘Simmer down. What did Betty do for work while she was staying here?’

Sheryl Saddon snorted, ‘Comedian. Betty didn’t work. She bummed change from the other girls here, and she cadged drinks and dinner off grandfather types down on the Boulevard. A couple of times she took off for two or three days and came back with money, then she told these fish stories about where it came from. She was such a little liar that nobody ever believed a word she said.’

‘Tell me about the fish stories. And about Betty’s lies in general.’

Sheryl stubbed out her cigarette and lit another one immediately. She smoked silently for a few moments, and I could tell that the actress part of her was warming to the idea of caricaturing Betty Short. Finally she said, ‘You know all this Black Dahlia stuff in the papers?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, Betty always dressed in black as a gimmick to impress casting directors when she made rounds with the other girls, which wasn’t often, because she liked to sleep till noon every day. But sometimes she'd tell you she was wearing black because her father died or because she was mourning the boys who died in the war. Then the next day she'd tell you her father was alive. When she was out for a couple of days and came back flush, she'd tell one girl a rich uncle died and left her a bundle and another that she won the money playing poker in Gardena. She told everybody nine thousand lies about being married to nine thousand different war heroes. You get the picture?'

I said, 'Vividly. Let's change the subject.'

'Goody. How about international finance?'

'How about the movies? You girls are all trying to break in, right?'

Sheryl gave me a vamp look. 'I have broken in. I was in *The Cougar Woman, Attack of the Phantom Gargoyle* and *Sweet Will Be the Honeysuckle*.'

'Congratulations. Did Betty ever get any movie work?'

'Maybe. Maybe once, but then again maybe not, because Betty was such a liar.'

'Go on.'

'Well, on Thanksgiving all the kids on the sixth floor chipped in for a potluck supper, and Betty was flush and bought two whole cases of beer. She was bragging about being in a movie, and she was showing around this viewfinder that she said the director gave her. Now lots of girls have got chintzy little viewfinders that movie guys give them, but this was an expensive one, on a chain, with a little velvet case. I remember that Betty was on cloud nine that night, talking up a blue streak.'

'Did she tell you the name of the movie?'

Sheryl shook her head. 'No.'

'Did she mention any names associated with the movie?'

'If she did, I don't remember.'

I looked around the room, counted twelve bunk beds at a dollar a night apiece and thought of a landlord getting fat. I said, 'Do you know what a casting couch is?'

The mock Cleopatra's eyes burned. 'Not me, buster. Not this girl *ever*.'

'Betty Short?'

'Probably.'

I heard a horn honking, walked to the window and looked out. A flatbed truck with a dozen Cleopatras and pharaohs in the back was at the curb directly behind my car. I turned around to tell Sheryl, but she was already out the door.

The last address on Millard's list was 1611 North Orange Drive, a pink stucco tourist flop in the shadow of Hollywood High School. Koenig snapped out of his nose-picking reverie as I double-parked in front of it, pointing to two men perusing a stack of newspapers on the steps. 'I'll take them, you take the skirts. You got names for them?'

I said, 'Maybe Harold Costa and Donald Leyes. You look tired, Sarge. Don't you want to sit this one out?'

'I'm bored. What should I ask them guys?'

'I'll handle them, Sarge.'

'You remember the kitty cat, Bleichert. Same thing happened to him happens to guys who try to jerk my chain when Fritzie ain't around. Now what do I roust them guys for?'

'Sarge—'

Koenig sprayed me with spittle. 'I'm ranking, hotshot! You do what Bib Bill says!'

Seeing red, I said, 'Get alibis and ask them if Betty Short ever engaged in prostitution'; Koenig snickered in reply. I took the lawn and steps at a run, the two men moving aside to let me through. The front door opened into a shabby sitting room; a group of young people were sitting around, smoking and reading movie mags. I said, ‘Police. I’m looking for Linda Martin, Marjorie Graham, Harold Costa and Donald Leyes.’

A honey blonde in a slacks suit dog-eared her *Photoplay*. ‘I’m Marjorie Graham, and Hal and Don are outside.’

The rest of the people got up and fanned out into the hallway, like I was a big dose of bad news. I said, ‘This is about Elizabeth Short. Did any of you know her?’

I got a half dozen negative head shakes, shocked and sad looks; outside I heard Koenig shouting, ‘You tell me true! Was the Short bimbo peddling it?’

Marjorie Graham said, ‘I was the one who called the police, Officer. I gave them Linda’s name because I knew she knew Betty, too.’

I pointed to the door. ‘What about those guys outside?’

‘Don and Harold? They both dated Betty. Harold called you because they knew you’d be looking for clues. Who’s that man yelling at them?’

I ignored the question, sat down beside Marjorie Graham and got out my notebook. ‘What can you tell me about Betty that I don’t know already? Can you give me *facts*? Names of other boyfriends, descriptions, specific dates? Enemies? Possible motives for somebody wanting to kill her?’

The woman flinched; I realized I was raising my voice. Keeping it low, I said, ‘Let’s start with dates. When did Betty live here?’

‘Early December,’ Marjorie Graham said. ‘I remember because there was a bunch of us sitting here listening to a radio program on the fifth anniversary of Pearl Harbor when she checked in.’

‘So that was December seventh?’

‘Yes.’

‘And how long was she here?’

‘No more than a week or so.’

‘How did she know about this place?’

‘I think Linda Martin told her about it.’

Millard’s memo stated that Betty Short spent most of December in San Diego. I said, ‘But she moved out shortly afterward, right?’

‘Yes.’

‘Why, Miss Graham? Betty lived in three places that we know of last fall – all in Hollywood. Why did she move around so much?’

Marjorie Graham took a tissue from her purse and fretted it. ‘Well, I don’t really know for sure.’

‘Was some jealous boyfriend after her?’

‘I don’t think so.’

‘Miss Graham, what *do* you think?’

Marjorie sighed. ‘Officer, Betty used up people. She borrowed money from them and told them stories, and … well, a lot of pretty hard-nosed kids live here, and I think they saw through Betty pretty quick.’

I said, ‘Tell me about Betty. You liked her, didn’t you?’

‘Yes. She was sweet and trusting and sort of dumb, but … inspired. She had this storage gift, if you want to call it that. She’d do anything to be liked, and she sort of took on the mannerisms of whoever she was with. Everybody here smokes, and Betty started smoking to be one of the kids, even though it was bad for her asthma and she hated cigarettes. And the funny thing is that she’d try to walk and talk like you, but she was always herself when she was doing it. She was always Betty or Beth or whatever nickname for Elizabeth she was going by at that moment.'

I kicked the sad dope around in my head. 'What did you and Betty talk about?'

Marjorie said, 'Mostly I just listened to Betty talk. We used to sit here and listen to the radio, and Betty told stories. Love stories about all these war heros – Lieutenant Joe and Major Matt and on and on. I knew they were just fantasies. Sometimes she talked about becoming a movie star, like all she had to do was walk around in her black dresses and sooner or later she'd get discovered. That sort of made me mad, because I've been taking classes at the Pasadena Playhouse, and I know that acting is hard work.'

I flipped to my notes from the Sheryl Saddon questioning. 'Miss Graham, did Betty talk about being in a movie sometime in late November?'

'Yes. The first night she was here she was bragging about it. She said she had a co-starring role, and she showed around a viewfinder. A couple of boys pressed her for details, and she told one of them it was at Paramount, another that it was at Fox. I thought she was just fibbing to get attention.'

I wrote 'Names' on a clean page and underlined it three times. 'Marjorie, what about names. Betty's boyfriends, people you saw her with?'

'Well, I know she went out with Don Leyes and Harold Costa, and I saw her once with a sailor, and I …'

Marjorie faltered;. I caught a troubled look in her eyes. 'What is it? You can tell me.'

Marjorie's voice was stretched thin. 'Right before she moved out I saw Betty and Linda Martin talking to this big older woman up on the Boulevard. She was wearing a man's suit, and she had short hair like a man. I only saw them with her that one time, so maybe it doesn't mean—'

'Are you saying the woman was a lesbian?'

Marjorie bobbed her head up and down and reached for a Kleenex; Bill Koenig stepped inside and hooked a finger at me. I walked over to him. He whispered, 'Them guys talked, said the stiff peddled her twat when she got strapped bad. I called Mr Loew. He said to keep that zipped, 'cause it's a better caper if she's a nice young cooze.'

I bit off an urge to spill the dyke lead; the DA and his flunky would probably quash it, too. I said, 'I've got another quick one here. Get statements from those guys, okay?'

Koenig giggled and walked outside; I told Marjorie to sit still and moved to the rear of the lobby. There was a registration desk, an open ledger on top of it. I stood at the counter and leafed through the pages until I saw a childishly scrawled 'Linda Martin,' with 'Room 14' printed across from it.

I took the first-floor corridor back to the room, knocked on the door and waited for an answer. When none came after five seconds, I tried the knob, It gave, and I pushed the door open.

It was a cramped little room containing nothing but an unmade bed. I checked the closet; it was dead empty. The nightstand held a stack of yesterday's papers folded open to 'Werewolf Murder' brouhaha; suddenly I *knew* the Martin girl was a lamster. I got down on the floor and ran a hand under the bed, brushed a flat object and pulled it out.

It was a red plastic change purse. I opened it and found two pennies, a dime and an identification card for Cornhusker High School, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The card was made out to Lorna Martilkova, DOB 12/19/31. There was a photo of a beautiful young girl below the school's crest; in my mind I was already typing out an all-points juvie runaway warrant.

Marjorie Graham appeared in the doorway. I held out the ID card; she said, ‘That’s Linda. God, she’s only fifteen.’

‘Middle-aged for Hollywood. When did you see her last?’

‘This morning. I told her I called the police, that they’d be coming by to talk to us about Betty. Was that the wrong thing to do?’

‘You couldn’t have known. And thanks.’

Marjorie smiled, and I found myself wishing her a speedy one-way trip out of movieland. I kept the wish silent as I smiled back and walked outside. On the porch, Bill Koenig was standing at parade rest and Donald Leyes and Harold Costa were sprawled in lounge chairs with that green-at-the-gills look that comes with taking a few rabbit punches.

Koenig said, ‘They didn’t do it.’

I said, ‘No shit, Sherlock.’

Koenig said, ‘My name ain’t Sherlock.’

I said, ‘No shit.’

Koenig said, ‘What?’

At Hollywood Station I exercised the Warrants cops’ special prerogative, issuing an all-points juvenile runaway warrant and a priority material witness warrant on Lorna Martilkova/Linda Martin, leaving the report forms with the daywatch boss, who told me the APBs would hit the air within the hour, and that he would send officers over to 1611 North Orange Drive to question the tenants on Linda/Lorna’s possible whereabouts. With that taken care of, I wrote my report on the series of questionings, stressing Betty Short as a habitual liar and the possibility that she acted in a movie sometime in November of ’46. Before finishing it up, I wavered on whether to mention Marjorie Graham’s lead on the old dyke. If Ellis Loew got a hold of the dope he would probably quash it along with the skinny on Betty as a part-time prostie, so I decided to omit it from the report and give the information verbally to Russ Millard.

From a squadroom phone I called the Screen Actor’s Guild and Central Casting and inquired about Elizabeth Short. A clerk told me that no one by that name or any diminutive of the name Elizabeth was ever listed with them, making it unlikely that she had appeared in a legit Hollywood production. I hung up thinking of the movie as another Betty fairy tale, the viewfinder a fairy-tale prop.

It was late afternoon. Being free of Koenig felt like surviving cancer and the three interviews felt like an overdose of Betty/Beth Short and her low-rent last months on earth. I was tired and hungry, so I drove to the house for a sandwich and a nap – and walked straight into another installment of the Black Dahlia Show.

Kay and Lee were standing around the dining room table, examining crime scene photos shot at 39th and Norton. There was Betty Short’s bashed head; Betty Short’s slashed breasts; Betty Short’s empty bottom half and Betty Short’s wide-open legs – all in glossy black and white. Kay was nervously smoking and shooting little glances at the pictures; Lee was eyeballing them, his face twitching in a half dozen directions, the Benzedrine man from outer space. Neither said a word to me; I just stood there playing straight man to the most celebrated stiff in LA history.

Finally Kay said, ‘Hi, Dwight,’ and Lee stabbed a shaky finger at a close-up of the torso mutilations. ‘It’s not a random job, I know it. Vern Smith says some guy just picked her up on the street, took her someplace and tortured her, then dumped her in the lot. Horseshit. The guy who did this hated her for a reason and wanted the whole goddamn world to know. Jesus, two fucking days he cut her. Babe, you took pre-med classes, you think this guy had medical training? You know, like some kind of mad doctor type?'

Kay put out her cigarette and said, 'Lee, Dwight's here'; Lee wheeled around.

I said, 'Partner—' and Lee tried to wink, smile and speak at the same time.

It came off as one awful grimace; when he got out, 'Bucky, listen to Kay, I knew all the college I bought her would do me some good,' I had to look away.

Kay's voice was soft, patient. 'This kind of theorizing is just nonsense, but I'll give you a theory if you'll eat something to calm yourself down.'

'Theory on, teach.'

'Well, it's just a guess, but maybe there were two killers, because the torture cuts are crude, while the bisection and the cut on the abdomen, which are obviously both postmortem, are neat and clean. Maybe there's just one killer though, and after he killed the girl he calmed down, then bisected her and made the abdominal cut. And anybody could have removed the internal organs with the body in two parts. I think mad doctors are only in the movies. Sweetie, *you* have to calm down. You have to quit taking those pills and you have to eat. Listen to Dwight, he'll tell you that.'

I looked at Lee. He said, 'I'm too hopped-up to eat,' then stuck out his hand like I'd just walked in. 'Hey partner. You learn anything good about our girl today?'

I thought of telling him I learned she wasn't worth a hundred full-time cops; I thought of spilling the dyke lead and Betty Short as a sad little floozy-liar to back the claim up. But Lee's dope-juiced face made me say, 'Nothing that's worth you doing this to yourself. Nothing that's worth seeing you useless when a bimbo you sent to Quentin is three days away from LA. Think of your little sister seeing you this way. Think of her—'

I stopped when tears started streaming from Lee's outer-space eyes. Now *he* just stood there like the straight man to his own blood kin. Kay moved between us, a hand on each of our shoulders. I walked out before Lee began weeping for real.

University Station was another outpost of Black Dahlia mania.

A wager pool sign-up list was posted in the locker room. It was in the form of a crudely drawn crap table felt, featuring betting spaces labeled 'Solved – pay 2 to 1,' 'Random sex job – pay 4 to 1,' 'Unsolved – even money,' 'Boyfriend(s) pay 1 to 4,' and '"Red" – no odds unless suspect captured.' The 'House $ man' was listed as Sergeant Shiner, and so far the big action was on 'boyfriend(s),' with a dozen officers signed up, all plopping down a sawbuck to win two-fifty.

The squadroom was more comic relief. Someone had hung the two halves of a cheap black dress from the doorway. Harry Sears, half gassed, was waltzing around the Negro cleaning woman, introducing her as the real Black Dahlia, the best colored songbird since Billie Holliday. They were taking nips from Harry's flask, the cleaning lady belting gospel numbers while officers trying to talk on the phone clamped hands to their free ears.

The straight business was frenzied, too. Men were working with DMV registrations and Huntington Park street directories, trying to put together a lead on the 'Red' Betty Short left San Dago with; others were reading her love letters, and two officers were on the DMV police line getting info on the license numbers Lee had gotten last night while camped out at Junior Nash's fuck pad. Millard and Loew were gone, so I dropped my questioning report and a note on the warrants I'd issued into a large tray marked FIELD DETECTIVE'S SUMMARIES. Then I took off before some ranking clown forced me to join the circus.

Being at loose ends made me think of Lee; thinking of Lee made me wish I was back at the squadroom, where at least there was a sense of humor about the dead girl. Then thinking of Lee made me mad, and I started thinking about Junior Nash, professional gunman more dangerous than fifty jealous boyfriend killers. Itchy, I went back to being a Warrants cop and prowled Leimert Park for him.

But there was no escape from the Black Dahlia.

Passing 39th and Norton, I saw rubberneckers gawking around the vacant lot while ice cream and hotdog vendors dispensed chow; an old woman was peddling Betty Short portrait glossies in front of the bar at 39th and Crenshaw, and I wondered if the charming Cleo Short had supplied the negatives for a substantial percentage cut. Pissed off, I pushed the buffoonery out of my mind and *worked*.

I spent five straight hours walking South Crenshaw and South Western, showing Nash's mug shots and talking up his MO of statch rape on young Negro tail. All I got was 'No' and the question 'Why ain't you after the guy who chopped up that nice Dahlia girl?' Toward mid-evening I surrendered myself to the notion that maybe Junior Nash really had blown LA. And still itchy, I rejoined the circus.

After a wolfed burger dinner, I called the night number at Administrative Vice and inquired about known lesbian gathering places. The clerk checked the Ad Vice intelligence files and came back with the names of three cocktail lounges, all on the same block of Ventura Boulevard out in the Valley: the Dutchess, the Swank Spot and La Verne's Hideaway. I was about to hang up when he added that they were out of the LAPD's jurisdiction in the unincorporated county territory patrolled by the sheriff's department, and were probably operating under their sanction – for a price.

I didn't think about jurisdictions on the ride out to the Valley. I thought about women with women. Not lez types, but soft girls with hard edges, like my string of fight giveaways. Going over the Cahuenga Pass, I tried to put pairs of them together. All I could come up with was their bodies and the smell of liniment and car upholstery – no faces. I used Betty/Beth and Linda/Lorna then, mug shots and high school ID combined with the bodies of the girls I remembered from my last pro fights. It got more and more graphic; then the 11000 block of Ventura Boulevard came into view and I got women-and-women for real.

The Swank Spot had a log cabin facade and double swinging doors like the saloons in western movies. The interior was narrow and poorly lit; it took long moments for my eyes to adjust to the darkness. When they did I saw a score of women trying to stare me down.

Some of them were bull dykes in khaki shirts and GI issue trousers; some were soft girls in skirts and sweaters. One hefty dagger eyed me head to toe; the girl standing next to her, a svelte redhead, put her head on her shoulder and slinked an arm around her thick waist. Feeling myself start to sweat, I looked for the bar and someone with the air of top dog. I spotted a lounge area at the back of the room, bamboo chairs and tables covered with liquor bottles, all of it encircled by wall neon blinking purple, then yellow, then orange. I walked over, arm-draped couples separated to let me through, giving me just enough room to maneuver.

The lezzie behind the serving bar poured a shot glass full of whiskey and placed it in front of me, saying. 'You from the Beverage Control?' She had piercing light eyes; neon reflections turned them almost translucent. I got a weird feeling that she knew what I was thinking about on the way over.

Downing the booze, I said, 'LAPD Homicide'; the dyke said, 'Not your bailiwick, but who got snuffed?' I fumbled for my snapshot of Betty Short and the Lorna/Linda ID card, then placed them on the bar. The whiskey lubed my hoarse voice: 'Have you seen either of them?'

The woman gave the two pieces of paper, then me, a long once-over. 'You tellin' me the Dahlia's a sister?'

'You tell me.'

'I'll tell you I've never seen her except in the papers, and the little schoolgirl twist I've never seen, because me and my girls don't truck with underaged stuff. Capice?'

I pointed to the shot glass; the dyke refilled it. I drank; my sweat warmed, then cooled off. 'Capice when your girls tell me that and I believe them.'

The woman whistled, and the lounge area filled up. I grabbed the pictures and handed them to a femme draped around a lumberjack lady. They checked the photos out and shook their heads, then passed them to a woman in a Hughes Aircraft jumpsuit. She said, 'No, but USDA choice tail,' and gave them to a couple next to her. They muttered 'Black Dahlia,' real shock in their voices. Both said, 'No'; the last lezzie said, 'Nyet, nein, no, and not my type besides.' She shoved the pictures at me, then spat on the floor. I said, 'Good night, ladies,' and made for the door, the word 'Dahlia' whispered over and over behind me.

The Dutchess was two more free shots, a dozen more hostile looks and 'No' answers, all in an old English motif. Walking into La Verne's Hideaway, I was half juiced and itchy for something I couldn't put my finger on.

La Verne's was dark inside, baby spots affixed to ceiling beams casting shadowy light on walls covered with cheap palm tree paper. Lezbo couples were cooing at each other in wraparound booths; the sight of two femmes kissing forced me to stare, then look away and seek out the bar.

It was recessed into the left wall, a long counter with colored lights reflecting off a Waikiki Beach scene. There was nobody tending it, no customers sitting on any of the stools. I walked to the back of the room, clearing my throat so the lovebirds in the booths could jump off cloud nine and return to earth. The strategy worked; clinches and kisses ended, angry and startled eyes looked up at the coming of bad news.

I said, 'LAPD Homicide,' and handed the pics to the nearest lezzie. 'The dark-haired one is Elizabeth Short. The Black Dahlia if you've been reading the papers. The other one's her pal. I want to know if any of you have seen them, and if so who with.'

The pictures made the rounds of the booths; I studied reactions when I saw that I'd have to use a bludgeon to get simple yes or no answers. Nobody said a word; all I got from reading faces was curiosity tinged with a couple of cases of lust. The photos came back to me, handed over by a diesel dagger sporting a flat top. I grabbed them and headed for the street and fresh air, stopping when I saw a woman behind the bar polishing glasses.

I moved to the bar and placed my wares on the counter, hooking a finger at her. She picked up the mug shot strip and said, 'I seen her picture in the paper and that's it.'

'What about this girl? She goes by the name Linda Martin.'

The barmaid held up the Lorna/Linda ID card and squinted at it; I saw a flicker of recognition pass over her face. 'No, sorry.'

I leaned over the counter. 'Don't fucking lie to me. She's fifteen fucking years old, so you come clean now, or I slap a contributing beef on you, and you spend the next five years eating pussy in Tehachapi.'

The lezbo recoiled; I half expected her to go for a bottle and brain me with it. Eyes on the bar, she said, 'The kid used to come in. Maybe two, three months ago.

But I've never seen the Dahlia, and I think the kid liked boys. I mean, she just cadged drinks off the sisters, that was it.'

Sidelong, I saw a woman just starting to sit down at the bar change her mind, grab her purse and make for the door, as if spooked by my words with the barmaid. The baby spotlight caught her face; I caught a fleeting resemblance to Elizabeth Short.

I gathered up my pictures, counted to ten and pursued the woman, getting to my car just as I saw her unlock the door of a snow-white Packard coupe parked a couple of spaces up from me. When she pulled out, I counted to five, then followed.

The rolling surveillance led me over Ventura Boulevard to the Cahuenga Pass, then down into Hollywood. Late-night traffic was scarce, so I let the Packard stay several car lengths in front of me as it headed south on Highland, out of Hollywood, into the Hancock Park District. At 4th Street, the woman turned left; within seconds we were in the heart of Hancock Park – an area Wilshire Division cops called 'Pheasant Under Glass Acres.'

The Packard turned the corner at Muirfield Road and stopped in front of a huge Tudor mansion fronted by a lawn the size of a football field. I continued on, my headlights picking up the car's rear plate: CAL RQ 765. Checking my rearview mirror, I saw the woman locking the driver's side door; even from a distance her trim sharkskin figure stood out.

I took 3rd Street out of Hancock Park. At Western I saw a pay phone, got out and called the DMV night line, requesting a vehicle make and criminal record check on white Packard coupe CAL RQ 765. The operator kept me waiting for close to five minutes, then returned with his read-out:

Madeleine Cathcart Sprague, white female, DOB 11/14/25, LA, 482 South Muirfield Road; no wants, no warrants, no criminal record.

Driving home, the shots of booze wore off. I started wondering if Madeleine Cathcart Sprague had anything at all to do with Betty/Beth and Lorna/Linda, or whether she was just a rich lezzie with a taste for low life. Steering with one hand, I took out my Betty Short mugs, superimposed the Sprague girl's face over them and came away with a common, everyday resemblance. Then I saw myself peeling off her sharkskin suit and knew I didn't care one way or the other.

CHAPTER TEN

I played the radio on the ride to University Station the next morning. The Dexter Gordon quartet was bebop-ping me into good spirits when ‘Billie’s Bounce’ quit bouncing, replaced by a feverish voice: ‘We interrupt our regular broadcast to bring you a bulletin. A major suspect in the investigation into the slaying of Elizabeth Short, the raven-haired party girl known as the Black Dahlia, has been captured! Previously known to the authorities only as “Red”, the man has now been identified as Robert “Red” Manley, age twenty-five, a Huntington Park hardware salesman. Manley was captured this morning at the South Gate home of a friend and is now being held and questioned at the Hollenbeck police station in East Los Angeles. In an exclusive handout to KGFJ, Deputy DA Ellis Loew, ace legal beagle working on the case as civilian-police liaison, said: “Red Manley is a hot suspect. We’ve got him pegged as the man who drove Betty Short up from San Diego on January ninth, six days before her torture-ravaged body was found in a vacant lot in Leimert Park. This looks like the big break we’ve all been hoping and praying for. God has answered our prayers!”’

Ellis Loew’s sentiments were replaced by a commercial for Preparation H, guaranteed to reduce the painful swelling of hemorrhoids or double your money back. I flipped the radio off and changed direction, heading for Hollenback Station.

The street in front of it was blocked off with sawhorse detour signs; patrolmen were holding reporters at bay. I parked in the alley behind the station and entered through the back door to the holding tank. Drunks jabbered in cells on the misdemeanor side of the catwalk; hardcase types glowered from the felony row. It was a jailhouse full house, but there were no jailers anywhere. Opening a connecting door into the station proper, I saw why.

What looked like the entire in-station contingent was crammed into a short corridor inset with interrogation cubicles, every man straining for a look through the one-way glass of the middle room on the left side. Russ Millard’s voice was coming out of a wall-mounted speaker: smooth, coaxing.

I nudged the officer nearest to me. ‘Has he confessed?’

The man shook his head. ‘No. Millard and his partner are giving him the Mutt and Jeff.’

‘Did he admit knowing the girl?’

‘Yeah. We got him from the DMV cross-checks, and he came along peacefully. Wanna make a little bet? Innocent or guilty, take your pick. I’m feelin’ lucky today.’

I ignored the offer, gently elbowed my way up to the glass and peered in. Millard was seated at a battered wooden table, a handsome young guy with a carrot-hued pompadour across from him fingering a pack of cigarettes. He looked scared shitless; Millard looked like the nice-guy priest in the movies – the one who’s seen it all and granted absolution for the whole enchilada.

Carrot top’s voice came over the speaker. ‘Please, I’ve told it three times now.’

Millard said, ‘Robert, we’re doing this because you didn’t come forward. Betty Short has been on the front page of every LA newspaper for three days now, and you knew we wanted to talk to you. But you hid out. How do you think that looks?'

Robert 'Red' Manley lit a cigarette, inhaled and coughed. 'I didn't want my wife to know I was chipping on her.'

'But you didn't chip on her. Betty wouldn't put out. She cock-teased you and didn't come across. That's no reason to hide from the police.'

'I dated her down in Dago. I danced slow dances with her. It's the same thing as chipping.'

Millard put a hand on Manley's arm. 'Let's go back to the beginning. Tell me how you met Betty, what you did, what you talked about. Take your time, nobody's rushing you.'

Manley stubbed out his cigarette into an overflowing ashtray, lit another one and wiped sweat from his brow. I looked around the corridor and saw Ellis Loew leaning against the opposite wall, Vogel and Koenig flanking him like twin dogs awaiting the command to attack. A static-filtered sigh came over the loudspeaker; I turned back and watched the suspect squirm in his chair. 'And this is the last time I'll have to tell it?'

Millard smiled. 'That's right. Go ahead, son.'

Manley got up and stretched, then paced as he talked. 'I met Betty the week before Christmas, at this bar in downtown Dago. We just started gabbing, and Betty let it slip that she was sort of on her uppers, staying with this woman Mrs. French and her daughter, sort of temporarily. I bought her dinner at an Italian joint in Old Town, then we went dancing at the Sky Room at the El Cortez Hotel. We—'

Millard interrupted. 'Do you always chase tail when you're out of town on business?'

Manley shouted, 'I wasn't chasing tail!'

'What were you doing, then?'

'I was infatuated, that's all. I couldn't tell if Betty was a gold digger or a nice girl, and I wanted to find out. I wanted to test my loyalty to my wife and I just …'

Manley's voice died down; Millard said, 'Son, for God's sake tell the truth. You were looking for some pussy, right?'

Manley slumped into his chair. 'Right.'

'Just like you always do on business trips, right?'

'No! Betty was different!'

'How was she different? Out-of-town stuff is out-of-town stuff, right?'

'No! I don't chip on my wife when I'm on the road! Betty was just …'

Millard's voice was so low that the loudspeaker barely picked it up. 'Betty just set you off. Right?'

'Right.'

'Made you want to do things you'd never done before, made you mad, made you —'

'No! No! I wanted to fuck her, I didn't want to hurt her!'

'Sssh. Sssh. Let's go back to Christmastime. You had that first date with Betty. Did you kiss her good night?'

Manley gripped the ashtray with both hands; they shook, butts spilled onto the table. 'On the cheek.'

'Come on, Red. No heavy pass?'

'No.'

'You had a second date with Betty two days before Christmas, right?'

'Right.'

'More dancing at the El Cortez, right?'

'Right.'

'Soft lights, drinks, soft music, then you made your move, right?'

'Goddamn you, quit saying "Right"! I tried to kiss Betty and she gave me this song and dance about how she couldn't sleep with me because the father of her child had to be a war hero and I was only in the army band. She was goddamn nuts on the subject! All she did was talk about these horseshit war heros!'

Millard stood up. 'Why do you say "horseshit," Red?'

'Because I knew they were lies. Betty said she was married to this guy and engaged to that guy, and I knew she was trying to make me look small because I never saw combat.'

'Did she mention any names?'

'No, just ranks. Major this and Captain that, like I should be ashamed of being a corporal.'

'Did you hate her for it?'

'No! Don't put words in my mouth!'

Millard stretched and sat down. 'After that second date, when was the next time you saw Betty?'

Manley sighed and rested his forehead on the table. 'I've told you the whole story three times.'

'Son, the sooner you tell it again, the sooner you'll be able to go home.'

Manley shivered and wrapped his arms around himself. 'After the second date I didn't hear from Betty until January eighth, when I got this telegram at my office. The telegram said she'd like to see me when I made my next sales run down to Dago. I wired back, saying I had to be in Dago tomorrow afternoon, and I'd pick her up. Then I picked her up, and she begged me to drive her up to LA. I said—'

Millard held up a hand. 'Did Betty say why she had to get to LA?'

'No.'

'Did she say she was meeting somebody?'

'No.'

'You agreed to do it because you thought she'd put out for you?'

Manley sighed. 'Yes.'

'Go ahead, son.'

'I took Betty with me on my rounds that day. She stayed in the car while I called on customers. I had some calls in Oceanside the next morning, so we spent the night in a motel there, and—'

'Let's have the name of the place again, son.'

'It was called the Cornucopia Motor Lodge.'

'And Betty CT'd you again that night?'

'She … she said she had her period.'

'And you fell for that old chestnut?'

'Yes.'

'Did it make you mad?'

'Goddamn it, I didn't kill her!'

'Sssh. You slept in the chair and Betty slept on the bed, right?'

'Right.'

'And in the morning?'

'In the morning we drove up to LA. Betty went with me on my rounds and tried to float me for a five-spot, but I turned her down. Then she handed me a cock-and-bull story about meeting her sister in front of the Biltmore Hotel. I wanted to get rid of her, so I dropped her in front of the Biltmore that night, right around five o'clock.

And I never saw her again, except for all that Dahlia stuff in the papers.'

Millard said, 'That was five o'clock, Friday, January tenth when you last saw her?'

Manley nodded. Millard looked straight at the glass, adjusted the knot of his necktie, then stepped outside. In the corridor, officers swarmed him, hurling questions. Harry Sears slipped into the room; next to me a familiar voice rose above the commotion. 'Now you'll see why Russ keeps Harry around.'

It was Lee, grinning a shit-eating grin, looking like a million tax-free dollars. I cuffed him around the neck. 'Welcome back to earth.'

Lee cuffed me back. 'It's your fault I look this good. Right after you left, Kay slipped me a Mickey Finn, some stuff she got at the drugstore. I slept seventeen hours, got up and ate like a horse.'

'Your own goddamn fault for bankrolling her chemistry classes. What do you think of Red?'

'A pussy hound at worst, a divorced pussy hound by the end of the week. You agree?'

'In spades.'

'You get anything yesterday?'

Seeing my best friend looking like a new man made it easy to twist the truth. 'You read my FI report?'

'Yeah, at University. Good work on the juvie warrant. You get anything else?'

I lied flat-out, a trim sharkskin figure dancing in the back of my head. 'No. You?'

Staring through the one way, Lee said, 'No, but what I said about getting the bastard still goes. Jesus, look at Harry.'

I did. The mild-mannered stutterer was circling the interrogation room table, twirling a metal-studded sap, whacking it hard into the tabletop each time he circuited. 'Ka-thack's' filled the speaker; Red Manley, arms wrapped around his chest, quivered as each blow reverberated.

Lee nudged me. 'Russ has got one rule – no actual hitting. But watch how—'

I shrugged off Lee's hand and stared through the one-way. Sears was tapping the sap on the table a few inches in front of Manley, his stutterless voice dripping cold rage. 'You wanted some fresh gash, and you thought Betty was easy. You came on strong, and that didn't work, so you begged. That didn't work, so you offered her money. She told you she was on the rag, and that was the final straw. You wanted to make her bleed for real. Tell me how you sliced her titties. Tell me—'

Manley screamed. 'No!' Sears smashed the sap into the ashtray, the glass cracked, butts flew off the table. Red bit his lip; blood spurted out, then dribbled down his chin. Sears sapped the pile of broken glass; shards exploded all over the room. Manley whimpered, 'No no no no no'; Sears hissed, 'You knew what you wanted to do. You're an old cunt chaser, and you knew lots of places to take girls. You plied Betty with a few drinks, got her to talk about her old boyfriends and came on like a pal, like nice little corporal willing to leave Betty to the *real men*, the men who saw combat, who deserved to get laid with a fine cooze like her—'

'No!'

Sears hit the table, ka-thack! '*Yes*, Reddy-poo, *yes*. I think you took her to a toolshed, maybe one of those abandoned warehouses out by the old Ford plant in Pico-Rivera. There was some twine and lots of cutting tools lying around, and you got a hard-on. Then you shot your load in your pants before you could stick it in Betty. You were mad before, but now you were *really* mad. You started thinking about all the girls who laughed at that tiny little dick of yours and all the times your wife said, “Not tonight, Reddy-poo, I’ve got a headache.” So you hit her and tied her down and beat her and cut her! Admit it, you fucking degenerate!’

‘No!’

Ka-thack!

The table jumped off the floor from the force of the blow. Manley almost jumped out of his chair; only Sears’ hand on the back slats kept him from toppling over.

‘Yes, Reddy-poo. *Yes*. You thought of every girl who said “I don’t suck,” every time your mommy spanked you, every evil eye you got from real soldiers when you played your trombone in the army band. Goldbrick needle-dick, pussy-whipped, that’s what you were thinking. That’s what Betty had to pay for. Right?’

Manley dribbled blood and spittle into his lap and gurgled. ‘No. Please, as God is my witness, no’; Sears said, ‘God hates liars,’ and sapped the table three times – *Ka-thack! Ka-thack! Ka-thack!* Manley lowered his head and began to dry sob; Sears knelt by his chair. ‘Tell me how Betty screamed and begged, Red. Tell me, then tell God.’

‘No. No. I didn’t hurt Betty.’

‘Did you get another hard-on? Did you come and come and come the more you cut her?’

‘No. Oh God, oh God.’

‘That’s right, Red. Talk to God. Tell God all about it. He’ll forgive you.’

‘No, please God.’

‘Say it, Red. Tell God how you beat and tortured and ripped up Betty Short for three fucking days, then cut her in two.’

Sears smashed the table once, twice, three times, then hurled it over onto its side. Red fumbled himself out of his chair and onto his knees. He clasped his hands and mumbled, ‘The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,’ then started weeping. Sears looked straight at the one-way, self-loathing etched into every plane of his flabby juicehound face. He gave the thumbs-down sign, then walked out of the room.

Russ Millard met him just outside the door and led him away from the general crowd of officers, in my direction. Eavesdropping on their whispered conversation, I picked up the gist of it: they both thought Manley was clean, but wanted to shoot him with Pentothal and give him a polygraph test to make sure. Looking back through the one-way, I saw Lee and another plainclothesman handcuffing Red, easing him out of the interrogation room. Lee was giving the man the kid gloves treatment he usually reserved for children, talking softly to him, one hand on his shoulder. The crowd broke up when the three of them disappeared into the holding tank. Harry Sears went back into the cubicle and began cleaning up his mess; Millard turned to me. ‘Good report yesterday, Bleichert.’

I said, ‘Thanks,’ knowing I was being sized up. We locked eyes. I asked, ‘What’s next?’

‘You tell me.’

‘First you send me back to Warrants, right?’

‘Wrong, but keep going.’

‘Okay, then we canvass around the Biltmore and try to reconstruct Betty Short’s movements from the tenth, when Red dropped her off, to the twelfth or thirteenth, when she got snatched. We blanket the area and collate the FIs and hope to hell the legit leads don’t get lost with all phonies this publicity is getting us.’

‘Keep going.’

‘We know Betty was movie-struck and promiscuous, and that she bragged about being in a movie last November, so my bet is that she wouldn’t turn down a roll on the casting couch. I think we should query producers and casting directors, see what we get.'

Millard smiled. 'I called Buzz Meeks this morning. He's an ex-cop, works as head of security at Hughes Aircraft. He's the Department's unofficial liaison to the studios, and he'll be asking around. You're doing well, Bucky. Run with the ball.'

I wavered – wanting to impress a senior officer; wanting to roust the rich lezzie myself. Millard's pump job came on as condescending, bones of praise to keep a young cop from balking at his unwanted assignment. Madeleine Cathcart Sprague framed in my mind, I said, 'All I know is that you should keep an eye on Loew and his boys. I didn't put it in my report, but Betty Short sold it outright when she needed money bad enough, and Loew's been trying to keep it kiboshed. I think he'll sit on anything that makes her look like an outright tramp. The more sympathy the public has for the girl, the more juice he gets as prosecuting attorney if this mess ever gets to court.'

Millard laughed. 'Bright penny, are you calling your own boss an evidence suppressor?'

I thought of myself as the same thing. 'Yeah, and a shit-brained, grandstanding son of bitch.'

Millard said, 'Touché,' and handed me a piece of paper. 'Betty sightings – restaurants and bars in Wilshire Division. You can work it single or with Blanchard, I don't care.'

'I'd rather canvass around the Biltmore.'

'I know you would, but I want foot beat men who know the area to work there, and I need smart pennies to eliminate the phonies from the tip list.'

'What are you going to be doing?'

Millard smiled sadly. 'Keeping an eye on the evidence suppressor shit-brained son of a bitch and his minions to make sure they don't try to coerce a confession out of that innocent man in the holding tank.'

I couldn't find Lee anywhere around the station, so I checked out the tip list as a single-o. The canvassing territory was centered in the Wilshire District, restaurant bars and juke joints on Western, Normandie and 3rd Street. The people I talked to were mostly barflies, daytime juicers eager to suck up to authority or gab with someone other than the usual boon acquaintances they found in gin mills. Pressing for facts, I got sincere fantasy – virtually every person had Betty Short giving them a long spiel taken from the papers and radio when she was really down in Dago with Red Manley or somewhere getting tortured to death. The longer I listened the more they talked about themselves, interweaving their sad tales with the story of the Black Dahlia, who they actually believed to be a glamorous siren headed for Hollywood stardom. It was as if they would have traded their own lives for a juicy front-page death. I included questions on Linda Martin/Lorna Martilkova, Junior Nash and Madeleine Cathcart Sprague and her snow-white Packard, but all it got me was stuporous deadpans. I decided that my FI report would consist of two words: 'All bullshit.'

I finished shortly after dark, and drove to the house to grab dinner.

Pulling up, I saw Kay storming out the door and down the steps, hurling an armful of paper onto the lawn, then storming back while Lee stormed beside her, shouting and waving his arms. I walked over and knelt beside the discarded pile; the papers were carbons of LAPD report forms. Sifting through them, I saw FIs, evidence indexes, questioning reports, tip lists and a complete autopsy protocol – all with 'E. Short, W.F. D.O.D. 1/15/47' typed at the top. They were obviously bootlegged from

University Station – and the very possession of them was enough to guarantee Lee a suspension from duty.

Kay came back with another load, shouting, ‘After all that’s happened, all that might happen, how can you do this? It’s sick and it’s insane!’ She dumped the papers beside the other pile; 39th and Norton glossies glinted up at me. Lee grabbed her by the arms and held her while she squirmed. ‘Goddamnit, you know what this is to me. You *know*. Now I’ll rent a room to keep the stuff in, but babe, you stick by me on this. It’s *mine* and I need you … and you *know*.’

They noticed me then. Lee said, ‘Bucky, you tell her. You reason with her.’

It was the funniest Dahlia circus line I’d heard so far. ‘Kay’s right. You’ve pulled at least three misdemeanors on this thing, and it’s getting out—’ I stopped, thinking of what *I’d* pulled, and where I was going at midnight. Looking at Kay, I shifted gears. ‘I promised him a week on it. That means four more days. On Wednesday it’s over.’

Kay sighed. ‘Dwight, you can be so gutless sometimes,’ then walked into the house. Lee opened his mouth to say something funny. I kicked a path through official LAPD paper to my car.

The snow-white Packard was in the same spot as last night. I staked it out from my car, parked directly in back of it. Huddled low in the front seat, I spent angry hours watching foot traffic enter and leave the three bars on the block – daggers, femmes and obvious sheriff’s dicks with that edgy look indigenous to bagmen. Midnight came and went; the foot traffic picked up – mostly lezzies headed for the hot sheet motels across the street. Then she walked out the door of La Verne’s Hideaway alone, a showstopper in a green silk dress.

I slid out the passenger side door just as she stepped off the curb, giving me a sidelong glance. ‘Slumming, Miss Sprague?’

Madeleine Sprague stopped; I closed the distance between us. She dug in her purse, pulling out car keys and a fat wad of cash. ‘So Daddy’s spying again. He’s on one of his little Calvinist crusades, and he said you shouldn’t be subtle.’ She switched to a deft imitation of a Scotchman’s burr: ‘Maddy girl, ye should not be congregating in such unsuitable places. It would not do to have ye seen by the wrong people there, lassie.’

My legs were trembling, like they did while I waited for the first-round bell. I said, ‘I’m a police officer.’

Madeleine Sprague went back to her normal voice. ‘Oh? Daddy’s buying policemen now?’

‘He didn’t buy me.’

She held out the cash and looked me over. ‘No, probably not. You’d be dressing better if you worked for him. So let’s try the West Valley Sheriffs. You’re already extorting La Verne, so you thought you’d try extorting her patrons.’

I took the money, counted over a hundred dollars, then handed it back. ‘Let’s try LAPD Homicide. Let’s try Elizabeth Short and Linda Martin.’

Madeleine Sprague’s brassy act died fast. Her face scrunched up with worry, and I saw that her resemblance to Betty/Beth was more hairdo and makeup than anything else; on the whole her features were less refined than the Dahlia’s, and only superficially similar. I studied that face: panicky hazel eyes caught by streetlight glow; forehead creased, like her brain was working overtime. Her hands were shaking, so I grabbed the car keys and money, stuffed them into her purse and tossed it on the hood of the Packard. Knowing I might have a major lead by the short hairs, I said, ‘You can talk to me here or downtown, Miss Sprague. Just don’t lie. I know you knew her, so if you jerk me off on that it’s the station and a lot of publicity you don’t want.’

The brass girl finally composed herself. I repeated, ‘Here or downtown?’ She opened the Packard’s passenger door and got in, sliding over behind the wheel. I joined her, flicking on a dashboard light so I could read her face. The smell of leather upholstery and stale perfume hit me; I said, ‘Tell me how long you knew Betty Short.’

Madeleine Sprague fidgeted under the light. ‘How did you know I knew her?’

‘You rabbited last night when I was questioning the barmaid. What about Linda Martin? Do you know her?’

Madeleine ran long red fingertips over the wheel. ‘This is all a fluke. I met Betty and Linda at La Verne’s last fall. Betty said it was her first time there. I think I talked to her one time after that. Linda I talked to several times, just cocktail lounge chit-chat.’

‘When last fall?’

‘November, I think.’

‘Did you sleep with either of them?’

Madeleine flinched. ‘No.’

‘Why not? That’s what that dive is all about, right?’

‘Not entirely.’

I tapped her green silk shoulder, hard. ‘Are you lez?’

Madeleine went back to her father’s burr, ‘Ye might say I take it where I can find it, laddie.’

I smiled, then patted the spot I’d jabbed a moment before. ‘You’re telling me that your sole contact with Linda Martin and Betty Short was a couple of cocktail bar conversations two months ago, right?’

‘Yes. That’s exactly what I’m telling you.’

‘Then why did you take off so fast last night?’

Madeleine rolled her eyes and rolled. ‘Laddie,’ Scotch-voiced; I said, ‘Cut the shit and tell it straight.’ The brass girl spat out: ‘Mister, my father is Emmett Sprague, *The* Emmett Sprague. He built half of Hollywood and Long Beach, and what he didn’t build he bought. He does not like publicity, and he would not like to see “Tycoon’s Daughter Questioned in Black Dahlia Case – Played Footsie with Dead Girl at Lesbian Nightclub” in the papers. Now do you get the picture?’

I said, ‘In Technicolor,’ and patted Madeleine’s shoulder.

She pulled away from me and sighed, ‘Is my name going into all kinds of police files where all kinds of slimy little policemen and slimy little yellow journalists will see it?’

‘Maybe, maybe not.’

‘What do I have to do to keep it out?’

‘Convince me of a few things.’

‘Such as?’

‘Such as first you give me your impression of Betty and Linda. You’re a bright kid – give me your play on them.’

Madeleine stroked the wheel, then the gleaming oak dashboard. ‘Well, they weren’t sisters, they were just using the Hideaway to cadge drinks and dinner.’

‘How could you tell?’

‘I saw them brush off passes.’

I thought of Marjorie Graham’s mannish older woman. ‘Any passes stand out? You know, rough stuff? Bull daggers getting persistent?’

Madeleine laughed. ‘No, the passes I saw were very ladylike.’

‘Who made them?’

‘Street trade I never saw before.’

‘Or since?’

‘Yes, or since.’

‘What did you talk about with them?’

Madeleine laughed again, harder. ‘Linda talked about the boy she left behind in Hicktown, Nebraska, or wherever it was she came from and Betty talked about the latest issue of *Screenworld*. On a conversational level, they were right down there with you, only they were better looking.’

I smiled and said, ‘You’re cute.’

Madeleine smiled and said, ‘You’re not. Look, I’m tired. Aren’t you going to ask me to prove I didn’t kill Betty? Since I can prove it, won’t that put an end to this farce?’

‘I’ll get to that in a minute. Did Betty ever talk about being in a movie?’

‘No, but she was movie-struck in general.’

‘Did she ever show you a movie viewfinder? A lens gadget on a chain?’

‘No.’

‘What about Linda? Did she talk about being in a movie?’

‘No, just her hicktown sweetheart.’

‘Do you have any idea where she’d go if she was on the lam?’

‘Yes. Hicktown, Nebraska.’

‘Besides there.’

‘No. Can I—’

I touched Madeleine’s shoulder, more of a caress than a pat. ‘Yeah, tell me your alibi. Where were you and what were you doing from last Monday, January thirteenth, through to Wednesday the fifteenth.’

Madeleine cupped her hands to her mouth and blew a horn fanfare, then rested them on the seat by my knee. ‘I was at our house in Laguna from Sunday night through Thursday morning. Daddy and Mommy and sister Martha were there with me, and so were our live-in servants. If you want verification, call Daddy. Our number is Webster 4391. But be discreet. Don’t tell him where you met me. Now, do you have any other questions?’

My private Dahlia lead was blown, but it gave me the green light in another direction. ‘Yeah. You ever do it with men?’

Madeleine touched my knee. ‘I haven’t met any lately, but I’ll do it with you to keep my name out of the papers.’

My legs were Jell-O. ‘Tomorrow night?’

‘All right. Pick me up at eight, like a gentleman. The address is 482 South Muirfield.’

‘I know the address.’

‘I’m not surprised. What’s your name?’

‘Bucky Bleichert.’

Madeleine said, ‘It goes with your teeth.’

I said, ‘Eight o’clock,’ and got out of the Packard while my legs could still function.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Lee said, ‘You want to catch the fight films at the Wiltern tonight? They’re showing oldies – Dempsey, Ketchel, Greb. What do you say?’

We were sitting at desks across from each other in the University squadroom, manning telephones. The clerical flunkies assigned to the Short case had been given Sunday off, so regular field dicks were doing the drudge work, taking down tips, then writing out slips assessing the tipsters and routing possible follow-ups to the nearest detective division. We’d been at it for an hour without interruption, Kay’s ‘gutless’ remark hanging between us. Looking at Lee, I saw that his eyes were just starting to pin, a sign that he was coming on to a fresh Benzie jolt. I said, ‘I can’t.’

‘Why not?’

‘I’ve got a date.’

Lee grinned-twitched. ‘Yeah? Who with?’

I changed the subject. ‘Did you smooth it out with Kay?’

‘Yeah, I rented a room for my stuff. The El Nido Hotel, Santa Monica and Wilcox. Nine scoots a week, chump change if it makes her feel good.’

‘De Witt gets out tomorrow, Lee. I think I should lean on him, maybe get Vogel and Koenig to do it.’

Lee kicked at a wastebasket. Paper wads and empty coffee cups flew out; heads darted up from other desks. Then his phone rang.

Lee picked it up. ‘Homicide, Sergeant Blanchard speaking.’

I stared at my routing slips; Lee listened to his caller. Wednesday, Dahlia kiss-off-time, came into focus as an eternity away, and I wondered if he’d need weaning off the Benzedrine. Madeleine Sprague jumped into my mind – her nine millionth jump since she said, ‘I’ll do it with you to keep my name out of the papers.’ Lee had been on his call for a long time without interjecting comments or questions; I started wishing that my phone would ring and make Madeleine jump away.

Lee put down the receiver. I said, ‘Anything interesting?’

‘Another loony. Who’s your date tonight?’

‘A neighbor girl.’

‘Nice girl?’

‘A honey. Partner, if I find you hopped-up after Tuesday, it’s the Bleichert-Blanchard rematch.’

Lee gave me an outer space grin. ‘It’s Blanchard-Bleichert, and you’d lose again. I’m getting coffee. You want some?’

‘Black, no sugar.’

‘Coming up.’

I logged in a total of forty-six phone tips, about half of them reasonably coherent. Lee took off in the early afternoon, and Ellis Loew stuck me with the job of typing up Russ Millard’s new summary report. It stated that Red Manley had been released to his wife after conclusively passing lie detector and Pentothal tests, and that Betty Short’s love letters had been thoroughly gone through. A number of her swains had been ID’d and cleared as suspects, as had most of the guys who appeared in her photographs. Efforts to identify the remaining men were continuing, and the Camp Cooke MPs had called in with the word that the soldier who beat up Betty in '43 was killed in the Normandy Invasion. As for Betty's many marriages and engagements, a forty-eight-state capital record check revealed that no marriage licenses had ever been issued to her.

The report went downhill from there. The license numbers that Lee had glommed from the window of Junior Nash's fuck pad had yielded zero; over three hundred Dahlia sightings a day were flooding LAPD and Sheriff's Department switchboards. There had been ninety-three phony confessions so far, with four seriously cracked loonies without alibis held at the Hall of Justice Jail, awaiting sanity hearings and probable shipment to Camarillo. Field interrogations were still going full speed – 190 full-time men now on the case. The only ray of hope was the result of my 1/17 FI questionings: Linda Martin/Lorna Martilkova was spotted in a couple of Encino cocktail lounges, and a big push to grab her was being centered in that area. I finished up the typing job gut certain that Elizabeth Short's killer was never going to be found, and put money on it – a double sawbuck on 'Unsolved-pay 2 to 1' in the squadroom pool.

I rang the doorbell of the Sprague mansion at exactly 8:00. I was dressed in my best outfit – blue blazer, white shirt and gray flannels – and put money on myself as a fool for kowtowing to the surroundings – I'd be taking the clothes off as soon as Madeleine and I got to my place. The ten hours of phone work stuck with me despite the shower I'd taken at the station, I felt even more out of place than I should have and my left ear still ached from the barrage of Dahlia talk.

Madeleine opened the door, a knockout in a skirt and a tight cashmere sweater. She once-overed me, took my hand and said, 'Look, I hate to pull this, but Daddy has heard about you. He insisted you stay for dinner. I told him we met at that art exhibit at Stanley Rose's Bookshop, so if you have to pump everybody for my alibi, try to be subtle about it. All right?'

I said, 'Sure,' let Madeleine link her arm through mine and lead me inside. The entrance foyer was as Spanish as the outside of the mansion was Tudor: tapestries and crossed wrought-iron swords on the whitewashed walls, thick Persian carpets over a polished wood floor. The foyer opened into a giant living room with a men's club atmosphere – green leather chairs arranged around low tables and settees; huge stone fireplace; small Oriental throw rugs, multicolored, placed together at different angles, so that just the right amount of oak floor bordered them. The walls were cherrywood, and featured framed sepias of the family and their ancestors.

I noticed a stuffed spaniel poised by the fireplace with a yellowed newspaper rolled into its mouth. Madeleine said, 'That's Balto. The paper is the LA *Times* for August 1, 1926. That's the day Daddy learned he'd made his first million. Balto was our pet then. Daddy's accountant called up and said, "Emmett, you're a millionaire!" Daddy was cleaning his pistols, and Balto came in with the paper. Daddy wanted to consecrate the moment, so he shot him. If you look closely, you can see the bullet hole in his chest. Hold your breath, lovey. Here's the family.'

Slack-jawed, I let Madeleine point me into a small sitting room. The walls were covered with framed photographs; the floor space was taken up by the three other Spragues in matching easy chairs. They all looked up; nobody stood up. Smiling without exposing my teeth, I said, 'Hello.' Madeleine made the introductions while I gawked down at the still-life ensemble.

'Bucky Bleichert, may I present my family. My mother, Ramona Cathcart Sprague.

My father, Emmett Sprague. My sister, Martha McConville Sprague.'

The ensemble came to life with little nods and smiles. Then Emmett Sprague beamed, got to his feet and stuck out his hand. I said, 'A pleasure, Mr. Sprague,' and shook it, eyeing him while he eyed me. The patriarch was short and barrel-chested, with a cracked, sun-weathered face and a full head of white hair that had probably once been sandy colored. I placed his age as somewhere in his fifties, his handshake as the grip of someone who'd done a good deal of physical labor. His voice was cut-glass Scottish, not the broad burr of Madeleine's imitation: 'I saw you fight Mondo Sanchez. You boxed the pants off him. Another Billy Conn you were.'

I thought of Sanchez, a built-up middleweight stiff I'd fought because my manager wanted me to get a rep for creaming Mexicans. 'Thanks, Mr. Sprague.'

'Thank you for giving such a dandy performance. Mondo was a good boy, too. What happened to him?'

'He died from a heroin overdose.'

'God bless him. Too bad he didn't die in the ring, it would have spared his family a lot of grief. Speaking of families, please shake hands with the rest of mine.'

Martha Sprague stood up on command. She was short, plump and blonde, with a tenacious resemblance to her father, blue eyes so light that it looked like she sent them out to be bleached and a neck that was acned and raw from scratching. She looked like a teenaged girl who'd never outgrow her baby fat and mature into beauty. I shook her firm hand feeling sorry for her; she caught what I was thinking immediately. Her pale eyes fired up as she yanked her paw away.

Ramona Sprague was the only one of the three who looked like Madeleine; if not for her I would have thought the brass girl was adopted. She possessed a pushing-fifty version of Madeleine's lustrous dark hair and pale skin, but there was nothing else attractive about her. She was fat, her face was flaccid, her rouge and lipstick were applied slightly off center, so that her face was weirdly askew. Taking her hand, she said, 'Madeleine has said so many nice things about you,' with a trace of a slur. There was no liquor on her breath; I wondered if she was jacked on drugstore stuff.

Madeleine sighed, 'Daddy, can we eat? Bucky and I want to catch a nine-thirty show.'

Emmett Sprague slapped me on the back. 'I always obey my eldest. Bucky, will you entertain us with boxing and police anecdotes?'

'Between mouthfuls,' I said.

Sprague slapped my back again, harder. 'I can tell you didn't catch too many in the cabeza. Like Fred Allen you are. Come on, family. Dinner is served.'

We filed into a large, wood-paneled dining room. The table in the middle of it was small, with five place settings already laid down. A serving cart was stationed by the door, leaking the unmistakable aroma of corned beef and cabbage. Old Man Sprague said, 'Hearty fare breeds hearty people, haute cuisine breeds degenerates. Dig in, lad. The maid goes to her voodoo revival meetings on Sunday nights, so there's no one here but us white folks.'

I grabbed a plate and piled it with food. Martha Sprague poured the wine and Madeleine dished herself out a small portion of each item and sat down at the table, motioning for me to sit beside her. I did, and Martha announced to the room: 'I want to sit opposite Mr. Bleichert so I can draw him.'

Emmett caught my eye and winked. 'Bucky, you are in for a cruel caricaturing. Martha's pencil never flinches. Nineteen years old she is, and a high-paid commercial artist already. Maddy's my pretty one, but Martha's my certified genius.'

Martha winced. She placed her plate directly across from me and sat down, arraying a pencil and a small sketch pad beside her napkin. Ramona Sprague took the adjoining seat and patted her arm; Emmett, standing by his chair at the head of the table, proposed a toast: ‘To new friends, prosperity and the great sport of boxing.’

I said, ‘Amen,’ forked a slice of corned beef into my mouth and chewed it. It was fatty and dry, but I put on a yum-yum face and said, ‘This is delicious.’

Ramona Sprague gave me a blank look; Emmett said, ‘Lacey, our maid, believes in voodoo. Some sort of Christian variation of it. She probably put a spell on the cow, made a pact with her nigger Jesus so the beast would be nice and juicy. Speaking of our colored brethren, how did it feel to shoot those two jigaboos, Bucky?’

Madeleine whispered, ‘Humor him.’

Emmett caught the aside and chuckled. ‘Yes, lad, humor me. In fact, you should humor all rich men pushing sixty. They might go senile and confuse you with their heirs.’

I laughed, exposing my choppers; Martha reached for her pencil to capture them. ‘I didn’t feel much of anything. It was them or us.’

‘And your partner? That blond lad you fought last year?’

‘Lee took it a bit harder than I did.’

Emmett said, ‘Blonds are overly sensitive. Being one, I know. Thank God I’ve two brownies in the family to keep us pragmatic. Maddy and Ramona have that bulldog tenacity that Martha and I lack.’

Only the food I was chewing kept me from braying outright. I thought of the spoiled sewer crawler I was going to screw later that night and her mother smiling numbly across the table from me. The impulse to laugh came on stronger and stronger; I finally got my mouthful swallowed, belched instead of howled and raised my glass. ‘To you, Mr. Sprague. For making me laugh for the first time in a week.’

Ramona gave me a disgusted look; Martha concentrated on her artwork. Madeleine played footsie with me under the table and Emmett toasted me back. ‘Rough week, you had, lad?’

I laughed. ‘In spades. I’ve been detached to Homicide to work on the Black Dahlia thing. My days off have been cancelled, my partner’s obsessed with it, and the crazies have been coming out of the woodwork. There’s two hundred cops working a single case. It’s absurd.’

Emmett said, ‘It’s tragic, is what it is. What’s your theory, lad? Who on God’s earth could have done a thing like that to another human being?’

I knew then that the family didn’t know about Madeleine’s tenuous connection to Betty Short, and decided not to press for her alibi. ‘I think it’s a random job. The Short girl was what you might call easy. She was a compulsive liar with a hundred boyfriends. If we get the killer, it’ll be a fluke.’

Emmett said, ‘God bless her, I hope you get him and I hope he gets a hot date with that little green room up at San Quentin.’

Running her toes up my leg, Madeleine pouted, ‘Daddy, you’re monopolizing the conversation and you’re making Bucky sing for his supper.’

‘Shall I sing for mine, lassie? Even though I’m the breadwinner?’

Old Man Sprague was angry – I could see it in his rising color and the way he hacked at his corned beef. Curious about the man, I said, ‘When did you come to the United States?’

Emmett beamed. ‘I’ll sing for anyone who wants to hear my immigrant success story. What kind of name is Bleichert? Dutch?’

‘German,’ I said.

Emmett raised his glass. ‘A great people, the Germans. Hitler was a bit excessive, but mark my words that someday we'll regret not joining forces with him to fight the Reds. Where in Germany are your people from, lad?'

'Munich.'

'Ah, München! I'm surprised they left. If I'd grown up in Edinburgh or some other civilized place I'd still be wearing kilts. But I came from godawful Aberdeen, so I came to America right after the first war. I killed a lot of your fine German countrymen during that war, lad. But they were trying to kill me, so I felt justified. Did you meet Balto out in the parlor?'

I nodded; Madeleine groaned, Ramona Sprague winced and speared a potato. Emmett said, 'My old dreamer friend Georgie Tilden taxidermied him. Scads of odd talents dreamer Georgie had. We were in a Scots regiment together during the war, and I saved Georgie's life when a bunch of your fine German countrymen got obstreperous and charged us with bayonets. Georgie was enamored of the flickers; he loved a good nickelodeon show. We went back to Aberdeen after the armistice, saw what a dead dog town it was, and Georgie persuaded me to come to California with him – he wanted to work in the silent flicker business. He was never worth a damn unless I was there to lead him around by the snout, so I looked around Aberdeen, saw that it was a third-class destiny and said, "Aye, Georgie, California it is. Maybe we'll strike rich. And if we don't, we'll fail where the sun always shines."'

I thought of my old man, who came to America in 1908 with big dreams – but married the first German emigrant woman he met and settled for wage slavery with Pacific Gas and Electric. 'What happened then?'

Emmett Sprague rapped the table with his fork. 'Knock wood, it was the right time to arrive. Hollywood was a cow pasture, but the silents were moving into their heyday. Georgie got work as a lighting man, and I found work building damn good houses – damn good and cheap. I lived outdoors and put every damn good dime back into my business, then took out loans from every bank and shylock willing to lend money and bought damn good property – damn good and cheap. Georgie introduced me to Mack Sennett, and I helped him build sets out at his studio in Edendale, then touched him for a loan to buy more property. Old Mack knew a lad on the make when he saw one, being one himself. He gave me the loan on the proviso that I help him with that housing project he was putting up – Hollywoodland – underneath that godawful hundred-foot sign he erected on Mount Lee to ballyhoo it. Old Mack knew how to squeeze a dollar dry, he did. He had extras moonlighting as laborers and vice versa. I'd drive them over to Hollywoodland after ten or twelve hours on a Keystone Kops flicker, and we'd put in another six hours by torchlight. I even got an assistant director's credit on a couple of movies, old Mack was so grateful for the way I squeezed his slaves.'

Madeleine and Ramona were picking at their food with sullen faces, like they'd been captive audiences to the story before; Martha was still drawing, staring intently at me, *her* captive. 'What happened to your friend?' I asked.

'God bless him, but for every story of success there's a corresponding one of failure. Georgie didn't butter up the right people. He didn't have the drive to complement his God-given talent, and he just fell by the wayside. He was disfigured in a car crash back in '36, and now he's what you might call a never was. I give him odd jobs tending some of my rental property and he does some rubbish hauling for the city—'

I heard a sharp screechy sound, and looked across the table. Ramona had missed stabbing a potato, and her fork had slid off the plate. Emmett said, 'Mother, are you feeling well? Is the food to your liking?'

Ramona stared in her lap and said, ‘Yes, Father’; it looked like Martha was bracing her elbow. Madeleine went back to playing footsie with me; Emmett said, ‘Mother, you and our certified genius have not been doing a very good job of entertaining our guest. Would you care to participate in the conversation?’

Madeleine dug her toes into my ankle – just as I was about to try to lighten things up with a joke. Ramona Sprague forked herself a small mouthful of food, chewed it daintily and said, ‘Did you know that Ramona Boulevard was named after me, Mr. Bleichert?’

The woman’s out-of-kilter face congealed around the words; she spoke them with a strange dignity. ‘No, Mrs. Sprague, I didn’t know that. I thought it was named after the Ramona Pageant.

‘I was named after the pageant,’ she said. ‘When Emmett married me for my father’s money he promised my family that he would use his influence with the City Zoning Board to have a street named after me, since all his money was tied up in real estate and he couldn’t afford to buy me a wedding ring. Father assumed it would be a nice residential street, but all Emmett could manage was a dead-end block in a red light district in Lincoln Heights. Are you familiar with the neighborhood, Mr. Bleichert?‘ Now the doormat’s voice held an edge of fury.

‘I grew up there,’ I said.

‘Then you know that Mexican prostitutes expose themselves out of windows to attract customers. Well, after Emmett succeeded in getting Rosalinda Street changed to Ramona Boulevard he took me for a little tour there. The prostitutes greeted him by name. Some even had anatomical nicknames for him. It made me very sad and very hurt, but I bided my time and got even. When the girls were small I directed my own little pageants, right outside on our front lawn. I used the neighbor’s children as extras and reenacted episodes out of Mr. Sprague’s past that he would rather forget. That he would—’

The head of the table was slammed; glasses toppled and plates rattled. I stared at my lap to give the family infighters back some of their dignity and saw that Madeleine was gripping her father’s knee so hard that her fingers were blue-white. She grabbed my knee with her free hand – with ten times the strength I thought she’d be capable of. An awful silence stretched, then Ramona Cathcart Sprague said, ‘Father, I’ll sing for my supper when Mayor Bowron or Councilman Tucker comes to dinner, but not for Madeleine’s male whores. A common policeman. My God, Emmett, how little you think of me.’

I heard chairs scraping the floor, knees bumping the table, then footsteps moving out of the dining room; I saw that my hand was gripping Madeleine’s the same way I curled it into an eight-ounce glove. The brass girl was whispering, ‘I’m sorry, Bucky. I’m sorry.’ then a cheery voice said, ‘Mr. Bleichert?’ and I looked up because it sounded so happy and sane.

It was Martha McConville Sprague, holding out a piece of paper. I took it with my free hand; Martha smiled and walked away. Madeleine was still muttering apologies when I looked at the picture. It was the two of us, both naked. Madeleine had her legs spread. I was between them, gnawing at her with giant Bucky Bleichert teeth.

We took the Packard down to hot sheet row on South La Brea. I drove, and Madeleine had the smarts not to talk until we passed a cinderblock auto court called the Red Arrow Inn. Then she said, ‘Here. It’s clean.’

I parked beside a line of pre-war jalopies; Madeleine went to the office and returned with the key to room eleven. She opened the door; I flicked on the wall light.

The flop was done up in dreary shades of brown and reeked of its previous inhabitants. I heard a dope sale being transacted in number twelve; Madeleine started to look like the caricature in her sister's drawing. I reached for the light switch to blot it all out. She said, 'No. Please, I want to see you.'

The narco sale burst into an argument. I saw a radio on the dresser and turned it on; an ad for Gorton's Slenderline Shop ate up the angry words. Madeleine pulled off her sweater and removed her nylons standing up; she was down to her undergarments before I began fumbling at my clothes. I snagged the zipper stepping out of my trousers; I ripped a shirt seam unhitching my shoulder holster. Then Madeleine was naked on the bed – and the kid sister's picture was obliterated.

I was nude inside of a second and joined with the brass girl inside of two. She muttered something like, 'Don't hate my family, they're not bad,' and I silenced her with a hard kiss. She returned it; our lips and tongues played until we had to break for breath. I ran my hands down to her breasts, cupping and kneading; Madeleine gasped little words about making up for the other Spragues. The more I kissed and felt and tasted her and the more she loved it, the more she murmured about *them* – so I grabbed her hair and hissed, 'Not them, *me*. Do *me*, be with *me*.'

Madeleine obeyed, going between my legs like a reverse of Martha's drawing. Captured that way, I felt myself getting ready to burst. I pushed Madeleine away so as not to explode, whispering, 'Me, not them,' stroking her hair, trying to concentrate on an inane radio jingle. Madeleine held me harder than any fight giveaway girl ever did; when I was cooled down and ready, I eased her onto her back and pushed myself inside her.

Now it was no common policeman and rich girl slut. It was us together, arching, shifting and moving, hard, but with all the time in the world. We moved together until the dance music and jingles ended and the radio dial tone came and went, the cinderblock rutting room silent except for us. Then we ended it – perfectly, together.

We held each other afterward, pockets of sweat binding us head to toe. I thought of going on duty in less than four hours and groaned; Madeleine broke our embrace and aped my trademark, flashing her perfect teeth. Laughing, I said, 'Well, you kept your name out of the papers.'

'Until we announce the Bleichert-Sprague nuptials?'

I laughed harder. 'Your mother would love that.'

'Mother's a hypocrite. She takes pills that the doctor gives her, so she's not a hophead. I fool around, so I'm a whore. She's sanctioned, I'm not.'

'Yes, you are. You're my—' I couldn't quite say, 'whore.'

Madeleine tickled my ribs. 'Say it. Don't be a cop from squaresville. *Say it.*'

I grabbed her hand before the tickling made me helpless. 'You're my paramour, you're my inamorata, you're my sweetheart, you're the woman I suppressed evidence for—'

Madeleine bit my shoulder and said, 'I'm your whore.'

I laughed. 'Okay, you're my violator of 234-A PC.'

'What's that?'

'The California penal code designation for prostitution.'

Madeleine waggled her eyebrows. '*Penal* code?'

I put up my hands. 'You got me there.'

The brass girl nuzzled me. 'I like you, Bucky.'

'I like you, too.'

'You didn't start out liking me. Tell true – at first you just wanted to screw me.'

'That's true.'

'Then when did you start liking me?'

'The moment you took off your clothes.'

'Bastard! You want to know when I started liking you?'

'Tell true.'

'When I told Daddy I met this nice policeman Bucky Bleichert. Daddy's jaw dropped. He was impressed, and Emmett McConville Sprague is a very hard man to impress.'

I thought of the man's cruelty to his wife and made a neutral comment: 'He's an impressive man.'

Madeleine said, 'Diplomat. He's a hardcase, tightwad Scotchman son of a bitch, but he's a man. You know how he really made his money?'

'How?'

'Gangster kickbacks and worse. Daddy bought rotten lumber and abandoned movie facades from Mack Sennett and built houses out of them. He's got firetraps and dives all over LA, registered to phony corporations. He's friends with Mickey Cohen. His people collect the rents.'

I shrugged. 'The Mick's thick with Bowron and half the Board of Supervisors. You see my gun and handcuffs?'

'Yes.'

'Cohen paid for them. He put up the dough for a fund to help junior officers pay for their equipment. It's good public relations. The city tax assessor never checks his books, because the Mick pays for the gas and oil on all his field agent's cars. So you're not exactly shocking me.'

Madeleine said, 'Do you want to hear a secret?'

'Sure.'

'Half a block of Daddy's Long Beach houses collapsed during the '33 earthquake. Twelve people were killed. Daddy paid money to have his name expunged from the contractor's records.'

I held Madeleine out at arm's length. 'Why are you telling me these things?'

Caressing my hands, she said, 'Because Daddy's impressed with you. Because you're the only boy I've ever brought home that he thought was worth spit. Because Daddy worships toughness and he thinks you're tough, and if we get serious he'd probably tell you himself. Those people weigh on him, and he takes it out on Mother because it was her money he built that block with. I don't want you to judge Daddy by tonight. First impressions last, and I like you and I don't want—'

I pulled Madeleine to me. 'Be still, babe. You're with me now, not your family.'

Madeleine held me tightly. I wanted to let her know things were copacetic, so I tilted her chin up. Tears were in her eyes; she said, 'Bucky, I didn't tell you all of it about Betty Short.'

I gripped her shoulders. 'What?'

'Don't be mad at me. It's nothing, I just don't want to keep it a secret. I didn't like you at first, so I didn't—'

'Tell me *now*.'

Madeleine looked at me, a stretch of sweat-stained bedsheet separating us. 'Last summer I was bar hopping a lot. Straight bars in Hollywood. I heard about a girl who was supposed to look a lot like me. I got curious about her and left notes at a couple of places – "Your lookalike would like to meet you" and my private number at the house. Betty called me, and we got together. We talked, and that was it. I ran into her again with Linda Martin at La Verne's last November. It was just a coincidence.'

‘And that’s all of it?’

‘Yes.’

Then babe, you’d better prepare yourself. There’s fifty-odd cops canvassing bars, and if even one of them gets hold of your little lookalike number, you’re headed for a trip across page one. There’s not a goddamned thing I could do about it, and if it happens, don’t ask me – because I’ve done all I’m going to.’

Drawing away from me, Madeleine said, ‘I’ll take care of it.’

‘You mean your Daddy will?’

‘Bucky lad, are ye telling me you’re jealous of a man twice your age and half your size?’

I thought of the Black Dahlia then, her death eclipsing my shoot-out headlines. ‘Why did you want to meet Betty Short?’

Madeleine shivered; the red neon arrow that gave the flop its name blinked through the window and across her face. ‘I’ve worked hard at being loose and free,’ she said. ‘But the way people described Betty it sounded like she was a natural. A real wild girl from the gate.’

I kissed my wild girl. We made love again, and I pictured her coupled with Betty Short the whole time – both of them naturals.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Russ Millard took in my rumpled clothes and said, ‘A ten-ton truck or a woman?’

I looked around at University squadroom starting to fill up with daywatch dicks. ‘Betty Short. No phone work today, okay, boss?’

‘In the mood for some fresh air?’

‘Keep talking.’

‘Linda Martin was spotted last night out in Encino, trying to get served at a couple of bars. You and Blanchard go out to the Valley and look for her. Start at the twenty-thousand block of Victory Boulevard and work west. I’ll be sending some other men as soon as they report in.’

‘When?’

Millard checked his watch. ‘Immediately, if not sooner.’

I eyeballed for Lee and didn’t see him, nodded assent and reached for the phone on my desk. I called the house, the City Hall Warrants office and Information for the number of the El Nido Hotel. I got a no answer for the first call and two no Blanchards for the others. Then Millard came back, with Fritz Vogel and – amazingly – Johnny Vogel in plainclothes.

I stood up. ‘I can’t find Lee, Skipper.’

Millard said, ‘Go with Fritzie and John. Take an unmarked radio car so you can keep in touch with the other men out there.’

The fat Vogel boys stared at me, then at each other. The look they exchanged said my unkempt state was a Class B Felony. ‘Thanks, Russ,’ I said.

We drove to the Valley, the Vogels in the front seat, me in the back. I tried to doze, but Fritzie’s monologue on hooers and woman killers made it impossible. Johnny nodded along; every time his father paused for breath, he said, ‘Right, Dad.’ Going over the Cahuenga Pass, Fritzie ran out of verbal steam; Johnny’s yes-man act fell silent. I closed my eyes and leaned against the window. Madeleine was doing a slow striptease in concert with motor hum when I heard the Vogels whispering.

‘… he’s asleep, Daddy.’

‘Don’t call me “Daddy” on the job, I’ve told you a million goddamn times. It makes you sound like a nancy boy.’

‘I proved I’m not no nancy boy. Homos couldn’t do what I did. I’m not cherry no more, so don’t say nancy boy.’

‘Be still, damn you.’

‘Daddy, I mean Dad—’

‘I said be still, Johnny.’

The fat braggart cop reduced to a child grabbed my interest; I faked a snore-wheeze so the two would keep it up. Johnny whispered. ‘See, Dad, he’s asleep. And he’s the nance, not me. I proved it. Buck-tooth bastard. I could take him, Dad. You know I could. Job-stealing bastard, I had Warrants in the bag until—’

‘John Charles Vogel, you hush this instant or I’ll take a strap to you, twenty-four-year-old policeman or not.’

The radio started barking then; I faked a big yawn. Johnny turned around and smiled. He said, ‘Catch up on your beauty sleep?’ wafting his legendary halitosis.

My first instinct was to call him on his crack about taking me – then my sense of squadroom politics took over. ‘Yeah, I had a late night.’

Johnny winked ineffectually. ‘I’m a quiff hound myself. I go a week without it, I’m climbing the walls.’

The dispatcher droned, ‘… repeat, 10-A–94, roger your location.’

Fritzie grabbed the mike. ‘10-A–94, rogering at Victory and Saticoy.’

The dispatcher replied, ‘See the barman at the Caledonia Lounge, Victory and Valley View. Warrantee Linda Martin reported there now. Code three.’

Fritzie hit the siren and punched the gas. Cars pulled to the curb; we shot forward in the middle lane. I sent one up to the Calvinist God I believed in as a kid: don’t let the Martin girl mention Madeleine Sprague. Valley View Avenue appeared in the windshield; Fritzie hung a hard right turn, killing the siren in front of a mock-bamboo hut.

The bar’s mock-bamboo door burst open; Linda Martin/Lorna Martilkova, looking as fresh-scrubbed as her picture, burst out. I tumbled from the car and hit the sidewalk running, Vogel and Vogel huffing and puffing behind me. Linda/Lorna ran like an antelope, clutching an oversized purse to her chest; I closed the distance between us by sprinting flat-out. The girl reached a busy side street and darted into traffic; cars swerved to avoid hitting her. She looked over her shoulder then; I dodged a beer truck and motorcycle on a collision course, sucked wind and *hauled*. The girl stumbled over the opposite curb, her purse went flying, I made a final leap and grabbed her.

She came up off the pavement spitting and beating at my chest; I grabbed her tiny fists, twisted them behind her back and cuffed her wrists. Lorna tried kicking then, well-aimed little shots at my legs. One kick connected with my shinbone; the girl, off balance from the cuffs, hit the ground ass-first. I helped her up, catching a wad of spittle on my shirtfront. Lorna yelped, ‘I’m an emancipated minor and if you touch me without a matron present I can sue you!’ Catching my breath, I push-pulled her over to where her purse was lying.

I picked it up, surprised by the bulk and weight. Looking inside, I saw a small metal film can. I said, ‘What’s the movie about?’ The girl stammered, ‘P-P-Please, mister, my p-p-parents.’

A horn tooted; I saw Johnny Vogel leaning out the window of the cruiser. ‘Millard said to bring the girl to Georgia Street juvie.’

I hauled Lorna over and shoved her into the backseat. Fritzie hit the siren, and we leadfooted.

The run to downtown LA took thirty-five minutes.

Millard and Sears were waiting for us on the steps of Georgia Street Juvenile Hall. I led the girl in while Vogel and Vogel strode ahead. Court matrons and juvie dicks cleared a path for us inside; Millard opened a door marked DETENTION INTERVIEWS. I removed Lorna’s cuffs, Sears walked into the room, pulled out seats and arranged ashtrays and notepads. Millard said, ‘Johnny, you go back to University and work the phones.’

Fat Boy started to protest, then looked at his father. Fritzie nodded yes; Johnny exited, looking wounded. Fritzie announced, ‘I’m gonna call Mr. Loew, He should be in on this.’

Millard said, ‘No. Not until we have a statement.’

‘Give her to me, I’ll get you a statement.’

‘A voluntary statement, Sergeant.’

Fritzie flushed. ‘I consider that a goddamn insult, Millard.’

‘You consider it what you damn well like, but you do what I damn well say, Mr. Loew or no Mr. Loew.’

Fritz Vogel stood perfectly still. He looked like a human A-bomb about to explode, his voice the fuse: ‘You whored with the Dahlia, didn’t you, girlie? You peddled your little twat with her. Tell me where you were during her lost days.’

Lorna said, ‘Screw you, Charlie.’

Fritzie stepped toward her; Millard moved between them. ‘I’ll ask the questions, Sergeant.’

You could have heard a pin drop. Vogel stood toe to toe with Millard. Seconds stretched, and then Fritzie squeaked, ‘You’re a goddamned bleeding heart Bolshevik.’

Millard took one step forward; Vogel took one step back. ‘Get out, Fritzie.’

Vogel took three steps backward. His heels hit the wall, and he pivoted out the door, slamming it. The echo reverberated; Harry disarmed the remnants of the bomb: ‘How does it feel to be the object of such a fuss, Miss Martilkova?’

The girl said, ‘I’m Linda Martin,’ and tugged at the pleats of her skirt.

I took a seat, caught Millard’s eye and pointed to the purse resting on the table, the film can poking out. The lieutenant nodded and sat down next to Lorna. ‘You know this is about Betty Short, don’t you, sweetheart?’

The girl lowered her head and began sniffling; Harry handed her a Kleenex. She tore it into strips and smoothed them out on the table. ‘Does this mean I’ll have to go back to my folks?’

Millard nodded. ‘Yes.’

‘My dad hits me. He’s a dumb Slovak, and he gets drunk and hits me.’

‘Sweetheart, when you get back to Iowa you’ll be on non-court probation. You tell your probation officer your father hits you and he’ll put a stop to it damn quick.’

‘If my dad finds out what I did in LA, he’ll hit me bad.’

‘He won’t find out, Linda. I told those other two officers to leave to make sure what you say stays confidential.’

‘If you send me back to Cedar Rapids, I’ll just run away again.’

‘I’m sure you will. Now the sooner you tell us what we want to know about Betty and the sooner we believe you, the sooner you’ll be on the train and able to escape. So that gives you a good reason to be truthful with us, doesn’t it, Linda?’

The girl went back to playing with her Kleenex. I sensed a jaded little brain considering all the angles, all the possible outs. Finally she sighed, ‘Call me Lorna. If I’m going back to Iowa I should get used to it.’

Millard smiled; Harry Sears lit a cigarette and poised his pen over his steno pad. My blood pressure zoomed to the tune of ‘No Madeleine, no Madeleine, no Madeleine.’

Russ said, ‘Lorna, are you ready to talk to us?’

The former Linda Martin said, ‘Shoot.’

Millard asked, ‘When and where did you meet Betty Short?’

Lorna mussed up her Kleenex strips. ‘Last fall, at this career girl’s place on Cherokee.’

‘1842 North Cherokee?’

‘Uh-huh.’

‘And you became friends?’

‘Uh-huh.’

‘Say yes or no please, Lorna.’

‘Yes, we became friends.’

‘What did you do together?’

Lorna bit at her cuticles. ‘We talked girl talk, we made casting rounds, we bummed drinks and dinner at bars—’

I interrupted: ‘What kind of bars?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean nice places? Dives? Servicemen’s hangouts?’

‘Oh. Just places in Hollywood. Places where we figured they wouldn’t ask me for ID.’

My blood pressure decelerated. Millard said, ‘You told Betty about the rooming house in Orange Drive, the place where you were staying, right?’

‘Uh-huh. I mean yes.’

‘Why did Betty move out of the place on Cherokee?’

‘It was too crowded, and she’d tapped all the girls for a dollar here, a dollar there, and they were mad at her.’

‘Were any of them particularly mad?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Are you sure Betty didn’t move out because of boyfriend trouble?’

‘I’m sure.’

‘Do you recall the names of any of the men Betty went out with last fall?’

Lorna shrugged. ‘They were just pickups.’

‘What about names, Lorna?’

The girl counted on her fingers, stopping when she got to three. ‘Well, there were these two guys at Orange Drive, Don Leyes and Hal Costa, and a sailor named Chuck.’

‘No last name on Chuck?’

‘No, but I know he was a gunnery mate second class.’

Millard started to ask another question, but I held up my hand to cut him off. ‘Lorna, I talked to Marjorie Graham the other day, and she said she told you the police were coming by Orange Drive to talk to the tenants about Betty. You ran then. Why?’

Lorna bit a hangnail off and sucked at the wound. ‘Because I knew that if my picture got in the papers as Betty’s friend my parents would see it and make the police send me home.’

‘Where did you go when you rabbited?’

‘I met a man in a bar and got him to rent me a room at an auto court in the Valley.’

‘Did you—’

Millard silenced me with a chopped hand gesture. ‘You said you and Betty made casting rounds together. Did you ever get any movie work?’

Lorna twisted her fingers together in her lap. ‘No.’

‘Then could you tell me what’s in that film can in your purse?’

Eyes on to the floor and dripping tears, Lorna Martilkova whispered, ‘It’s a movie.’

‘A dirty movie?’

Lorna nodded mutely. The girl’s tears were rivers of mascara now; Millard handed her a handkerchief. ‘Sweetheart, you have to tell us all of it, from the beginning. So think it all out, and take your time. Bucky, get her some water.’

I left the room, found a drinking fountain and cup dispenser in the hall, filled a large paper container and returned with it. Lorna was speaking softly when I placed the cup on the table in front of her.

'… and I was cadging at this bar in Gardena. This Mexican man – Raoul or Jorge or something – started talking to me. I thought I was pregnant, and I was desperate wicked bad for money. He said he'd give me two hundred dollars to act in a nudie film.'

Lorna stopped, slugged down the water, took a deep breath and kept going. 'The man said he needed another girl, so I called Betty at the Cherokee place. She said yes, and the Mexican man and me picked her up. He got us hopped on reefers, I think 'cause he was afraid we'd get scared and back out. We drove down to Tijuana, and we made the movie at this big house outside town. The Mex man worked the lights and ran the camera and told us what to do and drove us back to LA, and that's *all of it, from the beginning,* so will you call my folks now?'

I looked at Russ, then Harry; they were staring at the girl impassively. Wanting to fill in the blank spaces of my own private lead, I asked, 'When did you make the film, Lorna?'

'Around Thanksgiving.'

'Can you give us a description of the Mexican man?'

Lorna stared at the floor. 'Just a greasy Mex. Maybe thirty, maybe forty, I don't know. I was on hop, and I don't remember too good.'

'Did he seem particularly interested in Betty?'

'No.'

'Did he touch either of you? Get rough with you? Make passes?'

'No. He just moved us around.'

'Together?'

Lorna whimpered, 'Yes'; my blood buzzed. My voice sounded weird to my own ears, like I was some ventriloquist's puppet. 'Then this wasn't just nudie stuff? This was you and Betty playing lez?'

Lorna gave a little dry sob and nodded; I thought of Madeleine and pushed ahead, oblivious to where the girl might take it: 'You lez? Was Betty lez? You do any *lez* pub crawling?'

Millard barked, 'Bleichert, can it!' Lorna leaned forward in her chair, grabbed the soft daddy cop and hugged him fiercely. Russ looked at me and brought a flat palm slowly down, like a conductor asking the orchestra for a hush. He stroked the girl's head with his free hand, then cocked a finger at Sears.

The girl moaned, 'I'm not lez, I'm not lez, it was just that one time'; Millard cradled her like a baby.

Sears asked, 'Was Betty a lesbian, Lorna?'

I held my breath. Lorna wiped her eyes on Millard's coat front and looked at me. She said, 'I'm not lezzie, and Betty wasn't, and we only bummed at normal-type bars, and it was just that one time in the movie because we were broke and on hop, and if this gets in the papers my daddy'll kill me.'

I glanced at Millard, sensed that he bought it, and got a strong instinct that the whole dyke offshoot of the case was a fluke. Harry asked, 'Did the Mexican man give Betty a viewfinder?'

Lorna muttered, 'Yes,' her head on Millard's shoulder.

'Do you remember his car? The make, the color?'

'I … I think it was black and old.'

'Do you remember the bar where you met him?'

Lorna lifted her head; I saw that her tears had dried. 'I think it was on Aviation Boulevard, near all those aircraft plants.'

I groaned; that part of Gardena was a solid mile of juke joints, poker parlors and cop-sanctioned whorehouses. Harry said, ‘When did you see Betty last?’

Lorna moved back to her own chair, clenching herself against another display of emotion – a hardcase reaction for a fifteen-year-old kid. ‘The last time I saw Betty was a couple of weeks later. Right before she moved out of the Orange Drive place.’

‘Do you know if Betty ever saw the Mexican man again?’

Lorna picked at the chipped polish on her nails. ‘The Mex was a fly-by-nighter. He paid us, drove us back to LA and left.’

I butted in: ‘But you saw him again, right? There’s no way he could have made a copy of the movie before you all drove back from TJ.’

Lorna studied her nails. ‘I went looking for him in Gardena, when I read in the papers about Betty. He was about to go back to Mexico, and I conned him out of a print of the movie. See … he didn’t read the papers, so he didn’t know that all of a sudden Betty was famous. See … I figured that a Black Dahlia stag film was a collector’s item, and if the police tried to ship me back to my folks, I could sell it and hire a lawyer to fight my extradition. You’ll give it back to me, won’t you? You won’t let people look at it?’

Out of the mouths of babes. Millard said, ‘You went back to Gardena and found the man again?’

‘Uh-huh. I mean yes.’

‘Where?’

‘At one of those bars on Aviation.’

‘Can you describe the place?’

‘It was dark, with flashing lights out front.’

‘And he willingly gave you a copy of the film? For nothing?’

Lorna eyed the floor. ‘I did him and his friends.’

‘Can you improve on your description of him, then?’

‘He was fat and he had a tiny little pecker! He was ugly and so were his friends!’

Millard pointed Sears to the door; Harry tiptoed quietly out. Russ said, ‘We’ll try to keep this out of the papers, and we’ll destroy the film. One question before the matron takes you up to your room. If we take you down to Tijuana, do you think you could find the house where the movie was shot?’

Shaking her head, Lorna said, ‘No, I don’t want to go down to that awful place. I want to go home.’

‘So your father can hit you?’

‘No. So I can get out again.’

Sears returned with a matron; the woman led hard/soft/pathetic/feisty Linda/Lorna away. Harry, Russ and I looked at one another; I felt the girl’s sadness smothering me. Finally the senior man said, ‘Comments?’

Harry kicked in first. ‘She’s hedging on the Mex and the pad in TJ. He probably beat her up and screwed her, and she’s afraid of reprisals. Aside from that, I buy her story.’

Russ smiled. ‘What about you, bright penny?’

‘She’s covering on the Mex angle. I think she might have been screwing him regularly, and now she’s protecting him from a smut rap. I’d also lay odds the guy is white, that the Mex routine is a cover-up to go along with the TJ stuff – which I do buy – because that place is a cesspool, and most of the smuthounds I rousted working Patrol got their stuff there.’

Millard winked à la Lee Blanchard. ‘Bucky, you are a very bright penny today. Harry, I want you to talk to Lieutenant Waters here. Tell him to hold the girl incommunicado for seventy-two hours. I want a private cell for her, and I want Meg Caulfield detached from Wilshire Clerical to play cellmate. Tell Meg to give her a good pumping and report in every twenty-four hours.

‘When you finish that, call R&I and Ad Vice for the rap sheets on white and Mexican males with pornography convictions, then call Vogel and Koenig and send them down to Gardena to check the bars for Lorna’s movie man. Call the Bureau too, and tell Captain Jack we’ve got a little Dahlia film to look at. Then call the *Times* and give them the smut lead before Ellis Loew sits on it. Give them a Jane Doe for Lorna, have them add an appeal for pornography tips and pack a bag, because we’re going down to Dago and TJ later tonight.’

I said, ‘Russ, you know this is a long shot.’

‘The biggest one since you and Blanchard beat the crap out of each other and became partners. Come on, bright penny. It’s blue movie night at City Hall.’

A projector and screen had already been set up in the muster room; an all-star cast was awaiting the all-star smut movie. Lee, Ellis Loew, Jack Tierney, Thad Green and Chief of Police C. B. Horrall himself were seated in front of the screen; Millard handed the film can to the clerical stooge manning the projector, muttering, ‘Where’s the popcorn?’

The big chief walked over and gave me a gladhander’s shake. ‘A pleasure, sir,’ I said.

‘A mutual pleasure, Mr. Ice, and my wife sends her belated regards for the pay raise you and Mr. Fire got us.’ He pointed to a seat next to Lee. ‘Lights! Camera! Action!’

I sat down beside my partner. Lee looked drawn, but not dope-juiced. A *Daily News* was unfolded on his lap; I saw ‘Boulevard-Citizens Mastermind to be Released Tomorrow – LA Bound After 8 Years in Custody.’ Lee checked out my raggedy state and said, ‘Getting any?’

I was about to respond when the lights went off. A blurred image hit the screen; cigarette smoke wafted into it. A title flashed – *Slave Girls From Hell* – then a big, high-ceilinged room with Egyptian hieroglyphics on the walls came into view in grainy black and white. Pillars shaped like coiled serpents were stationed throughout the room; the camera zoomed in for a close-up of two inset plaster snakes swallowing each other’s tails. Then the snakes dissolved into Betty Short, wearing only stockings, doing an inept hoochie-koochie dance.

My groin clenched; I heard Lee draw a sharp breath. An arm entered the screen, passing a cylindrical object to Betty. She took it; the camera moved in. It was a dildo, scales covering the shaft, fangs extending from the large circumcized head. Betty put it in her mouth and sucked it, eyes wide open and glassy.

There was an abrupt cut, then Lorna, naked, was lying on a divan, her legs spread. Betty entered the picture. She knelt between Lorna’s legs, stuck the dildo inside her and simulated sex with it. Lorna buckled and rotated her hips, the screen went out of focus, then blipped to a close-up – Lorna writhing in phony ecstasy. Even a two-year-old could tell she was contorting her face to hold back screams. Betty re-entered the frame, poised between Lorna’s thighs.

She looked up at the camera, mouthing, ‘No, please.’ Then her head was shoved down, and she worked her tongue next to the dildo in a shot so close in that every ugly detail seemed to be magnified ten million times.

I wanted to shut my eyes, but couldn’t. Next to me, Chief Horrall said calmly, ‘Russ, what do you think? You think this has got anything to do with the girl’s murder?'

Millard answered with a hoarse voice. 'It's a long shot, Chief. The movie was made in November and from what the Martilkova girl said, the Mexican doesn't play as a killer. It's got to be checked out, though. Maybe the Mex showed the movie to somebody, and *he* got a case on Betty. What I—'

Lee kicked his chair over and shouted: 'Who gives a fuck if he didn't kill her! I've sent Boy Scouts to the green room for less than that! So if you won't do something about it, I will!'

Everyone sat there, shock-stilled. Lee stood in front of the screen, blinking from the hot white light in his eyes. He wheeled and ripped the obscenity down; the screen and tripod hit the floor with a crash. Betty and Lorna continued their sex on a chalked-up blackboard; Lee took off running. I heard the projector knocked over in back of me; Millard yelled, 'Bleichert, get him!'

I got up, tripped, got up again and tore out of the muster room, catching sight of Lee stepping into the elevator at the end of the hall. When the doors shut and the elevator descended, I ran for the stairs, hurtled down six flights and out into the parking lot just in time to see Lee peeling rubber northbound on Broadway. There was a string of unmarked cruisers lined up on the Department's side of the lot; I jogged over and checked under the driver's seat of the nearest one. The keys were right there. I hit the ignition, then the gas, and took off.

I gained ground quickly, coming up behind Lee's Ford as he swerved into the middle lane on Sunset, heading west. I gave him three short horn blasts; he responded by tapping his horn in the LAPD semaphore that meant 'Officer in Pursuit'. Cars pulled over to let him through – there was nothing I could do but hit my own horn and stay glued to his tail.

We hauled ass out of downtown, through Hollywood and over the Cahuenga Pass to the Valley. Turning onto Ventura Boulevard, I got spooked by the proximity of the lez bar block; when Lee ground his Ford to a halt smack in the middle of it, I choked on a wave of panic and thought: *He can't know about my brass girl, there's no way; the lezzie film must have flipped his switch*. Then Lee got out and pushed through the door of La Verne's Hideaway. Worse panic made me stomp the brakes and fishtail the cruiser into the sidewalk; thoughts of Madeleine and evidence suppression raps propelled me into the dive after my partner.

Lee was facing off booths full of daggers and femmes, shouting curses. I flailed with my eyes for Madeleine and the barmaid I'd rousted; not seeing them, I got ready to cold cock my best friend.

'You fucking quiff divers seen a little movie called *Slave Girls From Hell*? You buy your stag shit from a fat Mex about forty? You—'

I grabbed Lee from behind in a full nelson and spun him around toward the door. His arms were clenched and his back was arched, but I was able to use his weight against him. We stumbled outside, then tripped together in a jumble of arms and legs and hit the pavement. I kept the hold clamped on with all my strength, then heard a siren approaching and snapped that Lee wasn't resisting – he was just lying there, muttering 'Partner' over and over.

The siren wailed louder, then died; I heard car doors slamming. I extricated myself from Lee and helped him, rag doll limp, to his feet. And Ellis Loew was right there.

Loew had murder in his eyes. It hit me that Lee's explosion came from his weird chastity, a week of death and dope and its pornographic capper. Safe myself, I put an arm around my partner's shoulders. 'Mr. Loew, it was just that goddamn movie. Lee thought the dykes here could give us a lead on the Mex.'

Loew hissed, 'Bleichert, shut up,' then turned his velvet rage on Lee: 'Blanchard, I got you Warrants. You're *my* man, and you made *me* look like a fool in front of the two most powerful men in the Department. This is no lesbian killing, those girls were on drugs and hated it. Now I covered for you with Horrall and Green, but I don't know how much good that will do you in the long run. If you weren't *Mr. Fire, Big Lee Blanchard*, you'd be suspended from duty already. You've gotten personally involved in the Short case, and that's an unprofessionalism I will not tolerate. You're back on Warrants duty as of tomorrow morning. Report to me at 0800, and bring in formal letters of apology to Chief Horrall and Chief Green. For the sake of your pension, I advise you to grovel.'

Lee, his body limp, said, 'I want to go to TJ to look for the smut man.'

Loew shook his head. 'Under the circumstances, I would call that request ridiculous. Vogel and Koenig are going to Tijuana, you're back on Warrants, and Bleichert, you're to remain on the Short case. Good day, Officers.'

Loew stormed over to his black-and-white; the patrolman driver hung a U-turn out into traffic. Lee said, 'I have to talk to Kay.' I nodded, and a sherrif's patrol car cruised by, the passenger cop blowing kisses to the lezzies in the doorway. Lee walked to his car murmuring, 'Laurie. Laurie, oh babe.'

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I showed up at the Bureau at 8:00 the next morning, wanting to ease Lee through the ignominy of his return to Warrants and share the diet of crow Ellis Loew would undoubtedly be feeding him. Identical memo slips from Chief Green were on both of our desks: 'Report to my office tomorrow, 1/22/47, 6:00 P.M.' The handwritten words looked ominous.

Lee did not report in at 8:00; I sat at my desk for the next hour, picturing him fretting over Bobby De Witt's release, a captive of his ghosts, his ghost chaser redemption gone now that he was off the Dahlia case. Across the partition in the DA's office, I heard Loew barking and pleading on the phone to the city editors of the *Mirror* and *Daily News* – Republican rags rumored to be sympathetic to his political aspirations. The gist of his talk was that he would help them cutthroat the *Times* and *Herald* with inside Dahlia info on the proviso that they soft-pedal their coverage of Betty Short's round-heeled ways and portray her as a sweet but misguided young girl. From the hotshot's self-satisfied farewells, I could tell that the newsmen went for it, buying Loew's line that 'The more sympathy we attract for the girl, the more juice we get when I prosecute the killer.'

When Lee didn't show up by 10:00 I went into the muster room and read through the bulging E. Short case file, wanting to satisfy myself that Madeleine's name wasn't in it. Two hours and two hundred form pages later I was satisfied – her name was not listed among the hundreds of people questioned, nor was she fingered by tipsters. The only mention of lesbians was obvious nut case stuff – religious crackpots calling in poison phone clues, informing on rival sect members as 'Nun dykes sacrificing the girl to Pope Pius XII' and 'Lezbos performing communistic anti-Christ rituals.'

By noon, Lee still hadn't put in an appearance. I called the house, University squadroom and the El Nido Hotel, with no success. Wanting to look busy so that no one would put me to work, I prowled the bulletin boards reading summary reports.

Russ Millard had compiled a new update before leaving for San Diego and Tijuana last night. It stated that he and Harry Sears would be checking the R&I and Ad Vice files for convicted and suspected pornographers, and would be searching for the smut movie filming site down in TJ. Vogel and Koenig had been unable to locate Lorna Martilkova's 'Mexican man' in Gardena, and were also going to Tijuana to work on the stag film angle. The coroner's inquest had been held yesterday; Elizabeth Short's mother was present, and identified her remains. Marjorie Graham and Sheryl Saddon testified about Betty's life in Hollywood, Red Manley as to how he drove Betty up from Dago and dropped her off in front of the Biltmore Hotel on January tenth. Intensive canvassing of the area around the Biltmore had thus far yielded no verified sightings, the records of convicted sex loonies and registered sex offenders were still being combed, the four drool case confessors were still being held at City Jail awaiting alibi checks, sanity hearings and further questioning. The circus was continuing, phone tips flooding in, resulting in third-, fourth- and fifth-hand questionings – officers talking to people who knew people who knew people who knew the exalted Dahlia. Needle in a haystack stuff straight down the line.

I was getting goldbrick looks from the men working at their desks, so I went back to my cubicle. Madeleine jumped into my head; I picked up the phone and called her.

She answered on the third ring: 'Sprague residence.'

'It's me. You want to get together?'

'When?'

'Now. I'll pick you up in forty-five minutes.'

'Don't come here, Daddy's having a business soiree. Meet you at the Red Arrow?'

I sighed. 'I've got an apartment, you know.'

'I only rut in motels. One of my rich girl idiosyncrasies. Room eleven at the Arrow in forty-five?'

I said, 'I'll be there,' and hung up. Ellis Loew tapped the partition. 'Go to work, Bleichert. You've been skating all morning, and it's getting on my nerves. And when you see your phantom partner, tell him his little no-show has cost him three days' pay. Now check out a radio car and roll.'

I rolled straight to the Red Arrow Motel. Madeleine's Packard was parked in the alley behind the bungalows; the door to room eleven was unlocked. I walked in, smelled her perfume and squinted into the darkness until I was rewarded with a giggle. Undressing, my eyes got accustomed to the lack of light; I saw Madeleine – a nude beacon on a tattered bedspread.

We joined so strongly that the bedsprings banged the floor. Madeleine kissed her way down to between my legs, made me hard, then did a quick turn onto her back. I went in her thinking of Betty and the snake shaft thing, then blotted it out by concentrating on the ripped wallpaper in front of my eyes. I wanted to go slow, but Madeleine gasped, 'Don't hold back, I'm ready.' I pushed hard, slamming the two of us together, my hands braced on the bed rail. Madeleine locked her legs around my back, grabbed the rail over her head and pushed, pulled and gyrated against me. We came seconds apart, moving in a stretching, slamming counterpoint; when my head hit the pillow, I bit at it to stanch my tremors.

Madeleine slid out from under me. 'Sugar, are you all right?'

I was seeing the snake thing. Madeleine tickled me; I twisted around and looked at her to make it go away. 'Smile at me. Look soft and sweet.'

Madeleine gave me a Pollyanna grin. Her smeared red lipstick reminded me of the Dahlia's death smile; I shut my eyes and grabbed her hard. She stroked my back softly, murmuring, 'Bucky, what is it?'

I stared at the curtains on the far wall.. 'We picked up Linda Martin yesterday. She had a print of a stag movie in her purse, her and Betty Short playing lez. They filmed it down in TJ, and there was all this spooky stuff in it. It spooked me, and it spooked my partner bad.'

Madeleine stopped her caresses. 'Did Linda mention me?'

'No, and I checked through the case file. There's no mention of that note-leaving number you pulled. But we've got a policewoman planted in the girl's cell to pump her, and if she blabs, you're sunk.'

'I'm not worried, sugar. Linda probably doesn't even remember me.'

I slid over to where I could eyeball Madeleine up close. Her lipstick was a bloody disarray, and I daubed at it with the pillow. 'Babe, I'm withholding evidence for you. It's a fair trade for what I'm getting, but it still spooks me. So you be damn sure you come clean. I'll ask you one time. Is there anything you haven't told me about you and Betty and Linda?'

Madeleine ran her fingers down my rib cage, exploring the welt scars I'd gotten in the Blanchard fight. 'Sugar, Betty and I made love once, that one time we met last summer. I just did it to see what it would be like to be with a girl who looked so much like me.'

I felt like I was sinking; like the bed was dropping out from under me. Madeleine looked like she was at the end of a long tunnel, captured by some kind of weird camera trick. She said, 'Bucky, that's all of it, I swear that's all of it,' her voice wobbling from deep nowhere. I got up and dressed, and it was only when I strapped on my .38 and cuffs that I felt like I'd quit treading quicksand.

Madeleine pleaded, 'Stay, sugar, stay'; I went out the door before I could succumb. In my cruiser, I flipped on the two-way, looking for good sane cop noise to distract me. The dispatcher barked, 'Code four all units at Crenshaw and Stocker. Clear robber scene, two dead, suspect dead, unit 4-A–82 reports suspect is Raymond Douglas Nash, white male, object fugitive warrant number—'

I yanked the radio cord and hit the ignition, gas and siren in what felt like a single swipe. Pulling out, I heard Lee pacifying me with 'Don't tell me you don't know the dead girl is a better piece of pie than Junior Nash'; speedballing downtown, I saw myself kowtowing to my partner's ghosts even though I knew the Okie killer was a real live killer bogeyman. Jamming into the Hall parking lot, I saw Lee cajoling, wheedling, pushing, pulling and twisting at me to get his way; running up to the Bureau, I saw red.

I came out of the stairway yelling, 'Blanchard!' Dick Cavanaugh, walking out of the bullpen, pointed to the bathroom. I kicked in the door; Lee was washing his hands in the sink.

He held them up to show me, blood oozing from cuts on the knuckles. 'I beat up a wall. Penance for Nash.'

It wasn't enough. I let the crimson loose all the way, smashing my best friend until my own hands were ruined and he was senseless at my feet.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Losing the first Bleichert-Blanchard fight got me local celebrity, Warrants and close to nine grand in cash; winning the rematch got me a sprained left wrist, two dislocated knuckles and a day in bed, woozy from an allergic reaction to the codeine pills Captain Jack gave me when he got word of the punch-out and saw me in my cubicle trying to tape up my fist. The only thing good that came of my 'victory' was a twenty-four-hour respite from Elizabeth Short; the worst was yet to come – bracing Lee and Kay to see if I could salvage the three of us, without giving up my balls.

I drove to the house Wednesday afternoon, Dahlia kiss-off day and the one-week anniversary of the celebrity stiff's first appearance. The confab with Thad Green was scheduled for 6:00 that evening, and if there was any way to work a patch job with Lee before then, it had to be tried.

The front door was standing open; the coffee table held a copy of the *Herald*, folded open to pages two and three. The detritus of my messy life was smeared all over it – the Dahlia, hatchet-faced Bobby De Witt homeward bound, Junior Nash shot by an off-duty sheriff's dick after he knocked off a Jap greengrocer, killing the proprietor and his fourteen-year-old son.

'We're famous, Dwight.'

Kay was standing in the hallway. I laughed; my bad knuckles throbbed. 'Notorious, maybe. Where's Lee?'

'I don't know. He left yesterday afternoon.'

'You know he's in trouble, don't you?'

'I know you beat him up.'

I walked over. Kay's breath reeked of cigarettes, her face was mottled from crying. I held her; she held me back and said, 'I don't blame you for it.'

I nuzzled her hair. 'De Witt's probably in LA by now. If Lee isn't back by tonight, I'll come and stay with you.'

Kay pulled away. 'Don't come unless you want to sleep with me.'

I said, 'Kay, I can't.'

'Why? Because of that neighbor girl you're seeing?'

I remembered my lie to Lee. 'Yes … no, not that. It's just that …'

'It's just *what*, Dwight?'

I grabbed Kay so she wouldn't be able to look in my eyes and know that half of what I was saying made me a child, half made me a liar. 'It's just that you and Lee are my family, and Lee's my partner, and until we get this trouble he's in settled and see if we're still partners then you and me together is just no damn good. The girl I've been seeing is nothing. She doesn't really mean a thing to me.'

Kay said. 'You're just frightened of anything that doesn't involve fighting and cops and guns and all that,' and tightened her grip. I let myself be held, knowing she'd nailed me clean. Then I broke it off and drove downtown to 'All That.'

The clock in Thad Green's waiting room hit 6:00, and there was no Lee; at 6:01 Green's secretary opened his door and ushered me in. The Chief of Detectives looked up from his desk. 'Where's Blanchard? He's the one I really wanted to see.'

I said, ‘I don’t know, sir,’ and stood at parade rest; Green pointed me to a chair. I sat down, and the COD fixed me with a hard stare. ‘You’ve got fifty words or less to explain your partner’s behavior Monday night. Go.’

I said, ‘Sir, Lee’s little sister was murdered when he was a kid, and the Dahlia case is what you might call an obsession with him. Bobby De Witt, the man he sent up on the Boulevard-Citizens job, got out yesterday, and a week ago we killed those four hoods. The stag film was the capper. It set Lee off, and he pulled that stunt at the dyke bar because he thought he could get a lead on the guy who made the film.’

Green quit nodding along. ‘You sound like a shyster trying to justify his client’s actions. In my police department, a man checks his emotional baggage when he pins on his badge, or he checks out. But just to let you know that I’m not entirely unsympathetic, I’ll tell you this. I’m suspending Blanchard for a trial board, but not for his Monday night tantrums. I’m suspending him for a memo he submitted stating that Junior Nash blew our jurisdiction. I think it was a phony. What do you think, Officer?’

I felt my legs fluttering. ‘I believed it, sir.’

‘Then you’re not as intelligent as your Academy scores led me to believe. When you see Blanchard, tell him to turn in his gun and badge. You stay on the Short investigation, and kindly refrain from fisticuffs on city property. Good night, Officer.’

I stood up, saluted and about-faced out of the office, maintaining my military gait until I was down the hall in the muster room. Grabbing a desk phone, I called the house, University squadroom and the El Nido Hotel – all with zero results. Then a dark thought crossed my mind, and I dialed the number of the County Parole office.

A man answered: ‘Los Angeles County Parole, may I help you?’

‘This is Officer Bleichert, LAPD. I need the disposition on a recent parolee.’

‘Shoot, Officer.’

‘Robert “Bobby” De Witt. Came out of Quentin yesterday.’

‘That’s easy. He hasn’t reported to his PO yet. We called the bus depot at Santa Rosa, and found out that De Witt didn’t buy a ticket for LA, he bought one for San Diego, with a transfer to Tijuana. We haven’t issued an absconder warrant yet. De Witt’s PO figured he might have gone down to TJ to get laid. He’s giving him until tomorrow morning to show up.’

I hung up, relieved that De Witt didn’t head straight for LA. Thinking of prowling for Lee, I took the elevator down to the parking lot and saw Russ Millard and Harry Sears walking toward the back stairs. Russ noticed me and hooked a finger; I trotted over.

I said, ‘What happened in TJ?’

Harry, breathing Sen-Sen, answered: ‘Goose egg on the stag movie. We checked for the pad and couldn’t find it, rousted some smut peddlers. Double goose egg. We checked some of the Short girl’s acquaintances in Dago – triple gooser. I—’

Millard put a hand on his partner’s shoulder. ‘Bucky, Blanchard’s down in Tijuana. A border patrolman we talked to saw him, recognized him from all the fight publicity. He was hobnobbing with a bad-looking bunch of Rurales.’

I thought of De Witt TJ bound and wondered why Lee would be talking to the Mex state police. ‘When?’

Sears said, ‘Last night. Loew and Vogel and Koenig are down there too, at the Divisidero Hotel. They’ve been talking to the TJ cops. Russ thinks they’re measuring spics for a frame on the Dahlia.’

Lee chased smut demons through my mind; I saw him bloody at my feet and shivered. Millard said, ‘Which is crap, because Meg Caulfield got the straight dope on the smut man out of the Martilkova girl. He’s a white guy named Walter “Duke” Wellington. We checked his Ad Vice jacket, and he’s got a half dozen pandering and pornography beefs. All well and good, except Captain Jack got a letter from Wellington, postmarked three days ago. He’s hiding out, gun-shy from all the Dahlia publicity, and he copped to making the film with Betty Short and Lorna. He was afraid of getting tagged for the snuff, so he sent in a detailed alibi for Betty’s missing days. Jack checked it out personally, and it’s ironclad. Wellington sent a copy of the letter to the *Herald*, and they’re publishing it tomorrow.’

I said, ‘So Lorna was lying to protect him?’

Sears nodded. ‘That looks like the picture. Wellington’s still on the lam from old pimping warrants, though, and Lorna clammed up when she got wise to Meg. And here’s the kicker: we called Loew to tell him the Mex man was horseshit, but a Rurale buddy of ours says that Vogel and Koenig are still rousting spics.’

The circus was turning into a farce. I said, ‘If the newspaper letter kiboshes their Mex job, they’ll be looking for patsies up here. We should hold our info back from them. Lee’s on suspension, but he made carbons from the case file, and he’s got them stored in a hotel room in Hollywood. We should hold on to it, use it to store our stuff.’

Millard and Sears nodded slowly; the real kicker kicked me. ‘County Parole said Bobby De Witt bought a ticket for TJ. If Lee’s down there too, it could be trouble.’

Millard shivered. ‘I don’t like the feel of it. De Witt’s a bad piece of work, and maybe he found out that Lee was headed down there. I’ll call the Border Patrol and have them put out a detain order on him.’

Suddenly I knew it all came down to me. ‘I’m going.’

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I crossed the border at dawn. Tijuana was just coming awake as I turned onto Revolución, its main drag. Child beggars were digging for breakfast in trash cans, taco venders were stirring pots of dog-meat stew, sailors and marines were being escorted out of whorehouses at the end of their five-spot all-nighters. The smarter ones stumbled over to Calle Colon and the penicillin pushers; the stupidos hot-footed toward East TJ, the Blue Fox and Chicago Club – no doubt eager to catch the early morning donkey show. Tourist cars were already lined up outside the cut-rate upholstery joints; Rurales driving prewar Chevys cruised like vultures, wearing black uniforms that looked almost like Nazi issue.

I cruised myself, looking for Lee and his ’40 Ford. I thought about stopping at the Border Patrol hut or Rurale substation to seek help, then remembered my partner was suspended from duty, illegally armed and probably stretched so thin that words from the wrong greaser would provoke him to God knows what. Recalling the Divisidero Hotel from my high school excursions south, I drove to the edge of town to seek American aid.

The pink Art Deco monstrosity stood on a bluff overlooking a tin roof shantytown. I intimidated the desk clerk; he told me the ‘Loew party’ was in suite 462. I found it on the ground floor rear, angry voices booming on the other side of the door.

Fritzie Vogel was yelling, ‘I still say we get ourselves a spic! The letter to the *Herald* didn’t say stag movie, it just said Wellington saw the Dahlia and the other girlie in November! We can still—’

Ellis Loew shouted back: ‘We *can’t* do that! Wellington admitted making the movie to Tierney! He’s the supervising officer, and we can’t go over his head!’

I opened the door and saw Loew, Vogel and Koenig huddled in chairs, all of them holding eight-star *Herald’s* obviously hot off the presses. The framing session fell silent; Koenig gawked; Loew and Vogel muttered, ‘Bleichert,’ simultaneously.

I said, ‘Fuck the fucking Dahlia. Lee’s down here, Bobby De Witt’s here and it’s got to go bad. You—’

Loew said, ‘Fuck Blanchard, he’s suspended’; I bee-lined for him. Koenig and Vogel formed a wedge between us; trying to move through them was like bucking a brick wall. The DA backed off to the other side of the room, Koenig grabbed my arms, Vogel put his hands on my chest and pushed me outside. Loew evil-eyed me from the doorway, then Fritzie chucked my chin. ‘I’ve got a soft spot for light heavyweights. If you promise not to hit Billy, I’ll help you find your partner.’

I nodded, and Koenig let me go. Fritzie said, ‘We’ll take my car. You don’t look fit to drive.’

Fritzie drove; I eyeballed. He kept up a stream of chatter on the Short case and the lieutenancy it was going to get him; I watched beggars swarm turistas, hookers dispense front seat blow jobs and zoot suit youths prowl for drunks to roll. After four fruitless hours the streets became too car-choked to manuever in, and we got out and walked.

On foot, the squalor was worse. The kiddie beggars got right up in your face, jabbering, shoving crucifixes at you. Fritzie swatted and kicked them away, but their hunger-ridden faces got to me, so I changed a fiver into pesos and tossed handfuls of coins into the gutter whenever they converged. It spawned scratching, biting and gouging free-for-alls, but it was better than looking into sunken eyes and seeing nada.

An hour of prowling two abreast got us no Lee, no Lee's '40 Ford and no gringos resembling Bobby De Witt. Then a Rurale in black shirt and jackboots, lounging in a doorway, caught my eye. He said, 'Policia?' and I stopped and flashed my badge in answer.

The cop dug in his pockets and pulled out a teletype photo strip. The picture was too blurred to identify, but the 'Robert Richard De Witt' was plain as day. Fritzie patted the cop's epaulets. 'Where, Admiral?'

The Mex clicked his heels and barked. 'Estación, vamanos!' He marched ahead of us, turning into an alley lined with VD clinics, pointing to a cinderblock hut fenced in with barbed wire. Fritzie handed him a dollar; the Mex saluted like Mussolini and about-faced away. I strode for the station, forcing myself not to run.

Rurales holding tommy guns flanked the doorway. I showed my badge; they heel clicked and let me in. Fritzie caught up with me inside; dollar bill in hand, he went straight for the front desk. The desk cop grabbed the buck and Fritzie said, 'Fugitive? Americano? De Witt?'

The deskman smiled and hit a switch beside his chair, barred doors in the side wall clicked open. Fritzie said, 'Precisely what is it we want this scum to tell us?'

I said, 'Lee's down here, probably chasing smut leads on his own. De Witt came here directly from Quentin.'

'Without checking in with his PO?'

'Right.'

'And De Witt has a hard-on for Blanchard from the Boulevard-Citizens job?'

'Right.'

'Enough said.'

We walked down a corridor lined with cells. De Witt was alone in the last lock-up, sitting on the floor. The door buzzed open; Kay Lake's defiler stood up. The years in stir had not been kind to him: the hatchet-faced tough of the '39 newspaper pictures was now a well-used piece of work, bloated in the body, grizzled in the face, his pachuco haircut as outdated as his Salvation Army suit.

Fritzie and I walked in. De Witt's greeting was con bravado tinged with just the right amount of subservience, 'Cops, huh? Well, at least you're Americans. Never thought I'd be glad to see you guys.'

Fritzie said, 'Why start now?' and kicked De Witt in the balls. He doubled over; Fritzie grabbed his duck's ass scruff and gave him a hard backhand. De Witt started to foam at the mouth; Fritzie let go of his neck and wiped pomade on his sleeve. De Witt hit the floor, then crawled over to the commode and vomited into it. When he tried to get himself upright, Fritzie pushed his head back into the bowl and held it there with a big spit-shined wing-tip brogue. The ex-bank-robber-pimp drank piss water and puke.

Vogel said, 'Lee Blanchard's here in TJ, and you came here flush out of Big Q. That's a goddamned strange coincidence, and I don't like it. I don't like you, I don't like the syphilitic whore you were born out of, I don't like being down here in a rat-infested foreign country when I could be at home with my family. I *do* like inflicting pain on criminals, so you had better answer my questions truthfully, or I'll hurt you bad.'

Fritzie released his foot; De Witt came up gasping for air. I picked a soiled skivvy shirt up off the floor, and was about to hand it to him when I remembered the lash scars on Kay's legs. The image made me throw the shirt at De Witt, then grab a chair from the catwalk and reach for my handcuffs. Fritzie swabbed the ex-con's face, I shoved him into the seat and cuffed his wrists to the back slats.

De Witt looked up at us; his trouser legs darkened as his bladder went. Fritzie said, 'Did you know that Sergeant Blanchard is here in Tijuana?'

De Witt shook his head back and forth, spraying off the remnants of his toilet dip. 'I ain't seen Blanchard since my fucking trial!'

Fritzie shot him a little backhand, his Masonic ring severing a cheek vein. 'Don't use profanity with me, and address me as sir. Now, did you know that Sergeant Blanchard is here in Tijuana?'

De Witt blubbered, 'No'; Fritzie said, 'No, *sir*,' and slapped him. De Witt hung his head, lolling his chin on his chest. Fritzie prodded it up with one finger. 'No, what?'

De Witt screeched, 'No, sir!'

Even through my hate haze I could tell he was coming clean. I said, 'Blanchard's afraid of you. Why?'

Twisting in the chair, greasy pompadour wilted over his forehead, De Witt laughed. Wild laughter, the kind that cuts through pain, then makes it worse. Livid, Fritzie balled a fist to punish him; I said, 'Let him be.' Vogel relented; De Witt's loony chuckles trailed off.

Sucking in breath, De Witt said, 'Man o Manieschewitz, what a laugh. Lee beauty gotta be scared of me 'cause of how I flapped my trap at the trial, but all I know is what I read in the papers, and I gotta tell you that little reefer roust put the fear of God into me, if I'm lyin', I'm flyin'. Maybe I was thinkin' revenge up to then, maybe I was talkin' trash to my cellies, but when Lee beauty killed them niggers and—'

Vogel right hooked De Witt, toppling him, chair and all, to the floor. Spitting blood and teeth, the aging lounge lizard moaned and laughed at the same time; Fritzie knelt beside him and pinched his carotid artery, shutting off the blood to his brain. 'Bobby boy, I do not like Sergeant Blanchard, but he is a fellow officer, and I will not have syphilitic scum like you defaming him. Now you risked a parole violation and a trip back to Q for a trip down here. When I let go of your neck you will tell me why, or I will pinch your neck again until your gray cells go snap, crackle and pop like Kellogg's Rice Krispies.'

Fritzie released the hold; De Witt's face went from blue to dark red. With one hand, Vogel grabbed suspect and chair and placed them upright. Lounge lizard Bobby started to laugh again, then sputtered blood and stopped. Looking up at Fritzie, he reminded me of a dog who loves his cruel master because it's the only one he's got. His voice was a beaten dog whimper: 'I came down to cop some horse and bring it back to LA before I reported in to my PO. The guy I got is supposed to be a softie, you tell him "Gee, sir, I been in stir eight years and I hadda get my ashes hauled," and he don't violate you for bein' late.'

De Witt took a deep breath; Fritzie said, 'Snap, crackle, pop.' Bobby boy dog whimpered the rest of his confession rapidamente: 'The man down here is this cholo named Felix Chasco. He's supposed to meet me at the Calexico Gardens Motel tonight. The LA man's the brother of this guy I knew at Quentin. I ain't met him and please don't hurt me no more.'

Fritzie let out a huge whoop and ran out of the cell to report his booty; De Witt licked blood off his lips and looked at me, his dog master now that Vogel was gone. I said, ‘Finish up on you and Lee Blanchard. And don’t get hysterical this time.’

De Witt said, ‘Sir, all that’s between me and Blanchard is that I fucked this cunt Kay Lake.’

I remember moving toward him and I remember picking him up two-handed by the neck, wondering how hard you had to squeeze a dog’s throat to make its eyeballs pop out. I remember him changing color and voices in Spanish, and Fritzie shouting, ‘His story checks.’ Then I remember being hurled backward, thinking, so that’s what bars feel like. Then I remember nothing.

I came to thinking I’d been knocked down in a third Bleichert-Blanchard fight, wondering how much hurt I’d put on my partner. I babbled, ‘Lee? Lee? Are you all right?’ then sighted in on two greaser cops with ridiculous dime store regalia on their blackshirts. Fritzie Vogel towered over them, saying, ‘I let Bobby boy go so we could tail him to his pal. But he blew the tail while you were catching up on your beauty sleep, which was too bad for him.’

Someone hugely strong lifted me up off the cell floor; coming out of my haze I knew it had to be Big Bill Koenig. Woozy and rubberlegged, I let Fritzie and the Mex cops lead me through the station and outside. It was dusk, and the TJ sky was already lit with neon. A Studebaker patrol car pulled up; Fritzie and Bill ushered me into the backseat. The driver hit the loudest siren the world had ever heard, then gunned it.

We drove west out of town, stopping in the gravel center of a horseshoe-shaped auto court. TJ cops in khakis and jodhpurs were standing guard in front of a back unit, holding pump shotguns. Fritzie winked and offered me his arm to lean on; I spurned it and got out of the car under my own steam. Fritzie led the way over; the cops saluted us with their gun barrels, then opened the door.

The room was a cordite-reeking slaughterhouse. Bobby De Witt and a Mexican man lay dead on the floor, bullet holes oozing blood all over them. Brain spatters leaking fluid covered one entire wall; De Witt’s neck was bruised from where I’d been throttling him. My first coherent thought was that I’d done it during my blackout, vigilante vengeance to protect the only two people I loved. Fritzie must have been a mind reader, because he laughed and said, ‘Not you, boyo. The spic is Felix Casco, a known dope trafficker. Maybe it was other dope scum, maybe it was Lee, maybe it was God. I say let our Mexican colleagues handle their own dirty laundry and let’s us go back to LA and get the son of a bitch who sliced the Dahlia.’

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Bobby De Witt's murder got a half column in the LA *Mirror*, I got a day off from a surprisingly solicitous Ellis Loew, Lee's disappearance got a squad of Metropolitan Division cops full-time.

I spent most of the day off in Captain Jack's office, being interrogated by them. They asked me hundreds of questions about Lee – from the reasons for his outbursts at the stag film and La Verne's Hideaway, to his obsession with the Short case, to the Nash memo and his shack job with Kay. I played fast and loose with facts, and lied by omission – keeping it zipped about Lee's Benzedrine use, his file room at the El Nido Hotel and the fact that his cohabitation was chaste. The Metro bulls repeatedly asked me if I thought Lee killed Bobby De Witt and Felix Chasco; I repeatedly told them he wasn't capable of murder. Asked for an interpretation of my partner's flight, I told them about beating Lee up over the Nash job, adding that he was an ex-boxer, maybe soon to be an ex-cop, too old to go back to fighting, too volatile to live a squarejohn life – and the Mexican interior was probably as good a place as any for a man like that. As the interrogation wound down, I sensed that the officers weren't interested in securing Lee's safety – they were building a case for his LAPD expulsion. I was repeatedly told not to stick my nose in their investigation and each time I agreed I dug my fingers into my palms to keep from hurling insults and worse.

From City Hall I went to see Kay. Two Metro goons had already paid her a visit, putting her through the wringer about her life with Lee, rehashing her old life with Bobby De Witt. The iceberg look she gave me said I was slime for belonging to the same police department; when I tried to comfort her and offer words of encouragement about Lee's return, she said, 'And all that,' and pushed me away.

I checked out room 204 of the El Nido Hotel then, hoping for some kind of message, some kind of clue that said, 'I'll be back, and the three of us will keep going.' What I found was a shrine to Elizabeth Short.

The room was a typical Hollywood bachelor flop: Murphy bed, sink, tiny closet. But the walls were adorned with Betty Short portrait pictures, newspaper and magazine photos, horror glossies from 39th and Norton, dozens of them enlarged to magnify every gruesome detail. The bed was covered with cardboard boxes – an entire detective's case file, with carbons of miscellaneous memos, tip lists, evidence indexes, FIs and questioning reports all cross-filed alphabetically.

Having nothing to do and no one to do it with, I leafed through the folders. The bulk of the information was staggering, the manpower behind it more staggering, the fact that it was all over one silly girl the most staggering of all. I didn't know whether to toast Betty Short or rip her off the walls, so I badged the desk clerk on my way out, paid him a month's rent in advance and kept the room like I promised Millard and Sears – even though I was really holding it for Sergeant Leland C. Blanchard.

Who was somewhere out there in the Big Nowhere.

I called up the classified desks of the *Times, Mirror, Herald* and *Daily News*, placing a personals ad to run indefinitely: 'Fire – Nightflower room will remain intact. Send me a message – Ice.’ With that behind me, I drove to the only place I could think of to send him one.

39th and Norton was just a block of empty lots now. No arclights, no police cars, no nighttime gawkers. A Santa Ana wind blew in while I stood there, and the more I pulled for Lee to come back to me the more I knew my hotshot cop life was as gone as everybody’s favorite dead girl.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

In the morning I sent the big boys a message. Hiding out in a storage room down the hall from my cubicle, I typed copies of a transfer request letter, one each for Loew, Russ Millard and Captain Jack. The letter read:

> I request to be detached from the Elizabeth Short investigation immediately, and returned to my duties at Central Division Warrants. I feel that the Short case is more than adequately staffed, by far more experienced officers than myself, and that I could more effectively serve the Department working Warrants. Moreover, with my partner, Sergeant L. C. Blanchard, missing, I will be in the position of Senior Officer, and I will need to break in a replacement at a time when there is most likely a large backlog of priority papers. In preparation for my duties as Senior Warrants officer, I have been studying for the Sergeant's Examination, and expect to take it at the next promotion board this spring. This, I feel, will give me leadership training, and will make up for my relative lack of experience as a plainclothes field officer.
>
> Respectfully,
> Dwight W. Bleichert, Badge 1611,
> Central Detectives

Finishing, I read the letter over, deciding that it worked in just the right blend of respect and exasperation, with the half-truth about the Sergeant's Exam a good closing line. I was signing the copies when I heard a tremendous ruckus coming from the bullpen.

I folded the pages into my jacket pocket and went to investigate. A group of detectives and crime lab techs in white smocks were surrounding a table, looking down at it, jabbering and gesturing away. I joined the throng, muttering 'Holy fuck', when I saw what was jazzing them.

An envelope was lying on a metal evidence tray. It was stamped and postmarked and smelled faintly of gasoline. The front of it was covered with letters, clipped from newspapers and magazines, glued to the plain white surface. The words spelled out:

TO THE HERALD AND OTHER LA PAPERS.
HERE IS DAHLIA'S BELONGINGS.
LETTER TO FOLLOW.

A lab man wearing rubber gloves slit the envelope and pulled out the contents – a little black address book, a plastic-sheathed Social Security card and a thin stack of photographs. Squinting, I read the name on the card – Elizabeth Ann Short – and knew the Dahlia case had blown wide open. The man next to me was talking the delivery up – a postal carrier found the envelope in a mailbox near the downtown library, almost keeled from a heart attack, then grabbed a pair of radio car bulls, who code three'd the booty over.

Ellis Loew pushed his way up against the lab techs, Fritzie Vogel at his heels. The head tech flailed his hands in anger; a cacophony of speculation hit the pen. Then there was a loud whistle, and Russ Millard yelled, 'Damnit, back off and let them work. And give them some quiet.'

We did.

The techs descended on the envelope, dusting it with print powder, leafing through the address book, examining the snapshots and calling out their findings like surgeons at an operating table:

'Two partial latents on the back flap, smudged, no more than one or two comparison points, not enough to run a make on, maybe enough to compare to incoming suspects—'

'No prints on Social Security card—'

'Pages of address book readable, but gasoline saturated, no chance of sustaining latents. Names and phone numbers mostly men, not listed alphabetically, some pages ripped out—'

'Photographs are of Short girl with servicemen in uniform, the men's faces crossed out—'

Stunned, I wondered: *Would* a letter follow? Was my random snuff theory blown? Since the stuff was obviously sent in by the killer, was *he* one of the servicemen in the pictures? Was the mailing cat and mouse, or the precursor to surrender and confession? All around me, other officers were running with the same dope, the same questions, talking in knots of two and three, or looking rapt, like they were talking with themselves. The lab techs took off with the plethora of new leads, cradling them in rubber-gloved hands. Then the only calm man in the room whistled again.

And again the commotion froze. Russ Millard, poker-faced, counted the heads and pointed us over to the rear bulletin board. We lined up there; he said, 'I don't know what it means, except I'm pretty sure the killer sent the stuff. The lab boys are going to need more time on the envelope, then they'll photograph the pages and give us a list of names to do interviews from.'

Dick Cavanaugh said, 'Russ, he's playing with us. Some of the pages were ripped out, and I'll lay you ten to one his name was on one of them.'

Millard smiled. 'Maybe, maybe not. Maybe he's crazy and wants to get caught, maybe some of the people in the book know him. Maybe the techs will get latents off the photos or be able to identify some of the men from the insignia of their uniforms. Maybe the bastard *will* send a letter. That's a lot of maybes, so I'll tell you what we've got for sure: all eleven of you are going to drop what you're doing and canvass the area around the mailbox where that envelope was found. Harry and I will be going over the case file to see if any of our previous suspects live or work around there. *Then*, when we've got the list of names from the book, we'll go at it *discreetly*. Betty spread herself pretty thin with men, and homewrecking isn't my style. Harry?'

Sears was standing by the wall map of downtown LA, holding a pen and clipboard. He stuttered, 'W-w-we'll do f-f-foot beats.' I saw my transfer request stamped 'Rejected.' Then I heard an argument on the opposite side of the squadroom.

The arguers were Ellis Loew and Jack Tierney, both of them trying to score points and keep it sotto voce. They ducked behind a wall post for privacy, I ducked over to an adjacent phone cubicle to eavesdrop – hoping for skinny on Lee.

It wasn't about Lee – it was about *Her*.

'… Jack, Horrall wants to take three quarters of the men off the investigation. Bond issue or no bond issue, he thinks he's given the voters enough of a show. We can get around him by going at the names in the book a hundred percent. The more publicity the case gets, the more truck we've got with Horrall—'

'Goddamn it, Ellis—'

‘No. Just listen to me. Before, I wanted to downplay the girl as a floozy. The way I see it now is that it’s too far out in the open already to sit on. We know what she was, and we’ll get it confirmed a couple of hundred times by the men in that little black book. We keep our men questioning them, I’ll keep feeding the names to my newspaper contacts, we’ll keep a head of steam on this thing until we get the killer.’

‘It’s a sucker play, Ellis. The killer’s name probably isn’t in the book. He’s a psycho, and he’s showing us his backside and saying, “Make something out of it.” The girl’s a gravy train, Ellis. I’ve known it from the beginning, just like you. But this has got to backfire on us. I’m working a half dozen other homicides with skeleton crews, and if the married men in that book get their names in the paper, then their lives will be shot to shit because they copped Betty Short for a quick piece of tail.’

There was a long stretch of silence. Then Loew said, ‘Jack, you know I’ll be DA sooner or later. If not next year, in ’52. And you know that Green will be retiring in a few years, and you know who I want to replace him. Jack, I’m thirty-six and you’re forty-nine. I may get another shot at something this big. You won’t. For God’s sake take the farsighted view on it.’

More silence. I pictured Captain Jack Tierney weighing the pros and cons of selling his soul to Satan with a Phi Beta Kappa key and a hard-on for the City of Los Angeles. When he said, ‘Okay, Ellis,’ I tore up my transfer request and walked back to rejoin the circus.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Over the next ten days the circus turned into wholesale farce, with an occasional tragedy thrown in.

No other leads were gleaned from the ‘Death Letter,’ and the 243 names in the book were divvied up between four detective teams, the low number of cops Jack Tierney’s ploy aimed at padding that part of the investigation into extended newspaper and radio juice. Russ Millard argued for twenty teams and a fast, clean sweep; Captain Jack, backstopped by the DA Satan, refused. When Big Bill Koenig was deemed too combustible to work the questionings and was given clerical duties, I was paired with Fritz Vogel. Together, we questioned fifty-odd people, mostly men, about their association with Elizabeth Short. We heard predictable stories of them meeting Betty in bars and buying her drinks and dinner, listening to her fantasies of being the bride or widow of war heros, bedding or not bedding her. A number of the men did not even know the notorious Dahlia – they were ‘friends of friends,’ their names passed on out of pussy hound camaraderie.

Of our parcel of names, sixteen of the guys were what Fritzie labeled ‘Certified Dahlia Fuckers.’ They were mostly lower-echelon movie minions: agents, talent scouts and casting directors who hung out at Schwab’s Drugstore chasing gullible would-be starlets, empty promises on their lips, Trojan ‘value packs’ in their pockets. They told proud or shamefaced casting couch stories every bit as sad as Betty’s tales of bliss with studs in uniform. Finally, the men in Elizabeth Short’s little black book had two things in common – they got their names in the LA dailies and they coughed up alibis that eliminated them as suspects. And word filtered back to the squadroom that the publicity eliminated more than a few of them as husbands.

The women were a mixed bag. Most were just pals – girl talk acquaintances, fellow cocktail lounge cadgers and aspiring actresses heading nowhere. A dozen or so were hookers and semi-pro B girls, instant soulmates that Betty met in bars. They gave us leads that petered out on follow-up investigation – basically, the word that Betty sold herself freelance to conventioneers at several lower-class downtown hotels. They hedged that Betty rarely peddled it, and could not identify any of her tricks by name; Fritzie’s canvassing of the hotels got him an angry zero, and the fact that several other women – R&I confirmed as prostitutes – couldn’t be located, pissed him off even more.

Madeleine Sprague’s name did not appear in the book, nor did it turn up in any of my subsequent questionings. No dyke or dyke bar leads came out of the 243 names, and every night I checked the University squadroom bulletin boards to see if any of the other teams had latched on to her monicker. None of them did, and I started to feel very safe regarding my evidence suppression tango.

While the book queries got most of the headlines, the rest of the circus continued on: tips, tips and more tips wasted thousands of police man-hours; poison phone and poison pen communiques had local squadroom dicks bracing spiteful loonies implicating their enemies for hundreds of major and minor grievances. Discarded women’s garments were sifted through at the Central crime lab, and every piece of size eight black female apparel that was found launched another extensive neighborhood run-through.

The biggest surprise of my little black book tour was Fritz Vogel. Free of Bill Koenig, he possessed a surprising wit, and in his muscle fashion he was as adept an interrogator as Russ Millard. He knew when to punch for information, hitting fast and hard, fueled by personal rancor but capable of putting it out of his mind when the interrogee coughed up what we wanted. Sometimes I sensed that he was holding back out of respect for my nice guy questioning style, that the pragmatist in him knew it was the best way to get results. We became an effective Mutt and Jeff duo fast, and I could tell that I was a restraining influence on Fritzie, a check and balance on his admitted fondness for hurting criminals. He gave me a wary respect for the hurt I'd put on Bobby De Witt, and a few days into the temporary partnership we were bullshitting in broken German, a way to kill time driving to and from questionings. With me, Fritzie spoke less in tirades and came across as one of the guys – with a mean streak. He talked up the Dahlia and his coveted lieutenancy, but didn't talk frames, and since he never tried to pull any railroad jobs around me and was straight in his FI reports, I got the notion that Loew had either given up the idea or was biding his time. I could also tell that Fritzie was constantly sizing me up, that he knew Koenig wouldn't cut it as partner to Detective Division brass, but with Lee gone, I would. The appraisal process flattered me, and I kept myself razor sharp during interrogations. I had played second banana to Lee working Warrants, and if Fritzie and I partnered up I wanted him to know that I wouldn't play stooge – or lacky – like Harry Sears to Russ Millard.

Millard, Fritzie's cop antithesis, exerted his own pull on me. He took to using Room 204 at the El Nido as his field office, going there at end of watch to read Lee's superbly cross-filed collection of paper. With Lee gone, time weighed heavy on me, so I joined him most evenings. When he looked at the Dahlia horror pictures, he always made the sign of the cross and murmured 'Elizabeth' with reverence; walking out, he said, 'I'll get him, dear.' He always left at 8:00 on the dot, to go home to his wife and sons. That a man could care so deeply yet put it aside so casually amazed me. I asked him about it; he said, 'I will not let brutality rule my life.'

From 8:00 on, my own life was ruled by two women, a crossfire of their strange, strong wills.

From the El Nido, I'd go to see Kay. With Lee gone and no longer footing the bills, she had to find full-time work, and she did – getting a job teaching sixth grade at an elementary school a few blocks off the Strip. I'd find her grading book reports and perusing kiddie artwork stoically, glad to see me, but caustic underneath, like maintaining a business-as-usual front would keep her grief over Lee's absence and her contempt for my reluctance at bay. I tried denting the front by telling her I wanted her, but would only move on it when Lee's vanishing act was resolved; she answered with overeducated psychological claptrap about our missing third, turning the education he bought her around, using it as a weapon against him. I exploded at phrases like 'paranoid tendencies' and 'pathological selfishness,' coming back with 'he *saved* you, he *made* you.' Kay's comeback for that was, '*He only helped me.*' I had no comeback for the truth behind the jargon and the fact that without Lee as a centerpiece, the two of us were loose ends, a family sans patriarch. It was that stasis that drove me out the door ten nights running – straight to the Red Arrow Motel.

So I brought Kay with me to Madeleine.

We'd rut first thing, talk later. The talk was always of Madeleine's family, followed by fantasies that I concocted so as not to feel impoverished in the wake of her tales. The brass girl had robber baron Daddy, *the* Emmett Sprague, confrere of Mack Sennett in the Hollywood salad days; art poseur and elixir-guzzling Mommy, a direct descendant of *the* California land grant Cathcarts; genius sister Martha, hotshot commercial artist, rising star on Ad Agency Row downtown. For a supporting cast there was Mayor Fletcher Bowron, public relations-minded thug Mickey Cohen, 'Dreamer' Georgie Tilden, Emmett's former stooge, the son of a famous Scottish anatomist and wastrel nickolodeon artiste. The Dohenys and Sepulvedas and Mulhollands were also close friends, as were Governor Earl Warren and DA Buron Fitts. Having only senile Dolph Bleichert, the late Greta Heilbrunner Bleichert, the Japs I snitched off and fight acquaintances, I spun yarns out of thin air: scholastic medals won and proms attended; bodyguarding FDR in '43. I dissembled away until it was time to rut again, grateful that we always kept the lights off between bouts, so Madeleine couldn't read my face and know I was coming from hunger.

Or from the Dahlia.

The first time it happened accidentally. We were making love, both of us close to peaking. My hand slipped off the bed rail and hit the light switch on the wall, illuminating Betty Short below me. For just a few seconds I believed it was her, and I called out for Lee and Kay to help me. When my lover was Madeleine again, I reached for the switch, only to have her grab my wrist. Moving hard, springs creaking, light glaring, I made Madeleine Betty – made her eyes blue instead of hazel, made her body Betty's body from the stag film, made her silently mouth, 'No, please.' Coming, I knew it could never be that good with just plain Madeleine; when the brass girl whispered, 'I knew she'd get to you sooner or later,' I dry sobbed that all my pillow stories were lies and poured out the nonstop true story of Lee and Kay and Bucky, straight through to Mr. Fire's fix on the dead girl and his jump off the face of the earth. When I finished, Madeleine said, 'I'll never be a schoolteacher from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, but I'll be Betty or anyone else you want me to be.' I let her stroke my head, grateful not to have to lie anymore, but sad that she – and not Kay – was my confessor.

So Elizabeth Short and I were formally joined.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Lee stayed gone and Madeleine stayed Betty, and there was nothing I could do about either transformation. Heeding the Metro goons' warning, I kept my nose out of their investigation, constantly wondering if Mr. Fire took his powder preplanned or accidentally. I did check his bank records, finding an $800 balance with no recent withdrawals, and when I heard that a nationwide and Mexico APB had been issued on Lee and his '40 Ford, yielding goose egg, my instincts told me he had fled way south of the border, where the Rurales used gringo police bulletins as toilet paper. Russ Millard told me that two Mexican men, both well-known dope traffickers, had been arrested in Juarez for the murder of Bobby De Witt and Felix Chasco, which eased my mind on Metro making Lee for the job – but then scuttlebutt filtered down from high, high brass circles. Chief Horrall had rescinded the APB and decreed, 'Let sleeping dogs lie.' Thad Green's secretary told Harry Sears that she had heard Lee was going to be dismissed from the LAPD if he did not show up within thirty days of the time he vanished.

January dwindled out, rainy days with only one spark of excitement. An envelope arrived by mail at the Bureau. It had a clipped word address, with a clipped word letter on plain bond paper inside:

HAVE CHANGED MY MIND
YOU WOULD NOT GIVE ME A SQUARE DEAL.
DAHLIA KILLING JUSTIFIED
— BLACK DAHLIA AVENGER

Taped to the page was a photograph of a short, heavy-set man wearing a business suit, his face scratched out. No prints or other forensic leads were gleaned from the snapshot or envelope, and since the servicemen pics from the first letter had been withheld from the press as a suspect elimination device, we knew letter number two was legit. The Bureau consensus was that the photo was of the killer, symbolically eliminating himself from the overall 'picture.'

With her death letter and stag film leads ground to dust, a second consensus took over: we were never going to get the bastard. The odds on 'Unsolved' dropped to even money in the squadroom pool; Thad Green told Russ and Captain Jack that Horrall was going to pull the chain on the Dahlia mess on February 5, returning a large number of officers to their normal duties. Rumor had it that I would be one of the returnees, breaking in Johnny Vogel as my partner. Bad Breath Johnny rankled, but going back to Warrants came on as Paradise regained. Betty Short would then exist the only place I wanted her to – as the spark point of my imagination.

CHAPTER TWENTY

‘The following Central Division and Detective Bureau officers temporarily assigned to the E. Short investigation are to return to their normal assignments, effective tomorrow, 2/6/47:

Sgt. T. Anders – ret. to Central Bunco.

Det. J. Arcola – ret. to Central Burglary.

Sgt. R. Cavanaugh – ret. to Central Robbery.

Det. G. Ellison – ret. to Central Detectives.

Det. A. Grimes – ret. to Central Detectives.

Det. C. Ligget – ret. to Central Juvenile.

Det. R. Navarette – ret. to Central Bunco.

Sgt. J. Pratt – ret. to Central Homicide. (See Lt. Ruley for assignment.)

Det. J. Smith – ret. to Central Homicide. (See Lt. Ruley.)

Det. W. Smith – ret. to Central Detectives.

Chief Horrall and Deputy Chief Green wish me to thank you for your help on this investigation, most especially the many overtime hours logged in. Commendation letters will be sent to all of you.

My thanks also—

Capt. J. V. Tierney, Commander, Central Detectives.

The distance between the bulletin board and Millard’s office was about ten yards; I covered it in about a tenth of a second. Russ looked up from his desk. ‘Hi, Bucky. How’s tricks?’

‘Why wasn’t I on that transfer list?’

‘I asked Jack to keep you on the Short case.’

‘Why?’

‘Because you’re getting to be a damn good detective, and Harry’s retiring in ’50. Want more?’

I was wondering what to say when the phone rang. Russ picked it up and said, ‘Central Homicide, Millard,’ then listened for a few moments and pointed to the extension on the desk across from him. I grabbed the receiver, catching a deep male voice in mid-sentence:

‘… attached to the CID unit here at Fort Dix. I know you’ve had a lot of confessions peter out on you, but this one sounds good to me.’

Russ said, ‘Go on, Major.’

‘The soldier’s name is Joseph Dulange. He’s an MP, attached to the headquarters company at Dix. He made the confession to his CO, coming off a bender. His buddies say he carries a knife, and he flew to Los Angeles on furlough on January eighth. On top of that, we found bloodstains on a pair of trousers – too small an amount to type. Personally, I think he’s a bad apple. He got in a lot of brawls overseas, and his CO says he’s a wife beater.’

‘Major, is Dulange near you right now?’

‘Yes. He’s in a cell across the hall.’

‘Do this for me, please. Ask him to describe Elizabeth Short’s birthmarks to you. If he does it accurately, my partner and I will be on the next transport flight out of Camp MacArthur.'

The major said, 'Yes, sir'; the Fort Dix half of the conversation broke off. Russ said, 'Harry's got the flu. Feel like a trip to New Jersey, bright penny?'

'Are you serious?'

'If that soldier comes up with the moles on Elizabeth's rear end, I am.'

'Ask him about the slash marks, the stuff that didn't make the papers.'

Russ shook his head. 'No. It might excite him too much. If this is legit, we're flying out on the QT and reporting in from Jersey. If Jack or Ellis get hold of this they'll send Fritzie, and he'll have that soldier in the electric chair by morning, guilty or otherwise.'

The Fritzie crack irked me. 'He's not that bad. And I think Loew's given up on the frame idea.'

'You're an impressionable penny, then. Fritzie's as bad as they get, and Ellis—'

The major came back on the line: 'Sir, Dulange said the girl had three little dark moles on the left cheek of her, uh … derriere.'

'You could have said ass, Major. And we're on our way.'

Corporal Joseph Dulange was a tall, hard-muscled man of twenty-nine, dark-haired, horse-faced, with a pencil-thin mustache. Dressed in olive drab fatigues, he sat across a table from us in the Fort Dix provost marshal's office, looking incorrigibly mean. A judge advocate captain sat beside him, probably to make sure Russ and I didn't try the civilian third degree. The eight-hour plane ride had been bumpy; at 4:00 A.M. I was still on LA time, exhausted but keyed-up. On the ride over from the airstrip, the CID major we'd talked to on the phone had briefed us on Dulange. He was a twice-married combat vet, a booze-hound, a feared brawler. His statement was incomplete, but buttressed by two hard facts: he flew to LA on January eighth, and was arrested for Plain Drunk in New York City's Pennsylvania Station on January seventeenth.

Russ kicked it off. 'Corporal, my name is Millard, and this is Detective Bleichert. We're from the Los Angeles Police Department, and if you convince us you killed Elizabeth Short, we'll arrest you and take you back with us.'

Dulange shifted in his chair and said, 'I sliced her,' his voice high and nasal.

Russ sighed. 'A lot of people have told us that.'

'I fucked her, too.'

'Really? You cheat on your wife?'

'I'm a Frenchman.'

I moved into my bad guy role. 'I'm a German, so who gives a shit? What's that have to do with you cheating on your wife?'

Dulange flicked his tongue like a reptile. 'I give it the French way. My wife don't like it like that.'

Russ elbowed me. 'Corporal, why did you take your furlough in Los Angeles? What were you interested in?'

'Cunt. Johnnie Red Label. Excitement.'

'You could have found that across the river in Manhattan.'

'Sunshine. Movie stars. Palm trees.'

Russ laughed. 'LA's got all of that. It sounds like your wife gives you a long leash, Joe. You know, furlough all by yourself.'

'She knows I'm a Frenchman. I give it to her good when I'm home. Missionary style, ten inches. She got no complaints.'

'What if she did complain, Joe? What would you do to her?'

Deadpan, Dulange said, ‘One complaint, I use my fists. Two complaints, I slice her in half.’

I broke in: ‘Are you telling me you flew three thousand miles to eat some pussy?’

‘I’m a Frenchman.’

‘You look like a homo to me. Gash divers are all repressed fruits, it’s been proven. You got an answer for that, shitbird?’

The soldier-lawyer got up and whispered in Russ’s ear; Russ nudged me under the table. Dulange cracked his deadpan into a big grin. ‘I got my answer hangin’ ten hard, flatfoot.’

Russ said, ‘You’ll have to excuse Detective Bleichert, Joe. He’s got a short fuse.’

‘He’s got a short pecker. All Krauts do. I’m a Frenchman, I know.’

Russ laughed uproariously, like he’d just heard a real kneeslapper at the Elks Club. ‘Joe, you’re a pisser.’

Dulange waggled his tongue. ‘I’m a Frenchman.’

‘Joe, you’re a hot sketch, and Major Carrol told me you’re a wife beater. Is that true?’

‘Can niggers dance?’

‘They certainly can. Do you enjoy hitting women, Joe?’

‘When they ask for it.’

‘How often does your wife ask for it?’

‘She asks for the big tensky every night.’

‘No. Asks to get hit, I mean.’

‘Every time I’m pallin’ with Johnnie Red and she cracks wise, then she’s askin’ for it.’

‘You and Johnnie go back a ways?’

‘Johnnie Red’s my best friend.’

‘Did Johnnie go with you to LA?’

‘In my pocket.’

Sparring with a psycho drunk was wearing me down; I thought of Fritzie and the direct approach. ‘Are you having the DTs, shitbird? You want a little rap in the cabeza to clear things up for you?’

‘Bleichert, enough!’

I shut up. The JA man glared at me; Russ straightened the knot in his necktie – the signal for me to keep zipped. Dulange cracked the knuckles on his left hand one by one. Russ tossed a pack of cigarettes on the table, the oldest ‘I’m your pal’ ploy in the book.

The Frenchman said, ‘Johnnie Red don’t like me to smoke ‘cept in his company. You bring Johnnie in, I’ll smoke. I confess better in Johnnie’s company, too. Ask the Catholic chaplain at North Post. He told me he always smells Johnnie when I go to confession.’

I started smelling Corporal Joseph Dulange as an attention-seeking drool case. Russ said, ‘Booze confessions aren’t valid in court, Joe. But I’ll tell you what. You convince me you killed Betty Short, and I’ll make sure Johnnie comes back to LA with us. A nice eight-hour flight would give you plenty of time to renew your acquaintance with him. What do you say?’

‘I say I chopped the Dahlia.’

‘I say you didn’t. I say you and Johnnie are going to stay parted for a while.’

‘I chopped her.’

‘How?’

‘On her titties, ear to ear and in half. Chop. Chop. Chop.’

Russ sighed. ‘Let’s backtrack, Joe. You flew out of Dix on Wednesday, January eighth, you landed at Camp MacArthur that night. You and Johnnie are in LA, anxious to sow some wild oats. Where did you go first? Hollywood Boulevard? Sunset Strip? The beach? Where?’

Dulange cracked his knuckles. ‘Nathan’s Tattoo Parlor, 463 North Alvarado.’

‘What did you do there?’

Crazy Joe rolled up his right sleeve, revealing a forked snake’s tongue with ‘Frenchy’ emblazoned below it. Flexing his bicep, the tattoo stretched. Dulange said, ‘I’m a Frenchman.’

Millard pulled his patented reversal. ‘I’m a cop, and I’m getting bored. When I get bored, Detective Bleichert takes over. Detective Bleichert was once the tenth-ranked light heavyweight in the world, and he is not a nice man. Right, partner?’

I balled my fists. ‘I’m a German.’

Dulange laughed. ‘No tickee, no washee. No Johnnie, no story.’

I almost leaped across the table at him. Russ grabbed my elbow and held it, viselike, while he bargained. ‘Joe, I’ll make you a deal. First you convince us you *knew* Betty Short. Give us some facts. Names, dates, descriptions. You do that, and when we take our first break, you and Johnnie can go back to your cell and get reacquainted. What do you say?’

‘Johnnie pint?’

‘No, his big brother Johnnie fifth.’

The Frenchman grabbed the pack of butts and shook one loose; Russ had his lighter out and extended. Dulange took a monumental drag, exhaling a rush of words along with the smoke:

‘After the tattoo joint, me and Johnnie got a cab downtown and got a room. Havana Hotel, Ninth and Olive, deucesky a night, big cockroaches. They started makin’ a ruckus, so I put out mousetraps. That killed ’em. Me and Johnnie slept it off, then the next day we went cunt chasin’. No luck. Next day I get me this Filipino cunt at the bus depot. She says she needs bus fare to Frisco, so I offer her a fivesky to take on me and Johnnie. She says tensky minumum for two guys. I say Johnnie’s hung like Jesus, she should pay me. We go back to the hotel, all the cockroaches got loose from the traps. I introduce her to Johnnie, tell her he goes first. She gets scared, says, “You think you’re Fatty Arbuckle?” I tell her I’m a Frenchman, who does she think she is, thinks she can high-hat Johnnie Red?

‘Cockroaches start howlin’ like niggers. The Filipino says Johnnie’s got sharp teeth, no sir. She runs like sixty, me and Johnnie hole up till late Saturday. We want cunt bad. We go by this army-navy on Broadway, and I get me some ribbons for my Ike jacket. DSC with oak leaf, silver star, bronze star, ribbons for all the Jap campaigns. I look like George S. Patton, only hung bigger. Me and Johnnie go to this bar called the Night Owl. Dahlia sashays in, Johnnie says, “Yes sir, that’s my baby, no sir, don’t mean maybe, yes sir, that’s my baby now.”’

Dulange stubbed out his cigarette and reached for the pack. Russ jotted notes; I figured time and location, remembering the Night Owl from my days working Central Patrol. I was on 6th and Hill – two blocks from the Biltmore Hotel, where Red Manley dropped Betty Short on Friday, January tenth. The Frenchman, DT recollections notwithstanding, had gained another notch of credibility.

Russ said, ‘Joe, this was Saturday the eleventh into Sunday the twelfth you’re talking about?’

Dulange fired up another cigarette. ‘I’m a Frenchman, not a calendar. Sunday follows Saturday, you figure it out.’

‘Go on.’

‘Anyhow, Dahlia, me and Johnnie have a little chat, and I invite her over to the hotel. We get there and the cockroaches are loose, singin’ and bitin’ at the woodwork. Dahlia says she won’t spreadsky ’less I kill ’em. I grab Johnnie and start boppin’ ’em with him, Johnnie told me it don’t hurt. But the Dahlia cunt won’t spreadsky till the roaches are disposed of scientific style. I go down the street and get this doctor. He gives the roaches poison injections for a fivesky. Me and Dahlia fuck like bunnies, Johnnie Red watches. He’s mad, ’cause Dahlia’s so good I don’t want to give him none.’

I threw in a cut-the-shit question: ‘Describe her body. Do a good job, or you won’t see Johnnie Red until you get out of the stockade.’

Dulange’s face went soft; he looked like a little kid threatened with the loss of his teddy bear. Russ said, ‘Answer the man’s question, Joe.’

Dulange grinned. ‘Till I cut ’em off, she had perky little titties with pink nipples. Kinda thick legs, nice bush. She had them moles I told Major Carroll about, and she had these scratches on her back, real fresh, like she’d just took a whippin’.’

I tingled, remembering the ‘soft lash marks’ the coroner mentioned at the autopsy. Russ said, ‘Go on, Joe.’

Dulange ghoul grinned. ‘Then Dahlia starts actin’ nutso, saying’, “How come you’re only a corporal if you won all them medals?” She starts callin’ me Matt and Gordon and keeps talkin’ about our baby, even though we just did it once, and I wore a safe. Johnnie gets spooked, and him and the cockroaches start singing’, “No sir, that *ain’t* my baby.’ I want more cuntsky, so I take Dahlia down the street to see the roach doctor. I slip him a tensky, and he gives her a fake examination and tells her, “The baby will be healthy and arrive in six months.”’

More confirmation, smack in the middle of a DT haze – the Matt and Gordon were obviously Matt Gordon and Joseph Gordon Fickling, two of Betty Short’s fantasy husbands. I thought 50–50, let’s close it out for Big Lee Blanchard; Russ said, ‘Then what, Joe?’

Dulange looked genuinely puzzled – pas bravado, booze-brain memories and a desire to be reunited with Johnnie Red. ‘Then I sliced her.’

‘Where?’

‘In half.’

‘No, Joe. Where did you perform the murder?’

‘Oh. At the hotel.’

‘What room number?’

‘116.’

‘How’d you get the body to 39th and Norton?’

‘I stole a car.’

‘What kind of car?’

‘A Chevy.’

‘Make and model?’

‘’43 sedan.’

‘American cars weren’t manufactured during the war, Joe. Try again.’

‘’47 sedan.’

‘Somebody left the keys in a nice new car like that? In downtown LA?’

‘I hot-wired it.’

‘How do you hot-wire a car, Joe?’

‘What?’

‘Explain the procedure to me.’

‘I forgot how I did it. I was drunk.’

I cut in: ‘Where’s 39th and Norton?’

Dulange toyed with the cigarette pack. ‘It’s near Crenshaw Boulevard and Coliseum Street.’

‘Tell me something that wasn’t in the papers.’

‘I cut her to ear to ear.’

‘Everybody knows that.’

‘Me and Johnnie raped her.’

‘She wasn’t raped, and Johnnie would have left marks. There weren’t any. Why’d you kill her?’

‘She was a bad fuck.’

‘Bullshit. You said Betty fucked like a rabbit.’

‘A bad rabbit.’

‘All cats are gray in the dark, shitbird. Why’d you kill her?’

‘She wouldn’t go French.’

‘That’s no reason. You can get French at any five-dollar whorehouse. A Frenchman like you should know that.’

‘She gave bad French.’

‘There’s no such thing, shitbird.’

‘I chopped her!’

I slammed the tabletop à la Harry Sears. ‘You’re a lying frog son of a bitch!’

The JA man got to his feet; Dulange bawled, ‘I want my Johnnie.’

Russ told the captain, ‘Have him back here in six hours,’ and smiled at me – the softest smile I’d ever seen him give.

So we left it at 50–50 moving toward 75–25 against. Russ left to call in his report and dispatch an SID team over to Room 116 of the Havana Hotel to check for bloodstains; I went to sleep in the BOQ room Major Carroll assigned us. I dreamed of Betty Short and Fatty Arbuckle in black and white; when the alarm went off I reached for Madeleine.

Opening my eyes, I saw Russ, dressed in a clean suit. He handed me a newspaper and said, ‘Never underestimate Ellis Loew.’

It was a Newark tabloid job bearing the headline: ‘Fort Dix Soldier Culprit in Sinsational Los Angeles Murder!’ Below the banner print were side-by-side photos of Frenchman Joe Dulange and Loew, posed theatrically behind his desk. The text read:

> In a scoop to our sister publication the Los Angeles *Mirror*, Los Angeles Deputy District Attorney Ellis Loew, Chief Legal Officer on the mystifying ‘Black Dahlia’ murder case, announced a major breakthrough last night. ‘I have just been informed by two of my closest colleagues, Lieutenant Russell Millard and Officer Dwight Bleichert, that Fort Dix, New Jersey Corporal Joseph Dulange has confessed to the murder of Elizabeth Short, and that the confession has been validated by facts that only the killer would know. Corporal Dulange is a known degenerate, and I will be supplying the press with more facts on the confession as soon as my men return Dulange to Los Angeles for arraignment.’
>
> The Elizabeth Short case has baffled authorities since the morning of January 15, when Miss Short’s nude, mutilated body, cut in half at the waist, was found in a vacant lot in Los Angeles. Deputy DA Loew would not reveal the details of Corporal Dulange’s confession, but he did say that Dulange was a known intimate of Miss Short. ‘Details will be forthcoming,’ he said. ‘The important thing is that

this fiend is in custody, where he will not kill again.’

I laughed. ‘What did you really tell Loew?’

‘Nothing. When I talked to Captain Jack the first time, I told him Dulange was a strong possible. He bawled me out for not reporting before we left, and that was it. The second time I called I told him Dulange was starting to look like another crazy. He got very upset, and now I know why.’

I stood up and stretched. ‘Let’s just hope he really killed her.’

Russ shook his head. ‘SID said there’s no bloodstains in the hotel room, and no running water to drain the body. And Carroll had a tri-state bulletin out on Dulange’s whereabouts January tenth through the seventeenth – drunk tanks, hospitals, the works. We just got a kickback: Frenchy was in the jail ward of St Patrick’s Hospital in Brooklyn January fourteenth to the seventeenth. Severe DTs. He was released that morning and picked up in Penn Station two hours later. *The man is clean.*’

I didn’t know who to be mad at. Loew and company wanted to clear the slate any way possible, Millard wanted justice, I was going home to headlines that made me look like a fool.

‘What about Dulange? You want to brace him again?’

‘And hear about more singing cockroaches? No. Carroll confronted him with the kickback. He said he made up the killing story to get publicity. He wants to reconcile with his first wife, and he thought the attention would get him some sympathy. I talked to him again, and it was nothing but DT stuff. There’s nothing more he can tell us.’

‘Jesus Christ.’

‘The savior indeed. Joe’s getting a quickie discharge and we’re getting a flight back to LA in forty-five minutes. So get dressed, partner.’

I put on my stale clothes, then Russ and I walked out to the sallyport to wait for the jeep that would take us to the airstrip. In the distance, I could see a tall uniformed figure approaching. I shivered against the cold; the tall man got closer. I saw that it was none other than Corporal Joseph Dulange.

Reaching the sallyport, he held out a morning tabloid and poked at his picture on the front page. ‘I got the whole hog, you’re small print where Krauts belong.’

I smelled Johnnie Red on his breath and sucker-punched him square in the chops. Dulange went down like a ton of bricks; my right hand throbbed. Russ Millard’s look reminded me of Jesus getting ready to rebuke the heathens. I said, ‘Don’t be so goddamn proper. Don’t be such a fucking saint.’

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Ellis Loew said, ‘I called this little meeting for several reasons, Bucky. One is to apologize for jumping the gun on Dulange. I was precipitous in talking to my newspaper people, and you got hurt. I apologize for that.’

I looked at Loew, and at Fritz Vogel sitting beside him. The ‘little meeting’ was in the living room of Fritzie’s house; the two days of Dulange headlines portrayed me as no worse than an overeager cop on a wild goose chase. ‘What do you want, Mr. Loew?’

Fritzie laughed; Loew said, ‘Call me Ellis.’

The setup hit a new bottom in the sublety department – way below the highballs and bowl of pretzels Fritzie’s hausfrau had served as amenities. I was supposed to meet Madeleine in an hour – and off-duty fraternizing with my boss was the last thing in the world I wanted. ‘Okay, Ellis.’

Loew bristled at my tone. ‘Bucky, we’ve clashed a number of times in the past. Maybe we’re even clashing now. But I think we agree on a few things. We’d both like to see the Short case closed out and get back to normal business. You want to go back to Warrants, and as much as I would like to prosecute the killer, my part in the investigation has gotten out of hand, and it’s time that I returned to the old cases on my docket.’

I felt like a bush league cardsharp holding a royal flush. ‘What do you want, Ellis?’

‘I want to return you to Warrants tomorrow, and I want to give the Short case a last go before I return to my old caseload. We’re both comers, Bucky. Fritzie wants you for his partner when he gets his lieutenancy, and—’

‘Russ Millard wants me when Harry Sears retires.’

Fritzie took a belt of his highball. ‘You’re too raw for him, boyo. He’s told people you can’t control your temper. Old Russ is a sob sister, and I’m much more your type.’

It was a good wild card; I thought of the disgusted look Russ gave me after I coldcocked Joe Dulange. ‘What do you want, *Ellis*?’

‘Very well, *Dwight*, I’ll tell you. There are four confessors still being held at City Jail. They’ve got no alibis for Betty Short’s missing days, they weren’t coherent when they were first questioned, and they are all violent, frothing-at-the-mouth lunatics. I want them reinterrogated, with what you might call “appropriate props.” It’s a muscle job, and Fritzie wanted Bill Koenig for it, but he’s a bit to enamored of violence, so I picked you. So, *Dwight*, yes or no. Back to Warrants or Homicide shitwork until Russ Millard gets tired of you? Millard is a patient, forbearing man, *Dwight*. That might be a long time.’

My royal flush collapsed. ‘Yes.’

Loew beamed. ‘Go to the city jail now. The night jailer has released waivers for the four men. There’s a drunk wagon in the nightwatch lot, keys under the mat. Drive the suspects to 1701 South Alameda, meet Fritzie. Welcome back to Warrants, *Dwight*.’

I stood up. Loew took a pretzel from the bowl and nibbled it daintily; Fritzie drained his glass, his hands shaking.

The loonies were waiting for me in a holding tank, wearing jail denims, chained together and manacled at the ankles. The waivers the jailer had given me came with mug shots and rap sheets carbons attached; when the cell door was racked electronically, I matched pictures to faces.

Paul David Orchard was short and burly, with a flat nose spread across half his face and long, pomade-lacquered blond hair; Cecil Thomas Durkin was a fiftyish mulatto, bald, freckled, close to six and a half feet tall. Charles Michael Issler had enormous sunken brown eyes, and Loren (NMI) Bidwell was a frail old man, shaking from palsy, liver spots covering his skin. He looked so pathetic that I double-checked his sheet to make sure I had the right man; child molesting beefs running back to 1911 told me I did. 'Out in the catwalk,' I said. 'Roll it up now.'

The four shuffled out, scissor-walking sideways, their chains dragging the floor. I pointed them to a side exit adjoining the catwalk; the jailer opened the door from outside. The loony conga line scissored into the parking lot; the jailer held a bead on them while I found the drunk wagon and backed it up.

The jailer opened the wagon's back door; I checked the rearview mirror and watched my cargo climb aboard. They were whispering among themselves, taking gulps of the crisp night air as they stumbled up and in. The jailer locked the door behind them and signaled me with his gun barrel; I took off.

1701 South Alameda was in the East LA Industrial District, about a mile and a half from the city jail. Five minutes later, I found it – a giant warehouse smack in the middle of a block of giant warehouses, the only one with its street facade illuminated: KOUNTY KING LUNCH MEAT – SERVING LOS ANGELES COUNTY WITH INSTITUTIONAL FOOD SINCE 1923. I tapped the horn as I parked; a door beneath the sign opened up, the light went off, Fritzie Vogel was standing there with his thumbs hooked in his belt.

I got out and unlocked the back door. The loonies stumbled into the street; Fritzie called, 'This way, gentlemen.' The four scissor-walked in the direction of the voice; a light went on in back of Fritzie. I secured the van and walked over.

Fritzie ushered the last loony in and greeted me in the doorway. 'County kickbacks, boyo. The man who owns this place owes Sheriff Biscailuz, and he's got a plainclothes lieutenant who's got a doctor brother who owes me. You'll see what I'm talking about in a while.'

I shut the door and bolted it; Fritzie led me past the scissor-walkers and down a hall reeking of meat. At the end, it opened into a huge room – sawdust-covered cement floors, row after row of rusted meathooks hanging from the ceiling. Sides of beef dangled from over half of them, in the open at room temperature while horseflies feasted. My stomach looped; then, at the rear, I saw four chairs stationed directly beneath four unused hooks and got the picture for real.

Fritzie was unlocking the loonies' manacles and cuffing their hands in front of them. I stood by and gauged reactions. Old Man Bidwell's palsy was going into overdrive, Durkin was humming to himself, Orchard sneered, his head cocked to one side, like his butch-waxed pompadour was weighing it down. Only Charles Issler looked lucid enough to be concerned – he was fretting his hands and looking from Fritzie to me, his eyes constantly darting.

Fritzie took a roll of tape from his pocket and tossed it to me. 'Tape the rap sheets to the wall next to the hooks. Alphabetically, straight across.'

I did it, noticing a sheet-draped table wedged diagonally into a connecting doorway a few feet away. Fritzie led the prisoners over and made them stand on the chairs, then dangle their handcuff chains loosely over the meathooks. I skimmed the rap sheets, hoping for facts that would make me hate the four enough to get me through the night and back to Warrants.

Loren Bidwell was a three-time Atascadero loser, the falls for aggravated sexual assault on minors. Between prison jolts, he confessed to all the big sex crimes, and was even a major suspect in the Hickman child snuff case back in the ’20s. Cecil Durkin was a hophead, a knife fighter and a jailhouse rape-o who played jazz drums with some good combos; he took two Quentin jolts for Arson and was caught masturbating at the scene of his last torch – the home of a bandleader who had allegedly stiffed him on payment for a nightclub gig. That fall cost him twelve years in stir; since his release he’d been working as a dishwasher, living at a Salvation Army domicile.

Charles Issler was a pimp and career confessor specializing in copping to hooker homicides. His three procuring beefs had netted him a year county jail time; his phony confessions two ninety-day observation stints at the Camarillo nut farm. Paul Orchard was a jack roller, a male prostitute, and a former San Bernardino County deputy sheriff. On top of his vice beefs, he had two convictions for grievous aggravated assault.

A little surge of hate juice entered me. It felt tenuous, like I was about to go into the ring against a guy I wasn’t sure I could take. Fritzie said, ‘A charming quartet, huh, boyo?’

‘Real choirboys.’

Fritzie curled a come-hither finger at me; I walked over and faced the four suspects. My hate juice was holding as he said, ‘You all confessed to killing the Dahlia. We can’t prove you did, so it’s up to you to convince us. Bucky, you ask questions about the girlie’s missing days. I’ll listen in until I hear syphilitic lies.’

I braced Bidwell first. His palsy spasms had the chair rocking underneath him; I reached up and grabbed the meat hook to hold him steady. ‘Tell me about Betty Short, pops. Why’d you kill her?’

The old man beseeched me with his eyes; I looked away. Fritzie, perusing the rap sheets on the wall, picked up on the silence. ‘Don’t be timid, boyo. That bird made little boys suck his hog.’

My hand twitched and jerked the hook. ‘Come clean, pop. Why’d you snuff her?’

Bidwell answered in a breathless geezer’s voice: ‘I didn’t kill her, mister. I just wanted a ticket to the honor farm. Three hots and a cot’s all I wanted. Please, mister.’

The geez didn’t look strong enough to *lift* a knife, let alone tie a woman down and carry the two halves of her stiff out to a car. I moved to Cecil Durkin.

‘Tell me about it, Cecil.’

The hepcat mocked me. ‘Tell you about it? You get that line from *Dick Tracy* or *Gangbusters*?’

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Fritzie watching, measuring me. ‘One more time, shitbird. Tell me about you and Betty Short.’

Durkin giggled. ‘I fucked Betty Short and I fucked your mama! I’m your daddy!’

I one-two’d him in the solar plexus, hard little shots. Durkin’s legs buckled, but he kept his feet on the chair. He gasped for breath, got a lungful and went back to bravado: ‘You think you clever, don’t you? You the bad guy, your buddy the nice guy. You gonna hit me, he gonna rescue me. Don’t you clowns know that bit went out with vaudeville?’

I massaged my right hand, still bone bruised from Lee Blanchard and Joe Dulange. 'I'm the nice guy, Cecil. Keep that in mind.'

It was a good line. Durkin fumbled for a comeback; I turned my attention to Charles Michael Issler.

He looked down and said, 'I didn't kill Liz. I don't know why I do these things, and I apologize. So please don't let that man hurt me.'

His manner was quietly sincere, but something about him put me off. I said, 'Convince me.'

'I … I can't. I just didn't.'

I thought of Issler as a pimp, Betty as a part-time prostie, and wondered if there was a possible connection between them – then remembered that the hookers in the little black book questionings said she always worked freelance. I said, 'Did you know Betty Short?'

'No.'

'Did you know of her?'

'No.'

'Why'd you confess to her murder?'

'She … she looked so sweet and pretty and I felt so bad when I saw her picture in the paper. I … I always confess to the pretty ones.'

'Your rap sheet says you only cop to hooker snuffs. Why?'

'Well, I …'

'You hit your girls, Charlie? You get them gone on hop? You make them service your pals—'

I stopped, thinking of Kay and Bobbie De Witt. Issler bobbed his head up and down, slowly at first, then harder and harder. Soon he was sobbing, 'I do such bad things, nasty, nasty things. Nasty, nasty, nasty.'

Fritzie walked over and stood beside me, brass knuckles coiled in both fists. He said, 'This kid gloves routine is getting us nowhere,' and kicked Issler's chair out from under him. The confessor-pimp screamed and flopped like an impaled fish; bones snapped as the cuffs caught the brunt of his weight. Fritzie said, 'Watch, boyo.'

Shouting, 'Jack Roller!' 'Nigger!' 'Baby fucker!' he kicked the other three chairs to the floor. Now there were confessors dangling four abreast, shrieking, grabbing at one another with their legs, an octopus in county jail denim. The screams sounded like one voice – until Fritzie zeroed in on Charles Michael Issler.

He roundhoused the knuckle dusters into his midsection, left-right, left-right, left-right. Issler screamed and gurgled; Fritzie yelled, 'Tell me about the Dahlia's missing days you syphilitic whoremonger!'

My legs felt like they were about to go. Issler screeched, 'I … don't … know … anything.' Fritzie shot him an uppercut to the crotch.

'*Tell me what you know!*'

'I knew you at Ad Vice!'

Fritzie winged rabbit punches. 'Tell me what you know! Tell me what your girls told you, you syphilitic whoremonger!'

Issler retched; Fritzie moved in close and worked his body. I heard ribs cracking, then stared off to my left, to a burglar alarm lever on the wall by the connecting doorway. I stared and stared and stared; Fritzie ran into my field of vision and wheeled over the sheet-covered table I'd noticed before.

The loonies flopped on their hooks, moaning low. Fritzie got right up next to me, cackled in my face, then whipped off the sheet.

The table held a naked female corpse, cut in half at the waist – a pudgy girl coiffed and made up to look like Elizabeth Short. Fritzie grabbed Charlie Issler by the scruff of the neck, hissing, ‘For your cutting pleasure, may I present Jane Doe number forty-three. You’re all going to slice her, and the best slicer buys the ticket!’

Issler shut his eyes and bit through his lower lip. Old Man Bidwell went purple, starting to foam at the mouth. I smelled loosed feces on Durkin and saw Orchard’s wrists broken, twisted to right angles, bones and tendons exposed. Fritzie pulled out a pachuco toad stabber and popped the blade. ‘Show me how you did it, you filths. Show me what didn’t get in the papers. Show me and I’ll be nice to you and make alllll your hurt go away. Bucky, take off their cuffs.’

My legs went. I stumbled into Fritzie, hurled him to the floor, ran for the alarm and pulled the lever. A code three response siren went off so good, so loud, so hard that it felt like its sound waves were what propelled me out of the warehouse and into the drunk wagon and all the way to Kay’s door with no excuses and words of loyalty for Lee.

So were Kay Lake and I formally joined.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Tripping that alarm was the costliest act of my life.

Loew and Vogel succeeded in putting the hush on it. I was booted off Warrants and back into uniform – swingwatch foot patrol out of Central Station, my old home. Lieutenant Jastrow, the watch boss, was thick with the demon DA. I could tell he was checking out my every act – waiting for me to snitch or rabbit or somehow follow up on the big wrong move I had to make.

I did nothing about it. It was the word of a five-year officer versus a twenty-two-year man and the city's future District Attorney, backed by their hole card: the radio car officers who responded to the alarm were made the new Central Division Warrants team, a piece of serendipity guaranteed to keep them quiet and happy. Two consolations kept me from going crazy: Fritzie didn't kill anybody, and when I checked the city jail release records I learned that the four confessors had been treated for 'car crash injuries' at Queen of Angels and shipped to different state ding farms for 'observation.' And my horror pushed me where I'd been too scared and stupid to go for a long, long time.

Kay.

That first night she was as much my grief catcher as my lover. I was afraid of noise and abrupt movement, so she undressed me and made me be still, murmuring, 'And all that,' every time I tried to talk about Fritzie or the Dahlia. She touched me so softly that it was hardly touching at all; I touched every whole and healthy part of her until I felt my own body cease to be fists and cop muscle. Then we roused each other slowly and made love, with Betty Short far away.

A week later I broke it off with Madeleine, the 'neighbor girl' whose identity I had kept secret from Lee and Kay. I didn't offer a reason, and the rich gutter crawler aced me as I was about to hang up the phone. 'Find somebody *safe*? You'll be back, you know. I look like her.'

Her.

A month passed. Lee didn't return, the two dope traffickers were convicted and hanged for the De Witt – Chasco killings, my Fire and Ice ad continued to run in all four LA dailies. The Short case moved from headlines to back pages, tips fell off to almost zero, everyone but Russ Millard and Harry Sears went back to their regular assignments. Still assigned to *Her,* Russ and Harry kept putting in straight eights at the Bureau and in the field, spending evenings at the El Nido, going over the master file. When I got off duty at 9:00, I'd visit for a while on my way to see Kay, quietly amazed at how obsessed Mr. Homicide was becoming, his family neglected as he prowled paper until midnight. The man inspired confession; when I told him the story of Fritzie and the warehouse, his absolution was a fatherly embrace and the admonishing, 'Take the Sergeant's Exam. In a year or so I'll go to Thad Green. He owes me one, and when Harry retires you'll be my partner.'

It was a promise to build on, and it kept bringing me back to the file. With my days free and Kay at work, I had nothing to do, so I read it over and over. The 'R,' 'S,' and 'T' folders were missing, which was an annoyance, but other than that it was perfection. My real woman had Betty Short pushed back across a Maginot Line into professional curiosity, and I kept reading, thinking and hypothesizing from the standpoint of becoming a good detective – the road I was on until I tripped that alarm. Sometimes I felt connections begging to be made, sometimes I cursed myself for not having ten percent more gray matter, sometimes the report carbons just made me think of Lee.

I continued with the woman he saved from a nightmare. Kay and I played house three and four times a week, the hours late now that I was working swingwatch. We made our tender kind of love and talked around the bad events of the past months, and as gentle and good as I was, I kept churning inside for an outside conclusion – Lee back, the Dahlia killer on a platter, one more Red Arrow shack with Madeleine or Ellis Loew and Fritzie Vogel nailed to a cross. What always came with it was a big, ugly replay of me hitting Cecil Durkin, followed by the question: how far would you have gone that night?

The beat was where it ate at me the most. I worked East 5th Street from Main to Stanford, skid row. Blood banks, liquor stores selling half pints and short dogs exclusively, fifty-cent-a-night flophouses and derelict missions. The unspoken rule down there was that foot beat hacks worked strong-arm. You broke up bottle gangs by whacking winos with your billy club; you hauled jigs out of the day labor joints when they insisted on getting hired. You rounded up drunks and ragpickers indiscriminately to meet the city quota, beating them down if they tried to run from the drunk wagon. It was attrition duty, and the only officers good at it were the transplanted Okie shitkickers hired in the manpower shortage during the war. I patrolled half-heartedly: little jabs with my stick, handing winos dimes and quarters to get them off the street and into the wine bars where I wouldn't have to roust them, low quotas on my drunk sweeps. I got a rep as the Central swingwatch 'sob sister'; twice Johnny Vogel saw me passing out chump change and hooted uproariously. Lieutenant Jastrow gave me a Class D fitness report my first month back in uniform – a clerical aide told me he cited my 'Reluctance to employ sufficient force with recalcitrant misdemeanants.' Kay got a kick out of the line, but I saw a stack of bum paper building up so high that all Russ Millard's juice wouldn't be able to return me to the Bureau.

So I was back where I was before the fight and the bond issue, only further east and on foot. Rumors raged on my way up to Warrants; now speculation centered on my fall. One story had me shitcanned for beating up Lee, others had me infringing on East Valley Division's process-serving territory, punking out on a bout with the 77th Street rookie who won the '46 Golden Gloves, incurring Ellis Loew's wrath by leaking Dahlia info to a radio station opposed to his upcoming DA candidacy. Every rumor portrayed me as a backstabber, a Bolshevik, a coward and a fool; when my second month's fitness report ended with the line, 'This officer's passive patrol behavior has earned him the enmity of every enforcement-minded policeman on his watch,' I started thinking of handing out five-spots to the winos and beatings to every bluesuit who looked at me even slightly hinky.

Then *she* came back.

I never thought about her on the beat; when I studied the file, it was just detective drudge work, facts and theorizing on a common DOA. When my lovemaking with Kay got too involved in affection, she came to help, served her purpose and was banished as soon as we finished. It was when I was asleep and helpless that she lived.

It was always the same dream. I was at the warehouse with Fritz Vogel, beating

Cecil Durkin to death. She watched screaming that none of the drool cases killed her, promising to love me if I made Fritzie quit hitting Charlie Issler. I stopped, wanting the sex. Fritzie continued his carnage, and Betty wept for Charlie while I had her.

I always woke up grateful for daylight, especially when Kay was beside me.

On April 4, almost two and a half months after Lee's disappearance, Kay got a letter on official LAPD stationery:

> 4/3/47
>
> Dear Miss Lake—
>
> This is to inform you that Leland C. Blanchard has been formally dismissed from the Los Angeles Police Department on grounds of moral turpitude, effective 3/15/47. You were the beneficiary of his Los Angeles City Credit Union account, and since Mr. Blanchard remains out of touch, we feel it is only fair to send you the existing balance.
>
> Best wishes,
> Leonard V. Strock,
> Sergeant,
> Personnel Division

A check for $14.11 was included. It made me killing mad, and I attacked the master file so I wouldn't attack my new enemy – the bureaucracy that owned me.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Two days later the connection jumped up off the carbon and grabbed me by the balls.

It was my own FI report, filed on 1/17/47. Under 'Marjorie Graham,' I had written: 'M. G. stated E. Short used nickname variations of "Elizabeth" according to the company she was with.'

Bingo.

I had heard Elizabeth Short called 'Betty,' 'Beth,' and once or twice 'Betsy,' but *only* Charles Michael Issler, a *pimp*, referred to her as 'Liz.' At the warehouse he had denied knowing her. I recalled that he didn't impress me as a killer, but that I still found him hinky. When I'd thought about the warehouse before, it was Durkin and the stiff that came on strong; now I replayed it strictly for facts:

Fritzie had beat Issler half to death, ignoring the other three loonies;

He had stressed side issues, shouting: 'Tell me what you know about the Dahlia's missing days,' 'Tell me what *you* know,' Tell me what your girls told you.'

Issler had answered back, 'I knew you at Ad Vice.'

I thought of Fritzie's hands shaking earlier that night; I remembered him shouting at Lorna Martilkova: 'You whored with the Dahlia, didn't you, girlie? *Tell me where you were during her lost days*.' Then the finale hit: Fritzie and Johnny Vogel whispering on the ride out to the Valley.

'*I proved I'm not no nancy boy. Homos couldn't do what I did*.'

'*Be still, damn you!*'

I ran out to the hall, fed the pay phone a nickel and dialed Russ Millard's number at the Bureau.

'Central Homicide, Lieutenant Millard.'

'Russ, it's Bucky.'

'Something wrong, bright penny? You sound shaky.'

'Russ, I think I've got something. I can't tell you now, but I need two favors.'

'This is about Elizabeth?'

'Yes. Goddamnit, Russ—'

'Hush, and tell me.'

'I need you to get me the Ad Vice file for Charles Michael Issler. He's got three pimping priors, so I know he'll have one.'

'And?'

I dry swallowed. 'I want you to check on Fritz Vogel's and John Vogel's whereabouts January tenth through fifteenth.'

'Are you telling me—'

'I'm telling you maybe. I'm telling you maybe real strong.'

There was a long silence, then: 'Where are you?'

'The El Nido.'

'Stay there. I'll call you back inside of half an hour.'

I hung up and waited, thinking of a sweet package of glory and revenge. Seventeen minutes later the phone rang; I pounded on it. 'Russ, what—'

'The file's missing. I checked the 'I's' myself. They were all put back unevenly, so my guess is that it was snatched recently. On the other, Fritzie was on duty at the Bureau straight through those days, racking up overtime on old cases, and Johnny was on vacation leave, where I don't know. Now, will you explain all this?'

I got an idea. 'Not now. Meet me here tonight. *Late*. If I'm not here, wait for me.'

'Bucky—'

'Later, padre.'

I called in sick that afternoon; that night I committed two felony B & E's.

My first victim was working swingwatch; I called Personnel Division and impersonated a city payroll clerk to get his home address and phone number. The catching officer kicked loose; at dusk I parked across the street and eyeballed the apartment house that John Vogel called home.

It was a stucco four flat on Mentone near the LA – Culver City border, a salmon-pink structure flanked by identical buildings painted light green and tan. There was a pay phone at the corner; I used it to dial Bad Breath Johnny's number, an extra precaution to make sure the bastard wasn't in. Twenty rings went unanswered. I walked calmly over, found a bottom floor door with 'Vogel' on the mail slot, worked a double-over hairpin into the keyhole and let myself in.

Inside, I held my breath, half expecting a killer dog to leap at me. I checked the luminous dial on my watch, decided ten minutes was tops and squinted for a light to turn on.

My eyes caught a floor lamp. I moved to it and pulled the cord, lighting up a tidy living room. There was a tidy bargain basement sofa with matching chairs, an imitation fireplace, cheesecake glossies of Rita Hayworth, Betty Grable and Ann Sheridan Scotch taped to the walls, what looked like a genuine captured Jap flag draped over the coffee table. The phone was on the floor by the sofa, with an address book next to it; I allotted half my time right there.

I checked every page. There was no Betty Short or Charles Issler, and none of the names listed were repeats from the master file or the names in Betty's 'little black book.' Five minutes down, five to go.

A kitchen, dinette and bedroom adjoined the living room. I turned off the lamp, moved in darkness to the half-open bedroom doorway and patted the inside wall for a light switch. Finding one, I flipped it on.

An unmade bed, four walls festooned with Jap flags and a big, scuffed chest of drawers were revealed. I opened the top drawer, saw three German Lugers, spare clips and a scattering of loose shells – and laughed at the taste of Axis Johnny. Then I opened the middle one, and a tingling was all over me.

Black leather harnesses, chains, whips, studded dog collars, Tijuana condoms that gave you a bludgeon-headed extra six inches. Smut books with pictures of naked women getting whipped by other women while they sucked harness-clad guys with big dicks. Close-up photos that captured fat, needle marks, chipped nail polish and dope-glazed eyes. No Betty Short, no Lorna Martilkova, no *Slave Girls from Hell* Egyptian backdrop or tie-in to Duke Wellington, but a parlay – whips to the coroner's 'light lash marks' – that was enough to nail Johnny Vogel as Dahlia suspect number one.

I shut the drawers, flicked off the light, tingle walked into the living room and turned on the lamp, then reached for the address book. 'Daddy & Mom's' number was GRanite-9401; if I got a no answer, B & E number two was a ten-minute drive away.

I dialed; Fritz Vogel's phone rang twenty-five times. I turned off the light and hauled ass.

Vogel Senior's small wood frame house was totally dark when I pulled up across from it. I sat behind the wheel remembering the layout from my previous visit, recalling two bedrooms off a long hallway, the kitchen, a rear service porch and a closed door across the hall from the bathroom. If Fritzie had a private den, that had to be it.

I took the driveway to the back of the house. The screen door to the service porch was open; I tiptoed past a washing machine to the barrier to the house proper. That door was solid wood, but feeling at the jamb I found it connected to the wall with a simple hook and eyelet. I shook the knob and felt plenty of give; if I could pop the little piece of metal, I was in.

I got down on my knees and patted the floor, stopping when my hand hit a skinny piece of metal. Pawing at it like a blind man, I realized I'd found an oil gauge dipstick. I smiled at my luck, stood up and popped the door open.

Thinking fifteen minutes tops, I moved through the kitchen, over to the hallway and down it, my hands in front of me to deflect unseen obstacles. A nightlight glowed inside the bathroom doorway – pointing me straight across to what I hoped was Fritzie's hideaway. I tried the knob – and the door opened.

The little room was pitch dark. I banged along the walls, hitting picture frames, feeling iceberg spooky until my leg grazed a tall wobbly object. It was about to topple when I snapped that it was a gooseneck lamp, reached for the top part and flipped the switch.

Light.

The pictures were photographs of Fritzie in uniform, in plainclothes, standing at attention with the rest of his 1925 Academy class. There was a desk positioned against the back wall, facing a window covered with a velvet curtain, a swivel chair and a filing cabinet.

I slid the top compartment open and fingered through manila folders stamped 'Intelligence Rpt – Bunco Division,' 'Intelligence Rpt – Burglary Division,' 'Intelligence Rpt – Robbery Division' – all with the names of individuals typed on side tabs. Wanting some kind of common denominator, I checked the first sheets of the next three folders I came to – finding only one carbon page in each of them.

But those single pieces of paper were enough.

They were financial accountings, list of bank balances and other assets, tallies made on known criminals that the Department couldn't legally touch. The routing designations at the top of each sheet spelled it out plain – it was the LAPD shooting the feds hot dope so that they could initiate tax evasion investigations. Handwritten notes – phone numbers, names and addresses – filled the margins, and I recognized Fritzie's Parker penmanship hand.

My breath came in short cold bursts as I thought: shake-down. He's either putting the screws to the hoods based on info in the rest of the files or selling them tip-offs on impending fed rousts.

Extortion, first degree.

Theft and harbouring of official LAPD documents.

Impeding the progress of federal investigations.

But no Johnny Vogel, Charlie Issler or Betty Short.

I tore through another fourteen folders, finding the same scrawled-over financial reports in all of them. I memorized the side tab names, then moved to the bottom compartment. I saw 'Known Offender Rpt – Administrative Vice Division' on the first file inside it – and knew I'd gotten the whole ball of wax.

Page one detailed the arrests, MO and confessing career of Charles Michael Issler, white male, born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1911; page two listed his 'Known Associates.' A June 1946 'whore book' check by his probation officer yielded six girls' names, followed by phone numbers and the arrest dates and dispositions of their hooking convictions. There were an additional four female names below the heading '? – No Prostitution Record.' The third name was 'Liz Short – Transient?'

I turned to page three and read down the column headed 'KAs, cont'; one name harpooned me. 'Sally Stinson' was in Betty Short's little black book, and none of the four questioning teams had been able to locate her. In brackets beside her name, some Ad Vice dick had penciled in, 'Works out of Biltmore bar – conventioneer johns.' Doodles in Fritzie's ink color surrounded the entry.

I forced myself to think like a detective, not a revenge-happy kid. The extortion stuff aside, it was certain that Charlie Issler knew Betty Short. Betty knew Sally Stinson, who hooked out of the Biltmore. Fritz Vogel didn't want anybody to know it. He probably arranged the warehouse stunt to find out how much Sally and/or his other girls had told Issler about Betty and the men she was recently with.

'I proved I'm not no nancy boy. Homos couldn't do what I did. *I'm not cherry no more,* so don't say nancy boy.'

I put the folders back in order, closed the cabinet, hit the light and relatched the backdoor before walking out the front like I owned the place, wondering briefly if there was any connection between Sally Stinson and the missing 'S's' in the master file. Treading air to my car, I knew it couldn't be – Fritzie didn't know that the El Nido work room existed. Then another thought took over: if Issler had blabbed about 'Liz' and her tricks I would have overheard. Fritzie was confident he could keep me quiet. It was an underestimation that I was going to bleed him for.

Russ Millard was waiting for me with two words: 'Report, Officer.'

I told him the whole story in detail. When I finished, he saluted Elizabeth Short on the wall, said, 'We're making progress, dear,' and formally stuck out his hand.

We shook, sort of like father and son after the big game. 'What next, padre?'

'Next you go back to duty like none of this happened. Harry and I will brace Issler at the nut farm, and I'll assign some men to look for Sally Stinson on the QT.'

I swallowed. 'And Fritzie?'

'I'll have to think about it.'

'I want him nailed.'

'I know you do. But you keep one thing in mind. The men that he extorted are criminals who would never testify against him in court, and if he gets wind of this and destroys the carbons, we wouldn't even be able to get him for an interdepartmental offence. *All* of this is going to require corroboration, so for now it's just us. And *you* had better settle down and control your temper until it's over.'

I said, 'I want in on the collar.'

Russ nodded. 'I wouldn't have it any other way.' He tipped his hat to Elizabeth on the way out the door.

I went back to swingwatch and played sob sister; Russ put men out to look for Sally Stinson. A day later, he called me at home with one dose of bad news, one of good:

Charles Issler had found a lawyer to file him a writ of habeas corpus; he had been released from the Mira Loma ding farm three weeks before. His LA apartment had been cleaned out; he couldn't be found. That was a kick in the balls, but the confirmation on the Vogel extortion front made up for it.

Harry Sears checked Fritzie's felony arrest records – from Bunco in 1934 up through his current position in Central Detectives. At one time or another Vogel had arrested every single man on the LAPD-FBI financial carbons. And the feds did not indict a single one of them.

I rotated off-duty the next day, and spent it with the master file, thinking *corroboration*. Russ called to say that he hadn't got any leads on Issler, that it looked like he'd blown town. Harry was keeping Johnny Vogel under a loose surveillance on and off duty; a buddy working West Hollywood Sheriff's Vice had kicked loose with some KA addresses – friends of Sally Stinson. Russ told me a half dozen times to take it easy and not jump the gun. He knew damn well I already had Fritzie in Folsom and Johnny in the Little Green Room.

I was scheduled to go back on duty Thursday, and got up early in order to spend a long morning with the master file. I was making coffee when the phone rang.

I picked it up. 'Yes?'

'It's Russ. We've got Sally Stinson. Meet me at 1546 North Havenhurst in half an hour.'

'Rolling.'

The address was a Spanish castle apartment house: whitewashed cement shaped into ornamental turrets, balconies topped by sun-weathered awnings. Walkways led up to the individual doors; Russ was standing by the one on the far right.

I left the car in a red zone and trotted over. A man in a disheveled suit and paper party hat strutted down the walkway, a slap-happy grin on his face. He slurred, 'Next shift, huh? Twosies on onesies, ooh la la!'

Russ led me up the steps. I rapped on the door; a not-young blonde with mussed hair and smeared makeup threw it open, spat, 'What did you forget this time?,' then, 'Oh shit.'

Russ held out his badge. 'LAPD. Are you Sally Stinson?'

'No, I'm Eleanor Roosevelt. Listen, I put out for the sheriff's more ways than one lately, so I'm tapped in the cash department. You want the other?'

I started to elbow my way inside; Russ grabbed my arm. 'Miss Stinson, it's about Liz Short and Charlie Issler, and it's here or the women's jail.'

Sally Stinson clutched the front of her robe and pressed it to her bodice. She said, 'Listen, I told the other guy,' then stopped and hugged herself. She looked like the floozy victim confronting the monster in old horror movies; I knew exactly who *her* monster was. 'We're not with him. We just want to talk to you about Betty Short.'

Sally appraised us. 'And he ain't gonna know?'

Russ flashed his father-confessor smile and lied. 'No, this is strictly confidential.'

Sally stood aside. Russ and I entered an archetypal trick pad front room – cheap furniture, bare walls, suitcases lined up in one corner for a quick getaway. Sally bolted the door. I said, 'Who's this guy we're talking about, Miss Stinson?'

Russ straightened the knot in his necktie; I clammed up. Sally jabbed a finger at the couch. 'Let's do this quicksville. Rehashing old grief is against my religion.'

I sat down; stuffing and the point of a spring popped out a few inches from my knee. Russ settled into a chair and got out his notebook; Sally took a perch on top of the suitcases, back to the wall and eyes on the door like a seasoned getaway artist. She started with the most often heard Short case intro line: 'I don't know who killed her.'

Russ said, 'Fair enough, but let's take it from the beginning. When did you meet Liz Short?'

Sally scratched a hickey on her cleavage. ‘Last summer. June, maybe.’

‘Where?’

‘At the bar at the Yorkshire House Grill downtown. I was half in the bag, waiting for my … waiting for Charlie I. Liz was putting the moves on this rich-looking old hairbag, coming on too strong. She scared him off. Then we started talking and Charlie showed up.’

I said, ‘Then what?’

‘Then we all discovered we had a lot in common. Liz said she was broke, Charlie says “you wanta make a quick double-saw,” Liz says “yeah,” Charlie sends us over for a twosie at the textile salesman’s convention at the Mayflower.’

‘And?’

‘And Liz was gooood. You want details, wait till I publish my memoirs. But I’ll tell you this. I’m pretty good at faking like I’m loving it, but Liz was great. She had this bee in her bonnet about keeping her stockings on, but she was like a virtuoso. Academy Award stuff.’

I thought of the stag film – and the strange gash on Betty’s left thigh. ‘Do you know if Liz ever appeared in any pornographic movies?’

Sally shook her head. ‘No, but if she did she’d be gooood.’

‘You know a man named Walter “Duke” Wellington?’

‘No.’

‘Linda Martin?’

‘Ixnay.’

Russ took over. ‘Did you turn any other tricks with Liz?’

Sally said, ‘Four or five, last summer. Hotel jobs. All conventioneers.’

‘Remember any names? Organizations? Descriptions?’

Sally laughed and scratched her cleavage. ‘Mr. Policeman, my first commandment is keep your eyes shut and try to forget. I’m good at it.’

‘Were any of the hotel jobs at the Biltmore?’

‘No. The Mayflower, the Hacienda House. Maybe the Rexford.’

‘Did any of the men react strangely to Liz? Get rough with her?’

Sally hooted. ‘Mostly they were just happy ’cause she faked it so good.’

Itchy to get at Vogel, I changed the subject. ‘Tell me about you and Charlie Issler. Did you know he confessed to the Dahlia killing?’

Sally said, ‘Not at first I didn’t. Then … well, anyway, I wasn’t surprised when I did hear. Charlie’s got this what you might wanta call compulsion to confess. Like if a prostie gets killed and it makes the papers, bye-bye Charlie and get out the iodine when he comes back, ’cause he always makes sure the rubber hose boys work him over.’

Russ said, ‘Why do you think he does it?’

‘How’s a guilty conscience sound?’

I said, ‘How’s this sound? You tell us where you were January tenth through fifteenth, and you tell us about this guy we all don’t like.’

‘Sounds like I’ve really got a choice.’

‘You do. Talk to us here or to a butch matron downtown.’

Russ tugged at his tie – hard. ‘Do you remember where you were on those dates, Miss Stinson?’

Sally fished cigarettes and matches from her pockets and lit up. ‘Everybody who knew Liz remembers where they were then. You know, like when FDR died. You keep wishing you could go back, you know, and change it.’

I started to apologize for my tactics; Russ beat me to it. ‘My partner didn’t mean to get nasty, Miss Stinson. This is a grudge thing for him.'

It was the perfect come-on. Sally Stinson tossed her cigarette on the floor, ground it out with her bare feet, then patted the suitcases. 'I'm adios as soon as you walk out the door. I'll tell you, but I won't tell no DAs, no Grand Juries, no other cops. I mean it. You walk out that door and it's bye-bye Sally.'

Russ said, 'It's a deal.' Sally's color rose; that and the anger in her eyes knocked a good ten years off her. 'On Friday the tenth I got a call at this hotel where I was staying. A guy said he's a friend of Charlie and he wants to buy me for this young guy he knows who's cherry. Two-day session at the Biltmore, a C-note and a half. I say I ain't seen Charlie in a while, how'd you get my number? The guy says "Never mind, meet me and the kid outside the Biltmore tomorrow at noon."

'I'm broke, so I say okay, and I meet the two guys. Big fat peas in a pod packing hardware, I know it's a father and son cop act. Money changes hands, sonny's got halitosis but I've seen worse. He tells me daddy's name and I get a little scared, but daddy amscrays and the kid's so lame I know I can take care of him.'

Sally lit another cigarette. Russ passed me Personnel photos of the Vogel boys; I handed them to her. She said, 'On the button,' burned their faces off with the tip of her Chesterfield, then got on with it.

'Vogel had a suite set up. Sonny and I tricked, and he tried to get me to play with these creepy sex gadgets he brought. I said, "Ixnay, ixnay, ixnay." He said he'll give me an extra twenty if he can whip me soft for fun. I said, "When hell freezes." Then he—'

I broke off the story. 'Did he talk about stag films? Lezzie stuff?'

Sally snorted. 'He talked about baseball and his peter. He called it the Big Schnitzel, and you know what? It wasn't.'

Russ said, 'Go on, Miss Stinson.'

'Well, we screw all afternoon, and I listen to the kid prattle about the Brooklyn Dodgers and the Big Schnitzel until I am blue in the face. Then I say, "Let's get dinner and some fresh air," and we go down to the lobby.

'And there's Liz, sitting all by herself. She tells me she needs money, and since I can tell sonny likes her, I set up a trick within a trick. We go back up to the suite, and I take a breather while they go at it in the bedroom. Liz skips out about twelve-thirty, whispers "Little Schnitzel" to me, and I never saw her again until I saw her picture all over the papers.'

I looked at Russ. He mouthed the word, 'Dulange'; I nodded, picturing Betty Short on the loose until she met Frenchman Joe on the morning of the twelfth. The missing Dahlia days were coming together.

Russ said, 'And you and John Vogel went back to your assignation then?'

Sally tossed the Personnel photos on the floor. 'Yes.'

'Did he talk to you about Liz Short?'

'He said she loved the Big Schnitzel.'

'Did he say that they'd made plans to meet again?'

'No.'

'Did he mention his father and Liz in any context at all?'

'No.'

'What did he say about Liz?'

Sally hugged herself. 'He said she liked to play his kind of games. I said, "What kind of games?" Sonny said, "Master and Slave" and "Cop and Whore."'

I said, 'Finish it up. Please.'

Sally eyed the door. 'Two days after Liz got in all the papers, Fritz Vogel came by my hotel and told me sonny said he'd tricked with her. He told me he'd got my name from some police file, and he questioned me about my … procurors. I mentioned Charlie I, and Vogel remembered him from when he worked this hotshot Vice detail. Then he got spooked, 'cause he remembered Charlie had this confessing problem. He called some partner of his on my phone and told him to yank some Vice file of Charlie's, then he made another call and went crazy, 'cause whoever he talked to told him Charlie was already in custody, that he'd already confessed to Liz.

'He beat me up then. He asked me all these questions, like whether Liz would mention tricking with a cop's son to Charlie. I told him Charlie and Liz were just acquaintances, that he'd just sent her out a few times, months and months ago, but he kept hitting me anyway, and he told me he'd kill me if I told the police about his son and the Dahlia.'

I got up to go; Russ sat still. 'Miss Stinson, you said that when John Vogel told you his father's name you got scared. Why?'

Sally whispered, 'A story I heard.' Suddenly she looked beyond used-up – ancient.

'What sort of story?'

Sally's whisper cracked. 'How he got kicked off that hotshot Vice job.'

I remembered Bill Koenig's rendition – that Fritzie caught syphilis from hookers when he worked Ad Vice, and was canned to take the mercury cure. 'He caught a bad dose. Right?'

Sally dredged up a clear voice: 'I heard he got the syph and went crazy. He thought a colored girl gave it to him, so he shook down this house in Watts and made all the girls do him before he took the cure. He made them rub his thing in their eyes, and two of the girls went blind.'

My legs were weaker than they were the night at the warehouse. Russ said, 'Thank you, Sally.'

I said, 'Let's go get Johnny.'

We took my car downtown. Johnny had been working a daywatch foot beat with overtime on swing, so at 11:00 A.M. I knew there was a good chance of snagging him alone.

I drove slowly, looking for his familiar blue serge figure. Russ had a syringe and Pentothal ampule he'd kept from the Red Manley interrogations out on the dashboard; even he knew this was a muscle job. We were cruising the alley in back of the Jesus Saves Mission when I spotted him – solo rousting a pair of piss bums scrounging in a trash can.

I got out of the car and yelled, 'Hey, Johnny!' Vogel Junior shook a finger at the winos and sidled over, thumbs in his Sam Browne belt.

He said, 'What you doin' in civvies, Bleichert?' and I hooked him to the gut. He bent over double, and I grabbed his head and banged it into the roof of the car. Johnny slumped, his lights dimming. I held him; Russ rolled up his left sleeve and jacked the silly syrup into the vein at the crook of his elbow.

Now he was out cold. I took the .38 from his holster, tossed it on to the front seat and stuffed Johnny into the back. I got in with him; Russ took the wheel. We peeled rubber down the alley, the piss bums waving their short dogs at us.

The ride to the El Nido took half an hour. Johnny giggled in his dope slumber, almost coming awake a couple of times; Russ drove silently. When we got to the hotel, Russ checked the lobby, found it empty and gave me the high sign from the door. I slung Johnny over my shoulder and hauled him up to room 204 – the hardest minute's work of my life.

The trip upstairs half roused him; his eyes fluttered as I dumped him into a chair and cuffed his left wrist to a heating pipe. Russ said, ‘The Pentothal’s good for another few hours. No way he can lie.’ I soaked a bath towel in the sink and swathed Johnny’s face with it. He coughed, and I pulled the towel away.

Johnny giggled. I said, ‘Elizabeth Short,’ and pointed to the glossies on the wall. Johnny, rubber-faced, slurred. ‘What about her?’ I gave him another dose of the towel, a cobweb-clearing bracer. Johnny spluttered; I let the wad of cold terrycloth drop into his lap. ‘How about *Liz* Short? You remember her?’

Johnny laughed; Russ motioned for me to sit beside him on the bed rail. ‘There’s a method to this. Let me ask the questions. You just hold on to your temper.’

I nodded. Johnny had the two of us in focus now, but his eyes were pinned and his features were slack and goofy. Russ said, ‘What’s your name, son?’

Johnny said, ‘You know me, loot,’ the slur on its way out.

‘Tell me anyway.’

‘Vogel, John Charles.’

‘When were you born?’

‘May 6, 1922.’

‘What’s sixteen plus fifty-six?’

Johnny thought for a moment, said, ‘Seventy-two,’ then fixed on me. ‘Why’d you hit me, Bleichert? I never did you no dirt.’

Fat Boy seemed genuinely befuddled. I kept it zipped; Russ said, ‘What’s your father’s name, son?’

‘You know him, loot. Oh … Friedrich Vogel. Fritzie for short.

‘Short like in Liz Short?’

‘Uh sure … like Liz, Betty, Beth, Dahlia … lots of monickers.’

‘Think about this January, Johnny. Your dad wanted you to lose your cherry, right?’

‘Uh … yeah.’

‘He bought you a woman for two days, right?’

‘Not a woman. Not a *real* one. A hooer. A hoooooer.’ The long syllable turned into a laugh; Johnny tried to clap his hands. One hand hit his chest; the other jerked at the end of its cuffed tether. He said, ‘This ain’t right. I’ll tell Daddy.’

Russ answered him calmly: ‘It’s only for a little while. You had the prostitute at the Biltmore, right?’

‘Right. Daddy got a rate because he knew the house dick.’

‘And you met Liz Short at the Biltmore, too. Right?’

Spastic movements hit Johnny’s face – eye tics, lip twitches, veins popping on his forehead. He reminded me of a knocked-down fighter trying to haul himself up off the canvas. ‘Uh … that’s right.’

‘Who introduced you?’

‘What’s her name … The hooer.’

‘And what did you and Liz do then, Johnny? Tell me about it.’

‘We … divvied on ten scoots for three hours and played games. I gave her the Big Schnitz. We played “Horse and Rider,” and I liked Liz, so I just whipped her soft. She was nicer than the blondie hooer. She kept her stockings on, ‘cause she said she had this birthmark nobody could look at. She liked the Schnitz, and she let me kiss her without the Listerine like the blondie made me gargle.’

I thought about Betty’s thigh gouge and held my breath. Russ said, ‘Johnny, did you kill Liz?’

Fat Boy jerked in his chair. ‘No! No no no no no no! No!’

‘Ssssh. Easy, son, easy. When did Liz leave you?’

‘I didn’t slice her!’

‘We believe you, son. Now when did Liz leave you?’

‘Late. Late Saturday. Maybe twelve, maybe one.’

‘You mean early Sunday morning?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Did she say where she was going?’

‘No.’

‘Did she mention any men’s names? Boyfriends? Men she was going to see?’

‘Uh … some flyboy she was married to.’

‘That’s all?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Did you see her again?’

‘No.’

‘Did your father know Liz at all?’

‘No.’

‘Did he force the house detective to change the name on the registration book after Liz’s body was found?’

‘Uh … yes.’

‘Do you know who killed Liz Short?’

‘No! No!’

Johnny was starting to sweat. I was too – anxious for facts to nail him with now that it looked like he and the Dahlia were just a one-night stand. I said, ‘You told your father about Liz when she made the papers, is that right?’

‘Uh … yes.’

‘And *he* told *you* about a guy named Charlie Issler? A guy who used to pimp Liz Short?’

‘Yes.’

‘And he told you Issler was in custody as a confessor?’

‘Uh … yes.’

‘Now you tell me what he said he was going to do about that, shitbird. You tell me damn good and slow.’

Fat Boy’s cut-rate heart rose to the challenge. ‘Daddy tried to get Ellis Jewboy to cut Issler loose, but he wouldn’t. Daddy knew this morgue attendant who owed him, and he got this DOA cooze and talked Jewboy into this idea. Daddy wanted Uncle Bill for it, but Jewboy said no, take you. Daddy said you’d do it ‘cause without Blanchard to tell you what to do you were jelly. Daddy said you were a sob sister, weak sister, buck tooth …’

Johnny started laughing hysterically, shaking his head, spraying sweat, rattling his cuffed wrist like a zoo animal with a new plaything. Russ stepped in front of me. ‘I’ll make him sign a statement. You take a half hour or so to calm down. I’ll feed him coffee, then when you get back we’ll figure out what’s next.’

I walked out to the fire escape, sat down and dangled my legs over the edge. I watched cars head up Wilcox to Hollywood and got it all down, the cost to myself, the whole enchilada. Then I played licence plate blackjack, southbound versus northbound, out-of-state cars as wild cards. Southbound was me, the house; northbound was Lee and Kay. Southbound stood on a chicken-shit seventeen; northbound got an ace and a queen for pure blackjack. Dedicating the enchilada to the three of us, I went back to the room.

Johnny Vogel was signing Russ’s statement, flushed and sweaty, with a bad case of the shakes. I read the confession over his shoulder: it laid out the Biltmore, Betty, and Fritzie's beating of Sally Stinson succinctly, to the tune of four misdemeanors and two felonies.

Russ said, 'I want to sit on this for now, and I want to talk to a legal officer.'

I said, 'No, padre,' and turned to Johnny.

'You're under arrest for suborning prostitution, withholding evidence, obstruction of justice and accessory to first-degree assault and battery.'

Johnny blurted, 'Daddy' and looked at Russ. Russ looked at me – and held out the statement. I put it in my pocket and cuffed Junior's wrists behind his back while he sobbed quietly.

The padre sighed. 'It's the shithouse until you retire.'

'I know.'

'You'll never get back to the Bureau.'

'I've already got a taste for shit, padre. I don't think it'll be so bad.'

I led Johnny down to my car and drove him the four blocks to Hollywood Station. Reporters and camera jockeys were lounging on the front steps; they went nuts when they saw the plainclothesman with the uniformed cop in bracelets. Flashbulbs popped, newshounds recognized me and shouted my name, I yelled back, 'No comment.' Inside, bluesuits goggle-eyed the sight. I shoved Johnny to the front desk and whispered in his ear: 'Tell your daddy I know about his extortion deal with the fed reports, and about the syph and the whorehouse in Watts. Tell him I'm going to the papers with it tomorrow.'

Johnny went back to his quiet sobbing. A uniformed lieutenant came over and blurted, 'What on God's earth is this here?'

A flashbulb went off in my eyes; there was Bevo Means with his notepad at the ready. I said, 'I'm Officer Dwight Bleichert and this is Officer John Charles Vogel.' Handing the statement to the lieutenant, I winked. 'Book him.'

I dawdled over a big steak lunch, then drove downtown to Central Station and my regular tour of duty. Heading into the locker room, I heard the intercom bark: 'Officer Bleichert, go to the watch commander's office immediately.'

I reversed directions and knocked on Lieutenant Jastrow's door. He called out, 'It's open.' I walked in and saluted like an idealistic rookie. Jastrow stood up, ignored the salute and adjusted his horn-rims like he was seeing me for the first time.

'You're on two weeks vacation leave as of now, Bleichert. When you return to duty, report to Chief Green. He'll assign you to another division.'

Wanting to milk the moment, I asked, 'Why?'

'Fritz Vogel just blew his brains out. That's why.'

My farewell salute was twice as crisp as my first one; Jastrow ignored it again. I walked across the hall thinking of the two blind whores, wondering if they'd find out or care. The muster room was crammed with blues waiting for roll call – a last obstacle before the parking lot and home. I took it slow, standing GI straight, meeting the eyes that sought mine, making them look down. The hisses of 'Traitor' and 'Bolshevik' all came when my back was turned. I was almost out the door when I heard applause and turned to see Russ Millard and Thad Green clapping good-bye.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Exiled to the shithouse and proud of it; two weeks to kill before I began serving my sentence at some putrid LAPD outpost. The Vogel arrest-suicide whitewashed as interdepartmental offenses and a father's shame over the ignominy. I closed out my glory days the only way that seemed decent – I chased the gone man.

I started at the LA end of his vanishing act.

I got nothing from repeated readings of Lee's arrest scrapbook; I questioned the lezzies at La Verne's Hideaway, asking whether Mr. Fire showed up to abuse them a second time – and got no's and jeers. The padre sneaked me a carbon of the complete Blanchard felony arrest file – it told me nothing. Kay, content in our monogamy, told me I was worse than a fool for what I was doing – and I knew it scared her.

Dredging up the Issler/Stinson/Vogel connection had convinced me of one thing – that I was a detective. Thinking like one as far as Lee was concerned was another matter, but I forced myself to do it. The ruthlessness I had always seen – and secretly admired – in him came across even deeper, making me care for him even more unequivocally. As did the facts I always came back to:

Lee disappeared when the Dahlia, Benzedrine and Bobby De Witt's imminent parole converged on him;

He was last seen in Tijuana at a time when De Witt was heading there and the Short case was centered on the U.S. – Mexico border;

De Witt and his dope partner Felix Chasco were murdered then, and even though two Mexican nationals were nailed for the job, it could have been a railroad – the Rurales wiping an unwanted homicide off their books;

Conclusion: Lee Blanchard could have murdered De Witt and Chasco, his motive a desire to protect himself from revenge attempts and Kay from lounge lizard Bobby's possible abuse. Conclusion within that conclusion: I didn't care.

My next step was to study the transcript of De Witt's trial. At the Hall of Records, more facts sunk in:

Lee named the informants who gave him the dope on De Witt as the Boulevard-Citizens 'brains,' then said that they left town to avoid reprisals from Lizard's friends. My follow-up call to R & I was unsettling – the snitches had no records at all. De Witt asserted a police frame because of his prior dope arrests, and the prosecution based its case on the marked money from the robbery found at De Witt's house and the fact that he had no alibi for the time of the heist. Of the four-man gang, two were killed at the scene of the crime, De Witt was captured and the fourth man remained at large. De Witt claimed not to know who he was – even though stooling might have gotten him a sentence reduction.

Conclusion: maybe it *was* an LAPD frame, maybe Lee *was* in on it, maybe he initiated it to curry favour with Benny Siegel, whose money was clouted by the real heisters, and who Lee was terrified of for good reason – he had stiffed the Bug Man on his fight contract. Lee then met Kay at De Witt's trial, fell in love with her in his chaste-guilty way and learned to hate Bobby for real. Conclusion within that conclusion: Kay couldn't have known. De Witt was scum who got what he deserved.

And the final conclusion: I had to hear the man confirm or deny himself.

Four days into my 'vacation,' I took off for Mexico. In Tijuana, I passed out pesos and American dimes and showed snapshots of Lee, holding quarters back to barter for 'informatión importante.' I acquired an entourage, no leads and the certainty that I would be trampled if I kept showing coin. From then on, I stuck to the traditional gringo cop-Mex cop one-dollar handout confidential exchange.

The TJ cops were black-shirted vultures who spoke only broken English – but they understood the international language very well. I stopped a score of individual 'patrolmen' on the street, flashed my shield and pictures, pressed dollar bills into their hands and asked questions in the best English-Spanish I could muster. The singles quickly snapped up, I got headshakes, bilingual bullshit broadsides and a strange series of tales that rang true.

One had 'el blanco explosivo' weeping at a stag film smoker held at the Chicago Club in late January; another featured a big blond guy beating the shit out of three jack rollers, then buying off the cops with double-saws peeled from a large roll. The capper was Lee donating 200 scoots to a leper ministry priest he met in a bar, buying drinks for the house, then driving to Ensenada. That bit of dope earned a five spot and a demand for an explanation. The cop said, 'The priest my brother. He ordain himself. Vaya con Dios. Keep your money in your pocket.'

I took the coast road eighty miles south to Ensenada, wondering where Lee got that kind of money to throw around. The drive was pleasant – scrub-lined bluffs giving way to the ocean on my right, hills and valleys covered with dense foliage to the left of me. Car traffic was scarce, with a steady trickle of pedestrians walking north: whole families lugging suitcases, looking scared and happy at the same time, like they didn't know what their dash across the border would bring them, but it had to be better than sucking Mexican dirt and tourist chump change.

Approaching Ensenada at twilight, the trickle became a migration march. A single line of people hugged the north-bound roadside, belongings wrapped in blankets and slung over their shoulders. Every fifth or sixth marcher carried a torch or a lantern, and all the small children were strapped papoose-style onto their mothers' backs. Coming over the last hill outside the city limits, I saw Ensenada, a smear of neon below me, torchlights punctuating the darkness until the overall fluorescence swallowed them.

I drove down into it, quickly sizing up the burg as a sea breeze version of TJ catering to a higher class of turista. The gringos were well behaved, there were no child beggars on the streets and no barkers in front of the profusion of juice joints. The wetback line originated out in the scrubland, and only cut through Ensenada to reach the coast road – and to pay tribute to the Rurales for letting them through.

It was the most blatant shakedown I had ever seen. Rurales in brownshirts, jodhpurs and jackboots were walking from peasant to peasant, taking money and attaching tags to their shoulders with staple guns; plainclothes cops sold parcels of beef jerky and dried fruit, putting the coins they received into changemakers strapped next to their sidearms. Other Rurales were stationed one man to a block to check the tags; when I turned off the main drag onto an obvious red light street, I glimpsed two brownshirts rendering a man senseless with the butts of their weapons: sawed-off pump shotguns.

I decided that it would be wise to check in with the law before going out to question the Ensenada citizenry. Also, Lee had been spotted talking to a group of Rurales up near the border shortly after leaving LA, and it might be possible to shake the locals for a line on him.

I followed a caravan of ’30s-vintage prowl cars down the red light block and across to the street paralleling the beach – and there was the station. It was a converted church: barred windows, the word POLICÍA painted in black over religious scenes carved into the white adobe facade. A searchlight was stationed on the lawn; when I got out of the car, badge out, American grin on, it was shined right at me.

I walked into it, eyes shielded, face smarting from the heat blast. A man cackled, ‘Yanqui copper, J. Edgar, Texas Rangers.’ His hand was out as I passed him. I pressed a dollar bill into it and entered the station.

The interior was even more churchlike: velvet wall hangings depicting Jesus and his adventures decorated the entrance hall; the benches filled with lounging brownshirts looked like pews. The front desk was a big block of dark wood, Jesus on the cross carved into it – most likely a retired altar. The fat Rurale standing sentry there licked his lips when he saw me coming – he reminded me of a child molester who would never retire.

I had my obligatory onesky out, but held back. ‘Los Angeles Police to see the chief.’

The brownshirt rubbed his thumbs and forefingers together, then pointed to my badge holder. I handed it over along with the dollar; he led me down a Jesus-frescoed hallway to a door marked CAPITÁN. I stood there while he went in and talked in rapid-fire Spanish; when he exited, I got a heel click and a belated salute.

‘Officer Bleichert, come in please.’

The non-accented words surprised me; I walked in to answer them. A tall Mexican man in a gray suit was standing there with his hand out – for a shake, not a dollar bill.

We shook. The man sat down behind a big desk and tapped a plate reading CAPITÁN VASQUEZ. ‘How can I help you, Officer?’

I grabbed my badge holder off the desk and put a picture of Lee down in its place. ‘That man is a Los Angeles police officer. He’s been missing since late January, and when he was last seen he was heading here.’

Vasquez examined the snapshot. The corners of his mouth twitched; he immediately tried to cover up the response by turning it into a negative head shake. ‘No, I haven’t seen this man. I will put out a bulletin to my officers and have them inquire in the American community here.’

I answered the lie. ‘He’s a hard man to miss, Captain. Blond, six feet, built like a brick shithouse.’

‘Ensenada attracts rough trade, Officer. That is why the police contingent here is so well armed and vigilant. Will you be staying awhile?’

‘At least overnight. Maybe your men missed him, and I can get some leads.’

Vasquez smiled. ‘I doubt that. Are you alone?’

I have two partners waiting for me in Tijuana.’

‘And what division are you assigned to?’

I lied big. ‘Metropolitan.’

‘You are very young for such prestigious duty.’

I picked up the photo. ‘Nepotism, Captain. My dad’s a deputy chief and my brother’s with the consulate in Mexico City. Good night.’

“And good luck, Bleichert.’

I rented a room at a hotel within walking distance of the nightclub/red light strip. For two dollars I got a ground-floor flop with an ocean view, a bed with a pancake-thin mattress, a sink and a key to the community john outside. I dumped my grip on the dresser, and as a precaution on the way out, yanked two hairs from my head and spit-glued them across the door-door-jamb juncture. If the fascisti prowled the pad, I would know.

I walked to the heart of the neon smear.

The streets were filled with men in uniform: brownshirts, U.S. marines and sailors. There were no Mex nationals to be seen, and everyone was quite orderly – even the knots of jarheads weaving drunk. I decided that it was the walking Rurale arsenal that kept things pacified. Most of the brownshirts were scrawny bantamweights, but they were packing firepower grande: sawed-offs, tommmys, .45 automatics, brass knucks dangling from their cartridge belts.

Fluorescent beacons pulsated at me: Flame Klub, Arturo's Oven, Club Boxeo, Falcon's Lair, Chico's Klub Imperial. 'Boxeo' meant 'boxing' in Spanish – so I made that dump my first stop.

Expecting darkness, I walked into a garishly lit room crowded with sailors. Mexican girls danced half naked on top of a long bar, dollar bills tucked into their G-strings. Canned marimba music and catcalls made the joint a deafening pocket of noise; I stood on my tiptoes looking for someone with the air of proprietor. At the back I saw an alcove papered with fight publicity stills. It drew me like a magnet, and I threaded my way past a new shift of nudies slinking to the bar to get to it.

And there *I* was, in great light heavyweight company, sandwiched between Gus Lesnevich and Billy Conn;

And there was Lee, right next to Joe Louis, who he could have fought if he'd dived for Benny Siegel.

Bleichert and Blanchard. Two white hopes gone wrong.

I stared at the pictures for a long time, until the raucousness around me dissipated and I wasn't in some upholstered sewer, I was back in '40 and '41, winning fights and rutting with giveaway girls who looked like Betty Short. And Lee was scoring knockouts and living with Kay – and, strangely, we were a family again.

'First Blanchard, now you. Who's next? Willie Pep?'

I was back in the sewer immediately, blurting, 'When? When did you see him?'

Whirling around, I saw a hulking old man. His face was cracked leather and broken bones – a punching bag – but his voice was nothing like a stumblebum's: 'A couple of months ago. The heavy rains in February. We musta talked fights for ten hours straight.

'Where is he now?'

'I ain't seen him since that one time, and maybe he don't want to see you. I tried to talk about that fight you guys had, but Big Lee won't have any. Says "We ain't partners no more" and starts tellin' me the featherweights are the best division pound for pound. I tell him, nix – it's the middles. Zale, Graziano, La Motta, Cerdan, who you kiddin'?'

'Is he still in town?'

'I don't think so. I own this place, and he ain't been back here. You lookin' to settle a grudge? A rematch maybe?'

'I'm looking to get him out of a shitload of trouble he's in.'

The old pug measured my words, then said, 'I'm a sucker for dancemasters like you, so I'll give you the only piece of skinny I've got. I heard Blanchard caused a ruckus over at the Club Satan, had to bribe his way out big with Captain Vasquez. You walk over five blocks to the beach, there's the Satan. You talk to Ernie the cook. He saw it. You tell him I said to be kosher with you, and take a deep breath when you walk in, 'cause there ain't nothin' like that place where you're comin' from.'

The Club Satan was a slate-roofed adobe hut sporting an ingenious neon sign: a little red devil poking the air with a trident-headed hard-on. It had its very own brownshirt doorman, a little Mex who scrutinized incoming patrons while fondling the trigger housing of a tripod BAR. His epaulet flaps were stuffed with yankee singles; I added one to the collection as I walked in, bracing myself.

From the sewer to the shitstorm.

The bar was a urinal trough. Marines and sailors masturbated into it while they gash dived the nudie girls squatting on top. Blow jobs were being dispensed underneath tables facing the front of the room and a large bandstand. A guy in a Satan costume was dicking a fat woman on a mattress. A burro with red velvet devil horns pinned to his ears stood by, eating hay out of a bowl on the floor. To the right of the stage, a tuxedo-clad gringo was crooning into a microphone: 'I've got a rich girl, her name's Roseanne, she uses a tortilla for a diaphragm! Hey! Hey! I've got a girl, her name is Sue, she's a one-way ticket to the big fungoo! Hey! Hey! I've got a girl her name's Corrine, she knows how to make my banana cream! Hey! Hey! …'

The 'music' was drowned out by chants from the tables – 'Donkey! Donkey!' I stood there getting sideswiped by revelers, then garlicky breath smothered me. 'Joo want the bar, handsome? Breakfast of champions, one dollar. Joo want *Me*? Roun' the world, two dollar.'

I got up the guts to look at her. She was old, fat, her lips crusted with chancre sores. I pulled bills from my pocket and shoved them at her, not caring what denomination they were. The whore genuflected before her nightclub Jesus; I shouted, 'Ernie. I have to see him now. The guy at Club Boxeo sent me over.'

Mamacita exclaimed, 'Vamanos!' and ran interference for me, pushing through a line of jarheads waiting for dinner seats at the bar. She led me to a curtained passageway beside the stage and down it to the kitchen. A spicy aroma perked my tastebuds – until I saw the rear end of a dog carcass hanging out of a stewpot. The woman spoke in Spanish to the chef – a strange-looking guy who came off as a Mex-Chink halfbreed. He nodded along, then walked over.

I had the snapshot of Lee out. 'I heard this man gave you some trouble a while back.'

The guy gave the photo a cursory eyeball. 'Who wants to know?'

I flashed my badge, giving the breed a glimpse of hardware. He said, 'He your friend?'

'My best friend.'

The breed tucked his hands under his apron; I knew one of them was holding a knife. 'Your friend drink fourteen shots of my best Mescal, house record. That I like. He make lots of toasts to dead women. That I don't mind. But he try to fuck with my donkey show, and that I don't take.'

'What happened?'

'Four of my guys he take, fifth he don't. Rurales take him home to sleep it off.'

'That's it'

The breed pulled out a stiletto, popped the button and scratched his neck with the dull side of the blade. 'Finito.'

I walked out the backdoor into an alley, scared for Lee. Two men in shiny suits were lounging by a streetlight; when they saw me they picked up the tempo of their foot shuffling and studied the ground like dirt was suddenly fascinating. I took off running; gravel scraping behind me said the two were in hot pursuit.

The alley ended at a connecting road to the red light block, with another, barely navigable dirt fork angling off in the direction of the beach. I took it at a full sprint, my shoulders brushing chicken wire fencing, penned-up dogs trying to get at me from the opposite sides. Their barks destroyed the rest of the street noise; I had no idea if the two were still on my tail. I saw the oceanfront boulevard looming in front of me, got my bearings, figured the hotel to be a block to the right and slowed to a walk.

I was half a block off – in my favor.

The dump was about a hundred yards away. Catching my breath, I strolled there, Mr. Square American slumming. The courtyard was empty; I reached for my room key. Then light from the second floor fluttered across the door – now minus my spit hair warning trap.

I drew my .38 and kicked the door in. A white man sitting in the chair by the bed already had his hands up and a peace offering on his lips: ‘Whoa, boy. I’m a friend. I’m not heeled, and if you don’t believe me then I’ll stand a frisk right now.’

I pointed my gun at the wall. The man got up and placed his palms on it, hands over head, legs spread. I patted him down, .38 at his spine, finding a billfold, keys and a greasy comb. Digging the muzzle in, I examined the billfold. It was stuffed with American cash; there was a California private investigator’s license in a laminated holder. It gave the man’s name as Milton Dolphine, his business address as 986 Copa De Oro in San Diego.

I tossed the billfold on the bed and eased the pressure on my gun; Dolphine squirmed. ‘That money’s jackshit compared to what Blanchard was holding. You go partners with me and it’s easy street.’

I kicked his legs out from under him. Dolphine hit the floor and sucked dust off the carpet. ‘You tell me all of it, and you watch what you say about my partner, or it’s a B & E roust and the Ensenada jail.’

Dolphine pushed himself up onto his knees. He gasped, ‘Bleichert, how the fuck did you figure I knew to come here? It occur to you that maybe I was nearby when you did your gringo cop routine with Vasquez?’

I sized the man up. He was past forty, fat and balding, but probably tough – like an ex-athlete whose hardness reverted to smarts when his body went. I said, ‘Somebody else is tailing me. Who is it?’

Dolphine spat cobwebs. ‘The Rurales. Vasquez has got a vested interest in you not finding out about Blanchard.’

‘Do they know I’m staying here?’

‘No. I told Cap I’d start the tail. His other boys must have picked you up. You lose them?’

I nodded and flicked Dolphine’s necktie with my gun. ‘How come you’re so cooperative?’

Dolphine put a light hand on the muzzle and eased it away from him. ‘I got my own vested interest, and I am damn good at playing both ends against the middle. I also talk a sight better sitting down. You think that’s possible?’

I grabbed the chair and placed it in front of him. Dolphine got to his feet, brushed off his suit and plopped himself into it. I reholstered my piece. ‘Slow and from the beginning.’

Dolphine breathed on his nails and buffed them on his shirt. I took the only other chair in the flop and sat down facing the slats so that I’d have something to grab. ‘Talk, goddamnit.’

Dolphine obliged. ‘About a month ago, this Mexican woman walked into my office in Dago. Chubby, wearing ten tons of makeup, but dressed to the nines. She offered me five hundred to locate Blanchard, and she told me she thought he was somewhere down around TJ or Ensenada. She said he was an LA cop, some kind of lamster. Knowing the LA cops love that green stuff, I started thinking money pronto.

'I asked my TJ snitches about him, showed around this newspaper picture the woman gave me. I heard that Blanchard was in TJ around late January, getting in fights, boozing, spending lots of dough. Then a pal on the Border Patrol tells me he's hiding out in Ensenada, paying protection to the Rurales – who are actually letting him booze and brawl in their town – something Vasquez just about never tolerates.

'Okay, so I came down here and started tailing Blanchard, who's playing the rich gringo to the hilt. I see him beat up these two spics who insult this señorita, with Rurale troopers standing by doing nothing. That means the protection tip is straight dope, and I start thinking money, money, money,'

Dolphine traced a dollar sign in the air; I grabbed the chair slats so hard that I could feel the wood start to give. 'Here's where it gets interesting. This one pissed-off Rurale who's not on the Blanchard payroll tells me that he heard Blanchard hired a couple of Rurale plainclothesmen to kill two enemies of his in Tijuana in late January. I drive back to TJ, pay out some bribe money to the TJ cops and learn that two guys named Robert De Witt and Felix Chasco were bumped off in TJ on January twenty-third. De Witt's name sounded familiar, so I called a friend working San Diego PD. He checked around and called me back. Now get this, if you didn't already know. Blanchard sent De Witt up to Big Q in '39, and De Witt vowed to get even. I figure that De Witt got early parole, and Blanchard had him snuffed to protect his own ass. I called my partner in Dago, and left a message with him for the Mexican woman. Blanchard is in Ensenada, protected by the Rurales, who probably snuffed De Witt and Chasco for him.'

I let go of the slats, my hands numb. 'What was the woman's name?'

Dolphine shrugged. 'She called herself Delores Garcia, but it was obviously a phony. After I heard about the De Witt-Chasco angle, I pegged her as one of Chasco's bimbos. He was supposed to be a gigolo with plenty of rich Mex gash on the line, and I figured the dame wanted revenge for the snuff. I figured she already knew somehow that Blanchard was responsible for the killings, and she just needed me to finger him.'

I said, 'You know the Black Dahlia thing up in LA?'

'The Pope a guinea?'

'Lee was working on the case right before he came down here, and in late January there was a Tijuana angle on it. Did you hear of him asking questions about the Dahlia?'

Dolphine said, 'Nada. You want the rest of it?'

'Rapidamente.'

'Okay. I went back to Dago, and my partner told me that the Mex dame got the message I left. I took off for Reno and a little vacation, and I blew the money she paid me at the crap table. I started thinking of Blanchard and all that money he had, wondering what the Mex dame had in mind for him. It really got to be a bug up my ass, and I went back to Dago, worked some missing persons jobs and came back to Ensenada about two weeks later. And you know whatt? There was no fucking Blanchard.

'Only a fool would've asked Vasquez or the troopers about him, so I hung around town picking up skinny. I saw this punk wearing Blanchard's old letterman's jacket, and this other punk with that Legion Stadium sweatshirt of his. I get word that two guys got hanged in Juarez for the De Witt-Chasco job, and I think, Rurale railroad all the way. I stay in town sucking up to Vasquez, snitching hopheads to him to stay on his good side. Finally I piece the Blanchard thing together. So if he was your buddy, get ready.'

At 'was,' my hands broke off the chair slat I was grabbing. Dolphine said, 'Whoa, boy.

I gasped, 'Finish it.'

The PI spoke slowly and calmly, like he was addressing a hand grenade. 'He's dead. Chopped up with an axe. Some punks found him. They broke into the house he was staying in, and one of them blabbed to the troopers, so they wouldn't get tagged for it. Vasquez bought them off with pesos and some of Blanchard's belongings, and the Rurales buried the body outside town. I heard rumors that none of the money was found, and I stuck around because I figured Blanchard was rogue and sooner or later some American cop would come looking for him. When you showed up at the station with that horseshit about working Metropolitan, I knew it was you.'

I tried to say no, but my lips wouldn't move; Dolphine speedballed the rest of his pitch: 'Maybe the Rurales did it, maybe it was the woman or friends of hers. Maybe one of them got the money and maybe they didn't, and *we* can. You *knew* Blanchard, you could get a grip on who—'

I leaped up and roundhoused Dolphine with the chair slat; he caught the blow on the neck, hit the floor and sucked carpet again. I aimed my gun at the back of his head; the shitbird private eye whimpered, then double-speeded a mercy plea: 'Look, I didn't know it was so personal with you. I didn't kill him, and I'll back off if you want to get whoever did it. Please, Bleichert, goddamn it.

I whimpered myself. 'How do I know it's true?'

'There's a sand pit by the beach. The Rurales dump stiffs there. A kid told me he saw a bunch of troopers burying a big white man right around the time that Blanchard got it. Goddamn you, it's true!'

I eased down the .38's hammer. 'Then show me.'

The burial ground was ten miles south of Ensenada, just off the coast road on a bluff overlooking the ocean. A big, burning cross marked the spot. Dolphine pulled up next to it and killed the engine. 'It's not what you think. The locals keep the damn thing lit up because they don't know who's buried there, and lots of them have got missing loved ones. It's a ritual with them. They burn the crosses, and the Rurales tolerate it, like it's some kind of panacea to keep the great unwashed gun-shy. Speaking of which, you want to put that thing away?'

My service revolver was pointed at Dolphine's midsection; I wondered how long I'd been holding the bead. 'No. Have you got tools?'

Dolphine swallowed. 'Gardening stuff. Listen—'

'No. You take me to the spot the kid told you about, and we dig.'

Dolphine got out of the car, walked around and popped open the trunk. I followed, watching him remove a large earth spade. Flame glow illuminated the PI's old Dodge coupe; I noticed a pile of fence pickets and rags next to the spare tire. Tucking the .38 into my waistband, I fashioned two torches out of them, wrapping the rags around the ends of the posts, then igniting them in the cross. Handing one to Dolphine, I said, 'Walk ahead of me.'

We strode into the sandpit, outlaws holding fireballs on a stick. The softness made the going slow; torchlight let me pick out grave offerings – little bouquets and religious statues placed atop dunes here and there. Dolphine kept muttering how gringos got dumped on the far side; I felt bones cracking beneath my feet. We reached an especially high drift, and Dolphine waved his torch at a tattered

American flag spread out on the sand. ‘Here. The punk said by el bannero.’

I kicked the flag away; a swarm of insects buzzed up. Dolphine screeched, ‘Cocksuckers,’ and swatted them with his torch.

A putrid smell rose from a big crater at our feet. ‘Dig,’ I said.

Dolphine went at it; I thought of ghosts – Betty Short and Laurie Blanchard – waiting for the shovel to hit bones. The first time it did I recited a psalm the old man had force-fed me; the second time, it was the ‘Our Fathers’ that Danny Boylan used to chant before our sparring sessions. When Dolphine said, ‘Sailor. I can see his jumper,’ I didn’t know if I wanted Lee alive and in grief or dead and nowhere – so I pushed Dolphine aside and shoveled myself.

My first blow sheared off the sailor’s skull, my second tore into the front of his tunic, pulling the torso free from the rest of the skeleton. The legs were in crumbled pieces; I shoveled past them into plain sand glinting with mica. Then it was maggot nests and entrails and a blood-matted crinoline dress and sand and odd bones and nothing – and then it was sunburned pink skin and blond eyebrows covered with stitch scars that looked familiar. Then Lee was smiling like the Dahlia, with worms creeping out of his mouth and the holes where his eyes used to be.

I dropped the shovel and ran. Dolphine shouted, ‘The money!’ behind me; I tore for the burning cross thinking that I put those scars on Lee, I did it to him. Reaching the car, I got in, gunned it in reverse, plowed the crucifix into the sand, then gnashed through the gears one-two-three going forward. I heard, ‘My car! The money!’ as I fishtailed onto the coast road northbound, reaching for the siren switch, slamming the dashboard when it hit me that civilian vehicles didn’t have them.

I made it to Ensenada, highballing at double the speed limit. I ditched the Dodge on the street by the hotel, then ran for *my* car – slowing when I saw three men approaching me in a flanking movement, their hands inside their jackets.

My Chevy ten yards away; the middle man coming into focus as Captain Vasquez, the other two fanning out to close me in from the sides. The only shelter a phone booth near the first door on the left U of the courtyard. Bucky Bleichert about to be DOA in a Mexican sand pit, his best friend along for the ride. I decided to let Vasquez get right up next to me and blow his brains out point-blank. Then a white woman walked out the left-hand door, and I saw my ticket home.

I ran over and grabbed her by the throat. She started to scream. I stifled the sound by moving my left hand to her mouth. The woman flailed with her arms, then clenched herself rigid. I pulled my .38 and pointed it at her head.

The Rurales advanced cautiously, hand cannons pressed to their sides. I shoved the woman into the phone booth, whispering, ‘*Scream and you’re dead. Scream and you’re dead.*’ Inside, I pinned her to the wall with my knees and removed my hand; the screams she put out were silent. I aimed my gun at her mouth to keep them that way, grabbed the receiver, fed the slot a nickel and dialed ‘O.’ Vasquez was standing in front of the booth now, livid, reeking of cheap American cologne. The operator came on the line with ‘Que?’ I blurted, ‘Habla ingtés?’

‘Yes, sir.’

I held the receiver chin to shoulder and fumbled all the coins in my pocket into the slot; I kept my .38 glued to the woman’s face. When a shitload of pesos were swallowed up, I said, ‘Federal Bureau of Investigation, San Diego field office. It’s an emergency.’

The operator muttered, ‘Yes, sir.’ I heard the call going through. The woman’s teeth chattered against my gun barrel. Vasquez tried bribery: ‘Blanchard was very rich, my friend. We could find his money. You could live very well here. You—’

‘FBI, Special Agent Rice.’

I stared daggers at Vasquez. ‘This is Officer Dwight Bleichert, Los Angeles Police Department. I’m in Ensenada, and I screwed up with some Rurales. They’re getting ready to kill me for nothing, and I thought you could talk Captain Vasquez here out of it.’

‘What the—’

‘Sir, I’m a legit LA policemen and you had better do this fast.’

‘You jerking my chain, son?’

‘Goddamn it, you want proof? I worked Central Homicide with Russ Millard and Harry Sears. I worked DA’s Warrants, I worked—’

‘Put the spic fellow on, son.’

I handed the receiver to Vasquez. He took it and leveled his automatic at me; I kept my .38 on the woman. Seconds ticked; the standoff held as the Rurale boss listened to the fed, getting paler and paler. Finally he dropped the phone and lowered his piece. ‘Go home, puta. Get out of my city and get out of my country.’

I holstered my gun and squeezed out of the booth; the woman shrieked. Vasquez stood back and waved his men away. I got in my car and peeled out of Ensenada on fear overdrive. It was only when I was back in America that I started obeying speed laws – and that was when it got bad with Lee.

Dawn was pushing up over the Hollywood Hills when I knocked on Kay’s door. I stood on the porch shivering, storm clouds and streaks of sunlight looming as strange things I didn’t want to see. I heard ‘Dwight?’ inside, followed by the sound of bolts being unlatched. Then the other remaining partner in the Blanchard/Bleichert/Lake triad was there, saying, ‘And all that.’

It was an epitaph I didn’t want to hear.

I walked inside, stunned at how strange and pretty the living room was. Kay said, ‘Lee’s dead?’

I sat down in his favorite chair for the first time. ‘The Rurales or some Mexican woman or her friends killed him. Oh, babe, I—’

Using Lee’s endearment jarred me. I looked at Kay, standing by the door, backlighted by the weird sun-streaks. ‘He hired the Rurales to kill De Witt, but that doesn’t mean shit. We’ve got to get Russ Millard and some decent Mexican cops on it …’

I stopped, noticing the phone on the coffee table. I started dialing the padre’s home number. Kay’s hand halted me. ‘No. I want to talk to you first.’

I moved from the chair to the couch; Kay sat beside me. She said, ‘You’ll hurt Lee if you go crazy with this.’

That was when I knew she’d been expecting it; that was when I knew she knew more than I did. ‘You can’t hurt something dead.’

‘Oh, yes you can, babe.’

‘Don’t call me that! That’s his!’

Kay moved closer and touched my cheek. ‘You can hurt him and you can hurt us.’

I pulled away from the caress. ‘You tell me why, *babe*.’

Kay cinched the belt on her robe and fixed me with a cold look. ‘I didn’t meet Lee at Bobby’s trial,’ she said. ‘I met him before. We became friends, and I lied about where I was staying so Lee wouldn’t know about Bobby. Then he found out on his own, and I told him how bad it was, and he told me about a business opportunity he had coming up. He wouldn’t tell me the details, and then Bobby was arrested for bank robbery and everything was chaos.

‘Lee planned the robbery and got three men to help him. He’d bought his way out of his contract with Ben Siegel, and it cost him every cent he’d made as a boxer. Two of the men were killed during the robbery, one escaped to Canada, and Lee was the fourth. Lee framed Bobby because he hated him for what he did to me. Bobby didn’t know we were seeing each other, and we made it look like we met at the trial. Bobby knew it was a frame, but he didn’t suspect Lee, just the LAPD in general.

‘Lee wanted to give me a home, and he did. He was very cautious with his part of the robbery money, and he always talked up his boxing savings and his gambling so the brass wouldn’t think he was living above his means. He hurt his career by living with a woman, even though we weren’t together that way. It was like a happy fairy tale until last fall, right after you and Lee became partners.’

I moved toward Kay, awed by Lee as the most audacious rogue cop in history. ‘I knew he had it in him.’

Kay drew away from me. ‘Let me finish before you get sentimental. When Lee heard about Bobby getting an early parole date, he went to Ben Siegel to try to get him killed. He was afraid of Bobby talking about *me*, upsetting our fairy tale with all the ugly things he knew about yours truly. Siegel wouldn’t do it, and I told Lee it didn’t matter, that there were three of us now and the truth couldn’t hurt us. Then, right before New Year’s, the third man from the robbery showed up. He knew that Bobby De Witt was getting out on parole, and he made a blackmail demand: Lee was to pay him ten thousand dollars, or he would tell Bobby that Lee masterminded the robbery and framed him.

‘The man said Lee’s deadline was Bobby’s release date. Lee put him off, then went to Ben Siegel to try to borrow the money. Siegel wouldn’t do it, and Lee begged him to have the man killed. He wouldn’t do that either. Lee learned that the man hung out with some Negroes who sold marijuana, and he—’

I saw it coming, huge and black like the headlines it got me, Kay’s words the new fine print: ‘That man’s name was Baxter Fitch. Siegel wouldn’t help Lee, so he got you. The men were armed, so I guess you were legally justified, and I guess you were damn lucky that no one looked into it. It’s the one thing I can’t forgive him for, the one thing I hate myself for tolerating. Still feeling sentimental, triggerman?’

I couldn’t answer; Kay did it for me. ‘I didn’t think so. I’ll finish up, and you tell me if you still want revenge.

‘The Short thing happened then, and Lee latched on to it for his little sister and who knows what else. He was terrified that Fitch had already talked to Bobby, that Bobby knew about the frame. He wanted to kill him or have him killed, and I begged and pleaded with him to just let it be, no one would believe Bobby, so just don’t hurt anybody else. If it wasn’t for that fucking dead girl I might have convinced him. But the case went down to Mexico, and so did Bobby and Lee and you. I knew that the fairy tale was over. And it is.’

FIRE AND ICE COPS KO NEGRO THUGS

SOUTHSIDE SHOOTOUT – COPS: 4,
HOODLUMS: 0

FOUR HOPHEADS SLAIN BY BOXER –
POLICEMEN IN BLOODY LA GUN BATTLE

Limp all over, I started to stand up; Kay grabbed my belt with both hands and brought me back down. ‘No! You don’t pull the patented Bucky Bleichert retreat this time! Bobby took pictures of me with animals, and Lee stopped it. He pimped me to his friends and hit me with a razor strap, and Lee stopped it. He wanted to love me, not fuck me, and he wanted us to be together, and if you weren't so intimidated by him you would have known it. We can't drag his name down. We have to give it all up and forgive him and get on with just us and—'

I retreated then, before Kay destroyed the rest of the triad.

Triggerman.

Stooge.

Bumfuck detective too blind to clear the case he was a homicide accessory to.

The weak point in a fairy tale triangle.

Best friend to a cop-bank robber, now the keeper of his secrets.

'Give it all up.'

I stuck to my apartment for the next week, killing off the remainder of my 'vacation.' I hit the heavy bag and skipped rope and listened to music; I sat on the back steps and took finger sights at blue jays perching on my landlady's clothesline. I convicted Lee of four homicides connected to the Boulevard-Citizens bank job and granted him a pardon based on homicide number five – himself. I thought of Betty Short and Kay until they blurred together; I reconstructed the partnership as a mutual seduction and figured out that I lusted for the Dahlia because I had her number, that I loved Kay because she had mine.

And I examined the past six months. It was all there:

The money Lee had been spending in Mexico was probably a separate stash of robbery swag.

On New Year's Eve I heard him weeping; Baxter Fitch had made his blackmail demand a few days before.

That fall, Lee had sought out Benny Siegel – in private – every time we went to the fights at the Olympic; he was trying to talk him into killing Bobby De Witt.

Right before the shoot-out, Lee had spoken on the phone to a snitch – allegedly about Junior Nash. The 'snitch' had fingered Fitch and the Negros, and Lee came back to the car looking spooked. Ten minutes later four men were dead.

On the night I met Madeleine Sprague, Kay shouted at Lee: '*After all that might happen*' – a portentous line, probably her predicting disaster with Bobby De Witt. During our time working the Dahlia case, she had been jittery, morose, concerned for Lee's well-being, yet weirdly accepting of his lunatic behavior. I thought she was upset over Lee's obsession with Betty Short's murder; she was really running toward and from the fairy tale's finale.

It was all there.

'Give it all up.'

When my refrigerator was empty, I took the patented Bucky Bleichert retreat down to the market to stock up. Walking in, I saw a box boy reading the local section of the morning *Herald*. Johnny Vogel's picture was at the bottom of the page; I looked over the kid's shoulder and saw that he'd been dismissed from the LAPD on a graft whitewash. A column over, Ellis Loew's name caught my eye – Bevo Means was quoting him that 'The Elizabeth Short investigation is no longer my raison d'etre – I have more pertinent fish to fry.' I forgot all about food, and drove to West Hollywood.

It was recess. Kay was in the middle of the schoolyard, supervising kids flopping around in a sandbox. I watched her awhile from the car, then walked over.

The kids noticed me first. I flashed my teeth at them until they started laughing.

Kay turned around then. I said, ‘It’s the patented Bucky Bleichert advance.’

Kay said, ‘Dwight’; the kids looked at us like they knew it was a big moment. Kay caught on a second later. ‘Did you come here to tell me something?’

I laughed; the kids chortled at another shot of my choppers. ‘Yeah. I decided to give it all up. Will you marry me?’

Kay, expressionless, said, ‘And we’ll bury the rest of it? The f-ing dead girl too?’

‘Yes. Her too.’

Kay stepped into my arms. ‘Then yes.’

We embraced. The children called out, ‘Miss Lake’s got a boyfriend, Miss Lake’s got a boyfriend!’

We were married three days later, May 2, 1947. It was a rush job, the vows given by the LAPD Protestant chaplain, the service held in the backyard of Lee Blanchard’s house. Kay wore a pink dress to satirize her lack of virginity; I wore my blue dress uniform. Russ Millard was best man, and Harry Sears came along as a guest. He started out with a stutter, and for the first time I saw that it was precisely his fourth drink that quashed it. I got the old man out of the rest home on a pass, and he didn’t know who the hell I was, but seemed to have a good time anyway – swigging from Harry’s flask, goosing Kay, hopping around to the music from the radio. There was a table laid out with sandwiches and punch, hard and soft. The six of us ate and drank, and total strangers walking down to the Strip heard the music and laughter and crashed the party. By dusk the yard was filled with people I didn’t know, and Harry made a run to the Hollywood Ranch Market for more food and booze. I unloaded my service revolver and let the unknown civilians play with it, and Kay danced polkas with the chaplain. When darkness hit, I didn’t want it to end, so I borrowed strings of Christmas lights from the neighbors and strung them over the backdoor and the clothesline and Lee’s favorite Yucca tree. We danced and drank and ate under a fake constellation, the stars red and blue and yellow. Around 2:00 A.M., the clubs on the Strip let out, revelers from the Trocadero and Mocambo made the scene, and Errol Flynn hung around for a while, his tux coat doffed for my jacket, replete with badge and pistol medals. If it weren’t for the thunderstorm that struck, it might have gone on forever – and I wanted it to. But the crowd broke up amidst frantic kisses and hugs, and Russ drove the old man back to the rest bin. Kay Lake Bleichert and I retired to the bedroom to make love, and I left the radio on to help distract me from Betty Short. It wasn’t necessary – she never crossed my mind.

3

Kay and Madeleine

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Time passed, Kay and I worked and played at being a young married couple.

After our quickie San Francisco honeymoon, I returned to what remained of my police career. Thad Green talked turkey to me: he admired what I did with the Vogels, but considered me useless as a patrol cop – I had earned the enmity of rank and file blues, and my presence in a uniformed division would only create grief. Since my year of junior college showed straight A's in chemistry and math, he assigned me to the Scientific Investigation Detail as an evidence technician.

The job was quasi-plainclothes – smocks in the lab and gray suits in the field. I typed blood, dusted for latent prints and wrote ballistics reports; scraped ooze off the walls at crime scenes and examined it under a microscope, letting the Homicide dicks take it from there. It was test tubes and beakers and clinical gore – an intimacy with death that I never became inured to; a constant reminder that I wasn't a detective, that I couldn't be trusted to follow up on my own findings.

From various distances I followed the friends and enemies the Dahlia case had given me.

Russ and Harry kept the El Nido file room intact, continuing to work overtime hours on the Short investigation. I had a key to the door, but didn't use it – per my promise to Kay to bury 'that – dead girl.' Sometimes I met the padre for lunch and asked him how it was going; he always said, 'Slowly,' and I knew that he would never find the killer and never quit trying.

In June of '47, Ben Siegel was shot to death in his girlfriend's Beverly Hills living room. Bill Koenig, assigned to 77th Street dicks after Fritz Vogel's suicide, caught a shotgun blast in the face on a Watts street corner early in '48. Both killings went unsolved. Ellis Loew was soundly trounced in the June '48 Republican primary, and I celebrated by cooking up beakers of moonshine on my Bunsen burner, getting everyone in the crime lab fried.

The '48 general election brought me news of the Spragues. A slate of reform Democrats were running for seats on the LA City Council and Board of Supervisors, 'City Planning' their basic campaign theme. They asserted that there were faultily designed, unsafe dwellings all over Los Angeles, and were calling for a grand jury probe on the contractors who built the structures back during the '20s real estate boom. The scandal tabloids took up the hue and cry, running articles on the 'boom barons' – Mack Sennett and Emmett Sprague among them – and their 'gangster ties.' *Confidential* magazine ran a series on Sennett's Hollywoodland tract and how the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce wanted to lop the L-A-N-D off the giant Hollywoodland sign on Mount Lee, and there were photographs of the Keystone Kops director standing beside a stocky man with a cute little girl in tow. I couldn't quite tell if it was Emmett and Madeleine, but I clipped the pictures anyway.

My enemies;

My friends;

My wife.

I processed evidence and Kay taught school, and for a while we reveled in the novelty of living a squarejohn life. With the house paid off in full and two salaries, there was plenty of money to spend, and we used it to pamper ourselves away from Lee Blanchard and the winter of '47. We took weekend trips to the desert and the mountains; we ate in restaurants three and four nights a week. We checked into hotels pretending to be illicit lovers, and it took me well over a year to realize that we did those things because it got us out of the pad the Boulevard-Citizens bank job paid for. And I was so heedless in my pursuit of pampering that it required a live-wire shock to spell it out.

A floorboard in the hallway came loose, and I pulled it all the way off so I could reglue it. Looking in the hole, I found a cash roll, two thousand dollars in C-notes secured by a rubber band. I didn't feel joyous or shocked; my brain went tick, tick, tick, and came up with the questions my rush into normal life had quashed:

If Lee had this money, plus the dough he was spending in Mexico, why didn't he pay off Baxter Fitch?

If he had the money, why did he go to Ben Siegel to try to borrow ten grand to meet Fitch's blackmail demand?

How could Lee have bought and furnished this house, put Kay through college and still have had a substantial sum left when his cut from the aborted heist couldn't have amounted to more than fifty grand or so?

Of course I told Kay; of course she couldn't answer the questions; of course she loathed me for dredging up the past. I told her we could sell the house and get an apartment like other normal squarejohns – and of course she wouldn't have it. It was comfort, style – a link to her old life that she would not give up.

I burned the money in Lee Blanchard's Deco-stream-line fireplace. Kay never asked me what I did with it. The simple act gave me back some smothered part of myself, cost me most of what I had with my wife – and returned me to my ghosts.

Kay and I made love less and less. When we did it was perfunctory reassurance for her and a dull explosion for me. I came to see Kay Lake Bleichert as wasted by the obscenity in her old life, just short of thirty and already going chaste. I brought the gutter to our bed then, the faces of hookers I saw downtown attached to Kay's body in the darkness. It worked the first few times, until I saw where I really wanted to go. When I finally made the move and came gasping, Kay stroked me with mothering hands, and I sensed that she knew I'd broken my marriage vow – with her right there.

1948 became 1949. I turned the garage into a boxing gym, complete with speed bag and heavy bag, jump ropes and barbells. I got back into fighting trim, and decorated the garage walls with fight stills of young Bucky Bleichert, circa '40-'41. My own image glimpsed through sweat-streaked eyes brought me closer to her, and I scoured used book stores for Sunday supplements and news magazines. I found sepia candids in *Colliers;* some family snapshots reproduced in old issues of the Boston *Globe*. I kept them out of sight in the garage, and the stack grew, then vanished one afternoon. I heard Kay sobbing inside the house that evening, and when I went to talk to her the bedroom door was locked.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

The phone rang. I reached for the bedside extension, then snapped that I'd been a couch sleeper for the past month and flailed at the coffee table. 'Yeah?'

'You still sleeping?'

It was the voice of Ray Pinker, my supervisor at SID. 'I was sleeping.'

'Past tense is right. Are you listening?'

'Keep going.'

'We've got a gunshot suicide from yesterday. 514 South June Street, Hancock Park. Body removed, looks open and shut. Do a complete work-up and drop the report off with Lieutenant Reddin at Wilshire dicks. Got it?'

I yawned. 'Yeah. Premises sealed?'

'The stiff's wife will show you around. Be courteous, this is filthy rich we're dealing with.'

I hung up and groaned. Then it hit me that the Sprague mansion was a block from the June Street address. Suddenly the assignment was fascinating.

I rang the bell of the pillared colonial manse an hour later. A handsome gray-haired woman of about fifty opened the door, dressed in dusty work togs. I said, 'I'm Officer Bleichert, LAPD. May I express my condolences, Mrs.—'

Ray Pinker hadn't given me a name. The woman said, 'Condolences accepted, and I'm Jane Chambers. Are you the lab man?'

The woman was trembling underneath her brusqueness; I liked her immediately. 'Yes. If you'll point me to the place I'll take care of it and leave you alone.'

Jane Chambers ushered me into a sedate, all-wood foyer. 'The study in back of the dining room. You'll see the rope. Now, if you'll excuse me I want to do some gardening.'

She took off dabbing at her eyes. I found the room, stepped over the crime scene rope and wondered why the bastard did himself in where his loved ones would see the gore.

It looked like a classic self-inflicted shotgun job: overturned leather chair, the outline of the stiff chalked on the floor beside it. The weapon, a double-barreled .12 gauge, was right where it should have been – three feet in front of the body, the muzzle coated with blood and shredded tissue. The light plaster walls and ceiling showed off blood and caked-on brains to full advantage, the teeth fragments and buckshot a dead giveaway that the victim had stuck both barrels in his mouth.

I spent an hour measuring trajectories and spatter marks, scraping matter into test tubes and dusting the suicide weapon for latents. When I finished, I took a bag from my evidence kit and wrapped up the shotgun, knowing full well it would end up the property of some LAPD sportsman. Then I walked out to the entrance hall, stopping when I saw a framed painting hung at eye level.

It was a portrait of a clown, a young boy done up in court jester's garb from long, long ago. His body was gnarled and hunched; he wore a stuporous ear-to-ear smile that looked like one continuous deep scar.

I stared, transfixed, thinking of Elizabeth Short, DOA at 39th and Norton. The more I stared the more the two blended; finally I pulled my eyes away and settled them on a photo of two arm-linked young women who looked just like Jane Chambers.

'The other survivors. Pretty, aren't they?'

I turned around. The widow was twice as dusty as before, smelling of insect spray and soil. 'Like their mother. How old are they?'

'Linda's twenty-three and Carol's twenty. Are you finished in the study?'

I thought of the daughters as contemporaries of the Sprague girls. 'Yes. Tell whoever cleans it up to use pure ammonia. Mrs. Chambers—'

'Jane.'

'Jane, do you know Madeleine and Martha Sprague?'

Jane Chambers snorted, 'Those girls and that family. How do you know them?'

'I did some work for them once.'

'Count yourself lucky it was a brief encounter.'

'What do you mean?'

The hallway phone rang. Jane Chambers said, 'Back to condolences. Thank you for being so nice, Mr.—'

'It's Bucky. Good-bye, Jane.'

'Good-bye.'

I wrote out my report at Wilshire Station, then checked the routine suicide file on Chambers, Eldridge Thomas, DOD 4/2/49. It didn't tell me much: Jane Chambers heard the shotgun explosion, found the body and called the police immediately. When detectives arrived, she told them her husband was depressed over his failing health and their eldest daughter's failing marriage. Suicide: case closed pending forensic crime scene work-up.

My work-up confirmed the verdict, plain and simple. But it didn't feel like enough. I liked the widow, the Spragues lived a block away, I was still curious. I got on a squadroom phone and put in calls to Russ Millard's newspaper contacts, giving them two names: Eldridge Chambers and Emmett Sprague. They did their own digging and calling, and got back to me on the station extension I was hogging. Four hours later I knew the following:

That Eldridge Chambers died enormously wealthy;

That from 1930 to 1934 he was president of the Southern California Real Estate Board;

That he nominated Sprague for membership in Wilshire Country Club in 1929, but the Scotsman was rejected because of his 'Jewish business associates' – i.e. East Coast hoodlums;

And the kicker: Chambers, through intermediaries, got Sprague kicked off the real estate board when several of his houses collapsed during the '33 earthquake.

It was enough for a juicy newspaper obit, but not enough for a test-tube cop with a foundering marriage and time on his hands. I waited four days; then, when the papers told me Eldridge Chambers was in the ground, I went back to talk to his widow.

She answered the door in gardening clothes, holding a pair of shears. 'Did you forget something or are you as curious as I thought you were?'

'The latter.'

Jane laughed and wiped dirt from her face. 'After you left I put your name together. Weren't you some sort of athlete?'

I laughed. 'I was a boxer. Are your daughters around? Have you got someone staying with you?'

Jane shook her head. 'No, and I prefer it that way. Will you join me for tea in the backyard?'

I nodded. Jane let me through the house and out to a shaded veranda overlooking a large bent grass yard more than half dug up into furrows. I sat down in a lounge chair; she poured iced tea. 'I've done all that garden work since Sunday. I think it's helped more than all the sympathy calls I've gotten.'

'You're taking it well.'

Jane sat down beside me. 'Eldridge had cancer, so I half expected it. I didn't expect a shotgun in our own home, though.'

'Were you close?'

'No, not anymore. With the girls grown up, we would have divorced sooner or later. Are you married?'

'Yes. Almost two years.'

Jane sipped tea. 'God, a newlywed. There's nothing better, is there?'

My face must have betrayed me. Jane said, 'Sorry,' then changed the subject. 'How do you know the Spragues?'

'I was involved with Madeleine before I met my wife. How well do you know them?'

Jane considered my question, staring out at the uprooted yard. 'Eldridge and Emmett went way back,' she said finally. 'They both made a lot of money in real estate and served on the Southern California board together. Maybe I shouldn't be saying this, since you're a policeman, but Emmett was a bit of a crook. A lot of his houses went down during the big quake in '33, and Eldridge said that he has lots of other property that has to go bad sooner or later – houses made out of *the* worst possible material. Eldridge got Emmett booted off the board when he found out that phony corporations controlled the rentals and sales – he was enraged that Emmett would never be held responsible if more lives were lost.'

I remembered talking with Madeleine about the same thing. 'Your husband sounded like a good man.'

Jane's lips curled into a smile – it looked like against her will. 'He had his moments.'

'He never went to the police about Emmett?'

'No. He was afraid of his gangster friends. He just did what he could, a little nuisance to Emmett. Being removed from the board probably cost him some business.'

'"He did what he could" isn't a bad epitaph.'

Now Jane's lips curled into a sneer. 'It was out of guilt. Eldridge owned slum blocks in San Pedro. When he learned he had cancer, he really started feeling guilty. He voted Democratic last year, and when they got in he had meetings with some of the new City Council members. I'm sure he gave them his dirt on Emmett.'

I thought of the Grand Jury probe the scandal sheets were predicting. 'Maybe Emett's heading for a fall. Your husband could have been—'

Jane rapped her ring finger on the tabletop. 'My husband was rich and handsome and did a mean Charleston. I loved him until I found out he was cheating on me, and now I'm starting to love him again. It is so strange.'

'It's not so strange,' I said.

Jane smiled very softly. 'How old are you, Bucky?'

'Thirty-two.'

'Well, I'm fifty-one, and I think it's strange, so it is strange. You shouldn't be so all-accepting of the human heart at your age. You should have illusions.'

'You're teasing me, Jane. I'm a cop. Cops don't have illusions.'

Jane laughed – heartily. Touché Now *I'm* curious. How did an ex-boxer cop get involved with Madeleine Sprague?'

Now I lied. 'I stopped her for a red light and one thing led to another.' My gut clenching, I asked casually, 'What do you know about her?'

Jane stomped her foot at a crow eyeing the rose bushes just off the veranda. 'What I know about the distaff Spragues is at least ten years old and quite strange. Baroque, almost.'

'I'm all ears.'

Jane said, 'Some might say all teeth.' When I didn't laugh, she looked across the dug-up yard to Muirfield Road and the boom baron's estate. 'When my girls and Maddy and Martha were little, Ramona directed pageants and ceremonies on that huge front lawn of theirs. Little enactments with the girls dressed up in pinafores and animal costumes. I let Linda and Carol participate, even though I knew Ramona was a disturbed woman. When the girls all got a bit older – in their teens – the pageants got stranger. Ramona and Maddy were very good at makeup, and Ramona staged these … epics, reenacting the things that happened to Emmett and his friend Georgie Tilden during World War I.

'So, she had children wearing soldier kilts and pancake faces, carrying toy muskets. Sometimes she smeared fake blood on them, and sometimes Georgie actually filmed it. It got so bizarre, so out of proportion, that I made Linda and Carol quit playing with the Sprague girls. Then one day Carol came home with some pictures Georgie took of her. She was playing dead, all smeared with red dye. That was the last straw. I stormed over to the Sprague house and berated Georgie, knowing Ramona wasn't really responsible for her actions. The poor man just took my abuse, and I felt terrible about it later – he was disfigured in a car wreck, and it turned him into a bum. He used to manage property for Emmett, now he just does yard work and weeds lots for the city.'

'And what happened to Madeleine and Martha then?'

Jane shrugged. 'Martha turned into some sort of art prodigy and Madeleine turned into a roundheels, which I guess you already know.'

I said, 'Don't be catty, Jane.'

Tapping the table with her ring, Jane said, 'I apologize. Maybe I'm wishing *I* could pull it off. I certainly can't spend the rest of my life gardening, and I'm too proud for gigolos. What do you think?'

'You'll find yourself another millionaire.'

'Unlikely, and one was enough to last me a lifetime. You know what I keep thinking? That it's almost 1950 and I was born in 1898. That floors me.'

I said what I'd been thinking for the past half hour. 'You make me wish things were different. That time was different.'

Jane smiled and sighed. 'Bucky, is that the best I can expect from you?'

I sighed back. 'I think it's the best anyone can.'

'You're a bit of a voyeur, you know.'

'And you're a bit of a gossip.'

'Touché Come on, I'll walk you out.'

We held hands on the way to the door. In the entrance hall, the scar mouth clown painting grabbed me again. Pointing to it, I said, 'God, that is spooky.'

'Valuable, too. Eldridge bought it for my forty-ninth birthday, but I hate it. Would you like to take it with you?'

‘Thanks, but no thanks.’

‘Thank you, then. You were my best condoler.’

‘And you were mine.’

We embraced for a moment, then I took off.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Bunsen burner jockey.

Couch sleeper.

Detective without a case.

I worked at all three throughout the spring of ’49. Kay left for school early each morning; I pretended to sleep until she was gone. Alone in the fairy tale house, I touched my wife’s things – the cashmere sweaters Lee bought her, her essays to be graded, the books she had stacked up waiting to be read. I kept looking for a diary, but never found one. At the lab I pictured Kay prowling *my* belongings. I toyed with the idea of writing a journal and leaving it out for her to find – detailed accounts of my coupling with Madeleine Sprague – running her nose in it to either gain forgiveness for my fix on the Dahlia or blow our marriage out of its stasis. I got as far as five pages scrawled in my cubicle – stopping when I smelled Madeleine’s perfume melding with the Lysol stench of the Red Arrow Motel. And wadding the pages up and throwing them away only fanned the brush fire into a blaze.

I kept the Muirfield Road mansion under surveillance for four nights running. Parked across the street, I watched lights go on and off, saw shadows flicker across leaded glass windows. I played with notions of crashing the Spragues’ family life, cashing in on being a hard boy to Emmett, coupling with Madeleine all over hot sheet row. None of the family left the manse during those nights – all four of their cars remained on the circular driveway. I kept wondering what they were doing, what shared history they were rehashing, what the odds were on someone mentioning the cop who came to dinner two years before.

On the fifth night, Madeleine, dressed in slacks and a pink sweater, walked to the corner to mail a letter. When she returned, I saw her notice my car, passing headlights illuminating the surprise on her face. I waited until she hurried back inside the Tudor fortress, then drove home, Jane Chambers’ voice taunting, ‘Voyeur, voyeur.’

Walking in, I heard the shower running; the bedroom door was open. Kay’s favorite Brahms quintet was on the phonograph. Remembering the first time I saw my wife naked, I undressed and lay down on the bed.

The shower went off; Brahms came on that much stronger. Kay appeared in the doorway wrapped in a towel. I said, ‘Babe,’ she said, ‘Oh, Dwight,’ and let the towel drop. We both began talking at once, apologies from both sides. I couldn’t quite make out her words, and I knew that she couldn’t unscramble mine. I started to get up to turn off the phonograph, but Kay moved to the bed first.

We fumbled at kisses. I went open-mouthed too fast, forgetting how Kay liked to be coaxed. Feeling her tongue, I pulled away, knowing she hated it. Closing my eyes, I trailed my lips down her neck; she moaned, and I knew it was a fake. The love sounds got worse – like something you’d expect from a stag film actress. Kay’s breasts were flaccid in my hands, her legs closed, but braced up against me. A knee nudge parted them – the response was jerky, spasmodic. Hard now, I made Kay wet with my mouth and went inside her.

I kept my eyes open and on hers so she would know it was just us; Kay turned away, and I knew she saw through it. I wanted to ease off and go slowly, softly, but the sight of a vein throbbing in Kay's neck made me go as hard as I could. I came grunting, 'I'm sorry goddamn you I'm sorry' and whatever Kay said back was muffled by the pillow she was burying her head in.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

The following night I was parked across the street from the Sprague mansion, this time in the unmarked Ford I drove on to SID field jobs. Time was lost on me, but I knew that every second was bringing me closer to knocking on the door or bolting outright.

My mind played with Madeleine nude; I wowed the other Spragues with killer repartee. Then light cut across the driveway, the door slammed and the Packard's head-beams went on. It pulled out onto Muirfield, hung a quick left turn on Sixth Street and headed east. I waited a discreet three seconds and followed.

The Packard stayed in the middle lane; I dogged it from the right one, a good four car lengths behind. We traveled out of Hancock Park into the Wilshire District, south on Normandie and east on 8th Street. I saw glittery bar beacons stretching for a solid mile – and knew Madeleine was close to something.

The Packard stopped in front of the Zimba Room, a dive with crossed neon spears above the entrance. The only other parking space was right behind it, so I glided up, my headlights catching the driver locking the door, my brain wires unraveling when I saw who it wasn't and *was*.

Elizabeth Short.

Betty Short.

Liz Short.

The Black Dahlia.

My knees jerked into the steering wheel; my trembling hands hit the horn. The apparition shielded her eyes and squinted into my beams, then shrugged. I saw familiar dimples twitch, and returned from wherever it was I was going.

It was Madeleine Sprague, completely made over as the Dahlia. She was dressed in an all-black clinging gown, with makeup and hairdo identical to Betty Short at her portrait photo best. I watched her sashay into the bar, saw a dot of yellow in her upswept black curls and knew that she'd taken her transformation all the way to the barrette Betty wore. The detail hit me like a Lee Blanchard one-two. On punch-drunk legs, I pursued the ghost.

The Zimba Room interior was wall-to-wall smoke, GI's and juke box jazz; Madeleine was at the bar sipping a drink. Looking around, I saw that she was the only woman in the place and already creating a hubbub – soldiers and sailors were elbowing the good news to one another, pointing to the black-clad figure and exchanging whispers.

I found a zebra-striped booth at the back; it was filled with sailors sharing a bottle. One glance at their peach fuzz faces told me they were underage. I held out my badge and said, 'Scram or I'll have the SP's here inside of a minute.' The three youths took off in a blue swirl, leaving their jug behind. I sat down to watch Madeleine portray Betty.

Guzzling half a tumbler of bourbon calmed my nerves. I had a diagonal view of Madeleine at the bar, surrounded by would-be lovers hanging on her every word. I was too far away to hear anything – but every gesture I saw her make was *not* hers, but that of some other woman. And every time she touched a member of her entourage my hand twitched toward my .38.

Time stretched, in a haze of navy blue and khaki with a jet black center.

Madeleine drank, chatted and brushed off passes, her attention narrowing down to a stocky sailor. Her coterie dwindled out as the man shot them mean looks; I killed off the bottle. Staring at the bar kept me from thinking, the loud jazz kept my ears perked for the sound of voices above it, the booze kept me from rousting the stocky man on a half dozen trumped-up charges. Then the woman in black and the sailor in blue were out the door, arms linked, Madeleine inches taller in her high heels.

I gave them a bourbon-calmed five seconds, then hauled. The Packard was turning right at the corner when I got behind the wheel; gunning it and hanging a hard right myself, I saw taillights at the end of the block. I zoomed up behind them, almost tapping the rear bumper; Madeleine's signal arm shot out the window, and she veered into the parking lot of a brightly lit auto court.

I skidded to a stop, then backed up and killed my headlights. From the street I could see sailor boy standing by the Packard smoking a cigarette, while Madeleine hit the motel office for the room key. She came outside with it a moment later, just like our old routine; she made the sailor walk ahead of her, just like she did with me. The lights went on and off inside the room, and when I listened outside it the blinds were drawn and our old station was on the radio.

Rolling stakeouts.

Field interrogations.

The Bunsen burner jockey now a detective *with* a case.

I kept Madeleine's Dahlia act under surveillance for four more nights; she pulled the same MO every time: 8th Street gin mill, hard boy with lots of confetti on his chest, the fuck pad at 9th and Irolo. When the two were ensconced, I went back and questioned bartenders and GIs she gave the ixnay to.

What name did the black-clad woman give?

None.

What did she talk about?

The war and breaking into the movies.

Did you notice her resemblance to the Black Dahlia, that murdered girl from a couple of years ago, and if so, what do you think she was trying to prove?

Negative answers and theories: She's a loony who thinks she's the Black Dahlia; she's a hooker cashing in on the Dahlia's look; she's a policewoman decoy out to get the Dahlia killer; she's a crazy woman dying of cancer, trying to attract the Dahlia slasher and cheat the Big C.

I knew the next stop was to roust Madeleine's lovers – but I didn't trust myself to do it rationally. If they said the wrong thing or the right thing, or pointed me in the wrong/right direction. I knew I couldn't be held accountable for what I would do.

The four nights of booze, catnaps in the car and couch naps at home with Kay sequestered in the bedroom took their toll on me. At work I dropped slides and mislabeled blood samples, wrote evidence reports in my own exhaustion shorthand and twice fell asleep hunched over a ballistics miscroscope, awakening to jagged shots of Madeleine in black. Knowing I couldn't hack night five by myself or give it a pass, I stole some Benzedrine tablets awaiting processing for Narcotics Division. They juiced me out of my fatigue and into a clammy feeling of disgust for what I'd been doing to myself – and they gave me a brainstorm to save me from Madeleine/Dahlia and make me a real cop again.

Thad Green nodded along as I plea-bargained him: I had seven years on the Department, my run-in with the Vogels was over two years before and mostly forgotten, I hated working SID and wanted to return to a uniformed division – preferably nightwatch. I was studying for the Sergeant's Exam, SID had served me well as a training ground for my ultimate goal – the Detective Bureau. I started to launch a tirade on my shitty marriage and how nightwatch would keep me away from my wife, faltering when images of the lady in black hit me and I realized I was close to begging. The Chief of Detectives finally silenced me with a long stare, and I wondered if the dope was betraying me. Then he said, 'Okay, Bucky,' and pointed to the door. I waited in the outer office for a Benzedrine eternity; when Green walked out smiling, I almost jumped loose of my skin. 'Newton Street nightwatch as of tomorrow,' he said. 'And try to be civil with our colored brethren down there. You've got a bad case of the yips, and I wouldn't want you passing it on to them.'

Newton Street Division was southeast of downtown LA, 95 percent slums, 95 percent Negroes, all trouble. There were bottle gangs and crap games on every corner; liquor stores, hair-straightening parlors and poolrooms on every block, code three calls to the station twenty-four hours a day. Footbeat hacks carried metal-studded saps; squadroom dicks packed .45 automatics loaded with un-regulation dum-dums. The local winos drank 'Green Lizard' – cologne cut with Old Monterey white port, and the standard pop for a whore was one dollar, a buck and a quarter if you used 'her place' – the abandoned cars in the auto graveyard at 56th and Central. The kids on the street were scrawny and bloated, stray dogs sported mange and perpetual snarls, merchants kept shotguns under the counter. Newton Street Division was a war zone.

I reported for duty after twenty-two hours of sack time, booze-weaned off the Benzies. The station commander, an ancient lieutenant named Getchell, supplied a warm welcome, telling me that Thad Green said I was kosher, and he'd accept me as such until I fucked up and proved otherwise. Personally, he hated boxers and stoolies, but he was willing to let bygones be bygones. My fellow officers would probably take some persuading, however; they *really* hated glory cops, boxers and Bolsheviks, and Fritzie Vogel was warmly remembered from his Newton Street tour years before. The cordial CO assigned me to a single-o foot beat, and I left that initial briefing determined to out-kosher God himself.

My first roll call was worse.

Introduced to the watch by the muster sergeant, I got no applause and a wide assortment of fisheyes, evil eyes and averted eyes. After the reading of the crime sheet, seven men out of the fifty-five or so stopped to shake my hand and wish me good luck. The sergeant gave me a silent tour of the division and dropped me off with a street map at the east edge of my beat; his farewell was, 'Don't let the niggers give you no shit.' When I thanked him, he said, 'Fritz Vogel was a good pal of mine,' and sped off.

I decided to kosherize myself fast.

My first week at Newton was muscle rousts and gathering information on who the *real* bad guys were. I broke up Green Lizard parties with my billy club, promising not to roust the winos if they fed me names. If they didn't kick loose, I arrested them; if they did, I arrested them anyway. I smelled reefer smoke on the sidewalk outside the gassed hair joint on 68th and Beach, kicked the door in and drew down on three grasshoppers holding felony quantities of maryjane. They snitched off their supplier and fingered an upcoming rumble between The Slausons and Choppers in return for my promise of leniency; I called in the info to the squadroom and flagged down a black-and-white to haul the hopheads to the station. Prowling the hooker auto dump got me prostitution collars, and threatening the girls' johns with calls to their wives got me more names. At week's end I had twenty-two arrests to my credit – nine of them felonies. And I had names. Names to test my courage on. Names to make up for the main events I'd dodged. Names to make the cops who hated me afraid of me.

I caught Downtown Willy Brown coming out of the Lucky Time Wine Bar. I said, 'You mother sucks a mean dick, Sambo'; Willy charged me. I took three to give six; when it was over Brown was blowing teeth out his nose. And two cops shooting the breeze across the street saw the whole thing.

Roosevelt Williams, paroled rape-o, pimp and policy runner, was tougher. His response to 'Hello, shitbird,' was 'You a whitey motherfuck' – and he hit first. We traded shots for close to a minute, in full view of a cadre of Choppers lounging on front stoops. He was getting the better of me, and I almost went for my baton – not the stuff of which legends are made. Finally I pulled a Lee Blanchard move, rolling upstairs-downstairs sets, wham-wham-wham-wham, the last blow sending Williams to dreamland and me to the station nurse for two finger splints.

Bare knuckles were now out of the question. My last two names, Crawford Johnson and his brother Willis, operated a rigged card game out of the rec room of the Mighty Reedeemer Baptist Church on 61st and Enterprise, catty corner from the greasy spoon where Newton cops ate for half price. When I came in the window, Willis was dealing. He looked up and said, 'Huh?' my billy club took out his hands and the card table. Crawford went for his waistband; my second baton blow knocked a silencer fitted .45 from his grip. The brothers crashed out of the door howling in pain; I picked up my new off-duty piece and told the other gamblers to grab their money and go home. When I walked outside, I had an audience: bluesuits chomping sandwiches on the sidewalk, watching the Johnson brothers hotfoot it, holding their broken paws. 'Some people don't respond to civility!' I yelled. An old sergeant rumored to hate my guts yelled back, 'Bleichert, you're an honorary white man!' and I knew I was kosherized.

The Johnson Brothers roust made me a minor legend. My fellow cops gradually warmed to me – the way you do to guys too crazy-bold for their own good, guys that you're grateful not to be yourself. It was like being a local celebrity again.

I got straight 100's on my first month's fitness report, and Lieutenant Getchell rewarded me with a radio car beat. It was a promotion of sorts, as was the territory that came with it.

Rumor had it that both the Slausons and the Choppers were out to do me in, and if they failed, Crawford and Willis Johnson were next in line to try. Getchell wanted me out of harm's way until they cooled off, so he assigned me to a sector on the western border of the division.

The new beat was an invitation to boredom. Mixed white and Negro, small factories and tidy houses, the best action you could hope for was drunk drivers and hitchhiking hookers soliciting motorists, trying to pick up a few bucks on their way down to the niggertown dope pads. I busted DDs and thwarted assignations by flashing my cherry lights, wrote traffic tickets by the shitload and generally prowled for anything out of the ordinary. Drive-in restaurants were popping up on Hoover and Vermont, spangly modern jobs where you could eat in your car and listen to music on speakers attached to the window posts. I spent hours parked in them, KGFJ blasting be-bop, my two-way on low in case anything hot came over the air. I eyeballed the street while I sat and listened, trawling for white hookers, telling myself that if I saw any who looked like Betty Short, I'd warn them that 39th and Norton was only a few miles away and urge them to be careful.

But most of the whores were jigs and bleached blondes, not worth warning and only worth busting when my arrest quota was running low. They were women, though, safe places to let my mind dawdle, safe substitutes for my wife at home alone and Madeleine crawling 8th Street gutters. I toyed with the idea of picking up a Dahlia/Madeleine lookalike for sex, but always quashed it – it was too much like Johnny Vogel and Betty at the Biltmore.

Going off-duty at midnight, I was always itchy, restless, in no mood to go home and sleep. Sometimes I hit the all-night movies downtown, sometimes the jazz clubs on South Central. Bop was moving into its heyday, and all-night sessions with a pint of bonded were generally enough to ease me home and into a dreamless sleep shortly after Kay left for work in the morning.

But when it didn't work, it was sweats and Jane Chambers' smiling clown and Frenchman Joe Dulange smashing cockroaches and Johnny Vogel and his whip and Betty begging me to fuck her or kill her killer, she didn't care which. And the worst of it was waking up alone in the fairy tale house.

Summer came on. Hot days sleeping it off on the couch; hot nights patrolling west niggertown, bonded sourmash, the Royal Flush and Bido Lito's, Hampton Hawes, Dizzy Gillespie, Wardell Gray and Dexter Gordon. Restless attempts to study for the Sergeant's Exam and the urge to blow off Kay and the fairy tale house and get a cheap pad somewhere on my beat. If it weren't for the spectral wino it might have gone on forever.

I was parked in Duke's Drive-in, eyeing a gaggle of trampy-looking girls standing by the bus stop about ten yards in front of me. My two-way was off, wild Kenton riffs were coming out of the speaker hook-up. The breezeless humidity had my uniform plastered to my body; I hadn't made an arrest in a week. The girls were waving at passing cars, one peroxide blonde gyrating her hips at them. I started synchronizing the bumps and grinds to the music, playing with the idea of pulling a shakedown, running them through R&I for outstanding warrants. Then a scraggy old wino entered the scene, one hand holding a short dog, the other out begging for chump change.

The bottle blonde quit dancing to talk to him; the music went haywire – all screeches – without her accompaniment. I flashed my headlights; the wino shielded his eyes, then shot me the finger. I was out of the black-and-white and on top him, Stan Kenton's band my backup.

Roundhouse lefts and rights, rabbit punches. The girl's shrieks out-decibeling Big Stan. The wino cursing me, my mother, my father. Sirens in my head, the smell of rotting meat at the warehouse, even though I knew it couldn't be. The old geez blubbering, 'Pleeese.'

I staggered to the corner pay phone, gave it a nickel and dialed my own number. Ten rings, no Kay, WE–4391 without thinking. Her voice: 'Hello, Sprague residence.' My stammers; then, 'Bucky? Bucky, is that you?' The wino weaving toward me, sucking his bottle with bloody lips. Hands inside my pockets, pulling out bills to throw him, cash on the pavement. 'Come over, sweet. The others are down at Laguna. It could be like old—'

I left the receiver dangling and the wino scooping up the better part of my last paycheck. Driving to Hancock Park, I ran, just this one time, just to be inside the house again. Knocking, on the door, I had myself convinced. Then Madeleine was there, black silk, upswept coiffure, yellow barrette. I reached for her; she stepped back, pulled her hair loose and let it fall to her shoulders. ‘No. Not yet. It’s all I have to keep you with.’

4

Elizabeth

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

For a month she held me in a tight velvet fist.

Emmett, Ramona and Martha were spending June at the family's beach house in Orange County, leaving Madeleine to look after the Muirfield Road estate. We had twenty-two rooms to play in, a dream house built from immigrant ambition. It was a big improvement over the Red Arrow Motel and Lee Blanchard's monument to bank robbery and murder.

Madeleine and I made love in every bedroom, tearing loose every silk sheet and brocade coverlet, surrounded by Picassos and Dutch masters and Ming Dynasty vases worth hundreds of grand. We slept in the late mornings and early afternoons before I headed for niggertown; the looks I got from her neighbors when I walked to my car in full uniform were priceless.

It was a reunion of avowed tramps, rutters who knew that they'd never have it as good with anyone else. Madeleine explained her Dahlia act as a strategy to get me back; she had seen me parked in my car that night, and knew that a Betty Short seduction would keep me returning. The desire behind it moved me even as the elaborateness of the ruse elicited revulsion.

She dropped the look the second the door shut that first time. A quick rinse brought her hair back to its normal dark brown, the pageboy cut returned, the tight black dress came off. I tried everything but threats of leaving and begging; Madeleine kept me mollified with 'Maybe some day.' Our implicit compromise was Betty talk.

I asked questions, she digressed. We exhausted actual facts quickly; from then on it was pure interpretation.

Madeleine spoke of her utter malleability, Betty the chameleon who would be anyone to please anybody. I had her down as the center of the most baffling piece of detective work the Department had ever seen, the disrupter of most of the lives close to me, the human riddle I had to know *everything* about. That was my final perspective, and it felt bone shallow.

After Betty, I turned the conversation to the Spragues themselves. I never told Madeleine that I knew Jane Chambers, broaching Jane's inside stuff in roundabout ways. Madeleine said that Emmett was mildly worried about the forthcoming demolitions up by the Hollywoodland sign; that her mother's pageantry and love of strange books and medieval lore were nothing but 'Hophead stuff – Mama with time on her hands and a snootful of patent medicine.' After a while, she came to resent my probes and demanded turnabout. I told lies and wondered where I would go if my own past was all I had left.

CHAPTER THIRTY

Pulling up in front of the house, I saw a moving van in the driveway and Kay's Plymouth, top down, packed with boxes. The run for clean uniforms was turning into something else.

I double-parked and bolted up the steps, smelling Madeleine's perfume on myself. The van started backing out; I yelled, 'Hey! Goddamn it, come back here!'

The driver ignored me; words from the porch kept me from going after him. 'I didn't touch your things. And you can have the furniture.'

Kay was wearing her Eisenhower jacket and tweed skirt, just like when I'd first met her. I said, 'Babe,' and started to ask 'Why?' My wife counterpunched' 'Did you think I'd let my husband vanish for three weeks and do nothing about it? I've had detectives following you, Dwight. She looks like that fucking dead girl, so you can have *her* – not me.'

Kay's dry eyes and calm voice were worse than what she was saying. I felt shakes coming on, bad heebie-jeebies. 'Babe, goddamn it—'

Kay backed out of grabbing range. 'Whoremonger. Coward. *Necrophile*.'

The shakes got worse; Kay turned and made for her car, a deft little pirouette out of my life. I caught another scent of Madeleine and walked into the house.

The bentwood furniture looked the same, but there were no literary quarterlies on the coffee table and no cashmere sweaters folded in the dining room cabinet. The cushions on my couch-bed were neatly arrayed, like I'd never slept there. My phonograph was still by the fireplace, but all Kay's records were gone.

I picked up Lee's favorite chair and threw it at the wall; I hurled Kay's rocker at the cabinet, reducing it to glass rubble. I upended the coffee table and rammed it into the front window, then tossed it out on the porch. I kicked the rugs into sloppy piles, pulled out drawers, tipped over the refrigerator and took a hammer to the bathroom sink, smashing it loose from the pipes. It felt like going ten rounds full blast; when my arms were too limp to inflict more damage I grabbed my uniforms and my silencer .45 and got out, leaving the door open so scavengers could pick the place clean.

With the other Spragues due back in LA anyday, there was only one place to go. I drove to the El Nido, badged the desk clerk and told him he had a new tenant. He forked over an extra room key; seconds later I was smelling Russ Millard's stale cigarette smoke and Harry Sears' spilled rye. And I was eyeball to eyeball with Elizabeth Short on all four walls: alive and smiling, dumbstruck with cheap dreams, vivisected in a weedy vacant lot.

And without even saying it to myself, I knew what I was going to do.

I removed the file cases from the bed, stacked them in the closet and ripped off the sheets and blankets. The Dahlia photos were nailed to the wall; it was easy to drape the bedding over them so that they were completely covered. The pad perfect, I went prowling for props.

I found a jet-black upswept wig at Western Costume, a yellow barrette at a dime store on the Boulevard. The heebie-jeebies came back – worse than bad. I drove to the Firefly Lounge, hoping it still had Hollywood Vice's sanction.

One eyeball circuit inside told me it did. I sat down at the bar, ordered a double Old Forester and stared at the girls congregating on a matchbook-size bandstand. Footlights set in the floor shined up at them; they were only thing in the dump illuminated.

I downed my drink. They all looked typical – hophead whores in cheap slit kimonos. Counting five heads, I watched the girls smoke cigarettes and adjust their slits to show more leg. None was anywhere near close.

Then a skinny brunette in a flouncy cocktail dress stepped onto the bandstand. She blinked at the glare, scratched her pert button nose and toed figure eights on the floor.

I hooked a finger at the bartender. He came over with the bottle; I held a palm over my glass. 'The girl in the pink. How much to take her to my place for an hour or so?'

The barman sighed. 'Mister, we've got three rooms here. The girls don't like—'

I shut him up with a crisp new fifty. 'You're making an exception for me. Be generous with yourself.'

The fifty disappeared, then the man himself. I filled my glass and downed it, eyes on the bartop until I felt a hand on my shoulder.

'Hi, I'm Lorraine.'

I turned around. Close up she could have been any pretty brunette – perfect molding clay. 'Hi, Lorraine. I'm … B-B-Bill.'

The girl snickered, 'Hi, *Bill*. You wanna go now?'

I nodded; Lorraine walked outside ahead of me. Straight daylight showed off the runs in her nylons and old needle scars on her arms. When she got in the car I saw that her eyes were dull brown; when she drummed her fingers on the dashboard I saw that her closest link to Betty was chipped nail polish.

It was enough.

We drove to the El Nido and walked up to the room without saying a word. I opened the door and stood aside to let Lorraine enter; she rolled her eyes at the gesture, then gave a low whistle to let me know the place was a dive. I locked the door behind us, unwrapped the wig and handed it to her. 'Here. Take off your clothes and put this on.'

Lorraine did an inept strip. Her shoes clunked on the floor, she snagged her nylons pulling them off. I made a move to unzip her dress, but she saw it coming, turned away and did it herself. With her back to me, she unhooked her bra, stepped out of her panties and fumbled with the wig. Facing me, she said, 'This your idea of a big thrill?'

The coiffure was askew, like a gag rug on a vaudeville comic; only her breasts were a good match. I took off my jacket and started to work at my belt. Something in Lorraine's eyes stopped me; I snapped that she was afraid of my gun and handcuffs. I got the urge to calm her down by telling her I was a cop – then the look made her seem more like Betty, and I stopped.

The girl said, 'You won't hurt—'; I said, 'Don't talk,' and straightened the wig, bunching her lank brown hair up inside it. The fit was still all wrong, whorish and out of kilter. Lorraine was shaking now; head-to-toe shivers as I stuck the yellow barrette into the coif to make things right. All it did was rip loose strands of black as dry as straw and tilt everything off to one side, like the girl was the slash mouth clown, not my Betty.

I said, 'Lie down on the bed.' The girl complied, legs rigid and pressed together, hand underneath her, a skinny length of tics and twitches. Prone, the wig was half on her head, half on the pillow. Knowing the pictures on the wall would spark perfection, I pulled off the sheets covering them.

I stared at portrait-perfect Betty/Beth/Liz; the girl screamed, '*No! Killer! Police!*'

Wheeling around, I saw a naked fraud transfixed by 39th and Norton. I hurled myself onto the bed, pressed my hands over her mouth and held her down, talking it right and perfect: 'It's just that she has all these different names to be, and this woman won't be her for me, and I can't be just anybody like her, and every time I try I fuck it up, and my friend went crazy because his little sister might have been her if somebody didn't kill her—'

'KILL—'

The wig in disarray on the bedspread.

My hands on the girl's neck.

I let go and stood up slowly, palms out, no harm meant. The girl's vocal cords stretched, but she couldn't come up with a sound. She rubbed her throat where my hands had been, the imprint still bright red. I backed off to the far wall, unable to talk.

Mexican standoff.

The girl massaged her throat; something like ice came into her eyes. She got off the bed and put on her clothes facing me, the ice getting colder and deeper. It was a look I knew I couldn't match, so I got out my ID buzzer and held up LAPD badge 1611 for her to see. She smiled; I tried to imitate her; she walked up to me and spat on the piece of tin. The door slammed, the pictures on the wall fluttered, my voice came back in racking fits, 'I'll get him for you, he won't hurt you anymore, I'll make it up to you, oh Betty Jesus fuck I will.'

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

The airplane flew east, slicing through cloud banks and bright blue sky. My pockets were stuffed with cash from my all but liquidated bank account, Lieutenant Getchell had bought my line about a grievously ill high school pal in Boston and had granted me a week's accumulated sick leave. A stack of notes from the Boston PD's background check was on my lap – laboriously copied from the El Nido file. I already had an interrogation itinerary printed out, aided by the metropolitan Boston street atlas I'd purchased at the LA airport. When the plane landed, it would be Medford/Cambridge/Stoneham and Elizabeth Short's past – the part that didn't get smeared across page one.

I'd hit the master file yesterday afternoon, as soon as I quit shaking and was able to put how close I'd gotten to havoc out my brain – at least the front part of it. One quick skimming told me that the LA end of the investigation was dead, a second and third told me it was deader, a fourth convinced me that if I stayed in town I'd go batshit over Madeleine and Kay. I had to run, and if my vow to Elizabeth Short was to mean anything, it had to be in her direction. And if it was a wild-goose chase, then at least it was a trip to clean territory – where my badge and live women wouldn't get me into trouble.

The revulsion on the hooker's face wouldn't leave me; I could still smell her cheap perfume and imagined her spitting indictments, the same words Kay had used earlier that day, only worse – because she knew what I was: a whore with a badge. Thinking about her was like scraping the bottom of my life on my knees – the only comfort in it the fact that I couldn't go any lower – that I'd chew the muzzle of my .38 first.

The plane landed at 7:35; I was the first in line to disembark, notebook and satchel in hand. There was a car rental place in the terminal; I rented a Chevy coupe and headed into the Boston metropolis, anxious to take advantage of the hour or so of daylight left.

My itinerary included the addresses of Elizabeth's mother, two of her sisters, her high school, a Harvard Square hash house where she slung plates in '42 and the movie theater where she worked as a candy girl in '39 and '40. I decided on a loop through Boston to Cambridge, then Medford – Betty's real stomping ground.

Boston, quaint and old, hit me like a blur. I followed street signs to the Charles River Bridge and crossed over into Cambridge: ritzy Georgian pads and streets packed with college kids. More signs led me to Harvard Square; there was stop one – Otto's Hofbrau, a gingerbread structure spilling the aroma of cabbage and beer.

I parked in a meter space and walked in. The Hansel and Gretel motif extended to the whole place – carved wood booths, beer steins lining the walls, waitresses in dirndl skirts. I looked around for the boss, my eyes settling on a smock-clad older man standing by the cash register.

I walked over, and something kept me from badging him. 'Excuse me. I'm a reporter, and I'm writing a story on Elizabeth Short. I understand that she worked here back in '42, and I thought you could tell me a little about her then.'

The man said, 'Elizabeth who? She some sort of movie star?'

‘She was killed in Los Angeles a few years ago. It’s a famous case. Do you—’

‘I bought this place in ‘46, and the only employee I got left from the war is Roz. Rozzie, come here! Man wants to talk to you!’

The battle-axe waitress of them all materialized – a baby elephant in a thigh-length skirt. The boss said, ‘This guy’s a reporter. Wants to talk to you about Elizabeth Short. You remember her?’

Rozzie popped her gum at me. ‘I told the *Globe* and the *Sentinel* and the cops the first time around, and I ain’t changing my story. Betsy Short was a dish dropper and a dreamer, and if she didn’t bring in so much Harvard business, she wouldn’t a lasted a day. I heard she put out for the war effort, but I didn’t know none of her boyfriends. End of story. And you ain’t no reporter, you’re a cop.’

I said, ‘Thank you for that perceptive comment,’ and left.

My atlas placed Medford twelve miles away, a straight run out Massachusetts Avenue. I got there just as night was falling, smelling it first, then seeing it.

Medford was a factory town, smoke-belching foundry stacks forming its perimeter. I rolled up my window to hold off the sulfur stink; the industrial area dwindled into blocks of narrow red-brick houses crammed together with less than a foot between them. Every block had at least two gin mills, and when I saw Swasey Boulevard – the street the movie theater was on – I opened my wind wing to see if the foundry stench was dissipating. It wasn’t – and the windshield was already bearing a film of greasy soot.

I found the Majestic a few blocks down, a typical Medford red-brick building, the marquee heralding *Criss Cross* with Burt Lancaster and *Duel in the Sun* – ‘All Star Cast.’ The ticket booth was empty, so I walked straight into the theater and up to the snack stand. The man behind it said, ‘Anything wrong, officer?’ I groaned that the locals had my number – three thousand miles from home.

‘No, nothing’s wrong. Are you the manager?’

‘The owner. Ted Carmody. You BPD?’

I reluctantly displayed my shield. ‘Los Angeles Police Department. It’s about Beth Short.’

Ted Carmody crossed himself. ‘Poor Lizzie. You got some hot leads? That why you’re here?’

I put a nickel on the counter, grabbed a Snickers bar and unwrapped it. ‘Let’s just say I owe Betty one, and I’ve got a few questions.’

‘Ask on.’

‘First off, I’ve seen the Boston Police background check file, and your name wasn’t listed on the interview sheet. Didn’t they talk to you?’

Carmody handed me back my nickel. ‘On the house, and I didn’t talk to the Boston cops because they talked Lizzie up like she was some sort of tramp. I don’t cooperate with bad-mouthers.’

‘That’s admirable, Mr Carmody. But what would you have told them?’

‘Nothing dirty, that’s for damn sure. Lizzie was all aces to me. If the cops had been properly respectful of the dead, I’d have told ’em that.’

The man was exhausting me. ‘I’m a respectful guy. Pretend that it’s two years ago and tell me.’

Carmody couldn’t quite peg my style, so I chomped the candy bar to ease him into some slack. ‘I’d have told ’em Lizzie was a bad worker,’ he said finally. ‘And I’d have told ’em I didn’t care. She brought the boys in like a magnet, and if she kept sneaking in to watch the picture, so what? For fifty cents an hour I didn’t expect her to slave for me.’

I said, ‘What about her boyfriends?’

Carmody slammed the counter; Jujubees and Milk Duds toppled over. ‘Lizzie wasn’t no roundheels! The only boyfriend I knew she had was this blind guy, and I knew it was just palship. Listen, you want to know what kind of kid Lizzie was? I’ll tell you. I used to let the blind guy in for free, so he could listen to the picture, and Lizzie kept sneaking in to tell him what was on the screen. You know, describe it to him. That sound like tramp behavior to you?’

It felt like a punch to the heart. ‘No, it doesn’t. Do you remember the guy’s name?’

‘Tommy something. He’s got a room over the VFW Hall down the block, and if he’s a killer I’ll flap my arms and fly to Nantucket.’

I stuck out my hand. ‘Thanks for the candy bar, Mr. Carmody.’

We shook. Carmody said, ‘You get the guy who killed Lizzie, I’ll buy you the factory that makes the goddamn things.’

As I said the words, I knew it was one of the finest moments of my life:

‘I will.’

The VFW Hall was across the street and down from the Majestic, yet another red-brick structure streaked with soot. I walked there thinking of blind Tommy as a big washout, someone I had to talk to soften up Betty, make her live more easily in me.

Side steps took me upstairs, past a mailbox labeled T. GILFOYLE. Ringing the bell, I heard music; looking in the one window I saw pitch darkness. Then a soft male voice came from the other side of the door. ‘Yes? Who is it?’

‘Los Angeles Police, Mr. Gilfoyle. It’s about Elizabeth Short.’

Light hit the window, the music died. The door opened, and a tall pudgy man wearing dark glasses pointed me inside. He was immaculate in striped sport-shirt and slacks, but the room was a pigsty, dust and grime everywhere, an army of bugs scattering from the unaccustomed blast of brightness.

Tommy Gilfoyle said, ‘My Braille teacher read me the LA papers. Why did they say such nasty things about Beth?’

I tried diplomacy. ‘Because they didn’t know her like you did.’

Tommy smiled and plopped into a ratty chair. ‘Is the apartment really disreputable?’

The couch was littered with phonograph records; I scooped a handful aside and sat down. ‘It could use a lick and a promise.’

‘I get slothful sometimes. Is Beth’s investigation active again? Priority stuff?’

‘No, I’m here on my own. Where did you pick up the cop lingo?’

‘I have a policeman friend.’

I brushed a fat bug off my sleeve. ‘Tommy, tell me about you and Beth. Give me something that didn’t make the papers. Something good.’

‘Is this personal with you? Like a vendetta?’

‘It’s more than that.’

‘My friend said policemen who take their work personally get in trouble.’

I stomped a cockroach exploring my shoe. ‘I just want to get the bastard.’

‘You don’t have to yell. I’m blind, not deaf, and I wasn’t blind to Beth’s little faults, either.’

‘How so?’

Tommy fingered the cane by his chair. ‘Well, I won’t dwell on it, but Beth was promiscuous, just like the newspapers implied. I knew the reason, but I kept still because I didn’t want to disgrace her memory, and I knew that it wouldn’t help the police find her killer.’

The man was wheedling now, caught between wanting to kick loose and keep secrets. I said, 'You let *me* judge that. I'm an experienced detective.'

'At your age? I can tell by your voice that you're young. My friend said that to make detective you have to serve at least ten years on the force.'

'Goddamn it, don't dick me around. I came here on my own and I didn't come to —'

I stopped when I saw that the man was frightened, one hand going for the telephone. 'Look, I'm sorry. It's been a long day, and I'm a long way from home.'

Tommy surprised me by smiling. 'I'm sorry, too. I was just being coy to prolong the company, and that's rude. So I'll tell you about Beth, her little foibles and all.

'You probably know she was star-struck, and that's true. You probably guessed that she didn't have much talent, and that's true, too. Beth read plays to me – acting all the parts, and she was a terrible ham – just awful. I understand the spoken word, so believe me, I know.

'What Beth was good at was writing. I used to sit in on movies at the Majestic, and Beth used to describe things so I'd have something to go with the dialogue. She was brilliant, and I encouraged her to write for the movies, but she just wanted to be an actress like every other silly girl who wanted to get out of Medford.'

I would have committed mass murder to get out. 'Tommy, you said you know the reason Beth was promiscuous.'

Tommy sighed. 'When Beth was sixteen or seventeen, these two thugs assaulted her, somewhere in Boston. One actually raped her, and the other was going to, but a sailor and a marine came by and chased them away.

'Beth thought the man might have made her pregnant, so she went to a doctor for an examination. He told her she had benign ovarian cysts, that she'd never be able to have children. Beth went crazy, because she'd always wanted lots of babies. She looked up the sailor and marine who'd saved her, and she begged them to father her child. The marine turned her down, and the sailor … he used Beth until he was shipped overseas.'

I thought immediately of Frenchman Joe Dulange – his account of the Dahlia hipped on being pregnant, how he fixed her up with a 'doctor buddy' and a bogus exam. That part of Dulange' story obviously wasn't as booze-addled as Russ Millard and I had originally thought – it was now a solid lead on Betty's missing days, the 'doctor buddy' at least a major witness, maybe a major suspect. I said, 'Tommy, do you know the names of the sailor and marine? The doctor?'

Tommy shook his head. 'No. But that was when Beth became so loose with servicemen. She thought they were her saviors, that they could give her a child, a little girl to be a great actress in case she never made it. It's sad, but the only place I heard Beth was a great actress was in bed.'

I stood up. 'What happened with you and Beth then?'

'We lost touch. She left Medford.'

'You've given me a good lead, Tommy. Thanks.'

The blind man tapped his cane at the sound of my voice. 'Then get who did it, but don't let Beth get hurt anymore.'

'I won't.'

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

The Short case was hot again – if only with me.

Hours of Medford pub crawling gave me promiscuous Betty, East Coast style – a big anticlimax after Tommy Gilfoyle's revelations. I caught a midnight flight back to LA and called Russ Millard from the airport. He agreed: Frenchman Joe's 'roach doctor' was probably legit, independent of Dulange's DTs. He proposed a call to the Fort Dix CID to try to get more details from the discharged loony, then a three-man canvassing of downtown doctor's offices, concentrating on the area around the Havana Hotel, where Dulange coupled with Betty. I suggested that the 'doctor' was most likely a barfly, an abortionist or a quack; Russ concurred. He said he would talk to R & I and his snitches, and he and Harry Sears would be knocking on doors inside of an hour. We divvied up the territory: Figueroa to Hill, 6th Street to 9th Street for me; Figueroa to Hill, 5th to 1st for them. I hung up and drove straight downtown.

I stole a Yellow Pages and made a list: legitimate MD's and chiropractors, herb pushers and mystics – bloodsuckers who sold religion and patent medicine under the 'doctor' aegis. The book had a few listings for obstetricians and gynacologists, but instinct told me that Joe Dulange's doctor ploy was happenstance – not the result of his consciously seeking a specialist to calm Betty down. Running on adrenaline, I worked.

I caught most of the doctors early in their day, and got the widest assortment of sincere denials I'd ever encountered as a cop. Every solid citizen croaker I talked to convinced me a little bit more that Frenchy's pal had to be at least a little bit hinky. After a wolfed sandwich lunch, I hit the quasi types.

The herb loonies were all Chinese; the mystics were half women, half squarejohn lames. I believed all of their bewildered no's; I pictured all of them too terrified by the Frenchman to consider his offer. I was about to start hitting bars for scuttlebutt on barfly docs when exhaustion hit me. I drove 'home' to the El Nido and slept – for all of twenty minutes.

Too itchy to try sleep again, I tried thinking logically. It was 6:00, doctors' offices were closing for the day, the bars wouldn't be *ripe* for canvassing for at least three hours. Russ and Harry would call me if they got something hot. I reached for the master file and started reading.

Time flew; names, dates and locations in police jargon kept me awake. Then I saw something that I'd perused a dozen times before, only this time it seemed off.

It was two memo slips:

> 1/18/47: Harry – Call Buzz Meeks at Hughes and have him call around on possible E. Short movie bus. associations. Bleichert says the girl was star struck. Do this independent of Loew – Russ.
>
> 1/22/47: Russ – Meeks says goose egg. Too bad. He was anxious to help – Harry.

With Betty's movie mania fresh in my mind, the memos looked different. I remembered Russ telling me that he was going to query Meeks, the Hughes security boss and the Department's 'unofficial liaison' to the Hollywood community; I recalled that this was during the time when Ellis Loew was suppressing evidence on Betty's promiscuity in order to secure himself a better prosecuting attorney's showcase. Also: Betty's little black book listed a number of lower-echelon movie people – names that were checked out during the '47 black book interrogations.

The big question:

If Meeks really had checked around, why didn't he come up with at least a few of the black book names and forward them to Russ and Harry?

I went out to the hall, got the Hughes Security number from the White Pages and dialed it. A singsong woman answered: 'Security. May I help you?'

'Buzz Meeks, please.'

'Mr. Meeks is out of the office right now. Whom shall I say is calling?'

'Detective Bleichert, LAPD. When will he be back?'

'When the budget meeting breaks up. May I asks what this is in reference to?'

'Police business. Tell him I'll be at his office in half an hour.'

I hung up and leadfooted it to Santa Monica in twenty-five minutes. The gate guard admitted me to the plant parking lot, pointing to the security office – a Quonset hut at the end of a long string of aircraft hangars. I parked and knocked on the door; the woman with the singsong voice opened it. Mr. Meeks said you should wait in his office. He won't be very long.'

I walked in; the woman left, looking relieved that her day's work was over. The hut was wallpapered with paintings of Hughes aircraft, military art on a par with the drawings on cereal boxes. Meeks' office was better decorated: photos of a burly crewcut man with various Hollywood hotshots – actresses I couldn't place by name along with George Raft and Mickey Rooney.

I took a seat. The burly man showed up a few minutes later, hand out automatically, like someone whose job was ninety-five percent public relations. 'Hello there. Detective Blyewell, is it?'

I stood up. We shook; I could tell that Meeks was put off by my two-day clothes and three-day beard. 'It's Bleichert.'

'Of course. What can I do for you?'

'I have a few questions about an old case you helped Homicide out with.'

'I see. You're with the Bureau, then?'

'Newton Patrol.'

Meeks sat down behind his desk. 'A little out of your bailiwick, aren't you? And my secretary said you were a detective.'

I closed the door and leaned against it. 'This is personal with me.'

'Then you'll top out. your twenty rousting nigger piss bums. Or hasn't anyone told you that cops who take things personal end up from hunger?'

'They keep telling me, and I keep telling them that's my hometown. You fuck a lot of starlets, Meeks?'

'I fucked Carol Lombard. I'd give you her number, but she's dead.'

'Did you fuck Elizabeth Short?'

Tilt, bingo, jackpot, lie detector perfect as Meeks flushed and fingered the papers on his blotter; a wheezing voice to back it up: 'You catch a few too many in the Blanchard fight? The Short cooze is dead.'

I pulled back my jacket to show Meeks the .45 I was carrying. 'Don't call her that again.'

'All right, tough guy. Now suppose you tell me what you want. Then we settle up and end this little charade before it gets out of hand. Comprende?'

'In '47, Harry Sears asked you to query your movie contacts on Betty Short. You reported back that it was a washout. You were lying. Why?'

Meeks picked up a letter opener. He ran a finger along the blade, saw what he was doing and put it down. 'I didn't kill her and I don't know who did.'

'Convince me, or I call up Hedda Hopper and give her tomorrow's column. How's this sound: 'Hollywood hanger-on suppressed Dahlia evidence because blank, blank, blank'? You fill in those blanks for me, or I fill them in for Hedda. Comprende?'

Meeks gave bravado another try. 'Bleichert, you are fucking with the wrong man.'

I pulled out the .45, made sure the silencer was on tight and slid a round into the chamber. 'No, you are.'

Meeks reached for a decanter on the sideboard by his desk; he poured himself a bracer and gulped it: 'What I got was a dead-end lead, but you can have it if you want it so bad.'

I dangled my gun by the trigger guard. 'From hunger, shitbird. So give it to me.'

Meeks opened up a safe built into his desk and pulled out a sheaf of papers. He studied them, then swiveled his chair and spoke to the wall. 'I got a tip on Burt Lindscott, a producer at Universal. I got it from a guy who hated Lindscott's pal Scotty Bennett. Scotty was a pimp and a bookie, and he gave out Lindscott's home phone number in Malibu to all the good-looking young stuff who applied at the Universal casting office. The Short girl got one of Scotty's cards, and she called Lindscott.

'The rest, the dates and so forth, I got from Lindscott himself. On the night of January tenth, the girl called from the Biltmore downtown. Burty had her describe herself, and he liked what he heard. He told the girl he'd give her a screen test in the morning, when he got back from a poker session at his club. The girl said she didn't have any place to go until then, so Lindscott told her to come over and spend the night at his place – his houseboy would feed her and keep her company. She took a bus out to Malibu, and the houseboy – he was queer – did keep her company. Then, the next day around noon, Lindscott and three buddies of his came home drunk.

'The guys thought they'd have some fun, so they gave the girl this screen test, reading from a screenplay Burt had lying around. She was bad, and they laughed her out, then Lindscott made her an offer: service the four of them and he'd give her a bit part in his next picture. The kid was still mad at them for laughing at her screen test, and she threw a tantrum. She called them draft dodgers and traitors and said they weren't fit to be soldiers. Burt kicked her out around two-thirty that afternoon, Saturday the eleventh. The houseboy said she was broke and that she said she was gonna walk back downtown.'

So Betty walked, or hitched, twenty-five miles downtown, meeting Sally Stinson and Johnny Vogel in the Biltmore lobby six hours or so later I said. 'Meeks, why didn't you report this? And look at me.'

Meeks swiveled around; his features were smeared with shame. 'I tried to get a hold of Russ and Harry, but they were out in the field, so I called Ellis Loew. He told me not to report what I'd found out, and he threatened to revoke my security clearance. Later on I found out that Lindscott was a Republican bigwig, and he'd promised Loew a bundle for his run at DA. Loew didn't want him implicated with the Dahlia.'

I shut my eyes so I wouldn't have to look at the man; Meeks copped pleas while I ran pictures of Betty hooted at, propositioned, kicked out to die. 'Bleichert, I checked out Lindscott and his houseboy and his buddies. These are legit depositions I've got –

the megillah. None of them could have killed her. They were all at home and at their jobs from the twelfth straight through Friday the seventeenth. None of them could have done it, and I wouldn't have sat on it if one of the bastards snuffed her. I've got the depositions right here, and I'll show you.'

I opened my eyes; Meeks was twirling the dial of a wall safe. I said, 'How much did Loew pay you to keep quiet?'

Meeks blurted, 'A grand,' and backed off as if fearing a blow. I loathed him too much to give him the satisfaction of punishment, and left with his price tag hanging in the air.

I now had Elizabeth Short's missing days halfway filled in:

Red Manley dropped her in front of the Biltmore at dusk on Friday, January tenth; she called Burt Lindscott from there, and her Malibu adventures lasted until 2:30 the following afternoon. She was back at the Biltmore that evening, Saturday the eleventh, met Sally Stinson and Johnny Vogel in the lobby, tricked with Johnny until shortly after midnight, then took off. She met Corporal Joseph Dulange then, or later in the morning, at the Night Owl Bar on 6th and Hill – two blocks from the Biltmore. She was with Dulange, there and at the Havana Hotel, until the afternoon or evening of Sunday, January twelfth, when he took her to see his 'doctor buddy'

Driving back to the El Nido, some missing piece of legwork nagged at me through my exhaustion. Passing a phone booth it came to me: if Betty called Lindscott in Malibu – a toll call – there would be a record with Pacific Coast Bell. If she made other toll calls, at that time or on the eleventh, before or after her coupling with John Vogel, P.C.B. would have the information in its records – the company saved tallies of pay phone transactions for cost and price studies.

My fatigue nosedived once more. I took side streets the rest of the way, running stop signs and red lights; arriving, I parked in front of a hydrant and ran up to the room for a notebook. I was heading for the hallway phone when it foiled me by ringing.

'Yes?'

'Bucky? Sweet, is that you?'

It was Madeleine. 'Look, I can't talk to you now.'

'We had a date yesterday, remember?'

'I had to leave town. It was for work.'

'You could have called. If you hadn't told me about this little hideaway of yours I'd have thought you were dead.'

'Madeleine, Jesus Christ—'

'Sweet, I need to see you. They're tearing those letters off the Hollywoodland sign tomorrow, *and* demolishing some bungalows Daddy owns up there. Bucky, the deeds lapsed to the city, but Daddy bought that property and built those places under his own name. He used *the* worst materials, and an investigator from the City Council has been nosing around Daddy's tax lawyers. One of them told him this old enemy of his who committed suicide left the Council a brief on Daddy's holdings and—'

It sounded like gibberish – tough guy Daddy in trouble, tough boy Bucky the second choice for consolation duty. I said, 'Look, I can't talk to you now,' and hung up.

Now it was real detective shitwork. I arrayed my notebook and pen on the ledge by the phone and emptied a four-day accumulation of coins from my pockets, counting close to two dollars – enough for forty calls. First I called the night supervisor at Pacific Coast Bell, requesting a list of all toll and collect calls made from Biltmore Hotel pay phones on the evenings of January 10, 11, and 12, 1947; the names and addresses of the called parties and the times of the calls.

I stood nervously holding the receiver while the woman did her work, shooting dirty looks to other El Nido residents who wanted to use the phone. Then, a half hour later, she came back on the line and started talking.

The Lindscott number and address was there among the 1/10 listings, but nothing else that night registered as hinky. I wrote all the information down anyway; then, when the woman got to the evening of 1/11 – right around the time Betty met Sally Stinson and Johnny Vogel in the Biltmore lobby – I hit paydirt:

Four toll calls were made to obstetricians' offices in Beverly Hills. I took down the names and numbers, along with the numbers for the doctors' night answering services, and the immediately following toll call listings. They produced no sparks – but I copied them anyway. Then I attacked Beverly Hills with an arsenal of nickels.

It took all my change to get what I wanted.

I told the answering service operators it was a police emergency; they put me through to the doctors at home. They had their secretaries drive to the office to check their back records, then call me at the El Nido. The whole process took two hours. At the end of it I had this:

On the early evening of January 11, 1947, a 'Mrs. Fickling' and a 'Mrs. Gordon' called a total of four different obstetricians' offices in Beverly Hills, requesting appointments for pregnancy testing. The after-hours service operators made appointments for the mornings of January 14 and 15. Lieutenant Joseph Fickling and Major Matt Gordon were two of the war heros Betty dated and pretended to be married to; the appointments were never kept because on the fourteenth she was getting tortured to death; on the fifteenth she was a mutilated pile of flesh at 39th and Norton.

I called Russ Millard at the Bureau; a vaguely familiar voice answered: 'Homicide.'

'Lieutenant Millard, please.'

'He's in Tucson extraditing a prisoner.'

'Harry Sears, too?'

'Yeah. How are you, Bucky? It's Dick Cavanaugh.'

'I'm surprised you could place my voice.'

'Harry Sears told me you'd be calling. He left a list of doctors for you, but I can't find it. That what you want?'

'Yeah, and I need to talk to Russ. When's he coming back?'

'Late tomorrow, I think. Is there someplace I can call you if I find the list?'

'I'm rolling. I'll call you.'

The other phone numbers had to be tried, but the obstetrician lead was too potent to sit on. I headed back downtown to look for Dulange's doctor buddy, my exhaustion dropped like a hot rock.

I kept at it until midnight, concentrating on the bars around 6th and Hill, talking up barflies, buying them drinks, racking up booze rebop and a couple of tips on abortion mills that almost sounded legit.

Another sleepless day ended; I took to driving from bar to bar, playing the the radio to keep from dozing off. The news kept droning on about the 'milestone refurbishing' of the Hollywoodland sign – playing up the lopping off of L-A-N-D as the biggest thing since Jesus. Mack Sennett and his Hollywoodland tract got a lot of air time, and a theater in Hollywood was reviving a bunch of his old Keystone Kops pictures.

Toward bar-closing time, I felt like a Keystone Kop and looked like a bum – scraggly beard, soiled clothes, fevered attention that kept wandering off. When drunks eager for more booze and camaraderie began giving me the brush, I took it as a strong hint, drove to a deserted parking lot, pulled in and slept.

Leg cramps woke me up at dawn. I stumbled out of the car looking for a phone; a black-and-white cruised by, the driver giving me a long fisheye. I found a booth at the corner and dialed the padre's number.

'Homicide Bureau. Sergeant Cavanaugh.'

'Dick, it's Bucky Bleichert.'

'Just the man I wanted to talk to. I've got the list. You got the pencil?'

I dug out a pocket notebook. 'Shoot.'

'Okay. These are licensed-revoked doctors. Harry said they were practicing downtown in '47. One, Gerald Constanzo, 1841½ Breakwater, Long Beach. Two, Melvin Praeger, 9661 North Verdugo, Glendale. Three, Willis Roach. That's Roach like in the bug, in custody at Wayside Honor Rancho, convicted of selling morph in …'

Dulange.

The DTs.

'So I take Dahlia down the street to see the *roach doctor*. I slip him a tensky, and he gives her a fake examination …'

Breathing shallowly, I said, 'Dick, did Harry write down the address where Roach was practicing?'

'Yeah. 614 South Olive.'

The Havana Hotel was two blocks away. 'Dick, call Wayside and tell the warden that I'll be driving up immediately to question Roach on the Elizabeth Short homicide.'

'Mother dog.'

'Motherfucking dog.'

A shower, shave and change of clothes at the El Nido had me looking like a homicide detective; Dick Cavanaugh's call to Wayside would give me the rest of the juice I needed. I took the Angeles Crest Highway north, laying 50–50 odds that Dr. Willis Roach was Elizabeth Short's murderer.

The trip took a little over an hour; Hollywoodland sign spiel accompanied me on the radio. The deputy sheriff in the gate hut examined my badge and ID card and called the main building to clear me; whatever he was told made him snap to attention and salute. The barbed-wire fence swung open; I drove past the inmate barracks and over to a large Spanish-style structure fronted by a tile portico. As I parked, an LASD captain in uniform walked over, hand out, nervous grin on. 'Detective Bleichert, I'm Warden Patchett.'

I got out and gave the man a Lee Blanchard bone-crusher. 'A pleasure, Warden. Has Roach been told anything?'

'No. He's in an interrogation room waiting for you. Do you think he killed the Dahlia?'

I started walking; Patchett steered me in the right direction. 'I'm not sure yet. What can you tell me about him?'

'He's forty-eight years old, he's an anesthesiologist, and he was arrested in October of '47 for selling hospital morphine to an LAPD narcotics officer. He got five to ten, did a year at Quentin. He's down here because we needed help in the infirmary and the Adult Authority thought he'd be a safe risk. He's got no prior arrests, and he's been a model prisoner.'

We turned into a low, tan brick building, a typical county 'utility' job – long corridors, recessed steel doors embossed with numbers and no names. Passing a string of one-way glass windows. Patchett grabbed my arm. 'There. That's Roach.'

I stared in. A bony middle-aged man in county denims was seated at a card table, reading a magazine. He was a smart-looking bird – high forehead covered by wisps of thinning gray hair, bright eyes, the kind of large, veiny hands you associate with doctors. I said, 'Care to sit in, Warden?'

Patchett opened the door. 'Wouldn't miss it.'

Roach looked up. Patchett said, 'Doc, this is Detective Bleichert. He's with the Los Angeles Police, and he's got a few questions for you.'

Roach put down his magazine – *American Anesthesiologist*. Patchett and I took seats across from him; the doctor/dope peddler said, 'However I can be of service,' his voice eastern and educated.

I went right for the throat. 'Dr. Roach, why did you kill Elizabeth Short?'

Roach smiled slowly; gradually his grin spread ear to ear. 'I expected you back in '47. After Corporal Dulange made that sad little confession of his, I expected you to break down my office door any second. Two and a half years after the fact surprises me, however.'

My skin was buzzing; it felt like bugs were getting ready to eat me for breakfast. 'There's no statute of limitations on murder.'

Roach's grin disappeared, replaced by a serious look, the movie doctor getting ready to deliver some bad news. 'Gentlemen, on Monday, January 13, 1947, I flew to San Franciso and checked in at the Saint Francis Hotel, preparatory to delivering my Tuesday night keynote speech at the annual convention of the Academy of American Anesthesiologists. I gave the speech Tuesday night, and was featured speaker at the farewell breakfast. Wednesday morning, January fifteenth. I was in the constant company of colleagues through the afternoon of the fifteenth, and I slept with my ex-wife at the Saint Francis both Monday and Tuesday nights. If you would like corroboration, call the Academy at their Los Angeles number, and my ex-wife, Alice Carstairs Roach, at San Francisco CR-1786.'

I said, 'Check that out for me, would you please, Warden?,' my eyes on Roach,.

Patchett left; the doctor said, 'You look disappointed.'

'Bravo, Willis. Now tell me about you and Dulange and Elizabeth Short.'

'Will you inform the Parole Board that I cooperated with you?'

'No, but if you don't tell me I'll have the LA District Attorney file charges on you for obstruction of justice.'

Roach acknowledged match point with a grin. 'Bravo, Detective Bleichert. You know, of course, that the reason the dates are so well fixed in my mind is due to all the publicity Miss Short's death garnered. So please trust my memory.'

I got out a pen and notepad. 'Go, Willis.'

Roach said, 'In '47 I had a lucrative little sideline selling pharmaceuticals. I sold them primarily in cocktail lounges, primarily to servicemen who had discovered their pleasures overseas during the war. That was how I met Corporal Dulange. I approached him, but he informed me that he appreciated the pleasures of Johnnie Walker Red Label scotch whisky exclusively.'

'Where was this?'

'At the Yorkshire House Bar, 6th and Olive Streets, near my office.'

'Go on.'

‘Well, that was the Thursday or Friday before Miss Short’s demise. I gave Corporal Dulange my card – injudiciously, as it turned out – and I assumed that I would never see the man again. Sadly, I was wrong.

‘I was in poor shape financially at that time, owing to the ponies, and I was living in my office. On the early evening of Sunday, January twelfth, Corporal Dulange showed up at my door with a lovely young woman named Beth in tow. He was quite drunk, and he took me aside, pressed ten dollars into my hand and told me lovely Beth was hipped on being pregnant. Would I please give her a quick examination and tell her it was so?’

‘Well, I obliged. Corporal Dulange waited in my outer office, and I took lovely Beth’s pulse and blood pressure and informed her that yes indeed she was pregnant. Her response was quite strange: she seemed sad and relieved at the same time. My interpretation was that she needed a reason to justify her obvious promiscuity, and child bearing seemed like the ticket.’

I sighed. ‘And when her death became news, you didn’t go to the police because you didn’t want them nosing around your dope racket?’

‘Yes, that’s correct. But there’s more. Beth asked to use my phone. I acceded, and she dialed a number with a Webster prefix and asked to speak to Marcy. She said, ‘It’s Betty,’ and listened for a while, then said, ‘Really? A man with a medical background?’ I didn’t hear the rest of the conversation, and Beth hung up and said, ‘I’ve got a date.’ She joined Corporal Dulange in my waiting room, and they left. I looked out the window, and she was giving him the brush-off. Corporal Dulange stormed away, and Beth walked across 6th Street and sat down at the westbound Wilshire Boulevard bus stop. That was about seven-thirty, Sunday the twelfth. There. You didn’t know that last part, did you?’

I finished up my shorthand version of it. ‘No, I didn’t.’

‘Will you tell the Parole Board that I gave you a valuable clue?’

Patchett opened the door. ‘He’s clean, Bleichert.’

‘No shit,’ I said.

Another piece of Betty’s missing days revealed; another trip back to the El Nido, this time to check the master file for Webster prefix phone numbers. Going through the paperwork, I kept thinking that the Spragues had a Webster number, the Wilshire bus passed within a couple of blocks of their place and Roach’s ‘Marcy’ could be mistaken ‘Maddy’ or ‘Martha.’ It didn’t follow logically – the whole family was down at their Laguna beach house the week of Betty’s disappearance, Roach was certain about the ‘Marcy’ and I had squeezed every ounce of Dahlia knowledge out of Madeleine.

Still, the thought simmered, like some buried part of me wanted to hurt the family for the way I’d rolled in the gutter with their daughter and sucked up to their wealth. I threw out another hook to keep it going; it fell flat when confronted with logic:

When Lee Blanchard disappeared in ’47, his ‘R’, ‘S’ and ‘T’ files were missing; maybe the Sprague file was among them.

But there was no Sprague file, Lee did not know that the Spragues existed, I kept everything pertaining to them away from him out of a desire to keep Madeleine’s lesbian bar doings under wraps.

I continued skimming the file, sweating in the hot, airless room. No Webster prefixes appeared, and I started getting nightmare flashes: Betty sitting on the westbound Wilshire bus stop, 7:30 P.M.., 1/12/47, waving bye-bye Bucky, about to jump into eternity. I thought about querying the bus company, a general rousting of drivers on that route – then realized it was too cold, that any driver who remembered picking up Betty would have come forward during all the ’47 publicity. I thought of calling the other numbers I’d gotten from Pacific Coast Bell – then jacked that chronologically they were off – they didn’t jibe with my new knowledge of where Betty was at what time. I called Russ at the Bureau and learned that he was still in Tucson, while Harry was working crowd control up by the Hollywoodland sign. I finished my paper prowl, with a total of zero Webster prefixes. I thought of yanking Roach’s P.C.B. file, nixing the notion immediately. Downtown LA, Madison prefix to Webster, was *not* a toll call – there would be no record, ditto on the Biltmore listings.

It came on then, big and ugly: bye-bye Bleichert at the bus stop, adios shitbird, has-been, never-was, stool pigeon nigger-town harness bull. You traded a good woman for skunk pussy, you’ve turned everything that’s been handed you to pure undiluted shit, your ‘I will’s’ amount to the eighth round at the Academy gym when you stepped into a Blanchard right hand – pratfalling into another pile of shit, clover that you turned to horse dung. Bye-bye Betty, Beth, Betsy, Liz, we were a couple of tramps, too bad we didn’t meet before 39th and Norton, it just might have worked, maybe *us* would’ve been the one thing we wouldn’t have fucked up past redemption -

I bolted downstairs, grabbed the car and rolled code three civilian, peeling rubber and grinding gears, wishing I had red lights and siren to sanction me faster. Passing Sunset and Vine, traffic got bottlenecked: shitloads of cars turning north on Gower and Beachwood. Even from miles away I could see the Hollywoodland sign dripping with scaffolding, scores of ant-like people climbing up the face of Mount Lee. The lull in movement calmed me down, gave me a destination.

I told myself it wasn’t over, that I’d drive to the Bureau and wait for Russ, that with two of us we’d put the rest of it together, that all *I* had to do was get downtown.

The traffic jam got worse – film trucks were shooting straight north while motorcycle bulls held back east-and westbound vehicles. Kids walked the lanes hawking plastic Hollywoodland sign souvenirs and passing out handbills. I heard, ‘Keystone Kops at the Admiral! Air-cooled! See the great new revival!’ A piece of paper was shoved in my face, the printed ‘Keystone Kops’, ‘Mack Sennett’ and ‘Deluxe Air-cooled Admiral Theatre’ barely registering, the photo on the bottom registering hugely loud and wrong, like your own scream.

Three Keystone Kops were standing between pillars shaped like snakes swallowing each other’s tails; a wall inset with Egyptian hieroglyphics was behind them. A flapper girl was lying on a tufted divan in the right-hand corner of the picture. It was unmistakably the background that appeared in the Linda Martin/Betty Short stag film.

I made myself sit still; I told myself that just because Emmett Sprague knew Mack Sennett in the ’20s and had helped him build sets in Edendale, *this* didn’t mean that he had anything to do with a 1946 smut film. Linda Martin had said the movie was shot in Tijuana; the still unfound Duke Wellington admitted making it. When traffic started moving, I hung a quick left up to the Boulevard and ditched the car; when I bought my ticket at the Admiral box office the girl recoiled from me – and I saw that I was hyperventilating and rank with sweat.

Inside, the air-conditioning froze that sweat, so that my clothes felt like an ice dressing. Final credits were rolling on the screen, replaced immediately by new opening ones, superimposed on papier mâché pyramids. I balled my fists when ‘Emmett Sprague, Assistant Director,’ flashed; I held my breath for a title that said where the thing was shot. Then a printed prologue came on, and I settled into an aisle seat to watch.

The story was something about the Keystone Kops transplanted to biblical days; the action was chases and pie throwing and kicks in the ass. The stag film set recurred several times, confirmed by more details each showing. The exterior shots looked like the Hollywood Hills, but there were no outside-inside scenes to pin down whether the set was in a studio or a private dwelling. I knew what I was going to do, but I wanted another hard fact to buttress all the logical 'What if's' that were stacking up inside me.

The movie dragged on interminably; I shivered from icy sweats. Then the end titles rolled, 'Filmed in Hollywood, U.S.A.,' and the 'what if's' fell like tenpins.

I left the theatre, shaking from the blast-oven heat outside. I saw that I'd left the El Nido without either my service revolver or off-duty .45, took side streets back and grabbed the handcannon. Then I heard, 'Hey, fella. Are you Officer Bleichert?'

It was the next-door tenant, standing in the hallway holding the phone at the end of its cord. I made a running grab for it, blurting, 'Russ?'

'It's Harry. I'm up at the end of B-B-Beachwood Drive. They're tearing down a b-bunch of b-bungalows, and t-t-this patrolman f-f-found t-this shack all b-b-b-bloodstained. T-T-There was an FI card filed up here on the twelfth and th-th-thirteenth and I-I-I-'

And Emmett Sprague owned property up there; and it was the first time I'd heard Harry stutter in the afternoon. 'I'll bring my evidence kit. Twenty minutes.'

I hung up, took the Betty Short print abstract from the file and ran down to the car. Traffic had slackened; in the distance I could see the Hollywoodland sign missing it's last two letters. I hauled east to Beachwood Drive, then north. As I approached the park area that bordered Mount Lee, I saw that all the excitement was contained behind ropes guarded by a cordon of blue suits; double-parking, I glimpsed Harry Sears walking over, badge pinned to his coat front.

His breath was now rife with liquor, the stutter gone. 'Jesus Christ, what a piece of luck. This foot hack was assigned to clear out the vagrants before they started the demolitions. He stumbled onto the shack and came down and got me. It looks like tramps have been in and out since '47, but maybe you could still forensic it.'

I grabbed my evidence kit; Harry and I walked uphill. Wrecking crews were tearing down bungalows on the street paralleling Beachwood, the workers shouting about gas leaking from pipes. Fire trucks stood by, hoses manned and pointed at huge rubble heaps. Bulldozers and earthmovers were lined up on the sidewalks, with patrolmen shepherding the locals out of potential harm's way. And up ahead of us, vaudeville reigned.

A system of pulleys was attached to the face of Mount Lee, supported by high scaffolding sunk into the ground at its base. The 'A' of Hollywoodland, some fifty feet high, was sliding down a thick wire while cameras rolled, photographs snapped, rubberneckers gawked and political types drank champagne. Dust from uprooted scrub bushes was everywhere; the Hollywood High School band sat in folding chairs on a jerry-built bandstand a few feet from the pulley wire's terminus. When the letter 'A' crashed to the dirt, they struck up 'Hooray for Hollywood.'

Harry said, 'This way.' We veered off on a dirt hiking trail circling the foot of the mountain. Dense foliage pressed in from both sides; Harry took the lead, walking sideways on a footpath pointing straight up the slope. I followed, scrub bushes snagging my clothes and brushing my face. After fifty uphill yards, the path leveled off into a small clearing fronted by a shallow stream of running water. And there was a tiny, pillbox-style cinderblock hut, the door standing wide open.

I walked in.

The side walls were papered with pornographic photographs of crippled and disfigured women. Mongoloid faces sucking dildoes, nudie girls with withered and brace-clad legs spread wide, limbless atrocities leering at the camera. There was a mattress on the floor; it was caked with layers and layers of blood. Bugs and flies were laced throughout the crust, stuck there as they feasted themselves to death. The back wall held tacked-on colour photos that looked like they were torn from anatomy texts: close-up shots of diseased organs oozing blood and pus. There were spray and spatter marks on the floor; a small spotlight attached to a tripod was stationed beside the mattress, the light fixture aimed at the center of it. I wondered about electricity, then examined the gizmo's base and saw a battery hook-up. A blood-sprayed stack of books rested in one corner – mostly science fiction novels, with *Gray's Advanced Anatomy* and Victor Hugo's *The Man Who Laughs* standing out among them.

'Bucky?'

I turned around. 'Go get ahold of Russ. Tell him what we've got. I'll do a forensic here.'

'Russ won't get back from Tucson till tomorrow. And kid, you don't look too healthy to me right—'

'Goddamn it, get out of here and let me do this!'

Harry stormed out, spitting crushed pride; I thought of the proximity to Sprague property and dreamer Georgie Tilden, bum shack dweller, son of a famous Scottish anatomist. 'Really? A man with a medical background?' Then I opened up my kit and raped the nightmare crib for evidence.

First I examined it top to bottom. Aside from obviously recent mud tracks – Harry's tramps probably – I found narrow strands of rope under the mattress. I scraped what looked like abraded flesh particles off them; I filled up another test tube with blood-matted dark hair taken from the mattress. I checked the blood crust for different colour shadings, saw that it was a uniform maroon and took a dozen samples. I tagged and packed the rope away, along with the anatomy pages and smut pictures. I saw a man's bootprint, blood-outlined, on the floor, measured it and traced the sole treads onto a sheet of transparent paper.

Next it was fingerprints.

I dusted every touch, grab and press surface in the room; I dusted the few smooth spines and glossy pages in the books on the floor. The books yielded only streaks; the other surfaces brought up smudges, glove marks and two separate and distinct sets of latents. Finishing, I took a pen and circled the smaller digits on the door, doorjamb and wall molding by the mattress headboard. Then I got out my magnifying glass and Betty Short's print blow-up and made comparisons.

One identical point;

Two;

Three – enough for a courtroom.

Four, five, six, my hands shaking because this was unimpeachably where the Black Dahlia was butchered, shaking so hard I couldn't transfer the other set of latents to plates. I hacked a four-digit spread off the door with my knife and wrapped it in tissue – forensic amateur night. I packed up my kit, tremble-walked outside, saw the running water and knew that was where the killer drained the body. Then a strange flash of color by some rocks next to the stream caught my eye.

A baseball bat – the business end stained dark maroon.

I walked to the car thinking of Betty alive, happy, in love with some guy who'd never cheat on her. Passing through the park, I looked up at Mount Lee. The sign now read just *Hollywood*; the band was playing, 'There's No Business Like Show Business.'

I drove downtown. The LA city personnel office and the office of the Immigration and Naturalization Service were closed for the day. I called R&I and got goose egg on Scotland-born George Tildens – and I knew I'd go crazy if I waited overnight to make the print confirmation. It came down to calling in a superior officer, breaking and entering or bribery.

Remembering a janitor cleaning up outside the personnel office, I tried number three. The old man heard my phony story out, accepted my double-sawbuck, unlocked the door and led me to a bank of filing cabinets. I opened a drawer marked CITY PROPERTY CUSTODIAL – PART-TIME, got out my magnifying glass and powder-dusted piece of wood – and held my breath.

Tilden, George Redmond, born Aberdeen, Scotland, 3/4/1896. 5 foot 11, 185 pounds, brown hair, green eyes. No address, listed as 'Transient – contact for work thru E. Sprague, WE-4391.' California Driver's license # LA 68224, vehicle: 1939 Ford pickup, license 6B119A, rubbish-hauling territory Manchester to Jefferson, La Brea to Hoover – 39th and Norton right in the middle of it. Left- and right-hand fingerprints at the bottom of the page; one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine matching comparison points – three for a conviction, six more for a one-way to the gas chamber. Hello, Elizabeth.

I closed the drawer, gave the janitor an extra ten-spot to keep him quiet, packed up the evidence kit and walked outside. I pinpointed the moment: 8:10 P.M., Wednesday, June 29, 1949, the night a flunky harness bull cracked the most famous unsolved homicide in California history. I touched the grass to see if it felt different, waved at office workers passing by, pictured myself breaking the news to the padre and Thad Green and Chief Horrall. I saw myself back at the Bureau, a lieutenant inside of a year, Mr. Ice exceeding the wildest Fire and Ice expectations. I saw my name in headlines, Kay coming back to me. I saw the Spragues squeezed dry, disgraced by their complicity in the killing, all their money useless. And *that* was what kiboshed my reverie: there was no way for me to make the arrest without admitting I suppressed evidence on Madeleine and Linda Martin back in '47. It was either anonymous glory or public disaster.

Or back-door justice.

I drove to Hancock Park. Ramona's Cadillac and Martha's Lincoln were gone from the circular driveway; Emmett's Chrysler and Madeleine's Packard remained. I parked my lackluster Chevy crossways next to them, the rear tires sunk into the gardener's rose bush border. The front door looked impregnable, but a side window was open. I hoisted myself up and into the living room.

Balto the stuffed dog was there by the fireplace, guarding a score of packing crates lined up on the floor. I checked them out; they were filled to the top with clothes, silverware and ritzy bone china. A cardboard box at the end of the row was overflowing with cheap cocktail dresses – a weird anomaly. A sketch pad, the top sheet covered with drawings of women's faces, was wedged into one corner. I though of commercial artist Martha, then heard voices upstairs.

I went to them, my .45 out, the silencer screwed on tight. They were coming from the master bedroom: Emmett's burr, Madeleine's pout. I pressed myself to the hallway wall, eased down to the doorway and listened.

'… besides, one of my foremen said the goddamn pipes are spewing gas. There'll be hell to pay, lassie. Health and safety code violations at the very least. It's time for me to show the three of you Scotland, and let our Jew friend Mickey C. utilize his talent for public relations. He'll put the onus on old Mack or the pinkos or some convenient stiff, trust me he will. And when things are kosher again, we'll come home.'

'But I don't *want* to go to Europe, Daddy. Oh God, *Scotland*. You've never been able to talk about it without saying how dreadful and provincial it is.'

'Is it your toothy chum you think you'll be missing? Ahh, I suspect it is. Well, let me put your heart to rest. Aberdeen's got strapping plowboys who'll put that piss-poor excuse for a man to shame. Less inquisitive, lads who know their place. You'll not lack for sturdy cocks-men, let me assure you. Bleichert served his purpose to us a long time ago, and it's just the danger-loving part of you that took him back in. An injudicious part, I might add.'

'Oh Daddy, I don't-'

I wheeled and stepped into the bedroom. Emmett and Madeleine were lying on the big canopied bed, clothes, her head on his lap, his rough carpenter's hands massaging her shoulders. The father-lover noticed me first; Madeleine pouted when Daddy's caresses stopped. My shadow hit the bed; she screamed.

Emmett silenced her, a whip-fast hand glinting with gem-stones over her mouth. He said, 'This isn't a cuckold, lad. It's just affection, and we've a dispensation for it.'

The man's reflexes and dinner table tone were pure style. I aped his calm: 'Georgie Tilden killed Elizabeth Short. She called here on January twelfth, and one of you fixed her up with Georgie. She took the Wilshire bus out here to meet him. Now you fill the rest of it in.'

Madeleine, eyes wide, trembled under her father's hand. Emmett looked at the none too steady gun aimed at him. 'I don't dispute that statement and I don't dispute your somewhat belated desire to see justice done. Shall I tell you where George can be found?'

'No. First you tell me about you two, then you tell me about your dispensation.'

'It's not germane, lad. I'll congratulate you on your detective work and tell you where Georgie can be found, and we'll leave it at that. Neither of us wants to see Maddy hurt, and discussing dour old family matters would affect her adversely.'

As if to underline paternal concern, Emmett released his hand. Madeleine wiped smeared lipstick off her cheeks and murmured, 'Daddy, make him stop.'

I said, 'Did Daddy tell you to fuck me? Did Daddy tell you to invite me to dinner so I wouldn't check your alibi? Did you all figure that a little hospitality and some cunt would brazen things out for you? Did you—'

'*Daddy make him stop!*'

Emmett's whip hand flashed again; Madeleine buried her face in it. The Scotchman made the next logical move. 'Let's get down to brass tacks, lad. Put the Sprague family history out of your mind. What do you want?'

I looked around the bedroom, picking out objects – and the price tags that Madeleine had bragged to me. There was the Picasso oil on the back wall – a hundred and twenty grand. Two Ming vases resting on the dresser – seventeen big ones. The Dutch Master above the headboard cost two hundred odd thou; the ugly Pre-Columbian gargoyle on the nightstand a cool twelve and a half. Emmett, smiling now, said, 'You appreciate nice things. I appreciate that, and nice things like those can be yours. Just tell me what you want.'

I shot the Picasso first. The silencer went 'Pffft' and the .45 hollow point blew the canvas in half. The two Mings were next, crockery fragments exploding all over the room. I missed the gargoyle with my first shot – a gold-bordered mirror the consolation prize. Daddy and darling daughter huddled on the bed; I took sight on Rembrandt or Titian or whoever the fuck it was. My bull's-eye blew a dandy hole out of it, along with a chunk of the wall. The frame toppled and hit Emmett's shoulder; the heat of the weapon singed my hand. I held on to it anyway, one round still in the chamber to get me my story.

Cordite, muzzle smoke and plaster haze making the air almost unbreathable. Four hundred grand in bits and pieces. The two Spragues a tangle of limbs on the bed, Emmett coming out of it first, stroking Madeleine, rubbing his eyes and squinting.

I placed the silencer to the back of his head. 'You, Georgie, Betty. Make me believe it or I'll take your whole fucking house down.'

Emmett coughed and patted Madeleine's stray curls; I said, 'You and your own daughter.'

My old brass girl looked up then, tears drying, dust and lipstick mottling her face. 'Daddy's not my real daddy and we've never really … so it's not wrong.'

I said, 'Then who is?'

Emmett turned, gently pushing my gun hand out of the way. He didn't look broken or angry. He looked like a businessman warming to the task of negotiating a tough new contract. 'Dreamer Georgie is Maddy's father, Ramona is her mother. Do you want the details, or will that fact suffice?'

I sat down in a silk brocade chair a few feet from the bed. 'All of it. And don't lie, because I'll know.'

Emmett stood up and tidied his person, giving the room damage a weather eye. Madeleine went into the bathroom; a few seconds later I heard water running. Emmett sat on the edge of the bed, hands firm on his knees, like it was man-to-man confessional time. I knew he thought he could get away with telling me only what he wanted to; I knew I was going to make him spill it all, whatever it took.

'Back in the mid–20's Ramona wanted a child,' he said. 'I didn't, and I got damn sick and tired of being nagged about fatherhood. One night I got drunk and thought, "Mother, you want a child I'll give you a lad just like me". I did her without wearing a skin, sobered up and put it out of my mind. I didn't know it, but she took up with Georgie then, just to get that foal she craved so dearly. Madeleine was born, and I thought she was from that one mean time. I took to her – my little girl. Two years later I decided to go for a matched set, and we made Martha.

'Lad, I know you've killed two men, which is more than I can brag. So I know you know what it is to hurt. Maddy was eleven when I realized she was the stark spitting image of Georgie. I found him and played tic-tac-toe on his face with a nigger shiv. When I thought he'd die I took him to the hospital and bribed the administrators into putting 'car crash victim' on their records. When Georgie got out of the hospital he was a pitiful disfigured wreck. I begged him to forgive me, and I gave him money and I got him work tending my property and hauling rubbish for the city.'

I recalled thinking that Madeleine resembled neither of her parents; I remembered Jane Chambers mentioning Georgie's car crash and descent to stumblebum. So far, I believed Emmett's story. 'What about Georgie himself? Did you ever think he was crazy? Dangerous?'

Emmett tapped my knee, man-to-man empathy. 'Georgie's father was Redmond Tilden, quite a celebrated doctor in Scotland. He was an anatomist. The Kirk was still strong in Aberdeen back then, and Doc Redmond could only legally dissect the corpses of executed criminals and the child molesters the villagers caught and stoned. Georgie liked to touch the organs his dad threw out. I heard a tale when we were boys, and I credit it. It seems that Doc Redmond bought a stiff from some body snatchers. He cut into the heart, and it was still beating. Georgie saw it, and it thrilled him. I credit the tale because in the Argonne Georgie used to take his bayonet to the dead Jerries. I'm not sure, but I think he's burgled graves here in America. Scalps and inside organs. Ghastly, all of it.'

I saw an opening, a stab in the dark that might hit home. Jane Chambers had mentioned Georgie and Ramona filming pageants that centered on Emmett's World War 1 adventures, and two years ago at dinner, Ramona had said something about 'Reenacting episodes out of Mr. Sprague's past he would rather forget.' I swung out with my hunch: 'How could you put up with someone so crazy?'

Emmett said, 'You've been idolized in your time, lad. You know how it is when a weak man needs you to look after him. It's a special bond, like having a daft little brother.'

I said, 'I had a daft big brother once. I looked up to him.'

Emmett laughed – fraudulently. 'That's a side of the fence I've never been on.'

'Oh yeah? Eldridge Chambers says otherwise. He left a brief with the City Council before he died. It seems that he witnessed some of Ramona and Georgie's pageants back in the thirties. Little girls with soldier kilts and toy muskets, Georgie holding off the Germans, you turning tail and running like a goddamn chickenshit coward.'

Emmett flushed and tried to dredge up a smirk; his mouth twitched spastically with the effort. I shouted, 'Coward!' and slapped him full force – and the hardcase Scotchman son of a bitch sobbed like a child. Madeleine came out of the bathroom, fresh makeup, clean clothes. She moved to the bed and embraced her 'Daddy,' holding him the way he'd held her just a few minutes before.

I said, 'Tell me, Emmett.'

The man wept on the shoulder of his ersatz daughter; she stroked him with ten times more tenderness than she'd ever given me. Finally he got out a shell-shocked whisper: 'I couldn't let Georgie go because he saved my life. We got separated from our company, all alone in a big field of stiffs. A German patrol was reconnoitering, sticking bayonets in everything British, dead or alive. Georgie piled Germans on top of us. They were all in pieces from a mortar attack. Georgie made me crawl under all these arms and legs and guts and stay there, and when it was over he cleaned me up and talked about America to cheer me up. So you see I couldn't …'

Emmett's whisper died out. Madeleine caressed his shoulders, ruffled his hair. I said, 'I know that the stag film with Betty and Linda Martin wasn't shot in TJ. Did Georgie have anything to do with it?'

Madeleine's voice had the timbre Emmett's had earlier, when he was the one holding up the front. 'No. Linda and I were talking at La Verne's Hideaway. She told me she needed a place to make a little movie. I knew what she meant, and I wanted to be with Betty again, so I let them use one of my daddy's vacant houses, one that had an old set in the living room. Betty and Linda and Duke Wellington shot the movie, and Georgie saw them doing it. He was always sneaking around Daddy's empty houses, and he got crazy over Betty. Probably because she looked like me … his daughter.'

I turned away to make it easier for her to spill the rest 'Then?'

'Then, around Thanksgiving, Georgie came to Daddy and said, "Give me that girl." He said he'd tell the whole world that Daddy wasn't my daddy, and he'd lie about what we did together, like it was incest. I looked around for Betty, but I couldn't find her. Later I found out she was in San Diego then. Daddy was letting

Georgie stay in the garage, because he was making more and more demands. He gave him money to keep him quiet, but he was still acting nasty and awful.

'Then, that Sunday night, Betty called, out of the blue. She'd been drinking, and she called me Mary or something like that. She said she'd been calling all the friends in her little black book trying to get a loan. I put Daddy on, and he offered Betty money to date a nice man he knew. You see, we thought Georgie just wanted Betty for … sex.'

I said, 'After all you knew about him, you believed that?'

Emmett shouted, 'He liked to touch dead things! He was passive! I didn't think he was a goddamned killer!'

I eased them into the rest. 'And you told them Georgie had a medical background?'

'Because Betty respected doctors,' Madeleine said. 'Because we didn't want her to feel like a whore.'

I almost laughed. 'Then?'

'Then I think you know the rest.'

'Tell me anyway.'

Madeleine delivered, hate oozing out of her. 'Betty took the bus out here. She and Georgie left. We thought they'd go someplace decent to be together.'

'Like the Red Arrow Motel?'

'No! Like one of Daddy's old houses that Georgie took care of! Betty forgot her purse, so we thought she'd be back for it, but she never came back and neither did Georgie, and then the papers came out and we knew what must have happened.'

If Madeleine thought her confession was over, she was wrong. 'Tell me what you did then. How you covered things up.'

Madeleine caressed Emmett while she spoke. 'I went looking for Linda Martin, and I found her at a motel in the Valley. I gave her money and told her that if the police picked her up and asked her about the movie she was to say it was filmed in Tijuana with a Mexican crew. She kept her part of the bargain when you captured her, and she only mentioned the movie because she had the print in her purse. I tried to find Duke Wellington, but I couldn't. That worried me, then he sent in his alibi to the *Herald-Express*, and it didn't mention where the movie was shot. So we were safe. Then—'

'Then I came along. And you pumped me for dope on the case, and you threw me little tidbits about Georgie to see if I bit.'

Madeleine quit stroking Daddy and studied her manicure. 'Yes.'

'What about the alibi you gave me? Laguna Beach, check with the servants?'

'We gave them money in case you actually did check. They don't speak English too well, and of course you believed me.'

Madeleine was smiling now. I said, 'Who mailed Betty's pictures and little black book in? There were envelopes sent, and you said Betty left her purse here.'

Madeleine laughed. 'That was genius sister Martha. She knew I knew Betty, but she wasn't home that night Betty and Georgie were here. She didn't know Georgie was blackmailing Daddy or that he killed Betty. She ripped the page with our number on it out of the book, and she scratched the faces off the men in the pictures as her way of saying, 'Look for a lesbian,' namely me. She just wanted me smeared, implicated. She also called the police and gave them a tip on La Verne's. The scratched faces were très genius Martha – she always scratches like a cat when she's mad.'

Something in her statement hit me as wrong, but I couldn't pin it down. 'Martha told you this?'

Madeleine buffed her red claws. 'When the little black book stuff made the papers, I knew it had to be Martha. I scratched a confession out of her.'

I turned to Emmett 'Where's Georgie?'

The old man stirred. 'He's probably staying at one of my vacant houses. I'll bring you a list.'

'Bring me all four of your passports, too.'

Emmett walked out of the battlefield bedroom. Madeleine said, 'I really did like you, Bucky. I really did.'

'Save it for Daddy. You're wearing the pants now, so save the sugar for him.'

'What are you going to do?'

'First I'm going home and putting all of this on paper, attached to material witness warrants for you and Daddy. Than I'm leaving them with another officer in case Daddy goes to his friend Mickey Choen with an offer for my head. Then I'm going after Georgie.'

Emmett came back and handed me four U.S. passport holders and a sheet of paper. Madeleine said, 'If you turn in those warrants, we'll ruin you in court. Everything about us will come out.'

I stood up and kissed the brass girl hard on the lips. 'Then we'll all go down together.'

I didn't drive home to write it all out. I parked a few blocks from the Sprague manse and studied the list of addresses, spooked by the juice Madeleine had shown, by her sense of how deep our stalemate went.

The houses were situated in two locales: Echo Park and Silverlake, and across town in Watts – bad territory for a fifty-three-year-old white man. Silverlake-Echo was several miles due east of Mount Lee, a hilly area with lots of twisting streets, greenery and seclusion, the kind of terrain a necrophiliac might find soothing. I drove there, five addresses circled on Emmett's sheet.

The first three were plain deserted shacks: no electricity, broken windows, Mexican gang slogans painted on the walls. No '39 Ford pickup 6B119A nearby – only desolation accompanied by Santa Ana winds blowing down from the Hollywood Hills. Heading towards the fourth pad just after midnight was when I got the idea – or the idea got me.

Kill him.

No public glory, no public disgrace – private justice. Let the Spragues go or coerce a detailed confession out of Georgie before you pull the trigger. Get it on paper, then figure out a way to hurt them with it at your leisure.

Kill him.

And try to live with it.

And try to lead a normal life with Mickey Cohen's good pal running the same type of schemes on you.

I put it all out of mind when I saw that the fourth house was intact at the dead end of a cul-de-sac – chaste exterior, the lawn neatly tended. I parked two doors down, then prowled the street on foot. There were no Ford trucks – and plenty of curbside spaces for them.

I studied the house from the sidewalk. It was a '20s stucco job, small, cube-shaped, off-white with a wood-beam roof. I circled it, driveway to tiny backyard and around a flagstone path to the front. No lights – the windows were all covered with what looked like thick blackout curtains. The place was utterly silent.

Gun out, I rang the buzzer. Twenty seconds, no answer. I ran my fingers down the door-doorjamb meeting point, felt cracked wood, got out my handcuffs and wedged in the narrow part of one ratchet. The teeth held; I whittled at the wood near the lock until I felt the door play slacken. Then I gave it a gentle kick – and it opened.

Light from outside guided me to a wall switch; I flipped it on, saw a cobweb-streaked empty room, walked to the porch and shut the door. The blackout curtains held in every bit of illumination. I moved back into the house, closed the door and stuck wood slivers into the bolt fixture to jam the lock.

With front access blocked off, I walked to the rear of the house. A medicinal stench was issuing from a room adjoining the kitchen. I toed the door open and tapped the inside wall for a switch. I hit one; harsh light blinded me. Then my vision cleared and I placed the smell: formaldehyde.

The walls were lined with shelves holding jars of preserved organs; there was a mattress on the floor, half covered by an army blanket. A red-headed scalp and two notebooks lay on top of it. I took a wheezing breath and forced myself to see it *all*.

Brains, eyes, hearts and intestines floating in fluid. A woman's hand, wedding ring still attached to her finger. Ovaries, glots of shapeless viscera, a jar filled with penises. Gum sections replete with gold teeth.

I felt dry heaves coming on, and squatted by the mattress to I wouldn't have to see any more gore. I picked up one of the notebooks and leafed through it; the pages were filled with neatly typed descriptions of grave robberies – cemeteries, plot names and dates in separate columns. When I saw 'East Los Angeles Lutheran,' where my mother was buried, I dropped the book and reached for the blanket for something to hold; crusted semen top to bottom made me throw it at the doorway. I opened the other binder to the middle then, neat masculine printing taking me back to January 14, 1947:

> *When she woke up Tuesday morning I knew she couldn't take much more and I knew I couldn't risk staying in the hills much longer. Derelicts and lovebirds were sure to be out and about sooner or later. I could tell she was so damn proud of her little titties even while I took Chesterfields to them yesterday. I decided to cut them off slowly.*
>
> *She was still in a stupor, maybe even shock. I showed her the Joe DiMaggio Louisville Slugger which had given me so much pleasure since Sunday night. I teased her with it. That took her out of her shock. I poked it at her little hole and she almost swallowed her gag. I wished there were nails to put in it, like the iron maiden or a chastity belt she would not soon forget. I held the bat in front of her, then I opened up a cigarette burn on her left tittie with my knife. She bit on her gag and blood from where I took the Joe DiMaggio to her teeth came out due to her biting so hard. I stuck the knife down to a little bone I felt, then I twisted it. She tried to scream and the gag slipped deeper into her throat. I pulled it out for one second and she yelled for her mother. I put it back in hard and cut her again on the right tittie.*
>
> *She's getting infected where's she's tied up now. The ropes are cutting her ankles and they're squishy with pus …'*

I put the notebook down, knowing I could do it, knowing if I faltered, a few more pages would turn me around. I stood up; the organ jars caught my attention, dead things all in a row, so neat, so perfect. I was wondering whether Georgie had ever killed before when I noticed a jar all by itself on the window ledge above the head of the mattress.

A triangular piece of flesh, tattoed. A heart with the Army Air Corps insignia inside it, the words ‘Betty & Major Matt’ below.

I closed my eyes and shook head to toe; I wrapped my arms around myself and tried to tell Betty I was sorry I’d seen that special part of her, that I didn’t mean to pry so far, that I was just trying to help. I tried to say it and say it and say it. Then something touched me softly, and I was grateful for the gentleness.

I turned around and saw a man, his face all scars, his hands holding little hooked instruments, tools for cutting and probing. He touched the scalpels to his cheeks; I gasped at where I’d been and reached for my gun. Twin streaks of steel lashed at me; the.45 slipped out of my waistband and hit the floor.

I sidestepped; the blades snagged my jacket and ripped a piece of my collarbone. I sent a kick at Tilden’s groin; the grave raper caught the blow off balance, buckled and leaped forward, crashing into me, knocking me back into the wall shelving.

Jars broke, formaldehyde sprayed, awful pieces of flesh were loosed. Tilden was right on top of me, trying to bring his scalpels down. I held his wrists up, then shot a knee between his legs. He grunted but didn’t retreat, his face getting closer and closer to mine. Inches away, he bared his teeth and snapped; I felt my cheek tearing. I kneed him again, his arm pressure slackened. I caught another bite on the chin, then dropped my hands. The scalpels hit the shelf in back of me; I flailed for a weapon and touched a big piece of glass. I dug it into Georgie’s face just as he yanked the blades free; he screamed; steel dug into my shoulder.

The shelving collapsed. Georgie fell on top of me, blood pouring from an empty eye socket. I saw my .45 on the floor a few feet away, dragged the two of us there and grabbed it. Georgie raised his head, making animal screeches. He went for my throat, his mouth huge in front of me. I jammed the silencer into his eye hole and blew his brains out.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Russ Millard supplied the Short case epitaph.

Adrenaline-fried, I left the death house and drove straight to City Hall. The padre had just gotten in from Tucson with his prisoner; when the man was ensconsed in a holding cell, I took Russ aside and told him the entire story of my involvement with the Spragues – from Marjorie Graham's lez tip to the shooting of Georgie Tilden. Russ, dumbstruck at first, drove me to Central Receiving Hospital. The emergency room doc gave me a tetanus shot, said, 'God, those bites look almost human,' and sutured them up. The scalpel wounds were superficial – and required only cleansing and bandaging.

Outside, Russ said, 'The case has to stay open. You'll be canned from the Department if you tell anyone else what happened. Now let's go take care of Georgie.'

It was 3:00 A.M. when we got to Silverlake. The padre was shaken by what he saw, but held his composure ramrod stiff. Then the best man I ever knew astonished me.

First he said, 'Go over and stand by the car'; then he fiddled with some pipes on the side of the house, paced off twenty yards and emptied his service revolver at the spot. Gas ignited; the house went up in flames. We highballed out of there without headlights. Russ shot me his line: 'That obscenity did not deserve to stand.'

Then it was incredible exhaustion – and sleep. Russ dropped me at the El Nido, I dived onto the bed and into twenty-odd hours of pitch-black unconsciousness. Waking up, the first thing I saw was the four Sprague passports on the dresser: the first thing I thought was: *they have to pay*.

If health and safety code violations or worse came down, I wanted the family in the country where they would suffer. I called the U.S. passport office, impersonated a detective captain and put a police hold on passport reissues for all four Spragues. It felt like an impotent gesture – a slap on the wrist. I shaved and showered then, extra careful not to wet my bandages or sutures. I thought about the end of the case so I wouldn't think about the shambles my life was in. I recalled that something Madeleine said the other day was off, wrong, out of sync. I played with the question while I dressed; going out the door to get something to eat, it hit home:

Madeleine said that Martha called the police with a tip on La Verne's Hideaway. But: I knew the Short case paperwork better than any cop alive, and there were no notations anywhere pertaining to the place. Two incidents sparked me then. Lee getting a long call during our phone-answering stint the morning after I met Madeleine; Lee going directly to La Verne's after he cracked up at the stag film showing. Only 'Genius' Martha could give me answers. I drove to Ad Agency Row to brace her.

I found Emmett Sprague's real daughter alone, eating lunch on a bench in the shade of the Young & Rubicam Building. She didn't look up when I sat down across from her; I remembered that Betty Short's little black book and pictures were taken out of a mailbox a block away.

I watched the pudgy girl-woman nibble a salad and read the newspaper. In the two and a half years since I'd seen her she'd held her own against fat and bad skin – but she still looked like a tough distaff version of Emmett.

Martha put the paper down and noticed me. I expected rage to light up her eyes; she surprised me by saying, 'Hello, Mr. Bleichert,' with just a touch of a smile.

I walked over and sat down beside her. The *Times* was folded over to a Metro section piece: 'Bizarre Fire in Silverlake Foothills – Body Found Charred Beyond Recognition.'

Martha said, 'I'm sorry for that picture I drew of you that night you came to dinner.'

I pointed to the newspaper. 'You don't seem surprised to see me.'

'Poor Georgie. No, I'm not surprised to see you. Father told me you knew. I've been underestimated all my life, and I always had a feeling Maddy and Father were underestimating you.'

I pushed the compliment aside. 'Do you know what "Poor Georgie" did?'

'Yes. From the beginning. I saw Georgie and the Short girl leave the house that night in Georgie's truck. Maddy and Father didn't know I knew, but I did. Only Mother never figured it out. Did you kill him?'

I didn't answer.

'Are you going to hurt my family?'

The pride in the 'my' knifed me. 'I don't know what I'm going to do.'

'I don't blame you for wanting to hurt them. Father and Maddy are dreadful people, and I went way out on a limb to hurt them myself.'

'When you sent in Betty's things?'

Now Martha's eyes fired up. 'Yes. I tore out the page in the book that had our number, but I thought there might be other numbers to lead the police to Father and Maddy. I didn't have the courage to send *our* number in. I should have. I—'

I held up a hand. 'Why, Martha? Do you know what would have happened if the police got the whole story about Georgie? Accessory charges, court, jail.'

'I didn't care. Maddy had you and Father, Mother and I had nothing. I just wanted the whole ship to sink. Mother has lupus now, she's only got a few years left. She's going to die, and that is so unfair.'

'The pictures and scratch marks. What did you mean by them?'

Martha laced her fingers together and twisted them until the knuckles were white. 'I was nineteen, and all I could do was draw. I wanted Maddy smeared as a dyke, and the last picture was Father himself – his face scratched out. I thought he might have left fingerprints on the back. I was desperate to hurt him.'

'Because he touches you like he touches Madeleine?'

'Because he doesn't!'

I braced myself for the spooky stuff. 'Martha, did you call the police with a tip on La Verne's Hideaway?'

Martha lowered her eyes. 'Yes.'

'Did you talk to—'

'I told the man about my dyke sister, how she met a cop named Bucky Bleichert at La Verne's last night and had a date with him tonight. Maddy was gloating to the whole family about you, and I was jealous. But I only wanted to hurt her – not you.'

Lee taking the call while I sat across a desk from him in University squadroom; Lee going directly to La Verne's when *Slave Girls From Hell* drove him around the twist. I said, 'Martha, you come clean on the rest of it.'

Martha looked around and clenched herself – legs together, arms to her sides, fists balled. 'Lee Blanchard came to the house and told Father he'd talked to women at La

Verne's – lesbians who could tie Maddy in to the Black Dahlia. He said he had to leave town, and for a price he wouldn't report his information on Maddy. Father agreed, and gave him all the money he had in his safe.'

Lee, Benzie-crazed, absent from City Hall and University Station; Bobby De Witt's imminent parole his reason for blowing town. Emmett's money the cash he was flaunting in Mexico. My own voice numb: 'Is there more?'

Martha's body was coiled spring-tight. 'Blanchard came back the next day. He demanded more money. Father turned him down, and he beat Father up and asked him all these questions about Elizabeth Short. Maddy and I heard it from the next room. I loved it and Maddy was wicked mad. She left when she couldn't take any more of her beloved daddy-poo groveling, but I kept listening. Father was afraid that Blanchard would frame one of us for the killing, so he agreed to give him a hundred thousand dollars and told him what happened with Georgie and Elizabeth Short.'

Lee's bruised knuckles; his lie: 'Penance for Junior Nash.'

Madeleine on the phone that day: 'Don't come over. Daddy's having a business soiree.' Our desperate rutting at the Red Arrow an hour later. *Lee filthy rich in Mexico. Lee letting Georgie Tilden go scot fucking free*.

Martha dabbed at her eyes, saw that they were dry and put a hand on my arm. 'The next day a woman came by and picked up the money. And that's all of it.'

I took out my wallet snapshot of Kay and showed it to her. Martha said, 'Yes. That's the woman.'

I stood up, alone for the first time since the triad was formed. Martha said, 'Don't hurt my family anymore. Please.'

I said, 'Get out, Martha. Don't let them ruin you.' I drove to West Hollywood Elementary School, sat in the car and kept an eyeball fix on Kay's Plymouth in the faculty parking lot. Lee's ghost buzzed in my head as I waited – bad company for close to two hours. The 3:00 bell rang right on time; Kay exited the building in a swarm of children and teachers a few minutes later. When she was alone by her car, I walked over.

She was arranging a load of books and papers in the trunk, her back to me. I said, 'How much of the hundred grand did Lee let you keep?'

Kay froze, her hands on a stack of fingerpaintings. 'Did Lee tell you about Madeleine Sprague and me back then? Is that why you've hated Betty Short all this time?'

Kay ran her fingers over the kiddie artwork, then turned and faced me. 'You are so, so good at some things.'

It was another compliment I didn't want to hear. 'Answer my questions.'

Kay slammed the trunk, her eyes dead on mine. 'I did not accept a cent of that money, and I didn't know about you and Madeleine Sprague until those detectives I hired gave me her name. Lee was going to run away no matter what. I didn't know if I'd ever see him again, and I wanted him to be comfortable, if such a thing was possible. He didn't trust himself to deal with Emmett Sprague again, so I picked up the money. Dwight, he knew I was in love with you, and he wanted us to be together. That was one of the reasons he left.'

I felt like I was sinking in a quicksand of all our old lies. 'He didn't leave, he *ran* from the Boulevard-Citizen job, from the frame on De Witt, from the trouble he was in with the Depart-'

'He loved us! Don't take that away from him!'

I looked around the parking lot. Teachers were standing by their cars, eyeing the husband and wife spat. They were too far away to hear; I imagined them chalking up the fight to kids or mortgages or cheating. I said, ‘Kay, Lee knew who killed Elizabeth Short. Did you know that?’

Kay stared at the ground. ‘Yes.’

‘He just let it go.’

‘Things got crazy then. Lee went down to Mexico after Bobby, and he said he’d go after the killer when he got back. But he didn’t come back, and I didn’t want you going down there too.’

I grabbed my wife’s shoulders and squeezed them until she looked at me.

‘And you didn’t tell me later? You didn’t tell *anyone*?’

Kay lowered her head again; I jerked it back up with both my hands. ‘And you didn’t tell anyone?’

In her calmest schoolteacher voice, Kay Lake Bleichert said, ‘I almost told you. But you started whoring again, collecting her pictures. I just wanted revenge on the woman who ruined the two men I loved.’

I raised a hand to hit her – but a flash of Georgie Tilden stopped me.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

I called in the last of my accumulated sick leave and spent a week killing time at the El Nido. I read and played the jazz stations, trying not to think about my future. I pored over the master file repeatedly, even though I knew the case was closed. Child versions of Martha Sprague and Lee racked my dreams; sometimes Jane Chambers' slash-mouth clown joined them, hurling taunts, speaking through gaping holes in his face.

I bought all four LA papers every day, and read them cover to cover. The Hollywood sign hubbub had passed, there was no mention of Emmett Sprague. Grand Jury probes into faulty buildings or the torched house and stiff. I began to get a feeling that something was wrong.

It took a while – long hours spent staring at the four walls thinking of nothing – but finally I nailed it.

'It' was a tenuous hunch that Emmett Sprague set Lee and I up to kill Georgie Tilden. With me he was blatant: 'Shall I tell you where Georgie can be found?' – perfectly in character for the man – I would have been more suspicious if he had tried a roundabout approach. He sent Lee after Georgie immediately after Lee beat him up. Was he hoping Lee's anger would peak when he saw the Dahlia killer? Did he know of Georgie's grave robbery treasure trove – and count on it making us killing mad? Did he count on Georgie to initiate a confrontation – one that would either eliminate him or the greedy/nosy cops who were creating such a nuisance? And why? For what motive? *To protect himself*?

The theory had one huge hole: namely, the incredible, almost suicidal audacity of Emmett, not the suicidal type.

And with Georgie Tilden – the Black Dahlia killer pure and clean – nailed – there was no logical reason to pursue it. But 'It' was backstopped by a tenuous loose end:

When I first coupled with Madeleine in '47, she mentioned leaving notes for Betty Short at various bars: 'Your lookalike would like to meet you.' I told her the act might come back to haunt her; she said, 'I'll take care of it.'

The most likely one to have 'taken care of it' was a policeman – and I refused to. *And*, chronologically, Madeleine spoke those words right around the time Lee Blanchard made his initial blackmail demand.

It was tenuous, circumstantial and theoretical, probably just another lie or half truth or thread of useless information. A loose end unraveled by a coming-from-hunger cop whose life was built on a foundation of lies. Which was the only good reason I could think of to pursue the ghost of a chance. Without the case, I had nothing.

I borrowed Harry Sears' civilian car and ran rolling skateouts on the Spragues for three days and nights. Martha drove to work and back home; Ramona stayed in; Emmett and Madeleine shopped and did other daytime errands. All four stuck to the manse on evenings one and two; on the third night Madeleine prowled as the Dahlia.

I tailed her to the 8th Street bar strip, to the Zimba Room, to a cadre of sailors and flyboys and ultimately the 9th and Irolo fuck pad with a navy ensign. I felt no jealousy, no sex pull this time. I listened outside room twelve and heard KMPC; the venetian blinds were down, no visual access. The only departure from Madeleine's previous MO was when she ditched her paramour at 2:00 A.M. and drove home – the light going on in Emmett's bedroom a few moments after she walked in the door.

I gave day four a pass, and returned to my surveillance spot on Muirfield Road shortly after dark that night. I was getting out of the car to give my cramped legs a breather when I heard, 'Bucky? Is that you?'

It was Jane Chambers, walking a brown and white spaniel. I felt like a kid with his hand caught in the cookie jar. 'Hello, Jane.'

'Hello, yourself. What are you doing? Spying? Torching for Madeleine?'

I remembered our conversation on the Spragues, 'Enjoying the crisp night air. How's that sound?'

'Like a lie. Want to enjoy a crisp drink at my place?'

I looked over at the Tudor fortress; Jane said, 'Boy, have you got a bee in your bonnet with that family.'

I laughed – and felt little aches in my bite wounds. 'Boy, have you got my number. Let's go get that drink.'

We walked around the corner to June Street. Jane unhooked the dog's leash; he trotted ahead of us, down the sidewalk and up the steps to the front door of the Chambers' colonial. We caught up with him a moment later; Jane opened the door. And there was my nightmare buddy – the scar mouth clown.

I shuddered. 'That goddamn thing.'

Jane smiled. 'Shall I wrap it up for you?'

'Please don't.'

'You know, after that first time we talked about it, I looked into its history. I've been getting rid of a lot of Eldridge's things, and I was thinking about giving it to charity. It's too valuable to give away, though. It's a Frederick Yannantuono original, and it's inspired by an old classic novel – *The Man Who Laughs* by Victor Hugo. The book is about—'

There was a copy of *The Man Who Laughs* in the shack where Betty Short was killed. I was buzzing so hard I could hardly hear what Jane was saying.

'—a group of Spaniards back in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They were called the Comprachicos, and they kidnapped and tortured children, then mutilated them and sold them to the aristocracy so that they could be used as court jesters. Isn't that hideous? The clown in the painting is the book's main character, Gwynplain. When he was a child he had his mouth slashed ear to ear. Bucky, are you all right?'

MOUTH SLASHED EAR TO EAR.

I shuddered, then forced a smile. 'I'm fine. The book just reminded me of something. Old stuff, just a coincidence.'

Jane scrutinized me. 'You don't look fine, and you want to hear another coincidence? I thought Eldridge wasn't on speaking terms with any of the family, but I found the receipt. It was Ramona Sprague who sold him the painting.'

For a split second I thought Gwynplain was spitting blood at me. Jane grabbed my arms. 'Bucky, what is it?'

I found my voice. 'You told me your husband bought that picture for your birthday two years ago. Right?'

'Yes. What—'

'In '47?'

'Yes. Buck—'

'What *is* your birthday?'

'January fifteenth.'

'*Let me see the receipt.*'

Jane, spooky eyed, fumbled at some papers on the end table across the hall. I stared at Gwynplain, transposing 39th and Norton glossies against his face. Then: 'Here. Now will you tell me what's going on?'

I took the piece of paper. It was purple stationery, covered with incongruously masculine block printing. 'Received from Eldridge Chambers, $3500.00 for the sale of the Frederick Yannantuono painting "The Man Who Laughs." This receipt constitutes Mr. Chambers' proof of ownership. Ramona Cathcart Sprague, January 15, 1947.'

The printing was identical to the script in the torture diary I read just before I killed Georgie Tilden.

Ramona Sprague murdered Elizabeth Short.

I grabbed Jane in a hard bear hug, then took off while she stood there looking stunned. I went back to the car, decided it was a single-o play, watched lights go on and off in the big house and sweated through a long night of reconstructions: Ramona and Georgie torturing together, separately, bisecting, divvying up the spare parts, running a two-car caravan to Leimert Park. I played every kind of variation imaginable; I ran riffs on how the thing ignited. I thought of everything but what I was going to do when I got Ramona Sprague alone.

At 8:19 Martha walked out the front door carrying an art portfolio, and drove east in her Chrysler.

At 10:37, Madeleine, valise in hand, got into her Packard and headed north on Muirfield. Emmett waved from the doorway; I decided to give him an hour or so to leave – or take him down along with his wife. Shortly after noon, he played into my hand – tooling off, his car radio humming light opera.

My month of playing house with Madeleine had taught me the servants' routine: today, Thursday, the housekeeper and gardener were off; the cook showed up at 4:30 to prepare dinner. Madeleine's valise implied some time away; Martha wouldn't return from work until 6:00. Emmett was the only wild card.

I walked across the street and reconnoitered. The front door was locked, the side windows were bolted. It was either ring the bell or B & E.

Then I heard tapping on the other side of the glass and saw a blurry white shape moving back into the living room. A few seconds later the sound of the front door opening echoed down the driveway. I walked around to meet the woman head on.

Ramona was standing in the doorway, spectral in a shapeless silk dressing gown. Her hair was a frizzy mess, her face was blotchy red and puffed up – probably from tears and sleep. Her dark brown eyes – identical in color to mine – were scary alert. She pulled a ladylike automatic from the folds of her gown and pointed it at me. She said, 'You told Martha to leave me.'

I slapped the gun out of her hand; it hit a straw welcome mat emblazoned with THE SPRAGUE FAMILY. Ramona gnawed at her lips; her eyes lost their focus. I said, 'Martha deserves better than a murderer.'

Ramona smoothed her gown and patted at her hair. I pegged the reaction as the class of a well-bred hophead. Her voice was pure cold Sprague: 'You didn't tell, did you?'

I picked up the gun and put it in my pocket, then looked at the woman. She had to be jacked on a twenty-year residue of drugstore hop, but her eyes were so dark that I couldn't tell if they were pinned or not. 'Are you telling me Martha doesn't know what you did?'

Ramona stood aside and bid me to enter. She said, 'Emmett told me it was safe now. He said that you'd taken care of Georgie and you had too much to lose by coming back. Martha told Emmett you wouldn't hurt us, and he said you wouldn't. I believed him. He was always so accurate about business matters.'

I walked inside. Except for the packing crates on the floor, the living room looked like business as usual. 'Emmett sent me after Georgie, and Martha doesn't know you killed Betty Short?'

Ramona shut the door. 'Yes. Emmett counted on you to take care of Georgie. He was confident that he wouldn't implicate me – the man was quite insane. Emmett is a physical coward, you see. He didn't have the courage to do it, so he sent an underling. And my God, do you honestly think I'd let Martha know what I'm capable of?'

The torture murderess was genuinely aghast that I'd impugned her as a mother. 'She'll find out sooner or later. And I know she was here that night. She saw Georgie and Betty leave together.'

'Martha left to visit a chum in Palm Springs an hour or so later. She was gone for the next week. Emmett and Maddy know. Martha doesn't. And my dear God, she mustn't.'

'Mrs. Sprague, do you know what you've—'

'I'm not Mrs. Sprague, I'm Ramona Upshaw Cathcart! You can't tell Martha what I did or she'll leave me! She said she wants to get her own apartment, and I haven't that much more time left!'

I turned my back on the spectacle and walked around the living room, wondering what to do. I looked at the pictures on the walls: generations of kilt-clad Spragues, Cathcarts cutting the ribbons in front of orange groves and vacant lots ripe for development. There was a fat little girl Ramona wearing a corset that must have strictured her bloody. Emmett holding a dark-haired child, beaming. Glassy-eyed Ramona poising Martha's' brush hand over a toy easel. Mack Sennett and Emmett giving each other the cuckold's horns. At the back of an Eden-dale group shot I thought I could see a young Georgie Tilden – handsome, no scars on his face.

I felt Ramona behind me, trembling. I said, 'Tell me all of it. Tell me why.'

Ramona sat down on a divan and spoke for three hours, her tone sometimes angry, sometimes sad, sometimes brutally detached from what she was saying. There was a table covered with tiny ceramic figurines beside her; her hands played with them constantly. I circled the walls, looking at the family pictures, feeling them meld into her story.

She met Emmett and Georgie in 1921, when they were Scottish immigrant boys on the make in Hollywood. She hated Emmett for treating Georgie like a lackey – and she hated herself for not speaking up about it. She didn't speak up because Emmett wanted to marry her – for her father's money, she knew – and she was a homely woman with slender husband prospects.

Emmett proposed. She accepted and settled into married life with the ruthless young contractor and budding real estate tycoon. Who she gradually grew to hate. Who she passively fought by gathering information.

Georgie lived in the apartment above the garage the first years they were married. She learned that he liked to touch dead things, and that Emmett reviled him for it. She took to poisoning the stray cats who trampled her garden, leaving them on Georgie's doorstep. When Emmett spurned her desire for him to give her a child, she went to Georgie and seduced him – exulting that she had the power to excite him with something alive – the fat body that Emmett derided and only plundered at odd times.

Their affair was brief, but resulted in a child – Madeleine. She lived in terror of a resemblance to Georgie asserting itself, and took to doctor-prescribed opiates. Two years later Martha was born of Emmett. This felt like a betrayal of Georgie – and she went back to poisoning stray animals for him. Emmett caught her in the act one day; he beat her for taking part in 'Georgie's perversion.'

When she told Georgie of the beating, he told her of saving the coward Emmett's life in the war – putting the lie to Emmett's version of the story: that *he* saved Georgie. She started planning her pageants then – how she would get back at Emmett symbolically in ways so subtle that he would never know he was being thrashed.

Madeleine cleaved to Emmett. She was the lovely child, and he doted on her. Martha became her mother's little girl – even though she was Emmett's spitting image. Emmett and Madeleine disdained Martha as a fatso and a crybaby; Ramona protected her, teaching her to draw, putting her to bed each night with admonishings not to hate her sister and father – even though she did. Protecting Martha and instructing her in the love of art became her reason for living, her strength in the intolerable marriage.

When Maddy was eleven, Emmett noted her resemblance to Georgie, and slashed her real father's face beyond recognition. Ramona fell in love with Georgie; he was now even more physically bereft than she – and she felt a parity had been achieved between them.

Georgie rebuffed her persistent advances. She came across Hugo's *The Man Who Laughs* then, and was moved by both the Comprachicos and their disfigured victims. She bought the Yannantuono painting and kept it hidden, staring at it as a memento of Georgie in her private hours.

When Maddy hit her teens she became promiscuous, sharing the details with Emmett, cuddling on the bed with him. Martha drew obscene pictures of the sister she hated; Ramona forced her to draw pastoral landscapes to keep her anger from going haywire. To get back at Emmett she staged her long-planned pageants; they spoke obliquely of his greed and cowardice. Toy houses falling down signified Emmett's jerry-built shacks crashing in the '33 earthquake; children hiding under store mannequins dressed in ersatz German uniforms portrayed Emmett the yellow. A number of parents found the pageants disturbing, and forbade their children to play with the Sprague girls. Around that time Georgie drifted out of their lives, doing his yard work and rubbish hauling, living in Emmett's abandoned houses.

Time passed. She concentrated on looking after Martha, pressing her to finish high school early, establishing funds at Otis Art Institute so that she would get special treatment. Martha thrived and excelled at Otis; Ramona lived through her accomplishments, on and off sedatives, often thinking of Georgie – missing him, wanting him.

Then, in the fall of '46, Georgie returned. She overheard him make his blackmail demand of Emmett: 'Give him' the girl in the dirty movie, or risk exposure of a good deal of the family's sordid past and present.

She became frighteningly jealous and hateful of 'that girl,' and when Elizabeth Short showed up at the Sprague house on January 12, 1947, her rage exploded. 'That girl' looked so much like Madeleine that it felt like the cruelest of jokes was being played on her. When Elizabeth and Georgie left in his truck, she saw that Martha had gone to her room to pack for her Palm Springs trip. She left a note on her door saying goodbye, that she was sleeping now. Then she casually asked Emmett where 'that girl' and Georgie were going.

He told her he heard Georgie mention one of his abandoneds up on North Beachwood. She went out the backdoor, grabbed their spare Packard, sped to Hollywood and and waited. Georgie and the girl arrived at the base of the Mount Lee park area a few minutes later. She followed them on foot to the shack in the woods. They went inside; she saw a light go on. It cast shadows over a shiny wood object leaning against a tree trunk – a baseball bat. When she heard the girl giggle, 'Did you get those scars in the war?' she went in the door, bat first.

Elizabeth Short tried to run. She knocked her unconscious and made Georgie strip her and gag her and tie her to the mattress. She promised him parts of the girl to keep forever. She took a copy of *The Man Who Laughs* from her purse and read aloud from it, casting occasional glances at the girl spread-eagled. Then she cut her and burned her and batted her and wrote in the notebook she always carried while the girl was passed out from the pain. Georgie watched, and together they shouted the chants of the Comprachicos. And after two-full days of it, she slashed Elizabeth Short ear to ear like Gwynplain, so she wouldn't hate her after she was dead. Georgie cut the body in two, washed the halves in the stream outside the shack and carried them to her car. Late at night, they drove to 39th and Norton – a lot that Georgie used to tend for the city. They left Elizabeth Short there to become the Black Dahlia, then she drove Georgie back to his truck and returned to Emmett and Madeleine, telling them that soon enough they would find out where she had been and finally respect her will. As an act of purging, she sold her Gwynplain painting to the bargain-loving art worshipper Eldridge Chambers down the street – making a profit on the deal. Then it was days and weeks of the horror that Martha would find out and hate her – and more and more laudanum and codeine and sleep potion to make it go away.

I was looking at a row of framed magazine ads – award-winning Martha artwork – when Ramona stopped talking. The silence jarred me; her story rolled on in my head, back and forth in sequence. The room was cool – but I was sweating.

Martha's 1948 Advertising Council first prizer featured a handsome guy in a seersucker suit walking on the beach, ogling a blonde dish sunbathing. He was so oblivious to everything else around him that he was about to get creamed by a big wave. The caption at the top of the page read: 'Not to worry! In his Hart, Shaffner & Marx Featherweight he'll be dried out and crisp – and ready to woo her at the club tonight!' The dish was sleek. Her features were Martha's – a soft, pretty version. The Sprague mansion was in the background, surrounded by palm trees.

Ramona broke the silence. 'What are you going to do?'

I couldn't look at her. 'I don't know.'

'You told me that already.'

The guy in the ad was starting to look like an idealized Emmett – the Scotchman as a Hollywood pretty boy. I threw out the one cop question Ramona's story inspired: 'In the fall of '46 someone was throwing dead cats into cemeteries in Hollywood. Was that you?'

'Yes. I was so jealous of her then, and I just wanted Georgie to know I still cared. *What are you going to do?*'

'I don't know. Go upstairs, Ramona. Leave me alone.'

I heard soft footfalls moving out of the room, then sobs, then nothing. I thought about the family's united front to save Ramona, how arresting her would blow my police career: charges of withholding evidence, obstruction of justice. Sprague money would keep her out of the gas chamber, she'd get eaten alive at Atascadero or a women's prison until the lupus got her, Martha would be ravaged, and Emmett and Madeleine would still have each other – withholding/obstruction beefs against them would be too second-hand to prosecute on. If I took Ramona in I was shot to shit as a policeman; if I let her go I was finished as a man, and in either case Emmett and Madeleine would survive – together.

So the patented Bucky Bleichert advance, stymied and stalemated, sat still in a big plush room full of ancestor icons. I looked through the packing crates on the floor – the Sprague getaway if the City Council got uppity – and saw the cheap cocktail dresses and the sketch pad covered with women's faces, no doubt Martha sketching alter egos to plaster over ads huckstering toothpaste and cosmetics and cornflakes. Maybe she could design an advertising campaign to spring Ramona from Tehachapi. Maybe without torturer Mommy she wouldn't have the guts to work anymore.

I left the manse and killed time making rounds of old haunts. I checked out the rest home – my father didn't recognize me, but looked full of malicious spunk. Lincoln Heights was rife with new houses – prefab pads waiting for tenants – 'No Down Payment' for GIs. The Eagle Rock Legion Hall still had a sign ballyhooing Friday night boxing, and my Central Division beat was still winos, rag suckers and Jesus shriekers. At twilight, I gave in: one last shot at the brass girl before I took her mommy down; one last chance to ask her why she was still playing Dahlia when she knew I'd never touch her again.

I drove to the 8th Street bar strip, parked at the corner of Irolo and waited with an eye on the Zimba Room entrance. I was hoping that the valise I'd seen Madeleine carrying in the morning didn't mean a trip somewhere; I was hoping her Dahlia prowl of two nights ago wasn't a one-shot deal.

I sat there eyeballing foot traffic: servicemen, civilian booze-hounds, neighborhood squares going in and out of the hash house next door. I thought of packing it in, then got frightened of the next stop – Ramona – and stuck. Just past midnight Madeleine's Packard pulled up. She got out – carrying her valise, looking like herself, not Elizabeth Short.

Startled, I watched her walk into the restaurant. Fifteen minutes passed slowly. Then she sashayed out, Black Dahlia to the nines. She tossed her valise in the Packard's backseat and hit the Zimba Room.

I gave her a minute's slack, then went over and peered in the doorway. The bar was serving a skeleton crew of army brass; the zebra-striped booths were empty. Madeleine was drinking by herself. Two soldiers were primping at stools down from her, getting ready to make the big move. They swooped a half second apart. The dump was too deserted for me to hold surveillance in; I retreated to the car.

Madeleine and a first lieutenant in summer dress khakis walked out an hour or so later. Per her old MO, they got in the Packard and headed around the corner to the 9th and Irolo auto court. I was right behind them.

Madeleine parked and walked to the manager's hut for the key; the soldier waited by the door of room twelve. I thought of frustration: KMPC on loud, venetian blinds down to the sill. Then Madeleine left the office, called to the lieutenant and pointed across the courtyard to a different unit. He shrugged and went over; Madeleine joined him and opened the door. The light went on and off inside.

I gave them ten minutes, then moved to the bungalow, resigned to big band standards and darkness. Moans were coming from inside, unaccompanied by music. I saw that the one window was open two feet or so, dried paint on the runner holding it stuck. I found shelter beside a trellis overgrown with vines, squatted down and listened.

Heavier moans, bed springs creaking, male grunts. Her love sounds reaching fever pitch – stagy, more soprano than when she was with me. The soldier groaning hard, all noise subsiding, then Madeleine, speaking with a feigned accent:

‘I wish there was a radio. Back home all the motels had them. They were bolted down and you had to put dimes in, but at least there was music.’

The soldier, trying to catch his breath: ‘I heard Boston’s a nice town.’

I placed Madeleine’s fake voice then: New England blue collar, the way Betty Short was supposed to speak. ‘Medford’s not nice, not nice at all. I had one lousy job after another. Waitress, candy girl at a theater, file clerk at a factory. That was why I came to California to seek my fortune. Because Medford was so awful.’

Madeleine’s ‘A’s’ were getting broader and broader; she sounded like a Boston guttersnipe. The man said, ‘You came out here during the war?’

‘Uh-huh. I got a job at the Camp Cooke PX. This soldier beat me up, and this rich man, this award-winning contractor, he saved me. He’s my stepdaddy now. He lets me be with whoever I want to be with so long as I come home to him. He bought me my nice white car and all my nice black dresses, and he gives me back rubs ’cause he’s not my real daddy.’

‘That’s the kind of dad to have. My dad bought me a bicycle once, and he gave me a couple of bucks toward a soap box derby racer. But he never bought me any Packards, that’s for damn sure. You’ve got yourself a real sugar daddy, Betty.’

I knelt down lower and peered through the window crack; all I could see were dark shapes on a bed in the middle of the room. Madeleine/Betty said, ‘Sometimes my stepdaddy doesn’t like my boyfriends. He never makes a fuss, because he’s not my real daddy and I let him give me backrubs. There was this one boy, a policeman. My stepdaddy said he was wishy-washy with a mean streak. I didn’t believe him, because the boy was big and strong, and he had these cute buck teeth. He tried to hurt me, but Daddy settled his hash. Daddy knows how to deal with weak men who suck around money and try to hurt nice girls. He was a big hero in the First World War and the policeman was a draft dodger.’

Madeleine’s accent was slipping, moving into another voice, low and guttural. I braced myself for more verbal lashing; the soldier said, ‘Draft dodgers should either be deported to Russia or shot. No, shooting’s too merciful. Hanged by the you know what, that’s more like it.’

Madeleine, a vibrato rasp, a perfect Mexican accent: ‘An axe ees better, no? The policeman have a partner. He tie up some loose ends for me – some notes I should not ’ave lef’ for a not so nice girl. The partner beat up my stepdaddy an’ run away to May-hee-co. I draw pictures of a face to be and buy cheap dress. I hire a detective to find him, an’ I make a pageant. I go down to Ensenada in dees-guise, I wear cheap dress, preten’ to be beggar and knock on hees door. “Gringo, gringo, I need money.” He turn hees back, I grab axe an’ chop him down. I take money he steal from stepdaddy. Seventy-one thousan’ dollar I bring back home.’

The soldier jabbered, ‘Look, is this some kind of joke?’ I pulled out my .38 and cocked the hammer. Madeleine as Milt Dolphine’s ‘rich Mex woman’ slipped into Spanish, a streak of raspy obscenities. I aimed through the window crack; the light went on inside; lover boy thrashing himself into his uniform spoiled my shot at the killer. I saw Lee in a sand pit, worms crawling out of his eyes.

The soldier bolted out the door, half dressed. Madeleine, slipping into her tight black gown, was an easy target. I drew a bead; a last flash of her nakedness made me empty the gun into the air. I kicked the window in.

Madeleine watched me climb over the sill. Undaunted by gunshots and flying glass, she spoke with soft savoir faire: ‘She was the only thing real to me, and I had to tell people about her. I felt so contrived next to her. She was a natural and I was just an imposter. And she was ours, sweet. You brought her back to me. She was what made it so good with us. She was ours.’

I mussed up Madeleine’s Dahlia hairdo, so that she looked like just another raven-clad floozy; I cuffed her wrists behind her back and saw myself in the sand pit, worm bait along with my partner. Sirens bared down from all directions; flashlights shined in the broken window. Out in the Big Nowhere, Lee Blanchard reprised his line from the Zoot Suit riot:

‘Cherchez la femme, Bucky. Remember that.’

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

We took the fall together.

Four black-and-whites responded to my shots. I explained to the officers that it was a lights and siren roll to Wilshire Station – I was booking the woman for Murder One. At the Wilshire squadroom, Madeleine confessed to the killing of Lee Blanchard, concocting a brilliant fantasy – a lovers' triangle of Lee/Madeleine/-Bucky, how she was intimately involved with both of us in the winter of 1947. I sat in on the interrogation, and Madeleine was flawless. Seasoned Homicide dicks bought her tale hook, line and sinker: Lee and I rivals for her hand, Madeleine preferring me as a potential husband. Lee going to Emmett, demanding that he 'give him' his daughter, beating the man half to death when he refused. Madeleine revenge-stalking Lee in Mexico, axing him to death in Ensenada. No mention of the Black Dahlia murder case at all.

I corroborated Madeleine's story, saying that I only recently figured out that Lee had been murdered. I then confronted Madeleine with a circumstantial run-though on the snuff and coerced a partial confession out of her. Madeleine was transported to the LA women's jail, and I went back to the El Nido – still wondering what I was going to do about Ramona.

The next day I returned to duty. At the end of my tour a team of Metro goons was waiting for me in the Newton locker room. They grilled me for three hours; I ran with the fantasy ball Madeleine started rolling. The grit of her story and my wild departmental rep carried me through the interrogation – and nobody mentioned the Dahlia.

Over the next week the legal machinery took over.

The Mexican government refused to indict Madeleine for the murder of Lee Blanchard – without a corpse and backup evidence extradition proceedings could not be initiated. A Grand Jury was called up to decide her fate; Ellis Loew was slated to present the case for the City of Los Angeles. I told him I would testify only by deposition. Knowing my unpredictability only too well, he agreed. I filled up ten pages with lies on the 'lovers' triangle,' fantasy embellishments worthy of romantic Betty Short at her best. I kept wondering if she would appreciate the irony.

Emmett Sprague was indicted by a separate Grand Jury – for health and safety code violations stemming from his mob-fronted ownership of dangerously faulty property. He was given fines in excess of $50,000 – but no criminal charges were filed. Counting the $71,000 that Madeleine stole from Lee, he was still close to twenty grand in the black on the deal.

The lovers' triangle hit the papers the day after Madeleine's case went to the Grand Jury. The Blanchard-Bleichert fight and the Southside shootout were resurrected, and for a week I was big-time local stuff. Then I got a call from Bevo Means of the *Herald:* 'Watch out, Bucky. Emmett Sprague's about to hit back, and the shit's about to hit the fan. 'Nuff said.'

It was *Confidential* magazine that nailed me.

The July 12 issue ran an article on the triangle. It featured quotes from

Madeleine, leaked to the scandal rag by Emmett. The brass girl had me ditching out on duty to couple with her at the Red Arrow Motel; stealing fifths of her father's whiskey to see me through nightwatch; giving her the inside lowdown on the LAPD's traffic ticket quota system and how I 'beat up niggers.' Innuendos pointed to worse offenses – but everything Madeleine said was true.

I was fired from the Los Angeles Police Department on grounds of moral turpitude and conduct unbecoming an officer. It was the unanimous decision of a specially convened board of inspectors and duty chiefs, and I did not protest it. I thought of turning over Ramona in hopes of pulling a grand-stander's turnabout, but kiboshed the idea. Russ Millard might be compelled to admit what he knew and get hurt; Lee's name would get coated with more slime; Martha would *know*. The firing was about two and a half years overdue; the *Confidential* exposé my final embarrassment to the Department. No one knew that better than I did.

I turned in my service revolver, my outlaw .45 and badge 1611.1 moved back to the house that Lee bought, borrowed $500 from the padre and waited for my notoriety to die down before I started looking for work. Betty Short and Kay weighed on me, and I went by Kay's school to look for her. The principal, eyeing me like a bug who just crawled out of the woodwork, said that Kay left a resignation letter the day after I hit the newsstands. It stated that she was going on a long cross-country automobile trip and would not be returning to Los Angeles.

The Grand Jury bound Madeleine over for trial on Manslaughter Three – 'premeditated homicide under psychological duress and with mitigating circumstances.' Her lawyer, the great Jerry Giesler, had her plead guilty and request a judge's chambers sentencing. Taking into account the recommendations of psychiatrists who found Madeleine to be a 'severely delusional violent schizophrenic adept at acting out many different personalities,' the judge sentenced her to Atascadero State Hospital for an 'indeterminate period of treatment not to subscribe below the minimum time allotted by the state penalties code: ten years of imprisonment.'

So the brass girl took the heat for her family and I took it for myself. My farewell to the Spragues was a front-page photo in the LA *Daily News*. Matrons were leading Madeleine out of the courtroom while Emmett wept at the defense table. Ramona, hollow-cheeked with disease, was being shepherded by Martha, all good strong business in a tailored suit. The picture was a lock on my silence forever.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

A month later I got a letter from Kay.

Sioux Falls, S.D.
8/17/49

Dear Dwight,

I didn't know if you'd moved back to the house, so I don't know if this letter will reach you. I've been checking the library for L.A. papers, and I know you're not with the Department anymore, so that's another place where I can't write to you. I'll just have to send this out and see what happens.

I'm in Sioux Falls, living at the Plainsman Hotel. It's the best one in town, and I've wanted to stay here since I was a little girl. It's not the way I imagined it, of course. I just wanted to wash the taste of L.A. out of my mouth, and Sioux Falls is as antithetical to L.A. as you can get without flying to the moon.

My grade school friends are all married and have children, and two of them are widows from the war. Everyone talks about the war like it's still going on, and the high prairies outside of town are being plowed for housing developments. The ones that have been constructed so far are so ugly, such bright, jarring colors. They make me miss our old house. I know you hate it, but it was a sanctuary for nine years of my life.

Dwight, I've read all the papers and that trashy magazine piece. I must have counted a dozen lies. Lies by omission and the blatant kind. I keep wondering what happened, even though I don't really want to know. I keep wondering why Elizabeth Short was never mentioned. I would have felt self-righteous, but I spent last night in my room just counting lies. All the lies I told you and things I never told you, even when it was good with us. I'm too embarrassed to tell you how many I came up with.

I'm sorry for them. And I admire what you did with Madeleine Sprague. I never knew what she was to you, but I know what arresting her cost you. Did she really kill Lee? Is that just another lie? Why can't I believe it?

I have some money that Lee left me (a lie by omission, I know) and I'm going to head east in a day or so. I want to be far away from Los Angeles, someplace cool and pretty and old. Maybe New England, maybe the Great Lakes. All I know is that when I see the place, I'll know it.

Hoping this finds you,

Kay.

P.S. Do you still think about Elizabeth Short? I think about her constantly. I don't hate her, I just *think* about her. Strange after all this time.

K. L. B.

I kept the letter and re-read it at least a couple of hundred times. I didn't think about what it meant, or implied about my future, or Kay's, or ours together: I just re-read it and thought about Betty.

I dumped the El Nido master file in the garbage and thought about her. H. J. Caruso gave me a job selling cars, and I thought about her while I was hawking the 1950 line. I drove by 39th and Norton, saw that houses were going up on the vacant lot and thought about her. I didn't question the morality of letting Ramona walk or wonder whether Betty would approve. I just thought about her. And it took Kay, always the smarter of the two of us, to put it together for me.

Her second letter was postmarked Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was written on stationery for the Harvard Motor Lodge.

9/11/49

Dear Dwight –

I'm still such a liar, procrastinator and chicken heart. I've known for two months, and I just got up the courage to tell you. If this letter doesn't reach you I'll actually have to call the house or Russ Millard. Better to try this way first.

Dwight, I'm pregnant. It had to have happened that one awful time about a month before you moved out. I'm due around Christmas and I want to keep it.

This is the patented Kay Lake retreat advancing. Will you please call or write? Soon? *Now?*

That's the big news. Per the P.S. on my last letter, something strange? Elegiac? Plain funny happened.

I kept thinking about Elizabeth Short. How she disrupted all our lives, and we never even knew her. When I got to Cambridge (God, how I love academic communities!) I remembered that she was raised nearby. I drove to Medford, stopped for dinner and got into a conversation with a blind man sitting at the next table. I was feeling gabby and mentioned Elizabeth Short. The man was sad at first, then he perked up. He told me about an L. A. policeman who came to Medford three months ago to find 'Beth's' killer. He described your voice and verbal style to a 'T.' I felt very proud, but I didn't tell him that cop was my husband, because I don't know if you still are.

Wondering,

Kay

I didn't call or write. I put Lee Blanchard's house on the market and caught a flight to Boston.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

On the plane I thought of all the things I'd have to explain to Kay, evidence to keep a new foundation of lies from destroying the two – or three – of us.

She would have to know that I was a detective without a badge, that for one month in the year 1949 I possessed brilliance and courage and the will to make sacrifices. She would have to know that the heat of that time would always make me vulnerable, prey to dark curiosities. She would have to believe that my strongest resolve was not to let any of it hurt her.

And she had to know that it was Elizabeth Short who was giving us our second chance.

Nearing Boston, the plane got swallowed up by clouds. I felt heavy with fear, like the reunion and fatherhood had turned me into a stone plummeting. I reached for Betty then; a wish, almost a prayer. The clouds broke up and the plane descended, a big bright city at twilight below. I asked Betty to grant me safe passage in return for my love.

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Version 1.0

Epub ISBN 9781446492642

Published by Windmill Books 2011

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

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First published in Great Britain in 1988 by Mysterious Press
First published in paperback in 1990 by Arrow Books

Windmill Books
The Random House Group Limited
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA

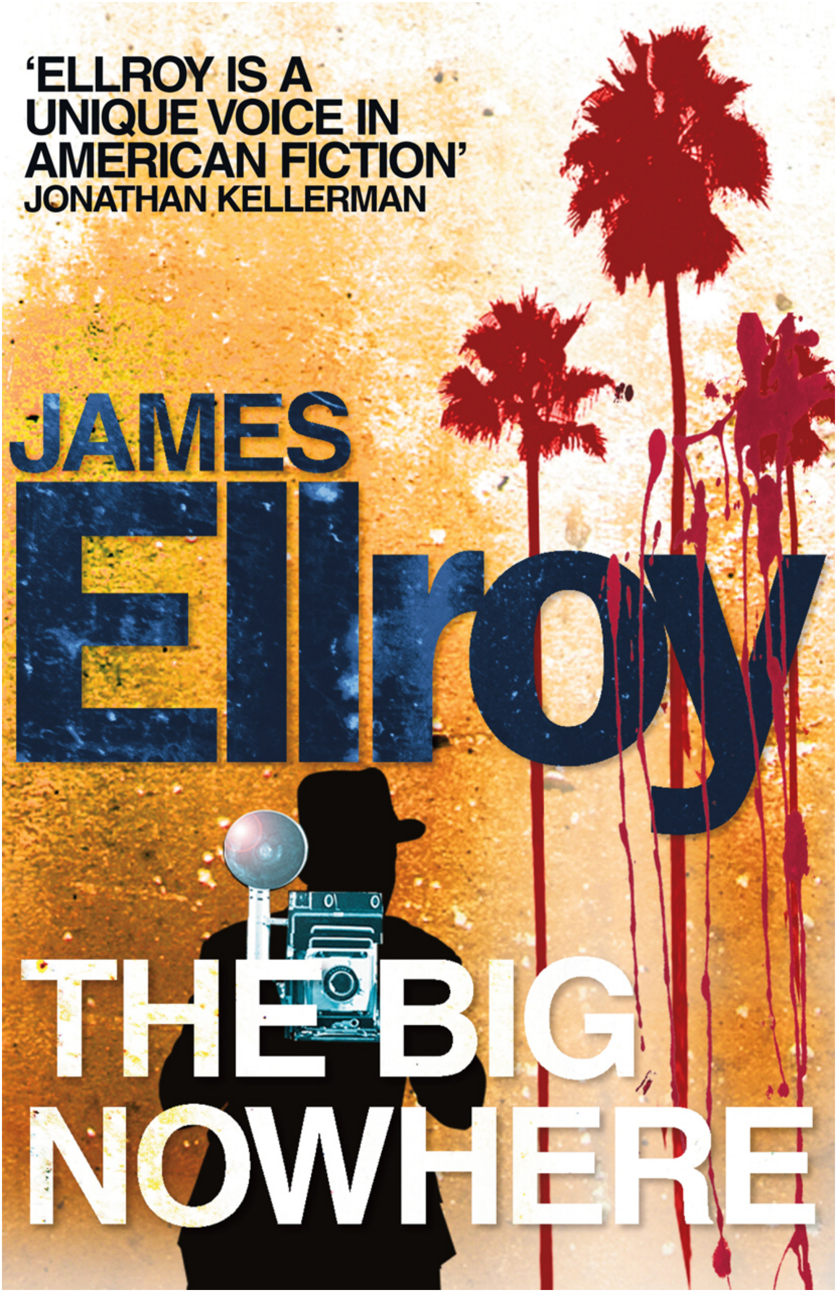
Addresses for companies within The Random House Group Limited can be found at:
www.randomhouse.co.uk/offices.htm

The Random House Group Limited Reg. No. 954009

www.randomhouse.co.uk

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9780099537861



'ELLROY IS A UNIQUE VOICE IN AMERICAN FICTION'
JONATHAN KELLERMAN
JAMES
Ellroy
THE BIG NOWHERE

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Copyright

About the Book

1950s Los Angeles: The City of Angels has become the city of the Angel of Death.

Communist witch-hunts and insanely violent killings are terrorising the community. Three men are plunged into a maelstrom of violence and deceit when their lives become inextricably linked as each one confronts his own personal darkness…

About the Author

James Ellroy was born in Los Angeles in 1948. He is the author of the acclaimed ‘LA Quartet’: *The Black Dahlia*, *The Big Nowhere*, *LA Confidential* and *White Jazz*. His most recent novel, *Blood’s a Rover*, completes the magisterial ‘Underworld USA Trilogy’ – the first two volumes of which (*American Tabloid* and *The Cold Six Thousand*) were both *Sunday Times* bestsellers.

Also by James Ellroy

THE UNDERWORLD U.S.A. TRILOGY

American Tabloid

The Cold Six Thousand

Blood's a Rover

THE L.A. QUARTET

The Black Dahlia

The Big Nowhere

L.A. Confidential

White Jazz

MEMOIR

My Dark Places

The Hilliker Curse

SHORT STORIES

Hollywood Nocturnes

JOURNALISM/SHORT FICTION

Crime Wave

Destination: Morgue!

EARLY NOVELS

Brown's Requiem

Clandestine

Blood on the Moon

Because the Night

Suicide Hill

Killer on the Road

THE BIG NOWHERE

James Ellroy

WINDMILL BOOKS

To
Glenda Revelle

It was written that I should
be loyal to the nightmare of my choice –

Joseph Conrad
Heart of Darkness

1
Red Crosscurrents

ONE

THUNDERSHOWERS HIT JUST before midnight, drowning out the horn honks and noisemaker blare that usually signaled New Year's on the Strip, bringing 1950 to the West Hollywood Substation in a wave of hot squeals with meat wagon backup.

At 12:03, a four-vehicle fender bender at Sunset and La Cienega resulted in a half dozen injuries; the deputies who responded got eyewitness testimony: the crash was caused by the clown in the brown DeSoto and the army major in the Camp Cooke staff car racing no-hands with dogs wearing paper party hats on their laps. Two arrests; one call to the Verdugo Street Animal Shelter. At 12:14, an uninhabited vet's shack on Sweetzer collapsed in a heap of drenched prefab, killing a teenaged boy and girl necking under the foundation; two County Morgue DOA's. At 12:29, a neon lawn display featuring Santa Claus and his helpers short-circuited, shooting flames along the electrical cord to its inside terminus – a plug attached to a maze of adapters fueling a large, brightly lit Christmas tree and nativity scene – severely burning three children heaping tissue-wrapped presents on a glow-in-the-dark baby Jesus. One fire truck, one ambulance and three Sheriff's prowl cars to the scene, a minor jurisdictional foul-up when the LAPD appeared in force, a rookie dispatcher mistaking the Sierra Bonita Drive address as City – not County – territory. Then five drunk drivings; then a slew of drunk and disorderlies as the clubs on the Strip let out; then a strongarm heist in front of Dave's Blue Room, the victims two Iowa yokels in town for the Rose Bowl, the muscle two niggers who escaped in a '47 Merc with purple fender skirts. When the rain petered out shortly after 3:00, Detective Deputy Danny Upshaw, the station's acting watch commander, predicted that the 1950's were going to be a shit decade.

Except for the drunks and nonbooze misdemeanants in the holding tank, he was alone. Every black-and-white and unmarked was out working graveyard; there was no chain of command, no switchboard/clerical girl, no plainclothes deputies in the squadroom. No khaki and olive drab patrolmen strutting around, smirking over their plum duty – the Strip, glossy women, Christmas baskets from Mickey Cohen, the real grief over the city line with the LAPD. No one to give him the fisheye when he picked up his criminology textbooks: Vollmer, Thorwald, Maslick – grid-searching crime scenes, blood spatter marks explained, how to toss an 18-foot-by-24-foot room for hard evidence in an hour flat.

Danny settled in to read, his feet up on the front desk, the station-to-prowler two-way turned down low. Hans Maslick was digressing on how to roll fingerprints off severely burned flesh, the best chemical compounds to remove scabbed tissue without singeing the skin below the surface of the print pattern. Maslick had perfected his technique during the aftermath of a prison fire in Düsseldorf in 1931. He had plenty of stiffs and fingerprint abstracts to work from; there was a chemical plant nearby, with an ambitious young lab assistant eager to help him. Together, they worked rapid fire: caustic solutions burning too deep, milder compounds not penetrating scarred flesh. Danny jotted chemical symbols on a notepad as he read; he pictured himself as Maslick's assistant, working side by side with the great criminologist, who would give him a fatherly embrace every time he made a brilliant logical jump. Soon he was transposing the scorched nativity scene kids against his reading, going solo, lifting prints off tiny fingers, double-checking them against birth records, the hospital precaution they took in case newborns got switched around –

'Boss, we got a hot one.'

Danny glanced up. Hosford, a uniformed deputy working the northeast border of the division, was in the doorway. 'What? Why didn't you call it in?'

'I did. You mustn't of –'

Danny pushed his text and notepad out of sight. 'What is it?'

'Man down. I found him – Allegro, a half mile up from the Strip. Jesus dog, you ain't ever seen noth –'

'You stay here, I'm going.'

Allegro Street was a narrow residential road, half Spanish bungalow courts, half building sites fronted by signs promising DELUXE LIVING in the Tudor, French Provincial and Streamline Moderne styles. Danny drove up it in his civilian car, slowing when he saw a barrier of sawhorses with red blinkers, three black-and-whites parked behind it, their headlights beaming out into a weed-strewn vacant lot.

He left his Chevy at the curb and walked over. A knot of deputies in rain slickers were pointing flashlights at the ground; cherry lamp glow fluttered over a sign for the ALLEGRO PLANTATION ARMS – FULL TENANCY BY SPRING 1951. The prowlers' low beams crisscrossed the lot, picking out booze empties, sodden lumber and paper debris. Danny cleared his throat; one of the men wheeled and pulled his gun, spastic twitchy. Danny said, 'Easy, Gibbs. It's me, Upshaw.'

Gibbs reholstered his piece; the other cops separated. Danny looked down at the corpse, felt his knees buckle and made like a criminologist so he wouldn't pass out or vomit:

'Deffry, Henderson, keep your lights on the decedent. Gibbs, write down what I say verbatim.

'Dead male Caucasian, nude. Approximate age thirty to thirty-five. The cadaver is lying supine, the arms and legs spread. There are ligature marks on the neck, the eyes have been removed and the empty sockets are extruding a gelatinous substance.'

Danny squatted by the corpse; Deffry and Henderson moved their flashlights in to give him some close-ups. 'The genitals are bruised and swollen, there are bite marks on the glans of the penis.' He reached under the dead man's back and felt wet dirt; he touched the chest near the heart, got dry skin and a residue of body heat. 'There is no precipitation on the cadaver, and since it rained heavily between midnight and three A.M., we can assume the victim was placed here within the past hour.'

A siren wailed toward the scene. Danny grabbed Deffry's flashlight and went in extra close, examining the worst of it. 'There is a total of six oval, irregular, circumscribed wounds on the torso between the navel and rib cage. Shredded flesh outlines the perimeters, entrails coated with congealed blood extruding from them. The skin around each wound is inflamed, directly outlining the shred marks, and –'

Henderson said, 'Hickeys sure as shit.'

Danny felt his textbook spiel snap. 'What are you talking about?'

Henderson sighed. 'You know, love bites. Like when a dame starts sucking on your neck. Gibbsey, show plainclothes here what that hat check girl at the Blue Room did to you Christmas.'

Gibbs chuckled and kept writing; Danny stood up, pissed at being patronized by a flunky harness bull. Not talking made the stiff sucker-punch him; his legs were rubber and his stomach was flip-flops. He flashed the five-cell at the ground surrounding the dead man, saw that it had been thoroughly trampled by LASD-issue brogans and that the prowl cars had obliterated any possible tire tracks. Gibbs said, 'I ain't sure I got all them words spelled right.'

Danny found his textbook voice. 'It doesn't matter. Just hold on to it and give it to Captain Dietrich in the morning.'

'But I'm off at eight. The skipper don't come in till ten, and I got Bowl tickets.'

'Sorry, but you're staying here until daywatch relieves you or the lab techs show up.'

'The County lab's closed New Year's, and I've had them tickets –'

A Coroner's wagon pulled to a stop by the sawhorses, killing its siren; Danny turned to Henderson. 'Crime scene ropes, no reporters or rubberneckers. Gibbs stays posted here, you and Deffry start shaking down the locals. You know the drill: witnesses to the dumping, suspicious loiterers, vehicles.'

'Upshaw, it is four-twenty fucking A.M.'

'Good. Start now, and you may be finished by noon. Leave a report in duplicate with Dietrich, and write down all the addresses where no one was home, so they can be checked later.'

Henderson stormed over to his cruiser; Danny watched the Coroner's men place the body on a stretcher and drape it with a blanket, Gibbs talking a blue streak to them, Rose Bowl odds and a number on the Black Dahlia case, still unsolved, still a hot topic. The profusion of cherry lights, flashlights and headbeams darted over the lot, picking out details: mud puddles reflecting moonlight and shadows, the neon haze of Hollywood in the distance. Danny thought of his six months as a detective, his own two homicides open-and-shut family jobs. The morgue men loaded the body, hung a U-turn and took off sans siren. A Vollmer maxim hit home: 'In murders of extreme passion, the killer will always betray his pathology. If the detective is willing to sort physical evidence objectively and then *think* subjectively from the killer's viewpoint, he will often solve crimes that are baffling in their randomness.'

Eyes poked out. Sex organs mauled. Bare flesh gored down to the quick. Danny followed the morgue wagon downtown, wishing his car had a siren to get him there faster.

The LA City and County morgues occupied the bottom floor of a warehouse on Alameda just south of Chinatown. A wooden partition separated the two operations: examination slabs, refrigerators and dissecting tables for bodies found within City confines, a different set of facilities for stiffs from the unincorporated area patrolled by the Sheriff's Department. Before Mickey Cohen sent the LAPD and Mayor's Office topsy-turvy with his Brenda Allen revelations – the high brass taking kickbacks from LA's most famous whores – there had been solid City/County cooperation, pathologists and cadaver caddies sharing plastic sheets, bone saws and pickling fluid. Now, with the County cops giving Cohen shelter on the Strip, there was nothing but interagency grief.

Edicts had come down from City Personnel: *no* loan-outs of City medical tools; *no* fraternizing with the County crew while on duty; *no* Bunsen burner moonshine parties, for fear of mistagged DOA's and body parts snatched as souvenirs resulting in scandals to back up the Brenda Allen job. Danny Upshaw followed the stretcher bearing John Doe # 1–1/1/50 up the County loading dock, knowing his chance of getting his favorite City pathologist to do the autopsy was close to nil.

The County side was bustling: traffic fatalities lined up on gurneys, morgue jockeys tagging big toes, uniformed deputies writing dead body reports and Coroner's men chaining cigarettes to kill the stench of blood, formaldehyde and stale chink takeout. Danny sidestepped his way over to a fire exit, then hooked around to the City loading dock, interrupting a trio of LAPD patrolmen singing 'Auld Lang Syne.' Inside, the scene was identical to the one on the County turf, except that the uniforms were navy blue – not olive drab and khaki.

Danny headed straight for the office of Dr. Norton Layman, Assistant Chief Medical Examiner for the City of Los Angeles, author of *Science*

Against Crime and his instructor for the USC night school course 'Forensic Pathology for Beginners.' A note was tacked to the door: 'I'm on days starting 1/1. May God bless our new epoch with less business than the first half of this rather bloody century – N. L.'

Cursing to himself, Danny got out his pen and notepad and wrote:

'Doc – I should have known you'd take the busiest night of the year off. There's an interesting 187 on the County side – male, sexually mutilated. Grist for your new book, and since I caught the squeal I'm sure I'll get the case. Will you try to get the autopsy? Capt. Dietrich says the ME on the County day shift gambles and is susceptible to bribes. Enough said – D. Upshaw.' He placed the sheet of paper on Layman's desk blotter, anchored it with an ornamental human skull and walked back to County territory.

Business had slacked off. Daylight was starting to creep across the loading dock; the night's catch was lined up on steel examination slabs. Danny looked around and saw that the only live one in the place was an ME's assistant propped up in a chair by the dispatch room, alternately picking his teeth and his nose.

He walked over. The old man, breathing raisinjack, said, 'Who are you?'

'Deputy Upshaw, West Hollywood Squad. Who's catching?'

'Nice duty. Ain't you a little young for a gravy job like that?'

'I'm a hard worker. Who's catching?'

The old man wiped his nose-picking finger on the wall. 'I can tell conversation ain't your strong suit. Doc Katz was catching, only a snootful of juice caught him. Now he's catching a few winks in that kike kayak of his. How come the hebes all drive Cadillacs? You're a detective, you got an answer for that?'

Danny felt his fists jam into his pockets and clench, his warning to ease down. 'It beats me. What's your name?'

'Ralph Carty, that's –'

'Ralph, have you ever done a preautopsy prep?'

Carty laughed. 'Sonny, I done them all. I did Rudy Valentino, who was hung like a cricket. I did Lupe Velez and Carole Landis, and I got pictures of both of them. Lupe shaved her snatch. You pretend they ain't dead, you can have fun. What do you say? Lupe and Carole, five-spot a throw?'

Danny got out his billfold and peeled off two tens; Carty went for his inside jacket pocket, whipping out a deck of glossies. Danny said, 'Nix. The guy I want is on a tray over there.'

'What?'

'I'm doing the prep. *Now*.'

'Sonny, you ain't a certified County morgue attendant.'

Danny added a five-spot to his bribe and handed it to Carty; the old man kissed a faded snapshot of a dead movie star. 'I guess you are now.'

Danny got his evidence kit from the car and went to work, Carty standing sentry in case the duty ME showed up pissed.

He stripped the sheet off the corpse and felt the limbs for postmortem lividity; he held the arms and legs aloft, dropped them and got the buckle that indicated rigor mortis coming on. He wrote, ‘Death around 1:00 A.M. likely,’ on his notepad, then smeared the dead man’s fingertips with ink and rolled his prints onto a piece of stiff cardboard, pleased that he got a perfect spread the first time around.

Next he examined the neck and head, measuring the purpled ligature marks with a caliper, writing the specs down. The marks encompassed the entire neck; much too long and broad to be a single- or double-hand span. Squinting, he saw a fiber under the chin; he picked it off with a tweezer, nailed it as white terrycloth, placed it in a test tube and on impulse forced the half-locked jaws open, holding them wide with a tongue depressor. Shining his penlight into the mouth, he saw identical fibers on the roof, tongue and gums; he wrote, ‘Strangled and suffocated with white terrycloth towel,’ took a deep breath and checked out the eye sockets.

The penlight beam picked out bruised membranes streaked with the gelatinous substance he’d noticed at the building site; Danny took a Q-tip and swabbed three slide samples from each cavity. The goo had a minty medicinal odor.

Working down the cadaver, Danny spot-checked every inch; scrutinizing the inside crook of the elbows, he tingled: old needle scars – faded, but there in force on both the right and left arms. The victim was a drug addict – maybe reformed – none of the tracks were fresh. He wrote the information down, grabbed his caliper and braced himself for the torso wounds.

The six ovals measured to within three centimeters of each other. They all bore teethmark outlines too shredded to cut casts from – and all were too large to have been made by a human mouth biting straight down. Danny scraped congealed blood off the intestinal tubes that extended from the wounds; he smeared the samples on slides and made a speculative jump that Doc Layman would have crucified him for:

The killer used an animal or animals in the postmortem abuse of his victim.

Danny looked at the dead man’s penis; saw unmistakable human teeth marks on the glans, what Layman called ‘homicidal affection,’ working for laughs in a classroom packed with ambitious off-duty cops. He knew he should check the underside and scrotum, saw Ralph Carty watching him and did it, getting no additional mutilations. Carty cackled, ‘Hung like a cashew’; Danny said, ‘Shut the fuck up.’

Carty shrugged and went back to his *Screenworld*. Danny turned the corpse onto its back and gasped.

Deep, razor-sharp cuts, dozens of them crisscrossing the back and shoulders from every angle, wood splinters matted into the narrow strips of caked blood.

Danny stared, juxtaposing the front and backside mutilations, trying to put them together. Cold sweat was soaking his shirt cuffs, making his hands twitch. Then a gruff voice. ‘Carty, who is this guy? What’s he doing here?’

Danny turned around, putting a pacify-the-locals grin on; he saw a fat man in a soiled white smock and party hat with ‘1950’ in green spangles. ‘Deputy Upshaw. You’re Dr. Katz?’

The fat man started to stick out his hand, then let it drop. ‘What are you doing with that cadaver? And by what authority do you come in here and disrupt my workload?’

Carty was shrinking into the background, making with supplicating eyes. Danny said, ‘I caught the squeal and wanted to prep the body myself. I’m qualified, and I lied and told Ralphy you said it was kosher.’

Dr. Katz said, ‘Get out of here, Deputy Upshaw.’

Danny said, ‘Happy New Year.’

Ralph Carty said, ‘It’s the truth, Doc – if I’m lyin’, I’m flyin’.’

Danny packed up his evidence kit, wavering on a destination: canvassing Allegro Street or home, sleep and dreams: Kathy Hudgens, Buddy Jastrow, the blood house on a Kern County back road. Walking out to the loading dock, he looked back. Ralph Carty was splitting his bribe money with the doctor in the rhinestone party hat.

TWO

LIEUTENANT MAL CONSIDINE was looking at a photograph of his wife and son, trying not to think of Buchenwald.

It was just after 8:00 A.M.; Mal was in his cubicle at the DA's Criminal Investigation Bureau, coming off a fitful sleep fueled by too much Scotch. His trouser legs were covered with confetti; the roundheeled squadroom steno had smeared kisses on his door, bracketing EXECUTIVE OFFICER in Max Factor's Crimson Decadence. The City Hall sixth floor looked like a trampled parade ground; Ellis Loew had just awakened him with a phone call: meet him and 'someone else' at the Pacific Dining Car in half an hour. And he'd left Celeste and Stefan at home alone to ring in 1950 – because he knew his wife would turn the occasion into a war.

Mal picked up the phone and dialed the house. Celeste answered on the third ring – 'Yes? Who is this that is calling?' – her bum phrasing a giveaway that she'd been speaking Czech to Stefan.

'It's me. I just wanted to let you know that I'll be a few more hours.'

'The blonde is making demands, Herr Lieutenant?'

'There's no blonde, Celeste. You know there's no blonde, and you know I always sleep at the Hall after the New Year's –'

'How do you say in English – rotkopf? Redhead? Kleine rotkopf scheisser schtupper –'

'Speak English, goddamn it! Don't pull this with me!'

Celeste laughed: the stage chortles that cut through her foreign-language routine and always made him crazy. 'Put my son on, goddamn it!'

Silence, then Celeste Heisteke Considine's standard punch line: 'He's not your son, Malcolm. His father was Jan Heisteke, and Stefan knows it. You are my benefactor and my husband, and the boy is eleven and must know that his heritage is not amerikanisch police talk and baseball and –'

'Put my son on, goddamn you.'

Celeste laughed softly. Mal knew she was acknowledging match point – him using his cop voice. The line went silent; in the background he could hear Celeste cooing Stefan out of sleep, singsong words in Czech. Then the boy was there – smack in the middle of them. 'Dad – Malcolm?'

'Yeah. Happy New Year.'

'We saw the fireworks. We went on the roof and held umb-umb –'

'You held umbrellas?'

'Yes. We saw the City Hall light up, then the fireworks went, then they . . . fissured?'

Mal said, 'They fizzled, Stefan. F-i-z-z-l-e-d. A fissure is a kind of a hole in the ground.'

Stefan tried the new word. 'F-i-s-u-r-e?'

'Two s's. We'll have a lesson when I get home, maybe take a drive by Westlake Park and feed the ducks.'

'Did you see the fireworks? Did you look out the window to see?'

He had been parrying Penny Diskant's offer of a cloakroom quickie then, breasts and legs grinding him, wishing he could do it. 'Yeah, it was pretty. Son, I have to go now. Work. You go back to sleep so you'll be sharp for our lesson.'

'Yes. Do you want to speak to Mutti?'

'No. Goodbye, Stefan.'

'Goodbye, D-D-Dad.'

Mal put down the phone. His hands were shaking and his eyes held a film of tears.

Downtown LA was shut down tight, like it was sleeping off a drunk. The only citizens in view were winos lining up for doughnuts and coffee outside the Union Rescue Mission; cars were erratically parked – snouts to smashed fenders – in front of the hot-sheet hotels on South Main. Sodden confetti hung out of windows and littered the sidewalk, and the sun that was looming above the eastern basin had the feel of heat, steam and bad hangovers. Mal drove to the Pacific Dining Car wishing the first day of the new decade an early death.

The restaurant was packed with camera-toting tourists wolfing the 'Rose Bowl Special' – hangtown fry, flapjacks, Bloody Marys and coffee. The headwaiter told Mal that Mr. Loew and another gentleman were waiting for him in the Gold Rush Room – a private nook favored by the downtown legal crowd. Mal walked back and rapped on the door; it was opened a split second later, and the 'other gentleman' stood there beaming. 'Knock, knock, who's there? Dudley Smith, so Reds beware. Please come in, Lieutenant. This is an auspicious assemblage of police brain power, and we should mark the occasion with proper amenities.'

Mal shook the man's hand, recognizing his name, his style, his often imitated tenor brogue. Lieutenant Dudley Smith, LAPD Homicide. Tall, beefside broad and red-faced; Dublin born, LA raised, Jesuit college trained. Priority case hatchet man for every LA chief of police dating back to Strongarm Dick Steckel. Killed seven men in the line of duty, wore custom-made club-figured ties: 7's, handcuff ratchets and LAPD shields stitched in concentric circles. Rumored to carry an Army .45 loaded with garlic-coated dumdums and a spring-loaded toad stabber.

'Lieutenant, a pleasure.'

'Call me Dudley. We're of equal rank. I'm older, but you're far better looking. I can tell we're going to be grand partners. Wouldn't you say so, Ellis?'

Mal looked past Dudley Smith to Ellis Loew. The head of the DA's Criminal Division was seated in a thronelike leather chair, picking the oysters and bacon out of his hangtown fry. 'I would indeed. Sit down, Mal. Are you interested in breakfast?'

Mal took a seat across from Loew; Dudley Smith sat down between them. The two were dressed in vested tweed suits – Loew's gray, Smith's brown. Both men sported regalia: Phi Beta Kappa key for the lawyer, lodge pins dotting the cop's lapels. Mal adjusted the crease in his rumpled flannels and thought that Smith and Loew looked like two mean pups out of the same litter. 'No thanks, counselor.'

Loew pointed to a silver coffeepot. 'Java?'

'No thanks.'

Smith laughed and slapped his knees. 'How about an explanation for this early morning intrusion on your peaceful family life?'

Mal said, 'I'll guess. Ellis wants to be DA, I want to be Chief DA's Investigator and you want to take over the Homicide Bureau when Jack Tierney retires next month. We've got venue on some hot little snuff that I haven't heard about, the two of us as investigators, Ellis as prosecuting attorney. It's a career maker. Good guess?'

Dudley let out a whooping laugh; Loew said, 'I'm glad you didn't finish law school, Malcolm. I wouldn't have relished facing you in court.'

'I hit it, then?'

Loew forked an oyster and dipped it in egg juice. 'No. We've got our tickets to those positions you mentioned, though. Pure and simple. Dudley volunteered for his own –'

Smith interrupted: 'I volunteered out of a sense of patriotism. I hate the Red filth worse than Satan.'

Mal watched Ellis take one bit of bacon, one of oyster, one of egg. Dudley lit a cigarette and watched him; Mal could see brass knuckles sticking out of his waistband. 'Why am I thinking grand jury job?'

Loew leaned back and stretched; Mal knew he was reaching for his courtroom persona. 'Because you're smart. Have you been keeping abreast of the local news?'

'Not really.'

'Well, there's a great deal of labor trouble going on, with the Hollywood movie studios in particular. The Teamsters have been picketing against the UAES – the United Alliance of Extras and Stagehands. They've got a long-term contract with RKO and the cheapie studios on Gower. They're picketing for more money and profit points, but they're not striking, and –'

Dudley Smith slammed the tabletop with two flattened palms. 'Subversive, mother-hating Pinks, every one of them.'

Loew did a slow burn; Mal sized up the Irishman's huge hands as neck snappers, ear gougers, confession makers. He made a quick jump, pegged Ellis as being afraid of Smith, Smith hating Loew on general principles: as a sharpster Jew lawyer son of a bitch. ‘Ellis, are we talking about a *political* job?’

Loew fondled his Phi Beta Kappa key and smiled. ‘We are talking about an extensive grand jury investigation into Communist influence in Hollywood, you and Dudley as my chief investigators. The investigation will center around the UAES. The union is rife with subversives, and they have a so-called braintrust that runs things: one woman and a half dozen men – all heavily connected to fellow travelers who went to jail for pleading the Fifth before HUAC in ’47. Collectively, UAES members have worked on a number of movies that espouse the Commie line, *and* they’re connected to a veritable Dun and Bradstreet of other subversives. Communism is like a spider’s web. One thread leads to a nest, another thread leads to a whole colony. The threads are names, and the names become witnesses and name more names. And you and Dudley are going to get me all those names.’

Silver captain’s bars danced in Mal’s head; he stared at Loew and ticked off objections, devils advocate against his own cause. ‘Why me instead of Captain Bledsoe? He’s Chief DA’s Investigator, he’s Mr. Toastmaster for the whole goddamn city and he’s everybody’s favorite uncle – which is important, since you come across like a shark. I’m a detective specializing in collecting homicide evidence. Dudley is Homicide brass flat out. Why *us?* And why now – at nine A.M. New Year’s morning?’

Loew counted rebuttal points on his fingers, the nails coated with clear polish and buffed to a gloss. ‘One, I was up late last night with the District Attorney. The Bureau’s final fiscal 1950 budget has to be submitted to the City Council tomorrow, and I convinced him that the odd forty-two thousand dollars we had left over should be used to fight the Red Menace. Two, Deputy DA Gifford of the Grand Jury Division and I have agreed to switch jobs. He wants criminal prosecution experience, and you know what I want. Three, Captain Bledsoe is going senile. Two nights ago he gave a speech to the Greater Los Angeles Kiwanis Club and lapsed into a string of obscenities. He created quite a stir when he announced his intention to “pour the pork” to Rita Hayworth, to “hose her till she bleeds.” The DA checked with Bledsoe’s doctor, and learned that our dear Captain has had a series of small strokes that he’s kept under wraps. He will be retiring on April fifth – his twentieth anniversary with the Bureau – and he is strictly a figurehead until then. Fourth, you and Dudley are damn good, damn smart detectives, and an intriguing contrast in styles. Fifth –’

Mal hit the tabletop a la Dudley Smith. ‘Fifth, we both know the DA wants an outside man for Chief Investigator. He’ll go to the Feds or fish around the LAPD before he takes me.’

Ellis Loew leaned forward. ‘Mal, he’s agreed to give it to you. Chief Investigator and a captaincy. You’re thirty-eight?’

‘Thirty-nine.’

‘A mere infant. Do well at the job and within five years you’ll be fending off police chief offers with a stick. And *I’ll* be District Attorney and McPherson will be Lieutenant Governor. Are you in?’

Ellis Loew’s right hand was resting flat on the table; Dudley Smith covered it with his and smiled, all blarney. Mal reviewed his caseload: a hooker snuff in Chinatown, two unsolved shine killings in Watts, a stickup and ADW at a coon whorehouse frequented by LAPD brass. Low priority, no priority. He put his hand on the pile and said, ‘I’m in.’

The pile dispersed; Dudley Smith winked at Mal. ‘Grand partners in a grand crusade.’ Ellis Loew stood up beside his chair. ‘First, I’ll tell you what we have, then I’ll tell you what we need.

‘We have sworn depositions from Teamster members, stating Red encroachment within the UAES. We’ve got Commie front membership lists cross-filed with a UAES membership list – with a lot of matching names. We’ve got prints of pro-Soviet films made during the war – pure Red propaganda – that UAES members worked on. We’ve got the heavy artillery that I’ll mention in a minute and I’m working on getting a batch of Fed surveillance photos: UAES brain trusters hobnobbing with known Communist Party members and HUAC indictees at Sleepy Lagoon protest activities back in ’43 and ’44. Good ammo, right from the gate.’

Mal said, ‘The Sleepy Lagoon stuff might backfire. The kids that were convicted were innocent, they never got the real killer and the cause was too popular. Republicans signed the protest petition. You might want to rethink that approach.’

Dudley Smith doused his cigarette in the remains of his coffee. ‘They were guilty, lad. All seventeen. I know that case. They beat José Diaz half to death, dragged him out to the Lagoon and ran him down with an old jalopy. A pachuco passion job, pure and simple. Diaz was sticking it to somebody’s cousin’s brother’s sister. You know how those taco benders intermarry and breed. Mongoloid idiots, all of them.’

Mal sighed. ‘It was a railroad, Lieutenant. It was right before the zoot suit riots, and everyone was cuckoo about the mexes. And a Republican governor pardoned those kids, not the Commies.’

Smith looked at Loew. ‘Our friend here takes the word of the fourth estate over the word of a brother officer. Next he’ll be telling us the Department was responsible for all our pooooor Latin breathren hurt during the riot. A popular Pinko interpretation, I might add.’

Mal reached for a plate of rolls – keeping his voice steady to show the big Irishman he wasn’t afraid of him. ‘No, a popular LAPD one. I was on the Department then, and the men I worked with tagged the job as horseshit, *pure and simple*. Besides –’

Loew raised his voice – just as Mal heard his own voice start to quiver. ‘*Gentlemen, please.*’

The interruption allowed Mal to swallow, dredge up a cold look and shoot it at Dudley Smith. The big man shot back a bland smile, said, ‘Enough contentiousness over a worthless dead spic,’ and extended his hand. Mal shook it; Smith winked.

Ellis Loew said, ‘That’s better, because guilty or not guilty isn’t germane to the issue here. The fact is that the Sleepy Lagoon case attracted a lot of subversives and *they* exploited it to their ends. That’s *our* focus. Now I know you both want to go home to your families, so I’ll wind this up for today.

‘Essentially, you two will be bringing in what the Feds call “friendly witnesses” – UAESers and other lefties willing to come clean on their Commie associations and name names. You’ve got to get admissions that the pro-Red movies UAES worked on were part of a conscious plot – propaganda to advance the Communist cause. You’ve got to get proof of venue – subersive activities within LA City proper. It also wouldn’t hurt to get some big names. It’s common knowledge that a lot of big Hollywood stars are fellow travelers. That would give us some . . .’

Loew paused. Mal said, ‘Marquee value?’

‘Yes. Well put, if a bit cynical. I can tell that patriotic sentiment doesn’t come easy to you, Malcolm. You might try to dredge up some fervor for this assignment, though.’

Mal thought of a rumor he’d heard: that Mickey Cohen bought a piece of the LA Teamsters off of their East Coast front man – an ex-syndicate trigger looking for money to invest in Havana casinos. ‘Mickey C. might be a good one to tap for a few bucks if the City funding runs low. I’ll bet he wouldn’t mind seeing the UAES out and his boys in. Lots of money to be made in Hollywood, you know.’

Loew flushed. Dudley Smith tapped the table with a huge knuckle. ‘No dummy, our friend Malcolm. Yes, lad. Mickey would like the Teamsters in and the studios would like the UAES out. Which doesn’t negate the fact that the UAES is crawling with Pinks. Did you know, lad, that we were almost colleagues once before?’

Mal knew: Thad Green offering him a transfer to the Hat Squad when his sergeantcy came through back in ’41. He turned it down, having no balls for armed robbery stakeouts, going in doors gun first, gunboat diplomacy police work: meeting the Quentin bus at the depot, pistol-whipping hard boys into a docile parole. Dudley Smith had killed four men working the job. ‘I wanted to work Ad Vice.’

‘I dont’ blame you, lad. Less risk, more chance for advancement.’

The old rumors: Patrolman/Sergeant/Lieutenant Mal Considine, LAPD/DA’s Bureau comer, didn’t like to get his hands dirty. Ran scared as a rookie working 77th Street Division – the heart of the Congo. Mal wondered if Dudley Smith knew about the gas man at Buchenwald. ‘That’s right. I never saw any percentage there.’

‘The squad was wicked fun, lad. You’d have fit right in. The others didn’t think so, but you’d have convinced them.’

He's got the old talk nailed. Mal looked at Ellis Loew and said, 'Let's wrap this up, okay? What's the heavy ammo you mentioned?'

Loew's eyes moved back and forth between Mal and Dudley. 'We've got two men assisting us. The first is an ex-Fed named Edmund J. Satterlee. He's the head of a group called Red Crosscurrents. It's on retainer to various corporations and what you might want to call "astute" people in the entertainment industry. It screens prospective employees for Communist ties and helps weed out subversive elements that may have wormed their way in already. Ed's an expert on Communism, and he's going to give you a rundown on how to most effectively collate your evidence. The second man is a psychiatrist, Dr. Saul Lesnick. He's been the "approved" headshrinker for the LA Communist Party since the '40s, and he's been an FBI informer for years. We've got access to his complete file of psychiatric records – all the UAES bigwigs – their personal dirt going back to before the war. *Heavy artillery*.'

Smith slapped the table and stood up. 'A howitzer, a barrage weapon, maybe even an atom bomb. We're meeting them at your house tomorrow, Ellis? Ten o'clock?'

Loew cocked a finger at him. 'Ten sharp.'

Dudley aped the gesture to Mal. 'Until then, partner. It's not the Hats, but we'll have fun nonetheless.'

Mal nodded and watched the big man exit the room. Seconds passed; Loew said, 'A rough piece of work. If I didn't think the two of you would be great together, I wouldn't have let him sign on.'

'He volunteered?'

'He's got a pipeline to McPherson, and he knew about the job before I got the go-ahead. Do you think you can keep him on a tight leash?'

The question was like a road map to all the old rumors. Ellis Loew had him down straight as a Nazi killer and probably believed that he was behind the botched snuff attempt on Buzz Meeks. They had to blow the Ad Vice and 77th Street stories out of the water. Dudley Smith knew better. 'I don't see any problem, counselor.'

'Good. How's things with Celeste and Stefan?'

'You don't want to know.'

Loew smiled. 'Cheer up, then. Good things are coming our way.'

THREE

TURNER 'BUZZ' MEEKS watched rental cops patrol the grounds of Hughes Aircraft, laying four to one that Howard hired the ineffectual bastards because he liked their uniforms, two to one he designed the threads himself. Which meant that the Mighty Man Agency was an RKO Pictures/ Hughes Aircraft/Tool Company 'Stray Dog' – the big guy's tag for tax-write-off operations that he bought and meddled in out of whim. Hughes owned a brassiere factory in San Ysidro – 100 percent wetback-run; he owned a plant that manufactured electroplate trophies; he owned four strategically located snack stands – essential to the maintenance of his all-cheeseburger/ chili dog diet. Buzz stood in his office doorway, noticed pleated flaps on the pockets of the Mighty Man standing by the hangar across from him, made the style as identical to a blouse Howard designed to spotlight Jane Russell's tits, and called the odds off. And for the three trillionth time in his life, he wondered why he always cut bets when he was bored.

He was now very bored.

It was shortly after 10:00 New Year's morning. Buzz, in his capacity as Head of Security at Hughes Aircraft, had been up all night directing Mighty Men in what Howard Hughes called 'Perimeter Patrol.' The plant's regular guards were given the night off; boozehound specters had been crisscrossing the grounds since yesterday evening. The high point of their tour was Big Howard's New Year's bonus – a flatbed truck loaded with hot dogs and Cokes arriving just as 1949 became 1950 – compliments of the burger write-off in Culver City. Buzz had put down his sheet of bookie calculations to watch the Mighty Men eat; he laid six to one that Howard would hit the roof if he saw their custom-embroidered uniforms dotted with mustard and sauerkraut.

Buzz checked his watch – 10:14 – he could go home and sleep at noon. He slumped into a chair, scanned the walls and studied the framed photos that lined them. Each one made him figure odds for and against himself, made him think of how perfect his figurehead job and what he *really* did were.

There was himself – short, broad, running to fat, standing next to Howard Hughes, tall and handsome in a chalk stripe suit – an Oklahoma shitkicker and a millionaire eccentric giving each other the cuckold's horns. Buzz saw the photo as the two sides of a scratchy hillbilly record: one side about a sheriff corrupted by women and money, the flip a lament for the bossman who bought him out. Next was a collection of police shots – Buzz trim and fit as an LAPD rookie in '34; getting fatter and better dressed as the pictures jumped forward in time: tours with Bunco, Robbery and Narcotics divisions; cashmere and camel's hair blazers, the slightly nervous look in his eyes indigenous to bagmen everywhere. Then Detective Sergeant Turner Meeks in a bed at Queen of Angels, high brass hovering around him, pointing to the wounds he survived – while *he* wondered if it was a fellow cop who'd set him up. A string of civilian pics on the wall above his desk: a fatter, grayer Buzz with Mayor Bowron, ex-DA Buron Fitts, Errol Flynn, Mickey Cohen, producers he'd pimped for, starlets he'd gotten out of litigation and into abortions, dope cure doctors grateful for his referrals. Fixer, errand boy, hatchet wielder.

Stony broke.

Buzz sat down at his desk and jotted credits and debits. He owned fourteen acres of Ventura County farmland; parched and worthless, he'd bought it for his parents to retire to – but they foiled him by kicking in a typhus epidemic in '44. The real estate man he'd been talking to said thirty bucks an acre tops – better to hold on to it – it couldn't go much lower. He owned a mint green '48 Eldo coupé – identical to Mickey C.'s, but without the bullet-proof plating. He had a shitload of suits from Oviatt's and the London Shop, the trousers all too tight in the gut – if Mickey bought secondhand threads he was home free – he and the flashy little hebe were exactly the same size. But the Mick threw away shirts he'd worn twice, and the debit list was running off the page and onto his blotter.

The phone rang; Buzz grabbed it. 'Security. Who's this?'

'It's Sol Gelfman, Buzz. You remember me?'

The old geez at MGM with the car thief grandson, a nice boy who clouted convertibles out of Restaurant Row parking lots, raced Mulholland with them and always left his calling card – a big pile of shit – in the back seat. He'd bought off the arresting officer, who altered his report to show two – not twenty-seven – counts of GTA, along with no mention of the turd drop MO. The judge had let the kid off with probation, citing his good family and youthful verve. 'Sure. What can I do for you, Mr. Gelfman?'

'Well, Howard said I should call you. I've got a little problem, and Howard said you could help.'

'Your grandson back to his old tricks?'

'No, God forbid. There's a girl in my new picture who needs help. These goniffs have got some smut pictures of her, from before I bought her contract. I gave them some money to be nice, but they're persisting.'

Buzz groaned – it was shaping up as a muscle job. 'What kind of pictures?'

'Nasty. Animal stuff. Lucy and this Great Dane with a schlong like King Kong. I should have such a schlong.'

Buzz grabbed a pen and turned over his debit list to the blank side. 'Who's the girl and what have you got on the blackmailers?'

'On the pickup men I got bubkis – I sent my production assistant over with the money to meet them. The girl is Lucy Whitehall, and listen, I got a private detective to trace the calls. The boss of the setup is this Greek she's shacking with – Tommy Sifakis. Is that chutzpah? He's blackmailing his own girlfriend, calling in his demands from their cute little love nest. He's got pals to do the pickups and Lucy don't even know she's being had. Can you feature that chutzpah?'

Buzz thought of price tags; Gelfman continued his spiel. 'Buzz, this is worth half a grand to me, and I'm doing you a favor, 'cause Lucy used to strip with Audrey Anders, Mickey Cohen's squeeze. I coulda gone to Mickey, but you did me solid once, so I'm giving you the job. Howard said you'd know what to do.'

Buzz saw his old billy club hanging by a thong from the bathroom doorknob and wondered if he still had the touch. 'The price is a grand, Mr. Gelfman.'

'What! That's highway robbery!'

'No, it's felony extortion settled out of court. You got an address for Sifakis?'

'Mickey would do it for free!'

'Mickey would go batshit and get you a homicide conspiracy beef. What's Sifakis' address?'

Gelfman breathed out slowly. 'You goddamn okie lowlife. It's 1187 Vista View Court in Studio City, and for a grand I want this thing wiped up clean.'

Buzz said, 'Like shit in the back seat,' and hung up. He grabbed his LAPD-issue equalizer and headed for the Cahuenga Pass.

The run to the Valley took him an hour; the search for Vista View Court another twenty minutes of prowling housing developments: stucco cubes arrayed in semicircles gouged out of the Hollywood Hills. 1187 was a peach-colored prefab, the paint already fading, the aluminum siding streaked with rust. Identically built pads flanked it – lemon yellow, lavender, turquoise, salmon and hot pink alternating down the hillside, ending at a sign proclaiming, VISTA VIEW GARDENS! CALIFORNIA LIVING AT ITS FINEST! NO $ DOWN FOR VETS! Buzz parked in front of the yellow dive, thinking of gumballs tossed in a ditch.

Little kids were racing tricycles across gravel front yards; no adults were taking the sun. Buzz pinned a cereal-box badge to his lapel, got out and rang the buzzer of 1187. Ten seconds passed – no answer. Looking around, he stuck a bobby pin in the keyhole and gave the knob a jiggle. The lock popped; he pushed the door open and entered the house.

Sunlight leaking through gauze curtains gave him a shot at the living room: cheapsky furniture, movie pinups on the walls, stacks of Philco table radios next to the sofa – obvious proceeds from a warehouse job. Buzz pulled the billy club from his waistband and walked through a grease-spattered kitchen-dinette to the bedroom.

More glossies on the walls – strippers in g-strings and pasties. Buzz recognized Audrey Anders, the ‘Va Va Voom Girl,’ alleged to have a master’s degree from some Podunk college; next to her, a slender blonde took up space. Buzz flicked on a floor lamp for a better look; he saw tame publicity stills: ‘Juicy Lucy’ in a spangly one-piece bathing suit, the address of a downtown talent agency rubber-stamped on the bottom. Squinting, he noticed that the girl had unfocused eyes and a slaphappy grin – probably jacked on some kind of hop.

Buzz decided on five minutes to toss the pad, checked his watch and went to work. Scuffed drawers yielded male and female undergarments tangled up indiscriminately and a stash of marijuana cigarettes; an end cabinet held 78s and dime novels. The closet showed a woman on her way up, a man running second: dresses and skirts from Beverly Hills shops, mothball-reeking navy uniforms and slacks, dandruff-flecked jackets.

With 3:20 down, Buzz turned to the bed: blue satin sheets, upholstered headboard embroidered with cupids and hearts. He ran a hand under the mattress, felt wood and metal, grabbed and pulled out a sawed-off pump shotgun, big black muzzle, probably a 10 gauge. Checking the breech, he saw that it was loaded – five rounds, double-aught buckshot. He removed the ammo and stuffed it in his pocket; played a hunch on Tommy Sifakis’ brain and looked under the pillow.

A German Luger, loaded, one in the chamber.

Buzz ejected the chambered round and emptied the clip, pissed that he didn’t have time to prowl for a safe, find the doggy stuff to shove in Lucy Whitehall’s face later, a jolt to scare her away from Greeks with dandruff and bedroom ordnance. He walked back to the living room, stopping when he saw an address book on the coffee table.

He leafed through it, no familiar names until he hit the G’s and saw Sol Gelfman, his home and MGM numbers ringed with doodles; the M’s and P’s got him Donny Maslow and Chick Pardell, dinks he rousted working Narco, reefer pushers who hung out at studio commissaries – not the extortionist type. Then he hit S and got his lever to squeeze the Greek dry and maybe glom himself a few solids on the side:

Johnny Stompanato, Crestview-6103. Mickey Cohen’s personal bodyguard. Rumored to have financed his way out of lowball duty with the Cleveland Combination via strongarm extortion schemes; rumored to front Mexican marijuana to local dealers for a 30 percent kickback.

Handsome Johnny Stomp. *His* name ringed in dollar signs and question marks.

Buzz went back to his car to wait. He turned the ignition key to Accessory, skimmed the radio dial across a half dozen stations, found Spade Cooley and his Cowboy Rhythm Hour and listened with the volume down low. The music was syrup on top of gravy – too sweet, too much. It made him think of the Oklahoma sticks, what it might have been like if he'd stayed. Then Spade went too far – warbling a tune about a man about to go to the state prison gallows for a crime he didn't commit. That made him think of the price he paid to get out.

In 1931 Lizard Ridge, Oklahoma, was a dying hick town in the lungs of the Dustbowl. It had one source of income: a factory that manufactured stuffed souvenir armadillos, armadillo purses and Gila monster wallets, then sold them to tourists blowing through on the highway. Locals and Indians off the reservation shot and skinned the reptiles and sold them to the factory piecework; sometimes they got carried away and shot each other. Then the '31 dust storms closed down U.S. 1 for six months straight, the armadillos and Gilas went crazy, ate themselves diseased on jimson weed, crawled off to die or stormed Lizard Ridge's main drag and got squashed by cars. Either way, their hides were too trashed and shriveled to make anyone a dime. Turner Meeks, ace Gila killer, capable of nailing the bastards with a .22 from thirty yards out – right on the spine where the factory cut its master stitches – knew it was time to leave town.

So he moved to LA and got work in the movies – revolving cowboy extra – Paramount one day, Columbia the next, the Gower Gulch cut-rate outfits when things got tight. Any reasonably presentable white man who could twirl a rope and ride a horse for real was skilled labor in Depression Hollywood.

But in '34 the trend turned from westerns to musicals. Work got scarce. He was about to take a test offered by the LA Municipal Bus Company – three openings for an expected six hundred applicants – when Hollywood saved him again.

Monogram Studio was being besieged by picketers: a combine of unions under the AFL banner. He was hired as a strike-breaker – five dollars a day, guaranteed extra work as a bonus once the strike was quelled.

He broke heads for two weeks straight, so good with a billy club that an off-duty cop nicknamed him 'Buzz' and introduced him to Captain James Culhane, the head of the LAPD's Riot Squad. Culhane knew a born policeman when he saw one. Two weeks later he was walking a beat in downtown LA; a month later he was a rifle instructor at the Police Academy. Teaching Chief Steckel's daughter to shoot a .22 and ride a horse earned him a sergeantcy, tours in Bunco, Robbery and the big enchilada – Narcotics.

Narco duty carried with it an unwritten ethos: you roust the lowest forms of humanity, you walk your tour knee-deep in shit, you get a dispensation. If you play the duty straight, you don't rat on those who don't. *If* you don't you lay off a percentage of what you confiscate direct to the coloreds or the syndicate boys who sell to shines only: Jack Dragna, Benny Siegel, Mickey C. And you watch the straight arrows in other divisions – the guys who want you out so they can get your job.

When he came on Narco in ’44, he struck his deal with Mickey Cohen, then the dark horse in the LA rackets, the hungry guy coming up. Jack Dragna hated Mickey; Mickey hated Jack; Buzz shook down Jack’s niggertown pushers, skimmed five grams on the ounce and sold it to Mickey, who loved him for giving Jack grief. Mickey took him to Hollywood parties, introduced him to people who needed police favors and were willing to pay; fixed him up with a roundheeled blonde whose cop husband was serving with the MPs in Europe. He met Howard Hughes and started bird-dogging for him, picking up star-struck farm girls, ensconcing them in the fuck pads the big guy had set up all over LA. It was going aces on all fronts: the duty, the money, the affair with Laura Considine. Until June 21, 1946, when an anonymous tip on a storefront operation at 68th and Slauson led him into an alleyway ambush: two in the shoulder, one in the arm, one through the left cheek of his ass. And a speedy wound ticket out of the LAPD, full pension, into the arms of Howard Hughes, who just happened to need a man . . .

And he still didn’t know who the shooters were. The slugs they took out of him indicated two men; *he* had two suspects: Dragna triggers or contract boys hired by Mal Considine, Laura’s husband, the Administrative Vice sergeant back from the war. He had Considine checked out within the Departments, heard that he turned tail from bar brawls in Watts, that he got his jollies sending in rookies to operate whores when he ran the night watch in Ad Vice, that he brought a Czech woman and her son back from Buchenwald and was planning to divorce Laura. Nothing concrete – one way or the other.

The only thing he had down for sure was that Considine knew about the deal with his soon-to-be ex and hated him. He’d taken a retirement tour of the Detective Bureau, a chance to say goodbye and pick up his courtesy badge, a chance to get a take on the man he cuckolded. He walked by Considine’s desk in the Ad Vice squadroom, saw a tall guy who looked more like a lawyer than a cop and stuck out his hand. Considine gave him a slow eyeball, said, ‘Laura always did have a thing for pimps,’ and looked away.

Even odds: Considine or Dragna, take your pick.

Buzz saw a late-model Pontiac ragtop pull up in front of 1187. Two women in crinoline party dresses got out and rocked toward the door on high high heels; a big Greek in a too-tight suitcoat and too-short trousers followed them. The taller of the skirts caught her stiletto spike in a pavement crack and went down on one knee; Buzz recognized Audrey Anders, hair in a pageboy, twice as beautiful as her picture. The other girl – ‘Juicy Lucy’ from the publicity stills – helped her up and into the house, the big man right behind them. Buzz laid three to one that Tommy Sifakis wouldn’t respond to the subtle approach, grabbed his billy club and walked up to the Pontiac.

His first shot sheared off the Indian-head hood ornament; his second smashed the windshield. Three, four, five and six were a Spade Cooley refrain that dented the grille into the radiator, causing steam clouds to billow all around him. Seven was a blind swing at the driver's side window, the crash followed by a loud 'What the fuck!' and a familiar metal-on-metal noise: a shotgun slide jacking a shell into the chamber.

Buzz turned and saw Tommy Sifakis striding down the walkway, the sawed-off held in trembling hands. Four to one the Greek was too mad to notice the weapon's light weight; two to one he didn't have time to grab his box of shells and reload. Bluff bet, straight across.

His baton at port arms, Buzz charged. When they were within heavy damage range, the Greek pulled the trigger and got a tiny little click. Buzz countered, swinging at a hairy left hand frantically trying to pump in ammo that wasn't there. Tommy Sifakis screamed and dropped the shotgun; Buzz brought him down with a forehand/backhand to the rib cage. The Greek spat blood and tried to curl into a ball, cradling his wounded parts. Buzz knelt beside him and spoke softly, accentuating his okie drawl. 'Son, let's let bygones be bygones. You rip up them pictures and shitcan the negatives and I won't tell Johnny Stomp you fingered him on the squeeze. Deal?'

Sifakis spat a thick wad of blood and 'F-f-fuck you'; Buzz whacked him across the knees. The Greek shrieked gobbledygook; Buzz said, 'I was gonna give you and Lucy another chance to work things out, but now I think I'm gonna advise her to find more suitable lodging. You feel like apologizin' to her?'

'F-f-f-y-y-you.'

Buzz drew out a long sigh, just like he did playing a homesteader who'd taken enough shit in an old Monogram serial. 'Son, here's my last offer. You apologize to Lucy, or I tell Johnny you snitched him, Mickey C. you're extortin' his girlfriend's pal and Donny Maslow and Chick Pardell you snitched them to Narco. Deal?'

Sifakis tried to extend a smashed middle finger; Buzz stroked his baton, catching a sidelong view of Audrey Anders and Lucy Whitehall in the doorway, jaws wide. The Greek lolled his head on the pavement and rasped, 'I p-pologize.'

Buzz saw flashes of Lucy and her canine co-star, Sol Gelfman botching her career with grade Z turkeys, the girl crawling back to the Greek for rough sex. He said, 'Good boy,' popped the baton into Sifakis' gut and walked over to the women.

Lucy Whitehall was shrinking back into the living room; Audrey Anders was blocking the doorway, barefoot. She pointed to Buzz's lapel. 'It's a phony.'

Buzz caught the South in her voice; remembered locker room talk: the Va Va Voom Girl could twirl her pastie tassels in opposite directions at the same time. 'Wheaties. You from New Orleans? Atlanta?'

Audrey looked at Tommy Sifakis, belly-crawling over to the curb. 'Mobile. Did Mickey send you to do that?'

'No. I was wonderin' why you didn't seem surprised, Now I know.'

'You care to tell me about it?'

'No.'

'But you've done work for Mickey?'

Buzz saw Lucy Whitehall sit down on the couch and grab a stolen radio for something to hold. Her face was blotchy red and rivers of mascara were running down her cheeks. 'I certainly have. Mickey disapprove of Mr. Sifakis there?'

Audrey laughed. 'He knows trash when he sees it, I'll give him that. What's your name?'

'Turner Meeks.'

'*Buzz* Meeks?'

'That's right. Miss Anders, have you got a place for Miss Whitehall to stay?'

'Yes. But what –'

'Mickey still hang out New Year's at Breneman's Ham 'n' Eggs?'

'Yes.'

'You get Lucy to pack a grip, then. I'll run you over there.'

Audrey flushed. Buzz wondered how much of her smarts Mickey put up with before he jerked the chain; if she ever did the tassel trick for him. She went over and knelt beside Lucy Whitehall, smoothing her hair, prying the radio out of her grasp. Buzz got his car and backed it up on the gravel front yard, one eye on the Greek, still moaning low. Neighbor people were peering out their windows, spread venetian blinds all around the cul-de-sac. Audrey led Lucy out of the house a few minutes later, one arm around her shoulders, one hand carrying a cardboard suitcase. On the way to the car, she stopped to give Tommy Sifakis a kick in the balls.

Buzz took Laurel Canyon back to Hollywood – more time to figure out the play if Johnny Stompanato turned up at his boss's side. Lucy Whitehall mumbled litanies on Tommy Sifakis as a nice guy with rough edges, Audrey cooing 'There, there,' feeding her cigarettes to shut her up.

It was coming on as a three-horse parlay: a grand from Gelfman, whatever Mickey slipped him if he got sentimental over Lucy and a shakedown or favor pried out of Johnny Stomp. Play it soft with the Mick – he hadn't seen him since he quit the Department and their percentage deal. Since then the man had survived a pipe bomb explosion, two IRS audits, his right-hand goon Hooky Rothman stubbing his face on the business end of an Ithaca .12 gauge and the shootout outside Sherry's – chalk that one up to Jack Dragna or shooters from the LAPD, revenge for the cop heads that rolled over the Brenda Allen job. Mickey had half of bookmaking, loansharking, the race wire and the dope action in LA; he owned the West

Hollywood Sheriff's and the few City high brass who didn't want to see him crucified. And Johnny Stomp had stuck with him through all of it: guinea factotum to a Jew prince. Play them both *very* soft.

Laurel Canyon ended just north of the Strip; Buzz took side streets over to Hollywood and Vine, dawdling at stoplights. He could feel Audrey Anders eyeing him from the back seat, probably trying to get a take on him and the Mick. Pulling up in front of Breneman's, he said, 'You and Lucy stay here. I got to talk to Mickey in private.'

Lucy dry-sobbed and fumbled with her pack of cigarettes; Audrey reached for the door handle. 'I'm going, too.'

'No, you're not.'

Audrey flushed; Buzz turned to Lucy. 'Sweetheart, this is about them pictures of you and that big old dog. Tommy was tryin' to squeeze Mr. Gelfman, and if you go inside looking distraught, Mickey just might kill him and get all of us in heaps of trouble. Tommy's got them rough edges, but the two of you just might be able to work things –'

Lucy bawled and made him stop; Audrey's look said he was lower than the dog. Buzz headed into Breneman's at a trot. The restaurant was crowded, the radio crew for 'Tom Breneman's Breakfast in Hollywood' packing up equipment and hustling it toward a side exit. Mickey Cohen was sitting in a wraparound booth, Johnny Stompanato and another muscle boy sandwiching him. A third man sat alone at an adjoining table, eyes constantly circling, a newspaper folded open on the seat beside him – obviously camouflaging a monster piece.

Buzz walked over; the gunman's hand slid under his morning *Herald*. Mickey stood up, smiling; Johnny Stomp and the other guy pasted identical grins on their faces and slid over to let him into the booth. Buzz stuck out his hand; Cohen ignored it, grabbed the back of his head and kissed him on both cheeks, scraping him with razor stubble. 'Big fellow, it has been too long!'

Buzz recoiled from a blast of cologne. 'Much too long, big fellow. How's business?'

Cohen laughed. 'The haberdashery? I got a florist's shop and an ice cream parlor now, too.'

Buzz saw that Mickey was giving him a shrewd once-over; that he'd caught his frayed shirt cuffs and a home manicure. 'No. *Business*.'

Cohen nudged the man on his left, a bony guy with wide blue eyes and a jailhouse pallor. 'Davey, business he wants. Tell him.'

Davey said, 'Men got to gamble and borrow money and schtup women. The shvartzes got to fly to cloud nine on white powder airlines. Business is good.'

Mickey howled with laughter. Buzz chuckled, faked a coughing attack, turned to Johnny Stompanato and whispered, 'Sifakis and Lucy Whitehall. *Keep your fucking mouth shut.*'

Mickey pounded his back and held up a glass of water; Buzz kept coughing, enjoying the look on Stompanato's face – a guinea Adonis turned into a busted schoolboy, his perfectly oiled pompadour about to wilt from fright. Cohen's back slaps got harder; Buzz took a gulp of water and pretended to catch his breath. 'Davey, you're a funny man.'

Davey half smiled. 'Best in the West. I write all Mr. Cohen's routines for the smokers at the Friar's Club. Ask him, "How's the wife?"'

Buzz saluted Davey with his glass. 'Mickey, how's the wife?'

Mickey Cohen smoothed his lapels and sniffed the carnation in the buttonhole. 'Some women you want to see, my wife you want to flee. These two Dragna humps were staking out my house after the Sherry's job, my wife brought them milk and cookies, told them to shoot low, she ain't had it from me since Lucky Lindy crossed the Atlantic, she don't want nobody else getting it either. My wife is so cold that the maid calls our bedroom the polar icecap. People come up to me and ask, "Mickey, are you getting any," and I pull a thermometer out of my jockey shorts, it says twenty-five below. People say, "Mickey, you're popular with the ladies, you must get reamed, steamed and dry-cleaned regularly." I say, "You don't know my wife – hog-tied, fried and swept to the side is more like it." Some women you *got* to see, some you *got* to flee. Oops – here she comes now!'

Mickey ended his schtick with a broad grab for his hat. Davey the gagster collapsed on the table, convulsed with laughter. Buzz tried to drum up chortles and couldn't; he was thinking that Meyer Harris Cohen had killed eleven men that he knew of and had to rake in at *least* ten million a year tax free. Shaking his head, he said, 'Mickey, you're a pisser.'

A group of squarejohns at the next table was giving the routine a round of applause; Mickey tipped his hat to them. 'Yeah? Then why ain't you laughing? Davey, Johnny, go sit someplace.'

Stompanato and the gagster slid silently out of the booth. Cohen said, 'You need work or a touch, am I right?'

'Nix.'

'Howard treating you right?'

'He treats me fine.'

Cohen toyed with his glass, tapping it with the six-carat rock on his pinky. 'I know you're in hock to some handbooks. You should be with me boychik. Good terms, no sweat on the payback.'

'I like the risk the other way. It gets my juices goin'.'

'You're a crazy fuck. What do you want? Name it.'

Buzz looked around the room, saw Stompanato at the bar belting a stiff one for guts and solid citizen types giving Mickey surreptitious glances, like he was a zoo gorilla who might bolt his cage. 'I want you not to lean on a guy who's about to make you real mad.'

'What?'

'You know Audrey's friend Lucy Whitehall?'

Mickey traced an hourglass figure in the air. ‘Sure. Solly Gelfman’s gonna use her in his next picture. He thinks she’s going places.’

Buzz said, ‘Hell in a bucket maybe,’ saw Mickey going into his patented low simmer – nostrils flaring, jaw grinding, eyes trawling for something to smash – and handed him the half-full Bloody Mary Johnny Stompanato left behind. Cohen took a gulp and licked lemon pulp off his lips. ‘Spill it. *Now*.’

Buzz said, ‘Lucy’s shack job’s been squeezing Solly with some dirty pictures. I broke it up, strong-armed the boy a little. Lucy needs a safe place to flop, and I know for a fact that the Greek’s got pals on the West Hollywood Sheriff’s – your pals. I also know he used to push reefer in Dragna territory – which made old Jack D. real mad. Two damn good reasons for you to leave him alone.’

Cohen was gripping his glass with sausage fingers clenched blue-white. ‘What . . . kind . . . of . . . pictures?’

The big wrong question – Mickey might be talking to Sol Gelfman and get the true skinny. Buzz braced himself. ‘Lucy and a dog.’

Mickey’s hand popped the glass, shards exploding all over the table, tomato juice and vodka spritzing Buzz. Mickey looked at his bloody palm and pressed it flat on the tabletop. When the white linen started to turn red, he said, ‘The Greek is fucking dead. He is fucking dog food.’

Two waiters had approached; they stood around shuffling their feet. The squarejohns at the next table were making with shocked faces – one old lady with her jaw practically down to her soup. Buzz waved the waiters away, slid next to Cohen and put an arm around his twitching shoulders. ‘Mickey, you can’t, and you know it. You put out the word that anybody who bucks Jack D. is your friend, and the Greek did that – in spades. Audrey saw me work him over – and *she’d* know. And the Greek didn’t know how stand-up you are – that your woman’s friends are like kin to you. Mickey, you got to let it go. You got too much to lose. Fix Lucy up with a nice place to stay, someplace where the Greek can’t find her. Make it a mitzvah.’

Cohen took his hand from the table, shook it free of glass slivers and licked lemon goo off his fingers. ‘Who was in it besides the Greek?’

Buzz showed him his eyes, the loyal henchman who’d never lie; he came up with two gunsels he’d run out of town for crashing Lew the Jew Wershow’s handbook at Paramount. ‘Bruno Geyer and Steve Katzenbach. Fairies. You gonna find Lucy a place?’

Cohen snapped his fingers; waiters materialized and stripped the table dervish fast. Buzz sensed wheels turning behind the Mick’s blank face – in *his* direction. He moved over to cut the man some slack; he stayed deadpan when Mickey said, ‘Mitzvah, huh? You fucking goyishe shitheel. Where’s Audrey and Lucy now?’

‘Out in my car.’

‘What’s Solly pay you?’

‘A grand.’

Mickey dug in his pants pockets and pulled out a roll of hundreds. He peeled off ten, placed them in a row on the table and said, ‘That’s the only mitzvah you know from, you hump. But you saved me grief, so I’m matching. Buy yourself some clothes.’

Buzz palmed the money and stood up. ‘Thanks, Mick.’

‘Fuck you. What do you call an elephant who moonlights as a prostitute?’

‘I don’t know. What?’

Mickey cracked a big grin. ‘A two-ton pickup that lays for peanuts.’

‘That’s a riot, Mick.’

‘Then why ain’t you laughing? Send the girls in – *now*.’

Buzz walked over to the bar, catching Johnny Stompanato working on another shot. Turning, he saw Cohen being glad-handed by Tom Breneman and the maitre d’, out of eyeshot. Johnny Stomp swiveled around; Buzz put five Mickey C-notes in his hand. ‘Sifakis snitched you, but I don’t want him touched. And I didn’t tell Mickey bubkis. *You owe me*.’

Johnny smiled and pocketed the cash. ‘Thanks, pal.’

Buzz said, ‘I ain’t your pal, you wop cocksucker,’ and walked outside, stuffing the remaining hundreds in his shirt pocket, spitting on his necktie and using it to daub the tomato juice stains on his best Oviatt’s worsted. Audrey Anders was standing on the sidewalk watching him. She said, ‘Nice life you’ve got, Meeks.’

FOUR

PART OF HIM knew it was just a dream – that it was 1950, not 1941; that the story would run its course while part of him grasped for new details and part tried to be dead still so as not to disrupt the unraveling.

He was speeding south on 101, wheeling a hot La Salle sedan. Highway Patrol sirens were closing the gap; Kern County scrubland loomed all around him. He saw a series of dirt roads snaking off the highway and hit the one on the far left, figuring the prowl cars would pursue straight ahead or down the middle. The road wound past farmhouses and fruit pickers' shacks into a box canyon; he heard sirens to his left and right, behind him and in front of him. Knowing any roadway was capture, he down-shifted and plowed across furrowed dirt, gaining distance on the wheeirr, wheeirr, wheeirr. He saw stationary lights up ahead and made them for a farmhouse; a fence materialized; he down-shifted, swung around in slow second gear and got a perfect view of a brightly lit picture window:

Two men swinging axes at a young blonde woman pressed into a doorway. A half-second flash of an arm severed off. A wide-open mouth smeared with orange lipstick screaming mute.

The dream speeded up.

He made it to Bakersfield; unloaded the La Salle; got paid. Back to San Berdoo, biology classes at JC, nightmares about the mouth and the arm. Pearl Harbor, 4F from a punctured eardrum. No amount of study, cash GTAs or *anything* can push the girl away. Months pass, and he returns to find out how and why.

It takes a while, but he comes up with a triangle: a missing local girl named Kathy Hudgens, her spurned lover Marty Sidwell – dead on Saipan – questioned by the cops and let go because no body was found. The number-two man most likely Buddy Jastrow. Folsom parolee, known for his love of torturing dogs and cats. Also missing – last seen two days after he tore across the dry cabbage field. The dream dissolving into typescript – criminology texts filled with forensic gore shots. Joining the LASD in '44 to know WHY; advancing through jail and patrol duty; other deputies hooting at him for his perpetual all-points want on Harlan 'Buddy' Jastrow.

A noise went off. Danny Upshaw snapped awake, thinking it was a siren kicking over. Then he saw the stucco swirls on his bedroom ceiling and knew it was the phone.

He picked it up. 'Skipper?'

'Yeah,' Captain Al Dietrich said. 'How'd you know?'

'You're the only one who calls me.'

Dietrich snorted. ‘Anyone ever call you an ascetic?’

‘Yeah, you.’

Dietrich laughed. ‘I like your luck. One night as acting watch commander and you get floods, two accident deaths and a homicide. Want to fill me in on that?’

Danny thought of the corpse: bite marks, the missing eyes. ‘It’s as bad as anything I’ve seen. Did you talk to Henderson and Deffry?’

‘They left canvassing reports – nothing hot. Bad, huh?’

‘The worst I’ve seen.’

Dietrich sighed. ‘Danny, you’re a rookie squadroom dick, and you’ve never worked a job like this. You’ve only seen it in your books – in black and white.’

Kathy Hudgen’s mouth and arm were superimposed against the ceiling – in Technicolor. Danny held on to his temper. ‘Right, Skipper. It was bad, though. I went down to the morgue and . . . watched the prep. It got worse. Then I went back to help Deffry and Hender –’

‘They told me. They also said you got bossy. Shitcan that, or you’ll get a rep as a prima donna.’

Danny swallowed dry. ‘Right, Captain. Any ID on the body?’

‘Not yet, but I think we’ve got the car it was transported in. It’s a ’47 Buick Super, green, abandoned a half block up from the building site. White upholstery with what looks like bloodstains. It was reported stolen at ten this morning, clouted outside a jazz club on South Central. The owner was still drunk when he called in – you call him for details.’

‘Print man dusting it?’

‘Being done now.’

‘Is SID going over the lot?’

‘No. The print man was all I could wangle downtown.’

‘Shit. Captain, I want this one.’

‘You can have it. No publicity, though. I don’t want another Black Dahlia mess.’

‘What about another man to work with me?’

Dietrich sighed – long and slow. ‘If the victim warrants it. For now, it’s just you. We’ve only got four detectives, Danny. If this John Doe was trash, I don’t want to waste another man.’

Danny said, ‘A homicide is a homicide, sir.’

Dietrich said, ‘You’re smarter than that, Deputy.’

Danny said, ‘Yes, sir,’ hung up, and rolled.

The day had turned cool and cloudy. Danny played the radio on the ride to Allegro; the weatherman was predicting more rain, maybe flooding in the canyons – and there was no news of the horrific John Doe. Passing the building site, he saw kids playing touch football in the mud and rubberneckers pointing out the scene of last night’s spectacle – an SID prowl of the lot would now yield zero.

The print wagon and abandoned Buick were up at the end of the block. Danny noticed that the sedan was perfectly parked, aligned with the curb six inches or so out, the tires pointed inward to prevent the vehicle from sliding downhill. A psych lead: the killer had just brutally snuffed his victim and transported the body from fuck knows where, yet he still had the calm to coolly dispose of his car – *by the dump scene* – which meant that there were probably no witnesses to the snatch.

Danny hooked his Chevy around the print car and parked, catching sight of the tech's legs dangling out the driver's side of the Buick. Walking over, he heard the voice the legs belonged to: 'Glove prints on the wheel and dashboard, Deputy. Fresh caked blood on the back seat and some white sticky stuff on the side headliner.'

Danny looked in, saw an old plainclothesman dusting the glove compartment and a thin patch of dried blood dotted with white terrycloth on the rear seat cushion. The seat rests immediately behind the driver were matted with crisscross strips of blood – the terrycloth imbedded deeper into the caking. The velveteen sideboard by the window was streaked with the gelatinous substance he'd tagged at the morgue. Danny sniffed the goo, got the same mint/medicinal scent, clenched and unclenched his fists as he ran a spot reconstruction:

The killer drove his victim to the building site like a chauffeur, the stiff propped up in his white terry robe, eyeless head lolling against the sideboard, oozing the salve or ointment. The crisscross strips on the seat rests were the razorlike cuts on his back soaking through; the blood patch on the cushion was the corpse flopping over sideways when the killer made a sharp right turn.

'Hey! Deputy!'

The print man was sitting up, obviously pissed that he was taking liberties. 'Look, I have to dust the back now. Do you mind . . .'

Danny looked at the rear-view mirror, saw that it was set strangely and got in behind the wheel. Another reconstruction: the mirror held a perfect view of the back seat, blood strips and goo-streaked sideboard. The killer had adjusted it in order to steal glances at his victim as he drove.

'What's your name, son?'

Now the old tech was really ticked. Danny said, 'It's Deputy Upshaw, and don't bother with the back seat – this guy's too smart.'

'Do you feel like telling me how you know that?'

The two-way in the print wagon crackled; the old-timer got out of the Buick, shaking his head. Danny memorized the registration card laminated to the steering column: Nestor J. Albanese, 1236 S. St. Andrews, LA, Dunkirk-4619. He thought of Albanese as the killer – a phony car theft reported – and nixed the idea as far-fetched; he thought of the rage it took to butcher the victim, the ice it took to drive him around LA in New Year's

Eve traffic. *Why?*

The tech called out, 'For you, Upshaw.'

Danny walked over to the print car and grabbed the mike. 'Yeah?'

A female voice, static-filtered, answered. 'Karen, Danny.'

Karen Hiltscher, the clerk/dispatcher at the station; *his* errand girl – occasional sweet talk for her favors. She hadn't figured out that he wasn't interested and persisted in using first names over the County air. Danny pushed the talk button. 'Yeah, Karen.'

'There's an ID on your 187. Martin Mitchell Goines, male Caucasian, DOB 11/9/16. Two convictions for marijuana possession, two years County for the first, three to five State for the other. Paroled from San Quentin after three and a half, August of '48. His last known address was a halfway house on 8th and Alvarado. He was a State parole absconder, bench warrant issued. Under employment he's listed as a musician, registered with Union Local 3126 in Hollywood.'

Danny thought of the Buick stolen outside a darktown jazz club. 'Have you got mugs?'

'Just came in.'

He put on his sugar voice. 'Help me with paperwork, sweet? Some phone calls?'

Karen's voice came out whiny and catty – even over the static. 'Sure, Danny. You'll pick up the mugshots?'

'Twenty minutes.' Danny looked around and saw that the print tech was back at work. He added, 'You're a doll,' hoping the girl bought it.

Danny called Nestor J. Albanese from a pay phone on Allegro and Sunset. The man had the raspy voice and skewed speech of a hangover sufferer; he told a booze-addled version of his New Year's Eve doings, going through it three times before Danny got the chronology straight.

He was club-hopping in darktown from 9:00 or so on, the bop joints around Slauson and Central – the Zombie, Bido Lito's, Tommy Tucker's Playroom, Malloy's Nest. Leaving the Nest around 1:00 A.M., he walked over to where he thought he left his Buick. It wasn't there, so he retraced his steps, drunk, figuring he'd ditched the car on a side street. The rain was drenching him, he was woozy from mai tais and champagne, he took a cab home and woke up – still smashed – at 8:30. He took another cab back to South Central, searched for the Buick for a solid hour, didn't find it and called the police to report it stolen. He then hailed another taxi and returned home again, to be contacted by the watch sergeant at the West Hollywood substation, who told him his pride and joy was a likely transport vehicle in a homicide case, and now, at 3:45 P.M. New Year's Day, he wanted his baby back – and that was that.

Danny 99 percent eliminated Albanese as a suspect – the man came off as legit stupid, professed to have no criminal record and seemed sincere when he denied knowing Martin Mitchell Goines. He told him the Buick would be kicked loose from the County Impound inside three days, hung up and drove to the Station for mugshots and favors.

Karen Hiltscher was out on her dinner break; Danny was grateful she wasn't around to make goo-goo eyes and poke his biceps, copping feels while the watch sergeant chuckled. She'd left the mugshot strip on her desk. Alive and with eyes, Martin Mitchell Goines looked young and tough – a huge, Butch-Waxed pompadour the main feature of his front, right and left side pics. The shots were from his second reefer roust: LAPD 4/16/44 on a mugboard hanging around his neck. Six years back; three and a half of them spent in Big Q. Goines had aged badly – and had died looking older than thirty-three.

Danny left Karen Hiltscher a memo: 'Sweetheart – will you do this for me? 1 – Call Yellow, Beacon and the indy cab cos. Ask about pickups of single males on Sunset between Doheny and La Cienega and side sts. between 3:00 to 4:00 A.M. last nite. Ditto pickups of a drunk man, Central and Slauson to 1200 block S. St. Andrews, 12:30 – 1:30 A.M. Get all log entries for pick-ups those times and locations. 2 – Stay friendly, okay I'm sorry about that lunch date I cancelled. I had to cram for a test. Thanks – D.U.'

The lie made Danny angry at the girl, the LASD and himself for kowtowing to teenaged passion. He thought of calling the 77th Street Station desk to tell them he was going to be operating in City territory, then kiboshed the idea – it was too much like bowing to the LAPD and their pout over the Sheriff's harboring Mickey Cohen. He held the thought, the contempt. A killer-hoodlum who longed to be a nightclub comic and got weepy over lost dogs and crippled kids brought a big-city police department to its knees with a wire recording: Vice cops taking bribes and chauffeuring prostitutes; the Hollywood Division nightwatch screwing Brenda Allen's whores on mattresses in the Hollywood Station felony tank. Mickey C. putting out his entire smear arsenal because the City high brass upped his loan shark and bookmaking kickbacks 10 percent. Ugly. Stupid. Greedy. *Wrong.*

Danny let the litany simmer on his way down to darktown – Sunset east to Figueroa, Figueroa to Slauson, Slauson east to Central – a hypothetical route for the car thief/killer. Dusk started coming on, rain clouds eclipsing late sunshine trying to light up Negro slums: ramshackle houses encircled by chicken wire, pool halls, liquor stores and storefront churches on every street – until jazzland took over. Then loony swank amidst squalor, one long block of it.

Bido Lito's was shaped like a miniature Taj Mahal, only purple; Malloy's Nest was a bamboo hut fronted by phony Hawaiian palms strung with Christmas-tree lights. Zebra stripes comprised the paint job on Tommy Tucker's Playroom – an obvious converted warehouse with plaster saxophones, trumpets and music clefs alternating across the edge of the roof. The Zamboanga, Royal Flush and Katydid Klub were bright pink, more purple and puke green, a hangarlike building subdivided, the respective doorways outlined in neon. And Club Zombie was a Moorish mosque featuring a three-story-tall sleepwalker growing out of the facade: a gigantic darky with glowing red eyes high-stepping into the night.

Jumbo parking lots linked the clubs; big Negro bouncers stood beside doorways and signs announcing 'Early Bird' chicken dinners. A scant number of cars was stationed in the lots; Danny left his Chevy on a side street and started bracing the muscle.

The doormen at the Zamboanga and Katydid recalled seeing Martin Mitchell Goines 'around'; a man setting up a menu board outside the Royal Flush took the ID a step further: Goines was a second-rate utility trombone, usually hired for fill-in duty. Since 'Christmas or so' he'd been playing with the house band at Bido Lito's. Danny read every suspicious black face he spoke to for signs of holding back; all he got was a sense that these guys thought Marty Goines was a lily-white fool.

Danny hit Bido Lito's. A sign in front proclaimed DICKY MCCOVER AND HIS JAZZ SULTANS – SHOWS AT 7:30, 9:30 AND 11:30 NITELY – ENJOY OUR DELUXE CHICKEN BASKET. Walking in, he thought he was entering a hallucination.

The walls were pastel satin bathed by colored baby spotlights that hued the fabric garish beyond garish; the bandstand backing was a re-creation of the Pyramids, done in sparkly cardboard. The tables had fluorescent borders, the high-yellow hostesses carrying drinks and food wore low-cut tiger costumes, the whole place smelled of deep-fried meat. Danny felt his stomach growl, realized he hadn't eaten in twenty-four hours and approached the bar. Even in the hallucinatory lighting, he saw the barman make him for a cop.

He held out the mugshot strip. 'Do you know this man?'

The bartender took the strip, examined it under the cash register light and handed it back. 'That's Marty. Plays 'bone with the Sultans. Comes in before the first set to eat, if you wants to talk to him.'

'When was the last time you saw him?'

'Las' night.'

'For the band's last set?'

The barman's mouth curled into a tight smile; Danny sensed that 'band' was square nomenclature. 'I asked you a question.'

The man wiped the bartop with a rag. 'I don' think so. Midnight set I remember seein' him. Sultans played two late ones las' night, on account of New Year's.'

Danny noticed a shelf of whiskey bottles without labels. 'Go get the manager.'

The bartender pressed a button by the register; Danny took a stool and swiveled to face the bandstand. A group of Negro men was opening instrument cases, pulling out sax, trumpet and drum cymbals. A fat mulatto in a double-breasted suit walked over to the bar, wearing a suck-up-to-authority smile. He said, 'Thought I knew all the boys on the Squad.'

Danny said, 'I'm with the Sheriff's.'

The mulatto's smile evaporated. 'I usually deal with the Seven-Seven, Mr. Sheriff.'

'This is County business.'

'This ain't County territory.'

Danny hooked a thumb in back of him, then nodded toward the baby spots. 'You've got illegal booze, those lights are a fire hazard and the County runs Beverage Control and Health and Safety Code. I've got a summons book in the car. Want me to get it?'

The smile returned. 'I surely don't. How can I be of service, *sir*?'

'Tell me about Marty Goines.'

'What about him?'

'Try everything.'

The manager took his time lighting a cigarette; Danny knew his fuse was being tested. Finally the man exhaled and said, 'Not much to tell. The local sent him down when the Sultans' regular trombone fell off the wagon. I'd have preferred colored, but Marty's got a rep for getting along with non-Caucasians, so I said okay. Except for ditching out on the guys last night, Marty never did me no dirt, just did his job copacetic. Not the world's best slideman, not the worst neither.'

Danny pointed to the musicians on the bandstand. 'Those guys are the Sultans, right?'

'Right.'

'Goines played a set with them that ended just after midnight?'

The mulatto smiled, 'Dicky McCover's up-tempo "Old Lang Syne." Even Bird envies that –'

'When was the set finished?'

'Set broke up maybe 12:20. Fifteen-minute break I give my guys. Like I said, Marty ditched out on that and the 2:00 closer. Only time he did me dirt.'

Danny went in for the Sultans' alibi. 'Were the other three men on stage for the final two sets?'

The manager nodded. 'Uh-huh. Played for a private party I had going after that. What'd Marty do?'

'He got murdered.'

The mulatto choked on the smoke he was inhaling. He coughed the drag out, dropped his cigarette on the floor and stepped on it, rasping, 'Who you think did it?'

Danny said, 'Not you, not the Sultans. Let's try this one: was Goines feeding a habit?'

'Say what?'

'Don't play dumb. Junk, H, horse, a fucking heroin habit.'

The manager took a step backward. 'I don't hire no goddamned hopheads.'

'Sure you don't, just like you don't serve hijack booze. Let's try this: Marty and women.'

'Never heard nothing one way or the other.'

'How about enemies? Guys with a hard-on for him?'

'Nothing.'

'What about friends, known associates, men coming around asking for him?'

'No, no and *no.* Marty didn't even have no family.'

Danny shifted gears with a smile – an interrogation technique he practiced in front of his bedroom mirror. 'Look, I'm sorry I came on so strong.'

'No, you ain't.'

Danny flushed, hoping the crazy lighting didn't pick it up. 'Have you got a man watching the parking lot?'

'No.'

'Do you remember a green Buick in the lot last night?'

'No.'

'Do your kitchen workers hang out in the lot?'

'Man, my kitchen people is too busy to hang out anyplace.'

'What about your hostesses? They sell it outside after you close?'

'Man, you are out of your bailiwick and way out of line.'

Danny elbowed the mulatto aside and threaded his way through the dinner crowd to the bandstand. The Sultans saw him coming and exchanged looks: cop-wise, *experienced.* The drummer quit arranging his gear; the trumpeter backed off and stood by the curtains leading backstage; the saxophone man stopped adjusting his mouthpiece and stood his ground.

Danny stepped onto the platform, blinking against the hot white light shining down. He sized up the sax as the boss and decided on a soft tack – his interrogation was playing to a full house. 'Sheriff's. It's about Marty Goines.'

The drummer answered him. 'Marty's clean. Just took the cure.'

A lead – if it wasn't one ex-con running interference for another. 'I didn't know he had a habit.'

The sax player snorted. 'Years' worth, but he kicked.'

'Where?'

'Lex. Lexington State Hospital in Kentucky. This about Marty's parole?'

Danny stepped back so he could eyeball all three men in one shot. 'Marty got snuffed last night. I think he was snatched from around here right after your midnight set.'

Three clean reactions: the trumpeter scared, most likely afraid of cops on general principles; the drummer trembling; the sax man spooked, but coming back mad. ‘We all gots alibis, ‘case you don’t already know.’

Danny thought: RIP Martin Mitchell Goines. ‘I know, so let’s try the usual drill. Did Marty have any enemies that you know of? Woman trouble? Old dope buddies hanging around?’

The sax said, ‘Marty was a fuckin’ cipher. All I knew about him was that he hung up his Quentin parole, that he was so hot to kick he went to Lex as a fuckin’ absconder. Big balls if you asks me – that’s a Fed hospital, and they mighta run warrant checks on him. Fuckin’ cipher. None of us even knew where he was stayin’.’

Danny kicked the skinny around and watched the trumpet player inch over from the curtains, holding his horn like it was an ikon to ward off demons. He said, ‘Mister, I think I got something for you.’

‘What?’

‘Marty told me he had to meet a guy after the midnight set, and I saw him walking across the street to the Zombie parking lot.’

‘Did he mention a name?’

‘No, just a guy.’

‘Did he say *anything* else about him? What they were going to do – anything like that?’

‘No, and he said he’d be coming right back.’

‘Do you think he was going to buy dope?’

The saxophone player bored into Danny with blue eyes lighter than his own brown ones. ‘Man, I fuckin’ told you Marty was clean, and intended to stay clean.’

Boos erupted from the audience; paper debris hit Danny’s legs. He blinked against the spotlight and felt sweat creeping down his rib cage. A voice yelled, ‘Ofay motherfuck’; applause followed it; a half-chewed chicken wing struck Danny’s back. The sax man smiled up at him, licked his mouthpiece and winked. Danny resisted an urge to kick the horn down his throat and quick-walked out of the club by a side exit.

The night air cooled his sweat and made him shiver; pulsating neon assaulted his eyes. Little bursts of music melded together like one big noise and the nigger sleep-walker atop the Club Zombie looked like doomsday. Danny knew he was scared, and headed straight for the apparition.

The doorman backed off from his badge and let him in to four walls of smoke and dissonant screeching – the combo at the front of the room heading toward a crescendo. The bar was off to the left, shaped like a coffin and embossed with the club’s sleepwalker emblem. Danny beelined there, grabbing a stool, hooking a finger at a white man polishing glasses.

The barkeep placed a napkin in front of him. Danny yelled, ‘Double bonded!’ above the din. A glass appeared; Danny knocked the bourbon back; the barman refilled. Danny drank again and felt his nerves go from sandpapered to warm. The music ended with a *thud-boom-scree*; the house lights went on amid big applause. When it trailed off, Danny reached in his pocket and pulled out a five-dollar bill and the Goines mugshot strip.

The bartender said, ‘Two spot for the drinks.’

Danny stuffed the five in his shirt pocket and held up the strip. ‘Look familiar?’

Squinting, the man said, ‘Is this guy older now? Maybe a different haircut?’

‘These are six years old. Seen him?’

The barman took glasses from his pocket, put them on and held the mugshots out at arm’s length. ‘Does he blow around here?’

Danny missed the question – and wondered if it was sex slang he didn’t know. ‘Explain what you mean.’

‘I mean does he gig, jam, play music around here?’

‘Trombone at Bido Lito’s.’

The barman snapped his fingers. ‘Okay, I know him then. Marty something. He juices between sets at Bido’s, been doing it since around Christmas, ’cause the bar at Bido’s ain’t supposed to serve the help. Hungry juicer, sort of like –’

Like *you*. Danny smiled, the booze notching down his temper. ‘Did you see him last night?’

‘Yeah, on the street. Him and another guy heading over to a car down by the corner on 67th. Looked like he had a load on. Maybe . . .’

Danny leaned forward. ‘Maybe *what*? Spell it out.’

‘Maybe a junk load. You work jazz clubs awhile, you get to know the ropes. This Marty guy was walking all rubbery, like he was on a junk nod. The other guy had his arm around him, helping him over to the car.’

Danny said, ‘Slow and easy now. The time, a description of the car and the other man. Real slow.’

Customers were starting to swarm the bar – Negro men in modified zoot suits, their women a half step behind, all made up and done up to look like Lena Home. The barkeep looked at his business, then back at Danny. ‘Had to be 12:15 to 12:45, around in there. Marty what’s his face and the other guy were cutting across the sidewalk. I know the car was a Buick, ’cause it had them portholes on the side. All I remember about the other guy was that he was tall and had gray hair. I only saw them sort of sideways, and I thought, “I should have such a nice head of hair.” Now can I serve these people?’

Danny was about to say no; the barkeep turned to a bearded young man with an alto sax slung around his neck. ‘Coleman, you know that white trombone from Bido’s? Marty what the fuck?’

Coleman reached over the bar, grabbed two handfuls of ice and pressed them to his face. Danny checked him out: tall, blond, late twenties and off-kilter handsome – like the boy lead in the musical Karen Hiltscher dragged him to. His voice was reedy, exhausted. ‘Sure. A from-hunger horn, I heard. Why?’

‘Talk to this police gentleman here, he’ll tell you.’

Danny pointed to his glass, going two shots over his nightly limit. The barman filled it, then slid off. The alto said, ‘You’re with the Double Seven?’

Danny killed his drink, and on impulse stuck out his hand. ‘My name’s Upshaw. West Hollywood Sheriff’s.’

The men shook. ‘Coleman Healy, late of Cleveland, Chicago and the planet Mars. Marty in trouble?’

The bourbon made Danny *too* warm; he loosened his tie and moved closer to Healy. ‘He was murdered last night.’

Healy’s face contorted. Danny saw every handsome plane jerk, twitch and spasm; he looked away to let him quash his shock and get hepcat again. When he turned back, Healy was bracing himself into the bar. Danny’s knee brushed the alto’s thigh – it was taut with tension. ‘How well did you know him, Coleman?’

Healy’s face was now gaunt, slack under his beard. ‘Chewed the fat with him a couple of times around Christmas, right here at this bar. Just repop – Bird’s new record, the weather. You got an idea who did it?’

‘A lead on a suspect – a tall, gray-haired man. The bartender saw him with Goines last night, walking toward a car parked on Central.’

Coleman Healy ran fingers down the keys of his sax. ‘I’ve seen Marty with a guy like that a couple of times. Tall, middle-aged, dignified looking.’ He paused, then said, ‘Look, Upshaw, not to besmirch the dead, but can I give you an impression I got – on the QT?’

Danny slid his stool back, just enough to get a full-face reaction – Healy wired up, eager to help. ‘Go ahead, impressions help sometimes.’

‘Well, I think Marty was fruit. The older guy looked like a nance to me, like a sugar daddy type. The two of them were playing footsie at a table, and when I noticed it, Marty pulled away from the guy – sort of like a kid with his hand caught in the cookie jar.’

Danny tingled, thinking of the tags he eschewed because they were too coarse and antithetical to Vollmer and Maslick: PANSY SLASH. QUEEN BASH. FRUIT SNUFF. HOMO PASSION JOB. ‘Coleman, could you ID the older man?’

Healy played with his sax. ‘I don’t think so. The light here is strange, and the queer stuff is just an impression I got.’

‘Have you seen the man before or since those times with Goines?’

‘No. Never solo. And I was here all night, in case you think I did it.’

Danny shook his head. ‘Do you know if Goines was using narcotics?’

‘Nix. He was too interested in booze to be a junk fiend.’

‘What about other people who knew him? Other musicians around here?’

‘Ixnay. We just gabbed a couple of times.’

Danny put out his hand; Healy turned it upside down, twisting it from a squarejohn to a jazzman shake. He said, ‘See you in church,’ and headed for the stage.

Queer slash.

Fruit snuff.

Homo passion job.

Danny watched Coleman Healy mount the bandstand and exchange back slaps with the other musicians. Fat and cadaverous, pocked, oily and consumptive looking, they seemed wrong next to the sleek alto – like a crime scene photo with blurs that fucked up the symmetry and made you notice the wrong things. The music started: piano handing a jump melody to the trumpet, drums kicking in, Healy's sax wailing, lilting, wailing, drifting off the base refrain into chord variations. The music digressed into noise; Danny spotted a bank of phone booths next to the powder room and rolled back to police work.

His first nickel got him the watch boss at the 77th Street Station. Danny explained that he was a Sheriff's detective working a homicide – a jazz musician and possible dope addict slashed and dumped off the Sunset Strip. The victim was probably not currently using drugs – but he wanted a list of local H pushers anyway – the snuff might be tied to dope intrigue. The watch boss said, 'How's Mickey these days?,' added, 'Submit request through official channels,' and hung up.

Pissed, Danny dialed Doc Layman's personal number at the City Morgue, one eye on the bandstand. The pathologist answered on the second ring. 'Yes?'

'Danny Upshaw, Doctor.'

Layman laughed. 'Danny Upstart is more like it – I just autopsied the John Doe you tried to usurp.'

Danny drew in a breath, turning away from Coleman Healy gyrating with his sax. 'Yes? And?'

'And a question first. Did you stick a tongue depressor in the corpse's mouth?'

'Yes.'

'Deputy, never, *ever*, introduce foreign elements into interior cavities until after you have thoroughly spotted the exterior. The cadaver had cuts with imbedded wood slivers all over his back – pine – and you stuck a piece of pine into his mouth, leaving similar slivers. Do you see how you could have fouled up my assessment?'

'Yes, but it was obvious the victim was strangled by a towel or a sash – the terrycloth fibers were a dead giveaway.'

Layman sighed – long, exasperated. 'The cause of death was a massive heroin overdose. The shot was administered into a vein by the spine, by the killer himself – the victim couldn't have reached it. The towel was placed in the mouth to absorb blood when the heroin hit the victim's heart and caused arteries to pop, which means the killer had at least elementary anatomical knowledge.'

Danny said, ‘Jesus fuck.’

Layman said, ‘An appropriate blasphemy, but it gets worse. Here’s some incidentals first:

‘One, no residual heroin in the bloodstream – Mr. Doe was not now addicted, although needle marks on his arms indicate he once was. Two, death occurred around 1:00 to 2:00 A.M., and the neck and genital bruises were both postmortem. The cuts on the back were postmortem, almost certainly made by razor blades attached to something like a pine slab or a 2 by 4. So far, brutal – but not past my ken. However . . .’

Layman stopped – his old classroom orator’s pause. Danny, sweating out his jolts of bonded, said, ‘Come on, Doc.’

‘All right. The substance in the eye sockets was KY Jelly. The killer inserted his penis into the sockets and ejaculated – at least twice. I found six cubic centimeters of semen seeping back towards the cranial vault. O+ secretor – the most common blood type among white people.’

Danny opened the phone booth door; he heard wisps of bebop and saw Coleman Healy going down on one knee, sax raised to the rafters. ‘The bites on the torso?’

Layman said, ‘Not human is what I’m thinking. The wounds were too shredded to make casts from – there’s no way I could have lifted any kind of viable teethmarks. Also, the ME’s assistant who took over after you pulled your little number swabbed the affected area with alcohol, so I couldn’t test for saliva or gastric juices. The victim’s blood – AB+ – was all I found there. You discovered the body when?’

‘Shortly after 4:00 A.M.’

‘Then scavenging animals down from the hills are unlikely. The wounds are too localized for that theory, anyway.’

‘Doc, are you sure we’re dealing with teeth marks?’

‘Absolutely. The inflammation around the wounds is from a mouth sucking. It’s too wide to be human –’

‘Do you think –’

‘Don’t interrupt. I’m thinking that – *maybe* – the killer spread blood bait on the affected area and let some kind of well trained vicious dog at the victim. How many men are working this job, Danny?’

‘Just me.’

‘ID on the victim? Leads?’

‘It’s going well, Doc.’

‘Get him.’

‘I *will.*’

Danny hung up and walked outside. Cold air edged the heat off his booze intake and let him collate evidence. He now had three solid leads:

The homosexual mutilations combined with Coleman Healy’s observation of Marty Goines being ‘fruit’; his ‘nance’ ‘sugar daddy type’ – who resembled the tall, gray-haired man the bartender saw with Goines, heading toward the stolen Buick last night – an hour or so before the estimated time of death; the heroin OD cause of death; the bartender's description of Goines weaving in a junk nod – that jolt of dope a probable precurser to the shot that burst his heart; Goines' previous addiction and recent dope cure. Putting the possible animal mutilations out of mind, he had one *hard* lead: the tall, gray-haired man – a sugar daddy capable of glomming heroin, hypodermic syringes and talking a reformed junkie into geezing up on the spot and ditching his New Year's Eve gig.

And no LAPD cooperation – yet – on local horse pushers; a junkie squeeze was the only logical play.

Danny walked across the street to Tommy Tucker's Playroom, found an empty booth and ordered coffee to kill the liquor in his system and keep him awake. The music/motif was ballads and zebra-striped upholstery, cheap jungle wallpaper offset by tiki torches licking flames up to the ceiling, another fire hazard, a blaze to burn the whole block to cinder city. The coffee was black and strong and made inroads on the bonded; the bop was soft – caresses for the couples in the booths: lovebirds holding hands and sipping rum drinks. The total package made him think of San Berdoo circa '39, him and Tim in a hot Olds ragger joy-riding to a hick-town prom, changing clothes at his place while the old lady hawked *Watchtowers* outside Coulter's Department Store. Down to their skivvies, horseplay, jokes about substitutes for girls; Timmy with Roxanne Beausoleil outside the gym that night – the two of them bouncing the Olds almost off its suspension. Him the prom wallflower, declining seconds on Roxy, drinking spiked punch, getting mawkish with the slow grind numbers and the hurt.

Danny killed the memories with police work – eyeball prowls for Health and Safety Code violations, liquor infractions, *wrongness*. The doorman was admitting minors; high yellows in slit gowns were oozing around soliciting business, there was only one side exit in a huge room sixteen seconds away from fireballing. Time passed; the music went from soft to loud to soft again; coffee and constant eye circuits got his nerves fine-honed. Then he hit paydirt, spotting two Negroes by the exit curtains pulling a handoff: cash for something palmable, a quick segue into the parking lot.

Danny counted to six and followed, easing the door open, peering out. The spook who took the money was striding toward the sidewalk; the other guy was two rows of cars down, opening the door of a rig topped by a long whip antenna. Danny gave him thirty seconds to geez up, light up or snort up, then pulled his .45, hunkered down and approached.

The car was a lavender Merc; marijuana smoke was drifting out the wind wings. Danny grabbed the driver's door and swung it open; the Negro shrieked, dropped his reefer and recoiled from the gun in his face. Danny said, 'Sheriff's. Hands on the dashboard slow or I'll kill you.'

The youth complied, in slow motion. Danny jammed the .45's muzzle under his chin and gave him a frisk; inside and outside jacket pockets, a waistband pat for weaponry. He found a lizardskin wallet, three marijuana cigarettes and no hardware; popped the glove compartment and flicked on the dashlight. The kid said, ‘Look, man’; Danny dug his gun in harder, until it cut off his air supply and forced him mute.

The reefer stench was getting brutal; Danny found the butt on the seat cushion and snuffed it. With his free hand he opened the wallet, pulled out a driver’s license and over a hundred in tens and twenties. He slipped the cash in his pocket and read the license: Carlton W. Jeffries, M.N., 5’ 11”, 165, DOB 6/19/29, 439 1/4 E. 98 St., L.A. A quick toss of the glove compartment got him DMV registration under the same name and a slew of unpaid traffic citations in their mailing envelopes. Danny put the license, reefers, money and registration into an envelope and dropped it on the pavement; he pulled his .45 out from under the boy’s chin and used the muzzle to turn his head toward him. Up close, he saw a chocolate brown punk next to tears, lips flapping, Adam’s apple bobbing up and down as he struggled for breath.

Danny said, ‘Information or five years State time minimum. You call it.’

Carlton W. Jeffries found a voice: high, squeaky. ‘What you think?’

‘I think you’re smart. Give me what I want, and I’ll put that envelope in the mail to you tomorrow.’

‘You could give it back now. Please. I need that money.’

‘I want a hard snitch. If you play both ends and I get hurt, I’ve got you nailed. Evidence, and the confession you just made.’

‘Man, I didn’t make no confession to you!’

‘Sure you did. You’ve been selling a pound a week. You’re the A-number-one Southside grasshopper.’

‘Man!’

Danny rested his gun barrel on Carlton W. Jeffries’ nose. ‘I want names. Heroin pushers around here. Give.’

‘Man –’

Danny flipped the .45 up and grabbed the muzzle, reversing his grip so the gun could be used as a bludgeon. ‘*Give, goddamn you.*’

Jeffries took his hands off the dash and wrapped his arms around himself. ‘Only guy I know is a guy name of Otis Jackson. Lives above the laundromat on One-o-three and Beach and please don’t give me no rat jacket!’

Danny holstered his piece and backed out the car door. His foot hit the DMV envelope just as he heard Carlton W. Jeffries start bawling. He picked the evidence up, tossed it on the seat and double-timed to his Chevy so he wouldn’t hear the sad little fuck blubber his gratitude.

103rd and Beach was a run-down intersection in the heart of Watts: hair-straightening parlors on two corners, a liquor store on the third, the Koin King Washeteria occupying number four. Lights were burning in the apartment above the laundromat; Danny parked across the street, doused his headbeams and scoped out the only possible access: side steps leading up to a flimsy-looking door.

He walked over and up them, tiptoes, no hand on the railing for fear it would creak. At the top, he pulled his gun, put an ear to the door and listened, picking up a man's voice counting: eight, nine, ten, eleven. Tapping the door, he faked a drawl straight from Amos 'n' Andy: 'Otis? You there, man? It's me, man.'

Danny heard 'Shit!' inside; seconds later the door opened, held to the jamb by a chain. A hand holding a switchblade stuck out; Danny brought his gun barrel down on the shiv, then threw his weight inward.

The switchblade hit the top step; a voice screeched; the door caved in, Danny riding it. Then it was a crash to the carpet and a topsy-turvy shot of Otis Jackson scooping junk bindles off the floor, stumbling to the bathroom, a toilet flushing. Danny got to his knees, sighted in and yelled, 'Sheriff's!' Otis Jackson flipped him his middle finger and weaved back to the living room wearing a shiteater grin.

Danny stood up, his head pounding with jazz chords. Otis Jackson said, 'The fuckin' Sheriff's ain't fuckin' shit around here.'

Danny lashed the .45 across his face. Jackson hit the rug, moaned and spit out cracked bridgework. Danny squatted beside him. 'You sell to a tall, gray-haired white man?'

Jackson spat bloody phlegm and a slice of his tongue. 'I'm with Jack D. and the Seven-Seven, mother –'

Danny held his gun at eye level. 'I'm with Mickey and the County, so what? I asked you a question.'

'I deal Hollywood, man! I know lots of gray-haired suckers!'

'Name them, and name everyone else you know who unloads at the clubs on South Central.'

'I'll let you kill me first, sucker!'

The jazz noise was coming back, soundtracking images: Coleman Healy fondling his sax, the reefer guy about to beg. Danny said, 'One more time. I want skinny on a tall white man. Middle-aged, silver hair.'

'An' I told you –'

Danny heard footsteps coming up the stairs, grunts and the unmistakable sound of revolvers being cocked. Otis Jackson smiled; Danny glommed the gist, holstered his piece and reached for his badge holder. Two big white men popped in the doorway aiming .38's; Danny had his shield out and a peace offering ready. 'Sheriff's. I'm a Sheriff's detective.'

The men walked over, guns first. The taller of the two helped Otis Jackson to his feet; the other, a fat guy with curly red hair, took Danny's ID buzzer, examined it and shook his head. 'Bad enough you guys get in bed with Mickey Kike, now you gotta beat up my favorite snitch. Otis, you are one lucky nigger. Deputy Upshaw, you are one stupid white man.'

The tall cop helped Otis Jackson into the bathroom. Danny stood up and grabbed his badge holder. The fat redhead said, ‘Get the fuck back to the County and beat up your own niggers.’

FIVE

'. . . AND THE MOST pervasive aspect of Communism, its single most insidiously efficacious tool, is that it hides under a million banners, a million different flags, titles and combinations of initials, spreading its cancer under a million guises, all of them designed to pervert and corrupt in the name of compassion and goodness and social justice. UAES, SLDC, NAACP, AFLCIO, League for Democratic Ideals and Concerned Americans Against Bigotry. All high-sounding organizations that all good Americans should be proud to belong to. All seditious, perverted, cancerous tentacles of the Communist Conspiracy.'

Mal Considine had been sizing up Edmund J. Satterlee, ex-Fed, ex-Jesuit seminarian, for close to half an hour, taking occasional glances at the rest of the audience. Satterlee was a tall man, pear-shaped, in his early forties; his verbal style was a cross between Harry Truman homespun and Pershing Square crackpot – and you never knew when he was going to shout or whisper. Dudley Smith, chain-smoking, seemed to be enjoying his pitch; Ellis Loew kept looking at his watch and at Dudley – probably afraid that he was going to drop ash all over his new living room carpet. Dr. Saul Lesnick, psychiatrist/longtime Fed informant, sat as far away from the Red Chaser as possible while remaining in the same room. He was a small, frail old man with bright blue eyes and a cough that he kept feeding with harsh European cigarettes; he had the look native to stool pigeons everywhere – loathing for the presence of his captors – even though he had allegedly volunteered his services.

Satterlee was pacing now, gesticulating to them like they were four hundred, not four. Mal squirmed in his chair, reminding himself that this guy was his ticket to a captaincy and Chief DA's Investigator.

'. . . and in the early days of the war I worked with the Alien Squad relocating Japs. I gained my first insights into how anti-American sentiment breeds. The Japs who wanted to be good Americans offered to enlist in the armed forces, most were resentful and confused, and the subversive element – under the guise of patriotism – attempted to coerce them into treason by concerted, heavily intellectualized attacks on alleged American racial injustices. Under a banner of American concerns: liberty, justice and free enterprise, the seditious Japs portrayed this democracy as a land of lynched Negroes and limited opportunities for coloreds, even though the Nisei were emerging as middle-class merchants when the war broke out. After the war, when the Communist Conspiracy emerged as the number-one threat to America's internal security, I saw how the same kind of thinking, of manipulation, was being used by the Reds to subvert our moral fiber. The entertainment industry and business were rife with fellow travelers, and I founded Red Crosscurrents to help weed out radicals and subversives. Organizations that want to keep themselves Red-free pay us a nominal fee to screen their employees and prospective employees for Commie associations, and *we* keep an exhaustive file on the Reds we uncover. This service also allows innocent people accused of being Pink to prove their innocence and gain employment that they might have been denied. Further –'

Mal heard Dr. Saul Lesnick cough; he looked at the old man sidelong and saw that the eruption was half laughter. Satterlee paused; Ellis Loew said, 'Ed, can we gloss the background and get down to business?'

Satterlee flushed, picked up his briefcase and took out a stack of papers, four individually clipped sheafs. He handed one each to Mal, Loew and Dudley Smith; Dr. Lesnick declined his with a shake of the head. Mal skimmed the top sheet. It was a deposition detailing picket line scuttlebutt: members of the United Alliance of Extras and Stagehands mouthing Pinko platitudes overheard by counter-pickets from the Teamsters. Mal checked the signees' names, recognizing Morris Jahelka, Davey Goldman and Fritzie 'Icepick' Kupferman – known Mickey Cohen strongarms.

Satterlee resumed his position in front of them; Mal thought he looked like a man who would kill for a lectern – or any resting place for his long, gangly arms. 'These pieces of paper are our first wave of ammunition. I have worked with a score of municipal grand juries nationwide, and the sworn statements of patriotic citizens always have a salutary effect on Grand Jury members. I think we have a great chance for a successful one here in Los Angeles now – the labor infighting between the Teamsters and the UAES is a great impetus, a shot at the limelight that will probably not come again. Communist influence in Hollywood is a broad topic, and the picket line trouble and UAES's fomenting of subversion within both contexts is a good device to get the public interested. Let me quote from the deposition of Mr. Morris Jahelka: "While picketing outside Variety International Pictures on the morning of November 29, 1949, I heard a UAES member, a woman named 'Claire,' tell another UAES member: 'With the UAES in the studios we can advance the cause better than the entire Red Guard. Movies are the new opiate of the people. They'll believe anything we can get on the screen.' " Gentlemen, Claire is Claire Katherine De Haven, a consort of Hollywood traitors and a known member of no fewer than fourteen organizations that have been classified as Communist Fronts by the California State Attorney General's Office. Is that not impressive?'

Mal raised his hand. Edmund J. Satterlee said, 'Yes, Lieutenant Considine? A question?'

'No, a statement. Morris Jahelka has two convictions for felony statch rape. Your patriotic citizen screws twelve-year-old-girls.'

Ellis Loew said, 'Goddamnit, Malcolm.'

Satterlee tried a smile, faltered at it and stuck his hands in his pockets. 'I see. Anything else on Mr. Jahelka?'

'Yes. He also likes little boys, but he's never been caught at it.'

Dudley Smith laughed. 'Politics makes for strange bedfellows, which doesn't negate the fact that in this case Mr. Jahelka is on the side of the angels. Besides, lad, we'll be damn sure his jacket is sealed, and the goddamn Pinks probably won't bring in lawyers for redirect questioning.'

Mal concentrated on keeping his voice calm. 'Is that true, Ellis?'

Loew fanned away plumes of Doc Lesnick's cigarette smoke. 'Essentially, yes. We're trying to get as many UAESers as possible to volunteer as witnesses, and hostile witnesses – subpoenaed ones – tend to try to assert their innocence by not retaining counsel. Also, the studios have a clause in their contract with UAES, stating that they can terminate the contract if certain areas of malfeasance can be proven against the contractee. Before the grand jury convenes – if our evidence is strong enough – I'm going to the studio heads to get UAES ousted on that clause – which should make the bastards hopping mad and rabid when they hit the witness stand. An angry witness is an ineffectual witness. You know that, Mal.'

Cohen and his Teamsters in; UAES out. Mal wondered if Mickey C. was a contributor to Loew's six-figure slush fund – which should hit the half million mark by the time of the '52 primaries. 'You're good, counselor.'

'So are you, *Captain*. Down to brass tacks, Ed. I'm due in court at noon.'

Satterlee handed Mal and Dudley mimeographed sheets. 'My thoughts on the interrogation of subversives,' he said. 'Guilt by association is a strong lever on these people – they're all connected up – everyone on the far left knows everyone else to one degree or another. In with your depositions I've got lists of Commie front meetings cross-filed with donation lists, which are excellent levers to procure information and get Reds to inform on other Reds to save their own damn skin. The donations also mean bank records that can be subpoenaed as evidence. Proffering surveillance photos to potential witnesses is my personal favorite technique – being shown at a subversive meeting puts the fear of God into the most Godless Pinks, and they'll inform on their own mother to stay out of jail. I may be able to get us some extremely damaging photos from a friend who works for Red Channels – some extremely good pictures of Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee picnics. In fact, I've been told the photos are the Rembrandts of Federal surveillance – actual CP bigwigs and Hollywood stars along with our friends in UAES. Mr Loew?'

Loew said, 'Thank you, Ed,' and gave his standard one finger up, indicating everybody stand. Dudley Smith practically leaped to his feet; Mal stood and saw Doc Lesnick walking to the bathroom holding his chest. Awful wet coughs echoed from the hallway; he pictured Lesnick retching blood. Satterlee, Smith and Loew broke up their circle of handshaking; the Red Chaser went out the door with the DA kneading his shoulders.

Dudley Smith said, 'Zealots are always tiresome. Ed's good at what he does, but he doesn't know when to quit performing. Five hundred dollars a lecture he gets. Capitalist exploitation of Communism, wouldn't you say so, Captain?'

'I'm not a captain yet, Lieutenant.'

'Ha! And a grand wit you have, too, to go with your rank.'

Mal studied the Irishman, less scared than he was yesterday morning at the restaurant. 'What's in this for you? You're a case man, you don't want Jack Tierney's job.'

'Maybe I just want to get next to you, lad. You're odds on for Chief of Police or County Sheriff somewhere down the line, all that grand work you did in Europe, liberating our persecuted Jewish brethren. Speaking of which, here comes the Hebrew contingent now.'

Ellis Loew was leading Lesnick into the living room and settling him into an easy chair by the fireplace. The old man arranged a pack of Gauloises, a lighter and ashtray on his lap, crossing one stick leg over the other to hold them in place. Loew pulled up chairs around him in a semicircle; Smith winked and sat down. Mal saw cardboard boxes packed with folders filling up the dining alcove, four typewriters stacked in one corner to accommodate the grand jury team's paperwork. Ellis Loew was preparing for war, his ranch house as headquarters.

Mal took the leftover chair. Doc Lesnick lit a cigarette, coughed and started talking. His voice was highbrow New York Jew working with one lung; Mal made his pitch as processed, spieled to a load of other cops and DAs.

'Mr Satterlee did you a disservice by not going back further in his rather threadbare history of subversive elements in America. He neglected to mention the Depression, starvation and desperate people, concerned people, who wanted to change terrible conditions.' Lesnick paused, got breath and stubbed out his Gauloise. Mal saw a bony chest heaving, nailed the old man as gravebait and sensed that he was wavering: the pain of speech versus a chance to justify his fink duty. Finally he sucked in a huge draft of air and kept going, some kind of fervor lighting up his eyes.

'I was one of those people, twenty years ago. I signed petitions, wrote letters and went to labor meetings that accomplished nothing. The Communist Party, despite its evil connotations, was the only organization that did not seem ineffectual. Its reputation gave it a certain panache, a cachet, and the self-righteous hypocrites who condemned it in a blanket manner made me want to belong to it in order to assert my defiance of them.

'It was an injudicious decision, one that I came to regret. Being a psychiatrist, I was designated the official CP analyst here in Los Angeles.

Marxism and Freudian analysis were very much in the intellectual vogue, and a number of people whom I later realized were conspirators against this country told me their . . . secrets, so to speak, emotional and political. Many were Hollywood people, writers and actors and their satellites – working-class people as deluded as I was regarding Communism, people who wanted to get close to the Hollywood people because of their movie connections. Just before the time of the Hitler-Stalin pact I became disillusioned with the Party. In '39, during the California State HUAC probe, I volunteered to serve the FBI as an undercover informant. I have served in that capacity for over ten years, while concurrently acting as CP analyst. I secretly made my private files available to the 1947 House Un-American Activities Committee probers, and I am doing the same for this grand jury probe now. The files are for UAES members essential to your probe, and should you require assistance in interpreting them, I would be happy to be of service.'

The old man nearly choked on his last words. He reached for his cigarette pack; Ellis Loew, holding a glass of water, got to him first. Lesnick gulped, coughed, gulped; Dudley Smith walked into the dining alcove and tapped the filing boxes and typewriters with his spit-shined brogues – uncharacteristically idle footwork.

A horn honked outside. Mal stood up to thank Lesnick and shake his hand. The old man looked away and pushed himself to his feet, almost not making it. The horn beeped again; Loew opened the door and gestured to the cab in the driveway. Lesnick shuffled out, gulping fresh morning air.

The taxi drove away; Loew turned on a wall fan. Dudley Smith said, 'How long does he have, Ellis? Will you be sending him an invitation to your victory celebration come '52?'

Loew scooped big handfuls of files off the floor and laid them out on the dining room table; he repeated the process until there were two stacks of paper halfway to the ceiling. 'Long enough to suit our purposes.'

Mal walked over and looked at their evidence: information extraction thumbscrews. 'He won't testify before the grand jury though?'

'No, never. He's terrified of losing his credibility as a psychiatrist. Confidentiality, you know. It's a good hiding place for lawyers, and doctors covet it too. Of course, it's not legally binding for them. Lesnick would be kaput as a psychiatrist if he testified.'

Dudley said, 'You would think he would like to meet his maker as a good patriotic American, though. He did volunteer, and that should be a grand satisfaction for someone whose next life looms so imminently.'

Loew laughed. 'Dud have you *ever* taken a step without spotting the angles?'

'The last time *you* did, counselor. Captain Considine, yourself?'

Mal said, 'Sometime back in the Roaring Twenties,' thinking that mano a mano, brain to brain, he'd favor the Dublin street thug over the Harvard

Phi Bete. ‘Ellis, when do we start approaching witnesses?’

Loew tapped the file stacks. ‘Soon, after you’ve digested these. Based on what you learn here, you’ll be making your first approaches – on weak points – weak people – who’d seem most likely to cooperate. If we can build up an array of friendly witnesses fast, fine. But if we don’t get a fair amount of initial cooperation, we’ll have to put in a plant. Our friends on the Teamsters have heard picket line talk – that the UAES is planning strategy meetings aimed at coercing exorbitant contract demands out of the studios. If we get a string of balks right off the bat, I want to pull back and put a decoy into the UAES. I want both of you to think of smart, tough, idealistic-looking young cops we can use if it comes to that.’

Chills grabbed Mal. Sending in decoys, *operating*, had made his rep at Ad Vice – it was what he was best at as a policeman. He said, ‘I’ll think on it. There’s just Dudley and me as investigators?’

Loew made a gesture that took in his whole house. ‘Clerks from the City pool here to handle the paperwork, Ed Satterlee for the use of his contracts, Lesnick for our psychiatric edification. You two to interrogate. I might get us a third man to prowl for criminal stuff, rattle cages, that kind of thing.’

Mal got itchy to read, think, operate. He said, ‘I’m going to clear up some loose ends at the Hall, go home and work.’

Loew said, ‘I’m going to prosecute a real estate man for drunk driving on his son’s motorcycle.’

Dudley Smith toasted his boss with an imaginary glass. ‘Have mercy. Most real estate men are good patriotic Republicans, and you might need his contribution one day.’

Back at City Hall, Mal made calls to satisfy his curiosity on his two new colleagues. Bob Cathcart, a savvy Criminal Division FBI man he’d worked with, gave him the scoop on Edmund J. Satterlee. Cathcart’s take: the man was a religious crackpot with a wild hair up his ass about Communism, so extreme in his views that Clyde Tolson, Hoover’s number-two man at the Bureau, repeatedly issued gag orders on him when he served as Agent in Charge at the Waco, Texas, field office. Satterlee was estimated to earn fifty thousand dollars a year in anti-Communist lecture fees; Red Crosscurrents was ‘a shakedown racket’ – ‘They’d clear Karl Marx if the dough was right.’ Satterlee was rumored to have been bounced off the Allen Squad for attempting a kickback operation: cash vouchers from interned Japanese prisoners in exchange for his safeguarding their confiscated property until they were released. Agent Cathcart’s summation: Ed Satterlee was a loony, albeit a rich and very efficient one – very adept at advancing conspiracy theories that stood up in court; very good at gathering evidence; very good at running outside interference for grand jury investigators.

A call to an old pal working the LAPD Metropolitan Squad and one to an ex-DA’s man now with the State Attorney General’s office supplied Mal with the true story on Saul Lesnick, MD, PhD. The old man was, and remained, a CP card carrier; he had been a Fed snitch since '39 – when he was approached by two LA office agents, who made him a deal: provide confidential psychiatric dirt to various committees and police agencies, and his daughter would be sprung from her five-to-ten-year sentence for hit and run drunk driving – one year down, four more to go minimum – the girl then currently hardtiming in Tehachapi. Lesnick agreed; his daughter was released and placed on indeterminate Federal parole – which would be revoked if the good doctor ever broke his cover or otherwise refused to cooperate. Lesnick, given six months tops in his fight with lung cancer, had secured a promise from a high-ranking Justice Department official: upon his death, all the confidential files he had loaned out would be destroyed; his daughter's vehicular manslaughter conviction and parole records would be expunged and all Fed/Municipal/State grand jury notations currently on official paper vis-à-vis Lesnick and his breaches of confidentiality with subversive patients would burn. No one would know that for ten years Saul Lesnick, Communist, psychiatrist, had played both ends against the middle – and had won his holding action.

Mal segued, new colleagues to old business, thinking that the lunger got what he paid for in spades, that his dance with the Feds was good value: a daughter spared broomstick rape and pernicious anemia from Tehachapi's famous all-starch cuisine in exchange for the rest of his life – shortened by suicide via French tobacco. And *he'd* have done the same thing for Stefan – he wouldn't have thought twice.

Paperwork was arrayed neatly across his desk; Mal, stealing glances at the huge grand jury pile, got to it. He wrote memos to Ellis Loew suggesting investigators to dig for backup evidence; he typed routing slips: case files to the green young Deputy DAs who would be prosecuting now that Loew was engaged full-time in battling Communism. A Chinatown hooker killing went to a kid six months out of the worst law school in California; the perpetrator, a pimp known for his love of inflicting pain with a metal-studded dildo, would probably walk on the charge. Two shine snuffs were routed to a youth still short of his twenty-fifth birthday – smart, but naive. This perp, a Purple Cobra warlord, had fired into a crowd of kids outside Manual Arts High School on the off-chance that there might be members of the Purple Scorpions in it. There weren't; an honor student and her boyfriend went down dead. Mal gave the kid a fifty-fifty chance for a conviction – Negroes killing Negroes bored white juries and they often dropped their verdicts on whim.

The armed robbery/ADW at Minnie Roberts' Casbah went to a Loew protégé; writing evidence summaries on the three cases took four hours and gave Mal finger cramps. Finishing, he checked his watch and saw that it was 3:10 – Stefan would be home from school. If he was lucky, Celeste would be visiting her crony down the street, bullshitting in Czech, gabbing about the old country before the war. Mal grabbed his stack of psychiatric dirt and drove home, resisting a kid's urge: to stop at an army-navy store and buy himself a pair of silver captain's bars.

Home was in the Wilshire District: a big white two-story that devoured his savings and most of his salary. It was the house that was too good for Laura – a kid marriage based on rutting didn't warrant the tariff. He'd bought it when he returned from Europe in '46, knowing that Laura was out and Celeste was in, sensing that he loved the boy more than he could ever love the woman – that the marriage was for Stefan's safety. There was a park with basketball hoops and a baseball diamond nearby; the neighborhood's crime rate was near zero and the local schools had the highest academic standing in the state. It was his happy ending to Stefan's nightmare.

Mal parked in the driveway and walked across the lawn – Stefan's lackluster mowing job, Stefan's softball and bat weighing down the hedge that he'd neglected to trim. Going in the door, he heard voices: the two-language fight he'd refereed a thousand times before. Celeste was running down verb conjugations in Czech, sitting on the divan in her sewing room, gesturing to Stefan, her captive in a straight-backed chair. The boy was fiddling with objects on an end table – thimbles and thread spools – arranging them by progression of color, so smart that he had to keep occupied even while on the receiving end of a lecture. Mal stood aside from the doorway and watched, loving Stefan for his defiance; glad that he was dark and pudgy like his real father was supposed to be – not lean and sandy-haired like Celeste – even though Mal was blond, and it clued people in that they weren't blood relations.

Celeste was saying, '. . . and it is the language of your people.'

Stefan was stacking the spools, making a little house out of them – dark colors the foundation, pastels on top. 'But I am to be an American now. Malcolm told me he can get me cit-cit-citizenship.'

'Malcolm is a minister's son and a policeman who does not understand our old country traditions. Stefan, your heritage. Learn to make your mother happy.'

Mal could tell this boy wasn't buying it; he smiled when Stefan demolished the spool house, his dark eyes fired up. 'Malcolm said Czechoslovakia is a . . . a . . . a . . .'

'A what, darling?'

'A Bohunk rubble heap! A shit pile! Scheiss! Scheiss! In German for mutti!'

Celeste raised a hand, stopped and hit her own pinched-together knees. 'In English for you – little ingrate, disgrace to your real father, a cultured man, a doctor, not a consort of whores and hoodlums –'

Stefan knocked over the end table and ran out of the room, straight into Mal, blocking the doorway. The small fat boy careened off his six-foot-three stepfather, then grabbed him around the waist and buried his head in his vest. Mal held him there, one hand steadying his shoulders, the other ruffling his hair. When Celeste stood up and saw them, he said, 'You'll never give it up, will you?'

Celeste mouthed words; Mal knew they were native tongue obscenities she didn't want Stefan to hear. The boy held on tighter, then let go and ran upstairs to his room. Mal heard ting-ting-ting – Stefan's toy soldiers being hurled at the door. He said, 'You know what it makes him think of, and you still won't give it up.'

Celeste adjusted her arms inside her overslung cardigan – the single European affectation Mal hated the most. 'Nein, herr Leutnant' – pure German, pure Celeste – Buchenwald, the gas man, Major Considine, cold-blooded killer.

Mal braced himself into the doorway. 'Captain soon, *Fräulein*, Chief DA's Investigator, and climbing. Juice, *Fräulein*. Just in case I think you're ruining my son and I have to take him away from you.'

Celeste sat down, knees together, a finishing school move, Prague 1934. 'To the mother the child belongs. Even a failed lawyer like you should know that maxim.'

A line that couldn't be topped. Mal kicked up the carpeting on his way outside; he sat on the steps and watched rain clouds hover. Celeste's sewing machine started to whir; upstairs, Stefan's soldiers were still dinging his already cracked and dented bedroom door. Mal thought that soon they'd be stripped of paint, dragoons without uniforms, and that simple fact would tear down everything he'd built up since the war.

In '45 he was an army major, stationed at a temporary MP barracks near the recently liberated Buchenwald concentration camp. His assignment was to interrogate surviving inmates, specifically the ones the medical evacuation teams deemed terminally ill – the husks of human beings who would most likely never live to identify their captors in court. The question and answer sessions were horrific; Mal knew that only the stony cold presence of his interpreter was keeping him frosty, contained, a pro. News from the home front was just as bad: friends wrote him that Laura was screwing Jerry Dunleavy, a buddy from the Homicide Bureau, and Buzz Meeks, a crooked Narcotics Squad dick and bagman for Mickey Cohen. And in San Francisco, his father, the Reverend Liam Considine, was dying of congestive heart disease and sending daily telegrams begging him to embrace Jesus before he died. Mal hated the man too much to give him the satisfaction and was too busy praying for the speedy and painless deaths of every single Buchenwald survivor, for the complete cessation of their memories and his nightmares. The old man died in October; Mal's brother Desmond, the usedcar king of Sacramento, sent him a telegram rich in religious invective. It ended with words of disownment. Two days later Mal met Celeste Heisteke.

She came out of Buchenwald physically healthy and defiant, and she spoke enough English to render the interpreter unnecessary. Mal conducted his interrogations of Celeste solo; they spoke on only one topic: her whoredom with an SS lieutenant colonel named Franz Kempflerr – his price for her survival.

Celeste's stories – graphically told – killed his nightmares better than the contraband phenobarbital he'd been blasting for weeks. They excited him, disgusted him, made him hate the Nazi colonel and hate himself for being a voyeur eight thousand miles away from his legendary whore sweep operations in Ad Vice. Celeste sensed his excitement and seduced him; together, they reenacted all of her adventures with Franz Kempflerr. Mal fell in love with her – because he knew she had his number better than dumb sexpot Laura ever did. Then, when she had him hooked, she told him of her dead husband and her six-year-old son, who might still be alive somewhere in Prague. Would he, a veteran detective, be willing to search for the boy?

Mal agreed, for the challenge and the chance to become more to Celeste than a voyeur-lover, more than the sewer crawler cop his family considered him to be. He made three trips to Prague, blundering around asking questions in pidgin Czech and German. Networks of Heisteke cousins resisted him; twice he was threatened with guns and knives and retreated, fear at his back like he was walking a beat in LA niggertown, whispers and catcalls from the okie cops who dominated the nightwatch there: college boy chickenshit, nigger scared, coward. On his final trip he located Stefan Heisteke, a pale, dark-haired child with a distended belly, sleeping outside a cigarette vendor's stall in a rolled-up carpet lent to him by a friendly black marketeer. The man told Mal that the boy became frightened if people spoke to him in Czech, the language he seemed to best understand; phrases in German and French elicited simple yes or no answers. Mal took Stefan to his hotel, fed him and attempted to bathe him – stopping when he started to scream.

He let Stefan wash himself; he let him sleep for seventeen uninterrupted hours. Then, armed with German and French phrase books, he began his most gruelling interrogation. It took a week of long silences, long pauses and halting questions and answers with half the room between them for Mal to get the story straight.

Stefan Heisteke had been left with trusted first cousins just before Celeste and her husband, gentile anti-Nazis, were captured by the Germans; they, fleeing, had shunted him to distant in-laws, who left him with friends who gave him to acquaintances sequestered in a deserted factory basement. He was there for the better part of two years, accompanied by a man and woman gone cabin-fevered. The factory processed dog food, and cans of horsemeat were all Stefan ate during that time. The man and woman used him sexually, then goo-goo-talked to him in Czech, lover's endearments to a five-and-six-year-old child. Stefan could not tolerate the sound of that language.

Mal brought Stefan back to Celeste, gave her a mercifully abbreviated account of his lost years and told her to speak French to him – or teach him English. He did not tell her that he considered her cousins accomplices to the boy's horror, and when Stefan himself told his mother what had happened, Celeste capitulated to Mal. He knew she had been using him before; now she loved him. He had a family to replace his shattered one at home in America.

Together, they began teaching Stefan English; Mal wrote to Laura, requested a divorce and got the paperwork ready to bring his new family stateside. Things were going very smoothly; then they went haywire.

Celeste's whoremaster officer had escaped before Buchenwald was liberated; just as Mal was about to take his discharge, he was captured in Kraków and held at the MP barracks there. Mal went to Kraków just to see him; the stockade duty officer showed him the Nazi's confiscated property, which included unmistakable locks of Celeste's hair. Mal walked back to Franz Kempflerr's cell and emptied his sidearm into the man's face.

A tight net was thrown over the incident; the military governor, an Army one-star, liked Mal's style. Mal took an honorable discharge, brought Celeste and Stefan to America, returned to his LAPD sergeantcy and divorced Laura. Of his two cuckolders, Buzz Meeks was wounded in a shootout and pensioned off to civilian life; Jerry Dunleavy stayed on the job – but out of his way. Rumor had it that Meeks thought Mal was behind the shooting – revenge for the affair with Laura. Mal let the talk simmer: it played a good counterpoint to the coward innuendo he'd inspired in Watts. Word leaked out here and there on the gas man; Ellis Loew, DA's comer, Jew, draft dodger, took an interest in him and offered to swing some gravy his way once he aced the lieutenant's exam. In '47 he made lieutenant and transferred to the DA's Bureau of Investigations, cop protégé to the most ambitious Deputy District Attorney the City of Los Angeles ever saw. He married Celeste and settled into family life, a ready-made child part of the deal. And the closer father and son became, the more mother resented it; and the more he pressed to formally adopt the boy the more she refused – and tried to mold Stefan in the manner of the old Czech aristocracy that was yanked out from under her by the Nazis – language lessons and European culture and customs, Celeste oblivious to the memories they'd uprooted.

'To the mother the child belongs. Even a failed lawyer like you should know that maxim.'

Mal listened to Celeste's sewing machine. Stefan's toy soldiers hitting the door. He came up with his own epigraph: saving a woman's life only induces gratitude if the woman has something to live for. All Celeste had was memories and a hated existence as a cop's hausfrau. All she wanted was to take Stefan back to the time of his horror and make him part of the memories. His final epigraph: he wouldn't let her.

Mal walked back in the house to read the Commie snitch's files: his glory grand jury and all it would reap.

Juice.

SIX

THE TWO PICKET lines moved slowly down Gower, past the entrances of the Poverty Row studios. The UAES hugged the inside, displaying banners stapled to plywood strips: FAIR PAY FOR LONG HOURS, CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS NOW! PROFIT SHARES FOR ALL WORKERS. The Teamsters paced beside them, a strip of sidewalk open, their signs – REDS OUT! NO CONTRACTS FOR COMMUNISTS – atop friction-taped two-by-four's. Talk between the factions was constant; every few seconds, 'Fuck' or 'shit' or 'Traitor' or 'Scum' would be shouted, a wave of garbled obscenities following. Across the street, reporters stood around, smoking and playing rummy on the hoods of their cars.

Buzz Meeks watched from the walkway outside Variety International Pictures' executive offices – three stories up, a balcony view. He remembered busting union heads back in the '30s; he sized up the Teamsters versus the UAES and saw a bout to rival Louis and Schmeling Number Two.

Easy: the Teamsters were sharks and the UAES were minnows. The Teamster line featured Mickey Cohen goons, union muscle and hard boys hired out of the day labor joints downtown; the UAES was old leftie types, stagehands past their prime, skinny Mexicans and a woman. If push came to shove, no cameras around, the Teamsters would use their two-by-four's as battering rams and charge – brass knuckle work in close, blood, teeth and nose cartilage on the sidewalk, maybe a few ears ripped off of heads. Then vamoose before the lackluster LAPD Riot Squad made the scene. *Easy*.

Buzz checked his watch. 4:45; Howard Hughes was forty-five minutes late. It was a cool January day, light blue sky mixed with rain clouds over the Hollywood Hills. Howard got sex crazy in the winter and probably wanted to send him out on a poontang prowl: Schwab's Drugstore, the extra huts at Fox and Universal, Brownie snapshots of well-lunged girls naked from the waist up. His Majesty's yes or no, then standard gash contracts to the yes's – one-liners in RKO turkeys in exchange for room and board at Hughes Enterprises' fuck pads and frequent nighttime visits from The Man himself. Hopefully, bonus money was involved: he was still in hock to a bookie named Leotis Dineen, a six-foot-six jungle bunny who hated people of the Oklahoma persuasion worse than poison.

Buzz heard a door opening behind him; a woman's voice called out, 'Mr. Hughes will see you now, Mr. Meeks.'

The woman had stuck her head out of Herman Gerstein's doorway; if the Variety International boss was involved, then bonus dough was a possible. Buzz ambled over; Hughes was seated behind Gerstein's desk, scanning the pictures on the walls: semicheesecake shots of Gower Gulch starlets going nowhere. He was dressed in his usual chalk stripe business suit, sporting his usual scars – facial wounds from his latest airplane crash. The big guy cultivated them with moisturizing lotion – he thought they gave him a certain panache.

And no Herman Gerstein; and no Gerstein's secretary. Buzz dropped the formalities that Hughes required when other people were present. 'Getting any, Howard?'

Hughes pointed to a chair. 'You're my bird dog, you should know. Sit, Buzz. This is important.'

Buzz sat down and made a gesture that took in the whole office: cheescake, rococo wall tapestries and a knight's suit of armor hatrack. 'Why here, boss? Herman got a job for me?'

Hughes ignored the question. 'Buzz, how long have we been colleagues?'

'Goin' on five years, Howard.'

'And you've worked for me in various capacities?'

Buzz thought: fixer, bagman, pimp. 'That's right.'

'And during those five years have I given you profitable referrals to other people in need of your talents?'

'You surely have.'

Hughes cocked two finger pistols, his thumbs the hammers. 'Remember the premiere of *Billy the Kid*? The Legion of Decency was outside Grauman's shouting "Whoremonger" at me and little old ladies from Pasadena were throwing tomatoes at Jane Russell, Death threats, the whole megillah.'

Buzz crossed his legs and picked lint off a trouser cuff. 'I was there, boss.'

Hughes blew imaginary smoke off his fingertips. 'Buzz, that was a dicey evening, but did I ever describe it as dangerous, or *big*?'

'No, boss. You surely didn't.'

'When Bob Mitchum was arrested for those marijuana cigarettes and I called you in to help with the evidence, did I describe *that* as dangerous or big?'

'No.'

'And when *Confidential Magazine* was getting ready to publish that article that alleged that I like well-endowed underage girls, and you took your billy club down to the office to reason with the editor, did I describe *that* as dangerous or big?'

Buzz winced. It was late '47, the fuck pads were at full capacity, Howard was a pork-pouring dervish and was filming his teenaged conquests endorsing his prowess – a ploy aimed at getting him a date with Ava Gardner. One of the film cans was snatched out of the RKO editing department and ended up at *Confidential*; he broke three sets of scandal mag fingers quashing the story – then blew Hughes' bonus betting stupid on the Louis-Walcott fight. 'No, Howard. You didn't.'

Hughes shot Buzz with his finger guns. 'Pow! Pow! Pow! Turner. I am telling you that that seditious spectacle down on the street is both dangerous *and* big, and *that* is why I called you here.’

Buzz looked at the pilot/inventor/mogul, exhausted by his theatrics, wanting to get to it. ‘Howard, is there any cash money involved in all this big danger? And if you’re askin’ me to break some union heads, take another think, ’cause I am too old and too fat.’

Hughes laughed. ‘Solly Gelfman wouldn’t say that.’

‘Solly Gelfman is too goddamned kind. Howard, what do you want?’

Hughes draped his long legs over Herman Gerstein’s desk. ‘What’s your opinion of Communism, Buzz?’

‘I think it stinks. Why?’

‘The UAES down there, they’re all Commies and Pinkos and fellow travelers. The City of Los Angeles is getting a grand jury together to investigate Communist influence in Hollywood, concentrating on the UAES. A bunch of studio heads – myself, Herman and some others – have formed a group called “Friends of the American Way in Motion Pictures” to help the City out. I’ve contributed to the kitty, so has Herman. We thought you’d like to help out, too.’

Buzz laughed. ‘With a contribution out of my meager salary?’

Hughes aped the laugh, putting an exaggerated okie twang on it. ‘I knew appealing to your sense of patriotism was a long shot.’

‘Howard, you’re only loyal to money, pussy and airplanes, and I buy you as a good buddy of the American Way like I buy Dracula turning down a job at a blood bank. So this grand jury thing is one of the three, and my money’s on money.’

Hughes flushed and fingered his favorite plane crash scar, the one a girl from the Wisconsin boonies was in love with. ‘Brass tacks then, Turner?’

‘Yes, sir.’

Hughes said, ‘The UAES is in at Variety International, RKO, three others here on Gower and two of the majors. Their contract is ironclad and has five more years to run. That contract is costly, and escalation clauses will cost us a fortune over the next several years. Now the goddamn union is picketing for extras: bonuses, medical coverage and profit points. Totally unacceptable. *Totally*.’

Buzz locked eyes with Hughes. ‘So don’t renew their goddamned contract or let them strike.’

‘Not good enough. The escalation clauses are too costly, and they won’t strike – they’ll pull very subtle slow dances. When we signed with UAES in ’45, no one knew how big television was going to get. We’re getting reamed at the box office, and we want the Teamsters in – despite the goddamned Pinko UAES and their goddamned ironclad contract.’

‘How you gonna get around that contract?’

Hughes winked; scars and all, the act made him look like a big kid. ‘There’s a fine-print clause in the contract that states the UAES can be ousted if criminal malfeasance – and that includes treason – can be proved against them. And the Teamsters will work much cheaper, if certain payments are made to certain silent partners.'

Buzz winked. 'Like Mickey Cohen?'

'I can't shit a shitter.'

Buzz put his feet on Gerstein's desk, wishing he had a cigar to light up. 'So you want the UAES smeared, before the grand jury convenes or sometime during the proceedings. That way you can boot them on the malfeasance clause and put in Mickey's boys without them Commies suin' you – for fear of gettin' in more shit.'

Hughes nudged Buzz's feet off the desk with his own immaculate wing tips. '"Smeared" is a misnomer. In this case we're talking about patriotism as the handmaid to good business. Because the UAES are a bunch of card-carrying Pinko subversives.'

'And you'll give me a cash money bonus to –'

'And I'll give you a leave of absence from your duties at the plant and a cash bonus to help the grand jury investigating team out. They've already got two cops as political interrogators, and the Deputy DA who's running the show wants a third man to rattle for criminal skeletons and make money pickups. Buzz, there's two things you know exceedingly well: Hollywood and our fair city's criminal elements. You can be very valuable to this operation. Can I count you in?'

Dollar signs danced in Buzz's head. 'Who's the DA?'

'A man named Ellis Loew. He ran for his boss's job in '48 and lost.'

Jewboy Loew, he of the colossal hard-on for the State of California. 'Ellis is a sweetheart. The two cops?'

'An LAPD detective named Smith and a DA's Bureau man named Considine. Buzz, are you in?'

The old odds: 50–50, either Jack Dragna or Mal Considine set up the shooting that got him two in the shoulder, one in the arm and one through the left cheek of his ass. 'I don't know, boss. There's bad blood between me and that guy Considine. Cherchez la femme, if you follow my drift. I might have to need money *really* bad before I say yes.'

'Then I'm not worried. You'll get yourself into a bind – you always do.'

SEVEN

CAPTAIN AL DIETRICH said, ‘I got four phone calls about your little escapades in City territory night before last. At home yesterday. *On my day off.*’

Danny Upshaw stood at parade rest in front of the station commander’s desk, ready to deliver an oral rundown on the Goines homicide – a memorized pitch, to end in a plea for more Sheriff’s manpower and an LAPD liaison. While Dietrich fumed, he scotched the ending and concentrated on making his evidence compelling enough so that the old man would let him work the snuff exclusively for at least two more weeks.

‘. . . and if you wanted information on heroin pushers, you should have had *our* Narco guys contact *theirs*. You don’t beat up the pushers, colored or otherwise. And the manager of Bido Lito’s runs another club inside the County, and he’s very simpatico with the watch sergeant at Firestone. And you were seen drinking on duty, which I do myself, but under more discreet circumstances. Follow my drift?’

Danny tried to look sheepish – a little trick he’d taught himself – eyes lowered, face scrunched up. ‘Yes, sir.’

Dietrich lit a cigarette. ‘Whenever you call me sir, I know you’re jerking my chain. You’re very lucky I like you, Deputy. You’re very lucky I think your gifts exceed your arrogance. Report on your homicide. Omit Dr Layman’s findings, I read your summary and I don’t like gore this early in the morning.’

Danny drew himself ramrod stiff in reflex – he’d wanted to play up the horror aspects to impress Dietrich. ‘Captain, so far I’ve got two half-assed eyewitness descriptions of the killer – tall, gray-haired, middle-aged O+ blood typed from his semen – very common among white people. I don’t think either witness could ID the man from mugs – those jazz clubs are dark and have distorted lighting. The print man who dusted the transport car got no latents except those belonging to the owner and his girlfriend. He did eliminations based on Civil Defense records – both Albanese and the girlfriend had CD jobs during the war. I checked taxi logs around the time the body was dumped and the car abandoned, and nothing but couples leaving the after-hours clubs on the Strip were picked up. Albanese’s story of going back to darktown to look for his car has been verified by cab records, which eliminates him as a suspect. I spent all day yesterday and most of the evening recanvassing Central Avenue, and I couldn’t find any other eyewitnesses who saw Goines with the tall, gray-haired man. I looked for the two eyewitnesses I talked to before, thinking I’d try to get some kind of composite drawing out of them, but they were gone – apparently these jazz types are mostly fly-by-nights.'

Dietrich stubbed out his cigarette. 'What's your next move?'

'Captain, this is a fag killing. The better of my two eyewitnesses pegged Goines as a deviant, and the mutilations back it up. Goines was killed with a heroin OD. I want to run mugshots of known homos by Otis Jackson and other local pushers. I want –'

Dietrich was already shaking his head. 'No, you cannot go back to City territory and question the man you pistol-whipped, and LAPD Narco will never cooperate with a list of local pushers – thanks to your escapades.' He picked a copy of the *Herald* off his desk, folded it over and pointed to a one-column piece: 'Vagrant's Body Found Dumped Off Sunset Strip New Year's Eve.' 'Let's keep it at this – low-key, no name on the victim. We've got great duty here at this division, we thrive on tourism, and I don't want it bollixed up because some queer slashed another queer hophead trombone player. Comprende?'

Danny twisted his fingers together behind his back, then shot his CO a Vollmer maxim. 'Uniform codes of investigation are the moral foundation of criminology.'

Captain A1 Dietrich said, 'Human garbage is human garbage. Go to work, Deputy Upshaw.'

Danny went back to the squadroom and brainstormed in his cubicle, partition walls bracketing him, the station's other three detectives – all at least ten years his senior – typing and jabbering into phones, the noise coming at him like gangbusters, then subsiding into a lull that was like no sound at all.

A mug blowup of Harlan 'Buddy' Jastrow, Kern County axe murderer and the jolt that made him a cop, glared from the wall above his desk; some deputy who'd heard about his all-point want on the man had drawn a Hitler mustache on him, a speech balloon extending from his mouth: 'Hi! I'm Deputy Upshaw's nemesis! He wants to fry my ass, but he won't tell anybody why! Watch out for Upshaw! He's a college boy prima donna and he thinks his shit don't stink!' Captain Dietrich had discovered the artwork; he suggested that Danny leave it there as a reminder to hold on to his temper and not high-hat the other men. Danny agreed; word got back to him that his fellow detectives liked the touch – it made them think he had a sense of humor that he didn't have – and it made him angry and somehow able to brainstorm better.

So far, two and a half days in, he had the basics covered. The Central Avenue jazz strip had been canvassed around the clock; every bartender, bouncer, musician and general hepcat on the block had been braced – ditto the area where the body was dumped. Karen Hiltscher had called San Quentin and Lexington State Hospital for information on Goines and his buddies, if any, there; they were waiting the results of those queries.

Rousting H pushers inside City confines was out for the time being, but he could put in a memo to Sheriff's Narco for a list of dinks dealing in the County, press on that and see if he got any crossover leads back to LAPD turf. Goines' musicians' union would be reopening after the holiday this morning, and for now he had nothing but his instincts – what was true, what wasn't true, what was too farfetched to be true and so horrible that it *had* to be true. Going eyeball to eyeball with Buddy Jastrow, Danny reconstructed the crime.

The killer meets Goines somewhwere on the jazz block and talks him into geezing up – despite Marty's recent dope cure. He's got the Buick already staked out, door jimmied open or unlocked, wires unhooked and ready to be juiced together for a quick start. They drive someplace quiet, someplace equidistant from darktown and the Sunset Strip. The killer jacks enough horse into a vein near Goines' spine to pop his heart arteries, a terrycloth towel right there to shove into his mouth and keep blood from drenching him. Figure, by the Zombie barman's estimate, that the killer and Goines left Central Avenue around 12:15 to 12:45 A.M., took a half hour to drive to the destination, ten minutes to set the snuff up and accomplish it.

1:00 to 1:30 A.M.

The killer throttles his victim postmortem; fondles his genitals until they bruise, slashes his backside with the razor blade device, pulls out his eyes, screws him in the sockets at least twice, bites – or has an animal bite – through his stomach to the intestines, then cleans him up and drives him to Allegro Street, a rainy night, no moisture atop the body, the rain having stopped shortly after 3:00, the stiff discovered at 4:00 A.M.

An hour to an hour and forty-five minutes to mutilate the body, depending on the location of the killing ground.

The killer so sex-crazed that he ejaculates twice during that time.

The killer – maybe – taking a circuitous route to the Strip, rear-view mirror hooked backward so he can view the corpse he is chauffeuring.

Flaw in the reconstruction so far: Doc Layman's tenuous 'blood bait' theory doesn't fit. Well-trained vicious dogs did not jibe with the scenario – they would be too difficult to deal with, a nuisance, a mess, too noisy at a murder scene, too hard to contain during moments of psychotic duress. Which meant that the teeth marks on the torso had to be human, even though the mouth imprints were too large to have been made by a human being biting down.

Which meant that the killer bit and gnawed and swiveled and gnashed his teeth to get a purchase on his victim's entrails, sucking the flesh upward to leave inflamed borders as he ravaged –

Danny bolted out of his cubicle and back to the records alcove adjoining the squadroom. One battered cabinet held the division's Vice and sex offender files – West Hollywood crime reports, complaint reports, arrest reports and trouble call sheets dating back to the station's opening in '37.

Some of the folders were filed alphabetically under ‘Arrestee’; some under ‘Complainant’; some numerically by ‘Address of Occurrence.’ Some held mugshots, some didn’t; gaps in the ‘Arrestee’ folders indicated that the arrested parties had bribed deputies into stealing reports that might prove embarrassing to them – and West Hollywood was only a small fraction of County territory.

Danny spent an hour scanning ‘Arrestee’ reports, looking for tall, gray-haired, middle-aged men with violence in their MOs, knowing it was a long shot to keep him busy while Musician’s Local 3126 opened at 10:30. The slipshod paperwork – rife with misspellings, smudged carbons and near illiterate recountings of sex crimes – had him to the point of screaming at LASD incompetence; turgid accounts of toilet liaisons and high school boys bribed into back seat blow jobs kept his stomach churning with a bile that tasted like fried coffee grounds and last night’s six shots of bonded. The time got him four possibles – men aged forty-three to fifty-five, 6′ 1″ to 6′ 4″, with a total of twenty-one sodomy convictions among them – most of the beefs stemming from fruit tank punkings – jailhouse coitus interruptus that resulted in additional County charges being filed. At 10:20, he took the folders up to the dispatcher’s office and Karen Hiltscher, sweaty, his clothes wilted before the day had hardly started.

Karen was working the switchboard, plugging in calls, a headset attached to her Veronica Lake hairdo. The girl was nineteen, bottle blonde and busy – a civilian LASD employee flagged for the next woman’s opening at the Sheriff’s Academy. Danny pegged her as bad cop stuff: the Department’s mandatory eighteen-month jail tour would probably send her off the deep end and into the arms of the first male cop who promised to take her away from dyke matrons, Mex gang putas and white trash mothers in for child abuse. The heartthrob of the West Hollywood Substation wouldn’t last two weeks as a policewoman.

Danny straightened his tie and smoothed his shirtfront, his beefcake prelude to begging favors. ‘Karen? You busy, sweetheart?’

The girl noticed him and took off her headset. She looked pouty; Danny wondered if he should lube her with another dinner date. ‘Hi, Deputy Upshaw.’

Danny placed the sex offender files up against the switchboard. ‘What happened to “Hi, Danny”?’

Karen lit a cigarette à la Veronica Lake and coughed – she only smoked when she was trying to vamp the cops working day watch. ‘Sergeant Norris heard me call Eddie Edwards “Eddie” and said I should call him Deputy Edwards, that I shouldn’t be so familiar until I get rank.’

‘You tell Norris I said you can call me Danny.’

Karen made a face. ‘Daniel Thomas Upshaw is a nice name. I told my mother, and she said it was a really nice name, too.’

‘What else did you tell her about me?’

‘That you’re really sweet and handsome, but you’re playing hard to get. What’s in those files?’

‘Sex offender reports.’

‘For that homicide you’re working?’

Danny nodded. ‘Sweet, did Lex and Quentin call back on my Marty Goines queries?’

Karen made another face – half vixen, half coquette. ‘I would have told you. Why did you give me those reports?’

Danny leaned over the switchboard and winked. ‘I was thinking of dinner at Mike Lyman’s once I get some work cleared up. Feel like giving me a hand?’

Karen Hiltscher tried to return the wink, but her false eyelash stuck to the ridge below her eye, and she had to fumble her cigarette into an ashtray and pull it free. Danny looked away, disgusted; Karen pouted, ‘What do you want on those reports?’

Danny stared at the muster room wall so Karen couldn’t read his face. ‘Call Records at the Hall of Justice Jail and get the blood types for all four men. If you get anything other than O+ for them, drop it. On the O+’s, call County Parole for their last known addresses, rap sheets and parole disposition reports. Got it?’

Karen said, ‘Got it.’

Danny turned around and looked at his cut-rate Veronica Lake, her left eyelash plastered to her plucked left eyebrow. ‘You’re a doll. Lyman’s when I clear this job.’

Musician’s Local 3126 was on Vine Street just north of Melrose, a tan Quonset hut sandwiched between a doughnut stand and a liquor store. Hepcat types were lounging around the front door, scarfing crullers and coffee, half pints and short dogs of muscatel.

Danny parked and walked in, a group of wine guzzlers scattering to let him through. The hut’s interior was dank: folding chairs aligned in uneven rows, cigarette butts dotting a chipped linoleum floor, pictures from *Downbeat* and *Metronome* scotch-taped to the walls – half white guys, half Negroes, like the management was trying to establish jazzbo parity. The left wall held a built-in counter, file cabinets in back of it, a haggard white woman standing guard. Danny walked over, badge and Marty Goines mugshot strip out.

The woman ignored the badge and squinted at the strip. ‘This guy play trombone?’

‘That’s right. Martin Mitchell Goines. You sent him down to Bido Lito’s around Christmas.’

The woman squinted harder. ‘He’s got trombone lips. What did he do for you?’

Danny lied discreetly. ‘Parole violation.’

The slattern tapped the strip with a long red nail. ‘The same old same old. What can I do for you?’

Danny pointed to the filing cabinets. ‘His employment record, as far back as it goes.’

The woman about-faced, opened and shut drawers, leafed through folders, yanked one and gave the top page a quick scrutiny. Laying it down on the counter, she said, ‘A nowhere horn. From Squaresville.’

Danny opened the folder and read through it, picking up two gaps right away: ’38 to ’40 – Goines’ County jolt for marijuana possession: ’44 to ’48 – his Quentin time for the same offense. Since ’48 the entries had been sporadic: occasional two-week engagements at Gardena pokerino lounges and his fatal gig at Bido Lito’s. Prior to Goines’ first jail sentence he got only *very* occasional work – Hollywood roadhouse stints in ’36 and ’37. It was the early ’40s when Marty Goines was a trombone-playing fool.

Under his self-proclaimed banner, ‘Mad Marty Goines & His Horn of Plenty,’ he’d gigged briefly with Stan Kenton; in 1941, he pulled a tour with Wild Willie Monroe. There were a whole stack of pages detailing pickup band duty in ’42, ’43 and early ’44 – one-night stands with six- and eight-man combos playing dives in the San Fernando Valley. Only the bandleaders and/or club managers who did the hiring were listed on the employment sheets – there was no mention of other musicians.

Danny closed the folder; the woman said, ‘Bubkis, am I right?’

‘You’re right. Look, do you think any of these guys around here might have known – I mean know – Marty Goines?’

‘I can ask.’

‘Do it. Would you mind?’

The woman rolled her eyes up to heaven, drew a dollar sign in the air and pointed to her cleavage. Danny felt his hands clenching the edge of the counter and smelled last night’s liquor oozing out of his skin. He was about to come on strong when he remembered he was on City ground and his CO’s shit list. He fished in his pockets for cash, came up with a five and slapped it down. ‘Do it now.’

The slattern snapped up the bill and disappeared behind the filing cabinets. Danny saw her out on the sidewalk a few seconds later, talking to the bottle gang, then moving to the doughnut and coffee crowd. She zeroed in on a tall Negro guy holding a bass case, grabbed his arm and led him inside. Danny smelled stale sweat, leaves and mouthwash on the man, like the knee-length overcoat he was wearing was his permanent address. The woman said, ‘This is Chester Brown. He knows Marty Goines.’

Danny pointed Brown to the nearest row of chairs. Miss Hepcat went back to her counter and the bass man shuffled over, plopped down and whipped out a bottle of Listerine. He said, ‘Breakfast of champions,’ gulped, gargled and swallowed; Danny sat two chairs over, close enough to hear, far away enough to defuse the stink. ‘Do you know Marty Goines, Chester?’

Brown burped and said, ‘Why should I tell you?’

Danny handed him a dollar. ‘Lunch of champions.’

‘I feed three times a day, officer. Snitching gives me an appetite.’

Danny forked over another single; Chester Brown palmed it, chugalugged and patted the Lysterine bottle. ‘Helps the memory. And since I ain’t seen Marty since the war, you gonna need that memory.’

Danny got out his pen and notepad. ‘Shoot.’

The bass man took a deep breath. ‘I gigged pickup with Marty, back when he called himself the Horn of Plenty. Hunger huts out in the Valley when Ventura Boulevard was a fuckin’ beanfield. Half the boys toked sweet lucy, half took the needle route. Marty was strung like a fuckin’ dog.’

So far, his seven-dollar story was running true – based on Goines’ union jacket and what he knew of his criminal record. ‘Keep going, Chester.’

‘Weeell, Marty pushed reefers – not too good, since I heard he did time for it, and he was a righteous boss mothafuckin’ burglar. All the pickup boys that was strung was doin’ it. They’d grab purses off barstools and tables, get the people’s addresses and swipe their house keys while the bartender kept them drinkin’. One set you’d have no drummer, one set no trumpet, and so forth, ’cause they was utilizin’ their inside skinny to be burglarizin’ the local patrons. Marty did lots of that, solo stuff, steal a car during his break, burglarize, then be back for his next set. Like I tol’ you, he was a righteous boss mothafuckin’ burglar.’

Righteous new stuff – even to an ex-car thief cop who thought he knew most of the angles. ‘What years are you talking about, Chester? Think hard.’

Brown consulted his Listerine. ‘I’d say this was goin’ on from summer of ’43 to maybe sometime in ’44.’

Goines copped his second marijuana beef in April of ’44. ‘Did he work alone?’

‘You mean on the burglarizin’?’

‘Right. And did he have running partners in general?’

Chester Brown said, “Cept for this one kid, the Horn of Plenty was a righteous loner. He had this sidekick, though – a white blondy kid, tall and shy, loved jazz but couldn’t learn to play no instrument. He’d been in a fire and his face was all covered up in bandages like he was the fuckin’ mummy. Just a fuckin’ kid – maybe nineteen, twenty years old. Him and Marty pulled a righteous fuckin’ fuckload of burglaries together.’

Danny’s skin was tingling – even though the kid couldn’t be the killer – a youth in ’43–’44 wouldn’t be gray and middle-aged in ’50. ‘What happened to the sidekick, Chester?’

‘I dunno, but you sure askin’ a lot of questions for a parole violation, and you ain’t asked me where I think Marty might be stayin’.’

‘I was getting to that. You got any ideas?’

Brown shook his head. ‘Marty always stayed to himself. Never socialized with the boys out of the club.’

Danny dry-swallowed. ‘Is Goines a homosexual?’

‘Say what?’

‘Queer, fruit, homo! Did he fucking like boys!’

Brown killed the bottle of Listerine and wiped his lips. ‘You don’t gots to shout, and that’s a nasty thing to say about somebody never did you harm.’

Danny said, ‘Then answer my question.’

The bass man opened his instrument case. There was no fiddle inside, only bottles of Listerine Mouthwash. Chester Brown cracked the cap on one and took a long, slow drink. He said ‘That’s for Marty, ’cause I ain’t the fool you think I am, and I know he’s dead. And he wasn’t no queer. He may not have been much for trim, but he sure as fuck wasn’t no fuckin’ fruitfly.’

Danny took Chester Brown’s old news and rolled with it to a pay phone. First he called City/County R&I, learned that Martin Mitchell Goines had no detainments on suspicion of B&E and that no blond youths were listed as accomplices on his two marijuana rousts; no blond youths with distinguishing burn marks were arrested for burglary or narcotics violations anywhere in the San Fernando Valley circa 1942–1945. The call was a fishing expedition that went nowhere.

A buzz to the West Hollywood Station switchboard got him a pouty conversation with Karen Hiltscher, who said that the four long shots from the sex offender files proved to be just that – a toss of their jail records revealed that none of the men had O+ blood. Administrators had called in from both San Quentin and Lexington State Hospital; they said that Marty Goines was an institutional loner, and his counselor at Lex stated that he was assigned a Fed case worker in LA – but hadn’t reported to him yet, and left no word about where he would be staying when he got to Los Angeles. Even though the lead was probably a big nothing, Danny told Karen to check the station’s burglary file for B&E men with jazz musician backgrounds and for mention of a burned-face burglar boy – a jazz aficionado. Rankling, the girl agreed; Danny hung up thinking he should raise the dreaded dinner ante from Mike Lyman’s to the Coconut Grove to keep her happy.

At just after 1:00 P.M. there was nothing he could do but pound familiar pavement one more time. Danny drove to darktown and widened his canvassing area, talking Goines and the gray-haired man to locals on the side streets adjoining Central Avenue, getting four solid hours of nothing; at dusk he drove back to West Hollywood, parked on Sunset and Doheny and walked the Strip, west to east, east to west, residential streets north into the hills, south to Santa Monica Boulevard, wondering the whole time why the killer picked Allegro Street as his place to dump the body. He wondered if the killer lived nearby, desecrated Goines’ corpse for that much more time and chose Allegro so he could gloat over the police and their efforts to nail him – the abandoned car a partial ruse to convince them he lived elsewhere. That theory played with led to others – subjective thinking – a Hans Maslick fundamental. Danny thought of the killer with his real car parked nearby for a quick getaway; the killer walking the Strip New Year's morning, sheltered by swarms of revelers, depleted from his awful back-to-back explosions. And that was when it got scary.

In a famous essay, Maslick described a technique he had developed while undergoing analysis with Sigmund Freud. It was called Man Camera, and involved screening details from the perpetrator's viewpoint. Actual camera angles and tricks were employed; the investigator's eyes became a lens capable of zooming in and out, freezing close-ups, selecting background motifs to interpret crime scene evidence in an aesthetic light. Danny was crossing Sunset and Horn when the idea struck him – transpose 3:45 New Year's morning to now, himself as a sex slasher, walking home or to his car or to an all-night market to get calm again. But he didn't see the other people strolling the Strip or lining up to get in the Mocambo or sitting at the counter at Jack's Drive Inn. He went straight for Marty Goines' eyes and guts and groin, an ultra close-up in Technicolor, his preautopsy prep magnified ten million times. A car swerved in front of him then; he twitched with heebie-jeebies, saw a kaleidoscope of Coleman the alto man, his look-alike from the movie with Karen, Tim. When he pointed his Man Camera at the passerby he was supposed to be viewing, they were all gargoyles, all wrong.

It took long moments for him to calm down, to get it right. He hadn't eaten since yesterday; he'd postponed his bourbon ration in order to tread the Strip clearheaded. Hitting late-night clubs and restaurants with questions on a tall, gray-haired man New Year's would be straightforward police work to keep him chilled.

He did it.

And got more nothing.

Two hours' worth.

The same accounts at Cyrano's, Dave's Blue Room, Ciro's, the Mocambo, La Rue, Coffee Bob's, Sherry's, Bruno's Hideaway and the Movieland Diner: every single place was packed until dawn New Year's. No one remembered a solitary, tall, gray-haired man.

At midnight, Danny retrieved his car and drove to the Moonglow Lounge for his four shots. Janice Modine, his favorite snitch, was hawking cigarettes to a thin weeknight crowd: lovebirds necking in wraparound booths, dancers necking while they slow-grinded to jukebox ballads. Danny took a booth that faced away from the bandstand; Janice showed up a minute later, holding a tray with four shot glasses and an ice water backup.

Danny knocked the drinks back – bam, bam, bam, bam, eyes away from Janice so she'd take the hint and leave him alone – no gratitude for the prostie beefs he'd saved her from, no overheard skinny on Mickey C. – useless because West Hollywood Division's most auspicious criminal was greasing most of West Hollywood's finest. The ploy didn't work; the girl squirmed in front of him, one spaghetti strap sliding off her shoulder, then the other. Danny waited for the first blast of heat, got it and saw all the colors of the lounge go from slightly wrong to right. He said, 'Sit down and tell me what you want before your dress falls off.'

Janice hunched into her straps and sat across the table from him. 'It's about John, Mr. Upshaw. He was arrested again.'

John Lembeck was Janice's lover/pimp, a car thief specializing in custom orders: stolen chassis for the basic vehicle, parts stolen to exact specifications. He was a San Berdoo native like Danny, knew from the grapevine that a County plainclothes comer used to clout cars all over Kern and Visalia and kept his mouth shut about it when he got rousted on suspicion of grand theft auto. Danny said, 'Parts or a whole goddamn car?'

Janice pulled a Kleenex out of her neckline and fretted it. 'Upholstery.'

'City or County?'

'I – I think County. San Dimas Substation?'

Danny winced. San Dimas had the most rowdy detective squad in the Department; in '46 the daywatch boss, jacked on turpen hydrate, beat a wetback fruit picker to death. 'That's the County. What's his bail?'

'No bail, because of John's last GTA. See, it's a parole violation, Mr. Upshaw. John's scared because he says the policemen there are really mean, and they made him sign a confession on all these cars he didn't really steal. John said I should tell you a San Berdoo homeboy who loves cars should go to bat for another San Berdoo homey who loves cars. He didn't say what it meant, but he said I should tell you.'

Pull strings to save his career from its first hint of dirt: call the San Dimas bulls, tell them John Lembeck was his trusted snitch and that a nigger hot car gang had a jail bid out on him, shiv time if the stupid shit ever made it to a County lockup. If Lembeck was docile at the holding tank, they'd let him off with a beating. 'Tell John I'll get on it in the morning.'

Janice had pinched her Kleenex into little wispy shreds. 'Thanks, Mr. Upshaw. John also said I should be nice to you.'

Danny stood up, feeling warm and loose, wondering if he should muscle Lembeck for going cuntish on him. 'You're always nice to me, sweetheart. That's why I have my nightcap here.'

Janice vamped him with wide baby blues. 'He said I should be *really* nice to you.'

'I don't want it.'

'I mean, like really *extra* nice.'

Danny said, 'It's wrong,' and placed his usual dollar tip on the table.

EIGHT

MAL WAS IN his office, on his twelfth full reading of Dr. Saul Lesnick's psychiatric files.

It was just after 1:00 A.M.; the DA's Bureau was a string of dark cubicles, illuminated only by Mal's wall light. The files were spread over his desk, interspersed with pages of notes splashed with coffee. Celeste would be asleep soon – he could go home and sleep in the den without her pestering him, sex offers because at this time of the morning he was her only friend, and giving him her mouth meant they could talk until one of them provoked a fight. Offers he'd accept tonight: the dirt in the files had him riled up like back in the Ad Vice days, when he put surveillance on the girls before they took down a whorehouse – the more you knew about who they were the better chance you had to get them to finger their pimps and money men. And after forty-eight hours of paper prowling, he felt he had a pulse on the Reds in the UAES.

Deluded.

Traitorous.

Perverse.

Cliché shouters, sloganeers, fashion-conscious pseudoidealists. Locusts attacking social causes with the wrong information and bogus solutions, their one legit gripe – the Sleepy Lagoon case – almost blown through guilt by association: fellow travelers soliciting actual Party members for picketing and leaflet distribution, nearly discrediting everything the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee said and did. Hollywood writers and actors and hangers-on spouting cheap trauma, Pinko platitudes and guilt over raking in big money during the Depression, then penancing the bucks out to spurious leftist causes. People led to Lesnick's couch by their promiscuity and dipshit politics.

Deluded.

Stupid.

Selfish.

Mal took a belt of coffee and ran a mental overview of the files, a last paraphrase before getting down to tagging the individual brain trusters he and Dudley Smith should be interrogating and the ones who should be singled out for their as yet unfound operative: Loew's project possibility, his favored tool already. What he got was a lot of people with too much money and too little brains pratfalling through the late '30s and '40s – betraying themselves, their lovers, their country and their own ideals, two events galvanizing their lunacy, spinning them out of their orbit of parties, meetings and sleeping around:

The Sleepy Lagoon case.

The 1947 House Un-American Activities Committee probe into Communist influence in the entertainment industry.

And the funny thing was – the two events gave the Pinkos some credibility, some vindication.

In August of 1942 a Mexican youth named José Diaz was beaten to death and run over with a car out at the Sleepy Lagoon – a grass-knolled meeting place for gang members in the Williams Ranch area of Central LA. The incident was allegedly sparked by Diaz being ejected from a nearby party earlier that night; he had allegedly insulted several members of a rival youth gang, and seventeen of them hauled him out to the Lagoon and snuffed him. Evidence against them was scant; the LAPD investigation and trial were conducted in an atmosphere of hysteria: the ’42–’43 zoot suit riots had produced a huge wave of anti-Mexican sentiment throughout Los Angeles. All seventeen boys received life sentences, and the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee – UAES brain trusters, Communist Party members, leftists and straight citizens – held rallies, circulated petitions and raised funds to employ a legal team – which ultimately got all seventeen pardoned. Hypocrisy within the idealism: Lesnick’s male patients, hearts bleeding over the poor railroaded Mexicans, complained to him of Communist Party white women screwing ‘proletariat’ taco benders – then assailed themselves as rabid bigots moments later.

Mal made a mental note to talk to Ellis Loew about the Sleepy Lagoon angle: Ed Satterlee wanted to procure SLDC rally pictures from the Feds – but since the kids were exonerated, it might backfire. Ditto the info the shrinkees poured out over ’47 HUAC. Better for him and Dudley to keep it sub rosa, not jeopardize Lesnick’s complicity and use the info only by implication: to squeeze the UAESers’ suspected weak points. Going with the HUAC stuff full-bore might jeopardize their grand jury: J. Parnell Thomas, the Committee’s chairman, was currently doing time on bribery charges; hotshot Hollywood stars had protested HUAC’s methods and Lesnick’s files were rife with nonpetty trauma deriving from the spring of ’47 – suicides, attempted suicides, frantic betrayals of friendship, booze and sex to kill the pain. If the ’50 LA City grand jury team attempted to use the juice of ’47 HUAC – *their first precedent* – they might engender sympathy for UAES members and subsidiary hostile witnesses. Better not to dip into old HUAC testimony for conspiracy evidence; imperative that the lefties be denied a chance to boo-hoo the grand jury’s tactics to the press.

Mal felt his overview sink in as solid: good evidence, good thoughts on what to use, what to hold back. He killed his coffee and went to the individuals – the half dozen of the twenty-two most ripe for interrogation and operation.

His first was a maybe. Morton Ziffkin: UAES member, CP member,

member of eleven other organizations classified as Commie fronts. Family man – a wife and two grown daughters. A highly paid screenwriter – 100 thou a year until he told HUAC to fuck off – now working for peanuts as a film splicer. Underwent analysis with Doc Lesnick out of a stated desire to 'explore Freudian thought' and allay his impulses to cheat on his wife with an onslaught of CP women 'out for my gelt – not my body.' A rabid, bad-tempered Marxist ideologue – a good man to bait on the witness stand – but he'd probably never snitch on his fellow Pinks. He sounded intelligent enough to make Ellis Loew seem like a fool, and his HUAC stint gave him an air of martyrdom. A maybe.

Mondo Lopez, Juan Duarte and Sammy Benavides, former Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee bigshots, recruited out of the Sinarquistas – a zoot suit gang given to sporting Nazi regalia – by CP bosses. Now token ethnics in the UAES hierarchy, the three spent the '40s throwing it to condescending white lefty women – enraged over their airs, but grateful for the action; more enraged at being told by their 'puto' cell leader to 'explore' that rage by seeing a psychiatrist. Benavides, Duarte and Lopez were currently working at Variety International Pictures, half the time as stagehands, half the time playing Indians in cheapy cowboy pictures. They were also serving as picket bosses on Gower Gulch – the closest thing the UAES had to muscle – pitiful when compared to the Mickey Cohen goons the Teamsters were employing. Mal pegged them as pussy hounds who fell into clover, the Sleepy Lagoon job their only real political concern. The three probably had criminal records and connections stemming from their zoot suit days, a good approach for the team's troubleshooter – if Ellis Loew ever found one.

Now the brain trust got ugly.

Reynolds Loftis, movie character actor, snitched to HUAC by his former homo lover Chaz Minear, a Hollywood script hack. Loftis did not suspect that Minear ratted him, and in no way reciprocated the finking. Both men were still with the UAES, still friendly at their meetings and at other political functions they attended. Minear, guilt-crazed over his fink duty, had said to Doc Lesnick: 'If you knew who he left me for, you'd understand why I did it.' Mal had scanned both Loftis' and Minear's files for more mention of 'he' and came up empty; there was a large gap in Lesnick's Loftis transcripts – from the years '42 to '44 – and Minear's pages bore no other mention of the third edge of the triangle. Mal recalled Loftis from westerns he'd taken Stefan to: a tall, lanky, silver-haired man, handsome like your idealized U.S. senator. And a Communist, and a subversive, and a hostile HUAC witness and self-described switch-hitter. A potential friendly witness par excellence – next to Chaz Minear, the Red with the most closeted skeletons.

And finally the Red Queen.

Claire De Haven did not possess a file, and several of the men had described her as too smart, strong and good to need a psychiatrist. She also screwed half her CP cell and all the SLDC bigwigs, including Benavides, Lopez and Duarte, who worshiped her. Chaz Minear was in her thrall, despite his homosexuality; Reynolds Loftis spoke of her as the ‘only woman I’ve ever really loved.’ Mal picked up on her smarts secondhand: Claire moved behind the scenes, tended not to shout slogans and retained the political and legal connections of her late father, a stolid right-wing counsel to the LA business establishment. Minear speculated to Doc Lesnick that her old man’s political juice kept her from being subpoenaed by HUAC in ’47 – and not one other witness mentioned her name. Claire De Haven screwed like a rabbit, but didn’t come off as a slut; she inspired the loyalty of homosexual screenwriters, switch-hitter actors, Mexican stagehands and Commies of all stripes.

Mal turned off the light, reminding himself to write Doc Lesnick a memo: all the files ended in the summer of ’49 – five months ago. Why? Walking out to the elevator, he wondered what Claire De Haven looked like, where he could get a picture, if he could get his decoy to operate her out of her lust – politics and sex to nail the woman as a friendly witness, the Red Queen squeezed like a Chinatown whore, captain’s bars dancing his way at the end of a stag movie.

NINE

BAGMAN TIME.

His first stop was Variety International, where Herman Gerstein gave him a five-minute lecture on the evils of Communism and handed him a fat envelope stuffed with C-notes; stop two was a short stroll through the Teamster and UAES picket lines over to Hollywood Prestige National Pictures, where Wally Voldrich, the head of Security, kicked loose with a doughnut box full of fifties dusted with powdered sugar and chocolate sprinkles. Howard's ten thou was already in his pocket; Mickey C.'s contribution to the Friends of the American Way in Motion Pictures would be his last pickup of the morning.

Buzz took Sunset out to Santa Monica Canyon, to the bungalow hideaway where Mickey palled with his stooges, entertained poon and hid out from his wife. The money in his pocket had him feeling brash: if Mal Considine was around when he dropped the bag with Ellis Loew, he'd rattle his cage to see what the four years since Laura had done to his balls. If it felt right, he'd tell Howard he'd sign on to fight Communism – Leotis Dineen was pressing him for a grand and a half, and he was a bad jigaboo to fuck with.

Cohen's bungalow was a bamboo job surrounded by specially landscaped tropical foliage, camouflage for his triggermen when the Mick and Jack Dragna were skirmishing. Buzz parked in the driveway behind a white Packard ragtop, wondering where Mickey's bullet-proofed Caddy was and who'd be around to hand him his envelope. He walked up to the door and rang the buzzer; a woman's deep-South voice drifted out a window screen. 'Come in.'

Buzz opened the door and saw Audrey Anders sitting at a living room table, hitting the keys of an adding machine. No makeup, dungarees and one of Mickey's monogrammed dress shirts didn't dent her beauty at all; she actually looked better than she did New Year's morning, pink party dress and high heels, kicking Tommy Sifakis in the balls. 'Hello, Miss Anders.'

Audrey pointed to a Chinese lacquered coffee table; a roll of bills secured by a rubber band was resting smack in the middle. 'Mickey said to tell you mazel tov, which I guess means he's glad you're in with this grand jury thing.'

Buzz sat down in an easy chair and put his feet up, his signal that he meant to stay and look awhile. 'Mickey takin' advantage of that master's degree of yours?'

Audrey tapped out a transaction, checked the paper the machine expelled and wrote on a pad, all very slowly. She said, ‘You believe the program notes at the El Rancho Burlesque?’

‘No, I just made you for the brains.’

‘The brains to keep books for a lending operation?’

‘Loan shark’s more the word, but I meant brains in general.’

Audrey pointed to Buzz’s feet. ‘Planning to stay awhile?’

‘Not long. You really got a master’s degree?’

‘Jesus, we keep asking each other these questions. No, I do not have a master’s degree, but I do have a certificate in accounting from a second-rate teachers college in Jackson, Mississippi. Satisfied?’

Buzz didn’t know if the woman wanted him out the door pronto or if she welcomed the interruption – totaling shark vig on a fine winter day was his idea of hunger. He played his only ace, his one opening to see what she thought of him. ‘Lucy Whitehall okay?’

Audrey lit a cigarette and blew two perfect smoke rings. ‘Yes. Sol Gelfman has her tucked away at his place in Palm Springs, and Mickey had some friend of his on the Sheriff’s Department issue something called a restraining order. If Tommy bothers Lucy, the police will arrest him. She told me she’s grateful for what you did. I didn’t tell her you did it for money.’

Buzz ignored the jibe and smiled. ‘Tell Lucy hi for me. Tell her she’s so pretty I might’ve done it for free.’

Audrey laughed. ‘In a pig’s eye you would. Meeks, what is between you and Mickey?’

‘I’ll answer that one with a question. Why you wanta know?’

Audrey blew two more rings and ground out her cigarette. ‘Because he talked about you for an hour straight last night. Because he said he can’t figure out if you’re the stupidest smart man or the smartest stupid man he ever met, and he can’t figure out why you blow all your money with colored bookies when you could bet with him for no vig. He said that only stupid men love danger, but you love danger and you’re not stupid. He said he can’t figure out whether you’re brave or crazy. Does any of this make sense to you?’

Buzz saw the words inscribed on his tombstone, all crimped together so they’d fit. He answered straight, not caring who Audrey told. ‘Miss Anders, I take risks Mickey’s afraid to, so I make him feel safe. He’s a little guy and I’m a little guy, and maybe I’m just a tad better with my hands and that baton of mine. Mickey’s got more to lose than me, so he runs scared more than me. And if I’m crazy, it means he’s smart. You know what surprises me about this talk we’re havin’, Miss Anders?’

The question interrupted Audrey starting to smile – a big beam that showed off two slightly crooked teeth and a cold sore on her lower lip. ‘No, what?’

‘That Mickey thinks enough of you to talk to you about stuff like that.

That surely does surprise me.'

Audrey's smile fizzled out. 'He loves me.'

'You mean he appreciates the favors you do him. Like when I was a cop, I skimmed that good old white powder and sold it to Mickey, not Jack D. We got to be as friendly as anybody and Mickey can be 'cause of that. I'm just surprised he plays it that close with a woman is all.'

Audrey lit another cigarette; Buzz saw it as cover for bad thoughts, good banter flushed down the toilet. He said, 'I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be so personal.'

Audrey's eyes ignited. 'Oh yes you did, Meeks. You *surely* did.'

Buzz got up and walked around the room, checking out the strange chink furnishings, wondering who'd picked them out, Mickey's wife or this ex-stripper/book-keeper who was making him feel jumpy, like a gun would go off if he said the wrong thing. He tried small talk. 'Nice stuff. Hate to see Jack D. put bullet holes in it.'

Audrey's voice was shaky. 'Mickey and Jack are talking about burying the hatchet. Jack wants to go in on a deal with him. Maybe dope, maybe a casino in Vegas. Meeks, I love Mickey and he loves me.'

Buzz heard the last words as bang, bang, bang, bang. He picked up the cash roll, stuffed it in his pocket and said, 'Yeah, he loves takin' you to the Troc and the Mocambo, 'cause he knows every man there is droolin' for you and afraid of him. Then it's an hour at your place and back to the wife. It's real nice the two of you talk every once in awhile, but as far as I'm concerned you're gettin' short shrift from a Jewboy who ain't got the brains to know what he's got.'

Audrey's jaw dropped; her cigarette fell into her lap. She picked it up and stubbed it out. 'Are you *this* crazy or *that* stupid?'

Bang, bang, bang, bang – cannon loud. Buzz said, 'Maybe I just trust you,' walked over and kissed Audrey Anders full on the lips, one hand holding her head, cradling it. She didn't open her mouth and she didn't embrace him back and she didn't push him away. When Buzz snapped that it was all he was going to get, he broke the clinch and floated to the car with quicksand under his feet.

It was bang, bang, bang, bang on the drive downtown, ricochets, old dumb moves kicked around to see how they stood up next to this doozie.

In '33 he'd charged six picket bulls outside MGM, caught nail-studded baseball bats upside his arms, took the boys out with his baton and caught tetanus – stupid, but the audaciousness helped get him his LAPD appointment.

Early in '42 he worked with the Alien Squad, rounding up Japs and relocating them to the horse paddocks at Santa Anita Racetrack. He grabbed a wiseacre kid named Bob Takahashi just as he was en route to get his ashes hauled for the first time, felt sorry for him and took him on a six-day toot in Tijuana – booze, whores, the dog track and a teary farewell at the border – bad Bob hightailing it south, a slant-eyed stranger in a round-eyed land. Very stupid – but he covered his absent ass by shaking down a suspicious-looking car outside San Diego, busting four grasshoppers transporting a pound of premium maryjane. The punks had a total of nineteen outstanding LA City warrants between them; he got a commendation letter and four felony notches on his gun. Another shit play turned into clover.

But the granddaddy was his brother Fud. Three days out of the Texas State Pen, Fud shows up at the door of then Detective-Sergeant Turner Meeks, informs him that he just stuck up a liquor store in Hermosa Beach, pistol-whipped the proprietor and intended to pay Buzz back the six yards he owed him with the proceeds. Just as Fud was digging through his blood-soaked paper bag, there was a knock at the door. Buzz looked through the spy hole, saw two blue uniforms, tagged blood as thicker than water and fired his own service revolver into the living room wall four times. The bluesuits started knocking down the door; Buzz hustled Fud to the cellar, locked him in, smashed the window leading to the back porch and trampled his landlady's prize petunias. When the patrolmen made it inside, Buzz told them he was LAPD and the perpetrator was a hophead he'd sent to Big Q – Davis Haskins – in reality a recent overdose in Billings, Montana; he'd picked up the info working an extradition job. The blues fanned out, called for backup and surrounded the neighborhood until dawn; Davis Haskins made the front page of the *Mirror* and *Daily News;* Buzz shat bricks for a week and kept Fud docile in the cellar with whiskey, baloney sandwiches and smut mags swiped from the Central Vice squadroom. And he walked on the caper, white trash chutzpah carrying him through, no one informing the police powers that be that a dead man robbed the Happy Time Liquor Store, drove a stolen La Salle up to the front door of Sergeant Turner 'Buzz' Meeks, then shot out his living room wall and escaped on foot. When Fud bought it a year later at Guadalcanal, his squad leader sent Buzz a letter; baby brother's last words were something like, 'Tell Turner thanks for the fur books and sandwiches.'

Stupid, crazy, sentimental, lunatic dumb.

But kissing Audrey Anders was worse.

Buzz parked in the City Hall lot, transferred all the cash to his doughnut box and took it upstairs to Ellis Loew's office. Going in the door, he saw Loew, Big Dudley Smith and Mal Considine sitting around a table, all of them talking at once, garbled stuff about cop decoys. No one glanced up; Buzz eyeballed Considine four years after he gave him the cuckold's horns. The man still looked more like a lawyer than a cop; his blond hair was going gray; there was something nervous and raggedy-assed about him.

Buzz rapped on the door and tossed the box onto the chair holding it open. The three looked over; he fixed his eyes on Considine. Ellis Loew nodded, all business; Dudley Smith said, ‘Hello, Turner, old colleague,’ all blarney; Considine eyed him back, all curiosity, like he was examining a reptile specimen he’d never seen before.

They held the look. Buzz said, ‘Hello, Mal.’

Mal Considine said, ‘Nice tie, Meeks. Who’d you roll for it?’

Buzz laughed. ‘How’s the ex, Lieutenant? She still wearin’ crotchless panties?’

Considine stared, his mouth twitching. Buzz stared back, his mouth dry.

Mexican standoff.

50–50, Considine or Dragna.

Maybe he’d hold off just a tad, cut the Red Menace just a bit more slack before he signed on.

TEN

IT WAS TWO nights of bad dreams and a day's worth of dead ends that had him making the run to Malibu Canyon.

Driving northbound on Pacific Coast Highway, Danny chalked it up as an elimination job: talk to the men on the list of fighting dog breeders he'd gotten from Sheriff's Central Vice, make nice with them and get educated confirmations or denials on Doc Layman's animal-aided killing/blood bait thesis. No such beast existed in the County Homicide files or with City R&I; if the breeders, men who would know if anyone did, laughed the theory off as nonsense, then maybe tonight he could sleep without the company of snapping hounds, entrails and screechy jazz.

It started this way:

After the Moonglow Lounge and Janice Modine's pass, he'd gotten an idea – build his own file on the Goines snuff, write down every shred of information, glom carbons of the autopsy and print reports, stick Dietrich with lackluster summaries and concentrate on *his* paperwork, *his* case – the 187 he'd follow up even if he didn't nail the bastard before the skipper pulled the plug. He drove to the Hollywood Ranch Market then, grabbed a stack of cardboard cartons, bought manila folders, colored side tabs, yellow legal pads, typing and carbon paper and drove home with them – allowing himself two extra shots of I. W. Harper as a reward for his dedication. The booze put him out on the couch – and it got hairy.

Goines' mutilations in wraparound Technicolor. Guts and big bruised penises, so close up that at first he couldn't tell what they were. Dogs rooting in the gore, him right there, Man Camera filming it until he joined the brood and started biting.

Two nights of it.

With a day of shit in between.

He put the first night's dream off as scare stuff caused by a frustrating case and no food in his system. In the morning he got double bacon, eggs, hash browns, toast and sweet rolls at the Wilshire Derby, drove downtown to the Sheriff's Central Bureau and scanned Homicide files. No animal-aided murders were on record; the only homosexual slashings even remotely similar to Marty Goines' were open-and-shut jobs – lovers' spats where the perpetrator was captured, still serving time or executed by the State of California.

Shitwork was next.

He called Karen Hiltscher at the Station and sweet-talked her into making phone queries of other musician's locals that might have sent Marty Goines out on gigs, and LA area jazz clubs that might have hired his trombone independently. He told her to ring the other LASD station houses and solicit run-throughs of their burglary files: paper scans for jazz musician/burglars who might prove to be known associates of Goines. The girl reluctantly agreed; he blew kisses into the phone, promised to call for results later and drove back to Local 3126.

There, the counterwoman gave him another look at the Horn of Plenty's employment record, and Danny copied down club and roadhouse addresses going back to Mad Marty's first gig in '36. He spent the rest of the day driving by jazz spots that were now laundromats and hamburger joints; jazz spots that had changed hands a half dozen times; jazz spots that had retained the same owner for years. And he got the same response across the board: a shrug at Goines' mugshot strip, the words 'Marty who?', a deadpan on the topics of jazzbo burglars and the longshot of a burglar kid with his face bandaged up.

At dusk, he called Karen for her results. Goose egg: more 'Marty who?', the burglar files yielding eleven names – seven negroes, two Mexicans, two white men whose jail records revealed AB+ and O− blood. Pure undiluted shit.

He remembered his promise to Janice Modine then, called the San Dimas Substation and talked to the boss of the Auto Theft Detail. John Lembeck was still in custody there, being sweated over a series of GTAs. Danny told the man his snitch story, stressing the angle that Lembeck was dead meat if he made it to the County jail. The squad boss agreed to roll him up for release; Danny could tell Jungle John was in for a severe thumping first – but not half as bad as he was going to give him.

Then it was back to his apartment, four shots of I. W. and work on the file, side tabs labeled and stuck to folders – 'Interviews,' 'Eliminations,' 'Chronology,' 'Canvassing,' 'Physical Evidence,' 'Background.' One thought burned throughout the writing of a detailed summary: where was Marty Goines living between the time of his release from Lexington State and his death? The thought led to a phone call – the night switchboard at the hospital for a list of other men released to California around the same time as Goines. The answer, after holding the line long distance for twenty minutes – none.

Exhaustion, writer's cramp and no sleep followed. Four bonus shots and a sheet-thrashing roll on the bed got him unconsciousness and the dogs again, the Man Camera with teeth – his – biting at a whole morgueful of O + stiffs lined up on gurneys. Morning and another big breakfast convinced him to make the elimination; he called Central Vice, got the list of breeders and was warned to go easy: the dog farms in Malibu Canyon were run by cracker strongarms, cousins from the Tennessee sticks. They bred their pit bulls there, which was not against the law; they only fought them in South LA, and none of the men had been convicted of dog fighting since the war.

Danny turned off Pacific Coast Highway at the Canyon Road and climbed inland through scrub-covered hills laced with little streams and valleys. The road was a narrow two-laner, the left side featuring kiddie camps, stables and occasional nightclubs, the right a wood retaining wall and a long drop into green-brown bush forest. Signs pointing into the scrub indicated clearings and houses and people; Danny saw the roofs of villas, Tudor steeples, the chimneys of extravagant log cabins. Gradually, the quality of the real estate declined – no ocean view, no sea breeze, the scrub thicker and thicker, no dwellings at all. When he hit the top of Malibu Ridge and started rolling downhill, he knew the dog farms had to be nearby – his vista was now dotted with tarpapered shacks and the heat was zooming up as the shade-producing foliage thinned out.

The Vice officer he'd talked to had the three farms tagged as a mile in on a dirt access road marked by a sign: PIT PUPS – AUTO PARTS. Danny found the sign just as the two-lane leveled off into a long, flat stretch, the San Fernando Valley in the distance. He swung onto it and wracked his Chevy's undercarriage for three-quarters of a mile, sharecropper-like shacks on both sides of him. Then he saw them – three cinderblock huts encircled by a barbed-wire fence; three dirt yards littered with axles, drive shafts and cylinder blocks; three individually penned broods of squat, muscular dogs.

Danny pulled up to the fence, pinned his badge to his jacket front and tapped the horn – a little courtesy to the hut dwellers. The dogs barked at the noise; Danny walked over to the nearest stretch of wire and looked at them.

They weren't the dogs of his dreams – black and sleek with flashing white teeth – they were brindle and tan and speckled terriers, barrel-chested, jaw-heavy and all muscle. They didn't have the outsized genitalia of his dogs; their barks weren't death snaps; they weren't ugly – they were just animals bred for a mean utility. Danny eyed the ones penned up closest to him, wondering what they'd do if he gave them a pat on the head, then told them he was glad they didn't look like some other dogs he knew.

'Rape-o, Hacksaw and Night Train. Them dogs won sixteen altogether. Southern California record for one man's stable.'

Danny turned to face the voice. A very fat man in overalls was standing in the doorway of the shack just off to his left; he was wearing thick glasses and probably couldn't see too well. Danny unpinned his badge and slipped it in his pocket, thinking the man was garrulous and ripe for an insurance agent ploy. 'Can I talk to you for a second about your dogs?'

The man ambled to the fence, squinting and blinking. He said, 'Booth Conklin. You in the market for a good pit hound?'

Danny looked into Booth Conklin's eyes, one a free-floating waller, the other cloudy and pocked with cataracts. 'Dan Upshaw. You could start me off with some information on them.'

Conklin said, 'I kin do better than that,' waddled to a speckled dog's pen and flipped the latch. The beast made a dash, hit the fence with his front paws and started licking the wire. Danny knelt and scratched his snout, a slick pink tongue sliding over his fingers. He said, ‘Good boy, good fellow,’ putting off Doc Layman’s theories as long longshots then and there.

Booth Conklin waddled back, holding a long piece of wood. ‘First lesson with pits is don’t talk baby talk to ’em or they won’t respect you. Rape-o here’s a leg pumper, just wants to get your trousers wet. My cousin Wallace named him Rape-o ’cause he’ll mount anything with bad intentions. Down, Rape-o, down!’

The pit bull kept nuzzling Danny’s fingers; Booth Conklin whacked him in the ass with his stick. Rape-o let out a shrill yowl, cowered away and started rubbing his backside in the dirt, all fours up and treading air. Danny felt his fists clenching; Conklin stuck the stick in Rape-o’s mouth. The dog clamped down his jaws; Conklin lifted him up and held him out at arm’s length. Danny gasped at the feat of strength.

Conklin spoke calmly, like holding seventy pounds of dog at the end of a stick was everyday stuff. ‘Pits dish it out, so they gotta be able to take it. I won’t sell you no dog if you gonna coddle it.’

Rape-o was hanging stock-still, groans vibrating from his throat. Every muscle was perfectly outlined; Danny thought that the animal was perfect mean beauty. He said, ‘I live in an apartment, so I can’t have a dog.’

‘You just come out to look and jaw?’

Rape-o’s groans were getting deeper and more pleasured; his balls constricted and he popped an erection. Danny looked away. ‘Questions more than anything else.’

Conklin squinted, his eyes slits behind coke bottle glasses. ‘You ain’t a policeman, are you?’

‘No, I’m an insurance investigator. I’m working a death claim and I thought you could help me with some questions.’

Conklin said, ‘I’m the helpful type, ain’t I, Rape-o,’ moving the stick up and down, wrist flicks while the dog humped the air. Rape-o yowled, yipped and whimpered; Danny knew what was happening and fixed on the fat man’s coke bottles. Rape-o let out a final yowl/yip/groan, let go and fell to the dirt. Conklin laughed. ‘You ain’t got the sense of humor for pits, I can tell. Ask your questions, boy. I got a cousin who’s an insurance man, so I’m prone to the breed.’

Rape-o slinked over to the fence and tried to rub his snout up against Danny’s knee; Danny took a step backward. ‘It’s a murder claim. We know the victim was killed by a man, but the coroner thinks he may have let a dog or coyote or wolf at him after he was dead. What do you think of the idea?’

Conklin stuck a toothpick in his mouth and worked his words around it. ‘Mister, I know the canine family real good, and coyotes and wolves is out – ’less the killer captured and starved them and left the dead guy out for them to pick clean someplace amenable. What kind of damage on your victim?'

Danny watched Rape-o curl up in the dirt and go to sleep, sated, his muscles slack. 'Localized. Teeth marks on the stomach, the intestines bitten and sucked on. It had to have happened someplace inside, because the body was clean when the police found it.'

Conklin snickered. 'Then you rule out coyotes and wolves – they'd go crazy and eat the fucker whole, and you can't exactly keep them inside the house. You thinkin' pits? Dogs?'

'If anything, yes.'

'You sure them teeth marks ain't human?'

'No, we're not sure.'

Booth Conklin pointed to his pit pens. 'Mister, I run these three farms for my cousins, and I know how to get what I want from dogs, and if I was crazy enough to want one of my pups to eat a man's guts, I imagine I could think up a way for him to do it. I'll tell you though, I've got a real taste for blood sport, and I couldn't imagine any human being doin' what you just told me.'

Danny said, 'If you wanted to, how would you do it?'

Conklin petted Rape-o's hindquarters; the dog lazily wagged its tail. 'I'd starve him and pen him and let bitch dogs in heat parade around in front of his cage and make him crazy. I'd muzzle him and bind his legs and put a restrainer around his dick so he couldn't get himself off. I'd get me a rubber glove and tweak his dick till he just about got there, then I'd clamp his balls so he couldn't shoot. I'd get me some doggie menstrual blood and spray it in his eyes and nose for a week or so, till he came to think of it as food and love. Then, when I had me a dead man, I'd spread a big puddle of pussy blood right where I wanted him to bite. And, mister? I'd have a gun handy in case that tormented old dog decided to eat *me*. That answer satisfy you?'

Danny thought: No animals, it just isn't *right*. But – have Doc Layman do organ taps on Goines, his body parts near the mutilations, tests for a second, nonhuman, blood type. He threw Booth Conklin a longshot question. 'What kind of people buy dogs from you?'

'Boys who love blood sport, and I ain't talkin' 'bout your crazy shit either.'

'Isn't dog fighting against the law?'

'You know who to grease, then there ain't no law. You sure you ain't a policeman?'

Danny shook his head. 'Amalgamated Insurance. Look, do you remember selling a dog to a tall, gray-haired man, middle-aged, within the past six months or so?'

Conklin gave Rape-o a gentle kick; the dog stirred, got up and trotted back to his pen. 'Mister, my customers are young studs in pickup trucks and niggers lookin' to have the toughest dog on the block.'

‘Do any of your customers stand out as different than that? Unusual?’

Booth Conklin laughed so hard he almost swallowed his toothpick. ‘Back durin’ the war, these movie types saw my sign, came by and said they wanted to make a little home movie, two dogs dressed up with masks and costumes fightin’ to the death. I sold them boys two twenty-dollar dogs for a C-note apiece.’

‘Did they make their movie?’

‘I ain’t seen it advertised at Grauman’s Chinese, so how should I know? There’s this sanitarium over on the beach side of the Canyon, dryout place for all the Hollywood types. I figured they were visitin’ there and headin’ to the Valley when they saw my sign.’

‘Were any of the men tall and gray-haired?’

Conklin shrugged. ‘I don’t really remember. One guy had a funny European accent, that I do recall. Besides, my eyes ain’t the best in the world. You about done with your questions, son?’

Ninety-five percent against on the blood bait theory; maybe a quash on his nightmares; useless dope on Hollywood lunacy. Danny said, ‘Thanks, Mr. Conklin. You were a big help.’

‘My pleasure, son. Come back sometime. Rape-o likes you.’

Danny drove to the Station, sent out for a hamburger, fries and milk even though he wasn’t hungry, ate half the meal and called Doc Layman at the City Morgue.

‘Norton Layman speaking.’

‘It’s Danny Upshaw, Doctor.’

‘Just the man I was going to call. Your news first or mine?’

Danny flashed: Rape-o chewing on Marty Goines’ midsection. He threw the remains of his burger in the wastebasket and said, ‘Mine. I’m sure the teethmarks are human. I just talked to a man who breeds fighting dogs, and he said your blood bait theory is feasible, but it would take a lot of planning, and I think the killing wasn’t *that* premeditated. He said dog menstrual blood would be the best bait, and I was thinking you could tap the cadaver’s organs next to his wounds, see if you got any foreign blood.’

Layman sighed. ‘Danny, the City of Los Angeles cremated Martin Mitchell Goines this morning. Autopsy completed, no claim on the body within forty-eight hours, ashes to ashes. I have some good news, though.’

Danny thought, ‘Shit’; said ‘Shoot.’

‘The slash wounds on the victim’s back interested me, and I remembered Gordon Kienzle’s wound book. Do you know it?’

‘No.’

‘Well, Kienzle is a pathologist who started out as an emergency room MD. He was fascinated with nonfatal assaults, and he put together a book of photos and specifications on man-inflicted woundings. I consulted it, and the cuts on Martin Mitchell Goines’ back are identical to the sample wounds listed under “Zoot Stick,” a two-by-four with a razor blade or blades attached at the end. Now, the zoot stick dates back to ’42 and ’43. It was popular with anti-Mexican gangs and Riot Squad cops, who used it to slash the zoot suits certain Latin elements were sporting.’

Check the City/County Homicide files for zoot stick killings. Danny said, ‘It’s a good lead, Doc. Thanks.’

‘Don’t thank me yet. I checked the files before I decided to call you. There are no zoot stick homicides on record. A friend of mine on the LAPD Riot Squad said 99 percent of your white-on-Mexican assaults weren’t reported and the Mexicans never took the damn sticks to each other, it was considered dirty pool or whatever. But it *is* a lead.’

Robe wad suffocating, hands or sash strangling, teeth biting, and now a zoot stick cutting. *Why the different forms of brutality?* Danny said, ‘See you in class, Doctor,’ hung up and walked back to his car just to be moving. Jungle John Lembeck was leaning against the hood, his face bruised, one eye purple and closed. He said, ‘They got real rough with me, Mr. Upshaw. I wouldn’t have told Janice to ditz you, except they were hurting me so bad. I’m stand-up, Mr. Upshaw. So if you want payback, I’ll understand.’

Danny balled his right fist and got ready to swing it – but a flash of Booth Conklin and his pit hound stopped him.

ELEVEN

THE CIGARS WERE Havanas, and their aroma made Mal wish he hadn't quit smoking; Herman Gerstein's pep talk and Dudley Smith's accompaniment – smiles, nods, little chuckles – made him wish that he was back at the LAPD Academy interviewing recruits for the role of idealistic young leftist. His one day of it had yielded no one near appropriate, and starting their interrogations without a decoy at the ready felt like a mistake. But Ellis Loew and Dudley, fired up by Lesnick's psychiatric dirt, were trigger-happy – and here they were getting ready to brace Mondo Lopez, Sammy Benavides and Juan Duarte, UAESers playing Indians on the set of *Tomahawk Massacre*. And now Gerstein's schtick was making him itchy, too.

The Variety International boss was pacing behind his desk, waving his Havana; Mal kept thinking of Buzz Meeks sliming back into his life at *the* worst possible moment.

'. . . and I can tell you this, gentlemen: through passive resistance and other Commie shit the UAES is gonna force the Teamsters into kicking some ass, which is gonna make the UAES look good and us look bad. Commies like to get hurt. They'll eat any amount of shit, smile like it's filet mignon and ask for seconds, turn the other cheek, then bite *you* on the ass. Like those pachucos down on Set 23. Zoot suit punks who got themselves a union card, a license to give shit and think their own shit don't stink. Am I right or is Eleanor Roosevelt a dyke?'

Dudley Smith laughed uproariously. 'And a grand quiff diver she is. Dark meat, too, I've heard. And we all know about the late Franklin's bent for little black terriers. Mr. Gerstein, Lieutenant Considine and I would like to thank you for your contributions to our endeavor and your hospitality this morning.'

Mal took the cue and stood up; Herman Gerstein reached into a humidor and grabbed a handful of cigars. Dudley got to his feet; Gerstein came at them like a fullback, pumping hands, stuffing Havanas in all their available pockets, showing them the door with hard back slaps. When it closed behind him, Dudley said, 'No flair for language. You can take the Jew out of the gutter, but you can't take the gutter out of the Jew. Are you ready to interrogate, Captain?'

Mal looked down at the UAES picket line, caught a back view of a woman in slacks and wondered if she was Claire De Haven. 'Okay, *Lieutenant*.'

'Ah, Malcolm, what a grand wit you have!'

They took Herman Gerstein's private elevator down to ground level and two rows of sound stages separated by a center walkway. The buildings were tan stucco, silo tall and humpbacked at the top, with sandwich boards propped up by the front doors – the name, director and shooting schedule of the movie crayoned on white plastic. Actors riding bicycles – cowboys, Indians, baseball players, Revolutionary War soldiers – whizzed by; motorized carts hauled camera equipment; technicians hobnobbed by a snack cart where a Roman centurion dished out doughnuts and coffee. The enclosed sets extended for nearly a quarter mile, black numbers above the doors marking them. Mal walked ahead of Dudley Smith, running Benavides/Lopez/Duarte file dirt through his head, hoping an on-the-job bracing wasn't too much, too quick.

Dudley caught up outside Set 23. Mal rang the buzzer; a woman in a saloon girl outfit opened the door and popped her gum at them. Mal displayed his badge and identification. 'We're with the District Attorney's Office, and we want to speak to Mondo Lopez, Juan Duarte and Sammy Benavides.'

The saloon girl gave her gum a last pop and spoke with a thick Brooklyn accent. 'They're on a take. They're the hotheaded young Indians who want to attack the fort, but the wise old chief don't want them to. They'll be finished in a few minutes, and you can –'

Dudley cut in. 'We don't require a plot synopsis. If you'll tell them it's the police, they'll adjust their busy schedule to accommodate us. And please do it now.'

The girl swallowed her gum and walked in front of them. Dudley smiled; Mal thought: he's a spellbinder – don't let him run the show.

The sound stage was cavernous: wire-strewn walls, lights and cameras on dollies, anemic-looking horses tethered to equipment poles and people standing around doing nothing. Right in the middle was an olive drab teepee, obviously fashioned from army surplus material, Indian symbols painted on the sides – candy apple red lacquer – like it was some brave's customized hot rod. Cameras and tripod lights were fixed on the teepee and the four actors squatting in front of it – an old pseudo-Indian white man and three pseudo-Indian Mexicans in their late twenties.

The saloon girl stopped them a few feet behind the cameras, whispering, 'There. The Latin lover types.' The old chief intoned words of peace; the three young braves delivered lines about the white eyes speaking with forked tongue, their voices pure Mex. Someone yelled, 'Cut!' and the scene became a blur of moving bodies.

Mal elbowed into it, catching the three pulling cigarettes and lighters out of their buckskins. He made them make him as a cop; Dudley Smith walked over; the braves gave each other spooked looks.

Dudley flashed his shield. 'Police. Am I talking to Mondo Lopez, Juan Duarte and Samuel Benavides?'

The tallest brave slipped a rubber band off his pony tail and shaped his hair into a pachuco do – duck's ass back, pompadour front. He said, 'I'm Lopez.'

Mal opened up his end strong. 'Care to introduce your friends, Mr. Lopez? We don't have all day.'

The other two squared their shoulders and stepped forward, the move half bravado, half kowtow to authority. Mal tagged the short, muscular one as Duarte, former Sinarquista squad leader, zoot suits and swastika armbands until the CP brought him around; his lanky pal as Benavides – Mr. Tight Lips to Doc Lesnick, his file a complete bore except for one session devoted to an account of how twelve-year-old Sammy molested his nine-year-old sister, a razor blade to her throat. Both men did a sullen foot dance; Muscles said, 'I'm Benavides.'

Mal pointed to a side door, then touched his tie clip – LAPD semaphore for *Let Me Run It.* 'My name's Considine, and this is Lieutenant Smith. We're with the DA's Office, and we'd like to ask you a few questions. It's just routine, and we'll have you back at work in a few minutes.'

Juan Duarte said, 'We got a choice?'

Dudley chuckled; Mal put a hand on his arm. 'Yes. Here or the Hall of Justice jail.'

Lopez cocked his head toward the exit; Benavides and Duarte fell in next to him, lit cigarettes and walked outside. Actors and technicians gawked at the Indian-paleface migration. Mal schemed a razzle-dazzle, himself abrasive at first, then making nice, Dudley asking the hard questions, him playing savior at the end – the big push to glom them as friendly witnesses.

The three halted their march just out the door, leaning against the wall, nonchalant. Mal let the men smoke in silence, then said, 'Boy, have you guys got it made.'

Three sets of eyes on the ground, three phony Indians in a cloud of cigarette smoke. Mal rattled the leader's cage. 'Can I ask you a question, Mr. Lopez?'

Mondo Lopez looked up. 'Sure, Officer.'

'Mr. Lopez, you must be taking home close to a C-note a week. Is that true?'

Mondo Lopez said, 'Eighty-one and change. Why?'

Mal smiled. 'Well, you're making almost half as much as I am, and I'm a college graduate and a ranking police officer with sixteen years' experience. All of you quit high school, isn't that true?'

A quick look passed among the three. Lopez smirked, Benavides shrugged and Duarte took a long drag on his cigarette. Mal saw them sighting in on his ploy way too soon and tried for sugar. 'Look, I'll tell you why I brought it up. You guys have beat the odds. You ran with the First Street Flats and the Sinarquistas, did some Juvie time and stayed clean. That's impressive, and we're not here to roust you for anything you yourselves did.'

Juan Duarte ground out his cigarette. 'You mean this is about our friends?'

Mal dredged the files for ammo, grabbing the fact that all three tried to join the service after Pearl Harbor. 'Look, I've checked your Selective Service records. You quit the Sinarquistas and the Flats and you tried to fight the Japs, you were on the right side with Sleepy Lagoon. When you were wrong you copped to it. That's the sign of a good man in my book.'

Sammy Benavides said, 'Is a stool pigeon a good man in your book, Mr. Po –'

Duarte silenced him with a sharp elbow. 'Who you trying to tell us is wrong now? Who you *want* to be wrong?'

Finally a good opening. 'How about the Party, gentlemen? How about Uncle Joe Stalin getting under the sheets with Hitler? How about slave labor camps in Siberia and all the stuff the Party has pulled in America while they condoned the stuff going on over in Russia? Gentlemen, I've been a cop for sixteen years and I've never asked a man to snitch his friends. But I'll ask *any* man to snitch his *enemies*, especially if they also happen to be mine.'

Mal caught his breath, thinking of Summations 115 at Stanford Law; Dudley Smith stood easy at his side. Mondo Lopez eyed the blacktop, then his *Tomahawk Massacre* costars. Then all three starting clapping.

Dudley flushed; Mal could see his red face going toward purple. Lopez brought a flat palm slowly down, killing the applause. 'How about you tell us what this is all about?'

Mal thrashed for file dirt and came up empty. 'This is a preliminary investigation into Communist influence in Hollywood. And we're not asking you to snitch your friends, just *our* enemies.'

Benavides pointed west, toward the front office and two picket lines. 'And this has got nothing to do with Gerstein wanting our union out and the Teamsters in?'

'No, this is a preliminary investigation that has nothing to do with whatever current labor troubles your union is involved in. This is –'

Duarte interrupted. 'Why *us*? Why me and Sammy and Mondo?'

'Because you're reformed criminals and you'd make damn good witnesses.'

'Because you thought we'd be jail-wise and bleed easy?'

'No, because you've been zooters and Reds, and we figured that maybe you had the brains to know it was *all* shit.'

Benavides kicked in, a leery eye on Dudley. 'You know the HUAC Committee pulled this snitch routine, and good people got hurt. Now it's happening again, and you want us to fink?'

Mal thought of Benavides as a kiddie raper talking decency; he could *feel* Dudley thinking the same thing, going crazy with it. 'Look, I *know* corruption. The HUAC chairman is in Danbury for bribery, HUAC itself was reckless. And I'll admit the LAPD screwed up on the Sleepy Lagoon thing.

But you can't tell –'

Mondo Lopez shouted, 'Screwed up! Pendejo, it was a fucking pogrom against my people by your people! You're sweet-talking the wrong people on the wrong case to get the wrong fuck –'

Dudley stepped in front of the three, his suitcoat open, .45 automatic, sap and brass knuckles in plain view. His bulk cast the Mexicans in one big shadow and his brogue went up octaves, but didn't crack. 'Your seventeen filthy compatriots murdered José Diaz in cold blood and beat the gas chamber because traitors and perverts and deluded weaklings banded up to save them. And I will brook no disrespect for a brother officer in my presence. Do you understand?'

Complete silence, the UAES men still in Dudley's shadow, stagehands eyeballing the action from the walkway. Mal stepped up to speak for himself, taller than Dudley but half his breadth. Scared. Pendejo. He got ready to give signals, then Mondo Lopez hit back. 'Those seventeen got fucked by the puto LAPD and the puto City court system. And that ees la fucking verdad.'

Dudley moved forward so that all there was between him and Lopez was the arc of a short kidney punch. Benavides backed away, shaking; Duarte mumbled that the SLDC got anonymous letters making a white guy for José Diaz, but nobody believed it; Benavides pulled him out of harm's way. Mal grabbed Dudley's arm; the big man flung him back and lowered his brogue to baritone range. 'Did you enjoy perverting justice with the SLDC, Mondo? Did you enjoy the favors of Claire De Haven – filthy rich capitalista, tight with the City Council, a real love for that undersized spic cock?'

Benavides and Duarte had their backs to the wall and were sliding away from the scene an inch at a time. Mal stood frozen; Lopez glared at Dudley; Dudley laughed. 'Perhaps that was unfair of me, lad. We all know Claire spread her favors thin, but I doubt she would have stooped to your level. Your SLDC friend Chaz Minear, now that's another story. Was he there for the prime Mex butthole?'

Benavides moved toward Dudley; Mal snapped out of his freeze, grabbed him and pushed him into the wall, seeing razor blades held to a little girl's throat. Benavides shouted, 'That puto bought boys at a puto escort service, he didn't do us!' Mal pressed harder, sweat-saturated suit against soaked buckskins, hard muscles straining at the body of a thin man almost forty. Benavides suddenly went slack; Mal took his hands off him and got a file flash: Sammy railing against queers to Doc Lesnick, a weak point they could have played smart.

Sammy Benavides slid down the wall and watched the Smith-Lopez eyeball duel. Mal tried to make his hands give signals, but couldn't. Juan Duarte was standing by the walkway, scoping the business long-distance. Dudley broke the standoff with a pivot and a lilting brogue aside. 'I hope you learned a lesson today, Captain. You can't play sob sister with scum.

You should have joined me on the Hat Squad. You would have learned then in grand fashion.'

Round one blown to hell.

Mal drove home, thinking of captain's bars snatched away from him, smothered in Dudley Smith's huge fists. And he had been partly at fault, going too easy when the Mexicans came on too smart, thinking he could reason with them, wheedle and draw them into logical traps. He'd thought of submitting a memo to Ellis Loew – lay off Sleepy Lagoon, it's too sympathetic – then he tossed it into the pot for empathy, hit a nerve with the Mexes and upset Dudley's bee in the bonnet on the case. And Dudley had stood up for him before he himself did, which made it hard to fault him for losing his temper; which meant that maybe direct UAES approaches were dead and they should concentrate solely on decoy infiltration and sub-rosa interrogations. His specialty – which didn't lessen the sting of Dudley's Hat Squad crack, and which increased the need for Buzz Meeks to join the grand jury team.

All debits, but on the plus side Dudley's ranting didn't put out information restricted to Lesnick's files, leaving that avenue of manipulation still open. What was troubling was a cop as smart as the Irishman taking a non-direct attack so personally, then hitting his 'brother officer' below the belt.

Pendejo.

Scared.

And Dudley Smith knows it.

At home, Mal took advantage of the empty house, dumping his sweaty clothes, showering, changing to a sport shirt and khakis and settling into the den to write a long memo to Loew – heavily stressing that there should be no further direct questioning of UAES members until their decoy was planted – a decoy now being a necessity. He was a page in when he realized that it had to be partly a gloss job – there was no way to accurately describe what happened at Variety International without portraying himself as a weakling or a fool. So he did gloss it, and filled up another page with warnings on the Loew choice for troubleshooter – Buzz Meeks – the man who held the possible distinction of being the single most crooked cop in the history of the Los Angeles Police Department – heroin skimmer, shakedown artist, bagman and now glorified pimp for Howard Hughes. After that page, he knew it was futile; if Meeks wanted in he *was* in – Hughes was the heaviest contributor to the grand jury bankroll and Meeks' bossman – what he said would go. After two pages he knew *why* the tack wasn't worth pursuing: Meeks was absolutely the best man for the job. And the best man for the job was afraid of him, just like he was afraid of Dudley Smith. Even though there was no reason for the fear.

Mal threw the Meeks memo in the wastebasket and started thinking decoy. The LAPD Academy was already out – straight arrow youths with no spark for impersonation. The Sheriff's Academy was unlikely – the Brenda Allen mess and the LASD sheltering Mickey Cohen made it unlikely that they would lend the City a smart young recruit. Their best bet was a rank-and-file City officer, smart, good-looking, adaptable and ambitious, mid to late twenties, a malleable young man without a hard-edged cop quality.

Where?

Hollywood Division was out – half the men had been implicated over Brenda Allen, had had their pictures in the paper, were running scared and angry and wild – there was even a rumor floating around that three men on the Hollywood Detective Squad had been behind last August's shootout at Sherry's – a botched snuff attempt on Mickey Cohen that wounded three and killed a Cohen utility trigger. *Out.*

And Central was packed with unqualified rookies who made the Department because of their war records; 77th Street, Newton and University featured outsized crackers hired on to keep the Negro citizenry in line. Hollenbeck might be a good place to look – but East LA was Mex, Benavides, Lopez and Duarte still had ties there, and that might blow their decoy's cover. The various detective divisions were a possible stalking ground – if they could find a man who didn't come off as irredeemably jaded.

Mal grabbed his LAPD station directory and started scanning it, one eye on the wall clock as it inched toward 3:00 and Stefan's home-from-school time. He was about to start calling CO's for preliminary screening talks when he heard footsteps in the hall; he swiveled in his chair, dropped his arms and got ready to let his son dogpile him.

It was Celeste. She looked at Mal's open arms until he dropped them; she said, 'I told Stefan to stay late after school in order that I should talk to you.'

'Yes?'

'The look on your face does not make this easy.'

'Spill it, goddamn you.'

Celeste clutched her beaded opera purse, a favored relic of Prague, 1935. 'I am going to divorce you. I have met a nice man, a man who is cultured and will make Stefan and me a better home.'

Mal thought: perfect calm, she knows her effects. He said, 'I won't let you. Don't hurt my boy or I'll hurt you.'

'You cannot. To the mother the child belongs.'

Maim her, let her know he *is* the law. 'Is he rich, Celeste? If you have to fuck to survive, you should fuck rich men. Right, *Fräulein?* Or powerful men, like Kempflerr.'

'You always return to that because it is so ugly and because it excites you so.'

Match point; Mal felt his sense of gamesmanship go blooey. 'I saved your wretched rich-girl ass. I killed the man who made you a whore. I gave you a home.'

Celeste smiled, her standard parting of thin lips over perfect teeth. 'You killed Kempflerr to prove yourself not a coward. You wanted to be like a real policeman, and you were willing to destroy yourself to do it. Only your dumb luck saved you. And you keep your secrets so badly.'

Mal stood up on punch-drunk legs. 'I killed someone who deserved to die.'

Celeste fondled her purse, fingers over beadwork embroidery. Mal saw it as stage business, the buildup to a punch line. 'No comeback for that one?'

Celeste put on her deepest iceberg smile. 'Herr Kempflerr was very kind to me and I only made up his nasty sexuality to excite you. He was a gentle lover, and when the war was almost over, he sabotaged the ovens and saved thousands of lives. You are lucky that military governor liked you, Malcolm. Kempflerr was going to help the Americans look for other Nazis. And I only married you because I felt very bad about the lies I seduced you with.'

Mal tried to say 'No,' but couldn't form the word; Celeste broadened her smile. Mal saw it as a target and ran to her. He grabbed her neck, held her to the doorway and aimed hard right hands at her mouth, teeth splintering up through her lips, cutting his knuckles. He hit her and hit her and hit her; he would have gone on hitting her, but 'Mutti!' and tiny fists pummeling his legs made him stop and run out of the house, afraid of a little boy – his own.

TWELVE

THE PHONE WOULDN'T quit ringing.

First it was Leotis Dineen, calling to tell him that Art Aragon knocked out Lupe Pimentel in the second round, raising his debt to twenty-one hundred even, with a vig payment due tomorrow. Next was the real estate man up in Ventura County. His glad tidings: the top offer for Buzz's dry-rotted, shadeless, rock-laden, non-irrigable, poorly located and generally misanthropic farmland was fourteen dollars an acre, the offerer, the pastor of First Pentecostal Divine Eminence Church, who wanted to turn it into a cemetery for the sanctified pets of members of his congregation. Buzz said twenty per, minimum; ten minutes later the phone rang again. No salutation, just, 'I didn't tell Mickey, because you're not worth going to the gas chamber for.' He suggested a romantic drink somewhere; Audrey Anders replied, 'Fuck you.'

Skating on the stupidest stupid move of his life made him feel cocky, despite Dineen's implied warning: my money or your kneecaps. Buzz thought of cash shakedowns – him against fences and hotel crawlers he'd leaned on as a cop, then nixed the notion – he'd gotten older and flabbier, while they'd probably gotten meaner and better armed. There was just himself against 50–50 Mal Considine, who held a mean stare but otherwise looked pretty withered. He picked up the phone and dialed his boss's private number at the Bel Air Hotel.

'Yes? Who is this?'

'Me. Howard, I want in on that grand jury turkey shoot. That job still open?'

THIRTEEN

DANNY WAS TRYING hard to stay under the speed limit, hauling into Hollywood – City jurisdiction – with the speedometer needle straddling forty. A few minutes ago a Lexington State administrator had called the station; a letter from Marty Goines, postmarked four days before, had just arrived at the hospital. It was addressed to a patient there and contained nothing but innocuous stuff about jazz – and the word that Goines had moved into an above-garage flop at 2307 North Tamarind. It was a scalding hot lead; if the address had been County ground, he'd have grabbed a black-and-white and rolled red lights and siren.

2307 was a half mile north of the Boulevard, in the middle of a long block of wood-framed Tudors. Danny parked curbside and saw that the cold afternoon had kept the locals indoors – no one was out taking the air. He grabbed his evidence kit, trotted up to the door of the front house and rang the bell.

Ten seconds, no answer. Danny walked back to the garage, saw a shacklike built-on atop it and took rickety steps up to the door. He tapped the pane three times – silence – got out his pocket knife and stuck it into the lock/door jamb juncture. A few seconds of prying, and snap! Danny scanned for witnesses, saw none, pushed the door open and closed it behind him.

The smell hit him first: metallic, acidic. Danny slow-motioned his evidence kit to the floor, drew his gun and fingered the wall for a light switch. His thumb flicked one on abruptly, before he'd clamped down his nerves to look. He saw a one-room dive turned slaughterhouse.

Blood on the walls. Huge, unmistakable streaks, exemplary textbook spit marks: the killer expelling big mouthfuls, spritzing the red out through his teeth, drawing little patterns on cheap floral wallpaper. Four whole walls of it – dips and curlicues and one design that looked like an elaborate letter W. Blood matting a threadbare throw rug, blood in large caked pools on the linoleum floor, blood saturating a light-colored sofa oozing stuffing, blood splashed across a stack of newspapers next to a table holding a hot plate, saucepan and single can of soup. Much too much blood to come from one ravaged human being.

Danny hyperventilated; he saw two doorless doorways off the left wall. He holstered his .45, jammed his hands in his pockets so as not to leave prints and checked the closest one out.

The bathroom.

White walls covered with vertical and horizontal blood lines, perfectly straight, intersecting at right angles, the killer getting the knack. A bathtub, the sides and bottom caked with a pinkish-brown matter that looked like blood mixed with soapsuds. A stack of men's clothing – shirts, trousers, a herringbone sports coat – folded atop the toilet seat.

Danny turned on the sink faucet with a knuckle, lowered his head, splashed and drank. Looking up, he caught his face in the mirror; for a second he didn't think it was him. He walked back to the main room, took rubber gloves from his evidence kit, slipped them on, returned to the bathroom and sifted through the clothing, dropping it on the floor.

Three pairs of pants. Three skivvy shirts. Three rolled-up pairs of socks. One sweater, one windbreaker, one sports jacket.

Three victims.

One other doorway.

Danny backed out of the bathroom and pivoted into a small kitchenette, expecting a gigantic rush of crimson. What he got was perfect tidiness: scrub brush, Ajax and a soap bar lined up on a rack above a clean sink; clean dishes in a plastic drainer; a 1949 calendar tacked to the wall, the first eleven months ripped off, no notations on the page for December. A telephone on a nightstand placed against the side wall and a battered Frigidaire next to the sink.

No blood, no horror artwork. Danny felt his stomach settle and his pulse take over, jolts like wires frazzling. Two other stiffs dumped someplace; a B&E on LAPD turf – Hollywood Division, where the Brenda Allen mess was the worst, where they hated the Sheriff's Department the most. His violation of Captain Dietrich's direct order: no strongarm, no prima donna in the City. No way to report what he found. An outside chance of the killer bringing number four here.

Danny gulped from the sink, swathed his face, let his gloved hands and jacket sleeves get sopping. He thought of tossing the pad for a bottle; his stomach heaved; he picked up the phone and dialed the station.

Karen Hiltscher answered. 'West Hollywood Sheriff's. May I help you?'

Danny's voice wasn't his. 'It's me, Karen.'

'Danny? You sound strange.'

'*Just listen.* I'm someplace where I shouldn't be and I need something, and I need you to call me back here when you've got it. And nobody can know. *Nobody.* Do you understand?'

'Yes. Danny, please don't be so rough.'

'*Just listen.* I want your verbal on every dead body report filed city and countywide over the past forty-eight hours, and I want you to call me back here with it, *quick.* Ring twice, hang up and call again. Got it?'

'Yes, Sweetie, are you all—'

'Dammit, *just listen.* I'm at Hollywood–4619, it's *wrong* and I could get in big trouble for being here, so don't tell anybody. *Do you fucking understand*?'

Karen whispered, ‘Yes, sweetie,’ and let her end of the line go dead. Danny hung up, wiped sweat off his neck and thought of ice water. He saw the Frigidaire, reached over and opened the door, bolted for the sink when he caught what was inside.

Two eyeballs coated with clear jelly in an ashtray. A severed human finger on top of a package of green beans.

Danny vomited until his chest ached and his stomach retched itself empty; he turned on the faucet and doused himself until water seeped inside his rubber gloves and he snapped that a sopping wet cop couldn’t forensic a crime scene that Vollmer or Maslick would have killed for. He turned the water off and shook himself half dry, hands braced against the sink ledge. The phone rang; he heard it as a gunshot, pulled his piece and aimed it at nothing.

Another ring, silence, a third ring. Danny picked up the receiver. ‘Yes? Karen?’

The girl had on her singsong pout. ‘Three DOAs. Two female Caucasians, one male Negro. The females were a pill suicide and a car wreck and the Negro was a wino who died of exposure, and you owe me the Coconut Grove for being so nasty.’

Eight walls of blood spritz and a would-be lady cop who wanted to go dancing. Danny laughed and opened the icebox door for more comic relief. The finger was long, white and thin, and the eyeballs were brown and starting to shrivel. ‘Anywhere, sweetie, anywhere.’

‘Danny, are you sure you’re—’

‘Karen, listen real close. I’m staying here to see who shows up. Are you working a double shift tonight?’

‘Until eight tomorrow.’

‘Then do this. I want the City and County air monitored for male Caucasian DBs. Stay at your switchboard, keep the City and County boxes on low and listen for homicide squeals with male Caucasian victims. Call me here the same way you just did if you get any. Have you got that?’

‘Yes, Danny.’

‘And sweetie, nobody can know. Not Dietrich, not anyone on the squad, *not anyone*.’

A long sigh, Karen’s version of Katharine Hepburn exhausted. ‘Yes, Deputy Upshaw,’ then a soft click.

Danny hung up and forensiced the pad.

He scraped dirt and dust samples off the floor in all three rooms, placing them in individually marked glassine envelopes; he got out his Rolleiflex evidence camera and shot wide angles and close-ups of the blood patterns. He scraped, tagged and tubed bathtub blood, couch and chair blood, wall blood, rug blood and floor blood; he took fiber samples from the three sets of clothes and wrote down the brand names on the labels.

Dusk came on. Danny kept the lights off, working with a pen flash held in his teeth. He dusted for latent prints, exhausting rolls of touch, grab and press surfaces, getting a rubber glove set – most likely the killer – and a full right- and partial left-hand unknown – which did not match the Marty Goines print abstract. Knowing Goines latents *should* appear, he kept going and was rewarded – a left spread off the kitchen sink ledge. Reconstructing the killer showering himself free of blood, he rolled every touch surface in the bathroom – bringing up one-, two-, three-finger and full hand span, surgical rubber tips, the hands of a large man, widely spaced where he braced himself into the shower/tub wall.

Midnight.

Danny took the severed finger out of the icebox, rolled it in ink, then on paper. A matchup to the middle right digit on the unknown set. The cut point was jagged, just above the knuckle, cauterized by scorching – charred black flesh scabbing it up. Danny checked the hot plate in the living room. Paydirt: fried skin stuck to the coils; the killer wanted to preserve the finger, a shock to whoever discovered the carnage.

Or was he planning to return with another victim?

And was he keeping the pad under surveillance to know when that option was blown?

12:45.

Danny gave the place a last toss. The one closet was empty; there was nothing secreted under the rugs; a penlight wall scan gave him another notch on his reconstruction: approximately two thirds of the blood caking was texturally uniform – victims two and three were almost certainly killed at the same time. Checking out the floor on his knees got him a last piece of evidence: a glob of hardened white paste residue, neutral in smell. He tagged and bagged it, tagged and bagged Marty Goines' eyeballs, sat down on the nonblooded edge of the sofa, gun out and resting on his knee – and waited.

Exhaustion crept in. Danny closed his eyes and saw blood patterns superimposed on the lids, white on red, the colors reversed like photographic negatives. His hands were numb from hours of working in rubber gloves; he imagined the metallic smell of the room as the smell of good whiskey, started tasting it, shut down the thought and ran theories in his head so the taste would stay away.

2307 Tamarind was a thirty-minute drive to the Strip tops – the killer had his maximum time of two hours to play with Marty Goines' corpse and decorate the pad. The killer was monstrously, *suicidally* bold to kill two other men – probably at the same time – in the same place. The killer probably had the subconscious desire to be captured that many psychopaths evinced; he was an exhibitionist and was probably distressed that the Goines snuff had received virtually no publicity. The other two bodies had probably been dumped someplace where they would be found, which meant that last night or yesterday was when murders two and three occurred. Questions: were the patterns on the wall significant in design or just blood spat in rage? What did the letter W mean? *Were the three victims randomly chosen on the basis of homosexuality or dope addiction, or were they previously known to the killer?*

More exhaustion, his brain wires frazzling from too much information, too few connecting threads. Danny took to looking at his luminous wristwatch dial to stay awake; 3:11 had just passed when he heard the outside lock being picked.

He got up and padded to the curtains beside the light switch, the door a foot away, his gun arm extended and braced with his left hand. The locking mechanism gave with a sharp ka-thack; the door opened; Danny hit the switch.

A fortyish fat man was frozen to the light. Danny took a step forward; the man pivoted into the muzzle of a .45 revolver. His hands jerked toward his pockets; Danny toed the door shut and barrel-lashed him across the face, knocking him into wallpaper zigzagged with blood. The fat man let out a yelp, saw the wall gore for real and hit his knees, hands clasped, ready to beg.

Danny squatted beside him, gun aimed at the trickle of blood on his cheek. The fat man mumbled Hail Marys; Danny fished out his cuffs, slid his .45 out of trouble, worked the ratchets and slapped them around prayer-pressed wrists. The bracelet teeth snapped; the man looked at Danny like *he* was Jesus. ‘Cop? You’re a cop?’

Danny gave him the once-over. Convict pallor, prison shoes, secondhand clothes and grateful that a policeman caught him breaking and entering, a parole violation and a dime minimum. The man looked at the walls, brought his eyes down, saw that he was kneeling two inches from a pool of blood with a dead cockroach basted in the middle. ‘Goddammit, tell me you’re—’

Danny grabbed his throat and squeezed it. ‘Sheriff’s. Keep your voice down and play straight with me and I’ll let you walk out of here.’ With his free hand, he gave Fats a pocket and waistband frisk, pulling out wallet, keys, a switchblade and a flat leather case, compact but heavy, with a zippered closure.

He eased off his throat hold and examined the wallet, dropping cards and papers to the floor. There was an expired California driver’s license for Leo Theodore Bordoni, DOB 6/10/09; a County Parole identification card made out to the same name; a plasma bank donor slip stating that Leo Bordoni, type AB+, could sell his plasma again on January 18, 1950. The cards were racetrack stuff – voided betting stubs, receipts, match-book covers with the names of hot horses and race numbers jotted on the back.

Danny let go of Leo Theodore Bordoni’s neck, the fat man’s reward for a parlay – reaction to the gore, blood type and physical description – that eliminated him as a killing suspect. Bordoni gurgled and wiped blood off his face; Danny unzipped the leather case and saw a set of bonaroos: pick gouger, baby glass cutter, chisel pry and window snap, all laid out on green velvet. He said, 'B&E, possession of burglar's tools, parole violation. How many falls have you taken, Leo?'

Bordoni massaged his neck. 'Three. Where's Marty?'

Danny pointed to the walls. 'Where do you think?'

'Oh fucking God.'

'That's right. Old Marty that nobody knows much about, except maybe you. You know about Governor Warren's habitual offender law?'

'Uh . . . no.'

Danny picked up his .45 and holstered it, helped Bordoni to his feet and shoved him into the one chair not soaked red/ brown. 'The law says any fourth fall costs you twenty to life. No plea bargains, no appeals, nada. You boost a fucking pack of cigarettes, it's a double dime. So you tell me everything there is to know about you and Marty Goines, or you hang twenty up at Quentin.'

Bordoni flicked his eyes around the room. Danny walked to the curtains, looked out at dark yards and houses and thought of his killer leaving him, clued to a trap by the light burning. He flipped the wall switch; Bordoni let out a long breath. 'Really bad for Marty? That the truth?'

Danny could see neon signs on Hollywood Boulevard, miles away. 'The worst, so tell me.'

Bordoni talked while Danny looked out at neon and dwindling headlights. 'I came out of Quentin two weeks ago, seven out of seven for heists. I knew Marty when he did his turn for reef, and we were buddies. Marty knew I had a parole date, and he knew my sister's number in Frisco. He's send me these letters every once in a while after he got out, phony name, no return address, 'cause he was an absconder and he didn't want the censors to get a handle on him.

'So Marty calls me at my sister's five days or so ago, maybe the thirtieth, maybe the thirty-first. He says he's playing horn for peanuts and hates it, he took the cure, he's gonna stay off horseback and pull jobs – burglaries. He says he just got together with an old partner and they needed a third man for a housebreak gang. I told him I'd be down in a week or so, and he gave me this address and told me to let myself in. That's me and Marty.'

Darkness made the room pulsate. Danny said, 'What was the partner's name? Where did Goines know him from?'

'Marty didn't say.'

'Did he describe him? Was he a partner of Marty's when he was pulling jobs back in '43 and '44?'

Bordoni said, 'Mister, it was a two-minute conversation, and I didn't even know Marty pulled jobs back then.'

'Did he mention an old running partner with a burned or scarred face? He'd be mid to late twenties by now.'

'No. Marty was always close-mouthed. I was his only pal at Q, and I was surprised when he said he had an old partner. Marty wasn't really the partner type.'

Danny shifted gears. 'When Goines sent you letters, where were they postmarked and what did they say?'

Bordoni sighed like he was bored; Danny thought of giving him a peek at his old pal's eyeballs. 'Spill, Leo.'

'They were from all over the country, and they were just jive – jazz, stuff, wish you were here, the horses, baseball.'

'Did Marty mention other musicians he was playing with?'

Bordoni laughed. 'No, and I think he was ashamed to. He was gigging all these Podunk clubs, and all he said was "I'm the best trombone they've ever seen," meaning Marty knew he wasn't much but these cats he was gigging with were really from hunger.'

'Did he mention anybody at all, other than this old partner you were going to team up with?'

'Nix. Like I told you, it was a two-minute conversation.'

The Miller High Life sign atop the Taft Building blipped off, jarring Danny. 'Leo, was Marty Goines a homosexual?'

'Marty! Are you crazy! He wouldn't even pork nancy boys up at Q!'

'Anybody up there ever makes advances to him?'

'Marty would have died before he let some brunser bust his cherry!'

Danny hit the light switch, hauled Bordoni up by his cuff chain and twisted his head so that it was level with a long slash of wall blood. 'That's your friend. That's why you were never here and you never met me. That's heat you don't want, so you just stay frosty and think of this thing as a nightmare.'

Bordoni bobbed his head; Danny let him go and unlocked the cuffs. Bordoni gathered his stuff up off the floor, taking extra care with his tool case. At the door, he said, 'This is personal with you, right?'

Buddy Jastrow long gone, four shots a night not enough, his textbooks and classes not real. Danny said, 'It's all I've got.'

Alone again, Danny stared out the window, watching movie marquees blink off, turning the Boulevard into just another long, dark street. He added 'possible burglary partner' to 'tall gray-haired,' 'middle-aged,' 'homosexual,' and 'heroin-wise'; he put off Bordoni's protestations that Marty wasn't fruit as sincere but wrong – and wondered how long he could stick inside the room without going crazy, without risking the landlord or someone from the front house dropping by.

Looking for house lights that might be *Him* looking back was childish; eye prowling for sinister shapes was a kid's game – the kind of game he played by himself as a schoolboy. Danny yawned, sat down in the chair and tried to sleep.

He got something near sleep, an exhaustion shortcut where he wasn't quite out, couldn't quite form thoughts and saw pictures that he wasn't making himself. Street signs, trucks, a saxophone man running scales on his instrument, flower patterns, a dog at the end of a stick. The dog made him twitch; he tried to open his eyes, felt them gummed and eased back to wherever he was going. Autopsy instruments hot from an autoclave, Janice Modine, a '39 Olds rocking on its suspension, a look inside, Tim pumping Roxy Beausoleil, an ether-soaked rag up to her nose so she'd giggle and pretend it was nice.

Danny jerked out of it, eyes opening to light through a part in the curtains. He swallowed dry phlegm, caught a reprise of his last image, got up and went to the kitchen for a drink of sink water. He was on a big gulping handful when the phone rang.

A second ring, stop, a third ring. Danny picked it up. 'Karen?'

The girl was almost breathless. 'City radio. See the maintenance man, Griffith Park, the hiking trail up from the observatory parking lot. Two dead men, LAPD rolling. Sweetie, did you *know* this was going to happen?'

Danny said, 'Just pretend it didn't happen,' slammed the phone down, grabbed his evidence kit and walked out of the upholstered slaughterhouse. He forced himself not to run to his car, eyes circuiting for onlookers, seeing none. Griffith Park was a mile away. He stripped off his rubber gloves, felt his hand tingle and gunned it there.

Two LAPD black-and-whites beat him.

Danny parked beside them at the foot of the hiking trail, the last stretch of asphalt before the stretch of mountain that formed the park's northern perimeter. No other cars were in the lot; he could see four bluesuits up ahead where the trail cut into woods, a longtime haven for winos and lovebirds without the price of a room.

Danny marked the time – 6:14 A.M. – got his badge out and walked up. The cops wheeled around, hands to holsters, shakes and queasy looks. Danny pointed to his tin. 'West Hollywood Sheriff's. I'm working a dumped body case, and I heard what you got over the air at the station.'

Two cops nodded; two turned away, like a County detective was lower than dirt. Danny swallowed dry; West Hollywood Substation was a half hour away, but the dummies didn't blink at the time glitch. They separated to give him a view; Danny got a mid-shot of hell.

Two dead men, nude, lying sideways on a little bed of dirt surrounded by low thornbushes. Rigor lock, coats of dust and leaf debris said they had been there at least twenty-four hours; the condition of the bodies said that they died at 2307 North Tamarind. Danny pulled a bush section back, knelt and zoomed his Man Camera in nightmare-close.

The men had been placed in a 69 position – head to groin, head to groin, genitals flopped towards each other's mouths. Their hands had been placed on each other's knees; the larger man was missing a right index finger. All four eyes were intact and wide open; the victims had been slashed like Marty Goines all over their backs – and their faces. Danny examined the pressed-together front sides; he could see blood and entrail residue.

He stood up. The patrolmen were smoking cigarettes, shuffling their feet, destroying the chance for a successful grid search. One by one they looked at him; the oldest of the four said, 'Those guys like yours?'

Danny said, 'Almost exactly,' thinking of the real camera in his evidence kit, snapshots for his file before the City bulls closed off *their* end of *his* case. 'Who found them?'

The old-timer cop answered him. 'Maintenance man saw a wino running down the hill screaming, so he went up and looked. He called us, came back up and got sick. We sent him home, and when the squad gets here they'll send you home, too.'

The other cops laughed. Danny let it pass and jogged down the trail to get the camera. He was almost to his Chevy when a plainclothes car and Coroner's wagon pulled into the lot and jammed up next to the black-and-whites.

A big, beef-faced man got out of the unmarked and looked right at him. Danny recognized him from newspaper pics: Detective Sergeant Gene Niles, squad whip at Hollywood Division, in up to his ears over Brenda Allen, no indictment, but a quashed lieutenancy and stalemated career – rumor having it that he took no cash, just trade goodies from Brenda's girls. The man's clothes said otherwise: smart navy blazer and razor-creased gray flannels, custom stuff no honest cop could afford.

Two Coroner's men hauled out collapsible gurneys; Danny saw Niles smell cop on him and head over, looking more and more curious and pissed; strange meat on his turf, too young to be working the Homicide Bureau downtown.

He met him halfway, a new story brewing, plausible stuff to satisfy a savvy cop. Face to face, he said, 'I'm with the Sheriff's.'

Niles laughed. 'You a little bit confused about your jurisdiction, Deputy?'

The 'Deputy' was all scorn, like a synonym for 'cancer.' Danny said, 'I'm working a homicide just like the two you've got up the hill.'

Niles bored in with his eyes. 'You sleep in those clothes, Deputy?'

Danny squeezed his hands into fists. 'I was on a stakeout.'

'You ever hear of carrying a razor on all-nighters, *Deputy*?'

'You ever hear of professional courtesy, *Niles*?'

Sergeant Gene Niles looked at his watch. 'A man who reads the papers. Let's try this. How'd you get up here twenty-two minutes after we logged the squeal at the station?'

Danny knew brass balls was the only way to cover his lie. 'I was down at the doughnut joint on Western, and there was a black-and-white with the radio on. How come it took *you* so long? You stop for a manicure?'

'A year ago I'd have reamed you for that.'

'A year ago you were going places. Do you want to hear about my homicide or do you want to sulk?'

Niles picked a piece of lint off his blazer. 'The dispatcher said it looks like a queer job. I hate queer jobs, so if you've got another queer job, I don't want to hear about it. Roll, *Deputy*. And get yourself some decent threads. Mickey Kike's got a haberdashery, and I know he gives all his prat boys a discount.'

Danny headed back to his Chevy seeing red. He drove down the park road to Los Feliz and Vermont and a pay phone, called Doc Layman and told him two Marty Goines companion stiffs were en route, grab them for autopsy no matter what. A minute later Niles' car and the Coroner's wagon went by southbound, no lights or sirens, flunkies killing a fine winter morning. Danny gave them a five-minute lead, took shortcuts downtown and parked in the shade of a warehouse across the street from the City Morgue loading dock. Fourteen minutes passed before the caravan appeared; Niles made a big show of shepherding the sheet-covered gurneys to the ramp; Norton Layman came out to help. Danny heard him berating Niles for separating the bodies.

He settled into his car to wait for Layman's findings; stretching out on the front seat, he closed his eyes and tried to sleep, knowing Doc would be four hours or more on the examinations. Sleep wouldn't come; a hot day started sizzling, warming up the car, making the upholstery sticky. Danny would begin to drop off, then start remembering his lies, what he could or couldn't tell whom. He could brazen his lie to the patrolmen, acting sheepish over being at the doughnut stand at 6:00 A.M., implying he'd been with a woman; he had to coddle Karen Hiltscher into keeping his stint at 2307 Tamarind under wraps. He couldn't let anyone see the contents of his evidence kit; he had to clue in LAPD to the letter that hipped him to Marty Goines' pad, post-dating the occurrence, making it seem like nothing big, letting them discover the gore for themselves. Leo Bordoni was a wild card, but he was probably con-wise enough to stay quiet; he had to fabricate a story to account for his whereabouts yesterday – a phony summary report to Dietrich was his best bet. And the big fear and big questions: if LAPD canvassed Tamarind, would a local report the tan 1947 Chevrolet parked outside 2307 overnight? Should he take advantage of his private lead, rape the neighborhood for witnesses himself, then report the letter, hoping that the worst they could get him for was *not* calling the dope in? If LAPD decided to ease off on their two homicides – Niles as catching officer hating 'queer jobs' – would they canvass at *all*? He had taken the call from Lexington State Hospital himself, via Karen Hiltscher's switchboard. If it all got tricky, would she blab fast to save herself? Would LASD/LAPD rivalry reduce the mess to something that only he cared about?

Heat reflecting off the windshield and too many brain wires short-circuiting on angles lulled Danny to sleep. Cramps and glare woke him up sweaty and itchy; his foot hit the horn and black dreamlessness became sound waves bouncing off four bloody walls. He looked at his watch, saw 12:10 and at least four hours unconscious; the Doc might be done with his dead men. Danny got out of the car, stretched his cramps and walked across the street to the morgue.

Layman was standing near the ramp, eating lunch off an examination slab, a body sheet for a tablecloth. He saw Danny, swallowed a bite of sandwich and said, 'You look bad.'

'That bad?'

'You look scared, too.'

Danny yawned; it made his gums ache. 'I've seen the bodies, and I don't think LAPD cares. That's scary.'

Layman wiped his mouth with a sheet corner. 'Here's a few more scares for you, then. Times of death – twenty-six to thirty hours ago. Both men were anally raped – O+ secretor semen. The wounds on their backs were pure zoot stick, identical in size and fiber content to Martin Mitchell Goines. The missing-finger man died from a throat gash made by a sharp, serrated knife. No cause of death on the other man, but I'd be willing to bet barbiturate OD. On our missing-finger friend I found a vomit-coated, punctured capsule, right up under the tongue. I tested some powder in it and got a home compound – sodium secobarbital, one part, one part strychnine. The secobarbital would hit first, inducing unconsciousness, the strychnine would kill. I think missing finger got indigestion, puked up part of his Mickey Finn and fought to live – that that was when he lost his digit – fighting with the knife man. Once I test the blood on both men and pump their stomachs, I'll know for sure. The missing-finger man was bigger – a larger bloodstream, so the compound didn't kill him like it did our other friend.'

Danny thought of 2307, vomit traces lost in the blood. 'What about the stomach bites?'

Layman said, 'Not human, but human. I found O+ saliva and human gastric juices on the wounds, and the bites were too frenzied and overlapping to make casts from. But – I got three individual tooth cuts – too large to ascribe to any known human dental abstract and too shredded at the bottom to identify on any single-tooth forensic index. I also took a glob of dental mortar paste out of one of the wounds. He wears dentures, Danny. Most likely on top of his own teeth. They might be steel, they might be some other synthetic material, they might be teeth fashioned from animal car-casses. And he's rigged up a way to mutilate with them *and* swallow. They're not human, and I know this doesn't sound professional, but I don't think this son of a bitch is either.'

FOURTEEN

ELLIS LOEW PERFORMED the ceremony in his office, Mal and Dudley Smith official witnesses. Buzz Meeks stood by the conference table, right hand raised; Loew recited the oath: 'Do you, Turner Meeks, hereby swear to loyally and conscientiously perform the duties of Special Investigator, Grand Jury Division of the District Attorney's Office for the City of Los Angeles, upholding the laws of this municipality, protecting the rights and property of its citizens, so help you God?'

Buzz Meeks said, 'Sure.' Loew handed him an ID holder replete with license photostat and DA's Bureau shield. Mal wondered how much Howard Hughes was paying the bastard, guessing at least three grand.

Dudley joined Meeks and Loew in a back-slapping circle; Mal credited an old rumor still holding: Meeks thought he was behind the shooting that got him his pension, Jack D. blowing it, then forgetting his grudge when the okie was no longer LAPD. Let him think it – anything to keep his new colleague as far away as two cops working the same job could be.

And Dudley. And maybe Loew now, too.

Mal watched the three share a toast, Glenlivet in crystal glasses. He took his notepad down to the far end of the table, Meeks and Dudley trading one-liners, Ellis shooting him a scowl that said, 'Let's work.' Loew's half nod acknowledged that their bad blood was just temporary. Mal thought: he should owe me, now I owe him. He picked up his pen to doodle, his knuckles throbbed, he knew Loew was right.

After the thing with Celeste, he'd driven around directionless until his hand started swelling, the pain brutal, blunting all his frantic plans to make it up to his son. He hauled to Central Receiving, flashed his badge and got special treatment: an injection of something that sent him higher than ten kites, teeth fragments pulled out of his fingers, cleansing and suturing and bandaging. He called the house and talked to Stefan, rambling about why he did it, how Celeste had hurt him worse, how she wanted to separate the two of them forever. The boy had seemed shocked, dumbfounded, stuttering details about Celeste's bloodied face – but he'd ended the conversation calling him 'Dad' and saying, 'I love you.'

And that little injection of hope made him think like a policeman. He called Ellis Loew, told him what happened, that lawyers and a custody battle were coming, don't let Celeste file charges and gain an advantage. Loew took the reins, driving to the house and shepherding Celeste to Hollywood Presbyterian, where her lawyer was waiting. The man took photographs of her bruised and bloody face; Loew convinced him not to let Celeste file criminal charges on a ranking DA's Bureau investigator, threatening reprisals if he did, promising not to intercede in the custody case if he agreed. The attorney did agree; Celeste's broken nose was set and two dental surgeons worked on her nearly destroyed gums and bridgework. Loew, enraged, called the pay phone where he was waiting and said, 'You're on your own with the kid. Never ask me for another favor.'

He drove back to the house then, finding Stefan asleep, breathing Celeste's old country sedative – schnapps and hot milk. He kissed the boy's cheek, moved a suitcase full of clothes and Lesnick's files to a motel on Olympic and Normandie, made arrangements for a woman cop he knew to check on Stefan once a day, slept off the painkiller on a strange bed and woke up thinking of Franz Kempflerr.

He couldn't stop thinking about him, and he couldn't put together any rationalizations that said Celeste was a liar. He did put together a series of phone calls that got him a lawyer: Jake Kellerman, a pragmatist who said continuances were the smart money, postpone the custody trial until Captain Considine was a grand jury hero. Kellerman advised him to stay away from Celeste and Stefan, said he'd call him for a strategy meeting soon – and left him with a Demerol hangover, aching knuckles and the certainty he should take the day off and stay away from his boss.

He still couldn't shake Kempflerr.

Going over Lesnick's files was just a distraction. He was getting a case on Claire De Haven, every notation on her tweaked him; he knew direct questioning was out for now, that finding an operative should be his main priority. Still, putting together the woman's past was enticing, and when he hit a piece of information he'd overlooked – Mondo Lopez bragging to the shrink about a dress he'd shoplifted for Claire's thirty-third birthday in May of '43, making her exactly *his* age – he took the woman and the Nazi down to the main public library for research.

He scanned microfilm for hours, banishing the German, bringing the woman into focus.

Buchenwald liberated, the Nuremberg trials, the biggest Nazis stating they just followed orders. The incredible mechanized brutality. Sleepy Lagoon a just cause championed by bad people. A hunch that Claire De Haven made the society pages as a debutante; confirmation in summer 1929: nineteen-year-old Claire at the Las Madrinas Ball – blurred black and white that only hinted at who she was.

With Kempflerr eclipsed by Göring, Ribbentrop, Dönitz and Keitel, the woman came on that much stronger. He called the DMV and got her driver's license stats, drove to Beverly Hills and kept her Spanish manse under surveillance. Two hours in, Claire left the house – her picture a prophecy of beauty fulfilled. She was trim, auburn-haired with just a few streaks of gray, and wore a face that was natural beauty and the best that money could buy – but *strong.* He followed her Cadillac down to the Villa Frascati; she met Reynolds Loftis there for lunch – the Mr. Dignity type he'd seen in a dozen movies. He had a drink at the bar and watched the two: the switch-hitter actor and the Red Queen held hands and kissed across the table every few minutes; they were undoubtedly lovers. He remembered Loftis to Lesnick: 'Claire is the only woman I've ever loved' – and felt jealous.

Glasses and ashtrays hit the table; Mal glanced up from his doodling – swastikas and hangman's nooses – and saw his fellow Red chasers looking at him. Dudley slid a clean glass and the bottle down. Mal slid it back and said, 'Lieutenant, you blew it for us with the Mexicans. This is for the record. I say no direct interrogations until Meeks gets us some hard criminal stuff that we can use, like indictment threats. I say we hit lefties outside UAES exclusively, turn them as friendly witnesses, get them to inform and plant a decoy as soon as we find one. I say we cover ourselves on the Mexicans by planting some lines in the political columns. Ed Satterlee's pals with Victor Reisel and Walter Winchell, they hate Commies, the UAES probably reads them. Something like this: "LA City grand jury team slated to investigate Red influence in Hollywood scotched due to lack of funds and political infighting." Every Pinko in the UAES knows what happened at Variety International the other day, and I say we put a lid on it and lull them to sleep.'

All eyes were on the Irishman; Mal wondered how he'd field the gauntlet – two witnesses to irrefutable logic. Dudley said, 'I can only apologize for my actions, Malcolm. You were circumspect, I was bull-headed, and I was wrong. But I think we should squeeze Claire De Haven before we pull back and go sub rosa. She's the fulcrum to snitch the whole brain trust, she's a virgin as far as grand juries go, breaking her would demoralize all those sad excuses for men in love with her. She's never been braced by the police, and I think she damn well might fold.'

Mal laughed. 'You're underestimating her. And I suppose you want to be the one to do the bracing?'

'No, lad, I think you should be the one. Of all of us here, you're the only one who comes off as even remotely idealistic. A kid gloves cop you are, kid gloves with a cruel streak. You'll nail her with that great right hook I've heard you've got.'

Ellis Loew mouthed the words, 'Not me,' hard eyes on Mal's end of the table. Buzz Meeks sipped Scotch. Mal winced, wondering exactly how much Dudley knew. 'It's a sucker play, Lieutenant. You screwed up once, now you're asking me to compound it. Ellis, a direct approach is bullshit. Tell him that.'

Loew said, 'Mal, control your language, because I agree with Dudley. Claire De Haven is a promiscuous woman, women like that are unbalanced, and I think we should risk the approach. In the meantime, Ed Satterlee is trying to coopt a man for us, a man he knew in the seminary who's infiltrated Communist cells in Cleveland. He's a pro, but he doesn't work cheap. Even if the approach with De Haven fails and the UAES is alerted to us, he'll be able to get next to them so subtly that they'll never know it in a million years. And I'm sure we can get the money for our decoy from Mr. Hughes. Right, Buzz?'

Buzz Meeks winked at Mal. 'Ellis, if this babe is a roundheels, I wouldn't be sendin' in a seminary boy to work her. Howard himself might do the trick. He likes poon, so maybe you could send him in in disguise.'

Loew rolled his eyes; Dudley Smith laughed, like he'd heard a real knee-slapper at the Elks Club smoker. Meeks winked again, testing the water – were you the one who got me shot to shit back in '46? Mal thought of his custody juice riding with a cracker buffoon, hatchet cop and hard-on lawyer. It wasn't until Loew banged the table to dismiss them that he realized he would be meeting the Red Queen face to face, his own pawn to operate.

FIFTEEN

DANNY SPENT THE next morning at his apartment, updating *his* file, all new stuff on the two new victims tied in to *his* case.

Twenty-four hours in, he had this:

No ID on victims two and three; Doc Layman, as a City pathologist, was privy to Hollywood Squad summary reports and would be calling when and if the bodies got names. He had already called to say that Sergeant Gene Niles was heading the LAPD investigation, deemed it lowball and was short-shrifting it so that he could return to a fur warehouse robbery that promised some newspaper ink to make up for the Brenda Allen smear that cost him his wife and kids. Uniformed cops were rousting winos in Griffith Park and getting nowhere; Niles himself had rubber-hosed two Sterno jockeys with child molester jackets. Layman's seventeen page autopsy report – which *did* tag the smaller of the two men as dying of a barbiturate OD – was ignored by Niles and the handful of uniformed flunkies detached to work under him. The Doc was convinced that a 'Reverse Black Dahlia Syndrome' was in effect – the three stiffs found so far had received a total of four inner section newspaper columns, city editors shying away because Marty Goines was trash and the whole thing was queer shit that you couldn't print without the Legion for Decency and Concerned Catholic Mothers on your ass.

Captain Dietrich had heard him out yesterday, facts, theories, omissions, lies and his giant lie – the doughnut stand whopper to cover him on 2307 Tamarind, still unreported. He'd nodded along, then said he'd *try* to get the interagency ball rolling with LAPD. Sheriff's dicks were out of the question – the three other men on the station squad were deluged and the County Detective Bureau would deem the Goines job too Mickey Mouse and messy now that City cops were involved. He had a pal working Hollywood daywatch – a lieutenant named Poulson who'd stayed tight with Mickey C. despite Brenda A. He'd talk to the man about the two departments putting a Homicide team together, and again stated that he thought it would come down to the quality of the victims. If two and three were hopheads, ex-cons or queers – forget it. If they were squarejohns – maybe. And unless the case got some juice, with an LAPD/LASD team formed, he was off it in ten days, Martin Mitchell Goines, DOD 1/1/50 tossed into the open file.

On his evidence gathered at 2307 Tamarind:

With two exceptions, just repeat stuff, what Hans Maslick called 'double negatives to prove positives.' He had gotten an unknown set of prints that matched with the taller dead man's missing finger; Layman had also rolled both stiffs. The white paste residue he bagged was obviously the denture adhesive that led Doc to his 99 percent sure denture theory. Leo Bordoni did not touch print-sustaining surfaces while he was in the room; the three sets of clothes had to be left behind in case the killer was captured and specifically confessed to leaving them folded atop the toilet. The dust and dirt trace elements were useless until he got a suspect to run comparisons on – leaving him only two jumps on LAPD and the killer: his photos of the blood streaks and his chance to canvass Tamarind Street solo if the City bulls soft-pedaled their investigation. Nightmares and big jeopardy.

After leaving the morgue yesterday, he drove to a camera shop and paid quadruple the normal fee to have his rolls of film developed immediately. The man at the counter looked askance at his raggedy state but took his money; he waited while the job was done. The camera man handed the prints and negatives over an hour later, commenting, 'Them walls what you call modern art?' He'd laughed and laughed and laughed himself home – his chuckles dying out when he tacked the photos to a corkboard evidence display he'd erected beside his file boxes.

Blood in glossy black and white was jarring, unnatural, the pictures things he could never let anyone see, even if he busted the combined homicides wide open. Thinking of them as his alone was comforting; he spent hours just staring, seeing designs within designs. Drip marks became strange body appendages; spray streaks were knives cutting at them. The eye circuits got so illogical that he turned to his case history text: blood spray marks exemplified. The cases elaborated were all German and Eastern European, psychopaths enacting vampire fantasies, spraying their victim's blood on convenient objects, asserting their lunacy by creating pictures of little or no significance. Nothing resembling the formation of the letter W; nothing pertaining to dentures.

Dentures.

His one hard lead to come out of victims two and three.

Not human.

They could be steel teeth, they could be plastic teeth, they could be teeth ripped out of animal carcasses. The next investigatory step was a complete paper chase: men capable of making dentures cross-probed against 'tall, middle-aged,' 'gray-haired,' 'O+ blood' and time frame opportunity.

Needles in a haystack.

Yesterday, he had taken his first step, checking dental lab listings in the seventeen separate LA City/County Yellow Pages. There were a total of 349, plus, in consideration of a possible animal carcass angle, 93 taxidermists' shops. A phone call to a lab picked at random and a long talk with a cooperative foreman got him this information: the 349 number was low; LA was the big league for the denture industry. Some labs didn't advertise in the Yellow Pages; some dentists had denture makers working in their offices. If a man worked on human dentures he could apply the same skills to animal or plastic teeth. *He* didn't know of any labs that specialized in animal choppers, good luck Deputy Upshaw, you've got your work cut out for you.

It was a ride to the Station then. Karen Hiltscher was just swinging back on duty; he brought candy and flowers to chill down her curiosity over Tamarind and any poutiness for the largest deluge of shitwork he'd ever tossed her way: *all* individual station and Sheriff's Bureau files checked for men with dental lab work histories, plus eliminations against blood type and physical description; calls started to his list of dental labs for breakdowns of male workers with the same physical stats. The girl took the goodies while a group of muster room loungers guffawed; she seemed hurt and miffed, didn't mention 2307 and agreed in a Bette Davis bitch pout to make the queries in her 'spare time.' He didn't press; she knew she had gained the upper hand on him.

Danny finished up his file work, thinking of Tamarind Street as virgin canvassing territory, wondering if the burglary partner Leo Bordoni mentioned applied to the case, if he was or wasn't connected to the burn-faced boy from Marty Goines' past. His paperwork now totaled fifty-odd pages; he'd spent fifteen of the past twenty-four hours writing. He'd resisted the impulse to scour around Tamarind, wait, look, talk up the locals, jump the gun on LAPD. If Niles had gotten a lead on the place, Doc Layman would have called him; most likely the street was just existing, business as usual, while its residents forgot minor occurrences that might crack his case. Phone the Lexington Hospital lead to Dietrich, making like he just got the call at home, then brief Karen on the lie? Or do it after, no risk on the skipper handing the job to his LAPD pal, the interagency gig *he* asked for?

No contest. Danny drove to Hollywood, to Tamarind Street.

The block *was* business as usual, warmer than two days ago, foot traffic on the sidewalk, people sitting on front porches, mowing lawns and trimming shrubs. Danny parked and canvassed, straight zero into mid-afternoon: no strange occurrences in the neighborhood, no strange vehicles, no info on Marty Goines, nothing unusual going on at 2307 Tamarind, garage apartment rear. No loiterers, no strange noises, zero – and nobody mentioned his tan Chevy parked streetside. He was starting to feel cocky about his maneuvering when an old lady walking a miniature schnauzer responded to his lead question with a yes.

Three nights ago, around 10:00, she'd been strolling Wursti and saw a tall man with beautiful silver hair walking back toward the garage at 2307, a 'weaving drunk' on either side of him. No, she had not seen any of the three men before; no, no strange noises from the garage apartment followed; no, she didn't know the woman who owned the front house; no, the men did not talk to each other, and she doubted she would be able to ID the silver-haired man if she saw him again.

Danny let the woman go, went back to his car, hunkered down to keep a fix on 2307. Instincts hit him hard:

Yes, the killer staked out the pad to see if cops showed up. Yes, he had the Griffith Park dump site already planned. Goines' name never made the papers, he was simply a vagrant, the killer knew his murder spot wasn't compromised by Goines' publicity. The only known Goines associates who knew of Mad Marty's demise were the jazzmen he had questioned, which eliminated jazzbos as suspects – with Goines ID'd by the law, no smart killer would bring future victims to the man's apartment. *Which meant that if no heat appeared in force on Tamarind Street, the killer might bring other victims here. Hold the lead safe from LAPD, stay staked out, pray the killer didn't witness his or Bordoni's break-in and today's canvassing, sit tight and he just might waltz right into your life with number four on his arm.*

Danny held, eyes on the house, rear-view adjusted to frame the driveway. Time stretched; a wrong-looking man strolled by, then two old ladies pushing shopping carts and a gaggle of boys wearing Hollywood High letter jackets. A siren whirred, getting closer; Danny thought of code three trouble down on the Boulevard.

Then everything went very fast.

An old lady opened the 2307 front house door; an unmarked prowler jammed into the driveway. Sergeant Gene Niles got out, looked across the street and saw him – a sitting duck in the car he'd had at Griffith Park yesterday morning. Niles started to head over; the old woman intercepted him, pointing toward the garage apartment. Niles stopped; the woman grabbed at his coat sleeves; Danny flailed for lies. Niles let himself be led down the driveway. Danny got bad heebie-jeebies – and drove to the Station to lay some cover.

Dietrich was standing by the squadroom entrance, wolfing a cigarette; Danny took his arm and steered him to the privacy of his own office. Dietrich went with it, swinging around as Danny shut the door. 'Lieutenant Poulson just called me. Gene Niles just called him, because he caught a call from Martin Goines' landlady. Blood and bloody clothes all over Goines' apartment, a mile from Griffith Park. Our one and LAPD's two were obviously snuffed there, you were seen staking the place out and rabbited. Why? Make it good so I don't have to suspend you.'

Danny had his answer down pat. 'A man from Lexington State called me at home this morning and told me he'd gotten a letter from Marty Goines, addressed to another patient. The return address was 2307 North Tamarind. I thought about that talk we had, greasing things with Poulson, us being cooperative even though Niles was pulling a snit. But I didn't trust LAPD to canvass properly, so I did it myself. I was taking a breather in my car when Niles saw me.'

Dietrich picked up an ashtray and stubbed out his smoke. 'And you didn't call me? On a lead that hot?'

‘I jumped the gun, sir. I’m sorry.’

Dietrich said, ‘I’m not sure I buy your story. Why didn’t you talk to the landlady before you canvassed? Poulson said Niles told him the woman was cherry – she was the one who discovered the mess.’

Danny shrugged, trying to belittle the question. ‘I knocked early on, but the old girl probably didn’t hear it.’

‘Poulson said she sounded like an alert old dame. Danny, were you in the neighborhood knocking off a matinee?’

The question didn’t register. ‘What do you mean, a movie?’

‘No, pussy. Your bimbo’s got a place near that doughnut stand where you heard the squeal yesterday, and Tamarind is near there. Were you shacking on County time?’

Dietrich’s tone had softened; Danny got his lies straight. ‘I canvassed, then I shacked. I was resting in my car when Niles showed up.’

Dietrich smiled/grimaced; the phone on his desk rang. He picked it up, said, ‘Yes, Norton, he’s here,’ listened and added, ‘One question. Have you got jackets on the two men?’

A long stretch of silence. Danny fidgeted by the door; Karen Hiltscher nudged it open, dropped a sheaf of papers on the Captain’s desk and walked out, eyes lowered. Danny thought: don’t let the skipper tell her I’ve got a woman; don’t let her tell him she fielded the call from Lex. Dietrich said, ‘Hold on, Norton. I want to talk to him first,’ placed a hand over the receiver and spoke to Danny. ‘There’s an ID on LAPD’s two bodies. They’re trash, so I’m telling you now: no interagency investigation, and you’ve got five more days on Goines before I yank you off. The Sun-Fax Market was held up this morning and if we don’t clear it by then, I want you on that. I’m letting you slide for not reporting Goines’ address, but I’m warning you: stay out of LAPD’s way. Tom Poulson is a close friend, we’ve stayed friends despite Mickey and Brenda, and I don’t want you fucking it up. Now here, Norton Layman wants to talk to you.’

Danny grabbed the phone. ‘Yeah, Doc.’

‘It’s your friendly City pipeline. Got a pencil?’

Danny fished pad and pen from his pockets. ‘Shoot.’

‘The taller man is George William Wiltsie, DOB 9/14/13. Two male prostitution arrests, booted out of the Navy in ’43 for moral turpitude. The other man is address-verified as Wiltsie’s known associate, maybe his brunser. Duane no middle name Lindenaur, DOB 12/5/16. One arrest for extortion – June, 1941. The beef did not go to court – the complainant dropped charges. There’s no employment listed for Wiltsie; Lindenaur worked as a dialogue rewrite man at Variety International Pictures. Both men lived at 11768 Ventura Boulevard, the Leafy Glade Motel. LAPD is rolling there now, so stay clear. Does this make you happy?’

Danny counted lies. ‘I don’t know, Doc.’

From his cubicle, Danny called R&I and the DMV and got complete records readouts on victims two and three. George Wiltsie was arrested for soliciting indecent acts at cocktail lounges in '40 and '41; the DA dropped charges both times for lack of evidence, and the man possessed a lengthy list of traffic violations. Duane Lindenaur was DMV-clean, and had only the one dropped extortion beef Doc Layman mentioned. Danny had the R&I clerk break down the victims' arrests by location; Wiltsie's rousts were in City jurisdiction, Lindenaur's was in the southeastern part of the County patrolled by Firestone Division. A request for a check of Lindenaur's package got him the arresting officer's name – Sergeant Frank Skakel.

Danny called Sheriff's Personnel and learned that Skakel was still working Firestone swingwatch. He buzzed him there, got the switchboard and was put through to the squadroom.

'Skakel. Speak.'

'Sergeant, this is Deputy Upshaw, West Hollywood.'

'Yeah, Deputy.'

'I'm working a homicide tied in to two City 187's, and you arrested one of the victims back in '41. Duane Lindenaur. Do you remember him?'

Skakel said, 'Yeah. He was working a queer squeeze on a rich lawyer named Hartshorn. I always remember the money jobs. Lindenaur got bumped, huh?'

'Yes. Do you remember the case?'

'Pretty well. The complainant's name was Charles Hartshorn. He liked boys, but he was married and he had a daughter he doted on. Lindenaur met Hartshorn through some fruit introduction service, perved with him and threatened to snitch Hartshorn's queerness to the daughter. Hartshorn called us in, we rousted Lindenaur, then Hartshorn got cold feet about testifying in court and dropped the charges.'

'Sergeant, was Hartshorn tall and gray-haired?'

Skakel laughed. 'No. Short and bald as a beagle. What's with the job? You got leads?'

'Lindenaur's on the City end, and there's no real leads yet. What was your take on Hartshorn?'

'He's no killer, Upshaw. He's rich, he's got influence and he won't give you the time of day. Besides, pansy jobs ain't worth it, and Lindenaur was a punk. I say c'est la vie, let sleeping queers lie.'

Back to the City, kid gloves this time, nothing to spawn more lies and trouble. Danny drove to Variety International Pictures, hoping Gene Niles would spend a decent amount of time at the Leafy Glade Motel. With the Goines end stalemated, victims two and three were the hot stuff, and Lindenaur as a studio scribe/extortionist felt hotter than Wiltsie as a male whore.

Rival union factions were picketing by the front gate; Danny parked across the street, put an ‘Official Police Vehicle’ board on the windshield, ducked his head and weaved through a maze of bodies waving banners. The gate guard was reading a scandal tabloid featuring a lurid column on *his* three killings – gory details leaked by a ‘reliable source’ at the LA morgue. Danny scanned half a page while he got out his badge, the guard engrossed, chewing a cigar. The two cases were now connected in print – if only by the LA *Tattler* – and that meant the possibility of more ink, radio and television news, phony confessions, phony leads and scads of bullshit.

Danny rapped on the wall; the cigar chewer put down his paper and looked at the badge held up. ‘Yeah? Who you here for?’

‘I want to talk to the people who worked with Duane Lindenaur.’

The guard didn’t flinch at the name; Lindenaur’s monicker hadn’t yet made the tabloid. He checked a sheet on a clipboard, said, ‘Set 23, the office next to the *Tomahawk Massacre* interior,’ hit a button and pointed. The gate opened; Danny threaded his way down a long stretch of blacktop filled with costumed players. The door to Set 23 was wide open; just inside it, three Mexican men were wiping war paint off their faces. They gave Danny bored looks; he saw a door marked REWRITE, went over and knocked on it.

A voice called, ‘It’s open’; Danny walked in. A lanky young man in tweeds and horn rims was stuffing pages in a briefcase. He said, ‘Are you the guy replacing Duane? He hasn’t showed up in three days and the director needs additional dialogue quicksville.’

Danny went in fast. ‘Duane’s dead, his friend George Wiltsie too. Murdered.’

The young man dropped his briefcase; his hands twitched up and adjusted his glasses. ‘Mm-mm-murdered?’

‘That’s right.’

‘And y-y-you’re a policeman?’

‘Deputy Sheriff. Did you know Lindenaur well?’

The youth picked up his briefcase and slumped into a chair. ‘N-no, not well. Just here at work, just superficially.’

‘Did you see him outside the studio?’

‘No.’

‘Did you know George Wiltsie?’

‘No. I knew he and Duane lived together, because Duane told me.’

Danny swallowed. ‘Were they lovers?’

‘I wouldn’t dream of speculating on their relationship. All I know is that Duane was quiet, that he was a good rewrite man and that he worked cheap, which is a big plus at this slave labor camp.’

A footstep scraped outside the door. Danny turned and saw a shadow retreating. Looking out, he caught a back view of a man fast-walking over to a bank of cameras and lighting fixtures. He followed; the man stood there, hands in his pockets, the classic ‘I’ve got nothing to hide’ routine.

Danny braced him, disappointed that he was young and mid-sized, no burn scars on his face, at best a conduit for second-hand dope. ‘What were you doing listening outside that door?’

The man was closer to a boy – skinny, acned, a high voice with a trace of a lisp. ‘I work here. I’m a set dresser.’

‘So that gives you the right to eavesdrop on official police business?’

The kid primped his hair. Danny said, ‘I asked you a question.’

‘No, that doesn’t give me–’

‘Then why did you?’

‘I heard you say Duaney and George were dead, and I knew them. Do you know–’

‘No, I don’t know who killed them, or I wouldn’t be here. How well did *you* know them?’

The boy played with his pompadour. ‘I shared lunch with Duaney – Duane – and I knew George to say hi to when he picked Duane up.’

‘I guess the three of you had a lot in common, right?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did you associate with Lindenaur and Wiltsie outside of here?’

‘No.’

‘But you talked, because the three of you had so goddamn much in common. Is that right?’

The boy eyed the floor, one foot drawing lazy figure eights. ‘Yes, sir.’

‘Then you tell me about what they had going and who else they had going, because if anyone around here would know, you would. Isn’t that right?’

The boy braced himself against a spotlight, his back to Danny. ‘They’d been together for a long time, but they liked to party with other guys. Georgie was rough trade, and he mostly lived off Duane, but sometimes he turned tricks for this fancy escort service. I don’t know anything else, so can I please go now?’

Danny thought of his call to Firestone Station – Lindenaur meeting the man he blackmailed through a ‘fruit introduction service.’ ‘No. What was the name of the escort service?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Who else did Wiltsie and Lindenaur party with? Give me some names.’

‘I don’t know and I don’t have any names!’

‘Don’t whine. What about a tall, gray-haired man, middle-aged. Did either Lindenaur or Wiltsie mention a man like that?’

‘No.’

‘Is there a man working here who fits that description?’

‘There’s a million men in LA who fit that description, so will you please–’

Danny clamped the boy’s wrist, saw what he was doing and let go. ‘Don’t raise your voice to me, just answer. Lindenaur, Wiltsie, a tall, gray-haired man.’

The kid turned and rubbed his wrist. ‘I don’t know of any men like that, but Duane liked older guys, and he told me he dug gray hair. Now are you satisfied?’

Danny couldn’t meet his stare. ‘Did Duane and George like jazz?’

‘I don’t know, we never discussed music.’

‘Did they ever talk about burglary or a man in his late twenties with burn scars on his face?’

‘No.’

‘Were either of them hipped on animals?’

‘No, just other guys.’

Danny said, ‘Get out of here,’ then moved himself, the kid still staring. The blacktop was deserted now, dusk coming on. He walked to the front gate; a voice from the guard hut stopped him. ‘Say, Officer. You got a minute?’

Danny halted. A bald man in a polo shirt and golf slacks stepped out and extended his hand. ‘I’m Herman Gerstein. I run this place.’

City turf. Danny gave Gerstein a shake. ‘My name’s Upshaw. I’m a Sheriff’s detective.’

Gerstein said, ‘I heard you were looking for the guys some script hack works with. That true?’

‘Duane Lindenaur. He was murdered.’

‘That’s too bad. I don’t like it when my people check out without telling me. What’s the matter, Upshaw? You ain’t laughing.’

‘It wasn’t funny.’

Gerstein cleared his throat. ‘To each his own, and I don’t have to beg for laughs, I’ve got comedians for that. Before you go, I want to inform you of something. I’m cooperating with a grand jury investigation into Commie influence in Hollywood, and I don’t like the idea of extraneous cops asking questions around here. You dig? National security outranks a dead script hack.’

Danny threw out a tweak on general principles. ‘A dead queer script hack.’

Gerstein looked him over. ‘Now that really ain’t funny, because I would never let a known homo work at my shop under any conditions. *Ever.* Is that clear?’

‘Vividly.’

Gerstein whipped three long cigars out of his slacks and stuck them in Danny’s shirt pocket. ‘Develop a sense of humor and you might go places. And if you have to come on the lot again, see me first. You understand?’

Danny dropped the cigars on the ground, stepped on them and walked out the gate.

A check of the local papers and more phone work were next.

Danny drove to Hollywood and Vine, bought all four LA dailies, parked in a no-parking zone and read. The *Times* and *Daily News* had nothing on his case: the *Mirror* and *Herald* gave it a back page brush-off, 'Mangled Bodies Found in Griffith Park,' and 'Dead Derelicts Discovered at Dawn' their respective taglines. Sanitized descriptions of the mutilations followed; Gene Niles blasted his horn about the job's random nature. There was no mention of ID on the victims and nothing pertaining to the death of Marty Goines.

A pay phone stood next to the newsstand. Danny called Karen Hiltscher and got what he expected – her dental lab queries were going very slowly, ten negatives since he gave her the job; her calls to other LASD stations and the Detective Bureau for checks on burglars with dental tech backgrounds got a total zero – no such men existed. Trial calls to two taxidermists yielded the fact that all stuffed animals wore plastic teeth; real animal teeth did not show up in dentures, only in the mouths of creatures still on the hoof. Danny urged Karen to keep plugging, said his goodbyes accompanied by kissy sounds and dialed the Moonglow Lounge.

Janice Modine was not waitressing that night, but John Lembeck was drinking at the bar. Danny made nice with the man he'd spared a beating; the car thief/pimp made nice back. Danny knew he was good for some free information and asked him for scoop on homosexual pimps and escort services. Lembeck said the only queer service he knew of was ritzy, hush-hush and run by a man named Felix Gordean, a legit talent agent with an office on the Strip and a suite at the Chateau Marmont. Gordean wasn't fruit himself, but provided boys to the Hollywood elite and old money LA.

Danny admonished Lembeck to stay frosty and took his Gordean dope to R&I and the DMV night line. Two calls, two squeaky-clean records and three plush addresses: 9817 Sunset for his office, the Chateau Marmont down the Strip at 7941 for his apartment, a beach house in Malibu: 16822 Pacific Coast Highway.

With one dime and one nickel left in his pocket, Danny played a hunch. He called Firestone Station, got Sergeant Frank Skakel and asked him the name of the 'fruit introduction service' where extortionist Duane Lindenaur met extortionee Charles Hartshorn. Skakel grumbled and said he'd ring Danny at his pay phone; ten minutes later he called back and said he'd dug up the original complaint report. Lindenaur met Hartshorn at a party thrown by a man who owned an escort service – Felix Gordean. Skakel ended with *his* admonition: while he was digging through the files, a buddy on the squad give him some lowdown: Gordean was paying heavy operation kickbacks to Sheriff's Central Vice.

Danny drove to the Chateau Marmont, an apartment house-hotel done up like a swank Renaissance fortress. The main building was festooned with turrets and parapets, and there was an inner courtyard of similarly adorned bungalows connected by pathways – high, perfectly trimmed hedges surrounding them. Gaslights at the end of wrought-iron poles illuminated address plates; Danny followed a winding string of numbers to 7941, heard dance music wafting behind the hedge and started for the path to the door. Then a gust of wind scudded clouds across the sky and moonlight caught two men in evening clothes kissing, swaying together in the dark porch enclosure.

Danny watched; the moon was eclipsed by more cloud cover; the door opened and admitted the men – laughter, a jump crescendo and a few seconds' worth of brightness easing them inside. Danny went pins and needles, squeezed between the hedge and the front wall and scissor-walked over to a large picture window covered by velvet drapes. There was a narrow space where the two furls of purple were drawn apart, with a strip of light giving access to tuxedos swirling across parquet, wall tapestries, the sparkle of glasses hoisted. Danny pressed his face to the window and looked in.

That close, he got distortion blur, Man Camera malfunctions. He pulled back so that his eyes could capture a larger frame, saw tuxedos entwined in movement, cheek-to-cheek tangos, all male. The faces were up against each other so that they couldn't be distinguished individually; Danny zoomed out, in, out, in, until he was pressed into the window glass with the pins and needles localized between his legs, his eyes honing for mid-shots, close-ups, faces.

More blur, blips of arms, legs, a cart being pushed and a man in white carrying a punch bowl. Out, in, out, better focus, no faces, then Tim and Coleman the alto together, swaying to hard jazz. The pins and needles hurting; Tim gone, replaced by a blond ingenu. Then shadows killing his vision, his lens cleared by a step backward – and a perfectly framed view of two fat, ugly wallflowers tongue-kissing, all oily skin and razor burn and hair pomade glistening.

Danny bolted home, seeing San Berdoo '39 and Tim giving him the fisheye when he wouldn't take seconds on Roxie. He found his spare I. W. Harper, knocked down his standard four shots and saw it worse, Tim reproachful, saying, yeah it was just horseplay, but *you* really liked it. Two more shots, the Chateau Marmont in Technicolor, all pretty ones that he knew had Timmy's body.

He went straight to the bottle then, quality sourmash burning like rotgut, Man-Cameraing women, women, women. Karen Hiltscher, Janice Modine, strippers he'd questioned about a stickup at the Club Largo, tits and cunt on display in the dressing room, inured to men looking at their stuff. Rita Hayworth, Ava Gardner, the hat check girl at Dave's Blue Room, his mother stepping out of the bathtub before she got fat and became a Jehovah's Witness. All ugly and wrong, just like the two wallflowers at the Marmont.

Danny drank standing up until his legs went. Going down, he managed to throw the bottle at the wall. It hit a pinup of the blood patterns at 2307 Tamarind.

SIXTEEN

MAL GOT HIS lies straight on the doorstep and rang the bell. Heels over hardwood echoed inside the house; he pulled his vest down to cover his slack waistband – too many meals forgotten. The door opened and the Red Queen was standing there, perfectly coiffed, elegantly dressed in silk and tweed – at 9:30 in the morning.

'Yes? Are you a salesman? There's a Beverley Hills ordinance against soliciting, you know.'

Mal knew she knew otherwise. 'I'm with the District Attorney's Office.'

'Beverley Hills?'

'The City of Los Angeles.'

Claire De Haven smiled – movie star quality. 'My accumulation of jaywalking tickets?'

Cop-quality dissembling – Mal knew she had him pegged as the nice guy in the Lopez/Duarte/Benavides questioning. 'The City needs your help.'

The woman chuckled – elegantly – and held the door open. 'Come in and tell me about it, Mr . . .?'

'Considine.'

Claire repeated the name and stood aside; Mal walked into a large living room furnished in a floral motif: gardenia-patterned divans, tufted orchid chairs, little tables and bookstands inlaid with wooden daisies. The walls were solid movie posters – anti-Nazi pictures popular in the late '30s and early '40s. Mal strolled up to a garish job ballyhooing *Dawn of the Righteous* – a noble Russki facing off a drooling blackshirt brandishing a Luger. Sunshine haloed the good guy; the German was shadowed in darkness. With Claire De Haven watching him, he counterpunched. 'Subtle.'

Claire laughed. 'Artful. Are you an attorney, Mr. Considine?'

Mal turned around. The Red Queen was holding a glass filled with clear liquid and ice. He couldn't smell gin and bet vodka – more elegant, no booze breath. 'No, I'm an investigator with the Grand Jury Division. May I sit down?'

Claire pointed to two chairs facing each other across a chess table. 'I'm warming to this. Would you like coffee or a drink?'

Mal said, 'No,' and sat down. The chair was upholstered in leather; the orchids were embroidered silk. Claire De Haven took the opposite seat and crossed her legs. 'You're crazy to think I'd ever inform. I won't, my friends won't, and we'll have the best legal talent money can buy.'

Mal played off the three Mexicans. 'Miss De Haven, this is a mop-up interview at best. My partner and I approached your friends at Variety

International the wrong way, our boss is very angry and our funding has been cut. When we got our initial paperwork on the UAES – old HUAC stuff – we didn't find your name mentioned, and all your friends seemed . . . well . . . rather doctrinaire. I decided to play a hunch and present my case to you, hoping you'd keep an open mind and find aspects of what I'm going to tell you reasonable.'

Claire De Haven smiled and sipped her drink. 'You speak very well for a policeman.'

Mal thought: and you blast vodka in the morning and fuck pachuco hoodlums. 'I went to Stanford, and I was a major with the MPs in Europe. I was involved in processing evidence to convict Nazi war criminals, so you see I'm not entirely unsympathetic to those posters on your walls.'

'You display empathy well, too. And now you've been employed by the studios, because it's easier to see Red than pay decent wages. You'll divide, conquer, get people to inform and bring in specialists. And you'll cause nothing but grief.'

From banter to cool outrage in a half second flat. Mal tried to look hangdog, thinking he could take the woman if he gave her a tough fight, but let her win. 'Miss De Haven, why doesn't the UAES strike in order to achieve its contract demands?'

Claire took a slow drink. 'The Teamsters would get in and stay in on a temporary payroll stipulation.'

A good opening; a last chance to play nice guy before they pulled back, planted newspaper dope and went decoy. 'I'm glad you mentioned the Teamsters, because they worry me. Should this grand jury succeed – and I doubt that it will – a racketeering force against the Teamsters would be a logical next step. They are very heavily infiltrated with criminal elements, much the way the American left is infiltrated by Communists.'

Claire De Haven sat still, not taking the bait. She looked at Mal, eyes lingering on the automatic strapped to his belt. 'You're an intelligent man, so state your case. Thesis sentence style, like you learned in your freshman comp class at Stanford.'

Mal thought of Celeste – juice for some indignation. 'Miss De Haven, I saw Buchenwald, and I know what Stalin is doing is just as bad. We want to get to the bottom of *totalitarian* Communist influence in the movie industry and inside the UAES, *end it*, prevent the Teamsters from kicking the shit out of you on the picket line and establish through the testimony some sort of demarcation line between *hard* Communist propaganda aggression and legitimate leftist political activity.' A pause, a shrug, hands raised in mock frustration. 'Miss De Haven, I'm a policeman. I collect evidence to put robbers and killers away. I don't like this job, but I think it needs to be done and I'm damn well going to do it as best I can. Can't you see my point?'

Claire took cigarettes and a lighter from the table and lit up. She smoked while Mal darted his eyes around the room, mock chagrin at blowing his calm. Finally she said, ‘You’re either a very good actor or in way over your head with some very bad men. Which is it? I honestly don’t know.’

‘Don’t patronize me.’

‘I’m sorry.’

‘No, you’re not.’

‘All right, I’m not.’

Mal got up and paced the room, advance man for his decoy. He noticed a bookcase lined with picture frames, examined a shelf of them and saw a string of handsome young men. About half were Latin lover types – but Lopez, Duarte and Benavides were absent. He remembered Lopez’ comment to Lesnick: Claire was the only gringa he’d met who’d suck him, and he felt guilty about it because only whores did that, and she was his Communista madonna. On a shelf by itself was a picture of Reynolds Loftis, his Anglo-Saxon rectitude incongruous. Mal turned and looked at Claire. ‘Your conquests, Miss De Haven?’

‘My past and future. Wild oats lumped together and my fiancé all by himself.’

Chaz Minear had gotten explicit on Loftis – what they did, the feel of his weight downstairs. Mal wondered how much the woman knew about them, if she even guessed Minear finked her future husband to HUAC. ‘He’s a lucky man.’

‘Thank you.’

‘Isn’t he an actor? I think I took my son to a movie he was in.’

Claire stubbed out her cigarette, lit another one and smoothed her skirt. ‘Yes, Reynolds is an actor. When did you and your son see the movie?’

Mal sat down, juggling blacklist dates. ‘Right after the war, I think. Why?’

‘A point that I’d like to make, as long as we’re talking in a civil manner. I doubt that you’re as sensitive as you portray yourself, but if you are I’d like to illustrate an example of the hurt men like you cause.’

Mal hooked a thumb back at Loftis’ picture. ‘With your fiancé?’

‘Yes. You see, you probably saw the movie at a revival house. Reynolds was a *very* successful character actor in the ’30s, but the California State Un-American Activities Committee hurt him when he refused to testify back in ’40. Many studios wouldn’t touch him because of his politics, and the only work he could get was on Poverty Row – toadying to an awful man named Herman Gerstein.’

Mal played dumb. ‘It could have been worse. People were blacklisted outright by HUAC in ’47. Your fiancé could have been.’

Claire shouted, ‘He *was* blacklisted, and I bet you know it!’

Mal jerked back in his chair; he thought he’d had her convinced he wasn’t wise to Loftis. Claire lowered her voice. ‘Maybe you knew it. Reynolds Loftis, Mr. Considine. Surely you know that he’s in the UAES.’

Mal shrugged, smokescreening a lie. ‘When you said Reynolds, I guessed that it was Loftis. I knew he was an actor, but I’ve never seen his photograph. Look, I’ll tell you why I was surprised. An old lefty told my partner and me that Loftis was a homosexual. Now you tell me he’s your fiancé.’

Claire’s eyes narrowed; for a half second she looked like a shrew in waiting. ‘Who told you that?’

Mal shrugged again. ‘Some guy who used to hang out and chase girls at the Sleepy Lagoon Committee picnics. I forget his name.’

Shrew in waiting to nervous wreck; Claire’s hands shaking, her legs twiching, grazing the table. Mal homed in on her eyes and thought he saw them pinning, like she was mixing pharmacy stuff with her vodka. Seconds dragged; Claire became calm again. ‘I’m sorry. Hearing Reynolds described as that upset me.’

Mal thought: no it didn’t – it was Sleepy Lagoon. ‘I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said it.’

‘Then why did you?’

‘Because he’s a lucky man.’

The Red Queen smiled. ‘And not just because of me. Will you let me finish that point I wanted to make?’

‘Sure.’

Claire said, ‘In ’47 someone informed on Reynolds to the House Committee – hearsay and innuendo – and he *was* blacklisted outright. He went to Europe and found work acting in experimental art films directed by a Belgian man he’d met in LA during the war. The actors all wore masks, the films created quite a stir, and Reynolds eked out a living acting in them. He even won the French version of the Oscar in ’48, and got mainstream work in Europe. Now the *real* Hollywood studios are offering him real work for real money, which will end if Reynolds is hauled before another committee or grand jury or kangaroo court or whatever you people call them.’

Mal stood up and looked at the door. Claire said, ‘Reynolds will never name names, I’ll never name names. Don’t ruin the good life he’s starting to have again. Don’t ruin me.’

She even begged with elegance. Mal made a gesture that took in leather upholstery, brocade curtains and a small fortune in embroidered silk. ‘How can you preach the Commie line and justify all this?’

The Red Queen smiled, beggar to muse. ‘The good work I do allows me a dispensation for nice things.’

A stellar exit line.

Mal walked back to his car and found a note stuck under the wiper blades: ‘Captain – greetings! Herman Gerstein called Ellis with a complaint: a Sheriff’s dick is making waves at Variety International (pansy homicide).

Ellis spoke to his CO (Capt. A1 Dietrich) about it – and we're supposed to tell the lad to desist. West Hollywood Substation when you finish with C.D.H., please – D.S.'

Mal drove to the station, pissed at a stupid errand when he should be orchestrating the team's next move: radio and newspaper spots to convince UAES the grand jury was kaput. He saw Dudley Smith's Ford in the lot, left his car next to it and walked in the front door. Dudley was standing by the dispatching alcove, talking to a Sheriff's captain in uniform. A girl behind the switchboard was flagrantly eavesdropping, toying with the headset on her neck.

Dudley saw him and hooked a finger; Mal went over and offered the brass his hand. 'Mal Considine, Captain.'

The man gave him a bonecrusher shake. 'Al Dietrich. Good to meet a couple of City boys who come off as human beings, and I was just telling Lieutenant Smith here not to judge Deputy Upshaw too harshly. He's got a lot of newfangled ideas about procedure and the like, and he's a bit of a hothead, but basically he's a damn good cop. Twenty-seven years old and already a detective must tell you something, right?'

Dudley boomed tenor laughter. 'Smarts and naivete are a potent combination in young men. Malcolm, our friend is working on a County homo snuff tied to two City jobs. He seems to be obsessed as only a young idealist cop can be. Shall we give the lad a gentle lesson in police etiquette and priorities?'

Mal said, 'A brief one,' and turned to Dietrich. 'Captain, where's Upshaw now?'

'In an interrogation room down the hall. Two of my men captured a robbery suspect this morning, and Danny's sweating him. Come on, I'll show you – but let him finish up first.'

Dietrich led them through the muster room to a short corridor inset with cubicles fronted by one-way glass. Static was crackling out of a wall speaker above the last window on the left. The captain said, 'Take a listen, the kid is good. And try to let him down easy, he's got a bad temper and I like him.'

Mal strode ahead of Dudley to the one-way. Looking in, he saw a hood he'd rousted before the war. Vincent Scoppet-tone, a Jack Dragna trigger, was sitting at a table bolted to the floor, his hands cuffed to a welded-down chair. Deputy Upshaw had his back to the window and was drawing water from a wall cooler. Scoppettone squirmed in his chair, his County denims sweat-soaked at the legs and armpits.

Dudley caught up. 'Ah, grand. Vinnie the guinea. I heard that lad found out a quail of his was distributing her favors elsewhere and stuck a .12 gauge up her love canal. It must have been messy, albeit quick. Do you know the difference between an Italian grandmother and an elephant? Twenty pounds and a black dress. Isn't that grand?'

Mal ignored him. Scoppettone's voice came over the speaker, synched a fraction of a second behind his lips. 'Eyeball witnesses don't mean shit. They got to be alive to testify. Understand?'

Deputy Upshaw turned around, holding a cup of water. Mal saw a medium-sized young man, even-featured with hard brown eyes, a dark brown crew cut and razor nicks on heavily shadowed pale skin. He looked lithe and muscular – and there was something about him reminiscent of Claire De Haven's picture-pretty boys. His voice was an even baritone. 'Down the hatch, Vincent. Communion. Confession. Requiescat en pace.'

Scoppettone gulped water, sputtered and licked his lips. 'You a Catholic?'

Upshaw sat down in the opposite chair. 'I'm nothing. My mother's a Jehovah's Witness and my father's dead, which is what you're gonna be when Jack D. finds out you're clouting markets on your own. And as far as the eyeball witnesses go, they'll testify. You'll be no bail downtown and Jack'll give you the go-by. You're in dutch with Jack or you wouldn't be pulling heists in the first place. Spill, Vincent. Feed me on your other jobs and the captain here will recommend honor farm.'

Scoppettone coughed; water dribbled off his chin. 'Without them witnesses, you got no case.'

Upshaw leaned over the table; Mal wondered how much the speaker was distorting his voice. 'You're ixnay with Jack, Vinnie. At best, he lets you go on the Sun-Fax, at worst he has you whacked when you hit the penitentiary. And that'll be Folsom. You're a known mob associate, and that's where they go. And the Sun-Fax is in Cohen territory. Mickey buys the gift baskets he greases judges with there, and he'll make damn sure one of those judges hears your case. In my opinion, you are just too stupid to live. Only a stupid shit would knock off a joint in Cohen territory. Are you looking to start a fucking war? You think Jack wants Mickey coming after him over a chump-change stickup?'

Dudley nudged Mal. 'That lad is very, very good.'

Mal said, 'In spades.' He pushed Dudley's elbow aside and concentrated on Upshaw and his verbal style – wondering if he could run Commie argot as well as he did gangsterese. Vincent Scoppettone coughed again; static hit the speaker, then died out into words. 'There ain't gonna be no war. Jack and Mickey been talkin' about a truce, maybe going in on a piece of business together.'

Upshaw said, 'You feel like talking about that?'

'You think I'm stupid?'

Upshaw laughed. Mal caught the phoniness, that Scoppettone didn't interest him – that it was just a job. But it was a Class A phony laugh – and the kid knew how to squeeze his own tension into it.

'Vinnie, I already told you I think you're stupid. You've got panic city written all over you, and I think you're on the outs with Jack bad. Let me guess: you did something to piss Jack off, you got scared, you thought you'd hightail. You needed a stake, you heisted the Sun-Fax. Am I right?'

Scoppettone was sweating heavy now – it was rolling off his face. Upshaw said, 'You know what else I think? One heist wouldn't have done it. I think there's other jobs we can make you for. I think I'm gonna check robbery reports all over the City and County, maybe Ventura County, maybe Orange and San Diego. I'll bet if I wire your mugs around I'll come up with some other eyeball witnesses. Am I right?'

Scoppettone tried laughter – a long string of squeaky ha ha ha's. Upshaw joined in and mimicked them until his prisoner shut up. Mal snapped: he's wound tight as a steel spring on something else and shooting it to Vinnie because he's the one here – *and he probably doesn't know he's doing it.*

Squirming his arms, Scoppettone said, 'Let's talk dealsky. I got something sweet.'

'Tell me.'

'Heroin. Heroin very large. That truce I told you about, Jack and Mickey partners. Quality Mex brown, twenty-five pounds. All for niggertown, cut-rate to lowball the independents down there. The God's truth. If I'm lyin', I'm flyin'.'

Upshaw aped Vinnie's tone. 'Then you've got wings stashed under your mattress, because the Mick and Dragna as partners is horseshit. Sherry's was six months ago, Cohen lost a man and doesn't forget stuff like that.'

'That wasn't Jack, that was LAPD. Shooters out of Hollywood Station, a snuff kitty half the fuckin' division kicked in for 'cause of fuckin' Brenda. Mickey Kike knows Jack didn't do it.'

Upshaw yawned – broadly. 'I'm bored, Vinnie. Niggers geezing heroin and Jack and Mickey as partners is a fucking snore. By the way, you read the papers?'

Scoppettone shook his head, spraying sweat. 'What?'

Upshaw pulled a rolled-up newspaper from his hip pocket. 'This was in last Tuesday's *Herald.* "Yesterday evening tragedy occurred at a convivial cocktail lounge in the Silverlake District. A gunman entered the friendly Moonmist Lounge, carrying a large-caliber pistol. He forced the bartender and three patrons to lie on the floor, ransacked the cash register and stole jewelry, wallets and purses belonging to his four victims. The bartender tried to apprehend the robber, and he pistol-whipped him senseless. The bartender died of head injuries this morning at Queen of Angels Hospital. The surviving robbery victims described the assailant as 'an Italian-looking white man, late thirties, five-ten, one hundred and ninety pounds.'" Vinnie, that's you.'

Scoppettone shrieked, 'That ain't me!' Mal craned his neck and squinted at the print on Upshaw's newspaper, glomming a full page on last week's fight card at the Olympic. He thought: pull out the stops, bluff him down, hit him once, don't get carried away and you're my boy –

'That ain't fucking me!'

Upshaw leaned over the table, hard in Scoppettone's face. 'I don't fucking care. You're standing in a lineup tonight, and the three squarejohns from the Moonmist Lounge are gonna look you over. Three white bread types who think all wops are Al Capone. See, I don't want you for the Sun-Fax, Vinnie, I want you for keeps.'

'I didn't do it!'

'Prove it!'

'I can't prove it!'

'Then you'll take the fucking fall!'

Scoppettone was putting his whole body into his head, the only part of him not lashed down. He shook it; he twisted it; he thrust his chin back and forth like a ram trying to batter a defence. Mal got a flash: the kid had him nailed for a backup heist that night; the whole performance was orchestrated for the newspaper punch line. He elbowed Dudley and said, 'Our's'; Dudley gave him the thumbs-up. Vinnie Scoppettone tried to jerk his chair off the floor; Danny Upshaw grabbed a handful of his hair and slapped his face – forehand, backhand, forehand, backhand – until he went limp and blubbered, 'Deal. Deal. Deal.'

Upshaw whispered in Scoppettone's ear; Vinnie drooled an answer. Mal stood on his tiptoes for a better shot at the speaker and heard only static. Dudley lit a cigarette and smiled; Upshaw hit a button under the table. Two uniformed deputies and a woman holding a steno pad double-timed down the corridor. They opened the interrogation room door and swooped on their live one; Danny Upshaw walked out and said, 'Oh shit.'

Mal studied the reaction. 'Good work, Deputy. You were damn good.'

Upshaw looked at him, then Dudley. 'You're City, right?'

Mal said, 'Right, DA's Bureau. My name's Considine, this is Lieutenant Smith.'

'And it's about?'

Dudley said, 'Lad, we were going to reprimand you for rattling Mr. Herman Gerstein's cage, but that's water under the bridge now. Now we're going to offer you a job.'

'What?'

Mal took Upshaw's arm and steered him a few feet away. 'It's a decoy plant for a grand jury investigation into Communist activity in the movie studios. A very well-placed DA is running the show, and he'll be able to square a temporary transfer with Captain Dietrich. The job is a career maker, and I think you should say yes.'

'No.'

'You can transfer to the Bureau clean after the investigation. You'll be a lieutenant before you're thirty.'

'No. I don't want it.'

'What *do* you want?'

'I want to supervise the triple homicide case I'm working – for the County *and* the City.'

Mal thought of Ellis Loew balking, other City hotshots he could grease for the favor. 'I think I can manage it.'

Dudley came over, clapped Upshaw on the back and winked. 'There's a woman you'll have to get next to, lad. You might have to fuck the pants off of her.'

Deputy Danny Upshaw said, 'I welcome the opportunity.'

2

Upshaw, Considine, Meeks

SEVENTEEN

HE WAS A COP again, bought and paid for, in with major leaguers playing for keeps. Howard's bonus had him out of hock with Leotis Dineen, and if the grand jury succeeded in booting the UAES from the studios he'd be minor-league rich. He had a set of keys to Ellis Loew's house and the use of the City clerks who'd be typing and filing there. He had a 'target list' of Pinkos untouched by previous grand juries. And he had the *big* list: UAES top dogs to glom criminal dirt on, no direct approaches now that they were deep in subterfuge, with newspaper pieces planted that said their investigation was dead. An hour ago he'd had his secretary place query calls to his local Fed contact, City/County DMV/R&I and the criminal records bureaus of California, Nevada, Arizona and Oregon States, requesting arrest report information on Claire De Haven, Morton Ziffkin, Chaz Minear, Reynolds Loftis and three unholy-sounding pachucos: Mondo Lopez, Sammy Benavides and Juan Duarte, asterisks after their names denoting them 'known youth gang members.' The gang squad boss at Hollenbeck Station had been his only call back; he said that the three were bad apples – members of a zooter mob in the early '40s before they cleaned up and 'got political.' East LA would be his first stop – once his secretary logged in the rest of her responses to his call-outs.

Buzz looked around his office for something to kill time with, saw the morning *Mirror* on the doormat and picked it up. He flipped through to the editorial page and got bingo! under Victor Reisel's by-line, less than twenty-four hours after cuckold Mal told Loew his plan.

The title was 'Reds 1 – City of Los Angeles 0. 3 Outs, No Witnesses on Base.' Buzz read:

It all came down to money – the great equalizer and common denominator. A grand jury was in the works, an important grand jury that would have been as far-reaching as the 1947 House Un-American Activities Committee hearings. Once again, Communist encroachment in the motion picture industry was to be delved into – this time within the context of labor trouble in the City of the Angels.

The United Alliance of Extras and Stagehands is currently under contract with a number of Hollywood studios. The union is rife with Communists and fellow travelers. The UAES is making exorbitant contract renegotiation demands, and a Teamster local which would like the opportunity to reach an amicable accord with the studios and step in to work UAES's job for reasonable wages and benefits is picketing against them. *Money.* The UAES implicitly advocates the end of the capitalist system and wants more of it.

The non ideologically involved Teamsters want to prove their on-the-job mettle by working for wages that anticapitalists spurn. Hollywood, showbiz: it’s a crazy world.

Crazy Item #1: The glut of pro-Russian movies made during the early 1940’s were largely scripted by members of the so-called UAES Brain trust.

Crazy Item #2: UAES Brain trust members belong to a total of 41 organizations that have been classified as Commie fronts by the State Attorney General’s Office.

Crazy Item #3: The UAES wants more of that filthy capitalist lucre; the Teamsters want jobs for their people; a number of patriotic men in the LA District Attorney’s Office had been slated to gather evidence for a prospective grand jury to delve into just *how* deep those green-loving UAESers’ influence in the movie biz went. Let’s face it: Hollywood is an unsurpassed tool for disseminating propaganda, and the Commies are the subtlest, most cruelly intelligent foe America has ever faced. Given access to the motion picture medium and its pervasiveness in our daily life, there is no end to the cancerous seeds of treason that well-placed movie Reds could plant – subtle satires and attacks on America, subliminally planted so that the public and right-thinking movie people would have no idea they were being brainwashed. The DA’s men had made approaches to several subversives, and were attempting to get them to admit to the error of their ways and appear as witnesses when money – the great equalizer and common denominator – reared its head to give aid and comfort to the enemy.

Lieutenant Malcolm Considine, of the DA’s Bureau of Investigations, said: ‘The City had promised us budget money, then withdrew. We’re understaffed and now unfunded, with a backlog of criminal matters clogging up potential grand jury docket time. We might be able to begin gathering evidence again in fiscal ’51 or ’52, but how many inroads will the Communists have made into our culture by then?’

How many indeed. Lieutenant Dudley Smith of the Los Angeles Police Department, Lieutenant Considine’s sadly short-lived partner in the DA Bureau’s sadly short-lived investigation, said, ‘Yes, it all came down to money. The City has precious little, and it would be immoral and illegal to seek outside funding. The Reds do not balk at exploiting the capitalist system, while we live by its rules, accepting the few inherent frailties in an otherwise just and humane philosophy. That’s the difference between them and us. They live by the law of the jungle, we are too peace-loving to stoop to it.’

Reds – 1, the City of Los Angeles and the movie-going public – 0.

It’s a crazy world.

Buzz put the paper down, thinking of crazy Dud circa ’38 – brass-knuckling a nigger hophead half to death for drooling on a cashmere overcoat Ben

Siegel greased him with. He hit the intercom. ‘Sweetheart, any results on those calls yet?’

‘Still waiting, Mr. Meeks.’

‘I’m going out to East LA. Leave my messages on my desk, would you, please?’

‘Yes, sir.’

The morning was cool, with rain threatening. Buzz took Olympic straight out, Hughes Aircraft to Boyle Heights with a minimum of red lights, no pretty scenery, time to think. The .38 he’d strapped on made his rolls of flab hang funny; his ID buzzer and the *Racing Form* weighted his pockets wrong, bum ballast that had him picking at his crotch to even things out. Benavides, Lopez and Duarte were either White Fence, 1st Flats or Apaches; the Mexes in the Heights were good people, anxious to suck up right and be good Americans. He’d get good information from them – and the idea bored him.

He knew why: he hadn’t been with a woman in years who wasn’t a whore or a starlet looking to get next to Howard. Audrey Anders had him running on her time, brainstorming on her so hard that even this sweetheart of a deal with the DA’s Office came a cropper. Betting with Leotis Dineen was plain stupid; chasing Audrey was stupid that meant something – a reason for him to quit gorging on porterhouse, au gratins and peach pie and lose a shitload of pounds so that his beaucoup wardrobe fit right – even though they’d never be able to go out in public together.

Downtown came and went; the woman stayed. Buzz tried concentrating on the job, turning north on Soto, heading into the terraced hillsides that formed Boyle Heights. The Jews had ceded the neighborhood to the Mexicans before the war; Brooklyn Avenue had gone from reeking of pastrami and chicken stock to reeking of cornmeal and deep-fried pork. The synagogue across from Hollenbeck Park was now a Catholic church; the old men with beanies who played chess under the pepper trees were replaced by pachucos in slit-bottom khakis – strutting, primping, walking the road camp walk, talking the jailhouse talk. Buzz circled the park, eyeing and tagging them: unemployed, mid-twenties, probably pushing fifty-cent reefers and collecting protection off the hebe merchants too poor to move to the new kosher canyon at Beverly and Fairfax. White Fence or 1st Flats or Apaches, with tattoos between their left thumbs and forefingers spelling it out. Dangerous when fired up on mescal, maryjane, goofballs and pussy; restless when bored.

Buzz parked and stuck his billy club down the back of his pants, throwing the fit off even worse. He approached a group of four young Mexicans; two saw him coming and took off, obviously to drop hot shit in the grass somewhere, reconnoiter and see what the fat puto cop wanted. The other two stood there watching a cockroach fight: two bugs in a shoebox placed on a bench, gladiators brawling for the right to devour a dead bug soaked in maple syrup. Buzz checked out the action while the pachucos pretended not to notice him; he saw a pile of dimes and quarters on the ground and dropped a five spot on it. 'Finsky on the fucker with the spot on his back.'

The Mexicans did double-takes; Buzz did a quick sizeup: White Fence tattoos on two sinewy right forearms; both vatos lean and mean at the welterweight limit; one dirty T-shirt, one clean. Four brown eyes sizing *him* up. 'I mean it. That fucker's got style. He's a dancemaster like Billy Conn.'

Both pachucos pointed to the shoebox; Clean T-shirt said, 'Billy muerto.' Buzz looked down and saw the spotted bug belly up, stuck to the cardboard in a pool of amber goo. Dirty Shirt giggled, scooped up the change and five-spot; Clean Shirt took an ice cream stick, lifted the winner out of the box and put him on the bark of a pepper tree next to the bench. The bug hung there licking his feelers; Buzz said, 'Double or nothin' on a trick I learned back in Oklahoma.'

Clean Shirt said, 'This some goddamn cop trick?'

Buzz fished out his baton and dangled it by the thong. 'Sort of. I got a few questions about some boys who used to live around here, and maybe you can help me. I pull off the trick, you talk to me. No snitch stuff, just a few questions. I don't do the trick, you stroll. Comprende?'

The clean shirt vato started to walk away; Dirty Shirt stopped him and pointed to Buzz's stick. 'What's that thing got to do with it?'

Buzz smiled and took three steps backward, eyes on the tree. 'Son, you set that roach's ass on fire and I'll show you.'

Clean Shirt whipped out a lighter, flicked it on and held the flame under the victor bug. The bug scampered up the tree; Buzz got a bead and overhanded his baton. It hit and clattered to the ground; Dirty Shirt picked it up and fingered pulp off the tip. 'That's him. Holy fuck.'

Clean Shirt made the sign of the cross, pachuco version, his right hand stroking his balls; Dirty Shirt crossed the standard way. Buzz tossed his stick in the air, bounced it off the inside crook of his elbow, caught it and twirled it behind his back, let it hit the pavement, then brought it to parade rest with a jerk of the thong. The Mexicans were slack-jawed now; Buzz braced them while their mouths were still open. 'Mondo Lopez, Juan Duarte and Sammy Benavides. They used to gangsterize around here. Spill nice and I'll show you some more tricks.'

Dirty Shirt spat a string of obscenities in Spanish; Clean Shirt translated. 'Javier hates 1st Flats like a dog. Like a fucking evil dog.'

Buzz was wondering if Audrey Anders would go for his stick routine. 'So those boys ran with the Flats?'

Javier spat on the pavement – an eloquent lunger. 'Traitors, man. Back maybe '43, '44, the Fence and Flats had a peace council. Lopez and Duarte was supposed to be in on it, but they joined the fuckin' Sinarquista Nazi putos, then the fuckin' Commie Sleepy Lagoon putos, when they shoulda been fightin' with us. The fuckin' Apaches cleaned the Flats' and Fences' fuckin' clock, man. I lost my cousin Caldo.'

Buzz unclipped two more fivers. 'What else have you got? Feel free to get ugly.'

'Benavides was ugly, man! He raped his own fuckin' little sister!'

Buzz handed out the money. 'Easy now. Give me some more on that, whatever else you got and some leads on family. *Easy*.'

Clean Shirt said, 'It's just a rumor on Benavides, and Duarte's got a queer cousin, so maybe he's queer, too. Queerness runs in families, I read it in *Argosy* magazine.'

Buzz tucked his billy club back in his pants. 'What about families? Who's got family still around here?'

Javier answered. 'Lopez' mother died, and I think maybe he got some cousins in Bakersfield. 'Cept for the maricón, mosta Duarte's people moved back to Mexico, and I know that puto Benavides got parents livin' on 4th and Evergreen.'

'A house? An apartment?'

Clean Shirt piped in: 'Little shack with all these statues in front.' He twirled a finger and pointed to his head. 'The mother is crazy. Loca grande.'

Buzz sighed. 'That's all I get for fifteen scoots and my show?'

Javier said, 'Every vato in the Heights hates those cabróns, ask them.'

Clean Shirt said, 'We could make up some shit, you could pay us for that.'

Buzz said, 'Try to stay alive,' and drove to 4th and Evergreen.

The lawn was a shrine.

Jesus statues were lined up facing the street; there was a stable made out of kid's Lincoln Logs behind them, a dog turd reposing in baby J.C.'s manger. Buzz walked up to the porch and rang the bell; he saw the Virgin Mary on an end table. The front of her flowing white gown bore an inscription: 'Fuck me.' Buzz made a snap deduction – Mr. and Mrs. Benavides couldn't see too well.

An old woman opened the door. 'Quién?'

Buzz said, 'Police, ma'am. And I don't speak Spanish.'

The ginch fingered a string of beads around her neck. 'I speak Inglés. Is about Sammy?'

'Yes, ma'am. How'd you know that?'

The old girl pointed to the wall above a chipped brick fireplace. A devil had been drawn there – red suit, horns and trident. Buzz walked over and scoped him out. A photo of a Mex kid was glued where his face should be, and a line of Jesus statues was looking up from the ledge, giving him the evil eye. The woman said, 'My son Sammy. Communisto. Devil incarnate.'

Buzz smiled. 'It looks like you're well protected, ma'am. You've got Jesus on the job.'

Mama Benavides grabbed a sheaf of papers off the mantel and handed them over. The top sheet was a State Justice Department publicity job – California-based Commie fronts in alphabetical order. The Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee was check-marked, with a line in brackets next to it: 'Write P.O. Box 465, Sacramento, 14, California, for membership list.' The old woman snatched the pages, flipped through them and stabbed a finger at a column of names. Benavides, Samuel Tomás Ignacio, and De Haven, Claire Katherine, were starred in ink. 'There. Is the truth, anti-Christ Communista y Communisto!'

The ginch had tears in her eyes. Buzz said, 'Well, Sammy's got his rough edges, but I wouldn't exactly call him the devil.'

'Is true! Yo soy la madre del diablo! You arrest him! Communisto!'

Buzz pointed to Claire De Haven's notation. 'Mrs. Benavides, what have you got on this woman here? Give me some good scoop and I'll beat that boogeyman up with my stick.'

'Communista! Drug addict! Sammy took her to clinica for cure, and she –'

Buzz saw a prime opening. 'Where is that clinic, ma'am? Tell me slow.'

'By ocean. Devil doctor! Communista whore!'

Satan's mother started bawling for real. Buzz blew East LA and headed for Malibu – a sea breeze, a doctor who owed him, no cockroach fights, no fuck me madonnas.

Pacific Sanitarium was in Malibu Canyon, a booze and dope dryout farm nestled in foothills a half mile from the beach. The main building, lab and maintenance shacks were surrounded by electrified barbed wire; the price for kicking hooch, horse and drugstore hop was twelve hundred dollars a week; detoxification heroin was processed on the premises – per a gentleman's agreement between Dr. Terence Lux, the clinic's bossman, and the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors – the agreement based on the proviso that LA politicos in need of the place could boil out for free. Buzz drove up to the gate thinking of all the referrals he'd given Lux: RKO juicers and hopheads spared jail jolts and bum publicity because Dr. Terry, plastic surgeon to the stars, had given them shelter and him a 10 percent kickback. One still rankled: a girl who'd OD'd when Howard booted her out of his A list fuck pad and back to selling it in hotel bars. He almost burned the three hundred Lux shot him for the business.

Buzz beeped his horn; the gate watchman's voice came over the squawk box: 'Yes, sir?'

Buzz spoke to the receiver by the fence. 'Turner Meeks to see Dr. Lux.'

The guard said, 'One moment, sir'; Buzz waited. Then: 'Sir, follow the road all the way down the left fork to the end. Dr. Lux is in the hatchery.'

The gate opened; Buzz cruised past the clinic and maintenance buildings and turned onto a road veering off into a scrub-covered miniature canyon. There was a shack at the end: low wire walls and a tin roof. Chickens squawked inside it; some of the birds were shrieking bloody murder.

Buzz parked, got out and peered through the wire. Two men in hipboots and khaki smocks were slaughtering chickens, hacking them with razor-bladed two-by-four's – the zoot sticks Riot Squad bulls used to pack back in the early ’40s, emasculating Mex hoodlums by slashing their threads. The stick wielders were good: single neck shots, on to the next one. The few remaining birds were trying to run and fly away; their panic had them scudding into the walls, the roof and the zoot men. Buzz thought: no chicken marsala at the Derby tonight, and heard a voice behind him.

‘Two birds with one stone. A bad pun, good business.’

Buzz turned. Terry Lux was standing there – all rangy gray handsomeness, like a dictionary definition of ‘physician’. ‘Hello, Doc.’

‘You know I prefer Doctor or Terry, but I’ve always made allowances for your homespun style. Is this business?’

‘Not exactly. What’s *that*? You doin’ your own catering?’

Lux pointed to the slaughterhouse, silent now, the stick men tossing dead chickens in sacks. ‘Two birds, one stone. Years ago I read a study that asserted a heavy chicken diet is beneficial to people with low blood sugar, which most alcoholics and drug addicts have. Stone one. Stone two is my special cure for narcotics users. My technicians drain out all their existing contaminated blood and rotate in fresh, healthy blood filled with vitamins, minerals and animal hormones. So, I have a hatchery and a slaughterhouse. It’s all very cost-effective and beneficial to my patients. What is it, Buzz? If it isn’t business, then it’s a favor. How can I help you?’

The smell of blood and feathers was making him gag. Buzz noticed a pulley system linking the maintenance huts to the clinic, a tram car stationed on a landing dock about ten yards in back of the chicken shack. ‘Let’s go up to your office. I’ve got some questions about a woman who I’m pretty damn sure was a patient of yours.’

Lux frowned and cleaned his nails with a scalpel. ‘I never divulge confidential patient information. You know that. It’s a prime reason why Mr. Hughes and yourself use my services exclusively.’

‘Just a few questions, Terry.’

‘I suppose money instead is out of the question?’

‘I don’t need money. I need information.’

‘And if I don’t proffer this information you’ll take your business elsewhere?’

Buzz nodded toward the tram car. ‘No tickee, no washee. Be nice to me, Terry. I’m in with the city of Los Angeles these days, and I just might get the urge to spill about that dope you manufacture here.’

Lux scratched his neck with the scalpel. ‘For medical purposes only, and politically approved.’

‘Doc, you tellin’ me you don’t trade the skim to Mickey C. for *his* referrals? The City hates Mickey, you know.’

Lux bowed in the direction of the car; Buzz walked ahead and got in. The doctor hit a switch; sparks burst from the cables; they moved slowly up and docked on an overhang adjacent to a portico with a spectacular ocean view. Lux led Buzz down a series of antiseptic white hallways to a small room crammed with filing cabinets. Medical posters lined the walls: a picture primer for plastic surgeons, facial reconstruction in the style of Thomas Hart Benton. Buzz said, 'Claire Katherine De Haven. She's some kind of Commie.'

Lux opened a cabinet, leafed through folders, plucked one and read from the top page: 'Claire Katherine De Haven, date of birth May 5, 1910. Chronic controlled alcoholic, sporadically addicted to phenobarbital, occasional Benzedrine use, occasional heroin skin-popper. She took my special cure I told you about three times – in '39, '43, and '47. That's it.'

Buzz said, 'Nix, I want more. That file of yours list any details? Any good dirt?'

Lux held up the folder. 'It's mostly medical charts and financial accounting. You can read them if you like.'

'No thanks. You remember her good, Terry. I can tell. So feed me.'

Lux put the file back and slid the cabinet shut. 'She seduced a few of her fellow patients while she was here the first time. It caused an upheaval, so in '43 I kept her isolated. She was remorseful both times, and on her second go-round I gave her a little psychiatric counseling.'

'You a headshrinker?'

Lux laughed. 'No, but I enjoy getting people to tell me things. In '43 De Haven told me she wanted to reform because some Mexican boyfriend of hers got beat up in the zoot suit riots and she wanted to work more efficaciously for the People's Revolt. In '47 the Red hearings back east sent her around the twist – some pal of hers got his you-know-what in the wringer. HUAC was good for business, Buzz. Lots of remorse, ODs, suicide attempts. Commies with money are the best Commies, don't you agree?'

Buzz ran the rest of the target list through his head. 'Who got his dick in the wringer, some bimbo of Claire's?'

'I don't remember.'

'Morton Ziffkin?'

'No.'

'One of her spics? Benavides, Lopez, Duarte?'

'No, it wasn't a Mex.'

'Chaz Minear, Reynolds Loftis?'

Bingo on 'Loftis' – Lux's face muscles tensing, coming together around a phony smile. 'No, not them.'

Buzz said, 'Horseshit. You give on that. *Now.*'

Lux shrugged – phony. 'I had a case on Claire, and so did Loftis. I was jealous. When you mentioned him, that brought it all back.'

Buzz laughed – his patented shitkicker job. 'Horse pucky. You've only got a case on money, so you fuckin' give me better than that.'

The doctor got out his scalpel and tapped it against his leg. ‘Okay, let’s try this. Loftis used to buy heroin for Claire, and I didn’t like it – I wanted her beholden to me. Satisfied?’

A good morning’s work: the woman as a hophead Mexfucker, Benavides a maybe kiddie raper, Loftis copping H for a fellow Red. ‘Who’d he glom from?’

‘I don’t know. *Really*.’

‘You got anything else good?’

‘No. You have any fine young Howard rejects to spice up the ward?’

‘See you in church, Doc.’

A stack of messages was waiting back at the office, partial results from his secretary’s phone queries. Buzz leafed through them.

Traffic ticket rebop predominated, along with some stale bread on the spics: unlawful assembly, nonfelony assault and battery resulting in Mickey Mouse juvie time. No sex shit on Samuel Tomás Ignacio Benavides, the ‘devil incarnate’; no political dirt on any of the three ex-White Fencers. Buzz turned to the last message slip – his secretary’s call back from the Santa Monica PD.

> Mr. Meeks –
>
> 3/44 – R. Loftis & another man – Charles (Eddington) Hartshorn, D.O.B. 9/6/1897, routinely questioned during vice Squad raid of S.M. deviant bar (Knight in Armor – 1684 S. Lincoln, S.M.) This from F.I. card check DMV/ R&I on Hartshorn: no crim. rec., traffic rec. clean, attorney. Address – 419 S. Rimpau, L.A. – hope this helps – Lois.

419 South Rimpau was Hancock Park, pheasant under glass acres, old LA money; Reynolds Loftis had a case on Claire De Haven – and now it looked like he addressed the ball from both sides of the plate. Buzz ran an electric shaver over his face, squirted cologne at his armpits and brushed a chunk of pie crust off his necktie. Filthy rich always made him nervous; filthy rich and fruit was a combo he’d never worked before.

Audrey Anders stuck with him on the ride over; he pretended his Old Spice was her Chanel #5 in just the right places. 419 South Rimpau was a Spanish mansion fronted by a huge expanse of grass dotted with rose gardens; Buzz parked and rang the bell, hoping for a single-o play: no witnesses if it got ugly.

A peephole opened, then the door. A peaches-and-cream blonde about twenty-five had her hand on the knob, wholesome pulchritude in a tartan skirt and pink button-down shirt. ‘Hello. Are you the insurance man here to see Daddy?’

Buzz pulled his jacket over the butt of his .38. ‘Yes, I am. In private, please. No man likes to discuss such grave matters in the presence of his family.'

The girl nodded, led Buzz through the foyer to a book-lined study and left him there with the door ajar. He noticed a liquor sideboard and thought about a quick one – a mid-afternoon bracer might give him some extra charm. Then 'Phil, what's this in-private stuff?' took it out of his hands.

A short pudgy man, bald with a fringe, had pushed the door open. Buzz held out his badge; the man said, 'What is this?'

'DA's Bureau, Mr. Hartshorn. I just wanted to keep your family out of it.'

Charles Hartshorn closed the door and leaned against it. 'Is this about Duane Lindenaur?'

Buzz drew a blank on the name, then remembered it from yesterday's late-edition *Tattler*: Lindenaur was a victim in the homo killings Dudley Smith told him about – the job the Sheriff's dick they just co-opted was set to run. 'No, sir. I'm with the Grand Jury Division, and we're investigating the Santa Monica Police. We need to know if they abused you when they raided the Knight in Armor back in '44.'

Veins throbbed in Hartshorn's forehead; his voice was boardroom-lawyer cold. 'I don't believe you. Duane Lindenaur attempted to extort money from me nine years ago – spurious allegations that he threatened to leak to my family. I dealt with the man legally then, and a few days ago I read that he had been murdered. I've been expecting the police at my door, and now you show up. Am I a suspect in Lindenaur's death?'

Buzz said, 'I don't know and I don't care. This is about the Santa Monica Police.'

'No, it is not. This pertains to the spurious allegations Duane Lindenaur made against me and the non sequitur of my happening to be in a cocktail lounge frequented by certain not respectable people when a police raid occurred. I have an alibi for the newspapers' estimated time of Duane Lindenaur's and the other man's deaths, and I want you to corroborate it without involving my family. If you so much as breathe a word to my wife and daughter, I will have your badge and your head. Do you understand?'

The lawyer's tone had gotten calmer; his face was one massive contortion. Buzz tried diplomacy again. 'Reynolds Loftis, Mr. Hartshorn. He was rousted with you. Tell me what you know about him, and I'll tell the Sheriff's detective who's workin' the Lindenaur case to leave you alone, that you're alibied up. That sound nice to you?'

Hartshorn folded his arms over his chest. 'I don't know any Reynolds Loftis and I don't make deals with grubby little policemen who reek of cheap cologne. Leave my home now.'

Hartshorn's 'Reynolds' was all wrong. Buzz moved to the sideboard, filled a glass with whiskey and walked up to the lawyer with it. 'For your nerves, Charlie. I don't want you kickin' off a heart attack on me.'

'Get out of my home, you grubby little worm.'

Buzz dropped the glass, grabbed Hartshorn's neck and slammed him against the wall. 'You're humpin' the wrong boy, counselor. *The* last boy around here you want to fuck with. Now here's the drill: you and Reynolds Loftis or I go into the living room and tell your little girl that daddy sucks cock at the Westlake Park men's room and takes it up the ass on Selma and Las Palmas. And you breathe a word to anybody that I leaned on you, and I'll have you in Confidential Magazine porkin' nigger drag queens. *Do you understand?*'

Hartshorn was beet red and spilling tears. Buzz let go of his neck, saw the imprint of a big ham hand and made that hand a fist. Hartshorn tremble-walked to the sideboard and picked up the whiskey decanter. Buzz swung at the wall, pulling the punch at the last second. 'Spill on Loftis, goddamnit. Make it easy so I can get the fuck out of here.'

Glass on glass chimed, followed by hard breathing and silence. Buzz stared at the wall. Hartshorn spoke, his voice dead hollow. 'Reynolds and I were just a . . . fling. We met at a party a Belgian man, a movie director, threw. The man was very au courant, and he threw lots of parties at clubs for our . . . his kind. It never got serious with Reynolds because there was a screenwriter he had been seeing, and some third man they were disturbed over. I was the odd man . . . so it never . . .'

Buzz turned and saw Hartshorn slumped in a chair, warming his hands on a whiskey glass. 'What else you got?'

'Nothing. I never saw Reynolds after that time at the Knight in Armor. Who are you going to –'

'Nobody, Charlie. Nobody's gonna know. I'll just say I got word that Loftis is . . .'

'Oh God, is this the witch hunts again?'

Buzz exited to the sound of the sad bastard weeping.

Rain had hit while he was applying the strongarm – hard needle sheets of it, the kind of deluge that threatened to melt the foothills into the ocean and sieve out half the LA Basin. Buzz laid three to one that Hartshorn would keep his mouth shut; two to one that more cop work would drive him batshit; even money that dinner at the Nickodell and the evening at home writing up a report on the day's dirt was the ticket. He could smell the queer's sweat on himself, going stale with his own sweat; he felt a beaucoup case of the sucker-punch blues coming on. Halfway to the office, he cracked the window for air and a rain bracer, changed directions and drove to his place.

Home was the Longview Apartments at Beverly and Mariposa, four rooms on the sixth floor, southern exposure, the pad furnished with leftovers from RKO movie sets. Buzz pulled into the garage, ditched his car and took the elevator up. And sitting by his door was Audrey Anders in a rain-spattered, sequin-spangled, gold lamé gown, a wet mink coat in her lap. She was using it as an ashtray; when she saw Buzz, she said, 'Last year's model.

Mickey'll get me a new one,' and stubbed her cigarette out on the collar.

Buzz helped Audrey to her feet, holding her hands just a beat too long. 'Did I really get this lucky?'

'Don't count your chickens. Lavonne Cohen took a trip with her mah-jongg club and Mickey thinks it's open season on me. Tonight was supposed to be the Mocambo, the Grove and late drinks with the Gersteins. I pulled a snit and escaped.'

'I thought you and Mickey were in love.'

'Love has its flip side. Did you know you're the only Turner Meeks in the Central White Pages?'

Buzz unlocked the door. Audrey walked in, dropped her mink on the floor and scoped the living room. The furnishings included leather couches and easy chairs from *London Holiday* and zebra head wall mounts from *Jungle Bwana;* the swinging doors leading to the bedroom were scavenged off the saloon set of *Rage on the Rio Grande.* The carpeting was lime green and purple striped – the bedspread one the Amazon huntress lollygagged on in *Song of the Pampas*. Audrey said, 'Meeks, did you *pay* for this?'

'Gifts from a rich uncle. You want a drink?'

'I don't drink.'

'Why not?'

'My father, sister and two brothers are drunks, so I thought I'd give it a pass.'

Buzz was thinking she looked good – but not as good as she did with no makeup and Mickey's shirt hanging to her knees. 'And you became a stripper?'

Audrey sat down, kicked off her shoes and warmed her feet on the mink. 'Yes, and don't ask me to do the tassel trick for you, because I won't. Meeks, what *is* the matter with you? I thought you'd be glad to see me.'

He could still smell the queer. 'I coldcocked a guy today. It was shitty.'

Audrey wriggled her toes, making the coat jump. 'So? That's what you do for a living.'

'The guys I usually do it to give me more of a fight.'

'So you're telling me it's all a game?'

He'd told Howard once that the only women worth having were the ones who had your number. 'There's gotta be somethin' we're better at than buttin' heads and askin' each other questions.'

The Va Va Voom Girl kicked the mink up in her lap. 'Is the bedroom this outré?'

Buzz laughed. '*Casbah Nocturne and Paradise Is Pink*. That tell you anything?'

'That's another question. Ask *me* something provocative.'

Buzz took off his jacket, unhooked his holster and threw it on a chair. 'Okay. Does Mickey keep a tail on you?'

Audrey shook her head. 'No. I made him stop it. It made me feel cheap.'

‘Where’s your car?’

‘Three blocks away.’

All green lights to make his best stupid move an epic. ‘You got it all figured out.’

Audrey said, ‘I didn’t think you’d say no.’ She waved her mink coat. ‘And I brought a towel for the morning.’

Buzz thought, RIP Turner Prescott Meeks, 1906–1950. He took a deep breath, sucked in his flab, pushed through the saloon doors and started peeling. Audrey came in and laughed at the bed – pink satin spread, pink canopy, pink embroidered gargoyles as foot posts. She got naked with a single flick of a clasp; Buzz felt his legs buckling as her breasts bobbed free. Audrey came to him and slipped off his tie, undid his shirt buttons, loosened his belt. He pried his shoes and socks off standing up; his shirt hit the floor via a bad case of the shivers. Audrey laughed and traced the goosebumps on his arms, then ran her hands over the parts of himself he couldn’t stand: his melon gut, his side rolls, the knife scars running up into his chest hair. When she started licking him there he knew she was okay on it; he picked her up to show her how strong he was – his legs almost blowing it – and put her down on the bed. He got out of his trousers and boxers under his own steam and lay down beside her – and in a half second she was all arms and legs around him, face to face and mouth open, pushing up against him like he was everything she’d ever wanted.

He kissed her – soft, hard, soft; he rubbed his nose into her neck and smelled Ivory Soap – not the perfume he’d played pretend with. He took her breasts in his hands and pinched the nipples, remembering everything every cop had told him about the headliner at the Burbank Burlesque. Audrey made different noises for each part of her he touched; he kissed and tongued between her legs and got one big noise. The big noise got bigger and bigger; her legs and arms went spastic. Her going so crazy got him almost there, and he went inside her so he could be part of it. Audrey’s hips pushing off the covers made him burst going in; he held on and she held him, and he gave her all his strength to smother their aftershocks. Half his weight, she was still able to push him up as she kept coming – and he grabbed her head and buried his head in her hair until he went limp and she quit fighting him.

Pink satin sheets and sweat bound them together. Buzz rolled over on his side, hooking a finger around Audrey’s wrist so they’d keep on touching while he got his breath. Eight years without a cigarette and he was panting like a track dog – and she was lying there all still and calm, a vein on the back of her arm tapping his finger the only thing that said she was still racing inside. His chest heaved; he tried to think of something to say; Audrey made finger tracks of his knife scars. She said, ‘This could get complicated.’

Buzz got his wind. ‘That mean you’re thinkin’ angles already?’

Audrey made like her nails were animals' claws and pretended to scratch him. 'I just like to know where I stand.'

The moment was slipping away from him – like it wasn't worth the danger. Buzz grabbed Audrey's hands. 'So that means we're lookin' at a next time?'

'You didn't have to ask. I'd have told you in a minute or so.'

'I like to know where I stand, too.'

Audrey laughed and pulled her hands away. 'You stand guilty, Meeks. You got me thinking the other day. So whatever happens, it's your fault.'

Buzz said, 'Sweetie, don't underestimate Mickey. He's sugar and spice with women and kids, but he kills people.'

'He knows I'll leave him sooner or later.'

'No, he doesn't. He figures you're an ex-stripper, a shiksa, you're thirty-somethin' and you've got no place to go. You give him a little bit of grief, maybe it gets his dick hard. But you stroll, that's somethin' else.'

She couldn't meet his eyes. Buzz said, 'Sweetie, where would you go?'

Audrey pulled a pillow down and hugged it, giving him both baby browns. 'I've got some money saved. A bunch. I'm going to buy some grove property in the Valley and bankroll rentals on a shopping center. They're the coming thing, Meeks. Another ten thousand and I can get in on the ground floor with thirty-five acres.'

Like his acreage: fourteen dollars per on the sure thing that should have made him rich. 'Where'd you get the money?'

'I saved it.'

'From Mickey's handouts?'

Audrey surprised him by chucking the pillow away and poking his chest. 'Are you jealous, *sweetie*?'

Buzz grabbed her finger and gave it a little love bite. 'Maybe just a tad.'

'Well, don't be. Mickey's all wrapped up in his union business and his drug thing with Jack Dragna, and I know how to play this game. Don't you worry.'

'Sweetie, you better. Because it is surely for keeps.'

'Meeks, I wish you'd quit talking about Mickey. You'll have me looking under the bed in a minute.'

Buzz thought of the .38 in the other room and the fruit lawyer with the bruised neck and tear-mottled cheeks. 'I'm glad bein' with you is dangerous. It feels good.'

EIGHTEEN

ACTING SUPERVISOR UPSHAW.

Task Force Boss.

Skipper.

Danny stood in the empty Hollywood Station muster room, waiting to address *his* three men on *his* homicide case – running the titles down in *the* single place where the Brenda Allen job caused the most grief. A cartoon tacked to the notice board spelled it out: Mickey Cohen wearing a Jew skullcap with a dollar sign affixed to the top, dangling two uniformed Sheriff's deputies on puppet strings. A balloon elaborated his thoughts: *Boy, did I give it to the LAPD! It's good I got the County cops to wipe my ass for me!* Danny saw little holes all over Mickey's face; LA's number-one hoodlum had been used as a dartboard.

There was a lectern and blackboard at the front of the room; Danny found chalk and wrote 'Deputy D. Upshaw, LASD,' in boldface letters. He positioned himself behind the stand like Doc Layman with his forensics class and forced himself to think of his other assignment so he wouldn't get antsy when it came time to lay down the law to *his* men, three detectives older and much more experienced than he. That job was coming on like a snooze and a snore, maybe a little shot of elixir to keep bad thoughts down and business on; it was why he was standing triumphant in a spot where the County police were loathed more than baby rapers. The deal was like pinching yourself to make sure the great things that were happening weren't just a dream – and he pinched himself for the ten millionth time since Lieutenant Mal Considine made his offer.

Dudley Smith had called him at home yesterday afternoon, interrupting a long day of nursing watered-down highballs and working on his file. The Irishman told him to meet him and Considine at West Hollywood Station; the fix was in via Ellis Loew, with the temporary detachment order approved by both Chief Worton and Sheriff Biscailuz. He'd brushed his teeth, gargled and forced down a sandwich before he met them – anticipating one question and building a lie to field it. Since they'd already told him he would be planted around Variety International Pictures and they knew he'd incurred boss-man Gerstein's wrath there, he had to convince them that only the gate guard, the rewrite man and Gerstein saw him in his cop capacity. It was Considine's *first* question – and a residue of bourbon calm helped him brazen it out. Smith bought it whole, Considine secondhand, when he ran his prerehearsed spiel on how he would completely alter his haircut and clothes to fit the role of Commie idealist.

Smith gave him a stack of UAES paperwork to take home and study and made him scan a batch of psychiatric reports in their presence; then it was hard brass tacks.

His job was to approach UAES's suspected weak link – a promiscuous woman named Claire De Haven – gain entrance to the union's strategy meetings and find out what they were planning. Why haven't they called a strike? Do the meetings involve the actual advocacy of armed revolt? Is there planned subversion of motion picture content? Did the UAES brain trust fall for Considine's sub-rosa move – planting newspaper and radio pieces that said the grand jury investigation had gone down – and just how strongly is UAES connected to the Communist Party?

Career maker.

'You'll be a lieutenant before you're thirty.'

'There's a woman you'll have to get next to, lad. You might have to fuck the pants off of her.'

A bludgeon to smash his nightmares.

He felt cocky when he left the briefing, taking the nonpsychiatric reports under his arm, promising to report for a second confab this afternoon at City Hall. He went back to his apartment, called a dozen dental labs that Karen Hiltscher hadn't tapped and got zilch, read a dozen homosexual homicide histories without drinking or thinking of the Chateau Marmont. He then started feeling *very* cocky, took his 2307 Tamarind blood scrapings to the USC chemistry building and bribed a forensics classmate into typing them, hoping he could combine the wall spray pictures with the victims' names, reconstruct and get another fix on his man. The classmate didn't even blink at the bloodwork and did his tests; Danny took home data and put it together with the photographs.

Three victims, three different blood types – the risk of showing illegally obtained evidence was worth it. The Marty Goines AB+ blood matched the sloppiest of the wall sprays; he was the first victim, and the killer had not yet perfected his interior decorating technique. George Wiltsie and Duane Lindenaur, types O− and B+, had their blood spat out *separately*, Wiltsie in designs less intricate, less polished. Conclusions reinforced and conclusions gained: Marty Goines was a spur-of-the-moment victim, and the killer went at him in a total rage. Although filled with suicidal bravado – as witnessed by his bringing victims two and three to Goines' apartment – he had to have had an ace reason for choosing Mad Marty, which could be one of three:

He knew the man and wanted to kill him out of hatred – a well-defined personal motive;

He knew the man and found him a satisfactory victim based on convenience and/or blood lust;

He did not know Marty Goines previously, but was intimately acquainted with the darktown jazz strip, and trusted himself to find a victim there.

Have *his* men recanvass the area.

On Wiltsie/Lindenaur:

The killer bit and gnawed and swallowed and sprayed Wiltsie's blood first, because he was the one who most attracted him. The relative refinement of the Lindenaur blood designs denoted the killer's satisfaction and satiation; Wiltsie, a known male prostitute, was his primary sex fix.

Tonight, double-agency sanctioned, he'd brace talent agent/procurer Felix Gordean, connected circumstantially to Wiltsie's squeeze Duane Lindenaur – and try for a handle on who the men were.

Danny checked the clock: 8:53; the other officers should be arriving at 9:00. He decided to stick behind the lectern, got out his notepad and went over the assignments he'd laid out. A moment later, he heard a discreet throat-clearing and looked up.

A stocky blond man, thirty-fivish, was walking toward him. Danny remembered something Dudley Smith said: a Homicide Bureau 'protégé' of his would be on the 'team' to grease things and make sure the other men 'fell in line.' He pasted on a smile and stuck out his hand; the man gave him a hard shake. 'Mike Breuning. You're Danny Upshaw?'

'Yes. Is it Sergeant?'

'I'm a sergeant, but call me Mike. Dudley sends regards and regrets – the station boss here says Gene Niles has to work the case with us. He was the catching officer, and the Bureau can't spare any other men. C'est la vie, I always say.'

Danny winced, remembering his lies to Niles. 'Who's the fourth man?'

'One of your guys, Jack Shortell, a squadroom sergeant from the San Dimas Substation. Look, Upshaw, I'm sorry about Niles. I know he hates the Sheriff's and he thinks the City end of the job should be shitcanned, but Dudley said to tell you, "Remember, you're the boss." Dudley likes you, by the way. He thinks you're a comer.'

His take on Smith was that he enjoyed hurting people. 'That's great. Tell the Lieutenant thanks for me.'

'Call him Dudley, and thank him yourself – you guys are partners on that Commie thing now. Look, here's the others.'

Danny looked. Gene Niles was walking to the front of the room, giving a tall man with wire-frame glasses a wide berth, like all Sheriff's personnel were disease carriers. He sat down in the first row of chairs and got out a notepad and pen – no amenities, no acknowledgment of rank. The tall man came up and gave Breuning and Danny quick shakes. He said, 'I'm Jack Shortell.'

He was at least fifty years old. Danny pointed to his name on the blackboard. 'A pleasure, Sergeant.'

'All mine, Deputy. Your first big job?'

'Yes.'

'I've worked half a dozen, so don't be too proud to yelp if you get stuck.'

‘I won’t be.’

Breuning and Shortell sat down a string of chairs over from Niles; Danny pointed to a table in front of the blackboard – three stacks of LAPD/LASD paper on the Goines/Wiltsie/Lindenaur snuffs. Nothing speculative from his personal file; nothing on the lead of Felix Gordean; nothing on Duane Lindenaur as a former extortionist. The men got out cigarettes and matches and fired up; Danny put the lectern between him and them and grabbed his first command.

‘Most of what we’ve got is in there, gentlemen. Autopsy reports, log sheets, my summary reports as catching officer on the first victim. LAPD didn’t see fit to forensic the apartment where the victims were killed, so there’s some potential leads blown. Of the officers working the two separate jobs, I’ve been the only one to turn up hard leads. I wrote out a separate chronology on what I got, and included carbons in with your official stuff. I’ll run through the key points for you now.’

Danny paused and looked straight at Gene Niles, who’d been staring hot pokers at him since he tweaked LAPD for fumbling the forensic ball. Niles would not move his eyes; Danny braced his legs into the lectern for some more frost. ‘On the night of January one, I canvassed South Central Avenue, the vicinity where the car that was used to transport Martin Goines’ body was stolen from. Eyewitnesses placed Goines with a tall, gray-haired, middle-aged man, and we know from the autopsy reports that the killer has O+ blood – typed from his semen. Goines was killed by a heroin overjolt, Wiltsie and Lindenaur were poisoned by a secobarbital/strychnine compound. All three men were mutilated in the same manner – cuts from an implement known as a zoot stick, bites with the dentures the killer was wearing all over their abdominal areas. The dentures could not possibly be duplicates of human teeth. He could be wearing plastic teeth or duplicates of animal teeth or steel teeth – but not human ones.’

Danny took his eyes off Niles and scoped all three of his men. Breuning was smoking nervously; Shortell was taking notes; Big Gene was burning cigarette holes in the desktop. Danny looked at him exclusively and dropped his first lie. ‘So we’ve got a tall, gray-haired, middle-aged white man with O+ blood who can cop horse and barbs, knows some chemistry and can hotwire cars. When he slammed the horse into Goines, he stuffed a towel into his mouth, which means that he knew the bastard’s heart arteries would pop and he’d vomit blood. So maybe he’s got medical knowledge. I’m betting he knows how to make dentures, and yesterday I got a tip from a snitch of mine: Goines was putting together a burglary gang. When you read my summary reports you’ll see that I questioned a vagrant named Chester Brown, a jazz musician. He knew Marty Goines back in the early ’40s and stated that he was a burglar then. Brown mentioned a youth with a burned face who was Goines’ KA, but I don’t think he fits in the picture. So add “burglar possible” to our scenario, and

I'll tell you what we're going to do.

'Sergeant Shortell, you'll be making phone queries on the dental work lead. I've got a very long list of dental labs, and I want you to call them and get to whoever keeps employment records. You've got solid elimination stuff to go with: blood type, physical description, the dates of the killings. Also ask about dental workers who aroused *any* kind of suspicion at their workplace, and if your instincts tell you someone is suspicious but you've got no blood type, call for jail records or Selective Service records or hospital records – or call any place else you can think of where you can get the information.'

Shortell had nodded along, writing it down; Danny gave him a nod and zeroed in on Niles and Breuning. 'Sergeant Breuning and Sergeant Niles, you are to check every City, County and individual municipality Vice and sex crime file for biting aberrations and eliminate potential suspects against our man's blood type and description. I want the files of every registered sex offender in the LA area gone through. I want a more thorough background check on Wiltsie and Lindenaur, and Wiltsie's male prostitution jacket pulled for KAs with our guy's stats. I want you to cross-check the sex information against the burglary files of middle-aged white men city-and countywide, and look for arrest reports on youth burglars with burn marks going back to '43. For every possible you get, I want a set of mugshots.

'There's an approach that I've let lie because of jurisdictional problems, and that's where the mugs come in. I want every known heroin and goofball pusher to see those pictures – hard muscle shakedowns, especially in jigtown. I want you to shake down *your* snitches for information, call every Vice Squad commander in every division, City and County, and tell them to have their officers check with their snitches for fruit bar scuttlebutt. Who's tall, gray, middle-aged and has a biting fetish? and I want you to call County and State Parole for dope on violent loony bin parolees. I want Griffith Park, South Central and the area where Goines' body was dumped thoroughly recanvassed.'

Breuning groaned; Niles spoke for the first time. 'You want a lot, Upshaw. You know that?'

Danny leaned over the lectern. 'It's an important case, and you'll share credit for the collar.'

Niles snorted. 'It's homo horseshit, we'll never get him, and if we did, so what? Do you care how many queers he cuts? I don't.'

Danny flinched at 'homo' and 'queers'; holding a stare on Niles made his eyes flicker, and he realized that he hadn't used the word 'homosexual' in his profile of the killer. 'I'm a policeman, so I care. And the job is good for our careers.'

'For *your* career, sonny. You've got some deal with some Jew DA downtown.'

'Niles, shitcan it!'

Danny looked around to see who shouted, felt his throat vibrating and saw that he'd gripped the lectern with blue-white fingers. Niles evil-eyed him; Danny couldn't match the stare. He thought of the rest of his pitch and delivered it, a trace of a flutter in his voice. 'Our last approach is pretty obscure. All three men were slashed by zoot sticks, which Doc Layman says Riot Squad cops used to use. There are no zoot stick homicides on record, and most zoot stick assaults were by Caucasians on Mexicans and not reported. Again, check with your informants on this and make your eliminations against blood type and description.'

Jack Shortell was still scribbling; Mike Breuning was looking up at him strangely, eyes narrowed to slits. Danny turned back to Niles. 'Got that, Sergeant?'

Niles had another cigarette going; he was scorching his desk with the tip. 'You're really in tight with the Jews, huh, Upshaw? What's Mickey Kike paying you?'

'More than Brenda paid you.'

Shortell laughed; Breuning's strange look broke into a smile. Niles threw his cigarette on the floor and stamped it out. 'Why didn't you report your lead on Marty Goines' pad, hotshot? What the fuck was happening there?'

Danny's hands snapped a piece of wood off the lectern. He said, 'Dismissed,' with some other man's voice.

Considine and Smith were waiting for him in Ellis Loew's office; big Dudley was hanging up a phone with the words, 'Thank you, lad.' Danny sat down at Loew's conference table, sensing the 'lad' was flunky Mike Breuning with a report on his briefing.

Considine was busy writing on a yellow legal pad; Smith came over and gave him the glad hand. 'How was your first morning as Homicide brass, lad?'

Danny knew he knew – verbatim. 'It went well, Lieutenant.'

'Call me Dudley. You'll be outranking me in a few years, and you should get used to patronizing men much your senior.'

'Okay, Dudley.'

Smith laughed. 'Lad, you're a heartbreaker. Isn't he a heartbreaker, Malcolm?'

Considine slid his chair next to Danny. 'Let's hope Claire De Haven thinks so. How are you, Deputy?'

Danny said, 'I'm fine, Lieutenant,' picking up something wrong between his superiors – contempt or plain tension working two ways – Dudley Smith in the catbird seat.

'Good. The briefing went well, then?'

'Yes.'

'Have you read that paperwork we gave you?'

'I've got it practically memorized.'

Considine tapped his pad. ‘Excellent. We’ll start now, then.’

Dudley Smith sat at the far end of the table; Danny geared his brain to listen and *think* before speaking. Considine said, ‘Here’s some rules for you to follow.

‘One, you drive your civilian car everywhere, on your decoy job *and* your homicide job. We’re building an identity for you, and we’ll have a script ready by late tonight. You’re going to be a lefty who’s been living in New York for years, so we’ve got New York plates for your car, and we’ve got a whole personal background for you to memorize. When you go by your various station houses to check reports or whatever, park on the street at least two blocks away, and when you leave here, go downstairs to the barbershop. Al, Mayor Bowron’s barber, is going to get rid of that crew cut of yours and cut your hair so that you look less like a cop. I need your trouser, shirt, jacket, sweater and shoe sizes, and I want you to meet me at midnight at West Hollywood Station. I’ll have your new Commie wardrobe and script ready, and we’ll finalize your approach. Got it?’

Danny nodded, pulled a sheet of paper off Considine’s pad and wrote down his clothing sizes. Dudley Smith said, ‘You wear those clothes everywhere, lad. On your queer job, too. We don’t want your new Pinko friends seeing you on the street looking like a dapper young copper. Malcolm, give our fair Daniel some De Haven lines to parry. Let’s see how he fields them.’

Considine spoke directly to Danny. ‘Deputy, I’ve met Claire De Haven, and I think that for a woman she’s a tough piece of work. She’s promiscuous, she may be an alcoholic and she may take drugs. We’ve got another man checking out her background and the background of some other Reds, so we’ll know more on her soon. I spoke to the woman once, and I got the impression that she thrives on banter and one-upmanship. I think that it sexually excites her, and I know she’s attracted to men of your general appearance. So we’re going to try a little exercise now. I’ll feed you lines that I think would be typical of Claire De Haven, you try to top them. Ready?’

Danny shut his eyes for better concentration. ‘Go.’

‘“But some people call us Communists. Doesn’t that bother you?”’

‘That old scarlet letter routine doesn’t wash with me.’

‘Good. Let’s follow up on that. “Oh, really? Fascist politicians have ruined many politically enlightened people by slandering us as subversives.”’

Danny grabbed a line from a musical he saw with Karen Hiltscher. ‘I’ve always had a thing for redheads, baby.’

Considine laughed. ‘Good, but don’t call De Haven “baby,” she’d consider it patronizing. Here’s a good one. “I find it hard to believe that you’d leave the Teamsters for us.”’

Easy. ‘Mickey Cohen’s comedy routines would drive anybody out.’

‘Good, Deputy, but in your decoy role you’d never get close to Cohen, so you wouldn't know that about him.'

Danny got a brainstorm: the dirty joke sheets and pulp novels his fellow jailers passed around when he worked the main County lockup. 'Give me some sex banter, Lieutenant.'

Considine flipped to the next note page. '"But I'm thirteen years older than you."'

Danny made his tone satirical. 'A grain of sand in our sea of passion.'

Dudley Smith howled; Considine chuckled and said, 'You just walk into my life when I'm engaged to be married. I don't know that I trust you.'

'Claire, there's only one reason *to* trust me. And that's that around you I don't trust myself.'

'Great delivery, Deputy. Here's a curveball: "Are you here for me or the cause?"'

Extra easy: the hero of a paperback he'd read working nightwatch. 'I want it all. That's all I know, that's all I want to know.'

Considine slid the notebook away. 'Let's improvise on that. "How can you look at things so simplistically?"'

His mental gears were click-click-clicking now; Danny quit digging for lines and flew solo. 'Claire, there's the fascists and us, and there's you and me. Why do *you* always complicate things?'

Considine, coming on like a femme fatale. '"You know I'm capable of eating you whole."'

'I love your teeth.'

'"I love your eyes."'

'Claire, are we fighting the fascists or auditing Physiology 101?'

'"When you're forty, I'll be fifty-three. Will you still want me then?"'

Danny, aping Considine's vamp contralto. 'We'll be dancing jigs together in Moscow, sweetheart.'

'Not so satirical on the political stuff, I'm not sure I trust her sense of humor on that. Let's get dirty. "It's so *good* with you."'

'The others were just girls, Claire. You're my first woman.'

'"How many times have you used that line?"'

Aw-shucks laughter – à la a pussy hound deputy he knew. 'Every time I sleep with a woman over thirty-five.'

'"Have there been many?"'

'Just a few thousand.'

'"The cause needs men like you."'

'If there were more women like you around, there'd be millions of us.'

'"What's that supposed to mean?"'

'That I really like you, Claire.'

'"Why?"'

'You drink like one of the boys, you know Marx chapter and verse, and you've got great legs.'

Dudley Smith started clapping; Danny opened his eyes and felt them misting. Mal Considine smiled. ‘She does have great legs. Go get your haircut, Deputy. I’ll see you at midnight.’

Mayor Bowron’s barber shaped Danny’s outgrown crew cut into a modified pompadour that changed the whole set of his face. Before, he looked like what he was: a dark-haired, dark-eyed Anglo-Saxon, a policeman who wore suits or sports jacket/slacks combos everywhere. Now he looked slightly Bohemian, slightly Latin, more of a dude. The new hairstyle offset his clothes rakishly; any cop who didn’t know him and spotted the gun bulge under his left armpit would shake him down on the spot, figuring him for some kind of outlaw muscle. The look and his banter improvisations made him feel cocky, like the Chateau Marmont was a fluke that nailing Claire De Haven would disprove once and for all. Danny drove back to Hollywood Station to prepare for his second pass at the Marmont and his first shot at Felix Gordean.

He went straight to the squadroom, Mickey Cohen was vilified on the walls: cartoons of him stuffing cash in Sheriff Biscailuz’ pockets, cracking a whip at a team of sled dogs in LASD uniforms, poking innocent citizens in the ass with a switchblade sticking out of his prayer cap. Danny fielded an assortment of fisheyes, found the records alcove and hit the sex offender files – shaking hands with the beast – fuel for his Gordean interrogation.

There were six cabinets full of them: musty folders stuffed with occurrence reports, mugshots clipped to the first inner page. The filing was not alphabetical, and there was no logic to the penal code placements – homosexual occurrences were lumped with straight exhibitionism and child molestation; misdemeanants and felons brushed against each other. Danny scanned the first two files in the top cabinet and snapped why the system was so sloppy: the men on the squad wanted this wretched data out of sight and out of mind. Knowing he *had* to look, he dug in.

Most of the stuff was homo.

The Broadway Departement Store on Hollywood and Vine had a fourth-floor men’s room known as ‘Cocksucker’s Paradise.’ Enterprising deviants had bored holes through the walls of the toilet stalls, enabling the occupants of adjoining shitters to get together for oral copulation. If you parked on a Griffith Park roadway with a blue handkerchief tied to your radio aerial, you were a queer. The corner of Selma and Las Palmas was where ex-cons with a penchant for anal rape and young boys congregated. The Latin inscription on the Pall Mall cigarette pack – ‘In Hoc Signo Vinces’ – translated as ‘With this sign we shall conquer’ – was a tentative means of homo identification – a sure thing when coupled with wearing a green shirt on a Thursday. The muscular Mex transvestite who blew sailors behind Grauman’s Chinese was known as ‘Donkey Dan’ or ‘Donkey Danielle’ because he/she possessed a thirteen-inch dick. The E-Z Cab Company was run by homos, and they would deliver you a boy, queer smut films, extra

KY Jelly, bennies, or your favourite liquor twenty-four hours a day.

Danny kept reading, weak in the knees and stomach, learning. When he saw a 1900–1910 birthdate or 6′ and up on a male Caucasian's yellow sheet, he checked the mugstrip; every man he locked eyes with looked too ugly and pathetic to be *his* man – and prowling the ensuing arrest reports for blood types always proved him right. Thomas (NMI) Milnes, 6′2″, 11/4/07, exposed himself to little boys and begged the arresting officers to rubber-hose him for it; Cletus Wardell Hanson, 6′1″, 4/29/04, carried a power drill with him to pave the way for new blow job territory, restaurant men's rooms his speciality. In stir, he put his ass on the line: day room gang bangs, a pack of cigarettes per man. Willis (NMI) Burdette, 6′ 5″, 12/1/1900, was a syphilitic street whore, beaten brainless by a half dozen johns he'd passed the disease to. Darryl 'Lavender Blue' Wishnick, 6′, 3/10/03, orchestrated orgies in the hills surrounding the Hollywood Sign and liked to pork pretty boys dressed in the attire of the United States armed forces.

Four hours in, four cabinets down. Danny felt his stomach settling around hunger pangs and the desire for a drink he usually got in the mid-afternoon. That was comforting; so was the new hairstyle he kept running his fingers through, and the new embellishments on his new identity that he'd mention to Considine tonight: nothing at his apartment should seem settled – he was just in from New York; he should leave his piece, cuffs and ID buzzer at home when he played Commie. Everything in the first four drawers was wrong for his man, not applicable to his bad moments outside Felix Gordean's window. Then he hit cabinet five.

This set of files was in some kind of order – 'No Arraignments,' 'Charges Dropped' or 'Check Agst. Future Arrests' stamped on the front of each folder. Danny read through the first handful and got straight male-on-male sex that went to arrest but not to court: coitus interruptus in parked cars; male shack jobs snitched by shocked landladies; a toilet assignation where the theater proprietor blew the whistle, then punked out for fear of bad publicity. Straight sex recounted in straight copese: abbreviations, technical terms for the acts, a few humorous asides by waggish Vice officers.

Danny felt shakes coming on. The files carried twin yellow sheets – two mugshot strips, both sex participants in black and white. He eyed the pages for birthdates and physical stats, but kept returning to the mugs, superimposing them against each other, playing with the faces – making them prettier, less conwise. After a half dozen files, he fell into sync: a look at the photos, a scan of the arrest report, back to the mugs and the action visualized with prettified versions of the two plug-uglies clipped to the first page. Mouths on mouths; mouths to crotches; sodomy, fellatio, soixante-neuf, a Man Camera smut job, a little voice going, 'It's for the investigation' when some detail hit him so large that his stomach queased to the point where he thought his bowels would go. *No* middle-aged tall guy's stats to make him stop and think; just the pictures, rapid fire, like nickelodeon flickers.

Bedspreads wet from fucking.

A naked blond man catching his breath, veins pumping in his legs.

Zoom-in shots of awful insertions.

'It's for the investigation.'

Danny broke the string of images – making the pretty ones all gray, all forty-fivish, all his killer. Knowing the killer only had sex to hurt helped put the brakes on his fantasies; Danny got his legs back and saw that he'd twisted a lank of his new hairdo clean off his scalp. He slammed the cabinet shut; he recalled queer vernacular and interposed it into the questions he'd ask Felix Gordean – himself as a smart young detective who came prepared, who'd talk on the level of anyone – even if it was wrong sex to a queer pimp.

Cop to voyeur and back again.

Danny drove home, showered and checked his closet for the best suit to go with his new hair, settling on a black worsted Karen Hiltscher had bought him – too stylish, too tapered and skinny in the lapels. When he put it on, he saw that it made him look dangerous – and the narrow shoulders outlined his .45 revolver. After two shots and a mouthwash chaser, he drove to the Chateau Marmont.

The night was damp and chilly, hinting of rain; music echoed through the Marmont's inner courtyard – string swells, boogie jumps and odd ballad tremolos. Danny took the footpath to 7941, chafing from the fit of Karen's suit. 7941 was brightly lit, the velvet curtain he'd peered through open wide; the dance floor of three nights before gleamed behind a large picture window. Danny fidgeted with his jacket and rang the bell.

Chimes sounded; the door opened. A small man with a short dark beard and perfectly layered thin hair stood there. He was wearing a tuxedo with a tartan cummerbund, dangling a brandy snifter against his leg. Danny smelled the same fifty-year-old Napoleon he bought himself once a year as his reward for spending Christmas with his mother. The man said, 'Yes? Are you with the Sheriff's?'

Danny saw that he'd unbuttoned his coat, leaving his gun exposed. 'Yes. Are you Felix Gordean?'

'Yes, and I don't appreciate bureaucratic faux pas. Come in.'

Gordean stood aside; Danny walked in and ran eye circuits of the room where he'd glimpsed men dancing and kissing. Gordean moved to a bookcase, reached behind the top shelf and returned with an envelope. Danny caught an address: 1611 South Bonnie Brae, the Sheriff's Central Vice operations front, where recalcitrant bookies got strong-armed, recalcitrant hookers got serviced, protections kickbacks got tallied. Gordean said, 'I always mail it in. Tell Lieutenant Matthews I don't appreciate in-person calls with their implied threat of additional charges.'

Danny let Gordean's hand hover in front of him – buffed nails, an emerald ring and probably close to a grand in cash. 'I'm not a bagman, I'm a detective working a triple homicide.'

Gordean smiled and held the envelope down at his side. 'Then let me initiate you regarding my relationship with your Department, Mr. –'

'It's Deputy Upshaw.'

'Mr. Upshaw, I cooperate fully with the Sheriff's Department in exchange for certain courtesies, chief among them your contacting me by telephone when you require information. Do you understand?'

Danny got a strange sensation: Gordean's frost was making him frosty. 'Yes, but as long as I'm here . . .'

'As long as you're here, tell me how I can assist you. I've never been questioned on a triple homicide before, and frankly I'm curious.'

Danny speedballed his three victims' names. 'Martin Goines, George Wiltsie and Duane Lindenaur. Dead. Raped and hacked to death.'

Gordean's reaction was more frost. 'I've never heard of a Martin Goines. I brokered introductions for George Wiltsie throughout the years, and I think George mentioned Duane Lindenaur to me.'

Danny felt like he was treading on an iceberg; he knew going in for shock value wouldn't play. 'Duane Lindenaur was an extortionist, Mr. Gordean. He met and attempted to exort money from a man named Charles Hartshorn – who allegedly met at a party you threw.'

Gordean smoothed his tuxedo lapels. 'I know Hartshorn, but I don't recall actually meeting Lindenaur. And I throw a lot of parties. When was this alleged one?'

'In '40 or '41.'

'That's a long time ago. You're staring at me very acutely, Mr. Upshaw. Is there a reason for that?'

Danny touched his own lapels, caught what he was doing and stopped. 'I usually get at least a "my God" or a twitch when I tell someone that an acquaintance of theirs has been murdered. You didn't bat an eye.'

'And you find that dismaying?'

'No.'

'Curious?'

'Yes.'

'Am I an actual suspect in these killings?'

'No, you don't fit my description of the killer.'

'Do you require alibis for me to further assert my innocence?'

Danny snapped that he was being sized up by an expert. 'All right. New Year's Eve and the night of January fourth. Where were you?'

Not a second's hesitation. 'I was here, hosting well-attended parties. If you require verification, please have Lieutenant Matthews do it for you – we're old friends.'

Danny saw flashes of *his* party: black-on-black tangos framed in velvet.

He flinched and stuffed his hands in his pockets; Gordean's eyes flicked at the show of nerves. Danny said, 'Tell me about George Wiltsie.'

Gordean walked to a liquor cabinet, filled two glasses and returned with them. Danny smelled the good stuff and jammed his hands down deeper so he wouldn't grab. 'Tell me about George Wilt –'

'George Wiltsie was a masculine image that a number of men found enticing. I paid him to attend my parties, dress well and act civilized. He made liaisons here, and I received fees from those men. I imagine that Duane Lindenaur was his lover. That's all I know about George Wiltsie.'

Danny took the glass Gordean was offering – something to do with his hands. 'Who did you fix Wiltsie up with?'

'I don't recall.'

'You *what*?'

'I host parties, guests come and meet the young men I provide, money is discreetly sent to me. Many of my clients are married men with families, and keeping a blank memory is an extra service I provide them.'

The glass was shaking in Danny's hand. 'Do you expect me to believe that?'

Gordean sipped brandy. 'No, but I expect you to accept that answer as all you are going to get.'

'I want to see the books for your service, and I want to see a client list.'

'No. I write nothing down. It might be considered pandering, you see.'

'Then name names.'

'No, and don't ask again.'

Danny forced himself to barely touch his lips to the glass; barely taste the brandy. He swirled the liquid and sniffed it, two fingers circling the stem – and stopped when he saw he was imitating Gordean. 'Mr Gor –'

'Mr Upshaw, we've reached an impasse. So let me suggest a compromise. You said that I don't fit your killer's description. Very well, describe your killer to me, and I will try to recall if George Wiltsie went with a man like that. If he did, I will forward the information to Lieutenant Matthews, and he can do with it what he likes. Will that satisfy you?'

Danny bolted his drink – thirty-dollar private stock guzzled. The brandy burned going down; the fire put a rasp on his voice. 'I've got the LAPD with me on this case, and the DA's Bureau. They might not like you hiding behind a crooked Vice cop.'

Gordean smiled – very slightly. 'I won't tell Lieutenant Matthews you said that, nor will I tell Al Dietrich the next time I send him and Sheriff Biscailuz passes to play golf at my club. And I have *good* friends with both the LAPD and the Bureau. Another drink, Mr. Upshaw?'

Danny counted to himself – one, two, three, four – the kibosh on a hothead play. Gordean took his glass, moved to the bar, poured a refill and came back wearing a new smile – older brother looking to put younger brother at ease. 'You know the game, Deputy. For God's sake quit coming on like an indignant boy scout.'

Danny ignored the brandy and sighted in on Gordean's eyes for signs of fear. 'White, forty-five to fifty, slender. Over six feet tall, with an impressive head of silver hair.'

No fear; a thoughtful scrunching up of the forehead. Gordean said, 'I recall a tall, dark-haired man from the Mexican Consulate going with George, but he was fifty-ish during the war. I remember several rather rotund men finding George attractive, and I know that he went regularly with a very tall man with red hair. Does that help you?'

'No. What about men in general of that description? Are there any who frequent your parties or regularly use your service?'

Another thoughtful look. Gordean said, 'It's the impressive head of hair that tears it. The only tall, middle-aged men I deal with are quite balding. I'm sorry.'

Danny thought, no you're not – but you're probably telling the truth. He said, 'What did Wiltsie tell you about Lindenaur?'

'Just that they were living together.'

'Did you know that Lindenaur attempted to extort money from Charles Hartshorn?'

'No.'

'Have you heard of either Wiltsie or Lindenaur pulling other extortion deals?'

'No, I have not.'

'What about blackmail in general? Men like your clients are certainly susceptible to it.'

Felix Gordean laughed. 'My clients come to my parties and use my service because I insulate them from things like that.'

Danny laughed. 'You didn't insulate Charles Hartshorn too well.'

'Charles was never lucky – in love or politics. He's also not a killer. Question him if you don't believe me, but be courteous, Charles has a low threshold for abuse and he has much legal power.'

Gordean was holding out the glass of brandy; Danny took it and knocked the full measure back. 'What about enemies of Wiltsie and Lindenaur, known associates, guys they ran with?'

'I don't know anything about that sort of thing.'

'Why not?'

'I try to keep things separate and circumscribed.'

'Why?'

'To avoid situations like this.'

Danny felt the brandy coming on, kicking in with the shots he'd had at home. 'Mr. Gordean, are you a homosexual?'

'No, Deputy. Are you?'

Danny flushed, raised, his glass and found it empty. He resurrected a crack from his briefing with Considine. 'That old scarlet letter routine doesn't wash with me.'

Gordean said, 'I don't quite understand the reference, Deputy.'

'It means that I'm a professional, and I can't be shocked.'

'Then you shouldn't blush so easily – your color betrays you as a naif.'

The empty glass felt like a missile to heave; Danny hit back on 'naif' instead. 'We're talking about three people dead. Cut up with a fucking zoot stick, eyes poked out, intestines chewed on. We're talking about blackmail and burglary and jazz and guys with burned-up faces, and you think you can hurt me by calling *me* naif? You think you –'

Danny stopped when he saw Gordean's jaw tensing. The man stared down at the floor; Danny wondered if he'd stabbed a nerve or just hit him on simple revulsion. 'What is it? Tell me.'

Gordean looked up. 'I'm sorry. I have a low threshold for brash young policemen and descriptions of violence, and I shouldn't have called –'

'Then help me. Show me your client list.'

'No. I told you I don't keep a list.'

'Then tell me what bothered you so much.'

'I did tell you.'

'And I don't feature you as that sensitive. So tell me.'

Gordean said, 'When you mentioned jazz, it made me think of a client, a horn player that I used to broker introductions to rough trade to. He impressed me as volatile then, but he's not tall or middle-aged.'

'And that's *all*?'

'Cy Vandrich, Deputy. Your tactics have gotten you more than I would normally have been willing to part with, so be grateful.'

'And that's *all*?'

Gordean's eyes were blank, giving nothing up. 'No. Direct all your future inquiries through Lieutenant Matthews and learn to sip fine brandy – you'll enjoy it more.'

Danny tossed his crystal snifter on a Louis XIV chair and walked out.

An hour and a half to kill before his meeting with Considine; more liquor out of the question. Danny drove to Coffee Bob's and forced down a hamburger and pie, wondering how much of the Gordean questioning slipped between the cracks: his own nerves, the pimp's police connections and savoir faire. The food calmed him down, but didn't answer his questions; he hit a pay phone and got dope on Cy Vandrich.

There was only one listed with DMV/R&I: Cyril 'Cy' Vandrich, WM, DOB 7/24/18, six arrests for petty theft, employment listed as 'transient' and 'musician.' Currently on his sixth ninety-day observation jolt at the Camarillo loony bin. A follow-up call to the bin revealed that Vandrich kept pulling crazy man stunts when he got rousted for shoplifting; that the Misdemeanor Court judge kept recommending Camarillo. The desk woman told Danny that Vandrich was in custody there on the two killing nights;

that he made himself useful teaching music to the nuts. Danny said that he might come up to question the man; the woman said that Vandrich might or might not be in control of his faculties – no one at the bin had ever been able to figure him out – whether he was malingering or seriously crazy. Danny hung up and drove to West Hollywood Station to meet Mal Considine.

The man was waiting for him in his cubicle, eyeing the Buddy Jastrow mug blowup. Danny cleared his throat; Considine wheeled around and gave him a closer once-over. 'I like the suit. It doesn't quite fit, but it looks like something a young lefty might affect. Did you buy it for your assignment?'

'No, Lieutenant.'

'Call me Mal. I want you to get out of the habit of using rank. *Ted.*'

Danny sat down behind his desk and pointed Considine to the spare chair. 'Ted?'

Considine took the seat and stretched his legs. 'As of today, you're Ted Krugman. Dudley went by your apartment house and talked to the manager, and when you get home tonight you'll find T. Krugman on your mailbox. Your phone number is now listed under Theodore Krugman, so we're damn lucky you kept it unlisted before. There's a paper bag waiting for you with the manager – your new wardrobe, some fake ID and New York plates for your car. You like it?'

Danny thought of Dudley Smith inside his apartment, maybe discovering his private file. 'Sure, Lieut – Mal.'

Considine laughed. 'No, you don't – it's all happening too fast. You're Homicide brass, you're a Commie decoy, you're a big-time comer. You're *made,* kid. I hope you know that.'

Danny caught glee wafting off the DA's man; he decided to hide his file boxes and blood spray pics behind the rolled-up carpet in his hall closet. 'I do, but I don't want to get fat on it. When do I make my approach?'

'Day after tomorrow. I think we've got the UAES lulled with our newspaper and radio plants, and Dudley and I are going to concentrate on lefties outside the union – KAs of the brain trusters – vulnerable types that we should be able to get to snitch. We're going over INS records for deportation levers on them, and Ed Satterlee is trying to get us some hot SLDC pictures from a rival clearance group. Call it a two-front war. Dudley and I on outside evidence, you inside.'

Danny saw Considine as all frayed nerves; he saw that *his* suit fit him like a tent, the jacket sleeves riding up over soiled shirtcuffs and long, skinny arms. 'How do I get inside?'

Considine pointed to a folder atop the cubicle's Out basket. 'It's all in there. You're Ted Krugman, DOB 6/16/23, a Pinko New York stagehand. In reality you were killed in a car wreck on Long Island two months ago. The local Feds hushed it up and sold the identity to Ed Satterlee. All your past history and KAs are in there. There's surveillance pictures of the Commie

KAs, and there's twenty-odd pages of Marxist claptrap, a little history lesson for you to memorize.

'So, day after tomorrow, around two, you go to the Gower Street picket line, portraying a Pinko who's lost his faith. You tell the Teamster picket boss that the day labor joint downtown sent you out, muscle for a buck an hour. The man knows who you are, and he'll set you up to picket with two other guys. After an hour or so, you'll get into political arguments with those guys – per the script I've written out for you. A third argument will result in a fistfight with a real bruiser – a PT instructor at the LAPD Academy. He'll pull his punches, but you fight for real. You're going to take a few lumps, but what the hell. Another Teamster man will shout obscenities about you to the UAES picket boss, who'll hopefully approach you and lead you to Claire De Haven, UAES's member screener. We've done a lot of homework, and we can't directly place Krugman with any UAESers. You look vaguely like him and at worst you'll be secondhand heard of. It's all in that folder, kid. Pictures of the men you'll be pulling this off with, everything.'

A clean day to work the homicides; a full night to become Ted Krugman. Danny said, 'Tell me about Claire De Haven.'

Considine countered, 'Have you got a girlfriend?'

Danny started to say no, then remembered the bogus paramour who helped him brazen out Tamarind. 'Nothing serious. Why?'

'Well, I don't know how susceptible you are to women in general, but De Haven's a presence. Buzz Meeks just filed a report that makes her as a longtime hophead – H and drugstore – but she's still formidable – and she's damn good at getting what she wants out of men. So I want to make sure you seduce her, not the opposite. Does that answer your question?'

'No.'

'Do you want a physical description?'

'No.'

'The odds that you'll have to lay her?'

'No.'

'Do you want her sexual background?'

Danny threw his question out before he could back down. 'No. I want to know why a ranking policeman has a crush on a Commie socialite.'

Considine blushed pink – the way Felix Gordean told him *he* blushed; Danny tried reading his face and caught: got *me*. Call-me-Mal laughed, slid off his wedding band and tossed it in the wastebasket. He said, 'Man to man?'

Danny said, 'No, brass to brass.'

Considine made the sign of the cross on his vestfront. 'Ashes to ashes, and not bad for a minister's son. Let's just say I'm susceptible to dangerous women, and my wife is divorcing me, so I can't chase around and give her ammo to use in court. I want custody of my son, and I will not give her one shred of evidence to spoil my case. And I don't usually offer my confessions to junior officers.'

Danny thought: this man is so far out on a limb that you can say anything to him and he'll stick around – because at 1:00 A.M. he's got no place fucking else to go. 'And *that's* why you're getting such a kick out of operating De Haven?'

Considine smiled and tapped the top desk drawer. 'Why am I betting there's a bottle in here?'

Danny felt himself blush. 'Because you're smart?'

The hand kept tapping. 'No, because your nerves are right up there with mine, and because you always stink of Lavoris. Brass to rookie, here's a lesson: cops who smell of mouthwash are juicers. And juicer cops who can keep it on a tight leash are usually pretty good cops.'

'Pretty good cops' flashed a green light. Danny nudged Considine's hand away, opened the drawer and pulled out a pint and two paper cups. He poured quadruple shots and offered; Considine accepted with a bow; they hoisted drinks. Danny said, 'To both our cases'; Considine toasted, 'To Stefan Heisteke Considine.' Danny drank, warmed head to toe, drank: Considine sipped and hooked a thumb over his back at Harlan 'Buddy' Jastrow. 'Upshaw, who is this guy? And why are you so bent out of shape on your goddamn homo killings?'

Danny locked eyes with Jastrow. 'Buddy's the guy I used to want to get, the guy who used to be the worst, the hardest nut to crack because he was just plain nowhere. Now there's this other thing, and it's just plain terror. It's incredibly brutal, and I think it might be random, but I don't quite go with that. I think I'm dealing with revenge. I think all the killer's methods are reenactments, all the mutilations are symbolic of him trying to get his past straight in his mind. I keep thinking it all out, and I keep coming back to revenge on old wrongs. Not everyday childhood trauma shit, but big, big stuff.'

Danny paused, drank and sighted in on the mugboard around Jastrow's neck: Kern County Jail, 3/4/38. 'Sometimes I think that if I know who this guy is and why he does it, then I'll know something so big that I'll be able to figure out all the everyday stuff like cake. I can get on with making rank and handling meat and potatoes stuff, because everything I ever sensed about what people are capable of came together on one job, and I nailed *why*. *Why*. Fucking *why*.'

Considine's, 'And why you do what you do yourself,' was very soft. Danny looked away from Jastrow and killed his drink. 'Yeah, and that. And why you're so hopped on Claire De Haven and me. And don't say out of patriotism.'

Considine laughed. 'Kid, would you buy patriotism if I told you the grand jury guarantees me a captaincy, Chief DA's Investigator and the prestige to keep my son?'

‘Yeah, but there’s still De Haven and –’

‘Yeah, and me. Let’s just put it this way. I have to know why, too, only I like going at it once removed. Satisfied?’

‘No.’

‘I didn’t think you would be.’

‘Do you *know* why?’

Considine sipped bourbon. ‘It wasn’t hard to figure out.’

‘I used to steal cars, Lieut – Mal. I was the ace car thief of San Berdoo County right before the war. Turnabout?’

Lieutenant Mal Considine stuck out a long leg and hooked the wastebasket over to his chair. He rummaged in it, found his wedding band and slipped it on. ‘I’ve got a confab with my lawyer for the custody case tomorrow, and I’m sure he’ll want me to keep wearing this fucking thing.’

Danny leaned forward. ‘Turnabout, Captain?’

Considine stood up and stretched. ‘My brother used to blackmail me, threaten to rat me to the old man every time I said something snotty about religion. Since ten strokes with a switch was the old man’s punishment for blasphemy, old Desmond pretty much got his way, which was usually me breaking into houses to steal stuff he wanted. So let’s put it this way: I saw a lot of things that were pretty swell, and some things that were pretty spooky, and I liked it. So it was either become a burglar or a spy, and policeman seemed like a good compromise. And sending in the spies appealed to me more than doing it myself, sort of like Desmond in the catbird seat.’

Danny stood up. ‘I’m going to nail De Haven for you. Trust me on that.’

‘I don’t doubt it, Ted.’

‘In vino veritas, right?’

‘Sure, and one more thing. I’ll be Chief of Police or something else that large before too long, and I’m taking you with me.’

NINETEEN

MAL WOKE UP thinking of Danny Upshaw.

Rolling out of bed, he looked at the four walls of Room 11, the Shangri-Lodge Motel. One framed magazine cover per wall – Norman Rockwell testimonials to happy family life. A stack of his soiled suits by the door – and no Stefan to run them to the dry cleaners. The memo corkboard he'd erected, one query tag standing out: locate Doc Lesnick. The fink/shrink could not be reached either at home or at his office and the 1942–1944 gaps in Reynolds Loftis' file had to be explained; he needed a general psych overview of the brain trusters now that their decoy was about to be in place, and all the files ended in the late summer of last year – why?

And the curtains were cheesecloth gauze; the rug was as threadbare as a tortilla; the bathroom door was scrawled over with names and phone numbers – 'Sinful Cindy, DU-4927, 38–24–38, loves to fuck and suck' – worth a jingle – if he ever ran Vice raids again. And Dudley Smith was due in twenty minutes good guy/bad guy as today's ticket: two Pinko screenwriters who avoided HUAC subpoenas because they always wrote under pseudonyms and blew the country when the shit hit the fan in '47. They had been located by Ed Satterlee operatives – private eyes on the Red Crosscurrents payroll – and both men knew the UAES bigshots intimately back in the late '30s, early '40s.

And getting so chummy with an underling was strange. A couple of shared drinks and they were spilling their guts to each other – bad chain of command policy – ambitious policemen should keep it zipped while they climbed the ladder.

Mal showered, shaved and dressed, running book – De Haven versus Upshaw, even money as his best bet. At 8:30 exactly a car horn honked; he walked outside and saw Dudley leaning against his Ford. 'Good morning, Malcolm! Isn't it a grand day!'

The drove west on Wilshire, Mal silent, Dudley talking politics. '. . . I've been juxtaposing the Communist way of life against ours, and I keep coming back to family as the backbone of American life. Do you believe that, Malcolm?'

Mal knew that Loew had filled him in on Celeste – and that as far as partners went, he could have worse – like Buzz Meeks. 'It has its place.'

'I'd be a bit more emphatic on that, given the trouble you're taking to get your son back. Is it going well with your lawyer?'

Mal thought of his afternoon appointment with Jake Kellerman. 'He's going to try to get me continuances until the grand jury is in session and making hay. I have the preliminary in a couple of days, and we'll start putting the stall in then.'

Dudley lit a cigarette and steered with one pinky. 'Yes, a crusading captain might convince the judge that water is thicker than blood. You know, lad, that I've a wife and five daughters. They serve well to keep the reins on certain unruly aspects of my nature. If he can keep them in perspective, a family is an essential thing for a man to have.'

Mal rolled down his window. 'I have no perspective where my son is concerned. But if I can keep you in perspective until the grand jury convenes, then I'll be in *grand* shape.'

Dudley Smith exhaled laughter and smoke. 'I'm fond of you, Malcolm – even though you don't reciprocate. And speaking of family, I've a little errand to run – my niece needs a talking-to. Would you mind a small detour to Westwood?'

'A brief detour, Lieutenant?'

'Very, Lieutenant.'

Mal nodded; Dudley turned north on Glendon and headed up toward the UCLA campus, parking in a meter space on Sorority Row. Setting the brake, he said, 'Mary Margaret, my sister Brigid's girl. Twenty-nine years old and on her third masters degree because she's afraid to go out and meet the world. Sad, isn't it?'

Mal sighed. 'Tragic.'

'The very thing I was thinking, but without your emphasis on sarcasm. And speaking of youths, what's your opinion of our young colleague Upshaw?'

'I think he's smart and going places. Why?'

'Well, lad, friends of mine say that he has no sense of his own place, and he impresses me as weak and ambitious, which I view as a dangerous combination in a policeman.'

Mal's first thought of rising: He shouldn't have confided in the kid, because half his juice was front just waiting to crack. 'Dudley, what do you want?'

'Communism vanquished. And why don't you enjoy the sight of comely young coeds while I speak to my niece?'

Mal followed Dudley up the steps of a Spanish manse fronted by a lawn display: Greek symbols sunk into the grass on wood stakes. The door was open; the lounge area buzzed: girls smoking, talking and gesturing at textbooks. Dudley pointed upstairs and said, 'Toot sweet'; Mal saw a stack of magazines on an end table and sat down to read, fielding curious looks from the coeds. He thumbed through a *Collier's*, a *Newsweek* and two *Life's* – stopping when he heard Dudley's brogue, enraged, echoing down the second-floor hallway.

It got louder and scarier, punctuated by pleas in a whimpering soprano.

The girls looked at Mal; he grabbed another magazine and tried to read. Dudley's laughter took over – spookier than the bellows. The coeds were staring now; Mal dropped his *Weekly Sportsman* and walked upstairs to listen.

The hallway was long and lined with narrow wooden doors; Mal followed Ha! Ha! Ha! to a door with 'Conroy' nameplated on the front. It was ajar a few inches; he looked in on a back wall lined with photos of Latino prizefighters. Dudley and the soprano were out of sight; Mal eavesdropped.

'. . . bull banks and pinatas and spic bantomweights. It's a fixation, lassie. Your mother may lack the stomach to set you straight, but I don't.'

The soprano, groveling, 'But Ricardo is a lovely boy, Uncle Dud. And I –'

A huge hand flashed across Mal's strip of vision, a slap turned to a caress, a head of curly red hair jerking into, then out of sight. 'You're not to say you love him, lassie. Not in my presence. Your parents are weak, and they expect me to have a say regarding the men in your life. I will always exercise that say, lassie. Just remember the trouble I spared you before and you'll be grateful.'

A plump girl/woman backed into view, hands on her face, sobbing. Dudley Smith's arms went around her; her hands turned to fists to keep him from completing the embrace. Dudley murmured sweet nothings; Mal walked back to the car and waited. His partner showed up five minutes later. 'Knock, knock, who's there? Dudley Smith, so Reds beware! Lad, shall we go impress Mr. Nathan Eisler with the righteousness of our cause?'

Eisler's last known address was 11681 Presidio, a short run from the UCLA campus. Dudley hummed show tunes as he drove; Mal kept seeing his hand about to hit, the niece cowering from her genial uncle's touch. 11681 was a small pink prefab at the end of a long prefab block; Dudley double-parked, Mal jammed facts from Satterlee's report:

Nathan Eisler. Forty-nine years old. A German Jew who fled Hitler and company in '34; CP member '36 to '40, then member of a half dozen Commie front organizations. Co-scenarist on a string of pro-Russki turkeys, his writing partner Chaz Minear; poker buddies with Morton Ziffkin and Reynolds Loftis. Wrote under pseudonyms to guard his professional privacy; slipped through the HUAC investigators' hands; currently living under the alias Michael Kaukenen, the name of the hero of *Storm Over Leningrad*. Currently scripting RKO B westerns, under yet another monicker, the work fronted by a politically acceptable hack writer who glommed a 35 percent cut. Best pals with Lenny Rolff, fellow writer expatriate, today's second interrogee.

Former lover of Claire De Haven.

They took a toy-littered walkway up to the porch; Mal looked through a screen door into the perfect prefab living room: plastic furniture, linoleum floor, spangly pink wallpaper. Children squealed inside; Dudley winked and rang the buzzer.

A tall, unshaven man walked up to the screen, flanked by a toddler boy and girl. Dudley smiled; Mal watched the little boy pop a thumb in his mouth, and spoke first. 'Mr. Kaukenen, we're with the District Attorney's Office and we'd like to talk to you. Alone, please.'

The kids pressed themselves into the man's legs; Mal saw scared slant eyes – two little half-breeds spooked by two big boogeymen. Eisler/Kaukenen called out, 'Michiko!'; a Japanese woman materialized and whisked the children away. Dudley opened the door uninvited; Eisler said, 'You are three years late.'

Mal walked in behind Dudley, amazed at how cheap the place looked – a white trash flop – the home of a man who made three grand a week during the Depression. He heard the kids bawling behind wafer-thin walls; he wondered if Eisler had to put up with the same foreign language shit he did – then popped that he probably dug it on general Commie principles. Dudley said, 'This is a charming house, Mr. Kaukenen. The color motif especially.'

Eisler/Kaukenen ignored the comment and pointed them to a door of the living room. Mal walked in and saw a small square space that looked warm and habitable: floor-to-ceiling books, chairs around an ornate coffee table and a large desk dominated by a class A typewriter. He took the seat furthest from the squeal of little voices; Dudley sat across from him. Eisler shut the door and said, 'I am Nathan Eisler, as if you did not already know.'

Mal thought: no nice guy, no 'I loved your picture *Branding Iron*.' 'Then you know why we're here.'

Eisler locked the door and took the remaining chair. 'The bitch is in heat again, despite reports that she had a miscarriage.'

Dudley said, 'You are to tell no one that we questioned you. There will be dire repercussions should you disobey us on that.'

'Such as what, Herr –'

Mal cut in. 'Mort Ziffkin, Chaz Minear, Reynolds Loftis and Claire De Haven. We're interested in their activities, not yours. If you cooperate fully with us, we might be able to let you testify by deposition. No open court, probably very little publicity. You slid on HUAC, you'll slide on this one.' He stopped and thought of Stefan, gone with his crazy mother and her new paramour. 'But we want hard facts. Names, dates, places and admissions. You cooperate, you slide. You don't, it's a subpoena and open court questioning by a DA I can only describe as a nightmare. Your choice.'

Eisler inched his chair away from them. Eyes lowered, he said, 'I have not seen those people in years.'

Mal said, 'We know, and it's their *past* activities that we're interested in.'

'And they are the only people that you want to know about?'

Mal lied, thinking of Lenny Rolff. 'Yes. Just them.'

'And what are these repercussions you speak of?'

Mal drummed the table. ‘Open court badgering. Your picture in the –’

Dudley interrupted, ‘Mr Eisler, if you do not cooperate, I will inform Howard Hughes that you are authoring RKO films currently being credited to another man. That man, your conduit to gainful employment as a writer, will be terminated. I will also inform the INS that you refused to cooperate with a sanctioned municipal body investigating treason, and urge that their Investigations Bureau delve into *your* seditious activities with an eye toward your deportation as an enemy alien and the deportation of your wife and children as potential enemy aliens. You are a German and your wife is Japanese, and since those two nations were responsible for our recent world conflict, I would think that the INS would enjoy seeing the two of you returned to your respective homelands.’

Nathan Eisler had hunched himself up, elbows to knees, clasped hands to chin, head down. Tears rolled off his face. Dudley cracked his knuckles and said, ‘A simple yes or no answer will suffice.’

Eisler nodded; Dudley said, ‘Grand.’ Mal got out his pen and notepad. ‘I know the answer, but tell me anyway. Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party, U.S.A.?’

Eisler bobbed his head; Mal said, ‘Yes or no answers, this is for the record.’

A weak ‘Yes.’

‘Good. Where was your Party unit or cell located?’

‘I – I went to meetings in Beverly Hills, West Los Angeles and Hollywood. We – we met at the homes of different members.’

Mal wrote the information down – verbatim shorthand. ‘During what years were you a Party member?’

‘April ’36 until Stalin proved him –’

Dudley cut in. ‘Don’t justify yourself, just answer.’

Eisler pulled a Kleenex from his shirt pocket and wiped his nose. ‘Until early in ’40.’

Mal said, ‘Here are some names. You tell me which of these people were known to you as Communist Party members. Claire De Haven, Reynolds Loftis, Chaz Minear, Morton Ziffkin, Armando Lopez, Samuel Benavides and Juan Duarte.’

Eisler said, ‘All of them.’ Mal heard the kids tromping through the living room and raised his voice. ‘You and Chaz Minear wrote the scripts for *Dawn of the Righteous, Eastern Front, Storm Over Leningrad* and *The Heroes of Yakustok*. All those films espoused nationalistic Russian sentiment. Were you told by Communist Party higher-ups to insert pro-Russian propaganda in them?’

Eisler said, ‘That is a naive question’; Dudley slapped the coffee table. ‘Don’t comment, just answer.’

Eisler moved his chair closer to Mal. ‘No. No, I was not told that.’

Mal flashed Dudley two fingers of his necktie – *he’s mine*. ‘Mr. Eisler, do you deny that those films contain pro-Russian propaganda?'

'No.'

'Did you and Chaz Minear arrive at the decision to disseminate that propaganda yourselves?'

Eisler squirmed in his chair. 'Chaz was responsible for the philosophizing, while I held that the story line spoke most eloquently for the points he wanted to make.'

Mal said, 'We have copies of those scripts, with the obvious propaganda passages annotated. We'll be back to have you initial the dialogue you attribute to Minear's disseminating of the Party line.'

No response. Mal said, 'Mr. Eisler, would you say that you have a good memory?'

'Yes, I would say that.'

'And did you and Minear work together in the same room on your scripts?'

'Yes.'

'And were there times when he said things along the lines of "This is great propaganda" or "This is for the Party"?'

Eisler kept squirming, shifting his arms and legs. 'Yes, but he was just being satirical, poking fun. He did not –'

Dudley shouted, 'Don't interpret, just answer!'

Eisler shouted back, 'Yes! Yes! Yes! Goddamn you, yes!'

Mal gave Dudley the cut-off sign; he gave Eisler his most soothing voice. 'Mr. Eisler, did you keep a journal during the time you worked with Chaz Minear?'

The man was wringing his hands, Kleenex shredding between fingers pumped blue-white. 'Yes.'

'Did it contain entries pertaining to your Communist Party activities and your script work with Chaz Minear?'

'Oh God, yes.'

Mal thought of the report from Satterlee's PIs: Eisler coupling with Claire De Haven circa '38–'39. 'And entries pertaining to your personal life?'

'Oh, Gott in himm . . . yes, yes!'

'And do you still have that journal?'

Silence, then, 'I don't know.'

Mal slapped the table. 'Yes, you do, and you'll have to let us see it. Only the germane political entries will be placed in the official transcript.'

Nathan Eisler sobbed quietly. Dudley said, 'You will give us that journal, or we will subpoena it and uniformed officers will tear your quaint little abode apart, gravely upsetting your quaint little family, I fear.'

Eisler gave a sharp little yes nod; Dudley eased back in his chair, the legs creaking under his weight. Mal saw a Kleenex box on the windowsill, grabbed it and placed it on Eisler's lap. Eisler cradled the box; Mal said, 'We'll take the journal with us, and we'll put Minear aside for now. Here's a general question. Have you ever heard any of the people we're interested in advocate the armed overthrow of the United States government?'

Two negatives shakes, Eisler with his head back down, his tears drying. Mal said, 'Not in the way of a formal pronouncement, but that sentiment stated.'

'Every one of us said it in anger, and it always meant nothing.'

'The grand jury will decide what you meant. Be specific. Who said it, and when.'

Eisler wiped his face. 'Claire would say. "The end justifies the means" at meetings and Reynolds would say that he was not a violent man, but he would take up a shillelagh if it came to us versus the bosses. The Mexican boys said it a million different times in a million contexts, especially around the time of Sleepy Lagoon. Mort Ziffkin shouted it for the world to hear. He was a courageous man.'

Mal caught up on his shorthand, thinking of UAES and the studios. 'What about the UAES? How did it tie in to the Party and the front groups you and the others belonged to?'

'The UAES was founded while I was out of the country. The three Mexican boys had found work as stagehands and recruited members, as did Claire De Haven. Her father had served as counsel to vested movie interests and she said she intended to exploit and . . . and . . .'

Mal's head was buzzing. 'And *what*? Tell me.'

Eisler went back to his finger-clenching; Mal said '*Tell me*. "Exploit" *and what?*'

'Seduce! She grew up around movie people and she knew actors and technicians who had been coveting her since she was a girl! She seduced them as founding members and got them to recruit for her! She said it was her penance for not getting subpeonaed by HUAC!'

Big time triple bingo.

Mal willed his voice as controlled as Dudley's. 'Who specifically did she seduce?'

Eisler picked and plucked and tore at the tissue box. 'I don't know, I don't know, I honestly do not know.'

'A lot of men, a few men, how many?'

'I do not know. I suspect only a few influential actors and technicians who she knew could help her union.'

'Who else helped her recruit? Minear, Loftis?'

'Reynolds was in Europe then, Chaz I don't know.'

'What was discussed at the first UAES meetings? Was there some kind of charter or overview they worked on?'

The Kleenex box was now a pile of ripped cardboard; Eisler brushed it off his lap. 'I have never attended their meetings.'

'We know, but we need to know who besides the initial founders were there and what was discussed.'

‘I don’t know!’

Mal threw an outside curve. ‘Are you still hot for Claire, Eisler? Are you protecting her? You know she’s marrying Reynolds Loftis. How’s that make you feel?’

Eisler threw his head back and laughed. ‘Our affair was brief, and I suspect that handsome Reynolds will always prefer young boys.’

‘Chaz Minear’s no young boy.’

‘And he and Reynolds did not last.’

‘Nice people you know, comrade.’

Eisler’s laughter turned low, guttural – and supremely Germanic. ‘I prefer them to you, obersturmbahnführer.’

Mal held his temper by looking at Dudley; Mr. Bad Guy returned him the cut-off sign. ‘We’ll overlook that comment out of deference to your cooperation, and you may call this your initial interview. My colleague and I will go over your answers, check them against our records and send back a long list of other questions, detailed specifics pertaining to your Communist front activities and the activities of the UAES members we discussed. A City Marshal will monitor that transaction, and a court reporter will take your deposition. After that interview, providing you answer a few more questions now and allow us to take your journal, you will be given friendly witness status and full immunity from prosecution.’

Eisler got up, walked on rubber legs to his desk and unlocked a lower drawer. He poked through it, pulled out a leather-bound diary, brought it back and laid it on the table. ‘Ask your few questions and leave.’

Dudley moved a flat palm slowly down: Go *easy*, Mal said, ‘We have a second interview this afternoon, and I think you can help us with it.’

Eisler stammered, ‘Wh-what, wh-who?’

Dudley, in a whisper. ‘Leonard Hyman Rolff.’

Their interrogee rasped the single word, ‘No.’ Dudley looked at Mal; Mal placed his left hand over his right fist: *no hitting*. Dudley said, ‘*Yes*, and we will brook no argument, no discussion. I want you to think of something shameful and incriminating indigenous to your old friend Lenny, something that other people know, so that we can put the blame of informing on them. *You will inform*, so I advise you to think of something effective, something that will loosen Mr. Rolff’s tongue and spare you a return visit from myself – without my colleague who serves so well to restrain me.’

Nathan Eisler had gone slab white. He sat stock-still, looking way past tears or shock or indignation. Mal thought that he seemed familiar; a few seconds of staring gave him his connection: the Buchenwald Jews who’d beat the gas chamber only to sink to an early grave via viral anemia. The memory made him get up and prowl the bookshelves; the dead silence kept going. He was scanning a shelf devoted to Marxist economics when Dudley’s whisper came back. ‘The repercussions, comrade. Refugee camps for your half-breed whelps. Mr. Rolff will receive his chance for friendly witness status, so if he's an obstreperous sort, you'll be doing him a favor by supplying us with information to convince him to inform. Think of Michiko forced to keep body and soul together back in Japan, all the tempting offers she'll receive.'

Mal tried to look back, but couldn't make himself; he fixed on *Das Kapital – A Concordance, Marx's Theories of Commerce and Repression* and *The Proletariat Speak Out*. Quiet sank in behind him; heavy fingers tapped the table. Then Nathan Eisler's monotone: 'Young girls. Prostitutes. Lenny is afraid his wife will find out he frequents them.'

Dudley sighed. 'Not good enough. Try harder.'

'He keeps pornographic pictures of the ones –'

'Too bland, comrade.'

'He cheats on his income tax.'

Dudley ha! ha! ha!'d. 'So do I, so does my friend Malcolm and so would our grand savior Jesus Christ should he return and settle in America. You know more than you are telling us, so please rectify that situation before I lose my temper and revoke your friendly witness status.'

Mal heard the kids giggling outside, the little girl squealing in Japanese. He said, 'Goddamn you, talk.'

Eisler coughed, took an audible breath, coughed again. 'Lenny will not inform as easily as I. He has not so much to lose.'

Mal turned, saw a death's head and turned away; Dudley cracked his knuckles. Eisler said, 'I will always try to think I did this for Lenny and I will always know I am lying.' His next deep breath wheezed; he let it out fast, straight into his snitch. 'I was traveling with Lenny and his wife Judith in Europe in '48. Paul Doinelle was making his masked series with Reynolds Loftis and hosted a party to seek financial backing for his next film. He wanted to solicit Lenny and brought a young prostitute for him to enjoy. Judith did not attend the party, and Lenny caught gonorrhea from the prostitute. Judith became ill and returned to America, and Lenny had an affair with her younger sister Sarah in Paris. He gave her the gonorrhea. Sarah told Judith she had the disease, but not that Lenny gave it to her. Lenny would not make love to Judith for many weeks after he returned to America and took a cure, employing various excuses. He has always been afraid Judith would logically connect the two events and realize what had occurred. Lenny confided in me and Reynolds and our friend David Yorkin, who I am sure you know from your wonderful list of front organizations. Since you are so concerned with Reynolds, perhaps you could make him the informant.'

Dudley said, 'God bless you, comrade.'

Mal grabbed Eisler's journal, hoping for enough treason to make two silver bars and his boy worth the price. 'Let's go nail Lenny.'

They found him alone, typing at a card table in his back yard, clack-clack-

clack leading them around the side of the house to a fat man in a Hawaiian shirt and chinos pecking on an ancient Underwood. Mal saw him look up and knew from his eyes that this guy was no pushover.

Dudley badged him. 'Mr Leonard Rolff?'

The man put on glasses and examined the shield. 'Yes. You're policemen?'

Mal said, 'We're with the District Attorney's Office.'

'But you're policemen?'

'We're DA's Bureau Investigators.'

'Yes, you are policemen as opposed to lawyers. And your names and ranks?'

Mal thought of their newspaper ink – and knew he had no recourse. 'I'm Lieutenant Considine, this is Lieutenant Smith.'

Rolff grinned. 'Recently portrayed as regretting the demise of the would-be City grand jury, which I now take it is a going concern once again. The answer is no, gentlemen.'

Mal played dumb. 'No what, Mr Rolff?'

Rolff looked at Dudley, like he knew he was the one he had to impress. 'No, I will not inform on members of the UAES. *No*, I will not answer questions pertaining to my political past or the pasts of friends and acquaintances. If subpoenaed, I will be a hostile witness and stand on the Fifth Amendment, and I am prepared to go to prison for contempt of court. You cannot make me name names.'

Dudley smiled at Rolff. 'I respect men of principle, however deluded. Gentlemen, would you excuse me a moment? I left something in the car.'

The smile was a chiller. Dudley walked out; Mal ran interference. 'You may not believe this, but we're actually on the side of the legitimate, non-Communist American left.'

Rolff pointed to the sheet of paper in his typewriter. 'Should you fail as a policeman you have a second career as a comedian. Just like me. The fascists took away my career as a screenwriter; now I write historical romance novels under the nom de plume Erica St Jane. And my publisher knows my politics and doesn't care. So does the employer of my wife, who has full tenure at Cal State. You cannot hurt either of us.'

Out of the mouths of babes.

Mal watched Lenny Rolff resume work on page 399 of *Wake of the Lost Doubloons.* Typewriter clack filled the air; he looked at the writer's modest stone house and mused that at least he saved more of his money than Eisler and had the brains not to marry a Jap. More clack-clack-clack; Page 399 became pages 400 and 401 – Rolff really churned it out. Then Dudley's brogue, the most theatrical he had ever heard it. 'Bless me father, for I have sinned. My last confession was never, because I am Jewish. I will currently rectify that situation, Monsignors Smith and Considine my confessors.'

Mal turned and saw Dudley holding a stack of photographs; Rolff finished typing a paragraph and looked up. Dudley pushed a snapshot in his face; Rolff said, ‘No,’ calmly. Mal walked around the table and scoped the picture close up.

It was fuzzy black and white, a teenage girl naked with her legs spread. Dudley read from the flip side. ‘To Lenny. You were the best. Love from Maggie at Minnie Robert’s Casbah, January 19, 1946.’

Mal held his breath; Rolff stood, gave Dudley an eye-to-eye deadpan and a steady voice. ‘No. My wife and I have forgiven each other our minor indiscretions. Do you think I would leave the pictures in my desk otherwise? *No. Thief. Fascist parasite. Irish pig.*’

Dudley tossed the photos on the grass; Mal shot him the no hitting sign; Rolff cleared his throat and spat in Dudley’s face. Mal gasped; Dudley smiled, grabbed a manuscript sheet and wiped the spittle off. ‘*Yes*, because fair Judith does not know about fair Sarah and the clap you gave her, and I just played a hunch on where you took your cure. Terry Lux keeps meticulous records, and he has promised to cooperate with me should you decide not to.’

Rolff, still voice steady. ‘Who told you?’

Dudley, making motions: *verbatim transcription*. ‘Reynolds Loftis, under much less duress than you were just subjected to.’

Mal thought through the gamble: if Rolff approached Loftis, all their covert questionings were compromised; the UAES might put the kibosh on new members – terrified of infiltration, blowing Danny Upshaw’s approach. He got out pen and pad, grabbed a chair and sat down; Dudley called his own bluff. ‘Yes or no, Mr Rolff. Give me your answer.’

Veins pulsed all over Leonard Rolff’s face. He said, ‘Yes.’

Dudley said, ‘Grand’; Mal wrote *L. Rolff, 1/8/50* at the top of a clean sheet. Their interrogee squared his glasses. ‘Open court testimony?’

Mal took the cue. ‘Most likely deposition. We’ll start with –’

Dudley, his voice raised for the first time. ‘Let me have this witness, counselor. Would you mind?’

Mal shook his head and turned his chair around, steno pad braced on the top slat. Dudley said, ‘You know why we’re here, so let’s get to it. Communist influence in the motion picture business. Names, dates, places and seditious words spoken. Since I’m sure he’s much on your mind, we’ll start with Reynolds Loftis. Have you ever heard him advocate the armed overthrow of the United States government?’

‘No, but –’

‘Feel free to volunteer information, unless I state otherwise. Have you some grand tidbits on Loftis?’

Rolff’s tone seethed. ‘He tailored his policeman roles to make the police look bad. He said he was doing his part to undermine the American system of jurisprudence.’ A pause, then, ‘If I testify in court, will he get the chance to tell about Sarah and me?’

Mal answered, half truth/half lies. 'It's very unlikely he'll stand as a witness, and if he tries to volunteer that information the judge won't let him get two seconds in. You're covered.'

'But outside of court –'

Dudley said, 'Outside of court you're on your own, and you'll have to rely on the fact that repeating the story makes Loftis appear loathsome.'

Rolff said, 'If Loftis told you that, then he must have been cooperative in general. Why do you need information to use against him?'

Dudley, not missing a trick. 'Loftis informed on you months ago, when we thought our investigation was going to be centred outside the UAES. Frankly, what with the recent labor troubles, the UAES presents a much nicer target. And frankly, you and the others were too ineffectual to bother with.'

Mal looked over and saw that Rolff bought it: his squared shoulders had relaxed and his hands had quit clenching. His follow-up question was dead on target: 'How do I know you won't do the same thing with me?'

Mal said, 'This grand jury is officially on, and you'll be given immunity from prosecution, something we never offered Loftis. What Lieutenant Smith said about the labor trouble is true. It's now or never, and we're here to make hay now.'

Rolff stared at him. 'You acknowledge your opportunism so openly that it gives you an awful credibility.'

Dudley ha' ha'd. 'There is one difference between our factions – we're right, you're wrong. Now, concerning Reynolds Loftis. He deliberately portrayed American policemen as misanthropic, correct?'

Mal went back to transcribing; Rolff said, 'Yes.'

'Can you recall when he said that?'

'At a party somewhere, I think.'

'Oh? A party for *the* Party?'

'No. No, I think it was a party back during the war, a summertime party.'

'Were any of these people also present and making seditious comments: Claire De Haven, Chaz Minear, Mort Ziffkin, Sammy Benavides, Juan Duarte and Mondo Lopez?'

'I think Claire and Mort were there, but Sammy and Juan and Mondo were busy with SLDC around that time, so they weren't.'

Mal said, 'So this was summer of '43, around the time the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee was going strongest?'

'Yes. Yes, I think so.'

Dudley said, 'Think, comrade. Minear was Loftis' bedmate. Was he there and acting vociferous?'

Mal caught up on his note-taking, shorthanding Dudley's flair down to simple questions; Rolff ended a long pause. 'What I remember about that party is that it was my last social contact with the people you mentioned until I became friendly with Reynolds again in Europe a few years ago. I recall that Chaz and Reynolds had been spatting and that Reynolds did not bring him to that party. After the party I saw Reynolds out by his car talking to a young man with a bandaged face. I also recall that my circle of political friends had become involved in the Sleepy Lagoon defense and were angry when I took a job in New York that precluded my joining them.'

Dudley said, 'Let's talk about Sleepy Lagoon.' Mal thought of his memo to Loew: nothing on the case should hit the grand jury – it was political poison that made the Pinkos look good. Rolff said, 'I thought you wanted me to talk about Reynolds.'

'Digress a little. Sleepy Lagoon. Quite an event, wasn't it?'

'The boys your police department arrested were innocent. Concerned apolitical citizens joined the Southern California left and secured their release. *That* made it quite an event, yes.'

'That's your interpretation, comrade. Mine differs, but that's what makes for horse races.'

Rolff sighed. 'What do you want to know?'

'Give me your recollections of the time.'

'I was in Europe for the trial and appeals and release of the boys. I remember the actual murder from the previous summer – '42, I think. I remember the police investigation and the arrest of the boys and Claire De Haven becoming outraged and holding fund-raisers. I remember thinking that she was currying favor with her many Latin suitors, that that was one reason she was so carried away with the cause.'

Mal butted in, thinking of culling facts from Dudley's bum tangent, wondering *why* the tangent. 'At these fund-raisers, were there CP bigshots present?'

'Yes.'

'We're going to be getting some SLDC surveillance pictures. You'll be required to help identify the people in them.'

'Then there's more of this?'

Dudley lit a cigarette and motioned Mal to quit writing. 'This is a preliminary interview. A City Marshal and court reporter will be by in a few days with a long list of specific questions on specific people. Lieutenant Considine and I will prepare the questions, and if we're satisfied with your answers we'll mail you an official immunity waiver.'

'Are you finished now, then?'

'Not quite. Let's return to Sleepy Lagoon for a moment.'

'But I told you I was in New York then. I was gone for most of the protests.'

'But you did know many of the SLDC principals. Duarte, Benavides and Lopez, for instance.'

'Yes. And?'

'And they were the ones who most loudly contended that the poor persecuted Mex boys got the railroad, were they not?'

‘Yes. Sleepy Lagoon sparked the zoot suit riots, *your* police department running amok. A number of Mexicans were practically beaten to death, and Sammy and Juan and Mondo were anxious to express their solidarity through the Committee.’

Mal swiveled his chair around and watched. Dudley was on a big fishing expedition, soaking up a *big* dose of rhetoric in the process – not the man’s style. Rolff said, ‘If that sounds doctrinaire to you, I’m sorry. It’s simply the truth.’

Dudley made a little pooh-pooh noise. ‘It always surprised me that the Commies and your so-called concerned citizens never proffered a suitable killer or killers of their own to take the fall on José Diaz. You people are masters of the scapegoat. Lopez, Duarte and Benavides were gang members who probably knew plenty of white punks to put the onus on. Was that ever discussed?’

‘No. What you say is incomprehensible.’

Dudley shot Mal a little wink. ‘My colleague and I know otherwise. Let’s try this. Did the three Mexes or any other SLDC members proffer sincerely believed theories as to who killed José Diaz?’

Gritting his teeth, Rolff said, ‘No.’

‘What about the CP itself? Did it advance any potential scapegoats?’

‘I *told* you no, I *told* you I was in New York for the bulk of the SLDC time.’

Dudley, straightening his necktie knot with one finger pointed to the street: ‘Malcolm, any last questions for Mr. Rolff?’

Mal said, ‘No.’

‘Oh? Nothing on our fair Claire?’

Rolff stood up and was running a hand inside his collar like he couldn’t wait to ditch his inquisitors and take a bath; Mal knocked his chair over getting to his feet. He dug for cracks to throw and came up empty. ‘No.’

Dudley stayed seated, smiling. ‘Mr Rolff, I need the names of five fellow travelers, people who are well acquainted with the UAES brain trust.’

Rolff said, ‘No. Unequivocally *no*.’

Dudley said, ‘I’ll settle for the names now, whatever intimate personal recollections you can supply us with in a few days, after a colleague of ours conducts background checks. The names, please.’

Rolff dug his feet in the grass, balled fists at his sides. ‘Tell Judith about Sarah and me. She won’t believe you.’

Dudley took a piece of paper from his inside jacket pocket. ‘May 11, 1948. “My Dearest Lenny. I miss you and want you in me despite what you carried with you. I keep thinking that of course you didn’t know you had it and you met that prostitute before we became involved. The treatments hurt, but they still make me think of you, and if not for the fear of Judith finding out about us, I would be talking about you my every waking moment.” Armbuster 304’s are the cheapest wall safes in the world, comrade. A man in your position should not be so frugal.'

Lenny Rolff hit the grass on his knees. Dudley knelt beside him and coaxed out a barely audible string of names. The last name, sobbed, was 'Nate Eisler.' Mal double-timed it to the car, looking back once. Dudley was watching his friendly witness hurl typewriter and manuscript, table and chairs helter-skelter.

Dudley drove Mal back to his motel, no talk the whole time, Mal keeping the radio glued to a classical station: bombastic stuff played loud. Dudley's goodbye was, 'You've more stomach for this work than I expected'; Mal went inside and spent an hour in the shower, until the hot water for the entire dump was used up and the manager came knocking on the door to complain. Mal calmed him down with his badge and a ten-spot, put on his last clean suit and drove downtown to see his lawyer.

Jake Kellerman's office was in the Oviatt Tower at Sixth and Olive. Mal arrived five minutes early, scanning the bare-bones reception room, wondering if Jake sacrificed a secretary for rental freight in one of LA's ritziest buildings. Their first confab had been overview; this one had to be meat and potatoes.

Kellerman opened his inner office door at 3:00 on the dot; Mal walked in and sat down in a plain brown leather chair. Kellerman shook his hand, then stood behind a plain brown wooden desk. He said, 'Preliminary day after tomorrow, Civil Court 32. Greenberg's on vacation, and we've got some goyishe stiff named Hardesty. I'm sorry about that, Mal. I wanted to get you a Jew who'd be impressed by your MP work overseas.'

Mal shrugged, thinking of Eisler and Rolff; Kellerman smiled. 'Care to enlighten me on a rumor?'

'Sure.'

'I heard you coldcocked some Nazi bastard in Poland.'

'That's true.'

'You killed him?'

The bare little office was getting stuffy. 'Yes.'

Kellerman said, 'Mazel tov,' checked his court calendar and some papers on the desk. 'At preliminary I'll start stalling for continuances and try to work out an angle to get you switched to Greenberg's docket. He'll fucking love you. How's the grand jury gig going?'

'It's going well.'

'Then why are you looking so glum? Look, is there any chance you'll get your promotion before the grand jury convenes?'

Mal said, 'No. Jake, what's your strategy past the continuances?'

Kellerman hooked two thumbs in his vest pockets. 'Mal, it's a hatchet job on Celeste. She deserted the boy –'

'She didn't desert him, the fucking Nazis picked up her and her husband and threw him in fucking Buchenwald.'

‘Ssh. Easy, pal. You told me the boy was molested as a direct result of being deserted by his mother. She peddled it inside to stay alive. Your MP battalion has got her liberation interview pictures – she looks like Betty Grable compared to the other women who came out alive. I’ll kill her in court with that – Greenberg or no Greenberg.’

Mal took off his jacket and loosened his tie. ‘Jake, I don’t want Stefan to hear that stuff. I want you to get a writ barring him from hearing testimony. An exclusion order. You can do it.’

Kellerman laughed. ‘No wonder you dropped out of law school. Writs excluding minor children from overhearing testimony in custody cases cannot be legally sanctioned unless the counsel of both parents approve it – which Celeste’s lawyer will never go for. If I break her down in court – and I will – he’ll want Stefan there on the off-chance he runs to mommy, not daddy. It’s out of our hands.’

Mal saw Stefan Heisteke, Prague ’45, coming off a three-year jag of canned dog food and rape. ‘You swing it, or you find stuff that happened after the war to hit Celeste with.’

‘Like her dutifully schooling Stefan in Czech? Mal, she doesn’t drink or sleep around or hit the boy. You don’t wrest custody from the natural mother because the woman lives in the past.’

Mal got up, his head throbbing. ‘Then you make me the biggest fucking hero since Lucky Lindy. You make me look so fucking good I make motherhood look like shit.’

Jake Kellerman pointed to the door. ‘Go get me a big load of Commies and I’ll do my best.’

Mal rolled to the Pacific Dining Car. The general idea was a feast to pamper himself away from Eisler, Rolff and Dudley Smith – the purging that an hour of scalding hot water didn’t accomplish. But as soon as his food arrived he lost interest, grabbed Eisler’s diary and flipped to 1938–1939, the writer’s time with Claire De Haven.

No explicitness, just analysis.

The woman hated her father, screwed Mexicans to earn his wrath, had a crush on her father and got her white lefty consorts to dress stuffed-shirt traditional like him – so she could tear off their clothes and make a game out of humiliating paternal surrogates. She hated her father’s money and political connections, raped his bank accounts to lavish gifts on men whose politics the old man despised; she went to tether’s end on booze, opiates and sex, found causes to do penance with and fashioned herself into an exemplary leftist Joan of Arc: organizing, planning, recruiting, financing with her own money and donations often secured with her own body. The woman’s political efficacy was so formidable that she was never dismissed as a camp follower or dilettante; at worst, only her psyche and motives were viewed as spurious. Eisler’s fascination with Claire continued after their affair ended; he remained her friend throughout her liaisons with pachuco thugs, dryouts at Terry Lux's clinic, her big penance number over Sleepy Lagoon: A Mex boyfriend beat up in the zoot riots, a boilout at Doc Terry's and then a full social season, stone cold sober, with the SLDC. Impressive. Dudley Smith's lunatic fixation aside, the seventeen kids accused of snuffing José Diaz were by all accounts innocent. And Claire Katherine De Haven – Commie rich girl slut – was a major force behind getting them sprung.

Mal leafed through the journal; the De Haven entries dwindled as he hit '44 and '45. He picked at his food and backtracked through a glut of pages that made Eisler look intelligent, analytical, a do-goodnik led down the primrose path by Pinko college professors and the specter of Hitler looming over Germany. So far, zero hard evidence – if the diary were introduced to the grand jury it would actually make Eisler appear oddly heroic. Remembering the man as a Reynolds Loftis friend/Chaz Minear co-worker, Mal scanned pages for them.

Minear came off as weak, the nance of the two, the clinging vine. Mal read through accounts of Chaz and Eisler scripting *Eastern Front* and *Storm Over Leningrad* together circa 1942–1943, Eisler pissed at Minear's sloppy work habits, pissed at his mooning over Loftis, pissed at himself for despising his friends' homosexuality – tolerable in Reynolds because at least he wasn't a swish. You could see Minear's impotent rage building back in the Sleepy Lagoon days – his crying on Eisler's shoulder over some fling Loftis was having – 'My God, Nate, he's just a boy, and he's been disfigured' – then refusing to go any further on the topic. Hindsight: in '47, Chaz Minear hit back at his faithless lover – the snitch to HUAC that got Reynolds Loftis blacklisted. Mal made a mental note: if Danny Upshaw couldn't infiltrate the UAES brain trust, then Chaz Minear, homosexual weak sister, might be ripe for overt bracing – exposure of his snitch duty the lever to get him to snitch again.

The rest of the diary was a bore: meetings, committees, gatherings and names for Buzz Meeks to check out along with the names Dudley coerced from Lenny Rolff. Mal killed it off while his steak got cold and his salad wilted in the bowl; he realized that he liked Nathan Eisler. And that with the journal checked out and dinner attempted, he had no place to go except back to the Shangri-Lodge Motel and nothing he wanted to do except talk to Stefan – a direct violation of Jake Kellerman's orders. All the motel had to offer was women's names scrawled on the bathroom door, and if he called Stefan he'd probably get Celeste, their first amenities since he reworked her face. Restless, he paid the check, drove up into the Pasadena foothills and parked in the middle of a totally dark box canyon: 'Cordite Alley,' the spot where his generation of LAPD rookies got fried on kickback booze, shot the shit and target practiced, tall clumps of sagebrush to simulate bad guys.

The ground held a thick layer of spent shells; dousing his headbeams, Mal saw that the other cop generations had blasted the sagebrushes to smithereens and had gone to work on the scrub pines; the trees were stripped of bark and covered with entry holes. He got out of the car, drew his service revolver and squeezed off six rounds into the darkness; the echo hurt his ears and the cordite stink smelled good. He reloaded and emptied the .38 again; over the hill in South Pasadena skid other guns went off, like a chain of dogs barking at the moon. Mal reloaded, fired, reloaded and fired until his box of Remingtons was empty; he heard cheers, howls, shrieks and then nothing.

The canyon rustled with a warm wind. Mal leaned against the car and thought about Ad Vice, operations, turning down the Hat Squad, where you went in the door gun first and cops like Dudley Smith respected you. In Ad Vice he busted a string of Chinatown whorehouses deemed inoperable – sending in fresh-scrubbed recruits for blow jobs, followed five minutes later by door-kicking harness bulls and lab techs with cameras. The girls were all straight off the boat and living at home with mama-san and papa-san, who thought they were working double shifts at the Shun-Wong Shirt Factory; he had a cordon of muscle cops accompany him to the storefront office of Uncle Ace Kwan, LA's number-one boss chink pimp. He informed Uncle Ace that unless he took his whores over the line to the County, he would show the pictures to the papa-sans – many of them Tong-connected – and inform them that Kwan-san was getting fat off daughtersan's diet of Caucasian dick. Uncle Ace bowed, said yes, complied and always sent him a candied duck and thoughtful card at Christmastime, and he always thought about passing the greeting on to his brother – while he was still on speaking terms with him.

Him.

Desmond.

Big Des.

Desmond Confrey Considine, who coerced him into dark houses and made him a cop, an operator.

Three years older. Three inches taller. An athlete, good at faking piety to impress the Reverend. The Reverend caught him boosting a pack of gum at the local Pig and Whistle and flayed his ass so bad that Big Des popped a bunch of tendons trying to get free of his bonds and was sidelined for the rest of the football season, a first-string linebacker with a third-string brain and a first-class case of kleptomania that he was now terrified to run with: no legs and no balls, courtesy of Liam Considine, first-string Calvinist.

So Desmond recruited his gangly kid brother, figuring his whippet thinness would get him inside the places he was now afraid to B&E, get him the things he wanted: Joe Stinson's tennis racquet, Jimmy Harris's crystal radio set, Dan Klein's elk's teeth on a string and all the other good stuff he couldn't stand to see other kids enjoying. Little Malcolm, who couldn't stop blaspheming even though the Reverend told him that now that he was fourteen the penalty was a whipping – not the dinner of pine tar soap and castor oil he was used to. Little Mally would become his stealer, or the Reverend would get an earful of Jesus doing it with Rex the Wonder Dog and Mary Magdalene jumping Willy, the old coon who delivered ice to their block on a swayback nag – stuff the Reverend knew Des didn't have the imagination to come up with.

So *he* stole, afraid of Desmond, afraid of the Reverend, afraid to confide in Mother for fear she'd tell her husband and he'd kill Des, then go to the gallows and leave them to the mercy of the cheapshit Presbyterian Charity Board. Six feet and barely one-ten, he became the San Francsico Phantom, shinnying up drainpipes and popping window latches, stealing Desmond sporting junk that he was too afraid to use, books he was too stupid to read, clothes he was too big to wear. He knew that as long as Des kept the stuff he had the goods on him – but he kept playing the game.

Because Joe Stinson had a snazzy sister named Cloris, and he liked being alone in her room. Because Dan Klein had a parrot who'd eat crackers out of your mouth. Because Jimmy Harris' roundheels sister caught him raiding the pantry on his way out, took his cherry and said his thing was big. Because en route to swipe Bill Rice's *National Geographics* he found Biff's baby brother out of his crib, chewing on an electrical cord – and he put him back, fed him condensed milk and maybe saved his life, pretending it was his kid brother and he was saving him from Des and the Reverend. Because being the San Francisco Phantom was a respite from being a stick-thin, scaredy-cat school grind with a crackpot father, doormat mother and idiot brother.

Until October 1, 1924.

Desmond had sent him on a second run to Jimmy Harris' place; he sqeezed in through the woodbox opening, knowing roundheels Annie was there. She *was* there, but not alone: a cop with his blue serge trousers down to his ankles was on the living room carpet pumping her. *He* gasped, tripped and fell; the cop beat him silly, signet rings lacerating his face to shreds. He cleansed his wounds himself, tried to get up the guts to break into Biff Rice's place to see if the baby was okay, but couldn't get up the nerve; he went home, hid Desmond's burglary stash and told him the tables were turned: ripped tendons or not, the ringleader had to steal for the thief or he'd spill the beans to the Reverend. There was only one thing he wanted, and then they'd be quits – one of Annie Harris' negligees – and *he'd* tell him when to pull the job.

He staked the Harris house out, learning that Annie serviced Officer John Rokkas every Tuesday afternoon when the rest of the family worked at the Harris' produce stall in Oakland. On a cold November Tuesday, *he* picked the lock for Des; Des went in and came out twenty minutes later, beaten to a pulp. *He* stole Desmond's booty and secreted it in a safe deposit box, establishing a parity of fear between the two Considine brothers. Desmond flunked out of Union Theological Seminary and became a bigshot in the used-car racket. Mal went to Stanford, graduated and lollygagged through a year of law school, dreaming of back-alley adventure, prowling for loose women and never really enjoying the capture. When law school became excruciatingly boring, he joined the Los Angeles Police Department, not knowing how long he'd last as a cop – or if he even could last. Then he went home for Christmas, twenty-three years old and a rookie running scared in LA niggertown. He wore his uniform to Christmas dinner: Sam Browne belt, silver-plated whistle, .38 revolver. Car king Desmond, still bearing the scars of Officer John Rokkas' beating, was terrified of his new persona. *He* knew he'd be a policeman until the day he died.

Mal segued from his brother to Danny Upshaw, the black box canyon surrounding him, spent ammunition sliding under his feet. How good was he? What would he see? Would what he saw be worth today multiplied fifty times – Ellis Loew stalking grand jury chambers wrapped in the American flag?

'You've more stomach for this work than I expected.'

Dudley was right.

Mal picked up a handful of empty shells, hurled them at nothing and drove home to the Shangri-Lodge Motel.

TWENTY

MICKEY COHEN'S HIDEAWAY was SRO.

The Mick and Davey Goldman were working on a new nightclub routine, a .12 gauge pump substituting for a floor mike. Johnny Stompanato was playing rummy with Morris Jahelka, going over plans for the Cohen–Dragna dope summit between hands. And Buzz was interviewing Mickey's Teamster goons, taking down picket line scuttlebutt, a last-minute precaution before Mal Considine sent in his operative.

So far, boring Commie jive:

The De Haven cooze and Mort Ziffkin traded clichés about overthrowing the 'studio autocracy'; Fritzie 'Icepick' Kupferman had a Teamster file clerk tagged as a UAES plant – they'd been spoon-feeding him only what they wanted him to hear for weeks now, letting him run the lunch truck across from the Variety International line. Mo Jahelka had a hinky feeling: UAES pickets weren't fighting back when shoved or verbally provoked – they seemed smug, like they were biding their time, even old lefty headbashers maintaining their frost. Moey seemed to think UAES had something up its sleeve. Buzz had padded the statements so Ellis Loew would think he was working harder than he was, feeling like a nice, tasty Christian in a lion's den, waiting for the lion to get hungry and notice him.

Johnny Stomp Lion.

Mickey Lion.

Johnny had been giving him the fisheye ever since he walked in the door, ten days since he kiboshed the squeeze on Lucy Whitehall and bought the guinea sharpster off with five Mickey C-notes. 'Hi, Buzz,' 'Hi, Johnny,' nothing else. He'd been with Audrey three times now, the one all-nighter at his place, two quick shots at Howard's fuck pad in the Hollywood Hills. If Mickey had any kind of surveillance on Audrey it was Johnny; if he got wise, it was mortgage his life to the fucker or kill him, no middle ground. If Mickey got wise, it was the Big Adios, when crossed, the little guy got vicious: he'd found the trigger who bumped Hooky Rothman, gave him two hollow points in the kneecaps, an evening of agony with a Fritzie Kupferman coup de grace: an icepick in the ear, Fritzie making like Toscanini conducting Beethoven, little dips and swirls with his baton before he speared the poor bastard's brain.

Mickey Lion, this bamboo bungalow his den.

Buzz put away his notepad, taking a last look at the four names Dudley Smith had called him with earlier: Reds to be background-checked, more shitwork, probably more padding. Mickey Lion and Johnny Lion were schmoozing by the fireplace now, a picture of Audrey Lioness in pasties and panties on the wall above them. The Mick hooked a finger at him; he walked over.

The comedian had some schtick ready. ‘A guy comes up and asks me, “Mickey, how’s business?” I tell him, “Pal, it’s like show business, there is no business.” I make a pass at this ginch, she says, “I don’t lay for every Tom, Dick and Harry.” I say, “What about me? I’m Mickey!”’

Buzz laughed and pointed to the picture of Audrey, eyes hard on Johnny Stomp. ‘You should put her in your routine. Beauty and the Beast. You’ll bring the house down.’

Goose egg from Johnny; Mickey screwing up his face like he was actually considering the suggestion. Buzz tested the water again. ‘Get some big jig to play sidekick, make like he’s giving it to Audrey. Coons are always good for a laugh.’

More nothing. Mickey said, ‘Shvartzes I don’t need, shvartzes I don’t trust. What do you get when you cross a nigger and a Jew?’

Buzz played dumb. ‘I don’t know. What?’

Mickey sprayed laughter. ‘A janitor who owns the building!’

Johnny chuckled and excused himself; Buzz eyed the Va Va Voom Girl at twenty and made quick book: a hundred to one he knew less than nothing about them. Mickey said, ‘You should laugh more. I don’t trust guys who don’t have no sense of humor.

‘You don’t trust anybody, Mick.’

‘Yeah? How’s this for trust. February eighth at the haberdashery, my deal with Jack D. Twenty-five pounds of Mex brown, cash split, food and booze. All my men, all Jack’s. Nobody heeled. *That* is trust.’

Buzz said, ‘I don’t believe it.’

‘The deal?’

‘The nobody heeled. Are you fuckin’ insane?’

Mickey put his arm around Buzz’s shoulders. ‘Jack wants four neutral triggers. He’s got two City bulls, I got this Sheriff’s dick won the Golden Gloves last year, and I’m still one short. You want the job? Five hundred for the day?’

He’d spend the money on Audrey: tight cashmere sweaters, red and pink and green and white, a size too small to show off her uplift. ‘Sure, Mick.’

Mickey’s grip tightened. ‘I got a storefront on the Southside. County juice, a little sharking, a little book. Half a dozen runners. Audrey’s keeping the ledgers for me, and she says I’m getting eaten alive.’

‘The runners?’

‘Everything tallies, but the daily take-in’s been short. I pay salary, the guys enforce their own stuff. Short of shaking down the guys, I got no way to know.’

Buzz slid free of Mickey’s arm, thinking of lioness larceny: Audrey with a hot pencil and a wet brain. ‘You want me to ask around on the QT? Get the squad boss at Firestone to shake down the locals, find out who's bettin' what?'

'Trust, Buzzchik. You nail who's doing me, I'll throw some bones your way.'

Buzz grabbed his coat. Mickey said. 'Hot date?'

'The hottest.'

'Anybody I know?'

'Rita Hayworth.'

'Yeah?'

'Yeah, trust me.'

'She red downstairs?'

'Black to the roots, Mick. There's no business like show business.'

His date was for 10:00 at Howard's spot near the Hollywood Bowl; Mickey and Johnny's no-take and the skim story had him running jumpy, his watch set to Audrey standard time, which made killing an hour somewhere pure horseshit. Buzz drove to the lion woman's house, parked behind her Packard ragtop and rang the bell.

Audrey answered the door, slacks, sweater and no makeup. 'You said you didn't want to know where I lived.'

Buzz shuffled his feet, making like a swain on a prom date. 'I checked your driver's license while you were asleep.'

'Meeks, that's not something you do to somebody you're sleeping with.'

'You're sleepin' with Mickey, ain't you?'

'Yes, but what does –'

Buzz slid past Audrey, into a bargain basement front room. 'Savin' money on furnishings to bankroll your shopping center?'

'Yes. Since you ask, I am.'

'Sweetie, you know what Mickey did to the ginzo killed Hooky Rothman?'

Audrey slammed the door and wrapped her arms around herself. 'He beat the man senseless and had Fritzie what's his name drive him over the state line and warn him never to come back. Meeks, what is this? I can't *stand* you this way.'

Buzz shoved her against the door, pinned her there and put his hands on her face, holding her still, his hands going gentle when he saw she wasn't going to fight him. 'You're skimmin' off Mickey 'cause you think he won't find out and he wouldn't hurt you if he did and now *I'm* the one that had to fuckin' protect you because you are so fuckin' dumb about the fuckin' guys you fuck and I'm in way over my fuckin' head with you so you get fuckin' smart because if Mickey hurts you I'll fuckin' kill him and all his fuckin' kike guinea pigshit –'

He stopped when Audrey started bawling and trying to get out words. He stroked her hair, bending down to listen better, turning to jelly when he heard, ‘I love you, too.’

They made love on the bargain basement floor and in the bedroom and in the shower, Buzz pulling the curtain loose, Audrey admitting she cheapskated on the bathroom fixtures, too. He told her he’d check with an ex-Dragna paper man he knew and show her how to redoctor Mickey’s books – or fix an angle to lay the onus off on some nonexistent welcher; she said she’d quit skimming, straighten up, fly right, and play the stock market like a squarejohn woman who didn’t screw gangsters or Red Squad bagmen. He said, ‘I love you’ fifty times to make up for her saying it first; he got her sizes so he could blow all his kickback take on clothes for her; they went down on each other to seal a pact: nobody was supposed to mention Mickey unless absolutely necessary, nobody was to talk about their future or lack of it, two dates a week was their limit, Howard’s fuck pads rotated, her place or his place as a treat once in a while, their cars stashed where the bad guys wouldn’t see them. No outside dates, no trips together, no telling friends what they had going. Buzz asked Audrey to do the tassel trick for him; she did; she went on to model her stripper outfits, then all the clothes in her wardrobe. Buzz figured that if he spent his gambling output on threads he wanted to see her in, he’d never be bored staying inside with her: he could take the clothes off, make love to her, watch her dress again. He thought that if they stayed inside forever, he’d tell her everything about himself, all the shitty stuff included, but he’d lay it out slowly, so she’d got to know him, not get scared and run. He talked a blue streak; she talked a blue streak; he let slip about the Doberman pinscher he killed when he burglarized a lumber-yard in Tulsa in 1921, and she didn’t care. Toward dawn, Audrey started falling asleep and he started thinking about Mickey and got scared. He thought about moving his car, but didn’t want to upset the perfect way his lioness had her head tucked against his collarbone. The scare got worse, so he reached to the floor, grabbed his .38 and stuck it under the pillow.

TWENTY-ONE

THE NUT BIN waiting room featured tables and plasticene couches in soothing colors: mint green, ice blue, pale yellow. Artwork by the nuts was tacked to the walls: finger paintings and draw-by-the-numbers jobs depicting Jesus Christ, Joe DiMaggio and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Danny sat waiting for Cyril 'Cy' Vandrich, dressed in Ted Krugman garb: dungarees, skivvy shirt, steel-toed motorcycle boots and a bombardier's leather jacket. He'd been up most of the night studying Mal Considine's scenario; he'd spent yesterday doing his own background-checks on Duane Lindenaur and George Wiltsie, prowling their Valley hangouts and getting nothing but a queasy sense of the two as homo slime. Slipping into the Ted role had been a relief, and when he drove up to the Camarillo gate the guard had double-taked his get-up and New York plates and openly challenged him as a cop, checking his ID and badge, calling West Hollywood Station to get the okay. So far, Upshaw into Krugman was a success – the acid test this afternoon at the picket line.

An orderly ushered a thirtyish man in khakis into the room – a shortish guy, skinny with broad hips, deep-set gray eyes and a hepcat haircut – one greasy brown lock perfectly covering his forehead. The orderly said, 'Him,' and exited; Vandrich sighed, 'This is a humbug. I've got connections on the switchboard, the girl said this is about murders, and I'm not a murderer. Jazz musicians are Joe Lunchmeat to you clowns. You've been trying to crucify Bird for years, now you want me.'

Danny let it go, sizing up Vandrich sizing him up. 'Wrong. This is about Felix Gordean, Duane Lindenaur and George Wiltsie. I know you're not a killer.'

Vandrich slumped into a chair. 'Felix is a piece of work, Duane what's his face I don't know from Adam and George Wiltsie padded his stuff so he'd look big to impress all the rich queens at Felix's parties. And why are you dressed up like rough trade? Think you'll get me to talk that way? That image is from hunger, and I outgrew it a long time ago.'

Danny thought: smart, hep, probably wise to the game. The rough trade crack washed over him; he fondled his jacket sleeves, loving the feel of the leather. 'You've got them all buffaloed, Cy. They don't know if you're crazy or not.'

Vandrich smiled; he shifted in his chair and cocked a hip toward Danny. 'You think I'm a malingerer?'

'I know you are, and I know that Misdemeanor Court judges get tired of giving the same old faces ninety days here when they could file on them for

Petty Theft Habitual and get them some felony time. Quentin time. Up there they don't ask you for it, they take it.'

'And I'm sure you know a lot about that, with your tough leather goods and all.'

Danny laced his hands behind his head, the jacket's soft fur collar brushing him. 'I need to know what you know about George Wiltsie and Felix Gordean, and maybe what Gordean does or doesn't know about some things. Cooperate, you'll always pull ninetys. Dick me around, the judge gets a letter saying you withheld evidence in a triple homicide case.'

Vandrich giggled. 'Felix got murdered?'

'No. Wiltsie, Lindenaur and a trombone man named Marty Goines, who used to call himself the "Horn of Plenty". Have you heard of him?'

'No, but I'm a trumpeter and I used to be known as the "Lips of Ecstasy." That's a double entendre, in case you haven't guessed.'

Danny laughed off the vamp. 'Five seconds or I walk and nudge the judge.'

Vandrich smiled. 'I'll play, Mr. Policeman. And I'll even give you a free introductory observation. But first I've got a question. Did Felix tell you about me?'

'Yes.'

Vandrich did a little number, crossing his legs, making mincy hand motions. Danny saw it as the fuck going nance in order to knuckle to authority; he felt himself start to sweat, his lefty threads too hot, too much. 'Look, just tell me.'

Vandrich quieted down. 'I knew Felix during the war, when I was putting on a crazy act to get out of the service. I played that act *everywhere.* I was living off an inheritance then, living it *up.* I went to Felix's parties and I trucked with Georgie once, and Felix thought I was non compos mentis, so if he sent you to see me he was probably playing a game. There. That's my free introductory observation.'

And *his* Gordean instincts confirmed: the pimp couldn't draw breath without trying an angle – which meant that he *was* holding back. Danny said, 'You're good,' got out his notebook and turned to the list of questions he'd prepared.

'Burglary, Vandrich. Did you know George Wiltsie to be involved in it, or do you know of anyone connected to Felix Gordean who pulls burglaries?'

Vandrich shook his head. 'No. Like I said, George Wiltsie I trucked with once, talk wasn't his forte, so we stuck to business. He never mentioned that guy Lindenaur. I'm sorry he got killed, but I just take nice things from stores, I don't associate with burglars.'

Danny wrote down 'No.' 'The same thing on dentists and dental technicians, men capable of making dentures.'

Vandrich flashed perfect teeth. 'No. And I haven't been to a dentist since high school.'

‘A young man, call him a boy – with a scarred, burned-up face in bandages. He was a burglar, and this would be back during the war.’

‘No. Ugh. Awful.’

Two more. ‘Nos.’ Danny said, ‘A zoot stick. That’s a long wooden stick with a razor blade or razor blades attached at the end. It’s a weapon from the war days, for cutting up the zoot suits that Mexicans used to wear.’

Vandrich said, ‘Double ugh and an ugh on pachucos in zoot suits in general.’

No, no, no, no – underlined. Danny put out his ace question. ‘Tall, gray-haired men, mid-forties now. Nice silver hair, guys who know jazz spots, hep enough to buy dope. Homosexual men who went to Gordean’s parties back when you did.’

Vandrich said, ‘No’; Danny turned to fresh paper. ‘This is where you shine, Cyril. Felix Gordean. Everything you know, everything you’ve heard, everything you’ve thought about him.’

Vandrich said, ‘Felix Gordean is . . . a . . . piece of . . . work,’ drawing the words out into a lisp. ‘He doesn’t truck with man, woman or beast, and his only kick is bringing guys out, getting them to admit what they are, then . . . procuring for them. He has a legitimate talent agency, and he meets lots of young men, really sensitive creative types . . . and . . . well . . . they’re prone to being like . . .’

Danny wanted to scream QUEER, FAGGOT, FRUIT, HOMO, PEDERAST, BRUNSER, PUNK, COCKSUCKER and ram slime from the Hollywood Squad reports down Vandrich’s throat, making him spit it out in the open where *he* could spit on it. He kneaded his jacket sleeves and said, ‘He gets his thrills getting guys to admit that they’re homosexuals, right?’

‘Uh, yes.’

‘You can *say* it, Vandrich. Five minutes ago you were trying to flirt with me.’

‘It . . . it’s hard to say. It’s so ugly and clinical and cold.’

‘So Gordean brings these *homosexuals* out. Then what?’

‘Then he enjoys showing them off at his parties and fixing them up. Getting them acting jobs, then taking their money for the introductions he arranges. Sometimes he has parties at his beach house and watches through these mirrors he has. He can look in, but the fellows in the bedroom can’t look out.’

Danny remembered his first pass at the Marmont: peeping, his stuff pressed to the window, jazzing on it. ‘So Gordean’s a fucking queer voyeur, he likes watching homos fuck and suck. Let’s try this: *Does he keep records for his introduction service?*’

Vandrich had pushed his chair into the wall. ‘No. He didn’t back then, at least. The word was that he had a great memory, and he was terrified of writing things down . . . afraid of the police. But . . .’

‘But what?’

‘B-but I h-heard he loves to keep it all in his head, and once I heard him say that his biggest dream was to have something on everybody he knew and a profitable way to use it.’

‘Like blackmail?’

‘Y-yes, I thought of that.’

‘Do you think Gordean’s capable of it?’

No lips, stutter or hesitation. ‘Yes.’

Danny felt his soft fur collar sticky with sweat. ‘Get out of here.’

Gordean holding back.

His talent agency a tool to fuel his voyeurism.

Blackmail.

No suspicious Gordean reactions on Duane Lindenaur, extortionist; Charles Hartshorn – ‘Short and bald as a beagle’ – eliminated as a suspect on his appearance, that fact buttressed by Sergeant Frank Skakel’s assessment of his character and his take on Hartshorn’s juice – the lawyer unapproachable for now. If Gordean himself was some sort of extortionist, it had to be coincidental to Lindenaur – both men moved in a world rife with blackmailees. The talent agency was the place to start.

Danny took PCH back to LA, all the windows down so he could keep his jacket on and buttoned full. Per Considine’s orders, he parked three blocks from Hollywood Station and walked the rest of the way, heading into the muster room dead on time for the noon meeting he’d called.

His men were already there, sitting in the first row of chairs, Mike Breuning and Jack Shortell gabbing and smoking. Gene Niles was four seats over, picking at a pile of papers on his lap. Danny grabbed a chair and sat down facing them.

Shortell said, ‘You still look like a cop.’ Breuning nodded agreement. ‘Yeah, but the Commies won’t get it. If they were so smart they wouldn’t be Commies, right?’

Danny laughed; Niles said, ‘Let’s get this over with, huh, Upshaw? I’ve got lots of work to do.’

Danny got out pad and pen. ‘So do I. Sergeant Shortell, you first.’

Shortell said, ‘Cut and dried. I’ve called ninety-one dental labs, run the descriptions by the people in charge and got a total of sixteen hinkers: strange-o’s, guys with yellow sheets. I eliminated nine of them by blood type, four are currently in jail and the other three I talked to myself. No sparks, plus the guys had alibis for the times of death. I’ll keep going, and I’ll call you if anything bites me.’

Danny said, ‘Just make sure it’s a denture bite,’ and turned to Breuning. ‘Mike, what have you and Sergeant Niles got?’

Breuning consulted a big spiral notebook. ‘What we’ve got is the old goose egg. On the biting MO, we checked LAPD, County and the muni files. We got a shine queer who bit his boyfriend’s dick off, a fat blond guy with a kiddie raper jacket who bites little girls and two guys who match our description – both in Atascadero for aggravated assault. On the queer bar scuttlebutt, zero. Biters do not hang out at homo cocktail lounges and say, “I bite. Want some?” The fruit detail cops I talked to laughed me out on that one. On the Vice and sex offender file eliminations, nothing. Burglarly, ditto. I cross-checked them, nothing duplicated. Nothing on a kid with burn scars. There were six middle-aged gray-haired possibles – all either in custody on the nights of the killings or alibied – squarejohn witnesses. On the recanvassing – nada – it’s too old now. Niggertown, Griffith Park, the area where Goines was dumped, nothing. Nobody saw anything, nobody gives a shit. On checking with snitches, forget it. This guy is a loner, I’d bet my pension he does not associate with criminal riff-raff. I personally leaned on the only three possibles I got from State and County Parole – two queers and a real sweetheart – this tall, gray preacher type who cornholed three Marines back during the war, used to lube his prong with toothpaste. All three were in for curfew at the Midnight Mission – alibied by no less than Sister Mary Eckert herself.’

Breuning stopped, out of breath, and lit a cigarette. He said, ‘Gene and I muscled every southside H man we could find, which wasn’t many – it’s dry all over. Rumor has it that Jack D, and/or Mickey C. are getting ready to move a load of cut-rate. Nothing. We leaned on the jazz musician angle, nothing with our man’s description. Ditto on goofballs. Nothing. And we leaned *hard*.’

Niles chuckled; Danny looked at his own absent doodling: a page of concentric zeros. ‘Mike, what about the zoot stick angle? – the assault files and snitch calls?’

Breuning eyes narrowed. ‘Another goose. And that’s old Mex stuff, pretty far afield. I know Doc Layman tagged the back wounds as zoot stick, but don’t you think he could be wrong? As far as I’m concerned, it just doesn’t play.’

A Dudley Smith stooge patronizing Norton Layman, MD, PhD. Danny reached for some frost. ‘No. Layman’s the best, and he’s right.’

‘Then I don’t think it’s a real lead. I think our guy just read about the damn sticks or eyeballed one of the zoot riots and got a kick out of them. He’s a fucking psycho, there’s no reason to those guys.’

Something about Breuning’s take on the sticks was off; Danny shrugged to cover the thought. ‘I think you’re wrong. I think the zoot sticks are essential to the way the killer thinks. My instincts tell me he’s revenging old wrongs, and the specific mutilations are a big part of it. So I want you and Niles to comb the station files in Mex neighborhoods and check old occurrence reports – ’42, ’43, around in there, the zoot riots, Sleepy Lagoon – back when the Mexes were taking heat.’

Breuning stared at Danny; Niles groaned and muttered, ‘My instincts.’ Danny said, ‘Sergeant, if you’ve got comments, address them to me.’

Niles cracked a grin. 'Okay. One, I don't like the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and their good buddy Mickey Kike, and I've got a County pal who says you're not the goody two shoes you pretend to be. Two, I've been doing a little work on my own, and I talked to a couple of Quentin parolees who said no way was Marty Goines a queer – and I believe them. And three, I think you personally fucked me by not calling in Tamarind Street, and I don't like that.'

No Bordoni. No Bordoni. No fucking Bordoni. Danny, calm. 'I don't care what you like or what you think. *And who were the parolees*?'

Two hard stares locked; Niles glancing down at his notebook. 'Paul Arthur Koenig and Lester George Mazmanian. And four, I don't like you.'

The bluff called. Danny looked at Niles, spoke to LASD Sergeant Shortell. 'Jack, there's a poster on the notice board that shits on our Department. Rip it up.'

Shortell's voice, admiring. 'My pleasure, skipper.'

Ted Krugman.

Ted Krugman.

Theodore Michael Krugman.

Teddy Krugman, Red Commie Pinko Subversive Stage-hand.

Friends with Jukey Rosensweig of Young Actors Against Fascism and Bill Wilhite, a cell boss with the Brooklyn CP; ex-lover of Donna Patrice Cantrell, leftist firebrand at Columbia University circa '43, jumper suicide in '47 – a dive off the George Washington Bridge when she got the news that her socialist father attempted suicide over his HUAC subpoena, turning himself into a permanent vegetable via ingestion of a scouring powder cocktail that scoured his brain down to sub-idiot quality. Ex-member of AFLCIO, North Shore Long Island CP, Garment Workers' Defense Committe, Concerned Americans Against Bigotry, Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and the Fair Play for Paul Robeson League. Socialist summer camps as a kid, New York City College dropout, not drafted because of his subversive politics, liked to work as a theater grip because of all the politically enlightened people you met and pussy. Worked a long string of Broadway shows, plus a handful of B movies shot on location in Manhattan. Slogan shouter, brawler, hardcase. Loved to attend meetings and demonstrations, sign petitions and talk Commie rebop. Active in the New York leftist scene until '48 – then nowhere.

Pictures.

Donna Patrice Cantrell was pretty but hard, a softer version of her dad the Ajax guzzler. Jukey Rosensweig was a big fat guy with bulging thyroid eyes and thick glasses; Bill Wilhite was white-bread handsome. His supporting cast of characters, caught in Fed surveillance snaps, were just faces attached to bodies wielding placards: names, dates and causes on the back, to shore him up with some more history.

Parked on Gower just north of Sunset, Danny ran through his script and photo kit. He had his co-star's faces down pat: the Teamster picket boss he was supposed to introduce himself to, the goons he'd be picketing and arguing with, the LAPD Academy muscleman he'd fight – and finally – if Considine's scenario played to perfection – Norman Kostenz, UAES picket boss, the man who'd take him to Claire De Haven. Deep-breathing, he locked his gun, badge, cuffs and Daniel Thomas Upshaw ID in the glove compartment, sliding Theodore Michael Krugman license photostats into the sleeves in his wallet. Upshaw into Krugman completed; Danny walked over, ready to do it.

The scene was pandemonium divided into two snake-like strips of bodies: UAES, Teamsters, banners on sticks, shouts and catcalls, three feet of sidewalk separating the factions, a debris-filled gutter and studio walls bracketing the lines down a quarter-mile-long city block. Newsmen standing by their cars on the opposite side of Gower; lunch trucks dispensing coffee and doughnuts; a bunch of oldster cops stuffing their faces, watching newshounds shoot-craps on a piece of cardboard laid across the hood of an LAPD black-and-white. Dueling bullhorns bombarding the street with squelch noise and static-layered repetitions of 'REDS OUT!' and 'FAIR PAY NOW!'

Danny found the Teamster picket boss, picture pure; the man winked on the sly and handed him a pine slab with UAES – UN-AMERICAN ESCAPED SUBVERSIVES printed on reinforced cardboard at the top. He went through a rigmarole of laying down the law and making him fill out a time card; Danny saw the guy working the Teamster lunch truck eyeball the transaction – obviously the UAES plant man mentioned in Considine's info package. The shouts got louder; the picket boss hustled Danny over to his marching buddies, Al and Jerry, picture perfect in their grubby work clothes. Tough-guy salutations per the script: three hard boys who brook no horseshit getting down to business. Then him – Ted Krugman – starring in his own Hollywood epic, surrounded by extras, one line of good guys, one of bad guys, all of them moving, separate lines going in opposite directions.

He marched, three abreast with Al and Jerry – pros who knew their stuff; signs came at him: FISCAL JUSTICE NOW!; END THE STUDIO AUTOCRACY!; NEGOTIATE FAIR WAGES! Teamster elbows dug into UAES rib cages; the bad guys winced, didn't elbow back, kept marching and yelling. It was Man Camera with something like Sound-O-Vision thrown in; Danny kept imagining mixmasters, meat grinders, buzz saws and cycle engines working overtime, not letting you think or sight on a fixed image. He kept talking his pre-planned diatribe, feeding Jerry, right on the button with Considine's first cue: 'You're talkin' the fuckin' Moscow party line, pal. Who's fucking side are you on?'

Himself, coming back: 'The side that's paying me a fucking buck an hour to picket, *pal!*'

Jerry, grabbing his arm as UAESers stood aside and watched: 'That's not good enough –'

He broke free and kept walking and shouting per the scenario; per the scenario the picket boss came over and issued him a warning about team play, hauling Al and Jerry over, making them all shake hands like kids in a schoolyard, a bunch of anaemic lefties scoping it out. All three of them played it sullen; the picket boss hot-footed it to the lunch truck; Danny saw him talking to the coffee man – UAES's plant – hooking a thumb back at the little fracas he just refereed. Al said, 'Don't goldbrick, Krugman'; Jerry muttered anti-Red epithets; Danny launched his 'I'm one of the guys' spiel, real real Krugman stuff in case the bad guys had a close ear down, stuff Considine yanked out of an old NYPD Red Squad report: garment worker unions bashing heads insanely, the 'bosses' on both sides fucking over the rank and file. Him *pleading* with philistine Al and Jerry to see the *reason* behind what he was saying; them shaking their heads and picketing away from him, disgusted at working the same line as a rat fucker Commie traitor.

Danny marched, banner high, shouting, 'REDS OUT!,' meaning it, but savoring the curve he'd just pitched. His Man Camera started working, everything seemed contained and controlled like he'd just had his four shots and didn't want a fifth, like he was born for this and the queer shit at Gordean's pad didn't really send him. It felt like chaos in a vacuum, being shoved into a meat grinder and laughing as you got chopped up. Time passed; Al and Jerry brushed by him: once, twice, three times, side-mouthing ugly stuff, bringing the LAPD goon with them on their fourth go-round, a brick shithouse blocking his path, fingers on his chest, the hump *improvising* on Considine's script: 'This guy's a tough guy Commie? He looks like a weak sister to me.'

The wrong words, then, 'Make it good you County fuck,' whispered up close. Danny improvised, bending the shithouse's fingers back, snapping them at the bottom digit. The man shrieked and swung a bum left hook; Danny stepped inside with a counter one-two to the solar plexus. The LAPD man doubled over; Danny shot him a steel-toed right foot to the balls, crashing him into a group of UAES pickets.

Shouts all around; whistles blowing. Danny picked up a discarded pine slab and got ready to swing it at his co-star's head. Then blue uniforms surrounded him and billy clubs beat him to the ground and he was pummeled, lifted, pummeled, lifted, dumped and kicked at. He went stone cold out – then he tasted blood and sidewalk and felt hands lifting him up until he was face to face with Norman Kostenz, looking just like Mal Considine's surveillance pic, a friendly guy who was saying, 'Ted Krugman, huh? I think I've heard of you.'

The next hour went Speed-O-Vision fast.

Friendly Norm helped him clean himself up and took him to a bar on the Boulevard. Danny came out of his thumping quickly, thudding pains in the soft part of his back, loose teeth, side aches. The bluesuits had to have been in on Considine's plan – improvising in his favor – or they'd have cracked his head open for real. The script had called for them to break up a fistfight, separating the combatants, some minor roughhouse before cutting them loose. They'd obviously played off his improvisation, the kicks and gutter dump their aside for his wailing on one of their own. Now the question was how hard 'Call me Mal' would come down on him for the damage he'd done – he was an ex-LAPD man himself.

At the bar it was all questions, back to Ted Krugman, no time to think of repercussions.

Norm Kostenz took his photograph for a record of the assault and kissed his ass, a tough-guy worshiper; Danny moved into Ted, nursing a beer and double shot, making like he rarely boozed, that it was just to ease his aching, fascist-thumped bones. The liquor did help – it took the bite off his aches and got him moving his shoulders, working out the kinks that would come later. The juice downed, he started feeling good, proud of his performance; Kostenz ran a riff on how Jukey Rosensweig used to talk about him and Donna Cantrell. Danny put out a sob number on Donna, using it to segue into his missing years: Prof Cantrell a vegetable, his beloved Donna dead, the fascists responsible, but him too numbed by grief to organize, protest or generally fight back. Koztenz pressed on what he had been doing since Donna's suicide; Danny gave him an Upshaw/Krugman combo platter: real-life car thief stories under Red Ted's aegis, phony East Coast venues. Friendly Norm ate it up, vicarious kicks on a platter; he called for a second round of drinks and asked questions about the garment district wars, the Robeson League, stuff Jukey had told him about. Danny winged it, flying high: names and pictures from Considine's kit, long spiels extolling the virtues of various lefties, borrowing from the actual personalities of deputies and San Berdoo townies he'd known. Kostenz licked his plate and begged for more; Danny went sky high, all his aches lulled, spun tales out of thin air and Considine's facts: a long schtick about his loss of political faith, his rapacious womanizing with the Commie quail from Mal's surveillance pics, his long cross-country odyssey and how self-hatred and a desire to scope the scene brought him to the Teamster picket line, but now he knew he could never be fascist muscle – he wanted to work, fight, organize and help UAES end the bloodsucking tyranny of the studio bosses. Almost breathless, Norm Kostenz took it in, got up and said, 'Can you meet me and our member screener tomorrow? The El Coyote on Beverly at noon?'

Danny stood up, weaving, knowing it was more from his Academy Award acting than from booze and a beating. He said, 'I'll be there,' and saluted like Uncle Joe Stalin in a newsreel he'd seen.

Danny drove home, checked to make sure his files and pictures were secure in their hiding place, hot-showered and daubed linament on the bruises that were starting to form on his back. Naked, he performed intro lines to Claire De Haven in front of the bathroom mirror, then dressed from his lefty wardrobe: wool slacks with a skinny belt, T-shirt, his workboots and the leather jacket. Ted Krugman but a cop, he admired himself in the mirror, then drove to the Strip.

Dusk was falling, twilight darkening over low rain clouds. Danny parked on Sunset across from the Felix Gordean Agency, hunkered down in the seat with binoculars and fixed on the building.

It was a one-story gray French Provincial, louvered windows and an arched doorway, deco lettering in brass above the mailbox. An enclosed autoport was built on, the entrance illuminated by roof lights. Three cars were parked inside; Danny squinted and wrote down three Cal '49 license numbers: DB 6841, GX 1167, QS 3334.

Full darkness hit; Danny kept his eyes on the doorway. At 5:33, a twenty-fivish male Caucasian walked out, got into green Ford coupé GX 1167 and drove away. Danny wrote down a description of the car and the man, then went back to straight surveillance. At 5:47, a white prewar La Salle, Cal '49 TR 4191, pulled in; a handsome young Latin type wearing a suitcoat and pegged pants got out, rang the buzzer and entered the agency. Danny jotted his stats down, kept looking, saw two older, dark-haired men in business suits leave, walk to the carport and get into a DB 6841 and QS 3334, back out and go off in opposite directions on Sunset. The Latin type left ten minutes later; Danny filled in his descriptions of the men – none of whom matched his suspect.

Time dragged; Danny stayed glued, smelling linament, feeling his muscle aches return. At 6:14 a Rolls-Royce pulled into the carport; a man in a chauffeur's outfit got out, rang the agency buzzer, spoke into the intercom and walked across the street and out of sight. Lights went off inside – until only a single window was glowing.

Danny thought: Gordean's driver leaving his car, probably no more 'clients' coming in. He spotted a phone booth on the corner, walked over, gave the box a coin and called the DMV Police Line.

'Yes? Who's requesting?'

Danny eyed the one light still on. 'Deputy Upshaw, West Hollywood Squad, and make this fast.'

The operator said, 'We're a little bit backlogged on vehicle registrations, but –'

'This is the *police* line, not DMV Central. I'm a Homicide detective, so you kick loose for me.'

The man sounded chastised. 'We were helping regis – I'm sorry, Deputy. Give me your names.'

Danny said, 'I've got the numbers and the vehicle descriptions, *you give* *me* the names. Four California ’49s: DB 6841, GX 1167, QS 3334 and TR 4191. Go fast.’

The operator said, ‘Yessir.’ The line buzzed; Danny watched the Felix Gordean Agency. Seconds stretched; the DMV man came back on the line. ‘Got them, Deputy.’

Danny braced his notepad against the wall. ‘Go.’

‘DB 6841 is Donald Willis Wachtel, 1638 Franklin Street, Santa Monica. GX 1167 is Timothy James Costigan, 11692 Saticoy Street, Van Nuys. On QS 3334, we’ve got Alan Brian Marks with a K-S, 209 4th Avenue, Venice, and TR 4191 is Augie Luis – that’s L-U-I-S – Duarte, 1890 North Vendome, Los Angeles. That’s it.’

No sparks on the names – except the ‘Duarte’ seemed vaguely familiar. Danny hung up just as the light in the window went off; he ran back to his car, got in behind the wheel and waited.

Felix Gordean walked out the door a few moments later. He checked the lock and flipped a switch that doused the carport lights, backed the Rolls out and hung a U-turn, then headed west on Sunset. Danny counted to five and pursued.

The Rolls was easy to track – Gordean drove cautiously and stuck to the middle lane. Danny let a car get in front of him and fixed on Gordean’s radio aerial, a long strip of metal with an ornamental Union Jack at the top, oncoming headlight glare making it stand out like a marker.

They cruised west, out of the Strip and into Beverly Hills. At Linden the middle car hung a right turn and headed north; Danny closed the gap on Gordean, touching the Rolls’ bumper with his headlights, then idling back. Beverly Hills became Holmby Hills and Westwood; traffic thinned out to almost nothing. Brentwood, Pacific Palisades, looming greenery dotted with Spanish houses and vacant lots – Sunset Boulevard winding through blackish green darkness. Danny caught the reflection of highbeams in back of him.

He let the throttle up; the beams came on that much stronger, then disappeared. He looked in the rear-view, saw low headlights three car lengths back and no one else on the road; he hit the gas and jammed forward until Gordean’s Rolls was less than a short stone’s throw from the snout of his Chevy. Another check of the rear-view; the back car right on his ass.

Tail.

Moving surveillance on *him*.

Three-car rolling stakeout.

Danny swallowed and glimpsed a string of vacant lots, dirt shouldered, off the right side of the street. He downshifted, swung a hard right turn, hit the shoulder and fishtailed across rock-strewn dirt, wracking the Chevy’s undercarriage. He saw the tail car on Sunset, lights off and zooming; he cut hard left, went down to first gear, back off dirt onto good hard blacktop.

Highbeams on; second and third, the gas pedal floored. A brown postwar sedan losing ground as he gained on it; him right on the car's ass, mud smeared across its rear plate, the driver probably near blinded by his lights.

Just then the sedan turned hard right and hauled up a barely lit side street. Danny downshifted, hit the brakes and skidded into a full turnaround brody, stalling the car facing the flow of traffic. Headlights were coming straight at him; he sparked the ignition, popped the clutch and gas, banged over the curb and up the street, horns blasting down on Sunset.

Bungalows lined both sides of the street; a sign designated it 'La Paloma Dr, 1900 N.' Danny speeded up, the blacktop getting steeper, no other moving cars in sight. Bungalow lights gave him some illumination; La Paloma Drive became a summit and leveled off – and there was his brown sedan on the roadside, the driver's door open.

Danny pulled up behind it, hit his brights, unholstered his piece. He got out and walked over, gun arm first. He looked in the front seat and saw nothing but neat velveteen upholstery; he stepped back and saw a '48 Pontiac Super Chief, abandonded on a half-developed street surrounded by totally dark hills.

His heart was booming; his throat was dry; his legs were butter and his gun hand twitched. He listened and heard nothing but himself; he scanned for escape routes and saw a dozen driveways leading into back yards and the entire rear of the Santa Monica Mountains.

Danny thought: *think procedure, go slow, you're interagency Homicide brass.* The 'brass' calmed him; he tucked his .45 into his waistband, knelt and checked out the front seat.

Nothing on the seat covers; the registration strapped to the steering column – right where it should be. Danny undid the plastic strip without touching flat surfaces, held it up to the light of his highbeams and read:

Wardell John Hascomb, 9816 1/4 South Iola, Los Angeles. Registration number Cal 416893-H; license number Cal JQ 1338.

LA South Central, darktown, the area where the killer stole the Marty Goines transport car.

HIM.

Danny got fresh shakes, drove back to Sunset and headed west until he spotted a filling station with a pay phone. With shaky hands, he slipped a nickel in the slot and dialed DMV Police Information.

'Yeah? Who's requesting?'

'D-Deputy Upshaw, West Hollywood Squad.'

'The guy from half an hour or so ago?'

'Goddamn – yes, and check the Hot Sheet for this: 1948 Pontiac Super Chief Sedan, Cal JQ 1338. If it's hot, I want the address it was stolen from.'

'Gotcha,' silence. Danny stood in the phone booth, warm one second, chilled the next. He took out his pad and pen, ready to write down what the operator gave him; he saw 'Augie Luis Duarte' and snapped why it seemed familiar: there was a Juan Duarte in the UAES info he studied – meaning nothing – Duarte was as common a Mex name as Garcia or Hernandez.

The operator came back. 'She's hot, clouted outside 9945 South Normandie this afternoon. The owner is one Wardell J. Hascomb, male Negro, 9816 South –'

'I've got that.'

'You know, Deputy, your partner was a whole lot nicer.'

'What?'

The operator sounded exasperated, like he was talking to a cretin. 'Deputy Jones from your squad. He called in for a repeat on those four names I gave you, said you lost your notes.'

Now the booth went freezing. No such deputy existed; someone – probably HIM – had been watching him stake Gordean's office, close enough to overhear his conversation with the clerk and glom the gist – that he was requesting vehicle registrations. Danny shivered and said, 'Describe his voice.'

'Your partner's? Too cultured for a County plainclothes dick, I'll –'

Danny slammed the receiver down, gave the phone his last coin and dialed the direct squadroom line at Hollywood Station. A voice answered, 'Hollywood Detectives'; Danny said, 'Sergeant Shortell. Tell him it's urgent.'

'Okay,' a soft click, the old-timer cop yawning, 'Yes? Who's this?'

'Upshaw. Jack, the killer was tailing me in a hot roller.'

'What the –'

'Just listen. I spotted him, and he rabbited and abandoned the car. Write this down: '48 Pontiac Super, brown, La Paloma Drive off Sunset in the Palisades, where it flattens out at the hill. Print man to dust it, you to canvass. He took off on foot and it's all hills there, so I'm pretty sure he's gone, but do it anyway. And fast – I won't be there to watchdog.'

'Holy fuck.'

'In spades, and get me this – records checks on these four men – Donald Wachtel, 1638 Franklin, Santa Monica. Timothy Costigan, 11692 Saticoy, Van Nuys. Alan Marks, 209 4th Avenue, Venice, and Augie Duarte, 1890 Vendome, LA. Got it?'

Shortell said, 'You've got it'; Danny hung up and trawled for HIM. He cruised back to La Paloma and found the car exactly the way he left it; he hung his flashlight out the window and shone it at bungalows, alleyways, back yards and foothills. Squarejohn husbands and wives taking out the trash; dogs, cats and a spooked coyote transfixed by the glare in its eyes. No tall, middle-aged man with lovely silver hair calmly making his getaway from a count of Grand Theft Auto. Danny drove back to Sunset and took it slowly out to the beach, scanning both sides of the street; at Pacific Coast Highway, he dug in his memory for Felix Gordean's address, came up with

16822 PCH and rolled there.

It was on the beach side of the road, a white wood Colonial built on pilings sunk into the sand, ‘Felix Gordean, Esq,’ in deco by the mailbox. Danny parked directly in front and rang the bell; chimes like the ones at the Marmont sounded; a pretty boy in a kimono answered. Danny badged him. ‘Sheriff’s. I’m here to see Felix Gordean.’

The boy lounged in the doorway. ‘Felix is indisposed right now.’

Danny looked him over, his stomach queasing at blond hair straight from a peroxide bottle. The living room backdropping the boy was ultramodern, with one whole wall mirrored – tinted glass like the one-ways in police interrogation stalls. Vandrich on Gordean: he perved watching men with men. Danny said, ‘Tell him it’s Deputy Upshaw.’

‘It’s all right, Christopher. I’ll talk to this officer.’

The pretty boy jumped at Gordean’s voice; Danny walked in and saw the man, elegant in a silk robe, staring at the one-way. He kept staring; Danny said, ‘Are you going to look at me?’

Gordean pivoted slowly. ‘Hello, Deputy. Did you forget something the other night?’

Christopher went over and stood by Gordean, giving the mirror a look-see and a giggle. Danny said, ‘Four names that I need rundowns on. Donald Wachtel, Alan Marks, Augie Duarte and Timothy Costigan.’

Gordean said, ‘Those men are clients and friends of mine, and they were all at my office this afternoon. Have you been spying on me?’

Danny stepped toward the two, angling himself away from the mirror. ‘Get specific. Who are they?’

Gordean shrugged and put his hands on his hips. ‘As I said, clients and friends.’

‘Like I said, get specific.’

‘Very well. Don Wachtel and Al Marks are radio actors, Tim Costigan used to be a crooner with the big bands and Augie Duarte is a budding actor who I’ve found commercial work for. In fact, maybe you’ve seen him on television. I found him a job playing a fruit picker in a spot for the California Citrus Growers’ Association.’

Pretty Boy was hugging himself, entranced by the mirror; Danny smelled fear on Gordean. ‘Remember how I described my suspect the other night? Tall, gray-haired and ‘forty-fivish?’

‘Yes. So?’

‘So have you seen anyone like that hanging out around your office?’

A deadpan from Gordean; Christopher turning from the mirror, his mouth opening. A brief hand squeeze, pimp to Pretty Boy; the kid’s deadpan. Danny smiled, ‘That’s it. I’m sorry I bothered you.’

Two men walked into the living room. They were wearing red silk briefs; one man was removing a sequined mask. Both were young and overly muscular, with shaved legs and torsos slicked down with some kind of oil.

They eyed the three standing there; the taller of them threw Danny a kissy face. His partner scowled, hooked his fingers inside his briefs, pulled him back to the hallway and out of sight. They trailed giggles; Danny felt like vomiting and went for the door.

Gordean spoke to his back. ‘No questions about that, Deputy?’

Danny turned around. ‘No.’

‘Wouldn’t you say it runs contrary to your life? I’m sure you’ve got a nice family. A wife or a girlfriend, a nice family who would find that shocking. Would you like to tell me about them over a glass of that nice Napoleon brandy you enjoy so much?’

For a split second Danny felt terrified; Gordean and Pretty Boy became paper silhouettes, villains to empty his gun into. He about-faced out the door, slamming it; he puked into the street, found a hose attached to the adjoining house, drank and doused his face with water. Steadied, he pulled his Chevy around to the opposite side of PCH and parked, lights off, to wait.

Pretty Boy left the house twenty minutes later, walking toward an overpass to the beach. Danny let him get to the steps, cut him five seconds’ more slack, then ran over. His motorcycle boots thunked on cement; the kid looked around and stopped. Danny slowed and walked up to him. Christopher said, ‘Hello. Want to enjoy the view with –’

Danny hooked him to the gut, grabbed a handful of bottle blond hair and lashed slaps across his face until he felt his knuckles wet with blood. The moon lit up that face: no tears, eyes wide open and accepting. Danny let the boy kneel to the cement and looked down at him huddling into his kimono. ‘You did see that man hanging around Gordean’s office. Why didn’t you talk?’

Christopher wiped blood from his nose. He said, ‘Felix didn’t want me to talk to you about it,’ no whimper, no defiance, no nothing in his voice.

‘Do you do everything Felix tells you to do?’

‘Yes.’

‘So you saw a man like that?’

Christopher got to his feet and leaned over the railing with his head bowed. ‘The man had really beautiful hair, like movie star hair. I do file work at the agency, and I’ve seen him out at the bus stop on Sunset a lot the last few days.’

Danny worked the kinks out of his knuckles, rubbing them on his jacket sleeve. ‘Who is he?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Have you seen him with a car?’

‘No.’

‘Have you seen anybody talking to him?’

‘No.’

‘But you told Felix about him?’

'Y-yes.'

'And how did he react?'

Christopher shrugged. 'I don't know. He didn't react much at all.'

Danny leaned over the railing, fists cocked. 'Yes, he fucking did, so you fucking tell me.'

'Felix wouldn't like me to tell.'

'No, but you tell me, or I'll hurt you.'

The boy pulled away, gulped and spoke fast, a fresh-turned snitch anxious to get it over with. 'At first he seemed scared, then he seemed to be thinking, and he told me I should point the man out from the window the next time I saw him.'

'Did you see him again?'

'No. No, I really didn't.'

Danny thought: and you never will, now that he knows I'm wise to his stakeout. He said, 'Does Gordean keep records for his introduction service?'

'No. No, he's afraid of it.'

Danny shot the boy an elbow. 'You people like playing games, so here's a good one. I tell you something, you put it together with Gordean, who I'm sure you know *real* well. And you look at me, so I can tell if you're lying.'

The kid turned, profile to full face, pretty to beaten and slack-featured. Danny tried to evil-eye him; trembly lips made him look at the ocean instead. 'Does Gordean know any jazz musicians, guys who hang at the jazz clubs down in darktown?'

'I don't think so, that's not Felix's style.'

'Think fast. Zoot stick. That's a stick with razor blades at the end, a weapon.'

'I don't know what you're talking about.'

'A man who looks like the one you say by the bus stop, a man who uses Gordean's service.'

'No. I'd never seen that man by the bus stop before, and I don't know any –'

'Dentists, dental workers, men who can make dentures.'

'No. Too chintzy for Felix. Oh God, this is so strange.'

'Heroin. Guys who push it, guys who like it, guys who can get it.'

'No, no, *no.* Felix hates needle fiends, he thinks they're vulgar. Can we please hurry up? I never stay out on my walks this long, and Felix might get worried.'

Danny got the urge to hit again; he stared harder at the water, imagining shark fins cutting the waves. '*Shut up and just answer.* Now the service. Felix gets his kicks bringing guys out, right?'

'Oh Jesus – yes.'

'Were any of those four men I mentioned queers that he brought out?'

'I – I don't know.'

'Queers in general?'

'Donald and Augie, yes. Tim Costigan and Al Marks are just clients.'

'Did Augie or Don ever turn tricks for the service?'

'Augie did, that's all I know.'

'Christopher! Did you fall in and drown!'

Danny shifted his gaze, wave churn to beach. Felix Gordean was standing on his back porch, a tiny figure lit by a string of paper lanterns. A glass door stood half open behind him; the two musclemen, barely visible, were entwined on the floor inside. Christopher said, 'Please, can I go now?'

Danny looked back at his sharks. 'Don't you tell Gordean about this.'

'What should I tell him about my nose?'

'Tell him a fucking shark bit you.'

'Christopher! Are you coming!'

Danny drove back to La Paloma Drive. An arclight was shining down on the abandoned Pontiac; Mike Breuning was sitting on the hood of an LAPD unmarked, watching a print man dust for latents. Danny killed his engine and beeped the horn; Breuning walked over and leaned in the window. 'No prints except the shine the car belongs to – we eliminated him from a gun registration set he had on file at the station. No records on those four names you gave Shortell, and he's out canvassing now. What happened? Jack said you said the killer was tailing you.'

Danny got out of the car, pissed that Breuning was goldbricking. 'I was staking a place on the Strip – a talent agency run by a guy who queer-pimps on the side. I got some license numbers and called the DMV, and somebody called up impersonating a cop and got them too. I was tailed out here, and the guy rabbited when I spotted him. This car was stolen from darktown – right near where the Marty Goines transport car was grabbed. I've got an eyeball witness that places a man matching the killer's description hanging around outside the pimp's office, which means that those four men should be put under surveillance. *Now.*'

Breuning whistled; the print man called out, 'Nothing but the guy from the elimination set.' Danny said, 'You and Jack keep shaking down the citizens. I know it's a longshot, but do it anyway. When you finish, check cab company log sheets for pickups in the Palisades and Santa Monica Canyon and shake down the bus drivers working the Sunset line. He had to blow the area somehow. He might have stolen another car, so check with the desks at West LA Station, Samo PD and the Malibu Sheriff's. I'm going home for a minute, then I'll head down to the Southside and check around where the Pontiac was clouted.'

Breuning pulled out a notebook. 'Will do, but where do you expect to get the extra men for your stakes on those names? Gene and Jack and I have got work up the wazoo already, and Dudley told me he's got you busy on that Commie thing.'

Danny thought of Mal Considine. 'We'll get the men, don't worry.'

The arclight went off; the stretch of roadway went dark. Breuning said, 'Upshaw, what's with this name Augie Luis Duarte? The killer ain't Mex and none of his victims were, so why'd you call it in?'

Danny decided to spill on Gordean. 'It's part of a lead I've been following up on my own. The pimp is a man named Felix Gordean, and he runs a classy introduction service for homos. George Wiltsie worked for him, the killer was staking his office out, Duarte was one of the names I gave the DMV clerk, and he's an ex-Gordean whore. Satisfied?'

Breuning whistled again. 'Maybe Dudley can get us the extra men. He's good at that.'

Danny slid back in the car, catching a funny jolt – Dudley Smith's toady was stringing him along. He said, 'You and Jack go to work, and if you get anything hot, call me at home.' He U-turned and took La Paloma down to Sunset, thinking of a sandwich, a weak highball and jigtown canvassing. Sunset was rife with late-evening drivers; Danny turned east and joined a jetstream of lights. His mind went nicely blank; miles passed. Then, hitting the Strip, he got terrified like the half second at the beach house – this time around Man Camera short takes.

Cy Vandrich vamping him.

Breuning going strange over the zoot sticks, like one of the things was slashing at him.

Niles and his two parolees; his 'I got a County pal who says you're not the goody two shoes you pretend to be.'

'Make it good you County fuck' and an LAPD man bloody at his feet.

The chase, like a car thief gig reversed; it had to be him, it couldn't be him, it was too wrong to be him and too right not to be him.

Gordean making like a mind reader.

Strong-arming a pathetic homo.

The takes dissolved into a cold craving for a drink that saw him the rest of the way home. Danny opened the door and blinked at unexpected light in his living room; he saw the bottle on the coffee table and thought he was entering a hallucination. He drew his gun, snapped that it was a crazy-man stunt and put it back; he walked up to the table, saw a note propped against the jug and read:

> Ted –
>
> You were brilliant at the picket line today. I was camped out at a surveillance spot on De Longpre and saw the whole thing. By the way, I told the Academy man to call you a 'County fuck,' hoping it would give you an added incentive to kick ass. Your ability exceeded my expectations, and I now owe that officer a good deal more than a bottle of whiskey – you broke all his fingers and nicely enlarged his nuts. I wangled him a commendation, and he's mollified for now. More good news: Captain Will Bledsoe died this morning of a massive stroke, and

> DA McPherson has promoted me to Captain and appointed me Chief DA's Investigator. Good luck with the UAESers (I saw Kostenz approach you). Let's nail them good, and after the grand jury I'll recommend you for an interim LASD Sergeantcy and start pulling strings to get you to the Bureau. I need a good exec, and the lieutenant's bars that come with it will make you the youngest brass hat in City/County history. Meet me tomorrow night at midnight at the Pacific Dining Car – we'll celebrate and you can update me on your work.
>
> Yours,
> Mal.

Danny began sobbing, racking sobs that wouldn't go into tears. He kept sobbing, forgetting all about the liquor.

TWENTY-TWO

CHIEF DA's INVESTIGATOR.

Two Silver Bars, an extra 3.5 grand a year, prestige for the custody battle. The command of twenty-four detectives culled from other police agencies on the basis of their brains and ability to collect evidence that would stand up in court. Substantial say-so in *the* decision process: when or when not to seek major felony indictments. The inside track for LAPD Chief of Detectives and Big Chief. Power: including rank over Dudley Smith and the noblesse oblige to make an afternoon of shit work with Buzz Meeks tolerable.

Mal walked into the Los Angeles office of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. Ellis Loew had called early; he and Meeks were to meet at INS, 'Try to bury whatever hatchet exists between you,' and check the service's files on UAES sympathizers born outside the United States for deportation levers. Loew had phrased it like an order; captain or not, he had no choice. The DA had also requested a detailed memo on his non-UAES questionings and an update on the overall investigation – which he was late on – eyeballing Danny Upshaw's performance had cost him an afternoon – he'd been playing operator boss while Dudley was out shaking down the Pinkos Lenny Rolff ratted on.

Mal settled into the file room the records supervisor had arranged for them to use. He checked his watch and saw that he was early: Meeks wasn't due until 9:00; he had forty minutes to work before the fat man slimed in. Stacks of files had been arranged on a long metal table; Mal shoved them to the far corner, sat down and started writing.

Memo – 1/10/50
To: Ellis Loew
From: Mal Considine
Ellis –

My first memo as Chief DA's Investigator – if it wasn't confidential you could frame it.

First off, Upshaw made a successful approach yesterday. I didn't get a chance to tell you on the phone, but he was terrific. I observed, and saw the UAES member screener approach him. I left Upshaw a note instructing him to meet me late tonight at the Dining Car for a report, and I'm betting he'll have made contact with Claire De Haven by then. I'll call you tomorrow morning with a verbal report on what he has to say.

Two days ago, Dudley and I approached Nathan Eisler and Leonard Rolff, screenwriters not subpoenaed by HUAC. Both men corroborated UAES members Minear and Loftis as planning to subvert motion picture content with Communist doctrine and both have agreed to testify as friendly witnesses. Eisler yielded a diary which further confirms Claire De Haven as promiscuous – good news for Upshaw. Eisler stated that De Haven recruited initial UAES members by sexual means – good to have for open court should she have the audacity to seek to testify. Rolff informed on a total of 4 non-UAES leftists. Dudley questioned 2 of them yesterday and phoned me last night with the results: they agreed to appear as friendly witnesses, time-, date- and place-corroborated Ziffkin, De Haven, Loftis, Minear and the 3 Mexicans as making inflammatory statements supporting the overthrow of the U.S.A. by the U.S. Party and informed on a total of 19 other fellow travelers. I'm working on a detailed questionnaire to be submitted to all friendly witnesses, facts for you to use in your opening presentation, and I want low-key City Marshals to oversee the delivery and pickup of the paperwork. The reason for this is that Dudley is too frightening a presence – sooner or later his intimidation tactics will have to backfire. The chance for a successful grand jury depends on the UAES being kept in the dark. We've lulled them to sleep, so let's keep Dudley on a tight leash. If one of our friendlies balks and squeals on us to the brain trust, we're screwed.

Here's some random thoughts:

1. – This thing is becoming an avalanche and soon it's going to be an avalanche of paper. Get those clerks out to your house: I'll be submitting reports, questionnaires, and interview abstracts constructed from details in Eisler's diary. Dudley, Meeks and Upshaw will be filing reports. I want all this info cross-filed for clarity's sake.

2. – You were worried on the Upshaw secrecy angle. Don't be. We checked and rechecked. 'Ted Krugman' was not directly known to any UAES members, he's secondhand known at best, but *known of.* Upshaw is a *very* smart officer, he knows how to run with the ball and I suspect he's enjoying his role-playing.

3. – Where's Dr. Lesnick? I need to talk to him, to run psych overview questions by him and to get his opinion on certain parts of Eisler's diary. Also, all his files end in Summer '49. Why? There's a gap ('42–'44) in the Loftis file, key to the time he was rabidly mouthing Commie sentiment and portraying cops as evil on screen to 'undermine the American system of jurisprudence.' I hope he didn't die on us – he looked almost dead ten days ago. Have Sgt. Bowman locate him and make sure he calls me, will you?

4. – When we've got our evidence together and collated, we'll need

to spend a goodly amount of time deciding which of our friendlies to call to the stand. Some will be shaky and angry, thanks to Dudley and his browbeatings. As I said before, his methods have to backfire. Once we're satisfied with the number of witnesses we've turned, I want to take over the questionings and go solo on them, kid gloves – more for the sake of the investigation's security than anything else.

5. – Dudley has a bee in his bonnet over the Sleepy Lagoon case, and he keeps bringing it up in our questionings. By all accounts, the defendants were innocent, and I think we should gag testimony pertaining to the SLDC in court – unless it tangents us to viable testimony. The case made the LA left look good, and we can't afford to make the UAES members (many) who also belonged to SLDC out as martyrs. I outrank Dudley now, and I'm going to dress him down on this and generally have him play it softer with witnesses.

In light of the above and in keeping with my new rank and promotion, I'm asking you to promote me to commanding officer of this investigation.

Yours,
Captain M. E. Considine,
Chief DA's Investigator

Writing out his new title gave Mal the chills; he thought of buying a fancy pen to commemorate the occasion. He moved down to the file stacks, heard 'Think fast' and saw a little blue object lobbing toward him, Buzz Meeks the lobber. He caught it on reflex – a velvet jeweler's box. Meeks said, 'A peace offering, skipper. I'll be damned if I'm gonna spend the day with a guy who mighta had me shot without kissin' some ass.'

Mal opened the box and saw a pair of shiny silver captain's bars. He looked at Meeks; the fat man said, 'I'm not askin' for a handshake or a "Gee, thanks, old buddy," but I sure would like to know if it was you sent those torpedoes after me.'

Something about Meeks was off: his usual slimy charm was subdued and he had to know that whatever happened in '46 had no bearing on now. Mal snapped the box shut and tossed it back. 'Thanks, but no thanks.'

Meeks palmed the gift. 'My last shot at civility, skipper. When I moved on Laura, I didn't know she was a cop's wife.'

Mal smoothed his vestfront; Meeks always made him feel like he needed steam cleaning. 'Take the files on the end. You know what Ellis wants.'

Meeks shrugged and complied, a pro. Mal dug into his first file, read through a long INS background check report, sensed a solid citizen type with bum politics spawned by the big European inflation and put the folder aside. Files two and three were more of the same; he kept stealing glances at Meeks grinding notes, wondering what the cracker wanted. Four, five, six, seven, eight, all Hitler refugee stuff, poison that made drifts to the far left seem justified. Meeks caught his eye and winked; Mal saw that he was happy or amused about something. Nine and ten dawdled over, then a rap on the file room door. ‘Knock, knock, who’s there? Dudley Smith, so Reds beware!’

Mal stood up; Dudley came over and gave him a barrage of hard back slaps. ‘Six years my junior, and a captain you are. How grand! Lad, you have my most heartfelt congratulations.’

Mal saw himself trashing the Irishman, making him eat orders and kowtow. ‘Congratulations accepted, Lieutenant.’

‘And you’ve a wicked wit to match your new rank. Wouldn’t you say so, Turner?’

Meeks rocked in his chair. ‘Dudley, I can’t get this boy to say much of anything.’

Dudley laughed. ‘I suspect there’s old fury between you two. What it derives from I don’t know, although cherchez la femme might be a good bet. Malcolm, while I’m here let me ask you something about our friend Upshaw. Is he sticking his snout into our investigation past his decoy work? The other men on the homo job resent him and seem to think he’s a meddler.’

‘While I’m here’ echoed; ‘cherchez la femme’ thundered – Mal knew Dudley had the story on him and Meeks. ‘You’re as subtle as a freight train, Lieutenant. And what is it about you and Upshaw?’

Dudley ha’ ha’d; Meeks said, ‘Mike Breuning’s ditzed on the kid, too. He called me last night and ran a list of names by me, four guys Upshaw wanted tails put on. He asked me if they were from the queer job or the grand jury. I told him I didn’t know, that I never met the kid, all I got on him was third-hand.’

Mal cleared his throat, ticked at being talked around. ‘What third hand, Meeks?’

The fat man smiled. ‘I was workin’ an angle on Reynolds Loftis, and I came up with a lead from Samo PD Vice. Loftis was rousted at a queer bar back in ’44, pallin’ with a lawyer named Charles Hartshorn, a big wheel downtown. I braced Hartshorn, and he thought at first I was a Homicide dick, ’cause he was acquainted with one of the dead homos from Upshaw’s job. I knew the guy was no killer. I leaned on him hard, then bought myself off on him rattin’ me by tellin’ him I’d keep the County heat away.’

Mal remembered Meeks’ memo to Ellis Loew: their first outside corroboration of Loftis’ homosexuality. ‘You’re sure Hartshorn wasn’t essential to Upshaw’s case?’

‘Boss, that guy’s only crime is bein’ a homo with money and a family.’

Dudley laughed. ‘Which is preferable to being a homo with no money and no family. You’re a family man, Malcolm. Wouldn’t you say that’s true?’

Mal’s chain snapped. ‘Dudley, what the fuck do you want? I’m running this job and Upshaw is working for me, so you just tell me why you're so interested in him.'

Dudley Smith did a master vaudeville take: a rebuked youth shuffling his feet, going hangdog with hunched shoulders and a pouting lower lip. 'Lad, you hurt my feelings. I just wanted to celebrate your good fortune and make it known that Upshaw has incurred the wrath of his fellow officers, men not used to taking orders from twenty-seven-year-old dilettantes.'

'The wrath of a Dragna bagman with a grudge on the Sheriff's and your protégé, you mean.'

'That's one interpretation, yes.'

'Lad, Upshaw is *my* protégé. And I'm a captain and you're a lieutenant. Don't forget what that means. Now please leave and let us work.'

Dudley saluted crisply and walked out; Mal saw that his hands were steady and his voice hadn't quivered; Meeks started applauding. Mal smiled, remembered who he was smiling at and stopped. 'Meeks, what do *you* want?'

Meeks rocked his chair. 'Steak lunch at the Dining Car, maybe a vacation up at Arrowhead.'

'And?'

'And I'm not hog-wild about this job and I don't like the idea of you makin' voodoo eyes at me till it's over and I liked you standin' up to Dudley Smith.'

Mal half smiled. 'Keep going.'

'You were scared of him and you dressed him anyway. I liked that.'

'I've got rank on him now. A week ago I'd have let it go.'

Meeks yawned, like it was all starting to bore him. 'Pal, bein' afraid of Dudley Smith means two things: that you're smart and you're sane. And I outranked him once and let him slide, because that is one smart fucker that never forgets. So, accolades, Captain Considine, and I still want that steak lunch.'

Mal thought of the two silver bars. 'Meeks, you're not the type to offer amends.'

Buzz stood up. 'Like I said, I'm not hog-wild about this job, but I need the money. So let's just say it's got me thinkin' about the amenities of life.'

'I'm not hog-wild about it either, but I need it.'

Meeks said, 'I'm sorry about Laura.'

Mal tried to remember his ex-wife naked, and couldn't. 'It wasn't me that had you shot. I heard it was Dragna triggers.'

Meeks tossed Mal the velvet box. 'Take it while I'm feelin' generous. I just bought my girl two C-notes' worth of sweaters.'

Mal pocketed the insignia and stuck out his hand; Meeks gave him a bonecrusher. 'Lunch, Skipper?'

'Sure, Sarge.'

They took the elevator down to ground level and walked out to the street. Two patrolmen were standing in front of a black-and-white sipping coffee; Mal picked a string of words out of their conversation: 'Mickey Cohen, bomb, bad.'

Meeks badged the two, hard. 'DA's Bureau. What'd you just say about Cohen?'

The younger cop, a peach-fuzz rookie type, said, 'Sir, we just heard on the radio. Mickey Cohen's house just got bombed. It looks bad.'

Meeks took off running; Mal followed him to a mint green Caddy and got in – one look at the fat man's face telling him 'why?' was a useless question. Meeks hung a tire-screeching U-ey out into Westwood traffic and hauled west, through the Veterans Administration Compound, out onto San Vicente. Mal thought of Mickey Cohen's house on Moreno; Meeks kept the pedal down, zigzagging around cars and pedestrians, muttering, 'Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.' At Moreno, he turned right; Mal saw fire engines, prowl units and tall plumes of smoke up the block. Meeks skidded up to a crime scene rope and got out; Mal stood on his tiptoes and saw a nice Spanish house smoldering, LA's number-one hoodlum standing on the lawn, unsinged, ranting at a cadre of uniform brass. Rubberneckers were choking the street, the sidewalk and adjoining front lawns; Mal looked for Meeks and couldn't see him anywhere. He turned and gave his backside a shot – and there was his grand jury cohort, the most corrupt cop in LA history, engaged in pure suicide.

Buzz was just past the edge of the commotion, smothering a showstopper blonde with kisses. Mal recognized her from gossip column pics: Audrey Anders, the Va Va Voom Girl, Mickey Cohen's on-the-side woman. Buzz and Audrey kissed; Mal gawked from a distance, then turned around and checked the lovebirds' flank, scoping for witnesses, Cohen goons who'd squeal to their master. The whole crowd was contained behind the crime scene ropes, occupied with Mickey's tirade; Mal kept scanning anyway. He felt a hard tap on his shoulder; Buzz Meeks was there wiping lipstick off his face. 'Boss, I am in your power. Now we gonna go get that steak?'

TWENTY-THREE

'. . . AND NORM SAYS you can fight. He's a prizefighting fan, so it must be true. Now the question is, are you willing to fight in other ways – and for us.'

Danny looked across the table at Claire De Haven and Norman Kostenz. Five minutes into his audition; the woman all business so far, keeping friendly Norm businesslike with little taps that chilled his gushing about the picket line fracas. A handsome woman who had to keep touching things: her cigarettes and lighter, Kostenz when he gabbed too heavy or said something that pleased her. Five minutes in and he knew this about acting: a big part of the trick was sneaking what was really going on with you into your performance. He'd been up all night canvassing darktown straight off a weird jag of sobbing, coming up with nothing on the stolen Pontiac, but sensing HIM watching; the La Paloma Drive canvassing was a zero, ditto the bus line and cab company checks, and Mike Breuning had called to tell him he was trying to wangle four officers to tail the men on his surveillance list. He felt tired and edgy and knew it showed; he was running with *his* case, not this Commie shit, and if De Haven pressed for background verification he was going to play pissed and bring the conversation down to brass tacks: his resurgence of political faith and what UAES had for him to prove it with. 'Miss De Haven –'

'Claire.'

'Claire, I want to help. I want to get moving again. I'm rusty with everything but my fists, and I have to find a job pretty soon, but I want to help.'

Claire De Haven lit a cigarette and sent a hovering waitress packing with a wave of her lighter. 'I think for now you should embrace a philosophy of nonviolence. I need someone to come with me when I go out courting contributors. You'd be good at helping me secure contributions from HUAC widows, I can tell.'

Danny took 'HUAC widows' as a cue and frowned, wounded by sudden memories of Donna Cantrell – hot love drowned in the Hudson River. Claire said, 'Is something wrong, Ted?'; Norm Kostenz touched her hand as if to say, 'Man stuff.' Danny winced, his muscle aches kicking in for real. 'No, you just reminded me of someone I used to know.'

Claire smiled. 'I reminded you or what I said did?'

Danny exaggerated a grimace. 'Both, Claire.'

'Care to elaborate?'

'Not quite yet.'

Claire called the waitress over and said, ‘A pitcher of martinis’; the girl curtsied away, writing the order down. Danny said, ‘No more action on the picket line, then?’

Kostenz said, ‘The time isn’t right, but pretty soon we’ll lower the boom’; Claire shushed him – a mere flicker of her zealot’s eyes. Danny horned in, Red Ted the pushy guy who’d step on anybody’s toes. ‘What “boom”? What are you talking about?’

Claire played with her lighter. ‘Norm has a precipitate streak, and for a boxing fan he’s read a lot of Gandhi. Ted, he’s impatient and I’m impatient. There was a grand jury investigation forming up, sort of a baby HUAC, but now it looks like it went bust. That’s still scary. And I listened to the radio on the ride over. There was another attempt on MickeyCohen’s life. Sooner or later, he’ll go crazy and sick his goons on the picket line at us. We’ll have to have cameras there to catch it.’

She hadn’t really answered his question, and the passive resistance spiel sounded like subterfuge. Danny got ready to deliver a flirt line; the waitress returning stopped him. Claire said, ‘Just two glasses, please’; Norm Kostenz said, ‘I’m on the wagon,’ and left with a wave. Claire poured two tall ones; Danny hoisted his glass and toasted, ‘To the cause.’ Claire said. ‘To all things good.’

Danny drank, making an ugh face, a nonboozer notching points with a juicehead woman; Claire sipped and said, ‘Car thief, revolutionary, ladies’ man. I am suitably impressed.’

Cut her slack, let *her* move, reel her in. ‘Don’t be, because it’s all phony.’

‘Oh? Meaning?’

‘Meaning I was a punk kid revolutionary and a scared car thief.’

‘And the ladies’ man?’

The hook baited. ‘Let’s just say I was trying to recapture an image.’

‘Did you ever succeed?’

‘No.’

‘Because she’s that special?’

Danny took a long drink, booze on top of no sleep making him misty. ‘She was.’

‘Was?’

Danny knew she’d gotten the story from Kostenz, but played along. ‘Yeah, was. I’m a HUAC widower, Claire. The other women were just not . . .’

Claire said, ‘Not her.’

‘Right, not her. Not strong, not committed, not . . .’

‘Not her.’

Danny laughed. ‘Yeah, not her. Shit, I feel like a broken record.’

Claire laughed. ‘I’d give you a snappy rejoinder about broken hearts, but you’d hit me.’

‘I only beat up fascists.’

'No rough stuff with women?'

'Not my style.'

'It's mine occasionally.'

'I'm shocked.'

'I doubt that.'

Danny killed the drink. 'Claire, I want to work for the union, more than just lubing old biddies for money.'

'You'll get your chance. And they're not old biddies – unless you think women *my* age are old.'

A prime opening. 'How old are you? Thirty-one, thirty-two?'

Claire laughed the compliment out. 'Diplomat. How old are you?'

Danny reached for Ted Krugman's age, coming up wit it maybe a beat too slow. 'I'm twenty-six.'

'Well, I'm too old for boys and too young for gigolos. How's that for an answer?'

'Evasive.'

Claire laughed and fondled her ashtray. 'I'll be forty in May. So thanks for the subtraction.'

'It was sincere.'

'No, it wasn't.'

Hook her now, get to the station early. 'Claire, do I have political credibility with you?'

'Yes, you do.'

'Then let's try this on the other. I'd like to see you outside our work for the union.'

Claire's whole face softened; Danny got an urge to slap the bitch silly so she'd get mad and be a fit enemy. He said, 'I mean it,' Joe Clean Cut Sincere, Commie version.

Claire said, 'Ted, I'm engaged'; Danny said, 'I don't care.' Claire reached into her purse, pulled out a scented calling card and placed it on the table. 'We should at least get better acquainted. Some of us in the union are meeting at my house tonight. Why don't you come for the end of the meeting and say hello to everybody. Then, if you feel like it, we can take a drive and talk.'

Danny palmed the card and stood up. 'What time?'

'8:30.'

He'd be there early; pure cop, pure work. 'I look forward to it.'

Claire De Haven had gotten herself back together, her face set and dignified. 'So do I.'

Krugman back to Upshaw.

Danny drove to Hollywood Station, parked three blocks away and walked over. Mike Breuning met him in the muster room doorway, grinning. 'You owe me one, Deputy.'

‘What for?’

‘Those guys on your list are now being tailed. Dudley authorized it, so you owe him one, too.’

Danny smiled. ‘Fucking A. Who are they? Did you give them my number?’

‘No. They’re what you might wanta call Dudley’s boys. You know, Homicide Bureau guys Dudley’s brought up from rookies. They’re smart guys, but they’ll only report to Dud.’

‘Breuning, this is my investigation.’

‘Upshaw, I know. But you’re damn lucky to have the men you’ve got, and Dudley’s working the grand jury job too, so he wants to keep you happy. Have some goddamn gratitude. You’ve got no rank and you’re running seven full-time men. When I was your age, I was rousting piss bums on skid row.’

Danny moved past Breuning into the muster room, knowing he was right, pissed anyway. Plainclothesmen and bluesuits were milling around, chuckling over something on the notice board. He looked over their shoulders and saw a new cartoon, worse than the one Jack Shortell ripped down.

Mickey Cohen, fangs, skullcap and a giant hard-on, pouring it up the ass of a guy in an LASD uniform. The deputy’s pockets were spilling greenbacks; Cohen’s speech balloon said: ‘Smile, sweetie! Mickey C. gives it kosher!’

Danny shoved a line of blues aside and pulled the obscenity off the wall; he pivoted around, faced a full contingent of enemy cops and tore the piece of cardboard to shreds. The LAPD men gawked, simmered and plain stared; Gene Niles pushed through them and faced Danny down. He said, ‘I talked to a guy named Leo Bordoni. He wouldn’t blab outright, but I could tell he’d been questioned before. I think you rousted him, and I think it was inside Goines’ pad. When I described the place it was like he’d already fucking been there.’

Except for Niles, the room was a blur. Danny said, ‘Not now, Sergeant,’ brass, the voice of authority.

‘Up your ass, not now. I think you B&E’d in my jurisdiction. I know you didn’t catch that squeal at the doughnut stand, and I’ve got a damn good lead where you did get it. If I can prove it, you’re –’

‘Niles not now.’

‘Up your ass, not now. I had a good robbery case going until you came along with your crazy homo shit. You’ve got a queer fix, you’re cuckoo on it and maybe you are a fucking queer!’

Danny lashed out, quick lefts and rights, short speed punches that caught Niles flush, ripped his face but didn’t move his body back one inch. The enemy cops dispersed; Danny launched a hook to the gut; Niles feinted and came in with a hard uppercut, slamming Danny into the wall. He hung there, a stationary target, pretending to be gone; Niles telegraphed a huge right hand at his midsection. Danny slid away just before contact; Niles' fist hit the wall; he screeched into the sound of bones crunching. Danny sidestepped, swung Niles around and rolled sets at his stomach; Niles doubled over; Danny felt the enemy cops moving in. Somebody yelled, 'Stop it!'; strong arms bear-hugged and picked him up. Jack Shortell materialized, whispering, 'Easy, easy,' in the bear hugger's ear; the arms let go; another somebody yelled 'Watch Commander walking!' Danny went limp and let the old-timer cop lead him out a side exit.

Krugman to Upshaw to Krugman.

Shortell got Danny back to his car, extracting a promise that he'd try to sleep. Danny drove home, woozy one second, all jitters the next. Finally pure exhaustion hit him and he employed Ted-Claire repartee to stay awake. The banter saw him straight to bed, a pass on Mal Considine's bottle. With the Krugman leather jacket as his blanket, he fell asleep immediately.

And was joined by odd women and HIM.

The San Berdoo High senior hop, 1939. Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey on the PA system, Susan Leffert leading him out of the gym and into the boys' locker room, a Mason jar of schnapps as bait. Inside, she fumbles at his shirt buttons, licking his chest, biting the hair. He tries to drum up enthusiasm by staring at his body in the dressing mirror, but keeps thinking of Tim; that feels good, but hurts, and finally having it both ways is just bad. He tells Susan he met an older woman he wants to be loyal to, she reminds him of Suicide Donna who bought him his nice bombardier jacket, a real war hero number. Susan says, 'What war?'; the action fades because he knows something's off, Pearl Harbor is still two years away. Then this tall, faceless man, silver-haired, naked, is there, all around him in a circle, and squinting to see his face makes him go soft in Susan's mouth.

Then a whole corridor of mirrors, him chasing HIM, Karen Hiltscher, Roxy Beausoleil, Janice Modine and a bevy of Sunset Strip gash swooping down while he hurls excuses.

'I can't today, I have to study.'

'I don't dance, it makes me self-conscious.'

'Some other time, okay?'

'Sweetie, let's keep this light. We work together.'

'I don't want it.'

'No.'

'Claire, you're the only real woman I've met since Donna.'

'Claire, I want to fuck you so bad just like I used to fuck Donna and all the others. They all loved it because I loved doing it so much.'

He was gaining ground on HIM, gaining focus on the gray man's brick shithouse build. The apparition twirled around; he had no face, but Tim's body and bigger stuff than Demon Don Eversall, who used to hang out in the shower, trap water in his jumbo foreskin, hold his thing out and croon, ‘Come drink from my cup of love.’ Hard kissing; bodies mashed together, the two of them inside each other, Claire walking out of the mirror, saying, ‘That’s impossible.’

Then a gunshot, then another and another.

Danny jolted awake. He heard a fourth ring, saw that he’d sweated the bed sopping, felt like he had to piss and threw off the jacket to find his trousers wet. He fumbled over to the phone and blurted, ‘Yes?’

‘Danny, it’s Jack.’

‘Yeah, Jack.’

‘Son, I cleared you with the assistant watch commander, this lieutenant named Poulson. He’s pals with Al Dietrich, and he’s reasonable about our Department.’

Danny thought: and Dietrich’s pals with Felix Gordean, who’s got LAPD and DA’s Bureau pals, and Niles is pals with God knows who on the Sheriff’s. ‘What about Niles?’

‘He’s been yanked from our job. I told Poulson he’d been riding you, that he provoked the fight. I think you’ll be okay.’ A pause, then, ‘Are you okay? Did you sleep?’

The dream was coming back; Danny stifled a shot of HIM. ‘Yeah, I slept. Jack, I don’t want Mal Considine to hear about what happened.’

‘He’s your boss on the grand jury?’

‘Right.’

‘Well, I won’t tell him, but somebody probably will.’

Mike Breuning and Dudley Smith replaced HIM. ‘Jack, I have to do some work on the other job. I’ll call you tomorrow.’

Shortell said, ‘One more thing. We got minor league lucky on our hot car queries – an Olds was snatched two blocks from La Paloma. Abandoned at the Samo Pier, no prints, but I’m adding “car thief” to our records checks. And we’re a hundred and forty-one down on the dental queries. It’s going slow, but I have a hunch we’ll get him.’

HIM.

Danny laughed, yesterday’s wounds aching, new bone bruises firing up in his knuckles. ‘Yeah, we’ll get him.’

Danny segued back to Krugman with a shower and change of clothes, Red Ted the stud in Karen Hiltscher’s sports jacket, pegged flannels and a silk shirt from Considine’s disguise kit. He drove to Beverly Hills middle-lane slow, checking his rear-view every few seconds for cars riding his tail too close and a no-face man peering too intently, shining his headlights too bright because deep down he wanted to be caught, wanted everyone to know *WHY*. No likely suspects appeared in the mirror; twice his trawling almost got him into fender benders. He arrived at Claire De Haven’s house forty-five minutes early; he saw Caddies and Lincolns in the driveway, muted lights glowing behind curtained windows and one narrow side dormer cracked for air, screened and shade covered – but open. The dormer faced a stone footpath and tall shrubs separating the De Haven property from the neighboring house; Danny walked over, squatted down and listened.

Words came at him, filtered through coughs and garbled interruptions. He picked out a man's shout: 'Cohen and his farshtunkener lackeys have to go nutso first'; Claire's 'It's all in knowing when to squeeze.' A soft, mid-Atlantic drawl: 'We have to give the studios an out to save face with, that's why knowing when is so important. It has to hit the fan just right.'

Danny kept checking his blind side for witnesses; he heard a long digression on the '52 presidential election – who'd run, who wouldn't – that degenerated into a childish shouting match, Claire finally dominating with her opinion of Stevenson and Taft, fascist minions of varying stripes. There was something about a movie director named Paul Doinelle and his 'Cocteau-like' classics; then an almost complete duet: the soft-voiced man chuckling over 'old flames,' a man with a stentorian Southern accent punch-lining, 'But I got Claire.' Danny recalled the psychiatric files: Reynolds Loftis and Chaz Minear were lovers years ago; Considine told him that now Claire and Loftis were engaged to be married. He got stomach flip-flops and looked at his watch: 8:27, time to meet the enemy.

He walked around and rang the bell. Claire opened the door and said, 'Right on time'; Danny saw that her makeup and slacks suit tamped down her wrinkles and showed off her curves better than the powder job and dress at the restaurant. He said, 'You look lovely, Claire.'

Claire whispered, 'Save it for later,' took his arm and led him into the living room, subtle swank offset by framed movie posters: Pinko titles from the grand jury package. Three men were standing around holding drinks: a Semitic-looking guy in tweeds, a small, trim number wearing a tennis sweater and white ducks, and a dead ringer composite for HIM – a silver-maned man pushing fifty, topping six feet by at least two inches, as lanky as Mal Considine but ten times as handsome. Danny stared at his face, thinking something about the set of his eyes was familiar, then looked away – queer or ex-queer or whatever, he was just an image – a Commie, not a killer.

Claire made the introductions. 'Gentlemen, Ted Krugman. Ted, left to right we have Mort Ziffkin, Chaz Minear and Reynolds Loftis.'

Danny shook their hands, getting, 'Hey there, slugger,' from Ziffkin, 'A pleasure,' from Minear and a wry smile out of Loftis, an implicit aside: I allow my fiancée to dally with younger guys. He gave the tall man his strongest grip, snapping hard into Ted K. 'The pleasure's all mine, and I'm looking forward to working with you.'

Minear smiled; Ziffkin said, 'Attaboy'; Loftis said, 'You and Claire have a good strategy talk, but get her home early, you hear?' – a Southern accent, but no syrup and another aside: he was sleeping with De Haven tonight.

Danny laughed, knowing he'd just memorized Loftis' features; Claire sighed, 'Let's go, Ted. Strategy awaits.'

They walked outside. Danny thought of rolling tails and steered Claire to his car. She said, 'Where do you want to strategize'; *her* aside, her parody on Loftis playing cute. Danny opened the passenger door, getting an idea: prowl darktown with the protective coloration of a woman in tow. It was nearly two weeks since he'd gone strong-arming down there, he probably wouldn't be recognized in his non-cop outfit and HE was near the Southside strip just yesterday. 'I like jazz. Do you?'

'I love it, and I know a great spot in Hollywood.'

'I know some places on South Central that really bop. What do you say?'

Claire hesitated, then said, 'Sure, sounds like fun.'

East on Wilshire, south on Normandie. Danny drove fast, thinking of his midnight meeting and ways to chill Considine on the Niles ruckus; he kept checking the rear-view mock casual, gifting Claire with a smile each time so she'd think he was thinking of her. Nothing strange appeared in the mirror; Reynolds Loftis' face stayed in his mind, a non-face to make *the* face jump out and bite him. Claire chain-smoked and drummed her nails on the dashboard.

The silence played right, two idealists deep in thought East on Slauson, south on Central, more mirror checks now that they were on HIS stomping ground. Danny pulled up in front of the Club Zombie; Claire said, 'Ted, what are you afraid of?'

The question caught him checking his waistband for the sap he always packed on niggertown assignments; he stopped and grabbed the wheel, Red Ted the persecuted Negro's buddy. 'The Teamsters, I guess. I'm rusty.'

Claire put a hand on his cheek. 'You're tired and lonely and driven. You want to please and do the right thing so badly that it just about breaks my heart.'

Danny leaned into the caress, a catch in his throat like when he saw Considine's bottle. Claire took her hand away and kissed the spot she'd touched. 'I am such a sucker for strays. Come on, strong silent type. We're going to listen to music and hold hands, and we're *not* going to talk about politics.'

The catch stuck; the kiss was still warm. Danny walked ahead of Claire to the door; the bouncer from New Year's Day was there and eyed him like he was just another white hepcat. Claire caught up just as the cold air got him back to normal: Krugman the Commie on a hot date, Upshaw the Homicide cop on overtime. He took her arm and led her inside.

The Zombie interior was just like two weeks before, with an even louder, more dissonant combo wailing on the bandstand. This time the clientele was all Negro: sea of black faces offset by colored lighting, a flickering canvas where a white/gray face would stand out and scream, ‘Me!’ Danny slipped the maitre d’ a five-spot and requested a wall table with a floor view; the man led them to seats near the back exit, took their order for a double bonded and a dry martini, bowed and motioned for a waitress. Danny settled Claire into the chair closest to the bandstand; he grabbed the one facing the bar and audience.

Claire laced her fingers through Danny’s and beat time on the table with her hands, a gentle beat, counterpoint to the screechy bebop that filled the room. The drinks arrived; Claire paid, a fiver to the high-yellow waitress, her free hand up to refuse the change. The girl sashayed off; Danny sipped bourbon – cheap house stuff that burned. Claire squeezed his hand; he squeezed back, grateful for loud music that made talk impossible. Looking out at the crowd, he sensed that HIM here was just as impossible – he’d know the police now had him pegged as a darktown car thief – he’d avoid South Central like the plague.

But the place felt right, safe and dark, Danny closed his eyes and listened to the music, Claire’s hand on his still making a beat. The combo’s rhythm was complex: drums shooting a melody to the sax, the sax winging it off on digressions, returning to simpler and simpler chords, then the main theme, then the trumpet and the bass taking flight, going crazy with more and more complicated riffs. Listening for the handoffs was hypnotic; half the sounds were ugly and strange, making him wish for the simple, pretty themes to come back. Danny listened, ignoring his drink, trying to figure the music out and predict where it was going. He felt like he was getting the synchronization when a crescendo came out of nowhere, the players quit playing, applause hit like thunder and bright lights came on.

Claire dropped his hand and started clapping; a mulatto lounge lizard sidled by the table, saying, ‘Hello, sweet. I ain’t seen you in a dog’s age.’ Claire averted her eyes; Danny stood up; the mulatto said, ‘Forget old friends, see if I care,’ and kept sidling.

Claire lit a cigarette, her lighter shaking. Danny said, ‘Who was that?’

‘Oh, a friend of a friend. I used to have a thing for jazz musicians.’

The mulatto had made his way up to the bandstand; Danny saw him slip something into the bass player’s hand, a flash of green picked up at the same time. Considine on De Haven: she was a skin-popper and devotee of pharmacy hop.

Danny sat down; Claire stubbed out her cigarette and sparked another one. The lights were dimmed; the music started – a slow romantic ballad. Danny tried the beating time maneuver, but Claire’s hand wouldn’t move. Her eyes were darting around the room; he saw the exit door across from them open up, spotlighting Carlton W. Jeffries, the grasshopper he’d strong-armed for a snitch on H pushers. The doorway cast a strip of light all the way over to Claire De Haven making with rabbity eyes, a rich white girl with a snout for lowlife afraid that more embarrassment might ruin her date with an undercover cop out to get her indicted for treason. The door closed; Danny felt her fear jump on him and turn the nice, dark, safe place bad, full of crazy jungle niggers who'd eat him whole, revenging all the niggers he'd pushed around. He said, 'Claire, let's leave, okay?;'

Claire said, 'Yes, let's.'

The ride back was all Claire with the jitters, rambling on what she'd accomplished with what organizations – a litany that sounded harmless and probably contained not one shred of information that Considine and Loew would find interesting. Danny let it wash over him, thinking of his meeting, wondering what Leo Bordoni told Gene Niles, if Niles really had a County source to place him inside 2307, and if he could prove it, would anybody care? Should he grease Karen Hiltscher on general principles, her being the only *real* snitch possibility, even though her even knowing Niles was unlikely? And how should he lay off the blame for the fight? How to make Considine think his future exec beating up one of his own men was kosher, when that man might just have him by the balls?

Danny turned onto Claire's block, thinking of good exit lines; slowing down and stopping, he had two at the ready. He smiled and prepared to perform; Claire touched his cheek, softer than the first time. 'I'm sorry, Teddy. It was a lousy first date. Rain check?'

Danny said, 'Sure,' going all warm, the catch again.

'Tomorrow night, here? Just us, strategy and whatever the spirit moves us to?'

Her hand had reversed itself, knuckles lightly tracing his jawline. 'Sure . . . darling.'

She stopped then, eyes shut, lips parted. Danny moved into the kiss, wanting the soft hand, not the hungry mouth painted pinkish red. Just as they touched, he froze and almost pulled away. Claire's tongue slid across his teeth, probing. He thought of Reynolds Loftis, gave the woman his face and did it.

TWENTY-FOUR

MAL WAS WATCHING Buzz Meeks eat, thinking that suicide love must be good for the appetite: the fat man had devoured a plate of stuffed shrimp, two double-thick pork chops with onion rings, and was now killing a huge piece of peach pie buried in ice cream. It was their second meal together, with INS file work and his run by Jake Kellerman's office in between; at lunch Meeks had wolfed a porterhouse, home fries and three orders of rice pudding. Mal picked at a plate of chicken salad and shook his head: Meeks said, 'A growin' boy's got to feed. What time's Upshaw due?'

Mal checked his watch. 'I told him midnight. Why, do you have plans?'

'A late one with my sweetie. Howard's usin' his spot up by the Bowl, so we're meetin' at her place. I told her I'd be there by one at the latest, and I mean to be punctual.'

'Meeks, are you taking precautions?'

Buzz said, 'We use the rhythm method. Her place when Howard's rhythm moves us.' He dug in his coat pockets and fished out an envelope. 'I forgot to tell you. When you were at your lawyer's, Ellis came by. I gave him your memo, and he read it and wrote you one. Apparently, your boy traded blows with some LAPD dick. Ellis said to read this and abide by it.'

Mal opened the envelope and pulled out a slip of paper covered with Ellis Loew's handwriting. He read:

> M.C. –
>
> I agree wholeheartedly with everything but your assessment of Dudley's methods. What you don't realize is that Dudley is so effective that his methods minimize the chance that potential witness will balk and inform on us to UAES. Also, I can't give you command of the investigation, not with the obvious dislike that exists between you and Dudley. It would ruffle the feathers of a man who up until yesterday shared your rank with many more years in grade. You're equals in this investigation and once we go to court you'll never have to work with him again.
>
> Something has come up on Deputy Upshaw. A Sgt. Breuning (LAPD) called to tell me that Upshaw got into a fistfight with another City officer (Sgt. G. Niles) this afternoon, over a stupid remark Niles made about 'queers.' This is, in light of the interagency command we set up for Upshaw, intolerable. Breuning also stated that Upshaw demanded four officers for surveillance work, and that Dudley, wanting to keep him happy, found the men. This is also intolerable. Upshaw is a young,

> inexperienced officer who, however gifted, has no right to be making such demands. I want you to sternly inform him that we will tolerate no more fisticuffs or prima donna behavior.
>
> Sgt. Bowman is now looking for Dr. Lesnick. I hope he didn't die on us, too – he's a valuable addition to our team.
>
> E.L.
>
> P.S. – Good luck in court tomorrow. Your promotion and current duties should help you secure a continuance. I think Jake Kellerman's strategy is sound.

Mal wadded the paper up and hurled it blindly; it bounced off the back of the booth, and landed on Meeks' butter plate. Buzz said, 'Whoa, partner'; Mal looked up and saw Danny Upshaw hovering. He said, 'Sit down, Deputy,' ticked until he noticed the kid's hands were shaking.

Danny slid into the booth next to Meeks. Buzz said, 'Turner Meeks' and gave him a shake; Danny nodded and turned to Mal. 'Congratulations, Captain. And thanks for the jug.'

Mal eyed his decoy, thinking that right now he looked not one iota cop. 'Thank you, and my pleasure. And before we get to business, what happened with Sergeant Niles?'

Danny gripped an empty water glass. 'He's got a crazy idea I B&E'd the place where the second and third victims were found. Essentially, he's miffed at taking orders from me. Jack Shortell told me the watch commander yanked him off the case, so I'm glad he's out of my hair.'

The answer sounded rehearsed. Mal said. 'That's all of it?'

'Yes.'

'And did you B&E?'

'No, of course not.'

Mal thought of the 'queer' remark, but let it pass. 'All right, then consider this a reprimand, from Ellis Loew *and* myself. No more of that, *period*. Don't let it happen again. Got that?'

Danny raised the glass, looking chagrined when he found it empty. 'Yes, Captain.'

'It's still "Mal". Do you want something to eat?'

'No thanks.'

'A drink?'

Danny pushed the glass away. 'No.'

Buzz said, 'Save your dukes for the Police Golden Gloves. I knew a guy made Sergeant beatin' up on guys his CO hated.'

Danny laughed; Mal wished that he'd order a shot for his nerves. 'Tell me about the approach. Have you met with De Haven?'

'Yeah, twice.'

'And?'

'And she's making a play for me.'

His operative was actually blushing. Mal said, 'Tell me about it.'

'There's not much to tell yet. We had a date tonight, we've got another one set for tomorrow night. I listened outside her house while a meeting was going on, and I picked up some stuff. Pretty vague, but enough to tell me that they have some kind of extortion angle going against the studios and they're planning to time it with the Teamsters going crazy on the picket line. So tell Mickey to keep his guys in check. I could tell this angle is important to their strategy, and when I see De Haven tomorrow, I'm going to press her for details.'

Mal kicked the dope around, thinking that it played true to his take on the brain trusters: they were duplicitous, they talked a lot, they took their own sweet time acting and let outside events call the tune. 'Who have you met besides Kostenz and De Haven?'

'Loftis, Minear and Ziffkin, but just briefly.'

'How did they impress you?'

Danny made an open-handed gesture. 'They didn't really impress me at all. I only spoke to them for a minute or so.'

Buzz chuckled and loosened his belt. 'You were lucky old Reynolds didn't jump your bones instead of De Haven. Nice-lookin' young guy like you would probably get that old prowler stiffin' up a hard yard.'

Danny flushed again. Mal thought of him working two twenty-four-hour-a-day cases, jamming them into one twenty-four-hour day. He said, 'Tell me how your other job's going.'

Danny's eyes were darting, flicking over the neighboring booths, lingering on men at the bar before returning to Mal. He said, 'Slow but well, I think. I've got my own home file, all the evidence and all my impressions and that's a help. I've got a bunch of records checks going, and so far that's slow, but steady. Where I think I'm getting close is on the victims, putting them together. He's not a random psycho, I *know* that. If I get closer I might need a decoy to help draw him out. Would it be possible to get another man?'

Mal said, 'No'; he watched Danny's eyes follow two men walking past their booth. 'No, not after your stunt with Niles. You've got those four officers Dudley Smith swung you –'

'They're Dudley's men, not mine! They won't even report to me, and Mike Breuning's jerking my chain! For all I know he's bunked out on the whole job!'

Mal slapped the table, bringing Danny's eyes back to him. 'Look at me and listen. I want you to calm down and take things slow. You're doing all you can on both your assignments, and aside from Niles you're doing great. Now you've lost one man, but you've got your tailing officers, so just figure you've cut your goddamn losses, knuckle down and be a professional. *Be a policeman.*'

Danny's eyes, blurry, held on Mal. Buzz said, 'Deputy, you got any hard leads on your victims, any whatcha call common denominators?'

The operative spoke to his operator. ‘A man named Felix Gordean. He’s a homosexual procurer connected to one of the victims, and I *know* the killer’s got some kind of fix on him. I haven’t leaned on him too hard yet, because he’s paying off County Central Vice and he says he’s got influence with LAPD and the Bureau.’

Mal said, ‘Well, I’ve never heard of him, and I’m top Bureau dog. Buzz, do you know this guy?’

‘Sure do, boss. Large City juice, larger County. One lean and mean fruitfly, plays golf with Sheriff Eugene Biscailuz, puts a few shekels in Al Dietrich’s pockets come Christmas-time, too.’

As he said the words, Mal knew it was one of the finest moments of his life. ‘Lean on him, Danny. I’ll stand the heat, and if anyone gives you grief, you’ve got the Chief DA’s Investigator for the City of Los Angeles in your corner.’

Danny stood up, looking heartbreaker grateful. Mal said, ‘Go home and sleep, Ted. Have a nightcap on me.’ The decoy left, saluting his brother officers; Buzz breathed out slowly. ‘That boy is upon a tall old tree limb lookin’ down at a tall old boy with a saw, and you’ve got more balls than brains.’

It was just about the nicest thing anyone ever told him. Mal said, ‘Have another piece of pie, lad. I’m picking up the check.’

TWENTY-FIVE

THE HALL WINDOW scraping, three soft footsteps on the bedroom floor.

Buzz stirred, rolled away from Audrey, reached under the pillow and palmed his .38, camouflaging the movement with a sleep sigh. Two more footsteps, Audrey snoring, light through a crack in the curtains eclipsed. A shape coming around his side of the bed; the sound of a hammer being cocked; 'Mickey, you're dead.'

Buzz stiff-armed Audrey to the floor, away from the voice; a silencer snicked and muzzle flash lit up a big man in a dark overcoat. Audrey screamed; Buzz felt the mattress rip an inch from his legs. In one swipe, he grabbed his billy club off the nightstand and swung it at the man's knees; wood-encased steel cracked bone; the man stumbled toward the bed. Audrey shrieked, 'Meeks!'; a shot ripped the far wall; another half second of muzzle light gave Buzz a sighting. He grabbed the man's coat and pulled him to the bed, smothering his head with a pillow and shot him twice in the face point-blank.

The explosions were muffled; Audrey screeching was siren loud. Buzz moved around the bed and bear-hugged her, killing her tremors with his own shakes. He whispered, 'Go into the bathroom, keep the light off and your head down. This was for Mickey, and if there's a backup man outside, he's comin'. Stay fuckin' down and stay fuckin' calm.'

Audrey retreated on her knees; Buzz went into the living room, parted the front curtains and looked out. There was a sedan parked directly across the street that wasn't there when he walked in; no other cars were stationed curbside. He did a run-through on what probably happened:

He looked like Mickey from a distance; *he* drove a green '48 Eldo. Mickey's house was bombed yesterday; Mickey, wife and pet bulldog survived. *He* parked his car the standard three blocks away; half-assed surveillance convinced the gunman *he* was Mickey, a short fat okie subbing for a short fat Jew.

Buzz kept eyeballing the sedan; it stayed still, no tell-tale cigarette glow. Five minutes went by; no cops or backup men appeared. Buzz took it as a single-o play, walked back to the bedroom and flicked on the overhead light.

The room reeked of cordite; the bed was soaked in blood; the pillow was solid saturated crimson. Buzz lifted it off and propped up the dead man's head. It had no face, there were no exit wounds, all the red was leaking out his ears. He rifled his pockets – and the wicked bad willies came on.

An LAPD badge and ID buzzer: Detective Sergeant Eugene J. Niles, Hollywood Squad. An Automobile Club card, vehicle dope in the lower left corner – maroon '46 Ford Crown Victoria Sedan, Cal '49 JS 1497. A California driver's license made out to Eugene Niles, residence 3987 Melbourne Avenue, Hollywood. Car keys and other keys and pieces of paper with Audrey's address and an architectural floor plan for a house that looked like Mickey's pad in Brentwood.

Old rumors, new facts, killer shakes.

The LAPD was behind the shootout at Sherry's; Jack D. and Mickey had buried the hatchet; Niles worked Hollywood Division, the eye of the Brenda Allen storm. Buzz ran across the street on fear overdrive, saw that the sedan was '46 Vicky JS 1497, unlocked the trunk and ran back. He hauled out a big bed quilt, wrapped Niles and his gun up in it, shoulder-slung him up and over to the Vicky and locked him in the trunk, folding him double next to the spare tire. Panting, sweat-soaked and shaky, he walked back and braced Audrey.

She was sitting on the toilet, naked, smoking. A half dozen butts littered the floor; the bathroom was a tobacco cloud. She looked like the woman from Mars: tears had melted her makeup and her lipstick was still smudged from their lovemaking.

Buzz knelt in front of her. 'Honey, I'll take care of it. This was for Mickey, so I think we're okay. But I should stay away from you for a while, just in case this guy had partners – we don't want them figurin' out it was you and me instead of you and Mickey.'

Audrey dropped her cigarette on the floor and snuffed it with her bare feet, no pain registering. She said, 'All right,' a hoarse smoker's croak.

Buzz said, 'You strip the bed and burn it in the incinerator. There's bullets in the mattress and the wall, you dig 'em out and toss 'em. And you don't tell *nobody*.'

Audrey said, 'Tell me it'll be all right.' Buzz kissed the part in her hair, seeing the two of them strapped down in the gas chamber. 'Honey, this will surely be all right.'

Buzz drove Niles' car to the Hollywood Hills. He found gardening tools in the back seat, a level patch of hard-scrabble off the access road to the Hollywood Sign and buried Mickey Cohen's would-be assassin in a plot about 4 by 4 by 4, working with an earth spade and grub hoe. He packed the dirt hard and tight so coyotes wouldn't smell flesh rot and get hungry; he put branches atop the spot and pissed on it: an epitaph for a fellow bad cop who'd put him in the biggest trouble of his trouble-prone life. He buried Niles' gun under a thornbush, drove the car out to the Valley, wiped it down, yanked the distributor and left it in an abandoned garage atop Suicide Hill – a youth gang fuck turf near the Sepulveda VA Hospital. Undrivable, the Vicky would be spare parts inside twenty-four hours.

It was 4:30 A.M.

Buzz walked down to Victory Boulevard, caught a cab to Hollywood and Vermont, walked the remaining half mile to Melbourne Avenue. He found a pay phone, glommed ‘Eugene Niles’ from the White Pages, dialed the number and let it ring twenty times – no answer. He located 3987 – the bottom left apartment of a pink stucco four-flat – and let himself in with Niles’ keys, set to prowl for one thing: evidence that other men were in on the Mickey hit.

It was a typical bachelor flop: sitting/sleeping room with Murphy bed, bathroom, kitchenette. There was a desk facing a boarded-up window; Buzz went straight for it, handling everything he touched with his shirttails. Ten minutes in, he had solid circumstantial evidence:

A certificate from the U.S. Army Demolition School, Camp Polk, Louisiana, stating that Corporal Eugene Niles successfully completed explosives training in December 1931 – make the fucker for the bomb under Mickey’s house.

Letters from Niles’ ex-wife, condemning him for trucking with Brenda Allen’s hookers. She’d read the grand jury transcript and knew her husband did his share of porking in the Hollywood Station felony tank – Niles’ motive to want Mickey dead.

An address book that included the names and phone numbers of four ranking Jack Dragna strongarms, listings for three other Dragna bagmen – cops he knew when he was LAPD – and a weird listing: ‘Karen Hiltscher, W. Hollywood Sheriff’s,’ with ‘!!!!’ in bright red doodles. That aside, more verification of Niles hating Mickey before the truce with Jack D. All told, it looked like a poorly planned single-o play, Niles desperate when his bomb didn’t blow the Mick to shit.

Buzz killed the lights and wiped both sides of the doorknob on his way out. He walked to Sunset and Vermont, dropped Niles’ house and car keys down a sewer grate and started laughing, wildly, stitches in his side. He’d just saved the life of the most dangerous, most generous man he’d ever met, and there was no way in the world he could tell him. The laughter got worse, until he doubled over and had to sit down on a bus bench. He laughed until the punch line sucker-punched him – then he froze.

Danny Upshaw beat up Gene Niles. The City cops hated the County cops. When Niles was tagged as missing, LAPD would be like flies over shit on a green kid already in shit up to his knees.

TWENTY-SIX

DANNY WAS TRYING to get Felix Gordean alone.

He'd begun his stakeout in the Chateau Marmont parking lot; Gordean foiled him by driving to his office with Pretty Boy Christopher in tow. Rain had been pouring down the whole three hours he'd been eyeing the agency's front door; no cars had hit the carport, the street was flooded and he was parked in a tow-away zone with his ID, badge and .45 at home because he was really Red Ted Krugman. Ted's leather jacket and Considine's sanction kept him warm and dry with the window cracked; Danny decided that if Gordean didn't leave the office by 1:00, he'd lean on him then and there.

At 12:35, the door opened. Gordean walked out, popped an umbrella and skipped across Sunset. Danny turned on his wiper blades and watched him duck into Cyrano's, the doorman fussing over him like he was the joint's most popular customer. He gave Gordean thirty seconds to get seated, turned up his collar and ran over, ducking rain.

The doorman looked at him funny, but let him in; Danny blinked water, saw gilt and red velvet walls, a long oak bar and Felix Gordean sipping a martini at a side table. He threaded his way past a clutch of businessman types and sat down across from him; Gordean almost swallowed the toothpick he was nibbling.

Danny said, 'I want to know what you know. I want you to tell me everything about the men you've brought out, and I want a report on all your customers and clients. I want it now.'

Gordean toyed with the toothpick. 'Have Lieutenant Matthews call me. Perhaps he and I can effect a compromise.'

'Fuck Lieutenant Matthews. Are you going to tell me what I want to know? *Now?*'

'No, I am not.'

Danny smiled. 'You've got forty-eight hours to change your mind.'

'Or?'

'Or I'm taking everything I know about you to the papers.'

Gordean snapped his fingers; a waiter came over; Danny walked out of the restaurant and into the rain. He remembered his promise to call Jack Shortell, hit the phone booth across from the agency, dialed the Hollywood Station squadron and heard, 'Yes?,' Shortell himself speaking, his voice strained.

'It's Upshaw, Jack. What have you got on –'

'What we've got is another one. LAPD found him last night, on an embankment up from the LA River. Doc Layman's doing him now, so –'

Danny left the receiver dangling and Shortell shouting, 'Upshaw!'; he highballed it downtown, parked in front of the City Morgue loading dock and almost tripped over a stiff on a gurney running in. Jack Shortell was already there, sweating, his badge pinned to his coat front; he saw Danny, blocked the path to Layman's examination room and said, 'Brace yourself.'

Danny got his breath. 'For what?'

Shortell said, 'It's Augie Luis Duarte, one of the guys on your tailing list; The bluesuits who found him ID'd him from his driver's license. LAPD's had the stiff since 12:30 last night – the squad guy who caught didn't know about our team. Breuning was here and just left, and he was making noises that Duarte blew *his* tail last night. Danny, I know that's horseshit. I was calling around last night looking for you, to tell you our car thief and zoot stick queries were bust. I talked to a clerk at Wilshire Station, and she told me Breuning was there all evening with Dudley Smith. I called back later, and the clerk said they were still there. Breuning said the other three men are still under surveillance, but I don't believe him.'

Danny's head boomed; morgue effluvia turned his stomach and stung his razor burns. He beelined for a door marked 'Norton Layman MD,' pushed it open and saw the country's premier forensic pathologist writing on a clipboard. A nude shape was slab-prone behind him; Layman stepped aside as if to say, 'Feast your eyes.'

Augie Duarte, the handsome Mex who'd walked out the Gordean Agency door two nights ago, was supine on a stainless steel tray. He was blood-free; bite wounds extruding intestinal tubes covered his stomach; bite marks ran up his torso in a pattern free of overlaps. His cheeks were slashed down to the gums and jawbone and his penis had been cut off, inserted into the deepest of the cuts and hooked around so that the head extended out his mouth, teeth clamped on the foreskin, rigor mortis holding the obscenity intact. Danny blurted, 'Oh God fuck no'; Layman said, 'The rain drained the body and kept the cuts fresh. I found a tooth chip in one of them and made a wet cast of it. It's unmistakably animal, and I had an attendant run it down to a forensic orthodontist at the Natural History Museum. It's being examined now.'

Danny tore his eyes off the corpse; he walked out to the dock looking for Jack Shortell, gagging on the stench of formaldehyde, his lungs heavy for fresh air. A group of Mexicans with a bereaved-family look was standing by the loading ramp staring in; a pachuco type stared at him extra hard. Danny strained to see Shortell, then felt a hand on his shoulder.

It was Norton Layman. He said, 'I just talked to the man at the Museum, and he identified my specimen. The killer wears wolverine teeth.'

Danny saw a blood W on cheap wallpaper. He saw W's in black and white, W's burned into Felix Gordean's face, W's all over the rosary-clutching wetbacks huddled together grieving. He saw W's until Jack

Shortell walked up the dock and grabbed his arm and he heard himself say, ‘Get Breuning. I don’t trust myself on it.’

Then he saw plain blood.

TWENTY-SEVEN

A STAKEOUT FOR his own son.

Mal sat on the steps outside Division 32, Los Angeles Civil Court. He was flanked by lawyers smoking; keeping his back to them kept light conversation away while he scanned for Stefan, Celeste and her shyster. When he saw them, it would be a quick men's room confab: don't believe the bad things you hear about me; when my man gets ugly about your mother, try not to listen.

Ten of the hour; no Stefan, Celeste and lawyer. Mal heard an animated burst of talk behind him.

'You know Charlie Hartshorn?'

'Sure. A nice guy, if a bit of a bleeding heart. He worked the Sleepy Lagoon defense for free.'

'Well, he's dead. Suicide. Hung himself at his house last night. Beautiful house, right off Wilshire and Rimpau. It was on the radio. I went to a party at that house once.'

'Poor Charlie. What a goddamn shame.'

Mal turned around; the two men were gone. He remembered Meeks telling him Reynolds Loftis was connected to Hartshorn via a queer-bar roust, but he didn't mention the man being associated with the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee at all. There was no mention of Hartshorn in any of the psychiatric or other grand jury files, and Meeks had also said that the lawyer had turned up – as a non-suspect – in Danny Upshaw's homicide investigation.

The Hartshorn coincidence simmered; Mal wondered how Meeks would take his suicide – he said he'd gut-shot the man with his queerness. Looking streetside, he saw Celeste, Stefan and a young guy with a briefcase get out of a cab; his boy glanced up, lit up and took off running.

Mal met him halfway down the steps, scooped him up laughing and pinwheeled him upside down and over. Stefan squealed; Celeste and briefcase double-timed; Mal whipped his son over his shoulder, quick-marched inside and turned hard into the men's room. Out of breath, he put Stefan down and said, 'Your dad's a captain,' dug in his pockets and pulled out one of the insignia Buzz gave him. 'You're a captain, too. Remember that. Remember that if your mother's lawyer starts talking me down.'

Stefan squeezed the silver bars; Mal saw that he had that bewildered fat-kid look he got when Celeste stuffed him with starchy Czech food. 'How have you been? How's your mother been treating you?'

Stefan spoke hesitantly, like he'd been force-fed old country talk since the breakup. ‘Mutti . . . wants that we should move out. She said we . . . we must move away before she decides to marry Rich-Richard.’

Richard.

‘I – I don’t like Richard. He’s nice to Mutti, but he’s n-nasty to his d-d-dog.’

Mal put his arms around the boy. ‘I won’t let it happen. She’s a crazy woman, and I won’t let her take you away.’

‘Malcolm –’

‘*Dad,* Stefan.’

‘Dad, please not to don’t hit Mutti again. *Please.*’

Mal held Stefan tighter, trying to squeeze the bad words out and make him say, ‘I love you.’ The boy felt wrong, flabby, like he was too skinny wrong as a kid. ‘Sssh. I’ll never hit her again and I’ll never let her take you away from me. Sssh.’

The door opened behind them; Mal heard the voice of an old City bailiff who’d been working Division 32 forever. ‘Lieutenant Considine, court’s convening and I’m supposed to bring the boy into chambers.’

Mal gave Stefan a last hug. ‘I’m a captain now. Stefan, you go with this man and I’ll see you inside.’

Stefan hugged back – hard.

Court convened ten minutes later. Mal sat with Jake Kellerman at a table facing the judge’s bench; Celeste, her attorney and Stefan were seated in chairs stationed diagonally across from the witness stand. The old bailiff intoned, ‘Hear ye, hear ye, court is now in session, the Honorable Arthur F. Hardesty presiding.’

Mal stood up. Jake Kellerman whispered, ‘In a second the old fart’ll say, “Counsel will approach the bench.” I’ll hit him for a first continuance for a month from now, citing your grand jury duties. Then, we’ll get another stay until the jury convenes and you’re gold. *Then* we’ll get you Greenberg.’

Mal gripped Kellerman’s arm. ‘Jake, make this happen.’

Kellerman whispered extra low, ‘It will. Just pray a rumor I heard isn’t true.’

Judge Arthur F. Hardesty banged his gavel. ‘Counsel will approach the bench.’

Jake Kellerman and Celeste’s lawyer approached, huddling around Hardesty; Mal strained to hear and picked up nothing but garbles – Jake sounding agitated. The huddle ended with a gavel slam; Kellerman walked back, fuming.

Hardesty said, ‘Mr. Considine, your counsel’s request for a one-month continuance has been denied. Despite your police duties, I’m sure you can find enough time to consult with Mr. Kellerman. All parties will meet here in my chambers ten days hence, Monday, January 22. Both contestants should be ready to testify. Mr. Kellerman, Mr. Castleberry, make sure your witnesses are informed of the date and bring whatever documents you wish to be considered as evidence. This preliminary is dismissed.'

The judge banged his gavel; Castleberry led Celeste and Stefan outside. The boy turned around and waved; Mal flashed him the V for victory sign, tried to smile and couldn't. His son was gone in a breath; Kellerman said, 'I heard Castleberry heard about your promotion and went batshit. I heard he leaked the hospital pictures to one of Hardesty's clerks, who told the judge. Mal, I'm sorry and I'm angry. I'm going to tell Ellis what Castleberry did and make sure that punk gets reamed for it.'

Mal stared at the spot where his son waved goodbye. 'Ream her. Pull out all the stops. If Stefan has to hear, he has to hear. Just fucking take her down.'

TWENTY-EIGHT

LOOKING AROUND ELLIS LOEW'S living room, Buzz set odds:

Twenty to one the grand jury handed down beaucoup UAES indictments; twenty to one the studios booted them on the treason clause prior to the official word, with the Teamsters signing to take their place inside twenty-four hours. If he convinced Mickey to make book on the proceedings, he could lay a bundle down and get well on top of Howard's bonus. Because the action in Loew's little command post said the Pinkos were buying one-way tickets for the Big Fungoo.

Except for tables and chairs set aside for clerks, all the furniture had been removed and dumped in the back yard. Filing cabinets filled with friendly witness depositions covered the fireplace; a corkboard was nailed to the front window, space for reports from the team's four investigators: M. Considine, D. Smith, T. Meeks and D. Upshaw. Captain Mal's stack of interrogation forms – questions tailored to individual lefties, delivered and notarized by City Marshals – was thick; Dudley's field summaries stacked out at five times their width – he had now turned fourteen hostiles into groveling snitch friendlies, picking up dirt on over a hundred snitchees in the process. His own reports comprised six pages: Sammy Benavides porking his sister, Claire De Haven skin-popping H and Reynolds Loftis as a homo bar hopper, the rest padding, all of it snoozeville compared to Mal's and Dudley's contributions. Danny Upshaw's stuff ran two pages – eavesdrop speculation and necking with Pinko Claire – him and the kid were not exactly burning down barns in their effort to destroy the Communist Conspiracy. There were tables with 'In' and 'Out' baskets for the exchange of information, tables for the photographic evidence Crazy Ed Satterlee was accumulating, a huge cardboard box filled with cross-referenced names, dates, political organizations and documented admissions: Commies, pinkers and fellow travelers embracing Mother Russia and calling for the end of the U.S.A. by means fair and foul. And – across the broadest stretch of bare wall – Ed Satterlee's conspiracy graph, his grand jury thumbscrew.

In one horizontal column, the UAES brain trust; in another, the names of the Communist front organizations they belonged to; in a vertical column atop the graph the names of friendly witnesses and their 'accusation power' rated by stars, with lines running down to intersect with the brainers and the fronts. Each star was Satterlee's assessment of the number of days' testimony a friendly was worth, based on the sheer power of time, place and hearsay: which Pinko attended where, said what, and which recanted

Red was there to listen – a brain-frying, mind-boggling, super-stupendous and absolutely amazing glut of information impossible to disprove.

And he kept seeing Danny Upshaw smack in the middle of it, treading shit, even though the kid was on the side of the angels.

Buzz walked out to the back porch. He'd been brainstorming escape routes under the guise of writing reports for hours; three phone calls had fixed Audrey's skimming spree. One was to Mickey, handing him a convoluted epic on how a bettor skimmed an unnamed runner who was screwing the bettor's sister and couldn't turn him in, but finally made him cough up the six grand he'd welched – the exact amount Audrey had grifted off the Mick. The second was to Petey Skouras, a tight-lipped runner who agreed to play the lovesick fool who finally made good to his boss for a cool grand – knowing Johnny Stompanato would come snouting around for the name Buzz wouldn't give on, find him acting hinky and pound a confession out of him – the returned cash his assurance that that was his only punishment. The third was to an indy shylock: seven thousand dollars at 20 percent, $8,400 due April 10 – his woman out of trouble, his gift for her grief: Gene Niles with his face blown off on her bed. Seven come eleven, thank God for the Commie gravy train. If they didn't succumb to the hots for each other, he and his lioness would probably survive.

The kid was still the wild card he didn't know how to play.

It was twelve hours since he'd prowled Niles' pad. Should he go back and make it look like Niles hightailed it? Should he have planted some incriminating shit? When the fucker was missed, would LAPD fix on him as a Dragna bad apple and let it lie? Would they make him for the bomb job and press Mickey? Would they assume a snuff and go hog-wild to find the killer?

Buzz saw Dudley Smith and Mike Breuning at the back edge of the yard, standing by Ellis Loew's couch, left out in the rain because the DA put business before comfort. A late sun was up; Dudley was laughing and pointing at it. Buzz watched dark clouds barreling in from the ocean. He thought: fix it, fix it, fix it, be a fixer. Be what Captain Mal told the kid to be.

Be a policeman.

TWENTY-NINE

DANNY UNLOCKED HIS door and tapped the wall light. The blood W's he'd been seeing since the morgue became his front room, spare and tidy, but with something skewed. He eyed the room in grids until he got it: the rug was puckered near the coffee table – he always toed it smooth on his way out.

He tried to remember if he did it *this* morning. He recalled dressing as Ted Krugman, nude to leather jacket in front of the bathroom mirror; he remembered walking outside thinking of Felix Gordean, Mal Considine's 'Lean on him, Danny' ringing in his ears. He did not remember his methodical rug number, probably because Teddy K. wasn't the meticulous type. Nothing else in the room looked askew; there was no way in the world HE would break into a policeman's apartment . . .

Danny thought of his file, ran for the hall closet and opened the door. It was there, pictures and paperwork intact, covered by wadded-up carpeting puckered just the right way. He checked the bathroom, kitchen and bedroom, saw the same old same old, sat down in a chair by the phone and skimmed the book he'd just bought.

The Weasel Family – Physiology and Habits, hot off a back shelf at Stanley Rose's Bookshop.

Chapter 6, page 59: The Wolverine.

A 40- to 50-pound member of the weasel family indigenous to Canada, the Pacific Northwest and the upper Midwest; pound for pound, the most vicious animal on earth. Utterly fearless and known for attacking animals many times its size; known to drive bears and cougars from their kills. A beast that cannot stand to watch other creatures enjoying a good feed – often blitzing them just to get at what remained of their food. Equipped with a highly efficient digestive system: wolverines ate fast, digested fast, shit fast and were always hungry; they possessed a huge appetite to match their general nastiness. All the vicious little bastards wanted to do was kill, eat and occasionally fuck other members of their misanthropic breed.

W
W
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The Wolverine.

Alter ego of a biting, gouging, raping, flesh-eating killer of immense hunger: sexual and emotional. A man who possessed total identification with an obscenely rapacious animal, an identity he has assumed to right old wrongs, animal mutilations the specific means, *his specific inner reconstruction of what was done to him*.

Danny turned to the pictures at the back of the book, ripped three wolverine shots out, dug through his file for the 2307 blood pics and made a collage above the bed. He tacked the awful weasel thing in the middle; he shone his floor lamp on the collection of images, stood back, looked and thought.

A fat, shuffle-footed creature with beady eyes and a thick brown coat to ward off the cold. A slinky tail, a short, pointed snout, sharp nails and long, sharp teeth bared at the camera. An ugly child who knew he was ugly and made up for it by hurting the people he blamed for making him that way. Snap flashes as the animal and 2307 merged: the killer was somehow disfigured or thought he was; since eyewitnesses tagged him as not facially marred, the disfigurement might be somewhere on his body. The killer thought he was ugly and tied it to sex, hence Augie Duarte slashed cheek to bone with his thing sticking out his mouth. A big snap, all instinct, but feeling gut solid: HE knew the burned-face burglar boy, who was too young to be the killer himself; HE drew inspiration or sex from his disfigurement – hence the facial slashing. Zoot stick assaults were being tapped at station houses citywide; car thief MO's were being collated; he told Jack Shortell to start calling wild-animal breeders, zoo suppliers, animal trappers and fur wholesalers. Cross-reference them with dental tech and *go*. Burglar, jazz fiend, H copper, teeth maker, car thief, animal worshiper, queer, homo, pederast, brunser and devotee of male whores. It was there waiting for them, some fact in a police file, some nonplussed dental worker saying. 'Yeah, I remember that guy.'

Danny wrote down his new impressions, thinking of Mike Breuning bullshitting him on the Augie Duarte tail, the other tails probably horseshit. Breuning's only possible motive was humoring him – keeping him happy on the homicide case so he'd be a good Commie operative and keep Dudley Smith happy on his anti-Red crusade. Shortell had called the other three men, warned them of possible danger and was trying to set up interviews: the only cop he could trust now, Jack would be tapping into Dudley's 'boys' to see if the three Gordean 'friends' had ever been under surveillance at all. He himself had stuck outside Gordean's agency trawling for more license plates, more potential victims, more information and maybe Gordean alone for a little strongarm – but the carport had stayed empty, the pimp hadn't showed and there was no traffic at his front door – rain had probably kept the 'clients' and 'friends' away. And he'd had to break the stakeout for his date with Claire De Haven.

A thud echoed outside the door – the sound of the paperboy chucking the

Evening Herald. Danny walked out and picked it up, scanning a headline on Truman and trade embargoes, opening to the second page on the off-chance there was an item on his case. Another scan told him the answer was no; a short column in the bottom right corner caught his attention.

Attorney Charles Hartshorn a Suicide –
Served Both the Society Elite and Society's Unfortunate

> This morning Charles E. (Eddington) Hartshorn, 52, a prominent society lawyer who dabbled in social causes was found dead in the living room of his Hancock Park home, an apparent self-asphyxiation suicide. Hartshorn's body was discovered by his daughter Betsy, 24, who had just arrived home from a trip and told Metro reporter Bevo Means: 'Daddy was despondent. A man had been around talking to him – Daddy was certain it had to do with a grand jury investigation he'd heard about. People always bothered him because he did volunteer work for the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee, and they found it strange that a rich man wanted to help poor Mexicans.'
>
> Lieutenant Walter Reddin of the LAPD's Wilshire Station said, 'It was suicide by hanging, pure and simple. There was no note, but no signs of a struggle. Hartshorn simply found a rope and a ceiling beam and did it, and it's a darn shame his daughter had to find him.'
>
> Hartshorn, a senior partner of Hartshorn, Welborn and Hayes, is survived by daughter Betsy and wife Margaret, 49. Funeral service notices are pending.

Danny put the paper down, stunned. Hartshorn was Duane Lindenaur's extortionee in 1941; Felix Gordean said that he attended his parties and was 'unlucky in love and politics.' He never questioned the man for three reasons: he did not fit the killer's description; the extortion was nearly nine years prior; Sergeant Frank Skakel, the investigating officer on the beef, had said that Hartshorn would refuse to talk to the police regarding the incident – and he stressed old precedents. Hartshorn was just another name in the file, a tangent name that led to Gordean. Nothing about the lawyer had seemed wrong; aside from Gordean's offhand 'politics' remark, there was nothing that tagged him as having a yen for causes, and there were no notations in the grand jury file on him – despite the preponderance of Sleepy Lagoon information. *But he was questioned by a member of the grand jury team.*

Danny called Mal Considine's number at the DA's Bureau, got no answer and dialed Ellis Loew's house. Three rings, then, 'Yeah? Who's this?', Buzz Meeks' okie twang.

'It's Deputy Upshaw. Is Mal around?'

'He's not here, Deputy. This is Meeks. You need somethin'?'

The man sounded subdued. Danny said, 'Do you know if anybody questioned a lawyer named Charles Hartshorn?'

'Yeah, I did. Last week. Why?'

'I just read in the paper that he killed himself.'

A long silence, a long breath. Meeks said, 'Oh shit.'

Danny said, 'What do you mean?'

'Nothin', kid. This on your homicide case?'

'Yes. How did you know that?'

'Well, I braced Hartshorn, and he thought I had to be a Homicide cop, 'cause a guy who tried to shake him down on his queerness years ago just got bumped off. This was right around when you joined up with us, and I remembered somethin' about this dink Lindenaur from the papers. Kid, I was a cop for years, and this guy Hartshorn wasn't holdin' nothin' back 'cept the fact he likes boys, so I didn't tell you about him – I just figured he was no kind of suspect.'

'Meeks, you should have told me anyway.'

'Upshaw, you gave me some barter on the old queen. I owe you on that, 'cause I had to rough him up, and I bought out by tellin' him I'd keep the homicide dicks away. And kid, that poor sucker couldn't of killed a fly.'

'Shit! Why did you go talk to him in the first place? Because he was connected to the Sleepy Lagoon Committee?'

'No. I was trackin' corroboration dirt on the Commies and I got a note said Hartshorn was rousted with Reynolds Loftis at a fruit bar in Santa Monica in '44. I wanted to see if I could squeeze some more dirt on Loftis out of him.'

Danny put the phone to his chest so Meeks wouldn't hear him hyperventilating, wouldn't hear his brain banging around the facts he'd just been handed and the way they *might just really play*:

Reynolds Loftis was tall, gray-haired, middle-aged.

He was connected to Charles Hartshorn, a suicide, the blackmail victim of Duane Linenaur, homicide victim number three.

He was the homosexual lover of Chaz Minear circa early '40s; in the grand jury psychiatric files, Sammy Benavides had mentioned 'puto' Chaz buying sex via a 'queer date-a-boy gig' – a possible reference to Felix Gordean's introduction service, which employed snuff victims George Wiltsie and Augie Duarte.

Last night in darktown, Claire De Haven had been all nerves; the killer had picked up Goines on that block and a hop pusher at the Zombie had addressed her. She sloughed it off, but she was known to the grand jury team as a longtime hophead. Did she procure the junk load that killed Marty Goines?

Danny's hands twitched the receiver off his chest; he heard Meeks on the other end of the line – 'Kid, you there? You there, kid?' – and managed to hook the mouthpiece into his chin. 'Yeah, I'm here.'

'There something you ain't tellin' me?'

‘Yes – no – fuck, I don’t know.’

The line hung silent for good long seconds; Danny stared at his wolverine pinups; Meeks said, ‘Deputy, are you tellin’ me Loftis is a suspect for your killin’s?’

Danny said, ‘I’m telling you *maybe.* Maybe real strong. He fits the killer’s description, and he . . . fits.’

Buzz Meeks said, ‘Holy fuckin’ dog.’

Danny hung up, thinking he’d kissed Reynolds Loftis in his mind – and he liked it.

Krugman into Upshaw into Krugman, pure Homicide cop.

Danny drove to Beverly Hills, no rear-view trawling. He Man Camera’d Reynolds Loftis wolverine slashing; the combination of 2307 pictures, Augie Duarte’s body and Loftis’ handsome face rooting in gore had him riding the clutch, shifting when he didn’t need to just to keep the images a little bit at bay. Pulling up, he saw the house lights on bright – cheery, liked the people inside had nothing to hide; he walked up to the door and found a note under the knocker: ‘Ted. Back in a few minutes. Make yourself at home – C.’

More nothing to hide. Danny opened the door, moved inside and saw a writing table wedged against a wall by the stairwell. A floor lamp was casting light on it; papers were strewn across the blotter, a leather-bound portfolio weighing them down, nothing to hide blinking neon. He walked over, picked it up and opened it; the top page bore clean typescript: ‘MINUTES AND ATTENDANCE, UAES EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, 1950 MEETINGS.’

Danny opened to the first page. More perfect typescript: the meeting/New Year’s party on 12/31/49. Present – scrawled signatures – were C. De Haven, M. Ziffkin, R. Loftis, S. Benavides, M. Lopez, and one name crossed out, illegible. Topics of discussion were ‘Picket Assignments.’ ‘Secretary’s Report,’ ‘Treasurer’s Report’ and whether or not to hire private detectives to look into the criminal records of Teamster picketers. The soiree commenced at 11:00 P.M. and ended at 6:00 A.M.; Danny winced at the gist: the ledger could be construed as an alibi for Reynolds Loftis – he was here during the time Marty Goines was snatched and killed – and the minutes contained nothing at all subversive.

Too much nothing to hide.

Danny flipped forward, finding a meeting on 1/4/50, the same people in attendance during the time frame of the Wiltsie/Lindenaur killings, the same strange crossout, the same boring topics discussed. And Loftis was with Claire last night when Augie Duarte probably got it – he’d have to check with Doc Layman on the estimated time of death. Perfect group alibis, no treason on the side, Loftis not HIM, unless the whole brain trust was behind the killings – which was ridiculous.

Danny stopped thinking, replaced the ledger, jammed his jumpy hands into his warm leather pockets. It was too much nothing to hide, because there was nothing to hide, because none of the brain trusters knew he was a Homicide cop, Loftis could have forged his name, a five-time corroborated alibi would stand up in court ironclad, even if the alibiers were Commie traitors, none of it meant anything, get your cases straight and identities straight and be a policeman.

The house was getting hot. Danny shucked his jacket, hung it on a coatrack, went into the living room and pretended to admire the poster for *Storm Over Leningrad.* It reminded him of the stupid turkeys Karen Hiltscher coerced him to; he was making a note to lube her on 2307 when he heard, 'Ted, how the hell are you?'

HIM.

Danny turned around. Reynolds Loftis and Claire were doffing their coats in the foyer. She looked coiled; he looked handsome, like a cultured blood sport connoisseur. Danny said, 'Hi. Good to see you, but I've got some bad news.'

Claire said, 'Oh'; Loftis rubbed his hands together and blew on them. 'Hark, what bad news?'

Danny walked up to frame their reactions. 'It was in the papers. A lawyer named Charles Hartshorn killed himself. It said he worked with the SLDC, and it implied he was being hounded by some fascist DA's cops.'

Clean reactions: Claire giving her coat a brush, saying, 'We'd heard. Charlie was a good friend to our cause'; Loftis tensing up just a tad – maybe because he and the lawyer had sex going. 'That grand jury went down, but it took Charlie with them. He was a frail man and a kind one, and men like that are easy pickings for the fascists.'

Danny flashed; he's talking about himself, he's weak, Claire's his strength. He moved into close-up range and hit bold. 'I read a tabloid sheet that said Hartshorn was questioned about a string of killings. Some crazy queer killing people he knew.'

Loftis turned his back, moving into a shamefully fake coughing attack; Claire played supporting actress, bending to him with her face averted, mumbling, 'Bad for your bronchitis.' Danny held his close-up and brain-screened what his eyes couldn't see: Claire giving her fiancé guts; Loftis the actor, knowing faces don't lie, keeping his hidden.

Danny walked into the kitchen and filled a glass with sink water, break to give the players time to recover. He walked back slowly and found them acting nonchalant, Claire smoking, Loftis leaning against the staircase, sheepish, a Southern gentleman who thought coughing déclassé. 'Poor Charlie. He liked Greek revelry once in a while, and I'm sure the powers that be would have loved to crucify him for that, too.'

Danny handed him the water. 'They'll crucify you for anything they can. It's a shame about Hartshorn, but personally, I like women.'

Loftis drank, grabbed his coat and winked. He said, ‘So do I,’ kissed Claire on the cheek and went out the door.

Danny said, ‘We’ve got bad luck so far. Last night, your friend Charlie.’

Claire tossed her purse on the table holding the meeting ledger – too casual. Her tad too-studied glance said she’d arranged the still life for him – Loftis’ alibi – *even though they couldn’t know who he was.* The threads of who was who, knew who, knew what got tangled again; Danny quashed them with a lewd wink. ‘Let’s stay in, huh?’

Claire said, ‘My idea, too. Care to see a movie?’

‘You’ve got a television set?’

‘No, silly. I’ve got a screening room.’

Danny smiled shyly, proletarian Ted wowed by Hollywood customs. Claire took his hand and led him through the kitchen to a room lined with bookcases, the front wall covered by a projection screen. A long leather couch faced the screen; a projector was mounted on a tripod a few feet behind it, a reel of film already fed in. Danny sat down; Claire hit switches, doused the lights and snuggled into him, legs curled under a swell of skirt. Light took over the screen, the movie started.

A test pattern; a black-and-white fade-in; a zoftig blonde and a Mexican with a duck’s ass haircut stripping. A motel room backdrop: bed, chipped stucco walls, sombrero lamps and a bullfight poster on the closet door. Tijuana, pure and simple.

Danny felt Claire’s hand hovering. The blonde rolled her eyes to heaven; she’d just seen her co-star’s cock – huge, veiny, hooked at the middle like a dowsing rod. She salaamed before him, hit her knees and started sucking. The camera caught her acne scars and his needle tracks. She sucked while the hophead gyrated his hips; he pulled out of her mouth and sprayed.

Danny looked away; Claire touched his thigh. Danny flinched, tried to relax but kept flinching; Claire fingered a ridge of coiled muscle inches from his stuff. Hophead screwed Pimples from behind, the insertion close in. Danny’s stomach growled – worse than when he was on a no-food jag. Claire’s hand kept probing; Danny felt himself shriveling – cold shower time where you shrunk down to nothing.

The blonde and the Mexican fucked with abandon; Claire kneaded muscles that would not yield. Danny started to cramp, grabbed Claire’s hand and squeezed it to his knee, like they were back at the jazz club and he was calling the shots. Claire pulled away; the movie ended with a close-up of the blonde and the Mex tongue-kissing.

Film snapped off the cylinder; Claire got up, hit the lights and exchanged reels. Danny uncramped into his best version of Ted Krugman at ease – legs loosely crossed, hands laced behind his head. Claire turned and said, ‘I was saving this for aprés bed, but I think we might need it now.’

Danny winked – his whole head twitching – lady-killer Ted. Claire turned the projector on and the lights off; she came back to the couch and snuggled down again. The second half of their double feature hit the screen.

No music, no opening credits, no subtitles like in the old silents – just blackness – gray flecks, the only indication that film was running. The darkness broke down at the corners of the screen, a shape took form and a dog's head came into focus: a pit bull wearing a mask. The dog snapped at the camera, the screen went black again, then slowly dissolved into white.

Danny remembered the dog breeder and his tale of Hollywood types buying pits to film; he jumped to the masked men at Felix Gordean's house; he saw that he'd shut his eyes and was holding his breath, the better to think who knew what, said what lied what. He opened his eyes, saw two dogs ripping at each other, animated red splashed in surreal patterns across black-and-white celluloid, disappearing and coloring the real blood its real color, a spritz fogging the camera lens, gray first, cartoon red next. He thought of Walt Disney gone insane; as if in answer, an evil-looking Donald Duck flashed on the screen, feathered phallus hanging to its webbed feet. The duck hopped around, impotent angry like the real Donald; Claire laughed; Danny watched the snapping dogs circle each other and charge, the darker dog getting a purchase on the speckled dog's midsection, plunging in with his teeth. And he knew his killer, whoever he was, had gone crazy watching this movie.

A black screen; Danny going light-headed from holding his breath, sensing Claire's eyes on him. Then all color footage, naked men circling each other just like the dogs, going for each other with sucking mouths, 69 close-ups, a pullback shot and Felix Gordean in a red devil costume, capering, prancing. Danny got hard; Claire's hand went there – like she *knew*. Danny squirmed, tried to shut his eyes, *couldn't* and kept looking.

A quick cut; then Pretty Boy Christopher, naked and hard, pointing his thing at the camera, the head nearly eclipsing the screen like a giant battering ram, white background borders looking just like parted lips and teeth holding the image intact through rigor mortis –

Danny bolted, double-timed to the front of the house, found a bathroom and locked the door. He got his shakes chilled with a litany: BE A POLICEMAN BE A POLICEMAN BE A POLICEMAN; he made himself think *facts*, flung the medicine cabinet open and got one immediately: a prescription bottle of sodium secobarbital, Wiltsie's and Lindenaur's death ticket in a little vial, Reynolds Loftis' sleep pills administered by D. Waltrow, MD, 11/14/49. Fumbling through shelves of ointments, salves and more pills got him nothing else; he noticed a second door, ajar, next to the shower stall.

He pushed it open and saw a little den all done up cozy, more bookshelves, chairs arranged around a leather ottoman, another desk with another cluttered blotter. He checked the clutter – mimeographed movie scripts with hand scrawl in the margins – opened drawers and found stacks of Claire De Haven stationery, envelopes, rolls of stamps and an old leather wallet. Flipping through the sleeves, he saw expired Reynolds Loftis ID: library card, membership cards to Pinko organizations, a '36 California driver's license with a tag stuck to the back side, Emergency Medical Data – allergic to penicillin, minor recurring arthritis, O+ *blood.*

HIM?

Danny closed the drawers, unlocked the bathroom door, wiped a towel across his face and slow-walked back to the screening room. The lights were on, the screen was blank and Claire was sitting on the couch. She said, 'I didn't think a tough boy like you would be so squeamish.'

Danny sat beside her, their legs brushing. Claire pulled away, then leaning forward. Danny thought: *she knows, she can't know.* He said, 'I'm not much of an aesthete.'

Claire put a warm hand to his face; her face was cold. 'Really? All my friends in the New York Party were mad for New Drama and Kabuki and the like. Didn't the movie remind you of Cocteau, only with more sense of humor?'

He didn't know who Cocteau was. 'Cocteau never jazzed me. Neither did Salvador Dali or any of those guys. I'm just a square from Long Island.'

Claire's hand kept stroking. It was warm, but the to-die-for softness of last night was all gone. 'I used to summer in Easthampton when I was a girl. It was lovely.'

Danny laughed, glad he'd read Considine's tourist brochure. 'Huntington wasn't exactly Easthampton, sweetie.'

Claire cringed at the endearment, started to let her hand go, then made with more caresses. Danny said, 'Who filmed that movie?'

'A brilliant man named Paul Doinelle.'

'Just for friends to see?'

'Why do you say that?'

'Because it's smut. You can't release films like that. It's against the law.

'You say that so vehemently, like you care about a bourgeois law that abridges artistic freedom.'

'It was ugly. I was just wondering what kind of man would enjoy something like that.'

'Why do you say "man"? I'm a woman, and I appreciate art of that nature. You're strictured in your views, Ted. It's a bad trait for people in our cause to have. And I *know* that film aroused you.'

'That's not true.'

Claire laughed. 'Don't be so evasive. Tell me what you want. Tell me what you want to do with me.'

She was going to fuck him just to get what he knew, which meant she knew, which meant –

Danny made Claire a blank frame and kissed her neck and cheeks; she sighed – phony – sounding just like a Club Largo girl pretending stripping was ecstasy. She touched his back and chest and shoulders – hands kneading – it felt like she was trying to restrain herself from gouging him. He tried to kiss her lips, but her mouth stayed crimped; she reached between his legs. He was frozen and shriveled there, and her hand made it worse.

Danny felt his whole body choking him. Claire took her hands away, reached behind her back and removed her sweater and bra in one movement. Her breasts were freckled – spots that looked cancerous – the left one was bigger and hung strange and the nipples were dark and flat and surrounded by crinkled skin. Danny thought of traitors and Mexicans sucking them; Claire whispered, 'Here, babe,' a lullaby to mother him into telling what he knew, who he knew, what he lied. She fondled her breasts towards his face; he shut his eyes and couldn't; thought of boys and Tim and HIM and couldn't –

Claire said, 'Ladies' man? Oh Teddy, how were you ever able to pull that charade off?' Danny shoved her away, left the house slamming doors and drove home thinking: *SHE CANNOT KNOW WHO I AM*. Inside, he went straight for his copy of the grand jury package, prowled pages to prove it for sure, saw 'Juan Duarte – UAES brain trust, extra actor/stagehand at Variety Intl Picts' on a personnel sheet, snapped to Augie Duarte choking on his cock on a morgue slab, snapped to the three Mexes on the *Tomahawk Massacre* set the day he questioned Duane Lindenaur's KAs, snapped on Norm Kostenz taking his picture after the picket line brawl. Snap, snap, snap, snap to two final snaps: the Mex at the morgue who eyed him funny was a Mex actor on the movie set he had to be an Augie Duarte relative, Juan Duarte the spic Commie actor/stagehand. The crossout on the meeting ledger had to be his name, which meant that he saw Kostenz' picture and told Loftis and Claire that Ted Krugman was a police detective working on Augie's snuff.

Which meant that the ledger was a setup alibi.

Which meant that the movie was a device to test his reactions and find out what he knew.

Which meant that the Red Bitch was trying to do to him what Mal Considine set him up to do to her.

WHICH MEANT THAT THEY KNEW WHO HE WAS.

Danny went for the shelf over the refrigerator, the place where he stashed his Deputy D. Upshaw persona. He picked up his badge and handcuffs and held them to himself; he unholstered his .45 revolver and aimed it at the world.

THIRTY

CHIEF OF DETECTIVES Thad Green nodded first to Mal, then to Dudley Smith. ‘Gentlemen, I wouldn’t have called you in this early in the morning if it wasn’t urgent. What I’m going to tell you has not been leaked yet, and it will remain that way.’

Mal looked at his LAPD mentor. The man, rarely grave, was coming on almost funereal. ‘What is it, sir?’

Green lit a cigarette. ‘The rain caused some mudslides up in the hills. About an hour ago, a body was found on the access road going up to the Hollywood Sign. Sergeant Eugene Niles, Hollywood Squad. Buried, shot in the face. I called Nort Layman in for a quick one, and he took two .38’s out of the cranial vault. They were fired from an Iver-Johnson Police Special, which you know is standard LAPD/LASD issue. Niles was last seen day before yesterday at Hollywood Station, where he got into a fistfight with your grand jury chum Deputy Daniel Upshaw. You men have been working with Upshaw, and I called you in for your conclusions. Mal, you first.

Mal made himself swallow his shock, think, then speak. ‘Sir, I don’t think Upshaw is capable of killing a man. I reprimanded him on Niles night before last, and he took it like a good cop. He seemed relieved that Niles was off his Homicide detail, and we all know that Niles was in up to here on Brenda Allen. I’ve heard he ran bag for Jack Dragna, and I’d look to Jack and Mickey before I accused a brother officer.’

Green nodded. ‘Lieutenant Smith.’

Dudley said, ‘Sir, I disagree with Captain Considine. Sergeant Mike Breuning, who’s also working that Homicide detail with Upshaw, told me that Niles was afraid of the lad and that he was convinced that Upshaw had committed a break-in in LAPD territory in order to get evidence. Niles told Sergeant Breuning that Upshaw lied about how he came to get word of the second and third victims, and that he was going to try to accrue criminal charges against him. Moreover, Niles was convinced that Upshaw had a very strange fixation on these deviant killings he’s so concerned with, and Niles calling Upshaw a ‘queer’ was what precipitated their fight. An informant of mine told me that Upshaw was seen threatening a known queer pimp named Felix Gordean, a man who is known to heavily pay off Sheriff’s Central Vice. Gordean told my man that Upshaw is crazy, obsessed with some sort of homo conspiracy, and that he made extortion demands on him – threatening to go to the newspapers unless he gave him special information – information that Gordean asserts does not even exist.’

Mal took the indictment in. ‘Who’s your informant, Dudley? And Why do you and Breuning care so much about Upshaw?'

Dudley smiled – a bland shark. 'I would not want that lad's unstable violent behavior to upset his work for our grand jury, and I would no more divulge the names of my snitches than you would, Captain.'

'No, but you'd smear a brother officer. A man who I think is a dedicated and brilliant young policeman.'

'I've always heard you had a soft spot for your operatives, Malcolm. You should be more circumspect in displaying it, though. Especially now that you're a captain. I personally consider Upshaw capable of murder. Violence is often the province of weak men.'

Mal thought that with the right conditions and one drink too many, the kid could shoot in cold blood. He said, 'Chief, Dudley's persuasive, but I don't make Upshaw for this at all.'

Thad Green stubbed out his cigarette. 'You men are too personally involved. I'll put some unbiased officers on it.'

THIRTY-ONE

THE PHONE RANG. Danny reached for the bedside extension, saw that he'd passed out on the floor and tripped over dead bottles and file folders getting to it. 'Yeah? Jack?'

Jack Shortell said, 'It's me. You listening?'

Danny blinked away wicked sunlight, grabbed paper and a pencil. 'Go.'

'First, Breuning's tails were all fake. I called in an old favor at LAPD Homicide, checked the work sheets for the men Dudley uses regularly and found out they were all working regular assignments full-time. I looked around for Gene Niles to see if I could sweet-talk him and get some more dope on it, but that bastard is nowhere. LAPD canvassed the area where Duarte's body was found – they caught the squeal and some rookie squadroom dick out of Central hopped on it. Nothing so far. Doc Layman's grid-searching for trace elements there – he wants complete forensics on Duarte so he can put him in his next textbook. He thinks the rain will kibosh it, but he's trying anyway, and on the autopsy it's the same story as the first three: sedated, strangled, mutilated after death. I called the other men on your tailing list, and they're going on little vacations until this blows over. Danny, did you know that guy Hartshorn you told me about killed himself?'

Danny said, 'Yeah, and I don't know if it plays with our case or not.'

'Well, I went by Wilshire Station and checked the report, and it looks clean – no forced entry, no struggle. Hartshorn's daughter said Pops was despondent over your grand jury.'

Danny was getting nervous; the scene with De Haven was coming back: she knew, they knew, no more Red Ted. 'Jack, have you got anything hot?'

Shortell said, 'Maybe a scorcher. I was up all night on the wolverine thing, and I got a great lead on an old man named Thomas Cormier, that's C-O-R-M-I-E-R. He's an amateur naturalist, famous, I guess you'd call him. He lives on Bunker Hill, and he rents weasel genus things to the movies and animal shows. He has a batch of individually penned-up wolverines, the only known batch in LA. Now listen, because this is where it gets good.

'Last night I went by the West Hollywood Substation to talk to a pal of mine who just transferred over. I heard the girl at the switchboard ragging you to the watch sergeant, and I played nice and sweet-talked her. She told me she was dragging her heels on her set of dental queries because she thought you were just using her. She gave me a list that had notes on it – negative on the killer's description, but positive on the animal teeth – Joredco Dental Lab on Beverly and Beaudry. They do animal dentures for taxidermists, and they're the only lab in LA that works with actual animal teeth – that lead you had that said all taxidermists use plastic teeth was wrong. And Beverly and Beaudry is seven blocks from Thomas Cormier's house – 343 South Corondelet.'

Red hot and biting.

Danny said, 'I'm rolling,' and hung up. He put muscling Felix Gordean aside, cleaned up and stashed his files, cleaned up his person and dressed as Daniel T. Upshaw, policeman, replete with badge, gun and official ID. Ted Krugman dead and buried, he drove to Bunker Hill.

343 South Corondelet was an eaved and gabled Victorian house sandwiched between vacant lots on the west edge of the Hill. Danny parked in front and heard animal yapping; he followed the sounds down the driveway and around to a terraced back yard with a picture postcard view of Angel's Flight. Lean-tos with corrugated metal roofs were arranged in L-shapes, one to each level of grass; the structures were fronted by heavy wire mesh, and the longest L had what looked like a generator device built onto its rear side. The whole yard reeked of animals, animal piss and animal shit.

'The smell getting to you, Officer?'

Danny turned around. The mind reader was a grizzled old man wearing dungarees and hipboots, walking toward him waving a fat cigar that blended in perfectly with the shit stink and made it worse. He smiled, adding bad breath to the effluvia. 'Are you from Animal Regulation or Department of Health?'

Danny felt the sun and the smell go to work on his skinful of booze, sandpapering him. 'I'm a Sheriff's Homicide detective. Are you Thomas Cormier?'

'I am indeed, and I've never killed anyone and I don't associate with killers. I've got some killer mustelids, but they only kill the rodents I feed them. If that's a crime, I'll take the blame. I keep my mustelidae in captivity, so if they called a bum tune, I'll pay the piper.'

The man looked too intelligent to be an outright loony. Danny said, 'Mr Cormier, I heard you're an expert on wolverines.'

'That is the God's truth. I have eleven in captivity right this instant, my baby refrigeration unit keeping them nice and cool, the way they like it.'

Danny queased on cigar smoke and halitosis; he willed himself pro. 'This is why I'm here, Mr Cormier. Four men have been killed between New Year's and now. They were mutilated by a man wearing denture plates with wolverine teeth attached. There's a dental lab several blocks from here – the only one in LA that manufactures actual animal dentures. I think that's a strange coincidence, and I thought maybe you could help me out with it.'

Thomas Cormier snuffed his cigar and pocketed the butt. 'That is just about the strangest thing I have heard in my entire time on this planet, which dates back to 1887. What else have you got on your killer?'

Danny said, 'He's tall, middle-aged, gray-haired. He knows the jazz world, he can purchase heroin, he knows his way around male prostitutes.' He stopped, thinking of Reynolds Loftis, wondering if he'd get anything that wasn't circumstantial on him. 'And he's a homosexual.'

Cormier laughed. 'Sounds like a nice fellow, and sorry I can't help you. I don't know anybody like that, and if I did, I think I'd keep my back to the wall and my trusty rifle out when he came to call. And this fellow's enamored of *Gulo luscus*?'

'If you mean wolverines, yes.'

'Lord. Well, I admire his taste in mustelids, if not the way he displays his appreciation.'

Danny sighed. 'Mr. Cormier, do you know anything about the Joredco Dental Lab?'

'Sure, just down the street. I think they make animal choppers.'

A clean take. Danny saw takes from Claire De Haven's movie, pictured HIM seeing it, getting aroused, wanting more. 'I'd like to see your wolverines.'

Cormier said, 'Thought you'd never ask,' and walked ahead of Danny to the refrigeration shed. The air went from warm to freezing; the yapping became snarling; dark shapes lashed out and banged the mesh fronts of their pens. Cormier said, '*Gulo luscus*. Carcajou – evil spirit – to the Indians. The most insatiable carnivore alive and pound for pound the meanest mammal. Like I said, I admire your killer's taste.'

Danny found a good sun angle – light square on a middle pen; he squatted down and looked, his nose to the wire. Inside, a long creature paced, turning in circles, snapping at the walls. It's teeth glinted; its claws scraped the floor; it looked like a coiled muscle that would not stop coiling until it killed and slept in satiation – or died. Danny watched, feeling the beast's power, feeling HIM feeling it; Cormier talked. '*Gulo luscus* is two things; smart and intractable. I've known them to develop a taste for deer, hide in trees and toss nice edible bark down to lure them over, then jump down and rip the deer's jugular out clean to the windpipe. Once they get a whiff of blood, they will not stop persisting. I've heard of wolverines stalking cougars wounded in mating battles. They'll jab them from behind, take nips out and run away, a little meat here and there until the cougar nearly bleeds to death. When the poor fellow's almost dead, *Gulo* attacks frontally, claws the cougar's eyes out of his head and eats them like gumballs.'

Danny winced, transposing the image: Marty Goines, HIM, the creature he was watching. 'I need to look at your records. All the wolverines you've lent out to movies and animal shows.'

Cormier said, 'Officer, you can't lend *Gulos* out, much as I'd like to make the money. They're my private passion, I love them and I keep them around because they shore up my reputation as a mustelidologist. You lend *Gulos* out, they'll attack anything human or animal within biting range. I had one stolen out of its pen five or six years ago, and my only consolation was that the stealer sure as hell got himself mangled.'

Danny looked up. 'Tell me about that. What happened?'

Cormier took out his cigar butt and fingered it. 'In the summer of '42 I worked nights at the Griffith Park Zoo, resident zoologist doing research on nocturnal mustelid habits. I had an earlier bunch of wolverines that were getting real fat. I knew somebody must have been feeding them, and I started finding extra mouse and hamster carcasses in the pens. Somebody was lifting the food latches and feeding my *Gulos*, and I figured it for a neighborhood kid who'd heard about my reputation and thought he'd see for himself. Truth be told, it didn't bother me, and it kind of gave me a cozy feeling, here's this fellow *Gulo* lover and all. Then, late in July, it stopped. I knew it stopped because there were no more extra carcasses in the cages and my *Gulos* went back to their normal weights. About a year and a half or so went by, and one night my *Gulo* Otto was stolen. I laughed like hell. I figured the feeder had to have a *Gulo* for himself and stole Otto. Otto was a pistol. If the stealer got away with keeping him, I'm sure Otto bit him real good. I called hospitals around here to see if they stitched a bite victim, but it was no go, no Otto.'

Bit him real good.

Danny thought of sedation – a wolverine Mickey Finned and stolen – HIM with his own evil mascot – *the story might just play.* He looked back in the pen; the wolverine noticed something and lashed the wire, making screechy blood W noises. Cormier laughed and said, 'Juno, *you're* a pistol.' Danny put his face up to the mesh, tasting the animal's breath. He said, 'Thanks, Mr. Cormier,' pulled himself away and drove to the Joredco Dental Lab.

He was almost expecting a neon sign facade, an animal mouth open wide, the address numbers done up as teeth. He was wrong: the lab was just a tan stucco building, a subtly lettered sign above the door its only advertisement.

Danny parked in front and walked into a tiny receiving area: a secretary behind a desk, a switchboard and calendar art on the walls – 1950 repeated a dozen times over, handsome wild animals representing January for local taxi-dermist's shops. The girl smiled at him and said, 'Yes?'

Danny showed his badge. 'Sheriff's. I'd like to speak to the man in charge.'

'Regarding?'

'Regarding animal teeth.'

The girl tapped an intercom switch and said, 'Policeman to see you, Mr. Carmichael.' Danny looked at pictures of moose, bears, wolves and buffalos; he noticed a sleek mountain cat and thought of a wolverine stalking it, killing it off with sheer ugly persistence.

A connecting door swung open; a man in a bloody white smock came in. Danny said, 'Mr. Carmichael?'

'Yes, mister?'

'It's Deputy Upshaw.'

'And this regards, Deputy?'

'It regards wolverine teeth.'

No reaction except impatience – the man obviously anxious to get back to work. 'Then I can't help you. Joredco is the only lab in Los Angeles that fashions animal dentures, and we've never done them for a wolverine.'

'Why?'

'Why? Because taxidermists do not stuff wolverines – they are not an item that people want mounted in their home or lodge. I've worked here for thirteen years and I've never filled an order for wolverine teeth.'

Danny thought it over. 'Could someone who learned the rudiments of animal-denture making here do it himself?'

'Yes, but it would be bloody and very slapdash without the proper tools.'

'Good. Because I'm looking for a man who likes blood.'

Carmichael wiped his hands on his smock. 'Deputy, what is this in regard to?'

'Quadruple homicide. How far back do your employment records go?'

The 'quadruple homicide' got to Carmichael – he looked shaken under his brusqueness. 'My God. Our records go back to '40, but Joredco employs mostly women. You don't think –'

Danny was thinking Reynolds Loftis wouldn't sully his hands in a place like this. 'I think maybe. Tell me about the men you've had working here.'

'There haven't been many. Frankly, women work for a lower wage. Our current staff has been here for years, and when we get rush orders, we hire bums out of day labor and kids from Lincoln and Belmont High School to do the scut work. During the war, we hired lots of temporaries that way.'

The Joredco connection felt – strangely – like it was clicking in, with Loftis clicking out. 'Mr. Carmichael, do you have a medical plan for your regular employees?'

'Yes.'

'May I see your records?'

Carmichael turned to the receptionist. 'Sally, let Deputy whatever here see the files.'

Danny let the remark slide; Carmichael went back through the connecting door. Sally pointed to a filing cabinet. 'Nasty prick, if you'll pardon my French. Medicals are in the bottom drawer, men in with the women. You don't think a real killer worked here, do you?'

Danny laughed. 'No, but maybe a real live monster did.'

It took him an hour to go through the medical charts.

Since November ’39, sixteen men had been hired on as dental techs. Three were Japanese, hired immediately after the Jap internment ended in ’44; four were Caucasian and now in their thirties; three were white and now middle-aged; six were Mexican. All sixteen men had, at one time or another, given blood to the annual Red Cross Drive. Five of the sixteen possessed O+ blood, the most common human blood type. Three of the men were Mexican, two were Japanese – but Joredco still felt right.

Danny went back to the shop and spent another hour chatting up the techs, talking to them while they pried teeth out of gum sections removed from the heads of elk, deer and Catalina Island boar. He asked questions about tall, gray-haired men who acted strange; jazz; heroin; guys with wolverine fixations. He breathed blood and animal tooth infection and stressed strange behavior among the temporary workers who came and went; he threw out teasers on a handsome Hollywood actor who just might have made the scene. The techs deadpanned him, no’d him and worked around him; his only lead was elimination stuff: most of the temps were Mex, wetbacks going to Belmont and Lincoln High sans green cards, veterans of the Vernon slaughter-houses, where the work was twice as gory and the money was even worse than the coolie wages Mr. Carmichael paid. Danny left thinking Reynolds Loftis would faint the second he hit the Joredco line; thinking the actor might be circumstantial linkage only. But Joredco/Cormier still felt right; the blood and decay smelled like something HE would love.

The day was warming up; heat that felt all the worse for coming after heavy rain. Danny sat in the car and sweated out last night’s drunk; he thought elimination, thought that the day labor joints kept no records in order to dodge taxes, that the high school employment offices were long shots he had to try anyway. He drove to Belmont High, talked to the employment counselor, learned that her records only went back to ’45 and checked the Joredco referrals – twenty-seven of them – all Mexes and Japs. Even though he knew the age range was wrong, he repeated the process at Lincoln: Mexes, Japs and a mentally deficient white boy hired because he was strong enough to haul two deer carcasses at a time. Gooser. But the rightness kept nagging him.

Danny drove to a bar in Chinatown. After two shots of house bonded, he knew this was his last day as Homicide brass: when he told Considine Ted Krugman was shot, he’d be shot back to the West Hollywood Squad, packing some large blame if Ellis Loew thought he’d jeopardized the chance for a successful grand jury. He could keep looking for HIM on his off-hours – but there was a good chance Felix Gordean would talk to his golf buddies Sheriff Biscailuz and Al Dietrich and he’d get dumped back into uniform or jail duty. He’d made an enemy of Gene Niles and pissed off Dudley Smith and Mike Breuning; Karen Hiltscher wouldn’t play pratgirl for him anymore; if Niles could prove he B&E’d 2307, he’d be in real trouble.

Two more shots; warm wisps edging out the gloom. He had a friend with rank and juice – if he could make up for blowing his decoy job, he could still ride Considine's coattails. A last shot; HIM again, HIM pure and abstract, like there was never a time when he didn't exist, even though they'd been together only a few weeks. He thought of HIM free of Reynolds Loftis and last night with Claire, taking it back chronologically, stopping at Augie Duarte dead on a stainless steel slab.

The facial cuts. Jump forward to last night's file work. His instinct: the killer knew Marty Goines' pal – the youth with the bandaged face – and drew sexual inspiration from him. Jump to Thomas Cormier, whose wolverines were overfed – worshiped? – during the summer of '42, Sleepy Lagoon summer, when zoot sticks were most in use. Cormier's interpretation: a neighborhood kid. Jump to Joredco. They hired youths, maybe youths out of skid row day labor, where they didn't keep records. The burn boy was white; all the high school referrals were Mex and Jap, except for the non-play retard. Maybe the workers he talked to never met the kid because he only worked there briefly, maybe they forgot about him, maybe they just didn't notice him. Jump forward to now. The burned-face boy was a burglar – Listerine Chester Brown tagged him as burglarizing with Goines circa '43 to '44, his face bandaged. If he was the one who stole Thomas Cormier's wolverine some eighteen months after his summer of '42 worship, and he was a local kid, he might have committed other burglaries in the Bunker Hill area during that time period.

Danny drove to Rampart Station, the LAPD division that handled Bunker Hill felonies. Mal Considine's name got him the squad lieutenant's attention; a few minutes later he was in a musty storeroom checking boxes of discarded occurrence reports.

The boxes were marked according to year; Danny found two grocery cartons stenciled '1942'. The reports inside were loose, the multi-page jobs stapled together with no carbons in between. There was no rhyme or reason to the order they were filed in – purse snatchings, muggings, petty thefts, burglaries, indecent exposures and loiterings were all lumped together. Danny sat down on a box of '48 reports and dug in.

He scanned upper right corners for penal code numbers – Burglary, 459.1. The two boxes for '42 yielded thirty-one; location was his next breakdown step. He carried the reports into the squadroom, sat at an empty desk facing a wall map of Rampart Division and looked for Bunker Hill street names to match. Four reports in, he got one; six reports in, three more. He memorized the ten north-south and eight east-west blocks of the Hill, tore through the rest of the pages and ended with eleven burglaries, unsolved occurrences, on Bunker Hill in the year 1942. And the eleven addresses were all within walking distance of Thomas Cormier's house and the Joredco Dental Lab.

Next was dates.

Danny flipped through the reports again quickly; the time and date of occurrence were typed at the bottom of each first page. May 16, 1942; July 1, 1942; May 27, 1942; May 9, 1942; June 16, 1942, and six more to make eleven: an unsolved burglary spree, May 9 to August 1, 1942. His head buzzing, he read 'Items Stolen' – and saw why Rampart didn't put out beaucoup men to catch the burglar:

Trinkets, family portraits, costume jewelry, cash out of purses and wallets. A deco wall clock. A cedar cigar humidor. A collection of glass figurines. A stuffed ring-neck pheasant, a stuffed bobcat mounted on rosewood.

More HIM, more not Loftis HIM. It had to be.

Danny tingled, like he was being dangled on electric strings. He went back to the storeroom, found the '43 and '44 boxes, looked through them and got zero Bunker Hill trinket jobs – the only burglary occurrence reports for those years denoted *real* 459.1's, real valuables taken; burglary reports resulting in arrest had already been checked City- and Countywide. Danny finished and kicked at the boxes; two facts kicked him.

The killer was ID'd as middle-aged; he had to be connected to the wolverine-worshiping burglar – a youth – who was emerging from today's work. Chester Brown told him that Marty Goines and his burned-face accomplice B&E'd in the San Fernando Valley '43 to '44; station houses out there might have occurrence reports – he could roll there after he muscled a certain Commie stagehand. And summer '42 was the height of the wartime blackout, curfew was rigidly enforced and field interrogation cards were written up on people caught out after 10:00 P.M. – when the wolverine lover was most likely prowling. If the cards were saved –

Danny tore the storeroom apart, throwing empty boxes; he sweated out his booze lunch, got sprayed with cobwebs, mildew and mouse turds. he found a box marked 'FI's '41–'43,' thumbed back the first few cards and saw that they were – amazingly – in chronological order. He kept flipping; the late spring and summer of '42 yielded eight names: eight white men aged nineteen to forty-seven stopped for being out after curfew, questioned and released.

The cards were filled out slapdash: all had the name, race and date of birth of the interrogee; only half had home addresses listed – in most cases downtown hotels. Five of the men would now be middle-aged and possibles for HIM; the other three were youths who could be the burned-face boy pre-burns – or – if *he* was tangential to the case – Thomas Cormier's neighborhood kid wolverine lover.

Danny pocketed the cards, drove to a pay phone and called Jack Shortell at the Hollywood squadroom. The squad lieutenant put the call through; Shortell came on the line sounding harried. 'Yeah? Danny?'

'It's me. What's wrong?'

'Nothing, except I'm getting the fisheye from every City bull in the place, like all of a sudden I'm *worse* than worse than poison. What have you got?'

'Names, maybe a hot one right in the middle. I talked to that Cormier guy and hit Joredco, and I couldn't put them straight together, but I'm damn sure our guy got kissing close to Cormier's wolverines. You remember that old burglary accomplice of Marty Goines I told you about?'

'Yeah.'

'I think I've got a line on him, and I just about think he plays. There was a bunch of unsolved burglaries on Bunker Hill, May to August of '42. Mickey Mouse stuff clouted, right near Cormier and Joredco. LAPD was enforcing curfew then, and I picked out eight possible FI cards from the area – May through August. I've got a hunch the killings stem from then – the Sleepy Lagoon killing and the SLDC time – and I need you to do eliminations – current address, blood type, dental tech background, criminal record and the rest.'

'Go, I'm writing it down.'

Danny got out his cards. 'Some have addresses, some don't. One, James George Whitacre, DOB 10/5/03, Havana Hotel, Ninth and Olive. Two, Ronald NMI Dennison, 6/30/20, no address. Three, Coleman Masskie, 5/9/23, 236 South Beaudry. Four, Lawrence Thomas Waznicki with a K-I, 11/29/08, 641 1/4 Bunker Hill Avenue. Five, Leland NMI Hardell, 6/4/24, American Eagle Hotel, 4th and Hill Streets. Six, Loren Harold Nadick, 3/2/02, no address. Seven, David NMI Villers, 1/15/04, no address. And Bruno Andrew Gaffney, 7/29/06, no address.'

Shortell said, 'All down. Son, are you getting close?'

Another electric jolt: the Bunker Hill burglaries ended on August 1, 1942; the Sleepy Lagoon murder – *the victim's clothes zoot stick slashed* – occurred on August 2. 'Almost, Jack. Some right answers and luck and that fucker is mine.'

Danny got to Variety International Pictures just as dusk was falling and the picket lines were breaking up for the day. He parked in plain view, put an 'Official Police Vehicle' sign on his windshield and pinned his badge to his coat front; he walked to the guard hut, no familiar faces, pissed that he was ignored. The gate man buzzed him in; he walked straight back to Set 23.

The sign on the wall had *Tomahawk Massacre* still in production; the door was open. Danny heard gunfire, looked in and saw a cowboy and an Indian exchange shots across papier-mâché foothills. Lights were shining down on them; cameras were rolling; the Mexican guy he'd seen outside the morgue was sweeping up fake snow in front of another backdrop: grazing buffalos painted on cardboard.

Danny hugged the wall going over; the Mex looked up, dropped his broom and took off running, right in front of the cameras. Danny ran after him, sliding on soap flakes; the moviemaking stopped; someone yelled, 'Juan, goddamn you! Cut! Cut!'

Juan ran out a side exit, slamming the door; Danny ran across the set, slowed and eased the door open. It was slammed against him, reinforced steel knocking him back; he slid on phony snow, hauled outside and saw Duarte racing down an alley toward a chain-link fence.

Danny ran full out; Juan Duarte hit the fence and started climbing. He snagged his trouser legs; he kicked, pulled and twisted to get free. Danny caught up, yanked him down by his waistband and caught a hard right hand in the face. Stunned, he let go; Duarte collapsed on top of him.

Danny kneed upward, a jerky shot; Duarte hit down, missing, smashing his fist on the pavement. Danny rolled away, came up behind him and pinned him with his weight; the Mex gasped, 'Puto fascist shitfuck fascist cop fascist shitfuck.' Danny fumbled out his cuffs, ratcheted Duarte's left hand and attached the spare bracelet to a fence link. The Mex flopped on his stomach and tried to tear the fence down, spitting epithets in Spanish; Danny got his breath, let Duarte shake and shout himself out, then knelt beside him. 'I know you saw my picture, and you saw me at the morgue and you snitched me to Claire. I don't care and I give a fuck about UAES and the fucking Red Menace. I want to get Augie's killer and I've got a hunch it goes back to Sleepy Lagoon. Now you can talk to me, or I'll nail you for Assault on a Police Officer right here. Call it now.'

Duarte shook his cuff chain; Danny said, 'Two to five minimum, and I don't give a shit about the UAES.' A crowd was forming in the alley; Danny waved them back; they retreated with sidelong looks and slow head shakes. Duarte said, 'Take these things off me and *maybe* I'll talk to you.'

Danny unlocked the cuffs. Duarte rubbed his wrist, stood up, got rubber-legged and slid down to a sitting position, his back against the fence. He said, 'Why's a hired gun for the studios give a damn about my dead fag cousin?'

Danny said, 'Get up, Duarte.'

'I talk better on my ass. Answer me. How come you care about a maricón who wanted to be a puto movie star like every other puto in this puto town?'

'I don't know. But I want the guy who killed Augie nailed.'

'And what's that got to do with you trying to get next to Claire De Haven?'

'I told you I don't care about that.'

'Norm Kostenz said you sure care. When I told him you were the fucking law, he said you should get a fucking Oscar for your bonaroo portrayal of Ted Krug –'

Danny squatted by Duarte, holding the fence. 'Are you going to spill or not?'

Duarte said, 'I'll spill, pendejo. You said you thought Augie's snuff went back to Sleepy Lagoon, and that got my interest. Charlie Hartshorn thought that too, so –'

Danny's hand shook the fence; he braced his whole body into it to stay steady. 'What did you say?'

'I said Charlie Hartshorn thought the same thing maybe, so maybe talking to a puto cop ain't all poison.'

Danny slid down the fence so he could eyeball Duarte close. 'Tell me all of it, slow and easy. You know Hartshorn killed himself, don't you?'

Duarte said, 'Maybe he did. You tell me.'

'No. You tell me, because I don't know and I've got to know.'

Duarte stared at Danny, squinty-eyed, like he couldn't figure him out. 'Charlie was a lawyer. He was a maricón, but he wasn't a swish or nothing. He worked Sleepy Lagoon, filing briefs and shit for free.'

'I know that.'

'Okay, here's what you don't know, and here's the kind of guy he was. When you saw me at the morgue it was my second time there. I got a call from a buddy who works there, maybe one in the morning, and he told me about Augie – the zoot cuts, all of it. I went to Charlie's house. He had legal juice, and I wanted to see if he'd goose the cops so they'd give Augie's snuff a good investigation. He told me he'd been goosed by some cop about the death of a guy named Duane Lindenaur, even though the cop pretended he didn't care about that. Charlie read this scandal rag that said Lindenaur and some clown named Wiltsie got cut up by a zoot stick, and my morgue buddy said Augie got chopped like that, too. I told Charlie, and he got the idea all three snuffs went back to Sleepy Lagoon. He called the cops and spoke to some guy named Sergeant Bruner or something –'

Danny cut in. 'Breuning? Sergeant Mike Breuning?'

'Yeah, that's him. Charlie told Breuning what I just told you and Breuning said he'd come to see him at his crib right away to talk to him about it. I took off then. So if Charlie thought there was something to this Sleepy Lagoon theory, maybe you ain't such a cabrón.'

Danny's brain stoked on overdrive:

Breuning's curiosity on the zoot stick queries, his making light of them. His strange reaction to the four surveillance names – Augie Duarte singled out – because he was Mex, a KA of a Sleepy Lagoon Committee member? Mal telling him that Dudley Smith asked to join the grand jury team, even though, as an LAPD Homicide lieutenant, there was no logical reason for him to work the job. Mal's story: *Dudley brutally interrogating Duarte/Sammy Benavides/Mondo Lopez, stressing the Sleepy Lagoon case and the guilt of the seventeen youths originally charged with the crime – even though the questioning tack was not germane to UAES.*

Hartshorn mentioning 'zoot stick' on the phone to Breuning.

Jack Shortell's oral report: Dudley Smith and Breuning were seen hobnobbing at Wilshire Station the night before last – the night Hartshorn killed himself. Did they make a quick run to Hartshorn's house – a scant mile from the station – kill him and return to the Wilshire squadroom, hoping that no one saw them leave and return – a perfect cop alibi?

And why?

Juan Duarte was looking at him like he was from outer space; Danny got his brain simmered down to where he could talk. 'Think fast on this. Jazz musicians, burglary, wolverines, heroin, queer escort services.'

Duarte slid a few feet away. 'I think they all stink. Why?'

'A kid who worships wolverines.'

Duarte put a finger to his head and twirled it. 'Loco mierda. A wolverine's a fucking rat, right?'

Danny saw Juno's claws lashing out. 'Try this, Duarte. Sleepy Lagoon, the Defense Committee, '42 to '44 and Reynolds Loftis. Think slow, go slow.'

Duarte said, 'Easy. Reynolds and his kid brother.'

Danny started to say, 'What?', stopped and thought. He'd read the entire grand jury package twice on arrival and twice last night; he'd read the psychiatric files twice before Considine took them back. In all the paperwork there was no mention of Loftis having a brother. But there was a gap – '42 to '44 – in Loftis' shrink file. 'Tell me about the kid brother, Duarte. Nice and slow.'

Duarte spoke rapidamente. 'He was a punk, a lame-o. Reynolds started bringing him around around the time the SLDC was hot. I forget the kid's name, but he was a kid, eighteen, nineteen, in there. He had his face bandaged up. He was in a fire and he got burned bad. When he got his burns healed up and the bandages and gauze and shit came off, all the girls in the Committee thought he was real cute. He looked just like Reynolds, but even handsomer.'

The new facts coming together went tap, tap, tap, knocks on a door that was still a long way from opening. A Loftis burn-faced brother put the actor back in contention for HIM, but contradicted his instinct that the killer drew sex inspiration from the youth's disfigurement; it played into Wolverine Prowler and Burn Face as one man and tapped the possibility that he was a killing accomplice – one way to explain the new welter of age contradictions. Danny said, 'Tell me about the kid. Why did you call him a punk?'

Duarte said, 'He was always sucking up to the Mexican guys. He told this fish story about how a big white man killed José Diaz, like we were supposed to like him because he said the killer wasn't Mexican. Everybody knew the killer was Mexican – the cops just railroaded the wrong Mexicans. He told this crazy story about seeing the killing, but he didn't have no real details, and when guys pressed him, he clammed up. The SLDC got some anonymous letters saying a white guy did it, and you could tell the kid brother sent them – it was crazy-man stuff. The kid said he was running from the killer, and once I said, "Pendejo, if the killer's looking for you, what the fuck you doing coming to these rallies where he could grab your crazy ass?" The kid said he had special protection, but wouldn't tell me no more. Like I said, he was a lame-o. If he wasn't Reynolds' brother, nobody woulda tolerated him at all.'

Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap. Danny said, 'What happened to him?'

Duarte shrugged. 'I don't know. I haven't see him since the SLDC, and I don't think nobody else has either. Reynolds don't talk about him. It's strange. I don't think I've heard Chaz or Claire or Reynolds talk about him in years.'

'What about Benavides and Lopez? Where are they now?'

'On location with some other puto cowboy turkey. You think this stuff about Reynolds' brother has got something to do with Augie?'

Danny brainstormed off the question. Reynolds Loftis' brother was the burn-faced burglar boy, Marty Goines' burglar accomplice, very possibly the Bunker Hill prowler/wolverine lover. The Bunker Hill B&Es stopped August 1, 1942; the next night, José Diaz was killed at the Sleepy Lagoon, three miles or so southeast of the Hill. The kid brother alleged that he witnessed a 'big white man' killing José Diaz.

Tap, tap, tap. Jump, jump, jump.

Dudley Smith was a big white man with a bone-deep cruel streak. He joined the grand jury team out of a desire to keep incriminating Sleepy Lagoon testimony kiboshed, thinking that with access to witnesses and case paperwork, he could get the jump on damaging evidence about to come out. Hartshorn's zoot stick call to Mike Breuning scared him; he and Breuning or one of them alone drove over from Wilshire Station to talk to the man: Hartshorn got suspicious. Either premeditatedly or on the spur of the moment, Smith and/or Breuning killed him, faking a suicide. Tap, tap, tap – thunder loud – with the door still closed on the most important question: *How did Smith killing José Diaz, his attempts to keep possible evidence quashed and his killing Charles Hartshorn connect to the Goines/Wiltsie/Lindenaur/Duarte murders? And why did Smith kill Diaz?*

Danny looked around at set doors spilling glimpses: the wild west, jungle swampland, trees in a forest. He said, 'Vaya con Dios,' left Duarte sitting there and drove home to hit the grand jury file, thinking he'd finally made detective in the eyes of Maslick and Vollmer. He walked in his building, light as air; he pushed the elevator button and heard footsteps behind him. Turning, he saw two big men with guns drawn. He reached for his own gun, but a big fist holding a set of big brass knucks hit him first.

He came awake handcuffed to a chair. His head was woozy, his wrists were numb and his tongue felt huge. His eyes homed in on an interrogation cubicle, three fuzzy men seated around a table, a big black revolver lying square in the middle. A voice said, '.38's are standard issue for your Department, Upshaw. Why do you carry a .45?'

Danny blinked and coughed up a bloody lunger; he blinked again and recognized the voice man: Thad Green, LAPD Chief of Detectives. The two men flanking Green fell into focus; they were the biggest plainclothes cops he'd ever seen.

'I asked you a question, Deputy.'

Danny tried to remember the last time he had a drink, came up with Chinatown and knew he couldn't have gone crazy while fried on bonded. He coughed dry and said, 'I sold it when I made detective.'

Green lit a cigarette. 'That's an interdepartmental offense. Do you consider yourself above the law?'

'No!'

'Your friend Karen Hiltscher says otherwise. She says you've manipulated her for special favors ever since you made detective. She told Sergeant Eugene Niles you broke into 2307 Tamarind and knew that two murder victims had recently been killed there. She told Sergeant Niles that your story about a girlfriend near the doughnut stand on Franklin and Western is a lie, that she phoned you the information off the City air. Niles was going to inform on you, Deputy. Did you know that?'

Danny's head woozed. He swallowed blood; he recognized the man to Green's left as the knuck wielder. 'Yeah. Yes, I knew.'

Green said, 'Who'd you sell your .38 to?'

'A guy in a bar.'

'That's a misdemeanor, Deputy. A criminal charge. You really don't care much for the law, do you?'

'Yes, yes, I care! I'm a policeman! Goddamn it, what is this!'

The knuck man said, 'You were seen arguing with a known homo procurer named Felix Gordean. Are you on his payroll?'

'No!'

'Mickey Cohen's payroll?'

'No!'

Green took over. 'You were given command of a Homicide team, a carrot for your grand jury work. Sergeant Niles and Sergeant Mike Breuning found it very strange that a smart young officer would be so concerned about a string of queer slashes. Would you like to tell us why?'

'No! What the fuck is this! I B&E'd Tamarind! What do you fucking want from me!'

The third cop, a huge bodybuilder type, said, 'Why did you and Niles trade blows?'

'He was ditzing me with Tamarind Street, threatening to rat me.'

'So that made you mad?'

'Yes.'

'Fighting mad?'

'Yes!'

Green said, 'We heard a different version, Deputy. We heard Niles called you a queer.'

Danny froze, reached for a comeback and kept freezing. He thought of ratting Dudley and kiboshed it – they'd never believe him – *yet.* 'If Niles said that, I didn't hear it.'

The knuck cop laughed. 'Strike a nerve, Sonny?'

'Fuck you!'

The weightlifter cop backhanded him; Danny spat in his face. Green yelled, 'No!'

The knuck man put his arms around weightlifter and held him back; Green chained another cigarette, butt to tip. Danny gasped, '*Tell me what this is all about.*'

Green waved the strongarms to the back of the cubicle, dragged on his smoke and stubbed it out. 'Where were you night before last between 2:00 and 7:00 A.M.?'

'I was at home in bed. Asleep.'

'Alone, Deputy?'

'Yes.'

'Deputy, during that time Sergeant Gene Niles was shot and killed, then buried in the Hollywood Hills. Did you do it?'

'No!'

'Tell us who did.'

'Jack! Mickey! Niles was fucking rogue!'

The knuck cop stepped forward; the weightlifter cop grabbed him, mumbling, 'Spit on my Hathaway shirt you queer-loving hump. Gene Niles was my pal, my good buddy from the army, you queer lover.'

Danny dug his feet in and pushed his chair against the wall. 'Gene Niles was an incompetent bagman son of a bitch.'

Weightlifter charged, straight for Danny's throat. The cubicle door opened and Mal Considine rushed in; Thad Green shouted commands impossible to hear. Danny brought his knees up, toppling the chair; the monster cop's hands closed on air. Mal crashed into him, winging rabbit punches; the knuck cop pulled him off and wrestled him out to the corridor. Shouts of 'Danny!' echoed; Green stationed himself between the chair and the monster, going, 'No, Harry, no,' like he was reprimanding an unruly monster dog. Danny ate linoleum and cigarette butts, heard, 'Get Considine to a holding tank', was lifted, chair and all, to an upright position. The knuck man went behind him and unlocked his cuffs; Thad Green reached for his .45 on the table.

Danny stood up, swaying; Green handed him his gun. 'I don't know if you did it or not, but there's one way to find out. Report back here to City Hall, room 1003, tomorrow at noon. You'll be given a polygraph test and sodium pentothal, and you'll be asked extensive questions about these homicides you're working and your relationships with Felix Gordean and Gene Niles. Good night, Deputy.'

Danny weaved to the elevator, rode to the ground floor and walked outside, his legs slowly coming back. He cut across the lawn toward the

Temple Street cabstand, stopping for a soft voice.

'Lad.'

Danny froze; Dudley Smith stepped out of a shadow. He said, 'It's a grand night, is it not?'

Small talk with a murderer. Danny said, 'You killed José Diaz. You and Breuning killed Charles Hartshorn. And I'm going to prove it.'

Dudley Smith smiled. 'I never doubted your intelligence, lad. Your courage, yes. Your intelligence, never. And I'll admit I underestimated your persistence. I'm only human, you know.'

'Oh, no you're not.'

'I'm skin and bone, lad. Eros and dust like all us frail mortals. Like you, lad. Crawling in sewers for answers you'd be better off without.'

'You're finished.'

'No, lad. You are. I've been talking to my old friend Felix Gordean, and he painted me a vivid picture of your emergence. Lad, next to myself Felix has the finest eye for weakness I've ever encountered. He knows, and when you take that lie detector test tomorrow, the whole world will know.'

Danny said, 'No.'

Dudley Smith said, 'Yes,' kissed him full on the lips and walked away whistling a love song.

Machines that know.

Drugs that don't let you lie.

Danny took a cab home. He unlocked the door and went straight for his files: facts you could put together for the truth, Dudley and Breuning and HIM nailed by 11:59, a last-minute reprieve like in the movies. He hit the hall light, opened the closet door. No file boxes, the rugs that covered them neatly folded on the floor.

Danny tore up the hall carpet and looked under it, dumped the bedroom cabinet and emptied the drawers, stripped the bed and yanked the medicine chest off the bathroom wall. He upended the living room furniture, looked under the cushions and tossed the kitchen drawers until the floor was all cutlery and broken dishes. He saw a half-full bottle by the radio, opened it, found his throat muscles too constricted and hurled it, knocking down the venetian blinds. He walked to the window, looked out and saw Dudley Smith haloed by a streetlight.

And he knew he knew. And tomorrow they would all know.

Blackmail bait.

His name in sex files.

His name bandied in queer chitchat at the Chateau Marmont.

Machines that know.

Drugs that don't let you lie.

Polygraph needles fluttering off the paper every time they asked him why he cared so much about a string of queer fag homo fruit snuffs.

No reprieve.

Danny unholstered his gun and stuck the barrel in his mouth. The taste of oil made him gag and he saw how it would look, the cops who found him making jokes about why he did it that way. He put the .45 down and walked to the kitchen.

Weapons galore.

Danny picked up a serrated-edged carving knife. He tested the heft, found it substantial and said goodbye to Mal and Jack and Doc. He apologized for the cars he stole and the guys he beat up who didn't deserve it, who were just there when he wanted to hit something. He thought of his killer, thought that he murdered because someone made him what he himself was. He held the knife up and forgave him; he put the blade to his throat and slashed himself ear to ear, down to the windpipe in one clean stroke.

3
Wolverine

THIRTY-TWO

A week later Buzz went by the grave, his fourth visit since LASD hustled the kid into the ground. The plot was a low-rent number in an East LA cemetery; the stone read:

Daniel Thomas Upshaw
1922–1950

No beloved whatever of.

No son of whoever.

No crucifix cut into the tablet and no RIP. Nothing juicy to catch a passerby's interest, like 'Cop Killer' or 'Almost DA's Bureau Brass.' Nothing to spell it out true to whoever read the half-column hush job on the kid's accidental death – a slip off a chair, a nose dive onto a kitchen cutlery rack.

Fall Guy.

Buzz bent down and pulled out a clump of crabgrass; the butt of the gun he'd killed Gene Niles with dug into his side. He stood up and kicked the marker; he thought that 'Free Ride' and 'Gravy Train' and 'Dumb Okie Luck' might look good too, followed by a soliloquy on Deputy Danny Upshaw's last days, lots of details on a tombstone skyscraper high, like the ones voodoo nigger pimps bought for themselves. Because Deputy Danny Upshaw was voodooing him, little pins stuck in a fat little Buzz Meeks voodoo doll.

Mal had called him with the word. The rain dug up Niles' body, LAPD grabbed Danny as a suspect, rough-housed him and cut him loose with orders to report for a lie detector test and sodium pentothal questioning the next day. When the kid didn't show, City bulls hit his pad in force and found him dead on the living room floor, throat slashed, the pad trashed. Nort Layman, distraught, did the autopsy, dying to call it a 187; the evidence wouldn't let him: fingerprints on the knife and the angle of the cut and fall said 'self-inflicted,' case closed. Doc called the death wound 'amazing' – no hesitation marks, Danny Upshaw wanted out bad and now.

LASD double-timed the kid graveside; four people attended the funeral: Layman, Mal, a County cop named Jack Shortell and himself. The homo investigation was immediately disbanded and Shortell took off for a vacation in the Montana boonies; LAPD closed the book on Gene Niles, Upshaw's suicide their confession and trip to the gas chamber. City-County police relations were all-time bad – and he skated, thin-icing it, trying to fix an angle to save both their asses, no luck, too late to do the kid any good.

Free Ride.

What kept nagging at him was that he fixed Audrey's skim spree first. Petey Skouras paid Mickey back the dough the lioness bilked; Mickey was generous and let him off with a beating: Johnny Stomp and a little blackjack work on the kidneys. Petey took off for Frisco then – even though the Mick, impressed with his repentance, would have kept him on the payroll. Petey had played into his fix by skedaddling; Mickey, Mr. Effusiveness, had upped his payoff on the dope summit guard gig to a grand, telling him the charming Lieutenant Dudley Smith would also be standing trigger. More cash in his pocket – while Danny Upshaw climbed the gallows.

Dumb Okie Luck.

Mal took it hard, going on a two-day drunk, sobering up with a direct frontal attack on the Red Menace. A strong-armed lefty told Dudley Smith that Claire De Haven made 'Ted Krugman' as a cop; Mal was enraged, but the consensus of the team was that they now had enough snitch testimony to take UAES down without Upshaw's covert dirt. Docket time was being set up; if all went well, the grand jury would convene in two weeks. Mal had gone off the deep end, crucifying Reds to perk his juice for *his* court battle. He'd turned Nathan Eisler's diary upside down for names, turning out snitches from four of the men Claire De Haven serviced to start her union. His flop at the Shangri-Lodge Motel now looked like Ellis Loew's living room: graphs, charts and cross-referenced hearsay, Mal's ode to Danny Upshaw, all of it proving one thing: that Commies were long on talk. And when the grand jury heard that talk, they probably wouldn't have the brains to think it out one step further: that the sad, deluded fuckers talked because they didn't have the balls to do anything else.

Buzz kicked the gravestone again; he thought that Captain Mal Considine almost had himself convinced that UAES was a hot damn threat to America's internal security – that he had to believe it so he could keep his son and still call himself a good guy. Odds on the Hollywood Commies subverting the country with their cornball propaganda turkeys, rallies and picket line highjinks: thirty trillion to one against, a longshot from Mars. The entire deal was a duck shoot, a play to save the studios money and make Ellis Loew District Attorney and Governor of California.

Bagman.

Fixer.

He'd been skating since the moment Mal called him with the news. Ellis told him to run background checks on the names in Eisler's diary; he called R&I, got their dope and let it go at that. Mal told him to conduct phone interviews with HUAC snitches back east; he gave a third of the numbers cursory calls, asked half the questions he was supposed to and edited the answers down to two pages per man, easy stuff for his secretary to type up. His big job was to locate Dr. Saul Lesnick, the grand jury's boss fink; he'd skated entirely on that gig – and kept skating in general. And always in the same direction – toward Danny Upshaw.

When he knew the hush was in, he drove up to San Bernardino for a look-see at the kid's past. He talked to his widowed mother, a faded ginch living on Social Security; she told him she didn't attend the funeral because Danny had been curt with her on his last several visits and she disapproved of his drinking. He got her talking; she painted a picture of Danny the child as smart and cold, a youngster who read, studied and kept to himself. When his father died, he expressed no grief; he liked cars and fix-it things and science books; he never chased girls and always kept his room spotless. Since he became a policeman, he visited her only on Christmas and her birthday, never more, never less. He got straight B's in high school and straight A's in junior college. He ignored the floozies who chased after him; he tinkered with hot rods. He had one close friend: a boy named Tim Bergstrom, now a phys. ed. teacher at San Berdoo High.

Buzz drove to the school and badged Bergstrom. The man had seen the newspaper plant on Upshaw's Death, said Danny was born to die young and elaborated over beers in a nearby bar. He said that Danny liked to figure things like motors and engines and arithmetic out, that he stole cars because he loved the danger, that he was always trying to prove himself, but kept quiet about it. You could tell he was crazy inside, but you couldn't figure out how or why; you could tell he was really smart, but you didn't know what he'd end up doing with his brains. Girls liked him because he was mysterious and played hard to get; he was a terrific street fighter. Years ago, drunk, Danny told him a story about witnessing a murder; that was when he got hipped on being a cop, hipped on scientific forensic stuff. He was a cold drunk: booze just made him more inside, more mysterious and persistent, and sooner or later you knew he'd persist with the wrong guy and get himself shot – what surprised him was that Danny died accidentally. Buzz let that one go and said, 'Was Danny a queer?' Bergstrom flushed, twitched, sputtered into his beer and said, 'Hell, no' – and two seconds later was whipping out pictures of his wife and kids.

Buzz drove back to LA, called a County pal, learned that Danny Upshaw's personnel file had been yanked and that for all intents and purposes the kid was never a member of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. He took a trip by the West Hollywood Substation, talked to the guys on the squad, learned that Danny never accepted bribes or trade pussy; he never moved on his snitch Janice Modine or on switchboard Karen Hiltscher – both of whom were dying to give it to him. Upshaw's fellow deputies either respected his brains or wrote him off as an idealistic fool with a mean streak; Captain Al Dietrich was rumored to like him because he was methodical, hard-working and ambitious. Buzz thought of him as a kid graduating from machines to people at the wrong time, fishing for WHY? in a river of shit, getting the worst answer two bad cases had to give and ending up dead because he couldn't lie to himself.

Daniel Thomas Upshaw, 1922–1950. Queer.

Turner Prescott Meeks, 1906–? Free ride because the kid couldn't take it.

'It' couldn't be anything else. Danny Upshaw didn't kill Gene Niles. Mal said Thad Green and two hardnoses roughed him up; they probably recounted Niles calling him a queer and went over what Dudley Smith told Mal and Green: that Danny was seen shaking down Felix Gordean. With a poly test and silly syrup pending, Green let the kid go home with his gun, hoping he'd spare LAPD the grief of a trial and Niles as a Dragna bagman coming out. Danny had obliged – but for the wrong reason and not with his gun.

Scapegoat.

Who got some kind of last laugh.

He couldn't sleep for shit; when he did put three or four hours together he dreamed of all the crappy stunts he'd pulled: farm girls coerced into Howard's bed; heroin boot-jacked and sold to Mickey, cash in his pocket, the junk sidetracked on its way to some hophead's arm. Sleeping with Audrey was the only cure – she'd played her string since Niles like a trouper – and touching her and keeping her safe kept the kid away. But their four nights in a row at Howard's place was dangerous too, and every time he left her he got scared and knew he had to do something about it.

Keeping his take on Danny away from Mal was one way. The cop couldn't believe the kid killed Niles, and he was pretty shrewd in tagging Cohen gunmen for the job – he'd watched Danny question a Dragna hump named Vinnie Scoppettone, who spilled on the shooting at Sherry's: LAPD shooters. But that was as far as his reconstruction went, and he still idealized Upshaw as a smart young cop headed for rank and glory. Keeping the kid's secret was the beginning.

Buzz cocked a finger at the gravestone and made up his mind around two facts. One, when LAPD crashed Upshaw's pad, they found it thoroughly trashed; Nort Layman did a forensic, came up with Danny's prints on a shitload of tossed furniture and pegged him going crazy in the last moments of his life. LAPD's property report – the contents of the apartment inventoried – carried no mention of the grand jury paperwork or the personal file Danny kept on his homicides. He broke into the place and tossed it extra good; no files were secreted anywhere inside the four rooms. Mal was there when the body was discovered; he said LAPD sealed the crib tight, with only Danny and the knife leaving the premises. Two, the night before he died, Danny called him: he was amazed that his two cases had crossed at the juncture of Charles Hartshorn and Reynolds Loftis.

'Deputy, are you tellin' me Loftis is a suspect for your killin's?'

'I'm telling you maybe. Maybe real strong. He fits the killer's description . . . and he fits.'

No way was Danny Upshaw a murder victim. No way did the file thief wreck his apartment. Dudley Smith had a strange fix on the kid, but there was no reason for him to steal the files, and if he did he would have faked a burglary.

Person or persons unknown – a good starting point for some payback.

Buzz found Mal in Ellis Loew's back yard, sitting on a sunbleached sofa, going over papers. He looked skinny beyond skinny, like he was starving himself to make the bantamweight limit. 'Hey, boss.'

Mal nodded and kept working. Buzz said, 'I want to talk to you.'

'About what?'

'Not some Commie plot, that's for damn sure.'

Mal connected a series of names with pencil lines. 'I know you don't take this seriously, but it is serious.'

'It's a serious piece of gravy, I'll give you that. And I sure want my share. It's just that I've got some other boogeymen on my mind right now.'

'Like who?'

'Like Upshaw.'

Mal put his paper and pencil down. 'He's LAPD's boogeyman, not yours.'

'I'm pretty sure he didn't kill Niles, boss.'

'We've been over that, Buzz. It was Mickey or Jack, and we'd never be able to prove it in a million years.'

Buzz sat down on the couch – it stank of mildew and some Red chaser had burned the arms with cigarette butts. 'Mal, you remember Upshaw tellin' us about his file on the queer snuffs?'

'Sure.'

'It was stolen from his apartment, and so was his copy of the grand jury package.'

'What?'

'I'm certain about it. You said LAPD sealed the pad and didn't take nothin', and I checked Upshaw's desk at West Hollywood Station. Lots of old paperwork, but zilch on the 187's and the grand jury. You been so absorbed chasin' pinkers you probably didn't even think about it.'

Mal tapped Buzz with his pencil. 'You're right, I didn't, and where are you fishing? The kid's dead and buried, he was in trouble over that B&E he pulled, he was probably finished as a cop. He could have been the best, and I miss him. But he dug his own grave.'

Buzz clamped down on Mal's hand. 'Boss, *we* dug his grave. You pushed him too hard on De Haven, and I . . . oh fuck it.'

Mal pulled his hand free. 'You what?'

'The kid had a fix on Reynolds Loftis. We talked on the phone the night before he died. He'd read about Charles Hartshorn's suicide, the paper made him as a Sleepy Lagoon lawyer and Upshaw had him as a lead on his homicides – Hartshorn was blackmailed by one of the victims. I told him Loftis was rousted with Hartshorn at a queer bar back in '44, and the kid went nuts. He didn't know Hartshorn was involved with Sleepy Lagoon, and that sure did seem to set him off. I asked him if Loftis was a suspect, and he said, “Maybe real strong”.’

Mal said, ‘Have you talked to that County man Shortell about this?’

‘No, he’s in Montana on vacation.’

‘Mike Breuning?’

‘I don’t trust that boy to answer straight. Remember how Danny told us Breuning fluffed the job and was jerkin’ his chain?’

‘Meeks, you sure took your time telling me this.’

‘I’ve been thinkin’ it over, and it took me a while to figure out what I was gonna do.’

‘Which is?’

Buzz smiled, ‘Maybe Loftis is a hot suspect, maybe he ain’t. Whatever, I’m gonna get me that queer slasher, whoever he is.’

Mal smiled. ‘And then what?’

‘Then arrest him or kill him.’

Mal said, ‘You’re out of your mind.’

Buzz said, ‘I was sorta thinkin’ about askin’ you to join me. A captain out of his mind has got more juice than a loaner cop with a few loose.’

‘I’ve got the grand jury, Meeks. And day after tomorrow’s the divorce trial.’

Buzz cracked his knuckles. ‘You in?’

‘No. It’s crazy. And I don’t feature you as the dramatic gesture type, either.’

‘I owe him. *We* owe him.’

‘No, it’s wrong.’

‘Think of the angles, skipper. Loftis as a psycho killer. You pop him for that before the grand jury convenes and UAES’ll go in the toilet so large they’ll hear it flush in Cleveland.’

Mal laughed; Buzz laughed and said, ‘We’ll give it a week or so. We’ll put together what we can get out of the grand jury file and we’ll talk to Shortell and see what he’s got. We’ll brace Loftis, and if it goes bust, it goes bust.’

‘There’s the grand jury, Meeks.’

‘A Commie like Loftis popped for four 187’s makes you so large that no judge in this state would fuck you over on your custody case. Think of that.’

Mal broke his pencil in two. ‘I need a continuance, *now*, and I won’t frame Loftis.’

‘That mean you’re in?’

‘I don’t know.’

Buzz went for the kill. ‘Well, shit there, *Captain.* I thought appealin’ to your career would get you, but I guess I was wrong. Just think about Danny Upshaw and how bad he wanted it, and how you got your rocks off sendin’ him after Claire De Haven. Think how maybe her and Loftis played with that cherry kid right before he cut his fuckin’ throat. Then you –’

Mal slapped Buzz hard in the face.

Buzz sat on his hands so he wouldn’t hit back.

Mal threw his list of names on the grass and said, ‘I’m in. But if this fucks up my grand jury shot, it’s you and me for real. For keeps.’

Buzz smiled. ‘Yessir, Captain.’

THIRTY-THREE

CLAIRE DE HAVEN said, ‘I take it this means all pretenses are off.’

A weak intro – he knew she had Upshaw made and the grand jury on track. Mal said, ‘This is about four murders.’

‘Oh?’

‘Where’s Reynolds Loftis? I want to talk to him.’

‘Reynolds is out, and I told you before that he and I will not name names.’

Mal walked into the house. He saw the front page of last Wednesday’s *Herald* on a chair; he knew Claire had seen the piece on Danny’s death, Sheriff’s Academy picture included. She closed the door – *her* no pretense – she wanted to know what *he* had. Mal said, ‘Four killings. No political stuff unless you tell me otherwise.’

Claire said, ‘I’ll tell you I don’t know what you’re talking about.’

Mal pointed to the paper. ‘What’s so interesting about last week’s news?’

‘A sad little obituary on a young man I knew.’

Mal played in. ‘What kind of young man?’

‘I think frightened, impotent and treacherous describes him best.’

The epitaph stung; Mal wondered for the ten millionth time what Danny Upshaw and Claire De Haven did to each other. ‘Four men raped and cut up. No political stuff for you to get noble about. Do you want to get down off your high Commie horse and tell me what you know about it? What Reynolds Loftis knows?’

Claire walked up to him, perfume right in his face. ‘You sent that boy to fuck information out of me and now *you* want to preach decency?’

Mal grabbed her shoulders and squeezed them; he got his night’s worth of report study straight in his head. ‘January 1, Marty Goines snatched from South Central, shot with heroin, mutilated and killed. January 4, George Wiltsie and Duane Lindenaur, secobarbital sedated, mutilated and killed. January 14, Augie Luis Duarte, the same thing. Wiltsie and Duarte were male whores, we know that certain men in your union frequent male whores and the killer’s description is a dead ringer for Loftis. Still want to play cute?’

Claire squirmed; Mal saw her as something wrong to touch and let go. She wheeled to a desk by the stairwell, grabbed a ledger and shoved it at him. ‘On January first, fourth and fourteenth, Reynolds was here in full view of myself and others. You’re insane to think he could kill anybody, and this proves it.’

Mal took the ledger, skimmed it and shoved it back to her. ‘It’s a fake. I don't know what the crossouts mean, but only your signature and Loftis' are real. The others are traced over, and the minutes are like Dick and Jane join the Party. It's a fake, and you had it out and ready. Now you explain that, or I go get a material witness warrant for Loftis.'

Claire held the ledger to herself. 'I don't believe that threat. I think this is some kind of personal vendetta with you.'

'Just answer me.'

'My answer is that your young Deputy Ted kept pressing me about what Reynolds was doing on those nights, and when I discovered that he was a policeman I thought he must have convinced himself that Reynolds did something terrible. Reynolds was here then for meetings, so I left this out for the boy to see, so he wouldn't launch some awful circumstantial pogrom.'

A perfect right answer. 'You didn't know a graphologist would eat that ledger up in court?'

'No.'

'And what did you think Danny Upshaw was trying to prove against Loftis?'

'I don't know! Some kind of treason, but not sex murders!'

Mal couldn't tell if she'd raised her voice to cover a lie. 'Why didn't you show Upshaw your real ledger? You were taking a risk that he'd spot a fake one.'

'I couldn't. A policeman would probably consider our real minutes treason.'

'Treason' was a howler; profundity from a roundheels who'd spread for anything pretty in pants. Mal laughed, caught himself and stopped; Claire said, 'Care to tell me what's so amusing?'

'Nothing.'

'You sound patronizing.'

'Let's change the subject. Danny Upshaw had a file on the murders, and it was stolen from his apartment. Do you know anything about that?'

'No. I'm not a thief. Or a comedienne.'

Getting mad shaved ten years off the woman's age. 'Then don't give yourself more credit than you're worth.'

Claire raised a hand, then held it back. 'If you don't consider my friends and me serious, then why are you trying to smear us and ruin our lives?'

Mal fizzled at a wisecrack; he said, 'I want to talk to Loftis.'

'You didn't answer my question.'

'I'm doing the asking. When's Loftis coming back?'

Claire laughed. 'Oh, mein policeman, what your face just said. You know it's a travesty, don't you? You think we're too ineffectual to be dangerous, which is just about as wrong as thinking we're traitors.'

Mal thought of Dudley Smith; he thought of the Red Queen eating Danny Upshaw alive. 'What happened with you and Ted Krugman?'

‘Get your names straight. You mean Deputy Upshaw, don’t you?’

‘*Just tell me.*’

‘I’ll tell you he was naive and eager to please and all bluff where women were concerned, and I’ll tell you you shouldn’t have sent such a frail American patriot after us. Frail and clumsy. Did he *really* fall on a cutlery rack?’

Mal swung an open hand; Claire flinched at the blow and slapped back, no tears, just smeared lipstick and a welt forming on her cheek. Mal turned and braced himself against the banister, afraid of the way he looked; Claire said, ‘You could just quit. You could denounce the wrongness of it, say we’re ineffectual and not worth the money and effort and still sound like a big tough cop.’

Mal tasted blood on his lips. ‘I want it.’

‘For what? Glory? You’re too smart for patriotism.’

Mal saw Stefan waving goodbye; Claire said, ‘For your son?’

Mal, trembling, said, ‘What did you say?’

‘We’re not the fools you think we are, recently promoted Captain. We know how to hire private detectives and they know how to check records and verify old rumors. You know, I’m impressed with the Nazi you killed and rather surprised that you can’t see the parallels between that regime and your own.’

Mal kept looking away; Claire stepped closer to him. ‘I understand what you must feel for your son. And I think we both know the fix is in.’

Mal pushed himself off the railing and looked at her. ‘Yeah. The fix is in, and this conversation didn’t happen. And I still want to talk to Reynolds Loftis. And if he killed those men, I’m taking him down.’

‘Reynolds has not killed anyone.’

‘Where is he?’

Claire said, ‘He’ll be back tonight, and you can talk to him then. He’ll convince you, and I’ll make you a deal. I know you need a continuance on your custody trial, and I have friends on the bench who can get it for you. But I don’t want Reynolds smeared to the grand jury.’

‘You can’t mean that.’

‘Don’t make a career out of underestimating me. Reynolds was hurt badly in ’47, and I don’t think he’d be able to go through it again. I’ll do everything I can to help you with your son, but I don’t want Reynolds hurt.’

‘What about you?’

‘I’ll take my knocks.’

‘It’s impossible.’

‘Reynolds has not killed anyone.’

‘Maybe that’s true, but he’s been named as a subversive too many times.’

‘Then destroy those depositions and don’t call those witnesses.’

‘You don’t understand. His name is all over our paperwork a thousand goddamn times.’

Claire held Mal's arms. 'Just tell me you'll try to keep him from being hurt too badly. Tell me yes and I'll make my calls, and you won't have to go to trial tomorrow.'

Mal saw himself doctoring transcripts, shuffling names and realigning graphs to point to other Commies, going mano a mano: his editorial skill versus Dudley Smith's memory. 'Do it. Have Loftis here at 8:00 and tell him it's going to be ugly.'

Claire took her hands away. 'It won't be any worse than your precious grand jury.'

'Don't go noble on me, because I know who you are.'

'Don't cheat me, because I'll use my friends to ruin you.'

A deal with a real red devil: the continuance buying him time to un-nail a subversive, nail a killer and nail himself as a hero. And just maybe cross Claire De Haven. 'I won't cheat you.'

'I'll have to trust you. And can I ask you something? Off the record?'

'What?'

'Your opinion of this grand jury.'

Mal said, 'It's a goddamn waste and a goddamn shame.'

THIRTY-FOUR

MICKEY COHEN WAS pitching a tantrum; Johnny Stompanato was fueling it; Buzz was watching – scared shitless.

They were at the Mick's hideaway, surrounded by muscle. After the bomb under the house went off, Mickey sent Lavonne back east and moved into the Samo Canyon bungalow, wondering who the fuck wanted him dead. Jack D. called to say it wasn't him – Mickey believed it. Brenda Allen was still in jail, the City cops had settled into a slow burn and cop bombers played like science fiction. Mickey decided it was the Commies. Some Pinko ordnance expert got word he was fronting the Teamsters, popped his cork and planted the bomb that destroyed thirty-four of his custom suits. It was a Commie plot – it couldn't be anything else.

Buzz kept watching, waiting by the phone for a call from Mal Considine. Davey Goldman and Mo Jahelka were prowling the grounds; a bunch of goons were oiling the shotguns stashed in the fake panel between the living room and bedroom. Mickey had started squawking half an hour ago, topics ranging from Audrey not giving him any to passive resistance on the picket line and how he was going to fix the UAES's red wagon. Comedy time until Johnny Stomp showed up and started talking *his* conspiracy.

The guinea Adonis brought bad news: when Petey Skouras blew to Frisco he took a week's worth of receipts with him – Audrey told him when he picked up the Southside front's cash take. Buzz horned in on the conversation, thinking the lioness couldn't be stupid enough to try to play Petey's splitsville for a profit – Petey himself had to have done it – his bonus atop the thousand-dollar beating. Johnny's news got worse: he took a baseball bat to a guy on the welcher's list, who told him Petey was no skimmer, Petey would never protect a girlfriend's brother because Petey liked boys – young darky stuff – a habit he picked up in a U.S. army stockade in Alabama. Mickey went around the twist then, spraying spit like a rabid dog, spitting obscenities in Yiddish, making his Jew strongarms squirm. Johnny had to know that his story contradicted Buzz's story; the fact that he wouldn't give him an even eyeball clinched it. When Mickey stopped ranting and started thinking, he'd snap to that, too – then he'd start asking questions and it would be another convoluted epic to his *boyfriend's* brother, how he didn't want poor Greek Petey smeared as taking it Greek. Mickey would believe him – probably.

Buzz got out his notepad and wrote a memo to Mal and Ellis Loew – abbreviated skinny from three triggermen moonlighting as picket goons. Their consensus: UAES still biding its time, the Teamster rank and file on fire to whomp some ass, the only new wrinkle a suspicious-looking van parked on Gower, a man with a movie camera in the back. The man, a studious bird with Trotsky glasses, was seen talking to Norm Kostenz, the UAES picket boss. Conclusion: UAES wanted the Teamsters to rumble, so they could capture the asswhomping on film.

His skate work done, Buzz listened to Mickey rant and checked his real notes – the grand jury and shrink files read over and put together with a few records prowls and a brief talk with Jack Shortell's partner at the San Dimas Substation. Shortell would be returning from Montana tomorrow; he could hit him for a real rundown on Upshaw's case then. The partner said that Jack said Danny seemed to think the killings derived from the time of the Sleepy Lagoon murder and the SLDC – it was the last thing the kid talked up before LAPD grabbed him. That in mind, Buzz matched the theory to his file facts.

He got:

Danny told him Reynolds Loftis fit his killing suspect's description – and in general – 'he fits.' Charles Hartshorn, a recent suicide, was rousted with Loftis at a local fruit bar in '44.

Two identical names and an R&I and DMV check got him Augie Duarte, snuff victim number four, and his cousin, SLDC/UAES hotshot Juan Duarte, currently working at Variety International Pictures – on a set next to the room where victim number three, Duane Lindenaur, worked as a rewrite man. SLDC Lawyer Hartshorn was blackmailed by Lindenaur years ago – a check on the crime report led him to an LASD Sergeant named Skakel, who had also talked to Danny Upshaw. Skakel told him that Lindenaur met Hartshorn at a party thrown by fag impresario Felix Gordean, the man Danny said the killer had a fix on.

The first victim, Marty Goines, died of a heroin overjolt. Loftis' fiancée Claire De Haven was a skin-popper; she took Dr Terry Lux's cure three times. Terry said Loftis copped H for her.

From Mal's report on the Sammy Benavides/Mondo Lopez/Juan Duarte questioning:

Benavides shouted something about Chaz Minear, Loftis' fag squeeze, buying boys at a 'puto escort service' – Gordean's?

Also on Minear: in his psych file, Chaz justified snitching Loftis to HUAC by pointing to a third man in a love triangle – 'If you knew who he was, you'd understand why I did it.'

Two strange-o deals:

The '42 to '44 pages were missing from Loftis' psych file and Doc Lesnick couldn't be found. At the three Mexes' questioning, one of the guys muttered an aside – the SLDC got letters tapping a 'big white man' for the Sleepy Lagoon murder.

Strange-o stuff aside, all circumstantial – but too solid to be coincidence.

The phone rang, cutting through Mickey's tirade on Commies. Buzz picked it up; Johnny Stomp watched him talk.

‘Yeah. Cap, that you?’

‘It’s me, Turner, my lad.’

‘You sound happy, boss.’

‘I just got a ninety-day continuance, so I am happy. Did you do your homework?’

Stompanato was still staring. Buzz said, ‘Sure did. Circumstantial but tight. You talk to Loftis?’

‘Meet me at 463 Canon Drive in an hour. We’ve got him as a friendly witness.’

‘No shit?’

‘No shit.’

Buzz hung up. Johnny Stomp winked at him and turned back to Mickey.

THIRTY-FIVE

HEADLIGHTS BOUNCED OVER the street, caught his windshield and went off. Mal heard a car door slamming and tapped his highbeams; Buzz walked over and said, ‘You do *your* homework?’

‘Yeah. Like you said, circumstantial. But it’s there.’

‘How’d you fix this up, Cap?’

Mal held back on the De Haven deal. ‘Danny wasn’t too subtle hitting up Claire for Loftis’ whereabouts on the killing dates, so she faked a meeting diary – Loftis alibied for the three nights. She says there were meetings, and he was there, but they were planning seditious stuff – that’s why she sugar-coated the damn thing. She says Loftis is clean.’

‘You believe it?’

‘Maybe, but my gut tells me they’re connected to the whole deal. This afternoon I checked Loftis’ bank records going back to ’40. Three times in the spring and summer of ’44 he made cash withdrawals of ten grand. Last week he made another one. Interesting?’

Buzz whistled. ‘From old Reynolds’ missing-file time. It’s gotta be blackmail, there’s blackmail all over this mess. You wanna play him white hat-black hat?’

Mal got out of the car. ‘You be the bad guy. I’ll get De Haven out of the way, and we’ll work him.’

They walked up to the door and rang the bell. Claire De Haven answered; Mal said, ‘You go somewhere for a couple of hours.’

Claire looked at Buzz, lingering on his ratty sharkskin and heater. ‘You mustn’t touch him.’

Mal hooked a thumb over his back. ‘Go somewhere.’

‘No thank yous for what I did?’

Mal caught Buzz catching it. ‘Go somewhere, Claire.’

The Red Queen brushed past them out the door; she gave Buzz a wide berth. Mal whispered, ‘Hand signals. Three fingers on my tie means hit him.’

‘You got the stomach for this?’

‘Yes. You?’

‘One for the kid, boss.’

Mal said, ‘I still don’t make you for the sentimental gesture type.’

‘I guess old dogs can learn. What just happened with you and the princess?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Sure, boss.’

Mal heard coughing in the living room; Buzz said, ‘I’ll kick-start him.’ A voice called, ‘Gentlemen, can we get this over with?’

Buzz walked in first, whistling at the furnishings; Mal followed, taking a long look at Loftis. The man was tall and gray per Upshaw’s suspect description; he was dashingly handsome at fifty or so and his whole manner was would-be slick – a costume of tweed slacks and cardigan sweater, a sprawl on the divan, one leg hooked over the other at the knee.

Mal sat next to him; Buzz thunked a chair down a hard breath away. ‘You and that honey Claire are gettin’ married, huh?’

Loftis said, ‘Yes, we are.’

Buzz smiled, soft and homespun. ‘That’s sweet. She gonna let you pork boys on the side?’

Loftis sighed. ‘I don’t have to answer that question.’

‘The fuck you don’t. You answer it, you answer it now.’

Mal came in. ‘Mr. Loftis is right, Sergeant. That question is not germane. Mr. Loftis, where were you on the nights of January first, fourth and the fourteenth of this year?’

‘I was here, at meetings of the UAES Executive Committee.’

‘And what was discussed at those meetings?’

‘Claire said I didn’t have to discuss that with you.’

Buzz snickered. ‘You take orders from a woman?’

‘Claire is no ordinary woman.’

‘She sure ain’t. A rich bitch Commie that shacks with a fruitfly sure ain’t everyday stuff to me.’

Loftis sighed again. ‘Claire told me this would be ugly, and she was correct. She also told me your sole purpose was to convince yourselves that I didn’t kill anyone, and that I did not have to discuss the UAES business that was transacted on those three nights.’

Mal knew Meeks would figure out the Claire deal before too long; he joined his partner on the black hat side. ‘Loftis, I don’t think you did kill anybody. But I think you’re in deep on some other things, and I’m not talking politics. We want the killer, and you’re going to help us get him.’

Loftis licked his lips and knotted his fingers together; Mal touched his tie bar: *go in full*. Buzz said, ‘What’s your blood type?’

Loftis said, ‘O positive.’

‘That’s the killer’s blood type, boss. You know that?’

‘It’s the most common blood type among white people, and your friend just said I’m no longer a suspect.’

‘My friend’s a soft touch. You know a trombone man named Marty Goines?’

‘No.’

‘Duane Lindenaur?’

‘No.’

‘George Wiltsie?’

Tilt: Loftis crossing and recrossing his legs, licking his lips. 'No.'

Buzz said, 'Horse fucking pucky, you don't. *Give*.'

'I said I never knew him!'

'Then why'd you describe him in the past tense?'

'Oh God –'

Mal flashed two fingers, then his left hand over his right fist: *He's mine, no hitting*. 'Augie Duarte, Loftis. What about him?'

'I don't know him' – a dry tongue over dry lips.

Buzz cracked his knuckles – loud. Loftis flinched; Mal said, 'George Wiltsie was a male prostitute. Did you ever traffic with him? Tell the truth or my partner will get angry.'

Loftis looked down at his lap. 'Yes.'

Mal said, 'Who set it up?'

'Nobody set it up! It was just . . . a date.'

Buzz said, 'A date you paid for, boss?'

'No.'

Mal said, 'Felix Gordean set you up with him, right?'

'No!'

'I don't believe you.'

'No!'

Mal knew a straight admission was out; he jabbed Loftis hard on the shoulder. 'Augie Duarte. Was he just a date?'

'No!'

'Tell the truth, or I'll leave you alone with the sergeant.'

Loftis pinched his knees together and hunched his shoulders down. 'Yes.'

'Yes what?'

'Yes. We dated once.'

Buzz said, 'You sound like a one-night stand man. A date with Wiltsie, a date with Duarte. Where'd you meet those guys?'

'Nowhere . . . at a bar.'

'What bar?'

'The Oak Room at the Biltmore, the Macombo, I don't know.'

'You're rattlin' my cage, boy. Duarte was Mex and those joints don't serve spics. So try again. Two goddamn queer slash murder victims you got between the sheets with. Where'd you meet them?'

Reynolds Loftis stayed crimped up and silent; Buzz said, 'You paid for them, right? It ain't no sin. I've paid for pussy, so why shouldn't somebody of your persuasion pay for boys?'

'No. No. No, that's not true.'

Mal, very soft. 'Felix Gordean.'

Loftis, trembling. 'No no no no no.'

Buzz twirled a finger and smoothed his necktie – the switcheroo sign. 'Charles Hartshorn. Why'd he kill himself?'

'He was tortured by people like you!'

Mal's switcheroo. 'You copped horse for Claire. Who'd you get it from?'

'Who told you that?' – Loftis actually sounding indignant.

Buzz leaned over and whispered, 'Felix Gordean'; Loftis jerked back and banged his head on the wall. Mal said, 'Duane Lindenaur worked at Variety International, where your friends Lopez, Duarte and Benavides are working. Juan Duarte is Augie Duarte's cousin. You used to appear in Variety International movies. Duane Lindenaur was blackmailing Charles Hartshorn. Why don't you put all that together for me.'

Loftis was sweating; Mal caught a twitch at *blackmail*. 'Three times in '44 and once last week you withdrew ten grand from your bank account. Who's blackmailing you?'

The man was oozing sweat. Buzz flashed a fist on the QT; Mal shook his head and gave him the switch sign. Buzz said, 'Tell us about the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee. Some strange stuff happened, right?'

Loftis wiped sweat off his brow; he said, 'What strange stuff?', his voice cracking.

'Like the letters the Committee got that said a big white man snuffed José Diaz. A deputy pal of ours seemed to think these here killings went back to Sleepy Lagoon – zoot stick time. All the victims were cut with zoot sticks.'

Loftis wrung his hands, popping more sweat; his eyes were glazed. Mal could tell Meeks went for a soft shot – innocuous stuff from his interrogation notes – but came up with a bludgeon. Buzz looked bewildered; Mal tamped down his black hat. 'Loftis, who's blackmailing you?'

Loftis squeaked, 'No'; Mal saw that he'd sweated his clothes through. 'What happened with the SLDC?'

'No!'

'Is Gordean blackmailing you?'

'I refuse to answer on the grounds that my answ –'

'You're a slimy piece of Commie shit. What kind of treason are you planning at your meetings? Cop on that!'

'Claire said I didn't have to!'

'Who's that piece of tail you and Chaz Minear were fighting over during the war? Who's that piece of fluff?'

Loftis sobbed and keened and managed a squeaky sing-song. 'I refuse to answer on the grounds that my answers might tend to incriminate me, but I never hurt anybody and neither did my friends so please don't hurt us.'

Mal made a fist, Stanford ring stone out to do maximum damage. Buzz put a hand on his own fist and squeezed it, a new semaphore: *don't hit him or I'll hit you.* Mal got scared and went for big verbal ammo: Loftis didn't know Chaz Minear ratted him to HUAC. 'Are you protecting Minear? You shouldn't, because he was the one who snitched you to the Feds. He was the one who got you blacklisted.'

Loftis curled into a ball; he murmured his Fifth Amendment spiel, like their interrogation was legal and defense counsel would swoop to the rescue. Buzz said, ‘You dumb shit, we coulda had him.’ Mal turned and saw Claire De Haven standing there. She was saying, ‘Chaz,’ over and over.

THIRTY-SIX

THE PICKET LINE action was simmering.

Buzz watched from the Variety International walkway; three stories up. Jack Shortell and Mal were supposed to call; Ellis Loew had called him at home, yanking him out of another Danny nightmare. The DA's command: convince Herman Gerstein to kick an additional five thou into the grand jury war chest. Herman was out – probably muff-diving Betty Grable – and there was nothing for him to do but stew on Considine's foul-up and scope the prelim to slaughter down on the street.

You could see it plain:

A Teamster goon with a baseball bat was lounging near the UAES camera van; when the shit hit the fan and the film rolled, he'd be Johnny on the spot to neutralize the cinematographer and bust up his equipment. Teamster pickets were carrying double and triple banner sticks, taped grips, good shillelaghs. Four muscle boys were skulking by the Pinkos' lunch truck – just the right number to tip it over and coffee-scald the guy inside. A minute ago he saw a Cohen triggerman make an on-the-sly delivery: riot guns with rubber-bullet attachments, wrapped in swaddling cloth like Baby Jesus. Over on De Longpre, the Teamsters had *their* moviemaking crew at the ready: actor/picketers who'd wade in, provoke just the right way and make sure a few UAES pickets whomped them; three camera guys in the back of a tarp-covered pickup. When the dust cleared, Mickey's boys would survive on celluloid as the good guys.

Buzz kept posing Mal against the action. The Cap had almost shot Doc Lesnick's confidentiality on the psych files – blowing the whistle on Minear squealing Loftis – just when they were getting close on the blackmail angle and Felix Gordean. He'd hustled him out of the house quicksville, so he wouldn't keep trashing the team's cover – if they were lucky, De Haven and Loftis figured a HUAC source gave them the dope on Minear. For a smart cop, Captain Malcolm Considine kept making stupid moves: it was twenty to one he'd cut a deal with Red Claire for the custody case continuance; ten to one his attack on Loftis came close to deep sixing it. The old nance was no killer, but the '42 to '44 gap in his psych file – a time he was terrified remembering – talked volumes, and he and De Haven were looking like prime suspects on the snatch of the kid's paperwork. And Doc Lesnick being noplace was starting to look as wrong as Mal fucking up his own wet dream.

The Teamster men were passing around bottles; UAES was marching and shouting its sad old refrain: 'Fair Wages Now,' 'End the Studio Tyranny.'

Buzz thought of a cat about to pounce on a mouse nibbling cheese on the edge of a cliff; he gave the matinee a pass and walked into Herman Gerstein's office.

Still no mogul; the switchboard girl at the plant knew to forward his calls to Herman's private line. Buzz sat behind Gerstein's desk, sniffed his humidor, admired his starlet pics on the wall. He was speculating on his grand jury bonus when the phone rang.

'Hello.'

'Meeks?'

Not Mal, not Shortell – but a familiar voice. 'It's me. Who's this?'

'Johnny.'

'Stompanato?'

'How soon they forget.'

'Johnny, what're you callin' me for?'

'How soon they forget their good deeds. I owe you one, remember?'

Buzz remembered the Lucy Whitehall gig – it seemed like a million years ago. 'Go, Johnny.'

'I'm paying you back, you cracker shitbird. Mickey knows Audrey's the skimmer. I didn't tell him, and I even kept hush on what you pulled with Petey S. It was the bank. Audrey put her skim in the Hollywood bank where Mick puts his race wire dough. The manager got suspicious and called him. Mickey's sending Fritzie over to get her. You're closer, so we're even.'

Buzz saw Icepick Fritzie carving. 'You knew about us?'

'I thought Audrey looked nervous lately, so I tailed her up to Hollywood, and she met you. Mickey doesn't know about you and her, so stay icy.'

Buzz blew a wet kiss into the phone, hung up and called Audrey's number; he got a busy signal, hauled down to the back lot and his car. He ran red lights and yellow lights and took every shortcut he knew speeding over; he saw Audrey's Packard in the driveway, jumped the curb and skidded up on the lawn. He left the motor running, pulled his .38, ran to the door and shouldered it open.

Audrey was sitting on her bargain basement lounge chair, hair in curlers, cold cream on her face. She saw Buzz and tried to cover herself; Buzz beelined for her and started kissing, getting all gooey. He said, 'Mickey knows you skimmed him,' between kisses; Audrey squealed. 'This isn't fair!' and 'You're not supposed to see me this way!' Buzz thought of Fritzie K. gaining ground, grabbed the lioness and slung her out to her car. He gasped, 'Ventura by Pacific Coast Highway, and I'm right behind you. It ain't the Beverly Wilshire, but it's safe.'

Audrey said, 'Five minutes to pack?'

Buzz said, 'No.'

Audrey said, 'Oh shit. I really liked LA.'

Buzz said, 'Say goodbye to it.'

Audrey popped off a handful of curlers and wiped her face. 'Bye-bye, LA.'

The two-car caravan made it to Ventura in an hour ten. Buzz ensconced Audrey in the shack at the edge of his farmland, hid her Packard in a pine grove, left her all his money except a tensky and a single and told her to call a friend of his on the Ventura Sheriff's for a place to stay – the man owed him almost as much as he owed Johnny Stompanato. Audrey started crying when she realized it really was bye-bye LA, bye-bye house, bank account, clothes and everything else except her bagman lover; Buzz kissed off the rest of her cold cream, told her he'd call his buddy to grease the skids and ring her at the guy's place tonight. The lioness left him with a dry-eyed sigh. 'Mickey was good with a buck, but he was lousy in bed. I'll try not to miss him.'

Buzz drove straight into Oxnard, the next town south. He found a pay phone, called Dave Kleckner at the Ventura Courthouse, made arrangements for him to pick up Audrey and dialed his own line at Hughes Aircraft. His secretary said Jack Shortell had called; she'd forwarded him to Herman Gerstein's office and Mal Considine's extension at the Bureau. Buzz changed his dollar into dimes and had the operator ring Madison – 4609; Mal answered, 'Yes?'

'It's me.'

'Where are you? I've been trying to get you all morning.'

'Ventura. A little errand.'

'Well, you missed the goodies. Mickey went nuts. He gave his boys on Gower Gulch carte blanche, and they're busting heads as we speak. I just got a call from a Riot Squad lieutenant, and he said it's the worst he's ever seen. Want to place bets?'

Odds on him getting the lioness out of the country: even money. 'Boss, Mickey's nuts on Audrey, that's what probably ripped his cork. He found out she was skimmin' at his shark mill.'

'Jesus. Does he know about –'

'Ixnay, and I wanta keep it that way. She's stashed up here for now, but it can't last forever.'

Mal said, 'We'll fix something. Are you still hot on payback?'

'More than ever. You talk to Shortell?'

'Ten minutes ago. Do you have something to write on?'

'No, but I got a memory. Shoot me.'

Mal said, 'The last thing Danny worked was a connection between the Joredco Dental Lab on Bunker Hill – they make animal dentures – and a naturalist who raises wolverines a few blocks away. Nort Layman identified bite marks on the victims as coming from wolverine teeth – that's what this is all about.'

Buzz whistled. 'Christ on a crutch.'

'Yeah, and it gets stranger. One, Dudley Smith never put tails on those men Danny wanted under surveillance. Shortell found out, and he doesn't know if it means anything or not. Two, Danny's fix on the Sleepy Lagoon killing and the SLDC ties in to some burglary accomplice of Marty Goines – a youth back in the early '40s – a kid with a burned face. Bunker Hill had a lot of unsolved B&Es the summer of '42, and Danny gave Shortell eight names from FI cards – curfew was being enforced then, so there were plenty of them. Shortell ran eliminations on the names and came up with one man with O+ blood – Coleman Masskie, DOB 5/9/23, 236 South Beaudry, Bunker Hill. Shortell thinks this guy may be a good bet as Goines' burglar buddy.'

Buzz got the numbers down. 'Boss, this Masskie guy ain't even twenty-seven years old, which sorta contradicts the middle-aged killer theory.'

Mal said, 'I know, that bothers me too. But Shortell thinks Danny was close to cracking the case – and *he* thought this burglary angle was a scorcher.'

'Boss, we gotta take down Felix Gordean. We were gettin' close last night, when you . . .'

Silence, then Mal sounding disgusted. 'Yeah, I know. Look, you take the Masskie lead, I'll shake Juan Duarte. I put four Bureau men out to find Doc Lesnick, and if he's alive and findable, he's ours. Let's meet tonight in front of the Chateau Marmont, 5:30. We'll stretch Gordean.'

Buzz said, 'Let's do it.'

Mal said, 'Did you figure out De Haven and me?'

'Took about two seconds. You don't think she'll cross you?'

'No, I've got the ace high hand. You and Mickey Cohen's woman. Jesus.'

'You're invited to the wedding, boss.'

'Stay alive for it, lad.'

Buzz took Pacific Coast Highway down to LA, Wilshire east to Bunker Hill. Dark clouds were brewing, threatening a deluge to soak the Southland, maybe unearth a few more stiffs, send a few more hardnoses out for payback. Two thirty-six South Beaudry was a low-rent Victorian, every single shingle weatherstripped and splintered; Buzz pulled up and saw an old woman raking leaves on a front lawn as jaundiced as the pad.

He got out and approached her. Closer up, she showed a real faded beauty: pale, almost transparent skin over haute couture cheekbones, full lips and the comeliest head of gray-brown hair he'd ever seen. Only her eyes were off – they were too bright, too protruding.

Buzz said, 'Ma'am?'

The old girl leaned on her rake; there was all of one leaf caught on the tines – and it was the only leaf on the whole lawn. 'Yes, young man? Are you here to make a contribution to Sister Aimee's crusade?'

'Sister Aimee's been out of business awhile, ma'am.'

The woman held out her hand – withered and arthritic looking – a beggar's paw. Buzz dropped some odd dimes in it. 'I'm lookin' for a man named Coleman Masskie. Do you know him? He used to live here seven, eight years ago.'

Now the old girl smiled. 'I remember Coleman well. I'm Delores Masskie Tucker Kafesjian Luderman Jensen Tyson Jones. I'm Coleman's mother. Coleman was one of the staunchest slaves I bore to proselytize for Sister Aimee.'

Buzz swallowed. 'Slaves, ma'am? And you certainly do have a lot of names.'

The woman laughed. 'I tried to remember my maiden name the other day, and I couldn't. You see, young man, I have had many lovers in my role as child breeder to Sister Aimee. God made me beautiful and fertile so that I might provide Sister Aimee Semple McPherson with acolytes, and the County of Los Angeles has given me many a Relief dollar so that I might feed my young. Certain cynics consider me a fanatic and a welfare chiseler, but they are the devil speaking. Don't you think that spawning good white progeny for Sister Aimee is a noble vocation?'

Buzz said, 'I certainly do, and I was sorta thinkin' about doin' it myself. Ma'am, where's Coleman now? I got some money for him, and I figure he'll kick some of it back to you.'

Delores scratched the grass with her rake. 'Coleman was always generous. I had a total of nine children – six boys, three girls. Two of the girls became Sister Aimee followers, one, I'm ashamed to say, became a prostitute. The boys ran away when they turned fourteen or fifteen – eight hours a day of prayer and Bible reading was too strenuous for them. Coleman remained the longest – until he was nineteen. I gave him a dispensation: no prayer and Bible reading because he did chores around the neighborhood and gave me half the money. How much money do you owe Coleman, young man?'

Buzz said, 'Lots of it. Where is Coleman, ma'am?'

'In hell, I'm afraid. Those who rebuke Sister Aimee are doomed to boil forever in a scalding cauldron of pus and Negro semen.'

'Ma'am, when did you last see Coleman?'

'I believe I last saw him in the late fall of 1942.'

A half-sane answer – one that played into Upshaw's timetable. 'What was old Coleman doin' then, ma'am?'

Delores pulled the leaf from her rake and crumbled it to dust. 'Coleman was developing worldly ways. He listened to jazz records on a Victrola, prowled around in the evenings and quit high school prematurely, which angered me, because Sister Aimee prefers her slaves to have a high school diploma. He got a dreadful job at a dental laboratory, and quite frankly he became a thief. I used to find strange trinkets in his room, but I let him be when he confessed his transgressions against private property and pledged ten percent of his proceeds to Sister Aimee.'

The dental lab, Coleman as a burglar – Upshaw's theory coming through.

‘Ma’am, was this ’42 when Coleman was doin’ his thievery?’

‘Yes. The summer before he left home.’

‘And did Coleman have a burned face? Was he disfigured somehow?’

The old loon was aghast. ‘Coleman was male slave beauty personified! He was as handsome as a matinee idol!’

Buzz said, ‘Sorry for impugnin’ the boy’s looks. Ma’am, who was Masskie? He the boy’s daddy?’

‘I don’t really recall. I was spreading myself quite thin with men back in the early nineteen twenties, and I only took the surnames of men with large endowments – the better for when I chanted my breeding incantations. Exactly how much money do you owe Coleman? He’s in hell, you know. Giving me the money might win a reprieve for his soul.’

Buzz forked over his last ten-spot. ‘Ma’am, you said Coleman hightailed in the fall of ’42?’

‘Yes, that’s true, and Sister Aimee thanks you.’

‘Why did he take off? Where did he go?’

Delores looked scared – her skin sank over her cheekbones and her eyes bugged out another couple of inches. ‘Coleman went looking for his father, whoever he was. A nasty man with a nasty brogue came around asking for him, and Coleman became terrified and ran away. The brogue man kept returning with questions on Coleman’s whereabouts, but I kept invoking the power of Sister Aimee and he desisted.’

Sleepy Lagoon killing time; Dudley Smith asking to join the grand jury team; Dudley’s off-the-track hard-on for the José Diaz murder and the SLDC. ‘Ma’am, are you talkin’ about an Irish brogue? A big man, late thirties then, red-faced, brown hair and eyes?’

Delores made signs, hands to her chest and up to her face, like she was warding off vampires in an old horror movie. ‘Get behind me, Satan! Feel the power of Four-square Church, Angelus Temple and Sister Aimee Semple McPherson, and I will not answer another single question until you provide adequate cash tribute. Get behind me or risk hell!’

Buzz turned out his pockets for bubkis; he knew a brick wall when he saw one. ‘Ma’am, you tell Sister Aimee to hold her horses – I’ll be back.’

Buzz drove home, ripped a photo of then-Patrolman Dudley Smith out of his LAPD Academy yearbook and rolled to the Chateau Marmont. Dusk and light rain were falling as he parked on Sunset by the front entrance; he was settling into a fret on the lioness when Mal tapped the windshield and got in the car.

Buzz said, ‘Gravy. You?’

‘Double gravy.’

‘Boss, it plays like a ricochet, and it contradicts “middle-aged” again.’

Mal stretched his legs. ‘So does my stuff. Nort Layman called Jack Shortell, he called me. Doc’s been grid-searching the LA River near where

Augie Duarte's body was found – he wants a complete forensic for some book he's writing. Get this: he found silver-gray wig strands with O+ blood – obviously from a head scratch – at the exact spot where the killer would have had to scale a fence to get away. That's why your ricochet plays.'

Buzz said, 'And why Loftis doesn't. Boss, you think somebody's tryin' to frame that old pansy?'

'It occurred to me, yes.'

'What'd you get off Juan Duarte?'

'Scary stuff, worse than goddamn wolverine teeth. Danny talked to Duarte, did you know that?'

'No.'

'It was right before LAPD grabbed him. Duarte told Danny that around the SLDC time Reynolds Loftis had a much younger kid brother hanging around – who looked just like him. At first, the kid had his face bandaged, because he'd been burned in a fire. Nobody knew how much he resembled Loftis until the bandages came off. The kid blabbed at the SLDC rallies – about how a big white man killed José Diaz – but nobody believed him. He was supposed to be running from the killer, but when Duarte said, "How come you're showing up here where the killer might see you," the brother said, "I've got special protection." Buzz, there are no notations on a Loftis kid brother in any of the grand jury files. And it gets better.'

Buzz thought: I know it does; he wondered who'd say 'Dudley Smith' first. 'Keep going. My stuff fits right in.'

Mal said, 'Duarte went to see Charles Hartshorn right before his alleged suicide, to see if he could get the cops to put some juice into investigating Augie's murder. Hartshorn said he'd been ditzed on Duane Lindenaur's killing – you, partner – and he read about the zoot stick mutilations on the other victims in a scandal sheet and thought the snuffs might be SLDC connected. Hartshorn called the LAPD then, and talked to a Sergeant Breuning, who said he'd be right over. Duarte left, and the next morning Hartshorn's body was found. Bingo.'

Buzz said it first. 'Dudley Smith. He was the big white man and he joined the team so he could keep the SLDC testimony watchdogged. That's why he was interested in Upshaw. Danny was hipped on the zoot stick mutilations, and Augie Duarte – Juan's cousin – was on his surveillance list. That's why Dudley blew off the tails. He went with Breuning to see Hartshorn, and somebody said the wrong thing. Necktie party, bye-bye, Charlie.'

Mal hit the dashboard. 'I can't fucking believe it.'

'I can. Now here's a good question. You been around Dudley lots more than I have lately. Is he tied to the queer snuffs?'

Mal shook his head. 'No. I've been racking my brain on it, and I can't put the two together. Dudley wanted Upshaw to join the team, and he couldn't have cared less about dead homos. It was when Danny pushed on "zoot stick" and "Augie Duarte" that Dudley got scared. Wasn't José Diaz a zooter?'

Buzz said, 'His threads were slashed with a zoot stick, I think I remember that. You got a motive for Dudley killin' Diaz?'

'Maybe. I went with Dudley to visit his niece. Apparently she's got a bent for Mexes and Dudley can't stand it.'

'Pretty slim, boss.'

'Dudley's insane! What the fuck more do you want?'

Buzz squeezed his partner's arm. 'Whoa, boy, and just listen to my stuff. Coleman Masskie's crazy mama and I had a little chat. She had lots of different kids by different daddies, she don't know who's whose. Coleman left home in the late fall of '42. He was a burglar, he loved jazz, he worked at the dental lab. All that fits Upshaw's scenario. Now, dig this: fall of '42, a big man with a brogue comes around askin' for Coleman. I describe Dudley, the ginch gets terrified and clams. I say Coleman's the one runnin' from the big white man, who's Dudley, who bumped José Diaz – and Coleman saw it. I say we stretch Gordean now – then go back and ply that old girl and try to tie her to Reynolds Loftis.'

Mal said, 'I'm taking Dudley down.'

Buzz shook his head. 'You take another think on that. No proof, no evidence on Hartshorn, an eight-year-old spic homicide. A cop with Dudley's juice. You're as nuts as he is if you think that plays.'

Mal put on a lilting tenor brogue. 'Then I'll kill him, *lad*.'

'The fuck you will.'

'I've killed a man before, Meeks. I can do it again.'

Buzz saw that he was out to do it – enjoying the view off the cliff. 'Partner, a Nazi in the war ain't the same thing.'

'You knew about that?'

'Why'd you think I was always afraid it was you 'stead of Dragna set me up? A mild-mannered guy like you kills once, he *can* do it again.'

Mal laughed. 'You ever kill anyone?'

'I stand on the Fifth Amendment, boss. Now you wanta go roust that queer pimp?'

Mal nodded. '7941's the address – I think it's back in the bungalow part.'

'You be the bad guy tonight. You're good at it.'

'After you, lad.'

Buzz took the lead. They walked through the lobby and out a side door to the courtyard; it was dark, and high hedges hid the individual bungalows. Buzz tracked the numbers marked on wrought-iron poles, saw 7939 and said, 'It's gotta be the next one.'

Gunshots.

One, two, three, four – close, the odd-numbered side of the walkway. Buzz pulled his .38; Mal pulled and cocked his. They ran to 7941, pinned themselves to the wall on opposite sides of the door and listened. Buzz heard footsteps inside, moving away from them; he looked at Mal, counted one, two, three on his fingers, wheeled and kicked the door in.

Two shots splintered the wood above his head; a muzzle flickered from a dark back room. Buzz hit the floor; Mal piled on top of him and fired twice blindly; Buzz saw a man spread-eagled on the carpet, his yellow silk robe soaked red from sash to collar. Cash wrapped in bank tabs surrounded the body.

Mal stumbled and charged. Buzz let him go, heard thumping, crashing, glass breaking and no more shots. He got up and checked the stiff – a fancy man with a neat beard, a neat manicure and not much of a torso left. The bank tabs were marked Beverly Hills Federal, and there was at least three thousand in half-grand packets within grabbing distance. Buzz resisted; Mal came back, panting. He wheezed, 'Car waiting. Late model white sedan.'

Buzz kicked a pack of greenbacks; they hit an embroidered 'F.G.' on the dead man's sleeve. 'Beverly Hills Fed. That where Loftis withdrew his money?'

'That's the place.'

Sirens in the distance.

Buzz waved goodbye to the cash. 'Loftis, Claire, the killer, what do you think?'

'Let's hit their place now. Before the Sheriffs ask us what we're –'

Buzz said, 'Separate cars,' and took off running as fast as he could.

Mal got there first.

Buzz saw him standing across the street from the De Haven house, U-turned and killed his engine. Mal leaned in the window. 'What took you?'

'I run slow.'

'Anybody see you?'

'No. You?'

'I don't think so. Buzz, we weren't there.'

'You're learnin' this game better every day, boss. What'd you get here?'

'Two cold cars. I looked in a window and saw De Haven and Loftis playing cards. They're clean. You make the killer for it?'

Buzz said, 'Nix. It's wrong. He's a psycho fuckin' rat worshiper, and it's my considered opinion that psycho rat worshipers don't carry guns. I'm thinkin' Minear. He fits with Loftis, and there was a line on him from the files, said he liked to buy boys.'

'You could be right. The Masskie woman next?'

'236 South Beaudry, boss.'

'Let's do it.'

Buzz got there first; he rang the bell and went eyeball to eyeball with Delores in a long white robe. She said, 'Did you bring monetary tribute for Sister?'

Buzz said, 'My bagman's comin' in a minute.' He took out the picture of

Dudley Smith. ‘Ma’am, is this the fella who was inquirin’ after Coleman?’

Delores blinked at the photograph and crossed herself. ‘Get behind me, Satan. Yes, that’s him.’

Seven come eleven, one more for Danny Upshaw. ‘Ma’am, do you know the name Reynolds Loftis?’

‘No, I don’t think so.’

‘Anybody named Loftis?’

‘No.’

‘Any chance you messed with a man named Loftis around the time Coleman was born?’

The old girl harumphed. ‘If by “messed” you mean engaged in breeding activities for Sister Aimee, the answer is no.’

Buzz said, ‘Ma’am, you told me Coleman went lookin’ for his daddy when he took off in ’42. If you didn’t know who his daddy was, how’d the boy know where to look?’

Delores said, ‘Twenty dollars for Sister Aimee and I’ll show you.’

Buzz slid off his high school ring. ‘Yours to keep, sweetie. Just show me.’

Delores examined the ring, pocketed it and walked away; Buzz stood on the porch wondering where Mal was. Minutes dragged; the woman returned with an old leather scrapbook. She said, ‘The genealogy of my slave breeding. I took pictures of all the men who gave me their seed, with appropriate comments on the back. When Coleman decided he had to find his father, he looked at this book for pictures of the men he most resembled. I hid the book when the brogue man came by, and I still want twenty dollars for this information.’

Buzz opened the scrapbook, saw that the pages contained stapled-on photographs of dozens of men, held it up to the porch light and started looking. Four pages down, a picture caught his eye: a spellbinder youthful, spellbinder handsome Reynolds Loftis in a tweed knicker suit. He pulled the photo out and read the writing on the back.

‘Randolph Lawrence (a nom de guerre?), summer-stock actor, the Ramona Pageant, August 30, 1922. A real Southern gentleman. Good white stock. I hope his seed springs fertile.’

1942: burglar, tooth technician, rat lover Coleman witnesses Dudley Smith killing José Diaz, sees this picture or others and locates Daddy Reynolds Loftis. 1943: Coleman, his face burned in a fire???, hangs out at SLDC rallies with his father/phony brother, talks up the big white man, nobody believes him. 1942 to 1944: Loftis’ psych file missing. 1950: killer Coleman. Was the psycho trying to frame Daddy/Reynolds for the queer murders, dressed up like Loftis himself – Doc Layman’s wig fragments the final kicker?

Buzz held out the picture. ‘That Coleman, ma’am?’

Delores smiled. ‘Rather close. What a nice-looking man. A shame I can’t remember spawning with him.’

A car door slammed; Mal got out and trotted up the steps. Buzz took him aside and showed him the photo. 'Loftis, 1922. AKA Randolph Lawrence, summer stock actor. He's Coleman's father, not his brother.'

Mal tapped the picture. 'Now I'm wondering how the boy got burned and why the brother charade. And you were right on Minear.'

'What do you mean?'

'I called the DMV. Minear owns a white '49 Chrysler New Yorker sedan. I went by his place in Chapman Park on my way here. It was in his building's garage, warm, and it looked just like the car at the Marmont.'

Buzz put an arm around Mal's shoulders. 'Gifts in a manger, and here's another one. That crazy woman in the doorway ID'd Dudley from a picture I got. He's the brogue man.'

Mal looked over at Delores. 'Do you think Dudley copped Danny's files?'

'No, I think he'd have faked a burglary. Coleman's our killer, boss. All we gotta do now is find him.'

'Shit. Loftis and Claire won't talk. I know it.'

Buzz took his arm away. 'No, but I bet we could squeeze Chaz beauty. He was tight with Loftis back in '43, '44, and I know a good squeeze artist to help us. You give that lady a double-saw and I'll go give him a call.'

Mal went for his billfold; Buzz walked into the house and found a phone by the kitchen door. He called Information, got the number he wanted and dialed it; Johnny Stompanato's slick guinea baritone oiled on the line. 'Talk to me.'

'It's Meeks. You wanta make some money? Number-one muscle on a strongarm job, make sure my buddy don't go crazy and hurt someone?'

Johnny Stomp said, 'You're a dead man. Mickey found out about you and Audrey. The neighbors saw you hustling her away, and I'm lucky he didn't figure out I tipped you. Nice to know you, Meeks. I always thought you had style.'

Move over Danny Upshaw, fat man coming through. Buzz looked at Mal paying off the rat killer's mother; he got an idea – or the idea got him. 'Contract out?'

'Ten grand. Fifteen if they get you alive so Mickey can get his jollies.'

'Chump change. Johnny, you wanna make twenty grand for two hours' work?'

'You slay me. Next you'll be offering me a date with Lana Turner.'

'I mean it.'

'Where you gonna get that dough?'

'I'll have it inside two weeks. Deal?'

'What makes you think you'll live that long?'

'Ain't you a gambler?'

'Oh shit. Deal.'

Buzz said, 'I'll call you back,' and hung up. Mal was standing beside him, shaking his head. 'Mickey knows?'

‘Yeah, Mickey knows. You got a couch?’

Mal gave Buzz a soft punch on the arm. ‘Lad, I think people are starting to get your number.’

‘Say what?’

‘I figured out something today.’

‘What?’

‘You killed Gene Niles.’

THIRTY-SEVEN

MAL'S TAKE ON Johnny Stompanato: two parts olive-oil charm, two parts hepcat, six parts plug-ugly. His take on the whole situation: Buzz was doomed, and his voice talking to Audrey on the phone said he knew it. Coleman arrested for four sex murders plus grand jury indictments added up to Stefan dropped on his doorstep like a Christmas bundle. The *Herald* and *Mirror* were playing up the Gordean killing, no suspects, puff pieces on the victim as a straight-arrow talent agent, no mention of the bank money – the catching officers probably got fat. The papers made UAES the instigators of the riot the Teamsters started; Buzz was impressed with his shot in the dark on Gene Niles and believed his promise not to spill on it. The fat man was going to brace Dudley's niece while he and Stompanato braced Chaz Minear, and when they had Coleman placed, he'd call his newspaper contacts so they could be in on the capture: first interviews with Captain Malcolm E. Considine, captor of the Wolverine Monster. And then Dudley Smith.

They were sitting in Stompanato's car, 8:00 A.M., a cop-crook stakeout. Mal knew his scenario; Buzz had filled Johnny in on his and had greased the doorman of Minear's building. The man told him Chaz left for breakfast every morning at 8:10 or so, walked over Mariposa to the Wilshire Derby and returned with the newspaper around 9:30. Buzz gave him a C-note to be gone from 9:30 to 10:00; during that half hour they'd have a wide-open shot.

Mal watched the door; Stompanato gave himself a pocket-knife manicure and hummed opera. At 8:09 a small man in tennis sweater and slacks walked out the entrance of the Conquistador Apartments; the doorman gave them the high sign. Stompanato sliced a cuticle and smiled; Mal jacked his plug-ugly quotient way up.

They waited.

At 9:30, the doorman tipped his cap, got into a car and drove off; at 9:33 Chaz Minear walked into the building holding a newspaper. Stompanato put his knife away; Mal said, 'Now.'

They quick-marched into the lobby. Minear was checking his mail slot; Johnny Stomp strode ahead to the elevator and opened the door. Mal dawdled by a wall mirror, straightening his necktie, getting a reverse view of Minear grabbing letters, Stompanato keeping the elevator door open with his foot, smiling like a good neighbor. Little Chaz walked over and into the trap; Mal came up behind him, nudged Johnny's foot away and let the door close.

Minear pushed the button for three. Mal saw his door key already in his hand, grabbed it and rabbit-punched him. Minear dropped his newspaper and mail and doubled over; Johnny pinned him to the wall, a hand on his neck. Minear went purply blue; it looked like his eyes were about to pop out. Mal talked to him, a mimic of Dudley Smith. 'We know you killed Felix Gordean. We were his partners on the Loftis job, and you're going to tell us allll about Reynolds and his son. Allll about it. *Lad.*'

The door slid open; Mal saw '311' on the key and an empty hallway. He walked out, located the apartment four doorways over, unlocked the door and stood back. Stompanato forced Minear inside and released his neck; Chaz fell down rasping for breath. Mal said, 'You know what to ask him. Do it while I toss for the files.'

Minear coughed words; Johnny stepped on his neck. Mal took off his jacket, rolled up his sleeves and tossed.

The apartment had five rooms: living room, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, study. Mal hit the study first – it was the furthest from Stompanato and the nance. A radio went on, the dial skimming across jazz, commercial jingles and the news, stopping at an opera, a baritone and a soprano going at each other over a thunderous orchestra. Mal thought he heard Minear scream; the music was turned up.

Mal worked.

The study – desk, filing cabinets and a chest of drawers – yielded stacks of movie scripts, carbons of Minear's political letters, correspondence to him, miscellaneous memoranda and a .32 revolver, the cylinder empty, a cordited barrel. The bedroom was pastel-appointed and filled with piles of books; there was a wardrobe closet crammed with expensive clothes and rows of shoes arrayed in trees. An antique cabinet featured drawers spilling propaganda tracts; there was nothing but more shoes under the bed.

The opera kept wailing; Mal checked his watch, saw 10:25, an hour down and two rooms clean. He gave the bathroom a cursory toss; the music stopped; Stompanato popped his head in the doorway. He said, 'The pansy spilled. Tell Meeks he better stay alive to get me my money.'

The hard boy looked green at the gills. Mal said, 'I'll do the kitchen and talk to him.'

'Forget it. Loftis and Claire what's her face got the files. Come on, you've gotta hear this.'

Mal followed Johnny into the living room. Chaz Minear was sitting prim and proper in a rattan chair; there were welts on his cheeks and blood had congealed below his nostrils. His tennis whites were still spotless, his eyes were unfocused, he was wearing an exhausted, almost slaphappy grin. Mal looked at Stompanato; Johnny said, 'I poured half a pint of Beefeater's into him.' He tapped the sap hooked into his belt. 'In vino veritas, capiche?'

Danny Upshaw had said the same thing to him – the one time they drank together. Mal took a chair facing Minear. 'Why did you kill Gordean? Tell me.’

Minear, an easy mid-Atlantic accent. ‘Pride.’

He sounded proud. Mal said, ‘What do you mean?’

‘Pride. Gordean was tormenting Reynolds.’

‘He started tormenting him back in ’44. It took you a while to get around to revenge.’

Minear focused on Mal. ‘The police told Reynolds and Claire that I informed on Reynolds to the House Committee. I don’t know how they knew, but they did. They confronted me about it, and I could tell Reynolds’ poor heart was broken. I knew Gordean was blackmailing him again, so I did penance. Claire and Reynolds and I had gotten so close again, and I imagine you could present a case for me acting in my own self-interest. It was good having friends, and it was awful when they started hating me.’

The rap was falling on him – he was the one who snitched the snitch. ‘Why didn’t you take the money?’

‘Oh Lord, I couldn’t. It would have destroyed the gesture. And Claire has all the money in the world. She shares so generously with Reynolds . . . and with all her friends. You’re not really a criminal, are you? You look more like an attorney or an accountant.’

Mal laughed – a kamikaze queer romantic had his number. ‘I’m a policeman.’

‘Are you going to arrest me?’

‘No. Do you want to be arrested?’

‘I want everyone to know what I did for Reynolds, but . . .’

‘But you don’t want them to know why? Why Gordean was blackmailing Loftis?’

‘Yes. That’s true.’

Mal threw a switcheroo. ‘Why did Reynolds and Claire steal Upshaw’s files? To protect all of you from the grand jury?’

‘No.’

‘Because of Reynolds’ kid brother? *His son?* Was it Upshaw’s *homicide* file they were most interested in?’

Minear sat mute; Mal waved Stompanato toward the back of the apartment. ‘Chaz, you’ve said it once. Now you have to say it to me.’

No answer.

‘Chaz, I’ll make you a deal. I’ll make sure everyone knows you killed Gordean, but I won’t let Reynolds get hurt anymore. All you’ll get is what you want. Reynolds will know you had courage and you paid him back. He’ll love you again. He’ll forgive you.’

‘Love you’ and ‘forgive you’ made Minear cry, sputters of tears that he dried with his sweater sleeves. He said, ‘Reynolds left me for him. That’s why I informed to HUAC.’

Mal leaned closer. ‘Left you for who?’

‘For *him*.’

‘Who’s “him”?’

Minear smiled, ‘Reynolds’ little brother was really his son. His mother was a crazy religious woman Reynolds had an affair with. She got money from him and kept the boy. When Coleman was nineteen, he ran away from the woman and found Reynolds. Reynolds took him in and became his lover. He left me to be with his own son.’

Mal pushed his chair back, the confession a horror movie he wanted to run screaming from. He said, ‘All of it,’ before he bolted for real.

Minear raised his voice, like he was afraid of his confessor running; he speeded up, like he was anxious to be absolved or punished. ‘Felix Gordean was blackmailing Reynolds back in ’44 or so. Somehow he figured out about him and Coleman, and he threatened to tell Herman Gerstein about it. Gerstein hates men like us, and he would have ruined Reynolds. When that policeman came around questioning Felix about the first three killings, Felix put things together. George Wiltsie had been with Reynolds, Marty Goines and Coleman were both jazz men. Then Augie Duarte was killed, and more details had been in the newspapers. The policeman had let some things slip and Felix knew Coleman had to be the killer. He renewed his blackmail demands, and Reynolds gave him another ten thousand.

‘Claire and Reynolds confided in me, and I knew I could make up for informing. They knew after the first three killings that it had to be Coleman – they read a tabloid that had details on the mutilations, and they knew from the names of the victims. They knew about it before the policeman tried to infiltrate UAES, and they were looking for Coleman to try to stop him. Juan Duarte saw Upshaw at the morgue when Augie was there, and recognized him from a picture Norm Kostenz took. He told Claire and Reynolds who Upshaw really was, and they got scared. They had read that the police were looking for a man who resembled Reynolds, and they thought Coleman must be trying to frame his father. They left out clues to exonerate Reynolds, and I followed Upshaw home from Claire’s house. The next day, Claire got Mondo Lopez to pick the lock of his apartment and look for things on the killings – things that would help them find Coleman. Mondo found his files and brought them to Claire. She and Reynolds were desperate to stop Coleman and keep the . . .’

Keep the whole horror epic from ruining Reynolds Loftis worse than the grand jury ever could.

Mal thought of Claire – terrified of a harmless Sleepy Lagoon remark the first time they talked; he thought of Coleman’s burn face, put it aside and went straight for the woman. ‘Claire and Coleman. What’s between them?’

The queer redeemer glowed. ‘Claire nurtured Coleman back in the SLDC days. He was in love with her, and he told her he always thought about her when he was with Reynolds. She heard out all his ugly, violent fantasies. She forgave them for being together. She was always so strong and accepting. The killings started a few weeks after the papers ran the wedding announcements. When Coleman learned that Reynolds was getting Claire forever, it must have made him crazy. Are you going to arrest me now?'

Mal couldn't make himself say no and break the rest of Chaz Minear. He couldn't say anything, because Johnny Stompanato had just walked into the room with his olive-oil charm back in place, and all he could think of was that he could never keep Stefan safe from the horror.

THIRTY-EIGHT

MARY MARGARET CONROY was coming across as a major league Mexophile.

Buzz had tailed her from her sorority house to a hand-holding kaffeeklatch at the UCLA Student Union; she was a simpering frail in the presence of a handsome taco bender named Ricardo. Their conversation was all in Spanish, and all he recognized were words like 'corazon' and 'felicidad,' love stuff he knew from the jukebox music at Mexican restaurants. From there, Dudley Smith's dough-faced niece went to a meeting of the Pan American Students' League, a class in Argentine history, lunch and more fondling with Ricardo. She'd been sequestered in a classroom with 'Art of the Mayans' for over an hour now, and when she walked out he'd pop the question – shit or get off the pot time.

He kept checking his flank, seeing bad guys everywhere, like Mickey with the Commies. Only his were real: Mickey himself, Cohen goons armed with icepicks and saps and garottes and silencered heaters that could leave you dead in a crowd, a heart attack victim, squarejohns summoning an ambulance while the triggerman walked away. He kept checking faces and kept trying not to cut odds, because he was too good an oddsmaker to give himself and Audrey much of a chance.

And he had a monster hangover.

And his back ached from boozy catnaps on Mal Considine's floor.

They'd been up most of the night, planning. He called Dave Kleckner in Ventura – Audrey was safely tucked in at his pad. He'd called Johnny Stomp with details on the Minear squeeze and gave Mal the lowdown on Gene Niles. Mal said he'd tagged him as the killer on a hunch – that payback for Danny was so antithetical to his style that he knew the debt had to be huge. Mal got weepy on the kid, then went loony on Dudley Smith – Dudley made for José Diaz, Charles Hartshorn, suppression of evidence and a fuckload of conspiracy raps, Dudley sucking gas up at Q. He never made the next jump: the powers that be would never let Dudley Smith stand trial for anything – his rank, juice and reputation were diplomatic immunity.

They talked escape routes next. Buzz held back on his idea – it would have sounded as crazy as Mal taking down Dudley. They talked East Coast hideouts, slow boats to China, soldier of fortune gigs in Central America, where the local strongmen paid gringos good pesos to keep the Red Menace in check. They talked the pros and cons of taking Audrey, leaving Audrey, the lioness stashed someplace safe for a couple of years. They came to one conclusion: he'd give payback another forty-eight hours tops, then go in a hole somewhere.

A classroom bell sounded; Buzz got pissed: Mary Margaret Conroy would never blab, only confirm by her actions – all he was doing was humoring Mal's hump on Dudley. 'Art of the Mayans' adjourned in a swirl of students, Mary Margaret the oldest by a good ten years. Buzz followed her outside, tapped her shoulder and said, 'Miss Conroy, could I talk to you for a second?'

Mary Margaret turned around, hugging her armload of books. She eyed Buzz with distaste and said, 'You're not with the faculty, are you?'

Buzz forced himself not to laugh. 'No, I'm not. Sweetie, wouldn't you say Uncle Dudley went a bit too far warnin' José Diaz away from you?'

Mary Margaret went sheet white and passed out on the grass.

Dudley for Diaz.

Buzz left Mary Margaret on the grass with a firm pulse and fellow students hovering. He got off the campus quick and drove to Ellis Loew's house to play a hunch: Doc Lesnick's absence while UAESer lunacy raged on all fronts was too pat. The four Bureau dicks trying to find the man were filing reports at the house, and there might be something in them to give him a spark atop the hunch and the flicker that caused it: all the psych files ended in the summer of '49, even though the brain trusters were still seeing Lesnick. The fact reeked of wrong.

Buzz parked on Loew's front lawn, already crowded with cars. He heard voices coming from the back yard, walked around and saw Ellis holding court on the patio. Champagne was cooling on an ice cart; Loew, Herman Gerstein, Ed Satterlee and Mickey Cohen were hoisting glasses. Two Cohen boys were standing sentry with their backs to him; nobody had seen him yet. He ducked behind a trellis and listened.

Gerstein was exulting: yesterday's picket brawl was blamed on the UAES; the Teamster film crew leaked their version of the riot to Movietone News, who'd be captioning it 'Red Rampage Rocks Hollywood' and shoving it into theaters nationwide. Ellis came on with his good news: the grand jury members being appointed by the City Council looked mucho simpatico, his house was packed with great evidence, mucho indictments seemed imminent. Satterlee kept talking about the climate being perfect, the grand jury a sweetheart deal that was preordained by God for this time and place only, a deal that would never come again. The geek looked about two seconds away from asking them to kneel in prayer; Mickey shut him up and not too subtly started asking questions about the whereabouts of Special Investigator Turner 'Buzz' Meeks.

Buzz walked to the front of the house and let himself in. Typists were typing; clerks were filing; there was enough documentation in the living room to make confetti for a thousand ticker tape parades. He moved to the report board and saw that it had been replaced by a whole wall of photographs.

Federal evidence stamps were attached to the borders; Buzz saw ‘SLDC’ a dozen times over and looked closer. The pics were obviously the surveillance shots Ed Satterlee was trying to buy off a rival clearance group; another scope and he noticed *every* photo was marked SLDC, with ’43 and ’44 dates tagged at the bottom, the pictures arranged chronologically, probably waiting for some artwork: circling the faces of known Commies. Buzz thought: Coleman, and started looking for a face swathed in bandages.

Most of the photos were overhead group shots; some were enlarged sections where faces were reproduced more clearly. The quality on all of them was excellent – the Feds knew their stuff. Buzz saw some blurry, too white faces in the earlier pics, crowd shots from the spring of ’43; he followed the pictures across the wall, hoping for Coleman sans gauze and dressings, an aid to ID the rat killer in person. He got bandage glimpses through the summer of ’43; little looks at Claire De Haven and Reynolds Loftis along the way. Then – blam! – a Reynolds Loftis view that was way off; the handsome queer too, too short in the tooth, with too much hair.

Buzz checked the date – 8/17/43 – rechecked the Loftis glimpses, rechecked the clothes on the bandaged man. Reynolds had noticeably thinning hair throughout; the too young Reynolds sported a full head of thick stuff. In three of the overhead shots, bandage man was wearing a striped skivvy shirt; in the close-up, too young Reynolds was wearing the same thing. Juan Duarte had told Mal that Reynolds’ ‘kid brother’ looked just like him – but *this man* was Reynolds in every respect except the hair, every facial plane and angle exactly like his father – a mirror image of Daddy twenty years younger.

Buzz thought semantics, thought ‘just like’ might be an uneducated greaseball’s synonym for ‘identical twin’; Delores Masskie called the resemblance ‘rather close’. He grabbed a magnifying glass off a typist’s desk; he followed the pictures, looking for more Coleman. Three over he got a close shot of the boy with a man and a woman; he put the lens up to it and squinted for all he was worth.

No burn scars of any kind; no pocked and shiny skin; no uneven patches where flesh was grafted.

Two photos over, one row down. November 10, 1943. The boy standing sideways facing Claire De Haven, shirtless. Deep, perfectly straight scars on his right arm, a row of them, scars identical to scars he saw on the arm of an RKO actor who’d had his face reconstructed after an auto wreck, scars that actor had pointed to with pride, telling him that only Doctor Terry Lux did arm grafts, the skin there was the best, so good that it was worth upper body tissue removal. The actor said that Terry made him look *exactly* like he did before the accident – when he looked at himself even he couldn’t tell the difference.

Terry Lux dried Claire De Haven out at his clinic three times.

Terry Lux had workers who slaughtered chickens with zoot sticks.

Terry Lux told him Loftis used to cop H for Claire; Marty Goines was snuffed by a heroin overjolt. Terry Lux diluted the morphine for his dope cures on the premises at his clinic.

Buzz kept the magnifying glass to the wall, kept scanning. He got a back view of Coleman shirtless, saw a patchwork of perfectly straight scars that made him think of zoot stick wounds; he found another set of group shots that looked like Coleman fawning all over Claire De Haven. Hard evidence: Coleman Masskie Loftis was plastic surgery altered to look more like his father. He resembled his father enough to ID him from Delores' pictures before; now he *was* him. His 'special protection' from Dudley Smith was being disguised as Loftis.

Buzz ripped the best Coleman pic off the wall, pocketed it and found a table stacked with reports from the Bureau men. He quick-skimmed the latest update; all the officers had accomplished was a shakedown of Lesnick's parolee daughter – she said the old man was just about gone from his lung cancer and was thinking about checking into a rest home to check out. He was about to pocket a list of local sanitoriums when he heard 'Traitor,' and saw Mickey and Herman Gerstein standing a few feet away.

Cohen with a clean shot, but a half dozen witnesses spoiling his chance. Buzz said, 'I suppose this means my guard gig's kaput. Huh, Mick?'

The man looked hurt as much as he looked mad. 'Goyishe shitheel traitor. Cocksucker. Communist. How much money did I give you? How much money did I set up for you that you should do me like you did?'

Buzz said, 'Too much, Mick.'

'That is no smart answer, you fuck. You should beg. You should beg that I don't do you slow.'

'Would it help?'

'No.'

'There you go, boss.'

Mickey said, 'Herman, leave this room'; Gerstein exited. The typers kept typing and the clerks kept clerking. Buzz gave the little hump's cage a rattle. 'No hard feelin's, huh?'

Mickey said, 'I will make you a deal, because when I say "deal", it is always to trust. Right?'

'Trust' and 'deal' were the man's bond – it was why he went with him instead of Siegel or Dragna. 'Sure, Mick.'

'Send Audrey back to me and I will not hurt a hair on her head and I will not do you slow. Do you trust my word?'

'Yes.'

'Do you trust I'll get you?'

'You're the odds-on favorite, boss.'

'Then be smart and do it.'

'No deal. Take care, Jewboy. I'll miss you. I really will.'

Pacific Sanitarium – fast.

Buzz turned off PCH and beeped his horn at the gate; the squawk box barked, 'Yes?'

'Turner Meeks to see Dr. Lux.'

Static sounds for a good ten seconds, then: 'Park off to your left by the door marked "Visiting," go through the lounge and take the elevator up to the second floor. Doctor will meet you in his office.'

Buzz did it, parking, walking through the lounge. The elevator was in use; he took stairs up to the second floor, saw the connecting door open, heard, 'Okie baboon' and stopped just short of the last step.

Terry Lux's voice: '. . . but I have to talk to him, he's a pipeline to Howard Hughes. Listen, there should be something in the papers today I'm interested in – a guy I used to do business with was murdered. I just heard about it on the radio, so go get me all the LA dailies while I talk to this clown.'

Odds on Lux–Gordean business: six to one in favor of. Buzz retraced his steps to the car, grabbed his billy club, stuck it down the back of his pants and took his time walking inside. The elevator was empty; he pushed the button for 2 and glided up thinking how much Terry loved money, how little he cared where it came from. The door opened; the dope doc himself was there to greet him. 'Buzzy, long time no see.'

The administrative corridor looked nice and deserted – no nurses or orderlies around. Buzz said, 'Terry, how are you?'

'Is this business, Buzz?'

'Sure is, boss. And on the extra QT. You got a place where we can talk?'

Lux led Buzz down the hall, to a little room with filing cabinets and facial reconstruction charts. He closed the door; Buzz locked it and leaned on it. Lux said, 'What the hell are you doing?'

Buzz felt the billy club tickling his spine. 'Spring of '43 you did a plastic job on Reynolds Loftis' son. Tell me about it.'

'I don't know what you're talking about. Check my '43 files if you like.'

'This ain't negotiable, Terry. This is you spill all, Gordean included.'

'There's nothing to negotiate, because I don't know what you're talking about.'

Buzz pulled out his baton and hit Lux behind the knees. The blow sent Lux pitching into the wall; Buzz grabbed a fistful of his hair and banged his face against the door jamb. Lux slid to the floor, trailing blood on polished mahogany, sputtering, 'Don't hit me. Don't hit me.'

Buzz backed up a step. 'Stay there, the floor looks good on you. Why'd you cut the boy to look like his old man? Who told you to do that?'

Lux tilted his head back, gurgled and shook himself like a dog shedding water. 'You scarred me. You . . . you scarred me.'

'Give yourself a plastic. And answer me.'

'Loftis had me do it. He paid me a lot, and he paid me never to tell anybody about it. Loftis and the psycho had essentially the same bone structure, and I did it.'

'Why'd Loftis want it done?'

Lux moved into a sitting position and massaged his knees. His eyes darted to an intercom phone atop a filing cabinet just out of reach; Buzz smashed the contraption with his stick. 'Why? And don't tell me Loftis wanted the boy to look like him so he could be a movie star.'

'He did tell me that!'

Buzz tapped the baton against his leg. 'Why'd you call Coleman a psycho?'

'He did his post-op here, and I caught him raiding the hatchery! He was cutting up the chickens with one of those zoot sticks my men use! He was drinking their goddamn blood!'

Buzz said, 'That's a psycho, all right'; he thought Terry *had* to be clean on snuff knowledge: the fool thought chickens were as bad as it got. 'Boss, what kind of business did you do with Felix Gordean?'

'I didn't kill him!'

'I know you didn't, and I'm pretty damn sure you don't know who did. But I'll bet you hipped him to something about Reynolds Loftis back around '43, '44 or so, and Gordean started collectin' hush money on it. That sound about right?'

Lux said nothing; Buzz said, 'Answer me, or I'll go to work on your kidneys.'

'When I tell Howard about this, you'll be in trouble.'

'I'm finished with Howard.'

Lux made an overdue move. 'Money, Buzz. That's what this is about, right? You've got an angle you want to buy in on and you need help. Am I right?'

Buzz tossed his stick out, holding the end of the thong. The tip hit Lux in the chest; Buzz jerked it back like a yo-yo on a string. Lux yipped at the little wonder; Buzz said, 'Coleman, Loftis and Gordean. Put them together.'

Lux stood up and straightened the folds of his smock. He said, 'About a year after the reconstruction on Coleman I went to a party in Bel Air. Loftis and his so-called kid brother were there. I pretended not to know them, because Reynolds didn't want anyone to know about the surgery. Later on that night, I was out by the cabanas. I saw Coleman and Loftis kissing. It made me mad. I'd plasticed the kid for an incestuous pervert. I knew Felix liked to put the squeeze on queers, so I sold him the information. I figured he blackmailed Loftis. Don't look so shocked, Meeks. You would have done the same thing.'

Minear's file quote: 'If you knew who *he* was, you'd know why I snitched' – the one reference Doc Lesnick let slip into the grand jury team's hands – *the half-dead old stoolie had to know the whole story.* Buzz looked at Lux culling back his dignity, pushed him into the wall and held him there with his stick. ‘When’s the last time you saw Coleman?’

Lux’s voice was high and thin. ‘Around ’45. Daddy and Sonny must have had a spat. Coleman came to me with two grand and told me he didn’t want to look so much like Daddy anymore. He asked me to break his face up scientifically. I told him that since I enjoy inflicting pain, I’d only take a grand and a half. I strapped him into a dental chair, put on heavy bag gloves and broke every bone in his face. I kept him on morph while he recovered down by the chicken shed. He left with a teeny weeny little habit and some not so teeny little bruises. He started wearing a beard, and all that was left of Reynolds was the set of his eyes. Now, do you want to take that goddamn club off of me?’

Bingo – the Goines heroin angle. Buzz held off on the baton. ‘I know you dilute your own morph here on the grounds.’

Lux took a scalpel from his pocket and started cleaning his nails. ‘Police sanctioned.’

‘You told me Loftis copped horse for Claire De Haven. Did you and him use the same suppliers?’

‘A few of them. Coloreds with cop connections down in southtown. I only deal with officially sanctioned lackeys – like you.’

‘Did Coleman have info on them?’

‘Sure. After the first surgery, I gave him a list. He had a crush on Claire, and he said he wanted to help her get the stuff, make the runs himself so she wouldn’t have to truck with niggers. When he left after my second surgery, he probably used them for his own habit.’

A round of applause for Coleman Loftis: he kicked morph and took up rat worship slaughter. ‘I want that list. Now.’

Lux unlocked the filing cabinet by the demolished phone. He pulled out a slip of lined paper and reached for some blank sheets; Buzz said, ‘I’ll keep the original,’ and grabbed it.

The doctor shrugged and went back to cleaning his nails. Buzz started to tuck his baton away; Lux said, ‘Didn’t your mother tell you it’s not polite to stare?’

Buzz kept quiet.

‘The strong, silent type. I’m impressed.’

‘I’m impressed with you, Terry.’

‘How so?’

‘Your recuperative powers. I’ll bet you got yourself convinced this little humiliation didn’t really happen.’

Lux sighed. ‘I’m Hollywood, Buzz. Easy come, easy go, and it’s already a dim memory. Got a sec for a question?’

‘Sure.’

‘What’s this about? There has to be money in it somewhere. You don’t work for free.’

Adios, Terry.

Buzz kidney-punched Lux, his hardest stick shot. The scalpel fell from the doctor’s hand. Buzz caught it, kneed Lux in the balls, smothered him into the wall and placed his right palm against it Jesus style. Lux screamed; Buzz rammed the scalpel into the hand and pounded it down to the hilt with his baton. Lux screamed some more, his eyes rolling back. Buzz shoved a handful of pocket cash into his mouth. ‘It’s about payback. This is for Coleman.’

THIRTY-NINE

MAL MADE ANOTHER circuit of the De Haven house, wondering if they'd ever leave and give him a crack at the files, wondering if they'd got the word on Gordean yet. If Chaz Minear had called, they would have run to him; the killing was front page and all over the radio, and friends of theirs had to know that Loftis at least knew the man. But both cars stayed put and there was nothing he could do but keep waiting, moving, waiting to swoop.

Canon Drive to Elevado, Comstock to Hillcrest to Santa Monica and around again – sitting surveillance was an invitation for the ubiquitous Beverly Hills cops to roust him, out of his jurisdiction and getting ready to pull a Class B felony. Every time around the house he imagined more horrors inside – Loftis and his own son, a knife to the part of him that lived to protect Stefan. Two hours of circling had him dizzy; he'd called Meeks' switchboard and left a message: meet me on Canon Drive – but Buzz's Caddy hadn't showed and it was getting to the point where he was close to going in the door gun first.

Santa Monica around to Canon. Mal saw a paperboy tossing newspapers on front porches and lawns, hooked an idea, pulled over three houses up from Claire's and fixed her porch in his rearview. The boy hurled his bundle and hit the door; the door opened and an androgynous arm scooped the newspaper up. If they didn't already know, they soon would – and if their brains held over their fear they'd think *Chaz*.

A slow minute passed. Mal fidgeted and found an old sweater in the back seat – a good window punch. Another slow bunch of seconds, then Claire and Loftis hurrying out to the Lincoln in the driveway. She got behind the wheel; he sat beside her; the car backed out and headed south – the direction of Minear's place.

Mal walked over to the house – a tall, dignified man in a three-piece suit carrying a loosely folded sweater. He saw a side window by the door, punched it in, reached around and picked the lock. The door snapped open; Mal let himself in, closed the door and threw the top bolt.

There were at least fifteen rooms to toss. Mal thought: closets, dens, places with desks – and hit the writing table by the stairwell. He pulled out a half dozen drawers, rummaged in a coat closet adjacent, feeling for folders and loose paper as much as looking.

No loot.

Back to the rear of the house; two more closets. Vacuum cleaners and carpet sweepers, mink coats, a prayer to his old Presbyterian God: please don't let them keep it in a safe. A den off a rear bathroom, bookshelves, a desk there – eight drawers of potpourri – movie scripts, stationery, old Loftis personal papers and no false bottoms or secret compartments.

Mal left the den by a side door and smelled coffee. He followed the scent to a large room with a movie screen and projector set up at the rear. A drop leaf table holding a coffeepot and a scattering of papers was stationed square in the middle, two chairs tucked under it – a study scene. He walked over, started reading and saw how good Danny Upshaw could have been.

The kid block-printed cleanly, thought intelligently, wrote with clarity and would have cracked the four killings easy if LAPD had given him an extra day or so. It was right here on his first summary report, page three, his second eyewitness on the Goines snatch. Claire and Reynolds had circled the information, confirming what Minear said: they were trying to find Loftis' son.

Page three.

Eyewitness Coleman Healy, questioned by Danny Upshaw on his first full day working the case.

He was late twenties – the right age. *He* was described as tall, slender and wearing a beard, which was undoubtedly a fake, one that he took off when he impersonated his father/lover. He *front-view*-confirmed a bartender's side view description of himself, filling in the middle-aged part. *He* was the first – and only, according to Jack Shortell – witness to identify Marty Goines as a homosexual, Upshaw's first homo lead outside of the mutilations. Put makeup on Coleman, and he could look middle-aged; put it all together with Doc Layman's silver wig strands found by the LA River and you had Coleman Masskie/Loftis/Healy committing murders out of his own blood lust and some kind of desire for revenge on incest raper Reynolds.

But one thing didn't play: Danny had questioned Coleman and met Reynolds. Why didn't he snap to their obvious resemblance?

Mal went through the rest of the pages, feeling the kid giving him juice. Everything was perfectly logical and boldly intelligent: Danny was beginning to get the killer's psyche down cold. There was a six-page report on his Tamarind Street break-in – he *did* do it – devil take the hindmost, fuck City/County strictures; he was afraid LAPD would ruin him for it, so he didn't take the polygraph that would have cleared him on Niles and night-trained it instead. Photographs showing blood patterns were mixed in with the reports; Danny had to have taken them himself, he'd risked a forensic in enemy territory. Mal felt tears in his eyes, saw himself building Ellis Loew's prosecution with Danny's evidence, making his own name soar on it. The Wolverine Killer in the gas chamber – sent there by the two of them and the unlikeliest best friend a ranking cop ever had: Buzz Meeks.

Mal dried his eyes; he made a neat stack of the pages and photographs. He saw feminine script in the margins of a jigtown canvassing list: Southside hotels, with jazz clubs check-marked against Danny's printing. He stuffed that page in his pocket, bundled the rest of the file up and walked to the front door with it. Tripping the bolt, he heard a key go in the lock; he opened the door bold, like Danny Upshaw at Tamarind Street.

Claire and Loftis were there on the porch; they looked at the broken glass, then at Mal and his armful of paper. Claire said, ‘You broke our deal.’

‘Fuck our deal.’

‘I was going to kill him. I finally figured out there was no other way.’

Mal saw a bag of groceries in Loftis’ arms; he realized they didn’t have time to see Minear. ‘For justice? People’s justice?’

‘We just talked to our lawyer. He said there’s no way you can prove any kind of homicide charges against us.’

Mal looked at Loftis. ‘It’s all coming out. You and Coleman, all of it. The grand jury and Coleman’s trial.’

Loftis stepped behind Claire, his head bowed. Mal glanced streetside and saw Buzz getting out of his car. Claire embraced her fiancé; Mal said, ‘Go look after Chaz. He killed a man for you.’

FORTY

DOWN TO DARKTOWN in Mal's car, Lux's list of heroin pushers and the Danny/Claire list taped to the dashboard. Mal drove; Buzz wondered if he'd killed the Plastic Surgeon to the Stars; they both talked.

Buzz filled in first: Mary Margaret's swooning confirmation and Lux minus the crucifixion. He talked up the plastic surgery on Coleman, a ploy to keep him safe from Dudley and fulfill his father's perv; Lux shooting Gordean the incest dope for blackmail purposes, the story of the burned face a device to hide the perv from Loftis' fellow lefties, the bandages simply the surgery scars healing. Buzz saved Lux rebreaking Coleman's face for last; Mal whooped and used the point to segue to sax man Healy, questioned by Danny Upshaw on New Year's Day – that was why the kid never snapped to a perfect Loftis/Coleman resemblance – it didn't exist anymore.

From there, Mal talked Coleman. Coleman's intro lead on Marty Goines as a fruit, Coleman stressing the tall, gray man, Coleman wearing a gray wig and probably makeup when he glommed his victims, shucking the beard Upshaw saw on him. Loftis and Claire had Mondo Lopez steal Danny's files when they found out he was working the homo killings – Juan Duarte had snitched him as a cop. Mal recounted the Minear interrogation, Coleman the third point of the '42–'44 love triangle, Chaz shooting blackmailer Gordean to redeem himself in Claire and Loftis' eyes, Claire and Loftis searching for Coleman. And they both agreed: Marty Goines, a longtime Coleman pal, was probably a victim of opportunity – he was there when the rat man *had* to kill. Victims two, three and four were to tie in to Daddy Reynolds – a hellish smear tactic.

They hit the Central Avenue Strip, daytime quiet, a block of spangly facades: the Taj Mahal, palm trees hung with Christmas lights, sequined music clefs, zebra stripes and a big plaster jigaboo with shiny red eyes. None of the clubs appeared to be open: bouncer-doormen and parking lot attendants sweeping up butts and broken glass were the only citizens out on the street. Mal parked and took the west side; Buzz took the east.

He talked to bouncers; he talked to auto park flunkies; he handed out all the cash he didn't stuff down Terry Lux's throat. Three of the darkies gave him 'Huh?'; two hadn't seen Coleman the alto guy in a couple of weeks; a clown in a purple admiral's tunic said he'd heard Healy was gigging at a private sepia club in Watts that let whiteys perform if they were hep and kept their lily-white meathooks off the colored trim. Buzz crossed the street and started canvassing toward his partner; three more 'Huh?'s' and Mal came trotting over to him.

He said, ‘I talked to a guy who saw Coleman last week at Bido Lito’s. He said he was talking to a sickly old Jewish man about half dead. The guy said he looked like one of the old jazz fiends from the rest home on 78th and Normandie.’

Buzz said, ‘You think Lesnick?’

‘We’re on the same track, lad.’

‘Quit callin’ me lad, it gives me the willies. Boss, I read a Bureau memo at Ellis’ house. Lesnick’s daughter said Pops was thinkin’ about checkin’ in to a rest bin to kick. There was a list of them, but I couldn’t grab it.’

‘Let’s hit that Normandie place first. You get anything?’

‘Coleman might be playin’ his horn at some private jig club in Watts.’

Mal said, ‘Shit. I worked 77th Street Division years ago, and there were tons of places like that. No more details?’

‘Nix.’

‘Come on, let’s move.’

They made it to the Star of David Rest Home fast, Mal running yellow lights, busting the speed limit by twenty miles an hour. The structure was a low tan stucco; it looked like a minimum security prison for people waiting to die. Mal parked and walked straight to the reception desk; Buzz found a pay phone outside and looked up ‘Sanitariums’ in the Yellow Pages.

There were thirty-four of them on the Southside. Buzz tore the page of listings out; he saw Mal standing by the car and walked over shaking his head. ‘Thirty-four bins around here. A long fuckin’ day.’

Mal said, ‘Nothing inside. No Lesnick registered, nobody dying of lung cancer on the ward. No Coleman.’

Buzz said, ‘Let’s try the hotels and pushers. If that’s no go, we’ll get some nickels and start callin’ the sanitariums. You know, I think Lesnick’s a lamster. If that was him with Coleman, he’s in this somehow, and he wouldn’t be registered under his own name.’

Mal tapped the hood of the car. ‘Buzz, Claire wrote that hotel list out. Minear said she and Loftis have been trying to find Coleman. If they’ve already tried –’

‘That don’t mean spit. Coleman’s been seen around here inside a week. He could be movin’ around, but always stayin’ close to the music. Somethin’s goin’ on with him and music, ’cause nobody made him for playin’ an instrument, now these boogies down here say he’s a hot alto sax. I say we hit hotels and H men while it’s still light out, then come dark we hit those jig joints.’

‘Let’s go.’

The Tevere Hotel on 84th and Beach – no Caucasians in residence. The Galleon Hotel on 91st and Bekin – the one white man staying there a three-hundred-pound rummy squeezed into a single room with his negress wife and their four kids. Walking back to the car, Buzz checked the two lists and grabbed Mal's arm. 'Whoa.'

Mal said, 'What?'

'A matcher. Purple Eagle Hotel, 96th and Central on Claire's list. Roland Navarette, Room 402 at the Purple Eagle on Lux's.'

'It took you a while.'

'Ink's all smudged.'

Mal handed him the keys. 'You drive, I'll see what else you missed.'

They drove southeast. Buzz ground gears and kept popping the clutch; Mal studied the two lists and said, 'The only matchup. You know what I was thinking?'

'What?'

'Lux knows Loftis and De Haven, and Loftis used to cop Claire's stuff. They could have access to Lux's suppliers, too.'

Buzz saw the Purple Eagle – a six-story cinderblock dump with a collection of chrome hood ornaments affixed above a tattered purple awning. He said, 'Could be,' and double-parked; Mal got out first and practically ran inside.

Buzz caught up at the desk. Mal was badging the clerk, a scrawny Negro with his shirtcuffs buttoned full in a sweltering lobby. He was muttering, 'Yessir, yessir, yessir,' one eye on Mal, one hand reaching under the desk.

Mal said, 'Roland Navarette. Is he still in 402?'

The hophead said, 'Nossir, nossir,' his hand still reaching; Buzz swooped around and pinned his wrist just as he was closing in on a junk bindle. He bent the fingers back; the hophead went, 'Yessir, yessir, yessir'; Buzz said, 'A white man, late twenties, maybe a beard. A jazz guy. He glom horse from Navarette?'

'Nossir, nossir, nossir.'

'Boy, you tell true or I break the hand you geez up with and throw you in the cracker tank at the Seven-Seven.'

'Yessir, yessir, yessir.'

Buzz let go and laid the bindle out on the desk. The clerk rubbed his fingers. 'White man, white woman here askin' same thing twenty minutes 'go. I tol' them, I tell you, Roland straighten up, fly right, don't sell no sweet horsey nohow.'

The punk's eyes strayed to a house phone; Buzz ripped it out and chucked it on the floor. Mal ran for the stairs.

Buzz huffed and puffed after him, catching up on the fourth-floor landing. Mal was in the middle of a putrid-smelling hallway, gun out, pointing to a doorway. Buzz got his breath, pulled his piece and walked over.

Mal ticked numbers; at three they kicked in the door. A Negro in soiled underwear was sitting on the floor sticking a needle in his arm, pushing the plunger down, oblivious to the noise and two white men pointing guns at him. Mal kicked his legs and pulled the spike out of his arm; Buzz saw a C-note resting under a fresh syringe on the dresser and knew Claire and Loftis had bought themselves a hot lead.

Mal was slapping the H man, trying to bring him back from cloud nine; Buzz knew that was futile. He hauled him away from Mal, dragged him to the bathroom, stuck his head in the toilet and flushed. Roland Navarette came back to earth with shakes, shivers and sputters; the first thing he saw out of the bowl was a .38 in his face. Buzz said, ‘Where’d you send them white people after Coleman?’

Roland Navarette said, ‘Man, this a humbug.’

Buzz cocked the gun. ‘Don’t make me.’

Roland Navarette said, ‘Coleman gigging at this after-hours on One-O-Six an’ Avalon.’

Watts, code three without a siren. Buzz fingered his billy club; Mal leadfooted through twilight traffic. One hundred and sixth and Avalon was the heart of the heart of Watts: every tarpaper shack on the block had goats and chickens behind barbed-wire fences. Buzz thought of crazed darkies sacrificing them for voodoo rituals, maybe inviting Coleman over for some wolverine stew and a night of jazz hot. He saw a string of blue lights flickering around the doorway of a corner stucco; he said, ‘Pull over, I see it.’

Mal swung hard right and killed his engine at the curb. Buzz pointed across the street. ‘That white car was in De Haven’s driveway.’ Mal nodded, opened the glove compartment and took out a pair of handcuffs. ‘I was going to let the papers in on this, but I guess there’s no time.’

Buzz said, ‘He might not be here. Loftis and Claire might be waitin’ him out, or there’d of been grief already. *You* ready?’

Mal nodded. Buzz saw a group of Negroes line up by the blue-lit door and start filing in. He motioned Mal out of the car; they hurried across the sidewalk and rode the last jazzbo’s coattails.

The doorman was a gigantic shine in a blue bongo shirt. He started to block the way in, then stepped back and bowed – an obvious police courtesy.

Buzz went in first. Except for blue Christmas bulbs taped to the walls and a baby spot illuminating the bar, the joint was dark. People sat at card tables facing the stage and a combo back-lit by more blue lights: blinkers covered with cellophane. The music was ear-splitting shit, one step down from noise. The trumpet, bass, drums, piano and trombone were Negro guys in blue bongo shirts. The alto sax was Coleman, no beard, a cracked blue bulb blinking across the set of Daddy Reynolds’ eyes.

Mal nudged Buzz and spoke loud in his ear. ‘Claire and Loftis at the bar. Over in the corner, tucked away.’

Buzz pivoted, saw the two, half shouted to make himself heard: ‘Coleman can’t see ’em. We’ll take him when this goddamn noise shuts off.’

Mal moved to the left side wall, ducking his head, moving up toward the bandstand; Buzz followed a few feet behind, doing a little shuffle: I'm not conspicuous, I'm not a cop. When they were almost to the edge of the stage, he looked back at the bar. Claire was still there; Loftis wasn't; a door on the right side of the room was just closing, showing a slice of light.

Buzz tapped Mal; Mal pointed over like he already knew. Buzz switched his gun from his holster to his right pants pocket; Mal had his piece pressed to his leg. The jigs quit playing and Coleman flew solo: squeals, rasps, honks, barks, growls, squeaks – Buzz thought of giant rats ripping flesh to the beat. There was a keening noise that seemed to go on forever, Coleman pitching his sax to the stars. The blue lights died; the keen went low note shuba-shuba-shuba in darkness and died. Real lights went on and the audience stampeded the bandstand, applauding.

Buzz pushed into the crush of bodies, Mal beside him, extra tall on his tiptoes. Everyone surrounding them was black; Buzz blinked for white and saw Coleman, sax held above his head, going through the right side door.

Mal looked at him; Buzz looked back. They pushed, punched, shoved, elbowed and kneed their way over, getting elbows, shoves and tossed drinks in their faces. Buzz came up on the door wiping bourbon sting out of his eyes; he heard a scream and a shot on the other side – and Mal went through the door gun first.

Another shot; Buzz ran after Mal's shadow. A smelly linoleum corridor. Two shapes struggling on the floor twenty feet down; Mal aiming, gun hand braced. A black guy turned a side corner and tried to block his aim; Mal shot him twice. The man careened off the walls and went down face first; Buzz got a look at the two on the floor. It was Loftis being strangled by Coleman Healy, big ugly pink dentures with fangs attached in his mouth. Coleman's chest was bloodied; Loftis was soaked dark red at the legs and groin. A revolver lay beside them.

Mal yelled, 'Coleman, get back!' Buzz slid down the wall, .38 out, looking for a clean shot at the rat man. Coleman made a denture-muffled bleat and bit off his father's nose; Mal fired three times, hitting Loftis in the side and chest, pitching him away from the thing attacking him. Coleman wrapped his arms around Daddy like an animal starved for food and went for his throat. Buzz aimed at his gorging head; Mal blocked his arm and fired again, a ricochet that tore the walls with zigzags. Buzz got free and squeezed a shot; Coleman grabbed his shoulder; Mal fumbled out his handcuffs and ran over.

Buzz threw himself prone and tried to find a shot; Mal's legs and flapping suitcoat made it impossible. He stumbled up and ran himself; he saw Coleman grab the gun on the floor and aim. One, two, three shots – Mal lifted clean off his feet and spun around with his face blown away. The body collapsed in front of him; Buzz walked to Coleman; Coleman leered behind bloody fangs and raised his gun. Buzz shot first, emptying his piece at the wolverine toothwork, screaming when he finally got an empty chamber. He kept screaming, and he was still screaming when a shitload of cops stormed in and tried to take Mal Considine away from him.

4
The Red Chaser Blues

FORTY-ONE

TEN DAYS WENT by; Buzz hid out at a motel in San Pedro. Johnny Stompanato brought him information and bothered him for his fee on the Minear squeeze; the chink restaurant down the street delivered three greasy squares a day; the newspapers and radio supplied more info. He called Audrey in Ventura every night, spinning her tall tales about Rio and Buenos Aires, where the U.S. government couldn't extradite and Mickey was too cheap to send men. He fretted on the last and craziest money-making scheme of his LA career, wondering if he'd survive to spend the proceeds. He listened to hillbilly music; and Hank Williams and Spade Cooley did terrible things to him. He missed Mal Considine wicked bad.

After the shootout, an LAPD army got the citizens quelled and the bodies removed. Four dead: Coleman, Loftis, Mal and the back door bouncer he shot. Claire De Haven disappeared – she probably sent Reynolds on his lunatic mission, heard the shots, decided one redemption for the night was sufficient and calmly caught a cab home to plan more People's Revolts, Beverly Hills style. He followed Mal to the morgue and gave a statement at the Seven-Seven squadroom, tying in the Healy/Loftis deaths to the homo snuffs and insisting the late Deputy Danny Upshaw get credit for cracking the case. His statement glossed the illegalities he and Mal pulled; he didn't mention Felix Gordean, Chaz Minear, Dudley Smith or Mike Breuning at all. Let fruitfly Chaz live to enjoy his redemption; crazy Dud was too large to tap for the José Diaz kill or Charles Hartshorn's 'suicide.'

Reading between newspaper lines, you could follow the upshot: the Gordean killing unsolved, no suspects; the shootout explained as Mal and himself 'following up a lead on an old case'; the dead boogie attributed to Coleman. No Commie or queer homicide angle on it at all – Ellis Loew had beaucoup press connections and hated complications. Reynolds and his son-lover were dismissed as 'old enemies settling a grudge' – the howler to top all howlers.

Mal Considine got a hero's funeral. Mayor Bowron attended, as did the entire LA City Council, Board of Supervisors and selected LAPD brass. Dudley Smith gave a moving eulogy, citing Mal's 'grand crusade' against Communism. The *Herald* ran a picture of Dudley chucking Mal's kid Stefan under the chin, exhorting him to 'be a trouper.'

Johnny Stomp was his conduit for dope on the grand jury, Ellis Loew to Mickey to him – and it looked like 24-karat stuff on all fronts:

Loew would begin his presentation of evidence next week – perfect timing – the UAES was still bearing the brunt of radio and newspaper editorials blaming them for the Gower Gulch bloodshed. Herman Gerstein, Howard Hughes and two other studio heads had told Loew they would oust UAES the day the grand jury convened – violating the union's contract on the basis of fine-print clauses pertaining to expulsion for subversive activities.

Johnny's other glad tidings: Terry Lux had suffered a stroke – the result of 'prolonged oxygen deprivation' caused by a mouthful of money and a popped artery in his right hand. He was recuperating well, but ruined tendons in that hand would prevent him from performing plastic surgery again. Mickey Cohen had upped the ante on the Meeks contract to $20,000; Buzz jacked his payoff on the Minear job to $25,000 so Stompanato wouldn't put a bullet in his head. The Mick was pulling his hair out over Audrey; he'd erected a shrine out of Audrey memorabilia: her stripper publicity pics, the costumes she wore when she headlined the Burbank in '38. Mickey locked the stuff up in his bedroom at the hideaway and spent hours mooning over it. Sometimes you could hear him crying like a baby.

And Turner Meeks himself, holder of the Va Va Voom Girl's real true love, was getting fat, fat, fatter on moo shu duck, sweet and sour pork, shrimp chop suey and beef kowloon – a shitload of condemned man's last meals. And with his money shot a day away, he knew there were two things he wanted to know before he stuck his head in the noose: the whole story on Coleman and why the UAES hadn't played its extortion scheme against the studios – whatever it was – yet. And he had a hunch he knew where to get the answers.

Buzz went to the motel office, changed a five into nickels and walked to the phone booth in the parking lot. He got out the list of rest homes he'd torn from the Yellow Pages the day of the shootout and started calling, impersonating a police officer. He figured Lesnick would be hiding under an alias, but he hit the flunkies he talked to with his real name anyway, along with 'old,' 'Jewish,' 'dying of lung cancer.' He was $3.10 poorer when a girl said, 'That sounds like Mr. Leon Trotsky.' She went on to say that the oldster had checked out against medical advice and left a forwarding address: the Seaspray Motel, 10671 Hibiscus Lane, Redondo Beach.

A cheap Commie joke making it easy for him.

Buzz walked to a U-Drive and rented an old Ford sedan, thinking it looked pretty long in the tooth for a getaway car. He paid a week's fee in advance, gave the clerk a look at his driver's license and asked him for a pen and paper. The clerk complied; Buzz wrote:

> Dr. Lesnick –
>
> I was in with the grand jury for a while. I was there when Coleman and Reynolds Loftis were killed and I know what happened with them '42–'44. I didn't let any of that information out. Check the newspapers if you don't believe me. I have to leave Los Angeles because of some

trouble I've gotten into and I would like to talk to you about Coleman. I won't tell what you tell me to the grand jury – I would get hurt if I did.

T. Meeks.

Buzz drove to the Seaspray Motel, hoping Mal's death kiboshed the Bureau men looking for Lesnick. It was an auto court at the tail of a dead-end street facing the beach; the office was shaped like a rocket ship pointed at the stars. Buzz walked in and punched the bell.

A youth with godawful pimples came in from the back. 'You want a room?'

Buzz said, 'Mr. Trotsky still alive?'

'Barely. Why?'

Buzz handed him the note and a five-spot. 'Is he in?'

'He's always in. Here or the beach. Where's he gonna go? Jitterbugging?'

'Give him the paper, sonny. Keep the five. If he says he'll talk to me, Abe Lincoln's got a brother.'

The pimple boy motioned Buzz outside; Buzz stood by his car and watched him walk to the middle of the court and knock on a door. The door opened, the boy went in; a minute later he came out lugging two beach chairs, a stooped old man holding his arm. The hunch played – Lesnick wanted some friendly ears on his way out.

Buzz let them come to him. The old man had a hand extended from ten yards away; his eyes were bright with sickness, his face was muddy beige and everything about him looked caved-in. His voice was strong – and the smile that went with it said he was proud of the fact. 'Mr Meeks?'

Buzz gave the hand a little tug, afraid of breaking bones. 'Yessir, Doctor.'

'And what is your rank?'

'I'm not a policeman.'

'Oh? And what were you doing with the grand jury?'

Buzz handed the clerk a fiver and grabbed the beach chairs. The boy walked off smiling; Lesnick held Buzz's arm. 'Why, then? I had thought Ellis Loew's minions were all policemen.'

Lesnick's weight on his was almost nothing – a stiff breeze would blow the fucker to Catalina. Buzz said, 'I did it for money. You wanta talk on the beach?'

Lesnick pointed to a spot near some rocks – it was free of glass and candy bar wrappers. Buzz shepherded him over, the chairs more of a strain than the man. He set the seats down facing each other, close, so he could hear if the Doc's voice went bum; he settled him in and watched him hunch into folds of terrycloth. Lesnick said, 'Do you know how I was convinced to become an informant?'

True snitch behavior – he had to justify himself. Buzz sat down and said, 'I'm not sure.'

Lesnick smiled, like he was glad he could tell it. 'In 1939 representatives of the Federal government offered me a chance to secure my daughter's release from Tehachapi Prison, where she was incarcerated for vehicular manslaughter. I was the official CP analyst in Los Angeles then, as I have remained. They told me that if I gave them access to my psychiatric files for evaluation by the 1940 State Attorney General's probe and other probes that might come up, they would release Andrea immediately. Since Andrea had a minimum of four more years to serve and had told me terrible stories of the abuse the matrons and her fellow inmates inflicted, I did not hesitate one second in agreeing.'

Buzz let Lesnick catch some breath – and cut to Coleman. 'And the reason you didn't kick loose with Loftis' file from '42 to '44 was because Coleman was smeared all over it. That right?'

Lesnick said, 'Yes. It would have meant much unnecessary suffering for Reynolds and Coleman. Before I turned the files over in toto I checked for other Coleman references. Chaz Minear alluded to Coleman, but only elliptically, so his file I relinquished. I did that same sort of editing when I gave my files to the HUAC investigators, but I lied and told them the Loftis file had been lost. I didn't think Ellis Loew woud believe that lie, so I just secreted Reynolds' file portion and hoped I would die before they asked me for it.'

'Why didn't you just chuck the damn thing?'

Lesnick coughed and hunched deeper into his robe. 'I had to keep studying it. It compelled me greatly. Why did you leave the grand jury? Was it moral qualms over Ellis Loew's methods?'

'I just didn't think UAES was worth the trouble.'

'Your statement on the newspapers gives you credibility, and I find myself wondering exactly how much you know.'

Buzz shouted over a sudden crash of waves. 'I worked the killings *and* the grand jury! What I don't know is the history!'

The ocean noise subsided; Lesnick coughed and said, 'You know all . . .'

'Doc, I know the incest stuff, and the plastic surgery and all about Coleman tryin' to frame his daddy. The only other guy who knew was that DA's captain who was killed at the jazz club. And I think you wanta tell what you got, or you wouldn't of pulled that juvenile "Trotsky" number. Make sense, headshrinker?'

Lesnick laughed, coughed, laughed. 'You understand the concept of subliminal motivation, Mr. Meeks.'

'I got a half-assed brain, boss. Wanta hear my theory why you held the files back from summer '49 on?'

'Please expound.'

'The UAESers who knew were talkin' about Reynolds and Claire gettin' married and how Coleman would take it. That right?'

'Yes. I was afraid the investigators would seize the Coleman references and try to locate him as one of their friendly witnesses. Claire tried to keep news of the wedding out of the papers so Coleman wouldn't see it, but she did not succeed. At a terrible price, as I'm sure you know.'

Buzz stared at the water, stone quiet: his favorite trick to open suspects up. After a minute or so, Lesnick said, 'When the second two victims were reported in the scandal tabloids, I knew the killer had to be Coleman. He was my analysand during the SLDC time. I knew he would have to be living somewhere near the Central Avenue jazz clubs, and I located him. We were close once, and I thought I could reason with him, get him to a locked institution and stop his senseless slaughter. Augie Duarte proved me wrong, but I tried. *I tried.* Think of that before you judge me too harshly.'

Buzz looked at the walking dead man. 'Doc, I'm not judgin' anybody in this fuckin' thing. I'm just leavin' town in a day or so, and I sure would like you to fill in what I don't know.'

'And nobody else will be told?'

Buzz threw Lesnick some crumbs. 'You tried to spare your friends grief while you played the game, and I've pulled tricks like that too. I've got these two friends who'd like to know why, but they ain't ever gonna. So could you maybe just tell me?'

Saul Lesnick told. It took him two hours, with many long pauses to suck in air and keep himself fueled. Sometimes he looked at Buzz, sometimes he looked out at the ocean. He faltered at some of the worst of it, but he always kept telling.

1942.

Wartime blackouts in LA, 10:00 P.M. curfew. Coleman was nineteen, living on Bunker Hill with his crazy mother Delores and two of his quasi-sisters. He used the surname 'Masskie' because slave breeder mommy needed a paternal monicker to get Relief payments for her son and the seven letters jibed with Sister Aimee's dictates on numerology. Coleman dropped out of Belmont High when they wouldn't let him play in the school band; he was heartbroken when the band teacher told him the stupid saxophone flubbing he did was just noise that indicated no talent, only strong lungs.

Coleman tried to join the army two months after Pearl Harbor; he flunked the physical on trick knees and a spastic colon. He passed out handbills for Angelus Temple, earned enough money to buy himself a new alto sax and spent hours running chords and improvisational charts that sounded good only to him. Delores wouldn't let him practice at home, so he took his horn to the Griffith Park hills and honked at the squirrels and coyotes and stray dogs that trucked there. Sometimes he walked to the downtown library and listened to Victrola records with earphones. His favorite was 'Wolverine Blues,' sung by an old coon named Hudson Healy. The jig mushed words, and you could hardly hear him; Coleman invented his own words, dirty stuff about wolverines fucking, and sometimes he sang alone under his breath. He listened to the record so much that he wore down the grooves to where you could hardly hear anything, and he started singing a little bit louder to make up for it. Finally, the old biddy who ran the Victrola Room got wind of his lyrics and gave him the boot. For weeks he jerked off to fantasies of Coleman the Wolverine butt raping her.

Delores kept bothering Coleman for Sister Aimee money; he took a job at the Joredco Dental Lab and gave her a percentage tithe. The work was pulling animal teeth out of decapitated trophy heads, and he loved it. He watched the more skilled workers make dentures with the teeth, fashioning plastic and mortar paste into choppers that could bite for eternity. He stole a set of bobcat plates and played with them when he honked his sax up in the hills. He pretended he was a bobcat and that Delores and his phony brothers and sisters were afraid of him.

Joredco laid Coleman off when the boss found a wetback family who'd work for an extra-low group rate. Coleman was hurt and tried to get a job at a couple of other dental labs, but found out Joredco was the only one that made dentures with *real* animal teeth. He took to prowling around after dark – *real* dark – everybody shut in behind blackout curtains so the Japs wouldn't see all the lights and do LA like they did Pearl Harbor.

Coleman composed music in his head while he prowled; curiosity about life behind the curtains almost drove him crazy. There was a list on the wall at a local barbershop: Bunker Hill citizens who were *good* citizens working defense jobs. The list said who was working days, swing and graveyard. Coleman took the names to the phone book and matched them to addresses; from there he made phone calls – a phony census poll – and figured out who was married and who wasn't. Unmarried and graveyard meant a Coleman foray.

He forayed a bunch of times: in through an unlocked window, busting open a woodbox door, sometimes chiseling a door jamb. He took little things and money to keep Delores off his back. His best catch was a stuffed bobcat. But Coleman liked just *being* in the empty houses best. It was fun to pretend to be an animal that could appreciate music. It was fun to be in dark places and pretend you could see in the dark.

Early in June, Coleman was on the Hill Street trolley and heard two guys talking about a strange-o named Thomas Cormier and the smelly animals he kept behind his house on Corondelet. One man recited the names: weasels, ferrets, badgers, otters and wolverines. Coleman got excited, census-called Thomas Cormier and learned he worked nights at the Griffith Park Zoo. The next night, armed with a flashlight, he visited the wolverines and fell in love with them.

They were nasty. They were vicious. They took shit from no one. They tried to chew through the front of their cages to get at him. They had a snarl that sounded like the high notes on his sax.

Coleman left; he didn't burglarize the house, because he wanted to keep coming back for more visits. He read up on the lore of the wolverine and reveled in tales of its savagery. He set rat traps in Griffith Park and brought his catch back for the wolverines to eat dead. He brought hamsters and fed them to the wolverines live. He shone his flashlight on the wolverines and watched them gorge on his goodies. He came without touching himself while he watched.

Coleman's summer was marred by Delores pestering him for more money. Late in July, he read in the paper about a local bachelor who working swing shift at Lockheed and owned a valuable coin collection. He decided to steal it, sell it and parcel the money out to Delores so she'd leave him alone.

On the night of August 2, Coleman tried – and was captured inside the house by the owner and two friends of his. He went for the owner's eyes like a good wolverine – unsuccessfully – but managed to get away. He ran the six blocks home, found Delores and a strange man going 69 on the couch with the lights on, was repulsed and ran back outside in a panic. He tried to run for the wolverine house, but the coin collection man and his pals – trawling in a car – found him. They drove him out to Sleepy Lagoon Park and beat him; the coin collection man wanted to castrate him, but his friends held him back. They left him there beaten bloody, composing music in his head.

Coleman stumbled over to a grassy knoll and saw – *or thought he saw* – a big white man beating a Mexican youth with his fists, slashing at his clothes with a razor-bladed two-by-four. The white man railed in a thick brogue: 'Spic filth! I'll teach you to traffic with clean young white girls!' He ran the boy down with a car and drove away.

Coleman examined the Mexican youth and found him dead. He made it home, lied to Delores about his injuries and spent time recuperating. Seventeen Mexican boys were indicted for the Sleepy Lagoon killing; a social ruckus over their innocence ensued; the boys were quickly put on trial and languished in jail. Coleman sent the LA Police Department anonymous letters during the trial – he described the monster he had come to call the Scotch Voice Man and told what really happened. Months passed; Coleman played his sax, afraid to burglarize, afraid to visit his wolverine friends. He worked skid row day labor and kicked back most of the scratch to keep Delores off his case. Then one day the Scotch Voice Man himself came walking up the steps of 236 South Beaudry.

Delores and his half sisters were gone for the day; Coleman hid out, realizing what must have happened: he left fingerprints on the letters and Scotch Voice retrieved the notes and compared the prints against the prints in his Selective Service file. Coleman hid out all that day and the next; Delores told him an 'evil man' was looking for him. He knew he had to run, but had no money; he got an idea: check crazy momma's scrapbook of old flames for men that he resembled.

Coleman found four photographs of a summer-stock actor named Randolph Lawrence – the dates on the back of the pictures and a strongish facial resemblance said this was his daddy. He copped two of the snapshots, hitchhiked to Hollywood and told a fish story to a clerk at the Screen Actors Guild. She believed his abridged tale of parental abandonment, checked the Guild files and informed him that Randolph Lawrence was really Reynolds Loftis, a character actor of some note: 816 Belvedere, Santa Monica Canyon.

The child showed up at his father's door. Reynolds Loftis was touched, pooh-poohed the story of the Scotch Voice Man, admitted his parentage and gave Coleman shelter.

Loftis was living with a screenwriter named Chaz Minear; the two men were lovers. They were members of the Hollywood leftist community, they were party-hopping devotees of avant-garde cinema. Coleman spied on them in bed – he both loved and hated it. He went with them to parties thrown by a Belgian filmmaker; the man screened movies featuring naked men and snapping dogs that reminded him of his wolverines – and the films obsessed him. Reynolds was generous with money and didn't mind that he spent his days in the back yard honking his alto. Coleman started hanging out at jazz clubs in the Valley and met a trombone player named Mad Marty Goines.

Mad Marty was a heroin fiend, a reefer seller, a burglar and a second-rate horn. He was a lowlife's lowlife, with a legitimate gift: teaching thievery and music. Marty taught Coleman how to hotwire cars and really blow alto, showing him how to shape notes, read music, take his repertoire of noises and powerful lungs and use them to make sounds that meant something.

It was now the winter of '43. Coleman was shedding his baby fat, getting handsome. Reynolds became demonstrative to him, physically affectionate – lots of hugs and kisses on the cheek. He suddenly credited the story of the Scotch Voice Man. He joined the Sleep Lagoon Defense Committee – a hot lefty item now that the seventeen boys had been convicted – to prove his faith in Coleman.

Reynolds told Coleman to be quiet about the Scotch Voice Man – nobody would believe him, and the important thing was to get the poor prosecuted boys out of jail. He told him Scotch Voice would never be caught, but the evil man was probably still looking for Coleman – who needed protective coloration to remain safe from him. Reynolds took Coleman to Dr. Terence Lux and had his face physically altered to his own specifications. While recuperating at the clinic, Coleman went crazy, killing chickens in the hatchery, pretending he was a wolverine while he drank their blood. He got leaves from the clinic and pulled burglaries with Mad Marty, his face bandaged like a movie monster; he went to SLDC rallies with his attentive father – and against his wishes told the story of José Diaz and the Scotch Voice Man. Nobody believed him, everyone patronized him as Reynold

Loftis' nutty kid brother burned in a fire – lies his father told him to go along with. Then the bandages came off and Coleman *was* his father twenty years younger. And Reynolds seduced his own youthful mirror image.

Coleman went with it. He knew he was safe from Scotch Voice; while recovering from the surgery he did not know how his new face would look, but he knew now that he was beautiful. The perversion was awful but continually exciting, like being a wolverine prowling in a strange dark house twenty-four hours a day. Acting the part of a platonic kid brother was an intriguing subterfuge; Coleman knew Daddy was terrified of their secret coming out and kept mum – he knew also that Reynolds was going to rallies and donating money to causes because he felt guilty for seducing him. Maybe the surgery was not for his safety – just for the seduction. Chaz moved out – bitter over the horrific cuckolding – spurning Reynolds' offer to make it a menage à trois. Minear went on a sex bender then, a different Felix Gordean male prostitute every night – Reynolds lived in terror of his ex-lover telling them of the incest and tricked with a bunch of prosties himself, for the sex and to keep his ear down. Coleman was jealous, but kept still about it, and his father's sudden frugality and displays of nervousness convinced him that Reynolds was being blackmailed. Then Coleman met Claire De Haven and fell in love with her.

She was Reynolds' friend and confrere in various leftist organizations, and she became Coleman's confidante. Coleman had begun to find sex with his father intolerable; he pretended the man was Claire to get through their nights together. Claire heard Coleman's horror story out and convinced him to see Dr. Lesnick, the CP's approved psychiatrist – Saul would never violate confidentiality with an analysand.

Lesnick heard Coleman out – in a series of arduously detailed two-hour sessions. He believed the Sleepy Lagoon story to be fabricated on two levels: Coleman needing to justify his search for his father and his own latent homo-sexuality; Coleman wanting to curry favor with SLDC Latins by saying the killer was white – not the unfound Mexican gang members the leftist community asserted the slayers to be. That aside, he believed Coleman's narratives, comforted him and urged him to break off the affair with his father.

Lesnick was also seeing Loftis as a patient; he knew Reynolds was guilt-crazed over the affair, giving more and more money to more and more causes – especially the SLDC – an adjunct of the lever of manipulation he had applied to get Coleman to consent to the plastic job. Coleman felt reality closing in and began visiting Thomas Cormier's wolverines again, feeding and loving them. One night he felt an incredible urge to pet and hold one. He opened a pen, tried to embrace the beast and was bitten all over his arms. He and the wolverine fought; Coleman won with a stranglehold. He took the carcass home, skinned it, ate its flesh raw and made dentures out of its teeth, wearing them in his private hours, pretending to be the wolverine – stalking, fucking, killing.

Time passed.

Reynolds, convinced by Claire and Lesnick, broke off the liaison with Coleman. Coleman resented his sex power being usurped and started hating Daddy outright. The boys convicted of the Sleepy Lagoon killing were exonerated and released from prison – the SLDC largely responsible for securing the piece of justice. Claire and Coleman continued to talk, but now sporadically. Coleman copped Southside heroin for her to dally with; Claire was more disturbed than pleased by the gesture, but she did give Coleman a two-thousand-dollar loan he asked for. He used the money to buy himself a second Terry Lux surgery, the doctor going at his face with weighted boxing gloves, then holing him up at the hatchery with morphine and syringes to keep himself painless. Coleman read anatomy and physiology texts there; he left the clinic, kicked the drug cold turkey and showed up at Claire's door black and blue, but not looking like his father. When he asked Claire to sleep with him, she ran away in horror.

1945.

Coleman moved out of Los Angeles, Claire's revulsion a hot wind at his back. He bummed around the country and played alto with pickup bands, taking Hudson Healy's surname. In '47, Reynolds Loftis went before HUAC, refused to inform and was blacklisted; Coleman read about it and was delighted. Coleman was living in a world of impacted rage: fantasies of hurting his father, possessing Claire, raping men who looked at him the wrong way and eating their flesh with the wolverine teeth he still carried everywhere. Composing music and playing it was the only thing holding him glued. Then, back in LA at the end of '49, he read that Daddy and Claire were getting married. His threadbare, jerry-built world crashed in.

Coleman's fantasies escalated to where he couldn't even think of music. He knew he had to act on the fantasies and build a purpose around them, clear and precise like what his music meant to him. He found out about Reynolds' UAES membership and learned when the union held its Executive Committee meetings. He decided to kill sex partners of his father's – ones he remembered from the time of Daddy's breakup with Chaz. Coleman recalled George Wiltsie and Latin lover Augie by face and name, but they would never be able to identify him: at the time he was protectively colored as a lowly kid brother. He remembered other Reynolds conquests strictly by face, but knew the bars they frequented. Finding victims would be easy, the rest of it more difficult.

The plan:

Kill the Reynolds lovers on UAES meeting nights, disguised as Reynolds, spreading Reynolds' identical O+ seed, dropping clues to point to Reynolds as the killer, forcing him to – at worst – be implicated in the murders, or – milder punishment – cough up his treasonous UAES meetings as alibis. Daddy could be convicted of the crimes; he could be a suspect and have to admit his homosexuality to the police; he might get smeared in the press, and if he used his precious union soirees as alibis, he might ruin his newly resurrected movie career on grounds of Pinko associations.

Coleman knew he needed money to finance his killing spree, and he was only making chump change gigging on Central Avenue. On Christmas Eve he ran into his old pal Marty Goines at Bido Lito's. Marty was surprised – and happy – it was the first time he'd seen Coleman post-bandages, years had gone by, the boy had become a man with a new face – and was not a bad alto. Coleman suggested they pull another B&E string; Mad Marty agreed. They made plans to talk after New Year's; then, early New Year's Eve, Goines saw Coleman outside Malloy's Nest and told him he'd called a Quentin buddy in Frisco, Leo Bordoni, and invited him to join their gang. Coleman, enraged at not being consulted – but not showing it – determined that Goines hadn't mentioned him or described him to Bordoni and decided that his old jazz mentor was prime wolverine bait. He told Marty to meet him at 67th and Central at 12:15, and to be quiet about it – there was a reason.

Coleman went to his room and got the Reynolds gray wig and makeup kit he'd brought. He fashioned a zoot stick from a plank he found in the garbage and a Gillette five-pack. He snapped that UAES was holding a party/meeting that night, copped four H bindles and a hypo from his old source Roland Navarette, pegged an unlocked Buick on 67th as his wheels, played his last gig at the Zombie, walked into the men's can at the Texaco Station on 68th as Coleman, walked out as Daddy.

Marty was right on time, but drunk – he didn't even blink at Coleman's disguise. Coleman coldcocked him on the sidewalk, slung him against his shoulder like a boozed-out buddy, got him into the Buick and hot-wired it. He geezed Marty up with a heavy junk load, drove him to his crib in Hollywood, shot him with the other three bindles and stuffed the hood of a terrycloth robe in his mouth so he wouldn't vomit blood on him when his cardiac arteries burst. Marty's heart popped big; Coleman strangled the rest of his life out, zoot slashed his back, pulled out his eyes like he tried to with the coin collection man back at Sleepy Lagoon. He raped those bare sockets; he put on his wolverine teeth and feasted, spraying blood on the walls to wild alto riffs in his head. When he was finished he left the eyeballs in the Frigidaire, dressed Goines in the white terry robe, carried him downstairs and propped him up in the back seat of the Buick. He adjusted the rear-view mirror so he could watch Marty with his eyeless head lolling; he drove to Sunset Strip in the rain, thinking of Daddy and Claire reamed to their teeth in every orifice. He deposited Marty nude in a vacant lot on Allegro, prime fruit territory, a corpse on display like the Black Dahlia. If he was lucky, victim number one would get just as much ink.

Coleman went back to his music, his other life. The Goines kill did not reap the publicity he hoped it would – the Dahlia was a beautiful woman, Marty an anonymous transient. Coleman rented U-Drive cars and patrolled 2307 Tamarind at odd times; no cops showed up – he could use the place again. He got George Wiltsie's address from the phone book and decided that Wiltsie would be victim number two. He spent nights cruising queer bars near the pad, saw Wiltsie at the dives, but always in the company of his squeeze, a guy he called 'Duane.' He almost decided to let the bastard live – but thinking of the possibilities a duo kill presented made him tingly and reminded him of Delores and the man going 69. Then Duane mentioned to a barman that he worked at Variety International – old Daddy turf.

Providence.

Coleman approached George and Duane, carrying a little kill kit he'd concocted: secobarbital caps bought from Roland Navarette, and strychnine from the drugstore. Two to one, barbiturate to poison – pinpricks on the capsules for a quick effect. Coleman suggested a party at 'his place' in Hollywood; George and Duane accepted. On the ride over in his U-Drive, he gave them a pint of rye to slug from. When they were half gassed, he asked them if they'd like to try some real Spanish Fly. Both men eagerly swallowed death pills; by the time they got to Marty's dump they were so woozy Coleman had to help them upstairs. Lindenaur was DOA, Wiltsie in a deep slumber. Coleman undressed them and went to work zooting the dead guy.

Wiltsie woke up and fought to live. Coleman slashed one of the fruiter's fingers off defending himself and killed him with a knife thrust to the throat. With both men dead, he zooted, wolverined, raped the standard way and drew music pictures and a trademark W on the walls. He put Wiltsie's digit in the icebox; he showered Duane and George free of blood, wrapped them in spare blankets, carried them down and drove to Griffith Park, his old sax-honking territory. He stripped them and carried them up to the hiking trail; he 69'd them for the world to see. If *he* was seen, he was seen as his father.

Two events coincided.

Dr. Saul Lesnick, near death and wanting to somehow recoup his moral losses, read a scandal tabloid account of the Wiltsie/Lindenaur murders. He recalled Wiltsie as a name bandied in a Reynolds Loftis psychiatric session years before; the zoot slashing reminded him of Coleman's fantasies regarding the Scotch Voice Man and the weapons at Terry Lux's hatchery. What finally convinced him that Coleman was the killer was the hunger behind the obliquely described bite marks. Coleman was hunger personified. Coleman wanted to be the most vicious, insatiable animal on earth, and now he was proving that he was.

Lesnick knew the police would kill Coleman if they caught him. Lesnick knew he had to try to get him to a locked-ward institution before he killed anyone else or took it in mind to go after Reynolds and Claire. He knew Coleman had to be close to the music, and found him playing at a club on Central Avenue. He regained Coleman's confidence as the one person who had never hurt him, secured him a cheap apartment in Compton and talked, talked, talked to him, hiding with him when a friend in the leftist community told him Reynolds and Claire were also seeking Coleman out. Coleman was experiencing moments of clarity – a classic behavior pattern in sexual psychopaths who had succumbed to murder to satisfy their lusts. He poured out the story of his first three killings; Lesnick knew that chauffeuring a dead man in the back seat and the second victims brought to Tamarind Street were a pure subconscious attempt to be caught. Psychological craters existed for a skilled psychologist to drive wedges into – Saul Lesnick's redemption for ten years of informing on people he loved.

Coleman was fighting his urges inchoately, with music. He was working on a long solo piece filled with eerie silences to signify lies and duplicities. The riffs would spotlight the unique high sounds he got with his sax, loud at first, then getting softer, with longer intervals of silence. The piece would end on a scale of diminishing notes, then unbroken quiet – which Coleman saw as being louder than any noise he could produce. He wanted to call his composition The Big Nowhere. Lesnick told him that if he got to a hospital, he would survive to perform it. The doctor saw Coleman faltering, clarity gaining. Then Coleman told him about Danny Upshaw.

He'd met Upshaw the night after he killed Marty Goines. The detective was on a routine canvassing assignment, and Coleman brazened him out with his 'I was in plain view all night' alibi, knowing Upshaw believed it. That belief meant Goines had kept mum about meeting him, and Coleman took the opportunity to lie about Marty being fruit and drop clues on tall, gray Daddy. He put Upshaw out of his mind and went on with his plan, killing Wiltsie and Lindenaur, wavering between Augie Duarte or another Daddy squeeze he knew as victim number four. But he'd started having dreams about the young detective, steamy stuff that said he really was what Daddy tried to make him. Coleman made a decision to murder Reynolds and Claire if he couldn't smear Daddy to the rafters – he thought that potential added blood to his stew would spice him up and make him dream about the women he once loved.

The plan didn't work. Coleman had more Upshaw dreams, more Upshaw fantasies. He was Daddy-garbed and in the process of staking out Felix Gordean's office for leads on old Reynolds lovers when he spotted Upshaw holding down his own surveillance; he was nearby when Upshaw phoned the DMV Police Information Line. He caught the gist of his talk, and tailed Upshaw in the Pontiac he'd stolen – just to get close to him. Upshaw spotted the tail; a chase followed; Coleman got away, stole another car, called the DMV and pretended to be the deputy's partner. One of the names the clerk read back to him was Augie Duarte; Coleman decided it was providence again and settled on him as victim four then and there. He drove to Gordean's beach house, spotted Upshaw's car, hid and listened to Gordean and one of his musclemen talking. The pimp/queer expert said, 'That policeman is coming out of the closet. I know it.'

The next day, Coleman let himself into Upshaw's apartment and savored it. He saw no mementoes of women, nothing but a too-tidy, impersonal pad. Coleman knew then, and began to feel a complete identification with Upshaw, a symbiosis. That night, Lesnick left the apartment to get medicine at County General, thinking Coleman's Upshaw fixation would break him down on his homosexuality, stymie and stalemate him. He was wrong. Coleman picked up Augie Duarte at a downtown bar, sedated him and took him to an abandoned garage in Lincoln Heights. He strangled him and hacked him and ate him and emasculated him like Daddy and all the others had tried to do to him. He left the body in the LA River wash, drove back to Compton and told Lesnick he had finally put Upshaw in perspective. He was going to compete with the man, killer against detective. Saul Lesnick left the apartment and took a cab back to his rest home, knowing Coleman Healy would wreak slaughter until he was slaughtered himself. And the frail old headshrinker had been trying to get up the guts for a mercy killing ever since.

Lesnick ended his narrative with a deft storyteller's flourish, pulling a revolver from the folds of his robe. He said, 'I saw Coleman one more time. He had read that Upshaw died accidentally and was very disturbed by it. He had just purchased opiates from Navarette and was going to kill another man, a man who had been an extra on one of Reynolds' films, an opium dabbler. The man had had a brief fling with Reynolds and Coleman was going to kill him. He told me, like he thought I would do nothing to stop it. I bought this gun at a pawnshop in Watts. I was going to kill Coleman that night, but you and Captain Considine got to him first.'

Buzz looked at the piece. It was old and rusted and would probably misfire, like the shrinker's nutso take on Sleepy Lagoon as a fantasy. Coleman would have slapped it out of his bony hand before Pops could pull the trigger. 'You pleased the way it turned out, Doc?'

'No. I am sorry for Reynolds.'

Buzz thought of Mal shooting straight at Daddy – wanting Coleman alive for his career and maybe something to do with his own kid. 'I've got a cop question, Doc.'

Lesnick said, 'Please. Ask me.'

'Well, I thought Terry Lux hipped Gordean to all the stuff Gordean blackmailed Loftis with. Your story makes me think Chaz Minear told Felix some details, details that he put together when he blackmailed Loftis a second time just lately. Stuff that made him think Coleman was killin' people.'

Lesnick smiled. ‘Yes, Chaz told Felix Gordean many things about Coleman’s clinic stay that could be construed as clues when put together with newspaper facts. I read that Gordean was murdered. Was it Chaz?’

‘Yeah. Does that please you?’

‘It’s a small happy ending, yes.’

‘Any thoughts on Claire?’

‘Yes. She’ll survive your grand jury pogrom like a Tigress. She’ll find another weak man to protect and other causes to champion. She’ll do good for people who deserve good done for them, and I will not comment on her character.’

Buzz said, ‘Before things got out of control, it looked like the UAES had some kind of extortion scheme brewin’ against the studios. Were you playin’ both ends? Holdin’ back stuff you heard as a psychiatrist to help the union?’

Lesnick coughed and said, ‘Who wants to know?’

‘Two dead men and me.’

‘And who else will hear?’

‘Just me.’

‘I believe you. Why, I don’t know.’

‘Dead men got no reason to lie. Come on, Doc. Spill.’

Lesnick fondled his pawnshop piece. ‘I have verified information on Mr. Howard Hughes and his penchant for underaged girls, and much information on various RKO and Variety International actors and the narcotics cures they periodically undergo. I have information on the underworld associations of many studio executives, including one RKO gentleman who ran down a family of four in his car and killed them. The arrest was fixed, and it never went to trial, but that allegation by itself would be most embarrassing. So the UAES is not without weapons, you see.’

Buzz said, ‘Boss, I pimped them girls to Howard and fixed up most of them dope cures. I got that RKO guy off the hook and ran the payoff to the judge that woulda arraigned them. Doc, the papers would never print what you got and the radio would never put it on the air. Howard Hughes and Herman Gerstein would laugh your extortion right back in your face. I’m the best fixer this town ever saw, and believe me the UAES is crucified.’

Saul Lesnick got to his feet, wobbled, but stayed standing. He said, ‘And how will you fix that?’

Buzz walked on the question.

When he got back to his motel, there was a note from the manager on the door: ‘Call Johnny S.’ Buzz went to the pay phone and dialed Stompanato’s number.

‘Talk to me.’

‘It’s Meeks. What’s up?’

‘Your number, but hopefully not my money. I just got a lead, through a friend of Mickey’s. LAPD did a routine ballistics run-through on that jazz club shootout you were in. That hotshot coroner Layman examined the report on the pills they took out of that rat guy you told me about. It looked familiar, so he checked back. Bullets from your gun matched the pills they took out of Gene Niles. LAPD makes you for the Niles snuff, and they’re out to get you in force. Shoot to kill. And I hate to mention it, but you owe me a lot of money.’

Buzz sighed. ‘Johnny, you’re a rich man.’

‘What?’

Buzz said, ‘Meet me here tomorrow at noon,’ and hung up. He dialed an East LA number and got, ‘Quien? Quien es?’

‘Speak English, Chico, it’s Meeks.’

‘Buzz! My Padrone!’

‘I’m changin’ my order, Chico, No thirty-thirty, make it a sawed-off.’

‘.12 gauge, Padrone?’

‘Bigger, Chico. The biggest you got.’

FORTY-TWO

The shotgun was a .10 gauge pump with a foot-long barrel. The slugs held triple-aught buckshot. The five rounds in the breech were enough to turn Mickey Cohen's haberdashery and the dope summit personnel into dog food. Buzz was carrying the weapon in a venetian blind container covered with Christmas wrapping paper.

His U-Drive clunker was at the curb a half block south of Sunset. The haberdashery lot was packed with Jew canoes and guinea gunboats; one sentry was stationed by the front door shooing away customers; the man by the back door looked half asleep, sitting in a chair catching a full blast of late-morning sun. Two neutral triggers accounted for – Dudley and the fourth man had to be inside with the action.

Buzz waved at the guy up on the corner – his prepaid accomplice recruited from a wine bar. The guy walked into the lot looking furtive, trying Caddy and Lincoln door handles, skirting the last row of cars by the fence. Buzz eased up slowly, waiting for the sentry to take note and pounce.

It took the sunbird almost half a minute to stir, get wise and tread over, a hand inside his jacket pocket. Buzz ran full speed, fat lightning on sneakered feet.

The sentry turned around at the last second; Buzz swung the Christmas box in his face and knocked him against the hood of a '49 Continental. The man pulled his gun; Buzz kneed him in the nads, popped his nose with a flat palm and watched the .45 auto hit the blacktop. Another knee spear put him down and keening; Buzz kicked the gun away, whipped off the box and used the butt of his sawed-off to beat him quiet.

The accomplice was gone; the sentry was bleeding at the mouth and nose, deep off in dreamland – maybe for keeps. Buzz pocketed the loose cannon, walked over to the back door and let himself in.

Laughter and hail-fellow dialogue booming; a short corridor lined with dressing rooms. Buzz inched up to a curtain, pulled a corner back and looked.

The summit was in full swing. Mickey Cohen and Jack Dragna were glad-handing each other, standing by a table laid out with cold cuts, bottles of beer and liquor. Davey Goldman, Mo Jahelka and Dudley Smith were knocking back highballs; a line of Dragna humps was standing by the front window curtains. Johnny Stompanato was nowhere to be seen because Johnny Stompanato was probably halfway to Pedro by now, hoping a certain fat man survived the morning. Over by the left wall, the real business was happening: two Mex National types counting a suitcase full of money while one Mickey guy and one Jack guy taste-tested the white-brown powder stuffed into reinforced paper bags in another suitcase. Their smiles said the stuff tasted good.

Buzz pulled the curtain aside and joined the party, sliding a round into the chamber to get some attention. The noise caused heads to turn, drinks and plates of food to drop; Dudley Smith smiled; Jack Dragna eyed the barrel. Buzz saw a cop type by the Mexes. Twenty to one he and Dudley were the only ones heeled; Dud was much too smart to try something. Mickey Cohen looked hurt. He said, 'As God is my witness I will do you worse than I did the guy who did Hooky Rothman.'

Buzz felt his whole body floating away from him. The Mexes were starting to look scared; a rap on the window would bring the outside man. He stepped over to where he could see every face in the room and trained his muzzle for a blast spread: Jack and Mickey vaporized the second he pulled the trigger. 'The money and the dope in one of your garment bags, Mick. Now and slow.'

Mickey said, 'Davey, he'll shoot. *Do it!*'

Buzz saw Davey Goldman cross his vision and start talking low Spanish to the Mexes. He caught a slant view of paper sacks and greenbacks being ladled into a zippered hanger bag, tan canvas with red piping and Mickey Cohen's face embossed on the front. Mickey said, 'If you send Audrey back to me I will not harm a hair on her head and I will not do you slow. If I find her with you, mercy I cannot promise. Send her back to me.'

A million-dollar deal blown – and all Mickey Cohen could think of was a woman. 'No.'

The bag was zipped up; Goldman walked it over extra slow. Buzz held his left arm out straight; Mickey was shaking like a hophead dying for a fix. Buzz wondered what he'd say next; the little big man said, '*Please.*'

The garment bag settled; Buzz felt his arm buckling. Dudley Smith winked. Buzz said, 'I'll be back for you, lad. Diaz and Hartshorn.'

Dudley laughed. 'You won't live the day.'

Buzz backed into the curtains. 'Don't go out the rear door, it's booby-trapped.'

Mickey Cohen said, '*Please.* You can't run with her. Not a hair on her head will I hurt.'

Buzz getawayed.

Johnny Stompanato was waiting for him at the motel, lying on the bed listening to an opera on the radio. Buzz dropped the garment bag, unzipped it and pulled out ten ten-thousand-dollar bank stacks. Johnny's jaw dropped; his cigarette hit his chest and burned a hole in his shirt. He snuffed the butt with a pillow and said, 'You did it.'

Buzz threw the money on the bed. 'Fifty for you, fifty for Mrs. Celeste Considine, 641 South Gramercy, LA. You make the delivery, and tell her it's for the kid's education.'

Stompanato hoarded the money into a tight little pile and gloated over it. 'How do you know I won't keep it all?'

'You like my style too much to fuck me.'

Buzz drove up to Ventura, parked in front of Deputy Dave Kleckner's house and rang the bell. Audrey answered. She was wearing an old Mickey shirt and dungarees, just like she was the first time he kissed her. She looked at the garment bag and said, 'Planning to stay awhile?'

'Maybe. You look tired.'

'I was up all night thinking.'

Buzz put his hands to her face, smoothing a wisp of stray hair. 'Dave home?'

'Dave's on duty until late, and I think he's in love with me.'

'Everybody's in love with you.'

'Why?'

'Because you make them afraid to be alone.'

'Does that include you?'

'Me especially.'

Audrey jumped into his arms. Buzz let go of the garment bag and kicked it for luck. He carried his lioness into the front bedroom and made a swipe at the light switch; Audrey grabbed his hand. 'Leave it on. I want to see you.'

Buzz got out of his clothes and sat on the edge of the bed; Audrey slow-grinded herself naked and leaped on him. They kissed ten times as long as they usually did and strung out everything else they'd ever done together. Buzz went into her fast, but moved extra slow; she pushed up with her hips harder than she did their first time. He couldn't hold it and didn't want to; she went crazy when he did. Like the first time, they thrashed the sheets off the bed and held each other, sweating. Buzz remembered how he'd hooked a finger around Audrey's wrist so they'd still be touching while he caught his breath. He did it again, but this time she squeezed his whole hand like she didn't know what the gesture meant.

They curled up, Audrey nuzzling. Buzz looked around the strange bedroom. Passport applications and stacks of South American tourist brochures were resting on the nightstand and boxes of women's clothing were arrayed by the door next to a brand-new suitcase. Audrey yawned, kissed his chest like it was sleep time and yawned again. Buzz said, 'Sweetie, did Mickey ever hit you?'

A drowsy head shake in answer. 'Talk later. *Lots* of talk later.'

'Did he ever?'

'No, only men.' Another yawn. 'No Mickey talk, remember our deal?'

'Yeah, I remember.'

Audrey gave him a squeeze and settled into sleep. Buzz picked up the brochure closest to him, a huckster job for Rio de Janeiro. He flipped pages, saw that Audrey had circled listings for guest cottages offering newlywed rates and tried to picture an on-the-lam cop-killer and a thirty-seven-year-old ex-stripper basking in the South American sun. He couldn't. He tried to picture Audrey waiting for him while he attempted to lay off twenty-five pounds of heroin to some renegade mob guy who hadn't already heard of the heist and the contract that went with it. He couldn't. He tried to picture Audrey with him when the LAPD closed in, hard-on glory cops holding their fire because the killer was with a woman. He couldn't. He thought of Icepick Fritzie finding them together, going icepick crazy on Audrey's face – and that picture was easy. Mickey saying 'Please' and going mushy with forgiveness was even easier.

Buzz listened to Audrey's breath; he felt her sweaty skin cooling. He tried to picture her getting some kind of bookkeeper's job, going home to Mobile, Alabama, and meeting a nice insurance man looking for a Southern belle. He couldn't. He made a big last try at the two of them buying their way out of the country with a nationwide cop-killer APB on his head. He tried extra, extra hard on that one – and couldn't find a way to make it stick.

Audrey stirred and rolled away from him. Buzz saw Mickey tired of her in a few years, cutting her loose for some younger stuff, a nice cash money separation gift. He saw Sheriff's, City cops, Feds and Cohen goons chasing his okie ass to the moon. He saw Ellis Loew and Ed Satterlee on easy street and old Doc Lesnick hounding him with, 'And how will you fix that?'

Lesnick was the kicker. Buzz got up, walked into the living room, grabbed the phone and had the operator get him Los Angeles CR–4619. A voice answered, 'Yeah?'

It was Mickey. Buzz said, 'She's at 1006 Montebello Drive in Ventura. You hurt her and I'll do you slower than you ever thought of doin' me.'

Mickey said, 'Mazel tov. My friend, you are still dead, but you are dead very fast.'

Buzz let the receiver down gently, went back to the bedroom and dressed. Audrey was in the same position, her head buried in the pillow, no way to see her face. Buzz said, 'You were the one,' and turned off the light. He grabbed his garment bag on the way out and left the door unlocked.

Dawdling on back roads got him to the San Fernando Valley just after 7:30 – full evening, black and starry. Ellis Loew's house was dark and there were no cars parked out front.

Buzz walked around to the garage, broke a clasp on the door and pushed it open. Moonlight picked out a roof bulb at the end of a string. He pulled the cord and saw what he wanted on a low shelf: two double-gallon cans of gasoline. He picked them up, found them near full, carried them to the front door and let himself in with his special-investigator's key.

A flick of the overhead light; the living room jarring white – walls, tables, cartons, shelves and odd mounds of paper – Loew and company's once-in-a-lifetime shot at the political moon. Graphs and charts and thousands of pages of coerced testimony. Boxes of photographs with linked faces to prove treason. A big fuckload of lies glued together to prove a single theory that was easy to believe because believing was easier than wading through the glut of horseshit to say, 'Wrong.'

Buzz doused the walls and shelves and tables and stacks of paper with gasoline. He soaked the Sleepy Lagoon Committee photos. He ripped down Ed Satterlee's graphs, emptied the cans on the floor and made a gas trail out to the porch. He lit a match, dropped it and watched the white whoosh into red and explode.

The fire spread back and upward; the house became a giant sheet of flame. Buzz got in his car and drove away, red glow lighting up the windshield. He took back streets northbound until the glow disappeared and he heard sirens whirring in the opposite direction. When the noise died, he was climbing into the foothills, Los Angeles just a neon smear in his rear-view mirror. He touched his future there on the seat: sawed-off, heroin, a hundred and fifty grand. It didn't feel right, so he turned on the radio and found a hillbilly station. The music was too soft and too sad, like a lament for a time when it all came cheap. He listened anyway. The songs made him think of himself and Mal and poor Danny Upshaw. Hardcases, rogue cops and Red chasers. Three dangerous men gone for parts unknown.

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Epub ISBN: 9781407088464
Version 1.0
www.randomhouse.co.uk
Published by Windmill Books in 2011

23 25 24 22

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First published in 1988
The Random House Group Limited
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road,
London SW1V 2SA

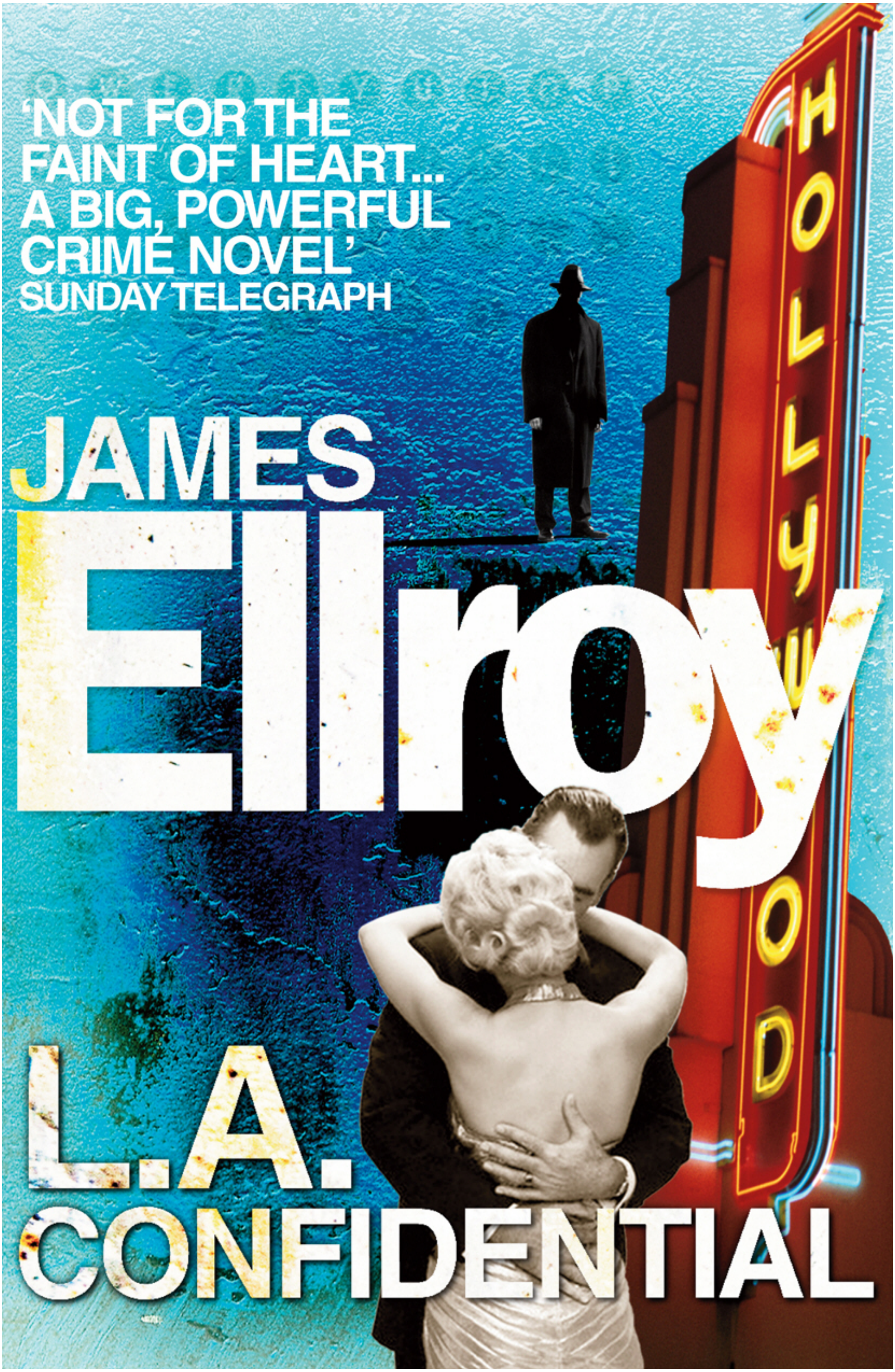
www.randomhouse.co.uk

Addresses for companies within The Random House Group Limited can be found at: www.randomhouse.co.uk/offices.htm

The Random House Group Limited Reg. No. 954009

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN 9780099537878



'NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART... A BIG, POWERFUL CRIME NOVEL'
SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

JAMES
Ellroy

L.A. CONFIDENTIAL

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Extract from *Perfidia*
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About the Book

Christmas 1951, Los Angeles: a city where the police are as crooked as the criminals.

Six prisoners are beaten senseless in their cells by cops crazed on alcohol. For the three L.A.P.D. detectives involved, it will expose the guilty secrets on which they have built their corrupt and violent careers…

About the Author

James Ellroy was born in Los Angeles in 1948. He is the author of the acclaimed ‘LA Quartet’: *The Black Dahlia, The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential* and *White Jazz*. His most recent novel, *Blood’s a Rover*, completes the magisterial ‘Underworld USA Trilogy’ – the first two volumes of which (*American Tabloid* and *The Cold Six Thousand*) were both *Sunday Times* bestsellers.

ALSO BY JAMES ELLROY

THE UNDERWORLD U.S.A. TRILOGY

American Tabloid
The Cold Six Thousand
Blood's a Rover

THE L.A. QUARTET

The Black Dahlia
The Big Nowhere
L.A. Confidential
White Jazz

MEMOIR

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Crime Wave
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EARLY NOVELS

Brown's Requiem
Clandestine
Blood on the Moon
Because the Night
Suicide Hill
Killer on the Road

L.A. Confidential

James Ellroy

WINDMILL BOOKS

To Mary Doherty Ellroy

A glory that costs everything and means nothing –
Steve Erickson

Prologue

February 21, 1950

AN ABANDONED AUTO court in the San Berdoo foothills; Buzz Meeks checked in with ninety-four thousand dollars, eighteen pounds of high-grade heroin, a 10-gauge pump, a .38 special, a .45 automatic and a switchblade he'd bought off a pachuco at the border – right before he spotted the car parked across the line: Mickey Cohen goons in an LAPD unmarked, Tijuana cops standing by to bootjack a piece of his goodies, dump his body in the San Ysidro River.

He'd been running a week; he'd spent fifty-six grand staying alive: cars, hideouts at four and five thousand a night – risk rates – the innkeepers knew Mickey C. was after him for heisting his dope summit and his woman, the L.A. Police wanted him for killing one of their own. The Cohen contract kiboshed an outright dope sale – nobody could move the shit for fear of reprisals; the best he could do was lay it off with Doc Englekling's sons – Doc would freeze it, package it, sell it later and get him his percentage. Doc used to work with Mickey and had the smarts to be afraid of the prick; the brothers, charging fifteen grand, sent him to the El Serrano Motel and were setting up his escape. Tonight at dusk, two men – wetback runners – would drive him to a beanfield, shoot him to Guatemala City via white powder airlines. He'd have twenty-odd pounds of Big H working for him stateside – if *he* could trust Doc's boys and *they* could trust the runners.

Meeks ditched his car in a pine grove, hauled his suitcase out, scoped the setup:

The motel was horseshoe-shaped, a dozen rooms, foothills against the back of them – no rear approach possible.

The courtyard was loose gravel covered with twigs, paper debris, empty wine bottles – footsteps would crunch, tires would crack wood and glass.

There was only one access – the road he drove in on – reconnoiterers would have to trek thick timber to take a potshot.

Or they could be waiting in one of the rooms.

Meeks grabbed the 10-gauge, started kicking in doors. One, two, three, four – cobwebs, rats, bathrooms with plugged-up toilets, rotted food, magazines in Spanish – the runners probably used the place to house their spics en route to the slave farms up in Kern County. Five, six, seven, bingo on that – Mex families huddled on mattresses, scared of a white man with a gun, 'There, there' to keep them pacified. The last string of rooms stood empty; Meeks got his satchel, plopped it down just inside unit 12: front/courtyard view, a mattress on box springs spilling kapok, not bad for a last American flop.

A cheesecake calendar tacked to the wall; Meeks turned to April and looked for his birthday. A Thursday – the model had bad teeth, looked good anyway, made him think of Audrey: ex-stripper, ex-Mickey inamorata; the reason he killed a cop, took down the Cohen/Dragna 'H' deal. He flipped through to December, cut odds on whether he'd survive the year and got scared: gut flutters, a vein on his forehead going tap, tap, tap, making him sweat.

It got worse – the heebie-jeebies. Meeks laid his arsenal on a window ledge, stuffed his pockets with ammo: shells for the .38, spare clips for the automatic. He tucked the switchblade into his belt, covered the back window with the mattress, cracked the front window for air. A breeze cooled his sweat; he looked out at spic kids chucking a baseball.

He stuck there. Wetbacks congregated outside: pointing at the sun like they were telling time by it, hot for the truck to arrive – stoop labor for three hots and a cot. Dusk came on; the beaners started jabbering. Meeks saw two white men – one fat, one skinny – walk into the courtyard. They waved glad-hander style; the spics waved back. They didn't look like cops or Cohen goons. Meeks stepped outside, his 10-gauge right behind him.

The men waved: big smiles, no harm meant. Meeks checked the road – a green sedan parked crossways, blocking something light blue, too shiny to be sky through fir trees. He caught light off a metallic paint job, snapped: Bakersfield, the meet with the guys who needed time to get the money. *The robin's-egg coupe that tried to broadside him a minute later.*

Meeks smiled: friendly guy, no harm meant. A finger on the trigger; a make on the skinny guy: Mal Lunceford, a Hollywood Station harness bull – he used to ogle the carhops at Scrivener's Drive-in, puff out his chest to show off his pistol medals. The fat man, closer, said, 'We got that airplane waiting.'

Meeks swung the shotgun around, triggered a spread. Fat Man caught buckshot and flew, covering Lunceford – knocking him backward. The wetbacks tore helter-skelter; Meeks ran into the room, heard the back window breaking, yanked the mattress. Sitting ducks: two men, three triple-aught rounds close in.

The two blew up; glass and blood covered three more men inching along the wall. Meeks leaped, hit the ground, fired at three sets of legs pressed together; his free hand flailed, caught a revolver off a dead man's waistband.

Shrieks from the courtyard; running feet on gravel. Meeks dropped the shotgun, stumbled to the wall. Over to the men, tasting blood – point-blank head shots.

Thumps in the room; two rifles in grabbing range. Meeks yelled, 'We got him!', heard answering whoops, saw arms and legs coming out the window. He picked up the closest piece and let fly, full automatic: trapped targets, plaster chips exploding, dry wood igniting.

Over the bodies, into the room. The front door stood open; his pistols were still on the ledge. A strange thump sounded; Meeks saw a man spread prone – aiming from behind the mattress box.

He threw himself to the floor, kicked, missed. The man got off a shot – close; Meeks grabbed his switchblade, leaped, stabbed: the neck, the face, the man screaming, shooting – wide ricochets. Meeks slit his throat, crawled over and toed the door shut, grabbed the pistols and just plain breathed.

The fire spreading: cooking up bodies, fir pines; the front door his only way out. *How many more men standing trigger?*

Shots.

From the courtyard: heavy rounds knocking out wall chunks. Meeks caught one in the leg; a shot grazed his back. He hit the floor, the shots kept coming, the door went down – he was smack in the crossfire.

No more shots.

Meeks tucked his guns under his chest, spread himself dead-man style. Seconds dragged; four men walked in holding rifles. Whispers: 'Dead meat' – 'Let's be reeel careful' – 'Crazy Okie fuck.' Through the doorway, Mal Lunceford not one of them, footsteps.

Kicks in his side, hard breathing, sneers. A foot went under him. A voice said, ‘Fat fucker.’

Meeks jerked the foot; the foot man tripped backward. Meeks spun around shooting – close range, all hits. Four men went down; Meeks got a topsy-turvy view: the courtyard, Mal Lunceford turning tail. Then, behind him, ‘Hello, lad.’

Dudley Smith stepped through flames, dressed in a fire department greatcoat. Meeks saw his suitcase – ninety-four grand, dope – over by the mattress. ‘Dud, you came prepared.’

‘Like the Boy Scouts, lad. And have you a valediction?’

Suicide: heisting a deal Dudley S. watchdogged. Meeks raised his guns; Smith shot first. Meeks died – thinking the El Serrano Motel looked just like the Alamo.

Part One

Bloody Christmas

Chapter One

BUD WHITE IN an unmarked, watching the '1951' on the City Hall Christmas tree blink. The back seat was packed with liquor for the station party; he'd scrounged merchants all day, avoiding Parker's dictate: married men had the 24th and Christmas off, all duty rosters were bachelors only, the Central detective squad was detached to round up vagrants: the chief wanted local stumblebums chilled so they wouldn't crash Mayor Bowron's lawn party for under-privileged kids and snarf up all the cookies. Last Christmas, some crazy nigger whipped out his wang, pissed in a pitcher of lemonade earmarked for some orphanage brats and ordered Mrs. Bowron to 'Strap on, bitch.' William H. Parker's first yuletide as chief of the Los Angeles Police Department was spent transporting the mayor's wife to Central Receiving for sedation, and now, a year later, *he* was paying the price.

The back seat, booze-packed, had his spine jammed to Jell-O. Ed Exley, the assistant watch commander, was a straight arrow who might get uppity over a hundred cops juicing in the muster room. And Johnny Stompanato was twenty minutes late.

Bud turned on his two-way. A hum settled: shopliftings, a liquor store heist in Chinatown. The passenger door opened; Johnny Stompanato slid in.

Bud turned on the dash light. Stompanato said, 'Holiday cheers. And where's Stensland? I've got stuff for both of you.'

Bud sized him up. Mickey Cohen's bodyguard was a month out of work – Mickey went up on a tax beef, Fed time, three to seven at McNeil Island. Johnny Stomp was back to home manicures and pressing his own pants. 'It's *Sergeant* Stensland. He's rousting vags and the payoff's the same anyway.'

'Too bad. I like Dick's style. You know that, *Wendell.*'

Cute Johnny: guinea handsome, curls in a tight pompadour. Bud heard he was hung like a horse and padded his basket on top of it. 'Spill what you got.'

'Dick's better at the amenities than you, *Officer White.*'

'You got a hard-on for me, or you just want small talk?'

'I've got a hard-on for Lana Turner, you've got a hard-on for wife beaters. I also heard you're a real sweetheart with the ladies and you're not too selective as far as looks are concerned.'

Bud cracked his knuckles. 'And you fuck people up for a living, and all the money Mickey gives to charity won't make him no better than a dope pusher and a pimp. So my fucking complaints for hardnosing wife beaters don't make me you. *Capisce*, shitbird?'

Stompanato smiled – nervous; Bud looked out the window. A Salvation Army Santa palmed coins from his kettle, an eye on the liquor store across the street. Stomp said, 'Look, you want information and I need money. Mickey and Davey Goldman are doing time, and Mo Jahelka's looking after things while they're gone. Mo's diving for scraps, and he's got no work for me. Jack Whalen wouldn't hire me on a bet and there was no goddamn envelope from Mickey.'

'No envelope? Mickey went up flush. I heard he got back the junk that got clouted off his deal with Jack D.'

Stompanato shook his head. 'You heard wrong. Mickey got the heister, but that junk is nowhere and the guy got away with a hundred and fifty grand of Mickey's money. So, Officer White, *I* need money. And if your snitch fund's still green, I'll get you some fucking-A collars.'

'Go legit, Johnny. Be a white man like me and Dick Stensland.'

Stomp snickered – it came off weak. 'A key thief for twenty or a shoplifter who beats his wife for thirty. Go for the quick thrill, I saw the guy boosting Ohrbach's on the way over.'

Bud took out a twenty and a ten; Stompanato grabbed them. 'Ralphie Kinnard. He's blond and fat, about forty. He's wearing a suede loafer jacket and gray flannels. I heard he's been beating up his wife and pimping her to cover his poker losses.'

Bud wrote it down. Stompanato said, 'Yuletide cheer, Wendell.'

Bud grabbed necktie and yanked; Stomp banged his head on the dashboard.

'Happy New Year, greaseball.'

Ohrbach's was packed – shoppers swarmed counters and garment racks. Bud elbowed up to floor 3, prime shoplifter turf: jewelry, decanter liquor.

Countertops strewn with watches; cash register lines thirty deep.

Bud trawled for blond males, got sideswiped by housewives and kids. Then – a flash view – a blond guy in a suede loafer ducking into the men's room.

Bud shoved over and in. Two geezers stood at urinals; gray flannels hit the toilet stall floor. Bud squatted, looked in – bingo on hands fondling jewelry. The oldsters zipped up and walked out. Bud rapped on the stall. 'Come on, it's St. Nick.'

The door flew open; a fist flew out. Bud caught it flush, hit a sink, tripped. Cufflinks in his face, Kinnard speed-balling. Bud got up and chased.

Through the door, shoppers blocking him; Kinnard ducking out a side exit. Bud chased – over, down the fire escape. The lot was clean: no cars hauling, no Ralphie. Bud ran to his prowler, hit the two-way. '4A31 to dispatcher, requesting.'

Static, then: 'Roger, 4A31.'

'Last known address. White male, first name Ralph, last name Kinnard. I guess that's K-I-N-N-A-R-D. Move it, huh?'

The man rogered; Bud threw jabs: bam-bam-bam-bam-bam. The radio crackled: '4A31, roger your request.' roger.'

'4A31, roger.'

'Positive on Kinnard, Ralph Thomas, white male, DOB – '

'Just the goddamn address, I told you – '

The dispatcher blew a raspberry. 'For your Christmas stocking, shitbird. The address is 1486 Evergreen, and I hope you – '

Bud flipped off the box, headed east to City Terrace. Up to forty, hard on the horn, Evergreen in five minutes flat. The 12, 1300 blocks whizzed by; 1400 – vet's prefabs – leaped out.

He parked, followed curb plates to 1486 – a stucco job with a neon Santa sled on the roof. Lights inside; a prewar Ford in the driveway. Through a plate-glass window: Ralphie Kinnard browbeating a woman in a bathrobe.

The woman was puff-faced, thirty-fivish. She backed away from Kinnard; her robe fell open. Her breasts were bruised, her ribs lacerated.

Bud walked back for his cuffs, saw the two-way light blinking and rogered. '4A31 responding.'

'Roger, 4A31, on an APO. Two patrolmen assaulted outside a tavern at 1990 Riverside, six suspects at large. They've been ID'd from their license plates and other units have been alerted.'

Bud got tingles. 'Bad for ours?'

‘That’s a roger. Go to 5314 Avenue 53, Lincoln Heights. Apprehend Dinardo, D-I-N-A-R-D-O, Sanchez, age twenty-one, male Mexican.’

‘Roger, and you send a prowler to 1486 Evergreen. White male suspect in custody. I won’t be there, but they’ll see him. Tell them I’ll write it up.’

‘Book at Hollenbeck Station?’

Bud rogered, grabbed his cuffs. Back to the house and an outside circuit box – switches tapped until the lights popped off. Santa’s sled stayed lit; Bud grabbed an outlet cord and yanked. The display hit the ground: exploding reindeer.

Kinnard ran out, tripped over Rudolph. Bud cuffed his wrists, bounced his face on the pavement. Ralphie yelped and chewed gravel; Bud launched his wife beater spiel. ‘You’ll be out in a year and a half, and I’ll know when. I’ll find out who your parole officer is and get cozy with him. I’ll visit you and say hi. You touch her again I’m gonna know, and I’m gonna get you violated on a kiddie raper beef. You know what they do to kiddie rapers up at Quentin? Huh? The Pope a fuckin’ guinea?’

Lights went on – Kinnard’s wife was futzing with the fuse box. She said, ‘Can I go to my mother’s?’

Bud emptied Ralphie’s pockets – keys, a cash roll. ‘Take the car and get yourself fixed up.’

Kinnard spat teeth. Mrs. Ralphie grabbed the keys and peeled a ten-spot. Bud said, ‘Merry Christmas, huh?’

Mrs. Ralphie blew a kiss and backed the car out, wheels over blinking reindeer.

Avenue 53 – Code 2 no siren. A black-and-white just beat him; two blues and Dick Stensland got out and huddled.

Bud tapped his horn; Stensland came over. ‘Who’s there, partner?’

Stensland pointed to a shack. ‘The one guy on the air, maybe more. It was maybe four spies, two white guys did our guys in. Brownell and Helenowski. Brownell’s maybe got brain damage, Helenowski maybe lost an eye.’

‘Big maybes.’

Stens reeked: Listerine, gin. ‘You want to quibble?’

Bud got out of the car. ‘No quibble. How many in custody?’

‘Goose. We get the first collar.’

‘Then tell the blues to stay put.’

Stens shook his head. ‘They’re pals with Brownell. They want a piece.’

‘Nix, this is ours. We get them booked, we write it up and make the party by watch change. I got three cases: Walker Black, Jim Beam and Cutty.’

‘Exley’s assistant watch commander. He’s a nosebleed, and you can bet he don’t approve of on-duty imbibing.’

‘Yeah, and Frieling’s *the* watch boss, and he’s a fucking drunk like you. So don’t worry about Exley. And I got a report to write up first – so let’s just do it.’

Stens laughed. ‘Aggravated assault on a woman? What’s that – six twenty-three point one in the California Penal Code? So I’m a fucking drunk and you’re a fucking do-gooder.’

‘Yeah, and you’re ranking. So now?’

Stens winked; Bud walked flank – up to the porch, gun out. The shack was curtained dark; Bud caught a radio ad: Felix the Cat Chevrolet. Dick kicked the door in.

Yells, a Mex man and woman hauling. Stens aimed head high; Bud blocked his shot. Down a hallway, Bud close in, Stens wheezing, knocking over furniture. The kitchen – the spies dead-ended at a window.

They turned, raised their hands: a pachuco punk, a pretty girl maybe six months pregnant.

The boy kissed the wall – a pro friskee. Bud searched him: Dinardo Sanchez ID, chump change. The girl boohooed; sirens scree’d outside. Bud turned Sanchez around, kicked him in the balls. ‘For ours, Pancho. And you got off easy.’

Stens grabbed the girl. Bud said, ‘Go somewhere, sweetheart. Before my friend checks your green card.’

‘Green card’ spooked her – *madre mia!.Madre mia!* Stens shoved her to the door; Sanchez moaned. Bud saw blues swarm the driveway. ‘We’ll let them take Pancho in.’

Stens caught some breath. ‘We’ll give him to Brownell’s pals.’

Two rookie types walked in – Bud saw his out. ‘Cuff him and book him. APO and resisting arrest.’

The rookies dragged Sanchez out. Stens said, ‘You and women. What’s next? Kids and dogs?’

Mrs. Ralphie – all bruised up for Christmas. ‘I’m working on it. Come on, let’s move that booze. Be nice and I’ll let you have your own bottle.’

Chapter Two

PRESTON EXLEY YANKED the dropcloth. His guests oohed and ahhed; a city councilman clapped, spilled eggnog on a society matron. Ed Exley thought: this is not a typical policeman's Christmas Eve.

He checked his watch – 8:46 – he had to be at the station by midnight. Preston Exley pointed to the model.

It took up half his den: an amusement park filled with papier-mâché mountains, rocket ships, Wild West towns. Cartoon creatures at the gate: Moochie Mouse, Scooter Squirrel, Danny Duck – Raymond Dieterling's brood – featured in the *Dream-a-Dream Hour* and scores of cartoons.

'Ladies and gentlemen, presenting Dream-a-Dreamland. Exley Construction will build it, in Pomona, California, and the opening date will be April 1953. It will be the most sophisticated amusement park in history, a self-contained universe where children of all ages can enjoy the message of fun and goodwill that is the hallmark of Raymond Dieterling, the father of modern animation. Dream-a-Dreamland will feature all your favorite Dieterling characters, and it will be a haven for the young and young at heart.'

Ed stared at his father: fifty-seven coming off forty-five, a cop from a long line of cops holding forth in a Hancock Park mansion, politicos giving up their Christmas Eve at a snap of his fingers. The guests applauded; Preston pointed to a snow-capped mountain. 'Paul's World, ladies and gentlemen. An exact-scale replica of a mountain in the Sierra Nevada. Paul's World will feature a thrilling toboggan ride and a ski lodge where Moochie, Scooter and Danny will perform skits for the whole family. And who is the Paul of Paul's World? Paul was Raymond Dieterling's son, lost tragically as a teenager in 1936, lost in an avalanche on a camping trip – lost on a mountain just like this one here. So, out of tragedy, an affirmation of innocence. And, ladies and gentlemen, every nickel out of every dollar spent at Paul's World will go to the Children's Polio Foundation.'

Wild applause. Preston nodded at Timmy Valburn – the actor who played Moochie Mouse on the *Dream-a-Dream Hour* – always nibbling cheese with his big buck teeth. Valburn nudged the man beside him; the man nudged back.

Art De Spain caught Ed's eye; Valburn kicked off a Moochie routine. Ed steered De Spain to the hallway. 'This is a hell of a surprise, Art.'

'Dieterling's announcing it on the *Dream Hour.* Didn't your dad tell you?'

'No, and I didn't know he knew Dieterling. Did he meet him back during the Atherton case? Wasn't Wee Willie Wennerholm one of Dieterling's kid stars?'

De Spain smiled. 'I was your dad's lowly adjutant then, and I don't think the two great men ever crossed paths. Preston just *knows* people. And by the way, did you spot the mouse man and his pal?'

Ed nodded. 'Who is he?'

Laughter from the den; De Spain steered Ed to the study. 'He's Billy Dieterling, Ray's son. He's a cameraman on *Badge of Honor*, which lauds our beloved LAPD to millions of television viewers each week. Maybe Timmy spreads some cheese on his whatsis before he blows him.'

Ed laughed. 'Art, you're a pisser.'

De Spain sprawled in a chair. 'Eddie, ex-cop to cop, you say words like "pisser" and you sound like a college professor. And you're not really an "Eddie", you're an "Edmund."'

Ed squared his glasses. 'I see avuncular advice coming. Stick in Patrol, because Parker made chief that way. Administrate my way up because I have no command presence.'

'You've got no sense of humor. And can't you get rid of those specs? Squint or something. Outside of Thad Green, I can't think of one Bureau guy who wears glasses.'

'God, you miss the Department. I think that if you could give up Exley Construction and fifty thousand a year for a spot as an LAPD rookie, you would.'

De Spain lit a cigar. Only if your dad came with me.'

'Just like that?'

'Just like that. I was a lieutenant to Preston's inspector, and I'm still a number two man. It'd be nice to be even with him.'

'If you didn't know lumber, Exley Construction wouldn't exist.'

'Thanks. And get rid of those glasses.'

Ed picked up a framed photo: his brother Thomas in uniform –

taken the day before he died. ‘If you were a rookie, I’d break you for insubordination.’

‘You would, too. What did you place on the lieutenant’s exam?’

‘First out of twenty-three applicants. I was the youngest applicant by eight years, with the shortest time in grade as a sergeant and the shortest amount of time on the Department.’

‘And you want the Detective Bureau.’

Ed put the photo down. ‘Yes.’

‘Then, first you have to figure a year minimum for an opening to come up, then you have to realize that it will probably be a Patrol opening, then you have to realize that a transfer to the Bureau will take years and lots of ass kissing. You’re twenty-nine now?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then you’ll be a lieutenant at thirty or thirty-one. Brass that young create resentment. Ed, all kidding aside. You’re not one of the guys. You’re not a strongarm type. *You’re not Bureau.* And Parker as Chief has set a precedent for Patrol officers to go all the way. Think about that.’

Ed said, ‘Art, I want to work cases. I’m connected and I won the Distinguished Service Cross, which some people might construe as strongarm. And I will *have* a Bureau appointment.’

De Spain brushed ash off his cummerbund. ‘Can we talk turkey, Sunny Jim?’

The endearment rankled. ‘Of course.’

‘Well . . . you’re good, and in time you might be really good. And I don’t doubt your killer instinct for a second. But your father was ruthless and likable. And you’re not, so . . .’

Ed made fists. ‘So, Uncle Arthur? Cop who left the Department for money to cop who never would – what’s your advice?’

De Spain flinched. ‘So be a sycophant and suck up to the right men. Kiss William H. Parker’s ass and pray to be in the right place at the right time.’

‘Like you and my father?’

‘*Touché,* Sunny Jim.’

Ed looked at his uniform: custom blues on a hanger. Razor-creased, sergeant’s stripes, a single hashmark. De Spain said, ‘Gold bars soon, Eddie. And braid on your cap. And I wouldn’t jerk your chain if I didn’t care.’

‘I know.’

‘And you *are* a goddamned war hero.’

Ed changed the subject. ‘It’s Christmas. You’re thinking about Thomas.’

‘I keep thinking I could have told him something. He didn’t even have his holster flap open.’

‘A purse snatcher with a gun? He couldn’t have known.’

De Spain put out his cigar. ‘Thomas was a natural, and I always thought he should be telling me things. That’s why I tend to spell things out for you.’

‘He’s twelve years dead and I’ll bury him as a policeman.’

‘I’ll forget you said that.’

‘No, remember it. Remember it when I make the Bureau. And when Father offers toasts to Thomas and Mother, don’t get maudlin. It ruins him for days.’

De Spain stood up, flushing; Preston Exley walked in with snifters and a bottle.

Ed said, ‘Merry Christmas, Father. And congratulations.’

Preston poured drinks. ‘Thank you. Exley Construction tops the Arroyo Seco Freeway job with a kingdom for a glorified rodent, and I’ll never eat another piece of cheese. A toast, gentlemen. To the eternal rest of my son Thomas and my wife Marguerite, to the three of us assembled here.’

The men drank; De Spain fixed refills. Ed offered his father’s favorite toast: ‘To the solving of crimes that require absolute justice.’

Three more shots.downed. Ed said, ‘Father, I didn’t know you knew Raymond Dieterling.’

Preston smiled. ‘I’ve known him in a business sense for years. Art and I have kept the contract secret at Raymond’s request – he wants to announce it on that infantile television program of his.’

‘Did you meet him during the Atherton case?’

‘No, and of course I wasn’t in the construction business then. Arthur, do you have a toast to propose?’

De Spain poured short ones. ‘To a Bureau assignment for our soon-to-be lieutenant.’

Laughter, hear-hears. Preston said, ‘Joan Morrow was inquiring about your love life, Edmund. I think she’s smitten.’

‘Do you see a debutante as a cop’s wife?’

‘No, but I could picture her married to a ranking policeman.’

‘Chief of Detectives?’

‘No, I was thinking more along the lines of commander of the

Patrol Division.'

'Father, Thomas was going to be your chief of detectives, but he's dead. Don't deny me my opportunity. Don't make me live an old dream of yours.'

Preston stared at his son. 'Point taken, and I commend you for speaking up. And granted, that was my original dream. But the truth is that I don't think you have the eye for human weakness that makes a good detective.'

His brother: a math brain crazed for pretty girls. 'And Thomas did?'

'Yes.'

'Father, I would have shot that purse snatcher the second he went for his pocket.'

De Spain said, 'Goddammit'; Preston shushed him. 'That's all right. Edmund, a few questions before I return to my guests. One, would you be willing to plant corroborative evidence on a suspect you knew was guilty in order to ensure an indictment?'

'I'd have to – '

'Answer yes or no.'

'I . . . no.'

'Would you be willing to shoot hardened armed robbers in the back to offset the chance that they might utilize flaws in the legal system and go free?'

'I . . .'

'Yes or no, Edmund.'

'No.'

'And would you be willing to beat confessions out of suspects you knew to be guilty?'

'No.'

'Would you be willing to rig crime scene evidence to support a prosecuting attorney's working hypothesis?'

'No.'

Preston sighed. 'Then for God's sake, stick to assignments where you won't have to make those choices. Use the superior intelligence the good Lord gave you.'

Ed looked at his uniform. 'I'll use that intelligence as a detective.'

Preston smiled. 'Detective or not, you have qualities of persistence that Thomas lacked. You'll excel, my war hero.'

The phone rang; De Spain picked it up. Ed thought of rigged Jap trenches – and couldn't meet Preston's eyes. De Spain said, 'It's

Lieutenant Frieling at the station. He said the jail's almost full, and two officers were assaulted earlier in the evening. Two suspects are in custody, with four more outstanding. He said you should clock in early.'

Ed turned back to his father. Preston was down the hall, swapping jokes with Mayor Bowron in a Moochie Mouse hat.

Chapter Three

PRESS CLIPPINGS ON his corkboard: ‘Dope Crusader Wounded in Shootout’; ‘Actor Mitchum Seized in Marijuana Shack Raid.’ *Hush-Hush* articles, framed on his desk: ‘Hopheads Quake When Dope Scourge Cop Walks Tall’; ‘Actors Agree: *Badge of Honor* Owes Authenticity to Hard-hitting Technical Advisor.’ The *Badge* piece featured a photo: Sergeant Jack Vincennes with the show’s star, Brett Chase. The piece did not feature dirt from the editor’s private file: Brett Chase as a pedophile with three quashed sodomy beefs.

Jack Vincennes glanced around the Narco pen – deserted, dark – just the light in his cubicle. Ten minutes short of midnight; he’d promised Dudley Smith he’d type up an organized crime report for Intelligence Division; he’d promised Lieutenant Frieling a case of booze for the station party – Hush-Hush Sid Hudgens was supposed to come across with rum but hadn’t called. Dudley’s report: a favor shot his way because he typed a hundred words a minute; a favor returned tomorrow: a meet with Dud and Ellis Loew, Pacific Dining Car lunch – work on the line, work to earn him juice with the D.A.’s Office. Jack lit a cigarette, read.

Some report: eleven pages long, very verbal, very Dudley. The topic: L.A. mob activity with Mickey Cohen in stir. Jack edited, typed.

Cohen was at McNeil Island Federal Prison: three to seven, income tax evasion. Davey Goldman, Mickey’s money man, was there: three to seven, down on six counts of federal tax fraud. Smith predicted possible skirmishing between Cohen minion Morris Jahelka and Jack ‘The Enforcer’ Whalen; with Mafia overlord Jack Dragna deported, they loomed as the two men most likely to control loansharking, bookmaking, prostitution and the race wire racket. Smith stated that Jahelka was too ineffectual to require police surveillance; that John Stompanato and Abe Teitlebaum, key Cohen strongarms, seemed to have gone legitimate. Lee Vachss, contract trigger employed by Cohen, was working a religious racket – selling patent medicines guaranteed to induce mystical experiences.

Jack kept typing. Dud's take hit wrong: Johnny Stomp and Kikey Teitlebaum were pure bent – they could never go pure straight. He fed in a fresh sheet.

A new topic: the February '50 Cohen/Dragna truce meeting – twenty-five pounds of heroin and a hundred and fifty grand allegedly stolen. Jack heard rumors: an ex-cop named Buzz Meeks heisted the summit, took off and was gunned down near San Bernardino – Cohen goons and rogue L.A. cops killed him, a Mickey contract: Meeks stole the Mick blind and fucked his woman. The horse was supposedly long gone unfound. Dudley's theory: Meeks buried the money and shit someplace unknown and was later killed by 'person or persons unknown' – probably a Cohen gunman. Jack smiled: if LAPD was in on a Meeks hit, Dud would never implicate the Department – even in an interdepartmental report.

Next, Smith's summary: with Mickey C. gone, mob action was at a lull; the LAPD should stay alert for new faces looking to crash Cohen's old rackets; prostitution was sticking over the county line – with Sheriff's Department sanction. Jack signed the last page 'Respectfully, Lieutenant D. L. Smith.'

The phone rang. 'Narcotics, Vincennes.'

'It's me. You hungry?'

Jack kiboshed a temper fit – easy – what Hudgens just might have on him. 'Sid, you're late. And the party's already on.'

'I got better than booze. I got cash.'

'Talk.'

'Talk this: Tammy Reynolds, co-star of *Hope's Harvest*, opens tomorrow citywide. A guy I know just sold her some reefer, a guaranteed felony pinch. She's tripping the light fantastic at 2245 Maravilla, Hollywood Hills. You pinch, I do you up feature in the next issue. Because it's Christmas, I leak my notes to Morty Bendish at the *Mirror*, so you make the dailies, too. Plus fifty cash and your rum. Am I fucking Santa Claus?'

'Pictures?'

'In spades. Wear the blue blazer, it goes with your eyes.'

'A hundred, Sid. I need two patrolmen at twenty apiece and a dime for the watch commander at Hollywood Station. And *you* set it up.'

'Jack! It's Christmas!'

'No, it's felony possession of marijuana.'

'Shit. Half an hour?'

‘Twenty-five minutes.’

‘I’m there, you fucking extortionist.’

Jack hung up, made an X mark on his calendar. Another day, no booze, no hop – four years, two months running.

His stage was waiting – Maravilla cordoned off, two blue-suits by Sid Hudgens’ Packard, their black-and-white up on the sidewalk. The street was dark and still; Sid had an arclight set up. They had a view of the Boulevard – Grauman’s Chinese included – great for an establishing shot. Jack parked, walked over.

Sid greeted him with cash. ‘She’s sitting in the dark, goofing on the Christmas tree. The door looks flimsy.’

Jack drew his .38. ‘Have the boys put the booze in my trunk. You want Grauman’s in the background?’

‘I like it! Jackie, you’re the best in the West!’

Jack scoped him: scarecrow skinny, somewhere between thirty-five and fifty – keeper of inside dirt supreme. He either knew about 10/24/47 or he didn’t; *if* he did, their arrangement was lifetime stuff. ‘Sid, when I bring her out the door, I do not want that goddamned baby spot in my eyes. Tell your camera guy that.’

‘Consider him told.’

‘Good, now count twenty on down.’

Hudgens ticked numbers; Jack walked up and kicked the door in. The arclight snapped on, a living room caught flush: Christmas tree, two kids necking in their undies. Jack shouted ‘Police!’; the lovebirds froze; light on a fat bag of weed on the couch.

The girl started bawling; the boy reached for his trousers. Jack put a foot on his chest. ‘The hands, slow.’

The boy pressed his wrists together; Jack cuffed him one-handed. The blues stormed in and gathered up evidence; Jack matched a name to the punk: Rock Rockwell, RKO ingenue. The girl ran; Jack grabbed her. Two suspects by the neck – out the door, down the steps.

Hudgens yelled, ‘Grauman’s while we’ve still got the light!’

Jack framed them: half-naked pretties in their BVDs. Flashbulbs popped; Hudgens yelled, ‘Cut! Wrap it!’

The blues took over: Rockwell and the girl hauled bawling to their prowler. Window lights popped on; rubber-neckers opened doors. Jack went back to the house.

A maryjane haze – four years later the shit still smelled good.

Hudgens was opening drawers, pulling out dildoes, spiked dog collars. Jack found the phone, checked the address book for pushers – goose egg. A calling card fell out: 'Fleur-de-Lis. Twenty-four Hours a Day – Whatever You Desire.'

Sid started muttering. Jack put the card back. 'Let's hear how it sounds.'

Hudgens cleared his throat. 'It's Christmas morning in the City of the Angels, and while decent citizens sleep the sleep of the righteous, hopheads prowl for marijuana, the weed with roots in Hell. Tammy Reynolds and Rock Rockwell, movie stars with one foot in Hades, toke sweet tea in Tammy's swank Hollywood digs, not knowing they are playing with fire without asbestos gloves, not knowing that a man is coming to put out that fire: the free-wheeling, big-time Big V, celebrity crimestopper Jack Vincennes, the scourge of grasshoppers and junk fiends everywhere. Acting on the tip of an unnamed informant, Sergeant Vincennes, blah, blah, blah. You like it, Jackie?'

'Yeah, it's subtle.'

'No, it's circulation nine hundred thousand and climbing. I think I'll work in you're divorced twice 'cause your wives couldn't stand your crusade and you got your name from an orphanage in Vincennes, Indiana. The Biggg Veeeee.'

His Narco tag: Trashcan Jack – a nod to the time he popped Charlie 'Yardbird' Parker and tossed him into a garbage bin outside the Klub Zamboanga. 'You should beat the drum on *Badge of Honor*. Miller Stanton's my buddy, how I taught Brett Chase to play a cop. Technical advisor kingpin, that kind of thing.'

Hudgens laughed. 'Brett still like them prepubescent?'

'Can niggers dance?'

'South of Jefferson Boulevard only. Thanks for the story, Jack.'

'Sure.'

'I mean it. It's always nice seeing you.'

You fucking cockroach, you're going to wink because you know you can nail me to that moralistic shitbird William H. Parker anytime you want – cash rousts going back to '48, you've probably got documentation worked around to let you off clean and crucify me –

Hudgens winked.

Jack wondered if he had it *all* down on paper.

Chapter Four

THE PARTY IN full swing, the muster room SRO.

An open bar: scotch, bourbon, a case of rum Trashcan Jack Vincennes brought in. Dick Stensland's brew in the water cooler: Old Crow, eggnog mix. A phonograph spewed dirty Christmas carols: Santa and his reindeer fucking and sucking. The floor was packed: nightwatch blues, the Central squad – thirsty from chasing vagrants.

Bud watched the crowd. Fred Turentine tossed darts at Wanted posters; Mike Krugman and Walt Dukeshearer played 'Name That Nigger,' trying to ID Negro mugshots at a quarter a bet. Jack Vincennes was drinking club soda; Lieutenant Frieling was passed out at his desk. Ed Exley tried to quiet the men down, gave up, stuck to the lock-up: logging in prisoners, filing arrest reports.

Almost every man was drunk or working on it.

Almost every man was talking up Helenowski and Brownell, the cop beaters in custody, the two still at large.

Bud stood by the window. Garbled rumors tweaked him: Brownie Brownell had his lip split up through his nose, one of the taco benders chewed off Helenowski's left ear. Dick Stens grabbed a shotgun, went spic hunting. He credited that one: he'd seen Dick carrying an Ithaca pump out to the parking lot.

The noise was getting brutal – Bud walked out to the lot, lounged against a prowler.

A drizzle started up. A ruckus by the jail door – Dick Stens shoving two men inside. A scream; Bud cut odds on Stens finishing out his twenty: with him watchdogging, even money; without him, two to one against. From the muster room: Frank Doherty's tenor, a weepy 'Silver Bells.'

Bud moved away from the music – it made him think of his mother. He lit a cigarette, thought of her anyway.

He'd seen the killing: sixteen years old, helpless to stop it. The old man came home; he must have believed his son's warning: you touch Mother again and I will kill you. Asleep – cuffs on his wrists and ankles, awake – he saw the fuck beat Mother dead with a tire iron. He screamed his throat raw; he stayed cuffed in the room with the body: a week, no water, delirious – he watched his mother rot. A truant officer found him; the L.A. Sheriff's found the old man. The trial, a diminished capacity defense, a plea bargain down to Manslaughter Two. Life imprisonment, the old man paroled in twelve years. His son – Officer Wendell White, LAPD – decided to kill him.

The old man was nowhere.

He'd jumped parole; prowling his L.A. haunts turned up nothing. Bud kept looking, kept waking to the sound of women screaming. He always investigated; it was always just wisps of noise. Once he kicked in a door and found a woman who'd burned her hand. Once he crashed in on a husband and wife making love.

The old man was nowhere.

He made the Bureau, partnered up with Dick Stens. Dick showed him the ropes, heard out his story, told him to pick his shots to get even. Pops would stay nowhere, but thumping wife beaters might drive the nightmares out of his system. Bud picked a great first shot: a domestic squawk, the complainant a longtime punching bag, the arrestee a three-time loser. He detoured on the way to the station, asked the guy if he'd like to tango with a man for a change: no cuffs, a walk on the charge if he won. The guy agreed: Bud broke his nose, his jaw, ruptured his spleen with a dropkick. Dick was right: his bad dreams stopped.

His rep as *the* toughest man in the LAPD grew.

He kept it up; he followed up: intimidation calls if the fuckers got acquitted, welcome home strongarms if they did time and got parole. He forced himself not to take gratitude lays and found women elsewhere. He kept a list of court and parole dates and sent the fuckers postcards at the honor farm; he got hit with excessive-force complaints and toughed them out. Dick Stens made him a decent detective; now he played nursemaid to his teacher: keeping him half sober on duty, holding him back when he got a hard-on to shoot for kicks. He'd learned to keep himself in check; Stens was now all bad habits: scrounging at bars, letting stick-up men slide for snitch dope.

The music inside went off key – wrong, not really music. Bud caught screeches – screams from the jail.

The noise doubled, tripled. Bud saw a stampede: muster room to cellblock. A flash: Stens going crazy, booze, a jamboree – bash the cop bashers. He ran over, hit the door at a sprint.

The catwalk packed tight, cell doors open, lines forming. Exley shouting for order, pressing into the swarm, getting nowhere. Bud found the prisoner list; checkmarks after 'Sanchez, Dinardo,' 'Carbijal, Juan,' 'Garcia, Ezekiel,' 'Chasco, Reyes,' 'Rice, Dennis,' 'Valupeyk, Clinton' – all six cop beaters in custody.

The bums in the drunk cage egged the men on.

Sten hit the #4 cell – waving brass knucks.

Willie Tristano pinned Exley to the wall; Crum Crumley grabbed his keys.

Cops shoved cell to cell. Elmer Lentz, blood splattered, grinning. Jack Vincennes by the watch commander's office – Lieutenant Frieling snoring at his desk.

Bud stormed into it.

He caught elbows going in; the men saw who it was and cleared a path. Stens slid into 3; Bud pushed in. Dick was working a skinny pachuco – head saps – the kid on his knees, catching teeth. Bud grabbed Stensland; the Mex spat blood. 'Heey, Mister White. I knowww you, *puto.* You beat up my frien' Caldo 'cause he whipped his *puto* wife. She was a fuckin' hooer, *pendejo.* Ain' you got no fuckin' brains?'

Bud let Stens go; the Mex gave him the finger. Bud kicked him prone, picked him up by the neck. Cheers, attaboys, holy fucks. Bud banged the punk's head on the ceiling; a bluesuit moved in hard. Ed Exley's rich-kid voice: 'Stop it, Officer – that's an order!'

The Mex kicked him in the balls – a dangling shot. Bud keeled into the bars; the kid stumbled out of the cell, smack into Vincennes. Trashcan, aghast – blood on his cashmere blazer. He put the punk down with a left-right; Exley ran out of the cellblock.

Yells, shouts, shrieks: louder than a thousand Code 3 sirens.

Stens whipped out a pint of gin. Bud saw every man there skunked to niggertown forever. Up on his tiptoes, a prime view – Exley dumping booze in the storeroom.

Voices: attaboy, Big Bud. Faces to the voices – skewed, wrong. Exley still dumping, Mr. Teetotaler Witness. Bud ran down the catwalk, locked him in tight.

Chapter Five

SHUT INTO A room eight feet square. No windows, no telephone, no intercom. Shelves spilling forms, mops, brooms, a clogged-up sink filled with vodka and rum. The door was steel-reinforced; the liquor stew smelled like vomit. Shouts and thudding sounds boomed through a heat vent.

Ed banged on the door – no response. He yelled into the vent – hot air hit his face. He saw himself pinioned and pick-pocketed, Bureau guys who figured he'd never squeal. He wondered what his father would do.

Time dragged; the jail noise stopped, fired up, stopped, started. Ed banged on the door – no luck. The room went hot; booze stench smothered the air. Ed felt Guadalcanal: hiding from the Japs, bodies piled over him. His uniform was sopping wet; if he shot the lock the bullets could ricochet off the plating and kill him. The beatings had to go wide: an I.A. investigation, civil suits, the grand jury. Police brutality charges; careers flushed down the toilet. Sergeant Edmund J. Exley crucified because he could not maintain order. Ed made a decision: fight back with his brains.

He wrote on the back of official departmental forms – version one, the truth:

A rumor started it: John Helenowski lost an eye. Sergeant Richard Stensland logged in Rice, Dennis, and Valupeyk, Clinton – he spread the word. It ignited all at once; Lieutenant Frieling, the watch commander, was asleep, unconscious from drinking alcohol on duty in violation of interdepartmental regulation 4319. Now in charge, Sergeant E. J. Exley found his office keys misplaced. The bulk of the men attending the station Christmas party stormed the cellblock. The cells containing the six alleged assaulters were opened with the misplaced keys. Sergeant Exley attempted to relock those cells, but the beatings had already commenced and Sergeant Willis Tristano held Sergeant Exley while Sergeant Walter Crumley stole the spare keys attached to his belt.

Sergeant Exley did not use force to get the spare keys back.

More details:

Stensland going crazy, policemen beating helpless prisoners. Bud White: lifting a squirming man, one hand on his neck.

Sergeant Exley ordering Officer White to stop: Officer White ignoring the order; Sergeant Exley relieved when the prisoner freed himself and eliminated the need for a further confrontation.

Ed winced, kept writing – 12/25/51, the Central Jail assaults in detail. Probable grand jury indictments, interdepartmental trial boards – Chief Parker's prestige ruined. Fresh paper, thoughts of inmate witnesses – mostly drunks – and the fact that virtually every officer had been drinking heavily. *They* were compromised witnesses; *he* was sober, uncompromised, and had made attempts to control the situation. *He* needed a graceful out; the Department needed to save face; the high brass would be grateful to a man who tried to circumvent bad press – who had the foresight to see it coming and plan ahead. He wrote down version two.

A digression on number one, the action shifted to limit the blame to fewer officers: Stensland, Johnny Brownell, Bud White and a handful of other men who'd already earned or were close to their pensions – Krugman, Tucker, Heineke, Huff, Disbrow, Doherty – older fish to throw the D.A.'s Office if indictment fever ran high. A subjective viewpoint, tailored to fit what the drunk tank prisoners saw, the assaulters trying to flee the cellblock and liberate other inmates. The truth twisted a few turns – impossible for other witnesses to disprove. Ed signed it, listened through the vent for version three.

It came slowly. Voices urged 'Stens' to 'wake up for a piece'; White left the cellblock, muttering what a waste it all was. Krugman and Tucker yelled insults; whimpers answered them. No further sound of White or Johnny Brownell; Lentz, Huff, Doherty prowling the catwalk. Sobs, *Madre mia* over and over.

6:14 A.M.

Ed wrote out number three: no whimpers, no *madre mia*, the cop beaters inciting other inmates. He wondered how his father would rate the crimes: brother officers assaulted, the assaulters ravaged. Which required absolute justice?

The vent noise dwindled; Ed tried to sleep and couldn't; a key went in the door.

Lieutenant Frieling – pale, trembling. Ed nudged him aside, walked down the corridor.

Six cells wide open – the walls slick with blood. Juan Carbijal on his bunk, a shirt under his head soaked red. Clinton Valupeyk washing blood off his face with toilet water. Reyes Chasco one giant contusion; Dennis Rice working his fingers – swollen blue, broken. Dinardo Sanchez and Ezekiel Garcia curled up together by the drunk cage.

Ed called for ambulances. The words ‘Prison Ward, County General’ almost made him retch.

Chapter Six

DUDLEY SMITH SAID, 'You're not eating, lad. Did a late night with your chums spoil your appetite?'

Jack looked at his plate: T-bone, baked potato, asparagus. 'I always order large when the D.A.'s Office picks up the tab. Where's Loew? I want him to see what he's buying.'

Smith laughed; Jack eyed the cut of his suit: baggy, good camouflage – make me a stage Irishman, cover my .45 automatic, knuckle dusters and sap. 'What's Loew have in mind?'

Dudley checked his watch. 'Yes, thirty-odd minutes of amenities should be a sufficient prelude to business on our grand savior's birthday. Lad, what Ellis wants is to be district attorney of our fair city, then governor of California. He's been a deputy D.A. for eight years, he ran for D.A. in '48 and lost, there's an off-year election coming up in March of '53, and Ellis thinks he can win. He's a vigorous prosecutor of criminal scum, he's a grand friend to the Department, and despite his Hebraic genealogy I'm fond of him and think he'll make a splendid district attorney. And, lad, you can help elect him. And make yourself a very valuable friend.'

The Mex he'd duked out – the whole deal might go wide. 'I might need a favor pretty soon.'

'One which he'll supply willingly, lad.'

'He wants me to run bag?'

'"Bagman" is a colloquialism I find offensive, lad. "Reciprocity of friendship" is a more suitable phrase, especially given the splendid connections you have. But money is at the root of Mr. Loew's request, and I'd be remiss in not stating that at the outset.'

Jack pushed his plate aside. 'Loew wants me to shake down the *Badge of Honor* guys. Campaign contributions.'

'Yes, and to keep that damnable *Hush-Hush* scandal rag off his back. And since reciprocity is our watchword here, he has specific favors to grant in return.'

'Such as?'

Smith lit a cigarette. 'Max Peltz, the producer of the show, has had tax trouble for years, and Loew will see to it that he never stands another audit. Brett Chase, whom you have so brilliantly taught to portray a policeman, is a degenerate pederast, and Loew will never prosecute him. Loew will contribute D.A.'s Bureau files to the show's story editor and you will be rewarded thusly: Sergeant Bob Gallaudet, the D.A.'s Bureau whip, is going to law school, doing well and will be joining the D.A.'s Office as a prosecutor once he passes the bar. You will then be given the chance to assume his old position – along with a lieutenancy. Lad, does my proposal impress you?'

Jack took a smoke from Dudley's pack. 'Boss, you know I'd never leave Narco and you know I'm gonna say yes. And I just figured out that Loew's gonna show up, give me a thank-you and not stay for dessert. So yes.'

Dudley winked; Ellis Loew slid into the booth. 'Gentlemen, I'm sorry I'm so late.'

Jack said, 'I'll do it.'

'Oh? Lieutenant Smith has explained the situation to you?'

Dudley said, 'Some lads don't require detailed explanations.'

Loew fingered his Phi Beta chain. 'Thank you then, Sergeant. And if I can help you in any way, *any way at all*, don't hesitate to call me.'

'I won't. Dessert, sir?'

'I would like to stay, but I have depositions waiting for me. We'll break bread another time, I'm sure.'

'Whatever you need, Mr. Loew.'

Loew dropped a twenty on the table. 'Again, thank you. Lieutenant, I'll talk to you soon. And gentlemen – Merry Christmas.'

Jack nodded; Loew walked off. Dudley said, 'There's more, lad.'

'More work?'

'Of sorts. Are you providing security at Welton Morrow's Christmas party this year?'

His annual gig – a C-note to mingle. 'Yeah, it's tonight. Does Loew want an invitation?'

'Not quite. You did a large favor for Mr. Morrow once, did you not?'

October '47 – too large. 'Yeah, I did.'

'And you're still friendly with the Morrows?'

'In a hired-hand sort of way, sure. Why?'

Dudley laughed. 'Lad, Ellis Loew wants a wife. Preferably a

Gentile with a social pedigree. He's seen Joan Morrow at various civic functions and fancies her. Will you play Cupid and ask fair Joan what she thinks of the idea?'

'Dud, are you asking me to get the future L.A. D.A. a fucking date?'

'I am indeed. Do you think Miss Morrow will be amenable?'

'It's worth a try. She's a social climber and she's always wanted to marry well. I don't know about a hebe, though.'

'Yes, lad, there is that. But you'll broach the subject?'

'Sure.'

'Then it's out of our hands. And along those lines – was it bad at the station last night?'

Now he gets to it. 'It was very bad.'

'Do you think it will blow over?'

'I don't know. What about Brownell and Helenowski? How bad did they get it?'

'Superficial contusions, lad. I'd say the payback went a bit further. Did you partake?'

'I got hit, hit back and got out. Is Loew afraid of prosecuting?'

'Only of losing friends if he does.'

'He made a friend today. Tell him he's ahead of the game.'

Jack drove home, fell asleep on the couch. He slept through the afternoon, woke up to the *Mirror* on his porch. On page four: 'Yuletide Surprise for *Hope's Harvest* co-stars.'

No pix, but Morty Bendish got in the 'Big V' shtick; 'One of his many informants' made it sound like Jack Vincennes had minions prowling, their pockets stuffed with *his* money – it was well known that the Big V financed his dope crusade with his own salary. Jack clipped the article, thumbed the rest of the paper for Helenowski, Brownell and the cop beaters.

Nothing.

Predictable: two cops with minor contusions was small potatoes, the punks hadn't had time to glom a shyster. Jack got out his ledger.

Pages divided into three columns: date, cashier's check number, amount of money. The amounts ranged from a C-note to two grand; the checks were made out to Donald and Marsha Scoggins of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The bottom of the third column held a running total: $32,350. Jack got out his bank-book, checked the balance, decided his next payment would be five hundred fiat. Five yards for Christmas. Big money until your Uncle Jack drops dead – and it'll never be enough.

Every Christmas he ran it through – it started with the Morrows and he saw them at Christmastime; he was an orphan, he'd made the Scoggins kids orphans, Christmas was a notoriously shitty time for orphans. He forced himself through the story.

Late September 1947.

Old Chief Worton called him in. Welton Morrow's daughter Karen was running with a high school crowd experimenting with dope – they got the shit from a sax player named Les Weiskopf. Morrow was a filthy-rich lawyer, a heavy contributor to LAPD fund drives; he wanted Weiskopf leaned on – with no publicity.

Jack knew Weiskopf: he sold Dilaudid, wore his hair in a jig conk, liked young gash. Worton told him a sergeantcy came with the job.

He found Weiskopf – in bed with a fifteen-year-old redhead. The girl skedaddled; Jack pistol-whipped Weiskopf, tossed his pad, found a trunk full of goofballs and bennies. He took it with him – he figured he'd sell the shit to Mickey Cohen. Welton Morrow offered him the security man gig; Jack accepted; Karen Morrow was hustled off to boarding school. The sergeantcy came through; Mickey C. wasn't interested in the dope – only Big H flipped his switch. Jack kept the trunk – and dipped into it for bennies to keep him juiced on all-night stakeouts. Linda, wife number two, took off with one of his snitches: a trombone player who sold maryjane on the side. Jack hit the trunk for real, mixing goofballs, bennies, scotch, taking down half the names on the *down beat* poll: THE MAN, jazzster's public enemy number one. Then it was 10/24/47 –

He was cramped in his car, staking the Malibu Rendezvous parking lot: eyes on two 'H' pushers in a Packard sedan. Near midnight: he'd been drinking scotch, he blew a reefer on the way over, the bennies he'd been swallowing weren't catching up with the booze. A tip on a midnight buy: the 'H' men and a skinny shine, seven feet tall, a real geek.

The boogie showed at a quarter past twelve, walked to the Packard, palmed a package. Jack tripped getting out of the car; the geek started running; the 'H' men got out with guns drawn. Jack stumbled up and drew his piece; the geek wheeled and fired; he saw two shapes closer in, tagged them as the nigger's backup, squeezed off a clip. The shapes went down; the 'H' men shot at the spook and at him; the spook nosedived a ’46 Studebaker.

Jack ate cement, prayed the rosary. A shot ripped his shoulder; a shot grazed his legs. He crawled under the car; a shitload of tires squealed; a shitload of people screamed. An ambulance showed up; a bull dyke Sheriffs deputy loaded him on a gurney. Sirens, a hospital bed, a doctor and the dyke whispering about the dope in his system – blood test validated. Lots of drugged sleep, a newspaper on his lap: ‘Three Dead in Malibu Shootout – Heroic Cop Survives.’

The ‘H’ guys escaped clean – the deaths pinned on them.

The spook was dead at the scene.

The shapes weren’t the nigger’s backup – they were Mr. and Mrs. Harold J. Scoggins, tourists from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the proud parents of Donald, seventeen, and Marsha, sixteen.

The doctors kept looking at him funny; the dyke turned out to be Dot Rothstein, Kikey Teitlebaum’s cousin, known associate of the legendary Dudley Smith.

A routine autopsy would show that the pills taken out of Mr. and Mrs. Scoggins came from Sergeant Jack Vincennes’ gun.

The kids saved him.

He sweated out a week at the hospital. Thad Green and Chief Worton visited; the Narco guys came by. Dudley Smith offered his patronage; he wondered just how much he knew. Sid Hudgens, chief writer for *Hush-Hush* magazine, stopped in with an offer: Jack to roust celebrated hopheads, *Hush-Hush* to be in on the arrests – cash to discreetly change hands. He accepted – and wondered just how much Hudgens knew.

The kids demanded no autopsy: the family was Seventh-Day Adventist, autopsies were a sacrilege. Since the county coroner knew damn well who the shooters were, he shipped Mr. and Mrs. Harold J. Scoggins back to Iowa to be cremated.

Sergeant Jack Vincennes skated – with newspaper honors.

His wounds healed.

He quit drinking.

He quit taking dope, dumped the trunk. He marked abstinent days on his calendar, worked his deal with Sid Hudgens, built his name as a local celebrity. He did favors for Dudley Smith; Mr. and Mrs. Harold J. Scoggins torched his dreams; he figured booze and hop would put out the flames but get him killed in the process. Sid got him the ‘technical advisor’ job with *Badge of Honor* – then just a radio show. Money started rolling in; spending it on clothes and women wasn't the kick he thought it would be. Bars and dope shakedowns were awful temptations. Terrorizing hopheads helped a little – but not enough. He decided to pay the kids back.

His first check ran two hundred; he included a letter: 'Anonymous Friend,' a spiel on the Scoggins tragedy. He called the bank a week later: the check had been cashed. He'd been financing his free ride ever since; unless Hudgens had 10/24/47 on paper he was safe.

Jack laid out his party clothes. The blazer was London Shop – he'd bought it with Sid's payoff for the Bob Mitchum roust. The tassel loafers and gray flannels were proceeds from a *Hush-Hush* exposé linking jazz musicians to the Communist Conspiracy – he squeezed some pinko stuff out of a bass player he popped for needle marks. He dressed, spritzed on Lucky Tiger, drove to Beverly Hills.

A backyard bash: a full acre covered by awnings. College kids parked cars; a buffet featured prime rib, smoked ham, turkey. Waiters carried hors d'oeuvres; a giant Christmas tree stood out in the open, getting drizzled on. Guests ate off paper plates; gas torches lit the lawn. Jack arrived on time and worked the crowd.

Welton Morrow showed him to his first audience: a group of Superior Court judges. Jack spun yarns: Charlie Parker trying to buy him off with a high-yellow hooker, how he cracked the Shapiro case: a queer Mickey Cohen stooge pushing amyl nitrite – his customers transvestite strippers at a fruit bar. The Big V to the rescue: Jack Vincennes single-handedly arresting a roomful of bruisers auditioning for a Rita Hayworth lookalike contest. A round of applause; Jack bowed, saw Joan Morrow by the Christmas tree – alone, maybe bored.

He walked over. Joan said, 'Happy holidays, Jack.'

Pretty, built, thirty-one or two. No job and no husband taking its toll: she came off pouty most of the time. 'Hi, Joan.'

'Hi, yourself. I read about you in the paper today. Those people you arrested.'

'It was nothing.'

Joan laughed. 'Sooo modest. What's going to happen to them? Rock what's-his-name and the girl, I mean.'

'Ninety days for the girl, maybe a year honor farm for Rockwell. They should hire your dad – he'd get them off.'

'You don't really care, do you?'

'I hope they cop a plea and save me a court date. And I hope they do some time and learn their lesson.'

'I smoked marijuana once, in college. It made me hungry and I ate a whole box of cookies and got sick. You wouldn't have arrested me, would you?'

'No, you're too nice.'

'I'm *bored* enough to try it again, I'll tell you that.'

His opening. 'How's your love life, Joanie?'

'It isn't. Do you know a policeman named Edmund Exley? He's tall and he wears those cute glasses. He's Preston Exley's son.'

Straight-arrow Eddie: war hero with a poker up his ass. 'I know who he is, but I don't really know him.'

'Isn't he cute? I saw him at his father's house last night.'

'Rich-kid cops are from hunger, but I know a nice fellow who's interested in you.'

'You do? Who?'

'A man named Ellis Loew. He's a deputy district attorney.'

Joan smiled, frowned. 'I heard him address the Rotary Club once. Isn't he Jewish?'

'Yeah, but look to the bright side. He's a Republican and a comer.'

'Is he nice?'

'Sure, he's a sweetheart.'

Joan flicked the tree, fake snow swirled. 'Well, tell him to call me. Tell him I'm booked up for a while, but he can stand in line.'

'Thanks, Joanie.'

'Thank *you*, Miles Standish. Look, I think I see Daddy giving me the come-hither. Bye, Jackie!'

Joan skipped off; Jack geared up for more shtick – maybe the Mitchum job, a soft version. A soft voice: 'Mr. Vincennes. Hello.'

Jack turned around. Karen Morrow in a green cocktail dress, her shoulders beaded with rain. The last time he'd seen her she was a too-tall, too-gawky kid forced to say thank you to a cop who'd strongarmed a hop pusher. Four years later just the too-tall stuck – the rest was a girl-to-woman changeover. 'Karen, I almost didn't recognize you.'

Karen smiled. Jack said, 'I'd tell you you've gotten beautiful, but you've heard it before.'

'Not from you.'

Jack laughed. 'How was college?'

'An epic, and not a story to tell you while I'm freezing. I told my parents to hold the party indoors, that England did not inure me to the cold. I have a speech prepared. Do you want to help me feed the neighbor's cats?'

'I'm on the job.'

'Talking to my sister?'

'A guy I know has a crush on her.'

'Poor guy. No, poor Joanie. Shit, this is not going the way I planned.'

'Shit, then let's go feed those cats.'

Karen smiled and led the way, wobbling, high heels on grass. Thunder, lightning, rain – Karen kicked off her shoes and ran barefoot. Jack caught up at the next-door porch – wet, close to laughing.

Karen opened the door. A foyer light was on; Jack looked at her – shivering, goose bumps. Karen shook water from her hair. 'The cats are upstairs.'

Jack took off his blazer. 'No, I want to hear your speech.'

'I'm sure you know what it is. I'm sure lots of people have thanked you.'

'You haven't.'

Karen shivered. 'Shit, I'm sorry, but this is not going the way I planned.'

Jack draped his coat around her shoulders. 'You got the L.A. papers over in England?'

'Yes.'

'And you read about me?'

'Yes. You – '

'Karen, they exaggerate sometimes. They build things up.'

'Are you telling me those things I've read are lies?'

'Not ex – no, they're not.'

Karen turned away. 'Good, I knew they were true, so here's your speech, and don't look at me, because I'm flustered. One, you got me away from taking pills. Two, you convinced my father to send me abroad, where I got a damn good education and met nice people. Three, you arrested that terrible man who sold me the pills.'

Jack touched her; Karen flinched away. 'No, let me tell it! Four, what I wasn't going to mention, is that Les Weiskopf gave girls pills for free if they slept with him. Father was stingy with my allowance and sooner or later I would have done it. So there – you kept my goddamned virtue intact.'

Jack laughed. ‘Am I your goddamned hero?’

‘Yes, and I’m twenty-two years old and not the schoolgirl-crush type.’

‘Good, because I’d like to take you to dinner sometime.’

Karen swung around. Her mascara was ruined; she’d chewed off most of her lipstick. ‘Yes. Mother and Father will have coronaries, but yes.’

Jack said, ‘This is the first stupid move I’ve made in years.’

Chapter Seven

A MONTH OF shit.

Bud ripped January 1952 off his calendar, counted felony arrests. January 1 through January 11: zero – he'd worked crowd control at a movie location – Parker wanted a muscle guy there to shoo away autograph hounds. January 14: the cop beaters acquitted on assault charges, Helenowski and Brownell chewed up – the spies' lawyer made it look like they instigated the whole thing. Civil suits threatened; 'get a lawyer?' scribbled by the date.

January 16, 19, 22: wife thumpers paroled, welcome home visits. January 23–25: stakeouts on a burglary ring, him and Stens acting on a tip from Johnny Stomp, who 'just seemed to know things, per a rumor: he used to run a blackmail racket. Gangland activity at a weird lull, Stomp scuffling to stay solvent, Mo Jahelka – looking after Mickey C.'s interests – probably afraid to push too much muscle. Seven arrests total, good for his quota, but the papers were working the station brouhaha, dubbing it 'Bloody Christmas,' and a rumor hit: the D.A.'s Office had contacted Parker, IAD was going to question the men partying on Christmas Eve, the county grand jury was drooling for a presentation. More notes: 'talk to Dick,' '*lawyer???*', '*lawyer when??*'

The last week of the month – comic relief. Dick off duty, drying out at a health ranch in Twenty-nine Palms; the squad boss thought he was attending his father's funeral in Nebraska – the guys took up a collection to send flowers to a mortuary that didn't exist. Two felony notches on the 29th: parole violators he'd glommed off another Stomp snitch – but he'd had to beat the shit out of them, kidnap them, haul them from county turf to city so the Sheriff's couldn't claim the roust. The 31st: a dance with Chick Nadel, a barkeep who ran hot appliances out of the Moonglow Lounge. An impromptu raid; Chick with a stash of hot radios; a snitch on the guys who boosted the truck, holed up in San Diego, no way to make it an LAPD caper. He busted Chick instead: receiving stolen goods with a prior, ten felony arrests for the month – at least a double-digit tally.

Pure shit – straight into February.

Back to uniform, six days of directing traffic – Parker's idea, Detective Division personnel rotating to Patrol for a week a year. Alphabetically: as a 'W' he stood at the rear of the pack. The late bird loses the worm – it rained all six of those days.

Floods on the job, a drought with the women.

Bud thumbed his address book. Lorene from the Silver Star, Jane from the Zimba Room, Nancy from the Orbit Lounge – late-breaking numbers. They had the look: late thirties, hungry – grateful for a younger guy who treated them nice and gave them a taste all men weren't shitheels. Lorene was heavyset – the mattress springs always banged the floor. Jane played opera records to set the mood – they sounded like cats fucking. Nancy was a lush, par for bar-prowl course. The jaded type – the type to break things off even quicker than he usually did.

'White, check this.'

Bud looked up. Elmer Lentz held out the *Herald* front page.

The headline: 'Police Beating Victims to File Suit.'

Subheadings: 'Grand Jury Ready to Hear Evidence,' 'Parker Vows Full LAPD Cooperation.'

Lentz said, 'This could be trouble.'

Bud said, 'No shit, Sherlock.'

Chapter Eight

PRESTON EXLEY FINISHED reading. ‘Edmund, all three versions are brilliant, but you should have gone to Parker immediately. Now, with all the publicity, your coming forth smacks of panic. Are you prepared to be an informant?’

Ed squared his glasses. ‘Yes.’

‘Are you prepared to be despised within the Department?’

‘Yes, and I’m prepared for whatever displays of gratitude Parker has to offer.’

Preston skimmed pages. ‘Interesting. Shifting most of the guilt to men with their pensions already secured is salutary, and this Officer White sounds a bit fearsome.’

Ed got chills. ‘He is. Internal Affairs is interviewing me tomorrow, and I don’t relish telling them about his stunt with the Mexican.’

‘Afraid of reprisals?’

‘Not really.’

‘Don’t ignore your fear, Edmund. That’s weakness. White and his friend Stensland behaved with despicable disregard for departmental bylaws, and they’re both obvious thugs. Are you prepared for your interview?’

‘Yes.’

‘They’ll be brutal.’

‘I know, Father.’

‘They’ll stress your inability to keep order and the fact that you let those officers steal your keys.’

Ed flushed. ‘It was getting chaotic, and fighting those men would have created more chaos.’

‘Don’t raise your voice and don’t justify yourself. Not with me, not with the I.A. men. It makes you appear – ’

A breaking voice. ‘Don’t say “weak,” Father. Don’t draw any sort of parallel with Thomas. And don’t assume that I can’t handle this situation.’

Preston picked up the phone. ‘I know you’re capable of holding your own. But are you capable of seizing Bill Parker’s gratitude before he displays it?'

'Father, you told me once that Thomas was your heir as a natural and I was your heir as an opportunist. What does that tell you?'

Preston smiled, dialed a number. 'Bill? Hello, it's Preston Exley . . . Yes, fine, thank you . . . No, I wouldn't have called your personal line for that . . . No, Bill, it's about my son Edmund. He was on duty at Central Station Christmas Eve, and I think he has valuable information for you . . . Yes, tonight? Certainly, he'll be there . . . Yes, and my regards to Helen . . . Yes, goodbye, Bill.'

Ed felt his heart slamming. Preston said, 'Meet Chief Parker at the Pacific Dining Car tonight at eight. He'll arrange for a private room where you can talk.'

'Which one of the depositions do I show him?'

Preston handed the paperwork back. 'Opportunities like this don't come very often. I had the Atherton case, you had a little taste with Guadalcanal. Read the family scrapbook and *remember those precedents*.'

'Yes, but which deposition?'

'You figure it out. And have a good meal at the Dining Car. The supper invitation is a good sign, and Bill doesn't like finicky eaters.'

Ed drove to his apartment, read, remembered. The scrapbook held clippings arranged in chronological order; what the newspapers didn't tell him he'd burned into his memory.

1934 – the Atherton case.

Children: Mexican, Negro, Oriental – three male, two female – are found dismembered, the trunks of their bodies discovered in L.A. area storm drains. The arms and legs have been severed; the internal organs removed. The press dubs the killer 'Dr. Frankenstein.' Inspector Preston Exley heads the investigation.

He deems the Frankenstein tag appropriate: tennis racket strings were found at all five crime scenes, the third victim had darning-needle holes in his armpits. Exley concludes that the fiend is recreating children with stitching and a knife; he begins hauling in deviates, cranks, loony bin parolees. He wonders what the killer will do for a face – and learns a week later.

Wee Willie Wennerholm, child star in Raymond Dieterling's stable, is kidnapped from a studio tutorial school. The following day his body is found on the Glendale railroad tracks – decapitated.

Then a break: administrators from the Glenhaven State Mental

Hospital call the LAPD – Loren Atherton, a child molestor with a vampire fixation, was paroled to Los Angeles two months before – and has not yet reported to his parole officer.

Exley locates Atherton on skid row: he has a job washing bottles at a blood bank. Surveillance reveals that he steals blood, mixes it with cheap wine and drinks it. Exley's men arrest Atherton at a downtown theater – masturbating during a horror movie. Exley raids his hotel room, finds a set of keys – the keys to an abandoned storage garage. He goes there – and finds Hell.

A prototype child packed in dry ice: male Negro arms, male Mexican legs, a male Chinese torso with spliced-in female genitalia and Wee Willie Wennerholm's head. Wings cut from birds stitched to the child's back. Accoutrements rest nearby: horror movie reels, gutted tennis rackets, diagrams for creating hybrid children. Photographs of children in various stages of dismemberment, a closet/darkroom filled with developing supplies.

Hell.

Atherton confesses to the killings; he is tried, convicted, hanged at San Quentin. Preston Exley keeps copies of the death photos; he shows them to his policemen sons – so that they will know the brutality of crimes that require absolute justice.

Ed flipped pages: past his mother's obit, Thomas' death. Outside of his father's triumphs, the only time the Exleys made the papers was when somebody died. He made the *Examiner*: an article on the sons of famous men fighting World War II. Like Bloody Christmas, there was more than one version.

The *Examiner* ran the version that won him his DSC: Corporal Ed Exley, sole survivor of a platoon wiped out in hand-to-hand combat, takes down three trenches filled with Jap infantry, twenty-nine dead total, if there were an officer present to witness the act he would have won the Congressional Medal of Honor. Version two: Ed Exley seizes the opportunity to make a scout run when a Jap bayonet charge is imminent, dawdles, comes back to find his platoon obliterated and a Jap patrol approaching. He hides under Sergeant Peters and Pfc Wasnicki, feels them buckle when the Japs strafe bodies; he bites into Wasnicki's arm, chews his wristwatch strap clean off. He waits for dusk, sobbing, covered by dead men, a tiny passage between bodies feeding him air. Then a terror run for battalion HQ – halted when he sees another slaughter scene.

A little Shinto shrine, tucked into a clearing covered with camouflage netting. Dead Japs on pallets, jaundice green, emaciated. Every man ripped stomach to ribcage; ornately carved swords, blood-caked, stacked neatly. Mass suicide – soldiers too proud to risk capture or die from malaria.

Three trenches cut into the ground behind the temple; weaponry nearby – rifles and pistols rusted out from heavy rain. A flamethrower wrapped in camouflage cloth – in working order.

He held it, knowing just one thing: he would not survive Guadalcanal. He'd be assigned to a new platoon; his scout run dawdlings wouldn't wash. He could not request an HQ assignment – his father would deem the act cowardice. He would have to live with contempt – fellow LAPD men wounded, awarded medals.

'Medals' led to 'Bond Tours' led to crime scene reconstructions. He saw his opportunity.

He found a Jap machine gun. He hauled the hara-kiri men to the trenches, put useless weapons in their hands, arranged them facing an opening in the clearing. He dropped the machine gun there, pointed toward the opening, three rounds left in the feeder belt. He got the flamethrower, torched the Japs and the shrine past forensic recognition. He got his story straight, made it back to battalion HQ.

Recon patrols confirmed the story: fighting Ed Exley, armed with Jap ordnance, french-fried twenty-nine of the little fuckers.

The Distinguished Service Cross – the second highest medal his country could bestow. A stateside bond tour, a hero's welcome, back to the LAPD a champion.

Some kind of wary respect from Preston Exley.

'Read the family scrapbook. Remember those precedents.'

Ed put the book away, still not sure how he'd play Bloody Christmas – but certain what the man meant.

Opportunities fall easy – you pay for them later.

Father, I've known it since I picked up that flamethrower.

Chapter Nine

'IF IT GOES to the grand jury, you won't swing. And the D.A. and I will try to keep it from going there.'

Jack counted favors on deposit. Sixteen G's to Loew's slush fund – Miller Stanton helped him lube the *Badge of Honor* gang. He tweaked Brett Chase himself, a concise little threat – a *Hush-Hush* exposé on his queerness. Max Peltz coughed up large – Loew frosted out a tax audit. A Cupid favor – tonight the man meets pouty Joan Morrow. 'Ellis, I don't even want to testify. I'm talking to some IAD goons tomorrow, and it *is* going to the grand jury. So fix it.'

Loew played with his Phi Beta chain. 'Jack, a prisoner assaulted you, and you responded in kind. You're clean. You're also somewhat of a public figure and the preliminary depositions that we've received from the plaintiff's attorneys state that four of the beating victims recognized you. You'll testify, Jack. But you won't swing.'

'I just thought I'd run it by you. But if you ask me to squeal on my brother officers, I'll plead fucking amnesia. *Comprende,* Counselor?'

Loew leaned across his desk. 'We shouldn't argue – we're doing too well together. Officer Wendell White and Sergeant Richard Stensland are the ones who should be worrying, not you. Besides, the grapevine tells me you have a new lady in your life.'

'You mean Joan Morrow told you.'

'Yes, and frankly she and her parents disapprove. You are fifteen years older than the girl, and you've had a checkered past.'

Caddy, ski instructor – an orphanage kid good at servicing rich folks. 'Joanie offer details?'

'Just that the girl has a mad crush on you and believes your press clippings. I assured Joan that those clippings are true. Karen tells Joan that so far you've behaved like a gentleman, which I find hard to believe.'

'That ends tonight, I hope. After our little double date, it's the *Badge of Honor* wrap party and an intimate interlude somewhere.'

Loew twisted his vest chain. 'Jack, has Joan been playing hard to get or does she really have that many men chasing her?'

Jack twisted the knife. ‘She’s a popular kid, but all those movie star guys are just fluff. Stick to your guns.’

‘Movie stars?’

‘Fluff, Ellis. Cute, but fluff.’

‘Jack, I want to thank you for coming along tonight. I’m sure you and Karen will be superb icebreakers.’

‘Then let’s hit it.’

Don the Beachcomber’s – the women waiting in a wraparound booth. Jack made introductions. ‘Ellis Loew, Karen Morrow and Joan Morrow. Karen, don’t they make a lovely couple?’

Karen said, ‘Hello,’ no hand squeeze – six dates and all she put out were bland good-night kisses. Loew sat next to Joan; Joanie checked him out – probably sniffing for signs of Jewishness. ‘Ellis and I are good phone chums already. Aren’t we?’

‘We are indeed’ – Loew working his courtroom voice.

Joan finished her drink. ‘How do you two know each other? Do the police work closely with the District Attorney’s Office?’

Jack kiboshed a laugh: I’m Jewboy’s bagman. ‘We build cases together. I get the evidence, Ellis prosecutes the bad guys.’

A waiter hovered. Joan ordered an Islander Punch; Jack asked for coffee. Loew said, ‘Beefeater martini.’ Karen put a hand over her glass. ‘Then this Bloody Christmas thing will strain relations between the police and Mr. Loew’s office. Isn’t that likely?’

Loew hit quick. ‘No, because the LAPD rank and file wish to see the wrongdoers dealt with severely. Right, Jack?’

‘Sure. Things like that give all policemen a black eye.’

The drinks arrived – Joan took hers down in three gulps. ‘You were there, weren’t you, Jack? Daddy said you always go to that station party, at least since your second wife left you.’

Karen: *‘Joanie!’*

Jack said, ‘I was there.’

‘Did you take a few licks for justice?’

‘It wasn’t worth it to me.’

‘You mean there weren’t any headlines to be had?’

‘Joanie, be quiet. You’re drunk.’

Loew fingered his tie; Karen fingered an ashtray. Joan slurped the rest of her drink. ‘Teetotalers are always so judgmental. You used to attend that party after your *first* wife left you, didn’t you, Sergeant?’

Karen gripped the ashtray. ‘You goddamn bitch.’

Joan laughed. ‘If you want a hero policeman, I know a man named Exley who at least risked his life for his country. Granted, Jack’s smooth, but can’t you see what he is?’

Karen threw the ashtray – it hit the wall, then Ellis Loew’s lap. Loew stuck his head in a menu; Joanie bitch glowered. Jack led Karen out of the restaurant.

Over to Variety International Pictures – Karen bad-mouthing Joanie non-stop. Jack parked by the *Badge of Honor* set; hillbilly music drifted out. Karen sighed. ‘My parents will get used to the idea.’

Jack turned on the dash light. The girl had dark brown hair done in waves, freckles, a touch of an overbite. ‘What idea?’

‘Well . . . the idea of us seeing each other.’

‘Which is going pretty slow.’

‘That’s partly my fault. One minute you’re telling me these wonderful stories and the next minute you just stop. I keep wondering what you’re thinking about and thinking that there’s so many things you can’t tell me. It makes me think you think I’m too young, so I pull away.’

Jack opened the door. ‘Keep getting my number and you won’t be too young. And tell me some of your stories, because sometimes I get tired of mine.’

‘Deal? My stories after the party?’

‘Deal. And by the way, what do you think of your sister and Ellis Loew?’

Karen didn’t blink. ‘She’ll marry him. My parents will overlook the fact that he’s Jewish because he’s ambitious and a Republican. He’ll tolerate Joanie’s scenes in public and hit her in private. Their kids will be a mess.’

Jack laughed. ‘Let’s dance. And don’t get star-struck, people will think you’re a hick.’

They entered arm in arm. Karen went in starry-eyed; Jack scoped his biggest wrap bash yet.

Spade Cooley and his boys on a bandstand, Spade at the mike with Burt Arthur ‘Deuce’ Perkins, his bass player, called ‘Deuce’ for his two-spot on a chain gang: unnatural acts against dogs. Spade smoked opium; Deuce popped ‘H’ – a *Hush-Hush* roust just looking to happen. Max Peltz glad-handing the camera crew; Brett Chase beside him, talking to Billy Dieterling, the head cameraman. Billy’s eyes on his twist, Timmy Valburn, Moochie Mouse on the *Dream-a-*

Dream Hour. Tables up against the back wall – covered with liquor bottles, cold cuts. Kikey Teitlebaum there with the food – Peltz probably had his deli cater the party. Johnny Stompanato with Kikey, ex-Mickey -Cohen boys huddling. Every *Badge of Honor* actor, crew member and general hanger-on eating, drinking, dancing.

Jack swept Karen onto the floor: swirls through a fast-tune medley, grinds when Spade switched to ballads. Karen kept her eyes closed; Jack kept his open – the better to dig the shmaltz. He felt a tap on the shoulder.

Miller Stanton cutting in. Karen opened her eyes and gasped: a TV star wanted to dance with her. Jack bowed. 'Karen Morrow, Miller Stanton.'

Karen yelled over the music. 'Hi! I saw all those old Raymond Dieterling movies you made. You were great!'

Stanton hoisted her hands square-dance style. 'I was a brat! Jack, go see Max – he wants to talk to you.'

Jack walked to the rear of the set – quiet, the music lulled. Max Peltz handed him two envelopes. 'Your season bonus and a boost for Mr. Loew. It's from Spade Cooley.'

Loew's bag was fat. 'What's Cooley want?'

'I'd say insurance you won't mess with his habit.'

Jack lit a cigarette. 'Spade doesn't interest me.'

'Not a big enough name?'

'Be nice, Max.'

Peltz leaned in close. 'Jack, *you* try to be nicer, 'cause you're getting a bad rep in the Industry. People say you're a hard-on, you don't play the game. You shook down Brett for Mr. Loew, fine, he's a goddamn faigeleh, he's got it coming. But you can't bite the hand that feeds you, not when half the people in the Industry blow tea from time to time. Stick with the shvartzes – those jazz guys make good copy.'

Jack eyeballed the set. Brett Chase in a hobnob: Billy Dieterling, Timmy Valburn – a regular fruit convention. Kikey T. and Johnny Stomp shmoozing – Deuce Perkins, Lee Vachss joining in. Peltz said, 'Seriously, Jack. Play the game.'

Jack pointed to the hard boys. 'Max, the game is my life. You see those guys over there?'

'Sure. What's that – '

'Max, that's what the Department calls a known criminal assembly. Perkins is an ex-con wheelman who fucks dogs, and Abe

Teitlebaum's on parole. The tall guy with the mustache is Lee Vachss, and he's made for at least a dozen snuffs for Mickey C. The good-looking wop is Johnny Stompanato. I doubt if he's thirty years old, and he's got a racket sheet as long as your arm. I am empowered by the Los Angeles Police Department to roust those cocksuckers on general suspicion, and I'm derelict in my duty for not doing it. Because I'm *playing the game*.'

Peltz waved a cigar. 'So keep playing it – but pianissimo on the tough-guy stuff. And look, Miller's bird-dogging your quail. Jesus, you like them young.'

Rumors: Max and high school trim. 'Not as young as you.'

'Ha! Go, you fucking gonif. Your girl's looking for you.'

Karen by a wall poster: Brett Chase as Lieutenant Vance Vincent. Jack walked over; Karen's eyes lit up. 'God, this is so wonderful! Tell me who everyone is!'

Full-blast music – Cooley yodeling, Deuce Perkins banging his bass. Jack danced Karen across the floor – over to a corner crammed with arclights. A perfect spot – quiet, a scope on the whole gang.

Jack pointed out the players. 'Brett Chase you already know about. He's not dancing because he's queer. The old guy with the cigar is Max Peltz. He's the producer, and he directs most of the episodes. You danced with Miller, so you know him. The two guys in skivvies are Augie Luger and Hank Kraft – they're grips. The girl with the clipboard is Penny Fulweider, she couldn't quit working even if she wanted to – she's the script supervisor. You know how the sets on the show are so modernistic? Well, the blond guy across from the bandstand is David Mertens, the set designer. Sometimes you'd think he was drunk, but he's not – he's got some rare kind of epilepsy, and he takes medicine for it. I heard he was in an accident and hit his head, that that started it. He's got these scars on his neck, so maybe that's it. Next to him there's Phil Shenkel, the assistant director, and the guy next to him is Jerry Marsalas, the male nurse who looks after Mertens. Terry Riegert, the actor who plays Captain Jeffries, is dancing with that tall redhead. The guys by the water cooler are Billy Dieterling, Chuck Maxwell and Dick Harwell, the camera crew, and the rest of the people are dates.'

Karen looked straight at him. 'It's your milieu, and you love it. And you care about those people.'

'I like them – and Miller's a good friend.'

‘Jack, you can’t fool me.’

‘Karen, this is Hollywood. And ninety percent of Hollywood is moonshine.’

‘Spoilsport. I’m gearing myself up to be reckless, so don’t put a damper on it.’

Daring him.

Jack tumbled; Karen leaned into the kiss. They probed, tasted, pulled back the same instant – Jack broke off the clinch dizzy.

Karen let her hands linger. ‘The neighbors are still on vacation. We could go feed the cats.’

‘Yeah . . . sure.’

‘Will you get me a brandy before we go?’

Jack walked to the food table. Deuce Perkins said, ‘Nice stuff, Vincennes. You got the same taste as me.’

A skinny cracker in a black cowboy shirt with pink piping. Boots put him close to six-six; his hands were enormous. ‘Perkins, your stuff sniffs fire hydrants.’

‘Spade might not like you talkin’ to me that way. Not with that envelope you got in your pocket.’

Lee Vachss, Abe Teitlebaum watching them. ‘Not another word, Perkins.’

Deuce chewed a toothpick. ‘Your quiff know you get your jollies shakin’ down niggers?’

Jack pointed to the wall. ‘Roll up your sleeves, spread your legs.’

Perkins spat out his toothpick. ‘You ain’t that crazy.’

Johnny Stomp, Vachss, Teitlebaum – all in earshot. Jack said, ‘Kiss the wall, shitbird.’

Perkins leaned over the table, palms on the wall. Jack pulled up his sleeves – fresh tracks – emptied his pockets. Paydirt – a hypo syringe. A crowd forming up – Jack played to it. ‘Needle marks and that outfit are good for three years State. Hand up the guy who sold you the hypo and you skate.’

Deuce oozed sweat. Jack said, ‘Squeal in front of your friends and you stroll.’

Perkins licked his lips. ‘Barney Stinson. Orderly at Queen of Angels.’

Jack kicked his legs out from under him.

Perkins landed face first in the cold cuts; the table crashed to the floor.

The room let out one big breath.

Jack walked outside, groups breaking up to let him through. Karen by the car, shivering. ‘Did you have to do that?’

He’d sweated his shirt clean through. ‘Yeah, I did.’

‘I wish I hadn’t seen it.’

‘So do I.’

‘I guess reading about things like that are one thing and seeing them is another. Would you try to – ’

Jack put his arms around her. ‘I’ll keep that stuff separate from you.’

‘But you’ll still tell me your stories?’

‘No . . . yeah, sure.’

‘I wish we could turn back the clock on tonight.’

‘So do I. Look, do you want some dinner?’

‘No. Do you still want to go see the cats?’

There were three cats – friendly guys who tried to take over the bed while they made love. Karen called the gray one Pavement, the tabby Tiger, the skinny one Ellis Loew. Jack resigned himself to the entourage – they made Karen giggle, he figured every laugh put Deuce Perkins further behind them. They made love, talked, played with the cats; Karen tried a cigarette – and coughed her lungs out. She begged for stories; Jack borrowed from the exploits of Officer Wendell White and spun gentler versions of his own cases: minimum strongarm, lots of sugar daddy – the bighearted Big V, protecting kids from the scourge of dope. At first the lies were hard – but Karen’s warmth made them easier and easier. Near dawn, the girl dozed off; he stayed wide awake, the cats driving him crazy. He kept wishing she’d wake up so he could tell her more stories; he got little jolts of worry: that he’d never remember all the phony parts, she’d catch him in whoppers, it would blow their deal sky high. Karen’s body grew warmer as she slept; Jack pressed closer to her. He fell asleep getting his stories straight.

Chapter Ten

A CORRIDOR FORTY feet long, both sides lined with benches: scuffed, dusty, just hauled up from some storage hole. Packed: men in plainclothes and uniform, most of them reading – newspapers screaming *Bloody Christmas.* Bud thought of him and Stens front page smeared: nailed by the spies and their lawyers. He'd gotten his call to appear at 4:00 A.M., pure I.A. scare tactics. Dick across the hall – back from the dry-out farm, into the jug. Six Internal Affairs interviews apiece – neither of them had snitched. A regular Christmas reunion, the gang's all here – except Ed Exley.

Time dragged, traffic flowed: interrogation room grillings. Elmer Lentz dropped a bomb: the radio said the grand jury requested a presentation – all the officers at Central Station 12/25/51 were to stand a show-up tomorrow, prisoners would be there to ID the roughnecks. Chief Parker's door opened; Thad Green stepped outside. 'Officer White, please.'

Bud walked over; Green pointed him in. A small room: Parker's desk, chairs facing it. No wall mementoes, a gray-tinted mirror – maybe a two-way. The chief behind his desk, in uniform, four gold stars on his shoulders. Dudley Smith in the middle chair; Green back in the chair nearest Parker. Bud took the hot seat – a spot where all three men could see him. Parker said, 'Officer, you know Deputy Chief Green, and I'm sure you know of Lieutenant Smith. The lieutenant has been serving me as an advisor during this crisis we've been having.'

Green lit a cigarette. 'Officer, you're being given a last chance to cooperate. You've been questioned repeatedly by Internal Affairs, and you've repeatedly refused to cooperate. Normally, you would have been suspended from duty. But you're a fine detective, and Chief Parker and I are convinced that your actions at the party were relatively blameless. You were provoked, Officer. You were not wantonly violent like most of the men accused.'

Bud started to talk; Smith cut him off. 'Lad, I'm sure that I speak for Chief Parker in this, so I will take the liberty of stating it without ellipses. It's a damn pity that the six scum who assaulted our brother officers weren't shot on the spot, and the violence visited upon them I deem mild. But, parenthetically, police officers who cannot control their impulses have no business being police officers, and the shenanigans perpetrated by the men outside have made the Los Angeles Police Department a laughingstock. This cannot be tolerated. Heads must roll. We must have cooperative policemen witnesses to offset the damage done to the Department's image – an image that has vastly improved under the leadership of Chief Parker. We have one major policeman witness already, and Deputy D.A. Ellis Loew stands firm in his desire not to prosecute LAPD officers – even if the grand jury hands down true bills. Lad, will you testify? For the Department, not the prosecution.'

Bud checked the mirror – two-way for sure – make D.A.'s Bureau goons taking notes. 'No, sir. I won't.'

Parker scanned a sheet of paper. 'Officer, you picked a man up by the neck and tried to bash his brains out. That looks very bad, and even though you were verbally provoked, the action stands out more than most of the abuse heaped on the prisoners. That goes against you. But you were heard muttering "This is a goddamned disgrace" when you left the cellblock, which is in your favor. Now, do you see how appearing as a voluntary witness could offset the disadvantages caused by your . . . imaginative show of force?'

A snap: Exley's their boy, *he* heard me, locked in the storeroom. 'Sir, I won't testify.'

Parker flushed bright red. Smith said, 'Lad, let's talk turkey. I admire your refusal to betray fellow officers, and I sense that loyalty to your partner is what stands behind it. I admire that especially, and Chief Parker has authorized me to offer you a deal. If you testify as to Dick Stensland's actions and the grand jury hands down a bill against him, Stensland will serve no time in jail if convicted. We have Ellis Loew's word on that. Stensland will be dismissed from the Department without pension, but his pension will be paid to him sub rosa, through monies diverted from the Widows and Orphans Fund. Lad, will you testify?'

Bud stared at the mirror. 'Sir, I won't testify.'

Thad Green pointed to the door. 'Be at Division 43 grand jury chambers tomorrow at 9:00. Be prepared to stand in a show-up and be called to testify. If you refuse to testify, you'll receive a subpoena and be suspended from duty pending a-trial board. Get out of here,

White.’

Dudley Smith smiled – very slightly. Bud shot the mirror a stiff middle finger.

Chapter Eleven

STREAKS AND SMUDGES on the two-way – expressions came off blurred. Thad Green tough to read; Parker simple – he turned ugly colors. Dudley Smith – lexophile with a brogue – too calculated to figure. Bud White too *too* easy: the chief quoted, ‘This is a goddamned disgrace’; a big thought balloon popped up: ‘Ed Exley is the stool pigeon.’ The middle finger salute was just icing.

Ed tapped the speaker; static crackled. The closet was hot – but not stifling like the Central Jail storeroom. He thought of his last two weeks.

He’d played it brass balls with Parker, presenting all three depositions, agreeing to testify as the Department’s key witness. Parker considered his assessment of the situation brilliant, the mark of an exemplary officer. He gave the least damaging of the three statements to Ellis Loew and his favorite D.A.’s investigator, a young law school graduate – Bob Gallaudet. The blame was shifted, more than deservedly, to Sergeant Richard Stensland and Officer Wendell White; less deservedly to three men with their pensions already secured. The chief’s reward to his exemplary witness: a transfer to a detective squadroom – a huge promotion. With the lieutenant’s exam aced, within a year he would stand as Detective Lieutenant E. J. Exley.

Green left the office; Ellis Loew and Gallaudet walked in. Loew and Parker conferred; Gallaudet opened the door. ‘Sergeant Vincennes, please’ – static out of the speaker.

Trashcan Jack: sleek in a chalk-striped suit. No amenities – he took the middle seat checking his watch. A look passed – Trash, Ellis Loew. Parker eyed the new fish, an easy read – pure contempt. Gallaudet stood by the door, smoking.

Loew said, ‘Sergeant, we’ll get right to it. You’ve been very cooperative with I.A., which is to your credit. But nine witnesses have identified you as hitting Juan Carbijal, and four drunk tank prisoners saw you carrying in a case of rum. You see, your notoriety preceded you. Even drunks read the scandal sheets.’

Dudley Smith took over. ‘Lad, we need your notoriety. We have a stellar witness who will tell the grand jury that you hit back only after being hit, and since that is probably the truth, further prisoner testimony will vindicate you. But we need you to admit bringing the liquor the men got drunk on. Admit to that interdepartmental infraction and you’ll get off with a trial board. Mr. Loew guarantees a quashed criminal indictment should one arise.’

Trashcan kept still. Ed read in: Bud White brought most of the booze, he’s afraid to inform on him. Parker said, ‘There will have to be a large shake-up within the Department. Testify, and you’ll receive a minor trial board, no suspension, no demotion. I’ll guarantee you a light slap on the wrist – a transfer to Administrative Vice for a year or so.’

Vincennes to Loew. ‘Ellis, have I got any more truck with you on this? You know what working Narco means to me.’

Loew flinched. Parker said, ‘None, and there’s more. You’ll have to stand in the show-up tomorrow, and we want you to testify against Officer Krugman, Sergeant Tucker and Officer Pratt. All three men have already earned their pensions. Our key witness will testify roundly, but you can plead ignorance to questions directed at the other men. Frankly, we must sate the public’s clamor for blood by giving up some of our own.’

Dudley Smith: ‘I doubt if you’ve ever drawn a stupid breath, lad. Don’t do it now.’

Trashcan Jack: ‘I’ll do it.’

Smiles all around. Gallaudet said, ‘I’ll go over your testimony with you, Sergeant. Dining Car lunch on Mr. Loew.’ Vincennes stood up; Loew walked him to the door.

Whispers out the speaker: ‘ . . . and I told Cooley you wouldn’t do it again’ – ‘Okay, boss.’ Parker nodded at the mirror.

Ed walked in, straight to the hot seat. Smith said, ‘Lad, you’re very much the man of the hour.’

Parker smiled. ‘Ed, I had you watch because your assessment of this situation has been very astute. Any last thoughts before you testify?’

‘Sir, am I correct in assuming that whatever criminal bills the grand jury hands down will be stalled or quashed during Mr. Loew’s postindictment process?’

Loew grimaced. He’d hit a nerve – just like his father said he would. ‘Sir, am I correct in that?’

Loew, patronizing. 'Have you attended law school, Sergeant?'

'No, sir. I haven't.'

'Then your esteemed father has given you good counsel.'

Voice steady. 'No, sir. He hasn't.'

Smith said, 'Let's assume you're correct. Let's assume that we are bending our efforts toward what all loyal policemen want: no brother officers tried publicly. Assuming that, what do you advise?'

The pitched he'd rehearsed – verbatim. 'The public will demand more than true bills, stalling tactics and dismissed indictments. Interdepartmental trial boards, suspensions and a big transfer shake-up won't be enough. You told Officer White that heads must roll. I agree, and for the sake of the chief's prestige and the prestige of the Department, I think we need criminal convictions and jail sentences.'

'Lad, I am shocked at the relish with which you just said that.'

Ed to Parker. 'Sir, you've brought the Department back from Horrall and Worton. Your reputation is exemplary and the Department's has greatly improved. You can assure that it stays that way.'

Loew said, 'Spill it, Exley. Exactly what does our junior officer informant think we should do?'

Ed, eyes on Parker. 'Dismiss the indictments on the men with their twenty in. Publicize the transfer shake-up and give the bulk of the men trial boards and suspensions. Indict Johnny Brownell, tell him to request a no-jury venue and have the judge let him off with a suspended sentence – his brother was one of the officers initially assaulted. And indict, try and convict Dick Stensland and Bud White. Secure them jail time. Boot them off the Department. Stensland's a drunken thug, White almost killed a man and supplied more liquor than Vincennes. Feed them to the goddamn sharks. Protect yourself, protect the Department.'

Silence, stretching. Smith broke it. 'Gentlemen, I think our young sergeant's advice is rash and hypocritical. Stensland has his rough edges, but Wendell White is a valuable officer.'

'Sir, White is a homicidal thug.'

Smith started to speak; Parker raised a hand. 'I think Ed's advice is worth considering. Ace them at the grand jury tomorrow, son. Wear a smart-looking suit and ace them.'

Ed said, 'Yes, sir.' He forced himself not to shout his joy to the rafters.

Chapter Twelve

SPOTLIGHTS, HEIGHT STRIPS: Jack at 5′11″; Frank Doherty, Dick Stens, John Brownell the short guys, Wilbert Huff, Bud White topping six. Central Jail punks across the glass, couched with D.A.'s cops taking names.

A speaker squawked, 'Left profile'; six men turned. 'Right profile,' 'Face the wall,' 'Face the mirror'; 'At ease, gentlemen.' Silence; then: 'Fourteen IDs apiece on Doherty, Stensland, Vincennes, White and Brownell, four for Huff. Oh shit, the P.A.'s on!'

Stens cracked up. Frank Doherty said, 'Eat shit, cocksucker.' White stayed expressionless – like he was already at the honor farm protecting Stens from niggers. The speaker: 'Sergeant Vincennes to room 114, Officer White report to Chief Green's office. The rest of you men are dismissed.'

114 – the grand jury witness room.

Jack walked ahead, through curtains down to 114. A crowded room: Bloody Christmas plaintiffs, Ed Exley in a too-new suit, loose threads at the sleeves. The Xmas boys sneered; Jack braced Exley. 'You're the key witness?'

'That's right.'

'I should've known it was you. What's Parker throwing you?'

'Throwing me?'

'Yeah, Exley. *Throwing you.* The deal, the payoff. You think *I'm* testifying for free?'

Exley futzed with his glasses. 'I'm just doing my duty.'

Jack laughed. 'You're playing an angle, college boy. You're getting something out of this, so you won't have to hobnob with the fucking rank-and-file cops who are going to hate your fucking guts for snitching. And if Parker promised you the Bureau, watch out. Some Bureau guys are gonna burn in this thing and you're gonna have to work with friends of theirs.'

Exley flinched; Jack laughed. 'Good payoff, I'll admit that.'

'You're the payoff expert. Not me.'

'You'll be outranking me pretty soon, so I should be nice. Did you know Ellis Loew's new girlfriend has the hots for you?'

A clerk called, 'Edmund J. Exley to chambers.'

Jack winked. 'Go. And clip those threads on your coat or you'll look like a rube.'

Exley walked across the hall – primping, pulling threads.

Jack killed time – thinking about Karen. Ten days since the party; life was mostly aces. He had to apologize to Spade Cooley; Welton Morrow was pissed over him and Karen – but the lukewarm Joanie/Ellis Loew deal almost made it up for him. Hotel shacks were a strain – Karen lived at home, his place was a dive, he'd been neglecting his payments to the Scoggins kids to make the freight at the Ambassador. Karen loved the illicit romance; he loved her loving it. Aces. But Sid Hudgens hadn't called and L.A. was heroin dry – no Narco jollies. A year at Ad Vice loomed like the gas chamber.

He felt like a fighter ready to dive. The Christmas geeks kept staring; the punk he'd thumped had on a nose splint – probably a phony some Jew lawyer told him to wear. The grand jury room door stood ajar; Jack walked over, looked in.

Six jurors at a table facing the witness stand; Ellis Loew hurling questions – Ed Exley in the box.

He didn't play with his glasses; he didn't hem and haw. His voice went an octave lower than normal – and stayed even. Skinny, not a cop type, he still had authority – and his timing was perfect. Loew pitched perfect outside sliders; Exley knew they were coming, but acted surprised. Whoever coached him did a fucking-A bang-up job.

Jack picked out details, sensed Exley reaching, a war hero – not a weak sister in a cellblock full of rowdies. Loew glossed over that; Exley's answers hit smart: he was outnumbered, his keys were snatched, he was locked in a storeroom – and that was that. He was a man who knew who he was, knew the futility of cheap heroics.

Exley spieled: rat-offs on Brownell, Huff, Doherty. He called Dick Stensland the worst of the worst, didn't blink snitching Bud White. Jack smiled when it hit him: everything is skewed toward our side. Krugman, Pratt, Tucker, pension safe – were set up – for *his* testimony. Stensland and White – heading for indictment city. What a fucking performance.

Loew called for a summation. Exley obliged: pap about justice. Loew excused him; the jurors almost swooned. Exley left the box limping – he'd probably jammed his legs asleep.

Jack met him outside. 'You were good. Parker would've loved it.'

Exley stretched his legs. 'You think he'll read the transcript?'

'He'll have it inside ten minutes, and Bud White'll fuck you for this if it takes the rest of his life. He was called in to Thad Green after the show-up, and you can bet Green suspended him. You had better pray he cops a deal and stays on the Department, because that is one civilian you do not want on your case.'

'Is that why you didn't tell Loew he brought most of the liquor?'

A clerk called, 'John Vincennes, five minutes.'

Jack got up some nerve. 'I'm snitching three old-timers who'll be fishing in Oregon next week. Next to you, I'm clean. *And smart.*'

'We're both doing the right thing. Only you hate yourself for it, and that's not smart.'

Jack saw Ellis Loew and Karen down the hall. Loew walked up. 'I told Joan you were testifying today, and she told Karen. I'm sorry, and I told Joan in confidence. *Jack, I'm sorry.* I told Karen she couldn't watch in chambers, that she'll have to listen over the – speaker in my office. *Jack, I'm sorry*.'

'Jewboy, you sure know how to guarantee a witness.'

Chapter Thirteen

BUD NURSED A highball.

Jukebox noise pounded him; he had the worst seat in the bar – a sofa back by the pay phones. His old football wounds throbbed – like his hard-on for Exley. No badge, no gun, indictments shooting his way – the fortyish redhead looked like the best thing he'd ever seen. He carried his drink over.

She smiled at him. The red looked fake – but she had a kind face. Bud smiled. 'That an old-fashioned you're drinking?'

'Yes, and my name's Angela.'

'My name's Bud.'

'Nobody was born with the name "Bud."'

'They stick you with a name like "Wendell," you look for an alias.'

Angela laughed. 'What do you do, *Bud?'*

'I'm sorta between jobs right now.'

'Oh? Well, what *did* you do?'

SUSPENDED! YOU DUMB FUCK LOOKING A GIFT HORSE IN THE MOUTH! 'I wouldn't play ball with my boss. Angela, what do you say – '

'You mean like a union dispute or something? I'm in the United Federation of Teachers, and my ex-husband was a shop steward with the Teamsters. Is that what you – '

Bud felt a hand on his shoulder. 'Lad, might I have a word with you?'

Dudley Smith. CALL IT I.A. RUNNING TAILS.

'This business, Lieutenant?'

'It is indeed. Say good night to your new friend and join me by those back tables. I've told the bartender to turn the music down so we can talk.'

A jump tune went soft; Smith walked off. A sailor had his hooks into Angela. Bud eased over to the lounges.

Cozy: Smith, two chairs, a table – a newspaper covering the top, a little mound underneath. Bud sat down. 'Is I.A. tailing me?'

‘Yes, and other likely indictees. It was your chum Exley’s idea. The lad has a piece of Chief Parker’s ear, and he told him that you and Stensland might be driven to commit rash acts. Exley vilified you and many other fine men on the witness stand, lad. I’ve read the transcript. His testimony was high treason and a despicable affront to all honorable policemen.’

Stens – holed up on a bender. ‘Don’t that paper say we been indicted?’

‘Don’t be precipitous, lad. I’ve used my piece of the chiefs ear to have your tail called off, so you’re with a friend.’

‘Lieutenant, what do you want?’

Smith said, ‘Call me Dudley.’

‘*Dudley*, what do you want?’

Ho, ho, ho – a beautiful tenor. ‘Lad, you impress me. I admire your refusal to testify and your loyalty to your partner, however unfounded. I admire you as a policeman, particularly your adherence to violence where needed as a necessary adjunct to the job, and I am most impressed by your punishment of woman beaters. Do you hate them, lad?’

Big words – his head spun. ‘Yeah, I hate them.’

‘And for good reason, judging from what I know of your background. Do you hate anything else quite so much?’

Fists so tight his hands ached. ‘Exley. Fucking Exley. Trashcan Jack, he’s gotta be up there, too. Dick Stens is giving himself cirrhosis ’cause those two squealed us off.’

Smith shook his head. ‘Not Vincennes, lad. He was the stalking horse for the Department, and we needed him to give the D.A.’s Office some bodies. He only snitched twenty-year men, and he took the blame for the liquor you brought to the party. No, lad, Jack does not deserve your hatred.’

Bud leaned over the table. ‘Dudley, what do you want?’

‘I want you to avoid an indictment and return to duty, and I have a way for you to do it.’

Bud looked at the newspaper. ‘How?’

‘Work for me.’

‘Doing what?’

‘No, more questions first. Lad, do you recognize the need to contain crime, to keep it south of Jefferson with the dark element?’

‘Sure.’

‘And do you think a certain organized crime element should be allowed to exist and perpetuate acceptable vices that hurt no one?'

'Sure, pork barrel. The game's gotta be played that way a little. What's this got to do – '

Smith yanked the paper – a badge and .38 special gleamed up. Bud, scalp prickles. 'I knew you had juice. You squared it with Green?'

'Yes, lad, I squared it – with Parker. With the part of his ear that Exley hasn't poisoned. He said if the grand jury didn't hand down a bill against you, your refusal to testify would not be punished. Now pick up your things before the proprietor calls the police.'

GLEAMING – Bud grabbed his goodies. 'There's no goddamn bill on me?'

Ho, ho, ho – mocking. 'Lad, the chief knew he was giving me a long shot, and I'm glad you haven't read the Four Star *Herald*.'

Bud said, '*How?*'

'Not yet, lad.'

'What about Dick?'

'He's through, lad. And don't protest, because it's unavoidable. He's been billed, he'll be indicted and he'll swing. He's the Department's scapegoat, on Parker's orders. And it was Exley who convinced him to hand Dick over. Criminal charges and jail time.'

A broiling hot room – Bud pulled his necktie loose, closed his eyes.

'Lad, I'll get Dick a nice berth at the honor farm. I know a woman deputy there who can fix things, and when he gets out I'll guarantee him a shot at Exley.'

Bud opened his eyes; Smith had the *Herald* spread full. The headline: 'Policemen Indicted in Bloody Christmas Scandal.' Below, a column circled: Sergeant Richard Stensland flagged on four charges, three old-timer cops billed, Lentz, Brownell, Huff swinging on two bills apiece. Underlined: 'Officer Wendell White, 33, received no true bills, although several sources within the District Attorney's Bureau had stated that first-degree assault bills seemed imminent. The grand jury's foreman stated that four police-beating victims recanted their previous testimony, which had Officer White attempting to strangle Juan Carbijal, age 19. The recanted testimony directly contradicted the testimony of LAPD Sergeant Edmund J. Exley, who had sworn under oath that White had, in fact, attempted to grievously injure Carbijal. Sergeant Exley's testimony is not considered tainted, since it resulted in probable indictments against seven other officers; however, although the grand jurors doubted the credibility of the recantings, they deemed them sufficient to deny the D.A.'s Office true bills against Officer White. Deputy D.A. Ellis Loew told reporters: "Something suspicious happened, but I don't know what it was. Four retractions have to supersede the testimony of one witness, even as splendid a witness as Sergeant Exley, a decorated war hero."'

Newsprint swirling. Bud said, 'Why? Why'd you do that for me? And how?'

Smith crumpled the paper. 'Lad, I need you for a new assignment Parker has given me the go-ahead on. It's a containment measure, an adjunct to Homicide. We're going to call it the Surveillance Detail, an innocuous name for a duty that few men are fit for, but you were born for. It's a muscle job and a shooting job and a job that entails asking very few questions. Lad, do you follow my drift?'

'In Technicolor.'

'You'll be transferred out of Central dicks when Parker announces his shake-up. Will you work for me?'

'I'd be crazy not to. Why, Dudley?'

'Why what, lad?'

'You shivved Ellis Loew to help me out, and everyone in the Bureau knows you and him are tight. Why?'

'Because I like your style, lad. Will that answer suffice?'

'I guess it'll have to. Now let's try "how?"'

'How what, lad?'

'How you got the spies to retract.'

Smith laid brass knucks on the table: chipped, caked with blood.

CALENDAR

1952

EXTRACT: L.A. *Mirror-News*, March 19:

POLICE BEATING SCANDAL: COPS DISCIPLINE THEIR OWN BEFORE WORST CULPRITS STAND TRIAL

LAPD Chief William H. Parker promised that he would seek justice – 'wherever the search takes me' – in the tangled web of police brutality and civilian lawsuits that has come to be known as the 'Bloody Christmas' scandal.

Seven officers have received criminal assault indictments stemming from their actions at the Central Division Jail on Christmas morning of last year. Those officers are:

Sergeant Ward Tucker, indicted for Second Degree Assault.

Officer Michael Krugman, Second Degree Assault and Battery.

Officer Henry Pratt, Second Degree Assault.

Sergeant Elmer Lentz, First Degree Assault with Battery.

Sergeant Wilbert Huff, First Degree Assault with Battery.

Officer John Brownell, First Degree Assault and Aggravated Assault.

Sergeant Richard Stensland, First Degree Assault, Aggravated Assault, First Degree Battery and Mayhem.

Parker did not dwell on the charges facing the indicted policemen, or on the scores of civil suits that beating victims Dinardo Sanchez, Juan Carbijal, Dennis Rice, Ezekiel Garcia, Clinton Rice and Reyes Chasco have filed against individual policemen and the Los Angeles Police Department. He announced that the following officers would receive interdepartmental trial boards, and, if not vindicated, would be severely disciplined within the Department.

Sergeant Walter Crumley, Sergeant Walter Dukeshearer, Sergeant Francis Doherty, Officer Charles Heinz, Officer Joseph Hernandez, Sergeant Willis Tristano, Officer Frederick Turentine, Lieutenant James Frieling, Officer Wendell White, Officer John Heineke and Sergeant John Vincennes.

Parker closed his press conference praising Sergeant Edmund J. Exley, the Central Division officer who came forward to testify before the grand jury. ‘It took great courage to do what Ed Exley did,’ the chief said. ‘The man has my greatest admiration.’

EXTRACT: L.A. *Examiner*, April 11:

FIVE ‘BLOODY CHRISTMAS’ INDICTMENTS DISMISSED; PARKER REVEALS RESULTS OF TRIAL BOARD ACTIONS

The District Attorney’s Office announced today that five future defendants in last year’s ‘Bloody Christmas’ police brutality scandal will not stand trial. Officer Michael Krugman, Officer Henry Pratt and Sergeant Ward Tucker, all forced to resign from the Los Angeles Police Department as the result of being charged, had their indictments dismissed on the basis of abandoned testimony. Deputy D.A. Ellis Loew, who had been set to prosecute them, explained. ‘Many minor witnesses, prisoners at the Central Station Jail last Christmas, cannot be located.’

In a related development, LAPD Chief William H. Parker announced the results of his ‘massive shake-up’ of police personnel. The following indicted and non-indicted officers were found guilty of various interdepartmental infractions pertaining to their behavior last Christmas morning.

Sergeant Walter Crumley: six months suspension from duty without pay, transferred to Hollenbeck Division.

Sergeant Walter Dukeshearer, six months suspension from duty without pay, transferred to Newton Street Division.

Sergeant Francis Doherty, four months suspension from duty without pay, transferred to Wilshire Division.

Officer Charles Heinz, six months suspension from duty without pay, transferred to the Southside Vagrant Detail.

Officer Joseph Hernandez, four months suspension from duty without pay, transferred to 77th Street Division.

Sergeant Wilbert Huff, nine months suspension from duty without pay, transferred to Wilshire Division.

Sergeant Willis Tristano, three months suspension from duty without pay, transferred to Newton Street Division.

Officer Frederick Turentine, three months suspension from duty without pay, transferred to East Valley Division.

Lieutenant James Frieling, six months suspension from duty without pay, transferred to the LAPD Academy Instruction Bureau.

Officer John Heineke, four months suspension from duty without pay, transferred to Venice Division.

Sergeant Elmer Lentz, nine months suspension from duty without pay, transferred to Hollywood Division.

Officer Wendell White, no suspension, transferred to the Homicide Adjunct Surveillance Detail.

Sergeant John Vincennes, no suspension, transferred to Administrative Vice.

EXTRACT: L.A. *Times*, May 3:

POLICE SCANDAL DEFENDANT RECEIVES SUSPENDED SENTENCE

Officer John Brownell, 38, the first Los Angeles policeman involved in the ‘Bloody Christmas’ scandal to face public trial, pleaded guilty at arraignment today and asked Judge Arthur J. Fitzhugh to sentence him immediately on the First Degree Assault and Aggravated Assault charges he was facing.

Brownell is the older brother of LAPD patrolman Frank D. Brownell, one of two officers injured in a bar brawl with six young men last Christmas Eve. Judge Fitzhugh, taking into account the facts that Officer Brownell was under psychological duress over the injury of his brother and that he had been discharged from the Los Angeles Police Department without pension, read the County Probation Department’s report, which recommended formal probation and no jail time. He then gave Brownell a year in the County Jail, sentence suspended, and ordered him to report to the county’s chief probation officer, Randall Milteer.

EXTRACT: L.A. *Examiner*, May 29:

STENSLAND CONVICTED – JAIL FOR L.A. POLICEMAN

. . . the eight-man, four-woman jury found Stensland guilty on four counts: First Degree Assault, Aggravated Assault, First Degree Battery and Mayhem, the charges stemming from the former police detective’s alleged maltreatment of Central Jail prisoners during last year’s ‘Bloody Christmas’ scandal. In biting testimony, Sergeant E. J. Exley of the LAPD described Stensland’s ‘rampage against unarmed men.’ Stensland’s attorney, Jacob Kellerman, attacked Exley’s credibility, stating that he was locked in a storeroom throughout most of the morning the events took place. In the end, the jurors believed Sergeant Exley, and Kellerman, citing the suspended sentence received by Bloody Christmas defendant John Brownell, asked Judge Arthur Fitzhugh to take mercy on his client. The judge did not oblige. He sentenced Stensland, already dismissed from the LAPD, to a year in the County Jail and remanded him to the custody of the Sheriffs deputies who would escort him to Wayside Honor Rancho. As he was led away, Stensland shouted obscenities regarding Sergeant Exley, who could not be reached for comment.

FEATURE: *Cavalcade Weekend*
Magazine, L.A. *Mirror*, July 3:

TWO EXLEY GENERATIONS SERVE THE SOUTHLAND

The first thing that strikes you about Preston Exley and his son Edmund is that they don't talk like cops, even though Preston served with the Los Angeles Police Department for fourteen years and Ed has been with the LAPD since 1943, shortly before he went off to war and won himself the Distinguished Service Cross in the Pacific Theater. In fact, before the Exley clan emigrated to America, their family tree spawned generations of Scotland Yard detectives. So police work is in the clan's blood, but even more so is a thirst for advancement.

Item: Preston Exley took an engineering degree at USC, studying by night while he pounded a dangerous downtown beat by day.

Item: The late Thomas Exley, Preston's eldest son,' achieved the highest scholastic average in the history of the LAPD Academy, and a plaque commemorating him is hung in the Academy's administration building. Tragically, Thomas was killed in the line of duty soon after his graduation. Further item: The second highest average was earned by Ed Exley himself, a summa cum laude UCLA graduate – at nineteen! – in 1941. Evidence going back generations: the Exleys don't talk like cops because they are not typical policemen.

Both men have been in the news lately. Preston, 58, has teamed up with world-renowned cartoonist/movie-maker/TV show host Raymond Dieterling to build Dream-a-Dreamland, the monumental amusement park that broke ground six months ago, with completion and opening scheduled for late April of next year. Exley Senior began his career in the construction business after he left the LAPD in 1936, taking his chief aide, Lieutenant Arthur De Spain, with him. At his spacious Hancock Park mansion, Preston Exley spoke with *Mirror* correspondent Dick St. Germain.

'I had an engineering degree and Art knew building materials,' he said. 'We had our combined life savings and borrowed from some independent investors who appreciated the wildcat mentality. We started Exley Construction and built cheap houses, then better houses, then office buildings, then the Arroyo Seco Freeway. We flourished beyond my wildest dreams. Now Dream-a-Dreamland, the gentle dreams of millions of people realized on two hundred acres. In a way, its a hard one to top.'

Exley smiled. 'Ray Dieterling is a visionary,' he said. 'Dream-a-Dreamland will give people the chance to live the many worlds he has created through films and animation. The mountain that he's calling Paul's World is a perfect example. Paul Dieterling, Ray's son, died tragically in an avalanche back in the mid-30s. Now there will be a mountain that serves as a benevolent testimony to the boy, a mountain that brings people joy, with a percentage of the revenues earned going to children's charities. That's a hard one to top.'

But will he try to top it?

Exley smiled again. 'I'm addressing the Los Angeles County Board of

Supervisors and the State Legislature next week,' he said. 'The subject will be the cost of Southern California mass rapid transit and the best way to link the Southland by freeway. Frankly, I want the job and I'm ready to offer the county an enticing bid.'

And then?

Exley smiled and sighed. 'And then there's all these politico fellows who've been pestering me,' he said. 'They think I'd be a natural for mayor, governor, senator or whatever, even though I keep telling them that Fletcher Bowron, Dick Nixon and Earl Warren are friends of mine.'

But is he ruling politics out?

'I rule nothing out,' Preston Exley said. 'Setting limitations is against my nature.'

And, as our reporters discovered, his son Edmund, now a detective sergeant with the LAPD's Hollywood Division, feels the same way. Recently in the news for testifying in a trial related to the 'Bloody Christmas' police scandal, Ed Exley sees blue skies ahead – although he plans to keep police work his sole career. Speaking to our correspondent at his family's Lake Arrowhead cabin, Exley Junior said, 'I want nothing other than to be a valuable, ranking detective presented with challenging cases. My father had the Loren Atherton case' – a reference to the 1934 child murderer who claimed six victims, including child star Wee Willie Wennerholm – 'and I'd like to be in a position to work cases of that importance. Being in the right place at the right time is important, and I have a deep need to solve things and create order out of chaotic situations, which I believe is a good drive for a detective to have.'

Exley was certainly in the right place at the right time in the fall of 1943, when, the sole survivor of a bayonet attack on his platoon, he single-handedly wiped out three trenches full of Japanese infantry. He was in the right place at the right time for justice when he courageously testified against fellow officers in a massive police brutality scandal. Exley says of the two incidents: 'That's the past, and right now I'm building for my future. I'm getting solid experience working Hollywood Detectives, and my father, Art De Spain and I spend evenings performing mock questionings to help me perfect my interrogation techniques. My father wants the world, but all I want is the most this police department has to offer.'

Preston Exley and Ed Exley survive Thomas, and Marguerite (nee Tibbetts) Exley, the clan's matriarch, who died of cancer six years ago. Do they feel the loss in their personal lives?

Preston said, 'God, yes, every day. They are both irreplaceable.'

On that subject, Edmund was more reflective. 'Thomas was Thomas,' he said. 'I was seventeen when he died and I don't think I ever knew him. My mother was different. I knew her, she was kind and brave and strong, and there was something sad about her. I miss her, and I think the woman I marry will probably be like her, only a bit more volatile.'

Two generations for this week's Profile – two men going places and serving the Southland while they do it.

BANNER: L.A. *Times,* July 9:

LOEW ANNOUNCES D.A.'S CANDIDACY

BANNER: Society page,
L.A. *Herald-Express,* September 12:

GALA LOEW/MORROW WEDDING ATTRACTS HOLLYWOOD, LEGAL CROWDS

EXTRACT: L.A. *Times,* November 7:

McPHERSON AND LOEW TOP D.A.'S FIELD: WILL CLASH IN SPRING ELECTION

William McPherson, seeking his fourth term as Los Angeles district attorney, will face upstart Deputy D,A. Ellis Loew in next March's general election, the two colleagues leading an eight-man field by a wide margin.

McPherson, 56, received 38 percent of the votes cast; Loew, 41, received 36 percent. Their closest rival was Donald Chapman, the former city parks commissioner, with 14 percent. The remaining five candidates, considered long shots with little chance of winning, received a total of 12 percent of the votes cast between them.

McPherson, in a scheduled press conference, predicted a down-to-the-wire campaign and stressed that he is an incumbent civil servant first and a political candidate second. Loew, at home with his wife, Joan, echoed those sentiments, predicted victory next March and thanked the voters at large and the law enforcement community in particular for their support.

1953

LAPD Annual Fitness Report,
Marked *Confidential,* dated
1/3/53, filed by Lt. Dudley
Smith, copies to Personnel and
Administration Divisions:

1/2/53
ANNUAL FITNESS REPORT
DUTY DATES: 4/4/52-12/31/52
SUBJECT: White, Wendell A., Badge 916
GRADE: Police Officer (Detective) (Civil Serv. Rate 4)
Division: Detective Bureau (Homicide Adjunct Surveillance Detail)
COMMANDING OFFICER: Lt. Dudley L. Smith, Badge 410.

Gentlemen:

This memorandum serves both as a fitness report on Officer White and an update on the first nine months of the Surveillance Detail's existence. Of the sixteen men working the squad, I consider White my finest officer. To date he has been attentive, thorough, and has put in long hours without complaint. He has a perfect attendance record, and has often worked two-week stretches of eighteen-hour days. White transferred to Surveillance under the cloud of last year's unfortunate Christmas mess, and Deputy Chief Green, citing the four excessive-force complaints filed against him, had some misgivings about the transfer (i.e.: that White's propensity for violence and the potentially violent nature of the assignment would prove to be a disastrous combination). This has not proven to be the case, and I unhesitatingly give Officer White straight ‘A’ markings in every fitness category. He has often evinced spectacular bravery. By way of example, I would like to cite several instances of White’s performance above and beyond the call of duty.

1. 5/8/52. On a liquor store stakeout, Officer White (who is plagued by old football injuries) chased a fleeing armed suspect for a half mile. The suspect fired repeatedly back at Officer White, who did not return his fire for fear of hitting innocent civilians. The suspect took a woman hostage and held a gun to her head, which held off the backup officers who had caught up with Officer White. White then walked through a side alley while his partners attempted to calm the suspect down. The suspect refused to release the woman, and White shot and killed him at point-blank range. The woman was unharmed.

2. Numerous instances. One of the key duties of the Surveillance Detail is to meet paroled prison inmates upon their return to Los Angeles and try to convince them of the folly of committing violent crimes in our city. This job requires great physical presence, and Officer White has, frankly, been instrumental in scaring many hardened criminals into a docile parole. He has spent much off-duty time tailing parolees with particularly violent records, and he is responsible for the arrest of John ‘Big Dog’ Cassese, a twice-convicted rapist and armed robber. On 7/20/52, White, while surveilling Cassese inside a cocktail lounge, overheard him attempting to suborn a minor female into prostitution. Cassese attempted to resist arrest, and Officer White subdued him through physical means. Later, White and two other Surveillance officers (Sgt. Michael Breuning, Officer R. J. Carlisle) questioned Cassese extensively about his post-parole activities. Cassese confessed to the rape/ murders of three women. (See Homicide arrest report 168-A, dated 7/22/52.) Cassese was tried, convicted and executed at San Quentin.

3. 10/18/52. Officer White, while surveilling parolee Percy Haskins, observed Haskins in a known criminal assembly with Robert Mackey and Karl Carter Goff. All three men possessed long armed-robbery records, and White sensed that a major felony was in the making and proceeded on that assumption. He tailed Haskins, Mackey and Goff to a market at 1683 S. Berendo. The three robbed the market, and White attempted to arrest them outside. The three refused to relinquish their weapons. White shot and killed Goff and severely wounded Mackey. Haskins surrendered. Mackey later died of his wounds and Haskins pleaded guilty to armed robbery with priors and was given a life sentence.

In summary, Officer White has taken the high ground and has been instrumental in making the Surveillance Detail’s first year a resounding success. I will be returning to my regular Homicide duties effective 3/15/53 and would like Officer White to join my squad as a regular Homicide detective. In my opinion, he has the makings of a fine case man.

Respectfully,
Dudley L. Smith, Badge 410,
Lieutenant, Homicide Division

LAPD Annual Fitness Report,

marked *Confidential*, dated 1/6/53,
filed by Capt. Russell Millard,
copies to Personnel and Administration
Divisions:

1/6/53
ANNUAL FITNESS REPORT
DUTY DATES: 4/13/52-12/31/52
SUBJECT: Vincennes, John, Badge 2302
GRADE: Detective Sergeant (Civil Serv. Rate 5)

DIVISION: Detective Bureau (Administrative Vice)
COMMANDING OFFICER: Capt. Russell A. Millard, Badge 5009

Gentlemen:

An overall 'D+' fitness rating for Sergeant Vincennes, along with some comments.

A. Since he doesn't drink, Vincennes is excellent at liquor violation operations.

B. Vincennes oversteps his bounds where narcotics are concerned, insisting on making possession arrests when dope is found collaterally at Ad Vice crime scenes.

C. He has not fulfilled my fears that he would neglect his Ad Vice duties to offer assistance to his Bureau mentor, Lt. Dudley Smith. This is to Vincennes' credit.

D. Vincennes is not terribly resented for his testimony in the Christmas assaults matter, because he lost his much coveted Narco assignment and because none of the officers he specifically informed on went to jail.

E. Vincennes is continually pressing me to return him to Narco. I will not sign his transfer papers until he makes a major case at Ad Vice – this is a long-standing Ad Vice transfer stipulation. Vincennes has had Deputy D.A. Ellis Loew exert pressure on me to transfer him, and I have refused. I will continue to refuse, even if Loew is elected D.A.

F. There are rumors that Vincennes leaks interdepartmental information to the *Hush-Hush* scandal rag. I have warned him: never leak word of our work or I will have your hide.

G. In conclusion, Vincennes has proven himself a barely adequate Ad Vice officer. His attendance is good, his reports are well written (and, I suspect, padded). He is too well known to operate bookmakers and adequate at working prostitution sweeps. He has not neglected his duties to fulfill his TV show commitments, which is to his credit. Ad Vice has a probable pornography crackdown coming up within the next few months and Vincennes has a chance to prove his mettle (and earn his major case transfer requirement) on that. Again, an overall 'D+' rating.

Respectfully,
Russell A. Millard, Badge 5009,
Commanding Officer,
Administrative Vice

LAPD Annual Fitness Report,

marked *Confidential*, dated 1/11/53,
filed by Lt. Arnold Reddin,
Commander, Hollywood Division Detective
Squad, copies to Personnel and
Administration Divisions:

1/11/53
ANNUAL FITNESS REPORT
DUTY DATES: 3/1/52–12/31/52
SUBJECT: Exley, Edmund J., Badge 1104
GRADE: Detective Sergeant (Civil Serv. Rate 5)
DIVISION: Detective (Hollywood Squad)
COMMANDING OFFICER: Lt. Arnold D. Reddin, Badge 556

Gentlemen:

On Sergeant Exley:

This man has obvious gifts as a detective. He is thorough, intelligent, seems to have no personal life and works very long hours. He is only thirty years old and in his nine months as a detective he has amassed a brilliant arrest record, with a 95 percent conviction rate on the cases (mostly minor felony property crimes) he has made. He is a thorough and succinct report writer.

Exley works poorly with partners and well by himself, so I have let him conduct interviews alone. He is a peerless interrogator and to my mind has gotten many miraculous confessions (without physical force). All well and good, and my overall fitness grade on Exley is a solid ‘A.’

But he is roundly hated by his fellow officers, the result of his serving as an informant in the Christmas shake-up, and he is despised for receiving a Bureau assignment out of it. (It seems to be common knowledge that Exley made the Detective Bureau as a result of his informing.) Also, Exley does not like to employ force with suspects, and most of the men consider him a coward.

Exley has passed the lieutenant’s exam with very high marks and an opening is probably coming up for him. I think he is both too young and too inexperienced to be a detective lieutenant and that such a promotion would create great resentment. I think he would be a roundly hated supervisor.

Respectfully,
Lt. Arnold D. Reddin, Badge 556

EXTRACT: L.A. *Daily News*, February 9:

IT’S OFFICIAL: CONSTRUCTION KING EXLEY TO LINK SOUTHLAND WITH SUPERHIGHWAYS

Today, the Tri-County Highway Commission announced that Preston Exley, ex-San Francisco paperboy and L.A. cop, would be the man to build the freeway system that will link Hollywood to downtown L.A., downtown to San Pedro, Pomona to San Bernardino and the South Bay to the San Fernando Valley.

‘Details will be forthcoming,’ Exley told the *News* by phone. ‘I’ll be holding a televised press conference tomorrow, and representatives of the State Legislature and the Tri-County Commission will be there with me.'

February 1953 issue, *Hush-Hush* Magazine:

L.A. D.A. TAKES TIME OFF FROM CAMPAIGN – RELAXING WITH COPPER CUTIE!!!

by Sidney Hudgens

Bill McPherson, the district attorney for the City of Los Angeles, likes them long and leggy, zesty and chesty – and dark and dusky. From Harlem's Sugar Hill to L.A.'s Darktown, the 57-year-old married man with three teenaged daughters is known as a sugar daddy who likes to toss around that long slush-fund green – in dark hot spots where the drinks are tall, the jazz is cool, reefer smoke hangs humid and black-white romance bebops to the jungle throb of a wailing tenor sax.

Can you dig it, hepcat? McPherson, engaged in a reelection campaign, the fight of his political life against ace crimebuster Ellis Loew, needs time to relax. Does he go to the pool at the staid Jonathan Club? No. Does he take the family to Mike Lyman's or the Pacific Dining Car? No. Where *does* he go? To the Darktown Strutter's Ball.

It's all shakin' south of Jefferson, hepcat. It's a different world down there. Get your hair marcelled, get yourself a purple sharkskin suit and trip the dark fantastic. D.A. Bill McPherson does – every Thursday nite.

But let's talk facts. Marion McPherson, Darktown Bill's long-suffering hausfrau, thinks Billy Boy spends Thursday nites watching Mexican bantamweights pound each other silly at the Olympic Auditorium. She's wrongsky – Bad Billy craves amour, not mayhem, on his Thursdays.

Fact numero uno – Bill McPherson is a regular at Minnie Roberts' Casbah – the swankiest colored cathouse on L.A.'s southside. Call it sinuendo, hepcat – but we've heard he likes the thirty-five-dollar milkbath, plied by two very large Congo cuties. Fact numero twosky – McPherson was seen listening to Charlie 'Bird' Parker (a notorious hophead) at Tommy Tucker's Playroom, on cloud ten from the Playroom's potent Plantation Punch. His date that night was one Lynette Brown, age eighteen, a dusky deelite with two juvenile arrests for possession of marijuana. Lynette told a secret *Hush-Hush* correspondent, 'Bill like his black. He say, "Once you had black you can't go back." He dig jazz and he like to party slow. He really married? He really distric' 'turney?'

He sure is, sweet thing. But for how much longer? There's a bunch of Thursdays between now and Election Day, and will Bad Bebop Billy be able to control his dark desires until then?

Remember, dear reader, you heard it first here – off the record, on the Q.T. and *very Hush-Hush.*

EXTRACT: L.A. *Herald-Express*, March 1:

BLOODY CHRISTMAS POLICEMAN TO LEAVE JAIL SOON

On April 2, Richard Alex Stensland leaves Wayside Honor Rancho a free man. Convicted last year on four assault charges related to the 1951 Bloody

Christmas police brutality scandal, he walks out an ex-cop with an uncertain future.

Stensland's former partner, Officer Wendell White, spoke to the *Herald.* He said, 'It was the luck of the draw, that — Christmas thing. I was there, and I could have been the guy that swung. It was Dick, though. He made a good cop out of me. I owe him for that and I'm — mad at what happened to him. I'm still Dick's friend, and I bet he's still got lots of friends in the Department.'

And among the civilian population, it appears. Stensland told a *Herald* reporter that upon his release he'll go to work for Abraham Teitlebaum, the owner of Abe's Noshery, a delicatessen in West Los Angeles. Asked whether he bears grudges against any of the people who put him in jail, Stensland said, 'Only one. But I'm too law-abiding to do anything about it.'

L.A. *Daily News,* March 6:

SCANDAL TURNS CLOSE D.A.'S RACE TO LANDSLIDE

It was expected to go down to the wire: incumbent city D.A. William McPherson vs. Deputy D.A. Ellis Loew, the winner to hold the job as top elected crime-fighter in the Southland for the next four years. Both men campaigned on the issues: how to deploy the city's legal budget the best way, how to most efficaciously fight crime. Both men, predictably, claimed they would fight crime the hardest. The L.A. law enforcement establishment considered McPherson soft on crime and too liberal in general and threw their support to Loew. Union organizations supported the incumbent. McPherson stood pat on his status quo record and played off his nice-guy personality, and Loew tried a young firebrand routine that didn't work: he came off as theatrical and vote-hungry. It was a gentleman's campaign until the February issue of *Hush-Hush* magazine hit the stands.

Most people take *Hush-Hush* and other scandal sheets with a grain of salt, but this was election time. An article alleged that D.A. McPherson, happily married for twenty-six years, cavorted with young Negro women. The D.A. ignored the article, which was accompanied by photographs of him and a Negro girl, taken at a nightclub in south central Los Angeles. Mrs. McPherson did not ignore the article – she filed for divorce. Ellis Loew did not mention the article in his campaign, and McPherson began to slip in the polls. Then, three days before the election, Sheriff's deputies raided the Lilac View Motel on the Sunset Strip, acting on the tip of an 'unknown informant' who called in with word of an illegal assignation in room 9. The assignators proved to be D.A. McPherson and a young Negro prostitute, age 14. The deputies arrested McPherson on statutory rape charges and heard out the story of Marvell Wilkins, a minor with two soliciting arrests.

She told them that McPherson picked her up on South Western Avenue, offered her twenty dollars for an hour of her time and drove her to the Lilac View. McPherson pleaded amnesia: he recalled having 'several martinis' at a dinner meeting with supporters at the Pacific Dining Car restaurant, then getting into his car. He remembers nothing after that. The rest is history: reporters and photographers arrived at the Lilac View Motel shortly after the deputies, McPherson became front-page news and on Tuesday Ellis Loew was elected city district attorney by a landslide.

Something seems fishy here. Scandal-rag journalism should not dictate the thrust of political campaigns, although we at the *Daily News* (admitted McPherson supporters) would never abridge their right to print whatever filth they desire. We have tried to locate Marvell Wilkins, but the girl, released from custody, seems to have disappeared off the face of the earth. Without pointing fingers, we at the *Daily News* ask District Attorney-elect Loew to initiate a grand jury investigation into this matter, if for no other reason than his desire to assume his new office with no dark clouds overhead.

Part Two

Nite Owl Massacre

Chapter Fourteen

THE WHOLE SQUADROOM to himself.

A retirement party downstairs – he wasn't invited. The weekly crime report to be read, summarized, tacked to the bulletin board – nobody else ever did it, they knew he did it best. The papers ballyhooing the Dream-a-Dreamland opening – the other cops Moochie mouse-squeaked him ad nauseam. Space Cooley playing the party; pervert Deuce Perkins roaming the halls. Midnight and nowhere near sleepy – Ed read, typed.

4/9/53: a transvestite shoplifter hit four stores on Hollywood Boulevard, disabled two salesclerks with judo chops. 4/10/53: an usher at Grauman's Chinese stabbed to death by two male Caucasians – he told them to put out their cigarettes. Suspects still at large; Lieutenant Reddin said he was too inexperienced to handle a homicide – he didn't get the job. 4/11/53: a stack of crime sheets – several times over the past two weeks a carload of Negro youths were seen discharging shotguns into the air in the Griffith Park hills. No IDs, the kids driving a '48– '50 purple Mercury coupe. 4/11–4/13/53: five daytime burglaries, private homes north of the Boulevard, jewelry stolen. Nobody assigned yet; Ed made a note: bootjack the job, dust before the access points got pawed. Today was the fourteenth – he might have a chance.

Ed finished up. The empty squadroom made him happy: nobody who hated him, a big space filled with desks and filing cabinets. Official forms on the walls – empty spaces you filled in when you notched an arrest and made somebody confess. Confessions could be ciphers, nothing past an admission of the crime. But if you twisted your man the right way – loved him and hated him to precisely the right degree – then he would tell you things – small details – that would create a reality to buttress your case and give you that much more intelligence to bend the next suspect with. Art De Spain and his father taught how to find the spark point. They had boxloads of old steno transcripts: kiddie rapers, heisters, assorted riffraff who'd confessed to them. Art would rabbit-punch – but he used the threat more than the act. Preston Exley rarely hit – he considered it the criminal defeating the policemen in and creating disorder. They read elliptical answers and made him guess the questions; they gave him a rundown of common criminal experiences – wedges to get the flow started. They showed him that men have levels of weakness that are acceptable because other men condone them and levels of weakness that produce a great shame, something to hide from all but a brilliant confessor. They honed his instinct for the jugular of weakness. It got so sharp that sometimes he couldn't look at himself in the mirror.

The sessions ran late – two widowers, a young man without a woman. Art had a bug on multiple murders – he had his father rehash the Loren Atherton case repeatedly: horror snatches, witness testimony. Preston obliged with psychological theories, grudgingly – he wanted his glory case to stay sealed off, complete, in his mind. Art's old cases were scrutinized – and *he* reaped the efforts of three fine minds: confessions straight across, 95 percent convictions. But so far his drive to crack criminal knowledge hadn't been challenged – much less sated.

Ed walked down to the parking lot, sleep coming on. 'Quack, quack,' behind him – hands turned him around.

A man in a kid's mask – Danny Duck. A left-right knocked off his glasses; a kidney shot put him down. Kicks to the ribs drove him into a ball.

Ed curled hard, caught kicks in the face. A flashbulb popped; two men walked away: one quacking, one laughing. Easy IDs: Dick Stensland's bray, Bud White's football limp. Ed spat blood, swore payback.

Chapter Fifteen

RUSS MILLARD ADDRESSED Ad Vice squad 4 – the topic pornography.

'Picture-book smut, gentlemen. There's been a bunch of it found at collateral crime scenes lately: narcotics, bookmaking and prostitution collars. Normally this kind of stuff is made in Mexico, so it's not our jurisdiction. Normally it's an organized crime sideline, because the big mobs have the money to manufacture it and the connections to get it distributed. But Jack Dragna's been deported, Mickey Cohen's in prison and probably too puritanical anyway, and Mo Jahelka's foundering on his own. Stag pix aren't Jack Whalen's style – he's a bookie looking to get his hands on a Vegas casino. And the stuff that's surfaced is too high quality for the L.A. area print mills: Newton Street Vice rousted them, they're clean, they just don't have the facilities to make magazines of this quality. But the backdrops in the pictures indicate L.A. venue: you can see what looks like the Hollywood Hills out some windows, and the furnishings in a lot of the places look like your typical cheap Los Angeles apartments. So our job is to track this filth to its source and arrest whoever made it, posed for it and distributed it.'

Jack groaned: the Great Jerk-off Book Caper of 1953. The other guys looked hot to glom the smut, maybe fuel up their wives. Millard popped a Digitalis. 'Newton Street dicks questioned everyone at the collateral rousts, and they all denied possessing the stuff. Nobody at the print mills knows where it was made. The mags have been shown around the Bureau and our station vice squads, and we've got zero IDs on the posers. So, gentlemen, look yourself.'

Henderson and Kifka had their hands out; Stathis looked ready to drool. Millard passed the smut over. 'Vincennes, is there someplace you'd rather be?'

'Yeah, Captain. Narcotics Division.'

'Oh? Anyplace else?'

'Maybe working whores with squad two.'

'Make a major case, Sergeant. I'd love to sign you out of here.'

Oohs, ahhs, cackles, oo-la-las; three men shook their heads no.

Jack grabbed the books.

Seven mags, high-quality glossy paper, plain black covers. Sixteen pages apiece: photos in color, black and white. Two books ripped in half; explicit pictures: men and women, men and men, girls and girls. Insertion close-ups: straight, queer, dykes with dildoes. The Hollywood sign out windows; Murphy-bed fuck shots, cheap pads: stucco-swirled walls, the hot plate on a table that came with every bachelor flop in L.A. Par for the stag-book course – but the posers weren't glassy-eyed hopheads, they were good-looking, well-built young kids – nude, costumed: Elizabethan garb, Jap kimonos. Jack put the ripped mags back together for a bingo: Bobby Inge – a male prostitute he'd popped for reefer – blowing a guy in a whalebone corset.

Millard said, 'Anybody familiar, Vincennes?'

An angle. 'Nothing, Cap. But where did you get these torn-up jobs?'

'They were found in a trash bin behind an apartment house in Beverly Hills. The manager, an old woman named Loretta Downey, found them and called the Beverly Hills P.D. They called us.'

'You got an address on the building?'

Millard checked an evidence form. '9849 Charleville. Why?'

'I just thought I'd take that part of the job. I've got good connections in Beverly Hills.'

'Well, they do call you "Trashcan." All right, follow up in Beverly Hills. Henderson, you and Kifka try to locate the arrestees in the crime reports and try to find out *again* where they got the stuff – I'll get you carbons in a minute. Tell them there'll be no additional charges filed if they talk. Stathis, take that filth by the costume supply companies and see if you can get a matchup to their inventory, then find out. who rented the costumes the . . . performers were wearing. Let's try it this way first – if we have to go through mugshots for IDs we'll lose a goddamn week. Dismissed, gentlemen. Roll, Vincennes. And don't get sidetracked – this is Ad Vice, not Narco.'

Jack rolled: R&I, Bobby Inge's file, his angle flushed out: Beverly Hills, see the old biddy, see what he could find out and concoct a hot lead that told him what he already knew – Bobby Inge was guilty of conspiracy to distribute obscene material, a felony bounce. Bobby would snitch his co-stars and the guys who took the pix –

one major class transfer requirement dicked.

The day was breezy, cool; Jack took Olympic straight west. He kept the radio going; a newscast featured Ellis Loew: budget cuts at the D.A.'s Office. Ellis droned on; Jack flipped the dial – a kibosh on thoughts of Bill McPherson. He caught a happy Broadway tune, thought about him anyway.

Hush-Hush was his idea: McPherson liked colored poon, Sid Hudgens loved writing up jig-fuckers. Ellis Loew knew about it, approved of it, considered it another favor on deposit. McPherson's wife filed for divorce; Loew was satisfied – he took a lead in the polls. Dudley Smith wanted more – and set up the tank job.

An easy parlay:

Dot Rothstein knew a colored girl doing a stretch at Juvenile Hall: soliciting beefs, Dot and the girl kept a thing sizzling whenever she did time. Dot got the little twist sprung; Dudley and his ace goon Mike Breuning fixed up a room at the Lilac View Motel: the most notorious fuck pad on the Sunset Strip, county ground where the city D.A. would be just another John caught with his pants down. McPherson attended a Dining Car soiree; Dudley had Marvell Wilkins – fourteen, dark, witchy – waiting outside. Breuning alerted the West Hollywood Sheriff's and the press; the Big V dropped chloral hydrates in McPherson's last martini. Mr. D.A. left the restaurant woozy, swerved his Cadillac a mile or so, pulled over at Wilshire and Alvarado and passed out. Breuning cruised up behind him with the bait: Marvell in a cocktail gown. He took the wheel of McPherson's Caddy, hustled Bad Bill and the girl to their tryst spot – the rest was political history.

Ellis Loew wasn't told – he figured he just got lucky. Dot sent Marvell down to Tijuana, all expenses paid – skim off the Woman's Jail budget. McPherson lost his wife and his job; his statch rape charge was dismissed – Marvell couldn't be located. Something snapped inside the Bigggg V –

The snap: one shitty favor over the line. The reason: Dot Rothstein in the ambulance October '47 – she knew, Dudley probably knew. If they knew, the game had to be played so the rest of the world wouldn't know – so Karen wouldn't.

He'd been her hero a solid year; somehow the bit got real. He stopped sending the Scoggins kids money, closing out his debt at forty grand – he needed cash to court Karen, being with her gave him some distance – on the Malibu Rendezvous. Joan Morrow Loew stayed bitchy; Welton and the old lady grudgingly accepted him – and Karen loved him so hard it almost hurt. Working Ad Vice hurt – the job was a snore, he hot-dogged on dope every time he got a shot. Sid Hudgens didn't call so much – he wasn't a Narco dick now. After the McPherson gig he was glad – he didn't know if he could pull another shakedown.

Karen had her own lies going – they helped his hero bit play true. Trust fund, beach pad paid for by Daddy, grad school. Dilettante stuff: he was thirty-eight, she was twenty-three, in time she'd figure it out. She wanted to marry him; he resisted; Ellis Loew as an in-law meant bagman duty until he dropped dead. He knew why his hero role worked: Karen was the audience he'd always wanted to impress. He knew what she could take, what she couldn't; her love had shaped his performance so that all he had to do was act natural – and keep certain secrets hidden.

Traffic snagged; Jack turned north on Doheny, west on Charleville. 9849 – a two-story Tudor – stood a block off Wilshire. Jack double-parked, checked mailboxes.

Six slots: Loretta Downey, five other names – three Mr. & Mrs., one man, one woman. Jack wrote them down, walked to Wilshire, found a pay phone. Calls to R&I and the DMV police information line; two waits. No criminal records on the tenants; one standout vehicle sheet: Christine Bergeron, the mailbox 'Miss,' four reckless-driving convictions, no license revocation. Jack got extra stats off the clerk: the woman was thirty-seven years old, her occupation was listed as actress/car hop, as of 7/52 she was working at Stan's Drive-in in Hollywood.

Instincts: carhops don't live in Beverly Hills; maybe Christine Bergeron hopped some bones to stretch the rent. Jack walked back to 9849, knocked on the door marked 'Manager.'

An old biddy opened up. 'Yes, young man?'

Jack flashed his badge. 'L.A. Police, ma'am. It's about those books you found.'

The biddy squinted through Coke-bottle glasses. 'My late husband would have seen to justice himself, Mr. Harold Downey had no tolerance for dirty things.'

'Did you find those magazines yourself, Mrs. Downey?'

'No, young man, my cleaning lady did. *She* tore them up and threw them in the trash, where I found them. I questioned Eula about it after I called the Beverly Hills police.'

'Where did Eula find the books?'

'Well . . . I . . . don't know if I should . . .'

A switcheroo. 'Tell me about Christine Bergeron.'

Harumph. 'That woman! And that boy of hers! I don't know who's worse!'

'Is she a difficult tenant, ma'am?'

'She entertains men at all hours! She roller-skates on the floor in those tight waitress outfits of hers! She's got a no-goodnik son who never goes to school! Seventeen years old and a truant who associates with lounge lizards!'

Jack held out a Bobby Inge mugshot; the biddy held it up to her glasses. 'Yes, this is one of Daryl's no-goodnik friends, I've seen him skulking around here a dozen times. Who *is* he?'

'Ma'am, did Eula find those dirty books in the Bergeron apartment?'

'Well . . .'

'Ma'am, are Christine Bergeron and the boy at home now?'

'No, I heard them leave a few hours ago. I have keen ears to make up for my poor eyesight.'

'Ma'am, if you let me into their apartment and I find some more dirty books, you could earn a reward.'

'Well . . .'

'Have you got keys, ma'am?'

'Of course I have keys, I'm the manager. Now, I'll let you look if you promise not to touch and I don't have to pay withholding tax on my reward.'

Jack took the mugshot back. 'Whatever you want, ma'am.'

The old woman walked upstairs, up to the second-floor units. Jack followed; granny unlocked the third door down. 'Five minutes, young man. And be respectful of the furnishings – my brother-in-law owns this building.'

Jack walked in. Tidy living room, scratched floor – probably roller-skate tracks. Quality furniture, worn, ill-cared-for. Bare walls, no TV, two framed photos on an end table – publicity-type shots.

Jack checked them out; old lady Downey stuck close. Matching pewter frames – two good-looking people.

A pretty woman – light hair in a pageboy, eyes putting out a cheap sparkle. A pretty boy who looked just like her – extra blond', big stupid eyes. 'Is this Christine and her son?'

'Yes, and they are an attractive pair, I'll give them that. Young man, what is the amount of that reward you mentioned?'

Jack ignored her and hit the bedroom: through the drawers, in the closet, under the mattress. No smut, no dope, nothing hinky – negligees the only shit worth a sniff.

'Young man, your five minutes are up. And I want a written guarantee that I will receive that reward.'

Jack turned around smiling. 'I'll mail it to you. And I need another minute or so to check their address book.'

'No! No! They could come home at any moment! I want you to leave this instant!'

'Just one minute, ma'am.'

'No, no, no! Out with you this second!'

Jack made for the door. The old bat said, 'You remind me of that policeman on that television program that's so popular.'

'I taught him everything he knows.'

He felt a quickie shaping up.

Bobby Inge rats off the smut peddlers, turns state's, some kind of morals rap on him and Daryl Bergeron: the kid was a minor, Bobby was a notorious fruitfly with a rap sheet full of homo-pandering beefs. Wrap it up tight: confessions, suspects located, lots of paperwork for Millard. The big-time Big V cracks the big-time filth ring and wings back to Narco a hero.

Up to Hollywood, a loop by Stan's Drive-in – Christine Bergeron slinging hash on skates. Pouty, provocative – the quasi-hooker type, maybe the type to pose with a dick in her mouth.

Jack parked, read the Bobby Inge sheet. Two outstanding bench warrants: traffic tickets, a failure-to-appear probation citation. Last known address 1424 North Hamel, West Hollywood – the heart of Lavender Gulch. Three fruit bars for 'known haunts' – Leo's Hideaway, the Knight in Armor, B.J.'s Rumpus Room – all on Santa Monica Boulevard nearby. Jack drove to Hamel Drive, his cuffs out and open.

A bungalow court off the Strip: county turf, 'Inge – Apt 6' on a mailbox. Jack found the pad, knocked, no answer. 'Bobby, hey, sugar,' a falsetto trill – still no bite. A locked door, drawn curtains – the whole place dead quiet. Jack went back to his car, drove south.

Fag bar city: Inge's haunts in a two-block stretch. Leo's Hideaway closed until 4:00; the Knight in Armor empty. The barkeep vamped him – 'Bobby who?' – like he really didn't know. Jack hit B.J.'s

Rumpus Room.

Tufted Naugahyde inside – the walls, ceiling, booths adjoining a small bandstand. Queers at the bar; the barman sniffed cop right off. Jack walked over, laid his mugshots out face up.

The barman picked them up. ‘That’s Bobby something. He comes in pretty often.’

‘How often?’

‘Oh, like several times a week.’

‘The afternoon or the evening?’

‘Both.’

‘When was the last time he was here?’

‘Yesterday. Actually, it was around this time yesterday. Are you –’

‘I’m going to sit at one of those booths over there and wait for him. If he shows up, keep quiet about me. Do you understand?’

‘Yes. But look, you’ve cleared the whole dance floor out already.’

‘Write it off your taxes.’

The barkeep giggled; Jack walked over to a booth near the bandstand. A clean view: the front door, back door, bar. Darkness covered him. He watched.

Queer mating rituals:

Glances, tête-à-têtes, out the door. A mirror above the bar: the fruits could check each other out, meet eyes and swoon. Two hours, half a pack of cigarettes – no Bobby Inge.

His stomach growled; his throat felt raw; the bottles on the bar smiled at him. Itchy boredom: at 4:00 he’d hit Leo’s Hideaway.

3:53 – Bobby Inge walked in.

He took a stool; the barman poured him a drink. Jack walked up.

The barman, spooked: darting eyes, shaky hands. Inge swiveled around. Jack said, ‘Police. Hands on your head.’

Inge tossed his drink. Jack tasted scotch; scotch burned his eyes. He blinked, stumbled, tripped blind to the floor. He tried to cough the taste out, got up, got blurry sight back – Bobby Inge was gone.

He ran outside. No Bobby on the sidewalk, a sedan peeling rubber. His own car two blocks away.

Liquor brutalizing him.

Jack crossed the street, over to a gas station. He hit the men’s room, threw his blazer in a trashcan. He washed his face, smeared soap on his shirt, tried to vomit the booze taste out – no go. Soapy water in the sink – he swallowed it, guzzled it, retched.

Coming to: his heart quit skidding, his legs firmed up. He took off his holster, wrapped it in paper towels, went back to the car. He saw a pay phone – and made the call on instinct.

Sid Hudgens picked up. '*Hush-Hush*, off the record and on the QT.'

'Sid, it's Vincennes.'

'Jackie, are you back on Narco? I need copy.'

'No, I've got something going with Ad Vice.'

'Something good? Celebrity oriented?'

'I don't know if it's good, but if it gets good you've got it.'

'You sound out of breath, Jackie. You been shtupping?'

Jack coughed – soap bubbles. 'Sid, I'm chasing some smut books. Picture stuff. Fuck shots, but the people don't look like junkies and they're wearing these expensive costumes. It's well-done stuff, and I thought you might have heard something about it.'

'No. No, I've heard bupkis.'

Too quick, no snappy one-liner. 'What about a male prostie named Bobby Inge or a woman named Christine Bergeron? She carhops, maybe peddles it on the side.'

'Never heard of them, Jackie.'

'Shit. Sid, what about independent smut pushers in general. What do you know?'

'Jack, I know that that is secret shit that I know nothing about. And the thing about secrets, Jack, is that everybody's got them. Including you. Jack, I'll talk to you later. Call when you get work.'

The line clicked off.

EVERYBODY'S GOT SECRETS – INCLUDING YOU.

Sid wasn't quite Sid, his exit line wasn't quite a warning.

DOES HE FUCKING KNOW?

Jack drove by Stan's Drive-in, shaky, the windows down to kill the soap smell. Christine Bergeron nowhere on the premises. Back to 9849 Charleville, knock knock on the door of her apartment – no answer, slack between the lock and the doorjamb. He gave a shove; the door popped.

A trail of clothes on the living room floor. The picture frame gone.

Into the bedroom, scared, his gun in the car.

Empty cabinets and drawers. The bed stripped. Into the bathroom.

Toothpaste and Kotex spilled in the shower. Glass shelves smashed in the sink.

Getaway – fifteen-minute style.

Back to West Hollywood – fast. Bobby Inge's door caved in easy; Jack went in gun first.

Clean-out number two – a better job.

A clean living room, pristine bathroom, bedroom showing empty dresser drawers. A can of sardines in the icebox. The kitchen trashcan clean, a fresh paper bag lining it.

Jack tore the pad up: living room, bedroom, bathroom, kitchen – shelves knocked over, rugs pulled, the toilet yanked apart. He stopped on a flash: garbage cans, full, lined both sides of the street -

There or gone.

Figure an hour-twenty since his run-in with Inge: the fuck wouldn't run straight to his crib. He probably got off the street, cruised back slow, risked the move out with his car parked in the alley. He figured the roust was for his old warrants or the smut gig; he knew he was standing heat and couldn't be caught harboring pornography. He wouldn't risk carrying it in his car – the odds on a shake were too strong. The gutter or the trash, right near the top of the cans, maybe more skin IDs for Big Trashcan Jack.

Jack hit the sidewalk, rooted in trashcans – gaggles of kids laughed at him. One, two, three, four, five – two left before the corner. No lid on the last can; glossy black paper sticking out.

Jack beelined.

Three fucking mags right on top. Jack grabbed them, ran back to his car, skimmed – the kids made goo-goo eyes at the windshield. The same Hollywood backdrops, Bobby Inge with boys and girls, unknown pretties screwing. Halfway through the third book the pix went haywire.

Orgies, hole-to-hole daisy chains, a dozen people on a quilt-covered floor. Disembodied limbs: red sprays off arms, legs. Jack squinted, eye-strain, the red was colored ink, the photos doctored – limb severings faked, ink blood flowing in artful little swirls.

Jack tried for IDs; obscene perfection distracted him: ink-bleeding nudes, no faces he knew until the last page: Christine Bergeron and her son fucking, standing on skates planted on a scuffed hardwood floor.

Chapter Sixteen

A PHOTOGRAPH, DROPPED in his mailbox: Sergeant Ed Exley bleeding and terrified. No printing on the back, no need for it: Stensland and White had the negative, insurance that he'd never try to break them.

Ed, alone in the squadroom, 6:00 A.M. The stitches on his chin itched; loose teeth made eating impossible. Thirty-odd hours since the moment – his hands still trembled.

Payback.

He didn't tell his father; he couldn't risk the ignominy of going to Parker or Internal Affairs. Revenge on Bud White would be tricky: he was Dudley Smith's boy, Smith just got him a straight Homicide spot and was grooming him for his chief strongarm. Stensland was more vulnerable: on probation, working for Abe Teitlebaum, an ex-Mickey Cohen goon. A drunk, begging to go back inside.

Payback – already in the works.

Two Sheriff's men bought and paid for: a dip in his mother's trust fund. A two-man tail on Dick Stens, two men to swoop on his slightest probation fuckup.

Payback.

Ed did paperwork. His stomach growled: no food, loose trousers weighted down by his holster. A voice out the squawk box: loud, spooked.

'Squad call! Nite Owl Coffee Shop one-eight-two-four Cherokee! Multiple homicides! See the patrolmen! Code three!'

Ed banged his legs getting up. No other detectives on call – it was his.

Patrol cars at Hollywood and Cherokee; blues setting up crime scene blockades. No plainclothesmen in sight – he might get first crack.

Ed pulled up, doused his siren. A patrolman ran over. 'Load of people down, maybe some of them women. I found them, stopped for coffee and saw this phony sign on the door, "Closed for Illness." Man, the Nite Owl *never* closes. It was dark inside and I knew this was a hinky deal. Exley, this ain't your squawk, this has gotta be downtown stuff, so – '

Ed pushed him aside, pushed over to the door. Open, a sign taped on: 'Closed Due to Illness.' Ed stepped inside, memorized.

A long, rectangular interior. On the right: a string of tables, four chairs per. The side wall mural-papered: winking owls perched on street signs. A checkered linoleum floor; to the left a counter – a dozen stools. A service runway behind it, the kitchen in back, fronted by a cook's station: fryers, spatulas on hooks, a platform for laying down plates. At front left: a cash register.

Open, empty – coins on the floor mat beside it.

Three tables in disarray: food spilled, plates dumped; napkin containers, broken dishes on the floor. Drag marks leading back to the kitchen; one high-heeled pump by an upended chair.

Ed walked into the kitchen. Half-fried food, broken dishes, pans on the floor. A wall safe under the cook's counter – open, spilling coins. Crisscrossed drag marks connecting with the other drag marks, dark black heel smudges ending at the door of a walk-in food locker.

Ajar, the cord out of the socket – no cool air as a preservative. Ed opened it.

Bodies – a blood-soaked pile on the floor. Brains, blood and buckshot on the walls. Blood two feet deep collecting in a drainage trough. Dozens of shotgun shells floating in blood.

NEGRO YOUTHS DRIVING PURPLE '48 – '50 MERC COUPE SEEN DISCHARGING SHOTGUNS INTO AIR IN GRIFFITH PARK HILLS SEVERAL TIMES OVER PAST TWO WEEKS.

Ed gagged, tried for a body count.

No discernible faces. Maybe five people dead for the cash register and safe take and what they had on them –

'Holy shit fuck.'

A rookie type – pale, almost green. Ed said, 'How many men outside?'

'I . . . I dunno. Lots.'

'Don't get sick, just get everybody together to start canvassing. We need to know if a certain type of car was seen around here tonight.'

'S-s-sir, there's this Detective Bureau man wants to see you.'

Ed walked out. Dawn up: fresh light on a mob scene. Patrolmen held back reporters; rubberneckers swarmed. Horns blasted; motorcycles ran interference: meat wagons cut off by the crowd. Ed looked for high brass; newsmen shouting questions stampeded him.

Pushed off the sidewalk, pinned to a patrol car. Flashbulbs pop pop pop – he turned so his bruises wouldn’t show. Strong hands grabbed him. ‘Go home, lad. I’ve been given the command here.’

Chapter Seventeen

THE FIRST ALL-BUREAU call-in in history – every downtown-based detective standing ready. The chiefs briefing room jammed to the rafters.

Thad Green, Dudley Smith by a floor mike; the men facing them, itchy to go. Bud looked for Ed Exley – a chance to scope out his wounds. No Exley – scotch a rumor he caught the Nite Owl squeal.

Smith grabbed the mike. 'Lads, you all know why we're here. "Nite Owl Massacre" hyperbole aside, this is a heinous crime that requires a hard and swift resolution. The press and public will demand it, and since we already have solid leads, we will give it to them.

'There were six people dead in that locker – three men and three women. I have spoken to the Nite Owl's owner, and he told me that three of the dead are likely Patty Chesimard and Donna DeLuca, female Caucasians, the late-shift waitress and cash register girl, and Gilbert Escobar, male Mexican, the cook and dishwasher. The three other victims – two men, one woman – were almost certainly customers. The cash register and safe were empty and the victims' pockets and handbags were picked clean, which means that robbery was obviously the motive. SID is doing the forensic now – so far they have nothing but rubber glove prints on the cash register and food locker door. No time of death on the victims, but the scant number of customers and another lead we have indicates 3:00 A.M. as the time of the killings. A total of forty-five spent 12-gauge Remington shotgun shells were found in the locker. This indicates three men with five-shot-capacity pumps, all of them reloading twice. I do not have to tell you how gratuitous forty of those rounds were, lads. We are dealing with stark raving mad beasts here.'

Bud looked around. Still no Exley, a hundred men jotting notes. Jack Vincennes in a corner, no notebook. Thad Green took over.

'No blood tracks leading outside. We were hoping for footprints to run eliminations against, but we didn't find any, and Ray Pinker from SID says the forensic will take at least forty-eight hours. The coroner says IDs on the customer victims will be extremely difficult because of the condition of the bodies. But we do have one very hot lead.

‘Hollywood Division has taken a total of four crime reports on this, so listen well. Over the past two weeks a carload of Negro youths were seen discharging shotguns into the air up at Griffith Park. There were three of them, and the shotguns were pumps. The punks were not apprehended, but eyeball witnesses ID’d them as driving a 1948 to 1950 Mercury coupe, purple in color. And just an hour ago Lieutenant Smith’s canvassing crew found a witness: a news vendor who saw a purple Merc coupe, ’48– ’50 vintage, parked across from the Nite Owl last night around 3:00 A.M.’

The room went loud: a big rumbling. Green gestured for quiet. ‘It gets better, so listen well. There are no ’48 to ’50 purple Mercurys on the hot sheet, so it is very doubtful that we’re dealing with a stolen car, and the state DMV has given us a registration list on ’48 to ’50 Mercurys statewide. Purple was an original color on the ’48 to ’50 coupe models, and those models were favored by Negroes. Over sixteen hundred are registered to Negroes in the State of California, and in Southern California there are only a very few registered to Caucasians. There are one hundred and fifty-six registered to Negroes in L.A. County, and there are almost a hundred of you men here. We have a list compiled: home and work addresses. The Hollywood squad is cross-checking for rap sheets. I want want fifty two-man teams to shake three names apiece. There’s a special phone line being set up at Hollywood Station, so if you need information on past addresses or known associates, you can call there. If you get hot suspects, bring them here to the Hall. We’ve got a string of interrogation rooms set up, along with a man to head the interrogations. Lieutenant Smith will give out the assignments in a second, and Chief Parker would like a word with you. Any questions first?’

A man yelled, ‘Sir, who’s running the interrogations?’

Green said, ‘Sergeant Ed Exley, Hollywood squad.’

Catcalls, boos. Parker walked up to the mike. ‘Enough on that. Gentlemen, just go out and get them. Use all necessary force.’

Bud smiled. The real message: kill the niggers clean.

Chapter Eighteen

JACK'S LIST:

George NMI Yelburton, male Negro, 9781 South Beach; Leonard Timothy Bidwell, male Negro, 10062 South Duquesne; Dale William Pritchford, male Negro, 8211 South Normandie.

Jack's temporary partner: Sergeant Cal Denton, Bunco Squad, a former guard at the Texas State Pen.

Denton's car down to Darktown, the radio humming: jazz on the 'Nite Owl Massacre.' Denton hummed: Leonard Bidwell used to fight welterweight, he saw him go ten with Kid Gavilan – he was one tough shine. Jack brooded on his back-to-Narco ticket: Bobby Inge, Christine Bergeron gone, no smut leads from the other squad guys. The orgy pix – beautiful in a way. His own private leads, fucked up by some crazy spooks killing six people for a couple hundred bucks. He could still taste the booze, still hear Sid Hudgens: 'We've all got secrets.'

Snitch call-ins first: his, Denton's. Shine stands, pool halls, hair-processing parlors, storefront churches – informants palmed, leaned on, queried. The Darktown shuffle – purple car/shotgun rebop, hazy, distorted – riffraff gone on Tokay and hair tonic. Four hours down, no hard names, back to the names on the list.

9781 Beach – a tar-paper shack, a purple '48 Merc on the lawn. The car stood sans wheels, a rusted axle sunk in the grass. Denton pulled up. 'Maybe that's their alibi. Maybe they fucked up the car after they did the Nite Owl so we'd think they couldn't drive it nowhere.'

Jack pointed over. 'There's weeds wrapped around the brake linings. Nobody drove that thing up to Hollywood last night.'

'You think?'

'I think.'

'You sure?'

'Yeah, I'm sure.'

Denton hauled to the South Duquesne address – another tar-paper dive. A purple Mercury in the driveway – a coon coach featuring fender skirts, mud flaps, 'Purple Pagans' on a hood plaque. Bolted to the porch: a heavy bag/speed bag combo. Jack said, ‘There’s your welterweight.’

Denton smiled; Jack walked up, pushed the buzzer. Dog barks inside – a real monster howling. Denton stood flank: the driveway, a bead on the door.

A Negro man opened up: wiry, a tough hump restraining a mastiff. The dog growled; the man said, ‘This ’cause I ain’ paid my alimony? That a goddamn po-lice offense?’

‘Are you Leonard Timothy Bidwell?’

‘That’s right.’

‘And that’s your car in the driveway?’

‘That’s right. And if you a po-lice doin’ repos on the side you barkin’ up the wrong tree, ’cause my baby is paid for outright with my purse from my losin’ effort ‘gainst Johnny Saxton.’

Jack pointed to the dog. ‘Put him back inside and close the door, walk out and put your hands on the wall.’

Bidwell did it extra slow; Jack frisked him, turned him around. Denton walked over. ‘Boy, you like 12-gauge pumps?’

Bidwell shook his head. ‘Say what?’ Jack threw a change-up. ‘Where were you last night at 3:00 A.M.?’

‘Right here at my crib.’

‘By yourself? If you got laid you got lucky. Tell me you got lucky, before my buddy gets pissed.’

‘I gots custody of my kids fo’ the week. They was with me.’

‘Are they here?’

‘They asleep.’

Denton prodded him – a gun poke to the ribs. ‘Boy, you know what happened last night? Bad juju, and I ain’t woofin’. You own a shotgun, boy?’

‘Man, I don’t need no fuckin’ shotgun.’

Denton poked harder. ‘Boy, don’t you use curse words with me. Now, before we get your pickaninnies out here, you gonna tell me who you lent your automobile to last night?’

‘Man, I don’ lend my sled to nobody!’

‘Then who’d you lend your 12-gauge pump shotguns to? Boy, you spill on that.’

‘Man, I tol’ you I don’t own no shotgun!’

Jack stepped in. ‘Tell me about the Purple Pagans. Are they a bunch of guys who like purple cars?’

‘Man, that is just a name for our club. I gots a purple car, some other cats in the club gots them too. Man, what is this all about?'

Jack took out his DMV sheet – the Merc owners all typed up. 'Leonard, did you read the papers this morning?'

'No. Man, what is – '

'Sssh. You listen to the radio or watch television?'

'I ain't got either of them. What's that – '

'Sssh. Leonard, we're looking for three colored guys who like to pop off shotguns and a Merc like yours, a '48, a '49, or a '50. I know you wouldn't hurt anybody, I saw you fight Gavilan and I like your style. We're looking for some *bad* guys. Guys with a car like yours, guys who might belong to your club.'

Bidwell shrugged. 'Why should I help you?'

'Because I'll cut my partner loose on you if you don't.'

'Yeah, and you get me a fuckin' snitch jacket, too.'

'No jacket, and you don't have to say anything. Just look at this list and point. Here, read it over.'

Bidwell shook his head. 'They's bad, so I jus' tell you. Sugar Ray Coates, drives a '49 coupe, a beautiful ride. He gots two buddies, Leroy and Tyrone. Sugar loves to party with a shotgun, I heard he gets his thrills shootin' dogs. He tried to get in my club, but we turned him down 'cause he is righteous trash.'

Jack checked his list – bingo on 'Coates, Raymond NMI, 9611 South Central, Room 114.' Denton had his own sheet out. 'Two minutes from here. We haul, we might get there first.'

Hero headlines. 'Let's do it.'

The Tevere Hotel: an L-shaped walk-up above a wash-ateria. Denton coasted into the lot; Jack saw stairs going up – just one floor of rooms, a wide-open doorway.

Up and in – a short corridor, flimsy-looking doors. Jack drew his piece; Denton pulled two guns: a .38, an ankle rig automatic. They counted room numbers; 114 came up. Denton reared back; Jack reared back; they kicked the same instant. The door flew off its hinges for a pure clean shot: a colored kid jumping out of bed.

The kid put up his hands. Denton smiled, aimed. Jack blocked him – two reflex pulls tore the ceiling. Jack ran in; the kid tried to run; Jack nailed him: gun-butt shots to the head. No more resistance – Denton cuffed his hands behind his back. Jack slipped on brass knucks and made fists. 'Leroy, Tyrone. *Where?'*

The kid dribbled teeth – 'One-two-one' came out – bloody.

Denton yanked him up by his hair; Jack said, ‘Don’t you fucking kill him.’

Denton spat in his face; shouts boomed down the hall. Jack ran out, around the ‘L,’ a skid to a stop in front of 121 –

A closed door. Background noise huge – no way to take a listen. Jack kicked; wood splintered; the door creaked open. Two coloreds inside – one asleep on a cot, one snoring on a mattress.

Jack walked in. Sirens whirring up very close. The mattress kid stirred – Jack bludgeoned him quiet, bashed the other punk before he could move. The sirens screeched, died. Jack saw a box on the dresser.

Shotgun shells: Remington 12-gauge double-aught buck. A box of fifty, most of them gone.

Chapter Nineteen

ED SKIMMED JACK VINCENNES' report. Thad Green watched, his phone ringing off the hook.

Solid, concise – Trash knew how to write a good quickie.

Three male Negroes in custody: Raymond 'Sugar Ray' Coates, Leroy Fontaine, Tyrone Jones. Treated for wounds received while resisting arrest; snitched by another male Negro – who described Coates as a shotgun toter who liked to blast dogs. Coates was on the DMV sheet; the informant stated that he ran with two other men – 'Tyrone and Leroy' – also living at the Tevere Hotel. The three were arrested in their underwear; Vincennes turned them over to prowl car officers responding to shots fired and searched their rooms for evidence. He found a fifty-unit box of Remington 12-gauge double-aught shotgun shells, forty-odd missing – but no shotguns, no rubber gloves, no bloodstained clothing, no large amounts of cash or coins and no other weaponry. The only clothing in the rooms: soiled T-shirts, boxer shorts, neatly pressed garments covered by dry cleaner's cellophane. Vincennes checked the incinerator in back of the hotel; it was burning – the manager told him he saw Sugar Coates dump a load of clothes in at approximately 7:00 this morning. Vincennes said Jones and Fontaine appeared to be inebriated or under the influence of narcotics – they slept through gunfire and the general ruckus of Coates resisting arrest. Vincennes told late-arriving patrolmen to search for Coates' car – it was not in the parking lot or anywhere in a three-block radius. An APB was issued; Vincennes stated that all three suspects' hands and arms reeked of perfume – a paraffin test would be inconclusive.

Ed laid the report on Green's desk. 'I'm surprised he didn't kill them.'

The phone rang – Green let it keep going. 'More headlines this way, he's shacking with Ellis Loew's sister-in-law. And if the coons doused their paws with perfume to foil a paraffin test, we can thank Jack for that – he gave that little piece of information to *Badge of Honor.* Ed, are you up for this?'

Ed's stomach jumped. 'Yes, sir. I am.'

'The chief wanted Dudley Smith to work with you, but I talked him out of it. As good as he is, the man is off the deep end on coloreds.'

'Sir, I know how important this is.'

Green lit a cigarette. 'Ed, I want confessions. Fifteen of the rounds we retrieved at the Nite Owl were nicked at the strike point, so if we get the guns we've got the case. I want the location of the guns, the location of the car and confessions before we arraign them. We've got seventy-one hours before they see the judge. I want this wrapped up by then. *Clean.'*

Specifics. 'Rap sheets on the kids?'

Green said, 'Joyriding and B&E for all three. Peeping Tom beefs for Coates and Fontaine. And they're not kids – Coates is twenty-two, the others are twenty. This is a gas chamber bounce pure and clean.'

'What about the Griffith Park angle? Shell samples to compare, witnesses to the guys letting off the shotguns.'

'Shell samples might be good backup evidence, if we can find them and the coloreds don't confess. The park ranger who called in the complaints is coming down to try for an ID. Ed, Arnie Reddin says you're the best interrogator he's ever seen, but you've never worked anything this – '

Ed stood up. 'I'll do it.'

'Son, if you do, you'll have my job one day.'

Ed smiled – his loose teeth ached. Green said, 'What happened to your face?'

'I tripped chasing a shoplifter. Sir, who's talked to the suspects?'

'Just the doctor who cleaned them up. Dudley wanted Bud White to have first shot, but – '

'Sir, I don't think – '

'Don't interrupt me, I was about to agree with you. No, I want *voluntary* confessions, so White is out. You've got first shot at all three. You'll be observed through the two-ways, and if you want a partner for a Mutt and Jeff, touch your necktie. There'll be a group of us listening through an outside speaker, and a recorder will be running. The three are in separate rooms, and if you want to play them off on each other, you know the buttons to hit.'

Ed said, 'I'll break them.'

His stage: a corridor off the Homicide pen. Three cubicles set up – mirror-fronted, speaker-connected – flip switches, and a string of suspects could hear their partners rat each other off. The rooms: six-by-six square, welded-down tables, bolted-down chairs. In 1, 2 and 3: Sugar Ray Coates, Leroy Fontaine, Tyrone Jones. Rap sheets taped to the wall outside – Ed memorized dates, locations, known associates. A deep breath to kill stage fright – in the #1 door.

Sugar Ray Coates cuffed to a chair, dressed in baggy County denims. Tall, light-complected – close to a mulatto. One eye swollen shut; lips puffed and split. A smashed nose – both nostrils sutured. Ed said, 'Looks like we both took a beating.'

Coates squinted – one-eyed, spooky. Ed unlocked his cuffs, tossed cigarettes and matches on the table. Coates flexed his wrists. Ed smiled. 'They call you Sugar Ray because of Ray Robinson?'

No answer.

Ed took the other chair. 'They say Ray Robinson can throw a four-punch combination in one second. I don't believe it myself.'

Coates lifted his arms – they flopped, dead weight. Ed opened the cigarette pack. 'I know, they cut off the circulation. You're twenty-two, aren't you, Ray?'

Coates: 'Say what and so what,' a scratchy voice. Ed scoped his throat – bruised, finger marks. 'Did one of the officers do a little throttling on you?'

No answer. Ed said, 'Sergeant Vincennes? The snazzy dresser guy?'

Silence.

'Not him, huh? Was it Denton? Fat guy with a Texas drawl, sounds like Spade Cooley on TV?'

Coates' good eye twitched. Ed said, 'Yeah, I commiserate – that guy Denton is one choice creep. You see *my* face? Denton and I went a couple of rounds.'

No bite.

'Goddamn that Denton. Sugar Ray, you and I look like Robinson and LaMotta after that last fight they had.'

Still no bite.

'So you're twenty-two, right?'

'Man, why you ask me that!'

Ed shrugged. 'Just getting my facts straight. Leroy and Tyrone are twenty, so they can't burn on a capital charge. Ray, you should have pulled this caper a couple of years ago. Get life, do a little

Youth Authority jolt, transfer to Folsom a big man. Get yourself a sissy, orbit on some of that good prison brew.'

'Sissy' hit home: Coates' hands twitched. He picked up a cigarette, lit it, coughed. 'I never truck with no sissies.'

Ed smiled. 'I know that, son.'

'I ain't your son, you ofay fuck. You the sissy.'

Ed laughed. 'You know the drill, I'll give you that. You've done juvie time, you know I'm the nice guy cop trying to get you to talk. That fucking Tyrone, I almost believed him. Denton must have knocked a few of my screws loose. How could I fall for a line like that?'

'Say what, man? What line you mean?'

'Nothing, Ray. Let's change the subject. What did you do with the shotguns?'

Coates rubbed his neck – shaky hands. 'What shotguns?'

Ed leaned close. 'The pumps you and your friends were shooting in Griffith Park.'

'Don't know 'bout no shotguns.'

'You don't? Leroy and Tyrone had a box of shells in their room.'

'That their bidness.'

Ed shook his head. 'That Tyrone, he's a pisser. You did the Casitas Youth Camp with him, didn't you?'

A shrug. 'So what and say what?'

'Nothing, Ray. Just thinking out loud.'

'Man, why you talkin' 'bout Tyrone? Tyrone's bidness is Tyrone's bidness.'

Ed reached under the table, found the audio switch for room 3. 'Sugar, Tyrone told me you went sissy up at Casitas. You couldn't do the time so you found yourself a big white boy to look after you. He said they call you "Sugar" because you gave it out so sweet.'

Coates hit the table. Ed hit the switch. 'Say what, *Sugar*?'

'Say I *took* it! *Tyrone* give it! Man, I was the fuckin' boss jocker on my dorm! Tyrone the sissy! Tyrone give it for candy bars! Tyrone love it!'

Switch back up. 'Ray, let's change the subject. Why do you think you and your friends are under arrest?'

Coates fingered the cigarette pack. 'Some humbug beef, maybe like dischargin' firearms inside city limit, some humbug like that. Wha's Tyrone say 'bout that?'

'Ray, Tyrone said lots of things, but let's get to meat and potatoes.

Where were you at 3:00 A.M. last night?'

Coates chained a smoke butt to tip. 'I was at my crib. Asleep.'

'Were you on hop? Tyrone and Leroy must have been, they were passed out while those officers arrested you. Some crime partners. Tyrone calls you a fairy, then him and Leroy sleep through you getting beat up by some cracker shitbird. I thought you colored guys stuck together. Were you hopped up, Ray? You couldn't take what you did, so you got yourself some dope and – '

'Take what! What you mean! Tyrone and Leroy fuck with them goofballs, not me!'

Ed hit the 2 and 3 switches. 'Ray, you protected Tyrone and Leroy up at Casitas, didn't you?'

Coates coughed out a big rush of smoke. 'You ain't woofin' I did. Tyrone give his boodie and Leroy so scared he almos' throw hisself off the roof and drink hisself blind on pruno. Stupid down-home niggers got no more sense than a fuckin' dog.'

Switches back up. 'Ray, I heard you like to shoot dogs.'

A shrug. 'Dogs got no reason to live.'

'Oh? You feel that way about people, too?'

'Man, what you sayin'?'

Switches down. 'Well, you must feet that way about Leroy and Tyrone.'

'Shit, Leroy and Tyrone almos' too stupid to live.'

Switches up. 'Ray, where's the shotguns you were shooting in Griffith Park?'

'They – I . . . I don't own no shotguns.'

'Where's your 1949 Mercury coupe?'

'I let . . . it just be safe.'

'Come on, Ray. A cherry rig like that? Where is it? I'd keep a nice sled like that under lock and key.'

'I said it safe!'

Ed slapped the table – two palms flat down. 'Did you sell it? Ditch it? It's a felony transport car. Ray, don't you think – '

'I didn't do no felony!'

'The hell you say! Where's the car?'

'I ain't sayin'!'

'Where's the shotguns?'

'I ain't – I don't know!'

'Where's the car?'

'I ain't sayin'!'

Ed drummed the table. ‘Why, Ray? You got shotguns and rubber gloves in the trunk? You got wallets and purses and blood all over the seats? Listen to me, you dumb son of a bitch, I’m trying to save you a gas chamber bounce like your buddies – they’re underage and you’re not, and somebody has to fry for this – ’

‘I don’t know what you talkin’ ‘bout!’

Ed sighed. ‘Ray, let’s change the subject.’

Coates lit another cigarette. ‘I don’ like your subjects.’

‘Ray, why were you burning clothes at 7:00 this morning?’

Coates trembled. ‘Say what?’

‘Say this. You, Leroy and Tyrone were arrested this morning. None of you had last night’s clothes with you. You were seen burning a big pile of clothes at 7:00. Add that to the fact that you hid the car that you, Tyrone and Leroy were cruising around in last night. Ray, it doesn’t look good, but if you give me something good to give the D.A., it’ll make me look good and I’ll say, “Sugar Ray wasn’t a punk like his sissy partners.” Ray, just give me something.’

‘Such as what, since I innocent of all this rebop you shuckin’ me with.’

Ed flipped 2 and 3. ‘Well, you’ve said bad things about Leroy and Tyrone, you’ve implied that they’re hopheads. Let’s try this: where do they get their stuff?’

Coates stared at the floor. Ed said, ‘The D.A. hates hop pushers. And you met Jack Vincennes, the Big V.’

‘Crazy fuckin’ fool.’

Ed laughed. ‘Yeah, Jack is a little on the crazy side. Personally, I think anyone who wants to ruin their life with narcotics should have the right, it’s a free country. But Jack’s good buddies with the new D.A., and they’ve both got hard-ons for hop pushers. Ray, give me one to give the D.A. Just a little one.’

Coates hooked a finger; Ed let the switches up and leaned in. Sugar Ray, a whisper. ‘Roland Navarette, lives on Bunker Hill. Runs a hole-up for parole ’sconders and sells red devils, and that ain’t for the fuckin’ D.A., that’s ’cause Tyrone shoot off his fat fuckin’ mouth.’

Switches down. ‘All right, Ray. You’ve told me that Roland Navarette sells barbiturates to Leroy and Tyrone, so now we’re making some progress. And you’re scared shitless, you know this is gas chamber stuff and you haven’t even asked me what it’s all about. Ray, you have a big guilty sign around your neck.’

Coates cracked his knuckles; his good eye darted, flickered. Ed killed the audio. ‘Ray, let’s change the subject.’

‘How ’bout baseball, motherfucker?’

‘No, let’s talk about pussy. Did you get laid last night or did you put that perfume on yourself to fuck up a paraffin test?’

Heebie-jeebie shakes.

Ed said, ‘Where were you at 3:00 last night?’

No answer, more shakes.

‘Strike a nerve, Sugar Ray? *Perfume? Women?* Even a piece of shit like you has to have some women he cares about. You got a mother? Sisters?’

‘Man, don’t you talk ’bout my mother!’

‘Ray, if I didn’t know you I’d say you were protecting some nice girl’s virtue. She was your alibi, you were shacked somewhere. But Tyrone and Leroy have got that same perfume on their mitts, and I’m betting against a gang bang, I’m betting you learned about paraffin tests up in road camp, I’m betting you’ve got just enough decency to feel some guilt over killing three innocent women.’

‘I AIN’T KILLED NOBODY!’

Ed pulled out the morning *Herald.* ‘Patty Chesimard, Donna DeLuca and one unidentified. Read this while I take a breather. When I come back you’ll get the chance to tell me about it and make a deal that just might save your life.’

Coates, Tremor City – all twitches, soaked denims. Ed threw the paper in his face and walked out.

Thad Green in the hall; Dudley Smith, Bud White at the listening post. Green said, ‘We got an eyeball confirmation from that ranger – those *were* the guys in Griffith Park. And you were great.’

Ed smelled his own sweat. ‘Sir, Coates was hinked on the women. I can feel it.’

‘So can I, so just keep going.’

‘Have we turned the guns or the car?’

‘No, and the 77th Street squad is shaking down their relatives and K.A.’s. We’ll get them.’

‘I want to lean on Jones next. Will you do something for me?’

‘Name it.’

‘Set up Fontaine. Unlock his cuffs and let him read the morning paper.’

Green pointed to the #3 mirror. *‘He’ll* break soon. Sniveling bastard.’

Tyrone Jones – weeping, a piss puddle on the floor by his chair. Ed looked away. 'Sir, have Lieutenant Smith read the paper into his speaker, nice and slow, especially the lines about the car spotted by the Nite Owl. I want this guy primed to fold.'

Green said, 'You've got it.' Ed checked out Tyrone Jones – dark-skinned, flabby, pockmarked. Bawling – cuffed in, welded down.

A whistle up the hall. Dudley Smith spoke into a microphone – silent lip movements. Ed fixed on Jones.

The kid twisted, heaved, buckled, like a film clip they showed at the Academy: an electric chair malfunction, a dozen jolts before the man fried. A sharp whistle up the corridor – Jones slumped, legs splayed, chin down.

Ed walked in. 'Tyrone, Ray Coates ratted you off. He said the Nite Owl was your idea, he said you got the idea while you were cruising Griffith Park. Tyrone, tell me about it. I think it was Ray's idea. He made you do it. Tell me where the guns and car are and I think we can save your life.'

No answer.

'Tyrone, this is a gas chamber job. If you don't talk to me you'll be dead in six months.'

No answer – Jones kept his head down.

'Son, all you have to do is tell me where the guns are and tell me where Sugar left the car.'

No answer.

'Son, this can be over in one minute. You tell me, and I get you transferred to a protective custody cell. Sugar won't be able to get you, Leroy won't be able to get you. The D.A. will let you turn state's. *You won't go to the gas chamber.*'

No response.

'Son, six people are dead and somebody has to pay. It can be you or it can be Ray.'

No answer.

'Tyrone, he called you a queer. He called you a sissy and a homo. He said you took it up the – '

'I DIDN' KILL NOBODY!'

A strong voice – Ed almost jumped back. 'Son, we have witnesses. We have evidence. Coates is confessing right now. He's saying you planned the whole thing. Son, save yourself. The guns, the car. *Tell me where they are.*'

'I didn' kill nobody!'

‘Sssh. Tyrone, do you know what Ray Coates said about you?’

Jones lifted his head. ‘I know he lie.’

‘I think he lied, too. I don’t think you’re a queer. I think he’s a queer, because he hates women. I think he liked killing those women. I think you feel bad about – ’

‘We didn’ kill no women!’

‘Tyrone, where were you last night at 3:00 A.M.?’

No answer.

‘Tyrone, why did Sugar Ray hide his car?’

No answer.

‘Tyrone, why did you guys hide the shotguns you were shooting in Griffith Park? We have a witness who ID’d you on that.’

No answer. Jones lolled his head – eyes shut, spilling tears.

‘Son, why did Ray burn the clothes you guys were wearing last night?’

Jones keening now -animal stuff.

‘They had blood on them, didn’t they? You killed six goddamn people, you got sprayed. Ray did the clean-up, he tidied the loose ends, *he’s* the one who hid the shotguns, he’s the boss man, he’s been giving the orders since you were giving out butthole up at Casitas. Spill, goddamn you!’

‘WE DIDN’ KILL NOBODY! I AIN’T NO FUCKIN’ QUEER!’

Ed circled the table – walking fast, talking slow. ‘Here’s what I think. I think Sugar Ray’s the boss, Leroy’s just a dummy, you’re the fat boy Sugar likes to tease. You all did road camp together, you and Sugar Ray got popped for Peeping Tom. Sugar liked looking at girls, you liked looking at boys. You both like looking at white folks, because that is the colored man’s forbidden fruit. You had your 12-gauge pumps, you had your snazzy ’49 Merc, you had some red devils you bought off Roland Navarette. You were up in Hollywood, white folks’ neck of the woods. Sugar was teasing you about being fruit, you kept saying it was just because there were no girls around. Sugar says prove it, prove it, and you guys start peeping. You’re getting mad, you’re all flying on hop, it’s late at night and there’s nothing to look at, all those nice white folks have their curtains down. You drive by the Nite Owl, there’s these nice white people inside – and it is just too fucking much to take. Poor fat sissy Tyrone, he takes over. He leads his boys into the Nite Owl. Six people are there – three of them women. You drag them into the locker, you hit the cash register and make the cook open the safe.

You take their billfolds and purses and you spill some perfume on your hands. Sugar says, “Touch the girlies, sissy. Prove you ain’t queer.” You can’t do it so you start shooting and everybody starts shooting and you love it because finally you’re more than a poor queer fat little nigger and – ’

‘NO! NO NO NO NO NO NO!’

‘Yes! Where’s the guns? You fucking confess and turn over the evidence or you’ll go to the fucking gas chamber!’

‘No! Didn’ kill nobody!’

Ed hit the table. ‘Why’d you ditch the car?’

Jones lashed his head, spraying sweat.

‘Why’d you burn the clothes?’

No answer.

‘Where did the perfume come from?’

No answer.

‘Did Sugar and Leroy rape the women first?’

‘No!’

‘Oh? You mean all three of you did?’

‘We didn’ kill nobody! We wasn’t even there!’

‘Where were you?’

No answer.

‘Tyrone, where were you last night?’

Jones sobbed; Ed gripped his shoulders. ‘Son, you know what’s going to happen if you don’t talk. So for God’s sake admit what you did.’

‘Didn’ kill nobody. None of us. Wasn’t even there.’

‘Son, you did.’

‘No!’

‘Son, you did, so tell me.’

‘We didn’!’

‘Hush now. Just tell me – *nice and slowly.*’

Jones started babbling. Ed knelt by his chair, listened.

He heard: ‘Please God, I just wanted to lose my cherry’; he heard: ‘Didn’t mean to hurt her so’s we’d have to die.’ He heard: ‘Not right punish what we didn’ do . . . maybe she be okay, she don’t die so I don’t die, ’cause I ain’t no queer.’ He felt himself buzzing, electric chair, a sign on top: THEY DIDN’T DO IT.

Jones slipped into a reverie – Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Father Divine. Ed hit the #2 cubicle.

Rank: sweat, cigarette smoke. Leroy Fontaine – big, dark, processed hair, his feet up on the table. Ed said, ‘Be smarter than your friends. Even if you killed her, it’s not as bad as killing six people.’

Fontaine tweaked his nose – bandaged, spread over half his face. ‘This newspaper shit ain’t shit.’

Ed closed the door, scared. ‘Leroy, you’d better hope she was with you at the coroner’s estimated time of death.’

No answer.

‘Was she a hooker?’

No answer.

‘Did you kill her?’

No answer.

‘You wanted Tyrone to lose his cherry, but things got out of hand. Isn’t that right?’

No answer.

‘Leroy, if she’s dead and she was colored you can cop a plea. If she was white you might have a chance. Remember, we can make you for the Nite Owl, and we can make it stick. Unless you convince me you were somewhere else doing something bad, we’ll nail you for what’s in that newspaper.’

No answer – Fontaine cleaned his nails with a match-book.

A big lie. ‘If you kidnapped her and she’s still alive, that’s not a Little Lindbergh violation. It’s not a capital charge.’

No answer.

‘Leroy, where are the guns and the car?’

No answer.

‘Leroy, is she still alive?’

Fontaine smiled – Ed felt ice on his spine. ‘If she’s still alive, she’s your alibi. I won’t kid you, it could get bad: kidnap, rape, assault. But if you eliminate yourself on the Nite Owl now, you’ll save us time and the D.A. will like you for it. Kick loose, Leroy. Do yourself a favor.’

No answer.

‘Leroy, look how it can go both ways. I think you kidnapped a girl at gunpoint. You made her bleed up the car, so you hid the car. She bled on your clothes, so you burned the clothes. You got her perfume all over yourselves. If you didn’t do the Nite Owl, I don’t know why you hid the shotguns, maybe you thought she could identify them. Son, if that girl is alive she is the only chance you’ve got.’

Fontaine said, ‘I thinks she alive.’

Ed sat down. *‘You think?’*

‘Yeah, I thinks.’

‘Who is she? *Where is she?’*

No answer.

‘Is she colored?’

‘She Mex.’

‘What’s her name?’

‘I don’ know. College-type bitch.’

‘Where did you pick her up?’

‘I don’ know. Eastside someplace.’

‘Where did you assault her?’

‘I don’ know . . . old building on Dunkirk some-wheres.’

‘Where’s the car and the shotguns?’

‘I don’ know. Sugar, he took care of them.’

‘If you didn’t kill her, why did Coates hide the shot-guns?’

No answer.

‘Why, Leroy?’

No answer.

‘Why, son? Tell me.’

No answer.

Ed hit the table. ‘Tell me, goddammit!’

Fontaine hit the table – harder. ‘Sugar, he poked her with them guns! He ’fraid it be evidence!’

Ed closed his eyes. ‘Where is she now?’

No answer.

‘Did you leave her at the building?’

No answer.

Eyes open. ‘Did you leave her someplace else?’

No answer.

Leaps: none of the three had cash on them, call their money evidence – stashed when Sugar burned the clothes. ‘Leroy, did you sell her out? Bring some buddies by that place on Dunkirk?’

‘We . . . we drove her ’roun’.’

‘Where? Your friends’ pads?’

‘Tha’s right.’

‘Up in Hollywood?’

‘We didn’ shoot them people!’

‘Prove it, Leroy. Where were you guys at 3:00 A.M.?’

‘Man, I cain’t tell you!’

Ed slapped the table. 'Then you'll burn for the Nite Owl!'

'We didn't do it!'

'Who did you sell the girl to?'

No answer.

'Where is she now?'

No answer.

'Are you afraid of reprisals? You left the girl somewhere, right? *Leroy, where did you leave her, who did you leave her with, she is your only chance to stay out of the fucking gas chamber!'*

'Man, I cain't tell you, Sugar, he like to kill me!'

'Leroy, where is she?'

No answer.

'Leroy, you turn state's you'll get out years before Sugar and Tyrone.'

No response.

'Leroy, I'll get you a one-man cell where nobody can hurt you.'

No response.

'Son, you have to tell me. I'm the only friend you've got.'

No response.

'Leroy, are you afraid of the man you left the girl with?'

No answer.

'Son, he can't be as bad as the gas chamber. *Tell me where the girl is.*'

The door banged open. Bud White stepped in, threw Fontaine against the wall.

Ed froze.

White pulled out his .38, broke the cylinder, dropped shells on the floor. Fontaine shook head to toe; Ed kept freezing. White snapped the cylinder shut, stuck the gun in Fontaine's mouth. 'One in six. Where's the girl?'

Fontaine chewed steel; White squeezed the trigger twice: clicks, empty chambers. Fontaine slid down the wall; White pulled the gun back, held him up by his hair. *'Where's the girl?'*

Ed kept freezing. White pulled the trigger – another little click. Fontaine, bug-eyed. 'S-ss-sylvester F-fitch, one-o-nine and A valon, gray corner house please don' hurt me no – '

White ran out.

Fontaine passed out.

Riot sounds in the corridor – Ed tried to stand up, couldn't get his legs.

Chapter Twenty

A FOUR-CAR CORDON: two black-and-whites, two unmarkeds. Sirens to a half mile out; a coast up to the gray corner house.

Dudley Smith drove the lead prowler; Bud rode shotgun reloading his piece. A four-car flank: black-and-whites in the alley, Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle parked streetside – rifles on the gray house door. Bud said, ‘Boss, he’s mine.’

Dudley winked. ‘Grand, lad.’

Bud went in the back way – through the alley, a fence vault. On the rear porch: a screen door, inside hook and eye. He slipped the catch with his penknife, walked in on tiptoes.

Darkness, dim shapes: a washing machine, a blind-covered door – strips of light through the cracks.

Bud tried the door – unlocked – eased it open. A hallway: light bouncing from two side rooms. A rug to walk on; music to give him more cover. He tiptoed up to the first room, wheeled in.

A nude woman spread-eagled on a mattress – bound with neckties, a necktie in her mouth. Bud hit the next room loud.

A fat mulatto at a table – naked, wolfing Kellogg’s Rice Krispies. He put down his spoon, raised his hands. ‘Nossir, don’t want no trouble.’

Bud shot him in the face, pulled a spare piece – bang bang from the coon’s line of fire. The man hit the floor dead spread – a prime entry wound oozing blood. Bud put the spare in his hand; the front door crashed in. He dumped Rice Krispies on the stiff, called an ambulance.

Chapter Twenty-one

JACK WATCHED KAREN sleep, putting their fight behind him.

Newspaper pix caused it: the Big V and Cal Denton rousting three colored punks – suspects in L.A.'s 'Crime of the Century.' Denton dragged Fontaine by his conk; Big V had neck holds on the other two. Karen said they reminded her of the Scottsboro Boys; Jack told her he saved their goddamned lives, but now that he knew they gang-raped a Mexican girl he wished he'd let Denton kill them outright. The argument deteriorated from there.

Karen slept curled away from him – covered tight like she thought he might hit her. Jack watched her while he dressed; his last two days hit him.

He was off the Nite Owl, back to Ad Vice. Ed Exley's interrogations tentatively cleared the spooks – pending questioning of the woman they'd been abusing. Bud White played some Russian roulette – the three clammed up. So far, there was no way to know if they had time to leave the woman, drive to the Nite Owl, return to Dark-town and gang-rape. Maybe Coates or Fontaine left Jones in charge of the girl and pulled the snuffs with other partners. No luck finding the shotguns; Coates' purple Merc was still missing. No restaurant loot found at their hotel; the debris in the incinerator too far gone for blood-on-fabric analysis. The perfume on the jigs' hands skunked a late paraffin test. Huge pressure at the Bureau: solve the fucking case fast.

The coroner was trying to ID the patron victims, working from dental abstracts and their physical stats crosschecked against missing persons bulletins, call-ins. Made: the cook/dishwasher, waitress, cash register girl; nothing yet on the three customers, the autopsies showed no sexual abuse on the women. Maybe Coates/Jones/Fontaine weren't the triggers; Dudley Smith on the job – his men bracing armed robbers, nuthouse parolees, every known L.A. geek with a gun jacket. The news vendor who spotted the purple Merc across from the Nite Owl was requestioned; now he said it could have been a Ford or a Chevy. Ford and Chevy registrations being checked; *now* the park ranger who ID'd the spooks said he wasn't sure. Ed Exley told Green and Parker the purple car might have been placed by the Nite Owl to put the onus on the jigs; Dudley pooh-poohed the theory – he said it was probably just a coincidence. A sure-thing case unraveling into a shitload of possibilities.

Huge press coverage – Sid Hudgens had already called – zero hink on the smut, nothing like 'We've *all* got secrets.' A heroic version of the arrests for fifty scoots – Sid hung up quick.

The Nite Owl cost him a day on the smut. He'd checked the squadroom postings: no leads, none of the other men tracked the shit. He filed a phony report himself: nothing on Christine Bergeron and Bobby Inge, nothing on the other mags he found. Nothing on his filth dreams: his sweetheart Karen orgied up.

Jack kissed Karen's neck, hoping she'd wake up and smile.

No luck.

Canvassing first.

Charleville Drive, questions, no luck: none of the tenants in Christine Bergeron's building heard the woman and her son move out; none knew a thing about the men she entertained. The adjoining apartment houses – ditto straight across. Jack called Beverly Hills High, learned that Daryl Bergeron was a chronic truant who hadn't attended classes in a week; the vice-principal said the boy kept to himself, didn't cause trouble – he was never in school *to* cause trouble. Jack didn't tell him Daryl was too tired to cause trouble: fucking your mother on roller skates takes a lot out of a kid.

His next call: Stan's Drive-in. The manager told him Chris Bergeron splitsvilled day before yesterday, two seconds after getting a phone call. No, he didn't know who the caller was; yes, he would buzz Sergeant Vincennes if she showed up; no, Chris did not unduly fraternize with customers or receive visitors while carhopping.

Out to West Hollywood.

Bobby Inge's place, talks – fellow tenants and neighbors. Bobby paid his rent on time, kept to himself, nobody saw him move out. The swish next door said he 'played the field – he wasn't seeing anyone in particular.' Tweaks: 'smut books,' 'Chris Bergeron,' 'this little twist Daryl' – the fruit deadpanned him cold.

Call West Hollywood dead – after B.J.'s Rumpus Room Bobby wouldn't be caught near the fag-bar strip. Jack grabbed a hamburger, checked his Inge rap sheet – no K.A.'s' listed. He studied his private filth stash, hard to concentrate, the contradictions in the pictures kept distracting him.

Attractive posers, trashy backdrops. Beautiful costumes that made you look twice at disgusting homo action. Artful orgy shots: inked-in blood, bodies connected over quilts – pix that made you squint to see female forms held in check by too much explicitness – the sex organ extravaganza made you want to see the women plain nude. The shit was pornography manufactured for money – but somewhere in the process an artist was involved.

A brainstorm.

Jack drove to a dime store, bought scissors, Scotch tape, a drawing pad. He worked in the car: faces cut from the mags, taped to the paper, men and women separated, repeats placed together to make IDs easier. Downtown to the Bureau for matchups: stag pix to Caucasian mug books. Four hours of squinting: eyestrain, zero identifications. Over to Hollywood Station, their separate Vice mugs, another zero; the West Hollywood Sheriffs Substation made zero number three. Bobby Inge aside, his smut beauties were virgins – no criminal records.

4:30 P.M. – Jack felt his options dwindling fast. Another idea caught: check Bobby Inge through the DMV; check Chris Bergeron through again – a complete paper prowl. R&I/Inge one more time – updates on his sheet.

He hit a pay phone, made the calls. Bobby Inge was DMV clean: no citations, no court appearances. Complete Bergeron paper: traffic violation dates, the names of her surety bond guarantors. R&I's only Inge update: a year-old bail report. One name crossed over – Bergeron to Inge.

Bail on an Inge prostie charge – fronted by Sharon Kostenza, 1649 North Havenhurst, West Hollywood. The same woman paid a Bergeron reckless-driving bond.

Jack called R&I back, ran Sharon Kostenza and her address through – no California criminal record. He told the clerk to check the forty-eight-state list; that took a full ten minutes. 'Sorry, Sarge. Nothing at all on the name.'

Back to the DMV; a shocker: no one named Sharon Kostenza possessed or had ever possessed a California driver's license. Jack drove to North Havenhurst – the address 1649 did not exist.

Brain circuits: prostie Bobby Inge, Kostenza bailed him on a prostie beef, prosties used phony names, prosties posed for stag pix. North Havenhurst a longtime call-house block –

He started knocking on doors.

A dozen quickie interviews; tags on nearby fuck joints. Two, on Havenhurst: 1611, 1564.

6:10 P.M.

1611 open for business; the boss deadpanned Sharon Kostenza, Bobby Inge, the Bergerons. Ditto the faces clipped from the fuck mags – the girls working the joint panned out likewise. The madam at 1564 cooperated – the names and faces were Greek to her and her whores.

Another burger, back to West Hollywood Substation. A run through the alias file: another flat busted dead end.

7:20 – no more names to check. Jack drove to North Hamel, parked with a view: Bobby Inge's door.

He kept a fix on the courtyard. No foot traffic, street traffic slow – the Strip wouldn't jump for hours. He waited: smoking, smut pictures in his head.

At 8:46 a quiff ragtop cruised by – a slow trawl close to the curb. Twenty minutes later – one more time. Jack tried to read plate numbers – nix, too dark out. A hunch: he's looking for window lights. If he's looking for Bobby's, he's got them.

He walked into the courtyard, lucked out on witnesses – none. Handcuff ratchets popped the door: teeth cutting cheap wood. He felt for a wall light, tripped a switch.

The same cleaned-out living room; the pad in the same disarray. Jack sat by the door, waited.

Boredom time stretched – fifteen minutes, thirty, an hour. Knocks on the front windowpane.

Jack drew down: the door, eye-level. He faked a fag lilt: 'It's open.'

A pretty boy sashayed in. Jack said, 'Shit.'

Timmy Valburn, a.k.a. Moochie Mouse – Billy Dieterling's squeeze.

'Timmy, what the fuck are you doing here?'

Valburn slouched, one hip cocked, no fear. 'Bobby's a friend. He doesn't use narcotics, if that's what you're here for. And isn't this a tad out of your jurisdiction?'

Jack closed the door. 'Christine Bergeron, Daryl Bergeron, Sharon

Kostenza. They friends of yours?'

'I don't know these names. Jack, what is this?'

'You tell me, you've been getting up the nerve to knock for hours. Let's start with where's Bobby?'

'I don't know. Would I be here if I knew where – '

'Do you trick with Bobby? You got a thing going with him?'

'He's just a friend.'

'Does Billy know about you and Bobby?'

'Jack, you're being vile. *Bobby is a friend.* I don't think Billy knows we're friends, but friends is all we are.'

Jack took out his notepad. 'So I'm sure you have a lot of friends in common.'

'No. Put that away, because I don't know any of Bobby's friends.'

'All right, then where did you meet him?'

'At a bar.'

'Name the bar.'

'Leo's Hideaway.'

'Billy know you chase stuff behind his back?'

'Jack, don't be crude. I'm not some criminal you can slap around, I'm a citizen who can report you for breaking into this apartment.'

Change-up. 'Smut. Picture-book stuff, regular and homo. That your bent, Timmy?'

One little eye flicker – not quite a wink. 'You get your kicks that way? You and Billy take shit like that to bed with you?'

No flinch. 'Don't be vile, Jack. It's not your style, but be nice. Remember what I am to Billy, remember what Billy is to the show that gives you the celebrity you grovel for. Remember who Billy knows.'

Jack moved extra slow: the smut mags and face sheets to a chair, a lamp pulled over for some light. 'Look at those pictures. If you recognize anybody, tell me. That's all I want.'

Valburn rolled his eyes, looked. The face sheets first: quizzical, curious. On to the costume skin books – nonchalant, a queer sophisticate. Jack stuck close, eyes on his eyes.

The orgy book last. Timmy saw inked-on blood and kept looking; Jack saw a neck vein working overtime.

Valburn shrugged. 'No, I'm sorry.'

A tough read – a skilled actor. 'You didn't recognize anybody?'

'No, I didn't.'

'But you did recognize Bobby.'

'Of course, because I know him.'

'But nobody else?'

'Jack, really.'

'Nobody familiar? Nobody you've seen at the bars your type goes to?'

'My type? Jack, haven't you been sucking around the Industry long enough to call a spade a spade and still be nice about it?'

Let it pass. 'Timmy, you keep your thoughts hidden. Maybe you've been playing Moochie Mouse too long.'

'What kind of thoughts are you looking for? I'm an actor, so give me a cue.'

'Not thoughts, *reactions.* You didn't blink an eye at some of the strangest stuff I've seen in fifteen years as a cop. Arty-farty red ink shooting out of a dozen people fucking and sucking. Is that everyday stuff to you?'

An elegant shrug. 'Jack, I'm *très* Hollywood. I dress up as a rodent to entertain children. Nothing in this town surprises me.'

'I'm not sure I buy that.'

'I'm telling you the truth. I don't know any of the people in those pictures, and I haven't seen those magazines before.'

'People of your type know people who know people. You know Bobby Inge, and he was in those pictures. I want to see your little black book.'

Timmy said, 'No.'

Jack said, 'Yes, or I give *Hush-Hush* a little item on you and Billy Dieterling as soul sisters. *Badge of Honor*, the *Dream-a-Dream Hour* and queers. You like that for a three-horse parlay?'

Timmy smiled. 'Max Peltz would fire you for that. He wants you to be nice. *So be nice.*

'You carry your book with you?'

'No, I don't. Jack, remember who Billy's father is. Remember all the money you can make in the Industry after you retire.'

Pissed now, almost seeing red. 'Hand me your wallet. Do it or I'll lose my temper and put you up against the wall.'

Valburn shrugged, pulled out a billfold. Jack glommed what he wanted: calling cards, names and numbers on paper scraps.

'I want those returned.'

Jack handed the wallet back light. 'Sure, Timmy.'

'You are going to fuck up very auspiciously one day, Jack. Do you know that?'

'I already have, and I made money on the deal. Remember that if you decide to rat me to Max.'

Valburn walked out – elegant.

Fruit-bar pickings: first names, phone numbers. One card looked familiar: 'Fleur-de-Lis. Twenty-four Hours a Day – Whatever You Desire. HO-01239.' No writing on the back – Jack racked his brain, couldn't make a connection.

New plan: call the numbers, impersonate Bobby Inge, drop lines about stag books – see who bit. Stick at the pad, see who called or showed up: long-shot stuff.

Jack called 'Ted – DU-6831' – busy signal; 'Geoff – CR-9640' – no bite on a lisping 'Hi, it's Bobby Inge.' 'Bing – Ax-6005' – no answer; back to 'Ted' – 'Bobby who? I'm sorry, but I don't think I know you.' 'Jim,' 'Nat,' 'Otto': no answers; he still couldn't make the odd card. Last-ditch stuff: buzz the cop line at Pacific Coast Bell.

Ring, ring. 'Miss Sutherland speaking.'

'This is Sergeant Vincennes, LAPD. I need a name and address on a phone number.'

'Don't you have a reverse directory, Sergeant?'

'I'm in a phone booth, and the number I want checked is Hollywood 01239.'

'Very well. Please hold the line.'

Jack held; the woman came back on. 'No such number is assigned. Bell is just beginning to assign five-digit numbers, and that one has not been assigned. Frankly, it may never be, the changeover is going so slow.'

'You're sure about this?'

'Of course I'm sure.'

Jack hung up. First thoughts: bootleg line. Bookies had them – bent guys at P.C. Bell rigged the lines, kept the numbers from being assigned. Free phone service, no way police agencies could subpoena records, no make on incoming calls.

A reflex call: The DMV police line.

'Yes? Who's requesting?'

'Sergeant Vincennes, LAPD. Address only on a Timothy V-A-L-B-U-R-N, white male, mid to late twenties. I think he lives in the Wilshire District.'

'I copy. Please hold.'

Jack held; the clerk returned. 'Wilshire it is. 432 South Lucerne.

Say, isn't Valburn that mouse guy on the Dieterling show?'

'Yeah.'

'Well . . . uh . . . what are you after him for?'

'Possession of contraband cheese.'

Chez Mouse: an old French Provincial with new money accoutrements – floodlights, topiary bushes – Moochie, the rest of the Dieterling flock. Two cars in the driveway: the ragtop prowling Hamel, Billy Dieterling's Packard Caribbean – a fixture on the *Badge of Honor* lot.

Jack staked the pad spooked: the queers were too well connected to burn, his smut job stood dead-ended – 'Whatever You Desire' some kind of dead-end tangent. He could level with Timmy and Billy, shake them down, squeeze their contacts: people who knew people who knew Bobby Inge – who knew who made the shit. He kept the radio tuned in low; a string of love songs helped him pin things down.

He wanted to track the filth because part of him wondered how something could be so ugly and so beautiful and part of him plain jazzed on it.

He got itchy, anxious to move. A throaty soprano pushed him out of the car.

Up the driveway, skirting the floodlights. Windows: closed, uncurtained. He looked in.

Moochie Mouse gimcracks in force, no Timmy and Billy. Bingo through the last window: the lovebirds in a panicky spat.

An ear to the glass – all he got was mumbles. A car door slammed; door chimes ting-tinged. A look-see in – Billy walking toward the front of the house.

Jack kept watching. Timmy pranced hands-on-hips; Billy brought a big muscle guy back. Muscles forked over goodies: pill vials, a glassine bag full of weed. Jack sprinted for the street.

A Buick sedan at the curb – mud on the front and back plates. Locked doors – kick glass or go home empty.

Jack kicked out the driver's-side window. Glass on his front seat booty – a single brown paper bag.

He grabbed it, ran to his car.

Valburn's door opened.

Jack peeled rubber – east on 5th, zigzags down to Western and a big bright parking lot. He ripped the bag open.

Absinthe – 190 proof on the label, viscous green liquid.
Hashish.
Black-and-white glossies: women in opera masks blowing horses.
‘Whatever You Desire.’

Chapter Twenty-two

PARKER SAID, 'ED, you were brilliant the other day. I disapprove of Officer White's intrusion, but I can't complain with the results. I need smart men like you, and . . . direct men like Bud. And I want both of you on the Nite Owl job.'

'Sir, I don't think White and I can work together.'

'You won't have to. Dudley Smith's heading up the investigation, and White will report directly to him. Two other men, Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle, will work with White – however Dudley wants to play it. The Hollywood squad will be in on the job, reporting to Lieutenant Reddin, who'll report to Dudley. We've got divisional contacts assigned, and every man in the Bureau is calling in informant favors. Chief Green says Russ Millard wants to be detached from Ad Vice to run the show with Dud, so that's a possibility. That makes twenty-four full-time officers.'

'What specifically do I do?'

Parker pointed to a case graph on an easel. 'One, we have not found the shotguns or Coates' car, and until that girl those thugs assaulted clears them on the time element we have to assume that they are still our prime suspects. Since White's little escapade they've refused to talk, and they've been booked on kidnap and rape charges. I think – '

'Sir, I'd be glad to have another try at them.'

'Let me finish. Two, we still have no IDs on the other three victims. Doc Layman's working overtime on that, and we're logging in four hundred calls a day from people worried about missing loved ones. There's an outside chance that this might be more than just a set of robbery killings, and if that proves to be the case I want you on that end of things. As of now, you're liaison to SID, the D.A.'s Office and the divisional contacts. I want you to go over every field report every day, assess them and share your thoughts with me personally. I want daily written summaries, copies to Chief Green and myself.'

Ed tried not to smile – the stitches in his chin helped. 'Sir, some thoughts before we continue?’

Parker leaned his chair back. ‘Of course.’

Ed ticked points. ‘One, what about searching for comparable shell samples in Griffith Park? Two, if the girl clears our suspects on the time element, what was that purple car doing across from the Nite Owl? Three, how likely are we to turn the guns and the car? Four, the suspects said they took the girl to a building on Dunkirk first. What kind of evidence did we get there?’

‘Good points. But one, shell samples to compare is a long shot. With breech-load weapons the rounds might have expelled back into the car those punks were driving, the actual locations listed in the crime reports were vague, Griffith Park is all hillsides, we’ve had rain and mudslides over the past two weeks and that park ranger has waffled on ID’ing the three in custody. Two, the news vendor who ID’d the car by the Nite Owl says now that maybe it was a Ford or a Chevy, so our registration checks are now a nightmare. If you’re thinking the car was placed there as a plant, I think that’s nonsense – how would anyone know *to* plant it there? Three, the 77th Street squad is tearing up the goddamn southside for the car and the guns, muscling K.A.’s, the megillah. And four, there was blood and semen all over a mattress in that building on Dunkirk.’

Ed said, ‘It all comes back to the girl.’

Parker picked up a report form. ‘Inez Soto, age twenty-one. A college student. She’s at Queen of Angels, and she just came out of sedation this morning.’

‘Has anyone spoken to her?’

‘Bud White went with her to the hospital. Nobody’s talked to her in thirty-six hours, and I don’t envy you the task.’

‘Sir, can I do this alone?’

‘No. Ellis Loew wants to prosecute our boys for Little Lindbergh – kidnapping and rape. He wants them in the gas chamber for that, the Nite Owl, or both. And he wants a D.A.’s investigator and a woman officer present. You’re to meet Bob Gallaudet and a Sheriffs matron at Queen of Angels in an hour. I don’t have to mention that the course of this investigation will be determined by what our Miss Soto tells you.’

Ed stood up. Parker said, ‘Off the record, do you make the coloreds for the job?’

‘Sir, I’m not sure.’

'You cleared them temporarily. Did you think I'd be angry with you for that?'

'Sir, we both want absolute justice. And you like me too much.'

Parker smiled. 'Edmund, don't dwell on what White did the other day. You're worth a dozen of him. He's killed three men line of duty, but that's nothing compared to what you did in the war. Remember that.'

Gallaudet met him outside the girl's room. The hall reeked of disinfectant – familiar, his mother died one floor down. 'Hello, Sergeant.'

'It's Bob, and Ellis Loew sends his thanks. He was afraid the suspects would get beaten to death and he wouldn't get to prosecute.'

Ed laughed. 'They might be cleared on the Nite Owl.'

'I don't care, and neither does Loew. Little Lindbergh with rape carries the death penalty. Loew wants those guys in the ground, so do I, so will you once you talk to the girl. So here's the sixty-four-dollar question. Did they do it?'

Ed shook his head. 'Based on their reactions, I'd lean against it. But Fontaine said they drove the girl around. "Sold her out" was the phrase he reacted to. I think it *could* have been Sugar Coates and a little pickup gang, maybe two of the guys they sold her to. None of the three had money on them when they were arrested, and either way – Nite Owl or gang rape – I think that money is stashed somewhere, covered with blood – like the bloody clothes Coates burned.'

Gallaudet whistled. 'So we need the girl's word on the time element *and* IDs on the other rapers.'

'Right. *And* our suspects are clammed, *and* Bud White killed the one witness who could have helped us.'

'That guy White's a pisser, isn't he? Don't look so spooked, being scared of him means you're sane. Now come on, let's talk to the young lady.'

They walked into the room. A Sheriff's matron blocked the bed – tall, fat, short hair waxed straight back. Gallaudet said, 'Ed Exley, Dot Rothstein.' The woman nodded, stepped aside.

Inez Soto.

Black eyes, her face cut and bruised. Dark hair shaved to the forehead, sutures. Tubes in her arms, tubes under the sheets. Cut knuckles, split nails – she fought. Ed saw his mother: bald, sixty pounds in an iron lung.

Gallaudet said, 'Miss Soto, this is Sergeant Exley.'

Ed leaned on the bed rail. 'I'm sorry we couldn't have given you more time to recuperate, and I'll try to make this as brief as possible.'

Inez Soto stared at him – dark eyes, bloodshot. A raspy voice: 'I won't look at any more pictures.'

Gallaudet: 'Miss Soto identified Coates, Fontaine and Jones from mugshots. I told her we might need her to look at some mugshots for IDs on the other men.'

Ed shook his head. 'That won't be necessary right now. Right now, Miss Soto, I need you to try to remember a chronology of the events that happened to you two nights ago. We can do this very slowly, and for now we won't need details. When you're more rested, we can go over it again. Please take your time and start when the three men kidnapped you.'

Inez pushed up on her pillows. 'They weren't men!'

Ed gripped the rail. 'I know. And they're going to be punished for what they did to you. But before we can do that we need to eliminate or confirm them as suspects on another crime.'

'I want them dead! I heard the radio! *I want them dead for that!*'

'We can't do that, because then the other ones who hurt you will go free. We have to do this correctly.'

A hoarse whisper. 'Correctly means six white people are more important than a Mexican girl from Boyle Heights. Those animals ripped me up and did their business in my mouth. They stuck guns in me. My family thinks I brought it on myself because I didn't marry a stupid *cholo* when I was sixteen. I will tell you nothing, *cabrón.'*

Gallaudet: 'Miss Soto, Sergeant Exley saved your life.'

'He ruined my life! Officer White said he cleared the *negritos* on a murder charge! Officer White's the hero – he killed the *puto* who took me up my ass!'

Inez sobbed. Gallaudet gave the cut-off sign. Ed walked down to the gift shop – familiar, his deathwatch. Flowers for 875: fat cheerful bouquets every day.

Chapter Twenty-three

BUD CAME ON duty early, found a memo on his desk.

4/19/53

Lad –

Paperwork is not your forte, but I need you to run records checks (two) for me. (Dr. Layman has identified the three patron victims.) Use the standard procedure I've taught you and first check bulletin 11 on the squadroom board: it updates the overall status of the case and details the duties of the other investigating officers, which will prevent you from doing gratuitous and extraneous tasks.

1. Susan Nancy Lefferts, W.F., DOB 1/29/22, no criminal record. A San Bernardino native recently arrived in Los Angeles. Worked as a salesgirl at Bullock's Wilshire (background check assigned to Sgt. Exley).

2. Delbert Melvin Cathcart, a.k.a. 'Duke,' W.M., DOB 11/14/14. Two statutory rape convictions, served three years at San Quentin. Three procuring arrests, no convictions. (A tough ID: laundry markings and the body cross-checked against prison measurement charts got us our match.) No known place of employment, last known address 9819 Vendome, Silverlake District.

3. Malcolm Robert Lunceford, a.k.a. 'Mal,' W.M., DOB 6/02/12. No last known address, worked as a security guard at the Mighty Man Agency, 1680 North Cahuenga. Former LAPD officer (patrolman), assigned to Hollywood Division throughout most of his eleven-year career. Fired for incompetence 6/50. Known to be a late night habitué of the Nite Owl. I've checked Lunceford's personnel file and concluded that the man was a disgraceful police officer (straight 'D' fitness reports from every C.O.). You check whatever paperwork exists on him at Hollywood Station (Breuning and Carlisle will be there to shag errands for you).

Summation: I still think the Negroes are our men, but Cathcart's criminal record and Lunceford's ex-policeman status mean that more than cursory background checks should be conducted. I want you as my adjutant on this job, an excellent baptism of fire for you as a straight Homicide detective. Meet me tonight (9:30) at the Pacific Dining Car. We'll discuss the job and related matters.

D.S.

Bud checked the main bulletin board. Nite Owl thick: field reports, autopsy reports, summaries. He found bulletin 11, skimmed it.

Six R&I clerks detached to check criminal records and auto registrations; the 77th Street squad shaking down jigtown for the shotguns and Ray Coates' Merc. Breuning and Carlisle muscling known gun jockeys; the area around the Nite Owl canvassed nine times without turning a single extra eyewitness. The spooks refused to talk to LAPD men, D.A.'s Bureau investigators, Ellis Loew himself. Inez Soto refused to cooperate on clearing up the time frame; Ed Exley blew a questioning session, said they should treat her kid-gloves.

Down the board: Malcolm Lunceford's LAPD personnel sheets. Bad news – Lunceford as a free-meal scrounger, general incompetent. A putrid arrest record; cited for dereliction of duty three times. An interdepartmental information request issued; four officers who worked with Lunceford responded. Grafter/buffoon: Mal drank on duty, shook down hookers for blowjobs, tried to shake down Hollywood merchants for his off-duty 'protection service' – letting him sleep on their premises while he was locked out of his apartment for nonpayment of rent. One complaint too many got Lunceford bounced in June 1950; all four responding officers stated that he probably wasn't a deliberate Nite Owl victim: as a policeman he habituated all-night coffee shops – usually to scrounge chow; he was probably at the Nite Owl at 3:00 A.M. because he was hooked on sweet Lucy and sleeping in the weeds and the Nite Owl looked cozy and warm.

Bud drove to Hollywood Station – Inez on his mind, Dudley, Dick Stens along with her. Guts: she tried to claw herself off the gurney to get at Sylvester Fitch, strapped dead to a morgue cot; she screamed: 'I'm dead, I want them dead!' He hustled her to the ambulance, filched morphine and a hypo, shot her up while no one was looking. The worst of it should have been over – but the worst was still coming.

Exley would interrogate her, make her spit out details, look at sex offender pix until she cracked. Ellis Loew wanted an airtight case – that meant show-ups, courtroom testimony. Inez Soto: the first headliner witness for the most ambitious D.A. who ever breathed – all he could do was see her at the hospital, say 'Hi,' try to muffle the blows. A brave woman shoved at Ed Exley – fodder for a cowardly hard-on.

Inez to Stens.

Good revenge: Danny Duck masks, Exley whimpering. The photo good insurance; Dick still jacked up on blood – a taste that told him he was still on the muscle. His job at Kikey T. 's deli stunk – the dump was a known grifter hangout, a probation rap waiting to happen. Stens sleeping in his car, boozing, gambling – jail taught him absolutely shit.

Bud cut north on Vine; sunlight picked up his reflection in the windshield. His necktie stood out: LAPD shields, 2's. The 2's stood for the men he killed; he'd have to get some new ties made up – 3's to add on Sylvester Fitch. Dudley's idea: *esprit de corps* for Surveillance. 'Snappy stuff: women got a kick out of them. Dudley was a kick – in the teeth, in the brains.

He owed him more than he owed Dick Stens – the man frosted Bloody Christmas, got him Surveillance, then Homicide. But when Dudley Smith brought you along you belonged to him – and he was so much smarter than everyone else that you were never sure what he wanted from you or how he was using you – shit got lost in all his fancy language. It didn't quite rankle, but you felt it; it scared you to see how Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle gave the man their souls. Dudley could bend you, shape you, twist you, turn you, point you – and never make you feel like some dumb lump of clay. But he always let you know one thing: he knew you better than you knew yourself.

No streetside parking – every space taken. Bud parked three blocks over, walked up to the squadroom. No Exley, every desk occupied: men talking into phones, taking notes. A giant bulletin board all Nite Owl – paper six inches thick. Two women at a table, a switchboard behind them, a sign by their feet: 'R&I/DMV Requests.' Bud went over, talked over phone noise. 'I'm on the Cathcart check, and I want all you can get me, known associates, the works. This clown was popped twice for statch rape. I want full details on the complainants, plus current addresses. He had three pimping rousts, no convictions, and I want you to check all the local city and county vice squads to see if he's got a file. If he does, I want names on the girls he was running. If you get names, get DOBs and run them back through R&I, DMV, City/County Parole, the Woman's Jail. *Details.* You got it?'

The girls hit the switchboard; Bud hit the bulletin board: paper tagged 'Victim Lunceford.' One update: a Hollywood squad officer talked to Lunceford's boss at the Mighty Man Agency. Facts: Lunceford patronized the Nite Owl virtually every early A.M. – after he got off his 6:00 – to – 2:00 shift at the Pickwick Bookstore

Building; Lunceford was a typical wino security guard not permitted to carry a sidearm; Lunceford had no known enemies, no known friends, no known lady friends, did not associate with his fellow Mighty Men, slept in a pup tent behind the Hollywood Bowl. The tent was checked out, inventoried: a sleeping bag, four Mighty Man uniforms, six bottles of Old Monterey muscatel.

Adiós, shitbird – you were in *the* wrong place at *the* wrong time. Bud checked Lunceford's arrest record: nineteen minor felony pops in eleven years as a cop, scratch revenge as a motive, kill six to get one stunk as a motive anyway. Still no Exley, no Breuning and Carlisle. Bud remembered Dudley's memo: check the station files for Lunceford listings.

A good bet: field interrogation cards filed by officer surname. Bud hit the storage room, pulled the 'L' cabinet – no folder for 'Lunceford, Officer Malcolm.' An hour checking misfiles 'A' to 'Z' – zero. No F.I.'s – strange – maybe Wino Mal never filed his field cards.

Almost noon, time for a chow run – a sandwich, talk to Dick. Carlisle and Breuning showed up – loafing, drinking coffee. Bud found a free phone, buzzed snitches.

Snake Tucker heard bupkis; ditto Fats Rice and Johnny Stomp. Jerry Katzenbach said it was the Rosenbergs – they ordered the snuffs from death row, make Jerry back on the needle. An R&I girl hovered.

She handed him a tear sheet. 'There's not much. Nothing on Cathcart's K.A.'s, not much detail besides his rap sheet. I couldn't get much on the statutory rape complainants, except that they were fourteen and blonde and worked at Lockheed during the war. My bet is they were transients. Sheriff's Central Vice had a file on Cathcart, with nine suspected prostitutes listed. I followed up. Two are dead of syphilis, three were underaged and left the state as a probation stipulation, two I couldn't get a line on. The remaining two are on that page. Does it help?'

Bud waved Breuning and Carlisle over. 'Yeah, it does. Thanks.'

The clerk walked off; Bud checked her sheet, two names circled: Jane (a.k.a. 'Feather') Royko, Cynthia (a.k.a. 'Sinful Cindy') Benavides. Last known addresses, known haunts: pads on Poinsettia and Yucca, cocktail lounges.

Dudley's strongarms hovered. Bud said, 'The two names here. Shag them, will you?'

Carlisle said, ‘This background check shit is the bunk. I say it’s the shines.’

Breuning grabbed the sheet. ‘Dud says do it, we do it.’

Bud checked their neckties – five dead men total. Fat Breuning, skinny Carlisle – somehow they looked just like twins. ‘So do it, huh?’

Abe’s Noshery, no parking, around the block. Dick’s Chevy out back, booze empties on the seat: probation violation number one. Bud found a space, walked up and checked the window: Stens guzzling Manischewitz, bullshitting with ex-cons – Lee Vachss, Deuce Perkins, Johnny Stomp. A cop type eating at the counter: a bite, a glance at the known criminal assembly, another bite – clockwork. Back to Hollywood Station – pissed that he was still playing nursemaid.

Waiting for him: Breuning, two hooker types – laughing up a storm in the sweatbox. Bud tapped the glass; Breuning walked out.

Bud said, ‘Who’s who?’

‘The blonde’s Feather Royko. Hey, did you hear the one about the well-hung elephant?’

‘What’d you tell them?’

‘I told them it was a routine background check on Duke Cathcart. They read the papers, so they weren’t surprised. Bud, it’s the niggers. They’re gonna burn for that Mex ginch, Dudley’s just going through this rigamarole ’cause Parker wants a showcase and he’s listening to that punk kid Exley with all his highfalut – ’

Hard fingers to the chest. ‘Inez Soto ain’t a ginch, and maybe it ain’t the jigs. So you and Carlisle go do some police work.’

Kowtow – Breuning shambled off smoothing his shirt. Bud walked into the box. The whores looked bad: a peroxide blonde, a henna redhead, too much makeup on too many miles.

Bud said, ‘So you read the papers this morning.’

Feather Royko said, ‘Yeah. Poor Dukey.’

‘It don’t sound like you’re exactly grieving for him.’

‘Dukey was Dukey. He was cheap, but he never hit you. He had a thing about chiliburgers, and the Nite Owl had good ones. One chiliburg too many, RIP Dukey.’

‘Then you girls buy all that robbery stuff in the papers?’

Cindy Benavides nodded. Feather said, ‘Sure. That’s what it was, wasn’t it? I mean, don’t you think so?’

‘Probably. What about enemies? Duke have any?’

‘No, Dukey was Dukey.’

‘How many other girls was he running?’

‘Just us. We are the meager remnants of Dukey-poo’s stable.’

‘I heard Duke ran nine girls once. What happened? Rival pimp stuff?’

‘Mister, Dukey was a dreamer. He liked young stuff personally, and he liked to run young stuff. Young stuff gets bored and moves on unless their guy gets mean. Dukey could get mean with other men, but never with females. RIP Dukey.’

‘Then Duke must’ve had something else going. A two-girl string wouldn’t cover him.’

Feather picked at her nail polish. ‘Dukey was jazzed up on some new business scheme. You see, he always had some kind of scheme going. He was a dreamer. And the schemes made him happy, made him feel like the meager coin Cindy and me turned for him wasn’t so bad.’

‘Did he give you details?’

‘No.’

Cindy had her lipstick out, smearing on another coat. ‘Cindy, he tell *you* anything?’

‘No’ – a little squeak.

‘Nothing about enemies?’

‘No.’

‘What about girlfriends? Duke have any young stuff going lately?’

Cindy grabbed a tissue, blotted. ‘N-no.’

‘Feather, you buy that?’

‘I guess Dukey wasn’t talking up nobody. Can we go now? I mean – ’

‘Go. There’s a cabstand up the street.’

The girls moved out fast; Bud gave them a lead, ran to his car. Up to Sunset across from the cabstand; a two-minute wait. Cindy and Feather walked up.

Separate cabs, different directions. Cindy shot due north on Wilcox, maybe toward home – 5814 Yucca. Bud took a shortcut; the cab showed right on time. Cindy walked to a green De Soto, took off westbound. Bud counted to ten, followed.

Up to Highland, the Cahuenga Pass to the Valley, west on Ventura Boulevard. Bud stuck close; Cindy drove middle lane fast. A last-second swerve to the curb by a motel – rooms circling a murky swimming pool.

Bud braked, U-turned, watched. Cindy walked to a left-side room, knocked. A girl – fifteenish, blonde – let her in. Young stuff – Duke Cathcart's statch rape type.

Eyeball Surveillance.

Cindy walked out ten minutes later – zoom – a U-turn back toward Hollywood. Bud knocked on the girl's door.

She opened it – teary-eyed. A radio blasted: 'Nite Owl Massacre,' 'Crime of the Southland's Century.' The girl focused in. 'Are you the police?'

Bud nodded. 'Sweetie, how old are you?'

No more focus – her eyes went blurry.

'Sweetie, what's your name?'

'Kathy Janeway. Kathy with a "K."'

Bud closed the door. 'How old are you?'

'Fourteen. Why do men always ask you that?'

A prairie twang.

'Where are you from?'

'North Dakota. But if you send me back I'll just run away again.'

'Why?'

'You want it in VistaVision? Duke said lots of guys get their jollies that way.'

'Don't be such a tough cookie, huh? I'm on your side.'

'That's a laugh.'

Bud scoped the room. Panda bears, movie mags, schoolgirl smocks on the dresser. No whore threads, no dope paraphernalia. 'Was Duke nice to you?'

'He didn't make me do it with guys, if that's what you mean.'

'You mean you only did it with him?'

'No, I mean my daddy did it to me and this other guy made me do it with guys, but Duke bought me away from him.'

Pimp intrigue. 'What was the guy's name?'

'No! I won't tell you and you can't make me and I forgot it anyway!'

'Which one of those, sweetie?'

'I don't want to tell!'

'Sssh. So Duke was nice to you?'

'Don't shush me. Duke was a panda bear, all he wanted was to sleep in the same bed with me and play pinochle. Is that so bad?'

'Honey – '

'My daddy was worse! My Uncle Arthur was *lots* worse!'

'Hush, now, huh?'

'You can't make me!'

Bud took her hands. 'What did Cindy want?'

Kathy pulled away. 'She told me Duke was dead, which any dunce with a radio knows. She told me Duke said that if anything happened to him she should look after me, and she gave me ten dollars. She said the police bothered her. I said ten dollars isn't very much, and she got insulted and yelled at me. And how'd you know Cindy was here?'

'Never mind.'

'The rent here's nine dollars a week and I – '

'I'll get you some more money if you'll – '

'Duke was *never* that cheap with me!'

'Kathy, hush now and let me ask you a few questions and maybe we'll get the guys who killed Duke. All right? Huh?'

A kid's sigh. 'Okay, all right, ask me.'

Bud, soft. 'Cindy said Duke told her to look after you if something happened to him. Do you think he figured something was gonna happen?'

'I don't know. Maybe.'

'Why maybe?'

'Maybe 'cause Duke was nervous lately.'

'Why was he nervous?'

'I don't know.'

'Did you ask him?'

'He said, "Just biz."'

Feather on Cathcart: 'Jazzed on some new business scheme.' 'Kathy, was Duke starting some new kind of thing up?'

'I don't know, Duke said girls don't need shoptalk. And I *know* he left me more than a crummy ten dollars.'

Bud gave her a Bureau card. 'That's my number at work. You call me, huh?'

Kathy plucked a panda off the bed. 'Duke was so messy and such a slob, but I didn't care. He had a cute smile and this cute scar on his chest, and he never yelled at me. My daddy and Uncle Arthur always yelled at me, so Duke never did. Wasn't that a nice thing to do?'

Bud left her with a hand squeeze. Halfway out to the street he heard her sobbing.

Back to the car, a brainstorm on the Cathcart play so far. Call Duke's 'new gig' and pimp intrigue weak maybes; call Nite Owl chiliburgers 99 percent sure the ink on his death warrant. A pimp statch raper and a grifter ex-cop for victims – strange – but par for the Hollywood Boulevard 3:00 A.M. course. Call it busywork for Dudley – maybe Cindy was hinked on more than the cash she held back. He could muscle the money out of her, glom some pimp scuttlebutt, close out the Cathcart end and ask Dud to send him down to Darktown. Simple – but Cindy was who-knows-where and Kathy had him dancing to her tune: savior with no place to go. He snapped to something missing from the bulletins: no checkout on Cathcart's apartment. A chance Duke's whore book might be there – leads on his gig and the pimp he bought Kathy from – a good time-killer.

Bud headed over Cahuenga. He saw a red sedan hovering back – he thought he'd seen it by the motel. He speeded up, made a run by Cindy's pad – no green De Soto, no red sedan. He drove to Silverlake checking his rearview. No tail car – just his imagination.

9819 Vendome looked virgin – a garage apartment behind a small stucco house. No reporters, no crime scene ropes, no locals out taking some sun. Bud popped the door with his hand.

A typical bachelor flop: living room/bedroom combo, bathroom, kitchenette. Lights on for a quick inventory – the way Dudley taught him.

A Murphy bed in the down position. Cheapie seascapes on the walls. One dresser, a walk-in closet. No doors on the bathroom and kitchenette – neat, clean. The whole pad looked spanking neat – at odds with Kathy: 'Duke was so messy and such a slob.'

Detail prowls – another Dudley trick. A phone on an end table, check the drawers: pencils, no address book, no whore book. A stack of Yellow Page directories, a toss – L.A. County, Riverside County, San Bernardino County, Ventura County. San Berdoo the only book used – ruffled pages, a cracked spine. Check the rufflings: 'Printshop' listings thumbed through. A connection, probably nothing: victim Susan Lefferts, San Berdoo native.

Bud eyeball-prowled, click/click/click. The bathroom and kitchen immaculate; neatly folded shirts in the dresser. The carpet clean, a bit grimy in the corners. A final click: the crib had been checked out, cleaned up – maybe tossed by a pro.

He went through the closet: jackets and slacks slipping off hangers. Cathcart had a nifty wardrobe – someone had been trying on his threads or this was the real Duke – Kathy's slob – and the tosser didn't bother with his clothes.

Bud checked every pocket, every garment: lint, spare change, nothing hot. A click: a test to test the tosser. He walked down to the car, got his evidence kit, dusted: the dresser a sure thing for latents. One more click: scouring powder wipe marks. Nail the pad as professionally print-wiped.

Bud packed up, got out, brainstormed some more – pimp war clicks, clickouts – Duke Cathcart had two skags in his stable, no stomach for pushing a fourteen-year-old nymphet – he was a pimp disaster area. He tried to click Duke's pad tossed to the Nite Owl – no gears meshed, odds on the coons stayed high. If the tossing played, tie it to Cathcart's 'new gig' – Feather Royko talked it up – she came off as clean as Sinful Cindy came off hinky. Cindy next – and she owed Kathy money.

Dusk settling in. Bud drove to Cindy's pad, saw the green De Soto. Moans out a half-cracked window – he shoved the sill up, vaulted in.

A dark hallway, grunt-grunt-grunt one door down. Bud walked over, looked in. Cindy and a fat man wearing argyles, the bed about ready to break. Fattie's trousers on the doorknob – Bud filched a billfold, emptied it, whistled.

Cindy shrieked; Fats kept pumping. Bud: 'SHITBIRD, WHAT YOU DOIN' WITH MY WOMAN!!!!'

Things speeded up.

Fattie ran out holding his dick; Cindy dove under the sheets. Bud saw a purse, dumped it, grabbed money. Cindy shrieked willy-nilly. Bud kicked the bed. 'Duke's enemies. Spill and I won't roust you.'

Cindy poked her head out. 'I . . . don't . . . know . . . nothin'.'

'The fuck you don't. Let's try this: somebody broke into Duke's place, you give me a suspect.'

'I . . . don't . . . know.'

'Last chance. You held back at the station, Feather came clean. You went to Kathy Janeway's motel and stiffed her with a ten-spot. What else you hold back on?'

'Look – '

'Give.'

'Give on what?'

'Give on Duke's new gig and his enemies. Tell me who used to pimp Kathy.'

'I don't know who pimped her!'

'Then give on the other two.'

Cindy wiped her face – smeared lipstick, runny makeup. 'All I know's this guy was going around talking up cocktail-bar girls, acting like Duke. You know, the same one-liners, real Dukey shtick. I heard he was trying to get girls to do call jobs for him. He didn't talk to me or Feather, this is just stale-bread stuff I heard, like from two weeks ago.'

Click: 'This Guy' maybe the pad tosser, 'This Guy' trying on Cathcart's clothes. 'Keep going on that.'

'That is all I heard, just the way I heard it.'

'What did the guy look like?'

'I don't know.'

'Who told you about him?'

'I don't even know that, they were just girls gabbing at the next table at this goddamned bar.'

'All right, easy. Duke's new gig. Give on that.'

'Mister, it was just another Dukey pipe dream.'

'Then why didn't you tell me before?'

'You know the old adage "Don't speak ill of the dead"?'

'Yeah. You know the bull daggers at the Woman's Jail?'

Cindy sighed. 'Dukey pipe dream number six thousand – smut peddler. Is that a yuck? Dukey said he was going to push this weird smut. That's all I know, we had a two-second conversation on the topic and that's all Duke said. I didn't press it 'cause I know a pipe dream when I hear one. Now will you get out of here?'

Loose Bureau talk: Ad Vice working pornography. 'What kind of smut?'

'Mister, I told you I don't know, it was Just a two-second conversation.'

'You gonna pay Kathy back what Duke left you?'

'Sure, Good Samaritan. Ten here, ten there. If I gave her the money all at once she'd just blow it on movie mags anyway.'

'I might be back.'

'I wait with bated breath.'

Bud drove to a mailbox, sent the cash out special delivery: Kathy Janeway, Orchid View Motel, plenty of stamps and a friendly note. Four hundred plus – a small fortune for a kid.

7:00 – time to kill before he met Dudley. The Bureau for a time-killer: Ad Vice, the squadroom board.

Squad 4 on the smut job – Kifka, Henderson, Vincennes, Stathis – four men tracking stag books, all reporting no leads. Nobody around, he could check by in the morning, it was probably nothing anyway. He walked over to Homicide, called Abe's Noshery.

Stens answered. 'Abe's.'

'Dick, it's me.'

'Oh? Checking up on me, *Officer*?'

'Dick, come on.'

'No, I mean it. You're a Dudley man now. Maybe Dud don't like the people I push my corned beef to. Maybe Dud wants skinny, thinks I'll talk to you. It ain't like you're your own man no more.'

'You been drinking, partner?'

'I drink kosher now. Tell Exley that. Tell him Danny Duck wants to dance with him. Tell him I read about his old man and Dream-a-fucking-Dreamland. Tell him I might come to the opening, Danny Duck requests the presence of Sergeant Ed cocksucker Exley for one more fucking dance.'

'Dick, you're way out of line.'

'The fuck you say. One more dance, Danny Duck's gonna break his glasses and chew his fuckin' throat – '

'Dick, goddammit – '

'Hey, fuck you! I read the papers, I saw the personnel on that Nite Owl job. You, Dudley S., Exley, the rest of Dudley's hard-ons. You're fucking partners with the cocksucker who put me away, you're sucking the same gravy case, so if you th – '

Bud threw the phone out the window. He walked down to the lot kicking things – then the Big Picture kicked him.

He should have swung for Bloody Christmas.

Dudley saved him.

Make Exley the Nite Owl hero so far – he'd be the one to send Inez back through Hell.

Strangeness on the Cathcart end, the case might go wide, more than a psycho robbery gang. *He* could make the case, twist Exley, work an angle to help out Stens. Which meant:

Not greasing Ad Vice for smut leads.

Holding back evidence from Dudley.

BEING A DETECTIVE – NOT A HEADBASHER – ON HIS OWN.

He fed himself drunk talk for guts:

It ain't like you're your own man.

It ain't like you're your own man.

It ain't like you're your own man.

He was scared.

He owed Dudley.

He was crossing the only man on earth more dangerous than he was.

Chapter Twenty-four

RAY PINKER WALKED Ed through the Nite Owl, reconstructing.

'Bim, bam, I'm betting it happened like this. First, the three enter and show their weaponry. One man takes the cash register girl, the kitchen boy and the waitress. This guy hits Donna DeLuca with his shotgun butt – she's standing by the cash register, and we found a piece of her scalp on the floor there. She gives him the money and the money from her purse, he shoves her and Patty Chesimard to the locker, picking up Gilbert Escobar in the kitchen en route. Gilbert resists – note the drag marks, the pots and pans on – the floor. A pop to the head – bim, bam – that little pool of blood you see outlined in chalk. The safe is exposed under the cook's stand, one of the three employee victims opens it, note the spilled coins. Bim, bam, Gilbert resists some more, another gun-butt shot, note the circle marked 1– A on the floor, we found three gold teeth there, bagged them and matched them: Gilbert Luis Escobar. The drag marks start there, old Gil has quit fighting, bim, bam, suspect number one plants victims one, two and three inside the food locker.'

Back to the restaurant proper – still sealed three nights post-mortem. Gawkers pressed up to the windows; Pinker kept talking. 'Meanwhile, gunmen two and three are rounding up victims four through six. The drag marks going back to the locker and the spilled food and dishes speak for themselves. You might not be able to see it because the linoleum's so dark, but there's blood under the first two tables: Cathcart and Lunceford, sitting separately, two gun-butt shots. We know who was where through blood typing. Cathcart drops by table two, Lunceford by table one. Now – '

Ed cut in. 'Did you dust the plates for more confirmation?'

Pinker nodded. 'Smudges and smears, two viable latents on dishes under Lunceford's table. That's how we ID'd him – we got a match to the set they took when he joined the LAPD. Cathcart and Susan Lefferts had their hands blown off, no way to cross-check on that, their dishes were too smudged anyway. We tagged Cathcart on a partial dental and his prison measurement chart, Lefferts on a full dental. Now, you see the shoe on the floor?'

'Yes.'

'Well, from an angle study it looks like Lefferts was flailing to get to Cathcart at the next table, even though they were sitting separately. Dumb panic, she obviously didn't know him. She started screaming, and one of the gunmen stuck a wad of napkins from that container there in her mouth. Doc Layman found a big wad of swallowed tissue in her throat at autopsy, he thinks she might have gagged and suffocated just as the shooting started. Bim, bam, Cathcart and Lefferts are dragged to the locker, Lunceford walks, the poor bastard probably thinks it's just a stickup. At the locker, purses and wallets are taken – we found a scrap of Gilbert Escobar's driver's license floating in blood just inside the door, along with six wax-saturated cotton balls. The gunmen had the brains to protect their ears.'

The last bit didn't play: his coloreds were too impetuous. 'It doesn't seem like enough men to do the job.'

Pinker shrugged. 'It worked. Are you suggesting one or more of the victims knew one or more of the killers?'

'I know, it's unlikely.'

'Do you want to see the locker? It'll have to be now, we promised the owner he could have the place back.'

'I saw it that night.'

'I saw the pictures. Jesus, you couldn't tell they were human. You're working the Lefferts background check, right?'

Ed looked out the window; a pretty girl waved at him. Dark-haired, Latin – she looked like Inez Soto. 'Right.'

'And?'

'And I spent a full day in San Bernardino and got nowhere. The woman used to live with her mother, who was half-sedated and wouldn't talk to me. I talked to acquaintances, and they told me Sue Lefferts was a chronic insomniac who listened to the radio all night. She had no boyfriends in recent memory, no enemies ever. I checked her apartment in L.A., which was just about what you'd expect for a thirty-one-year-old salesgirl. One of the San Berdoo people said she was a bit of a round-heels, one said she belly-danced at a Greek restaurant a few times for laughs. Nothing suspicious.'

'It keeps coming back to the Negroes.'

‘Yes, it does.’

‘Any luck on the car or the weapons?’

‘No, and 77th Street’s checking trashcans and sewer grates for the purses and wallets. And I know an approach we can make and save the investigation a lot of time.’

Pinker smiled. ‘Check Griffith Park for the nicked shells?’

Ed turned to the window – the Inez type was gone. ‘If we place those shells, then it’s either the Negroes in custody or another three.’

‘Sergeant, that is one large long shot.’

‘I know, and I’ll help.’

Pinker checked his watch. ‘It’s 10:30 now. I’ll find the occurrence reports on those shootings, try to pinpoint the locations and meet you with a sapper squad tomorrow at dawn. Say the Observatory parking lot?’

‘I’ll be there.’

‘Should I get clearance from Lieutenant Smith?’

‘Do it on my say-so, okay? I’m reporting directly to Parker on this.’

‘The park at dawn then. Wear some old clothes, it’ll be filthy work.’

Ed ate Chinese on Alvarado. He knew why he was heading that way: Queen of Angels was close, Inez Soto might be awake. He’d called the hospital: Inez was healing up quickly, her family hadn’t visited, her sister called, said Mama and Papa blamed her for the nightmare – provocative clothing, worldly ways. She’d been crying for her stuffed animals; he had the gift shop send up an assortment – gifts to ease his conscience – he wanted her as a major witness in his first big homicide case. And he just wanted her to like him, wanted her to disown four words: ‘Officer White’s the hero.’

He stalled with a last cup of tea. Stitches, dental work – his wounds were healing, made small: his mother and Inez blurred together. He’d gotten a report: Dick Stens hung out with known armed robbers, bet with bookies, took his salary in cash and frequented whorehouses. When his men had him pinned cold they’d call County Probation and fix an arrest.

Which paled beside ‘Officer White’s the hero’ and Inez Soto with the fire to hate him.

Ed paid the check, drove to Queen of Angels.

Bud White was walking out.

They crossed by the elevator. White got the first word in. ‘Give your career a rest and let her sleep.’

‘What are you doing here?’

‘Not looking to pump a witness. Leave her alone, you’ll get your chance.’

‘This is just a visit.’

‘She sees through you, Exley. You can’t buy her off with teddy bears.’

‘Don’t you want the case cleared? Or are you just frustrated that there’s nobody else for you to kill?’

‘Big talk from a brownnosing snitch.’

‘Did you come here to get laid?’

‘Different circumstances, I’d eat you for that.’

‘Sooner or later, I’ll take you and Stensland down.’

‘That goes two ways. War hero, huh? Those Japs must’ve rolled over for you.’

Ed flinched.

White winked.

Tremors – all the way up to her room. Ed looked before he knocked.

Inez was awake – reading a magazine. Stuffed animals strewn on the floor, one creature on the bed: Scooter Squirrel as a footrest. Inez saw him, said, ‘No.’

Faded bruises, her features coming back hard. ‘No what, Miss Soto?’

‘No, I won’t go through it with you.’

‘Not even a few questions?’

‘No.’

Ed pulled a chair up. ‘You don’t seem surprised to see me here so late.’

‘I’m not, you’re the subtle type.’ She pointed to the animals. ‘Did the district attorney reimburse you for those?’

‘No, that was out of my own pocket. Did Ellis Loew visit you?’

‘Yes, and I told him no. I told him that the three *negrito putos* drove me around, took money from other *putos* and left me with the *negrito puto* that Officer White killed. I told him that I can’t remember or won’t remember or don’t want to remember any more details, he can take his pick and that is *absolutamente* all there is to it.’

Ed said, ‘Miss Soto, I just came to say hello.’

She laughed in his face. ‘You want the rest of the story? An hour later my brother Juan calls and tells me I can’t go home, that I disgraced the family. Then *puto* Mr. Loew calls and says he can put me up in a hotel if I cooperate, then the gift shop girl brings me those *puto* animals and says they’re gifts from the nice policeman with the glasses. I’ve been to college, *pendejo.* Don’t you think I can follow the chain of events?’

Ed pointed to Scooter Squirrel. ‘You didn’t throw him away.’

‘He’s special.’

‘Do you like Dieterling characters?’

‘So what if I do!’

‘Just asking. And where do you put Bud White in your chain of events?’

Inez fluffed her pillows. ‘He killed a man for me.’

‘He killed him for himself.’

‘And that *puto* animal is dead just the same. Officer White just comes by to say hello. He warns me about you and Mr. Loew. He tells me I should cooperate, but he doesn’t press the subject. He hates you, subtle man. I can tell.’

‘You’re a smart girl, Inez.’

‘You want to say “for a Mexican,” I know that.’

‘No, you’re wrong. You’re just plain smart. And you’re lonely, or you would have asked me to leave.’

Inez threw her magazine down. ‘So what if I am!’

Ed picked it up. Dog-eared pages: a piece on Dream-a-Dreamland. ‘I’m going to recommend that we give you some time to get well and recommend that when this mess goes to court you be allowed to testify by written deposition. If we get enough Nite Owl corroboration from other sources, you might not have to testify at all. And I won’t come back if you don’t want me to.’

She stared at him. ‘I’ve still got no place to go.’

‘Did you read that article on the Dream-a-Dreamland opening?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did you see the name “Preston Exley”?’

‘Yes.’

‘He’s my father.’

‘So what? I know you’re a rich kid, blowing your money on stuffed animals. So what? Where will I go?’

Ed held the bed rail. ‘I’ve got a cabin at Lake Arrowhead. You can stay there. I won't touch you, and I'll take you to the Dream-a-Dreamland opening.'

Inez touched her head. 'What about my hair?'

'I'll get you a nice bonnet.'

Inez sobbed, hugged Scooter Squirrel.

Ed met the sappers at dawn, groggy from dreams: Inez, other women. Ray Pinker brought flashlights, spades, metal detectors; he'd had Communications Division issue a public appeal: witnesses to the Griffith Park shotgun blastings were asked to come forth to ID the blasters. The occurrence report locations were marked out into grids – all steep, scrub-covered hillsides. The men dug, uprooted, scanned with gizmos going tick, tick, tick – they found coins, tin cans, a .32 revolver. Hours came, went; the sun beat down. Ed worked hard – breathing dirt, risking sunstroke. His dreams returned, circles leading back to Inez.

Anne from the Marlborough School Cotillion – they did it in a '38 Dodge, his legs banged the doors. Penny from his UCLA biology class: rum punch at his frat house, a quick backyard coupling. A string of patriotic roundheels on his bond tour, a one-night stand with an older woman – a Central Division dispatcher. Their faces were hard to remember; he tried and kept seeing Inez – Inez without bruises, no hospital smock. It was dizzying, the heat was dizzying, he was filthy, exhausted – it all felt good. More hours went – he couldn't think of women or anything else. More time down, yells in the distance, a hand on his shoulder.

Ray Pinker holding out two spent shotgun shells and a photo of a shotgun shell strike surface. A perfect match: identical firing pin marks straight across.

Chapter Twenty-five

TWO DAYS SINCE the Fleur-de-Lis grab – no way to tell how far he could take it.

Two days, one suspect: Lamar Hinton, age twenty-six, arrested for strongarm assault, a conviction on an ADW, a deuce at Chino – paroled 3/51. Current employment: telephone installer at P.C. Bell – his parole officer suspected he moonlighted rigging bootleg bookie lines. A mugshot match: Hinton the muscle boy at Timmy Valburn's house.

Two days, no break on his stalemate: a made case would ticket him back to Narco, making *this* case meant Valburn and Billy Dieterling for material witnesses – well-connected homos who could flush his Hollywood career down the toilet.

Two days of page prowling – every roundabout approach tapped out. He checked the collateral case reports, talked to the arrestees – more denials – nobody admitted buying the smut. One day wasted; nothing at Ad Vice to goose his leads: Stathis, Henderson, Kifka reported zero, Millard was trying to co-boss the Nite Owl – pornography was not on his mind.

Two days since: midway through day two he hit hard – the bootleg number, Muscle Boy.

No Fleur-de-Lis phone listing; brain gymnastics tagged his personal connection – the first time he saw the calling card.

Tilt:

Xmas Eve '51, right before Bloody Christmas. Sid Hudgens set up a reefer roust – he popped two grasshoppers, found the card at their pad, thought nothing else of it.

Scary Sid: 'We've all got secrets, Jack.'

He pushed ahead anyway, that undertow driving him: he wanted to know who made the smut – and why. He hit the P.C. Bell employment office, cross-checked records against physical stats until he hit Lamar Hinton – tilt, tilt, tilt, tilt, tilt -

Jack looked around the squadroom – men talking Nite Owl, Nite Owl, Nite Owl, the Big V chasing hand-job books.

The orgy pix.

Vertigo.

Jack chased.

Hinton's route: Gower to La Brea, Franklin to the Hollywood Reservoir. His A.M. installations: Creston Drive, North Ivar. Jack found Creston on his car map: Hollywood Hills, a cul-de-sac way up.

He drove there, saw the phone truck: parked by a pseudo-French chateau. Lamar Hinton on a pole across the street – monster huge in broad daylight.

Jack parked, checked the truck – the loading door wide open. Tools, phone books, Spade Cooley albums – no suspicious-looking brown paper bags. Hinton stared at him; Jack went over badge first.

Hinton trundled down the pole; six-four easy, blond, muscles on muscles. 'You with Parole?'

'Los Angeles Police Department.'

'Then this ain't about my parole?'

'No, this is about you cooperating to avoid a parole rap.'

'What do you – '

'Your parole officer don't really approve of this job you've got, Lamar. He thinks you might start doing some bootlegs.'

Hinton flexed muscles: neck, arms, chest. Jack said, 'Fleur-de-Lis, "Whatever You Desire." You desire no violation, you talk. You don't talk, then back to Chino.'

One last flex. 'You broke into my car.'

'You're a regular Einstein. Now, you got the brains to be an informant?'

Hinton shifted; Jack put a hand on his gun. 'Fleur-de-Lis. Who runs it, how does it work, what do you push? Dieterling and Valburn. Tell me and I'm out of your life in five minutes.'

Muscles thought it through: his T-shirt bulged, puckered. Jack pulled out a fuck mag – an orgy pic spread full. 'Conspiracy to distribute pornographic material, possession and sales of felony narcotics. I've got enough to send you back to Chino until nineteen-fucking-seventy. Now, did you move this smut for Fleur-de-Lis?'

Hinton bobbed his head. 'Y-y-yeah.'

'Smart boy. Now, who made it?'

'I d-don't know. Really, honest, I d-don't.'

'Who posed for it?'

'I don't kn-know, I just d-d-delivered it.'

‘Billy Dieterling and Timmy Valburn. *Go.*’

‘J-just c-customers. Queers, you know, they like to fag party.’

‘You’re doing great, so here’s the big question. Who – ’

‘Officer, please don’t – ’

Jack pulled his .38, cocked it. ‘You want to be on the next train to Chino?’

‘N-no.’

‘Then answer me.’

Hinton turned, gripped the pole. ‘P-pierce Patchett. He runs the business. He-he’s some kind of legit businessman.’

‘Description, phone number, address.’

‘He’s maybe fifty-something. I th-think he lives in B-brentwood and I don’t know his n-number ’cause I get paid b-by the m-mail.’

‘More on Patchett. Go.’

‘H-he sugar-p-pimps girls made up like movie stars. H-he’s rich. I-I only met him once.’

‘Who introduced you?’

‘This guy Ch-chester I used to see at M-m-muscle Beach.’

‘Chester who?’

‘I don’t know.’

Hinton: bunching, flexing – Jack figured hot seconds and he’d snap. ‘What else does Patchett push?’

‘L-lots of b-boys and girls.’

‘What about through Fleur-de-Lis?’

‘W-whatever you d-desire.’

‘Not the sales pitch, what specifically?’

Pissed more than scared. ‘Boys, girls, liquor, dope, picture books, bondage stuff!’

‘Easy, now. Who else makes the deliveries?’

‘Me and Chester. He works days. I don’t like – ’

‘Where’s Chester live?’

‘I don’t know!’

‘Easy, now. Lots of nice people with lots of money use Fleur-de-Lis, right?’

‘R-right.’

The records in the truck. ‘Spade Cooley? Is he a customer?’

‘N-no, I just get free albums ’cause I party with this guy Burt Perkins.’

‘You fucking would know him. The names of some customers. *Go.’*

Hinton dug into the pole. Jack flashed: the monster turning, six .38s not enough. ‘Are you working tonight?’

‘Y-yes.’

‘The address.’

‘No . . . please.’

Jack frisked: wallet, change, butch wax, a key on a fob. He held the key up; Hinton bobbed his head bam bam – blood on the pole.

‘The address and I’m gone.’

Bam bam – blood on the monster’s forehead. ‘5261B Cheramoya.’

Jack dropped the pocket trash. ‘You don’t show up tonight. You call your parole officer and tell him you helped me, you tell him you want to be picked up on a violation, you have him put you up someplace. You’re clean on this, and if I get to Patchett I’ll make like one of the smut people snitched. *And if you clean that place out you are Chino-fucking-bound.’*

‘B-but you *t-told* me.’

Jack ran to his car, gunned it. Hinton tore at the pole barehanded.

Pierce Patchett, fifty-something, ‘some kind of legit businessman.’

Jack found a pay phone, called R&I, the DMV. A make: Pierce Morehouse Patchett, DOB 6/30/02, Grosse Pointe, Michigan. No criminal record, 1184 Gretna Green, Brentwood. Three minor traffic violations since 1931.

Not much. Sid Hudgens next – fuck his smut hink. A busy signal, a buzz to Morty Bendish at the *Mirror.*

‘City Room, Bendish.’

‘Morty, it’s Jack Vincennes.’

‘The Big V! Jack, when are you going back to the Narco Squad? I need some good dope stories.’

Morty wanted shtick. ‘As soon as I get squeaky-clean Russ Millard off my case and make a case for him. And *you* can help.’

‘Keep talking, I’m all ears.’

‘Pierce Patchett. Ring a bell?’

Bendish whistled. ‘What’s this about?’

‘I can’t tell you yet. But if it breaks his way, you’ve got the exclusive.’

‘You’d feed me before you feed Sid?’

‘Yeah. Now I’m all ears.’

Another whistle. ‘There’s not much, but what there is is choice.

Patchett's a big handsome guy, maybe fifty, but he looks thirty-eight. He goes back maybe twenty-five years in L.A. He's some kind of judo or jujitsu expert, he's either a chemist by trade or he was a chemistry major in college. He's worth a boatload of greenbacks, and I know he lends money to businessman types at thirty percent interest and a cut of their biz, I know he's bankrolled a lot of movies under the table. Interesting, huh? Now try this on: he's rumored to be some kind of periodic heroin sniffer, rumored to dry out at Terry Lux's clinic. All in all, he's what you might wanta call a powerful behind-the-scenes strange-o.'

Terry Lux – plastic surgeon to the stars. Sanitarium boss: booze, dope cures, abortions, detoxification heroin available – the cops looked the other way, Terry treated L.A. politicos free. 'Morty, that's all you've got?'

'Ain't that enough? Look, what I don't have, Sid might. Call him, but remember I got the exclusive.'

Jack hung up, called Sid Hudgens. Sid answered: *'Hush-Hush.* Off the record and on the QT.'

'It's Vincennes.'

'Jackie! You got some good Nite Owl scoop for the Sidster?'

'No, but I'll keep an ear down.'

'Narco skinny maybe? I want to put out an all-hophead issue – shvartze jazz musicians and movie stars, maybe tie it in to the Commies, this Rosenberg thing has got the public running hot with a thermometer up their ass. You like it?'

'It's cute. Sid, have you heard of a man named Pierce Patchett?'

Silence – seconds ticking off long. Sid, too Sid-like. 'Jackie, all I know on the man is that he is very wealthy and what I like to call "Twilight." He ain't queer, he ain't Red, he don't know anybody I can use in my quest for prime sinuendo. Where'd you hear about him?'

Bullshitting him – he could taste it. 'A smut peddler told me.'

Static – breath catching sharp. 'Jack, smut is from hunger, strictly for sad sacks who can't get their ashes hauled. Leave it alone and write when you get work, *gabishe*?'

Hang up – bang! – a door slamming, cutting you off, some line you couldn't cross back to. Jack drove to the Bureau, MALIBU RENDEZVOUS stamped on that door.

The Ad Vice pen stood empty, just Millard and Thad Green in a huddle by the cloakroom. Jack checked the assignment board – more no-leads – walked around to the supply room on the QT. Unlocked – easy to pull off a snatch. Downwind: the high brass talking Nite Owl.

‘Russ, I know you want in. But Parker wants Dudley.’

‘He’s too volatile on Negroes, Chief. We both know it.’

‘You only call me “Chief” when you want something, *Captain.’*

Millard laughed. ‘Thad, the sappers found matching spents in Griffith Park, and I heard 77th Street turned the wallets and purses. Is that true?’

‘Yes, an hour ago, in a sewer. Blood-caked, print-wiped. SID matched to the victims’ blood. It’s the coloreds, Russ. I know it.’

‘I don’t think it’s the ones in custody. Do you see them leaving a rape scene on the southside, then driving the girl around to let their friends abuse her, *then* driving all the way to Hollywood to pull the Nite Owl job – when two of them are high on barbiturates?’

‘It’s a stretch, I’ll admit that. We need to nail down the outside rapists and get Inez Soto to talk. So far she’s refused. But Ed Exley is working on her, and Ed Exley is very good.’

‘Thad, I won’t let my ego get in the way. I’m a captain, Dudley’s a lieutenant. We’ll share the command.’

‘I worry about your heart.’

‘A heart attack five years ago doesn’t make me a cripple.’

Green laughed. ‘I’ll talk to Parker. Jesus, you and Dudley. What a pair.’

Jack found what he wanted: a tape recorder/phone tapper, bolt-on style, headphones. He hustled it out a side door, no witnesses.

Dusk, Cheramoya Avenue: Hollywood, a block off Franklin. 5261: a Tudor four-flat, two pads upstairs, two down. No lights – probably too late to glom ‘Chester’ the day man. Jack rang the B buzzer – no response. An ear to the door, a listen – no sounds, period. In with the key.

Jackpot: one glance told him Hinton played it straight – no cleanout. Pervert fucking Utopia – floor-to-ceiling shelves jammed with goodies.

Maryjane: leaf, prime buds. Pills – bennies, goofballs, red devils, yellow jackets, blue heavens. Patent dope: laudanum, codeine mixture, catchy brand names: Dream-scope, Hollywood Sunrise, Martian Moonglow. Absinthe, pure alcohol in pints, quarts, half gallons. Ether, hormone pills, envelopes of cocaine, heroin. Film cans, smutty titles: *Mr. Big Dick, Anal Love, Gang Bang, High School Rapist, Rape Club, Virgin Cocksucker, Hot Negro Love, Fuck Me Tonite, Susie's Butthole Deelite, Boys in Love, Locker Room Lust, Blow the Man Down, Jesus Porks the Pope, Cocksucker's Paradise, Cornholers Meet the Ramrod Boys, Rex the Randy Rottweiler.* Old stag books: T.J. venues, women sucking cock, boys sucking cock, up-the-hole close-ups. Dusty – not a hot item; empty spaces alongside, maybe the good smut, *his smut*, was piled there: make Lamar for cleaning *that* out? Why? The rest of the shit spelled felony time to the year 2000. Snapshots – candid-type pix – real-life movie stars in the raw. Lupe Velez, Gary Cooper, Johnny Weissmuller, Carole Landis, Clark Gable, Tallulah Bankhead muff-diving, corpses going 69 on morgue slabs. A color pic: Joan Crawford and a notoriously well hung Samoan extra named 'O.K. Freddy' fucking. Dildoes, dog collars, whips, chains, amyl nitrite poppers, panties, brassieres, cock rings, catheters, enema bags, black lizard pumps with six-inch heels and a female mannequin covered by a tarp – plasterboard, rubber lips, glued-on pubic hair, a snatch made from a garden hose.

Jack found the bathroom and pissed. A mirror threw his face back: old, strange. He went to work: tapper to the phone, the oldie smut skimmed.

Cheap stuff, probably Mex-made: spic hairstyles on skinny junkie posers. Vertigo: he felt swirly, like a good hop jolt. The dope on the shelves made him drool; he mixed Karen in with the pictures. He paced the room, tapped a hollow place, pulled up the rug. Bingo on a cute hidey-hole: a basement, stairs leading to an empty black space.

The phone rang.

Jack hit the tapper, picked up. 'Hi. Whatever You Desire' – Lamar. Hinton mimicked.

'Click, a hang-up, he shouldn't have used the slogan. A half hour passed – the phone rang. 'Hi, it's Lamar' – casual.

A pause, click.

A chain of smokes – his throat hurt. The phone rang.

Try a mumble. 'Yeah?'

'Hi, it's Seth up in Bel Air. You feel like bringing something over?'

'Sure.'

'Make it a jug of the wormwood. Make it fast and you made a nice tip.'

‘Uh . . . gimme the address again, would ya?’

‘Who could forget digs like mine? It’s 941 Roscomere, and don’t dawdle.’

Jack hung up. Ring ring again.

‘Yeah?’

‘Lamar, tell Pierce I need to . . . Lamar, is that you, boychik?’

SID HUDGENS.

Lamar – with a tremor. ‘Uh, yeah. Who’s this?’

Click.

Jack pushed ‘Replay.’ Hudgens talked, recognition creeped in –

SID KNEW PATCHETT. SID KNEW LAMAR. SID KNEW THE FLEUR-DE-LIS RACKET.

The phone rang – Jack ignored it. Splitsville – grab the tapper, wipe the phone, wipe all the filth he’d touched. Out the door queasy – night air peaking his nerves.

He heard a car revving.

A shot took out the front window; two shots smashed the door.

Jack drew, fired – the car hauling, no lights.

Clumsy: two shots hit a tree and sprayed wood. Three more pulls, no hits, the car fishtailing. Doors opening – eyewitnesses.

Jack got his car – skids, brodies, no lights until Franklin and a main traffic flow. No make on the shooter car: dark, no lights, the cars all around him looked alike: sleek, wrong. A cigarette slowed him down. He drove straight west to Bel Air.

Roscomere Road: twisty, all uphill, mansions fronted by palm trees. Jack found 941, pulled into the driveway.

Circular, looping a big pseudo-Spanish: one story, low slate roof. Cars in a row – a Jag, a Packard, two Caddies, a Rolls. Jack got out – nobody braced him. He hunkered down, took plate numbers.

Five cars: classy, no Fleur-de-Lis bags on plush front seats. The house: bright windows, silk swirls. Jack walked up and looked in.

He knew he’d never forget the women.

One almost Rita Hayworth à la *Gilda.* One almost Ava Gardner in an emerald-green gown. A near Betty Grable – sequined swimsuit, fishnet stockings. Men in tuxedos mingled – background debris. He couldn’t stray his eyes from the women.

Astonishing make-believe. Hinton on Patchett: ‘He sugar-pimps these girls made up to look like movie stars.’ ‘Made up’ didn’t cut it: call these women chosen, cultivated, enhanced by an expert. Astonishing.

Veronica Lake walked through the light. Her face wasn't as close: she just oozed that cat-girl grace. Background men flocked to her.

Jack pressed up to the glass. Smut vertigo, real live women. Sid, that door slamming, that line. He drove home, bad vertigo – achy, itchy, jumpy. He saw a *Hush-Hush* card on his door, 'Malibu Rendezvous' inked on the bottom.

He saw headlines:

DOPED-OUT DOPE CRUSADER SHOOTS INNOCENT CITIZENS!

CELEBRITY COP INDICTED FOR KILLINGS!

GAS CHAMBER FOR THE BIG-TIME BIG V! RICH KID GIRLFRIEND BIDS DEATH ROW AU REVOIR!

Chapter Twenty-six

AN ARM-IN-ARM ENTRANCE – Inez in her best dress and a veil to hide her bruises. Ed kept his badge out – it got them past the press. Attendants formed the guests into lines – Dream-a-Dreamland was open for business.

Inez was awestruck: quick breaths billowed her veil. Ed looked up, down, sideways – every detail made him think of his father.

A grand promenade – Main Drag, USA, 1920 – soda fountains, nickelodeons, dancing extras: the cop on the beat, a paperboy juggling apples, ingenues doing the Charleston. The Amazon River: motorized crocodiles, jungle excursion boats. Snow-capped mountains; vendors handing out mouse-ear beanies. The Moochie Mouse Monorail, tropical isles – acres and acres of magic.

They rode the monorail: the first car, the first run. high speed, upside down, right side up – Inez unbuckled herself giggling. The Paul's World toboggan; lunch: hot dogs, snow cones, Moochie Mouse cheese balls.

On to 'Desert Idyll,' 'Danny's Fun House,' an exhibit on outer space travel. Inez seemed to be tiring: gorged on excitement. Ed yawned – his own late night catching up.

A late squeal at the station: a shootout on Cheramoya, no perpetrators caught. He had to go to the scene: an apartment house, shots riddling a downstairs unit. Weird: .38s, .45s retrieved, the living room all shelving – empty except for some sadomasochist paraphernalia – and no telephone. The building's owner couldn't be traced; the manager said he was paid by mail, cashier's checks, he got a free flop and a C-note a month, so he was happy and didn't ask questions – he couldn't even name the dump's tenant. The condition of the apartment indicated a rapid clean-out – but no one saw a thing. Four hours of report writing – four hours snatched from the Nite Owl.

The exhibit was a bore – a sop to culture. Inez pointed to the ladies' room; Ed stepped outside.

A VIP tour on the promenade – Timmy Valburn shepherding bigwigs. The *Herald* front page hit him: Dream-a-Dreamland, the Nite Owl, like nothing else mattered.

He tried to reinterrogate Coates, Jones and Fontaine – they would not give him one word. Eyewitnesses responded to the appeal for IDs on the Griffith Park shooters and could not identify the three in custody: they said they 'can't quite be sure.' Vehicle checks now extended to '48– '50 Fords and Chevys – nothing hot so far. Jockeying for command of the case: Chief Parker supported Dudley Smith, Thad Green pumped up Russ Millard. No shotguns found, no trace of Sugar Ray's Merc. Wallets and purses belonging to the victims were found in a sewer a few blocks from the Tevere Hotel – combine that with the matching shells found in Griffith Park and you got what the papers didn't report: Ellis Loew bullying Parker to bully him: 'It's all circumstantial so far, so have your boy Exley keep working on that Mexican girl, it looks like he's getting next to her, have him talk her into a questioning session under sodium pentothal, let's get some juicy Little Lindbergh details and fix the Nite Owl time frame once and for all.'

Inez sat down beside him. They had a view: the Amazon, plaster mountains. Ed said, 'Are you all right? Do you want to go back?'

'What I want is a cigarette, and I don't even smoke.'

'Then don't start. Inez – '

'Yes, I'll move into your cabin.'

Ed smiled. 'When did you make up your mind?'

Inez tucked her veil under her hat. 'I saw a newspaper in the bathroom, and Ellis Loew was gloating about me. He sounded happy, so I figured I'd put some distance between us. You know, I never thanked you for my bonnet.'

'You don't have to.'

'Yes I do, because I'm naturally bad-mannered around Anglos who treat me nice.'

'If you're waiting for the punch line, there isn't any.'

'Yes, there is. And for the record again, I won't tell you about it, I won't look at pictures, and I won't testify.'

'Inez, I submitted a recommendation that we let you rest up for now.'

'And "for now's" a punch line, and the other punch line's that you go for me, which is okay, because I've looked better in my time and no Mexican man would ever want a Mexican girl who was gang-raped by a bunch of *negrito putos*, not that I've ever gone for

Mexican guys anyway. You know what's scary, Exley?'

'I told you, it's Ed.'

Inez rolled her eyes. 'I've got a creep brother named Eduardo, so I'll call you Exley. You know what's scary? What's scary is that I feel good today because this place is like a wonderful dream, but I know that it's got to get really bad again because what happened was a hundred times more real than this. Do you understand?'

'I understand. For now, though, you should try trusting me.'

'I don't trust you, Exley. Not "for now," maybe not ever.'

'I'm the only one you can trust.'

Inez flipped her veil down. 'I don't trust you because you don't hate them for what they did. Maybe you think you do, but you're helping your career out at the same time. Officer White, he hates them. He killed a man who hurt me. He's not as smart as you, so maybe I can trust him.'

Ed reached a hand out – Inez slid away. 'I want them dead. *Absolutamente muerto. Comprende*?'

'I *comprende.* Do you *comprende* that your beloved Officer White is a goddamned thug?'

'Only if you *comprende* that you're jealous of him. Look, oh God.'

Ray Dieterling, his father. Ed stood up; Inez stood up starry-eyed. Preston said, 'Raymond Dieterling, my son Edmund. Edmund, will you introduce the young lady?'

Inez, straight to Dieterling. 'Sir, it's a pleasure to meet you. I've been . . . oh, I'm just a big fan.'

Dieterling took her hand. 'Thank you, dear. And your name?'

'Inez Soto. I've seen . . . oh, I'm just a big fan.'

Dieterling smiled, sad – the girl's story front-page news. He turned to Ed. 'Sergeant, a pleasure.'

A good handshake. 'Sir, an honor. And congratulations.'

'Thank you, and I share those congratulations with your father. Preston, your son has an eye for the ladies, doesn't he?'

Preston laughed. 'Miss Soto, Edmund has rarely evinced such good taste.' He handed Ed a slip of paper. 'A Sheriff's officer called the house looking for you. I took the message.'

Ed palmed the paper; Inez blushed through her veil. Dieterling smiled. 'Miss Soto, did you enjoy Dream-a-Dreamland?'

'Yes, I did. Oh God, yes.'

'I'm glad, and I want you to know that you have a good job here anytime you wish. All you have to do is say the word.'

‘Thank you, thank you, sir’ – Inez wobbly. Ed steadied her, looked at his message: ‘Stensland on toot at Rain-check Room, 3871 W. Gage. Felony assembly, parole off. Alerted. Waiting for you – Keefer.’

The partners walked off bowing; Inez waved to them. Ed said, ‘I’ll take you back, but I’ve got a little stop to make first.’

They drove back to L.A., the radio going, Inez beating time on the dashboard. Ed played scenes: Stensland crushed with snappy one-liners. An hour to Raincheck Room – Ed parked behind a Sheriff’s unmarked. ‘I’ll only be a few minutes. You stay here, all right?’

Inez nodded. Pat Keefer left the bar; Ed got out, whistled.

Keefer came over; Ed steered him away from Inez. ‘Is he still there?’

‘Yeah, skunk drunk. I’d just about given up on you, you know.’

A dark alley by the bar. ‘Where’s the Parole man?’

‘He told me to take him, this is county jurisdiction. His pals took off, so there’s just him.’

Ed pointed to the alley. ‘Bring him out cuffed.’

Keefer went back in; Ed waited by the alleyway door. Shouts, thuds, Dick Stens muscled out: smelly, disheveled. Keefer pulled his head back; Ed hit him: upstairs, downstairs, flails until his arms gave out. Stens hit the ground retching; Ed kicked him in the face, stumbled away. Inez on the sidewalk. Her one-liner: ‘Officer White’s the thug?’

Chapter Twenty-seven

BUD FED THE woman coffee – get her out, go see Stens at the lock-up.

Carolyn something, she looked okay at the Orbit Lounge, morning light put ten years on her. He picked her up on a flash: he just got the word on Dick, if he couldn't find a woman he was going to find Exley and kill him. She wasn't bad in bed – but he had to think of Inez to charge up enthusiasm, it made him feel cheap, the odds on Inez ever doing it for love were about six trillion to one. He stopped thinking about her – the rest of the night was all bad talk and brandy.

Carolyn said, 'I think I should go.'

'I'll call you.'

The doorbell rang.

Bud walked Carolyn over. Across the screen: Dudley Smith and a West Valley dick – Joe DiCenzo.

Dudley smiled; DiCenzo nodded. Carolyn ducked out – like she knew they knew the score. Bud scoped his front room: the fold-out down, a bottle, two tumblers.

DiCenzo pointed to the bed. 'There's his alibi, and I didn't think he did it anyway.'

Bud shut the door. 'Did *what?* Boss, what is this?'

Dudley sighed. 'Lad, I'm afraid I'm the bearer of bad tidings. Last night a young lassie named Kathy Janeway was found in her motel room, raped and beaten to death. Your calling card was found in her purse. Sergeant DiCenzo took the squeal, knew you were a protégé of mine and called me. I visited the crime scene, found an envelope addressed to Miss Janeway, and recognized your rather unformed handwriting immediately. Explain with brevity, lad – Sergeant DiCenzo is heading the investigation and wants you eliminated as a suspect.'

A body shot – little Kathy sobbing. Bud got his lies straight. 'I was on the Cathcart background check and this hooker who worked for Cathcart told me the Janeway girl was Cathcart's last squeeze, but he didn't pimp her. I talked to the girl, but she didn't know nothing worth reporting. She told me the hooker was holding cash from Cathcart for her, but she wouldn't kick loose. I shook her down and mailed the money to the kid.'

DiCenzo shook his head. 'Do you routinely shake down hookers?'

Dudley sighed. 'Bud has a sentimental weakness for females, and I find his account plausible within the limitations of that limitation. Lad, who was this "hooker" you mentioned?'

'Cynthia Benavides, a.k.a. "Sinful Cindy."'

'Lad, you didn't include mention of her in any of the reports you've filed. Which have been rather threadbare, I might add.'

Lies: hold back on smut, Cathcart's pad tossed, the pimp who sold Kathy to Duke. 'I didn't think she was important stuff.'

'Lad, she is a tangential Nite Owl witness. And haven't I taught you to be thorough in your reports?'

Mad now – Kathy on a morgue slab. 'Yeah, you have.'

'And what precisely have you accomplished since that dinner meeting of ours – which is when you *should* have reported on Miss Janeway and Miss Benavides?'

'I'm still checking out Lunceford and Cathcart K.A.'s.'

'Lad, Lunceford's known associates are extraneous to this investigation. Have you learned of anything else on Cathcart?'

'No.'

Dudley to DiCenzo. 'Lad, are you satisfied that Bud isn't your man?'

DiCenzo pulled out a cigar. 'I'm satisfied. And I'm satisfied he ain't the smartest human being ever to breathe. White, toss me a bone. Who do you think did the girl?'

The red sedan: the motel, Cahuenga. 'I don't know.'

'A succinct answer. Joe, let me have a few minutes alone with my friend, would you please?'

DiCenzo walked out smoking; Dudley leaned against the door. 'Lad, you cannot shake down prostitutes for money to pay off underaged mistresses. I understand your sentimental attachment to women, and I know that it is an essential component of your policeman's persona, but such overinvolvement cannot be tolerated, and as of this moment you are off the Cathcart and Lunceford checks and back on the Darktown end of the case. Now, Chief Parker and I are convinced that the three Negroes in custody are our perpetrators, or, at the very most, another jigaboo gang is responsible. We still have no murder weapons and no shake on

Coates' car, and Ellis Loew wants more evidence for a grand jury presentation. Our fair Miss Soto will not talk, and I'm afraid we must urge her to take pentothal and endure a questioning session. Your job is to check files and question known Negro sex offenders. We need to find the men our unholy three let abuse Miss Soto, and I think the job is right up your alley. Will you do this for me?'

Big words – more body shots. 'Sure, Dud.'

'Good lad. Clock in and out at 77th Street Station, and make your reports more detailed.'

'Sure, Boss.'

Smith opened the door. 'I tendered that reprimand with much affection, lad. Do you know that?'

'Sure.'

'Grand. You are much in my thoughts, lad. Chief Parker has given me approval on a new containment measure, and I've already signed on Dick Carlisle and Mike Breuning. Once we close the Nite Owl, I'm going to ask you to join us.'

'That sounds good, Boss.'

'Grand. And lad? I'm sure you know that Dick Stensland was arrested and Ed Exley had a part in it. You are not to retaliate. Do you understand?'

The red sedan – call it a maybe.

Cathcart's pad tossed and wiped, his clothes prowled – ?????

Sinful Cindy: Duke's smut peddler pipe dream.

Feather Royko on Duke: 'Hopped up on some new biz.'

The Dukey shtick man trying to recruit B-girls. Ad Vice checked out: zero on their smut job. Trashcan Jack V., ace report padder, asked for a transfer to the Nite Owl – he said the job was from hunger. Russ Millard's last c.o.'s summary: 86 the gig – call it a wash.

He lied to Dudley and strolled on it.

If he'd ratted little Kathy to Juvie she'd be reading a movie mag somewhere.

THE PIMP WHO SOLD HER TO DUKE: 'THIS GUY MADE ME DO IT WITH GUYS.'

EXLEY EXLEY EXLEY EXLEY EXLEY EXLEY EXLEY –

Sinful Cindy's rap sheet – four known haunt whore bars listed. Her pad first – no Cindy. Hal's Nest, the Moonmist Lounge, the Firefly

Room, the Cinnabar at the Roosevelt – no Cindy. An old Vice cop's story: whores congregating at Tiny Naylor's Drive-in – the carhops scouted tricks for them. Over to Tiny's, Cindy's De Soto outside – a food tray hooked to the door.

Bud parked beside her. Cindy saw him, dumped her tray, rolled up her window. Wham – the De Soto in reverse. Bud sprinted, popped the hood, yanked the distributor – the car stalled dead.

Cindy rolled down her window. 'You stole my money! You ruined my lunch!'

Bud dropped a five on her lap. 'Lunch is on me.'

'Mister big shot! Mister big spender!'

'Kathy Janeway got raped and beaten to death. Give on the guy who used to pimp her, give on her tricks.'

Cindy put her head on the wheel. The horn beeped; she came back up pale, no tears. 'Dwight Gilette. He's some kind of colored guy passing. I don't know nothing about her old tricks.'

'Gilette drive a red car?'

'I don't know.'

'You got an address?'

'I heard he lives in this tract in Eagle Rock. It's white only, so he plays it that way. But I know he didn't kill her.'

'How do you figure?'

'He's a swish. He's careful about his hands, and he'd never put it in a girl.'

'Anything else?'

'He carried a knife. His girls call him "Blue Blade" 'cause his name's Gilette.'

'You don't seem surprised Kathy got it that way.'

Cindy touched her eyes – bone dry. 'She was born for it. Dukey softened her up, so she quit hating men. A few more years and she would've learned. Shit, I should have treated her better.'

'Yeah, me too.'

Eagle Rock, an R&I check: Dwight Gilette, a.k.a. 'Blade,' a.k.a. 'Blue Blade,' 3245 Hibiscus, Eagle's Aerie Housing Development. Six suborning arrests, no convictions, listed as a male Caucasian – if he was a shine he was passing with style. Bud found the tract, the street: cozy stucco cubes, Hibiscus a prime spot: a smoggy L.A. view.

3245: peach paint job, steel flamingos on the lawn, a blue sedan in the driveway. Bud walked up, pushed the buzzer – jingly chimes sounded.

A high-yellow guy opened up. Thirtyish, short, plump, slacks and a silk shirt with a Mr. B. collar. ‘I heard on the radio, so I thought you fellows might be coming by. The radio said midnight, and I have an alibi. He lives a block away and I can have him here toot-sweet. Kathy was a sweet kid and I don’t know who’d do a thing like that. And don’t you fellows usually come in pairs?’

‘You finished?’

‘No. My alibi is my lawyer, he still lives a block away and he’s very well placed in the American Civil Liberties Union.’

Bud shouldered him into the house, whistled.

Fruit heaven: deep pile rugs, Greek god statues. Male nudes on the wall – paint on velvet flocking. Bud said, ‘Cute.’

Gilette pointed to the phone. ‘Two seconds or I call my attorney.’

Quick throw. ‘Duke Cathcart. You sold Kathy to him, right?’

‘Kathy was headstrong, Duke made me an offer. Duke’s dead in that awful Nite Owl thing, so don’t tell me you suspect me of that.’

No hink. ‘I heard Duke was pushing smut. You hear that?’

‘Smut is déclassé and the answer is no.’

More no hink. ‘Give me some trade talk on Duke. What’ve you heard?’

Gilette stood one hip jutting. ‘I heard a guy was asking around about Duke, coming on like Duke, maybe thinking about crashing his stable, not that he had much of a stable left, I’ve heard. Now will you please leave me alone before I call my friend?’

The phone rang – Gilette walked to the kitchen, grabbed an extension. Bud walked in slow. Nice stuff: Frigidaire, coil burner stove on full blast: eggs, boiling water, stew.

Gilette made kissy sounds, hung up. ‘Are *you* still here?’

‘Nice pad, Dwight. Business must be good.’

‘Business is excellent, thank you very much.’

‘Good. I need skinny on Kathy’s old tricks, so cough up your whore book.’

Gilette hit a switch above the sink. A motor growled; he shoved scrapings down a garbage hole. Bud flipped the switch up. ‘Your whore book.’

‘No, *nein, nyet* and never.’

Bud hooked him to the gut. Gilette rolled with it, grabbed a knife, swung. Bud sidestepped, kicked at his balls. Gilette doubled up; Bud hit the garbage switch. The motor *scree'd*; Bud jammed the queer's knife hand down the chute.

SCREEEE – the sink shot back blood, bone. Bud yanked the hand out minus fingers – SCREEEEE fifty times louder. Stumps to the burner coils, stumps to the icebox sizzling. 'GIVE ME THE FUCKING WHORE BOOK' – through a SCREEEEEEEE echo chamber.

Gilette, eyes rolling back. 'Drawer . . . by TV . . . ambulance.'

Bud dropped him, ran to the living room. Empty drawers, back to the kitchen – Gilette on the floor eating paper.

Choke hold: Gilette spat out a half-chewed page. Bud picked up the wad, stumbled outside, burned flesh making him gag. He smoothed the paper out: names, phone numbers – smeared, two legible: Lynn Bracken, Pierce Patchett.

Chapter Twenty-eight

JACK AT HIS desk, counting lies.

At work: a string of dead-end reports; legit zeros from the other squad guys totaled luck: Millard wanted to dump the smut job. Count duty no-shows as lies – he'd spent a full day chasing names – matches to the cars in Bel Air. Four names tagged; no luck at a modeling agency specializing in movie star lookalikes – none of the girls came close to his beauties. Put the names aside, chalk up the day as a wash – Sid Hudgens made pursuit a dead issue. He just wanted to see the women again – add that one to his lies to Karen.

They spent the morning at her beach place. Karen wanted to make love; he put her off with bullshit: he was distracted, he'd asked to be detached to the Nite Owl because justice was so important. Karen tried to undress him; he told her he had a sprained back; he didn't say he wasn't interested because all he wanted to do was use her, make her do it with other women, recreate fuck book scenarios. His biggest lie: he didn't tell her that he'd finally stepped in shit that didn't turn to clover, that he'd played an angle that played him back to the gas chamber door, that his home-to-Narco ticket read adiós, lovebirds – because she'd trace 10/24/47 to all his other lies and his carefully constructed nice-guy Big V would go down in flames.

He didn't tell her he was terrified. She didn't sense it – his front was still strong.

Other fronts holding – dumb luck.

Sid hadn't called, his monthly *Hush-Hush* came on schedule – no note, some 'sinuendo' on Max Peltz and teenage poon – nothing scary. He checked the report on the Fleur-de-Lis shoot-out: bright boy Ed Exley caught the squeal. Exley baffled: no make on the drop-pad tenants, the shelves cleaned out – only some bondage shit left – make the rest of the filth down the hidey-hole. Make Lamar Hinton for the shots – a free ride – the Big V was off the case, the Big V had a new mission.

Sid Hudgens knew Pierce Patchett and Fleur-de-Lis; Sid Hudgens knew the Malibu Rendezvous. Sid had a load of private dirt files stashed. The Big V's job: find *his* file, destroy it.

Jack checked his plate list, names matched to DMV pics.

Seth David Krugliak, the owner of the Bel Air manse – fat, oily, a movie biz lawyer. Pierce Morehouse Patchett, Fleur-de-Lis Boss – Mr. Debonair. Charles Walker Champlain, investment banker – shaved head, goatee. Lynn Margaret Bracken, age twenty-nine – Veronica Lake. No criminal records.

'Hello, lad.'

Jack swiveled around. 'Dud, how are you? What brings you to Ad Vice?'

'A confab with Russ Millard, my colleague on the Nite Owl now. And on that topic, I heard you want in.'

'You heard right. Can you swing it?'

Smith passed him a mimeo sheet. 'I already have, lad. You're to join in the search for Coates' car. Every garage within the radius on this page is to be checked – with or without the owner's consent. You're to begin immediately.'

A map carbon: southside L.A. in street grids. 'Lad, I need a personal favor.'

'Name it.'

'I want you to keep a tail on Bud White. He's gotten personally involved in the unfortunate killing of a child prostitute, and I need him stable. Will you stick to him nights, great tailer that you are?'

Bad Bud – always a sucker for strays. 'Sure, Dud. Where's he working out of?'

'77th Street Station. He's been assigned to roust jigaboos with sex offender records. He's on daywatch at 77th, and you'll be clocking in and out there as well.'

'Dud, you're a lifesaver.'

'Would you care to elaborate on that, lad?'

'No.'

Chapter Twenty-nine

MEMO:

‘From: Chief Parker. To: Dep. Chief Green, Capt. R. Millard, Lt. D. Smith, Sgt. E. Exley. Conference: Chief’s Office, 4:00 P.M., 4/23/53. Topic: Questioning of witness Inez Soto.’ His father’s note: ‘She’s wonderful and Ray Dieterling’s much taken with her. But she’s a material witness and a Mexican, and I advise you not to get too attached to her. And under no circumstances should you shack up with her. Cohabitation is against departmental regs and being with a Mexican woman could seriously stall your career.’

Parker kicked things off. ‘Ed, the Nite Owl case is narrowing down to the Negroes in custody or some other colored gang. Now, word has it that you’ve gotten close to the Soto girl. Lieutenant Smith and I deem it imperative that she undergo questioning in order to clear up the time element, alibi or not alibi the three in custody, and identify the other men who assaulted her. We think pentothal is the best way to get results, and pentothal works best when a subject is at ease. We want you to convince Miss Soto to cooperate. She probably trusts you, so you’ll have credibility.’

Inez post-Stensland: shell-shocked, hard-pressed to move to Arrowhead. ‘Sir, I think all our evidence so far is circumstantial. I think we should get other corroboration before I approach Miss Soto, and I want to try questioning Coates, Jones and Fontaine again.’

Smith laughed. ‘Lad, they refused to talk to you the other day, and now they have a pinko public defender who’s advising them to stay mute. Ellis Loew wants a grand jury presentation – Nite Owl and Little Lindbergh – and you can facilitate it. Kid gloves have gotten us nowhere with our fair Miss Soto, and it’s time we quit coddling her.’

Russ Millard: ‘Lieutenant, I agree with Sergeant Exley. If we keep pressing on the southside, we’ll turn rape witnesses and maybe find Coates’ car and the murder weapons. My instincts tell me the girl’s recollections of that night might be too muddled to do us any good, and if we make her remember, it might wreck her life more than it’s been wrecked already. Can you picture Ellis Loew badgering her in front of the grand jury? Not very pretty, is it?'

Smith laughed – straight at Millard. 'Captain, you politicked very hard to share this command with me, and now you advance a sob sister sensibility. This is a brutal mass murder that requires a swift and hard resolution, not a sorority party. And Ellis Loew is a brilliant attorney and a compassionate man. I'm sure he would handle Miss Soto with care.'

Millard swallowed a pill, chased it with water. 'Ellis Loew is a headline-grubbing buffoon, not a policeman, and he should not be directing the thrust of this investigation.'

'Fair Captain, I deem that comment near seditious in its – '

Parker raised a hand. 'Gentlemen, enough. Thad, will you take Captain Millard and Lieutenant Smith down the hall and buy them coffee while I talk to the sergeant here?'

Green ushered the two outside. Parker said, 'Ed, Dudley's right.'

Ed kept quiet. Parker pointed to a stack of newspapers. 'The press and the public demand justice. We'll look very bad if we don't clear this up soon.'

'Sir, I know.'

'Do you care about the girl?'

'Yes.'

'You know that sooner or later she'll have to cooperate?'

'Sir, don't underestimate her. She's steel inside.'

Parker smiled. 'Then let's see how much steel you possess. Convince her to cooperate, and if we get enough corroboration to convince Ellis Loew he's got a show-stopper grand jury case, I'll jump you on the promotion list. You'll be a detective lieutenant immediately.'

'And a command?'

'Arnie Reddin retires next month. I'll give you the Hollywood detective squad.'

Ed tingled.

'Ed, you're thirty-one. Your father didn't make lieutenant until he was thirty-three.'

'I'll do it.'

Chapter Thirty

PERVERT PATROL:

Cleotis Johnson, registered sex offender, pastor of the New Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church of Zion, had an alibi for the night Inez Soto was kidnapped: he was in the 77th Street drunk tank. Davis Walter Bush, registered sex offender, alibied up by a half dozen witnesses: they were engaged in an all-night crap game in the rec room of the New Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church of Zion. Fleming Peter Hanley, registered sex offender, spent that night at Central Receiving: a drag queen bit his dick; a team of emergency room docs labored to save the organ so he could notch up a few more convictions for sodomy with mayhem.

Pervert patrol, a call to Eagle Rock Hospital: Dwight Gilette made it there. A skate: the swish didn't die on him.

Four more RSOs alibied; a run by the Hall of Justice Jail. Stens flying high on raisinjack – a jailer fixed him a toilet brew cocktail. Rants: Ed Exley, Danny Duck porking Ellis Loew.

Home, a shower, DMV checks: Pierce Patchett, Lynn Bracken. Calls – a pal working Internal Affairs, West Valley Station. Good results: no Gilette complaint, three men on the Kathy snuff.

Another shower – he could still smell the day on himself.

Bud drove to Brentwood: squeeze Pierce Morehouse Patchett, no criminal record – strange for a name in a pimp's whore book. 1184 Gretna Green, a big Spanish mansion: all pink, lots of tile.

He parked, walked up. Porch lights came on: soft focus on a man in a chair. He matched Patchett's DMV stats, looked shitloads younger than his DOB. 'Are you a police officer?'

His cuffs were hooked on his belt. 'Yeah. Are you Pierce Patchett?'

'I am. Are you soliciting for police charities? The last time, you people called at my office.'

Pinned eyes – maybe zoned on some kind of hop. Body-builder muscles, a tight shirt to show them off. An easy voice – he came on like he always sat in the dark waiting for cops to call. 'I'm a

Homicide detective.'

'Oh? Who was killed and why do you think I can help you?'

'A girl named Kathy Janeway.'

'That's only half an answer, Mr. –?'

'It's Officer White.'

'Mr. White, then. Again, why do you think I can help you?'

Bud pulled up a chair. 'Did you know Kathy Janeway?'

'No, I did not. Did she claim to know me?'

'No. Where were you last night at midnight?'

'I was here, hosting a party. If push comes to shove, which I hope it won't, I'll supply you with a guest list. Why do you – '

Bud cut in: 'Delbert "Duke" Cathcart.'

Patchett sighed. 'I don't know him either. Mr. White – '

'Dwight Gilette, Lynn Bracken.'

A big smile. 'Yes, I know those people.'

'Yeah? Then keep going.'

'Now let me interrupt. Did one of them give you my name?'

'I shook down Gilette for his whore book. He tried to chew up the page that had your name and this Bracken woman's name on it. Patchett, why's a shit pimp have your phone number?'

Patchett leaned forward. 'Do you care about criminal matters peripheral to the Janeway killing?'

'No.'

'Then you wouldn't feel obliged to report them.'

The fucker had style. 'That's right.'

'Then listen closely, because I'll only say it once, and if it gets repeated I'll deny it. I run call girls. Lynn Bracken is one of them. I bought Lynn from Gilette a few years ago, and if Gilette tried to chew up my name it was because he knows that I hate and fear the police, and he thought – correctly – that I would squash him like a bug if I thought he put the police on to me. Now, I treat my girls very well. I have grown daughters myself, and I lost a baby girl to crib death. I do not like the thought of women being hurt and I frankly have a great deal of money to indulge my fancies. Did this Kathy Janeway girl die badly?'

Beaten to death, semen in the mouth, rectum, vagina. 'Yeah, very bad.'

'Then find her killer, Mr. White. Succeed, and I'll give you a handsome reward. If that goes against your moral grain, I'll donate the money to a police charity.'

‘Thanks, but no thanks.’

‘Against your code?’

‘I don’t have one. Tell me about Lynn Bracken. She street?’

‘No, call. Gilette was ruining her with bad clients. *I’m* very selective who my girls truck with, by the way.’

‘So you bought her off Gilette.’

‘That’s correct.’

‘Why?’

Patchett smiled. ‘Lynn looks very much like the actress Veronica Lake, and I needed her to fill out my little studio.’

‘What “little studio”?’

Patchett shook his head. ‘No. I admire your intrusive style and I sense you’re on your best behavior, but that’s all I’ll give you. I’ve cooperated, and if you persist I’ll meet you with my attorney. Now, would you like Lynn Bracken’s address? I doubt that she knows anything about the late Miss Janeway, but if you like I’ll call her and tell her to cooperate.’

Bud pointed to the house. ‘I got her address. You get this address running call girls?’

‘I’m a financier. I have an advanced degree in chemistry, I worked as a pharmacist for several years and invested wisely. “Entrepreneur” sums me up best, I think. And don’t tweak me with criminal slang, Mr. White. Don’t make me regret I leveled with you.’

Bud scoped him. Two to one he *was* leveling, thought cops were bugs that leveling worked with sometimes. ‘Okay, then I’ll wrap it up.’

‘Please do.’

Notebook out. ‘You said Gilette was pimping Lynn Bracken, right?’

‘I dislike the word “pimp,” but yes.’

‘Okay, were any of your other girls street-pimped, call-pimped?’

‘No, all my girls are either models or girls that I saved from general Hollywood heartbreak.’

Switcheroo. ‘You don’t read the papers too good, right?’

‘Correct. I try to avoid bad news.’

‘But you heard of the Nite Owl Massacre.’

‘Yes, because I do not dwell in a cave.’

‘That guy Duke Cathcart was one of the victims. He was a pimp, and lately a guy’s been asking around about him, trying to get girls to do call jobs for him. Now Gilette street-pimped Kathy Janeway, and you know him. I'm thinking maybe you might do business with some other people who might give me a line on this guy.'

Patchett crossed his legs, stretched. 'So you think "this guy" might have killed Kathy Janeway?'

'No, I don't think that.'

'Or you think he's behind that Nite Owl thing. I thought Negro youths were supposed to be the killers. What crime are you investigating, Mr. White?'

Bud gripped the chair – fabric ripped. Patchett put his hands up, palms out. 'The answer to your questions is no. Dwight Gilette is the only person of that breed I've ever dealt with. Low-level prostitution is not my field of expertise.'

'What about B&E?'

'B and E?'

'Breaking and entering. Cathcart's apartment was tossed, and the walls were wiped.'

Patchett shrugged. 'Mr. White, you're speaking in Sanskrit now. I simply don't know what you're talking about.'

'Yeah? Then what about smut? You know Gilette, Gilette sold you Lynn Bracken, Gilette sold Kathy Janeway to Cathcart. Cathcart was supposed to be starting up a smut biz.'

'Smut' buzzed him – little eye flickers. Bud said, 'Ring a bell?'

Patchett picked up a glass, swirled ice cubes. 'No bells, and your questions are getting further and further afield. Your approach has been novel, so I've tolerated it. But you're wearing me thin and I'm beginning to think that your motives for being here are quite muddled.'

Bud stood up pissed, no handle on the man. Patchett said, 'One of your tangents is personal with you, isn't it?'

'Yeah.'

'If it's the Janeway girl, I meant what I said. I may suborn women into illicit activities, but they're handsomely compensated, I treat them very well and make sure the men they deal with show them every due respect. Good night, Mr. White.'

Thoughts for the ride: how did Patchett get his number so quick, did his evidence suppression bit backfire – Dudley suspicious, wise to how far he'd go to hurt Exley. Lynn Bracken lived on Nottingham off Los Feliz; he found the address easy – a modern-style triplex. Colored lights beamed out the windows – he looked before he rang.

Red, blue, yellow – figures cut through the beams. Bud watched his very own stag show.

A Veronica Lake dead ringer, nude on her tiptoes: slender, full-breasted. Blond – hair in a perfect pageboy cut. A man moving inside her, straining, crouching for the fit.

Bud watched; street sounds faded. He blotted out the man, studied the woman: every inch of her body in every shade of light. He drove home tunnel-vision – nothing but her.

Inez Soto on his doorstep.

Bud walked over. She said, ‘I was at Exley’s place in Lake Arrowhead. He said there was no strings, then he showed up and told me I had to take this drug to make me remember. I told him no. Did you know you’re the only Wendell White in the Central Directory?’

Bud straightened her hat, tucked a loose piece of veil under the crown. ‘How’d you get down here?’

‘I took a cab. A hundred of Exley’s dollars, so at least he’s good for something. Officer White, I don’t want to remember.’

‘Sweetie, you already do. Come on, I’ll fix you up with a place.’

‘I want to stay with you.’

‘All I’ve got’s a fold-out.’

‘Fine by me. I figure there has to be a first time again.’

‘Give it a rest and get yourself a college boy.’

Inez stood up. ‘I was starting to trust him.’

Bud opened the door. The first thing he saw was the bed – trashed from Carolyn or whatever her name was. Inez plopped down on it – seconds later she was sleeping. Bud tucked her in, stretched out in the hall with his suitcoat for a pillow. Sleep came slow – his long strange day kept replaying. He went out seeing Lynn Bracken; toward dawn he stirred and found Inez curled up next to him.

He let her stay.

Chapter Thirty-one

HE KNEW HE was dreaming, knew he couldn't stop. He kept flinching with the replay.

Inez at the cabin: 'Coward,' 'Opportunist,' 'Using me to further your career.' Her out-the-door salvo: 'Officer White's ten times the man you are, with half the brains and no big-shot daddy.' He let her go, then chased: back to L.A., the Soto family shack. Three pachuco brothers came on strong; old man Soto supplied an epitaph: 'I don't have that daughter no more.'

The phone rang. Ed rolled over, grabbed it. 'Exley.'

'It's Bob Gallaudet. Congratulate me.'

Ed pushed his dream away. 'Why?'

'I passed the bar exam, making me both an attorney and a D.A.'s Bureau investigator. Aren't you impressed?'

'Congratulations, and you didn't call at 8:00 A.M. to tell me that.'

'Right you are, so listen close. Last night a lawyer named Jake Kellerman called Ellis Loew. He's representing two witnesses, brothers, who say they've got a viable Duke Cathcart connection to Mickey Cohen. They say they can clear the Nite Owl. They've got some outstanding L.A. warrants for pushing Benzedrine, and Ellis is giving them immunity on that, plus possible immunity on any conspiracy charges that might stem from their connection to the Nite Owl. We're having a meeting at the Mirimar Hotel in an hour – the brothers and Kellerman, you, me, Loew and Russ Millard. Dudley S. won't be there. Thad Green's orders – he thinks Millard's the better man for this.'

Ed swung out of bed. 'So who are these brothers?'

'Peter and Baxter Englekling. Heard of them?'

'No. Is this an interrogation?'

Gallaudet laughed. 'Wouldn't you love that. No, it's Kellerman reads a prepared statement, we hobknob with Loew over whether to let them turn state's and take it from there. I'll brief you. Mirimar parking lot in forty-five minutes?'

'I'll be there.'

Forty-five on the button. Gallaudet met him in the lobby – no handshake, straight to it. ‘Want to hear what we’ve got?’

‘Go.’

They talked walking. ‘They’re waiting for us, a steno included, and what we’ve got are Pete and Bax Englekling, age thirty-six, age thirty-two, San Bernardino-based . . . quasi-hoods, I guess you’d call them. They both did Youth Authority time for pushing maryjane back in the early ’40s, and except for the bennie pushing warrants, they’ve stayed clean. They own a legit printshop up in San Berdoo, they’re what you’d call genius fix-it guys, and their late father was a real piece of work. Get this: he was a college chemistry teacher and some kind of pioneering pharmaceuticalist who developed early antipsychotic drugs. Impressive, right? Now get this: Pops, who kicked off in the summer of ’50, developed dope compounds for the old mobs – and Mickey C. was his protector back in his bodyguard days.’

‘This won’t be dull. But do *you* make Cohen for the Nite Owl? He’s in prison, for one thing.’

‘Exley, I make those colored guys in custody. Gangsters *never* kill innocent citizens. But frankly, Loew likes the idea of a mob angle. Come on, they’re waiting.’

Into suite 309, the meeting in a small living room. One long table – Loew and Millard across from three men: a middle-aged lawyer, near twins in overalls – thinning hair, beady eyes, bad teeth. A steno by the bedroom door, perched with her machine set to go.

Gallaudet carried chairs over. Ed nodded around, sat by Millard. The lawyer checked papers; the brothers lit cigarettes. Loew said, ‘For the official record, it is 8:53 A.M., April 24, 1953. Present are myself, Ellis Loew, district attorney for the City of Los Angeles, Sergeant Bob Gallaudet of the D.A.’s Bureau, Captain Russ Millard and Sergeant Ed Exley of the Los Angeles Police Department. Jacob Kellerman represents Peter and Baxter Englekling, potential prosecution witnesses in the matter of the multiple homicides perpetrated at the Nite Owl Coffee Shop on April 14 of this year. Mr. Kellerman will read a prepared statement given to him by his clients, they will initial the stenographer’s transcript. As a courtesy for this voluntary statement, the District Attorney’s Office is dismissing felony warrant number 16114, dated June 8, 1951, against Peter and Baxter Englekling. Should this statement result in the arrests of the perpetrators of the aforementioned multiple homicides, Peter and Baxter Englekling will be granted immunity from prosecution in all matters pertaining to the said, including accessory, conspiracy and all collateral felonies and misdemeanors. Mr. Kellerman, do your clients understand the aforesaid?'

'Yes, Mr. Loew, they do.'

'Do they understand that they may be asked to submit to questioning after their statement has been read?'

'They do.'

'Read the statement, Counselor.'

Kellerman put on bifocals. 'I've eliminated Peter and Baxter's more colorful colloquialisms and cleaned up their language and syntax, please bear that in mind.'

Loew tugged at his vest. 'We're capable of discerning that. Please continue.'

Kellerman read: 'We, Peter and Baxter Englekling, do swear that this statement is entirely true. In late March of this year, approximately three weeks before the Nite Owl killings, we were approached at our legitimate business, the Speedy King Printshop in San Bernardino. The man who approached us was one Delbert "Duke" Cathcart, who said that he had gotten our names from "Mr. XY," an acquaintance from our youth camp sentence days. Mr. XY had informed Cathcart that we ran a printshop which featured a high-speed offset press of our own design, which was true. Mr. XY had also told Cathcart that we were always interested in quote turning a quick buck unquote, which was also true.'

Chuckles. Ed wrote, 'Vict. Susan Lefferts from S. Berdoo – connection?' Loew said, 'Continue, Mr. Kellerman. We're all capable of laughing and thinking at the same time.'

Kellerman: 'Cathcart showed us photographs of people engaged in explicit sexual activities, some of them homosexual in nature. Some of the photographs were quote arty-farty unquote. I.E.: people in colorful costumes and animated red ink embossed on some of the snapshots. Cathcart said that he heard we could manufacture high-quality magazine-type books very fast, and we said this was true. Cathcart also stated that a number of magazine-type books had already been manufactured, using the obscene photographs, and quoted us the cost involved. We knew we could make the books at one eighth of that cost.'

Ed passed Millard a note: 'Isn't Ad Vice working a pornography job?' The brothers smirked; Loew and Gallaudet whispered. Millard passed a note back: ‘Yes – no leads from a 4 man team. A cold trail tracking the (“strange costumed” per the statement) books – we’re dropping it. Also, no field reports submitted so far link Cathcart to pornography.’

Kellerman sipped water. ‘Cathcart then told us that he heard our late father, Franz “Doc” Englekling, was friends with Meyer Harris “Mickey” Cohen, Los Angeles mobster currently incarcerated at McNeil Island Penitentiary. We said this was true. Cathcart then made his basic proposal. He said that distribution of the pornographic books would have to be quote very close unquote, because the quote strange cats unquote who took the photographs and did the pasteup work seemed like they had lots to hide. He did not elaborate on this further. He said that he had access to a network of quote rich perverts unquote who would pay large sums for the books and proposed that we could also manufacture quote regular fuck-suck shit unquote, that could be distributed in large quantities. Cathcart claimed to have access to quote pervert mailing list unquote, quote junkies and whores unquote to serve as models, and access to quote classy call girls unquote, who might pose for a lark if their quote crazy sugar daddyo unquote agreed. Again, Cathcart did not elaborate on any of his claims, nor did he mention specific names or locations.’

Kellerman flipped pages. ‘Cathcart told us that he would be the procurer, talent scout and middleman. We would be the manufacturers of the books. We were also to visit Mickey Cohen at McNeil Island and get him to release funds to get the business started. We were also to solicit his advice on starting a distribution system. In exchange for the above Cohen would be given a quote bonaroo unquote percentage cut.’

Ed passed a note: ‘No follow-up names – it’s too convenient.’ Millard whispered, ‘And the Nite Owl is not Mickey’s style.’ Bax Englekling chuckled; Pete poked his ears with a pencil. Kellerman read: ‘We visited Mickey Cohen in his cell at McNeil, approximately two weeks before the Nite Owl killings. We proposed the idea to him. He refused to help and became very angry when we told him the idea was conceived by Duke Cathcart, whom he referred to as quote a notorious statch rape-o shitbird unquote. In conclusion, we believe that gunmen employed by Mickey Cohen perpetrated the Nite Owl Massacre, a kill-six-to-get-one ruse undertaken out of his hatred for Duke Cathcart. Another possibility is that Cohen talked up Cathcart's proposed scheme on the prison yard and word got out to Cohen rival Jack "The Enforcer" Whalen, who, always looking for new rackets to crash, assassinated Cathcart and five innocent bystanders as subterfuge. We believe that if the killings were the result of pornography intrigue, we too might become victims. We swear that this deposition is true and not rendered under physical or mental duress.'

The brothers clapped. Kellerman said, 'My clients welcome questions.'

Loew pointed to the bedroom. 'After I talk to my colleagues.'

They walked in; Loew closed the door. 'Conclusions. Bob, you first.'

Gallaudet lit a cigarette. 'Mickey Cohen, despite his many faults, does not murder people out of pique, and Jack Whalen's only interested in gambling rackets. I believe their story, but everything we've dug up on Cathcart makes him look like a pathetic chump who couldn't get something this big going. I say it's tangent stuff at best. I still make the boogies for the job.'

'I agree. Captain, your opinion.'

Millard said, 'I like one possible scenario – with major reservations. *Maybe* Cohen talked up the job on the yard at McNeil, word got to the outside and somebody took it from there. *But* – if this deal is smut-connected, then the Englekling boys would either have been killed or approached by now. I've been running a stag book investigation out of Ad Vice for two weeks and my squad has heard nothing on this and hit one brick wall after another. I think Ed and Bob should talk to Whalen, then fly up to McNeil and talk to Mickey. I'll question those lowlifes in the next room, and I'll talk to my Ad Vice men. I've read every field report filed by every man on the Nite Owl, and there is not one mention of pornography. I think Bob's right. It's a tangent we're dealing with.'

'Agreed. Bob, you and Exley talk to Cohen and Whalen. Captain, did you have capable men on your job?'

Millard smiled. 'Three capable men and Trashcan Jack Vincennes. No offense, Ellis. I know he's involved with your wife's sister.'

Loew flushed. 'Exley, do you have anything to add?'

'Bob and the captain covered my points, but there's two things I want to mention. One, Susan Lefferts was from San Berdoo. Two, if it's not the Negroes in custody or another colored gang, then the car by the Nite Owl was a plant and we are dealing with one huge conspiracy.'

'I think we have our killers. And on that note, are you making progress with Miss Soto?'

'I'm working at it.'

'Work harder. Good efforts are for schoolboys, results are what counts. Go to it, gentlemen.'

Ed drove to his apartment – a change of clothes for the run to McNeil. He found a note on the door.

> Exley –
>
> I still think you're everything I said you were, but I called the house and talked to my sister and she said you came by and were obviously concerned about my welfare, so I'm thawing a little bit. You've been nice to me (when you weren't covering angles or beating up people) and maybe I'm an opportunist myself and I'm just using you for shelter until I get better and can accept Mr. Dieterling's offer, so since I live in a glass house I shouldn't throw stones at you. That's as close to an apology as I'm going to give you and I will continue to refuse to cooperate. Get the picture? Is Mr. Dieterling for real about a job at Dream-a-Dreamland? I'm going shopping today with the rest of the money you gave me. Keeping busy makes me think about it less. I'll come by tonight. Leave a light burning.
>
> Inez

Ed changed and taped his spare key to the door. He left a light burning.

Chapter Thirty-two

JACK IN HIS car, waiting to tail Bud White. Mangled hands, fruit-caked clothes – a shift breaking down garage doors, high-spirited darkies japping the search teams – rooftop hit-and-runs. No luck on Coates' Merc; Millard's bomb still exploding, lucky he heard by phone – he would have shit his pants otherwise.

'Vincennes, two witnesses have contacted Ellis Loew. They said Duke Cathcart was involved in some kind of unrealized scheme to push that smut we've been chasing. My guess is that it doesn't connect to the Nite Owl, but have you come up with anything?'

He said, 'No.' He asked if the other guys on the squad hit pay dirt. Millard said, 'No.'

He didn't tell him his reports were all bullshit. He didn't tell him he didn't care if the smut gig and the Nite Owl were doubled up from here to Mars. He didn't tell him he wouldn't rest easy until he had Sid Hudgens' file in his hand and the niggers sucked gas – guilty or not.

Eyes on the bullpen back door: blues hauling in sex geeks. Bud White inside – rubber hose work. He blew his tail last night – Dudley was pissed. Tonight he'd stick close, then hit Hudgens: get the Malibu Rendezvous wiped.

White walked out. Good light: Jack saw blood on his shirt. He hit the ignition, waited.

Chapter Thirty-three

NO COLORED LIGHTS – white light behind closed curtains. Bud pushed the buzzer.

The door opened – backlight on Lynn Bracken. ‘Yes? Are you the policeman Pierce told me about?’

‘That’s right. Did Patchett tell you what it was about?’

She held the door open. ‘He said you weren’t quite sure yourself, and he said I should be candid and cooperate with you.’

‘You do everything he tells you?’

‘Yes, I do.’

Bud walked in. Lynn said, ‘The paintings are real and I’m a prostitute. I’ve never heard of Kathy what’s-her-name, and Dwight Gilette would never sexually abuse a female. If he were going to kill one, he would have used a knife. I have heard of that man Duke Cathcart, essentially that he was a loser with a soft spot for his girls. And that’s all the news that’s fit to print.’

‘You finished?’

‘No. I have no information on Dwight’s other girls, and all I know about that Nite Owl thing is what I read in the papers. Satisfied?’

Bud almost laughed. ‘You and Patchett had *some* talk. Did he call you last night?’

‘No, this morning. Why?’

‘Never mind.’

‘It’s Officer White, isn’t it?’

‘It’s Bud.’

Lynn laughed. ‘*Bud*, do you believe what Pierce and I have told you?’

‘Yeah, pretty much.’

‘And you know why we’re humoring you.’

‘You use words like that, you might make me mad.’

‘Yes. But you know.’

‘Yeah, I know. Patchett’s running whores, maybe other stuff on the side. You don’t want me to report you on it.’

‘That’s right. Our motives are selfish, so we’re cooperating.’

‘You want some advice, Miss Bracken?’

‘It’s Lynn.’

‘Miss Bracken, here’s my advice. Keep cooperating and don’t fucking ever try to bribe me or threaten me or I’ll have you and Patchett in shit up to your ears.’

Lynn smiled. Bud caught it – Veronica Lake in some turkey he saw, Alan Ladd comes home from the war to find his bitch wife snuffed. ‘Do you want a drink, *Bud*?’

‘Yeah, plain scotch.’

Lynn walked to the kitchen, came back with two short ones. ‘Are they making progress on the girl’s killing?’

Bud knocked his back. ‘There’s three men on it. It’s a sex job, so they’ll round up all the usual perverts. They’ll give it a decent shot for a couple of weeks, then let it go.’

‘But you won’t let it go.’

‘Maybe, maybe not.’

‘Why are you so concerned?’

‘Old stuff.’

‘Old personal stuff?’

‘Yeah.’

Lynn sipped her drink. ‘Just asking. And what about the Nite Owl thing?’

‘That’s coming down to these nig – colored guys we arrested. It’s a big fucking mess.’

‘You say “fuck” a lot.’

‘You fuck for money.’

‘There’s blood on your shirt. Is that an integral part of your job?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Do you enjoy it?’

‘When they deserve it.’

‘Meaning men who hurt women.’

‘Bright girl.’

‘Did they deserve it today?’

‘No.’

‘But you did it anyway.’

‘Yeah, just like the half dozen guys you screwed today.’

Lynn laughed. ‘Actually, it was two. Off the record, did you beat up Dwight Gilette?’

‘Off the record, I stuck his hand down a garbage disposal.’

No gasp, no double take. ‘Did you enjoy it?’

‘Well . . . no.’

Lynn coughed. ‘I’m being a bad hostess. Would you like to sit down?’

Bud sat on the sofa; Lynn sat an arm’s length over. ‘Homicide detectives are different. You’re the first man I’ve met in five years who didn’t tell me I look like Veronica Lake inside of a minute.’

‘You look better than Veronica Lake.’

Lynn lit a cigarette. ‘Thank you. I won’t tell your lady friend you said that.’

‘How do you know I got a lady friend?’

‘Your jacket is a mess and. reeks of perfume.’

‘You’re wrong. This is me taking a pass on a pass.’

‘Which you . . .’

‘Yeah, which I seldom fucking do. Keep cooperating, Miss Bracken. Tell me about Pierce Patchett and this racket of his.’

‘Off the – ’

‘Yeah, off the record.’

Lynn smoked, sipped scotch. ‘Well, putting what he’s done for me aside, Pierce is a Renaissance man. He dabbles in chemistry, he knows judo, he takes good care of his body. He loves having beautiful women beholden to him. He had a marriage that failed, he had a daughter who died very young. He’s very honest with his girls, and he only lets us date well-behaved, wealthy men. So call it a savior complex. Pierce loves beautiful women. He loves manipulating them and making money off them, but there’s real affection there, too. When I first met Pierce I told him my little sister was killed by a drunken driver. He actually cried. Pierce Patchett is a hardcase businessman, and yes, he runs call girls. But he’s a good man.’

It played straight. ‘What else has Patchett got going?’

‘Nothing illegal. He puts business deals and movie deals together. He advises his girls on business matters.’

‘Smut?’

‘God, not Pierce. He likes to *do* it, not look at it.’

‘Or sell it?’

‘Yes, or sell it.’

Almost too smooth – like Patchett’s smut hink needed a whitewash. ‘I’m starting to think you’re snowing me. There’s gotta be a perv deal here. Sugar-pimping’s one thing, but you make this guy out to be fucking Jesus. Let’s start with Patchett’s “little studio."'

Lynn put out her cigarette. 'Suppose I don't want to talk about that?'

'Suppose I give you and Patchett to Administrative Vice?'

Lynn shook her head. 'Pierce thinks you have your own private vendetta going, that it's in your best interest to eliminate him as a suspect in whatever it is you're investigating and keep quiet about his dealings. He thinks you won't inform on him, that it would be stupid for you to do it.'

'Stupid is my middle name. What else does Patchett think?'

'He's waiting for you to mention money.'

'I don't do shakedowns.'

'Then why – '

'Maybe I'm just fucking curious.'

'So be it. Do you know who Dr. Terry Lux is?'

'Sure, he runs a dry-out farm in Malibu. He's dirty to the core.'

'Correct on both counts, and he's also a plastic surgeon.'

'He did a plastic on Patchett, right? Nobody his age looks that young.'

'I don't know about that. What Terry Lux *does* do is alter girls for Pierce's little studio. There's Ava and Kate and Rita and Betty. Read that as Gardner, Hepburn, Hayworth and Grable. Pierce finds girls with middling resemblances to movie stars, Terry performs plastic surgery for exact resemblances. Call them Pierce's concubines. They sleep with Pierce and selected clients – men who can help him put together movie and business deals. Perverse? Perhaps. But Pierce takes a cut of all his girls' earnings and invests it for them. He makes his girls quit the life at thirty – no exceptions. He doesn't let his girls use narcotics and he doesn't abuse them, and I owe him a great deal. Can your policeman's mentality grasp those contradictions?'

Bud said, 'Jesus fucking Christ.'

'No, Mr. White. Pierce Morehouse Patchett.'

'Lux cut you to look like Veronica Lake?'

Lynn touched her hair. 'No, I refused. Pierce loved me for it. I'm really a brunette, but the rest is me.'

'And how old are you?'

'I'll be thirty next month, and I'll be opening up a dress shop. See how time changes things? If you'd met me a month from now, I wouldn't be a whore. I'd be a brunette who didn't look quite so much like Veronica Lake.'

'Jesus Christ.'

'No, Lynn Margaret Bracken.'

Too quick – almost a blurt. 'Look, I want to see you again.'

'Are you asking me for a date?'

'Yeah, because I can't afford what Patchett charges.'

'You could wait a month.'

'No, I can't.'

'No more shoptalk, then. I don't want to be somebody's suspect.'

Bud made a check mark in the air: Patchett crossed off for Kathy and the Nite Owl. 'Deal.'

Chapter Thirty-four

MICKEY COHEN'S CELL.

Gallaudet laughed: velvet-covered bed, velvet-flocked shelves, commode with a velvet-flocked seat. Heat through a wall vent – Washington State, still cold in April. Ed was tired: they talked to Jack 'The Enforcer' Whalen, eliminated him, flew a thousand miles. 1:00 A.M. – two cops waiting for a psychopathic hoodlum busy with a late pinochle game. Gallaudet patted Cohen's pet bulldog: Mickey Cohen, Jr., snazzy in a velvet-flocked sweater. Ed checked his Whalen notes.

Rambling – they couldn't shut him up. Whalen laughed off the Englekling theory, digressed on L.A. organized crime.

Mob activity in a general lull since Mickey C. hit stir. The insider view: the Mick power broke, Swiss bank money tucked away – cash to rebuild with. Morris Jahelka, Cohen underboss, given a fiefdom – he promptly blew it, investing badly, no funds to pay his men. Whalen said *he* was doing well and offered his Cohen theory.

He figured Mickey was parceling out bookmaking, loansharking, dope and prostitution franchises – small, choosy who they dealt with; when paroled he'd consolidate, grab the money the franchise men invested for him, rebuild. Whalen based his theory on hink: Lee Vachss, ex-Cohen trigger, seemed to have gone legit; Johnny Stompanato and Abe Teitlebaum ditto – two wrong-o's who couldn't walk a straight line. Make all three of them still on the grift – maybe safeguarding Cohen's interests. Chief Parker – afraid the lull might lead to Mafia encroachment – just fielded a new front line against out-of-town muscle: Dudley Smith and two of his goons set up shop at a motel in Gardena: they beat gang guys half to death, stole their money for police charity contributions, put them back on the bus, train or plane to wherever they came from – all very much on the QT.

Whalen concluded:

He's allowed to operate because somebody had to provide gambling services or a bunch of crazy independents would shoot L.A. to shit. 'Containment' – a Dudley S. word – said it all: the police establishment knew he only shot when shot at; he *played the game.* The idea of him or Mickey blasting six people over jack-off books was pure bullshit. Still, things were too quiet, shit had to be brewing.

Mickey Cohen, Jr., yipped; Ed looked up. Mickey Cohen walked in, holding a box of dog biscuits. He said, 'I have never killed no man that did not deserve killing by the standards of our way of life. I have never distributed no obscene shit to be used for the purpose of masturbation and only took a confabulation with Pete and Bax Englekling because of my fondness for their late father, may God rest his soul even though he was a fucking kraut. I do not kill innocent bystanders because it's a mitzvah not to and because I adhere to the Ten Commandments except when it is bad for business. Warden Hopkins told me why you was here and I made you wait because you must be stupid morons to make me for this vicious and stupid caper, obviously the handiwork of stupid shvartzes. But since Mickey Junior likes you I will give you five minutes of my time. Come to Daddy, bubeleh!'

Gallaudet howled. Cohen knelt on the floor, put a biscuit in his mouth. The dog ran to him, grabbed the biscuit, kissed him. Mickey nuzzled the beast; Cohen Junior squealed, pissed. Ed saw a man on the catwalk: Davey Goldman, Mickey's chief accountant, at McNeil on his own tax beef.

Goldman sidled away. Gallaudet said, 'Mickey, the Englekling brothers said you went crazy when they mentioned Duke Cathcart was behind their idea.'

Cohen spat biscuit crumbs. 'Are you familiar with the old saying "blowing off steam"?'

Ed said, 'Yes, but what about other names? Did the Engleklings mention any other names besides Cathcart?'

'No, and Cathcart I never met myself. I heard he had a statch rape jacket, so I judged him on that. The Bible says, "Judge not, lest ye be judged," so since I am willing to be judged, I say, "Judge on, O Mickster."'

'Did you give the brothers any advice on setting up a distribution system?'

'No! As God and my beloved Mickey Junior are my witnesses, no!'

Gallaudet: 'Mick, here's the key question. Did you talk up the deal on the yard? Who else did you tell about it?'

'I told nobody! Jerk-off books are from sin and hunger! I even chased Davey away when those meshugeneh brothers came calling! Davey's my ears, that's how much I respect the cardinal virtue of confidentiality!'

Gallaudet said, 'Ed, I called Russ Millard while you were talking to the warden. He said he checked with his Ad Vice guys on the pornography job, and they've got nothing. No Cathcart, no leads on the books. Russ went through all the Nite Owl field reports and got nothing. Bud White background checked Cathcart, and he reported nothing. Ed, Susie Lefferts from San Berdoo is just a coincidence. Cathcart couldn't make a smut deal happen if he tried. This whole thing was the Engleklings' buying out of some old warrants and a dog show.'

Ed nodded. Mickey Cohen, Sr., cradled Mickey Cohen, Jr. 'Fathers and sons are food for thought, are they not a veritable feast? My canine offspring and me, old Doc Franz and his gap-toothed white trash lowlifes. Franz was a chemical genius, great things he did for the drool case mentally disturbed. When a boatload of Big H was stole from me way back, I thought of Franz, and how if I had his brains instead of my own poetic genius I would have recreated my own white powder to sell. Go home, boy-chiks. Dirty books will not win you your murder case. It's the shvartzes, it's the fucking shvoogies.'

Chapter Thirty-five

BOTTLES: WHISKY, GIN, brandy. Flashing signs: Schlitz, Pabst Blue Ribbon. Sailors downing cold beers, happy folks juicing their lights out. Hudgens' pad a block away – booze would give him the guts. He knew it before he tailed Bud White – now he had a thousand times the reason.

The barman yelled, 'Last call.' Jack killed his club soda, pressed the glass to his neck. His day hit him – again.

Millard says Duke Cathcart was involved in some scheme to push *his* smut.

Bud White visits Lynn Bracken, one of the lookalike whores. He stays inside two hours; the whore walks him out. He tails White home, starts thinking evidence: White knows Bracken, she knows Pierce Patchett, he knows Hudgens. Sid knows about the Malibu Rendezvous, Dudley Smith probably knows. Big Dud's reason for the tail job: White bent out of shape on a *hooker* snuff.

Pulsing beer signs: neon monsters. Brass knucks in the car, the Sidster might fold, kick loose with his file –

Jack bolted: Hudgens' place, no lights on, Sid's Packard at the curb. The door – brass knucks for a knocker.

Thirty seconds – nothing. Jack tried the door – no give – shouldered the jamb. The door popped open.

That smell.

Slow motion: handkerchief out, gun out, elbow to the wall – the switch, no prints. Switch down, lights on.

Sid Hudgens hacked up on the floor – a rug soaked black, the floor a blood slick.

Arms and legs severed, out at weird angles off his torso.

Split open crotch to neck, bones showing white through red.

Cabinets upended behind him – folders dumped on a clean patch of rug.

Jack bit his arms to kill screams.

No blood tracks, say the killer got out the back door. Hudgens naked, coated red-black. Limbs off his torso, strands of gore at the cut points, swirls like his inked-in fuck books –

Jack bolted.

Around the house, down the driveway. The back door: ajar, spilling light. Inside: a water-slick floor – no blood prints, tracks covered. He walked in, found grocery bags under the sink. Shaky steps to the living room. File cabinet dirt: folders, folders, folders – one, two, three, four, five bags – two trips to his car.

A quiet L.A. street at 2:20 A.M., calm down mumbo jumbo.

Fifty trillion people had motives. Nobody knew he'd seen the inked-in books. The mutilations would get written off – just psycho stuff.

He had to find his file.

Jack doused lights, sawed the front door with his handcuffs – let them think it's a burglar. He took off, no destination, just driving.

Just driving wore thin. He found a motel strip, a hot-sheet flop: Oscar's Sleepytime Lodge.

He paid a week's rent, hauled his bags in, took a shower and put his stale clothes back on. A cockroach palace: bugs, grease on the wall above the bed. He smelled himself: stale working on foul. He locked the door, prowled dirt.

Hush-Hush back issues, clippings, pilfered police documents. Files: Montgomery Clift as the smallest dick in Hollywood, Errol Flynn as a Nazi agent. A hot item: Flynn and some homo writer named Truman Capote. Commies, Commie sympathizers, celebrity spook fuckers ranging from Joan Crawford to former D.A. Bill McPherson. Hopheads galore: shit on Charlie Parker, Anita O'Day, Art Pepper, Tom Neal, Barbara Payton, Gail Russell. Intact *Hush-Hush* articles: 'Mafia Ties to the Vatican!!!,' 'Lavender Liturgy: Is "Rock" Hudson Really "Rockette"?,' 'Grasshopper Alert: Beware of Hollywood's Tea Bag Babies.' Complete files, too tame to be Hudgens' secret stash – Commies, queers, lezbos, dopesters, satyrs, nymphos, misogynists, mob-bought politicos.

Nothing on Sergeant Jack Vincennes.

Nothing on *Badge of Honor* – a big Hudgens fixation – he knew Sid had a file on Brett Chase.

Strange.

More strange: *Hush-Hush* ran a smear on Max Peltz – there was nothing on him.

Nothing on Pierce Patchett, Lynn Bracken, Lamar Hinton, Fleur-de-Lis.

Jack measured his filth pile. Big – make the killer a file thief, if he got any files it wasn't many – his pile looked like it would jam the cabinets to bursting.

ALIBI.

Jack stuffed his files in the closet. 'Do Not Disturb' on the door, back to his apartment.

5:10 A.M.

Under the knocker: 'Jack – remember our date Thurs.' 'Jack sweetie – are you hibernating? XXXX-K.' He walked in, grabbed the phone, dialed 888.

'Police Emergency.'

A hepcat drawl. 'Man, I want to report a murder. If I'm lyin', I'm llyin'.'

'Sir, is this legitimate?'

'Yeah, if I'm – '

'What is your address, sir?'

'My address is nowhere, but I was gonna burglarize this house, then I saw this body.'

'Sir – '

'421 South Alexandria, got that?'

'Sir, where are – '

Jack hung up, stripped, lay down on the bed. Figure twenty minutes for the bluesuits, ten to ID Hudgens. They putz around, make it as a big case, call Homicide. The desk man thinks brass, shakes a boss case man out of bed. Thad Green, Russ Millard, Dudley S. – they'd all think Big V pronto – his phone would ring in a hot hour.

Jack lay there – sweating up a clean set of sheets. Ring ring – at 6:58.

Jack, yawning. 'Yeah?'

'Vincennes, it's Russ Millard.'

'Yeah, Cap. What time is it? What's – '

'Never mind. Do you know where Sid Hudgens lives?'

'Yeah, Chapman Park somewhere. Cap, what's – '

'421 South Alexandria. *Now*, Vincennes.'

Shave, shower, clothes that stayed dry. Forty minutes to the scene – a fuckload of cop cars on Sid Hudgens' lawn. Morgue men hefting plastic bags: blood, body parts.

Jack parked on the lawn. An attendant wheeled out a gurney: gore wrapped in sheets. Russ Millard by the door; two comers – Don Kleckner, Duane Fisk – down the driveway. Patrolmen shooed away spectators; reporters crowded the sidewalk. Jack walked up to Millard. 'Hudgens?' – not too much shock, a pro.

'Yes, your buddy. A bit chewed up, I'm afraid. A burglar called it in. He was about to tap the house, then he saw the body. Pry marks on the doorjamb, so I buy it. Don't look inside if you've eaten.'

Jack looked. Dried blood, white tape outlines: arms, legs, torso – the severing points marked. Millard said, 'Somebody *hated* him. You see those drawers over there? I think the killer snuffed him for his files. I had Kleckner call the *Hush-Hush* publisher. He's going to open up the office and give us copies of the recent stuff Hudgens was working on.'

Old Russ wanted a comment. Jack crossed himself: his first time since the orphanage, where the fuck did it come from.

'Vincennes, you were his friend. What do you think?'

'I think he was scum! Everybody hated him! You've got all L.A. for suspects!'

'Easy, now, *easy*. I know you've leaked information to Hudgens, I know you two did business. If we don't wrap this in a few days, I'm going to want a statement.'

Duane Fisk spieling Morty Bendish – make book on a *Mirror* scoop. Jack said, 'I'll kick loose. What am I going to do, impede the progress of an official investigation?'

'Your sense of duty is admirable. Now, let's talk about Hudgens. Girls, boys, what did he like?'

Jack lit a cigarette. 'He liked dirt. He was a goddamned degenerate. Maybe he pulled his pud while he looked at his own goddamn shitrag, I don't know.'

Don Kleckner walked up, a copy of *Hush-Hush* spread open: 'TV Mogul Loves to Ogle – And Then Some!!! And Teen Queens Are His Scene!!!' 'Captain, I bought this at that newsstand on the corner. And the publisher told me *Badge of Honor* was a bee in Hudgens' bonnet.'

'This is good. Don, you start canvassing. Vincennes, come here.'

Over to the lawn. Millard said, 'This keeps coming back to people you know.'

'I'm a cop and I'm Hollywood. I know lots of people, and I know Max Peltz likes young trim. So what? He's sixty years old and he's no killer.'

'We'll decide that this afternoon. You're block searching on the Nite Owl, right? Looking for Coates' car?'

'Yeah.'

'Then go back to that now and report to the Bureau at 2:00. I'm going to ask some key people from *Badge of Honor* to come in for some friendly questioning. You can help grease things.'

Billy Dieterling, Timmy Valburn – 'People He Knew' closing in. 'Sure, I'll be there.'

Morty Bendish ran up. 'Jackie, does this mean I'll get *all* your exclusives now?'

Garage door break-ins, niggers hurling fruit – *real* work back at the motel. He was heading into Darktown when it hit him.

He cut east, parked by the Royal Flush. Claude Dineen's Buick up on blocks – he was probably dealing shit in the men's room.

Jack walked in. Everything froze: the Big V meant grief. The barman poured a double Old Forester; Jack downed it – cutting off five years kosher. The juice warmed him. He kicked the men's room door in.

Claude Dineen geezing up.

Jack kicked him prone, yanked the spike from his arm. A frisk, no resistance – Claude was up on cloud ten. Bingo: tinfoil Benzedrine. He swallowed a roll dry, flushed the hypo down the toilet. He said, 'I'm back.'

He hit the motel juiced, primed to figure angles. File go-round number two.

Nothing new jumped out; one instinct buzzed him: Hudgens didn't keep his 'secret' files at home. If the killer snuffed him for a particular file, he tried to torture the location out of him first. The killer didn't glom a lot of files – the cabinets wouldn't hold much more than what he stole. Sid's Big V file was still at large – if the killer found it he might keep it, might throw it away.

Jump: Hudgens/Patchett connected, pornography/vice rackets the connection. Put the Cathcart/Nite Owl connection aside: Millard/Exley called it a bust – denials from Whalen and Mickey C., Cathcart never got his smut gig going. Millard's report: the Englekling brothers didn't know who took the pictures; Cathcart got ahold of some of the stag books, went crazy with a harebrained scheme. Put that aside and what he had was:

Bobby Inge, Christine and Daryl Bergeron – gone. Lamar Hinton, the probable shooter at the Fleur-de-Lis drop – undoubtedly gone. Timmy Valburn, a Fleur-de-Lis customer, rousted by him – a connection to Billy Dieterling, a *Badge of Honor* cameraman, catch him at Millard's questioning party – *stay calm on that.* Say Timmy told Billy about the roust; Billy was there when he trashed Hinton's car, *keep calm*, the queers had shitloads to lose by admitting their connection to Fleur-de-Lis – which Russ Millard did not know existed.

Brainstorming, chain-smoking.

Mutilations on Hudgens' body matched the inked-in poses in the fuck books he found outside Bobby Inge's pad. *No other cops had seen those specific books* – Millard viewed the stiff, tagged the chopped limbs as straight amputations.

Hudgens warned him away from Fleur-de-Lis. Lynn Bracken was a Patchett whore – maybe she knew Sid.

Wild card: Dudley Smith told him to tail Bud White. His reason: White running maverick on a hooker killing. Bracken was a hooker, Patchett ran hookers. But: *Dudley did not mention any tie-ins to the Nite Owl or pornography – Patchett/Bracken/smut/Fleur-de-Lis et fucking al were probably Greek to him. The Englekling brothers/Cathcart wash aside, smut/Patchett/Bracken/Fleur-de-Lis/Hudgens in no way made its way into the incredible glut of interdivision posted Nite Owl paperwork.*

Sky high: Benzedrine, cop logic. 11:20 – time to kill before the Bureau. Two real leads – Pierce Patchett, Lynn Bracken.

Bracken was closer.

Jack drove to her apartment, settled in behind her car. Give her an hour, play it by ear if she left.

Time Benzedrine-flew; Bracken's door stayed shut. 12:33 – a kid chucked a newspaper at it. If Morty Bendish speedballed his story and that kid pitched the *Mirror* –

The door opened; Lynn Bracken picked the paper up, yawned back inside. The paperboy swooped by, carrier sacks in plain view: Los Angeles *Mirror-News.* Be in there, Morty.

Bang! – Bracken slammed the door, ran to her car. She gunned it, swerved west on Los Feliz. Jack cut her two seconds slack, tailed her.

Southwest: Los Feliz to Western to Sunset, Sunset straight out – ten miles over the speed limit. Odds on: a fear run to Patchett's place, she didn't want to use the phone.

Jack looped south, shortcutted, made 1184 Gretna Green burning rubber. A huge Spanish manse, a huge front lawn – Lynn Bracken hadn't showed yet.

A skidding heart: he forgot what you paid to eat bennies. He parked, checked out the house: nobody out and about. Up to the door, a duck around the side – find some windows.

All closed. A gardener working around back – no way to circuit without being seen. A car door slammed; Jack ran to a front window: closed, a part in the curtains he could squint through.

The doorbell rang; Jack squinted in. Patchett walked to the door, opened it. Lynn Bracken shoved her newspaper at him – zoom into a panic duet: mute lip movements, fear very large. Jack put an ear to the glass – all he heard was his own heart thumping. No need for sound: they didn't know Sid was dead, they're scared anyway, they didn't kill him.

They walked into the next room – full curtains, no way to look or listen. Jack ran to his car.

He made the Bureau ten minutes late. The Homicide pen was jam-packed *Badge of Honor*: Brett Chase, Miller Stanton, David Mertens the set man, Jerry Marsalas his nurse – one long bench crammed tight. Standing: Billy Dieterling, the camera crew, a half dozen briefcase men: attorneys for sure. The gang looked nervous; Duane Fisk and Don Kleckner paced with clipboards. No Max Peltz, no Russ Millard.

Billy D. shot him the fisheye; the rest of the gang waved. Jack waved back; Kleckner buttonholed him. 'Ellis Loew wants to see you. Booth number six.'

Jack walked down. Loew was staring out a back wall mirror – a lie detector stall across the glass. Polygraph time: Millard questioning Peltz, Ray Pinker working the machine.

Loew noticed him. 'I'd rather Max didn't have to go through that. Can you fix it?'

Protecting a slush-fund contributor. 'Ellis, I've got no truck with Millard. If Max's lawyer advised him to do it, he'll have to do it.'

'Can Dudley fix it?'

'Dud's got no truck with him either, Millard's the pious type. And before you ask me, I don't know who killed Sid, and I don't care. Has Max got an alibi?'

'Yes, but one that he would rather not use.'

'How old is she?'

'Quite young. Would – '

'Yeah, Russ would file on him for it.'

'My God, all this for scum like Hudgens.'

Jack laughed. 'Counselor, one of his little mudslings got you elected.'

'Yes, politics makes for strange bedfellows, but I doubt if he'll be grieved. You know, we've got nothing. I talked to those attorneys outside, and they all assured me their clients have valid alibis. They'll give statements and be eliminated, the rest of the *Badge of Honor* people will be alibied and then we'll only have the rest of Hollywood to deal with.'

An opening. 'Ellis, you want some advice?'

'Yes, give me your appropriately cynical view.'

'Let it play out. Push on the Nite Owl, that's the one the public wants cleared. Hudgens was shit, the investigation'll be a shit show and we'll never get the killer. Let it play out.'

The door opened; Duane Fisk put two thumbs down. 'No luck, Mr. Loew. Alibis straight across, and they sound like good ones. The coroner estimated Hudgens' death at midnight to 1:00 A.M., and these people were all in plain view somewhere else. We'll go for corroboration, but I think it's a wipe.'

Loew nodded; Fisk walked out. Jack said, 'Let it go.'

Loew smiled. 'What's your alibi? Were you in bed with my sister-in-law?'

'I was in bed alone.'

'I'm not surprised – Karen said you've been moody and scarce lately. You look edgy, Jack. Are you afraid your arrangement with Hudgens will be publicized?'

'Millard wants a deposition, I'll give him one. You buy Sid and me as lodge brothers?'

'Of course. Along with Dudley Smith, myself and several other well-known choirboys. You're right on Hudgens, Jack. I'll broach it to Bill Parker.'

A yawn – the bennies were losing their kick. 'It's a dog of a case, and you don't want to prosecute it.'

'Yes, since the victim did facilitate *my* election, and he might have left word that *you* leaked word to him on Mr. McPherson's quote dark desires. Jack . . .'

'Yeah, I'll keep my nose down, and if your name turns up on paper I'll destroy it.'

'Good man. And if I . . .'

'Yeah, there is something. Track the reports on the investigation. Sid kept some secret dirt files, and if your name's anywhere, it's there. And if I get a lead on where, I'll be there with a match.'

Loew, pale. 'Done, and I'll talk to Parker this afternoon.'

Ray Pinker rapped on the mirror, pressed a graph to the glass: twin needle lines – no wild fluctuations. Out the speaker: 'Not guilty, but no give on his alibi. Was he *en flagrante*?'

Loew smiled. Russ Millard, speaker loud. 'Go to work, Vincennes. Nite Owl block canvassing, if you recall. Your cockamamie TV show hasn't panned out so far, and I want a written statement on your dealings with Hudgens. *By 0800 tomorrow.*'

Darktown beckoned.

South to 77th. Jack popped another roll and picked up his search map; the desk sergeant told him the spooks were getting feistier, some pinko agitators put a bug up their ass, more garbage attacks, the garage men were going out in threes: one detective, two patrolmen, teams on opposite sides of the street. Meet his guys at 116th and Wills – they'd been one man short since noon.

The bennies kicked in – Jack zoomed back up. He drove to 116 and Wills: a stretch of cinderblock shacks, windows stuffed with cardboard. Din alleys, a bicycle brigade: colored kids packing fruit. His guys up ahead: two patrolmen on the left, two blues and a plainclothes on the right. Armed: tin snips, rifles. Jack parked, made the left-side team a threesome.

Pure shitwork.

Knock on the door, get permission to search the garage. Three quarters of the locals played possum; back to the garage, open the door, cut the lock. The right-side team didn't ask – they went in snips first, dawdled, brandished their hardware at the bicycle kids. The left-side kids tried to look mean; one kid chucked a tomato over their heads. The blues fired over his head – taking out a pigeon coop, chewing up a palm tree. Dusty garage after dusty garage after dusty garage – no '49 Merc license DG114.

Twilight, a block of deserted houses – broken windows, weed jungle lawns. Jack started feeling punk: achy teeth, chest pings. He heard rebel yells across the street; the right-side team triggered shots. He looked at his partners – then they all tore ass over.

The Holy Grail in a rat-infested garage: a purple ’49 Merc, jig rig to the hilt. California license DG114 – registered to Raymond ‘Sugar Ray’ Coates.

Two patrolmen whipped out bottles.

A couple of bicycle kids jabbered: the bonaroo paint job, a white cat hanging around the alley.

The left-side guys broke into a rain dance.

Jack squinted through a side window. Three pump shotguns on the floor between the seats: big bore, probably 12-gauge.

Yells – deafening; back slaps – bonecrusher hard. The kids yelled along; a patrolman let them slug from his bottle. Jack took a big gulp, emptied his gun at a street-light, got it with his last shot. Whoops, rebel yells; Jack let the kids play quick draw with his piece. Sid Hudgens buzzed him – he took a big drink, chased him away.

Chapter Thirty-six

A PRIVATE ROOM at the Pacific Dining Car. Dudley Smith, Ellis Loew, Bud across the table. Blistered hands, three days of hose work: sex offenders blurred in his head.

Dudley said, ‘Lad, we found the car and the shotguns an hour ago. No prints, but one of the firing pins perfectly matches the nicked shells we found at the Nite Owl. We took the victims’ purses and wallets out of a sewer grate near the Tevere Hotel, which means that we have a damn near airtight case. But Mr. Loew and I want the whole hog. We want confessions.’

Bud shoved his plate away. It all came back to the spooks – scotch his shot at Exley. ‘So you’ll put bright boy on the niggers again.’

Loew shook his head. ‘No, Exley’s too soft. I want you and Dudley to question them, inside the jail, tomorrow morning. Ray Coates has been in the infirmary with an ear infection, but they’re releasing him back into general population early tomorrow. I want you and Dud there bright and early, say 7:00.’

‘What about Carlisle and Breuning?’

Dudley laughed. ‘Lad, you’re a much more frightful presence. This job has the name “Wendell White” on it, as does another assignment I’ve kicked off lately. One you’ll be interested in.’

Loew said, ‘Officer, it’s been Ed Exley’s case so far, but now you can share the glory. And I’ll grant you a favor in return.’

‘Yeah?’

‘Yes. Dick Stensland has been handed a six-count probation indictment. Do it, and I’ll drop four of those charges and put him in front of a lenient judge. He’ll be sentenced to no more than ninety days.’

Bud stood up. ‘Deal, Mr. Loew. And thanks for dinner.’

Dudley beamed. ‘Until 7:00 tomorrow, lad. And why are you leaving so abruptly, is it a hot date you have?’

‘Yeah, Veronica Lake.’

She opened the door, all Veronica: spangly gown, blonde curl over one eye. ‘If you’d called first, I wouldn’t look this ridiculous.’

She looked edgy. Her dye job was off: uneven, dark at the roots. ‘Bad date?’

‘An investment banker Pierce wants to curry favor with.’

‘Did you fake it good?’

‘He was so self-absorbed that I didn’t have to fake it.’

Bud laughed. ‘You turn thirty, you do it strictly for thrills.’

Lynn laughed, still edgy, she might touch him first just to have something to do with her hands. ‘If men don’t try to be Alan Ladd, they might get the real Lynn Margaret.’

‘Worth the wait?’

‘You know it is, and you’re wondering if Pierce told me to be receptive.’

He couldn’t think of a comeback.

Lynn took his arm. ‘I’m glad you thought of that, and I like you. And if you wait in the bedroom I’ll scrub off Veronica and that investment banker.’

She came to him naked, a brunette, her hair still wet. Bud forced himself to go slow, take time with his kisses, like she was a lonely woman he wanted to love to death. Lynn played off his timing: her kisses back, her touches. Bud kept thinking she was faking – he rushed to taste her so he’d know.

Lynn moaned, put his hands on her breasts, set up a rhythm for his fingers. Bud followed her lead, loved it when she gasped and came over and over, hair-trigger. Real – so real he forgot about himself; he heard something like ‘In me, please in me.’ He rubbed himself hard on the bed, went in her, kept his hands on her breasts like she taught him. Hard inside her – he let himself go just as her legs pulsed and her hips pushed him up off the sheets – then his face pressing wet hair, their arms locked on each other tight.

They rested, talked. Lynn talked up her diary: a thousand pages back to high school in Bisbee, Arizona. Bud rambled on the Nite Owl, his strongarm job in the morning – sitting-duck stuff he couldn’t take much more of. Lynn’s look said, ‘Then just give it up’; he didn’t have an answer, so he spieled on Dudley, the heartbreaker rape girl with a crush on him, how he’d hoped the Nite Owl would swing another way so he could use it to juke this guy he hated. Lynn talked back with little touches; Bud told her he was letting the Kathy snuff go for now, it was too easy to go crazy on – crazy like his play with Dwight Gilette. Lynn pressed on his family; he told her ‘I don’t have one’; he ran down his outlaw job: Cathcart, his pad tossed, his smut dream, the San Berdoo Yellow Pages open to printshops clicking in to the Englekling brothers plea bargain, then clicking out, back to the colored punks they had on ice. He knew she knew the gist: he was frustrated because he wasn’t that smart, he wasn’t really a Homicide detective – he was the guy they brought in to scare other guys shitless. After a while, the talk petered out – Bud felt restless, pissed at himself for spilling too much too fast. Lynn seemed to sense it: she bent down and drove him crazy with her mouth. Bud stroked her hair, still a little wet, glad she didn’t have to fake it with him.

Chapter Thirty-seven

EVIDENCE – THE VICTIMS' belongings found near the Tevere Hotel; Coates' Merc and the shotguns located: forensic verification on the piece that shot the strangely marked rounds. No grand jury on earth would refuse to hand down Murder One. The Nite Owl case was made.

Ed at his kitchen table, writing a report: Parker's last summary. Inez in the bedroom, her bedroom now, he couldn't get up the nerve to say: 'Just let me sleep with you, we'll see how things go, wait on the other.' She'd been moody – reading books on Raymond Dieterling, getting up nerve to ask the man for a job. The news on the guns didn't bolster her – even though it meant no testimony. Evidence – her outside wounds had healed, there was no physical pain to distract her. She kept feeling it happen.

The phone rang; Ed grabbed it. An extra click – Inez picking up in the bedroom.

'Hello?'

'Russ Millard, Ed.'

'Captain, how are you?'

'It's Russ to sergeants and up, son.'

'Russ, have you heard about the car and the guns? The Nite Owl's history.'

'Not exactly, and that's why I called. I just talked to a Sheriff's lieutenant I know, a man on the Jail Bureau. He told me he heard a rumor. Dudley Smith's taking Bud White in to beat confessions out of our boys. Tomorrow morning, early. I had them moved to another cellblock where they can't get at them.'

'Jesus Christ.'

'The savior indeed. Son, I have a plan. We go in early, confront them with the new evidence and try for legitimate confessions. You play the bad guy, I'll play savior.'

Ed squared his glasses. 'What time?'

'Say 7:00?'

'All right.'

'Son, it means making an enemy out of Dudley.'

The bedroom line clicked off. 'So be it. Russ, I'll see you tomorrow.'

'Sleep well, son. I need you alert.'

Ed hung up. Inez in the doorway, wearing his robe – huge on her. 'You can't do this to me.'

'You shouldn't eavesdrop.'

'I was expecting a call from my sister. Exley, you can't.'

'You wanted them in the gas chamber, they're going there. You didn't want to testify, now I doubt if you'll have to.',

'I want them hurt. I want them to suffer.'

'No. It's wrong. This is a case that demands absolute justice.'

She laughed. 'Absolute justice fits you like this robe fits me, *pendejo.*'

'You got what you wanted, Inez. Let it go at that and get on with your life.'

'What life? Living with you? You'll never marry me, you're so deferential around me that I want to scream and every time I've got myself convinced you're a pretty decent guy you do something that makes me say, "*Madre mia*, how can I be so dumb?" And now you'd deny me this? *This little thing?*'

Ed held up his report. 'Dozens of men built this case. Those animals will be dead by Christmas. *Todos*, Inez. *Absolutamente.* Isn't that enough?'

She laughed – harder. 'No. Ten seconds and they go to sleep. Six hours they beat me and fucked me and stuck things in me. No, it's not enough.'

Ed stood up. 'So you'll let Bud White jeopardize our case. Ellis Loew probably arranged this, Inez. He's thinking airtight grand jury presentation, a two day trial with half of it him grandstanding. He'd jeopardize what he's already got for that. Be smart and recognize it.'

'No, you recognize that the fix is in. The *negritos* die because that's the way it is. I'm just a witness nobody needs anymore, so maybe tomorrow Officer White takes a few licks for my justice.'

Ed made fists. 'White's a brutal disgrace of a policeman and a slimy, womanizing son of a bitch.'

'No, he's just a guy who calls a spade a spade and doesn't look six ways before he crosses the street.'

'He's shit. *Mierda.*'

'Then he's my *mierda.* Exley, I. *know* you. You don't give a damn about justice, you just care about yourself. You're only doing that thing tomorrow to hurt Officer White, and you're only doing it because you know that he knows what you are. You treat me like you want to love me, then you give me nothing but money and social connections, which you've got plenty of and won't miss. You take no risks for me, and Officer. White risks his *estúpido* life and doesn't weigh the consequences, and when I get better you'll want to fuck me and set me up someplace where you won't have to be seen in public with me, which is revolting to me, and if for no other reason I love *estúpido* Officer White because at least he has the sense to know what you are.'

Ed walked up to her. 'And what am I?'

'Just a run-of-the-mill coward.'

Ed raised a fist, flinched when she flinched. Inez pulled off her robe. Ed looked, looked away – at the wall and his framed army medals. A target – he threw them across the room. Not enough. He took a bead on a window, reared back, hit soft padded curtains instead.

Chapter Thirty-eight

JACK WOKE UP seeing smut.

Karen in orgy shots – Veronica Lake loving her. Blood: fuck pix as coroner's pix, beautiful women drenched red. The first real thing he saw was daybreak – then Bud White's car parked by Lynn Bracken's pad.

Cracked lips, bone aches head to toe. He swallowed his last bennies, brought back his last thoughts before oblivion.

Nothing in the files, Patchett and Bracken his only Hudgens leads. Patchett had servants living in. Bracken lived alone – he'd brace her when White left her bed.

Jack brainstormed a tailing report – lies to snow Dudley Smith. A door slammed – a sound like a gunshot. Bud White walked to his car.

Jack hit the seat prone. The car pulled away, seconds, another gunshot/door slam. A quick look: a brunette Lynn Bracken heading out.

Over to her car, up to Los Feliz, east. Jack followed: the right lane, dawdling back. Sparse early morning traffic: call the woman too distracted to spot him.

Due east, into Glendale. North on Brand, a swerve to the curb in front of a bank. Jack pulled around the corner to a sighting point – the corner store, a grocer's – milk cartons stacked by the door.

He squatted down, watched the sidewalk. Lynn B. was talking to a man: nervous, a shaky little guy. He opened the bank and hustled her in; a Ford and Dodge were parked further down – no way to nail plate numbers. Lamar Hinton walked outside lugging boxes.

Files, files, files – it had to be.

Bracken and the bank geek hauled boxes: a run to the Dodge and Lynn's Packard. The geek locked up the bank, hit the Ford and U-turned southbound; Hinton and Bracken formed a chain – separate cars heading north.

Seconds tick tick tick – Jack counted to ten, chased.

He caught them a mile out – weaving, creeping up, falling back –

downtown Glendale, north into foothills. Traffic dwindled; Jack found a lookout spot: a clean view of the road winding upward. He parked, watched: the cars kept climbing, took a fork, disappeared.

He followed their route straight to a campsite – picnic tables, barbecue pits. Two cars behind a pine row; Bracken and Hinton carrying boxes – muscle boy dangling a gas can off one pinky.

Jack ditched his car, snuck up behind some scrub pines. Bracken and Hinton dumped: paper in a big charcoal pit. They turned their backs; Jack sprinted over, ducked down.

They came back, another load: Bracken with a lighter out, Hinton's arms full. Jack stood up, kicked, pistol-whipped – the balls, left/right/left to the face. Hinton went down dropping paper; Jack broke his arms – knees to the elbows, jerks at the wrists.

Hinton went white – shock coming on.

Bracken had hold of the gas can and a lighter.

Jack stood in front of the pit, his .38 cocked.

Standoff.

Lynn held the can, the cap loose, spilling fumes. Flick – a flame on the lighter. Jack drew down – right in her face.

Standoff.

Hinton tried to crawl. Jack's gun hand started shaking. 'Sid Hudgens, Patchett and Fleur-de-Lis. It's either me or Bud White, and I can be bought.'

Lynn killed the flame, lowered the gas. 'What about Lamar?'

Hinton: pawing at the dirt, spitting blood. Jack lowered his gun. 'He'll live. And he shot at me, so now we're quits.'

'He didn't shoot at you. Pierce . . . I just know he didn't.'

'Then who did?'

'I don't know. Really. And Pierce and I don't know who killed Hudgens. The first we heard of it was the newspapers yesterday.'

The pit – folders on charcoal. 'Hudgens' private dirt, right?'

'Yes.'

'Yes and keep going.'

'No, let's talk about your price. Lamar told Pierce about you, and Pierce figured out that you were that policeman who always seems to wind up in the scandal sheets. So as you say, you can be bought. Now, for how much?'

'What I want's in with those files.'

'And what do you – '

'I know about you and the other girls Patchett runs. I know all about Fleur-de-Lis and the shit Patchett pushes, including the smut.'

No fluster – the woman put out a stone face. 'Some of your stag books have pictures with animated ink. Red, like blood. I saw pictures of Hudgens' body. He was cut up to match those photos.'

The stone face held. 'So now you're going to ask me about Pierce and Hudgens.'

'Yeah, and who doctored up the photos in the books.'

Lynn shook her head. 'I don't know who made those books, and neither does Pierce. He bought them bulk from a rich Mexican man.'

'I don't think I believe you.'

'I don't care. Do you want money besides?'

'No, and I'm betting whoever made those photographs killed Hudgens.'

'Maybe somebody who got excited by the pictures killed him. Do you care either way? Why am I betting Hudgens had dirt on you, and that's what's behind all this?'

'Smart lady. And I'm betting Patchett and Hudgens didn't play golf or – '

Lynn cut him off. 'Pierce and Sid were planning on working a deal together. I won't tell you any more than that.'

Extortion – it had to be. 'And those files were for that?'

'No comment. I haven't looked at the files, and let's keep this a stalemate and make sure nobody gets hurt.'

'Then tell me what happened at the bank.'

Lynn watched Hinton try to crawl. 'Pierce knew that Sid kept his private files in safe-deposit boxes at that B of A. After we read that he'd been killed, Pierce figured the police would locate the files. You see, Sid had files on Pierce's dealings – dealings legitimate policemen would disapprove of. Pierce bribed the manager into letting us have the files. And here we are.'

Jack smelled paper, charcoal. 'You and Bud White.'

Lynn made fists, pressed them to her legs. 'He has nothing to do with any of this.'

'Tell me anyway.'

'Why?'

'Because I don't make you two as the hot item of 1953.'

A smile from deep nowhere – Jack almost smiled back. Lynn said, 'We're going to strike a deal, aren't we? A truce?'

'Yeah, a non-agression pact.'

‘Then make this part of it. Bud approached Pierce, investigating the murder of a young girl named Kathy Janeway. He’d gotten Pierce’s name and mine from a man who used to know her. Of course, we didn’t kill her, and Pierce didn’t want a policeman coming around. He told me to be nice to Bud . . . and now I’m starting to like him. And I don’t want you to tell him anything about this. *Please.*’

She even begged with class. ‘Deal, and you can tell Patchett the D.A. thinks the Hudgens case is a loser. It’s heading for the back burner, and if I find what I want in that pile, today didn’t happen.’

Lynn smiled – this time he smiled back. ‘Go look after Hinton.’

She walked over to him. Jack dug into the folders, found name tabs, kept digging. A spate of *T*’s and a run of *V*’s, the kicker. ‘Vincennes, John.’

Eyewitness accounts: squarejohns at the beach that night. Nice folks who saw him drill Mr. & Mrs. Harold J. Scoggins, nice folks who told Sid about it for cash, nice folks who didn’t tell the ‘authorities’ for fear of ‘getting involved.’ The results of the blood test Sid bribed the examining doctor into suppressing: the Big V with a snootful of maryjane, Benzedrine, liquor. His own doped-up statement in the ambulance: confessions to a dozen shakedowns. Conclusive proof: Jack V. snuffed two innocent citizens outside the Malibu Rendezvous.

‘I got Lamar back to my car. I’ll drive him to a hospital.’

Jack turned around. ‘This is too good to be true. Patchett’s got carbons, right?’

That smile again. ‘Yes, for his deal with Hudgens. Sid gave him carbons of every file except the files he kept on Pierce himself. Pierce wanted the carbons as his insurance policy. I’m sure he didn’t trust Sid, and since we have all of Hudgens’ files right here, I’m sure Pierce’s files are in there.’

‘Yeah, and you have a carbon on mine.’

‘Yes, Mr. Vincennes. We do.’

Jack tried to ape that smile. ‘Everything I know about you, Patchett, his rackets and Sid Hudgens is going into a deposition, *multiple* copies to *multiple* safe-deposit boxes. If anything happens to me or mine, they go to the LAPD, the D.A.’s Office and the L.A. *Mirror.*’

‘Stalemate, then. Do you want to light the match?’

Jack bowed. Lynn doused the files, torched them. Paper sizzled, fireballed – Jack stared until his eyes stung.

‘Go home and sleep, Sergeant. You look terrible.’

Not home – Karen’s.

He drove there woozy, keyed up. He started to feel the close-out: bad debts settled bad, a clean slate. He got the idea just like he got the idea to shake down Claude Dineen. He didn’t say the words, didn’t rehearse it. He turned the radio on so he’d keep the notion fresh.

A stern-voiced announcer:

‘ . . . and the southside of Los Angeles is now the focus of the largest manhunt in California history. We repeat, an hour and a half ago, just after dawn, Raymond Coates, Tyrone Jones and Leroy Fontaine, the accused killers in the Nite Owl massacre case, escaped from the Hall of Justice Jail in downtown Los Angeles. The three had been moved to a minimum security cellblock to await requestioning and made their escape by the means of knotted-together bedsheets and a jump out a second-story window. Here, recorded immediately after the escape, are the comments of Captain Russell Millard of the Los Angeles Police Department, co-supervisor of the Nite Owl investigation.

‘“I . . . assume full responsibility for this incident. I was the one who ordered the three suspects sequestered in a minimum security unit. I . . . every effort will be made to recapture them with all due speed. I . . .”’

Jack turned the radio off. Close-out: pious Russ Millard’s career. Call-out: figure the whole Bureau yanked from bed for the dragnet. He yawned the rest of the way to Karen’s, rang her bell seeing double.

Karen opened up. ‘Sweetie, *where have you been*?’

Jack plucked curlers out of her hair. ‘Will you marry me?’

Karen said, ‘Yes.’

Chapter Thirty-nine

ED, STAKED OUT at 1st and Olive. His father's shotgun for backup, a replay on his hunch.

Sugar Ray Coates: 'Roland Navarette, lives on Bunker Hill. Runs a hole-up for parole absconders.'

A whispered snitch: the speakers didn't catch it, doubtful Coates remembered he said it. R&I, Navarette's mugshot, address: a rooming house midway down Olive, half a mile from the Hall of Justice Jail. A dawn breakout – they couldn't make Darktown unseen. Figure all four of them armed.

Scared – like Guadalcanal '43.

Outlaw – he didn't report the lead.

Ed drove to mid-block. A clapboard Victorian: four stories, peeling paint. He jumped the steps, checked out the mail slots: R. Navarette, 408.

Inside, his suitcoat around the shotgun. A long hallway, glass-fronted elevator, stairs. Up those stairs – he couldn't feel his footsteps. The fourth-floor landing – nobody in sight. Down to 408, drop the suitcoat. Inez screaming primed him – he kicked the door in.

Four men eating sandwiches.

Jones and Navarette at a table. Fontaine on the floor. Sugar Coates by the window, picking his teeth.

No weapons in sight. Nobody moved.

Odd sounds – 'You're under arrest' strangling out. Jones put his hands up. Navarette raised his hands. Fontaine laced his hands behind his head. Sugar Ray said, 'Cat got your goddamn tongue, sissy?'

Ed jerked the trigger: once, twice – buckshot took off Coates' legs. Recoil – Ed braced against the doorway, aimed. Fontaine and Navarette stood up screaming; Ed SQUEEZED the trigger, blew them up in one spread. Recoil, a bad pull: half the back wall came down.

Blood spray thick – Ed stumbled, wiped his eyes. He saw Jones make the elevator.

He ran after him: slid, tripped, caught up. Jones was pushing buttons, screaming prayers – inches from the glass, ‘Please Jesus.’ Ed aimed point-blank, squeezed twice. Glass and buckshot took his head off.

Strong legs now, fuck civilian screams all around him.

Ed ran downstairs, into a crowd: blues, plainclothesmen. Hands pounded his back; men shouted his name. A voice close by: ‘Millard’s dead. Heart attack at the Bureau.’

Chapter Forty

RAIN FOR THE funeral. A graveside service: Dudley Smith's eulogy, a priest's last words.

Every Bureau man attended: Thad Green's orders. Parker called out the press: a little ceremony after they planted Russ Millard. Bud watched Ed Exley comfort the widow – his best profile to the cameras.

A week of cameras, headlines: Ed Exley, 'L.A.'s Greatest Hero' – World War II stalwart, the man who slayed the Nite Owl slayers and their accomplice. Ellis Loew told the press the three confessed before they escaped – nobody mentioned the niggers were unarmed. Ed Exley was made.

The priest's spiel picked up steam. The widow started weeping – Exley put an arm around her shoulders. Bud walked away.

Lightning, more rain – Bud ducked into the chapel. Parker's soiree was set up: lectern, chairs, a table laid out with sandwiches. More lightning – Bud looked out the window, saw the casket hit the dirt. Ashes to fucking ashes – Stens got six months, scuttlebutt had Exley and Inez a hot item: kill four jigs, get the girl.

The mourners headed up – Ellis Loew slipped, took a pratfall. Bud hit on the good stuff: Lynn, West Valley on the Kathy snuff. Let the bad shit go for now.

Into the chapel: raincoats and umbrellas dumped, a rush for seats. Parker and Exley stood by the lectern. Bud sprawled in a chair at the back.

Reporters, notepads. Front row seats: Loew, the widow Millard, Preston Exley – hot news for Dream-a-Dreamland.

Parker spoke into the mike. 'This is a sad occasion, an occasion of mourning. We mourn a kind and good man and a dedicated policeman. We mark his passing with regret. The loss of Captain Russell A. Millard is the loss of Mrs. Millard, the Millard family and all of us here. It will be a hard loss to bear, but bear it we will. There is a passage I recall from somewhere in the annals of literature. That passage is "If there was no God, how could I be a

Captain?" It is God who will see us through our grief and our loss. The God who allowed Russ Millard to become a captain, His captain.'

Parker pulled out a small velvet case. 'And life continues through our losses. The loss of one splendid policeman coincides with the emergence of another one. Edmund J. Exley, detective sergeant, has amassed a brilliant record in his ten years with the Los Angeles Police Department, three of those years given over to service in the United States Army. Ed Exley received the Distinguished Service Cross for gallantry in the Pacific Theater, and last week he evinced spectacular bravery in the line of duty. It is my honor to present him with the highest measure of honor this Police Department can bestow: our Medal of Valor.'

Exley stepped forward. Parker opened the case, took out a gold medallion hung from a blue satin ribbon and placed it around his neck. The men shook hands – Exley had tears in his eyes. Flashbulbs popped, reporters scribbled, no applause. Parker tapped the mike.

'The Medal of Valor is a very high expression of esteem, but not one with practical everyday applications. Spiritual ramifications aside, it does not reward the recipient with the challenge of good, hard police work. Today I am going to utilize a rarely used chiefs prerogative and reward Ed Exley with *work*. I am promoting him two entire ranks, to captain, and assigning him as the Los Angeles Police Department's floating divisional commander, the assignment formerly held by our much loved colleague Russ Millard.'

Preston Exley stood up. Civilians stood up; the Bureau men stood on cue – Thad Green flashed them two thumbs. Scattered applause, lackluster. Ed Exley stood ramrod straight; Bud stayed sprawled in his chair. He took out his gun, kissed it, blew pretend smoke off the barrel.

Chapter Forty-one

A GALA LAWN wedding, a Presbyterian service – old man Morrow called the shots and picked up the tab. June 19, 1953: the Big V ties the knot.

Miller Stanton best man; Joanie Morrow – swacked on champagne punch – matron of honor. Dudley Smith the hit of the reception – stories, Gaelic songs. Parker and Green came at Ellis Loew's request; boy captain Ed Exley showed up. The Morrows' social circle pals rounded out the guest list – and swelled old Welton's huge backyard to bursting.

Marriage vows for his close-out. Bad debts settled good: new calendar days, his 'insurance policy deposition' stashed in fourteen different bank vaults. Scary vows: he pumped himself up at the altar.

Parker buried the Hudgens killing. Bracken and Patchett stalemated. Dudley called off his tail on White, bought his phony reports: no Lynn, White prowling bars at night. He staked Lynn's place for a couple of days, it looked like she had a good thing going with Bud – who always was a sucker.

Like himself.

The minister said the words; they said the words; Jack kissed his bride. Hugs, backslaps – well wishers swept them away from each other. Parker drummed up some warmth; Ed Exley worked the crowd, no sign of his Mexican girl. Nicknames now: 'Shotgun Ed,' 'Triggerman Eddie.' 'L.A.'s Greatest Hero' smiles on a bagman cop marrying up.

Jack found a spot above the pool house – a little rise with a view. Two celebrants stuck out: Karen, Exley. Give him credit: he seized the opportunity, made the Department look bold. *He* wouldn't have had the stomach for it – or the rage.

Exley. White. Himself.

Jack counted secrets: his own, whatever lived at that edge where pornography touched a dead scandal monger and lightly brushed the Nite Owl Massacre. He thought of Bud White, Ed Exley. He set up a wedding day prayer: the Nite Owl dead and buried, safe passage for ruthless men in love.

CALENDAR

1954

EXTRACT: L.A. *Herald-Express*, June 16:

EX-POLICEMAN ARRESTED FOR MURDEROUS ROBBERY SPREE

Richard Alex Stensland, 40, former Los Angeles police detective and a defendant in the 1951 'Bloody Christmas' police scandal, was arrested early this morning and charged with six counts of armed robbery and two counts of first-degree murder. Arrested with him at his hideout in Pacoima were Dennis 'The Weasel' Burns, 43, and Lester John Miciak, 37. The other men were charged with four armed-robbery counts and two counts of first-degree murder.

The arrest raid was led by Captain Edmund J. Exley, divisional floating commander for the Los Angeles Police Department, currently assigned to head up the LAPD's Robbery Division. Assisting Captain Exley were Sergeants Duane Fisk and Donald Kleckner. Exley, whose testimony in the Bloody Christmas scandal sent Stensland to jail in 1952, told reporters: 'Eyewitnesses identified photographs of the three men. We have conclusive proof that these men are responsible for stickups at six central Los Angeles liquor stores, including the robbery of Sol's Liquors in the Silverlake District on June 9. The proprietor of that store and his son were shot and killed during that robbery and eyewitnesses place both Stensland and Burns at the scene. Intensive questioning of the suspects will begin soon, and we expect to clear up many other unsolved robberies.'

Stensland, Burns and Miciak offered no resistance during their arrest. They were taken to the Hall of Justice Jail, where Stensland was restrained from attacking Captain Exley.

BANNER: L.A. *Mirror-News*, June 21:

STENSLAND CONFESSES, DESCRIBES REIGN OF ROBBERY TERROR

BANNER: L.A. *Herald-Express*, September 23:

LIQUOR STORE KILLERS CONVICTED; DEATH PENALTY FOR EX-POLICEMAN

EXTRACT: L.A. *Times*, November 11:

STENSLAND DIES FOR LIQUOR STORE KILLINGS – GUNMAN FORMER POLICEMAN

At 10:03 yesterday morning, Richard Stensland, 41 and a former Los Angeles police officer, died in the gas chamber at San Quentin Prison for the June 9 murders of Solomon and David Abramowitz. The killings took place during a liquor store holdup. Stensland was convicted and sentenced on September 22 and refused to appeal his sentence.

The execution went off smoothly, although Stensland appeared inebriated. Present among the press and prison officials were two LAPD detectives: Captain Edmund J. Exley, the man responsible for Stensland's capture, and Officer Wendell White, the condemned killer's former partner. Officer White visited Stensland in his death row cell on execution eve and stayed through the night with him. Assistant Warden B. D. Terwilliger denied that Officer White supplied Stensland with intoxicating liquor and denied that White viewed the execution while drunk himself. Stensland verbally abused the prison chaplain who was present and his last words were obscenities directed at Captain Exley.

1955

Hush-Hush Magazine, May 1955 Issue:

WHO KILLED SID HUDGENS?

Justice in the City of the Fallen Angels reminds us of a line from that sinsational sepia show *Porgy and Bess.* Like 'a man,' it's 'a sometime thing.' As in for instance: if you're a well-connected contributor to demon D.A. Ellis Loew's slush fund and you get murdered – killer beware!!! – L.A. Chief of Police William H. Parker will spare no expense unearthing the fiend who put you on the night train to the Big Adiós. But if you're a crusading journalist writing for this magazine and you get chopped into Ken-L ration in your own living room – killer rejoice!!! – Chief Parker and his moralistic, misanthropic, mindless mongolians will sit on their hands (well worn from palming payoffs) and whistle 'justice is a sometime thing' while the killer whistles Dixie.

It has now been two years since Sid Hudgens was fatally slashed in his Chapman Park living room. Two years ago the LAPD had its (sticky, graft-ridden) hands full with the infamous Nite Owl murder case, which was resolved when one of their members took the law into his own (overweeningly ambitious, opportunistic) hands and shotgunned the shotgunners to the Big Au Revoir. Sid Hudgens' murder was assigned to two flunky detectives with a total of zero 'made' homicide cases between them. They, of course, did not find the killer or killers, spent most of their days here at the *Hush-Hush* office reading back issues for clues, scarfing coffee and doughnuts and ogling the comely editorial assistants who flock to *Hush-Hush* because we know where the bodies are buried . . .

We at *Hush-Hush* tap the inside pulse of the City of the Fallen Angels, and we *have* investigated the Sidster's death on our own. We have gotten nowhere, and we ask the Los Angeles Police Department the following questions:

Sid's pad was ransacked. What happened to the ultra on the QT, ultra secret and ultra *Hush-Hush* files the Sidster was supposed to be keeping – sinuendo even too scalding for us to publish?

Why didn't D.A. Ellis Loew, elected largely on the strength of a *Hush-Hush* article exposing the peccadillos of his incumbent opponent, give us a backscratch in return and use his legal juice to force the LAPD to track down the Sidster's slayer?

Celebrity cop John 'Jack' Vincennes, the famous dope scourge 'Big V,' was a close friend of Sid's and was responsible for many of his crusading exposés on the menace of narcotics. Why didn't Jack (heavily connected to Ellis Loew – *we* won't utter the word 'bagman,' but feel free to *think* it) investigate the killing on his own, out of palship for his beloved buddy the Sidster?

Unanswerable questions for now – unless *you*, the reading public, take up the cry. Look for updates in future issues – and remember, dear reader, you heard it first here: off the record, on the QT and *very Hush-Hush.*

Hush-Hush Magazine, December 1955 issue:

JUSTICE WATCH: BEWARE THE LOEW/VINCENNES COMBINE!!!!

We've pussyfooted long enough, dear reader. In our May issue we marked the second anniversary of the fiendish murder of ace *Hush-Hush* scribe Sid Hudgens. We lamented the fact that his killing remains unsolved, gently prodded the Los Angeles Police Department, D.A. Ellis Loew and his brother-in-law by marriage LAPD Sergeant Jack Vincennes to do something about it, asked a few pertinent questions and got no response. Seven months have passed without justice being done, so here's some more questions:

Where *are* Sid Hudgens' *ultra* sin-tillating and sin-sational secret files – the files too hot for even scalding *Hush-Hush* to handle?

Did D.A. Loew quash the Hudgens murder investigation because the crusading Sidster recently published an exposé on *Badge of Honor* producer/director Max Peltz and his bent for teenage girls, and Peltz was a (five figure!!!) contributor to Loew's 1953 D.A.'s campaign fund?

Has Loew ignored our pleas for justice because he's too busy gearing up for his spring 1957 reelection campaign? Is Jack 'We won't use the word "Bagman"' Vincennes again shaking down Holly-woodites for contributions for brother-in-law Ellis and thus unable to investigate the Sidster's death?

More on the Big-time Big V:

Is Vincennes, dope-buster supreme, on the sauce and feuding with his much younger rich-girl wife, who persuaded him to leave his beloved Narco Division, but now frets over his working the hazardous LAPD Surveillance Detail????

Fuel for thought, dear reader – and a gentle prodding for belated justice. The search for justice for Sid Hudgens continues. Remember, dear reader: you heard it first here, off the record, on the QT and *very Hush-Hush.*

1956

'Crimewatch' feature, *Hush-Hush* Magazine, October 1956 issue:

GANGLAND DROUGHT AS COHEN PAROLE APPROACHES: WILL FEAST FOLLOW FAMINE WITH THE MICKSTER REDUX?

You, dear reader, probably haven't noticed, since you're a law-abiding citizen who relies on *Hush-Hush* to keep you abreast of the dark and sin-sational side of life. This publication has been accused of being sin-ical, but we're also sin-cere in our desire to inform you of the perils of crime, organized and otherwise, which is why this periodical periodically offers a 'Crimewatch' feature. This month we offer a palpably percolating potpourri centering on malicious L.A. mob activity or the lack of it, our focus the currently incarcerated Meyer Harris Cohen, 43, also known as the misanthropic Mickster, the inimitable Mickey C.

The Mick has been reposing at McNeil Island Federal pen since November of 1951, and he should be paroled sometime next year, certainly by the end of 1957. You all know Mickey by reputation: he's the dapper little gent who ruled the L.A. rackets circa '45 to '51, until Uncle Sammy popped him for income tax evasion. He's a headline grabber, he's a big mocher, face it: he's a mensch. And he's up at McNeil, freezing his toches in the admittedly plush cell, his pet bulldog Mickey Cohen, Jr., keeping his tootsies warm, his money man Davey Goldman, also convicted of tax beefs, warming a cell down the hall. L.A. gangland activity has been – enjoying? *enduring?* – a strange lull since Mickey packed his PJs for Puget Sound, and we at *Hush-Hush*, privy to many unnamable insider sources, have a theory as to what's been shaking. Listen close, dear reader: this is off the record, on the QT and *very Hush-Hush.*

November '51: adiós Mickey, pack a toothbrush and don't forget to write. Before catching the McNeil Island Express, the Mickster informs his number two man, Morris Jahelka, that he (Mo) will remain titular boss of Kingdom Cohen, which Mickey has 'long-term loan' divested to various legit, non-criminal businessmen that he trusts, to be quietly run by out-of-town muscle on a drastically scaled-down basis. Mickey may come off like a vicious buffoon, but Mrs. Cohen's little boy has a head on his simian shoulders.

Are you on our wavelength so far, dear reader? Yes? Good, now listen even more closely.

Mickey languishes in his cell, living the prison life of Riley, and time goes by. The Mick gets percentage fees from his 'franchise holders,' funneled straight to Swiss bank accounts, and when he's paroled he'll get 'give-back fees' and have Kingdom Cohen returned to him on a planer. He'll rebuild his evil empire and happy days will be here again.

Such is the power of the ubiquitous Mickey C. that for several years no upstart gangsters try to crash his lulled-down, on-siesta rackets. Jack 'The Enforcer' Whalen, however, a well-known thug/gambler, somehow knows of Mickey's plan to let sleeping dogs snooze while he's stuck in stir and the police are gratefully twiddling their thumbs with no mobster nests to swat. Whalen does not attack the diminutized Kingdom Cohen – he simply builds up a rival, strictly bookmaking kingdom with no fear of reprisals.

Meanwhile, what has happened to some of the Mickster's chief goons? Well, nebbish-like Mo Jahelka keeps triplicate sets of books for the franchise holders, whiz at figures that he is, and Davey Goldman, stuck in stir with his boss, walks Mickey Cohen, Jr., around the McNeil Island yard. Abe Teitlebaum, Cohen muscle goon, owns a delicatessen that features greasy sandwiches named after Borscht Belt comedians, and Lee Vachss, Mr. Ice Pick To The Ear, sells patent medicine. *Our* favorite Mickey misanthrope, Johnny Stompanato (sometimes known as 'Oscar' because of his Academy Award-size appendage), nurses a long-term case of the hots for Lana Turner, and may have returned to his old pre-Cohen ways: running blackmail/extortion rackets. Assuming that Whalen and Mickey don't collide upon the Mick's release, things look hunky-dory and copacetic, don't they? Gangland amity all around?

Perhaps *no*.

Item: in August of 1954 John Fisher Diskant, an alleged Cohen franchise holder, was gunned down outside a motel in Culver City. No suspects, no arrests, current disposition: the case reposes in the open file of the Culver City P.D.

Item: May 1955: two alleged Cohen prostitution bosses, franchise holders both – Nathan Janklow and George Palevsky – are gunned down outside the Torch Song Tavern in Riverside. No suspects, no arrests, current disposition: the Riverside County sheriff says case closed due to lack of evidence.

Item: July 1956: Walker Ted Turow, known drug peddler who had recently stated his desire to 'push white horse very large and become a bonaroo racketeer' is found shot to death at his pad in San Pedro. You guessed it: no clues, no suspects, no arrests, current disposition with the LAPD's Harbor Division: open file, we're not holding our breath.

Now, dig it, children: all four of these gang-connected or would be gang-connected chumps were shot dead by three-man trigger gangs. The cases were barely investigated because the respective investigating agencies considered the victims lowlifes whose deaths did not merit justice. We wish we could say that ballistics reports indicate that the same guns were used for all three shootings, but they weren't – although .30-30 ripples pistols were the killers' M.O. all three times. And we at *Hush-Hush* know that no interagency effort has been launched to catch the killers. In fact, we at *Hush-Hush* are the first even to connect the crimes in theory. Tsk, tsk. We *do* know that Jack Whalen and his chief factotums are alibied up tight as a crab's pincer for the times of the killings and that Mickey C. and Davey G. have been questioned and have no idea who the bad boys are. Intriguing, right, dear reader? So far, no overt moves have been made to take over siesta time Kingdom Cohen, but we have word that Mickey minion Morris Jahelka has packed up and moved to Florida, scared witless . . .

And the Mickster is soon to be paroled. What will happen then??????

Remember, dear reader, you saw it here first. Off the record, on the QT and *very Hush-Hush*.

1957

CONFIDENTIAL LAPD REPORT: compiled by Internal Affairs Division, dated 2/10/57.
Investigating officer: Sgt. D. W. Fisk, Badge 6129, IAD. Submitted at the request of Deputy Chief Thad Green, Chief of Detectives.
Subject: White, Wendell A., Homicide Division

Sir:

When you initiated this investigation you stated that Officer White passing the sergeant's exam with high marks after two failing attempts and nine years in the Bureau startled you, especially in the light of Lt. Dudley Smith's recent promotion to captain. I have thoroughly investigated Officer White and have come up with many contradictory items which should interest you. Since you already have access to Officer White's arrest record and personnel sheet, I will concentrate solely on those items.

1. White, who is unmarried and without immediate family, has been

intimately involved on a sporadic basis with one Lynn Margaret Bracken, age 33, for the past several years. This woman, the owner of Veronica's Dress Shop in Santa Monica, is rumored (unsubstantiated by police records) to be an ex-prostitute.

2. White, who was brought into Homicide by Lt. Smith in 1952, has, of course, not turned into the superior case man that (now) Capt. Smith assumed he would be. His 1952–53 work under Lt. Smith with the Surveillance Detail was, of course, legendary, and resulted in White's killing two men in the line of duty. Since his (April 1953) shooting of Nite Owl case collateral suspect Sylvester Fitch, White has served under Lt./Capt. Smith with little formal distinction. However (rather amazingly), there have been no excessive force complaints filed against him (see White's personnel sheets 1948–51 for records of his previous dismissed complaints). It is known that during those years and up until the spring of 1953 White visited paroled wife beaters and verbally and/or physically abused them. Evidence points to the fact that these illegal forays have not recurred for almost four years. White remains volatile (as you know, he received a departmental reprimand for punching out windows in the Homicide pen when he received word that his former partner, Sgt. R. A. Stensland, had been sentenced to death), but it is known that he has sometimes avoided work with Lt./Capt. Smith's Mobster Squad, straining his relationship with Smith, his Bureau mentor. Citing the violent nature of the assignment, White has been quoted as saying, 'I've got no more stomach left for that stuff.' Interesting, when given White's reputation and past record.

3. In spring 1956, White took nine months' accumulated sick leave and vacation time when Capt. E. J. Exley rotated in as acting commander of Homicide. (A well-known hatred exists between White and Capt. Exley, deriving from the 1951 Christmas brutality affair.) During his time off from duty, White (whose Academy scores indicate only average intelligence and below average literacy) attended criminology and forensics classes at USC and took and passed (at his own expense) the FBI's 'Criminal Investigation Procedures' seminar at Quantico, Virginia. White had failed the sergeant's exam twice before embarking on these studies, and on his third attempt passed with a score of 89. His sergeantcy should come in before the end of the 1957 calendar year.

4. In November 1954, R. A. Stensland was executed at San Quentin. White asked for and received permission to attend the execution. He spent the night before the execution on death row drinking with Stensland. (I was told the assistant warden overlooked this infraction of prison rules out of a regard for Stensland's ex-policeman status.) Capt. Exley also attended the execution, and it is not known if he and White had words before or after the event.

5. I saved the most interesting item for last. It is interesting in that it illustrates White's continued (and perhaps increasing) tendency to overinvolve himself in matters pertaining to abused and (now) murdered women, i.e. White has shown undue curiosity in a number of unsolved prostitute killings that he believes to be connected: murders that have taken place in California and various parts of the West over the past several years. The victim's names, DODs and locations of death are:

Jane Mildred Hamsher, 3/08/51, San Diego

Kathy NMI Janeway, 4/19/53, Los Angeles
Sharon Susan Palwick, 8/29/53, Bakersfield, Calif.
Sally NMI DeWayne, 11/02/55, Needles, Ariz.
Chrissie Virginia Renfro, 7/16/56, San Francisco

White has told other Homicide officers that he thinks evidential similarities point to one killer, and he has traveled (at his own expense) to the above-listed cities where the crimes occurred. Naturally, the detectives that White has talked to considered him a pest and were reluctant to share information with him, and it is not known whether he has made progress toward solving any of the above cases. Lt. J. S. DiCenzo, Commander of the West Valley Station squad, stated that he thinks White's hooker-killing fixation dates back to the time of the Nite Owl case, when White became personally concerned about the murder of a young prostitute (Kathy Janeway) he was acquainted with.

6. All in all, a surprising investigation. Personally, I admire White's initiative and persistence in pursuing a sergeantcy and his (albeit untoward) tenacity in the matter of the prostitute homicides. A list of my interview references will follow in a separate memo.

Respectfully,
Sgt. D. W. Fisk, 6129, IAD

CONFIDENTIAL LAPD REPORT: Compiled by Internal Affairs Division, dated 3/11/57.
Investigating officer: Sgt. Donald Kleckner, Badge 688, IAD. Submitted at the request of William H. Parker, Chief of Police
Subject: Vincennes, John, Sergeant, Surveillance Detail.

Sir:

You stated that you wished to explore, in light of Sgt. Vincennes' deteriorating duty performance, the advisability of offering him early retirement by stress pension before the twentieth anniversary of his LAPD appointment comes up in May 1958. I deem that measure inappropriate at this time. Granted, Vincennes is an obvious alcoholic; granted also, his alcoholism cost him his job with *Badge of Honor* and thus cost the LAPD a small fortune in promotional considerations. Granted again, at 42 he is too old to be working a high-risk assignment such as the Surveillance Detail. As for his admittedly deteriorating performance, it is only deteriorating because Vincennes was, during his Narcotics Division heyday, a bold and inspired policeman. From my interviews I have concluded that he does not drink on duty and that his deteriorating performance can best be summed up by 'sluggishness' and 'bad reflexes.' Moreover, should Vincennes reject an early retirement offer, my guess is that the pension board would back him up.

Sir, I know that you consider Vincennes a disgrace as a policeman. I agree with you, but advise you to consider his connection to District Attorney Loew. The Department needs Loew to prosecute our cases, as your new chief aide, Capt. Smith, will tell you. Vincennes continues to solicit funds and run errands for Loew, and should Loew, as expected, be reelected next week, he would most likely intercede if you decided to pressure Vincennes out of the Department. My recommendation is as follows: keep Vincennes on

Surveillance until 3/58, when a new commander is scheduled to rotate in with his own replacement officers, then assign him to menial duties in a patrol division until his 5/15/58 retirement date arrives. At that time, Vincennes, humbled by a return to uniformed duty, could probably be persuaded to separate from the Department with all due speed.

Respectfully,
Donald J. Kleckner, IAD

BANNER: L.A. *Times*, March 15:

LOEW REELECTED IN LANDSLIDE; STATEHOUSE BID NEXT?

EXTRACT: L.A. *Times*, July 8:

MICKEY COHEN WOUNDED IN PRISON YARD ATTACK

McNeil Island Federal Prison officials announced that yesterday mobsters Meyer Harris 'Mickey' Cohen and David 'Davey' Goldman were wounded in a vicious daylight attack.

Cohen and Goldman, both slated to be paroled in September, were watching a softball game on the prison yard when three hooded assailants wielding pipes and handmade 'shivs' descended. Goldman was stabbed twice in the shoulder and beaten viciously about the head, and Cohen escaped with superficial puncture wounds. Prison doctors said that Goldman's injuries are severe and that he may have suffered irreparable brain damage. The assailants escaped, and at this moment a massive investigation is being conducted to discover who they are. McNeil administrator R. J. Wolf said, 'We believe this was a so-called death contract, contracted to in-prison inmates by outside sources. Every effort will be made to get to the bottom of this incident.'

Hush-Hush Magazine, October 1957 issue:

MICKEY COHEN BACK IN L.A.!!! ARE HIS BAD OLD GOOD TIMES HERE TO STAY???

He was the most colorful mobster the City of Fallen Angels had ever seen, Hepcat – and to dig his act at the Mocambo or the Troc was like watching Daddy-o Stradivarius chop a fiddle from a tree trunk. He'd crack jokes written by gagster Davey Goldman, slip fat envelopes to the bagmen from the Sheriffs Department and do a wicked Lindy hop with his squeeze Audrey Anders or the other comely quail sashaying on the premises. Eyes would dart to his table and the ladies would surreptitiously survey his chief bodyguard, Johnny Stompanato, and wonder, 'Is he really *that* large?' Sycophants, stooges, glad-handers, pissanters and general rimbamboos would drop by the Mickster's side, to be rewarded with jokes, a backslap, a handout. The Mick was a soft touch for crippled kids, stray dogs, the Salvation Army and the United Jewish Appeal. The Mick also ran bookmaking, loansharking, gambling, prostitution and dope rackets and killed an average of a dozen people a year. Nobody's perfect, right, Hepcat? You leave your toenail trimmings on the bathroom floor, Mickey sends people on the night train to

Slice City.

Dig it, Hepcat: people also tried to kill Mickey!!! A mensch like that? – No!!!! Yes, Hepcat, what goes around comes around. The trouble was, the Mick had more lives than the proverbial feline, kept dodging bombs, bullets and dynamite while those around him went down dead, survived six years at McNeil Island Pen, including a recent shiv/pipe attack – and now he's back! Sy Devore, watch out: the Mickster will be in for a few dozen shiny new sharkskin suits; Trocadero and Mocambo cigarette girls, get ready for some C-note tips. Mickey and his entourage will soon descend on the Sunset Strip, and – *very Hush-Hush* – yes, ladies, Johnny Stompanato is *that* large, but he only has eyes for Lana Turner, and word is that he and Lana have been playing more than footsie lately . . .

But back to Mickey C. Avid *Hush-Hush* readers will recall our October '56 Crimewatch feature, where we speculated on the gangland 'lull' that has been going on since the Mick went to stir. Well, some *still* unsolved deaths occurred, and that pipe/shiv attack that wounded Mickey and left his stooge Davey Goldman a vegetable? Well . . . they never got the hooded inmate assailants who attempted to send Mickey and his man to Slice City . . .

Call this a warning, children: he's a mensch, he's local color to the nth degree, he's the marvelous, malevolent benevolent Mickster. He's tough to kill, 'cause innocent bystanders take the hot lead with his name on it. Mickey's back, and his old gang might be forming up again. Hepcat, when you club hop on the sin-tillating Sunset Strip, bring a bulletproof vest in case Meyer Harris Cohen sits nearby.

EXTRACT: L.A. *Herald-Express*, November 10:

MOBSTER COHEN SURVIVES BOMB ATTEMPT

A bomb exploded under the home of paroled mobster Mickey Cohen early this morning. Cohen and his wife, Lavonne, were not injured, but the bomb did destroy a wardrobe room that housed three hundred of Cohen's custom-made suits. Cohen's pet bulldog, asleep nearby, was treated for a singed tail at West-side Veterinary Hospital and released. Cohen could not be reached for comment.

Confidential letter, addendum to the outside agency investigation report required on all incoming commanders of Internal Affairs Division, Los Angeles Police Department, requested by Chief William H. Parker.

11/29/57

Dear Bill –

God, we were sergeants together! It seems like a million years ago, and you were right. I did relish the chance to slip briefly back into harness and play detective again. I felt slightly treacherous interviewing officers behind Ed and Preston's back, but again you were right: firstly in your overall policy of outside agency validation for incoming I.A. chiefs, and secondly in choosing an ex-policeman predisposed to like Ed Exley to query brother officers on the man. Hell, Bill, we both love Ed. Which makes me happy to state that, basic investigation aside (the D.A.'s Bureau is conducting it, aren't they?), I have nothing but positives to report.

I spoke to a number of Detective Bureau men and a number of uniformed officers. One consensus of opinion held: Ed Exley is very well respected. Some officers considered his shooting of the Nite Owl suspects injudicious, most considered it bold and a few tagged it as intentionally grandstanding. Whatever, my opinion is that that act is what Ed Exley is most remembered for and that it has largely eclipsed the bad feelings he generated by serving as an informant in the Bloody Christmas matter. Ed's jump from sergeant to captain was greatly resented, but he is considered to have proven his mettle as divisional floater: the man has run seven divisions in under five years, established many valuable contacts and has earned the general respect of the men serving under him. Your basic concern: that his 'not one of the boys' nature would provoke anger when it was learned that he would be running I.A., seems so far to be unfounded. Word is out that Ed will take over I.A. early in '58, and it is tacitly assumed that he will vigorously pursue the assignment. My guess is that his reputation for sternness and intelligence will deter many potentially bent cops into sticking to the straight and narrow.

It is also known that Ed has passed the exam for promotion to inspector and is first on the promotion list. Here some notes of discord appear. It is generally viewed that Thad Green will retire in the next several years and that Ed might well be chosen to replace him as chief of detectives. The great majority of the men I spoke to voiced the opinion that Capt. Dudley Smith, older, much more experienced and more the leader type, should have the job.

Some personal observations to supplant your outside agency report. (1) Ed's relationship with Inez Soto is physically intimate, but I know he would never violate departmental regs by cohabitating with her. Inez is a great kid, by the way. She's become good friends with Preston, Ray Dieterling and myself, and her public relations work for Dream-a-Dreamland is near brilliant. And so what if she's a Mexican? (2) I spoke to I.A. Sgts. Fisk and Kleckner about Ed – the two worked Robbery under him, are junior straight-arrow Exley types and are positively ecstatic that their hero is about to become their C.O. (3) As someone who has known Ed Exley since he was a child, and as an ex-police officer, I'll go on the record: he's as good as his father and I'd be willing to bet that if you made a tally you'd see that he's made more major cases than any LAPD detective ever. I'm also willing to bet that he's wise to this affectionate little ploy you've initiated: all good cops have intelligence networks.

I'll close with a favor. I'm thinking of writing a book of reminiscences about my years with the Department. Would it be possible for me to borrow the file on the Loren Atherton case? Without Preston and Ed knowing, please – I don't want them to think I've gone arty-farty in my waning years.

I hope this little addendum serves you well. Best to Helen, and thanks for the opportunity to be a cop again.

Sincerely,
Art De Spain

LAPD TRANSFER BULLETINS

1. Officer Wendell A. White, Homicide Division to the Hollywood Station Detective Squad (and to assume the rank of Sergeant), effective 1/2/58.

2. Sgt. John Vincennes, Surveillance Detail to Wilshire Division Patrol, effective when a replacement officer is assigned, but no later than 3/15/58.

3. Capt. Edmund J. Exley to permanent duty station: Commander, Internal Affairs Division, effective 1/2/58.

Part Three

Internal Affairs

Chapter Forty-two

THE DINING CAR had a New Year's hangover: drooping crepe paper, '1958' signs losing spangles. Ed took his favorite booth: a view of the lounge, his image in a mirror. He marked the time – 3:24 P.M., 1/2/58. Let Bob Gallaudet show up late – anything to stretch the moment.

In an hour, the ceremony: Captain E. J. Exley assumes a permanent duty station – Commander, Internal Affairs Division. Gallaudet was bringing the results of his outside agency validation – the D.A.'s Bureau had gone over his personal life with a magnifying glass. He'd pass – his personal life was squeaky clean, putting the Nite Owl boys in the ground outgunned his Bloody Christmas snitching – he'd known it for years.

Ed sipped coffee, eyes on the mirror. His reflection: a man a month from thirty-six who looked forty-five. Blond hair gone gray; crease lines in his forehead. Inez said his eyes were getting smaller and colder; his wire rims made him look harsh. He'd told her harsh was better than soft – boy captains needed help. She'd laughed – it was a few years ago, when they were still laughing.

He placed the conversation: late '54, Inez analytical – 'You're a ghoul for watching that man Stensland die.' A year and a half post-Nite Owl; today made four years and nine months. A look in the mirror, a claim on those years – and what he'd had with Inez.

His killings pushed Bud White out: four deaths eclipsed one death. Those first months she was all his: he'd proven himself to her specifications. He bought her a house down the block; she loved their gentle sex; she accepted Ray Dieterling's job offer. Dieterling fell in love with Inez and her story: a beautiful rape victim abandoned by her family dovetailed with his own losses – once divorced, once wid-owered, his son Paul dead in an avalanche, his son Billy a homosexual. Ray and Inez became father and daughter – colleagues, deep friends. Preston Exley and Art De Spain joined Dieterling in devotion – a circle of hardcase men and a woman who made them grateful for the chance to feel gentle.

Inez took friendships from a fantasy kingdom: the builders, the second generation – Billy Dieterling, Timmy Valburn. A chatty little clique: they talked up Hollywood gossip, poked fun at male foibles. The word 'men' sent them into gales of laughter. They made fun of policemen and played charades in a house bought by Captain Ed Exley.

All claims came back to Inez.

After the killings, he had nightmares: were they innocent? Impotent rage made his finger jerk the trigger; the dramatic resolution made the Department look so good that little facts like 'Unarmed' and 'Not Dangerous' would never surface to crush him. Inez stilled his fears with a statement: the rapists drove her to Sylvester Fitch's house in the middle of the night and left her there – giving them time to take down the Nite Owl. She never told the police about it because she did not want to recount the especially ugly things that Fitch did to her. He was relieved: *guilty* dead men shored up the justice in his rage.

Inez.

Time passed, the glow wore off – her pain and his heroism couldn't sustain them. Inez knew he'd never marry her: a high-ranking cop, a Mexican wife – career suicide. His love held by threads; Inez grew remote – a sometime lover in practice. Two people molded by extraordinary events, a powerful supporting cast hovering: the Nite Owl dead, Bud White.

White's face in the green room: pure hatred while Dick Stensland sucked gas. A look at Dicky Stens dying, a look his way, no words necessary. Leave time called in so they wouldn't have to work together when he took over Homicide. He'd surpassed his brother, grown closer to his father. His major case record was astounding; in May he'd be an inspector, in a few years he'd compete with Dudley Smith for chief of detectives. Smith had always given him a wide berth and a wary respect couched in contempt – and Dudley was the most feared man in the LAPD. Did he know that his rival feared only one thing: revenge perpetrated by a thug/cop without the brains to be imaginative?

The bar was filling up: D.A.'s personnel, a few women. The last time with Inez was bad – she just serviced the man who paid the mortgage. Ed smiled at a tall woman – she turned away.

'Congratulations, Cap. You're Boy Scout clean.'

Gallaudet sat down – strained, nervous.

'Then why do you look so grim? Come on, Bob, we're partners.'

'*You're* clean, but Inez was put under loose surveillance for two weeks, just routine. Ed . . . oh shit, she's sleeping with Bud White.'

The ceremony – one big blur.

Parker made a speech: policemen were subject to the same temptations as civilians, but needed to keep their baser urges in check to a greater degree in order to serve as moral exemplars for a society increasingly undercut by the pervasive influence of Communism, crime, liberalism and general moral turpitude. A morally upright exemplar was needed to command the division that served as a guarantor of police morality, and Captain Edmund J. Exley, war hero and hero of the Nite Owl murder case, was that man.

He made a speech himself: more pap on morality. Duane Fisk and Don Kleckner wished him luck; he read their minds through his blur: they wanted his chief assistant spots. Dudley Smith winked, easy to read: 'I will be our next chief of detectives – not you.' Excuses for leaving took forever – he made it to her place with the blur clearing hard.

6:00 – Inez got home around 7:00. Ed let himself in, waited with the lights out.

Time dragged; Ed watched his watch hands move. 6:50 – a key in the door.

'Exley, are you skulking? I saw your car outside.'

'No lights. I don't want to see your face.' Noises – keys rattling, a purse dropped to the floor. 'And I don't want to see all that faggot Dreamland junk you've plastered on the walls.'

'You mean the walls of the house you paid for?'

'You said it, not me.'

Sounds: Inez resting herself against the door. 'Who told you?'

'It doesn't matter.'

'Are you going to ruin him for it?'

'*Him?* No, there's no way I could do it without making myself look even more foolish than I've been. And you can say his name.'

No answer.

'Did you help him with the sergeant's exam? He didn't have the brains to pass it on his own.'

No answer.

'How long? How many fucks behind my back?'

No answer.

‘How long, *puta*?’

Inez sighed. ‘Maybe four years. On and off, when we each needed a friend.’

‘You mean when you didn’t need me?’

‘I mean when I got exhausted being treated like a rape victim. When I got terrified of how far you’d go to impress me.’

Ed said, ‘I took you out of Boyle Heights and gave you a life.’

Inez said, ‘Exley, you started to scare me. I just wanted to be a girl seeing a guy, and Bud gave me that.’

‘Don’t you say his name in this house.’

‘You mean in *your* house?’

‘I gave you a decent life. You’d be pounding tortillas on a rock if it wasn’t for me.’

‘*Querido*, you turn ugly so well.’

‘How many other lies, Inez? How many other lies besides him?’

‘Exley, let’s break this off.’

‘No, give me a rundown.’

No answer.

‘How many other men? How many other lies?’

No answer.

‘Tell me.’

No answer.

‘You fucking whore, after what I did for you. *Tell me.*’

No answer.

‘I let you be friends with my father. *Preston Exley is your friend because of me.* How many other men have you fucked behind my back? How many other lies after what I did for you?’

Inez, a small voice. ‘You don’t want to know.’

‘Yes I do, you fucking whore.’

Inez pushed off the door. ‘Here’s the only lie that counts, and it’s all for you. Not even my sweetie pie Bud knows it, so I hope it makes you feel special.’

Ed stood up. ‘Lies don’t scare me.’

Inez laughed. ‘*Everything* scares you.’

No answer.

Inez, calm. ‘The *negritos* who hurt me couldn’t have killed the people at the Nite Owl, because they were with me the whole night. They never left my sight. I lied because I didn’t want you to feel bad that you’d killed four men for me. And you want to know what the *big* lie is? You and your precious absolute justice.'

Ed pushed out the door, hands on his ears to kill the roar. Dark, cold outside – he saw Dick Stens strapped down dead.

Chapter Forty-three

BUD CHECKED OUT his new badge: ‘Sergeant’ where ‘Policeman’ used to be. He put his feet up on his desk, said goodbye to Homicide.

His cubicle was a mess – five years’ worth of paper. Dudley said the Hollywood squad transfer was just temporary – his sergeantcy shocked the brass, Thad Green was juking him for his window-punching number: Dick Stens green room bound, left/right hooks into glass. A fair trade: he never became a crackerjack case man because the only cases that mattered were case closed and case/cases shitcanned. Transfer blues: leaving Bureau HQ meant no early crack at dead-body reports – a good way to keep tabs on the Kathy Janeway case and the hooker snuff string he knew tied to it.

Stuff to take with him:

His new nameplate – ’Sergeant Wendell White,’ a picture of Lynn: brunette, goodbye Veronica Lake.

A Mobster Squad photo: him and Dud at the Victory Motel. Mobster Squad goodies – brass knuckles, a ball-bearing sap – he might leave them behind.

Lock and key stuff:

His FBI and forensics class diplomas; Dick Stensland’s legacy: six grand from his robbery take. Dick’s last words – a note a guard passed him.

> Partner –
>
> I regret the bad things I done. I especially regret the people I hurt when I was a policeman who just got in my way when I was feeling mean and the Christmas guys and the liquor store man and his son. It’s too late to change it all. So all I can do is say I’m sorry, which don’t mean anything worthwhile. I’ll try to take my punishment like a man. I keep thinking it could be you instead of me who did what I did, that it was just the luck of the draw and I know maybe you’ve thought the same thing. I wish being sorry counted for more with guys like you and me. I payed the piper and called the tune and all that, but Exley kept the piper tune going when he didn’t have to and if I got a last request it is that you get him for his share and don’t be stupid and do something dumb like I would have did. Use your brains and that money I told you where to find and give it to him good, a good one in the keester from Sergeant Dick Stens. Good luck, partner. I can’t hardly believe that when you read this I’ll be dead.

Double-locked in the bottom drawer:

His file on the Janeway/hooker snuffs, his private Nite Owl file – textbook pure, like he learned in school.

Two cases that proved he was a real detective; Dick's shot at Ed Exley. He pulled them out, read them over – college boy stuff all the way.

The Janeway string.

When things sizzled down with Lynn, he started looking for stuff to jazz him. Prowling for women didn't cut it – ditto his on-and-off thing with Inez. He flunked the sergeant's exam twice, paid his way through school with Dick's stash, worked the Mobster Squad part-time: meeting trains, planes, buses, taking would-be racketeers to the Victory Motel, beating the shit out of them and escorting them back to planes, trains, buses. Dud called it 'containment'; he called it too much to take and still like looking at yourself in the mirror. Good cases never came his way at Homicide: Thad Green bootjacked them, assigned different men. His classes taught him interesting stuff about forensics, criminal psychology and procedure – he decided to apply what he'd learned to an old case that still simmered with him: the Kathy Janeway job.

He read Joe DiCenzo's case file: no leads, no suspects, written off as a random sex kill. He read the autopsy reconstruction: Kathy beaten to death, face blows, a man with rings on both fists. B+ secretor semen in the mouth, rectum, vagina – three separate ejaculations, the bastard took his time. He got a flash backed up by case histories: a sex fiend like that doesn't kill just once, then go back to twiddling his thumbs.

He started paper-prowling – the kind of thing he used to hate.

No similar solveds or unsolveds anywhere in the LAPD and Sheriffs Department files – the search took him eight months. He worked his way through other police agencies – Stens' money for a stake. Zero for Orange County, San Bernardino County; four months in and a match with the San Diego PD: Jane Mildred Hamsher, 19, hooker, DOD 3/8/51, the same handwork and three-way rape: no clues, no suspects, case closed.

He read LAPD and SDPD M.O. files and got nowhere; he remembered Dudley warning him off the Janeway case – ragging him for going crazy on woman basher jobs. He went ahead anyway;

pay dirt on a tri-state teletype: Sharon Susan Palwick, 20, hooker, DOD 8/29/53, Bakersfield, California. The same specs: no suspects, no leads, case closed. Dud never mentioned the teletype – if he knew it existed.

He went to Diego and Bakerfield – read files, pestered detectives who worked the cases. They were bored with the jobs – and gave him the brush. He tried reconstructing the time and place element: who was in those cities on the dates of the killings. He checked old train, bus and airplane records, got no crossover names, put out standing tri-state teletypes requesting information on the killer's M.O., asking for call-ins should his killer ply that M.O. again. Nothing came in on the info request; three dead-body reports trickled in over the years: Sally NMI DeWayne, 17, hooker, Needles, Arizona, 11/2/55; Chrissie Virginia Renfro, 21, hooker, San Francisco, 7/14/56; Maria NMI Waldo, 20, hooker, Seattle two months ago: 11/28/57. The call-ins logged in late, the same results: goose egg. Every angle, every schoolboy approach tapped – for nothing. Kathy Janeway and five other prostitutes raped, beaten to death – open stuff only with him.

A 116-page dead-end file to take to the Hollywood squad – his own case, dead for now.

And his major case – pages and pages he kept checking over. Dick Stens' case: nails in Ed Exley's coffin. He got goose bumps just saying the words.

The Nite Owl case.

Starting in on the Janeway job brought it back: the Duke Cathcart/smut connection, evidence withheld, insider stuff to fuck Exley. Timing was against him then: he didn't have the smarts to pursue it, the niggers escaped, Exley gunned them down. The Nite Owl case was closed – the weird side bits around it forgotten. Years passed; he went back to the Janeway snuff, discovered a string. And little Kathy made him think Nite Owl, Nite Owl, Nite Owl.

Brainwork.

Back in '53, Dwight Gilette and Cindy Benavides – Kathy Janeway K.A.'s – told him a guy who came on like Duke Cathcart was talking up muscling Cathcart's pimp business. What 'pimp business'? – Duke had only two skags in his stable, but he had been talking up going into the smut biz – at first it sounded like a pipe dream coming from a major-league pipe dreamer – but it got validated when the Englek1ing brothers came forward and told their story of

Cathcart approaching them with a deal: they'd print the smut, he'd distribute it, they'd approach Mickey Cohen for financing.

Cut to facts:

He was inside Duke's pad post-Nite Owl. It was tidied up and print-wiped; Duke's clothes had been gone through. The San Bernardino Yellow Pages were ruffled – the pages for printing shops especially. Pete and Bax Englekling owned a printshop in San Berdoo; Nite Owl victim Susan Nancy Lefferts was originally from San Berdoo.

Cut to the coroner's report:

The examining pathologist based his identification of Cathcart's body on two things: dental plate *fragments* cross-checked against Cathcart's prison dental records and the 'D.C.' monogrammed sports jacket the stiff was wearing. The plate fragments were standard California prison issue – any ex-con who'd done time in the state penal system could have plastic like that in his mouth.

Cut to his insider skinny:

Kathy Janeway mentioned a 'cute' scar on Duke's chest. There was no mention of that scar anywhere in Doc Layman's autopsy report – and Cathcart's chest was not obliterated by shotgun pellets. A final kicker: the Nite Owl stiff was measured at 5′8″; Cathcat's prison measurement chart listed him at 5′9¼″.

Conclusion:

A Cathcart impersonator was killed at the Nite Owl.

Cut to:

Smut.

Cindy Benavides said Duke was getting ready to push it; Ad Vice was investigating smut back then – he'd read through Squad 4's reports – all the men reported no leads, Russ Millard died, the fuck book gig fell by the wayside. The Englekling brothers told their story of Duke Cathcart's smut approach, how they visited Mickey Cohen in prison, how he refused to bankroll the deal. They thought Cohen ordered the Nite Owl snuffs out of batshit moral convictions – a ridiculous idea – but what if some kind of Nite Owl plot got started with the Mick? Exley submitted a report that said he and Bob Gallaudet talked up that theory, but the jigs escaped around then – and the Nite Owl got pinned on them.

Cut to:

His theory.

What if Cohen told some prison punk about the Cathcart/

Englekling plan – or his man Davey Goldman did? What if the punk got paroled, talked up crashing Duke's stable while he was really just shoring up juice for his Duke impersonation? What if he killed Duke, stole some of his clothes and ended up at the Nite Owl by chance – because Duke frequented the place, or more likely – *as part of some kind of criminal rendezvous that went bad, the killers leaving, coming back with shotguns, blasting the Cathcart impersonator and five innocent bystanders to make it look like a robbery?*

Flaw in his theory so far:

He'd checked McNeil parole records: only Negroes, Latins and white men too large or too small to be the Cathcart impersonator were released between the time of the Cohen-Englekling brothers meeting and the Nite Owl. But – Cohen could have talked up the Cathcart smut proposal, word could have leaked to the outside, the impersonation could have been four or five tinies fucking removed.

Theories on top of theories, theories that proved he had the brains to call himself a detective:

Say the Nite Owl snuffs came out of smut intrigue. That meant the niggers were innocent, the real killers planted the shotguns in Ray Coates' car – which meant that the purple Merc seen outside the Nite Owl was a coincidence – the killers couldn't have known that three spooks were recently seen discharging shotguns in Griffith Park and would rank as natural first suspects. Somehow the killers found Coates' car before the LAPD – and planted the shotguns, print-wiped. It could have happened a half dozen ways.

1. Coates, in jail, could have told his lawyer where the car was stashed; the killers or their front man could have approached him for the information – or could have coerced him into making Coates talk.

2. The jigs could have spilled the location to one of their fellow inmates – maybe a planted inmate in with the killers.

3. His favorite, because it was simplest: the killers were smarter than the LAPD, did their own garage search, checked out garages behind deserted houses first – while the police went at it in grids.

Or the spooks told other inmates, who got released and got approached by the killers; or – unlikely – a cop finger man told them how the block search was breaking down. Impossible to check it all out: the Hall of Justice Jail destroyed its 1935–55 records to make way for more storage space.

Or the jigs really were guilty.

Or it was some other bunch of boogies riding around, blasting the air in Griffith Park, killing six people at the Nite Owl. Their 1948–50 Ford/Chevy/Merc was never located because the purple paint job was homemade, never listed on a DMV form.

Brainwork from a guy who never thought he had much of a brain – and he didn't make a shine gang for the snuffs, because -

The Englekling brothers sold their printshop mid-'54, then dropped off the face of the earth. Two years ago, he issued a 'Whereabouts' bulletin: no results, no positive results on the cadaver bulletins he'd been tracking statewide: zilch on the brothers, no stiffs that might be the real Duke Cathcart. And – six months ago, following up in San Berdoo, he got a hot lead.

He found a San Berdoo townie who'd seen Susan Nancy Lefferts with a man matching Duke Cathcart's description – two weeks before the Nite Owl killings. He showed him some Cathcart mugshots; the man said, 'Close, but no cigar.' The Nite Owl forensic had Susan Nancy 'flailing' to touch the man sitting at the next table: Duke Cathcart, really the impersonator, supposedly unknown to her. Why were they sitting at *different tables?* The kicker: he tried to interview Sue Lefferts' mother, a chance to run the boyfriend by her. She refused to talk to him.

Why?

Bud packed up: mementoes, ten pounds of paper. Stalemates for now – no new whore leads, the Nite Owl dead until he braced Mickey Cohen. Out to the elevator – adiós, Homicide.

Ed Exley walked by staring.

He knows about Inez and me.

Chapter Forty-four

STAKEOUT: HANK'S RANCH MARKET, 52nd and Central. A sign above the door: 'Welfare Checks Cashed.' January 3, relief day – check-cashers shooting craps on the sidewalk. Surveillance Squad 5 got a tip – some anonymous ginch said her boyfriend and his buddy were going to take the market off, she was pissed at the boyfriend for porking her sister. Jack in the point car, watching the door, Sergeant John Petievich parked on 52 – scowling like he wanted to kill something.

Lunch: Fritos, straight vodka. Jack yawned, stretched, cut odds: Aragon vs. Pimentel, what Ellis Loew wanted – he was supposed to meet him at a political soiree tonight. The vodka burned his stomach; he had to piss wicked bad.

Horn toots – his signal. Petievich pointed to the sidewalk. Two white men entered the market.

Jack walked across the street. Petievich walked over. A frame on the doorway, a look in. The robbers at the checkstand, backs to the door – guns out, spare hands full of money.

No proprietor. No customers. A squint down the far aisle – blood and brains on the wall. SILENCER. BACK DOOR MAN. Jack shot the heisters in the back.

Petievich screamed; back door footsteps; Jack fired blind, chased. Bottles broke over his head: blind shots, silencer rounds – no noise, muffled thwaps. Down the far aisle, two dead winos, a door closing. Petievich fired, blew the door off – a man sprinted across the alley. Jack emptied his piece; the man vaulted a fence. Shouts from the sidewalk; crapshooters cheering. Jack reloaded, jumped the fence, hit a backyard. A Doberman jumped at him, snarling, snapping teeth in his face – Jack shot him point-blank. The dog belched blood; Jack heard shots, saw the fence explode.

Two bluesuits hit the yard running. Jack dropped his gun; they fired anyway – wide – blowing out fence pickets. Jack put his hands up. Police officer! Police officer! Policeman!'

They came up slow, frisked him – peach-fuzz rookies. The taller kid found his ID. ‘Hey, Vincennes. You used to be some kind of hotshot, didn’t you?’

Jack cold-cocked him – a knee to the nuts. The kid went down; the other kid gawked.

Jack went looking for a place to drink.

He found a juke joint, ordered a line of shots. Two drinks killed his shakes; two more made him a toastmaster.

To the men I just killed: sorry, I’m really better at shooting unarmed civilians. I’m being squeezed into retirement, so I thought I’d 86 a couple of real bad guys before I capped my twenty.

To my wife: you thought you married a hero, but you grew up and learned you were wrong. Now you want to go to law school and be a lawyer like Daddy and Ellis. No sweat on the money: Daddy bought the house, Daddy upgrades your marriage, Daddy will pay for tuition. When you read the paper and see that your husband drilled two evil robbers, you’ll think they’re the first notches on his gun. Wrong – in ’47 dope crusader Jack blasted two innocent people, the big secret he almost wants to spill just to get some life kicking back into his marriage.

Jack downed three more shots. He went where he always went when with a certain amount of shit in his system – back to ’53 and smut.

He felt safe on the blackmail: his depositions for insurance, the Hudgens snuff buried – *Hush-Hush* resurrected it, got nowhere. Patchett and Bracken never approached him – they had the carbon of Sid’s Big V file, kept their end of the bargain. He heard Lynn and Bud White were still an item; call the brainy whore and Patchett memories – bad news from that bad bloody spring. What drove him was the smut.

He kept it in a safe-deposit box. He knew it was there, knew it excited him – knew that loving it would trash his marriage. He threw himself into the marriage, building walls to keep them safe from that spring. A string of sober days helped; the marriage helped. Nothing he did changed things – Karen just learned who he was.

She saw him muscle Deuce Perkins; he said ‘nigger’ in front of her parents. She figured out his press exploits were lies. She saw him drunk, pissed off. He hated her friends; his one friend – Miller Stanton – dropped out of sight when he blew *Badge of Honor*. He got bored with Karen, ran to the smut, went crazy with it.

He tried to ID the posers again – still no go. He went to Tijuana, bought other fuck books – no go. He went looking for Christine Bergeron, couldn't find her, put out teletypes that got him bupkis. No way to have the real thing – he decided to fake it.

He bought hookers, shook down call girls. He fixed them up to look like the girls in his books. He had them three and four at a pop, chains of bodies on quilts. He costumed them, choreographed them. He aped the pictures, took his own pictures, recaptured; sometimes he thought of the blood pix and got scared: perfect matches to murder mutilations.

Real women never thrilled him like the pictures did; fear kept him from going to Fleur-de-Lis – straight to the source. He couldn't figure out Karen's fear – why she didn't leave him.

A last drink – bad thoughts adieu.

Jack cleaned up, walked back to his car. No hubcaps, broken wiper blades. Crime scene tape around Hank's Ranch Market; two black-and-whites in the lot. No reprimand note on his windshield – the vandals probably stole it.

He hit the bash at full swing: Ellis Loew, a suite packed with Republican bigshots. Women in cocktail gowns; men in dark suits. The Big V: chinos, a sport shirt sprayed with dog blood.

Jack flagged a waiter, grabbed a martini off his tray. Framed pictures on the wall caught his eye.

Political progress: *Harvard Law Review*, the '53 election, a howler shot: Loew telling the press the Nite Owl killers confessed before they escaped. Jack laughed, sprayed gin, almost choked on his olive. Behind him: 'You used to dress a bit more nicely.'

Jack turned around. 'I used to be some kind of hotshot.'

'Do you have an excuse for your appearance?'

'Yeah, I killed two men today.'

'I see. Anything else?'

'Yeah, I shot them in the back, plugged a dog and took off before my superior officers showed up. And here's a news flash: I've been drinking. Ellis, this is getting stale, so let's get to it. Who do you want me to touch?'

'Jack, lower your voice.'

'What is it, boss? The Senate or the statehouse?'

'Jack, it's not the time to discuss this.'

‘Sure it is. Tell true. You’re gearing up for the ’60 elections.’

Loew, on the QT. ‘All right, it’s the Senate. I did have some favors to ask, but your current condition precludes my asking them. We’ll talk when you’re in better shape.’

An audience now: the whole suite. ‘Come on, I’m dying to run bag for you. Who do I shake down first?’

‘*Sergeant, lower your voice.*’

Raise that voice. ‘Cocksucker, I shit where you breathe. I put Bill McPherson in the tank for you, I cold-cocked him and put him in bed with that colored girl, I fucking deserve to know who you want me to put the screws to next.’

Loew, a hoarse whisper. ‘Vincennes, you’re through.’

Jack tossed gin in his face. ‘God, I fucking hope so.’

Chapter Forty-five

'. . . AND WE'RE MORE than the moral exemplars that Chief Parker spoke of the other day. We are the dividing line between the old police work and the new, the old system of promotion through patronage and enforcement through intimidation and a new emerging system: the elite police corps that impartially asserts its authority in the name of a stern and unbiased justice, that punishes its own with a stern moral vigor should they prove duplicitous to the higher moral standards an elite corps demands of its members. And, finally, we are the protectors of the public image of the Los Angeles Police Department. Know that when you read interdepartmental complaints filed against your brother officers and feel the urge to be forgiving. Know that when I assign you to investigate a man you once worked with and liked. Know that our business is stern, absolute justice, whatever the price.'

Ed paused, looked at his men: twenty-two sergeants, two lieutenants. 'Nuts and bolts now, gentlemen. Under my predecessor, Lieutenant Phillips and Lieutenant Stinson supervised field investigations autonomously. As of now, I will assume direct field command, with Lieutenant Phillips and Lieutenant Stinson serving as my execs on an alternating basis. Incoming complaints and information requests will be routed through my office first, I'll read the material and make my assignments accordingly. Sergeant Kleckner and Sergeant Fisk will serve as my personal assistants and will meet with me every morning at 0730. Lieutenant Stinson and Lieutenant Phillips, please meet me in my office in one hour to discuss my assuming command of your ongoing investigations. Gentlemen, you're dismissed.'

The meeting dispersed in silence; the muster room emptied. Ed replayed his speech, hitting key phrases. 'Absolute justice' hit with Inez Soto's voice.

Dump ashtrays, straighten chairs, tidy the bulletin board. Unfurl the flags by the lectern, check them for dust. Back to his speech, his father's voice: 'Duplicitous to the higher moral standards an elite corps demands of its members.’ Two days ago, his speech would have been the truth. Inez Soto’s speech made it a lie.

Flags, gold-fringed. Gold-plated opportunism: he killed those men out of a weak man’s rage. As the Nite Owl killers they gave the rage meaning: absolute justice boldly taken. He twisted the meaning to support what the public was telling him: you’re L.A.’s greatest hero, you’re going to the top and beyond. Bud White’s revenge, the man too stupid to grasp it: a simple cuckold accompanied by a woman’s few words had him treading lies at the top, thrashing for a way to make his stale glory real.

Ed walked into his office: clean, neat – no order to secure. Complaint forms on his desk – he sat down, worked.

Jack Vincennes in big trouble.

1/3/58: while on a Surveillance Detail stakeout, Vincennes shot and killed two armed robbers – gunmen who had murdered three people at a southside market. Vincennes gave chase to a third gunman/robber, lost him, was approached by two patrolmen who did not know he was a police officer. The patrolmen fired at Vincennes, assuming him to be a member of the robbery gang; Vincennes dropped his gun and allowed himself to be frisked – then assaulted one of the officers and vacated the crime scene before Homicide and the coroner arrived. The third suspect remained at large; Vincennes went to a political gathering honoring D.A. Ellis Loew, his brother-in-law by marriage. Presumed to be drunk, he verbally abused Loew and threw a drink in his face – in full view of the guests.

Ed skimmed Vincennes’ personnel file. A 5/58 pension securement date – goodbye, Trashcan Jack – you were close. Stacks of his Narcotics Squad reports: thorough, detailed to the point of being padded. Between the lines: Vincennes had a hard-on for minor dope violators – especially Hollywood celebrities and jazz musicians – substantiating an old rumor: he called *Hush-Hush* Magazine to be in on his gravy rousts. Vincennes was transferred to Administrative Vice as part of the Bloody Christmas shake-up; another stack of reports: bookmaking and liquor infraction operations, no zeal, plenty of verbal padding. Ad Vice assignment into the spring of ’53: Russ Millard commanding the division, a pornography investigation running concurrent with the Nite Owl. And a *big* anomaly: assigned to trace smut, Vincennes repeatedly reported no leads, commented that the other men on the assignment were coming up empty, twice offered the opinion that the investigation should be dropped.

Antithetical Jack V. behavior.

Smut brushed shoulders with the Nite Owl.

Ed thought back.

The Englekling brothers, Duke Cathcart, Mickey Cohen. Smut dismissed as a viable Nite Owl lead – three dead Negroes, case closed.

Ed read the file again. Years of padded reports, one assignment bereft of paper. Vincennes returned to Narco in July ’53 – he went back to his old ways, continued them straight through to the end of his duty with Surveillance.

Big-time anomaly.

Coinciding with the Nite Owl.

Spring ’53, another connection: Sid Hudgens was murdered then – unsolved. Ed hit the intercom.

‘Yes, Captain?’

‘Susan, find out who besides Sergeant John Vincennes was assigned to the Fourth Squad at Administrative Vice in April of 1953. Do that, then locate them.’

A half hour for results. Sergeant George Henderson, Officer Thomas Kifka retired; Sergeant Lewis Stathis working Bunco. Ed called his C.O.; Stathis walked in ten minutes later.

A burly man – tall, stooped. Nervous – an I.A. bracing out of nowhere was a spooker. Ed pointed him to a chair. Stathis said, ‘Sir, this is about . . .’

‘Sergeant, this has nothing to do with you. This has to do with an officer you worked Ad Vice with.’

‘Captain, my Ad Vice tour was years ago.’

‘I know, late ’51 through the summer of ’53. You transferred out just as I rotated in on my floater assignment. Sergeant, how closely did you work with Jack Vincennes?’

Stathis smiled. Ed said, ‘Why are you grinning?’

‘Well, I read in the paper that Vincennes juked these two heist guys, and talk around the Bureau has it that he bugged out on the scene unannounced. That’s a big infraction, so I was smiling ’cause it figured he’d be the Ad Vice guy you’d be interested in.’

‘I see. And did you work closely with him?’

Stathis shook his head. ‘Jack was strictly the single-o type. You know, the beat of a different drummer. Sometimes we worked the same general assignments, but that was it.'

'Your squad worked a pornography investigation in the spring of '53, do you recall that?'

'Yeah, it was a colossal waste of time. Dirty skin books, a waste of time.'

'You yourself reported no leads.'

'Yeah, and neither did Trashcan or the other guys. Russ Millard got co-opted to that Nite Owl thing, and the skinbook caper fell through.'

'Do you recall Vincennes acting strangely during that time?'

'Not really. I remember he only showed up at the squadroom at odd times and that him and Russ Millard didn't like each other. Like I said, Vincennes was a loner. He didn't pal around with the guys on the squad.'

'Do you recall Millard making specific queries of the squad when two printshop operators came forward with smut information?'

Stathis nodded. 'Yeah, something to do with the Nite Owl that didn't pan out. We all told old Russ that those skin books could not be traced hell or high water.'

One hunch going dry. 'Sergeant, the Department was running a fever with the Nite Owl back then. Can you recall how Vincennes reacted to it? Any little thing out of the ordinary?'

Stathis said, 'Sir, can I be blunt?'

'Of course.'

'Well, then I'll tell you that I always figured Vincennes was a cheap-shot cop on the take somehow. Put that aside, I remember he was sort of nervous around the time of the skin book job. On the Nite Owl, I'd say he was bored with it. He was in on the arrest of those colored guys, he was there when our guys found the car and the shotguns, and he still seemed bored by it.'

Coming on again – no facts, just instincts. 'Sergeant, think. Vincennes' behavior around the time of the Nite Owl and the pornography investigation. Anything out of the ordinary with him. *Think.*'

Stathis shrugged. 'Maybe one thing, but I don't think it amounts to – '

'Tell me anyway.'

'Well, back then Vincennes had the cubicle next to mine, and sometimes I could hear him pretty good. I was at my desk and heard part of a conversation, him and Dudley Smith.'

'And?'

'And Smith asked Vincennes to put a tail on Bud White. He said White'd gotten personally involved in a hooker homicide and he didn't want him doing nothing rash.'

Skin prickles. 'What else did you hear?'

'I heard Vincennes agree, and the rest of it was garbled.'

'This was during the Nite Owl investigation?'

'Yes, sir. Right in the middle of it.'

'Sergeant, do you remember Sid Hudgens, the scandal sheet man, being killed around that time?'

'Yeah, an unsolved.'

'Do you recall Vincennes talking about it?'

'No, but the rumor was that him and Hudgens were buddies.'

Ed smiled. 'Sergeant, thank you. This was off the record, but I don't want you to repeat our conversation. Do you understand?'

Stathis got up. 'I won't, but I feel bad about Vincennes. I heard he's topping out his twenty in a few months. Maybe he vamoosed 'cause shooting those heist guys got to him.'

Ed said, 'Good day, Sergeant.'

Something old, wrong.

Ed sat with his door open. Gold-braided flags just outside – opportunities knocked.

Vincennes might have dirt on Bud White.

Instincts: Trash running scared in the spring of '53.

Connect the 'skin-book caper' to the Nite Owl.

Inez Soto's indictment – he killed three innocent men.

If he cut Vincennes a break on his I.A. investigation –

Ed hit the intercom. 'Susan, get me District Attorney Loew.'

Chapter Forty-six

MICKEY COHEN SAID, 'I got my own problems to worry about. The fershtunkener Nite Owl case and fershtunkener dirty books I don't know from the Bible, another book I never read. That rebop bored me five years ago, now it is an even further distance from hunger. I got my own problems, such as look at my poor baby.'

Bud looked. A raggedy-assed bulldog by the Mickster's fireplace – wheezing, his tail in a splint. Cohen said, 'That is Mickey Cohen, Jr., my heir who is not long for this canine world. A bomb attempt in November he survived, though a goodly number of my Sy Devore suits did not. His poor tail has remained steadily infected and his appetite is dyspeptic. Cops resurrecting old grief is not good for his health.'

'Mr. Cohen – '

'I like a man who addresses me with proper decorum. What did you say your name was again?'

'Sergeant White.'

'Sergeant White then, I will tell you there is no end to the grief in my life. I am like Jesus your goy savior carrying the weight of the world on his back. Back in prison these fershtunkener goons attack me and my man Davey Goldman, Davey gets his brains scrambled, gets paroled and starts walking around in public with his shlong hanging out; it's big, I don't blame him for advertising, but the Beverly Hills cops ain't so enlightened and now he's doing ninety days' observation at the Camarillo nut bin. As if that is not enough grief for your yiddisher Jesus to undergo, then feature that while I was in prison some colleagues looking after my interests were bumped off by persons unknown. And now my old boys won't form back together with me. My God, Kikey T., Lee Vachss, Johnny Stompanato – '

Kill the tirade. 'I know Johnny Stomp.'

Cohen hit the roof. 'Ferstunkener Johnny, Judas from the best-selling Bible is his middle name! Lana Turner is his Jezebel and not his Mary Magdalene, his cock leads him to grovel for her like a dowsing rod. Granted, he is even better hung than Davey G., but my blessed Jesus I took him away from being a two-bit extortionist and made him my bodyguard, and now he refuses to re-enlist, he'd rather nosh grease at Kikey's fucking deli and hobnob with Deuce Perkins, who I have it on good authority plays hide the salami with members of the canine persuasion. Did you say your name was White?'

'That's right, Mr. Cohen.'

'Wendell White? *Bud* White?'

'That's me.'

'Boychik, why didn't you tell me?'

Cohen Junior pissed in the fireplace. Bud said, 'I didn't think you'd heard of me.'

'Heard, shmeard, word gets out. Word is you're Dudley Smith's lad. Word is you and the Dudster and a couple of his other hard boys been keeping L.A. safe for democracy while this so-called crime drought's been going on. A motel in Gardena, a little blackjack work to the kidneys, va va va voom. Maybe now, maybe if I can get my old guys to quit noshing grease and associating with dog fuckers, I can get business going again. I should be nice to you so's you and the Dudster reciprocate. So what's with this Nite Owl rehash?'

His pitch – canned. 'I heard how the Englekling brothers visited you up at McNeil, how they talked up Duke Cathcart's deal. I was thinking that you or Davey Goldman might have talked it up on the yard and word got out that way.'

Mickey said, 'Nix. Not possible, 'cause I never told Davey. True, I am well known for my cell business confabs, but not a soul on this earth did I tell. I told that guy Exley that when we shmoozed on the topic years ago. And here's a bonus insight from the Mickster. It is my considered opinion that dirty books are a high-profit item worth killing innocent bystanders over only if an established high-profit market already exists. Give the fucking Nite Owl up, those shvartzes the hero kid bumped took the ticket and probably did the job anyway.'

Bud said, 'I don't think Duke Cathcart was killed at the Nite Owl. I think it was a guy impersonating him. I think the guy killed Cathcart, took over his identity and wound up at the Nite Owl. I was thinking the whole thing got started up at McNeil.'

Cohen rolled his eyes. 'Not with me it didn't, boychik, 'cause I told nobody, and I can't feature Pete and Bax stopping to spread the word out on the yard. Where'd this clown Cathcart live?'

'Silverlake.'

'Then dig up the Silverlake Hills. Maybe you'll find a nice vintage stiff.'

A flash – San Berdoo, Sue Lefferts' mother at her pad – eyes darting to a built-on room. 'Thanks, Mr. Cohen.'

Cohen said, 'Forget the fershtunkener Nite Owl.'

Cohen Junior took a bead on Bud's crotch.

San Bernardino, Hilda Lefferts. Last time she shoved him out pronto; this time he'd hit on the boyfriend: Susan Nancy was seen with a guy matching Duke Cathcart's description – press, intimidate.

A two-hour run. The San Berdoo Freeway would be working soon – cut the trip in half. Exley Senior to Junior: the coward knew about him and Inez, his look the other day spelled it plain. They were both biding their time. But if things fell his way he'd hit harder – Exley would *never* tag him for the brains to hit smart.

Hilda Lefferts lived in a dump: a shingle shack with a cinder block add-on. Bud walked up, checked out the mailbox. Good intimidation stuff: Lockheed pension check, Social Security check, County Relief check. He pushed the buzzer.

The door opened a crack. Hilda Lefferts looked over the chain. 'Told you before, now I'll say it again. I'm not buying what you're selling, so let my poor daughter rest in peace.'

Bud fanned out the checks. 'County Relief told me to hold these back until you cooperate. No tickee, no washee.'

Hilda squealed; Bud popped the chain, walked in. Hilda backed away. 'Please. I need that money.'

Susan Nancy smiled down from four walls: vamp poses on a nightclub floor. Bud said, 'Come on, be nice, huh? You remember what I tried to ask you last time? Susan had a boyfriend here in San Berdoo right before she moved to L.A. You looked scared when I told you before, you look scared now. *Come on.* Five minutes on that and I'm gone. And nobody's gonna know.'

Hilda, eyeball circuits: the checks, the add-on room. 'Nobody?'

Bud forked over Lockheed. 'Nobody. Come on. I'll give you the other two after you tell me.'

Hilda spoke straight to her daughter – the picture by the door. 'Susie, you told me you met the man at a cocktail lounge and I told you I didn't approve. You said he was a nice man who'd paid his debt to society, but you wouldn't tell me his name. I saw you with him one day, and you called him Don or Dean or Dick or Dee, and he said, "No, Duke. Get used to it." Then I was out one day and old Mrs. Jensen next door saw you with the man here at the house and thought she heard a ruckus . . .'

Match it: 'debt to society' equals 'ex-con.' 'Did you ever learn the man's name?'

'No, I didn't. I . . .'

'Did Susan know two brothers named Englekling? They lived here in San Bernardino.'

Hilda squinted at the picture. 'Oh, Susie. No, I don't think I know that name.'

'Did Susan's boyfriend ever mention the name "Duke Cathcart" or mention a pornography business?'

'No! Cathcart was the name of one of the dead people where Susie died, and Susie was a good girl who would never associate with filth!'

Bud forked over County Relief. 'Easy now. Tell me about the ruckus.'

Hilda, tears coming on. 'I came home the next day, and I thought I saw dried blood on the floor of the new den, I'd just had it built with the money from my husband's insurance policy. Susan and the man came back and acted nervous. The man crawled around under the house and called a Los Angeles phone number, then he and Susan Nancy left. A week later she was killed . . . and . . . I, well, I thought all that suspicious behavior meant the killings . . . I just thought of conspiracies and reprisals, and when that nice man who became such a hero came by a few days later with his background check, I just stayed quiet.'

Goose bumps: Susie Lefferts' boyfriend the Cathcart impersonator. 'The ruckus': the boyfriend kills Cathcart – probably in San Berdoo to talk to the Engleklings. Susie at the Nite Owl, scoping out some kind of meeting, the boyfriend playing Cathcart – which meant the killers never saw the real Cathcart face-to-face.

THE BOYFRIEND CRAWLING AROUND UNDER THE HOUSE.

Bud got the phone, the operator, an L.A. number: P.C. Bell police information. A clerk came on. 'Yes, who's requesting?'

'Sergeant W. White, LAPD. I'm in San Bernardino at RAnchview 04617. I need a list of all calls to Los Angeles from that number, say from March 20 to April 12, 1953. Got that?'

The clerk said, 'I copy.' Seconds, two minutes plus, the clerk back on. 'Three calls, Sergeant. April 2 and April 8, all to the same number, HO-21118. That's a pay phone, the corner of Sunset and Las Palmas.'

Bud hung up. Phone booth calls a half mile from the Nite Owl; the deal or the meet worked out – extra cautious.

Hilda fretted Kleenex. Bud saw a flashlight on an end table. He grabbed it, ran with it.

Outside to the add-on, a foundation crawlspace – one tight fit. Down, under, in.

Dirt, wood pilings, a long burlap sack up ahead. Smells: mothballs, rot. An elbow crawl to the bag – mothballs and rot getting stronger. He poked the sack, saw a rat's nest explode.

All around him: rats blinded by light.

Bud ripped burlap. In with the flashlight, rats, a skull caked with gristle. Drop the flash, rip two-handed, rats and mothballs in his face. A huge rip, a bullet hole in the skull, a skeleton hand out a sleeve – 'D.C.' on flannel.

He crawled out gulping air. Hilda Lefferts was right there. Her eyes said, 'Please God, not that.'

Clean air; clean daylight almost blinding. White light gave him the idea – his shiv at Exley.

A scandal mag leak. A guy at *Whisper* owed him – a pinko rag, they bled for Commies and jigs and hated cops.

Hilda, about to shit her drawers. 'Was . . . there . . . anything under there?'

'Nothing but some rats. I want you to stay put, though. I'm gonna bring back some mugshots for you to look at.'

'May I have that last check?'

The envelope – flecked with rat droppings. 'Here. Compliments of Captain Ed Exley.'

Chapter Forty-seven

A NICE INTERROGATION room – no bolted-down chairs, no piss smell. Jack looked at Ed Exley. ‘I knew I was in the shit, but I didn’t think I rated the top dog.’

Exley: ‘You’re probably wondering why you haven’t been suspended.’

Jack stretched. His uniform chafed – he hadn’t worn it since 1945. Exley looked creepy – skinny, gray-haired, rimless glasses that made his eyes come off brutal. ‘I was wondering. My guess is Ellis had second thoughts on the complaint he filed. Bad publicity and all that.’

Exley shook his head. ‘Loew considers you a liability to his career and his marriage, and leaving that crime scene and assaulting that officer are enough in themselves to warrant a suspension and a dismissal.’

‘Yeah? Then why haven’t I been suspended?’

‘Because for the moment I’ve interceded with Loew and Chief Parker. Any other questions?’

‘Yeah, where’s the tape recorder and the steno?’

‘I didn’t want them here.’

Jack pulled his chair up. ‘Captain, what *do* you want?’

‘I’ll throw that back at you. Do you want to flush your career down the toilet or would you like to skate for a few months and cash out your twenty?’

Easy: Karen’s face when he told her. ‘Okay, I’ll play. Now what do you want?’

Exley leaned close. ‘In the spring of ’53 your friend and business associate Sid Hudgens was murdered and two detectives who worked the case under Russ Millard told me you referred to Hudgens as “scum” and were visibly agitated on the morning his body was discovered. During this time frame Dudley Smith asked you to tail Bud White, and you agreed. During this time frame the Nite Owl case was active and you worked a pornography investigation with Ad Vice and repeatedly submitted no-lead reports, when your long-standing procedure was to jam every report you wrote full of filler. During this time two men, Peter and Baxter Englekling, came forward to offer state's evidence on an alleged pornography link to the Nite Owl. Russ Millard queried you on it, you went along with your "no leads" routine. Throughout the smut investigation you repeatedly urged that the job be dropped. Those same two detectives, Sergeants Fisk and Kleckner, overheard you urging Ellis Loew to soft-pedal the Hudgens investigation, and one of your fellow Ad Vice officers recalls you as being atypically nervous throughout the smut job and absent from the squadroom for unusually long periods of time. Put it all together for me, would you, Jack?'

Ten counts guilty – he knew he was gawking, blinking, twitching. 'How . . . the . . . fuck did you . . .'

'It doesn't matter. Now let's hear your interpretation of what I want.'

Jack caught some breath. 'Okay, so I tailed Bud White. Dud was afraid he'd go apeshit over some hooker snuff, 'cause White had that tendency where young stuff was concerned. Okay, so I tailed him and didn't pick up anything worth a damn. You and White hate each other, everyone knows it. You figure someday he'll try to get you for your job on Dick Stensland and you'll cut me slack with Loew and Parker in exchange for some dirt on him. *Is that what you want*?'

'Call that twenty percent of it and give me something you learned about White.'

'Such as?'

'How about him and women?'

'White likes women, but that's no news flash.'

'IAD ran a personal on White after he passed the sergeant's exam. The report had him seeing a woman named Lynn Bracken. Did White know her back in '53?'

Jack shrugged. 'I don't know. I never heard that name.'

'Vincennes, your face says you're a liar, but put the Bracken woman aside, she doesn't interest me. Was White seeing Inez Soto during the time you were tailing him?'

He almost laughed. 'No, not while I had my tail on him. Is that what you're so worked up on? You think White and your – '

Exley raised a hand. 'I'm not going to ask you if you killed Hudgens, I'm not going to make you put that spring together for me, not yet and maybe never. Just give me your opinion on something. You were up to your ears on the smut job *and* you worked the Nite Owl. Do you make the three Negroes for the killings?'

Jack inched back – get away from those eyes. 'There's loose ends out there, I knew it then. If it wasn't the three you got, maybe it was some other spooks, maybe they knew where Coates hid his car and planted the shotguns. Maybe it's tied to the smut. Do you care? Those niggers raped your woman, so what you did was right. What's this about, Captain?'

Exley smiled. Jack pegged it: a man sticking one foot off a cliff, hopping on one leg. 'Captain, what's this – '

'No, my motives are my business, and here's my first guess. Hudgens was connected to the smut somehow, and he had a file on you. That's why you were all over that mess.'

Quicksand. 'Yeah, I did something really bad once. You know . . . shit, sometimes I think . . . sometimes I think I don't care who finds out anymore.'

Exley stood up. 'I've already squared the complaints against you. There'll be no trial board, no charges. Part of the agreement I made with Chief Parker is a stipulation that you voluntarily retire in May. I told him you'd agree, and I convinced him that you deserve a full pension. He didn't question my motives, and I don't want you to question them either.'

Jack stood up. 'And the trade?'

'If the Nite Owl ever goes wide, you and everything you know belong to me.'

Jack stuck out his hand. 'Jesus, you turned into a cold son of a bitch.'

CALENDAR

FEBRUARY-MARCH 1958

Whisper Magazine, February 1958 issue:

WRONG MAN KILLED IN NITE OWL SLAUGHTER? WEB OF MYSTERY SPREADS . . .

You remember the Nite Owl brouhaha, don't you? On April 14, 1953, three shotgun-toting killers entered the convivial Nite Owl Coffee Shop, just off Hollywood Boulevard in sunny Los Angeles, robbed and murdered three employees and three patrons and got away with an estimated three hundred scoots, which divided by six comes to about fifty bucks a life. The Los Angeles Police Department threw itself into the case with characteristic zeal, arrested three young Negro men on suspicion of committing the murders and also charged them with kidnapping and raping a young Mexican girl. The LAPD was not quite certain that the three Negroes – Raymond 'Sugar Ray' Coates, Tyrone Jones and Leroy Fontaine – committed the Nite Owl killings, but they were sure that the young men were the rapists of Inez Soto, 21, a college student. The Nite Owl investigation continued, with much attendant publicity and great pressure on the LAPD to solve L.A.'s 'Crime of the Century.'

The LAPD pursued fruitless leads for two weeks, then discovered the murder weapons inside Ray Coates' car, stored in an abandoned South Los Angeles garage. Shortly after that, Coates, Jones and Fontaine escaped from the Hall of Justice Jail . . .

Enter a young police detective: Sergeant Edmund J. Exley of the LAPD. World War II hero, UCLA grad, informant against his fellow cops in the 1951 'Bloody Christmas' police brutality scandal and the son of construction mogul Preston Exley, the builder of Raymond Dieterling's mammoth Dream-a-Dreamland and the massive Southern California freeway system. The plot thickens . . .

Item: Sergeant Ed Exley was in love with rape victim Inez Soto.

Item: Sergeant Ed Exley located, shot and killed Raymond Coates, Tyrone Jones and Leroy Fontaine, with – poetic justice – a shotgun.

Item: Sergeant Ed Exley was promoted (two whole ranks!!!) to captain a week later, a large reward for his justice-by-the-sword resolution of a case the LAPD needed to solve quicksville in order to ensure perpetuation of its (overblown?) reputation.

Item: *Captain* Ed Exley (a rich kid with a substantial private trust fund left to him by his late mother) soon became very cozy with Inez Soto and bought her a house down the block from his apartment.

Item: we at *Whisper* have it on very good authority that Raymond Coates, Leroy Fontaine, Tyrone Jones and the man who was sheltering them – Roland Navarette – were unarmed when hero Ed Exley gunned them down . . . and, now, nearly five years since the Nite Owl killings, the plot thickens again . . .

Now, *Whisper* is the underdog of what the squaresville press calls 'Scandal Sheet Journalism.' We're not the mighty *Hush-Hush*, we're based out of New York and our beat is primarily the East Coast. But we do have our L.A. sources, and among them is a crusading private eye who wishes to remain anonymous. This man has been obsessed with the Nite Owl case for years, has investigated it extensively and has come up with some startling revelations. This man, whom we shall call 'Private Eye X,' spoke to *Whisper* correspondents and revealed the following:

Private Eye eye-tem: during the Nite Owl investigation, two brothers, *Peter and Baxter Englekling*, printshop operators from San Bernardino, California, came forth and told authorities an account of how *Nite Owl victim Delbert 'Duke' Cathcart* approached them with a plan to print pornographic material, then theorized that the Nite Owl killings were the result of intrigue within the pornography underworld. The LAPD pooh-poohed the brothers' theory in their haste to pin the crime on the Negroes, and now the Engleklings seem to have disappeared off the face of the globe . . .

Private Eye eye-tem: Mrs. Hilda Lefferts, mother of San Bernardino born and bred *Nite Owl victim Susan Nancy Lefferts*, told Private Eye X that immediately before the killings her daughter had a mysterious, unnamed boyfriend who greatly resembled Duke Cathcart, and she even heard him tell Susan Nancy: 'Call me "Duke." Get used to the idea.'!!! Mrs. Lefferts could not identify the man from privately hoarded mugshots that Private Eye X showed her. X then developed what we consider an x-cellent and x-citing theory!

X theory eye-tem: we think that mystery boyfriend X killed Duke Cathcart in an attempt to take over his pornography business, impersonated Duke Cathcart and wound up at the Nite Owl Coffee Shop to do biz with the three men who perpetrated the slaughter. Susan Nancy sat nearby in order to watch her boyfriend wheel and deal. Private Eye X offers the following unimpeachable evidence as proof:

Mrs. Lefferts said boyfriend X looked just like Duke Cathcart.

The body identified as Cathcart's was too decimated to correctly ID. The coroner's final identification was based on a *partial* dental plate reconstruction cross-checked against Cathcart's prison dental records – yet other prison records listed Cathcart's height at 5′8″ while the body discovered at the Nite Owl was 5′9¼″. All in all, unmistakable proof that an impersonator, not Duke Cathcart, was killed at the Nite Owl Coffee Shop . . .

X-citing x-trapolations that we believe will lead to some x-tremely interesting revelations, x-asperate the trigger-happy Los Angeles Police Department and perhaps x-onerate the three Negroes falsely accused of the Nite Owl killings. We at *Whisper* urge the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office to x-hume the bodies of the Nite Owl victims; we x-coriate Captain Ed Exley for his cold-blooded murder of four societal victims and x-pressly petition the LAPD: redeem your old wrongs in the name of justice! Reopen the Nite Owl case!!!

EXTRACT: San Francisco *Chronicle*, February 27:

GAITSVILLE SLAYINGS BAFFLE POLICE

Gaitsville, Calif., Feb. 27, 1958 – A bizarre double murder has the citizens of Gaitsville, a small town sixty miles north of San Francisco, scared – and the Marin County Sheriffs baffled.

Two days ago, the bodies of Peter and Baxter Englekling, 41 and 37, were discovered at their apartment next door to the printshop where they were employed as typesetters. The two brothers, in the words of Marin County Sheriffs Lieutenant Eugene Hatcher, were 'shady characters with criminal connections.' The lieutenant guardedly elaborated to *Chronicle* reporter George Woods.

'Both Engleklings had criminal records for narcotics offenses,' Lieutenant Hatcher said. 'Granted, they've been clean for a number of years, but they were still shady characters. For instance, they were working at the printing shop under assumed names. So far we have no clues, but we do think we're dealing with a torture-for-information scenario.'

The Englekling brothers worked at Rapid Bob's Printing on East Verdugo Road in Gaitsville and lived in the apartment building next door. Their employer, Robert Dunkquist, 53, knew the pair as Pete and Bax Girard, and discovered their bodies on Tuesday morning. 'Pete and Bax had worked for me for a year and they were as regular as clockwork. When they were late for work on Tuesday I knew something was up. Also, the shop had been ransacked and I wanted them to help me find the culprits.'

The Englekling brothers, whose true identities were revealed by a fingerprint teletype check, were shot to death, and Lieutenant Hatcher is certain the killer used a .38 revolver equipped with a silencer. 'Our ballistics man found iron shavings embedded in the rounds we took out of the victims. This indicates a silencer and also indicates why the neighbors never reported any shots.'

Lieutenant Hatcher would not reveal the status of his investigation, but he did state that all the standard investigatory approaches are being utilized. He stated that both victims were tortured prior to being shot, but would not describe the crime scene. 'We want to keep that knowledge private,' he said. 'Sometimes publicity-seeking lunatics confess to crimes like this, even though they didn't commit them. Keeping your facts private helps eliminate the guilty from the innocent.'

Peter and Baxter Englekling have no known living relatives, and their bodies are being held at the Gaitsville city coroner's office. Lieutenant Hatcher urged all parties who might have information concerning the homicides to contact the Marin County Sheriff's Department.

EXTRACT: San Francisco *Examiner*, March 1:

MURDER VICTIMS LINKED TO CELEBRATED LOS ANGELES CRIME

Peter and Baxter Englekling, murder victims killed in Gaitsville, California, on February 25, were material witnesses in the famous Nite Owl murder case that occurred in Los Angeles in April 1953, Marin County Sheriffs Lieutenant Eugene Hatcher revealed today.

'We got an anonymous tip on it yesterday,' Lieutenant Hatcher told the *Examiner*. 'A man just called in the information, then hung up. We verified it with the D.A.'s Bureau down in L.A., and they said it was true. I don't think it has anything to do with our case, but I called the Los Angeles Police Department anyway and ran it by them. They gave me the brush-off, so I say the heck with them.'

EXTRACT: L.A. *Daily News*, March 6:

NITE OWL REDIVIVUS – SHOCKING NEW REVELATIONS POINT TO INNOCENT MEN KILLED

This is an ugly story. The *Daily News*, frankly Los Angeles' only exposé-oriented newspaper and the only Southland paper proud to call itself 'muckraking,' does not shy away from such stories. This story punctures the hero image of a man considered by many to be a perfect exemplar of law-and-order righteousness, and when heroes possess feet of clay, we at the

Daily News believe that it is our duty to expose their shortcomings to public scrutiny. The issues here are great, as notable as the crime that spawned them, so we are frankly sending up a muckraking hue and cry. That hue and cry: the infamous Nite Owl murder case – six people brutally robbed and shotgunned to death at a Hollywood coffee shop in April 1953 – was solved incorrectly, at a great cost to justice. We want to see the case reopened and true justice achieved.

Raymond Coates, Leroy Fontaine and Tyrone Jones – do you recall those names? They were the three Negro youths, criminals and sex offenders to be sure, who were railroaded by the Los Angeles Police Department. Arrested shortly after the Nite Owl murders, they offered a hellish alibi: they could not have committed the killings because they were engaged in the kidnap and gang rape of a young woman named Inez Soto. They abused Miss Soto at a deserted building in South Los Angeles, then confessed that they drove her around and 'sold her out' to their friends for more sexual abuse. They left Miss Soto with a man named Sylvester Fitch, and an LAPD officer shot and killed him while effecting the brave young woman's escape.

Miss Soto refused to cooperate with the police investigation, which at the time centered on the imperative of establishing where Coates, Jones and Fontaine were at the time of the Nite Owl killings. Were they with her and the other alleged rapists (none of whom, besides Fitch, were ever identified)? Did they have time to drive from South Los Angeles to Hollywood, commit the Nite Owl killings, then return to heap more abuse upon her? Was she conscious throughout the total sum of her degradation?

Unanswered questions – until now.

The police investigation spread into two forks: searching for evidence to corroborate Jones, Coates and Fontaine as the killers; searching for general evidence, standard police work based on the supposition that the three youths were guilty only of kidnap and rape, but not murder. Miss Soto still refused to cooperate. Both investigatory forks proved moot when Coates, Jones and Fontaine escaped from jail and were gunned down by our aforementioned hero: LAPD Sergeant Edmund Exley.

College man, World War II hero, son of the illustrious Preston Exley, Ed Exley used the Nite Owl case as a springboard for his ruthless personal ambition. He was promoted to captain at age 31 and as of this writing will soon become an inspector – at 36, the youngest in LAPD history. He is mentioned as a potential Republican office-seeker almost as often as his construction-king father. A few persistent rumors surround him: that the men killed were unarmed, that D.A. Ellis Loew dreamed up the Nite Owl confession that Coates, Jones and Fontaine allegedly made before they escaped. What is not generally known is that Ed Exley was in love with Inez Soto and condoned her lack of cooperation during the investigation, later bought her a house and has been intimately involved with her for close to five years.

And now, two recent developments have blown the Nite Owl case wide open.

Back in 1953, two men, brothers, came forward as material witnesses with information on the Nite Owl killings. Those men, Peter and Baxter Englekling, asserted that a pornography plot was at the base of the coffee shop massacre, per a scheme devised by one of the victims: ex-convict

Delbert 'Duke' Cathcart. The LAPD chose to ignore this information. Then, almost five years later, Peter and Baxter Englekling were viciously murdered in the small upstate town of Gaitsville. Those killings, which took place on February 25, are unsolved with a complete absence of clues. But a long-unanswered question was about to be answered.

At San Quentin Penitentiary, a Negro prisoner named Otis John Shortell read a San Francisco newspaper account of the Englekling brothers' killings, an account which mentioned their tenuous connection to the Nite Owl case. The article got Otis John Shortell thinking. He requested an audience with the assistant warden and made a startling confession.

Otis John Shortell, in prison on an accumulation of grand-theft auto convictions and frankly desiring a sentence reduction as a reward for his cooperation, confessed that he was one of the men Coates, Fontaine and Jones 'sold' Inez Soto to. He was with Miss Soto and the three youths between the hours of 2:30 and 5:00 on the morning of the Nite Owl killings, *during the entire murder time frame.* He told the warden that he never came forward to exonerate the three for fear of rape charges being filed against him. He further stated that Coates had a large quantity of narcotics in his car and that that was the reason he never relinquished its location to the police. Shortell cited a recent conversion to Pentecostal Christianity as his reason for finally making his confession, but prison authorities were dubious. Shortell petitioned for an in-cell lie detector test to prove his veracity and was given a total of four polygraph examinations. He passed all four tests conclusively. Shortell's attorney, Morris Waxman, has sent notarized copies of the polygraph examiner's reports to the *Daily News* and the LAPD. We have advanced this article. What will the LAPD do?

We decry the injustice of shotgun justice. We decry the motives of triggerman Ed Exley. We openly challenge the Los Angeles Police Department to reopen the Nite Owl Murder Case.

EXTRACT: L.A. *Times*, March 11:

NITE OWL HUE AND CRY BUILDING

A welter of unrelated events and a fire fanned by a series of articles in the Los Angeles *Daily News* are pressuring the Los Angeles Police Department to reopen the 1953 Nite Owl murder case investigation.

LAPD Chief William H. Parker called the controversy 'a powder keg with a wet fuse. It's all a bunch of baloney. The testimony of a degenerate criminal and an unrelated double murder do not constitute a reason to reopen a case successfully solved five years ago. I stood by Captain Ed Exley's actions in 1953 and I stand by them now.'

Chief Parker's references allude to the February 25 murders of Peter and Baxter Englekling, material witnesses to the original Nite Owl investigation, and the recent testimony of San Quentin inmate Otis John Shortell, who claimed to be with the three formerly accused killers during the time frame of the Nite Owl murders. Citing Shortell's in-prison lie detector tests, his attorney Morris Waxman stated, 'Polygraphs don't lie. Otis is a religious man who carries a great burden of guilt for not coming forth to exonerate innocent men five years ago, and now he wants to see justice done. He has given three dead victims a lie detector-validated alibi and now he wants to see the real killers punished. I will not cease publicizing this matter until the LAPD agrees to do their duty and reopen the case.'

Richard Tunstell, city editor of the Los Angeles *Daily News*, echoed that sentiment. 'We've got our teeth sunk into something important. We're not going to let go.'

BANNERS

L.A. *Daily News,* March 14:

J'ACCUSE – LAPD IN NITE OWL COVER-UP

L.A. *Daily News,* March 15:

OPEN LETTER TO TRIGGERMAN EXLEY

L.A. *Times,* March 16:

CONVICT'S LAWYER PETITIONS STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL FOR NITE OWL CASE REOPENING

L.A. *Herald-Express,* March 17:

PARKER TO THE PRESS: NITE OWL A DEAD ISSUE

L.A. *Daily News,* March 19:

CITIZENS DEMAND JUSTICE – PICKETS STALK THE LAPD

L.A. *Herald-Express,* March 20:

PARKER/LOEW IN HOT SEAT GOVERNOR KNIGHT: NITE OWL A 'POWDER KEG'

L.A. *Mirror-News,* March 20:

THE WAGES OF DEATH – EXCLUSIVE PICS OF EXLEY/SOTO LOVE NEST

L.A. *Examiner,* March 20:

POLICE SWITCHBOARDS FLOODED: CITIZENS VOICE NITE OWL OPINIONS

L.A. *Times,* March 20:

PARKER BACKS EXLEY AND HOLDS FIRM: 'NO NITE OWL REOPENING'

L.A. *Daily News,* March 20:

JUSTICE MUST PREVAIL! DEMAND POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY! REOPEN THE NITE OWL CASE NOW!

Part Four

Destination: Morgue

Chapter Forty-eight

THE PHONE RANG: odds on the press 20 to 1. Ed picked up anyway. ‘Yes?’

‘Bill Parker, Ed:’

‘Sir, how are you? And thanks for that quote in the *Times.*’

‘I meant it, son. We’re going to tough this thing out and let it pass. How’s Inez taking it? The publicity, I mean.’

‘My father said she’s staying at Ray Dieterling’s place in Laguna. And we broke it off a few months ago. It just wasn’t working.’

‘I’m sorry. Inez is a plucky girl, though. Compared to what she’s been through, this thing should be cake.’

Ed rubbed his eyes. ‘I’m not so sure it’ll pass.’

‘I think it will. The Gaitsville Police won’t cooperate on the Englekling homicides and that Negro at Quentin has nil value as a witness. His polygraph seems valid, but his attorney is a grandstanding shyster only interested in getting his client out of – ’

‘Sir, all that aside, I don’t think the men I killed did the Nite Owl and – ’

‘Don’t interrupt me and don’t tell me you’re so suicidally naive as to think reopening the case will do one whit of good. Now, I’m waiting for it to pass and the attorney general up in Sacramento is waiting for it to pass. Bad publicity, petitions for justice and the like *always* peak out and pass.’

‘And if it doesn’t?’

Parker sighed. ‘If the A.G. orders a state-run special investigation, I’ll file an LAPD injunction against him and preempt him with an investigation of our own. I have Ellis Loew’s full support on that strategy – but it *will* pass.’

Ed said, ‘I’m not so sure I want it to.’

Chapter Forty-nine

MOBSTER SQUAD DUTY: room 6, the Victory Motel. Bud, Mike Breuning, a Frisco boy cuffed to the hot seat – Joe Sifakis, three loanshark falls, snatched off a train at Union Station. Breuning worked the hose; Bud watched.

Fourteen hundred on the dresser – a police charity donation. A get-out-of-town pitch in high gear – dental work coming up. Bud checked his watch – 4:20 – Dudley was late. Sifakis screamed.

Bud walked into the bathroom. Four obscene walls: sex ditties, some dated. '53 entries – he thought Nite Owl straight off. Scary: the Nite Owl big-time news, Dud wanted to talk to him bad. He turned on the sink – cover the screams. He tested *his* Nite Owl string, found it watertight.

Nobody knew he leaked his story to *Whisper* – if the high brass knew he would have heard – and Cathcart's stiff was still under the house. Nobody knew he tipped the Gaitsville Sheriff's to the Englekling connection to the Nite Owl. Lucky breaks: the brothers dead, the spook up at Quentin – probably a legit alibi. He was clean on the evidence he suppressed in '53 – if Dudley had an inkling he was holding stuff back it probably tied to his fix on the Kathy snuff. Dud was the Nite Owl supervisor, he'd want the brouhaha to pass – a reopening would make him look like a supporting player chump – second banana to hero chump Ed Exley. Parker was trying to keep a reopening kiboshed, call the odds against it 5 to 1, 5 to 1 that Exley would come out smelling -

Sifakis screamed – the door shook.

Bud doused his head in the sink. A scrawl by the mirror: Meg Greunwitz fucks good – AX-74022. Girls' names on the walls; last week the L.A. Sheriff's bagged a dead hooker, add it to his list: Lynette Ellen Kendrick, age 21, DOD 3/17/58. Beaten, ring lacerations, three-hole rape – the county cops wouldn't give him the time of –

Sifakis started babbling. The bathroom got too hot to take.

Bud walked out. Sifakis, snitch-frenzied. ' . . . and I know things, I *hear* things. Like, dig, with the Mick out it's open season. Things was on this weird slowdown while he was inside, but these shooter teams took out these guys that was running his franchises, then these maverick guys, three triggers bang bang bang, they 86'd Mickey's men and these guys trying to crash his loanouts. Everybody used to respect Dud S. as a trucemaker, but now he don't do a damn thing. You want a prostie roust? Huh? Huh? You want a good tip on a . . .'

Breuning looked bored. Bud went out to the courtyard: crabgrass, barbed-wire fenced. Fourteen empty rooms – LAPD bought the property cheap.

'Lad.'

Dudley on the sidewalk. Bud lit a cigarette, walked over.

'Lad, I'm sorry I'm late.'

'It don't matter, you said it was serious.'

'Yes, it is all of that. How are you enjoying the Hollywood squad, lad? Is it to your liking?'

'I liked Homicide better.'

'Grand, and I'll see to it that you return sometime soon. And have you been relishing the spectacle of friend Exley ridiculed by the fourth estate?'

Smoke made him cough. 'Yeah, sure. Too bad the case won't get reopened and really make him squirm. Not that I'd want to see you stand heat for it, though.'

Dudley laughed. 'I see the conflicts inherent in your perspective. And I feel a certain ambivalence myself, especially since a little birdie in Sacramento has informed me that the attorney general will soon press to reopen the case. Ellis Loew has an injunction prepared should things get dicey, so I think it is safe to assume that the Nite Owl is regrettably our hot potato once again. Political infighting, lad. The pinko Democrats have taken the tack of jigaboos wrongly accused, intend to press the issue during the primary elections, and the Republican A.G. has sidestepped and counterpunched. Lad, do you possess any Nite Owl information that you haven't presented to me?'

Ready, prepared. 'No.'

'Ah, grand. That aside then, I have an assignment for you here at the Victory tonight. A very large and muscular man requires a bracing, and frankly Mike and Dick lack the presence to appropriately impress him. It's a small world, lad – I think this chap

knew our friend Duke Cathcart back in ’53. Maybe he can give you some information on your Kathy Janeway fixation. Does fair Kathy’s fate still concern you, lad?’

Bud swallowed – dry.

‘Lad, forget that I asked. Fixations like that are like prostitutes – they can reform, but their old ways still linger. Tonight at 10:00, lad. And be of good cheer. I have some extracurricular work for you soon, work that should rekindle your old fearsome habits.’

Bud blinked.

Dudley smiled, walked to room 6.

Prostitute equals Lynn. Janeway jibe equals just how much?

Joe Sifakis screamed – through four walls, out to the edge of the courtyard.

Chapter Fifty

GALLAUDET SLIPPED HIM the news: the Attorney General's Office was set to press for a reopening: state-financed, state-run. Ellis Loew was set to usurp their investigation – the LAPD, Nite Owl redux. Time to call it all in.

Ed in a coffee shop on La Brea. Jack Vincennes due, paperwork on the table: Nite Owl, notes on the Hudgens case.

Check mark: was the man at San Quentin telling the truth? Most likely yes – whatever his motives.

Check mark: did the Englekling killings tie in to the Nite Owl? No way to tell until the Marin Sheriff's shared their information.

Check mark: the purple car by the Nite Owl. A hunch: it was an innocent vehicle, the real killers followed the publicity, located Ray Coates' car before the LAPD, planted the shotguns. This meant – astoundingly – that they planted the spent shells found in Griffith Park. Hall of Justice Jail records '35 to '55 had been destroyed – if the killers gleaned the information as part of a jail connection, finding that connection would most likely prove impossible. Have Kleckner and Fisk thoroughly investigate every logical possibility pertaining to the purple car/planted shotguns.

Check mark: victim Malcolm Lunceford, ex-LAPD officer/wino security guard. Did he tie in to some kind of criminal conspiracy that resulted in the Nite Owl massacre? Answer: unlikely – he was a certified, long-term Nite Owl habitué, late nights always.

Ed sipped coffee, thought POWER. Abused: IAD was autonomous inside and outside the Department; he'd had Fisk and Kleckner working toward a possible reopening – LAPD's or his own. Vincennes admitted his tail on Bud White and lied about White knowing his sporadic girlfriend – Lynn Bracken – during the spring of '53. Lynn Bracken was placed under loose surveillance; Fisk just submitted a report.

The woman was rumored to be an ex-prostitute; she co-owned a dress shop in Santa Monica. Her partner: Pierce Morehouse Patchett, age fifty-six. Kleckner secured a financial report: Patchett emerged as a wealthy investor known to pimp call girls to business associates. The financial kicker:

Patchett owned an apartment building in Hollywood. A weird shootout took place there – in the middle of the Nite Owl time frame. He caught the squeal himself: no suspects apprehended, sadomasochist gear in a shot-riddled downstairs unit. The manager claimed not to know the building's owner – he was paid by mail, suspected a dummy corporation issued him his paycheck. He knew the first name of the apartment's tenant – 'Lamar,' a 'big blond guy.' The manager blamed Lamar for the shootout; a Hollywood Division follow-up report stated that Lamar had not been seen since the incident. Incident closed.

Trashcan was late. Move to the Hudgens notes.

God-awful butchery, no hard suspects, Hudgens roundly hated. A lackluster investigation – heat fell briefly on Max Peltz and the *Badge of Honor* crew – *Hush-Hush* published an article 'exposing' Peltz and his lust for teenage girls. Peltz passed a polygraph test; the rest of the 'crew' proffered alibis. Between the lines – Parker considered the victim scum, short-shrifted the case.

Still no Trash. Ed skimmed the alibi sheet.

Max Peltz engaged in statutory rape – heavily implied, no charges filed. Script girl Penny Fulweider home with her husband; Billy Dieterling alibied – Timmy Valburn. Set designer David Mertens – a sickly man suffering from epilepsy and other ailments – alibied by Jerry Marsalas, his live-in male nurse. Star Brett Chase at a party; co-star Miller Stanton likewise. A bust – but Hudgens' death had to play central to Vincennes' spring '53.

Trashcan walked up, sat down. No prelims. 'You're calling it in?'

'I'm meeting with Parker tomorrow. I'm sure he's going to announce a reopening.'

Vincennes laughed. 'Then don't look so grim. If you're crazy enough to want it, at least act happy.'

Ed placed six shell casings on the table. 'Three of these are target rounds I retrieved from your last range practice, three are rounds I took out of a Hollywood Division evidence locker. Identical lands and grooves. April '53, Jack. You remember that shootout on Cheramoya?'

Trash grabbed the table. 'Keep going.'

'Pierce Patchett owns that building on Cheramoya, and it's a nicely hidden ownership. S&M gear was found on the premises, and

Patchett is a K.A. of Lynn Bracken, Bud White's girlfriend, who you denied knowing. You were working a smut job for Ad Vice then, and smut and sadomasochist paraphernalia are in the same ballpark. The last time we talked you admitted that Hudgens had a file on you, that that was why you were all over the place then. Here's my big leap, so correct me if I'm wrong. Bracken and Patchett were K.A.'s of Hudgens.'

Vincennes dug his hands in – the table shook. 'So you're a smart fucker. So what?'

'So did Bud White know Hudgens?'

'No, I don't think – '

'What does White have on Patchett and Bracken?'

'I don't know. Exley, look – '

'No, *you* look. And you answer me. Did you get Hudgens' file on you?'

Trashcan, sweating. 'Yeah, I did.'

'Who from?'

'The Bracken woman.'

'How did you get it out of her?'

'Deposition threat. I wrote out a deposition on her and Patchett, everything I put together about them. I made carbons and stashed them in safe-deposit boxes.'

'And you – '

'Yeah, I've still got them. And they've still got a carbon on me.'

Educated guess. 'And Patchett was pushing that smut you were chasing?'

'Yeah. Exley, look – '

'No, Vincennes, *you* look. Do you still have copies of the smut books?'

'I've got the depositions and the books. You want them, I get my evidence suppression wiped. And half the Nite Owl collar.'

'A third. There's no way to make the case without White.'

Chapter Fifty-one

ROOM 6 AT Victory. Dudley, a muscle creep chained to the hot seat. Dot Rothstein ogling *Playboy*. Bud watched her scope cheesecake: a bull-dyke cop in a Hughes Aircraft jumpsuit.

Dudley skimmed a rap sheet. 'Lamar Hinton, age thirty-one. One ADW conviction, a former telephone company employee strongly suspected of installing bootleg bookie lines for Jack "The Enforcer" Whalen. A parole absconder since April 1953. Lad, I think it is safe to refer to you as an organized crime associate, thus someone in need of reeducation in the ways of polite society.'

Hinton licked his lips; Dudley smiled. 'You came along peacefully, which is to your credit. You did not give us a song and dance about your civil rights, which, since you don't have any, speaks well of your intelligence. Now, my job is to deter and contain organized crime in Los Angeles, and I have found that physical force often serves as the most persuasive corrective measure. Lad, I will ask questions, you will answer them. If I am satisfied with your answers, Sergeant Wendell White will remain in his chair. Now, why did you abscond your parole in April 1953?'

Hinton stuttered. Bud threw backhands – eyes on the wall so he wouldn't have to see. Left/right/left/right/left/right – Dot flashed the cut-off sign.

Cease fire. Dudley: 'A little admonishing to show you what Sergeant White is capable of. Now, from here on in I will accommodate your stammer. Do you recall the question? Why did you abscond your parole in April 1953?'

Stut-stut-stutter: Hinton with his eyes squeezed shut.

'Lad, we're waiting.'

Hinton: 'H-h-had b-b-blow t-town.'

'Ah, grand. And what precipitated your need to leave?'

'J-just w-woman t-t-trouble.'

'Lad, I don't believe you.'

'Th-th-the t-truth.'

Dudley nodded. Bud threw backhands – pulled, fake full force.

Dot said, ‘This boy could take a lot of grief. Come on, sugar, make it easy on yourself. April ’53. Why’d you blow town?’

Bud heard Breuning and Carlisle next door. It hit him: 4/53 – the Nite Owl.

‘Lad, I overestimated the power of your memory, so let me help it along. Pierce Patchett. You were acquainted with him back then, weren’t you?’

Bud, chills: evidence suppression, he shouldn’t know Patchett existed –

Hinton jerked, thrashed.

‘Ah, grand, I think we touched a nerve.’

Dot sighed. ‘God, such muscles. I should have such muscles.’

Dudley howled.

Kill the chills: he’s on the reopening – maybe Hinton works in. *If he knew about my evidence dance I wouldn’t be here.*

Dot sapped Hinton: the arms, the knees. Muscles took it stoic: no yelps, no whimpers.

Dudley laughed. ‘Lad, you have a high threshold for discomfort. Comment on the following, please: Pierce Patchett, Duke Cathcart and pornography. Be concise or Sergeant White will test that threshold.’

Hinton, no stutter. ‘Fuck you, Irish cocksucker.’

Ho, ho, ho. ‘Lad, you’re a regular Jack Benny. Wendell, show our organized crime associate your opinion of unsolicited comedy acts.’

Bud grabbed Dot’s sap. ‘What are you looking for, boss?’

‘Full and docile cooperation.’

‘Is this the Nite Owl? You said Duke Cathcart.’

‘I want full and docile cooperation on all topics. Have you objections to that?’

Dot said, ‘White, just do it. God, I should have such muscles.’

Bud got close. ‘Let me play him solo. Just a couple minutes.’

‘A return to your old methods, lad? It’s been a while since you evinced enthusiasm for this kind of work.’

Bud whispered. ‘I’m gonna let him think he can take me, then shiv him. You and Dot wait outside, okay?’

Dudley nodded, walked Dot out. Bud turned the radio on: a commercial, used-car values at Yeakel Olds.

Hinton rattled his chains. ‘Fuck you, fuck that Irish guy and fuck that fucking diesel dyke.’

Bud pulled up a chair. ‘I don’t like this stuff, so you be good and give me some answers on the side and I'll tell the man to cut you loose. You got that? No parole roust.'

'Fuck you.'

'Hinton, I think you know Pierce Patchett, and maybe you knew Duke Cathcart. You can tell me some side stuff and I'll – '

'Fuck your mother.'

Bud threw Hinton and his chair across the room. The hot seat landed sideways – slats popped off. Shelves collapsed – the radio broke, spewing static.

Bud uprighted the chair one-handed. Hinton pissed his pants. Bud heard himself talking, a weird voice like a brogue. 'Give me some pimp stuff, lad. Cathcart, a coon named Dwight Gilette – they both ran this girl Kathy Janeway. She got snuffed and I don't like that. You got information on them, *lad*?'

Eyeball to eyeball – Hinton's wide wide. No stutter, don't rile the fucking animal. 'Sir, I just had this driver job for Mr. Patchett, me and this guy Chester Yorkin. All we did was deliver these . . . these illegal things . . . and Cathcart, him I don't know from Adam. I heard Gilette was a swish, all I know's he used to get hooers for Spade Cooley's parties. You want skinny on Spade? I know he blows opium, he's a righteous degenerate dope fiend. He's playing the El Rancho now, you roust him. But I don't know no hooer killers and I don't know no girl Kathy Janeway.'

Bud shook the chair – Hinton kept snitching. 'Sir, Mr. Patchett, he ran call girls. Gorgeous tail, all fixed up like movie stars. His favorite was this gorgeous cunt Lynn, looked just like – '

Bud went straight for his face. The face went red, big men pressed in – arms around him – lifting him. The ceiling zooming down, cracked stucco swirls going black.

Questions and answers through black, shouts and whimpers through gauze – a wall that held faces back. Stag books, Cathcart, Pierce P. – the full drift couldn't get through. A strain to hear 'Lynn Bracken,' no yield on the name, the black going that much blacker. Mickey Cohen, '53 and why'd you run – he tore at the gauze for that name. Shrieks that made him burrow into softness – snapshots of Lynn all around him.

Lynn blond and a whore, brunette and herself. Lynn on his thing with Inez: 'Be kind to her and spare me the details.' Lynn filling up her diary while he punked out on reading it because he knew she had him down cold. Lynn thinking two steps ahead of him, drifting in and out of his life while he drifted in and out of hers. That black gauze throbbing – questions, answers. Black silence, cracked stucco swirls going light.

Room 7 at the Victory: cots for the Mobster Squad guys. The door to 6 wide open.

Bud rolled off his cot, stood up. His head throbbed, his jaw ached, he'd ripped up his pillow burrowing in. Into 6, a shambles: the hot seat, blood on the walls. No Hinton, no Dot, no Dudley and his boys. 1:10 A.M. – no way to figure out the questions and answers.

He drove home woozy, too trashed to think. He unlocked his door yawning – the overhead light went on. Something/somebody grabbed him.

Cuffs on his wrists. Ed Exley, Jack Vincennes – square in front of him. A side check: Fisk and Kleckner – I.A. shitbirds – pinning his arms.

Exley slapped him. Fisk grabbed his neck, popped a finger on his carotid.

A folder in his face. Exley: 'I.A. ran a personal on you when you made sergeant, so we already know about Lynn Bracken. Vincennes had a tail on you back in '53, and he's got you, Bracken and Pierce Patchett in this deposition here. You braced Patchett on the Kathy Janeway homicide, and you were all over the Nite Owl like a plague. I need what you know, and if you don't cooperate I'll begin an I.A. investigation into your evidence suppression immediately. The Department needs a scapegoat on the old Nite Owl job – and I'm too valuable to take the fall. If you don't cooperate, I'll use every bit of my juice to ruin you.'

The choke hold went slack – Bud tried to pull away. Kleckner and Fisk dug in. 'You fuck, I'll fucking kill you.'

Exley laughed. 'I don't think so, and if you play you get your evidence suppression chilled, part of the collar and a little plum – a liaison to those hooker snuffs you care so much about.'

Black gauze coming back. 'Lynn?'

'She's our first interrogation – with pentothal. If she's clean, she walks.'

He doesn't know about *Whisper*, I've still got that stiff in San Berdoo. 'And you and me when it's over.'

Chapter Fifty-two

NO SLEEP – VINCENNES' deposition wouldn't let him. The wake-up call he didn't need: a reporter at 6:00 A.M. Radio news riding over: reopening speculation, a *mano a mano* with his father – the freeway system near done, the Nite Owl hero now a villain. Parking lot pickets – Commie types demanding justice.

Early – for the most important meeting of his career.

Parker's conference room was set up – notepads on the table. Ed wrote 'Patchett,' 'Bracken,' 'Patchett's "deal" with Hudgens – extortion?'; he underlined 'Pornography pictures match Hudgens mutilations – have Vincennes bring smut books to Bureau.' White's contribution: 'Patchett hinked on smut in '53'; 'Patchett/Englekling bros and father chem background'; 'Duke Cathcart's pad tossed & San Berdoo Yellow Pages (printshops) ruffled.' White was still holding back – he knew it.

Deposition underlined: 'Patchett involved (through Fleur-de-Lis racket) in (contained) distribution of smut Ad Vice chasing in '53, smut Cathcart developed distribution scheme around, smut connected to mutilations on Hudgens' body.'

Conclusion:

A dense series of criminal conspiracies at least five years old resulting in no fewer than four and perhaps as many as a dozen major crimes.

The other men filed in – Parker, Dudley Smith, Ellis Loew. Nods, quick sit-downs.

Parker said, 'We're reopening. The A.G.'s Office wants to usurp the job, but Ellis has filed a restraining order against them, which should buy us two weeks' time. We've got two weeks to clear the case and recover the respect we lost. We've got two weeks before Sacramento comes down here and makes us a laughingstock. I want this case cleared, legally inviolate and in the hands of the grand jury within twelve days. Do you understand, gentlemen?'

Nods all around. Loew said, 'I'm personally in a difficult position here, since Coates, Jones and Fontaine *did* confess to me. On reflection, I must admit that they were stupid and naive boys psychologically susceptible to suggestion, so – '

Smith cut in. 'Ellis, that's blood under the bridge. We simply got the wrong coloreds, not the ones who fired off those shotguns in Griffith Park. The real culprits are some smart Darktown strutters who knew where Coates stashed his car, then planted the weapons. Lads who knew niggertown well and simply beat us to the location. The purple car seen by the Nite Owl was just a coincidence that the killers capitalized on. I think the Griffith Park car was stolen or out of state, and in any event I think it's not applicable. We have to begin by shaking down the southside again.'

Ed smiled – Smith's tack played into his plan. 'Essentially I agree, and I've got one of my I.A. men checking old registrations. But aren't we ahead of ourselves? Shouldn't we set up a chain of command first?'

Loew coughed. 'Ed, I think your shooting those thugs was a noble act, whatever your motives. But I think giving you the command would just make the press and the public more resentful. I think you should take a subsidiary role in this investigation.'

Outrage down pat. 'I'm tired of being the bad guy on the six o'clock news and I'm tired of my sex life in the papers. I'm also the best detective in the – '

Parker cut in. 'You are the best detective we have, and I understand your need to cut your losses. But Ellis is right, this is too personal with you. I've given Dudley the command. He'll recruit a team from Homicide and various squadrooms and take it from there.'

'And me? Do I get a piece of the case?'

Parker nodded. 'I'll give you anything within reason.'

The kill. 'I want the chance to develop my own evidence with I.A. autonomy. I want the use of my two personal aides from I.A. and my choice of two officers to serve as field runners.'

'That's fine by me. Dudley?'

'Yes, I think that's fair. Lad, who did you have in mind for runners?'

'Jack Vincennes and Bud White.'

Smith almost gawked. Parker said, 'Strange bedfellows, but then it's a strange case. Twelve days, gentlemen. Not one minute longer.'

Chapter Fifty-three

JACK WOKE UP on the couch, wrote Karen a note.

> Sweetie –
>
> Fairs fair & yeah I screwed up with Ellis. But this goddamn sofa for two months isn't fair & if the Department can forgive me then you should be able to too. I haven't had a drink for six weeks, which if you checked the calendar by my closet you'd know. I don't expect you to think that makes everything right with us, but give me some credit for trying. I'll try – you want to go to law school, great, but I bet you'll hate it. In May I'll retire, maybe I can get a police chief job in some hick town near a good law school. I'll try, but cut me some slack because this deep freeze number is driving me crazy & right now I can't afford to be crazy because I've been detached back to work plainclothes on something that's very important to me. I'll probably be working late for the next week or so, but I'll call & check in.
>
> J.

He dressed, waited for the phone to ring. Coffee in the kitchen, a note from Karen.

> J. –
>
> I've been a bitch lately. I'm sorry and I think we should try to figure some things out. You were asleep when I got home or I would have invited you into the boudoir.
>
> XXXXX – K
>
> P.S. A girl at work showed me this magazine that I thought you might be interested in seeing. I know you know that man Exley it mentions and it certainly is pertinent to what's been in the papers lately.

On the table: *Whisper* – 'All the Din That's Fit to Print.' Jack thumbed it smiling, caught a Nite Owl spread.

Hopped-up stuff – 'Crusading Private Eye,' 'Duke Cathcart impersonator,' smut speculation. Ed Exley raked over hot coals – Exley hatred big. A snap take: 'P.I.' Bud White shivs Exley – a February issue on sale in January, out before the Englekling brothers got clipped and that shine up at Quentin dropped that alibi. East Coast circulation, you probably couldn't find the rag in L.A. Exley and the high brass couldn't have seen it – or *he* would have heard.

The phone rang – Jack grabbed it. 'Exley?'

'Yes, and you're officially detached. White talked to Lynn Bracken. She's agreed to be pentothaled, and I want you to bring her in. She'll be waiting at that Chinese restaurant across from the Bureau in an hour. Meet her there and bring her up to I.A., and if she's got a lawyer get rid of him.'

'Look, I saw something I think you should see.'

'Just bring me the woman.'

The woman five years post-file burning – Lynn Bracken sipping tea at Al Wong's. Jack watched her through the window.

Still a showstopper. A brunette now, a thirty-fivish beauty drawing stares. She saw him. Jack got flutters: his file.

She walked out. Jack said, 'I didn't want this to happen.'

'You let it. And aren't you afraid of what I know about you?'

Something skewed: she was too calm five minutes from a bracing. 'I've got this scary captain looking after me. If it came out, I'm betting he'd kibosh it.'

'Don't make any bets you can't cover. And I'm only doing this because Bud told me he'd get hurt if I didn't.'

'What else did Bud tell you?'

'Bad things about your scary captain. Can we go now? I want to get this over with.'

They walked across the street, up the back Bureau stairs. Fisk met them outside I.A., steered them to Exley's office. A scary set-up: scary Captain Ed. Ray Pinker, a desk covered with medical stuff – vials, syringes. A polygraph machine – backup if the truth juice failed.

Pinker filled a hypo. Exley pointed Lynn to a chair. 'Please, Miss Bracken.'

Lynn sat down. Pinker swabbed her left arm, fitted a tourniquet. Exley, all business. 'I don't know what Bud White told you, but essentially this is an investigation involving several interrelated criminal conspiracies. If you provide us with viable information we're prepared to grant you immunity on any possible criminal charges you might accrue.'

Lynn made a fist. 'I can't very well lie. Can we get this over with, please?'

Pinker took her arm, injected her. Exley punched a tape machine.

Lynn went dreamy-eyed – not quite pentothal gaga. Exley talked into a hand mike. ‘Witness Lynn Bracken, March 22, 1958. Miss Bracken, please count backward from one hundred.’

Slurs right off. ‘Hundred, ninety-nine, ninety-eight, ninety-sev, nine-six . . .’

Pinker checked her eyes, nodded. Jack grabbed a chair. Still too calm – he could taste it.

Exley coughed. ‘3/22/58, present with the witness are myself, Sergeant Duane Fisk, Sergeant John Vincennes and forensic chemist Ray Pinker. Duane, transcribe in shorthand.’

Fisk grabbed a notepad. Exley said, ‘Miss Bracken, how old are you?’

A slight slur. ‘Thirty-four.’

‘And your occupation?’

‘Businesswoman.’

‘Do you own Veronica’s Dress Shop in Santa Monica?’

‘Yes.’

‘Why did you choose the name “Veronica’s”?’

‘A personal joke.’

‘Please elaborate.’

‘It’s a name from my old life.’

‘How specifically?’

A dreamy smile. ‘I used to be a prostitute made up to resemble Veronica Lake.’

‘Who convinced you to do that?’

‘Pierce Patchett.’

‘I see. Did Pierce Patchett kill a man named Sid Hudgens in April 1953?’

‘No. I mean I don’t know. Why would he?’

‘Do you know who Sid Hudgens was?’

‘Yes. A scandal-sheet writer.’

‘Did Patchett know Hudgens?’

‘No. I mean if he did know him, he would have told me, a famous man like that.’

A lie – she couldn’t be full on the juice. She had to know he knew she was lying – she was thinking he’d cover her to protect himself.

Exley: ‘Miss Bracken, do you know who killed a girl named Kathy Janeway in the spring of 1953?’

‘No.’

‘Do you know a man named Lamar Hinton?’

‘Yes.’

‘Please elaborate.’

‘He worked for Pierce.’

‘In what capacity?’

‘As a driver.’

‘And when was this?’

‘Several years ago.’

‘Do you know where Hinton is now?’

‘No.’

‘Elaborate on your answer, please.’

‘No, he went away, I don’t know where he went.’

‘Did Hinton attempt to kill Sergeant Jack Vincennes in April 1953?’

‘No.’

She told him no back then.

‘Who did try to kill him?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Who else worked or works as a driver for Patchett?’

‘Chester Yorkin.’

‘Please elaborate.’

‘Chet, Chester Yorkin, he lives in Long Beach somewhere.’

‘Does Pierce Patchett suborn women into prostitution?’

‘Yes.’

‘Who killed the six people at the Nite Owl Coffee Shop in April 1953?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Does Pierce Patchett sell a variety of illegal items through a service known as Fleur-de-Lis?’

‘I don’t know.’

A huge lie. Hink on her face: veins pulsing.

Exley: ‘Does Dr. Terry Lux perform plastic surgery on Patchett’s prostitutes in order to increase their resemblance to movie stars?’

Veins smoothing out. ‘Yes.’

‘Is Patchett in fact a long-term procurer of expensive call girls?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did Patchett distribute expensive and artfully produced pornography during the spring of 1953?’

‘I don’t know.’

White knuckles. Jack grabbed a notepad, wrote: ‘Patchett a chem whiz. L.B.’s lying & I think she’s on dope to counter pentothal. Get blood sample.'

'Miss Bracken, does – '

Jack passed the note. Exley scanned it, passed it to Pinker. Pinker fixed up a spike.

'Miss Bracken, does Patchett possess secret files stolen from Sid Hudgens?'

'I don't kn – '

Pinker grabbed Lynn's arm, fed the needle. Lynn jerked up; Exley grabbed her. Pinker pulled out the spike; Exley pinned Lynn to his desk. She thrashed and kicked – Fisk got behind her and cuffed her. Spitting now – she caught Exley in the face. Fisk wrestled her out to the hall.

Exley wiped his face – red, mottled. 'I wasn't sure myself. I thought she might have been confused.'

Jack handed him *Whisper*. 'I knew how she should answer better than you. Captain, you should see this.'

Scary: that red face, those eyes. Exley read the piece, tore the rag in half. 'White did this. You go up to San Bernardino and talk to Sue Lefferts' mother. I'm going to break that whore.'

San Berdoo in an uproar: Exley breaking that whore as a slide show. 'Hilda Lefferts' in the phone book, directions, the house: white shingles, a cinderblock add-on.

A granny type watering the lawn. Jack parked, taped up the rip job on *Whisper*. The old girl saw him and rabbited – a run for the door.

He ran over. She squealed, 'Let my Susie rest in peace!'

Jack shoved *Whisper* in her face. 'An L.A. policeman talked to you, right? Big man about forty? You told him your daughter had a boyfriend who looked like Duke Cathcart right before the Nite Owl. He told her "get used to calling me 'Duke."' The policeman showed you mugshots and you couldn't make the boyfriend. Is this true? You read this and tell me.'

She read, fast, squinting away sunlight. 'But he said he was a policeman, not a private detective. Those were police-type pictures he showed me, and it wasn't my fault that I couldn't identify Susie's beau. And I want to go on record as stating that Susie was a virgin when she died.'

'Ma'am, I'm sure she was – '

'And I want it to go on record that that policeman or whatever checked underneath the new wing on my house and found not a thing amiss. Young man, you're a policeman, aren't you?'

Jack shook his head – it felt sludgy. 'Lady, what are you telling me?'

'I'm telling you that Mr. Private Eye Policeman or whatever crawled around under my house two months or so ago, because I told him Susan Nancy's beau did the same thing right after this ruckus they had with this other fellow right before that Nite Owl thing that you people keep tormenting me over, may Susie and the other victims rest in peace. All he found were rodents, not signs of foul play, so there.'

So there.

Granny pointed to a crawlspace flush with the ground – so there.

It fucking could not be. Bud White did not have the brains to let a card that strong sit.

Jack took a flashlight down under – Hilda Lefferts stood watching, so there. Dust, rot, mothball stink – light on dirt, rats, rat eyes glowing. Burlap, mothballs, gristlecaked bones, a skull with a hole between the eyes.

Chapter Fifty-four

ED WATCHED LYNN BRACKEN through the two-way.

Kleckner was questioning her, a nice guy set-up for Mr. Bad Guy – himself. She'd been repentothaled; Ray Pinker was testing her blood. Three hours in a cell hadn't broken her – she was still lying with style.

Ed turned the speaker up. Kleckner: 'I'm not saying that I don't believe you, I'm just saying my policeman's experience has shown me that pimps usually hate women, so I don't buy Patchett as such a philanthropist.'

'You have to look at his background, how he lost a little girl to crib death. I'm sure your policeman's mentality can grasp the cause and effect, even if you can't accept it.'

'Let's talk about his background then. You've described Patchett as a financier with L.A. roots going back thirty years. You've said that he puts deals together, so be specific about the deals.'

Lynn sighed – pure panache. 'Movie financing deals, real estate and contracting deals. Here's one for all you movie fans in the audience. Pierce told me he'd financed a few of Raymond Dieterling's early shorts.'

Cozy: Bud White's girlfriend's pimp knew Preston Exley's good buddy. Kleckner changed tape. Ed studied the whore.

Beautiful – a good part of it hung on the fact that she wasn't perfect. Her nose was too pointed; she had crease lines on her forehead. Big shoulders, big hands – beautifully formed, all the more stunning for being large. Blue eyes that probably danced when a man said the right thing; she probably thought Bud White had primitive integrity and respected him for not trying to impress her with gifts he didn't have. She kept her clothing subtle because she knew it would make more of an impression on the people she wanted to impress; she thought most meh were weak and trusted her brains to slide her through anything. Suppositions leading up to a hunch: couple her brains with the counterdope in her system and you got a pentothal-immune witness dissembling with impunity –

and style.

‘Captain, you got a call. It’s Vincennes.’

Fisk had his phone, stretched to the end of the cord. Ed took it. ‘Vincennes?’

‘Yeah, and listen close, ’cause that scandal sheet story was kosher and there’s lots more.’

‘White?’

‘Yeah, White was that phony P.I., and he braced old lady Lefferts two months or so ago. She told him that story of her daughter’s boyfriend who looked like Duke Cathcart and another doozie.’

‘What?’

‘Just listen. A couple weeks before the Nite Owl, a neighbor saw Susie and the boyfriend alone at the house and heard them get into a ruckus with another guy. The boyfriend was seen crawling around under the house later that same day. Now, when White braced the old lady, he called P.C. Bell and checked their records for toll calls from the house to L.A. mid-March to mid-April ’53. I did the same thing and got three tollers, all to a pay phone in Hollywood near the Nite Owl. Now, you think that’s hot, you – ’

‘Goddammit – ’

‘Captain, *listen.* White crawled around under the house and told granny there was nothing there. I went under and found a stiff, wrapped in mothballs to kill the stink and a fucking bullet hole in the head. I got Doc Layman up to San Berdoo. He brought Duke Cathcart’s prison dental file, the Coroner’s Office copy. It was a perfect match. The first ID was bogus, off a partial plate, just like that article said. Fuck, I can’t believe White put all this together and just left the stiff there. Captain, you there?’

Ed grabbed Fisk. ‘Where’s Bud White?’

Fisk looked scared. ‘I heard he went up north with Dudley Smith. The Marin Sheriff’s decided to kick loose on the Engleklings.’

Back to Trashcan. ‘That article said the woman saw some mugs.’

‘Yeah, White brought back some shots marked “State Records Bureau.” Now we both know the state sets run light, so my guess is White didn’t want to bring her down here to check our books. Anyway, she couldn’t ID the boyfriend, and if the boyfriend was one of the Nite Owl stiffs we’ll have him, ’cause Nort Layman took prison dental plate fragments out of his head back in ’53. Bring her down? Show her our books?’

‘Do it.’

Fisk took the phone. Ray Pinker walked up, holding a chem sheet. 'Prestilphyozine, Captain. It's an extremely rare experimental antipsychotic drug used to tranquilize violent mental patients. Somebody professional slipped it to our lady friend, because only a pro would know this breed of phyozine would be likely to counteract pentothal. Skipper, you should sit down, you look like you're about to have a coronary.'

Chemistry whiz Patchett: the Englekling brothers' father: a chemist who developed antipsychotic compounds. Bud White's whore across the glass – alone now, a tape recorder spinning.

Ed walked in. Lynn said, 'You again?'

'That's right.'

'Don't you have to charge me or release me?'

'Not for another sixty-eight hours.'

'Aren't you violating my constitutional rights?'

'Constitutional rights have been waived for this one.'

'This one?'

'Don't play dumb. This one is Pierce Patchett distributing pornography, including picture-book photographs that exactly match the mutilations on a murder victim, namely his late "partner" Sid Hudgens. This one is one of the supposed Nite Owl victims tied in to a conspiracy to distribute that pornography and your friend Bud White withholding major evidence on who the real victim was. Now, White told you to cooperate and you came here under the influence of a drug to counteract pentothal. That's against you, but you can still save yourself *and White* a lot of trouble by cooperating.'

'Bud can look after himself. And you look terrible. Your face is all red.'

Ed sat down, turned off the tape. 'You don't even feel the dosage, do you?'

'I feel like I've had four martinis, and four martinis just make me that much more lucid.'

'Patchett sent you in without a lawyer to buy time, I know it. He knows you were called in as part of the Nite Owl reopening, so he knows he's a material witness at least. Personally, I don't see him as a killer. I know a great deal about Patchett's various enterprises, and you can save him a great deal of trouble by cooperating with me.'

Lynn smiled. 'Bud said you were quite smart.'

'What else did he say?'

'That you were a weak, angry man competing with your father.'

Let it pass. 'Then let's concentrate on my smarts. Patchett is a chemist, and it may be reaching, but I'm betting he studied under Franz Englekling, a pharmacologist who developed drugs such as the antipsychotic compound Patchett put you under to beat the pentothal. Englekling had two sons, who were murdered in Northern California last month. Those two men came forward during the base Nite Owl investigation and mentioned a quote crazy sugar daddy-o unquote who had access to lots of quote highclass call girls unquote. Obviously Patchett, obviously tied to a would-be smut merchant named Duke Cathcart, one of the alleged Nite Owl victims. Obviously Patchett is all over this thing and in for some trouble he doesn't need and you can help circumvent.'

Lynn lit a cigarette. 'So you're very, very smart.'

'Yes, and I'm a very good detective with a five-year backlog of withheld evidence to work from. I know about your file-burning episode, I know about Patchett's proposed extortion plan with Hudgens. I've read the deposition Vincennes bargained you with and I know all about Patchett's various enterprises, including Fleur-de-Lis.'

'So you're assuming that Pierce has some very damaging information on Vincennes.'

'Yes, which the district attorney and I will quash in the interest of protecting the reputation of the Los Angeles Police Department.'

Fluster: Lynn dropped her cigarette, fumbled her lighter. Ed said, 'You and Patchett can't win. I've got twelve days to square this thing right, and if I can't do it I'm going to start looking for subsidiary indictments. There's at least a dozen I can hang on Patchett, and believe me if I don't make this case I'll do anything I can to make myself look good.'

Lynn stared at him. Ed stared back. 'Patchett made you, didn't he? You were a pom-pom girl from Bisbee, Arizona, and a whore. He taught you how to dress and talk and think, and I am very impressed with the results. But I've got twelve days to keep my life out of the toilet, and if I can't do it I'm going to take you and Patchett down.'

Lynn turned on the tape player. 'Pierce Patchett's whore for the record. I'm not afraid of you and I've never loved Bud White more. It makes me happy that he withheld evidence and got the better of you, and you're a fool for underestimating him. I used to be jealous of him sleeping with Inez Soto, but now I respect the poor girl's good sense in leaving a moral coward for a man.'

Ed pressed 'Erase,' 'Stop,' 'Start.' 'For the record, sixty-seven hours to go and my next interrogation won't be so cordial.'

Kleckner opened the door, passed him a folder. 'Captain, Vincennes brought the Lefferts woman in. They're checking out mugs, and he said you wanted these.'

Ed stepped outside. A thick folder – glossy-paper smut.

The top books: pretty kids, explicit action, colorful costumes. Some of the heads had been cropped and taped back on – per the deposition – Jack tried to ID the posers from mugshots and thought cropping would facilitate the effort. Ugly/arty stuff – just like Trashcan said.

The bottom books – plain black covers – Trashcan's garbage can find. The first inked-in shots – embossed red streaming from disembodied limbs, posers linked orifice to orifice. The homicide match: a spread-eagled boy in sync to the Hudgens crime scene stills.

Past astonishing – and whoever posed the smut pics killed Hudgens.

Ed hit the last book, froze. A nude pretty boy, arms spread – ink/blood gouting off his torso. Familiar, too familiar, not from a Hudgens coroner's shot. He turned pages and caught a foldout: boys, girls, offset limbs touching, ink designs linking them.

AND HE KNEW.

He ran down the hall to Homicide, found their 1934 records, found 'Atherton, Loren, 187 P.C. (multiple).' Three thick folders, then the photos – shot by Dr. Frankenstein himself.

Children immediately after their dismemberment.

Their arms and legs arranged just off their torsos.

White waxed paper under the bodies.

Blood fingerpainted around their limbs, red on white, intricate designs identical to the pornographic ink shots, limb spreads identical to the Hudgens severings.

Ed mangled his fingers slamming the cabinet, Code 2'd to Hancock Park.

A party at Preston Exley's mansion: valets parking cars, music in the back – probably a rose garden bash. Ed went in the front door and stopped short – his mother's library was gone.

Replacing it: a long space eclipsed by a model – lengths of highway over papier-mâché cities. Directional markers at the perimeters – the entire freeway system.

Perfection – it jerked him out of his filth-picture haze. Boats in San Pedro Harbor, the San Gabriel Mountains, tiny autos on asphalt. Preston Exley's greatest triumph on the eve of its completion.

Ed pushed a car – ocean to foothills. His father's voice: 'I thought you'd be working South Central today.'

Ed turned around. 'What?'

Preston smiled. 'I thought you'd be making up for your recent bad press.'

Non sequiturs – the Atherton photos came back. 'Father, excuse me, but I don't know what you're talking about.'

Preston laughed. 'We've seen each other so seldom lately that we've forgotten the amenities.'

'Father, there's something – '

'I'm sorry, I was referring to Dudley Smith's statement to the *Herald* today. He said the reopening investigation was being centered on the southside, that you're looking for another Negro gang.'

'No, that's not the way it's going.'

Preston put a hand on his shoulder. 'You look frightened, Edmund. You do not look like a ranking policeman and you did not come here to enjoy my completion celebration.'

The hand felt warm. 'Father, outside of the Department, who's seen the old Atherton photographs?'

'Now I'll say "what?" You're referring to the photographs in the case file? The ones I showed you and Thomas years ago?'

'Yes.'

'Son, what are you talking about? Those photographs are sealed LAPD evidence, never released to the press or the public. Now tell me – '

'Father, the Nite Owl is collateral to several other major crimes, and Negro gangs have nothing to do with it. One of them is – '

'Then explain the evidence the way I taught you. I've had cases like – '

'Nobody has ever had a case like this, I'm a better detective than you *ever* were and *I've* never had a case like this.'

Preston clamped both hands down – Ed felt his shoulders go numb. 'I'm sorry for that, but it's true and I've got a five-year-old mutilation homicide connected to the Nite Owl case that says so. The victim was cut *identically* to Loren Atherton's victims and *identical* to some ink-embossed pornographic photographs tangential to the Nite Owl. Which means that either somebody saw the Atherton pictures and took it from there or you got the wrong suspect in '34.'

The man didn't even blink. 'Loren Atherton was incontrovertibly guilty, with a confession and eyewitness verification. You and Thomas saw his photographs, and I doubt seriously that those photographs have ever left the Homicide pen downtown. Unless you hypothesize a policeman killer, which I find absurd, then the only explanation is that Atherton showed the photographs to some person or persons prior to his arrest. *You* got the wrong men in your glory case – I did not make that error. *Think* before you raise your voice to your father.'

Ed stepped back – his legs brushed the model, broke off a piece of freeway. 'I apologize, and I should be asking your advice, not competing with you. Father, is there anything about the Atherton case you haven't told me?'

'Apology accepted, and no, there isn't. You, Art and I went over the case constantly during our seminar period, and I expect that you know it as well as I do.'

'Did Atherton have *any* known associates?'

Preston shook his head. 'Emphatically no. He was the very model of a psychotic loner.'

A deep breath. 'I want to interview Ray Dieterling.'

'Why? Because one of his child stars was killed by Atherton?'

'No, because a witness identified Dieterling as a K.A. of a criminal tangential to the Nite Owl.'

'How long ago?'

'Thirty years or so.'

'This person's name?'

'Pierce Patchett.'

Preston shrugged. 'I've never heard of him and I don't want you bothering Raymond. Emphatically no, a thirty-year-old acquaintanceship does not warrant bothering a man of Ray Dieterling's stature. *I'll* ask Ray about him and report back to you. Will that suffice?'

Ed looked at the model. Hypnotic: L.A. grown huge, Exley

Construction containing it. His father's hands, gentle now. 'Son, you've come very far and you've earned my respect absolutely. You've taken a beating for Inez and those men you killed, and I think you're bearing up strongly. For now, though, I want you to consider this. The Nite Owl case got you where you are today and a quick resolution on the reopening will keep you there. Collateral homicide investigations, however compelling, might seriously distract you from your main objective and thus destroy your career. Please remember that.'

Ed squeezed his father's hands. 'Absolute justice. Remember that?'

Chapter Fifty-five

BOTH CRIME SCENES sealed – the printshop, the pad next door. One Marin sheriff – a fat guy named Hatcher. A lab man talking nonstop.

Crime Scene 1: the back room at Rapid Bob's Printing. Bud scoped Dudley nonstop, flashing back to *his* pitch: 'We thought you were going to kill him, so we stopped you. I'm sorry if we were untoward, but you were, a handful. Hinton is associated with some very bad people, and I'll elaborate in all due time.'

He didn't press it – Dud might have stuff on him.

Lynn in custody.

Exley's slap in the face.

The lab man pointed to a rack of dumped shelves. ' . . . okay, so the front of the shop looked hunky-dory, so our perpetrator didn't bother with it. We found cigarette butts in an ashtray here, two brands, so let's assume the Engleklings were working late. Let's assume the perpetrator picked the front door lock, tiptoed up and got the drop on them. Glove prints on the jamb of the connecting door, so that backs it up. He comes in, he makes our boys open those cabinets I showed you, he doesn't find what he wants. He gets pissed and yanks those shelves to the floor, glove prints on the fourth shelf up indicate a right-handed man of average height. The brothers open the boxes that spilled off – we got a whole load of smudged latents that indicate Pete and Bax were a bit panicked by this time. So, the perpetrator obviously didn't find what he wanted and marched our boys across the driveway to their apartment. Gentlemen, follow me.'

Out the door, across an alley. The lab guy carried a flashlight; Bud stuck to the back.

Lynn cocky – convinced she could beat truth juice with her brains.

Dud probably had his own insider leads – but he still kept talking up niggers.

The lab man said, 'Note the dirt on the driveway. On the morning the bodies were found our tech crew discovered and photographed three sets of footmarks too shallowly placed to make exemplers from. Two sets walking ahead of a single set, which indicates a march at gunpoint.'

Over to a bungalow court. Dudley stone quiet – on the plane he hardly talked.

Would *Whisper* hit?

Play the stiff under the house against Exley – *HOW?*

Tape on the door – Hatcher peeled it off. The lab man opened up with a pass key. Lights inside – Bud squeezed in first.

A shambles – all forensicked up.

Blood spills on a wall-to-wall carpet – tape-marked. Glass tubes on the floor – circled, held in see-through evidence bags. Scattered around: photo negatives – dozens – cracked, scalded surfaces. Overturned chairs, a dumped dresser, a sofa with the stuffing ripped out. Tucked in the largest rip: a glassine bag tagged 'Heroin.'

The lab guy spieled. 'Those tubes contain chemicals that we've ID'd as antipsychotic drugs. The negatives were mostly too blurred to identify, but we were able to figure out that most of them were pornographic photographs. The images were mostly burned off with chemicals taken from the refrigerator in the kitchen: our boys owned a whole cornucopia of corrosive solutions. I'll hypothesize here: Peter and Baxter Englekling were tortured before they were shot to death – that we know. I think the killer showed them each negative individually, asked them questions, then burned them – and the pictures. What was he looking for? I don't know, maybe he wanted the picture participants identified. We found a magnifying glass under the couch, so I'm leaning toward that theory now. Also, note the plastic bag marked "Heroin" extruding from the couch, the contents of which, of course, we locked up. Four bags total in a safe little hidey-hole. The killer left a small fortune in salable dope behind.'

Into the kitchen, more chaos, the icebox open – spilling tubes, bottles marked with chemical symbols. Stacked by the sink: something like printing press plates.

The tech man pointed to the mess. 'Another hypothesis, gentlemen. In my crime scene report you'll note that I've listed no less than twenty-six separate chemical substances found on the premises. The killer tortured Pete and Bax Englekling with chemicals, and he knew which chemicals would scald flesh. I'd call his torture method a means of opportunity, so I'm betting the man had an engineering, a medical or a chemistry background. Now the bedroom.'

Bud thought: PATCHETT.

Back to the bedroom, blood drops in the hall along the way. A small room, a twelve-by-twelve slaughterhouse.

Two body outlines – one on the bed, one on the floor, dried blood tape-to-tape both places. Clothesline sash wrapped around the bedposts; more sash on the floor; taped circles on the bedsheets, the floor, a nightstand by the bed. A bullet hole circled on one wall; a forensic display on a corkboard: more scalded negatives.

Lab man: 'Just glove prints and Englekling prints on the negatives, we dusted every one of them, then placed most of them back in their original locations. The ones on the board were found here in the bedroom, which as you can tell was where the torture and the killings took place. Now, those small circles on the bed and elsewhere indicate sections of torso, arm and leg tissue scalded off the Englekling brothers, and if you look closely at the floor you'll be able to see patches of singed carpet caused by chemical spills. Both men were shot twice with a silencer-fitted .38 revolver. Baffling threads we took off the shells indicate the silencer and indicate why no shots were heard. The bullet hole in the wall is our one real lead, and it's easy to reconstruct what happened. Bax Englekling got free of his bonds, got ahold of the gun and fired a wounding shot before the killer got the gun back and shot him. The shell we took out of the wall had shredded Caucasian flesh and gray arm hair stuck to it, along with O-plus blood. Both Englekling boys were AB-minus, so we know the perpetrator was hit. The blood drops leading out to the living room and the negatives that he took out to look at indicate that it wasn't a major wound. Lieutenant Hatcher's crew found a blood-soaked O-plus towel in a sewer down the street, so that was his tourniquet. My last hypothesis is that this bastard really had a hard-on for those negatives.'

Hatcher spoke up. 'And we've got nothing. We've canvassed two dozen times, we've got no eyewitnesses and those goddamned brothers did not have a single K.A. that we've been able to turn. We hit doctors' offices, emergency rooms, train stations, airports and bus stations looking for sightings of a wounded man and got nothing. If the brothers had an address book, it was taken. Nobody saw anything or heard anything. Like my science buddy says, our guy really had a boner for those negatives, which might – and I emphasize "might" – have something to do with our victims coming forth on that Nite Owl case of yours years ago. They had a dirty-picture theory then, right?'

Dudley said, 'They did indeed, quite unsubstantiated.'

'And the L.A. papers said you just reopened the case.'

'Yes, that's correct.'

'Captain, I regret that we didn't decide to cooperate with you earlier, but put that aside. Have you got anything to give me on the new end of your case that I can use?'

Dudley smiled. 'Chief Parker has authorized me to secure a copy of your case file to read. He said that if I find evidential links to our homicides, he'll release a transcription of the Englekling brothers' 1953 testimony.'

'Which you say pertains to pornography, which our case sure as hell does.'

Dudley lit a cigarette. 'Yes, if it doesn't pertain to heroin just as much.'

Hatcher snorted. 'Captain, if our boy got his chops licked over white horse, he'd have stolen that stuff stashed in the couch.'

'Yes, or the killer was simply a frothing-at-the-mouth psychopath who evinced a psychopathic reaction to the negatives for unfathomable reasons of his own. Frankly, the heroin angle interests me. Have you any evidence that the brothers were either selling or manufacturing it?'

Hatcher shook his head. 'None, and as far as *our* case goes, I don't think it plays. Have you got a pornography angle on the reopening?'

'No, not as yet. Again, after I've read your case file I'll be in touch.'

Hatcher – ready to bust. 'Captain, you came all the way up here for our evidence, and you got nothing to give in return?'

'I came up here at the urging of Chief Parker, who pledges his full cooperation should your case warrant reciprocity.'

'Big words, sahib, that I don't like the sound of.'

Getting ugly – Dudley dug in with a big blarney smile. Bud walked out to the curb, dug in by their rental.

Scared, standing on GO.

Dudley walked out; Hatcher and the lab man locked the printshop. Bud said, 'I don't follow you at all these days, boss.'

'Starting when, lad?'

'Let's try last night with Hinton.'

Dudley laughed. 'You were your old cruel self last night. It warmed my heart and convinced me that the extracurricular work I have planned for you remains within your grasp.'

'What work?'

'In due time.'

'What happened to Hinton?'

'We released him well-chastised and terrified of Sergeant Wendell White.'

'Yeah, but what were you pressing him on?'

'Lad, you have your extracurricular secrets, I have mine. We'll hold a clarification session soon.'

GO. 'No. I just want to know where we both stand on the Nite Owl. *Now.*'

'Edmund Exley, lad. We both stand there.'

'What?' – scared to his own ears.

'*Edmund Jennings Exley.* He's been your raison d'être since Bloody Christmas, and he's why you don't tell me certain things. I love you, so I respect your omissions. Now reciprocate my love and respect my lack of clarification for the next twelve days and you'll see him destroyed.'

'What are you – ' a little kid's voice.

'You've never accorded him credit, so I'll tell you now. As a man he's less than negligible, but as a detective he far exceeds even myself. There. God and yourself witness plaudits for a man I despise. Now will you respect my omissions – as I respect yours?'

Past GO. 'No. Just fucking tell me what you want me to do. Just explain it.'

Dudley laughed, smiled. 'Do nothing for now but listen. I've found out that Thad Green will be retiring to take over the U.S. Border Patrol later this spring. Our new chief of detectives will be either Edmund Exley or myself. His upcoming inspectorship gives Exley the inside track, and Parker favors him personally. I plan on using certain aspects of our mutually withheld evidence to clear the Nite Owl posthaste, establish myself as the new front-runner and ruin Exley in the process. Lad, bear with me for a few more days and I'll guarantee you your own personal revenge.'

The deal was Exley/Dudley vs. Exley.

No contest.

Past GO: the crumbs he spilled to Exley, Exley's promise – liaison, the hooker snuffs. 'Boss, is there a carrot in this for me?'

‘Besides our friend’s downfall?’

‘Yeah.’

‘And in exchange for a full disclosure? Beyond what you gave Exley as part of your field runner agreement?’

Jesus, what the man knew. ‘Right.’

Ho Ho Ho. ‘Lad, you drive a hard bargain, but will a Chief of Detectives’ Special Inquiry suffice? Say 187 P.C. multiple, various jurisdictions?’

Bud stuck out his hand. ‘Deal.’

Dudley said, ‘Stay away from Exley and treat yourself to a grand clean room at the Victory. I’ll be by to see you in a day or so.’

‘You take the car, I got business in Frisco first.’

He blew forty bucks on a cab, cruised the Golden Gate high on adrenaline. Double cross: a bad deal to survive, then a good deal to win – up from the minors to the majors. Exley had insider tips and sad Trashcan Jack; Dudley had insider juice that almost went psychic. Turnaround: he lied to Dudley to burn down Exley; five years later the man calls it in: lies forgiven, two cops, one torch. San Francisco bright in the distance, Dudley Smith’s voice: ‘Edmund Jennings Exley.’ Chills just saying the name.

Over the bridge, a stop at a pay phone. Long-distance: Lynn’s number, ten rings, no answer. 9:10 P.M., a spooker – she should have been home from the Bureau by dark.

Across town for the drop-off: San Francisco Police Department, Detective Division HQ. Bud pinned on his badge, walked in.

Homicide on floor three – arrows painted on the wall pointed him up. Creaky stairs, a huge squad bay: Nightwatch lull: two men up by the coffee.

They walked over. The younger guy pointed to his shield. ‘L.A., huh? Help you with something?’

Bud held his ID out. ‘You’ve got an old 187, like one a pal of mine on the L.A. Sheriff’s caught. He asked me to check out your case file.’

‘Well, the captain’s not here now. Maybe you should try in the morning.’

The older man checked his ID. ‘You’re the guy that’s bugs on prostie jobs. The captain said you keep calling up and you’re a royal pain in the keester. What’s the matter, you got another one?’

‘Yeah, Lynette Ellen Kendrick, L.A. County last week. Come on, ten minutes with the file and I'm out of your hair.'

The young guy: 'Hey, catch the drift? The captain wanted you to see the file, he woulda sent you an invitation.'

The old guy: 'The captain's a jack-off. What's our victim's name and DOD?'

'Chrissie Virginia Renfro, July 16, '56.'

'Well then, I'll tell you what you do. You hit the records room around the corner, find your 1956 unsolved cabinet and go to the *R*'s. You don't take anything out and you skedaddle before junior here has a migraine. Got it?'

'Got it.'

Autopsy pictures: orifice rips, facial close-ups – pulp, no real face, ring fragments embedded in cheekbones. Wideangle shots: the body, found at Chrissie's pad – a dive across from the St. Francis Hotel.

Pervert shakedown reports – local deviates brought in, questioned, released for lack of evidence. Foot fuckers, sadist pimps, Chrissie's pimp himself – in the Frisco City Jail when Chrissie was snuffed. Panty sniffers, rape-o's, Chrissie's regular Johns – all alibied up, no names that crossed to the other case files he'd read.

Canvassing reports: local yokels, guests at the St. Francis. Six loser sheets, a grabber.

7/16/56: a St. Francis bellhop told detectives he caught Spade Cooley's late show at the hotel's Lariat Room, then saw Chrissie Virginia Renfro, weaving – 'maybe on hop'– walk into her building.

Grabber – Bud sat still, worked it up.

Grab Lynette Ellen Kendrick, DOD L.A. County last week. Grab an unrelated snitch – Lamar Hinton stooling everything in sight. Grabs: Dwight Gilette – Kathy Janeway's ex-pimp – supplied whores for Spade Cooley's parties. Spade was an opium smoker, a 'degenerate dope fiend.' Spade was in L.A., playing the El Rancho Klub on the Strip – a mile from Lynette Kendrick's pad.

First glitch: Spade couldn't have a jacket, no way to check his blood type – he rode in Sheriff Biscailuz' volunteer posse – P.R. stuff – nobody with a yellow sheet allowed.

Keep grabbing, check the M.E.'s report, 'Bloodstream Contents.' Page 2, a scorcher – 'undigested foodstuffs, semen, a heavily narcotizing amount of food-dispersed opium further verified by tar residue in teeth.'

Bud threw his arms up – like he could reach through the roof and haul down the moon. He banged the ceiling, came back to earth thinking – this was not a solo job, he was hiding out from Exley, Dudley just didn't care. He saw a phone, hit the ceiling, came down with a partner:

Ellis Loew – sex murders made him drool.

He grabbed the phone.

Chapter Fifty-six

HILDA LEFFERTS TAPPED a mugshot. ‘There, that’s Susan Nancy’s beau. Will you take me home now?’

Bingo – a pudgy hardcase type, a real Duke Cathcart lookalike. Dean NMI Van Gelder, W.M., DOB 3/4/21. 5′8¾″, 178 lbs., blue eyes, brown hair. One armedrobbery bounce – 6/42 – ten to twenty, released from Folsom 6/52, full minimum sentence topped – no parole. No further arrests – chalk it up to Bud White’s theory – Van Gelder got it at the Nite Owl.

Hilda said, ‘That’s it – *Dean.* Susan Nancy called him “Dean,” but he said, “No, get used to calling me “Duke.”’

Jack said, ‘You sure?’

‘Yes, I’m sure. Six hours of looking at these awful pictures and you ask me if I’m sure? If I wanted to lie I would have pointed somebody out hours ago. *Please,* Officer. First you find a body under my house, next you subject me to these pictures. Now will you please take me home?’

Jack shook his head no. Work it: Who? to Van Gelder to Cathcart to the Nite Owl. One parlay made sense – the Englekling brothers to Cathcart to a brush with Mickey Cohen – in stir back in ’53. He picked up the phone, dialed O.

‘Operator.’

‘Operator, this is a police emergency. I need to be put through to somebody in administration at McNeil Federal Penitentiary, Puget Sound, Washington.’

‘I see. And your name?’

‘Sergeant Vincennes, Los Angeles Police Department. Tell them I’m on a homicide investigation.’

‘I see. Circuits to Washington State have been – ’

‘Shit. I’m at MAdison 60042. Will you – ’

‘I’ll try your call now, sir.’

Jack hung up. Forty seconds by the wall clock – *bbring brinng.*

‘Vincennes.’

‘Deputy Warden Cahill at McNeil. This pertains to a homicide?’

Hilda Lefferts was pouting – Jack turned away from her. ‘Yeah, and all I need’s one answer. Got a pencil?’

‘Of course.’

‘Okay. I need to know if a white male named Dean Van Gelder, that’s two separate words on the last name, visited an inmate at McNeil say from February through April 1953. All I need’s a yes or no and the names of any inmates he visited.’

A sigh. ‘All right, please hold. This may take a while.’

Jack held counting minutes – Cahill came back on at twelve plus. ‘That’s a positive. Dean Van Gelder, DOB 3/4/21, visited inmate David Goldman on three occasions: 3/27/53, 4/1/53 and 4/3/53. Goldman was at McNeil on tax charges. Perhaps you’ve heard – ’

Work in Davey G. – Mickey Cohen’s man. Work in Van Gelder’s last visit – two weeks before the Nite Owl, the same time the Englekling brothers lubed Mickey – the meet where they spilled the smut plan. The prison man kept babbling – Jack hung up on him. The Nite Owl case started to shake.

Chapter Fifty-seven

ED DROVE LYNN BRACKEN home, a last shot before having her arrested. She protested, then went along: her day of truth dope, counterdope and browbeating showed – she looked frazzled, exhausted. Call her smart, strong and chemically fortified; she gave up nothing but Pierce Patchett crumbs – however she managed it. Patchett knew a whitewash wouldn't wash; Lynn funneled out her call girl tale – and Patchett had to have lawyers waiting in case that crumb went to indictments. Reopening day one was pure insane: Dudley Smith up in Gaitsville while his hot dogs shook down Darktown; Vincennes' body under the house and his ID on Dean Van Gelder – Davey Goldman's McNeil visitor pre-Nite Owl. Bud White for a runner, then his *Whisper* leak breaking – he was a fool to trust him for a second. All of that he could take: he was a professional detective used to dealing with chaos.

But the Atherton case and his father circuiting in was something else. Now he felt suspended, one simple instinct running him: the Nite Owl had a life past any detective's volition – and the will to make its horror known whether he was there to probe evidence or not, whether he was capable of forming plans or just hanging on for the ride.

He had a plan to work Bracken and Patchett.

Lynn blew smoke rings out the window. 'Down two blocks and turn left. You can stop there, I'm right near the corner.'

Ed braked short. 'One last question. At the Bureau you implied that you knew Patchett and Sid Hudgens were planning to work an extortion racket.'

'I don't recall endorsing that statement.'

'You didn't dispute it.'

'I was tired and bored.'

'You endorsed it, implicitly. And it's in Jack Vincennes' deposition.'

'Then perhaps Vincennes lied about that part. He used to be quite a celebrity. Wouldn't you also call him quite a self-dramatist?'

An opening. ‘Yes.’

‘And do you think you can trust him?’

Fake chagrin oozing. ‘I don’t know. He’s my weak point.’

‘So there you are. Mr. Exley, are you going to arrest me?’

‘I’m beginning to think it wouldn’t do any good. What did White say when he told you to come in for questioning?’

‘Just to come clean. Did you show him Vincennes’ deposition?’

The truth – make her grateful. ‘No.’

‘I’m glad, because I’m sure it’s full of lies. Why didn’t you show it to him?’

‘Because he’s a limited detective, and the less he knows the better. He’s also a protégé of a rival officer on the case, and I didn’t want him passing information to him.’

‘Are you speaking of Dudley Smith?’

‘Yes. Do you know him?’

‘No, but Bud speaks of him often. I think he’s afraid of him, which means that Smith must be quite a man.’

‘Dudley’s brilliant and vicious to the core, but I’m better. And look, it’s late.’

‘Can I give you a drink?’

‘Why? You spat in my face today.’

‘Well, given the circumstances.’

Her smile made his smile easy. ‘Given the circumstances, one drink.’

Lynn got out of the car. Ed watched her move: high heels, a shit day – but her feet hardly touched the ground. She led him to her building, unlocked the bottom door and hit a light.

Ed walked in. Exquisite – the fabrics, the art. Lynn kicked off her shoes and poured brandies; Ed sat on a sofa – pure velvet.

Lynn joined him. Ed took his drink, sipped. Lynn warmed the glass with her hands. ‘Do you know why I invited you in?’

‘You’re too intelligent to try to wrangle a deal, so I’ll guess you’re just curious about me.’

‘Bud hates you more than he loves me or anyone else. I’m beginning to see why.’

‘I don’t really want your opinion.’

‘I was leading up to a compliment.’

‘Some other time, all right?’

‘I’ll change the subject then. How’s Inez Soto handling the publicity? She’s been all over the papers.’

‘She’s taking it poorly, and I don’t want to talk about her.’

‘It galls you that I know so much about you. You don’t have information to compete.’

Move the wedge. ‘I have Vincennes’ deposition.’

‘Which I suspect you doubt the truth of.’

Throw the change-up. ‘You mentioned that Patchett financed some early Raymond Dieterling films. Can you elaborate on that?’

‘Why? Because your father is associated with Dieterling? You see the disadvantages of being the son of a famous man?’

No hink, a deft touch with the knife. ‘Just a policeman’s question.’

Lynn shrugged. ‘Pierce mentioned it to me in passing several years ago.’

The phone rang – Lynn ignored it. ‘I can tell you don’t want to talk about Jack Vincennes.’

‘I can tell you do.’

‘I haven’t seen much in the news about him lately.’

‘That’s because he flushed everything he had down the toilet. *Badge of Honor*, his friendship with Miller Stanton, all of it. Sid Hudgens getting murdered didn’t help, since *Hush-Hush* owed half its filth to Vincennes’ shakedowns.’

Lynn sipped brandy. ‘You don’t like Jack.’

‘No, but there’s part of his deposition that I believe absolutely. Patchett has carbons of Sid Hudgens’ private dirt files, including a carbon of a file on Vincennes himself. You can do yourself some good by acknowledging it.’

If she bit she’d start now.

‘I can’t acknowledge it, and the next time we speak I’ll have a lawyer. But I can tell you that I think I know what such a file would contain.’

First wedge in place. ‘And?’

‘Well, I think the year was 1947. Vincennes got involved in a gunfight at the beach. He was under the influence of narcotics and shot and killed two innocent people, a husband and wife. My source has verification, including the testimony of an ambulance deputy and a notarized statement from the doctor who treated Jack for his wounds. My source has blood test results that show the drugs in his system and testimony from eyewitnesses who didn’t come forth. Is that information you’d suppress to protect a brother officer, Captain?’

The Malibu Rendezvous: Trashcan's glory job. The phone rang – Lynn let it go. Ed said, 'Jesus Christ,' no need to fake.

'Yes. You know, when I read about Vincennes I always thought he had some very dark reasons for persecuting dope users, so I wasn't surprised when I found that out. And, Captain? If Pierce did have file carbons, I'm sure he would have destroyed them.'

Her last bit rang fake – Ed played a lie off it. 'I know Jack loves dope, it's been a rumor around the Bureau for years. And I know you're lying about the files and I know Vincennes would do anything to get his file back. You and Patchett shouldn't underestimate him.'

'The way you've underestimated Bud White?'

Her smile came on like a target – he thought for a second that he'd hit her. She laughed before he could; he leaned in and kissed her instead. Lynn pulled back, then kissed back; they rolled to the floor shedding clothes. The phone rang – Ed kicked it off the hook. Lynn pulled him inside her; they rolled, moved together, trashed furniture. It ended as fast as it started – he could feel Lynn reaching to peak. Seconds apart for that, good enough, rest. His story laid out between sighs, like it was a burden too heavy to carry.

Rogue cop Jack Vincennes, on dope and too hot to handle. He'd do anything to get his file back, he had to get that file. Captain E. J. Exley had to use him for what he knew – but Vincennes was doped up, boozed up, going psycho on him -

Chapter Fifty-eight

BUD HIT L.A. at dawn, off the midnight bus down from Frisco. His city looked strange, new – like everything else in his life.

He got a taxi and dozed; he kept snapping awake to Ellis Loew: ‘It sounds like a great case, but multiple homicides are tricky and Spade Cooley is a well-known figure. I’ll put a D.A.’s Bureau team on it and *you stay out of it for now.*’ Cut to Lynn: calls, the phone off the hook, smothered. Strange, but like her – when she wanted to sleep she wanted to sleep.

He couldn’t believe his life, it was just too goddamn amazing.

The cab dropped him off. He found a note on his door – ‘Sergeant Duane W. Fisk’ on the letterhead.

> Sgt. White –
>
> Captain Exley wants to see you immediately (something pertaining to *Whisper* magazine and a body under a house). Report to I.A. immediately upon your return to Los Angeles.

Bud laughed, packed a bag: clothes, his paper stash – the hooker killings, the Nite Owl – Dudley’s for the asking. He threw the note in the toilet, pissed on it.

He drove to Gardena, checked into the Victory: a room with clean sheets, a hot plate, no bloodstains on the walls. Fuck sleep – he fixed coffee, worked.

Everything he knew on Spade Cooley – half a longhand page.

Cooley was an Okie fiddler/singer, a skinny guy, maybe late forties. He had a couple of hit records, his TV show was big for a while. His bass player, Burt Arthur Perkins, a.k.a. ‘Deuce,’ did time on a chain gang for sodomy on dogs and was rumored to have a shitload of mob K.A.’s.

On the investigation:

Lamar Hinton said Spade smoked opium; Spade played the Lariat Room in Frisco – across from Chrissie Renfro’s place of death. Chrissie died with ‘O’ in her system; Spade was currently playing the El Rancho Klub in L.A., close by Lynette Ellen Kendrick’s apartment. Lamar Hinton said Dwight Gilette – Kathy Janeway’s old pimp – supplied whores for Cooley's parties.

Circumstantial – but tight.

A phone wired to the wall – Bud grabbed it, called the County Coroner's Office.

'Medical Examinations, Jensen.'

'Sergeant White for Dr. Harris. I know he's busy, but tell him it's just one thing.'

'Hold, please,' click, click, click. 'Sergeant, what is it this time?'

'One thing off your autopsy report.'

'You're not even a county officer.'

'Stomach and bloodstream contents on Lynette Kendrick. Come on, huh?'

'That's easy, because Kendrick won our best stomach award last week. Are you ready? Frankfurters with sauerkraut, french fries, Coca-Cola, opium, sperm. Jesus, what a last supper.'

Bud hung up. Ellis Loew said stay out of it. Kathy Janeway said GO.

He drove to the Strip, put the M.O. together.

First the El Rancho Klub, closed, 'Spade Cooley and His Cowboy Rhythm Band Appearing Nitely.' A publicity still by the door: Spade, Deuce Perkins, three other cracker types. No heavily ringed fingers; a lead rubberstamped at the bottom: 'Represented by Nat Penzler Associates, 653 North La Cienega, Los Angeles.'

Across the street: the Hot Dog Hut, kraut dogs and fries on the menu. Down the Strip by Crescent Heights: a well-known prostie stroll. A mile south at Melrose and Sweetzer: Lynette Ellen Kendrick's apartment.

Easy:

Spade picked her up late, no witnesses. He had the food and the dope, suggested a cozy all-nighter, took Lynette home. They got high, chowed down – Spade beat her to death, raped her three times postmortem.

Bud hooked south to La Cienega. 653: a redwood A-frame, 'Nat Penzler Assoc.' by the mailbox. The door propped open; a girl inside making coffee.

Bud walked in. The girl said, 'Yes, can I help you?'

'The boss around?'

'Mr. Penzler's on the telephone. Can *I* help you?'

One connecting door – 'N.P.' brass-stamped. Bud pushed it open;

an old man yelled, ‘Hey! I’m on a call! What are you, a bill collector? Hey, Gail! Give this clown a magazine!’

Bud flashed his badge. The man hung up the phone, pushed back from his desk. Bud said, ‘You’re Nat Penzler?’

‘Call me Natsky. Are you looking for representation? I could get you work playing thugs. You have that Neanderthal look currently in vogue.’

Let it go. ‘You’re Spade Cooley’s agent, right?’

‘Right. You want to join Spade’s band? Spade’s a money-maker, but my shvartze cleaning lady sings better than him, so maybe I can get you a spot, a bouncer gig at the El Rancho at least. Lots of trim there, boychik. A moose like you could get reamed, steamed and drycleaned.’

‘You through, pops?’

Penzler flushed. ‘Mr. Natsky to you, caveman.’

Bud shut the door. ‘I need to see Cooley’s booking records going back to ’51. You want to do this nice or not?’

Penzler got up, blocked his filing cabinets. ‘Showtime’s over, Godzilla. I never divulge client information, even under threat of a subpoena. So amscray and come back for lunch sometime, say on the twelfth of never.’

Bud tore the phone cord from the wall; Penzler slid the top drawer open. ‘No rough stuff, please, caveman! I do my best work with my face!’

Bud thumbed folders, hit ‘Cooley, Donnell Clyde,’ dumped it on the desk. A picture hit the blotter: Spade, four rings on ten fingers. Pink sheets, white sheets, then blue sheets – booking records clipped by year.

Penzler stood by muttering. Bud matched dates.

Jane Mildred Hamsher, 3/8/51, San Diego – Spade there at the El Cortez Sky Room. April ’53, Kathy Janeway, the Cowboy Rhythm Band at Bido Lito’s – South L.A. Sharon, Sally, Chrissie Virginia, Maria up to Lynette: Bakersfield, Needles, Arizona, Frisco, Seattle, back to L.A., shifting personnel listed on pay cards: Deuce Perkins playing bass most of the time, drum and sax guys coming and going, Spade Cooley *always* headlining, in those cities on those DODs.

Blue sheets dripping wet – his own sweat. ‘Where’s the band staying?’

Penzler: ‘The Biltmore, and you didn’t get it from Natsky.’

'That's good, 'cause this is Murder One and I wasn't here.'

'I am like the Sphinx, I swear to you. My God, Spade and his lowlife crew. My God, do you know what he grossed last year?'

He called the lead in to Ellis Loew; Loew hit the roof: 'I told you to stay out! I've got three *civilized* men on it, and I'll tell them what you've got, but you stay out and get back to the Nite Owl, *do you understand me*?'

He understood: Kathy Janeway kept saying GO.

The Biltmore.

He forced himself to drive there slow, park by the back entrance, politely ask the clerk where to find Mr. Cooley's party. The clerk said, 'The El Presidente Suite, floor nine'; he said, 'Thank you' so calm that everything went into slow motion and he thought for a second he was swimming.

The stairs were like swimming upstream – Little Kathy kept saying KILL HIM. The suite: double doors, gold-filigreed – eagles, American flags. He jiggled the knob, the doors opened.

High swank gone white trash – three crackers passed out on the floor. Booze empties, dumped ashtrays, no Spade.

Connecting doors – the one on the right featured noise. Bud kicked it in.

Deuce Perkins in bed watching cartoons. Bud pulled his gun. 'Where's Cooley?'

Perkins popped in a toothpick. 'On a drunk, which is where I'm goin'. You want to see him, come to the El Rancho tonight. Chances are he'll show up.'

'The fuck, he's the headliner.'

'Most times. But Spade's been erratic lately, so I been fillin' in. I sing good as him and I'm better lookin', so nobody seems to mind. Now, you want to get out of here and leave me alone with my entertainment?'

'Where's he drinking?'

'Put that gun away, junior. The worse you got him for's nonpayment of child support, and Spade always pays sooner or later.'

'Nix, this is Murder One, and I heard he likes opium.'

Perkins coughed out his toothpick. 'What'd you say?'

'Hookers. Spade like young girls?'

'He don't like to kill them, just play hide the tubesteak like you and me.'

'Where is he?'

'Man, I'm not no snitch.'

Backhanded pistol whips – Perkins yelped, spat teeth. The TV went loud; kids squealing for Kellogg's Cornflakes. Bud shot the screen out.

Deuce snitched: 'Check the "O" joints in Chinatown and please fuckin' leave me alone!'

Kathy said KILL HIM. Bud thought of his mother for the first time in years.

Chapter Fifty-nine

THE DOCTOR SAID, 'I told this to your Captain Exley, and I told him an interview with Mr. Goldman would most likely prove fruitless – the man is simply not lucid most of the time. However, since he insisted on sending you up here, I'll run through it again.'

Jack looked around. Camarillo was creepy: lots of geeks, geek artwork on the walls. 'Would you? The captain wants a statement from him.'

'Well, he'll be lucky to get one. Last July, Mr. Goldman and his confrere Mickey Cohen were attacked with knives and pipes at McNeil Island Prison. Unidentified assailants apparently, and Cohen was relatively unharmed while Mr. Goldman suffered serious brain damage. Both men were paroled late last year, and Mr. Goldman began to behave quite erratically. Late in December he was arrested for urinating in public in Beverly Hills, and the judge ordered him here for ninety days' observation. We've had him since Christmas and we've just recycled him in for another ninety. Frankly, we can't do a thing with him, and the only thing mysterious is that Mr. Cohen visited and offered to transfer Mr. Goldman to a private treatment facility at his own expense, but Mr. Goldman refused and acted terrified of him. Isn't that odd?'

'Maybe not. Where is he?'

'On the other side of that door. Be gentle with him, please. The man was a gangster, but he's just a sad human being now.'

Jack opened the door. A small padded room; Davey Goldman on a long padded bench. He needed a shave; he reeked of Lysol. Slack-jawed Davey scoping a *National Geographic*.

Jack sat beside him – Goldman moved away. Jack said, 'This place is the shits. You should've let Mickey spring you.'

Goldman picked his nose, ate it.

'Davey, you on the outs with Mickey?'

Goldman held out his magazine – naked negroes waving spears.

'Cute, and when they start showing white stuff I'll subscribe. Davey, you remember me? Jack Vincennes? I used to work LAPD

Narco and we used to run into each other on the Strip.'

Goldman scratched his balls. He smiled, low voltage, nobody home.

'Is this an act? Come on, Davey. You and the Mick go way back. You know he'd take care of you.'

Goldman squashed an invisible bug. 'Not anymore.'

A gone man's voice – nobody could fake it that good. 'Say, Davey, whatever happened to Dean Van Gelder? You remember him, he used to visit you at McNeil.'

Goldman picked his nose, wiped it on his feet. Jack said, 'Dean Van Gelder. He visited you at McNeil in '53, right around the time these two guys Pete and Bax Englekling visited Mickey. Now you're afraid of Mickey, and Van Gelder clipped a guy named Duke Cathcart and got clipped himself during the world famous Nite Owl fucking Massacre. You got any brains left to talk about that?'

No lights blinked on.

'Come on, Davey. You tell me, you won't feel so sad. Talk to your Uncle Jack.'

'Dutchman! Dutch fuck! Mickey should know to hurt me but he don't. Hub rachmones, Meyer, hub rachmones, Meyer Harris Cohen te absolvo my sins.'

His mouth did the talking – the rest of the man came off dead. Jack parlayed: Van Gelder the Dutchman, Yiddish to Latin, something like betrayal. 'Come on, keep going. Confess to Father Jack and I'll make it allll better.'

Goldman picked his nose; Jack shoved him. 'Come on!'

'Dutchman blew it!'

????? – maybe – a jail bid on Duke Cathcart. 'Blew what, come on!'

Goldman, a gone monotone. 'Franchise boys got theirs three triggers blip blip blip. Fucking slowdown ain't no hoedown, Mickey thinks he'll get the fish but the Irish Cheshire got the fishy and Mickey gets the bones no gravy he is dead meat for the meow monster. Hub rachmones Meyer, I could trust you, not them, it's all on ice but not for us te absolvo . . .'

??????????? 'Who are these guys you're talking about?'

Goldman hummed a tune, off key, familiar. Jack caught the melody: 'Take the "A" Train.' 'Davey, *talk* to me.'

Davey sang. 'Bumpa – bump bump bump bump bump bump bump bump the cute train bump bump bump bump the cute train.'

??????????????????? – worse, like his brain had padded walls. ‘Davey, just talk.’

Geek talk: ‘Bzz, bzz bzz talking bug to hear. Betty, Benny bug to listen, Barney bug. Hub rachmones Meyer my dear friend.’

????????? into just maybe something:

The Engleklings saw Cohen *in his cell*, pitched him on Duke Cathcart’s smut scheme. Mickey swore he did not tell a soul. Goldman found out about it, decided to crash the racket, dispatched Dean Van Gelder to snuff Cathcart – or maybe buy in on the deal.???????? – How – ?????? – DID HE HAVE A BUG PLANTED IN COHEN’S CELL?

‘Davey, *tell me about the bug.*’

Goldman started humming ‘In the Mood.’

The doctor opened the door. ‘That’s it, Officer. You’ve bothered this man long enough.’

Exley okayed it on the phone: a run to McNeil to check for evidence of bugging apparatus in Mickey Cohen’s former cell. The Ventura County Airport was a few miles away – he was to fly to Puget Sound, take a cab to the pen. Bob Gallaudet would have a Prison’s Bureau man there to run liaison – the McNeil administrators pampered Cohen, probably took bribes for the service, might not cooperate without a push. Exley called the bug theory a long shot; he ranted that Bud White was missing – Fisk and Kleckner were out looking for him, the bastard was probably running from his *Whisper* piece and the body in San Berdoo – Fisk left him a note, mentioned the discovery. Parker said Dudley Smith was studying the Englekling case file and would report on it soon; Lynn Bracken was still holding back. Jack said, ‘What do we do about that?’ Exley said, ‘The Dining Car at midnight. We’ll discuss it.’

Scary Captain Ed closing ominous.

Jack drove to Ventura, caught his flight – Exley called ahead, vouchered his ticket. A stewardess handed out newspapers; he grabbed a *Times* and *Daily News* and read Nite Owl.

Dudley’s boys were ripping up Darktown, hauling in known Negro offenders, looking for the *real* punks popping shotguns in Griffith Park. Pure bullshit: whoever planted the weapons in Ray Coates’ car planted the matching shells in the park, feeding off location leads in the press – only pros would have the brains and the balls to do it. Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle were running a command post at 77th Street Station – the entire squad and twenty extra men from Homicide detached to work the case. No way were crazed darkies guilty – it was starting to look like 1953 all over again. The *Daily News* showed photos: Central Avenue swarmed by placardwaving boogies, the house Exley bought Inez Soto. A dandy shot in the *Times* – Inez outside Ray Dieterling's place in Laguna, shielding her eyes from flashbulbs.

Jack kept reading.

The State Attorney General's Office issued a statement: Ellis Loew outfoxed them by planting a restraining order, but they were still interested in the case and would intercede when the order lapsed – unless the LAPD solved the Nite Owl mess to the satisfaction of the Los Angeles County Grand Jury within a suitable period of time. LAPD issued a press release – a detail-packed doozie on Inez Soto's 1953 gang rape accompanied by a heartwarming rendition of how Captain Ed Exley helped her rebuild her life. Exley's old man got a treatment: the *Daily News* played up the completion of the Southern California freeway system and reported a late-breaking rumor – Big Preston was soon to announce his candidacy in the governor's race, a scant two and a half months before the Republican primary, the eleventh-hour announcement strategy a ploy to capitalize on upcoming freeway brouhaha. How would his son's bad press affect his chances?

Jack measured his own chances. He was back on with Karen because she saw he was trying; the best way to keep it going was to cash in his twenty, grab his pension, get out of L.A. The next two months would be a sprint dodging bullets: the reopening, what Patchett and Bracken had on him. Odds you couldn't figure – for a sprinter he was scared and tired – and starting to feel old. Exley had sprint moves in mind – late dinner meets weren't his style. Bracken and Patchett might deal his dirt in; Parker might quash it to protect the Department. But Karen would know, and what was left of the marriage would go down – because she could just barely take that she'd married a drunk and a bagman. 'Murderer' was one bullet they both couldn't dodge.

Three hours in the air; three hours pent up thinking. The plane touched down at Puget Sound; Jack caught a cab to McNeil.

Ugly: a gray monolith on a gray rock island. Gray walls, gray fog, barbed wire at the edge of gray water. Jack got out at the guard hut; the gatekeeper checked his ID, nodded. Steel gates slid back into stone.

Jack walked in. A wiry little man met him in the sallyport. 'Sergeant Vincennes? I'm Agent Goddard, Prison's Bureau.'

A good handshake. 'Did Exley tell you what it's about?'

'Bob Gallaudet did. You're on the Nite Owl and related conspiracy cases and you think Cohen's cell might have been bugged. We're looking for evidence to support that theory, which I don't think is so farfetched.'

'Why?'

They walked bucking wind – Goddard talked above it. 'Cohen got the royal treatment here, Goldman too. Privileges up the wazoo, unlimited visitors and not too much scrutiny on the stuff brought into their tier, so a bug could have been planted. Are you thinking Goldman crossed Mickey?'

'Something like that.'

'Well, could be. They had cells two doors apart, on a tier Mickey requested, because half the cells had ruined plumbing and you couldn't house inmates in them. You'll see, I've got the whole row vacated and closed off.'

Checkpoints, the blocks – six-story tiers linked by catwalks. Upstairs to a corridor – eight empty cells. Goddard said, 'The penthouse. Quiet, underpopulated and a nice day room for the boys to play cards in. We have an informant who says Cohen got approval on the inmates placed up here. Can you feature the cheek of that?'

Jack said, 'Jesus, you're good. And fast.'

'Well, Exley and Gallaudet carry weight, and the powers that be here didn't have time to prepare. Now check the goodies I brought.'

On the day room table: crowbars, chisels, mallets, a long thin pole with a hook at the end. On a blanket: a tape recorder, a tangle of wires. Goddard said, 'First we tear this tier up. I admit it's a long shot, but I brought a recorder along in case we find tape.'

'I'd call that a maybe. Goldman and Cohen got paroled last fall, but they got bushwacked in July and Davey got his brains scrambled. I'm thinking if he was the one monitoring the tape then maybe he was too wet-brained to pull the machine.'

'Enough gabbing. Let's dig.'

They dug.

Goddard plumbed a line from the heat duct in Cohen's cell to the heat duct in Goldman's, marked a line on the ceilings of the two cells in between, started probing with a mallet and chisel. Jack pried a protection plate off the duct on Mickey's wall, banged around inside the chute with the hook device. Nothing but hollow tin walls, no wires just inside. Frustrating: it was the logical place to plant a microphone. Heat boomed out the duct; Jack changed his mind, Washington was cold, the heat would be on too much of the time, drowning out conversation. He checked the walls and ceiling for other conduits – nothing – then the area around the vent. Irregularly applied spackling dotted with pinholes right by the protector plate; he smashed his mallet until half the wall came down and a small Spackle-covered microphone dangling off a wire came loose. The wire jerked from his hand, straight back into the wall. Five seconds later Goddard stood there holding it – attached to a tape recorder covered with plastic. 'Halfway between the cells, a little hidey-hole right off the vent. Let's listen, huh?'

They fired it up in the day room. Goddard hooked up his machine, changed spools, pushed buttons – tape-recorded tape.

Static, a dog yipping, 'There, there, bubeleh' – Mickey Cohen's voice. Goddard said, 'They let him keep a dog in his cell. Only in America, huh?'

Cohen: 'Quit licking your schnitzel, little precious.' More yips, a long silence, a click-off sound. Goddard said, 'I was timing it. Voice-activated mike. Five minutes and it goes off automatically.'

Jack brushed plaster off his hands. 'How'd Goldman get in to change the tape?'

'He must have had some kind of hook thing, like that pole I gave you. The grate on his heat vent was loose, so we know somebody was poking around in there. Jesus, this thing has been in there how long? And Goldman had to have help, this is no one-man operation. Listen, here that click?'

Another click, a strange voice: 'For how much? I'll have that guard place the bet.' Cohen: 'A thousand on Basilio, that little guinea is mean. And take a run by the infirmary and see Davey, my God a goddamn turnip those goons turned him into, I swear I will live to see them in a vegetable puree.' Overlapping voices, mumbles, Mickey cooing, his dog yipping.

Nail the time: Goldman and Cohen had been attacked; Mickey laid down an early bet on the Robinson-Basilio fight last September, he was probably out by then – he got down before the odds dropped.

Click off, click on, forty-six minutes of Mickey and at least two other men playing cards, mumbling, flushing the toilet. The used tape almost gone; click off, click on, the fucking dog yowling.

Mickey: ‘Six years and ten months here and to lose Davey’s redoubtable brain right before I leave. Such tsurus to go home on. Mickey Junior, quit licking your putz, you faigeleh.’

A strange voice: ‘Get him a bitch, and he won’t have to.’

Cohen: ‘My God to be so nimble and so hung, like Heifetz on the fiddle with his shlong that dog is, and hung like Johnny Stompanato to boot. And on the topic of boots, I read Hedda Hopper’s column and see Johnny’s putting the boots to Lana Turner, such a crush he’s had for so long, she must have a cunt like chinchilla.’

The strange-voice man cracked up. Cohen: ‘Enough already, you brownnoser, save some for Jack Benny. Johnny I need now, Johnny I can’t locate ’cause he’s playing bury the brisket with movie stars. My franchise guys keep getting clipped and I need Johnny to put an ear down for who, but that big dick dago cunt-bandit is nowhere! I want those cocksuckers clipped! I want those shitbirds who hurt Davey to cease residence on this earth!’

Mickey cough, cough, coughed. Strange Voice: ‘How about Lee Vachss and Abe Teitlebaum. You could put them on it.’

Cohen: ‘Such a shmendrik you are for a confidant, but you do play cribbage good. No, Abe has grown too soft to work muscle, too much grease noshed at his deli, such grease clogs the arteries that inspire mayhem, and Lee Vachss loves death too much to be discerning. Lana, what a snatch she must have, like cashmere.’

The tape ran out. Goddard said, ‘Mickey sure does have a verbal style, but what did all that have to do with the Nite Owl case?’

‘How’s “nothing” sound?’

Chapter Sixty

ONE WALL OF his den was now a graph: Nite Owl related case players connected by horizontal lines, vertical lines linking them to a large sheet of cardboard blocked off into information sections – events culled from Vincennes' deposition. Ed wrote margin notes; his father's call still hammered him: 'Edmund, I'm running for governor. Your recent notoriety may have hurt me, but put that aside. I don't want the Atherton case resurrected in print and tied to your various cases, and I don't want Ray Dieterling bothered. I want you to direct all your queries along those lines to me, and between the two of us we'll work things out.'

He agreed. It rankled. It made him feel like a child – like sleeping with Lynn Bracken made him feel whorish. And too many Dieterling names were popping up on the graph.

Ed crossed lines.

Sid Hudgens lined to the ink smut Vincennes found in '53; the smut lined to Pierce Patchett. Line to: Christine Bergeron, her son Daryl and Bobby Inge, smut posers who disappeared almost concurrent with the Nite Owl. Have Fisk and Kleckner initiate a new search for them; attempt to identify the other posers – one more time. Put the smut/Hudgens line to the Atherton case aside, former Inspector Preston Exley would make discreet inquiries when asked.

A theoretical line – Pierce Patchett to Duke Cathcart. Lynn Bracken denied it, a lie, Vincennes' deposition had Patchett pushing the smut Cathcart planned to distribute – *but who made it*? Hudgens to Patchett and Bracken: the dirtmonger was terrified that Vincennes was nosing around Fleur-de-Lis; Lynn told Jack that Patchett and Hudgens were going in on a gig together, she now denied it, another lie. He needed another graph just to chart lies – he didn't have a room big enough to hold it.

More lines:

Davey Goldman to Dean Van Gelder to Duke Cathcart and Susan Nancy Lefferts – incomprehensible until Vincennes reported back from McNeil Island, and Bud White, obviously hiding out, was questioned on what he might be suppressing. Vocational lines – Patchett, the Englekling brothers and their father possessed chemistry backgrounds; Patchett, a reputed heroin sniffer, had plastic surgery connections to Dr. Terry Lux, the owner of a booze/dope sanitarium. Dudley Smith's report to Parker stated that Pete and Bax Englekling were tortured to death with corrosive chemicals, no other details added. Conclusion: the link to decipher every interconnected line had to be Patchett – his whores, his smut posers, Patchett the conduit to the man who made the blood smut, killed Hudgens and formed the final line stretching back to 1934 and his own father's glory case.

Too many lines to ignore.

Patchett bankrolled early Dieterling films. Dieterling's son Billy and boyfriend Timmy Valburn used Fleur-de-Lis; Valburn was a Bobby Inge K.A. Billy worked on *Badge of Honor*, the first focus of the Hudgens homicide investigation. *Badge of Honor* co-star Miller Stanton was a Dieterling kid star around the same time that Wee Willie Wennerholm was murdered – by Loren Atherton? Slash lines – Atherton to the smut to Hudgens; lines of coincidence too convenient not to cut at family loyalty – seventeen years post-Atherton, Preston Exley builds Dream-a-Dreamland.

Governor Exley. Chief of Detectives Exley.

Ed thought of Lynn, tasted her, shuddered. A quick jump to Inez – a new line to utilize.

He drove to Laguna Beach.

The press, swarming: perched by their cars, playing cards on Ray Dieterling's lawn. Ed pulled around the block, walked up, sprinted.

They saw him, chased him. He made the door, slammed the knocker. The door opened – straight into Inez.

She slammed it, bolted it. Ed walked into the living room – Dream-a-Dreamland smiled all around him.

Gimcracks, porcelain statues: Moochie, Danny, Scooter. Wall photos: Dieterling and crippled children. Canceled checks encased in plastic – six figures to fight kids' diseases.

'See, I've got company.'

Ed turned to face her. 'Thanks for letting me in.'

'They've been treating you worse than me, so I figured I owed you.'

She looked pale. ‘Thanks. And you know it’ll pass, just like last time.’

‘Maybe. You look lousy, Exley.’

‘People keep telling me that.’

‘Then maybe it’s true. Look, if you want to stay and talk awhile, fine, but please don’t talk about Bud or all this *mierda* that’s going on.’

‘I wasn’t planning on it, but small talk was never our forte.’

She walked up. Ed embraced her; she grabbed his arms and pushed herself away. Ed tried a smile. ‘I saw some gray hairs. When you’re my age you’ll probably be as gray as I am. How’s that for small talk?’

‘Small, and I can do better. Preston’s running for governor, unless his notorious son ruins his chances. I’m going to be his campaign coordinator.’

‘Governor Dad. Did he say I’d ruin his chances?’

‘No, because he’d never say bad things about you. Just try to do what you can not to hurt him.’

Reporters outside – Ed heard them laughing. ‘I don’t want Father to be hurt either. And you can help me prevent it.’

‘How?’

‘A favor. A favor between you and me, nobody else to know.’

‘What? Explain it.’

‘It’s very complicated, and it involves Ray Dieterling. Do you know the name “Pierce Patchett”?’

Inez shook her head. ‘No, who is he?’

‘He’s an investor of sorts, that’s all I can tell you. I need you to use your access at Dream-a-Dreamland to check his financial connections to Dieterling. Check back to the late ’20s, very quietly. Will you do that for me?’

‘Exley, this sounds like police business. And what does it have to do with your father?’

Recoiling: doubting the man who formed him. ‘Father might be in some tax trouble. I need you to check Dieterling’s financial records for mention of him.’

‘Bad trouble?’

‘Yes.’

‘Check back to ’50 or so? When they began planning for Dream-a-Dreamland?’

‘No, go back to 1932. I know you’ve seen the books at Dieterling

Productions, and I know you can do it.'

'With explanations to follow?'

More recoil. 'On Election Day. Come on, Inez. You love him almost as much as I do.'

'All right. For your father.'

'No other reason?'

'All right, for what you've done for me and the friends you gave me. And if that sounds cruel, I'm sorry.'

A Moochie Mouse clock struck ten. Ed said, 'I should go, I've got a meeting in L.A.'

'Go out the back way. I think I still hear the vultures.'

The recoil got squared driving back.

Call it standard elimination procedure:

If his father really did know Ray Dieterling during the time of the Atherton case, he had a valid reason for not revealing it, he was probably embarrassed at plumbing business deals with a man he once rubbed shoulders with in the process of a hellish murder investigation. Preston Exley believed that policemen striking friendships with influential civilians was inimical to the concept of impartial absolute justice, and if he fell short of his own standards it was understandable that he would not want the fact known.

Squared with love and respect.

Ed made the Dining Car early; the maître d' said his guest was waiting. He walked back to his favorite booth – a private nook behind the bar. Vincennes was there, holding a tape spool.

Ed sat down. 'That's tape off a bug?'

Vincennes slid the spool over. 'Yeah, filled with Mickey C. running off at the mouth on stuff that has nothing to do with the Nite Owl. Too bad, but I think we can put Davey down as a traitor to Mickey, and I think he must have heard the Engleklings offer Mick the Cathcart deal. He liked the sound of it and sent Van Gelder after Duke. And that's as far as I can take it.'

The man looked shot. 'Good work, Jack. Really, I mean it.'

'Thanks, and that first name bit just went over large.'

Ed picked up a menu, emptied his pockets underneath it. 'It's midnight and I'm all out of subtlety.'

'You're working up to something. What'd you get out of Bracken?'

'Nothing but lies. And you're right, Sergeant. The McNeil end is dead for now.'

‘So?’

‘So tomorrow I’m hitting Patchett. I’m sealing I.A. off from Dudley and his men and bringing in Terry Lux, Chester Yorkin and every Patchett flunky that Fisk and Kleckner can find.’

‘Yeah, but what about Bracken and Patchett?’

Ed saw Lynn naked. ‘Bracken tried to buy out of your deposition. She snitched you on that escapade in Malibu, and I played her back on it.’

Trash slammed his head down on two clenched fists. Ed said, ‘I told her you’d do anything to get the file back. I told her you still love dope and you’re in hock to some bookies. You’re up for a trial board and you want to crash Patchett’s rackets.’

Vincennes raised his head – pale, knuckle-gouged. ‘So tell me you’ll square what’s in the file.’

Ed picked up his menu. Underneath: heroin, Benzedrine, a switchblade, a 9mm automatic. ‘You’re going to shake Patchett down. He snorts heroin, so you offer him some. If you want some stuff to get your own juice up, you’ve got it. You’re going after him to get your file back and to find out who made the blood smut and killed Hudgens. I’m working on a script, and you’ll have it by tomorrow night. You’re going to scare the shit out of Patchett and you’re going to do whatever it takes to get what we both want. I know you can do it, so don’t make me threaten you.’

Vincennes smiled. He almost hit the chord – the old big-time Big V. ‘Suppose it goes bad?’

‘Then kill him.’

Chapter Sixty-one

OPIUM FUMES BANGED his head; chink backtalk banged it worse: ‘Spade not here, my place have police sanction, I pay I pay!’ Uncle Ace Kwan sent him to Fat Dewey Shin, who sent him to a string of dens on Alameda – Spade was there, but Spade was gone, ‘I pay! I pay!’, try Uncle Minh, Uncle Chin, Uncle Chan. The Chinatown runaround, it took him hours to figure it out, a shuffle from enemy to enemy. Uncle Danny Tao pulled a shotgun; he took it away from him, blackjacked him, still couldn’t force a snitch. Spade was there, Spade was gone – and if he took one more whiff of ‘O’ he knew he’d curl up and die or start shooting. The punch line: he was shaking Chinatown for a man named Cooley.

Chinatown dead for now.

Bud called the D.A.’s Bureau, gave the squad whip his Perkins/Cooley leads; the man yawned along, signed off bored. Out to the Strip; the Cowboy Rhythm Band on stage, no Spade, nobody had seen him in a couple of days. Hillbilly clubs, local bars, night spots – no sightings of Donnell Clyde Cooley. 1:00 fucking A.M., no place to go but Lynn’s – ‘Where *were* you?’ and a bed.

Rain came on – a downpour. Bud counted taillights to stay awake: red dots, hypnotizing. He made Nottingham Drive near gone – dizzy, numb in the limbs.

Lynn on her porch, watching the rain. Bud ran up; she held her arms out. He slipped, steadied himself with her body.

She stepped back. Bud said, ‘I was worried. I kept calling you last night before things got crazy.’

‘Crazy how?’

‘The morning, it’s too long a story for now. How did it – ’

Lynn touched his lips. ‘I told them things about Pierce that you already know, and I’ve been getting misty with the rain and thinking about telling them more.’

‘More what?’

‘I’m thinking that it’s over with Pierce. In the morning, sweetie. Both our stories for breakfast.’

Bud leaned on the porch rail. Lightning lit up the street – and dry tears on Lynn's face. 'Honey, what is it? Is it Exley? Did he hardnose you?'

'It's Exley, but not what you're thinking. And I know why you hate him so much.'

'What do you mean?'

'That he's just the opposite of all the good things you are. He's more like I am.'

'I don't get it.'

'Well, it's a credibility he has for being so calculating. I started out hating him because you do, then he made me realize some things about Pierce just by being who he is. He told me some things he didn't have to, and my own reactions surprised me.'

More lightning – Lynn looked god-awful sad. Bud said, 'For instance?'

'For instance Jack Vincennes is going crazy and has some kind of vendetta against Pierce. And I don't care half as much as I should.'

'How did you get so friendly with Exley?'

Lynn laughed. '*In vino veritas.* You know, sweetie, you're thirty-nine years old and I keep waiting for you to get exhausted being who you are.'

'I'm exhausted tonight.'

'That's not what I meant.'

Bud turned on the porch light. 'You gonna tell me what happened with you and Exley?'

'We just talked.'

Her makeup was tear streaked – it was the first time he'd seen her not beautiful. 'So tell me about it.'

'In the morning.'

'No, now.'

'Honey, I'm as tired as you are.'

Her little half smile did it. 'You slept with him.'

Lynn looked away. Bud hit her – once, twice, three times. Lynn faced straight into the blows. Bud stopped when he saw he couldn't break her.

Chapter Sixty-two

IAD – PACKED.

Chester Yorkin, the Fleur-de-Lis delivery man, stashed in booth #1; in 2 and 3: Paula Brown and Lorraine Malvasi, Patchett whores – Ava Gardner, Rita Hayworth. Lamar Hinton, Bobby Inge, Christine Bergeron and son could not be located; ditto the smut posers – Fisk and Kleckner failed to make them from extensive mugbook prowls. In booth 4: Sharon Kostenza, real name Mary Alice Mertz, a plum off Vincennes' deposition – the woman who once bailed Bobby Inge out of jail and paid a surety bond for Chris Bergeron. In booth 5: Dr. Terry Lux, his attorney – the great Jerry Geisler.

Ray Pinker standing by with counterdope – so far none of the new fish looked drugged.

Two officers guarding the squadroom – private interrogations – strict I.A. autonomy.

Kleckner and Fisk grilling Mertz and pseudo Ava – armed with deposition copies, smut photos, a case summary. Yorkin, Lux and phony Rita cooling their heels.

Ed worked in his office; draft three of Vincennes' script. A thought nagged him: if Lynn Bracken reported to Patchett in full, he would have yanked his people before the police could bring them in – the way Inge, Bergeron and son disappeared immediately pre-Nite Owl. Two possibles on that – she was playing an angle or their rutting had her confused and she was stalling to figure the upshot. Most likely the former – the woman cut her last confused breath at birth.

He could still taste her.

Ed drew lines on paper. Inez to check Dieterling connections to Patchett and his father – that thought still made him wince. Two I.A. men out looking for White – apprehend the bastard and break him. Billy Dieterling and Timmy Valburn to be questioned – kid gloves, they had prestige, juice. A line to the Hudgens kill and the Hudgens/Patchett 'gig' – Vincennes' deposition stated that Hudgens' *Badge of Honor* files were missing at the time of his death, anomalous, the show was a Hudgens fixation. The *Badge of Honor* people were alibied for the murder – but another reading of the case file was in order.

Half his maze of cases read extortion.

Line to an outside issue – Dudley Smith, going crazy for a quick Darktown collar. Line to a rumor: Thad Green was going to take over the U.S. Border Patrol come May. A theoretical line: Parker would choose his new chief of detectives solely on the basis of the Nite Owl case – him or Smith. Dudley might send White back to break his autonomy; criss cross all lines to keep *his* case sealed.

Kleckner walked in. ‘Sir, the Mertz woman won’t cooperate. All she’ll say is that she lives under that Sharon Kostenza alias and that she makes bail for Patchett’s people when they get arrested for outside charges. Nobody’s *ever* been arrested working for him, we know that. She says she can’t ID the people in the photos and she’s mum on that extortion angle you told me to play up. She deadpanned the Nite Owl – and I believe her.’

‘Release her, I want her to go to Patchett and panic him. What did Duane get off Ava Gardner?’

Kleckner passed him a sheet of paper. ‘Lots. Here’s the high points, and he’s got the actual interview on tape.’

‘Good. You go soften up Yorkin for me. Bring him a beer and baby sit him.’

Kleckner walked out smiling. Ed read Fisk’s memo.

Witness Paula Brown 3/25/58

1. Witness revealed names of numerous P.P. call girl/male prostitute customers (specifics to follow in separate memo & on tape)
2. Could not ID people in photos (seems truthful on this)
3. Extortion hook got her talking
4. P.P. gave his girls/male prostitutes bonuses to get their customers to reveal intimate details of their lives
5. P.P. makes his prosts quit at 30 (apparent bee in his bonnet)
6. On in-home prostitution assignments, P.P. had prosts leave doors/ windows open so men with cameras could take compromising photos. Prosts also made wax impressions of locks on certain rich custs doors
7. P.P. had famous (T. Lux obviously) plastic surgeon cut male/female prosts to look like movie stars and thus make more $
8. Male prosts extorted $ from married homosexual custs & split take

with P.P.
Bored by Nite Owl quests (obviously has no guilty knowledge)

Astounding audacious perversion.

Ed hit sweatbox row, checked the mirrors. Fisk and phony Ava talking; Kleckner and Yorkin drinking beer. Terry Lux reading a magazine, Jerry Geisler fuming. Lorraine Malvasi alone in a cloud of smoke. Astounding audacious perversion – the woman had Rita Hayworth's face down to the bone, up to the hairdo from *Gilda*.

He opened the door. Rita/Lorraine stood up, sat down, lit a cigarette. Ed handed her Fisk's memo. 'Please read this, Miss Malvasi.'

She read, chewing lipstick. 'So?'

'So do you confirm that or not?'

'So I'm entitled to a lawyer.'

'Not for seventy-two hours.'

'You can't hold me here that long.'

'Caaant' – a bad New York accent. 'Not here, but we can hold you at the Woman's Jail.'

Lorraine bit at a nail, drew blood. 'You caan't.'

'Sure I can. Sharon Kostenza's in custody, so she can't make bail for you. Pierce Patchett is under surveillance and your friend Ava just spilled what you read there. She talked first, and all I want you to do is fill in some blanks.'

A little sob. 'I caan't.'

'Why not?'

'Pierce has been too nice to – '

Cut her off. 'Pierce is finished. Lynn Bracken turned state's on him. She's in protective custody, and I can go to her for the answers or save myself the trouble and ask you.'

'I caaan't.'

'You can and you will.'

'No, I caaan't.'

'You'd better, because you're an accessory to eleven felonies in Paula Brown's statement alone. Are you afraid of the dykes at the jail?'

No answer.

'You should be, but the matrons are worse. Big husky bull daggers with nightsticks. You know what they do with those – '

'All right all right all right! All right I'll tell you!'

Ed took out a notepad, wrote ‘Chrono.’ Lorraine: ‘It’s not Pierce’s fault. This guy made him do it.’

‘What guy?’

‘I don’t know. Really, for real, I don’t know.’

‘Chrono’ underlined. ‘When did you start working for Patchett?’

‘When I was twenty-one.’

‘Give me the year.’

‘1951.’

‘And he had Terry Lux perform surgery on you?’

‘Yes! To make me more beautiful!’

‘Easy now, please. Now a second ago you said that a guy – ’

‘I don’t know who the guy is! I caan’t tell you what I don’t know!’

‘Sssh, please. Now, you confirmed Paula Brown’s statement and you said that a “guy,” *whose identity you don’t know*, coerced Patchett into the extortion plans detailed in that statement. Is that correct?’

Lorraine put out her cigarette, lit another one. ‘Yes. Extortion is like blackmail, right, so yes.’

‘When, Lorraine? Do you know *when* “this guy” approached Patchett?’

She counted on her fingers. ‘Five years ago, May.’

‘Chrono’ hard underlined. ‘That’s May of 1953?’

‘Yeah, ’cause my father died that month. Pierce called us kids in and said we had to do it, he didn’t want to, but this guy had him by the you-know-whats. He didn’t say the guy’s name and I don’t think none of the other kids know it either.’

‘Chrono’ one month post-Nite Owl. ‘Think fast, Lorraine. The Nite Owl massacre. Remember that?’

‘What? Some people got shot, right?’

‘Never mind. What else did Patchett tell you when he called you in?’

‘Nothing.’

‘*Nothing* else on Patchett and extortion? Remember, I’m not asking you if you did any of this. I’m not asking you to incriminate yourself.’

‘Well, maybe three months or so before that I heard Veronica – I mean Lynn – and Pierce talking. He said him and that scandal mag man who got killed later were gonna run this squeeze thing where Pierce would tell him about our clients’ secret little . . . you know, fetishes, and the man would threaten the clients with being in *Hush-*

Hush. You know, pay money or be in the scandal mag.'

Extortion theory validated. An instinct: on some level Lynn was playing straight, she hadn't told Patchett to prepare – he never would have let these people come in. 'Lorraine, did Sergeant Kleckner show you some pornographic pictures?'

A nod. 'I told him and I'll tell you. I don't know any of the people and those pictures gave me the creeps.'

Ed walked out. Duane Fisk in the hallway. 'Good work, sir. When you got her on that "this guy" bit, I went back and ran it by Ava. She confirmed it and confirmed that no ID.'

Ed nodded. 'Tell her that Rita and Yorkin have been booked, then release her. I want her to go back to Patchett. How's Kleckner doing with Yorkin?'

Fisk shook his head. 'That boy's a hardcase. He's practically daring Don to make him talk. Hey, where's Bud White now that we need him?'

'Amusing, but don't keep it up. And right now I want you to take Lux and Geisler to lunch. Lux is here voluntarily, so be nice. Tell Geisler that this is a multiple homicide major conspiracy case, and tell him Lux gets full collateral immunity for his cooperation and a signed promise of no courtroom testimony. Tell him it's already in writing, and if he wants verification to call Ellis Loew.'

Fisk nodded, walked down to booth 5. Ed checked the #1 look-in.

Chester Yorkin wising off at the mirror: making faces, flipping the bird. Skinny, a pompadour flopped over his eyes oozing grease. Welts on his arms – maybe old needle marks.

Ed opened the door. Yorkin said, 'Hey, I know you, I read about you.'

Tracks confirmed – scar tissue on the welts. 'I've been in the news.'

Giggle, giggle. 'This is an old one, *kemo sabe*. Something like you saying, "I never hit suspects 'cause that's the cop lowered to the level of the criminal." You wanta hear my answer? I never snitch 'cause cops are all cocksuckers who get their cookies off making guys talk.'

'You through?' – Bud White's stock line.

'No. Your father takes it up the ass from Moochie Mouse.'

Scared, but he did it – an elbow to the windpipe. Yorkin gasped; Ed got behind him, cuffed him, shoved him to the floor.

Scared, but steady hands: look, Dad, no fear.

Yorkin backed into a corner.

Scared, another Bad Bud move: a chair, a roundhouse swing, the chair smashed to the wall just above the suspect's head. Yorkin tried to squirm away; Ed kicked him back to his corner. Slow now: don't let your voice break, don't let your eyes go soft behind your glasses. '*Everything.* I want to know about the smut and the other shit you push through Fleur-de-Lis. *Everything.* You start with those tracks on your arms and why a smart man like Patchett trusts a junkie like you. And you know one thing right now – Patchett is finished and I'm the only one who can cut you a deal. *Do you understand me?*'

Yorkin bobbed his head yes yes yes. 'Test pilot. I flew for him! Test pilot!'

Ed unlocked his cuffs. 'Say that again.'

Yorkin rubbed his neck. 'Guinea pig.'

'What?'

'I let him test horse on me. Here and there, a little at a time.'

'Start over. Slowly.'

Yorkin coughed. 'Pierce got this heroin stolen off this Cohen-Jack Dragna deal years ago. This guy Buzz Meeks left some with these guys Pete and Bax Englekling, just a sample, and they gave it to their father, who was some kind of chemistry hotshot. He taught Pierce in college, and he laid the shit off to him and died, a heart attack or something. This other guy, I don't know his name so don't ask me, he killed Meeks or something like that. He got the rest of the shit, like eighteen pounds' worth. Pierce has been developing compounds with the stuff for years. He wants to make the cheapest and the safest and the best. I just . . . I just take some test pops.'

Astounding lines crossing. 'You were making deliveries for Fleur-de-Lis five years ago, right?'

'Right, yeah, sure.'

'You and Lamar Hinton.'

'I ain't seen Lamar in years, you can't pin Lamar's shit on me!'

Ed grabbed the spare chair, brandished it. 'I don't want to. Give me an answer on this, and if I like it I'll owe you a solid. It's a test and you're a test pilot, so you should do well. Who shot at Jack Vincennes outside the Hollywood drop back in '53?'

Yorkin cringed. 'Me. Pierce told me to clip him. I shouldn't of done it by the drop. I fucked up and Pierce got pissed.'

Patchett nailed: attempted murder on a police officer. 'What did he do to you for that?'

‘He tested me bad. He gave me all these bad compounds he said he had to eliminate. He made me take these bad fucking flights.’

‘So you hate him for it.’

‘Man, Pierce ain’t like regular people. I hate him, but I dig him too.’

Ed pushed the chair away. ‘Do you remember the Nite Owl shootings?’

‘Sure, years ago. What’s that got to do – ’

‘Never mind, and here’s the important thing. If you fill this in for me, I’ll give you a written immunity statement and put you up in protective custody until Patchett’s down. Smut, Chester. You remember those orgy books Fleur-de-Lis was running five years ago?’

Yorkin bobbed his head yes.

‘The ink blood on the pictures, do you remember that?’

Yorkin smiled – snitching eager now. ‘I know that story good. Pierce is going down for real?’

Ten hours from the script. ‘Maybe tonight.’

‘Then fuck him for all those bad flights.’

‘Chester, just tell me slowly.’

Yorkin stood up, worked the kinks from his legs. ‘You know what’s a bitch about Pierce? He’d say all these things around me when I was on a flight, like I was harmless ’cause I couldn’t remember nothing he said.’

Ed got out his notebook. ‘Try to tell it in order.’

Yorkin rubbed his throat, coughed. ‘Okay, Pierce had this old string of girls that he let go, this was around when we were moving them picture books. Some guy, I don’t know his name, he talked some of the girls and their Johns into posing for them pictures. He made books out of them and went to Pierce to get money to move the books wide, you know, he promised Pierce a cut. Pierce, he liked the idea, but he didn’t want to expose his girls or their Johns. He bought a bunch of the books off the guy to move through Fleur-de-Lis, you know, just a close distribution he called it, like a test market, he figured he could keep track of the stuff that way.’

Old lines crossing: the close distribution wasn’t that close, Ad Vice retrieved throwaway copies – Vincennes to the case. ‘Keep going, Chester.’

‘Well, the guy who made the stuff, somehow he weaseled some info on the Englekling brothers out of Pierce, how they had this printing press place and was always bent for money. He found himself a front man, and the front man, he approached the brothers. You know, a plan to make the shit bulk and move it.'

The front man: Duke Cathcart. Zigzag lines from Cohen to the brothers, the brothers to Patchett, back on a sideswipe: Mickey at McNeil Island – then Goldman and Van Gelder. *Line the heroin to the pornography.* 'Chester, how do you know all this?'

Yorkin laughed. 'I'd be on a mainline flight and Pierce, he'd be on safe old white horse up the nose. He'd just jaw at me like I some kind of dog you talk to.'

'So Patchett and the smut are dead, right? All he's interested in is pushing the heroin.'

'Nix. That guy who brought Pierce the eighteen pounds years ago? Well, he's got a hard-on for the smut. He's got lists of all these rich perverts and all these contacts in South America. Him and Pierce, they sat on the original pictures for years, then they had some new books made up who-knows-where. They got the shit in a warehouse someplace, I don't know where, just waiting to go. I think Pierce was waiting for some kind of heat to die down.'

No new lines crossed. A phrase sunk in: *profit motive.* Pornography by itself was chancy; twenty pounds of heroin *developed* meant millions. Yorkin said, 'One more 'case you get antsy on my deal. Pierce has got him a booby-trapped safe by his house. He's got money, dope, all kinds of stuff stashed there.'

Ed kept thinking MONEY.

Yorkin: 'Hey, talk to me! You want the new drop address? 8819 Linden, Long Beach. Exley, talk to me!'

'Steak in your cell, Chester. You've earned it.'

Fresh lines – Ed pulled Fisk's and Kleckner's summaries, added the Yorkin/Malvasi revelations.

Heroin and pornography lined. 'The Guy' who made the smut books as Sid Hudgens' killer, his front man Duke Cathcart – killed by Dean Van Gelder, ordered killed or merely approached by Davey Goldman – who learned of the smut proposal via the bug in Mickey Cohen's cell. Cohen omnipresent – his stolen heroin ended up with both the Engleklings and 'The Man' who brought Patchett the eighteen pounds of 'H' for development, 'The Man' who also loved pornography and convinced Patchett to manufacture new books from the 1953 prototypes. An instinct: Cohen was Mr. Patsy going back eight years, in and out of jail, a focal point who never dealt his own hand into the welter of cases. A line to a conclusion: the Nite Owl killings were semiprofessional at least, an attempt to take over the heroin and pornography rackets of Pierce Patchett. Cathcart, attempting to push the smut on his own, was the focus of the killings. Did he misrepresent his importance to the wrong people, or did the shooters deliberately take out Van Gelder, knowing or not knowing he was a Cathcart impersonator? Lines to organized crime intrigue, semipro at least, with all mob lines dead or incapacitated: Franz Englekling and sons – dead, Davy Goldman a vegetable, Mickey Cohen befuddled by the action going on around him. A question line: who clipped Pete and Bax Englekling? The terror line: Loren Atherton, 1934. How could it be?

Fisk rapped on the door. ‘Sir, I brought Lux and Geisler back.’

‘And?’

‘Geisler gave me a prepared statement.’

‘Read it.’

Fisk pulled out a sheet. ‘“Pertaining to my relationship with Pierce Morehouse Parchett, I, Terence Lux, M.D., do offer the following notarized statement. To wit: my relationship with Pierce Patchett is professional: i.e., I have performed extensive plastic surgery on a number of male and female acquaintances of his, perfecting already existing resemblances to exact resemblances of several notable actors and actresses. Unsubstantiated rumors hold that Patchett employs these young people for purposes of prostitution, but I have no conclusive evidence that this is true. Duly sworn,” et cetera.’

Ed said, ‘Not good enough. Duane, you take Yorkin and Rita Hayworth across the street and book them. Aiding and Abetting, and leave the arrest dates blank. Allow them one phone call each, then go down to Long Beach and seize 8819 Linden. That’s a Fleur-de-Lis drop, and I’m sure Patchett’s cleaned it out, but do it anyway. If you find the place virgin, bust it up and leave the door open.’

Fisk swallowed. ‘Uh, sir? Bust it up? And no booking date on our suspects?’

‘*Bust it up. Make a statement. And don’t question my orders.*’

Fisk said, ‘Uh, yes, sir.’ Ed closed the door, buzzed Kleckner. ‘Don, send Dr. Lux and Mr. Geisler in.’

‘Yes, sir,’ loud on the intercom. Whispered: ‘They’re pissed, Captain. Thought you should know.’

Ed opened the door. Geisler and Lux walked up – brusque.

No handshakes. Geisler said, ‘Frankly, that lunch didn’t begin to cover the hourly rate I’m going to have to charge Dr. Lux. I think it’s reprehensible that he came here voluntarily and was kept waiting so long.’

Ed smiled. ‘I apologize. I accept the formal statement you offered and I have no real questions for Dr. Lux. I have just one favor to ask and a large one to grant in return. And send me your bill, Mr. Geisler. You know I can afford it.’

‘I know your father can. Continue, please. You’re holding my interest so far.’

Ed to Lux. ‘Doctor, I know who you know and you know who I know. And I know you deal in legal morphine cures. Help me with something and I’ll pledge my friendship.’

Lux cleaned his nails with a scalpel. ‘The *Daily News* says you’re obsolescent.’

‘They’re mistaken. Pierce Patchett and heroin, Doctor. I’ll settle for rumors and I won’t ask for your sources.’

Geisler and Lux went into a huddle – a step out of the door, whispers. Lux broke it off. ‘I’ve heard Pierce is connected to some very bad men who want to control the heroin trade in Los Angeles. He’s quite the chemist, you know, and he’s been developing a special blend for years. Hormones, antipsychotic strains, quite a brew. I’ve heard it puts regular heroin to shame and I heard it’s ready to be manufactured and sold. One in my column, Captain. Jerry, take the man at his word and send him my bill.’

Semipro, pro – his new lines all spelled HEROIN. Ed called Bob Gallaudet, left a message with his secretary: Nite Owl maybe breaking – call me. A picture on his desk hooked him: Inez and his father at Arrowhead. He called Lynn Bracken.

‘Hello?’

‘Lynn, it’s Exley.’

‘God, hello.’

‘You didn’t go to Patchett, did you?’

‘Did you think I would? Were you setting me up to?’

Ed laid the picture face down. ‘I want you to get out of L.A. for a week or so. I have a place at Lake Arrowhead, you can stay there. Leave this afternoon.’

‘Is Pierce . . .’

‘I’ll tell you later.’

‘Will you come up?’

Ed checked the Vincennes script. ‘As soon as I set something up. Have you seen White?’

‘He came and went, and I don’t know where he is. Is he all right?’

‘Yes. No, shit, I don’t know. Meet me at Fernando’s on the lake. It’s right by my place. Say six?’

‘I’ll be there.’

‘I figured you’d take some convincing.’

‘I’ve already convinced myself of lots of things. Leaving town just makes it easier.’

‘*Why*, Lynn?’

‘The party was over, I guess. Do you think keeping your mouth shut’s a heroic act?’

Chapter Sixty-three

BUD WOKE UP at the Victory. Dusk out the window – he'd slept through half a night and a day. He rubbed his eyes; Spade Cooley locked right back on him. He smelled cigarette smoke, saw Dudley sitting by the door.

'Bad dreams, lad? You were thrashing a bit.'

Nightmare: Inez trashed by the press, his fault – what he did to nail Exley.

'Lad, in repose you reminded me of my daughters. And you know I care for you no less.'

He'd sweated the sheets through. 'What's with the job? What's next?'

'Next you listen. I've long been involved in containing hard crime so that myself and a few colleagues might someday enjoy a profit dispensation, and that day will soon be arriving. As a colleague, you will share handsomely. Grand means will be in our hands, lad. Imagine the means to keep the nigger filth sedated and extrapolate from there. One obstreperous Italian you've dealt with in the past is involved, and I think you can be particularly useful in keeping him in line.'

Bud stretched, cracked his knuckles. 'I meant the reopening. Talk straight, okay?'

'Edmund Jennings Exley is as straight as I can be. He's trying to prove bad things against Lynn, lad. Salt on all the old wounds he's given you.'

Live wires buzzing. 'You knew about us. I should've known.'

'There is precious little I don't know, and nothing I would not do for you. Coward Exley has touched the only two women you've loved, lad. Think of grand ways to hurt him.'

Chapter Sixty-four

THEY MADE LOVE straight off – Ed knew they'd have to talk if they didn't, Lynn seemed to sense the same thing. The cabin was musty, the bed unmade – stale from last time with Inez. Ed kept the lights on: the more he saw, the less he'd think. It helped him through the act; counting Lynn's freckles kept him from peaking. Slow on the act, both of them, making up for their tumble off the couch. Lynn had bruises; Ed knew they came from Bud White. For a tightrope act they were gentle; their long embrace after felt like payback for their lies. When they started talking they'd never stop. Ed wondered who'd say 'Bud White' first.

Lynn said it. Bud was the fulcrum that convinced her to lie to Patchett: the police investigation was a joke, they were grasping at straws. White knew of Patchett's milder doings, she was afraid he'd get in trouble if Pierce fought back. Pierce might try to buy his friendship, he thought everyone had a price tag, he didn't know her Wendell couldn't be bought. Bud got her thinking; the more she thought the more she hurt; a certain police captain kissing a certain ex-whore at the only moment she would have let him just added to the party's over, Pierce made me but he's bad deep down, if I let him go then maybe I'll get back some of the good things he's killed in me. Ed winced through the words, knew he couldn't return her candor – now Jack Vincennes was going in barefoot, he'd counted on Lynn to push Patchett to panic, past Fisk taking a fire axe to the drop, past his people grilled and arrested. Lynn met his silence with words – excerpts from her diary, a show-and-tell for fugitive lovers her pronouncement. Funny, sad – old tricks derided, a monologue on carhop hookers that almost had him laughing. Lynn on Inez and Bud White – he loved her here and there and mostly at a distance because her rage was worse than his, drained him, a night here and there was all he could take. No jealousy – so his own jealousy jumped up, almost forced him to shout questions: heroin and extortion, astounding audacious perversion, just how much do you know? The gift she gave him wouldn't let him; soft hands on his chest made him throw out a parity in candor before he started interrogating or lying just to have something to say.

He went straight to his family, spiraled past to present. Mama’s boy Eddie, golden boy Thomas, the jig he danced when his brother stopped six bullets. Being a policeman/patrician from a long line of Scotland Yard detectives. Inez, four men killed out of weakness; Dudley Smith going crazy to find a suitable scapegoat that Ellis Loew and Chief Parker just might accept as a panacea. A headlong rush to the great Preston Exley in all his intractable glory and how ink-embossed pornography lined to a dead scandalmonger, vivisected children and his father and Raymond Dieterling twenty-four years ago. A rush until there was nothing left to say and Lynn kissed his lips shut and he fell asleep touching her bruises.

Chapter Sixty-five

ROGUE COP BIG V – give Exley credit for good casting. He synced his approach call to the drop raid – Patchett said, 'Yes, I'll talk to you. Eleven tonight, and come alone.'

He wore a tape wire hooked across a bulletproof vest.

He carried a bag of heroin, a switchblade, a 9mm automatic. Exley's Benzedrine down the toilet, grief he didn't need.

He walked up, rang the bell – stage fright all the way.

Patchett opened the door. Pinned-back eyes like Exley predicted – a nose junkie.

Jack, per the script: 'Hello, Pierce' – all contempt.

Patchett shut the door. Jack threw the dope in his face. It hit him, fell to the floor.

Ad lib time. 'Just a peace offering. Not up to that shit you tested on Yorkin anyway. Did you know my brother-in-law's the city D.A.? He's a bonus you get if you make a deal with me.'

Patchett: 'Where did you get that?' Calm, the stuff up his nose wouldn't let him show fear.

Jack pulled out the knife, scratched his neck with the blade. He felt blood, licked it off a finger – Academy Award psycho. 'I shook down some niggers. You know all about that, right? *Hush-Hush* Magazine used to write me up. You and Sid Hudgens go way back, so you should know.'

No fear. 'You made trouble for me five years ago. I still have that file carbon on you, and I think it's fair to say that you broke your part of our bargain. I'm assuming you've shown your superiors your deposition.'

Knife bit: the tip of the blade in one palm, a little push to retract it. More blood, a key Exley line. 'I'm way past you in the information department. I know about the heroin you got from the Cohen-Dragna deal and what you've been doing with it. I know about the smut you were pushing in '53, and I know all about those extortion shakedowns with your whores. And all I want is my file and some information. You give me that and I'll put the fritz to everything Captain Exley has.'

'What information?'

The script, verbatim. 'I made a deal with Hudgens. The deal was my file destroyed and ten grand in cash in exchange for some juicy dirt I had on the LAPD high brass. I knew Sid was going to work a shakedown scheme with you, and I'd already backed down on Fleur-de-Lis – you know that's true. Sid got killed before I could pick up the money and the file, and I think the killer got both of them. I need that money, 'cause I'm getting shitcanned off the Department before I can collect my pension, and I want the fucker who robbed me dead. You didn't *make* that smut back in '53, but whoever did killed Sid and robbed me. Give me the name and I'm yours.'

Patchett smiled. Jack smiled – one last push before the pistol-whipping. 'Pierce, the Nite Owl was smut and heroin – yours. Do you want to swing for that?'

Patchett pulled out a piece, shot him three times. Silencer thwaps – the slugs shattered the tape gizmo, bounced off his vest.

Three more shots – two in the vest, one wide.

Jack crashed into a table, came up aiming. A jammed slide, Patchett on him, two misfire clicks right up close. Patchett in his face, the knife out, a blind stab, a scream – the blade catching.

Patchett's left hand nailed to the table. Another scream, his right hand arcing – a hypo in it. The needle mainline close, stab, zooooom somewhere nice. Shots rifle loud, 'No, Abe, no, Lee, no!' Flames, smoke, rolling away from the grief, so he could live to love the needle again, maybe see the funny man with his hand shivved to the table.

Chapter Sixty-six

THE CLOCK IN his head was way off, his watch had quit working – he wasn't sure if it was Wednesday or Thursday. His Nite Owl 'disclosure' ate up a whole evening – Dudley was so far ahead of him he never even took notes. The man left him at midnight, pumped up with bold language, no date for the strongarm cop's ball. Dud's date was Exley: clear the Nite Owl and ruin his career, seconds for Bad Bud White: 'Think of grand ways to hurt him.' Murder was all he could think of – a fair trade for Lynn; killing an LAPD captain was the springs in his clock all snapping – one more span of skewed time and he'd do it. Some point early A.M. Kathy Janeway hit him up – Kathy the way she looked then. She found him a date for the wee small hours – the man who killed her.

And Spade Cooley stood him up.

He went by the Biltmore, talked to the Cowboy Rhythm Band – Spade was still gone, Deuce Perkins was off on his own toot. The D.A.'s Bureau night clerk gave him the brush – were they even on the case? Another tear through Chinatown, a run by his apartment – a couple of I.A. hard-ons parked out front. A wolfed meal at a burger stand, dawn creeping up, a pile of *Heralds* that told him it was Friday. A Nite Owl headline: jigs crying police brutality, Chief Parker promising justice.

He felt tired one second, keyed up the next. He tried to set his watch to the radio; the hands stuck; he threw a hundred-dollar Gruen out the window. Tired, he saw Kathy; keyed up, he saw Exley and Lynn. He drove to Nottingham Drive to check cars.

No white Packard – and Lynn always parked the same place.

Bud walked around the building – no sign of Exley's blue Plymouth. A neighbor woman bringing in milk. She said, 'Good morning. You're Miss Bracken's friend, aren't you?'

The old snoop – Lynn said she peeped bedrooms. 'That's right.'

'Well, as you can see, she's not here.'

'Yeah, and you don't know where she is.'

'Well . . .'

‘Well what? You seen her with a man? Tall, glasses?’

‘No, I haven’t. And mind your tone, young man. Well what, indeed.’

Bud badged her. ‘*Well what,* lady? You were gonna tell me something.’

‘Until you got cheeky, I was going to tell you where Miss Bracken went. I heard her talking to the manager last night. She was asking for directions.’

‘*Where to?*’

‘Lake Arrowhead, and I would have told you before you got cheeky.’

Exley’s place, Inez told him about it, a cabin flying flags: American, state, LAPD. Bud drove to Arrowhead, cruised by the lake, found it: banners cutting wind, no blue Plymouth. Lynn’s Packard in the driveway.

A brodie to the porch; a leap up the steps. Bud punched in a window, unlatched the door. No response to the noise – just a musty front room done up hunting lodge provincial.

He walked into the bedroom. Sweat stink, lipstick blots on the bed. He kicked the feathers out of the pillows, dumped the mattress, saw a leather binder underneath. Lynn’s ‘Scarlet Letters’ for sure – she’d been talking up her diary for years.

Bud grabbed it, got ready to rip – down the spine like his old phone book trick. The smell made him stop – if he didn’t look, he was a coward.

Flip to the last page. Lynn’s handwriting, bold black ink, the gold pen he’d bought her.

> March 26, 1958
>
> More on E.E. He just drove off and I could tell he was chagrined by all the things he told me last night. He looked vulnerable in the A.M. light, stumbling to the bathroom without his glasses. I pity Pierce his misfortune in encountering such an essentially frightened and unyielding man. E.E. makes love like my Wendell, like he never wants it to end, because when it ends he will have to return to what he is. He is perhaps the only man I have ever met who is as compromised as I am, who is so smart, circumspect and cautious that you can always see his wheels turning and thus wish you could always talk in the dark so that face value would be less complex. He is so smart and pragmatic that he makes W. W. appear childish and thus less heroic than he really is. And considering his dilemma, my betrayal of Pierce’s friendship and patronage seem frankly callow. This man has been so obsessively beholden to his father for so long that the crux of it must influence every step he takes,

> yet he is still taking steps, which amazes me. E.E. didn't delve too far into specifics, but the basic thrust is that some of the more artful pornographic books that Pierce was selling five years ago have diagrams that match the mutilations on Sid Hudgens' body and the wounds on the victims of a murderer named Loren Atherton, who was apprehended by Preston Exley in the 1930s. P.E. is soon to announce his candidacy for governor and E.E. now considers that his father solved the Atherton case incorrectly and inferred that he suspects P.E. of establishing business relations with Raymond Dieterling at the time of that case (one of Atherton's victims was a Dieterling child star). Another strange crux: E.E., my *très* smart pragmatist, considers his father such a moral exemplar and paragon of efficacy that he is terrified of accepting normal incompetence and rational business self-interest as within the bounds of acceptable human behavior. He is afraid that solving his 'Nite Owl related' cases will reveal P.E.'s fallibility to the world and destroy his gubernatorial chances, and he is obviously even more afraid of having to accept his father as a mortal, especially difficult since he has never accepted himself as one. But he will go ahead with his cases, deep down he seems quite determined. As much as I love him, in the same situation my Wendell would just shoot everyone involved, then look for somebody a bit more intelligent to sort out the bodies, like that urbane Irishman Dudley Smith he always mentions. More on this and related matters after a walk, breakfast and three strong cups of coffee.

Now he ripped – down the spine, across the grain, leather and paper shredded to bits.

The phone, IAD direct. Buzz, buzz, 'Internal Affairs, Kleckner.'

'It's White. Put Exley on.'

'White, you're in troub – ' A new voice on the line. 'This is Exley. White, where are you?'

'Arrowhead. I just read Lynn's diary and got the whole story on your old man, Atherton and Dieterling. *The whole fucking story.* I'm running a suspect down, and when I find him it's your daddy on the six o'clock news.'

'I'll make a deal with you. Just listen.'

'Never.'

Back to L.A., the old Spade routine: Chinatown, the Strip, the Biltmore, his third circuit since time went haywire. The chinks were starting to look like the Cowboy Rhythm Band, the El Rancho guys were growing slant eyes. Every known haunt triple-checked, three times everything – except for a single hit on his agent.

Bud drove to Nat Penzler Associates. The connecting door was open – Mr. Natsky was eating a sandwich. He took a bite, said, 'Oh shit.'

'Spade's been ditching out on his gig. He must be costing you money.'

Penzler eased a hand behind his desk. 'Caveman, if you knew the grief my clients cause me.'

'You don't sound so concerned.'

'Bad pennies always turn up.'

'Do you know where he is?'

Penzler brought his hand up. 'My guess is on the planet Pluto, hanging out with his pal Jack Daniels.'

'What were you doing with your hand?'

'Scratching my balls. You want the job? It pays five yards a week, but you have to kick back ten percent to your agent.'

'Where is he?'

'He is somewhere in the vicinity of nowhere I know. Check with me next week and write when you get brains.'

'Like that, huh?'

'Caveman, if I knew would I withhold from a bruiser like you?'

Bud kicked him out of his chair. Penzler hit the floor; the chair spun, tipped. Bud reached under the desk, pulled out a bundle wrapped with string. A foot on top, a jerk on the knot – clean black cowboy shirts.

Penzler stood up. 'Lincoln Heights. The basement at Sammy Ling's, and you didn't get it from Natsky.'

Ling's Chow Mein: a dive on Broadway up from Chinatown. Parking spaces in back; a rear entrance to the kitchen. No outside basement access, steam shooting from an underground vent. Bud circled the place, heard voices out the vent. Make the trapdoor in the kitchen.

He found a two-by-four in the lot, went in the back way. Two slants frying meat, an old geek skinning a duck. A fix on the trapdoor, easy: lift the pallet by the oven.

They spotted him. The young chinks jabbered; Papasan waved them quiet. Bud held his shield out.

The old man rubbed fingers. 'I pay! I pay I pay! You go!'

'Spade Cooley, Papa. You go downstairs and tell him Natsky brought the laundry. Chop-chop.'

'Spade pay! You leave alone! I pay! I pay!'

The kids circled. Papa-san waved his cleaver.

'You go now! Go now! I pay!'

Bud fixed a line on the floor. Papa stepped over it.

Bud swung his stick – pops caught it waist-high. He crashed into the stove, his face hit a burner, his hair caught fire. The kids charged; Bud got their legs in one shot. They hit the floor tangled up – Bud smashed in their ribs. Pops doused his head in the sink, charged with his face scorched black.

A roundhouse to the knees – Papa went down glued to that cleaver. Bud stepped on his hand, cracked the fingers – Papa let go screaming. Bud dragged him to the oven, kicked the pallet loose. Yank the trapdoor, drag the old man downstairs.

Fumes: opium, steam. Bud kicked Papa-san quiet. Through the fumes: dope suckers on mattresses.

Bud kicked through them. All chinks – they grumbled, swatted, sucked back to dreamland, Smoke: in his face, up his nose, breathing hard so he took it down his lungs. Steam like a beacon: a sweat room at the back.

He kicked over to the door. Through a mist: naked Spade Cooley, three naked girls. Giggles, arms and legs cockeyed – an orgy on a slippery tile bench. Spade so tangled up in women that you couldn't shoot him clean.

Bud flipped a wall switch. The steam died, the mist fizzled. Spade looked over. Bud took his gun out.

KILL HIM.

Cooley moved first: a shield, two girls pressed tight. Bud moved in – yanking arms, legs, nails raking his face. The girls slipped, stumbled, tumbled out the door. Spade said, 'Jesus, Mary and Joseph.'

Smoke inside him, brewing up his very own dreamland. Last rites, stretch the moment. 'Kathy Janeway, Jane Mildred Hamsher, Lynette Ellen Kendrick, Sharon – '

Cooley yelled, 'GODDAMN YOU IT'S PERKINS!'

The moment snapped – Bud saw his gun half-triggered. Colors swirled around him; Cooley talked rapid fire. 'I saw Deuce with that last girlie, that Kendrick. I know'd he liked to hurt hooers and when that last girlie turned up dead on the TV I asked him 'bout it. Deuce, he like to scared me to death, so's I took off on this here toot. Mister, you gotta believe me.'

Color flashes: Deuce Perkins, plain vicious. One color blinking – turquoise, Spade's hands. 'Those rings, where'd you get them?'

Cooley pulled a towel over his lap. 'Deuce, he makes them. He brings a hobby kit with him on the road. He's been crackin' all these vague-type jokes for years, how they protects his hands for his intimate-type work, and now I know what he means.'

'Opium. Can he get it?'

'That cracker shitbird steals my shit! Mister, you gotta believe me!'

Starting to. 'My killing dates put you in the right place to do the jobs. Just *you.* Your booking records show different goddamn guys traveling with you, so how do you – '

'Deuce, he's been my road manager since '49, he *always* travels with me. Mister, you gotta believe me!'

'*Where is he?*'

'I don't know!'

'Girlfriends, buddies, other perverts. *Give.*'

'That miserable sumbitch got no friends I know of 'cept that wop shitbird Johnny Stompanato. Mister, you gotta believe – '

'I believe you. You believe I'll kill you if you scare him away from me?'

'Praise Jesus, I believe.'

Bud walked into the smoke. The chinks were still on the nod, Papa was just barely breathing.

R&I on Perkins:

No California beefs, clean on his Alabama parole – he'd spent '44–'46 on a chain gang for animal sodomy. Transient musician, no known address listed. K.A. confirmation on Johnny Stompanato – ditto Lee Vachss and Abe Teitlebaum – mob punks all. Bud hung up, remembered a talk with Jack Vincennes – he'd rousted Deuce at a *Badge of Honor* party – Johnny, Teitlebaum and Vachss were there with him.

Kid gloves: Johnny used to be his snitch, Johnny hated him, feared him.

Bud called the DMV, got Stomp's phone number – ten rings, no answer. Two more no-answers: the Cowboy Rhythm Band at the Biltmore, the El Rancho. Kikey Teitlebaum's deli next – Kikey and Johnny were tight.

A run out Pico, shaking off fumes. A keen edge settling in: get Perkins alone, kill him. Then Exley.

Bud parked, looked in the window. A slow afternoon, pay dirt – Johnny Stomp, Kikey T. at a table.

He walked in. They spotted him, whispered. Years since he'd seen them – Abe was fatter, Stomp still guinea slick.

Kikey waved. Bud grabbed a chair, carried it over. Stomp said, 'Wendell White. How's tricks, *paesano*?'

'Tricky. How's tricks with Lana Turner?'

'Trickier. Who told you?'

'Mickey C.'

Teitlebaum laughed. 'Must have a hole like the Third Street Tunnel. Johnny's leaving for Acapulco with her tonight, and me, I shack with Sadie five-fingers. White, what brings you here? I ain't seen you since Dick Stens used to work for me.'

'I'm looking for Deuce Perkins.'

Johnny tap-tapped the table. 'So talk to Spade Cooley.'

'Spade don't know where he is.'

'So why ask me? Mickey tell you Deuce and me are close?'

No ritual question: what do you want him for? And fat-mouth Kikey too quiet. 'Spade said you and him were acquaintances.'

'Acquaintances is right. We go back, *paesano*, so I'll tell you I haven't seen Deuce in years.'

Change-up pitch. 'You ain't my *paesano*, you wop cocksucker.'

Johnny smiled, maybe relieved, their old cop-snitch game one more time. A look at Kikey – the fat man working on spooked. 'Abe, you're tight with Perkins, right?'

'Nix. Deuce is too meshugeneh for me. He's just a guy to say hi to once in a blue fucking moon.'

A lie – Perkins' rap sheet said different. 'So maybe I'm confused. I know you guys are tight with Lee Vachss, and I heard him and Deuce are tight.'

Kikey laughed – too stagy. 'What a yuck. Johnny, I think Wendell here is really confused.'

Stomp said, 'Oil and water, those two. Tight? What a howl.'

Standing up for Vachss for no reason. 'You guys are the howl. I figured you'd ask me what the grief was right off.'

Kikey pushed his plate aside. 'It occur to you we just don't care?'

'Yeah, but you guys love to shmooz and milk the grapevine.'

'So shmooz.'

A rumor: Kikey beat a guy to death for calling him a yid. 'I'll shmooz, it's a nice day and I got nothing better to do than hobnob with a greasy wop and a fat yid.'

Abe ho-ho-ho'd, cuffed his arm oh-you-kid. 'You're a pisser. So what do you want Deuce for?'

Bud cuffed him back hard – 'None of your fucking business, Jewboy' – throw a change-up to Johnny. 'What are you doing now that Mickey's out?'

Tap, tap, tap – a pinky ring on a bottle of Schlitz. 'Nothing you'd be interested in. I got things contained, so don't you worry. What are *you* doing?'

'I'm on the Nite Owl reopening.'

Johnny tap-tapped too hard – his bottle almost tipped. Kikey, working on pale. 'You don't think Deuce Perkins . . .'

Stompanato: 'Come on, Abe. Deuce for the Nite Owl, what a howl.'

Bud said, 'I gotta piss,' walked to the bathroom. He closed the door, counted to ten, opened it a crack. The shitbirds spieling full blast – Abe wiping his face with a napkin. Let the pieces fit in.

Hink: Deuce for the Nite Owl.

Jack V. spotted Vachss, Stomp, Kikey and Perkins at a party – maybe a year pre-Nite Owl.

A Mobster Squad roust, a snitch off Joe Sifakis: *three-man* trigger gangs clipping Cohen franchise hoods, maverick hoods. The Victory Motel buzzing hard.

Bud grabbed the piece, dropped it, grabbed it.

'Contain.'

Dudley's favorite big word – 'containment.'

His motel pitch: 'containing,' 'profit dispensation,' 'obstreperous Italian you've dealt with in the past' – Johnny Stomp an old snitch who hated him. Dud hot for his 'full disclosure'; the Lamar Hinton roust – a shakedown for Nite Owl information, Dot Rothstein there, Kikey Teitlebaum's cousin –

Bud washed his face, walked back calm. Stomp said, 'Have a good one?'

'Yeah, and you're right. I want Deuce for some old warrants, but I got a hunch on the Nite Owl.'

Calm Johnny: 'Oh, yeah?'

Calm Kikey: 'Some new shvoogies, right? All I know's what I read in the papers.'

Bud: 'Maybe, but if it wasn't some new niggers, then that purple car by the Nite Owl was a plant. Take care, guys. If you see Deuce, tell him to call me at the Bureau.'

Calm Johnny tap-tap-tapped.

Calm Kikey coughed, popped sweat.

Calm Bud, not so calm: out to the car, around the corner to a pay phone. The P.C. Bell police number, one long fucking wait.

'Uh, yes, who's requesting?'

'Sergeant White, LAPD. It's a trace job.'

'For when, Sergeant?'

'*For now.* It's a homicide priority, private lines and pay phones at a restaurant. *It's now.*'

'One second, please.'

Transfer click-click-clicks – a new woman. 'Sergeant, what exactly do you need?'

No Calm Bud. 'Abe's Noshery at Pico and Veteran. All calls out on all phones for the next fifteen goddamn minutes. Lady, don't hump me on this.'

'We can't initiate actual traces, Officer.'

'Just who the calls are to, goddamn it.'

'Well, if it *is* a homicide priority. What is your number now?'

Bud read off the phone. 'GRanite 48112.'

Harumph. 'Fifteen minutes then. And next time allow us more operating leeway.'

Bud hung up – Dudley Dudley Dudley Dudley Dudley – hard time cut off by *brrrinnngg.* He grabbed the phone, fumbled it, cradled it. 'Yeah?'

'Two calls. One to DUnkirk 32758 – a Miss Dot Rothstein holds that number. The second to AXminster 46811, the residence of a Mr. Dudley L. Smith.'

Bud dropped the receiver. The clerk babbled from someplace safe and calm that he'd never see again – no Lynn, no safety in a badge.

Captain Dudley Liam Smith for the Nite Owl.

Chapter Sixty-seven

JACK VINCENNES CONFESSED.

He confessed to knocking up a girl at the St. Anatole's Orphan Home, to killing Mr. and Mrs. Harold J. Scoggins. He confessed to tank-jobbing Bill McPherson with a hot little nigger girl, to planting dope on Charlie Parker, to shaking down hopheads for *Hush-Hush* Magazine. He tried to jerk out of bed and raise his hands to form the Stations of the Cross. He babbled something like hub rachmones, Mickey, and bump bump bump bump the cute train. He confessed to beating up junkies, to running bag for Ellis Loew. He begged his wife to forgive him for fucking whores who looked like women in dirty picture books. He confessed that he loved dope and was unfit to love Jesus.

Karen Vincennes stood by weeping: she couldn't listen, she had to listen. Ed tried to shoo her out – she wouldn't let him. He called the Bureau from outside Arrowhead; Fisk gave him the word: Pierce Patchett shot and killed last night, his mansion torched, burned to the ground. Fireman had discovered Vincennes in the backyard – smoke inhalation, rips in his bulletproof vest. They got him to Central Receiving, a doctor took a blood sample. The results: Trashcan on a test flight, a heroin/antipsychotic drug compound. He'd live, he'd be fine – when the OD in his system flushed out.

A nurse swabbed Vincennes' face; Karen fretted Kleenex. Ed checked Fisk's memo: 'Inez Soto called. No info on R.D. $ dealings. R.D. suspicious of queries??? – she was cryptic – D.W.'

Ed crumpled it, tossed it. Vincennes went in barefoot – while he was shacked with Lynn. Somebody killed Patchett, left them both to burn.

Burned like Exley father and son – Bud White holding the torch.

He couldn't look at Karen.

'Captain, I've got something.'

Fisk in the hallway. Ed walked over, led him away from the door. 'What is it?'

'Nort Layman completed the autopsy. Patchett's cause of death was five .30–30 slugs fired from two different rifles. Ray Pinker ran ballistics tests and came up with a match to an old Riverside County bulletin. May of ’55, unsolved with no leads, I checked. Two men gunned down outside a tavern. It looked like a gangland job.’

All coming down to the heroin. ‘That’s all you’ve got?’

‘No. Bud White tore up a dope den in Chinatown and beat three Chinamen half to death. He came in asking questions, badged them and went crazy. One of them ID’d his personnel photo. Thad Green called I.A. on it, and I caught the squeal. Pickup order, sir? I know you want him and Chief Green said it’s your call.’

Ed almost laughed. ‘No, no pickup order.’

‘Sir?’

‘I said no, so cut it off there. And you and Kleckner do this for me. Contact Miller Stanton, Max Peltz, Timmy Valburn and Billy Dieterling. Have them come to my office tonight at 8:00 for questioning. Tell them *I’m* the investigating officer, and if they want no publicity, then bring no lawyers. And get me Homicide’s file on the old Loren Atherton case. Seal it, Sergeant. I don’t want you to look at it.’

‘Sir . . .’

Ed turned away. Karen in the doorway, dry-eyed. ‘Do you think Jack did those things?’

‘Yes.’

‘He mustn’t know that I know. Will you promise not to tell him?’

Ed nodded, looked in the room. The Big V begged for communion.

Chapter Sixty-eight

A FILE ROOM at the main DMV – boxes stacked shoulder-high. A confirmation search – a riff on Johnny and Kikey's last hink. Riff in, out, back, around – he was so high he could think it through and prowl registration records at the same time.

Make Stomp, Teitlebaum and Lee Vachss for the Nite Owl triggers; make them the shooter gang bumping upstart mobsters and Cohen franchise holders. Deuce Perkins was part of the gang – the others didn't know he beat hookers to death – they'd consider it amateur shit, wouldn't tolerate it. Dudley was the leader – he couldn't be anything else. All his job offer stuff was a try at recruiting him; the Lamar Hinton roust was Dud frosting out loose ends on the Patchett side of things – make Patchett and Smith some kind of K.A.'s, make Hinton dead, Breuning and Carlisle part of the gang. 'Contain,' 'Contained,' 'Containment,' 'Profit Dispensation.' Call it Dudley trying to control the L.A. rackets – and pin the Nite Owl on a new bunch of jigs.

Bud tore through boxes: auto registrations, early April '53. Schoolboy thinking: he figured the car by the Nite Owl was a plant; the shotguns in Coates' car, the shells in Griffith Park, both plants – the killers followed the case, got lucky on the Merc, found some boogies to take the heat. Wrong – LAPD conspirators were in on the job. They read crime reports, got hipped to some joyriding spooks firing shotguns – lay the onus on them – they figured the arresting officers would kill them, case closed.

So they got themselves a car that matched the crime report description. They made sure it was spotted near the Nite Owl. They wouldn't steal a car – cops wouldn't risk a late night roust. They didn't buy a purple car – they bought a different colored one and painted it.

Bud kept working. No logic to the file mess: Mercs, Chevies, Caddies, L.A., Sacramento, Frisco, whoever registered the car would've used a phony name. One luck-out: the registers' race, DOB and physical stats listed on cards attached to the initial purchase carbons. Facts to eliminate against, like he learned in school: ’48 – ’50 Mercs, Southern California purchasers, stats that matched to Dudley, Stomp, Vachss, Teitlebaum, Perkins, Carlisle and Breuning. Hours of digging, a pile inches thick – then a strange one that felt warm.

1948 primer-gray Merc coupe, purchased April 10, 1953. Register: Margaret Louise March, W.F., DOB 7/23/18, brown and brown, 5′9″, 215 lbs. Register’s address: 1804 East Oxford, Los Angeles. Phone number: NOrmandie 32758.

Warm to scalding – Fat Dot Rothstein’s specs. Oxford ran north-south – not east-west. The call to Dot from the Noshery – DU-32758 – the dumb dyke tacked her own number onto a different exchange.

And bought herself some purple paint.

Bud whooped, punched the air, kicked boxes. Two cases made in one day – if anyone believed him. All dressed up and no one to kill. Circumstantial Dudley evidence – no hard proof. Dudley too well placed to fall, nobody who cared like he did.

Except Exley.

Chapter Sixty-nine

A STAKEOUT ON the house he grew up in. He couldn't go in and question his father; he couldn't ask for his help. He couldn't tell the man he confided secrets to a woman – and gave a brutal enemy the means to patricide. He brought the Atherton file with him – there was nothing in it he didn't already know, the man who made the smut and killed Sid Hudgens was intrinsic to the Atherton murders, maybe the killer himself – truths Preston Exley would dispute out of pride. He couldn't go in; he couldn't stop thinking. He counted memories instead.

His father bought the house for his mother; it was really just a sop to his pride – the Exleys flee the middle class grandly. They never had Christmas lights on the lawn – Preston Exley said it was lowlife. Thomas fell off balconies – and had the style not to cry. His father threw him a 'back from the war' party – only the mayor, the City Council and LAPD men who could further his career were invited.

Art De Spain walked to his car, looking frail, one arm bandaged. Ed watched him drive off, his father's man, his Dutch uncle. Memory: Art said he wasn't cut out to be a detective.

The house loomed big and cold. Ed drove back to the hospital.

Trash was up, giving Fisk a statement. Ed watched from the doorway.

' . . . and I was playing off Exley's script. I don't remember exactly what I said, but Patchett pulled out a gun and shot me. That shit piece Exley gave me jammed, and Patchett slammed me with a hypo. Then I heard shots and "No, Abe, no, Lee, no." And now you know as much as I do.'

From the hall, loud: 'Abe Teitlebaum, Johnny Stompanato and Lee Vachss. They did the Nite Owl. Throw in Deuce Perkins as part of the gang and get ready to shit when I tell you who else I got.'

Ed smelled his sweat, his breath. White pushed him inside – firm, not too rough. 'Put our stuff aside for a minute. Did you hear what I said?'

The names registered: gang muscle, a not-bad line to HEROIN. White looked insane – disheveled, a zealot. Fisk said, 'Sir, do you want me to . . .'

Ed moved his shoulders – White dropped his hands right on cue. 'Two minutes, *Captain.*'

Scared – *be a captain.* 'Duane, go get yourself some coffee. White, get my interest before I ream you for the Chinamen.'

Fisk walked out. Ed said, 'Jack, you stay. White, you keep my interest.'

White closed the door. Disheveled: soiled clothes, ink-smudged hands. 'Good I heard the radio on you, Trashcan. I didn't know you were here, I mighta tried to do it all myself.'

Vincennes, on the bed looking queasy. 'Do *what?* Abe, Lee. You make Teitlebaum and Vachss for Patchett, spell it out.'

Ed: 'You look Crim 101, White. Make like you're writing an occurrence chronology.'

White smiled – pure kamikaze. 'I been tracking a string of hooker killings for years. It started with this girl Kathy Janeway. She got snuffed back in '53, right around the Nite Owl. She was Duke Cathcart's girlfriend.'

Ed nodded. 'I know that story. I.A. ran a personal on you when you passed the sergeant's exam.'

'Oh, yeah? What you don't know is that a few years ago my case broke. I thought my killer was Spade Cooley – his band was in all the hooker snuff cities on the DODs. I was wrong. Cooley ratted off the real killer – Burt Arthur Perkins.'

Vincennes spoke up. 'I buy Deuce as a woman killer. He's wrong to the core.'

White said, 'You should know, 'cause Cooley said he was pals with Johnny Stompanato, and back around '52 you told me you rousted him hanging out with Johnny Stomp, Kikey T. and Lee Vachss. Cooley told me Johnny and Deuce were tight, so I went looking for Johnny.'

Ed said, 'All right, so you went to Stompanato.'

White lit a cigarette. 'Nix. Now I tell you that Dudley Smith has been using me for strongarm jobs on the Mobster Squad going back years. You know how he talks? "Containment," that's one of his favorite words. Contain crime, contain this, contain that. He's been beating around the bush about offering me outside work, and the other night he said I could be useful keeping the "obstreperous

Italian" that's afraid of me in line. Johnny Stomp's afraid of me – he used to snitch for me and I used to muscle him good. You know how Dud's this so-called gangland peacemaker? Well, the other night him, Carlisle and Breuning worked over this guy Lamar Hinton at the Victory, supposedly a Mobster Squad job. Bullshit – all Dudley asked him about was Nite Owl stuff – smut, Pierce Patchett.'

Ed, bug-eyed: this can't be coming. 'So you went to Stompanato looking for Perkins.'

'Right. I go to Kikey's deli, and Johnny's there with Kikey. I ask Johnny about Deuce, and Johnny's all hinked. Kikey's hinked worse and they both lie and say Deuce is just some bumfuck acquaintance. They deny that Deuce is tight with Lee Vachss, when I know goddamn otherwise. Johnny uses the word 'containment,' which is not a Johnny-type word. Hink all over these guys, and I drop that I'm on the Nite Owl reopening and they almost shit, Deuce for the Nite Owl, ho, ho. I leave, go to a pay phone and have P.C. Bell put a fifteen-minute trace on all calls out of the deli. Two calls – one to Dot Rothstein, Dudley's good pal and Kikey's cousin, one to Dudley's house.'

Vincennes said, 'Holy fucking shit.' Ed jerked a hand to his gun – wrong – White was a cop. 'Give me corroboration.'

White flicked his smoke out the window. 'Crim 101. The niggers didn't do it, so Dud and his gang planted a car by the Nite Owl. I went to the DMV and checked April '53 registrations, Caucasians this time. Dot Rothstein bought a '48 Merc, primer gray, on April 10. A phony name, a phony address, but the stupid bitch used the real digits on her own phone number.'

Vincennes looked shell-shocked. Ed reeled in a line so he wouldn't scream DUDLEY. 'Right before the Nite Owl I was working late at Hollywood Station. Spade Cooley was playing a retirement party downstairs, and I saw Burt Perkins roaming the halls. Try this theory: Mal Lunceford, ex-LAPD patrolman. Call him the forgotten Nite Owl victim, and remember he worked Hollywood Division for most of his time on the Department. Now, did one of the shooters have a grudge against Lunceford? Was Perkins removing records of it that night at the station? Did the conspirators know that Lunceford was a Nite Owl regular and plan their Cathcart or Cathcart-impersonator hit so that they could clip him too?'

White answered. 'Dudley put me on the Lunceford background check, probably because he thought I'd fuck it up. I checked for old Lunceford F.I.'s and couldn't find a goddamn one. I buy that theory.'

DUDLEY past screaming – Ed held it down. Vincennes: 'Fisk told me about Patchett, how he got the Cohen-Dragna summit heroin, how him and this unnamed bad guy who's obviously Dudley were getting ready to push it. Now, I know for a fact that Dud bodyguarded that deal, and there was this rumor floating around years ago – that Dud led this posse that killed this guy Buzz Meeks who heisted the summit. Fisk said that Patchett got most of the white horse that got clouted, some from the Englekling brothers and their father, some from this bad guy who's obviously Dudley. Okay, so what I'm thinking is – could Lunceford have been in on the posse? Was *that* when Dudley got the dope?'

White shook his head – new stuff for him. 'You fill me in on that, because I got a lead that ties in. Dud was talking up his containment shit, and he said something about keeping the niggers sedated, which sounds like heroin to me.'

Ed said, 'Call that done for now. Jack, run with the Goldman-Van Gelder angle. Put it together with our new leads.'

Trash stood up, steadied himself on the bed rail. 'Okay, let's say Davey G. was in with Dudley, Stompanato, Kikey, Vachss and Dot. How any of them could trust a psycho like Deuce I don't know, but fuck it. Anyway, they're all conspiring against Mickey C. White, you don't know this, but Goldman had a bug in Mickey's cell at McNeil. I'm betting Dudley and his friends were in with Davey from the beginning, but fuck it, however it happened, Davey heard the Englekling brothers approach Mickey with Duke Cathcart's smut deal.'

Ed raised a hand. 'Chester Yorkin said that the man who brought Patchett the bulk of the heroin – let's assume it's Dudley – had a hard-on for smut and quote "contacts in South America and pervert mailing lists." I always wondered about the profit on pornography, and now Dudley's connection makes it seem more feasible.'

Vincennes said, 'Let me keep going. Dud worked with the OSS in Paraguay after the war and he ran Ad Vice back in '39 or so, so I know he's got those contacts, but sit on that. Right now we've got Goldman going to Smith and Stompanato with the word on the smut plan. Everybody, especially Dud, likes the idea, and they decide to crash the racket. On his own, a double cross, I don't know, Davey sends Dean Van Gelder, his prison visitor, to talk to Cathcart.

Van Gelder decides to crash Duke's prostie racket and the smut gig on his own. He'd been seen by Davey face-to-face, but the outside prison men had never seen him. He figured he looked like Cathcart, so he could impersonate Cathcart and cut his own deal. By the time the impersonation was found out he'd be too far in good with the outside men for Davey to care what he'd done. So Van Gelder moved to San Berdoo to be close to the Englekling brothers. He fell in with Sue Lefferts and snuffed Duke. He knew the names of at least one of the outside men, called them at a pay phone from the Lefferts' house and asked for a meet. He went in tough and suggested a public place, he figured Sue could sit nearby and he'd be safe. One of the outside guys put Lunceford together with the Nite Owl and said let's meet there. Dud or one of his guys approached Patchett right *before* the Nite Owl and told him to get his loose ends tidied. Patchett didn't know exactly what was gonna happen, but he had Chris Bergeron and her kid and Bobby Inge blow town just as I was starting in on the smut gig for Ad Vice.'

An air-cooled room – Ed felt every word boost the temperature. 'Let me throw out a chronology, starting right after Van Gelder as Cathcart contacts the outside men. Now, we know Dudley loves pornography, we know he's been sitting on eighteen pounds of 'H' since the Cohen-Dragna deal. Try this theory: he breaks into Cathcart's apartment and finds something that leads him to Patchett, something that includes mention of his chemistry background and his connections to old Dr. Englekling. He goes to Patchett, they strike a deal – develop the heroin, push the smut. He's astounded that Patchett's thinking along the same lines, that he's already got some of the horse from Doc Englekling. Now Dudley wants Cathcart killed, Mal Lunceford silenced for whatever reason – and he wants Patchett terrified. He's a policeman, and he's read about those Negroes discharging shotguns in Griffith Park. He sets up the meet at the Nite Owl, knowing Lunceford will be there, and Jack's right – he was ambiguous, but he told Patchett to get rid of his loose ends. Moving ahead, the investigation goes wider than Dudley thinks it will – because the Negroes don't get killed during their arrest, and they don't confess. He puts White on the Cathcart background check, and he probably *didn't* know that Perkins killed the Janeway girl, but he wanted White steered away from getting involved on general principles – he wanted him to steer clear of possible Cathcart-Nite Owl connections.

All eyes on Bud White. The zealot: ‘Okay, Dudley put me on the Cathcart check because he thought I’d screw up. But I checked out Duke’s pad and saw that it was print-wiped, and I figured that somebody had tried on his clothes. The Dudley guys wiped the place, but they didn’t touch the phone books, and I could tell that the San Berdoo printshop listings had been looked over. Now, I got a theory. When I was on the Carthcart check, I met Kathy Janeway at this motel out in the valley. Two days later she’s raped and killed. When I left the motel I thought I was being tailed, but then I forgot about it. I think the tail was Deuce Perkins. I think Dud put a tail on Cathcart’s K.A.’s, just to keep tabs on the investigation, which explains how he’s always known so much about all this stuff that I’ve always kept secret. So Deuce, who’s a rape-o shitbird psycho, sees Kathy and goes for her. Maybe Dudley knew he killed her, maybe he didn’t. Either way he fucking pays.’

Vincennes lit a cigarette, coughed. ‘We’ve got no evidence, but I’ve got some more stuff to tie in. One, Doc Layman took five .30–30 slugs out of Patchett, and he said they match this gang unsolved in Riverside County. When Davey Goldman was babbling away up in Camarillo, he said something about three triggers. He babbled some other stuff that keeps running through my head, but it doesn’t make any sense. Exley, did you listen to that tape I found at McNeil?’

Ed nodded. ‘You’re right. Nothing salient at all, just a passing mention of some gang hits.

White: ‘There’s been a bunch of mob unsolveds. I know, ’cause a suspect spilled some tangent stuff on them on a Mobster Squad roust. Always three triggers, Cohen franchise holders and upstart hoods clipped. Easy money: Stompanato, Vachss and Teitlebaum keeping things copacetic for Mickey C.’s parole. They wanted to keep things chilled for their containment gig and they figured when Mickey got out they’d test the wind and either clip him or use him. My bet’s on clip. They had Cohen and Goldman bushwhacked in prison – a pure cross on Davey. Mickey’s house got bombed and Mickey lived to tell. They’ll clip him before too long and they’ll contain real good, ’cause Dud’s Mr. Mobster Squad and he’s got Parker’s fucking – what’s the word? mandate? – to keep out-of-town muscle out. Do you fucking believe it?’

Trash laughed. ‘Grand, lad, grand. And all the hits were paving the way for Dud to push Patchett’s heroin. He got the command on the reopening so he could find some new patsies, and he’s set to push the horse. He's got the smut stashed, and he didn't warn Patchett about the investigation because he was already planning to kill him. He didn't touch Lynn Bracken, because he figured Patchett kept her in the dark on all his worst stuff. He let her come in for questioning because he figured she'd stall Exley's part of the investigation.'

Lynn Bracken.

Ed winced, moved toward the door. 'And we still don't know who made the smut and killed Hudgens. Or the Englekling brothers, which doesn't look like a pro job. White, you went up to Gaitsville with Dudley, and he submitted a soft-pedal report on – '

'It was another psycho job. Heroin lying around, and the killer just left it. He tortured the brothers with chemicals and burned up a bunch of smut negatives with acid solutions. The lab tech said he thought the killer was trying to ID the people in the pictures. The chemistry stuff made me think Patchett, but then I thought he must've already known who the picture people were. I don't really think their heroin ties to our heroin, the brothers were dope peddlers on and off for years. Chemists and dope peddlers, and if Patchett wanted their dope, he would've stolen it. I think the brothers got killed by somebody, I don't know, outside the center of this mess.'

Trash sighed. '*There's no evidence.* Patchett and the whole Englekling family are dead, and Dud probably killed Lamar Hinton. You got nothing at the Fleur-de-Lis drop and White's little grandstand with Stompanato and Teitlebaum means that now Dudley's been alerted and he's taking care of *his* loose ends. I don't think we've got much of a case.'

Ed thought it through. 'Chester Yorkin told me Patchett had a booby-trapped safe outside his house. The house is being guarded now, the West L.A. squad has a team on it. In a day or so, I'll go lift the guards. There might be something in that safe that nails Dudley.'

White said, 'So right now, what? No evidence, and Stompanato's leaving for Acapulco today with Lana Turner. What now?'

Ed opened the door – Fisk was outside drinking coffee. 'Duane, get back in touch with Valburn, Stanton, Billy Dieterling and Peltz. Change the meeting to the downtown Statler at 8:00. Call the hotel and set up three suites and call Bob Gallaudet and tell him to call me here – tell him it's urgent.'

Fisk went for a phone. Vincennes said, ‘You’re hitting the Hudgens end.’

Ed turned away from White. ‘*Think.* Dudley’s a policeman. We need evidence, and we may get it tonight.’

‘I’ll take Stanton. We used to be friends.’

Line it – a Dieterling kid star, Preston Exley. ‘No . . . I mean are you up to it?’

‘It’s my case too, Captain. I’ve come this far, and I went up against Patchett for you and damn near got killed.’

Weigh the risk. ‘All right, you take Stanton.’

Trash rubbed his face – pale, stubbled. ‘Did I . . . I mean when Karen was here and I was unconscious . . . did I . . .’

‘She doesn’t know anything you don’t want her to. Now go home, I want to talk to White.’

Vincennes walked out – ten years older in a day. White said, ‘The Hudgens end is bullshit. It’s all Dudley now.’

‘No. First we buy some time.’

‘Protecting Daddy? Jesus, and I thought I was dumb on women.’

‘*Just think.* Think what Dudley is and what taking him down means. Think, and I’ll make you a deal.’

‘I told you *never.*’

‘You’ll like this one. You keep quiet about my father and the Atherton case and I’ll let you have Dudley and Perkins.’

White laughed. ‘The collars? I got them anyway.’

‘No. I’ll let you kill them.’

Chapter Seventy

EXLEY'S RULE RANKLED: no hitting, Billy and Timmy were too upscale to take muscle. Hotel good guy/bad guy rankled – they should be muscling Dudley at the Victory. Bob Gallaudet took Max Peltz; Trashcan was grilling Miller Stanton. Gallaudet got briefed by Exley – everything but the Atherton angle. He thought he could prosecute Dudley Smith, Exley didn't tell him Dud and Deuce Perkins were paid for. Fucking Exley wouldn't let him out of his sight – he took him through every piece of the case step by step, like they were partners who could trust each other. The case all put together was amazing, Exley had an amazing fucking brain – but he was stupid if he didn't know one thing: after Dudley and Deuce, Preston E. was next. Easy: Dick Stens wouldn't have it otherwise.

Bud watched – a crack in the bathroom doorway.

The queers sat side by side; Mr. Good Guy pussyfooted. Yes, they bought Fleur-de-Lis dope; yes, they knew Pierce Patchett 'socially.' Yes, Pierce snorted 'H,' we heard rumors he sold pornographic books – but *we* never indulged in such things. Kid gloves: the fruits thought the Patchett snuff was why they got the royal hotel treatment. Captain Exley would never be nasty – Preston Exley was running for governor, Ray Dieterling throwing hot financial backup.

Exley, loud. 'Gentlemen, there's an old homicide that might tie in to the Patchett killing.'

Bud walked in. Exley said, 'This is Sergeant White. He has a few questions for you, then I think we can wrap it up.'

Timmy Valburn sighed. 'Well, I'm not surprised. Miller Stanton and Max Peltz are down the hall, and the last time the police questioned all of us was when that awful man Sid Hudgens was killed. So *I'm* not surprised.'

Bud pulled a chair up. 'Why'd you say "awful"? You kill him?'

'Oh, Sergeant *really*. Do I look like the killer type to you?'

'Yeah, you do. Guy who makes his living playing a mouse has gotta be capable of anything.'

'Sergeant, *really*.'

'Besides, *you* weren't called in on the Hudgens job. Billy tell you about it? A little pillow talk, maybe?'

Billy Dieterling to Exley. 'Captain, I don't like this man's tone.'

Exley said, 'Sergeant, keep it clean.'

Bud laughed. 'That's the pot calling the kettle black, but screw it. You guys alibied each other for Hudgens, now it's five years later and you alibi each other up for Patchett. Hinky to me. My take on fruits is that they can't stick to the same bed for five minutes, let alone five years.'

Valburn: 'You're an animal.'

Bud pulled out a file sheet. 'Alibis on the Hudgens case. You and Billy in bed together, Max Peltz porking some teenage quiff. Miller Stanton at a party where your queer buddy Brett Chase also happens to be. So far, we got a real all-American crew on *Badge of Honor*. David Mertens the set man, he's at home with his male nurse, so maybe he's fruit, too. What I want – '

Exley, on cue: 'Sergeant, watch your language and get to the point.'

Valburn seethed; Billy D. faked boredom. But something in the last spiel nudged him – his eyes went from good guy to bad guy. 'The point is that Sid Hudgens had a boner for *Badge of Honor* at the time he was killed. Patchett gets killed five years later, and him and Hudgens were partners. These homos here, they're both tied to *Badge of Honor* and they kicked loose with intimate details on Patchett's rackets. Captain, if it walks, talks and quacks like a duck, then it's a duck – not a mouse.'

Valburn said, 'Quack, quack, idiot. Captain, will you tell this man who he's dealing with?'

Exley, stern. 'Sergeant, these gentlemen aren't suspects. They're voluntary interviewees.'

'Well, shit, sir, I don't see no difference.'

Exley, exasperated. 'Gentleman, to end this once and for all, please tell the sergeant. Did either of you even *know* Sid Hudgens personally?'

Two 'No' head shakes. Bud flew – Exley poetry. 'If it squeaks like a mouse and swishes, it's a queer mouse. Captain, *think*. These guys bought dope off Fleur-de-Lis, and they admitted they knew Patchett sniffed horse and pushed pornography. They've got the lowdown on Patchett's rackets, but they claim they didn't know Patchett and Hudgens were partners. I say we take them through Patchett's little enterprises and see what they do know.'

Exley raised his hands – fake helpless. 'A few more specific questions then, gentlemen. Again, anything illegal that you admit to will be overlooked – and will not go outside this room. Do you understand, Sergeant?'

Fucking brilliant: build them up to who made the blood smut. Trash said Timmy was spooked by the stuff – he showed it to him in '53. Credit Exley with balls – the closer they got to the smut the closer they got to his old man and Atherton. 'Okay, sir.'

Timmy and Billy shared a look: nice people strafed by low class. Exley flashed it over. 'And, Sergeant – I'll ask the questions.'

'Yes, sir. You guys tell the truth. I'll know if you're lying.'

Exley sighed. 'Just a few questions. First, did you know that Patchett procured call girls for business associates?'

Two 'Yes' nods. Bud said, 'He ran boys, too. You guys ever buy any outside stuff?'

Exley: 'Not another word, Sergeant.'

Timmy slid closer to Billy. 'I won't dignify that last question with an answer.'

Bud winked. 'You're cute. I ever wind up in stir, I hope you're in my cell.'

Billy mimed spitting on the floor. Exley rolled his eyes – God save us from this heathen. 'Moving along. Were you aware that Patchett employed a plastic surgeon to surgically alter his prostitutes to resemble movie stars?'

Timmy said, 'Yes', Billy said, 'Yes.' Exley smiled like that was everyday stuff. 'Were you also aware that those prostitutes, both male and female, engaged in other criminal pursuits at Patchett's direction?'

Build them up to 'extortion,' the Patchett/Hudgens partnership. Exley told him the story: Lorraine/Rita said 'This Guy' made Patchett squeeze his 'clients,' right when Pierce was set to go partners with Hudgens – *right after the Nite Owl killings.* A brainstorm coming – maybe a connector back to Dudley. 'Answer the captain, shit-birds.'

Billy said, 'Ed, make him stop. Really, this has gone far enough.'

Bud laughed. '*Ed?* Oops, I forgot, boss. Your daddy's pals with his daddy.'

Exley riled for real – flushed, trembling. 'White, shut your mouth.'

The fruits loved it – smiles, titters. Exley said, 'Gentlemen, please answer the question.'

Timmy shrugged. 'Be specific. What other "criminal pursuits"?'

'Specifically blackmail.'

Two legs brushing twitched apart – Bud caught it plain. Exley touched his necktie – GO FULL.

Brainstorm: Johnny Stomp as 'This Guy.' Johnny Stomp an old shake artist, no visible means of support. Crim 101 – Lorraine Malvasi said the squeezes went down May '53 – Dudley's gang had already teamed up with Patchett. 'Yeah, *blackmail.* Married Johns and pervs and queers are prone to it. It's like an occupational hazard. Ever get squeezed by one of your playmates?'

Now Billy rolled his eyes. 'We don't frequent prostitutes. Male or female.'

Bud pulled his chair closer. 'Well, your sweetie pie here was a known associate of a known fruit hustler named Bobby Inge. If it quacks like a duck, it's a duck. So quack, quack, and kick loose with who put the arm on you.'

Exley, stern. 'Gentlemen, do you know the names of any specific Patchett prostitutes?'

Billy came on butch. 'He's a storm trooper, and we don't have to answer his questions.'

'The fuck. You crawl around in sewers, you gotta meet some rats. Ever hear of a cute little twist named Daryl Bergeron? Ever get a yen for a woman and go for his mother? Daryl did – Trashcan Jack Vincennes has got a smut book with pictures of them fucking on roller skates. You're floating in a sewer on a Popsicle stick you fucking queer bastards, so – '

Valburn: 'Ed, make him stop!'

Exley: 'Sergeant, enough!'

Bud, dizzy, like a man inside his head was feeding him lines. 'The hell you say. These geeks are all over Patchett's schemes. One of them's a TV star, one of them's got a famous daddy. Two faggots with plenty of money just fucking ripe to be squeezed. That don't play smart to you?'

Exley – KEEP STILL – a finger to his collar. 'Sergeant White has a point, although I apologize for his way of expressing it. Gentlemen, just for the record. Have either of you any knowledge of extortion schemes involving Pierce Patchett and/or his prostitutes?'

Timmy Valburn said, 'No.'

Billy Dieterling said, 'No.'

Bud got ready to whisper.

Exley leaned forward. 'Have either of you ever been threatened with blackmail?'

Two more nos – two queers sweating up a nice cool room. Bud whispered, 'Johnny Stompanato.'

The fags froze. Bud said, '*Badge of Honor* dirt. Is that what he wanted?'

Valburn started to speak – Billy shushed him. Exley: SLOW.

The dizzy head man said NO. 'Did he have dirt on your father? The great fucking Raymond Dieterling?'

Exley shot the cut-off sign. The dizzy man showed his face: Dick Stens sucking gas. '*Dirt.* Wee Willie Wenner-holm, Loren Atherton and the kiddie murders. *Your father.*'

Billy trembled, pointed to Exley. '*His* father!'

Four-way stares – cut off by Valburn sobbing. Billy helped him up, embraced him. Exley said, 'Get out. Now. You're free to go.'

He looked sad more than mad or scared.

Billy walked Timmy out. Bud walked to the window. Exley walked over, talked to a hand mike. 'Duane, Valburn and Dieterling are on their way. You and Don tail them.'

Bud scoped him – a little taller, half his bulk. Something made him say, 'I shouldn't have done that.'

Exley looked out the window. 'It'll be over soon. All of it.'

Bud looked down. Fisk and Kleckner stood by the door; the queers hit the sidewalk running. The I.A. men chased – a bus held them back. The bus zoomed by – no Billy and Timmy. Fisk and Kleckner stood in the street looking stupid.

Exley started laughing.

Something made Bud laugh.

Chapter Seventy-one

THEY REHASHED OLD times; Stanton drank room service bubbly. Jack laid out his pitch: Patchett/Hudgens, smut, heroin, the Nite Owl. He could tell Miller knew something; he could tell he wanted to spill it.

Old touches: how he taught Miller to play a cop; how he took Miller down to Central Avenue to get laid and wound up rousting Art Pepper. Gallaudet poked his head in, said Max Peltz was clean – Max stories ate up another hour. Miller got misty – '58 would be the show's last season. Too bad they lost touch with each other, but the Big V was acting too crazy, a pariah in the Industry. White and Exley arguing next door – Jack cut to it.

'Miller, is there something you're dying to tell me?'

'I don't know, Jack. It's old rebop.'

'This mess *goes* back. You know Patchett, don't you?'

'How'd you know that?'

'Educated guess. And the captain's file said Patchett bankrolled some old Dieterling films.'

Stanton checked his glass – empty. 'Okay, I know Patchett from way back. It's some story, but I don't see how it applies to what you're interested in.'

Jack heard the side door scrape carpet. 'All I know is that you've been dying to tell me ever since I said the word "Patchett."'

'Damn, I don't feel like a cop around you. I feel like a fat actor about to lose his series.'

Jack looked away – cut the man slack. Stanton said, 'You know I was the chubby kid in Dieterling's serials way back when. Willie Wennerholm, Wee Willie, he was the big star. I used to see Patchett at the studio school, and I knew he was some kind of Dieterling business partner, because our tutor had a crush on him and told all the kids who he was.'

'And?'

'And Wee Willie was kidnapped from the school and chopped up by Dr. Frankenstein. You were the case, it was famous. The police picked up this guy Loren Atherton. They said he killed Willie and all these other children. Jack, this is the hard part.'

'So tell it fast.'

Very fast. 'Mr. Dieterling and Patchett came to me. They gave me tranquilizers and told me I had to come along with this older boy and visit a police station. I was fourteen, the older boy was maybe seventeen. Patchett and Mr. Dieterling coached me, and we went to the station. We talked to Preston Exley, he was a detective back then. We told him just what Patchett and Mr. Dieterling told us to – that we'd seen Atherton prowling around the studio school. We identified Atherton and Exley believed us.'

An actor's pause. Jack said, 'Goddammit, *and*?'

Slower. 'I never saw the older boy again, and I can't even remember his name. Atherton was convicted and executed, and I wasn't asked to testify at his trial. It got to be '39, right in there. I was still in the Dieterling stable, but I was a boy ingenue. Mr. Dieterling had this little studio contingent go out to the opening of the Arroyo Seco Freeway, just a publicity appearance. Preston Exley, he was a big-shot contractor now, and he cut the ribbon. I heard Mr. Dieterling, Patchett and Terry Lux, you know him, talking.'

Pins and needles. 'Miller, come on.'

'I'll never forget what they said, Jack. Patchett told Lux, "I've got the chemicals to keep him from hurting anybody and you plasticked him." Lux said, "And I'll get him a keeper." Mr. Dieterling, I'll never forget the way his voice sounded. He said, "And I gave Preston Exley a scapegoat he believes in beyond Loren Atherton. And I think the man owes me too much now to hurt me."'

Jack touched himself – he thought he'd stopped breathing. Breathing behind him – strained. Eyes on Exley and White in the doorway – up close to each other frozen.

Chapter Seventy-two

NOW ALL HIS lines crossed in ink.

Red ink mutilations. An inkwell spilling blood. Cartoon characters on a marquee with Raymond Dieterling, Preston Exley, an all-star criminal cast. Ink colors: red, green for bribe money. Black for mourning – the dead supporting players. White and Vincennes knew, they'd probably tell Gallaudet – he kicked them out of the hotel knowing it. He could warn his father or not warn his father and the end would be the same. He could keep going or sit in this room and watch his life explode on television.

Long hours down – he couldn't reach for the phone. He turned on the TV, saw his father at a freeway ceremony, stuck his gun in his mouth while the man mouthed platitudes. The trigger half back – fade to a commercial. He emptied four rounds, spun the cylinder, put the barrel to his head. He squeezed the trigger twice, empty chambers, he couldn't believe what he'd done. He threw his piece out the window – a wino grabbed it off the sidewalk, shot up the sky. He laughed, sobbed, punched himself out on the furniture.

More hours down doing nothing.

The phone rang – Ed flailed for it blind. 'Uh . . . yes?'

'Captain, you there? It's Vincennes.'

'I'm here. What is it?'

'I'm at the Bureau with White. We just caught a squeal and grabbed it. 2206 North New Hampshire, Billy Dieterling's house. Billy and an unknown male dead. Fisk rolled on it already. Cap, *are you there*?'

No no no – yes. 'I'm going . . . I'll be there.'

'Will do. And by the way, White and I didn't tell Gallaudet what Stanton said. Thought you should know that.'

'Thank you, Sergeant.'

'Thank White. He's the one you had to worry about.'

Fisk met him there – a mock Tudor lit by headlights – black-and-whites, crime lab cars on the lawn.

Ed ran up; Fisk spoke shorthand. 'Neighbor woman heard screams, waited half an hour and called. She saw a man run out, get into Billy Dieterling's car and take off. He hit a tree down the block, got out and ran. I took a statement. White, male, early forties, average build. Sir, brace yourself.'

Flashbulb pops inside. Ed said, '*Seal it here.* No Homicide, no station cops. No press, and I don't want Dieterling's father to find out. Have Kleckner seal the car and go get me Timmy Valburn. *Find him. Now.*'

'Sir, they blew our tail. I feel bad about this, like it's our fault.'

'It doesn't matter, just do what I told you.'

Fisk ran to his car; Ed walked in, looked.

Billy Dieterling on a white couch soaked red. A knife in his throat; two knives in his stomach. His scalp on the floor, stuck to the carpet with an icepick. A few feet away: a fortyish white man – disemboweled, eviscerated, knives in his cheeks, two kitchen forks in his eyes. Drug capsules soaking in floor blood.

No artful desecrations – his man was past it now.

Ed walked into the kitchen. Patchett to Lux '39: 'I've got the chemicals to keep him from hurting anybody, and you plasticked him.' Cupboards dumped; forks and spoons on the floor. Ray Dieterling '39: 'A scapegoat he believes in.' Bloody footprints in and out – his man made trips for more adornment. Lux: 'I'll get him a keeper.' A scalp section in the sink. 'Preston Exley, he was a big-shot contractor now.' A bloody handprint on the wall, a psycho passion job for Crim 101's all-time list.

Ed squinted at the print – ridges and whirls showed plainly. Psycho oblivion: his man pressed his hand there to leave an imprimatur.

Back to the living room. Trashcan Jack in the middle of a half dozen lab techs. Bad flashbulb glare, no Bud White.

Trash said, 'The other man's Jerry Marsalas. He's a male nurse, and he's sort of the keeper of this guy on the *Badge of Honor* crew. David Mertens, the set designer. Very quiet, he's got epilepsy or something like that.'

'Plastic surgery scars?'

'Graft scars all over his neck and back. I saw him with his shirt off once.'

Tech swarming now – Ed led Vincennes out to the porch. Cool air, bright bright headlights. Trash said, 'Mertens is the right age to be that older kid Stanton was talking about. Lux cut him, so Miller wouldn't have recognized him on the set. All the grafts on his back, he could have been cut lots of times. Jesus, the look on your face. You're taking it all the way?'

'I don't know. I want one more day to see what we can get on Dudley.'

'And see if White tries to shank you. He could have told Gallaudet the whole story, but he didn't.'

'White's as crazy as anybody in this thing.'

Trash laughed. 'Yeah, like you. Boss, if you and Gallaudet want this mess to go to due process, you'd better lock that boy up. He's out to kill Dudley and Deuce, and believe me he'll do it.'

Ed laughed. 'I told him he could.'

'You'd *let him* do – '

Cut him off. 'Jack, do this. Stake Mertens' place and see if you can find White, then – '

'He's chasing down Perkins, how do I – '

'Just try to find him. And with or without him, meet me at Mickey Cohen's house tomorrow at nine. We're going to brace him on Dudley.'

Vincennes looked around. 'I don't see anybody from Homicide here.'

'You and Fisk caught it, so Homicide doesn't know. I can keep it I.A.-sealed for twenty-four hours or so. It's ours until the press gets it.'

'No APB on Mertens?'

'I'll call out half of I.A. He's a drooling psychotic. We'll get him.'

'Suppose I find him. You don't want him talking old times, not with your father part of it.'

'Take him alive. I want to talk to him.'

Vincennes said, 'For crazy, White's got nothing on you.'

Ed sealed it.

He called Chief Parker, told him he had an I.A.-related double homicide and was keeping the victims' identities secret. He woke up five I.A. men, filled them in on David Mertens, sent them out to canvass for him. He made the neighbor lady who called in the squeal take a sedative, go to bed, promise she wouldn't spill the name 'Billy Dieterling' to the press. The press arrived – he mollified them with John Doe IDs, sent them packing. He walked to the end of the block and examined the car – Kleckner watchdogging it – a

Packard Caribbean with the front wheels up on the curb, the fender nosed into a tree. The driver's seat, dash and shift lever – bloody; perfect bloody handprints on the outside of the windshield. Kleckner stripped the license plates; Ed told him to drive the car home, stash it, team up with the searchers. Courtesy calls from a pay phone: the watch commander at Rampart Station, the duty M.E. at the City Morgue. A lie: Parker wanted a twenty-four-hour blanket on the killings – no statements to the press, no autopsy reports circulated. 3:40 A.M., no Homicide brass at the scene – Parker carte-blanched him.

Sealed.

Ed walked back to the house. Quiet – no newsmen, no rubberneckers. Tape outlines – no bodies. Techs dusting, bagging evidence. Fisk in the kitchen doorway – looking nervous. 'Sir, I've got Valburn. Inez Soto's with him. I went down to Laguna on a hunch. You told me Miss Soto knew him.'

'What did Valburn tell you?'

'Nothing. He said he'd only talk to you. I broke it to him, and he cried himself out on the ride up. He said he's ready to make a statement.'

Inez walked out. Grief all over her, her nails chewed bloody. 'I blame you for this. I blame you for pushing Billy to it.'

'I don't know what you mean, but I'm sorry.'

'You had me spy on Raymond. Now you did this.'

Ed stepped toward her. She slapped him, hit him. 'Leave us all alone!'

Fisk grabbed her, eased her outside. Gentle – soft hands, a low voice. Ed walked down the hall looking in rooms.

Valburn in the den, taking pictures off the wall. Bright eyes glazed over, a too-bright voice. 'If I keep doing things I'll be fine.'

A group shot came down. 'I need a full statement.'

'Oh, you'll get one.'

'Menens killed Hudgens, Billy and Marsalas, plus Wee Willie and those other children. I need the why. Timmy, look at me.'

Timmy plucked a framed photo. 'We were together since 1949. We had our little indiscretions, but we always stayed together and loved each other. Don't give me a speech about getting his killer, Ed. I just couldn't bear it. I'll tell you what you want to know, but try not to be déclassé.'

'Timmy – '

Valburn threw the frame at the wall. 'David Mertens, goddamn you!'

Glass shattered. The picture landed face up: Raymond Dieterling holding an inkwell. 'Start with the pornography. Jack Vincennes talked to you about it five years ago, and he thought you were holding back.'

'Is this another third degree?'

'Don't make it one.'

Timmy squared a stack of frames. 'Jerry Marsalas made David create that strange . . . filth. Jerry was a very bad man. He'd been David's companion for years, and he regulated the drugs that kept him . . . relatively normal. Sometimes he'd escalate and de-escalate his dosages and get David to do commercial art piecework, just so he could keep the money. Raymond paid Jerry to look after David. He got David the job at *Badge of Honor* so that Billy could look after him, too – Billy ran the camera crew since the show first went on.'

Ed said, 'Don't get ahead of yourself. Where did Marsalas and Mertens find the posers?'

Timmy hugged his pictures. 'Fleur-de-Lis. Marsalas had used the service for years. He'd buy call girls when he was flush, and he knew lots of Pierce's old string of girls and lots of . . . sexually adventurous people that the girls told him about. He found out that a lot of Fleur-de-Lis customers had a bent for specialty smut, and he talked some of Pierce's old girls into letting him voyeur their sex parties. Jerry took pictures, David took pictures, and Jerry escalated David's drug intake and made him do pasteup work. The ink blood was all David's idea. Jerry hired some studio art director to make finished books out of the pictures and took them to Pierce. Do you follow? I don't know what *you* know.'

Ed got out his notebook. 'Miller Stanton told us some background things. Patchett and Dieterling were partners at the time of the Atherton killings, and you know I make Mertens for them. Just keep going. If I need something clarified, I'll tell you.'

Timmy said, 'All right then. If you don't know it, the ink pictures were similar to the woundings on the Atherton victims. Pierce didn't know it when he saw the books, I guess only policemen saw the evidence photos. He also didn't know that David Mertens was the Wennerholm killer's new identity, so when Marsalas hatched this plan to sell the books and went to Pierce for financing, he just thought it was dirty books that compromised his prostitutes and their customers. He turned Marsalas down on his offer, but he did buy some of the books to sell through Fleur-de-Lis. Then Marsalas went to this man Duke Cathcart, and he went to these people the Englekling brothers. Ed, your Mr. Fisk hinted that all this has to do with the Nite Owl case, but I don't – '

'I'll tell you later. You're talking about early '53, and I'm following you so far. Just keep telling it in order.'

Timmy laid his pictures down. 'Then Patchett went to Sid Hudgens. He and Hudgens were going to be partners in some extortion thing that I don't know anything about, and Pierce told Hudgens about Marsalas and his smut. He'd had Marsalas checked out, and he knew he was a regular on the *Badge of Honor* set, which interested Hudgens, because he had always wanted to do an exposé on the show for *Hush-Hush.* Pierce gave Hudgens a few of the books he'd held back from Fleur-de-Lis, and Hudgens approached Marsalas. He demanded information on the show's stars and threatened Jerry with exposure of his smut dealings if he didn't cooperate. Jerry gave him some tame stuff on Max Peltz, and a little while later it appeared in print. Then Hudgens was murdered, and of course it was Jerry who put David up to it. He lowered his drug dosage and drove him insane. David reverted to his old . . . to the way he killed the children. Marsalas did it because he was afraid Hudgens would keep trying to extort him. He went with David, and he stole Hudgens' *Badge of Honor* files from his house, including an incomplete file Hudgens had on him and David. I don't think he knew that Pierce already had carbons of the files he and Hudgens were going to use for their blackmail thing, or that Pierce knew the bank where Hudgens kept his original files stashed.'

Three key questions coming up; more corroboration first. 'Timmy, when Vincennes questioned you five years ago, you acted suspiciously. Did you know back then that Mertens made the smut?'

'Yes, but I didn't know who David *was.* All I knew was that Billy kept an eye on him, so I kept quiet to Jack.'

Question number one. 'How do you know all this? Everything you've told me.'

Timmy's eyes glazed fresh. 'I found out tonight. After the hotel, Billy wanted that awful policeman's hints about Johnny Stompanato explained. Billy's known most of the story for years, but he wanted to know the rest. We went to Raymond's house in Laguna. Raymond knew about the more recent things from Pierce, and he told Billy the whole story. I just listened.'

'And Inez was there.'

'Yes, she heard it all. She blames you, sweetie. Pandora's box and all that.'

She knew, his father probably knew. Full disclosure as good as public. 'So Patchett supplied the dope that's kept Mertens docile all these years.'

'Yes, he's quite physiologically ill. He gets brain inflammations periodically, and that's when he's most dangerous.'

'And Dieterling got him the job with *Badge of Honor* so Billy could look after him.'

'Yes. After the Hudgens killing Raymond read about the mutilations and thought they sounded like the ones from the old child murders. He contacted Patchett, who he knew was friendly with Hudgens. Raymond revealed David's identity to Pierce, and Pierce became terrified. Raymond was afraid to take David away from Jerry, and he's been paying Jerry extraordinary money to keep David drugged up.'

Key question two. 'You've been waiting for this one, Timmy. Why has Ray Dieterling gone to all this trouble for David?'

Timmy turned a picture around – Billy, a lump-faced man. 'David is Raymond's illegitimate son. He's Billy's half brother, and look at him. Terry Lux has cut him so often that he's so ugly next to my sweet Billy that you almost can't look.'

Moving on grief – Ed cut in before he snapped. 'What happened tonight?'

'Tonight Raymond filled Billy in on everything going back to Sid Hudgens – he didn't know any of it. Billy made me stay with Inez at Laguna. He told me he was going to snatch David from Jerry's house and wean him off the drugs. He must have tried it, and Marsalas must have retaliated. I saw those pills on the floor . . . and oh God David must have just gone insane. He couldn't understand who was good and who was bad and just . . .'

Three. 'At the hotel you reacted to Johnny Stompanato. Why?'

'Stompanato's been blackmailing Pierce's customers for years. He caught me with another man and got part of the Mertens story out of me. Not much, just that Raymond paid for David's upkeep. It . . . it was before I knew very much. Stompanato's been preparing a dossier to bleed Raymond dry. He's been threatening Billy with notes, but I don't think he knows who David is. Billy was trying to convince his father to have him killed.'

Sun broke through a window – it caught Timmy when his tears broke through. He held Billy's picture, a hand over David's face.

Chapter Seventy-three

AN I.A. GOON relieved him at 7:00 – pissed that he was sleeping, slumped in the doorway with his gun out. The house stayed virgin – no blood-crazed David Mertens showed up. The I.A. guy said Mertens was still at large; Captain Exley's orders: meet him and Bud White at Mickey Cohen's place at 9:00. Jack rolled to a pay phone, played a hunch.

A call to the Bureau – Dudley Smith on 'emergency family leave.' Breuning and Carlisle working 'out of state' – the squad lieutenant at 77th the temporary Nite Owl boss. A buzz to the Main Woman's Jail: Deputy Dot Rothstein on 'emergency family leave.' The hunch: they had nothing but theories, Dudley's loose ends were getting snipped.

Jack drove home, shaking off a dream: Davey Goldman's wet-brain ramblings. Make the 'Dutchman' Dean Van Gelder, the 'Irish Cheshire' Dudley. 'Franchise boys got theirs three triggers blip blip blip' – call that the shooters – Stompanato, Vachss, Teitlebaum – taking out hoods. 'Bump bump bump bump bump bump bump cute train' – ??????? Crazy – maybe Patchett's dope was still working some voodoo.

Karen's car was gone. Jack walked in, saw a layout on the coffee table: airplane tickets, a note.

> J. –
>
> Hawaii, and note the date. May IS, the day you become an official pensioner. Ten days and nights to get reacquainted. Dinner tonight. I made reservations at Perino's, and if you're still working call me so I can cancel.
>
> xxxxx K.
>
> P.S. I know you're wondering, so I'll tell you. When you were at the hospital you talked in your sleep. Jack, I know the worst I can possibly know and I don't care. We never have to discuss it. Capt. Exley heard you and I don't think he cares either. (He's not as bad as you said he was.)
>
> Many X's
> K.

Jack tried to cry – no go. He shaved, showered, put on slacks and his best sports jacket – over a Hawaiian shirt. He drove to Brentwood thinking everything around him looked new.

Exley on the sidewalk, holding a tape recorder. Bud White on the porch – I.A. must have found him. Jack made it a threesome.

White walked over. Exley said, ‘I just spoke to Gallaudet. He said without hard evidence we can’t go to Loew. Mertens and Perkins are still out there, and Stompanato’s in Mexico with Lana Turner. If Mickey doesn’t give us anything good, then I’m going directly to Parker. Full disclosure on Dudley.’

From the doorway: ‘Are you coming in or aren’t you? You want to give me grief, give me indoor grief.’

Mickey Cohen in a robe and Jew beanie. ‘Last call to give grief! Are you coming?’

They walked up. Cohen closed the door, pointed to a small gold coffin. ‘My late canine heir, Mickey Cohen, Jr. Distract me from my real grief, you goyisher cop fucks. The service is today at Mount Sinai. I bribed the rabbi to give my beloved a human sendoff. The shmendriks at the mortuary think they’re burying a midget. Talk to me.’

Exley talked. ‘We came to tell you who’s been killing your franchise people.’

‘What “franchise people”? Continue in this vein and I shall have to stand on the Fifth Amendment. And what is that tape doohickey you’re holding?’

‘Johnny Stompanato, Lee Vachss and Abe Teitlebaum. They’re part of a gang, and they got the heroin you lost at your meeting with Jack Dragna back in ’50. They’ve been killing your franchise people, and they tried to have you and Davey Goldman killed at McNeil. They bombed your house and didn’t get you, but sooner or later they will.’

Cohen laughed outright. ‘Granted, those old pals have been vacant from my life and are not amenable to rejoining me. But they do not have the intelligence to fuck with the Mickster and succeed.’

White: ‘Davey Goldman was working with them. They crossed him when they tried to clip you two at McNeil.’

Mickey Cohen, livid. ‘No! Never in six thousand millenniums would Davey do that to me! Never! Sedition in the same league as Communism you are talking!’

Jack said, ‘We got proof. Davey had your cell bugged. That’s how word on the Englekling brothers and who knows what else got out.’

'Lies! Combine Davey with the others and you still do not have the voltage to fuck with me!'

Exley futzed with the recorder – tape spun. Whirr, whirr, 'My God to be so nimble and so hung, like Heifetz on the fiddle with his shlong that dog is, and hung like – '

Cohen hit the roof. 'No! No! No man on earth is capable of shtupping me like that!'

Exley pushed buttons. Start – 'Lana, what a snatch she must have' – stop, start – a card game, a toilet flushing. Mickey kicked the coffin. 'All right! I believe you!'

Jack: 'Now you know why Davey wouldn't let you put him in a rest home.'

Cohen wiped his face with his beanie. 'Not even Hitler is capable of such things. Who could be so brainy and so ruthless?'

White said, 'Dudley Smith.'

'Oh, Jesus Christ. Him I could believe. No . . . tell me in full view of my late beloved you are joking.'

'An LAPD captain? This is for real, Mick.'

'No, this I don't believe. Give me proof, give me evidence.'

Exley said, 'Mickey, you give *us* some.'

Cohen sat down on the coffin. 'I think I know who tried to clip me and Davey in the pen. Coleman Stein, George Magdaleno and Sal Bonventre. They're en route to San Quentin, a pickup chain from other jails. When they land, you could talk to them, ask them who put out the bid on me and Davey. I was going to clip them, but I couldn't get a good rate, such gonifs these jailhouse killers are.'

Exley packed up his tape kit. 'Thanks. When the bus gets in, we'll be there.'

Cohen moaned. White said, 'Kleckner left me a memo. Kikey and Lee Vachss are supposed to be meeting at the deli this morning. I say we brace them.'

Exley said, 'Let's do it.'

Chapter Seventy-four

ABE'S NOSHERY: THE tables full, Kikey T. at the cash register. White pressed up to the window. 'Lee Vachss at a table on the right.' Ed put a hand on his holster – empty – his suicide play. Trashcan opened the door.

Chimes. Kikey glanced over, reached under the register. Ed saw Vachss make heat, make like he was smoothing his trousers. Metal flashing waist-high.

People ate, talked. Waitresses circulated. Trash walked toward the register; White eyeballed Vachss. Metal flashed: under the table coming up.

Ed pulled White to the floor.

Kikey and Vincennes drew down.

Crossfire – six shots – the window went out, Kikey hit a stack of canned goods. Screams, panic runs, blind shots – Vachss firing wild toward the door. An old man went down coughing blood; White stood up shooting, a moving target – Vachss weaving back toward the kitchen. A spare on White's waistband – Ed stumbled up, grabbed it.

Two triggers on Vachss. Ed fired – Vachss spun around grabbing his shoulder. White fired wide; Vachss tripped, crawled, stood up – his gun to a waitress' head.

White walked toward him. Vincennes circled left; Ed circled right. Vachss blew the woman's brains out point-blank.

White fired. Vincennes fired. Ed fired. No hits – the woman's body took their shots. Vachss inched backward. White ran up; Vachss wiped brains off his face. White emptied his gun – all head shots.

Screams, a stampede to the door, a man bucking glass shards out the window. Ed ran to the counter, bolted it.

Kikey on the floor, blood gouting from chest wounds. Ed got right up in his face. 'Give me Dudley. Give me Dudley for the Nite Owl.'

Sirens loud. Ed cupped an ear, bent down.

'Grand. Begorra, lad.'

Down closer. 'Who took out the Nite Owl?'

Blood gurgles. 'Me. Lee. Johnny Stomp. Deuce drove.'

'*Abe, give me Dudley.*'

'Grand, lad.'

Sirens brutal loud. Shouts, footsteps. 'The Nite Owl. *Why*?'

Kikey coughed blood. 'Dope. Picture books. Cathcart had go. Lunceford on posse what got dope and hung out Nite Owl. F.I.'s on Stomp so Deucey stole. Man said scare Patchett. Two birds one stone Duke and Mal. Mal wanted money 'cause he knew man on posse.'

'Give me Dudley. Say Dudley Smith was your partner.'

Vincennes squatted down. The restaurant boomed: millions of voices. Blood on the counter – Ed thought of David Mertens. A flash – the Dieterling studio school – a mile from Billy D.'s house. 'Abe, he can't hurt you now.'

Kikey started choking.

'Abe – '

'Can too hurt can too.'

Fading – Trash slammed his chest. 'You fuck, give us something!'

Kikey mumbled, pulled a gold star off his neck. 'Mitzvah. Johnny wants jail guys out. Q train. Dot got guns.'

Vincennes, looking crazed. 'It's a train, not a bus. It's a crash-out. Davey G. knew about it, he was rambling. Exley, the cute train, the *Q train.* Cohen said the guys from the jail bid are on it.'

Ed grabbed at it, caught it. 'YOU CALL.'

Trash ran out. Ed stood up, breathed chaos: cops, shattered glass, an ambulance backed through the window loading bodies. Bud White shouting orders, a little girl in a blood-spattered dress eating a doughnut.

Trash came back – more crazed. 'The train left L.A. ten minutes ago. Thirty-two inmates in one car, and the phone on board's out. I called Kleckner and told him to find Dot Rothstein. This was a set-up, Captain. Kleckner never left White that memo – this had to be Dudley.'

Ed shut his eyes.

'Exley – '

'All right, you and White go to the train. I'll call the Sheriffs and Highway Patrol and have them set up a diversion.'

White walked over, winked at Ed. He said, 'Thanks for the push,' stepped on Kikey T.'s face until he quit breathing.

Chapter Seventy-five

A MOTORCYCLE ESCORT met them, shot them out the Pomona Freeway. Half the stretch elevated: you could see the California Central tracks, a single train running north – a freight carrier, inmate cargo in the third car – barred windows, steel-reinforced doors. Surface streets outside Fontana – up to hills abutting the tracks – and a small standing army.

Nine prowl cars, sixteen men with gas masks and riot pumps. Sharpshooters in the hills, two machinegunners, three guys with smoke grenades. At the edge of the curve: a big buck deer on the tracks.

A deputy handed them shotguns, gas masks. 'Your pal Kleckner called the command post, said that Rothstein woman was DOA at her apartment. She either hanged herself or somebody hanged her. Either way, we gotta assume she got the guns on. There's four guards and six crewmen on board that train. We stand ready with smoke and call for the password – every prison chain's got one. We hear the okay, we call a warning and wait. No okay, we go in.'

A train whistle blew. Somebody yelled, 'Now!'

The sharpshooters ducked down. The gas men hugged the ground. The fire team ran behind a pine row – Bud found a tree up close. Jack took a spot beside him.

The train made the curve – brakes caught, sparks on the tracks. The engine car stopped – nose up to the obstruction.

Megaphone: 'Sheriffs! Identify yourself with the password!'

Silence – ten seconds' worth. Bud eyeballed the engine car window – blue denim flashed.

'Sheriffs! Identify yourself with the password!'

Silence – then a fake bird call.

The gas men hit the windows – grenades broke glass, slipped between the bars. Tommygunners charged car 3 – full clips took down the door.

Smoke, screams.

Somebody yelled, 'Now!'

Smoke out the door – men in khaki running through it. A sharpshooter picked one off; somebody yelled, ‘No, they’re ours!’

Cops swarmed the car – masks on, shotguns up. Jack grabbed Bud. ‘They’re not in that one!’

Bud ran, hit the car 4 platform. Open the door – a dead guard just inside, inmates running helter-skelter.

Bud fired, pumped, fired – three went down, one aimed a handgun. Bud pumped, fired, missed – a crate beside the man exploded. Jack jumped on the platform – the inmate squeezed a shot. Jack caught it in the face, spun, hit the tracks.

The shooter ran. Bud pumped, hit empty. He dropped his shotgun, pulled his .38 – one, two, three, four, five, six shots – hits in the back, he was killing a dead man. Noise outside the car – convicts on the tracks by Trashcan’s body. Deputies behind them firing close – buckshot and blood, black/red air.

A smoke bomb exploded – Bud ran into #5 gagging. Gunfire: white guys in denim shooting colored guys in denim, guards in khaki shooting both of them. He jumped the train, ran for the trees.

Bodies on the tracks.

Convicts picked off sitting duck-style.

Bud hit the pines, hit his car, gunned it over the tracks dragging the axles. Into a gully, fishtailing down, tires sliding on gravel. A tall man standing by a car. Bud saw who he was, aimed straight for him.

The man ran. Bud sideswiped the car, skidded to a stop. He got out – groggy, bloody from a crack on the dash. Deuce Perkins walked up shooting.

Bud caught one in the leg, one in the side. Two misses, a hit in the shoulder. Another miss – Perkins dropped the gun, pulled a knife. Bud saw rings on his fingers.

Deuce stabbed. Bud felt his chest rip, tried to make fists, couldn’t. Deuce lowered his face, smirked – Bud kneed him in the balls and bit his nose off. Perkins shrieked; Bud bit into his arm, threw his weight down.

They tumbled. Perkins made animal noises. Bud thrashed his head, felt the arm rip out of its socket.

Deuce dropped the knife. Bud picked it up – blinded by rings that killed women. He dropped the knife, beat Perkins to death with his own two wounded hands.

Chapter Seventy-six

THE PATCHETT ESTATE in ruins – two acres of soot, debris. Shingles on the lawn, a scorched palm tree in the pool. The house itself rubble – collapsed stucco, soaked ashes. Find a booby-trapped safe inside a six-trillion-square-inch perimeter.

Ed kicked through the rubble. David Mertens hovered – he had to be *there*, it was just too right.

The floor collapsed into the foundation blocks – timber to be cleared away. Wood heaps, mounds of sodden fabric – no telltale metal glints. A ten-man/one-week job, a tech for the booby trap. Around to the yard.

A cement back porch – a slab with fried furniture. Solid cement – no cracks, no grooves, no obvious access to a safe hole. The pool house another rubble heap.

Wood three feet high – too much work if Mertens was *there.* Circuit the pool – burned chairs, a diving platform. A handgrenade pin floating in the water.

Ed kicked the floating palm tree. Porcelain chips in the fronds; a piece of shrapnel embedded in the trunk. Down prone, squinting: capsules in the water, black squares that looked like detonator caps. The shallow end steps exploded plaster – metal grids showing, more pills. Check the lawn – extra-scorched grass running from the pool to the house.

Access to the safe. Grenade and dynamite safeguards. Flames shooting to the terminus, defusing the booby trap – just maybe.

Ed jumped in the water, tore at the plaster – pills and bubbles broke to the surface. Two-handed rips – plaster, water, bubbles, a swinging metal door. Pill eruptions, folders under plastic, plastic over cash and white powder. Loads and. loads and loads – then nothing but a deep black hole. Sopping-wet runs to his car – the sun beat down – he was almost dry when he got the stash loaded. One last trip in case HE was THERE: pills scooped from the deep end.

The car heater warmed him up. He drove to the Dieterling school, bolted the fence.

Quiet – Saturday – no classes. A typical playground – basketball hoops, softball diamonds. Moochie Mouse on everything – backboards to base markers.

Ed walked to the south fence perimeter – the closest route from Billy Dieterling's house. Gristled skin on chain links – handholds up and over. Dark dots on faded asphalt – blood, an easy trail.

Across the playground, down steps to a boiler room door. Blood on the knob, a light on inside. He took out Bud White's spare, walked in.

David Mertens shivering in a corner. A hot room – the man sweating up bloody clothes. He showed his teeth, twisted his mouth into a screech. Ed threw the pills at him.

He grabbed them, gagged them down. Ed aimed at his mouth, couldn't pull the trigger. Mertens stared at him. Something strange happened with time – it left them alone. Mertens fell asleep, his lips curled over his gums. Ed looked at his face, tried for some outrage. He still couldn't kill him.

Time came back: the wrong way. Trials, sanity hearings, Preston Exley reviled for letting this monster go free. Time hard on the trigger – he still couldn't do it.

Ed picked the man up, carried him out to his car.

Pacific Sanitarium – Malibu Canyon. Ed told the gate guard to send down Dr. Lux – Captain Exley wanted to pay back his favor.

The guard pointed him to a space. Ed parked, ripped off Mertens' shirt. Brutal – the man was one huge scar.

Lux headed over. Ed pulled out two bags of powder, two stacks of thousand-dollar bills. He placed them on the hood, rolled down the rear windows.

Lux walked up, checked the back seat. 'I know that work. That's Douglas Dieterling.'

'Just like that?'

Lux tapped the powder. 'The late Pierce Patchett's? Let's not be outraged, Captain. The last I heard you were no Cub Scout. And what is it that you wish?'

'That man taken care of on a locked ward for the rest of his life.'

'I find that acceptable. Is this compassion or the desire to spare our future governor's reputation?'

'I don't know.'

'Not a typical Exley answer. Enjoy the grounds, Captain. I'll have my orderlies clean up here.'

Ed walked to a terrace, looked at the ocean. Sun, waves – maybe some sharks out feeding. A radio snapped on behind him. ' . . . so for more on that thwarted prison train break. A Highway Patrol spokesman told reporters that the death toll now stands at twenty-eight inmates, seven guards and crew members. Four deputy sheriffs were injured and Sergeant John Vincennes, celebrated Los Angeles policeman and the former technical advisor to the *Badge of Honor* TV show, was shot and killed. Sergeant Vincennes' partner, LAPD Sergeant Wendell White, is in critical condition at Fontana General Hospital. White pursued and killed the crash-out's pickup man, identified as Burt Arthur "Deuce" Perkins, a nightclub entertainer with underworld connections. A team of doctors are now striving to save the valiant officer's life, although he is not expected to live. Captain George Rachlis of the California Highway Patrol calls this tragedy – '

The ocean blurred through his tears. White winked and said, 'Thanks for the push.' Ed turned around. The monster, the dope, the money – gone.

Chapter Seventy-seven

THE POOL STASH: twenty-one pounds of heroin, $871,400, carbons of Sid Hudgens' dirt files. Included: blackmail photos, records of Pierce Patchett's criminal enterprises. The name 'Dudley Smith' did not appear – nor did the names of John Stompanato, Burt Arthur Perkins, Abe Teitlebaum, Lee Vachss, Dot Rothstein, Sergeant Mike Breuning, Officer Dick Carlisle. Coleman Stein, Sal Bonventre, George Magdaleno – killed in the crash-out. Davey Goldman reinterviewed at Camarillo State Hospital – he could not give a coherent statement. The Los Angeles County Coroner's Office ruled Dot Rothstein's death a suicide. David Mertens stayed in locked-ward custody at Pacific Sanitarium. Relatives of the three innocent citizens killed at Abe's Noshery brought suit against the LAPD for reckless endangerment. The crash-out received national news coverage, was labeled the 'Blue Denim Massacre.' Surviving inmates told sheriff's detectives that squabbling among the armed prisoners resulted in guns changing hands – soon every inmate on the train was free. Racial tensions flared up, aborting the crash-out before the authorities arrived.

Jack Vincennes was posthumously awarded the LAPD's Medal of Valor. No LAPD men were invited to the funeral – the widow refused an audience with Captain Ed Exley.

Bud White refused to die. He remained in intensive care at Fontana General Hospital. He survived massive shock, neurological trauma, the loss of over half the blood in his body. Lynn Bracken stayed with him. He could not speak, but responded to questions with nods. Chief Parker presented him with his Medal of Valor. White freed an arm from a traction sling, threw the medal in his face.

Ten days passed.

A warehouse in San Pedro burned to the ground – remnants of pornographic books were discovered. Detectives labeled the fire 'professional arson,' reponed no leads. The building was owned by Pierce Patchett. Chester Yorkin and Lorraine Malvasi were reinterrogated. They offered no salient information, were released from custody.

Ed Exley burned the heroin, kept the files and the money. His final Nite Owl report omitted mention of Dudley Smith and the fact that David Mertens, now the object of an all-points bulletin for his murders of Sid Hudgens, Billy Dieterling and Jerry Marsalas, was also the 1934 slayer of Wee Willie Wennerholm and five other children. Preston Exley's name was not spoken in any context.

Chief Parker held a press conference. He announced that the Nite Owl case had been solved – correctly this time. The gunmen were Burt Arthur 'Deuce' Perkins, Lee Vachss, Abraham 'Kikey' Teitlebaum – their motive to kill Dean Van Gelder, an ex-convict masquerading as the incorrectly identified Delbert 'Duke' Cathcart. The shootings were conceived as a terror tactic, an attempt to take over the vice kingdom of Pierce Morehouse Patchett, a recent murder victim himself. The State Attorney General's Office reviewed Captain Ed Exley's 114-page case summary and announced that it was satisfied. Ed Exley again received credit for breaking the Nite Owl murder case. He was promoted to inspector in a televised ceremony.

The next day Preston Exley announced that he would seek the Republican Party's gubernatorial nomination. He shot to the front of a hastily conducted poll.

Johnny Stompanato returned from Acapulco, moved into Lana Turner's house in Beverly Hills. He remained there, never venturing outside, the object of a constant surveillance supervised by Sergeants Duane Fisk and Don Kleckner. Chief Parker and Ed Exley referred to him as their Nite Owl 'Addendum' – the living perpetrator to feed the public now that they were temporarily mollified with dead killers. When Stompanato left Beverly Hills for Los Angeles City proper, he would be arrested. Parker wanted a clean front-page arrest just over the city line – he was willing to wait for it.

The Nite Owl case and the murders of Billy Dieterling and Jerry Marsalas remained news. They were never speculatively connected. Timmy Valburn refused to comment. Raymond Dieterling issued a press release expressing grief over the loss of his son. He closed down Dream-a-Dreamland for a one-month period of mourning. He remained in seclusion at his house in Laguna Beach, attended to by his friend and aide Inez Soto.

Sergeant Mike Breuning and Officer Dick Carlisle remained on emergency leave.

Captain Dudley Smith remained front stage center throughout the post-reopening round of press conferences and LAPD/D.A.'s Office meetings. He served as toast-master at Thad Green's surprise party honoring Inspector Ed Exley. He did not appear in any way flustered knowing that Johnny Stompanato remained at large, was under twenty-four-hour surveillance and thus immune to assassination. He did not seem to care that Stompanato would be arrested in the near future.

Preston Exley, Raymond Dieterling and Inez Soto did not contact Ed Exley to congratulate him on his promotion and reversal of bad press.

Ed knew they knew. He assumed Dudley knew. Vincennes dead, White fighting to live. Only he and Bob Gallaudet knew – and Gallaudet knew nothing pertaining to his father and the Atherton case.

Ed wanted to kill Dudley outright.

Gallaudet said, kill yourself instead, that's what you'd be doing.

They decided to wait it out, do it right.

Bud White made the wait unbearable.

He had tubes in his arms, splints on his fingers. His chest held three hundred stitches. Bullets had shattered bones, ripped arteries. He had a plate in his head. Lynn Bracken tended to him – she could not meet Ed's eyes. White could not talk – being able to talk in the future was doubtful. His eyes were eloquent: Dudley. Your father. What are you going to do about it? He kept trying to make the V-for-victory sign. Three visits, Ed finally got it: the Victory Motel, Mobster Squad HQ.

He went there. He found detailed notes on White's prostitute-killing investigation. The notes were a limited man reaching for the stars, pulling most of them down. Limits exceeded through a brilliantly persistent rage. Absolute justice – anonymous, no rank and glory. A single line on the Englekling brothers that told him their killer still walked free. Room 11 at the Victory Motel – Wendell 'Bud' White seen for the first time.

Ed knew why he sent him there – and followed up.

A phone company check, one interview – all it took. Confirmation, an epigraph to build on it: Absolute Justice. The TV news said Ray Dieterling walked through Dream-a-Dreamland every day – easing his grief in a deserted fantasy kingdom. He'd give Bud White a full day of his justice.

Good Friday, 1958. The A.M. news showed Preston Exley entering St. James Episcopal Church. Ed drove to City Hall, walked up to Ellis Loew's office.

Still early – no receptionist. Loew at his desk, reading. Ed rapped on the door.

Loew glanced up. 'Inspector Ed. Have a chair.'

'I'll stand.'

'Oh? Is this business?'

'Of sorts. Last month Bud White called you from San Francisco and told you Spade Cooley was a sex killer. You said you'd put a D.A.'s Bureau team on it, and you didn't. Cooley has donated in excess of fifteen thousand dollars to your slush fund. You called the Biltmore Hotel from your place in Newport and talked to a member of Cooley's band. You told him to warn Spade and the rest of the guys that a crazy cop was going to come around and cause trouble. White braced Deuce Perkins, the real killer. Perkins sent him after Spade, he probably thought he'd kill him and save him from the rap. Perkins was warned by you and went into hiding. He stayed out long enough to turn White into a vegetable.'

Loew, calm. 'You can't prove any of that. And since when are you so concerned about White?'

Ed laid a folder on his desk. 'Sid Hudgens had a file on you. Contribution shakedowns, felony indictments you dismissed for money. He's got the McPherson tank job documented, and Pierce Patchett had a photograph of you sucking a male prostitute's dick. Resign from office or it all goes public.'

Loew – sheet white. 'I'll take you with me.'

'Do it. I'd enjoy the ride.'

He saw it from the freeway: Rocketland and Paul's World juxtaposed – a spaceship growing out of a mountain, a big empty parking lot. He took surface streets to the gate, showed the guard his shield. The man nodded, swung the fence open.

Two figures strolled the Grand Promenade. Ed parked, walked up to them. Dream-a-Dreamland stood hear-a-pin-drop silent.

Inez saw him – a pivot, a hand on Dieterling's arm. They whispered; Inez walked off.

Dieterling turned. ‘Inspector.’

‘Mr. Dieterling.’

‘It’s Ray. And I’m tempted to say what took you so long.’

‘You knew I’d be coming?’

‘Yes. Your father disagreed and went on with his plans, but I knew better. And I’m grateful for the chance to tell it here.’

Paul’s World across from them – fake snow near blinding. Dieterling said, ‘Your father, Pierce and I were dreamers. Pierce’s dreams were twisted, mine were kind and good. Your father’s dreams were ruthless – as I suspect yours are. You should know that before you judge me.’

Ed leaned against a rail, settled in. Dieterling spoke to his mountain.

1920.

His first wife, Margaret, died in an automobile accident – she bore his son Paul. 1924 – his second wife, Janice, gave birth to son Billy. While married to Margaret, he had an affair with a disturbed woman named Faye Borchard. She gave him son Douglas in 1917. He gave her money to keep the boy’s existence secret – he was a rising young filmmaker, wished a life free of complications, was willing to pay for it. Only he and Faye knew the facts of Douglas’ parentage. Douglas knew Ray Dieterling as a kindly friend.

Douglas grew up with his mother; Dieterling visited frequently, a two-family life: wife Margaret dead, sons Paul and Billy ensconced with himself and wife Janice – a sad woman who went on to divorce him.

Faye Borchard drank laudanum. She made Douglas watch pornographic cartoons that Raymond made for money, part of a Pierce Patchett scheme – cash to finance their legitimate dealings. The films were erotic, horrific – they featured flying monsters that raped and killed. The concept was Patchett’s – he put his narcotic fantasies on paper, handed Ray Dieterling an inkwell. Douglas became obsessed with flight and its sexual possibilities.

Dieterling loved his son Douglas – despite his rages and fits of strange behavior. He despised his son Paul – who was petty, tyrannical, stupid. Douglas and Paul greatly resembled each other.

Ray Dieterling grew famous; Douglas Borchard grew wild. He lived with Faye, watched his father’s cartoon nightmares – birds plucking children out of schoolyards – Patchett fantasies painted on film. He grew into his teens stealing, torturing animals, hiding out in skid row strip shows. He met Loren Atherton on the row – that evil man found an accomplice.

Atherton's obsession was dismemberment; Douglas' obsession was flight. They shared an interest in photography, were sexually aroused by children. They spawned the idea of creating children to their own specifications.

They began killing and building hybrid children, photographing their works in progress. Douglas killed birds to provide wings for their creations. They needed a beautiful face; Douglas suggested Wee Willie Wennerholm's – it would be a kindly nod to kindly 'Uncle Ray' – whose early work he found so exciting. They snatched Wee Willie, butchered him.

The newspapers called the child killer 'Dr. Frankenstein' – it was assumed there was only one assailant. Inspector Preston Exley commanded the police investigation. He learned of Loren Atherton, a paroled child molester. He arrested Atherton, discovered his storage garage abattoir, his collection of photographs. Atherton confessed to the crimes, said that they were his work solely, did not implicate Douglas and stated his desire to die as the King of Death. The press lauded Inspector Exley, echoed his appeal: citizens with information on Atherton were asked to come forth as witnesses.

Ray Dieterling visited Douglas. Alone in his room, he discovered a trunk full of slaughtered birds, a child's fingers packed in dry ice. He *knew* immediately.

And felt responsible – his quick-buck obscenities had created a monster. He confronted Douglas, learned that he might have been seen at the school near the time Wee Willie was kidnapped.

Protective measures:

A psychiatrist bribed to silence diagnosed Douglas: a psychotic personality, his disorder compounded by chemical brain imbalances. Remedy: the proper drugs applied for life to keep him docile. Ray Dieterling was friends with Pierce Patchett – a chemist who dabbled in such drugs. Pierce for inner protection – Pierce's friend Terry Lux for the outer.

Lux cut Douglas a whole new face. Atherton's lawyer stalled the trial. Preston Exley kept looking for witnesses – a well-publicized search. Ray Dieterling treaded panic – then formed a bold plan.

He fed drugs to Douglas and young Miller Stanton. He coached them to say they saw Loren Atherton, *alone*, kidnap Wee Willie Wennerholm – they were afraid to come forth until now – afraid Dr.

Frankenstein would get them. The boys told Preston Exley their story; he believed them; they identified the monster. Atherton did not recognize his surgically altered friend.

Two years passed. Loren Atherton was tried, convicted, executed. Terry Lux cut Douglas again – destroying his resemblance to the witness boy. Douglas lived in Pierce Patchett sedation, a room at a private hospital – guarded by male nurses. Ray Dieterling became even more successful. Then Preston Exley knocked on his door.

His news: a young girl, older now, had come forth. She had seen Dieterling's son Paul with Loren Atherton – at the school the day Wee Willie was kidnapped.

Dieterling knew it was really Douglas – his resemblance to Paul was that strong. He offered Exley a large amount of money to desist. Exley took the money – then attempted to return it. He said, 'Justice. I want to arrest the boy.'

Dieterling saw his empire ruined. He saw the petty and mindless Paul exonerated. He saw Douglas somehow captured – destroyed for the grief his art had spawned. He insisted that Exley keep the money – Exley did not protest. He asked him if there was no other way.

Exley asked him if Paul was guilty.

Raymond Dieterling said, 'Yes.'

Preston Exley said, 'Execution.'

Raymond Dieterling agreed.

He took Paul camping in the Sierra Nevada. Preston Exley was waiting. They dosed the boy's food; Exley shot him in his sleep and buried him. The world thought Paul was lost in an avalanche – the world believed the lie. Dieterling thought he would hate the man. The price of justice on his face told him he was just another victim. They shared a bond now. Preston Exley gave up police work to build buildings with Dieterling seed money. When Thomas Exley was killed, Ray Dieterling was the first one he called. Together they built from the weight of their dead.

Dieterling ended it. 'And all of this is my rather pathetic happy ending.'

Mountains, rockets, rivers – they all seemed to smile. 'My father never knew about Douglas? He really thought Paul was guilty?'

'Yes. Will you forgive me? In your father's name.'

Ed took out a clasp. Gold oak-leafs – Preston Exley's inspector's insignia. A hand-me-down – Thomas got it first. ‘No. I’m going to submit a report to the county grand jury requesting that you be indicted for the murder of your son.’

‘A week to get my affairs in order? Where could I run to, someone as famous as I am.’

Ed said, ‘Yes,’ walked to his car.

The freeway model gone – replaced by campaign posters. Art De Spain unpacking leaflets, no arm bandage – a textbook bullet scar. ‘Hello, Eddie.’

‘Where’s Father?’

‘He’ll be back soon. And congratulations on inspector. I should have called you, but things have been hectic around here.’

‘Father hasn’t called me either. You’re all pretending everything’s fine.’

‘Eddie . . .’

A bulge on Art’s left hip – he still carried a piece. ‘I just spoke to Ray Dieterling.’

‘We didn’t think you would.’

‘Give me your gun, An.’

De Spain handed it over butt first. Silencer threads, S&W.38s.

‘Why?’

‘Eddie . . .’

Ed dumped the shells. ‘Dieterling told me everything. And you were Father’s exec back then.’

The man looked proud. ‘You know my M.O., Sunny Jim. It was for Preston. I’ve always been his loyal adjutant.’

‘And you knew about Paul Dieterling.’

De Spain took his gun back. ‘Yes, and I’ve known for years that he wasn’t the real killer. I got a tip back in ’48 or so. It placed the kid somewhere else at the time of the Wennerholm snatch. I didn’t know if Ray gave Paul over legitimately or not, and I couldn’t break Preston’s heart by telling him he killed an innocent boy. I couldn’t upset his friendship with Ray – it just would have hurt him too much. You know how the Atherton case has always driven me. I’ve always had to know who killed those kids.’

‘And you never found out.’

De Spain shook his head. ‘No.’

Ed said, ‘Get to the Englekling brothers.’

Art picked up a poster: Preston backdropped by building grids. ‘I was visiting the Bureau. I know it was ’53, right in there. I saw these pictures on the Ad Vice board. Nice-looking kids, like a stag-shot daisy chain. The design reminded me of the pictures Loren Atherton took, and I knew that just Preston and I and a few other officers had seen them. I tried to track down the pictures and didn’t get anywhere. A while later I heard how the Englekling brothers gave that smut testimony for the Nite Owl investigation, but you didn’t follow up on it. I figured they were a lead, but I couldn’t find them. Late last year I got a tip that they were working at this printshop up near Frisco. I went up to talk to them. All I wanted was to find out who made that smut.’

White’s notes: God-awful torture. ‘Just to talk to them? I *know* what happened there.’

Awful pride glaring. ‘They took it for a shakedown. It went bad. They had some old smut negatives, and I tried to get them to ID the people. They had some heroin and some antipsychotic drugs. They said they knew a sugar daddy who was going to push some horse blend that would set the world on fire, but they could do better. They laughed at me, called me “pops.” I got this notion that they had to know who made that smut. I don’t know . . . I know I went crazy. I think I thought they killed all those children. I think I thought they’d hurt Preston somehow. Eddie, they *laughed* at me. I figured they were dope pushers, I figured next to Preston they were nothing. And this old man took them both out.’

He’d fretted the poster to shreds. ‘You killed two men for nothing.’

‘Not for nothing. For Preston. And I beg you not to tell him.’

‘Just another victim’ – maybe the victim that justice lets slide.

‘Eddie, he can’t know. And he can’t know that Paul Dieterling was innocent. Eddie, please.’

Ed pushed him aside, walked through the house. His mother’s tapestries made him think of Lynn. His old room made him think of Bud and Jack. The house felt filthy – bad money bought and paid for. He walked downstairs, saw his father in the doorway.

‘Edmund?’

‘I’m arresting you for the murder of Paul Dieterling. I’ll be by in a few days to take you in.’

The man did not budge an inch. ‘Paul Dieterling was a psychopathic killer who richly deserved the punishment I gave him.’

‘He was innocent. And it’s Murder One either way.’

Not one flicker of remorse. Unbudging, unyielding, unflinching, intractable rectitude. ‘Edmund, you’re quite disturbed at this moment.’

Ed walked past him. His goodbye: ‘Goddamn you for the bad things you made me.’

Downtown to the Dining Car: a bright place full of nice people. Gallaudet at the bar, sipping a martini. ‘Bad news on Dudley. You don’t want to hear this.’

‘It can’t be any worse than some other things I’ve heard today.’

‘Yeah? Well, Dudley’s scot-free. Lana Turner’s daughter just knifed Johnny Stompanato. D.O. fucking A. Fisk was staked out across the street and saw the meat wagon and the Beverly Hills P.D. take Johnny away. No Dudley witness, no Dudley evidence. Grand, lad.’

Ed grabbed the martini, killed it. ‘Fuck Dudley sideways. I’ve got a shitload of Patchett’s money for a bankroll, and I’ll burn down that Irish cocksucker if it’s the last fucking thing I ever do. *Lad.*’

Gallaudet laughed. ‘May I make an observation, Inspector?’

‘Sure.’

‘You sound more like Bud White every day.’

CALENDAR

APRIL 1958

EXTRACT: L.A. *Times*, April 12:

GRAND JURY REVIEWS NITE OWL EVIDENCE; DECLARES CASE CLOSED

Almost five years to the day after the crime, the City and County of Los Angeles bid official farewell to the Southland’s ‘Crime of the Century,’ the infamous Nite Owl murder case.

On April 16, 1953, three gunmen entered the Nite Owl Coffee Shop on Hollywood Boulevard and shot-gunned three employees and three patrons to death. Robbery was the assumed motive, and suspicion soon fell on three Negro youths, who were arrested on suspicion of the crime. The three: Raymond Coates, Tyrone Jones and Leroy Fontaine, escaped from jail and were killed resisting arrest. The three allegedly confessed to District Attorney Ellis Loew prior to their escape, and the case was assumed to have been solved.

Four years and ten months later, a San Quentin inmate, Otis John Shortell, came forward with information that led many to believe that the three youths were innocent of the Nite Owl killings. Shortell said that he was in the presence of Coates, Jones and Fontaine while they were engaged in the gang rape of a young woman, at the exact time of the coffee shop slaughter.

Shortell’s testimony, verified by lie detector tests, created a public clamor to reopen the case.

The clamor was fanned by the February 25 murders of Peter and Baxter Englekling. The brothers, convicted narcotics traffickers, were material witnesses to the 1953 Nite Owl investigation and asserted at that time that the killings originated from a web of intrigue involving pornography. The Englekling killings remain unsolved. In the words of Marin County Sheriffs Lieutenant Eugene Hatcher, ‘No leads at all. But we’re still trying.’

The Nite Owl case was reopened, and an involved pornography link was revealed. On March 27, wealthy investor Pierce Morehouse Patchett was shot and killed at his Brentwood home, and two days later police shot and killed Abraham Teitlebaum, 49, and Lee Peter Vachss, 44, his assumed slayers. Later that day the infamous ‘Blue Denim Massacre’ occurred. Among the criminal dead: Burt Arthur ‘Deuce’ Perkins, a nightclub singer with underworld ties. Teitlebaum, Vachss and Perkins were assumed to be the Nite Owl killers. LAPD Captain Dudley Smith elaborated.

‘The Nite Owl killings derived from a grandly realized scheme to distribute heinous and soul-destroying pornographic filth. Teitlebaum, Vachss and Perkins were attempting to kill Nite Owl patron Delbert “Duke” Cathcart, an independent smut merchant, and take over Pierce Patchett’s smut racket in the process. Alas, it was really one Dean Van Gelder, a criminal impersonating Cathcart, who was there in Cathcart’s place. The Nite Owl murder case will go down as a testimony to the cruel caprices of fate, and I am glad that it has finally been resolved.’

Then Captain, now Inspector Edmund Exley, credited with solving the Nite Owl reopening case, said that it has finally been resolved, despite rumors that a fourth conspirator died abruptly, just as he was about to be arrested. ‘That’s nonsense,’ Exley said. ‘I gave the county grand jury a detailed brief on the case and testified extensively myself. They accepted my findings. It’s over.’

At some great cost. LAPD Chief of Detectives Thad Green, soon to retire and assume command of the U.S. Border Patrol, said, ‘For sheer expense and the number of accumulated investigatory man-hours, the Nite Owl case has no equal. It was a once-in-a-lifetime case and the price for clearing it was very, very high.’

EXTRACT: L.A. *Mirror-News*, April 15:

LOEW RESIGNATION A SHOCKER; LEGAL CROWD BUZZES

Speculation in Southland legal circles rages: why did Los Angeles District Attorney Ellis Loew resign from office yesterday and scotch a brilliant political career? Loew, 49, announced his resignation at his regular weekly press conference, citing nervous exhaustion and a desire to return to private practice. Aides close to the man described the abrupt retirement as stupefyingly atypical. The D.A.’s Office is stunned: Ellis Loew appeared happy, fit and in perfect health.

Chief Criminal Prosecutor Robert Gallaudet told this reporter: ‘Look, I’m stunned, and I don’t stun easily. What’s Ellis’ underlying motive? I don’t know, ask him. And when the City Council appoints an interim D.A., I hope it’s me.’

After the shock waves subsided, plaudits rolled in. LAPD Chief William H. Parker described Loew as a ‘vigorous and fair-minded foe of criminals,’ and Parker’s aide, Captain Dudley Smith, said, ‘We’ll miss Ellis. He was a grand friend of justice.’ Governor Knight and Mayor Norris Poulson sent Loew telegrams asking him to reconsider his decision. Loew himself could not be reached for comment.

EXTRACT: L.A. *Herald-Express*, April 19:

DREAM-A-DREAMLAND SUICIDES: GRIEF, BEWILDERMENT CONTINUE

They were found together at Dream-a-Dreamland, temporarily closed to mourn the death of a great man’s son. Preston Exley, 64, former Los Angeles policeman, master builder and neophyte politician; Inez Soto, 28, publicity director at the world’s most celebrated amusement complex and a key witness in the awful Nite Owl murder case. And Raymond Dieterling, 66, the father of modern animation, the genius who virtually created the cartoon art form, the man who built Dream-a-Dreamland as a tribute to a child tragically lost. The world at large and Los Angeles in particular have expressed great grief and bewilderment.

They were found last week, together, on Dream-a-Dreamland’s Grand Promenade. There were no notes, but County Coroner Frederic Newbarr quickly ruled out foul play and established the deaths as suicides. The means: all three had ingested fatal quantities of a rare antipsychotic drug. Expressions of grief greeted the news – President Eisenhower, Governor Knight and Senator William Knowland were among those who offered condolences to the loved ones of the three. Exley and Dieterling left fortunes: the building magnate willed his construction kingdom to his longtime aide Arthur De Spain and his $17-million financial estate to his son Edmund, a Los Angeles police officer. Dieterling left his more than vast holdings to a legal trust, with instructions to disperse the funds and future Dream-a-Dreamland profits among various children’s charities. With the legalities taken care of and public shock and bereavement hardly abating, speculation into the motives for the suicides began to rage.

Miss Soto was romantically linked to Preston Exley’s son Edmund and had been despondent over recent publicity pertaining to her involvement in the Nite Owl case. Raymond Dieterling was distraught over the recent murder of his son William. Preston Exley, however, had recently celebrated his greatest triumph, the completion of the Southern California mass freeway system, and had just announced his candidacy in the governor’s race. A poll conducted shortly before his death showed him gaining and favored to win the Republican nomination. There seems to be no logical motive for the man to take his own life. Those closest to Preston Exley – Arthur De Spain and son Edmund – have refused comment.

Letters of sympathy and floral tributes flood Dream-a-Dreamland and Preston Exley’s Hancock Park home. Flags fly at half mast throughout the State of California. Hollywood grieves the loss of a moviemaking colossus. The single word ‘Why?’ rests on millions of lips.

Preston Exley and Ray Dieterling were giants. Inez Soto was a spunky hard-luck girl who became their trusted aide and close friend. Before their deaths, all three added codicils to their wills, stating that they wished to be buried at sea together. Yesterday they were, summarily, with no religious service and no guests in attendance. The Dream-a-Dreamland security chief handled the arrangements and would not disclose the location where the bodies were laid to rest. The word ‘Why?’ still rests on millions of lips.

Mayor Norris Poulson doesn’t know why. But he does offer a fitting eulogy. ‘Very simply, these two men symbolized the fulfillment of a vision – Los Angeles as a place of enchantment and high-quality everyday life. More than anyone else, Raymond Dieterling and Preston Exley personified the grand and good dreams that have built this city.’

Part Five

After You’ve Gone

Chapter Seventy-eight

ED IN HIS dress blue uniform.

Parker smiled, pinned gold stars to his shoulders. 'Deputy Chief Edmund Exley. Chief of Detectives, Los Angeles Police Department.'

Applause, flashbulbs. Ed shook Parker's hand, checked the crowd. Politicos, Thad Green, Dudley Smith. Lynn at the back of the room.

More applause, a handshake line. Mayor Poulson, Gallaudet, Dudley.

'Lad, you have performed so grandly. I look forward to serving under you.'

'Thank you, Captain. I'm sure we'll have a grand time together.'

Dudley winked.

The City Council filed by; Parker led the crowd to refreshments. Lynn stayed in the doorway.

Ed walked over. Lynn said, 'I can't believe it. I'm giving up a hotshot with seventeen million dollars for a cripple with a pension. Arizona, love. The air's good for pensioners and I know where everything is.'

She'd aged the past month – beautiful to handsome. 'When?'

'Right now, before I back down.'

'Open your purse.'

'What?'

'Just do it.'

Lynn opened her purse – Ed dropped in a plastic bundle. 'Spend it fast, it's bad money.'

'How much?'

'Enough to buy Arizona. Where's White?'

'At the car.'

'I'll walk you.'

They skirted the party, took side stairs down. Lynn's Packard in the watch commander's space, a summons stuck to the windshield. Ed tore it up, checked the back seat.

Bud White. Braces on his legs, his head shaved and sutured. No splints on his hands – they looked strong. A wired-up mouth that made him look goofy.

Lynn stood a few feet away. White tried to smile, grimaced. Ed said, ‘I swear to you I’ll get Dudley. I swear to you I’ll do it.’

White grabbed his hands, squeezed until they both winced. Ed said, ‘Thanks for the push.’

A smile, a laugh – Bud forced them through wires. Ed touched his face. ‘You were my redemption.’

Party noise upstairs – Dudley Smith laughing. Lynn said, ‘We should go now.’

‘Was I ever in the running?’

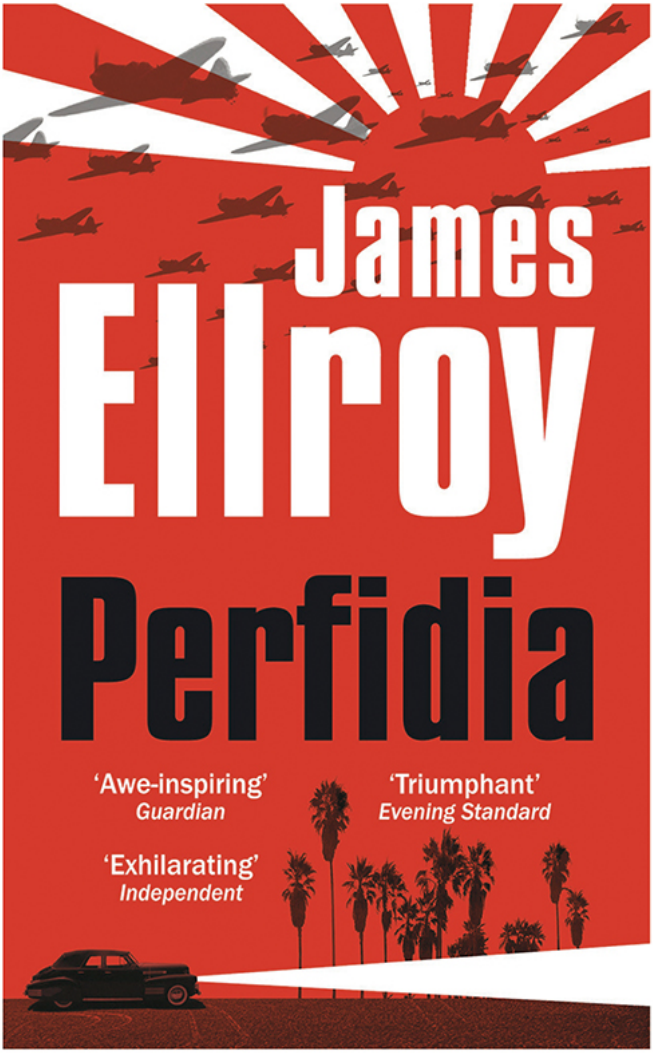
‘Some men get the world, some men get ex-hookers and a trip to Arizona. You’re in with the former, but my God I don’t envy you the blood on your conscience.’

Ed kissed her cheek. Lynn got in the car, rolled up the windows. Bud pressed his hands to the glass.

Ed touched his side, palms half the man’s size. The car moved – Ed ran with it, hands against hands. A turn into traffic, a goodbye toot on the horn.

Gold stars. Alone with his dead.

Read on for the first chapter of
James Ellroy's latest novel


James
Ellroy
Perfidia
'Awe-inspiring'
Guardian
'Triumphant'
Evening Standard
'Exhilarating'
Independent

Perfidia
OUT NOW

Reminiscenza.

I wandered off in a prairie blizzard 85 years ago. The cold rendered me spellbound, then to now. I have outlived the decree and find myself afraid to die. I cannot will cloudbursts the way I once did. I must recollect with yet greater fury.

It was a fever then. It remains a fever now. I will not die as long as I live this story. I run to Then to buy myself moments Now.

Twenty-three days.

Blood libel.

A policeman knocks on a young woman's door. Murderers' flags, aswirl.

Twenty-three days.

This storm.

Reminiscenza.

THE THUNDERBOLT BROADCAST

GERALD L. K. SMITH | K-L-A-N RADIO, LOS ANGELES | BOOTLEG TRANSMITTER/TIJUANA, MEXICO | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5, 1941

The Jew Control Apparatus mandated this war—and now it's ours, whether we want it or not. It has been said that no news is good news, but that maxim predates the wondrous invention of radio, with its power to deliver *all* the news—good *and* bad—at rocket-ship speed. Regrettably, tonight's news is *all bad,* for the Nazis and the Japs are on a ripsnorting rampage—and the war is rapidly heading *our* undeserved and unwanted way.

Item: Adolf Hitler breached his deal with Red Boss Joseph Stalin in the summer and invaded the vast wasteland of repugnant Red Russia. Hammer-and-sickle armies are currently grinding *der Führer*'s stalwart soldiers to bratwurst outside Moscow—but the natty Nazis have *already* bombed Britain to smithereens and have placed half of central Europe under Nordic Nationalist rule. Hitler's *still* got the pep to give American ground troops a fair fight—which will assuredly occur at some not-too-far-off point in our great nation's future. Does it make you apoplectically ambivalent, my friends? We don't want this war—but in for a penny, in for a pound.

Item: the illustrious *Il Duce,* Benito Mussolini, is faring poorly in his North African campaign—but don't count him out. Italians are lovers more than fighters, it has been said—grand opera is much more their style. That is certainly true—but those bel canto–belting bambinos *still* represent a strategic threat in the lower-European theater. Yes, storm clouds are forming in the east. Storm clouds are *breaking* to our west, I'm sad to say—in the form of our most presently poised *alleged* enemies: the Japs.

Are you that much more amply ambivalent, my friends? Like me, you've opened your ardent arms to America First. But, Hirohito's heathen hornets are now heading across the high seas—and I don't like it one bit.

Item: the State Department just issued a bulletin. Jap convoys are currently headed for Siam, and an invasion is expected momentarily.

Item: civilians are fleeing Manila, the capital city of the

Philippines.

Item: President Franklin "Double-Cross" Rosenfeld has sent a personal message to the Jap Emperor. That message is both entreaty and warning: Desist in your aggressions or run the risk of full-scale American intervention.

Uncle Sam is getting hot. The Hawaiian Islands are *our* possession and the Pacific gateway to mainland America. The lush tropical atolls that beeline in our direction are now targets for Jap gun sights. This undeserved, unwarranted and unwanted war is heading *our* way—whether we want it or not.

Item: President Rosenfeld wants to know why Hirohito's hellions are massing in French Indochina.

Item: Radio Bangkok has issued warnings of a possible Jap sneak attack on Thailand. Jap envoys are conferring with Secretary of State Cordell Hull at this very moment. The Japs are hissing with forked tongues—because they say they want peace, even as Jap Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo lambasts America for our refusal to understand Japanese "ideals" and our continued protests against *alleged* Japanese pogroms in East Asia and the Pacific.

Yes, my friends—it's becoming *Jew*niversally apparent. This Communist-concocted war is heading *our* way—whether we want it or not.

No sane American desires our participation in a Fight-for-the-Kikes foreign war. No sane American wants to send American boys off to certain peril. No sane American denies that *this* war cannot be kept off *our* shores unless we circumvent and interdict it on *foreign* soil. I'm ripsnortingly right about this, my friends—I'm apple-cheeked with apostasy.

We didn't start this war. Adolf Hitler and hotsy-totsy Hirohito didn't start this war, either. The Jew Control apparatchiks cooked up this Red borscht stew and turned friend upon friend, the world over. Are you apoplectically ambivalent, my good friends?

Yes, the war is coming our way, even though we sure as shooting don't want it. And America *never* runs from a fight.

Part One

THE JAPS

(December 6–December 11, 1941)

December 6, 1941

1

HIDEO ASHIDA

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1941

9:08 a.m.

There—Whalen's Drugstore, 6th and Spring streets. The site of four recent felonies. 211 PC—Armed Robbery.

The store was jinxed. Four heists in one month predicted a fifth heist. It was probably the same bandit. The man worked solo. He covered his face with a bandanna and carried a long-barreled gat. He always stole narcotics and till cash.

The Robbery Squad was shorthanded. A geek wearing a Hitler mask hit three taverns in Silver Lake. It was 211 plus mayhem. The geek pistol-whipped the bartenders and groped female customers. He was gun-happy. He shot up jukeboxes and shelves full of booze.

Robbery was swamped. Ashida built the trip-wire gizmo and chose this test spot. He'd created the prototype in high school. His first test spot was the Belmont High showers. He used it to photograph Bucky after basketball prac—

A car swerved northbound on Spring. The driver saw Ashida. Of course—he yelled, "Goddamn Jap!"

Ray Pinker responded. Of course—he yelled, "Screw you!"

Ashida stared at the ground. The feeder cord ran across the street and stopped at the curb in front of the drugstore. The geek bandit parked in the same spot all four times. The cord led to a trip-action camera encased in hard rubber. The wheel jolts of cars parking activated gears. A shutter and flashbulb clicked and snapped photos of rear license plates. Rolls of film were stashed in rubber-coated tubes. A single load would cover a full day's worth of cars.

Pinker lit a cigarette. "It's a wild-goose chase. We're civilian criminologists, not cops. We know the damn thing works, so why are we here? It's not like we've been tipped to another job."

Ashida smiled. "You know the answer to that."

"If the answer is 'We've got nothing better to do,' or 'We're scientists with no personal lives worth a damn,' then you're right."

A bus passed southbound. A Mexican guy blew smoke rings out his window. He saw Ashida. He yelled, "*Puto* Jap!"

Pinker flipped his cigarette. It fell short of the bus.

"Which one of you was born here? Which one of you did *not* swim the Rio Grande illegally?"

Ashida squared off his necktie. "Say it again. You were exasperated the first time you said it, so I know it was a candid response."

Pinker grinned. "You're my protégé, so you're *my* Jap, which gives me a vested interest in you. You're the only Jap employed by the Los Angeles Police Department, which makes you that much more unique and gives me that much more cachet."

Ashida laughed. A '38 DeSoto pulled up in front of the drugstore. The wheels hit the wire, the lens clicked, the flashbulb popped. A tall man got out. He had Bucky Bleichert's dark hair and small brown eyes. Ashida watched him enter the drugstore.

Pinker ducked across the street and futzed with the bulb slot. Ashida window-peeped the drugstore and tracked the man. The glass distorted his features. Ashida *made* him Bucky. He shut his eyes, he blinked, he opened his eyes and transformed him. The man evinced Bucky's grace now. He *glided.* He smiled and displayed big buck teeth.

The man walked out. Pinker ran back across the street and blocked Ashida's view. The car drove off. Ashida blinked. The world lost its one-minute Bucky Bleichert glow.

They settled back in. Pinker leaned on a lamppost and chain-smoked. Ashida stood still and felt the downtown L.A. whir.

The war was coming. The whir was all about it. He was a native-born Nisei and second son. His father was a gandy dancer. Pops guzzled terpin hydrate and worked himself to death laying railroad track. His mother had an apartment in Little Tokyo. She was pro-Emperor and spoke Japanese just to torque him. The family owned a truck farm in the San Fernando Valley. His brother Akira ran it. It was mostly Nisei acreage out there. Mexican illegals picked their crops. It was a common Nisei practice. It was shameful, it was prudent, it was labor at low cost. The practice bordered on indentured servitude. The practice assured solvency for the Nisei farmer class.

The practice entailed collusion. The family paid bribes to a

Mexican State Police captain. The payments saved the wetbacks from deportation. Akira accepted the practice and implemented it sans moral probe. It permitted second son Hideo to ignore the family trade and pursue his criminological passion.

He had advanced degrees in chemistry and biology. He was a Stanford Ph.D. at twenty-two. He knew serology, fingerprinting, ballistics. He went on the Los Angeles Police Department a year ago. He wanted to work with its legendary head chemist. He was a protégé looking for a mentor. Ray Pinker was a pedagogue looking for a pupil. The bond was formed in that manner. The assigned roles blurred very fast.

They became colleagues. Pinker was admirably blind per racial matters. He compared Ashida to Charlie Chan's number-one son. Ashida told Pinker that Charlie Chan was Chinese. Pinker said, "It's all Greek to me."

Spring Street was lined with mock-snow Christmas trees. They were coated with bird dung and soot. A kid hawked *Heralds* outside the drugstore. He shouted the headline: "*FDR in Last-Ditch Talks with Japs!*"

Pinker said, "The damn gizmo works."

"I know."

"You're a goddamn genius."

"I know."

"That rape-o's still operating. The Central Vice guys make him for an MP. He dicked another lady two nights ago."

Ashida nodded. "The first victim resisted and tore off a strip of his armband. He wore his uniform shirt under his civilian coat. I've got fiber samples at my lab in my mother's apartment."

Pinker ogled a big blonde draped around a sailor. The sailor fish-eyed Ashida.

"Bucky Bleichert's fighting at the Olympic tomorrow night. The skinny is he'll fight a few more times and come on the Department."

Ashida flushed. "I knew Bucky in high school."

"I know. That's why I said it."

"Who's he fighting?"

"A stumblebum named Junior Wilkins. Elmer Jackson collared him for flimflam. He was running a back-to-Africa con with some shine preacher."

A '37 Ford coupe parked upside the drugstore. There—the wheels hit the wire, the lens clicks, the flashbulb pops on cue.

Pinker coughed and turned away from Ashida. A man got out of the car. He wore a fedora and an overcoat with the collar up.

Ashida prickled. It was *no-overcoat* warm.

Pinker hacked and coughed. He was almost doubled up. The man pulled a handkerchief over his face.

Ashida tingled.

It was perfect. It was ideal. Pinker didn't see the man. They had the plate number. He could let the crime occur. He could run his forensic study from inception.

The man entered the drugstore.

Ashida checked his watch. It was 9:24 a.m.

Pinker turned around and lit a cigarette. Ashida scanned the drugstore window. The man walked down the toothpaste aisle. Ashida checked his watch on the sly.

The man hunkered out of sight. 9:25, 9:26, 9:27.

Pinker said, "My wife thinks it's dirt in the air, but I say it's just excess phlegm."

The man ran out of the drugstore. He gripped a paper bag and a half-visible pistol. He knocked over the newsboy. He shagged his car and peeled out.

Pinker said, "Holy shit." The cigarette dropped from his mouth.

The newsboy ran into the drugstore. Pinker ran toward a call box. Ashida ran up to the gizmo.

He unlocked it and knelt close. He studied the negative in the feeder. There, faint and blurred: Cal KFE-621.

A car idled by. The driver was a Shriner, replete with fez. He saw Ashida and got all contorted. Ashida stood up and made fists. The car pulled away.

"FDR in Last-Ditch Talks with Japs!" The newsboy stared at Ashida and shrieked it.

There—a cop siren at 9:31.

Ashida stood poised. A K-car took the corner and skid-stopped just short of the gizmo. Ashida was eyeball close. He recognized the guys: Buzz Meeks and Lee Blanchard.

They got out. Meeks worked Headquarters Robbery. Blanchard worked Central Patrol. Meeks wore a fresh-pressed suit. Blanchard wore a slept-in uniform.

Meeks said, "What gives, kid? How come you beat us here?"

Blanchard said, "What gives, Hirohito?"

Meeks jerked Blanchard's necktie and snapped his head.

Blanchard blushed.

Ashida pointed to the gizmo. “Mr. Pinker and I were testing this device. The store’s a patsy, so we chose it for our test site. Car wheels set off a camera under that tubing. We lucked into the robbery. The suspect’s plate number is KFE-621.”

Meeks winked and squatted by the gizmo. Blanchard got in the car and sent out the squawk. Meeks was a Dust Bowl vet and ex–cowboy film actor. He came on under James Edgar “Two-Gun” Davis. He was a bagman to Mayor Frank Shaw. The county grand jury sacked Shaw and Chief Davis. Meeks dodged fourteen indictments.

Blanchard was an ex–heavyweight contender. He bought a house above the Sunset Strip with his fight stash. He cracked a big bank job in ’39 and cinched his cop reputation. He was shacked up with a woman—Kay something. Shack jobs were verboten under Chief C. B. Horrall. The Chief was soft on Lee and turned a blind eye. Meeks and Blanchard were rumor magnets. The most prevalent: Lee was tight with Ben Siegel and the Jewish syndicate.

The drugstore was all hubbub. Voices bounced off the windows. Ashida looked inside. Pinker had the witnesses huddled.

Meeks picked his teeth and admired the gizmo. Blanchard stepped out of the K-car.

“The car was snatched in front of a pool hall on East Slauson. The 77th Street desk logged it at 8:16. It’s got to be a spook. White don’t survive from Jefferson south.”

Meeks checked his watch. “Call Traffic, tell them to issue a bulletin, and tell them to spice it up. One-man crime wave, armed and dangerous. Make it sound like a meat-and-potatoes job.”

Blanchard made the Churchill V sign. Meeks primped in the window reflection. Ashida walked into the drugstore.

He imprinted the floor plan. He memorized the witnesses’ faces. He gauged distances geometrically. He moved his eyes, details accrued, he smelled body odors imbued with adrenaline.

Two white-coat pharmacists. A suit-and-tie manager. Two old-lady customers. The fat pharmacist had a boil on his neck. The thin pharmacist had the shakes. One old lady was obese. Her vein pattern indicated arterial sclerosis.

The witnesses were pressed in tight. Meeks walked behind the front counter and stood facing them.

“I’m Sergeant Turner Meeks, and I’m listening.”

The manager said, “He walked in and went straight to the pharmacy. He wore a mask and had a gun, but I don’t think it was the man who robbed us those other times. This man was taller and thinner.”

The pharmacists bobbed their heads—yeah, boss, we agree.

Meeks said, “What happened then?”

The fat pharmacist said, “He lined us up and stole our wallets. He walked us down the first pill aisle, stole a bottle of phenobarbital and fired his gun into the ceiling.”

Ashida prickled. There—the uncommon detail.

“Mr. Pinker and I were across the street. We would have heard the shot.”

The fat pharmacist went nix. “The gun had a silencer. It stuck off the end of the barrel.”

Ashida walked back to the pharmacy. Note the cash register, Hershey bars and Christmas-card display. He rang up a one-dollar sale. The money drawer popped open. The slots were stuffed with ones through twenties.

Instinct.

The bandit wanted dope more than money. The wallet thefts were secondary. They were undertaken to obscure the primary motive.

Anomaly.

Why steal only *one* bottle of phenobarbital? The action rebutted the dope-fiend robber archetype.

Ashida vaulted the counter and walked down the first aisle. There—no ejected shell casing. There—*two* options.

The robber picked it up, or the gun was a revolver.

There—the bullet hole in the ceiling. Metal shards on the floor below—decomposed silencer threads.

He knelt down and studied them. The edges were burned from muzzle heat. The threads dropped off in little swirls.

Ashida walked back to the front counter. Pinker had his evidence kit. Meeks uncorked a bottle of drugstore hooch and passed it around. Blanchard raided the chewing-gum rack. Meeks stuffed his pockets full of rubbers.

The jug made the rounds. Ashida declined it. The pharmacists took healthy pulls. The old ladies giggled and sipped.

Blanchard said, “We got a kickback from Traffic. The car was dumped three blocks from here. We got glove prints on the dashboard so far.”

Meeks lit a cigar. “Did he touch anything inside the store? Can you folks help me with that?”

The fat pharmacist coughed. “He brushed the comic-book rack on his way out. I think he might have snagged his coat.”

Pinker went *Now.* Ashida caught it and ducked past the witnesses. The rack was stuffed with *Mickey Mouse* and *Tarzan.* Ashida swiveled it twice. Nothing and nothing. Yes—right *there.*

Bright red threads, attached to one prong.

Wool felt, densely woven, *familiar.*

Ashida pulled out a pen and evidence envelope. He plucked the threads and sealed them. He wrote “211 PC/Whalen’s Drugstore/10:09 a.m., 12/6/41” on the envelope flap.

More laughs up front—Blanchard and Meeks made like the Ritz Brothers. Ashida sniffed the envelope. He smelled the fabric through the paper. He made the synaptic catch.

The suspected MP rapist. The fibers off his armband. Pinker said he just raped another lady. The fool wore the armband on his rape prowls.

There was no red in the robber’s overcoat. The rack prongs were situated at the man’s waist level. The overcoat featured open-topped pockets. The fabric threads might have come from something sticking out. He had comparison fibers at his mother’s place. He could confirm or exclude the match.

There’s the whistle—Pinker’s I need you *now.*

Ashida tracked the sound. Pinker was back in the pharmacy. He had his evidence camera out. He shot three exposures of the bullet hole, three exposures of the silencer shards.

“This job intrigues me. He didn’t terrorize the witnesses with the gun, he didn’t steal till cash, he squeezed a gunshot off for kicks.”

Ashida nodded. “It’s as if he was testing the silencer. And why did he only steal *one* bottle of the phenobarbital?”

Pinker nodded. “I like the test-fire theory. It’s obviously a homemade suppressor, because you’ve got thread burns from a single firing. Eight or ten shots would render the thing useless.”

“You’re right, and the manager said it’s not the same man who robbed the store on the prior occasions. Whatever his primary and secondary motives, he picked out a patsy.”

Pinker scooped shards into an envelope. “There’s probably a crawl space between the ceiling and the roof.”

The ceiling was made from loose gypsum-board panels. Ashida jumped and popped the one beside the bullet hole. Pinker made hand stirrups. Ashida caught the boost and got up.

The crawl space was all mildewed planks and cobwebs. Ashida hoisted himself in. He smelled stale gunpowder. He stood up and snagged himself on a cobweb. He brushed it off and got out his pocket flashlight. The beam caught insect swarms and a scurrying rat. There—six decomposed bullet chunks.

Be careful. You've been in this from inception. There's your official duty—and there's You.

Stanford, '36. Introductory Forensics: "All true clinicians succumb and hoard evidence. The practice creates a symbiosis of *it* and *you.*"

He checked his watch. He held the flashlight in his teeth and got out another envelope. He wrote "211 PC/Whalen's Drugstore/10:16 a.m., 12/6/41" on the front. He scooped four bullet chunks into it. He put the other two in his pocket.

The rat squirmed by him. He brushed himself off and dropped out of the hole. He landed deftly. He saw Buzz Meeks eyeballing the narcotics shelves.

"Look at this, kid."

Ashida looked. Bingo—four bottle rows neatly arrayed. The fifth row—*dis*arrayed. Vials of morphine paregoric—rifled, for sure.

"The pharmacist said he only stole phenobarbital."

Meeks said, "Yeah, and I believe him. But the skinny pharmacy guy's got the heebie-jeebies, and his shirt collar's soaked through. My guess is he's got a habit."

"Yes. He took advantage of the robbery to steal a vial of the paregoric. He only took what the robber could have carried on his person, and what he could hide himself."

Meeks winked. "You are *so* right, Charlie Chan."

"I'm Japanese, Sergeant. I know you can't tell the difference, but I'm not a goddamn Chinaman."

Meeks grinned. "You look like an American to me."

Ashida went swoony. Praise always made him flutter like a—

He glanced up front. Pinker dusted the door. Blanchard scrounged razor blades off the manager. The hophead pharmacist was green at the gills. His hands twitched, his Adam's apple bob-bobbed.

Meeks walked up to him and grabbed his necktie. The tie was a leash. Meeks pulled him back to the pharmacy and shoved him into Ashida. The hophead pissed his pants. Ashida shoved him into the counter and checked himself for stains.

The hophead quaked. The piss stain spread. Meeks pulled the sap off his belt.

“You swipe a jug of the paregoric? That a regular practice of yours?”

“One a week, boss. I’m cutting down. If I’m lyin’, I’m flyin’.”

“You got thirty seconds to convince me that you didn’t finger this here robbery. You got twenty-nine seconds as of right now.”

The hophead made prayer hands. “Not me, boss. I went to pharmacy school at Saint John Bosco J.C. I was raised by the Dominican Brothers.”

Meeks grabbed a bottle of morph off the shelf. The hophead licked his lips.

“Who are you going to call to snitch off pushers in exchange for confiscated hop? Who’s your Oklahoma-born-and-bred papa?”

“S-S-S-Sergeant T-T-Turner M-M-Meeks. He’s my daddy—if I’m lyin’, I’m flyin’.”

Meeks tossed the jug at him. The hophead caught it and vamoosed down the aisle. Meeks said, “You’re fastidious, Ashida. I don’t know why you got such a fascination for this line of work.”

The party up front was adjourning. Blanchard hugged the old ladies. The manager whipped out a camera and took snapshots. He got Pinker with his print brush and Big Lee in a boxer’s crouch. Meeks walked over and traded mock blows with him. The old ladies squealed.

They all waved bye-bye on the sidewalk. Ashida smoothed out his suit coat and let the crowd disperse. Pinker, Blanchard and Meeks stood over the gizmo. Blanchard and Meeks had that *Holy shit* look.

Ashida walked outside and over. A prowl car swung north and grazed the curb. Pinker, Blanchard and Meeks snapped to.

Pinker said, “Look sharp now.”

Meeks said, “Whiskey Bill.”

Blanchard said, “Pious cocksucker.”

A uniformed captain got out and inspected the gizmo. He wore glasses. He was dark-haired, midsize and trim. Odds on Captain William H. Parker.

Ashida snapped to. Parker examined the feeder cords. Pinker, Blanchard and Meeks stood at parade rest.

Parker toed the cord. “It’s innovative, but the wider practical applications are eluding me. Address this point and describe the creative genesis and full mechanical workings in significant detail, and have your report on my desk by 9:00 a.m. tomorrow.”

Ashida and Pinker nodded.

Parker looked at Meeks. "You're offensively overweight. Lose thirty pounds within the next thirty days, or I'll have Chief Horrall put you on the 'Fat Husband's Diet' recently extolled in the *Ladies' Home Journal.*"

Meeks nodded.

Parker looked at Blanchard. "Roll down your sleeves. Your mermaid tattoo is repugnant."

Blanchard rolled down his sleeves.

Parker tapped his watch. "It's now 10:31. I want a stolen-car report, with a synopsis of the robbery, on my desk in fifty-nine minutes."

Pinker nodded. Ashida nodded. Ditto Blanchard and Meeks. Parker got in his car and took off.

Meeks said, "Whiskey Bill."

Blanchard said, "He lost money on my fight with Jimmy Bivens. He can't let it go."

Pinker said, "The fight was fixed. You should have told him."

10:32 a.m.

Army half-tracks rolled down Spring. Trucks hauling howitzers tailed them. The convoy ran for blocks. It was all over the radio. Fortifications for defense plants and Fort MacArthur.

Soldier-drivers waved to the locals. Pedestrians stopped to applaud. Men doffed their hats, kids cheered, women blew kisses.

The traffic rumble was bad. Ashida cut east on 4th Street and north on Broadway. Passersby kept eyeing him.

He felt disembodied. He broke the law to observe lawlessness from a criminal act's inception. He succumbed to criminal pathology. He initiated an experiment. Would early access and distanced empathy allow him to understand criminals more clearly?

Introductory Forensics. He knew he'd succumb in time. He'd know the case as it grabbed him. That symbiosis—*it* and *you.*

He seized a textbook opportunity. He had to determine the pathology of a prosaic heist and report his findings first. His findings might serve the greater cause of forensic criminology. His findings might serve no cause at all. He was compelled to act. He was quintessentially Japanese. Japanese men were born to embody the concept of *Act.*

Ashida turned east and hit Little Tokyo. His pulse decelerated, his breath relaxed. A black-and-white cruised by. The driver recognized him and waved.

His mother had a walk-up at 2nd and San Pedro. The halls always reeked of broiled eel. He had his own apartment, across from Belmont High.

It was brimful of lab gear. The overflow filled his old bedroom at his mother's place. Mariko welcomed his intrusions. They allowed her to torque him at whim.

Ashida entered the building and unlocked the door. The place was quiet. Mariko was off somewhere, probably boozing and fomenting. He walked to his old bedroom and locked himself in.

Shelves packed with textbooks. Chemical vials and vats. Beakers, Bunsen burners, a hot plate. A spectrograph and three microscopes bolted to a table.

Ashida placed the bullet chunks on the table and grabbed his ammo-ID text. He held a magnifying glass over the chunks and studied the creases and dents.

The bullet pierced gypsum. The book was cross-referenced—ammo types to material fired upon. The photos were clear. Page 68—gypsum board. Two pages on—a bullet fragment with near-identical creases and dents.

The classic German firearm. The 9mm Luger.

The Luger had a floating-toggle ejector. The rounds always arced slowly. A deft shooter could catch an ejected shell in the air.

He ID'd the bullet independently. He withheld two fragments. He gave Ray Pinker the remaining four. Pinker would or would not ID them.

Pinker was not as skilled at bullet identification. He was cultivating *this* evidential lead all by himself.

The fibers next.

Pinker knew he kept the book-rack fibers. Pinker knew he had the armband fibers here. They were sharing this lead. It was hypothetical, thus far.

Ashida got out both fiber sets. They looked naked-eye similar. He placed them under the slides of his comparison microscope.

He swiveled in close. He scanned for texture and color consistency. *Almost, almost, go in closer still.* Yes—the book-rack fibers were cut from the same type of armband cloth.

He could boil out the fabric dye and blotter-dry it. He could run chemical tests. The tests carried their own systematic flaws. The results would prove inconclusive.

A key-in-lock noise jarred him. He walked into the living room. Mariko had 11:00 a.m. booze breath.

He said, “Hello, Mother.” She spoke slurred Japanese back. He bowed and tried to take her hand. She pulled away and flashed a magazine.

A “picture bride” rag. Choose a photograph and send for a young woman. She’ll be shipped from Japan. Include the five-hundred-dollar steamship fare. All brides guaranteed to be fertile and subservient.

“I’ve told you, Mother. I’m not going to marry a fifteen-year-old girl out of a brothel.”

“You too old to be bachelor. Neighbors get suspicious.”

“The neighbors don’t concern me. Akira’s a bachelor, why don’t you pester him?”

Mariko segued to pidgin talk. She learned it in railroad camps, circa 1905. She spoke it to demean his education.

“Speak straight English, Mother. You’ve been here for thirty-six years.”

Mariko plopped on the couch. “Franklin Double-Cross Rosenfeld back down to Minister Togo. ‘U.S. surrender to China imminent,’ Chiang Kai-shek say.”

Ashida laughed. “You’ve got your geopolitics confused, Mother. I’d ask you where you heard it, but I’m afraid you’ll tell me.”

Mariko giggled. “Father Coughlin. Christian Front. ‘No war for Jew bankers,’ Gerald L. K. Smith say. Lucky Lindy *ichiban.* He fly Atlantic solo, land at Hirohito’s feet.”

Enough.

Ashida walked to the kitchen. The Hiram Walker Ten High stood by the dish rack. Ashida poured a double shot and walked it in to Mariko. She knocked it back and tee-heed. She patted the couch.

He sat down. “Tell me something that isn’t crazy. Pretend that I’m Akira and we have business to discuss.”

“Farm profits up 16% last quarter. Jew accountant find way to deduct bribes to Captain Madrano. He say ‘Care and feeding of wetbacks good deduction.’ ”

Ashida tapped her arm. “Parts of speech, Mother. Don’t drop your articles. You always do it when you’ve been drinking.”

Mariko jabbed his arm. “This better? I read about Bucky Bleichert in the *Herald.* It say he got fight coming up, but it don’t say my son's friend a cream puff who only fight bums he can beat. It don't say my son think his mama's Fifth Column, but Bucky's papa Fifth Column, 'cause he in German-American Bund."

Sucker punch. She got drunk, she played dumb, she hit low.

"Don't talk that way about Bucky, Mama. You know it isn't true."

"Bucky scaredy-cat. Afraid to fight Mexican boy. Papa in Bund, Bucky cream puff."

Ashida stood up and knocked over a lamp stand. Mariko put two fingers over her lips and went *Sieg Heil!* Ashida swerved to his room and slammed the door.

The room was too hot now. Heat pressurized his chemicals and caused vapor leak. He turned on the fan and called the Robbery squadroom direct.

He got three rings. He heard "It's Meeks, and I'm listening."

"Hideo Ashida, Sergeant."

"Yeah, and you're Johnny-on-the-spot, given what time it is. Did you call to tell me something I don't know?"

"I did, yes."

Meeks coughed. "Then tell me, 'cause I'm listening."

"The book-rack fiber matched the armband fiber. It *is* the same cloth, so it's quite likely that the fiber came from an Army-issue armband. It may or may not be the *exact* armband worn by the same man, but it *is* the same cloth, and the chronological order of the crimes makes the rapist a suspect for the robbery."

Meeks whistled. "Well, I think I should tell Dudley Smith about this. He'll see what Jack Horrall wants to do."

Ashida said, "What do you mean?"

"Well, you got the rape-to-armed-robbery parlay, and the likelihood of some U.S. armed services fiend on the loose. It sounds like this guy's good for some mother dog shit, and it might notch us some cachet with the Army if we stop this short of a court-martial."

Ashida gulped. "Or a civilian trial?"

"You're getting the picture, son. Mrs. Ashida didn't raise any dumb kids."

Ashida dropped the receiver. Squadroom noise bounced up off the floor.

He chose this male world. He's learning its customs and codes. It's unbearably thrilling.

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Epub ISBN: 9781448108572
Version 1.0

Published by Windmill Books 2011

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

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First published in Great Britain in 1990 by Mysterious Press
First published in paperback in 1991 by Arrow Books

Windmill Books
The Random House Group Limited
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA

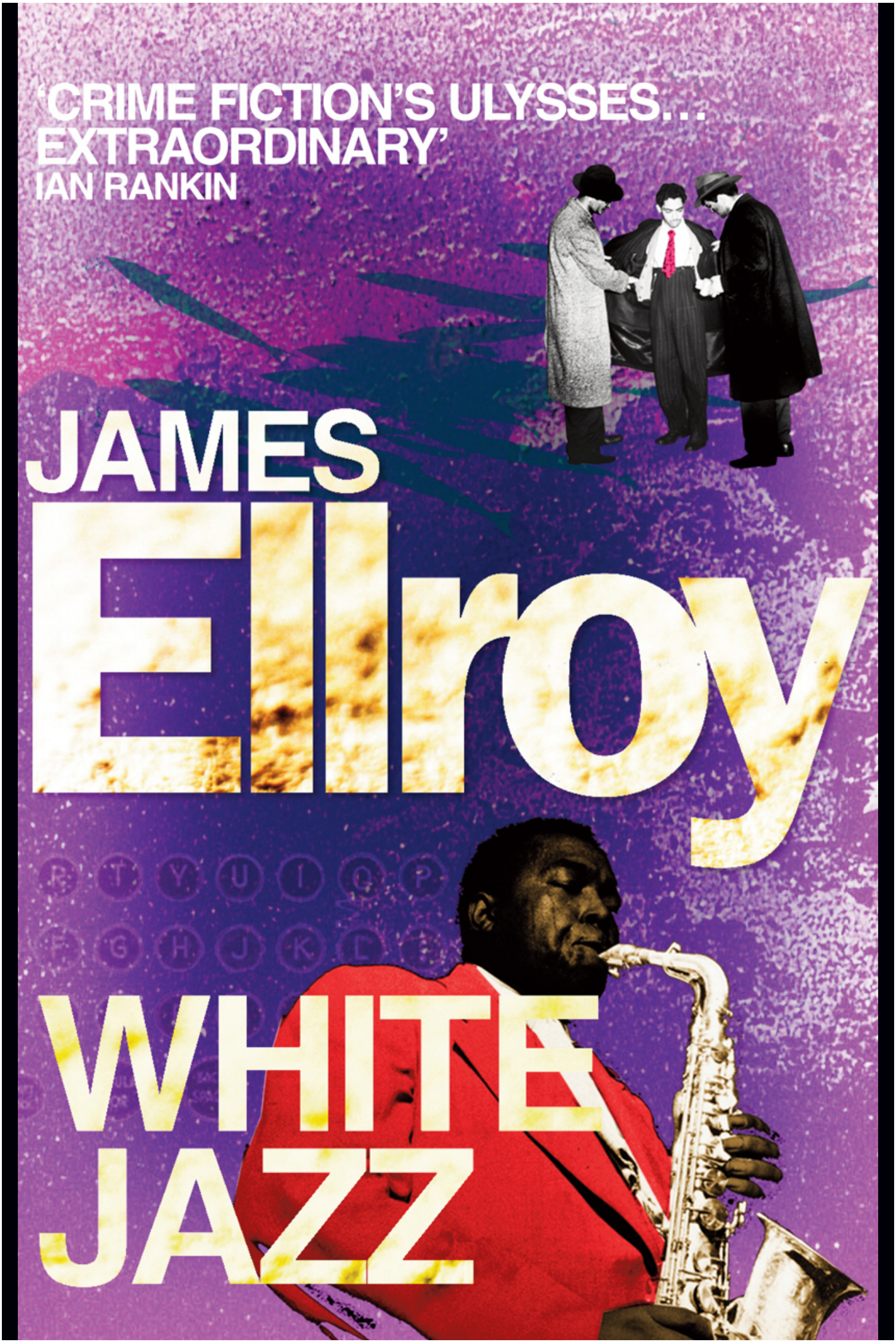
Addresses for companies within The Random House Group Limited
can be found at:
www.randomhouse.co.uk/offices.htm

The Random House Group Limited Reg. No. 954009

www.randomhouse.co.uk

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN 9780099537885



‘CRIME FICTION’S ULYSSES…
EXTRAORDINARY’
IAN RANKIN

JAMES
Ellroy

WHITE
JAZZ

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About the Book

Los Angeles, 1958: a city on the make. A boom town at the edge of a new era ripe for plunder.

Lieutenant Dave Klein: in turn a lawyer, bagman, slum landlord, mob killer. Klein stands at the centre of a complex web of plots where violence and death will intersect.

About the Author

James Ellroy was born in Los Angeles in 1948. He is the author of the acclaimed ‘LA Quartet’: *The Black Dahlia, The Big Nowhere, LA Confidential* and *White Jazz*. His most recent novel, *Blood’s a Rover*, completes the magisterial ‘Underworld USA Trilogy’ – the first two volumes of which (*American Tabloid* and *The Cold Six Thousand*) were both *Sunday Times* bestsellers.

ALSO BY JAMES ELLROY

THE UNDERWORLD U.S.A. TRILOGY

American Tabloid
The Cold Six Thousand
Blood's a Rover

THE L.A. QUARTET

The Black Dahlia
The Big Nowhere
L.A. Confidential
White Jazz

MEMOIR

My Dark Places
The Hilliker Curse

SHORT STORIES

Hollywood Nocturnes

JOURNALISM/SHORT FICTION

Crime Wave
Destination: Morgue!

EARLY NOVELS

Brown's Requiem
Clandestine
Blood on the Moon
Because the Night
Suicide Hill
Killer on the Road

White Jazz

JAMES ELLROY

WINDMILL BOOKS

TO
Helen Knode

In the end I possess my birthplace and am possessed by its language.

—Ross MacDonald

All I have is the will to remember. Time revoked/fever dreams – I wake up reaching, afraid I'll forget. Pictures keep the woman young.

L.A., fall 1958.

Newsprint: link the dots. Names, events – so brutal they beg to be connected. Years down – the story stays dispersed. The names are dead or too guilty to tell.

I'm old, afraid I'll forget:

I killed innocent men.

I betrayed sacred oaths.

I reaped profit from horror.

Fever – that time burning. I want to go with the music – spin, fall with it.

L.A. *Herald-Express*, 10/17/58:

BOXING PROBE IN PROGRESS; FEDERAL GRAND JURY TO HEAR WITNESSES

Yesterday, a spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Los Angeles announced that Federal agents are probing the 'gangland infiltrated' Southland prize fight scene, with an eye toward securing grand jury indictments.

U.S. Attorney Welles Noonan, former counsel to the McClellan Rackets Committee, said that Justice Department investigators, acting on information supplied by unnamed informants, are soon to question colorful Los Angeles 'mob fringe character' Mickey Cohen. Cohen, now thirteen months out of prison, is rumored to have attempted contract infringement on a number of local prize-fighters. Currently being questioned under hotel guard are Reuben Ruiz, bantamweight contender and regular attraction at the Olympic Auditorium, and Sanderline Johnson, former ranked flyweight working as a croupier at a Gardena poker establishment. A Justice Department press release stated that Ruiz and Johnson are 'friendly witnesses'. In a personal aside to *Herald* reporter John Eisler, U.S. Attorney Noonan said: 'This investigation is now in its infancy, but we have every hope that it will prove successful. The boxing racket is just that: a racket. Its cancerous tentacles link with other branches of organized crime, and should Federal grand jury indictments result from this probe, then perhaps a general probe of Southern California mob activity will prove to be in order. Witness Johnson has assured my investigators that boxing malfeasance is not the only incriminating information he has been privy to, so perhaps we might start there. For now, though, boxing is our sole focus.'

POLITICAL STEPPINGSTONES HINTED

Some skepticism greeted news of the prize fight probe. 'I'll believe it when the grand jury hands down true bills,' said William F. Degnan, a former FBI agent now retired in Santa Monica. 'Two witnesses do not make a successful investigation. And I'm wary of anything announced in the press: it smacks of publicity seeking.'

Mr Degnan's sentiments were echoed by a source within the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office. Queried on the probe, a prosecuting attorney who wishes to remain anonymous stated: 'It's politics pure and simple. Noonan's friends with [Massachusetts Senator and presidential hopeful] John Kennedy, and I've heard he's going to run for California Attorney General himself in '60. This probe has to be fuel for that run, because Bob Gallaudet [interim Los Angeles District Attorney expected to be elected to a full term as DA ten days hence] might well be the Republican nominee. You see, what a *Federal* probe implicitly states is that *local* police and prosecutors can't control crime within their own bailiwick. I call Noonan's grand jury business a political stepping-stone.'

U.S. Attorney Noonan, 40, declined comment on the above speculation, but a surprise ally defended him with some vigor. Morton Diskant, civil liberties lawyer and Democratic candidate for Fifth District City Councilman, told this writer: 'I distrust the Los Angeles Police Department's ability to maintain order without infringing on the civil rights of Los Angeles citizens. I distrust the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office for the same reason. I especially distrust Robert Gallaudet, most specifically for his support of [Fifth District Republican Councilman] Thomas Bethune, my incumbent opponent. Gallaudet's stand on the Chavez Ravine issue is unconscionable. He wants to evict impoverished Latin Americans from their homes to procure space for an L.A. Dodgers ballpark, a frivolity I deem criminal. Welles Noonan, on the other hand, has proven himself to be both a determined crimefighter and a friend of civil rights. Boxing is a dirty business that renders human beings walking vegetables. I applaud Mr. Noonan for taking the high ground in combatting it.'

WITNESSES UNDER GUARD

U.S. Attorney Noonan responded to Mr. Diskant's statement. 'I appreciate his support, but I do not want partisan political comments to cloud the issue. That issue is boxing and the best way to sever its links to organized crime. The U.S. Attorney's Office does not seek to supersede the authority of the LAPD or to in any way ridicule or undermine it.'

Meanwhile, the boxing probe continues. Witnesses Ruiz and Johnson are in protective custody at a downtown hotel, guarded by Federal agents and officers on loan from the Los Angeles Police Department: Lieutenant David Klein and Sergeant George Stemmons, Jr.

'Hollywood Cavalcade' Feature, *Hush-Hush* Magazine, 10/28/58:

MISANTHROPIC MICKEY SLIPS, SLIDES, AND NOSEDIVES SINCE PAROLE

Dig it, hepcats: Meyer Harris Cohen, the marvelous, benevolent, malevolent Mickster, has been out of Federal custody since September, '57. He did 3 to 5 for income tax evasion; his ragtag band dispersed, and the former mob kingpin's life since then has been one long series of skidmarks across the City of the Fallen Angels, the town he used to rule with bullets, bribes and bullspit bonhomie. Dig, children, and smell the burning rubber of those skids: off the record, on the Q.T. and *very* Hush-Hush.

April, '58: former Cohen henchman Johnny Stompanato is shanked by Lana Turner's daughter, a slinky 14 year old who should have been trying on prom gowns instead of skulking outside Mommy's bedroom with a knife in her hand. Too bad, Mickster: Johnny was your chief strongarm circa '49-'51, maybe *he* could have helped curtail your post prison tailspin. And tsk, tsk: you *really shouldn't* have sold Lana's sinsational love letters to Johnny – we heard you raided the 'Stomp Man's' Benedict Canyon love shack while Johnny was still in the meat wagon on his way to Slab City.

More sin-tillating scoop on the Mickster:

Under the watchful eye of his parole officer, Mickey has since made attempts to straighten up and skid right. He bought an ice cream parlor that soon became a criminal haven and went bust when parents kept their children away in droves; he financed his own niteclub act, somnambulistic shtick at the Club Largo. Snore City: bum bits on Ike's golf game, gags about Lana T. and Johnny S., the emphasis on

‘Oscar’, the Stomp Man’s Academy Award size appendage. And – Desperation City – the Mickster salaamed for Jesus during Billy Graham’s Crusade at the L.A. Coliseum!!!! The chutzpah of Mickey renouncing his Jewish heritage as a P.R. ploy!!!! For shame, Mickster, for shame!!!!! And now the scenario darkens.

Item:

Federal agents are soon to scold Mickey for infringing on the contracts of local prizefight palookas.

Item:

Four of Mickey’s goons – Carmine Ramandelli, Nathan Palevsky, Morris Jahelka and Antoine ‘The Fish’ Guerif – have mysteriously disappeared, presumably snuffed by person or persons unknown, and (very strangely, hepcats) Mickey is keeping his (usually on overdrive) yap shut about it.

Rumors are climbing the underworld grapevine: two surviving Cohen gunmen (Chick Vecchio and his brother Salvatore ‘Touch’ Vecchio, a failed actor rumored to be *très* lavender) are planning nefarious activities outside of Mickey’s aegis. Get it on the ground floor, Mickster – we’ve heard that your sole source of income is Southside vending and slot machines: cigarettes, rubbers, french ticklers and one-armed bandits stuffed into smoky back rooms in Darktown jazz clubs. For shame again, Mickey! Shvartze exploitation! Penny ante and beneath you, you the man who once ruled the L.A. rackets with a paralyzingly pugnacious panache!

Get the picture, kats and kittens? Mickey Cohen is Skidsville, U.S.A., and he needs moolah, gelt, the old cashola. Which explains our most riotous rumor revelation, raffishly revealed for the frenetically foremost first time!

Digsville:

Meyer Harris Cohen is now in the movie biz!!

Move over C. B. DeMille: the fabulous, benevolent, malevolent Mickster is now sub-rosa financing a horror cheapie currently shooting in Griffith Park! He’s saved his negro exploited nickels and is now partners with Variety International Pictures in the making of *Attack of the Atomic Vampire*. It’s sensational, it’s non-union, it’s a turkey of epic proportions!

Further Digsville:

Ever anxious to parsimoniously pinch pennies, Mickey has cast lavender loverboy Touch Vecchio in a key role – and the Touchster is hot, hot, hotsville with the star of the movie: limpwristed lothario Rock Rockwell. Off-camera homo hijinx! You heard it first here!

Final Digsville:

Enter Howard Hughes: Mr Airplane/Tool Magnate, lascivious luster after Hollywood lovelies. He used to own R.K.O. Studios; now he’s an independent producer known for keeping wildly well-endowed wenches welded to ‘personal service contracts’ – read as bit roles in exchange for frequent night-time visits. Dig: we’ve heard that Mickey’s leading lady left the mammary-mauling mogul spinning his own propeller – she actually amscrayed on a Hughes contract and car hopped until Mickey materialized at Scrivner’s Drive-In dying for a chocolate malt.

Are you smitten, Mickster?

Are you heartbroken, Howard?

Hollywood Cavalcade shifts gears with an open letter to the Los Angeles Police Department.

Dear LAPD:

Recently, three wino bums were found strangled and mutilated in abandoned houses in the Hollywood area. *Very* Hush-Hush: we’ve heard the still-at-large killer snapped their windpipes post-mortem, utilizing great strength. The press has paid these heinously horrific killings scant attention; only the sin-sation slanted L.A. *Mirror* seems to care that three Los Angeles citizens have met such nauseatingly nasty nadirs. The LAPD's Homicide Division has not been called in to investigate; so far only two Hollywood Division detectives are working the case. Hepcats, it's the pedigree of the victims that determine the juice of investigation – and if three squarejohn citizens got choked by a neck-snapping psychopath, then LAPD Chief of Detectives Edmund J. Exley would waste no time mounting a full scale investigation. Often it takes a catchy tag name to bring dirty criminal business into the public's consciousness and thus create a clamor for justice. Hush-Hush hereby names this anonymous killer fiend the 'Wino Will-o-the-Wisp' and petitions the LAPD to find him and set him up with a hot date in San Quentin's green room. They cook with gas there, and this killer deserves a four-burner cookout.

Watch for future updates on the Wino Will-o-the-Wisp, and remember you heard it first here: off the record, on the Q.T. and *very* Hush-Hush.

PART I

STRAIGHT LIFE

1

THE JOB: TAKE down a bookie mill, let the press in – get some ink to compete with the flight probe.

Some fruit sweating a sodomy beef snitched: fourteen phones, a race wire. Exley's memo said show some force, squeeze the witnesses at the hotel later – find out what the Feds had planned.

In person: 'If things get untoward, don't let the reporters take pictures. You're an attorney, Lieutenant. Remember how clean Bob Gallaudet likes his cases.'

I hate Exley.

Exley thinks I bought law school with bribe money.

I said four men, shotguns, Junior Stemmons as co-boss. Exley: 'Jackets and ties; this will end up on TV. And no stray bullets – you're working for me, not Mickey Cohen.'

Someday I'll shove a bribe list down his throat.

Junior set it up. Perfect: a Niggertown street cordoned off; bluesuits guarding the alley. Reporters, prowl cars, four jackets and ties packing twelve-gauge pumps.

Sergeant George Stemmons, Jr, snapping quick draws.

Hubbub: porch-loafing jigs, voodoo eyes. My eyes on the target – closed curtains, a packed driveway – make a full shift inside working bets. A cinderblock shack – figure a steel plate door.

I whistled; Junior walked over twirling his piece.

'Keep it out, you might need it.'

'No, I've got a riot gun in the car. We go in the door, we—'

'We *don't* go in the door, it's plated. We start banging on the door, they burn their paper. You still hunt birds?'

'Sure. Dave, what—'

'You got ammo in your car? Single-aught birdshot?'

Junior smiled. 'That big window. I shoot it out, the curtain takes the pellets, we go in.'

'Right, so you tell the others. And tell those clowns with the cameras to roll it, Chief Exley's compliments.'

Junior ran back, dumped shells, reloaded. Cameras ready; whistles, applause: wine-guzzling loafers.

Hands up, count it down—

Eight: Junior spreads the word.

Six: the men flanked.

Three: Junior window-aiming.

One: 'Now!'

Glass exploded *ka*-BOOM, loud loud loud; recoil knocked Junior flat. Cops too shocked to yell 'TRIPLE AUGHT!'

Window curtains in rags.

Screams.

Run up, jump the sill. Chaos: blood spray, bet slip/cash confetti. Phone tables dumped, a stampede: out the back door bookie fistfights.

A nigger coughing glass.

A pachuco minus some fingers.

'Wrong Load' Stemmons: 'Police! Stop or we'll shoot!'

Grab him, shout: 'This was shots fired inside, a fucking criminal altercation. We went in the window because we figured the door wouldn't go down. You talk nice to the new guys and tell them I owe them one. You get the men together and make fucking-A sure they know the drill. *Do you understand me?*'

Junior shook free. Foot thumps – window-storming plain-clothes-men. Cover noise: I pulled my spare piece. Two ceiling shots, a wipe – evidence.

Toss the gun. More chaos: suspects kicked prone, cuffed.

Moans, shouts, shotgun wadding/blood stink.

I 'discovered' the gun. Reporters ran in; Junior spieled them. Out to the porch, fresh air.

'You owe me eleven hundred, Counselor.'

Make the voice: Jack Woods. Mixed bag – bookie/strong-arm/contract trigger.

I walked over. 'Did you catch the show?'

'I was just driving up – and you should put that kid Stemmons on a leash.'

'His daddy's an inspector. I'm the kid's mentor, so I've got a captain's job as a lieutenant. Did you have a bet down?'

'That's right.'

'Slumming?'

'I'm in the business myself, so I spread my own bets around for good will. Dave, you owe me eleven hundred.'

'How do you know you won?'

'The race was fixed.'

Jabber – newsmen, the locals. 'I'll get it out of the evidence vault.'

'C'est la guerre. And by the way, how's your sister?'

'Meg's fine.'

'Say hi for me.'

Sirens; black & whites pulling up.

'Jack, get out of here.'

'Good seeing you, Dave.'

Book the fuckers – Newton Street Station.

Rap sheet checks: nine outstanding warrants total. Missing Fingers came up a sweetheart: rape, ADW, flimflam. Shock pale, maybe dying – a medic fed him coffee and aspirin.

I booked the plant gun, bet slips and money – minus Jack Woods' eleven hundred. Junior, press relations: the lieutenant owes you a story.

Two hours of pure shitwork.

4:30 – back to the Bureau. Messages waiting: Meg said drop by; Welles Noonan said the guard gig, six sharp. Exley: 'Report in detail.'

Details – type them out, more shitwork:

4701 Naomi Avenue, 1400 hours. Set to raid a bookmaker's drop, Sgt George

Stemmons, Jr, and I heard shots fired inside the premises. We did not inform the other officers for fear of creating a panic. I ordered a shot-gun round directed at the front window; Sgt Stemmons misled the other men with a 'birdshot assault' cover story. A .38 revolver was found; we arrested six bookmakers. The suspects were booked at Newton Station; the wounded received adequate first aid and hospital treatment. R&I revealed numerous extant warrants on the six, who will be remanded to the Hall of Justice Jail and arraigned on felony charges 614.5 and 859.3 of the California Penal Code. All six men will be subsequently interrogated on the shots fired and their bookmaking associations. I will conduct the interrogations myself – as Division Commander I must personally guarantee the veracity of all proferred statements. Press coverage of this occurrence will be minimal: reporters at the scene were unprepared for the rapid transpiring of events.

Sign it: Lieutenant David D. Klein, Badge 1091, Commander, Administrative Vice.

Carbons to: Junior, Chief Exley.

The phone—

'Ad Vice, Klein.'

'Davey? Got a minute for an old gonif buddy?'

'Mickey, Jesus Christ.'

'I know, I'm supposed to call you at home. Uh … Davey … a favor for Sam G.?'

G. for Giancana. 'I guess. What?'

'You know that croupier guy you're watchdogging?'

'Yeah.'

'Well … the radiator's loose in his bedroom.'

2

ROCKABYE REUBEN RUIZ: ‘This is the tits. I could get used to this.’

The Embassy Hotel: parlor, bedrooms, TV. Nine floors up, suite service: food and booze.

Ruiz belting Scotch, half-assed restless. Sanderline Johnson watching cartoons, slack-jawed.

Junior practicing quick draws.

Try some talk. ‘Hey, Reuben.’

Popping mock jabs: ‘Hey, Lieutenant.’

‘Hey, Reuben. Did Mickey C. try to infringe on your contract?’

‘He what you call strongly suggested my manager let him buy in. He sent the Vecchio brothers out to talk to him, then he punked out when Luis told them, “Hey, kill me, ’cause I ain’t signin’ no release form.” You want my opinion? Mickey ain’t got the stones for strongarm no more.’

‘But you’ve got the *cojones* to snitch.’

Jabs, hooks. ‘I got a brother deserted the army, maybe lookin’ at Federal time. I got three bouts coming up at the Olympic, which Welles Noonan can fuck up with subpoenas. My family’s what you call from a long line of thieves, what you call trouble prone, so I sorta like making friends in what you might call the law-enforcement community.’

‘Do you think Noonan has good stuff on Mickey?’

‘No, Lieutenant, I don’t.’

‘Call me Dave.’

‘I’ll call you Lieutenant, ’cause I got enough friends in the law-enforcement community.’

‘Such as?’

‘Such as Noonan and his FBI buddy Shipstad. Hey, you know School-boy Johnny Duhamel?’

‘Sure. He fought in the Gloves, turned pro, then quit.’

‘You lose your first pro fight, you better quit. I told him that, ’cause Johnny and me are old friends, and Johnny is now *Officer* Schoolboy Johnny Duhamel, on the fuckin’ LAPD, on the righteous Mobster Squad, no less. He’s tight with the – what you call him? – legendary? – Captain Dudley Smith. So I got enough fuck—’

‘Ruiz, watch your language.’

Junior – pissed. Johnson goosed the TV – Mickey Mouse ran from Donald Duck.

Junior killed the volume. ‘I knew Johnny Duhamel when I taught at the Academy. He was in my evidence class, and he was a damn good student. I don’t like it when criminals get familiar with policemen. *Comprende, pendejo?*’

‘*Pendejo*, huh? So I’m the *stupido*, and you’re this punk cowboy, playin’ with your gun like that sissy mouse on fuckin' television.'

Necktie pull, signal Junior: FREEZE IT.

He froze – fumbling his gun.

Ruiz: 'I can always use another friend, *Dave*. There something you want to know?'

I boosted the TV. Johnson stared, rapt – Daisy Duck vamping Donald. Ruiz: 'Hey, *Dave*. You wangle this job to pump me?'

Huddle close, semi-private. 'You want to make another friend, then give. What's Noonan have?'

'He's got what you call aspirations.'

'I know that. *Give*.'

'Well … I heard Shipstad and this other FBI guy talking. They said Noonan's maybe afraid the fight probe's too limited. Anyway, he's thinking over this backup plan.'

'And?'

'And it's like a general L.A. rackets thing, mostly Southside stuff. Dope, slots, you know, illegal vending machines and that kind of shit. I heard Shipstad say something about the LAPD don't investigate colored on colored homicides, and all this ties to Noonan making the new DA – what's his name?'

'Bob Gallaudet.'

'Right, Bob Gallaudet. Anyway, it all ties to making him look bad so Noonan can run against him for attorney general.'

Darktown, the coin biz – Mickey C.'s last going stuff. 'What about Johnson?'

Snickers. 'Look at that mulatto wetbrain. Can you believe he used to be forty-three, zero and two?'

'Reuben, *give*.'

'Okay, give he's close to a fuckin' idiot, but he's got this great memory. He can memorize card decks, so some made guys gave him a job at the Lucky Nugget down in Gardena. He's good at memorizing conversations, and some guys weren't so what you call discreet talking around him. I heard Noonan's gonna make him do these memory tricks on the stand, which—'

'I get the picture.'

'Good. I quit my own trouble-prone ways, but I sure got a trouble-prone family. I shouldn't of told you what I did, so since you're my friend I'm sure this ain't getting back to the Federal guys, right, *Dave?*'

'Right. Now eat your dinner and get some rest, okay?'

Midnight – lights out. I took Johnson; Junior took Ruiz – my suggestion.

Johnson, bedtime reading: 'God's Secret Power Can Be Yours'. I pulled a chair up and watched his lips: glom the inside track to Jesus, fight the Jew-Communist conspiracy to mongrelize Christian America. Send your contribution to Post Office Box blah, blah, blah.

'Sanderline, let me ask you something.'

'Uh, yessir.'

'Do you believe that pamphlet you're reading?'

'Uh, yessir. Right here it says this woman who came back to life said Jesus guarantees all gold-star contributors a new car every year in heaven.'

JESUS FUCK.

'Sanderline, did you catch a few in your last couple of fights?'

'Uh, no. I stopped Bobby Calderon on cuts and lost a split decision to Ramon Sanchez. Sir, do you think Mr. Noonan will get us a hot lunch at the grand jury?'

Handcuffs out. ‘Put these on while I take a piss.’

Johnson stood up – yawning, stretching. Check the heater – thick pipes – nix ballast.

Open window – nine-floor drop – this geek half-breed smiling.

‘Sir, what do you think Jesus drives himself?’

I banged his head against the wall, threw him out of the window screaming.

3

LAPD HOMICIDE SAID suicide, case closed.

The DA: suicide probable.

Confirmation – Junior, Ruiz – Sanderline Johnson, crazy man.

Listen:

I watched him read, dozed off, woke up – Johnson announced he could fly. He went out the window before I could voice my disbelief.

Questioning: Feds, LAPD, DA's men. Basics: Johnson crash-landed on a parked De Soto, DOA, no witnesses. Bob Gallaudet seemed pleased: a rival's political progress scotched. Ed Exley: report to my office, 10:00 A.M.

Welles Noonan: incompetent disgrace of a policeman; pitiful excuse for an attorney. Suspicious – my old nickname – 'the Enforcer'.

No mention: 187 PC – felonious homicide.

No mention: outside-agency investigations.

No mention: interdepartmental charges.

I drove home, showered, changed – no reporters hovering yet. Downtown, a dress for Meg – I do it every time I kill a man.

10:00 A.M.

Waiting: Exley, Gallaudet, Walt Van Meter – the boss, Intelligence Division. Coffee, pastry – fuck me.

I sat down. Exley: 'Lieutenant, you know Mr Gallaudet and Captain Van Meter.'

Gallaudet, all smiles: 'It's been "Bob" and "Dave" since law school, and I won't fake any outrage over last night. Did you see the *Mirror*, Dave?'

'No.'

'"Federal Witness Plummets to Death", with a sidebar: "Suicide Pronouncement: 'Hallelujah, I Can Fly!'" You like it?'

'It's a pisser.'

Exley, cold: 'The lieutenant and I will discuss that later. In a sense it ties in to what we have here, so let's go to it.'

Bob sipped coffee. 'Political intrigue. Walt, you tell him.'

Van Meter coughed. 'Well … Intelligence has done some political operations before, and we've got our eye on a target now – a pinko lawyer who has habitually bad-mouthed the Department and Mr Gallaudet.'

Exley: 'Keep going.'

'Well, Mr. Gallaudet should be elected to a regular term next week. He's an ex-policeman himself, and he speaks our language. He's got the support of the Department and some of the City Council, but—'

Bob cut in. 'Morton Diskant. He's neck and neck with Tom Bethune for Fifth

District city councilman, and he's been ragging me for weeks. You know, how I've only been a prosecutor for five years and how I cashed in when Ellis Loew resigned as DA. I've heard he's gotten cozy with Welles Noonan, who just might be on my dance card in '60, and Bethune is our kind of guy. It's a very close race. Diskant's been talking Bethune and I up as right-wing shitheads, and the district's twenty-five percent Negro, lots of them registered voters. You take it from there.'

Play a hunch. 'Diskant's been riling the spooks up with Chavez Ravine, something like "Vote for me so your Mexican brothers won't get evicted from their shantytown shacks to make room for a ruling-class ballpark." It's five-four in favor on the Council, and they take a final vote sometime in November after the election. Bethune's an interim incumbent, like Bob, and if he loses he has to leave office before the vote goes down. Diskant gets in, it's a deadlock. We're all civilized white men who know the Dodgers are good for business, so let's get to it.'

Exley, smiling: 'I met Bob in '53, when he was a DA's Bureau sergeant. He passed the bar and registered as a Republican the same day. Now the pundits tell us we'll only have him as DA for two years. Attorney General in '60, then what? Will you stop at Governor?'

Laughs all around. Van Meter: 'I met Bob when he was a patrolman and I was a sergeant. Now it's "Walt" and "Mr Gallaudet."'

'I'm still "Bob". And you used to call me "son".'

'I will again, Robert. If you disown your support of district gambling.'

Stupid crack – the bill wouldn't pass the State Legislature. Cards, slots and bookmaking – confined to certain areas – taxable big. Cops hated it – say Gallaudet embraced it for votes. 'He'll change his mind, he's a politician.'

No laughs – Bob coughed, embarrassed. 'It looks like the fight probe is down. With Johnson dead, they've got no confirming witnesses, and I got the impression Noonan was just using Reuben Ruiz for his marquee value. Dave, do you agree?'

'Yeah, he's a likable local celebrity. Apparently Mickey C. made some kind of half-baked attempt to muscle his contract, so Noonan probably wanted to use Mickey for *his* marquee value.'

Exley, shiv shot: 'And we know you're an expert on Mickey Cohen.'

'We go back, Chief.'

'In what capacity?'

'I've offered him some free legal advice.'

'Such as?'

'Such as "Don't fuck with the LAPD." Such as "Watch out for Chief of Detectives Exley, because he never tells you exactly what he wants."'

Gallaudet, calm: 'Come on, enough. Mayor Poulson asked me to call this meeting, so we're on his time. And I have an idea, which is to keep Ruiz on our side. We use him as a front man to placate the Mexicans in Chavez Ravine, so if the evictions go down ugly, we have him as our PR guy. Doesn't he have some kind of burglary jacket?'

I nodded. 'Juvie time for B&E. I heard he used to belong to a burglary gang, and I know his brothers pull jobs. You're right – we should use him, promise to keep his family out of trouble if he goes along.'

Van Meter: 'I like it.'

Gallaudet: 'What about Diskant?'

I hit hard. 'He's a pinko, so he has to have some Commie associates. I'll find them and strongarm them. We'll put them on TV, and they'll snitch him.'

Bob, head shakes: 'No. It's too vague and there's not enough time.'

‘Girls, boys, liquor – give me a weakness. Look, I screwed up last night. Let me do penance.’

Silence: long, *loud*. Van Meter, off a sigh: ‘I heard he loves young women. He supposedly cheats on his wife very discreetly. He likes college girls. Young, idealistic.’

Bob, a smirk fading: ‘Dudley Smith can set it up. He’s done this kind of thing before.’

Exley, weird emphatic: ‘No, not Dudley. Klein, do you know the right people?’

‘I know an editor at *Hush-Hush*. I can get Pete Bondurant for the pix, Fred Turentine for bugging. Ad Vice popped a call house last week, and we’ve got just the right girl sweating bail.’

Stares all around. Exley, half smiling: ‘So do your penance, Lieutenant.’

Bob G. – diplomat. ‘He let me study his crib sheets in law school. Be nice, Ed.’

Exit line – he waltzed, Van Meter walked hangdog.

Say it: ‘Will the Feds ask for an investigation?’

‘I doubt it. Johnson did ninety days observation at Camarillo last year, and the doctors there told Noonan he was unstable. Six FBI men canvassed for witnesses and got nowhere. They’d be stupid to pursue an investigation. You’re clean, but I don’t like the way it looks.’

‘You mean criminal negligence?’

‘I mean your longstanding and somewhat well-known criminal associations. I’ll be kind and say you’re “acquainted” with Mickey Cohen, a focus of the investigation your negligence destroyed. Imaginative people might make a slight jump to “criminal conspiracy”, and Los Angeles is filled with such people. You see how—’

‘Chief, listen to—’

‘No, you listen. I gave you and Stemmons that assignment because I trusted your competence and I wanted an attorney’s assessment of what the Feds had planned in our jurisdiction. What I got was “Hallelujah, I can Fly” and “Detective Snoozes While Witness Jumps Out Window.”’

Quash a laugh. ‘So what’s the upshot?’

‘You tell me. Assess what the Feds have planned past the fight probe.’

‘I’d say with Johnson dead, not much. Ruiz told me Noonan had some vague plans to mount an investigation into the Southside rackets – dope, the Darktown slot and vending machines. If that probe flies, the Department could be made to look bad. But *if* it goes, Noonan will announce it first – he’s headline happy. We’ll get a chance to prepare.’

Exley smiled. ‘Mickey Cohen runs the Southside coin business. Will you warn him to get his stuff out?’

‘I wouldn’t dream of it. Off the topic, did you read my report on the bookie house?’

‘Yes. Except for the shots fired, it was salutary. What is it? You’re looking at me like you want something.’

I poured coffee. ‘Throw me a bone for the Diskant job.’

‘You’re in no position to ask favors.’

‘After Diskant I will be.’

‘Then ask.’

Bad coffee. ‘Ad Vice is boring me. I was passing through Robbery and saw a case that looked good on the board.’

‘The appliance store heist?’

‘No, the Hurwitz fur warehouse job. A million in furs clouted, no leads, and Junior

Stemmons popped Sol Hurwitz at a dice game just last year. He's a degenerate gambler, so I'd bet money on insurance fraud.'

'No. It's Dudley Smith's case, and he's ruled insurance out. And you're a commanding officer, not a case man.'

'So stretch the rules. I tank the Commie, you throw me one.'

'No, it's Dudley's job. The case is three days old and he's already been assigned. Beyond that, I wouldn't want to tempt you with saleable items like furs.'

Shivved – deflect it. 'There's no love lost between you and Dud. He *wanted* chief of detectives, and you got it.'

'COs always get bored and want cases. Is there any particular reason why you want this one?'

'Robbery's clean. You wouldn't be suspicious of my friends if I worked heist jobs.'

Exley stood up. 'A question before you go.'

'Sir?'

'Did a friend tell you to push Sanderline Johnson out the window?'

'No, sir. But aren't you glad he jumped?'

I slept the night off, a room at the Biltmore – figure reporters had my pad staked out. No dreams, room service: 6:00 P.M. breakfast, the papers. New banners: 'U.S. Attorney Blasts "Negligent" Cop'; 'Detective Voices Regret at Witness Suicide.' Pure Exley – *his* press gig, *his* regret. Page three, more Exley: no Hurwitz-job leads – a gang with toolmaking/electronics expertise boosted a million plus in cold fur. Pix: a bandaged-up security guard; Dudley Smith ogling a mink.

Robbery, sweet duty: jack up heist guys and boost their shit.

Work the Commie: phone calls.

Fred Turentine, bug man – yes for five hundred. Pete Bondurant – yes for a grand – and he'd pay the photo guy. Pete, *Hush-Hush* cozy – more heat on the smear.

The Women's Jail watch boss owed me; a La Verne Benson update cashed her out. La Verne – prostitution beef number three – no bail, no trial date. La Verne to the phone – suppose we lose your rap sheet – yes! yes! yes!

Antsy – my standard postmurder shakes. Antsy to itchy – drive.

A run by my pad – reporters – no haven there. Up to Mulholland, green lights/no traffic – 60, 70, 80. Fishtails, curve shimmy – slow down, think.

Think Exley.

Brilliant, cold. In '53 he gunned down four niggers – it closed out the Nite Owl case. Spring '58 – evidence proved he killed the wrong men. The case was reopened; Exley and Dudley Smith ran it: *the* biggest job in L.A. history. Multiple homicides/smut intrigue/interlocked conspiracies – Exley cleared it for real. His construction-king father killed himself non sequitur; now Inspector Ed got his money. Thad Green resigned as Chief of Detectives; Chief Parker jumped Dudley to replace him: Edmund Jennings Exley, thirty-six years old.

No love lost – Exley and Dudley – two good haters.

No Detective Division reforms – just Exley going iceberg cold.

Green lights up to Meg's house – just her car out front. Meg in the kitchen window.

I watched her.

Dish duty – a lilt to her hands – maybe background music. Smiling – a face almost mine, but gentle. I hit the horn—

Yes – a primp – her glasses, her hair. A smile – anxious.

I jogged up the steps; Meg had the door open. 'I had a feeling you'd bring me a gift.'

'Why?'

'The last time you got in the papers you bought me a dress.'

'You're the smart Klein. Go on, open it.'

'Was it terrible? They had this clip on TV.'

'He was a dumb bunny. Come on, open it up.'

'David, we have to discuss some business.'

I nudged her inside. '*Come on.*'

Rip, tear – wrapping paper in shreds. A whoop, a mirror dash – green silk, a perfect fit.

'Does it work?'

A swirl – her glasses almost flew. 'Zip me?'

Shape her in, tug the zipper. Perfect – Meg kissed me, checked the mirror.

'Jesus, you and Junior. He can't stop admiring himself either.'

A swirl, a flash: prom date '35. The old man said take Sissy – the guys hounding her weren't appropriate.

Meg sighed. 'It's beautiful. Just like everything you give me. And how is Junior Stemmons these days?'

'Thank you, you're welcome, and Junior Stemmons is half smart. He's not really suited for the Detective Bureau, and if his father didn't swing me the command at Ad Vice I'd kick his ass back to a teaching job.'

'Not a forceful enough presence?'

'Right, with a hot-dog sensibility that makes it stand out worse, and itchy nerves like he's raiding the dope vault at Narco. Where's your husband?'

'Going over some blueprints for a building he's designing. And while we're on the subject …'

'Shit. Our buildings, right? Deadbeats? Skipouts?'

'We're slumlords, so don't act surprised. It's the Compton place. Three units in arrears.'

'So advise me. You're the real estate broker.'

'Two units are one month due, the other is two months behind. It takes ninety days to file an eviction notice, and that entails a court date. And *you're* the attorney.'

'Fuck, I hate litigation. And will you sit down?'

She sprawled – a green chair, the green dress. Green against her hair – black – a shade darker than mine. 'You're a good litigator, but I know you'll just send some goons down with fake papers.'

'It's easier that way. I'll send Jack Woods or one of Mickey's guys.'

'Armed?'

'Yeah, and fucking dangerous. Now tell me you love the dress again. Tell me so I can go home and get some sleep.'

Counting points – our old routine. 'One, I love the dress. Two, I love my big brother, even though he got all the looks and more of the brains. Three, by way of amenities, I quit smoking again, I'm bored with my job and my husband and I'm considering sleeping around before I turn forty and lose the rest of my looks. Four, if you knew any men who weren't cops or thugs I'd ask you to fix me up.'

Points back: 'I got the Hollywood looks, you got the real ones. Don't sleep with Jack Woods, because people have this tendency to shoot at him, and the first time you and Jack tried shacking it didn't last too long. I do know a few DAs, but they'd bore you.'

'Who do I have left? I flopped as a gangster consort.'

The room swayed – frazzled time. ‘I don’t know. Come on, walk me out.’

Green silk – Meg stroked it. ‘I was thinking of that logic class we took undergrad. You know, cause and effect.’

‘Yeah?’

‘I … well, a hoodlum dies in the papers, and I get a gift.’

Swaying bad. ‘Let it go.’

‘Trombino and Brancato, then Jack Dragna. Honey, I can live with what we did.’

‘You don’t love me the way I love you.’

4

REPORTERS AT MY door, wolfing take-out.

I parked out back, jimmied a bedroom window. Noise – newsmen gabbing *my story*. Lights off, crack that window: talk to defuse Meg's bomb.

Straight: I'm a kraut, not a Jew – the old man's handle got clipped at Ellis Island. '38 – the LAPD; '42 – Marines. Pacific duty, back to the Department '45. Chief Horrall resigns; William Worton replaces him – a squeaky-clean Marine Corps major general. Semper Fi: he forms an ex-Marine goon squad. Espirit de Corps: we break strikes, beat uppity parolees back to prison.

Law school, freelance work – the GI Bill won't cover USC. Repo man, Jack Woods' collector – 'the Enforcer'. Work for Mickey C: union disputes settled strongarm. Hollywood beckons – I'm tall, handsome.

Nix, but it leads to *real* work. I break up a squeeze on Liberace – two well-hung shines, blackmail pix. I'm in with Hollywood and Mickey C. I make the Bureau, make sergeant. I pass the bar, make lieutenant.

All true.

I topped my twenty last month – true. My Enforcer take bought slum pads – true. I shacked with Anita Ekberg and the redhead on 'The Spade Cooley Show' – false.

Bullshit took over; talk moved to Chavez Ravine. I shut the window and tried to sleep.

No go.

Lift that window – no newsmen. TV: strictly test patterns. Turn it off, run the string out – MEG.

It was always there scary wrong – and we touched each other too long to say it. I kept the old man's fists off her; she kept me from killing him. College together, the war, letters. Other men and other women fizzled.

Rowdy postwar years – 'the Enforcer'. Meg – pal, repo sidekick. A fling with Jack Woods – I let it go. Study ate up my time – Meg ran wild solo. She met two hoods: Tony Trombino, Tony Brancato.

June '51 – our parents dead in a car wreck.

The guts, the will—

A motel room – Franz and Hilda Klein fresh buried. Naked just to see. On each other – every taste half recoil.

Meg broke it off – no finish. Fumbles: our clothes, words, the lights off.

I still wanted it.

She didn't.

She ran crazy with Trombino and Brancato.

The fucks messed with Jack Dragna – the Outfit's number-one man in L.A. Jack showed me a picture: Meg – bruises, hickeys – Trombino/Brancato verified.

Verified – they popped a mob dice game.

Jack said five grand, you clip them – I said yes.

I set it up – a shakedown run – 'We'll rob this bookie holding big.' August 6, 1648 North Ogden – the Two Tonys in a '49 Dodge. I slid in the backseat and blew their brains out.

'Mob Warfare' headlines – Dragna's boss torpedo picked up quick. His alibi: Jack D.'s parish priest. Gangland unsolved – let the fucking wops kill each other.

I was paid – plus a tape bonus: a man raging at the scum who hurt his sister. Dragna's voice – squelched out. My voice: 'I will fucking kill them. I will fucking kill them for free.'

Mickey Cohen called. Jack said I owed the Outfit – the debt kosher for a few favors. Jack would call, I'd be paid – strictly business.

Hooked.

Called:

June 2, '53: I clipped a dope chemist in Vegas.

March 26, '55: I killed two jigs who raped a mob guy's wife.

September '57, a rumor: Jack D. – heart disease bad.

I called him.

Jack said, 'Come see me.'

We met at a beachfront motel – his fixing-to-die-fuck spot. Guinea heaven: booze, smut, whores next door.

I begged him: cancel my debt.

Jack said, 'The whores do lez stuff.'

I choked him dead with a pillow.

Coroner's verdict/mob consensus: heart attack.

Sam Giancana – my new caller. Mickey C. his front man: cop favors, clip jobs.

Meg sensed something. Lie away her part, take all the guilt. Sleep – restless, sweaty.

The phone – grab it – 'Yes?'

'Dave? Dan Wilhite.'

Narco – the boss. 'What is it, Captain?'

'It's … shit, do you know J. C. Kafesjian?'

'I know who he is. I know what he is to the Department.'

Wilhite, low: 'I'm at a crime scene. I can't really talk and I've got nobody to send over, so I called you.'

Hit the lights. 'Fill me in, I'll go.'

'It's, shit, it's a burglary at J.C.'s house.'

'Address?'

'1684 South Tremaine. That's just off—'

'I know where it is. Somebody called Wilshire dicks before they called you, right?'

'Right, J.C.'s wife. The whole family was out for the evening, but Madge, the wife, came home first. She found the house burgled and called Wilshire Station. J.C., Tommy and Lucille – that's the other kid – came home and found the house full of detectives who didn't know about our … uh … arrangement with the family. Apparently, it's some goddamn nutso B&E and the Wilshire guys are making pests of themselves. J.C. called my wife, she called around and found me. Dave …'

'I'll go.'

'Good. Take someone with you, and count it one in your column.'

I hung up and called for backup – Riegle, Jensen – no answer. Shit luck – Junior

Stemmons – 'Hello?'

'It's me. I need you for an errand.'

'Is it a call-out?'

'No, it's an errand for Dan Wilhite. It's smooth J.C. Kafesjian's feathers.'

Junior whistled. 'I heard his kid's a real psycho.'

'1684 South Tremaine. Wait for me outside, I'll brief you.'

'I'll be there. Hey, did you see the late news? Bob Gallaudet called us "exemplary officers", but Welles Noonan said we were "incompetent free-loaders". He said that ordering room-service booze for our witnesses contributed to Johnson's suicide. He said—'

'*Just be there*.'

Code 3, do Wilhite solid – aid the LAPD's sanctioned pusher. Narco/J.C. Kafesjian – twenty years connected – old Chief Davis brought him in. Weed, pills, H – Darktown trash as clientele. Snitch duty got J.C. the dope franchise. Wilhite played watchdog; J.C. ratted pushers, per our policy: keep narcotics isolated south of Slauson. His legit work: a dry-cleaning chain; his son's work: muscle goon supreme.

Crosstown to the pad: a Moorish job lit up bright. Cars out front: Junior's Ford, a prowl unit.

Flashlight beams and voices down the driveway. 'Holy shit, holy shit' – Junior Stemmons.

I parked, walked over.

Light in my eyes. Junior: 'That's the lieutenant.' A stink: maybe blood rot.

Junior, two plainclothesmen. 'Dave, this is Officer Nash and Sergeant Miller.'

'Gentlemen, Narco's taking this over. You go back to the station. Sergeant Stemmons and I will file reports if it comes to that.'

Miller: '"Comes to that"? Do you *smell* that?'

Heavy, acidic. 'Is this a homicide?'

Nash: 'Not exactly. Sir, you wouldn't believe the way that punk Tommy What's-His-Name talked to us. *Comes to*—'

'Go back and tell the watch commander Dan Wilhite sent me over. Tell him it's J.C. Kafesjian's place, so it's not your standard 459. If that doesn't convince him, have him wake up Chief Exley.'

'Lieutenant—'

Grab a flashlight, chase the smell – back to a snipped chain-link fence. Fuck – two Dobermans – no eyes, throats slit, teeth gnashing chemical-soaked washrags. Gutted – entrails, blood – blood dripping toward a jimmied back door.

Shouts inside – two men, two women. Junior: 'I shooed the squadroom guys off. Some 459, huh?'

'Lay it out for me, I don't want to question the family.'

'Well, they were all at a party. The wife had a headache, so she took a cab home first. She went out to let the dogs in and found them. She called Wilshire, and Nash and Miller caught the squeal. J.C., Tommy and the daughter – the two kids live here, too – came home and raised a ruckus when they found cops in the living room.'

'Did you talk to them?'

'Madge – that's the wife – showed me the damage, then J.C. shut her up. Some heirloom-type silverware was stolen, and the damage was some strange stuff. Do you feature this? I have never worked at B&E job like this one.'

Yells, horn bleats.

'It's not a job. And what do you mean "strange stuff"?'

'Nash and Miller tagged it. You'll see.'

I flashed the yard – foamy meat scraps – call the dogs poisoned. Junior: 'He fed them that meat, then mutilated them. He got blood on himself, then trailed it into the house.'

Follow it:

Back-door pry marks. A laundry porch – bloody towels discarded – the burglar cleaned up.

The kitchen door intact – he slipped the latch. No more blood, the sink evidence tagged: 'Broken Whiskey Bottles'. Cabinet-drawers theft tagged: 'Antique Silverware'.

Them:

'You whore, to let strange policemen into our home!'

'Daddy, please don't!'

'We always call Dan when we need help!'

A dining room table, photo scraps piled on top: 'Family Pictures'. Sax bleats upstairs.

Walk the pad.

Too-thick carpets, velvet sofas, flocked wallpaper. Window air coolers – Jesus statues perched beside them. A rug tagged: 'Broken Records/Album Covers' – *The Legendary Champ Dineen: Sooo Slow Moods; Straight Life:* The Art Pepper Quartet; *The Champ Plays the Duke*.

LPs by a hi-fi – stacked neat.

Junior walked in. 'Like I told you, huh? Some damage.'

'Who's making that noise?'

'The horn? That's Tommy Kafesjian.'

'Go up and make nice. Apologize for the intrusion, offer to call Animal Control for the dogs. Ask him if he wants an investigation. Be nice, do you understand?'

'Dave, he's a criminal.'

'Don't worry, I'll be brown-nosing his old man even worse.'

'DADDY, DON'T!' – booming through closed doors.

'J.C, LEAVE THE GIRL ALONE!'

Spooky – Junior *ran* upstairs.

'THAT'S RIGHT, GET OUT' – a side door slamming – 'Daddy' in my face.

J.C. close up: a greasy fat man getting old. Burly, pockmarked, bloody facial scratches.

'I'm Dave Klein. Dan Wilhite sent me over to square things.'

Squinting: 'What so important he couldn't come himself?'

'We can do this any way you want, Mr. Kafesjian. If you want an investigation, you've got it. You want us to dust for prints, maybe get you a name, you've got it. If you want payback, Dan will support you in anything within reason, if you follow—'

'I follow what you mean and I clean my own house. I deal with Captain Dan strictly, not strangers in my parlor.'

Two women snuck by. Soft brunettes – nongrease types. The daughter waved – silver nails, blood drops.

'You see my girls, now forget them. They are not for you to know.'

'Any idea who did it?'

'Not for you to talk about. Not for you to mention business rivals who might want to hurt me and mine.'

'Rivals in the dry-cleaning biz?'

'Not for you to make jokes! Look! Look!'

A door tag: 'Mutilated Clothing'. 'Look! Look! Look!' – J.C. yanked the knob –

'Look! Look! Look!'

Look: a small closet. Spread-legged, crotch-ripped pedal pushers tacked across the walls.

Stained – smell it – semen.

'Now it is not to laugh. I buy Lucille and Madge so many nice clothes that they must keep some down in the parlor. Perverted degenerate wants to hurt Lucille's pretty things. *You look*.'

Tijuana whore stuff: 'Pretty'.

'Not so funny now, Dan Wilhite's errand boy. Now you don't laugh.'

'Call Dan. Tell him what you want done.'

'I clean my own house!'

'Nice threads. Your daughter working her way through college?'

Fists clenching/veins popping/face-rips trickling – this fat greasy fuck pressing close.

Shouts upstairs.

I ran up. A room off the hall – scope the damage.

Tommy K. up against the wall. Reefers on the floor, tough guy Junior frisking him. Jazz posters, Nazi flags, a sax on the bed.

I laughed.

Tommy smiled nice – this skinny nongreaser.

Junior: 'He *flaunted* that maryjane. He *ridiculed* the Department.'

'Sergeant, apologize to Mr. Kafesjian.'

Half pout, half shriek: 'Dave … God … *I'm sorry*.'

Tommy lit up a stick and blew smoke in Junior's face.

J.C., downstairs: 'Go home now! I clean my own house!'

5

BAD SLEEP, NO sleep.

Meg's call woke me up: get our late rent settled, no silk-dress talk. I said, 'Sure, sure' – hung up and pitched Jack Woods: twenty per cent on every rent dollar collected. He jewed me up to twenty-five – I agreed.

Work calls: Van Meter, Pete Bondurant, Fred Turentine. Three green lights: La Verne's pad was bugged; a photo man was stashed in the bedroom. Diskant – tailed and overheard: drinks at Ollie Hammond's Steakhouse, 6:00 P.M.

The bait stood ready: *our* Commie consort. Pete said *Hush-Husk* loved it: pinko politico trips on his dick.

I called Narco – Dan Wilhite was out – I left a message. Bad sleep, no sleep – the nightmare Kafesjians. Junior last night, comic relief: 'I know you don't think I rate the Bureau, but I'll show you, I'll really show you.'

5:00 P.M. – fuck sleep.

I cleaned up, checked the *Herald* – Chavez Ravine bumped my dead man off page one. Bob Gallaudet: 'The Latin Americans who lose their dwellings will be handsomely compensated, and in the end a home for the L.A. Dodgers will serve as a point of pride for Angelenos of all races, creeds and colors.'

Knee-slapper stuff – it doused my Kafesjian hangover.

Ollie Hammond's – stake the bar entrance, wait.

Morton Diskant in the door, six sharp.

La Verne Benson in at 6:03 – tweed skirt, knee sox, cardigan.

6:14 – Big Pete B., sliding the seat back.

'Diskant's with his friends, La Verne's two booths down. Two seconds in and she's giving him these hot looks.'

'You think he'll tumble?'

'I would, but then I'm a pig for it.'

'Like your boss?'

'You can say his name – Howard Hughes. He's a busy guy – like you.'

'He was a dumb fuck. If he didn't jump, I probably would have pushed him.'

Pete tapped the dashboard – huge hands – they beat a drunk-tank brawler dead. The L.A. Sheriff's canned him; Howard Hughes found a soulmate.

'*You* been busy?'

'Sort of. I collect dope for *Hush-Hush*, I keep Mr. Hughes out of *Hush-Hush*. People try to see *Hush-Hush*, I convince them otherwise. I scout pussy for Mr. Hughes, I listen to Mr. Hughes talk this crazy shit about airplanes. Right now Mr. Hughes has got me tailing this actress who jilted him. Dig this: this cooze blows out of Mr. Hughes' number-one fuck pad, with a three-yard-a-week contract to boot, all to act in some horror cheapie. Mr. Hughes has got her signed to a seven-year slave contract, and he wants to get it violated on a morality clause. Can you feature this pussy pig preaching morality?'

'Yeah, and you love it because you're—'

'Because I'm a pig for the life, like you.'

I laughed, yawned. 'This could go on all night.'

Pete lit a cigarette. 'No, La Verne's impetuous. She'll get bored and honk the Commie's shvantz. Nice kid. She actually helped Turentine set up his microphones.'

'How's Freddy doing?'

'He's busy. Tonight he compromises this Commie, next week he wires some fag bathhouse for *Hush-Hush*. The trouble with Freddy T. is he's a booze pig. He's got all these drunk-driving beefs, so the last time the judge stuck him with this service job teaching electronics to the inmates up at Chino. Klein, look.'

La Verne at the bar door – two thumbs up. Pete signaled back. 'That means Diskant's meeting her after he ditches his friends. See that blue Chevy, that's hers.'

I pulled out – La Verne in front – right turns on Wilshire. Straight west – Sweetzer, north, the Strip. Curvy side streets, up into the hills – La Verne stopped by a stucco four-flat.

Ugly: floodlights, *pink* stucco.

I parked a space back – room for the Red.

La Verne wiggled up to her door. Pete sent out love taps on my siren.

Foyer lights on and off. Window lights on – the downstairs-left apartment. Party noise: the pad across from La Verne's.

Pete stretched. 'You think Diskant's got the smarts to make this for an unmarked?'

La Verne opened her curtains, stripped to peignoir and garters. 'No, he's only got one thing on his mind.'

'You're right, 'cause he's a pig for it. I say one hour or less.'

'Twenty says fifteen minutes.'

'You're on.'

We settled in, eyes on that window. Lull time, party noise: show tunes, voices. Bingo – a tan Ford. Pete said, 'Forty-one minutes.'

I slid him twenty. Diskant walked up, hit the door, buzzed. La Verne, window framed: bumps and grinds.

Pete howled.

Diskant walked in.

Ten minutes ticking by slow … lights off at La Verne's love shack. Hold for the photo man's signal: flashbulb pops out that front window.

Fifteen minutes … twenty … twenty-five – a Sheriff's unit double-parking.

Pete nudged me. 'Fuck. That party. 116.84 California Penal Code, Unlawfully Loud Assembly. *Fuck*.'

Two deputies walking. Nightstick raps on the party-pad window.

No response.

'Klein, this is not fucking good.'

Rap rap rap – La Verne's front window. Flashbulb pops – *the bedroom window* – big-time-bad-news improvisation.

Screams – our Commie hooker.

The deputies kicked the foyer door down – I chased the fuckers, badge out—

Across the lawn, up the steps. Topsy-turvy glimpses: the photo man dropping out a window sans camera. Through the lobby – party kids mingling – La Verne's door snapped clean. I pushed through, punks tossing drinks in the face.

'Police! Police officer!'

I jumped the doorway dripping Scotch – a deputy caught me. My badge in his face: 'Intelligence Division! LAPD!'

The dipshit just gawked me. Bedroom shrieks—

I ran in—

Diskant and La Verne floor-tumbling – naked, flailing, gouging. A camera on the bed; a dumbfuck shouting: 'Hey! You two stop that! We're the Sheriff's!'

Pete ran in – Dumbfuck grinned familiar – old deputy-acquaintance recognition. Fast Pete: he hustled the clown out quicksville. La Verne vs. the pinko: kicks, sissy punches.

The camera on the bed: grab it, pop the film out, seal it. Hit the button – flashbulb light in Diskant's eyes.

One blind Commie – La Verne tore free. I kicked him and punched him – he yelped, blinked and focused – ON THE FILM.

Shakedown:

'This was supposed to be some kind of setup, but those policemen broke it up. You were heading for the scandal sheets, something like "Red Politician Blah Blah Blah." You come across and that won't happen, because I sure would hate for your wife to see this film. Now, are you sure you want to be a city councilman?'

Sobs.

Brass knucks on. 'Are you sure?'

More sobs.

Kidney shots – my knucks tore flab.

'*Are you sure?*'

Beet-red bawling: 'Please don't hurt me!'

Two more shots – Diskant belched foam.

'You drop out tomorrow. Now say yes, because I don't like this.'

'Y-yes p-p-p—'

Fucked-up shitty stuff – I hit the living room quashing shakes. No cops, La Verne draped in a sheet.

Pete, dangling bug mikes: 'I took care of the deputies, and Van Meter called on your two-way. You're supposed to meet Exley at the Bureau right now.'

Downtown. Exley at his desk.

I pulled a chair up, slid him the film. 'He's pulling out, so we won't have to go to *Hush-Hush*.'

'Did you enjoy the work?'

'Did you enjoy shooting those niggers?'

'The public has no idea what justice costs the men who perform it.'

'Which means?'

'Which means thank you.'

'Which means I have a favor coming.'

'You've been given one already, but ask anyway.'

'The fur robbery. Maybe it's insurance fraud, maybe it's not. Either way, I want to work cases.'

'No, I told you it's Dudley Smith's assignment.'

'Yeah, you and Dud are such good buddies. And what's with this "already" favor?'

'Besides no reprimand or interdepartmental charges on Sanderline Johnson?'

'Chief, come on.'

'I destroyed the autopsy report on Johnson. The coroner noted a non sequitur bruise with imbedded paint fragments on his forehead, as if he banged his head against a windowsill before he jumped. I'm not saying that you're culpable; but other people, notably Welles Noonan, might. I had the file destroyed. And I have a case for you. I'm detaching you from Ad Vice immediately to start working on it.'

Weak knees: 'What case?'

'The Kafesjian burglary. I read the Wilshire Squad occurrence report, and I've decided I want a major investigation. I'm fully aware of the family's LAPD history, and I don't care what Captain Wilhite wants. You and Sergeant Stemmons are detached as of now. Shake the family, shake their known associates. J.C. employs a runner named Abe Voldrich, so lean on him while you're at it. I want a full forensic and the files checked for similar B&Es. Start tomorrow – with a show of force.'

I stood up. 'This is fucking insane. Lean on *our* sanctioned Southside dope kingpin when the U.S. Attorney just might be planning a rackets probe down there. Some pervo kills two dogs and jacks off on some—'

Exley, standing/crowding: 'Do it. Detach canvassing officers from Wilshire Patrol and bring in the Crime Lab. Stemmons lacks field experience, but use him anyway. *Show of force*. And don't make me regret the favors I've done you.'

6

SHOW OF FORCE.

8:00 A.M., 1684 South Tremaine. Personnel: lab crew, print team, four bluesuits.

The blues deployed: house-to-house witness checks, trashcan checks. Traffic cops standing by to shoo the press off.

Show of force – Exley's wild hair up the ass.

Show of force – short-shrift it.

A compromise with Dan Wilhite – one edgy phone call. I said Exley pure had me; he called the job crazy – J.C. and the Department: twenty years of two-way profit. I owed Dan; he owed me – favors backlogged. Wilhite, scared: 'I retire in three months. My dealings with the family won't stand up to outside-agency scrutiny. Dave … can you … play it easy?'

I said, 'My ass first, yours second.'

He said, 'I'll call J.C. and jerk his leash.'

8:04 – showtime.

Black & whites, a lab van. Patrolmen, tech men. Gawkers galore, little kids.

The driveway – I walked the lab guys back. Ray Pinker: 'I called Animal Control. They told me they got no dead dog reports from this address. You think the people planted them in some pet cemetery?'

Garbage day – trashcans lined up in the alley. 'Maybe, but check those cans behind the back fence. I don't think Old Man Kafesjian's so sentimental.'

'I heard he was a real sweetheart. We find the dogs, then what?'

'Take tissue samples for a make on what they were poisoned with. If they're still chewing on washcloths, get me a make on the chemical – it smelled like chloroform. I need ten minutes to talk up J.C., then I want you to come inside and bag fibers in the kitchen, living room and dining room. Send the print guys in then, and tell them just the downstairs – I don't think our burglar went upstairs. He jerked off on some pedal pushers, so if Pops didn't throw them out you can test the semen for blood type.'

'Jesus.'

'Yeah, Jesus. Listen, if he did dump them, they're probably in those garbage cans. Pastel-colored pedal pushers ripped at the crotch, not everyday stuff. And Ray? I want a nice fat summary report on all this.'

'Don't shit a shitter. You want me to pad it, say it.'

'Pad it. I don't know what Exley wants, so let's give him something to chew on.'

Madge at the back door, looking out. Heavy makeup – Pan-Cake over bruises.

Ray nudged me. 'She doesn't look Armenian.'

'She's not, and their kids don't look it either. Ray—'

'Yeah, I'll pad it.'

Back to the street – rubberneckers swarming. Junior and Tommy K. locking eyes.

Tommy, porch loafer: bongo shirt, pegger pants, sax.

Junior sporting his new look: whipped dog with a mean streak.

I braced him – avuncular. 'Come on, don't let that guy bother you.'

'It's those looks of his. Like he knows something I don't.'

'Forget about it.'

'You didn't have to kowtow to him.'

'I didn't disobey my CO.'

'Dave …'

'Dave nothing. Your father's an inspector, he got you the Bureau, and my Ad Vice command was part of the deal. It's a game. You owe your father, I owe your father, I owe Dan Wilhite. We both owe the Department, so we have to play things like Exley's off the deep end on this deal. Do you understand?'

'I understand. But it's your game, so just don't tell me it's right.'

Slap his fucking face – no – don't. 'You pull that idealistic shit on me and I'll hand your father a fitness report that will bounce you back to a teaching job in record goddamn time. *My game got you where you are*. You play along or you see "ineffectual command presence", "overly volatile" and "poor composure in stress situations" on Daddy's desk tonight. You call it, Sergeant.'

Punk bravado: '*I'm playing*. I called the Pawnshop Detail and gave them a description of the silverware, and I got a list of Kafesjian's dry-cleaning shops. Three for you, three for me, the usual questions?'

'Good, but let's see what the patrolmen turn first. Then, after you hit your three go downtown and check the Central burglary files and Sheriff's files for 459s with similar MOs. You turn some, great. If not, check homicide unsolveds – maybe this clown's a goddamn killer.'

A stink, fly swarms – lab men hauled the dogs out, dripping garbage.

'I guess you wouldn't tell me these things if you didn't care.'

'That's right.'

'You'll see, Dave. I'll prove myself on this one.'

Tommy K. honked his sax – spectators clapped. Tommy bowed and pumped his crotch.

'Hey, Lieutenant! You come and talk to me!'

J.C. on the porch, holding a tray out. 'Hey! We have an eye opener!'

I walked up. Bottled beer – Tommy grabbed one and guzzled. Check his arms: skin-pop tracks, swastika tattoos.

J.C. smiled. 'Don't tell me too early for you.'

Tommy belched. 'Schlitz, Breakfast of Champions.'

'Five minutes, Mr. Kafesjian. Just a few questions.'

'I say all right, Captain Dan said you okay, this thing is not your idea. You follow me. Tommy, you go offer the other men Breakfast of Champions.'

Tommy dipped the tray à la carhop. J.C. bowed, follow-me style.

I followed him into the den: pine walls, gun racks. Check the parlor – print men, carhop Tommy hawking beer.

J.C. shut the door. 'Dan told me you just going to go through the motions.'

'Not quite. This is Ed Exley's case, and his rules are different than ours.'

'We do business, your people and mine. He knows that.'

'Yeah, and he's stretching the rules this time. He's the Chief of Detectives, and Chief Parker lets him do what he wants. I'll try to go easy, but you'll have to play along.'

J.C.: greasy and ugly. Face scratches – his own daughter clawed him. ‘Why? Exley, he’s crazy?’

‘I don’t know why, which is a damn good question. Exley wants the major-case treatment on this one, and he’s a better goddamn detective than I am. I can only bullshit him so far.’

J.C. shrugged. ‘Hey, you smart, you got more juice. You a lawyer, you tight with Mickey Cohen.’

‘No. I fix things, Exley *runs* things. You want smart? Exley’s the best detective the LAPD’s ever seen. Come on, help me. You don’t want regular cops nosing around, I understand that. But some piece-of-shit burglar breaks in here and rips up—’

‘I clean my own house! Tommy and me, we find this guy!’

Easy now: ‘No. *We* find him, then maybe Dan Wilhite gives you a shot. No trouble, nice and legal.’

Head jerks no-no. ‘Dan says you got questions. You ask, I answer. I play ball.’

‘No you’ll cooperate, no you won’t?’

‘I cooperate.’

Notebook out. ‘Who did it? Any ideas?’

‘No’ – deadpan – no read.

‘Enemies. Give me some names.’

‘We got no enemies.’

‘Come on, you sell narcotics.’

‘Don’t say that word in my home!’

EASY NOW: ‘Let’s call it business. Business rivals who don’t like you.’

Fist shakes no-no. ‘*You* make the rules, we play right. We do business fair and square so we don’t make no enemies.’

‘Then let’s try this. You’re what we call a suborned informant. People like that make enemies. Think about it and give me some names.’

‘Fancy words for snitch and fink and stool pigeon.’

‘Names, Mr. Kafesjian.’

‘Men in prison can’t break into nice family houses. I got no names for you.’

‘Then let’s talk about Tommy and Lucille’s enemies.’

‘No enemies, my kids.’

‘Think. This guy breaks in, breaks phonograph records and mutilates your daughter’s clothing. Did those records belong to Tommy?’

‘Yes. Tommy’s long-play record albums.’

‘Right. And Tommy’s a musician, so maybe the burglar had a grudge against him. He wanted to destroy his property and Lucille’s, but for some reason he didn’t get upstairs to their bedrooms. So, *their* enemies. Old musician buddies, Lucille’s old boyfriends. *Think*.’

‘No, no enemies’ – soft – say his brain just clicked on.

Change-up: ‘I need to fingerprint you and your family. We need to compare your prints against any prints the burglar might have left.’

He pulled a money clip out. ‘No. It’s not right. I clean my own—’

I squeezed his hand shut. ‘Play it your way. Just remember it’s Exley’s show, and I owe him more than I owe Wilhite.’

He tore his hand free and fanned out C-notes.

I said, ‘Fuck you. Fuck your whole greasy family.’

Rip, tear – he trashed two grand easy.

I waltzed before it got worse.

7

SHITWORK TIME.

Pinker labbed the dogs. The print guys got smudges, partials. The crowd dwindled; blues canvassed. Junior logged reports: nothing hot that night, archetypal Kafesjian rebop.

Dig: epic family brawls, all-night sax noise. J.C. watered the lawn in a jock strap. Tommy pissed out his bedroom window. Madge and Lucille: wicked tantrum shouters. Bruises, black eyes – standard issue.

Slow time – let it drag.

Lucille and Madge took off – adios in a pink Ford Vicky. Tommy practiced scales – the lab men popped in earplugs. Beer cans out the windows – Lunch of Champions.

Junior fetched the *Herald*. A Morton Diskant announcement: press conference, 6:00 tonight.

Time to kill – I hit the lab van, watched the techs work.

Tissue slicing extraction – our boy jammed the dogs' eyes down their throats. Back to my car, a doze – bum sleep two nights running stretched me thin.

'Dave, rise and shine' – Ray Pinker, too goddamn soon.

Up yawning. 'Results?'

'Yes, and interesting. I'm not a doctor and what I did wasn't an autopsy, but I think I can reconstruct some things conclusively.'

'Go. Tell me now, then route me a summary report.'

'Well, the dogs were poisoned with hamburger laced with sodium tryctozine, commonly known as ant poison. I found leather glove fragments on their teeth and gums, which leads me to believe that the burglar tossed them the meat, but didn't wait for them to die before he mutilated them. You told me you smelled chloroform, remember?'

'Yeah. I figured it was the washrags in their mouths.'

'You're close so far. But it wasn't chloroform, it was stelfactiznide chloride, a dry-cleaning chemical. Now, J.C. Kafesjian owns a string of dry-cleaning shops. Interesting?'

The man broke in, stole and destroyed. A psycho, but precise – no disarray. Bold: and time-consuming. Psycho-crazy shit: *and* neat, precise.

'You're saying he might know the family, might work in one of the shops.'

'Right.'

'Did you find the girl's pants?'

'No. We found charred fabric mounds in that garbage can with the dogs, so there's no way to test the semen for blood type.'

'Shit. Fried pedal pushers sounds just like J.C.'

'Dave, listen. This verges on theory, but I like it.'

'Go ahead.'

'Well, the dogs were chemically scalded right around their eyes, and the bones in their snouts were broken. I think the burglar debilitated them with the poison, clamped down on their snouts, then tried to blind them while they were still alive. Stelfactiznide causes blindness when locally applied, but they flailed too much and bit him. They died from the poison, then he gutted them postmortem. He had some strange fix on their eyes, so he carefully pulled them out, stuffed them down their throats and stuffed the washrags soaked in chemical in their mouths. All four eyeballs were saturated with that chloride, so I rest my case.'

Junior and a bluesuit hovering. 'Dave—'

Cut him off: 'Ray, have you *ever* heard of watchdog torture on a 459?'

'Never. And I'll go out on a limb for motive.'

'Revenge?'

'Revenge.'

'Dave …'

'*What?*'

'This is officer Bethel. Officer, tell the lieutenant.'

Nervous – a rookie. 'Uh, sir, I got two confirmations on a prowler on this block the night of the burglary. Sergeant Stemmons, he's had me checking on the houses where nobody was home earlier. This old lady told me she called the Wilshire desk, and this man, he said he saw him too.'

'Description?'

'J-just a young male Caucasian. No other details, but I called the desk anyway. They did send a car out. No luck, and no white prowlers got arrested or FI carded anywhere in the division that night.'

A lead – shove it at Junior. 'Call Wilshire and get four more men to hit the not-at-home addresses, say from six o'clock on. Have them go for descriptions on possible prowlers. Check those files I told you to and go by the first three Kafesjian shops on your list. Ray?'

'Yeah, Dave.'

'Ray, tell Stemmons here your chemical angle. Junior, hit that angle with the employees at the shops. If you get a rabbit, don't do something stupid like kill him.'

'Why not? Live by the sword, die by the sword.'

'You dumb shit, I want to hear this guy's take on the Kafesjians.'

Three E–Z Kleen shops – 1248 South Normandie closest. I drove over – the pink Ford stood out front.

I double-parked; a guy ran out looking anxious. Make him: Abe Voldrich, Kafesjian high-up.

'Please, Officer. They don't know anything about this goddamn break-in. Call Dan Wilhite, talk to him about the … uh …'

'Ramifications?'

'Yeah, that's a good word. Officer—'

'Lieutenant.'

'Lieutenant, let it rest. Yes, the family has enemies. No, they won't tell you who they are. You could ask Captain Dan, but I doubt if he'd tell you.'

Smart little hump. 'So we won't discuss enemies.'

'Now we're cooking with gas!'

'What about stelfactiznide chloride?'

'What? Now you're talking Greek to me.'

'It's a dry-cleaning chemical.'

'That end of the business I don't know from.'

Walking in: 'I want an employee list – all your shops.'

'No. We hire strictly colored people for the cleaning and pressing work, and most of them are on parole and probation. They wouldn't appreciate you asking questions.'

Jig crime – no – it played wrong. 'Do you have colored salespeople?'

'No, J.C. doesn't trust them around money.'

'Let me check your storeroom.'

'For that what you call it chemical? Why?'

'The watchdogs were burned with it.'

Sighing: 'Go, just don't roust the workers.'

I skirted the counter. A small factory in back: pressers, vats, darkies folding shirts. Wall shelves: jars, bottles.

Check labels – two run-throughs, a catch: stelfactiznide chloride, skull and crossbones.

I sniffed a jug – foul/familiar – my eyes burned. Put it back, dawdle – the women might show. No luck – just darting slave eyes. I walked back up front popping sweat.

Lucille at the counter, hanging shirts. Bump bump – ass grinds to a radio beat. Bump, flash: a vamp smile.

I smiled back. Lucille zipped her mouth, threw away a pretend key. Outside: Voldrich and Madge. Mama K.: wet makeup, tears.

I walked out to the car. Whispers – I couldn't hear shit.

I hit a pay phone – fuck the E-Z Kleen shops.

I called Ad Vice and left a message for Junior: buzz Dan Wilhite, bag a Kafesjian snitch list. Probably futile – he'd refuse, hot to placate J.C. A message *from* Junior: he'd checked around, learned stel-what-the-fuck was a standard dry-cleaning chemical used worldwide.

Back to South Tremaine – one black & white in front. Bethel waved me over. 'Sir, we got two more confirmations on that prowler night before last.'

'More details on his description?'

'No, but it looks like he's a peeper too. We got that same "young, white" male, and both people said he was peeping in windows.'

Think: burglary/mutilation tools. 'Did they say he was carrying anything?'

'No, sir, but I think he could have secreted the B&E stuff on his person.'

'But the people didn't call in complaints.'

'No, sir, but I got a lead that might tie in.'

Coax him: 'So tell me, Officer.'

'Well, the woman in the house directly across the street told me that sometimes Lucille Kafesjian dances naked in her bedroom window. You know, with the lights on behind her at night. She said she does it when her parents and her brother are out for the evening.'

Guesswork:

Exhibitionist Lucille, peeper/prowler/B&E man hooked on the family.

'Bethel, you're going places.'

'Uh, yessir. Where?'

'In general. Right now, though, you stick here. You keep going back to the addresses where no one was home earlier. You try to flesh out the description of the peeper. Got it?'

'Yessir!'

Rolling shitwork:

Wilshire Station, paper checks: arrest rosters, MO files, FI cards. Results: window-peeping young white men – zero. Dog-slashing burglars – zero.

University Station, arrest/MO – buppkis. FI cards, three recent: a 'youngish,' 'average build' white man was reported peeping whore motels. *My* eyeball man? – maybe – but:

No motel addresses – just 'South Western Avenue' listed. No complainant names or badge ID numbers listed.

No place to go right now.

I called 77th Street Station. The squad boss, bored:

No dog snuffs. A young white peeper spotted roof-prowling: fuck-pad motels, jazz clubs. No arrests, no suspects, no FI cards – the squad had a new card system pending. He'd route me the club/motel locations – if and when he found them.

Tommy K.'s *jazz* records smashed?

More calls: Central Jail, LAPD/Sheriff's R&I. Results: no dog-snuff arrests this year; zero on young white peeper/prowlers. 459 pops post-Kafesjian: no Caucasian perps.

Calls – a pay phone hogged three hours – every LAPD/Sheriff's squad room tapped. Shit: no young white peepers in custody; two wetback dog slashers deported to Mexico.

Waiting: the Bureau pervert file.

I rolled downtown. An office check – no messages, a report on my desk:

CONFIDENTIAL
10/30/58
TO: LIEUTENANT DAVID D. KLEIN
FROM: SERGEANT GEORGE STEMMONS, JR.
TOPIC: KAFESJIAN/459 P.C.
947.1 (HEALTH 9 SAFETY CODE – ANIMAL MAYHEM)

SIR:

As ordered, I checked the Central Bureau and Sheriff's Central Burglary files for 459's similar to ours. None were listed. I also cross-checked 947.1 offenders (very few were listed) against the 459 files and found no crossover names. (The youngest 947.1 offender is currently 39 years old, which contradicts the prowler lead that Officer Bethel gave us.) I also checked local/statewide homicide files back to 1950. No 187's/187's collateral to burglaries similar to our perpetrator's MO were listed.

Re: Captain Wilhite. I 'diplomatically' asked him to supply us with a list of pushers/addicts informed on by the Kafesjians, and he said that their snitches were never tallied, that no records were kept to protect the family. Captain Wilhite offered one name, a man recently informed on by Tommy Kafesjian: marijuana seller Wardell Henry Knox, male negro, employed as a bartender at various jazz clubs. Captain Wilhite's officers could not locate Knox. Knox was recently murdered (unsolved). It was a negro on negro homicide that presumably received only a cursory investigation.

Re the E-Z Kleen shops: at all three locations the staff flatly refused to talk to me.

Returning to Captain Wilhite. Frankly, I think he lied about the Kafesjian's snitches never being tallied. He expressed displeasure over your argument with J.C. Kafesjian and told me he has heard rumors that the Federal rackets probe will be launched, centering on narcotics dealings in South-Central Los Angeles. He expressed concern that the LAPD's suborning of the Kafesjian family will be made public and thus discredit both the Department and the individual Narcotics Division officers involved with the family.

I await further orders.

Respectfully,
Sgt. George Stemmons, Jr.
Badge 2104
Administrative Vice Division

Junior – half-ass smart when he tried. I left him a note: the peeper, stripper Lucille updates. Orders: go back to the house, run the canvassers, avoid the family.

Keyed up – glom the pervert file. Dog stuff/B&E/Peeping Tom, see what jumped:

A German shepherd-fucking Marine. Doctor 'Dog': popped for shooting his daughter up with beagle pus. Dog killers – none fit my man's specs. Dog fuckers, dog suckers, dog beaters, dog worshipers, a geek who chopped his wife while dressed up as Pluto. Panty sniffers, sink shitters, masturbators – lingerie jackoffs only. Faggot burglars, transvestite break-ins, 'Rita Hayworth' – Gilda gown, dyed bush hair, caught blowing a chloroformed toddler. The right age – but a jocker cut his dick off, he killed himself, a full-drag San Quentin burial. Peepers: windows, skylights, roofs – the roof clowns a chink brother act. No watchdog choppers, the geeks read passive, caught holding their puds with a whimper. Darryl Wishnick, a cute MO: peep, break, enter, rape watchdogs subdued by goofball-laced meat – too bad he kicked from syph in '56. One flash: peepers played passive, my guy killed badass canines.

No jumps.

5:45 – keyed up, hungry. Rick's Reef the ticket – maybe Diskant on TV.

I drove over, wolfed bar pretzels. TV news: Chavez Ravine, traffic deaths, the Red.

Boost the volume:

'… and so I'm withdrawing for personal reasons. Thomas Bethune will be re-elected by default, which I fervently hope will not guarantee the facilitation of the Chavez Ravine land grab. I will continue to protest this travesty as a private citizen. I …'

No more appetite – I took off. Nowhere to go – just a cruise. South – some magnet pulled me.

Figueroa, Slauson, Central. A gray cop Plymouth behind me – say IAD, Exley ordered. I gunned it – adios, maybe tail car.

Peeper turf – nightclubs, fuck flops. Bido Lito's, Klub Zamboanga, Club Zombie – low roofs, good for climbing. Lucky Time Motel, Tick Tock Motel. Easy peeping: roof access, weeds shoulder high. A brain click: catch Lester Lake at the Tiger Room.

U-turn, check the rearview, shit – a gray Plymouth cut off.

IAD or Narco? Goons keeping tabs?

Side streets – dawdling evasive – Lester's set closed at 8:00 sharp. Lester Lake: tenant, informant. Snitch duty cheap – he owed me.

Fall '52:

A call from Harry Cohn, movie kingpin. My 'Enforcer' tag intrigued him; he figured 'Klein' made me a Jewboy. A shvartze crooner was banging his girlfriend – clip him for ten grand.

I said no.

Mickey Cohen said no.

Cohn called Jack Dragna.

I knew I'd get the job – no refusal rights. Mickey: a taste for light poon don't rate death – but Jack insists.

I called Jack: this is petty shit, don't set a standard. Muscle Lester Lake – don't kill him.

Jack said *you* muscle him.

Jack said take the Vecchio brothers.

Jack said take the nigger someplace, cut his vocal cords—

Gulp – one split second—

'Or I'll nail you for Trombino and Brancato. I'll drag your whore sister's name through the mud.'

I grabbed Lester Lake at his crib: get cut or get killed – you call it. Lester said, cut, fast, please. The Vecchios showed – Touch packed a scalpel. A few drinks to loosen things up – knockout drops for Lester.

Anesthesia – Lester moaned for Mama. I hustled a disbarred doctor over – surgery in exchange for no abortion charge. Lester healed up; Harry Cohn found a new girlfriend: Kim Novak.

Lester's voice went baritone to tenor – he chased jig poon strictly now. Touch brought boyfriends to hear him.

Lester said he owed me. Our deal: a flop at my shine-only dive – reduced rent for good information. Success: he talked spook to the spooks and snitched bookies.

The club – a tiger-striped facade, a tiger-tux doorman. Inside: tiger-fur walls, tiger-garb drink girls. Lester Lake on stage, belting 'Blue Moon'.

I grabbed a booth, grabbed a tigress – 'Dave Klein to see Lester.' She zipped backstage – slot machines clanged out the doorway. Lester: mock-humble bows, bum applause.

House lights on, dig it: jungle bunnies sprawled in tiger-fur booths. Lester right there, holding a plate.

Chicken and waffles – popping grease. 'Hello, Mr. Klein. I was gonna call you.'

'You're short on the rent.'

He sat down. 'Yeah, and you slumlords cut a man no slack. Could be worse, though. You could be a Jew slumlord.'

Eyes our way. 'I always meet you in public. What do people figure we're doing?'

'Nobody never asks, but I figure they figure you still collect bets for Jack Woods. I'm a betting man, so I'd say that's it. And speaking of Jack, he was collecting your rents this afternoon, which made me want to call you before he leaned on me like he leaned on that poor sucker down the hall.'

'Help me out and I'll let you slide.'

'You mean you asks, I answers.'

'No. First you get rid of that slop, then I ask and you answer.'

A tiger girl passed – Lester dumped his plate and swiped a shot glass. A gulp, a belch: 'So ask.'

'Let's start with burglars.'

'Okay, Leroy Coates, out on parole and spending money. Wayne Layne, boss pad creeper, pimping his wife to make the nut on his habit. Alfonzo Tyrell—'

'My guy's white.'

'Yeah, but I keep to the dark side of town. Last time *I* heard of a white burglar was never.'

'Fair enough, but I'd call this guy a psycho. He cut up two Dobermans, stole nothing but silverware, then trashed some family-type belongings. Run with it.'

'Run with it nowheres. I know nothing 'bout a crazy man like that, 'cept you don't have to be Einstein to figure he's bent on that family. Wayne Layne shits in washing machines, and he's as crazy a B&E man as I care to be acquainted with.'

'Okay, peepers then.'

'Say what?'

'Peeping Toms. Guys who get their kicks looking in windows. I've got peeper reports nailed at my burglary location *and* all over the Southside – hot-sheet motels and jazz clubs.'

'I'll ask around, but you sure ain't getting much for your month's rent.'

'Let's try Wardell Henry Knox. He sold maryjane and worked as a bartender at jazz joints, presumably down here.'

'Presumably, 'cause white clubs wouldn't hire him. And *was* is correct, 'cause he got himself snuffed a few months ago. Person or persons unknown, just in case you wants to know who did it.'

Jukebox blare close – jerk the cord – instant silence. 'I know he was murdered.'

Indignant niggers mumbling – fuck them. Lester: 'Mr Klein, your questions are getting pretty far afield. I'll guess a motive on Wardell, though.'

'I'm listening.'

'Pussy. Ol' Wardell had hound blood. He was the righteous fuckin' pussy hound supreme. If it moved, he'd poke it. He'd ream it, steam it, banana cream it. He must've had a million enemies. He'd fuck a woodpile on the off chance there was a snake inside. He liked to taste it and baste it, but he'd never waste it. He—'

'Enough, Jesus Christ.'

Lester winked. 'Ask me something I might know something about.'

In close. 'The Kafesjian family. You've got to know more than I do.'

Lester talked low. 'I know they're tight with your people. I know they only sell to Negroes and what you'd call anybody but square white folks, 'cause that's the way Chief Parker likes things. Pills, weed, horse, they are *the* number-one suppliers in Southside L.A. I know they lend money and take the vig out in snitch information, you know, independent pushers they can rat to the LAPD, 'cause that is part of their bargain with your people. Now, I *know J.C.* and Tommy hire these inconspicuous-type Negro guys to move their stuff, with Tommy riding herd on them. And you want crazy? – try Tommy the K. He hangs out with the suedes at Bido Lito's and gets up and plays this godawful tenor sax whenever they let him, which is frequently, 'cause who wants to refuse a crazy man, even a little skinny twerp like Tommy? Tommy is craaazy. He is bad fuckin' juju. He is the Kafesjian muscle guy, and I heard he is righteous good with a knife. I also heard he will do anything to ingratiate hisself with Narco. I heard he clipped this drunk driver who hit-and-ran this Narco guy's daughter.'

Craaazy. 'That's all?'

'Aint it enough?'

'What about Tommy's sister, Lucille? She's a geek, she parades around naked at her pad.'

'I say say what and so what. Too bad Wardell's dead, he'd probably want to poke her. Maybe she likes it dark, like her brother. I'd poke her myself, 'cept last time I tried white stuff I got my neck sliced. You should know, you was there.'

Jukebox trills – Lester himself – somebody put the plug back in. 'They let you put your own songs in there?'

'Chick and Touch Vecchio do. They're more sentimental 'bout that old neck-slicin' time than slumlord Dave Klein. Long as they run the Southside slots and vending shit for Mr. Cohen, Lester Lake's rendition of "Harbor Lights" will be on that jukebox. Which gives me pause, 'cause the past two weeks or so these new out-of-town-lookin' guys been working the hardware, which might bode bad for ol' Lester.'

'Those haaarbor lights' – pure schmaltz. 'Mickey should watch it, the Feds might be checking out the machinery down here. And did anyone ever tell you you sound like a homo? Like Johnnie Ray out of work?'

Howling: 'Yeah, my ladyfriends. I make them think I gots queer tendencies, then they works that much harder to set me straight. Touch V. comes in with his sissy boys, and I studies his mannerisms. He brings in this bottle-blond sissy, it was like getting a righteous college degree in fruitness.'

I yawned – tiger stripes spun crazy.

'Get some sleep, Mr. Klein. You look all bushed.'

Fuck sleep – that magnet was still pulling me.

I zigzagged east and south – no gray Plymouths on my ass. Western Avenue – peeper turf – whore motels, no addresses to work off. Western and Adams – whore heaven – girls jungled up by Cooper's Donuts. Colored, Mex, a few white – slit-leg gowns, pedal pushers. Jump start: Lucille's hip huggers, slashed and jizzed on.

Brain jump:

Western and Adams – University Division. University Vice, hooker ID stashes there: alias files, john lists, arrest-detention reports. Lucille smiling whorish, Daddy's blood on her claws – jump to her selling it for kicks.

Big jump – odds against it.

I rolled away—

Uny Station, brace the squad whip – that whore stuff, a mishmash:

Loose mug shots, report carbons. Names: whores, whore monikers, men detained/booked with whores. Three cabinets' worth of paper in no discernable order.

Skimming through:

No 'Kafesjian', no Armenian names – an hour wasted – no surprise – most hookers got bailed out behind monikers. Punch line: if Lucille whored, *if* she got popped – she'd probably call Dan Wilhite to chill things. 114 detention reports, 18 white girls – no physical stats matched Lucille. A half-ass system – most cops let whore reports slide, the girls always repeated. John lists: no Luce, Lucille, Lucy white girl listed – no Armenian surnames.

More mugs – some with neckboard numbers and printing: real names, john names, dates. Shine girls, Mexicans, whites – 99.9 per cent skank. Goosebumps: Lucille – profile, full face – no neckboard, no printing.

Go, do it: recheck all paper. Three go-grounds – zero, zilch, buppkis. No clicks back to Lucille.

Just one mug strip.

Call it lost paperwork.

Say Dan Wilhite yanked the paper – the mugs got overlooked.

Guess burglar = peeper = Lucille K. john.

I wrote it up, a note to Junior:

Check all stationhouse john/prostie lists – try for information on Lucille's tricks.

Goosebumps: that godawful family.

I hit the Bureau, dropped the note on Junior's desk. Midnight: Ad Vice empty:

'Klein?'

Dan Wilhite across the hall. I called him over – *my* squadroom.

'So?'

'So, I'm sorry for the run-in with Kafesjian.'

'I'm not looking for apologies. I'll say it again: so?'

'So it's a tight situation, and I'm trying to be reasonable. I didn't ask for this job, and I don't want it.'

'I know, and your Sergeant Stemmons already apologized for your behavior. He also asked for a tally of perpetrators J.C. and his people have informed on, which I refused to give him. Don't ask again, because all notations pertaining to the Kafesjians have been destroyed. *So?*'

'So it's like that. And the question should be "So what does Exley want?"'

Wilhite crowded up, hands on hips. 'Tell me what you think this 459 is. I think it's a dope mob warning. I think Narco is best suited to handle it, and I think you should tell Chief Exley that.'

'I don't think so. I think the burglar's hinked on the family, maybe Lucille specifically. It might be a window peeper who's been working Darktown lately.'

'Or maybe it's a crazy-man act. A rival mob using terror tactics.'

'Maybe, but I don't think so. I'm not really a case man, but—'

'No, you're a thug with a law degree—'

FROST/EASY/DON'T MOVE.

'—and I regret calling you into this mess. Now I've heard that that Fed probe *is* going to happen. I've heard Welles Noonan has auditors checking tax returns – my own and some of my men. That probably means that he knows about Narco and the Kafesjians. We've all taken gratuities, we've all got expensive items we can't explain, so—'

Sweating on me, hot tobacco breath.

'—you do your duty to the Department. You've got your twenty in, I don't and my men don't. You can practice law and suck up to Mickey Cohen, and we can't. *You* owe us, because you let Sanderline Johnson jump. Welles Noonan has got this Southside hard-on because *you* compromised his prizefight job. The heat on my men is because of *you*, so *you* square things. Now, J.C. and Tommy are crazy. They've never dealt with hostile police agencies, and if the Feds start pressing them they'll go out of control. I want them quieted down. Stall this bullshit investigation of yours, feed Exley whatever you have to. Just get out of that family's way as quick as you can.'

Crowded, elbowed in. 'I'll try.'

'Do it. Make like it's a paying job. Make like I think you pushed Johnson out the window.

'Do you?'

'You're greedy enough, but you're not that stupid.'

Crowd him back, walk – my legs fluttered. A clerk's slip on my desk: 'P. Bondurant called. Said to call H. Hughes at Bel-Air Hotel.'

8

'… AND MY MAN Pete told me about your splendid performance vis-à-vis the Morton Diskant matter. Did you know that Diskant is a member of four organizations that have been classified as Communist fronts by the California State Attorney General's Office?'

Howard Hughes: tall, lanky. A hotel suite, two flunkies: Bradley Milteer, lawyer; Harold John Miciak, goon.

7:00 A.M. – distracted, a plan brewing: frame some geek for the Kafesjian job.

'No, Mr. Hughes. I didn't know that.'

'Well, you should. Pete told me your methods were rough, and you should know that Diskant's record justified those methods. Among other things, I'm seeking to establish myself as an independent motion picture producer. I'm planning on producing a series of films depicting aerial warfare against the Communists, and a major theme of those films will be the end justifies the means.'

Milteer: 'Lieutenant Klein is also an attorney. If he accepts your offer, you'll receive an additional interpretation of the contractual aspects.'

'I haven't practiced much law, Mr. Hughes. And I'm pretty busy right now.'

Miciak coughed. Tattooed hands – zoot gang stuff. 'This ain—*isn't* a lawyer job. Pete Bondurant's got his plate full, so—'

Hughes, interrupting. '"Surveillance" sums this assignment up best, Lieutenant. Bradley, will you elaborate?'

Milteer, prissy: 'Mr. Hughes has a young actress named Glenda Bledsoe signed to a full-service contract. She was living in one of his guest homes and was being groomed to play lead roles in his Air Force films. She infringed on her contract by moving out of the guest home and by leaving script sessions without asking permission. She's currently playing the female lead in a non-union horror film shooting in Griffith Park. It's called *Attack of the Atomic Vampire*, so you can imagine the quality of the production.'

Hughes, prissy: 'Miss Bledsoe's contract allows her to make one non-Hughes film per year, so I cannot violate the contract for that. There is, however, a morality clause that we can utilize. If we can prove Miss Bledsoe to be an alcoholic, criminal, narcotics addict, Communist, lesbian, or nymphomaniac, we can violate her contract and get her black-balled from the film industry on that basis. Our one other avenue is to secure proof that she knowingly took part in publicizing non-Hughes performers outside of her work for this ridiculous monster film. Lieutenant, your job would be to surveil Glenda Bledsoe with an eye toward securing contract-violating information. Your fee would be three thousand dollars.'

'Have you explained the situation to her, Mr. Milteer?'

'Yes.'

'How did she react?'

'Her reply was "Fuck you." Your reply, Lieutenant?'

Close to 'No' – freeze it – think:

Hush-Hush said Mickey C. bankrolled that movie.

'Guest home' meant 'fuck pad' meant Howard Hughes left to choke his own chicken.

Think:

Glom some Bureau guys for tail work. Glom a slush fund: Kafesjian frame cash.

JEW HIM UP.

'Five thousand, Mr. Hughes. I can recommend cheaper help, but I can't neglect my regular duties for any less than that.'

Hughes nodded: Milteer whipped out a cash roll. 'All right, Lieutenant. This is a two-thousand-dollar retainer, and I'll expect reports at least every other day. You can call me here at the Bel-Air. Now, is there anything else you need to know about Miss Bledsoe?'

'No, I'll find an in on the movie crew.'

Hughes stood up. I laid on the glad hand: 'I'll nail her, sir.'

A limp shake – Hughes wiped his hand on the sly.

New money – spend it smart. Think smart:

Nail Glenda Bledsoe fast. Let Junior carry some Kafesjian weight – hope his fuck-up string ended. Figure out that Darktown tail, stay tailless.

Instinct: Exley wouldn't rat me on Johnson. Logic: he destroyed the coroner's file; I could rat him for a piece of Diskant. Instinct: call his *Kafesjian fix PERSONAL*. Instinct – call me bait – a bad cop sent out to draw heat.

Conclusions:

Number one: Call Wilhite and Narco more dangerous; call me a bent cop juking their meal ticket. Maybe the Fed grand jury blues upcoming: true bills, indictments. Rogue cops out of work then, one scapegoat: a lawyer-landlord with a sure police pension. Out-of-work killers, one target: me.

Number two: Find a burglar/pervert confessor – some geek to take my 459 fall. Palm squadroom bulls for leads; keep Junior on the case legit. No legit B&E man? – Joe Pervert buys the dive.

I drove over to Hollywood Station. No file-room clerk – I boosted '459 Cleared', 'False Confessions', '49–'57. A 187 sheet on the board – the 'Wino Will-o-the-Wisp'. Perv stuff, nice – I grabbed a carbon.

Conclusion number three:

Call me still short of scared.

Griffith Park, the west road up – streams, small mountains. Steep turns, scrub-hill canyons – Movieland.

I pulled into a makeshift lot – vehicles parked tight. Shouts, picket signs bobbing way back. I hopped a flatbed, scoped the ruckus.

Union placard shakers – Chick Vecchio facing them off – the stiff-arm fungoo up close. A clearing, trailers, the set: cameras, a rocket ship half Chevy.

'Scab!' 'Scab scum!'

Over, buck the line – 'Police officer!' Punk pickets – they let me through, no grief. Chick greeted me – smiles, back slaps.

'Scab scum!' 'Police collusion!'

We walked over to the trailers. Catcalls, no rocks – sob sisters. Chick: 'You looking for Mickey? I'll bet he's got a nice envelope for you.'

'He told you?'

'No, it's what my brother would call an "inescapable conclusion to the cognoscenti." Come on, a witness flies out the window with Dave Klein standing by. What's a card-carrying cogno supposed to think?'

'I think you almost did some union thumping.'

'Hey, we should have called the old Enforcer. Seriously, you got ideas? Mickey's got a bad case of the shorts. You know any boys who won't cost us an arm and a leg?'

'Fuck it, let them picket.'

'Uh-uh. They yell when we're shooting, which means scenes have to be redubbed, which costs money.'

Someone, somewhere: 'Cameras! Action!'

'Serious, Dave.'

'Okay, call Fats Medina at the Main Street Gym. Tell him I said five sparring partners and a roadblock. Tell him you'll go fifty a man.'

'For real?'

'Do it tonight, and you won't have union trouble tomorrow. Come on, I want to check out this movie.'

Up to the set. Chick held a finger to his lips – scene in progress.

Two 'actors' gesticulating. The spaceship close up: Chevy fins, Studebaker grille, Kotex-box launching pad.

Touch Vecchio: 'Russian rocket ships have dropped atomic waste on Los Angeles – a plot to turn Angelenos into automatons susceptible to Communism! They have created a vampire virus! People have turned into monsters who devour their own families!'

His co-star – blond, padded crotch: 'Family is the sacred concept that binds all Americans. We must stop this soul-usurping invasion whatever the cost!'

Chick, cupping a whisper: 'The hoot is my brother's killed eight men, and he takes this noise serious. And feature – him and that bottle-blond fruitcake are porking in trailers every chance they get, *and* chasing chicken down at the Fern Dell toilets. You see that guy with the megaphone? That's Sid Frizell, the so-called director. Mickey hired him on the cheap, and to me he reads ex-con who couldn't direct a Mongolian cluster fuck. He's always talking to that guy Wylie Bullock, the cameraman, who at least has got a place to live, unlike most of the bums Mickey's hired. Feature: he hired the crew out of the slave markets down on skid row. They sleep on the set, like this is some kind of fucking hobo jungle. And the dialogue? Frizell – Mickey shoots him an extra sawbuck a day to be scriptwriter.'

No Mickey, no women. Touch: 'I would slay the highest echelon of the Soviet Secretariat to protect the sanctity of my family!'

Blondie: 'I of course empathize. But first we must isolate the atomic waste before it seeps into the Hollywood Reservoir. Look at these wretched victims of the vampire virus!'

Cut to werewolf-mask extras hip-hopping. Hip, hop – T-Bird popped out of back pockets.

Sid Frizell: 'Cut! I told you people to leave your wine back with your blankets and sleeping bags! And remember Mr Cohen's order – no wine before your lunch break!'

A geek lurched into the spaceship. Touch squeezed Blondie's ass on the QT.

Frizell: 'Five-minute break and no drinking!' Background noise: 'Scab scum! Police puppets!'

No Glenda Bledsoe.

Touch oozed by the camera slow. ‘Hi, Dave. Looking for Mickey?’

‘People keep asking me that.’

‘Well, it’s an inescapable conclusion of the cognoscenti.’

Chick winked. ‘He’ll show up. He goes by this bakery to get week-old bread to make sandwiches with. Feature the cuisine we get: stale bread, stale doughnuts and this lunch meat sold out the back door at this slaughterhouse out in Vernon. I quit eating on the set when I caught fur on my baloney and cheese.’

I laughed. Script talk: Blondie and an old geek dressed like Dracula.

Touch sighed. ‘Rock Rockwell is going to be such a big star. Listen, he’s actually telling Elston Majeska how to interpret his lines. What does that imply to the cognoscenti?’

‘Who’s Elston Majeska?’

Chick: ‘He was some kind of silent-movie star over in Europe, and now Mickey gets him passes from this rest home. He’s a junkie, so Mickey pays him off in this diluted H he gets cheap. Old Elston says his lines, shoots up and goes on a sugar jag. You ought to see him snarf those stale doughnuts.’

Pops peeled a Mars Bar, weaving – Blondie grabbed his cape.

Touch, swooning: ‘One man sandwich with the works!’

Frizell: ‘Glenda to the set in five minutes!’

‘When I met Mickey, he was clearing ten million a year. From that to this, Jesus Christ.’

Chick: ‘Things come and go.’

Touch: ‘The torch passes.’

‘Bullshit. Mickey got out of McNeil Island a year ago – and *nobody* has grabbed his old action. Is he scared? Four of his guys have gotten clipped, all unsolveds – and I mean *nobody* knows who did it. You guys are all the muscle he’s got left, and I can’t feature why you stick around. What’s he got left, the Niggertown coin business? How much can he be turning on that?’

Chick shrugged. ‘So feature we been with Mickey a long time. Feature we don’t like change. He’s a scrapper, and scrappers get results sooner or later.’

‘Nice results. And Lester Lake told me some out-of-town guys are working the Southside coin.’

Chick shrugged. Wino cheers and wolf whistles – Glenda Bledsoe in a pom-pom-girl outfit.

Feature:

Tall, lanky, honey blond. All legs, all chest – a grin said she never bought in. A little knock-kneed, big eyes, dark freckles. Pure something – maybe style, maybe juice.

Touch shot me details: ‘Glamorous Glenda. Rock and me are the only males on the set immune to her charms. Mickey discovered her working at Scrivner’s Drive-In. He’s smitten, Chick’s smitten. Glenda and Rock play brother and sister. She’s been infected with the vampire virus, and she puts the make on her own brother. She turns into a monster and sends Rock running off into the hills.’

Frizell: ‘Actors on their marks! Camera! Action!’

Rock: ‘Susie, I’m your big brother. The vampire virus has stunted your moral growth, and you’ve still got two years to go at Hollywood High.’

Glenda: ‘Todd, in times of historic struggle, the rules of the bourgeoisie don’t apply.’

A clinch, a kiss. Frizell: ‘Cut! It’s a take! Print it!’

Rock broke the clinch. Whistles, cheers. A wino booed; Glenda flipped him the finger. Mickey C. ducked in a trailer, lugging groceries.

I eased around the set and tapped the door.

'Wine money not disbursed until six o'clock! The tsuris you stumble-bums inflict! This is a motion picture location, not the Jesus Saves Rescue Mission!'

I opened the door, caught a flying bagel. Stale – I tossed it back.

'David Douglas Klein, the "Douglas" a dead giveaway you are not of my kindred blood, you farshtinkener Dutch fuck. Refuse my food, but I doubt you will refuse the money. Sam Giancana has transmitted to me for you.'

Mickey tucked a wad under my holster. 'Sammy says thank you. Sammy says damn good job on such short notice.'

'It was too close to home, Mick. It caused me lots of trouble.'

Mickey plopped into a chair. 'Sammy doesn't care for your troubles. You of all people should know the ethos of that farshtinkener crazy cocksucker.'

'He's supposed to care about *your* trouble.'

'Which in his brutish spaghetti-bender fashion he does.'

Glenda cheesecake – four walls' worth. 'Let's say he miscalculated this time.'

'As the song goes, "I should care?"'

'You should care. Noonan's prizefight probe went out the window too, so now he's hot to get something going in Niggertown. If the Feds hit the Southside, they'll raid your coin locations. If I get a line on it I'll tell you, but I might not know. Sam put your last going business in real trouble.'

Chick V. by the doorway; Mickey, cheesecake eyes. 'David, such tsuris you predict, such tsuris I am nonplussed by. My desires are strictly to see district gambling get in, then retire to Galapagos and watch turtles fuck in the sun.'

Laugh it out. 'District gambling will never pass the State Legislature, and if it did, you'd never get a franchise. Bob Gallaudet is the only reputable politician who supports it, and he'll change his mind if he makes attorney general.'

Chick coughed; Mickey shrugged. A permit on the door: 'Parks-Recreation, Approval to Film.' I squinted – 'Robert Gallaudet', small print.

Laugh *that* out. 'Bob let you film here for a campaign contribution. He's about to make DA, so you think a grand or two gets you the inside track on district gambling. Jesus, you must be shooting dope like old Dracula.'

Pinups galore – Mickey blew them kisses. 'The prom date I never had in 1931. I could guarantee her a corsage and many fine hours of Bury the Brisket.'

'She reciprocate?'

'Tomorrow, maybe yes, but today she breaks my heart. Dinner tonight was already finalized, then Herman Gerstein called. His company is set to distribute my movie, and he needs Glenda to accompany his faygeleh heartthrob Rock Rockwell on a publicity date. Such tsuris – Herman is grooming that rump ranger for stardom apart from me, he's terrified the scandal rags will discover he takes his pleasure Greek. Such duplicity to lose her company, my comely brisketeer.'

'Publicity date' – contract breaker. 'Mickey, watch your coin biz. Remember what I told you.'

'Go, David. Take a bagel for the road.'

I walked out; Chick walked in. I checked my envelope – five G's.

A pay phone, two dimes: the DMV cop line, Junior.

Stats: Glenda Louise Bledsoe, 5'8", 125, blond/blue, DOB 8/3/29, Provo, Utah. California license since 8/46, five moving violations. '56 Chevrolet Corvette, red/

white, Cal. DX 413. Address: 2489½ N. Mount Airy, Hollywood.

Junior at the Bureau – no luck – the Ad Vice clerk said he didn't check in. I left a message: buzz me at Stan's Drive-in.

I dawdled over, grabbed a space by the phone booth. Coffee, a burger – scan those file carbons.

Burglars, confessors – physical stats/MO/priors – I took notes. The Wino Will-o-the-Wisp – shit, still at large. Names, names, names – candidates for a psycho framee. Scribbling notes – distracted – flirty car-hops, new money. Nagging me: a frame meant no payoff – no way to match Lucille and the burglar to WHY?

The phone – I ran, grabbed it. 'Junior?'

'Yeah, the clerk said to call you.'

Wary – not his style. 'You got that note I left you, right?'

'Right.'

'Right, and did you check the stationhouse whore files for paper on Lucille Kafesjian?'

'I'm working on it. Dave, I can't talk now. I'll – look, I'll call you later.'

'The fuck later, you *jump* on that work—' CLICK – dead air.

Home, paperwork. Pissed at Junior – an erratic punk getting worse. Paperwork: Exley's Kafesjian report padded up fat. Lists next: potential Glenda tailers, potential pervert framees. Calls in: Meg – Jack Woods glommed our back rent. Pete B: do Mr Hughes solid, I convinced him you're not a Hebe. Calls out: Ad Vice, Junior's pad, no luck – find him, ream his insubordinate heart. My tailer list, bum luck holding – no men to start tonight. *My* job by default – a publicity date meant contract breaker.

Back to Hollywood: side streets, the freeway. No tails on me: dead sure. Up Gower, Mount Airy, left turn.

2489: courtyard bungalows – peach stucco. A carport – with a red and white Corvette snuggled in.

5:10 – just dark. I parked close – courtyard/carport view.

Time dragged – the stakeout blues – piss in a cup, toss it, doze. Auto/foot traffic – light. 7:04 – three cars at the curb.

Doors open, flashbulbs popping: Rock Rockwell – tuxedo, bouquet. A jog to the courtyard, back with Glenda – nice – a tight sweater dress. Bulb glare caught her patented Look – it's a joke and I know it. Zoom: all three cars U-turned southbound.

Rolling stakeout – fours cars long – Gower, Sunset west. The Strip, Club Largo, three-car pile-out.

Valets swooped in, servile. More photos – Rockwell looked bored. I parked in the red and fixed my windshield: 'Official Police Vehicle'. The entourage hit the club.

I badged in, badged a Shriner off a bar stool. Turk Butler on stage – bistro belter supreme. Ringside: Rock, Glenda, scribes. Photo men by the exit – zoom lenses zoomed in.

Break that contract.

Dinner: club soda, pretzels. Easy eyeball work: Glenda talked, Rock sulked. The reporters ignored him – snore city.

Turk Butler off stage, chorus girls on. Glenda smoked and laughed. Big lungs on the dancers – Glenda pulled her sweater up for chuckles. Rock hit the sauce – whiskey sours.

A club hop at ten sharp – across Sunset on foot to the Crescendo. Another bar stool, eyeball surveillance: pure Glenda. Showstopper Glenda – odd wisps of Meg, and her own SOMETHING.

Midnight – a dash for the cars – I tailed the convoy brazen close. Back to Glenda's pad, sidewalk arc lights: a dud goodnight kiss caught on film.

The newsman took off; Glenda waved. Quiet out – voices carried. Rock: 'Hell, now I've got no wheels.'

Glenda: 'Take mine, and bring Touch back with you. Say two hours?'

Rock grabbed her keys and ran – gleeful. The Vette peeled out burning rubber – Glenda winced. 'Bring Touch back with you' hit funny – tail him.

Gower south, Franklin east. Sparse traffic – still no tails on *me*. North on Western, say a movie set run – Mickey's permit kept the park road open.

Los Feliz, left turn, Fern Dell – streams and glades before the Griffith Park hills. Brake lights blinked – fuck – Fern Dell – Vice cops called it Cocksuckers' Paradise.

He parked – rush hour – cigarette tips red in the dark. I swung right and stopped – my beams on Rock and a cute young quiff.

I killed my lights, cracked the window. Close – I caught the proposition:

'Hi.'

'Hi.'

'I … I think fall is the best time in L.A., don't you?'

'Yeah, sure. Listen, I just borrowed a *really* nice car. We could maybe make last call at the Orchid Room, then go someplace. I've got some time to kill before I pick my boy – I mean somebody up.'

'You don't mince words.'

'I don't mince period. Come on, say yes.'

'Nix, sweetie. You're big and brusque, which I like, but the last big brusque guy I said yes to turned out to be a deputy sheriff.'

'Oh, come on.'

'Nix, nyet, nein and no. Besides, I heard Administrative Vice has been operating Fern Dell.'

Wrong – Ad Vice never popped fruits. Outside chance – gung-ho Junior, Vice cowboy.

Rock – 'Thanks for the memories' – match flare, his cigarette lit. Prowling now – easy to track –1 watched the tip glow queer to queer.

Time wheezed, a bum soundtrack: sex moans out in the woods. An hour, an hour ten – Rock walked back zipping his fly.

Zoom – the Vette peeled, I followed slow – no traffic – call the set his destination. A roadblock out of nowhere – baseball-bat men waved him through.

Truck headlights approaching – I backed up and watched.

Brake squeals – a big flatbed – picket clowns in back. A spotlight flashed – bright white blindness on the target.

Goons hit the truck swinging – nail-studded Louisville Sluggers. The windshield exploded – a man stumbled out belching glass. The driver ran – a nail shot took his nose off.

The bed gate crashed – goons went in close – ribcage work. Fats Medina dragged a guy by the hair – his scalp came off.

No screams – wrong – why no sound—

Back to Fern Dell, down to Glenda's. No screams – weird – then my pulse quit banging my ears so I could hear.

Wait the boys out: 'Rock', 'Touch' – the nance type, this eight-notch killer. Suspicious: 2:00 A.M., a B-movie siren set for hostess.

One courtyard light on – hers. I tapped the two-way, flipped bands to kill boredom. Dispatch calls – the Bureau frequency – voices.

Hurwitz fur-job talk – Robbery men. Make the voices: Dick Carlisle, Mike Breuning – Dudley Smith strongarms. No trace on the furs; Dud wanted fences braced *hard*. Crackle; station-to-station interference. Breuning: Dud pulled Johnny Duhamel off the Mobster Squad – a scary kick-ass ex-fighter. More static – I flipped dials – a liquor-store heist on La Brea.

The Vette hit the carport; the boys hit Glenda's pad nuzzled up.

One ring – the door open and shut.

Figure access.

The courtyard proper – too risky. Nix the roof – no way to get up. Behind the bungalows – maybe a window to peep.

Risk it – worth it – juicy hearsay.

I walked over, counted back doors down – one, two, three – hers locked tight. One window – curtains cracked – eyes to the glass:

A dark bedroom, a connecting door ajar.

Press the glass, slide it up. Open – no shimmy, no squeak. Vault the sill: up and in.

Smells: cotton, stale perfume. Dark going gray – I saw a bed and bookshelves. Voices – hug the door – listen:

Glenda: 'Well, there is a precedent.'

Touch: 'Not a successful one, sweetie.'

Rockwell: 'Marie "the Body" McDonald. A from-nowhere career, then this kidnapping out of nowhere. The papers smelled publicity stunt quicksville. I think—'

Glenda: 'It wasn't realistic, that's why. Her hair wasn't even mussed. Remember, Mickey Cohen is bankrolling our movie. He's hot for me, so the press will think gangland intrigue right off. Howard Hughes used to keep me, so we've got him for a supporting play—'

Touch: '"Keep," what a euphemism.'

Rock: 'What's a euphemism?'

Touch: 'Lucky you're gorgeous, 'cause you'd never make it on brains.'

Glenda: 'Cut it out, and listen. I'm wondering what the police will think. It's not a kidnapping for ransom, because frankly nobody would pay good money to get Rock and I out of trouble. What I'm think—'

Touch: 'The police will think revenge on Mickey or something, and Mickey won't know a thing. The police love to bother Mickey. Bothering Mickey is a favorite activity of the Los Angeles Police Department. And you two will be *good*. Georgie Ainge will slap you around just a little bit more than a smidgin, for realism's sake. The police will buy it, so just don't worry. You'll both be kidnap victims, and you'll both get lots of publicity.'

Rock: 'Method acting.'

Glenda: 'It compromises Howard, the creep. He'd never violate the contract of a beautiful kidnap victim.'

Touch: 'Tell true, sweetie. Was he hung?'

Glenda: 'Hung like a cashew.'

They all howled. The real howler: fake kidnaps *always* bombed. A doorway crack – I pressed up, squinted. Glenda – robe, wet hair: 'He talked about airplanes to get himself excited. He called my breasts my propellers.'

More laughs – Glenda edged out of my light. Needle scratches, Sinatra – wait the tune out for one more look.

No luck – just 'Ebb Tide' done very slow. Through the bedroom, out the window, thinking crazy: *Don't snitch her*.

9

MONSTERS:

Charles Issler, confessor – front-page-hot female snuffs. ‘Hit me! Hit me!’ – known to bite Homicide bulls who wouldn’t oblige.

Michael Joseph Krugman, confessor – the Jesus Christ 187. His motive – revenge – Jesus fucked his wife.

Swirling:

Beaucoup confessors – find a pasty in LAPD file print. Some INSTINCT working through—

Donald Fitzhugh – queer stuff confessor; Thomas Mark Janeway – kiddie molestations strictly. That INSTINCT THING worked me over – almost a taunt. The Wino Will-o-the-Wisp: strangler/mutilator/stumblebum slayer. No hard candidates—

I woke up. THAT INSTINCT big:

The Kafesjians *knew* who trashed their pad – if I framed some geek they’d fuck things up.

Sweaty sheets/sweaty files/that rap sheet I glommed late:

George Sidney Ainge, aka ‘Georgie’. White male, DOB 11/28/22. Pimp convictions ’48, ’53 – fourteen months County time total. Gun sale rousts ’56, ’7, ’8 – no convictions. Last known address 1219 S. Dunsmuir, L.A. Vehicle: ’51 Caddy Eldo, QUR 288.

Touch to Glenda: ‘Georgie Ainge will slap you around just a little bit more than a smidgin.’

I shaved, showered, dressed. Glenda smiled, saying stall things for now.

The Bureau, an Exley memo waiting: ‘Kafesjian/459 – report in full.’ 8:00, no daywatch men in yet – no potential Georgie Ainge skinny.

Coffee – overdue. Some DA called – that botched bookie raid – I shitted him lawyer to lawyer. Junior walking: up the side stairs, furtive. I whistled – long and shrill.

He walked over. I shut the door, shut my voice in: ‘Never hang up on me or get cute like that again. One more time and I’m submitting a transfer request that will ruin you in the Bureau so fast—’

‘Dave—’

‘Dave shit. Stemmons, you fucking toe the line. You obey my orders, you do what I tell you to do. *Now*, did you check the stationhouse files for paper on Lucille Kafesjian?’

‘N-no listings, I ch-checked all around’ – nervous, hinky.

Change-up: ‘Have you been hotdogging queers in Fern Dell Park?’

‘W-what?’

'Some quiff said Ad Vice was operating the park, which we both know is bullshit. I repeat, were you—'

Hands up – placating me. 'Okay, okay, guilty. I owed a favor to this old student of mine at the Academy. He's working Hollywood Vice and he's swamped, the squad boss has him detached to that wino-killing job. I just made a few collars and let him do the booking. Look, I'm sorry if I didn't go by the rules.'

'*Learn the fucking rules*.'

'Sure, Dave, sorry.'

Shaky, sweaty – I gave him a handkerchief. 'Have you heard of a pimp named Georgie Ainge? He sells guns on the side.'

Head bobs, eager to please. 'I heard he's a rape-o. Some squadroom guy told me he likes gigs where he gets to hurt women.'

'Wipe your goddamn face, you're sweating up my floor.'

Junior quick-drawed – the gun bobbed at *me*. Quick – slap him – my law school ring drew blood.

White knuckles on his piece. Brains – he pointed it down.

'Stay angry, tough guy. We've got an outside job, and I want you pissed.'

Separate cars, let him stew with half the picture: good guy/bad guy, no arrest. Stay pissed: I've got a moonlight gig going, a fake kidnap might deep-six it. Junior – 'Sure, Dave, sure' – eager beaver.

I got there first – a mock chateau – four floors, maybe ten units per. A '51 Eldo at the curb – a match to the Ainge rap sheet.

I checked the mail slots: G. Ainge, 104. Junior's Ford hit the curb – two wheels on the sidewalk. I beelined down the hall.

Junior caught up. I winked; he winked – half twitch. I pushed the buzzer.

The door opened a crack. Ear tug – cue the bad guy.

Junior: 'LAPD, open up!' – wrong – I signaled kick it in.

The door swung wide. Right there: a fat lowlife, arms raised. Old tracks – hold for the 'I'm Clean' pitch.

'I'm clean, Officers. I got me a nice little job, and I got me Nalline test results that prove I don't geez no more. I'm still on County probation, and my PO knows I switched from horse to Silver Satin.'

I smiled. 'We're sure you're clean, Mr. Ainge. May we come in?'

Ainge stood aside; Junior closed the door. The flop: Murphy bed, wine bottles tossed helter-skelter. TV, magazines: *Hush-Hush*, girlie stuff.

Junior: 'Kiss the wall, shitbird.'

Ainge spread out. I scoped a *Hush-Hush* cover: Marie 'the Body' McDonald, fake kidnap supreme.

Georgie ate wallpaper; Junior frisked him slow. Page two: some boyfriend drove Marie to Palm Springs and stashed her in an old mining shack. A ransom demand – her agent called the FBI. Satire: stage your own publicity kidnap, five easy steps.

Junior dropped Ainge – a kidney shot – not bad.

Georgie sucked wind. I skimmed the mags – bondage smut – women gagged and harnessed.

Junior kicked Ainge prone. A blonde looked sort of like Glenda.

Out loud: '"Lesson number one: call Hedda Hopper in advance. Lesson number two: don't hire kidnappers from Central Casting. Lesson number three: don't pay your publicist with marked ransom money." Whose idea, Georgie? You or Touch Vecchio?'

No answer.

I flashed two fingers: GO FULL. Junior slammed kidney shots; Georgie Ainge drooled bile.

Kneel down close. 'Tell us about it. It's not going to happen, but tell us anyway. Tell us nice and we won't tell your PO. Stay snotty and we'll pop you for possession of heroin.'

Gurgles, 'Fuck you.'

Two fingers/GO FULL.

Rabbit shots – strong – Ainge curled up fetal-style. A punch hit the floor – Junior yelped and grabbed his piece.

I snatched it, worked the chamber, popped the clip.

Junior – 'Dave, Jesus!' – farewell, tough guy.

Ainge groaned – Junior kicked him – ribs cracked.

'OKAY! OKAY!'

I hauled him into a chair; Junior grabbed his gun back. Silver Satin on the bed – toss it over.

Chugalug – Ainge coughed, burped blood. Junior crawled for his clip – hands and knees.

'Whose idea?'

Ainge – 'How'd you tumble?' – wincing.

'Never mind. I asked you, "Whose idea?"'

'Touch, Touch V., his idea. The deal was to goose his bun boy's career, with that blond cooze along for some cheesecake. Touch said three hundred and no rough stuff. Listen, I just took the job to get a taste.'

Junior: 'A taste of horse? I thought you were clean, shitbird.'

'"Shitbird" went out with vaudeville. Hey, you get your badge in a cereal box?'

I held Junior back. 'A taste of what?'

Giggles. 'I don't sell guns no more, I don't procure females for purposes of prostitution. I switched from H to jungle juice, so my tastes are none of—'

'*A taste of what?*'

'Shit, I just wanted to bust up that Glenda cooze.'

I froze – Ainge kept talking – rank wine breath.

'… you know, I just wanted to put the hurt on something Howard Hughes put the boot to. I got fired at Hughes Aircraft during the war, so you could maybe call that Glenda cunt my payback. Va-va-voom, that is some fine piece of—'

I kicked his chair over, threw the TV at his head. He ducked – tubes popped, exploded. I grabbed Junior's gun – aimed, fired – clicks, no fucking clip, fuck me.

Ainge snaked under the bed. Soft, talking nice:

'Look, you think that Glenda woman's My Fair Lady? Look, I *know* her, she used to whore for this pimp Dwight Gilette. I can hand her up to you on a *guaranteed gas-chamber bounce*.'

'Gilette' – vague – a 187 unsolved. I unloaded my own piece – safety valve.

Ainge, soft: 'Look, I sold guns then. Glenda knew that. Gilette was slapping her around, so she bought a .32 to protect herself. I don't know, something happened, so Glenda shot Gilette. She shot him, and she ended up taking his knife away from him. She fucking cut him too, and then she sold me the gun back. I've got it stashed, you know, I figured maybe some day, some reason, maybe it's got prints on it, I was gonna threaten her with it on the kidnap thing. Touch, he don't know about it, *but you can make this a fucking gas-chamber job*.'

Make the case:

’55, ’56 – Dwight Gilette, mulatto pimp, dead at his pad. Highland Park dicks handled it: fatal shots, no gun found – the stiff stabbed post-mortem. Knife man Gilette – aka ‘Blue Blade’. Forensics: two blood types made; female hair and bone chips found. Hypothesis: knife fight with a whore, some hooker shot/shanked a skilled blade freak.

Bugs up my spine.

Ainge kept talking – gibberish – I didn’t hear it. Junior scribbled up his notebook fast.

Fast – don’t think why – find the gun.

One room – an easy toss – closet, dresser, cupboards. Ainge blabbing non-stop – Junior coaxing him out from under the bed. Tossing hard, tossing zero: skin mags, probation forms, rubbers. Topsy-turvy glimpses: evidence prof Junior stacking pages.

No gun.

‘Dave.’

Ainge cozied up – a fresh bottle half guzzled. Junior: ‘Dave, we’ve got ourselves a homicide.’

‘No. It’s too old, and there’s just this geek’s word.’

‘Dave, come on.’

‘No. Ainge, where’s the gun?’

No answer.

‘Tell me where the gun is, goddamn it.’

No answer.

‘Ainge, give up the fucking gun.’

Junior, quick hand signals: LET ME WORK HIM.

Work shit – grab his notebook. Skim it – Georgie’s pitch down – details, approximate dates. No locate on the gun – call odds on latent prints thirty to one.

Junior, flexing his mean streak: ‘Dave, give me my notebook back.’

I shoved it at him. ‘Wait outside.’

This X-ray stare – not bad for a punk.

‘*Stemmons, mail outside*.’

Junior eeeased out, tough-guy slow. I locked the door and fixed on Ainge.

‘Give up the gun.’

‘Not on your life. I was talking scared then, but now I figure different. You want my interpretation?’

Brass knucks, get ready.

‘My interpretation is the kid thinks a murder beef for the Glenda cooze is a good idea, but for some reason you don’t. I also know that if I give up that gun it’s a probation violation vis-à-fucking-vis harboring contraband items. You know what a “hole card” is? You know—’

On him – knucks downstairs/upstairs – flab rippers/broken face bones/fear-of-God time:

‘No kidnapping. Not a word to Touch or Rockwell. You don’t talk about Glenda Bledsoe, you don’t go near her. You don’t give that gun up to my partner or anyone else.’

Coughs/moans/sputters trying to yes me. Bloody phlegm on my hands; shock waves up my knuck arm. I kicked through TV rubble getting out.

Junior on the sidewalk, smoking. No preamble: ‘We pop the Bledsoe woman for Gilette. Bob Gallaudet will grant Ainge immunity on the gun charge. Dave, she’s Howard Hughes’ ex-girlfriend. This is a big major case.’

Head throbs. 'It's shit. Ainge told me the gun story was a lie. What we've got is a three-year-old homicide with one convicted-felon hearsay witness. *It's shit.*'

'No, Ainge lied *to you*. I think there is a gun extant.'

'Gallaudet would never file. I'm an attorney, you're not. believe me.'

'Dave, just listen.'

'No, forget it. You were damn good in there, but it's over. We came to break up an impending felony, and—'

'And protect this moonlight job of yours.'

'Right, which I'll kick back to you on.'

'Which is unreported income in violation of departmental regs.'

Seeing red: 'There's no case. We're on the Kafesjian job, which is a major case, because Exley's got a hard-on for it. If you want juice, play tight with me on that. Maybe we soft-pedal it, maybe we don't. We have to work angles on that case to protect the Department, and I don't want you going off half-cocked on some stale-bread pimp snuff.'

'A homicide is a homicide. And you know what I think?'

Smug little shitbird. 'What?'

'That you want to protect that woman.'

Seeing red, seeing black.

'And I think that for a cop on the take, you take pretty small. If you want to steal, steal big. If I ever broke the regs, I wouldn't start at the bottom.'

PURE BLACK – knucks out.

Pure rabbit – Junior tripped into his car. Pulling out, window down: 'You owe me for the way you patronize me! You owe me! And I might collect damn soon!'

RED BLACK RED.

Junior fishtailed straight through a red light.

I drove to the set just to see her; I figured one look would say yes or no.

Big blue eyes looked right through me – I couldn't even guess. She acted; she laughed; she talked – her voice gave nothing away. I stuck to the trailers and framed her in longshots – Miss Vampire/maybe pimp slasher. A change of costume, demure stuff to low-cut gown—

Shoulder-blade scars. ID them: slash marks, one puncture wound/bone notch. Call it à la *Hush-Hush:*

HOOKER/ACTRESS MURDERS HALF-BREED PIMP! AIRPLANE MOGUL SMITTEN! ROGUE COP STEPS FROM CLOVER TO SHIT!

I watched her act, watched her subtle-goof the whole silly business. Dark came on, I just watched, no one bugged the skulking stage-door Johnny.

Rain shut things down – I would have watched all night otherwise.

A pay-phone stint, zero luck: no Exley at the Bureau, no Junior to wheedle or threaten. Wilhite, my feelers out – not at Narco, not at home. Down to the Vine Street Hody's: paperwork, dinner.

I wrote out two Exley reports: full disclosure and whore Lucille omitted – insurance if I swung Willhite's way. That frame brainstorm – nix it – Exley wouldn't bite, the Kafesjians made one big monkey wrench. Hard to concentrate – Junior hovered – taunting me with murderess Glenda.

Ex-whore Glenda; whore Lucille.

Rain blurred people outside. Hard to see faces, easy to imagine them – easy to make women Glenda. A brunette looked in the window – Lucille K. one split second.

I banged the table getting up; she waved to a waitress, just some plain Jane.

Darktown – nowhere else to go.

Systematic:

No exact peeper locations – two divisions botched paperwork – no whore motel/jazz club addresses to work from. South on Western, driving one-handed, one hand free to jot motel names. Systematic: no tails on *me*, forty-one hot-sheet flops Adams to Florence.

Jazz clubs, more confined: Central Avenue, southbound. Nineteen clubs, count bars in, boost the tally up to sixty-odd. Rain kept foot traffic thin; neon signs hit hypnotic – half-second blips in my windshield.

Rain fizzling – try the coffee-and-donuts routine.

A Cooper's stand on Central – whore heaven – I fed the girls coffee and showed the Lucille pix. Big nos, one yes – a Western-and-Adams girl stepping east. Her story: Lucille worked 'occasional' – tight pedal pushers – no street name, no truck with other whores.

Pedal pushers – slashed/jacked off on – *my* burglar.

Midnight – half the clubs shut down. Neon blipped off; I caught boss men locking their doors. Peeper/prowler questions – 'Say what?'s straight across. The Lucille mugs – straight deadpans.

1:00 A.M., 2:00 A.M. – shit police work. B-girls at bus stops and cab stands – I talked Lucille with my brain revving Glenda. More nos, more rain – I ducked into a diner.

A counter, booths. Packed – all spooks. Whispers, nudges – niggers smelling Law. Two B-girl types in a front booth – hands under the table furtive quick.

I joined them. One bolted – I jerked her back by the wrist. Sitting beside me: a skanky high yellow. Bad juju percolating – I could feel it.

'Dump your purses on the table.'

Slow and cool: two pseudo-snakeskin bags turned out. Felony tilt: tin-foil Benzedrine.

Change-up: 'Okay, you're clean.'

Darky: 'Sheeeit!'

High Yellow: 'Man, what you—?'

I flashed the Lucille pix. 'Seen her?'

Purse debris zoomed back; High Yellow chased Bennies with coffee.

'*I said*, have you seen her?'

High Yellow: 'No, but this other po-lice been—'

The dark girl shushed her – I felt the nudge.

'What "other police"? And don't you lie to me.'

High Yellow: ''Nuther officer was aroun' asking questions 'bout that girl. He didn' have no photographs, but he had this, this … police sketch, he called it. Very same girl, good picture if you asks me.'

'Was he a young man? Sandy-haired, late twenties?'

'That's right. He had this big pom-po-dour that he kept playin' with.'

Junior – maybe working off a Bureau likeness sheet. 'What kind of questions did he ask you?'

'He ask did that mousy little white girl ho' roun' here. I say, "I don't know." He ask did I work the bars down here, and I say yes. He ask 'bout some Peepin' Tom, I say I don't know 'bout no jive Peepin' Tom.'

Brace the dark girl: 'He asked you the same questions, right?'

'Tha's right, an' I told him the same answers, which is the righteous whole truth.'

'Yeah, but *you* nudged your friend here, which means *you* told her something else about that policeman, because *you* are the one acting hinky. Now spill before I find something else in your purse.'

Cop-hater rumbles – the whole room. 'Tell me, goddamn it.'

High Yellow: 'Lynette tol' me she sees that po-liceman shake down a man in Bido Lito's parking lot. Colored man, an' Lynette say the pom-podour cop take money from him. Lynette say she see that same po-lice at Bido's talkin' to that pretty-boy blond po-liceman who works for that mean Mr. Dudley Smith, who jist loves to have his strongarm men roust colored people. Ain' all that whooole truth, Lynette?'

'Sho' is, sugar. The whoooole truth, if I'm lyin', I'm flyin'.'

Flying:

Junior – shakedown artist? – 'If you want to steal, steal big.' 'Pretty-boy blond cop'—??????

'Who was the colored man at Bido Lito's?'

Lynette? 'I don't know, an' I ain't seen him before or since.'

'What did you mean by "shakedown"?'

'I mean he put the arm on that poor man for money, and he be usin' rude language besides.'

'Give me a name for that blond cop.'

'Ain' got a name, but I seen him with Mr. Smith, and he so cute I *give* it free to him.'

Lynette laughed; High Yellow howled. The whole room laughed – at me.

Bido Lito's, 68th and Central – closed. Mark it: a lead on crazy man Junior.

I staked the parking lot – no suspicious shit – music out a door down the block. Squint, catch the marquee: 'Club Alabam – Art Pepper Quartet Nitely.' Art Pepper – *Straight Life* – a Tommy K. smashed record.

Strange music: pulsing, discordant. Distance distorted sounds – I synced a beat to people talking on the sidewalk. Hard to see faces, easy to imagine them: I made all the women Glenda. A crescendo, applause – I hit my brights to get a real look. Too bright – jigs passing a reefer – gone before I could blink.

I pulled up and walked in. Dark – no doorman/cover charge – four white guys on stage, backlit. Sax, bass, piano, drums – four beats – not music, not noise. I bumped a table, bumped a left-behind jug.

My eyes adjusted – bourbon and a shot glass right there. I grabbed a chair, watched, *listened*.

Sax solo – honks/blats/wails – I poured a shot, downed it.

Hot – I thought of Meg – juicehead parents scared us both away from liquor. Match flare: Tommy Kafesjian at ringside. Three shots quick – my breath timed itself to the music. Crescendos, no break, a ballad.

Pure beautiful: sax, piano, bass. Whispers: 'Champ Dineen,' 'The Champ, that's his,' Tommy's broken record: *Sooo Slow Moods*.

One more shot – bass notes – skipped heartbeats. Glenda, Meg, Lucille – some booze reflex warmed their faces.

Exit-door light – Tommy K. walking out. Validate this slumming, pure cop instincts:

Peeper/prowler/B&E man – all one man. Jazz fiend/voyeur – the noise fed the watching.

Noise/music – go, follow it—

Hot-sheet row – motels pressed tight – one long block. Stucco dives – bright colors – an alley behind them.

Ladder roof access: I parked, climbed, looked.

Vertigo – noise/music and liquor still had me. Slippery, careful, a perch – pure balls made me choose a high signpost. A breeze, a view: windows.

A few showing light: fuck flop rooms – bare walls – nothing else. I shivered out the booze – the music hit harder.

Lights on and off. Bare walls – no way to see faces, easy to imagine:

Glenda killing that pimp.

Glenda naked – Meg's body.

Chills – I got the car, cranked the heater, drove—

Meg's – dawn – no lights on. Hollywood – Glenda's place dark. Back to my place – a letter from Sam G. in the mailbox.

USC season tickets. A.P.S.: 'Thanks for proving jungle bunnies can fly.'

Noise/music – I smashed the mailbox two-handed.

L.A. *Times*, 11/4/58:

COUNCILMANIC RACE ANTICLIMACTIC; CHAVEZ RAVINE SWING VOTE GAINED BY DEFAULT

A down to the wire run was expected in the race for Fifth District City Councilman; today's election vote should have been nip and tuck. But while state, municipal, and judicial candidates nervously awaited poll news, incumbent Republican Councilman Thomas Bethune relaxed with his family at his Hancock Park home.

Up until last week, Bethune was hotly challenged by Morton Diskant, his liberal Democratic opponent. Diskant, stressing his credentials as a civil liberties lawyer, sought to portray Bethune as a pawn of the Los Angeles political establishment, his chief focus the Chavez Ravine issue. The Fifth Councilmanic District, which has a 25% Negro population, became a litmus test: how would voters respond when an entire campaign revolved around whether or not to relocate impoverished Latin Americans in an attempt to create space for a Los Angeles Dodgers ballpark?

Diskant pressed that issue, along with what he called 'collateral matters': the allegedly overzealous enforcement measures of the Los Angeles Police Department and the 'Gas Chamber Happy' Los Angeles District Attorney's Office. More than a litmus test, the Fifth District race was crucial to the passage of the Chavez Ravine bond issue: a Council straw vote showed that body currently standing 5 to 4 in favor, with all other Republican and Democratic candidates vying for Council seats also voicing their approval of the measure. Thus, only Diskant's election could force a City Council deadlock and legally postpone the wedding of Chavez Ravine and the Dodgers for some time.

But it was not to be. Last week, Diskant dropped out of the race, just as straw polls began to show him pulling ahead of his incumbent opponent. The Chavez Ravine Council vote will remain 5 to 4 in favor, and the bond issue is expected to be voted into law in mid-November. Diskant cited 'personal reasons' as his motive for withdrawing; he did not elaborate further. Speculation in political circles has raged, and U.S. Attorney Welles Noonan, Chief Federal Prosecutor for the greater Southern California District, voiced this opinion to *Times* reporter Jerry Abrams: 'I won't name names, and frankly I can't name names. But Diskant's withdrawal smacks of some sort of coercion. And I'll go on the record as a Democrat and a determined crimefighter with credentials including work for the McClellan Senate Rackets Committee: you can be both a moderate liberal and a foe of crime, as my good friend Senator John Kennedy proved by his work for the Committee.'

Noonan declined to answer questions on his own political ambitions, and Morton Diskant could not be reached to voice his response. Councilman Bethune told the *Times*: 'I hated to win this way, because I relish a good fight. Get those hot dogs and peanuts ready, [Dodger organization president] Walter O'Malley, because I'm putting in for season tickets. Play ball!'

L.A. *Mirror*, 11/5/58:

GALLAUDET ELECTED D. A.; YOUNGEST IN CITY'S HISTORY

It was no surprise: Robert 'Call Me Bob' Gallaudet, 38, a former LAPD and DA's

Bureau officer who went to USC Law School nights, was elected Los Angeles District Attorney yesterday, topping a six man field with 59% of the total votes cast.

His election marks a fast rising career streaked with good luck, chiefly the resignation of former DA Ellis Loew last April. Gallaudet, then Loew's favored prosecutor, was appointed interim DA by the City Council, largely, it was believed, because of his friendship with LAPD Chief of Detectives Edmund Exley. A Republican, Gallaudet is expected to run for State Attorney General in 1960. He is a staunch law and order advocate, and a frequent target of death penalty repeal groups, who consider him overzealous in his recommendations of capital punishment.

A recent barb was thrown at the new District Attorney from another angle. Welles Noonan, U.S. Attorney for the Southern California Federal District and often spoken of as Gallaudet's likely opponent in the Attorney General's race, told the *Mirror*. 'DA Gallaudet's support of the District Gambling Bill currently stalled in the California State Legislature stands out as a startling contradiction to this man's supposedly bedrock anti-crime philosophy. That bill [i.e. – proposed legitimate gambling zones confined to certain areas surveilled by local police agencies, where cards, slot machines, off-track betting and other games of chance will be legal, but heavily surtaxed for State revenue purposes] is a moral outrage that condones compulsive gambling under the guise of political good. It will become a magnet for organized crime, and I exhort DA Gallaudet to retract his support of the measure.'

At a press conference to announce his upcoming victory gala at the Ambassador Hotel's Cocoanut Grove two nights from now, Gallaudet pooh-poohed his critics, chiefly U.S. Attorney Noonan. 'Look, he's running against me for A.G. already, and I just got elected to *this* job. On my political future: no comment. My comment on my election as Los Angeles District Attorney: watch out, criminals. And take heart, Angelenos: I'm here to make this city a peaceful, safe haven for all its law-abiding citizens.'

***Hush-Hush* Magazine, 11/6/58:**

HELLO DODGERS!!! ADIOS HUDDLED MASSES!!!

Dig it, kats and kittens, chicks and charlies: we love the national pastime as much as you do, but enough is enough. Doesn't that great lady the Statue of Liberty have some kind of rebop inscribed by her tootsies? Something like: 'Give us your poor, huddled, wretched masses yearning to be free?' Look, east coast geography isn't our strong suit, and we can tell you're tired of this patriotic shtick already. Look, *everybody* wants a bonaroo home for the Dodgers, us included. *But* – iconoclasm dictates that we take a different tack, if only for the sake of our circuitously circling circulation. Social protest from *Hush-Hush*! They said it couldn't happen! Remember, dear reader, you heard it first here!

Dig: The L.A. City Council is set to boot an egregiously entrenched enclave of impecunious, impoverished, impetuously machismo mangled Mexican-Americans from their sharecropper shingle shacks in that shady, smog-shrouded Shangri-La Chavez Ravine!!! Those pennant flopper, fly ball dropper L.A. Dodgers are moving in as soon as the dust clears and a stadium is built – and they'll have a new home from which to rule the National League cellar!!! Dig it!! You're happy, we're happy!! Go, Dodgers!!! But what will happen to those dourly dispossessed, Dodger doomed delinquents; the maladroitly mismanaged Mexicans?

Digsville: The California State Bureau of Land and Way is granting shack dwellers $10,500 per family relocation expenses, roughly ½ the cost of a slipshod, slapdash slum pad in such colorful locales as Watts, Willowbrook and Boyle Heights. The Bureau is also enterprisingly examining dervishly developed dump dives proferred by rapaciously rapid real estate developers: would-be Taco Terraces and Enchilada Estates where Burrito Bandits bounced from shamefully sheltered Chavez Ravine could live in jerry-rigged slum splendor, frolicking to fleabag firetrap fandangos!

Dig, we've heard that among the sites being considered are converted horse paddock-jail cells once used to house Japanese internees during World War II, and a converted bungalow motel in Lynwood, replete with heart shaped bed and cheesy gilt-edged mirrors. Say! Those places sound like the office here at *Hush-Hush!!!*

Hey! The rent here on the sin-tillating, salivatingly sensational Sunset Strip has steadily steepened – and we've heard that several dismayingly disgusted dispossessees have put in for their money and moved back to Mexico ahead of the general eviction date, leaving behind abandoned shacks! Hey – *Hush-Hush* could move its operations into them! As a result, we could charge a lower price for this rag! If you believe that, we'll sell you a Pendejo Penthouse and a brand new Chorizo Chevrolet!

But, to close on a more serious note, it appears that the L.A. powers-that-be have a front man chatting up the many remaining Chavez Ravine dwellers, passing out trinkets and doing his best to convince them to move out before the established eviction date without seeking legal injunctions. That man: popular bantam-weight battler Reuben Ruiz, currently ranked 8th by *Ring* Magazine, a man whom *Hush-Hush* hastens to charge with a checkably checkered past.

Item:

Reuben Ruiz served time at the Preston Reformatory for juvenile burglary.

Item:

Reuben Ruiz has three brothers: Ramon, Reyes and Reynaldo – !God! – alliteration to make *Hush-Hush* proud! – and all three men have burglary and/or grand theft auto convictions on their records.

Item:

Reuben Ruiz was a guarded witness during Federal bright boy Welles Noonan's recently short-lived boxing probe. (You recall that probe, hepcats: another witness jumped out the window while the LAPD detective guarding him resided in Snooze City.)

Item:

Reuben Ruiz was spotted a few days ago, lunching at the Pacific Dining Car with DA Bob Gallaudet and City Councilman Thomas Bethune. A late breaking extra, on the Q.T. and *very* Hush-Hush:

Reuben Ruiz' brother Ramon was arrested for grand theft auto several days before, but now the charges have been mysteriously dropped …

A captivatingly corrosive coercion conclusion to consider:

Is Reuben Ruiz a bagman-P.R. man for the DA's Office and City Council? Does Ruiz' hellacious hermano rowdy Ramon owe his freedom to Reuben's politically prudent pandering? Will Reuben's extra-curricular efforts extricate his lethal left hook when he fights tough Stevie Moore at the Olympic next week?

Remember, dear reader, you heard it first here: off the record, on the Q.T. and *very* Hush-Hush.

'Crimewatch' Feature, *Hush-Hush* Magazine, 11/6/58:

FUR FLIES FURTIVELY OUT OF FUR KING'S FREEZERS – FUR WHERE?

You all know Sol 'The Fur King' Hurwitz, hepcats: he does his own commercials on TV's Spade Cooley Show. His running gag is an animated snowstorm descending on Grauman's Chinese Theatre while unprepared Angelenos shiver in Bermuda shorts. He cuts these commercials on a sound stage made up like an igloo, with his marionette mascot Maurizio Mink supplying a hard sell Greek chorus scientists are predicting a new ice age several centuries down the line, buy your Hurwitz Fur now at rock bottom low prices, easy monthly payments, store your fur during the 'off season' at our San Fernando Valley fur warehouse free of charge. Follow the drift, kats and kittens? Sol Hurwitz knows that fur is a preposterous Southern California item, and he's poking fun at himself while neglecting to mention the basic fact of his business: people buy furs for two reasons: to look good and to show off how much money they have.

Dig that especially L.A. ethos? Good, you're on our wavelength. Dig further that Hurwitz' free storage come-on is good for lots of biz. Shiver, shiver, brrrr. Your beloved Charlie Chinchilla, Mindy Mink, and Rachel Raccoon are safe with Sol, right? Well, up until October 25th you weren't whistling Dixie …

On that fateful night, three or four daring desperadoes presumed to have toolmaking and electronics expertise *fur*tively *fur*thered their criminal careers by overpowering a security guard and absconding with an estimated one million dollars in 'Off Season' storaged furs. Did you read the small print on your 'free' storage contracts, kool kats? If not, dig: in case of theft, Hurwitz Furs' insurance carrier reimburses you at the rate of 25% of the estimated value of your lost stole or coat, and *fur*thermore, the police have no clues as to who these *furs*htinkener *fur*tive *fur* heisters are!

Captain Dudley Smith, head of the LAPD's Robbery Division, told reporters at Van Nuys Station: 'We know that a large flatbed truck was the means of entry and escape, and the regrettably injured guard told us that three or four men wearing stocking masks disabled him. A complex freezer locking system was dismantled, giving the robbers access to the furs. Technical expertise is an obvious strong point of this gang of thieves, and I will not rest until they are apprehended.'

Assisting Captain Smith are Sergeant Michael Breuning and Sergeant Richard Carlisle. A surprise addition to the celebrated crimebuster's team: Officer John Duhamel, known to So Cal fight fans as 'Schoolboy' Johnny Duhamel, former middleweight Golden Gloves champ. Captain Smith, Sergeant Breuning and Sergeant Carlisle refused to talk to *Hush-Hush*, but ace *Hush-Hush* scribe Duane Tucker cornered Officer 'Schoolboy' Duhamel at last week's Hollywood Legion Stadium fistfest. Off the record, on the Q.T. and *very* Hush-Hush, Officer 'Schoolboy' spoke out of school.

He called the robbery a baffler, and ruled out insurance fraud, even though Sol Hurwitz is rapaciously rumored to be a dice game degenerate. 'Schoolboy' then bit his tongue and offered no *fur*ther comments.

In a *fur*ther development, a score of *fur*ious *fur*meisters picketed Sol Hurwitz' Pacoima scene-of-the-crime storage facility. With a scant 25% assessed value refund coming to them, these perplexed parents impatiently importuned Mindy Mink, Rachel Raccoon and Charlie Chinchilla:

Come home! It's 80 degrees and we're freezing without you!

Look for *fur*ther developments in upcoming Crimewatch features: Remember, you heard it *furs*t here: off the record, on the Q.T. and *very* Hush-Hush!

L.A. *Herald-Express*, 11/7/58:

U.S. ATTORNEY ANNOUNCES SOUTHSIDE RACKETS PROBE

This morning, in a brief, tersely worded prepared statement, U.S. Attorney Welles Noonan announced that Justice Department investigators assigned to the Southern California District Office would soon begin a 'minutely detailed, complex and far reaching' probe into racketeering in South-Central Los Angeles. He called his investigation a 'gathering of evidence aimed at establishing criminal conspiracies'; he said that his goal was to present 'convincing evidence' to a specially convened Federal Grand Jury, with an eye toward securing major indictments.

Noonan, 40, former counsel to the U.S. Senate's McClellan Rackets Committee, said that his investigation would encompass crimes including narcotics trafficking, jukebox, vending machine and slot machine illegalities, and that he would 'thoroughly explore' rumors that the Los Angeles Police Department allows vice to rage in Southside Los Angeles and rarely investigates homicides involving both Negro victims and perpetrators.

The U.S. Attorney declined to answer reporters' questions, but stated that his task force would include four prosecuting attorneys and at least a dozen specially selected Justice Department agents. He closed his press conference stating that he fully expects the Los Angeles Police Department to refuse to cooperate with the probe.

LAPD Chief William H. Parker and Chief of Detectives Edmund Exley were informed of U.S. Attorney Noonan's announcement. They declined to comment.

PART II

VAMPIRA

10

SCOPE THE PARTY:

The Cocoanut Grove, a society band. Chief Parker, Exley – smiles for our boy: Gas Chamber Bob Gallaudet. Drink waiters, dancing – Meg brought Jack Woods so she could mambo. Dudley Smith, Mayor Poulson, Tom Bethune – no thank-you to me for the tank job.

Newsmen, Dodger execs. Gallaudet grinning, bombed by flashbulbs.

Mingle, look:

George Stemmons, Sr., two Smith goons: Mick Breuning, Dick Carlisle. Read their lips: FED PROBE, FED PROBE. Parker and Exley holding cocktails – talking FED PROBE – bet money. Meg danced Jack by – hoodlums still jazzed her – my fault.

Show-up time: I owed Bob congratulations. Better to wait, get him alone – *my* bad PR lingered. I watched the crowd, matched thoughts to faces.

Exley – tall, easy to spot. He'd read my 459 report: the Lucille/peeper leads, a bogus addendum – shitcan the job, it's dead-ended. He said keep going; some part of me rejoiced – I wanted to drag that family through the gutter. Both ends against the middle: I'd told Dan Wilhite I'd go easy.

Inspector George Stemmons, Sr., by the punchbowl – Junior twenty-odd years older. Junior missing since the Georgie Ainge roust – stale-mate time – he knew Glenda Bledsoe killed Dwight Gilette. *His* Kafesjian report: fluff. No john/whore file checks, my Darktown scoop made him too busy: that shakedown outside Bido Lito's; that confab with a 'pretty-boy blond cop.' Pretty boy's ID: Johnny Duhamel, Dud Smith's new Mobster Squad lad.

Junior: no way to trust him; no way to dump him off the case just yet.

Solo now:

I checked the stationhouse lists – luck at University – john names, no hooker names connected. I ran them through the DMV and R & I – all phonies – most Vice cops didn't press for real IDs – no heart to ream pussy prowlers. Luck crapped out – I saved the names to check against – most johns kept the same alias.

Darktown strutter:

I questioned Western Avenue whores, three nights' worth – no Lucille pic IDs. I checked with the 77th Squad – still no locate on the peeper complaints. I peeped myself: the Kafesjian pad, car-radio jazz to kill boredom. Two nights – family brawls; one night, Lucille alone – a window striptease – the radio pulsed to her movements. Three nights total, no other watchers – make *me* the only voyeur. That Big Instinct confirmed: prowler/peeper/B&E man – all one man.

Homework, two nights' worth: Art Pepper, Champ Dineen – listening to what the burglar smashed. My phonograph, the volume torqued: that Instinct solid. One session pushed me back to the house – I tailed Tommy K. down to Bido Lito's.

Tommy: *in with his own key*, weed bags stashed by slot machines. I called Lester Lake: glom me skinny on Tommy's known associates.

Happy chatter – the party crowd swelling. Meg and Jack Woods talking – they'd probably start up again. Jack muscled our rent; we cut a percentage deal: his dice game, our Westside vacant. Holding hands: my sister, my hood friend. Exhausted – I shifted to Glenda Overdrive—

Hooked bad – I couldn't subcontract the Hughes job. Moonlight work: I tailed her, watched for tails on me, ditched some maybes. Movie set skulks, rolling stakeouts:

Glenda raids Hughes' fuck pads; Glenda donates stolen food to 'Dracula's' rest home. Frequent Glenda guests: Touch V. and Rock Rockwell – Georgie Ainge nowhere in sight. Last night, Good Deed Glenda: foie gras for the oldsters at the Sleepy Glade dump.

R&I – Bledsoe, Glenda Louise:

No wants, no warrants, no prostitution arrests. 12/46: ten days, juvie shoplifting. A Juvenile Hall file note: Glenda beat up an amorous bull dyke.

LAPD Homicide – Dwight William Gilette, DOD 4/19/55 (unsolved) – ZERO ON GLENDA LOUISE BLEDSOE.

Fake reports to Bradley Milteer: Glenda's thefts deleted, her publicity date lied off – a 'friendly outing'. Glenda Overdrive driving me: good scary/scary good.

I edged up to the crowd. Gallaudet had a new haircut: that Jack Kennedy/Welles Noonan style. A nod my way, but no shake – bad-press cops rated low. Walter O'Malley sidled by – Bob almost genuflected. Chavez Ravine, ballpark – loud, happy.

'Hello, lad.'

That brogue – Dudley Smith.

'Hello, Dud.'

'A fine evening, is it not? Mark my words, we are celebrating the beginning of a splendid political career.'

An envelope passed: Dodger man to DA's man. 'Bob was always ambitious.'

'Like yourself, lad. And does the prospect of a stadium for our home team thrill you?'

'Not particularly.'

Dud laughed. 'Nor I. Chavez Ravine was a splendid place to purchase spic trinkets, but now I fear it will be replaced by traffic jams and more smog. Do you follow baseball, lad?'

'No.'

'Not interested in athletics? Is extracurricular money your only passion?'

'It's this Jew name I got stuck with.'

Howls – his suitcoat gapped. Check the ordnance: magnum, sap, switchblade. 'Lad, you have the power to amuse this old man.'

'I only get funny when I'm bored – and baseball bores me. Boxing's more my sport.'

'Ah, I should have known. Ruthless men always admire fisticuffs. And I phrase "ruthless" as a compliment, lad.'

'No offense taken. And speaking of boxing, Johnny Duhamel's working for you, right?'

'Correct, and a splendidly fear-inducing addition to the Mobster Squad he is. I've given him work on my fur-robbery job as well, and he is proving himself to be a splendid all-around young policeman. Why do you ask, lad?'

'His name came up. One of my men used to teach at the Academy. Duhamel was a student of his.'

‘Ahh, yes. George Stemmons, Jr., am I correct? What a memory for students past that lad must have.’

‘That’s him.’

Exley nailed me – a curt nod. Dud caught it: ‘Go, lad, Chief Exley beckons from across the room. Ah, the gaze of a shark he has.’

‘Good seeing you, Dud.’

‘My pleasure entirely, lad.’

I walked over. Exley, straight off: ‘There’s a briefing day after tomorrow. Nine o’clock, all Bureau COs. Be there – we’re going to discuss the Fed probe. Also, I want you to get ahold of the Kafesjian family’s tax records. You’re an attorney – find a loophole.’

‘Income tax records require a Federal writ. Why don’t you ask Welles Noonan? It’s his district.’

White knuckles – his wineglass shook. ‘I read your report, and the john names interest me. I want a trick sweep on Western and Adams tomorrow night. Set it up with University Vice, and detach as many men as you need. I want detailed information on Lucille Kafesjian’s customers.’

‘Are you sure you want to risk riling that family with the Feds around the goddamn corner?’

‘Do it, Lieutenant. Don’t question my motives or ask why.’

Pissed – I hit the lobby steaming. A phone, a dime – buzz the Bureau.

‘Administrative Vice, Officer Riegle.’

‘Sid, it’s me.’

‘Hi, Skipper. You telepathic? Hollenbeck just left you a message.’

‘Hold on, I need you to set something up first.’

‘All ears.’

‘Call University and set up a trick sweep. Say eight men and two whore wagons. Make it eleven P.M. tomorrow night. Western and Adams, Chief Exley’s authorization.’

Sid whistled: ‘Care to explain?’

BRAINSTORM:

‘And tell the squad lieutenant I need a row of interrogation rooms, and tell Junior Stemmons to meet me at the station, I want him in on this.’

Scribble sounds. ‘It’s on paper. You want that message now?’

‘Shoot.’

‘The Pawnshop Detail turned the Kafesjian silverware. Some Mexican tried to pawn it in Boyle Heights, and the shop owner saw our bulletin and stalled him. He’s in custody at Hollenbeck Station.’

I whooped – heads turned. ‘Call Hollenbeck, Sid. Tell them to put the Mex in a sweat room. I’ll be right over.’

‘On it, Skipper.’

Back to the party – Gas Chamber Bob swamped – no way to check out graceful. A blond swirled by – Glenda – a blink – just some woman.

11

JESUS CHASCO – FAT, Mex – not my peeper. No rap sheet, a ’58 green card running out. Scared – the sweat room sweats.

‘Habla inglés, Jesus?’

‘I speak English good as you do.’

Skim the crime sheet. ‘This says you attempted to sell stolen silverware to the Happytime Pawnshop. You told the officers that you didn’t steal the silverware, but you wouldn’t tell them where you got it. Okay, that’s one felony – receiving stolen goods. You gave your car as your address, so that’s a misdemeanour charge – vagrancy. How old are you, Jesus?’

T-shirt and khakis – sweated up. ‘Forty-three. Why you ask me that?’

‘I’m figuring five years in San Quentin, then the boot back to Mexico. By the time you get back here, you might win a prize as the world’s oldest wetback.’

Chasco waved his arms; sweat flew. ‘I sleep in my car to save money!’

‘Yeah, to bring your family up here. Now sit still or I’ll cuff you to your chair.’

He spit on the floor; I dangled my handcuffs eye-level. ‘Tell me where you got the silverware. If you prove it, I’ll cut you loose.’

‘You mean you—’

‘I mean you walk. No charges, no nada.’

‘Suppose I don’t tell you?’

Wait him out, let him show some balls. Ten seconds – a classic pachuco shrug. ‘I do custodian work at this motel. It’s on 53rd and Western, called the Red Arrow Inn. It’s … you know, for *putas* and their guys.’

Tingles. ‘Keep going.’

‘Well … I was fixing the sink in room 19. I found all this nice-looking silver stuck into the bed … you know, the sheets and the mattress all ripped up. I … I figured … I figured the guy who rented the room went crazy … and … and he wouldn’t press no charges if I swiped his stuff.’

Grab the lead: ‘*What does “the guy” look like?*’

‘I don’t know – a guy. I never seen him. Ask the night clerk, she’ll tell you.’

‘She’ll tell both of us.’

‘Hey, you said—’

‘Put your hands behind your back.’

Balls – two seconds’ worth – another shrug. I cuffed him up loose – keep him friendly.

‘Hey, I’m hungry.’

‘I’ll get you a candy bar.’

‘You said you’d cut me loose!’

‘I’m going to.’

‘But my car’s back here!’

‘Take a bus.’

‘*Pinche cabrón! Puto! Gabacho maricón!*’

A half-hour run. Praise Jesus: no backseat noise, no cuff thrashing. The Red Arrow Inn: connected cabins, two rows, a center driveway. A neon sign: ‘Vacancy.’

I pulled up to cabin 19: dark, no car out front. Chasco: ‘I got my master key.’

I unlocked his cuffs. High beams on – he opened 19, backlit nice.

‘Come look! Just like I tol’ you, man!’

I walked over. Evidence: doorjamb jimmy marks – *recent* – fresh splinters. The room itself: small, linoleum floor, no furniture. The bed: slashed sheets, ripped mattress spilling kapok.

‘Go get the clerk. Don’t run away, you’ll piss me off.’

Chasco hauled. I scoped the bed close up: fork holes in the mattress, stabs down to the springs. Semen stains – my peeper screamed CATCH ME NOW. I ripped off a sheet swatch – the jizz could be tested for blood type.

‘No-good ofay trash!’

I turned around – ‘Ofay trash dee-stroy my nice bed!’ – this jig granny flapping a rent card.

Grab it – ‘John Smith’ – predictable – ten days paid up front, checkout time tomorrow. Granny popped spit; Chasco pointed outside.

I followed him. Jesus, eager: ‘Carlotta don’t know who rented the room. She said she thinks it’s a young white guy. She said this wino rented the room for him, and the tenant guy said he had to have room 19. She ain’t seen the tenant guy herself. I ain’t either, but listen, I know that wino. You give me five dollars and a ride back to my car and I find him for you.’

Fork it over: two fives, the Lucille pix. ‘One for you, one for Carlotta. Tell her I don’t want any trouble and ask her if she knows this girl. *Then* you go find me that wino.’

Chasco ran back, passed the five, flashed the mugs – Moms nodded yes yes yes. Jesus, back to me: ‘Carlotta said that girl’s like a once-in-a-while – she rent short-timer and don’t fill out no rent card. She said she’s a prostie, and she always ask for number 18, right next to where I found that nice silver. She said the girl likes 18 ’cause she got a street view case the police show up.’

Think:

Room 19, room 18: the peeper peeping Lucille’s trick fucks. Room 19 jimmy marks – make some third party involved?

Granny jiggled a tin can. ‘For Jehovah. Jehovah get ten per cent of all rent money spent on this sinful premises tithed back to him. I gots the slot-machine gambleitis myself, and I kicks back ten per cent of my winnings to Jehovah. You a handsome young po-lice, so for one more dollar for Jehovah I give you more skinny on that slummin’, thrill-seekin’ white ho’ Hay-soos showed me them pictures of.’

Fuck it, fork it – Moms fed the can. ‘I seen that girl at Bido Lito’s, where I was indulgin’ my one-arm-bandit gambleitis to tithe Jehovah. This other po-lice, he was askin’ people at the bar ’bout her. I tol’ him what I tol’ you: she jist a thrill-seekin’, slummin’ white ho’. Later on, after hours I seen that girl in the pictures do this striptease with this bee-you-tiful mink coat. That other po-lice, he saw it too, but he actin’ cool, like he *not* a police, an’ he didn’t even stop her from makin’ that disgraceful display, *or* act like he was too hot and bothered.’

Think – don’t jump yet. ‘Jesus, go get me that wino. Carlotta, what did that policeman look like?'

Chasco breezed. Moms: 'He had light brown hair done up with pomade, an' he maybe thirty years old. Nice-lookin', but not as high-steppin' as you, Mister Po-lice.'

Jump: Darktown Junior lead number two. Reverse jump: Rock Rockwell at Fern Dell – some quiff said Ad Vice was working the Park. Junior copped to it – 'a favor' – he owed a pal working Hollywood Vice.

Rattle rattle – I shoved Moms some change. 'Listen, have you ever seen the man staying in this room?'

'Praise Jehovah, I seen him from the back.'

'Have you ever seen him *with* anyone else?'

'Praise Jehovah, no I hasn't.'

'When was the last time you saw the girl in my photographs?'

'Praise Jehovah, when she did that striptease at Bido's maybe four, five days ago.'

'When was the last time she brought a trick to this front room here?'

'Praise Jehovah, maybe a week ago.'

'Where does she solicit her tricks?'

'Praise Jehovah, I don't know.'

'Has she brought the same man more than once? Does she have regular tricks?'

'Praise Jehovah, I has taught myself not to look at the faces of these sinners.'

Chasco walked a piss bum up. 'I don't know, but I think maybe this guy's not so sharp with questions.'

'This guy': Mex, Filipino – grime-caked – a tough call. 'What's your name, sahib?'

Mumbles, hiccups – Jesus shushed him. 'The cops call him Flame-O, 'cause sometimes he sets himself on fire when he's drunk.'

Flame-O flashed some scars – Moms took off going 'Uggh.' Jesus: 'Look, I asked him 'bout that guy he rented the room for, an' I don't think he remembers so good. You still gonna drive me—'

Back to room 19 – my blinders on. Throw the lock, eyeball it – zoom – a connecting door.

Room 19 to room 18 – Lucille's preferred fuck spot. Jamb-ledge jimmy marks – different than the front door marks.

Think:

Peeper hits or tries to hit Lucille's room.

Peeper trashes his own room, leaves the silver, moves out panicked. Or: *different* pry marks on peeper's front door. Say somebody else broke in. Make some third party involved?

I rattled the connecting door – no answer. A shoulder push – slack, give, snap – I rode loose hinges into room 18.

Just like 19 – but no closet door. Something else: ripples on the wall above the bed.

Up close: buckled wallpaper, paste spackling. A square indentation – perforated drywall underneath. Peeled wallpaper – one thin strip, follow the line:

The wall to the connecting door – a drop to the crack under the door.

Odds on:

A bug – planted and removed, the mike above the bed – the peeper voyeurs Lucille, basic electronics skill—

I tore up the room – empty, zero, nothing. Number 19 – dump it twice, closet swag: Jockey shorts tangling up a tape spool.

Panic move-out validated.

Moms and Jesus outside pitching tantrums.

I shoved through them double time. Granny chucked her tin can at me.

The Bureau – Code 3 – a lab stop, orders: test the sheet-swatch jizz for blood type. My office, my old chem kit – dust the spool.

Smudges – no latent prints. Edgy now, I glommed a tape rig from the storeroom.

Nightwatch lull – the squadroom stood quiet. I shut my door, pressed Play, killed the lights.

Listen:

Static, traffic boom, window shimmy. Outside noises: business at the Red Arrow Inn.

Spook whores talking – ten minutes of pimp/trick rebop. I could *SEE IT*: hookers outside HER window. Silence, tape hiss, a door slamming. 'In advance, sweet' – pause – 'Yes, that means now' – Lucille.

'Okay, okay' – a man. A pause, shoes dropped, mattress squeaks – three minutes' worth. The tape almost out, groans – his climax. Silence, garbled words, Lucille: 'Let's play a little game. Now I'll be the daughter and you'll be the daddy, and if you're *reeeeal* sweet we can go again no extra.'

Traffic noise, driveway noise, breath. Easy to imagine:

That wall between them.

Surveillance not enough.

My peeper breathing hard – scared to bust down that wall.

12

STATIC GARBLED DREAMS: Lucille talking sex jive to *me*. The lab, my wake-up call – the jizz tested out O+. Chills off a late phone stint: Hollywood Vice called Junior's queer roust story bullshit.

'Horse pucky – whoever told you that lied through his teeth. We're too busy with the Will-o-the-Wisp to work fruits, and none of our guys have popped Fern Dell Park chicken in over a year.'

Coffee – half a cup – my nerves jangled.

The buzzer – loud.

I opened up – fuck – Bradley Milteer and Harold John Miciak.

Stern looks – their cop colleague in a towel. Miciak scoped my Jap sword scar.

'Come in, gentlemen.'

They shut the door behind them. Milteer: 'We came for a progress report.'

I smiled – servile. 'I have sources on the movie set accruing information on Miss Bledsoe.'

'You've been in Mr Hughes' employ for a week, Lieutenant. Frankly, so far you haven't "accrued" the results he hoped for.'

'I'm working on it.'

'Then please produce results. Are your normal police duties interfering with your work for Mr. Hughes?'

'My police duties aren't quite normal.'

'Well, be that as it may, you are being paid to secure information on Miss Glenda Bledsoe. Now, Mr Hughes seems to think that Miss Bledsoe has been pilfering foodstuffs from his actress domiciles. A criminal theft charge will violate her contract, so will you surveil her even more diligently?'

Miciak flexed his hands – no gang tattoos.

'I'll begin that surveillance immediately, Mr. Milteer.'

'Good. I expect results, Mr. Hughes expects results.'

Miciak – jailhouse eyes, cop-hater fuck.

'First Flats or White Fence, Harold?'

'Uh, what?'

'Those tattoos Mr. Hughes made you burn off.'

'Listen, I'm clean.'

'Sure, Mr. Hughes had your record wiped.'

Milteer: 'Lieutenant, *really*.'

The geek: 'Where'd you get that scar, hotshot?'

'A Jap sword.'

'What happened to the Jap?'

'I stuck the sword up his ass.'

Milteer, rolled eyes oh-you-heathens: 'Results, Mr. Klein. Harold, come.'

Harold walked. Fist signals back at me – pure White Fence.

Movie-set bustle:

Wine call – Mickey C. doling out T-bird to his 'crew'. 'Director' Sid Frizell, 'cameraman' Wylie Bullock – poke the head monster's eyes out with a stick or a knife? Glenda feeding extras sturgeon, read *her* eyes: 'Who's *that* guy, I've seen him before.'

Rock Rockwell's trailer – tap the door.

'It's open!'

I walked in. Cozy: a mattress, one chair. Rockwell cranking push-ups on the floor. THE LOOK: cop, oh fuck.

'It's not a roust, I'm friends with Touch.'

'Did I hear my name?'

Touch stepped out of the bathroom. No fixtures – just TV sets stacked high. 'David, you didn't see those.'

'See what?'

Rockwell slid up on the mattress; Touch tossed him a towel. 'Meg's my first customer. She told me she wants to put TV's in all your furnished vacancies so she can raise the rent. Oh, excuse me. Rock Rockwell, David Klein.'

No hello – Rock toweled off. Touch: 'Dave, what's this about?'

Eyes on Rockwell – Touch caught the drift. 'He can keep police-type confidences.'

'I had some questions about activities in Fern Dell Park.'

Rockwell scratched the mattress – Touch sprawled beside him. '*Vice*-type activities?'

I pulled the chair up. 'Sort of, and it gets tricky because I think one of my men might be pulling shakedowns in Fern Dell.'

Touch tensed up.

'What? What is it?'

'David, what does this man of yours look like?'

'Five-ten, one-sixty, long sandy hair. Sort of cute – you might like him.'

No laugh – Touch coiled toward Rockwell.

'Come on, tell me. We go back – you know nothing you say leaves this room.'

'Well … since it sort of involves Mickey, and you're his friend …'

Coax him: 'Come on – like the magazine says: "off the record".'

Touch stood up, threw a robe on, paced – 'Last week, that guy, that … policeman you just described to a T, he rousted me in Fern Dell. I told him who I was, *who I knew*, including Mickey Cohen, which *he* was oblivious to. Look, I was cruising – you know what I am, David – Rock and I, we have this arrangement—'

Rockwell – BAM! – out the door pulling on pants.

'It's the way our kind of people have to be to get along, and this … oh shit, this *policeman* said he'd seen me installing slots and coin hardware on the Southside a while back, and he said that Fed probe would happen and he'd snitch me to it if I didn't cooperate with him, so all right, *we* both know how to do business, David, but *this policeman* was acting so hopped-up and crazy that *I knew he didn't*, so I listened. He said, "You must know Darktown pretty well," I said yes, I got the impression he was messed up on Bennies or goofballs *or both*, and *then* he started rambling about – and I quote you, David – this "gorgeous" – he actually used the word "gorgeous" – other policeman working the Mobster Squad—'

'Gorgeous' Johnny Duhamel. My head throbbed – queer lilt synchronized—

'*This policeman, he just kept rambling*. He wouldn't tell me *details*, he just … kept rambling. He told me this crazy story about a whore in a mink coat stripping and how the gorgeous Mobster Squad cop got panicky and made her stop. David, here's where it gets strange and funny and sort of … well … *incestuous*, because the crazy policeman saw that the fur-coat spiel made me just a tad suspicious. He came on strong, and he found a gun on me and threatened me with a concealment charge, and I said the fur thing spooked me because Johnny Duhamel, that sort-of-famous ex-boxer, he tried to sell Mickey a bulk load of hot furs, which Mickey refused. The crazy cop, he laughed and laughed and started muttering "Gorgeous Johnny", and then he just sort of warned me off and walked away, and David, that policeman, he is one of us, if you catch my drift, dear heart, and I only told you all this because our mutual friend Mickey played just a tad of a supporting role.'

Touch – hands in his robe, out with a piece – bet he almost shoved it up Junior's ass.

Think:

Junior shakes down a guy at Bido Lito's.

Hobnobs with Johnny Duhamel – Bido Lito's.

Scopes out Lucille's fur strip – Bido Lito's.

More:

Junior – Kafesjian work fluffed off.

Fern Dell Park shakedowns – faggot Junior – Touch knew the turf-call it a maybe.

Touch: 'I don't want you to tell Mickey what I told you. Duhamel just approached Mickey because he's Mickey. Mickey doesn't know anything about that extortionist policeman of yours, I just know it. Dave, are you listening to me?'

'I heard you.'

'You won't tell him.'

'No, I won't tell him.'

'You look like you've seen a ghost.'

'Lots of them.'

Ghost chaser—

The Observatory lot – phone work.

Dime one: Jack Woods – set to bird-dog Junior post-trick sweep. Two: Ad Vice/Sid Riegle/confirmation: everything set, Junior told to stick at University Station. Orders: walk over to Robbery, skim the fur-heist file. Riegle: sure, I'll call you back.

Tick tick tick – my pulse outran my watch. Eleven minutes, Sid with stale news:

No suspects, fences leaned on – no furs surfacing. Three to five men, a true solid knowhow: electronics and toolworking. Dud Smith ruled out fraud – no profit motive – Sol Hurwitz packed low payoff-rate insurance. Sid – 'Why the interest?' – cut him off, work dime three – a Personnel clerk who owed me.

My offer: your debt wiped for a file check: Officer John Duhamel. He agreed; I asked one question: did Duhamel possess technical expertise?

I held the line – twenty long minutes. Results: Duhamel, cum laude grad – engineering – USC, '56. Straight-A average – rah, rah, fellow Trojan.

Duhamel – possible fur thief. Possible partners: Reuben Ruiz and his brothers – Reuben and Johnny fought amateur together. Nix it on instinct: Ruiz boosted pads, ditto his brothers – the family topped out at auto theft. More likely:

Dudley co-opts Johnny to the fur heist; Johnny gloms some solo leads and gloms some furs. Smart into dumb – he offers Mickey Cohen the goods – the kid doesn't know Mickey's scuffling.

My scuffle – rat him to Dud? – think it through. *Tick tick tick* – not yet – too circumstantial. My priority: sort Junior and Johnny out, ease Junior off Glenda.

Ghost chaser.

Glenda.

Results.

Time before the trick sweep – tail her.

The park road – wait her out.

Her routine: drive home at 2:00, pilfer later. Time to kill, time to think—

Easy: my 'crush' stretched me too thin – catch her stealing and snitch her – TODAY. Kicks: get her a Commie lawyer enraged at big money – Morton Diskant, just the ticket. Arraignment, trial – Glenda pays cunthound Morty off in trade. 'Guilty,' State time, Dave Klein there with flowers when they boot her.

Play the radio, drift.

Bop – maybe queer cops prowling Darktown – too jangly, too frantic. Skim the dial, ballads – 'Tennessee Waltz' – Meg '51, that song, the Two Tonys – Jack Woods probably knew the whole story. Him and Meg back on; I dumped a witness and she got suspicious – and Jack wouldn't shit her. She'd know, she'd be scared, she'd forgive me. Her and Jack – I wasn't jealous – call him dangerous and safe – safer than me.

Back to bop – jangly good now – think:

Lucille on tape: 'I'll be the daughter and you'll be the daddy.' Lucille, nude: fleshy like this boot camp whore I had. Big-band tunes, the war, schoolgirl Glenda – *close her out*—

Noon, 1:00, 1:30 – I snoozed and woke up cramped. Stomach growls, a piss in the weeds. Early: her Vette zooming by with the top down.

I rolled – a brown Chevy cut between us – weird familiar. Squint, make the driver: Harold John Miciak.

Three-car tail string – absurd.

Up to the Observatory; down to street level. Glenda carefree, her scarf billowing. Pissed: hit the siren, ream that shitbird.

Miciak gunned it – bumper-to-bumper close. Glenda looked around; he looked around – sixty miles an hour, kill the siren, hit the mike: 'Police! Pull over now!'

He swerved, banged the curb, stalled out. Glenda slowed down and stopped.

I got out.

Miciak got out.

Glenda watched – see it her way:

This big goon walks up shouting; this shoulder-holster shirtsleeves guy shouts back: 'This is mine! You'll get your results! Tell your fucking boss that!'

The goon stutters, kicks the ground, U-turns off.

The cop goes back to his car – his B-movie goddess is gone.

Time to kill, time to figure her route. I tried due cast: Hughes' Glendale fuck pad.

I drove there. Paydirt: a Tudor mansion flanked by airplane-shaped hedges. A circular driveway – her Vette by the door.

I pulled up. Drizzling – I got out and touched the rain. Glenda walked out carrying groceries.

She saw me.

I just stood there.

She tossed me a tin of caviar.

13

WESTERN AND ADAMS – the whores briefed nice – quasi-deputies for the night.

Bluesuits out in force: popping tricks, impounding trick cars.

Prostie vans behind Cooper's Donuts; Vice bulls bagging IDs. Men stationed southbound and northbound – hot to foil sex prowlers hot to rabbit.

My perch: Copper's roof. Ordnance: binoculars, a bullhorn.

Dig the panic:

Johns soliciting whores – cops grabbing them. Vehicles impounded, van detainment – fourteen fish bagged so far, prelim Q&A:

'You married?'

'You on parole or probation?'

'You like it white or colored? Sign this waiver, we might cut you loose at the station.'

No Lucille K.

Some clown tried to run – a rookie plugged his back tires.

Epidemic boo-hoo – 'DON'T TELL MY WIFE!' Leg-shackle clangs – the prostie vans shook.

Luck – whores mixed fifty-fifty: white girls, coons. Fourteen tricks arrested – all Caucasian.

Panic down below: Shriners bagged en masse. Five men, fez hats flying – a whore grabbed one and pranced.

I hit the bullhorn: 'We've got nineteen! Let's close it down!' The station – dawdle over – let Sid Riegle work setup. Luck: Junior's Ford by the squadroom door. Headlight signals goosed me walking in: Jack Woods, contingency tail man.

Squadroom, muster room, jail. I badged the jailer – *click/whoosh* – the door opened. Down the catwalk, turn the corner: the swish tank facing the drunk tank. Drunks and tricks hooting at the floorshow: drag queens masturbating.

Riegle outside the bars, marking nametags. He shook his head – too much noise to talk.

I scanned the fish – shit – nothing peeper-aged. Fuck it – I hit the show-up room.

Chairs, a height strip stage: one-way glass lit up harsh. Rap sheets and IDs laid out for me – I checked them against my john alias list.

No crossovers – expected – I'd run the fake names through the DMV. No real-name spinoffs; driver's license ages thirty-eight and up – my peeper ten years older minimum. Six tricks misdemeanor rap-sheeted – no Peeping Toms, burglars, sex fiends. A cover note: sixteen out of nineteen men were married.

Riegle walked in. I said, 'Where's Stemmons?'

'He's waiting in one of the interrogation rooms. Dave, is the scoop on this real? J.C. Kafesjian's daughter is some kind of prostie?'

‘It’s true, and don’t ask me what Exley wants, and don’t tell me how the Department doesn’t need this shit with the Feds nosing around.’

‘I was gonna mention it, but I think I’ll stay on your good side. One thing, though.’

‘What’s that?’

‘I saw Dan Wilhite in the watch commander’s office. Given what he is to the Kafesjians, I’d say he’s more than a little pissed.’

‘Shit, that’s more shit I don’t need.’

Sid smiled. ‘Yeah, but it’s a duck shoot – they *all* signed the false-arrest waivers.’

I smiled back. ‘Move them in.’

Riegle walked back out; I grabbed the intercom mike. Shackle clang, shackle shuffle – whore chasers lit up on stage.

‘Good evening, gentlemen, and listen closely’ – the speaker kicked on loud.

‘You have all been arrested for soliciting for purposes of prostitution, a California Penal Code violation punishable by up to a year in the Los Angeles County Jail. Gentlemen, I can make this easy or I can make this one of the worst experiences of your life, and the way I play it depends entirely on you.’

Blinks, shuffles, dry sobs – sad sacks all in a row. I read my John list and scoped reactions:

‘John David Smith, George William Smith – come on, be original. John Jones, Thomas Hardesty – that’s more like it. D.D. Eisenhower – come on, that’s beneath you. Mark Wilshire, Bruce Pico, Robert Normandie – street names, come on. Timothy Crenshaw, Joseph Arden, Lewis Burdette – he’s a baseball player, right? Miles Swindell, Daniel Doherty, Charles Johnson, Arthur Johnson, Michael Montgomery, Craig Donaldson, Roger Hancock, Chuck Sepulveda, David San Vicente – Jesus, more street names.’

Fuck – I couldn’t scan faces that quick.

‘Gentlemen, here’s where it gets either easy or very difficult. The Los Angeles Police Department wishes to spare you grief, and frankly your *illegal* extramarital pursuits do not concern us that greatly. Essentially, you have been detained to aid us in a burglary investigation. A young woman known to occasionally sell her services on South Western Avenue is involved, and I need to isolate men who have purchased those services.’

Riegle up on stage, mug shots out.

‘Gentleman, we can legally hold you for seventy-two hours prior to arraigning you in Misdemeanor Court. You are entitled to one phone call apiece, and should you decide to call your wives, you might tell them that you are being held at University Station on one-eighteen-dash-six-zero charges: soliciting for purposes of prostitution. I understand that you might be reluctant to do that, so listen closely, I’ll only say it once.’

Rumbles – breath fogged the glass.

‘Officer Riegle will show you photographs of that young woman. If you have purchased her services, take two steps forward. If you have seen her streetwalking, but haven’t purchased her services, raise your right hand.’

Pause a beat.

‘Gentlemen, *legitimate confirmations* will get all of you released within several hours, *with no charges filed*. If none of you admit to purchasing this woman’s services, then I will conclude that either you are lying or simply that none of you have ever seen her or dallied with her, which means in either case that all nineteen of you will be subjected to intensive questioning, and all nineteen of you will be booked, held for seventy-two hours and arraigned on soliciting charges. You will be held during that time in the facility that we reserve here for homosexual prisoners, i.e. the queer tank, where those nigger queens were shaking their dicks at you. Gentlemen, if any of you do admit to dallying with the young lady, and your statements convince us that you are telling the truth, you will in no way be criminally charged and your disclosures will be kept in the strictest confidence. Once we are convinced, you will all be released and allowed to claim your confiscated property and impounded cars. Your cars are being held at a County lot nearby, and as a reward for your cooperation you will not be charged the standard impound fee. Again: we want the truth. You cannot lie your way out of here by claiming that you fucked her when you didn't – your lies won't wash. Sid, pass the mugs.'

Handoff: Riegle to a scrawny granddad type.

Dizzy, lawyer high – David Klein, Juris Doctor.

I looked down, held a breath, looked up: one Shriner and one lounge lizard stood forward. I checked driver's license pix and matched up names:

Shriner: Willis Arnold Kaltenborn, Pasadena. Lizard: Vincent Michael Lo Bruto, East L.A. A rap sheet check, paydirt on the wop: child-support skips.

Sid walked in. 'We did it.'

'Yeah, we did. Stemmons is waiting, right?'

'Right, and the tape recorder's in with him. The fourth booth down, he's there.'

'Put Kaltenborn in number 5, and the greaseball in with Junior. Take the rest of them back to the drunk tank.'

'Feed them?'

'Candy bars. And no phone calls – a smart attorney could wangle writs. Where's Wilhite?'

'I don't know.'

'Keep him away from the sweat rooms, Sid.'

'Dave, he's a captain.'

'Then … shit, just do it.'

Riegle strolled out – pissed. I strolled, itchy – over to sweat box row.

Standard six-by-eights, peekaboo glass. Booth 5: fez man Kaltenborn. Number 4: Lo Bruto, Junior, a tape rig on the table.

Lo Bruto rocked his chair; Junior squirmed. Touch V.'s take: Junior doped up at Fern Dell. The Ainge roust, a late make: dope eyes. Worse now – pin slits.

Open the door, slam it. Junior nodded – half lurch.

I sat down. 'What do they call you – Vince? Vinnie?'

Lo Bruto picked his nose. 'The ladies call me Mr. Big Dick.'

'That's what they call my partner here.'

'Yeah? The nervous, silent type. He must get a lot.'

'He does, but we're not here to discuss his sex life.'

'Too bad, 'cause I got time. The old lady and the kids are in Tacoma, so I coulda done the whole seventy-two hours, but I figured, why spoil it for other guys? Look, I fucked her, so why beat around the bush, no pun intended.'

I slid him cigarettes. 'I like you, Vinnie.'

'Yeah, then call me Vincent. And save your money, 'cause I quit on March 4, 1952.'

Junior stripped the pack. Shot nerves: three swipes at a match.

I leaned back. 'How many times did you go with that girl?'

'Once.'

'Why just once?'

'Once qualifies as strange. More than once you might as well pop your old lady for all the surprises you get with whoo-ers.'

'You're a smart guy, Vincent.'

'Yeah, then why am I a security guard for a buck twenty an hour?'

Junior smoking – huge drags. I said, 'You tell me.'

'I don't know – I get to choke my mule on the Mighty Man Agency's time. It's a living.'

Hot – I took off my jacket. 'So you solicited that girl just once, right?'

'Right.'

'Had you seen her around before?'

'No.'

'Have you seen her since?'

'There hasn't been no since. Jesus Christ, I get paid, I go cruising for some strange and some punk kid cop strongarms me. Jesus fucking—'

'Vincent, what attracted you to that girl?'

'She was white. I got no taste for nigger stuff. I'm not prejudiced, I just don't dig it. Some of my best friends are nig – I mean Negroes, but I don't go for dark cooze.'

Junior smoking – hot – he kept his coat on.

Lo Bruto: 'Your partner don't talk much.'

'He's tired. He's been working undercover up in Hollywood.'

'Yeah? Wow, now I know why he's such a pussy bandit. Man-oh-Manischewitz, they say the snatch grows fine up there.'

I laughed. 'It does, but he's been working fruits. Say, partner, remember how you popped those queers in Fern Dell? Remember – you helped out that Academy pal of yours?'

'Sure' – dry-mouthed, scratchy.

'Jesus, partner, it must have made you sick. Did you stop for some poon on the way home, just to get rid of the TASTE?'

Sweaty knuckle pops – his sleeves dropped. WRIST TRACKS – he tugged his cuff links to hide them.

Lo Bruto: 'Hey, I thought this was my show.'

'It is. Sergeant Stemmons, any questions for Vincent?'

'No' – dry, fretting those cuff links.

I smiled. 'Let's get back to the girl.'

Lo Bruto: 'Yeah, let's do that.'

'Was she good?'

'Strange is strange. She was better than the wife, but not as good as the amateur stuff handsome here probably gets.'

'He likes them *blond* and *gorgeous*.'

'We all do, but I'm lucky to get it plain old Caucasian.'

Junior stroked his gun, spastic-handed.

'So how was she better than your wife?'

'She moved around more, and she liked to talk dirty.'

'What did she call herself?'

'She didn't tell me no name.'

Lucille's window striptease – use it. 'Describe the girl naked.'

Fast: 'Chubby, low-slung tits. Big brown nipples, like she maybe had some *paisan* blood.'

Tilt – he knew. 'What was she wearing when you picked her up?'

'Hip huggers – you know, pedal pushers.'

'Where did you screw her?'

'In the snatch, where else?'

'The location, Vincent.'

'Oh. I… uh … I think it was a dive called the Red Arrow Inn.'

I tapped the tape rig. 'Listen close, Vincent. There's a man on this, but I don't think it's you. Just tell me if the girl talked up any similar stuff.'

Lo Bruto nodded; I punched Play. Static hiss, 'Now I'll be the daughter and you'll be the daddy, and if you're *reeeeal* sweet we can go again no extra.'

I hit Stop. Junior – no reaction. Lo Bruto: 'Boy, that sick kitten is just full of surprises.'

'Meaning?'

'Meaning she didn't make me wear a safe.'

'Maybe she uses a diaphragm.'

'Nyet. Trust Mr. Big Dick, these girls *always* go the rubber route.'

'And she didn't?'

'What can I tell you, she let this jockey ride bareback. And let me tell you, *paisan*, my big sausage *works*. Witness the goddamn offspring that got me slaving to feed them.'

A guess: scrape jobs made Lucille sterile. 'What about that tape?'

'What about it?'

'Did the girl talk up any of that daddy-daughter stuff with you?'

'No.'

'But you said she talked dirty.'

Tee-hee. 'She said I was the biggest. I said they don't call me Mr. Big Dick for nothing. She said she's liked them big since way back when, and I said, "Way back when to a kid like you means last week." She said something like "You'd be surprised."'

Junior tugged his cuff links. Tweak him: 'This Lucille sounds like a Fern Dell Park faggot, partner. Big dicks, that's a queer fixation. *You've* worked fruits more than me, wouldn't you say so?'

Hot seat – Junior squirmed.

'Wouldn't you say so, Sergeant?'

'Y-yeah, s-sure' – hoarse.

Back to Big Dick. 'So the girl wore pedal pushers, right?'

'Right.'

'Did she mention a guy perved on her, maybe peeping her trick assignations?'

'No.'

'And she wore pedal pushers?'

'Yeah, I told you that already.'

'What else did she wear?'

'I don't know. A blouse, I think.'

'What about a *fur coat*?'

Hophead nerves – Junior twitched a cuff link clean off.

'No, no fur coat. I mean, Christ, she's a Western Avenue whoo-er.'

Change-up: 'So you said the girl talked dirty to you.'

'Yeah. She said Mr. Big Dick sure deserved his nickname.'

'Forget about your dick. Did she talk dirty besides that?'

'She said she was screwing some guy named Tommy.'

Tingles/goosebumps. 'Tommy who?'

'I don't know, she didn't say no last name.'

'Did she say he was her brother?'

'Come on, that's crazy.'

'"Come on"? You remember that tape that I just played you?'

'So that was a game. Daddy and daughter don't mean brother, and white people don't do that kind of stuff. It's a sin, it's an *infamia*, it's—'

Hit the table. '*Did she say he was her brother*?'

'No.'

'Did she say his last name?'

'No' – soft – scared now.

'Did she say he was perved on her?'

'No.'

'Did she say he was a musician?'

'No.'

'Did she say he sold narcotics?'

'No.'

'Did she say he paid her for it?'

'No.'

'Did she say he was a burglar?'

'No.'

'A peeper, a voyeur?'

'No.'

'Did she say what he did?'

'No.'

'Did she talk about her family?'

'No.'

'Did she describe this guy?'

'No.'

'Did she say he chased colored girls?'

'No. Officer, look—'

I slapped the table – Big Dick crossed himself.

'Did she mention a man named Tommy Kafesjian?'

'No.'

'Fur coats?'

'No.'

'Fur-coat robberies?'

Junior squirming, scratching his hands.

'Officer, she just said she was banging this guy Tommy. She said he wasn't that good, but he turned her out, and you always pack a torch for the guy who took your cherry.'

I froze.

Junior jumped bolt upright – that cuff link rolled under the door.

Itchy scratchy nerves – he jerked the door open. Standing outside: Dan Wilhite. Hall speaker blinks – he'd heard.

'Klein, come here.'

I stepped forward. Wilhite jabbed my chest – I bent his hand back. '*This is my case. You don't like it, take it up with Exley*.'

Narco goons right there – I let him go. Junior tried to waltz – I pulled him back.

Wilhite – pale, popping spit bubbles.

His boys flushed – wicked pissed, spoiling to trash me.

Lo Bruto: 'Jesus, I'm hungry.'

I shut the door.

'Hey, I'm starved. Can I have a sandwich or something?'

I hit the intercom. 'Sid, bring the other man in.'

Lo Bruto out, Kaltenborn in: this fat geek wearing a fez. Junior sulked and hid his eyes.

The geek – 'Please, I don't want any trouble' – his voice half-ass familiar.

I hit Play.

Lucille: 'In advance, sweet.' Pause. 'Yes, that means *now*.'

Kaltenborn winced – hot potato.

Pause, 'Okay, okay' – *more* familiar. Mattress squeaks, grunts – Fats sobbed along.

Lucille: 'Let's play a little game. Now I'll be the daughter and you'll be the daddy, and if you're *reeeeal* sweet we can go again no extra.'

Big sobs.

I pushed Stop. 'Was that you, Mr. Kaltenborn?'

Sobs, nods. Junior squirmed – junkie shitbird.

'Quit crying, Mr. Kaltenborn. The sooner you answer my questions, the sooner we'll let you go.'

His fez slid down cockeyed. 'Lydia?'

'What?'

'My wife, she won't…'

'This is strictly confidential. *Is* that you on the tape, Mr. Kaltenborn?'

'Yes, yes it is. Did … did the police record that…'

'That *illegal* extramarital assignation? No, we didn't. Do you know who did?'

'No, of course not.'

'*Did* you play the daddy?'

Muffled, sob-choked: 'Yes.'

'Then tell me about it.'

Fretting the fez – twisting it, stroking it. 'I wanted to go again, so the girl put on her clothes and begged me to rip them off. She said, "Rip my clothes off, Daddy." I did it, and we went again, and that's all. I don't know her name – I never saw her before and I haven't seen her since. This is all just a terrible coincidence. That girl was the only prostitute I ever trafficked with, and I was at a meeting with my Shrine brothers to discuss our charity fish fry when one of them asked me if I knew where prostitutes could be procured, so I—'

'Did the girl talk about a man named Tommy?'

'No.'

'A *brother* named Tommy?'

'No.'

'A man who might be following her, or tape-recording her or eaves-dropping on her?'

'No, but I—'

'*But what?*'

'But I heard a man in the room next to us crying. Maybe it was my imagination, but it was as if he was listening to us. It was as if what he heard disturbed him.'

Peeper bingo.

'Did you *see* the man?'

'No.'

'Did you hear him say or mutter specific words?'

'No.'

'Did the girl mention other members of her family?'

'No, she just said what I told you and what you played me on that tape. Officer … where did you get that? I… I don't want my wife to hear—'

'Are you *sure* she didn't mention a man named Tommy?'

'Please, Officer, you're shouting!'

Change-up: 'I'm sorry, Mr. Kaltenborn. Sergeant, do you have any questions?'

Sergeant – this gun-fondling hophead – 'N-no' – watch his hands.

'Mr. Kaltenborn, did this girl wear a FUR COAT?'

'No, she wore tight toreador pants and some sort of inexpensive wrap.'

'Did she say she dug STRIPTEASE?'

'No.'

'Did she say she frequented a Negro club named BIDO LITO'S?'

'No.'

'Did she say that peeling off a HOT FUR COAT was ecstasy?'

'No. What are you –?'

Junior dropped his hands – watch for a quick draw.

'Mr. Kaltenborn did she say she knew a GORGEOUS BLOND POLICEMAN who used to be a boxer?'

'No, she didn't. I… I don't understand the thrust of these questions, Officer.'

'Did she say she knew a shakedown-artist cop with a THRUST for young blond guys?'

RABBIT—

Out the door, down the hall – Junior, his piece unholstered. Outside, chase him, sprint—

He made his car – heaving breathless. I grabbed him, pinned his gun hand, bent his head back.

'*I'll let you slide on all of it. I'll pull you off the Kafesjian job before you fuck things up worse. We can trade off right now*.'

Greasy pomade hair – he thrashed his head free. Stray headlights hit this dope face oozing spittle: 'That cunt killed Dwight Gilette, and you're suppressing it. Ainge left town, and maybe I got the gun she fired. You're queer for that cunt and I think you pushed that witness out the window. *No trade*, and you just *watch* me take you and that cunt down.'

I grabbed his neck and dug in to kill him. Obscene – his breath, his lips curled to bite. I edged back – slack – a knee slammed me. Down, sucking wind, kicked prone – tires spinning gravel.

Headlights: Jack Woods in tail pursuit.

West L.A., 3:00 A.M. Junior's building – four street-level units – no lights on. No Junior Ford parked nearby – pick the lock, hit the lights.

Aches groin to ribcage – hurt him, kill him. I left the lights on – *let him* show.

Bolt the door, walk the pad.

Living room, dinette, kitchen. Matched wood – fastidious. Neatness, grime: squared-off furniture, dust.

The sink: moldy food, bugs.

The icebox: amyl nitrite poppers.

Butt-filled ashtrays – Junior's brand – lipstick-smudged.

Bathroom, bedroom: grime, makeup kit – the lipstick color matched the butts. A waste basket; red-lip-blotted tissue overflowing. An unmade bed, popped poppers on the sheets. I flipped the pillow: a silencer-fitted Luger and shit-caked dildo underneath.

Paperbacks on the nightstand: *Follow the Boys, The Greek Way, Forbidden Desire*.

A padlocked trunk.

A wall photo: Lieutenant Dave Klein in LAPD dress blues. Track queer thinking, zoooom:

I'm not married.

No woman heat pre-Glenda.

Meg – he *couldn't* know.

The Luger smiling – 'Go ahead, shoot something.'

I fired, point-blank silent: shattered glass-ripped plaster-ripped ME. I shot the trunk – splinters-cordite haze – the lock flew.

I tore in. Neat paper stacks – fastidious Junior. Slow, inventory them pro—

Carbons:

Johnny Duhamel's Personnel file. Dudley Smith fitness reports – all Class A. Co-opt requests – Johnny to the fur job – fur-heist references checkmarked. Strange: Johnny *never* worked Patrol – he moved straight to the Bureau post-Academy.

More Duhamel – boxing programs – beefcake deluxe. Academy papers, Evidence 104 – Junior told Reuben Ruiz he taught Johnny. Straight A's, blind fag love – Duhamel's prose style stunk. More fur-job paper: Robbery reports, figure Junior scooped Dudley – *he* made Johnny as the thief and Dud never tumbled.

A formal statement: Georgie Ainge rats Glenda on the Dwight Gilette 187. Lieutenant D.D. Klein suppresses the evidence; Junior tags the motive: lust. Grab those pages, safe-deposit-box info underneath: figure Junior had backup statements stashed at some bank. No mention of the gun or Glenda's prints on a gun – maybe Junior stashed the piece as a hole card.

Plaster dust settling – my shots grazed some pipes. Miscellaneous folders, file cards:

Folder number one – Chief Ed Exley clippings – the Nite Owl job. Number two – odd Exley cases '53–'58. Concise – the *Times, Herald* – fastidious.

WHY?

The cards – LAPD FIs – four-by-six field questioning forms. 'Name', 'Location,' 'Comments' – filled in shorthand. I read through them and interpreted:

All locations 'F.D.P.' – make that Fern Dell Park. Initials, no names. Numbers – California Penal Code designations – lewd and lascivious behavior.

Comments: homo coitus interruptus, Junior levies on-the-spot fines – cash, jewelry, reefers.

Sweaty, close to breathless. Three cards clipped together – initials 'T.V.' Comments: the Touch Vecchio roust – credit Junior with extortion skill:

Touch calls Mickey C. power-broke and desperate. He's hot to do something 'on his own'; he's got his own shakedown gig brewing. Feature: Chick Vecchio to pork famous women; Touch to pork celebrated fruits. Pete Bondurant to take pix and apply the strongarm; cough up or *Hush-Hush* gets the negatives.

Chills – bad juju. The phone – once, stop, once – Jack's signal.

I grabbed the bedside extension. 'Yeah?'

'Dave, listen. I tailed Stemmons to Bido Lito's. He met J.C. and Tommy Kafesjian in this back room they've got there. I saw them shake him for a wire, and I caught a few words before they shut the window.'

'*What?*'

'What I heard was Stemmons talking. He offered to protect the Kafesjian family – he actually said "family" – from you and somebody else, I couldn't catch the name.'

Maybe Exley – that clip file. 'What else?'

‘Nothing else. Stemmons walked out the front door counting money, like Tommy and J.C. just palmed him. I tailed him down the street, and I saw him badge this colored guy. I think the guy was selling maryjane, and I think he palmed Stemmons.’

‘Where is he now?’

‘Heading your way. Dave, you owe me—’

I hung up, dialed 111, got Georgie Ainge’s listing. Dial it, two rings, a message: ‘The number you have reached has been disconnected.’ Junior’s story held: Ainge blew town.

Options:

Stall him, threaten to rat him as a homo. Maim him, trade him: depositions and print gun for no exposé.

Shit logic – psychos don’t barter.

I doused the lights, packed the Luger. Kill him/don’t kill him. Pendulum: if he walks in on the wrong swing he’s dead.

Think – queer pinup fever – psycho Junior hates heartthrob Glenda.

Time went nutso.

My ribs ached.

The morning paper hit the door – I shot a chair. Bullet logic: this grief for a woman I never even touched.

I walked outside. Dawn – milkman witnesses nixed murder.

I dropped the Luger in a trashcan.

I primped – don’t think, just do it.

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I KNOCKED; SHE answered. My move – she moved first. ‘Thanks for yesterday.’

Set ready: gown and raincoat. My move – she moved first. ‘It’s David Klein, right?’

‘Who told you?’

She held the door open. ‘I saw you on the set, and I saw you following me a few times. I know what unmarked police cars look like, so I asked Mickey and Chick Vecchio about you.’

‘And?’

‘And I’m wondering what you want.’

I walked in. Nice stuff – maybe fuck-pad furnished. TVs by the couch – Vecchio stash.

‘Be careful with those televisions, Miss Bledsoe.’

‘Tell your sister that. Touch told me he sold her a dozen of them.’

I sat on the couch – hot Philcos close by. ‘What else did he tell you?’

‘That you’re a lawyer who dabbles in slum property. He said you turned down a contract at MGM because strike-breaking appealed to you more than acting.’

‘Do you know why I was following you?’

She pulled a chair up – not too close. ‘You’re obviously working for Howard Hughes. When I left him, he threatened to violate my contract. You obviously know Harold Miciak, and you obviously don’t like him. Mr. Klein, did you …?’

‘Scare off Georgie Ainge?’

‘Yes.’

I nodded. ‘He’s a pervert, and fake kidnaps never work.’

‘How did you know about it?’

‘Never mind. Do Touch and his boyfriend know I scared him away?’

‘No, I don’t think so.’

‘Good, then don’t tell them.’

She lit a cigarette – the match shook. ‘Did Ainge talk about me?’

‘He said you used to be a prostitute.’

‘I was also a carhop and Miss Alhambra, and yes, I used to work for a call service in Beverly Hills. A very expensive one, Doug Ancelet’s.’

Shake her: ‘You worked for Dwight Gilette.’

Stylish – that cigarette prop helped. ‘Yes, and I was arrested for shoplifting in 1946. Did Ainge mention anything—’

‘Don’t tell me things you might regret.’

A smile – cheap – not *that* smile. ‘So you’re my guardian angel.’

I kicked a TV over. ‘Don’t patronize me.’

Not a blink: ‘Then what do you want me to do?’

‘Quit stealing from Hughes, apologize to him and fulfill the stipulations of your contract.'

Her raincoat slid off – bare shoulders, knife scars. 'Never.'

I leaned closer. 'You've gone as far as you can on looks and charm, so use your brains and do the smart thing.'

Smiling: 'Don't *you* patronize me.'

That smile – I smiled back. 'Why?'

'*Why?* Because I was *dismissable* to him. Because last year I was carhopping and one of his "talent scouts" saw me win a dance contest. He got me an "audition", which consisted of me taking off my brassiere and posing for pictures, which Mr. Hughes liked. Do you know what it's like to get screwed by a man who keeps naked pictures of you and six thousand other girls in his Rolodex?'

'Nice, but I'm not buying.'

'Oh?'

'Yeah, I think you got bored and moved on. You're an actress, and the style angle of jilting Howard Hughes appealed to you. You figured you could get yourself out of trouble, because you've been in shitloads of trouble before.'

'*Why,* Mr. Klein?'

'Why what?'

'Why are you putting yourself to such trouble to keep me out of trouble?'

'I can appreciate style.'

'No, I don't believe you. And what else did Georgie Ainge say about me?'

'Nothing. What else did the Vecchio brothers say about me?'

Laughing: 'Touch said he used to have a crush on you. Chick said you're dangerous. Mickey said he's never seen you with a woman, so maybe that rules out the standard reason for your being interested in me. I'm only thinking that there must be a payoff involved somewhere.'

Scope the room – books, art – taste she got somewhere. 'Mickey's on the skids. If you thought you traded Hughes up for a big-time gangster, you're wrong.'

She chained cigarettes. 'You're right, I miscalculated.'

'Then square things with Hughes.'

'Never.'

'Do it. Get us both out of trouble.'

'No. Like you said, I've been in trouble before.'

Zero fear – daring me to say I KNOW.

'You should see yourself on camera, Miss Bledsoe. You're laughing at the whole thing, and it's real stylish. Too bad the movie's headed for drive-ins in Dogdick, Arkansas. Too bad no men who can help your career will see it.'

A flush – one split second. 'I'm not as beholden to men as you think I am.'

'I didn't say you liked it, I just meant you know it's the game.'

'Like being a bagman and a strikebreaker?'

'Yeah, wholesome stuff. Like you and Mickey Cohen.'

Smoke rings – nice. 'I'm not sleeping with him.'

'Good, because guys have been trying to kill him for years, and it's the people around him who get hurt.'

'He was something once, wasn't he?'

'He had style.'

'Which we both know you appreciate.'

This portrait on a shelf – a ghoul woman. 'Who's that?'

'That's Vampira. She's the hostess of an awful horror TV show. I used to carhop her, and she gave me pointers on how to act in your own movie when you're in someone else's movie.'

Shaky hands – I wanted to touch her.

'Are you fond of Mickey, Mr. Klein?'

'Sure. He had it once, so it's rough to see him diving for scraps.'

'Do you think he's desperate?'

'*Attack of the Atomic Vampire*?'

Glenda laughed and coughed smoke. 'It's worse than you think. Sid Frizell is putting in all this gore and incest, so Mickey's afraid they'll have to book it straight into drive-ins to make a profit.'

I fixed the TV pile. 'Be smart and go back to Hughes.'

'No. Frizell's directing some stag films on the side, though. He has a place in Lynwood fixed up with mirrored bedrooms, so maybe I could get work there.'

'Not your style. Does Mickey know about it?'

'He's pretending he doesn't, but Sid and Wylie Bullock have been talking it up. Mr. Klein, what are you going to do about this?'

Shelves packed tight – college texts. I opened one – comp stuff, doodling: a heart circling 'G.B. & M.H'.

'Yes, I stole those. What are you going—'

'What happened to M.H.?'

That smile. 'He got another girl pregnant and died in Korea. David—'

'I don't know. Maybe I'll just pull out and set you up with an attorney. But the best you can hope for is a violated contract and no criminal charges.'

'And the worst?'

'Howard Hughes is Howard Hughes. One word to the DA gets you indicted for grand theft.'

'Mickey said you're friends with the new DA.'

'Yeah, he used to study my crib sheets in law school, and Hughes put two hundred grand in his slush fund.'

'David—'

'It's Dave.'

'I like David better.'

'No, my sister calls me that.'

'So?'

'Let it rest.'

The phone rang – Glenda picked up. 'Hello? … Yes, Mickey, I know I'm late … No, I've got a cold … Yes, but Sid and Wylie can shoot around my scenes … No, I'll try to come in this afternoon … Yes, I won't forget our dinner … No – goodbye, Mickey.'

She hung up. I said, 'M.H. took off, but Mickey won't.'

'Well, he's lonely. Four of his men have disappeared, and I think he knows they're dead. Business was business, but I think he misses them more than anything else.'

'He's still got Chick and Touch.'

A breeze – Glenda shivered. 'I don't know why they stay. Mickey has this scheme to have them seduce famous people. It's so un-Mickey it's pathetic'

'Pathetic' – Junior's notes confirmed. Glenda – shivers, goose-bumps.

I grabbed her raincoat and held it out – she stood up smiling.

Touching her.

She slid the coat on; I pulled it back and touched her scars. Glenda: this slow turn around to kiss me.

Day/night/morning – the phone off the hook, the radio low. Talk, music – soft ballads lulled Glenda sleepy. Losing her brought it ALL back.

She slept hard, stirred hungry. Yawns, smiles – open eyes caught me scared. Kisses kept her from asking; the whole no-payoff feel kept me breathless.

Pressed hard together – no thoughts. *Her* breath peaking – no thoughts. Inside her when her eyes said don't hold back – no queers, no peepers, no dope-peddler-daughter whores taunting me.

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'… AND THEY ARE out there, within our jurisdiction, superseding our jurisdiction. So far as we know, there are seventeen Federal agents and three Deputy U.S. Attorneys backstopping Welles Noonan. Noonan has not requested an LAPD liaison, so we must fully assume that this is a hostile investigation aimed at discrediting us.'

Chief William H. Parker speaking. Standing by: Bob Gallaudet, Ed Exley. Seated: all stationhouse commanders and Detective Division COs. Missing: Dan Wilhite, Dudley Smith – Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle pinch-hitting.

Eerie – *no* Narco men. Odd – no Dudley.

Exley at the mike: 'The chief and I view this "investigation" as conceived for political gain. Federal agents are not city policemen and certainly not conversant with the realities of maintaining order in Negro-inhabited sectors. Welles Noonan wishes to discredit both the Department and our colleague Mr. Gallaudet, and Chief Parker and I have agreed on measures to limit his success. I will be briefing each of you division heads individually, but before I commence I'll hit some key points you should all be aware of.'

I yawned – bed-bruised, exhausted. Exley: 'Division commanders should tell their men, both plainclothes and uniform: muscle and/or palm your informants and tell them not to cooperate with any Federal agents they might encounter. Along those lines, I want Southside club and bar owners visited. "Visited" is a euphemism, gentlemen. 'Visited' means that the station COs at Newton, University and 77th Street should send intimidating plainclothesmen around to tell the owners that since we overlook certain infractions of theirs, they should overlook speaking candidly to the Feds. The Central Vagrant Squad will follow a parallel line: they will round up local derelicts to insure their silence vis-à-vis enforcement measures that quasi-liberals like Noonan might consider overzealous. The 77th Squad is to politely muscle white swells out of the area – we want no well-connected people federally entrapped. Robbery and Homicide Division detectives are currently sifting through recent Negro-on-Negro unsolved homicides, with an eye toward presenting indictment-ready evidence to Mr. Gallaudet – we want to counter Noonan's charge that we let colored 187s lie doggo. And finally, I think it's safe to say that the Feds might raid the slot and vending-machine locations controlled by Mickey Cohen. We will let them do this, and we will let Cohen take the fall. Central Vice has destroyed all the coin-hardware complaints that we've ignored, and we can always say that we didn't know those machines existed.'

Implied: Mickey didn't yank his Southside coin. Warn him – again – tell Jack Woods to pull his Niggertown book.

Parker walked out; Exley coughed – crypto-embarrassed. 'The chief has never liked women fraternizing with Negroes, and he's hardnosed the club owners down there who encourage it. Sergeant Breuning, Sergeant Carlisle – you men make sure that those club owners don't talk to the Feds.'

Smirks – Dudley's boys loved strongarm. Exley: 'That's all for now. Gentlemen, please wait outside my office, I'll be down to brief you individually. Lieutenant Klein, please remain seated.'

Gavel bangs – meeting adjourned. A big exit; Gallaudet slipped me a note.

Exley walked over. Brusque: 'I want you to stay on the Kafesjian burglary. I'm thinking of stepping it up, and I want a detailed report on the trick sweep.'

'Why wasn't Narco represented at this meeting?'

'Don't question my measures.'

'One last time: the Kafesjians are prime Fed meat. They're twenty years dirty with the Department. Rattling their cage is suicidal.'

'One last time: don't question my motives. One last time: you and Sergeant Stemmons stay on the case full priority.'

'Was there any specific reason why you wanted Stemmons on this job?'

'No, he just seemed like the logical choice.'

'Meaning?'

'Meaning he works closely with you at Ad Vice, and he had excellent ratings as an evidence teacher.'

Deadpan – a tough read. 'I can't believe this personal-involvement routine. Not from you.'

'Make it personal yourself.'

Tight reins – don't laugh. 'It's getting there.'

'Good. Now what about the family's known associates?'

'I've got my best snitch looking into it. I spoke to a man named Abe Voldrich, but I don't think he knows anything about the burglary.'

'He's a longtime Kafesjian KA. Maybe he has some family background information.'

'Yeah, but what do you want – a burglary suspect or family dirt?'

No retort – he walked. I checked Gallaudet's note:

Dave—

I understand your need to protect certain friends of yours who have Southside business dealings, and I think Chief Exley's fix on the Kafesjians is a bit untoward. Please do what you can to protect the LAPD's Southside interests, especially in light of this damn Fed probe. And please, without telling Chief Exley, periodically update me on the Kafesjian investigation.

Four days – chase evidence, get chased back. Sprint, get chased harder – pictures I couldn't outrun.

I told Mickey to pull his machines – he shrugged the whole Fed business off. Shit-for-brains Mickey – Jack Woods yanked his biz in record time. Chase Exley with paper: Kafesjian 459 PC, record detail. Covered: the peeper tape and Q & A – those two Lucille tricks.

Exley said keep going. Small talk: how's Stemmons handling the job?

I said just fine. Mental pictures: beefcake Johnny Duhamel, lipstick on cigarette butts.

Exley said keep going; I fed Bob Gallaudet information on the sly. Politics: he didn't want Welles Noonan reaping juice off the Kafesjians.

Chase, watch for chasers. No tails – near-crack-ups making sure. Exley/Hughes/Narco/the Feds: potential chasers, big resources.

Chasing evidence:

I staked the Red Arrow Inn – no Lucille, no peeper suspects. I checked 77th: no peeper FI cards found. Tri-State MO checks: zero. Lester Lake said scoop soon – 'maybe'. Chasing secrets, chasing pictures—

Solo trick rousts – no new Lucille fuckers confirmed. Western and Adams, points south – pressing for stories – I stayed high-octane juiced on that family.

Like Exley.

Call it lawyer style:

Disturbing the Kafesjians with a Federal narcotics probe in progress is certifiably insane. Edmund Exley is a certifiably brilliant detective with nationally recognized leadership skills. Narco was not present at Exley's Fed probe briefing. Narco is the most autonomous LAPD division. Narco and the Kafesjian family go back autonomously twenty-odd years. Exley knows that the Fed probe will succeed. Exley wants the probe diverted from the rank-and-file LAPD. Exley knows that heads must roll. Exley has convinced Chief Parker that the least damaging, most judicious move is to sacrifice Narco to the Feds – they can be portrayed as rogue cops autonomously run amok without severely damaging the overall prestige of the Department.

I didn't quite buy it – his hard-on for that family played too ugly.

Like mine, like Junior's.

George Stemmons II – my worst pictures.

I chased him four days – call him plain gone. Ad Vice: straight no-shows. The pad I trashed: locked tight. Dark-town: no. His father's house: no. Fern Dell: no. Fag bars: no, he didn't have the guts to go that blatant. Long shot – Johnny Duhamel – his known haunts.

Personnel shot me his address. I checked it three days/nights running – no Johnny, no Junior. No way to catch Duhamel on duty – I couldn't tip Dudley Smith. An instinct said Junior's crush ran unrequited – Blond and Gorgeous didn't play fruit. Possible approach: Reuben Ruiz, Johnny's pal. Gallaudet turned him: front man set to oil the spics out of Chavez Ravine.

I fed Bob a snow job: Ruiz knew a guy I needed to lean on. Gallaudet: he's in training somewhere, check the Ravine in a few days – he'll be there working the crowd.

Tapped out.

Clay pigeon:

Junior nails Glenda dead – for Murder One. A nigger pimp victim – Gallaudet might not seek an indictment. But: Howard Hughes snaps his fingers; Gas Chamber Bob jumps. Snap – pick the judge, stack the jury – Glenda green-room bound. Accessory charges pending on me.

The upshot:

Neutralize Junior. Hush up his Kafesjian dealings – if Exley tumbles, he'll rat Glenda to *buy out. My buyout – Duhamel – feed him to Dudley, the peak moment, work for Exley – Junior/Glenda insurance.*

I paid Jack Woods two grand: find me Junior Stemmons. My *skip trace – HER – a movie-set trailer late nights.*

Miciak kept quiet – we both made his tail strictly freelance. I wrote Milteer fake reports – Glenda fed me fake details. The set – Mickey's wino crew passed out. We talked low, made love and danced around IT.

I never said I knew; she never pressed me. Biographies, gaps: I hid Meg, she bypassed whoring.

I never said I kill people. I never said Lucille K. made me a voyeur.

She said I used people up.

She said I only bet on rigged games.

She said ranking cop/lawyer put some distance on white trash.

She said I never got burned.

I said three out of four – not bad.

PART III

DARKTOWN RED

16

DIRT ROADS, SHACKS. Hills trapping smog – Chavez Ravine.

Swamped – I parked long-distance and scanned it:

Greeks waving placards. Newsmen, bluesuits. Commie types chanting: ‘Justice, sí! Dodgers, no!’

Friendly throngs – eyes on Reuben Ruiz, gladhander. Sheriff’s bulls, Agent Will Shipstad.

Ruiz – Fed witness?

I jogged into it – ‘Hey, hey! No, no! Don’t drive us back to Mexico!’ Badge out – blues eased me through.

Heckler hubbub:

Ruiz, fighting tonight – be there to cheer his opponent. The fascist Bureau of Land and Way: plans to relocate the spics to Lynwood slum pads. ‘Hey, hey! No, no! Justice, sí! Dodgers, no!’

Ruiz blasting bullhorn Spanish:

Move out early! Your relocation dough means Easy Street! New homes soon available! Enjoy the new Dodger Stadium YOU helped create!

Noise war – Reuben’s bullhorn won. Deputies tossed tickets – spics genuflected, grabbed. I snatched one: Ruiz vs. Stevie Moore, Olympic Auditorium.

Chants, jabber – Ruiz saw me and bucked fans.

I shoved close. Reuben cupped a shout: ‘We should yak! Say my dressing room after my bout?’

I nodded yes – ‘Scum! Dodger pawn!’ – no way to talk. A quick run – the Bureau, my office.

A message from Lester Lake – meet me 8:00 tonight – Moonglow Lounge. Exley skirted Ad Vice – I gestured him over.

‘I had a few questions.’

‘Ask them, as long as they’re not “What do you want?”’ ‘Let’s try “Why just two men on a case you’re so hot to clear?”’

‘No. Next question, and don’t ask “Why me?”’

‘Let’s try “What’s in it for me?”’

Exley smiled. ‘If you clear the case I’ll exercise a rarely used chief of detective’s prerogative and jump you to captain without a civil-service listing. I’ll rotate Dudley Smith into Ad Vice and give you the Robbery Division command.’

Jig heaven – don’t swoon.

‘Is something wrong, Lieutenant? I would have expected you to express your gratitude.’

‘Thanks, Ed. That’s a dandy carrot you just dangled.’

‘Given what you are, I’d say it is. Now I’m busy, so ask your next question.’

'Lucille Kafesjian's the key to this thing. I've got a hunch that the family knows damn well who the burglar is, and I want to bring her in for questioning.'

'No, not yet.'

Change-up: 'Give me the Hurwitz fur job. Take it away from Dudley.'

'No, and no emphatically, and don't ask me again. Now, let's wrap this up.'

'Okay, then let me lean on Tommy Kafesjian.'

'Explain "lean on", Lieutenant.'

'*Lean on. Muscle*. I fuck Tommy up, he tells us what we want to know. You know, outré police methods, like the time you shot those unarmed niggers.'

'No direct approach on the family. Other than that, you have carte blanche.'

Carte blanche shitwork, overdue: big fucking distractions.

Simple:

Lucille pix/tape rig/motel list – haul them southbound and ask questions:

Have you rented to her?

Has a man requested a room adjoining hers?

Have wino/bums rented rooms here by proxy?

Bad odds – call the Red Arrow her sole trick pad.

Southbound – Central Avenue all the way. Police intrigue, big-time:

IA cars trailing Fed cars – discreet. Bum rousts – Vag cops spread thick. Prostie wagons prowling for whores.

Feds:

License-plate checks outside bars and nightclubs.

Kibitzing a sidewalk crap game.

Staking out a swanky coon whorehouse.

Crew-cut gray suit Feds Darktown rife.

I stopped at 77th Street Station and borrowed a tape rig. Sweat box row was packed: jig-on-jig 187 'clearance'. Feds outside with cameras – snapping cop IDs.

Shitwork now:

Tick Tock Motel, Lucky Time Motel – no to all my questions. Darnell's Motel, De Luxe Motel – straight nos. Handsome Dan's Motel, Cyril's Lodge – No City. Hibiscus Inn, Purple Roof Lodge – NO.

Nat's Nest – 81st and Normandie. 'Kleen Rooms Always' – brace the clerk.

'Yessir, I know this girl. She's a short-timer rental, an' she always ask for the same room.'

I gripped the counter. 'Is she registered now?'

'Nosir, an' not for maybe six, seven days.'

'Do you know what she uses the room for?'

'Nosir. My motto is "See no evil, hear no evil," an' I adheres to that policy 'cept when they be makin' too much noise doin' whatever it is they be doin'.'

'Does the girl ask for a front room with a street view?'

Shocked: 'Yessir. How you know that?'

'Have you rented the room next to hers to a young white man? Did a bum request that particular room and register for him?'

Shut-my-mouth shocked – he dipped behind the counter and pulled out a rent card. 'See, "John Smith", which in my opinion be an alias. See, he gots two days left on his rent. He ain' in right now, I seen him leave this morn—'

'*Show me those rooms*.'

He beelined outside, fumbling keys. Two doors opened quick – good and cop scared.

Separate bungalows – no connecting door.

I caught up. Easy now – frost him with a ten spot. 'Watch the street. If that white guy shows up, stall him. Tell him you've got a plumber in his room, then come and get me.'

'Yessir, yessir' – genuflecting streetside—

Two doors – no mutual access. Side windows – the peeper could WATCH her. Hedges below, a loose-stone walk path.

Look:

A wire out HIS window.

Into HIS hedge, out, under the stones.

I grabbed it and pulled—

Stones flew – the wire jerked taut. Into HER room – under the carpet, yank – a spackle-covered mike snapped off the wall.

Walk the cord back:

HIS window – jam the ledge up – step in. Pull – *thunk* – a tape machine under the bed.

Empty reels.

Back outside, check the doors – no pry marks. Figure HE went in HER window.

I shut both doors and tossed HIS room.

The closet:

Soiled clothes, empty suitcase, record player.

The dresser: skivvies, jazz albums – Champ Dineen, Art Pepper. Title matchers – Tommy K.'s smashed wax duplicated.

The bathroom:

Razor, shaving cream, shampoo.

Pull the rug:

Girlie mags – *Transom* – three issues. Cheesecake, text: movie-star 'confessions'.

No tape.

Dump the mattress, punch the pillow – a hard spot – tear, rip—

One tape spool – rig it up for a listen fast—

Nerves – I fumbled the goods, smeared potential prints. Spastic-handed – loop the tape/push Start.

Rustles, coughs. I shut my eyes and imagined it: lovers in bed.

Lucille: 'You don't get tired of these games?'

Unknown Man: 'Hand me a cigarette' – pause – 'No, I don't tire of them. You certainly know how to—'

Sobs – distant – motel room walls shutting *my* man out.

Trick Man: '… and you know that father-daughter games have staying power. Really, given our age variance, it's quite a natural bed game to play.'

A cultured voice – Tommy/J.C. antithetical.

Sobs, louder.

Lucille: 'These places are filled with losers and lonesome creeps.'

No hink/no recognition/no surveillance fear.

Click – figure a radio – '… chanson d'amour, ratta-tat-tatta, play encore.' Blurred voices, *click*, Trick Man: '… of course, there was always that little dose you gave me.'

'Dose': clap/syph?

I checked the reels – tape running out.

Sleepy voices jumbled – *more than a trick stand*. I shut my eyes – please, one more game.

Silent tape hiss – sleepy lovers. Hinge creaks/'God!' – too close, too real – NOW.

Eyes open – a white man standing by the door.

Fucked up blurry vision – I drew down, aimed, fired. Two shots – the doorjamb splintered; one more – wood scraps exploding.

The man ran.

I ran out aiming.

Screams, shouts.

Zigzags – my man bucking traffic. I fired running – two shots went wide. Aiming straight – a clear shot – this jolt: if you kill him, you won't know WHY?

Bolting traffic, sighting in on this white head bobbing. Horns, brakes – black faces on the sidewalk, my white speck disappearing.

I tripped, stumbled, ran. Losing him – black all around me.

Shouts.

Black faces scared.

My reflection in a window: this terrified geek.

I slowed down. Another window – black faces – follow their eyes:

A curbside roust – Feds and niggers. Welles Noonan, Will Shipstad, FBI muscle.

Grabbed, shoved – pinned to a doorway. Rabbit-punched – I dropped my piece.

Pinned – gray suit Fed gorillas. Welles Noonan sucker-punched me: spit in my face. His punch line: 'That's for Sanderline Johnson.'

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THE MOONGLOW – EARLY for Lester. Jukebox tunes killed time. Noonan, backed by music – replays still smelling his spittle: Those Feds – cut-rate revenge. Back to Nat's Nest – prowl cars responding to shots. I chased them off and bagged evidence: records, skin mags, tape rig, tape.

Calls next:

Orders to Ray Pinker: dust both rooms, bring a sketch man – make the clerk face-detail the peeper. Mugshot checks later – pray for good eyes.

Jack Woods, glad tidings: he spotted Junior, tailed him for two hours and lost him. Busy Junior – three indy pusher shakedowns – Jack glommed descriptions and plate numbers.

Jack, verbatim: 'He looked fried to the gills and fucking insane. I checked his car out while he stopped for cigarettes. You know what I saw in the backseat? A hypodermic kit, six empty tuna-fish cans and three sawed-off shotguns. I don't know what he's got on you, but in my opinion you should clip him.'

The jukebox, unmistakable – Lester Lake's 'Harbor Lights' – and not on my dime.

Bingo – Lester himself, oozing fear. 'Hellow, Mr. Klein.'

'Sit down. Tell me about it.'

'Tell you about what?'

'The look on your face and why you played that goddamn song.'

Sitting down: 'Just reassurance. Good to know Uncle Mickey keeps my tune in his Wurlitzers.'

'Mickey should pull his boxes before the Feds pull him. What is it? I haven't seen you this spooked since the Harry Cohn thing.'

'Mr. Klein, you know a couple of Mr. Smith's boys named Sergeant Breuning an' Sergeant Carlisle?'

'What about them?'

'Well, they workin' overtime at the Seven-Seven.'

'Come on, get to it.'

Breathless: 'They goin' aroun' tryin' to solve colored-on-colored killin's, word is to forestall all this potential good Federal investigation publicity. You remember you ask me 'bout a maryjane pusher named Wardell Knox? You remember I tol' you he got hisself killed by person or persons unknown?'

Tommy K. snitched Knox to Narco – Dan Wilhite told Junior. 'I remember.'

'Then you should remember I tol' you ol' Wardell was a cunthound with a million fuckin' enemies. He was fuckin' a million different ladies, includin' this high-yellow cooze Tilly Hopewell that I was also climbin'. Mr. Klein, I heard them Mr. Smith boys been lookin' for me on account of some bogus rumor that I snuffed fuckin' Wardell, and it looks to me like they be measurin' me for a quick statistic. Now you want skinny on the fuckin' Kafesjians and their fuckin' known associates, so I got a real knee-slapper for you, which is that I just recently heard that crazy Tommy Kafesjian popped ol' Wardell roun' September, some kind of fuckin' dope or sex grievance, 'cause he was also climbin' that fine Tilly Hopewell on occasion.'

Breathless/heaving.

'Look, I'll talk to Breuning and Carlisle. They'll lay off you.'

'Yeah, maybe tha's true, 'cause ol' slumlord Dave Klein knows the right people. But Mr. Smith, he hates the colored man. An' I don' see you people pinnin' the Wardell Knox job on Tommy the K., your righteous motherfuckin' informant.'

'So do you want to change the world or waltz on this thing?'

'I wants you to give me an extra month's free rent for all the fine skinny I gots on the fuckin' Kafesjian family.'

'Harbor Lights' snapped on again. Lester: 'And on that note, I heard the daughter's a righteous semipro hooker. I heard Tommy and J.C. beat up Mama Kafesjian and her like batting practice. I heard Madge – that's Mama – used to have a thing goin' with Abe Voldrich, he's this head guy in their dope operation, an' he runs one of their dry-cleaning joints on the side. I heard Voldrich dries up big bushels of maryjane in them big dryers they got at their plants. I heard the way they keep things copacetic with rival pushers is kickbacks from little Mickey Mouse independents that they tolerates, but no righteous organizations would ever try to infringe on the Southside, 'cause they knows the LAPD would come down hard just to keep them Armenian fucks happy. I heard the only humps they snitch to you people is the indies who won't kick back no operatin' tribute. I heard the family is fuckin' skin tight, even though they don't treat each other with so much fuckin' respect. I heard that outside of Voldrich an' this colored trim Tommy the K. goes for, the family only gots employees and customers, not no fuckin' friends. I heard Tommy used to be pals with some white kid named Richie, I don't know no last name, but I heard they blew these punk square horns together, like they pretended they had talent. That crazy-ass burglary you told me about – them chopped-up watchdogs an' stolen silverware an' shit – I heard jackshit 'bout that. I also heard you thinkin' 'bout raisin' the rent in my buildin', so I—'

Cut him off: 'What about Tommy fucking Lucille?'

'Say what? I didn't hear nothin' like that. I said "skin tight", not fuckin' skin deep.'

'What about this Richie guy?'

'Shit, I tol' you what I heard, no more, no less. You want me—'

'Keep asking around about him. He might connect to this peeper guy I've been chasing.'

'Yeah, you mentioned that Peepin' Tom motherfucker, an' I knows how to improvise off what a man tells me. So I been askin' aroun' 'bout that an' I ain't heard nothin'. Now, 'bout that rent increase—'

'Ask around if the Kafesjians have been looking for a peeper themselves. I have a hunch that they know who the burglar is.'

'An' I got a hunch slumlord Dave Klein gonna raise my rent.'

'No, and I'll carry you to January. If Jack Woods comes around to collect, call me.'

'What about Mr. Smith's boys in hot pursuit of ol' Lester?'

'I'll take care of it. Do you know Tilly Hopewell's address?'

'Can my people dance? Have I strapped on at that love shack more than a few times myself?'

'Lester—'

'8491 South Trinity, apartment 406. Say, where you goin'?'

'The fights.'

'Moore and Ruiz?'

'That's right.'

'Bet on the Mex. I used to climb Stevie Moore's sister, an' she tol' me Stevie couldn't take it to the breadbasket.'

I badged in ringside – late.

The sixth-round break – card girls strutting. Spectator chants: 'Dodgers, no! Ruiz must go!' Boos, shouts: pachucos vs. Commies.

The bell –

Rockabye Reuben circling; Moore popping right-hand leads. Mid-ring clinch – Ruiz loose, the spook winded.

'Break! Break!' – the ref in and out.

Moore stalking slow – elbows up, open downstairs. Headhunter Reuben – near-miss hooks moving back.

Lazy Reuben, bored Reuben.

A snap guess: tank top.

Moore – no steam, no juice. Ruiz – lazy hooks, lazy right-hand leads.

Moore swarming and sucking in air; Reuben eating blockable shots – the coon wide open.

Moore catching wind, his guard low.

Bullseye – the wrong man went down.

Pachuco cheers.

Pinko boos.

Reuben – this oh-fuck look – stalling the count. Dawdle time – he oozed over to a neutral corner slow.

Six, seven, eight – Moore up, wobbly.

Ruiz dawdling center ring. Moore backing up – shot to shit. Bomb range, Reuben bombs – wild misses. Ten, twelve, fourteen – real air whizzers.

Ruiz fake-gasping; fake-weary arms flopping dead.

Moore threw a bolo shot.

Rockabye Reuben staggered.

Moore – left/right bolos.

Reuben hit the canvas – eyes rolling, fake out. Seven, eight, nine, ten – Moore kissed Sammy Davis, Jr, at ringside.

Bleacher attack – get the Reds – spics tossing piss-filled beer cups. Placard shields – no help – the pachucos moved in swinging bike chains.

I hit an exit – coffee down the block, let things chill. Twenty minutes, back over – shitloads of prowl cars and Commies shackled up.

Back in – follow the liniment stench. Dressing rooms, Ruiz alone – wolfing a taco plate.

'Bravo, Reuben. The best tank job I've ever seen.'

'Hey, and the riot wasn't so bad neither. Hey, Lieutenant, what did those back-pedal hooks tell you?'

I shut the door – noise down the hall – newsmen and Moore. 'That you know how to entertain the chosen few.'

Chugging beer: 'I hope Hogan Kid Bassey saw the fight, 'cause the deal was Moore gets the bantam elimination shot and I move up to the feathers and fight him. I'll kick his ass, too. Hey, Lieutenant, we ain't talked since that night Sanderline jumped.'

'Call me Dave.'

'Hey, Lieutenant, a nigger and a Mexican jump out a six-story window the same time. Who hits the ground first?'

'I've heard it, but tell me anyway.'

'The nigger, 'cause the Mexican's got to stop on the way down and spray "*Ramón y Kiki por vida*" on the wall.'

Ha, ha – polite.

'So, Lieutenant, I know you saw Will Shipstad watchdogging me at the ravine. Let me reassure you and Mr. Gallaudet that I'm grateful for this what you call public-relations gig you got me, 'specially since it got my goddamn brother off another GTA bounce. So, yeah, I'm a Fed witness again, but Noonan just wants me to testify on some stale-bread bookie stuff, and I'd never snitch Mickey C. or your buddy Jack Woods.'

'I always figured you knew how to play.'

'You mean play to the chosen few?'

'Yeah. Business is business, so you fuck your own people to get next to the DA.'

Smiling nice: 'I got a trouble-prone family, so I gotta figure they're more important than Mexicans in general. Hey, I kiss a little ass, so that what you call them – slumlords? – like you and your sister can stay fat. You know, *Dave*, the fuckin' Bureau of Land and Way's been checking out these dumps in Lynwood. There's supposed to be some what you call converted whorehouse that these hard boys want to dump my poor evicted *hermanos* into, so maybe you and your goddamn slumlord sister can buy in on the ground floor.'

Brains – fuck his bravado. 'You know a lot about me.'

'Hey, Dave "the Enforcer" Klein, people talk about you.'

Change-up: 'Is Johnny Duhamel queer?'

'Are you nuts? He is the snatch hound to end all snatch hounds.'

'Seen him lately?'

'We keep in touch. Why?'

'Just checking up. He's on the Hurwitz fur case, and it's a big assignment for an inexperienced officer. Has he talked to you about it?'

Head shakes – half-ass wary. 'No. Mostly he talks about this Mobster Squad job he's got.'

'Anything specific?'

'No, he said he's not supposed to talk about it. Hey, why you pumping me?'

'Why did you look so sad all of a sudden?'

Hooks, jabs – air whizzed. 'I saw Johnny maybe a week ago. He said he'd been doing this bad stuff. He didn't, how you say, elaborate, but he said he needed a penance beating. We put on gloves, and he let me punch him around. I remember he had these what you call blisters on his hands.'

Rubber-hose work – Johnny probably hates it. 'Remember Sergeant Stemmons, Reuben?'

'Sure, your partner at the hotel. Nice haircut, but a punk if you ask me.'

'Have you seen him?'

'No.'

'Has Johnny mentioned him to you?'

'No. Hey, what's this Johnny routine?'

I smiled. 'Just routine.'

'Sure, subtle guy. Hey, what do you get when you cross a Mexican and a nigger?'

'I don't know.'

‘A thief who’s too lazy to steal!’

‘That’s a riot.’

Fondling a Schlitz: ‘You ain’t laughing so hard, and I can tell you’re thinking: at the ravine Rockabye Reuben said we should talk.’

‘So talk.’

Pure pachuco – he bit off the bottle cap and guzzled. ‘I heard Noonan talking to Will Shipstad about you. He hates you like a goddamn dog. He thinks you pushed Johnson out the window and fucked up some guy named Morton Diskant. He tried to get me to say I heard you toss Johnson, and he said he’s gonna take you down.’

18

FORENSICS – AT MY living room desk.

Dust the magazines, tape rig, spools – smudges and four identical latents. I rolled my own prints to compare – it confirmed my own fumble-hand fuck-up.

The phone rang—

'Yes?'

'Ray Pinker, Dave.'

'You're finished?'

'Finished is right. First, no viable suspect latents, and we dusted every touch surface in both rooms. We took elimination sets off the clerk, who's also the owner, the janitor and the chambermaid, all Negroes. We got *their* prints in the rooms and nothing else.'

'Fuck.'

'Succinctly put. We also bagged the male clothing and tested some semen-stained shorts. It's O positive again, with the same cell breakdown – your burglar or whatever is quite a motel hopper.'

'Shit.'

'Succinct, but we had better luck on the sketch reconstruction. The clerk and the artist worked up a portrait, and it's waiting for you at the Bureau. Now—'

'What about mug shots? Did you tell the clerk we'll need him for a viewing?'

Ray sighed – half pissed. 'Dave, the man took off for Fresno. He implied that your behavior disturbed him. I offered him an LAPD reimbursement for the door you shot out, but he said it wouldn't cover the aggravation. He also said don't go looking for him, because he is gone, no forwarding. I didn't press for him to stay, because he said he'd complain about that door you destroyed.'

'Shit. Ray, did you check—'

'Dave, I'm way ahead of you. I asked the other employees if *they* had seen the tenant of that room. They both said no, and I believed them.'

Shit. Fuck.

Half pouty: 'Lots of trouble for a one-shot 459, Dave.'

'Yeah, just don't ask me why.'

Click – my ear stung.

Go, keep dusting:

Smudges off the album covers – grooved records themselves wouldn't take prints. Champ Dineen on my hi-fi: *Sooo Slow Moods, The Champ Plays the Duke*.

Background music – I skimmed *Transom*.

Piano/sax/bass – soft. Cheesecake pix, innuendo: blond siren M.M. craves she-man R.H. – she'll do anything to turn him around. Nympho J.M. – gigantically endowed – seeks double-digit males at Easton's Gym. Ten inches and up, please – J.M. packs a ruler to make sure. Recent conquests: B-movie hulk F.T.; gagster M.B.; laconic cowboy star G.C.

Breathy sax, heartbeat bass.

Stories – traveling-salesman gems. Pix: big-tit slatterns drooping out of lingerie. Piano trills – gorgeous.

One issue down, Dineen percolating. *Transom*, June ’58:

M.M. and baseball M.M. hot – her J.D.M. torch pushed her toward hitters. The swank Plaza Hotel – ten-day/ten-night homestand.

Alto sax riffs – Glenda/Lucille/Meg, swirling.

Ads: dick enlargers, home law school. ‘Mood Indigo’ à la Dineen – low brass.

A daddy/daughter story – a straight-dialogue intro: Photos: this skank brunette, bikini-clad.

‘Well … you look like my daddy.’

‘Look? Well, yeah, I’m old enough. I guess a game is a game, right? I can be the daddy because I fit the part.’

‘Well, like the songs says, “My heart belongs to Daddy”.’

Skim the text:

Orphan Loretta lusts for a daddy. The evil Terry deflowered her – she crawls for him, she hates it. She sells herself to older men – a preacher kills her. Accompanying pix: the skank sash-cord-strangled.

Champ Dineen roaring – think it through:

Loretta equals Lucille; Terry equals Tommy. ‘Orphan’ Loretta – non sequitur. Lucille lusts for Daddy J.C. – hard to buy her hot for that greasy shitbird.

Call the dialogue voyeured.

Call the peeper ‘author’.

Transom, July ’58 – strictly movie-star raunch. Check the master-head – a Valley address – hit it tomorrow.

The phone rang – cut the volume – catch it.

‘Glen—’

‘Yes. Are you psychic or just hoping?’

‘I don’t know, maybe both. Look, I’ll come up to the set.’

‘No. Sid Frizell’s shooting some night scenes.’

‘We’ll go to a hotel. We can’t use your place or my place – it’s too risky.’

That laugh. ‘I read it in the *Times* today. Howard Hughes and his entourage left for Chicago for some Defense Department meeting. David, the Hollywood Hills “actress domicile” is available, and I have a key.’

Past midnight – call it safe. ‘Half an hour?’

‘Yes. Miss you.’

I put the phone down and cranked the volume. Ellington/Dineen – ‘Cottontail’. Memory lane – ’42 – the Marine Corps. Meg – that tune – dancing at the El Cortez Sky Room.

Raw now – sixteen years gone bad. The phone right there – do it.

‘Hello?’

‘I’m glad I got you, but I figured you’d be out after Stemmons.’

‘I had to get some sleep. Look, slavedriver—’

‘Kill him, Jack.’

‘Okay by me. Ten?’

‘Ten. Clip him and buy me some time.’

19

THE HILLS – A big Spanish off Mulholland.

Lights on, Glenda's car out front. Twenty-odd rooms – fuck pad supreme.

I parked, beams on a '55 Chevy. Bad familiar: Harold John Miciak's.

Be sure, tweak the high beams – Hughes Aircraft decals on the back fender.

Late-night quiet – big dark houses, just one lit.

I got out and listened. Voices – his, hers – muffled low.

Up, try the front door – locked. Voices – his edgy, hers calm. Circuit the house, listen:

Miciak: '… you could do worse. Look, you come across for me, you pretend it's Klein. I seen him come see you in Griffin Park, and as far as that goes, you can still give it to him – I'm not possessive and I got no partners. Mr. Hughes, he's never gonna know, just you come across for me and get that money I want from Klein. I know he's got it, 'cause he's connected with some mob guys. Mr. Hughes, he told me so hisself.'

Glenda: 'How do I know there's just you?'

Miciak: ''Cause Harold John's the only daddy-o in L.A. man enough to mess with Mr. Hughes and this cop who thinks he's so tough.'

Around to the dining room window. Curtain gaps – look:

Glenda edging backward; Miciak pressing up, grinding his hips.

Slow walking – both of them – a knife rack behind Glenda. I tried the window – no give.

Glenda: 'How do I know there's just you?'

Glenda: one hand reaching back, one hand out come hither.

Glenda: 'I think we'd be good together.'

Around the back, a side door – I shoulder-popped it and ran in.

The hallway, the kitchen, there—

A clinch: his hands groping, hers grabbing knives.

Slow-motion numb – I *couldn't* move. Shock-still frozen, look:

Knives down – in his back, in his neck – twisted in hilt-deep. Bone cracks – Glenda dug in – two hands blood-wet. Miciak thrashing AT HER—

Two more knives snagged – Glenda stabbing blind.

Miciak clawing the rack, up with a cleaver.

I stumbled in close – numb legs – smell the blood—

He stabbed, missed, lurched into the knife rack. She stabbed – his back, his face – blade jabs ripped his cheeks out.

Gurgles/screeches/whines – Miciak dying loud. Knife handles sticking out at odd angles – I threw him down, twisted them, killed him.

Glenda – no screams, this look: SLOW, I've been here before.

SLOW:

We killed the lights and waited ten minutes – no outside response. Plans then – soft whispers holding each other bloody.

No dining room carpet – luck. We showered and swapped clothes – Hughes kept a male/female stash. We bagged our own stuff, washed the floor, the rack, the knives.

Blankets in a closet – we wrapped Miciak up and locked him in his car trunk. 1:50 A.M. – out, back – no witnesses. Out and back again – *our* cars tucked below Mulholland.

A plan, a fall guy: the Wino Will-o-the-Wisp, L.A.s favorite at-large killer.

Out to Topanga Canyon solo – I drove Miciak's car. Hillhaven Kiddieland Kamp – defunct, wino turf. I flashlight-checked all six cabins – no bums residing.

I stashed the car out of sight.

I wiped it.

Kougar Kub Kabin – dump the body.

I throttled the corpse per the Wisp MO.

I rolled it through sawdust to stuff up the stab wounds. Forensic logic: impacted wounds made knife casting impossible.

Hope logic:

Howard Hughes, publicity shy – he might not push to find his man's killer.

I walked back to Pacific Coast Highway. SLOW fear speeding up—

Sporadic tails dogging me.

A tail tonight meant grief forever.

Glenda picked me up at PCH. Back to Mulholland, two cars to my place, bed just to talk.

Small talk – her will held. CinemaScope/Technicolor knife work – I pushed to know she didn't like it.

I hit the pillow by her face.

I shined the bed light in her eyes.

I told her:

My father shot a dog/I torched his toolshed/he hit my sister/I shot him, the gun jammed/these Two Tony fucks hurt my sister/I killed them/I killed five other men/I took money – what gives you the right to play it so stylish—

Hit the pillow, make her talk – no style, no tears:

She was floating, carhopping, this pretend actress. She was sleeping around for rent money – a guy told Dwight Gilette. He propositioned her: turn tricks for a fifty-fifty split. She agreed, she did it – sad sacks mostly. Georgie Ainge once – no rough stuff from him – but regular beatings from Gilette.

She got mad. She got this pretend-actress idea: buy a gun off Georgie and scare Dwight. Pretend actress with a prop now: a real pistol.

Dwight made her drive his 'nieces' to his 'brother's' place in Oxnard. It was fun – cute colored toddlers – their pictures on TV a week later.

Two four-year-olds starved, tortured and raped – found dead in an Oxnard sewer.

Pretend actress, errand girl. This real-actress idea:

Kill Gilette – before he sends any more kids out to be snuffed.

She did it.

She didn't like it.

You don't skate from things like that – you crawl stylish.

I held her.

I talked a Kafesjian blue streak.

Champ Dineen lulled us to sleep.

I woke up early. I heard Glenda in the bathroom, sobbing.

20

HARRIS DULANGE – FIFTY, bad teeth. ‘Since me and the magazine are as clean as a cat’s snatch, I will tell you how *Transom* works. First we hire hookers or aspiring actresses down on their luck for the photos. The written stuff is by yours truly, the editor-in-chief, or it’s scribed by college kids who write out their fantasies in exchange for free issues. It’s what *Hush-Hush* calls “Sinuendo”. We tack those movie-star initials onto our stories so that our admittedly feeble-minded readers will think, “Wow, is that really Marilyn Monroe?”’

Tired – I made an early Bureau run for Pinker’s sketch. Exley said no all-points distribution – last night left me too fried to fight him.

‘Lieutenant, are you daydreaming? I know this isn’t the nicest office in the world, but …’

I pulled the June ’58 issue out. ‘Who wrote this father-daughter story?’

‘I don’t even have to look. If it’s plump brunettes hot for some daddy surrogate, it’s Champ Dineen.’

‘*What?* Do you know who Champ Dineen *is*?’

‘*Was*, because he died some time back. I *knew* the guy was using a pseudonym.’

I flashed Pinker’s sketch. Dulange deadpanned it: ‘Who’s this?’

‘Odds are it’s the man who wrote those stories. Haven’t you *seen* him?’

‘No. We only talked on the phone. Nice-looking picture, though. Surprising. I figured the guy would be a troll.’

‘Did he say his real name was Richie? That might be a lead on his ID.’

‘No. We only talked on the phone once. He said his name was Champ Dineen, and I thought, “Copacetic, and only in L.A.” Lieutenant, let me ask you. Does the Champster have a voyeur fetish?’

‘Yes.’

Dulange – nodding, stretching: ‘Say eleven months ago, around Christmas, this pseudo-Champ guy calls me up out of the blue. He says he’s got access to some good *Transom*-type stuff, something like a whorehouse peek. I said, “Swell, send me a few samples, maybe we can do business.” So … he sent me two stories. There was a PO-box return address, and I thought, “What? He’s on the lam or he lives in a post office box?”’

‘Go on.’

‘So the stuff was good. *Cash good* – and I rarely pay for text, just pictures. Anyway, it was two girlie-daddy stories, and the dialogue introductions were realistic, like he eavesdropped on this sick game stuff. The accompanying stories weren’t so hot, but I sent him a C-note off the books and a note: “Keep the fires stoked, I like your stuff.”’

‘Did he send the stories in handwritten?’

‘Yes.’

'Did you keep them?'

'No, I typed them over, then tossed them.'

'You did that every time he sent stories in?'

'That's right. Four issues featuring the Champ, four times I typed the stuff up and tossed it. That was June '58 you showed me, plus the Champ also made it in February '58, May '58 and September '58. You want copies? I can have the warehouse send them to you, maybe take a week.'

'No sooner?'

'The wetbacks they got working there? For them a week's Speedy Gonzales.'

I laid a card down. 'Send them to my office.'

'Okay, but you'll be disappointed.'

'Why?'

'The Champ's a one-trick jockey. It's all quasi-incest stuff featuring plump brunettes. I think I'll start editing him and change things around. Rita Hayworth looking to bang father surrogates is spicier, don't you think?'

'Sure. Now, what about a contributors' file?'

He tapped his head. 'Right here. We're cramped for space in the plush offices of *Transom* magazine.'

Itchy – thinking Glenda. 'Do you pay the man by check?'

'No, always cash. When we talked on the phone he said cash only. Lieutenant, you're getting antsy, so I'll tell you. Check PO box 5841 at the main downtown post office. That's where I send the gelt. It's always cash, and if you're thinking of finking me to the IRS, don't – because the Champ man is covered under various petty-cash clauses.'

Hot – the A.M. sweats. 'How did he sound that one time you talked to him?'

'Like a square punk who always wanted to be a hepcat jazz musician. Say, did you know that my kid brother was a suspect in the Black Dahlia case?'

PO box stakeout? – too time-consuming. Glom a writ to bag the contents? – ditto. Bust the box open? – yes – call Jack Woods.

Phone dimes:

Jack – no answer. Meg – tap our property account for ten grand cash. Okay, no 'Why?', news: She and Jack were an item again. I resisted a cheap laugh: give *him* the ten – he's killing Junior for me.

Shot/shivved/bludgeoned – picture it – Junior dead.

Pincushion Miciak – seeing *it/feeling* it: knife blades snagged on his spine.

More calls:

Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle – 77th, the Bureau – no luck. Picture Lester Lake scared shitless – cops out to frame him.

Picture Glenda: 'Shit, David, you caught me crying.'

I drove down to Darktown – a name-tossing run. Bars and early-open jazz clubs – go.

Names:

Tommy Kafesjian, Richie – an old Tommy friend? Tilly Hopewell – consort – Tommy and the late Wardell Knox. My wild card: Johnny Duhamel – ex-fighter cop.

Names tossed to:

B-girls, hopheads, loafers, juice friends, bartenders. My tossbacks: Richie – straight deadpans. White Peeping Toms – ditto. Tilly Hopewell – junkie talk – she was an ex-hype off a recent hospital cure. Wardell Knox – 'He dead and I don't know who did it.' Schoolboy Johnny – boxing IDs only.

My peeper sketch: zero IDs.

Dusk – more clubs open – More name tosses – zero results – I checked slot-machines traffic on reflex. A coin crew at the Rick Rack – white/spic – Feds across the street, camera ready. Mickey slot men on film – Suicide Mickey.

Cop-issue Plymouths out thick – Feds, LAPD. Intermittent heebie-jeebies – tails on me LAST NIGHT?

I stopped at a pay phone. Out of dimies – I used slugs.

Glenda – my place, her place – no answer. Jack Woods – no answer. Over to Bido Lito's – toss names, toss shit – I got nothing but sneers back.

Two-drink minimum – I grabbed a stool and ordered two scotches. Voodoo eyes: wall-to-wall niggers.

I downed the juice fast – two drinks, no more. Scotch warm, this idea: wait for Tommy K. and shove him outside. Do you fuck your sister/does your father fuck your sister – brass knucks until he coughed up family dirt.

The barman had drink three ready – I said no. A combo setting up – I waved the sax man over. He agreed: twenty dollars for a Champ Dineen medley.

Lights down. Vibes/drums/sax/trumpet – go.

Themes – loud/fast, soft/slow. Soft – the barman talked mythic Champ Dineen.

Dig:

He came out of nowhere. He looked white – but rumor made his bloodlines mongrel. He played piano and bass sax, wrote jazz and cut a few sides. Handsome, jumbo hung: he fucked in whorehouse peek shows and never had his picture taken. Champ in love: three rich-girl sisters, their mother. Four mistresses – four children born – a rich cuckold daddy shot the Champ Man dead.

A drink on the bar – I bolted it. *My* mythic peeper – dig *his* story, just maybe:

Whorehouse peek equals *Transom*; family intrigue equals KAFESJIAN.

I ran outside – across the street to a phone bank. Jack Wood's number, three rings – 'Hello?'

'It's me.'

'Dave, don't ask. I'm still looking for him.'

'Keep going, it's not that.'

'What is it?'

'It's another two grand if you want it. You know the all-night post office downtown?'

'Sure.'

'Box 5841. You break in and bring me the contents. Wait until three o'clock or so, you'll get away clean.'

Jack whistled. 'You've got Fed trouble, right? Some kind of seizure writ won't do it, so—'

'Yes or no?'

'Yes. I like you in trouble, you're generous. Call me tomorrow, all right?'

I hung up. My memory jolted – *plate numbers*. Jack's work – those Junior shakedownees he spotted. I dug my notebook out and buzzed the DMV.

Slow – read the numbers off, wait. Cold air juked my booze rush and cleared my head – *pusher* shakedown victims – potential Junior/Tommy snitchers.

My readout:

Patrick Dennis Orchard, male Caucasian – 1704½ S. Hi Point; Leroy George Carpenter, male negro – 819 W. 71st Street, #114; Stephen NMI Wenzel, male Caucasian, 1811 S. St. Andrews, #B.

Two white men – surprising. Think: Lester Lake shot me Tilly Hopewell's address.

There, grab it: 8491 South Trinity, 406.

Close by – I got there quick. A four-story walk-up – I parked curbside.

No lift – I walked up for real. 406 – push the buzzer.

Spyhole clicks. 'Who is it?'

'Police.'

Chain noise, the door open. Tilly: a thirtyish high yellow, maybe half white.

'Miss Hopewell?'

'Yes' – no coon drawl.

'It's just a few questions.'

She walked backward – dead cowed. The front room: shabby, clean. 'Are you from the Probation?'

I closed the door. 'LAPD.'

Goosebumps. 'Narco?'

'Administrative Vice.'

She whipped papers off the TV. 'I'm clean. I had my Nalline test today. See?'

'I don't care.'

'Then…'

'Let's start with Tommy Kafesjian.'

Tilly backed up, brushed a chair, plunked down. 'Say what, Mr. Police?'

'Say what shit, you're not that kind of colored. *Tommy Kafesjian*.'

'I know Tommy.'

'And you've been intimate with him.'

'Yes.'

'And you've been intimate with Wardell Knox and Lester Lake.'

'That's true, and I'm not the kind of colored who thinks it's all a big sin, either.'

'Wardell's dead.'

'I know that.'

'Tommy killed him.'

'Tommy's evil, but I'm not saying he killed Wardell. And if he did, he's LAPD protected, so I'm not giving away anything you don't already know.'

'You're a smart girl, Tilly.'

'You mean for colored I'm smart.'

'Smart's smart. Now give me a motive for Tommy killing Wardell. Was it bad blood over you?'

Sitting prim – this junkie schoolmarm. 'Tommy and Wardell could never get that fired up over a woman. I'm not saying Tommy killed him, but *if* he killed him, it's because Wardell was behind on some kind of dope payment. Which doesn't mean anything to you, considering the Christmas baskets Mr. J.C. Kafesjian sends downtown.'

Change-up: 'Do you like Lester Lake?'

'Of course I do.'

'You don't want to see him get popped for a murder he didn't commit, do you?'

'No, but who says that's going to happen? Any plain fool can tell Lester's not the kind of man who could kill anybody.'

'Come on, you know things don't work that way.'

Getting antsy – raw off that dope cure. 'Why do you care so much about Lester?'

'We help each other out.'

'You mean you're the slum man Lester snitches for? You want to help him out, fix his bathtub.'

Change-up: 'Johnny Duhamel.'

‘Now I’ll say “say what” for real. Johnny who?’

Name toss: ‘Leroy Carpenter … Stephen Wenzel … Patrick Orchard. … Let’s try a policeman named George Stemmons, Jr.’

Cigarettes on a tray close by – Tilly reached trembly.

Kick it over, set her off—

‘That Junior is trash! Steve Wenzel’s my friend, and that Junior trash stole his bankroll and his speedballs and called him a white nigger! That Junior talked this crazy talk to him! I saw that crazy Junior man popping goofballs right out in the open by this club!’

Flash it – *my* bankroll. ‘*What crazy talk?* Come on, you’re just off the cure, you know you can use a fix. *Come on, what crazy talk?*’

‘I don’t know! Steve just said crazy nonsense!’

‘What else did he tell you about Junior?’

‘Nothing else! He just said what I told you!’

‘Patrick Orchard, Leroy Carpenter. *Do you know them?*’

‘No! I just know Steve! And I don’t want a snitch jacket!’

Twenty, forty, sixty – I dropped cash on her lap. ‘Tommy and his sister Lucille. Anything ugly. Tommy will never know you told me.’

Dope eyes now – fuck fear. ‘Tommy said that sometimes Lucille whores. He said that a man in Stan Kenton’s band recommended her to this Beverly Hills call-girl man. Doug something … Doug Ancelet? Tommy said that Lucille worked for that man for a while like several years ago, but he fired her because she gave these tricks of hers the gonorrhea.’

Recoil: Glenda, ex-Ancelet girl. My peeper tape – the trick to Lucille – ‘that little dose you gave me.’

Tilly: dope eyes, new money.

Carpenter/Wenzel/Orchard – I swung an address circuit south/northwest. Nobody home – circuit south, crack the wind wings – cold air cleared my head.

Make Junior dead or dead soon – faggot-smear him postmortem. Leak queer dirt to *Hush-Hush* – taint his Glenda dirt. Retoss his pad, dump evidence – pump his shakedown victims. Work Kafesjian 459 – and tie in Junior dirty. Question mark: his Exley file.

Brain circuits:

Exley proffers my Kafesjian payoff: Robbery Division CO. It’s a shiv to Dudley Smith, the fur-job boss – the perp his ‘protégé’ Johnny Duhamel.

Johnny and Junior – heist partners?

My instinct: unlikely.

Reflex instinct: hand Johnny up to Dud – deflect Exley’s shiv, curry Dud’s favor.

South, hit the gas: talk had Smith working 77th. Over – newsmen outside – a captain grandstanding.

Ignore Negro-victim 187s – never!

Watch for zealous justice soon!

Door guards kept reporters out: civilians verboten, zealotry wrapped.

I badged in. Sweat box row was packed: nigger suspects, two cop teams twirling saps.

‘Lad.’

Smith in the bullpen doorway. I walked over; he shot me a bonecrusher shake. ‘Lad, was it me you came to see?’

Sidestep: ‘I was looking for Breuning and Carlisle.’

'Ahh, grand. Those bad pennies should turn up, but in the meantime share a colloquy with old Dudley.'

Chairs right there – I grabbed two.

'Lad, in my thirty years and four months as a policeman I have never seen anything quite like this Federal business. You've been on the Department how long?'

'Twenty years and a month.'

'Ah, grand, with your wartime service included, of course. Tell me, lad, is there a difference between killing Orientals and white men?'

'I've never killed a white man.'

Dud winked – oh, you kid. 'Nor have I. Jungle bunnies account for the seven men I have killed in the line of duty, stretching a point to allow for them as human. Lad, this Federal business is damningly provocative, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

'Concisely put. And in that concise attorney's manner of yours, what would you say is behind it?'

'Politics. Bob Gallaudet for the Republicans, Welles Noonan for the Democrats.'

'Yes, strange bedfellows. And ironic that the Federal Government should be represented by a man with fellow-traveler tendencies. I understand that that man spat in your face, lad.'

'You've got good eyes out there, Dud.'

'Twenty-twenty vision, all my boys. Lad, do you hate Noonan? It's safe to say that he' – wink – 'considers you negligent in the matter of Sanderline Johnson's unscheduled flight.'

I winked back. 'He thinks I bought him the ticket.'

Ho, ho, ho. 'Lad, you dearly amuse this old man. By any chance were you raised Catholic?'

'Lutheran.'

'Aah, a Prod. Christianity's second string, God bless them. Do you still believe, lad?'

'Not since my pastor joined the German-American Bund.'

'Aah, Hitler, God bless him. A bit unruly, but frankly I preferred him to the Reds. Lad, did your second-string faith feature an equivalent to confession?'

'No.'

'A pity, because at this moment our interrogation rooms are filled with confessees and confessors, that grand custom being utilized to offset any untoward publicity this Federal business might foist upon the Department. Brass tacks, lad. Dan Wilhite has told me of Chief Exley's potentially provocative fixation on the Kafesjian family, with you as his agent provocateur. Lad, will you confess your opinion of what the man wants?'

Sidestep: 'I don't like him any more than you do. He got chief of detectives over you, and I wish to hell you'd gotten the job.'

'Grand sentiments, lad, which of course I share. But what do you think the man is doing?'

Feed him – my Johnny snitch prelim. 'I think – maybe – he's sacrificing Narco to the Feds. It's a largely autonomous division, and *maybe* he's certain that the Fed probe will prove successful enough to require a scapegoat that will protect the rest of the Department *and* Bob Gallaudet. Exley is two things: intelligent and ambitious. I've always thought that he'll get tired of police work and try politics himself, and we know how tight he is with Bob. I think – *maybe* – he's convinced Parker to let Narco go, with his eye on his own goddamn future.'

'A brilliant interpretation, lad. And as for the Kafesjian burglary itself, and your role as Exley's chosen investigating officer?'

I ticked points: 'You're right, I'm an agent provocateur. Chronologically: Sander line Johnson jumps, and now Noonan hates me. The Southside Fed probe is already rumored, and the Kafesjian burglary occurs coincident to it. Coincident to *that*, I operate a pinko politician who's enamored of Noonan. Now, the Kafesjian burglary is nothing – it's a pervert job. But the Kafesjians are scum personified and tight with the LAPD's most autonomous and vulnerable division. At first I thought Exley was operating Dan Wilhite, but now I think he put me out there to draw heat. I'm out there, essentially getting nowhere on a worthless pervert 459. It's a one – I mean *two*-man job, and if Exley *really* wanted the case cleared he would have put out a half-dozen men. I think he's running me. He's playing off my reputation and running me.'

Dudley, beaming: 'Salutary, lad – your intelligence, your lawyer-sharp articulation. Now, what does Sergeant George Stemmons, Jr, think of the job? My sources say he's been behaving rather erratically lately.'

Spasms – don't flinch. 'You mean your source Johnny Duhamel. Junior taught him at the Academy.'

'Johnny's a good lad, and your colleague Stemmons should trim his disgraceful sideburns to regulation length. Did you know that I co-opted Johnny to the Hurwitz investigation?'

'Yeah, I'd heard. Isn't he a little green for a case like that?'

'He's a grand young copper, and I heard that you yourself sought to command the job.'

'Robbery's clean, Dud. I'm looking out for too many friends working Ad Vice.'

Ho-ho, wink-wink. 'Lad, your powers of perception have just won you the undying friendship of a certain Irishman named Dudley Liam Smith, and I am frankly amazed that two bright lads such as ourselves have remained merely acquaintances all these many years.'

SNITCH DUHAMEL.

DO IT NOW.

'On the topic of friendship, lad, I understand that you and Bob Gallaudet are quite close.'

Hallway noise – grunts/thuds/'Dave Klein my friend!'

Lester – sweat box row.

I sprinted over – door number 3 was just closing. Check the window – Lester handcuffed, dribbling teeth – Breuning and Carlisle swinging saps overtime.

Shoulder wedge – I snapped the door clean.

Breuning – distracted – huh?

Carlisle – blood-fogged glasses.

Out of breath, pitch the lie: 'He was with me when Wardell Knox was killed.'

Carlisle: 'Was that a.m. or p.m.?'

Breuning: 'Hey, Sambo, try to sing "Harbor Lights" now.'

Lester spat blood and teeth in Breuning's face.

Carlisle balled his fists – I kicked his legs out. Breuning yelped, blood-blind – I sapped his knees.

That brogue:

'Lads, you'll have to release Mr. Lake. Lieutenant, bless you for expediting justice with your splendid alibi.'

21

DEAR MR. HUGHES, Mr. Milteer:

On the dates of 11/11, 11/12 and 11/13/58, Glenda Bledsoe participated in actively publicizing performers currently under contract to Variety International Pictures, a clear legal breach of her contract with Hughes Aircraft, Tool Company, Productions et al. Specifically, Miss Bledsoe allowed herself to be photographed and interviewed with actors Rock Rockwell and Salvatore 'Touch' Vecchio, on matters pertaining to their acting careers outside the production/publicity confines of *Attack of the Atomic Vampire*, the motion picture all three are currently involved with. Specifics will follow in a subsequent note, but you should now be advised that Miss Bledsoe's Hughes contract is legally voided: she can be sued in civil court, dunned for financial damages and blackballed from future studio film appearances under various clauses of her Hughes contract. My continued surveillance of Miss Bledsoe has revealed no instances of actress domicile theft; if items are missing from those premises, most likely they have been stolen by local youths employing loose window access: such youths would know that the domiciles were intermittently occupied and take their thievery from there. Please inform me if you wish me to continue surveilling Miss Bledsoe; be advised that you now have enough information to proceed with all legal dispatch.

Respectfully,
David D. Klein

Dawn – the trailer. Glenda sleeping; Lester curled up outside by the spaceship.

I stepped out; Lester stirred and gargled T-Bird. Confab: the camera boss and director.

'Come on, Sid, this time the head vampire *plucks* the guy's eyes out.'

'But Mickey's afraid I'm making things too gruesome. I… I don't know.'

'Jesus Christ, you take the extra and pour some fake blood in his eyes.'

'Wylie, *you* come on. Let me have coffee before I start thinking gore at six-forty-nine in the morning.'

Lester weaved over – cut, bruised. 'I always wanted to be a movie star. Maybe I stick aroun' an extra day or so, play the Negro vampire.'

'No, Breuning and Carlisle will be looking for you. They didn't pin Wardell Knox on you, but they'll find something.'

'I don't feel so much like runnin'.'

'*You do it.* I told you last night: call Meg and tell her I said she should stake you. You want to end up dead for resisting arrest some goddamn night when you think they've forgotten about it?'

'No, I don't think I do. Say, Mr. Klein, I never thought I'd see the day Mr. Smith gave me a break.'

I winked à la Dudley. 'He likes my style, lad.'

Lester strolled back to his bottle. The director fisheyed me – I strolled to the trailer, nonchalant.

Glenda was reading my note. 'David, this could kill – I mean *ruin* me in the film business.'

'We have to give them something. If they believe it, they won't press theft charges. And it diverts attention from the actress pads.'

'There's been nothing on TV or in the papers.'

'The more time goes by, the better. Hughes might report him missing, and the body will be found sooner or later. Either way, we might or might not be questioned. I had words with him, so I'm more likely to be a pro forma suspect. I can handle it, and I know you can handle it. We're … oh shit.'

'We're *professionals?*'

'Don't be so cruel, it's too early.'

She took my hands. 'When can *we* go public?'

'We may have already. I shouldn't have stayed so late, and we should probably cool things for a while.'

'Until when?'

'Until we're clear on Miciak.'

'That's the first time we've said his name.'

'We haven't really talked about it at all.'

'No, we've been too busy sharing secrets. What about alibis?'

'For up to two weeks you were home alone. After two weeks you don't remember – nobody remembers that long.'

'There's something else bothering you. I could tell last night.'

Neck prickles – I blurted it. 'It's the Kafesjian job. I was questioning a girl who knows Tommy K., and she said Lucille did call jobs for Doug Ancelet.'

'I don't think I knew her. The girls never used their real names, and if I knew someone similar to the way you described her, I would have told you. Are you going to question him?'

'Yeah, today.'

'When did she work for Doug?'

'*Doug?*'

Glenda laughed. 'I worked for Doug briefly, after the Gilette thing, and you're disturbed that I used to do what I did.'

'No – I just don't want you connected to any of this.' Lacing our fingers – 'I'm not, except that I'm connected to you' – squeezing tighter – 'So *go*. It's Premier Escorts, 481 South Rodeo, next to the Beverly Wilshire Hotel.'

I kissed her. 'You make things worse, then you make them better.'

'No, it's just that you like your trouble in smaller doses.'

'You've got me.'

'I'm not so sure. And be careful with Doug. He used to pay off the Beverly Hills Police.'

I walked – lightheaded. Lester serenaded winos by the spaceship – 'Harbor Lights' – the gap-toothed version.

Phone news:

Woods spotted Junior in Darktown – then lost him running a red light. Jack –

irked, going back out: 'It looks like he's living in his car. He had his badge pinned to his coat, like he's a fucking Wild West sheriff, and I saw him buying gas with two big automatics shoved down his pants.'

Bad, but:

He hit box 5841 – check under his doormat, grab the key, check his mail slot. 'Four envelopes, Dave. Jesus, I thought you were sending me after jewels or something. And you owe me—'

I hung up and drove over. There: the key, the slot, four letters. Back to my car – Champ Dineen mail.

Two letters sealed, two slit. I opened the sealed ones – both from *Transom* to Champ – recent postmarks. Inside: fifty-dollar bills, notes: 'Champ – Thanx mucho, Harris'; 'Champ – Thanx, man!'

Two slit – left for safekeeping? – no return address, Christmas '57 postmarks. Eleven months PO box stashed – why?

December 17, 1957

My Dear Son,

I am so sad to be apart from you this holiday season. Circumstances have not been kind in the keeping us together department for several years now. The others of course do not miss you the way I do, which makes me miss you more and makes me miss the pretend happy family that we once had years ago.

The strange life that you have chosen to live is a strange comfort to me, though. I don't miss the housekeeping money I send you and it's like a secret joke when your father reads my itemized household expense lists with large 'miscellaneous' amounts that I refuse to explain. He, of course, considers you just someone in hiding from the real responsibilities of life. I know that the circumstances of our family life and theirs too has done something to you. You cannot live the way other people do and I love you for not pretending to. Your musical interests must give you comfort and I always buy the records you tell me to buy even though the music is not normally the type of music I enjoy. Your father and sisters ignore the records and suspect that I buy them only to be in touch with you in this difficult absence of yours, but they don't know that they are direct recommendations! I only listen to them when the others are out and with all the lights off in the house. Every day I intercept the mailman before he gets to our house so the others will not know that you are contacting me. This is our secret. We are new to living this way, you and me, but even if we have to live this way always like long lost pen pals living in the same city I will do it because I understand the terrible things this long history of insanity both our families has endured has done to you. I understand and I don't judge you. That is my Christmas gift to you.

Love,
Mother

Neat handwriting, ridged paper – non-print-sustaining. No Richie confirmation; 'Long history of insanity/both our families'. My peeper: mother/father/sisters. 'Circumstances of our family life and theirs too has done something to you.'

December 24, 1957

Dear Son,

Merry Christmas even though I don't feel the Christmas spirit and even though the jazz Christmas albums you told me to buy didn't cheer me up,

> because the melodies were so out of kilter to my more traditional ear. I just feel tired. Maybe I have iron poor blood like on the Geritol TV commercials, but I think it is more like an accumulation that has left me physically exhausted on top of the other. I feel like I want it to be over. I feel more than anything else like I just don't want to know any more. Three months ago I said I was close to doing it and it spurred you to do a rash thing. I don't want to do that again. Sometimes when I play some of the prettier songs on the records you suggest to me I think that heaven will be like that and I get close. Your sisters are no comfort. Since your father gave me what that prostitute gave him I can only use him for his money, and if I had my druthers I would give you all the money anyway. Write to me. The mail gets bollixed up at Xmastime, but I'll be watching for the postman at all different times.
>
> Love,
> Mother

Sisters/music/well-heeled father.

Mother suicidal – close three months before – 'it spurred you to do a rash thing.'

'Your father gave me what that prostitute gave him.'

The peeper tape, Trick Man to Lucille: 'that little dose you gave me.'

Doug Ancelet fires Lucille – 'She gave these tricks of hers the gonorrhea.'

Snap call:

The peeper taped Lucille and *his own father*.

'Insanity.'

'Both our families.'

'Our family life and *theirs* too has done something to you.'

I drove home, changed, grabbed the tape rig, extra sketches and my John list. A pay-phone stop, a call to Exley – I pitched him hard, no explanation:

Leroy Carpenter/Steve Wenzel/Patrick Orchard – I want them. Send squadroom men out – *I want those pushers detained*.

Exley agreed – grudgingly. Agreed too: Wilshire Station detention. Suspicious: Why not 77th?

Unsaid:

I'm having a cop killed/I don't want Dudley Smith around – he's too close to this fur-thief cop—

'I'll implement it, Lieutenant. But I want a full report on your interrogations.'

'Yes, sir!'

10:30 A.M. – Premier Escorts should be open.

Out to Beverly Hills – Rodeo off the Beverly Wilshire. Open: a ground-floor suite, a receptionist.

'Doug Ancelet, please.'

'Are you a client?'

'A potential one.'

'May I ask who recommended you?'

'Peter Bondurant' – pure bluff – a big-time whorehound.

Behind us: 'Karen, if he knows Pete, send him in.'

I walked back. A nice office – dark wood, golf prints. An old man dressed for golf, PR smile on.

'I'm Doug Ancelet.'

'Dave Klein.'

'How is Pete, Mr. Klein? I haven't seen him in a dog's age.'

'He's busy. Between his work for Howard Hughes and *Hush-Hush* he's always on the run.'

Pseudo-warm: 'God, the stories that man has. You know, Pete has been both a client for several years *and* a talent scout for companions for Mr. Hughes. In fact, we've introduced Mr. Hughes to several young ladies who've gone on to become contract actresses for him.'

'Pete gets around.'

'He does indeed. My God, he's the man who verifies the veracity of those scurrilous stories in that scurrilous scandal rag. Has he explained how Premier Escorts works?'

'Not in detail.'

Practiced: 'It's by word of mouth exclusively. People know people, and they recommend us. We operate on a principle of relative anonymity, and all our clients use pseudonyms and call us when they wish to have an introduction made. That way we don't have their real names or phone numbers on file. We have picture files on the young ladies we send out on dates, and they use appropriately seductive pseudonyms themselves. With the exception of a few clients like Pete, I doubt that I know a half-dozen of my clients and girls by their real names. Those picture files on the girls also list the pseudonyms of the men they've dated, to aid us in making recommendations. *Anonymity*. We accept only cash as payment, and I assure you, Mr. Klein – I've forgotten your real name already.'

Tweak him: 'Lucille Kafesjian.'

'I beg your pardon?'

'Another client mentioned her to me. A sexy brunette, a little on the plump side. Frankly, he said she was great. Unfortunately, he also said that you dismissed her for giving your clients venereal disease.'

'Unfortunately, I've dismissed a few girls for that offense, and one of them did use an Armenian surname. Who was the client who mentioned her?'

'A man in Stan Kenton's band.'

Eyeing me – copwise now. 'Mr. Klein, what do you do for a living?'

'I'm an attorney.'

'And that's a tape recorder you're carrying?'

'Yes.'

'And why are you carrying a revolver in a shoulder holster?'

'Because I command the Administrative Vice Division, Los Angeles Police Department.'

Turning florid: 'Did Pete Bondurant give you my name?'

Flash the peeper sketch, dig his reaction: '*He* gave you my name? I've never seen him before, and that likeness reads much younger than the vast majority of my clients. Mr—'

'Lieutenant.'

'Mr Lieutenant Whatever Out-of-Your-Jurisdiction Policeman, leave this office immediately!'

I shut the door. Ancelet flushed heart-attack red – baby him. 'Are you in with Mort Riddick on the BHPD? Talk to him, he'll verify me. I bluffed in with Pete B., so call Pete and ask about me.'

Turning beet-red/purple. A decanter set on his desk – I poured him a shot.

He guzzled it and made refill nods. I poured him a short one – he chased it with pills.

'You son of a bitch, using a trusted client of mine as subterfuge, you son of a bitch.'

Refill number two – *he* poured this time.

'A few minutes of your time, Mr. Ancelet. You'll make a valuable contact on the LAPD.'

'No good son of a bitch' – winding down.

I flashed the john list. 'These are trick names I got out of a police file.'

'I *will not identify any of my client names or pseudonyms*.'

'Former clients, then, that's all I'm asking.'

Squinting, finger-scanning: 'There, "Joseph Arden". He used to be a client several years back. I remember because my daughter lives near the Arden Dairy in Culver City. This man trucks with common street girls?'

'That's right. And johns always keep the same alias. Now, did this man trick with that Armenian-named girl you told me about?'

'I don't recall. And remember what I told you: I don't keep client files, and my picture file on that clap-passing slut is strictly ancient history.'

Lying fuck – file cabinets stacked wall-to-wall. 'Listen to a tape. It'll take two minutes.'

He tapped his watch. '*One minute*. I'm due on the tee at Hillcrest.'

Fast: rig the spools, press Play. Squelch, Stop, Start, there:

Lucille: 'These places are filled with losers and lonesome creeps.'

Stop, Start, 'Chanson d'Amour', the trick: '... of course, there was always that little dose you gave me.'

I pressed Stop. Ancelet, impressed: 'That's Joseph Arden. The girl sounds somewhat familiar, too. Satisfied?'

'How can you be sure? You only listened for ten seconds.'

More watch taps. '*Listen*, I do most of my business on the phone, and I recognize voices. Now, follow this train of thought: I have asthma. That man had a slight wheeze. I remembered that he called me out of the blue several years ago. He wheezed, and we discussed asthma. He said he heard two men in an elevator discussing my service and got the Premier Escorts number out of the Beverly Hills Yellow Pages, where frankly I advertise my more legitimate escort business. I set the man up with a few dates and *that was that*. Satisfied?'

'And you don't recall which girls he selected.'

'Correct.'

'And he never came in to look at your picture file.'

'Correct.'

'And of course you don't keep a pseudonym file on your clients.'

Tap tap. 'Correct, and Jesus Christ, they'll tee off without me. Now, Mr. Policeman Friend of Pete's Who I Have Humored Past the Point of Courtesy, please—'

In his face: '*Sit down. Don't move. Don't pick up the phone*.'

He kowtowed – twitching and fuming dark red. File cabinets – nine drawers – go —

Unlocked, manilla folders, side tabs. Male names – lying old whoremaster fuck. Alphabetical: 'Amour, Phil,' 'Anon, Dick,' 'Arden, Joseph'—

Pull it:

No real name/no address/no phone number.

Ancelet: 'This is a rank invasion of privacy!'

Assignations:

7/14/56, 8/1/56, 8/3/56 – Lacey Kartoonian – call her Lucille. *9/4/56*, 9/11/56 – Susan Ann Glynn, a footnote: 'Make this girl use a pseudonym: I think she wants clients to be able to locate her thru normal channels to avoid paying commission.'

'They are on the second hole already!'

I yanked drawers – one, two, three, four – male names only. Five, six, seven – initialed folders/nude whore pix.

'Get out now, you fucking hard-on voyeur, before I call Mort Riddick!'

Yanking folders – no L.K., NO Lucille pictures—

'Karen, call Mort Riddick at the station!'

I yanked *his* phone out by the cord – watch his face throb. My own throbs: fuck L.K., find G.B.—

'Mr. Ancelet, Mort's on his way!'

No L.K., files dwindling. There, G.B. paydirt – 'Gloria Benson' in brackets. Glenda's movie name – she said she chose it.

I grabbed the file, grabbed the tape rig and hauled. Outside, my car – I peeled rubber – down to my jurisdiction.

Look:

Two nude snapshots dated 3/56 – Glenda looked embarrassed. Four 'dates' listed, a note: 'A headstrong girl who went back to car hopping.'

I ripped it all up.

I hit my siren out of pure fucking joy.

22

ONE SUSAN ANN GLYNN DMV-listed – Ocean View Drive, Redondo Beach.

Twenty minutes south. A clapboard shack, no view – a pregnant woman on the porch.

I parked and walked up. Blond, mid-twenties – DMV stat bullseye.

‘Are you Susan Ann Glynn?’

She patted a sit-down place. Expectant: cigarettes, magazines.

‘You’re the policeman Doug called about?’

I sat down. ‘He *warned* you?’

‘Uh-huh. He said you looked through an old trick file that had my name on it. He said you might come to see me and make trouble like you did with him. I said I sure hope he makes it before three-thirty, when my husband gets home.’

Noon now. ‘Your husband doesn’t know what you used to do?’

A kid yelping inside – she lit a cigarette on reflex. ‘Uh-uh. And I bet if I cooperate with you, you won’t tell him.’

‘That’s right.’

She coughed, smiled. ‘The baby kicked. Now, uh, Doug said the trick was Joseph Arden, so I put on my thinking cap. This isn’t for murder or anything like that, is it? Because that man behaved like a gentleman.’

‘I’m investigating a burglary.’

Cough, wince. ‘You know, I remember that I liked that man. I remember him good because Doug said be nice ’cause this other service girl gave him the clap, and he had to get it treated.’

‘Did he tell you his real name?’

‘No. I used *my* real name at the service for a while, but Doug accused me of trying to recruit customers for myself, so I stopped.’

‘What did Joseph Arden look like?’

‘Nice looking. Cultured looking. Maybe in his late forties. He looked like he had money.’

‘Tall, short, heavy, slender?’

‘Maybe six feet. I guess you’d say he had a medium build. Blue eyes, I think. What I guess you’d call medium-brown hair.’

I showed the sketch. ‘Does this look like him?’

‘This man looks too young. The chin sort of reminds me of him, though.’

Noise inside – Susan winced. Check her magazines: *Photoplay, Bride’s*. ‘Do you know what mug shots are?’

‘Uh-huh, from the TV. Pictures of criminals.’

Soft: ‘Would you—?’

‘No’ shakes – emphatic. ‘Mister, this man was no criminal. I could look at your pictures until this new baby of mine has her sweet sixteen and never see his face.'

'Did he mention a son named Richie?'

'We didn't talk much, but on like our second date he said his wife just tried to kill herself. At first I didn't believe it, 'cause lots of men tell you sad things about their wives so you'll feel sorry for them and pretend you like it more.'

'You said at first you didn't believe him. What convinced you?'

'He told me he and his wife had this fight a few weeks back, and she just started screaming and picked up a can of Drano and started drinking it. He said he stopped her and fetched this doctor neighbor of his so he wouldn't have to take her to the hospital. Believe me, that story was so awful that I knew he didn't make it up.'

'Did he say that she went to a hospital for follow-up treatment?'

'No. He said the neighbor doctor took care of all of it. He said he was glad, 'cause that way nobody knew how crazy his wife was.'

One dead lead. 'Did he tell you his wife's name?'

'No.'

'Did he mention the names of any other family members?'

'No, he sure didn't.'

'Did he mention any other girls who worked for Doug Ancelet?'

Nods – eager. 'Some girl with one of those foreign-type I-A-N names. It seemed to me he had—'

'Lacey Kartoonian?'

'Riiight.'

'What did he say about her?'

'That she loved it. That's a big thing with call-service customers. They think they're the only ones who can make you love it.'

'Be more specific'

'He said, "Do it like Lacey does." I said, "How's that?" He said, "Love it." That's all he said about her, I'm sure.'

'He didn't mention her as the one who gave him a dose?'

'Uh-uh, that's all he said. And I never met that girl myself, and nobody else ever brought her up to me. And if she didn't have such a funny call name I wouldn't have remembered her at all.'

Chrono links:

Christmas '57: peeper's mother with the suicide blues *again*. Susan Glynn/Joseph Arden – trick dates 9/56. Mrs Arden, Drano drinker – private treatment. Police agencies sealed suicide files. Arden, wealthy – *if* his wife killed herself, he'd buy *extra* legal closure.

Linkage:

Letters, peeper tapes, Ancelet. Quotes:

Joseph Arden to Lucille: 'that dose you gave me.'

Mom to Champ/peeper: 'Your father gave me what that prostitute gave him.'

Conclusive:

The peeper peeped his own father fucking Lucille.

Susan: 'Penny for your thoughts.'

'You don't want to know.'

'Ask me one.'

Try her: 'When you worked for the service, did you know a girl named Gloria Benson? Her real name's Glenda Bledsoe.'

Smiling, pleased: 'I remember her. She quit Doug's to become a movie star. When I read she was under contract to Howard Hughes it made me so happy.'

23

WILSHIRE STATION – WAIT, work.

I dusted the Mom-peeper envelopes – two prints surfaced. I checked Jack Woods' Vice sheet – match-up – Jack pawed the goods.

No post-Christmas letters box-stashed – why?

I buzzed Sid Riegle: check white female attempted suicides/suicides Christmas '57 up. Assume Coroner's file closure; inquire station squad to squad – City/County. Look for: middle-aged/affluent/husband/son/daughters. Sid said I'll help you part time – *you* never show up – *I'm* running Ad Vice by default.

I called the Arden Dairy – a shot at a Joseph Arden make. Strikeout: no Arden-surname owners/employees; the founder dead, heirless.

I called University Station – 4:00 – nightwatch roll call in progress. Via intercom hookup:

Did any of you men trick-card Joseph Arden – white male alias?

One taker – 'I *think* I carded that alias' – no real name, vehicle or description recalled.

Joseph Arden – dead for now.

A teletype check: no Topanga Canyon 187s – Pincushion Miciak decomposing.

Dinner: candy bars from a vending machine. Grab a sweat room, wait.

I tilted a chair back – sleep waves hit me. Half dreaming: Mr Third Party says hi!

The Red Arrow Inn – peeper jimmies Lucille's door. Jimmy marks *on the peeper's door* – nonmatching. Kafesjian 459: watchdogs chopped and blinded – eyes shoved down their throats.

The peeper sobbing, listening to:

Lucille with odd tricks – and his own father.

Read the peeper passive.

Read the burglar brutal.

Silverware stolen, found: the peeper's bed stabbed and ripped. Assumed: the peeper himself. My new instinct: third party/door chopper = burglar/bed slasher =

One separate fiend.

Half dreaming – sex-fiend gargoyles chasing me. Half waking – 'Double-header, Lieutenant' – Joe Plainclothes shoving two punks in.

One white, one colored. The plainclothesman cuffed them to chairs, their hands racked to the slats.

'Blondie's Patrick Orchard, and the Negro guy's Leroy Carpenter. My partner and me checked Stephen Wenzel's place, and it looked like he cleaned it out in a hurry.'

Orchard – skinny, pimples. Carpenter – purple suit, this coon fashion plate.

'Thanks, Officer.'

'Glad to oblige' – smile – 'Glad to earn a few points with Chief Exley.'

‘Did you run them for warrants?’

‘Sure did. Leroy’s a child-support skip, and Pat’s a Kern County probation absconder.’

‘If they cooperate, I’ll cut them loose.’

He winked. ‘Sure you will.’

I winked. ‘Check the jail roster tomorrow if you don’t believe me.’

Orchard smiled. Leroy said, ‘Say what?’ Plainclothes – huh? – back out shrugging.

Showtime.

I reached under the table – bingo – a sap taped on. ‘I meant what I said, and this has got *nothing* to do with you. This is about a policeman named George Stemmons, Jr. He was observed rousting you two and a guy named Stephen Wenzel, and all I want is for you to tell me about it.’

Orchard – wet lips – snitch-eager.

Leroy – ‘Fuck you, ofay motherfuck, I know my rights.’

I sapped him – arms, legs – and dumped his chair. He hit the floor sideways – no bleats, no yelps – good stones.

Orchard, snitch frenzied: ‘Hey, I know that Junior cat!’

‘And?’

‘And he shook me down for my roll!’

‘And?’

‘And he stole my … my …’

‘And he stole your felony narcotics. *And?*’

‘And he was stoned out of his fucking gourd!’

‘*And?*’

‘And he was talking this “I’m a criminal mastermind” rebop!’

‘*And?*’

‘And he boosted my shit! He popped these goofballs right out in the open by the Club Alabam!’

Tilly Hopewell confirmed. ‘*And?*’

‘An-an-an’—’

I sapped his chair. ‘AND?’

‘An-an-an’ I know Steve Wenzel. St-St-Steve s-said J-Junior t-t-talked this crazy shit to him!’

Tilly confirmation ditto. I checked Leroy – too quiet – watch his fingers—

Waistband pokes, surreptitious.

I hauled his chair up and jerked his belt – H bindles popped out of his pants.

Improvise:

‘Pat, I didn’t find these on Mr Carpenter, I found them on you. Now, do you have anything else to say about Junior Stemmons, Steve Wenzel and yourself?’

Leroy – ‘Crazy, daddy-o!’ – dig the ofay.

‘AND, Mr. Orchard?’

‘An-an-and St-Steve s-said he c-cut a d-deal w-w-with c-crazy Junior. J-Junior p-promised Steve this b-big money to buy this b-bulk horse. C-couple days ago, Steve, he told me this. He s-s-said J-Junior n-needed twenty-four hours to get the money.’

Leroy: ‘Sissy fink stool pigeon motherfucker.’

Craaazy Junior – KILL HIM, JACK.

Twirling my sap: ‘Possession of heroin with intent to sell. Conspiracy to distribute narcotics. Assault on a police officer, because you just took a swing at me. *AND*, Mr. Orch—’

‘Okay! Okay! Okay!’

I sapped the table. 'AND?'

'A-and c-crazy Junior, he made me go with him to the club Alabam. Y-y-you know that b-boxer cop?'

'*Johnny Duhamel?*'

'R-right, who w-won the G-Golden Gloves. J-J-Junior, he started bothering the-the-the-the—'

Tongue tied bad – uncuff him, cut him slack.

Leroy: 'You afraid to let *my* hands free, Mr Po-lice?' Orchard: 'Fuck, that's better.'

'AND?'

'And J-Junior, he was bugging the G-Golden Gloves guy.'

'What was Duhamel doing at the Club Alabam?'

'It looked like he was eyeballing these guys back by this curtained-off room they got there.'

'What guys? What were they doing?'

'It looked like they were filing numbers off these slot machines.'

'*And?*'

'Man, you keeping saying that!'

I sapped the table hard – it jumped off the floor. 'AND why did Junior Stemmons take you to the Club Alabam?'

Orchard, hands up, begging: 'Okay okay okay. Junior what's-his-name was stoned out of his gourd. He buttonholed the Golden Gloves man and told him this crazy fantasy rebop that I had this big money to buy mink coats with. The boxer cop, he almost went nuts shushing Junior. They almost threw blows, and I saw these two *other* cops that I sorta knew by sight watching the whole thing sort of real interested.'

'Describe the two other cops.'

'Shit, mean looking. A heavyset blond guy, and this thin guy with glasses.'

Breuning and Carlisle – go from there:

Duhamel scoping slot work – Mobster Squad duty? Goons scoping *him* – suspected fur thief?

Orchard: 'Man, I got no more "ands" for you. Whatever you threaten me with, I'll be feeding you bullshit from here on in.'

Work the spook: '*Give*, Leroy.'

'Give shit, I ain't no stool pigeon.'

'No, you're a small-time independent narcotics pusher.'

'Say what?'

'Say this heroin is a month's pay for you.'

'An' say I got a bail bondsman ready to stand my bail an' a righteous Jew lawyer set to defend me. Say you book me, say I get my phone call. Say what, shit.'

I uncuffed him. 'Did Tommy Kafesjian ever muscle you, Leroy?'

'Tommy K. don't scare me.'

'Sure he does.'

'Horse pucky.'

'You're either paying him protection, snitching for him or running from him.'

'Horse pucky.'

'Well, I don't think snitching's your style, but I think you're looking over your shoulder a lot waiting for some Kafesjian guy to notice you.'

'Maybe that's true. But maybe the Kafesjians ain't gonna control the Southside traffic that much longer.'

'Did Junior Stemmons tell you that?'

'Maybe he did. But maybe it's just loose talk pertainin' to this big Southside Federal thing. And either way I ain't no snitch.'

Tough monkey.

'Leroy, why don't you tell me how Junior Stemmons muscled you.'

'Fuck you.'

'Why don't you tell me what you two talked about.'

'Fuck your mother.'

'You know, if you cooperate with me, it might help bring the Kafesjians down.'

'Fuck you. I ain't no snitch.'

'Leroy, were you acquainted with a maryjane pusher named Wardell Knox?'

'Fuck you, so what if I was?'

'He was murdered.'

'No shit, Sherlock.'

'You know, there's quite a push to clear up these Negro homicides.'

'No shit, Dick Tracy.'

Tough and stupid.

I walked Orchard next door and cuffed him in tight. Back to Leroy—

'Give on you and Junior Stemmons, or I drive you down to 77th Street and tell Dudley Smith you killed Wardell Knox and molested a bunch of little white kids.'

Coup de grace – I laid the H on the table. 'Go ahead, I never saw it.'

Leroy snatched his shit back. Zoooom – instant cooperation:

'All that Junior punk and me *did* was talk. Mostly he talked and I listened, 'cause he shook me down for my roll and some shit, and I knew that wasn't no crackerjack badge he showed me.'

'Did he mention Tommy Kafesjian?'

'Not Tommy specific'

'Tommy's sister Lucille?'

'Uh-uh.'

'A peeper spying on Lucille?'

'Uh-uh, he just said the Kafesjian family itself was going down, gonna get fucked up by the Federal business. He said LAPD Narco was gonna get neutralized by the Feds, and he was gonna be the new Southside dope kingpin—'

KILL HIM.

—'this snotnose little twerpy cop flying on a snootful of shit. He said he had the goods on the Kafesjians, and access to his boss's burglary investigation, which was full of dirty stuff to blackmail J.C. Kafesjian with—'

KILL HIM.

—'and he said he was gonna drive the Kafesjians out and steal their turf, and right about this time I'm biting my tongue to keep from laughing. Next he says he's got stuff on these brothers working for Mickey Cohen. He said they're gonna pull these sex shakedowns on movie stars—'

Junior's FI cards – Vecchio stud service—

—'and the capper is little Junior says he's gonna take over Mickey Cohen's kingdom, which as I understand it ain't such a hot kingdom no more.'

'And?'

'And I was just thinking the money and dope I lost was worth it to catch this crazy motherfucker's act.'

Woods' surveillance – Junior, Tommy and J.C. at Bido Lito's. Overheard: he'd protect THEM from ME. Double-agent Junior – mercy-kill him.

'Give me the dope back.'

‘Man, you said I could have it!’

‘Give it to me.’

‘Fuck you, lying motherfucker!’

I sapped him down, broke his wrists, pried it free.

24

'CRAZY MOTHERFUCKER'S ACT.'

Junior's door – six padlocks – crazy new precautions. The dumbfuck used LAPD hardware – my master keys got me in.

Hit the lights.

Rice Krispies on the floor.

Piano wire strung ankle-high.

Closet doors nailed shut; mousetraps on the furniture.

CRAAAAZY.

Toss it slow now – the trunk distracted me last time—

I pried the closets open – nothing but food scraps inside.

Cornflakes and tacks on the kitchen floor.

Sink sludge – motor oil, glass shards; friction tape sealing the icebox. Peel it off—

Amyl nitrite poppers in an ice tray.

Reefer buds in a casserole dish.

Chocolate ice cream – plastic shoved down an open pint container. Dump it, yank —

One Minox spy camera – no film loaded in.

The hall – neck-high wires – duck. The bathroom – mousetraps, a medicine chest glued shut. Smash it open – K-Y jelly and two C-notes on a shelf.

A hamper – nailed tight – pry, pull—

Bloody hypos – spikes up – a booby trap. Dump them – a small steel strong box underneath.

Locked – I banged it open on the wall.

Booty:

One B of A Hollywood branch passbook – balance $9,183.40.

Two safe-deposit-box keys, one instruction card. Fuck: 'Box access requires password and/or visual okay.'

Call it:

Evidence holes – Junior caution pre-complete CRAAAZY.

Logic:

Glenda-Klein depositions stashed THERE – ditto the gun Georgie Ainge sold Glenda.

Find the password.

I tossed the bedroom – carpet glass spread thick – the trunk gone. The drawers – pure shit – paper scraps gibberish-scrawled.

I dumped the mattress, the couch, the chairs – no rips, no stash holes. I pulled the TV apart – mousetraps snapped. That wall section I shot out – stuffed with Kotex.

No password. No FI cards. No depositions. No Exley/no Duhamel files.

Snap, crackle, pop – Rice Krispies underfoot.

Phone *bbrinng*—

The hall extension – grab it.

'Uh, yeah?'

'It's me, Wenzel. Uh, Stemmons … look, man … I don't want any part of dealing with you.'

I faked Junior's voice: 'Meet me.'

'No … I'll get your money back to you.'

'Come on, let's talk about—'

'No, you're nuts!' – *click*, say it: Junior bought Wenzel's dope; Wenzel wised up later.

Bank books, box keys – mine now. I clipped the padlocks fumble-handed – kill him, Jack.

I drove to Tilly's place. Four flights up – knock – no answer.

Peep the spyhole, listen – light, TV laughs. A shoulder wedge snapped the door.

Tilly flipping channels – sprawled on the floor, hophead-dreamy.

Bindles on a chair – say a pound's worth.

Flip – Perry Como, boxing, Patti Page. Slack-face Tilly on cloud nine.

I crammed the door shut and bolted it. Tilly flipped stations, goofy-eyed: Lawrence Welk, Spade Cooley. I grabbed her, dragged her—

Clenching up, kicking – good. The bathroom, the shower, full blast water—

Cold – soak her clothes, freeze her sober. Wet myself – fuck it.

Freezing her: big shivers, jumbo goosebumps. Teeth clicks trying to beg me – sweat her.

Hot water – fighting now – I let her hit, kick, squirm. Back to ice-cold – 'All right! All right!' – no dope slur.

I pulled her out, sat her down on the toilet.

'I think Steve Wenzel left you that dope for safekeeping. He was going to give it to that policeman Junior Stemmons we talked about the other night, and Junior already paid him for it. Now he wants to give Junior his money back because Junior's crazy and he's scared. *Now you tell me what you know about that*.'

Tilly trembled – spastic shivers. I tossed her towels and tapped the heater.

She bundled up. 'Are you going to tell the Probation?'

'Not if you cooperate with me.'

'And what about that …'

'That shit in your front room that will get you a dime in some dyke farm if I decide to get ugly?'

Popping cold sweat now. 'Yes.'

'I won't touch it. And I know you want to geez, so the sooner you talk to me, the sooner you can.'

Red coils, heat. Tilly: 'Steve heard that Tommy Kafesjian's out to kill him. This seller man Pat Orchard, he knows Steve, and he was in jail this afternoon. This policeman strong-armed him—'

'That was me.'

'I'm not surprised, but just let me tell you. Anyway, according to Steve, that policeman which I guess was you asked this Pat Orchard all these questions about this Junior policeman. You released him, and he went to Tommy Kafesjian and snitched that Junior man and Steve. He said that Steve sold Junior his big stash, and that Junior policeman was talking up all this dope-kingpin jive. Steve said he moved out of his place, and he's going to try to give Junior his money back, 'cause he heard Tommy's out to get him.'

'And Wenzel left his shit with you for safekeeping.'

Antsy – squirming up her towels. 'That's right.'

'I cut Orchard loose no more than three hours ago. How did you learn all this so quickly?'

'Tommy came by here before Steve did. He told me, 'cause he knows I know Steve, and he thought I might know where he's hiding. I didn't tell him I talked to you the other night, and I said I don't know where Steve is, which is the truth. He left, then Steve came by and dropped his stash off. I told him, "You run from that crazy Tommy and that crazy Junior."'

Steve calls Junior – and gets me. 'What else did you and Tommy talk about?'

Stifling coil heat – Tilly dripped sweat. 'He wanted to do it to me, but I said no 'cause you told me he killed Wardell Knox.'

'What else? The sooner I go, the sooner you can—'

'Tommy said he's looking for this guy spying on his sister, Lucille. He said he's going crazy looking for that spyer.'

'What else did he tell you about him?'

'Nothing.'

'Did he say he was a musician?'

'No.'

'Did he say his name was Richie?'

'No.'

'Did he say he had leads on where the guy was?'

'No. He said the spyer was like a f-ing phantom, and he didn't know where he was.'

'Did he mention a different man, someone spying on the spyer?'

'No.'

'Did he mention *any* name on the spyer?'

'No.'

'Champ Dineen?'

'Do you think I'm stupid? Champ Dineen was this music writer who died years ago.'

'What else did Tommy say about Lucille?'

'Nothing.'

'Did he mention the name Joseph Arden?'

'No. Please, I need to—'

'Did Tommy say *he* was screwing Lucille?'

'Mister, you got an evil curiosity about that girl.'

Fast: out to the front room, back with the dope.

'Mister, that belongs to Steve.'

I cracked the window, looked down – a crap game in the alley dead below.'

'Mister …'

I tossed a bindle out – dice-blanket bullseye. 'What else did Tommy say about Lucille?'

'*Nothing*. Mister, please!'

Shouts downstairs – dope from heaven.

Two more bindles out – 'Mister, I need that!' – four, five – alleyway roars.

'TOMMY AND LUCILLE' – six, seven, eight.

Nine, ten – 'It's wrong to be thinking what you're thinking. Would you be doing that with your own sister?'

Crap-game reveries – praise Jesus.

Eleven, twelve – I threw them at Tilly.

Downtown – R&I – a run for Steve Wenzel's rap sheet and mugshots. Wenzel – two dope falls, butt-ugly: lantern-jaw white trash. No KAs/ known haunts listed – I shifted to THEM.

A run by their house – lights on, cars out front. I parked, window reconned.

Down the driveway – dark – I watched for new dogs. Hop the fence, peep around – Madge cooking, no Lucille. Dark rooms, the den – J.C., Tommy and Abe Voldrich.

I squatted down. Closed windows – no sound. Eyeball it:

J.C. waving papers; Tommy giggling. Voldrich – read his hands – be calm.

Muffled shouts – the window glass hummed.

I squinted; J.C. kept waving those papers. He moved closer – fuck – Ad Vice forms.

No way to read the fine print.

Probably Klein-to-Exley stuff – peeper leads. Stolen, leaked – maybe Junior, maybe Wilhite.

'Tommy going crazy chasing that spyer.'

I circuited back to my car. Peep surveillance – *my* eyes on *her* window. Forty minutes down – there – Lucille nonachalant naked. Her lights went out too fucking soon – I scoped the front door still hungry to watch.

Ten minutes, fifteen.

Slam – the three men ran out – over to separate cars. Tommy's Merc crunched off the sidewalk dragging sparks.

J.C. and Voldrich headed northbound.

Tommy – dead south.

Follow *him*—

La Brea south, Slauson east – this purple coon coach. *Way* east, Central Avenue south.

Peeper turf.

Light traffic – lay back, tail that jig rig. Way south – Watts – east.

Tommy, brake lights on – Avalon and 103 – after-hours-party-club row.

Nigger Heaven:

Two tenements wood-plank-linked – three stories up, open windows, fire-escape access.

Tommy parked. I cruised by, backed up, watched him:

He walked over to the right-side building.

He climbed up the fire escape and stepped on the plank.

Tommy creeping – wobbly wood, rope holds.

Tommy crouching.

Tommy peeping the left-side window.

Big-time hinky wrong: Tommy just plain looking.

I bolted my car, bolted the left-side steps. No lobby lookout – sprint.

Three floors up – bouncers at the door. Looks: who's this cop know? Instant bouncer-doormen – I walked in.

Mock-zebra walls, party geeks – white, colored. Music, party noise.

I scanned the room – no peeper-sketch look-alikes, no Tommy.

Check the window – no Tommy on the plank.

Geeks packed tight – white hepcats/snazzy niggers – hard to move.

Reefer smoke close by – lantern-jaw Steve Wenzel passing a stick.

Geeks between us.

Tommy behind him, hands in his coat.

Hands out – a sawed-off pump getting loose.

I yelled—

Some nigger hit a switch – the room went black.

Shotgun roar – full auto – one long blast. Spatter spray/random pistol shots/screams – muzzle flash lit up Steve Wenzel, faceless.

Screams.

I ripped through them out the window.

I crawled the plank, glass and brains in my hair.

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HARBOR FREEWAY NORTHBOUND, two-way squawk:

‘Code 3 all units vicinity 103rd and Avalon multiple homicides 10342 South Avalon third floor ambulances responding repeat all units multiple 187s 10342 South Avalon see the building superintendent—’

Breathing blood – my raincoat cleaned me up – clean, but still smelling it.

‘Repeat all units four dead 10342 South Avalon Code 3 ambulances responding.’

Shell shock worse than Saipan – the road blurred.

‘Traffic units vicinity 103 and Avalon Code 3 see Sergeant Disbrow Code 3 urgent.’

6th Street off-ramp, down to Mike Lyman’s – Exley’s late dinner spot. I palmed the waiter: get the Chief *now*.

Happy people all around me – gargoyles.

‘Lieutenant, this way please!’

I followed the waiter. A booth at the back – Exley standing, Bob Gallaudet sprawled – what’s this?’

Exley: ‘Klein, what is it?’

Bar seats close – I gestured him over. Bob – feelers perking, out of earshot.

‘Klein, what *is* it?’

‘You remember that pickup order you issued this morning?’

‘Yes. Three men to be detained at Wilshire Station. You owe me an explanation on it, so start—’

‘One of the men was an undie pusher named Steve Wenzel, and half an hour ago Tommy Kafesjian shotgunned him at one of those sanctioned after-hours pads in Watts. I was there, I saw it, it’s all over the City air. Four dead so far.’

Explain this to me.’

‘It all pertains to Junior Stemmons.’

‘*Explain it*.’

‘Fuck … he’s dirty past your wildest … fuck, he’s shooting dope, he’s shaking down pushers. He’s a faggot, he’s extorting queers in Fern Dell Park, I think he’s leaking my 459 reports to you to the Kafesjians, he’s driving around Niggertown like a crazy man, talking up how he’s the new—’

Restraining me: ‘And you’ve been trying to take care of it yourself.’

I pulled loose. ‘That’s right. Junior bought Wenzel’s stash, to quote unquote “set himself up as the new Southside dope kingpin.” One of the other men on that pickup order, *who I questioned extensively about Stemmons and Wenzel*, snitched both of them to Tommy K. I tailed Tommy down to Watts, and I was there when he took out Wenzel.’

Pure patrician frost: ‘I’ll send an IAD team down to seal those homicides. It was Wenzel and innocent bystanders?’

'Right.'

'Then I'll make sure *his* ID is kept away from the press, which will prevent that pickup order from coming back to haunt us.'

'You don't want the Feds getting ahold of this, so you'd better drop a blanket on the press right now.'

'Klein, you know that you can't approach—'

'I won't go near Tommy Kafesjian – *yet* – even though I saw him kill a man, even though you won't tell me why you're using me to operate that family.'

No rebuke, no comeback.

'Where's Stemmons now?'

'I don't know' – KILL HIM, JACK.

'Do you think they'll …'

'I don't *think* they'll clip him. They might put Dan Wilhite on it, but I don't think they'd clip an LAPD man.'

'I want a detailed confidential report on this within twenty-four hours.'

I crowded him – Bob G. watching. '*Nothing on paper*, are you fucking insane? And while I've got you, you should know that Junior's queer for Johnny Duhamel. Next time you see Dudley, tell him he's got a fruit heart-throb working for him.'

Exley blinked – simple loose talk shivved him. 'There must be a reason why you didn't tell me these things about Stemmons before.'

'You don't inspire friendly talks.'

'No, but you're much too smart to bypass authority when it can get you what you want.'

'Then help me get a bank writ. Junior has some dope stashed in safe-deposit boxes. Help me get it out before it embarrasses the Department.'

'Altruistic of you to be so concerned, but *you're* the lawyer, bank writs are Fed business and Welles Noonan is the U.S. Attorney here.'

'You could petition a Federal judge.'

'No.'

'No, *and?*'

'No, and right now I want you to go by that man Wenzel's place and toss it for evidence on his dealings with Junior Stemmons. If you find any, destroy it. *That* would be a service to the Department.'

'Chief, let *me* take care of Stemmons.'

'No. I'm going to call out every man in IAD. I'm going to wrap that Watts shootout up, find Stemmons and sequester him where the Feds can't find him.'

Junior ratting Glenda – wide screen/VistaVision/3-D—

'Will you quash *anything* incriminating that comes out on me and mine?'

'Yes. But don't cloak your self-serving motives in respect for the Department. Given what you are, it's pitifully transparent.'

Change-up: 'Has IAD been tailing me sporadically since the Johnson thing?'

'No. If you've been under surveillance, it's the Feds. I forgave you for *that* murder, remember?'

X-ray eyes – the fuck made me blink.

'Clean yourself up, Lieutenant. You smell like blood.'

I cruised by Wenzel's pad – J.C.'s car was parked outside. Call it: potential Tommy links snipped quick.

Shell-shock images:

The Feds bag Junior live. He plea bargains: queer exposure quashed in exchange for Dave Klein nailed. Junior, evidence-prof savant – all my killings, all my payoffs itemized.

Go-toss that insane hovel one more time—

I drove over, unlocked six padlocks to get in. Lights on, new horror: Shotgun shells in the oven.

Cherry bombs crammed down a toaster.

Razor blades choking a heat duct.

Do it:

Bag the spy camera.

Bag the gibberish notes.

Dump the furniture again – four chairs in – loose stitching. Rip, reach—

Cash tucked away – $56.

Gilette 187 carbons – Homicide-pilfered.

A new Glenda/Klein report – more detail:

> PRIOR TO HER FATAL SHOOTING AND STABBING OF GILETTE, MISS BLEDSOE FIRED TWO NON-WOUNDING SHOTS WITH THE AFOREMENTIONED .32 REVOLVER THAT SHE HAD PURCHASED FROM GEORGE AINGE. (SEE BALLISTICS REPORT # 114–55 ATTACHED TO THE HIGHLAND PARK SQUAD CASE FILE FOR DETAILS ON THE EXPENDED ROUNDS TAKEN FROM GILETTE'S BODY AND FOUND EMBEDDED IN HIS LIVING ROOM WALLS.) THAT REVOLVER IS NOW SAFE IN MY POSSESSION, LEFT WITH ME BY AINGE PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FROM LOS ANGELES. I HAVE TEST FIRED SIX ROUNDS FROM IT, AND BALLISTICS ANALYSIS OF THE ROUNDS INDICATES THAT THEY ARE *IDENTICAL* TO THE ROUNDS TAKEN FROM BOTH GILETTE'S BODY AND THE GILETTE PREMISES. IT IS PLASTIC WRAPPED AND THE SMOOTH PEARL GRIPS SUSTAINED RIGHT AND LEFT THUMB PRINTS WHICH MATCH TO ELEVEN COMPARISON POINTS THE PRINTS ON FILE FROM GLENDA BLEDSOE'S 1946 JUVENILE SHOPLIFTING ARREST.

I ripped it up, flushed it.

'Safe'/'wrapped'/powdered = safety-box-stashed.

I tapped the walls – no hollow spots.

I unzipped cusions – mousetraps set with Cheez Whiz snapped at me.

I yanked a loose floorboard – an electric dashboard Jesus glowed up iridescent.

I laughed—

99 per cent CRAAAZY Junior – 1 per cent sane. Sane evidence – methodical, logical, concise, succinct, plausible – assume death provisions rigged – willing the concise, logical, plausible, succinct evidence to its most logical, potentially vindictive heir: Howard Fucking Hughes.

Laughing – hard to breathe – Rice Krispies popping on the floor. Voices next door – why's that nice Mr Stemmons laughing so CRAAAZY?

I grabbed the phone, fumbled it, dialed.

'Hello? Dav—'

'Yeah, it's me.'

'Where are you? What happened with Doug?'

Ancelet – skewed time – ancient stuff. 'I'll tell you when I see you.'

'Then come over now.'

'I can't.'

‘Why?’

‘I’m waiting someplace. There’s an off chance the guy who lives here might show up.’

‘Then leave him a note and have him call you at my place.’

Don’t laugh. ‘I can’t.’

‘You sound very strange.’

‘I’ll tell you about it when I see you.’

Silence – line crackle – Miciak hovered.

‘David, do you …’

‘Don’t say his name, and if it hasn’t been in the papers or on TV, figure no.’

‘And when it’s yes, I know what to do.’

‘You always know what to do.’

‘And you’ll always push me for where I learned it.’

‘I’m a detective.’

‘No, you’re this man who implements things. And everything about *me* can’t be explained.’

‘But I’ll—’

‘But you’ll always try – so come over and try now.’

‘I can’t. Glenda, tell me things. Distract me.’

Hear it – match flare, exhale. ‘Well, Herman Gerstein came by the set today and raised hell with Mickey. It seems that he’s seen rushes, and he’s afraid Sid Frizell’s making the movie too gory. Also quote, “This vampire incest routine might get that goddamn goyishe Legion of Decency on our ass,” unquote. To top that off, Touch told me that Rock gave him the crabs, and Sid’s been screening outtakes from this stag film he’s shooting down in Lynwood. Not the most attractive performers, but the crew seemed to enjoy it.’

I checked a window – dawn coming. ‘I should keep this line open.’

‘Tonight then?’

‘I’ll call you.’

‘Be careful.’

‘Always.’

I hung up, grabbed a chair and drifted someplace. Vampires there: Tommy, Pops chasing Meg with his fly down. Blank sleep, hands on me – ‘Yeah, he’s the boss at Ad Vice.’

‘Lieutenant, wake up.’

Up thrashing.

Two prototype IA men, guns out.

‘Sir, Junior Stemmons is dead.’

26

CODE 3 TO Bido Lito's – two cars – no explanation. Spooked: Jack said he'd lose the corpse.

Side streets, there:

Reporters, prowl cars, Plymouths – Feds snapping zoom-lens pix. Civilians milling around – no crowd ropes yet.

I parked and followed a morgue team. Feds talking – duck by, listen:

'… and their pictures weren't in our Intelligence files. These were unknown, most likely out-of-town hoods seen servicing the coin machines here and at a dozen other Southside locations.'

'Frank—'

'Please, just listen. Yesterday, Noonan got an anonymous tip on a garage down here. We hit it, and we found slot machines up the wazoo. *But* – it was just a separate garage on a dirty little street, and we can't trace the ownership to save our lives.'

Slot intrigue – fuck it—

I ran inside. Heavy brass: Exley, Dudley Smith, Inspector George Stemmons, Sr Lab men swarming, Dick Carlisle, Mike Breuning.

Voodoo eyes strafed me – Lester Lake's savior. They flipped stiff fingers surreptitious – Breuning kissed his.

Flashbulb pops. Stemmons shouting, close to tears.

Morgue jockeys pushed a gurney in. I chased them – past the bandstand, back hallways – a slot room.

FUCK—

Junior dead – fetal-curled on the floor.

Junkie-tied – an arm tourniquet – rigor-locked teeth on a sash cord.

A spike bent off a mainline; bulging eyes. Short sleeves – needle tracks and vein scars exposed.

A bluesuit, gawking: 'I checked his pockets. He had a key to the front door on him.'

A lab man: 'The janitor got here early and found him. Jesus, this kind of grief right in the middle of the Fed thing.'

The coroner, mind reader: 'It's either a legitimate OD or a very skillful hotshot. Those marks are proof of the man's addiction. My God, a Los Angeles police officer.'

Jack Woods – never.

Ray Pinker nudged me. 'Dave, Chief Exley wants to see you out back.'

I double-timed it out to the lot. Exley was standing by Junior's car. 'Interpret this.'

'Interpret shit. It's real or it's the Kafesjians.'

'IA said they found you asleep in Stemmons' apartment.'

'That's right.'

'What were you doing there?'

'I drove over to Steve Wenzel's place and saw J.C.'s car in front. Junior's apartment was close, and I thought he might show up. What happened with Watts?'

'Five dead, and no eyewitnesses. It was dark when Tommy Kafesjian fired, is that correct?'

'Yeah, he had some nigger kill the lights. Did you—'

'Wenzel was the only white victim, and the state of his body precluded an early ID. Apparently, the shotgun rounds provoked a reaction from a number of independently armed men inside the club. Bob Gallaudet and I went down there and mollified the press. We told them all the victims were Negroes and promised them passes to the Chavez Ravine evictions if they soft-pedaled the story. Of course they agreed.'

'Yeah, but you can bet the Feds were monitoring our radio calls.'

'They were there taking pictures, but so far as they know it was just some sort of glorified Negro altercation.'

'And since they're charging us with giving shine killings the go-by, you sent a dozen Homicide dicks over for appearances.'

'Correct, and Bob and I spoke to an influential Negro minister. He has political aspirations, and he promised to talk to the victims' loved ones. While he's at it, he's going to urge them not to talk to the Feds.'

Junior's car – grime-streaked windows, filthy. 'What did you find here?'

'Narcotics, canned food and homosexual literature. IA's impounding it.'

Noise inside the club. Check the window: Stemmons, Sr, kicking chairs. 'What about Junior?'

'We'll tell the press it was accidental death. IA will investigate, very discreetly.'

'And steer clear of the Kafesjians.'

'They'll be dealt with in time. Do you think Narco could have done this?'

Stemmons sobbing.

'Klein—'

'No. Sure, they could rig a hotshot, but I don't think it's them. I'm leaning toward a legit OD.'

'Why?'

'A patrolman said Junior had a front-door key in his pocket. He was a doped-up crazy fuck, and this place is a known Tommy K. dope drop and hangout. If they were going to kill him, they wouldn't have left the body here.'

'What kind of condition did you find his apartment in?'

'You wouldn't believe me if I told you, and you should let me forensic it. I aced forensics undergrad, and I trashed the place and probably left prints up the ying-yang.'

'Do it, then wipe it. And call Pacific Bell and get his phone records sealed. Now, last night you said Stemmons had dope stored in safe-deposit boxes.'

'Yes.'

'Do you know which banks?'

'I've got his bank books and the box keys.'

'Good, and you're an attorney, so I'll go along with your "dope stash" fantasy and tell you to study your law books and figure out a strategy to bypass Welles Noonan and secure a bank writ.'

'*Fantasy?*'

Sighing: 'Stemmons has dirt on you. It's most likely stored in those boxes. He was extorting you on some level, or you would have dealt with him in your inimitable strongarm fashion before this lunacy of his extended so far out of control.'

NOW, SPILL IT:

'He had a clipping file on *you*. It was hidden with some Personnel forms on Johnny Duhamel. Last night I made a bullshit comment on Duhamel that jacked your blood pressure up about twenty points, so don't you fucking patronize me.'

'Describe the file' – no reaction, pure frost.

'All your Bureau cases. Thorough – Junior was as good a paperwork evidence man as I've ever seen. I broke into his apartment last week and found it. *Last night* it was gone.'

'Interpret.'

I winked Dudley-style. 'Let's just say it's nice to know that my good buddy Ed has got a personal stake in this too. And don't worry on Kafesjian 459 PC – I'm in way too deep to stop.'

Window view – Papa Stemmons grieving. 'You should calm him down, Eddie. We don't want him screwing up this personal thing of ours.'

'Call me after your forensic' – about-face, watch him go.

Window view:

Exley waltzing up to Stemmons – no handshake, no embrace. Crack the window, listen:

'Your son … forbid you to interfere or talk to the press … spare you the pain of his pervert tendencies made public.'

Stemmons weaving, grief-crazy.

27

CAR RADIO DOWNTOWN:

KMPC: Policeman Found Dead at Southside Jazz Club – LAPD Says Heart Attack.

KGFJ: After-Hours Shootout! Five Negroes Dead!

Press blanket – Exley working fast.

Nothing on Harold John Miciak.

Police-band check – dipshit cops ID'ing Junior by name.

The Bureau, my office – a run for clean clothes. A locker-room shave and shower – keyed up, exhausted.

Down the hall to Personnel – I requisitioned Junior's print abstract. Furtive: I grabbed Johnny Duhamel's.

The lab – I bagged on evidence kit and a camera. A call to PC Bell – Exley's name dropped.

Do this:

Compile all Gladstone 4–0629 calls going back twenty days.

List the names and addresses of all people called.

Hold all George Stemmons, Jr, records – awaiting Chief Exley's court order.

Call *me* at that number – with full results – inside four hours.

Car radio back out:

Watts killings – Negro preacher blames liquor – 'the enslaver of our people.'

Exley press-leak fantasia:

During a hot pursuit through a closed-down Southside nightclub, Sergeant George Stemmons, Jr, suffers a fatal heart attack. The robber escapes; there will be no autopsy – it violates the dead officer's religion.

No Miciak.

No Fed stuff.

Blues guarding Junior's door – I locked them out and worked.

I took photos:

Booby traps/cornflake piles/sloth.

I bagged fibers, listed property.

Print dusting next – tedious, slow. I got Junior himself – multiple sets – ten point matched to the abstract. The living room/hallway/kitchen – odd latents, featuring scar ridges. An easy make – me – Pops caught me stealing and burned my fingers.

Three rooms down – I wiped them clean. The inside doorway – a new set, a match: Duhamel, eight comparison points. Extrapolate it: Johnny scared to enter.

I wiped them. The phone rang – PC Bell, responding.

I copied:

10/28/58 – BR 6-8499 – Mr. & Mrs. George Stemmons, 4128 Dresden, Pasadena.

10/30/58 – BR 6–8499 – ditto.
11/2/58 – MA 6–1147 – Administrative Vice Division, LAPD.
11/2/58 – Mom/Dad.
11/3/58, 11/3/58, 11/4/58, 11/4/58 – Ad Vice.
11/5/58, 11/5/58, 11/6/58 – GR 1–1790 – John Duhamel, 10477 Oleander, Eagle Rock.
11/6/58, 11/6/58, 11/7/58, 11/9/58 – AX 4–1192 – Victory Motel, Gardena.
11/9/58 – MU 8–5888 – pay phone, 81st/Central – Los Angeles.
11/9/58 – MU 7–4160 – pay phone, 79th/Central – Los Angeles.
11/9/58 – MU 6–1171 – pay phone, 67th/Central – Los Angeles.
11/9/58 – Victory Motel.
11/9/58 – ditto.
11/9/58 – Duhamel's pad.
11/10/58 – WE 5–1243 – pay phone, Olympic/La Brea – Los Angeles.
11/10/58 – Victory Motel.
11/10/58, 11/10/58, 11/12–58 – KL 6–1885 – pay phone, Aviation/Hibiscus – Lynwood.
11/16/58 – HO 4–6833 – Glenda Bledsoe, 2489½ N. Mount Airy, Hollywood.

Writer's cramp – interpret the data:

Mom-Dad/work early on – straight biz. Duhamel calls next – Junior going crazy. The Victory Motel – Mobster Squad HQ – Smith's strongarm spot/Johnny on duty.

Pay phones then – Darktown locations – say dope biz, maybe talks with Steve Wenzel. A non-sequitur phone booth – Olympic and La Brea – the Kafesjian pad six blocks south. Crazy Junior – THEY said don't call the house.

11/12 to 11/16 – no calls, Junior INSANE. 11/16 – *my* late Glenda call.

Logical, but:

Lynwood pay-phone calls = ????

Exhaustion-fried – I dusted the bed rail.

Fuck—

Interlocked hand spread – laced fingers gripping. Sweat smears, viable latents: and *no* Johnny points. Obvious Junior prints linked with unknown prints: some ham-handed faggot.

Wipe them – *bbring bbring* – grab the phone, shut the bed out.

'Exley?'

'It's John Duhamel.'

'*What the – how did you know I was here?*'

'I heard a radio call about Stemmons. I drove by his place, and the patrolmen told me you were inside. I – look, I need to talk to you.'

ADRENALINE – my head buzzed.

'Where are you?'

'No … meet me tonight.'

'Come on, *now*.'

'No, we'll make it eight o'clock. 4980 Spindrift. It's in Lynwood.'

'*Why there?*'

'Evidence.'

'Johnny, tell me—'

Click – dial tone – tap the button – Exley, fast.

NO.

Don't – he's hinked on Johnny – just maybe.

Option call – I dialed MA 4–8630.

'Office of the District Attorney.'

'Dave Klein for Bob Gallaudet.'

'I'm sorry, sir. Mr. Gallaudet is in a staff meeting.'

'Tell him it's urgent.'

Transfer clicks, 'Dave, what can I do for you?'

'A favor.'

'Name it – you've shot me a few recently.

'I need a look at an IAD personal file.'

'Is this an Ed innovation? IA's very much his cadre.'

'Yeah, it's an Exley thing. When a man makes the Detective Bureau, IAD does a very thorough background check. I'm meeting a man tonight, and I need more of a handle on him. It's about the Darktown trouble, and you could get a look at the file with no questions.'

'You're doing this behind Ed's back.'

'Yeah, like those Kafesjian reports I gave you.'

A pause – seconds ticking. 'Touché, so call me back in a few hours. It can't leave the Bureau, but I'll oblige you with a synopsis. What's the man's name?'

'John Duhamel.'

'Schoolboy Johnny? I lost a bundle on his pro debut. Care to enlighten me?'

'When it's over, Bob. Thanks.'

'Well, quid pro quo for now. And next time I see you, let me tell you about the meeting Ed and I had with this colored minister. Strange bedfellows, huh?'

That bed – laced hands. 'The fucking strangest.'

28

SURPLUS ADRENALINE – IT jacked me up to peep the Kafesjians. I staked their house from three doors down – no bedroom-window strip show. Nobody peeper-chasing – three cars on the lawn.

Stakeout time killer – my car radio:

Junior eulogized – LAPD chaplain Dudley Smith: ‘He was a grand lad. He was a dedicated crimefighter, and it is a cruel caprice of fate that so young a man should suffer cardiac arrest while chasing a common robber.’

Welles Noonan on KNX: ‘… and I’m not saying that the surprising death of an allegedly healthy young policeman is connected to the other five deaths that have occurred within the past twenty-four hours in South Central Los Angeles, but it seems curious to me that the Los Angeles Police Department should be so eager to explain it all away and be done with it.’

Smart Noonan – shit draws flies.

4:00 – Tommy sax-honks – my cue to leave. My own music juicing me – I was closing in on SOMETHING.

Early dusk – clouds, rain. A phone booth stop – Bob out, Riegle in. Bum station check news – no suicides clicked in PEEPER’S MOTHER.

Up to the set – hard rain – no shooting in progress. Luck: her trailer light on. A sprint – in the door dodging puddles.

Glenda was smoking, distracted. Sprawled on the bed – no rush to touch me.

Easy guess: ‘Miciak?’

She nodded. ‘Bradley Milteer came by. Apparently he and Herman Gerstein know each other independent of his work for Hughes. He told Herman that Miciak’s body and car were found, and that all of Hughes’ contract players were going to be discreetly questioned. Mickey overheard him tell Herman that detectives from the Malibu Sheriff’s Station would be by to talk to me.’

‘That’s all you heard?’

‘No. Mickey said the Sheriff’s are keeping their investigation under wraps to avoid embarrassing Howard.’

‘Did he mention the Hollywood Division LAPD? A killer named the Wino Will-o-the-Wisp?’

Glenda blew smoke rings. ‘No. I thought – I mean *we* thought Hughes would just push this under the table.’

‘No, *we wished* it. And there’s no evidence that Miciak was killed at…’

‘At the *fuck pad* where Howard Hughes used to *fuck* me and the man I killed wanted to *fuck* me?’

Stop her/make her think. ‘You bought it, and now you’re paying for it. Now you act your way out.'

'Direct me. Tell me something to make it easy.'

Touch me, tell me things.

'You say you were home alone that night. You don't flirt with the officers or try to charm them. You subtly drop that Hughes is a lech and you can spill the goods on it. You reach for whatever it is that you won't tell me about that gave you the stones to … oh shit, Glenda.'

'Okay' – just like that – 'Okay.'

I kissed her – dripping wet. 'Is there a phone I can use?'

'Outside Mickey's trailer. You know, if I could cry on cue, I would.'

'Don't, please.'

'You're leaving?'

'I have to meet a man.'

'Later, then?'

'Yeah, I'll come by your place.'

'I won't expect much. You look like you haven't slept in a week.'

Raining buckets – I ducked under Mickey's trailer awning. The phone worked – I dialed Gallaudet's private line.

He picked up himself. 'Hello?'

'Its me, Bob.'

'Dave, hi, and quid pro quo fulfilled. Are you listening?'

'Shoot.'

'John Gerald Duhamel, age twenty-five. As far as IA personal files go, not much – I checked a few others for a comparison.'

'And?'

'And aside from the interesting combination of a cum laude engineering degree and an amateur boxing career, not much of note.'

'Family?'

'An only child. His parents were supposedly rich, but died in a plane crash and left the kid broke while he was still in college, and under known associates we've got the somewhat dicey Reuben Ruiz and his sticky-fingered brothers, but of course Reuben's on our side now. The kid apparently has an undiscriminating appetite for poontang, which I did myself when I was twenty-five. There were unsubstantiated rumors that he tanked his one and only pro fight, and that's all the news that's fit to print.'

No bells rang. 'Thanks, Bob.'

'I'll never high-hat you, son – I remember those crib sheets too well.'

'Thanks.'

'Take care son.'

I hung up, took a breath, ran—

'Dave! Over here!'

Lightning glow lit up the voice – Chick Vecchio under a tarp hang. Bums behind him, sucking T-Bird.

I dashed over – time to kill.

Chick: 'Mickey's at home today.'

Glenda – fifty-fifty he knew. 'I should have known. Fuck, this rain.'

'The *Herald* said two inches. The *Herald* also said that kid partner of yours had a heart attack. Why don't I believe the *Herald?*'

'Because your kid brother told you my kid partner shook him down in Fern Dell

Park.'

'Yeah, and I don't feature twenty-nine-year-old extortionist cops having heart attacks.'

'Chick, *come on*.'

'All right, all right. Touch told me he told you about him and Stemmons in Fern Dell, but there's something he didn't tell you.'

Preempt him: 'You, Touch and Pete Bondurant are planning your own shakedown gig. It's sex, and it's cough up or *Hush-Hush* gets the pictures. Stemmons got it out of Touch, so now you're afraid that *we* know.'

'Hey, *you* know.'

I lied: 'Stemmons told me. The regular Bureau doesn't have a clue, and if they knew they'd bury it to protect the kid's reputation. Your gig's covered.'

'Copacetic, but I still don't feature no heart attack.'

'Off the record?'

'Uh-huh, and on the QT, like *Hush-Hush*.'

I cupped a whisper. 'The kid was fucking around with J.C. and Tommy Kafesjian. He was popping H, and he OD'd or took a hotshot. It's a toilet job, and it's headed for a whitewash.'

Chick cupped a whisper. 'Feature the K. boys are not to screw around with.'

'Feature I'm starting to think that Ed Exley's going to take those humps down two seconds after the Fed heat peters out.'

'Which may be a while, the way things are looking.'

Wind, rain. 'Chick, what's with Mickey? I saw some new guys moving slots out of the Rick Rack, with Feds right across the street taking pictures.'

Chick shrugged. 'Mickey's Mickey. He's this hebe hardhead you can't talk sense to half the time.'

'The whole thing played funny. A couple of the slot guys were Mex, and Mickey never hires spics. I tipped him on the Feds early on, but he still won't pull his metal.'

'Touch and me are staying out of all this Southside business. It sounds to me like Mickey's hiring freelance.'

Winos pissing on the spaceship. 'Yeah, and maybe cut-rate, like your crew here. Does he need money that bad? I know he's buffered, but sooner or later the Feds will pin those machines on him.'

'Off the record?'

'Sure.'

'Then feature Mickey's paying off a syndicate loan with his slot percentages, so he's got to let the machines linger a bit. I guess he knows it's risky, but he's scuffling.'

'Yeah – "He's a scrapper, and scrappers always get results."'

'I said it and I meant it.'

'And he thinks he'll get a district gambling franchise.'

'Feature that bill could pass.'

'Feature the AG's office under Gas Chamber Bob Gallaudet? Feature him granting *Mickey Cohen* a franchise?'

Smirking: 'Feature I don't think you came here to see Mickey.'

Wet ground – the spaceship capsized – bums cheered. 'I hope this movie makes money.'

'So does Mickey. Hey, where you going?'

'Lynwood.'

'Hot date?'

‘Yeah, with a pretty-boy strongarm cop.’
‘I’ll tell Touch – he’ll be jealous.’
Adrenaline – rain peaked it.

29

LYNWOOD – WIND, RAIN – streets running crisscross and diagonal. Dark – hard to see; Aviation and Hibiscus – that pay phone one the corner.

Tombstone laughs – Jack's call reprised:

'He kicked natural or got snuffed by somebody else? Come on, let me redeem myself. Say Welles Noonan for that same ten?'

Stucco pads – quasi slums; empty bungalow courts. Spindrift – the 4900 block – I skimmed numbers.

24, 38, 74. 4980: a two-deck stucco dive, abandoned.

One light on – downstairs left, the door open.

I walked up.

An empty living room – cobwebs, dusty floor – Schoolboy Johnny standing there calm.

No jacket, empty holster – trust me.

Trust shit – watch his hands.

'Are you grieving for Junior, Johnny?'

'What do you know about Stemmons and me?'

'I know he made you for the fur heist. I know that other stuff doesn't count.'

'Other stuff' made him blink. Ten feet apart – watch his hands.

'He had evidence on you, too. He felt terrible things for certain people, and he collected evidence on them to even things out.'

'We can work out a deal. I don't care about the fur job.'

'You don't know the half – eye flickers craaaazy.

Footsteps behind me.

My hands pinned/my mouth cupped – smothered/my sleeves rolled up/stabbed.

Walking air – tunnel vision – peripheral grass. Tingles/flutters up my groin/toasty warm.

Side doorways, shoes, trouser legs flapping.

Elbow dipped, shoes on concrete, right turn—

A door opened – warm air, light. Mirrored walls, herringbone patterns up close. Somebody stretched me prone.

Light overhead – snowflake blurry.

Whir, click/click – cylinder noise, like a camera. Sliding on my knees – white wax paper under me.

Propped up.

Tape strips on my eyes – slapped sticky blind.

Somebody hit me.

Somebody poked me.

Somebody burned me – hot/cold sizzles on my neck.

Not so tingly/toasty warm – no flutters up my groin.

Somebody pulled the tape off – sticky red blood in my eyes.

Cylinder *click-clicks*.

Propped up on white wax paper. Something in my right hand, heavy and shiny: MY souvenir Jap sword.

Shoved, focused in:

Johnny Duhamel naked, holding MY gun.

Burned: hot/cold – my neck, my hands.

Burned raw – Johnny kneeling, glassy eyes, taunting me.

Burned – steam in my face – Johnny taunting me – blue slant eyes.

Get him, cut him – wild swings, misses.

Johnny weaving – grip down, swing two-handed.

Miss, hit, miss – pale skin ripped, tattoos gouting blood. Hit, rip, rip – an arm gone, socket spray. Johnny jabbering Jap singsong, blue slant eyes—

Miss, miss – Jap Johnny prone, twitching crazy. Sight in – this chest tattoo – split it, split him—

Miss, miss – wax paper shredding.

Hit, jerk down – spine snaps/blade drag/pull – red EVERYWHERE.

Gasping – hard to breathe – blood in my mouth.

Somebody stabbed me – I went tingly/toasty warm/flutters up my groin.

Fading out: flamethrower burns toasty nice, Jap surrender.

Floating toasty black. *Tick tick* somewhere – a clock – I counted seconds. Six thousand – drifting off – ten thou four hundred.

Jap zeros gliding, voices:

Meg: Pops never touched me – David, don't hurt him. The peeper: Daddy, Daddy. Lucille: He's *my* Daddy.

Jap zeros strafing Darktown. *Tick tick* – fourteen thousand odd.

Toasty black.

Blurry: gray herringbones, shoes.

Wall mirrors topsy-turvy; Jap zeros. I tried to wave – stupid – taped-down arms wouldn't let me.

A chair – taped in snug.

Projector clicks.

White light, a white screen.

Movie time – Pops and Meg? – don't let him grope her.

I thrashed – futile – sticky tape, no give.

A white screen.

Cut to:

Johnny Duhamel naked.

Cut to:

Dave Klein swinging a sword.

Zooming in – the sword grip: SSGT D.D. Klein USMC Saipan 7/24/43.

Cut to:

Johnny begging – 'Please' – mute sound.

Cut to:

Dave Klein thrashing – stabbing, missing.

Cut to:

A severed arm twitching on wax paper.

Cut to:

Dave Klein, gutting motions – Johnny D. coughing entrails.

Cut to:

Lens glass dripping red; a finger flicking spine chips off the surface.

I screamed—

A needle stab cut me off mute.

Fading in – moving – night – windshield blur.

Niggertown – South Central.

Chest pains, neck pains. Beard stubble, no holster.

Swerving.

Sirens *whoop whoop*.

Burn aches.

Disinfectant stink – somebody washed me.

Where/what/who – Johnny Duhamel begging.

No.

Not for real.

THEY made me do it.

Please – I didn't like it.

Sirens, flames up ahead.

30

FIRE TRUCKS, PROWL cars. Beard stubble – say a day's worth. Smoke, fire – Bido Lito's flaming skyward.

A roadblock – swing right – I jumped the curb. Gray suit camera men right there – monsters.

Bumper crunch, this sign: 'Self-Determination Is Yours With the Prophet Muhammed.'

Resting now – a nice soft dashboard. Fading out: 'That's Klein. Grab him.'

'I think he's got a concussion.'

'He looked drugged to me.'

'I don't think this is legal.'

'It's dicey, but it's legal. We found him blacked out near an arson homicide scene, and he's a major suspect in our overall investigation. Mr Noonan has a source in the Coroner's Office. He told him that Klein's partner died of a heroin overdose, and just look at this man's condition.'

'Jim, for the written record in case this reaches litigation.'

'Shoot.'

'All right. It's 3:40 A.M., November 19, 1958, and I am Special Agent Willis Shipstad. With me are Special Agents James Henstell and William Milner. We are at the downtown Federal Building with Lieutenant David Klein of the Los Angeles Police Department. Lieutenant Klein was picked up in a stuporous condition one hour ago at 67th Street and Central Avenue in South Los Angeles. He was unconscious and in a disheveled state. We brought him here to assure that he receives proper medical attention.'

'That's a riot.'

'Jim, strike Bill's comment. Resuming, Lieutenant Klein, whom our Intelligence records indicate to be forty-two years old, has sustained possible head injuries. His hands and neck have been burned, the scarring forensically consistent with burns caused by dry ice. There are bloodstains on his shirt and there is friction tape stuck to his jacket. He is unarmed. We properly parked his 1957 Plymouth police vehicle at the intersection where we found him. Prior to interrogation, Lieutenant Klein will be offered attention.'

Propped up in a straight-backed chair.

Feds.

'Jim, have this typed and see that Mr. Noonan gets a carbon.'

A sweat hole. Will Shipstad, two G-men. A table, chairs, a steno rig.

Shipstad: 'He's coming to. Jim, get Mr. Noonan.'

One Fed walked. I stretched – kinks and aches head to toe.

Shipstad: 'You know me, Lieutenant. We met at the Embassy Hotel.'

'I remember.'

'This is my partner, Special Agent Milner. Do you know where you are?'

My Jap sword – wide screen/color.

'Do you want to see a doctor?'

'No.'

Milner – fat, cheap cologne. 'Are you sure? You're looking a little raggedy-ass.'

'No.'

Shipstad: 'Witness that Mr. Klein refused medical attention. What about an attorney? Being one yourself, you know that we have the right to hold you for questioning.'

'I waive.'

'You're sure?'

Johnny – Jesus God.

'I'm sure.'

'Bill, witness that Mr. Klein was offered and refused legal counsel.'

'Why am I here?'

Milner: 'Look at yourself. The question should be where have you been?'

Shipstad: 'We picked you up at 67th and Central. A short time prior to that, the Bido Lito's club was arsoned. We had agents in the vicinity on general serveillance, and one of them heard a witness talking to LAPD detectives. The witness said he was walking by Bido Lito's shortly after the club closed for the night and saw a broken front window. Seconds later the place caught fire. That certainly sounds like a firebombing to me.'

Milner: 'Three people died in that fire. So far, we're assuming it was the club's two owners and the cleanup man. Lieutenant, do you know how to concoct a Molotov cocktail?'

Shipstad: 'We're not suggesting that *you* torched Bido Lito's. Frankly, the condition we picked you up in suggests that you were incapable of lighting a cigarette. Lieutenant, look how this appears. Two nights ago, five people were killed at an after-hours club in Watts, and a somewhat reliable source told us that Ed Exley and Bob Gallaudet exerted a great deal of pressure to keep the details under wraps. *Now*, the following morning your colleague Sergeant George Stemmons, Jr, is found dead at Bido Lito's. Chief Exley feeds the press a song and dance about a heart attack, when we've heard that it was most likely a self-inflicted heroin overdose. *Now*, forty-odd hours after *that*, Bido Lito's is torched, and *you* drive by not long after in a state that indicates narcotic-induced intoxication. Lieutenant, do you see how all this appears?'

Kafesjian setup. Johnny D. gouting blood—

Milner: 'Klein, are you with us?'

'Yes.'

'Do you routinely use narnotics?'

'No.'

'Oh, just occasionally?'

'Never.'

'How about submitting to a blood test?'

'How about releasing me on a prima facie evidence writ?'

Milner: 'Hey, he went to law school.'

Shipstad: 'Where were you coming from when we picked you up?'

'I refuse to answer.'

Milner: 'Sure, on the grounds that it might incriminate you.'

'No, on the grounds of nonincriminating information disclosure as detailed in *Indiana* v. *Harkness, Bodine, et al.*, 1943.'

'Hey, he went to law school. You got anything to add to that, hotshot?'

'Yeah, you're a fat piece of shit and your wife fucks Rin-Tin-Tin.'

Cardiac red – fat shitbird. Shipstad: '*Enough.* Lieutenant, where were you?'

'Refuse to answer.'

'What happened to your service revolver?'

'Refuse to answer.'

'Can you explain the unkempt condition we found you in?'

'Refuse to answer.'

'Can you explain the blood on your shirt?'

Johnny begging—'

'Refuse to answer.'

Milner: 'Something getting to you, hotshot?'

Shipstad: 'Where were you?'

'Refuse to answer.'

'Did you torch Bido Lito's?'

'No.'

'Do you know who did?'

'No.'

'Did the LAPD do it as revenge for Stemmons' death?'

'No, you're crazy.'

'Did Inspector George Stemmons, Sr, order the torch?'

'I don't – no, you're crazy.'

'Did *you* torch Bido Lito's to avenge your partner's death?'

'No' – getting light-headed.

Milner: 'We don't smell liquor on your breath.'

Shipstad: 'Were you under the influence of narcotics when we found you?'

'No.'

'Do you use narcotics?'

'No' – speaker lights on the wall – listeners somewhere.

'Were you forcibly administered narcotics?'

'No' – a good guess – JOHNNY CO-STAR. The door opened – Welles Noonan stepped in.

Milner walked out. Noonan: 'Good morning, Mr. Klein.'

Jack Kennedy hair – reeking of hairspray. 'I said, "Good morning."'

JOHNNY BEGGING.

'Klein, are you listening to me?'

'I heard you.'

'Good. I had a few questions before we release you.'

'Ask them.'

'I will. And I look forward to sparring with you. I remember that precedent you upbraided Special Agent Milner with, so I think we'd be evenly matched.'

'How do you get your hair to do that?'

'I'm not here to share my hairdressing secrets with you. Now, I'm going—'

'Cocksucker, you spit in my face.'

'Yes. And you were at the very least criminally negligent in the matter of Sanderline Johnson's death. So far, these are—'

'Ten minutes or I call Jerry Geisler for habeas.'

'He'll never find a judge.'

‘Ten minutes or I engage Kanarek, Brown and Mattingly to file nuisance claims that entail immediate appearances.’

‘Mr Klein, did you—’

‘Call me “Lieutenant”.’

‘Lieutenant, how well do you know the history of the Los Angeles Police Department?’

‘Get to it, don’t lead me.’

‘Very well. Who initiated what I’ll euphemistically describe as the “arangement” between the LAPD and Mr J.C. Kafesjian?’

‘What “arrangement”?’

‘Come, *Lieutenant*. You know you despise them as much as we do.’

Lead him, cut him slack. ‘I think it was Chief Davis, the chief before Horrall. Why?’

‘And this was circa 1936, ’37?’

‘Around then, I think. I joined the Department in ’38.’

‘Yes, and I hope that the fact that your pension is secure hasn’t given you a false sense of invulnerability. Lieutenant, Captain Daniel Wilhite is the liaison between the Kafesjian family and Narcotics Division, is he not?’

‘Refuse to answer.’

‘I understand, brother-officer loyalty. Has Wilhite operated the Kafesjians since the beginning of your arrangement?’

‘The way I understand it, Chief Davis brought the Kafesjians in and operated them until Horrall took over as chief late in ’39. Dan Wilhite didn’t join the Department until mid-’39, so he couldn’t have been their original operator, if he has fucking indeed *ever* been their operator.’

Fey aristocrat: ‘Oh, come, Lieutenant. You know Wilhite and the Kafesjians are near-ancient allies.’

‘Refuse to comment. But keep asking me about the Kafesjians.’

‘Yes, we’ve heard they’ve piqued your interest.’

JOHNNY BEGGING.

Shipstad: ‘You’re looking queasy. Do you want a drink of—’

Noonan: ‘Did you tell Mickey Cohen to remove his slot and vending machines? He was lax, you know. We’ve got pictures of his men servicing them.’

‘Refuse to answer.’

‘We’ve recently turned a major witness, you know.’

Don’t bite.

‘A *major* witness.’

‘Your clock’s ticking.’

‘Yes, it is. Will, do you think Mr. Klein torched Bido Lito’s?’

‘No, sir, I don’t.’

‘He can’t or won’t account for his whereabouts.’

‘Sir, I’m not so sure he knows himself.’

I stood up – my legs almost went. ‘I’ll take a cab back to my car.’

‘Nonsense, Special Agent Shipstad will drive you. Will, I’m curious as to where the lieutenant has spent the past day or so.’

‘Sir, my guess is either a hell of a woman or a run-in with a grizzly bear.’

‘Aptly put, and the blood on his shirt suggests the latter. Do you know how I suggest we find out?’

‘No, sir.’

‘We monitor Southside homicide calls and see which ones Edmund Exley tries to obfuscate.'

'I like it, sir.'

'I thought you would. It's empirically valid, since we both know that Dave here murdered Sanderline Johnson. I think it's a family enterprise. Dave does the scut work, sister Meg invests the money. How's this for an adage? "The family that slays together stays—"'

I jumped him – my legs caved – Shipstead pried me off. Thumbs on my carotid, hauled across the hallway blacking out—

Locked in, snapping back fast – wide awake quick. A four-by-six space – quilt walls – no chairs, no table. A wall speaker outlet and mirrored spyhole – adjoining-room access.

A padded cell/watching post – scope it out:

Scarred glass – some distortion. Audio squelch – I slapped the speaker – better. Check the mirror: Milner and Abe Voldrich next door.

Milner: '… what I'm saying is that either J.C. and Tommy will be indicted, or the publicity they get when we make the grand jury minutes available to the press will ruin them. Narco is going to be cut off at the knees, and I think Ed Exley knows it himself, because he has taken no measures to protect them or to sequester evidence. Abe, without Narco the Kafesjians are just a bunch of stupes running a marginally profitable dry-cleaning business.'

Voldrich: 'I … am … not … an informant.'

Milner: 'No, you're a fifty-one-year-old Lithuanian refugee with a green card we can revoke at any time. Abe, do you want to live behind the Iron Curtain? Do you know what the Commies would do to you?'

'I am not a snitch.'

'No, but you'd like to be. You're letting hints drop. You told me you dried marijuana bales in one of the E-Z Kleen dryers.'

'Yes, and I told you J.C., Tommy and Madge didn't know about it.'

Cigarette smoke – blurred faces.

Milner: 'You know that J.C. and Tommy are scum. You always go to lengths to differentiate Madge from them. She's a nice woman, and you're an essentially decent man who fell in with bad people.'

Voldrich: 'Madge is a very fine woman who for many reasons … well, she just needs Tommy and J.C.'

Milner: 'Did Tommy clip a drunk driver who killed a Narco cop's daughter?'

'I stand on that Fifth Amendment thing.'

'You and the whole goddamn world – they never should have broadcast the Kefauver hearings. Abe—'

'Agent Milner, please charge me or release me.'

'You got your phone call, and you elected to call your sister. If you'd called J.C., he would have found a smart lawyer to get you released on a writ. I think you want to do the right thing. Mr Noonan explained the immunity agreement to you, and he's promised you a Federal service reward. I think you want it. Mr Noonan wants to take three major witnesses to the grand jury, one of them you. And the nice thing is that if all three of you testify, everyone who could conceivably hurt you will be indicted and convicted.'

'I am not an informant.'

'Abe, did Tommy and J.C. kill Sergeant George Stemmons, Jr?'

'No' – hoarse.

'He died from a heroin overdose. Tommy and J.C. could have faked something like that.'

'No – I mean I don't know.'

'Which one?'

'I mean no, I don't think so.'

'Abe, you're not exactly a poker face. Now, along those lines, we know that Tommy plays his horn at Bido Lito's. Is he tight there?'

'Fifth Amendment.'

'That's TV for you. Kids break a window, they plead the Fifth. Abe, how well did the Kafesjians know Junior Stemmons?'

'Fifth Amendment.'

'Stemmons and a Lieutenant David Klein were bothering them about a burglary that occurred at their house two weeks ago. What do you know about that?'

'Fifth Amendment.'

'Did they try to shake down the Kafesjians for money?'

'No – I mean Fifth Amendment.'

'Abe, you're an open book. Come on, Stemmons was a junkie, and Klein's as dirty as cops get.'

Voldrich coughed – the speaker caught static. 'No. *Fifth Amendment.*'

Milner: 'Let's change the subject.'

'How about politics?'

'How about Mickey Cohen? Do you know him?'

'I have never met the man.'

'Maybe not, but you're an old Southside hand. What do you know about Mickey's coin racket down there?'

'I know buppkis. I know that slot machines play to a nickel-and-dime mentality, which explains their allure to stupid shvartzes.'

Milner: 'Let's change the subject.'

'How about the Dodgers? If I was a Mexican, I'd be happy to leave Chavez Ravine.'

'How about Dan Wilhite?'

'Fifth Amendment.'

'We've looked at his tax records, Abe. J.C. gave him twenty per cent of the E-Z Kleen shop on Alvarado.'

'Fifth Amendment.'

'Abe, every man working Narco owns unaffordable items that we think J.C. gave them. We've audited their tax returns, and when we call them in to explain those items and say "Tell us where you got them and you'll skate," J.C. will be sunk on twenty-four counts of bribery and suborning federal tax fraud.'

'Fifth Amendment.'

'Abe, I'll give you some advice: *always plead the Fifth across the board*. Conversational answers interspersed with the Fifth simply serve to single out the responses that indicate guilty knowledge.'

Silence.

'Abe, you're looking a little green at the gills.'

No answer.

'Abe, we heard Tommy's been looking for a guy named Richie. We've got no last name, but we've heard that he and Tommy used to play jazz together and pull B&E's.'

I pressed up to the glass – smoke, distortion – 'Fifth Amendment.'

'Abe, you never won a dime at poker.'

Pressing up – squinting, ears cocked.

‘You really do want to help us out, Abe. Once you admit it you’ll feel a lot better.’

Door clangs – I eased off the wall.

Two Feds flanking Welles Noonan. I hit first: ‘You want to turn me as a witness.’

Noonan patted his hair. ‘Yes, and my wife’s pulling for you. She saw your picture in the papers, and she’s quite smitten.’

‘Quid pro quo?’

‘You’re not desperate enough, but try me.’

‘Richie Something. Tell me what you’ve got on him.’

‘No, and I’ll have to upbraid Agent Milner for leaving that speaker on.’

‘Noonan, we can deal on this.’

‘No, you’re not ready to beg yet. Gentlemen, escort Mr. Klein to a taxi.’

31

BIDO LITO'S – DAYBREAK.

Scorched rubble, the bandstand dead center. Ash heaps, shattered glass.

Sidewalk phone intact. One dime in my pockets – be there, please.

Six rings – 'Hello?' sleepy-voiced.

'It's me.'

'*Where are you?*'

'I'm all right.'

'I didn't ask you – David, where *were* you?'

Tingles – just hearing her.

'I can't – look, were you questioned?'

'Yes, two Sheriff's men. They said it was routine, that all the Hughes contract actresses were being questioned. They didn't seem to know that Howard had me under surveillance, and I didn't have to give an alibi for a specific time, because they couldn't establish the time Miciak died. They—'

'Don't say names.'

'Why? Where are you calling from?'

'A pay phone.'

'David, you sound frightened. Where *were* you?'

'I'll tell you if – I mean when it's over.'

'Is this the Kafesjian thing?'

'How did you know that?'

'I just did. There's things you don't tell me, so—'

'There's things you don't tell me.'

Silence.

'Glenda?'

'Yes, and there's things that I won't.'

'Talk to me, then.'

'Come over.'

'I can't, I have to sleep.'

'What kind of things should I tell you?'

'I don't know, good things.'

Soft, sleepy-voiced: 'Well, when I was seeing H.H. I pumped him for some stock tips and bought low. Those stocks are rising now, so I think I'll make a nice profit. When you stood me up night before last, I had dinner with Mickey. He's still enamored of me, and he had me critique his acting style, something to do with his making an important speech soon. My car has a loose clutch, and I—'

'Look, it's going to be all right.'

'Is it *all* going to be all right?'

'Sure.'
'You don't sound convinced.'
'I'll call you when I can.'

Vandals got my hubcabs. Movie time encore:
'PLEASE DON'T KILL ME.'
'PLEASE DON'T KILL ME LIKE YOU KILLED ALL THE OTHERS.'
Happytime Liquor two doors down.
I walked in, bought a pint of Scotch. Back to the car – three shots quick.
Shudders – no toasty-warm tingles.
I tossed the rest – booze was for perverts and cowards.
Meg taught me.

32

MY PLACE: NEAT and clean. I holstered up replacement goods: my Marine .45.

A scream then:

My Jap sword on a bookshelf – blood-flecked.

Five grand beside it.

Sleep – JOHNNY BEGGING.

Noon – I woke up reaching for the phone. A quick reflex call: Lynwood City Hall.

Inquire:

4980 Spindrift – vacant four-flat – who's it belong to? A clerk shuffle, the word:

Lynwood City foreclosed – the owner died circa '46. Abandoned for twelve years, rebuilding bids out: potential Chavez Ravine evictee housing. A title search? – impossible – storage-basement floods destroyed those records.

Lynwood – why meet there?

Duhamel: 'Evidence.'

Out for the papers, back for coffee. Four L.A. dailies full of Darktown:

The after-hours shootout – five dead, no clues, no suspects. Four shines ID'd – 'Negro' Steve Wenzel deleted. Exley: 'Experienced Homicide detectives are working this case full-time. It is a top LAPD priority.'

A flash:

Movie time – mirrored walls – familiar *somehow*—

The *Herald:*

'Three Dead in Jazz Club Fire: Arson Cops Tag Blaze "Accidental."' Exley: 'We believe that the fire at Bido Lito's is in no way connected to the tragic heart attack death of Sergeant George Stemmons, Jr, two days before on those same premises.'

Instinct: Junior hotshot – by THEM.

Instinct: potential evidence torched.

The *Mirror-News* – skank-slanted:

Dead cop/niteclub inferno – what's shaking? Stemmons, Sr, quoted: 'Negro hoodlums killed my son!' Exley's rebuttal: 'Pure nonsense. Sergeant Stemmons died of cardiac arrest pure and simple. The Coroner's Office will release findings along those lines within twenty-four hours. And the notion that the Los Angeles Police Department set fire to Bido Lito's as revenge for Sergeant Stemmons' death is simply preposterous.'

Junior RIP – a Catholic service upcoming. Officiating: Dudley Smith, lay chaplain.

Snide:

'With a Federal rackets probe in full swing down in South Central Los Angeles (and one generally believed to be aimed at discrediting the Los Angeles Police

Department), Chief of Detectives Edmund J. Exley certainly is doing his best to pooh-pooh the current Southside crime wave to members of the press. Local sources say that there are as many Federal agents on the streets as there are LAPD men, which one would think bodes for diminished crime statistics. Something is fishy here, and it certainly isn't the catfish gumbo which used to be served at the recently scorched Bido Lito's Club.'

Exley, L.A. *Times:* 'I feel sorry for the Federal authorities currently seeking to manufacture a successful rackets investigation in Los Angeles. They will fail, because the enforcement measures employed by the Los Angeles Police Department have proven successful for many years. Apparently, Welles Noonan has targeted the LAPD's Narcotics Division for indictments, and I was recently asked why I have not sequestered the men working that division. My answer? Simply that those men have nothing to hide.'

BIG instinct – Narco, Fed bait.

The *Times/Herald/Mirror* – no male DB's found. The *Examiner:* 'Sewer Worker makes Grisly Discovery.'

Skim it:

A storm drain on the Compton/Lynwood border – Sheriff's turf. Found: a white male DB – tall, pale, 160 – headless, no fingers, no feet. Dead for twenty-four to thirty-six hours – EVISCERATED, SPINE SEVERED.

'No identifying marks were found on the body. Sheriff's detectives believe that the killer or killers decapitated the victim and cut off his hands and feet to render a forensic identification impossible.

'If you have information regarding this man, John Doe #26–1958, County Homicide Bulletin 141–26–1958, call Sgt B.W. Schenkner, Firestone Sheriff's Station, TU 3–0985.'

I could call that number. I could plead:

No location or exact time-frame knowledge – I was drugged and coerced.

My assumed coercers: the Kafesjians. Two-man coercion minimum – logistics dictated it.

THEM:

Dope access.

A motive – rogue cop orbits – Duhamel linked to Junior linked to me.

I could plead details:

Johnny and Junior – fur-job filthy – maybe more. Junior – would-be 'Dope Kingpin' – extorting THEM. Me – this crazed peeper chaser – THEY wanted HIM.

I could plead evidence:

My Jap sword and five grand on a bookshelf.

My hit fee – common insider knowledge.

My sword – common knowledge – I killed a shitload of Japs with it and won the Navy Cross.

I could plead linkage:

I knew Junior/Junior knew Johnny/I fucked with the Kafesjians/Junior fucked with them/Johnny fucked with them directly or indirectly – directly or indirectly due to crazy faggot Junior Stemmons/Johnny called me to plead out or buy out like I'm pleading out now/the Kafesjians made me kill him – they made me a movie star.

Home movie time.

Splicing and developing time – who did the work?

Dave Klein left alive – movie killer. Time ticking, two ways it could go:

Straight coercion: desist on the peeper.

Fed/LAPD screenings: countless angles.

I could plead theories:

Say Johnny called me legit.

Say *he* kept the meet quiet.

I told Bob Gallaudet about it; I told Chick Vecchio – obliquely.

Chick knew my clip fee.

Chick knew my sword.

Chick knew THEM – or people who did.

Chick knew Junior was fucking with the Kafesjians.

Chick tips THEM off.

99 per cent sure – I was coerced into killing Johnny Duhamel.

1 per cent doubt – I'm a murderer.

My closing plea:

I don't like it.

I shaved and showered. Haggard, new gray hair – forty-two going on dead. Burn tickles toweling off – dry ice coaxed my performance. My sword, five grand – fear tactics.

Invest that money—

I called Hughes Aircraft – Pete picked up.

'Bondurant.'

'Dave Klein, Pete.'

Caught short: 'You *never* call me here. This is work, right?'

'Five grand's worth.'

'Split?'

'Your share.'

'Then this isn't a police gig like last time.'

'No, this is a muscle job on a hard boy.'

'You're good at that by yourself.'

'It's Chick Vecchio, and I know about that shakedown deal you're working with him and Touch. I want to play an angle on it.'

'And you're not gonna tell me how you found out about it.'

'Right.'

'And if I say no, you're not gonna spoil it for us.'

'Right.'

'And you figured you by yourself, Chick might not fold, but both of us he would.'

'Right.'

Knuckle pops on his end – Pete thinking angles.

'Go to seven and answer a few questions.'

'Seven.'

Pop, pop – ugly. 'So what's the beef?'

'Chick put me in shit with the Kafesjians.'

'So clip him. That's more your style.'

'I need a snitch.'

'Chick's a tough boy.'

'Seven. Yes or no.'

Pop, pop – phone static – killer hands. 'Yes with a condition, because I always thought Chick was essentially a greasy wop fuck, and because Mickey changed his mind and told him and Touch not to do this sex gig. I figure Mickey was always nice to me, so I'm doing him a solid he can pay back if he ever quits this movie-mogul shit and starts behaving like a white man. Now, what's the angle?'

'Straight strongarm, with dirt on Chick himself – in case he runs to Sam Giancana. Chick's Outfit, and the Outfit doesn't like this kind of extortion.'

'So you want to catch him at it. I bring my camera, we go from there.'

'Right. *If* we don't have to wait too long.'

Knuckle pops—

'Pete, come on.'

'I need two days.'

'Fuck.'

'Fuck nothing, Chick's set to bed down Joan fucking Crawford. Now *that* is worth waiting for.'

Movie stars/movie time – Johnny begging.

'All right. Two days.'

'There's that condition, Klein.'

'What?'

'If it looks like Chick's thinking revenge, then we clip him.'

'Agreed.'

Walking air – tunnel vision – peripheral grass.

Side doorways.

Mirrored walls.

Gray herringbones – a coat?

I drove down to Lynwood – crowding the speed limit.

Aviation and Hibiscus first – that pay phone. Feed the slot, use it:

PC Bell said *outgoing* booth calls weren't tallied.

Sid Riegle said his suicide queries yielded zero.

4980 Spindrift – still abandoned. The downstairs-left unit – unlocked.

Four empty rooms – like Johnny never showed up there.

Rainy that night, sunny now. I made street circuits – nothing clicked. Vacant bungalow courts – whole blocks of them.

Treading air that night – like I was carried. Grass, side doorways, a right turn.

Maybe: a courtyard right-side room – movie time.

Wet that night, sunny now – maybe dried footprints on grass.

GO—

Six blocks – thirty-odd courts. Epidemic crabgrass – weedy dry, no footprints. Right-side doors – boarded/nailed/locked – dusty, no fresh entry marks.

Johnny laughed: 'Why Lynwood, Dave?'

More street circuits – empty courtyards forever.

Fuck.

Downtown to Central Records. Their burglary file vault – crime sheets back to '50.

Agent Milner:

'We heard Tommy's been looking for a guy named Richie. We've got no last name, but we heard that he and Tommy used to play jazz together and pull B&E's.'

Tommy's rap sheet – undoubtedly expunged. Richie Something – maybe not.

GO—

Male adults – four cabinets' worth – no 'Richard' – derivation Caucasians. Juvie – seven Richards – five Negro, two white – porkers topping out 250.

'Unsolved' – adult/juvie – hodgepodge stuff. '50 and up, bad typing – I got eyestrain. Tilt – 11/6/51:

Music Man Murray's 983 N. Weyburn, Westwood Village. Trumpets stolen and recovered: traced to unnamed juvies. No arrests, two kid suspects – 'Tommy', 'Richie' – no surnames. The detective assigned: Sgt. M.D. Breuning, West L.A. Squad.

Three more cabinets – no Tommy/Richie extant.

Easy to extrapolate:

Strongarm Breuning works a chump 459. He blows the job and gets nudged: Tommy's J.C. Kafesjian's son.

Do it – eat dirt.

I called Robbery first – 'Breuning's out.' 77th ditto – try the Victory Motel.

'Mobster Squad, Carlisle.'

'Sergeant, it's Dave Klein.'

Breath flutters – 'Yeah, what is it?'

'Look, I'm sorry about that trouble with Lester Lake.'

'Sure. You side with a nigger over two… Shit, all right, he was your snitch. Look, you want Dudley? He's out.'

'Is Breuning in?'

'He's with Dud. What is it?'

'It's an old juvie 459 Breuning worked. November '51. Have Mike call me, all right?'

'Mike? Sure, *Dave*' – slam/dial tone.

Tapping out.

My best move now – tail THEM.

My worst move – they'd spot me.

My best nightmare: THEY approach ME. Movie time explained: threats, offers – at least I'd know WHY.

Darktown by default – go, let things happen.

Familiar now – synced to music in my head. Familiar faces staring back: black, sullen. Slow cruising, two-way-radio sputter:

County calls – no Johnny John Doe talk. No Miciak, no Bido's – half-ass comforting.

I tapped the glove box – no candy – just dope stashed and forgotten. Hiss, crackle – a gang fight at Jordan High.

North – a run by THEIR house – Fed surveillance thick. Sax noise – Will Shipstad wearing earplugs.

Radio hum – my soundtrack for Johnny begging. North on instinct overdrive: Chavez Ravine.

Feds thick – I stuck to the car. Check the view:

Eviction papers tacked door to door. A face-off: Commie geeks and pachucos. Earthmovers, dump trucks – LAPD guards standing by.

More:

The main drag cordoned off: Reuben Ruiz dancing a samba. Fans pressing close, wet-eyed women. Fed bodyguards – disgusted.

Two-way boom:

'Code 3 all units vicinity 249 South ARDEN repeat 249 South ARDEN multiple homicides 249 South ARDEN Detective units Roger your locations 249 South ARDEN on-call Homicide units that vicinity Roger your locations!'

33

ROLLING CODE 3.

South Arden/Joseph Arden/street name/trick name. A Hancock Park address – affluent – a strong maybe.

‘Request animal disposal unit 249 South Arden. Be advised all units now standing.’

I hit the mike: ‘4-ADAM-31 to Bureau base urgent. Over.’

‘Roger, 4-A-31.’

‘Urgent. Repeat urgent. Lieutenant D.D. Klein seeking Chief Exley. Over.’

‘Roger, 4-A-31.’

Makeshift code: ‘Urgent. Advise Chief Exley homicides at 249 South Arden likely *major case* connected. Request permission to seal under IA autonomy. Urgent that you find Chief Exley. Over.’

‘Roger, 4-A-31. State your location.’

‘3rd and Mariposa westbound. Over.’

Dead air, speeding—

‘4-A-31, please Roger.’

‘Roger, this is 4-A-31.’

‘4-A-31, assume command 249 South Arden IA autonomy. Over.’

‘4-A-31, Roger, over.’

3rd westbound – siren earaches. Arden Boulevard – right turn, right there:

A big Tudor house swamped – prowl cars, morgue cars.

Civilian cliques on the sidewalk – nervous.

Ice cream trucks, kids.

I jammed in curbside. Two brass hats on the porch, looking queasy.

I ran up. One lieutenant, one captain – green. A hedge behind them dripping vomit.

‘Ed Exley wants this sealed: no press, no downtown Homicide. I’m in charge, and IA’s bagging the evidence.’

Nods – queasy – nobody said, ‘Who are you?’

‘Who found them?’

The captain: ‘Their mailman called it in. He had a special-delivery package, and he wanted to leave it at the side door. The dogs didn’t bark like they usually do, and he saw blood on a window.’

‘He ID’d them?’

‘Right. It’s a father and two daughters. Phillip Herrick, Laura and Christine. The mother’s dead – the mailman said she killed herself earlier this year. Hold your nose when you—’

In – smell it – blood. Flashbulbs, gray suits – I pushed through.

The entrance foyer floor: two dead shepherds belly-up, dripping mouth foam.

Tools nearby – spade/shears/pitchfork – bloody.

Meat scraps/drool/puke trails.

Stabbed and cut and forked – entrail piles soaking a throw rug.

I squatted down and pried their jaws loose – tech men gasped.

Washrags in their mouths – stelfactiznide-chloride-soaked.

Match it up – Kafesjian 459.

Walk/look/think – plainclothesmen gave me room:

The front hallway – broken records/tossed covers. Christmas jazz wax – confirm the Mom-peeper letters.

The dining room:

Booze bottles and portraits smashed – another K.-job match. *Family pictures:* a dad and two daughters.

Mom to peeper: 'Your sisters.'

Suicide talk/suicide confirmation.

A tech stampede – follow it – the den.

Three dead on the floor: one male, two female.

Details:

Their eyes shot out – powder-black cheeks, exit spatter.

Ripped cushions on a chair – bullet mufflers.

Shears, chainsaw, axe – bloody, propped in a corner.

The rug – soaked bubbling.

His pants down.

Castrated – his penis in an ashtray.

The women:

Cut/sawed/snipped – limbs dangling by skin shreds.

Bloody walls, windows sprayed – kids looking in.

Artery gout red: the floor, the ceiling, the walls. Plainclothesmen oozing shell shock.

A framed photo spritzed: handsome daddy, grown daughters.

Peeper kin.

'Fuuuck'/'My God'/Hail Marys. I skirted the blood and checked access.

Rear hall, back door, steps – jimmy marks, meat scraps, drool.

One high-heel pump just inside.

Work it:

He pries in quiet, throws the meat, waits outside.

The dogs smell it, eat it, quease.

He walks in.

Shoots Herrick.

Finds the tools, kills the dogs.

The girls come home, see the door, run in. One shoe lost – scattered tools – he hears them.

CRAAAZY shooting/mutilation – leaded windows kill the noise.

Homicide/symbolic destruction – he probably didn't steal.

Snap guess: the girls showed up unexpected.

I looked outside – trees, shrubs – hiding spots. No blood drip – say he stole clean clothes.

Blues and a mailman smoking – brace them. 'Did the Herricks have a son?'

The mailman nodded. 'Richard. He escaped from Chino something like September of last year. He went up on dope charges.'

Mom – 'pen pals/same city' – lamster Richie explained it. 'Spurred you/rash thing'

– he waltzed minimum-security Chino.

Nervous blues jabbering: Richie caught/convicted/gassed – their instant suspect.

Killer Richie? – NO – think it through:

The Red Arrow Inn – Richie's peep spot B&E'd. His bed ripped – with Kafesjian 459 silver. Dead cert – this killer/that burglar – one man – broken bottle/smashed record/snuffed dog confirmation. Richie – passive watcher – someone watching and pressing him. Tommy K. chasing him outright, flirt with the notion: Tommy stone psycho, Tommy trashes his own house, now THIS.

Back inside:

Blood drops – dark, fading – the main hallway off the den. I followed them upstairs – red into pink, a bathroom – stop.

Floor water – the toilet bowl full – a knife floating in piss water. Pink water in the shower, bloody hair clots.

Reconstruct it:

Bloody clothes ripped and flushed – the toilet floods. A shower then? – check the towel rack – one towel sodden.

Recent – broad-daylight killings.

I checked the hallway – wet footprint indentations on the carpet. Easy tracks – straight to a bedroom.

Drawers open, clothes scattered. A wallet on the floor – turned out, no cash.

A driver's license: Phillip Clark Herrick, DOB 5/14/06. The ID pic: 'Fuck me Daddy' bland handsome.

Wallet sleeves – a photo – Lucille naked. A fake license: Joseph Arden – Herrick stats, a fake address.

I checked the window: South Arden was roped off. Bluesuit cordons held reporters back.

Other bedrooms—

One hallway, three doors. Two open – girlish bedrooms – undisturbed. One door locked – I shoulder-popped it.

A snap make: Richie's room preserved.

Neat, mothball-reeking.

Jazz posters.

Books: music bios, sax theory.

Kid-type paintings: Lucille softened, demure.

A graduation pic: Richie, peeper sketch perfect.

Doors slamming – check the window – IA swarming in.

Lucille – idealized, a madonna.

Books: all jazz.

Funny – no tech stuff – and Richie *knew* bugging.

Running footsteps – Exley in my face, catching breath. 'You should be downstairs. Ray Pinker briefed me, but I wanted your interpretation first.'

'There's nothing to interpret. It's Richie Herrick, or it's the guy who broke into his motel room. Check my early reports, I mentioned him then.'

'I remember. And you've been avoiding me. I told you to call me after you forensic'd Stemmons' apartment.'

'There was nothing to report.'

'Where have you been?'

'People keep asking me that.'

'That's not an answer.'

Bloody wing tips – he got close.

‘So what now? That’s a question.’

‘I’m issuing an APB on Richard Herrick.’

‘Think it over first. I don’t *think* this is him.’

‘You obviously want me to prompt you. *So*, Lieutenant?’

‘So I think we should haul in Tommy K. I’ve got a strong tip that he’s been looking for Richie Herrick. Richie’s a damn good hider, but Tommy *knows* him. He’s got a better chance of finding him than we do.’

‘No direct approach on the Kafesjians. And I am issuing that APB, because the Kafesjians are under blanket Fed surveillance, which somewhat impedes their ability to search for Herrick. Moreover, these deaths are front-page news. Herrick will read about them and act even more furtively. We can only control the press so far.’

‘Yeah, which must really gall you.’

‘Frankly, it does. Now surprise me or anticipate me. Tell me something I don’t know.’

I jabbed his vest – hard. ‘Johnny Duhamel’s dead. He’s a Sheriff’s John Doe down near Compton, and I think you two are dirty together. You’re running me on the Kafesjians, and it ties in to Duhamel. I’m not thinking so straight these days, and I’m getting to the point where I’m going to fuck you for it.’

Exley stepped back. ‘You’re detached to Homicide and in charge of this investigation. You can do anything you want except approach the Kafesjians.’

Chimes streetside – ice cream trucks.

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3RD STREET, BUREAU bound. A stoplight at Normandie – Plymouths cut me off and boxed me in.

Four cars – Feds piled out aiming shotguns. Radio mike loud: 'You are under arrest. Get out with your hands up.'

I killed the engine, set the brake, complied. Slooow: grip the roof, arms spread.

Swamped/frisked/cuffed – crew-cut shitbirds loving it.

Milner poked me. 'Reuben Ruiz said he saw you dump Johnson.'

Three men tossed my car. A skinny hump checked the glove compartment.

'Milner, look. Looks like white horse to me!'

Lying snitch fuck Ruiz.

Heroin jammed in my face.

Downtown – the Fed Building – manhandled upstairs. Shoved into an office—

Four walls paper-draped – graph lines visible underneath.

Noonan and Shipstad waiting.

Milner sat me down; Shipstad took my cuffs off. My dope passed Fed to Fed – whistles all around.

Noonan: 'Too bad Junior Stemmons is dead. He could have been your alibi on Johnson.'

'You mean you *know* Ruiz is lying? You *know* he was sleeping when Johnson jumped?'

Shipstad: 'There's no evidence sticker on this bag of white powder, Lieutenant.'

Milner: 'I think he's got a habit.'

His partner: 'Stemmons sure as hell did.'

Noonan tugged his necktie – his underlings walked out.

Shipstad: 'Do you wish to examine the arrest warrant, Mr. Klein?'

Noonan: 'We'll have to amend it to include violation of Federal narcotics statutes.'

I threw a guess out: 'You rigged the warrant with a friendly judge. You told Ruiz to lie, then recant when you turned me. You told the judge what you were doing. It's a Federal warrant on some trumped-up civil-rights violation, not a California Manslaughter One paper, because no Superior Court Judge would sign it.'

Noonan: 'Well, it got your attention. And of course we have binding evidence.'

'Release me.'

Noonan: 'I said "*binding*".'

Shipstad: 'Shortly after we released you early this morning, Abe Voldrich was released to take care of some personal business. He was found murdered this afternoon. He left a suicide note, which a graphologist examined and said was written under physical duress. Voldrich had agreed to testify as a Federal witness, on all matters pertaining to the Kafesjian family and this perhaps tangential burglary investigation that you and the late Sergeant Stemmons were involved in. An agent went by his house to pick Voldrich up for more questioning and found him.'

Noonan: 'Agent Milner canvassed the area. A 1956 powder-blue Pontiac coupe was seen parked by his house around the approximate time of his death.'

Shipstad: 'Did you kill him?'

Noonan: 'You own a blue automobile, don't you?'

'You know I didn't kill him. You know it's Tommy and J.C. You know that I own a dark blue '55 Dodge.'

Shipstad: 'The Kafesjians have an excellent alibi for the time of Voldrich's death.'

Noonan: 'They were at home, under twenty-four-hour Federal surveillance.'

'So they called out a contract.'

Shipstad: 'No, their phone was tapped.'

Noonan: 'And *had* been tapped, going back prior to the time we picked up Voldrich.'

'What else did they discuss on the phone?'

Shipstad: 'Unrelated matters. Nothing pertaining to that Richie you seemed to be so interested in last night.'

Scooped – no Herrick update – clueless on the South Arden slaughter.

'Get to it. Get to "binding evidence".'

Noonan: 'Your appraisal of the situation first, Mr. Klein.'

'You want to take three witnesses to the grand jury. I'm one, one just died, one's this so-called major surprise witness. You're short a man so you're doubling up on me. That's my appraisal, so *let's hear your offer*.'

Noonan: 'Immunity on the Johnson killing. Immunity on *all* potential criminal charges that you might accrue. A written guarantee that no Federal tax liens will be filed against you should it be revealed that you have unreported income earned as a direct result of criminal conspiracies that you've engaged in. For this, you agree to enter Federal custody and testify in open court as to your knowledge of the Kafesjian family, their LAPD history, and most importantly your own history of dealings with organized crime, *excluding* Mickey Cohen.'

Light bulb – Major Witness Mickey.

Reflex jolt – never.

'You bluffed, I call.'

Shipstad ripped the draping off the walls. Shredded paper in piles – column graphs underneath.

I stood up. Boldface print – easy to read.

Column one: names and dates – my mob hits.

Column two: my property transactions detailed. Corresponding dates – Real Estate Board kickbacks – five thousand dollars each – my clip fee funneled.

Column three: kickback receivers listed. Detailed: slum dives offered to me lowball cheap. Corresponding dates: escrow and closing.

Column four – Meg's tax returns '51–'*57*. Her *unreported* cash listed and traced: to appraisers and permit signers bribed.

Column five – witness numbers – sixty-odd bribe takers listed.

Names and numbers – pulsing.

Noonan: 'Much of the data regarding you is circumstantial and subject to interpretation. We've listed only the men that the underworld grapevine credits you with killing, and those five-thousand-dollar windfalls that followed are circumstantially seductive and not much more. The important thing is that you and your sister are indictable on seven counts of Federal tax fraud.'

Shipstad: 'I convinced Mr. Noonan to extend the immunity agreement to cover your sister. If you agree, Margaret Klein Agee will remain exempt from all Federal charges.'

Noonan: 'What's your answer?'

Shipstead: 'Klein?'

Clock ticks, heartbeats – something short-circuiting inside me.

'I want four days' grace before I enter custody, and I want a Federal bank writ to allow me access to Junior Stemmons' safe-deposit boxes.'

Shipstad, bait grabber: 'Did he owe you money?'

'That's right.'

Noonan: 'I agree, provided a Federal agent goes with you to the bank.'

A contract in my face – fine print pulsing.

I signed it.

‘*You sound resigned.*’

‘*It’s all got a life of its own.*’

‘*Meaning?*’

‘*Meaning you should tell* me *things.*’

‘*You don’t mention certain things. You call me from phone booths so you won’t have to.*’

‘*I want to put it all together first.*’

‘*You said it’s sorting itself out.*’

‘*It is, but I’m running out of time.*’

‘*You or we?*’

‘*Just me.*’

‘*Don’t start lying to me*. Please.’

‘*I’m just trying to put things straight.*’

‘*But you still won’t tell me what you’re doing.*’

‘*It’s this trouble I got you in. Let it go at that.*’

‘*I bought that trouble myself – you told me that.*’

‘*Now you sound resigned.*’

‘*Those Sheriff’s men came by again.*’

‘*And?*’

‘*And a cameraman told them we were sleeping together in my trailer.*’

‘*Do they know I was hired to tail you?*’

‘*Yes.*’

‘*What did you tell them?*’

‘*That I’m free, white and twenty-nine, and I’ll sleep with whoever I want to.*’

‘*And?*’

‘*And Bradley Milteer told them that you and Miciak had words. I said I met Miciak through Howard, and he was easy to dislike.*’

‘*Good, that was smart.*’

‘*Does this mean we’re suspects?*’

‘*It means they know my reputation.*’

‘*What reputation?*’

‘*You know what I mean.*’

‘That?’

‘*That.*’

‘*… Oh shit, David.*’

‘*Yeah, “oh shit”.*’

‘*Now you sound tired.*’

‘*I am tired. Tell me—*’

‘*I knew that was coming.*’

‘*And?*’

‘*And my clutch is still on the fritz, and Mickey asked me to marry him. He said he’d “cut me loose” in five years and make me a star, and he’s been behaving as oblique as David Douglas Klein at his most guarded. He’s got some kind of strange acting bug, and he keeps talking about his “cue” and his “curtain call”.*’

‘*And?*’

‘*How do you know there’s more?*’

‘*I can tell.*’

‘*Smart man.*’

‘And?’

‘*And Chick Vecchio’s been coming on to me. It’s almost like …* ’

‘*His whole attitude changed overnight.*’
‘*Smart man.*’
‘*Don’t worry, I’ll take care of it.*’
‘*But you won’t tell me what it’s about?*’
‘*Just hold on for a few more days.*’
‘*Because it’s all sorting itself out?*’
‘*Because there’s still a chance I can force things our way.*’
‘*Suppose you can’t?*’
‘*Then at least I’ll know.*’
‘*You sound resigned again.*’
‘*It’s dues time. I can feel it.*’

L.A. *Herald-Express*, 11/21/58:

HANCOCK PARK SLAYINGS SHOCK CITY

The murders of wealthy chemical engineer Phillip Herrick, 52, and his daughters Laura, 24, and Christine, 21, continue to shock the Southland and confound the Los Angeles Police Department with their brazen brutality.

In the mid afternoon hours of November 19th, police surmise that a man invaded the comfortable Tudor style home where widower Phillip Herrick lived with his two daughters. Forensic experts have reconstructed that he gained access through a flimsily locked back door, fatally poisoned the family's two dogs, then shot Phillip Herrick and employed gardening tools found on the premises to hideously mutilate both Mr Herrick and the animals. Evidence indicates that Laura and Christine returned home at this point and surprised the killer, who similarly butchered them, showered himself free of their blood and donned clothes belonging to Mr. Herrick. He then either walked or drove away, accomplishing the bestial murders in something like near silence. Postal employee Roger Denton, attempting to deliver a special delivery package, saw blood on the inside den windows and immediately called police from a neighboring house.

'I was shocked,' Denton told *Herald* reporters. 'Because the Herricks are nice people who had already had their fill of tragedy.'

FAMILY NO STRANGER TO TRAGEDY

As police began a house-to-house canvassing for possible witnesses and lab technicians sealed the premises off to search for clues, neighbors congregating outside in a state of horrified confusion told reporter Todd Walbrect of tragic recent turns in the family's affairs.

For many years the Herricks seemed to enjoy a happy life in affluent Hancock Park. Phillip Herrick, a chemist by trade and the owner of a chemical manufacturing business that supplied industrial solvents to Southland machine shops and dry-cleaning establishments, was active in the Lions Club and Rotary; Joan (Renfrew) Herrick did charitable work and headed drives to feed indigent skid row habitués festive Thanks-giving dinners. Laura and Christine matriculated at nearby Marlborough Girls' School and UCLA, and son Richard, now 26, attended public schools and played in their marching bands. But dark clouds were hovering: in August of 1955, 'Richie' Herrick, 23, was arrested in Bakersfield: he sold marijuana and heroin-cocaine 'goof-balls' to an undercover police officer. Convicted of the offense, he was sentenced to four years in Chino Prison, a harsh sentence for a first offender, meted out by a judge anxious to establish a reputation for sternness.

Neighbors state that Richie's imprisonment broke Joan Herrick's heart. She began drinking and neglecting her charity work, and spent many hours alone listening to jazz records that Richie recommended to her in long letters from prison. In 1956 she attempted suicide; in September of 1957 Richie Herrick escaped from minimum-security Chino and remained at large, police believe, without ever contacting his mother. Joan Herrick went into what several acquaintances described as a 'fugue state', and on February 14th of this year committed suicide with an overdose of sleeping pills.

Postman Roger Denton: 'What a godawful shame that so much awfulness was visited on one nice family. I remember when Mr Herrick put those heavy leaded windows in. He hated noise, and now the police say those windows helped stifle the noise of that killer fiend doing his work. I'll miss the Herricks and pray for them.'

EXPRESSIONS OF SHOCK AS POLICE INVESTIGATION SPREADS OUT

Shock waves have spread through Hancock Park and indeed the entire Southland, and a memorial service for Christine and Laura Herrick drew hundreds at Occidental College, where they were both enrolled in graduate programs. Locksmiths citywide have reported a tremendous business upswing; guard dog sales have doubled locally. Private security patrols for Hancock Park are being considered, and meanwhile police are jealously guarding investigatory information.

The Herrick investigation is being headed by Lieutenant David D. Klein, the commander of the Los Angeles Police Department's Administrative Vice Division, recently in the news when a Federal witness he was guarding committed suicide in his presence. Lieutenant Klein has detached a half dozen men from the Department's Internal Affairs Detail to work under him, along with his aide, Officer Sidney Riegle.

Chief of Detectives Edmund Exley defended his choice of Lieutenant Klein, 42, a 20-year officer with no Homicide Division experience. 'Dave Klein is an attorney and a very savvy detective,' he said. 'He has worked on a burglary case that may be tangentially connected, and he is very good at keeping evidence under wraps. I want this case cleared, and so I have selected the best possible men to achieve that end.'

Lieutenant Klein addressed reporters at the LAPD Detective Bureau. 'This investigation is proceeding rapidly,' he said, 'and progress has been made. Many known associates of the Herrick family have been questioned and eliminated as suspects, and extensive canvassing of the area surrounding the murder scene yielded no eyewitnesses to the killer entering or leaving the Herrick home. We have eliminated robbery and revenge against the family as motives, and most importantly eliminated the Herricks Chino escapee son Richard as a suspect. He had been our initial major suspect, and we had issued an all-points-bulletin to aid in his capture, but we have now lifted that bulletin, although Richard Herrick is an escaped felon and we would very much like to talk to him. We are now centering our search on a sexual psychopath rumored to be seen near Hancock Park shortly before the killings. Although the three victims were not specifically sexually assaulted, the crime has the earmarks of being perpetrated by a sexual deviate. I, personally, am convinced that this man, whose name I cannot reveal, is the killer. We are making every effort to apprehend him.'

And, meanwhile, fear besieges the Southland. Police patrols in Hancock Park have been doubled and the current boom in home security measures continues.

A funeral service for Phillip, Laura and Christine Herrick will be held today at St. Basil's Episcopal Church in Brentwood.

L.A. *Times*, 11/21/58:

SOUTHSIDE CRIME WAVE AROUSES SUSPICION

Citing crime statistics and current rumors, U.S. Attorney Welles Noonan stated today that Southside Los Angeles is ‘boiling over with violent intrigue’ that may well be ‘connected on some as yet undetermined level.’

Noonan, heading up a much-publicized Federal rackets probe centered in South Central Los Angeles, spoke to reporters at his office.

‘During the past four days eight violent deaths have occurred within a three-mile South Los Angeles radius,’ he said. ‘This is *double* the average of any one-month period of any given year going back to 1920. Add on the curious heart attack of a supposedly healthy young policeman at a nightclub later burned down, and count as perhaps curious the mutilated body of an unidentified man found two miles further south on the Compton-Lynwood border. Collectively, you have fodder for much interesting speculation.’

Noonan elaborated. ‘Three nights ago an unexplained shootout at an illegal after hours club in Watts occurred,’ he said. ‘Two Negro men and three Negro women were killed, although rumors persist that one of the victims was white. The following morning a young LAPD officer named George Stemmons, Jr., was found dead, allegedly of a heart attack, in a back room at the Bido Lito’s jazz club. A scant day and a half later Bido Lito’s burned to the ground. Federal agents overheard an eyewitness tell LAPD detectives that he heard a Molotov-cocktail-like explosion moments before Bido Lito’s caught fire, but the LAPD Arson Squad has now attributed the blaze, which took three lives, to a carelessly tossed cigarette.’

Reporters interrupted the impromptu press conference with questions. Repeatedly stressed: the Federal rackets probe is specifically targeted to discredit the Los Angeles Police Department’s Southside enforcement measures; isn’t the U.S. Attorney taking an adversarial position on incomplete information?

Noonan responded. ‘Granted,’ he said, ‘that unidentified body found in the L.A. County Sheriff’s jurisdiction may be a non sequitur, but I ask you to consider the following.

‘One, remember what I told you about that eyewitness to the Bido Lito’s fire. Two, consider that the father of the young policeman who expired of alleged heart failure at Bido Lito’s earlier, himself a high-ranking Los Angeles police officer, stated that he thought his son was murdered. That man has been suspended from duty for his open criticism of Chief Ed Exley’s handling of the situation, and is rumored to be resting at home under doctor-ordered sedation.’

Reporters pressed: isn’t the Federal-LAPD quagmire coming down to a battle waged by two highly respected, nationally known crimefighters: himself and LAPD Chief of Detectives Edmund Exley?

Noonan said, ‘No. I will not let personalities or political ambitions dictate the thrust of my investigation. What I do know is: after hours clubs are allowed to flourish in Watts under unofficial LAPD sanction. Five Negro citizens died as a result, and despite assigning a dozen officers to the case, Ed Exley has not been able to come up with a single arrest. He has shoved the suspicious death of a Los Angeles policeman under the carpet and has deliberately misrepresented the facts in a triple-homicide arson case.’

In related developments, Noonan refused to comment on the persistent rumor that LAPD Narcotics Division officers are soon to be called in for questioning, or whether Abraham Voldrich, a rumored Federal witness recently deceased, was murdered or committed suicide.

‘No comments on those questions,’ he said. ‘But on the topic of witnesses, let me state that when it comes time to present evidence to the Federal Grand Jury, I will offer a major surprise witness with extraordinary cachet and another witness prepared to give astonishing testimony.'

Edmund Exley responded to the U.S. Attorney's accusations: 'Welles Noonan is an unscrupulous hack politician with spurious liberal credentials. He has no grasp of the situation in Southside Los Angeles and his smear campaign against the LAPD is based on lies, fatuous rumors and innuendo. The Federal rackets probe is a politically motivated front aimed at establishing Noonan as a viable candidate for State office. It will fail because he has grievously underestimated the moral rectitude of the Los Angeles Police Department.'

Dues time/time running out – RUN.

Herrick 187 PC – six IA men and Sid Riegle co-opted. Forty-eight hours in:

No eyewitnesses, no vehicle pegged. No prints, no Richie-to-Mom letters found. Confirmed: the dogs sucked stelfactiznide chloride.

Background check:

Laura and Christine Herrick – nice girls. Good students, square boyfriends – almost Hancock Park wives.

Joan Renfew Herrick – secret boozer. Suicide attempts, suicide. A neighbor doctor told me:

Joanie burned herself, and begged morphine. Demerol prescribed; self-inflicted burns kept it coming. Zombie matron – all-day jazz on cloud nine.

'She drank *Drano, Lieutenant. Her ultimate suicide was inevitable, and a merciful relief for the people who cared about her.*'

Richie Herrick – shy boy, chump musician. One friend – 'This hood Tommy,' 'Oil and water, him and Tommy – I think Richie had a crush on Tommy's sister.' Neighborhood shock expressed: shy Richie the dope peddler. The Bakersfield PD queried: Richie was bagged dead to rights, open-and-shut. No co-defendants, no Tommy involved – three-to-four Chino.

Richie's prison file – missing. Misplaced? Misfiled? Stolen? – possible suspect Dan Wilhite – just a hunch.

Warden aides searching for it: I wanted to nail Richie's Chino KAs.

Escape reports 9/57 – adios, Richie – no details, no leads.

Mike Breuning – no call from him yet – my BESE lead was tapped out.

Phillip Herrick:

No record, no Vice Squad sheets City/County.

Chemist.

Chemical manufacturer.

PH Solvents, Inc. – dry-cleaning supplies.

Stelfactiznide chloride – made in-house.

Distributed statewide – to dry-cleaning shops and industrial plants.

NOT a customer: E-Z Kleen/J.C. Kafesjian.

PH employees alibi-checked – clean straight across.

Cross-family background check:

Phillip Herrick – DOB 5/14/06 – Scranton, Pennsylvania.

John Charles Kafesjian – DOB 1/15/03 – Scranton, Pennsylvania.

No Pennsylvania criminal records/State Police employment check:

1930–32 – Balustrol Chemicals, Scranton. Phillip Herrick: solvent analyst; J.C. Kafesjian: laborer/mixer.

California DMV check:

6/32 – both men glom drivers' permits.

Birth record check:

1932–37: Tommy/Lucille, Richie/Laura/Christine born.

Time ticking – RUN – custody looming.

Running separate – Exley and Noonan – chasing bank writs.

Noonan moving east – furtive – petitioning Fed jurists. Exley sticking west – slower, no connections.

Name it ALL: the Kafesjian/Herrick case.

Breaking now – CRAAAZY volition.

Crazy fake press leaks – my idea.

We announced a fake APB, then fake withdrew it. One fake suspect fed to the press: an *unnamed psycho. Bait: to calm Richie down and lure Tommy to him.*

A help: Richie's mug shot on page one – a bum likeness, peeper sketch imperfect.

A hindrance: Feds dogging THEM.

Exley, page-one tweaks:

'Dave Klein is a very savvy detective.'

'He has worked on a burglary case that may be tangentially connected.'

Bait: push THEM toward Richie/push THEM toward me.

One glitch: Fed lockstep surveillance on the Kafesjians.

RUN—

Junior's funeral – mandatory Bureau attendance. Exley there for PR, Dudley Smith somber. Stemmons, Sr, still distraught, sedative bombed.

Father-son farewell: Sad-ass Bible readings. Thirty years since First Dutch Lutheran, catch the gist: mercy for the sick and insane.

RUN – Sheriff's Homicide chasers – 'routine' questions, two sessions' worth:

Were you hired to tail Glenda Bledsoe?

Did you become intimate with her?

Did she steal from Howard Hughes' guest homes?

Yes, yes, no – one cop smirking.

Did you argue with Harold John Miciak?

Yes – this cop-hater shitbird. Instant empathy, a smirky punch line: don't you think Mr Hughes might try to fuck you for taking his money and his girlfriend?

Running with me – Sid Riegle/six IA men: background checks/interviews/shitwork. Meg working on a title search – 4980 Spindrift/'Why meet there?' My own sister: searching records, tracing money – Phillip Herrick's fortune, find me filth—

Kafesjian/Herrick – Mom to Richie: 'Long history of insanity, both our families.'

Killer Richie – no.

Killer Tommy – doubtful.

Leaning toward: Mr Third Party insane.

Narco men running scared – persistent Bureau rumors. Mass cop divestment: Kafesjian gratuities dumped. Rumors had Dan Wilhite begging Exley: say something, do something.

Exley noncommittal; Fed rumors; nineteen subpoenas headed Narco's way.

My subpoena's on hold – via Fed custody extortion. Key witness Dave Klein, compromisable: if *that movie showed up on Noonan's desk. Call* 'if' *wishful thinking – I kept waiting the delivery out – time ticking slow.*

Running, thinking:

THEY made the film – Chick Vecchio their point man. Make him snitch: THEY coerced my starring role.

Conspiracy indictments potentially pending – 'maybe' one tainted witness skates.

Maybe wishful thinking.

Running, watching:

THEIR house – night surveillance, parked three doors down. SRO: Feds in front, Feds out back. Family tantrums inside – my nostalgia soundtrack—

The Two Tonys – pomade spatter off point-blank head shots. 'No, my children' – a clip victim weeping. Rape-o double-header – buckshot tore this nigger faceless.

Silk dresses for Meg – penance gifts. Meg with Jack Woods now – her own killer. Meg holding ten grand – Jack stiffed, Junior otherwise dead. A stray thought: Abe Voldrich snuffed, a car spotted Jack's car: that *make,* that *model.*

Music to watch by: car-radio bop night one. Night two – straight Champ Dineen.

Soft: Richie and Lucille, maybe lovers. Soft: Glenda turning my way off a skid, all this courage.

Champ Dineen – my car radio on low. Echoed out Lucille’s window – the same station.
Lucille in her window – no makeup, new hair – Richie’s bedroom pictures life-size.
A nightgown on – almost prim.
Feds on the street – family close.
Johnny begging – constant refrains – unshakable.
Two days down, two days left before custody. Two late nights with Glenda.
She said, ‘We might not walk.’
I said, ‘You will.’
She said, ‘You’re tired.’
She said, ‘You want to confess.’

PART IV

MONEY JUNGLE

35

'WELL, THIS WRIT *does* appear to be in order. But what's this stamp on the bottom?'

Agent Henstell: 'It's a routing stamp. The U.S. attorney here sent the paperwork to a judge back east.'

'Was there a reason for that?'

To bypass Exley-friendly jurists – open the vault, you officious little shit.

'No, Mr. Noonan simply knew that the Federal judge for this district was too busy to read writ requests.'

'I see. Well, I suppose—'

I goosed him: 'The writ's valid, so let's move this along.'

'There's no need to be brusque. This way, *gentlemen*.'

Teller cages, guard station, walk-in vault. Unlocked – a Pinkerton at parade rest. Henstell: 'Before we go in, I want to recap Mr. Noonan's instructions.'

'I'm listening.'

'One, you're allowed to keep any money you might find. Two, you're allowed to go through any personal papers you might find, alone, in an examination cubicle here on bank property. After you go through them, they are to be turned over to me, for booking as Federal evidence. Three, any contraband items such as narcotics, or firearms, will be seized as evidence immediately.'

'Firearms' – icy tingles. 'Agreed.'

'All right, then. Mr. Welborn, after you.'

Quick march – Welborn leading. Gray metal aisles – safe-deposit boxes recessed floor to ceiling. Left turn, right turn, stop.

Welborn, dangling keys: '5290 and 5291. There's an examination room around the corner.'

'And you're to leave Agent Henstell and me alone.'

'As you wish.'

Two boxes knee-high; four key slots. Tingles – I stuck my keys in.

Welborn – master keys in – clicks simultaneous.

Handkerchiefs up my sleeves.

Welborn, prissy: 'Good day, Officers.'

Quick now – Henstell picking a cuticle, bored—

I cracked the drawers – paper piles bulged the boxes wide. RIGHT THERE on top:

A revolver – evidence bagged. Powder-dusted prints on the grips and barrel housing – protective glazed.

Henstell picking his nose.

Quick:

Unwrap the gun – bury it – paper-pile cover.

Henstell: 'What have we got?'

'Folders and paperwork so far.'

'Noonan wants it all, and I wouldn't mind being out of here by lunchtime.'

I dropped my hands; the handkerchiefs fell out. Block his view – wipe the piece—

Three times – Glenda – make sure.

I handed it over. 'Henstell, look at this.'

He twirled the gun and snapped quick draws – bad déjà vu.

'Pearl grips – this Stemmons guy must have had a cowboy fetish. And look, no numbers on the barrel plate.'

I pulled the drawers out. 'Do you want to look through these for narcotics?'

'No, but Noonan wants it all when you're finished. He said I should pat-search you afterwards, but that's not my style.'

'Thanks.'

'You're going to love Federal custody. Noonan pops for steak lunch every day.'

Fake grunts: 'You want to give me a hand with this?'

'Come on, they can't be *that* heavy.'

Good fake out – I moved on it – over to a catty-corner cubicle. One table, one chair, no inside lock – I jammed the chair under the doorknob.

Dump the drawers, check the contents:

Folders, photos, odd papers – I stacked them on the table.

Four keys on a fob – 'Brownell's Locksmiths, 4024 Wabash Ave, East Los Angeles.'

Loose newspaper clippings – I smoothed out the crumples

Go – skim it all:

Typed depositions – Glenda Bledsoe/Dwight Gilette – Murder One. My evidence suppression – detailed in longhand.

Georgie Ainge's statement: a typed original and five carbons.

Photo blow-ups: Glenda's juvie print strip and the gun prints. A finger-print analysis report; photo glossies with comparison points checked.

Witness Disposition Report:

'Mr Ainge is currently living under an assumed name at an undisclosed location in the San Francisco area. I have telephone access to him and have given him money so that he might hide out and escape potential reprisals from Lieutenant David D. Klein. He remains available to me should he be called as a witness in the matter of the County of Los Angeles vs. Glenda Louise Bledsoe.'

My bullshit detector clicked in – Ainge bugged out on his own – I'd bet money.

Handwritten pages – doodles, scrawls – half-legible hieroglyphics:

(Unreadable)/'I've got a trail worked out on paper'/(unreadable)/ 'He's spent a fortune so far'/(unreadable)/ink smears. 'So he's spent a fortune operating Officer John Duhamel' – smears – 'But of course he's a rich kid policeman whose father died (April 1958) and left him millions.'

Scribbles/penis drawings – doped-up homo Junior. 'Rich kid' Exley – easy make – working Johnny D. – no huge surprise. Doodles/gun drawings/indecipherable gobbledy-gook. 'Operating this guy whose story you won't believe.' Coffee stains/ smears/cock drawings/'See file marked Evidence 1.'

Check the stack – there – a folder:

Newspaper clippings: mid-April '58. Human-interest schmaltz:

Johnny Duhamel turns pro – his 'wealthy' parents died penniless and USC dunned their estate. Johnny: attending grad school, three jobs – no pro fight career plans. USC cracks down: repay your college debt or drop out.

That piece – the L.A. *Times*, 4/18/58. Three recaps – the *Herald/Examiner/Mirror* – 4/24, 5/2, 5/3.

Weird:

Four L.A. dailies/four stories – no new facts exposited, no new angles probed. Gallaudet's file check confirmed: Duhamel's parents died broke.

More 'Evidence #1': numbered document photos. I flashed back to Junior's pad – that Minox camera.

Photos 1, 2, 3: Security First National Bank forms. Checking and savings accounts opened: Walton White, 2750 N. Edgemont, Los Angeles. Two thirty-grand deposits coming off hinky: Edgemont stopped at 2400.

Notations on the back:

#1 – 'Manager described "Walton White" as "familiar somehow", 6′2INCH, 170, blond-gray hair, glasses, late thirties.'

#2 – 'Manager shown magazine photograph of Edmund Exley. Confirms that E.E. opened the "Walton White" accounts.'

#3 – 'Manager stated that "Walton White" (E.E.) requested blank bank checks immediately so that he could begin fulfilling transactions.'

Hot now – I started sweating.

Photos 4, 5, 6 – cancelled 'Walton White' checks. Four grand, four grand, five grand – 4/23, 4/27, 4/30/58.

Made out to:

Fritzie Huntz, Paul Smitson, Frank Brigantino.

Bingo: the bylines on those copycat articles.

Photo #7 – a cancelled check. Eleven grand and change paid out to: the USC Alumni Debt Fund.

'So he's spent a fortune operating Officer John Duhamel.'

'Operating this guy whose story you won't believe.'

Reporters bribed.

Johnny bought.

Junior glomming bank records – intimidation prowess and charm pre-CRAAAZY.

Sweating – dripping on my file sway:

Duhamel fight clippings.

A deposition – Chuck 'the Greek' Chamales – matchmaker, Olympic Auditorium.

'Revealed under the threat to expose his liaison with Lurleen Ruth Cressmeyer, age 14';

Johnny D. tanked his one pro fight.

Ed Exley paid him to do it.

Duhamel told Chamales this – 'one night when he was drunk.' The Greek to Junior, verbatim: 'He didn't get specific. He just told me on the QT that that Exley guy had special work for him.'

Odd pages left – gibberish/doodling. One sheet block-printed:

ADDENDUM:

As former Academy evidence instructor I was invited to the October 16th retirement party for Sgt. Dennis Payne. Talked about my recent sergeantcy and transfer to Ad Vice with Capt. Didion, who told me my father had old Dep. Chief Green move Dave Klein up to the Ad Vice command as only a Lieutenant partially to grease things for my ultimately taking a spot there. Capt. Didion told Dave 'The Enforcer' stories for half an hour, and I only listened because I wanted to tap the grapevine for information on Johnny. Capt. Didion told me that Exley personally requested that Johnny graduate early (the 7/10/58 cycle) in order to fill a potential Wilshire Patrol vacancy, which made no sense to him. Also, Dennis Payne confirmed what I suspected when Johnny was yanked early from my evidence class: that Exley urged those undercover assignments on him personally, asking Capt. Didion that he be assigned to them while still technically a cadet.

Exley and Duhamel – operating partners – operating WHO?

Suspects:

The Kafesjians.

Narco.

'This guy whose story you won't believe.'

'This guy' – *singular*. A semantic fuck-up – maybe, maybe not.

Single-o suspects:

Tommy K.

J.C.

Dan Wilhite.

Skewed – I couldn't link them directly to Johnny.

Crack the door – Henstell on the walkway, pacing. Shove the chair back, jam the knob shut, go—

I lit a match and torched a file page: faggot artwork sizzled. More matches, more pages – a contained blaze right there on the table.

Smoke out the floor crack—

Henstell banged on the door. 'Klein, Goddamn it, what the hell are you doing!'

Flames, charred paper, smoke. I kicked the table over, stomped the blaze out.

'Klein, Goddamn it!'

Jerk the door open, shove him back, coughing smoke—

'Tell Noonan it was personal. Tell him I'm still his witness, and now I owe *him* one.'

Out to East L.A., light-headed – light smoke inhalation. Custody forty-seven hours off – two days to GET it:

'LONG HISTORY OF INSANITY BOTH OUR FAMILIES.'

Olympic east – rain clouds dousing smog. Chasing/chased/partnered up/partner fucked:

Richie's Chino file was still missing – warden's aides were tossing storage bins for it. Sid Riegle was out chasing Richie – Darktown/Hancock Park – no leads.

Six IA men tapped out: no new Herrick/Kafesjian links. Links extant: Pennsylvania/chemical work/L.A. arrivals '31–'32. Late-'31 marriages: Joan Renfrew, Madge Clarkson – no criminal records – their hometowns queried.

Meg chasing real estate: a Spindrift pad title search. Zero so far, Meg persisting.

The Kafesjians at home, cabin-fevered – Feds out front, Feds out back. Partnered-up-family-tight – no way to tell them:

You and the Herricks – filthy together. Liquor bottles smashed/dogs blinded/music trashed – murder/suicide/castration – I can TASTE it. You'll tell me, you'll tell somebody – I'm partnered up strong on my ride down.

Strong and dirty: Exley. Strong/cautious/grasping: Noonan.

Use them both: fight/squirm/lie/beg/manipulate them.

Exley: Johnny D. as my wedge. The Feds – no lever yet – that fire fried my momentum. Henstell: 'You know, Mr. Noonan *was* starting to think you'd be a pretty good witness.'

Was/is/could be/would be: DUES TIME. Junior nullified now – Glenda safe – punch my new grief ticket: FEDERAL.

No pre-court testimony taken yet – custody meant interrogation. Noonan – cautious/grasping – shooting me wake-up phone calls:

'You're commanding a homicide case – how odd.'

'Would Richard Herrick be the Richie you seem to be so interested in? The man Tommy Kafesjian seems to be rather concerned with? Chief Exley told the *Herald* that you worked on a burglary case that may be tangentially connected to the killings. We *must* discuss this after you enter custody.'

'I understand the dilemma you're in, David. You may think that you can dissemble to us and be less than forthcoming vis-à-vis your organized-crime connections, thus sparing yourself a Syndicate death sentence. You will of course be given Federal protection after your grand jury testimony, but you should know now that lies and lies by omission will not be tolerated.'

Smart fucker.

Holding back information – bet on it. My bug fear: those Fed tails post-Johnson. Long-shot stuff, hard to shake: Abe Voldrich snuffed, a blue Pontiac spotted. Jack Woods – nine contract hits minimum – *my* preferred killer. Jack Woods, proud owner: a powder-blue '56 Pontiac.

Downtown, the 3rd Street Bridge, Boyle Heights. East to Wabash – Brownell's Locksmiths—

A parking-lot drive-up hut.

Four keys – three numbered – maybe traceable.

I pulled up, honked. A man right there, customer smile on. 'Help you?'

I flashed my badge and the key fob. '158–32, 159–32, 160–32, and one unstamped. Who did you make them for?'

'I don't even have to check my files, 'cause that 32 coding's from this rent-a-locker storage place I do all the locker keys for.'

'So you don't know who rented these individual lockers?'

'Right you are. The unstamped key's for the front door, the number keys are for lockers. And I don't cut no duplicates 'less the manager at the place gives the okay.'

'What "place"?'

'The Lock-Your-Self at 1750 North Echo Park Boulevard, which is open twenty-four hours, case you didn't know.'

'You're pretty snappy with your answers.'

'Well…'

'Come on, tell me.'

'Well…'

'Well nothing, I'm a police officer.'

Whiny, wheedling. 'Well, I hate to be a stool pigeon, 'cause I sorta liked the guy.'

'What guy?'

'I don't know his name, but he's that little Mex bantam fights at the Olympic all the time.'

'Reuben Ruiz?'

'Right you are. He came in yesterday and told me he wanted dupes of the keys with them numbers, like he *saw* the keys but couldn't get his mitts on the two original sets I cut. I told him, "Ixnay, not even if you was Rocky Marciano himself."'

'You cut *two* original sets for the Lock-Your-Self place?'

'One customer original, one management original. The manager sent a guy by for a second customer set, 'cause the people who rented those lockers wanted dupes.'

Set number one – Junior. Set number two – maybe Johnny D. – Reuben's pal.

'Officer, them locks and keys are being changed continually to thwart theft. So if you talk to Bob, the manager, will you tell him I'm doing my part toward keeping things—'

I hit the gas – the lock man ate exhaust fumes.

Echo Park off Sunset – a bigwarehouse. A parking lot, no door guard – my door key got me in.

Huge: crisscross hallways, locker-lined. A directory/map up front, number-coded.

The 32 codings were tagged 'Jumbo'. Follow the map – two corridors down, left, stop:

Three floor-to-ceiling lockers six feet wide.

Scratched up – lock-pick marks.

Keys in, crack the doors:

158–32: mink coats hung eight feet deep, six feet wide.

Seven empty hangers.

159–32: stoles amd pelts – dumped shoulder-high.

160–32: fox/monk/raccoon coats – fuckloads hung/dumped/piled/folded/tossed.

Johnny/Junior/Reuben.

Dudley Smith, fur-heist boss – scooped/hoodwinked/stiffed.

Exley and Duhamel – operating WHO?

Mink – touch it, smell it. Empty hangers – Lucille's fur strip? Johnny trying to sell Mickey Cohen bulk fur??

Reuben Ruiz: ex-B&E man/burglar brothers.

His direct key approach – no go.

Break-in scratches/no door guard/Lock-Your-Self: open twenty-four hours.

Key clicks/lock clicks/brain clicks – I got my notebook and pen out. Three lockers – I dropped three indentical notes inside:

> I want to deal on Johnny Duhamel, Junior Stemmons and whatever or whoever else connects to this. This is for money, independent of Ed Exley.
>
> D. Klein

Lock the doors – lock clicks/brain clicks – get to a phone.

I found a booth across Sunset. Ad Vice, two rings, 'Riegle.'

'Sid, it's me.'

'You mean it's you and you want something.'

'You're right.'

'So tell me, but I'll tell *you* right now this homicide work is wearing me thin.'

'Meaning?'

'Meaning Richie Herrick is nowhere. First Exley issues an APB, then he rescinds it, and we *still* can't locate one single white man known to frequent Negro areas.'

'I know, and our best bet is to let Tommy Kafesjian find him for us.'

'Which doesn't seem too likely with those Armenian humps holed up with Fed surveillance outside their house. Jesus…'

'Sid, write this down.'

'Okay, I'm listening.'

'The storage locker place at 1750 North Echo Park.'

'All right, I wrote it down. Now what?'

'Now you get your civillian car and stake out the entrance and parking lot. You write down the plate numbers on everyone who walks in. Every five or six hours you call in the stats to the DMV, and you go through until tomorrow morning and call me.’

Stage groans. ‘You’ll explain then?’

‘That’s right.’

‘It’s the Herrick job?’

‘It’s fucking everything.’

36

REUBEN RUIZ – TALK, strongarm – whatever it took.

R&I shot me his address: 229 South Loma. Not that far – a quick run over – brother Ramon on the porch.

‘Reuben’s at the ravine, bein’ a *puto* for the City of Los Angeles.’

Another quick run – Chavez Ravine.

Swarming now – evictions pending. ‘Police Parking’ – a dirt lot going in. Cop cars jammed up tail to snout: Sheriff’s, LAPD, Feds.

Hills fronting the main drag; Mex kids chucking rocks. Black & whites scratched and dented.

An access road up – narrow, dusty. I walked it, hit the top, caught the view:

Hecklers bucking blueshit containment – the main road cordoned off. Shack-lined roads/hills/gulleys – eviction notices rife. Camera crews shooting door to door: Feds and a bobbing sombrero.

Dig it: shack dwellers swarming that hat.

I walked down into it; blues juked me through the cordon. Catch the view: Shipstad, Milner, Ruiz in bullfighter garb.

Reuben:

Passing out money, spics swamping him.

‘*Dinero!*’

‘*El jefe Ruiz!*’

Big-time Mex jabber – incomprehensible.

Milner gaga-eyed: what *is* this?

I shoved, waved – Shipstad saw me. Trembly and flushed – Henstell probably blabbed.

He shoved toward me. We collided: hands on suitcoats instinctive.

‘*Gracias el jefe Reuben!*’ – Ruiz tossing cash away.

A dirt yard off the road – Shipstad pointed over. I followed him – tree shade, a sign: ‘Notice to Vacate.’

‘Justify that firebug routine before Noonan revokes your immunity and has you arrested.’

Eyeball magnet: Reuben dishing out greenbacks.

‘Look at me, Klein.’

At him, lawyer bullshit: ‘It was nontangential incriminating evidence. It in no way pertained to the Kafesjian family or to any focus of your investigation or my potential grand jury testimony. Noonan has enough on me as it is, and I didn’t want to feed him more potential indictable information.’

‘Attorney to attorney, how can you live the way you do?’

Tongue tied—

'We're trying to help you get out of this alive. I'm developing a plan to relocate you after you testify, and frankly Noonan doesn't think I should be working so hard at it.'

'Which means?'

'Which means I dislike him slightly more than I dislike you. Which means he's two seconds away from arresting you and putting you on display as a hostile witness, then releasing you and letting Sam Giancana or whoever have you killed.'

Meg jailed/brutalized/clipped – Technicolor. 'Will you relocate my sister?'

'That's impossible. This last escapade has cost you credibility with Noonan, relocation for your sister was not covered in your contract and there is no established precedent for mobsters harming the loved ones of fugitive witnesses.'

GET MONEY.

Ruiz throwing it away.

'We're your only hope. I'll square things with Noonan, but you be at the Federal Building by eight A.M. day after tomorrow, or we'll find you, arrest your sister and begin tax-charge proceedings.'

Crowd noise, dust. Reuben watching us.

I waved the keys. Sunlight on metal – he nodded.

Shipstad: 'Klein…'

'I'll be there.'

'Eight A.M.'

'I heard you.'

'It's your only—'

'What's Ruiz doing?'

He looked over. 'Expiation of guilt or some such concept. Can you blame him? All this for a baseball stadium?'

Reuben walked up.

'Did you come to see *him?* And what's with those keys?'

'Give me some time with him.'

'Is it personal?'

'Yeah, it's personal.'

Shipstad walked; Ruiz passed him and winked. Rockabye Reuben: bullfight threads, grin.

'Hey, Lieutenant.'

I twirled the keys. 'You go first.'

'No. First you tell me this is just two witness buddies gabbing, then you tell me popping Mexican bantamweights for robbery don't push your buzzer.'

Bulldozers down the road – a shack crashed.

'*Keys*, Reuben. You saw the originals, memorized the numbers and tried to get that locksmith to cut dupes, and there's tool marks on the lockers at that storage place.'

'I didn't hear you say anything like "This is just two guys who'd like each other to stay out of trouble talking."'

Gear whine/wood snap/dust – the noise made me flinch. 'I'm way past arresting people.'

'I sort of thought so, given what the Feds been saying.'

'Reuben, *spill*. I've got this half-assed notion you want to.'

'Do penance, maybe. Spill, I don't know.'

'Did you boost some furs out of those lockers?'

'As many as me and my righteous B&E buddies could carry. And they're gone, in case you want a mink for your slumlord sister.'

Flowers sprouting next to weeds; smog wafting in.

'So you bagged some furs, sold them and gave the money to your poor exploited brethren.'

'No, I gave a silver fox pelt to Mrs Mendoza next door, 'cause I popped her daughter's cherry and never married her, *then* I sold the furs, *then* I got drunk and gave the money away.'

'Just like that?'

'Yeah, and those stupidos down there'll probably spend it on Dodger tickets.'

'Reuben—'

'Fuck it, all right – me, Johnny Duhamel and my brothers took down the Hurwitz fur warehouse. You were maybe pushing that way when I saw you in my dressing room, so now you tell me what *you* got before I sober up and get bored with this penance routine.'

'Let's try Ed Exley operating Johnny.'

Smog – Reuben coughed. 'You picked a good fucking topic'

'I figured if Johnny talked to anybody, it was you.'

'You figured pretty good.'

'He told you about it?'

'Most of it, I guess. Look, this is, you know, off the record?'

I nodded – easy now – cut him rope.

Tick tick tick tick.

Jerk the rope: 'Reuben—'

'Yeah, okay, I guess it was like this spring, like April or something. Exley, he read this newspaper story about Johnny. You know, a what you call human-interest story, like here's this guy in graduate school working all these jobs, he used to be a comer in the Golden Gloves, but now he's gotta turn pro even though he don't want to, 'cause his parents croaked and stiffed him and his school, and how he's broke. You follow me so far?'

'Keep going.'

'Okay, so Exley, he approached Johnny and what you call manipulated him. He gave Johnny money and paid off his college loan, and he paid off these debts Johnny's parents left. Exley, he's like some kind of rich-kid cop with this big inheritance, and he gave Johnny this bonaroo fucking amount of money and paid these reporter guys to write these other, you know, similar-type newspaper stories about him, playing on this angle that he had to turn pro out of, you know, financial necessity.'

'And Exley made Johnny tank that one pro fight he had.'

'Right.'

'And the newspaper pieces and the tank job were to set Johnny up as some sort of hard-luck kid, so it would look realistic when he applied to the LAPD.'

'Right.'

'And Exley got Johnny eased into the Academy?'

'Right.'

'And all this was to set Johnny up to work undercover.'

'Right, to get next to some people or something that Exley had this hard-on for, but don't ask me who, 'cause I don't know.'

THEM/Dan Wilhite/Narco – mix them, match them—

'Keep going.'

Bobs, feints – Reuben oozed sweat. 'So Exley, he got Johnny this outside work while he was in the Academy, this gig where he what you call infiltrated these

Marine Corps guys who were beating up and robbing all these rich queers. That punk Stemmons, you know, that ex-partner of yours, he was Johnny's teacher at the Academy, and he read this report that Johnny wrote on the fruit-roller gig.'

'And?'

'And Stemmons, he was both, you know, attracted to and, what you call it, repelled by homos. He had the hots for Johnny, which embarrassed the shit out of Johnny, 'cause he's a cunt man from the gate. Anyway, Johnny busted up the fruit-roller ring, and the Marine Corps police, they got, you know, convictions against the guys. Johnny graduated from the Academy and got assigned to the Detective Bureau right off, 'cause the queer gig made him look righteous good, and 'cause being a Golden Gloves champ gave him some righteous prestige. Anyway, that Irish guy, you know Dudley Smith, he took a shine to Johnny and got him assigned to the Mobster Squad, 'cause he wanted an ex-fighter for this strongarm work they do.'

Linkage clicking in – no surprises yet.

'And?'

'*And* somehow Stemmons found out that Exley was what you call operating Johnny, *and* he pulled this wild queer number on him, *and* it disgusted Johnny, but he didn't beat that *puto* faggot silly, 'cause Stemmons was this hotshot evidence teacher cop who could screw Johnny on this gig he was fuckin' embroiled in with Exley.'

Popping punches, popping sweat – little moves synced to his story.

'And?'

'*And* you cops always pull that "and" bit to keep people talking.'

'Then let's try "so".'

'*So* I guess it was about this time that Johnny got tangled up in the fur job. He said he had inside help, and he just hired on me and my brothers to do the hauling work. He was doing these other so-called bad things, and I figured it was strongarm shit on the Mobster Squad, but Johnny said it was lots worse, like so bad he was afraid to tell his good buddy Exley about it. Fucking Stemmons, he was talking all this criminal-mastermind noise up to Johnny, and I don't know, but somehow he found out about Johnny and the fur heist.'

Ruiz shit-eater-grinning – punched out, winded.

'When did Johnny tell you all this?'

'After the fur heist, when we put on gloves and he told me to give him this penance beating.'

'And around that time Stemmons tried to horn in on Johnny's part of the fur job.'

'Right.'

'Come on, Reuben. Right, *and?*'

'And Johnny told me the fur job was an Exley setup from the gate. It was part of his what you call cover, and Exley was in with that guy Sol Hurwitz. Hurwitz was some kind of gone-bust gambler, and fuckin' rich-kid Exley, he bought all the furs and told Johnny how to stage the heist.'

AUDACIOUS.

Links missing.

Exley's heist/Dudley Smith's investigation – why did Exley assign someone that good?

Linkage chronology – pure guesswork:

Johnny offers Mickey Cohen hot fur.

Dud gloms the Cohen lead and scares Mickey shitless.

Exley intercedes.

Exley operates Mickey – *toward what end?*

Mickey, skewed behavior – movie mogul, Darktown bungler – he *still* won't pull his Southside slots.

Chick Vecchio – Mickey linked.

Chick – finger man – Kafesjian movie time.

Mickey and Chick – linked to:

THEM/Narco/Dan Wilhite.

Links:

Missing/hidden/obscured/twisted CRAAAZY—

Reuben – punched out, grinning: '*So*, I guess all this is just between us witness buddies.'

'That's right.'

'Is Johnny dead?'

'Yes.'

'Too bad he never got married. Mea fucking culpa, I could of dropped a nice mink coat on his widow.'

Crash noise – another shack went down.

37

STONE'S THROW: CHAVEZ RAVINE to Silverlake. Over to Jack Woods' place – his car outside.

Powder blue gleaming: Jack's baby.

The front door stood ajar – I knocked first.

'I'm in the shower! It's open!'

I walked in – brazen Jack – phones and bet slips in plain view. A wall photo: Jack, Meg and me – the Mocambo, '49.

'You remember that night? Meg got plowed on brandy alexanders.'

Meg sat between us – hard to tell whose girl.

'You're cruising down memory lane pretty steep, partner.'

I turned around. 'You clipped a guy for Mickey a couple of days before. You were flush, so you picked up the tab.'

Jack cinched his robe. 'Is this the pot calling the kettle black?'

'Did you pop Abe Voldrich?'

'Yeah, I did. Do you care?'

'Not exactly.'

'Then you just came by to rehash old times.'

'It's about Meg, but I wouldn't mind an explanation.'

Jack lit a cigarette. 'Chick Vecchio bought the hit for Mickey. He said Narco and Dan Wilhite wanted it. Voldrich was the Kafesjian family's bagman to the LAPD. Chick said it was Mickey's idea, that the Feds had turned Voldrich as a witness, and Mickey wanted his connections to the Kafesjians snipped. Ten grand, partner. My consolation prize for that hump Stemmons dying on me.'

'I'm not so sure I buy it.'

'So what? Business is business, and Mickey and those Armenians have got lots of stuff going down in Niggertown.'

'Something's missing. Mickey doesn't clip people anymore, and he hasn't got ten grand liquid to save his life.'

'So it was the Kafesjians direct, or Dan Wilhite through Chick. Look, what do you care who—'

'Wilhite doesn't know Chick personally, I'd bet on it.'

My sister's lover – bored. 'Look, Chick played on you and me as friends. He said Voldrich could spill to the Feds on you, so did I want to make ten G's and help a buddy out. *Now*, you want to tell me how you made me for the job?'

Links: obscured/hidden/fucked with—

'Dave—'

'The Feds saw a car like yours near Voldrich's place. They didn't get any numbers, or you'd have heard from them by now.'

'So it was just an educated guess.'

'You're the only clip guy I know with a powder-blue car.'

'So what about Meg?'

'First you tell me how it stands with you two.'

'It stands that she's thinking about leaving her husband and getting a place with me.'

'A phone drop? Some crap-game pad?'

'We ruined her for squarejohn guys years ago, so don't act like she doesn't know the score.'

That photo – a woman, two killers.

'The Feds have got me by the shorts. I'm going into custody day after tomorrow, and if they try to screw me on my immunity deal Meg might get hurt. I want you to tell her to pull our money out of the bank, and I want you to stash her some place safe until I call you.'

'Okay.'

'Just "okay"?'

'Okay, send postcards from wherever the Feds hide you, and I've had a hunch that you were screwed for a couple of weeks now.'

That picture—

Jack smiled. 'Meg said she's doing this title search for you, and every time you talk on the phone you sound less like a strongarm guy.'

'And more like a lawyer?'

'No, more like a guy trying to buy his way out.'

'Look after her.'

'Write when you can, Counselor.'

A pay-phone call to Homicide. Shit news – no trace on Richie Herrick's Chino file. A message – meet Pete Bondurant – 8:00, the Smokehouse, Burbank.

The Vecchio job – looming ugly

Time to kill. Stone's throw: Silverlake to Griffith Park. I drove up the east road to the Observatory.

Smog clearing, a view: Hollywood, points south. Coin telescopes mounted by the entrance: 180-degree swivels.

Time to kill, pocket change – I aimed one at the set.

Glass blur, asphalt, hills. Parked cars, up, over: the spaceship.

Crank the lens, squint – people.

Sid Frizell and Wylie Bullock talking: maybe their standard gore shrick. Blur, twist the lens: winos sleeping in the weeds.

Look:

A trailer door embrace: Touch and Rock Rockwell. Over right: Mickey C. spieling extras. Metal glare – Glenda's trailer, Glenda.

Sitting on the steps, her legs jammed up. Her vampire gown getting ratty – faded, threadbare.

Glass blur, sun streaks. People walking by – dark obstructions. Hard to see, easy to imagine:

Her breath catching low guiding me in.

Sweat matting her hair a shade darker.

Touching her scars – her eyes implicit: horror gave me the will – and I won't tell you how.

Sun spots, eyestrain. Twist the scope – a wino fistfight – pratfalls, gouging.

The lens clicked off – my time was up. My eyes hurt – I closed them and just stood there. Images hit me rapid-fire:

Dave Klein, strikebreaker – teeth on my truncheon.

Dave Klein, bet enforcer – baseball bat work.

Dave Klein, killer – hung over from cordite and blood stench.

Meg Klein, sobbing: ‘I don’t want you to love me that way.’

Joan Herrick: ‘Long history of insanity both our families.’

Somebody, please: give me one last chance to know.

38

'… SO MR HUGHES is pissed. Some psycho chopped Harold Miciak, and he was hoping it'd be open and shut, but now the Malibu Sheriffs' are thinking it's not that Wino Will-o-the-Wisp guy. They're thinking somebody chopped Miciak and strangled him to make it look like the Wisp, and Miciak's ex-wife is bothering Mr Hughes to put private eyes on the job like he's supposed to spend *money* on this thing. *Then,* on top of all *that,* Bradley Milteer finds out that *you're* porking Glenda Bledsoe and that she's been stealing from Mr Hughes' fuck pad, but *you* never reported it.'

Southbound – Pete's car. Bonus armed: knucks and sap.

'I got you the Glenda gig. Mr Hughes didn't trust me on it, 'cause he knows I'm susceptible to snatch. I figured, give the job to the old Enforcer, 'cause he's pretty stoical in the woman department.'

I stretched – neck kinks, jangly nerves. 'I'm paying you seven grand for this.'

'Yeah, and you bought me a barbeque beef plate and a beer, which frankly Mr Hughes never did. What I'm saying is that Mr Hughes is pissed at you, which is grief you don't need.'

Normandie south – Pete smoking – crack the window. Replay: my call to Noonan.

'You burned up potential Federal evidence. You're lucky I haven't revoked your immunity outright, and now you want this rather outsized favor.'

'PLEASE.'

'I like the tremor in your voice.'

'*PLEASE*. Lift the surveillance on the Kafesjians tomorrow. It's my last full day before custody, and I want to see if I can learn a few things before I go in.'

'My guess is that this pertains to the Kafesjians looking for that Richie character, who may be Richard Herrick of that rather outré triple-homicide case you're working.'

'You're right.'

'Good. I appreciate candor, and I'll do it if you formally depose your Richie information during your pre-grand-jury interviews.'

'I agree.'

'It's settled, then. Go with God, Brother Klein.'

'Brother' Klein – Lutheran choirboy – fists/sap/knucks—

Pete nudged me. 'Chick's meeting Joan Crawford at the Lucky Nugget. She'll be camouflaged up, and they're gonna play pokerino or something, then head for the fuck spot from there. I'm gonna snap some pictures on the QT, then Chick's gonna give me the high sign. We'll tail them to the spot, let them get cozy and take it from there.'

Cold air, bouncing headlights. A billboard: 'Dodger Stadium Is *Your* Dream! Support the Chavez Ravine Bill!'

Pete: ‘Seven grand for your thoughts.’

‘I’m thinking Chick must have a money stash someplace.’

‘If you’re thinking take it, it means we have to clip him.’

‘It’s just a thought.’

‘And as thoughts go, not bad. Jesus, you and some ex-carhop actress. Is she—’

‘Yeah, she’s worth the trouble.’

‘I wasn’t gonna ask you that.’

‘I know.’

‘Like that.’

Straight south – Gardena – Pete talking grapevine:

Fred Turentine, *Hush-Hush* bug man: scandal duty for off-the-books cash. Boozer Freddy, AWOL: from dry-out farms and his jail teaching gig. Fed heat, restless niggers – you couldn’t score good ribs or dark poon for shit.

Gardena – poker-place row pulsing neon. The Lucky Nugget – Chick’s Caddy in the lot, top down.

We pulled up behind it – tail ready. Front-seat action – Joan Crawford and Chick necking hot.

Pete said, ‘Duck down, they’ll see you.’

I ducked and listened – car doors slammed. Back up – lovebirds on the stroll.

Pete got out. ‘Take a snooze or something. Don’t play the radio, you’ll run the battery down.’

Tracks inside: movie star, thug, shakedown man. I skimmed the radio dial: news, religious shit, bop.

Memory jog: rolling Gardena drunks back in high school. Bop to ballads, memory lane – zipping Meg’s prom gown too slow.

Fuck it – spare the battery – I turned the music off and dozed. Pete at the door: ‘Wake up, they’re leaving.’

The Caddy rolled, ragtop up. Pete pulled out – not too close.

East, north – cool air woke me up. Easy tailwork – collusion – Pete drove nonchalant. One arm out to her window, oblivious: Joan fucking Crawford.

Due north – Compton, LYNWOOD – spooky turf.

Chick out front: left turn, right turn – Spindrift Drive.

48, 4900 – curb plates pulsing weird/nuts/strange. 4980 – Johnny D. – ‘Why meet there?’

Hard to breathe – I rolled the window down.

Left turn, right turn.

Empty courtyards.

Dry-ice chills: hot and cold.

Pete: ‘Jesus, I never made you for such a fresh-air fiend.’

Chick stopped – brake-light taps, signallike.

Memory lane:

Needle stabbed.

Toasty-warm tingly doped up.

Chick and Joanie, walking love-draped:

Into a vacant courtyard, up the RIGHT side walkway.

Then:

Carried, treading air.

RIGHT turn – a skanky room – MOVIE TIME.

Now:

Sucking air – hard to breathe – Johnny replays zinging me.

Pete pulled up curbside. 'Chick passed me a note. He knows some guys making smut films here, so he thought Joanie'd like that angle. Movie stars never fail to fucking amaze me.'

Memory clicks – brutal late:

Glenda said Sid Frizell was shooting stag films.

'At same abandoned dive.'

'Down in LYNWOOD.'

'Hey, Klein, are you okay?'

Weapon check: .45, sap, knucks. 'Let's go.'

Pete loaded his camera. 'It's all set. We go in on "Baby, it's so good."'

Ready: knuck teeth scraped my law-school ring.

Pete: 'Now.'

We ran in: stucco cubes, walkways, grass.

Place it then and now: Movie time, Johnny begging: 'PLEASE DON'T KILL ME.'

Sex grunts – a right-side shack midway down. Tiptoes up, listen:

Smut moans, Chick: 'Baby it's so gooood.'

Pete camera ready.

Looks, nods, kicks – we snapped the door clean.

Pitch black half a second.

Flashbulb pops: Joan Crawford gobbling Chick V. tonsil-deep.

Speedo:

Bulb blips – Joanie running out of the door bare-ass, shrieking.

Chick pawing at a wall switch – the lights on.

A magnum on the nightstand – I grabbed it and scooped the room:

Mirrored walls.

Linoleum floor – maroon dots – dried blood.

Chick on the bed, zipping his fly.

Knucks/gun butt – quick—

I bashed his face, racked his nuts, cracked his arms. Bone jar up my hands – Chick balled himself tight.

A shadow on the bed – Pete restraining me. '*Ease off*. I gave Crawford some clothes and some money. *We've got time to do this right*.'

Chick doubled up, quaking, good cause: two giant fists flexing straight at him.

Canned shtick – Pete gleeful:

'The left one's the hospital, the right one's death. The right one steals your life while the left steals your breath. These hands are bad juju and the bad boogaloo, they're the teeth of the demon as he slides down the flue.'

Chick stood up – bloody, trembly. 'I am Outfit. I am a made guy. Feature you are both dead for this.'

Pete: 'Dave, ask the man a question.'

I said, 'You set me up. I told you I was meeting a "pretty-boy strongarm cop" in Lynwood. Now, for starters you tell me *who* you told and how they got that home-movie idea.'

'Feature I will tell you nothing.'

Pete grabbed him by the neck. Flick: two hundred pounds airborne. Chick hit the far wall – mirror glass shattered.

Rag doll Chick – this 'huh?' look.

Pete right there – stomp, stomp – fingers cracking under his heels. Chick showed balls: no audible grief.

I knelt down. 'You set me up with the Kafesjians.'

'Go fuck yourself.'

'Chick, we go back. This doesn't have to be ugly.'

'Feature you *are* ugly.'

'You fingered me to the Kafesjians. Cop to it and go from there.'

'I didn't clue nobody you were meeting that cop you told me about. So you got set up, what the fuck, they set you up. Feature I knew they set you up, but feature it was after the goddamn fact.'

'You said "they". You mean the Kafesjians?'

'I mean it's a figure of goddamn speech. You got set up 'cause you were born for it, all the shit you pulled and walked on. You got set up, but feature I didn't do it.'

Pete: 'I didn't know you knew the Kafesjians. I thought you were strictly a Mickey guy.'

'Fuck you. You're a chump change pimp for Howard Hughes. I fucked your mother. My dog fucked your mother.'

Pete laughed.

Chick – broken fingers, shock pale: 'Feature I been roughhoused before. Feature I gave you a free introductory answer, but from here on in you get shit.'

Blood flecks on the floor – Johnny begging.

'You said "they". You mean the Kafesjians? Give me some details I can use.'

'You mean feed to the Feds? I know you rolled over for Welles Noonan.'

This greaseball thug – sweating off Joan Crawford's perfume.

'Hand the fuckers up. Give me details.'

'Detail this' – one smashed middle finger twirling. 'Suck on this, you kraut cocksuck—'

I grabbed his hand – a wall socket close – jam that fuck-you finger in—

Sparks/smoke – Chick convulsing – live-wire jolts shaking me.

Pete shook me: 'STOP IT, YOU'LL KILL HIM!'

Chick shook free: juiced-up hip-hops on his knees, going green.

Fast:

Pete tossed him on the bed. Pillows, sheets, blankets – one mummified geek inside seconds.

Hip-hops sputtering out, his green tinge fading.

Johnny Duhamel begging – IN THIS ROOM.

I grabbed the magnum and popped the cylinder. Six rounds – I dumped five.

Pete nodded: I *think* he's okay.

Show the gun, show the cylinder – spin it, lock it.

Chick – read his eyes – 'You wouldn't.'

I aimed point blank – my gun, his head. 'You said "they". Did you mean the Kafesjian family?'

No response.

I pulled the trigger – *click* – empty chamber.

'How'd you get in with the Kafesjians? I didn't know you knew them.'

No response.

I pulled the trigger – *click* – empty chamber.

'I know you gave Jack Woods the contract on Abe Voldrich, and Jack said Mickey ordered it. I don't believe that, so you tell me who really did.'

Chick, raspy: 'Fuck you.'

I pulled the trigger – twice – empty chambers.

Pete whooped: 'Mother dog!'

Rainbow Chick turning gray/green/blue.

Cock the hammer, eeeaase the trigger sooo slooow …

'Okay, okay PLEASE!'

I pulled the gun back. Chick coughed, spat phlegm and talked:

'I got this order to recruit a hit on Abe Voldrich. Feature they figured I was too well known on the Southside to do it myself, so I thought, "Dave Klein, he could get burned by this Federal biz," and "Jack Woods, he does a job for a price, he's Dave's buddy, he'd want to spare Dave grief," so I talked him into it that way, not that he didn't jew me up on the ticket.'

Raspy working on hoarse: 'So, feature – I *talked* to Voldrich. The Feds cut him loose to take care of some stuff for a day or so, and I wanted to know what he knew before I had Jack clip him. Now, now, now' – snitch fever – 'you just listen.'

Pete popping his knuckles – loud, like hammer clicks.

Chick, thrashing his blankets: 'Voldrich said the Feds were hot to turn you as a witness. He said he overheard Welles Noonan and this FBI man Shipstad talking. They said they bugged your pad, and they've got a tape with you talking this amorphous stuff about your mob hits, and Glenda Bledsoe saying she snuffed some nigger pimp named Dwight Gilette. Feature, Davey: Noonan told Shipstad he was going to offer you immunity, get a shitload of information, then violate the agreement unless you testify against Glenda on the murder charge. Shipstad tried to talk Noonan out of crossing you, but Noonan hates you so bad he said he'd never agree.'

Feature:

The bed spinning.

The room spinning.

The gun spinning.

'Who are "they"?'

'Davey, please. I just did you this all-time solid.'

'Something's off here. You're not the one the Kafesjians would send to pump Abe Voldrich. Now, who set me up to kill Johnny Duhamel?'

'Davey, *please*.'

Everything spinning—

'Please, Davey…'

I hit him – gun-butt shots – his blanket caught the brunt. I pulled them down – ribcage work – the bed spun.

'Who set me up?'

No snitch.

'What's with Mickey? Why are those out-of-town guys working his slots with the Feds right there?'

No snitch.

'You're in with the Kafesjians? You're tight with them? *You fucking tell me what you know about Tommy chasing a guy named Richie Herrick*.'

No snitch – ribcage work – my pistol grips shattered. Pete flashed me a signal: EASY.

I spun the cylinder again. 'Is Sid Frizell shooting smut films here?'

No answer.

I pulled the trigger – *click* – empty chamber.

Chick balled up, quaking—

Pull the trigger – *click* – empty chamber.

Quaking/snitch-begging eyes: 'They said they needed a strongarm place, so I said take this place, Sid and his crew were editing their stag stuff, so this place was empty.'

'Did they tell you they were making their own movie?'

'No! They said "strongarm spot"! That's all they said!'

'Who developed their film? Did someone on Mickey's movie crew help them out?'

'No! Frizell and his guys are fucking clowns! They don't know anybody except me!'

'Who's been running you?'

'No, Davey, please!'

I put the gun to the mattress – next to his head. 'Who are THEY?'

'NO! I CAN'T! I WON'T!'

I pulled the trigger – *click/click/roar* – muzzle flash set his hair on fire.

This scream.

This huge hand snuffing flames out – stretching huge to quash that scream.

A whisper:

'We'll stash him at one of your buildings. You do what you have to do, and I'll watchdog him. We'll work an angle on his money, and sooner or later he'll spill.'

Smoke. Mattress debris settling.

Chick torched half-bald.

EVERYTHING SPINNING.

39

BACK TO L.A. – Pete's car solo – pay-phone steps en route.

I broke it to Glenda: you're nailed for Dwight Gilette. She said, 'Oh, shit' and hatched a plan: she'd bus it to Fresno, hide out with an old carhop pal. Phone-tap panic hit me – I spieled her through the checkout procedure. Glenda pulled wires and checked diodes – no tap on her line.

Her goodbye: 'We're too good-looking to lose.'

Jack Woods – three no-answers – Meg ditto. A booth outside the Bureau, luck – Jack just walked in. I told him the Feds fucked me: grab Meg, grab our money, GO.

'Okay, Dave' – no goodbye.

I ran up to Ad Vice. A clerk's slip on my desk: 'Call Meg. Important.'

My In box, my Out box – no new Herrick field reports. I checked my desk – the Kafesjian/Herrick case file was gone.

The phone rang—

'Yeah?'

'Boss, it's Riegle.'

'Yeah?'

'Come on, you assigned me to a stakeout, remember? The storage locker place, you told me—'

'Yeah, I remember. Is this routine, or something good?'

Miffed: 'I got you twelve hours of DMV-certified squarejohns and one interesting bit.'

'So tell me.'

'So, a guy went in, then ran back to his car looking spooked. *So*, I got his plate number and checked him out, and I thought he looked sort of familiar. *So*, Richard Carlisle, you know him? He's LAPD, and I think he works for Dudley Smith.'

Soft clicks.

'Boss, are you—'

I cradled the phone down, soft clicks building:

Dick Carlisle – fur-job detective.

Dick Carlisle – Mike Breuning's partner.

11/51 – Breuning dead-ends a juvie B&E. Obvious perps: Tommy K., Richie Herrick.

My Kafesjian/Herrick case file – missing.

I walked down the hall to Personnel. File request slip on the clerk's desk – for Division COs only.

I braced the clerk:

Michael Breuning, Richard Carlisle – get me their folders. 'Yes, sir,' ten minutes, folders out – 'not to leave the room.'

Carlisle – Previous Employment – no clicks.

Breuning – movie click – Wilshire Film Processing, developing technician – ‘37–’39 – pre-LAPD.

Click – soft, circumstantial.

1:00 A.M. – back to Ad Vice. Stray thoughts: Pete guarding Chick at my El Segundo vacant.

Chick:

‘THEY.’

Afraid to say ‘Kafesjian.’

Afraid to snitch they/THEM/who?

That message slip: ‘Call Meg. Important.’

Circumstantial – prickles up my short hairs.

Meg at Jack’s – worth a try. Three rings – Jack, edgy: ‘Yes?’

‘It’s me.’

Background noise: high heels tapping. Jack said, ‘She’s here. She’s taking it pretty well, maybe just a little bit nervous.’

‘You’re leaving tomorrow?’

‘Right. We’ll hit the banks early, withdraw the cash and get bank drafts. Then we’re going to drive down to Del Mar, open some new accounts and find a place. You want to talk to her?’

Tap tap – Meg pacing – high heels made her stocking seams bunch. ‘No. Tell her it’s just goodbye for now, and ask her what the message was.’

Tap, tap, low voices. Footsteps, Jack: ‘Meg said she’s got a partial trace on that building in Lynwood.’

‘And?’

‘She found some property evaluation reports in that storage basement at the City Hall. What she’s got is a 1937 report listing Phillip Herrick and a Dudley L. Smith as bidders on 4980 Spindrift. Hey, you think that’s *the* Dudley Smith?’

Sweaty hands – I dropped the phone.

Say it:

Ed Exley vs. Dudley Smith.

40

EMERGENCY COMMAND #'S – my desk card. Chief of Detectives (Home) – dial it.

Exley, 1:00 A.M. alert: 'Yes? Who is this?'

'It's Klein. I just figured out you're working Dudley Smith.'

'Come over now. My address is 432 South McCadden.'

A trellised Tudor – lights on, the door ajar. I walked in uninvited.

A showroom living room, catalog perfect. Exley in a suit and knotted tie – 2:00 fucking A.M.

'How did you find out?'

'I beat you to a bank writ and hit Junior Stemmons' vault boxes. He had notes on you operating Duhamel, and Reuben Ruiz filled in some blank spots on the fur heist. I found out that Dudley and Phillip Herrick went in on some property together back in '37. Herrick and J.C. Kafesjian came to L.A. a few years before, and I'm betting Dudley was the one who set J.C. up with the LAPD.'

Standing there, arms crossed. 'Continue.'

'It fits. My Kafesjian and Herrick files were stolen, and Richie's prison records are missing. Dudley could have snatched them both easily. He loves developing protégés, so you shoved Johnny Duhamel in his face.'

'Continue.'

Shock him: 'I killed Johnny. Dudley doped me up, provoked me and filmed it. A fucking *movie* exists. I think he's waiting to use me for something.'

Exley 'shock' – one neck vein pulsing. 'When you said Duhamel was dead, I knew it had to be Dudley, but this film business surprises me.'

'Surprise *me*. Give me your end of it.'

He pulled chairs up. 'Give me your take on Dudley Smith.'

'He's brilliant and obsessed with order. He's cruel. It's occurred to me a few times that he's capable of anything.'

'Beyond your wildest imaginings.'

Scalp prickles. 'And?'

'And he's been trying to set himself up to control the L.A. rackets for years.'

'*And?*'

'And, in 1950 he acquired some heroin stolen from a Mickey Cohen-Jack Dragna truce meeting. He enlisted a chemist, who spent years developing compounds with it, in order to produce the drug more cheaply. His design was to accrue profit through selling it, to utilize it to keep Negro criminal elements sedated and then branch out into other rackets. His ultimate goal was something along the lines of "contained" organized crime. He wanted to perpetuate illegal enterprises within specific vice zones, most notably South Los Angeles.'

‘Get to specifics.’

Slow – tantalizing me: ‘In ’53 Dudley became involved in an attempt to take over a pornography racket. A meet was set up at the Nite Owl Coffee Shop. Dudley sent three men in with shotguns. A robbery was faked, and six people were killed. Dudley was instrumental in attempting to frame three Negro thugs for the murders. They escaped from jail and hid out, and as you know, I shot and killed them, along with the man who was hiding them.’

The room swirled—

‘The case was assumed closed. As you also know, a man came forth later and gave the men I killed a valid Nite Owl alibi, which prompted a re-opening. I know you know most of the story, but let two facts suffice: the actual gunmen were killed during the reopened investigation, and they left not one shred of evidence pointing to Dudley Liam Smith.’

Swirling – grab for threads:

Dudley – smut fiend? – MOVIE TIME. Sid Frizell shooting stag films in that courtyard – no connection to Smith.

‘Dud’s got new takeover plans going – strictly Nigger-town.’

‘Bravo, Lieutenant.’

‘He’s running Mickey Cohen?’

‘Continue.’

‘Mickey’s been scuffling since he got out of prison. Four of his men disappeared earlier this year – Dudley killed them. All Mickey’s got going is that stupid horror movie he’s bankrolling, which I don’t think ties to any of this.’

‘Continue.’

‘Mickey’s been acting strange since the Fed business started. He won’t dump his Southside coin machines, and I warned him half a dozen times. He’s got some out-of-town guys servicing slots in plain sight, with the Feds right there taking pictures. I mentioned it to Chick Vecchio, who handed me a line of shit about Mickey paying off a syndicate loan with his coin percentages. Chick’s in with Dudley. Dudley clipped those four Mickey guys and approached Chick. Chick’s the liaison between Dud and Mickey. That slot work with the Feds watching is some kind of setup.’

Exley fucking *smiled*. ‘You’ve put it together exactly as I have.’

‘Get to Johnny. Tell me how you operated him.’

‘No, tell me about your Stemmons evidence first.’

I ticked points: ‘I know about those bank accounts you set up. I know how you paid those reporters to write stories about Johnny. I know you paid off his debts, got him to tank that fight and got him into the Academy. You set up the fur heist yourself, so I’m thinking you arranged leads to have Dudley actually *make* Johnny for the heist. You *knew* how Dudley loved developing “protégés”, so you put a fucking humdinger right in front of his nose.’

‘Keep going.’

‘Breuning and Carlisle – they’re in with Dudley.’

‘Correct.’

‘You got Johnny that Academy undercover job.’

‘Elaborate on that.’

Leading me/pushing me/praising me – this string-pulling weak sister.

‘You coached him to overreact. Dudley likes tough boys, so you made damn sure Johnny established some strongarm credentials.’

‘Bravo, Lieutenant’ – toss the dog a bone.

‘You like running people as much as Dudley does. It must gall you to know he’s better at it.'

'You're sure of that?'

'No, you cocksucker, I'm not. But I *know* it must get you to look in the mirror and see Dudley.'

Exley 'anger' – a tight grimace.

'Continue.'

'No, you give me a chronology. Dudley bit, and got Johnny assigned to the Mobster Squad. He's the Robbery Division CO, so he got the Hurwitz heist pro forma. You planted leads to put Dudley on to Johnny, then what?'

'Then Johnny became an offical Mobster Squad goon. It's brutal work, Lieutenant. I always thought you'd be well suited for it.'

Tight fists – my knuckles ached. 'Reuben Ruiz said Johnny was doing some "very bad things". Dudley started working *him* then, right? He made Johnny for the robbery, and he *liked* it. It impressed him, so he let Johnny in on his plans.'

'You're on track. Continue.'

'Continue shit – what "very bad things"?'

'Dudley had Johnny terrorizing out-of-town hoodlums he had plans for. Johnny told me he was having difficulty doing it.'

'You should have pulled him then.'

'No. I needed more.'

'Do you think those out-of-town guys were the guys working Mickey's slots? Do you think it ties into Dud running Mickey?'

'Yes. I'm not entirely sure, but I think it's possible.'

His chair – Scotch tape dangling off a slat.

'Wrap it up.'

Exley buffed his glasses – his eyes looked soft without them. 'Johnny began to lose Dudley's respect. He was too lax with the out-of-town men, and he told me that Carlisle and Breuning were surveilling him sporadically, apparently because Dudley became instinctively suspicious of him. Junior Stemmons came back into Johnny's life then, quite accidentally. Both he and Johnny were working South-Central, and somehow Stemmons got Johnny to admit his participation in the fur robbery. Johnny didn't, apparently, implicate me, but Stemmons sensed that he was being operated. Dudley became aware of how dangerously unstable Stemmons was, and I *think* he suspected him of trying to extort Johnny. I *know* for a fact that Dudley tried to get a bank writ to seize potential Stemmons evidence, and I'm assuming that he tortured Johnny for information on the extent of Junior's knowledge before he had you kill him. I had already gone to a Federal law clerk that I know, and he stalled Dudley's writ while I tried to get one. You got to the vault boxes first, and I'm thinking that Welles Noonan must have assisted you.'

That dangling tape – just maybe.

'He did.'

'Are you going to be a Federal witness?'

'I'm supposed to be.'

'But you're considering not testifying?'

Glenda – potential FED indictments pending.

'Mostly I'm thinking of running.'

'What's stopping you?'

'The Kafesjian-Herrick job.'

'You're expecting some kind of payoff?'

'No, I just want to know why.'

‘Is that all you want?’

‘No. I want you to get me a cup of coffee, and I want to know why you assigned me to the Kafesjian burglary.’

Exley stood up. ‘Do you think Dudley killed Junior Stemmons?’

‘No, he would have ditched the body to buy more time to get at the vault boxes.’

‘Are you thinking it was a legitimate overdose?’

‘No, I’d bet on Tommy K. My guess is that Junior came on strong and Tommy got pissed. It happened *at* Bido Lito’s, so Tommy left the body there. The Kafesjians torched the place to destroy evidence.’

‘You could be right. Wait, I’ll get you your coffee.’

He walked out. Kitchen sounds – I grabbed the tape.

Safe-combination bingo: 34L-16R-31L. Squarejohns thinking: every rich stupe pulled that chair-reminder bit. I pressed the tape back and scoped the room: cold, expensive.

Exley brought coffee in on a tray. I poured a cup for show.

‘You put me on the Kafesjian burglary to bait Dudley.’

‘Yes. Has he approached you?’

‘Indirectly, and I told him flat out that you were using me as some sort of agent provocateur. He let it go at that.’

‘And he has you compromised with that movie you told me about.’

‘PLEASE DON’T KILL ME.’

‘Get to it. Dudley and the Kafesjians.’

He sat down. ‘The burglary itself was just a coincidence, and I simply capitalized on the fact that Dan Wilhite sent you over to smooth things out with J.C. I suspect that the burglary and the Herrick killings, which *are* connected, are connected to Dudley at best tangentially. Essentially, after the Nite Owl reopening, I began querying retired officers about Dudley. I learned that he, not Chief Horrall, suborned the Kafesjians into the LAPD fold twenty-odd years ago. *He* was the one who initiated the notion of contained narcotics peddling in exchange for a certain amount of Southside order and snitch information, and of course many years later he went crazy with the notion of containment in general.’

‘What about Phillip Herrick?’

‘Your property-ownership lead is my first indication of a Smith-Herrick connection. You see, I just wanted Dudley diverted. I knew he had things brewing in South-Central, and I knew he was taking a discreet percentage from J.C. Kafesjian. I wanted the Kafesjians rattled, and I had hoped that your reputation would move Dudley to approach you.’

‘Then you’d operate me.’

‘Yes.’

Dawn breaking – my last free day. ‘I burned up Junior’s evidence. He had notes, your cancelled checks to those reporters, everything.’

‘All my dealings with Duhamel were verbal. You’ve just assured me that there is no evidence on my operation extant.’

‘It’s comforting to know that you’ll skate.’

‘You can, too.’

‘Don’t jerk my chain. Don’t offer me protection, and don’t mention sparing the Department.’

‘You consider your situation beyond those things?’

Dawn light – my eyes stung. ‘I’m fucked, plain and simple.’

‘Ask a favor then. I’ll grant it.’

‘I got Noonan to lift his surveillance on the Kafesjians. They’ll be tail-free today only, and I think they’ll go after Richie Herrick. I want a dozen mobile tail men with civilian radio cars, and a special frequency set up to monitor their calls. It’s a shot at Dudley, which should please you no fucking end.’

‘You’re assuming Richie can fill in some blanks on Dudley and the Kafesjians?’

‘I’m assuming he knows all of it.’

Exley stuck a hand out – Dave, my buddy. ‘I’ll set up a radio spot at Newton Station. Be there at ten-thirty, I’ll have your men briefed and ready.’

That hand, persistent – I ignored it.

‘You’re letting Narco go. The Department needs a scapegoat, and they’re it.’

That hand disappeared. ‘I have extensive dossiers on every Narco officer. At the proper time, I’m going to present them to Welles Noonan, as a way of affecting a rapprochement. And, parenthetically, Dan Wilhite committed suicide last night. He left a note that included a brief mention of the bribes he’s taken, and I’m going to send Noonan a memorandum on it before too long. He was obviously afraid of having his more outré secrets exposed, which is something you should consider should you decide to testify against the Department.’

Bad morning light – glaring.

‘I’m past all that.’

‘You’re not past needing me. I can help satisfy your curiosity regarding those families, so don’t forget that your interests are identical to mine.’

Bad morning light – one day left.

41

10:30 – NEWTON STREET station. A briefing room – chairs facing me.

No sleep – phone work kept me up. Recap: early-A.M. check-in-the Wagon Wheel Motel.

Those fur-storage notes: Dudley knew I knew/Dudley knew where I lived.

Calls:

Glenda said she was safe in Fresno.

Pete said he had Chick V. stashed, with Fred Turentine guarding him. Safe: *my* slum building, dummy signers, untraceable. 'When he heals up a little, I'm gonna lean on him. He's got money tucked away someplace, I can tell.'

Implied: rob him, kill him.

Welles Noonan had Kafesjian news:

Per our bargain: all Fed tails were lifted today only. TV misinformation was planted: 'Probe surveillance quashed by court injunction.'

'I'm hoping our friends will think that an LAPD fix is in, and resume their outside life. Godspeed in this mission of yours, Brother Klein – and tune in Channel 4 or KMPC at two-forty-five this afternoon. Really, you'll be in for quite a treat.'

Lying treacherous hump.

Tail men walked in and sat down. Mixed bag: suits and ties, loafer types. Twelve men – eyes on me.

'Gentlemen, I'm Dave Klein. I'm commanding the Herrick homicide job, and per Chief Exley's order, you are to keep a twenty-four rolling surveillance on J.C., Tommy, Lucille and Madge Kafesjian. We are hoping that one of them will lead us to Richard Herrick, who Chief Exley and I want to question as a material witness in the Herrick 187s.'

Little nods – Exley pre-briefed them.

'Gentlemen, those folders on your desks contain Intelligence Division photos of the four Kafesjians, along with State Records Bureau mugs of Richard Herrick, and a more recent artist's sketch of him. Know those faces. Memorize them. You'll be stringing three-man tails on each family member, both mobile and on foot, and I don't want you losing them.'

Folders open, pix out – pros.

'You're all skilled tail men, or Chief Exley wouldn't have chosen you. You've got radio-equipped civilian cars, and Communications Division has got you hooked up on band 7, which is absolutely Fed-listening proof. You're hooked up car to car, so you can talk among yourselves or contact me here at the base. You all know how to leapfrog suspects, and there are boom mikes outside the Kafesjian house. There's a man in a point car listening, and once you assume your perimeter posts, he'll tell you when to roll. Questions so far?'

No hands up.

'Gentlemen, if you see Richard Herrick, apprehend him alive. He's a peeper at worst, and both Chief Exley and I believe that a man peeping on him is in fact the Herrick family killer. If approached, I doubt that he'll react violently or resist arrest. He might try to flee, in which case you should pursue him and take him *alive* by any means necessary. *Should you spot one of the Kafesjians, specifically Tommy or J.C., trying to kill or in any way harm Richard Herrick, kill them*. If Tommy himself spots your tail and attempts to flee, chase him. If he makes *any* aggressive moves toward you, *kill him*.'

Whistles, smiles.

'Go – you're dismissed.'

Bugs in my walls, bugs on my phone. Bugs snooping on Glenda, snooping on Meg. Fred Turentine – the 'Bug King' – guarding Chick.

Bugs in my buildings – three hundred units plus. Tenants overheard: fix the roof, kill the rats. Bugs blasting bop – niggers tearing up my slum pads.

'Sir? Lieutenant Klein?'

I woke up aiming – trigger happy.

A bluesuit – scared. 'S-s-sir, the point man broadcast in. He said the two Kafesjian guys are mobile, and he said he heard them talking up Richie Herrick.'

42

TAIL REPORTS – BAND 7, continuous squawk:

11:14: Madge and Lucille at home. J.C. and Tommy driving eastbound – separate cars.

11:43: J.C. at the downtown Public Library. Tail men in foot pursuit – walkie-talkie talkback:

The music room – J.C. rousting winos. ‘Hey! You know Richie Herrick, he used to read books here! Hey, you seen Richie, you tell me!’

No Richie confirmations.

12:06: J.C. mobile, eastbound.

12:11: Madge and Lucille at home.

Earaches – my headset fit tight.

12:24: J.C. at a skid-row movie house.

‘He’s shining a flashlight at all these bums sleeping. He’s getting nowhere, and he’s getting mad.’

12:34: J.C. walking – Q&A at the Jesus Saves Mission.

12:49: Tommy walking – skid row.

12:56: Tommy at a skin-book arcade.

12:58: Tommy talking to a clerk.

Linkage?:

Transom magazine – Richie Herrick, author.

1:01: Tommy muscling the clerk. Unit 3-B67, walkie-talkie: ‘The guy’s pleading with Tommy. If Tommy pulls a weapon, I’ll go in.’

1:01: J.C. at a hot-dog stand.

1:03–1:04: Tommy driving northbound.

1:06: Unit 3-B67, walkie talkie:

‘I talked to the clown Tommy leaned on, and he said that Richie bought dirty magazines there. He said Richie said something about a pad in Lincoln Heights, and he told Tommy about it to get him off his back.’

1:11: Tommy – Pasadena Freeway north.

1:14: Tommy – Lincoln Heights off-ramp.

1:19: J.C. eating lunch: five kraut dogs, Bromo Seltzer.

1:21: Lucille heading out in her Ford Vicky.

1:23: Tommy cruising North Broadway, Lincoln Heights.

1:26: Madge at home.

1:34: J.C. scarfing dessert: jelly doughnuts and beer.

1:49: Tommy cruising side streets, Lincoln Heights.

1:53: Lucille – Pasadena Freeway northbound.

1:56: Lucille – Lincoln Heights off-ramp.

1:59: 3-B67/3-B71 – crosstalk:

Lucille cruising Lincoln Heights.

Tommy cruising Lincoln Heights.

North/south/east/west zigzags – missing each other.

Educated guess:

Two Richie chasers chasing Richie – cross-purposes.

Maybe Lucille got a phone tip – maybe the skin-mag clerk.

2:00–2:04: All J.C/Tommy/Lucille units:

No Richie Herrick sightings.

Transmitter static. I flipped dials – squelch, odd words: 'multiple', 'maybe mob stuff'. 'Watts'.

A clerk tapped me. 'Sorry, Lieutenant, a Code 3 screwed up the lines.'

'What is it?'

'Homicides at the Haverford Wash. Maybe shotguns, maybe gangster stuff.'

My hackles jumped. 'You monitor band 7, I'm going.'

Watts – Code 3, join the crowd: black & whites, lab vans, Fed cars. *Deep* Watts – rural – fields, scattered shacks.

A bluff – cop vehicles at the edge. I skidded up and fishtailed in close.

Men looking down – Feds and LAPD combined. Push through, scope it:

A concrete run-off ditch – twenty feet deep.

Sewage water ankle-high – tech men kicking through it.

Blood streaks down the right-side embankment.

Four garbage-soaked bodies just below.

Steep cement leading down – I skidded all the way. Tech guys snapping pix – bulb light bouncing off bloody water.

I looked up:

Trees lining the embankment – good cover.

I looked down:

Shotgun shells bobbing in the muck.

Call it:

Tree-cover ambush – buckshot blew them down.

I sloshed over – techs swarming – more sirens up top. Four bottom-sucking dead men – their backsides ripped tailbone to ribcage.

Jumbled voices on the bluff: Noonan, Shipstad, Exley. Lab men flipping bodies, getting gore-splashed.

Four stiffs face-up now – two white, two Mex. I made three: goons working Mickey C. coin.

Snap conclusion:

Dudley ambush – NO FACE SHOTS – Darktown slot geek victims.

Snap theory:

Staged killings for the Feds – some onus dropped on out-of-town gangs. A Dudley Smith charade – SOMEHOW.

Look:

Exley kicking up water – his cuffs soaked.

Noonan closer – trousers rolled, fucking garters.

Tech talk, scrambled:

Handguns on the stiffs.

Spent rounds up top – threads attached – the killers wore bulletproof vests.

Lab men swamping Exley, holding him back. Noonan on me, splashing me.

Waving photos – matching dead men – dead panicked.

'Oh God, oh no. We identified these—'

I steered him clear of Exley. Noonan kicked at the water – shotgun shells jumped.

'We identified these men. Mickey Cohen divested his Southside coin machines to them. They're part of a midwestern syndicate …. Mickey said they're the ones who killed those men of his who just disappeared a while ago. Mickey's got no stomach for the rackets anymore …. He sold them his coin business to get out of it.'

Bullshit – actor Mickey – Glenda critiqued his 'style'.

Noonan: 'We turned Mickey as a witness. We granted him immunity and promised him a Federal Service Medal. He thinks it will help him secure a district gambling franchise, which is absurd, since that bill will never pass the State Legislature.'

Mr U.S. Attorney – plaid garters.

'Klein, do *you* know everything about this?'

'Major Witness' Mickey – confirmed. A flash: Bob Gallaudet supported district gambling.

Exley watching us.

'Klein—'

'No, I don't.'

'This may hurt us. Mickey was going to testify against those men.'

'Us'/'we' – Glenda juked Fed royal.

'I want an extra day before I enter custody.'

'Under no circumstances. Don't ask me again, and don't even consider begging additional favors. This is your last day to resolve your curiosity vis-à-vis the Kafesjians, and as of tomorrow those curiosities will become a matter of Federal testimony.'

Mr U.S. Attorney – used rubbers stuck to his ankles.

'Who do you think killed these guys?'

'I would say East Coast mafiosi. I would say the word got out that Mickey divested his coin machines, and some East Coast men are attempting to crash the racket.'

Clueless dumbfuck.

'Trust ME, lad' – Dudley Smith in my head.

Shouts up top:

'Mr Noonan! Mr Noonan, he's on the radio!'

Noonan splashed up the hill; Exley hooked a finger my way.

Duck him – up to the bluff fighting shivers. Fed cars, Feds: Shipstad, Noonan, Milner et fucking al.

Mickey Cohen on KMPC:

'… This is a public announcement undertaken in true sincerity, so I will say it now: I am severing my rackets connections. It is a mitzvah and a good deed of atonement, and I am coming forth to aid the Federal rackets probe currently doing business in Nigger – I mean Southside Los Angeles. I do this with great personal tsuris, which is the same as agony to you many Angeleno viewers and listeners who do not understand Yiddish. I am doing this severing because vicious midwestern hoodlums killed four of my men some months ago, and they are now threatening to kill my ex-wife, and let me now state that those rumors of her leaving me for some shvartze calypso singer are false. I am doing this severing because it is the moral thing to do as taught in the Bible, that wonderful perennial bestseller with many wonderful lessons for gentiles and Jews alike. I sold my Nig – I mean Southside vending-machine business to the midwestern hoodlums to save lives. I am now prepared to aid my dear friend U.S. Attorney Welles Noonan and his courageous…'

Mickey rambling.

Shipstad grinning.

Noonan trembling – wet feet, rage.

'… and the Federal rackets probe is undertaken out of principles espoused in the Bible, one of those goyishe chapters that serve as the basis of inspirational movies like *Samson and Delilah* or maybe the scintillating *The Ten Commandments*.'

Noonan: 'Mickey's testimony is a bit anticlimactic now. I would like to blame these deaths on the Kafesjians, but vending machines have never been their raison d'être. Eight A.M. tomorrow, Brother Klein. Bring Kafesjian information, and don't even think of asking for an extension.'

'Trust ME, lad' – Dudley Smith sweet as Jesus.

43

4:09: J.C. AND Madge at home.

4:16: Lucille walking – Lincoln Heights – bars, news-stands.

4:23: Tommy walking – Lincoln Heights. Unit 3-B67: 'I think he's checking out shooting galleries. He's hit four places the past two hours, and they look like hype pads to me.'

4:36: Lucille walking.

4:41: Tommy walking.

3-B67: 'I called the Highland Park Squad about those places Tommy hit. They said hype pads affirmative. Him and Lucille haven't run into each other yet, which goddamn amazes me.'

4:53—4:59, all units: No Richie Herrick sightings.

5:02: Base to all J.C./Madge units: proceed to Lincoln Heights and saturate for Richie Herrick.

5:09: Lucille at Kwan's Chow Mein Pagoda. 3-B71: 'She walked straight to the kitchen, and I *know* this place. Uncle Ace Kwan sells white horse, so I'll bet Lucy didn't stop in for chop suey.'

5:16: Lucille exiting the restaurant. 3-B71: 'She looks nervous, and she's carrying a brown paper bag.'

Weird – hype Lucille? – unlikely.

Junkie Richie – ditto.

Tommy cruising dope pads – ????

5:21: Tommy pissing in the street in full view of children. 3-B67: 'Jesus, what a whanger! This clown has gotta hold the white man's world record!'

A clerk nudged me; I pulled off my headset. 'What is it?'

'High brass to see you. The parking lot, ASAP.'

Exley.

Go – past the squadroom – civilian radio blaring: Gangland Slayings! Mickey Cohen Reforms! Outside – Dudley.

Lounging on a prowl car.

Breuning and Carlisle by the fence – out of earshot. Breuning wearing a herringbone coat – MOVIE TIME patterns.

'Hello, lad.'

Don't flinch, don't move too sudden, don't tremble.

'I got your notes, lad.'

I stepped closer. Smell him: bay rum cologne.

'I hope you availed yourself of a splendid mink stole for that lovely sister of yours. Is she still consorting with Jack Woods?'

'I've got Chick Vecchio stashed. He snitched you on the movie, the furs, you running Mickey and those slot guys you clipped in Watts.'

'I would say you're dissembling. I would say Exley hearsay is your sole source of information. You're assuming I told Chick things that indeed I didn't, and frankly I doubt that he would speak indiscreetly, even under the most severe duress.'

'Try to find him.'

'Is he dead or just temporarily indisposed?'

'He's alive, and he'll talk to stay that way.'

Breuning and Carlisle watching us bug-eyed.

'They can't hear us, lad.'

Don't blink. Don't tremble—

'Lad, your notes stated that you wished to act independent of Edmund Exley. I found that encouraging, and your mention of money even more so.'

'Breuning put that sword in my hand. I'll trade you Vecchio for him, the movie and fifty thousand.'

'Mike was hardly the director of your cinema debut.'

'Let's just say he pays.'

'Lad, you surprise me. I had thought your homicidal tendencies to be strictly profit-motivated.'

'I'm afraid you'll just have to accept this new aspect of my personality.'

Dudley roared. 'Lad, your sense of humor is beyond salutary, and I agree to your offer.'

'Tonight then. A public place.'

'Yes, my thoughts exactly. Shall we make it eight o'clock, the Hollywood Ranch Market parking lot?'

'Agreed.'

'I'll have Mike bring the fifty. He'll think it's a payoff run, and he'll be told to accompany you to fetch Vecchio. Take him with you, and when things are settled, call me at AXminster 6–4031 to tell me where Chick can be found. And, lad? Mike will be wearing a vest – you should know that and aim accordingly.'

'I'm surprised – you and Breuning go back.'

'Yes, lad, but you and I go forward. And on that topic, how do you assess the extent of Edmund Exley's information?'

Seal it – touch him. That cologne – don't gag.

'Lad …'

I draped an arm around his shoulders. 'He knows everything that I do and whatever else Johnny Duhamel told him. There's nothing on paper, and his Duhamel evidence is hearsay impossible to corroborate. He ran me against you on the Kafesjian burglary, and my only regret is that he's too big to kill.'

'Are you saying our transgressions might go unpunished as a result of his lack of evidence?'

'I'm saying you'll skate – *if* you curtail your plans with Mickey.'

'And yourself, lad? Dare I proffer the word "loyalty"?'

'It's the Feds, Exley or you. You're the only one with cash money.'

Embracing me – Dudley Liam Smith. 'You've made a wise choice, lad. We'll discuss Exley later, and I won't insult your intelligence with the word "trust".'

44

6:16: J.C. AND Madge at home.

6:21: Tommy prowling dope pads – Lincoln Heights.

6:27: Lucille prowling bars – Lincoln Heights.

6:34, all units: no Richie Herrick sightings.

6:41: Tommy eating dinner: Kwan's Chow Mein Pagoda.

3-B67, walkie-talkie: 'I'm no lip reader, but I can tell Uncle Ace is telling Tommy how Lucille copped some white horse from him. Tommy's goddamn fuming. Oops, he's walking. 3-B67 to base, over and out.'

6:50: Tommy cruising Lincoln Heights – random zigzags.

6:54: Lucille walking – Lincoln Park – chatting up bums.

6:55, 6:56, 6:57, 6:58 – Mike Breuning pictured dead a hundred ways.

NO—

45

'… SO I'LL CROSS Dudley. I won't hand over Vecchio – and Dudley thinks I'm going to kill Breuning. *We* nail Breuning for the Duhamel killing, and *I'll* eyewitness Tommy K. popping Steve Wenzel, which gives us a wedge on the Kafesjians. Breuning will fucking shit his pants when I ARREST him, then we'll—'

'Klein, will you calm down—'

'Calm down shit, I'm a lawyer, you listen to me.'

'Klein—'

'No, you listen. Breuning snitches Dudley, then Gallaudet convenes a special County grand jury to hear evidence. We upstage the Feds on Narco and the Kafesjians tangential to Dudley, and I testify, on the Duhamel killing and all conspiracies extant with the Kafesjians, Dan Wilhite, Narco, Smith, Mickey Cohen, my mob hits, all of it. I'm a cop, I'm an attorney, I'll be the goat, I'll testify when the trials start, the Feds'll be fucked, you'll look so good Welles Noonan'll wither up and die and Gas Chamber Bob'll ride the trials straight to the governorship and—'

'Klein—'

'Exley, PLEASE, let me do this. Dudley knows I'm a killer, and he thinks he's operating *me* on Breuning. Now, if I bring Breuning in, he'll punk out – without Dudley he's got no guts. Exley, PLEASE.'

Tick tick tick tick tick – seconds/a minute—

'Do it.'

Phone-booth sweats – drenched – I cracked the door for a breeze.

'And no backup men at the Ranch Market – Breuning might spot them.'

'Agreed. Do it.'

Pay phone to pay phone – bug-fear precautions. Long distance – twenty dimes – Newton Station to Mel's Drive Inn, Fresno.

Glenda talked a blue streak:

Touch told Mickey she drove to T.J. for a scrape. Dig her new stand-in – Rock Rockwell, full drag. Dig Fed witness Mickey on TV – blatant Vampire *plugs*.

Reckless Glenda – tell me everything.

She was carhopping now: roller skates, cowgirl outfits. A Fed fugitive – fuck it – she spilled a malt on the Fresno DA – and he loved *it. Good tips, getting gooood on skates – really gooood tray dips. Stylish Glenda, strong Glenda – tell me ANYTHING*.

Her blue streak dwindled; her tough-girl shtick tapped out hoarse. Scared Glenda – chain-smoking to tamp down her nerves.

I told her:

You scared me.

You cut me loose from this woman I had no business loving.

46

HOLLYWOOD RANCH MARKET – Fountain and Vine.

Open-air entrance, parking lot. Cars, shoppers, box boys pushing carts.

8:02 P.M. – standing curbside. Sweaty, chafing – my bulletproof vest fit tight.

Breuning walking toward me – across-the-lot diagonal.

Packing a suitcase.

Fatter than fat – *his* vest bunched up at the hips.

Parking-lot lights: humdrum shoppers lit up. No backup types dawdling.

I cut over. Breuning clenched up – fat neck toady fuck.

‘Show me the money.’

‘Dud said you should hand up Vecchio first.’

‘Just show me.’

He opened the bag – just a crack. Cash stacks – fifty grand easy.

‘Satisfied?’

A box boy circled by, hands in his apron. A toupee, familiar—

Breuning eyeballed him – Say what?

Black-and-white-glossy familiar – slot surveillance pix—

Breuning fumbled his piece up—

His suitcase hit the ground.

I snagged my .45 on my vest.

The box boy shot through his apron two-handed – Breuning caught two clean head shots.

Screams.

A breeze – money flying.

I got my piece free; the box boy swung my way – two hands out.

Point blank: three shots slammed my vest and pitched me backward.

Muzzle smoke in his eyes – I shot through it.

Point blank – no way to miss – a bloody toupee sheared clean, Jesus fuck—

Screams.

Shoppers grabbing money.

Breuning and the box boy tangled up dead.

Another ‘box boy’ – braced against a car hood, aiming at me.

People running/milling/huddling/eating pavement.

I threw myself prone. Shots – rifle loud.

Roof snipers.

That box boy blending in – human shields bobbing every which way.

Snipers – Exley backup.

Firing at the box boy – missing wide.

Bullhorn amplified: ‘Cease fire! Hostage!’

I stood up. ‘Hostage’: box boy dragging an old lady backward.

Elbows flailing, clawing at him – resisting mean.

Blade flash – he slit her throat down to the windpipe.

Bullhorn roar: ‘Get him!’

Rifle shots strafed the old lady – box boy hit the sidewalk hauling dead weight.

Run—

Straight across diagonal – his blind side.

‘DON’T SHOOT, HE’S OURS!’ – somebody/somewhere.

On him, his shield up – this mouth-gaping, neck-severed thing. I shot through her face and ripped them separate; I matched his face as one more Fed-photo dead man.

47

'THE CRIME WAVE that has local authorities baffled continues. A scant hour ago four people were shot and killed at the picturesque Hollywood Ranch Market, two of them identified as Midwest-based criminals posing as market employees. An LAPD officer was also gunned down, as was an innocent woman taken hostage by one of the criminals. Thousands of dollars dropped from a suitcase were scattered in the ensuing pandemonium, and when calculating in the gangland slayings in Watts earlier today that also left four dead, the City of the Angels begins to seem like the City of the Devils.'

My motel room, TV news. Call it for *real*:

Exley backup, Smith targets: Breuning and me. A Dudley charade: rogue cops slain, bag cash found. Movie time pending then: my rep even more trashable postmortem.

'… LAPD Chief of Detectives Edmund J. Exley spoke to reporters at the scene.'

Recap – my Newton check-in call:

'Tommy and Lucille are still cruising Lincoln Heights, and they *still* haven't seen each other. And … uh … sir? Your pal Officer Riegle called in … and … uh … sir, he said to tell you he heard that Chief Exley issued an APB order on you 'cause you left that shooting scene without telling anybody.'

Exley on camera: 'At this time we are withholding the identities of the victims for legal reasons. I will neither confirm nor refute a rival television station's speculation on the identity of the officer who was killed, and at this time I can only state that he was killed in the line of duty, while attempting to entrap a criminal with marked LAPD money.'

Flashback: that slot man eating that old lady's brains.

I called El Segundo. Ring, ring – 'Yeah, who's this?' – Pete Bondurant.

'It's me.'

'Hey, were you at the Ranch Market? Some news guy said Mike Breuning got it and one cop bugged out.'

'Does Chick know about Breuning?'

'Yeah, and it's spooking him no end. Hey, *were you there?*'

'I'll be over in an hour and tell you about it. Is Turentine there?'

'He's here.'

'Have him set up a tape recorder and ask him if he's got the equipment to monitor police calls. Tell him I want to tap into band 7 at Newton Street Station.'

'Suppose he doesn't have the stuff?'

'Then tell him to get it.'

48

THE STASH PAD – *my* low-rent unit.

Pete, Freddy T.; Chick Vecchio cuffed to a heat pipe. A tape rig and short-wave set – with band 7 pickup.

Mobile units calling in to Newton. Broadcasting base to cars: Exley himself.

Incoming:

Tommy and Lucille cruising separate – Lincoln Heights, Chinatown, moving south.

The point man at the K. house:

‘I heard it out the boom mike. It sounded to me like J.C. just slapped the piss out of Madge. To top it off, there’s Fed cars driving by on the QT every hour or so.’

Unit 3-B71: ‘Lucille’s walking around Chinatown asking questions. She’s looking sorta distraught, and that last joint she went into – the Kowloon – it looked like a dope front to me.’

Pete – wolfing spareribs.

Fred – nursing a highball.

Chick – purple bruises, half his scalp scorched.

Fred poured himself a refill. ‘The Kafesjians and you. I don’t get it.’

‘It’s a long story.’

‘Sure, and I wouldn’t mind listening to something other than these goddamn radio calls.’

Pete said, ‘Don’t tell him shit, it’ll end up in *Hush-Hush*.’

‘I’m just thinking twelve mobile tail cars and Ed Exley monitoring calls himself means it’s some kind of big deal, which maybe Dave should elaborate on. Like for instance, who are these Tommy and Lucille chumps looking for?’

Light bulb:

Richie ‘Peeper’ Herrick – Chino inmate/bugging know-how. Fred Turentine, drunk driver – Chino teaching gigs.

‘Freddy, when were you teaching that electronics class up at Chino?’

‘Early ’57 up till I got bored and hung up my probation maybe six months ago. Why? What’s that got to do with—’

‘Did a kid named Richie Herrick take the class?’

Light bulb – dim – juicer Freddy. ‘Riiiight, Richie Herrick. He escaped, and some psycho chopped his family.’

‘So, did he take your class?’

‘Sure did. I remember him, because he was a shy kid and he played these jazz records while the class worked on their projects.’

‘And?’

‘And that’s it. There was this other white guy that he palled with, and he took the class with Herrick. He stuck close to him, but I don’t think it was a queer thing.’

'Do you remember his name?'

'Nooo, I can't place it.'

'Description?'

'Shit, I don't know. Just your average white-trash inmate with a duck's-ass haircut. I don't even remember what he was in for.'

Something?/nothing? – tough call. Chino files missing—

'Dave, what's this all ab—'

Pete: 'Leave Klein alone, you're getting paid for this.'

Band 7:

Tommy mobile – Chinatown.

Lucille mobile – Chinatown near Chavez Ravine.

I doused the volume and grabbed a chair. Chick edged his chair back.

In his face: 'DUDLEY SMITH.'

'Davey, please' – raspy dry.

'He's behind all the trouble in Niggertown, and he just sent Mike Breuning out to die. Spill on him, and I'll cut you loose and give you some money.'

'Suppose I don't?'

'Then I'll kill you.' 'Davey…'

Pete signaled me: feed him liquor.

'Davey… Davey… please.'

I handed him Freddy's glass.

'You guys don't know Dudley. You don't know the kind of stuff he'd do to me.'

Bonded sour mash – three fingers. 'Drink it, you'll feel better.'

'Davey…'

'*Drink*.'

Chick guzzled it down. Grab the glass, refill it, watch him swill.

Instant booze panache: 'So what kind of money are you talking about? I've got expensive tastes, you know.'

'Twenty grand' – pure bullshit.

'That plays lowball to me.'

Pete said, 'Talk to Klein or *I'll* fucking kill you.'

'Okay, okay, okay' – refill gestures.

I filled the glass. 'Chick, *give*.'

'Okay okay okay' – sipping slow.

I propped the tape rig up by his chair and hit Record.

'*Dudley*, Chick. The furs, Duhamel, the Kafesjians, the whole takeover story.'

'I guess I know most of it. Feature Dudley likes to talk, 'cause he figures everybody's too scared of him to tattle.'

'*Get to it*.'

Booze-brave: 'I say Domenico "Chick" Vecchio knows when to talk and when to shut up. I say fuck 'em all except six, and save them for the pall-bearers.'

Pete said, 'Will you *please* fucking give?'

'Okay okay, feature Dudley, he was the boss at Robbery Division. Exley, he had this hard-on for him, because he made Dud for lots of stuff over the years—'

'Like the Nite Owl job?'

'Yeah, like the Nite Owl. Anyway, Dudley always took the most interesting robbery cases for himself, 'cause that's just the way he is. So Exley shot the Hurwitz Fur case to Robbery, and Dud grabbed it, and he got some leads that he later on figured out were planted by Exley, and those fucking leads led him to his very own so-called protégé, Johnny Duhamel.'

Freddy and Pete noshing spareribs – rapt.

'Keep going.'

'Okay, now Dudley, he'd recruited Schoolboy Johnny for the Mobster Squad. You know how he drools for tough boys, and when Johnny was in the LAPD Academy he showed some meanness that Dud really liked. So he stayed mean on the Mobster Squad, and now Dudley sees that he's a fucking badass heist guy, which, being Dudley, pleases him no fucking end. So, Dud called Johnny on the heist, and Johnny admitted it, but he refused to snitch his partners, which also impressed Dud. So, feature, Dudley gave Johnny a skate on the fur job and confided some of his own crime gigs to him, which meant that so far Exley's trap was working.'

Tape hiss. Chick, snitching nice and loose now: 'So feature that Dudley bagged Johnny's furs and stored them at a storage locker joint. A couple got out, 'cause Dudley told Johnny to get next to Lucille Kafesjian when Exley assigned you and that punk Stemmons to that burglary job. Johnny, he got a little lightweight boner for Lucille and gave her one.'

'Dudley told Johnny to become intimate with Lucille?'

'Yeah, sort of like a safeguard if you started leaning on the Kafesjians too hard.'

'Then what?'

'Then that goddamn Stemmons blundered in. He was Johnny's teacher at the Academy, and Johnny made him for a closet fruit back then. So Junior, he saw this striptease that Lucille did with this mink Johnny gave her, I think he was working Bido Lito's on the burglary job. Johnny was there, and him and Junior talked, which resparked this fucking faggot torch Stemmons had for Johnny.'

'So at first Junior came on like a pal.'

'Right, and feature that all that Mobster Squad strongarm stuff wasn't really Johnny's style, it was just this role Exley had him playing. Anyway, Johnny, he was stretched pretty thin and feeling pretty bad about it, and he told Stemmons about how brutal the work was, and Junior started figuring out that somebody was running him undercover. Johnny never flat-out snitched Dudley to him, but he told him about these "auditions" Dudley was doing without naming no names.'

'What "auditions"?'

'Dud was bringing these out-of-town guys in. He needed them to work the Southside coin, and he *wanted* the Feds to see them. Dud said later that Johnny figured out the guys were going to get clipped when Mickey went public with his Fed witness bit.'

Haverford Wash – four dead. 'But Johnny didn't confide *that* to Junior.'

'Right.'

'And the coin men were just pigeons set up to get clipped later?'

'Right.'

'What about the "auditions" themselves?'

'Dudley told the out-of-town guys they had to earn the right to work for him. He said that meant enduring pain. He paid them money to let Johnny hurt them while he watched and talked this philosophical shit to them. Dick Carlisle said Dud broke their spirits and made them goddamn slaves.'

Pete said. 'Holy shit.'

Freddy said, 'I don't believe this.'

'Who clipped the slot guys?'

'Carlisle and Breuning. You want to hear a nice Dudley touch? He had them soak their buckshot in rat poison, then repack the shells.'

'Get back to Johnny.'

Chick stretched – his cuff chain rattled. 'Dud had Johnny monitoring the slot guys – you know, watching them service the machines. He was doing that one night or something, and Dick Carlisle saw Junior come up to him and start talking this nutso rebop. Carlisle got this feeling that Johnny might be a plant, so he told Dudley, and Dud had Carlisle and Breuning keep this loose tail on him. Now, I don't know who killed Stemmons – probably Tommy or J.C. Kafesjian – but around the time Carlisle got hinky, J.C. told Dudley that Stemmons was acting crazy, shaking down pushers, shaking down him and Tommy and telling them he could monkey-wrench *your* burglary investigation. So, this nutty faggot Junior, he's talking up his own Niggertown takeover stuff, and in my opinion Dud would have clipped him himself, if he hadn't of OD'd or got snuffed by the Kafesjians.'

'Then what?'

'Then Dud got a tip that Johnny called *you* to set up a meet – *and I didn't tell him*. So now he *knew* Johnny was a fucking traitor or decoy or something.'

The meet: Chick knew. Bob Gallaudet knew.

'Then what?'

'So Johnny told you to meet him at that pad in Lynwood. Dud used to own it years ago, so I guess Johnny just wanted to meet you someplace close to the bungalow where… you know.'

Change-up: 'Phillip Herrick.'

'Who's that?'

'He was murdered in Hancock Park last week. Dudley co-owned 4980 Spindrift with him.'

'So?'

Easy call: no Herrick knowledge.

'So Johnny told me to meet him there, and your little movie set was close by. What do you figure he wanted to show me?'

'Maybe the smut-movie setup.'

'Maybe, but you told me Sid Frizell wasn't connected to any of Dudley's plans.'

'He's not, but Dud *loves* stag stuff, and when he got tight with Mickey, Mickey told him about this batshit horror movie he was bankrolling and how Sid Frizell wanted to shoot smut films, but he couldn't find a spot. Dud told Mickey to tell Frizell to use one of the rooms in that court, so down the line Sid did, but feature I know for a fact that he doesn't even know Dudley.'

SOMETHING – some CONNECTION – knifing me.

'Does Dudley own those bungalows?'

'Feature yes he does, through dummy partners. Feature he owns about twenty other abandoned dives, just bought dirt fucking cheap off the Lynwood City Council.'

'And?'

Leering at me ugly drunk: 'And feature Dudley Liam Smith does not get his rocks off on girls, boys or Airedale terriers. Feature he likes to watch. Feature the mirror walls in that flop where you rousted me and feature he's got a shitload of other flops just like it. Feature he's got this idea to film these on-the-sly smut movies where the fuckers and fuckees don't even know they're being watched. Feature he's got bids in with the Bureau of Land and Way to house the spics evicted from Chavez Ravine in those pads and that dump on Spindrift. Feature Dudley's going to film all these taco benders fucking and sell the movies to geeks like himself who dig all that voyeuristic horseshit.'

Rumors:

Sid Frizell shooting LYNWOOD stag films.

LYNWOOD spic relocation maybe looming.

That SOMETHING – click:

Atomic Vampire.

Movie gore: incest/eye poking/blinding.

Kafesjian 459 – dogs blinded.

Herrick 187 – three victims eye socket blasted.

Sid Frizell – ex-con type.

Non-Dudley-connected – Chick convinced me.

Non-click: SOMETHING missing.

I said, 'Dudley and Mickey.'

'You mean what's the skinny on Dudley's rackets thing?'

Shortwave sputter: 'Chinatown, Chinatown, Chavez Ravine.'

'Right.'

'Well, feature the word "containment". That's Dud's big word, and what he wants to do is build up this empire on the Southside, maybe stretching into Lynwood, where he's got all this property. He'll only sell dope to niggers, and he'll run whores and smut on the QT, and he'll run all the coin hardware that Mickey so-called divested. His big deal is supposed to be district gambling, with Mickey as his front man. Feature he killed all of Mickey's guys except me and Touch, and feature he fucking manipulated Mickey into cozying up to the Feds. The Mick's a hero now, he's a lovable schmuck, and Dud thinks he can buy up more Lynwood property and start so-called "containing" the economy down there, then set Mickey up to front his district gambling franchise, all nice and legal.'

'District gambling won't pass the State Legislature.'

'Well, feature Dudley thinks otherwise. Feature he's got a political guy with very large juice in his pocket to make sure it does get passed.'

Gas Chamber Bob Gallaudet: district gambling supporter.

Tipped off to the Duhamel meet.

Goosebumps: my dry-ice burns started tickling.

'So Dud found out you were meeting Johnny. Breuning and Carlisle slugged you and doped you up, and Dud tortured Johnny before you sliced him. They got him to admit that Exley was running him as a decoy and that he had these fake bank accounts and this operations cash stashed in a safe at his house. Johnny said he kept trying to pull out of the deal because he knew the slot guys would probably get clipped and lots of other shit would hit the fan, but Exley kept sending him back to find out more.'

Radio hum: Tommy mobile, Lucille mobile.

Pete and Freddy dumbstruck – holy shit/mother dog!

'Why did Dudley make that movie? Why didn't he just kill Johnny and me?'

'He said he wanted to compromise you and use you. He said he was going to offer you this job as liaison and bagman to the LAPD. He said he could use you to take Ed Exley down. He said you were probably a pretty good lawyer, and he said you could teach him things about property maintenance.'

Chick oozing brainwaves: kowtow to Dudley or die.

Pete oozing brainwaves: kill the wop and grab his money.

Freddy oozing brainwaves: *Hush-Hush* would love THIS.

Atomic Vampire – INCEST/GORE.

'Chick, what do you know about Sid Frizell?'

'Feature I know close to nothing.'

'Has he done time?'

'County time for child-support skips. He's no hard-case penitentiary guy, if that's what you're thinking.'

To Freddy: '*Sid Frizell*. He's a tall, skinny guy about thirty-five. He's got sort of an Okie drawl.'

'No bells. Am I supposed to know him?'

'I thought he might have taken your class at Chino.'

'No, I don't think so. I mean, I'm a bug man, so I listen to how people talk. Sorry, but there were no Okie drawls in my class.'

SOMETHING MISSING.

I grabbed the phone and got an operator – Chino on the line.

A warden's aide answered. Go, tell him:

Compile a roster for me – cons at Chino Richie Herrick concurrent. Messenger it down? – No, I'll call you back for a verbal.

2:00 A.M. – custody looming. Radio sputter, *pop/pop* – Pete cracking his knuckles. Chick loopy drunk, scorched hair – my damage.

Smells – stale food, smoke. A view out the window: overflowing trashcans. *My* building – nine G's a year net profit.

Think: snitches, deal-outs.

Last-ditch tries.

Welles Noonan – a Gallaudet rival.

Think trades: Glenda for Bob G. and Dudley.

The bedroom phone – shaky hands on the dial. MA 4–0218 – Noonan.

'U.S. Attorney's Office, Special Agent Shipstad.'

'It's Klein.'

'*Klein, this call didn't happen.*' – low furtive.

'What?'

'Noonan got a film can special-delivery. It's you chopping up some guy, and *I* know it's a setup, but *he* doesn't care. A note said copies go to the press if you testify for us, and Noonan said your immunity agreement is cancelled. He's issued a Federal arrest warrant on you, and *this call did not happen.*'

CLICK—

Chairs/shelves/tables – I threw them and kicked them and dumped them. I punched myself arm-dead on the curtains; exhaustion had me swaying light-headed.

Radio squawk:

'Madge left the house alone. The point car's on her.'

'Lucille's entering Chavez Ravine. She's driving erratic, she's side-swiping trees—'

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CRISSCROSS HEADLIGHTS, DIRT roads – Chavez Ravine.

Dark – no streetlights – cop lights only. Roof lights, headlights, flashlights – tail men mobile and on foot.

Bumper crunched upside a tree: Lucille's Ford, abandoned.

APBs out on me—

I ditched my car and sprinted up the access road. Zigzag flashlights down below: a shack-to-shack search.

'Lad.'

Dark, just his voice. I aimed at it, half pull triggered.

'Lad, hear me out before you act precipitously.'

'You sent that movie to Noonan.'

'No, Bob Gallaudet did. I told him you had Chick Vecchio hidden, and Bob assumed that Chick would behave in a cowardly fashion and inform on us. Lad, Bob handed you up to Noonan. He threatened to make public a second copy of the film if you testified as a Federal witness, assuming that your testimony would damn both himself and this aging Irishman who bears quite a grudging fondness to you. Noonan was furious, of course, and Bob quite wisely retreated to a more judicious footing: he said that the film threat stood, but he would not enter the attorney general's race if Noonan promised no open-court mention of him. Noonan, bright lad that he is, agreed'

'Gallaudet ratted *you* to Noonan?'

'No, Allah be praised, he just evinced panic and spoke nebulously of complex criminal conspiracies. I'm sure Noonan considers me just an aging policeman with a gift for language and a stern reputation.'

Shouts down below. Stray headlights blipped Dudley smiling benign.

'Who gave Bob that movie copy?'

'Mike Breuning. He was afraid our enterprises were in jeopardy, so he gave Robert a copy to cut a deal for himself. Alas, Mike confessed what he had done before I sent him out to meet you, which is why I set him up so harshly.'

'Gallaudet?'

'Ensconced with Allah, lad. Neatly dismembered and unreachable. Kill Vecchio, if you haven't already, and there's just Exley sans hard evidence.'

'Chick told me Duhamel snitched Exley.'

'Yes, that's true.'

'He said Exley kept money in a safe?'

'Yes, Chick is correct.'

'Inside his house?'

'Yes, lad, that would be logical.'

'Big money?'

'Yes, that's correct. Lad, get to the point, you're tantalizing me.'

'I can tap that safe. I'll kill Vecchio and steal Exley's money. We'll split it.'

'You're very generous, and I'm surprised that you haven't expressed rancor over my machinations at the Ranch Market.'

'I want you to like me. If I run, I don't want you coming after the people I leave here.'

'You're perceptive to assume my survival.'

'The money?'

'I'll accept half graciously.'

Commotion down the hill: cops kicking in shack doors.

'Chick told you the thrust of my plans, did he, lad?'

'Yes.'

'Did you infer that I enjoy watching?'

'Yes.'

'I view it as a dispensation for the grand work of contain-ment I'll be doing. I view it as a means to touch compelling filth without succumbing to it.'

FLASH: Lucille nude.

'You're a watcher, lad. You've touched your own dark capacities, and now you enjoy the surcease of simple watching.'

FLASH: whore-pad windows.

'I empathize with your curiosities, lad.'

FLASH – peeper tapes – pictures synced to sounds.

'It pleases me that the Kafesjians and Herricks seem to have piqued those curiosities. Lad, I could tell you many grand stories about those two families.'

FLASH – bright open windows – TELL ME THINGS.

'Lad, do you feel the basis of an understanding starting to form? Are you beginning to see the two of us as kindred souls, brothers in curious—'

Shouts, flashlights converging—

I ran down – tripping and stumbling. Shacks pressed up tight together – lights fixed in one doorway.

Tail men huddled outside – push through, look:

Lucille and Richie Herrick – DOA.

Tourniquet tied/veins pumped/mouths frozen gasping.

Entwined on a mink coat bed.

H bindles, spikes and Drano on a fox pelt.

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8:01 A.M. – FEDERAL FUGITIVE.

Fugitive pad, fugitive car – a ’51 Chevy bought off a junker lot. Fugitive calls:

Glenda safe – style vs. fear – style winning.

Sid Riegle, panicked – Exley men rousted my men.

Bureau talk: Lucille and Richie died from heroin-Drano cocktails. Sid: ‘Ray Pinker said she hotshot him, then killed herself. Doc Newbarr said no way was it murder, then suicide – everything was too nice and neat.’

More talk:

Tommy and J.C. – Fed-rousted and released at 4:00 A.M. Madge K. gone for parts unknown – the point man lost her.

A call to Pete – find me that woman, she can TELL ME things.

Fugitive wheels: the Cahuenga Pass south. Rearview panic checks – everything looked strange and wrong.

Radio news: Hot L.A. Crime Wave! Mickey Cohen Federal Witness! DA Gallaudet Misses Breakfast Talk – Assembled Scribes Baffled!

Last night – Dudley’s farewell:

‘I’ll require verification on Chick. His right hand should suffice – it bears quite a recognizable tattoo.’

Brain teaser:

Vampire gore/the Kafesjian-Herrick case – who?/why?

South: Hollywood, Hancock Park. Left turn – 432 South McCadden.

Virgin – no cars curb or driveway.

I walked up and knocked. Nobody watching – knife the keyhole, work the lock.

In.

Close the door, bolt it – lights on, go.

I checked the living room walls: no pictures, no fake panels.

I checked the den – framed photos – Dudley Smith, Bureau toastmaster. Pull them, look behind—

No safe.

Upstairs – three bedrooms – more walls, more pictures:

Dudley Smith as Santa Claus – a polio ward, ’53.

Dudley Smith, guest speaker – Christian Anti-Communist Crusade.

Dudley Smith at a crime scene: ogling a dead jigaboo.

Three bedrooms – twenty Dudley Smith pictures – Exley hate fuel.

No safe.

Back downstairs – check the kitchen – nothing.

Check the carpets – every one tacked flat. Uptairs – hallway throw rugs – pull them—

A hinged panel under a red Persian.
Inset with a tumbler dial and handle.
Trembly – 34L–16R–3IL – two run-throughs, snap/thunk – yank the handle.
Drawstring bank bags. Five. Nothing else.
Hundreds, fifties, twenties. Old bills.
I shut the lid, spun the dial and fixed the rugs. Downstairs, the kitchen—
Cutlery right there. I grabbed a cleaver – heebie-jeebies – Chick.

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'DAVEY … PLEASE.'

Psychic: begging me two seconds in the door. A tattoo on his right hand: 'Sally 4-Ever.'

'Davey, please.'

638 grand and that cleaver. Pete out chasing Madge, Fred asleep in the bedroom.

Chick, cuffed down – panic spritzing:

We go back, we had laughs, I'm sorry I got fresh with Glenda, but how can you blame me? We had laughs, we made money, Pete wants to kill me, he's a fucking neon sign ….

'Davey, please.'

Pillow bullet mufflers. Curtains for a makeshift shroud.

'Davey … Jesus Christ … Davey.'

Tired – no stones for it – yet.

Dead man talking:

I'll disappear … you can trust me … Glenda's great … Sid Frizell says she's star stuff. Frizell … what a chump … no ideas … that camera guy Wylie Bullock's got twice the smarts, and he couldn't direct traffic on Mars. You and Glenda … I wish you the best… Davey, I know what you got planned, I can see it in your eyes….

Tired.

No stones for it – yet.

The phone rang – I cradled it up. 'Yeah?'

'It's Pete.'

'And?'

'And I found Madge Kafesjian.'

'*Where?*'

'The Skyliner Motel, Lankershim and Croft in Van Nuys. She's in room 104, and the desk man says she's on a hankie binge.'

'You're staking her?'

'I'm on your payroll, and I'm watching that room till you say otherwise.'

'*Just stay there*. I'll be out soon, so—'

'Look, I talked to Mr Hughes. He said the Sheriff's found a witness who saw Glenda by the Hollywood Hills fuck pad like the approximate night that Miciak bought it. They think she's hinky, and they're looking for her as a suspect. It looks like she blew town, but—'

'*Just stick at the motel.*'

'Your payroll, boss. How's Chick—'

I hung up and dialed Chino direct.

'Deputy Warden Clavell's office.'

‘Is he in? It’s Lieutenant Klein, LAPD.’

‘Oh, *yes,* sir. Mr. Clavell left me a list of names to read you.’

‘Read off the released inmates first.’

‘Current addresses too?’

‘The names first, I want to see if something grabs me.’

‘Yes, sir’ – slow, precise:

‘Altair, Craig V.… Allegretto, Vincent W.… Anderson, Samuel NMI.… Bassett, William A.… Beltrem, Ronald D.… Bochner, Kurt NMI.… Bonestell, Chester W.… Bordenson, Walter S.… Bosnitch, Vance B.… Bullock, Wylie D.—’

Tilt/click/snap – SOMETHING missing/SOMETHING there:

Wylie Bullock.

Vampire cameraman.

Idea man – pressing gore on Sid Frizell.

‘Burdsall, John C. … Cantrell, Martin NMI—’

‘Go back to Wylie Bullock. Give me his parole date and his last known adress.’

‘Um … he was paroled on November 9, 1957, and his parole disposition address is the Larkview Trailer Court, Arroyo and Brand in Glendale.’

Freddy in the hallway – yawning.

‘Sir, do you want the rest of these names?’

I put the phone down. ‘Was there a guy named Wylie Bullock in your class at Chino?’

‘Yeah … riiight … he was that guy following Richie Herrick around.’

Adrenaline – *zoooom.*

Chick: ‘Hail Mary full of grace the Lord is with thee.’

Stay of execution: dumb guinea luck.

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R&I/DMV:

Bullock, Wylie Davis – DOB 7/16/25. Brown/brown, 5′10INCH, 165. Popped 3/56 – pornography beefs – 3 to 5, Chino.

Occupation: photographer-cameraman. Vehicle: ’54 Packard Clipper, white & salmon, Cal. GHX 617.

Freeways out to Glendale – my rat’s-ass car belched smoke. Wylie/Madge/Dudley – TELL ME THINGS.

Arroyo off-ramp, south to Brand – the Larkview Trailer Court.

Parking slots: and no two-tone Packard tucked in. A map out front: ‘W. Bullock’ – three rows over, six trailers down.

Rock gardens, jacked-up trailers, white trash wives out sunning. My SOMETHING MISSING:

Frizell-Bullock confabs – Wylie assertive: Incest! Poke the vampire’s eyes out!

Three over, six down – a chromium Airstream. My.45 out surreptitious – knock.

No answer – no surprise – no Packard. I tried the door – locked – too many squarejohns around for a break-in.

The set – go.

Freeways back – my clunker wheezed. Griffith Park, the set – no Bullock vehicle in sight.

Mickey by the spaceship – wearing a Jew beanie.

‘The Feds and LAPD were here chasing your tush. The Malibu Sheriff’s were looking for my erstwhile star Glenda Bledsoe, who I understand you are playing Bury the Brisket with. You break my heart, you handsome snatch bandit.’

No ‘crew’ – just Mickey. ‘Where is everybody?’

‘Schmuckface, *Attack of the Atomic Vampire* is in showbiz parlance a “wrap”. Glenda may look a bit muscular in her concluding moments, given that Rock Rockwell portrayed her in long shots, but that aside I consider my movie a cinema landmark.’

‘Where’s Wylie Bullock?’

‘I should know? I should care?’

‘Sid Frizell?’

‘Paid off and on the night boat to Nowheresville for all I care.’

Beanie, flag lapel pin – hero Mickey. ‘You look happy.’

‘I have a movie in the can, and I have made friends of the Federal persuasion. And do not judge me as a snitch fuck, because a certain U.S. attorney told me you have those tendencies yourself.’

Dudley’s lovable schmuck. ‘I’ll miss you, Mickey.’

'Run, David. The tsuris you have caused seeks retribution. Run to Galapagos and watch turtles fuck in the sun.'

The Cahuenga Pass – back over coughing fumes. Lankershim and Croft – the Skyliner Motel.

Horseshoe-shaped – cut-rate pool-view cabanas. Pete staked out curbside – snoozing with the seat back.

I parked behind him. Tell-me money in the trunk – I stuffed my pockets.

Skirt the pool over – room 104. I knocked – Madge opened up quick.

Haggard – heavy makeup made it worse. 'You're that policeman. Our house was broken into … you came over….'

'Hankie binge' – wet eyes, tear tracks.

'I'm sorry about your daughter.'

'It was a merciful death for both of them. Did you come to arrest me?'

'No. Why should I—'

'If you don't know, I won't tell you.'

'I just wanted to talk to you.'

'So you filled your pockets with money.'

C-notes spilling out. 'I figured it couldn't hurt.'

'Did Dan Wilhite send you?'

'He's dead. He killed himself.'

'Poor Dan' – one short sigh.

'Mrs. Kafesjian …'

'Come in. I'll answer your questions if you promise not to slander the children.'

'Whose children?'

'Ours. Whoever's. Just exactly what did you …?'

I sat her down. 'Your family and the Herricks.'

'What do you want to know?'

'Tell me everything.'

1932 – Scranton, Pennsylvania.

J.C. Kafesjian and Phillip Herrick work at Balustrol Chemicals. J.C. is a laborer, Phillip a solvent analyst. J.C. is crude, Phil is cultured – they are friends – nobody knows why.

1932: the friends move to Los Angeles together. They court women and marry them: J.C. and Madge Clarkson, Phil and Joan Renfrew.

Five years pass: the men toil at boring chemical jobs. Five children are born: Tommy and Lucille Kafesjian; Richard, Laura and Christine Herrick.

J.C. and Phil are bored, angry and poor. Their chemistry knowledge inspires a scheme: brew homemade liquor.

They do it – and thrive.

The Depression continues; poor people *need* cut-rate spirits. J.C. and Phil sell it cheap – work-camp workers their chief clientele. They accrue profits and hoard their shares.

J.C. and Phil – friends and partners.

J.C. and Phil – cuckolding each other.

Neither man knows:

Two affairs predate their weddings. Lovers: J.C. and Joan, Phillip and Madge. The adultery continues – five chidren are born – their patrimony inconclusive.

J.C. opens a dry-cleaning shop; Phil invests in a chemical plant. They continue their home liquor business.

J.C. pushes Phil to cut costs: lower-quality alcohol solvents mean greater profits.

Phil agrees.

They sell a batch to some CCC workers – a dozen men go permanently blind.

June 22, 1937:

A blind man carries a pump shotgun into a tavern.

He fires the weapon at random – three people are killed.

He sticks the barrel in his mouth and blows his own head off.

Sergeant Dudley Smith investigates. He learns the source of the shotgun man's blinding; he tracks the liquor to Phil and J.C. He makes them an offer: his silence for a percentage of their holdings.

They agree.

Dudley recognizes J.C.'s mean streak – and cultivates it. He believes that Negroes could be kept dope-sedated; he urges J.C. to sell them drugs. He urges Chief Davis to let J.C. 'serve' them: as a sanctioned dope peddler and informant to the fledgling Narcotics Squad.

Dudley hides his role – few know that he is J.C.'s recruiter. Chief Davis retires in '39; Chief Horrall takes over. He assumes credit for the Kafesjian recruitment – and taps Officer Dan Wilhite to serve as J.C.'s contact.

Years pass; Dudley continues to extract his business percentage. J.C.'s dry-cleaning shops flourish; he builds up a Southside dope kingdom. Phil Herrick earns legitimate wealth: PH Solvents is hugely successful.

The adultery goes on: J.C. and Joan, Phillip and Madge.

Both women have assured their lovers that birth control precautions have been taken. Both have lied – they loathe their husbands, but will not leave them. Madge knows J.C. would kill her; Joan needs Phillip's money and newly developed social connections.

Five children.

Inconclusive patrimony.

No dangerous resemblances emerging.

Joan *wanted* J.C.'s baby: he treated her atypically tender. Madge wanted Phillip's: she despised her vicious husband. Guesswork fathers softens things – both women believe it.

Post-World War II:

Major Dudley Smith, OSS, sells black-market penicillin to escaped Nazis. Phil Herrick, naval officer, serves in the Pacific; J.C. Kafesjian runs his dry-cleaning shops and dope racket. Dudley returns to L.A. late in '45; Herrick, fourteen months at sea, comes home unexpectedly.

He finds Joan nine months pregnant. He beats her – and learns that J.C. has been her lover throughout their marriage. She had planned to put the child up for adoption; Phil's surprise return prevented her. She hid her pregnancy with long indoor sojourns; Laura, Christine and Richie – away at boarding school – do not know what happened.

Joan runs to J.C.

Madge hears them talking and confronts them.

J.C. brutally beats both women.

Madge admits her long affair with Phil Herrick.

Cuckold husbands, cuckold wives. Enraged men – two women beaten and raped. Terrible chaos. Abe Voldrich calls in Dudley Smith.

He has the five children blood-tested – the results are ambiguous. Joan Herrick delivers her baby; Dudley strangles it three days old.

Laura and Christine never learn the facts of their lineage.

Tommy, Lucille and Richie do – several years later.

The boys grow up friends – maybe brothers – whose father is whose? They burglarize houses and play jazz; Richie falls in love with Lucille. He comforts her with Champ Dineen – he didn't know his bloodlines either.

Tommy emulates his 'name' father J.C. – selling dope while still in high school. He's always lusted after Lucille – now there's a chance she *isn't* his sister. He rapes her – and makes her his personal whore.

Richie finds out – and swears to kill Tommy.

Tommy relishes the vow – he considers Richie a weakling.

Richie drives to Bakersfield to buy a gun. He gets caught selling dope; Dudley Smith intercedes, but cannot convince the DA to drop charges. Richie Herrick, sentenced to Chino: 1955.

Tommy swears he'll kill him when he's released – he knows his personal whore Lucille deeply loves him. Richie swears to kill Tommy – he has debased the maybe sister he loves chastely.

Lucille runs wild – prostitute, window dancer, taunter of men. Phil Herrick seeks her out – his maybe daughter. Their first coupling is a street assignation. Lucille agrees just to taunt him.

His gentleness surprised her – this maybe daddy more like Richie than Tommy. They continued to meet: always talking, always playing games. Phil Herrick and Lucille: maybe daddy-daughter lovers, maybe just a whore and a John.

And Madge and Joan became friends. They hid from the madness together – fugitive times spent simply talking. Confidantes: years of partial shelter.

Richie escaped from Chino – fit only to voyeur-watch Lucille. Joan and Richie exchanged letters; Richie said a friend soon to be paroled would avenge him painlessly. This man seemed to have a hold on Richie: Richie never even said his name.

Joan killed herself nine months ago; the insanity peaked all at once. Lucille did not know Richie was watching her; Tommy read Junior Stemmons' reports and assumed that Richie was the voyeur. He vowed to kill him – afraid that Exley-linked men would find him first. Lucille found him – their ticket to shelter in a needle.

Tissues on the floor – Madge fretted a whole box to shreds.

'Would you call that "everything," Lieutenant?'

'I don't know.'

'Then you're a very curious man.'

'Do you know the name Wylie Bullock?'

'No.'

'Who killed Junior Stemmons?'

'I did. He was browbeating Abe Voldrich at one of our cleaning shops. I was afraid he'd find out the truth about Richie and Lucille, and I wanted to protect them. I attacked him rather foolishly, and Abe subdued him. We knew Dudley would protect us if we killed him, and Abe knew he was an addict.'

'So Abe shot him up and dumped him at Bido Lito's.'

'Yes.'

'And you told Tommy, and he burned the place down. He hung out there, and he was afraid we'd find evidence on him.'

'Yes. And I don't feel bad about that young Stemmons. I think he was in as much pain as Richie and Lucille were.’

I emptied my pockets – big wads of cash.

‘You’re naive, lieutenant. Money won’t make J.C. and Tommy go away.’

53

‘EVERYTHING’ = ‘MORE’ = ‘BULLOCK’.

Back to the trailer dump – a two-tone Packard in the lot. I jammed up behind it, spewing smoke.

Voices, feet kicking gravel.

Thick fumes – I got out coughing. Exley and two IA men – packing shotguns.

‘Everything’ means ‘more’ means—

Fumes, gravel dust. Shotgun flankers, Exley sweating up a custom-made suit.

‘Bullock killed the Herricks and trashed the Kafesjian place. How did you know—’

‘I called Chino to get my own roster. That woman in the warden’s office told me you went crazy over Bullock.’

‘Let’s take him. And get those guys out of here – I *know* he’s got stuff on Dudley.’

‘You men wait here. Fenner, give the lieutenant your shotgun.’

Fenner tossed it – I pumped a shell home.

Exley said, ‘All right then.’

Now:

We ran three rows over, six trailers down – civilians watched us slack-jawed. That Airstream – radio hum, the door open—

I stepped in aiming; Exley squeezed in behind me. Two feet away: Wylie Bullock in a lawn chair.

This bland geek:

Smiling.

Raising his hands cop-wise slow.

Spreading ten fingers wide – no harm meant.

I jammed the shotgun barrel under his chin.

Exley cuffed his hands behind his back.

Radio hum: Starfire 88’s at Yeakel Olds.

‘Mr. Bullock, you’re under arrest for the murders of Phillip, Laura and Christine Herrick. I’m the LAPD chief of detectives, and I’d like to question you here first.’

Monster’s den: *Playboy* pinups, mattress. Bullock: Dodger T-shirt, calm brown eyes.

I goosed him: ‘I know about you and Richie Herrick. I know you told him you’d get him revenge on the Kafesjians, and I’ll bet you know the name Dudley Smith.’

‘I want a cell by myself and pancakes for breakfast. If you say that’s okay, I’ll talk to you here.’

I said, ‘Make like you’re telling us a story.’

‘Why? Cops like to ask questions.’

‘This is different.’

‘Pancakes and *sausage?*

‘Sure, every day.’

Chairs circled up, the door shut. No Q&A/no notebooks – Maniac speaks:

June, 1937 – Wylie Bullock, almost twelve – ‘I was just a kid, you dig me?’

An only child, nice parents – but poor. ‘Our flop was as small as this trailer, and we ate at this gin mill every night, because you got free seconds on the cold cuts.’

June 22:

A crazy blind man enters the tavern. Random shotgun blasts: his parents get vaporized.

‘I got hospitalized, ’cause I was in some kind of shock.’

Foster homes then – ‘some nice, some not so hot’ – revenge dreams minus a bad guy – the shotgun man killed himself. Trade schools – a knack for cameras – ‘Old Wylie’s a born shutterbug.’ Camera jobs, curiosity: 6/22/37 – why?

Amateur detective Wylie – he kept pestering the cops. The brush-off: ‘They kept saying the case file was lost.’ Newspaper study: Sergeant Dudley Smith, investigating officer. Calls to now-Lieutenant Smith – none returned.

He haunted that tavern. Rumors haunted the place itself: bad bootleg trashed the shotgun man’s eyes. He chased rumors: who sold bootleg whiskey back in ’37?

Bad leads – years’ worth – ‘like impossible to verify, you know?’ Two rumors persistent: ‘dry-cleaning-cut hooch,’ ‘this Armenian guy – J.C.’

He made a logical jump: the E-Z Kleen shops/J.C. Kafesjian. ‘I didn’t have any proof – it just felt right. I kept a scrapbook on the blind man case, and I had this picture of Sergeant Smith from ’37.’

‘It was becoming like an obsession.’

Supporting that obsession: camera work. Illegal: ‘I took snatch pictures and sold them to sailors and Marines up from Diego.’

Obsession focus: the Kafesjians.

‘I sort of circled around them. I found out J.C. and Tommy pushed dope and had these police connections. Lucille was a floozy, and Tommy was vicious. It was sort of like they were my pretend family. Tommy had this buddy Richie, and the two of them played this jazz music really lousy. I used to follow them, and I watched them get into some kind of big falling-out over Lucille. Richie got popped selling dope up in Bakersfield. He got sentenced to Chino, and I was in an E-Z Kleen shop one day, and I heard Tommy tell Abe Voldrich that when he got out Richie was dead meat.’

Early ’56 – two bombshells hit him simultaneous:

One – he’s outside a Southside E-Z Kleen. Huddled up: J.C. Kafesjian and Dudley Smith – nineteen years older than that news pic.

Two – he gets popped selling snatch photos.

‘I figured Dudley Smith and the Kafesjians were dirty together. I couldn’t *prove* anything, but I thought maybe Smith gave J.C. a skate on that poison liquor he sold. After a while I just believed it.’

He started hatching revenge plots – this Eyeball Man inside him fed him plans. He pleaded guilty to selling pornography – his lawyer said beg for mercy.

‘At the County Jail this guy told me about the X-ray lab at Chino – what a good job it was. I figured I could get a job there if I got sentenced to State time, ’cause I knew so much about photography. See, I had a real plan now, and I wanted to do a Chino hitch so I could get next to Richie.’

The judge hit him with three-to-five State. They bought his X-ray experience snow job: Wylie Davis Bullock, go to Chino.

‘So I went to Chino and got next to Richie. He was a lonely kid, so I befriended him, and he told me this AMAZING goddamn story.’

Amazing:

The Kafesjians, the Herricks – who fathered whose children? Phil Herrick and J.C. – bootleg dealers back in the '30s. The blind man killings – Richie said yes, maybe – it might be Dudley Smith's wedge. Incest: maybe/quasi/brother/father perv stuff.

'I guarantee you you have never heard *nothing* to compare to the stuff Richie told me.'

Richie, sissy/voyeur:

'He told me he was in love with Lucille, but he wouldn't touch her because she might be his half-sister. He said he loved spying on her.'

Richie, compulsive talker:

'He put things together for me. I figured out enough about Dudley Smith to know that he met up with Herrick and Kafesjian some time right after the killings. I figured Smith got cozy with them and took bribes not to snitch that they brewed that liquor. I knew now. I knew these two crazy families killed my family.'

Richie, talking vengeance on Tommy:

'I knew he didn't have the balls for it. I said just wait – I'll get you your revenge if you promise not to bother the Kafesjians.'

Richie promised.

'Then his mother wrote him and went through this sob-sister suicide routine. Richie walked Chino – fucking minimum security, he just *walked*.'

Richie stayed loose.

He got paroled two months later.

'I tried to find Richie. I staked out the Kafesjian and Herrick houses, but I never saw him.'

'That Lucille, though – wow. I used to watch her do the shimmy-shimmy naked.'

Months ticked by. 'One day right before she killed herself I saw Old Lady Herrick leave a letter in her box for the postman. I snuck up and grabbed it, and it was addressed to Champ Dineen, this jazz clown that Richie worshipped. There was a PO box address, so I figured Moms and Richie were working a mail-drop thing. I sent Richie a note at his box: "Dig Lucille do the shimmy shimmy in her window. Now you be patient and I'll get you your revenge."'

The note worked – months ticked by – he peeped Richie peeping Lucille. AMAZING: peeper Richie, amateur bug man – that electronics class did him solid. He walked the straight and narrow himself – movie jobs, parole confabs – nobody knew the Eyeball Man kept his dick hard—

'I started getting these wild ideas.

'The Eyeball Man said I should follow the Kafesjian guys and Dudley Smith around just for kicks.

'I was dogging Smith one day. He had lunch with Mickey Cohen, and I grabbed a booth next to them. Cohen said he was fronting this horror movie shooting in Griffith Park, and this Sid Frizell guy who was directing it shot stag films on the side. Smith said he loved naughty movies, and that Cohen should tell Frizell he had a nice sound stage he could use. Cohen said Frizell was skanky enough to take him up on it.'

He hit the *Vampire* set – 'Man, was this flick from hunger.' He offered his camera sevices cut-rate; Cohen hired him; he gamed dumbfuck Sid Frizell – strapped for ideas. 'I fed him these incestuous-type bits and all this blinding stuff, 'cause I figured one day I'd show Richie the finished-up movie. I told Frizell I had smut experience, and he pestered this Cohen guy Chick Vecchio into talking to Smith. Smith gave the okay, so Frizell got to shoot his stuff at this dive down in Lynwood.

‘So I got cozy close to things, but I still didn’t have *the* fucking plan worked out. Then the Eyeball Man came through.’

He said tweak the Kafesjians with a voodoo B&E. Put the onus on Richie – keep him scared – keep him hiding.

‘So I did it. I guess it’s like symbolism, ’cause the Eyeball Man told me exactly how to do things. I tried to blind the dogs with this dry-cleaning chemical, but that didn’t work, so I pulled their eyes out. I broke liquor bottles to goose them on their bootleg gig, and I broke Tommy’s records up ’cause the Eyeball Man said that would symbolize how Richie hated Tommy. Richie always hated Lucille whoring, so I cut her pedal pushers up and shot a load on them.’

Wicked fun.

‘The Eyeball Man said make Richie squirm, so I scoped him out at these motels, getting all weepy over Lucille, and I cut up his bed with this silverware I stole to spook him. There was lots of heat around the Kafesjians because of the B&E and the Fed thing, so the Eyeball Man told me to kill Phil Herrick early. The daughters came home unexpected and the Eyeball Man said snuff them too. I figured Richie was a fucking escapee, so the cops would think he did it and snuff him on the spot.’

Then?

‘The Eyeball Man said kill Tommy and J.C. slow. He said rip Dudley Smith’s eyes out and eat them.’

Now?

‘Pancakes and sausage, daddy-o. A nice safe cell for me and the Eyeball Man.’

Licking his chops.

Flapjack batter on a shelf.

EVERYTHING.

Chest pings/headache/dry mouth – Dudley Smith meets the Eyeball Man.

Exley pointing at the door.

I followed him outside. Spooky sunlight – trailer-park geeks watching us.

‘What’s your assessment?’

Juke him/fuck him – LIE:

‘I want to take Bullock in to Welles Noonan. I’m dodging custody, and he can help me smooth things out. He’s a key witness on Dudley and the Kafesjians, and if we cooperate with the Feds we can cut their probe off at the knees, especially with you giving them Narco.’

‘He’s insane. He’s not a valid witness.’

‘Yeah, but all he is to *us* is a psycho. He’s not even fit to stand trial.’

‘Gallaudet will get indictments. He’ll prosecute him himself.’

‘Bob’s dead. He was in with Dudley on some district gambling scheme. Dudley killed him.’

Weak knees – I steadied him – Edmund Jennings Exley popping cold sweat.

‘I’ve got Chick Vecchio stashed. He begged me for Federal custody, and Madge Kafesjian filled in some of Bullock’s story and told me how Dudley hooked J.C. up with the Department. Exley, it’s all *contained*. Vecchio, Bullock, Madge – *they* rat Dudley and only Narco gets hurt. It’s *your* basic plan, and all you have to do is cut me some slack before I take Bullock in.’

‘Specifically?’

‘Call Noonan. Tell him you’re handing your Narco dossiers over. Tell him to retract his warrant on me until I bring our witness in.’

Do it – grab the bait – I’ll run with *your* money—

‘Exley …’

‘Yes. Move Bullock some place safe after dark, then call me.’

‘You’ll call Noonan?’

‘Yes, I’ll call him now.’

‘I’m surprised you’re trusting me.’

‘I’ve betrayed your trust before, and I’m running out of strategies. Just keep the shotgun and try not to kill him.’

I settled in.

Bullock talked pancakes and the Eyeball Man.

EVERYTHING spun me crazy – backward, forward – back to Meg, up to Glenda.

Escaped plans. Buyouts. Schemes – nothing jelled.

Dusk came on – I kept the lights off. Music somewhere – EVERYTHING spun me fresh.

Nothing jelled.

Bullock fell asleep cuffed to his chair.

Nothing jelled.

Bullock muttered gibberish in his sleep.

Shakes, shudders – something like a whimper ripping through me.

I braced myself against the wall—

Killings, beatings, bribes, payoffs, kickbacks, shakedowns. Rent coercion, music jobs, strikebreaker work. Lies, intimidation, vows trashed, oaths broken, duties scorned. Thievery, duplicity, greed, lies, killings, beatings, bribes, payoffs, Meg—

That whimper got loose – Bullock cocked his head to hear it better. Sobs then – choking back tears, sobs racking through me so hard the trailer shook.

EVERYTHING.

Spinning, falling, confessing.

I don't know how long it lasted.

I came out of it thinking:

NOT ENOUGH.

I made the call.

54

THE SEARS & ROEBUCK parking lot: wide open, empty. A block off: *my* Eastside building.

Early. Arclights on asphalt – he'd see us.

683 grand stuffed in four attaché cases.

My .45 taped to my ankle.

Wylie Bullock in the front seat – cuffed with his hands in his lap.

Exley's cleaver beside him.

Headlights coming.

I laid the money bags on the hood. No suitcoat, no holster – frisk me.

Healights up, brakes, lights off. Dudley Smith stepped out, smiling.

Coatless, empty holster – frisk *me*.

'Lad, you're early.'

'I'm cautious.'

'Given your circumstances, I would be, too. And that man I glimpse in your car?'

'He's a pilot. He's flying me south.'

He looked in – the passenger window half down. Bullock stayed calm, my suitcoat draped over his cuffs.

'What grand briefcases! Have you tallied the amount?'

'Almost seven hundred thousand.'

'Is this my share?'

'It's yours.'

'In exchange for?'

'The safety of the people I leave here.'

'You used the plural, lad. Have you loved ones beyond your sister?'

'Not really.'

'Aah, grand. And Vecchio?'

'He's dead.'

'Have you brought the verification I requested?'

'It's in with the money.'

'Well, then given that Edmund Exley is unapproachable and somewhat compromised, I would say this is goodbye.'

I stepped closer – blocking his view – cover for Bullock.

'I've still got those curiosities.'

'Such as?'

Louder – *barely* – don't rile him yet:

'Madge Kafesjian told me about the blind man killings. I wondered how you cut your deal with J.C. and Phil Herrick.'

Dudley roared – huge stage laughs.

I reached back and freed the door.

‘I was brazen then, lad. I understood the metaphors of greed and blind rage, and the absurdity of a sightless man wielding a ten-gauge did not escape me.’

‘I wish I could have seen you cut the deal.’

‘It was fairly prosaic, lad. I simply told Mr. Kafesjian and Mr. Herrick that their thriftily brewed liquor caused four deaths and assorted untold suffering. I informed them that in exchange for a percentage of their business holdings that suffering would remain strictly a point of contention between them and God.’

‘Just like that?’

‘Bullock mumbling.

‘I also offered visual persuasion. A coroner’s photograph of a young couple rendered headless expressed a certain shock value.’

Mumbling louder – I coughed to cover the noise.

‘Lad, is your pilot confrere talking to himself?’

Getting hinky – watch his hands.

‘Lad, will you open the briefcase that contains my verfication?’

I stepped closer.

Dudley flexed his hands one single beat too quick.

I pivoted to slam a knee shot; he sidestepped me.

Shivs dropping out his shirt cuffs – grab a briefcase, swing it—

Two stilettos palmed deft.

Stabbing at me – ripping leather – two blades stuck.

I dropped the briefcase.

Dudley stood wide open.

Bullock piled out, hands on the cleaver.

‘EYEBALL MAN! EYEBALL MAN!’

I slammed a knee shot.

Dudley went down.

Bullock went at him cleaver-first.

Wild swings – the handcuffs fucked his grip up – the blade ripped Dudley’s mouth ear to ear. Roundhouse coup de grace – the cleaver hit asphalt.

‘EYEBALL MAN!’ Bullock on Dudley:

Biting.

Clawing.

Ripping at his eyes.

Look:

One gushing red socket.

‘NO!’ – *my* scream/my gun out/aiming at them tangled up together.

I fired twice – two misses – ricochets off the pavement.

Two more shots braced against the hood – Bullock’s face exploded.

Bone spray in my eyes.

Firing blind – ricochet zings, a jammed slide.

Dudley on Bullock – prying at his hands.

Dudley weaving, screaming exultant – his eye cupped back to his face.

I grabbed the money and ran. Echoes boomed behind me: ‘EYEBALL MAN! EYEBALL MAN!’

A week – backtrack it:

I ran that one block to my building. Old bookie stash holes in the basement – I tucked the money away.

Calls from the janitor's phone:

Glenda. long distance: come down, grab the cash, hide. Pete in El Segundo: cut Chick loose – Glenda's got twenty grand for you.

Pandemonium at Sears – prowl cars responding to shots. Bullock dead, Dudley rushed to Queen of Angels. My explanation: ask Chief Exley.

I was arrested – bagged on Exley's APB. I was allowed one phone call – I buzzed Noonan.

A custody battle ensued – LAPD vs. Feds – Noonan victorious.

Material witness protection – no charges filed on me yet.

A Statler Hilton suite, friendly guards: Jim Henstell and Will Shipstad.

A TV in my room – dig the news:

Mickey Cohen – solid-citizen Fed helper.

Gas Chamber Bob G. – nine days missing, where's the DA?

Frequent visits from Welles Noonan.

My tack: total silence.

His tack: threats, lawyer logic.

Exley called him the day we glommed Bullock; dig the deal he offered:

A joint LAPD/Fed effort – Narco swings and Dave Klein brings in four witnesses. Cooperation assured; Exley quoted verbatim: 'Let's bury the hatchet and work together. One of the witnesses will be a high-ranking LAPD man, more like a hostile interrogatee. He has intimate knowledge on the Kafesjian family, and I would call him federally indictable on at least a half-dozen charges. I think he will more than make up for the loss of Dan Wilhite, who regrettably committed suicide last week. Mr Noonan, this officer is very dirty. All I ask is that he be portrayed as a contained, totally autonomous entity within the LAPD, just as you've agreed to portray the Narcotics Division.'

Coming up: an LAPD/Fed press conference.

My 'witnesses':

Wylie Bullock – dead.

Chick V. – probably hiding.

Madge – grieving somewhere.

Dudley Smith – on the critical list.

'Critical' PR – Exley press manipulation – no word on the Bullock thing issued. No City charges filed on me; Bullock cremated.

No 'witnesses' – and Noonan was furious.

Threats:

'I'll prosecute your sister on tax charges.'

'I'll give the DA's Office my bugging tapes – Glenda Bledsoe goddamn admitted she killed Dwight Gilette.'

'I have you on tape telling a man named Jack to "kill him". If you refuse to talk to me, I'll have Federal agents comb a list of your known associates for that man.'

My tack: total silence.

My ace: sole-witness status – I knew EVERYTHING.

Days dragged. No more L.A. 'crime wave' news – Noonan and Exley put the fix in. Tommy and J.C. – under Fed surveillance, untouchable.

A visit from Ed Exley.

'I think you stole money from me. Cooperate with Noonan and I'll let you keep it. You'll need money – and I won't miss it.'

'*Without your testimony Dudley can't be touched.*'

'*If this agreement with the Feds falls through, the Department will look disgracefully ineffectual.*'

My tack: total silence.

A visit from Pete B. Whispers: Glenda's got the money – and she paid me my cut. Word's out you're a Fed snitch – Sam Giancana just issued a contract.

A visit from two Sheriffs dicks: 'We like Glenda Bledsoe for the Miciak job.'

My tack – confession – I killed him solo. I dropped knife wound details – they bought it – they said they'd file Murder One on me.

Noonan right there: 'I will use the full power of the Federal Government to keep this man in my sole custody.'

A phone call – Jack Woods checking in:

'*Meg's okay. Sam G. put the word out – you're dead.*'

Stale news.

Long days – playing cards with Will Shipstad killed time. Instincts: he hates Fed work, he hates Noonan. I threw out a bribe flyer: erase the Glenda tape for thirty grand.

He agreed.

Noonan confirmed it the next day: 'Incompetent technicians!' – a huge tantrum.

Long nights – bad dreams – killings, beatings, bribes, shakedowns, lies.

Bad sleep, no sleep.

Afraid to sleep, nightmares on call: Johnny begging, one-eyed Dudley.

Glenda – hard to conjure – easy to hear:

'*You want to confess.*'

Two nights, six legal pads – Dave 'the Enforcer' Klein confesses—

Killings, beatings, bribes, payoffs, shakedowns – my police career up to Wylie Bullock. Lies, intimidation, vows trashed, oaths broken. Exley and Smith – my accessories – tell the world.

Ninety-four pages – Shipstad leaked it to Pete B.

Conduit Pete, copies to: Hush-Hush, *the L.A.* Times, *the State AG.*

Time ticking, Noonan crazed: the press conference is pending. I need you to talk.

Threats, offers, threats—

I talked:

'*Give me two days of freedom under Federal guard. When I return to custody we'll prepare my testimony.*'

Noonan – reluctant, half crazy: 'Yes.'

L.A. *Herald-Express*, 12/6/58:

LAPD-FEDERAL PRESS CONFERENCE CANCELLED

The announcement last week surprised everybody: the Los Angeles Police Department and the U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern California District, were holding a joint press conference. Adversaries during U.S. Attorney Welles Noonan's still ongoing Southside rackets probe, the two law enforcement agencies had recently come across as anything but friendly. Federal officers charged the LAPD with allowing vice to rage in South-Central Los Angeles, while LAPD Chief of Detectives Edmund Exley accused Mr Noonan of mounting a politically motivated smear campaign against his Department. That dissention ended last week when both men issued identical statements to reporters. Now, tomorrow's press conference has been precipitously called off, leaving many members of the Southern California law enforcement community baffled.

Last week's press release was carefully worded; it hinted only that a cooperative Federal-LAPD effort had been mounted, one perhaps aimed at securing indictments against members of the LAPD's Narcotics Division. Much more was to have been revealed tomorrow, and an anonymous source within the U.S. Attorney's Office stated that he thought the joint effort was scotched due to breach of official promises. Queried as to exactly what 'promises', the source stated: 'A Los Angeles police officer skipped Federal custody. He was to have testified against members of the LAPD Narcotics Squad and a criminal family they have long been allied with, and he was also to have induced a total of four other potential witnesses into testifying. He did not deliver those witnesses, and when allowed two days out of custody to take care of personal matters, he attacked his guard and escaped. Frankly, without him the Federal Government has only Mickey Cohen, a former gangster, to offer testimony.'

CRIME WAVE SPECULATION

This situation occurs in the middle of a statistically staggering Los Angeles crime wave, much of it Southside based. The City homicide rate for the past month soared 1600%, and although neither the LAPD nor U.S. Attorney's Office will confirm it, speculation has linked last week's gangland killings in Watts to the Hollywood Ranch Market shootout that also left four dead. Add on the mysterious disappearance of Los Angeles District Attorney Robert Gallaudet and the November 19 Herrick family slayings, still unsolved, and you have what Governor Goodwin J. Knight has called 'a powder keg situation. I have every confidence in the ability of Chief Parker and Deputy Chief Exley to maintain order, but you still have to wonder what could cause such a drastic upsweep in crime.'

Asked to comment on the press conference cancellation, Chief Exley refused. Queried on the recent crime wave, he stated: 'It was simply coincidental and non-tangential, and now it's over.'

L.A. *Mirror*, 12/8/58:

LAPD PRE-EMPTS FEDS IN DARING MOVE

The Los Angeles Police Department's famously stern Chief of Detectives Edmund J. Exley called an impromptu press conference this morning. He was expected to digress on the recent Federal Southside crime investigation and offer comments on why the LAPD and local U.S. Attorney's Office have apparently abandoned their short-lived 'cooperative venture' into probing both Southside malfeasance and the Los Angeles Police Department's own Narcotics Division.

He did neither. Instead, in a terse prepared statement, he blasted the Narcotics Division himself and said that he would personally deliver incriminating evidence to a specially convened County grand jury, then offer tax fraud information unilaterally to the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Describing 'Narco' as a 'police unit autonomously run amok', Exley stated that he was certain its 'long-standing tradition of graft' did not extend to other LAPD divisions, but Internal Affairs Division, under his supervision, was going to 'comb this police department like a bloodhound sniffing out graft to make sure.'

Stunned reporters asked questions; Exley refused to answer them. He did state that the commanding officer of Narcotics Division, Captain Daniel Wilhite, 44, recently committed suicide, and that Internal Affairs detectives were currently interviewing various 'Narco' officers with an eye toward securing voluntary grand jury testimony.

Asked just how 'dirty' 'Narco' was, Chief Exley said, 'Very. I am personally stating that it has been in collusion with a vicious dope-pushing family for over twenty years. It is my desire to reform the Narcotics Division from the ground up and take that family down. I will be passing pertinent Federal venue information on to U.S. Attorney Welles Noonan, but he should know that I am taking the primary responsibility for cleaning my own house.'

***Hush-Hush* Magazine, 12/11/58:**

FREEDOM OF SPEECH GAGGED!!! J'ACCUSE! J'ACCUSE!

Journalistic nitroglycerine – that's the only way to describe it. 94 pages that arrived at *Hush-Hush* ten days ago, atom bomb accusations that were also sent to a Los Angeles newspaper and the State Attorney General's Office.

They chose to ignore it; we chose to print it. The confidential source that transmitted this literary A-bomb verified its authenticity – and we believed him. 94 pages: scorching, scalding, burning hot revelations, the confessions of a crooked Los Angeles policeman on the run from the mob, the cops and his own violent past. You *would have seen it here* on December 18th – but something happened.

Kats and kittens, we're on dicey legal ground here. We can describe the 'legal' machinations that have censored us; our lawyers tell us that the vague description of the material covered in the preceding paragraph does not violate the 'legal' injunction filed against us by the Los Angeles Police Department.

And we'll go just a tad further in our description: those 94 pages would have brought the LAPD to its knees. Our (regrettably) anonymous author, unflinching in his portrayal of his own corruption, also charged celebrated Los Angeles policemen with felony malfeasance on a spectacular scale and claimed that LAPD officials covered up a complex web of circumstances surrounding the recent L.A. crime wave. Scalding, scorching hot revelations – verifiably true – and we can't print them.

That's as much as our attorneys will permit us to tell you about those 94 pages. Is your appetite whetted? Good, now let us stoke your rage.

An employee of ours, a man charged with gathering electronic information, has a drinking problem. He saw those 94 pages, recognized them as dynamite and called an LAPD acquaintance. Our employee, a probation absconder ducking drunk driving warrants, leaked those pages to his acquaintance. Word spread to the LAPD hierarchy; a restraining order was secured. Our employee was rewarded: his warrants were rendered null and void. Those scalding 94 pages were seized; we cannot print any portion of them under threat of ‘legal’ injunction.

The newspaper? The State Attorney General’s Office?

They discarded their 94 pages. They ridiculed them as hog-wash. The monstrous facts were too ugly to believe.

The author? He’s out there among the night blooming fiends in the City of the Fallen Angels.

The upshot? You decide. Decry this fascistic censorship. Write to us. Write to the LAPD. Express your rage. Send one up for a rogue cop whose mea culpa read too explosive to print.

BANNERS:

L.A. *Times*, 12/14/58:

GRAND JURY CONVENED; 'NARCO' COPS TESTIFY

L.A. *Mirror*, 12/15/58:

HUSH-HUSH 'CENSORSHIP' BLAST MEETS DEAF EARS

L.A. *Herald-Express*, 12/16/58:

LAPD DERIDES HUSH-HUSH INVECTIVE

L.A. *Times*, 12/19/58:

NARCOTICS OFFICERS INDICTED

L.A. *Mirror*, 12/21/58:

EXLEY: HUSH-HUSH ACCUSATIONS 'NONSENSE'

L.A. *Mirror*, 12/22/58:

REPUTED DOPE KINGPINS FACE GRAND JURY

L.A. *Herald-Express*, 12/23/58:

GRAND JURY SHOCKER: NO KAFESJIAN INDICTMENTS-ACTING DA SAYS NARCO TESTIMONY COMPROMISED

L.A. *Examiner*, 12/26/58:

GALLAUDET STILL MISSING; SEARCH CONTINUES

L.A. *Mirror*, 12/27/58:

MAYOR POULSON: HUSH-HUSH ACCUSATIONS LAUGHABLE

L.A. *Mirror*, 12/28/58:

FEDERAL RACKETS PROBE DISBANDS

L.A. *Herald-Express*, 1/3/59:

TOASTMASTER POLICEMAN VOTED SPECIAL PENSION

The scene was sad, touching, antithetical to recent police headlines: Narcotics officers indicted on graft charges. The scene: a grossly injured Los Angeles policeman fighting for his life in a hospital bed.

Dudley L. Smith, Captain, LAPD. Dublin born, Los Angeles raised, a World War II OSS spymaster. 53 years old, thirty years a policeman. A wife, five daughters. Numerous commendations for bravery, LAPD toastmaster, lay chaplain. Dudley L. Smith: stabbed in an altercation with a robber five weeks ago – now fighting for his life.

He's winning that fight so far: he lost an eye, he's paralyzed, he's sustained brain damage, he'll probably never walk again. When he's lucid he charms nurses with his brogue and jokes that he'll do advertisements like the eye patch man who hucksters Hathaway Shirts. He's not lucid most of the time, and that's a heartbreaker.

The LAPD will not release details on the altercation that earned Dudley Smith his wounds; they know he would prefer to spare the family of the robber he killed the ignominy of public recognition. That's a heartbreaker, as is the fact that Dudley Smith will require intensive sanitarium care for the rest of his life.

His police pension and savings won't cover it. He's too proud to accept police charity contributions. He's a legendary policeman, much beloved, a cop who has killed eight men in the line of duty. Knowing these things, LAPD Chief of Detectives Edmund Exley asked Los Angeles City Council to exercise a rarely used option and vote him a special pension: an amount to sustain his care in a comprehensively equipped sanitarium indefinitely.

The City Council agreed and voted in Dudley Smith's pension unanimously. Chief Exley told reporters: 'It's important that Captain Smith remains contained and receives the care he deserves. He'll be safe and secure, and he'll be able to live out his days free of the taxing problems of police work.'

Dudley L. Smith, hero. May those days stretch long and peacefully.

PART V

HUSHABYE

55

TAKE OUT CARTONS, newspaper stacks – Pete's hole-up a month in.

A tract house outside San Diego. Safe – his ex-wife was touring Europe for six weeks. Rent pirate Pete: two grand a week.

Newspapers – the story dispersed:

My confession quashed by legal injunction.

Dudley half-dead.

The Fed probe blitzed.

Narco destroyed – Exley triumphant.

Time to think.

Phone time – outside conduit Pete reporting in:

Warrants out on me – State and Fed – nine indictments total. 'They've got you on Miciak, tax charges, two State and three Federal conspiracy statutes. There's national APBs out on you, plus Fed bulletins up the wazoo. You can keep the house until January 27th, but that's it.'

Pete – January 13:

'Glenda's still in Fresno. The Feds have got her under surveillance, but I think I can sneak her down for a visit before you take off.'

January 14:

'I called Jack Woods. He said Meg's okay, and I checked with a Fed guy I know. He said Noonan's not going to file tax charges on her – he's too busy cooking up some new probe gig to give a shit.'

January 15.

January 16.

January 17.

Tired, sludgy – chink take-out five weeks straight.

January 18:

'Dave, I can't get you a passport, I've got no legit contacts, and I heard the mob fronts aren't selling them, 'cause they figure *you're* buying.'

January 19 – blind run fever.

Nightmares – EVERYTHING swirling.

January 20:

'Glenda thinks they lifted the surveillance on her. She's going to bring your money down in a couple of days.'

January 21 – Pete, fucking scared:

'Mr Hughes found out I've been hiding you. He's pissed that Glenda skated on Miciak and … shit, you know, you and her. He wants some personal payback, and he said he won't turn you in if you cooperate. Dave, I'll try to go easy.'

56

ON MY KNEES – woozy. Shock waves up my spine – one punch in.

The backyard – Howard Hughes watching.

I stood up groggy – loose teeth, split lips. Left-right/left-right/left-right – my nose somewhere down my throat. Propped up – eyebrow flaps shredded loose, shading my eyes.

Howard Hughes in a business suit and wing tips.

Kicked prone – ‘No, use your fists.’

Jerked upright – left hook/left hook – splitting gums, no nose, hard to breathe. Left hook/left hook – bones cracking.

No legs, no face – signet ring rips jaw to hairline.

‘A few more.’

‘He can’t take any more.’

‘Don’t contradict me.’

No legs, no face. Eyes to the sun – burning red – please don’t blind me. Left-right/left-right – ‘Leave him for the doctor.’

Fading somewhere – don’t take my eyes.

Spinning, falling.

Music.

Darkness/light/pain – arm jabs, crazy bliss. Light = sight – don't take my eyes.

Spinning, falling – EVERYTHING synced to bop. Champ Dineen riffs – Lucille and Richie waved down from heaven.

Sweating – cold swipes at my face. Somebody's face – an old man.

Needle jabs eating up pain.

Arm pops = craaaazy bliss.

EVERYTHING – spinning, falling.

Cheek rubs half blissed – thick beard stubble.

Time – light into dark, light into dark, light into dark.

A man wearing glasses – maybe a dream. Voices – dreamy, half real.

Music.

57

FOUR DAYS SEDATED.

The doctor, walking out: ‘I left you some morphine Syrettes. You’re healing up nicely, but you’ll need to get some bones set within a month or so. Oh, and a friend of yours left you a package.’

Numb throbs chin to forehead. Fresh newspapers – check the dates – January 22 to 25.

Mirror check:

My nose – smashed flat.

My jaw – bent sideways.

No eyebrows – scar tissue instead.

A raised hairline – scalp cuts ripped me balding.

Two new ears.

One eye squinty, one eye normal.

Dark brown hair gone pure gray inside a week.

Call it:

A new face.

Healing – bruises fading, sutures out.

I checked the package:

One blank passport.

One .38 revolver, silencer fitted.

A note, unsigned:

Klein—

IA found you, and I’ve decided to let you go. You served me very well and you deserve the chance I’m giving you.

Keep the money you took. I’m not optimistic, but I hope the passport helps. I won’t apologize for the way I used you, since I believe the Smith situation justified it. He’s neutralized now, but if you consider the justice you meted out less than absolute, you have my permission to follow it up more thoroughly. Frankly, I’m through with him. He’s cost me enough as it is.

Indirect order: kill him.

Not HIM – THEM.

58

‘WE USED TO be a great-looking pair.’

‘That part’s all on you now’ – loose teeth, painful.

‘You’re different, David.’

‘Sure, look at me.’

‘No, it’s that we’ve been together for five minutes and you haven’t asked me to tell you things.’

Glenda: carhop suntan, close to gaunt. ‘I just want to look at you.’

‘I’ve looked better.’

‘No, you haven’t.’

She touched my face. ‘Was I worth it?’

‘Whatever it cost, whatever it took.’

‘Just like that?’

‘Yeah, just like that.’

‘You should have grabbed that movie contract way back when.’

Money bags by the door – time closing in.

Glenda said, ‘Tell *me* things.’

Back to then, up to always – I told her EVERYTHING.

I faltered sometimes – pure horror jolted me silent. That silence, implicit: *you* – tell *me*.

Lights kisses said no.

I told her all of it. Glenda listened, short of spellbound – like she knew.

The story hung between us. Kissing her hurt – her hands said let me.

She undressed me.

She slid out of her clothes just past my reach.

I roused slow – just let me look. Persistent Glenda, soft hands – inside her half-crazy just from looking.

She moved above me – propped up off my bruises. Just watching her felt wrong – I pulled her down.

Her weight on me hurt – I kissed her hard to rip through the pain. She started peaking – my hurt ebbed – I came blending into her spasms.

I opened my eyes. Glenda framed my face with her hands – just looking.

Sleep – day into night. Up startled – a clock by the bed – 1:14.

January 26.

A camera on the dresser – Pete’s ex-wife’s. I checked the film – six exposures remaining.

Glenda stirred.

I walked into the bathroom. Morphine Syrettes in a dish – I popped one and mixed it with water.

I got dressed.

I stuffed two hundred grand in Glenda's purse.

The bedroom—

Glenda yawning, hands out, thirsty – I gave her the glass.

She gulped the water down. Stretches, little tucks – back to sleep.

Look:

A half-smile brushing her pillow. One shoulder outside the covers, old scars going tan.

I snapped pictures:

Her face – eyes closed – dreams she'd never tell me. Lamp light, flash-bulb light: blond hair on white linen.

I sealed the film.

I picked up the money bags – heavy, obscene.

I walked out the door bracing back sobs.

59

EASY:

I took a bus to L.A. and got a hotel room. I had a typewriter sent up-one blank passport rendered valid.

My new name: Edmund L. Smith.

Picture valid: photo-booth snapshots, glue.

My ticket out: Pan Am, L.A. to Rio.

My wounds were healing up.

My new face was holding: no handsome Dave Klein showing through.

Morphine pops kept me calm and crazy exultant. This crazy notion: you walked.

Not yet.

60

I BOUGHT A new clunker – two hundred dollars cash. I took a detour airport-bound: 1684 South Tremaine.

8:00 A.M. – quiet, peaceful.

Voices inside – bellicose male.

I walked back, tried the rear door – unlocked. Laundry room, kitchen door – yank it.

J.C. and Tommy at the table, guzzling beer.

Say what?

What the—

J.C. first – silencer THWAP – brains out his ears. Tommy, beer bottle raised – THWAP – glass in his eyes.

He screamed: ‘DADDY!’

EYEBALL MAN! EYEBALL MAN! I shot them both faceless blind.

61

AIRPORT HEAT: FEDS, Sheriff’s men, mob lookouts. Right through them – no blinks – up to the counter.

Friendly service, a glance at my passport. I checked my money bags through – ‘Have a pleasant flight, Mr. Smith.’

Gone – just like that.

The will to remember.

Fever dreams – that time burning.

Old now – a gringo exile rich off real estate. My confession complete – but still not enough.

Postscripts:

Will Shipstad – private practice from '59 up.

Reuben Ruiz – Bantam champ, '61–'62.

Chick Vecchio – shot and killed robbing a liquor store.

Touch V. – managing drag-queen acts in Vegas.

Fred Turentine – dead – cirrhosis. Lester Lake – dead – cancer.

The place lost/the time burning/close to them somehow.

Madge Kafesjian – alone – that house, those ghosts.

Welles Noonan – convicted of jury tampering – 1974. Sentenced to three to five Fed – a Seconal OD suicide en route to Leavenworth.

Meg – old, a widow – my conduit there to here. Wealthy – our slum pads traded up for condos.

Spinning, falling – afraid I'll forget:

Mickey Cohen – perpetual scuffler – two prison jolts. Dead – heart attack, '76.

Jack Woods, Pete B. – old, in failing health.

Dick Carlisle:

Retired from the LAPD – never charged as a Dudley Smith accomplice. 'Dick the Fur King' – the Hurwitz stash expanded legit. Dry-cleaning mogul – the E–Z Kleen chain purchased from Madge.

Dudley Smith – still half-lucid, still a charmer: Gaelic songs for the girls who wet-nurse him.

Edmund Exley:

Chief of Detectives, Chief of Police. Congressman, Lieutenant Governor, current gubernatorial candidate.

Acknowledged Dudley Smith admirer – politically expedient, smart.

Dudley – rakish in his eye patch. Pundit when sane: snappy quotes on 'containment', always good for a news retrospective. A reminder: men were men then.

Glenda:

Movie star, TV star. Sixtyish – the matriarch on a long-running series.

Glenda:

Thirty-odd years famous. Always with me – those pictures held close. Ageless – every movie, every printed photo shunned.

In my dreams – spinning, falling.

Like Exley and Dudley and Carlisle.

Exiled from me, things to tell me – prosaic horrors that define their long survival. Words to update this confession to free me.

Dreams: spinning, falling—

I'm going back. I'm going to make Exley confess every monstrous deal he ever cut with the same candor I have. I'm going to kill Carlisle, and make Dudley fill in every moment of his life – to eclipse my guilt with the sheer weight of his evil. I'm going to kill him in the name of our victims, find Glenda and say:

Tell me anything.

Tell me everything.

Revoke our time apart.

Love me fierce in danger.

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Version 1.0

Epub ISBN 9781448108626

Published by Windmill Books 2011

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

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First published in Great Britain in 1992 by Century
First published in paperback in 1993 by Arrow Books

Windmill Books
The Random House Group Limited
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA

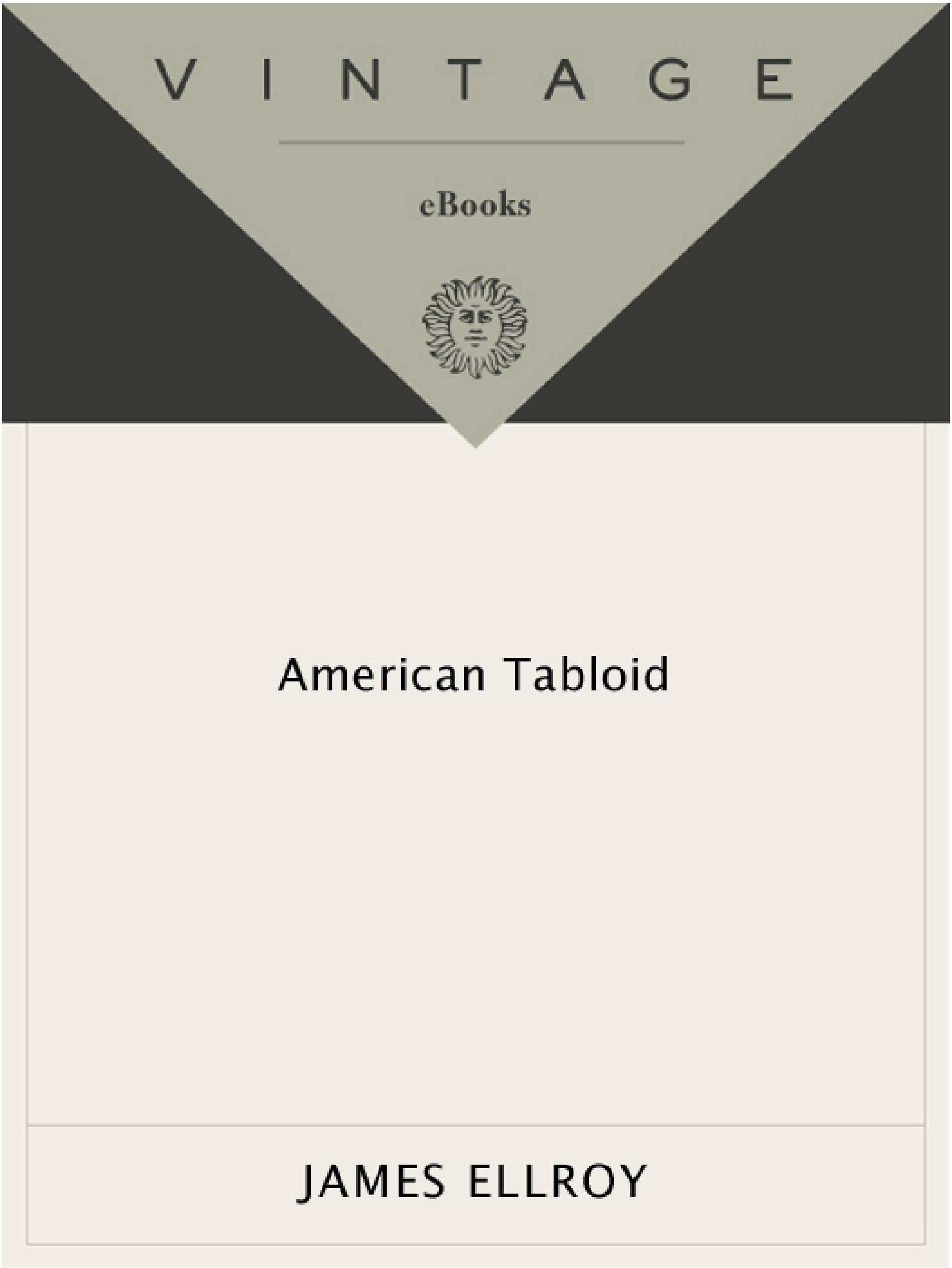
Addresses for companies within The Random House Group Limited can be found at:
www.randomhouse.co.uk/offices.htm

The Random House Group Limited Reg. No. 954009

www.randomhouse.co.uk

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9780099537892



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Also by James Ellroy

Hollywood Nocturnes

L.A. Confidential

The Big Nowhere

The Black Dahlia

Killer on the Road

Suicide Hill

Because the Night

Blood on the Moon

Clandestine

Brown's Requiem

White Jazz

My Dark Places

Crime Wave

The Cold Six Thousand

American Tabloid

James Ellroy

Vintage Books
A Division of Random House, Inc.
New York

FIRST VINTAGE BOOKS EDITION, APRIL 2001

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The Library of Congress has cataloged the Knopf edition as follows:
Ellroy, James, [date]
American tabloid: a novel / by James Ellroy.—1st ed.
p. cm.
eISBN: 978-0-307-79843-5
I. Title.
PS3555.L6274A8 1995
813′.54—dc20 94-42898
CIP

www.vintagebooks.com

v3.1

To
NAT SOBEL

America was never innocent. We popped our cherry on the boat over and looked back with no regrets. You can't ascribe our fall from grace to any single event or set of circumstances. You can't lose what you lacked at conception.

Mass-market nostalgia gets you hopped up for a past that never existed. Hagiography sanctifies shuck-and-jive politicians and reinvents their expedient gestures as moments of great moral weight. Our continuing narrative line is blurred past truth and hindsight. Only a reckless verisimilitude can set that line straight.

The real Trinity of Camelot was Look Good, Kick Ass, Get Laid. Jack Kennedy was the mythological front man for a particularly juicy slice of our history. He talked a slick line and wore a world-class haircut. He was Bill Clinton minus pervasive media scrutiny and a few rolls of flab.

Jack got whacked at the optimum moment to assure his sainthood. Lies continue to swirl around his eternal flame. It's time to dislodge his urn and cast light on a few men who attended his ascent and facilitated his fall.

They were rogue cops and shakedown artists. They were wiretappers and soldiers of fortune and faggot lounge entertainers. Had one second of their lives deviated off course, American History would not exist as we know it.

It's time to demythologize an era and build a new myth from the gutter to the stars. It's time to embrace bad men and the price they paid to secretly define their time.

Here's to them.

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Also by James Ellroy

Part I

1

Pete Bondurant

(Beverly Hills, 11/22/58)

He always shot up by TV light. Some spics waved guns. The head spic plucked bugs from his beard and fomented. Black & white footage; CBS geeks in jungle fatigues. A newsman said, Cuba, bad juju—Fidel Castro's rebels vs. Fulgencio Batista's standing army.

Howard Hughes found a vein and mainlined codeine. Pete watched on the sly—Hughes left his bedroom door ajar.

The dope hit home. Big Howard went slack-faced.

Room service carts clattered outside. Hughes wiped off his spike and flipped channels. The "Howdy Doody" show replaced the news—standard Beverly Hills Hotel business.

Pete walked out to the patio—pool view, a good bird-dog spot. Crappy weather today: no starlet types in bikinis.

He checked his watch, antsy.

He had a divorce gig at noon—the husband drank lunch alone and dug young cooze. Get *quality* flashbulbs: blurry photos looked like spiders fucking. On Hughes' timecard: find out who's hawking subpoenas for the TWA antitrust divestment case and bribe them into reporting that Big Howard blasted off for Mars.

Crafty Howard put it this way: "I'm not going to fight this divestment, Pete. I'm simply going to stay incommunicado indefinitely and force the price up until I *have* to sell. I'm tired of TWA anyway, and I'm not going to sell until I can realize *at least* five hundred million dollars."

He'd said it pouty: Lord Fauntleroy, aging junkie.

Ava Gardner cruised by the pool. Pete waved; Ava flipped him the bird. They went back: he got her an abortion in exchange for a weekend with Hughes. Renaissance Man Pete: pimp, dope procurer, licensed PI goon.

Hughes and him went *waaay* back.

June '52. L.A. County Deputy Sheriff Pete Bondurant—night watch commander at the San Dimas Substation. That one shitty night: a nigger rape-o at large, the drunk tank packed with howling juiceheads.

This wino gave him grief. "I know you, tough guy. You kill innocent women and your own—"

He beat the man to death barefisted.

The Sheriff's hushed it up. An eyeball witness squealed to the Feds. The L.A. agent-in-charge tagged Joe Wino "Joe Civil Rights Victim."

Two agents leaned on him: Kemper Boyd and Ward J. Littell. Howard Hughes saw his picture in the paper and sensed strongarm potential. Hughes got the beef quashed and offered him a job: fixer, pimp, dope conduit.

Howard married Jean Peters and installed her in a mansion by herself. Add "watchdog" to his duties; add the world's greatest rent-free doghouse: the mansion next door.

Howard Hughes on marriage: "I find it a delightful institution, Pete, but I also find cohabitation stressful. Explain that to Jean periodically, won't you? And if she gets lonely, tell her that she's in my thoughts, even though I'm very busy."

Pete lit a cigarette. Clouds passed over—pool loungers shivered. The intercom crackled—Hughes was beckoning.

He walked into the bedroom. "Captain Kangaroo" was on TV, the volume down low.

Dim black & white lighting—and Big Howard in deep-focus shadows.

"Sir?"

"It's 'Howard' when we're alone. You know that."

"I'm feeling subservient today."

“You mean you’re feeling your oats with your paramour, Miss Gail Hendee. Tell me, is she enjoying the surveillance house?”

“She likes it. She’s as hinky of shack jobs as you are, and she says twenty-four rooms for two people smooths things out.”

“I like independent women.”

“No you don’t.”

Hughes plumped up his pillows. “You’re correct. But I do like the *idea* of independent women, which I have always tried to exploit in my movies. And I’m sure Miss Hendee is both a wonderful extortion partner *and* mistress. Now, Pete, about the TWA divestment …”

Pete pulled a chair up. “The process servers won’t get to you. I’ve got every employee at this hotel bribed, and I’ve got an actor set up in a bungalow two rows over. He looks like you and dresses like you, and I’ve got call girls going in at all hours, to perpetuate the myth that you still fuck women. I check every man and woman who applies for work here, to make sure the Justice Department doesn’t slip a ringer in. All the shift bosses here play the stock market, and for every month you go unfucking-subpoenaed I give them twenty shares of Hughes Tool Company stock apiece. As long as you stay in this bungalow, you won’t be served and you won’t have to appear in court.”

Hughes plucked at his robe—little palsied fidgets. “You’re a very cruel man.”

“No, I’m *your* very cruel man, which is why you let me talk back to you.”

“You’re ‘my man,’ but you still retain your somewhat tawdry private investigator sideline.”

“That’s because you crowd me. That’s because I’m not so good at cohabitation either.”

“Despite what I pay you?”

“No, *because* of it.”

“For instance?”

“For instance, I’ve got a mansion in Holmby Hills, but you’ve got the deed. I’ve got a ’58 Pontiac coupe, but you’ve got the pink slip. I’ve got a—”

“This is getting us nowhere.”

“Howard, you want something. Tell me what it is and I’ll do it.”

Hughes tapped his remote-control gizmo. “Captain Kangaroo” blipped off. “I’ve purchased *Hush-Hush* magazine. My reasons for acquiring a scurrilous scandal rag are twofold. One, I've been corresponding with J. Edgar Hoover, and I want to solidify my friendship with him. We both love the type of Hollywood gossip that *Hush-Hush* purveys, so owning the magazine would be both pleasurable and a smart political move. Second, there's politics itself. To be blunt, I want to be able to smear politicians that I dislike, especially profligate playboys like Senator John Kennedy, who might be running for President against my good friend Dick Nixon in 1960. As you undoubtedly know, Kennedy's father and I were business rivals back in the '20s, and frankly, I hate the entire family."

Pete said, "And?"

"And I know that you've worked for *Hush-Hush* as a 'story verifier,' so I know you understand that aspect of the business. It's a quasi-extortion aspect, so I know it's something you'll be good at."

Pete popped his knuckles. " 'Story verification' means 'Don't sue the magazine or I'll hurt you.' If you want me to help out that way, fine."

"Good. That's a start."

"Wrap it up, Howard. I know the people there, so tell me who's going and who's staying."

Hughes flinched—just a tad. "The receptionist was a Negro woman with dandruff, so I fired her. The stringer and so-called 'dirt digger' quit, and I want you to find me a new one. I'm keeping Sol Maltzman on. He's been writing all the articles, under a pseudonym, for years, so I'm prone to retaining him, even though he's a blacklisted Commie known to belong to no less than twenty-nine left-wing organizations, and—"

"And that's all the staff you need. Sol does a good job, and if worse comes to worse, Gail can fill in for him—she's written for *Hush-Hush* on and off for a couple of years. You've got your lawyer Dick Steisel for the legal stuff, and I can get you Fred Turentine for bug work. I'll find you a good dirt digger. I'll keep my nose down and ask around, but it might take a while."

"I trust you. You'll do your usual superb job."

Pete worked his knuckles. The joints ached—a sure sign that rain was coming. Hughes said, "Is that necessary?"

"These hands of mine brought us together, Boss. I'm just letting you know they're still here."

The watchdog house living room was 84′ by 80′.

The foyer walls were gold-flecked marble.

Nine bedrooms. Walk-in freezers thirty feet deep. Hughes had the carpets cleaned monthly—a jigaboo walked across them once.

Surveillance cameras were mounted on the roof and the upstairs landings—aimed at Mrs. Hughes' bedroom next door.

Pete found Gail in the kitchen. She had these great curves and long brown hair—her looks still got to him.

She said, "You usually hear people walk into houses, but our front door's a half-mile away."

"We've been here a year, and you're still cracking jokes."

"I live in the Taj Mahal. That takes some getting used to."

Pete straddled a chair. "You're nervous."

Gail slid her chair away from him. "Well … as extortionists go, I'm the nervous type. What's the man's name today?"

"Walter P. Kinnard. He's forty-seven years old, and he's been cheating on his wife since their honeymoon. He's got kids he dotes on, and the wife says he'll fold if I squeeze him with pictures and threaten to show them to the kids. He's a juicer, and he always gets a load on at lunchtime."

Gail crossed herself—half shtick, half for real. "Where?"

"You meet him at Dale's Secret Harbor. He's got a fuck pad a few blocks away where he bangs his secretary, but you insist on the Ambassador. You're in town for a convention, and you've got a snazzy room with a wet bar."

Gail shivered. Early a.m. chills—a sure sign that she had the yips.

Pete slipped her a key. "I rented the room next door to yours, so you can lock up and make it look good. I picked the lock on the connecting door, so I don't think this one will be noisy."

Gail lit a cigarette. Steady hands—good. "Distract me. Tell me what Howard the Recluse wanted."

"He bought *Hush-Hush*. He wants me to find him a stringer, so he can pull his pud over Hollywood gossip and share it with his pal J. Edgar Hoover. He wants to smear his political enemies, like your old boyfriend Jack Kennedy."

Gail smiled toasty warm. "A few weekends didn't make him my boyfriend."

"That fucking smile made him something."

"He flew me down to Acapulco once. That's a Howard the

Recluse kind of gesture, so it makes you jealous."

"He flew you down on his honeymoon."

"So? He got married for political reasons, and politics makes for strange bedfellows. And my God, you are *suuuch* a voyeur."

Pete unholstered his piece and checked the clip—so fast that he didn't know why. Gail said, "Don't you think our lives are strange?"

They took separate cars downtown. Gail sat at the bar; Pete grabbed a booth close by and nursed a highball.

The restaurant was crowded—Dale's did a solid lunch biz. Pete got choice seating—he broke up a fag squeeze on the owner once.

Lots of women circulating: mid-Wilshire office stuff mostly. Gail stuck out: beaucoup more je ne sais quoi. Pete wolfed cocktail nuts—he forgot to eat breakfast.

Kinnard was late. Pete scanned the room, X-ray-eye-style.

There's Jack Whalen by the pay phones—L.A.'s # 1 bookie collector. There's some LAPD brass two booths down. They're fucking whispering: "Bondurant" … "Right, that Cressmeyer woman."

There's Ruth Mildred Cressmeyer's ghost at the bar: this sad old girl with the shakes.

Pete slid down Memory Lane.

Late '49. He had some good sidelines going: card-game guard and abortion procurer. The scrape doctor was his kid brother, Frank.

Pete joined the U.S. Marines to bag a green card. Frank stayed with the family in Quebec and went to medical school.

Pete got hip early. Frank got hip late.

Don't speak French, speak English. Lose your accent and go to America.

Frank hit L.A. with a hard-on for money. He passed his medical boards and hung out his shingle: abortions and morphine for sale.

Frank loved showgirls and cards. Frank loved hoodlums. Frank loved Mickey Cohen's Thursday-night poker game.

Frank made friends with a stickup guy named Huey Cressmeyer. Huey's mom ran a Niggertown scrape clinic. Huey got his girlfriend pregnant and asked Mom and Frank for help. Huey got stupid and heisted the Thursday-night game—Pete was off guard duty with the flu.

Mickey gave Pete the contract.

Pete got a tip: Huey was holed up at a pad in El Segundo. The house belonged to a Jack Dragna trigger.

Mickey hated Jack Dragna. Mickey doubled the price and told him to kill everyone in the house.

December 14, 1949—overcast and chilly.

Pete torched the hideout with a Molotov cocktail. Four shapes ran out the back door swatting at flames. Pete shot them and left them to burn.

The papers ID'd them:

Hubert John Cressmeyer, 24.

Ruth Mildred Cressmeyer, 56.

Linda Jane Camrose, 20, four months pregnant.

François Bondurant, 27, a physician and French-Canadian émigré.

The snuffs stayed officially unsolved. The story filtered out to insiders.

Somebody called his father in Quebec and ratted him. The oid man called him and begged him to deny it.

He must have faltered or oozed guilt. The old man and old lady sucked down monoxide fumes the same day.

That old babe at the bar was fucking Ruth Mildred's twin.

Time dragged. He sent the old girl an on-the-house refill. Walter P. Kinnard walked in and sat down next to Gail.

The poetry commenced.

Gail signaled the bartender. Attentive Walter caught the gesture and whistled. Joe Barman zoomed over with his martini shaker—regular boozer Walt packed some weight here.

Helpless Gail searched her purse for matches. Helpful Walt flicked his lighter and smiled. Sexy Walt was dripping scalp flakes all over the back of his jacket.

Gail smiled. Sexy Walt smiled. Well-dressed Walt wore white socks with a three-piece chalk-stripe suit.

The lovebirds settled in for martinis and small talk. Pete eyeballed the pre-bed warmup. Gail guzzled her drink for courage—her jaggedy nerves showed through plain.

She touched Walt's arm. Her guilty heart showed plain—except for the money, she hates it.

Pete walked over to the Ambassador and went up to his room. The setup was perfect: his room, Gail's room, one connecting door for a slick covert entrance.

He loaded his camera and attached a flashbulb strip. He greased the connecting doorjamb. He framed angles for some face shots.

Ten minutes crawled by. Pete listened for next-door sounds. There, Gail's signal—"Damn, where's my key?" a beat too loud.

Pete pressed up to the wall. He heard Lonely Walt pitch some boo-hoo: my wife and kids don't know a man has certain needs. Gail said, Why'd you have *seven* kids then? Walt said, It keeps my wife at home, where a woman belongs.

Their voices faded out bed-bound. Shoes went thunk. Gail kicked a high-heeled pump at the wall—her three-minutes-to-blastoff signal.

Pete laughed—thirty-dollar-a-night rooms with goddamn wafer-thin walls.

Zippers snagged. Bedsprings creaked. Seconds tick-tick-ticked. Walter P. Kinnard started groaning—Pete clocked him saddled in at 2:44.

He waited for 3:00 even. He eeeeased the door open—that doorjamb grease lubed out every little scriiich.

There: Gail and Walter P. Kinnard fucking.

In the missionary style, with their heads close together—courtroom adultery evidence. Walt was loving it. Gail was feigning ecstasy and picking at a hangnail.

Pete got closeup close and let fly.

One, two, three—flashbulb blips Tommy-gun fast. The whole god-damn room went glare bright.

Kinnard shrieked and pulled out dishrag limp. Gail tumbled off the bed and ran for the bathroom.

Sexy buck-naked Walt: 5′9″, 210, pudgy.

Pete dropped his camera and picked him up by the neck. Pete laid his pitch out nice and slow.

"Your wife wants a divorce. She wants eight hundred a month, the house, the '56 Buick and orthodontic treatments for your son Timmy. You give her everything she wants, or I'll find you and kill you."

Kinnard popped spit bubbles. Pete admired his color: half shock-blue, half cardiac-red.

Steam whooshed out the bathroom door—Gail's standard postfuck shower always went down quick.

Pete dropped Walt on the floor. His arm fluttered from the lift: two hundred pounds plus, not bad.

Kinnard grabbed his clothes and stumbled out the door. Pete saw him tripping down the hallway, trying to get his trousers on right.

Gail walked out of a steam cloud. Her "I can't take much more of this" was no big surprise.

Walter P. Kinnard settled non-litigiously. Pete's shutout string jumped to Wives 23, Husbands 0. Mrs. Kinnard paid off: five grand up front, with 25% of her alimony promised in perpetuity.

Next: three days on Howard Hughes' time clock.

The TWA suit was spooking Big Howard. Pete stepped up his diversions.

He paid hookers to spiel to the papers: Hughes was holed up in numerous fuck pads. He bombarded process servers with phone tips: Hughes was in Bangkok, Maracaibo, Seoul. He set up a second Hughes double at the Biltmore: an old stag-movie vet, beaucoup hung. Pops was priapic for real—he sent Barbara Payton over to service him. Booze-addled Babs thought the old geek really *was* Hughes. She dished far and wide: Little Howard grew six inches.

J. Edgar Hoover could stall the suit easy. Hughes refused to ask him for help.

"Not yet, Pete. I need to cement my friendship with Mr. Hoover first. I see my ownership of *Hush-Hush* as the key, but I need you to find me a new scandal man first. *You know* how much Mr. Hoover loves to accrue titillating information...."

Pete put the word out on the grapevine:

New *Hush-Hush* dirt digger needed. Interested bottom-feeders—call Pete B.

Pete stuck by the watchdog house phone. Geeks called. Pete said, Give me a hot dirt tidbit to prove your credibility.

The geeks complied. Dig the sampling:

Pat Nixon just hatched Nat "King" Cole's baby. Lawrence Welk ran male prosties. A hot duo: Patti Page and Francis the Talking Mule.

Eisenhower had certified spook blood. Rin Tin Tin got Lassie pregnant. Jesus Christ ran a coon whorehouse in Watts.

It got worse. Pete logged in nineteen applicants—all fucking strange-o's.

The phone rang—Strange-O #20 loomed. Pete heard crackle on the line—the call was probably long distance.

"Who's this?"

"Pete? It's Jimmy."

HOFFA.

"Jimmy, how are you?"

"Right now I'm cold. It's cold in Chicago. I'm calling from a pal's house, and the heater's on the blink. Are you sure *your* phone's not tapped?"

"I'm sure. Freddy Turentine runs tap checks on all of Mr. Hughes' phones once a month."

"I can talk then?"

"You can talk."

Hoffa cut loose. Pete held the phone at arm's length and heard him juuuust fine.

"The McClellan Committee's on me like flies on shit. That little weasel cocksucker Bobby Kennedy's got half the country convinced the Teamsters are worse than the goddamn Commies, and he's fucking hounding me and my people with subpoenas, and he's got investigators crawling all over my union like—"

"Jimmy—"

"—fleas on a dog. First he chases Dave Beck out, and now he wants *me*. Bobby Kennedy is a fucking avalanche of dogshit. I'm building this resort in Florida called Sun Valley, and Bobby's trying to trace the three million that bankrolled it. He figures I took it from the Central States Pension Fund—"

"Jimmy—"

"—and he thinks he can use me to get his pussy-hound brother elected President. He thinks James Riddle Hoffa's a fucking political steppingstone. He thinks I'm gonna bend over and take it in the keester like some goddamn homosexual queer. He thinks —"

"Jimmy—"

"—I'm some pansy like him and his brother. He thinks I'm gonna roll over like Dave Beck. As if all this ain't enough, I own this cabstand in Miami. I've got these hothead Cuban refugees working there, and all they do is debate fucking Castro versus fucking Batista like like like …"

Hoffa gasped out hoarse. Pete said, "What do you want?"

Jimmy caught some breath. “I’ve got a job for you in Miami.”

“How much?”

“Ten thousand.”

Pete said, “I’ll take it.”

He booked a midnight flight. He used a fake passenger name and charged a first-class seat to Hughes Aircraft. The plane landed at 8:00 a.m., on time.

Miami was balmy working on hot.

Pete cabbed over to a Teamster-owned U-Drive and picked up a new Caddy Eldo. Jimmy pulled strings: no deposit or ID was required.

A note was taped under the dashboard.

“Go by cabstand: Flagler at N.W. 46th. Talk to Fulo Machado.” Directions followed: causeways to surface streets marked on a little map.

Pete drove over. The scenery evaporated quick.

Big houses got smaller and smaller. White squares went to white trash, jigs and spics. Flagler was wall-to-wall low-rent storefronts.

The cabstand was tiger-striped stucco. The cabs in the lot had tiger-stripe paint jobs. Dig those tiger-shirted spics on the curb—snarfing doughnuts and T-Bird wine.

A sign above the door read: Tiger Kab. Se Habla Español.

Pete parked directly in front. Tiger men scoped him out and jabbered. He stretched to six-five-plus and let his shirttail hike. The spics saw his piece and jabbered on overdrive.

He walked in to the dispatch hut. Nice wallpaper: tiger photos taped floor to ceiling. *National Geographic* stock—Pete almost howled.

The dispatcher waved him over. Dig his face: scarred by tic-tac-toe knife cuts.

Pete pulled a chair up. Butt-Ugly said, “I’m Fulo Machado. Batista’s secret police did this to me, so take your free introductory look now and forget about it, all right?”

“You speak English pretty well.”

“I used to work at the Nacional Hotel in Havana. An American croupier guy taught me. It turned out he was a *maricón* trying to corrupt me.”

“What did you do to him?”

“The *maricón* had a shack on a pork farm outside of Havana, where he brought little Cuban boys to corrupt them. I found him there with another *maricón* and murdered them with my machete. I stole all the pigs’ food from their troughs and left the door of the shack open. You see, I had read in the *National Geographic* that starving pigs found decomposing human flesh irresistible.”

Pete said, “Fulo, I like you.”

“Please reserve judgment. I can be volatile where the enemies of Jesus Christ and Fidel Castro are concerned.”

Pete stifled a yuk. “Did one of Jimmy’s guys leave an envelope for me?”

Fulo forked it over. Pete ripped it open, itchy to roll.

Nice—a simple note and a photo.

“Anton Gretzler, 114 Hibiscus, Lake Weir, Fla. (near Sun Valley). OL4-8812.” The pic showed a tall guy almost too fat to live.

Pete said, “Jimmy must trust you.”

“He does. He sponsored my green card, so he knows that I will remain loyal.”

“What’s this Sun Valley place?”

“It is what I think is called a ‘sub-division.’ Jimmy is selling lots to Teamster members.”

Pete said, “So who do you think’s got more juice these days—Jesus or Castro?”

“I would say it is currently a toss-up.”

Pete checked in at the Eden Roc and buzzed Anton Gretzler from a pay phone. The fat man agreed to a meet: 3:00, outside Sun Valley.

Pete took a snooze and drove out early. Sun Valley was the shits: three dirt roads gouged from swampland forty yards off the Interstate.

It was “sub-divided”—into matchbook-size lots piled with junk siding. Marshland formed the perimeter—Pete saw gators out sunning.

It was hot and humid. A wicked sun cooked greenery dry brown.

Pete leaned against the car and stretched some kinks out. A truck crawled down the highway belching steam; the man in the passenger seat waved for help. Pete turned his back and let the geeks pass by.

A breeze kicked dust clouds up. The access road hazed over. A big sedan turned off the Interstate and barreled in blind.

Pete stood aside. The car brodied to a stop. Fat Anton Gretzler got out.

Pete walked over to him. Gretzler said, “Mr. Peterson?”

“That’s me. Mr. Gretzler?”

Fats stuck his hand out. Pete ignored it.

“Is something wrong? You said you wanted to see a lot.”

Pete steered Fat Boy down to a marsh glade. Gretzler caught on quick: Don’t resist. Gator eyes poked out of the water.

Pete said, “Look at my car. Do I look like some union schmuck in the market for a do-it-yourself house?”

“Well … no.”

“Then don’t you think you’re doing Jimmy raw by showing me these piece-of-shit pads?”

“Well …”

“Jimmy told me he’s got a nice block of houses around here just about ready to go. You’re supposed to wait and show *them* to the Teamsters.”

“Well … I thought I—”

“Jimmy says you’re an impetuous guy. He says he shouldn’t have made you a partner in this thing. He says you’ve told people he borrowed money from the Teamsters’ Pension Fund and skimmed some off the top. He’s says you’ve been talking up the Fund like you’re a made guy.”

Gretzler squirmed. Pete grabbed his wrist and snapped it—bones sheared and poked out through his skin. Gretzler tried to scream and choked up mute.

“Has the McClellan Committee subpoenaed you?”

Gretzler made “yes” nods, frantic.

“Have you talked to Robert Kennedy or his investigators?”

Gretzler made “no” nods, shit-your-pants scared.

Pete checked the highway. No cars in view, no witnesses—

Gretzler said, “PLEASE.”

Pete blew his brains out halfway through a rosary.

2

Kemper Boyd

(Philadelphia, 11/27/58)

The car: a Jaguar XK-140, British racing green/tan leather. The garage: subterranean and dead quiet. The job: steal the Jag for the FBI and entrap the fool who paid you to do it.

The man pried the driver's-side door open and hot-wired the ignition. The upholstery smelled rich: full leather boosted the "resale" price into the stratosphere.

He eased the car up to the street and waited for traffic to pass. Cold air fogged the windshield.

His buyer was standing at the corner. He was a Walter Mitty crime-voyeur type who had to get close.

The man pulled out. A squad car cut him off. His buyer saw what was happening—and ran.

Philly cops packing shotguns swooped down. They shouted standard auto-theft commands: "Get out of the car with your hands up!"/"Out—now!"/"Down on the ground!"

He obeyed them. The cops threw on full armor: cuffs, manacles and drag chains.

They frisked him and jerked him to his feet. His head hit a prowl car cherry light—

The cell looked familiar. He swung his legs off the bunk and got his identity straight.

I'm Special Agent Kemper C. Boyd, FBI, interstate car theft infiltrator.

I'm *not* Bob Aiken, freelance car thief.

I'm forty-two years old. I'm a Yale Law School grad. I'm a seventeen-year Bureau veteran, divorced, with a daughter in college—and a long-time FBI-sanctioned car booster.

He placed his cell: tier B at the Philly Fed Building.

His head throbbed. His wrists and ankles ached. He tamped down his identity a last notch.

I've rigged auto-job evidence and skimmed money off of it for years. IS THIS AN INTERNAL BUREAU ROUST?

He saw empty cells down both sides of the catwalk. He spotted some papers on his sink: newspaper mock-ups topped by banner headlines:

"Car Thief Suffers Heart Attack in Federal Custody"/"Car Thief Expires in Federal Building Cell."

The text was typed out below.

> This afternoon, Philadelphia Police enacted a daring arrest in the shadow of picturesque Rittenhouse Square.
>
> Acting on information supplied by an unnamed informant, Sergeant Gerald P. Griffen and four other officers captured Robert Henry Aiken, 42, in the act of stealing an expensive Jaguar auto-mobile. Aiken meekly let the officers restrain him and—

Someone coughed and said, "Sir?"

Kemper looked up. A clerk type unlocked the cell and held the door open for him.

"You can go out the back way, sir. There's a car waiting for you."

Kemper brushed off his clothes and combed his hair. He walked out the freight exit and saw a government limo blocking the alley.

His limo.

Kemper got in the back. J. Edgar Hoover said, "Hello, Mr. Boyd."

"Good afternoon, Sir."

A partition slid up and closed the backseat off. The driver pulled out.

Hoover coughed. "Your infiltration assignment was terminated rather precipitously. The Philadelphia Police were somewhat rough, but they have a reputation for that, and anything less would have lacked verisimilitude."

"I've learned to stay in character in situations like that. I'm sure the arrest was believable."

"Did you affect an East Coast accent for your role?"

"No, a midwestern drawl. I learned the accent and speech patterns when I worked the St. Louis office, and I thought they'd complement my physical appearance more effectively."

"You're correct, of course. And personally, I would not want to second-guess you on anything pertaining to criminal role-playing. That sports jacket you're wearing, for instance. I would not appreciate it as standard Bureau attire, but it's quite appropriate for a Philadelphia car thief."

Get to it, you officious little—

"In fact, you've always dressed distinctly. Perhaps 'expensively' is more apt. To be blunt, there have been times when I wondered how your salary could sustain your wardrobe."

"Sir, you should see my apartment. What my wardrobe possesses, it lacks."

Hoover chuckled. "Be that as it may, I doubt if I've seen you in the same suit twice. I'm sure the women you're so fond of appreciate your sartorial flair."

"Sir, I hope so."

"You endure my amenities with considerable flair, Mr. Boyd. Most men squirm. You express both your inimitable personal panache and a concurrent respect for me that is quite alluring. Do you know what this means?"

"No, Sir. I don't."

"It means that I like you and am prone to forgive indiscretions that I would crucify other agents for. You're a dangerous and ruthless man, but you possess a certain beguiling charm. This balance of attributes outweighs your profligate tendencies and allows me to be fond of you."

DON'T SAY "WHAT INDISCRETIONS?"—HE'LL TELL YOU AND MAIM YOU.

"Sir, I greatly appreciate your respect, and I reciprocate it fully."

"You didn't include 'fondness' in your reciprocity, but I won't press the point. Now, business. I have an opportunity for you to earn two regular paychecks, which should delight you no end."

Hoover leaned back coax-me style. Kemper said, "Sir?"

The limo accelerated. Hoover flexed his hands and straightened his necktie. "The Kennedy brothers' recent actions have distressed me. Bobby seems to be using the McClellan Committee's labor racketeering mandate as a means to upstage the Bureau and advance his brother's presidential aspirations. This displeases me. I've been running the Bureau since before Bobby was born. Jack Kennedy is a desiccated liberal playboy with the moral convictions of a crotch-sniffing hound dog. He's playing crimefighter on the McClellan Committee, and the very existence of the committee is an implicit slap in the Bureau's face. Old Joe Kennedy is determined to buy his son the White House, and I want to possess information to help mitigate the boy's more degenerately egalitarian policies, should he succeed."

Kemper caught his cue. "Sir?"

"I want you to infiltrate the Kennedy organization. The McClellan Committee's labor-racketeering mandate ends next spring, but Bobby Kennedy is still hiring lawyer-investigators. As of now you are retired from the FBI, although you will continue to draw full pay until July 1961, the date you reach twenty years of Bureau service. You are to prepare a convincing FBI retirement story and secure an attorney's job with the McClellan Committee. I know that both you and Jack Kennedy have been intimate with a Senate aide named Sally Lefferts. Miss Lefferts is a talkative woman, so I'm sure young Jack has heard about you. Young Jack is on the McClellan Committee, and young Jack loves sexual gossip and dangerous friends. Mr. Boyd, I am sure that you will fit in with the Kennedys. I'm sure that this will be both a salutary opportunity for you to practice your skills of dissembling and duplicity, *and* the chance to exercise your more promiscuous tastes."

Kemper felt weightless. The limo cruised on thin air.

Hoover said, "Your reaction delights me. Rest now. We'll arrive in Washington in an hour, and I'll drop you at your apartment."

Hoover supplied up-to-date study notes—in a leather binder stamped “CONFIDENTIAL.” Kemper mixed a pitcher of extra-dry martinis and pulled up his favorite chair to read through them.

The notes boiled down to one thing: Bobby Kennedy vs. Jimmy Hoffa.

Senator John McClellan chaired the U.S. Senate’s Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor and Management Field, established in January 1957. Its subsidiary members: Senators Ives, Kennedy, McNamara, McCarthy, Ervin, Mundt, Goldwater. Its chief counsel and investigative boss: Robert F. Kennedy.

Current personnel: thirty-five investigators, forty-five accountants, twenty-five stenographers and clerks. Its current housing: the Senate Office Building, suite 101.

The Committee’s stated goals:

To expose corrupt labor practices; to expose labor unions collusively linked to organized crime. The Committee’s methods: witness subpoenas, document subpoenas, and the charting of union funds diverted and misused in organized crime activities.

The Committee’s de facto target: the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the most powerful transportation union on earth, arguably the most corrupt and powerful labor union ever.

Its president: James Riddle Hoffa, age 45.

Hoffa: mob bought-and-paid-for. The suborner of: extortion, wholesale bribery, beatings, bombings, management side deals and epic abuse of union funds.

Hoffa’s suspected holdings, in violation of fourteen antitrust statutes:

Trucking firms, used car lots, a dog track, a car-rental chain, a Miami cabstand staffed by Cuban refugees with extensive criminal records.

Hoffa’s close friends:

Mr. Sam Giancana, the Mafia boss of Chicago; Mr. Santo Trafficante Jr., the Mafia boss of Tampa, Florida; Mr. Carlos Marcello, the Mafia boss of New Orleans.

Jimmy Hoffa:

Who lends his “friends” millions of dollars, put to use illegally.

Who owns percentages of mob-run casinos in Havana, Cuba.

Who illegally funnels cash to Cuban strongman Fulgencio Batista *and* rebel firebrand Fidel Castro.

Who rapes the Teamsters' Central States Pension Fund, a cash-rich watering hole rumored to be administered by Sam Giancana's Chicago mob—a loan-shark scheme wherein gangsters and crooked entrepreneurs borrow large sums at usurious interest rates, with nonpayment penalties up to and including torture and death.

Kemper caught the gist: Hoover's jealous. He always said the Mob didn't exist—because he knew he couldn't prosecute it successfully. Now Bobby Kennedy begs to differ.…

A chronology followed.

Early '57: the Committee targets Teamster president Dave Beck. Beck testifies five times; Bobby Kennedy's relentless goading breaks the man. A Seattle grand jury indicts him for larceny and income tax evasion.

Spring '57: Jimmy Hoffa assumes complete control of the Teamsters.

August '57: Hoffa vows to rid his union of gangster influence—a large lie.

September '57: Hoffa goes to trial in Detroit. The charge: tapping the phones of Teamster subordinates. A hung jury—Hoffa escapes sentencing.

October '57: Hoffa is elected International Teamster president. A persistent rumor: 70% of his delegates were illegally selected.

July '58: the Committee begins to investigate direct links between the Teamsters and organized crime. Closely scrutinized: the November '57 Apalachin Conclave.

Fifty-nine high-ranking mobsters meet at the upstate New York home of a "civilian" friend. A state trooper named *Edgar* Croswell runs their license plates. A raid ensues—and Mr. Hoover's longstanding "there is no Mafia" stance becomes untenable.

July '58: Bobby Kennedy proves that Hoffa resolves strikes through management bribes—this practice dating back to '49.

August '58: Hoffa appears before the Committee. Bobby Kennedy goes at him—and traps him in numerous lies.

The notes concluded.

The Committee was currently probing Hoffa's Sun Valley resort outside Lake Weir, Florida. Bobby Kennedy subpoenaed the Central States Pension Fund books and saw that three million dollars went into the project—much more than reasonable building costs. Kennedy's theory: Hoffa skimmed at least a million dollars off the top and was selling his union brothers defective prefab material and alligator-infested swampland.

Ergo: felony land fraud.

A closing addendum:

"Hoffa has a Sun Valley front man: Anton William Gretzler, 46, a Florida resident with three previous bunco convictions. Gretzler was subpoenaed 10/29/58, but now appears to be missing."

Kemper checked the Hoffa "Known Associates" list. One mame sizzled:

Pete Bondurant, W.M., 6′5″, 230, DOB 7/16/20, Montreal, Canada.

No criminal convictions. Licensed private investigator/former Los Angeles County deputy sheriff.

Big Pete: shakedown man and Howard Hughes' pet goon. He and Ward Littell arrested him once—he beat a Sheriff's inmate to death. Littell's comment: "Perhaps the most fearsome and competent rogue cop of our era."

Kemper poured a fresh drink and let his mind drift. The impersonation took shape: heroic aristocrats form a common bond.

He liked women, and cheated on his wife throughout their marriage. Jack Kennedy liked women—and held his marriage vows expedient and whimsical. Bobby liked his wife and kept her pregnant—insider talk tagged him faithful.

Yale for him; Harvard for the Kennedys. Filthy-rich Irish Catholics; filthy-rich Tennessee Anglicans gone bankrupt. Their family was large and photogenic; his family was broke and dead. Someday he might tell Jack and Bobby how his father shot himself and took a month to die.

Southerners and Boston Irish: both afflicted with incongruous accents. He'd resurrect the drawl it took so long to lose.

Kemper prowled his clothes closet. Impersonation details clicked in.

The charcoal worsted for the interview. A holstered .38 to impress tough guy Bobby. No Yale cuff links—Bobby might possess a proletarian streak.

His closet was twelve feet deep. The back wall was offset by framed photographs.

His ex-wife, Katherine—the best-looking woman who ever breathed. They debuted at the Nashville Cotillion—a society scribe called them "southern grace personified." He married her for sex and her father's money. She divorced him when the Boyd fortune evaporated and Hoover addressed his law school class and *personally* invited him to join the FBI.

Katherine, in November 1940:

"You watch out for that prissy little fussbudget, do you hear me, Kemper? I think he has carnal designs on you."

She didn't know that Mr. Hoover only fucked power.

In matching frames: his daughter, Claire, Susan Littell and Helen Agee—three FBI daughters hell-bent on law careers.

The girls were best friends split up by studies at Tulane and Notre Dame. Helen was disfigured—he kept the pictures in his closet to quash pitying comments.

Tom Agee was sitting in his car—working a routine stakeout for some bank heisters outside a whorehouse. His wife had just left him—Tom couldn't find a sitter for nine-year-old Helen. She was sleeping in the backseat when the heisters came up shooting.

Tom was killed. Helen was muzzle-burned and left for dead. Help arrived—six hours later. Flash particles had scorched Helen's cheeks and scarred her for life.

Kemper laid out his interview clothes. He got some lies straight and called Sally Lefferts.

The phone rang twice. "Uh, hello?"—Sally's little boy picked up.

"Son, get your mother. Tell her it's a friend from the office."

Sally came on the line. "Who's this from the U.S. Senate clerical pool bothering this poor overworked aide?"

"It's me. Kemper."

"Kemper, what are you doing calling me with my husband in the backyard right now as we speak!"

"Ssssh. I'm calling you for a job referral."

"What are you saying? Are you saying Mr. Hoover got wise to your evil ways with women and showed you the gate?"

"I retired, Sally. I utilized a dangerous-duty dispensation clause and retired three years early."

"Well, my heavens, Kemper Cathcart Boyd!"

"Are you still seeing Jack Kennedy, Sally?"

"Occasionally, dear heart, since you gave *me* the gate. Is this about trading little black books and evil tales out of school, or —?"

"I'm thinking of applying for a job with the McClellan Committee."

Sally whooped. "Well, I think you *should*! I think I should put a note on Robert Kennedy's desk recommending you, and you should send me a dozen long-stemmed Southern Beauty roses for the effort!"

"You're the southern beauty, Sally."

"I was too much woman for De Ridder, Louisiana, and that is a fact!"

Kemper hung up with kisses. Sally would spread the word: ex-FBI car thief now seeking work.

He'd tell Bobby how he crashed the Corvette theft ring. He wouldn't mention the Vettes he stripped for parts.

He moved the next day. He walked right in to the Senate Office Building and suite 101.

The receptionist heard him out and tapped her intercom. "Mr. Kennedy, there's a man here who wants to apply for an investigator's position. He has FBI retirement credentials."

The office spread out unpartitioned behind her—all cabinet rows, cubicles and conference rooms. Men worked elbow-to-elbow tight—the place hummed.

The woman smiled. "Mr. Kennedy will see you. Take this first little aisle straight back."

Kemper walked into the hum. The office had a scavenged look: mismatched desks and filing bins, and corkboards top-heavy with paper.

"Mr. Boyd?"

Robert Kennedy stepped out of his cubicle. It was the standard size, the standard desk and two chairs.

He offered the standard too-hard handshake—totally predictable.

Kemper sat down. Kennedy pointed to his holster bulge. "I didn't know that retired FBI men were allowed to carry guns."

"I've incurred enemies through the years. My retirement won't stop them from hating me."

"Senate investigators don't wear sidearms."

"If you hire me, I'll put mine in a drawer."

Kennedy smiled and leaned against his desk. "You're from the South?"

"Nashville, Tennessee."

"Sally Lefferts said you were with the FBI for what, fifteen years?"

"Seventeen."

"Why did you retire early?"

"I worked auto-theft infiltration assignments for the past nine years, and it had gotten to the point where I was too well known to car thieves to go undercover convincingly. The Bureau bylaws contain an early-retirement clause for agents who have engaged in prolonged stints of hazardous duty, and I utilized it."

" 'Utilized'? Did those assignments debilitate you in some way?"

"I applied for a position with the Top Hoodlum Program first. Mr. Hoover rejected my application personally, although he knew full well that I had desired organized crime work for some time. No, I wasn't debilitated. I was frustrated."

Kennedy brushed hair from his forehead. "So you quit."

"Is that an accusation?"

"No, it's an observation. And frankly, I'm surprised. The FBI is a tight-knit organization that inspires great loyalty, and agents do not tend to retire out of pique."

Kemper raised his voice—just barely. "A great many agents realize that organized crime, not domestic Communism, poses the greatest threat to America. The Apalachin revelations forced Mr. Hoover to form the Top Hoodlum Program, which of course he did with some reluctance. The program is accruing antimob intelligence, but not seeking hard evidence to build toward Federal prosecution, but at least that's something, and I wanted to be part of it."

Kennedy smiled. "I understand your frustration, and I agree with your critique of Mr. Hoover's priorities. But I'm still surprised that you quit."

Kemper smiled. "Before I 'quit,' I snuck a look at Mr. Hoover's private file on the McClellan Committee. I'm up-to-date on the Committee's work, up to and including Sun Valley and your missing witness Anton Gretzler. I 'quit' because Mr. Hoover has the Bureau neurotically focused on harmless leftists, while the McClellan Committee is going after the real bad guys. I 'quit' because given my choice of monomaniacs, I'd rather work for you."

Kennedy grinned. “Our mandate ends in five months. You’ll be out of work.”

“I have an FBI pension, and you’ll have forwarded so much evidence to municipal grand juries that they’ll be begging your investigators to work for them ad hoc.”

Kennedy tapped a stack of papers. “We work hard here. We plod. We subpoena and trace money and litigate. We don’t risk our lives stealing sports cars or dawdle over lunch or take women to the Willard Hotel for quickies. Our idea of a good time is to talk about how much we hate Jimmy Hoffa and the Mob.”

Kemper stood up. “I hate Hoffa and the Mob like Mr. Hoover hates you and your brother.”

Bobby laughed. “I’ll let you know within a few days.”

Kemper strolled by Sally Lefferts’ office. It was 2:30—Sally might be up for a quickie at the Willard.

Her door was open. Sally was at her desk fretting tissues—with a man straddling a chair up close to her.

She said, “Oh, hello, Kemper.”

Her color was up: rosy verging on flushed. She had that too-bright I’ve-lost-at-love-again glow on.

“Are you busy? I can come back.”

The man swiveled his chair around. Kemper said, “Hello, Senator.”

John Kennedy smiled. Sally dabbed at her eyes. “Jack, this is my friend Kemper Boyd.”

They shook hands. Kennedy did a little half-bow.

“Mr. Boyd, a pleasure.”

“My pleasure entirely, sir.”

Sally forced a smile. Her rouge was streaked—she’d been crying.

“Kemper, how did your interview go?”

“It went well, I think. Sally, I have to go. I just wanted to thank you for the referral.”

Little nods went around. Nobody’s eyes met. Kennedy handed Sally a fresh tissue.

Kemper walked downstairs and outside. A storm had fired up—he ducked under a statue ledge and let the rain graze him.

The Kennedy coincidence felt strange. He walked straight from an interview with Bobby into a chance meeting with Jack. It felt like he was gently pushed in that direction.

Kemper thought it through.

Mr. Hoover mentioned Sally—as his most specific link to Jack Kennedy. Mr. Hoover knew that he and Jack shared a fondness for women. Mr. Hoover sensed that he'd visit Sally after his interview with Bobby.

Mr. Hoover *sensed* that he'd call Sally for an interview referral immediately. Mr. Hoover knew that Bobby needed investigators and interviewed walk-in prospects at whim.

Kemper took the logical leap—

Mr. Hoover has Capitol Hill hot-wired. He knew that you broke up with Sally at her office—to forestall a big public scene. He picked up a tip that Jack Kennedy was planning the same thing—and took a stab at maneuvering you into a position to witness it.

It felt logically sound. It felt quintessentially Hoover.

Mr. Hoover doesn't entirely trust you to forge a bond with Bobby. He took a shot at placing you in a symbiotic context with Jack.

The rain felt good. Lightning crackled down and backlit the Capitol dome. It felt like he could stand here and let the whole world come to him.

Kemper heard foot scrapes behind him. He knew who it was instantly.

"Mr. Boyd?"

He turned around. John Kennedy was cinching up his overcoat.

"Senator."

"Call me Jack."

"All right, Jack."

Kennedy shivered. "Why the hell are we standing here?"

"We can run for the Mayflower bar when this lets up a bit."

"We can, and I think we should. You know, Sally's told me about you. She told me I should work on losing my accent the way you lost yours, so I was surprised to hear you speak."

Kemper dropped his drawl. "Southerners make the best cops. You lay on the cornpone and people tend to underestimate you and let their secrets slip. I thought your brother might know that, so I acted accordingly. You're on the McClellan Committee, so I figured I should go for uniformity."

Kennedy laughed. "Your secret's safe with me."

"Thanks. And don't worry about Sally. She likes men the way we like women, and she gets over the attendant heartaches pretty fast.”

“I knew you figured it out. Sally told me you cut her off in a similar fashion.”

Kemper smiled. “You can always go back occasionally. Sally appreciates an occasional afternoon at a good hotel.”

“I’ll remember that. A man with my aspirations has to be conscious of his entanglements.”

Kemper stepped closer to “Jack.” He could almost see Mr. Hoover grinning.

“I know a fair number of women who know how to keep things unentangled.”

Kennedy smiled and steered him into the rain. “Let’s go get a drink and talk about it. I’ve got an hour to kill before I meet my wife.”

3

Ward J. Littell

(Chicago, 11/30/58)

Black bag work—a classic FBI Commie crib prowl.

Littell snapped the lock with a ruler. His hands dripped sweat—apartment-house break-ins always played risky.

Neighbors heard B&E noise. Hallway sounds muffled incoming footsteps.

He closed the door behind him. The living room took shape: ratty furniture, bookshelves, labor protest posters. It was a typical CPUSA member's dwelling—he'd find documents in the dinette cupboard.

He did. Ditto the standard wall photos: Sad old "Free the Rosenbergs" shots.

Pathos.

He'd surveilled Morton Katzenbach for months. He'd heard scads of leftist invective. He knew one thing: Morty posed no threat to America.

A Commie cell met at Morty's doughnut stand. Their big-time "treason": feeding bear claws to striking auto workers.

Littell got out his Minox and snapped "documents." He blew three rolls of film on donation tallies—all short of fifty dollars a month.

It was boring, shitty work. His old refrain kicked in automatically.

You're forty-five years old. You're an expert bug/wire man. You're an ex-Jesuit seminarian with a law degree, two years and two months shy of retirement. You've got an alimony-fat ex-wife and a daughter at Notre Dame, and if you pass the Illinois Bar exam and quit the FBI, your gross earnings over the next X-number of years will more than compensate for your forfeited pension.

He shot two lists of "political expenses." Morty annotated his doughnut handouts: "Plain," "Chocolate," "Glazed."

He heard key-in-the-lock noise. He saw the door open ten feet in front of him.

Faye Katzenbach lugged groceries in. She saw him and shook her head like he was the saddest thing on earth.

"So you people are common thieves now?"

Littell knocked over a lamp running past her.

The squadroom was noontime quiet—just a few agents standing around clipping teletypes. Littell found a note on his desk.

K. Boyd called. In town en route to Florida. Pump Room, 7:00?

Kemper—yes!

Chick Leahy walked up, waving file carbons. "I'll need the complete Katzenbach folder, with photo attachments, by December 11th. Mr. Tolson's coming in for an inspection tour, and he wants a CPUSA presentation."

"You'll have it."

"Good. Complete with documents?"

"Some. Mrs. Katzenbach caught me before I finished."

"Jesus. Did she—?"

"She did *not* call the Chicago PD, because she knew who I was and what I was doing. Mr. Leahy, half the Commies on earth know the term 'black bag job.' "

Leahy sighed. "Say it, Ward. I'm going to turn you down, but you'll feel better if you say it."

"All right. I want a Mob assignment. I want a transfer to the Top Hoodlum Program."

Leahy said, "No. Our THP roster is full. And as special agent-in-charge my assessment of you is that you're best suited for political surveillance, which I consider important work. Mr. Hoover considers domestic Communists more dangerous than the Mafia, and I have to say that I agree with him."

They stared at each other. Littell broke it off—Leahy would stand there all day if he didn't.

Leahy walked back to his office. Littell shut his cubicle door and got out his bar texts. Civic statutes went unmemorized—Kemper Boyd memories cut them adrift.

Late '53: they corner a kidnapper in L.A. The man pulls a gun; *he* shakes so hard he drops his. Some LAPD men laugh at him. Kemper doctors the report to make *him* the hero.

They protest the disposition of Tom Agee's pension—Mr. Hoover wants to award it to Tom's floozy wife. Kemper talks him into a surviving-daughter disbursement; Helen now has a handsome sinecure.

They arrest Big Pete Bondurant. *He* makes a gaffe: ribbing Pete in Québecois French. Bondurant snaps his handcuff chain and goes for his throat.

He runs. Big Pete laughs. Kemper bribes Bondurant into silence on the matter—catered cell food does the trick.

Kemper never judged his fearful side. Kemper said, "We both joined the Bureau to avoid the war, so who's to judge?" Kemper taught him how to burglarize—a good fear tamper-downer.

Kemper said, "You're my priest-cop confessor. I'll reciprocate and hear your confessions, but since my secrets are worse than yours, I'll always get the better end of the deal."

Littell closed his textbook. Civil statutes were dead boring.

The Pump Room was packed. A gale blew off the lake—people seemed to whoosh inside.

Littell secured a back booth. The maître d' took his drink order: two martinis, straight up. The restaurant was beautiful: colored waiters and a pre-symphony crowd had the place sparkling.

The drinks arrived. Littell arranged them for a quick toast. Boyd walked in, via the hotel lobby.

Littell laughed. "Don't tell me you're staying here."

"My plane doesn't leave until two a.m., and I needed a place to stretch my legs. Hello, Ward."

"Hello, Kemper. A valedictory?"

Boyd raised his glass. "To my daughter Claire, your daughter

Susan and Helen Agee. May they do well in school and become better attorneys than their fathers."

They clicked goblets. "Neither of whom ever practiced law."

"You clerked, though. And I heard you wrote deportation writs that saw litigation."

"We're not doing so badly. At least you're not. So who's putting you up here?"

"My new temporary employer booked me a room out by Midway, but I decided to splurge and make up the difference out of my pocket. And the difference between the Skyliner Motel and the Ambassador-East is pretty steep."

Littell smiled. "What new temporary employer? Are you working Cointelpro?"

"No, it's something a good deal more interesting. I'll tell you a few drinks down the line, when you're more likely to get blasphemous and say, 'Jesus Fucking Christ.' "

"I'll say it now. You've just effectively killed small talk, so I will say it *fucking* now."

Boyd sipped his martini. "Not yet. You just hit the jackpot on the wayward-daughter front, though. That should cheer you up."

"Let me guess. Claire's transferring from Tulane to Notre Dame."

"No. Helen graduated Tulane a semester early. She's been accepted at the University of Chicago law school, and she'll be moving here next month."

"Jesus!"

"I knew you'd be pleased."

"Helen's a courageous girl. She'll make a damn fine lawyer."

"She will. And she'll make some man a damn fine consort, if we haven't ruined her for young men her own age."

"It would take a—"

"Special young man to get by her affliction?"

"Yes."

Boyd winked. "Well, she's twenty-one. Think of how the two of you would upset Margaret."

Littell killed his drink. "And upset my own daughter. Susan, by the way, says Margaret is spending weekends with a man in Charlevoix. But she'll never marry him as long as she has my paycheck attached."

"You're her devil. You're the seminarian boy who got her pregnant. And in the religious terms you're so fond of, your marriage was purgatory."

"No, my job is. I black-bagged a Commie's apartment today and photographed an entire ledger page devoted to doughnuts. I honestly don't know how much longer I can do this kind of thing."

Fresh drinks arrived. The waiter bowed—Kemper inspired subservience. Littell said, "I figured something out in the process, right between the chocolate and the glazed."

"What?"

"That Mr. Hoover hates left-wingers because their philosophy is based on human frailty, while his own is based on an excruciating rectitude that denies such things."

Boyd held his glass up. "You never disappoint me."

"Kemper—"

Waiters swooped past. Candlelight bounced off gold flatware. Crêpe suzettes ignited—an old woman squealed.

"*Kemper—*"

"Mr. Hoover had me infiltrate the McClellan Committee. He hates Bobby Kennedy and his brother Jack, and he's afraid their father will buy Jack the White House in '60. I'm now a fake FBI retiree on an indefinite assignment to cozy up to both brothers. I applied for a job as a temporary Committee investigator, and I got the word today that Bobby hired me. I'm flying to Miami in a few hours to look for a missing witness."

Littell said, "Jesus Fucking Christ."

Boyd said, "You never disappoint me."

"I suppose you're drawing two salaries?"

"You know I love money."

"Yes, but do you like the brothers?"

"Yes, I do. Bobby's a vindictive little bulldog, and Jack's charming and not as smart as he thinks he is. Bobby's the stronger man, and he hates organized crime like you do."

Littell shook his head. "You don't hate anything."

"I can't afford to."

"I've never understood your loyalties."

"Let's just say they're ambiguous."

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/2/58. Official FBI telephone call transcript: “Recorded at the Director’s Request”/“Classified Confidential 1-A: Director’s Eyes Only.” Speaking: Director Hoover, Special Agent Kemper Boyd.

JEH: Mr. Boyd?

KB: Sir, good morning.

JEH: Yes, it is a good morning. Are you calling from a secure phone?

KB: Yes. I’m at a coin phone. If the connection seems weak, it’s because I’m calling from Miami.

JEH: Little Brother has put you to work already?

KB: Little Brother doesn’t waste time.

JEH: Interpret your rapid hiring. Use names if you must.

KB: Little Brother was initially suspicious of me, and I think it will take time to win him over. I ran into Big Brother at Sally Lefferts’ office, and circumstances forced us into a private conversation. We went out for a drink and developed a rapport. Like many charming men, Big Brother is also easily charmed. We hit it off quite well, and I’m certain he told Little Brother to hire me.

JEH: Describe the “circumstances” you mentioned.

KB: We discovered that we shared an interest in sophisticated and provocative women, and we went to the Mayflower bar to discuss related matters. Big Brother confirmed that he is going to run in 1960, and that Little Brother will begin the campaign groundwork when the McClellan Committee mandate ends this coming April.

JEH: Continue.

KB: Big Brother and I discussed politics. I portrayed myself as incongruously liberal by Bureau standards, which Big Brother—

JEH: You have no political convictions, which adds to your efficacy in situations like this. Continue.

KB: Big Brother found my feigned political convictions interesting and opened up. He said that he considers Little Brother’s hatred of Mr. H. somewhat untoward, although justified. Both Big Brother and their father have urged Little Brother to strategically retreat and offer Mr. H. a deal if he cleans up his organization, but Little Brother has refused. My personal opinion is that Mr. H. is legally inviolate at this time. Big Brother shares that opinion, as do a number of Committee investigators. Sir, I think Little Brother is ferociously dedicated and competent. My feeling is that he will take Mr. H. down, but not in the foreseeable future. I think it will take years and most likely many indictments, and that it certainly won't happen within the Committee mandate time frame.

JEH: You're saying the Committee will hand the ball to municipal grand juries once their mandate expires?

KB: Yes. I think it will take years for the Brothers to reap real political benefit from Mr. H. And I think a backlash might set in and hurt Big Brother. Democratic candidates can't afford to be viewed as antiunion.

JEH: Your assessments seem quite astute.

KB: Thank you, Sir.

JEH: Did Big Brother bring my name up?

KB: Yes. He knows about your extensive files on politicians and movie stars you deem subversive, and he's afraid you have a file on him. I told him your file on his family ran to a thousand pages.

JEH: Good. You would have lost credibility had you been less candid. What else did you and Big Brother discuss?

KB: Chiefly women. Big Brother mentioned a trip to Los Angeles on December 9th. I gave him the phone number of a promiscuous woman named Darleen Shoftel and urged him to call her.

JEH: Do you think he has called her?

KB: No, Sir. But I think he will.

JEH: Describe your duties for the Committee thus far.

KB: I've been looking for a subpoenaed witness named Anton Gretzler here in Florida. Little Brother wanted me to serve him a backup summons. There's an aspect of this we should discuss, since Gretzler's disappearance may tie in to a friend of yours.

JEH: Continue.

KB: Gretzler was Mr. H.'s partner in the alleged Sun Valley land fraud. He—

JEH: You said "was." You're assuming Gretzler is dead?

KB: I'm certain he's dead.

JEH: Continue.

KB: He disappeared on the afternoon of November 26th. He told his secretary he was going to meet a "sales prospect" at Sun

Valley and never returned. The Lake Weir Police found his car in a swamp marsh nearby, but they haven't been able to locate a body. They canvassed for witnesses and turned up a man who was driving by Sun Valley on the Interstate at the same time the "sales prospect" was to meet Gretzler. The man said he saw a man parked on the Sun Valley access road. He said the man averted his face when he drove by, so it's doubtful he could identify him. He did describe him, however. Six foot four or five, "huge," two hundred and forty pounds. Dark hair, thirty-five to forty. I'm thinking it—

JEH: Your old friend Peter Bondurant. He's singularly outsized, and he's on that list of Mr. H.'s known associates that I gave you.

KB: Yes, Sir. I checked airline and car rental records in Los Angeles and Miami and turned up a Hughes Aircraft charge that I'm certain Bondurant made. I know he was in Florida on November 26th, and I'm circumstantially certain that Mr. H. hired him to kill Gretzler. I know that you and Howard Hughes are friends, so I thought I'd inform you of this before I told Little Brother.

JEH: Do not inform Little Brother under any circumstances. The status of your investigation should remain thus: Gretzler is missing, perhaps dead. There are no leads and no suspects. Pete Bondurant is invaluable to Howard Hughes, who is a valuable friend of the Bureau. Mr. Hughes recently purchased a scandal magazine to help disseminate political information favorable to the Bureau, and I do not want his feathers ruffled. Do you understand?

KB: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I want you to fly to Los Angeles on a Bureau charge and tweak Pete Bondurant with your suspicions. Get a favor from him, and cloak your friendly overtures with the knowledge that you can hurt him. And when your Committee duties permit, go back to Florida and clean up potential loose ends on the Gretzler front.

KB: I'll wrap up here and fly to L.A. late tomorrow.

JEH: Good. And while you're in Los Angeles, I want you to bug and wire Miss Darleen Shoftel's home. If Big Brother contacts her, I want to know.

KB: She won't voluntarily assent, so I'll have to rig her apartment sub rosa. Can I bring in Ward Littell? He's a great wire man.

JEH: Yes, bring him in. This reminds me that Littell has been coveting a Top Hoodlum Squad spot for some time. Do you think he'd like a transfer as a reward for this job?

KB: He'd love it.

JEH: Good, but let me be the one to inform him. Goodbye, Mr. Boyd. I commend you for work well done.

KB: Thank you, Sir. Goodbye.

4

(Beverly Hills, 12/4/58)

Howard Hughes cranked his bed up a notch. “I can’t tell you how lackluster the last two issues have been. *Hush-Hush* is a weekly now, which increases the need for interesting gossip incrementally. *We need a new dirt digger*. We’ve got you for story verification, Dick Steisel for legal vetting and Sol Maltzman to write the pieces, but we’re only as good as our scandals, and our scandals have been chaste and ridiculously dull.”

Pete slouched in a chair and thumbed last week’s issue. On the cover: “Migrant Workers Carry VD Plague!” A co-feature: “Hollywood Ranch Market—Homo Heaven!”

“I’ll keep at it. We’re looking for a guy with unique fucking qualifications, and that takes time.”

Hughes said, “You do it. And tell Sol Maltzman that I want a piece entitled ‘Negroes: Overbreeding Creates TB Epidemic’ on next week’s cover.”

“That sounds pretty far-fetched.”

“Facts can be bent to conform to any thesis.”

“I’ll tell him, Boss.”

“Good. And while you’re out …”

“Will I get you some more dope and disposable hypos? *Yes, sir!*”

Hughes flinched and turned the TV on. “Sheriff John’s Lunch Brigade” hit the bedroom—squealing tots and cartoon mice the size of Lassie.

Pete strolled out to the parking lot. Lounging upside his car like he owned it: Special Agent Kemper Fucking Boyd.

Six years older and still too handsome to live. That dark gray suit had to run four hundred clams easy.

“What is this?”

Boyd folded his arms over his chest. “This is a friendly errand for Mr. Hoover. He’s concerned about your extracurricular work for Jimmy Hoffa.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’ve got an ‘in’ on the McClellan Committee. They’ve got some pay phones near Hoffa’s house in Virginia rigged to register slug calls. That cheap fuck Hoffa makes his business calls from public booths and uses slugs.”

“Keep going. Your slug call pitch is bullshit, but let’s see where you’re taking it.”

Boyd winked—brass-balled motherfucker.

“One, Hoffa called you twice late last month. Two, you bought a round-trip L.A.-to-Miami ticket under an assumed name and charged it to Hughes Aircraft. Three, you rented a car at a Teamster-owned rent-a-car outlet and were *maybe* seen waiting for a man named Anton Gretzler. I think Gretzler’s dead, and I think Hoffa hired you to clip him.”

They’d never find a corpse: he tossed Gretzler in a swamp and watched gators eat him.

“So arrest me.”

“No. Mr. Hoover doesn’t like Bobby Kennedy, and I’m sure he wouldn’t want to upset Mr. Hughes. He can live with you and Jimmy on the loose, and so can I.”

“So?”

“So let’s do something nice for Mr. Hoover.”

“Give me a hint. I’m just dying to roll over.”

Boyd smiled. “The head writer at *Hush-Hush* is a Commie. I know Mr. Hughes appreciates cheap help, but I still think you should fire him immediately.”

Pete said, “I’ll do that. And you tell Mr. Hoover that I’m a patriotic guy who knows how friendship works.”

Boyd waltzed off—no nod, no wink, suspect dismissed. He walked two car rows over and bagged a blue Ford with a Hertz bumper sticker.

The car pulled out. Boyd fucking waved.

Pete ran to the hotel phone bank and called information. An operator shot him the main Hertz number.

He dialed it. A woman answered: “Good morning, Hertz Rent-a-Car.”

“Good morning. This is Officer Peterson, LAPD. I need a current customer listing on one of your cars.”

“Has there been an accident?”

“No, it’s just routine. The car is a blue ’56 Ford Fairlane, license V as in ‘Victor,’ D as in ‘dog,’ H as in ‘Henry,’ four-nine-zero.”

“One minute, Officer.”

Pete held the line. Boyd’s McClellan pitch danced around in his head.

“I have your listing, Officer.”

“Shoot.”

“The car was rented to a Mr. Kemper C. Boyd, whose current Los Angeles address is the Miramar Hotel in Santa Monica. The invoice says the charge is to be billed to the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Investigations. Does that help?—”

Pete hung up. His head dance went stereophonic.

Strange: Boyd in a Committee-rented car. Strange because: Hoover and Bobby Kennedy were rivals. Boyd as FBI man *and* Committee cop?—Hoover would never allow him to moonlight.

Boyd was stylish working on slick—and a good man to front friendly warnings.

A good man to spy on Bobby?—“Maybe” working on “Yes.”

Sol Maltzman lived in Silverlake—a dive above a tux rental joint.

Pete knocked. Sol opened up, pissed—this knock-kneed geek in Bermuda shorts and a T-shirt.

“What is it, Bondurant? I’m very busy.”

“Bohn-dew-rahn”—the little Commie prick said it French-style.

The pad reeked of cigarettes and cat litter. Manila folders dripped off every stick of furniture; a wooden cabinet blocked the one window.

He’s got Hollywood dirt files. He’s just the type to hoard scandal *skank*.

"Bohn-dew-rahn, what *is* it?"

Pete grabbed a folder off a lamp stand. Press clippings on Ike and Dick Nixon—snoresville.

"Put that down and tell me what you want!"

Pete grabbed his neck. "You're fired from *Hush-Hush*. I'm sure you've got some dirt files we can use, and if you point them out and save me trouble, I'll tell Mr. Hughes to shoot you some severance pay."

Sol flipped him off—the double bird, twirling at eye level.

Pete let him go. Dig his neck: 360'd by a jumbo hand print.

"I'll bet you keep the good stuff in that cabinet."

"No! There's nothing in there you'd want!"

"Open it for me, then."

"No! It's locked, and I'm not giving you the combination!"

Pete kneed him in the balls. Maltzman hit the floor gasping. Pete tore his shirt off and stuffed a wad of fabric in his mouth.

Check that TV by the couch—gooood audial cover.

Pete turned it on full blast. A car huckster hit the screen, screaming shit about the new Buick line. Pete pulled his piece and shot the padlock off the cabinet—wood chips sprayed out craaaazy.

Three files fell out—maybe thirty skank pages total.

Sol Maltzman shrieked through his gag. Pete kicked him unconscious and turned the TV down.

He had three files and a bad case of the post-strongarm hungries. The ticket was Mike Lyman's and the Steak Lunch De-Luxe.

Dirt De-Luxe pending: Sol wouldn't hoard bum information.

Pete took a back booth and noshed a T-bone and hash browns. He laid the folders out for easy perusal.

The first file featured document photos and typed notes. No Hollywood gossip; no *Hush-Hush* feature ammo.

The pix detailed bankbook tallies and an income tax return. The tax filer's name came off familiar: Mr. Hughes' pal George Killebrew, some Tricky Dick Nixon flunky.

The name on the bankbook was "George Kill*ington*." The 1957 deposit total was $87,416.04. George Kill*ebrew*'s reported income for the year: $16,850.00.

A two-syllable name change—hiding over seventy grand.

Sol Maltzman wrote: “Bank employees confirm that Killebrew deposited the entire $87,000 in five to ten thousand dollar cash increments. They also confirm that the tax identification number that he gave was false. He withdrew the entire amount in cash, along with six thousand odd dollars in interest, closing out the account before the bank sent out its standard notification of interest income to the Federal tax authorities.”

Unreported income and unreported bank interest. Bingo: felony tax fraud.

Pete made a late snap-connection.

The House Committee on Un-American Activists fucked Sol Maltzman. Dick Nixon was a HUAC member; George Killebrew worked for him.

File #2 featured blow-job pix galore. The suckee: a teenage pansy. The sucker, Sol Maltzman identified: “HUAC counsel Leonard Hosney, 43, of Grand Rapids, Michigan. My soul-debilitating work for *Hush-Hush* finally paid off in the form of a tip proffered by a bouncer at a male brothel in Hermosa Beach. He took the photos and assured me that the boy is a minor. He will be supplying additional documentation photos in the near future.”

Pete chained a cigarette butt to tip. The Big Picture came into focus.

The files were Sol’s revenge against HUAC. It was some kind of fucked-up penance: Sol wrote right-wing-slanted smears and stashed this shit for belated payback.

File #3 packed more photos: of canceled checks, deposit slips and bank notes. Pete shoved his food aside—*this* was smear bait supreme.

Sol Maltzman wrote: “The political implications of Howard Hughes’ 1956 loan of $200,000 to Richard Nixon’s brother Donald are staggering, especially since Nixon is expected to be the 1960 Republican Presidential nominee. This is a clear-cut case of an immensely wealthy industrialist buying political influence. It can be circumstantially supported by serving up many verifiable examples of Nixon-initiated policy directly beneficial to Hughes.”

Pete rechecked the evidence pix. The verification was solid—straight down the line.

His food was cold. He’d sweated his shirt starched to wilted.

Insider knowledge was a big fucking blast.

His day was all aces and 8's—some dead man's hand he couldn't play or fold.

He could hold onto the Hughes/Nixon dirt. He could let Gail take Sol's job at *Hush-Hush*—she'd done magazine work before—she was tired of divorce shakedowns anyway.

The HUAC staff was aces flush, but MONEY angles eluded him. Kemper Boyd's walk-on had his antenna feelers perk-perk-perking.

Pete drove to the Miramar Hotel and staked out the parking lot. Boyd's car was stashed back by the pool. Lots of women in swimsuits were out sunning—surveillance conditions could be worse.

Hours dragged by. The women came and went. Dusk hampered and shut down the view.

Miami crossed his mind—tiger-striped cabs and hungry gators.

6:00 p.m., 6:30, 7:00. 7:22: Boyd and Ward Fucking Littell walking by the pool.

They got into Boyd's rent-a-car. They pulled out onto Wilshire eastbound.

Littell was Joe Scaredy Cat to Boyd's Cool Cat. Memory Lane: those Feds and him shared a history.

Pete eased into traffic behind them. They did a two-car rollout: east on Wilshire, Barrington north to Sunset. Pete dawdled back and leap-frogged lanes—mobile bird-dog jobs jazzed him.

He was good. Boyd was unhip to the tail—he could tell.

They cruised east on Sunset: Beverly Hills, the Strip, Hollywood. Boyd turned north on Alta Vista and parked—midway down a block of small stucco houses.

Pete slid to the curb three doors up. Boyd and Littell got out; a streetlamp lit their moves.

They put on gloves. They grabbed flashlights. Littell unlocked the trunk and picked up a tool box.

They walked up to a pink stucco house, picked the lock and entered.

Flashlight beams crisscrossed the windows. Pete U-turned and spotted the curb plate: 1541 North.

It had to be a bug/wire job. FBI men called B&E's "black baggers."

The living-room lights snapped on. The fuckers were going at it brazen.

Pete grabbed his reverse book off the backseat. He skimmed it by the dashboard light.

1541 North Alta Vista matched to: Darleen Shoftel, HO3-6811.

Bug jobs took about an hour—he could run her through R&I. He saw a phone booth back at the corner—he could call and watch the house simultaneous.

He walked down and buzzed the County line. Karen Hiltscher picked up—he recognized her voice immediately.

"Records and Information."

"Karen, it's Pete Bondurant."

"You knew it was me after all this time?"

"I guess it's just one of those voices. Look, can you run somebody for me?"

"I suppose, even though you're not a deputy sheriff anymore, and I really shouldn't."

"You're a pal."

"I sure am, especially after the way you—"

"The name's Darleen Shoftel. That's D-A-R-L-E-E-N, S-H-O-F-T-E-L. The last known address I have is 1541 North Alta Vista, Los Angeles. Check all—"

"I know what to do, Pete. You just hold the line."

Pete held. House lights blinked up the block—covert Feds at work.

Karen carne back on. "Darleen Shoftel, white female, DOB 3/9/32. No wants, no warrants, no criminal record. She's clean with the DMV, but West Hollywood Vice has a blue sheet on her. There's one notation, dated 8/14/57. It says that a complaint was filed against her by the management at Dino's Lodge. She was soliciting for acts of prostitution at the bar. She was questioned and released, and the investigating detective described her as a 'high-class call girl.' "

"That's all?"

"That's not bad for one phone call."

Pete hung up. He saw the house lights blip off and checked his watch.

Boyd and Littell walked out and loaded their car. Sixteen minutes flat—a black-bag world record.

They drove away. Pete leaned against the booth and worked up a scenario.

Sol Maltzman was working up his own scheme, unknown to the Feds. Boyd was in town to warn him on the Gretzler hit and hot-wire a call girl's pad. Boyd was a glib liar: "I've got an 'in' on the McClellan Committee."

Boyd knew he clipped Gretzler—a McClellan Committee witness. Boyd told Hoover he clipped Gretzler. Hoover said, That's no skin off my ass.

Boyd's car: McClellan Committee-vouchered. Hoover: well-known Bobby Kennedy hater and subterfuge king. Boyd, smooth and educated: probably a good infiltration man.

Question #1: Did the infiltration tie in to the wire job? Question #2: If this turns into money, who signs *my* paycheck?

Maybe Jimmy Hoffa—the McClellan Committee's chief target. Fred Turentine could piggyback the Fed wiring and pick up every word the Feds did.

Pete saw $$$'s—like a 3-across slot-machine jackpot.

He drove home to the watchdog pad. Gail was on the portico—her cigarette tip bobbed and dipped, like she was pacing.

He parked and walked up. He kicked an overflowing ashtray and spilled butts on some prize rosebushes.

Gail backed away from him. Pete kept his voice soft and low.

"How long have you been out here?"

"For hours. Sol was calling every ten minutes, begging for his files. He said you stole some files of his and pushed him around."

"It was business." "He was frantic. I couldn't listen."

Pete reached for her arms. "It's cold out. Let's go inside."

"No. I don't want to."

"Gail—"

She pulled away. "No! I don't want to go back in that big awful house!"

Pete cracked some knuckles. "I'll take care of Sol. He won't bother you anymore."

Gail laughed—shrill and weird and something else. "I know he won't."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean he's dead. I called him back to try to calm him down, and a policeman answered the phone. He said Sol shot himself."

Pete shrugged. He didn't know what to do with his hands.

Gail ran to her car. She stripped gears pulling out of the driveway—and almost plowed a woman pushing a baby carriage.

5

(Washington, D.C., 12/7/58)

Ward was scared. Kemper knew why: Mr. Hoover's private briefings spawned legends.

They waited in his outer office. Ward sat hold-your-breath still. Kemper knew: he'll be twenty minutes late exactly.

He wants Ward cowed. He wants *me* here to buttress the effect.

He'd already phoned in his report: The Shoftel job went perfectly. A Los Angeles–based agent was assigned to monitor the bug and wiretap recordings from a listening post and forward the salient tapes to Littell in Chicago. Ace wire man Ward would cull them—and send the best excerpts to Mr. Hoover.

Jack wasn't due in L.A. until December 9th. Darleen Shoftel was servicing four tricks a night—the listening-post man praised her stamina. The L.A. *Times* ran a brief mention of Sol Maltzman's suicide. Mr. Hoover said Pete Bondurant probably "fired him" rather harshly.

Ward crossed his legs and straightened his necktie. Don't: Mr. Hoover hates fidgeters. He ordered us here to reward you—so please do not fidget.

Hoover walked in. Kemper and Littell stood up.

"Gentlemen, good morning."

They said, "Good morning, Sir"—in unison, with no overlap.

"I'm afraid this will have to be brief. I'm meeting Vice-President Nixon shortly."

Littell said, "I'm very pleased to be here, Sir."

Kemper almost winced: Do not interject comments, however servile.

"My schedule forces me to effect brevity. Mr. Littell, I appreciate the Job you and Mr. Boyd did in Los Angeles. I'm rewarding you with a position on the Chicago Top Hoodlum Squad. I'm doing this at the displeasure of SAC Leahy, who considers you best suited for political surveillance work. I realize, Mr. Littell, that you consider the CPUSA ineffectual, if not moribund. I deem this attitude dangerously fatuous, and sincerely hope you'll outgrow it. You're a personal colleague of mine now, but I warn you not to be seduced by the dangerous life. You can't possibly be as good at it as Kemper Boyd is."

6

(Washington, D.C., 12/8/58)

Littell did paperwork in his bathrobe.

He did it exultantly hung over: they celebrated with Cordon Rouge and Glenlivet. The damage showed: empty bottles and room-service carts piled with untouched food.

Kemper showed restraint. He didn't. Hoover's "brevity" stung; champagne and scotch let him make fun of it. Coffee and aspirin hardly dented his hangover.

A snowstorm closed the airport—he was stuck in his hotel room. Hoover sent up a mimeo file for him to study.

> CHICAGO TOP HOODLUM SQUAD CONFIDENTIAL: CRIME FIGURES, LOCATIONS, METHODS OF OPERATION AND RELATED OBSERVATIONS.

It ran sixty detail-padded pages. Littell popped two more aspirin and underlined salient facts.

> The current stated goal of the Top Hoodlum Program (outlined in Bureau Directive #3401, 12/19/57) is the gathering of organized crime

> intelligence. At this date, and until direct notice of a superseding policy, any and all criminal intelligence gathered is to be retained solely for future use. The Top Hoodlum Program is not mandated to gather intelligence to be employed in the process of directly building cases for Federal prosecution. Criminal intelligence obtained through electronic surveillance methods may be, at the discretion of the Regional SAC, transmitted to municipal police agencies and prosecuting bodies.

The elliptical gist: Hoover knows you can't prosecute the Mob and consistently win. He won't sacrifice Bureau prestige for occasional convictions.

> Top Hoodlum Program squads may employ electronic surveillance methods on their own autonomy. Verbatim tape and transcription logs are to be rigorously kept and transmitted to the Regional SAC for periodic review.

Bug-and-tap carte blanche—good.

> The Chicago THP Squad has effected an electronic surveillance penetration (microphone placements only) at Celano's Custom Tailors, 620 North Michigan Avenue. Both the U.S. Attorney's Office (Northern Illinois Region) and the Cook County Sheriff's Intelligence Division consider this location to be the informal headquarters of ranking Chicago mobsters, their chief lieutenants and selected underlings. A comprehensive tape and stenographer-transcribed intelligence library has been established on the listening post premises.
>
> The suborning of informants should be considered a priority of all THP agents. As of this (12/19/57) date, no informants with intimate knowledge of the Chicago Crime Syndicate have been activated. Note: All transactions involving the exchange of informant intelligence for Bureau-vouchered monies must first be approved by the Regional SAC.

Translation: FIND YOUR OWN SNITCH.

The Top Hoodlum Program mandate currently allows for the assignment of six agents and one secretary/stenographer per regional office. Yearly budgets are not to exceed the guidelines established in Bureau directive #3403, 12/19/57.

Budget stats droned on. Littell flipped to CRIME FIGURES.

Sam Giancana, born 1908. AKA “Mo,” “Momo,” “Mooney.” Giancana is the Chicago Mob “Boss of Bosses.” He follows Al Capone, Paul “The Waiter” Ricca and Anthony “Joe Batters”/“Big Tuna” Accardo as the Chicago overlord of all gambling, loan-sharking, numbers, vending machine, prostitution and labor rackets. Giancana has been personally involved in numerous Mob-related killings. He was rejected for World War II service as a “constitutional psychopath.” Giancana lives in suburban Oak Park. He is frequently seen in the company of his personal bodyguard Dominic Michael Montalvo, AKA “Butch Montrose,” born 1919. Giancana is a close personal associate of International Brotherhood of Teamsters President James Riddle Hoffa. He is rumored to have a voice in the loan selection process of the Teamsters’ Central States Pension Fund, an exceedingly rich and dubiously administered union trust believed to have financed many illegal ventures.

Gus Alex, born 1916. (Numerous AKA’s.) Alex is the former North Side rackets boss now deployed as the Chicago Mob’s political “fixer” and liaison to corrupt elements within the Chicago Police Department and the Cook County Sheriff’s Office. He is a closely allied associate of Murray Llewellyn Humphreys, AKA “Hump” and “The Camel,” born 1899. Humphreys is the Chicago Mob’s “eider statesman.” He is semi-retired, but is sometimes consulted on Chicago Mob policy decisions.

John “Johnny” Rosselli, born 1905. Rosselli is a

> closely allied associate of Sam Giancana and serves as the front man of the Chicago Mob-owned Stardust Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. Rosselli is rumored to have substantial casino-hotel holdings in Havana, Cuba, along with Cuban gambling magnates Santo Traficante Jr. and Carlos Marcello, the Mob bosses of Tampa, Florida, and New Orleans, Louisiana, respectively.

Known-associate and investment lists followed. Staggering: Giancana/Hoffa/Rosselli/Trafficante/Marcello et al. knew every major hoodlum in every major U.S. city and owned legitimate interests in trucking firms, nightclubs, factories, race horses, banks, movie theaters, amusement parks and over three hundred Italian restaurants. Their collective indictment-to-conviction ratio: 308 to 14.

Littell skimmed an appendix: MINOR CRIME FIGURES. Mob bosses wouldn't snitch—but the little fish might.

> Jacob Rubenstein, born 1911. AKA "Jack Ruby." This man operates a striptease club in Dallas, Texas, and is known to dabble in small-time loansharking. He is rumored to occasionally transmit Chicago Mob money to Cuban politicians, including President Fulgencio Batista and rebel leader Fidel Castro. Rubenstein/Ruby is Chicago-born and has maintained extensive ties within the Chicago Mob. He is a frequent Chicago visitor.
>
> Herschel Meyer Ryskind, born 1901. AKA "Hersh," "Hesh," "Heshie." This man is a former (circa 1930s) member of the Detroit-based 'Purple Gang.' He resides in Arizona and Texas, but maintains strong Chicago Mob ties. He is rumored to be active in the Gulf Coast heroin trade. He is alleged to be a close friend of Sam Giancana and James Riddle Hoffa and is said to have mediated labor disputes for the Chicago Mob.

"Alleged to be"/"rumored to have"/"believed to be." Key phrases revealing a key truth: the file read noncommittal and equivocal. Hoover didn't really hate the Mob—the THP was his response to Apalachin.

> Lenny Sands, born 1924. (Formerly Leonard Joseph Seidelwitz), AKA "Jewboy Lenny." This man is considered to be a mascot to the Chicago Mob. His nominal occupation is lounge entertainer. He frequently entertains at Chicago Mob and Cook County Teamster gatherings. Sands is said to have occasionally delivered Chicago Mob funds to Cuban police officials as part of the Chicago Mob's efforts to maintain a friendly political climate in Cuba and insure the continued success of their Havana casinos. Sands has a vending machine pick-up route and is a salaried employee of the Chicago Mob's quasi-legitimate "Vendo-King" business front. (Note: Sands is a well-established Las Vegas/Los Angeles entertainment business "fringe character." He is also rumored to have given U.S. Senator John Kennedy (D–Massachusetts) speech lessons during his 1946 Congressional campaign.)

A Mob flunky knew Jack Kennedy. And *he* wired a whore's pad to entrap him.

Littell jumped back and forth: MINOR CRIME FIGURES to RELATED OBSERVATIONS.

> Chicago Mob territories are geographically divided. The North Side, Near North Side, West Side, South Side, Loop, Lakefront and northern suburb areas are run by underbosses who report directly to Sam Giancana.
>
> Mario Salvatore D'Onofrio, born 1912. AKA "Mad Sal." This man is an independent loan shark and bookmaker. He is allowed to operate because he pays Sam Giancana a large operating tribute. D'Onofrio was convicted of 2nd Degree Manslaughter in 1951 and served a five-year sentence at the Illinois State Penitentiary at Joliet. A prison psychiatrist described him as a "Psychopathically-derived criminal sadist with uncontrollable psycho-sexual urges to inflict

> pain." He was recently a suspect in the torture-murders of two Bob O'Link Country Club golf professionals rumored to owe him money.
>
> Independent bookmaker-loansharks flourish in Chicago. This is due to Sam Giancana's policy of extracting high-percentage operating tributes. One of Giancana's most fearsome underbosses, Anthony "Icepick Tony" Iannone (born 1917), serves as the Chicago Mob's liaison to independent bookmaker-loanshark factions. Iannone is strongly believed to be responsible for the mutilation murders of no less than nine heavily indebted loanshark customers.

Names jumped out. Odd appellations made him laugh.

Tony "the Ant" Spilotro, Felix "Milwaukee Phil" Alderisio, Frank "Franky Strongy" Ferraro.

Joe Amato, Joseph Cesar Di Vareo, Jackie "Jackie the Lackey" Cerone.

> The Teamsters' Central States Pension Fund remains a source of constant law énforcement speculation. Does Sam Giancana have final Fund loan approval? What is the established protocol for granting loans to criminals, quasi-legitimate businessmen and labor racketeers seeking capital?

Jimmy "Turk" Torello, Louie "the Mooch" Eboli.

> The Miami PD Intelligence Squad believes that Sam Giancana is a silent partner in the Tiger Kab Kompany, a Teamster-owned taxi service run by Cuban refugees believed to possess extensive criminal records.

Daniel "Donkey Dan" Versace, "Fat Bob" Paolucci—

The phone rang. Littell fumbled for it—eyestrain had him seeing double.

"Hello?"

"It's me."

"Kemper, hi."

"What have you been doing? When I left you were two sheets to the wind."

Littell laughed. "I've been reading the THP file. And so far, I'm not too impressed with Mr. Hoover's anti-Mob mandate."

"Watch your mouth, he might have bugged your room."

"That's a cruel thought."

"Yes, if not far-fetched. Ward, look, it's still snowing, and you'll never be able to fly out today. Why don't you meet me at the Committee office? Bobby and I are grilling a witness. He's a Chicago man, and you might learn something."

"I could use some air. You're at the old Senate Office Building?"

"Right, suite 101. I'll be in interview room A. It's got an observation corridor, so you'll be able to watch. And remember my cover. I'm retired from the FBI."

"You're a glib dissembler, Kemper. It's rather sad."

"Don't get lost in the snow."

The setup was perfect: a closed hallway with one-way glass access and wall-mounted speakers. Partitioned off in cubicle A: the Kennedy brothers, Kemper, and a blond man.

Cubicles B, C and D were vacant. He had the watching gallery to himself—the snowstorm must have scared people home.

Littell hit the speaker switch. Voices crackled out with minimum static.

The men sat around a desk. Robert Kennedy played host and worked the tape recorder.

"Take your time, Mr. Kirpaski. You're a voluntary witness, and we're here at your disposal."

The blond man said, "Call me Roland. Nobody calls me Mr. Kirpaski."

Kemper grinned. "Any man who rolls over on Jimmy Hoffa deserves that formality."

Brilliant Kemper—reviving his Tennessee drawl.

Roland Kirpaski said, "That's nice, I guess. But you know, Jimmy Hoffa's Jimmy Hoffa. What I mean is, it's like they say about the elephant. He don't forget."

Robert Kennedy laced his hands behind his head. "Hoffa will have plenty of time in prison to remember everything that put him there."

Kirpaski coughed. "I'd like to say something. And

I'd … uh … like to read it off when I testify in front of the Committee."

Kemper said, "Go ahead."

Kirpaski leaned his chair back. "I'm a union guy. *I'm a Teamster*. Now, I told you all them stories about Jimmy doing this and doing that, you know, telling his guys to lean on these other guys that wouldn't play ball and so forth. I guess maybe all that stuff is illegal, but you know what? That don't bother me so much. The only reason I'm so-called rolling over on Jimmy is because I can add up two and two and get four, and I heard enough at fucking Chicago Local 2109 to figure out that Jimmy Fucking Hoffa is cutting side deals with management, which means that he is a scab piece of shit, pardon my French, and I want to go on the record as saying that that is my motive for ratting him off."

John Kennedy laughed. Littell flashed on the Shoftel job and winced.

Robert Kennedy said, "Duly noted, Roland. You'll be able to read any statement you like before you testify. And remember, we're saving your testimony for a televised session. Millions of people will see you."

Kemper said, "The more publicity you get, the more unlikely it is that Hoffa will attempt reprisals."

Kirpaski said, "Jimmy don't forget. He's like an elephant that way. You know those gangster pictures you showed me? Those guys I saw Jimmy with?"

Robert Kennedy held up some photos. "Santo Trafficante Jr. and Carlos Marcello."

Kirpaski nodded. "Right. I also want to go on the record as saying that I've heard good things about those guys. I heard they hire union men exclusively. No Mafia guy ever said, 'Roland, you're a dumb Southside Polack' to me. Like I said, they visited Jimmy at his suite at the Drake, and all they talked about was the weather, the Cubs and politics in Cuba. I want to go on the record as saying I got no gripe against the fucking Mafia."

Kemper winked at the one-way. "Neither does J. Edgar Hoover."

Littell laughed. Kirpaski said, "What?"

Robert Kennedy drummed the table. "Mr. Boyd is performing for some unseen colleague of his. Now, Roland, let's get back to

Miami and Sun Valley."

Kirpaski said, "I'd like to. Jesus, this snow."

Kemper stood up and stretched his legs. "Walk us through your observations again."

Kirpaski sighed. "I was a Chicago delegate to the convention last year. We stayed at the Deauville in Miami. I was still friendly with Jimmy then, because I hadn't figured out he was a scab cocksucker cutting side deals with—"

Robert Kennedy cut in. "Stick to the point, please."

"The point is I ran some errands for Jimmy. I went by the Tiger Kab stand, which is spelled with a goddamn K, and picked up some cash so Jimmy could take some guys from the Miami locals out on a boat to shoot sharks with Tommy guns, which is one of Jimmy's favorite Florida things to do. I must have picked up three grand easy. The cabstand was like the planet Mars. All these crazy Cuban guys wearing tiger-colored shirts. The boss Cuban was this guy Fulo. He was selling these hot TVs out of the parking lot. The Tiger Kab business is strictly cash-operated. If you want my considered opinion, it's a tax evasion bounce looking to happen."

Static rattled the speaker—Littell tapped the squelch button and smoothed the volume out. John Kennedy looked bored and restless.

Robert Kennedy doodled on a notepad. "Tell us about Anton Gretzler again."

Kirpaski said, "We all went out shark shooting. Gretzler came along. Him and Jimmy were talking by themselves over on one end of the boat away from the shark shooters. I was down in the can, being seasick. I guess they thought they had privacy, because they were talking up this not-too-legal-sounding stuff, which I want to go on the record as stating was no skin off my ass, because it didn't involve collusion with management."

John Kennedy tapped his watch. Kemper prompted Kirpaski. "What exactly did they discuss?"

"Sun Valley. Gretzler said he had land surveys done, and his surveyor said the land wouldn't fall into the swamp for five years or so, which would let them off the hook, legally speaking. Jimmy said he could tap the Pension Fund for three million dollars to purchase the land and prefab material, and maybe they could pocket some cash up front."

Robert Kennedy jumped up. His chair crashed—the one-way glass shimmied. “That is very strong testimony! That is a virtual admission of conspiracy to commit land fraud and intent to defraud the Pension Fund!”

Kemper picked the chair up. “It’s only courtroom valid if Gretzler corroborates it or perjures himself denying it. Without Gretzler, it’s Roland’s word versus Hoffa’s. It comes down to credibility, and Roland has two drunk-driving convictions while Hoffa’s record is technically clean.”

Bobby fumed. Kemper said, “Bob, Gretzler has to be dead. His car was dumped in a swamp, and the man himself can’t be found. I’ve put a lot of hours in trying to find him, and I haven’t turned up one viable lead.”

“He could have faked his own death to avoid appearing before the Committee.”

“I think that’s unlikely.”

Bobby straddled his chair and gripped down on the slats. “You may be right. But I may still send you down to Florida to make sure.”

Kirpaski said, “I’m hungry.”

Jack rolled his eyes. Kemper winked at him.

Kirpaski sighed. “I said I’m hungry.”

Kemper checked his watch. “Wrap it up for the senator, Roland. Tell us how Gretzler got drunk and shot his mouth off.”

“I get the picture. Sing for your supper.”

Bobby said, “Goddamnit—”

“All right, all right. It was after the shark shoot. Gretzler was pissed because Jimmy ridiculed him for holding his Tommy gun like a sissy. Gretzler started talking up these rumors he’d heard about the Pension Fund. He said he heard the Fund is a lot fucking richer than people knew, and nobody could subpoena the books, because the books weren’t real. See, Gretzler said there were these ‘real’ Teamster Fund books, probably in code, with fucking tens of millions of dollars accounted for in them. This money gets loaned out at these exorbitant rates. There’s supposed to be some retired Chicago gangster—a real brain—who’s the bookkeeper for the ‘real’ books and the ‘real’ money, and if you’re thinking about corroboration, forget it—I’m the only one Gretzler was talking to.”

Bobby Kennedy pushed his hair back. His voice went high, like an excited child’s.

“It’s our big wedge, Jack. First we subpoena the front books again and determine their solvency. We trace the loaned-out money the Teamsters admit to and try to determine the existence of hidden assets within the Fund and the probability that those ‘real’ books exist.”

Littell pressed up to the glass. He felt magnetized: tousle-haired, passionate Bobby—

Jack Kennedy coughed. “It’s strong stuff. *If* you can produce verifiable testimony on those books before the Committee’s mandate ends.”

Kirpaski applauded. “Hey, he speaks. Hey, Senator, glad you could join us.”

Jack Kennedy cringed, mock-wounded. Bobby said, “My investigators will be forwarding our evidence along to other agencies. Whatever we dig up will be acted on.”

Jack said, “Eventually?” Littell translated: “Too late to bolster *my* career.”

The brothers locked eyes. Kemper leaned across the table between them. “Hoffa’s got a block of houses set up at Sun Valley. He’s down there himself, giving PR tours. Roland’s going down to look around. He runs a Chicago local, so it won’t look suspicious. He’ll be calling in to report what he sees.”

Kirpaski said, “Yeah, and I’m also gonna ‘see’ this cocktail waitress I met when I went down for the convention. But you know what? I’m not gonna tell my wife she’s on the menu.”

Jack motioned Kemper in close. Littell caught static-laced whispers:

“I’m flying to L.A. when this snow lets up.”/“Call Darleen Shoftel—I’m sure she’d love to meet you.”

Kirpaski said, “I’m hungry.”

Robert Kennedy packed his briefcase. “Come on, Roland. You can join the family for supper at my house. Try not to say ‘fuck’ around my children, though. They’ll learn the concept soon enough.”

The men filed out a back door. Littell hugged the glass for one last look at Bobby.

7

(Los Angeles, 12/9/58)

Darleen Shoftel faked a mean climax. Darleen Shoftel had whore pals over for shop talk.

Darleen was a bigggg name dropper.

She said Franchot Tone dug bondage. She called Dick Contino a champion muff diver. She dubbed B-movie man Steve Cochran "Mr. King Size."

Phone calls came in and went out. Darleen talked to tricks, hooker chums and Mom in Vincennes, Indiana.

Darleen loved to talk. Darleen said nothing to explain why two Feds wired her crib.

They attached the Fed apparatus four days ago. 1541 North Alta Vista was miked up floor to rafters.

Fred Turentine piggybacked the Boyd/Littell setup. He heard everything the FBI heard. The Feds rented a listening-post house down the block; Freddy monitored *his* hookups from a van parked next door and kept Pete supplied with tape copies.

And Pete smelled money and called Jimmy Hoffa—maybe a bit premature.

Jimmy said, "You got a good sense of smell. Come down to

Miami on Thursday and tell me what you got. If you got nothing, we can go out on my boat and shoot sharks."

Thursday was tomorrow. Shark shooting was strictly for geeks. Freddy's pay was two hundred a day—steep for a crash course in extraneous sex jive.

Pete moped around the watchdog house. Pete savored the hints he dropped on Mr. Hughes: I know you lent Dick Nixon's brother some coin. Pete kept playing the piggyback tapes out of sheer boredom.

He hit Play. Darleen moaned and groaned. Bedsprings creaked; something headboard-like slammed something wall-like. Dig it: Darleen with a big fat porker in the saddle.

The phone rang—Pete grabbed it fast.

"Who's this?"

"It's Fred. Get over here now—we just hit paydirt."

The van was crammed with contraptions and gadgets. Pete banged his knees climbing in.

Freddy looked all hopped up. His zipper was down, like he'd been choking the chicken.

He said, "I recognized that Boston accent immediately, and I called you the second they started screwing. Listen, this is live."

Pete put on headphones. Darleen Shoftel spoke, loud and clear.

"… you're a bigger hero than your brother. I read about you in *Time* magazine. Your PT boat got rammed by the Japs or something."

"I'm a better swimmer than Bobby, that's certainly true."

3-cherry jackpot: Gail Hendee's old squeeze, Jack the K.

Darleen: "I saw your brother's picture in *Newsweek* magazine. Doesn't he have like four thousand kids?"

Jack: "At least three thousand, with new ones popping up all the time. When you visit his house the little shits attach themselves to your ankles. My wife finds Bobby's need to breed vulgar."

Darleen: " 'Need to breed'—that's cute."

Jack: "Bobby's a true Catholic. He needs to have children and punish the men that he hates. If his hate instincts weren't so unerring, he'd be a colossal pain in the ass."

Pete clamped his headset down. Jack Kennedy talked, postfuck languid:

"I don't hate like Bobby does. Bobby hates with a fury. Bobby hates Jimmy Hoffa very powerfully and simply, which is why he'll win in the end. I was in Washington with him yesterday. He was taking a deposition from a Teamster man who'd become disgusted with Hoffa and had decided to inform on him. Here's this dumb brave Polack, Roland something from Chicago, and Bobby takes him home for dinner with his family. You see, uh …"

"Darleen."

"Right, Darleen. You see, Darleen, Bobby's more heroic than I am because he's truly passionate and generous."

Gadgets blinked. Tape spun. They hit the royal flush/Irish Sweep-stakes-jackpot—Jimmy Hoffa would SHIT when he heard it.

Darleen: "I still think that PT boat thing was pretty swell."

Jack: "You know, you're a good listener, Arlene."

Fred looked ready to DROOL. His fucking eyes were dollar-sign dilated.

Pete made fists. "This is mine. You just sit tight and do what I tell you to."

Freddy cringed. Pete smiled—his hands put the fear out every time.

A Tiger Kab met his plane. The driver talked Cuban politics nonstop: *El grande* Castro advancing! *El puto* Batista in retreat!

Pancho dropped him off at the cabstand. Jimmy had the dispatch shack commandeered—goons were packing up life jackets and Tommy guns.

Hoffa shooed them out. Pete said, "Jimmy, how are you?"

Hoffa picked up a nail-studded baseball bat. "I'm all right. You like this? Sometimes the sharks get up close to the boat and you can give them a few whacks."

Pete opened up his tape rig and plugged it into a floor outlet. The tiger-stripe wallpaper made his head swim.

"It's cute, but I brought something better."

"You said you smelled money. That's gotta mean my money for your trouble."

"There's a story behind it."

"I don't like stories, unless I'm the hero. And you know I'm a busy—"

Pete put a hand on his arm. "An FBI man braced me. He said he had an ‘in’ on the McClellan Committee. He said he made me for the Gretzler job, and he said Mr. Hoover didn’t care. You know Hoover, Jimmy. He’s always left you and the Outfit alone.”

Hoffa pulled his arm loose. “So? You think they’ve got evidence? Is that what that tape’s all about?”

“No. I think the Fed’s spying on Bobby Kennedy and the Committee for Hoover, or something like that, and I think Hoover’s on our side. I tailed the guy and his partner up to a fuck pad in Hollywood. They bugged and wired it, and my guy Freddy Turentine hooked up a piggy-back. Now, listen.”

Hoffa tapped his foot like he was bored. Hoffa brushed tiger-striped lint off his shirt.

Pete tapped Play. Tape hissed. Sex groans and mattress squeaks escalated.

Pete timed the fuck. Senator John F. Kennedy: 2.4-minute man.

Darleen Shoftel faked a climax. There, that Boston bray: “My god-damn back gave out.”

Darleen said, “It was soooood. Short and sweet’s the best.”

Jimmy twirled his baseball bat. Goosebumps bristled up his arms.

Pete pushed buttons and cut to the good stuff. Two-Minute Jack rhapsodized:

“… a Teamster man who’d become disgusted with Hoffa … this dumb brave Polack, Roland something from Chicago.”

Hoffa popped goose bumps. Hoffa choked up a grip on his bat.

“This Roland something has working-class panache.… Bobby’s got his teeth in Hoffa. When Bobby bites down he doesn’t let go.”

Hoffa popped double goose bumps. Hoffa went bug-eyed like a fright-wig nigger.

Pete stood back.

Hoffa let fly—watch that nail-topped Louisville Slugger GO—

Chairs got smashed to kindling. Desks got knocked legless. Walls got spike-gouged down to the baseboard.

Pete stood *way* back. A glowing plastic Jesus doorstop got shattered into eight million pieces.

Paper stacks flew. Wood chips ricocheted. Drivers watched from the sidewalk—Jimmy roundhoused the window and glass-blasted them.

James Riddle Hoffa: heaving and voodoo-eyed stuporous.

His bat snagged on a doorjamb. Jimmy stared at it—say what?

Pete grabbed him in a bear hug. Jimmy's eyes rolled back, catatonic-style.

Hoffa flailed and squirmed. Pete squeezed him close to breathless and baby-talked him.

"I can keep Freddy on the piggyback for two hundred a day. Sooner or later we might get something you can fuck the Kennedys with. I've got some political dirt files, too. They might do us some good someday."

Hoffa focused in half-lucid. His voice came out laughing-gas squeaky.

"What … do … you … want?"

"Mr. Hughes is going nuts. I was thinking I'd get next to you and cover my bets."

Hoffa squirmed free. Pete almost choked on his smell: sweat and bargain-basement cologne.

His color receded. He caught his breath. His voice went down a few octaves.

"I'll give you 5% of this cabstand. You keep the piggyback going in L.A. and show up here once in a while to keep these Cubans in line. Don't try to Jew me up to 10%, or I'll say 'fuck you' and send you back to L.A. on the bus."

Pete said, "It's a deal."

Jimmy said, "I've got a job in Sun Valley. I want you to come with me."

They took a Tiger Kab out. Shark-shoot goodies bulged up the trunk: nail bats, Tommy guns and suntan oil.

Fulo Machado drove. Jimmy wore fresh threads. Pete forgot to bring spare clothes—Hoffa's stink stuck to him.

Nobody talked—Jimmy Hoffa sulking killed chitchat. They passed buses filled with Teamster chumps headed for the sucker-bait tract pads.

Pete did mental arithmetic.

Twelve cab drivers working around-the-clock. Twelve men with Jimmy Hoffa-sponsored green cards—taking short-end taxi-fare splits to stay in America. Twelve moonlighters: stickup men, strikebreakers, pimps. 5% of the top-end money and whatever else he could scrounge—this gig packed potential.

Fulo pulled off the highway. Pete saw the spot where he whacked Anton Gretzler. They followed a bus convoy to the bait cribs—three miles from the Interstate easy.

Movie spotlights gave off this huge glow—extra-bright, like a premiere at Grauman's Chinese. The cosmetic Sun Valley looked good: tidy little houses in a blacktop-paved clearing.

Teamsters were boozing at card tables—at least two hundred men squeezed into the walkways between houses. A gravel parking lot was crammed with cars and buses. A bar-b-que pit stood adjacent—check that spike-impaled steer twirling and basting.

Fulo parked close to the action. Jimmy said, "You two wait here."

Pete got out and stretched. Hoffa zoomed into the crowd—toadies swarmed him right off the bat.

Fulo sharpened his machete on a pumice stone. He packed it in a scabbard strapped to the backseat.

Pete watched Jimmy work the crowd.

He showed off the pads. He gave little speeches and wolfed bar-b-que. He seized up and flushed around a blond Polack type.

Pete chain-smoked. Fulo played the cab radio: some Spanish-language pray-for-Jesus show.

A few buses took off. Two carloads of hookers pulled in—trashy Cuban babes chaperoned by off-duty state troopers.

Jimmy huckstered and hawked Sun Valley applications. Some Teamsters grabbed their cars and fishtailed off drunk and rowdy.

The Polack bagged a U-drive Chevy and burned gravel like he had a hot date somewhere.

Jimmy walked up fast—stubby legs chugging on overdrive. You didn't need a fucking road map: the Polack was Roland Kirpaski.

They piled in to the tiger sled. Fulo gunned it. The radio geek cranked up a donation plea.

Lead-foot Fulo got the picture. Lead-foot Fulo went 0 to 60 inside six seconds.

Pete saw the Chevy's taillights. Fulo floored the gas and rammed them. The car swerved off the road, clipped some trees and stalled dead.

Fulo brodied in close. His headlights strafed Kirpaski—stumbling through a clearing thick with marsh grass.

Jimmy got out and chased him. Jimmy waved Fulo's machete. Kirpaski tripped and stood up flashing two fuck-you fingers.

Hoffa carne in swinging. Kirpaski went down flailing wrist stumps gouting blood. Jimmy swung two-handed—scalp flaps flew.

The radio clown jabbered. Kirpaski convulsed head to toe. Jimmy wiped blood from his eyes and kept swinging.

8

(Miami, 12/11/58)

Kemper called the car game Devil's Advocate. It helped him keep his loyalties straight and honed his ability to project the right persona at the right time.

Bobby Kennedy's distrust inspired the game. His southern accent slipped once—Bobby caught it instantly.

Kemper cruised South Miami. He began the game by marking who knew what.

Mr. Hoover knew *everything*. SA Boyd's "retirement" was cloaked in FBI paperwork: if Bobby sought corroboraron, he'd find it.

Claire knew everything. She'd never judge his motives or betray him.

Ward Littell knew of the Kennedy incursion. He most likely disapproved of it—Bobby's crimebuster fervor deeply impressed him. Ward was also an ad hoc infiltration partner, compromised by the Darleen Shoftel wire job. The job shamed him—but gratitude for his THP transfer outweighed his guilt pangs. Ward did not know that Pete Bondurant killed Anton Gretzler; Ward did not know that Mr. Hoover condoned the murder. Bondurant terrified Ward—a sane response to Big Pete and the legend he inspired. The Bondurant matter should be kept from Ward at all cost.

Bobby knew that he was pimping for Jack—supplying him with the numbers of especially susceptible old flames.

Questions and answers next: practice for deflecting skepticism.

Kemper braked for a woman lugging groceries. His game snapped to the present tense.

Bobby thinks I'm chasing leads on Anton Gretzler. I'm really protecting Howard Hughes' pet thug.

Q: You seem bent on crashing the Kennedy inner, circle.

A: I can spot comers a mile off. Cozying up to Democrats doesn't make me a Communist. Old Joe Kennedy's as far right as Mr. Hoover.

Q: You "cozied up" to Jack rather fast.

A: If circumstances had been different, I could have been Jack.

Kemper checked his notebook.

He had to go by Tiger Kab. He had to go to Sun Valley and show mug shots to the witness who saw the "big man" avert his face off the Interstate.

He'd show him *old* mug shots—bad current Bondurant likenesses. He'd discourage a confirmation: you didn't really see *this* man, did you?

A tiger-striped taxi swerved in front of him. He saw a tiger-striped hut down the block.

Kemper pulled up and parked across the street. Some curbside loungers smelled COP and dispersed.

He walked into the hut. He laughed—the wallpaper was fresh-flocked tiger-striped velveteen.

Four tiger-shirted Cubans stood up and circled him. They wore their shirttails out to cover waistband bulges.

Kemper pulled his mug shots out. The tiger men circled in tighter. A man pulled out a stiletto and scratched his neck with the blade.

The other tiger men laughed. Kemper braced the closest one. "Have you seen him?"

The man passed the mug strip around. Every man flashed recognition and said "No."

Kemper grabbed the strip. He saw a white man on the sidewalk checking his car out.

The knife man sidled up close. The other tiger men giggled. The knife man twirled his blade right upside the gringo's eyes.

Kemper judo-chopped him. Kemper snapped his knees with a side-kick. The man hit the floor prone and dropped his shiv.

Kemper picked it up. The tiger men backed off en masse. Kemper stepped on the knife man's knife hand and slammed the blade through it.

The knife man screamed. The other tiger men gasped and tittered. Kemper exited with a tight little bow.

• • •

He drove out 1-95 to Sun Valley. A gray sedan stuck close behind him. He changed lanes, dawdled and accelerated—the car followed from a classic tail distance.

Kemper eased down an off-ramp. A hicktown main street ran perpendicular to it—just four gas stations and a church. He pulled into a Texaco and parked.

He walked to the men's room. He saw the tail car idle up to the pumps. The white man dawdling by Tiger Kab got out and looked around.

Kemper shut the door and pulled his piece. The room was smelly and filthy.

He counted seconds off his watch. He heard foot scuffs at fifty-one.

The man nudged the door open. Kemper yanked him in and pinned him to the wall.

He was fortyish, sandy-haired, and slender. Kemper pat-searched him from the ankles up.

No badge, no gun, no leatherette ID holder.

The man didn't blink. The man ignored the revolver in his face.

The man said, "My name is John Stanton. I'm a representative of a U.S. Government agency, and I want to talk to you."

"About what?"

Stanton said, "Cuba."

9

(Chicago, 12/11/58)

Snitch candidate at work: “Jew-boy Lenny” Sands collecting jukebox cash.

Littell tailed him. They hit six Hyde Park taverns in an hour—Lenny worked fast.

Lenny kibitzed. Lenny cracked jokes. Lenny passed out Johnnie Walker Red Label miniatures. Lenny told the story of Come-San-Chin, the Chinese cocksucker—and bagged his coin receipts inside seven minutes.

Lenny was a deficient tail-spotter. Lenny had unique THP stats: lounge entertainer/Cuban bagman/Mob mascot.

Lenny pulled up to the Tillerman’s Lounge. Littell parked and walked in thirty seconds behind him.

The place was overheated. A bar mirror tossed his reflection back: lumberjack coat, chinos, work boots.

He still looked like a college professor.

Teamster regalia lined the walls. A framed glossy stood out: Jimmy Hoffa and Frank Sinatra holding up trophy fish.

Workingmen walked through a hot buffet line. Lenny sat at a back table, with a stocky man wolfing corned beef.

Littell ID'd him: Jacob Rubenstein/AKA Jack Ruby.

Lenny brought his coin sacks. Ruby brought a suitcase. It was a probable vending cash transfer.

There were no empty tables adjoining them.

Men stood at the bar drinking lunch: rye shots and beer chasers. Littell signaled for the same—nobody laughed or snickered.

The barman served him and took his money. He downed his lunch quick—just like his Teamster brothers.

The rye made him sweat; the beer gave him goose bumps. The combination tamped down his nerves.

He'd had one THP Squad meeting. The men seemed to resent him—Mr. Hoover slotted him in personally. An agent named Court Meade came on friendly; the others welcomed him with nods and perfunctory handshakes.

He had three days in as a THP agent. Including three shifts at the bug post, studying Chi-mob voices.

The barman cruised by. Littell raised two fingers—the same way his Teamster brothers called for refills.

Sands and Ruby kept talking. There was no table space near them—he couldn't get close enough to listen.

He drank and paid up. The rye went straight to his head.

Drinking on duty was a Bureau infraction. Not *strictly* illegal—like wiring fuck pads to entrap politicians.

The agent working the Shoftel post was probably swamped—he hadn't sent a single tape out yet. Mr. Hoover's Kennedy hate seemed insanely misguided.

Robert Kennedy seemed heroic. Bobby's kindness to Roland Kirpaski seemed pure and genuine.

A table opened up. Littell walked through the lunch line and grabbed it. Lenny and Rubenstein/Ruby were less than three feet away.

Ruby was talking. Food dribbled down his bib.

"Heshie always thinks he's got cancer or some farkakte disease. With Hesh a pimple's always a malignant tumor."

Lenny picked at a sandwich. "Heshie's a class guy. When I played the Stardust Lounge in '54 he came every night. Heshie always preferred lounge acts to the main-room guys. Jesus Christ and the Apostles could be playing the big room at the Dunes, and Heshie'd be over at some slot palace checking out some guinea crooner ’cause his cousin’s a made guy.”

Ruby said, “Heshie loves blow jobs. He gets blow jobs exclusively, ’cause he says it’s good for his prostrate. He told me he hasn’t dipped the schnitzel since he was with the Purples back in the ’30s and some shiksa tried to schlam him with a paternity suit. Heshie told me he’s had over ten thousand blow jobs. He likes to watch ‘The Lawrence Welk Show’ while he gets blown. He’s got nine doctors for all these diseases he thinks he’s got, and all the nurses blow him. That’s how he knows it’s good for his prostrate.”

“Heshie” was most likely Herschel Meyer Ryskind: “active in the Gulf Coast heroin trade.”

Lenny said, “Jack, I hate to stiff you with all these coins, but I didn’t have time to go to the bank. Sam was very specific. He said you were making rounds and only had limited time. I’m glad we had time to nosh, though, ’cause I always enjoy watching you eat.”

Ruby wiped his bib. “I’m worse when the food’s better. There’s a deli in Big D that’s to die for. Here, my shirt’s just spritzed. At that deli it’s spray-painted.”

“Who’s the money for?”

“Batista and the Beard. Santo and Sam are hedging their bets political-wise. I’m flying down next week.”

Lenny pushed his plate aside. “I’ve got this new routine where Castro comes to the States and gets a job as a beatnik poet. He’s smoking maryjane and talking like a shvartze.”

“You’re big-room talent, Lenny. I’ve always said so.”

“Keep saying it, Jack. If you keep saying it, somebody might hear you.”

Ruby stood up. “Hey, you never know.”

“That’s right, you never do, Shalom, Jack. It’s always a pleasure watching you eat.”

Ruby walked out with his suitcase. Jewboy Lenny lit a cigarette and rolled his eyes up to God.

Lounge acts. Blow jobs. Rye and beer for lunch.

Littell walked back to his car lightheaded.

Lenny left twenty minutes later. Littell tailed him to Lake Shore Drive northbound.

Whitecap spray hit the windshield—booming wind had the lake churning. Littell cranked up his heater—too hot replaced too cold.

The liquor left him cotton-mouthed and just a tad woozy. The road kept dipping—just a little.

Lenny signaled to exit. Littell leaped lanes and eased up behind him. They swung down into the Gold Coast—too upscale to be Vendo-King turf.

Lenny turned west on Rush Street. Littell saw high-toned cocktail spots up ahead: brownstone fronts and low-key neon signs.

Lenny parked and walked into Hernando's Hideaway. Littell cruised by extra-slow.

The door swung back. He saw two men kissing—a little half-second teaser blip.

Littell double-parked and switched jackets: lumberjack to blue blazer. The chinos and boots had to stay.

He walked in bucking wind. The place was dark and mid-afternoon quiet. The decor was discreet: all polished wood and forest-green leather.

A banquette section was roped off. Two duos sat at opposite ends of the bar: older men, Lenny and a college boy.

Littell took a seat between them. The bartender ignored him.

Lenny was talking. His inflections were polished now—devoid of growl and Yiddish patter.

"Larry, you should have seen this wretched man eat."

The bartender came over. Littell said, "Rye and beer." Heads turned his way.

The barman poured a shot. Littell downed it and coughed. The barman said, "My, aren't we thirsty!"

Littell reached for his wallet. His ID holder popped out and landed on the bar badge-up.

He grabbed it and threw some change down. The barman said, "Don't we want our beer?"

Littell drove to the office and typed up a tail report. He chewed a roll of Clorets to kill his liquor breath.

He omitted mention of his beverage intake and his blunder at Hernando's Hideaway. He stressed the basic gist: that Lenny Sands might have a secret homosexual life. This might prove to be a recruitment wedge: he was obviously hiding that life from his Mob associates.

Lenny never noticed him. So far, his tail stood uncompromised.

Court Meade rapped on his cubicle screen. “You’ve got a long-distance call, Ward. A man named Boyd in Miami on line 2.”

Littell picked up. “Kemper, hi. What are you doing back in Florida?”

“Working at cross-purposes for Bobby and Mr. Hoover, but don’t tell anyone.”

“Are you getting results?”

“Well, people keep approaching me, and Bobby’s witnesses keep disappearing, so I’d have to call it a toss-up. Ward …”

“You need a favor.”

“Actually, two.”

Littell leaned his chair back. “I’m listening.”

Boyd said, “Helen’s flying into Chicago tonight. United flight 84, New Orleans to Midway. She gets in at 5:10. Will you pick her up and take her to her hotel?”

“Of course. And I’ll take her to dinner, too. Jesus, that’s last-minute but great.”

Boyd laughed. “That’s our Helen, an impetuous traveler. Ward, do you remember that man Roland Kirpaski?”

“Kemper, I saw him three days ago.”

“Yes, you did. In any event, he’s allegedly down in Florida, but I can’t seem to find him. He was supposed to call Bobby and report on Hoffa’s Sun Valley scheme, but he hasn’t called, and he left his hotel last night and hasn’t returned.”

“Do you want me to go by his house and talk to his wife?”

“Yes, if you wouldn’t mind. If you get anything pertinent, leave a coded message with Communications in D.C. I haven’t found a hotel here yet, but I’ll check in with them to see if you’ve called.”

“What’s the address?”

“It’s 818 South Wabash. Roland’s probably off on a toot with some bimbo, but it can’t hurt to see if he’s called home. And Ward?”

“I know. I’ll remember who you’re working for and play it close to the vest.”

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. And by the way, I saw a man today who’s as good a role player as you are.”

Boyd said, “That impossible.”

Mary Kirpaski rushed him inside. The house was overfurnished and way overheated.

Littell took off his overcoat. The woman almost pushed him into the kitchen.

“Roland always calls home every night. He said if he didn’t call on this trip, I should cooperate with the authorities and show them his notebook.”

Littell smelled cabbage and boiled meat. “I’m not with the McClellan Committee, Mrs. Kirpaski. I haven’t really worked with your husband.”

“But you know Mr. Boyd and Mr. Kennedy.”

“I know Mr. Boyd. He’s the one who asked me to check on you.”

She’d chewed her nails bloody. Her lipstick was applied way off-center.

“Roland didn’t call last night. He kept this notebook on Mr. Hoffa’s doings, and he didn’t take it to Washington because he wanted to talk to Mr. Kennedy before he agreed to testify.”

“What notebook?”

“It’s a list of Mr. Hoffa’s Chicago phone calls, with dates and everything like that. Roland said he stole the phone bills of some of Mr. Hoffa’s friends because Mr. Hoffa was afraid to call long distance from his hotel, because he thought his phone might be tapped.”

“Mrs. Kirpaski …”

She grabbed a binder off the breakfast table. “Roland would be so mad if I didn’t show it to the authorities.”

Littell opened the binder. Page 1 listed names and phone numbers, neatly arranged in columns.

Mary Kirpaski crowded up to him. “Roland called up the phone companies in all the different cities and found out who the numbers belonged to. I think he impersonated policemen or something like that.”

Littell flipped pages front to back. Roland Kirpaski printed legibly and neatly.

Several “calls received” names were familiar: Sam Giancana, Carlos Marcello, Anthony Iannone, Santo Trafficante Jr. One name was familiar and scary: Peter Bondurant, 949 Mapleton Drive, Los Angeles.

Hoffa called Big Pete three times recently: 11/25/58, 12/1/58, 12/2/58.

Bondurant snapped manacles bare-handed. He allegedly killed people for ten thousand dollars and plane fare.

Mary Kirpaski was fondling rosary beads. She smelled like Vicks VapoRub and cigarettes.

"Ma'am, could I use the phone?"

She pointed to a wall extension. Littell pulled the cord to the far end of the kitchen.

She left him alone. Littell heard a radio snap on one room over.

He dialed the long-distance operator. She put him through to the security desk at L.A. International Airport.

A man answered. "Sergeant Donaldson, may I help you?"

"This is Special Agent Littell, Chicago FBI. I need an expedite on some reservation information."

"Yes, sir. Tell me what you need."

"I need you to query the airlines that fly Los Angeles to Miami round-trip. I'm looking for reservations going out on either December the eighth, ninth or tenth, and returning any time after that. I'm looking for a reservation under the name Peter Bondurant, spelled B-O-N-D-U-R-A-N-T, or reservations charged to the Hughes Tool Company or Hughes Aircraft. If you turn up positive on any of that, and the reservation is in a man's name, I need a physical description of the man either picking up his ticket or boarding the airplane."

"Sir, that last part is needle-in-a-haystack stuff."

"I don't think so. My suspect is a male Caucasian in his late thirties, and he's about six-foot-five and very powerfully built. If you see him, you don't forget him."

"I copy. Do you want me to call you back?"

"I'll hold. If you don't get me anything in ten minutes, come back on the line and take my number."

"Yes, sir. You hold now. I'll get right on this."

Littell held the line. An image held him: Big Pete Bondurant crucified. The kitchen cut through it: cramped, hot, saints' days marked on a parish calendar—

Eight minutes crawled by. The sergeant came back on the line, excited.

"Mr. Littell?"

"Yes."

"Sir, we hit. I didn't think we would, but we did."

Littell got out his notebook. “Tell me.”

“American Airlines flight 104, Los Angeles to Miami. It left L.A. at 8:00 a.m. yesterday, December 10th, and arrived in Miami at 4:10 p.m. The reservation was made under the name Thomas Peterson and was charged to Hughes Aircraft. I talked to the agent who issued the ticket, and she remembered that man you described. You were right, you don’t forget—”

“Is there a return reservation?”

“Yes, sir. American flight 55. It arrives in Los Angeles at 7:00 a.m. tomorrow morning.”

Littell felt dizzy. He cracked a window for some air.

“Sir, are you there?”

Littell cut the man off and dialed O. A cold breeze flooded the kitchen.

“Operator.”

“I need Washington, D.C. The number is KL4-8801.”

“Yes, sir, just one minute.”

The call went through fast. A man said, “Communications, Special Agent Reynolds.”

“This is Special Agent Littell in Chicago. I need to transmit a message to SA Kemper Boyd in Miami.”

“Is he with the Miami office?”

“No, he’s on a detached assignment. I need you to transmit the message to the Miami SAC and have him locate SA Boyd. I think it’s a matter of a hotel check, and if it wasn’t so urgent, I’d do it myself.”

“This is irregular, but I don’t see why we can’t do it. What’s your message?”

Littell spoke slowly. “Have circumstantial and suppositional—underline those two words—evidence that J.H. hired our old oversized French confrere to eliminate Committee witness R.K. Our confrere leaves Miami late tonight, American flight 55. Call me in Chicago for details. Urge that you inform Robert K. immediately. Sign it W.J.L.”

The agent repeated the message. Littell heard Mary Kirpaski sobbing just outside the kitchen door.

Helen’s flight was late. Littell waited in a cocktail lounge near the gate.

He rechecked the phone call list. His instinct held firm: Pete

Bondurant killed Roland Kirpaski.

Kemper mentioned a dead witness named Gretzler. If he could connect the man to Bondurant, TWO murder charges might fly.

Littell sipped rye and beer. He kept checking the back wall mirror to gauge his appearance.

His work clothes looked wrong. His glasses and thinning hair didn't jibe with them.

The rye burned; the beer tickled. Two men walked up to his table and grabbed him.

They jerked him upright. They clamped down on his elbows. They steered him back to an enclosed phone bank.

It was swift and sure—no civilian patrons caught it.

The men pinned his arms back. Chick Leahy stepped out of a shadow and got right up in his face.

Littell felt his knees go. The men propped him up on his toes.

Leahy said, "Your message to Kemper Boyd was intercepted. You could have violated his cover on the incursion. Mr. Hoover does not want to see Robert Kennedy aided, and Peter Bondurant is a valued colleague of Howard Hughes, who is a great friend of Mr. Hoover and the Bureau. Do you know what *fully* coded messages are, Mr. Littell?"

Littell blinked. His glasses fell off. Everything went blurry.

Leahy jabbed his chest, hard. "You're off the THP and back on the Red Squad as of now. And I strongly urge you not to protest."

One man grabbed his notebook. The other man said, "You reek of liquor."

They elbowed him aside and walked out. The whole thing took thirty seconds.

His arms hurt. His glasses were scratched and dented. He couldn't quite breathe or stay balanced on his feet.

He swerved back to his table. He choked down rye and beer and leveled his shakes out.

His glasses fit crooked. He checked out his new mirror image: the world's most ineffectual workingman.

An intercom boomed, "United flight 84 from New Orleans is now arriving."

Littell finished his drinks and chased them with two Clorets. He walked over to the gate and bucked passengers up to the jetway.

Helen saw him and dropped her bags. Her hug almost knocked him down.

People stepped around them. Littell said, “Hey, let me see you.”

Helen looked up. Her head grazed his chin—she’d grown tail.

“You look wonderful.”

“It’s Max Factor number-four blush. It does wonders for my scars.”

“What scars?”

“Very funny. And what are *you* now, a lumberjack?”

“I was. For a few days, at least.”

“Susan says Mr. Hoover’s finally letting you chase gangsters.”

A man kicked Helen’s garment bag and glared at them. Littell said, “Come on, I’ll buy you dinner.”

They had steaks at the Stockyard Inn. Helen talked a blue streak and got tipsy on red wine.

She’d gone from coltish to rangy; her face had settled in strong. She’d quit smoking—she said she knew it was fake sophistication.

She always wore her hair in a bun to flaunt her scars. She wore it down now—it rendered her disfigurement matter-of-fact.

A waiter pushed the dessert cart by. Helen ordered pecan pie; Littell ordered brandy.

“Ward, you’re letting me do all the talking.”

“I was waiting to summarize.”

“Summarize what?”

“You at age twenty-one.”

Helen groaned. “I was starting to feel mature.”

Littell smiled. “I was going to say that you’ve become poised, but not at the expense of your exuberance. You used to trip over your words when you wanted to make a point, but now you think before you talk.”

“Now people just trip over my luggage when I’m excited about meeting a man.”

“A man? You mean a friend twenty-four years your senior who watched you grow up?”

She touched his hands. “A man. I had a professor at Tulane who said that things change with old friends and students and teachers, so what’s a quarter of a century here and there?”

“You’re saying he was twenty-five years older than you?”

Helen laughed. “Twenty-six. He was trying to minimize things to make them seem less embarrassing.”

“You’re saying you had an affair with him?”

"Yes. And I'm saying it wasn't lurid and pathetic, but going out with undergrad boys who thought I'd be easy because I was scarred up was."

Littell said, "Jesus Christ."

Helen waved her fork at him. "Now I know you're upset, because some part of you is still a Jesuit seminarian, and you only invoke our Savior's name when you're flustered."

Littell sipped brandy. "I was going to say, 'Jesus Christ, have Kemper and I ruined you for young men your own age?' Are you going to spend your youth chasing middle-aged men?"

"You should hear Susan and Claire and I talk."

"You mean my daughter and her best friends swear like longshoremen?"

"No, but we've been discussing men in general and you and Kemper in specific for years, in case you've felt your ears burning."

"I can understand Kemper. He's handsome and dangerous."

"Yes, and he's heroic. But he's a tomcat, and even Claire knows it."

Helen squeezed his hands. He felt his pulse racing. He got this Jesus Fucking Christ crazy idea.

Littell took off his glasses. "I'm not so sure Kemper's heroic. I think heroes are truly passionate and generous."

"That sounds like an epigram."

"It is. Senator John F. Kennedy said it."

"Are you enamored of him? Isn't he some terrible liberal?"

"I'm enamored of his brother Robert, who is truly heroic."

Helen pinched herself. "This is the strangest conversation to be having with an old family friend who's known me since before my father died."

That Idea—Jesus Christ.

Littell said, "I'll be heroic for you."

Helen said, "We can't let this be pathetic."

He drove her to her hotel and carried her bags upstairs. Helen kissed him goodbye on the lips. His glasses snagged in her hair and fell to the floor.

Littell drove back to Midway and caught a 2:00 a.m. flight to Los Angeles. A stewardess gawked at his ticket: his return flight left an hour after they landed.

One last brandy let him sleep. He woke up woozy just as the plane touched down.

He made it with fourteen minutes to spare. Flight 55 from Miami was landing at gate 9, on time.

Littell badged a guard and got permission to walk out on the tarmac. A wicked hangover headache started kicking in.

Baggage men cruised by and checked him out. He looked like a middle-aged bum who'd slept in his clothes.

The airplane landed. A ground crew pushed passenger steps out.

Bondurant exited up front. Jimmy Hoffa flew his killers first-class.

Littell walked up to him. His chest hammered and his legs went numb. His voice fluttered and broke.

"Someday I'm going to punish you. For Kirpaski and everything else."

10

(Los Angeles, 12/14/58)

Freddy left a note under the wiper blades:

"I'm getting some lunch. Wait for me."

Pete climbed in the back of the van. Freddy had a cooling system rigged: a fan aimed at a big bowl of ice cubes.

Tape spun. Lights flashed. Graph needles twitched. The place was like the cockpit of a low-rent spaceship.

Pete cracked a side window for some air. A Fed type walked by —probably listening-post personnel.

Air blew in—Santa Ana hot.

Pete dropped an ice cube down his pants and laughed falsetto. He sounded just like SA Ward J. Littell.

Littell squeaked his warning. Littell smelled like stale booze and sweat. Littell had jackshit for evidence.

He could have told him:

I whacked Anton Gretzler, but Hoffa killed Kirpaski. I stuffed shotgun shells in his mouth and glued his lips shut. We torched Roland and his car at a refuse dump. Double-aught buckshot blew his head up—you'll never get a dental-work ID.

Littell doesn't know that Jack's big mouth killed Roland

Kirpaski. The listening-post Fed might be sending him tapes—but Littell hasn't put the scenario together.

Freddy climbed in the van. He adjusted some graph gizmo and spritzed grief straight off.

"That Fed that just walked by keeps checking out the van. I'm parked here at all fucking hours, and all he needs to do is sweep me with a fucking Geiger counter to figure out I'm doing the same fucking thing he is. I can't park around the fucking block 'cause I'll lose the fucking signal. I need a fucking house around here to work from, 'cause then I can set up some equipment that's fucking powerful enough to pick up from the Shoftel babe's pad, but that fucking Fed bagged the last fucking For Rent sign in the fucking neighborhood, and the fucking two hundred a day you and Jimmy are paying me ain't enough to make up for the fucking risks I'm taking."

Pete snagged an ice cube and squeezed it into shards. "Are you finished?"

"No. I've also got a fucking boil on my fucking ass from sleeping on the fucking floor here."

Pete popped a few knuckles. "Wrap it up."

"I need some *good* money. I need it for fucking hazardous-duty pay, and to upgrade this operation with. Get me some good money and I'll kick a nice piece of it back to you."

"I'll talk to Mr. Hughes and see what I can do."

Howard Hughes got his dope from a nigger drag queen named Peaches. Pete found the drop pad cleaned out—the queen next door said Peaches went up on a sodomy bounce.

Pete improvised.

He drove to a supermarket, bought a box of Rice Krispies and pinned the toy badge inside to his shirt front. He called Karen Hiltscher at R&I and glommed some prime information: the fry cook at Scrivner's Drive-In sold goofballs and might be extortable. She described him: white, skinny, acne scars and Nazi tattoos.

Pete drove to Scrivner's. The kitchen door was open; the geek was at the deep fryer, dipping spuds.

The geek saw him.

The geek said, "That badge is a fake."

The geek looked at the freezer—a sure sign that he stored his shit there.

Pete said, “How do you want to do this?”

The geek pulled a knife. Pete kicked him in the balls and deep-fried his knife hand. Six seconds only—pill heists didn’t rate total mayhem.

The geek screamed. Street noise leveled out the sound. Pete shoved a sandwich in his mouth to muzzle him.

His dope stash was in the freezer next to the ice cream.

• • •

The hotel manager gave Mr. Hughes a Christmas tree. It was fully flocked and decorated—a bellboy left it outside the bungalow.

Pete carried it into the bedroom and plugged it in. Sparkly lights blinked and twinkled.

Hughes blipped off a Webster Webfoot cartoon. “What is this? And why are you carrying a tape recorder?”

Pete dug through his pockets and tossed pill vials under the tree. “Ho, ho, fucking ho. It’s Christmas ten days early. Codeine and Dilaudid, ho, ho.”

Hughes scrunched himself up on his pillows. “Well … I’m delighted. But aren’t you supposed to be auditioning stringers for *Hush-Hush*?”

Pete yanked the tree cord and plugged in the tape rig. “Do you still hate Senator John F. Kennedy, Boss?”

“I certainly do. His father screwed me on business deals going back to 1927.”

Pete brushed pine needles off his shirt. “I think we’ve got the means to juke him pretty good in *Hush-Hush*, if you’ve got the money to keep a certain operation going.”

“I’ve got the money to buy the North American continent, and if you don’t quit leading me on I’ll put you on a slow boat to the Belgian Congo!”

Pete pressed the Play button. Senator Jack and Darleen Shoftel boned and groaned. Howard Hughes clutched his bedsheets, dead ecstatic.

The fuck crescendoed and diminuendoed. Jack K. said, “My god-damn back gave out.”

Darleen said, “It was goooood. Short and sweet’s the best.”

Pete pressed Stop. Howard Hughes twitched and trembled.

“We can have *Hush-Hush* print this up if we’re careful, Boss. But we've got to watch the wording real close."

"Where … did … you … get that?"

"The girl's a prostitute. The FBI had her place wired, and Freddy Turentine hooked up on top of it. So we can't print anything that would tip the Feds off. We can't print anything that only could have come from the bug."

Hughes plucked at his sheets. "Yes, I'll finance your 'operation.' Have Gail Hendee write the story up—something like 'Priapic Senator Dallies with Hollywood Playgirl.' We've got an issue coming out the day after tomorrow, so if Gail writes it today and gets it to the office by this evening, it can make that next issue. Have Gail write it today. The Kennedy family will ignore it, but the legitimate newspapers and wire services might come to us asking for details to enlarge the story, which of course we will give them."

Big Howard beamed kid-at-Christmas-like. Pete plugged his tree back in.

Gail needed convincing. Pete sat her down on the watchdog-house veranda and laid out a line of sweet talk.

"Kennedy's a geek. He had you meet him on his goddamned honeymoon. He dropped you two weeks later, and kissed you off with a god-damn mink coat."

Gail smiled. "He was nice, though. He never said, 'Honey, let's get a divorce racket going.' "

"When your old man's worth a hundred million dollars, you don't have to do things like that."

Gail sighed. "You win, like always. And you know why I haven't been wearing that mink lately?"

"No."

"I gave it to Mrs. Walter P. Kinnard. You took a big cut of her alimony, and I figured she could use some cheering up."

Twenty-four hours zipped by.

Hughes kicked loose thirty grand. Pete pocketed fifteen. If the *Hush-Hush* smear exposed the bug, he'd be covered financially.

Freddy bought a long-range transceiver and started looking for a house.

That Fed kept eyeballing his van. Jack K. didn't call or drop by.

Freddy figured Darleen was only worth one poke.

Pete stuck by the watchdog-house phone. Geeks kept interrupting his daydreams.

Two *Hush-Hush* stringer prospects called: ex-vice cops hipped on Hollywood lowdown. They flunked his impromptu pop quiz: Who's Ava Gardner fucking?

He made some calls out—and planted a new Hughes double at the Beverly Hilton. Karen Hiltscher recommended the man: her scabby wino father-in-law. Pops said he'd work for three hots and a cot. Pete booked the Presidential Suite and placed a standing room-service order: T-bird and cheeseburgers for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Jimmy Hoffa called. He said, The *Hush-Hush* thing sounds good, but I want MORE! Pete neglected to share his basic opinion: Jack and Darleen were just a two-minute mattress ride.

He kept thinking about Miami. The cabstand, colorful spics, tropical sunshine.

Miami felt like adventure. Miami felt like money.

He woke up early publication morning. Gail was gone—she'd taken to avoiding him with aimless drives to the beach.

Pete walked outside. His first-press-run copy was stuffed in the mailbox, per instructions.

Dig the cover lines: "Tomcat Senator Likes Catnip! Ask Nipped-At L.A. Kittens!" Dig the illustration: John Kennedy's face on a cartoon cat's body, the tail wrapped around a blonde in a bikini.

He flipped to the piece. Gail used the pen name Peerless Politicopundit.

> U.S. Senate cloakroom wags say he's far from being the most dedicatedly demonic Democrat dallier. No, Senator L.B. (Lover Boy?) Johnson probably tops political polis in that department, with Florida's George F. 'Pass the Smackeroos' Smathers coming in second. No, Senator John F. Kennedy is rather a tenuously tumescent tomcat, with a tantalizingly trenchant taste for those finely-furred and felicitous felines who find him fantastically fetching themselves!

Pete skimmed the rest. Gail played it half-assed—the smear wasn't vicious enough. Jack Kennedy ogled women and "bewitched, bothered and bewildered" them with "baubles, bangles, beads" and "brilliant Boston beatitudes." No heavy-duty skank; no implied fucking; no snide jabs at Two-Minute-Man Jack.

Perk, perk, perk—his all-star feelers started twitching—

Pete drove downtown and cruised by the *Hush-Hush* warehouse. Things looked absolutely first-glance SOP.

Men were wheeling bound stacks out on dollies. Men were loading pallets. A line of newsstand trucks were backed up to the dock.

SOP, but:

Two unmarked prowl cars were parked down the street. That ice cream wagon idling by looked dicey—the driver was talking into a hand mike.

Pete circled the block. The fuzz multiplied: four unmarkeds at the curb and two black & whites around the corner.

He circled again. The shit hit the fan and sprayed out in all directions.

Four units were jammed up to the loading dock—running full lights and siren.

Plainclothesmen piled out. A bluesuit cordon hit the warehouse with cargo hooks.

An LAPD van blocked the distribution trucks off. Swampers dropped their loads and threw their hands up.

It was fucking scandal-rag chaos. It was fucking skank-sheet Armaggedon—

Pete drove to the Beverly Hills Hotel. A Big Ugly Picture formed: somebody ratted off the Kennedy issue.

He parked and ran by the pool. He saw a big crowd outside the Hughes bungalow.

They were peeping in Big Howard's bedroom window. They looked like fucking ghouls at an accident scene.

He ran up and pushed to the front. Billy Eckstine nudged him. "Hey, check this out."

The window was open. Two men were jacking up Mr. Hughes—double-teaming him with Big Verbal Grief.

Robert Kennedy and Joseph P. Kennedy Sr.

Hughes was swaddled in bed quilts. Bobby was waving a hypo.

Old Joe was raging.

"… You're a pathetic lecher and a narcotics addict. I am two seconds away from exposing you to the whole wide world, and if you think I'm bluffing please note that I opened the window to let your hotel neighbors have a sneak preview of what the whole world will know if you ever allow your filthy scandal rag to write another word about my family."

Hughes cringed. His head banged the wall and sent a picture frame toppling.

Some all-star voyeurs dug the show: Billy, Mickey Cohen, some faggot Mouseketeer sporting a jumbo mouse-ear beanie.

Howard Hughes whimpered. Howard Hughes said, "Please don't hurt me."

• • •

Pete drove to the Shoftel pad. The Big Ugly Picture expanded: either Gail snitched or the Feds exposed the piggyback.

He pulled up behind Freddy's van. Freddy was down on his knees in the street—cuffed to the front-bumper housing.

Pete ran over. Freddy yanked at his shackle chain and tried to stand up.

He'd scraped his wrist bloody. He'd ripped his knees raw crawling on the pavement.

Pete knelt down in front of him. "What happened? Quit grabbing at that and look at me."

Freddy did some wrist contortions. Pete slapped him. Freddy snapped to and focused in half-alert.

He said, "The listening-post guy sent his transcripts to some Fed in Chicago and told him he was hinked on my van. Pete, this thing plays wrong to me. There's just one FBI guy working single-o, like he went off half-cocked or some—"

Pete ran across the lawn and bolted the porch. Darleen Shoftel ducked out of his way, snapped a high heel and fell on her ass.

The Big and Ugly Final Picture:

Spackle-coated mikes on the floor. Two tap-gutted phones belly-up on an end table.

And SA Ward J. Littell, standing there in an off-the-rack blue suit.

It was a stalemate. You don't whack FBI men impromptu.

Pete walked up to him. He said, “This is a bullshit roust, or you wouldn’t be here alone.”

Littell just stood there. His glasses slipped down his nose.

“You keep flying out here to bother me. Next time’s the last time.”

Littell said, “I’ve put it together.” The words came out all quivery.

“I’m listening.”

“Kemper Boyd told me he had an errand at the Beverly Hills Hotel. He talked to you there, and you got suspicious and tailed him. You saw us black-bag this place and got your friend to put in auxiliary wires. Senator Kennedy told Miss Shoftel about Roland Kirpaski testifying, and you heard it and talked Jimmy Hoffa into giving you the contract.”

Booze guts. This skinny stringbean cop with 8:00 a.m. liquor breath.

“You’ve got no proof, and Mr. Hoover doesn’t care.”

“You’re right. I can’t arrest you and Turentine.”

Pete smiled. “I’ll bet Mr. Hoover liked the tapes. I’ll bet he won’t be too pleased that you blew this operation.”

Littell slapped his face. Littell said, “That’s for the blood on John Kennedy’s hands.”

The slap was weak. Most women slapped harder.

He knew she’d leave a note. He found it on their bed, next to her house keys.

> I know you figured out I soft-soaped the article. When the editor didn’t question it I realized it wasn’t enough and called Bob Kennedy. He said he would probably be able to pull strings and get the issue pulled. Jack is sort of callous in some ways, but he doesn’t deserve what you planned. I don’t want to be with you any more. Please don’t try to find me.

She left the clothes he bought her. Pete dumped them out in the street and watched cars drive over them.

11

(Washington, D.C., 12/18/58)

"To say that I am furious belittles the concept of fury. To say that consider your actions outrageous demeans the notion of outrage."

Mr. Hoover paused. The pillow on his chair made him tower over two tail men.

Kemper looked at Littell. They sat flush in front of Hoover's desk.

Littell said, "I understand your position, Sir."

Hoover patted his lips with a handkerchief. "I do not believe you. And I do not rate the value of objective awareness nearly as high as I rate the virtue of loyalty."

Littell said, "I acted impetuously, Sir. I apologize for that."

" 'Impetuous' describes your attempt to contact Mr. Boyd and foist your preposterous Bondurant suspicions on him and Robert Kennedy. 'Duplicitous' and 'treacherous' describe your unauthorized flight to Los Angeles to uproot an official Bureau operation."

"I considered Bondurant a murder suspect, Sir. I thought that he had implemented a piggyback on the surveillance equipment that Mr. Boyd and I had installed, and I was correct."

Hoover said nothing. Kemper knew he'd let the silence build.

The operation blew from two flanks. Bondurant's girlfriend tipped Bobby to a smear piece; Ward logicked out the Kirpaski hit himself. That logic held a certain validity: Pete was in Miami concurrent with Roland.

Hoover fondled a paperweight. "Is murder a Federal offense, Mr. Littell?"

"No, Sir."

"Are Robert Kennedy and the McClellan Committee direct rivals of the Bureau?"

"I don't consider them that, Sir."

"Then you are a confused and naive man, which your recent actions more than confirm."

Littell sat perfectly still. Kemper saw his pulse hammer his shirt front.

Hoover folded his hands. "January 16, 1961, marks the twentieth anniversary of your Bureau appointment. You are to retire on that day. You are to work at the Chicago office until then. You are to remain on the CPUSA Surveillance Squad until the day you retire."

Littell said, "Yes, Sir."

Hoover stood up. Kemper stood a beat later, per protocol. Littell stood up too fast—his chair teetered.

"You owe your continued career and pension to Mr. Boyd, who was most persuasive in convincing me to be lenient. I expect you to repay my generosity by promising to maintain absolute silence regarding Mr. Boyd's McClellan Committee and Kennedy family incursion. *Do you* promise that, Mr. Littell?"

"Yes, Sir. I do."

Hoover walked out.

Kemper put his drawl on. "You can breathe now, son."

The Mayflower bar featured wraparound banquettes. Kemper sat Littell down and thawed him out with a double scotch-on-the-rocks.

They bucked sleet walking over—there was no chance to talk. Ward took the thrashing better than he expected.

Kemper said, "Any regrets?"

"Not really. I was going to retire at twenty years, and the THP is a half-measure at best."

“Are you rationalizing?”

“I don’t think so. I’ve had a …”

“Finish the thought. Don’t let me explicate for you.”

“Well … I’ve had a … taste of something very dangerous and good.”

“And you like it.”

“Yes. It’s almost as if I’ve touched a new world.”

Kemper stirred his martini. “Do you know why Mr. Hoover allowed you to remain with the Bureau?”

“Not exactly.”

“I convinced him that you were volatile, irrational and addicted to taking heedless risks. The element of truth in that convinced him that you were better off inside the barn pissing out than outside the barn pissing in. He wanted me there to buttress the intimidation, and if he had signaled me I would have laced into you myself.”

Littell smiled. “Kemper, you’re leading me. You’re like an attorney drawing out a witness.”

“Yes, and you’re a provocative witness. Now, let me ask you a question. What do you think Pete Bondurant has planned for you?”

“My death?”

“Your postretirement death, more likely. He murdered his own brother, Ward. And his parents killed themselves when they found out. It’s a Bondurant rumor that I’ve chosen to believe.”

Littell said, “Jesus Christ.”

He was awed. It was a perfectly lucid response.

Kemper speared the olive in his glass. “Are you going to continue the work you started without Bureau sanction?”

“Yes. I’ve got a good informant prospect now, and—”

“I don’t want to know specifics just yet. I just want you to convince me that you understand the risks from both within and outside the Bureau, and that you won’t behave foolishly.”

Littell smiled—and *almost* looked bold. “Hoover would crucify me. If the Chicago Mob knew I was investigating them without sanction, they’d torture and kill me. Kemper, I’ve got a wild notion about where you’re leading me.”

“Tell me.”

“You’re thinking of working for Robert Kennedy for real. He’s gotten to you, and you respect the work he’s doing. You’re going to turn things over a notch and start feeding Hoover a minimum of information and selected misinformation."

Lyndon Johnson waltzed a redhead by the back booths. He'd seen her before—Jack said he could arrange an introduction.

"You're right, but it's the senator I want to work for. Bobby's more your type. He's as Catholic as you are, and the Mob is just as much his raison d'être."

"And you'll feed Hoover as much information as you deem fit."

"Yes."

"The inherent duplicities won't bother you?"

"Don't judge me, Ward."

Littell laughed. "You enjoy my judgments. You enjoy it that someone besides Mr. Hoover has your number. So *I'll* warn *you*. Be careful with the Kennedys."

Kemper raised his glass. "I will be. And you should know that Jack might damn well be elected President two years from now. If he is, Bobby will have carte blanche to fight organized crime. A Kennedy administration might mean considerable opportunities for both of us."

Littell raised his glass. "An opportunist like you would know."

"*Salud*. Can I tell Bobby that you'll share your intelligence with the Committee? Anonymously?"

"Yes. And it just hit me that I retire four days before the next presidential inauguration. Should your profligate friend Jack be the one taking office, you might mention a worthy lawyer-cop who needs a job."

Kemper pulled out an envelope. "You were always a quick study. And you forget that Claire has both our numbers."

"You're smirking, Kemper. Read me what you've got there."

Kemper unrolled a sheet of notebook paper. "Quote, 'And Dad, you wouldn't believe this one a.m. phone call I got from Helen. Are you sitting down? She had a hot date with Uncle Ward (date of birth March 8, 1913, to Helen's October 29, 1937) and necked with him in her room. Wait until Susan finds out! Helen's always sideswiped older men, but this is like Snow White attacking Walt Disney! And I always thought you were the one she had eyes for,' unquote."

Littell stood up, blushing. "She's meeting me later, at my hotel. I told her men liked women who traveled for them. And she's been the pursuer so far."

“Helen Agee is a college girl in the guise of a Mack truck. Remember that if things get complicated.”

Littell laughed, and walked off primping. His posture was good, but those dented glasses had to go.

Idealists disdained appearances. Ward had no flair for nice things.

Kemper ordered a second martini and watched the back booths. Echoes drifted his way—congressmen were talking up Cuba.

John Stanton called Cuba a potential Agency hotspot. He said, I might have work for you.

Jack Kennedy walked in. Lyndon Johnson’s redhead passed him a napkin note.

Jack saw Kemper and winked.

Part II

12

(Chicago, 1/1/59)

Unidentified Male #1: “Beard, schmeard. All I know is Mo’s real fuckin’ nervous.”

Unidentified Male #2: “The Outfit’s always covered its bets Cuba-wise. Santo T. is Batista’s best fuckin’ friend. I talked to Mo maybe an hour ago. He goes out for the paper and comes back to watch the fuckin’ Rose Bowl on TV. The paper says Happy fuckin’ New Year, Castro has just taken over Cuba and who knows if he’s pro-U.S., pro-Russian or pro-Man-from-Mars.”

Littell tilted his seat back and adjusted his headphones. It was 4:00 p.m. and snowing—but the Celano’s Tailor Shop talkfest talked on.

He was alone at the THP bug post. He was violating Bureau regs and Mr. Hoover’s direct orders.

Man #1: “Santo and Sam got to be sweating the casinos down there. The gross profit’s supposed to run half a million a day.”

Man #2: “Mo told me Santo called him right before the kickoff. The crazy fuckin’ Cubans down in Miami are pitching a fit. Mo’s got a piece of that cabstand, you know the one?”

Man #1: “Yeah, the Tiger Kabs. I went down there for the

Teamster convention last year and rode in one of those cabs, and I was picking orange and black fuzz out of my ass for the next six fuckin' months."

Man #2: "Half those Cuban humps are pro-Beard, and half of them are pro-Batista. Santo told Sam it's nuts at the stand, like niggers when their welfare checks don't arrive."

Laughter hit the feed box—static-laced and overamplified. Littell unhooked his headset and stretched.

He had two hours left on his shift. He'd gleaned no salient intelligence so far: Cuban politics didn't interest him. He'd logged in ten days of covert listening—and accrued no hard evidence.

He cut a deal with SA Court Meade—a surreptitious work trade. Meade's mistress lived in Rogers Park; some Commie cell leaders lived nearby. They worked out an agreement: I take your job, you take mine.

They spent cosmetic time working their real assignments and flip-flopped all report writing. Meade chased Reds and an insurance-rich widow. He listened to hoodlums colloquialize.

Court was lazy and pension-secure. Court had twenty-seven years with the Bureau.

He was careful. *He* hoarded insider knowledge of Kemper Boyd's Kennedy incursion. *He* filed detailed Red Squad reports and forged Meade's signature on all THP memoranda.

He always watched the street for approaching agents. He always entered and exited the bug post surreptitiously.

The plan would work—for a while. The lackluster bug talk was vexing—he needed to recruit an informant.

He'd tailed Lenny Sands for ten consecutive nights. Sands did not habituate homosexual meeting spots. His sexual bent might not prove exploitable—Sands might belittle the threat of exposure.

Snow swirled up Michigan Avenue. Littell studied his one wallet photo.

It was a laminated snapshot of Helen. Her hairdo made her burn scars stand out.

The first time he kissed her scars she wept. Kemper called her "the Mack Truck Girl." He gave her a Mack truck bulldog hood hanger for Christmas.

Claire Boyd told Susan they were lovers. Susan said, "When the shock wears off, I'll tell Dad what I think."

She still hadn't called him.

Littell put on his headset. He heard the tailor shop door slam.

Unknown Man #1: "Sal, Sal D. Sal, do you believe this weather? Don't you wish you were down in Havana shooting dice with the Beard?"

"Sal D,": most likely Mario Salvatore D'Onofrio, AKA "Mad Sal." Key THP stats:

Independent bookmaker/loan shark. One manslaughter conviction in 1951. Labeled "a psychopathically-derived criminal sadist with uncontrollable psycho-sexual urges to inflict pain."

Unknown Man #2: "*Che se dice*, Salvatore? Tell us what's new and unusual."

Sal D.: "The news is I lost a bundle on the Colts over the Giants, and I had to tap Sam for a fucking loan."

Unknown Man #1: "You still got the church thing, Sal? Where you take the paisan groups out to Tahoe and Vegas?"

Static hit the line. Littell slapped the feed box and cleared the air flow.

Sal D.: "… and Gardena and L.A. We catch Sinatra and Dino, and the casinos set us up in these private slot rooms and kick back a percentage. It's what you call a junket—you know, entertainment and gambling and shit. Hey, Lou, you know Lenny the Jew?"

Lou/Man #1: "Yeah, Sands. Lenny Sands."

Man #2: "Jewboy Lenny. Sam G.'s fuckin' court jester."

Squelch noise drowned out the incoming voices. Littell slapped the console and untangled some feeder cords.

Sal D.: "… So I said, 'Lenny, I need a guy to travel with me. I need a guy to keep my junketeers lubed up and laughing, so they'll lose more money and juke up my kickbacks.' He said, 'Sal, I don't audition, but catch me at the North Side Elks on January 1st. I'm doing a Teamster smoker, and if you don't dig—' "

The heat needle started twitching. Littell hit the kill switch and felt the feed box go cool to the touch.

The D'Onofrio/Sands connection was interesting.

He checked Sal D.'s on-post file. The agent's summary read horrific.

> D'Onofrio lives in a South Side Italian enclave surrounded by Negro-inhabited housing projects. The

> majority of his bettors and loan customers live within that enclave and D'Onofrio makes his collection rounds on foot, rarely missing a day. D'Onofrio considers himself to be a guiding light within his community, and the Cook County Sheriff's Gangster Squad believes that he plays the role of "protector"—i.e., protecting Italian-Americans against Negro criminal elements, and that this role and his strongarm collection and intimidation tactics have helped to insure his long bookmaker/loanshark reign. It should also be noted that D'Onofrio was a suspect in the unsolved 12/19/57 torture-murder of Maurice Theodore Wilkins, a Negro youth suspected of burglarizing a church rectory in his neighborhood.

A mug shot was clipped to the folder. Mad Sal was cyst-scarred and gargoyle ugly.

• • •

Littell drove to the South Side and circled D'Onofrio's loan turf. He spotted him on 59th and Prairie.

The man was walking. Littell ditched his car and foot-tailed him from thirty yards back.

Mad Sal entered apartment buildings and exited counting money. Mad Sal tabulated transactions in a prayer book. Mad Sal picked his nose compulsively and wore low-top tennis shoes in a blizzard.

Littell stuck close behind him. Wind claps covered his footsteps.

Mad Sal peeped in windows. Mad Sal took a beat cop's money: $5 on the Moore/Durelle rematch.

The streets were near-deserted. The tail felt like a sustained hallucination.

A deli clerk tried to stiff Mad Sal. Mad Sal plugged in a portable stapler and riveted his hands to the counter.

Mad Sal entered a church rectory. Littell stopped at the pay phone outside and called Helen.

She picked up on the second ring. "Hello?"

"It's me, Helen."

"What's that noise?"

"It's the wind. I'm calling from a phone booth."

"You're outside in this?"

"Yes. Are you studying?"

"I'm studying torts and welcoming this distraction. Susan called, by the way."

"Oh, shit. And?"

"And she said I'm of age, and you're free, white and forty-five. She said, 'I'm going to wait and see if you two last before I tell my mother.' Ward, are you coming over tonight?"

Mad Sal walked out and slipped on the rectory steps. A priest helped him up and waved goodbye.

Littell took his gloves off and blew on his hands. "I'll be by late. There's a lounge act I have to catch."

"You're being cryptic. You act like Mr. Hoover's looking over your shoulder every second. Kemper tells *his* daughter everything about his work."

Littell laughed. "I want you to analyze the Freudian slip you just made."

Helen whooped. "Oh, God, you're right!"

A Negro boy walked by. Mad Sal bolted after him.

Littell said, "I have to go."

"Come by later."

"I will."

Mad Sal chased the kid. Snowdrifts and low-cut sneakers slowed him down.

The Elks Hall steps were jammed. Non-Teamster admittance looked dicey: goons were running an ID checkpoint at the door.

Men filed in with bottle bags and six-packs. They had union badges pinned to their topcoats—about the same size as Bureau shields.

A fresh swarm hit the steps. Littell held up his FBI badge and pushed to the middle. The stampede jostled him inside.

A blonde in G-string and pasties ran the coat-check concession. The foyer walls were lined with bootleg slot machines. Every pull hit a jackpot—Teamsters scooped up coins and yelled.

Littell pocketed his badge. The crowd whooshed him into a big rec hall.

Card tables faced a raised bandstand. Every table was set up with whisky bottles, paper cups and ice.

Strippers dispensed cigars. Tips bought unlimited fondling.

Littell grabbed a ringside seat. A redhead dodged hands, naked—cash wads had popped her G-string.

The lights went down. A baby spot hit the bandstand. Littell built a quick scotch-on-the-rocks.

Three other men sat at his table. Total strangers pounded his back.

Lenny Sands walked on stage, twirling a mike cord à la Sinatra. Lenny mimicked Sinatra—straight down to his spitcurl and voice:

"Fly me to the moon in my souped-up Teamster rig! I'll put skidmarks on management's ass, 'cause my union contract's big! In other words, Teamsters are kings!!"

The audience hooted and yelled. A man grabbed a stripper and forced her into some dirty-dog dance steps.

Lenny Sands bowed. "Thank you thank you thank you! And ring-a-ding, men of the Northern Illinois Council of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters!"

The crowd applauded. A stripper brought ice refills by—Littell caught a breast in the face.

Lenny said, "It sure is hot up here!"

The stripper hopped on stage and dropped ice cubes down his pants. The audience howled; the man beside Littell squealed and spat bourbon.

Lenny made ecstatic faces. Lenny shook his trouser legs until the ice dropped out.

The crowd wolf-whistled and shrieked and thumped their tables—

The stripper ducked behind a curtain. Lenny put on a Boston accent—Bobby Kennedy's voice pushed into soprano range.

"Now you listen to me, Mr. Hoffa! You quit associating with those nasty gangsters and nasty truck drivers and snitch off all your friends or I'll tell my daddy on you!"

The room rocked. The room rolled. Foot stomps had the floor shaking.

"Mr. Hoffa, you're a no-goodnik and a nasty man! You quit trying to unionize my six children or I'll tell my daddy and my big brother Jack on you! You be nice or I'll tell my daddy to buy your union and make all your nasty truck drivers servants at our family compound in Hyannis Port!"

The room roared. Littell felt queasy-hot and lightheaded.

Lenny minced. Lenny preened. Lenny DID Robert F. Kennedy, faggot crusader.

“Mr. Hoffa, you stop that nasty forced bargaining this instant!”

“Mr. Hoffa, stop yelling, you’re wilting my hairdo!”

“Mr. Hoffa, be NIIICE!”

Lenny squeezed the room dry. Lenny wrung it out from the basement to the roof.

“Mr. Hoffa, you’re just SOOOOO butch!”

“Mr. Hoffa, quit scratching—you’ll ruin my nylons!”

“Mr. Hoffa, your Teamsters are just TOOOOO sexy! They’ve got the McClellan Committee and me in such a TIZZY!”

Lenny kept it cranking. Littell caught something three drinks in: he never ridiculed *John* Kennedy. Kemper called it the Bobby/Jack dichotomy: if you liked one man, you disliked the other.

“Mr. Hoffa, stop confusing me with facts!”

“Mr. Hoffa, stop berating me, or I won’t share my hairdressing secrets with your wife!”

The Elks Hall broiled. Open windows laced in freezing air. The drink ice ran out—strippers filled bowls with fresh snow.

Mob men table-hopped. Littell spotted file-photo faces.

Sam “Mo”/“Momo”/“Mooney” Giancana. Icepick Tony Iannone, Chimob underboss. Donkey Dan Versace, Fat Bob Paolucci, Mad Sal D’Onofrio himself.

Lenny wrapped it up. The strippers shimmied on stage and took bows.

“So fly me to the stars, union paycheck fat! Jimmy Hoffa is our tiger now—Bobby’s just a scrawny rat! In other words, Teamsters are kings!!!!”

Table thumps, claps, cheers, yells, whistles, howls—

Littell ran out a back exit and sucked air in. His sweat froze; his legs fluttered; his scotch dinner stayed down.

He checked the door. A conga line snaked through the rec hall—strippers and Teamsters linked up hands-to-hips. Mad Sal joined them—his tennis shoes squished and leaked snow.

Littell caught his breath and slow-walked around to the parking lot. Lenny Sands was cooling off by his car, scooping ice packs from a snow drift.

Mad Sal walked up and hugged him. Lenny made a face and pulled free.

Littell crouched behind a limousine. Their voices carried his way.

“Lenny, what can I say? You were stupendous.”

“Insider crowds are easy, Sal. You just gotta know what switches to flip.”

“Lenny, a crowd’s a crowd. These Teamsters are working Joes, just like my junket guys. You lay off the politics and pour on the Italian stuff. I fuckin’ guarantee, every time you lay on the paisan stuff you’ll have a roomful of hyenas on your hands.”

“I don’t know, Sal. I might have a Vegas gig coming up.”

“I am fuckin’ begging you, Lenny. And my fuckin’ junketeers are well known as the biggest casino losers in fuckin’ captivity. Va-va-voom, Lenny. The more they lose, the more we make.”

“I don’t know, Sal. I might have a chance to open for Tony Bennett at the Dunes.”

“Lenny, I am begging. On all fours like a fuckin’ dog I am begging.”

Lenny laughed. “Before you start barking, go to fifteen percent.”

“Fifteen? … fuck … You Jew me up, you fuckin’ Jew hump.”

“Twenty percent, then. I only associate with Jew haters for a price.”

“Fuck you, Lenny. You said fifteen.”

“Fuck *you*, Sal. I changed my mind.”

Silence stretched—Littell visualized a long staredown.

“Okay okay okay. Okay for fuckin’ twenty, you fuckin’ Jew bandit.”

“Sal, I like you. Just don’t shake my hand, you’re too greasy to touch.”

Car doors slammed. Littell saw Mad Sal snag his Caddy and slalom out to the street.

Lenny turned on his headlights and idled the engine. Cigarette smoke blew out the driver’s-side window.

Littell walked to his car. Lenny was parked two rows over—he’d spot his departure.

Lenny just sat there. Drunks careened in front of his beams and took pratfalls on ice.

Littell wiped ice off his windshield. The car sat in snow up to its bumpers.

Lenny pulled out. Littell cut him a full minute’s slack and followed his tracks in the slush.

They led straight to Lake Shore Drive northbound. Littell caught up with him just short of the ramp.

Lenny swung on. Littell stayed four car lengths behind him.

It was a crawl tail—tire chains on crusted blacktop—two cars and one deserted expressway.

Lenny passed the Gold Coast off-ramps. Littell dawdled back and fixed on his taillights.

They crawled past Chicago proper. They crawled past Glencoe, Evans ton and Wilmette.

Signs marked the Winnetka town limits. Lenny spun right and pulled off the highway at the very last second.

There was no way to follow him—he'd spin out or clip a guardrail.

Littell took the next off-ramp down. Winnetka was 1:00 a.m. quiet and beautiful—all Tudor mansions and freshly plowed streets.

He grid-cruised and hit a business thoroughfare. A stretch of cars were parked outside a cocktail lounge: Perry's Little Log Cabin.

Lenny's Packard Caribbean was nosed up to the curb.

Littell parked and walked in. A ceiling banner brushed his face: "Welcome 1959!" in silver spangles.

The place was cold-weather cozy. The decor was rustic: mock-timber walls, hardwood bar, Naugahyde lounging sofas.

The clientele was all male. The bar was standing room only. Two men sat on a lounge sofa, fondling—Littell looked away.

He stared straight ahead. He felt eyes strafe him. He spotted phone booths near the rear exit—enclosed and safe.

He walked back. Nobody approached him. His holster rig had rubbed his shoulders raw—he'd spent the whole night sweating and fidgeting.

He sat down in the first booth. He cracked the door and caught a full view of the bar.

There's Lenny, drinking Pernod. There's Lenny and a blond man rubbing legs.

Littell watched them. The blond man slipped Lenny a note and waltzed off. A Platters medley hit the jukebox.

The room thinned out a few couples at a time. The sofa couple stood up, unzipped. The bartender announced last call.

Lenny ordered Cointreau. The front door opened. Icepick Tony

Iannone walked in.

"One of Giancana's most feared underbosses" started French-kissing the barman. The Chicago Mob killer suspected of nine mutilation murders was sucking and biting on the barman's ear.

Littell went dizzy. Littell went dry-mouthed. Littell felt his pulse go crazy.

Tony/Lenny/Lenny/Tony—who knows who's QUEER?

Tony saw Lenny. Lenny saw Tony. Lenny ran out the rear exit.

Tony chased Lenny. Littell froze. The phone booth went airless and sucked all the breath out of him.

He got the door open. He stumbled outside. Cold air slammed him.

An alley ran behind the bar. He heard noise down and left, by the back of the adjoining building.

Tony had Lenny pinned down on a snowdrift. Lenny was biting and kicking and gouging.

Tony pulled out two switchblades. Littell pulled his gun, fumbled it and dropped it. His warning scream choked out mute.

Lenny kneed Tony. Tony pitched sideways. Lenny bit his nose off.

Littell slid on ice and fell. Soft-packed snow muffled the sound. Fifteen yards between him and them—they couldn't see him or hear him.

Tony tried to scream. Lenny spat his nose out and jammed snow in his mouth. Tony dropped his knives; Lenny grabbed them.

They couldn't see him. He slid on his knees and crawled for his gun.

Tony pawed at the snow. Lenny stabbed him two-handed—in his eyes, in his cheeks, in his throat.

Littell crawled for his gun.

Lenny ran.

Tony died coughing up bloody snow.

Music drifted outside: a soft last-call ballad.

The exit door never opened. Jukebox noise covered the whole —

Littell crawled over to Tony. Littell picked the corpse clean: watch, wallet, key ring. Print-sustaining switchblades shoved in hilt-deep—yes, do it.

He pulled them free. He got his legs. He ran down the alley until his lungs gave out.

13

(Miami, 1/3/59)

Pete pulled up to the cabstand. A mango splattered on his windshield.

The street was void of tiger cars and tiger riffraff. Placard wavers prowled the sidewalk, armed with bags full of too-ripe fruit.

Jimmy called him in L.A. yesterday. He said, “Earn your five fucking percent. The Kennedy bug went down, but you still owe me. My Cubans have been batshit since Castro took over. You go to Miami and restore fucking order and you can keep your five fucking—”

Somebody yelled, “*Viva Fidel!*” Somebody yelled, “*Castro, el grande puto communisto!*” A garbage war erupted two doors down: kids tossing fat red pomegranates.

Pete locked his car and ran into the hut. A redneck type was working the switchboard, solo.

Pete said, “Where’s Fulo?”

The geek yuk-yuk-yukked. “The trouble with this operation is half the guys are pro-Batista and half the guys are pro-Castro. You just can’t get guys like that to show up for work when there’s a nifty riot in progress, so here I am all by myself.”

“I said, ‘Where’s Fulo?’ ”

“Working this switchboard is an education. I’ve been getting these calls asking me where the action is and ‘What should I bring?’ I like Cubans, but I think they’re prone to untoward displays of violence.”

The geek was cadaver thin. He had a bad Texas drawl and the world’s worst set of teeth.

Pete cracked his knuckles. “Why don’t you tell me where Fulo is.”

“Fulo went looking for action, and my guess is he brought his machete. And you’re Pete Bondurant, and I’m Chuck Rogers. I’m a good friend of Jimmy and some boys in the Outfit, and I am a *dedicated* opponent of the worldwide Communist conspiracy.”

A garbage bomb wobbled the front window. Two lines of placard wavers squared off outside.

The phone rang. Rogers plugged the call in. Pete wiped pomegranate seeds off his shirt.

Rogers unhooked his headset. “That was Fulo. He said if ‘*el jefe* Big Pete’ got in, he should go by his place and give him a hand with something. I think it’s 917 Northwest 49th. That’s three blocks to the left, two to the right.”

Pete dropped his suitcase. Rogers said, “So who do you like, the Beard or Batista?”

The address was a peach stucco shack. A Tiger Kab with four slashed tires blocked the porch.

Pete climbed over it and knocked. Fulo cracked the door and slid a chain off.

Pete shoved his way in. He saw the damage straight off: two spies wearing party hats, *muerto* on the living-room floor.

Fulo locked up. “We were celebrating, Pedro. They called my beloved Fidel a true Marxist, and I took offense at this slander.”

He shot them in the back at point-blank range. Small-bore exit wounds—the cleanup wouldn’t be that big a deal.

Pete said, “Let’s get going on this.”

Fulo smashed their teeth to powder. Pete burned their fingerprints off on a hot plate.

Fulo dug the spent rounds out of the wall and flushed them down the toilet. Pete quick-scorched the floor stains—spectograph tests would read negative.

Fulo pulled down the living-room drapes and wrapped them around the bodies. The exit wounds had congealed—no blood seeped through.

Chuck Rogers showed up. Fulo said he was competent and trustworthy. They dumped the stiffs into the trunk of his car.

Pete said, "Who are you?"

Chuck said, "I'm a petroleum geologist. I'm also a licensed pilot and a professional anti-Communist."

"So who foots the bill?"

Chuck said, "The United States of America."

Chuck felt like cruising. Pete co-signed the notion—Miami grabbed his gonads like L.A. used to.

They cruised. Fulo tossed the bodies off a deserted stretch of the Bal Harbor Causeway. Pete chain-smoked and dug the scenery.

He liked the big white houses and the big white sky—Miami as one big shiny bleach job. He liked the breathing room between swank districts and slums. He liked the shitkicker cops out prowling—they looked like they'd be hell on rambunctious niggers.

Chuck said, "Castro's ideological beliefs are up in the air. He's made statements that can be construed as very pro-U.S. and very pro-Red. My friends in the intelligence community are working on plans to cornhole him if he goes Commie."

They drove back to Flagler. Armed men were guarding the cabstand—off-duty fuzz with that fat-and-sassy look.

Chuck waved to them. "Jimmy takes good care of the police contingent around here. He's got this phantom union set up, and half the cops working this sector have got nice no-show jobs and nice paychecks."

A kid slammed a leaflet on their windshield. Fulo translated odd slogans—Commie-type platitudes all.

Rocks hit the car. Pete said, "This is too crazy. Let's go stash Fulo someplace."

Rogers leased a room in an all-spic boardinghouse. Radio gear and hate leaflets covered every spare inch of floor space.

Fulo and Chuck relaxed with beers. Pete skimmed pamphlet titles and got a good laugh mojo going.

"Kikes Kontrol Kremlin!" "Fluoridation: Vatican Plot?" "Red Storm-clouds Brewing—One Patriot's Response." "Why Non-Caucasians Overbreed: A Scientist Explains." "Pro-American Checklist: Do You Score RED or Red, White and Blue?"

Fulo said, "Chuck, it is rather crowded in here."

Rogers futzed with a short-wave receiver. A hate tirade kicked in: Jew bankers, blah blah.

Pete hit a few switches. The rant sputtered out cold.

Chuck smiled. "Politics is something you come around to slow. You can't expect to understand the world situation immediately."

"I should introduce you to Howard Hughes. He's as crazy as you are."

"You think anticommunism is crazy?"

"I think it's good for business, and anything that's good for business is okay with me."

"I don't think that's a very enlightened attitude."

"Think what you like."

"I will. And I know you're thinking, 'Holy Hannah, who is this guy that's my fellow murder-one accessory, because we sure have shared some unusual experiences in our short acquaintance."

Pete leaned against the window. He caught a little blip of a prowl car half a block down.

"My guess is you're a CIA contract hand. You're supposed to get next to the Cubans at the stand while everybody waits to see how Castro jumps."

Fulo came on indignant. "Fidel will jump toward the United States of America."

Chuck laughed. "Immigrants make the best Americans. You should know, huh, Pete? Aren't you some kind of frog?"

Pete popped his thumbs. Rogers flinched.

"You just make like I'm a 100% American who knows what's good for business."

"Whoa now. I never doubted your patriotism."

Pete heard whispers outside the door. Looks circulated—Chuck and Fulo caught the gist quick. Pete heard shotgun announcement noise: three loud and clear breach-to-barrel pumps.

He dropped his piece behind some pamphlets. Fulo and Chuck put their hands up.

Plainclothesmen kicked the door down. They ran in with shotgun butts at high port arms.

Pete went down behind a powder-puff shot. Fulo and Chuck played it rugged and got beaten skull-cracking senseless.

A cop said, "The big guy's faking." A cop said, "We can fix that."

Rubber-padded gun butts slammed him. Pete curled up his tongue so he wouldn't bite it off.

• • •

He came to cuffed and shackled. Chair slats gouged his back; percussion bopped him upside his brain.

Light hit his eyes. One eye only—tissue flaps cut his sight in half. He made out three cops sitting around a bolted-down table.

Snare drums popped behind his ears. A-bombs ignited up and down his spine.

Pete flexed his arms and snapped his handcuff chain.

Two cops whistled. One cop applauded.

They'd *double*-manacled his ankles—he couldn't give them an encore.

The senior cop crossed his legs. "We got an anonymous tip, Mr. Bondurant. One of Mr. Machado's neighbors saw Mr. Adolfo Herendon and Mr. Armando Cruz-Martín enter Mr. Machado's house, and he heard what might have been shots several hours later. Now, a few hours after that, you and Mr. Rogers arrive separately. The two of you and Mr. Machado leave carrying two large bundles wrapped in window curtains, and the neighbor gets Mr. Rogers' license number. We checked Mr. Rogers' car, and we noticed some debris that looks like skin fragments, and we certainly would like to hear your comments on all of this."

Pete stuck his eyebrow back in place. "Charge me or release me. You know who I am and who I know."

"We know you know Jimmy Hoffa. We know you're pals with Mr. Rogers, Mr. Machado and some other Tiger Kab drivers."

Pete said, "Charge me or release me." The cop tossed cigarettes and matches on his lap.

Cop #2 leaned in close. "You probably think Jimmy Hoffa's bought off every policeman in this town, but son, I'm here to tell you that simply ain't the case."

"Charge me or release me."

"Son, you are trying my patience."

"I'm not your son, you cracker faggot."

"Boy, that kind of talk will get your face slapped."

"If you slap me, I'll go for your eyes. Don't make me prove it."

Cop #3 came on soft. "Whoa, now, whoa. Mr. Bondurant, you know we can hold you for seventy-two hours without charging you. You know you've probably got a concussion and could use some medical attention. Now, why don't you—"

"Give me my phone call, then charge me or release me."

The senior cop laced his hands behind his head. "We let your friend Rogers make a call. He fed the jailer some cock-and-bull story about having government connections and called a Mr. Stanton. Now, who are you gonna call—Jimmy Hoffa? You think Uncle Jimmy's gonna go your bail on a double-homicide charge and maybe engender all kinds of bad publicity that he doesn't need?"

An A-bomb blast hit his neck. Pete almost blacked out.

Cop #2 sighed. "This boy's too woozy to cooperate. Let's let him rest up a bit."

He passed out, woke up, passed out. His headache subsided from A-bomb to nitroglycerine.

He read wall scratchings. He swiveled his neck to stay limber. He broke the world's record for holding a piss.

He broke down the situation.

Fulo cracks or Fulo doesn't crack. Chuck cracks or Chuck doesn't. Jimmy buys them bail or lets them swing. Maybe the DA gets smart: spic-on-spic homicides rate bubkes.

He could call Mr. Hughes. Mr. Hughes could nudge Mr. Hoover—which meant case fucking closed.

He told Hughes he'd be gone three days. Hughes agreed to the trip, no questions asked. Hughes agreed because the Kennedy shakedown backfired. Joe and Bobby shrunk his balls down to peanut size.

And Ward J. Littell slapped *him*.

Which decreed the cocksucker's death sentence.

Gail was gone. The Jack K. gig went pfffft. Hoffa's Kennedy hate sizzled—hot, hot, hot. Hughes was still gossip/smear crazed and hot to find a new *Hush-Hush* stringer.

Pete read wall musings. The Academy Award winner: "Miami PD Sucks Rhino Dick."

Two men walked in and pulled chairs up. A jailer unshackled his legs and walked out fast.

Pete stood up and stretched. The interrogation room dipped and swayed.

The younger man said, "I'm John Stanton, and this is Guy Banister. Mr. Banister is retired FBI, and he was assistant superintendent of the New Orleans Police for a spell."

Stanton was slight and sandy-haired. Banister was big and booze-flushed.

Pete lit a cigarette. Inhaling torqued his headache. "I'm listening."

Banister grinned. "I remember that civil rights trouble of yours. Kemper Boyd and Ward Littell arrested you, didn't they?"

"You know they did."

"I used to be the Chicago SAC, and I always thought Littell was a weak sister."

Stanton straddled his chair. "But Kemper Boyd's another matter. You know, Pete, he went by the Tiger stand and showed your mug shot around. One of the men pulled a knife, and Boyd disarmed him in a rather spectacular fashion."

Pete said, "Boyd's a stylish guy. And this is starting to play like some kind of audition, so I'll tell you that I'd recommend him for Just about any kind of law-enforcement work."

Stanton smiled. "You're not a bad audition prospect yourself."

Banister smiled. "You're a licensed private investigator. You're a former deputy sheriff. You're Howard Hughes' man, and you know Jimmy Hoffa, Fulo Machado and Chuck Rogers. Those are stylish credentials."

Pete stubbed his cigarette out on the wall. "The CIA's not so bad, as credentials go. That's who you are, right?"

Stanton stood up. "You're free to go. No charges will be filed on you, Rogers or Machado."

"But you'll be keeping in touch?"

"Not exactly. But I may ask a favor of you one day. And of course, you'll be well paid for it."

14

(New York City, 1/5/59)

The suite was magnificent. Joe Kennedy bought it from the hotel outright.

A hundred people left the main room only half-filled. The picture window gave you the breadth of Central Park in a snowstorm.

Jack invited him. He said his father's Carlyle bashes were not to be missed—and besides, Bobby needs to talk to you.

Jack said there might be women. Jack said Lyndon Johnson's redhead might appear.

Kemper watched cliques constellate and dissolve. The party swirled all around him.

Old Joe stood with his horsy daughters. Peter Lawford ruled an all-male group. Jack speared cocktail shrimp with Nelson Rockefeller.

Lawford prophesied the Kennedy cabinet. Frank Sinatra was considered a shoo-in for Prime Minister of Pussy.

Bobby was late. The redhead hadn't arrived—Jack would have signaled him if he saw her first.

Kemper sipped eggnog. His tuxedo jacket fit loose—he'd had it cut to cover a shoulder holster. Bobby enforced a strict no-sidearms policy—*his* men were lawyers, not cops.

He was *twice* a cop—double-salaried and double-dutied.

He told Mr. Hoover that Anton Gretzler and Roland Kirpaski were dead—but their "presumed dead" status had not demoralized Bobby Kennedy. Bobby was determined to chase Hoffa, the Teamsters and the Mob WAY past the McClellan Committee's expiration date. Municipal PD racket squads and grand jury investigators armed with Committee-gathered evidence would then become the Get Hoffa spearhead. Bobby would soon be preparing the groundwork for Jack's 1960 campaign—but Jimmy Hoffa would remain his personal target.

Hoover demanded investigatory specifics. He told him that Bobby wanted to trace the "spooky" three million dollars that financed Hoffa's Sun Valley development—Bobby was convinced that Hoffa skimmed cash off the top and that Sun Valley itself constituted land fraud. Bobby instinctively believed in the existence of separate, perhaps coded, Teamster Central States Pension Fund books—ledgers detailing tens of millions of dollars in hidden assets—money lent to gangsters and crooked businessmen at gargantuan interest rates. An elusive rumor: A retired Chicago hoodlum managed the Fund. Bobby's personal instinct: The total Fund package was his most viable Get Hoffa wedge.

He had two salaries now. He had two sets of conflicting duties. He had John Stanton hinting at offers—if the CIA's Cuban plans stabilized.

It would give him a third salary. It would give him enough income to sustain his own pied-à-terre.

Peter Lawford cornered Leonard Bernstein. Mayor Wagner chatted up Maria Callas.

A waiter refilled Kemper's tankard. Joe Kennedy walked an old man up.

"Kemper, this is Jules Schiffrin. Jules, Kemper Boyd. You two should talk. The two of you are rascals from way back."

They shook hands. Joe slid off to talk to Bennett Cerf.

"How are you, Mr. Schiffrin?"

"I'm fine, thank you. And I know why I'm a rascal. But you? You're too young."

"I'm a year older than Jack Kennedy."

"And I'm four years younger than Joe, so things even out. Is that your occupation, rascal?”

“I’m retired from the FBI. Right now, I’m working for the McClellan Committee.”

“You’re an ex-G-man? And retired so young?”

Kemper winked. “I got tired of FBI-sanctioned car theft.”

Schiffrin mimicked the wink. “Tired, schmired. How bad could it be if it bought you custom mohair tuxedos like you’re wearing? I should own such a tux.”

Kemper smiled. “What do you do?”

“ ‘Did do’ is more like it. And what I did do was serve as a financier and a labor consultant. Those are euphemisms, in case you’re wondering. What I *didn’t* do was have lots of lovely children to enjoy in my old age. Such lovely children Joe has. Look at them.”

Kemper said, “You’re from Chicago?”

Schiffrin beamed. “How did you know that?”

“I’ve studied regional accents. It’s something I’m good at.”

“Good doesn’t describe it. And that drawl of yours, is that Alabama?”

“Tennessee.”

“Aah, the Volunteer State. It’s too bad my friend Heshie isn’t here. He’s a Detroit-born gonif who’s lived in the Southwest for years. He’s got an accent that would baffle you.”

Bobby walked into the foyer. Schiffrin saw him and rolled his eyes. “There’s your boss. Pardon my French, but don’t you think he’s a bit of a shitheel?”

“In his way, yes.”

“Now y*ou’re* euphemizing. I remember Joe and I were yakking once, about how we fucked Howard Hughes on a deal thirty years ago. Bobby objected to the word ‘fuck’ because his kids were in the next room. They couldn’t even hear, but—”

Bobby signaled. Kemper caught the gesture and nodded.

“Excuse me, Mr. Schiffrin.”

“Go. Your boss beckons. Nine kids Joe had, so one shitbird isn’t such a bad average.”

Kemper walked over. Bobby steered him straight into the cloakroom. Fur coats and evening capes brushed up against them.

“Jack said you wanted to see me.”

“I did. I need you to collate some evidence briefs and write out a summary of everything the Committee’s done, so that we can send out a standardized report to all the grand juries who'll be taking over for us. I realize that paperwork isn't your style, but this is imperative."

"I'll start in the morning."

"Good."

Kemper cleared his throat. "Bob, there's something I wanted to run by you."

"What?"

"I have a close friend. He's an agent in the Chicago office. I can't tell you his name just yet, but he's a very capable and intelligent man."

Bobby wiped snow off his topcoat. "Kemper, you're leading me. I realize that you're used to having your way with people, but please get to the point."

"The point is he was transferred off the Top Hoodlum Program against his will. He hates Mr. Hoover and Mr. Hoover's 'There is no Mob' stance, and he wants to conduit anti-Mob intelligence through me to you. He understands the risks, and he's willing to take them. And for what it's worth, he's an ex-Jesuit seminarian."

Bobby hung his coat up. "Can we trust him?"

"Absolutely."

"He wouldn't be a conduit to Hoover?"

Kemper laughed. "Hardly."

Bobby looked at him. Bobby gave him his witness-intimidation stare.

"All right. But I want you to tell the man not to do anything illegal. I don't want a zealot out there wiretapping and God knows what else because he thinks I'll back him up on it."

"I'll tell him. Now, what areas do you—?"

"Tell him I'm interested in the possibility that secret Pension Fund books exist. Tell him that if they do, it's likely that the Chicago Mob administers them. Have him work off that supposition, and see if he can come up with any general Hoffa intelligence while he's at it."

Guests filed past the cloakroom. A woman trailed her mink coat on the floor. Dean Acheson almost tripped over it.

Bobby winced. Kemper saw his eyes slip out of focus.

"What is it?"

"It's nothing."

"Is there anything else you'd—?"

“No, there isn’t. Now, if you’ll excuse me …”

Kemper smiled and walked back to the party. The main room was crowded now—maneuvering was a chore.

The mink woman had heads turning.

She made a butler pet her coat. She insisted that Leonard Bernstein try it on. She mambo-stepped through the crowd and snatched Joe Kennedy’s drink.

Joe gave her a small, gift-wrapped box. The woman tucked it in her purse. Three Kennedy sisters walked off in a huff.

Peter Lawford ogled the woman. Bennett Cerf slid by and peeked down her dress. Vladimir Horowitz waved her over to the piano.

Kemper took a private elevator down to the lobby. He picked up a courtesy phone and badged the switchboard girl for a straight patch to Chicago.

She put him through. Helen answered on the second ring.

“Hello?”

“It’s me, sweetheart. The one you used to have a crush on.”

“Kemper! What are you doing with that syrupy southern accent!”

“I’m engaged in subterfuge.”

“Well, *I’m* engaged in law school and looking for an apartment, and it is *so* difficult!”

“All good things are. Ask your middle-aged boyfriend, he’ll tell you.”

Helen whispered. “Ward’s been moody and secretive lately. Will you try to—?”

Littell came on the line. “Kemper, hi.”

Helen blew kisses and put her extension down. Kemper said, “Hello, son.”

“Hello yourself. I hate to be abrupt, but have you—?”

“Yes, I have.”

“And?”

“And Bobby said yes. He said he wants you to work for us sub rosa, and he wants you to follow up on that lead Roland Kirpaski gave us, and try to determine if there really are secret Pension Fund books hiding untold zillions of dollars.”

“Good. This is … very good.”

Kemper lowered his voice. “Bobby reiterated what I told you. Don’t take unnecessary risks. You remember that. Bobby’s more of a stickler for legalities than I am, so you just remember to be careful, and remember who you have to look out for."

Littell said, "I'll be careful. I may have a Mob man compromised on a homicide, and I think I might be able to turn him as an informant."

The mink woman walked through the lobby. A slew of bellboys rushed to get the door for her.

"Ward, I have to go."

"God bless you for this, Kemper. And tell Mr. Kennedy that I won't disappoint him."

Kemper hung up and walked outside. Wind roared down 76th Street and toppled trashcans set out on the curb.

The mink woman was standing under the hotel canopy. She was unwrapping Joe Kennedy's gift.

Kemper stood a few feet away from her. The gift was a diamond broach tucked inside a roll of thousand-dollar bills.

A wino stumbled by. The mink woman gave him the broach. Wind fanned the roll and showed off at least fifty grand.

The wino giggled and looked at his broach. Kemper laughed out loud.

A cab pulled up. The mink woman leaned in and said, "881 Fifth Avenue."

Kemper opened the door for her.

She said, "Aren't the Kennedys vulgar?"

Her eyes were drop-dead translucent green.

15

(Chicago, 1/6/59)

One jiggle snapped the lock. Littell pulled his pick out and closed the door behind him.

Passing headlights strafed the windows. The front room was small and filled with antiques and art deco gewgaws.

His eyes adjusted to the dark. There was good outside light—he didn't need to risk turning lamps on.

Lenny Sands' apartment was tidy and midwinter stuffy.

The Icepick Tony killing was five days old and unsolved. The TV and papers omitted one fact: that Iannone died outside a queer tryst spot. Court Meade said Giancana put the fix in: he didn't want Tony slandered as a homo, and refused to believe it himself. Meade quoted some scary bug-post talk: "Sam's got scouts out rousting known fruit rollers"; "Mo said Tony's killer is gonna get castrated."

Giancana couldn't believe a self-evident fact. Giancana thought Tony walked into Perry's Little Log Cabin by mistake.

Littell got out his pen flash and Minox. Lenny's recent schedule included Vendo-King pickups until midnight. It was 9:20 now—he had time to work.

Lenny's address book was tucked under the living-room phone. Littell skimmed through it and noted auspicious names.

Eclectic Lenny knew Rock Hudson and Carlos Marcello. Hollywood Lenny knew Gail Russell and Johnnie Ray. Gangland Lenny knew Giancana, Butch Montrose and Rocco Malvaso.

One strange thing: His Mob address/numbers didn't match the on-file THP listings.

Littell flipped pages. Odd names hit him.

Senator John Kennedy, Hyannis Port, Mass.; Spike Knode, 114 Gardenia, Mobile, Alabama; Laura Hughes, 881 5th Ave., New York City; Paul Bogaards, 1489 Fountain, Milwaukee.

He shot through the book alphabetically. He held the pen flash in his teeth and snapped one photograph per page. He notched thirty-two exposures up to the M's.

His legs ached from squatting down to shoot. The flash kept slipping out of his mouth.

He heard key/lock noise. He heard door rattles—NINETY MINUTES AHEAD OF SCHED—

Littell hugged the wall by the door. He replayed every judo move Kemper taught him.

Lenny Sands walked in. Littell grabbed him from behind and cupped his mouth shut. Remember—"Jam one thumb to the suspect's carotid and take him down supine."

He did it Kemper-pure. Lenny went prone with no resistance. Littell pulled his muzzle hand free and kicked the door shut.

Lenny didn't scream or yell. His face was jammed into a wad of scrunched-up carpet.

Littell eased off the carotid. Lenny coughed and retched.

Littell knelt beside him. Littell pulled out his revolver and cocked it.

"I'm with the Chicago FBI. I've got you for the Tony Iannone killing, and if you don't work for me I'll hand you up to Giancana and the Chicago PD. I'm not asking you to inform on your friends. What I'm interested in is the Teamsters' Pension Fund."

Lenny heaved for breath. Littell stood up and hit a wall switch—the room went bright with glare.

He saw a liquor tray by the couch. Cut-glass decanters full of scotch, bourbon and brandy.

Lenny pulled his knees up and hugged them. Littell tucked his gun in his waistband and pulled out a glassine bag.

It held two blood-crusted switchblades.

He showed them to Lenny. He said, "I dusted them for prints and got four latents that matched your DMV set."

It was a bluff. All he got were smears.

"You've got no choice in this, Lenny. You know what Sam would do to you."

Lenny broke a sweat. Littell poured him a scotch—the smell made him salivate.

Lenny sipped his drink two-handed. His tough-guy voice didn't quite work.

"I know bubkes about the Fund. What I know is that connected guys and certain businessman types apply for these large-interest loans and get pushed up some kind of loan ladder."

"To Sam Giancana?"

"That's one theory."

"Then elaborate on it."

"The theory is that Giancana consults with Jimmy Hoffa on all the big-money loan applications. Then they get accepted or refused."

"Are there alternative Pension Fund books? What I'm thinking of is coded books hiding secret assets."

"I don't know."

Kemper Boyd always said COW YOUR INFORMANTS.

Lenny hauled himself into a chair. Schizophrenic Lenny knew that tough Jewboys don't cringe on the floor.

Littell poured himself a double scotch. Lounge-Act Lenny said, "Make yourself at home."

Littell tucked the switchblades in his pocket. "I checked your address book, and I noticed that your addresses don't match the addresses that the Top Hoodlum Program has on file."

"What addresses?"

"The addresses of members of the Chicago Crime Cartel."

"Oh, *those* addresses."

"Why don't they match?"

Lenny said, "Because they're fuck pads. They're pads where guys go to cheat on their wives. I've got keys to some of the pads, because I drop off jukebox receipts to them. In fact, I was bagging receipts at that fucking queer bar when that fucking faggot Iannone came on to me."

Littell downed his drink. "I *saw* you kill Iannone. I *know* why you were at Perry's Little Log Cabin, and *why* you frequent Hernando's Hideaway. I *know* you've got two lives and two voices and two sets of God knows what else. I *know* that Iannone went after you because he didn't want you knowing that he did, too."

Lenny SQUEEEZED his glass, two-handed. Thick-cut crystal snapped and shattered—

Whisky sprayed out. Blood mixed with it. Lenny did not yelp or flinch or move.

Littell tossed his glass on the couch. "I know you made a deal with Sal D'Onofrio."

No response.

"I know you're going to travel with his gambling junkets."

No response.

"Sal's a loan shark. Could he refer prospects up the Pension Fund ladder?"

No response.

Littell said, "Come on, talk to me. I'm not going to leave until I have what I came for."

Lenny wiped blood off his hands. "I don't know. Maybe, maybe not. As sharks go, Sal's small fry."

"What about Jack Ruby? He sharks part-time down in Dallas."

"Jack's a clown. He knows people, but he's a clown."

Littell lowered his voice. "Do the Chicago boys know you're a homosexual?"

Lenny choked sobs back. Littell said, "Answer the question and admit what you are."

Lenny shut his eyes and nodded, no no no.

"Then answer this question. *Will you be my informant?*"

Lenny shut his eyes and nodded, yes yes yes.

"The papers said Iannone was married."

No response.

"Lenny …"

"Yes. He was married."

"Did he have a fuck pad?"

"He must have."

Littell buttoned up his overcoat. "I might do you a solid, Lenny."

No response.

"I'll be in touch. You know what I'm interested in, so get on it."

Lenny ignored him. Lenny started picking glass out of his hands.

He took a key ring off Iannone's body. It contained four keys on a fob marked "Di Giorgio's Locksmith's, 947 Hudnut Drive, Evanston."

Two car keys and one assumed house key. The remaining key might be for a fuck-pad door.

Littell drove up to Evanston. He hit on some dumb late-night luck: the locksmith lived in back of his shop.

The unexpected FBI roust scared the man. He identified the keys as his work. He said he installed all of Iannone's door locks—at two addresses.

2409 Kenilworth in Oak Park. 84 Wolverton in Evanston.

Iannone lived in Oak Park—that fact made the papers. The Evanston address was a strong fuck-pad possibility.

The locksmith supplied easy-to-follow directions. Littell found the address in just a few minutes.

It was a garage apartment behind a Northwestern U frat house. The neighborhood was dark and dead quiet.

The key fit the door. Littell let himself in, gun first. The place was uninhabited and musty.

He turned on the lights in both rooms. He tossed every cupboard, drawer, shelf, cubbyhole and crawl space. He found dildoes, whips, spiked dog collars, amyl nitrite ampules, twelve jars of K-Y Jelly, a bag of marijuana, a brass-studded motorcycle jacket, a sawed-off shotgun, nine rolls of Benzedrine, a Nazi armband, oil paintings depicting all-male sodomy and soixante-neuf and a snapshot of Icepick Tony Iannone and a college boy nude cheek-to-cheek.

Kemper Boyd always said PROTECT YOUR INFORMANTS.

Littell called Celano's Tailor Shop. A man answered—"Yeah?"—unmistakably Butch Montrose.

Littell disguised his voice. "Don't worry about Tony Iannone. He was a fucking faggot. Go to 84 Wolverton in Evanston and see for yourself."

"Hey, what are you say—?"

Littell hung up. He nailed the snapshot to the wall for the whole world to see.

16

(Los Angeles, 1/11/59)

Hush-Hush was cramming toward deadline. The office staff was buzzing on Benzedrine-spiked coffee.

"Artists" were pasting up a cover: "Paul Robeson—Royal Red Recidivist." A "correspondent" was typing copy: "Wife Beater Spade Cooley—Will the Country Stomper Stomp Too Far?" A "researcher" was browsing pamphlets, trying to link nigger hygiene to cancer.

Pete watched.

Pete was bored.

MIAMI bopped through his head. *Hush-Hush* felt like a giant cactus shoved up his ass.

Sol Maltzman was dead. Gail Hendee was long gone. The new *Hush-Hush* staff was 100% geek. Howard Hughes was frantic to find a dirt digger.

His prospects all said NO. Everybody knew the L.A. fuzz seized the Kennedy smear issue. *Hush-Hush* was the leper colony of scandal-sheet journalism.

Hughes CRAVED dirt. Hughes CRAVED slander skank to share with Mr. Hoover. What Hughes CRAVED, Hughes BOUGHT.

Pete bought an issue's worth of dirt. His cop contacts supplied him with a one-week load of lackluster skank.

"Spade Cooley, Boozefried Misogynist!" "Marijuana Shack Raid Nets Sal Mineo!" "Beatnik Arrests Shock Hermosa Beach!"

It was pure bullshit. It was very un-Miami.

Miami was goood. Miami was this drug he got withdrawals from. He left Miami with a mild concussion—not bad for the pounding he took.

Jimmy Hoffa called him in to restore order. He got out of jail and did it.

The cabstand demanded order—political rifts had business fucked six ways from Sunday. The riots sputtered out, but Tiger Kab still simmered with factional jive. He had pro-Batista and pro-Castro guys to deal with—left- and right-wing ideologue thugs who needed to be toilet-trained and broken in to the White Man's Rule of Order.

He laid down laws.

No drinking and placard waving on the job. No guns or knives—check your weapons with the dispatcher. No political fraternizing—rival factions must remain segregated.

One Batistaite challenged the rules. Pete beat him half-dead.

He laid down more laws.

No pimping on duty—leave your whores at home. No B&Es or stick-ups on duty.

He made Chuck Rogers the new day dispatcher. He considered it a political appointment.

Rogers was a CIA contract goon. Co-dispatcher Fulo Machado was CIA-linked.

John Stanton was a mid-level CIA agent—and a new cabstand habitué. He got Fulo's murder-one beef squelched with a snap of his fingers.

Stanton's pal Guy Banister hated Ward Littell. Banister and Stanton were hipped on Kemper Boyd.

Jimmy Hoffa owned Tiger Kab. Jimmy Hoffa had points in two Havana casinos.

Littell and Boyd made *him* for two killings. Stanton and Banister probably didn't know that. Stanton fed him that little teaser: "I may ask a favor of you one day."

Things were dovetailing tight and cozy. His feelers started perk-perk-perking.

Pete buzzed the receptionist. “Donna, get me long distance person-to-person. I want to talk to a man named Kemper Boyd at the McClellan Committee office in Washington, D.C. Tell the operator to try the Senate Office Building, and if you get through, say I’m the caller.”

“Yes, sir.”

Pete hung up and waited. The call was a longshot—Boyd was probably out somewhere, conniving.

His intercom light flashed. Pete picked up the phone.

“Boyd?”

“Speaking. And surprised.”

“Well, I owe you one, so I thought I’d deliver.”

“Keep going.”

“I was in Miami last week. I ran into two men named John Stanton and Guy Banister, and they seemed real interested in you.”

“Mr. Stanton and I have already spoken. But thanks. It’s nice to know they’re still interested.”

“I gave you a good reference.”

“You’re a sport. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“You can find me a new dirt digger for *Hush-Hush*.”

Boyd hung up, laughing.

17

(Miami, 1/13/59)

The Committee booked him into a Howard Johnson's. Kemper upgraded to a two-room suite at the Fontainebleau.

He made up the difference out of his own pocket. He was closing in on three salaries—it wasn't that big an extravagance.

Bobby sent him back to Miami. He instigated the trip himself—and promised to return with some key Sun Valley depositions. He didn't tell Bobby that the CIA was thinking about recruiting him.

The trip was a little vacation. If Stanton was good, they'd connect.

Kemper carried a chair out to the balcony. Ward Littell had mailed him a report—he needed to edit it before sending it on to Bobby.

The report was twelve typed pages. Ward included a longhand preface.

> K.B.,
>
> Since we're partners in this gentle subterfuge, I'm giving you a verbatim account of my activities. Of course, you'll want to omit mention of my more flagrant illegalities, given Mr. Kennedy's proviso. As

> you'll note, I have made substantial progress. And believe me, given the extreme circumstances, I have been very careful.

Kemper read the report. "Extreme circumstances" didn't quite cover it.

Littell witnessed a homosexual murder. The victim was a Chicago Mob underboss. The killer was a Mob fringe dweller named Lenny Sands.

Sands was now Littell's snitch. Sands had recently partnered up with a bookie/loanshark named "Mad Sal" D'Onofrio. D'Onofrio shepherded gambling junkets to Las Vegas and Lake Tahoe—Sands was to accompany the groups as their "traveling lounge act." Sands had keys to mobster "fuck pads." Littell coerced him into making duplicates and surreptitiously entered three fuck pads to look for evidence. Littell observed and left untouched: weapons, narcotics, and $14,000 in cash—hidden in a golf bag at the fuck pad of one Butch Montrose.

Littell located Tony Iannone's fuck pad: a garage apartment littered with homosexual paraphernalia. Littell was determined to protect his informant from potential reprisals. Littell disclosed the fuck pad's location to Chicago Mob members and staked it out to see if they followed up on his anonymous tip. They did: Sam Giancana and two other men broke down the fuck pad door an hour later. They undoubtedly saw Iannone's homosexual contraband.

Amazing. Fully emblematic of the Ward Littell Trinity: luck, instinct, naive courage.

> Littell concluded:
>
> My ultimate goal is to facilitate a loan seeker "up the ladder" to the Teamsters' Central States Pension Fund. This loan seeker will be, ideally, my own legally compromised informant. Lenny Sands (and potentially "Mad Sal" D'Onofrio) may prove to be valuable allies in recruiting such an informant. My ideal loan seeker would be a crooked businessman with Organized Crime connections, a man susceptible to physical intimidation and threats of Federal prosecution. Such an informant could help us determine the existence of alternative Pension Fund books containing

> hidden, thus illegal, assets. This avenue of approach presents Robert Kennedy with unlimited opportunities at prosecution. If such books do exist, the administrators of the hidden assets will be indictable on numerous counts of Grand Larceny and Federal Tax Fraud. I agree with Mr. Kennedy: this may prove to be the way to link Jimmy Hoffa and the Teamsters to the Chicago Mob and break their collective power. If monetary collusion on such a rich and pervasive scale can be proven, heads will roll.

The plan was ambitious and stratospherically risky. Kemper snapped to a possible glitch straight off.

Littell exposed Icepick Tony's sexual bent. Did he consider *all* the potential ramifications?

Kemper called the Miami airport and altered his D.C. flight for a Chicago stopover. The move felt sound: if his hunch proved right, he'd need to give Ward a good thrashing.

Dusk came on. Room service brought his standing order up—punctual to the minute.

He sipped Beefeater's and picked at smoked salmon. Collins Avenue glowed; twinkling lights bracketed the beachfront.

Kemper got a mild glow on. He reprised his moments with the mink woman and thought of a dozen lines he could have used.

Chimes rang. Kemper ran a comb through his hair and opened the door.

John Stanton said, "Hello, Mr. Boyd."

Kemper ushered him in. Stanton walked around and admired the suite.

"Robert Kennedy treats you well."

"You're being disingenuous, Mr. Stanton."

"I'll be blunt, then. You grew up wealthy and lost your family. Now you've adopted the Kennedys. You're in the practice of reclaiming your wealth in small increments, and this really is quite a handsome room."

Kemper smiled. "Would you like a martini?"

"Martinis taste like lighter fluid. I've always judged hotels by their wine list."

"I can send down for whatever you like."

"I won't be here long enough."

"What's on your mind?"

Stanton pointed to the balcony. “Cuba’s out there.”

“I know that.”

“We think Castro will go Communist. He’s set to come to America in April and offer his friendship, but we think he’ll behave badly and force an official rejection. He’s going to deport some ‘politically undesirable’ Cubans soon, and they’ll be granted asylum here in Florida. We need men to train them and form them into an anti-Castro resistance. The pay is two thousand dollars a month, in cash, plus the chance to purchase discount-priced stock in Agency-backed front companies. This is a firm offer, and you have my personal assurance that we won’t let your Agency work interfere with your other affiliations.”

“ ‘Affiliations’? Plural?”

Stanton stepped out on the balcony. Kemper followed him up to the railing.

“You ‘retired’ from the FBI rather precipitously. You were close to Mr. Hoover, who hates and fears the Kennedy brothers. *Post hoc, propter ergo hoc*. You were an FBI agent on Tuesday, a prospective pimp for Jack Kennedy on Wednesday, and a McClellan Committee investigator on Thursday. I can follow logical—”

“What’s the standard pay rate for CIA contract recruits?”

“Eight-fifty a month.”

“But my ‘affiliations’ make me a special case?”

“Yes. We know you’re getting close to the Kennedys, and we think Jack Kennedy might be elected President next year. If the Castro problem extends, we’ll need someone to help influence his Cuban policy.”

“As a lobbyist?”

“No. As a very subtle agent provocateur.”

Kemper checked the view. Lights seemed to shimmer way past Cuba.

“I’ll consider your offer.”

18

(Chicago, 1/14/59)

Littell ran into the morgue. Kemper called him from the airport and said MEET ME THERE NOW.

He called half an hour ago. He didn't elaborate. He said just those four words and slammed the phone down.

A row of autopsy rooms extended off the foyer. Sheet-covered gurneys blocked the hallway.

Littell pushed through them. Kemper stood by the far wall, next to a row of freezer slabs.

Littell caught his breath. "What the fuck is—?"

Kemper pulled a slab out. The tray held a male Caucasian dead body.

The boy was torture slashed and cigarette burned. His penis was severed and stuffed in his mouth.

Littell recognized him: the kid in Icepick Tony's nude snapshot.

Kemper grabbed his neck and forced him down close. "This is on you, Ward. You should have destroyed every bit of evidence pointing to Iannone's known associates *before* you tipped off those Mob guys. Guilty or not, they had to kill someone, so they decided to kill the boy in the picture *you* left for them to see."

Littell jerked backward. He smelled stomach bile and blood and forensic dental abrasive.

Kemper shoved him down closer.

"You're working for Bobby Kennedy, and *I* set it up, and Mr. Hoover will destroy me if he finds out. You're damn lucky I decided to check some missing-persons reports, and you had damn well better convince me you won't fuck up like this again."

Littell closed his eyes. Tears spilled out. Kemper shoved him in cheek to cheek with the dead boy.

"Meet me at Lenny Sands' apartment at ten. We'll shore things up."

Work didn't help.

He tailed Commies and wrote out a surveillance log. His hands shook; his printing was near-illegible.

Helen didn't help.

He called her just to hear her voice. Her law school chitchat brought him close to screaming.

Court Meade didn't help.

They met for coffee and exchanged reports. Court told him he looked lousy. Court said his report looked threadbare—like he wasn't spending much time at the listening post.

He couldn't say, I'm slacking off because I found a snitch. He couldn't say, I fucked up and got a boy killed.

Church helped a little.

He lit a candle for the dead boy. He prayed for competence and courage. He cleaned up in the bathroom and remembered something Lenny said: Sal D. was recruiting junketeers at Saint Vibiana's this evening.

A tavern stop helped.

Soup and crackers settled his stomach. Three rye-and-beers cleared his head.

Sal and Lenny had the Saint Vib's rec hall all to themselves. A dozen K of C men took in their pitch.

The group sat at a clump of bingo tables near the stage. The Knights looked like drunks and wife beaters.

Littell loitered outside a fire exit. He cracked the door to watch and listen.

Sal said, “We leave in two days. Lots of my regulars couldn’t get away from their jobs, so I’m lowering my price to nine-fifty, airfare included. First we go to Lake Tahoe, then Vegas and Gardena, outside L.A. Sinatra’s playing the Cal-Neva Lodge in Tahoe, and you’ll be front row center to catch his show. Now, Lenny Sands, formerly Lenny Sanducci, and a Vegas star in his own right, will give you a Sinatra that out-Sinatras Sinatra. Go, Lenny! Go, paisan!”

Lenny blew smoke rings Sinatra-style. The K of C men clapped. Lenny flicked his cigarette above their heads and glared at them.

“Don’t applaud until I finish! What kind of Rat Pack Auxiliary are you! Dino, go get me a couple of blondes! Sammy, go get me a case of gin and ten cartons of cigarettes or I’ll put your other eye out! Hop to it, Sammy! When the Chicago Knights of Columbus Chapter 384 snaps its fingers, Frank Sinatra jumps!”

The Knights haw-haw-hawed. A nun pushed a broom by the group and never looked up. Lenny sang, “Fly me to the Coast with Big Sal’s junket tour! He’s the swingin’ gambling junket king, so dig his sweet allure! In other words, Vegas beware!”

The Knights applauded. Sal dumped a paper bag out on a table in front of them.

They sifted through the clutter and grabbed knickknacks. Littell saw poker chips, French ticklers, and Playboy rabbit key chains.

Lenny held up a novelty pen shaped like a penis. “Which one of you big-dick gavones wants to be the first one to sign up?”

A line formed. Littell felt his stomach turn over.

He walked to the curb and vomited. The rye and beer burned his throat. He hunched over and puked himself dry.

Some junket men walked past him twirling key chains. A few laughed at him.

Littell braced himself against a lamppost. He saw Sal and Lenny in the rec hall doorway.

Sal backed Lenny into the wall and jabbed at his chest. Lenny mimed a single word: “Okay.”

The door stood ajar. Littell pushed it all the way open.

Kemper was going through Lenny’s address book. He’d turned on all the living-room lights.

“Easy, son.”

Littell shut the door. “Who let you in?”

"I taught you how to B&E, remember?"

Littell shook his head. "I want him to trust me. Another man showing up like this might frighten him."

Kemper said, "You need to frighten him. Don't underestimate him just because he's queer."

"I saw what he did to Iannone."

"He panicked, Ward. If he panics again, we could get hurt. I want to establish a certain tone tonight."

Littell heard footsteps outside the door. There was no time to kill the lights for surprise.

Lenny walked in. He did a broad stage actor's double-take.

"Who's he?"

"This is Mr. Boyd. He's a friend of mine."

"And you were in the neighborhood, so you thought you'd break in and ask me a few questions."

"Let's not go at things this way."

"*What* way? You said we'd talk on the phone, and you told me you were in this by yourself."

"Lenny—"

Kemper said, "I did have a question."

Lenny hooked his thumbs through his belt loops. "Then ask it. And help yourself to a drink. Mr. Littell always does."

Kemper looked amused. "I glanced through your address book, Lenny."

"I'm not surprised. Mr. Littell always does that, too."

"You know Jack Kennedy and a lot of Hollywood people."

"Yes. And I know you and Mr. Littell, which proves I'm not immune to slumming."

"Who's this woman Laura Hughes? This address of hers—881 Fifth Avenue—interests me."

"Laura interests lots of men."

"You're trembling, Lenny. Your whole manner just changed."

Littell said, "What are you talk—?"

Kemper cut him off. "Is she in her early thirties? Tall, brunette, freckles?"

"That sounds like Laura, yes."

"I saw Joe Kennedy give her a diamond broach and at least fifty thousand dollars. That looks to me like he's sleeping with her."

Lenny laughed. His smile said, Oh, you heathen.

Kemper said, “Tell me about her.”

“No. She’s got nothing to do with the Teamsters’ Pension Fund or anything illegal.”

“You’re reverting, Lenny. You’re not coming off like the hard boy that took out Tony Iannone. You’re starting to sound like a little fairy with a squeaky voice.”

Lenny went instant baritone. “Is this better, Mr. Boyd?”

“Save the wit for your lounge engagements. Who is she?”

“I don’t have to tell you that.”

Kemper smiled. “You’re a homosexual and a murderer. You have no rights. You’re a Federal informant, and the Chicago FBI owns you.”

Littell felt queasy. His heartbeat did funny little things.

Kemper said, “*Who is she?*”

Lenny came on hard butch. “This is not FBI-approved. If it was there’d be stenographers and paperwork. This is some sort of private thing with you two. And I won’t say a goddamned thing that might hurt Jack Kennedy.”

Kemper pulled out a morgue glossy and forced it on Lenny. Littell saw the dead boy with his mouth stuffed full.

Lenny shuddered. Lenny put on an instant rough-trade face.

“So? So this is supposed to scare me?”

“Giancana did this, Lenny. He thought this man killed Tony Iannone. One word from us, and this will be you.”

Littell grabbed the snapshot. “Let’s hold back a second. You’ve made your point.”

Kemper steered him into the dining room. Kemper pressed him into a cabinet with his fingertips.

“Don’t ever contradict me in front of a suspect.”

“Kemper …”

“Hit him.”

“Kemper—”

“*Hit him*. Make him afraid of you.”

Littell said, “I can’t. Goddamnit, don’t do this to me.”

“Hit him, or I’ll call Giancana and rat him off right now.”

“No. Come on … please.”

Kemper handed him brass knuckles. Kemper made him lace his fingers in.

“Hit him, Ward. Hit him, or I’ll let Giancana kill him.”

Littell trembled. Kemper slapped him. Littell stumbled over to

Lenny and weaved in front of him.

Lenny smiled this preposterous pseudo-tough-guy smile. Littell balled his fist and hit him.

Lenny clipped an end table and went down spitting teeth. Kemper threw a sofa cushion at him.

"Who's Laura Hughes? Tell me in detail."

Littell dropped the knucks. His hand throbbed and went numb.

"I said, 'Who's Laura Hughes?' "

Lenny nuzzled the cushion. Lenny spat out a chunk of gold bridgework.

"I said, 'Who's Laura Hughes?' "

Lenny coughed and cleared his throat. Lenny took a big let's-get-this-over-with breath.

He said, "She's Joe Kennedy's daughter. Her mother's Gloria Swanson."

Littell shut his eyes. The Q&A made absolutely no—

Kemper said, "Keep going."

"How far? I'm the only one outside the family who knows."

Kemper said, "Keep going."

Lenny took another breath. His lip was split up to his nostrils.

"Mr. Kennedy supports Laura. Laura loves him and hates him. Gloria Swanson hates Mr. Kennedy because he cheated her out of lots of money when he was a movie producer. She disowned Laura years ago, and that's all the 'keep going' I've got, goddamn you."

Littell opened his eyes. Lenny picked up the end table and flopped into a chair.

Kemper twirled the knucks on one finger. "Where did she get the name Hughes?"

"From Howard Hughes. Mr. Kennedy hates Hughes, so Laura took the name to annoy him."

Littell closed his eyes. He started seeing things he wasn't conjuring up.

"Ask Mr. Sands a question, Ward."

An image flickered out—Lenny with his phallus-shaped pen.

"Ward, open your eyes and ask Mr. Sands a—"

Littell opened his eyes and took his glasses off. The room went soft and blurry.

"I saw you arguing with Mad Sal outside the church. What was that about?"

Lenny worked a tooth loose. “I tried to quit the junket gig.”

“Why?”

“Because Sal’s poison. Because he’s poison like you are.”

He sounded I’m-a-snitch-now resigned.

“But he didn’t let you quit?”

“No. I told him I’d work with him for six months tops, if he’s still ...”

Kemper twirled his knucks. “If he’s still what?”

“Still fucking alive.”

He sounded calm. He sounded like an actor who just figured out his role.

“Why wouldn’t he be?”

“Because he’s a degenerate gambler. Because he owes Sam G. twelve grand, and a contract’s going out if he doesn’t pay it back.”

Littell put his glasses on. “I want you to stick with Sal, and let me worry about his debts.”

Lenny wiped his mouth on the cushion. That one knuck shot cut him a brand-new harelip.

Kemper said, “Answer Mr. Littell.”

Lenny said, “Oh yes, yes, Mr. Littell, sir”—arch-ugly-faggot inflected.

Kemper slipped the knucks into his waistband. “Don’t tell Laura Hughes about this. And don’t tell anybody about our arrangement.”

Lenny stood up, knock-kneed. “I wouldn’t dream of it.”

Kemper winked. “You’ve got panache, son. And I know a magazine man in L.A. who could use an insider like you.”

Lenny pushed his lip flaps together. Littell sent up a prayer: Please let me sleep through this night with no dreams.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/16/59. Official FBI telephone call transcript: "Recorded at the Director's Request"/"Classified Confidential 1-A: Director's Eyes Only." Speaking: Director Hoover, Special Agent Kemper Boyd.

JEH: Good morning, Mr. Boyd.
KB: Sir, good morning.
JEH: We have an excellent connection. Are you nearby?
KB: I'm at a restaurant on Northeast "I" Street.
JEH: I see. The Committee offices are close by, so I imagine you're hard at work for Little Brother.
KB: I am, Sir. At least cosmetically.
JEH: Update me, please.
KB: I convinced Little Brother to send me back to Miami. I told him that I could depose some Sun Valley land fraud witnesses, and in fact I did bring back some inconclusive depositions.
JEH: Continue.
KB: My real motive in traveling to Florida was to accrue information for you on the Gretzler and Kirpaski matters. You'll be pleased to know that I checked in with both the Miami and Lake Weir Police Departments and learned that both cases have been moved to open file status. I consider that a tacit admission that both homicides will remain unsolved.
JEH: Excellent. Now update me on the brothers.
KB: The Committee's labor racketeering mandate expires in ninety days. The paperwork forwarding process is now in the compilation stage, and I'll be sending you carbons of every piece of salient memoranda sent to our target grand juries. And, again, Sir, my opinion is that Jimmy Hoffa is legally inviolate at this time.
JEH: Continue.
KB: Big Brother has been calling legitimate labor leaders allied with the Democratic Party, to assure them that the trouble that Little Brother has stirred up with Hoffa does not mean that he is anti-labor overall. My understanding is that he will announce his candidacy in early January of next year.
JEH: And you remain certain that the brothers do not suspect the Bureau of collusion in the Darleen Shoftel matter?
KB: I'm certain, Sir. Pete Bondurant's girlfriend informed Little

Brother of the Hush-Hush piece, and Ward Littell exposed both our primary bug and Bondurant's secondary bug independent of her.

JEH: I heard the Brothers' father made Howard Hughes eat crow.

KB: That's true, Sir.

JEH: Hush-Hush has been lackluster lately. The advance peeks that Mr. Hughes has been sending me have been quite tame.

KB: I've been staying in touch with Pete Bondurant on general principles, and I think I've found him a Hollywood-connected man he could use as a stringer.

JEH: If my bedtime reading improves, I'll know you've succeeded.

KB: Yes, Sir.

JEH: We have Ward Littell to thank for that entire Big Brother snafu.

KB: I passed through Chicago and saw Littell two days ago, Sir.

JEH: Continue.

KB: I had initially thought that his THP expulsion might push him toward taking anti-Mob actions on his own, so I decided to check up on him.

JEH: And?

KB: And my concerns were groundless. Littell seems to be suffering his Red Squad work in silence, and the only change of habit that I could detect was that he's begun an affair with Tom Agee's daughter Helen.

JEH: An affair of a sexual nature?

KB: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Is the girl of age?

KB: She's twenty-one, Sir.

JEH: I want you to keep an eye on Littell.

KB: I will, Sir. And while I have you, could I bring up a tangential matter?

JEH: Certainly.

KB: It involves the Cuban political situation.

JEH: Continue.

KB: In the course of my Florida visits I've met several pro-Batista and pro-Castro Cuban refugees. Now, apparently Castro is going Communist. I've learned that undesirables of varying political stripes will be expelled from Cuba and granted asylum in the U.S., with most of them settling in Miami. Would you like information on them?

JEH: Do you have an information source?

KB: Yes, Sir.

JEH: But you'd rather not reveal it?

KB: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I hope they're paying you.

KB: It's an ambiguous situation, Sir.

JEH: You're an ambiguous man. And yes, any and all Cuban emigre intelligence would be appreciated. Have you anything to add? I'm due at a meeting.

KB: One last thing, Sir. Did you know that the brothers' father had an illegitimate daughter with Gloria Swanson?

JEH: No, I did not know that. You're certain?

KB: Reasonably. Should I follow up on it?

JEH: Yes. But avoid any personal entanglements that might upset your incursion.

KB: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Forewarned is forearmed. You have a tendency to adopt people, such as the morally-impaired Ward Littell. Don't extend that tendency toward the Kennedys. I suspect that their powers of seduction exceed even your own.

KB: I'll be careful, Sir.

JEH: Good day, Mr. Boyd.

KB: Good day, Sir.

19

(Los Angeles, 1/18/59)

Dick Steisel said, “If Mr. Hughes is so tight with J. Edgar Hoover, have *him* call off the goddamn process servers.”

Pete scoped out his office. The client photos were boffo—Hughes shared a wall with some South American dictators and bongo player Preston Epps.

“He won’t ask Hoover for favors. He figures he hasn’t kissed his ass enough yet.”

“He can’t keep dodging subpoenas forever. He should simply divest TWA, earn his three or four hundred million and get on to his next conquest.”

Pete rocked his chair and put his feet up on Steisel’s desk. “He doesn’t see things that way.”

“And how do you see things?”

“The way he pays me to.”

“Which means, in this instance?”

“Which means I’m going to call Central Casting, bag a half-dozen actors and have them made up as Mr. Hughes, then send them out in Hughes Aircraft limos. I’m going to tell them to hit some night spots, throw some cash around and talk up their travel plans. Timbuktu, Nairobi—who gives a shit? It'll buy us some time."

Steisel sifted through desk clutter. "TWA aside, you should know that most of the *Hush-Hush* articles you've sent over for vetting are libelous. Here's an example from that Spade Cooley piece. 'Does Ella Mae Cooley have 'Everlast' stamped across her chest? She should, because Spade's been bopping bluegrass ballads on her already dangerously dented decolletage! It seems that Ella Mae told Spade she wanted to join a free love cult! Spade responded with fiddle-honed fisticuffs, and now Ella Mae has been sporting brutally black-and-blue blistered bosomage.' You see, Pete, there's no loophole rhetoric or—"

Steisel moaned and droned. Pete shut him out and daydreamed.

Kemper Boyd called him yesterday. He said, "I've got you a lead on a magazine stringer. His name's Lenny Sands, and he's playing a junket engagement at the Cal-Neva Lodge in Lake Tahoe. Go talk to him—I think he'd be perfect for *Hush-Hush. But* —he's tight with Ward Littell, and I know you'll figure out he's FBI-connected. And you should also know that Littell has an eyeball witness on the Gretzler job. Mr. Hoover told him to forget about it, but Littell's the volatile type. I don't want you to even mention Littell to Lenny."

Lenny Sands sounded good. The "eyeball witness" line was horseshit.

Pete said, "I'll go see Sands. But let's talk turkey about something else, too."

"Cuba?"

"Yeah, Cuba. I'm starting to think it's a gravy train for us law-enforcement retirees."

"You're right. And I'm thinking of buying in myself."

"I want in. Howard Hughes is driving me nuts."

"Do something nice, then. Do something John Stanton would like."

"For instance?"

"Look me up in the Washington, D.C. white pages, and send me some goodies."

Steisel jerked him out of his daydream. "Get these college kids to insert 'alleged' and 'supposed, ' and make the pieces more hypothetical. Pete, are you listening to me?"

Pete said, “Dick, I’ll see you. I’ve got things to do.”

He drove to a pay phone and dialed favors. He called a cop buddy, Mickey Cohen, and Fred Otash, “Private Eye to the Stars.” They said they could glom some “goodies,” with D.C. delivery guaranteed pronto.

Pete called Spade Cooley. He said, I just kiboshed a new smear on you. Grateful Spade said, “What can *I* do for *you*?”

Pete said, I need six girls from your band. Have them meet me at Central Casting in an hour.

Spade said, Yes, Big-Daddy-O!

Pete called Central Casting and Hughes Aircraft. Two clerks promised satisfaction: six Howard Hughes look-alikes and six limousines would be waiting at Central in one hour.

Pete rendezvoused with his shills and paired them off: six Howards, six women, six limos. The Howards got specific instructions: Live it up through to dawn and spread the word that you’re blasting off for Rio!

The limos hauled ass. Spade dropped Pete off at the Burbank airport.

He caught a puddle jumper to Tahoe. The pilot started his downswing right over the Cal-Neva Lodge.

Be good, Lenny.

The casino featured slots, craps, roulette, blackjack, poker, keno, and the world’s thickest deep-pile carpets. The lobby featured a panoply of jumbo cardboard Frank Sinatras.

Dig that one by the door—somebody drew a dick in Frankie’s mouth.

Dig that tiny cardboard cutout by the bar: “Lenny Sands at the Swingeroo Lounge!”

Somebody yelled, “Pete! Pete the Frenchman!” It had to be somebody Outfit—or somebody suicide prone.

Pete looked around. He saw Johnny Rosselli, waving from a booth just inside the bar enclosure.

He walked over. The booth was all-star: Rosselli, Sam G., Heshie Ryskind, Carlos Marcello.

Rosselli winked. “Frenchman Pete, *che se dice*?”

“Good, Johnny. You?”

“*Ça va*, Pete, *ça va*. You know the boys here? Carlos, Mo and Heshie?”

“Just by reputation.”

Handshakes went around. Pete stayed standing—per Outfit protocol.

Rosselli said, “Pete’s French-Canadian, but he don’t like to be reminded of it.”

Giancana said, “Everybody’s gotta come from somewhere.”

Marcello said, “Except me. I got no fucking birth certificate. I was either born in fucking Tunis, North Africa, or fucking Guatemala. My parents were Sicilian greenhorns with no fucking passports. I shoulda asked them, ‘Hey, where was I born?’ when I had the chance.”

Ryskind said, “Yeah, but I’m a Jew with a finicky prostate. My people came from Russia. And if you don’t think that’s a handicap in this crowd …”

Marcello said, “Pete’s been helping Jimmy out in Miami lately. You know, at the cabstand.”

Rosselli said, “And don’t think we don’t appreciate it.”

Giancana said, “Cuba has to get worse before it gets better. Now the fucking Beard has ‘nationalized’ our fucking casinos. He’s got Santo T. in custody down there, and he’s costing us hundreds of thousands a day.”

Rosselli said, “It’s like Castro just shoved an atom bomb up the ass of every made guy in America.”

Nobody said, “Sit down.”

Sam G. pointed out a lowlife walking by counting nickels. “D’Onofrio brings these chumps here. They stink up my room and don’t lose enough to compensate. Me and Frank have got forty percent of the Lodge between us. This is a top-line room, not a resort for the lunchpail crowd.”

Rosselli laughed. “Your boy Lenny’s working with Sal now.”

Giancana took a bead on the lowlife and pulled a make-believe trigger. “Somebody’s gonna put a new part in Mad Sal D’Onofrio’s hair. Bookies that owe more than they take in are like fucking Communists sucking the welfare tit.”

Rosselli sipped his highball. “So, Pete, what brings you to the Cal-Neva?”

“I’m interviewing Lenny Sands for a job. I thought he might make a good stringer for *Hush-Hush*.”

Sam G. passed him some play chips. “Here, Frenchman, lose a grand on me. But don’t move Lenny out of Chicago, all right? I like having him around.”

Pete smiled. The “boys” smiled. Get the picture? They’ve tossed you all the crumbs they think you’re worth.

Pete walked. He got caught up in the tail end of a stampede—low rollers heading for the low-rent lounge.

He followed them in. The room was SRO: every table full, latecomers holding up the walls.

Lenny Sands was on stage, backed by a piano and drums.

The keyboard man tickled some blues. Lenny bopped him on the head with his microphone.

“Lew, Lew, Lew. What are we, a bunch of moolies? What are you playing? ‘Pass me the Watermelon, Mama, ’Cause My Spareribs are Double-Parked’?”

The audience yukked. Lenny said, “Lew, give me some Frankie.”

Lew Piano laid down an intro. Lenny sang, half Sinatra/half fag falsetto:

“I’ve got you under my skin. I’ve got you, keestered deep inside of me. So deep, my hemorrhoids are riding me. I’ve got you—WHOA!—under my skin.”

The junket chumps howled. Lenny cranked up his lisp:

“I’ve got you, chained to my bed. I’ve got you, and extra K-Y now! So deep, you can’t really say why now! I’ve got you under my skin!”

The geeks yuk-yuk-yukked and tee-hee-heed. Peter Lawford walked in and checked the action—Frank Sinatra’s #1 toady.

The drummer popped a rim shot. Lenny stroked his mike at crotch level.

“You gorgeous he-men from the Chicago Knights of Columbus, I just adore you!”

The audience cheered—

“And I want you to know that all my womanizing and chasing ring-a-ding cooze is just subterfuge to hide my overweening lust for YOU, the men of K of C Chapter 384, you gorgeous hunks of manicotti with your king-sized braciolas that I just can’t wait to sautee and fricassee and take deep into my tantalizing Tetrazzini!”

Lawford looked hot to trot. It was common insider knowledge that he'd kill to suck up to Sinatra.

The junketeers roared. Some clown waved a K of C flag.

"I just love you love you love you! I can't wait to dress up in drag and invite all of you to sleep over at my Rat Pack slumber party!"

Lawford bolted toward the stage.

Pete tripped him.

Dig the toady's pratfall—an instant all-time classic.

Frank Sinatra shoved his way into the lounge. The junketeers went stone fucking nuts.

Sam G. intercepted him. Sam G. whispered to him, nice and gentle and FIRM.

Pete caught the gist.

Lenny's with the Outfit. Lenny's not a guy you rough up for sport.

Sam was smiling. Sam dug Lenny's act.

Sinatra about-faced. Ass-kissers surrounded him.

Lenny cranked his lisp waaaaay up. "Frankie, come back! Peter, get up off the floor, you gorgeous nincompoop!"

Lenny Sands was one cute shitbird.

• • •

He slipped the head blackjack dealer a note to forward to Sands. Lenny showed up at the coffee shop, on-the-dot punctual.

Pete said, "Thanks for coming."

Lenny sat down. "Your note mentioned money. That's something that always gets my attention."

A waitress brought them coffee. Jackpot gongs went off—baby slots were bolted to every table.

"Kemper Boyd recommended you. He said you'd be perfect for the job."

"Are you working for him?"

"No. He's just an acquaintance."

Lenny rubbed a scar above his lips. "What is the job exactly?"

"You'd be the stringer for *Hush-Hush*. You'd be digging up the stories and scandal bits and feeding them to the writers."

"So I'd be a snitch."

"Sort of. You keep your nose down in L.A., Chicago and Nevada, and report back."

"For how much?"

"A grand a month, cash."

"Movie-star dirt, that's what you want. You want the skank on entertainment people."

"Right. And liberal-type politicians."

Lenny poured cream in his coffee. "I've got no beef with that, except for the Kennedys. Bobby I can do without, but Jack I like."

"You were pretty tough on Sinatra. He's pals with Jack, isn't he?"

"He pimps for Jack and brown-noses the whole family. Peter Lawford's married to one of Jack's sisters, and he's Frank's brown-nose contact. Jack thinks Frank's good for chuckles and not much else, and you didn't hear any of this from me."

Pete sipped coffee. "Tell me more."

"No, you ask."

"Okay. I'm on the Sunset Strip and I want to get laid for a C-note. What do I do?"

"You see Mel, the parking-lot man at Dino's Lodge. For a dime, he'll send you to a pad on Havenhurst and Fountain."

"Suppose I want nigger stuff?"

"Go to the drive-in at Washington and La Brea and talk to the colored carhops."

"Suppose I dig boys?"

Lenny flinched. Pete said, "I know you hate fags, but answer the question."

"Shit, I don't … wait … the doorman at the Largo runs a string of male prosties."

"Good. Now, what's the story on Mickey Cohen's sex life?"

Lenny smiled. "It's cosmetic. He doesn't really dig cooze, but he likes to be seen with beautiful women. His current quasi-girlfriend is named Sandy Hashhagen. Sometimes he goes out with Candy Barr and Liz Renay."

"Who clipped Tony Trombino and Tony Brancato?"

"Either Jimmy Frattiano or a cop named Dave Klein."

"Who's got the biggest dick in Hollywood?"

"Steve Cochran or John Ireland."

"What's Spade Cooley do for kicks?"

"Pop bennies and beat up his wife."

"Who'd Ava Gardner cheat on Sinatra with?"

"Everybody."

"Who do you see for a quick abortion?"

"I'd go see Freddy Otash."

"Jayne Mansfield?"

"Nympho."

"Dick Contino?"

"Muff diver supreme."

"Gail Russell?"

"Drinking herself to death at a cheap pad in West L.A."

"Lex Barker?"

"Pussy hound with jailbait tendencies."

"Johnnie Ray?"

"Homo."

"Art Pepper?"

"Junkie."

"Lizabeth Scott?"

"Dyke."

"Billy Eckstine?"

"Cunt man."

"Tom Neal?"

"On the skids in Palm Springs."

"Anita O'Day?"

"Hophead."

"Cary Grant?"

"Homo."

"Randolph Scott?"

"Homo."

"Senator William F. Knowland?"

"Drunk."

"Chief Parker?"

"Drunk."

"Bing Crosby?"

"Drunk wife-beater."

"Sergeant John O'Grady?"

"LAPD guy known for planting dope on jazz musicians."

"Desi Arnaz?"

"Whore chaser."

"Scott Brady?"

"Grasshopper."

"Grace Kelly?"

"Frigid. I popped her once myself, and I almost froze my shvantze off."

Pete laughed. "Me?"

Lenny grinned. "Shakedown king. Pimp. Killer. And in case you're wondering, I'm much too smart to ever fuck with you."

Pete said, "You've got the job."

They shook hands.

Mad Sal D. walked in the door, waving two cups spilling nickels.

20

(Washington, D.C., 1/20/59)

United Parcel dropped off three big boxes. Kemper carried them into his kitchen and opened them.

Bondurant wrapped the stuff in oilcloth. Bondurant understood the concept of “goodies.”

Bondurant sent him two submachine guns, two hand grenades and nine silencer-fitted .45 automatics.

Bondurant included a succinct, unsigned note:

“Your move and Stanton’s.”

The machine guns came with fully loaded drums and a maintenance manual. The .45s fit his shoulder rig perfectly.

Kemper strapped one on and drove to the airport. He caught the 1:00 p.m. New York shuttle with time to spare.

881 Fifth Avenue was a high-line Tudor fortress. Kemper ducked past the doorman and pushed the “L. Hughes” lobby buzzer.

A woman’s voice came on the intercom. “Take the second lift on the left, please. You can leave the groceries in the foyer.”

He elevatored up twelve floors. The doors opened straight into an apartment vestibule.

The vestibule was the size of his living room. The mink woman was leaning against a full-sized Greek column, wearing a tartan robe and slippers.

Her hair was tied back. She was juuust starting to smile.

"I remember you from the Kennedys' party. Jack said you're one of Bobby's policemen."

"My name's Kemper Boyd, Miss Hughes."

"From Lexington, Kentucky?"

"You're close. Nashville, Tennessee."

She folded her arms. "You heard me give the cab driver my address, and you described me to the doorman downstairs. He told you my name, and you rang my bell."

"You're close."

"You saw me give that vulgar diamond broach away. Any man as elegantly dressed as you are would appreciate a gesture like that."

"Only a well-taken-care-of woman would make that kind of gesture."

She shook her head. "That's not a very sharp perception."

Kemper stepped toward her. "Then let's try this. You did it because you knew you had an audience. It was a Kennedy kind of thing to do, and I'm not criticizing you for it."

Laura cinched her robe. "Don't get presumptuous with the Kennedys. Don't even talk presumptuously about them, because when you least expect it they'll cut you off at the knees."

"You've seen it happen?"

"Yes, I have."

"Did it happen to you?"

"No."

"Because you can't expel what you haven't admitted?"

Laura pulled out a cigarette case. "I started smoking because most of the sisters did. They had cases like this, so Mr. Kennedy gave me one."

"Mr. Kennedy?"

"Or Joe. Or Uncle Joe."

Kemper smiled. "My father went broke and killed himself. He willed me ninety-one dollars and the gun he did it with."

"Uncle Joe will leave me a good deal more than that."

"What's the current stipend?"

"A hundred thousand dollars a year and expenses."

“Did you decorate this apartment to resemble the Kennedys’ suite at the Carlyle?”

“Yes.”

“It’s beautiful. Sometimes I think I could live in hotel suites forever.”

She walked away from him. She turned on her heels and disappeared down a museum-width hallway.

Kemper let five minutes pass. The apartment was huge and quiet—he couldn’t get his bearings.

He worked his way left and got lost. Three corridors led him back to the same pantry; the four entrances to the dining room had him spinning in circles. He hit intersecting hallways, a library, *wings*—

Traffic sounds straightened him out. He heard foot scuffs on the terrace behind the grand piano.

He walked over. The terrace would swallow up his kitchen at least twice.

Laura was leaning against the railing. A breeze ruffled her robe.

She said, “Did Jack tell you?”

“No. I figured it out myself.”

“You’re lying. The Kennedys and a friend of mine in Chicago are the only ones who know. Did Mr. Hoover tell you? Bobby says he doesn’t know, but I’ve never believed him.”

Kemper shook his head. “Mr. Hoover doesn’t know. Lenny Sands told a Chicago FBI man who’s a friend of mine.”

Laura lit a cigarette. Kemper cupped his hands around the match.

“I never thought Lenny would tell a soul.”

“He didn’t have much choice. If it’s any consol—”

“*No*, I don’t want to know. Lenny knows bad people, and bad people can make you say things you don’t want to.”

Kemper touched her arm. “Please don’t tell Lenny you met me.”

“Why, Mr. Boyd?”

“Because he’s embarrassingly well connected.”

“No, you don’t understand. I’m asking you what you’re doing here.”

“I saw you at Joe Kennedy’s party. I’m sure you can fill in the rest yourself.”

“That’s not an answer.”

“I couldn’t very well ask Jack or Bobby for your number.”

“Why not?”

“Because Uncle Joe wouldn’t approve, and Bobby doesn’t entirely trust me.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m embarrassingly well connected.”

Laura shivered. Kemper draped his suitcoat around her shoulders.

She pointed to his holster. “Bobby told me the McClellan people don’t carry guns.”

“I’m off duty.”

“Did you think I’d be so bored and indolent that you could just ring my bell and seduce me?”

“No, I thought I’d buy you dinner first.”

Laura laughed and coughed smoke. “Is Kemper your mother’s maiden name?”

“Yes.”

“Is she alive?”

“She died in a nursing home in ’49.”

“What did you do with the gun your father left you?”

“I sold it to a classmate in law school.”

“Does he carry it?”

“He died on Iwo Jima.”

Laura dropped her cigarette in a coffee cup. “I know so many orphans.”

“So do I. You’re sort of one your—”

“*No*. That’s not true. You’re just saying it to make points with me.”

“I don’t think it’s much of a stretch.”

She snuggled into his suitcoat. The sleeves flopped in the wind.

“Repartee is one thing, Mr. Boyd, and the truth is another. The truth is my robber-baron father fucked my movie-star mother and got her pregnant. My movie-star mother had already had three abortions and didn’t want to risk a fourth. My movie-star mom disowned me, but my father enjoys flaunting me in front of his legitimate family once a year. The boys like me because I’m provocative, and they think I’m nifty because they can’t fuck me, because I’m their half-sister. The girls hate me because I’m a coded message from their father that says men can fuck around, but women can’t. Do you get the picture, Mr. Boyd? I have a family. My father put me through boarding school and several colleges. My father supports me. My father informed his family of my existence when Jack brought me home from a Harvard alumni mixer as the unwitting pawn in a rather vicious ploy I had initiated to assert myself into the family. Imagine his surprise when Father said, 'Jack, you can't fuck her, she's your half-sister. ' Little Bobby, twenty and Calvinistic, overheard the conversation and spread the word. My father figured what the hell, the word's out, and invited me to stay for dinner. Mrs. Kennedy had a rather traumatic reaction to all of this. Our 'embarrassingly well connected' friend Lenny Sands was giving Jack speech lessons for his first congressional campaign, and was at the house for dinner. He stopped Rose from making a scene, and we've been sharing secrets ever since. *I have a family*, Mr. Boyd. My father is evil and grasping and ruthless and willing to destroy anybody who so much as looks the wrong way at the children he publicly acknowledges. And I hate everything about him except the money he gives me and the fact that he would probably destroy anybody who tried to hurt me as well."

Car horns bleeped long and shrill. Laura pointed down at a line of taxis. "They perch there like vultures. They always make the most noise when I'm playing Rachmaninoff."

Kemper unholstered his piece. He honed in on a sign marked Yellow Cabs Only.

He braced his arm on the railing and fired. Two shots sheared the sign off the signpost. The silencer went *thwack*—Pete was a good ordnance supplier.

Laura whooped. Cabbies gestured up, spooked and bewildered.

Kemper said, "I like your hair."

Laura untied it. The wind made it dance.

They talked.

He told her how the Boyd fortune evaporated. She told him how she flunked out of Juilliard and flopped as a socialite.

She called herself a musical dilettante. He called himself an ambitious cop. She recorded Chopin on a vanity label. He sent Christmas cards to car thieves he arrested.

He said he loved Jack but couldn't stand Bobby. She called Bobby deep Beethoven and Jack Mozart most glib. She called Lenny Sands her one true friend and didn't mention his betrayal. He said his daughter, Claire, shared all his secrets.

Devil's Advocate snapped on automatically. He knew exactly what to say and what to omit.

He called Mr. Hoover a vindictive old queen. He portrayed himself as a liberal pragmatist hitched to the Kennedy star.

She revived the orphanhood theme. He described the three-daughter combine.

Susan Littell was judgmental and shrill. Helen Agee was courageous and impetuous. His Claire was too close to know just yet.

He told her about his friendship with Ward. He said he wanted a younger brother for keeps—and the Bureau gave him one. He said Ward worshiped Bobby. She said Bobby sensed that Uncle Joe was evil and chased gangsters to compensate for his patrimony.

He hinted at his own lost brother. He said the loss made him push Ward in odd ways.

They talked themselves exhausted. Laura called "21" and had dinner sent up. The Chateaubriand and wine made her drowsy.

They left it unspoken.

Not tonight—next time.

Laura fell asleep. Kemper walked through the apartment.

Two circuits taught him the layout. Laura told him the maid needed a map. The dining room could feed a small army.

He called the Agency's Miami Ops number. John Stanton picked up immediately.

"Yes?"

"It's Kemper Boyd. I'm calling to accept your offer."

"I'm very pleased to hear that. I'll be in touch, Mr. Boyd. We'll have lots to discuss."

"Good night, then."

"Good night."

Kemper walked back to the drawing room. He left the terrace curtains open—skyscrapers across the park threw light on Laura.

He watched her sleep.

21

(Chicago, 1/22/59)

Lenny's spare fuck-pad key unlocked the door. Littell hacked the jamb down to the bolt to fake a forensically valid burglar entry.

He broke the blade off his pen knife. The B&E shakes had him hacking too hard.

His trial break-in taught him the floor plan. He knew where everything was.

Littell shut the door and went straight for the golf bag. The $14,000 was still tucked inside the ball pocket.

He put his gloves on. He allotted seven minutes for cosmetic thievery.

He unplugged the hi-fi.

He emptied drawers and ransacked the medicine cabinet.

He dumped a TV, a toaster and the golf bag by the door.

It looked like a classic junkie-pad boost. Butch Montrose would never suspect anything else.

Kemper Boyd always said PROTECT YOUR INFORMANTS.

He pocketed the money. He carried the swag to his car, drove it to the lake and dumped it in a garbage-strewn tide pool.

Littell got home late. Helen was asleep on his side of the bed.

Her side was cold. Sleep wouldn't come—he kept replaying the break-in for errors.

He drifted off around dawn. He dreamed he was choking on a dildo.

He woke up late. Helen left him a note.

> School bodes. What time did you get home? For a (dismayingly) liberal FBI man you certainly are a zealous Communist chaser. What do Communists do at midnight?
>
> Love, love, love,
> H

Littell forced down coffee and toast. He wrote his note on plain bond paper.

> Mr. D'Onofrio,
>
> Sam Giancana has issued a contract on you. You will be killed unless you repay the $12,000 you owe him. I have a way for you to avoid this. Meet me this afternoon at 4:00. The Kollege Klub, 1281 58th, Hyde Park.

Littell put the note in an envelope and added five hundred dollars. Lenny said the junket tour had concluded—Sal should be back at home.

Kemper Boyd always said SEDUCE YOUR INFORMANTS WITH MONEY.

Littell called the Speedy-King Messenger Service. The dispatcher said he'd send a courier right over.

Mad Sal was prompt. Littell pushed his rye and beer aside.

They had the whole row of tables to themselves. The college kids at the bar wouldn't be able to hear them.

Sal sat down across from him. His flab rolls jiggled and hiked his shirt up over his belly button.

He said, "So?"

Littell pulled his gun and held it in his lap. The table covered him.

"So what did you do with that five hundred?"

Sal picked his nose. “I got down on the Blackhawks versus the Canadiens. Ten o’clock tonight that five hundred is a thousand.”

“You owe Giancana eleven thousand more than that.”

“So who the fuck told you?”

“A reliable source.”

“You mean some Fed snitch cocksucker. You’re a Fed, right? You’re too candy-ass looking to be anything else, and if you was CPD or the Cook County Sheriff’s, I’d’ve bought you off by now, and I’d be fucking your wife and cornholing your snotnose little boy while you was off at work.”

“You owe Giancana twelve thousand dollars that you don’t have. He’s going to kill you.”

“Tell me something I don’t know.”

“You killed a colored boy named Maurice Theodore Wilkins.”

“That accusation is stale bread. It is fucking rebop you got out of some file.”

“I just turned an eyeball witness.”

Sal dug into his ears with a paper clip. “That is horse pucky. Feds don’t investigate nigger homicides, and a little birdie told me that that kid was killed by an unknown assailant in the basement of the church rectory he stole from. The birdie said the assailant waited for the priests to go to a ball game, and then he cut the nigger boy up with a chainsaw after he made the nigger boy blow him. The birdie said there was lots of blood, and the assailant took care of the stink with altar wine.”

Kemper Boyd always said NEVER SHOW FEAR OR DISGUST.

Littell laid a thousand dollars on the table. “I’m prepared to pay off your debt. In two or three installments, so Giancana won’t suspect anything.”

Sal grabbed the money. “So I take it, so I don’t take it. For all I know, Mo might decide to whack me ’cause he’s jealous of my good looks.”

Littell cocked his gun. “Put the money down.”

Sal did it. “So?”

“So are you interested?”

“So if I’m not?”

“So Giancana clips you. So I put out the word that you killed Tony Iannone. You’ve heard the rumors—Tony got whacked outside a homo joint. Sal, you’re an open book. Jesus, ‘blow’ and ‘cornhole.’ I think you developed a few habits in Joliet.”

Sal ogled the cash. Sal smelled like tobacco sweat and Aqua Velva lotion.

"You're a loan shark, Sal. What I'm asking for won't be too far out of line."

"S-s-so?"

"So I want to get at the Teamsters' Pension Fund. I want you to help me push somebody up the ladder. I'll find a man with a pedigree looking for a loan, and you help me set him up with Sam and the Fund. It's that simple. And I'm not asking you to snitch anybody."

Sal ogled the money.

Sal popped sweat.

Littell dropped three thousand dollars on the pile.

Sal said, "Okay."

Littell said, "Take it to Giancana. Don't gamble with it."

Sal gave him the bah-fungoo sign. "Stow the lecture. And remember I fucked your mother, which makes me your daddy."

Littell stood up and roundhoused his revolver. Mad Sal caught the barrel square in the teeth.

Kemper Boyd always said COW YOUR INFORMANTS.

Sal coughed up blood and gold fillings. Some kids at the bar watched the whole thing, bug-eyed.

Littell stared them down.

22

(Miami, 2/4/59)

The boat was late.

U.S. Customs agents crowded the dock. The U.S. Health Service had a tent pitched in the parking lot behind it.

The refugees would be X-rayed and blood-tested. The contagious ones would be shipped to a state hospital outside Pensacola.

Stanton checked his passenger manifest. “One of our on-island contacts leaked us a list. All the deportees are male.”

Waves hit the pilings. Guy Banister flicked a cigarette butt at them.

“Which implies that they’re criminals. Castro’s getting rid of plain old ‘undesirables’ under the ‘politically undesirable’ blanket.”

Debriefing huts flanked the dock. U.S. Border Patrol marksmen crouched behind them. They had first-hint-of-trouble/shoot-to-kill orders.

Kemper stood above the front pilings. Waves smashed up and sprayed his trouser legs.

His specific job was to interview Teofilio Paez, the ex-security boss for the United Fruit Company. A CIA briefing pouch defined UF: “America’s largest, most long-established and profitable in-Cuba corporation and the largest on-island employer of unskilled and semi-skilled Cuban National workers. A long-standing bastion of Cuban anti-Communism. Cuban National security aides, working for the company, have long been effective in recruiting anti-Communist youth eager to infiltrate left-wing worker’s groups and Cuban educational institutions.”

Banister and Stanton watched the skyline. Kemper stepped into a breeze and let it ruffle his hair.

He had ten days in as a contract agent—two briefings at Langley and this. He had ten days in with Laura Hughes—the La Guardia shuttle made trysting easy.

Laura felt legitimate. Laura went crazy when he touched her. Laura said brilliant things and played Chopin *con brio*.

Laura was a Kennedy. Laura spun Kennedy tales with great verve.

He hid those stories from Mr. Hoover.

It felt like near-loyalty. It felt near-poignant—and Hoover-compromised.

He needed Mr. Hoover. He continued to feed him phone reports, but limited them to McClellan Committee intelligence.

He rented a suite at the St. Regis Hotel, not far from Laura’s apartment. The monthly rate was brutal.

Manhattan got in your blood. His three paychecks totaled fifty-nine thousand a year—nowhere near enough to sustain the life he wanted.

Bobby kept him busy with boring Committee paperwork. Jack had dropped hints that the family might have post-Committee work for him. His most likely position would be campaign security boss.

Jack enjoyed having him around. Bobby continued to vaguely distrust him.

Bobby wasn’t up for grabs—and Ward Littell knew it.

He talked to Ward twice a week. Ward was ballyhooing his new snitch—a bookie/loan shark named Sal D’Onofrio.

Cautious Ward said he had Mad Sal cowed. Angry Ward said Lenny Sands was now working for Pete Bondurant.

Angry Ward knew that *he* set it up.

Ward sent him intelligence reports. He edited out the illegalities and forwarded them to Bobby Kennedy. Bobby knew Littell solely as “The Phantom.” Bobby prayed for him and marveled at his courage.

Hopefully, that courage was tinged with circumspection. Hopefully, that boy on the morgue slab taught Ward a few things.

Ward was adaptable and willing to listen. Ward was another orphan—raised in Jesuit foster homes.

Ward had good instincts. Ward believed that “alternative” Pension Fund books existed.

Lenny Sands thought the books were administered by a Mob elder statesman. He’d heard that cash was paid for loan referrals that resulted in large profits.

Littell might be stalking *big* money. It was potential knowledge to hide from Bobby.

He did hide it. He cut every Fund reference from the Phantom’s reports.

Littell was malleable for a zealot. The Big Question was this: Could his covert work be hidden from Mr. Hoover?

A dark speck bobbed on the water. Banister held up binoculars. “They don’t look wholesome. There’s a crap game going on at the back of the barge.”

Customs men hit the dock. They packed revolvers, billy clubs and shackle chains.

Stanton showed Kemper a photograph. “This is Paez. We’ll grab him right off, so Customs can’t requisition him.”

Paez looked like a skinny Xavier Cugat. Banister said, “I can see him now. He’s up front, and he’s cut and bruised.”

Stanton winced. “Castro hates United Fruit. Our propaganda section picked up a polemic he wrote on it nine months ago. It was an early indication that he might go Commie.”

Whitecaps pushed the barge in close. The men were kicking and clawing to be first off.

Kemper flicked the safety off his piece. “Where are we detaining them?”

Banister pointed north. “The Agency owns a motel in Boynton Beach. They concocted a cover story about fumigation and evicted all the tenants. We’ll pack these beaners in six to a room and see who we can use.”

The refugees yelled and waved little flags on sticks. Teo Paez was crouched to sprint.

The Customs boss yelled, “On ready!”

The barge tapped the dock. Paez jumped off. Kemper and Stanton grabbed him and bear-hugged him.

They picked him up and ran with him. Banister ran interference—“CIA custody! He’s ours!”

The riflemen fired warning shots. The refugees ducked and covered. Customs men grappled the barge in and cinched it to the pilings.

Kemper hustled Paez through the crowd. Stanton ran ahead and unlocked a debriefing hut.

Somebody yelled, “There’s a body on the boat!”

They got their man inside. Banister locked the door. Paez hit the floor and smothered it with kisses.

Cigars fell out of his pockets. Banister picked one up and sniffed the wrapper.

Stanton caught his breath. “Welcome to America, Mr. Paez. We’ve heard very good things about you, and we’re very glad you’re here.”

Kemper cracked a window. The dead man passed by on a gurney—blade-punctured from head to toe. Customs agents lined up the exiles—maybe fifty men total.

Banister set up his tape recorder on a table. Stanton said, “You had a death on the boat?”

Paez slumped into a chair. “No. It was a political execution. We surmised that the man had been deported to serve as an anti-American spy. Under interrogation he revealed that this was true. We acted accordingly.”

Kemper sat down. “You speak excellent English, Teo.”

“I speak the slow and exaggeratedly formal English of the laboriously self-taught. Native speakers tell me that I sometimes lapse into hilarious malapropisms and mutilations of their language.”

Stanton pulled a chair up. “Would you mind talking with us now? We’ve got a nice apartment ready for you, and Mr. Boyd will drive you there in a little while.”

Paez bowed. “I am at your disposable.”

“Excellent. I’m John Stanton, by the way. And these are my colleagues, Kemper Boyd and Guy Banister.”

Paez shook hands all around. Banister pocketed the rest of the cigars and turned on the tape machine.

"Can we get you anything before we start?"

"No. I would like my first American meal to be a sandwich at Wolfie's Delicatessen in Miami Beach."

Kemper smiled. Banister laughed outright. Stanton said, "Teo, is Fidel Castro a Communist?"

Paez nodded. "Yes. Indubitably so. He is a Communist in both thought and practice, and my old network of student informants have told me that airplanes carrying Russian diplomats have flown in to Havana late at night on several occasions recently. My friend Wilfredo Olmos Delsol, who was on the boat with me, has the flight numbers memorized."

Banister lit a cigarette. "Che Guevara's been Red since way back."

"Yes. And Fidel's brother Raúl is a Communisto pig himself. Moreover, he is a hypocriticize. My friend Tomás Obregón says that Raúl is selling confiscated heroin to rich drug addicts and hypocriticizingly spewing Communist rhetoric at the same time."

Kemper checked his custody list. "Tomás Obregón was on the boat with you."

"Yes."

"How would he have information on the Cuban heroin trade?"

"Because, Mr. Boyd, he was involved in the heroin trade himself. You see, my fellow boat passengers are mostly criminal scum. Fidel wanted to be rid of them and foisted them on America in hopes that they would practice their trades on your shores. What he failed to realize was that Communism is a bigger crime than dope peddling or robbery or murder, and that even criminals might possess the patriotic desire to reclaim their homeland."

Stanton rocked his chair back. "We've heard that Castro has taken over the Mafia-owned hotels and casinos."

"It is true. Fidel calls it 'nationalization.' He has stolen the casinos and millions of dollars from the Mafia. Tomás Obregón told me that the illustrious American gangster Santo Trafficante Jr. is currently in custody at the Nacional Hotel."

Banister sighed. "That cocksucker Castro has a death wish. He is fucking with both the United States of America *and* the Mafia."

"There is no Mafia, Guy. At least Mr. Hoover has always said so."

"Kemper, even God can make mistakes."

Stanton said, “Enough of that. Teo, what’s the status of the American citizens remaining inside Cuba?”

Paez scratched and stretched. “Fidel wants to appear humane. He is coddling the influential Americans still in Cuba and allowing them to see only the alleged good his revolution has done. He is going to release them slowly, to return to America as duped tools to dispense communistic propaganda. And in the meantime, Fidel has burned many of the cane fields of my beloved United Fruit, and has tortured and killed many of my student informants under the indictment that they are spies for the ‘*imperialisto y fascisto*’ La United.”

Stanton checked his watch. “Guy, take Teo over for his medical. Teo, go with Mr. Banister. Mr. Boyd will drive you into Miami in a little while.”

Banister hustled Paez out. Kemper watched them walk to the X-ray shack.

Stanton shut the door. “Dump the dead man somewhere, Kemper. I’ll debrief all the personnel who’ve seen him. And don’t rattle Guy’s cage, he can be volatile.”

“I’ve heard. Rumor has it that he was assistant superintendent of the New Orleans Police for about ten minutes, until he got drunk and shot off his gun in a crowded restaurant.”

Stanton smiled. “And rumor has it that you’ve fenced a few hot Corvettes in your day.”

“Touché. And parenthetically, what did you think of Pete Bondurant’s gun donation?”

“I was impressed. We’re thinking of making Pete an offer, and I’ll be bringing it up the next time I talk to the deputy director.”

Kemper said, “Pete’s a good man. He’s good at keeping rowdies in line.”

“Yes, he is. Jimmy Hoffa uses him to good effect at that Tiger Kab place. Keep going, Kemper. I can tell that you’ve got your thinking cap on.”

Kemper turned off the tape recorder. “John, you’re going to find that a sizable percentage of those men out there are uncontrollably psychopathic. Your notion of indoctrinating them and training them as potential anti-Castro guerrillas may not work. If you house them with stable Cuban immigrant families and find them work, per your existing plan, you’ll find them reverting to their former criminal predilections as soon as the novelty of being in this country wears off."

"You're saying we should screen them more thoroughly."

"No, I'm saying *I* should. I'm saying we should extend the detention period at the Agency's motel, and I should be the one with final authority as to who we recruit."

Stanton laughed. "May I ask what qualifies you for this?"

Kemper ticked off points on his fingers. "I worked undercover for nine years. I know criminals, and I like them. I infiltrated car theft rings, arrested the members and worked with the U.S. Attorney's Office in building their cases for prosecution. I understand the need certain criminals have to acquiesce to authority. John, I got so close to some of those car thieves that they insisted on deposing their confessions to me only—the agent who betrayed them and arrested them."

Stanton whistled—out-of-character for him. "Are you suggesting that you expand your duties and remain with the men you select as their field officer? That seems unrealistic to me, given your other entanglements."

Kemper slapped the table. "*No*. I'm strongly proposing Pete Bondurant for that job. What I'm saying is this: A hardcore criminal contingent, properly indoctrinated and supervised, could be very effective. Let's assume that the Castro problem extends. I think that even at this early date, it's safe to assume that the Agency will have a large pool of future deportees and legally emigrated Cubans to choose from. Let's make this first cadre an elite one. It's *ours*, John. Let's make it the best."

Stanton tapped his chin. "Mr. Dulles was ready to request green cards for all the men. He'd be pleased to know that we're being so selective early on. He hates begging the INS for favors."

Kemper put a hand up. "Don't deport the men we reject. Banister knows some Cubans in New Orleans, doesn't he?"

"Yes. There's a large Batistaite community there."

"Then let Guy have the men we reject. Let them find jobs or not find jobs, and have them file for visas on their own in Louisiana."

"How many men do you think will meet your qualifications?"

"I have no idea."

Stanton looked eager. "Mr. Dulles has approved the purchase of some cheap south Florida land for our initial training site. I think I could convince him to keep our permanent cadre there small and contained, if you think the men you select can also train future arrivals before we disperse them to the other camps that I'm certain will be springing up."

Kemper nodded. "I'll make training skills one of my criteria. Where is this land?"

"It's on the coast, outside a small town named Blessington."

"Is it accessible to Miami?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I was thinking of the Tiger Kab stand as a recruiting hub."

Stanton looked almost hot and bothered. "Gangster connotations aside, I think the Tiger Kab place could be utilized. Chuck Rogers is working there already, so we've already got an in."

Kemper said, "John"—very slowly.

Stanton looked dead ecstatic. "The answer to all your suggestions is yes, pending the deputy director's approval. And bravo, Kemper. You're more than fulfilling my expectations."

Kemper stood up and bowed. "Thanks. And I think we'll make Castro rue the day he sent that boat off."

"From your mouth to God's ears. And by the way, what do you think your friend Jack would say about our little freedom barge?"

Kemper laughed. "Jack would say, 'Where's the women?' "

Paez talked a blue streak. Kemper rolled down his window for relief.

They hit Miami at rush hour. Paez kept jabbering. Kemper drummed the dashboard and tried to replay his talk with Stanton.

"… and Mr. Thomas Gordean was my *patrón* at La United. He loved pussy until his fondness for I. W. Harper bonded bourbon inappropriated him. Most of the executives at La United got out after Castro took over, but Mr. Gordean has remained behind. Now, he is drinking even more heavily. He has several thousand shares of United Fruit stock with him, and refuses to leave. He has bought off militiamen to be his private bodyguards and is beginning to sprout the Communist line himself. My great fear is that Mr. Gordean will go Communisto like the Fidel I loved long ago. I fear that he will become a propaganda tool par eccentricity and …"

"Stock shares"—

"Thomas Gordean"—

A light bulb popped on and nearly blinded him. Kemper almost ran his car off the road.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/10/59. Hush-Hush stringer report: Lenny Sands to Pete Bondurant.

Pete,

Here's a lead I've picked up. 1.—Mickey Cohen's diving for crumbs. He's got two goons (George Piscatelli 8c Sam Lo Cigno) set to maybe work a sex shakedown racket. I got this from Dick Contino, in Chicago for some accordion soiree. Mickey got the idea when he read Lana Turner's love letters to Johnny Stompanato after Lana's daughter shanked Johnny. Johnny used to screw rich widows and had some out-of-work cameraman film it. Mickey's got some choice film clips. Tell Mr. Hughes he'll sell them for 3 grand.

Cheers,
Lenny

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/24/59. Hush-Hush stringer report: Lenny Sands to Pete Bondurant.

Pete,

I've been on the road with Sal D'Onofrio's junket gig. Here's some tidbits. 1.—All the midnight shift cocktail waitresses at the Dunes Hotel in Vegas are hookers. They serviced President Eisenhower's Secret Service crew when Ike addressed the Nevada State Legislature. 2.—Rock Hudson's banging the maitre d' at the Cal-Neva restaurant. 3.—Lenny Bruce is hooked on dilaudid. There's a whole squad of L.A. County Sheriff's set to entrap him the next time he appears on the Strip. 4.—Freddy Otash got Jayne Mansfield an abortion. The daddy was a shvartze dishwasher with a 16″ schlong. Peter Lawford's got pictures of the guy stroking it. I bought one off Freddy 0. I'll send it to you to forward to Mr. Hughes. 5.—Bing Crosby's drying out at a Catholic Church retreat for alcoholic priests and nuns outside 29 Palms. Cardinal Spellman visited him there. They went on a bender and drove to L.A. blotto. Spellman sideswiped a car filled with wetbacks and sent 3 of them to the hospital. Bing bought them off with autographed pictures and a few hundred dollars. Spellman flew back to New York with the DT’s. Bing stayed in L.A. long enough to beat up his wife and then went back to the dry-out farm.

Cheers,
Lenny

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/4/59. Personal note: J. Edgar Hoover to Howard Hughes.

Dear Howard,

I thought I would drop you a line to tell you how much I think Hush-Hush has improved since Mr. Bondurant hired your new stringer. Now there’s a man who would make an excellent FBI agent! I so look forward to the verbatim reports that you send mel Should you wish to expedite their delivery, have Mr. Bondurant contact Special Agent Rice at the Los Angeles Office. Many thanks also for the Stompanato home movie and the snapshot of the prodigiously endowed negro. Forewarned is forearmed: you have to know your enemy before you can combat him.

All best,
Edgar

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/19/69. Personal letter: Kemper Boyd to J. Edgar Hoover. Marked: EXTREMELY CONFIDENTIAL.

Sir:

Per our previous conversation, I’m passing on salient Kennedy family information gleaned from Laura (Swanson) Hughes.

I’ve gained a degree of Miss Hughes’ confidence in the course of establishing a casual friendship with her. My relationship with the Kennedys gives me credibility, and Miss Hughes was impressed with the fact that I determined the secret of her parentage without actually broaching the topic to Kennedy family members or her other knowledgeable friends.

Miss Hughes loves to talk about the family, but she only discusses John, Robert, Edward, Rose and the sisters in bland terms. She reserves considerable wrath for Joseph P. Kennedy Sr., cites his ties to Boston mobster Raymond L.S. Patriarca and a retired Chicago “bootlegger-financier” named Jules Schiffrin, and delights in telling stories of Mr. Kennedy’s business rivalry with Howard Hughes. (Miss Hughes adopted the name “Hughes” on her eighteenth birthday, replacing the Kennedy-Swanson proffered “Johnson” in an effort to somehow fluster her father, one of Howard Hughes’ most auspicious enemies.)

Miss Hughes contends that Joseph P. Kennedy’s gangster ties run considerably deeper than the “he was a bootlegger” tag foisted upon him by the press in reference to his highly successful scotch whisky import business pre-prohibition. She cannot cite specific gangster intimates or recall incidents that she has witnessed or heard of second-hand; nevertheless, her sense of Joseph P. Kennedy as “deeply gangster connected” remains inchoately strong.

I will continue my friendship with Miss Hughes and report all salient Kennedy family intelligence to you.

Respectfully,
Kemper Boyd

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/21/59. Summary report: SA Ward J. Littell to Kemper Boyd. “For editing and forwarding to Robert F. Kennedy.”

Dear Kemper,

Things continue apace here in Chicago. I’m continuing to pursue domestic Communists per my regular Bureau assignment, although they impress me as more pathetic and less dangerous by the day. That said, I’ll move to our real concerns.

Sal D’Onofrio and Lenny Sands continue, unknown to each other, to serve as my informants. Sal, of course, paid back the $12,000 he owed Sam Giancana; Giancana let him off with a beating. Apparently, my theft of Butch Montrose’s $14,000 was never connected to Sal’s $12,000 windfall. I ordered Sal to repay Giancana in three increments and he followed that order. My initial violence directed at Sal proved to be far-sighted: I seem to have the man thoroughly cowed. In the course of casual conversation I told him that I had been a Jesuit seminarian. D’Onofrio, a self-described “Devout Catholic,” was impressed by this and now considers me something of a father-confessor. He has confessed to six torture-murders, and of course I now have those (gruesomely detailed) confessions to hold over him. Aside from the occasional nightmares the confessions have induced, Sal and I seem to be proceeding on an even keel. I told him I would appreciate it if he would refrain from killing and self-destructive gambling while under my stewardship, and so far he seems to be doing that. Sal has provided me with rather tame pieces of anti-Mob intelligence (not worth forwarding to you or Mr. Kennedy) but has not been of help in steering me toward a loan seeker to hoist up the Teamster Pension Fund ladder. This was the sole reason I suborned him as my informant, and he has failed me in that capacity. I suspect that proving the existence of “alternative” Pension Fund books will be a gruesomely attenuated process.

Lenny Sands continues to wear almost as many hats as you. He’s the Hush-Hush stringer (God, what ugly work that must be!), Sal’s junket partner and a general Chicago Mob drone. He says he’s actively engaged in attempting to accrue information on the workings of the Pension Fund and says that he believes the rumor that Sam Giancana pays bonuses for Fund loan referrals is true. He also believes that “alternative,” perhaps coded, Pension Fund books detailing hidden assets do exist. In conclusion, I’ve yet to glean hard information from either Sands or D’Onofrio.

On another front, Mr. Hoover seems to be dodging a potential opportunity to impede Chicago Mob members. Court Meade picked up an (elliptically worded) mention of a robbery on the tailor shop bug. Chicago Mob soldiers Rocco Malvaso and Dewey Di Pasquale apparently clouted $80,000 from a (non-Chicago Mob) high-stakes crap game in Kenilworth. THP agents airteled this information to Mr. Hoover, who told them not to forward it to the applicable agencies for follow-up investigation. My God, that man’s twisted priorities!

I’ll close now. By way of farewell: you continue to amaze me, Kemper. God, you as a CIA man! And with the McClellan Committee disbanded, what will you be doing for the Kennedys?

Godspeed,
WJL

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/26/59. Personal note: Kemper Boyd to J. Edgar Hoover. Marked: EXTREMELY CONFIDENTIAL.

Sir:

I thought I would drop you a line and update you on the Ward Littell front. Littell and I continue to speak regularly on the telephone, and I remain convinced that he is not undertaking overt or covert anti-Mob actions on his own authority.

You mentioned that Littell was spotted near Celano's Tailor Shop and the Top Hoodlum Program listening post. I subtly queried Littell on this and am satisfied with his answer: that he was meeting SA Court Meade for lunch.

Littell's personal life seems to revolve around his affair with Helen Agee. This affair has put a strain on his relationship with his daughter, Susan, who disapproves of the liaison. Normally, Helen is in close contact with my daughter Claire, but now that they attend different colleges the frequency of that contact has been curtailed. The Littell-Agee romance seems to be comprised of three or four nights a week of domestic get-togethers. Both retain separate residences, and I think they will continue to do so. I'll continue to keep an eye on Littell.

Respectfully,
Kemper Boyd

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/30/59. Personal note: Kemper Boyd to Ward J. Littell.

Ward:

I strongly urge that you stay away from Celano's Tailor Shop and the listening post area, and avoid being seen with Court Meade. I think I've eased some mild suspicions Mr. Hoover might have had, but you cannot be too careful. I strongly advise you to stop your assignment trade with Meade. Destroy this letter immediately.

KB

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/4/59. Summary report: Kemper Boyd to John Stanton. Marked: CONFIDENTIAL/HAND POUCH DELIVER.

John:

Here's the update you requested in your last pouch. I apologize for the delay, but as you've pointed out, I'm "multiply-employed."

1.—Yes, the McClellan Committee's labor racketeering mandate has terminated. No, the Kennedys haven't offered me a permanent job yet. I think they will soon. There are numerous possibilities, since I'm both an attorney and a cop. Yes, I have discussed Cuba with Jack. He has no opinion on its viability as a 1960 campaign issue yet. He is strongly anti-Communist, despite his reputation as a liberal. I'm optimistic.

2.—I've concluded my "auditions" at the Boynton Beach Motel. Today marks the end of the 90-day sequestering period prescribed by Deputy Director Bissell, and tomorrow the bulk of our men will be sent to Louisiana. Guy Banister has a network of legally emigrated Cubans ready to receive them. They will be providing housing, employment and references aimed at procuring them visas. Guy will funnel the men into his own indoctrination/ training program.

I have selected four men to form the nucleus of our Blessington Cadre. I consider them to be the best of the fifty-three men on the 2/4/59 "Banana Boat." Since I am "multiply-employed," I was not present for much of the sequestering, but capable case officers followed the indoctrination and psychological testing guidelines I set down.

Those guidelines were exceedingly rigorous. I personally supervised polygraph tests to determine the presence of Castro-planted informants. All fifty-three men passed (I think the man they killed on the boat was the ringer). Backup Sodium Pentothal tests were administered. Again, all the men passed.

Interrogations followed. As I suspected, all fifty-three men possessed extensive criminal records inside Cuba. Their offenses included armed robbery, burglary, arson, rape, heroin smuggling, murder and various "political crimes." One man was revealed to be a deviate who had molested and decapitated six small children in Havana. Another man was a homosexual procurer despised by the other exiles. I deemed both men to be dangerously unstable and terminated them under the indoctrination guidelines set down by the Deputy Director.

All the men were subjected to hard interrogation verging on torture. Most resisted with great courage. All the men were physically drilled and verbally abused in the manner of Marine

Corps boot camp. Most responded with the perfect mixture of anger and subservience. The four men I selected are intelligent, violent in a controlled manner, physically skilled, garrulous (they'll be good Miami recruiters), acquiescent to authority and resoundingly pro-American, anti-Communist and anti-Castro. The men are:

A)—TEOFHIO PAEZ himself. DOB 8/6/21. Former Security Chief for United Fruit. Skilled in weaponry and interrogation techniques. Former Cuban Navy frogman. Adept at political recruitment.

B)—TOMAS OBREGON. DOB 1/17/30. Former Castro guerrilla. Former Havana dope courier and bank robber. Skilled in Juyitsu and the manufacture of explosives.

C)—WILFREDO OLMOS DELSOL. DOB 4/9/27. OBREGON's cousin. Former leftist firebrand turned rightist zealot when his bank accounts were "Nationalized." Former Cuban Army drill instructor. Small arms weaponry expert.

D)—RAMON GUTIERREZ. DOB 10/24/19. Pilot. Skilled propaganda pamphleteer. Former torturer for Batista's Secret Police. Expert in counterinsurgency techniques.

3.—I've toured the area surrounding the land the Agency purchased for the Blessington campsite. It is impoverished and inhabited by poor white trash, a fair number of them Ku Klux Klan members. I think we need an impressive white man to run the campsite, a man capable of instilling fear in any local rednecks who become perturbed at the notion of Cuban emigres squatting in their bailiwick. I recommend Pete Bondurant. I checked his World War n Marine Corps record and was impressed: he survived fourteen hand-to-hand combat charges on Saipan, won the Navy Cross and rose from buck private to captain via field commission. I strongly urge you to hire Bondurant on an Agency contract basis.

That's all for now. I'll be at the St. Regis in New York if you need me.

Yours,
KB

PS: You were right about Castro's U.S. trip. He refused to register in a hotel that didn't admit Negroes, then went up to Harlem and began issuing anti-U.S. statements. His behavior at the U.N. was deplorable. I salute your prescience: the man was “forcing a rejection.”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/12/59. Memo: John Stanton to Kemper Boyd.

Kemper,

The Deputy Director has approved the hiring of Pete Bondurant. I have minor qualms, and I want you to send him on a trial run of some sort before we approach him. Use your own discretion.

JS

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(Chicago, 5/18/59)

Helen buttered a slice of toast. “Susan’s slow burn is getting to me. I don’t think we’ve spoken more than three or four times since she heard about us.”

Mad Sal was due to call. Littell pushed his breakfast aside—he had absolutely no appetite.

“I’ve spoken to her exactly twice. Sometimes I think it’s a pure tradeoff—I gained a girlfriend and lost a daughter.”

“You don’t seem too bothered by the loss.”

“Susan feeds on resentment. She’s like her mother that way.”

“Claire told me Kemper’s having an affair with some rich New York City woman, but she won’t divulge details.”

Laura Hughes was one-half Kennedy. Kemper’s Kennedy incursion was now a two-front campaign.

“Ward, you’re very remote this morning.”

“It’s work. It preoccupies me.”

“I’m not so sure.”

It was almost 9:00—7:00 a.m. Gardena time. Sal was an inveterate early-bird gambler.

Helen waved her napkin at him. “Yoo-hoo, Ward! Are you listening to—?”

“What are you saying? What do you mean, ‘I’m not so sure’?”

“I mean your Red Squad work bores and vexes you. You always describe it with contempt, but for months you’ve been engrossed in it.”

“And?”

“And you’ve been having nightmares and mumbling in Latin in your sleep.”

“And?”

“And you’re starting to hide out from me when we’re in the same room. You’re starting to act like you’re forty-six and I’m twenty-one, and there’s things you can’t tell me, because I just wouldn’t understand.”

Littell took her hands. Helen pulled them away and knocked a napkin holder off the table.

“Kemper tells Claire everything. I would think that you’d try to emulate him that way.”

“Kemper is Claire’s father. I’m not yours.”

Helen stood up and grabbed her purse. “I’ll think about that on my way home.”

“What happened to your 9:30 class?”

“It’s Saturday, Ward. You’re so ‘preoccupied’ that you don’t know what day it is.”

Sal called at 9:35. He sounded agitated.

Littell made nice to calm him down. Sal enjoyed sweet talk.

“How’s the tour going?”

“A junket’s a junket. Gardena’s good ’cause it’s close to L.A., but fuckin’ Jewboy Lenny keeps taking off to dig up shit for *Hush-Hush* and keeps showing up late for his gigs. You think I should slice him like I did that guy who—”

“Don’t confess over the phone, Sal.”

“Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned.”

“Stop it. You know what I’m interested in, so if you have anything, tell me.”

“Okay, okay. I was in Vegas and heard Heshie Ryskind talking. Hesh said the boys are worried on the Cuban front. He said the Outfit paid the Beard a shitload of money in exchange for his word the fuckin’ casinos could keep operating if he took over the fuckin’ country. But now he’s gone Commie and fuckin’ nationalized the casinos. Hesh said the Beard's got Santo T. in jail in Havana. The boys don't like the Beard so much these days. Hesh said the Beard's like the low man in a Mongolian cluster fuck. You know, sooner or later he'll get *really* fucked."

Littell said, "And?"

"And before I left Chicago I talked on the phone to Jack Ruby. Jack had a case of the shorts, so I lent him a wad to unload this one strip club and buy himself another one, the Carousel or something. Jack's always good on the payback, 'cause he sharks on the side himself down in Dallas, and—"

"Sal, you're building up to something. Tell me what it is."

"Whoa whoa whoa—I thought cops liked that corroboration stuff."

"Sal—"

"Whoa, listen now. Jack corroborated what Heshie said. He said he'd talked to Carlos Marcello and Johnny Rosselli, and they both said the Beard is costing the Outfit seventy-five thousand a day in bank interest on top of their daily fucking casino profit nut. Think about it, Padre. Think of what the Church could do with seventy-five grand a day."

Littell sighed. "Cuba doesn't interest me. Did Ruby give you anything on the Pension Fund?"

Mad Sal said, "Weeeeel …"

"Sal, goddamnit—"

"Naughty, naughty, Padre. Now say ten Hail Marys and check this. Jack told me he forwarded this Texas oil guy straight to Sam G. for a Pension Fund loan, like maybe a year ago. Now this is a class-A tip, and I deserve a reward for it, and I need some fuckin' money to cover bets with, because bookies and shylocks with no bankroll get hurt and can't snitch to candy-ass Fed cocksuckers like you."

Ruby's THP designation: bagman/small-time loan shark.

"Padre Padre Padre. Forgive me because I have bet. Forgive me because—"

"I'll try to get you some money, Sal. *If* I can find a borrower for you to introduce to Giancana. I'm talking about a direct referral, from you to Sam."

"Padre … Jesus."

"Sal …"

"Padre, you're fucking me so hard it hurts."

"I saved your life, Sal. And this is the only way you'll ever get another dime out of me."

"Okay okay okay. Forgive me, Father, for I have taken it up the dirt road from this ex-seminarian Fed who—"

Littell hung up.

The squadroom was weekend quiet. The agent manning the phone lines ignored him.

Littell cadged the teletype machine and queried the Dallas office.

The reply would take at least ten minutes. He called Midway for flight information—and hit lucky.

A Pan-Am connector departed for Dallas at noon. A return flight would have him home shortly after midnight.

The kickback rolled off the wire: Jacob Rubenstein/AKA Jack Ruby, DOB 3/25/11.

The man had three extortion arrests and no convictions: in '47, '49 and '53.

The man was a suspected pimp and Dallas PD informant.

The man was the subject of a 1956 ASPCA investigation. The man was strongly suspected of sexually molesting dogs. The man was known to occasionally shylock to businessmen and desperate oil wildcatters.

Littell ripped up the teletype. Jack Ruby was worth the trip.

Airplane hum and three scotches lulled him to sleep. Mad Sal's confessions merged like a Hit Parade medley.

Sal makes the Negro boy beg. Sal feeds the bet welcher Drano. Sal decapitates two kids who wolf-whistle at a nun.

He'd verified those deaths. All four stood "Unsolved." All four victims were rectal-raped postmortem.

Littell woke up sweaty. The stewardess handed him a drink unsolicited.

The Carousel Club was a striptease-row dive. The sign out front featured zaftig girls in bikinis.

Another sign said, Open 6:00 P.M.

Littell parked behind the building and waited. His rental car reeked of recent sex and hair pomade.

A few cops cruised by. One man waved. Littell caught on: They think you're a brother cop with your hand in Jack's pocket.

Ruby drove up at 5:15, alone.

He was a dog fucker and a pimp. This would have to be ugly.

Ruby got out and unlocked the back door. Littell ran up and intercepted him.

He said, "FBI. Let's see your hands." He said it in the classic Kemper Boyd style.

Ruby looked skeptical. He was wearing a ridiculous porkpie hat.

Littell said, "Empty your pockets." Ruby obeyed him. A cash roll, dog biscuits, and a .38 snub-nose hit the ground.

Ruby spat on them. "I know out-of-town shakedowns on an intimate level. I know how to deal with cops in cheap blue suits with liquor breath. Now take what you want and leave me the fuck alone."

Littell picked up a dog biscuit. "Eat it, Jack."

Ruby got up on his toes—some kind of lighter-weight boxer's stance. Littell flashed his gun and handcuffs.

"I want you to eat that dog biscuit."

"Now look …"

" 'Now look, *sir*.' "

"Now look, *sir*, who the fuck do you—?"

Littell jammed the biscuit in his mouth. Ruby chewed on it to keep from gagging.

"I'm going to make demands of you, Jack. If you don't comply, the IRS will audit you, Federal agents will pat-search your customers every night and the Dallas *Morning News* will expose your sexual bent for dogs."

Ruby chewed. Ruby sprayed crumbs. Littell kicked his legs out from under him.

Ruby went down on his knees. Littell kicked the door open and kicked him inside.

Ruby tried to stand up. Littell kicked him back down. The room was ten-by-ten and littered with piles of striptease gowns.

Littell kicked a pile in Ruby's face. Littell dropped a fresh dog biscuit in his lap.

Ruby put it in his mouth. Ruby made horrible choking sounds.

Littell said, "Answer this question. *Have you ever referred borrowers to higher-end loan sharks than yourself?*"

Ruby nodded—yes yes yes yes yes.

"Sal D'Onofrio lent you the money to buy this place. Nod if that's true."

Ruby nodded. His feet were snagged up in soiled brassieres.

"Sal kills people routinely. Did you know that?"

Ruby nodded. Dogs started barking one room over.

"He tortures people, Jack. He enjoys inflicting pain."

Ruby thrashed his head. His cheeks bulged like that dead boy on the morgue slab.

"Sal burned a man to death with a blowtorch. The man's wife came home unexpectedly. Sal shoved a gasoline-soaked rag in her mouth and ignited it. He said she died shooting flames like a dragon."

Ruby pissed in his pants. Littell saw the lap stain spread.

"Sal wants you to know a few things. One, your debt to him is erased. Two, if you don't cooperate with me or you rat me to the Outfit or any of your cop friends, he'll come to Dallas and rape you and kill you. Do you understand?"

Ruby nodded—yes yes yes. Biscuit crumbs shot out of his nostrils.

Kemper Boyd always said DON'T FALTER.

"You're not to contact Sal. You're not to know my name. You're not to tell anyone about this. You're to contact me every Tuesday at 11:00 a.m. at a pay phone in Chicago. I'll call you and give you the number. Do you understand?"

Ruby nodded—yes yes yes yes yes yes. The dogs keened and clawed at a door just a few feet in front of him.

"I want you to find a high-end borrower for Sal. Somebody Sal can send up to Giancana and the Pension Fund. Nod if you agree to do it, and nod twice if you understand the whole situation."

Ruby nodded three times.

Littell walked out.

The dog noise went cacophonous.

His return flight landed at midnight. He drove home, keyed up and exhausted.

Helen's car was parked out front. She'd be up; she'd be earnest; she'd be eager to reconcile.

Littell drove to a liquor store and bought a half-pint. A wino panhandled him. He gave him a dollar—the poor shit looked sort of like Jack Ruby.

It was 1:00 a.m. Sunday morning. Court Meade might be working the listening post.

He called. No one answered. Some THP man was ditching his shift.

Kemper urged him to avoid the post. Kemper might not consider one last visit too risky.

Littell drove over and let himself in. The bug transmitter was unplugged; the room was freshly cleaned and tidied up. A note taped to the main console box explained why.

> Memo:
>
> Celano's Tailor Shop is undergoing fumigation 5/17-5/20/59. All on-premises shifts will be suspended during that time.

Littell cracked his bottle. A few drinks revitalized him and sent his thoughts scattergunning out in a million directions.

Some brain wires crackled and crossed.

Sal needed money. Court Meade was talking up a dice-game heist. Mr. Hoover said to let the matter rest.

Littell checked the bug transcript logs. He found a colloquy on the job, filed by SA Russ Davis last month.

> 4/18/59. 2200 hrs. Alone at tailor shop: Rocco Malvaso & Dewey "The Duck" Di Pasquale. What sounded like drinking toasts was obscured by jackhammer and general construction noise outside on Michigan Ave. Two minutes passed while both men apparently used the bathroom. Then this conversation occurred.
>
> Malvaso: Te salud, Duck.
>
> Di Pasquale: Quack, quack. The nice thing is, you know, they can't report it.
>
> Malvaso: The Kenilworth cops would shit. That is the squarejohn town to end all squarejohn towns. The last time two handsome big dick guys like us took down eighty grand in a crap game there was the twelfth of fucking never.
>
> Di Pasquale: Quack, quack. I say they're

> independent guys who had it coming. I say if you're not mobbed-up with Momo you're duck shit. Hey, we wore masks and disguised our voices. To boot, those Indy cocksuckers don't know we're connected. I felt like Super Duck. I'm thinking I should get a Super Duck costume and wear it the next time I take my kids to Disneyland.
>
> Malvaso: Quack, fucking quack, you web-footed cocksucker. You had to shoot your gun off, though. Like no fucking getaway is fucking complete without some duck-billed cocksucker shooting off his gun.
>
> (Note: the Kenilworth Police report unexplained shots fired on the 2600 block of Westmoreland Ave., 2340 hrs., 4/16/59).
>
> Di Pasquale: Hey, quack, quack. It worked. We've got it stashed nice and safe and
>
> Malvaso: And too fucking public for my taste.
>
> Di Pasquale: Quack, quack. Sixty days ain't too long to wait for the split. Donald's been waiting fucking twenty years to bang Daisy, 'cause Walt Disney won't let him. Hey, remember last year? Jewboy Lenny did my birthday party? He did that routine where Daisy's sucking Donald off with her beak, what a fucking roar.
>
> Malvaso: Quack, quack, you cocksucker.
>
> (Note: construction noise obscured the rest of this conversation. Door slam sounds at 2310 hrs.)

Littell checked the THP ID file. Malvaso and Di Pasquale lived in Evanston.

He played the 4/18/59 tape and compared it to the typed transcript. Russ Davis forgot to include departing shtick.

The Duck hummed "Chattanooga Choo Choo."

Malvaso sang, "I got the key to your heart."

"Too public," "key" and "choo choo." Two *suburban-situated* robbers waiting sixty days for their split.

There were forty-odd *suburban* train stations linked to Chicago.

With forty-odd waiting rooms lined with storage lockers.

The lockers were rented by the month. For cash only, with no records kept, with no-name receipts issued.

Two robbers. Two *separate* key locks per locker door.

The locks were changed every ninety days—per Illinois TA law.

Thousands of lockers. Unmarked keys. Sixty days until the split—with thirty-three already elapsed.

The lockers were steel-plated. The waiting rooms were guarded 24 hours.

Littell spent two full days thinking it through. It came down to this:

He could tail them. But when they picked up the money, he'd be helpless.

He could only tail them one at a time. It came down to this: preexisting bad odds doubled against him.

He decided to try anyway. He decided to pad his Red Squad reports and tail the men on alternate days for one week.

Day one: He tails Rocco Malvaso from 8:00 a.m. to midnight. Rocco drives to his numbers dens, his union shops and his girlfriend's place in Glencoe.

Rocco goes nowhere near a train station.

Day two: He tails Dewey the Duck from 8:00 a.m. to midnight. Dewey drives to numerous prostitution collections.

Dewey goes nowhere near a train station.

Day three: He tails Rocco Malvaso from 8:00 a.m. to midnight. Rocco drives to Milwaukee and pistol-whips recalcitrant pimps.

Rocco goes nowhere near a train station.

Day four: He tails Dewey the Duck from 8:00 a.m. to midnight. Dewey entertains at Dewey Junior's outdoor birthday party, dressed up as Donald Duck.

Dewey goes nowhere near a train station.

Day five: He tails Rocco Malvaso from 8:00 a.m. to midnight. Rocco spends said time with a call girl at the Blackhawk Hotel in Chicago.

Rocco goes nowhere near a train station.

Day six, 8:00 a.m.: He picks up his tail on Dewey the Duck. 9:40 a.m.: Dewey's car won't start. Mrs. Duck drives Dewey to the Evanston train station.

Dewey loiters in the waiting room.

Dewey eyes the lockers.

Locker #19 is affixed with a Donald Duck decal.

Littell almost swoons.

Nights six, seven and eight: He stakes out the station. He learns that the watchman leaves for his coffee break at 3:10 a.m.

The man walks down the street to an all-night diner. The waiting room is left unguarded for at least eighteen minutes.

Night nine: He hits the station. He's armed with a crowbar, tin snips, a mallet and a chisel. He snaps the door off locker 19 and steals the four grocery bags full of money inside.

It totals $81,492.

He now has an informant fund. The bills are old and well circulated.

He gives Mad Sal ten thousand dollars for starters.

He finds the Jack Ruby look-alike wino and gives him five hundred.

The Cook County Morgue supplies him with a name. Icepick Tony Iannone's lover was one Bruce William Sifakis. He sends the boy's parents ten thousand dollars anonymously.

He drops five thousand in the poor box at Saint Anatole's and stays to pray.

He asks forgiveness for his hubris. He tells God that he has gained his selfhood at great cost to other people. He tells God that he loves danger now, and it thrills him much more than it frightens him.

24

(Havana, 5/28/59)

The plane taxied in. Pete got out his passport and a fat roll of ten-spots.

The passport was Canadian, and CIA-forged.

Militiamen hit the runway. The Cuban fuzz tapped all the Key West flights for handouts.

Boyd called him two days ago. He said John Stanton and Guy Banister dug that old Big Pete panache. Boyd had just signed on with the Agency. He said he had a tailor-made Big Pete job, which might prove to be a CIA audition run.

He said, “You fly from Key West to Havana under a Canadian passport. You speak French-accented English. You find out where Santo Trafficante is and take delivery of a note from him. The note should be addressed to Carlos Marcello, Johnny Rosselli and Sam Giancana, et al. It should state that Trafficante advises no Mob retaliation against Çastro for nationalizing the casinos. You’re also to locate a very frightened United Fruit executive named Thomas Gordean and bring him back with you for debriefing. This has to be accomplished very soon—Castro and Ike are set to permanently cancel all commercial flights running from the U.S. to Cuba."

Pete said, "Why me?"

Boyd said, "Because you can handle yourself. Because the cabstand gave you a crash course in Cubans. Because you're not a known Mob man that Castro's secret police might have a file on."

Pete said, "What's the pay?"

Boyd said, "Five thousand dollars. And if you're detained, the same diplomatic courier who's trying to get Trafficante and some other Americans out will arrange for your release. It's just a matter of time before Castro releases all foreign nationals."

Pete wavered. Boyd said, "You'll also receive my personal promise that Ward Littell—a very disturbed and dangerous man—will never touch you. In fact, I set you up with Lenny Sands to buffer the two of you."

Pete laughed.

Boyd said, "If the Cuban cops roust you, tell the truth."

The doors opened. Pete stuck a ten-dollar bill inside his passport. Militiamen climbed into the plane.

They wore mismatched gun belts and carried odd pistols. Their shirt-front regalia was straight out of some Kellogg's Corn Flakes box.

Pete squeezed up toward the cockpit. Arc lights strafed the doorways and windows. He walked down the ramp ducking blinding goddamn glare.

A guard snatched his passport. The ten-spot disappeared. The guard bowed and handed him a beer.

The other passengers filed out. Militia geeks checked their passports for tips and came up empty.

The boss guard shook his head. His minions confiscated purses and wallets. A man protested and tried to hold on to his billfold.

The spies laid him out prone on the runway. They cut his trousers off with razor blades and picked his pockets clean.

The other passengers quit squawking. The boss guard rifled through their stuff.

Pete sipped beer. Some guards walked up with their hands out.

He greased them, one ten-spot per hand. He goofed on their uniforms: lots of frayed khaki and epaulets like the ushers at Grauman's Chinese.

A little spic waved a camera. "You play futbol, hombre? Hey, big man, you play futbol?"

Somebody lobbed a football. Pete caught it one-handed. A flashbulb popped right upside his face.

Get the picture? They want you to pose.

He crouched low and waved the ball like Johnny Unitas. He went deep for a pass, blocked an invisible lineman and bounced the ball off his head like a nigger soccer ace he saw on TV once.

The spies clapped. The spies cheered. Flashbulbs pop-pop-popped.

Somebody yelled, “Hey, eees Robert Mitchum!” Peasant types ran out on the runway, waving autograph books. Pete ran for a taxi stand by the gate.

Little kids urged him on. Cab doors opened, presto chango. Pete dodged an oxcart and piled into an old Chevy. The driver said, “Joo are not Robert Mitchum.”

They cruised Havana. Animals and street riffraff clogged traffic. They never got above ten miles an hour.

It was 92 degrees at 10:00 p.m. Half the geeks out on the stroll wore fatigues and full Jesus Christ beards.

Dig those whitewashed Spanish-style buildings. Dig the posters on every facade: Fidel Castro smiling, Fidel Castro shouting, Fidel Castro waving a cigar.

Pete flashed the snapshot Boyd gave him. “Do you know this man?”

The driver said, “*Sí.* It is Mr. Santo Junior. He is in custody at the Nacional Hotel.”

“Why don’t you take me there.”

Pancho hung a U-turn. Pete saw hotel row up ahead—a line of harassed skyscrapers facing the beach.

Lights sparkled down on the water. A big stretch of glow lit the waves up turquoise blue.

The cab pulled up to the Nacional. Bellboys swooped down—clowns in threadbare tuxedos. Pete whipped a ten-spot on the driver—the fuck almost wept.

The bellboys stuck their hands out. Pete lubed them at the rate of ten scoots per. A cordon pushed him into the casino.

The joint was packed. Commies dug capitalisto-style gambling.

The croupiers wore shoulder holsters. Militia geeks ran the blackjack table. The clientele was 100% beaner.

Goats roamed free. Dogs splashed in a crap table filled with water. Dig the floorshow back by the slot machines: an Airedale and a Chihuahua fucking.

Pete grabbed a bellboy and yelled in his ear. "Santo Trafficante. You know him?"

Three hands appeared. Three tens went out. Somebody pushed him into an elevator.

Fidel Castro's Cuba should be renamed Nigger Heaven.

The elevator zoomed up. A militiaman opened the door gun first.

Dollar bills dripped out of his pockets. Pete added a ten-spot. The gun disappeared, *rápidamente*.

"Did you wish to enter custody, *señor*? The fee is fifty dollars a day."

"What does that include?"

"It includes a room with a television, gourmet food, gambling and women. You see, American passport holders are being temporarily detained here in Cuba, and Havana itself is momentarily unsafe. Why not enjoy your detention in luxury?"

Pete flashed his passport. "I'm Canadian."

"Yes. And of French distraction, I can tell."

Steam trays lined the hallway. Bellboys pushed cocktail carts by. A goat was taking a shit on the carpet two doors down.

Pete laughed. "Your guy Castro's some innkeeper."

"Yes. Even Mr. Santo Trafficante Jr. concedes that there are no four-star jails in America."

"I'd like to see Mr. Trafficante."

"Please follow me, then."

Pete fell in step. Boozed-out gringo fat cats careened down the hallway. The guard pointed out custody high spots.

Suite 2314 featured stag films screened on a bedsheet. Suite 2319 featured roulette, craps and baccarat. Suite 2329 featured naked hookers on call. Suite 2333 featured a live lesbian peep show. Suite 2341 featured suckling pigs broiled on a spit. Suites 2350 through 2390 comprised a full-size golf driving range.

A spic caddy squeezed by them schlepping clubs. The guard clicked his heels outside 2394.

"Mr. Santo, you have a visitor!"

Santo Trafficante Jr. opened the door.

He was fortyish and pudgy. He wore nubby-silk Bermuda shorts and glasses.

The guard scooted off. Trafficante said, “The two things I hate most are Communists and chaos.”

“Mr. Trafficante, I’m—”

“I’ve got eyes. Four, in fact. You’re Pete Bondurant, who clips guys for Jimmy. Some six-foot-six gorilla knocks on my door and acts servile, I put two and two together.”

Pete walked into the room. Trafficante smiled.

“Did you come to bring me back?”

“No.”

“Jimmy sent you, right?”

“No.”

“Mo? Carlos? I’m so fucking bored I’m playing guessing games with a six-foot-six gorilla. Hey, what’s the difference between a gorilla and a nigger?”

Pete said, “Nothing?”

Trafficante sighed. “You heard it already, you hump. My father killed a guy once who spoiled one of his punch lines. Maybe you’ve heard of my father?”

“Santo Trafficante *Senior*?”

“*Salud*, Frenchman. Jesus, I’m so fucking bored I’m playing one-up with a gorilla.”

Pig grease spattered out a cooling vent. The pad was furnished modern-ugly—lots of fucked-up color combos.

Trafficante scratched his balls. “So who sent you?”

“A CIA man named Boyd.”

“The only CIA guy I know is a redneck named Chuck Rogers.”

“I know Rogers.”

Trafficante shut the door. “I know you know him. I know the whole story of you and the cabstand, and you and Fulo and Rogers, and I know stories about you that I bet you wished I didn’t know. You know *how* I know? I know because everybody in this life of ours likes to talk. And the only fucking saving grace is that none of us talks to people outside the life.”

Pete looked out the window. The ocean glowed turquoise blue way past the buoy line.

“Boyd wants you to write a note to Carlos Marcello, Sam Giancana and Johnny Rosselli. The note’s supposed to say that you recommend no reprisals against Castro for nationalizing the casinos. I think the Agency’s afraid the Outfit will go off half-cocked and screw up their own Cuban plans.”

Trafficante grabbed a scratch pad and pen off the TV. He wrote fast and enunciated clearly.

"Dear Premier Castro, you Commie dog turd. Your revolution is a crock of Commie shit. We paid you good money to let us keep our casinos running if you took over, but you took our money and fucked us up the brown trail until we bled. You are a bigger piece of shit than that faggot Bobby Kennedy and his faggot McClellan Committee. May you personally get syphillis of the brain and the dick, you Commie cocksucker, for fucking up our beautiful Nacional Hotel."

Golf balls ricocheted down the hallway. Trafficante flinched and held the note up.

Pete read it. Santo Junior delivered—nice, neat, grammatical.

Pete tucked the note in his pocket. "Thanks, Mr. Trafficante."

"You're fucking welcome, and I can tell you're surprised that I can write and say two different things at the same time. Now, you tell your Mr. Boyd that that promise is good for one year and no more. Tell him we're all swimming in the same stream as far as Cuba goes, so it's in our best interest not to piss in his face."

"He'll appreciate it."

"Appreciate, shit. If you appreciated, you'd take me back with you."

Pete checked his watch. "I've only got two Canadian passports, and I'm supposed to bring back a United Fruit man."

Trafficante picked up a golf club. "Then I can't complain. Money's money, and United Fruit's tapped more out of Cuba than the Outfit ever did."

"You'll get out soon. Some courier's working on getting all the Americans out."

Trafficante lined up a make-believe putt. "Good. And I'll set you up with a guide. He'll drive you around and take you and the UF man to the airport. He'll rob you before he drops you off, but that's as good as the help gets with these fucking Reds in power."

A croupier supplied directions to the house—Tom Gordean threw a torch party there just last week. Jesús the guide said Mr. Tom burned a mean cane field—he was hot to revamp his *fascisto* image.

Jesús wore jungle fatigues and a baseball cap. He drove a Volkswagen with a hood-mounted machine gun.

They took dirt roads out of Havana. Jesús steered with one hand and blasted palm trees simultaneous. Sizzling cane fields lit the sky up orange-pink—torch parties were a big deal in post-Batista Cuba.

Phone poles blipped by. Fidel Castro's face adorned every one.

Pete saw house lights in the distance—two hundred yards or so up. Jesús pulled into a clearing dotted with palm stumps.

He eased in like he knew where he was going. He didn't gesture or say one fucking word.

It felt wrong. It felt *prearranged.*

Jesús braked and doused his headlights. A torch whooshed the second they snapped off.

Light spread out over the clearing. Pete saw a Cadillac ragtop, six spies, and a white man reeling drunk.

Jesús said, "That is Señor Tom."

The spies had sawed-off shotguns. The Caddy was stuffed with luggage and mink coats.

Jesús jumped out and jabbered spic to the spies. The spies waved to the gringo in the Volkswagen.

The minks were piled above the door line. U.S. currency was bulging out of a suitcase.

Pete caught on, dead solid perfect.

Thomas Gordean was weaving. He was waving a bottle of Demerara rum. He was putting out a line of pro-Commie jive talk.

He was slurring his words. He was dead drunk working on dead.

Pete saw torches ready to light. Pete saw a gas can sitting on a tree stump.

Gordean kept spritzing. He got up a fucking A-#1 Commie cliché head of steam.

Jesús huddled with the spies. They waved at the gringo again. Gordean puked on the hood of the Caddy.

Pete slid next to the machine gun. The spies turned away and went for their waistbands.

Pete fired. One tight swivel at their backs cut them down. The *ack-ack* sent a flock of birds up squawking.

Gordean hit the ground and curled himself up fetal-tight. The bullet spread missed him by inches.

The spies died screaming. Pete strafed their bodies into pulp. Cordite and muzzle-scorched entrails formed one putrid smell combination.

Pete poured gas on the stiffs and the Volkswagen and torched them. A box of .50-caliber ammo exploded.

Señor Tom Gordean was passed out cold.

Pete tossed him in the backseat of the Caddy. The mink coats made a cozy little bed.

He checked the luggage. He saw a shitload of money and stock certificates.

Their flight left at dawn. Pete found a road map in the glove compartment and marked a route back to Havana.

He got in the Caddy and punched it. French-fried palm trees provided a glow to drive by.

He made the airport before first light. Friendly militiamen swamped El Señor Mitchum.

Tom Gordean woke up with the shakes. Pete fed him rum-and-Cokes to keep him docile. The spies nationalized the money and furs—no big surprise.

Pete signed Robert Mitchum autographs. Some Commie commissar escorted them to the plane.

The pilot said, "You're not Robert Mitchum."

Pete said, "No shit, Sherlock."

Gordean dozed off. The other passengers eyeballed them—they reeked of gasoline and liquor.

The plane landed at 7:00 a.m. Kemper Boyd met them. He handed Pete an envelope containing five thousand dollars.

Boyd was juuuuust a tad nervous. Boyd was more than just a tad dismissive.

He said, "Thanks, Pete. Take that jitney into town with the other people, all right? I'll call you in L.A. in a few days."

He got five grand. Boyd got Gordean and a suitcase full of stock shares. Gordean looked bewildered. Boyd looked quintessentially un-Boyd.

Pete hopped on the jitney He saw Boyd steer Gordean to. a storage hut.

Here's this deserted hick-town airfield. Here's this CIA man and this drunk, alone.

His feelers started twitching in high fucking gear.

25

(Key West, 5/29/59)

The hut was matchbook-size. He had to cram the table and two chairs in.

Kemper handled Gordean with kid gloves. The interrogation dragged—his subject had the DTs.

“Does your family know that you possess this United Fruit stock?”

“What ‘family’? I’ve been married and divorced more than Artie Shaw *and* Mickey Rooney. I’ve got a few cousins in Seattle, but all they know is the way to the bar at the Woodhaven Country Club.”

“Who else in Cuba knows that you own this stock?”

“My bodyguards know. But one minute we’re drinking and getting ready to expunge a few imperialist cane fields, and the next thing I know I’m in the backseat of my car with that buddy of yours at the wheel. I’m not ashamed to admit that I’ve been on a toot, and things are pretty dim. That buddy of yours, does he carry a machine gun?”

“I don’t think so.”

“What about a Volkswagen?”

“Mr. Gordean …”

"Mr. Boyce, or whatever your name is, what's going on? You sit me down in this shack and ransack my suitcase. You ask me these questions. You think because I'm a rich American businessman that I'm on your side. You think I don't know how you CIA fuckers rigged the elections in Guatemala? I was on my way to cocktails with Premier Castro when your buddy shanghaied me. That's *Fidel Castro*. He's the liberator of Cuba. He's a nice man and a wonderful basketball player."

Kemper laid down his stock release forms. They were superbly forged—a counterfeiter friend did the job.

"Sign these please, Mr. Gordean. They're reimbursement vouchers for your airfare."

Gordean signed in triplicate. Kemper signed the notary statement and seal-stamped all three signatures.

His friend rigged the seal, at no extra charge.

Gordean laughed. "CIA man/notary public. What a combo."

Kemper pulled his .45 and shot him in the head.

Gordean flew off his chair. Blood sprayed out one ear. Kemper stepped on his head to stanch the spritz.

Something rustled outside. Kemper pushed the door open with his gun.

It was Pete Bondurant, standing there with his hands in his pockets.

They both smiled.

Pete drew "50/50" in the air.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 6/11/59. Summary Report: Kemper Boyd to John Stanton. Marked: CONFIDENTIAL/HAND POUCH DELIVER.

John:

I delayed the writing of this communique for two reasons. One, I wanted to see a botched incident through to its conclusion before contacting you. Two, this note details a mission that I (quite frankly) blew.

You had asked me to use my own discretion and send Pete Bondurant on a trial run to help determine his suitability for Agency contract employment. I did this, and sent Bondurant into Cuba to pull out a United Fruit executive named Thomas Gordean, a man whom Teofilio Paez described as “volatile” and “espousing the Communist line.” Bondurant succeeded in the first part of his mission. We installed Mr. Gordean at the Rusty Scupper Motel in Key West for de-briefing, and made the mistake of leaving him alone to rest. Gordean committed suicide with a .45 automatic he had secreted on his person. I summoned the Key West Police, and Bondurant and I de-briefed them. A coroner’s jury ruled Gordean’s death a suicide. Bondurant testified as to Gordean’s apparent alcoholism and depressive behavior. An autopsy confirmed that Gordean showed signs of advanced liver damage. His body was shipped to a distant cousin in Seattle (Gordean had no immediate family).

Should you require verification, please contact Captain Hildreth of the Key West Police. Of course, I apologize for this boondoggle. And I assure you that nothing like this will happen again.

Sincerely,
Kemper Boyd

DOCUMENT INSERT: 6/19/59. Personal note: John Stanton to Kemper Boyd.

Dear Kemper,

Of course, I am furious. And of course you should have informed me of this snafu immediately. Thank God Gordean had no Immediate family capable of causing trouble for the Agency. That expressed, I'll state that most likely you were to some degree a victim of mitigating circumstances. After all, as you once said, you are an attorney and a cop, not a spy.

You'll be pleased to know that Deputy Director Bissell is quite taken with your idea of creating an elite cadre to run the Blessington campsite. The campsite is currently under construction; your four personally selected recruits (Paez, Obregon, Delsol, Gutierrez) are undergoing further training at Langley and doing quite well. As previously stated, the Deputy Director has approved the hiring of Pete Bondurant to run the campsite. That, of course, was before the Gordean snafu. Right now, I want to wait and reconsider Bondurant.

In conclusion, the Gordean incident sits poorly with me, but my enthusiasm for you as a contract agent remains strong. Until I tell you otherwise, undertake no more missions on your own authority.

John Stanton

DOCUMENT INSERT: 6/28/59. Personal note: Ward J. Littell to Kemper Boyd. "For editing and forwarding to Robert F. Kennedy."

Kemper,

My anti-Mob intelligence gathering continues apace. I now have several independently gleaned indications that alternative (most likely coded) Teamster Pension Fund books do exist. Lenny Sands believes they exist. Sal D'Onofrio has heard rumors to that effect. Other sources have supplied rumors: a retired Chicago Mob man administers the books; Sam Giancana serves as the Pension Fund's "Chief Loan Approval Officer." As pervasive as these rumors are, I have nothing resembling corroboration. And of course I won't, until I can suborn a cosmetic borrower and gain some kind of literal access to the Fund itself.

And (on May 18th) I coerced a third informant into my stable. This man (a Dallas-based strip club operator/loanshark) is searching for a borrower to refer to Sal D'Onofrio and thence to Sam Giancana. I consider this man to be a mgjor informant, because he previously referred a loan seeker to Giancana and the Pension Fund. He calls me at a pay phone near my apartment every Tuesday morning; I have given him money on several occasions. He fears me and respects me to just the right degree. Like Sal D'Onofrio, he has perpetual money troubles. I believe that, sooner or later, he will supply me with a potentially subornable borrower.

I also now have a fund of my own, i.e., an informant fund. In late May I secured an $81,000 robbery stash, one unreported to any police agency. I have paid Sal D'Onofrio $32,000 from this fund, strengthening my hold over him. Strange, but I had originally thought that Lenny Sands would be my most valued informant, but both Sal and the Dallas man have proven themselves more competent (or is it more desperate for money)? I blame you, Kemper. Setting Lenny up with Pete Bondurant and Hush-Hush was detrimental to my purposes. Lenny has seemed abstracted lately. He travels with Sal's junket tours and moonlights for Hush-Hush, and seems to have forgotten what I hold over him. Does he taik to your friend Miss Hughes? I'd be curious to know.

Per your instructions, I'm avoiding Court Meade and the listening post. Court and I have also formally ceased our assignment trade. I'm being careful, but I can't help dreaming Utopian dreams. My essential dream? A John P. Kennedy Presidential Administration, with Robert Kennedy fulfilling his brother's anti-Mob mandate. God, Kemper, wouldn't that be heaven? Tell Mr. Kennedy he's in my prayers.

Yours,
WJL

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/3/59. Personal note: Kemper Boyd to Robert F. Kennedy.

Dear Bob,

Just a short note to update you on the work of your anonymous colleague the "Chicago Phantom."

He's working hard, and I hope you find it gratifying that there's at least one human being on earth who hates Organized Crime as much as you do. But, as hard as he is working—and always within the legal guidelines you set down to me—he's getting scant results pursuing the possibility that alternative Pension Fund books exist. The Chicago Mob is a closed circle, and he hasn't been able to gain the inside information he hoped he would.

Moving along. Aren't you and Jack going to offer me some post-McClellan Committee employment?

Yours,
Kemper

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/9/59. Personal Letter: Robert F. Kennedy to Kemper Boyd.

Dear Kemper,

Thanks for your note on the Phantom. It is good to know that an ex-seminarian FBI man shares my anti-Mob fervor, and what most impresses me about him is that he doesn't seem to want anything. (Jesuit sem boys are schooled in self-denial.) You, however, want everything. So, yes, Jack and I have an offer for you. (We'll discuss details and money later.)

We want you to stay with our organization and fill two positions. The first: traffic manager for the McClellan Committee's legal paperwork. We've disbanded, but like the Phantom, I'm still afire. Let's keep our anti-Mob and anti-Hoffa momentum going. You could be very helpful in seeing that our evidence gets into the proper investigatory hands. Secondly, Jack's going to announce his candidacy in January. He wants you to manage security for his primary campaigns and hopefully through to November. How about it?

Bob

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/13/59. Personal note: Kemper Boyd to Robert F. Kennedy.

Dear Bob,

I accept. Yes, unlike the Phantom I want everything. Let's nail Jimmy Hoffa and elect Jack President.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/27/59. Official FBI telephone call transcript: “Recorded at the Director’s Request”/“Classified Confidential 1-A: Director’s Eyes Only.” Speaking: Director Hoover, Special Agent Kemper Boyd.

JEH: Good morning, Mr. Boyd.

KB: Good morning, Sir.

JEH: Your message mentioned good news.

KB: Excellent news, Sir. The brothers have hired me on a more or less permanent basis.

JEH: In what capacity?

KB: I’m to supervise the routing of McClellan Committee evidence to various, grand juries and investigative agencies, and run security for Big Brother’s campaign.

JEH: Little Brother remains persistent on the Hoffa front, then.

KB: He’ll crucify the man sooner or later.

JEH: Catholics have been known to go overboard with the concept of crucifixion.

KB: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Let’s continue on the Catholic recidivist front. Is Mr. Littell continuing to walk the straight and narrow?

KB: Yes, Sir.

JEH: SAC Leahy has airtelled me his Red Squad reports. He appears to be doing a satisfactory job.

KB: You frightened him last year, Sir. He just wants to make it through to his retirement. As I’ve told you, he’s drinking quite a bit and is quite caught up in his affair with Helen Agee.

JEH: Allow me to use “affair” as a segue point. How is your liaison with Miss Laura Hughes progressing?

KB: I’d hardly call it a liaison, Sir.

JEH: Mr. Boyd, you are talking to the world’s nonpareil bullshit artist and master of subterfuge. As good as you are at it, and you are brilliantly good, I am better. You are fucking Laura Hughes, and I’m sure you would fuck all the acknowledged Kennedy sisters and old Rose Kennedy herself if you thought it would ingratiate you with Jack. There. That said, what does Miss Hughes have to say about the family?

KB: She limits her anecdotes to her father, Sir. She’s quite vitriolic on the topic of her father and his friends.

JEH: Continue.

KB: Apparently Joe and his old friend Jules Schiffrin secreted Mexican illegals across the border during the '20s. They used the men as set construction help when Joe owned the RKO Studio. Joe and Schiffrin used the women sexually, hired them out as domestics, took half their pay for room-and-board, then turned them over to the Border Patrol and had them deported. Schiffrin took a number of the women back to Chicago with him and opened up a whorehouse that catered to mobsters and politicians exclusively. Laura says Joe made a movie surreptitiously at the whorehouse. It's Huey Long and two Mexican midgets with oversized breasts.

JEH: Miss Hughes is a vivid anecdotist. What does she say about the brothers?

KB: She's guarded about them.

JEH: As you yourself are.

KB: I'm fond of them, yes.

JEH: I think you've set limits to your betrayal. I think you're unaware of how deeply enthralled you are with that family.

KB: I keep things compartmentalized, Sir.

JEH: Yes, I'll credit you with that. Now, let's move to your Cuban emigre compartment. Do you recall telling me that you had access to Cuban exile intelligence?

KB: Of course, Sir. I'll be sending a detailed summary report along soon.

JEH: Laura Hughes must be quite expensive.

KB: Sir?

JEH: Don't act disingenuous, Kemper. It's quite obvious the CIA has recruited you. Three paychecks, my lord.

KB: Sir, I keep things compartmentalized.

JEH: You certainly do, and far be it from me to upset those compartments. Good day, Mr. Boyd.

KB: Good day, Sir.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/4/59. Hush-Hush stringer report: Lenny Sands to Pete Bondurant.

Pete,

It's strange, but every homo in captivity seems to want to bite my tush these days, which is unusual because I've been playing some pretty square rooms. As you know, I've been working my wop gig with Sal D'Onofrio. We've been playing Reno, Vegas, Tahoe, Gardena and some Lake Michigan cruise boats that feature gambling. I've been running into fruits galore, a regular Layfayette Escad (butt) drill of fruitness. 1)—Delores' Drive-In on Wilshire & La Cienega in L.A. employs all fruit carhops moonlighting as male prosties. A frequent customer: Adlai (Lay?) Stevenson, 2-time prez'l candidate with pinko (Lavender?) leanings Mr. Hughes probably disapproves of. 2)—Dave Garroway of TV's Today Show was recently popped for honking young boys in NYC's Times Square. It was (hush?) hushed up, but "Dave the Slave" as he's known on the fag circuit was recently spotted at an all-male tomcat house outside Vegas. 3)—I ran into an off-duty Marine Corps lance-corporal in Tahoe. He said he knows a gunnery-sergeant running a fruit roller ring out of Camp Pendleton. It works this way: handsome young jarheads prowl Silverlake (The Swish Alps?) & the Sunset Strip & entrap homos. They don't put out & shake the fruits down for $. I called the gunnery sgt & wired him a C-note. He spilled on some celebrity fruitcakes the fruit roller ring glommed onto. Dig this: Walter Pidgeon (12″ wang) bangs boys at a plushly-furnished fag crib in the Los Feliz district. Also, British matinee idol Larry (the Fairy?) Olivier recently took the law into his own hands when he groped a Marine MP at the Wiltern Theatre. Other homos ED'd by the Fruit Roller Corps include Danny Kaye, Liberace (big surprise), Monty Clift & conductor Leonard Bernstein. Hey, have you noticed I'm starting to write in the Hush-Hush style? More later.

Cheers,
Lenny

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/12/59. Personal memorandum: Kemper Boyd to John Stanton. Marked: CONFIDENTIAL/HAND POUCH DELIVER.

John:

Some further thoughts on Pete Bondurant, the Tiger Kab stand and our elite Cadre.

The more I think about it, the more I see Tiger Kab as the potential hub for our Miami activities. I broached this thought to Fulo Machado (a former Castroite now bristlingly anti-Castro), the cabstand co-dispatcher and a close friend of contract agent Chuck Rogers. Machado shared my enthusiasm. He agreed to let Rogers take over as permanent cabstand dispatcher-boss. Fulo got approval from Jimmy Hoffa, who frankly prefers white men in supervisory positions. Fulo is now recruiting for us, on the cabstand payroll. Hoffa knows that cooperating with the Agency is smart business. He sees Cuba as our common cause, far-sighted for such a brutal and single-minded man.

I would like to propose Fulo Machado as the fifth member of our cadre. I would also like you to allow Rogers to hire Tomas Obregon, Wilfredo Olmos Delsol, Teofilio Paez and Ramon Gutierrez as full-time drivers. Although construction of the Blessington campsite is almost complete, we do not have exile recruits to train there. Until more deportees arrive, I think our men can be best utilized recruiting in Miami's Cuban community.

Per Bondurant. Yes, he (and I) screwed up on the Thomas Gordean matter. But, Bondurant is already employed as Jimmy Hoffa's ad hoc cabstand enforcer. He also secured a note from Santo Trafficante personally requesting that no Mafia reprisals be launched against Castro for nationalizing the Havana casinos. Bondurant forwarded this note to S. Giancana, C. Marcello and J. Rosselli. All three agree with Trafficante's reasoning. Again, brutal, short-sighted men are cooperating with the Agency out of a sense of common cause.

Bondurant is also the de-facto editor of a scandal magazine we can use as a counterintelligence organ. And, finally, I think he's the best man alive to run the campsite. They don't come any tougher, as I think any local rednecks who toy with him will discover.

What do you think of my proposals?

Kemper Boyd

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/19/59. Personal memo: John Stanton to Kemper Boyd.

Kemper,

You batted 1000%. Yes, Machado can join the Cadre. Yes, Rogers can hire Delsol, Obregon, Paez and Gutierrez as drivers. Yes, have them recruit in Miami. Yes, hire Pete Bondurant to run Blessington, but have him retain his job with Howard Hughes as well. Hughes Is a potentially valuable ally, and we don't want him estranged from the Agency.

Good work, Kemper.

John

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/21/59. Teletype report: Intelligence Division, Los Angeles Police Department, to SA Ward J. Littell, Chicago FBI. Sent "Private Mail Closure" to SA Littell's home address.

Mr. Littell,

Per your: telephone query on Salvatore D'Onofrio's recent Los Angeles activities. Be advised that:

The subject was spot-surveilled as a known underworld figure.

He was seen borrowing money from independent shylocks. Subsequent questioning of said shylocks revealed that the subject told them he would give them "big kickbacks" for referring "high-ticket" loan-seekers to him. The subject was also seen betting heavily at Santa Anita Racetrack. Surveilling officers heard the subject tell a just-met acquaintance: "I've blown half the wad my sugar daddy-o gave me already."

The subject was observed behaving in an erratic fashion during his gambling junket engagement at the Lucky Nugget Casino in Gardena. His junket companion, Leonard Joseph Seidelwitz (AKA Lenny Sands), also a known underworld figure, was seen entering various homosexual cocktail lounges. It should be noted that Seidelwitz's junket skits have become increasingly obscene and violently anti-homosexual.

Should you require further information, please let me know.

James E. Hamilton

Captain, Intelligence Division, Los Angeles Police Department

26

(Chicago, 8/23/59)

The amp made small talk boom. Littell picked up mobster amenities.

He wire-linked Mad Sal's parlor to his back bedroom closet. He overmiked the walls and got excessive voice vibrato.

The closet was hot and cramped. Littell sweated up his headset.

Talking: Mad Sal and "movie producer" Sid Kabikoff.

Sal went on a gambling binge. Littell confronted him with an LAPD teletype describing his actions. Sal said he blew the fifty-odd grand Littell gave him.

The train-locker heist stood unsolved—Sal didn't know where the cash came from. The tailor-shop bug blasted scuttlebutt on the topic—but Malvaso and the Duck remained clueless.

Then Jack Ruby called him.

And said, "I finally got a guy for Sal D. to goose up to the Pension Fund."

His informants were in sync—except for Lenny Sands.

Littell wiped off his headset. Kabikoff spoke, overamp loud: "… and Heshie says his blow-job tally's closing in on twenty thousand."

Mad Sal: "Sid, Sid the Yid. You didn't fly up from bumfuck

Texas to schmooze the grapevine with me."

Kabikoff: "You're right, Sal. I was passing through Dallas and had a schmooze with Jack Ruby. Jack said, 'See Sal D. In Chicago. Sal's the man to see for a big vigorish loan from the Pension Fund.' Jack said, 'Sal's the middleman. He can fix you up with Momo and above. Sal's the man with access to the money.' "

Mad Sal: "You say 'Momo' like you think you're some kind of made guy."

Kabikoff: "It's like you talking Yiddish. Everybody wants to think they're connected. Everybody wants to be in the loop."

Mad Sal: "The Loop's downtown, you fat bagel bender."

Kabikoff: "Sal, Sal."

Mad Sal: "Sal, my big fat braciola, you lox jockey. Now you tell me the scheme, 'cause there's gotta be a scheme, 'cause you ain't tapping the Fund for your little bagel biter's bar mitzvah."

Kabikoff: "The scheme is smut movies, Sal. I've been shooting smut down in Mexico for a year now. T.J., Juarez, you can get talent cheap down there."

Mad Sal: "Get to it. Cut the fucking travelogue."

Kabikoff: "Hey, I'm setting a mood."

Mad Sal: "I'll mood you, you mameluke."

Kabikoff: "Sal, Sal. I've been shooting smut. I'm good at it. In fact, I'm shooting a picture down in Mexico in a couple of days. I'm using some strippers from Jack's club. It's going to be great—Jack's got some gorgeous gash working for him. Sal, Sal, don't look at me that way. What I want to do is this. I want to make legit horror and action pictures with smut-movie casts. I want to book the legit pictures into the bottom half of double features and film the pornographic shit to help defer costs. Sal, Sal, don't frown like that. It's a moneymaker. I'll cut Sam and the Pension Fund in for 50% of my profits *plus* my payback and vigorish. Sal, listen to me. This deal has got 'Moneymaker' scrawled across the fucking stars in fucking neon."

Silence—twenty-six seconds worth.

Kabikoff: "Sal, quit giving me the evil eye and listen. This deal is a moneymaker, and I want to keep it in the loop. You know, in a way, the Fund and me go way back. See, I heard Jules Schiffrin's the bookkeeper for the Fund. You know, for the real books that people outside the loop don't know about. See, I knew Jules way back when. Like feature back in the '20s even, when he was selling dope and using the profits to finance movies with RKO back when Joe Kennedy owned it. Tell Sam to remember me to Jules, okay? Just to remind him that I'm a trustworthy guy and I'm still in the loop."

Littell clamped down on his headphones. Jesus Fucking—

"Jules Schiffrin"/"Fund bookkeeper"/"real books."

Sweat seeped into the phones—voices fizzed out incoherent. Littell wrote the quotes down verbatim on the closet wall.

Kabikoff: "... so I'm flying back to Texas in a few days. Take my card, Sal. No, take two and give one to Momo. Business cards always make a good impression."

Littell heard goodbyes and a door slamming. He took off his headset and stared at the words on the wall.

Mad Sal walked up. Fat jiggled under his T-shirt.

"How'd I do? I had to give him some shit or he wouldn't've believed it was the real me."

"You were good. Now just watch your money. You won't get another dime from me until I've tapped into the Fund."

"What do I do about Kabikoff?"

"I'll call you inside a week and tell you whether or not to refer him to Giancana."

Sal belched. "Call me in L.A. I'm taking another junket out to Gardena."

Littell stared at the wall. He memorized each and every word and copied them over into his notebook.

27

(Gardena, 8/25/59)

Lenny preened and smacked kisses. The junketeers ate it up—go Lenny, go, go, go.

Lenny hated fags. Lenny ate fags like Godzilla ate Tokyo. Lenny ate up the Lucky Nugget lounge.

Pete watched. Lenny spritzed shtick—fag Castro gropes fag Ike at the All-Fag Summit!!!!

“Fidel! Get your beard out of my crotch this instant! Fidel! What a biiiig Havana cigar you have!”

The junketeers loved it. The junketeers thought it was high-tone political satire.

Pete was bored. Stale shtick and stale beer—the Lucky Nugget was an armpit.

Dick Steisel sent him down. Dick had a grievance: Lenny’s recent shit was too coarse to print. Hughes and Hoover loved it—but random homo slurs could deep-six *Hush-Hush*.

“Fidel! Pass me the K-Y, and we’ll renew diplomatic relations! Fidel! My hemorrhoids are burning up like a United Fruit cane field!”

Kemper Boyd thought Lenny had talent. Kemper had a brainstorm: Let's dispense anti-Castro rage through *Hush-Hush*!

Lenny could write the stuff up. Lenny used to run bag to Batfeta—he knew the turf and the style, and Cuban Commies couldn't sue.

Lenny cranked shtick. Pete screened 10:00 p.m. daydreams. THAT MOMENT flashed by in Technicolor.

There's Tom Gordean, dead. There's Boyd, smiling. There's the suitcase full of UF stock.

They cut their deal right there beside the body. They rented a motel room, popped a shot off and rigged Gordean in a suicide pose. The stupid Key West cops bought the charade.

Boyd sold the stock. They made $131,000 apiece.

They met in D.C. for the split. Boyd said, "I can get you in on the Cuban thing, but it will probably take months. I'll have to explain the Gordean mission as a fuck-up."

Pete said, "Tell me more."

Boyd said, "Go back to L.A., do your *Hush-Hush* work and babysit Howard Hughes. I think Cuba and our combined connections can make us both rich."

He flew back and did it. He told Hughes he might have to go on leave soon.

Hughes was pissed. He unpissed him with a shitload of codeine.

The Cuban Cause had him drooling. He wanted in wicked bad. Santo Trafficante got booted out of Cuba last month, and spread the word that Castro should get butt-fucked for his Crimes Against Casino Profiteering.

Boyd called the cabstand a "potential launching pad." Boyd had this big throbbing wet dream: Jimmy Hoffa sells Tiger Kab to the Agency.

Chuck Rogers called him once a week. He said the cabstand was running trouble-free. Jimmy Hoffa sent him his monthly 5% —and he wasn't doing jackshit to earn it.

Boyd had Rogers hire his pet Cubans: Obregón, Delsol, Paez and Gutiérrez. Chuck fired the six *pro*-Castro geeks on the payroll —the fucks drove off hurling death threats.

Tiger Kab was now 100% anti-Castro.

Lenny ended his routine—with a riff on Ad*lay* Stevenson, King of the Turd Burglars. Pete ducked out behind a standing ovation.

The junketeers loved their Lenny. Lenny brushed through them like a prima diva slumming.

Perk-perk-perk—his feelers kicked in strong. He got this feeler-verified idea: Let's tail the little hump.

They drove north, with three cars between them. Lenny's Packard had a big whip antenna—Pete used it as a tracking device.

They took Western Avenue up to L.A. proper. Lenny swung west on Wilshire and north on Doheny. Traffic had thinned out—Pete hung back and cut the boy some slack.

Lenny turned east on Santa Monica. Pete grooved on the string of fruit bars—the 4-Star, the Klondike, some new ones. It was Memory Lane turf—he extorted every joint on the row back in his Sheriff's days.

Lenny hugged the curb, slooow cruising. He passed the Tropics, the Orchid and Larry's Lasso Room.

Lenny, don't wear your hate so fucking outré and naked.

Pete dawdled two car lengths back. Lenny pulled into the parking lot behind Nat's Nest.

Big Pete's got X-ray eyes. Big Pete's like Superman and the Green Hornet.

Pete circled the block and cruised through the lot. Lenny's car was parked by the back door.

Pete wrote out a note.

> If you get lucky, send him home. Meet me at Stan's Drive-in at Sunset & Highland. I'll stay there until after bar closing time.
>
> Pete B.

He stuck the note to Lenny's windshield. A fruit swished by and checked him out head-to-toe.

Pete ate in his car. He had two chili burgers, French fries and coffee.

Carhops skated by. They wore leotards, push-up bras and tights.

Gail Hendee used to call him a voyeur. It always jazzed him when women nailed his shit.

The carhops looked good. Hauling trays on skates kept them trim. The blonde lugging hot fudge sundaes looked like good shakedown bait.

Pete ordered peach pie a la mode. The blonde brought it to him. He saw Lenny walking up to the car.

He opened the passenger door and slid in.

He looked stoic. The prima diva was one tough little fruitfly.

Pete lit a cigarette. “You told me you were too smart to fuck with me. Does that still hold?”

“Yes.”

“Is this what Kemper Boyd and Ward Littell have on you?”

“‘This’? Yeah, ‘this’ is.”

“I don’t buy it, Lenny, and I don’t think Sam Giancana would care in the long run. I think I could call Sam right now and say, ‘Lenny Sands fucks boys,’ and he’d be shocked for a couple of minutes, then sit on the information. If Boyd and Littell tried to bluff you with that, I think you’d have the brains and the stones to call them on it.”

Lenny shrugged. “Littell said he’d spill to Sam and the cops.”

Pete dropped his cigarette in his water glass. “I’m not buying. Now, you see that brunette on skates over there?”

“I see her.”

“I want you to tell me what Boyd and Littell squeezed you with by the time she gets over to that blue Chevy.”

“Suppose I can’t remember?”

“Then figure everything you’ve heard about me is true, and take it from there.”

Lenny smiled, prima-diva-style. “I killed Tony Iannone, and Littell made me for it.”

Pete whistled. “I’m impressed. Tony was a rough boy.”

“Don’t string me along, Pete. Just tell me what you’re going to do about it.”

“The answer’s nothing. All this secret shit of yours goes no further.”

“I’ll try to believe it.”

“You can believe that Littell and I go back awhile, and I don’t like him. Boyd and me are friendly, but Littell’s something else. I can’t lean on him without pissing off Boyd, but if he ever gets too rowdy with you, let me know.”

Lenny bristled and clenched up. “I don’t need a protector. I’m not that kind of …”

Carhops zigzagged by. Pete rolled down his back window for some air.

"You've got credentials, Lenny. What you do in your spare time is your business."

"You're an enlightened guy."

"Thanks. Now, do you feel like telling me who or what you're snitching for Littell?"

"No."

"Just plain 'No'?"

"I want to keep working for you. Let me out of here with something, all right?"

Pete popped the passenger door latch. "No more fag stuff for *Hush-Hush*. From now on you write anti-Castro, anti-Commie stuff exclusively. I want you to write the pieces directly for the magazine. I'll get you some information, and you can make the rest of the shit up. You've been to Cuba, and you know Mr. Hughes' politics. Take it from there."

"Is that all?"

"Unless you want pie and coffee."

• • •

Lenny Sands fucks boys. Howard Hughes lends Dick Nixon's brother money.

Secret shit.

Big Pete wants a woman. Extortion experience preferred, but not mandatory.

The phone rang too fucking early.

Pete picked up. "Yeah?"

"It's Kemper."

"Kemper, shit, what time is it?"

"You're hired, Pete. Stanton's putting you on immediate contract status. You're going to be running the Blessington campsite."

Pete rubbed his eyes. "That's the official gig, but what's ours?"

"We're going to facilitate a collaboration between the CIA and organized crime."

28

(New York City, 8/26/59)

Joe Kennedy handed out presidential-sealed tie pins. The Carlyle suite took on a fake-presidential glow.

Bobby looked bored. Jack looked amused. Kemper pinned his necktie to his shirt.

Jack said, “Kemper’s a thief.”

Bobby said, “We came here to discuss the campaign, remember?”

Kemper brushed lint off his trousers. He wore a seersucker suit and white bucks—Joe called him an ice-cream jockey out of work.

Laura loved the outfit. He bought it with his stock-theft money. It was good summertime wedding attire.

Joe said, “FDR gave me those pins. I kept them because I knew I’d host a meeting like this one day.”

Joe wanted an event. The butler had arranged hors d’oeuvres on a sideboard near their chairs.

Bobby pulled off his necktie. “My book will be published in hardback in February, about a month after Jack announces. The paperback edition will come out in July, right around the time of the convention. I'm hoping it will put the whole Hoffa crusade in perspective. We don't want Jack's association with the McClellan Committee to hurt him with labor."

Jack laughed. "That goddamn book's eating up all your time. You should get a ghost writer. I did, and I won the Pulitzer Prize."

Joe smeared caviar on a cracker. "I heard Kemper wanted his name deleted from the text. That's too bad, because then you could have titled it *The Ice Cream Jockey Within.*"

Kemper toyed with his tie pin. "There's a million car thieves out there who hate me, Mr. Kennedy. I'd prefer that they not know what I'm doing."

Jack said, "Kemper's the furtive type."

Joe said, "Yes, and Bobby could learn from him. I've said it a thousand times before, and I'll say it a thousand times again. This hard-on for Jimmy Hoffa and the Mafia is horseshit. You may need those people to help you get out the vote one day, and now you're adding insult to injury by writing a book on top of chasing them via the goddamn Committee. Kemper plays his cards close to the vest, Bobby. You could learn from him."

Bobby chuckled. "Enjoy the moment, Kemper. Dad sides against his kids with outsiders present once in a decade."

Jack lit a cigar. "Sinatra's pals with those gangster guys. If we need them, we could use him as a go-between."

Bobby punched a chair cushion. "Frank Sinatra is a cowardly, finger-popping lowlife, and I will never make deals with gangster scum."

Jack rolled his eyes. Kemper took it as a cue to play middleman.

"I think the book has possibilities. I think we can distribute copies to union members during the primaries and notch some points that way. I've made a lot of law-enforcement connections working for the Committee, and I think we can forge an alliance of nominally Republican DAs by pushing Jack's anticrime credentials."

Jack blew smoke rings. "Bobby's the gangbuster, not me."

Kemper said, "You were on the Committee."

Bobby smiled. "I'll portray you heroically, Jack. I won't say that you and Dad were soft on Hoffa from the gate."

They all laughed. Bobby grabbed a handful of canapes.

Joe cleared his throat. “Kemper, we invited you to this session chiefly to discuss J. Edgar Hoover. We should discuss the situation now, because I’m hosting a dinner at Pavilion tonight, and I need to get ready.”

“Do you mean the files that Hoover has on all of you?”

Jack nodded. “I was thinking specifically of a romance I had during the war. I’ve heard that Hoover’s convinced himself that the woman was a Nazi spy.”

“Do you mean Inga Arvad?”

“That’s right.”

Kemper snatched one of Bobby’s canapes. “Mr. Hoover has that documented, yes. He bragged about it to me years ago. May I make a suggestion and clear the air about something?”

Joe nodded. Jack and Bobby pushed up to the edge of their chairs.

Kemper leaned toward them. “I’m sure Mr. Hoover knows that I went to work for the Committee. I’m sure he’s disappointed that I haven’t been in touch with him. Let me re-establish contact and tell him that I’m working for you. Let me assure him that Jack won’t replace him as FBI director if he’s elected.”

Joe nodded. Jack and Bobby nodded.

“I think it’s a smart, cautious move. And while I’ve got the floor, I’d like to bring up the Cuban issue. Eisenhower and Nixon have declared themselves anti-Castro, and I’ve been thinking that Jack should establish some anti-Fidel credentials.”

Joe fiddled with his tie pin. “Everybody’s starting to hate Castro. I don’t see Cuba as a partisan issue.”

Jack said, “Dad’s right. But I’ve been thinking that I might send some Marines down if I’m elected.”

Joe said, “*When* you’re elected.”

“Right. I’ll send some Marines down to liberate the whorehouses. Kemper can lead the troops. I’ll have him establish a spearhead in Havana.”

Joe winked. “Don’t forget your spear, Kemper.”

“I won’t. And seriously, I’ll keep you posted on the Cuban front. I know some ex-FBI men with good anti-Castro intelligence.”

Bobby brushed hair off his forehead. “Speaking of FBI men, how’s the Phantom?”

“In a word, he’s persistent. He’s chasing those Pension Fund books, but he’s not making much headway.”

"He's starting to impress me as pathetic."

"Believe me, he's not."

"Can I meet him?"

"Not until he retires. He's afraid of Mr. Hoover."

Joe said, "We all are."

Everybody laughed.

The St. Regis was a slightly downscale Carlyle. Kemper's suite was a third the size of the Kennedys'. He kept a room at a modest hotel in the West 40s—Jack and Bobby contacted him there.

It was stifling hot outside. The suite was a perfect 68 degrees.

Kemper wrote a note to Mr. Hoover. He said, It's confirmed—if elected, Jack Kennedy won't fire you. He played a game of Devil's Advocate next—his standard post-Kennedy-conference ritual.

Doubters questioned his travels. Doubters questioned his complex allegiances.

He sprang logical traps on himself and evaded them brilliantly.

He was seeing Laura tonight—for dinner and a recital at Carnegie Hall. She'd ridicule the pianist's style and practice his showstopper piece endlessly. It was the Kennedy quintessence: Compete, but don't go public unless you can win. Laura was half-Kennedy and a woman—she possessed competitive spirit but no family sanction. Her half-sisters married skirt chasers and stayed faithful; Laura had affairs. Laura said Joe loved his girls but deep down considered them niggers.

He'd been with Laura for seven months now. The Kennedys had no inkling of the liaison. When an engagement was formalized, he'd tell them.

They would be shocked, then relieved. They considered him trustworthy and knew that he kept things compartmentalized.

Laura loved ballsy men and the arts. She was a solitary woman—with no real friends except Lenny Sands. She exemplified the pervasive Kennedy orbit: A mobbed-up lounge lizard gave Jack speech lessons and forged a bond with his half-sister.

That bond was borderline scary. Lenny might tell Laura things. Lenny might tell her grisly stories.

Laura never mentioned Lenny—despite the fact that he facilitated their meeting.

She probably talked to Lenny long-distance.

Lenny was volatile. An angry or frightened Lenny might say:

Mr. Boyd made Mr. Littell hit me. Mr. Boyd and Mr. Littell are nasty extortionists. Mr. Boyd got me my *Hush-Hush* job—which is very nasty employment.

His Lenny fears peaked in late April.

The Boynton Beach auditions revealed two security risks: a child molester and a homosexual pimp. CIA guidelines mandated termination. He took them out to the Everglades and shot them.

The pimp saw it coming and begged. He shot him in the mouth to cut his squeals off.

He told Claire he killed two men in cold blood. She responded with anti-Communist platitudes.

The pimp reminded him of Lenny. The pimp sparked Devil's Advocate impromptus that he couldn't lie his way out of.

Lenny could ruin him with Laura. Further coercion might backfire—Lenny was volatile.

There was no cut-and-dried Lenny solution. Easing Laura's loneliness might help—she'd be less inclined to contact Lenny.

He brought Claire up from Tulane and introduced her to Laura in mid-May. She was wowed by Laura—a big-city sophisticate ten years her senior. A friendship clicked—the two became great phone chums. Claire joined Laura for occasional weekends, full of concerts and museum tours.

He traveled to earn his three paychecks. His daughter kept his future fiancée company.

Laura told Claire her whole story. Claire inspired full disclosure. Claire was wowed—My Dad might be the President's secret brother-in-law someday.

He pimped for the maybe future President. Jack went through his little black book and sideswiped a hundred women inside six months. Sally Lefferts called Jack a de facto rapist. "He backs you into a corner and charms you until you're plain bushed. He convinces you that turning him down would make you just about the most worthless female who ever lived."

His little black book was near-depleted. Mr. Hoover might tell him to fix Jack up with FBI-plant call girls.

It might happen. If Jack's campaign flourished, Mr. Hoover might simply say, "DO IT."

The phone rang. Kemper caught it on the second ring.

"Yes?"

A long-distance line crackled. "Kemper? It's Chuck Rogers. I'm at the stand, and something happened I figured you should know about."

"What?"

"Those pro-Castro guys I fired cruised by last night and shot up the parking lot. We were damn lucky nobody got hurt. Fulo says he thinks they've got a hole-up someplace close."

Kemper stretched out on the couch. "I'll be down in a few days. We'll fix things up."

"Fix things how?"

"I want to convince Jimmy to sell the stand to the Agency. You'll see. We'll work something out with him."

"I say let's be decisive. I say we can't lose face in the Cuban community by letting Commie shitheads shoot at us."

"We'll send them a message, Chuck. You won't be disappointed."

• • •

Kemper let himself in with his key. Laura left the terrace doors open—concert lights had Central Park sparkling.

It was too simple and too pretty. He'd seen some Cuban reconnaissance shots that put it to shame.

They showed United Fruit buildings torched against a night sky. The pictures were pure raw spellbinding—

Something said:

Check Laura's phone bills.

He rifled her study drawers and found them. She'd called Lenny Sands eleven times within the past three months.

Something said, *Convince yourself decisively*.

It was most likely nothing. Laura never mentioned Lenny or acted in any way suspicious.

Something said, *Make her tell you.*

They sat down to martinis. Laura was sunburned from a long day shopping.

She said, "How long were you waiting?"

Kemper said, "About an hour."

"I called you at the St. Regis, but the switchboard man said you'd left already."

"I felt like a walk."

"When it's so grisly hot out?"

"I had to check my messages at the other hotel."

"You could have called the desk and asked for them."

"I like to show myself every so often."

Laura laughed. "My lover's a spy."

"Not really."

"What would my ersatz family think if they knew you had a suite at the St. Regis?"

Kemper laughed. "They'd consider it imitative, and wonder how I could afford it."

"I've wondered myself. Your FBI pension and salary from the family aren't that generous."

Kemper put a hand on her knees. "I've been lucky in the stock market. I've said it before, Laura. If you're curious, ask."

"All right, I will. You've never mentioned taking walks before, so why did you take a walk on the hottest day of the year?"

Kemper made his eyes mist over. "I was thinking of my friend Ward, and these walks we'd take along the lakefront in Chicago. I've been missing him lately, and I think I confused the Chicago lakefront climate with Manhattan's. What's the matter, you look sad."

"Oh, nothing."

She took the bait. His Chicago/friend talk nailed her.

"Horseshit, 'Oh, nothing.' Laura ..."

"No, really, it's nothing."

"Laura ..."

She pulled away from him. "Kemper, *it's nothing*."

Kemper sighed. Kemper feigned perfect chagrined exasperation.

"No, it's not, it's Lenny Sands. Something I said reminded you of him."

She relaxed. She was buying the whole verbal package.

"Well, when you said you knew Lenny you were evasive, and I haven't brought him up because I thought it might bother you."

"Did Lenny tell you that he knew me?"

"Yes, and some other nameless FBI man. He wouldn't give me any details, but I could tell that he was afraid of you both."

"We helped him out of trouble, Laura. There was a price. Do you want me to tell you what that price was?"

"No. I don't want to know. It's an ugly world that Lenny lives in ... and ... well, it's just that you live in hotel suites and work for my quasi-family and God knows who else. I just wish we could be more open somehow."

Her eyes convinced him to do it. It was dead risky but the stuff of legends.

Kemper said, "Put on that green dress I gave you."

Pavilion was all silk brocade and candlelight. A pre-theater crowd came dressed to the nines.

Kemper slipped the maître d' a hundred dollars. A waiter led them back to the family's private room.

Time stood still. Kemper posed Laura beside him and opened the door.

Joe and Bobby looked up and froze. Ava Gardner put her glass down in slow motion.

Jack smiled.

Joe dropped his fork. His soufflé exploded. Ava Gardner caught chocolate sauce on the bodice.

Bobby stood up and balled his fists. Jack grabbed his cummerbund and pulled him back into his chair.

Jack laughed.

Jack said something like, "More balls than brains."

Joe and Bobby glowed—radioactively pissed.

Time stood still. Ava Gardner looked smaller than life.

29

(Dallas, 8/27/59)

He rented a suite at the Adolphus Hotel. His bedroom faced the south side of Commerce Street and Jack Ruby's Carousel Club.

Kemper Boyd always said DON'T SCRIMP ON SURVEILLANCE LODGING.

Littell watched the door with binoculars. It was 4:00 p.m. now, with no Live Striptease Girls until 6:00.

He'd checked Chicago-to-Dallas flight reservations. Sid Kabikoff flew in to Big D yesterday. His itinerary included a rent-a-car pickup.

His final destination was McAllen, Texas—smack on the Mexican border.

He flew down to make a smut film. He told Mad Sal that he was shooting it with Jack Ruby strippers.

Littell called in some sick time. He coughed when he talked to SAC Leahy. He purchased his airplane ticket under a pseudonym—Kemper Boyd always said COVER YOUR TRACKS.

Kabikoff told Mad Sal that "real" Fund books existed. Kabikoff told Mad Sal that Jules Schiffrin kept them. Kabikoff told Mad Sal that Jules Schiffrin knew Joe Kennedy.

It had to be a benign business acquaintance. Joe Kennedy cut a wide business swath.

Littell watched the door. An eyestrain headache slammed him. A crowd formed outside the Carousel Club.

Three muscular young men and three cheap-looking women. Sid Kabikoff himself—fat and sweaty.

They said hellos and lit cigarettes. Kabikoff waved his hands, effusive.

Jack Ruby opened the door. A dachshund ran out and took a shit on the sidewalk. Ruby kicked turds into the gutter.

The crowd moved inside. Littell visualized a rear-entry reconnaissance.

The back door was hook-and-eye latched, with slack at the door-doorjamb juncture. A dressing room connected to the club proper.

He walked across the street and hooked around to the parking lot. He saw one car only: a '56 Ford convertible with the top down.

The registration was strapped to the steering column. The owner was one Jefferson Davis Tippit.

Dogs yapped. Ruby should rename his dive the Carousel Kennel Club. Littell walked up to the door and popped the latch with his penknife.

It was dark. A crack of light cut through the dressing room.

He tiptoed up to the source. He smelled perfume and dog effluvia. The crack was a connecting door left ajar.

He heard overlapping voices. He made out Ruby, Kabikoff and a man with a deep Texas twang.

He squinted into the light. He saw Ruby, Kabikoff and a uniformed Dallas cop—standing by a striptease runway.

Littell craned his neck. His view expanded.

The runway was packed. He saw four girls and four boys, all buck naked.

Ruby said, "J.D., are they not gorgeous?"

The cop said, "I'm partial to women exclusively, but all in all I got to agree."

The boys stroked erections. The girls oohed and aahed. Three dachshunds cavorted on the runway.

Kabikoff giggled. "Jack, you're a better talent scout than Major Bowes and Ted Mack combined. 100%, Jack. I'm talking no rejections for these lovelies."

J.D. said, "When do we meet?"

Kabikoff said, "Tomorrow afternoon, say 2:00. We'll meet at the coffee shop at the Sagebrush Motel in McAllen, and drive across to the shoot from there. What an audition! All auditions should go so smooth!"

One boy had a tattooed penis. Two girls were knife-scarred and bruised. A dogfight erupted—Ruby yelled, "No, children, no!"

Littell ordered a room-service dinner: steak, Caesar salad and Glenlivet.

It was a robbery-stash splurge—and more Kemper's style than his.

Three drinks honed his instincts. A fourth made him certain. A nightcap made him call Mad Sal in L.A.

Sal pitched a tantrum: I need money, money, money.

Littell said, I'll try to get you some.

Sal said, Try hard.

Littell said, It's on. I want you to refer Kabikoff for a Fund loan. Call Giancana and set up a meeting. Call Sid in thirty-six hours and confirm it.

Sal gulped. Sal oozed fear. Littell said, I'll try to get you some money.

Sal agreed to do it. Littell hung up before he started begging again.

He didn't tell Sal that his robbery stash was down to eight hundred dollars.

Littell left a 2:00 a.m. wake-up call. His prayers ran long—Bobby Kennedy had a large family.

The drive took eleven hours. He hit McAllen with sixteen minutes to spare.

South Texas was pure hot and humid. Littell pulled off the highway and inventoried his backseat.

He had one blank-paged scrapbook, twelve rolls of Scotch tape and a Polaroid Land Camera with a long-range Rolliflex zoom lens. He had forty rolls of color film, a ski mask and a contraband FBI flashing roof light.

It was a complete mobile evidence kit.

Littell eased back into traffic. He spotted the Sagebrush Motel: a horseshoe-shaped bungalow court right on the main drag.

He pulled in and parked in front of the coffee shop. He put the car in neutral and idled with the air conditioner on.

J.D. Tippit pulled in at 2:06. His convertible was overloaded: six smut kids up front and camera gear bulging out of the trunk.

They entered the coffee shop. Littell snapped a zoom-lens shot to capture the moment.

The camera whirred. A picture popped out and developed in his hand in less than a minute.

Amazing—

Kabikoff pulled up and beeped his horn. Littell snapped a shot of his rear license plate.

Tippit and the kids walked out with soft drinks. They divided up between the cars and headed out southbound.

Littell counted to twenty and followed them. Traffic was light—they drove surface streets for five minutes and hit the border crossing one-two-three.

A guard waved them through. Littell popped a location-setting snapshot: two cars en route to Federal violations.

Mexico was a dusty extension of Texas. They drove through a long string of tin-shack villages.

A car squeezed in behind Tippit. Littell used it for protective cover.

They drove up into scrub hills. Littell fixed on J.D.'s foxtail-tipped antenna. The road was half dirt and half blacktop—gravel chunks snapped under his tires.

Kabikoff turned right at a sign: Domicilio de Estado Policía. "State Police Barracks"—an easy translation.

Tippit followed Kabikoff. The road was all dirt—the cars sent dust clouds swirling. They fishtailed up a little rock-clustered mountain.

Littell stayed on the main road and kept going. He saw some tree cover fifty yards up the mountainside—a thick clump of scrub pines to shoot from.

He pulled over and parked off the road. He packed his gear into a duffel bag and covered his car with scrub branches and tumbleweeds.

Echoes bounced his way. The "shoot" was just over the top of the hill.

He followed the sounds. He lugged his gear up a 90-degree grade.

The crest looked down on a dirt-packed clearing. His vantage point was goddamn superb.

The “barracks” was a tin-roofed shack. State Police cars were parked beside it—Chevys and old Hudson Hornets.

Tippit was lugging film cans. Fat Sid was bribing Mexican cops. The smut kids were checking out some handcuffed women.

Littell crouched behind a bush and laid out his gear. His zoom lens brought him into close-up range.

He saw wide-open barracks windows and mattresses set up inside. He saw black shirts and armbands on the cops.

The cop cars had leopard-skin seat covers. The women wore prison ID bracelets.

The crowd dispersed. The blackshirts uncuffed the women. Kabikoff hauled equipment inside the barracks.

Littell went to work. The heat had him weaving on his knees. His zoom lens got him in very close.

He snapped pictures and watched them develop. He placed them in neat rows inside his duffel bag.

He snapped smut girls entwined on a mattress. He snapped Sid Kabikoff coercing lesbian action.

He snapped obscene insertions. He snapped dildo gang bangs. He snapped smut boys whipping Mexican women bloody.

The Polaroid cranked out instant closeups. Fat Sid was color-glossy indicted:

For Suborning Lewd Conduct. For Felony Assault. For Filming Pornography for Interstate Sales, in violation of nine Federal statutes.

Littell shot his way through forty rolls of film. Sweat soaked the ground all around him.

Sid Kabikoff was evidence-snapped:

White slaving. Violating the Mann Act. Serving as an accessory to kidnapping and sexual battery.

Snap!—a snack break—cops baking tortillas on a prowl-car roof.

Snap!—a prisoner tries to escape. Snap!/snap!/snap!—two cops catch her and rape her.

Littell walked back to his car. He started sobbing just over the border.

He taped the pictures into his scrapbook and calmed down with prayers and a half-pint. He found a good spot to perch: the access-road curb, a half-mile north of the border.

The road ran one way. It was the only route to the Interstate. It was nicely lit—you could almost read license plate numbers.

Littell waited. Air-conditioner blasts kept him from dozing. Midnight came and went.

Cars drove by law-abidingly slow—the Border Patrol gave tickets all the way to McAllen.

Headlights swept by. Littell kept scanning rear plates. The air-conditioner freeze was making him sick.

Kabikoff's Cadillac passed—

Littell slid out behind him. He slapped the cherry light to his roof and pulled on his ski mask.

The light swirled bright red. Littell hit his high beams and tapped the horn.

Kabikoff pulled over. Littell boxed him in and walked up to his door.

Kabikoff screamed—the mask was bright red with white devil's horns.

Littell remembered making threats.

Littell remembered his final pitch: YOU'RE GOING TO TALK TO GIANCANA WIRED UP.

He remembered a tire iron.

He remembered blood on the dashboard.

He remembered begging God PLEASE DON'T LET ME KILL HIM.

30

(Miami, 8/29/59)

“Cocksu Commie fuckers shoot up my cabstand! First it’s Bobby Kennedy, now it’s these Red Cuban shitheels!”

Heads turned their way—Jimmy Hoffa talked loud. Lunch with Jimmy was risky—the hump sprayed food and coffee routinely.

Pete had a headache. The Tiger Kab hut stood catty-corner from the diner—the fucking tiger stripes were giving him eyestrain.

He turned away from the window. “Jimmy, let’s talk—”

Hoffa cut him off. “Bobby Kennedy’s got every shithead grand jury in America chasing me. Every shithead prosecutor in creation wants to go the rump route with James Riddle Hoffa.”

Pete yawned. The red-eye from L.A. was brutal.

Boyd gave him marching orders. Boyd said, Make a deal for the cabstand—I want an intelligence/recruiting hub in Miami. More banana boats are due. When the Blessington campsite flies, we’ll need more driver spots for our boys.

A waitress brought fresh coffee—Hoffa had spritzed his cup empty. Pete said, “Jimmy, let’s talk business.”

Hoffa dumped in cream and sugar. “I didn’t think you flew in for that roast-beef sandwich."

Pete lit a cigarette. "The Agency wants to lease a half-interest in the cabstand. There's lots of Agency and Outfit guys that are starting to feel pretty strongly about Cuba, and the Agency thinks the stand would be a good place to recruit out of. And there'll be shitloads of Cuban exiles coming into Miami, which means big business if the stand goes anti-Castro in a big way."

Hoffa belched. "What do you mean, 'lease'?"

"I mean you get a guaranteed $5,000 a month, in cash, plus half the gross profits, plus an Agency freeze with the IRS, just in case. My 5% comes off the top, you'll still have Chuck Rogers and Fulo running the stand, and I'll be coming by to check in regularly, once I start my contract job down in Blessington."

Jimmy's eyes flashed—$$$$$. "I like it. But Fulo said Kemper Boyd's tight with the Kennedys, which I do not like one iota."

Pete shrugged. "Fulo's right."

"Could Boyd get me off the hook with Bobby?"

"I'd say his loyalties are stretched too thin to try it. With Boyd, you take the bitter with the sweet."

Hoffa dabbed a stain off his necktie. "The bitter is those Commie humps who shot up my cabstand. The sweet is that if you took care of them, I'd be inclined to accept that offer."

Pete huddled up a crew at the dispatch hut. Solid guys: Chuck, Fulo, Boyd's man Teo Paez.

They pulled chairs up in front of the air conditioner. Chuck passed a bottle around.

Fulo sharpened his machete on a rock. "I understand that all six of the traitors have vacated their apartments. I have been told that they have moved into a place called a 'safe house.' It is near here, and I believe it is Communisto-financed."

Chuck wiped spit off the bottle. "I saw Rolando Cruz checking out the stand yesterday, so I think it's safe to say we're under surveillance. A cop friend of mine got me their license numbers, so if you say we go trawling, that'll help."

Paez said, "Death to traitors."

Pete ripped the air conditioner off the wall. Steam billowed out.

Chuck said, "I get it. You want to give them a target."

Pete closed down the stand—in full public view. Fulo called an air-conditioner repairman. Chuck radioed his drivers and told them to return their cabs *now*.

The repairman came and removed the wall unit. The drivers dropped off their taxis and went home. Fulo put a sign on the door: Tiger Kab Temporarily Closed.

Teo, Chuck and Fulo went trawling. They drove their radio-rigged off-duty cars, devoid of tiger stripes and Tiger Kab regalia.

Pete snuck back to the hut. He kept the lights off and the windows locked. The dump was brutal hot.

A four-way link hooked in: the three cars to the Tiger Kab switchboard. Fulo prowled Coral Gables; Chuck and Teo prowled Miami. Pete connected in to them via headset and hand microphone.

It was ass-scratching, sit-still duty. Chuck hogged the airwaves with a long rant on the Jew-Nigger Pantheon.

Three hours slogged by. The trawl cars kept a line of chatter up. They did not see hide-nor-fucking-hair of the pro-Castro guys.

Pete dozed with his headset on. The thick air had him wheezing. Crosstalk gibberish sparked these little two-second nightmares.

His *standard* nightmares: charging Jap infantry and Ruth Mildred Cressmeyer's face.

Pete dozed to radio fuzz and wah-wah feedback. He thought he heard Fulo's voice: "Two Car to base, urgent, over."

He jerked awake and snapped his mike on. "Yeah, Fulo."

Fulo clicked on. Traffic noise filtered in behind his voice.

"I have Rolando Cruz and César Salcido in sight. They stopped at a Texaco station and filled up two Coca-Cola bottles with gasoline. They are driving toward the stand rapidly."

"Flagler or 46th?"

"46th Street. Pete, I think they—"

"*They're going to torch the cabs*. Fulo, you stay behind them, and when they turn into the lot, you box them in. *And no shooting, do you understand?*"

"*Sí,* I comprende. Ten-four, over."

Pete dumped his headset. He saw Jimmy's nail-topped baseball bat on a shelf above the switchboard.

He grabbed it and ran out to the parking lot. The sky was pitch black and the air oooozed moisture.

Pete swung the bat and worked out some kinks. Headlights bounced down 46th—low, like your classic Cubano hot rod.

Pete crouched by a tiger-striped Merc.

The taco wagon swung into the lot.

Fulo's Chevy glided in sans lights and engine, right behind it.

Rolando Cruz got out. He was packing a Molotov cocktail and matches. He didn't notice Fulo's car—

Pete came up behind him. Fulo flashed his brights and backlit Cruz plain as day.

Pete swung the bat full-force. It ripped into Cruz and snagged on his ribs.

Cruz screamed.

Fulo piled out of his car. His high beams strafed Cruz, spitting blood and bone chips. César Salcido piled out of the spicmobile, wet-your-pants scared.

Pete yanked the bat free. The Molotov hit the pavement AND DID NOT SHATTER.

Fulo charged Salcido. The taco wagon idled at a high pitch—good cover noise.

Pete pulled his piece and shot Cruz in the back. The high beams caught Fulo's part of the show.

He's duct-taping Salcido upside the face. He's got the taco-wagon trunk wide open. There's dervish-quick Fulo, uncoiling the parking-lot hose.

Pete dumped Cruz in the trunk. Fulo nozzle-sprayed his entrails down a sewer hole.

It was dark. Cars cruised up and down Flagler, oblivious to the whole fucking thing.

Pete grabbed the Molotov. Fulo parked his Chevy. He was lip-syncing numbers over and over—Salcido probably spilled the safe-house address.

The taco wagon was metal-flake purple and fur-upholstered—a cherry '58 Impala niggered up.

Fulo took the wheel. Pete got in back. Salcido tried to scream through his gag.

They hauled down Flagler. Fulo yelled an address: 1809 Northwest 53rd. Pete turned on the radio full-blast.

Bobby Darin sang "Dream Lover," earsplitting loud. Pete shot Salcido in the back of the head—exploding teeth ripped the tape off his mouth.

Fulo drove VERY VERY SLOW. Blood dripped off the dashboard and seats.

They gagged on muzzle smoke. They kept the windows up to seal the smell in.

Fulo made left turns and right turns. Fulo made nice directional signals. They drove their coffin wagon out to the Coral Gables Causeway—VERY VERY SLOW.

They found an abandoned mooring dock. It ran thirty yards out into the bay.

It was deserted. No winos, no lovebirds, no late-night fly casters.

They got out. Fulo put the car in neutral and pushed it up on the planks. Pete lit the Molotov and tossed it inside.

They ran.

Flames hit the tank. The Impala exploded. The planking ignited kindling-quick.

The dock whoooshed into one long fireball. Waves lapped up and fizzed against it.

Pete coughed his lungs out. He tasted gunsmoke and swallowed blood off the dead men.

The dock caved in. The Impala sunk down on some reef rocks. Steam hissed off the water for a solid minute.

Fulo caught his breath. "Chuck lives nearby. I have a key to his room, and I know he has equipment we can use."

They found suppressor-rigged revolvers and bulletproof vests. They found Chuck's Tiger Kab parked at the curb.

They grabbed the guns and vested up. Pete hot-wired the cab.

Fulo drove a hair too fast. Pete thought of old Ruth Mildred all the way.

The house looked decrepit. The door looked un-breakdownable. The place was bracketed by palm groves—the only crib on the block.

The front room lights were on. Gauze curtains covered the window. Shadows stood out well defined.

They crouched beside the porch, just below the windowsill. Pete made out four shadow shapes and four voices. He pictured four men boozing on a couch FACING THE WINDOW.

Fulo seemed to pick up on his brainwaves. They checked their vests and their guns—four revolvers and twenty-four rounds total.

Pete counted off. They stood up and fired on “three”—straight through the window.

Glass exploded. Silencer thunks faded into screams.

The window went down. The curtains went down. They had *real* targets now—Commie spies up against a blood-spattered wall.

The spics were flailing for guns. The spics were wearing shoulder holsters and cross-draw hip rigs.

Pete vaulted the sill. Return fire hit his vest and spun him backward.

Fulo charged. The Commies fired wide; the Commies fired near-death erratic. They got off un-suppressored big-bore pistol shots— tremendously goddamn loud.

A vest deflection sent Fulo spinning. Pete stumbled up to the couch and emptied both his guns at ultraclose range. He notched head hits and neck hits and chest hits, and took in a big gasping breath of gray viscous something—

A diamond ring rolled across the floor. Fulo grabbed it and kissed it. Pete wiped blood from his eyes. He saw a stack of plastic-wrapped bricks by the TV set.

White powder was leaking out. He knew it was heroin.

31

(Miami, 8/30/59)

Kemper read by the Eden Roc pool. A waiter freshened his coffee every few minutes.

The *Herald* ran it in banner print: “Four Dead in Cuban Dope War.”

The paper reported no witnesses and no leads. The assumed perpetrators were “Rival Cuban Gangs.”

Kemper linked events.

John Stanton sends him a report three days ago. It states that President Eisenhower’s Cuban-Ops budget has come in way below the requested amount. It states that Raul Castro is funding a Miami propaganda drive through heroin sales. It states that a distribution shack/safe house has already been established. It states that the heroin gang includes two ex-Tiger Kab men: César Salcido and Rolando Cruz.

He tells Pete to clear an Agency/cabstand lease deal. He assumes that Jimmy Hoffa will stipulate vengeance on the men who shot up the stand. He knows that Pete will wreak that vengeance with considerable flair.

He has dinner with John Stanton. They discuss his report at length.

John says, Heroin-pushing Commies are tough competition. Ike will kick loose more money later on, but now is now.

More banana boats are due. Anti-Castro zealots will swarm Florida. Hothead ideologues will join the Cause and demand action.

Rampant factionalism might reign. The Blessington campsite is still short of operational and their Elite Cadre is still untested. The dope clique might usurp their strategic edge and financial hegemony.

Kemper said, Heroin-pushing Commies *are* tough. You can't compete with men who'll go that far.

He made Stanton say it himself. He made Stanton say, Unless we exceed their limits.

Talk went ambiguous. Abstractions passed as facts. A euphemistic language asserted itself.

"Self-budgeted," "autonomous" and "compartmentalized." "Need-to-know basis" and "Ad hoc utilization of Agency resources."

"Co-opting of Agency-aligned pharmacological sources on a cash-and-carry basis."

"Without divulging the destination of the merchandise."

They sealed the deal with elliptical rhetoric. He let Stanton think he devised most of the plan.

Kemper skimmed his newspaper. He noticed a page-four banner: "Grisly Causeway Discovery."

An arsoned Chevy collapses a rickety wooden dock. Rolando Cruz and César Salcido are along for the dip.

"Authorities believe the killings of Cruz and Salcido may be connected to the slayings of four other Cubans in Coral Gables late last night."

Kemper flipped back to page one. A single paragraph stood out.

"Although the dead men were rumored to be heroin traffickers, no narcotics were found on the premises."

Be prompt, Pete. And be as smart and farsighted as I think you are.

Pete showed up early, carrying a large paper bag. He didn't check out the women by the pool or walk up with his usual swagger.

Kemper slid a chair out. Pete saw the *Herald* on the table, folded to the page-one headline.

Kemper said, “You?”

Pete put the bag on the table. “Fulo and me.”

“Both jobs?”

“That’s right.”

“What’s in the bag?”

“Fourteen point six pounds of uncut heroin and a diamond ring.”

Kemper fished the ring out. The stones and gold setting were beautiful.

Pete poured a cup of coffee. “Keep it. To consecrate my marriage to the Agency.”

“Thanks. I may be popping a question with it soon.”

“I hope she says yes.”

“Did Hoffa?”

“Yeah, he did. He put a condition on the deal, which I fucking fulfilled, as I’m sure you already know.”

Kemper nudged the bag. “You could have unloaded it yourself. I wouldn’t have said anything.”

“I’m along for the ride. And for now, I’m enjoying it too much to fuck with your agenda.”

“Which is?”

“Compartmentalization.”

Kemper smiled. “That’s the biggest word I’ve ever heard you use.”

“I read books to teach myself English. I must have read the Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary at least ten times.”

“You’re an immigrant success story.”

“Go fuck yourself. But before you do it, tell me my official CIA duties.”

Kemper twirled the ring. Sunlight made the diamonds twinkle.

“You’ll be nominally running the Blessington campsite. There’s some additional buildings and a landing strip going up, and you’ll be supervising the construction. Your assignment is to train Cuban refugees for amphibious sabotage runs into Cuba, and to funnel them to other training sites, the cabstand and Miami for general gainful employment.”

Pete said, “It sounds too legal.”

Pool water splashed at their feet. His suite upstairs was almost Kennedy-sized.

“Boyd—”

“Eisenhower has given the Agency a tacit mandate to covertly undermine Castro. The Outfit wants their casinos back. Nobody wants a Communist dictatorship ninety miles off the Florida coast.”

“Tell me something I don’t know.”

“Ike’s budget allocation came in a little low.”

“Tell me something interesting.”

Kemper poked the bag. A tiny trace of white powder puffed out.

“I have a plan to refinance our part of the Cuban Cause. It’s implicitly Agency-vetted, and I think it will work.”

“I’m getting the picture, but I want to hear you say it.”

Kemper lowered his voice. “We link up with Santo Trafficante. We utilize his narcotics connections and my Cadre as pushers, and sell this dope, Santo’s dope and all the other dope we can get our hands on in Miami. The Agency has access to a poppy farm in Mexico, and we can buy some fresh-processed stuff there and have Chuck Rogers fly it in. We finance the Cause with the bulk of the money, give Trafficante a percentage as operating tribute and send a small percentage of the dope into Cuba with our Blessington men. They’ll distribute it to our on-island contacts, who will sell it and use the money to purchase weapons. Your specific job is to supervise my Cadre and make sure they sell only to Negroes. You make sure my men don’t use the dope themselves, and keep their profit skim at a minimum.”

Pete said, “What’s our percentage?” Pete’s response was utterly predictable.

“We don’t take one. If Trafficante approves my plan, we’ll get something much sweeter.”

“Which you’re not going to talk about now.”

“I’m meeting Trafficante in Tampa this afternoon. I’ll let you know what he says.”

“And in the meantime?”

“If Trafficante says yes, we’ll get going in a week or so. In the meantime, you drive down to Blessington and check things out, meet the Cadre and tell Mr. Hughes that you’ll be taking some prolonged Florida vacations.”

Pete smiled. “He’ll be pissed.”

“You know how to get around that.”

"If I'm working up in Miami, who's going to run the campsite?"

Kemper got out his address book. "Go see Guy Banister in New Orleans. Tell him we need a tough white man to run the camp, a shitkicker type who can handle the crackers around Blessington. Guy knows every right-wing hardcase on the Gulf Coast. Tell him we need a man who's not too insane and willing to move to South Florida."

Pete wrote Banister's number on a napkin. "You're convinced all this is going to work?"

"I'm certain. Just pray that Castro doesn't go pro-U.S."

"That's a nice sentiment from a Kennedy man."

"Jack would appreciate the irony."

Pete cracked his knuckles. "Jimmy thinks you should tell Jack to put a leash on Bobby."

"Never. And I want to see Jack elected President, and I will not intercede with the Kennedys to help Hoffa. I keep—"

"—things compartmentalized, I know."

Kemper held the ring up. "Stanton wants me to help influence Jack's Cuban policy. We want the Cuban problem to extend, Pete. Hopefully into a Kennedy administration."

Pete cracked his thumbs. "Jack's got a nice head of hair, but I don't see him as President of the United States."

"Qualifications don't count. All Ike did was invade Europe and look like your uncle."

Pete stretched. His shirttail slid up over two revolvers.

"Whatever happens, I'm in. This is too fucking big to pass up."

His rent-a-car came with a discreet dashboard Jesus. Kemper slipped the ring over its head.

The air conditioner died outside Miami. A radio concert kept his mind off the heat.

A virtuoso played Chopin. Kemper replayed the scene at Pavilion.

Jack played peacemaker and smoothed things out. Old Joe's freeze thawed out nicely. They stayed for one awkward drink.

Bobby sulked. Ava Gardner was plain flummoxed. She had no idea what the scene meant.

Joe sent him a note the next day. It closed with, "Laura deserves a man with balls."

Laura said "I love you" that night. He made up his mind to propose to her at Christmas.

He could afford Laura now. He had three paychecks and two full-time hotel suites. He had a low six-figure bank-account balance.

And if Trafficante says yes …

Trafficante understood abstract concepts.

“Self-budgeted,” “autonomous” and “compartmentalized” amused him.

“Agency-aligned pharmacological sources” made him laugh outright.

He wore a nubby-weave silk suit. His office was turned out in blond-wood Danish modern.

He loved Kemper’s plan. He grasped its political thrust immediately.

The meeting extended. A yes-man served anisette and pastry.

Their conversation veered in odd directions. Trafficante critiqued the Big Pete Bondurant myth. The paper bag by Kemper’s feet went unmentioned.

The yes-man served espresso and Courvoisier VSOP. Kemper marked the moment with a bow.

“Raúl Castro sent this in, Mr. Trafficante. Pete and I want you to have it, as a symbol of our good faith.”

Trafficante picked up the bag. He smiled at the weight and gave it a few little squeezes.

Kemper swirled his brandy. “If Castro is eliminated as a direct or indirect result of our efforts, Pete and I will insure that your contribution is recognized. More importantly, we’ll try to convince the new Cuban ruler to allow you, Mr. Giancana, Mr. Marcello and Mr. Rosselli to regain control of your casinos and build new ones.”

“And if he refuses?”

“We’ll kill him.”

“And what do you and Pete want for all your hard work?”

“If Cuba is liberated, we want to split 5% of the profits from the Capri and Nacional Hotel casinos in perpetuity.”

“Suppose Cuba stays Communist?”

“Then we get nothing.”

Trafficante bowed. “I’ll talk to the other boys, and of course, my vote is ‘Yes.’ ”

32

(Chicago, 9/4/59)

Littell picked up static interference. House-to-car bug feeds always ran rough.

The signal fed in from fifty yards out. Sid Kabikoff wore the microphone taped to his chest.

Mad Sal had arranged the meet. Sam G. insisted on his apartment—take it or leave it. Butch Montrose met Sid on the stoop and walked him up to the left-rear unit.

The car was broiling. Littell kept his windows up as a sound filter.

Kabikoff: “You’ve got a nice place, Sam. Really, what a choice pad-à-terre.”

Littell heard scratching noise—flush on the mike. He visualized the at-the-source cause.

Sid’s stretching the tape. He’s rubbing those bruises I inflicted down in Texas.

Giancana’s voice came in garbled. Littell thought he heard Mad Sal mentioned.

He tried to find Sal this morning. He cruised his collection turf and couldn’t locate him.

Montrose: "We know you knew Jules Schiffrin back in the old days. We know you know some of the boys, so it's like you're recommended from the gate."

Kabikoff: "It's like a loop. If you're in the loop you're in the loop."

Cars boomed by. Windowpanes rattled close to the feed-in.

Kabikoff: "Everybody in the loop knows I'm the best smut man in the West. Everybody knows Sid the Yid's got the best-looking cunt and the boys with the putzes down to their knees."

Giancana: "Did Sal tell you to ask for a Pension Fund loan specific?"

Kabikoff: "Yeah, he did."

Montrose: "Is Sal in some kind of money trouble, Sid?"

Traffic noise covered the signal. Littell timed it at six seconds even.

Montrose: "I know Sal's in the loop, and I know the loop's the loop, but I'm also saying my own little love shack got burglarized in January, and I got rammed for fourteen Gs out of my fucking golf bag."

Giancana: "And in April some friends of ours got clouted for eighty grand they had stashed in a locker. You see, right after these hits Sal started spending new money. Butch and me just put it together, sort of circumstantially."

Littell went lightheaded. His pulse went haywire.

Kabikoff: "No. Sal wouldn't do something like that. No … he wouldn't.…"

Montrose: "The loop's the loop and the Fund's the Fund, but the two ain't necessarily the same thing. Jules Schiffrin's with the Fund, but that don't mean he'd roll over for a loan for you, just because you shared spit way back when."

Giancana: "We sort of think somebody's trying to get at Jimmy Hoffa and the Fund through a goddamn fake loan referral. We talked to Sal about it, but he didn't have nothing to say."

Littell hyperventilated. Spots blipped in front of his eyes.

Montrose: "So, did somebody approach you? Like the Feds or the Cook County Sheriff's?"

Thumps hit the mike. It had to be Sid's pulse racing. Fizzing noise overlapped the thumps—Sid's sweat was clogging up the feeder ducts.

The feed sputtered and died. Littell hit his volume switch and got nothing but a static-fuzzed void.

He rolled down the windows and counted off forty-six seconds. Fresh air cleared his head.

He can't rat me. I wore that ski mask both times that we talked.

Kabikoff stumbled out to the sidewalk. Wires dangled from the back of his shirt. He got his car and punched it straight through a red light.

Littell hit the ignition. The car wouldn't start—his bug feed ran down the battery.

• • •

He knew what he'd find at Sal's house. Four rye-and-beers prepared him to break in and see it.

They tortured Sal in his basement. They stripped him and tied him to a ceiling pipe. They hosed him and scorched him with jumper cables.

Sal didn't talk. Giancana didn't know the name Littell. Fat Sid didn't know his name or what he looked like.

They might let Sid go back to Texas. They might or might not kill him somewhere down the line.

They left a cable clamped to Sal's tongue. Voltage burned his face shiny black.

Littell called Fat Sid's hotel. The desk clerk said Mr. Kabikoff was in—he had two visitors just an hour ago.

Littell said, "Don't ring his room." He stopped for two more rye-and-beers and drove over to see for himself.

They left the door unlocked. They left Sid in an overflowing bathtub. They tossed a plugged-in TV set on top of him.

The water was still bubbling. Electric shock had burned Kabikoff bald.

Littell tried to weep. The rye-and-beers left him too anesthetized.

Kemper Boyd always said DON'T LOOK BACK.

33

(New Orleans, 9/20/59)

Banister supplied files and pedigree notes. Pete narrowed his prospects down to three men.

His hotel room was file-inundated. He was deluged with rap sheets and FBI reports—the far-right South captured on paper.

He got the scoop on Ku Klux Klan klowns and neo-Nazis. He learned about the National States Rights Party. He marveled at the pointy-heads on the FBI payroll—half the Klans in Dixie were Fed-saturated.

Fed snitches were out castrating and lynching. Hoover's only real concern was KKK mail-fraud minutiae.

A fan ruffled loose file papers. Pete stretched out on the bed and blew smoke rings.

Memo to Kemper Boyd:

The Agency should bankroll a Blessington KKK Klavern. Dirt-poor crackers surrounded the campsite—spic haters all. Klan hijinks would help keep them diverted.

Pete skimmed rap sheets. His instinct held—his prospects were the least rabid of the bunch.

Said prospects:

The Reverend Wilton Tompkins Evans, ex-con radio messiah. Pastor of the "Anti-Communist Crusade of the Air," a weekly short-wave tirade. Spanish-fluent; ex-paratrooper; three convictions for statutory rape. Banister's assessment: "Capable and tough, but perhaps too anti-papist to work with Cubans. He'd be a great training officer and I'm sure he'd relocate, because he can broadcast his radio program from anywhere. Close friend of Chuck Rogers."

Douglas Frank Lockhart, FBI informant/Klansman. Ex-Tank Corps sergeant; ex-Dallas cop; ex-gun runner to rightist dictator Rafael Trujillo. Banister's assessment: "Probably the premier Klan informant in the South and a true Klan zealot in his own right. Tough and brave, but easily led and somewhat volatile. Seems to bear no grudge against Latins, especially if they are strongly anti-Communist."

Henry Davis Hudspeth, the South's #1 purveyor of hate propaganda. Spanish fluent; expert in Hapkido jujitsu. World War II fighter ace, with thirteen Pacific Theater kills. Banister's assessment: "I like Hank, but he can be stubborn and untowardedly vitriolic. He's currently working for me as liaison between my exile camp near Lake Pontchartrain and Dougie Frank Lockhart's nearby Klan Klavern. (I own the property both are situated on.) Hank's a good man, but maybe not suited for second banana status."

All three men were close by. All three had party plans tonight —the Klan was torching a cross out by Guy's camp.

Pete tried to notch a pre-cross-burn nap. He was running on a sleep deficit—his past three weeks were hectic and exhausting.

Boyd glommed some morphine from that CIA-friendly dope ranch. He flew it out to L.A. and gave it to Mr. Hughes.

Mr. Hughes appreciated the gift. Mr. Hughes said, Go back to Miami with my best wishes.

He didn't tell him, I'm an anti-Red crusader now. With 5% of two casinos forever—if Cuba trades Red for Red, White and Blue.

Boyd sold the deal to Trafficante. Marcello, Giancana and Rosselli agreed to it. Boyd figured they'd make at least fifteen million dollars per year per man.

He told Lenny to swamp *Hush-Hush* with anti-Castro propaganda. He told him to shitcan the sex jive that Hughes and Hoover drooled for. He told him to make up some skank to keep them happy.

L.A. was prison camp. Florida was summer camp.

He flew back to Miami quicksville. Boyd had signed on the Mexican dope farm as the Cadre's chief supplier. Chuck flew the initial fourteen pounds down for cutting and brought it back at six times the weight. Trafficante kicked loose bonuses for all Cadre personnel.

He gave them sawed-offs and magnums. He gave them bulletproof vests and cherry-new dopemobiles.

Fulo chose a '59 Eldo. Chuck picked out a sweet Ford Vicky. Delsol, Obregón, Paez and Gutiérrez were all Chevy men. Spies will be spies—they tacoized their sleds from stem to stern.

He met the men and got to know them.

Gutiérrez was solid and quiet. Delsol was calculating and smart. His cousin Obregón seemed borderline dicey—Boyd was starting to think he might run light on balls.

Santo Junior retooled his Miami dope biz. The Cadre took over the nigger trade exclusively.

Boyd decreed free tastes for all local junkies. The Cadre dispensed a shitload of shit totally gratis. Chuck renamed Niggertown Cloud Nine.

They segued from philanthropy to business. They prowled and sold their shit in two-man cars—with shotguns in plain sight. A junkie tried to rob Ramón Gutiérrez. Teo Paez cut him down with rat-poison-laced buckshot.

Santo Junior was pleased so far. Santo proffered the #1 Cadre Commandment: You may not sample the merchandise. Pete proffered Commandment #2: If you use Big "H," I will kill you.

Miami was Crime Heaven. Blessington was the Pearly Gates To.

The campsite took up fourteen acres. The installation included two bunkhouses, a weapons shed, an operations hut, a drill field and a landing strip. A dock and speedboat launch site were still in construction.

Cadre recruiters jumped the gun and sent some training prospects down. Local crackers took offense at the spic squatters on their turf. Pete hired some unemployed Klansmen to work on the dock. The move facilitated a temporary peace—Klavernites and exiles were toiling together.

Fourteen squatters were now in residence. More exiles were fleeing Cuba every day. There were more CIA campsites pending

—with forty-odd projected by mid-1960.

Castro would survive—just long enough to make Boyd and him rich.

The cross burned high and wide. Pete caught the glow from half a mile out.

A dirt road veered off the highway. Signs pointed the way: “Nigger stay out!” “KKK—White Man Unite!”

Bugs popped in through his air vents. Pete swatted them off. He saw a barbed-wire fence and Klansmen at parade rest.

They wore white robes and hoods with purple piping. Dig their kanine kompanions: sheet-swaddled Doberman pinschers.

Pete flashed Banister’s gate pass. The pointy-heads checked him out and waved him in.

He parked beside some trucks and went strolling. The cross lit up a segregated pine-forest clearing.

Cubans milled around on one side. Whites boogie-woogied on the other. A row of sign-plastered trailers divided them.

On his left: Klan bake sale, Klan rifle range, vendors hawking Klan regalia. On his right: the Blessington campsite duplicated.

Pete strolled the redneck side. Pointy-hoods bobbed his way—Hey, man, where’s your sheet?

Bugs buzz-bombed the cross. Rifle shots and target pings overlapped. The humidity was close to 100%.

Nazi armbands went for $2.99. Jew rabbi voodoo dolls—a steal at 3 for $5.00.

Pete walked by the trailers. He saw a sandwich board propped up against an old Airstream: “WKKK—Rev. Evans Anti-Communist Crusade.”

A hi-fi speaker was bolted to the axle. Sound sputtered out—pure crackpot gibberish.

He looked in the window. He saw twenty-odd cats pissing, shitting and fucking. A tall geek was screaming into a microphone. A cat was clawing some short-wave wires, about to get French-fried to kingdom come.

Pete scratched one prospect and kept walking. All the Caucasoids wore hoods—he couldn’t match Hudspeth or Lockhart to their mug shots.

“Bondurant! Down here!”

It was Guy Banister’s voice, booming up from below ground level.

A hatch snapped out of the dirt. A periscope thingamajig popped up and wiggled.

Guy had rigged himself a fucking bomb shelter.

Pete dropped down into it. Banister pulled the hatch shut behind him.

The space was twelve-by-twelve square. *Playboy* pinups covered the walls. Guy had socked in a shitload of Van Camp's pork & beans and bourbon.

Banister retracted the telescope. "You looked lonesome all by yourself with no sheet."

Pete stretched. His head grazed the ceiling.

"It's sweet, Guy."

"I thought you might like it."

"Who's paying for it?"

"Everybody."

"Which means?"

"Which means I own the land, and the Agency put up the buildings. Carlos Marcello donated three hundred thousand for guns, and Sam Giancana put up some money to buy off the State Police. The Klan folks pay to enter and sell their wares, and the exiles work four hours a day on a road crew and kick back half their pay to the Cause."

An air cooler hummed full-blast. The shelter was a goddamn igloo.

Pete shivered. "You said Hudspeth and Lockhart would be here."

"Hudspeth was arrested for grand theft auto this morning. It's his third offense, so there's no bail. Evans is here, though. And he's not a bad fellow, if you stay off the topic of religion."

Pete said, "He's got to be psycho. And Boyd and I don't want psychos working for us."

"But you'll employ more presentable psychos."

"Have it your way. And if it's Lockhart by default, I want a few minutes alone with him."

"Why?"

"Any man who parades around in a sheet has got to be able to convince me he can keep things compartmentalized."

Banister laughed. "That's a big word for a guy like you, Pete."

"People keep telling me that."

"That's because you're dealing with a higher type of person now that you're Agency."

"Like Evans?"

"Point taken. But offhand, I'd say that that man has stronger anti-Communist credentials than you do."

"Communism's bad for business. Don't pretend it's anything more than that."

Banister hooked his thumbs in his belt. "If you think that makes you sound worldly, you're sadly mistaken."

"Yeah?"

Banister smiled, too smug to live. "Accepting Communism is synonymous with promoting Communism. Your old nemesis Ward Littell accepts Communism, and a friend of mine in Chicago told me that Mr. Hoover is building a pro-Communist profile on him, based on his inactions more than his actions. You see where being worldly and accepting gets you when the chips are down?"

Pete cracked some knuckles. "Go get Lockhart. You know what Boyd wants, so explain it to him. And from here on in, shitcan the lectures."

Banister flinched. Banister started to open his mouth.

Pete went "Boo!"

Banister scurried out the hatch, double-time quick.

The silence and cold air felt sweet. The canned goods and liquor looked tasty. The wallpaper looked sweet—Miss July, especially.

Say the Russians drop the A-bomb. Say you hole up here. Cabin fever might set in and convince you the women were real.

Lockhart dropped down the hatch. He wore a soot-flecked sheet, cinched by a gunbelt and two revolvers.

He had bright red hair and freckles. His drawl was deep Mississippi.

"The money I like, and the move to Florida don't bother me. But that no-lynching rule has gotta go."

Pete backhanded him. Dougie Frank stayed upright—give him an A-plus for balance.

"Man, I have killed oversized white trash for less than what you just did!"

Punk bravura: Give him a C-minus.

Pete slapped him again. Lockhart pulled his right-hand piece—but didn't aim it.

Nerves: A-plus. Sense of caution: B-minus.

Lockhart wiped blood off his chin. “I like Cubans. I might stretch my racial-exclusion policy and let your guys into my Klavern.”

Sense of humor: A-plus.

Lockhart spit a tooth out. “Give *me* something. Let me know that I’m more than just some punching bag.”

Pete winked. “Mr. Boyd and I might put you on a bonus plan. And the Agency just might give you your own Ku Klux Klan.”

Lockhart did a Stepin Fetchit shuffle. “Thank you, massah! If you was pro-Klan like a real white man, I’d kiss the hem of your sheet!”

Pete kicked him in the balls.

He went down—but didn’t yelp or whimper. He cocked his gun—but didn’t fire.

The man got passing marks overall.

34

(New York City, 9/29/59)

The cab crawled uptown. Kemper balanced paperwork on his briefcase.

A graph showed primary-election states divided by county. Intersecting columns listed his law-enforcement contacts.

He checkmarked the presumed Democrats. He crossed out the presumed GOP hardcases.

It was boring work. Joe should simply buy Jack the White House.

Traffic slogged. The cabbie rode his horn. Kemper played a game of Devil's Advocate—dissembling practice never hurt.

Bobby questioned his constant Florida sojourns. His response verged on indignation.

"I'm in charge of forwarding McClellan Committee evidence, aren't I? Well, the Sun Valley case sticks in my craw, and Florida's a state that Jack needs to carry in the general election. I've been down there talking to some disaffected Teamsters."

The cab passed through slums. Ward Littell crashed his thoughts.

They hadn't talked or corresponded in a month. The D'Onofrio killing made a brief news splash and stayed unsolved. Ward didn't call or write to comment.

He should contact Ward. He should find out if Mad Sal's death derived from his work as Ward's informant.

The driver stopped at the St. Regis. Kemper paid him and quick-walked to the desk.

A clerk hovered. Kemper said, "Would you buzz my suite and ask Miss Hughes to come down?"

The clerk slipped on a headset and punched his switchboard. Kemper checked his watch—they were running way late for dinner.

"She's on the phone, Mr. Boyd. There's a conversation in progress."

Kemper smiled. "It's probably Miss Hughes and my daughter. They talk for hours at hotel rates."

"It's Miss Hughes and a man, actually."

Kemper caught himself clenching. "Let me have your headset, would you?"

"Wellllll …"

Kemper slipped him ten dollars.

"Wellllll …"

Kemper went to fifty. The clerk palmed it and handed him his earphones.

Kemper slipped them on. Lenny Sands was talking, very high-pitched and fey.

"… As terrible as he was he's dead, and he worked for the drunk just like me. There's the drunk and the brute, and now the brute has me writing these preposterous articles about Cuba. I can't name names, but Laura, my God …"

"You don't mean my friend Kemper Boyd?"

"He's not the one I'm afraid of. It's the brute and the drunk. You never know what the drunk will do, and I haven't heard from him since Sal was killed, which is driving me absolutely stark raving …"

It was compartmental turbulence. It would have to be contained.

35

(Chicago, 10/1/59)

Waves pushed litter up on the shore. Paper cups and cruise-boat programs shredded at his feet.

Littell kicked them out of his way. He passed the spot where he dumped the Montrose B&E swag.

Garbage then, garbage now.

He had three dead men to light candles for. Jack Ruby seemed to be safe—he called the Carousel Club once a week to hear his voice.

Sal resisted torture. Sal never said “Littell” or “Ruby.” Kabikoff knew him only as a cop in a ski mask.

“Mad Sal” and “Sid the Yid”—the nomenclature used to amuse him. Bobby Kennedy allegedly loved Mob nicknames.

He was sloughing off his Phantom reports. He was sloughing off his Red Squad work. He told SAC Leahy that God and Jesus Christ were leftists.

He cut Helen down to one night a week. He quit calling Lenny Sands. He had two constant companions: Old Overholt and Pabst Blue Ribbon.

A sodden magazine washed in. He saw a picture of Jack

Kennedy and Jackie.

Kemper said the senator had hound blood. Kemper said Bobby held his marriage vows sacred.

Fat Sid said their dad knew Jules Schiffrin. Schiffrin kept the real Pension Fund books—liquor couldn't numb that one fact.

Littell cut over to Lake Shore Drive. His feet ached and his trouser cuffs spilled sand.

It was dusk. He'd been walking due south for hours.

His bearings clicked in. He saw that he was three blocks away from a real live destination.

He walked over and knocked on Lenny Sands' door. Lenny opened up and just stood there.

Littell said, "It's over. I won't ask anything else of you." Lenny stepped closer. Words roared out in one long string. Littell heard "stupid" and "worthless" and "coward." He looked Lenny in the eyes and stood there while he roared himself breathless.

36

(Chicago, 10/2/59)

Kemper snapped the lock with his Diners Club card. Lenny didn’t learn that it takes deadbolts to keep rogue cops out.

Littell never learned that INFORMANTS DON’T RETIRE. He observed the retirement gala from the street—and saw Ward soak up abuse like a true flagellant.

Kemper closed the door and stood in the dark. Lenny walked to the A&P ten minutes ago, and should return within half an hour.

Laura learned not to press embarrassing topics. She never mentioned that call at the St. Regis.

Kemper heard footsteps and key sounds. He moved toward the light switch and screwed the silencer to his piece.

Lenny walked in. Kemper said, “It’s not over.”

A shopping bag fell. Glass broke.

“You don’t talk to Laura or Littell again. You work *Hush-Hush* for Pete. You find out everything you can about the Pension Fund books and report exclusively to me.”

Lenny said, “No.”

Kemper hit the switch. The living room lit up—antique-overfurnished and *très, très* effete.

Lenny blinked. Kemper shot the legs off an armoire. The crash shattered bone china and crystal.

He shot up a bookcase. He shot a Louis Fourteen couch into stuffing wads and wood chips. He shot up a hand-painted Chippendale wardrobe.

Sawdust and muzzle smoke swirled. Kemper got out a fresh clip.

Lenny said, “Yes.”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/5/59. Hush-Hush magazine article. Written by Lenny Sands, under the pseudonym Peerless Politicopundit.

CANCEROUS CASTRO COMMUNISTICALLY CALCIFIES CUBA WHILE HEROIC HERMANOS HUNGER FOR HOMELAND!

He's been in power a scant ten months, but the Free World already has the number of that slogan-slamming, stogie-stinking strongman Fidel Castro!

Castro ousted the democratically-elected anti-Communist Cuban Premier Fulgencio Batista last New Year's day. The bombastic bushy-bearded beatnik bard promised land reforms, social justice and pickled plantains on every plate—the standard stipends of welfare-waffled Commie commissars. He took over a small bastion of freedom 90 miles off U.S. shores, pathologically picked the pockets of patriotic patriarchs, nauseously "nationalized" U.S.-owned hotel-casinos, fried the friendly fragrant fields of the United Fruit Company and generally absconded with astronomical amounts of America's most peon-protecting, Commie-constraining export: money!!!

Yes, kats and kittens, it all comes down to divinely-deigned dollops of dollars—U.S., of course, those gorgeously garlanded greenbacks replete with pulsatingly powerful Presidential portraits, caricatures captivating in their corrosive condemnation of Communism!!!

Item: the beatnik bard bamboozled beleaguered bellhops at the formerly swank Nacional and Capri hotels in Havana, nastily nationalized their tips and rapidly replaced them with a regiment of rowdy Red regulators—bandy-legged bantamweight bandidos who also serve as crucifyingly-corrupt craps croupiers!

Item: fruit fields frantically french-fried! Peons passionately protected by America's altruistically-altered egalitarian economy are now welfare-wilted, pauper-periled Red Recidivists grubbing for Commie compensation!

Item: Raul "The Tool" Castro has flamboyantly flooded Florida with hellishly horrific, hophead-hazarding amounts of the demonically deadly "Big H": Heroin!!!: He's bent on needle-notching vast legions of Cuban immigrant slaves: zorched-out zombies to spread the cancerous Castro gospel between bouts of Heroin-hiatused, junkie-junketeered euphoria!

Item: there's a growing number of Cuban exiles and homegrown American patriots who take egregious exception to the beatnik brothers' broadside of bamboozlement. Right now they're recruiting in Miami and South Florida. These men are tantalizingly tough tigers who have earned their orange-and-black—not Red—stripes in the jungles of Castro's jam-packed, jerry-rigged jails. Every day, more and more men like them are arriving on America's shores, anxious to sing the mellifluous melodies of "My Country 'Tis of Thee."

This reporter talked to an American named "Big Pete," a dedicated anti-Communist currently training anti-Castro guerrillas. "It all comes down to patriotism," Big Pete said. "Do you want a Communist dictatorship 90 miles off our shores or not? I don't, so I've joined the Cuban Freedom Cause. And I'd like to extend an invitation to all Cuban exiles and native-born men of Cuban descent. Join us. If you're in Miami, ask around. Local Cubans will tell you we mean business."

Item: with men like Big Pete on the job, Castro should be considering a new career. Hey! I know a few coffeehouses in L.A.'s way-out Venice West who could use a gone beatnik poet like Fidel! Hey, Fidel! Can you dig it, Daddy-O?

Remember, dear reader, you heard it first here: off the record, on the Q.T. and very Hush-Hush.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/19/59. Personal Note: J. Edgar Hoover to Howard Hughes.

Dear Howard,

I greatly eryoyed Peerless Politicopundit's piece in the October 5th issue of Hush-Hush. It was, of course, far-fetched, but subtract the purple prose and what remains is politically substantive.

Lenny Sands has certainly adapted to the Hush-Hush style. And as a fledgling propagandist he shows promise. I found the subliminally-planted plugs for the Tiger Kab Kompany to be a nice little aside to the cognoscenti, and especially eryoyed the lofty sentiments expressed by our pragmatist friend Pierre Bondurant.

All in all, a most salutary issue.

Warmest regards,
Edgar

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/30/59. Summary Report: John Stanton to Kemper Boyd. Marked: CONFIDENTIAL/HAND POUCH DELIVER.

Dear Kemper,

A short note to keep you advised of some recent policy decisions. You remain hard to reach, so I'm sending this to you via courier.

First off, our superiors are now more than ever convinced that the Castro problem will extend. Although the President's latest allocation came in low, we have every hope that Castro's powers of persistence will loosen up the White House pursestrings. To paraphrase our friend Peerless Politicopundit: "Nobody wants a Communist dictatorship ninety miles from our shores." (I wish I could write reports like he writes yellow journalism).

Mr. Dulles, Deputy Director Bissell and selected Cuban-expert case officers are beginning to plan for an exile invasion in late 1960 or early 1961. It is assumed that by that date the Agency will have a pool of at least ten thousand well-trained U.S.-based exile troops to draw from, and that public opinion will be strongly on our side. The general idea is to launch an amphibious assault force, backed by air cover, from Gulf Coast campsite-launch sites. I'll keep you abreast as plans develop further. And you keep at our friend Jack. If this plan stays on hold until after January 20, 1961, there's a chance he'll be the man to approve it or scrap it.

Since we last spoke, eleven more "Banana Barges" have landed in Florida and Louisiana. Regional case officers have been assigned immigrant caseloads and are dispersing the men to various campsites. Many who decline regular Agency assistance will be heading to Miami. I'll be curious to see if our Cadre latches on to any of them. As I'm sure you know, the Blessington site is now ready to house troops formally. I have approved the hiring of Douglas Frank Lockhart to run the camp, and I think it is time to rotate our Cadre on a Miami-business, Blessington-training axis. Put Pete Bondurant and Chuck Rogers on this immediately, and have Bondurant pouch deliver a report to me inside six weeks.

Per our Cadre's Miami "business," and in keeping with our elliptical way of discussing it, I'll state that I'm glad profits seem to be growing and that the agreement you reached with our Agency-friendly source in Mexico seems to be flourishing. I envision a time when our superiors will vet this "business" as good common sense, but until anti-Castro rancor or whatever reaches that point I must stress absolute compartmentalization and secrecy. Mr. Trafficante's participation must remain secret, and I would not want it generally known that Mr. S. Giancana and Mr. C. Marcello have also contributed to the Cause.

Keep me posted, and burn this communique.

All best,
John

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/1/59. Summary Report: Kemper Boyd to Robert F. Kennedy.

Dear Bob,

I had a talk with James Dowd, the head of the Organized Crime Section at the Department of Justice. (I knew him when he was with the U.S. Attorney's Office.) As a courtesy, I had sent Mr. Dowd carbons of the paperwork I forwarded to various grand juries seeking Hoffa evidence, and now that courtesy seems to be bringing results.

As you know, the Landrum-Griffin Labor Reform Bill passed Congress, so now the Republican-dominated Justice Department has a clear "Get Hoffa" mandate. Dowd has deployed investigators and assistant-counsels to grand jury investigatory bodies in Ohio, Louisiana and Florida. The McClellan Committee spawned Landrum-Griffin; everyone knows it. Dowd has seen the political light and has decided to concentrate his energy on our Sun Valley evidence. (He thinks the two missing witnesses—Gretzler and Kirpaski—give it a moral weight.) As of 10/25/59, he had assigned six men to serve with three south Florida grand juries. They are actively seeking disgruntled Teamsters who had pur chased Sun Valley property. Dowd thinks the "Get Hoffa" process will be grindingly attenuated, which suits our political purposes to a degree.

My strongest sense is that we do not want "Get Hoffa" rancor to go too bi-partisan, and we do want Jack to stand out as the anti-labor corruption candidate. Dowd told me that he expects Hoffa to barnstorm primary election states and deluge voters with anti-Kennedy sentiment, and I think this may play into our hands. As hard as he sometimes tries to hide it, under duress Hoffa always comes off as a psychopathic thug. We want the Teamsters to endorse the Republican candidate. We want Richard Nixon to take Hoffa's money and sidestep labor corruption as an issue in the general election. That said, I think it is imperative that Jack redouble his efforts to woo legitimate labor leaders and convince them that he differentiates them from Hoffaites.

I'm shifting my emphasis now to the primaries. The Kennedy crime fighter image has impressed many of my normally-Republican law enforcement acquaintances, and I'm working my way through Wisconsin, New Hampshire and West Virginia county by county. Your local organizations seem sound, and I've told each and every volunteer I've met to keep their ears down for Hoffa barnstorming scuttlebutt.

More later. Write your book; I think it could be a valuable campaign tool.

Yours,
Kemper

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/9/59. Memorandum: Robert F. Kennedy to Kemper Boyd.

Kemper,

Thanks for the note. You're starting to think politically, and I think your Hoffa-Republican observations were quite astute. I'm glad the Justice Department has focused on Sun Valley, which I have always considered our strongest Hoffa case.

I've always believed that illegally-procured Pension Fund money (the "Spooky" 3 million) financed Hoffa's Sun Valley investment, and that Hoffa skimmed a large amount off the top. Some Pension Fund leads and/or intelligence on the possibility of "Real" Pension Fund books would do us a lot of good now.

What's the Chicago Phantom been doing? You've always portrayed this anonymous Jesuit crusader as quite a worker, but you haven't forwarded a Phantom report to me In months.

Bob

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/17/59. Note: Kemper Boyd to Robert P. Kennedy.

Dear Bob,

I agree. We certainly could use some Pension Fund leads now. The Phantom is working hard, but he's run up against one brick wall after another. And keep in mind, he's an FBI agent with a full load of regular duties. He's persisting, but as I've said before, it's very slow going.

Kemper

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/4/59. FBI Field Surveillance Report: Chicago Special Agent-in-Charge Charles Leahy to J. Edgar Hoover. Marked: EXTREMELY CONFIDENTIAL/DIRECTOR'S EYES ONLY.

Sir,

Per your request, agents co-opted from the Sioux City Office have kept SA Ward J. Littell under spot surveillance since 9/15/59. He has not been observed in the vicinity of Celano's Tailor Shop, and he has apparently refrained from covert anti-Organized Crime activity. He has not been seen with SA Kemper Boyd, and the (11/20/59 initiated) tap on his home telephone indicates that he speaks only to Helen Agee, with occasional calls to his ex-wife Margaret. He does not call or receive calls from his daughter Susan, and since the 11/20/59 tap initiation date SA Boyd has not called him.

Littell's work performance has steadily deteriorated. This decline was in effect before the spot tails were initiated. Assigned to surveil CPUSA members in Hyde Park and Rogers Park, Littell frequently abandons his surveillance positions to drink in taverns or visit various Catholic churches.

Littell's Red Squad reports have been slipshod. He regularly misrepresents the hours he spends on his assignments and his comments on CPUSA members can only be considered overly charitable.

On 11/26/59, SA W.R. Hinckle observed CPUSA cell leader Malcolm Chamales accost Littell outside his apartment building. Chamales accused Littell of "FBI black bag chicanery" and challenged him to respond. Littell invited Chamales to a tavern. SA Hinckle observed them engaged in a political discussion. They met again on 11/29 and 12/1. SA Hinckle observed both meetings and believes the two men are becoming friends or at least drinking companions.

Bureau-friendly University of Chicago sources have reported that SA Littell and Helen Agee have been seen on campus arguing heatedly. Their affair appears to be strained and Miss Agee was overheard urging Littell to seek help for his drinking problem. On 11/3/59, SA J.S. Burtler observed Littell and Miss Agee engage in a political discussion. Miss Agee expressed admiration for Vice-President Richard Nixon. Littell referred to Mr. Nixon as "Tricky Dick" and called him a "Red-baiting, slush-fund financed crypto-fascist."

In conclusion: a pro-Communist profile of Littell is now being compiled. I believe that his subversive statements, treasonous Red Squad omissions and friendship with Malcolm Chamales will continue and comprise a damaging security risk portrait.

Respectfully,
Charles Leahy
SAC, Chicago Office

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/21/59. Field Report: Pete Bondurant to Kemper Boyd, "For Forwarding to John Stanton." Marked: KB —BE CAREFUL HOW YOU TRANSMIT THIS.

KB,

Sorry this report Stanton wanted is late. I don't like writing things down, so cross out what you want and get it to him. Make sure Stanton destroys it. I know he thinks the Agency will go along with what we're doing 100% somewhere down the line, but that might be a long time.

1.—My Klan workers finished up the dock and the speedboat launch-site. Blessington's now 100% operational.

2.—Dougie Frank Lockhart is solid. He's got the usual crazy ideas that guys in his line of work have, but that's just the way things are & I don't think it's too bad if it doesn't interfere with his job. His FBI contact was pissed that he won't be snitching those rival KKK's in Louisiana, but he changed his tune when Lockhart told him you were heading up the operation. My guess is that he checked with Hoover, who told him you have carte blanche. Lockhart has done a good job so far. I got some $ from Trafficante for him & he's used it to start up his own Klan outside Blessington. He handed out signing bonuses and all the local Klan guys quit their old Klans to sign on with Dougie Frank. I've told him you want no lynchings, church bombings or beatings. He's disappointed, but going along. Lockhart gets along with Cubans & has told his Klan guys not to stir up any racial trouble with the Cadre or our trainees. So far, the guys have gone along with his orders.

3.—Our Miami business is good and getting better. Last month's gross at the Booker T. Washington Housing Project was 14% higher than the Trafficante organization's best month ever. The October gross at the George Washington Carver Project was 9% higher than ST's best. Chuck Rogers says the men at the Mexican ranch are solid. They set up a deal where he can fly in & out without filing flight logs with the Mex. State Police. We've got a landing strip at Blessington now, so Chuck can make the pick-up runs that much safer. I've been driving the split money to ST in Tampa every week. He's pleased with his profits and has been dishing out bonus $ to the Cadre regularly. He's been kicking back 15% directly to me to funnel into the Cause and 5% to a gun fund that Guy Banister has set up in New Orleans. So far, Fulo, Chuck, Paez, Obregon, Delsol & Gutierrez have been completely honest. There have been no shortages of merchandise or $.

4.—Stanton wanted fitness reports on the men. My feeling is that until somebody steals merchandise or $ or punks out on a job they all deserve A+ ratings. Obregon's a little gunshy about speedboat runs into Cuba & his cousin Delsol is a little shifty, but so far this is just minor stuff. What matters is that these are pro-U.S., anti-Castro diehards who don't steal from Trafficante. I say let them bootjack fares at the cabstand and blow off steam with booze and whores. I say you can't snap their leashes too hard or they'll get antsy.

5.—As recruiters, they're not bad. We've got 44 bunks at Blessington & they've been keeping them filled up. Chuck, Fulo, Lockhart & me have been training the men in 15 day cycles. We teach small arms, riflery, hand-to-hand combat & speedboat sabotage techniques, then funnel the men to Miami with job leads. The men recruit there & send their own prospects to a case officer codenamed HK/Cougar, who sends them to one of the Agcy-backed resident training camps according to bunk-availability. If this invasion you told me about ever comes off we should: have a surplus of well-trained soldiers to pick from.

6.—Paez, Obregon, Delsol, Gutierrez, Fulo & me have all made night speedboat runs into Cuba. We've dropped off merchandise with our on-island contacts & gunned down some militia patrol boats. Fulo & Gutierrez made a run & saw some militiamen sleeping on the beach. They killed all 30 with Tommy guns. Fulo scalped the ranking officer & now flies the scalp on the radio antenna of our lead boat.

7.—Like you wanted, I'm spreading myself between Blessington, our Miami business & the cabstand. Jimmy Hoffa is sort of pissed that you're pals with the Kennedys, but he's pleased with the lease deal, & the more Cuban immigrants that hit Miami the more $ Tiger Kab makes. And thanks for the merchandise you gave me for H.H. Since I'm in Florida all the time I guess that that stuff is what's keeping me on his payroll. I'd quit, but I know you want to cultivate some kind of Agcy. connection with him. I call him once a week to keep my hand in. H.H. says he's got Mormons looking after him now. They're helping him dodge the TWA process servers & doing the work I used to, except for procuring merchandise. I think that as long as I can supply that I'll draw an L.A. paycheck.

8.—Lenny Sands is editing Hush-Hush singlehandedly. I thought that Cuban piece he wrote was pretty good & got some good plugs in for the Cause.

That's it. I don't like writing things down, so tell Stanton to destroy this.

Viva La Causal

PB

37

(Blessington, 12/24/59)

Lockhart put his feet up on the dashboard. His fiber-fill Santa Claus suit had him sweating.

"You won't let me bomb churches or kill niggers. Now, what about enforcing the Klan Moral Kode?"

Pete played in—Dougie Frank was good for yuks. "What's that?"

"Well, you get word Joe Redneck's sister Sally has eyes for Leroy with the rumored 12-inch hog leg, and you catch them at it. You heat up your KKK branding iron and mark Sally as a race mixer."

"What about Leroy?"

"You ask him where he got his, and do they make them that size in white."

Pete laughed. Dougie Frank blew his nose out the window.

"I'm serious, Pete. I'm the Imperial Wizard of the South Florida Royal Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, and so far all I've done is hand out CIA bonus money and start up a softball team to play your goddamn crypto-jigaboo exiles."

Pete swerved around a stray dog. The truck hit a pothole; the gift-wrapped turkeys in the back bounced and slid.

“Don’t tell me your FBI operator let you do lynchings.”

“No, he didn’t. But he also didn’t say, ‘Dougie Frank, don’t kill no niggers while you’re on the U.S. Government payroll, now.’ You see the difference? You’re *tellin’* me I can’t do it, and you mean it.”

Pete saw shacks up ahead—good turkey drop-off spots. Santo Junior said to lube the locals—he had excess poultry stock off a hijack and figured free Christmas birds would promote goodwill.

“Do your job. This is big stuff we’re involved in, so treat it seriously.”

Lockhart said, “I am. I am doing my job and keeping my mouth shut about Chuck Rogers flying white powder airlines into the Fort Blessington airstrip, yessir. What I’m also sayin’ is my boys need some recreation.”

Pete swung around a turn. “I’ll talk to Jimmy Hoffa. Maybe he can take your guys out shark shooting.”

“What I had in mind was enforcing Moral Kode Bylaw Number Sixty-nine.”

“What’s that?”

“That’s where you catch Leroy’s brothers Tyrone and Rufus knockin’ on Sally’s door.”

“What do you do?”

“Tar and feather Sally.”

“What about Tyrone and Rufus?”

“You make them pull down their pants to see if it runs in the family.”

Pete laughed. Dougie Frank scratched his snowy-white beard. “How come I’m the one who had to dress up like Santa Claus?”

“I couldn’t find a red suit my size.”

“You could have dressed up one of the Cubans.”

“Come on. A spic Santa Claus?”

“I think this job is degrading.”

Pete pulled into a ratty dirt playground. Some colored kids saw Santa and went gaga.

Dougie Frank got out and lobbed turkeys at them. The kids ran up and tugged at his beard.

The local whites got turkeys. The local jigs got turkeys. The Blessington cops got turkeys and hijack Jim Beam.

The trainees got turkey dinners and Trojan prophylactics. Santo Junior sent down a Christmas treat: a busload of Tampa whores. Forty-four men and forty-four hookers made for squeaks off forty-four bunks.

Pete sent the girls home at midnight. Lockhart burned a Yuletide cross out in the boonies. Pete got an urge to hit Cuba and kill Commies.

He called Fulo in Miami. Fulo dug the idea. Fulo said, I'll round up some guys and drive down.

Chuck Rogers flew a load of dope in. Pete gassed up the lead speedboat.

Lockhart cruised by with some moonshine. Pete and Chuck traded chugs. Nobody smoked—the shit might ignite.

They sat on the dock. Floodlights lit up the whole campsite.

A trainee screamed in his sleep. Embers blew down off the cross. Pete remembered Xmas '45: The L.A. Sheriff's signed him on fresh out of the Marine Corps.

Fulo's car dipsy-doodled across the runway. Chuck stacked Tommy guns and ammo by the dock moorings.

Dougie Frank said, "Can I go?"

Pete said, "Sure."

Delsol, Obregón and Fulo piled out of the Chevy. They walked sway-bellied—blitzed by too much beer and turkey.

They waddled over to the dock. Tomás Obregón wore shades—at 2:00 a.m. Shades *and* long sleeves—on a half-assed balmy night.

A dog barked out in the sticks. Chuck Rogers mimicked hound yelps like this late-nite cracker deejay he grooved on. Everybody traded holiday back slaps.

Pete slapped Obregón's shades off. The fuck had dope-pinned eyes—floodlight glare nailed them clean.

Obregón froze. Rogers threw a choke hold on him.

Nobody talked. Nobody had to—the picture spread *rápidamente*.

Obregón squirmed. Fulo jerked his sleeves up. Skin-pop tracks ran down his arms, red and ugly.

Everybody looked at Delsol—Obregón's fucking cousin. The picture spread: Let him do it.

Chuck let Obregón go. Pete handed his gun to Delsol.

Obregón trembled and almost teetered off the dock. Delsol shot him six times in the chest.

He spun into the water. Steam hissed out his exit wounds.

Fulo dove in and scalped him.

Delsol looked away.

38

(Hyannis Port, 12/25/59)

A Christmas tree grazed the ceiling. Spray-on snowflakes dusted a huge pile of gifts.

Kemper sipped eggnog. Jack said, “Holidays make you sad, I can tell.”

“Not exactly.”

“My parents overdid having children, but yours should have had the foresight to give you a sibling or two.”

“1 had a younger brother. He died in a hunting accident.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“My father and I were stalking deer near our summer place. We kept getting glimpses, and kept firing through brush. One of the glimpses was Compton Wickwire Boyd, age eight. He was wearing a tan jacket and a hat with white ear flaps. It was October 19, 1934.”

Jack looked away. “Kemper, I’m sorry.”

“I shouldn’t have mentioned it. You said you wanted to talk, and I have to leave for New York in an hour. That story is a guaranteed conversation-stopper.”

The den was overheated. Jack inched his chair away from the fireplace.

"You're meeting Laura?"

"Yes. My daughter's having Christmas dinner with some friends in South Bend, then going on a ski trip. She'll be joining Laura and I in New York."

Pete's ring was buffed and polished. He was set to pop the question tonight.

"You and Laura were a hell of a shock."

"But you're getting used to it?"

"I think everyone is, to one degree or another."

"You're nervous, Jack."

"I'm announcing in eight days. Obstacles keep popping up in my mind, and I keep wondering how to deal with them."

"For instance?"

"West Virginia. What do I say to a coal miner who says, 'Son, I heard your daddy's one of the richest men in America, and you never had to work a day in your life?' "

Kemper smiled. "You say, That's true.' And a grizzled old character actor that we plant in the crowd says, 'And son, you ain't missed a damn thing.';"

Jack roared. Kemper snapped to a connection: Giancana and Trafficante ran big blocks of West Virginia.

"I know some people down there who might be able to help you."

"Then indebt me to them in unconscionable ways, so I can embrace my genetic fate as a corrupt Irish politician."

Kemper laughed. "You're still nervous. And you said you wanted to talk to me, which implied a serious discussion."

Jack rocked his chair back and brushed fake snow off his sweater. "We've been thinking of Mr. Hoover. We were thinking he knows the story of Laura's parentage."

Devil's Advocate clicked in, automatically. "He's known for years. He knows I'm seeing Laura, and he told me the facts of her parentage before she did."

Bobby's kids romped through the room. Jack shooed them out and toed the door shut.

"That voyeuristic little faggot cocksucker."

Kemper ad-libbed. "He also knows about all your paternity buyouts, and most of your sustained affairs. Jack, I'm your best hedge against Hoover. He likes me and trusts me, and all he wants is to keep his job if you're elected."

Jack tapped a humidor on his chin. "Dad's got himself half-convinced that Hoover sent you over to spy on us."

"Your dad's no dummy."

"*What?*"

"Hoover caught me skimming off a car-theft investigation and retired me early. I applied for the McClellan Committee job on my own, and Hoover started keeping tabs on me. He learned I was seeing Laura and asked me for information on you. I said no, and Hoover said, 'You owe me one.' "

Jack nodded. His look said: Yes, I'll buy that.

"Dad had a private detective follow you around Manhattan. The man said you keep a suite at the St. Regis."

Kemper winked. "The way you live rubs off, Jack. I've got a pension, a salary and stock dividends, and I'm courting an expensive woman."

"You're in Florida a good deal."

"Hoover has me spying on pro-Castro groups. It's that 'one' I owe him."

"That's why you're so hipped on Cuba as a campaign issue."

"Right. I think Castro's a goddamned menace, and I think you should take a hard line against him."

Jack lit his cigar. His look said: Thank God this is over.

"I'll tell Dad it's all okay. He wants a promise, though."

"Which is?"

"That you won't marry Laura any time soon. He's afraid reporters might get nosy."

Kemper handed him the ring. "Keep this for me. I was planning to ask Laura tonight, but I guess I'll have to wait until you're elected."

Jack slipped it in his pocket. "Thanks. Does this mean you're out a Christmas gift?"

"I'll pick something up in New York."

"There's an emerald pin under the tree there. Laura looks good in green, and Jackie won't miss it."

39

(South Bend, 12/25/59)

Littell got off the train and checked for tails.

The arrivals and departures looked normal—just Notre Dame kids and anxious parents. Some cheerleaders shivered—short-skirted pompom girls out in ten-degree weather.

The crowd dispersed. No platform loiterers stuck close to him. In a phrase: The Phantom sees phantoms.

Tail sightings were a probable booze by-product. The clicks on his phone line were most likely overactive nerves.

He'd dismantled his two phones. He found no wiretap apparatus. The Mob couldn't rig *outside* taps—only police agencies could. That man watching him and Mai Chamales last week—probably just a barfly tweaked by their left-of-center conversation.

Littell hit the station lounge and knocked back three rye-and-beers. Christmas dinner with Susan mandated fortification.

Amenities dragged. Talk bounced between safe topics.

Susan tensed when he hugged her. Helen steered clear of his hands. Claire had grown into a distaff Kemper—the resemblance had solidified amazingly.

Susan never addressed him by name. Claire called him “Ward baby”—Helen said she was in a Rat Pack phase. Susan smoked like her mother now—straight down to match flicks and exhales.

Her apartment mimicked Margaret’s: too many porcelain knickknacks and too much stiff furniture.

Claire played Sinatra records. Susan served diluted eggnog—Helen must have told her that her father drank to excess.

He said he hadn’t heard from Kemper in months. Claire smiled—she knew all her father’s secrets. Susan laid out dinner: Margaret’s boring glazed ham and sweet potatoes.

They sat down. Littell bowed his head and offered a prayer.

“O heavenly Father, we ask thy blessing on all of us, and on our absent friends. I commend to you the souls of three men recently departed, whose deaths were caused by arrogant if heartfelt attempts to facilitate justice. I ask you to bless all of us on this sacred day and in the year to come.”

Susan rolled her eyes and said “Amen.” Claire carved the ham; Helen poured wine.

The girls got full glasses. He got a splash. It was cheap Cabernet Sauvignon.

Claire said, “My Dad’s proposing to his mistress tonight. Let’s hear it for my Dad and my nifty new mom, who’s only nine and a half years older than me.”

Littell almost gagged. Social climber Kemper as secret Kennedy in-law—

Susan said, “Claire, really. ‘Mistress’ and ‘nifty’ in the same sentence?”

Claire made cat claws. “You forgot to mention the age difference. How could you? We both know that age gaps are your pet peeve.”

Helen groaned. Susan pushed her plate aside and lit a cigarette.

Littell filled his glass. Claire said, “Ward baby, assess the three of us as attorneys.”

Littell smiled. “It’s not hard. Susan prosecutes misdemeanors, Helen defends wayward FBI men, and Claire goes into corporate law to finance her father’s expensive tastes in his old age.”

Helen and Claire laughed. Susan said, “I don’t appreciate being defined by pettiness.”

Littell gulped wine. “You can join the Bureau, Susie. I’ll be retiring in a year and twenty-one days, and you can take my place and torment pathetic leftists for Mr. Hoover."

"I wouldn't characterize Communists as pathetic, Father. And I don't think you could support your bar tab on a twenty-year pension."

Claire flinched. Helen said, "Susan, please."

Littell grabbed the bottle. "Maybe I'll go to work for John F. Kennedy. Maybe he'll be elected President. His brother hates organized crime more than Communists, so maybe it runs in the family."

Susan said, "I can't believe you place common hoodlums in the same league as a political system that has enslaved half the world. I can't believe that you could be hoodwinked by a fatuous liberal politician whose father intends to buy him the presidency."

"Kemper Boyd likes him."

"Excuse me, Father, and excuse me, Claire, but Kemper Boyd worships money, and we all know that John F. Kennedy has plenty of that."

Claire ran out of the room. Littell flat-guzzled wine.

"Communists don't castrate innocent men. Communists don't hook up car batteries to people's genitals and electrocute them. Communists don't drop TV sets into bathtubs or—"

Helen ran out. Susan said, "Father, goddamn you for your weakness."

He called in accumulated sick leave and holed up through New Year's. The A&P delivered food and liquor.

Law school finals kept Helen away. They talked on the phone—mostly petty chitchat and sighs. He heard occasional clicks on the line and wrote them off to nerves.

Kemper didn't call or write. The man was ignoring him.

He read Bobby Kennedy's book about the Hoffa wars. The story thrilled him. Kemper Boyd did not appear in the text.

He watched the Rose Bowl and Cotton Bowl on TV. He eulogized Icepick Tony Iannone—dead one year ago exactly.

Exactly four rye-and-beers induced euphoria. He fantasized an exact form of courage: the will to move on Jules Schiffrin and the Fund books.

More liquor killed the notion. To move meant to sacrifice lives. His courage was weakness pushed into grandiosity.

He watched John Kennedy announce his Presidential candidacy. The Senate Caucus Room was packed with his supporters.

Cameras cut to a picket line outside. Teamsters chanted: “Hey, hey, ho, ho, Kennedy says ‘Labor NO! ’ ”

A reporter spoke voice-over: “A Florida grand jury has Teamster president James R. Hoffa under close scrutiny. He is suspected of felony land fraud in matters pertaining to the Teamsters’ Sun Valley development.”

An insert shot caught Hoffa laughing off Sun Valley.

Littell juxtaposed words:

Pete, kill some men for me, will ya?

Father, goddamn you for your weakness.

40

(Tampa, 2/1/60)

Jack Ruby said, “I am desperate. That well-known indigent Sal D. owed me a bundle when he died, and the IRS is climbing up my you-know-what for back payments I ain’t got. I’m overextended on my club, Sam already turned me down, and you know I am a great friend to the Cuban Cause. A pal and me brought strippers down to entertain the boys in Blessington, which was strictly voluntary on my part and has nothing to do with the request I just made.”

Santo Junior sat at his desk. Ruby stood in front of it. Three fat German shepherds drooped off the couch.

Pete watched Ruby grovel. The office stunk: Santo gave his dogs free run of the furniture.

Ruby said, “I am desperate. I am here before you like a supplicant before his local pontiff.”

Trafficante said, “No. You brought some girls down when I was locked up in Havana, but that is not ten grand’s worth of collateral. I can let you have a thousand out of my pocket, but that’s it.”

Ruby stuck his hand out. Santo greased him with C-notes off a flash roll. Pete got up and opened the door.

Ruby walked out fondling the money. Santo spritzed cologne on the spot where he stood groveling.

"That man is rumored to have strange sexual tastes. He could give you diseases that would put cancer to shame. Now, tell me some good things, because I don't like to start my day with beggars."

Pete said, "Profits went up 2% in December and January. I think Wilfredo Delsol's okay on his cousin, and I don't think he'd ever rat off the Cadre. Nobody's stealing from us, and I think the Obregón thing put a good little scare out."

"Somebody's fucking up, or you wouldn't've asked to see me."

"Fulo's been running whores. He's got them turning tricks for five-dollar pops and candy bars. He's turning over all the money, but I still think it's bad business."

Trafficante said, "Make him stop."

Pete sat on the edge of the couch. King Tut put out a cursory growl.

"Lockhart and his Klan buddies built a social club down the road from the campsite, and now they're talking about lynching spooks. On top of that, Lockhart's pals with that Dallas cop guy J.D. that drove down here with Ruby. Chuck Rogers wants to take J.D. up in his plane and drop some hate leaflets. He's talking about saturation-bombing South Florida."

Trafficante slapped his desk blotter. "Make this foolishness stop."

"I will."

"You didn't have to run this by me."

"Kemper thinks all discipline should initiate with you. He wants the men to think we're labor as opposed to management."

"Kemper's a subtle guy."

Pete stroked King Farouk and King Arthur. Fucking King Tut evil-eyed him.

"He's every bit of subtle."

"Castro turned my casinos into pigsties. He lets goats shit on the carpets my wife picked out personally."

Pete said, "He'll pay."

He drove back to Miami. The cabstand was packed with loafers: Lockhart, Fulo, and the whole fucking Cadre.

Minus Chuck Rogers—up in his airplane dropping hate bombs.

Pete shut down the stand and laid down The Law. He called it the Declaration of Cadre Non-Independence and the New KKK Bill of Non-Rights.

No pimping. No robbery. No flim-flam. No B&E. No extortion. No hijacking.

No lynching. No nigger assaults. No church bombings. No racial shit directed at Cubans.

The Blessington Klan's specific mandate:

Love all Cubans. Leave them alone. Fuck up anybody who fucks with your new Cuban brethren.

Lockhart called the mandate quasi-genocidal. Pete cracked his knuckles. Lockhart shut his mouth.

The huddle broke up. Jack Ruby came by and begged a ride—his carburetor blew, and he needed to run his girls down to Blessington.

Pete said okay. The girls wore capris and halter tops—things could be worse.

Ruby rode up front. J.D. Tippit and the strippers rode in the back of the truck. Rain clouds were brewing—if a storm hit, they were screwed.

Pete took two-lane roadways south. He played the radio to keep Ruby quiet. Chuck Rogers flew down from deep nowhere and spun tree-level backflips.

The girls cheered. Chuck dropped a six-pack; J.D. caught it. Hate leaflets blew down—Pete plucked one out of the air.

"Six Reasons Why Jesus Was Pro-Klan." #1 set the tone: because Commies fluoridated the Red Sea.

Ruby eyeballed the scenery. Tippit and the girls guzzled beer. Chuck blew off his flight pattern and brick-bombed a nigger church.

The radio signal faded. Ruby started whining.

"Santo don't possess the world's longest memory. Santo stiffs me with one-tenth of what I asked him for 'cause his memory's nine-tenths on the blink. Santo don't understand the tsuris I went through bringing those ladies down to Havana. Sure the Beard was giving him grief. But he didn't have no crazy Fed from Chicago leeching onto him."

Pete snapped to. "What Fed from Chicago?"

"I don't know his name. I only met him in the flesh once, praise Allah."

“Describe him.”

“Maybe six foot one, maybe forty-six or -seven years of age. Glasses, thin gray hair, and a boozer in my considered opinion, since the one time I met him face-to-face he had whisky on his breath.”

The road dipped. Pete hit the brakes and almost stalled the truck out.

“Tell me how he leeched onto you.”

“Why? Give me one good reason why I should share this abuse with you.”

“I’ll give you a thousand dollars to tell me the story. If I like the story, I’ll give you four more.”

Ruby counted on his fingers—one to five a half dozen times.

Pete tapped a little tune on the wheel. The beat ran 1-2-3-4-5.

Ruby lip-synched numbers: 1-2-3-4-5, 1-2-3-4-5.

Pete held up five fingers. Ruby counted them out loud.

“Five thousand if you like it?”

“That’s right, Jack. And a thousand if I don’t.”

“I am taking a tremendous risk in telling you this.”

“Then don’t.”

Ruby fretted his Jew-star necklace. Pete splayed five fingers out on the dashboard. Ruby kissed the star and took a bigggg breath.

“Last May this farkakte Fed braces me down in Dallas. He makes every conceivable threat on God’s green earth, and I believe him, ’cause I know he’s this crazy goyishe zealot with nothing to lose. He knows I’ve sharked in Big D and up in Chicago, and he knows I’ve sent people looking for high-end loans to Sam Giancana. That’s what he’s got this colossal hard one for. He wants to trace the money that gets loaned out from the Teamsters’ Pension Fund.”

It was vintage Littell: bold *and* stupid.

“He gets me to call him at a pay phone in Chicago once a week. He gives me a few dollars when I tell him I’m running on fumes. He gets me to tell him about this movie guy I know, Sid Kabikoff, who’s interested in seeing this loan shark named Sal D’Onofrio, who’s gonna shoot him up to Momo for a Pension Fund loan. What happened after that I don’t know. But I read in the Chicago papers that both Kabikoff and D’Onofrio have been murdered, so-called ‘torture-style,’ and that both cases are unsolved. I’m not no Einstein, but ‘torture’ in Chicago means Sam G. And I also know that Sam don't know I was involved, or I'd have been visited. And it don't take an Einstein to figure out the crazy Fed was at the root of all this pain."

Littell was working outlaw. Littell was Boyd's best friend. Lenny Sands worked with Littell and D'Onofrio.

Ruby plucked a dog hair off his lap. "Is that five thousand dollars' worth of story?"

The road blurred. Pete damn near plowed a gator.

"Has the Fed called you since Sal D. and Kabikoff died?"

"No, praise Allah. Now what about my five—?"

"You'll get it. And I'll pay you three thousand extra if he calls you again and you get back to me on it. And if you end up helping me out with him, I'll make it another five."

Ruby went apoplectic. "Why? Why the fuck do you care to the extent of all this money?"

Pete smiled. "Let's keep this between the two of us, all right?"

"You want secret, I'll give you secret. I'm a well-known secret type of guy who knows how to keep his mouth shut."

Pete pulled his magnum and drove with his knees. Ruby smiled —ho, ho—What's this?

Pete popped the cylinder, dumped five rounds and spun it.

Ruby smiled—ho, ho—Kid, you're too much.

Pete shot him in the head. The five-to-one odds held: the hammer hit an empty chamber.

Ruby went Klan-sheet white.

Pete said, "Ask around. See what people say about me."

They hit Blessington at dusk. Ruby and Tippit got their strip show ready.

Pete called Midway Airport and impersonated a police officer. A clerk confirmed Ruby's story: A Ward J. Littell flew to Dallas and back last May 18.

He hung up and called the Eden Roc Hotel. The switchboard girl said Kemper Boyd was "out for the day."

Pete left him a message: "10:00 tonight, the Luau Lounge— urgent."

Boyd took it casual. He said, "I know Ward's been chasing the Fund," like he was too bored to breathe.

Pete blew smoke rings. Boyd's tone pissed him off—he drove eighty miles for a display of fucking ennui.

"It doesn't seem to bother you."

"I'm a bit overextended on Littell, but other than that, I don't think it's anything to be concerned about. Do you feel like divulging your source?"

"No. He doesn't know Littell's name, and I've got him cowed pretty good."

A tiki torch lit their table. Boyd flickered in and out of this weird little glow.

"I don't see how this concerns you, Pete."

"It concerns Jimmy Hoffa. He's tied to us on the Cuban thing, and Jimmy is the fucking Pension Fund."

Boyd drummed the table. "Littell is fixated on the Chicago Mob and the Fund. It doesn't touch on our Cuban work, and I don't think we owe Jimmy a warning. And I don't want you to talk to Lenny Sands about this. He's not conversant on the topic, and you don't need to trouble him with it."

It was vintage Boyd: "need-to-know basis" straight down the line.

"We don't have to warn Jimmy, but I'll say this loud and clear. Jimmy hired me to clip Anton Gretzler, and I don't want Littell to burn me for it. He's already made me for the job, and he's just crazy enough to go public with it, Mr. Hoover or no Mr. Hoover."

Boyd twirled his martini stick. "You clipped Roland Kirpaski, too."

"No. Jimmy clipped him himself."

Boyd whistled—très, très casual.

Pete got up in his face. "You cut Littell too much slack. You make fucking allowances for him that you shouldn't."

"We both lost brothers, Pete. Let it go at that."

The line didn't compute. Boyd talked on these weird levels sometimes.

Pete leaned back. "Are you watchdogging Littell? How tight a leash are you keeping on him?"

"I haven't been in touch with him in months. I've been distancing myself from him and Mr. Hoover."

"Why?"

"Just an instinct."

"Like an instinct for survival?"

"More of a homing instinct. You move away from some people, and you move toward the people of the moment."

"Like the Kennedys."

"Yes."

Pete laughed. "I've hardly seen you since Jack hit the trail."

"You won't be seeing me at all until after the election. Stanton knows I can't be dividing my time."

"He *should* know. He hired you to get next to the Kennedys."

"He won't regret it."

"I don't. It means I get to run the Cadre solo."

"Can you handle it?"

"Can niggers dance?"

"They surely can."

Pete sipped his beer. It was flat—he forgot he ordered it.

"You said 'election' like you think the job's going through to November."

"I'm reasonably certain it will. Jack's ahead in New Hampshire and Wisconsin, and if we get past West Virginia I think he'll go all the way."

"Then I hope he's anti-Castro."

"He is. He's not as voluble as Richard Nixon, but then Dick's a Red-baiter from way back."

"President Jack. Jesus Christ."

Boyd signaled a waiter. A fresh martini hit the table quick.

"It's seduction, Pete. He'll back the country into a corner with his charm, like it's a woman. When America sees that it's a choice between Jack and twitchy old Dick Nixon, who do you think they'll get between the sheets with?"

Pete raised his beer. "Viva La Causa. Viva Bad-Back Jack."

They clinked glasses. Boyd said, "He'll get behind the Cause. And if the invasion goes, we want it to be in his administration."

Pete lit a cigarette. "I'm not worried about that. Put Littell aside, and there's only one thing to be worried about."

"You're concerned that the Agency at large will find out about our Cadre business."

"That's right."

Boyd said, "I want them to find out. In fact, I'm going to inform them some time before November. It's inevitable that they will find out, and by the time they do my Kennedy connection will make me too valuable to dismiss. The Cadre will have recruited too many good men and have made too much money, and as far as morality goes, how does selling heroin to Negroes rate when compared to illegally invading an island?”

More vintage Boyd: “self-budgeted,” “autonomous”—

“And don’t worry about Littell. He’s trying to accrue evidence to send to Bobby Kennedy, but I monitor all the information that Bobby sees, and I will not let Littell hurt you at all, or hurt Jimmy for the Kirpaski killing or anything else related to you or the Cause. But sooner or later Bobby will take Hoffa down, and I do not want you to meddle in it.”

Pete felt his head swim. “I can’t argue with any of that. But I’ve got a pipeline to Littell now, and if I think your boy needs a scare, I’m going to scare him.”

“And I can’t argue with that. You can do whatever you have to do, as long as you don’t kill him.”

They shook hands. Boyd said, “*Les gens que l’on comprend—ce sont eux que l’on domine*.”

En français, Pierre, souviens-toi:

Those we understand are those we control.

41

(New York City/Hyannis Port/
New Hampshire/Wisconsin/Illinois/West Virginia,
2/4/60–5/4/60)

Christmas Day made him certain. Every day since built on it.

Jack kept Laura's ring. Kemper took Jackie's emerald pin. His car wouldn't start—a Kennedy chauffeur checked it out for him. Kemper strolled the compound and caught Jack in mid-transformation.

He was standing on the beach, alone. He was rehearsing his public persona in full voice.

Kemper stood out of sight and watched him.

Jack went from tallish to tall. He brayed less and rumbled more. His stabbing gestures hit some mark he'd always missed before.

Jack laughed. Jack cocked his head to listen. Jack masterfully summarized Russia, civil rights, the race for space, Cuba, Catholicism, his perceived youth and Richard Nixon as a duplicitous, do-nothing reactionary unfit to lead the greatest country on earth into perilous times.

He looked heroic. Claiming the moment drained all the boy out of him.

The self-possession was always there. He'd postponed the claim until it could give him the world.

Jack knew he'd win. Kemper knew he'd impersonate greatness with the force of an enigma granted form. This new freedom would make people love him.

• • •

Laura loved the pin.

Jack took New Hampshire and Wisconsin.

Jimmy Hoffa barnstormed both states. Jimmy mobilized Teamsters and ranted on national TV. Jimmy betrayed his essential lunacy every time he opened his mouth.

Kemper mobilized the backlash. Pro-Jack pickets scuffled with Teamster pickets. The pro-Jack boys were good shouters and good placard swingers.

Bobby's book hit the best-seller lists. Kemper distributed free copies at union halls. The consensus four months in: Jimmy Hoffa was nullified.

Jack was spellbindingly handsome. Hoffa was bloated and harried. All his anti-Kennedy broadsides carried a footnote: "Currently under investigation for land fraud."

People loved Jack. People wanted to touch him. Kemper let the people get non-security close.

Kemper let photographers get close. He wanted people to think Jack's amusement was really love beaming back.

They were running unopposed in Nebraska. The West Virginia primary was six days off—Jack should knock Hubert Humphrey out of the race.

Frank Sinatra was wowing hillbilly voters. A Rat Pack stooge composed a ring-a-ding Jack Anthem. Payola got it constant airplay.

Laura called Sinatra a small penis with a big voice.

Jack's ascent enraged her. She was blood kin and an outcast. Kemper Boyd was a stranger granted insider status.

He called her from the road every night. Laura considered the contact pro forma.

He knew that she missed Lenny Sands. She didn't know that he'd banished him.

Lenny changed his Chicago number—there was no way that Laura could call him. Kemper put a trace on his phone bills and confirmed that he hadn't called her.

Bobby remembered "voice coach" Lenny. Some staffers decreed a brush-up course and invited Lenny to New Hampshire.

Jack "introduced" Lenny to Kemper. Lenny played along and did not display an ounce of rancor or fear.

Lenny worked Jack's speaking voice into top shape. Bobby put him on the Wisconsin payroll—as a crowd-building front man. Lenny built up big crowds on a small budget—Bobby was thrilled.

Claire spent most weekends with Laura. She said Jack's half-sister was a rabid Nixon fan.

Like Mr. Hoover.

They talked in mid-February. Mr. Hoover made the call. He said, "My, it's been a long time!" in a purely disingenuous tone.

Kemper updated his allegiances and detailed Joe Kennedy's old suspicions. Hoover said, "I'll build up a file to buttress your dissemblings. We'll make it appear that all your Florida trips were solely on my behalf. I'll anoint you the Bureau's ace pro-Castro-group monitor."

Kemper supplied key Florida dates. Hoover sent him mock itineraries to memorize.

Hoover never mentioned the campaign. Kemper knew that he sensed a Kennedy victory.

Hoover did not mention Jack and women. Hoover did not suggest hot-wiring prostitutes. Hoover did not nail the reason why Kemper Boyd had stayed distant.

He didn't want to implement another sex shakedown. He wanted to retain one strong loyalty compartment.

Pimp shakedowns?—no. Pimp *service*?—certainly.

He got Jack one call girl per night. He called his local vice squad contacts for referrals—and skin-searched every girl that Jack fucked.

The girls loved Jack.

So did SA Ward Littell.

They hadn't spoken in over six months. Ward showed up at Jack's big Milwaukee rally—the old Chicago Phantom as the new Chicago Wraith.

He looked frail and unkempt. He did not look like anyone's notion of a G-man.

Ward refused to talk Mob scuttlebutt or Pension Fund strategy. Ward refused to discuss the D’Onofrio homicide.

Ward said he was neglecting his Red Squad assignment. He said he’d struck up a friendship with a leftist he was tailing.

The Kennedy campaign thrilled him. He wore Kennedy buttons to work and made a scene when SAC Leahy told him to stop it.

Littell’s anti-Mob crusade was dead. Mr. Hoover couldn’t touch them now: the Boyd/Littell collusion was null and void.

Kemper told Bobby the Phantom was still plugging. Bobby said, Don’t bother me with trifles.

Littell was set to retire in eight months. His drunken dream was a Kennedy appointment.

Ward loves Jack.

New Hampshire loves Jack.

Wisconsin loves Jack.

West Virginia had its heart up for grabs. Greenbrier County was vote-crucial and totally Mob-run.

He decided not to ask the Boys for help. Why indebt Jack to men that Bobby hated? America loves Jack. Sinatra put it best:

“That old Jack Magic has me in its spell!”

42

(Blessington/Miami, 2/4/60–5/4/60)

That "lost brothers" line kept zinging him. Pete couldn't get it out of his head.

John Stanton toured the campsite in mid-March. Pete quizzed him on Kemper Boyd's background.

Stanton said the CIA researched the man. The hunting-accident story earned him high marks—Kemper didn't let shit weigh him down.

Boyd spoke French. Boyd made big words come alive. Boyd made his whole world go whoosh—

His last three months: "autonomous," straight from Webster's Unabridged.

Kemper's timecard read strictly KENNEDY. Pete's timecard now read strictly CUBA.

Fulo quit running whores. Lockhart embraced the New Klan Kode. Six two-week cycles worked through Blessington—746 men total.

They learned weaponry, judo, speedboating and demolition fundamentals. Chuck Rogers fed them pro-U.S. doctrine.

The Cadre kept recruiting in Miami. Cuban hotheads kept signing up.

The Agency now had sixty operational campsites. They established an exile "grad school" in Guatemala: a fully equipped military facility.

Ike loosened his pursestrings. Ike approved exile invasion plans. It was a big policy shift—three plots to whack Fidel backfired and scrambled the thinking at Langley.

Shooters couldn't get close. Aides smoked exploding cigars marked for the Beard. Langley figured fuck it—let's invade Cuba.

Maybe early next year. Maybe in Bad-Back Jack's administration.

Boyd said Jack would approve the plan. Boyd was fucking persuasive. Santo Junior spread the word: Kemper Boyd has Jack Kennedy's ear.

The Outfit dropped some coin on Jack's campaign—quietly and anonymously. Big fat compartmentalized donations.

Jimmy Hoffa didn't know. Jack didn't know—and wouldn't be told until the optimum moment to call in the debt.

Sam G. said he could buy Jack Illinois. Lenny Sands said Sam spent a fortune in Wisconsin. West Virginia ditto—Chi-Mob money had the state locked in for Jack.

Pete asked Lenny if Boyd knew about all that finagling. Lenny said, I don't think so. Pete said, Let's keep it that way—Kemper wouldn't like to think that he'd put Jack in hock.

Boyd inspired confidence. Trafficante loved him. Santo passed the Cuban Cause hat—Giancana, Rosselli and Marcello ponied up large.

It was classic compartmentalization.

The CIA high brass condoned the gifts. And they learned about the Cadre dope biz—before Kemper informed them.

They condoned it. They considered it plausibly deniable and told John Stanton to continue. They told Stanton to hide this knowledge from non-CIA personnel.

Like outside police agencies. Like moralistic politicians.

Stanton was relieved. Kemper was amused. He said the issue illustrated the Jack/Bobby dichotomy: dope peddling as divisive moral issue.

Big Brother would wince and try to ignore the alliance. Little Brother would side with God and banish all Mob-CIA contact.

Big Brother was worldly, like his dad. Little Brother was prissy, like a dejuiced Ward Littell with functioning balls.

Bobby had his father's money and his brother's cache. Littell had booze and religion. Jack Ruby had a five-grand pointer's fee—if Littell swerved through his life again, Big Pete would be notified.

Boyd told him not to kill Littell. Boyd co-signed Littell's Pension Fund hard-on—which meant at least an outside chance at co-opting big money.

Littell loved Bad-Back Jack.

Like Darleen Shoftel. Like Gail Hendee.

Like himself.

Hey, Jack—you fucked my old girlfriend. I don't care—Kemper Boyd says you're a white man.

I'm selling dope for you. I'm running cash to a man named Banister—who links YOU to a Jew/papist plot to butt-fuck America.

You'd dig Fort Blessington, Jack. It's a Mob resort now—the Boys come by to catch the anti-Castro floorshow. Santo Junior bought a motel outside town. He'd put you up for free—if you dump your kid brother in the Everglades.

Sam G. drops by. Carlos Marcello visits. Johnny Rosselli brings Dick Contino and his accordion. Lenny Sands puts on shows—his transvestite Fidel shtick brings the house down.

Dope profits were up. Cadre morale was sky-high. Ramón Gutiérrez kept a tally of speedboat-run scalpees. Heshie Ryskind started up a scalp bonus fund.

Lenny Sands was on smear duty: the Beard as scandal-sheet whipping boy. Mr. Hughes dug the political thrust, but preferred to see *Hush-Hush* exposit sex skank exclusively.

Pete called Hughes once a week. The fucker ranted nonstop.

The TWA gig was dragging on. Dick Steisel kept Hughes look-alikes on retainer. Hughes believed that niggers caused cancer—and kept urging Ike to reinstate slavery.

Germ-obsessed Mormon nuts kept Big Howard company. They kept his bungalow sanitized: A-bomb-strength bug spray worked wonders. Some doofus named Duane Spurgeon bossed the crew. He stretched lubricated rubbers over every doorknob spooks might have touched.

Hughes was on a new kick: getting weekly blood transfusions. He sucked in pure Mormon blood exclusively—purchased from a blood bank outside Salt Lake City.

Hughes always said, Thanks for the dope. Pete always said, Thank the Agency.

He still got a Hughes paycheck. He still got twenty-three alimony cuts. He got 5% of Tiger Kab and his contract agent pay.

He used to pimp and pull shakedowns. Now he rode shotgun to History.

Jimmy Hoffa stopped by the cabstand every few days. His standard M.O. was to rave at non-English-speaking drivers. Wilfredo Delsol was running the switchboard now—whacking his cousin killed his appetite for strongarm.

Wilfredo understood English. He said Jimmy teed off on Cubans, but couldn't sustain it. Whoever took the first few "fuckheads" got a reprieve. Hoffa couldn't scream a sentence that didn't end "Kennedy."

Pete saw Jack and Jimmy on TV back-to-back. Kennedy charmed a heckler speechless. Hoffa wore white socks and an egg-spattered necktie.

Hold the tip sheet—I can spot winners and losers. Sometimes he just couldn't sleep. That big fucking whoooosh was like a hydrogen bomb inside his head.

43

(Greenbrier, 5/8/60)

Flanking cordons jammed up to the rostrum. Pro-Jack and pro-Teamster pickets—hard boys all.

The main drag was blocked off to cars. The pre-rally crowd extended back three blocks: at least six thousand people packed in shoulder-to-shoulder tight.

They jabbered and hummed. Placards bobbed ten feet high.

Jack was set to speak first. Humphrey lost a rigged coin toss and spoke last. Jack regalia outgunned Hubert three to one—the West Virginia campaign in a nutshell.

Teamster goons yelled into bullhorns. Some rednecks hoisted a cartoon banner: Jack with fangs and a papal biretta.

Kemper cupped his ears—the crowd roar was painful. Rocks shredded the banner—he paid some kids to crouch down and let fly.

Jack was due. Bad acoustics and Hoffa invective would drown out his speech.

No great loss—people would still *see* him. The crowd would disperse when Humphrey showed up—free liquor was being served at select downtown taverns.

It was Kemper Boyd liquor. An old pal hijacked a Schenley's truck and sold him the contents.

The street was packed. The sidewalks were packed. Peter Lawford was lobbing tie tacks at a gaggle of nuns.

Kemper mingled and watched the rostrum. He saw non-sequitur faces a few yards apart: Lenny Sands and a prototype Mob guy.

The Mob guy flashed Lenny a thumbs-up. Lenny flashed him two thumbs back.

Lenny was *off* the campaign payroll. Lenny had no *official* duties here.

The Mob man veered right. Lenny pushed his way left and ducked down an alley lined with trash cans.

Kemper followed him. Stray elbows and knees slowed him down.

High-school kids jostled him across the sidewalk. Lenny was midway down the alley, huddled with two cops.

The crowd noise leveled out. Kemper crouched behind a trash can and eavesdropped.

Lenny fanned a cash roll. A cop plucked bills off of it. His buddy said, "For two hundred extra we can stall the Humphrey bus and bring in some boys to shout him down."

Lenny said, "Do it. And this is strictly on Mr. G., so don't mention it to anybody with the campaign."

The cops grabbed the whole roll and squeezed through an alleyway door. Lenny leaned against the wall and lit a cigarette.

Kemper walked up to him. Hipster Lenny said, "So?"

"So, tell me about it."

"What's to tell?"

"Fill in the blanks for me, then."

"What's to fill in? We're both Kennedy guys."

Lenny could maneuver. Lenny could outfrost any cool cat on earth.

"Giancana put money into Wisconsin, too. Is that right? You couldn't have performed the way you did on what Bobby gave you."

Lenny shrugged. "Sam and Hesh Ryskind."

"Who told them to? You?"

"My advice don't rate that high. You know that."

"Spill, Lenny. You're playing coy, and it's starting to annoy me.”

Lenny stubbed his cigarette on the wall. “Sinatra was bragging up his influence with Jack. He was saying Jack as President wouldn’t be the same Jack that sat on the McClellan Committee, if you catch my meaning.”

“And Giancana bought the whole package?”

“No. I think you gave Frank a big fucking assist. Everybody’s real impressed with what you’ve been doing on the Cuba front, so they figured if you like Jack he can’t be all bad.”

Kemper smiled. “I don’t want Bobby and Jack to find out about this.”

“Nobody does.”

“Until the debt gets called in?”

“Sam don’t believe in frivolous reminders. And in case you’re thinking of reminding me, I’ll tell you now. I haven’t come up with bubkes on the Pension Fund.”

Kemper heard footscrapes. He saw Teamsters left and Teamsters right—chain swingers crouched at both ends of the alley.

They had their sights on Lenny. Tiny Lenny, Jewish Lenny, Kennedy toady Lenny—

Lenny didn’t see them. Pissy Lenny was entrenched in his cool cat/tough guy act.

Kemper said, “I’ll be in touch.”

Lenny said, “See you in shul.”

Kemper backed through the alleyway door and double-locked it behind him. He heard shouts, chain rattles and thuds—the classic labor-goon two-way press.

Lenny never yelled or screamed. Kemper timed the beating at a minute and six seconds.

44

(Chicago, 5/10/60)

The work was driving Littell schizophrenic. He had to satisfy the Bureau *and* his conscience.

Chick Leahy hated Mai Chamales. HUAC had linked Mai to sixteen Commie front groups. Leahy's FBI mentor was former Chicago SAC Guy Banister.

Banister hated Mai. Mai's Red Squad sheet was eighty pages long.

He liked Mai. They had coffee every so often. Mai spent '46 to '48 in Lewisburg—Banister built up a sedition profile and talked the U.S. Attorney into an indictment.

Leahy called him this morning. He said, "I want lockstep surveillance on Mal Chamales, Ward. I want you to go to every meeting he goes to and catch him making inflammatory remarks that we can use."

Littell called Chamales and warned him. Mal said, "I'm addressing an SLP group this afternoon. Let's just pretend we don't know each other."

Littell mixed a rye and soda. It was 5:40—he had time to work before the national news.

He padded his report with useless details. He omitted Mal's anti-Bureau tirade. He closed with noncommital remarks.

"The subject's Socialist Labor Party speech was tepid and filled with nebulous cliches of a decidedly leftist, but non-seditious nature. His comments during the question and answer period were not inflammatory or in any way provocative."

Mal called Mr. Hoover "a limp-wristed Fascist in jackboots and lavender lederhosen." An inflammatory statement?—hardly.

Littell turned on the TV. John Kennedy filled the screen—he just won the West Virginia primary.

The doorbell rang. Littell hit the entry buzzer and got out some money for the A&P kid.

Lenny Sands walked in. His face was scabbed, bruised and sutured. A bandaged splint held his nose in place.

Lenny swayed. Lenny smirked. Lenny twirled his fingers at the TV— "Hello, Jack, you gorgeous slice of Irish roast lamb!"

Littell stood up. Lenny weaved into a bookcase and stiff-armed himself steady.

"Ward, you look marvelous! Those frayed slacks from J.C. Penney's and that cheap white shirt are so YOU!"

Kennedy was addressing civil rights. Littell hit the off switch in mid-discourse.

Lenny waved goodbye. "Ta, Jack, my brother-in-law in the best of all possible worlds if I liked girls and you had the profile in courage to acknowledge my dear friend Laura that that gorgeously cruel Mr. Boyd drove out of my life."

Littell moved toward him. "Lenny …"

"Don't you fucking come any closer or try to touch me or try to assuage your pathetic guilt or in any way mess with my gorgeous Percodan high or I won't spill my lead on the Teamster Pension Fund books that I've had all along, you sad excuse for a policeman."

Littell stiff-armed a chair. His fingers ripped through the fabric. He started weaving on his feet just like Lenny.

The bookcase shimmied. Lenny was weaving on his heels—doped up and punch-drunk.

"Jules Schiffrin keeps the books someplace in Lake Geneva. He's got an estate there, and he's got the books in safes or in safe-deposit boxes at some banks around there. I know because I played a gig there and I heard Jules and Johnny Rosselli talking.

Don’t ask for details because I don’t have any and concentrating makes my head hurt.”

His arm slid. The chair slid behind it. Littell stumbled up against the TV console.

“Why are you telling me this?”

“Because you’re a tiny smidgen better than Mr. Beast and Mr. Boyd and in my opinion Mr. Boyd only wants the information for its profit potential, and besides I took a beating for doing some work for Mr. Sam—”

“Lenny—”

“—and Mr. Sam said he’d make a powerful man crawl for it, but I said please don’t do that—”

“Lenny—”

“—and Jules Schiffrin was with him, and they were talking about somebody called ‘Irish Joe’ back in the ’20s, and how they made these movie extra girls crawl—”

“Lenny, come on—”

“—and it all felt so ugly that I popped a few more Peres, and here I am, and if I’m lucky I won’t remember all this in the morning.”

Littell stepped closer. Lenny slapped and scratched and flailed and kicked him away.

The bookcase fell. Lenny tripped and weaved out the door.

Law texts hit the floor. A framed photograph of Helen Agee shattered.

Littell drove to Lake Geneva. He arrived at midnight and checked in at a motel off the Interstate. He paid cash in advance and registered under a fake name.

The phone book in his room listed Jules Schiffrin. His address was marked “Rural Free Delivery.” Littell checked a local map and pegged it: a woodland estate near the lake.

He drove out and parked off the road. Binoculars got him in close.

He saw a stonework mansion on a minimum of ten acres. Trees enclosed the property. There were no walls or fences.

No floodlamps. Two hundred yards from the door to the roadway. Alarm tape bracketing the front windows.

No guard hut and no gate. The Wisconsin State Police probably kept watch on an informal basis.

Lenny said “safes or safe-deposit boxes.” Lenny said “Mr. Boyd”/“information”/“profit potential.”

Lenny was drugged up but lucid. His Mr. Boyd line was easy to decode.

Kemper was chasing Fund leads independently.

Littell drove back to his motel. He checked the Yellow Pages and found listings for nine local banks.

Discreet behavior would cloak his lack of sanction. Kemper Boyd always stressed boldness *and* discretion.

Kemper shook down Lenny on his own. The revelation didn’t shock him at all.

• • •

He slept until 10:00. He checked a map and saw that the banks were all within walking distance.

The first four managers cooperated. Their replies were direct: Mr. Schiffrin does not rent with us. The next two managers shook their heads. Their replies were direct: Our facilities do not include safe-deposit boxes.

Manager number seven asked to see a bank writ. It was no great loss: the name Schiffrin sailed past him, unrecognized.

Banks number eight and nine: no safe-deposit boxes on the premises.

There were several major cities nearby. There were two dozen small towns spread out in a hundred-mile radius. Safe-deposit box access was a pipe dream.

“Safes” meant on-site placement. Safe-alarm companies retained placement diagrams—and did not release them without suit for legal cause.

Lenny played an on-site engagement. He might have seen the safe or safes firsthand.

Lenny was too combustible to approach now.

But—

Jack Ruby was a probable Schiffrin acquaintance. Jack Ruby was bribable and acquiescent.

Littell found a pay phone. A long-distance operator patched him through to Dallas.

Ruby picked up on the third ring. “This is the Carousel Club, where your entertainment dollar goes—”

“It’s me, Jack. Your friend from Chicago.”

“Fuck … this is grief I don’t …”

He sounded flummoxed, flabbergasted and dyspeptically peeved.

“How well do you know Jules Schiffrin, Jack?”

“Casual. I know Jules casual at best. Why? Why? Why?”

“I want you to fly up to Wisconsin and drop by his place in Lake Geneva on some pretext. I need to know the interior layout of his house, and I’ll give you my life savings if you do it.”

“Fuck. You are grief I don’t—”

“Four thousand dollars, Jack.”

“Fuck. You are grief I don’t—”

Dog yaps cut Ruby off.

45

(Blessington, 5/12/60)

Jimmy Hoffa said, “I know how Jesus must have felt. The fucking pharaohs rose to power on his coattails like the fucking Kennedy brothers are rising on mine.”

Heshie Ryskind said, “Get your history straight. It was Julius Caesar that did Jesus in.”

Santo Junior said, “Joe Kennedy is a man you can reason with. It’s strictly Bobby that’s the bad seed. Joe will explain certain facts of life to Jack if he makes it.”

Johnny Rosselli said, “J. Edgar Hoover hates Bobby. And he knows you can’t fight the Outfit and win. If the kid is elected, cooler heads than that little cocksucker Bobby’s will prevail.”

The Boys were sprawled in deck chairs out on the speedboat dock. Pete kept their drinks fresh and let them run off at the mouth.

Hoffa said, “Fucking Jesus turned fish into bread, and that’s about the only thing I haven’t tried. I’ve spent six hundred grand on the primaries and bought every fucking cop and alderman and councilman and mayor and fucking grand juror and senator and judge and DA and fucking prosecutorial investigator who’d let me. I'm like Jesus trying to part the Red Fucking Sea and not getting no further than some motel on the beach."

Ryskind said, "Jimmy, calm down. Go get yourself a nice blow job and relax. I've got some reliable local numbers. These are girls who know their trade and would love to satisfy a famous guy like you."

Rosselli said, "If Jack is elected, Bobby will fade into the woodwork. My bet is he'll run for governor of Massachusetts, and Raymond Patriarca and the Boston boys will have to worry about him."

Santo Junior said, "That will never happen. Old Joe and Raymond go too far back. And when push comes to shove, it's Joe who hands down the law—not Jack or Bobby."

Hoffa said, "It's the handing down of grand jury indictments that bothers me. My lawyer said the Sun Valley thing is unlikely to go my way, which means indictments by the end of the year. So don't make Joe Kennedy sound like Jesus handing God the Ten Commandments on Mount Fucking Vesuvius."

Ryskind said, "Santo was just making a point."

Rosselli said, "It's Mount Ararat, Jimmy. Mount Vesuvius is in fucking Yellowstone Park."

Hoffa said, "You guys don't know Jack Kennedy. Fucking Kemper Boyd's got you convinced he's a gung-ho anti-Castro guy when he's really a pinko, Commie-appeasing, nigger-loving fucking homo masquerading as a cunt man."

Wave spray hit the dock. Cadence counts sounded off fifty yards over—Lockhart was running troops through close-order drill.

Ryskind said, "I could go for a blow job."

Rosselli said, "What's the count at, Hesh?"

Ryskind said, "Somewhere in the vicinity of seventeen thousand."

Santo Junior said, "Don't shit a shitter. I'd say eight thousand tops. Anything more than that and you'd be too fucking occupied to make money."

The dock phone rang. Pete tilted his chair back and grabbed the receiver.

"This is Bondurant."

"I'm glad it's you, but don't you soldier types say hello?"

Jack Ruby—un-fucking-mistakable.

Pete cupped the mouthpiece. “What is it? I told you not to call unless it’s important.”

“What it is is the crazy Fed. He called me yesterday, and I’ve been stalling him.”

“*What did he want?*”

“He offered me four Gs to fly up to Lake Geneva Goddamn Wisconsin and case the layout of Jules Schiffrin’s house up there. It seems to me this is part of that farkakte Pension Fund—”

“Tell him you’ll do it. Set up a meet someplace quiet forty-eight hours from now and call me back.”

Ruby gulped and stammered. Pete hung up and popped his knuckles ten across.

The goddamn phone rang again—

Pete snagged it. “Jack, what are you doing?”

A man said, “This ain’t Jack. This is a certain Mr. Giancana looking for a certain Mr. Hoffa, who a little birdie told me is there with you.”

Pete waved the phone. “It’s for you, Jimmy. It’s Mo.”

Hoffa belched. “Hit that loudspeaker doohickey on that post there. Sam and me got nothing to hide from you guys.”

Pete tapped the switch. Hoffa yelled straight at the mike stand: “Yeah, Sam.”

The speaker kicked in loud:

“Your West Virginia guys fucked up my boy Lenny Sands, Jimmy. Don’t let anything like that happen again or I’d be inclined to make you apologize in front of an audience. My advice to you is to leave politics the fuck alone and concentrate on staying out of jail.”

Giancana slammed his phone down. The sound made the whole dock shimmy. Heshie, Johnny and Santo shared this green-at-the-gills look.

Hoffa blew verbal. Birds shot up out of trees and covered the sky.

46

(Lake Geneva, 5/14/60)

The road bisected two fenced-off pastures. Clouds covered the moon—visibility was close to nil.

Littell pulled over and stuffed his money in a grocery bag. It was 10:06—Ruby was late.

Littell turned off his headlights. Clouds skittered by. The moon lit up a huge shape walking toward the car.

The windshield exploded. The dashboard fell on his lap. A steel bar cracked the steering wheel and ripped the gearshift out.

Hands jerked him across the hood. Glass ripped through his cheeks and lodged in his mouth.

Hands dumped him in a ditch.

Hands picked him up and pinioned him against a barbed-wire fence.

He was dangling. Steel barbs pierced his clothes and held him upright.

The monster ripped his holster off. The monster hit him and hit him and hit him.

The fence shook. Twisty metal gouged his backside down to the bone. He coughed up blood and chunks of glass and a big piece of a Chevy hood ornament.

He smelled gasoline. His car exploded. A heat blast singed his hair.

The fence collapsed. He looked up and saw clouds ignite.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/19/60. FBI Memorandum: Milwaukee Special Agent-in-Charge John Campion to Director J. Edgar Hoover.

Sir:

Our investigation into the near-fatal assault on SA Ward Littell is proceeding but making scant headway, primarily due to SA Littell's poor attitude and lack of cooperation.

Agents from both the Milwaukee and Chicago Offices canvassed Lake Geneva for eyewitnesses to the assault and for witnesses to Littell's general presence in the area and were unable to locate any. Chicago SAC Leahy informed me that Littell was under loose surveillance for matters pertaining to internal Bureau security and that on two recent occasions (May 10th and May 14th) the agents mobile-tailing Littell lost him on roadways leading north to the Wisconsin border. The nature of Littell's business in the Lake Geneva area is thus far unknown.

Per investigatory specifics:

1)—The assault occurred on a rural access road four miles southeast of Lake Geneva. 2)—Brush marks in the dirt near the remains of Littell's car indicate that the assailant obliterated all traces of his tire tracks, rendering forensic casting impossible. 3)—Littell's car was burned with a highly-flammable nitrous gas compound of the type used in the manufacture of military explosives. Such compounds burn themselves out very quickly and are used because they minimize the risk of decimating the area surrounding the target. The assailant obviously has military experience and/or access to military ordnance. 4)—Forensic analysis revealed the presence of charred U.S. currency laced with paper bag fragments. The aggregate weight of the fragments indicates that Littell was carrying a large amount of money in a grocery sack. 5)—Farmers rescued Littell, who was pinned to a downed section of barbed-wire fence. He was taken to Overlander Hospital near Lake Geneva and treated for a massive series of posterior cuts and lacerations, broken ribs, contusions, a broken nose, broken collarbone, internal hemorrhaging and facial gouges caused by contact with windshield glass. Littell checked out against medical advice fourteen hours later and engaged a taxi cab to drive him to Chicago. Chicago Office agents assigned to loose-tail Littell saw him entering his apartment building. He collapsed in the entry hall, and the agents interceded on their own authority and drove him to Saint Catherine's Hospital. 6)—Littell remains at the hospital. He is listed in "good condition" and will most likely be released within a week. A supervising physician told agents that the scarring on his face and backside will be permanent and that he should slowly recover from his other injuries. 7)—Agents have repeatedly queried Littell on three topics.: his presence in Lake Geneva, the presence of the burned money and enemies who might want to hurt him. Littell stated that he was in Lake Geneva scouting retirement property and denied the presence of the money. He said that he had no enemies and considered the assault a case of mistaken identity. When asked about CPUSA members who might be seeking vengeance on him for his Bureau Red Squad work, Littell replied, "Are you kidding? Those Commies are all nice guys." 8)—Agents have surmised that Littell has made at least two trips to Lake Geneva. His name has not appeared on any hotel or motel ledgers, so we are assuming he either registered under assumed names or stayed with friends or acquaintances. Littell's response—that he took catnaps in his car—was not convincing.

The investigation continues. I respectfully await orders.

John Campion
Special Agent-in-Charge, Milwaukee Office

DOCUMENT INSERT: 6/3/60. FBI Memorandum: Chicago SAC Charles Leahy to Director J. Edgar Hoover.

Sir,

Per SA Ward J. Littell, please be informed.

SA Littell is now back on light duty and has been assigned to review Federal deportation briefs in conjunction with the U.S. Attorney's Office, work which utilizes the writ-analysis expertise he developed in law school. He refuses to discuss the assault with other agents, and as SAC Campion may have told you, we have yet to find witnesses to his Lake Geneva visits. Helen Agee told agents that Littell has not discussed the assault with her. I personally questioned SA Court Meade, Littell's only friend in the

Chicago Office, and have the following to report.

A)—Meade states that in late 1958 and early 1959, following his expulsion from the Top Hoodlum Program, Littell “loitered” near the THP listening post and expressed interest in the squad’s work. That interest dissipated, Meade stated, and he further surmised that it is extremely unlikely that Littell engaged in anti-Mob actions on his own. Meade scoffed at the notion that the Chicago Mob was responsible for the assault or that left-wingers surveilled by Littell were seeking vengeance for his Red Squad efforts. Meade thinks that Littell’s “marked bent” for young women, as evinced by his continuing affair with Helen Agee, was the motive for the assault. Meade colorfully stated, “Go back up to Wisconsin and look for some idealistically-inclined girl with nasty brothers who didn’t take kindly to sis consorting with a forty-seven-year-old boozehound, G-man or no G-man.” I find this theory plausible.

B)—Littell’s Bureau arrest record going back to 1950 was checked with an eye toward uncovering recently paroled felons perhaps inclined toward vengeance. A list of twelve men was compiled, and all twelve were alibi-cleared. I recalled Littell’s 1952 arrest of one Pierre “Pete” Bondurant, and how the man taunted Littell during detainment procedures. Agents checked Bondurant’s whereabouts during the assault time frame and confirmed that he was in Florida.

The pro-Communist profile of Littell continues to develop. Littell remains a confirmed friend of long-term subversive Mal Chamales and phone tap logs now pinpoint a total of nine Littell/Chamales telephone conversations, all of which contain lengthy expressions of Littell’s sympathy for left-wing causes and expressions of his disdain for FBI “witch hunting.” On May 10 I called Littell and ordered him to implement immediate lockstep surveillance on Mal Chamales. Five minutes later Littell called Chamales and warned him. Chamales addressed a Socialist Labor Party meeting that afternoon. Littell and a trusted Bureau informant attended, unknown to each other. The informant presented me with a verbatim transcript of Chamales’ seditious, virulently anti-Bureau, anti-Hoover remarks. Littell’s May 10th report on the meeting called these remarks non-inflammatory. The report was filled with numerous other outright lies and distortions of a treasonous nature.

Sir, I believe it is now time to confront Littell on both his lack of cooperation in the assault matter and more pertinently on his recent seditious actions. Will you please respond? I think this demands immediate action.

Respectfully,
Charles Leahy

DOCUMENT INSERT: 6/11/60. FBI Memorandum: Director J. Edgar Hoover to Chicago SAC Charles Leahy.

Mr. Leahy,

Per Ward Littell: do nothing yet. Put Littell back on CPUSA surveillance duties, relax the surveillance on him and keep me informed of the assault investigation.

JEH

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/9/60. Official FBI Telephone Call Transcript: "Recorded at the Director's Request"/"Classified Confidential 1-A: Director's Eyes Only." Speakinhg: Director Hoover, Special Agent Kemper Boyd.

KB: Good afternoon, Sir.

JEH: Kemper, I'm peeved at you. You've been avoiding me for some time.

KB: I wouldn't put it that way, Sir.

JEH: Of course you wouldn't. You'd put it in a way calculated to minimize my rancor. The question is, would you have contacted me if I hadn't contacted you?

KB: Yes, Sir. I would have.

JEH: Before or after the coronation of King Jack the First?

KB: I wouldn't call the coronation a sure thing, Sir.

JEH: Does he have a delegate majority?

KB: Almost. I think he'll be nominated on the first ballot.

JEH: And you think he'll win.

KB: Yes, I'm reasonably certain.

JEH: I can't dispute that. Big Brother and America have all the earmarks of a fatuous love affair.

KB: He is going to retain you, Sir.

JEH: Of course he is. Every President since Calvin Coolidge has, and you should temper your distancing process with the knowledge that Prince Jack will be in office for a maximum of eight years, while I shall remain in office until the Millennium.

KB: I'll keep that in mind, Sir.

JEH: I would advise you to. You should also be advised that my interest in Big Brother extends beyond the confines of wishing to keep my job. Unlike you, I have altruistic concerns, such as the internal security of our nation. Unlike you, my primary concern is not self-preservation and monetary advancement. Unlike you, I do not credit the ability to dissemble as my single greatest skill.

KB: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Allow me to interpret your reluctance to contact me. Were you afraid I would ask you to introduce. Big Brother to Bureau-friendly women?

KB: Yes and no, Sir.

JEH: Meaning?

KB: Meaning Little Brother doesn't entirely trust me. Meaning the primary campaign schedule was hectic and only left me time to procure local call girls. Meaning I might have been able to house Big Brother in hotel rooms with standing Bureau bugs, but Little Brother has been around law enforcement for years, and he just might know that co-opt bugs like that exist.

JEH: I always reach a certain point with you.

KB: Meaning?

JEH: Meaning I don't know whether or not you're lying, and to one degree or another I don't care.

KB: Thank you, Sir.

JEH: You're welcome. It was an appalling compliment, but a sincere one. Now, are you going to Los Angeles for the convention?

KB: I'm leaving tomorrow. I'll be staying at the downtown Statler.

JEH: You'll be contacted. King Jack will not want for female friendship should he find himself bored between accolades.

KB: Electronically-adorned friends?

JEH: No, just good listeners. We'll talk about some co-opt work during the fall campaign, if Little Brother trusts you with travel plans.

KB: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Who assaulted Ward Littell?

KB: I'm not sure, Sir.

JEH: Have you spoken to Littell?

KB: Helen Agee called and told me about the beating. I called Ward at the hospital, but he refused to tell me who did it.

JEH: Pete Bondurant comes to mind. He's involved in your Cuban escapades, isn't he?

KB: Yes, he is.

JEH: Yes, he is, and?

KB: And we talk as Agency business dictates.

JEH: The Chicago Office was satisfied with Bondurant's alibi. The alibi-giver was a reputed Heroin trafficker with numerous rape convictions inside Cuba, but as Al Capone once said, an alibi is an alibi.

KB: Yes, Sir. And as you once said, anti-Communism breeds strange bedfellows.

JEH: Goodbye, Kemper. I very much hope that our next communique is at your instigation.

KB: Goodbye, Sir.

47

(Los Angeles, 7/13/60)

The clerk handed him a gold-plated key. “We had a reservations glitch, sir. Your room was inadvertently given away, but we’re going to give you a suite at our regular room rate.”

Check-ins pushed up to the desk. Kemper said, “Thanks. It’s a glitch I can live with.”

The clerk shuffled papers. “May I ask you a question?”

“Let me guess. If my room is being charged to the Kennedy campaign, why am I staying here instead of at the Biltmore with the rest of the staff?”

“Yes, sir. That’s it exactly.”

Kemper winked. “I’m a spy.”

The clerk laughed. Some delegate types waved to get his attention.

Kemper brushed past them and elevatored up to the twelfth floor. His suite: the double-doored, gold-sealed, all-antique Presidential.

He walked through it. He savored the appointments and checked out the north-by-northeast view.

Two bedrooms, three TVs and three phones. Complimentary champagne in a pewter ice bucket marked with the U.S. presidential seal.

He deciphered the "glitch" instantly: J. Edgar Hoover at work.

He wants to scare you. He's saying, "I own you." He's satirizing your Kennedy fervor and love of hotel suites.

He wants potential bug/tap intelligence.

Kemper turned on the living-room TV. Convention commentary hit the screen.

He turned on the other sets—and boosted the volume way up.

He grid-searched the suite. He found condensor mikes inside five table lamps and fake panels behind the bathroom mirrors.

He found two auxiliaries spackled into the living-room wainscoting. Tiny perforations served as sound ducts—nonprofessionals would never spot them. He checked out the telephones. All four were tapped.

Kemper thought it through from Hoover's perspective.

We discussed standing bugs a few days ago. He knows I don't want to set Jack up with "Bureau-friendly" women.

He said he thinks Jack is inevitable. He may be dissembling. He may be seeking knowledge of adultery—to aid his good friend Dick Nixon.

He knows you'll see through the "reservations glitch." He thinks you'll make your confidential calls from pay phones. He thinks you'll curtail your in-suite talk or destroy the bug/taps out of pique.

He knows Littell taught you bug/tap fundamentals. He doesn't know Littell taught you some fine points.

He knows you'll uncover the *main bugs*. He thinks you won't uncover the backups—the ones he plans to sucker-punch you with.

Kemper turned off the TVs. Kemper faked a vivid temper tantrum— "Hoover, goddamn you!" and worse expletives.

He ripped out the primary bug/taps.

He grid-searched the suite again—even more diligently.

He found secondary phone taps. He spotted microphone perforations on two mattress labels and three chair cushions.

He went down to the lobby and rented room 808 under a pseudonym. He called John Stanton's service and left his fake name and room number.

Pete was in L.A., meeting with Howard Hughes. He called the watchdog house and left a message with the pool cleaner.

He had free time now. Bobby didn't need him until 5:00.

He walked to a hardware store. He bought wire cutters, pliers, a Phillips-head screwdriver, three rolls of friction tape and two small magnets. He walked back to the Statler and worked.

He rewired the buzzer housings. He recircuited the feeder wires. He muffled the bells with pillow stuffing. He scraped the rubber off the lead cables—incoming talk would register incoherently on all the backup-tapped phones.

He laid the pieces out for easy reassembly. He called room service for Beefeater's and smoked salmon.

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Calls came in. His squelch system worked perfectly.

He barely heard the callers. Line crackle would drown out all second-party talk—the taps would only pick up his voice.

His LAPD liaison called. As planned: a motorcycle escort would accompany Senator Kennedy to the convention.

Bobby called. Could he get some cabs to shuttle staffers back to the Biltmore?

Kemper called a car service and implemented Bobby's order. He had to strain to hear the dispatcher talk.

Horns blasted down on Wilshire Boulevard. Kemper checked his watch and the living-room window.

His "Protestants for Kennedy" motorcade passed by. On time to the minute—and prepaid at fifty dollars a car.

Kemper turned on the TVs and paced between them. History beamed out in crisp black & white.

CBS called Jack a first ballot shoo-in. ABC flashed panning shots—a big Stevenson demonstration just erupted. NBC featured a prissy Eleanor Roosevelt: "Senator Kennedy is simply too young!"

ABC ballyhooed Jackie Kennedy. NBC showed Frank Sinatra working the delegate floor. Frankie was vain—Jack said he spray-painted his bald spot to cut down camera glare.

Kemper paced and flipped channels. He caught a late-afternoon potpourri.

Convention analysis and a baseball game. Convention interviews and a Marilyn Monroe movie. Convention shots, convention shots, convention shots.

He caught some nice shots of Jack's HQ suite. He saw Ted Sorensen, Kenny O'Donnell and Pierre Salinger.

He met Salinger and O'Donnell once only. Jack pointed out Sorensen—"the guy who wrote *Profiles in Courage* for me."

It was "compartmentalization" classically defined. Jack and Bobby knew him—but no one else really did. He was just that cop who fixed things and got Jack women.

Kemper wheeled the TVs together. He created a tableau: Jack in closeups and mid-shots.

He turned the room lights off and dimmed the volume. He got three images and one homogeneous whisper.

Wind ruffled Jack's hair. Pete called Jack's head of hair his chief attribute.

Pete refused to discuss the Littell assault. Pete sidestepped the issue to talk money.

Pete called him while Littell was still in the hospital. Pete got right to the point.

"You're jazzed on the Pension Fund books, and so's Littell. You're goosing him to find them, so you can work a money angle on it. I say, after the election we *both* brace Littell. Whatever the angle is, we split the profit."

Pete emasculated Ward. Pete delivered the "scare" that he said he would.

He called Littell at the hospital. Ward compartmentalized his response.

"I don't trust you on this, Kemper. You can get the forensic particulars from the Bureau, but I'm not telling you WHO or WHY."

The WHERE was Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. The location *had to be* Pension Fund pertinent. "I don't trust you on this" could only mean one thing: Lenny Sands was talking trash to Littell.

Pete knew compartmentalization. Ward and Lenny knew it. John Stanton said the CIA coined that particular concept.

John called him in D.C. in mid-April. He said Langley just erected a compartmental wall.

"They're cutting us off, Kemper. They know about our Cadre business, and they approve, but they will not budget us one nickel. We're on salary as Blessington campsite staff, but our actual Cadre business has been excommunicated."

It meant no CIA cryptonyms. No CIA acronyms. No CIA code names and no CIA initial/oblique-sign gobbledegook.

The Cadre was purely compartmentalized.

Kemper flipped channels with the sound off. He got a gorgeous juxtaposition: Jack and Marilyn Monroe on adjoining TV screens.

He laughed. He snapped to the ultimate tweak-Hoover embellishment.

He picked up the phone and dialed the daily weather number. He got a monotone buzz—barely audible.

He said, “Kenny? Hi, it’s Kemper Boyd.” He waited four seconds. “No, I need to talk to the senator.”

He waited fourteen seconds. He said, “How are you, Jack?”—bright and cheerful.

He waited five seconds to allow for a plausible reply. He said, “Yes, everything is set up with the escort.”

Twenty-two seconds. “Yes. Right. I know you’re busy.”

Eight seconds. “Yes. Tell Bobby I’ve got the security people at the house all set up.”

Twelve seconds. “Right, the purpose of this call *is* to see if you want to get laid, because if you do, I’m expecting calls from a few girls who’d love to meet you.”

Twenty-four seconds. “I don’t believe it.”

Nine seconds. “Lawford set it up?”

Eight seconds. “Come on, Jack. *Marilyn Monroe?*”

Eight seconds. “I’ll believe it if you tell me not to send my girls over.”

Six seconds. “Jesus Christ.”

Eight seconds. “They’ll be disappointed, but I’ll extend the raincheck.”

Eight seconds. “Right. Naturally, I’ll want details. Right. Goodbye, Jack.”

Kemper hung up. Jack and Marilyn bumped television heads.

He just created Voyeur/Wiretap Heaven. Hoover would cream his jeans and maybe even spawn some crazy myth.

48

(Beverly Hills, 7/14/60)

Wyoming went for Bad-Back Jack. The delegates went stone fucking nuts.

Hughes doused the volume and scrunched up on his pillows. “He’s nominated. But that’s a far cry from being elected.”

Pete said, “Yes, sir.”

“You’re being deliberately obtuse. ‘Yes, sir’ is not the proper response, and you’re sitting there in that chair being deliberately disrespectful.”

A commercial blipped on: Yeakel Oldsmobile, the voters’ choice!

“How’s this? ‘Yes, sir, Jack’s got a nice head of hair, but your man Nixon will thrash him soundly in the general election. ’ ”

Hughes said, “It’s better, but I detect a certain impertinence.”

Pete cracked his thumbs. “I flew out because you said you needed to see me. I brought you a three-month supply of shit. You said you wanted to discuss some subpoena dodging strategy, but all you’ve done so far is rant about the Kennedys.”

Hughes said, “That is gross impertinence.”

Pete sighed. “Get your Mormons to show me the door, then. Get Duane Spurgeon to score you dope in violation of six trillion fucking state and Federal statutes."

Hughes flinched. His IV tubes stretched; his blood bottle wiggled. Vampire Howard: sucking in transfusions to assure his germ-free longevity.

"You're a very cruel man, Pete."

"No. Like I told you once before, I'm *your* very cruel man."

"Your eyes have gotten smaller and crueler. You keep looking at me strangely."

"I'm waiting for you to bite my neck. I've been around the block a few times, but this new Dracula kick of yours is something to see."

Hughes fucking *smiled.* "It's no more amazing than you fighting Fidel Castro."

Pete smiled. "Was there something important you wanted to talk about?"

The convention flashed back on. Bad-Back Jack supporters whooped and swooned.

"I want you to vet the subpoena-avoidance plans my Mormon colleagues have devised. They've come up with some ingenious —"

"We could have done it over the phone. You've been holding the TWA paperwork off since '57, and I don't think the Justice Department gives a shit anymore."

"Be that as it may, I now have a specific reason to avoid divesting TWA until the most opportune moment."

Pete sighed. Pete said, "I'm listening."

Hughes tapped his drip gizmos. A blood bottle drained red to pink.

"When I finally divest, I want to use the money to buy hotel-casinos in Las Vegas. I want to accumulate large, undetectable cash profits and breathe wholesome, germ-free desert air. I'll have my Mormon colleagues administer the hotels, to insure that Negroes who might pollute the environment are politely but firmly discouraged from entering, and I'll create a cash-flow base that will allow me to diversify into various defense-industry areas without paying taxes on my seed money. I'll—"

Pete tuned him out. Hughes kept spritzing numbers: millions, billions, trillions. Jack the K. was on TV—spritzing "Vote for Me!" with the sound down.

Pete ran numbers in his head.

There's Littell in Lake Geneva—chasing the Pension Fund. There's Jules Schiffrin—a well-respected Chi-Mob graybeard. Jules *just might* have the Pension books stashed at his pad.

Hughes said, "Pete, you're not listening to me. Quit looking at that puerile politician and give me your full attention."

Pete hit the off switch. Jack the Haircut faded out.

Hughes coughed. "That's better. You were looking at that boy with something like admiration."

"It's his hair, Boss. I was wondering how he got it to stand up like that."

"You have a short memory. And I have a short fuse where ironic answers are concerned."

"Yeah?"

"Yes. You might recall that two years ago I gave you thirty thousand dollars to try to compromise that boy with a prostitute."

"I remember."

"That's not a complete answer."

"The complete answer is Things change.' And you don't think America's going to get between the sheets with Dick Nixon when they can cozy up to Jack, do you?"

Hughes pushed himself upright. His bed rails shook; his IV rig teetered.

"*I own Richard Nixon.*"

Pete said, "I know you do. And I'm sure he's real grateful for that loan you floated his brother."

Dracula got the shakes. Dracula got his dentures snagged up on the roof of his mouth.

Dracula got some words out. "I—I—I'd forgotten that you knew about that."

"A busy guy like you can't remember everything."

Drac reached for a fresh hypo. "Dick Nixon's a good man, and the entire Kennedy family is rotten down to the core. Joe Kennedy's been lending gangsters money since the '20s, and I know for a fact that the infamous Raymond L. S. Patriarca owes him the very shirt off his back."

He had the Nixon loan documented. He could feed the dope to Boyd and curry big-time favor with Jack.

Pete said, "Like I owe you."

Hughes beamed. "I knew you'd see my point."

49

(Chicago, 7/15/60)

Littell studied his new face.

His weak jawline was rebuilt with pins and bone chips. His weak chin was smashed into a cleft. The nose he always hated was flattened and ridged.

Helen said he looked dangerous. Helen said his scars put hers to shame.

Littell stepped back from the mirror. Shifting light gave him new angles to savor.

He limped now. His jaw clicked. He put on twenty pounds in the hospital.

Pete Bondurant was a cosmetic surgeon.

He had a bold new face. His old pre-Phantom psyche couldn't live up to it.

He was afraid to move on Jules Schiffrin. He was afraid to confront Kemper. He was afraid to talk on the phone—little line clicks popped in his ears.

The clicks could be jaw-pin malfunctions. The clicks could be audial DTs.

He was six months short of retirement. Mal Chamales said the

Party needed lawyers.

A TV boomed next door. John Kennedy’s acceptance speech faded into applause.

The Bureau discontinued their assault inquiry. Hoover knew that he could sabotage Boyd’s Kennedy incursion.

Littell stepped close to the mirror. The scars above his eyebrows furrowed.

He couldn’t stop looking.

50

(Miami/Blessington, 7/16/60–10/12/60)

Pete turned forty on a speedboat run to Cuba. He led a raid on a militia station and took sixteen scalps.

Ramón Gutiérrez sketched up a Cadre mascot: a pit bull with an alligator snout and razor-blade teeth. Ramón's girlfriend sewed up mascot shoulder patches.

A printer fashioned mascot calling cards. "FREE CUBA!" roared out of the Beast's mouth.

Carlos Marcello carried one. Sam G. carried one. Santo Junior handed out dozens to friends and associates.

The Beast craved blood. The Beast craved Castro's beard on a stick.

Training cycles pushed through Blessington. The invasion plan mandated new ordnance. Dougie Frank Lockhart purchased surplus landing craft and "invaded" Alabama once per cycle.

The Gulf Coast simulated Cuba. Trainees hit the beach and scared the shit out of sunbathers.

Dougie Frank trained troops full-time. Pete trained troops part-time. Chuck, Fulo and Wilfredo Delsol ran the cabstand.

Pete led speedboat runs into Cuba. Everybody went along—

except Delsol.

The Obregón kill snipped part of his balls. Pete didn't judge him—losing blood kin in a flash was no picnic.

Everybody sold dope.

The Cadre supplied spook junkies exclusively. The Miami PD implicitly approved. Narco Squad payouts served as disapproval insurance.

A redneck gang tried to crash their turf late in August. One geek shot and killed a Dade County deputy.

Pete found the guy—holed up with seventy grand and a case of Wild Turkey. He took him out with Fulo's machete and donated the cash to the deputy's widow.

Profits zoomed. The % system worked slick as shit—fat stipends went to Blessington and Guy Banister. Lenny Sands ran the *Hush-Hush* propaganda war. Purple prose bopped the Beard every week.

Dracula called weekly. He spouted broken-record bullshit: I want to buy up Las Vegas and render it germ-free! Drac was half lucid and half nuts—and only really cagey where coin was concerned.

Boyd called bi-weekly. Boyd was Bad-Back Jack's security boss and head pimp.

Mr. Hoover kept chasing him with phone calls. Kemper kept avoiding them. Hoover wanted him to slip Jack some hot-wired pussy.

Boyd called it a sprint: Avoid The Man until Jack becomes The Man.

Hoover hot-wired Boyd's L.A. hotel suite. Kemper shot him some spicy misinformation: Jack the K is banging Marilyn Monroe!

Hoover bought the lie. An L.A. agent told Boyd that Monroe was now under intense surveillance: bug/taps and six full-time men.

Said agents were baffled. Jack the Haircut and MM have not been in contact.

Pete laughed himself silly. Dracula confirmed the rumor: Marilyn and Jack were one hot item!!!!

Boyd said he skin-searched all Jack's girls.

Boyd said Kennedy and Nixon were running neck-and-neck.

Pete didn't say, *I've* got dirt. I can SELL it to Jimmy Hoffa; I can

GIVE it to you to smear Nixon with.

Jimmy's a colleague. Boyd's a partner. Who's more pro-Cause—Jack or Nixon?

Tricky Dick was hotly anti-Beard. Jack was vocal but still short of rabid.

John Stanton called Nixon "Mr. Invasion." Kemper said Jack would green-light all invasion plans.

Boyd's key campaign issue was COMPARTMENTALIZATION.

Ike and Dick knew the Agency and the Mob were Cuba-linked. The Kennedys didn't know—and might or might not be told if Jack bags the White House.

Who decides whether to spill?—Kemper Cathcart Boyd himself. The deciding factor: moralist Bobby's perceived influence on Big Brother.

Bobby could scut all Mob/CIA ties. Bobby could scut the Boyd/Bondurant casino incentive deal.

Jack or Dick—one very tough call.

The smart bet: Don't smear seasoned Red-baiter Nixon. Not so smart, but sexy: Smear him and put Jack in the White House. Vote Boyd. Vote the Beast. Vote Fidel Castro's beard on a stick.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/13/60. FBI memorandum: Chicago SAC Charles Leahy to Director J. Edgar Hoover. Marked: CONFIDENTIAL/DIRECTOR'S EYES ONLY.

Sir,

The pro-Communist derogatory profile on SA Ward J. Littell is now complete. This memo supplants all previous confidential reports pertaining to Littell, with itemized evidence documents to follow under separate cover.

To briefly update you on recent developments:

1.—Claire Boyd (daughter of SA Kemper C. Boyd and longtime Littell family friend) was contacted and agreed not to tell her father of the interview. Miss Boyd stated that last Christmas SA Littell made obscenely disparaging anti-Bureau, anti-Hoover remarks and praised the American Communist Party.

2.—There are no leads in the Littell assault investigation. We still do not know what Littell was doing in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

3.—SA Littell's mistress, Helen Agee, was spot-surveilled for a two-week period last month. Several of Miss Agee's University of Chicago Law School professors were quizzed about her political statements. We now have four confirmed reports that Miss Agee has also been publicly critical of the Bureau. One professor (Chicago Office informant #179) stated that Miss Agee railed against the FBI for their failure to solve a "simple assault case up in Wisconsin" and went on to call the Bureau "the American Gestapo that got my father killed and turned my lover into a cripple." (A U of C dean is going to recommend that Miss Agee's graduate school grant funding be rescinded under provisions of a student loyalty statement that all law school enrollees sign.)

In conclusion:

I think it is now time to approach SA Littell. I await further orders.

Respectfully,
Charles Leahy
Chicago SAC

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/15/60. FBI memorandum: Director J.

Edgar Hoover to SAC Charles Leahy.

Mr. Leahy,

No approach on SA Littell until I so direct.

JEH

51

(Chicago, 10/16/60)

His hangover was brutal. Bad dreams left him schizy—every man in the diner looked like a cop.

Littell stirred his coffee. His hands shook. Mal Chamales toyed with a sweet roll and shook almost as hard.

“Mal, you’re leading up to something.”

“I’m in no position to be asking favors.”

“If it’s an official FBI favor, you should know that I retire exactly three months from today.”

Mal laughed. “Like I said, the Party always needs lawyers.”

“I’d have to pass the Illinois Bar first. It’s either that or move to D.C. and practice Federal law.”

“You’re not much of a leftist sympathizer.”

“Or a Bureau apologist. Mal—”

“I’m up for a teaching job. The word’s out that the State Board of Ed’s breaking the blacklist. I want to cover my bets, and I was thinking you could edit your reports to show that I quit the Party.”

The tall man at the counter looked familiar. The man loitering outside did, too.

“Ward …”

“Sure, Mal. I’ll write it up in my next report. I’ll say you quit the Party to take a job with the Nixon campaign.”

Mal dashed some tears back. Mal almost dumped the table trying to hug him.

Littell said, “Get out of here. I don’t like embracing Commies in public.”

The diner faced his apartment building. Littell hogged a window seat and killed time polling bumper stickers.

Two Nixon cars were parked at the curb. He saw a Nixon-Lodge decal on his landlord’s windshield.

Traffic whizzed by. Littell caught glimpses: six Nixons and three Kennedys.

The waitress topped off his coffee. He added two shots from his flask.

Instant straw poll results: Nixon sweeps Chicago!

Sunlight hit the window. Wonderful distortions hit him: his new face and his jagged new hairline.

Helen ran up the steps outside his apartment. She looked harried—no makeup, no overcoat, mismatched skirt and blouse.

She saw his car. She looked across the street and saw him in the window.

She ran over. Notebook paper flew out of her handbag.

Littell walked to the door. Helen *shoved* it open two-handed.

He tried to grab her. She pulled his gun out of his holster and hit him with it.

She hit him in the chest. She hit him in the arms. She tried to pull the trigger with the safety on. She hit him with flailing girl punches—too fast to stop.

Eyeliner ran down her cheeks. Her handbag capsized and spilled books. She shouted odd words: “grant fund rescinding” and “loyalty oath” and “FBI” and “YOU YOU YOU.”

Heads bobbed their way. Two men at the counter pulled *their* guns.

Helen stopped hitting him. Helen said, “Goddamnit, this is YOU, I know it is.”

He drove to the office. He boxed in Leahy’s car and ran up to the squadroom.

Leahy’s door was shut. Court Meade saw him and turned away.

Two men walked by in shirtsleeves and shoulder holsters. Littell remembered them: the phone guys rigging lines outside his apartment.

Leahy’s door swung open. A man stuck his head out. Littell remembered him: that guy at the post office yesterday.

The door closed. Voices seeped through it: “Littell,” “the Agee girl.”

He kicked the door off its hinges. He framed the scene à la Mal Chamales.

Four gray-flannel fascists in conference. Four parasitic, exploitative, right-wing—

Littell said, “Remember what I know. Remember how I can hurt the Bureau.”

He bought wire cutters, safety goggles, magnetic shielding strips, a glass cutter, rubber gloves, a .10-gauge shotgun, a hundred rounds of double-aught buckshot, a box of industrial dynamite, three hundred yards of acoustical baffling, a hammer, nails and two large duffel bags.

He stored his car in a service garage.

He rented a ’57 Ford Victoria—with fake Cointelpro ID.

He bought three quarts of scotch—just enough to wean himself dry.

He drove south to Sioux City, Iowa.

He turned in his rental car and caught a train north to Milwaukee.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/17/60. Confidential memorandum: John Stanton to Kemper Boyd.

Kemper,

I got a disquieting phone call from Guy Banister, so I thought I'd pass the information along to you. You're hard to reach these days, so I hope this gets to you within a reasonable length of time.

Guy's friends with the Miami SAC, who's tight with the CO of the Miami PD Intelligence Squad. The Squad keeps suspected pro-Castro Cubans under loose surveillance, with routine license plate checks on all the male Latins they are spotted with. Our man Wilfredo Olmos Delsol was seen on two occasions with Gaspar Ramon Blanco, age 37, a known pro-Communist member of the Committee for Cuban Understanding, a Raul Castro-financed propaganda front. This troubles me, chiefly because of PB's set- to with Delsol's cousin Tomas Obregon. Have PB check this out, would you? Our compartmentalization procedures preclude my contacting him directly.

All best,
John

52

(Miami, 10/20/60)

The pilot announced a late arrival. Kemper checked his watch—Pete's allotted time just evaporated.

Pete caught up with him in Omaha this morning. He said, I've got something for you—something you'll want to *see*.

He promised that the stopover would take no more than twenty minutes. He said, I'll put you on the next plane back to Jack.

Miami twinkled below. He had crucial work in Omaha—postponed by this six-hour detour.

The race was too close to call. Nixon *might* have a slight edge—with eighteen days left to go.

He called Laura from the departure lounge. She lit into his Kennedy ties. Claire kept saying that Laura ached for a Nixon victory.

Claire said FBI men questioned her last month. Their sole topic was Ward Littell's politics.

The agents intimidated her. They cautioned her not to mention the interview to her father.

Claire broke the promise and called him three days ago. He called Ward immediately.

His phone rang and rang. The rings had a distinct wiretap pitch.

He called Court Meade to check on Ward's whereabouts. Meade said Ward kicked the SAC's door down and vanished.

Claire called him in Omaha last night. She said the Bureau got Helen's law school grant revoked.

Mr. Hoover stopped calling him two days ago. It all connected somehow. The campaign had him running too fast to be scared.

Cross winds roughed up their descent. The plane taxied in with a fishtailing whoosh.

Kemper checked his window. He saw Pete standing outside, with the ground crew. The men were palming cash rolls and fawning at the big guy with the money.

Landing stairs locked in. Kemper crowded up to the door.

The co-pilot cranked it open. There's Pete—with a baggage cart parked on the runway, right below them.

Kemper took the steps three at a time. Pete grabbed him and cupped a yell. "Your plane's delayed! We've got half an hour!"

Kemper jumped on the cart. Pete gunned it. They dodged luggage piles and swung around to a janitor's hut.

A baggage handler got the door. Pete slipped him twenty dollars.

A linen tablecloth was draped over a workbench. On it: gin, vermouth, a glass and six sheets of paper.

Pete said, "Read through that."

Kemper skimmed the top page. His hackles jumped immediately.

Howard Hughes lent Dick Nixon's kid brother $200,000. Check photostats, bookkeeping notes and bank slips proved it. Somebody compiled an itemized list: Nixon-proffered legislation linked to Hughes government contracts.

Kemper mixed a drink. His hands shook. He spilled Beefeater's all over the workbench.

He looked at Pete. "You haven't asked for money."

"If I wanted money, I would have called Jimmy."

"I'll tell Jack he's got a friend in Miami."

"Tell him to let us invade Cuba, and I'll call it even."

The martini was gorgeously dry. The janitor's hut glowed like the Carlyle.

"Keep an eye on Wilfredo Delsol. It's anticlimactic now, but I think he might be screwing up."

Pete said, "Call Bobby. I want to hear you put the little fuck in hock to me."

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/23/60. Cleveland Plain Dealer headline:

HUGHES-NIXON LOAN REVELATIONS ROCK CAMPAIGN

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/24/60. Chicago Tribune subhead:

KENNEDY BLASTS NIXON-HUGHES “COLLUSION”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/25/60. Los Angeles Herald-Express headline and subhead:

NIXON DENIES INFLUENCE-PEDDLING ACCUSATIONS

HUGHES LOAN BROUHAHA CUTS VEEP’S LEAD IN POLLS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/26/60. New York Journal-American subhead:

NIXON CALLS LOAN FLAP “TEMPEST IN TEAPOT”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/28/60. San Francisco Chronicle headline:

NIXON BROTHER CALLS HUGHES LOAN “NON-POLITICAL”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/29/60. Kansas City Star subhead:

KENNEDY BLASTS NIXON FOR HUGHES LOAN

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/3/60: Boston Globe headline:

GALLUP POLL: PREZ’L RACE DEAD HEAT!

53

(Lake Geneva, 11/5/60)

Littell ran through his checklist.

Goggles, earplugs, wire cutters, glass cutter—check. Magnet strips, gloves, shotgun, ammunition—check.

Waterproof-fuse dynamite—check. Acoustical baffling, hammer, nails—check.

Check: You wiped every print-sustaining surface in this motel room.

Check: You left your check-out cash on the dresser.

Check: You avoided all contact with your fellow motel tenants.

He ran through his three-week precaution list.

You changed motels every other day—in zigzag patterns throughout southern Wisconsin.

You wore fake beards and fake mustaches at all times.

You changed rental cars at odd intervals. You took buses between car-rental pickups. You secured said cars at distant sites: Des Moines, Minneapolis and Green Bay.

You rented said cars with fake ID.

You paid cash.

You parked said cars nowhere near the motels you checked into.

You made no motel-room phone calls. You print-wiped every surface before you checked out.

You employed tail-evasion tactics. You limited your liquor intake: six shots a night to insure steady nerves.

You spotted no tails.

You stared at single men, gauged their reactions and discerned nothing cop- or Mob-like. Most men evinced discomfort: you were rough-looking now.

You cased Jules Schiffrin's estate. You determined that the man had no live-in help or on-site watchmen.

You learned Schiffrin's routine:

Saturday-night dinner and cards at Badger Glen Country Club. Early-Sunday-morning sojourns at the home of one Glenda Rae Mattson.

Jules Schiffrin was gone from 7:05 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. every Saturday into Sunday. His estate was police patrolled every two hours—cursory perimeter road checks.

You secured safe-placement and alarm diagrams. You queried seventeen services to get them. You impersonated a Milwaukee PD lieutenant and buttressed the impersonations with forged documents and credentials purchased from a forger that you arrested years ago.

All your police impersonations were carried out in disguise.

Two steel-plated safes were installed on the premises. They weighed ninety-five pounds apiece. You had their exact location memorized.

Final checks:

Your new motel room outside Beloit: safely rented.

The newspaper piece on Schiffrin's art collection: clipped out to leave at the crime scene.

Littell took a deep breath and downed three quick shots. His nerves fluttered and *almost* leveled out.

He checked his face in the bathroom mirror. One last look for courage—

Low clouds covered the moon. Littell drove to the half-mile-out point.

It was 11:47. He had two hours and thirteen minutes to get clear.

A State Police cruiser passed him eastbound. On time: the standard 11:45 perimeter check.

Littell swung off the pavement. Hard-packed dirt grabbed his tires. He hit his brights and slalomed downhill.

The slope evened out. He brodied his back wheels to obliterate tread marks.

Trees dotted the clearing—his car couldn't be seen from the road.

He killed the lights and grabbed his duffel bag. He saw house lights due west uphill—a faint directional glow to work off of.

He walked toward it. Leaf clumps obscured his footprints. The glow expanded every few seconds.

He hit the driveway adjoining the carport. Schiffrin's Eldorado Brougham was gone.

He ran to the library window and crouched low. An inside lamp provided hazy light to work by.

He got out his tools and snipped two wires taped to a storm drain. An exterior arc light sputtered. He saw alarm tape bracketing the window glass—mounted between two thick panes.

He gauged the circumference.

He cut magnet-tape strips to cover it.

He stuck them to the outside glass in a near-perfect outline.

His legs ached. Cold sweat stung some shaving cuts.

He ran a magnet over the tape. He traced a circle inside the outline with his glass cutter.

The glass was THICK—it took two hands and all his weight to notch a groove.

No alarms went off. No lights flashed.

He gouged circles in the glass. No sirens whirred; no general pursuit noise went down.

His arms burned. His blade went sharp to dull. His sweat froze and made him shiver.

The outside pane broke. He tucked his sleeves inside his gloves and bore down harder.

TWENTY-NINE MINUTES ELAPSED.

Elbow pressure snapped the inside pane. Littell kicked the frame glass out to make a crawl space.

He vaulted inside. The fit was tight—glass shards cut him down to the skin.

The library was oak-paneled and furnished with green leather chairs. The side walls featured artwork: one Matisse, one Cézanne, one van Gogh.

Floor lamps gave him light—just enough to do the job by.

He arranged his tools.

He found the safes: wall-panel-recessed two feet apart.

He covered every inch of wall space with triple-thick acoustical baffling. He hammered it down tight—fivepenny nails into high-varnished oak.

He X-marked the sections covering the safes. He put on his goggles and stuffed in his earplugs. He loaded his shotgun and let fly.

One round, two rounds—huge contained explosions. Three rounds, four rounds—padding chunks and hardwood decomposing.

Littell reloaded and fired, reloaded and fired, reloaded and fired.

Wood chips sliced his face. Muzzle smoke had him retching. Visibility was zero: mulch slammed up against his goggles.

Littell reloaded and fired, reloaded and fired, reloaded and fired. Forty-odd rounds took the wall and rear ceiling beams down.

Wood and plaster crashed. Second-story furniture dropped down and shattered. Two safes fell out of the rubble.

Littell kicked through it—Please, God, let me breathe.

He vomited splinters and scotch. He coughed up gunsmoke and black phlegm. He dug through wood heaps and lugged the safes over to his duffel bag.

SEVENTY-TWO MINUTES ELAPSED.

The library was blasted through to the dining room. Forty-odd explosions toppled the artwork.

The Cézanne was intact. The Matisse bore slight frame damage. The van Gogh was pellet-shredded nothingness.

Littell dropped the newspaper clip.

Littell lashed the duffel to his back with curtain strips.

Littell grabbed the paintings and ran out the front door.

Pure air made him go lightheaded. He gulped it in and ran.

He slid on leaves and bounced off trees. His bladder went—nothing ever felt so good. He stumbled, hunched over double—two hundred pounds of steel kept him plummeting downhill.

He fell. His body went rubber—he couldn't stand up or lift the duffel bag.

He crawled and dragged it the rest of the way. He loaded his car and fishtailed up to the access road, heaving for breath the whole time.

He caught his face in the rearview mirror. The word "heroic" came up short.

He took switchbacks north/northwest. He found his preselected detonation spot: a forest clearing outside Prairie du Chien.

He lit the clearing with three big Coleman lanterns. He burned the paintings and scattered the ashes.

He crimped the butt ends of six sticks of dynamite and slid them up against the safe dial-housings.

He strung fuses a hundred yards out and lit a match.

The safes blew. The doors shot all the way up to the tree line. A breeze scattered scorched piles of currency.

Littell sifted through them. The blast destroyed at least a hundred thousand dollars.

Undamaged:

Three large ledger books wrapped in plastic.

Littell buried the scraps of money and dumped the safe sections in a sewage stream adjoining the clearing. He drove to his new motel and obeyed all speed limits en route.

Three ledgers. Two hundred pages per unit. Cross-column notations on each page, squared off in a standard bookkeeping style.

Huge figures listed left to right.

Littell laid the books out on the bed. His first instinct:

The amounts exceeded all possible compilations of monthly or yearly Pension Fund dues.

The two brown leather ledgers were coded. The number/letter listings in the far left-hand column roughly corresponded in digit length to names.

Thus:

AH795/WZ458YX =

One five-letter first name and one seven-letter last name.

MAYBE.

The black leather ledger was uncoded. It contained similarly large financial tallies—and two- and three-letter listings in the far left-hand column.

The listings *might* be: lender or lendee initials.

The black book was subdivided into vertical columns. They were real-word designated: “Loan %” and “Transfer #.”

Littell put the black book aside. His second instinct: code breaking would not be easy.

He went back to the brown books.

He followed symbol names and figures and watched money accrue horizontally. Neatly doubled sums told him the Pension Fund repayment rate: a usurious 50%.

He spotted letter repetitions—in four-to-six-letter increments—most likely a simple date code. A for 1, B for 2—something told him it was just that simple.

He matched letters to numbers and EXTRAPOLATED:

Fund loan profiteering went back thirty years. The letters and numbers ascended left to right—straight up to early 1960.

The average amount lent was $1.6 million. With repayment fees: $2.4 million.

The smallest loan was $425,000. The largest was $8.6 million.

Numbers growing left to right. Multiplications and divisions in the far right-hand columns—odd percentage calculations.

He EXTRAPOLATED:

The odd numbers were loan investment profits, tallied in over and above payback interest.

Eyestrain made him stop. Three quick shots of scotch refueled him.

He got a brainstorm:

Look for Hoffa’s Sun Valley skim money

He scanned columns with a pencil. He linked the dots: mid ’56 to mid ’57 and ten symbols to spell “Jimmy Hoffa.”

He found 1.2 and 1.8—hypothetically Bobby Kennedy’s “spooky” three million. He found five symbols, six, and five in a perfectly intersecting column.

5, 6, 5 = James Riddle Hoffa.

Hoffa laughed off the Sun Valley charges. With valid assurance: his chicanery was very well cloaked.

Littell skimmed the books and picked out odd totals. Tiny zeros extended—the Fund was billionaire rich.

Double vision set in. He corrected it with a magnifying glass.

He quick-scanned the books again. Identical numbers kept recurring—in four-figure brackets.

[1408]—over and over.

Littell went through the brown books page by page. He found twenty-one 1408s—including two next to the Spooky Three Million. Quick addition gave him a total: forty-nine million dollars lent out or borrowed. Mr. 1408 was well-heeled either way.

He checked the black book initial column. It was alphabetically arranged and entered in Jules Schiffrin's neat block printing.

It was 9:00 a.m. He had five hours of study in.

The "Loan %" subhead tweaked him. He saw "B-E" straight down the graph—the number/letter code decoded to 25%.

He EXTRAPOLATED:

The initials tagged Pension Fund lenders—repaid at a fat but not brutal rate.

He checked the "Transfer #" column. The listings were strictly uniform: initials and six digits, no more.

He EXTRAPOLATED:

The initials were bank account numbers—repaid mobster money laundered clean. Said initials all ended in B—most likely short for the word "branch."

Littell copied over letters on a scratch pad.

BOABHB = Bank of America, Beverly Hills branch. HSALMBB = Home Savings & Loan, Miami Beach branch.

It worked.

He was able to form known bank names out of every set of letters.

He jumped columns tracing 1408. Right there on the money: JPK, SR/SFNBB/811512404.

SFN meant Security-First National. BB could mean Buffalo branch, Boston branch, or other B-city branches.

The SR probably denoted a "Senior." Why the added designation?

Just above JPK, SR: JPK [1693] BOADB. The man was a piker compared to 1408: he lent the Fund a paltry $6.4 million.

The added SR was simply to distinguish the lender from someone with the same initials.

JPK, SR [1408] SFNBB/811512404. One filthy-rich money-lending—

Stop.

Stop right there.

JPK, SR.

Joseph P. Kennedy, Senior.

BB for Boston branch.

August '59—Sid Kabikoff talking to Mad Sal:

"I knew Jules way back when"/"when he was SELLING DOPE and USING THE PROFITS to finance movies with RKO back when JOE KENNEDY owned it."

Stop. Make the call. Impersonate a Bureau hard-on and confirm it or refute it.

Littell dialed O. He dripped sweat all over the telephone.

An operator came on. "What number, please?"

"I want the Security-First National Bank, in Boston, Massachusetts."

"One moment, sir. Til look the number up and connect you."

Littell held the line. Adrenaline hit: he went dizzy and parched.

A man answered. "Security-First National."

"This is Special Agent Johnson, FBI. Let me speak to the manager, please."

"Please hold. I'll transfer you."

Littell heard connection clicks. A man said, "This is Mr. Carmody. May I help you?"

"Th-this is Special Agent Johnson, FBI. I have an account number at your bank here, and I need to know who it belongs to."

"Is this an *official* request? It's a Sunday, and I'm here overseeing our monthly inventory—"

"This is an official request. I can get a bank writ, but I'd rather not put you to the trouble of an in-person visit."

"I see. Well … I guess…."

Littell came on firm. "The number is 811512404."

The man sighed. "Well, uh, the 404 listings denote safe-deposit-box storage accounts, so if you're interested in balance figures, I'm afraid—"

"How many storage boxes are rented out to that account number?"

"Well, that account is quite familiar to me, because of its size. You see—"

"*How many boxes?"*

"An entire vault now of ninety."

“Can valuables be transferred directly into that vault from outside sources?”

“Certainly. They could be placed in the boxes sight unseen, by second parties with access to the account holder’s password.”

Ninety stash boxes. Millions in Mob-laundered CASH—

“Who does that account number belong to?”

“Well …”

“Shall I get a writ?”

“Well, I …”

Littell almost shouted it. “*Is the account holder Joseph P. Kennedy Sr.?”*

“Well … uh … yes.”

“The senator’s father?”

“Yes, the senator’s—”

The phone slipped out of his hand. Littell kicked it across the room.

The black book. Mr. 1408, millionaire loan shark.

He went back over the numbers and confirmed it. He triple-checked every digit until his vision blurred.

Yes: Joe Kennedy lent the Fund Sun Valley seed money. Yes: The Fund lent the money out to James Riddle Hoffa.

Sun Valley constituted felony land fraud. Sun Valley spawned two Pete Bondurant killings: Anton Gretzler and Roland Kirpaski.

Littell tracked 1408s across paper. He saw continuous commas—and no cash-out bottom-line one-time profit.

Joe only took interest out. Joe’s base loan sums stayed liquid inside the Fund.

Growing.

Laundered, hidden, obfuscated, tax-sheltered and funneled—

disbursed to labor thugs, dope pushers, shylocks and mobbed-up fascist dictators.

The all-code books contained specifics. He could crack the code and know exactly where the money went.

My secrets, Bobby—I’ll never let you hate your father.

Littell went eight drinks over his limit. He passed out shouting numbers.

54

(Hyannis Port, 11/8/60)

Jack stood a million votes up and way ahead in the electoral. Nixon gouged at his lead—the Midwest looked problematic.

Kemper watched three TVs and juggled four phones. His motel room was one big cable socket—the Secret Service demanded multiple lines in and out.

The red phone was his personal line. The two white phones hooked in direct to the Kennedy compound. The blue phone linked the Secret Service to the almost-President-elect.

It was 11:35 p.m.

CBS called Illinois tight. NBC said “Cliffhanger!” ABC said Jack would win, with 51% of the vote.

Kemper checked the window. Secret Service men mingled outside—they’d booked up the entire motel complex.

White phone #2 rang. It was Bobby, with complaints.

A journalist pole-vaulted into the compound. A hot rod sporting Nixon banners plowed the main house lawn.

Kemper called two off-duty cops and sent them over. He told them to beat up all trespassers and impound their vehicles.

The red phone rang. It was Santo Junior, with Mob scuttlebutt.

He said, Illinois looks dicey. He said, Sam G. threw some weight to help Jack.

Lenny Sands was out stuffing ballot boxes. He had a hundred aldermen helping him. Jack should blitz Cook County and eke out a statewide win by a nun's-cunt-hair margin.

Kemper hung up. The red phone rang again. It was Pete, with more secondhand gossip.

He said Mr. Hoover called Mr. Hughes. Mr. Hughes told Pete that Marilyn Monroe was quite naughty.

The Feds had her hot-wired. During the past two weeks she banged disc jockey Allan Freed, Billy Eckstine, Freddy Otash, Rin Tin Tin's trainer, Jon "Ramar of the Jungle" Hall, her pool cleaner, two pizza delivery boys, talk-show man Tom Duggan and her maid's husband—but no Senator John F. Kennedy.

Kemper laughed and hung up. CBS judged the race "too close to call."

ABC retracted its prediction. The race was now "too close to call."

White phone #1 rang.

Kemper picked up. "Bob?"

"It's me. I just called to say we're way ahead in the electoral, and Illinois and Michigan should put us over. The Hughes loan thing helped, Kemper. Your 'unnamed source' should know that it was a factor."

"You don't sound too elated."

"I won't believe it until it's final. And a friend of Dad's just died. He was younger than him, so he's taking it hard."

"Anybody I know?"

"Jules Schiffrin. I think you met him a few years ago. He had a heart attack in Wisconsin. He came home and found his house burglarized, and just keeled over. A friend of Dad's in Lake Geneva called—"

"Lake Geneva?"

"Right. North of Chicago. Kemper …"

The Littell assault location. Schiffrin: a Chicago-based gonif type.

"Kemper …"

"I'm sorry. I was distracted."

"I was going to say something …"

"About Laura?"

"How did you know that?"

"You never come off hesitant unless it's about Laura."

Bobby cleared his throat. "Call her. Tell her we'd appreciate it if she didn't contact the family for a while. I'm sure she'll understand."

Court Meade said Littell vanished. It was circumstantial, but—

"Kemper, are you listening to me?"

"Yes."

"Call Laura. Be kind, but be firm."

"I'll do it."

Bobby hung up. Kemper placed a red phone call through the switchboard: Chicago, BL8-4908.

It went through. He heard two rings and two very faint tap-clicks.

Littell said, "Hello?"

Kemper covered the mouthpiece.

Littell said, "Is that you, Boyd? Are you coming back into my life because you're scared, or because you think I might have something you want?"

Kemper disconnected.

Ward J. Littell—Jesus Fucking Christ.

55

(Miami, 11/9/60)

Guy Banister screeched long-distance. Pete felt an earache coming on.

"We're looking at a new papist hegemony. He loves niggers and Jews, and he's been soft-line on Communism since he was a congressman. I can't believe he won. I can't believe the American people bought his line of bull—"

"Get to it, Guy. You said J.D. Tippit picked up something."

Banister de-throttled his spiel. "I forgot I called you for a reason. And I forgot you were soft-line on Kennedy."

Pete said, "I like his hair. It gets my dick hard."

Banister *re*-throttled. Pete cut him off quick.

"It's 8:00 fucking a.m. I've got cab calls backed up and three drivers out sick. Tell me what you want."

"I want Dick Nixon to demand a recount."

"Guy—"

"All right, then. Boyd was supposed to tell you to talk to Wilfredo Delsol."

"He did."

"*Did* you talk to him?"

"No. I've been busy."

“Tippit said he heard Delsol’s been seen with some Castro guys. A bunch of us think he should explain.”

“I’ll go see him.”

“You do that. And while you’re at it, try to develop some political brains.”

Pete laughed. “Jack’s a white man. I’ve got a big hard-on just thinking about his hair.”

Pete drove to Wilfredo’s pad and knocked on the door. Delsol opened up in his skivvies.

He was bleary-eyed. He was scrawny. He looked too sleepy to stand upright.

He shivered and plucked at his balls. He shook the cobwebs out of his head and caught on fast.

“Somebody told you something bad about me.”

“Keep going.”

“You only visit people in order to scare them.”

“That’s right. Or to ask them to explain some things.”

“Ask me, then.”

“You were seen talking to some pro-Castro guys.”

“That’s true.”

“So?”

“So they heard how my cousin Tomás died. They thought they could get me to betray the Cadre.”

“And?”

“And I told them I hated what happened to Tomás, but I hate Fidel Castro more.”

Pete leaned against the door. “You don’t much like speedboat runs.”

“Killing odd militiamen is futile.”

“Suppose you get assigned to an invasion group?”

“I’ll go.”

“Suppose I tell you to whack one of those guys you were seen talking to?”

“I would say Gaspar Blanco lives two blocks from here.”

Pete said, “Kill him.”

Pete cruised Niggertown—for the pure time-marking fuck of it. The radio ran election news exclusively.

Nixon conceded. Frau Nixon pitched some boo-hoo. Bad-Back Jack thanked his staff and announced that Frau Bad-Back was pregnant.

Nigger junkies were cliqued up by a shine stand. Fulo and Ramón drove up to service them. Chuck was trading bindles for signed-over welfare checks.

Jack talked up the New Frontier. Fulo dropped off a fat load of shit with the shoeshine man.

A local bulletin flashed on.

Shots fired outside Coral Gables bodega! Police ID dead man as one Gaspar Ramon Blanco!

Pete smiled. November 8, 1960, was an all-time classic day.

He stopped at Tiger Kab after lunch. Teo Paez had a parking-lot sale going: hot TVs for twenty scoots a pop.

The sets were hooked up to a battery pack. Jack the K beamed out of two dozen screens.

Pete mingled with potential buyers. Jimmy Hoffa popped out of the crowd, popping sweat on a nice cool day.

"Hi, Jimmy."

"Don't gloat. I know you and Boyd wanted that cunt-lapping faggot to win."

"Don't worry. He'll put his kid brother on a tight leash."

"As if that's my only worry."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean Jules Schiffrin's dead. His place in Lake Geneva got clouted for some priceless fucking paintings, and some priceless fucking paperwork got lost in the process. Jules had a heart attack, and now our shit has probably been torched in some burglar's fucking basement."

LITTELL. 100% certifiably insane.

Pete started laughing.

Hoffa said, "What's so fucking funny?"

Pete roared.

Hoffa said, "Stop laughing, you frog fuck."

Pete couldn't stop. Hoffa pulled a piece and shot Jack the Haircut six TV screens across.

56

(Washington, D.C., 11/13/60)

The mailman brought a special-delivery letter. It was postmarked Chicago and sent without a return address. Kemper opened the envelope. The one page inside was neatly typed.

I have the books. They are fail-safed against my death or disappearance in a dozen different ways. I will release them only to Robert Kennedy, if I am given a Kennedy Administration appointment within the next three months. The books are safely hidden. Hidden with them is an 83-page deposition, detailing my knowledge of your McClellan Committee-Kennedy incursion. I will destroy that deposition only if I am given a Kennedy Administration appointment. I remain fond of you, and am grateful for the lessons you taught me. At times, you acted with uncharacteristic selflessness and risked exposure of your many duplicitous relationships in an effort to help me achieve what I must fatuously describe as my manhood. That said, I will also state that I do not trust your motives regarding the books. I still consider you a friend, but I do not trust you one iota.

Kemper jotted a note to Pete Bondurant.

Forget about the Teamster books. Littell finessed us, and I'm beginning to rue the day I taught him some things. I made some discreet queries with the Wisconsin State Police, who are frankly baffled. I'll supply forensic details the next time we talk. I think you'll be grudgingly impressed. Enough pissing and moaning. Let's depose Fidel Castro.

57

(Chicago, 12/8/60)

Wind rocked the car. Littell turned up the heat and pushed his seat back to stretch out.

His stakeout was strictly cosmetic. He might join the party himself—Mal would get a huge kick out of it.

It was a Bust the Blacklist bash. The Chicago Board of Ed had hired Mal Chamales to teach remedial math.

Guests walked up to the house. Littell recognized leftists with Red Squad sheets half a mile long.

A few waved to him. Mal said he might send his wife out with coffee and cookies.

Littell watched the house. Mal turned his Christmas lights on—the tree by the porch bloomed all blue and yellow.

He'd stay until 9:30. He'd write the bash up as a routine holiday soiree. Leahy would accept his assessment pro forma—their stalemate precluded direct confrontations.

His door-kicking episode and Lake Geneva time went unquestioned. He had thirty-nine days to go until his retirement. The Bureau's no-confrontation policy would hold and see him through to civilian life.

He had the Fund books stashed in a bank vault in Duluth. He had two dozen cryptography texts at home. He had seventeen days logged in without an ounce of liquor.

He could send the Fund books to Bobby on a moment's notice. He could delete Joe Kennedy's name with a few swipes of a pencil.

Dead leaves strafed the windshield. Littell got out of the car and stretched his legs.

He saw men running up Mal's driveway. He heard metal-on-metal pump-shotgun-slide noise.

He heard footsteps behind him. Hands slammed him across the hood and ripped off his gunbelt.

He gouged his face on a sharp strip of chrome. He saw Chick Leahy and Court Meade kick Mal's door down.

Big men in suits and overcoats swarmed him. His glasses fell off. Everything went claustrophobic and blurry.

Hands dragged him into the street. Hands cuffed and shackled him.

A midnight-blue limo pulled up.

Hands grappled him in. Hands shoved him face-to-face with J. Edgar Hoover.

Hands slapped tape across his mouth.

The limo pulled out. Hoover said, "Mal Chamales is being arrested for sedition and advocating the violent overthrow of the United States of America. Your FBI service is terminated as of this day, your pension has been revoked, and a detailed profile of you as a Communist sympathizer has been sent to the Justice Department, the bar associations of all fifty states and the deans of every university law school in the Continental U.S. Should you go public with information pertaining to Kemper Boyd's clandestine activities, I will guarantee you that your daughter, Susan, and Helen Agee will never practice law, and guarantee that the interesting coincidence of your three-week absence and the destruction of Jules Schiffrin's Lake Geneva estate will be mentioned to key organized-crime figures who might find that coincidence intriguing. In keeping with your leftist sympathies and bleeding-heart concern for the financially wretched and morally impaired, you will now be deposited into a venue where your instincts for self-abnegation, self-flagellation and pinko vicissitudes will be fully appreciated. Driver, stop the car."

The limo decelerated. Hands uncuffed him and unshackled him.

Hands dragged him out the door. Hands dumped him into a South Side gutter.

Colored piss bums walked up and checked him out. Say what, white man?

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/18/60. Personal note: Kemper Boyd to Attorney General Designate Robert F. Kennedy.

Dear Bob,

Congratulations, first of all. You'll make a splendid Attorney General, and I can envision Jimmy Hoffa and certain others swinging from yardarms already.

Hoffa makes for a good segue point. The purpose of this letter is to recommend former Special Agent Ward J. Littell for a Justice Department counselship. Littell (the Chicago Phantom who has worked for us sub-rosa since early 1959) is a 1940 Summa Cum Laude Notre Dame Law grad, Federal-Bar licensed. He is considered brilliant in the field of Federal Deportation Statutes and will be bringing with him a good deal of recently accrued anti-Mob, anti-Teamster evidence.

I realize that Littell, in his anonymous capacity, has been out of touch with you for some time, and hope that that fact will not dampen your enthusiasm for him. He is a splendid attorney and a dedicated crimefighter.

Yours,
Kemper

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/21/60. Personal note: Robert F. Kennedy to Kemper Boyd.

Dear Kemper,

Per Ward Littell, my answer is emphatically "No." I have received a report from Mr. Hoover that, though perhaps biased, persuasively paints a portrait of Littell as an alcoholic with ultra left-wing tendencies. Mr. Hoover also included evidence that indicates that Littell was receiving bribes from Chicago Mob members. This, to me, negates the viability of his alleged anti-Mob, anti-Teamster evidence.

I realize that Littell is your friend, and that he did work hard for us at one time. Frankly, though, we cannot afford even the slightest taint on our new appointees.

Let's consider the Littell matter closed. The question of your

Kennedy Administration employment remains, and I think you'll be pleased with what the President-elect and I have come up with.

Best, Bob

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/17/61. Personal letter: J. Edgar Hoover to Kemper Boyd.

Dear Kemper,

Three-fold congratulations.

One, your recent evasion tactics were superbly efficacious. Two, your Marilyn Monroe aside had me going for quite some time. What a myth you have created! With luck, it will enter what Hush-Hush would call the "Peephole Pantheon!"

Thirdly, bravo for your appointment as roving Justice Department counsel. My contacts tell me you'll be concentrating on voting rights abuse in the south. How fitting! Now you'll be able to champion left-inclined negroes with the same tenacity that you embrace right-wing Cubans!

I think you've found your metier. I would be hard-pressed to conceive of work more suitable for a man with such a lenient code of loyalty.

I hope we'll get the chance to be colleagues again.

As always,
JEH

58

(New York City, 1/20/61)

She'd been crying. Tear streaks had ruined her makeup.

Kemper stepped into the foyer. Laura cinched her robe and stepped away from him.

He held out a small bouquet. "I'm going down to the Inaugural. I'll be back in a few days."

She ignored the flowers. "I figured that out. I didn't think you put on that tuxedo to impress me."

"Laura ..."

"I wasn't invited. Some neighbors of mine were, though. They donated ten thousand dollars to Jack's campaign."

Her mascara was running. Her whole face looked off-kilter.

"I'll be back in a few days. We'll talk things over then."

Laura pointed to an armoire. "There's a check for three million dollars in the top drawer. It's mine, if I never contact the family again."

"You could rip it up."

"Would you?"

"I can't answer that question."

Her fingers were cigarette-stained. She'd left overflowing ashtrays out in plain sight.

Laura said, “Them or me?”

Kemper said, “Them.”

Part III

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/7/61. Memorandum: Kemper Boyd to John Stanton. Marked: CONFIDENTIAL/HAND POUCH DELIVER.

John,

I've been subtly pressing Little Brother and a few White House aides for information, and I am sad to report that as of this date the President is ambivalent about our invasion plans. The imminent nature of the plans apparently has him waxing indecisive. It's obvious that he doesn't want to deal with something so pressing this early in his administration.

The President and Attorney General Kennedy have been briefed by Director Dulles and Deputy Director Bissell. Little Brother attends many high-level presidential briefings; it is obvious that he is becoming the President's chief advisor on all urgent matters. Little Brother (to the consternation of some friends of ours) remains fixated on Organized Crime and seems to be uninterested in the Cuban issue. My contacts tell me that the President hasn't updated him on the "at-ready" status of our invasion plans.

The Blessington campsite stands pre-invasion ready. Recruit training cycles have been suspended; as of 1/30/61, the forty-four bunks have been filled with graduate troops culled from other induction camps: men specifically trained in amphibious warfare tactics. These men now stand as the Blessington Invasion Force. Pete Bondurant and Douglas Frank Lockhart are putting them through rigorous daily maneuvers and report that their morale is very high.

I visited Blessington last week, to assess its at-ready status prior to Mr. Bissell's 2/10/61 inspection. I'm happy to report that Pete and Lockhart have whipped things into top-flight shape.

Landing crafts are now docked at camouflaged inlets built by laborers recruited from Lockhart's Klan Klavern. Chuck Rogers gave Ramon Gutierrez a refresher flying course as part of a Bondurant-devised plan to have Gutierrez portray a Castro defector and fly into Blessington on Invasion Day with doctored anti-Castro atrocity photographs to be leaked to the press as genuine. Weapons and ammunition stand inventoried and at-ready. An in-let a half mile from the campsite is being prepared to house the troopship that will carry the Blessington invasion force. It should be at-ready by 2/16/61.

I am now free to spend occasional time in Florida, chiefly because the brothers believe the falsehood that I established over a year ago: that Mr. Hoover has coerced me into spying on anti-Castro groups in the Miami area. My current Justice Department assignment (investigating the accusations of Negroes denied voting rights) should have me sequestered in the south for some time. I specifically requested this assignment because of its proximity to Miami and Blessington. My southern background convinced Little Brother to give me the job, and he has allowed me to choose my initial target districts. I picked the area surrounding Anniston, Alabama. There are eight daily commercial flights to Miami, which should make job hopping just a matter of a ninety-minute plane ride. Should you need me, call my service in D.C. or contact me directly at the Wigwam Motel outside Anniston. (Don't say what you're thinking: I know it's beneath me.)

Again, let me stress the importance of obfuscating all Agency-Outfit links to Little Brother. I was as amazed and dismayed as our Sicilian colleagues when Big Brother tapped him for AG. His anti-Outfit fervor has if anything increased, and we do not want him to learn that Messrs. C.M., S.G. and J.R. have donated money to the Cause, or that our Cadre business even exists.

I'll close now. See you in Blessington 2/10.

KB

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/9/61. Memorandum: John Stanton to Kemper Boyd. Marked: CONFIDENTIAL/HAND POUCH DELIVER.

Kemper,

I received your memo. Things sound excellent, although I wish Big Brother wasn't waffling. I've developed some new additions to our basic Blessington Invasion Plan. Will you tell me what you think when we meet at the inspection?

1.—I've assigned Pete Bondurant and Chuck Rogers to coordinate on-site Blessington security and communications between Blessington and other launch sites in Nicaragua and Guatemala.

Rogers can fly between sites, and I think Pete will be especially effective as a rover-peacekeeper.

2.—Teo Paez has brought in a new recruit: Nestor Javier Chasco, DOB 4/12/23. Teo knew the man in Havana when he was running a string of informants for United Fruit. Chasco infiltrated numerous left-wing groups and once foiled an assassination attempt on a UF executive.

When Castro took over, Chasco infiltrated Raul Castro's on-island heroin operation and siphoned dope to anti-Castro rebels, who of course sold it and used the money to purchase weapons. Chasco is an experienced dope trafficker, an expert interrogator, and a Cuban Army-trained sharpshooter lent out by President Batista to various South American government leaders. Teo says that Chasco assassinated no less than fourteen leftist insurgents between the years 1951 and 1958.

Chasco, who had been supporting himself by selling marijuana, escaped Cuba by speedboat last month. He contacted Paez in Miami and begged him to find him pro-Cause work. Teo introduced him to Pete Bondurant and later described the meeting to me as "Love at first sight."

You were unreachable, so Pete contacted me and recommended Nestor Chasco for Immediate Blessington and Cadre employment. I met Chasco and was very impressed. I hired the man immediately and had Pete introduce him to the other Cadre members. Paez told me that the meetings were amicable. Chasco is learning the Cadre business ropes and doubling as a Blessington drill instructor. He'll be shuffling between Blessington, Miami and our formal facilities in Guatemala and Nicaragua—a case officer passing through Blessington noted his training skills and put in an expedite personnel request directly to Mr. Bissell.

You'll meet Chasco at the inspection. I think you'll be impressed, too.

3.—During the actual invasion time frame, I want you and Chasco to patrol the Cadre's Miami business sites. Our on-island sources expect some invasion plan intelligence to leak to Cuba, and I want to make sure that local pro-Castro groups don't try to hit us when they think we're focusing solely on invasion logistics. It should be easy for you to get away. Miami is Anniston-accessible and you can tell Little Brother that Mr. H. sent you in to monitor pro-Castro activity.

I'll close with an embarrassing request.

Carlos M. gave Guy Banister an additional $300,000 gun money. The man is a great friend to the Cause, and he has some very great (and I think justified) fears regarding Little Brother. Can you find out what Bobby's plans are regarding Carlos?

Thanks in advance for considering this. See you tomorrow in Blessington.

John

59

(Blessington, 2/10/61)

Eyes left, eyes right. Port arms, snap the bolt—let's see those carbon-free M-1 chambers.

The drill field sparkled. The trainees moved like spic Rockettes—every turn and slapdown was synchronized.

Lockhart called cadence. Néstor Chasco played flag bearer. The Stars & Stripes and Pit Bull Monster fluttered.

Pete lead a white-glove inspection line. Richard Bissell and John Stanton trailed him—civilian squarejohns in worsted wool suits.

The trainees wore starched fatigues and chrome helmets. Fulo, Paez, Delsol, and Gutiérrez stood off in a squad leader flank.

Boyd watched from the dock. He didn't want rank-and-file recruits to know him.

Pete checked weapons and handed them back. Bissell patted shoulders and smiled. Stanton stifled yawns—he knew it was all PR bullshit.

Lockhart yelled, "Shoulderrr arms! Guide-on front and centerrr!"

Forty-four rifles went up. Chasco marched ten paces forward and about-faced.

Chasco saluted. Chasco snapped his flags out at arm's length.

Lockhart yelled, "At ease!" The men hoisted down one by one for a nifty ripple effect.

Bissell gawked. Stanton applauded.

Boyd was eyeballing Chasco. Stanton built the little shitbird up as Jesus Christ sans mercy.

Chasco ate tarantula meat and drank panther piss. Chasco killed Reds from Rangoon to Rio.

Chasco coughed and spat on the pavement. "It is a pleasure to be here with joo in America. It is an honor to be able to fight the tyrant Fidel Castro, and an honor to introduce to joo Señor Richard Bissell."

Locomotive cheers went up—choo-choo-choo fifty voices strong.

Bissell waved the noise down. "Señor Chasco is right. Fidel Castro is a murderous tyrant who needs to be taken down a peg or two. I'm here to tell you that we're going to do it, most likely in the not-too-distant future."

CHOO-CHOO-CHOO-CHOO-CHOO-CHOO—

Bissell stabbed the air Kennedy-style. "Your morale is high, and that's damn good. There's also some pretty damn high morale inside Cuba, and I would have to say that right now that morale is running about three or four brigade's worth. I'm referring to on-island Cubans just waiting for you to establish a beachhead and show them the way to Fidel Castro's parlor."

CHOO-CHOO-CHOO-CHOO-CHOO—

"You men, and many other men, are going to invade and recapture your homeland. You are going to link with anti-Castro forces living on-island and depose Fidel Castro. We have close to sixteen hundred troops now stationed in Guatemala, Nicaragua and along the Gulf Coast, ready to be launched from coastal installations. You are among those troops. You are a crack unit which will see action. You will be backed by surplus B-26s and escorted to your homeland by a task force of U.S. Navy supply boats. You will succeed. You will spend Christmas with your loved ones in a liberated Cuba."

Pete gave the signal. A forty-four-gun salute shocked Bissell speechless.

Stanton threw a lunch at the Breakers Motel. The guest list was White Men Only: Pete, Bissell, Boyd, Chuck Rogers.

Santo Junior owned the place. Blessington men dined and drank on the cuff. The coffee shop served starchy wop food—strictly shitsville.

They hogged a choice window table. Bissell hogged the conversation—nobody could squeeze a word in. Pete sat down next to Boyd and picked at a plate of linguine.

Chuck handed out beers. Boyd passed Pete a note.

I like Chasco. He's got that "Don't underestimate me because I'm puny" look that I associate with W.J. Littell. Can we send him in to shoot Fidel?

Pete scribbled up his napkin.

Let's have him shoot Fidel & WJL. Jimmy's scared & pissed because his Fund books got clouted & we're the only ones who know who did it. Can't we do something about it?

Boyd wrote *NO* on his menu. Pete laughed out loud.

Bissell took offense. "Did I say something funny, Mr. Bondurant?"

"No, sir. You didn't."

"I didn't think so. I was saying that President Kennedy has been briefed several times, but he still won't commit to an invasion date, which I don't find amusing at all."

Pete poured himself a beer. Stanton said, "Mr. Dulles describes the President as 'enthusiastic, but cautious.' "

Bissell smiled. "Our secret weapon is Mr. Boyd here. He's our Kennedy confidante, and I imagine that if push came to shove, he could reveal his covert Agency standing, and then overtly advocate our invasion plan."

Pete froze the moment: Boyd about to lose it six ways from Sunday. Stanton stepped in. "Mr. Bissell's joking, Kemper."

"I know that. And I know that he understands how complex our alliances have become."

Bissell fingered his napkin. "I do, Mr. Boyd. And I know how generous Mr. Hoffa, Mr. Marcello and a few other Italian gentlemen have been to the Cause, and I know that you possess a certain amount of influence in the Kennedy camp. And as the

President’s chief Cuban-issue liaison, I also know that Fidel Castro and Communism are a good deal worse than the Mafia, although I wouldn’t dream of asking you to intercede on our friends’ behalf, because it might cost you credibility with your sacred Kennedys.”

Stanton dropped his soup spoon. Pete let a big breath out eeeasy. Boyd put out a big shit-eating grin. “I’m glad you feel that way, Mr. Bissell. Because if you did ask me, I’d have to tell you to go fuck yourself.”

60

(Washington, D.C., 3/6/61)

He took three shots a night—no more, no less.

He switched from whisky to straight gin. The burn compensated for the scant volume.

Three shots tweaked his hatreds. Four shots and up cut those hatreds all the way loose.

Three shots said, You project danger. Four shots or more said, You're ugly and you limp.

He always drank facing his hallway mirror. The glass was chipped and cracked—his new apartment was furnished on the cheap.

Littell knocked the shots back, one-two-three. The glow let him spar with himself.

You're two days shy of forty-eight years old. Helen left you. J. Edgar Hoover fucked you—you fucked him and he fucked you back much more efficaciously.

You risked your life for nothing. Robert F. Kennedy shunned you. You went to hell and back for a form-letter rejection.

You tried to contact Bobby in person. Yes-men showed you out. You sent four notes to Bobby. All four went unanswered.

Kemper tried to get you work at the Justice Department. Bobby nixed it—the alleged Hoover hater kowtowed to Hoover. Hoover put the fix in: No law firm or law school will employ you.

Kemper knows you've got the Fund books. His fear defines your bond now.

You went to a Jesuit retreat in Milwaukee. Newspapers lauded your burglary daring: MYSTERY ART THIEF TEARS LAKE GENEVA ESTATE DOWN! You did odd jobs for the monsignor and imposed your own code of silence.

You boiled the booze out. You put on some muscle. You studied cryptography texts. Prayer told you who to hate and who to forgive.

You read a Chicago *Trib* obit: Court Meade died of a massive heart attack. You toured old haunts. The foster homes you grew up in were still churning out Jesuit robots.

You're licensed to practice in D.C. Hoover left you an escape hatch—in his own backyard.

The move east was invigorating. Washington law firms seeking applicants were shocked by your Commie pedigree.

Kemper comes through. Egalitarian Kemper was still friendly with old car-thief confreres. Car thieves were prone to Federal indictments and always in need of cheap representation.

Car thieves brought you occasional work—enough to sustain an apartment and three shots a night.

Kemper called to chat. He never mentioned the Fund books. You can't hate a man so high up on a ledge. You can't hate a man so immune to hatred himself.

He gave you great gifts. They compensate for his betrayals.

Kemper calls his civil rights work "moving." It's that cheap noblesse oblige the Kennedys evince so condescendingly.

You hate the mass seduction that Joe Kennedy financed, Your foster fathers bought you one cheap toy per Christmas. Joe bought his sons the world with cancerous money.

Prayer taught you to hate falsehood. Prayer gave you insight. Prayer was like a choke hold on mendacity.

You see the President's face and see through it. You see Jimmy Hoffa skate on Sun Valley charges—a newsman cites insufficient evidence.

You hold numbers to reverse that injustice. You hold numbers to indict the Kennedy seduction.

You can break the remaining Fund code. You can expose the Robber Baron and his son the Priapic Boy Führer.

Littell got out his cryptography books. Three shots a night taught him this:

You're down, but you're capable of anything.

61

(Washington, D.C., 3/14/61)

Bobby held the floor. Fourteen lawyers pulled chairs up and balanced notebooks and ashtrays on their knees.

The briefing room was drafty. Kemper leaned against the back wall with his topcoat slung over his shoulders.

The AG brayed—there was no need to get close. He had free time—a storm delayed his flight to Alabama.

Bobby said, “You know why I called you in, and you know what your basic job is. I’ve been tied up in red tape since the Inauguration, so I haven’t been able to get to the applicable case files, and I’ve decided to let you do that on your own. You’re the Organized Crime Unit, and you know what your mandate is. And I’ll be damned if I’m going to dawdle any longer.”

The men got out pens and pencils. Bobby straddled a chair in front of them.

“We’ve got lawyers and investigators of our own, and any attorney worth his salt is also a catch-as-catch-can investigator. We’ve got FBI agents we can utilize as needed, if I can convince Mr. Hoover to shift his priorities a bit. He’s still convinced that domestic Communists are more dangerous than organized crime, and I think that making the FBI more cooperative is going to be a major obstacle to overcome."

The men laughed. An ex-McClellan cop said, "We shall overcome."

Bobby loosened his tie. "We shall. And roving counsel Kemper Boyd, who's spying from the peanut gallery, will overcome racial exclusion practices in the South. I won't ask Mr. Boyd to join us, because skulking at the back of the room is very much his modus operandi."

Kemper waved. "I'm a spy."

Bobby waved back. "The President has always contended that."

Kemper laughed. Bobby half-ass liked him now—breaking off with Laura clinched it. Claire and Laura stayed close—he got regular updates from New York.

Bobby said, "Enough bullshit. The McClellan Committee hearings have provided us with a hit list, and at the top we've got Jimmy Hoffa, Sam Giancana, Johnny Rosselli and Carlos Marcello. I want the IRS files on these men pulled, and I want the intelligence files of the Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Cleveland and Tampa PDs combed for mention of them. I also want probable-cause briefs written, so that we can subpoena their financial books and personal records."

A man said, "What about Hoffa specifically? He got hung-juried on Sun Valley, but there's got to be other approaches we can use."

Bobby rolled up his sleeves. "A hung jury first time out means an acquittal next time. I've given up hope of tracing the Spooky Three Million, and I'm starting to think that the so-called 'Real' Pension Fund books are nothing but a pipe dream. I think we need to impanel grand juries and deluge them with Hoffa evidence. And while we're at it, I want to pass a Federal law requiring all municipal PDs to obtain Justice Department writs to implement their wiretaps, so that *we* can have access to every bit of wiretap intelligence seized nationwide."

The men cheered. An old McClellanite threw some mock punches.

Bobby stood up. "I found an old deportation order on Carlos Marcello. He was born in Tunis, North Africa, of Italian parents, but he's got a phony Guatemalan birth certificate. I want to deport him to Guatemala, and I want to do it damn soon."

Kemper broke a little lightweight sweat—

62

(Rural Mexico, 3/22/61)

Poppy fields blitzed the horizon. Stalk bulbs oozing dope covered a valley half the size of Rhode Island.

Prison inmates did the plucking. Mexican cops cracked the whip and did all the conversion work.

Heshie Ryskind led the tour. Pete and Chuck Rogers tagged along and let him play MC.

“This farm has supplied me and Santo for years. They convert ‘Q’ into morphine for the Agency, too, ’cause the Agency’s always backing some right-wing insurgents that get shot at and wounded a lot, and they always need the morph as medication. Most of the zombies they got working here stay past the end of their sentence ’cause all they want to do is suck a pipe and nosh a few tortillas on the side. I wish I had such simple needs. I wish I didn’t have to keep nine fucking doctors on retainer ’cause I’m such a fucking hypochondriac, and I wish I didn’t have the chutzpah—which is the same as ‘audacity’ to you goyim—to try to break the world’s record for getting blow jobs, ’cause I think I’ve reached the point where all that suction is doing my prostate more harm than good. And I’m not the blow-job magnet I used to be. I’ve got to travel with a good cunt man now to see any action at all. Lately, I've had Dick Contino bird-dogging for me. I catch all his lounge gigs, and Dick shoots me all the surplus suction I can handle."

The sun slammed down. They rode out in rickshaws, with junkie inmates at the helm.

Pete said, "We need ten pounds precut for the Cadre. I won't be able to get back here until after the invasion."

Chuck laughed. "If and when your boy Jack approves it."

Pete flicked a bulb—white shit oozed out. "And I want a substantial morphine supply for the medics at Blessington. Let's just figure this is our last visit for a while."

Heshie leaned against his rickshaw. The pilot wore a loincloth and a Dodger baseball cap.

"All this can be arranged. It's a lot simpler than arranging blow jobs for sixty at some farkakte Teamster convention."

Chuck dabbed bulb goo on a shaving cut. "My jaw's going a little numb. It's a nice effect, but I wouldn't ruin my life for it."

Pete laughed. Heshie said, "I'm tired. I'll go back and get your stuff loaded up, then I'm taking a nap."

Chuck hopped in his rickshaw. The pilot looked like fucking Quasimodo.

Pete stood on his tiptoes. The view spread waaay out.

Maybe a thousand stalk rows. Maybe twenty slaves per row. Low worker overhead: cot space, rice and beans came cheap.

Chuck and Heshie took off—dig that crazy rickshaw drag race.

Boyd said Mr. Hoover had a maxim: Anti-Communism breeds strange bedfellows.

They flew from Mexico to Guatemala. The Piper Deuce cruised sluggish—Chucky overstuffed the cargo hold.

With rifles, hate pamphlets, heroin, morphine, tortillas, tequila, Army surplus jump boots, Martin Luther Coon voodoo dolls, back issues of *Hush-Hush*, and five hundred mimeographed copies of a Guy Banister-circulated report culled from the L.A. FBI office, stating that even though Mr. Hoover knew full well that President John F. Kennedy was *not* playing bury-the-brisket with Marilyn Monroe, he kept her under intensive surveillance anyway, and duly noted that during the last six weeks Miss Monroe fucked Louis Prima, two off-duty Marines, Spade Cooley, Franchot Tone, Yves Montand, Stan Kenton, David Seville of David Seville and the Chipmunks, four pizza delivery boys, bantamweight battler Fighting Harada and a disc jockey at an all-spook R&B station.

Chuck called it "essential ordnance."

Pete tried to doze. Air sickness kept him awake. The training camp popped out of a cloud bank, right on schedule.

It loomed biggg. From the air it looked like ten Blessingtons.

Chuck cut his flaps and eased down. Pete puked out his window just shy of the runway.

They taxied in. Pete gargled tequila for a breath rinse. Cuban trainees hit the hold and off-loaded the rifles.

A case officer trotted up with supply forms. Pete got out and itemized them: guns, R&R booze, *Hush-Hush* anti-Beard propaganda.

The guy said, "You can eat now, or wait for Mr. Boyd and Mr. Stanton."

"Let me walk around a little. I've never seen the place."

Chuck pissed on the runway. Pete said, "Any word on a go date?"

The guy shook his head. "Kennedy's waffling. Mr. Bissell's starting to think we'll be lucky to go before summer."

"Jack will come through. He'll see that it's too sweet a deal to pass up."

Pete meandered. The camp was Disneyland for killers.

Six hundred Cubans. Fifty white men running herd. Twelve barracks, a drill field, a rifle range, a pistol range, a landing strip, a mess hall, an infiltration course and a chemical-warfare simulation tunnel.

Three launch inlets gouged out of the Gulf a mile south. Four dozen amphibious crawlers rigged with .50-caliber machine guns.

An ammo dump. A field hospital. A Catholic chapel with a bilingual chaplain.

Pete meandered. Old Blessington grads waved hello. Case officers showed him some good shit.

Dig Néstor Chasco—staging mock-assassination maneuvers.

Dig that anti-Red indoctrination workshop.

Dig the verbal abuse drills—calculated to increase troop subservience.

Dig the corpsman's amphetamine stash—pre-packaged pre-invasion courage.

Dig the action in that barbed-wire enclosure—peons flying on a drug called LSD.

Some of them screamed. Some wept. Some grinned like LSD was a blast. A case officer said John Stanton hatched the idea—let's flood Cuba with this shit before we invade.

Langley co-signed the brainstorm. Langley embellished it: Let's induce mass hallucinations and stage the Second Coming of Christ!!!!!

Langley found some suicidal actors. Langley dolled them up to look like J.C. Langley had them set to pre-invade Cuba, concurrent with the dope saturation.

Pete howled. The case officer said, "It's not funny." A drug-zorched peon whipped out his wang and jacked off.

Pete meandered. Everything sparkled and gleamed.

Dig the bayonet drills. Dig the spit-shined jeeps. Dig that rummy-looking priest dispensing outdoor Holy Communion.

Loudspeakers announced chow call. It was 5:00 and nowhere near dark—military types dined early.

Pete walked over to the lounge hut. A pool table and wet bar ate up two-thirds of the floor space.

Boyd and Stanton walked in. A large fucker blocked the doorway—resplendent in French paratrooper khakis.

Kemper said, "*Entrez, Laurent.*"

He was jug-eared and plain huge. He had that frog imperialist swagger down pat.

Pete bowed. "*Salut, capitaine.*"

Boyd smiled. "Laurent Guéry, Pete Bondurant."

Froggy clicked his heels. "*Monsieur Bondurant. C'est un grand plaisir de faire votre connaissance. On dit que vous êtes un grand patriote.*"

Pete tossed out some Québecois. "*Tout le plaisir est à moi, capitaine. Mais je suis beaucoup plus profiteur que patriote.*"

Froggy laughed. Stanton said, "Translate for me, Kemper. I'm starting to feel like a rube."

"You're not missing much."

"You mean it's just Pete trying to be civilized with the only other six-foot-six Frenchman on earth?"

Froggy shrugged—*Quoi? Quoi? Quoi?*

Pete winked. "*Vous êtes quoi done, capitaine? Etes-vous un* 'right-wing crackpot'? Etes-vous un 'mercenary on the Cuban gravy train'?"

Froggy shrugged—*Quoi? Quoi? Quoi?*

Boyd steered Pete out to the porch. Spies double-timed through a chow line across from the drill field.

"Be nice, Pete. He's Agency."

"In what fucking capacity?"

"He shoots people."

"Then tell him to clip Fidel and learn English. Tell him to do something impressive, or he's just another frog geek to me."

Boyd laughed. "He killed a man named Lumumba in the Congo last month."

"So what?"

"He's killed quite a few uppity Algerians."

Pete lit a cigarette. "So tell Jack to send him down to Havana. And send Néstor down with him. And tell Jack that he owes me one for the Nixon-Hughes thing, and as far as I'm concerned, history's not moving fast enough. Tell him to give us a go date, or I'll boat on down to Cuba and whack Fidel myself."

Boyd said, "Be patient. Jack's still getting his sea legs, and invading a Communist-held country is a big commitment. Dulles and Bissell are keeping after him, and I'm convinced he'll say yes before too long."

Pete kicked a tin can off the porch. Boyd pulled his piece and unloaded it. The can danced all the way across the drill field.

The chow-line crew applauded. Big-bore reverb had a few guys clutching their ears.

Pete kicked at the shell casings. "*You* talk to Jack. Tell him the invasion's good for business."

Boyd twirled his gun on one finger. "I can't openly proselytize for the invasion without blowing my Agency cover, and I'm damn lucky to have FBI cover to be in Florida in the first place."

"That civil rights gig must be sweet. You just go through the motions and fly to Miami when the niggers start getting on your nerves."

"It's not like that."

"No?"

"No. I like the Negro people I work with just as much as you like our Cubans, and offhand I'd say that their grievances are considerably more justified."

Pete tossed his cigarette. "Say what you like. And *I'll* say this again. You cut people too much slack.”

“You mean I don’t let people get to me.”

“That’s not what I mean. What I mean is you accept too much weak shit in people, and for my money it’s some condescending rich-kid quality you picked up from the Kennedys.”

Boyd popped in a fresh clip and slid a round in the chamber. “I’ll grant Jack that quality, but not Bobby. Bobby’s a true judger and hater.”

“He hates some pretty tight friends of ours.”

“He does. And he’s starting to hate Carlos Marcello more than I’d like him to”

“Did you tell Carlos that?”

“Not yet. But if things escalate a bit more, I might ask you to help him out of a scrape.”

Pete cracked a few knuckles. “And I’ll say yes, no questions asked. Now, *you* say yes to something.”

Boyd aimed at a mound of dirt twenty yards off. “No, you cannot kill Ward Littell.”

“Why?”

“He’s got the books fail-safed.”

“So I torture him for the pertinent information, then kill him.”

“It won’t work.”

“Why?”

Boyd shot a rattlesnake headless.

“I said ‘Why?,’ Kemper.”

“Because he’d die just to prove he could do it.”

63

(Washington, D.C., 3/26/61)

His cards read:

Ward J. Littell
Counselor-At-Law
Federal Bar Licensed
OL6-4809

No address—he didn't want clients to know that he worked out of his apartment. No glossy stock or embossed letters—he couldn't really afford them.

Littell cruised the third-floor hallway. Indicted felons took the cards and looked at him like he was crazy.

Shyster. Ambulance chaser. Middle-aged lawyer on the skids.

The Federal courthouse did a brisk business. Six divisions and full arraignment docketing—all unaccompanied lowlifes qualified as potential clients.

Littell passed out cards. A man flicked a cigarette butt at him.

Kemper Boyd walked up. Beautiful Kemper—so fit and groomed that he sparkled.

"Can I buy you a drink?"

"I don't drink like I used to."

"Lunch then?"

"Sure."

• • •

The Hay-Adams dining room faced the White House. Kemper kept glancing out the window.

"… And my work entails taking depositions and filing them in Federal District Court. We're trying to insure that Negroes previously barred from voting aren't excluded on the basis of illegally levied poll taxes or constrained by literacy tests that the local registrars want them to fail."

Littell smiled. "And I'm sure the Kennedys will rig binding legal clauses to insure that every Negro in Alabama registers as a Democrat. You have to consider things like that in the early stages of building a dynasty."

Kemper laughed. "The President's civil rights policy isn't that cynically conceived."

"Is your application of it?"

"Hardly. I've always considered suppression ill-advised and futile."

"And you like the people?"

"Yes, I do."

"Your southern accent's back in force."

"It disarms the people I deal with. They appreciate it that a southern white man's on their side. You're grinning,. Ward. What is it?"

Littell sipped coffee. "It occurred to me that Alabama is rather close to Florida."

"You were always quick."

"Does the attorney general know that you're moonlighting?"

"No. But I do have a certain sanction on my Florida visits."

"Let me guess. Mr. Hoover's supplying you with cover, and as much as he professes to hate him, Bobby would never do *anything* to upset Mr. Hoover."

Kemper waved a waiter off. "Your hatred's showing, Ward."

"I don't hate Mr. Hoover. You can't hate someone who runs so true to form."

"But Bobby—"

Littell whispered. “You know what I risked for him. And you know what I got back. And what I can’t abide is that the Kennedys pretend to be better than that.”

Kemper said, “You’ve got the books.” He shot his cuffs and displayed a solid gold Rolex.

Littell pointed to the White House. “Yes, I do. And they’re booby-trapped a dozen different ways. I filed instruction contingency briefs with a dozen different lawyers when I was drunk, and even I can’t remember them all.”

Kemper folded his hands. “With depositions on my Kennedy incursion to go to the Justice Department in the event of your death or prolonged disappearance?”

“No. With depositions on your incursion and depositions on astronomically lucrative Joseph P. Kennedy Mob-linked financial malfeasance to go to municipal PD gangster squads nationwide, and every Republican member of the House and the Senate.”

Kemper said, “Bravo.”

Littell said, “Thank you.”

A waiter placed a phone on their table. Kemper placed a folder next to it.

“Are you broke, Ward?”

“Almost.”

“You haven’t expressed a word of rancor regarding my recent behavior.”

“It wouldn’t do any good.”

“How do you currently feel about organized crime?”

“My current feelings are relatively charitable.”

Kemper tapped the folder. “That’s a pilfered INS file. And you’re the best deportation-writ lawyer on God’s green earth.”

Littell’s shirt cuffs were soiled and frayed. Kemper wore solid gold cufflinks.

“Ten thousand dollars to start, Ward. I’m certain I can get it for you.”

“For *doing what?* For releasing the books to you?”

“Forget the books. All I ask is that you don’t release them to anyone else.”

“Kemper, what are you talk—?”

“Your client will be Carlos Marcello. And it’s Bobby Kennedy who wants to deport him.”

The phone rang. Littell dropped his coffee cup.

Kemper said, “That’s Carlos. Be obsequious, Ward. He’ll expect a certain amount of fawning.”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/2/61. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript: “TRANSCRIBED AT THE DIRECTOR’S REQUEST”/ “DIRECTOR’S EYES ONLY.” Speaking: Director J. Edgar Hoover, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.

RFK: It’s Bob Kennedy, Mr. Hoover. I was hoping I could have a few minutes of your time.

JEH: Certainly.

RFK: There were a few matters of protocol I wanted to discuss.

JEH: Yes.

RFK: Communications, to begin with. I sent you a directive requesting carbons of all summary reports submitted by your Top Hoodlum Program squads. That directive was dated February 17th. It’s now the 2nd of April, and I’ve yet to see a single report.

JEH: These directives take time to implement.

RFK: Six weeks seems like ample time to me.

JEH: You perceive an undue delay. I do not.

RFK: Will you expedite the implementation of that directive?

JEH: Certainly. Will you refresh my memory as to why you issued it?

RFK: I want to assess every scrap of anti-Mob intelligence the Bureau acquires and share it where needed with the various regional grand juries that I hope to impanel.

JEH: You may be acting injudiciously. Leaking information that could only have originated from THP sources might jeopardize THP informants and electronic surveillance placements.

RFK: All such information will be evaluated from a security standpoint.

JEH: That function should not be trusted to non-FBI personnel.

RFK: I adamantly disagree. You’re going to have to share your information, Mr. Hoover. The simple cultivation of intelligence will not bring Organized Crime tb its knees.

JEH: The Top Hoodlum Program mandate does not provide for information-sharing to expedite grand jury indictments.

RFK: Then we’re going to have to revise it.

JEH: I would consider that a rash and heedless act.

RFK: Consider it what you like, and consider it done. Consider the Top Hoodlum Program mandate superseded by my direct order.

JEH: May I remind you of this simple fact: you cannot prosecute the Mafia and win.

RFK: May I remind you that for many years you denied that the Mafia existed. May I remind you that the FBI is but one cog in the overall wheel of the Justice Department. May I remind you that the FBI does not dictate Justice Department policy. May I remind you that the President and I consider 99% of the left-wing groups that the FBI routinely monitors to be harmless if not outright moribund, and laughably inoffensive when compared to Organized Crime.

JEH: May I state that I consider that burst of invective to be ill-conceived and fatuous in its historical perspective?

RFK: You may.

JEH: Was there anything of a similar or less offensive nature that you wish to add?

RFK: Yes. You should know that I intend to initiate wiretap accountability legislation. I want the Justice Department to be informed of every single instance of wiretapping undertaken by municipal police departments nationwide.

JEH: Many would consider that undue Federal meddling and a flagrant abuse of States' Rights.

RFK: The concept of States' Rights has been a smokescreen to obscure everything from de facto segregation to outmoded abortion statutes.

JEH: I disagree.

RFK: Duly noted. And I would like you to duly note that from this day on you are to inform me of every electronic surveillance operation that the FBI engages in.

JEH: Yes.

RFK: Duly noted?

JEH: Yes.

RFK: I want you to personally call the New Orleans SAC and have him assign four agents to arrest Carlos Marcello. I want this done within seventy-two hours. Tell the SAC that I'm having Marcello deported to Guatemala. Tell him that the Border Patrol will be contacting him to iron out details.

JEH: Yes.

RFK: Duly noted?

JEH: Yes.

RFK: Good day, Mr. Hoover.

JEH: Good day.

64

(New Orleans, 4/4/61)

He was too late—by seconds.

Four men grappled Carlos Marcello into a Fed sled. Right outside his house—with Mrs. Carlos on the porch, throwing a fit.

Pete pulled up across the street and watched it happen. His rescue mission clocked in half a minute tardy.

Marcello was dressed in BVDs and beach flip-flops. Marcello looked like this low-rent Il Duce on the rag.

Boyd fucked up.

He said, Bobby wants Carlos deported. He said, You and Chuck get to New Orleans and snatch him first. He said, Don't call and warn him—just get there.

Boyd said bureaucratic jive would give them time. Boyd mis-fucking calculated.

The Feds took off. Frau Carlos stood on the porch, wringing her hands grieving-wife-style.

Pete tailed the Fed car. Early a.m. traffic got between them. He eye-balled the Fed's antenna and rode a purple Lincoln's back bumper.

Chuck was back at Moisant Airport, gassing up the Piper. The

Feds were heading that way.

They'd fly Carlos out commercial or dump him on the Border Patrol. He'd be Guatemala-bound—and Guatemala loved the CIA.

The Fed car took surface streets east. Pete saw a bridge up ahead—toll booths and two eastbound lanes across the river.

Both lanes were hemmed in by guardrails. Narrow pedestrian walkways ran flush along the edge of the bridge.

Cars were stacked up in front of the booths—at least twenty per lane.

Pete hopped lanes and swerved in front of the Fed car. He spotted a squeeze space between the left-hand booth and the guardrail.

He accelerated in. A rail housing snapped off his outside mirror.

Horns blared. His left-side hubcaps went spinning. A toll taker looked over and doused an old lady with coffee.

Pete SQUEEZED past the booths and hit the bridge going forty. The Fed sled was stalled, way way back.

He made it to Moisant fast. His rent-a-car was dinged, chipped and paint-stripped.

He ditched it in an underground lot. He greased a skycap for airport information.

Commercial flights to Guatemala? No, sir, none today. The Border Patrol office? Next to the Trans-Texas counter.

Pete cruised by and loitered behind a newspaper. The office door opened and closed.

Men carried shackles in. Men carried flight logs out. Men stood outside the door and kibitzed.

A guy said, "I heard they popped him in his skivvies."

A guy said, "The pilot really hates wops."

A guy said, "They're flying out at 8:30."

Pete ran to the private-plane hangar. Chucky was perched on the snout of his Piper, reading a hate mag.

Pete caught his breath. "They've got Carlos. We've got to get down to Guatemala City ahead of them and see what we can work out."

Chuck said, "That's a goddamned foreign country. We're only supposed to bring the man back to Blessington. We've barely got the gas to—"

“Let’s go. We’ll patch some calls in and work something out.”

Chuck got clearance to take off and land. Pete called Guy Banister and explained the situation.

Guy said he’d call John Stanton and try to rig a plan. He had short wave gear out at Lake Pontchartrain and could radio in to Chuck’s frequency.

They took off at 8:16. Chuck put on his headphones and cribbed flight calls.

The Border Patrol plane departed late. Their Guatemala City ETA was forty-six minutes behind them.

Chuck flew medium-low and kept his headset on. Pete skimmed hate pamphlets out of sheer boredom.

The titles were a howl. The ultimate: “KKK: Kommunist Krucifixion Krusade!”

He found a skin mag/hate mag combo under his seat. Dig that zaftig blonde with the swastika earrings.

Big Pete wants a woman. Extortion experience preferred, but not mandatory.

Dashboard lights flashed. Chuck bootjacked a plane-to-base message and transcribed it in his log.

> The Border Patrol guys are goofing on Carlos. They radio’d their HQ that they’ve got no lavatory on board & Carlos refuses to piss in a tin can. (They think he’s got a little one.)

Pete laughed. Pete pissed in a cup and doused the Gulf from 6,000 feet.

Time dragged. Stomach flutters came and went. Pete chased a Dramamine with warm beer.

Lights flashed. Chuck rogered a Pontchartrain patch-in and transcribed the message.

> Guy got through to JS. JS pulled strings & got thru to Guat. contacts. We’re cleared to land with no passport check & if we can get ahold of CM its set up to register him at G.C. Hilton under name Jose Garcia. JS says KB says to have CM call lawyer in Washington D.C. at OL6-4809 tonight.

Pete pocketed the message. The Dramamine kicked in to his system: good night, sweet prince.

Leg cramps woke him up. Jungle terrain and a big black runway hovered.

Chuck eased the plane down and cut the engines. Some spies rolled out a literal red carpet.

It was a bit frayed, but nice.

The beaners looked like right-wing toady types. The Agency saved Guatemala's ass once—some staged coup expunged a shitload of Reds.

Pete hopped out and stamped his legs awake. Chuck and the spies talked rapid-fire Spanish.

They were back in Guatemala—too fucking soon.

The talk escalated. Pete felt his ears pop-pop-pop. They had forty-six minutes to rig *something.*

Pete walked over to the Customs shack. He got this little Technicolor brain blip: Carlos Marcello needs to urinate.

The bathroom adjoined the passport counter. Pete checked it out.

It ran about 8 feet by 8 feet square. A flimsy screen covered the back window. The view featured more runways and a line of rattletrap bi-planes.

Carlos was stocky. Chuck was rail thin. He was all-around-huge himself.

Chuck walked in and unzipped by the urinal. "We got a big foul-up. I don't know if it's good news or bad."

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying the Border Patrol's set to land in seventeen minutes. They've got to refuel here and fly to another airport sixty miles away. *That's* where Customs is set to pick up Carlos. That ETA I got is for the other goddamned air—"

"How much money have we got in the plane?"

"Sixteen thousand. Santo said to drop it off with Banister."

Pete shook his head. "We grease the Customs guys with it. We fucking inundate them, so they'll take the risk. All we need is a car and a driver outside that window, and you to push Carlos through."

Chuck said, "I get it."

Pete said, "If he doesn't have to piss, we're fucked."

The spies dug the plan. Chuck greased them at the rate of two grand per man. They said they'd keep the Border Patrol guys busy while Carlos Marcello took the world's longest whiz.

Pete loosened the window screen. Chuck stashed the Piper two hangars over.

The spies supplied a '49 Merc getaway car. The spies supplied a driver—a musclebound fag named Luis.

Pete backed the Merc up to the window. Chuck crouched on the toilet seat with last week's *Hush-Hush*.

The Border Patrol plane landed. A crew hustled out refueling pumps. Pete crouched behind the Customs shack and watched.

The spies zipped out the red carpet. A little geek brushed it off with a whisk broom.

Two Border Patrol clowns deplaned. The pilot said, "Let him go. Where's he gonna run to?"

Carlos tumbled out of the plane. Carlos ran to the shack, knock-kneed in tight BVDs.

Luis idled the engine. Pete heard the bathroom door slam.

Carlos yelled, "ROGERS, WHAT THE FUCK—?"

The window screen popped out. Carlos Marcello squeezed through—and snagged himself bare-assed in the process.

The run to the Hilton took an hour. Marcello blasted Bobby Kennedy nonstop.

In English. In straight Italian. In Sicilian dialect. In New Orleans Cajun French patois—not bad for a wop.

Luis detoured by a men's shop. Chuck took down Marcello's sizes and bought him some threads.

Carlos dressed in the car. Little window-squeeze abrasions bloodied up his shirt.

The hotel manager met them at the freight entrance. They freight-lifted up to the penthouse on the QT.

The manager unlocked the door. One glance said Stanton *delivered*.

The pad featured three bedrooms, three bathrooms and a rec room lined with slot machines. The living room was Kemper Boyd fantasy size.

The bar was fully stocked. A guinea cold-cut buffet was laid out. The envelope by the cheese tray contained twenty grand and a note.

Pete & Chuck,

I'm betting you were able to get ahold of Mr. Marcello. Take good care of him. He's a valuable friend to the Cause.

JS

Marcello grabbed the money. The manager genuflected. Pete showed him the door and slipped him a C-note.

Marcello snarfed salami and breadsticks. Chuck built a tall Bloody Mary.

Pete paced off the suite. Forty-two yards lengthwise—whoa!

Chuck curled up with a hate mag. Marcello said, "I really had to piss. When you hold a piss that long it pisses you off."

Pete snagged a beer and some crackers. "Stanton's got you a lawyer in D.C. You're supposed to call him."

"I've talked to him already. I've got the best Jew lawyers money can buy, and now I've got him."

"You should call him now and get it over with."

"You call him. And stay on the line in case I need you to translate. Lawyers talk this language I don't always get the first time around."

Pete grabbed the coffee table extension. The hotel operator placed his call.

Marcello picked up the bar phone. The long-distance rings came through faint.

A man said, "Hello?"

Marcello said, "Who's this? Are you that guy I talked to at the Hay-Adams?"

"Yes, this is Ward Littell. Is this Mr. Marcello?"

Pete almost SHIT—

Carlos slumped into a chair. "This is him, calling from Guatemala City, Guatemala, where he does not want to be. Now, if you want to get my attention, say something bad about the man who put me here."

Pete clenched up wicked bad. He covered his mouthpiece so they wouldn't hear him hyperventilate.

Littell said, "I hate that man. He hurt me once, and there is very little that I wouldn't do to cause him discomfort."

Carlos tee-hee-heed—weird for a bass-baritone. "You got my attention. Now, stow that ass-kiss routine you dropped on me before, and say something to convince me you're good at what you do.”

Littell cleared his throat. “I specialize in deportation writ work. I was an FBI agent for close to twenty years. I’m a good friend of Kemper Boyd, and although I distrust his admiration for the Kennedys, I’m convinced that his devotion to the Cuban Cause supersedes it. He wants to see you safely and legally reunited with your loved ones, and I’m here to see that it happens.”

Pete felt queasy. BOYD, YOU FUCK—

Marcello snapped breadsticks. “Kemper said you were ten grand’s worth of good. Now, if you deliver like you talk, ten grand’s just the start of you and me.”

Littell came on servile. “It’s an honor to work for you. And Kemper apologizes for your inconvenience. He was tipped off on the raid at the last second, and he didn’t think they could pull it off as fast as they did.”

Marcello scratched his neck with a breadstick. “Kemper always gets the job done. I’ve got no complaints against him that can’t wait until the next time I see that too-handsome face of his face-to-face. And the Kennedys keestered 49.8% of the American voters, including some good friends of mine, so I don’t begrudge him that admiration if it don’t fuck with my life and limb.”

Littell said, “He’ll be pleased to hear that. And you should know that I’m writing up a temporary reinstatement brief that will be reviewed by a three-judge Federal panel. I’ll be calling your attorney in New York, and we’ll begin devising a long-range legal strategy.”

Marcello kicked off his shoes. “Do it. Call my wife and tell her I’m okay, and do whatever you need to do to get me the fuck out of here.”

“I will. And I’ll be bringing some paperwork down for you to sign. You can expect to see me within seventy-two hours.”

Marcello said, “I want to go home.”

Pete hung up. Steam hissed out of his ears like he was Donald Fucking Duck.

They killed time. The jumbo pad let them kill it separately.

Chucky watched spic TV. King Carlos buzzed his serfs long-distance. Pete fantasized ninety-nine ways to murder Ward Littell.

John Stanton called in. Pete regaled him with the toilet-snatch story. Stanton said the Agency would cover their bribe tab.

Pete said, Boyd fixed Carlos up with a lawyer. Stanton said, I heard he's quite good. Pete almost said, Now I can't kill him.

BOYD, YOU FUCK.

Stanton sard the fix was in. Ten grand would buy Carlos a temporary visa. The Guatemalan foreign minister was set to publicly state:

Mr. Marcello *was* born in Guatemala. His birth certificate is legitimate. Attorney General Kennedy is wrong. Mr. Marcello's origins are in no way ambiguous.

Mr. Marcello split to America—*legally*. Sadly, we have no records to corroborate this. The burden of proof now falls upon Mr. Kennedy.

Stanton said the minister hates Jack the K.

Stanton said Jack fucked his wife and both his daughters.

Pete said, Jack fucked my old girlfriend. Stanton said, Wow—and you *still* helped elect him!

Stanton said, Have Chuck grease the minister. And by the way, Jack's still dicking around on a go-date.

Pete hung up and looked out the window. Guatemala City by twilight—strictly the rat's ass.

They all dozed off early. Pete woke up early—a nightmare had him balled up under his sheets, gasping for breath.

Chuck was out on his bribe run. Carlos was on his second cigar.

Pete opened the living-room curtains. He saw a big hubbub down at ground level.

He saw a string of trucks at the curb. He saw men with cameras. He saw cables stretching into the lobby.

He saw people gesturing up.

He saw a big movie camera pointing straight up at them.

Pete said, "We're blown."

Carlos dropped his cigar in his hash browns and ran to the window.

Pete said, "The Agency's got a camp an hour from here. If we can find Chuck and fly out, we'll make it."

Carlos looked down. Carlos saw the ruckus. Carlos pushed his breakfast cart through the window and watched it bullseye down eighteen stories.

65

(Rural Guatemala, 4/8/61)

Heat shimmied off the runway. Blast-oven heat—Kemper should have warned him to dress light.

Kemper warned him that Bondurant would be there. He hustled Marcello out of Guatemala City three days ago and arranged for the CIA to play innkeeper.

Kemper added a postscript: Pete knows you've got the Fund books.

Littell stepped away from the plane. He felt woozy. His connecting flight from Houston was a World War II transport.

Propeller thwack boosted the heat. The campsite was large and dusty—odd buildings plunked down in a red clay jungle clearing.

A jeep skidded up. The driver saluted.

"Mr. Littell?"

"Yes."

"I'll drive you over, sir. Your friends are waiting for you."

Littell got in. The rearview mirror caught his bold new face.

He had three shots back in Houston. *Daytime* shots to help him rise to this one-time occasion.

The driver peeled out. Troops marched by in strict formation;

cadence counts overlapped.

They pulled into a barrack's quadrangle. The driver stopped in front of a small Quonset hut. Littell grabbed his suitcase and walked in ramrod-straight.

The room was air-conditioned. Bondurant and Carlos Marcello stood by a pool table.

Pete winked. Littell winked back. His whole face contorted.

Pete cracked his knuckles—his old intimidation trademark. Marcello said, "What are you, faggots, winking at each other?"

Littell put his suitcase down. The snaps creaked. His surprise had the damn thing bulging.

"How are you, Mr. Marcello?"

"I'm losing money. Every day Pete and my Agency friends treat me better, so every day I end up pledging more money to the Cause. I figure the nut on this hotel's running me twenty-five grand a day."

Pete chalked up a pool cue. Marcello jammed his hands in his pockets.

Kemper warned him: the man does not shake hands.

"I talked to your attorneys in New York a few hours ago. They want to know if you need anything."

Marcello smiled. "I need to kiss my wife on the cheek and fuck my girlfriend. I need to eat some duck Rochambeau at Galatoire's, and I cannot accomplish any of that here."

Bondurant racked up the table. Littell swung his suitcase up and blocked it off lengthwise.

Marcello chuckled. "I'm starting to detect old grief here."

Pete lit a cigarette. Littell caught the exhale full-on.

"I've got a good deal of paperwork for you to review, Mr. Marcello. We'll need to spend some time together and devise a story that details your immigration history, so that Mr. Wasserman can use it when he files his injunction to get your deportation order rescinded. Some very influential people want to see you repatriated, and I'll be working with them as well. I realize that all this unexpected travel must be exhausting, so Kemper Boyd and I are going to arrange for Chuck Rogers to fly you back to Louisiana in a few days and hide you out."

Marcello did a quick little shuffle. The man was deft and fast on his feet.

Pete said, "What happened to your face, Ward?"

Littell opened the suitcase. Pete picked up the 8-ball and cracked it in half barehanded.

Wood chunks snapped and popped. Marcello said, “I’m not sure I like where this is going.”

Littell pulled out the Fund books. A quick prayer tamped down his nerves.

“I’m sure you both know that Jules Schiffrin’s estate in Lake Geneva was burglarized last November. Some paintings were stolen, along with some ledgers rumored to contain Teamster Pension Fund notations. The thief was an informant for a Chicago-based Top Hoodlum Program agent named Court Meade, and he gave the books to Meade when he realized that the paintings were too well-known and recognizable to sell. Meade died of a heart attack in January, and he willed the books to me. He told me he never showed them to anyone else, and in my opinion he was waiting to sell them to somebody in the Giancana organization. There’s a few pages that have been torn out, but aside from that I think they’re intact. I brought them to you because I know how close you are to Mr. Hoffa and the Teamsters.”

Marcello went slack-jawed. Pete snapped a pool cue in half.

He tore out fourteen pages back in Houston. He had all the Kennedy entries safely stashed.

Marcello offered his hand. Littell kissed a big diamond ring papal-style.

66

(Anniston, 4/11/61)

Voting rolls and poll tax reports. Literacy test results and witness statements.

Four corkboard-mounted walls dripping with paper—systematic suppression in typescript black-on-white.

His room was small and drab. The Wigwam Motel was not quite the St. Regis.

Kemper worked up a voting rights obstruction brief. One literacy test and one witness deposition formed his evidentiary basis.

Delmar Herbert Bowen was a male Negro, born 6/14/19 in Anniston, Alabama. He was literate, and a self-described "big reader."

On 6/15/40, Mr. Bowen tried to register to vote. The registrar said, Boy, can you read and write?

Mr. Bowen proved that he could. The registrar asked exclusionary questions, pertaining to advanced calculus.

Mr. Bowen failed to answer them. Mr. Bowen was denied the right to vote.

He subpoenaed Mr. Bowen's literacy test. He determined that the Anniston registrar fabricated the results.

The man said that Mr. Bowen could not spell “dog” and “cat.” Mr. Bowen did not know that coitus precipitates childbirth.

Kemper clipped pages. The work bored him. The Kennedy civil rights mandate was not bold enough for his taste.

His mandate was gunboat diplomacy.

He grabbed a sandwich at a lunch counter yesterday. In the colored section—for the pure hell of it.

A cracker called him a “nigger lover.” He judo-chopped him into a bowl of grits.

Shots zinged his door last night. A colored man told him the Klan torched a cross down the block.

Kemper finished the Bowen brief. He did it catch-up fast—he had to meet John Stanton in Miami in three hours.

Phone calls blitzed his morning and put him off-schedule. Bobby called for a deposition update; Littell called to drop his latest A-bomb.

Ward delivered the Fund books to Carlos Marcello. Pete Bondurant observed the transaction. Marcello seemed to buy Ward’s convoluted cover story.

Ward said, “I made copies, Kemper. And the depositions on your incursion and Joe Kennedy’s malfeasance remain fail-safed. And I’d appreciate it if you advised Le Grand Pierre not to kill me.”

He called Pete immediately. He said, “Don’t kill Littell or tell Carlos his story is bullshit.” Pete said, “Credit me with some brains. I’ve been playing this game as long as you.”

Littell finessed them. It was no severe loss—the books were always a moneymaking longshot.

Kemper oiled his .45. Bobby knew he carried it—and laughed it off as pretentious.

He wore it to the Inaugural. He found Bobby on the parade route and told him he cut Laura off clean.

He found Jack at a White House reception. He called him “Mr. President” for the first time. Jack’s first presidential decree: “Find me some girls for later tonight.”

Kemper rustled up two Georgetown coeds. President Jack told him to stash the girls away for late quickies.

Kemper stashed them in White House guest rooms. Jack caught him yawning and splashing water on his face.

It was 3:00 a.m., with Inaugural galas set to run past dawn.

Jack suggested a pick-me-up. They walked into the Oval Office and saw a doctor preparing vials and hypodermics.

The President rolled up one sleeve. The doctor injected him. John F. Kennedy looked positively orgasmic.

Kemper rolled up one sleeve. The doctor injected him. A rocket pay-load hit his system.

The ride lasted twenty-four hours. The time and place cohered around it.

Jack's ascent became his. That simple truth felt spellbindingly articulate. The time and place were beholden to one Kemper Cathcart Boyd. In that sense, he and Jack were indistinguishable.

He picked up one of Jack's old flames and made love to her at the Willard. He described the Moment to senators and cab drivers. Judy Garland showed him how to dance the Twist.

The ride sputtered out and left him wanting more. He knew that more would only vulgarize the Moment.

The phone rang. Kemper cinched his overnight bag and picked up.

"This is Boyd."

"It's Bob, Kemper. I've got the President here with me."

"Does he want me to repeat that update I gave you?"

"No. We need you to help us sort out a communications glitch."

"Pertaining to?"

"Cuba. I realize that you're only informally acquainted with some recent developments, but I still think you're the best man for this."

"For what? What are we talking about?"

Bobby came off exasperated. "The projected exile invasion, which you may or may not have heard about. Richard Bissell just dropped by my office and said the CIA's chomping at the bit, and their Cubans are just a bit beyond restless. They've got the key landing site picked out. It's some place called Playa Girón, or the Bay of Pigs."

It was NEW news. Stanton never told him that Langley picked a site.

Kemper faked bewilderment. "I don't see how I can help you. You know I don't know anybody in the CIA."

Jack came on the line. "Bobby didn't know the thing was this far advanced, Kemper. Allen Dulles briefed us on it before I took office, but we haven't discussed it since then. My advisors are split down the middle on the damn thing."

Kemper slipped on his holster. Bobby said, "What we need is an independent assessment of the exiles' readiness."

Kemper laughed. "Because if the invasion fails and it becomes known that you backed the so-called 'rebels,' you'll be fucked in the court of world opinion."

Bobby said, "Vividly put."

Jack said, "And to the point. And I should have taken Bobby into my confidence on this a few weeks ago, but he's been so goddamned busy chasing gangsters. Kemper …"

"Yes, Mr. President."

"I've been waffling on a date, and Bissell's been pressing me. I know you've been doing that anti-Castro work for Mr. Hoover, so I know you're at least somewhat …"

"I am somewhat conversant on Cuba, at least from a pro-Castro-group standpoint."

Bobby cracked the whip. "Cuba's always been a bit of a fixation for you, so go to Florida and make something positive out of it. Visit the CIA training camps, and take a swing through Miami. Call back and tell us if you think the operation has a chance to succeed, and do it damn fast."

Kemper said, "I'll leave now. I'll report back inside forty-eight hours."

John almost died laughing. Kemper almost called a cardiologist.

They sat on Stanton's private terrace. Langley let him upgrade to the Fontainebleau—hotel-suite living was contagious.

A breeze blew up Collins Avenue. Kemper's throat hurt—he repeated the phone talk replete with Jack's Boston bray.

"John …"

Stanton caught his breath. "I'm sorry, but I never thought presidential indecisiveness could be so goddamn funny."

"What do you think I should tell him?"

"How about, 'The invasion will guarantee your re-election.' "

Kemper laughed. "I've got some time to kill in Miami. Any suggestions?"

"Yes, two."

"Tell me, then. And tell me why you wanted to see me when you knew I was swamped in Alabama."

Stanton poured a short scotch-and-water. “That civil rights work must be vexing.”

“Not really.”

“I think the Negro vote is a mixed blessing. Aren’t they easily led?”

“I’d call them slightly less malleable than our Cubans. And considerably less criminally inclined.”

Stanton smiled. “Stop it. Don’t make me start laughing again.”

Kemper put his feet up on the railing. “I think you could use a few laughs. Langley’s running you ragged, and you’re drinking at 1:00 p.m.”

Stanton nodded. “This is true. Everybody from Mr. Dulles on down would like the invasion to go off some time in the next five minutes, and I’m no exception. And to answer your initial question, I want you to spend the next forty-eight hours devising realistic-sounding intelligence on troop readiness to submit to the President, and I want you to prepatrol our Cadre territory with Fulo and Nestor Chasco. Miami’s our best source of street-level intelligence, and I want you to assess just how far and how accurately rumors pertaining to the invasion have spread within the Cuban community.”

Kemper mixed a gin and tonic. “I’ll get on it right away. Was there anything else?”

“Yes. The Agency wants to set up a Cuban ‘government in exile,’ to be housed at Blessington during the actual invasion. It’s mostly cosmetic, but we’ve got to have at least a facsimile of a consensus-chosen leadership ready to install if we get Castro out within, say, three or four days of our go date.”

“And you want my opinion as to who gets the nod?”

“Right. I know you’re not too well versed on exile politics, but I thought you might have picked up some opinions from the Cadre.”

Kemper faked deep thought. Steady now, make him wait—

Stanton threw his hands up, “Come on, I didn’t tell you to go into a goddamn trance about—”

Kemper snapped out of it—bright-eyed and forceful. “We want far-right-wingers susceptible to working with Santo and our other friends in the Outfit. We want a figurehead leader who can maintain order, and the best way to re-stabilize the Cuban economy is to get the casinos operating on a full profit margin. If

Cuba stays volatile or the Reds take over again, we've got to be able to draw on the Outfit for financial assistance."

Stanton laced his hands around one knee. "I was expecting something a bit more enlightened from Kemper Boyd the civil rights reformer. And I'm sure you know that the donations of our Italian friends only account for a tiny percentage of our legitimately funded government budget."

Kemper shrugged. "Cuba's solvency depends on American tourism. The Outfit can help insure that. United Fruit is out of Cuba now, and only a bribable far-right-winger will be willing to de-nationalize their holdings."

Stanton said, "Keep going. You're close to persuading me."

Kemper stood up. "Carlos is down at the Guatemala camp with my lawyer friend. Chuck's going to fly him to Louisiana in a few days and hide him out, and I've heard that he's getting more pro-exile by the day. I'm betting that the invasion *will* succeed, but that chaos will reign inside Cuba for some time. Whoever we install will fall under intense public scrutiny, which means public accountability, and we both know that the Agency will be subjected to intense scrutiny that will limit our deniability in all matters pertaining to covert action. We'll need the Cadre then, and we'll probably need a half-dozen more groups as ruthless and autonomous as the Cadre, and *we'll need them to be privately funded.* Our new leader will need a secret police, and the Outfit will provide him with one, and if he falters in his pro-U.S. stance, the Outfit will assassinate him."

Stanton stood up. He looked bright-eyed verging on feverish.

"I don't have the final say, but you sold me. Your pitch wasn't as flowery as your boy's Inaugural address, but it was a good deal more politically astute."

AND PROFIT-MOTIVATED—

Kemper said, "Thanks. It's an honor to be compared to John F. Kennedy."

Fulo drove. Néstor talked. Kemper watched.

They cruised Cadre turf in random figure-eights. Slum shacks and housing projects zipped by.

Néstor said, "Send me back to Cuba. I will shoot Fidel from a rooftop. I will become the Simón Bolívar of my country."

Fulo's Chevy was packed with dope. Powder puffed out of plastic bags and dusted the seats.

Néstor said, “Send me back to Cuba as a boxer. I will beat Fidel to death with bolo punches like Kid Gavilan.”

Rheumy eyes popped their way—local junkies knew the car. Winos pressed up for handouts—Fulo was a well-known soft touch.

Fulo called it the New Marshall Plan. Fulo said his handouts inspired subservience.

Kemper watched.

Néstor stopped at drop sites and sold pre-packaged bindles. Fulo backstopped all transactions with a shotgun.

Kemper watched.

Fulo spotted a *non-Cadre* transaction outside Lucky Time Liquors. Néstor sprayed the transactors with .12-gauge-propelled rock salt.

The transactors dispersed every which way. Rock salt tore through your clothes and made your skin sting like a mother humper.

Kemper watched.

Néstor said, “Send me back to Cuba as a skin diver. I will shoot Fidel with an underwater spear gun.”

Street-corner rummies sucked down T-Bird. Glue fiends sniffed rags. Half the front lawns featured dilapidated jalopies.

Kemper watched. Cab calls squawked up the squawk box. Fulo drove from Darktown to Poquito Habana.

Faces went from black to brown. Incidental colors shifted and went more pastel.

Pastel-fronted churches. Pastel-fronted dance clubs and bodegas. Men in bright pastel guayabera shirts.

Fulo drove. Néstor talked. Kemper watched.

They passed parking-lot crap games. They passed soapbox orations. They passed two kids pummeling a pro-Beard pamphleteer.

Kemper watched.

Fulo glided down Flagler and traded cash for prostitute street talk.

One girl said Castro was queer. One girl said Castro had a 12″ chorizo. All the girls wanted to know one thing: When’s this big invasion gonna happen?

A girl said she picked up a rumor down at Blessington. Ain’t that big invasion next week?

One girl said Guantánamo was gonna get A-bombed. One girl said, You're wrong—it's Playa Girón. One girl said flying saucers would soon descend on Havana.

Fulo drove. Né stor polled strolling Cubans up and down Flagler.

They'd all heard invasion rumors. They all shared them with gusto.

Kemper shut his eyes and listened. Nouns jumped out of run-on Spanish.

Havana, Playa Girón, Baracoa, Oriente, Playa Girón, Guantánamo, Guantánamo.

Kemper caught the upshot:

People were talking.

On-leave trainees were talking. Agency-front-group men were talking. The talk was innuendo, bullshit, wish fulfillment and truth by default—speculate on enough invasion sites and you'll hit the right one out of sheer luck.

The talk constituted a minor security leak.

Fulo didn't seem worried. Néstor shrugged the talk off. Kemper categorized it as "containable."

They cruised the side streets off Flagler.

Fulo monitored cab calls. Néstor talked up ways to torture Fidel Castro. Kemper looked out his window and savored the view.

Cuban girls blew them kisses. Car radios churned out mambo music. Street loafers gobbled melons soaked in beer.

Fulo clicked off a call. "That was Wilfredo. He said Don Juan knows something about a dope drop, and maybe we should go see him."

Don Juan Pimentel had a TB cough. His front room was littered with customized Barbie and Ken dolls.

They stood just inside the door. Don Juan smelled like mentholated chest rub.

Fulo said, "You can talk in front of Mr. Boyd. He is a wonderful friend of our Cause."

Néstor picked up a nude Barbie. The doll wore a Jackie Kennedy wig and Brillo-pad crotch hair.

Don Juan coughed. "It is twenty-five dollars for the story, and fifty dollars for the story and the address."

Néstor dropped the doll and crossed himself. Fulo handed Don Juan two twenties and a ten.

He tucked the cash in his shirt pocket. “The address is 4980 Baiustrol. Four men from the Cuban Intelligence Directorate live there. They are terribly afraid that your invasion will succeed and that their supply from the island will be, how you say, removed. They have at the house a very large supply of single shots packaged to sell in order to make quick money to, how you say, bankroll their resistance to your resistance. They have over a pound of heroin ready to be sold in these small amounts where there is to be the, how you say, most profit.”

Kemper smiled. “Is the house guarded?”

“I do not know.”

“Who would they sell the stuff to?”

“Certainly not to Cubans. I would say to the negritos and the poor whites.”

Kemper nudged Fulo. “Is Mr. Pimentel a reliable informant?”

“Yes. I think so.”

“Is he strongly anti-Castro?”

“Yes. I think so.”

“Would you trust him not to betray us under any circumstances?”

“Well … that is hard to …”

Don Juan spat on the floor. “You are a coward not to ask such questions to my face.”

Kemper judo-chopped him. Don Juan clipped a doll rack and went down gagging for breath.

Néstor dropped a pillow on his face. Kemper pulled his .45 and fired through it point-blank.

His silencer ate up the noise. Blood-soaked feathers billowed.

Néstor and Fulo looked shocked. Kemper said, “I’ll explain later.”

REBELS RESCUE CUBA! COMMIES PANDER POISON DOPE IN RAPACIOUS REVENGE!

HEROIN HOLOCAUST! PUSHER CASTRO GLOATS! DESPERATE DICTATOR IN EXILE! DOPE DEATH TOLL MOUNTS!

Kemper printed the headlines on a dispatch sheet. Tiger Kab swirled all around him—the midnight shift was just coming on.

He wrote a cover note.

PB,

Have Lenny Sands write up Hush-Hush articles to accompany the enclosed headlines. Tell him to expedite it and to check the Miami papers over the next week or so for background details and call me if necessary. This, of course, pertains to the invasion, and my feeling is that we're very close to a go-date. I can't go into my plan in detail yet, but I think it's something you'd appreciate. If Lenny finds my orders confusing, tell him to extrapolate off the headlines in the inimitable Hush-Hush style.

I know you're somewhere in Nicaragua or Guatemala, and I'm hoping this pouch gets to you. And try to think of WJL as a colleague. Peaceful co-existence doesn't always mean appeasement.

KB

Kemper stamped the envelope: C. ROGERS/NEXT FLIGHT/URGENT. Fulo and Néstor walked by, looking befuddled—he never explained why he killed Don Juan.

Santo Junior had a pet shark named Batista. They drove to Tampa and dumped Don Juan in his pool.

Kemper pulled a phone into the men's room. He rehearsed his pitch three times, complete with pauses and asides.

He called Bobby's secretary. He told her to turn on her tape recorder.

She jumped to it. She bought his perfectly honed urgency.

He lauded. He gushed. He praised exile morale and combatreadiness. The CIA had a brilliant plan. Their pre-invasion security was water-tight.

He raved like a skeptic newly converted. He inserted New Frontier rhetoric. His Tennessee drawl oozed convert righteousness.

The woman said she'd rush the tape to Bobby. Her voice quivered and broke.

Kemper hung up and walked out to the parking lot. Teo Paez swung by and passed him a note.

> W. Littell called. Said all is well with CM. CM's N.Y. lawyer says Justice Dept. agents are searching Louisiana for CM. W. Littell says CM should stay at Guat. camp or at least out of country for awhile.

Ward Littell in ascent—truly amazing.

A breeze kicked in. Kemper stretched out on a tiger-striped hood and looked at the sky.

The moon hovered close. Batista had bright white teeth the same color.

Kemper dozed. Chants woke him up. He heard GO GO GO GO GO— that one word and nothing else.

The shouts were ecstatic. The dispatch hut boomed like a giant echo chamber.

The invasion date was set. It couldn't be anything less than that.

Santo fed Batista steaks and fried chicken. His pool was an Olympic-sized grease spill.

Batista bit Don Juan's head off. Néstor and Fulo turned away.

He didn't. He was starting to enjoy killing more than he should.

67

(Rural Nicaragua, 4/17/61)

PIGS! PIGS! PIGS! PIGS! PIGS! PIGS! PIGS! PIGS! PIGS!

Six hundred men chanted it. The staging site shook behind that one word.

The men jumped into trucks. The trucks locked in bumper-to-bumper and headed down to the launch dock.

PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS—

Pete watched. John Stanton watched. They jeep-patrolled the site and watched everything click into on-go status.

On-GO at the dock: one insignia-deleted U.S. troop ship. On board: landing craft, mortars, grenades, rifles, machine guns, radio gear, medical gear, mosquito repellent, maps, ammo and six hundred Sheik prophylactics—a Langley shrink foresaw mass rape as a victory by-product.

On-GO: six hundred Benzedrine-blasted Cuban rebels.

On-GO at the air strip: sixteen B-26 bombers, set to hammer Castro's standing air force. Dig their blacked-out U.S. insignia—this gig was non-imperialisto.

PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS—

The abbreviation fit the destination. John Stanton got the chant going at reveille—that shrink said repetition built up courage.

Pete chased high-octane bennies with coffee. He could see it and feel it and smell it—

The planes neutralize Castro air power. The ships go out—staggered departures from a half-dozen launch sites. A second air strike kills militiamen en masse. Chaos spawns mass desertion.

Freedom fighters hit the beach.

They march. They kill. They defoliate. They link up with on-island dissidents and reclaim Cuba—weakened by dope and propaganda foreplay.

They were waiting for Bad-Back Jack to okay the first air strike. All the orders had to emanate from the Haircut.

PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS PIGS—

Pete and Stanton jeep-patrolled the site. They had a short-wave set rigged to the dashboard—site-to-site communication made easy.

They had direct feeds to Guatemala, Tiger Kab and Blessington. They were radio contained at that level—only Langley direct-channeled to the White House.

The order came down: Jack says to send six planes out.

Pete felt his dick go limp. The radio man said Jack wants to move real cautiously.

Six from sixteen was a big fucking reduction.

They kept circuiting the site. Pete chain-smoked. Stanton fretted a Saint Christopher medal.

Boyd pouched a message three days ago—some cryptic *Hush-Hush* orders for Lenny Sands. He forwarded the information. Lenny said he'd write the stuff up quick.

Lenny always delivered. Ward Littell always surprised.

That Teamster book hand-off was superb. Littell's brown-nose job on Carlos was better.

Boyd had them lodged at the Guatemalan campsite. Marcello glommed a private phone line and ran his rackets biz long-distance.

Carlos liked fresh seafood. Carlos liked to throw big dinner parties. Littell had 500 Maine lobsters air-shipped to Guatemala daily.

Carlos turned crack troopers into salivating gluttons. Carlos turned said troopers into coolies—trained exile guerrillas shined his shoes and ran his errands.

Boyd was running the Marcello operation. Boyd gave Pete one direct order: LEAVE LITTELL ALONE.

The Bondurant-Littell truce was Boyd-enforced and *temporary*.

Pete chain-smoked. Cigarettes and bennies had him parched. His hands kept doing things he didn't tell them to.

They kept circuiting. Stanton sweated his clothes wringing wet.

PIGS! PIGS! PIGS! PIGS! PIGS!

They parked by the dock and watched troops climb the boarding plank. Six hundred men hopped on in just under two minutes.

Their short-wave set sputtered. The needle bounced to the Blessington frequency.

Stanton plugged in his headset. Pete lit his zillionth cigarette of the day.

The troop ship creaked and waddled. A fat Cubano puked over the stern.

Stanton said, "Our government-in-exile's in place, and Bissell ended up approving those far-right boys I recommended. That's good, but that fake-defector charade we cooked up backfired. Gutiérrez landed the plane at Blessington, but the reporters that Dougie Lockhart called in recognized Ramón and started booing. It's not a big thing, but a fuck-up's still a fuck-up."

Pete nodded. He smelled vomit and bilge water and oil off six hundred rifles.

Stanton unhooked his headset. His Saint Christopher was fretted shiny to dull.

They kept circuiting. It was gas-guzzling Benzedrine bullshit.

Please, Jack:

Send some more planes in. Give the orders to send the boats out.

Pete got wild-ass itchy. Stanton blathered on and on about his kids.

Hours took decades. Pete ran lists in his head to shut Stanton out.

The men he killed. The women he fucked. The best hamburgers in L.A. and Miami. What he'd be doing if he never left Quebec. What he'd be doing if he never met Kemper Boyd.

Stanton worked the radio. Reports crackled in.

They heard that the air strike fizzled. The bombers nailed less than 10% of Fidel Castro's air force.

Bad-Back Jack took the news hard. He responded in cuntish fashion: no second air strike just yet.

Chuck Rogers squeaked a call in. He said Marcello and Littell were still in Guatemala. He dropped some late-breaking stateside info: the FBI invaded New Orleans in response to fake Carlos sightings!

It was Boyd's doing. He figured erroneous phone tips would keep Bobby diverted and help cover Marcello's tracks.

Chuck signed off. Stanton clamped his headphones down and kept his ears perked for stray calls.

Seconds took years. Minutes took fucking millenniums.

Pete scratched his balls raw. Pete smoked himself hoarse. Pete shot palm fronds off of trees just to shoot *something*.

Stanton rogered a call. "That was Lockhart. He says our government-in-exile's close to rioting. They need you at Blessington, and Rogers is flying in from Guatemala to pick you up."

They detoured by the Cuban coast. Chuck said it added nil time to their flight plan.

Pete yelled, "Let's get low!"

Chuck throttled down. Pete saw flames from two thousand feet and half a mile out.

They swooped below radar level and belly-rolled along the beach. Pete jammed binoculars out his window.

He saw aircraft wreckage—Cuban and rebel. He saw smoldering palm groves and hose trucks parked on the sand.

Air-raid sirens were blasting full-tilt. Dock-mounted spotlights were pre-dusk operational. Pillboxes had been set up just above the high tide line—fully manned and sandbagged.

Militiamen crowded the dock. Dig those little geeks with Tommy guns and aircraft ID guides.

They were eighty miles south of Playa Girón. *This* stretch of beach was red-alert ready. If the Bay of Pigs was *this* fortified, the entire invasion was fucked.

Pete heard muzzle pops. Little chickenshit pepperings went bip-bip-bip.

Chuck caught on—they're shooting at *us*.

He flipped the Piper belly to backside. Pete spun topsy-turvy.

His head hit the roof. His seatbelt choked him immobile.

Chucky rolled and flew upside down all the way to U.S. waters.

Dusk hit. Blessington glowed under high-wattage arc lights.

Pete popped two Dramamines. He saw redneck gawkers and ice cream trucks perched outside the front gates.

Chuck fishtailed down the runway and brought the plane to a dead stall. Pete hopped out woozy—Benzedrine and incipient nausea packed this wicked one-two punch.

A prefab hut stood in the middle of the drill field. Triple-strength barbed wire sequestered it. Unsynchronized shouts boomed out—a far cry from your snappy PIGS PIGS PIGS!

Pete stretched and worked out some muscle kinks. Lockhart ran up to him.

"Goddamnit, get in there and calm those spies down!"

Pete said, "What happened?"

"What happened is Kennedy's stalling. Dick Bissell said he wants a win, but he don't want to go the whole hog and get blamed if the invasion goes bust. I got my rusty old cargo ship all ready to go, but that Pope-worshiping cocksucker in the White House won't—"

Pete slapped him. The little shitbird weaved and stayed upright.

"I said, '*What happened?*' "

Lockhart wiped his nose and giggled. "What happened is my Klan boys sold the provisional government guys some moonshine, and they started arguing politics with some of the regular troops. I whipped up a crew and isolated the troublemakers with that there barbed wire, but that don't alter the fact that you got sixty frustrated and liquored-up Cuban hotheads in there biting at each other like copperheads when they should be concentrating on the problem at hand, which is liberating a Commie-held dictatorship."

"Do they have guns?"

"No sir. I got the weapons shack locked and guarded."

Pete reached into the cockpit. Right upside the dashboard: Chuck's fungo bat and all-purpose tool kit.

He grabbed them. He pulled out the tin snips and tucked the bat into his waistband.

Lockhart said, "What are you doing?"

Chuck said, "I think I know."

Pete pointed to the pump shed. “Let go with the fire hoses in exactly five minutes.”

Lockhart hooted. “Them hoses will tear that prefab right down.”

“That’s what I want.”

The sequestered spies laughed and yelled. Lockhart took off and hit the pump shed at a sprint.

Pete ran over to the fence and snipped out a section of coiling. Chuck wrapped his hands in his windbreaker and pulled down a big wall of barbs.

Pete scrunched down and crawled through. He ran up to the hut in a deep fullback crouch. One fungo bat shot took the door down.

His crash-in went unnoticed. The government-in-exile boys were preoccupied.

With arm wrestling, card games and shine-guzzling contests. With a baby-alligator race right there on the floor.

Dig the rooting sections. Dig the blankets covered with bet chits. Dig the bunks weighted down with moonshine jugs.

Pete choked up a bat grip. On-GO: that good old boot-camp pugel-stick training.

He waded in. Tight swings clipped chins and ribcages. The government-in-exile boys fought back—odd fists hit him haphazardly.

His bat shattered bunk beams. His bat shattered a fat man’s dentures. The gators scurried outside while the getting was good.

The government boys got the picture: Do not resist this big Caucasian madman.

Pete tore through the hut. The spies made like a backdraft and got waaay behind him.

He tore out the rear door and swung at the porch-to-roof stanchions. Five swings left-handed, five swings right—switch-hitting like fucking Mickey Mantle.

The walls shuddered. The roof wiggled. The foundation shimmy-shimmied. The spies evacuated—Earthquake! Earthquake!

The hoses hit. Jet-pressure tore the fence down. Hydraulic force ripped the hut roofless.

Pete caught a spritz and went tumbling. The hut burst into cinderblock shingles.

Dig the government-in-exile:

Running. Stumbling. Doing the jet-spray jigaboo jiggle.

Call it *Hush-Hush* style:

WATER-WHACKED WETBACKS WIGGLE! BOOZE-BLITZED AND BESOAKED BASTION BOOGIE-WOOGIES!

The hoses snapped off. Pete started laughing.

Men stood up soaked and trembling. Pete's laugh went contagious and built to a roar.

The drill field was an instant prefab dump site.

The laughter went locomotive and shaped into a perfect martial cadence. A chant built off of it:

PIGS! PIGS! PIGS! PIGS! PIGS!

Lockhart dispensed blankets. Pete sobered the men up with bennie-laced Kool-Aid.

They loaded the troop ship at midnight. 256 exiles climbed on —hotwired to reclaim their country.

They loaded weapons, landing craft and medical supplies. Radio channels stayed open: Blessington to Langley and every port-of-departure command post.

The word passed through:

Jack the Haircut says, no second air strike.

Nobody proffered first-strike death stats. Nobody proffered reports on coastal fortifications.

Those spotlights and beach bunkers went unreported. Those militia lookouts went unmentioned.

Pete knew why.

Langley knows it's now or never. Why inform the troops that we're in crap-shoot terrain from here on in?

Pete swigged moonshine to wean himself off the bennies. He passed out on his bunk midway through this weird hallucination.

Japs, Japs, Japs. Saipan, '43—in wide-screen Technicolor.

They swarmed him. He killed them and killed them and killed them. He screamed readiness warnings. Nobody understood his Québecois French.

Dead Japs popped back to life. He rekilled them barehanded. They turned into dead women—Ruth Mildred Cressmeyer clones.

Chuck woke him up at dawn. He said, "Kennedy came halfway through. All the sites launched their troops an hour ago."

Waiting time dragged. Their short-wave set went on the fritz.

Troop ship transmissions came in garbled. Site-to-site feeds registered as static-laced gibberish.

Chuck couldn't nail the malfunction. Pete tried straight telephone contact—calls to Tiger Kab and his Langley drop.

He got two sustained busy signals. Chuck chalked them up to pro-Fidel line jamming.

Lockhart had a hot number memorized: the Agency's Miami Ops office. Boyd called it "Invasion Central"—the sparkplug Cadre guys never got close to.

Pete dialed the number. A busy signal blared extra loud. Chuck nailed the source of the sound: covertly strung phone lines overloaded with incoming calls.

They sat around the barracks. Their radio coughed out strange little sputters.

Time dragged. Seconds took years. Minutes took solar-system eternities.

Pete chained cigarettes. Dougie Frank and Chuck bummed a whole pack off of him.

A Klan guy was hosing off the Piper. Pete and Chuck shared a reeeeealllly long look.

Dougie Frank jammed their wavelength. "Can I go, too?"

Diversionary dips got them close. They caught the Bay of Pigs in tight and ugly.

They saw a supply ship snagged on a reef. They saw dead men flopping out of a hole in the hull. They saw sharks bobbing at body parts twenty yards offshore.

Chuck swung around and made a second pass. Pete bumped the control panel. The extra passenger had them cramped in extra tight.

They saw beached landing craft. They saw live men climbing over dead men. They saw a hundred-yard stretch of bodies in bright-red shallow water.

The invaders kept coming. Flamethrowers nailed them the second they hit the wave break. They got flash-fried and boiled alive.

Fifty-odd rebels were shackled facedown in the sand. A Commie with a chainsaw was running across their backs.

Pete saw the blade drag. Pete saw the blood gout. Pete saw their heads roll into the water.

Flames jumped up at the plane—short by inches.

Chuck pulled off his headset. “I picked up an Ops call! Kennedy says, ‘No second air strike,’ and he says he won’t send in any U.S. troops to help our guys!”

Pete aimed his Magnum out the window. A flame clap spun it out of his hand.

Sharks were churning up the water right below them. This fat Commie fuck waved a severed head.

68

(Rural Guatemala, 4/18/61)

Their room adjoined the radio hut. Invasion updates seeped through the walls uninvited.

Marcello tried to sleep. Littell tried to study deportation law.

Kennedy refused to order a second air strike. Rebel soldiers were captured and slaughtered on the beach.

Reserve troops were chanting “PIGS! PIGS! PIGS! PIGS! PIGS!” That silly word roared through the barracks quadrangle.

Right-wing dementia: mildly distracting. Mildly gratifying: a detectable rise in contempt for John F. Kennedy.

Littell watched Marcello toss and turn. He was bunking with a Mafia chieftain—mildly amazing.

His charade worked. Carlos scanned ledger columns and recognized his own Fund transactions. His indebtedness increased exponentially.

Carlos was accruing large legal debts. Carlos owed his safety to a reformed FBI crimebuster.

Guy Banister called this morning. He said he picked up some straight dope: Bobby Kennedy knows that Carlos is really hiding out in Guatemala.

Bobby applied diplomatic pressure. The Guatemalan prime minister kowtowed. Carlos would be deported, "but not swiftly."

Banister used to call him a weak sister. His phone manner was near-deferential now.

Marcello started snoring. He was drooping off his army cot in monogrammed silk pajamas.

Littell heard shouts and banging noises next door. He formed a picture: men slapping desks and kicking odd inanimate objects.

"It's a washout"/"That vacillating chickenshit"/"He won't send in planes or ships to shell the beach."

Littell walked outside. The troopers worked up a new chant.

"KEN-NEDY, DON'T SAY NO! KEN-NEDY, LET US GO!"

They bounced around the quad. They swigged straight gin and vodka. They gobbled pills and kicked apothecary jars like soccer balls.

The case officers' lounge had been looted. The dispensary door had been trampled to pulp.

"KEN-NEDY, LET US GO! KEN-NEDY IS A PU-TO!"

Littell stepped inside and grabbed the wall phone. Twelve coded digits got him Tiger Kab direct.

A man said, "*Sí?* Cabstand."

"I'm looking for Kemper Boyd. Tell him it's Ward Littell."

"*Sí.* One second."

Littell unbuttoned his shirt—the humidity was awful. Carlos mumbled through a bad dream.

Kemper picked up. "What is it, Ward?"

"What is it with you? You sound anxious."

"There's riots all over the Cuban section, and the invasion isn't going our way. Ward, what is—?"

"I got word that the Guatemalan government's looking for Carlos. Bobby Kennedy knows he's here, and I think I should move him again."

"Do it. Rent an apartment outside Guatemala City, and call me with the phone number. I'll have Chuck Rogers meet you there and fly you someplace more removed. Ward, I can't talk now. Call me when—"

The line went dead. Overtaxed circuits—mildly annoying. Mildly amusing: Kemper C. Boyd mildly flustered.

Littell walked outside. The chants were a good deal more than mildly pissed-off.

“KEN-NEDY IS A PU-TO! KEN-NEDY FEARS FI-DEL CAS-TRO!”

69

(Miami, 4/18/61)

Kemper mixed the dope. Néstor mixed the poison. They worked on two desks jammed together.

They had the dispatch hut to themselves. Fulo shut down Tiger Kab at 6:00 p.m. and gave the drivers strict orders: Visit riot scenes and maim Fidelistos.

Kemper and Néstor kept working. Their hotshot assembly line moved slowly.

They mixed strychnine and Drano into a heroin-like white powder. They packaged it in single-pop plastic bindles.

They played their short-wave set. Awful death tallies sputtered in.

Hush-Hush went to press yesterday. Lenny called him for details. The piece described a resounding Bay of Pigs victory.

Jack could *still* force a win. The ODs would defame Castro, WIN OR LOSE.

They B&E'd the drop house two days ago—a little safety-first trial run. They found two hundred "H" bindles stashed behind a heating panel.

Don Juan Pimentei fed them straight information. His death eliminated witness testimony.

Néstor cooked up a shot. Kemper loaded a syringe and test-fired it.

A milky liquid squirted out. Néstor said, “It looks believable. I think it will fool the negritos who buy it.”

“Let’s go by the house. We have to make the switch tonight.”

“Yes. And we must pray that President Kennedy acts more boldly.”

• • •

A rainstorm pushed the riot action indoors. Prowl cars were double-parked outside half the nightclubs on and off Flagler.

They drove to a pay phone. Néstor dialed the drop pad and got an extended dial tone. The house was two blocks away.

They circled by it. The street was middle-class Cubano—small cribs with small front yards and toys on the lawn.

The drop pad was peach-stucco Spanish. It was late-night quiet and nonsecurity dark.

No lights. No cars in the driveway. No TV shadows bouncing out the front window.

Kemper parked at the curb. No doors opened; no window curtains opened or retracted.

Néstor checked their suitcase. “The back door?”

“I don’t want to risk it again. The lock mechanism almost splintered last time.”

“How do you expect to get in, then?”

Kemper pulled his gloves on. “There’s a dog-access door built into the kitchen door. You scoot down, reach in, and pop the inside latch.”

“Dog doors mean dogs.”

“There was no dog last time.”

“Last time does not mean this time.”

“Fulo and Teo surveilled the place. They’re sure there’s no dog.”

Néstor slipped gloves on. “Okay, then.”

They walked up the driveway. Kemper checked their blind side every few seconds. Low-hanging storm clouds provided extra cover.

The door was perfect for large dogs and small men. Néstor scooted down and pulled himself into the house.

Kemper worked his gloves on extra-snug. Néstor opened the door from the inside.

They locked up. They took off their shoes. They walked through the kitchen to the heat panel. They took three steps straight ahead and four to the right—Kemper paced off exact measurements last time.

Néstor held the flashlight. Kemper removed the panel. The bindles were stashed in the identical position.

Néstor re-counted them. Kemper opened up the suitcase and got out the Polaroid.

Néstor said, "Two hundred exactly." Kemper shot a re-creation closeup.

They waited. The picture popped out of the camera.

Kemper taped it to the wall and held the flashlight on it. Néstor switched bindles. He duplicated the arrangement all the way down to tiny tucks and folds.

They sweated up the floor. Kemper swabbed it dry.

Néstor said, "Let's call Pete and see how things stand."

Kemper said, "It's out of our hands."

Please, Jack—

They agreed on a through-to-dawn car stakeout. Local residents parked on the street—Néstor's Impala wouldn't look out of place.

They slid their seats back and watched the house. Kemper fantasized Jack Saves Face scenarios.

Please come home and get your stash. *Please sell it quick to validate our hotoff-the-press propaganda*.

Néstor dozed. Kemper fantasized Bay of Pigs heroics.

A car pulled into the driveway. Door slams woke Néstor up wild-eyed.

Kemper covered his mouth. "Ssssh, now. Just look."

Two men walked into the house. Interior lights framed the doorway.

Kemper recognized them. They were pro-Castro agitators rumored to dabble in dope.

Néstor pointed to the car. "They left the motor running."

Kemper watched the door. The men locked up and walked out with a large attaché case.

Néstor cracked his window. Kemper caught some Spanish.

Néstor translated. “They’re going to an after-hours club to sell the stuff.”

The men got back in their car. The inside roof light went on. Kemper saw their faces bright as day.

The driver opened the case. The passenger unwrapped a bindle and snorted it.

And twitched. And spasmed. And convulsed—

GET IT BACK. THEY WON’T SELL IT NOW—

Kemper stumbled out of the car and ran up the driveway. Kemper pulled his piece and charged the dope car head-on.

The OD man spasm-kicked the windshield out.

Kemper aimed at the driver. The OD man lurched and blocked his shot.

The driver pulled a snub-nose and fired. Kemper fired straight back at him. Néstor ran up firing—two shots took out a side window and zinged off the roof of the car.

Kemper caught a slug. Ricochets ripped the convulsing man faceless. Néstor shot the driver in the back and blew him into the horn.

It went off AAAH-OOO-GAAAH, AAAH-OOO-GAAAH—LOUD LOUD LOUD.

Kemper shot the driver in the face. His glasses shattered and tore the pompadour off his toupee.

The horn blared. Néstor blew the steering wheel off the column. The goddamn horn reverberated LOUDER.

Kemper saw his collarbone push through his shirt. He weaved down the driveway wiping somebody’s blood out of his eyes. Néstor caught him and piggybacked him to their car.

Kemper heard horn noise. Kemper saw spectators on the sidewalk. Kemper saw Cubano punks by the death car—boosting that attaché case.

Kemper screamed. Néstor popped a real “H” bindle under his nose.

He gagged and sneezed. His heart revved and purred. He coughed up some pretty red blood.

Néstor gunned the car. Spectators ran for cover. That funny-looking bone flopped out at a funny right angle.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/19/61. Des Moines Register headline:

FAILED COUP LINKED TO U.S. SPONSORS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/19/61. Los Angeles Herald-Express headline:

WORLD LEADERS DECRY “ILLEGAL INTERVENTION”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/20/61. Dallas Morning News headline:

KENNEDY BLASTED FOR “HEEDLESS PROVOCATIONS”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/20/61. San Francisco Chronicle headline and subhead:

RAY OF PIGS FIASCO REVILED BY U.S. ALLIES

CASTRO GLOATS AS REBEL DEATH TOLL MOUNTS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/20/61. Chicago Tribune headline and subhead:

KENNEDY DEFENDS BAY OF PIGS ACTIONS

WORLDWIDE CENSURE CRIPPLES PRESIDENT’S PRESTIGE

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/21/61. Cleveland Plain Dealer headline and subhead:

CIA BLAMED FOR BAY OF PIGS FIASCO

EXILE LEADERS BLAME “KENNEDY COWARDICE”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/22/61. Miami Herald headline and subhead:

KENNEDY: “SECOND AIR STRIKE COULD HAVE SPARKED WORLD WAR III”

EXILE COMMUNITY HONORS LOST AND CAPTURED HEROES

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/23/61. New York Journal-American headline and subhead:

KENNEDY DEFENDS BAY OF PIGS ACTION

RED LEADERS BLAST “IMPERIALIST AGGRESSION”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/24/61. Hush-Hush magazine article. Written by Lenny Sands, under the pseudonym Peerless Politicopundit.

COWARDLY CASTRATO CASTRO OUSTED!

RETREATING REDS WREAK RAT-POISON REVENGE!

His rancorous Red reign ran for a rotten two years. Shout it loud, proud and un-kowtowed: Fidel Castro, the bushy-bearded beatnik bard of bilious bamboozlement, was determinedly and dramatically deposed last week by a heroically homeland-hungering huddle of hopped-up hermanos righteously rankled by the Red Recidivist’s rape of their nation!

Call it D-Day ’61, kats & kittens. Call the Bay of Pigs the Caribbean Carthage; Playa Giron the Patriotic Parthenon. Call Castro debilitated and depilatoried—word has it that he shaved off his beard to dodge the deep and dangerous depths of revenge-seeker recognition!

Fidel Castro: the shabbily-shorn Samson of 1961! His deliriously delighted Delilahs: God-fearing, red, white & blue revering Cuban heroes!!!

Castro and his murderously malignant machinations: trenchantly terminated, 10-4, over-and-out. The Monster’s maliciously maladroit maneuverings: still morally mauling Miami!!!!

Item: Fidel Castro craves cornucopias of cash—getaway gelt to felicitously finance future finaglings!

Item: Fidel Castro has cravenly criticized America’s eminently egalitarian and instantly inclusive racial policies, reproachfully ragging U.S. leaders for their nauseously niggling neglect of Negro citizens.

Item: as previously posited, Fidel Castro and seditious sibling Raul sell homicidally hazardous Heroin in Miami.

Item: as the Bay of Pigs waggled and waxed as Castro's Waterloo, the mendacious mastiff's minor miscreant minions mined Miami's Negro section with rat-poison-riddled Heroinl Scores of Negro drug addicts injected these carcinogenic Commie cocktails and died doomonically draconean deaths!!!

Item: this issue was rushed to press, to insure that Hush-Hush readers would not be left hungrily homesick for our properly protectionist parade of Playa Giron platitudes. Thus we cannot name the aforementioned Negroes or offer specific details on their dastardly deaths. That information will appear in scintillatingly-scheduled subsequent issues, in courageous conjunction with a new ongoing feature: "Banana Republic Boxscore: Who's Red? Who's Dead?"

Adios, dear reader—and let's all meet for a tall Cuba Libre in laceratingly liberated Havana.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/1/61. Personal note: J. Edgar Hoover to Howard Hughes.

Dear Howard,

You must not be concerning yourself with Hush-Hush these days. If you'll glance at the April 24th issue, you'll see that it went to press at best precipitously and at worst with a certain amount of criminal negligence and/or criminal intent.

Did Mr. L. Sands perhaps possess some spurious foreknowledge of unforetellable events? His piece mentioned a number of Negro heroin overdoses in the Miami area, and my Miami police contacts tell me that no such overdoses occurred.

Nine Cuban teenagers, however, did die from injections of poisonous Heroin. My contact told me that on April 18, two Cuban youths stole an attache case containing a large quantity of toxic Heroin from a car involved in an unsolved shootout that left two Cuban men dead.

My contact mentioned the curiously prophetic (if historically inaccurate) Hush-Hush piece. I told him that it was merely one of life's odd coincidences, an explanation that seemed to satisfy him.

I would advice you to tell Mr. Sands to get his facts reasonably straight. Hush-Hush should not publish science fiction, unless it's directly in our best interest.

All best, Edgar

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/8/61. Miami Herald sidebar:
PRESIDENT CONVENES HIGH-LEVEL GROUP TO ASSESS BAY OF PIGS FAILURE

Calling the aborted Cuban exile invasion at the Bay of Pigs a "bitter lesson," President Kennedy today stated that it was also a lesson he intended to learn from.

The President told an informal gathering of reporters that he has organized a study group to delve into precisely why the Bay of Pigs invasion failed and to also assess U.S.-Cuban policy in the wake of what he called a "catastrophically embarrassing episode."

The group will interview evacuated Bay of Pigs survivors, Central Intelligence Agency personnel involved in high-level invasion planning and Cuban exile spokesmen from the numerous anti-Castro organizations currently flourishing in Florida.

The study group will include Admiral Arleigh Burke and General Maxwell Taylor. The chairman will be Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/10/61. Personal note: Robert F. Kennedy to Kemper Boyd.

Dear Kemper,

I hate to trouble a wounded man with work, but I know you're resilient, healing nicely and looking forward to getting back to your Justice Department duties. I feel bad about sending you into harm's way, so thank God you're recovering.

I've got a second assignment for you, one that geographically suits your work in Anniston and your occasional Miami excursions for Mr. Hoover. The President has formed a group to study the Bay of Pigs mess and the Cuban question in general. We'll be meeting with CIA administrators, action-level case officers, Bay of Pigs survivors and representatives from many CIA-sponsored and non-CIA-sponsored exile factions. I'm chairing the group, and I want you to serve as my point man and liaison to the Miami-based CIA contingent and their Cuban charges.

I think you'll be good at the job, even though your pre-invasion appraisal of exile readiness turned out to be quite inaccurate. You should know that the President and I do not blame you in any way for the ultimate failure of the invasion. At this stage of assessment, I think the blame should be leveled at over-zealous CIA men, sloppy pre-invasion security and an egregious miscalculation of in-Cuba discontent.

Enjoy another week's rest in Miami. The President sends his best, and we both think it's ironic that a forty-five-year-old man who has courted danger all his adult life should be hit by a stray bullet fired by an unknown assailant at a riot scene.

Get well and call me next week.
Bob

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/11/61. Identical airtel memorandums: FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to the New York City, Los Angeles, Miami, Boston, Dallas, Tampa, Chicago and Cleveland Special Agents-in-Charge. All marked: CONFIDENTIAL 1-A/DESTROY UPON RECEIPT.

Sir—

Your name has been deleted from this airtel for security purposes. Consider this communique top secret and report back to me personally upon implementation of the following order.

Have your most trustworthy THP agents accelerate their efforts to install bug/wiretaps in known Organized Crime meeting places. Consider this your top priority. Do not communicate information pertaining to this operation within existing Justice Department channels. Conduit all oral and written reports and bug/tap transcripts to me exclusively. Consider this operation to be self-contained and void of superseding Justice Department sanction.

JEH

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/27/61. Orlando Sentinel "Crimewatch" feature.

THE ODD ODYSSEY OF CARLOS MARCELLO

Nobody seems to know where the man was born. It is generally conceded that (alleged) Mafia Chief Carlos Marcello was born in either Tunis, North Africa, or somewhere in Guatemala. Marcello's earliest recollections are not of either location. They are of his adopted homeland, the United States of America, the country that Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy deported him from on April 4th of this year.

Carlos Marcello: Man Without a Country.

As Marcello tells it, the U.S. Border Patrol shanghaied him out of New Orleans and deposited him near Guatemala City, Guatemala. He said that he daringly escaped from the airport and hid out in "various Guatemalan hellholes" with a lawyer companion frantically seeking to legally return him to home, hearth, and his (alleged) three hundred million dollar a year rackets empire. Meanwhile, Robert F. Kennedy was following up on anonymous tips that placed the (alleged) Mob boss in numerous Louisiana locales. The tips did not pan out. Kennedy realized that Marcello had been hiding out in Guatemala, with Guatemalan government protection, since the very moment of his "daring escape."

Kennedy exerted diplomatic pressure. The Guatemalan Prime Minister bowed to it and ordered the State Police to begin a search for Marcello. The (alleged) Mafia sultan and his lawyer companion were discovered living in a rented apartment near Guatemala City. Both men were immediately deported to El Salvador.

They walked from village to village, ate in greasy spoon cantinas and slept in mud huts. The lawyer attempted to contact a Marcello underling, a pilot who might fly them to more amenable hideouts. The man could not be reached, and Marcello and his lawyer companion, ever fearful of another deportation action, kept walking.

Robert F. Kennedy and his Justice Department lawyers readied legal briefs. Marcello's lawyer companion wrote briefs and phoned them in to the (alleged) Mafia pasha's formal legal team in New York City. Marcello's pilot friend appeared out of nowhere, and (according to this reporter's confidential source) flew his contraband confreres all the way from El Salvador to Matamoros, Mexico, at treetop level to avoid radar detection.

Marcello and his lawyer companion then walked across the border. The (alleged) Mob maharajah turned himself in at the U.S. Border Patrol Detention Center in McAllen, Texas, confident that a three-judge immigration appeals panel would allow him to be released on bond and remain in America.

His confidence was justified. Marcello walked out of court last week a free man—albeit a man haunted by the awful specter of statelessness.

A Justice Department official told this reporter that the Marcello deportation matter could drag on legally for years. When asked if a suitable compromise might be reached, Attorney General Kennedy said, "It's possible, if Marcello is willing to give up his U.S. assets and relocate to Russia or Lower Mozambique."

Carlos Marcello's odd odyssey continues....

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/30/61. Personal note: Kemper Boyd to John Stanton.

John,

Thanks for the gin and smoked salmon. It beat the hospital fare hands down and was greatly appreciated.

I've been back in Anniston since the 12th. Little Brother does not respect the concept of convalescence, so I've been bird-dogging freedom riders and collecting statements for his Cuban Study Group. (We can thank N. Chasco for getting me into the hospital sans police notification. Nestor is excellent at bribing bilingual doctors).

The Study Group assignment troubles me. I've been around the Cause since its inception, and one loose word to Little Brother will destroy me with both brothers, get me disbarred as a lawyer and prevent me from ever obtaining any kind of police/intelligence agency work ever again. That said, you should know that I have deliberately sought out exile interviewees that I have not met before and that do not know that I am covertly Agency-employed. I am editing their statements to show the Agency's pre-invasion planning in as positive a light as possible. As you know, Big Brother has become virulently anti-Agency. Little Brother shares his fervor, but is also evincing a true enthusiasm for the Cause. This heartens me, but I must once again stress the absolute necessity of obfuscating all Outfit-exile-Agency links to Little Brother, which now becomes more problematic, given his new proximity to the Cause.

I'm going to absent myself from my Agency contract work and concentrate solely on my two Justice Department assignments. I feel that I can best serve the Agency by working as a direct conduit between them and Little Brother. With the Cuban issue undergoing profound policy reassessment, the closer I remain to the policy shapers the better I can serve the Agency and the Cause.

Our Cadre business remains solidly lucrative. I trust the ability of Fulo and Nestor to keep it that way. Santo tells me that our Italian colleagues will continue to make sizable donations. Playa Qiron gave everyone a taste of what could be. Nobody wants to stop now. Wouldn't our lives be a lot easier if Little Brother didn't hate Italians so much?

Yours, Kemper

70

(Miami/Blessington, 6/61–11/61)

Tiger Kab featured a big indoor dartboard. The drivers tacked up Fidel Castro pix and shredded them into confetti.

Pete had his own private targets.

Like Ward Littell. Carlos Marcello's boy now—mobbed-up and untouchable.

Like Howard Hughes—his *ex*-bossman/benefactor.

Hughes fired him. Lenny Sands said the Mormons made him do it. The *Hush-Hush* fiasco helped.

Boyd was in the hospital then, plowed on morphine. He couldn't call Lenny and say, "Pull the issue." Lenny was incommunicado with some bun boy. He didn't know the invasion crapped out.

Dracula loved his Mormons. Boss Mormon Duane Spurgeon glommed some dope contacts. Drac could now fly Narco Airlines without a Pete Bondurant ticket.

The good news: Spurgeon had cancer. The bad news: Hughes scuttled *Hush-Hush*.

The Bay of Pigs/OD piece caught some embarrassing flak. Hughes kept Lenny on the payroll to write a *private* skank sheet.

The sheet would feature skank too skanky for public skank consumption. The sheet would be read by two skank fiends only: Dracula and J. Edgar Hoover.

Drac was paying Lenny five hundred clams a week. Drac was calling Lenny every night. Lenny was fed up with Drac and his “I want Las Vegas!” wet dream.

Hughes and Littell were strictly dartboard prelims. The main event was President John F. Kennedy.

Who:

Waffled, wiggled, weaseled, punked out and pulled out at Pigs.

Who:

Cringed, crawled, crapped his pants, cravenly crybabied and let Cuba stay Commie.

Who:

Shilly-shallied, sashayed, shook and shit his britches while eleven Blessington men got slaughtered.

He handed Jack the Hughes/Nixon loan dirt. *He* co-signed the cocksucker’s White House mortgage. The Boyd/Bondurant casino percentage deal—about as au courant as Slippery Dick Nixon.

The Agency kept cloning exile hard-ons. Speedboat crews kept popping the Cuban coast. It was all fart-in-a-hurricane kid stuff.

Jack called a second invasion “quite possible.” He wouldn’t give a go date or commit beyond nebulous rhetoric.

Jack’s chickenshit. Jack’s a pouty, panty-waisted, powder puff.

Blessington was still capacity-booked. The Cadre dope biz was still flourishing. Fulo bought off the Boyd shootout witnesses—forty people got fat paydays.

Néstor saved Boyd’s life. Néstor knew no fear. Néstor snuck into Havana once a week on the off chance that he might run into the Beard.

Wilfredo Delsol ran the cabstand. The kid was behaving solidly now. His pro-Castro dance was no more than a two-second tango.

Jimmy Hoffa bopped by Tiger Kab occasionally. Jimmy was Kennedy Hater Number One—for good fucking cause.

Bobby K. had Jimmy dancing to his beat: the old Nuisance Roust/Grand Jury Blues. Jimmy got a wild bug up his ass—manifested by nostalgia for the Darleen Shoftel shakedown.

Jimmy said, “We could do it again. I could neutralize Bobby by getting at Jack. You got to believe that Jack still likes cooze.”

Jimmy was persistent on the topic. Jimmy echoed the hate that the whole Outfit shared.

Sam G. said, "I rue the day I bought Jack Illinois." Heshie Ryskind said, "Kemper Boyd liked Jack, so we figured he had to be kosher."

Boyd was now some triple or quadruple agent. Boyd was a self-proclaimed insomniac. Boyd said rearranging lies kept him up nights.

Boyd was the Cuban Study Group liaison. Boyd was on Cadre sabbatical—a ploy designed to simplify his life.

Boyd fed Bobby pro-CIA distortions. Boyd fed the CIA Study Group secrets.

Boyd pressed Bobby and Jack. Boyd urged them to assassinate Castro and facilitate a second invasion.

The brothers nixed the notion. Boyd called Bobby more pro-Cause than Jack—but only up to some ambiguous point.

Jack said, No second invasion. Jack refused to grant whack-the-Beard approval. The Study Group cooked up an alternative called Operation Mongoose.

It was nifty long-range nomenclature. Let's recapture Cuba some time this century. Here's 50 million dollars a year—fetch, CIA, fetch!

Mongoose spawned JM/Wave. JM/Wave was the nifty code name for six buildings on the Miami U campus. JM/Wave featured snazzy graph rooms and the latest in covert study workshops.

JM/Wave was grad school for geeks.

Fetch, CIA, fetch. Monitor your exile groups, but don't act boldly—it might fuck with Jack the Haircut's poll standings.

Boyd still loved Jack. He was in too deep to see through him. Boyd said he loved his civil rights work—because there was no subterfuge involved.

Boyd had trouble sleeping. It's a blessing, Kemper—you don't want my claustrophobic nightmares.

71

(Washington, D.C., 6/61–11/61)

He loved his office. Carlos Marcello bought it for him.

It was a spacious three-room suite. The building was very close to the White House.

A professional furnished it. The oak walls and green leather nearly matched Jules Schiffrin's study.

He had no receptionist and no secretary. Carlos did not believe in sharing secrets.

Carlos brought him full circle. The ex-Chicago Phantom was now a Mafia lawyer.

The symmetry felt real. He hitched his star to a man who shared his hatreds. Kemper facilitated the union. He knew that it would jell.

John F. Kennedy took Kemper full circle. They were two charming, shallow men who never grew up. Kennedy sicced thugs on a foreign country and betrayed them when he saw how it looked. Kemper protected certain Negroes and sold heroin to others.

Carlos Marcello played the same rigged game. Carlos used people and made sure they knew the rules. Carlos knew that he would pay for his life with eternal damnation.

They walked hundreds of miles together. They went to mass in jungle towns and contributed extravagant church tithes.

They walked alone. No bodyguards or back scratchers walked with them.

They ate in cantinas. They bought entire villages lunch. He wrote deportation briefs on tabletops and phoned them in to New York.

Chuck Rogers flew them to Mexico. Carlos said, "I trust you, Ward. If you say 'Turn yourself in,' I'll do it."

He fulfilled that trust. Three judges reviewed the evidence and released Marcello on bond. The Littell writ work was considered audaciously brilliant.

Grateful Carlos set him up with James Riddle Hoffa. Jimmy was predisposed to fondness—Carlos handed the Fund books back to him and described the circumstances behind their return.

Hoffa became his second client. Robert Kennedy remained his sole adversary.

He wrote briefs for Hoffa's formal litigators. The results confirmed his brilliance.

July '61: A second Sun Valley indictment is dismissed. Littell writs prove the grand jury was improperly impaneled.

August '61: A South Florida grand jury is cut off at the knees. A Littell brief proves that evidence was obtained through entrapment.

He'd come full circle.

He quit drinking. He rented a beautiful Georgetown apartment and finally cracked the Fund book code.

Numbers and letters became words. Words became names—to track against police files, city directories and every financial listing in the public domain.

He tracked those names for four months straight. He chased celebrity names, political names, criminal names and anonymous names. He ran obituary checks and criminal record checks. He quadruple-checked names, dates and figures, and cross-referenced all salient data.

He tracked names linked to numbers linked to public stockholder reports. He assessed names and numbers for his own investment portfolio—and amassed a staggering secret history of financial collusion.

Among the Teamster Central States Pension Fund lendees:

Twenty-four U.S. senators, nine governors, 114 congressmen, Allen Dulles, Rafael Trujillo, Fulgencio Batista, Anastasio Somoza, Juan Perón, Nobel Prize researchers, drug-addicted movie stars, loan sharks, labor racketeers, union-busting factory owners, Palm Beach socialites, rogue entrepreneurs, French right-wing crackpots with extensive Algerian holdings, and sixty-seven unsolved homicide victims extrapolatable as Pension Fund deadbeats.

The chief cash conduit/lender was one Joseph P. Kennedy Sr.

Jules Schiffrin died abruptly. He might have sensed uncharted Fund potential—machinations past the grasp of the common mobsters.

He could implement Schiffrin's knowledge. He could put the full force of his will behind that one thing.

Five months stone-cold sober taught him this:

You're capable of anything.

Part IV

72

(Miami, 12/20/61)

Agency guys called the place “Suntan U.” Girls in shorts and halter tops five days before Christmas—no shit.

Big Pete wants a woman. Extortion experience preferred, but not mandat—

Boyd said, “Are you listening to me?”

Pete said, “I’m listening, and I’m observing. It’s a nice tour, but the coeds are impressing me more than JM/Wave.”

They cut between buildings. The Ops station was cattycorner to the women’s gym.

“Pete, are you—?”

“You were saying Fulo and Néstor could run the Cadre business by themselves. You were saying Lockhart went off contract status to start up his own Klan in Mississippi and snitch for the Feds. Chuck’s taking his place at Blessington, and *my* new gig is funneling guns to Guy Banister in New Orleans. Lockhart’s got some gun connections I can tap into, and Guy’s touting some guy named Joe Milteer, who’s hooked into some guys in the John Birch Society and the Minutemen. They’ve got beaucoup fucking gun money, and Milteer will be dropping some off at the cabstand."

They hit a shady walkway and grabbed a bench out of the sun. Pete stretched his legs and eyeballed the gym.

"That's good retention for a bored listener."

Pete yawned. "JM/Wave and Mongoose are boring. Coastal harassment, gun running and monitoring exile groups is one big snore."

Boyd straddled the bench. College kids and Cuban hard-ons fraternized two benches over.

"Describe your ideal course of action."

Pete lit a cigarette. "We should clip Fidel. I'm for it, you're for it, and the only guys that aren't for it are your pals Jack and Bobby."

Boyd smiled. "I'm starting to think we should do it anyway. If we could develop a patsy to take the fall, the hit would probably never be traced back to the Agency or to us."

"Jack and Bobby would just figure they got lucky."

Boyd nodded. "I should run it by Santo."

"I already did."

"Did he like the idea?"

"Yeah, he did. And he ran it by Johnny Rosselli and Sam G., and they both said they wanted to be in on it."

Boyd rubbed his collarbone. "You got a quorum just like that?"

"Not exactly. They all like the idea, but it sounds like they'll need some more convincing."

"Maybe we should hire Ward Littell to whip up a few briefs. He's certainly the chief convincer of the moment."

"You mean you appreciate the way he snowed Carlos and Jimmy."

"Don't you?"

Pete blew smoke rings. "I appreciate a good comeback as much as the next man, but I draw the line at Littell. And you're smiling because your sissy kid brother finally started acting half-ass competent."

College girls walked by. Big Pete wants a—

Boyd said, "He's on our side now, remember?"

"I remember. And I remember that your friend Jack used to be."

"He still is. And he listens to Bobby like he listens to no one else, and Bobby's becoming more pro-Cause by the day."

Pete blew nice concentric rings. “That’s good to know. Maybe it means we’ll tap into our casino money about the time fucking Bobby himself gets elected President.”

Boyd looked distracted. It could be shootout side effects—trauma fucked you up long-range sometimes.

“Kemper, are you listening to—?”

Boyd cut him off. “You were evincing general anti-Kennedy sentiment. You were about to start in on the President, even though he remains our best wedge to get at the casino money, and even though general CIA unpreparedness and *not* Kennedy cowardice was the major contributing cause of the Bay of Pigs disaster.”

Pete whooped and slapped the bench. “I should have known better than to rag your boys.”

“It’s ‘boy,’ singular.”

“I fucking apologize, although I still don’t see what’s so fucking thrilling about sucking up to the President of the United States.”

Boyd grinned. “It’s the places he lets you go.”

“Like protecting niggers in Meridian, Mississippi?”

“I’ve got Negro blood now. That transfusion I got at Saint Augustine’s came from a colored man.”

Pete laughed. “What you’ve got is a Big White Bwana complex. You’ve got your spooks and your spies, and you’ve got this crazy notion that you’re their southern aristocrat savior.”

Boyd said, “Are you finished?”

Pete clicked his eyes off a tall brunette. “Yeah, I’m finished.”

“Do you feel like rationally discussing a Fidel hit?”

Pete flicked his cigarette at a tree. “My one rational comment is ‘Let Néstor do it.’ ”

“I was thinking of Néstor and two expendable backup shooters.”

“Where do we find them?”

“We look around. You recruit two two-man teams, I recruit one. Néstor goes with the finalists no matter what.”

Pete said, “Let’s do it.”

Dougie Frank Lockhart had the far-right South wired. Gun seekers knew the man to call: carrot-topped Dougie in Puckett, Mississippi.

Santo and Carlos kicked in fifty Gs apiece. Pete took the coin and went gun shopping.

Dougie Frank brokered the deals for a 5% commission. He procured A-1 hand-me-downs hot off the race hate circuit.

Lockhart knew his job. Lockhart knew the Dixie Right was reassessing its weaponry needs.

The Commie Threat had mandated major ordnance. Tommy guns, mortars and grenades fit the bill. Feisty niggers now eclipsed the Red Menace—and small arms handled them best.

The Deep South was one big loony yard sale.

Pete traded junk pistols for brand-new bazookas. Pete bought operational Thompsons for fifty scoots a pop. Pete supplied six campsites with half a million rounds of ammunition.

The Minutemen, the National States Rights Party, the National Renaissance Party, the Exalted Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, the Royal Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, the Imperial Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and the Klarion Klan Koalition for the New Konfederacy supplied him. He supplied six exile camps, full of expendable backup killers.

Pete spent three weeks gun shopping. He made five Miami-New Orleans circuits.

The fifty grand evaporated. Heshie Ryskind kicked in an additional twenty. Heshie was scared—his doctors diagnosed him with lung cancer.

Heshie whipped up a camp R&R tour to take his mind off his bum health. He brought in Jack Ruby and his strippers, Dick Contino and his accordion.

The strippers stripped and cavorted with exile trainees. Heshie bought entire campsites blow jobs. Dick Contino played “Lady of Spain” six thousand times.

Jimmy Hoffa showed up at the Lake Pontchartrain soiree. Jimmy ranted, railed and raved against the Kennedys nonstop.

Joe Milteer joined the party outside Mobile. He dropped ten grand on the gun fund, unsolicited.

Guy Banister called Old Joe “harmless.” Lockhart said the old boy loved to torch nigger churches.

Pete auditioned backup triggers for the Fidel hit. He laid down his criteria with two simple questions.

Are you an expert marksman?

Would you die to set up Néstor Chasco’s killshot?

He schmoozed up at least a hundred Cubans. Four men made the cut.

CHINO CROMAJOR:

Bay of Pigs survivor. Willing to detonate Castro with a strip-search-proof enema bomb.

RAFAEL HERNÁNDEZ-BROWN:

Cigar maker/gunman. Willing to slip the Beard a poison panatella and go up in smoke with the man who raped his tobacco fields.

CÉSAR RAMOS:

Former Cuban Army cook. Willing to whip up an exploding suckling pig and die at Castro's Last Supper.

WALTER "JUANITA" CHACÓN:

Sadistic drag queen. Willing to butt-fuck Fidel and go out orgasmic in exile crossfire.

Memo to Kemper Boyd:

Top my shooters—if you can.

73

(Meridian, 1/11/62)

Kemper snorted a coke-“H” speedball. It was precisely his sixteenth taste of dope.

It was his twelfth since the doctor cut off his medication. It averaged out to 1.3 *nonaddicted* tastes per month.

His head twirled. His brain revved. His shabby room at the Seminole Motel looked almost pretty.

Memo:

Go see that colored preacher. He’s rounding up a group of voting rights complainants.

Memo:

See Dougie Frank Lockhart. He’s got two would-be triggers lined up for you to audition.

The taste hit *all the way* home.

His collarbone quit throbbing. The pins holding it together meshed clean.

Kemper wiped his nose. The portrait above his desk took on a glow.

It was Jack Kennedy, photographed pre-Pigs. His post-Pigs inscription: “To Kemper Boyd. I guess we both caught a few bullets lately."

Taste #16 felt high-octane. Jack's smile was high-test—Dr. Feelgood shot him up before the photo session.

Jack looked young and invincible. The last nine months knocked a lot of that out of him.

The Bay of Pigs fiasco did it. Jack grew up behind a tidal wave of censure.

Jack blamed himself—and the Agency. Jack fired Allen Dulles and Dick Bissell. Jack said, "I'll smash the CIA into a thousand pieces."

Jack hates the CIA. Bobby doesn't. Bobby now hates Fidel Castro like he hates Hoffa and the Mob.

The Bay of Pigs postmortem was painfully protracted. He double-agented as Kemper Boyd, chaperone. He showed Bobby scores of sanitized exiles—the noncriminal types that Langley wanted him to see.

The Study Group called the invasion:

"Quixotic," "undermanned" and "based on specious intelligence."

He agreed. Langley disagreed.

Langley thought he was a Kennedy apologist. They considered him politically unsound.

John Stanton told him this. He silently agreed with the appraisal.

He vocally agreed: Yes, JM/Wave will prove efficacious.

He silently disagreed. He urged Bobby to assassinate Fidel Castro. Bobby disagreed. He said it was too gangster-like and inimical to Kennedy policy.

Bobby was a bully with strong moral convictions. His guidelines were often hard to gauge.

Bully Bobby set up racket squads in ten major cities. Their one goal was to recruit organized-crime informants. The move enraged Mr. Hoover. Independent Mob-busters might upstage the Top Hoodlum Program.

Bully Bobby hates Bully J. Edgar. Bully J. Edgar reciprocates. It was unprecedented hatred—the Justice Department seethed with it.

Hoover staged protocol slowdowns. Bobby trashed FBI autonomy. Guy Banister said Hoover placed illegal bug/taps in Mob venues coast to coast.

Bobby had no inkling. Mr. Hoover knew how to keep secrets.

So did Ward Littell. Ward's best secret was Joe Kennedy's Teamster Fund "malfeasance."

Joe had a near-fatal stroke late last year. Claire said it "devastated" Laura.

She tried to contact her father. Bobby prevented it. That three-million-dollar buyoff was binding and permanent.

Claire graduated from Tulane magna cum laude. The NYU law school accepted her. She moved to New York City and took an apartment near Laura.

Laura rarely mentioned him. Claire told her he was wounded by a "random gunshot" in Miami. Laura said, "Kemper and 'random'? *Never.*"

Claire believed his squeaky-clean version of the shootout. Claire zoomed down to Saint Augustine's the second the doctor called her.

Claire said Laura had a new boyfriend. Claire said he was nice. Claire said she met Laura's "nice friend," Lenny Sands.

Lenny violated his order and resumed contact with Laura. Lenny always played things indirectly—that *Hush-Hush* Bay of Pigs piece was filled with double-edged innuendo.

He didn't care. Lenny was extortable and long gone from his life.

Lenny dug up dirt for Howard Hughes. Lenny tattled certain secrets and quashed others. Lenny possessed circumstantial evidence on how badly Kemper Boyd fucked up in April '61.

Kemper sniffed another speedball.

His heart revved. His collarbone went numb. He remembered how last May compensated for last April.

Bobby ordered him to follow some Freedom Riders. He said, "Just observe, and call for help if Klansmen or whoever get rowdy. Remember, you're still convalescing."

He observed. He got up closer than reporters and camera crews.

He saw civil rights workers board buses. He tailed them. Hymns roared out of wide-open windows.

Shitkickers tailed the buses. Car radios blared "Dixie." He badged a few rock throwers off, with his gun arm still in a sling.

He stopped in Anniston. Some rednecks slashed his tires. A white mob stormed the depot and pelted a Freedom Bus out of town.

He rented an old Chevy and played catch-up. He zoomed out Highway 78 and caught a mob scene.

The bus had been torched. Cops, Freedom Riders and crackers were tangled up off the roadside.

He saw a colored girl batting flames off her pigtails. He saw the torch artist peel rubber. He ran him off the road and pistol-whipped him half-dead.

I take a few tastes now and then. It's just to help me keep things straight.

"… And the best thing about what I'm proposing is that you won't have to testify in open court. Federal judges will read your depositions and my accompanying affidavits and go from there. If any of you are called to testify, it will be in closed session, with no reporters, opposing counsel or local police officials present."

The pretty little church was SRO. The preacher rounded up sixty-odd people.

Kemper said, "Questions?"

A man yelled, "Where you from?" A woman yelled, "What about protection?"

Kemper leaned over the pulpit. "I'm from Nashville, Tennessee. You might recall that we had some boycotts and sit-ins there in 1960, and you might recall that we've made great strides toward integration, with minimum bloodshed. I realize that Mississippi is a whole lot less civilized than my home state, and as far as protection goes, I can only say that when you go to register to vote, you'll have numbers on your side. The more people who offer depositions, the better. The more people who register and vote, the better. I'm not saying that certain elements will take kindly to your voting, but the more of you who vote the better your chance of electing local officials who'll keep those elements in line."

A man said, "We got a nice cemetery outside. It's just that none of us want to move in real soon."

A woman said, "You can't expect the law around here to jump on our side all of a sudden."

Kemper smiled. Two tastes and a two-martini lunch made the church glow.

"As cemeteries go, that one you've got is just about the prettiest

I’ve ever seen, but none of us want to visit it until some time around the year 2000, and as far as protection goes, I can only say that President Kennedy did a pretty good job of protecting those Freedom Riders last year, and if those aforementioned white-trash, peckerwood, redneck-cracker elements turn out in force to suppress your God-given civil rights, then the Federal government will meet that challenge with greater force, because your will to freedom will not be defeated, because it is good and just and true, and you have the strength of kindness, decency and unflinching rectitude on your side.”

The congregation rose and applauded.

“… So it’s what you call a sweetheart deal. I got my Royal Knights Klavern, which is basically an FBI franchise, and all I gotta do is keep my ear down and rat off the Exalted Knights and Imperial Knights for mail fraud, which is the only Klan stuff Mr. Hoover really cares about. I got my own informants subcontracted into both them groups, and I pay them out of my Bureau stipend, which helps to consolidate the power of my own group.”

The shack reeked of stale socks and stale reefer smoke. Dougie Frank wore a Klan sheet and Levi’s.

Kemper smashed a fly perching on his chair. “What about those shooters you mentioned?”

“They’re here. They’ve been bunking with me, ’cause the motels around here don’t differentiate between Cubans and niggers. ’Course, you’re trying to change all that.”

“Where are they now?”

“I got a shooting range down the road. They’re there with some of my Royals. You want a beer?”

“How about a dry martini?”

“Ain’t none of those in these parts. And any man asks for one’s gonna get tagged as a Federal agitator.”

Kemper smiled. “I’ve got a bartender at the Skyline Lounge on my side.”

“Must be a Jew or a homo.”

Kemper laid on some drawl. “Son, you are trying my patience.”

Lockhart flinched. “Well … shit, then, you should know that I heard Pete found his four boys. Guy Banister said you’re still two short, which don’t surprise me, given all the integration work you've been doing."

"Tell me about the shooters. Limit your extraneous comments and get to the point."

Lockhart wiggled his chair back. Kemper slid his chair closer to him.

"Well, uh, Banister, he sent them over to me. They stole a speedboat in Cuba and ran it aground off the Alabama coast. They robbed some gas stations and liquor stores and renewed an old acquaintance with that Frenchy guy Laurent Guéry, who told them to call Guy for some anti-Fidel work."

"And?"

"And Guy considered them too goddamn crazy for his taste, which is too crazy for just about anybody's. He sent them to me, but I got about as much use for them as a dog does for fleas."

Kemper moved closer. Lockhart backed his chair into the wall.

"Man, you are crowding me more than I'm used to."

"Tell me about the Cubans."

"Jesus, I thought we were friends."

"We are. Now, tell me about the Cubans."

Lockhart slid his chair sideways. "Their names are Flash Elorde and Juan Canestel. 'Flash' ain't Elorde's real first name. He just took it 'cause there's some famous spic boxer with the same last name as him who uses it as a nickname."

"And?"

"And they're both crack shots and big Fidel haters. Flash ran this prostitution slave trade in Havana, and Juan was this rape-o who got castrated by Castro's secret police, 'cause he raped something like three hundred women between the years 1959 and 1961."

"Are they willing to die for a free Cuba?"

"Shit, yes. Flash says that given the life he's led, every day he wakes up alive is a miracle."

Kemper smiled. "You should adopt that attitude, Dougie."

"Which means?"

"Which means there's a nice colored church outside Meridian. It's called the First Pentecostal Baptist, and it's got a beautiful moss-hung cemetery next door."

Lockhart pinched one nostril and blew snot on the floor. "So fucking what? What are you, some nigger church conno-sewer?"

Kemper milked his drawl. "Tell your boys not to touch that church."

"Shit, man, how do you expect a self-respecting white man to respond to something like that?"

"Say, 'Yes, sir, Mr. Boyd.' "

Lockhart sputtered. Kemper hummed the "We Shall Overcome" song.

Lockhart said, "Yes, sir, Mr. Boyd."

Flash sported a Mohawk haircut. Juan sported a big testicle bulge—handkerchiefs or wadded-up tissue filled the space where his nuts used to reside.

The range was a vacant lot adjoining a trailer park. Full-dress Klansmen shot tin cans and swigged beer and Jack Daniel's.

They hit one can out of four at thirty yards. Flash and Juan notched all hits from twice that distance.

They shot old M-ls in late-afternoon light. Better rifles and telescopic sights would make them invincible.

Dougie Frank circulated. Kemper watched the Cubans shoot.

Flash and Juan stripped to the waist and used their shirts to swat off mosquitos. Both men were torture-scarred from the hips up.

Kemper whistled and signaled Lockhart: Send them over, now.

Dougie Frank rounded them up. Kemper leaned against an old Ford half-ton. The bed was jammed with liquor bottles and guns.

They walked over. Kemper came on courtly and genteel.

Smiles and bows went around. Handshakes went down. Flash and Juan pulled their shirts on—a sign of respect for the Big Bwana white man.

Kemper cut the niceties off. "My name is Boyd. I have a mission to offer you."

Flash said, "*Sí, trabajo. Quién el—*"

Juan shushed him. "What kind of mission?"

Kemper tried Spanish. "*Trabajo muy importante. Para matar el grande puto Fidel Castro*."

Flash jumped up and down. Juan grabbed him and restrained him.

"This is not a joke, Mr. Boyd?"

Kemper pulled out his money clip. "How much would it take to convince you?"

They crowded up to him. Kemper fanned out hundred-dollar bills.

“I hate Fidel Castro just as much as any Cuban patriot. Ask Mr. Banister or your friend Laurent Guéry about me. I’ll pay you out of my own pocket until our backers come through, and if we succeed and get Castro, I’ll guarantee you large bonuses.”

The cash hypnotized them. Kemper went in for the close.

He slipped a hundred to Flash and a hundred to Juan. One to Flash, one to Juan, one to Flash—

Canestel squeezed his hand shut. “We believe you.”

Kemper snagged a bottle out of the truck. Flash beat mambo time on the back fender.

A Klansman yelled, “Save some for us white men!”

Kemper took a drink. Flash took a drink. Juan chug-a-lugged half the bottle.

The cocktail hour segued into get-acquainted time.

Kemper bought Flash and Juan some clothes. They moved their gear out of Lockhart’s shack.

Kemper called his broker in New York. He said, Sell some stock and send me five thousand dollars.

The man said, Why? Kemper said, I’m hiring some underlings.

Flash and Juan needed lodging. Kemper braced his friendly desk clerk and asked him to revise his WHITES ONLY policy.

The man agreed. Flash and Juan moved into the Seminole Motel.

Kemper called Pete in New Orleans. He said, Let’s arrange a Whack Fidel audition.

They brainstormed.

Kemper set the budget at fifty grand per shooter and two hundred grand for general overhead. Pete suggested severance pay—ten Gs for each rejected shooter.

Kemper agreed. Pete said, Let’s do the gig at Blessington. Santo can put Sam G. and Johnny up at the Breakers Motel.

Kemper agreed. Pete said, We need a spic fall guy—non-CIA/non-Cadre-connected. Kemper said, We’ll find one.

Pete said, My boys are braver than your boys.

Kemper said, No, they’re not.

Flash and Juan felt like drinking. Kemper took them to the Skyline Lounge.

The bartender said, They ain’t white. Kemper slipped him twenty dollars. The bartender said, They are now.

Kemper drank martinis. Juan drank I.W. Harper. Flash drank Myers's rum and Coke.

Flash spoke Spanish. Juan translated. Kemper learned the rudiments of slave prostitution.

Flash kidnapped the girls. Laurent Guéry got them hooked on Algerian horse. Juan broke the virgins in and tried to perv them into digging random sex.

Kemper listened. The ugly things drifted away, compartmentalized and non-applicable.

Juan said he missed his balls. He could still get hard and fuck, but he missed the total shoot-your-load experience.

Flash raged against Fidel. Kemper thought: I don't hate the man at all.

The six wore starched fatigues and camouflage lampblack. It was Pete's idea: Let's turn our shooter candidates out scary.

Néstor built a range behind the Breakers parking lot. Kemper called it a jerry-rig masterpiece.

It featured pulley-mounted targets and chairs scrounged from a demolished cocktail hut. The audition weaponry was CIA-prime: M-1s, assorted pistols, and scope-fitted .30.06's.

Teo Paez fashioned straw-stuffed Castro targets. They were life-size and realistic—replete with beards and cigars.

Laurent Guéry crashed the party. Teo said he blew France *rápidamente*. Néstor said he'd tried to clip Charles de Gaulle.

The judges sat under an awning. S. Trafficante, J. Rosselli and S. Giancana—curled up with highballs and binoculars.

Pete played armorer. Kemper played MC.

"We've got six men for you gentlemen to choose from. You'll be funding this operation, and I know you'll want last say as to who goes in. Pete and I are proposing three-man teams, with NSstor Chasco, who you already know, as the third man in all cases. Before we start, I want to stress that these men are loyal, fearless and fully comprehend the risks involved. If captured, they will commit suicide rather than reveal who set up this operation."

Giancana tapped his watch. "I'm running late. Can we get this show on the road?"

Trafficante tapped his. "Move it, would you, Kemper? I'm due back in Tampa."

Kemper nodded. Pete cranked Fidel #1 fifty feet out. The men loaded their revolvers and assumed the two-handed combat stance.

Pete said, “Fire.”

Chino Cromajor blew Castro’s hat off. Rafael Hernandez-Brown decigared him. César Ramos severed both his ears.

The reverberations faded. Kemper gauged reactions.

Santo looked bored. Sam looked restless. Johnny looked mildly nonplussed.

Juanita Chacón aimed crotch-high and fired. Fidel #1 lost his manhood.

Flash and Juan fired twice. Fidel lost his arms and his legs.

Laurent Guéry clapped. Giancana checked his watch.

Pete cranked Fidel #2 a hundred yards out. The shooters raised their obsolete M-1s.

The judges held up their binoculars. Pete said, “Fire.”

Cromajor shot Castro’s eyes out. Hernández-Brown lopped off his thumbs.

Ramos nailed his cigar. Juanita castrated him.

Flash blew his legs off at the knees. Juan slammed a cardiac bullseye.

Pete yelled, “Cease fire!” The shooters lowered their weapons and lined up at parade rest.

Giancana said, “It’s impressive, but we can’t go off half-cocked on something this big.”

Trafficante said, “I have to agree with Mo.”

Rosselli said, “You need to give us some time to think about it.”

Kemper felt queasy. His speedball rush turned ugly.

Pete was trembling.

74

(Washington, D.C., 1/24/62)

Littell locked the money in his desk safe. One month's retainer—$6,000 cash.

Hoffa said, "You didn't count it."

"I trust you."

"I could've made a mistake."

Littell tilted his chair back and looked up at him. "That's unlikely. Especially when you walked it over here yourself."

"You'd've felt better walking over to my shop in this fucking cold?"

"I could have waited until the first."

Hoffa perched on the edge of the desk. His overcoat was soaked with melting snow.

Littell moved some folders. Hoffa picked up his crystal paperweight.

"Did you come for a pep talk, Jimmy?"

"No. But if you got one, I'm all ears."

"How's this. You're going to win and Bobby's going to lose. It's going to be a long and painful war, and you're going to win by sheer attrition."

Jimmy squeezed the paperweight. “I was thinking Kemper Boyd should leak a copy of my Justice Department file to you.”

Littell shook his head. “He won’t do it, and I won’t ask him to. He’s got the Kennedys and Cuba and God knows what else wrapped in tidy little packages that only he knows the logic of. There’s lines he won’t cross over, and you and Bobby Kennedy are one of them.”

Hoffa said, “Lines come and go. And as far as Cuba goes, I think Carlos is the only Outfit guy who still gives a shit. I think Santo, Mo and the others are pissed off and bored with the whole notion of that rinky-dink goddamn island.”

Littell straightened his necktie. “Good. Because *I’m* bored with everything except keeping you and Carlos one step ahead of Bobby Kennedy.”

Hoffa smiled. “You used to like Bobby. I heard you used to really admire him.”

“Lines come and go, Jimmy. You said so yourself.”

Hoffa dropped the paperweight. “This is true. It is also fucking true that I need an edge on Bobby. And you fucking pulled the plug on that Kennedy wire job that Pete Bondurant was working for me back in ’58.”

Littell forced a wince into a smile. “I didn’t know you knew that.”

“That is obvious. It should also be fucking obvious that I forgive you.”

“And obvious that you want to try it again.”

“This is true.”

“Call Pete, Jimmy. I don’t have much use for him, but he’s the best shakedown man alive.”

Hoffa leaned across the desk. His trouser legs slid up and showed off cheap white sweat socks.

“I want you in on it, too.”

75

(Los Angeles, 2/4/62)

Pete rubbed his neck. It was all kinked and knotted—he flew out in a coach seat made for midgets.

"I jump when you say 'jump,' Jimmy, but coast-to-coast for coffee and pastry is pushing it."

"I think L.A.'s the place to set this up."

"Set what up?"

Hoffa dabbed eclair cream off his necktie. "You'll see soon enough."

Pete heard noise in the kitchen. "Who's that poking around?"

"It's Ward Littell. Sit down, Pete. You're making me nervous."

Pete dropped his garment bag. The house stunk of cigars—Hoffa let visiting Teamsters use it for stag nights.

"Littell, shit. This is grief I don't need."

"Come on. Ancient history's ancient history."

Recent history: *Your* lawyer stole *your* Fund books—

Littell walked in. Hoffa put his hands up, peacemaker-style. "Be nice, you guys. I wouldn't put the two of you in the same room unless it was good."

Pete rubbed his eyes. "I'm a busy guy, and I flew overnight for this little breakfast klatch. Give me one good reason why I should take on additional fucking work, or I'm heading back to the airport."

Hoffa said, "Tell him, Ward."

Littell warmed his hands on a coffee cup. "Bobby Kennedy's coming down unacceptably hard on Jimmy. We want to work up a derogatory tape profile on Jack and use it as a wedge to get him to call off Bobby.

If I hadn't interfered, the Shoftel operation might have worked. I think we should do it again, and I think we should recruit a woman that Jack would find interesting enough to sustain an affair with."

Pete rolled his eyes. "You want to shake down the President of the United States?"

"Yes."

"You, me and Jimmy?"

"You, me, Fred Turentine and the woman we bring in."

"And you're going at this like you think we can trust each other."

Littell smiled. "We both hate Jack Kennedy. And I think we've got enough dirt on each other to buttress a non-aggression pact."

Pete popped some prickly little goosebumps. "We can't tell Kemper about this. He'd rat us in a second."

"I agree. Kemper has to stay out of the loop on this one."

Hoffa belched. "I'm watching you two humps stare at each other, and I'm starting to feel like I'm out of the fucking loop, even though I'm financing the fucking loop."

Littell said, "Lenny Sands."

Hoffa sprayed eclair crumbs. "What the fuck does Jewboy Lenny have to do with fucking anything?"

Pete looked at Littell. Littell looked at Pete. Their brainwaves meshed somewhere over the pastry tray.

Hoffa looked dead flummoxed. His eyes went out of focus somewhere near the planet Mars. Pete steered Littell to the kitchen and shut the door.

"You're thinking Lenny's this big Hollywood insider. You're thinking he might know some women we could use as bait."

"Right. And if he doesn't come through, at least we're here in Los Angeles."

"Which is the best place on earth to find shakedown-type women."

Littell sipped coffee. "Right. And Lenny was my informant once. I've got a hold on him, and if he doesn't cooperate, I'll squeeze him with it."

Pete cracked some knuckles. "He's a homo. He shanked this made guy in an alley behind some fruit bar."

"Lenny told you that?"

"Don't look so hurt. People have this tendency to tell me things they don't want to."

Littell dumped his cup in the sink. Hoffa paced outside the door.

Pete said, "Lenny knows Kemper. And I think he's tight with that Hughes woman that Kemper had a thing with."

"Lenny's safe. If worse comes to worse, we can squeeze him with the Tony Iannone job."

Pete rubbed his neck. "Who else knows we're planning this?"

"Nobody. Why?"

"I was wondering if it was common knowledge all over the Outfit."

Littell shook his head. "You, me and Jimmy. That's the loop."

Pete said, "Let's keep it that way. Lenny's tight with Sam G., and Sam's been known to go apeshit when people get rough with him."

Littell leaned against the stove. "Agreed. And I won't tell Carlos, and you won't tell Trafficante and those other Outfit guys you and Kemper deal with. Let's keep this contained."

"Agreed. A few of those guys hung me and Kemper out to dry on something a couple of weeks ago, so I'm not prone to tell them much of anything."

Littell shrugged. "They'll find out in the end, and they'll be pleased with the results we get. Bobby's been riding them, too, and I think we can safely say that Giancana will find whatever we had to do to Lenny justified."

Pete said, "I like Lenny."

Littell said, "So do I, but business is business."

Pete traced dollar signs on the stove. "What kind of money are we talking about?"

Littell said, "Twenty-five thousand a month, with your expenses and Freddy Turentine's fee worked in. I know you'll need to travel for your CIA job, and that's fine with both Jimmy and me. I've done wire jobs for the Bureau myself, and I think that between you, me and Turentine, we'll be able to cover all our bases."

Hoffa banged on the door. "Why don't you guys come out here and talk to *me?* This tête-à-tête shit is wearing me thin!"

Pete steered Littell back to the laundry room. "It sounds good. We find a woman, wire a few pads and fuck Jack Kennedy where it hurts."

Littell pulled his arm free. "We need to check Lenny's *Hush-Hush* reports. We might get a lead on a woman that way."

"*I'll* do it. I might be able to get a look at the reports Howard Hughes keeps at his office."

"Do it today. I'll be staying at the Ambassador until we get things set up."

The door shook—Jimmy had his tits in a twist.

Littell said, "I want to bring Mr. Hoover in on this."

"*Are you insane?*"

Littell smiled, kiss-my-ass condescending. "He hates the Kennedys like you and I do. I want to re-establish contact, leak a few tapes to him and have him in my corner as a wedge to help out Jimmy and Carlos."

Not *so* insane—

"You know he's a voyeur, Pete. Do you know what he'd give to have the President of the United States fucking on tape?"

Hoffa barged into the kitchen. His shirt was dotted with doughnut sprinkles—every color of the rainbow.

Pete winked. "I'm starting not to hate you so much, Ward."

Hughes' business office was marked RESTRICTED ACCESS now. Mormon goons flanked the door and checked IDs with some weird scanner gizmo.

Pete dawdled by the parking lot gate. The guard chewed his ear off.

"Us non-Mormons call this place Castle Dracula. Mr. Hughes we call the Count, and we call Duane Spurgeon—he's the head Mormon—Frankenstein, 'cause he's dying of cancer and looks like he's dead already. I remember when this building wasn't full of religious crackpots, and Mr. Hughes came in in person, and he didn't have this big germ phobia and these crazy plans to buy up Las Vegas, and he didn't get blood transfusions like Bela Lugosi

—”

“Larry—”

“—and he actually talked to people, you know? Now the only people he talks to besides the Mormons are Mr. J. Edgar Hoover himself and Lenny the *Hush-Hush* guy. You know why *I’m* talking so much? Because I work the gate all day and pick up scuttlebutt, and the only non-Mormon people I see are the Filipino janitor and this Jap switchboard girl. Mr. Hughes can still wheel and deal, though, I got to say that. I heard he’s pushed the TWA divestment price way up, so when he gets the gelt he can funnel it straight into some account he’s holding, like some kind of zillion-dollar ‘buy up Vegas’ fund …”

Larry ran out of breath. Pete whipped out a hundred-dollar bill.

“They keep Lenny’s stringer reports in the file room, right?”

“Right.”

“There’s nine more of these if you get me in there.”

Larry shook his head. “That’s impossible, Pete. We got virtually an all-Mormon staff here. Some of the guys are Mormon and ex-FBI, and Mr. J. Edgar Hoover himself helped pick them.”

Pete said, “Lenny’s in L.A. full-time now, right?”

“Right. He gave up his place in Chicago. I heard he’s writing *Hush-Hush* as some kind of restricted mimeo sheet.”

Pete forked over the hundred. “Look up his address for me.”

Larry checked his Rolodex and plucked a card. “It’s 831 North Kilkea, which isn’t that far from here.”

A hospital van pulled up. Pete said, “What’s that?”

Larry whispered. “Fresh blood for the Count. Certified Mormon-pure.”

The new gig felt good, but strictly second-string. The main gig should be WHACK FIDEL.

Santo and Company quashed it. They acted bored, like the Cause meant jackshit.

WHY?

He cut his shooters loose. Kemper took his boys back to Mississippi.

Laurent Guéry went with them. Kemper tapped his own stock fund for Ops cash. Kemper was acting weirdly persistent lately.

Pete turned on to Kilkea. 831 was your standard West Hollywood four-flat.

The standard two-story Spanish-style building. The standard two units per floor. The standard beveled glass doors that your standard B&E guys drooled for.

There was no garage at the back—the tenants had to park at the curb. Lenny's Packard was nowhere in sight.

Pete parked and walked up to the porch. All four doors showed slack at the door-doorjamb juncture.

The street was dead. The porch was dead quiet. The mail slot for the left downstairs unit read "L. Sands."

Pete snapped the lock with his pocketknife. An inside light hit him straight off.

Lenny planned to stay out after dark. He could prowl the pad for four solid hours.

Pete locked himself in. The crib spread out off a hallway—maybe five rooms total:

He checked the kitchen, the dinette and the bedroom. The pad was nice and quiet—Lenny eschewed pets and stay-at-home bun boys.

An office connected to the bedroom. It was cubbyhole size—a desk and a row of file cabinets ate up all the floor space.

Pete checked the top drawer. It was one fat mess—Lenny jammed it full of overstuffed folders.

The folders contained 100% U.S. prime-cut skank.

Published *Hush-Hush* skank and unpublished skank tips. Skank logged in since early '59—the all-time Skank Hit Parade.

Boozer skank, hophead skank, homo skank. Lezbo skank, nympho skank, miscegenation skank. Political skank, incest skank, child molester skank. The one skank problem: the female skankees were too skankily well known.

Pete spotted some non-sequitur skank: a real skankeroo report dated 9/12/60. A Hush-Hush editorial memo was attached to the page.

> Lenny,
>
> I don't see this one as a feature or anything else. If it went to arrest & trial, great, but it didn't. The whole thing seems skewed to me. Plus, the girl's a nobody.

Pete read the report. Skewed?—no shit.

Lenny "Skank Man" Sands, verbatim:

I learned that gorgeous redhead singer-dancer Barb Jahelka (the lead attraction in her ex-husband Joey Jahelka's "Swingin' Dance Revue") was arrested on August 26th as part of an extortion scheme levied against Rock Hudson.

It was a photo job. Hudson and Barb were in bed at Rock's house in Beverly Hills when a man snuck in and managed to snap several pictures with infra-red film. A few days later Barb demanded that Hudson pay her 10 thousand dollars or the pictures would be circulated everywhere.

Rock called private detective Fred Otash. Otash called the Beverly Hills PD, and they arrested Barb Jahelka. Hudson then went soft hearted and refused to press charges. I like this for the 9/24/60 issue. Rock's a hot ticket these days, and Barb's a real dish. (I've got bikini pictures of her we can use.) Let me know, so I can formally write the piece up.

Skewed?—no shit, Sherlock.

Rock Hudson was a fruitfly with no yen for cooze. Fred Otash was an ex-cop Hollywood lapdog. Dig the skewed postscript: Freddy's phone number doodled right there on the report.

Pete grabbed the phone and dialed it. A man answered, "Otash."

"It's Pete Bondurant, Freddy."

Otash whistled. "This has to be interesting. The last time you made a sociable phone call was never."

"I'm not starting now."

"This sounds like we're talking about money. If it's your money for my time, I'm listening."

Pete checked the report. "In August of '60 you allegedly helped Rock Hudson out of a jam. I think the whole thing was a setup. I'll give you a thousand dollars to tell me the story."

Otash said, "Go to two thousand and throw in a disclaimer."

Pete said, "Two thousand. And if push comes to shove, I'll say I got the information elsewhere."

Funny noise hit the line. Pete ID'd it: Freddy tapping his teeth with a pencil.

"Okay, Frenchman."

"Okay, and?"

"Okay, and you're right. The setup was Rock was afraid of being exposed as a queer, so he cooked up a deal with Lenny

Sands. Lenny brought in this number Barb Jahelka and her ex-husband Joey, and Barb and Rock got between the sheets. Joey faked a break-in and took some pictures, Barb made a fake extortion demand, and Rock fake called me in."

"And you fake called the Beverly Hills PD."

"Right. They popped Barb for extortion one, then Rock got fake sentimental and dropped the charges. Lenny wrote the thing up for *Hush-Hush*, but for some reason it never got published. Lenny tried to leak the story to the legit press, but nobody would touch it, because half the goddamn country knows Rock's a homo."

Pete sighed. "The whole caper went nowhere."

Otash sighed. "That's correct. Rock paid Barb and Joey two Gs apiece, and now you're paying me an extra two just to tell you the whole sorry tale."

Pete laughed. "Tell me about Barb Jahelka while you're at it."

"All right. My take on Barb is that she's slumming, but she doesn't know it. She's smart, she's funny, she looks good and she knows she's not the next Patti Page. I think she's from the Wisconsin boonies, and I think she did six months honor farm for maryjane possession about four or five years ago. She used to have a thing going with Peter Lawford"—

Jack's brother-in-law—

"and she treats her ex-husband Joey, who's a piece of shit, exactly the way he ought to be treated. I'd have to say she likes kicks, and I'll bet she'd tell you she likes danger, but my take is she's never been tested. If you're interested in her whereabouts, try the Reef Club in Ventura. The last I heard, Joey Jahelka was fronting some kind of cut-rate Twist show up there."

Pete said, "You like her, Freddy. You're an open book."

"So are you. And while we're being candid, let me heartily recommend that girl for whatever kind of shakedown you've got in mind."

The Reef Club was all driftwood and fake barnacles. The clientele was mostly college kids and low-rent hipsters.

Pete snagged a table just off the dance floor. Joey's Swingin' Twist Revue went on in ten minutes.

Wall speakers churned out music. Twist geeks flailed and bumped asses. Pete's table vibrated and shook the head off his nice glass of beer.

He called Karen Hiltscher before he left L.A. Sheriff's R&I had a sheet on one Barbara Jane (Lindscott) Jahelka.

She was born 11/18/31, in Tunnel City, Wisconsin. She had a valid California driver's license. She went down on a reefer beef circa 7/57.

She did six months County time. She was suspected of shanking a bull dyke at the Hall of Justice Jail. She was married—8/3/54–1/24/58—to:

Joseph Dominic Jahelka, born 1/16/23, New York City. New York State convictions: statch rape, flimflam, forging Dilaudid prescriptions.

Joey Jahelka was probably a slavering hophead. He'd probably drool for the Dilaudid he just copped back in L.A.

Pete sipped beer. The hi-fi blared jungle-bunny music. A loudspeaker blared, "Ladies and gentlemen, the Reef Club is proud to present for your twisting pleasure—Joey Jahelka and his Swingin' Twist Revue!!!"

Nobody cheered. Nobody applauded. Nobody stopped twisting.

A trio jumped on stage. They wore calypso shirts and mismatched tuxedos. Pawnshop tags dangled off their equipment.

They set up. The twisters and table crowd ignored them. A jukebox tune bled into their opener.

A high-school kid played tenor sax. The drummer was a bantamweight pachuco. The guitar man matched Joey's R&I stats.

The greasy little hump was half on-the-nod. His socks were de-elasticized way below his ankles.

They played loud, shitty music. Pete felt the wax in his ears start to crumble.

Barb Jahelka slinked up to the mike. Barb oozed healthy pulchritude. Barb was no show-biz-subspecies junkie.

Tall Barb. Lanky Barb. That sparkly red bouffant was no fucking dye job.

Dig that tight, low-cut gown. Dig the heels that put her over six feet.

Barb sang. Barb had weak pipes. The combo drowned her out every time she reached for a high note.

Pete watched. Barb sang. Barb DANCED—*Hush-Hush* would tag it HOT, HOT, HOTSVILLE.

Some male twisters stopped twisting to dig on the big rangy redhead. One girl poked her partner—You get your eyes off of her!

Barb sang weak-voiced and monotonous. Barb put out unique gyrations flat-out concurrent.

She kicked her shoes off. She thrust her hips out and popped seams down one leg.

Pete watched her eyes. Pete tapped the envelope in his pocket.

She'd read the note. The money would hook her in. She'd give Joey the dope and urge him to get lost.

Pete chain-smoked. Barb lost a breast and tucked it back before the Twist fiends noticed.

Barb smiled—oops!—dazzling.

Pete passed the envelope to a waitress. Twenty dollars guaranteed transmittal.

Barb danced. Pete shot her something like a prayer: Please be able to TALK.

He knew she'd be late. He knew she'd close the club and let him sweat for a while. He knew she'd call Freddy O. for a quick rundown of his pedigree.

Pete waited at an all-night coffee shop. His chest hurt—Barb twisted him through two packs of cigarettes.

He called Littell an hour ago. He said, Let's meet at Lenny's at 3:00—I think I might have found our woman.

It was 1:10 now. He might have called Littell just a tad premature.

Pete sipped coffee and checked his watch every few seconds. Barb Jahelka walked in and spotted him.

Her skirt and blouse looked half-assed demure. No-makeup did nice things to her face.

She sat down across from him. Pete said, "I hope you called Freddy."

"I did."

"What did he tell you?"

"That he'd never mess with you. And that your partners always make money."

"Is that all he said?"

"He said you knew Lenny Sands. I called Lenny, but he wasn't home."

Pete pushed his coffee aside. "Did you try to kill that dyke you shivved?"

Barb smiled. “No. I wanted to stop her from touching me, and I didn’t want it to cost me the rest of my life.”

Pete smiled. “You didn’t ask me what this is all about.”

“Freddy already gave me his interpretation, and you’re paying me five hundred dollars for a chat. And by the way, Joey says, ‘Thanks for the taste.’ ”

A waitress hovered. Pete shooed her away. “Why do you stay with him?”

“Because he wasn’t always a drug addict. Because he arranged to have some men who hurt my sister taken care of.”

“Those are good reasons.”

Barb lit a cigarette. “The best reason is I love Joey’s mom. She’s senile, and she thinks we’re still married. She thinks Joey’s sister’s kids are our kids.”

Pete laughed. “Suppose she dies?”

“Then the day of the funeral is the day I say goodbye to Joey. He’ll have to get a new girl singer and a new chauffeur to drive him to his Nalline tests.”

“I bet that’ll break his heart.”

Barb blew smoke rings. “Over’s over. That’s a concept junkies don’t understand.”

“You understand it.”

“I know. And you’re thinking it’s a weird thing for a woman to get.”

“Not necessarily.”

Barb stubbed out her cigarette. “What’s this all about?”

“Not yet.”

“When?”

“Soon. First, you tell me about you and Peter Lawford.”

Barb toyed with her ashtray. “It was brief and ugly, and I broke it off when Peter kept pestering me to go to bed with Frank Sinatra.”

“Which you didn’t feel like doing.”

“Right.”

“Did Lawford introduce you to Jack Kennedy?”

“No.”

“Do you think he told Kennedy about you?”

“Maybe.”

“You’ve heard about Kennedy and women?”

“Sure. Peter called him ‘insatiable,’ and a showgirl I knew in

Vegas told me some stories."

Pete smelled suntan oil. Redheads and bright stage lights—

Barb said, "Where are we going with this?"

Pete said, "I'll see you at the club tomorrow night and tell you."

Littell met him outside Lenny's building. Night-owl Lenny had his lights on at 3:20 a.m.

Pete said, "The woman's great. All we need is Lenny to front the introduction."

"I want to meet her."

"You will. Is he alone?"

Littell nodded. "He came home with a pickup two hours ago. The boy just left."

Pete yawned—he hadn't slept in twenty-four-plus hours. "Let's take him."

"Good cop-bad cop?"

"Right. Alternating, so we keep him off balance."

They walked up to the porch. Pete rang the bell. Littell screwed a crimped ugly look on his face.

Lenny opened up. "Don't tell me, you forgot—"

Pete pushed him inside. Littell slammed the door and threw the bolt.

Chic Lenny cinched his robe. Fey Lenny threw his head back and laughed.

"I thought we were quits, Ward. And I thought you only crawled around Chicago."

Littell said, "We need some help. And all you have to do is introduce a man to a woman and keep quiet about it."

"Or?"

"Or we hand you up for the Tony Iannone killing."

Pete sighed. "Let's do this civilized."

Littell said, "Why? We're dealing with a sadistic little faggot who killed a man and bit his goddamn nose off."

Lenny sighed. "I've been double-teamed before. This routine is nothing new to me."

Littell said, "We'll try to make it interesting."

Pete said, "Five grand, Lenny. All you have to do is introduce Barb Jahelka to another friend of yours."

Littell popped his knuckles. Lenny said, "Give it up, Ward.

Rough-trade mannerisms don't suit you."

Littell slapped him. Lenny slapped him back.

Pete stepped between them. They looked ridiculous—two bloody-nosed pseudo tough guys.

"Come on, you two. Let's do this civilized."

Lenny wiped his nose. "Your face looks different, Ward. Those scars are soooooo you."

Littell wiped his nose. "You didn't seem surprised when Pete mentioned Barb Jahelka."

Lenny laughed. "That's because I was still in shock from the notion of you two as playmates."

Littell said, "That's not a real answer."

Lenny shrugged. "How' s this? Barb's in the Life, and everybody in the Life knows everybody else in the Life."

Pete lobbed a change-up. "Name some hotels Jack Kennedy takes his women to."

Lenny twitched. Pete popped his thumbs double-loud.

Littell said, "Name some hotels."

Swishy Lenny squealed, "This is sooooo fun! Hey, let's call Kemper Boyd and make it a foursome!"

Littell slapped him. Lenny popped some tears—fag bravado, adieu.

Pete said, "Name some hotels. Don't make *me* get rough with you."

Lenny put on a lisp. "The El Encanto in Santa Barbara, the Ambassador-East in Chicago, and the Carlyle in New York."

Littell pushed Pete into the hallway—well out of Lenny's earshot. "Hoover's got standing bugs in the El Encanto and Ambassador-East.

The managers assign those suites to whoever he tells them to."

Pete whispered. "He's put it together. He knows what we want, so let's close him."

They walked back to the living room. Lenny was guzzling high-test Bacardi.

Littell looked ready to drool. Hoffa said he had ten months off the sauce. Lenny's liquor cart was radioactive—rum and scotch and all kinds of good shit.

Lenny downed the juice two-handed. Pete said, " 'Jack, this is Barb. Barb, this is Jack.' "

Lenny wiped his lips. "I have to call him 'Mr. President' now."

Littell said, “When was the last time you saw him?”

Lenny coughed. “A few months ago. At Peter Lawford’s beach house.”

“Does he always go by Lawford’s place when he’s in L.A.?”

“Yes. Peter throws wonderful parties.”

“Does he invite unattached women?”

Lenny giggled. “Does he *ever*.”

“Does he invite you?”

“Usually, dear heart. The President likes to laugh, and what the President likes, the President gets.”

Pete stepped in. “Who else goes to the parties? Sinatra and those Rat Pack guys?”

Lenny poured a stiff refill. Littell licked his lips and plugged the bottle.

Pete said, “*Who else goes to those parties?*”

Lenny shrugged. “Amusing people. Frank used to come, but Bobby made Jack drop him.”

Littell stepped in. “I read that Kennedy’s coming to Los Angeles on February 18th.”

“That’s true, dear heart. And guess who’s throwing a party on the 19th.”

“Were you invited, Lenny?”

“Yes, I was.”

“Does the Secret Service frisk the guests or run them through a metal detector?”

Lenny reached for the bottle. Pete grabbed it first.

“Answer Mr. Littell’s question, goddamnit.”

Lenny shook his head. “No. What the Secret Service does is eat, drink and discuss Jack’s protean sex drive.”

Pete said, “ ‘Barb, this is Jack. Jack, this is Barb.’ ”

Lenny sighed. “I’m not an imbecile.”

Pete smiled. “We’re upping your fee to ten thousand, because we know you’re way too smart to mention this to anybody.”

Littell pushed the liquor cart out of his sight. “That specifically includes Sam Giancana and your Outfit friends, Laura Hughes, Claire Boyd and Kemper Boyd, on the extreme off-chance that you run into them.”

Lenny laughed. “Kemper’s not in on this? Toooo bad—I wouldn’t mind rubbing whatevers with *him* again.”

Pete said, “Don’t treat this like a joke.”

Littell said, “Don’t think Sam will let you walk for the Tony job.”

Pete said, “Don’t think that Sam still likes Jack, or that he’d lift a finger to help him. Sam bought Jack West Virginia and Illinois, but that was a long time ago, and Bobby’s been goddamn unfriendly to the Outfit since then.”

Lenny weaved into the cart. Littell steadied him.

Lenny pushed him away. “Sam and Bobby must have *something* cooking, ’cause Sam said the Outfit’s been doing some work to help Bobby out with Cuba, but Bobby doesn’t know about it, and Sam said, ‘We sort of think he should be told.’ ”

Pete caught a quick flash:

The Whack Fidel auditions. Three Outfit biggies, bored and noncommittal.

Littell said, “Lenny, you’re drunk. You’re not making any—”

Pete cut him off. “What else did Giancana say about Bobby Kennedy and Cuba?”

Lenny leaned against the door. “Nothing. I just heard two seconds of this conversation he was having with Butch Montrose.”

“When?”

“Last week. I went to Chicago for a Teamster smoker.”

Littell said, “Forget about Cuba.” Lenny weaved and flashed the V-for-victory sign.

“Viva Fidel! Down with the U.S. imperialist insect!”

Pete slapped him.

Littell said, “ ‘Barb, this is Jack.’ And remember what we’ll do if you betray us.”

Lenny spat out some gold bridgework.

The combo played way off-key. Pete figured they were zorched on his Dilaudid.

The Reef Club rocked. Twist nuts had the floor shaking.

Barb danced close to chaste by her standards. Pete figured the potential gig had her distracted.

Littell commandeered a wraparound bar booth. Barb waved when she saw them walk in.

Pete drank beer. Littell drank club soda. Amplifier boom shook their table.

Pete yawned. He got a room at the Statler and slept through the day and half the evening.

Hoffa sent two grand to Fred Otash. Littell wrote a note to Hoover and sent it via Jimmy's FBI contact.

The note said, We want to install bugs and wiretaps. The note said, We want to fuck one of YOUR MAJOR ENEMIES.

Hoffa retained Fred Turentine. Freddy was set to tap phones and plant bugs where needed.

Pete yawned. Lenny's Bobby/Cuba pitch kept twisting through his head.

Littell nudged him. "She's got the looks."

"And the style."

"How smart is she?"

"A lot smarter than my last extortion partner."

Barb worked the "Frisco Twist" into a crescendo. Her junkie backup group kept playing like she wasn't even there.

She walked off stage. Twist clowns jostled her across the dance floor. A horny geek followed her and scoped out her cleavage close up.

Pete waved. Barb slid into the booth next to him.

Pete said, "Miss Lindscott, Mr. Littell."

Barb lit a cigarette. "It's technically 'Jahelka.' When my mother-in-law dies, I'll go back to 'Lindscott.' "

Littell said, "I like 'Lindscott.' "

Barb said, "I know. It fits my face better."

"Have you ever worked as an actress?"

"No."

"What about that charade with Lenny Sands and Rock Hudson?"

"I only had to fool the police and spend a night in jail."

"Was two thousand dollars worth the risk?"

Barb laughed. "Compared to four hundred dollars for three Twist shows a night, six nights a week?"

Pete pushed his beer and pretzels aside. "You'll make a lot more than two thousand dollars with us."

"For doing what? Besides sleeping with some powerful man, I mean."

Littell leaned toward her. "It's high risk, but it's only temporary."

"So? The Twist is temporary and boring."

Littell smiled. "If you met President Kennedy and wanted to impress him, how would you act?”

Barb blew three perfect smoke rings. “I’d act profane and funny.”

“What would you wear?”

“Flat heels.”

“Why?”

“Men like women they can look down to.”

Littell laughed. “What would you do with fifty thousand dollars?”

Barb laughed. “I’d wait out the Twist.”

“Suppose you get exposed?”

“Then I’ll figure that you’re worse than whoever we’re shaking down and keep my mouth shut.”

Pete said, “It won’t come to that.”

Barb said, “*What* won’t?”

Pete fought this urge to touch her. “You’ll be safe. This is one of those high-risk things that gets settled nice and quiet.”

Barb leaned close to him. “Tell me what ‘it’ is. I know what it is, but I want to hear *you* say it.”

She brushed his leg. The contact made his whole body flutter.

Pete said, “It’s you and Jack Kennedy. You’ll meet him at a party at Peter Lawford’s house in two weeks. You’ll be wearing a microphone, and if you’re as good as I think you are, that will just be the start of it.”

Barb took their hands and squeezed them. Her look said, Pinch me, am I dreaming?

“Am I some kind of Republican Party shill?”

Pete laughed. Littell laughed harder.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/18/62. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript: “TAPED AT THE DIRECTOR’S REQUEST”/“DIRECTOR’S EYES ONLY.” Speaking: Director J. Edgar Hoover, Ward J. Littell.

JEH: Mr. Littell?
WJL: Yes, Sir.
JEH: Your communique was quite bold.
WJL: Thank you, Sir.
JEH: I had no idea you were employed by Mr. Hoffa and Mr. Marcello.
WJL: Since last year, Sir.
JEH: I will not comment on the attendant irony.
WJL: I would call it manifest, Sir.
JEH: That is apt. Am I correct in assuming that the ubiquitous and quite overextended Kemper Boyd secured you this employment?
WJL: Yes, Sir. You are correct.
JEH: I bear Mr. Marcello and Mr. Hoffa no ill will. I have viewed the Dark Prince’s crusade against them to be ill-conceived from the start.
WJL: They know that, Sir.
JEH: Am I correct in assuming that you have undergone an apostasy concerning the brothers?
WJL: Yes, Sir.
JEH: Am I to assume that the promiscuous King Jack is the target of your operation?
WJL: That is correct, Sir.
JEH: And the fearsome Pete Bondurant is your partner in this endeavor?
WJL: Yes, Sir.
JEH: I will not comment on the attendant irony.
WJL: Sir, do we have your approval?
JEH: You do. And you, personally, have my astonishment.
WJL: Thank you, Sir.
JEH: Is the apparatus in place?
WJL: Yes, Sir. So fax we’ve only been able to wire the Carlyle, and until our plant makes contact with the target and facilitates the affair, we don’t really know where they’ll be coupling.

JEH: If they couple at all.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Your note mentioned certain hotels.

WJL: Yes, Sir, the El Encanto and Ambassador-East. I know that our target likes to take women to those hotels, and I know that the Bureau retains standing bugs at both locations.

JEH: Yes, although the Dark King now likes to cavort in the Presidential Suites.

WJL: I hadn't thought of that, Sir.

JEH: I'll have trustworthy Bureau men install the apparatus and monitor it. And I will share my tapes with you, if you forward copies of your Carlyle tapes to me.

WJL: Of course, Sir.

JEH: Have you considered wiring the first brother-in-law's beach house?

WJL: It's impossible, sir. Fred Turentine can't get in to install the microphones.

JEH: When will your plant meet the Dark King?

WJL: Tomorrow night, Sir. At the beach house you just mentioned.

JEH: Is she attractive?

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I hope she's wily and resilient and impervious to the boy's charm.

WJL: I think she'll do a fine job, Sir.

JEH: I'm quite anxious to hear her on tape.

WJL: I'll forward only the best transcriptions, Sir.

JEH: You have my admiration. Kemper Boyd taught you well.

WJL: You did, too, Sir.

JEH: I will not comment on the attendant irony.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I know that in time you'll ask favors of me. I know that you'll keep me abreast of the transcriptions and ask your favors Judiciously.

WJL: I win, Sir.

JEH: I misjudged you and underestimated you, and I'm glad we're colleagues again.

WJL: So am I, Sir.

JEH: Good day, Mr. Littell.

WJL: Good day, Sir.

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(Meridian, 2/18/62)

Shots woke him up. Rebel yells made him dive for his gun.

Kemper rolled off the bed. He heard brake squeals down on the highway—non-Lockhart Klansmen or plain old rednecks popping rounds and running.

Word is out.

There's a Fed nigger lover in town. The Seminole Motel is packed with his spic/frog minions.

The shots were scary. The nightmare they cut off was worse.

Jack and Bobby had him under the hot lights. They said, J'accuse—we know you're Mob-CIA linked all the way back to '59.

The nightmare was literal and direct. The origin was Pete's phone call last week.

Pete talked up the Whack Fidel auditions. He said he developed a theory to explain why the Outfit nixed the hit.

Pete said Sam G. might be set to tell Bobby a secret. Hey, Mr. AG— the Outfit's been your Cuban Cause ally for three years now.

Pete picked up a lead that strongly suggested it. Pete thinks

Sam might have someone spill the secret soon. Pete thinks Sam wants to embarrass Bobby into a Mob War cease-fire.

Pete said, I'll look into it.

Kemper got up and dry-swallowed three Dexedrine. Pete's theory speedballed and went personal.

Bobby wants *me* to show him JM/Wave some time soon. He thinks my CIA ties date from 5/61 on. JM/Wave is packed with my *pre-Pigs* colleagues—and Cuban exiles well acquainted with organized crime figures.

Kemper shaved and dressed. The Dexedrine kicked in fast. He heard thumps next door—Laurent Guéry pounding early morning push-ups.

John Stanton pulled strings. Laurent, Flash and Juan were granted INS green cards. Néstor Chasco moved to Meridian and joined the group. The Seminole Motel was now "Adjunct" Cadre HQ.

He cashed in twenty thousand dollars' worth of stock. Guy Banister donated matching funds. The Clip Castro Squad was now self-contained and totally autonomous.

He took voting rights reports by day. He staged assassination drills by night.

He won over quite a few local Negroes. First Pentecostal Baptist was now 84% depositioned.

Some crackers roughed up the pastor. He found them and broke their legs with a two-by-four.

Dougie Frank parceled off half his gun range. The Adjunct Cadre practiced seven nights a week.

They shot at standing and moving targets. They took recon tramps through the woods. Cuban infiltration runs would begin soon.

Juan and Flash had him close to Spanish-fluent. He could dye his hair and stain his face and go to Cuba as a covert Latin.

He could get close. He could shoot.

They all loved to talk. They drank post-practice moonshine and gabbed through half the night.

They worked up a three-language patois. They told gory campfire tales and passed around bottles.

Juan described his castration. Chasco talked up his Batista-ordered clip jobs.

Flash saw Playa Girón up close. Laurent saw the hushed-up

Paris slaughter—gendarmes beat two hundred Algerians to death and dumped them in the Seine last October.

He could get close. *He* could shoot. The fair-skinned Anglo-Saxon could be Cuban.

The Dexedrine hit full-bore. Cold coffee provided a nice booster.

The date jumped off his Rolex. Happy Birthday—you're forty-six years old and don't look it.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/21/62. Partial microphone to mobile listening post transcript. Transcribed by: Fred Turentine. Tape/written copies to: P. Bondurant, W. Littell.

9:14 p.m., February 19, 1962. L. Sands & B. Jahelka enter house (target & entourage arrived at 8:03). Traffic noise on Pacific Coast Highway accounts for scrambled signal and large continuity gaps. B. Jahelka's visit clock synchronized & live monitored.

Initial code:

BJ—Barb Jahelka. LS—Lenny Sands. PL—Peter Lawford. MU1—Male Unknown #1. MU2—Male Unknown #2. FU 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: Female Unknowns #1–#7. JFK–John F. Kennedy. RFK—Robert F. Kennedy. (Note: I think MU #1 and #2 are Secret Service agents.)

9:14–9:22: garbled.

9:23–9:26: overlapping voices. BJ's voice comes through, mostly casual greetings. (I think she was being introduced to FU #1–#7. Note high-pitched laughter on tape copies.)

9:27–9:39: BJ & PL.

PL (conversation in progress): You stand out in this crowd, Barb.

BJ: My beauty or my height?

PL: Both.

BJ: You're so full of shit.

FU3: Hi, Peter.

PL: Hi, doll.

FU6: Peter, I just love the President's hair.

PL: Give it a tug. He won't bite you.

FU3, FU6: laughter.

BJ: Are they showgirls or hookers?

PL: The bleached blonde's a barmaid at the Sip n' Surf in Malibu. The others work the show line at the Dunes. You see the brunette with the lungs?

BJ: I see her.

PL: She plays skin flute in Frank Sinatra's all-girl band.

BJ: Very funny.

PL: Not funny, because Bobby made Jack drop Frank. Frank put in a heliport at his place in Palm Springs so Jack could visit him, but that judgmental little shit Bobby made Jack give him the brush-off, just because he knows a few gangsters. Look at him. Isn't he a wicked looking little shit?

BJ: He has buck teeth.

PL: That never touch women.

BJ: Are you saying he's a fag?

PL: I have it on good authority that he only fucks his wife, doesn't go down, and only gives it to Ethel for purposes of procreation. Isn't he a wicked looking little shit?

FU2: Peter! I just met the President out on the beach!

PL: That's nice. Did you suck his cock?

FU2: You're a pig.

PL: Oink! Oink!

BJ: I think I need a drink.

PL: I think you need a lobotomy. Really, Barb. I just wanted you to sleep with Prank once.

BJ: He's not my type.

PL: He could have helped you. He would have kicked that wicked little shit Joey out of your life.

BJ: Joey and I have a history. I'll cut him loose when the time's right.

PL: You cut me loose too soon. Frank was deeply smitten with you, doll. He sensed that you were hiding things, and I have it on good authority that he hired a private eye to find out what those things were.

BJ: Did he tell you what he found out?

PL: Mum's the word, doll. Mum's the goddamn—

FU1: Oh God, Peter, I just met President Kennedy!

PL: That's nice. Did you suck his cock?

BJ, FU1, FU7: garbled.

PL: Oink! Oink! Oink! I'm a Presidential piglet!

9:40–10:22: garbled. Static quality indicates that Secret Service men installed and were calling out on private phone lines.

10:23–10:35: garbled. BJ (standing near hi-fi set) talking to: FU1, 3, 7. (She should have been told to avoid noisy appliances & record players.)

10:36–10:41: BJ in bathroom (indicated by sink & toilet sounds).

10:42–10:49: garbled.

10:50–11:04: BJ & RFK.

BJ (conversation in progress): It’s just a craze, and you have to catch these things before they crest, and then bail out before they fizzle so you won’t look like a loser.

RFK: Then I guess you could say the Twist is like politics.

BJ: You could. Opportunism’s certainly the common denominator.

RFK: It sounds trite, but you don’t talk like an ex-showgirl.

BJ: Have you met a lot of them?

RFK: Quite a few, yes.

BJ: When you were investigating gangsters?

RFK: No, when my brother introduced me to them.

BJ: Did they have a common denominator?

RFK: Yes. Availability.

BJ: I’d have to agree with that.

RFK: Are you going out with Lenny Sands?

BJ: We’re not dating. He just brought me to the party.

RFK: How did he bill the gathering?

BJ: He didn’t say, ‘come join the harem,’ if that’s what you mean.

RFK: Then you noticed the high woman to man ratio.

BJ: You know I did, Mr. Kennedy.

RFK: Call me Bob.

BJ: All right, Bob.

RFK: I’m just assuming that since you know Peter and Lenny, you know how certain things are.

BJ: I think I follow you.

RFK: I know you do. I’m only mentioning it because I’ve known Lenny for a long time, and he seems sad and nervous tonight, and I’ve never seen him that way before. I’d hate to think that Peter put him up to—

BJ: I don’t like Peter. I had a fling with him several years ago, and I broke it off when I saw that he was really no better than a toady and a pimp. I came to this party because Lenny needed a date and I thought it would be nice to spend a cool winter evening at the beach and maybe meet the Attorney General and President of the United States—

RFK: Please, I didn’t mean to offend you.

BJ: You didn’t.

RFK: When I get hornswoggled into evenings like this, I find myself checking out the anomalies from a security standpoint.

When the anomaly is a woman, well, you see what I mean.

BJ: Given the other women here, it's good to be an anomaly.

RFK: I'm bored and two drinks over my limit. I don't normally get so personal with people I just met.

BJ: Want to hear a good joke?

RFK: Sure.

BJ: What did Pat Nixon say about her husband?

RFK: I don't know.

BJ: Richard was a strange bedfellow long before he entered politics.

RFK (laughing): Jesus, that's a riot. I'll have to tell that to—

Garbled (airplane flying overhead). Remainder of BJ–RFK conversation lost to static.

11:05–11:12: Hi-fi noise & car noise indicate that BJ is walking thru house & that people are leaving the party.

11:13–11:19: BJ talking directly to microphone. (Tell her not to do this. It's a security risk.)

BJ: I'm out on this deck overlooking the beach. I'm alone, and I'm whispering so people won't hear what I'm saying or think I'm crazy. I haven't met the Big Man yet, but I noticed him notice me and nudge Peter like he was saying, who's the redhead? It's freezing out here, but I dug a mink coat out of a closet, and now I'm nice and warm. Lenny's drunk, but I think he's trying to have a good time. He's schmoozing with Dean Martin now. The Big Man is in Peter's bedroom with two blondes. I saw Bobby a few minutes ago. He was eating out of the fridge like a starving man. The Secret Service men are looking through a stack of Playboy Magazines. You can tell they're thinking, boy, I'm sure glad stodgy old Dick Nixon didn't get elected. Somebody's smoking pot out on the beach, and I'm thinking hard to get's the way to play this. I'm thinking he'll find me. I heard Bobby tell one of the Secret Service men that the Big Man didn't want to leave until 1:00. That gives me some time. Lenny said Peter showed him my infamous Nugget Magazine foldout from November, 1956. He's about 6′ or 6′1″, so with flats on he'll have a few inches on me. I have to say that Hollywood trash aside, this is one of those moments that young girls write about in their diaries. Also, I declined three invitations to Twist, because I thought it might rip my microphone loose. Did you hear that? The bedroom door behind me just shut, and the two blondes snuck out, giggling. I'm going to shut up now.

11:20–11:27: silence. (Wave noise indicates that BJ has remained on the beach deck.)

11:28–11:40: BJ & JFK.

JFK: Hi.

BJ: Jesus.

JFK: Hardly, but thanks anyway.

BJ: How about, hello, Mr. President?

JFK: How about, hello, Jack?

BJ: Hello, Jack.

JFK: What's your name?

BJ: Barb Jahelka.

JFK: You don't look like a Jahelka.

BJ: It's Lindscott, actually. I work with my ex-husband, so I kept my married name.

JFK: Is Lindscott Irish?

BJ: It's an Anglo-German bastardization.

JFK: The Irish are all bastards. Bastards, cranks and drunks.

BJ: Can I quote you?

JFK: After I'm re-elected. Put it in the portable John F. Kennedy, next to 'Ask not what your country can do for you.'

BJ: Can I ask you a question?

JFK: Sure.

BJ: Is being President of the United States the biggest fucking blast on earth?

JFK (sustained laughter): It truly is. Your supporting cast of characters is worth the price of admission alone.

BJ: For instance?

JFK: That rube Lyndon Johnson. Charles de Gaulle, who's had a poker up his ass since the year 1910. That closet fairy J. Edgar Hoover. These crazy Cuban exiles my brother's been dealing with, 80% of whom are lowlife scum. Harold Macmillan, who defines the word—

MU2: Excuse me, Mr. President.

JFK: Yes?

MU1: You have a call.

JFK: Tell them I'm busy.

MU2: It's Governor Brown.

JFK: Tell him I'll call him back.

MU1: Yes, Sir.

JFK: So, Barb, did you vote for me?

BJ: I was on tour, so I didn't get the chance to vote.

JFK: You could have cast an absentee ballot.

BJ: It slipped my mind.

JFK: What's more important, the Twist or my career?

BJ: The Twist.

JFK (sustained laughter): Excuse my naivete. When you ask a silly question.

BJ: It was more like ask a candid question, get a candid answer.

JFK: That's true. You know, my brother thinks you're overqualified for this party.

BJ: He acts like he's slumming himself.

JFK: That's perceptive.

BJ: Your brother never won a dime at poker.

JFK: Which is one of his strengths. Now, what happens when this silly dance craze of yours wears itself out?

BJ: I'll have saved enough money to set my sister up in a Bob's Big Boy franchise in Tunnel City, Wisconsin.

JFK: I carried Wisconsin.

BJ: I know. My sister voted for you.

JFK: What about your parents?

BJ: My father's dead. My mother hates Catholics, so she voted for Nixon.

JFK: A split vote isn't too bad. That's a lovely mink, by the way.

BJ: I borrowed it from Peter.

JFK: Then it's one of the six thousand furs my father bought my sisters.

BJ: I read about your father's stroke. It made me sad.

JFK: Don't be. He's too evil to die. And by the way, do you travel with that revue Peter told me about?

BJ: Constantly. In fact, I'm leaving for an East Coast swing on the 27th.

JFK: Would you leave your itinerary with the White House switchboard? I thought we might have dinner if our schedules permit.

BJ: I'd like that. And I will call.

JFK: Please. And take the mink with you. You do things for it that my sister never could.

BJ: I couldn't.

JFK: I insist. Really, she won't miss it.

BJ: All right, then.

JFK: I don't normally raid people's closets, but I want you to have it.

BJ: Thank you, Jack.

JFK: My pleasure. And regretfully, I have to make some phone calls.

BJ: Until next time, then.

JFK: Yes. That's the way to look at it.

MUl: Mr. President?

JFK: Hold on, I'm coming.

11:41–12:03: silence. (Wave noise indicates that BJ has remained on the beach deck.)

12:03–12:09: garbled voices and hi-fi noise. (Obvious departures throughout.)

12:10: BJ & LS leave the party. Live tape feed close: 12:11 a.m., February 20, 1962.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/4/62. Carlyle Hotel bedroom microphone transcript. Transcribed by: Fred Turentine. Tape/ written copies to: P. Bondurant, W. Littell.

BJ phoned the listening post to say she was meeting the target for "dinner." She was instructed to double open & shut the bedroom door to activate the mike. Active feed from 8:09 p.m. on. Initial log: BJ—Barb Jahelka. JFK—John F. Kennedy.

8:09–8:20: sexual activity. (See tape transcript. High sound quality. Voices discernable.)

8:21–8:33: conversation.

JFK: Oh, God.

BJ: Hmmm.

JFK: Slide over a little. I want to take some pressure off my back.

BJ: How's that?

JFK: Better.

BJ: Want a back rub?

JFK: No. There's nothing you can do that you haven't done already.

BJ: Thanks. And I'm glad you called me.

JFK: What did I get you out of?

BJ: Two shows at the Rumpus Room in Passaic, New Jersey.

JFK: Oh, God.

BJ: Ask me a question.

JFK: All right. Where's that mink coat I gave you?

BJ: My ex-husband sold it.

JFK: You let him do that?

BJ: It's a game we play.

JFK: What do you mean?

BJ: He knows I'm going to leave him soon. I'm in debt to him, so he takes these little advantages whenever he finds them.

JFK: It's a large debt, then?

BJ: Very large.

JFK: You've got my interest. Tell me more.

BJ: It's just grief from Tunnel City, Wisconsin, circa 1948.

JFK: I like Wisconsin.

BJ: I know. You carried it.

JFK (laughing): You're droll. Ask me a question.

BJ: Who's the biggest fuckhead in American politics?

JFK (laughing): That closet queen J. Edgar Hoover, who'll be retiring on January 1, 1965.

BJ: I hadn't heard anything about that.

JFK: You will.

BJ: I get it. You have to be re-elected first.

JFK: You're learning. Now, tell me more about Tunnel City, Wisconsin, in 1948.

BJ: Not now.

JFK: Why?

BJ: I'm tantalizing you, so we can prolong this thing of ours.

JFK (laughing): You know men.

BJ: Yes, I do.

JFK: Who taught you? Initially, I mean.

BJ: The entire adolescent male population of Tunnel City, Wisconsin. Don't look so shocked. The total number of boys was eleven.

JFK: Go on.

BJ: No.

JFK: Why?

BJ: Two seconds after we made love you looked at your watch. I'm thinking that the way to keep you in bed is to string out my autobiography.

JFK (laughing): You can contribute to my memoirs. You can say John F. Kennedy wooed women with room service club sandwiches and quickies.

BJ: It was a great club sandwich.

JFK (laughing): You're droll and cruel.

BJ: Ask me a question.

JFK: No. You ask me one.

BJ: Tell me about Bobby.

JFK: Why?

BJ: He seemed suspicious of me at Peter's party.

JFK: He's suspicious in general, because he's crawling around in the legal gutter with Jimmy Hoffa and the Mafia, and it's starting to get to him. It's some sort of occupational policeman's disease that he's developed. One day it's Jimmy Hoffa and land fraud in Florida. The next day it's deporting Carlos Marcello. Now it's Hoffa and the Test Fleet taxi case in Tennessee, and don't ask me what it means, because I'm not a lawyer and I don't share Bobby's need to pursue and eradicate.

BJ: He's tougher than you, isn't he?

JFK: Yes, he is. And as I told a girl several years ago, he's truly passionate and generous.

BJ: You're looking at your watch again.

JFK: I have to go. I'm due at the U.N.

BJ: Good luck, then.

JFK: I won't need it. The General Assembly is nothing but fuckheads. Let's do this again, Barb. I had fun.

BJ: So did I. And thanks for the club sandwich.

JFK (laughing): There's more where that came from.

Single door slam deactivates mike. Transcript close: 8:34 p.m., March 3rd, 1962.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/9/62. Carlyle Hotel bedroom microphone transcript. Transcribed by: Fred Turentine. Tape/written copies to: P. Bondurant, W. Littell.

BJ phoned the listening post at 4:20 p.m. She said she was meeting the target for "dinner" at 5:30. Active feed from 6:12 p.m. on. Initial log: BJ—Barb Jahelka. JFK—John F. Kennedy.

6:13–6:25: sexual activity. (See tape transcript. High sound quality. Voices discernable.)

6:14–6:32: conversation.

BJ: Oh, God.

JFK: Last time I said that.

BJ: This time was better.

JFK (laughing): I thought so, too. But I thought the club sandwich lacked pizzazz.

BJ: Ask me a question.

JFK: What happened in Tunnel City, Wisconsin, in 1948?

BJ: I'm amazed that you remembered.

JFK: It's only been a month or so

BJ: I know. But it was just a casual comment that I made.

JFK: It was a provocative one, though.

BJ: Thanks.

JFK: Barb.

BJ: All right. On May 9, I jilted Billy Kreuger. Billy got together with Tom McCandless, Fritzie Schott and Johnny Coates. They decided to teach me a lesson. I was out of town, though. My parents took me to a church fellowship convention in Racine. My sister Margaret stayed at home. She was rebellious, and she hadn't figured out that church conventions were good places to meet boys.

JFK: Keep going.

BJ: To be continued.

JFK: Oh, God. I hate unresolved mysteries.

BJ: Next time.

JFK: How do you know there'll be a next time?

BJ (laughing): I know what kind of interest I'm capable of sustaining.

JFK: You're good, Barb. You're damn good.

BJ: I want to see if it's possible to know a man in one hour, once-a-month increments.

JFK: You'll never make an untoward demand of me, will you?

BJ: No. I will not.

JFK: God bless you.

BJ: Do you believe in God?

JFK: Only for public appearances. Now, ask me a question.

BJ: Do you have somebody who finds women for you?

JFK (laughing): Not really. Kemper Boyd's probably the closest thing, but he makes me a tad uncomfortable, so I haven't really used him since the Inauguration.

BJ: Who's Kemper Boyd?

JFK: He's a Justice Department lawyer. You'd like him. He's wildly good-looking and rather dangerous.

BJ: Are you jealous of him? Is that why he makes you uncomfortable?

JFK: He makes me uncomfortable because his one great regret is that he's not a Kennedy, which is quite a tough regret to respect. He's been dealing with some of those lowlife exiles for Bobby's Study Group, and I think in some ways he's no better than they are. He just went to Yale Law School, latched onto me and proved himself useful.

BJ: Pimps ingratiate themselves with authority. God, look at Peter.

JPK: Kemper's no Peter Lawford, I'll say that for him. Peter's got no soul to sell, and Kemper sold his at a pretty steep price and didn't even know it.

BJ: How so?

JPK: I can't go into details, but he threw over the woman he was engaged to to curry favor with me and my family. You see, he came from money, but his father lost it all and killed himself. He's living out some unsavory fantasy with me, and once you recognize it, the man becomes hard to take.

BJ: Let's talk about something else.

JPK: How about Tunnel City, Wisconsin, in 1948?

BJ: To be continued.

JPK: Shit.

BJ: I like cliffhangers.

JPK: I don't. I hated movie serials when I was a boy.

BJ: You should install a wall clock here. That way, you won't have to sneak looks at your watch.

JPK: You're droll. Hand me my trousers, would you?

BJ: Here.

Single door slam deactivates mike. Transcript close: 6:33 p.m., April 8, 1962.

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(Miami, 4/15/62)

The cop was late. Pete killed time doodling up dispatch sheets.

He drew little hearts and arrows. He wrote out words Lenny and Barb said and underlined them for emphasis.

The words were strong. Cabstand bustle washed over him like total fucking silence.

Lenny's words spawned a theory. The Outfit wants Bobby K. to know they've been helping out with Cuba. Bobby hasn't been told yet. If he knew, he would have fungooed Kemper Boyd. If he knew, he would have snipped all known Mob-CIA ties.

The Outfit knows that Bobby doesn't want a Fidel hit. They refused to fund the shooter team for just that reason.

His theory simmered for weeks. He ran guns to exile camps and Kemper worked his two gigs in Mississippi. Kemper was out to depilatory the Beard—his lack of Mob sanction did not seem to bother him one bit.

Barb was out to trim Jack the Haircut.

The cop was late. Pete drifted into Barb Overdrive.

Her words were accumulating—on tape and in print. He had the best words memorized.

Fred Turentine was running the Carlyle bug post—an apartment off 76th and Madison. A Barb Fucks Jack tape/print library was now in the works. Littell's Hoover ploy succeeded. Feds wired the Presidential Suites at the El Encanto and Ambassador-East.

Mr. Hoover was their extortion colleague. Feds checked the Carlyle suite once a week—let's keep those bedroom mikes tucked out of sight.

Jack K. was a six-minute bed jockey. Jack K. was a big fucking loudmouth.

Jack called Cuban exiles "lowlifes." Jack called Kemper Boyd a pathetic social climber.

The cop was late. Pete drew more hearts and arrows.

He had a new theory. Dig it: Barb's talking to Jack and to ME.

Barb says she won't leave Joey Jahelka—"because he arranged to have some men who hurt my sister taken care of." Barb won't tell Jack the whole story.

Barb hints that big intrigue went down in May '48.

Barb knows *he'll* play the tapes and read the transcripts. Barb wants *him* to fill in the blanks. Jack won't press too hard for answers—she's just one of his three million steady fucks.

Barb knows *he's* an ex-cop. Barb knows *he* can find out.

He called the Wisconsin State Police. He had Guy Banister initiate Fed queries. The whole thing took forty-eight hours.

5/11/48:

Margaret Lynn Lindscott is gang-raped in Tunnel City, Wisconsin. She IDs her attackers: William Kreuger, Thomas McCandless, Fritz Schott, and John Coates. No charges are filed. All four boys have unshakable alibis.

1/14/52:

William Kreuger is shot and killed in Milwaukee. The "mugging-homicide" remains unsolved.

7/4/52:

Thomas McCandless is shot and killed in Chicago. The "assumed professional hit" remains unsolved.

1/23/54:

Fritz Schott disappears. A decomposed body is found near Des Moines—maybe or maybe not his. Three shell casings are discovered nearby. The "assumed gunshot homicide" remains unsolved.

John Coates is alive and well. He's a cop in Norman, Oklahoma.

Pete unlocked his desk and pulled out the magazine. There's Barb at twenty-five—a pulchritudinous Miss Nugget.

Barb seduced Mob-allied Joey Jahelka. Barb got him to finagle hits on the men who raped her sister.

John Coates was still alive. The Mob did not clip cops without big provocation.

Grateful Barb married Joey. Grateful Barb carried the debt.

The cop was late. Pete studied the foldout for the ten millionth time.

They airbrushed her breasts. They powdered her freckles. The picture didn't nail her smarts and je ne sais quoi.

Pete put the magazine away. Pete doodled up another dispatch sheet.

He called Barb once a week. He tossed out little love checks—You don't *really* dig Jack, do you?

She didn't. She dug the allure—but Jack was just a six-minute erection and some chuckles.

The shakedown was proceeding. Turentine flew out to L.A. and checked up on Lenny Sands. Freddy said Lenny was solid. Freddy said Lenny would never rat off the operation.

He played the Barb tapes over and over. He reran Lenny's blurt almost as much.

Three major Mob contributors abandoned the Cuban Cause. Littell said Carlos Marcello was the only Outfit big who still cared.

Why?

His guess was MONEY.

Pete kept his nose down for two months straight. His theory percolated.

He kept playing theoretical match-ups. He kept linking Cuban Cause and Outfit personnel. Last week he made a big theoretical jump.

November 1960.

Wilfredo Olmos Delsol is seen talking to pro-Castro agents. Wilfredo Olmos Delsol was *recently* seen:

Driving a new car. Wearing new threads. Showing off new women.

He hired a Miami cop to spot-tail Delsol. The man reported back.

Delsol met with hinky Cubans six nights running. Their license plates were fake number/fake tag counterfeits.

The cop tailed the men to their pads. The pads were rented under obvious fake names. The Cubans were pro-Castro agents with no visible means of support.

The cop glommed a phone-company snitch. He paid him five hundred dollars and told him to steal Delsol's recent phone bills.

The cop said his snitch succeeded. The cop was late with the goods.

Pete doodled. He drew little hearts and arrows, ad fucking infinitum.

Sergeant Carl Lennertz showed up a full hour late. Pete waltzed him out to the parking lot.

They exchanged envelopes. The transaction went down in two seconds flat.

Lennertz took off. Pete opened his envelope and pulled out two sheets of paper.

The Florida Bell man delivered. Delsol made four months' worth of suspicious phone calls.

He called Santo and Sam G. at their unlisted numbers. He called six pro-Castro front groups a total of twenty-nine times.

Pete felt his pulse go snap/crackle/pop.

He drove to Delsol's house. The puto's new-money Impala was parked on the front lawn.

He boxed it in with his car. He slashed the tires with his pocket knife. He wedged a porch chair under the front doorknob. He ripped a cord off an outside air cooler and balled it around his right fist.

He heard running water and music inside the house.

Pete walked around to the back. The kitchen door stood ajar.

Delsol was washing dishes. The geek was snapping his dishrag to a mambo beat.

Pete waved. Delsol waved soapy hands—Come on in.

A little radio was perched on the sink ledge. Perez Prado was cranking out "Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White."

Pete walked in. Delsol said, "*Hola, Pedro*."

Pete sucker-punched him. Delsol jackknifed. Pete dropped the radio in the sink.

Water fizzed. Pete kicked Delsol in the ass and shot him into sink water up to his elbows.

He screamed. He pulled his arms out and cut loose with this godawful shriek.

Steam whooshed through the kitchen—dig that baby mushroom cloud.

Pete shoved the dishrag in his mouth. Delsol's arms were scorched bright red and hairless.

"You've been calling Trafficante, Giancana and some pro-Castro guys. You've been seen with some left-wing Cubans, and you've been spending money."

Delsol flipped him off. Dig that firecracker-red "Fuck You" finger.

"I think most of the Outfit's quits on the Cause, and I want to know why. You put all this together or your face goes into the water."

Delsol spat the rag out. Pete lashed his hands with the air-cooler cord and rabbit-punched him back into the suds.

He spun in sideways. Juiced-up water splashed all over him.

He screamed and pulled his arms out. Pete dragged him to the fridge and buried his hands in ice cubes.

Stabilize, fucker—don't go into shock.

Pete dumped loose cubes into a bowl. Delsol untied the cord with his teeth and wiggled his hands in.

The sink water bubbled and fizzed. Pete lit a cigarette to kill the charred-flesh stink.

Delsol slumped into a chair. His cardiac flush subsided—the puto radiated good resistance.

Pete said, "Well?"

Delsol hugged the bowl with his knees. Ice popped out and hit the floor.

Pete said, "Well?"

"Well, you killed my cousin. Did you think I would always stay loyal?"

His voice stayed just short of a whimper. Spies withstood pain with the best.

"That's not the answer I wanted."

"I thought it was a good answer for a man who killed his own brother by mistake."

Pete picked up a kitchen knife. "Tell me what I want to hear."

Delsol double-flipped him. Dig those two “Fuck You” fingers shedding skin down to the knuckle.

Pete stabbed the chair. The blade ripped a trouser seam half an inch from Delsol’s balls.

Delsol pulled the knife loose and dropped it on the floor. Pete said, “Well?”

“Well, I suppose I must tell you.”

“Keep going, then. Don’t make me work so hard.”

Delsol smiled. Delsol was exhibiting fucking epic machismo. “You were right, Pedro. Giancana and Mr. Santo have abandoned La Causa.”

“What about Carlos Marcello?”

“No. He is not with them. He is still enthusiastic.”

“What about Heshie Ryskind?”

“He is not with them either. I have heard he is very ill.”

“Santo is still backing the Cadre.”

Delsol smirked. Blisters started bubbling up on his arms.

“I think he will withdraw his support soon. I am certain it will happen.”

Pete chained cigarettes. “Who else has betrayed the Cadre?”

“I do not consider what I did betrayal. The man you used to be would not consider it that, either.”

Pete flipped his cigarette in the sink. “Just answer my questions. I don’t want to hear your extraneous comments.”

Delsol said, “All right. I am the only one in this.”

“ ‘This’?”

Delsol shivered. A big blister on his neck popped and spritzed blood.

“Yes. This is what you thought it was.”

“Explain it for me, then.”

Delsol stared at his hands. “I mean that Mr. Santo and the others have gone over to Fidel. They are just pretending enthusiasm for La Causa, to impress Robert Kennedy and other powerful officials. They are hoping Kennedy will learn about their support and not try to hurt them so hard. Raúl Castro is selling them heroin very cheaply. In exchange, they have given him information on the exile movement.”

Heroin was MONEY. His theory was confirmed straight down the line.

“Keep going. I know there’s more.”

Delsol did a little blank-face number. Pete stared at him. Pete held the stare and held it and held it—

Delsol blinked. "Yes, there is more. Raúl is trying to convince Fidel to let Mr. Santo and the others reopen their casinos in Havana. Mr. Santo and Mr. Sam promised they would inform Raúl on the progress at JM/Wave and try to warn them of any assassination attempts on Fidel."

More confirmation. More potential grief. Santo and Sam could force Boyd to disband his hit squad.

Delsol examined his arms. His tattoos were scorched into odd smudges.

Pete said, "There's more."

"No. There isn't."

Pete sighed. "There's your part. You were recruited because the pro-Castro guys knew the Cadre killed your cousin, and they figured you were vulnerable. You've got a part in this, and it's got something to do with heroin, and if you don't tell me, I'm going to start hurting you again."

"Pedro …"

Pete squatted in front of the chair. Pete said, "*Heroin. Tell me about it.*"

Delsol crossed himself. The ice-cube bowl slipped to the floor and shattered.

"A Cuban shipment is coming in by speedboat. Two hundred pounds of it, uncut. Some pro-Castro men will be there to guard it. I am supposed to transmit it to Mr. Santo."

"When?"

"The night of May 4th."

"Where?"

"The Gulf Coast in Alabama. A place called Orange Beach."

Pete got the shakes. Delsol caught his fear instantaneously.

"We must pretend this never happened, Pedro. You yourself must pretend that you never really believed in the Cause. We must not interfere with men who are so much more powerful than we are."

Boyd took it cool. Pete steamed up the phone booth yelling.

"We can still make our casino deal happen. We can send in your team, have them clip Castro and create fucking chaos. Maybe things work out and Santo honors our deal, maybe they don't work out. At the very fucking least, we can snuff Fidel

Castro."

Boyd said, "No. The deal is dead and the Cadre is finished, and sending in my men precipitously will only get them killed."

Pete kicked the door off its hinges—

"What do you mean, 'NO'?"

"I mean we should recoup our losses. We should make some money before somebody tells Bobby about the Outfit and the Agency."

The door crashed across the sidewalk. Pedestrians stepped around it. A little kid jumped on it and cracked the glass in half.

"The heroin?"

Boyd was calm. "There's two hundred pounds, Pete. We let it sit for five years and sell it overseas. You, me and Néstor. We'll make at least three million dollars apiece."

Pete went lightheaded. Dig it: that 9.9 earthquake is strictly internal.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/25/62. Carlyle Hotel bedroom microphone transcript. Transcribed by: Fred Turentine. Tape/ written copies to: P. Bondurant, W. Littell.

BJ phoned the listening post at 3:08 p.m. She said she was meeting the target "for dinner" at 5:00. She was instructed to double open & shut the bedroom door to activate the mike. Active feed from 5:23 p.m. on. Initial log: BJ—Barb Jahelka. JFK —John F. Kennedy.

5:24–5:33: sexual activity. (See tape transcript. High sound quality. Voices discernable.)

5:34–5:41: conversation.

JFK: Shit, my back.

BJ: Let me help.

JFK: No, that's all right.

BJ: Stop looking at your watch. We just finished.

JFK (laughing): I really should have that wall clock installed.

BJ: And tell the chef to get with it. That was a lousy club sandwich.

JFK: It was. The turkey was dry and the bacon was soggy.

BJ: You seem distracted, Jack.

JFK: Smart girl.

BJ: The weight of the world?

JFK: No, my brother. He's on the warpath about my friends and the women I see, and he's acting like a colossal pain in the ass.

BJ: For instance?

JFK: He's on a witch hunt. Frank Sinatra knows some gangsters, so Frank had to go. The women Peter sets me up with are gonorrhea carrying tarts, and you're too polished and aware of your effects to be a Twist bunny, so you're suspect on general principles.

BJ (laughing): What's next? Can I expect to see FBI men following me?

JFK (laughing): Hardly. Bobby and Hoover hate each other too much to collaborate on anything that touchy. Bobby's overworked, so he's touchy, and Hoover's touchy because he's a Nazi faggot who hates all men with normal appetites. Bobby's running Justice, chasing gangsters and running point for my Cuban policy. He's up to his neck in psychopathic lowlife, and

Hoover fights him on protocol matters every inch of the way. And I'm the one who takes the brunt of his frustration. Say, why don't we change jobs? You be the President of the United States and I'll Twist at, what's the name of that place you're appearing?

BJ: Del's Den in Stamford, Connecticut.

JFK: Right. What do you say, Barb? Shall we switch jobs?

BJ: It's a deal. And after I take over, I'll fire J. Edgar Hoover and order Bobby to take a vacation.

JFK: You're thinking like a Kennedy now.

BJ: How so?

JFK: I'm going to let Bobby be the one to give Hoover the sack.

BJ: Stop looking at your watch.

JFK: You should hide it from me next time.

BJ: I will.

JFK: I have to go. Hand me my trousers, will you?

BJ: They're wrinkled.

JFK: It's your fault.

Single door slam deactivates mike. Transcript close: 5:42 p.m., April 24, 1962.

DOCUMENT INSERTS: 4/25/62, 4/26/62, 5/1/62. Top Hoodlum Program wiretap outtakes: Los Angeles, Chicago and Newark venues. Marked: CONFIDENTIAL/TOP SECRET/ DIRECTOR'S EYES ONLY.

Los Angeles, 4/25/62. Placement: Rick-Rack Restaurant pay phone. Number dialed: MA2-4691. (Pay phone at Mike Lyman's Restaurant.) Caller: Steven "Steve the Skeev" De Santis. (See THP File #814.5, Los Angeles Office.) Person called: unknown male ("Billy"). Six minutes and four seconds of non-applicable conversation precedes the following.

SDS: And Frank shot his big fucking mouth off and Mo believed him. Jack's my boy, blah, blah. Jewboy Lenny told me he stuffed half the fucking ballot boxes in Cook County.

UM: You say Frank like you know the man personal.

SDS: I do, you fuck. I met him backstage at the Dunes Hotel once.

UM: Sinatra's a hump. He walks Outfit and talks Outfit, but he's really just a stupe from Hoboken, New Jersey.

SDS: He's a stupe who should pay, Billy.

UM: He should. Every time that rat prick Bobby comes down on the Outfit, Frankie should take a shot to the nuts. He should pay double for what that cunt Bobby's doing to Jimmy and the Teamsters, and triple for that stroll through Guatemala Uncle Carlos had to take.

SDS: The Kennedys should pay.

UM: In the best of all worlds they would.

SDS: They got no sense of fucking gratitude.

UM: They got no sense, period. I mean, Joe Kennedy and Raymond Patriarca go way back.

SDS: No sense.

UM: No fucking sense.

Non-applicable conversation follows.

Chicago, 4/26/62. Placement: North Side Elks Club pay phone. Number dialed: BL4-0808 (pay phone at Saparito's Trattoria Restaurant). Caller: Dewey "The Duck" Di Pasquale. (See THP file #709.9, Chicago Office.) Person called: Pietro "Pete Sap" Saparito. Four minutes and twenty-nine seconds of non-applicable conversation precedes the following.

DDP: What's worse than the clap and the syph is the Kennedys. They are trying to grind the Outfit into duck shit. Bobby's got these racket squads set up all over the country. These are cocksuckers who can't be bought for love or money.

PS: Jack Kennedy ate at my restaurant once. I should have poisoned the cocksucker.

DDP: Quack, quack. You should have.

PS: Don't start that duck routine with me, you hump.

DDP: You should invite Jack and Bobby and his racket squad guys to your place and poison them all.

PS: I should. Hey, you know my waitress, Deeleen?

DDP: Sure. I heard she plays skin clarinet with the best.

PS: She does. And she banged Jack Kennedy. She said he had this little piccolo dick.

DDP: The Irish ain't hung for shit. It's a well-known fact.

PS: Italian men have the biggest.

DDP: And the best.

PS: I heard Mo's hung like a mule.

DDP: Who told you?

PS: Mo himself.

Non-applicable conversation follows.

Newark, 5/1/62. Placement: Lou’s Lucky Lounge pay phone. Number dialed: MU6-9441 (pay phone at Reuben’s Delicatessen, New York City). Caller: Herschel “Heshie” Ryskind (See THP file #887.8, Dallas Office). Person called: Morris Milton Weinshank (See THP file #400.5, New York City Office). Three minutes and one second of non-applicable conversation precedes the following.

MMW: We’re all sorry you’re sick, Hesh. We’re all pulling for you and praying for you.

HR: I want to live long enough to see Sam G. kick Sinatra’s skinny bantamweight tuchus from here to Palermo. Sinatra and some CIA shitheel convinced Sam and Santo that Jack the K. was kosher. Use your noggin and think, Morris. Think about Ike and Harry Truman and FDR. Did they give us grief like this?

MMW: They did not.

HR: I know it’s Bobby and not Jack that’s the instigator. But Jack knows the rules. Jack knows you can’t sic your rabid dogs on people who did you favors.

MMW: Sam thought Frank had pull with the brothers. He thought he could get Jack to call Bobby off.

HR: Frank was dreaming. The only pull Frank’s got is with his putz. All Frank and that CIA guy Boyd want to do is suck the big Kennedy cock.

MMW: Jack and Bobby got nice hair.

HR: Which somebody should part with a forty-five caliber dum-dum.

MMW: Such hair. I should have such hair.

HR: You want hair? Buy a fucking wig.

Non-applicable conversation follows.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/1/62. Personal note: Howard Hughes to J. Edgar Hoover.

Dear Edgar,

Duane Spurgeon, my chief aide and legal advisor, is terminally ill. I need a replacement to go on retainer immediately. Of course, I would prefer a morally-sound lawyer with an FBI background. Could you recommend a man?

All best,

78

(Washington, D.C., 5/2/62)

Their bench faced the Lincoln Memorial. Nannies and small children scampered by.

Hoover said, “The woman is quite good.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

“She lures King Jack into provocative traps.”

Littell smiled. “Yes, Sir. She does.”

“King Jack has mentioned my forced retirement twice. Did you tell the woman to prod him in that direction?”

“Yes, Sir. I did.”

“Why?”

“I wanted to increase your stake in the operation.”

Hoover straightened the crease in his trousers. “I see. And I cannot fault your logic.”

Littell said, “We want to convince the man to make his brother tone down his assault on my clients and their friends, and if they think you have copies of the tapes, it will go a long way toward convincing them to retain you.”

Hoover nodded. “I cannot fault your logic.”

“I would rather not go public with the tapes, Sir. I would rather see this resolved behind the scenes."

Hoover patted his briefcase. "Is that why you asked me to return my copies temporarily?"

"Yes, Sir."

"You don't trust me to keep them in cold storage?"

Littell smiled. "I want you to possess absolute deniability should Robert Kennedy bring in outside agency investigators. I want all the tapes kept in a single location, so that they can be destroyed if necessary."

Hoover smiled. "And so that, if worse comes to worse, Pete Bondurant and Fred Turentine can be portrayed as the sole perpetrators of the plot?"

Littell said, "Yes, Sir."

Hoover shooed a perching bird away. "Who's financing this? Is it Mr. Hoffa or Mr. Marcello?"

"I'd rather not say, Sir."

"I see. And I cannot fault your desire for secrecy."

"Thank you, Sir."

"Suppose public exposure becomes necessary?"

"Then I would go forward in late October, right before the congressional elections."

"Yes. That would be the optimum time."

"Yes, Sir. But as I said, I would rather not—"

"You needn't repeat yourself. I'm not senile."

The sun broke out of a cloud bank. Littell broke a slight sweat.

"Yes, Sir."

"You hate them, don't you?"

"Yes, I do."

"You're not alone. The THP has private taps and bugs installed in fourteen critical organized crime locales. We've been picking up a good deal of Kennedy resentment. I haven't informed the Brothers, and I'm not going to."

"I'm not surprised, Sir."

"I've compiled some wonderfully vituperative outtakes. They are hilariously colloquial and profane."

"Yes, Sir."

Hoover smiled. "Tell me what you're thinking."

Littell smiled. "That you trust me. That you trust me because I hate them as much as you do."

Hoover said, "You're correct. And my God, wouldn't Kemper be hurt if he overheard King Jack's assessment of his character?"

"He would be. Thank God he has no idea this operation exists."

A little girl skipped by. Hoover smiled and waved.

"Howard Hughes needs a new right-hand man. He asked me to find him someone with your qualifications, and I've recommended you."

Littell grabbed the bench. "I'm honored, Sir."

"You should be. You should also know that Howard Hughes is a very disturbed man with a rather tenuous hold on reality. He only communicates by telephone and letter, and I think there's a fair chance that you may never meet him face-to-face."

The bench shook. Littell folded his hands over one knee.

"Should I call him?"

"He'll call you, and I would advise you to accept his offer. The man has a silly, if exploitable, plan to purchase Las Vegas hotel-casinos a few years from now, and I think the notion has intelligence-gathering potential. I told Howard the names of your other clients, and he was quite impressed. I think the job is yours for the asking."

Littell said, "I want it."

Hoover said, "Of course you do. You've been hungry all your life, and you've finally reconciled your desires with your conscience."

79

(Orange Beach, 5/4/62)

They had 3:00 a.m. moonlight to work by. It was half a curse—*total* dark meant SURPRISE.

Pete pulled off the blacktop. He saw sand dunes up ahead—big high ones.

Néstor draped his legs across Wilfredo Delsol. Wilfredo the Mummy was duct-taped head to toe and stuffed between the front and back seats.

Boyd rode shotgun. Delsol wheezed through his nose. They kidnapped him at his pad on their way out of Miami.

Pete shifted to four-wheel drive. The Mummy lurched and banged Néstor's legs.

The jeep bounced between dunes. Boyd examined their track obfuscator—rake prongs attached to metal tubing.

Néstor coughed. "The beach is half a mile. I walked it twice."

Pete braked and cut the engine. Wave noise came on strong. Boyd said, "Listen to that. If we're lucky, they won't hear us."

They got out. Néstor dug a hole and buried Delsol in sand up to his nose.

Pete tossed a tarp over the jeep. It was light tan and sand-dune compatible.

Néstor rigged the rake gizmo. Boyd inventoried hardware.

They had silencer-fitted .45s and machine guns. They had a chainsaw, a clock bomb and two pounds of plastic explosive.

They slapped on lampblack. They loaded up their packs.

They walked. Néstor dragged the rake. Tire tracks and footprints disappeared.

They crossed the blacktop and hiked up to a parallel access road—about a third of a mile. The road-to-waveline sand strip was roughly two hundred yards wide.

Néstor said, “The State Police never patrol here.”

Pete held up his infrareds. He spotted clumps 300 yards down the strip.

Boyd said, “Let’s get close.”

Pete stretched—his bulletproof vest fit tight. “There’s nine or ten men just above the west sand. We should come up along the shoreline and hope the goddamn surf noise covers us.”

Néstor crossed himself. Boyd filled his hands and his mouth—with two .45s and a Buck knife.

Pete felt earthquake tremors—9.999-fucking-9.

They walked down to the wet sand. They hunkered low and crab-crawled. Pete got this wild-ass notion: I’M THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS WHAT THIS MEANS.

Boyd walked point. The shapes took form. Smashing waves supplied audial cover.

The shapes were sleeping men. One insomniac was sitting up—check that glowing cigarette tip.

They got close.

They got closer.

They got very very close.

Pete heard snores. A man moaned in Spanish.

They charged.

Boyd shot the cigarette man. Muzzle flash lit a line of sleeping bags.

Pete fired. Néstor fired. Silencer thuds overlapped.

They had good light now—powder glare off four weapons.

Goose down exploded. Screams kicked in loud and faded into tight little gurgles.

Nestor brought a flashlight in close. Pete saw nine U.S. Army bags, shredded and blood soaked.

Boyd popped in fresh clips and shot the men point-blank in the face. Blood hit Néstor's flashlight and shaded the beam light red.

Pete heaved for breath. Bloody feathers blew into his mouth.

Néstor kept the light steady. Boyd knelt down and slit throats. He went in deep and low—windpipes and spinal cords snapped.

Néstor dragged the bodies out.

Pete turned the sleeping bags over and stuffed them with sand.

Boyd patted them into shape. It was good simulation—the boat men would see dozing men.

Néstor dragged the bodies down to a tide pool. Boyd brought the chainsaw.

Pete yank-started it. Boyd spread the stiffs out for cutting.

The moon passed by low. Néstor supplied extra light.

Pete sawed from a crouch. The teeth caught on a leg bone straight off.

Néstor pulled the man's foot taut. The teeth whirred through easy.

Pete sawed through a string of arms. The saw kept bucking into the sand. Skin and gristle pop-pop-popped in his face.

Pete quartered the men. Boyd severed their heads with his Buck knife. One swipe and one tug at the hair did the job.

Nobody talked.

Pete kept sawing. His arms ached. Bone fragments made the belt-motor skip.

His hands slipped. The teeth jumped and raked a dead man's stomach.

Pete smelled bile. He dropped the saw and puked himself dry.

Boyd took over. Néstor fed body parts to the tide pool. Sharks thrashed in to eat.

Pete walked down to the surf line. His hands shook—lighting a cigarette took forever.

The smoke felt good. The smoke killed the bad smells. DON'T THEY KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS—

The sawing stopped. Dead silence underscored his own crazy heartbeat.

Pete walked back to the tide pool. Sharks flailed and leaped halfway out of the water.

Néstor loaded the machine guns. Boyd twitched and fidgeted—high-pitched by Boyd cool-cat standards.

They crouched behind a shoal bank. Nobody talked. Pete got

Barb on the brain wicked good.

Dawn hit just past 5:30. The beach looked plain peaceful. The blood by the sleeping bags looked like plain old wave seepage.

Néstor kept his binoculars up. He got a sighting at 6:12 a.m.

"I see the boat. It's about two hundred yards away."

Boyd coughed and spat. "Delsol said six men would be aboard. We want most of them off before we fire."

Pete heard motor hum. "It's getting close. Nestor, you get down there."

Néstor ran over and crouched by the sleeping bags. The hum built to a roar. A speedboat bucked waves and fishtailed up on shore.

It was a rat-trap double outboard, with no lower compartment.

Néstor waved. Néstor yelled, "*Bienvenidos! Viva Fidel!*"

Three men hopped off the boat. Three men stayed on. Pete signaled Kemper: ON for you/OFF for me.

Boyd threw a burst at the boat. The windshield exploded and blew the men back against the motors. Pete gunned his men down with one tight strafe.

Néstor walked up to them. He spit in their faces and capped them with shots in the mouth.

Pete ran up and vaulted onto the boat. Boyd circled around to the outboards and finished his three with single head pops.

The heroin was triple-wrapped and stuffed in duffel bags. The sheer weight was astonishing.

Néstor slapped the plastic explosive next to the outboards. The bomb clock was set for 7:15.

Pete off-loaded the dope.

Néstor tossed the sleeping bags and his three dead men on board.

Boyd scalped them. Néstor said, "This is for Playa Girón."

Pete rope-tied the wheel to the helm bracings and turned the boat around. The compass read south-southeast. The boat would stay on course—barring gale winds and tidal waves.

Boyd hit the motors. Both blades caught on his first pull. They jumped off the sides and watched the boat skid off.

It would explode twenty miles out to sea.

Pete shivered. Boyd tucked the scalps into his pack. Orange Beach looked absolutely pristine.

Santo Junior would call. He'd say, Delsol fucked me on a deal. He'd say, Pete, you find that cocksucker.

Santo would omit details. He wouldn't say the deal was Commie-linked and a direct betrayal of the Cadre.

Pete waited for the call at Tiger Kab. He took over the switchboard—Delsol never showed up for work.

Cab calls were backlogged. Drivers kept saying, Where's Wilfredo?

He's at a hideout pad. Néstor's guarding him. There's a pound of Big "H" in plain sight.

Boyd drove the rest of the dope to Mississippi. Boyd was stretched a wee bit thin, like he crossed some line with killing.

Pete felt the real line. DON'T YOU KNOW WHO WE FUCKED?

They'd watchdogged Delsol for two weeks running. He didn't betray them. The dope rendezvous would have been canceled if he did.

He's at his fake hideout. He's an instant junkie—Néstor shot tracks up his arms. He's zorched on horse—waiting for this goddamn phone call.

It was 4:30 p.m. They split Orange Beach nine and a half hours ago.

Cab calls came in. The phones rang every few seconds. They had pickups backlogged and twelve cabs out—Pete felt like screaming or putting a gun to his head.

Teo Paez cupped his desk phone. "Line two, Pete. It's Mr. Santo."

Pete picked up casual slow. "Hi, Boss."

Santo said the words. Santo came through right on cue.

"Wilfredo Delsol fucked me. He's hiding out, and I want you to find him."

"What did he do?"

"*Don't ask questions. Just find him and do it right now*."

Néstor let him in. He'd turned the living room into an instant junkie pigsty.

Dig the syringe in plain view. Dig the candy bars mashed into the carpet. Dig that white powder residue on every flat cutting surface.

Dig Wilfredo Olmos Delsol: dope-swacked on a plush-velour couch.

Pete shot him in the head. Néstor chopped off three of his fingers and dropped them in an ashtray.

It was 5:20. Santo wouldn't buy a one-hour search-and-find. They had time to reinforce the lie.

Néstor split—Boyd had work for him back in Mississippi. Pete tamped down his nerves with deep breaths and a dozen cigarettes.

He visualized it. He got the details straight in his head. He put his gloves on and did it.

He dumped the icebox.

He slashed the couch down to the springs.

He ripped the living-room walls out in a mock dope-search frenzy.

He burned cooking spoons.

He formed heroin into snort lines on a glass-topped coffee table.

He found a discarded lipstick and smeared it on some filter-tip butts.

He slashed Delsol with a kitchen knife. He scorched his balls with a wood-burning tool he found in the bedroom.

He dipped his hands in Delsol's blood and wrote "Traitor" on the living-room wall.

It was 8:40 p.m.

Pete ran down to a pay phone. Real live fear juked his performance.

Delsol's dead—tortured—I got a tip on his hideout—he was strung-out—dope everywhere—somebody trashed the place—I think he was on a toot with some whores—Santo, tell me, what the fuck is this all about?

80

(Washington, D.C., 5/7/62)

Littell made business calls. Mr. Hoover gave him a tap scrambler to insure that his calls stayed private.

He called Jimmy Hoffa at a pay phone. Jimmy was profoundly tap-phobic.

They discussed the Test Fleet taxi fraud case. Jimmy said, Let's bribe some jurors.

Littell said he'd send him a jury list. He told Hoffa to have front men make the bribe offers.

Jimmy said, What's shaking with the shakedown?

Littell reported, ALL SYSTEMS GO. Baby Jimmy said, Let's squeeze Jack now!!!

Littell said, Be patient. We'll squeeze him at the optimum time.

Jimmy threw a goodbye fit. Littell called Carlos Marcello in New Orleans.

They discussed his deportation case. Littell stressed the need for tactical delays.

"You beat the Federal government by frustrating them. You exhaust them and make them rotate attorneys on and off your case. You try their patience and resources, and stall the hell out of them."

Carlos got the point. Carlos asked a truly silly goodbye question.

"Can I get a tax deduction on my Cuban bag donations?"

Littell said, "Regretfully, no."

Carlos signed off. Littell called Pete in Miami.

He picked up on the first ring. "This is Bondurant."

"It's me, Pete."

"Yeah, Ward. I'm listening."

"Is something wrong? You sound agitated."

"Nothing's wrong. Is something wrong with our deal?"

"Nothing's wrong. I've been thinking of Lenny, though, and I keep thinking he's too close to Sam for my liking."

"You think he'd spill to Sam?"

"Not exactly. What I'm thinking is—"

Pete cut him off. "Don't tell me what you're thinking. You're running this show, so just tell me what you want."

Littell said, "Call Turentine. Have him fly out to L.A. and tap Lenny's phone as an added precaution. Barb's out there, too. She's appearing at a place in Hollywood called the Rabbit's Foot Club. Have Freddy check on her and see how she's holding up."

Pete said, "This sounds good to me. Besides, there's other things I don't want Sam to make Lenny do."

"What are you talking about?"

"Cuban stuff. You wouldn't be interested."

Littell checked his calendar. He saw writ-submission dates running straight into June.

"Call Freddy, Pete. Let's not sit on this."

"Maybe I'll meet him in L.A. I could use a change of scenery."

"Do it. And let me know when the tap's in."

"I will. See you, Ward."

Littell hung up. The scrambler blinked and broke off his line of thought.

Hoover accepted him now. Their courtly moments were over. Hoover reverted to his standard curt behavior.

Hoover expected him to beg.

Please reinstate Helen Agee in law school. Please let my leftist friend out of prison.

He'd never beg.

Pete was nervous. He had a hunch that Kemper Boyd forced

Pete into things he couldn't control.

Boyd collected acolytes. Boyd felt at one with Cuban killers and poor Negroes. Kemper's gloss seduced Pete. The Cuban mess pushed them far beyond their ken.

Carlos said they cut a deal with Santo Trafficante. Their potential profit made Carlos laugh. He said Santo would never pay them that much money.

Carlos embraced the Cuban mess. Carlos said Sam and Santo wanted to cut their losses.

Net loss. Net gain. Profit potential.

He had the Fund books. He needed to clear a stretch of time and develop a strategy to exploit them.

Littell turned his chair around and looked out the window. Cherry blossoms brushed the glass—close enough to touch.

The phone rang. Littell tapped the speaker switch. "Yes?"

A man said, "This is Howard Hughes."

Littell almost giggled. Pete told these hilarious Dracula tales—

"This is Ward Littell, Mr. Hughes. And I'm very pleased to talk to you."

Hughes said, "You should be pleased. Mr. Hoover has shared your impeccable credentials with me, and I intend to offer you $200,000 a year for the privilege of entering my employ. I will not require you to move to Los Angeles, and we will communicate solely by letter and telephone. Your specific duties will be to handle the writ work in my painfully protracted TWA divestment suit, and to help me purchase Las Vegas hotel-casinos with the profits I expect to accrue when I finally divest TWA. Your Italian connections will prove invaluable in this regard, and I will expect you to ingratiate yourself with the Nevada State Legislature and help me devise a policy to insure that my hotels remain Negro- and germ-free—"

Littell listened.

Hughes continued.

Littell didn't even try to respond.

81

(Los Angeles, 5/10/62)

Pete held the flashlight. Freddy replaced the dial housing. The work went down bite-your-nails nervous and slow.

Freddy fucked with some loose wires. “I hate Pacific Bell phones. I hate night jobs and working in the dark. I hate bedroom extensions, because the goddamn cords get tangled up behind the goddamn bed.”

“Don’t complain, just do it.”

“My screwdriver keeps jamming. And are you *sure* Littell wants us to tap *both* extensions?”

Pete said, “*Just do it.* Two extensions and a pickup box outside. We’ll stash it in those shrubs by the driveway. If you quit complaining, we can be out of here in twenty minutes.”

Freddy gouged his thumb. “Fuck. I hate Pacific Bell phones. And Lenny don’t have to use his home phones to rat us. He can rat us in person or rat us from a pay phone.”

Pete gripped down on the flashlight. The beam wiggled and jumped.

“You fucking stop complaining, or I’ll shove this fucking thing up your ass.”

Freddy flinched and bumped a shelf. A *Hush-Hush* clipping file went flying.

"All right, all right. You been jumpy since you got off the airplane, so I'll only say it once. *Pacific Bell phones are the shits*. When you tap their lines, half the time the incoming callers can hear clicks. It's fucking unavoidable. And who's going to monitor the pickup box?"

Pete rubbed his eyes. He was nursing an on-and-off migraine since the night he killed Wilfredo Delsol.

"Littell can get some Feds to watch the box. We only need to check it every few days."

Freddy bent a lamp over the phone. "Go watch the door. 1 can't work with you standing over me."

Pete walked into the living room. His headache popped him right between the eyes.

He popped two aspirin. He washed them down with Lenny's cognac, straight from the bottle.

The stuff went down smooth. Pete knocked back a short refill.

His headache de-torqued. The veins above his eyes stopped pulsing.

Santo bought the charade so far. Santo never said *how* Delsol fucked him.

Santo said Sam G. got fucked, too. He didn't mention hijacked dope or fifteen dead men. He didn't say some big Outfit guys cozied up to Fidel Castro.

He said he had to cut the Cadre loose.

"Just for now, Pete. I've heard there's Federal pressure coming down. I want to extricate out of narcotics for a while."

The man just imported two hundred pounds of Big "H." The man was talking up extrication with a straight face.

Santo showed him a police report. The Miami fuzz bought the charade. They considered it one grisly dope killing—with assumed Cuban exile perpetrators.

Boyd and Néstor went back to Mississippi. The dope was stashed in forty safe-deposit boxes.

They resumed their Whack Castro training. They didn't care that the Outfit dug Fidel now. They didn't seem to know that there were men who could make them stop.

Their fear wasn't screwed on tight.

His was.

They didn't know you don't fuck with the Outfit.

He did.

He always sucked up to men with REAL power. He never broke the rules they set. He had to do what he did—but he didn't know WHY.

Santo swore vengeance. Santo said he'd find the dope thieves—whatever it cost, whatever it took.

Boyd thought they could sell the dope. Boyd was wrong. Boyd said he'd snitch the Mob-Agency links. Boyd said he could level out Bobby's rage.

He wouldn't do it. He couldn't do it. He'd never risk losing stature with the Kennedys.

Pete took another drink. His three shots killed a third of the bottle. Freddy lugged his tools out. "Let's go. I'll drive you back to your hotel."

"You go. I want to take a walk."

"Where to?"

"I don't know."

The Rabbit's Foot Club was a hotbox—four walls trapping smoke and stale air. Underaged Twisters ruled the dance floor—a big liquor-law infraction.

Joey and the boys played half on-the-nod. Barb was singing some dippy wah-wah tune. A single sad-ass hooker sat at the bar.

Barb spotted him. She smiled and fumbled some lyrics.

The only half-private booth in the room was occupied. Two Marines and two high-school girls—ripe for eviction.

Pete told them to shove off. They caught his size and did it. The girls left their fruity rum drinks on the table.

Pete sat down and sipped at them. His headache leveled off a bit more. Barb closed with a weak "Twilight Time" cover.

A few Twisters clapped. The combo dispersed backstage. Barb walked straight over and joined him.

Pete slid close to her. Barb said, "I'm surprised. Ward said you were in Miami."

"I thought I'd come out and see how things were going."

"You mean you thought you'd check up on me?"

Pete shook his head. "Everybody thinks you're solid. Freddy Turentine and I came out to check on Lenny."

Barb said, "Lenny's in New York. He's visiting a friend."

"A woman named Laura Hughes?"

"1 think so. Some rich woman with a place on Fifth Avenue."

Pete toyed with his lighter. "Laura Hughes is Jack Kennedy's half-sister. She used to be engaged to that man Kemper Boyd that Jack told you about. Boyd was Ward Littell's FBI mentor. My old girlfriend Gail Hendee slept with Jack on his honeymoon. Lenny gave Jack speech lessons back in '46."

Barb took one of Pete's cigarettes. "You're saying this is all too cozy for words."

Pete gave her a light. "I don't know what I'm saying."

Barb tossed her hair back. "Did Gail Hendee work gigs with you?"

"Yes."

"Divorce gigs?"

"That's right."

"Was she as good as me?"

"No."

"Were you jealous that she slept with Jack Kennedy?"

"Not until Jack fucked me personally."

"What are you saying?"

"That I had a personal stake in the Bay of Pigs."

Barb smiled. Bar light twinkled off her hair.

"Are you jealous of Jack and me?"

"If I hadn't heard the tapes I might have been."

"What are you saying?"

"That you're not giving him anything real."

Barb laughed. "This nice Secret Service man always drives me back to where I'm staying. We stopped for pizza last time."

"You're saying that's real?"

"Only compared to an hour with Jack."

The jukebox fired up. Pete reached over and pulled the plug. Barb said, "You blackmailed Lenny into this."

"He's used to getting blackmailed."

"You're nervous. You're tapping your knee against the table, and you don't even know you're doing it."

Pete stopped. His fucking foot started twitching to compensate.

Barb said, "Does our thing scare you?"

Pete jammed his knees down steady. "It's something else."

"Sometimes I think you'll kill me when all this is over."

"We don't kill women."

"You killed a woman once. Lenny told me."

Pete flinched. "And you cozied up to Joey so he'd buy hits on those guys who raped your sister."

She didn't flinch. She didn't move. She didn't show a fucking ounce of fear.

"I should have known you'd be the one to care."

"What are you saying?"

"That I wanted to see if Jack cared enough to do the checking that you did."

Pete shrugged. "Jack's a busy man."

"So are you."

"Does it bug you that Johnny Coates is still alive?"

"Only when I think of Margaret. Only when I think that she'll never let a man touch her."

Pete felt the floor dip.

Barb said, "Tell me what you want."

Pete said, "I want you."

They took a room at the Hollywood-Roosevelt. The Grauman's Chinese marquee blipped their window.

Pete tripped out of his pants. Barb pulled off her Twist gown. Loose rhinestones hit the floor—Pete gouged his feet on them.

Barb kicked his holster under the bed. Pete pulled the covers down. The stale perfume stuck to the sheets made him sneeze.

She raised her arms and unhooked her necklace. He saw the white-powdered stubble where she shaved.

He pinned her wrists to the wall. She saw what he wanted and let him taste her there.

The taste stung. She flexed her arms so he could have it all.

He felt her nipples. He smelled the sweat dripping off her shoulders.

She pushed her breasts up to him. The big veins and big freckles looked like nothing he'd ever seen. He kissed them and bit them and pushed her into the wall with his mouth.

Her breath went crazy. Her pulse tapped his lips. He slid his hands down her legs and put a finger inside her.

She pushed him off. She stumbled to the bed and lay down crossways. He spread her legs and knelt on the floor between them.

He touched her stomach and her arms and her feet. He felt a pulse every place he touched. She had big veins all over, pulsing out of red hair and freckles.

He jammed his hips into the mattress. The movement got him so hard it hurt.

He tasted her hair. He felt the folds underneath it. He made her pulse go crazy with little bites and nuzzles.

She buckled and thrashed off his mouth. She made crazy funny sounds.

He came without her even touching him. He shook and sobbed and kept tasting her.

She spasmed. She bit through the sheets. She lulled and spasmed, lulled and spasmed, lulled and spasmed. Her back arched and slammed the mattress into the box springs.

He didn’t want it to end. He didn’t want to lose the taste of her.

82

(Meridian, 5/12/62)

The air conditioner short-circuited and died. Kemper woke up sweaty and congested.

He swallowed four Dexedrine. He started building lies immediately.

I didn't tell you about the links, because:

I didn't know myself. I didn't want Jack to get hurt. I only found out recently, and I thought it best to let sleeping dogs lie.

The Mob and the CIA?—it boggled my mind when I learned.

The lies felt weak. Bobby would investigate and trace his own links back to '59.

Bobby called last night. He said, "Meet me in Miami tomorrow. I want you to show me around JM/Wave."

Pete called from L.A. a few minutes later. He heard a woman humming a Twist tune in the background.

Pete said he just talked to Santo. Santo told him to hunt down the dope heisters.

"He said *find* them, Kemper. He said *don't kill them under any circumstances*. He didn't seem too concerned that I might find out the deal was Castro-financed."

Kemper told him to rig another forensic charade. Pete said, I'll fly to New Orleans and get started. Call me at the Olivier House Hotel or Guy Banister's office.

Kemper mixed a speedball and snorted it. The coke piggybacked the Dexedrine straight to his head.

He heard cadence counts outside. Laurent pushed the Cubans through calisthenics every morning.

Flash and Juan came up to his chest. Néstor could fit in his knapsack.

Néstor shanked a redneck yesterday. All the man did was nick his fender. Néstor had the post-heist screaming mimis.

Néstor fled. The cracker survived. Flash said Néstor stole a speedboat and headed for Cuba.

Néstor left a note. It said, Save my share of the stuff. I'll be back when Castro's dead.

Kemper showered and shaved. His little pick-me-up had the razor jumping.

Lies wouldn't come.

Bobby wore dark glasses and a hat. Kemper convinced him to tour JM/Wave incognito.

The AG with shades and a stingy-brim fedora. The AG as Rat Pack reject.

They strolled the facility. Bobby's getup inspired odd looks. Contract men walked by and waved hello.

Lies wouldn't come.

They toured at a leisurely pace. Bobby kept his famous voice to a whisper. A few Cubans recognized him and played along with the ruse.

Kemper showcased the Propaganda Section. A case officer rattled off statistics. Nobody said, Jack Kennedy is a vacillating sob sister.

Nobody dropped Mob names. Nobody dropped hints that they knew Kemper Boyd before the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Bobby liked the air recon plans. The communications room impressed him.

Lies wouldn't come. Details wouldn't mesh with any degree of verisimilitude.

They toured the Map Section. Chuck Rogers walked up, hale-hearty. Kemper steered Bobby away from him.

Bobby used the men's room and stormed out in a huff. Somebody scrawled anti-Kennedy remarks above the urinals.

They walked over to the Miami U cafeteria. Bobby bought them coffee and sweet rolls.

College kids carried trays past their table. Kemper forced himself not to fidget—the Dexedrine was surging especially strong.

Bobby cleared his throat. "Say what you've been thinking."

"*What?*"

"Say that coastal harassment and intelligence gathering aren't enough. Tell me we need to assassinate Fidel Castro for the three hundredth time and get it out of your system."

Kemper smiled. "We need to assassinate Fidel Castro. And I'll memorize your response, so you won't have to say it again."

Bobby said, "You know my response. I hate redundancy, and I hate this hat. How does Sinatra manage it?"

"He's Italian."

Bobby pointed to some coeds in short shorts. "Don't they have a dress code here?"

"The code is as little as possible."

"I should tell Jack. He could address the student body."

Kemper laughed. "I'm glad to see that you've become more accepting."

"More discerning, maybe."

"And more specifically disapproving?"

"Touché."

Kemper sipped coffee. "Who's the man been seeing?"

"Some fluff. And a Twist performer Lenny Sands introduced him to."

"Who isn't fluff?"

"Let's say she's mentally overqualified for some cheap dance craze."

"You've met her?"

Bobby nodded. "Lenny brought her to Peter Lawford's house in Los Angeles. I got the impression that she thinks a few steps ahead of most people, and Jack always calls me from the Carlyle to say how smart she is, which is not what Jack usually comments on in a woman."

Lenny, the Twist, L.A.—a puzzling little triad.

"What's her name?"

"Barb Jahelka. Jack was on the phone with her this morning. He said he called her at 5:00 a.m. L.A. time, and she still managed to come off smart and funny."

Pete called from L.A. last night. A woman was humming "Let's Twist Again."

"What is it about her that you disapprove of?"

"Probably just the fact that she doesn't behave like most of Jack's quickies."

Pete was a shakedown man. Lenny was an L.A. show-biz reptile.

"Do you think she's dangerous in some way?"

"Not exactly. I'm just suspicious because I'm the attorney general of the United States, and suspiciousness goes with the job. Why do you care? We've given this woman two minutes more than she deserves."

Kemper crumpled his coffee cup. "I was just steering talk away from Fidel."

Bobby laughed. "Good. And no, you and our exile friends cannot assassinate him."

Kemper stood up. "Do you want to look around some more?"

"No. I've got a car picking me up. Do you want a lift to the airport?"

"No. I have to make some phone calls."

Bobby took off his shades. A coed recognized him and squealed.

Kemper commandeered a vacant JM/Wave office. The switchboard put him through to LAPD R&I direct.

A man picked up. "Records and Information. Officer Graham."

"Dennis Payne, please. Tell him it's Kemper Boyd, long distance."

"Hold on, please."

Kemper scribbled up a scratch pad. Payne came on the line posthaste.

"Mr. Boyd, how are you?"

"I'm fine, Sergeant. You?"

"Fair to middling. And I'll bet you have a request to make."

"I do. I need you to check for a rap sheet on a white female named Barbara Jahelka, probable spelling J-A-H-E-L-K-A. She's probably twenty-two to thirty-two, and I think she lives in Los

Angeles. I also need you to check for an unlisted number. The name is either Lenny Sands or Leonard J. Seidelwitz, and it's probably a West Hollywood listing."

Payne said, "I copy. You hold, okay? This might take a few minutes."

Kemper held. His pick-me-up was inducing mild palpitations.

Pete didn't state his L.A. business. Lenny was extortable and bribable.

Payne came back on the line. "Mr. Boyd? We've got two positives."

Kemper grabbed a pen. "Keep going."

"The Sands number is OL5-3980, and I got a felony marijuana possession on the girl. She's the only Barbara Jahelka in our files, and her DOB matches up to what you told me."

"Disposition?"

"She was arrested in July '57. She did six months and topped out two years of summary probation."

It was inconclusive information.

"Would you check for something more recent? FI cards or arrests that didn't go to arraignment?"

Payne said, "Will do. I'll check with the Sheriff's and our other local municipals, too. If the girl's been in trouble since '57, we'll know."

"Thanks, Sergeant. I appreciate it."

"Give me an hour, Mr. Boyd. I should have something or nothing by then."

Kemper disconnected. The switchboard patched him in to Lenny's L.A. number.

It rang three times. Kemper heard faint tap clicks and hung up.

Pete was a shakedown man. Pete was a bug/tap man. Pete's bug/tap partner was the celebrated Fred Turentine.

Freddy's brother owned a TV repair shop in L.A. Freddy worked there between wire jobs.

Kemper called Los Angeles information. An operator gave him the number. He fed it to the JM/Wave switchboard and told the girl to put him through.

The line hissed and crackled. A man picked up on the first ring. "Turentine's TV. Good morning."

Kemper faked a lowlife growl. "Is Freddy there? This is Ed. I'm friends with Freddy and Pete Bondurant."

The man coughed. “Freddy’s in New York. He was here a few days ago, but he went back.”

“Shit. I need to send him something. Did he leave an address?”

“Yeah, he did. Wait … let’s see … yeah, it’s 94 East 76th Street, New York City. The number’s MU6-0197.”

Kemper said, “Thanks. I appreciate it.”

The man coughed. “Tell Freddy hi. Tell him his big brother says to stay out of trouble.”

Kemper hung up. The office tilted in and out of focus.

Turentine was lodged near 76th and Madison. The Carlyle Hotel was on the northeast corner.

Kemper dialed the switchboard and gave the girl Lenny’s number one more time.

She reconnected him. He heard three rings and three tiny tap clicks.

A woman answered. “Mr. Sands’ residence.”

“Is this Mr. Sands’ service?”

“Yes, sir. And Mr. Sands can be reached in New York City. The number is MU6-2433.”

Laura’s number.

Kemper disconnected and redialed the switchboard. The girl said, “Yes, Mr. Boyd.”

“Get me New York City, please. The number is MU6-0197.”

“Please hang up, sir. All my circuits are busy, but I’ll put your call through in a second.”

Kemper leaned on the cutoff button. The pieces fit—circumstantially, instinctively—

The phone rang. He jerked the receiver up.

“Yes?”

“What do you mean, ‘Yes?’? The operator placed *your* call to *me*.”

Kemper wiped a line of sweat off his forehead. “That’s right, she did. Is this Fred Turentine?”

“That’s right.”

“This is Kemper Boyd. I work with Pete Bondurant.”

Silence stretched a solid beat too long.

“So you’re looking for Pete?”

“That’s right.”

“Well … Pete’s in New Orleans.”

“That’s right. I forgot.”

“Well … why’d you think he’d be here?”

“It was just a hunch.”

“Hunch, shit. Pete said he wasn’t giving out this number.”

“Your brother gave it to me.”

“Well … shit … he wasn’t supposed—”

“Thanks, Fred. I’ll call Pete in New Orleans.”

The line went dead. Turentine hung up dead finessed and dead scared.

Kemper watched the second hand circle his watch. His shirt sleeves were soaked clear through.

Pete would do it. Pete wouldn’t do it. Pete was his longtime partner, which constituted proof of—

Nothing.

Business was business. Jack got between them. Call it the Triangle Twist: Jack, Pete and Barb what’s-her-name.

Kemper dialed the switchboard. The operator redialed the LAPD.

Payne answered. “Records and Information.”

“It’s Kemper Boyd, Sergeant.”

Payne laughed. “And an hour to the second.”

“Did you find out anything else?”

“Yeah, I did. Beverly Hills PD arrested the Jahelka girl for extortion in August 1960.”

Jesus God—

“Details?”

“The girl and her ex-husband tried to shake down Rock Hudson with some sex pictures.”

“Of Hudson and the girl?”

“That’s correct. They demanded some money, but Hudson went to the police. The girl and her ex were arrested, but Hudson retracted the charges.”

Kemper said, “It stinks.”

Payne said, “To high heaven. A friend of mine on the BHPD said the whole thing was some sort of ploy to establish Hudson as a pussy hound, when he’s really some kind of homo. He heard a rumor that *Hush-Hush* was behind the whole thing.”

Kemper put the phone down. His little palpitations almost cut his breath off.

LENNY—

He caught a 1:45 connector to La Guardia. He popped four Dexedrine and chased them with two in-flight martinis.

The flight took three and a half hours. Kemper shredded cocktail napkins and checked his watch every few minutes.

They landed on time. Kemper caught a cab outside the terminal. He told the driver to cruise by the Carlyle and drop him at 64th and Fifth.

Rush-hour traffic crawled. The Carlyle run ate up an hour.

94 East 76th Street was fifty yards from the hotel. It was an ideal apartment/listening-post location.

The cabbie swung south and dropped him outside Laura's building. The doorman was busy with a tenant.

Kemper ran into the lobby. An old lady held the elevator for him.

He hit "12." The old lady backed away. He saw his gun in his hand and tried to remember unholstering it.

He tucked it in his waistband. The old lady hid behind a huge handbag. The ride up took forever.

The door opened. Laura had redecorated the foyer—a complete French Provincial makeover.

Kemper walked through it. The elevator zoomed up behind him. He heard laughter on the terrace.

He ran toward the sound. Throw rugs snagged under his feet. He took the last hallway at a sprint and knocked over two lamps and an end table.

They were standing. They were holding drinks and cigarettes. They looked like they weren't quite breathing.

Laura, Lenny and Claire.

They looked funny. They looked like they didn't quite know him.

He saw his gun out. He saw the trigger at half-pull.

He said something about shaking down Jack Kennedy.

Claire said "Dad?" like she wasn't quite sure.

He aimed at Lenny.

Claire said, "Dad, please."

Laura dropped her cigarette. Lenny flicked his cigarette at him and smiled.

The tip burned his face. Ashes singed his suitcoat. He steadied his aim and pulled the trigger.

The gun jammed.

Lenny smiled.
Laura screamed.
Claire’s scream made him turn tail and run.

83

(New Orleans, 5/12/62)

Bullshit flowed bilateral. Banister's office was submerged in right-wing rebop.

Guy said the Klan bombed some churches. Pete said Heshie Ryskind had cancer.

Boyd's Clip Castro Team was all-time elite. Dougie Frank Lockhart was one elite gun runner.

Pete said Wilfredo Delsol fucked Santo Junior on a dope deal. The fucker got fucked backed by fucker or fuckers unknown.

Banister sipped bourbon. Pete goosed the charade along. Say, Guy, what have you heard about this?

Guy said he heard bubkes. No shit, Sherlock—this line of talk is all shuck and jive.

Pete sprawled in a chair and played with a tall Jack Daniel's. He took little medicinal sips for migraine relief.

New Orleans was hot. The office sucked in heat. Guy sat behind his desk and peeled sweat off his forehead with a switchblade.

Pete kept drifting back to Barb. He couldn't hold a non-Barb line of thought for more than six seconds.

The phone rang. Banister dug through desk debris and caught it.

“Yeah? … Yeah, he’s here. Hold on a second.”

Pete stood up and snagged the phone off the desk. “Who’s this?”

“It’s Fred. And don’t you fucking lose your temper for what I’m gonna tell you.”

“You just calm down, then.”

“You can’t calm down when you got a fucking concussion. You can’t calm down—”

Pete walked the phone to the far end of the office. The cord stretched taut.

“Calm down, Freddy. Just tell me what happened.”

Freddy caught his breath. “Okay. Kemper Boyd called the post this morning. He said he was looking for you, but I knew he was lying. Now, he came by—in person—an hour ago. He knocked on the door looking like a crazy man. I didn’t let him in, and I saw him practically knock down an old lady and get into this cab she was getting out of.”

The phone cord almost snapped. Pete stepped back and cut it some slack.

“And that’s it?”

“Fuck no!”

“Freddy, what are you say—”

“I’m saying Lenny Sands came by a few minutes later. I let him in because I figured he knew what Boyd was up to. He brained me with a chair and sacked the place. He stole all the tapes and written transcripts and took off. I woke up after, shit—I don’t know, half an hour. I went by the Carlyle and saw ail these police cars out front. Pete, Pete, Pete—”

His legs dipped. The wall caught him.

“Pete, it was Lenny. He kicked the door in and trashed the Kennedy suite. He pulled out the microphones, and fucking escaped out a fire door. Pete, Pete, Pete—

“Pete, we’re fucked—

“Pete, it had to be Lenny—

“Pete, I wiped down the post and moved out all my equipment and—”

The connection died—Pete twitched and jerked the cord out of the wall.

Boyd knew he was in New Orleans. Boyd would catch the first available flight down.

The gig was burned. Boyd and Lenny collided and fucked things up somehow.

The Feds knew by now. The Secret Service knew. Boyd couldn't go to Bobby to explain—his Mob ties compromised him.

Boyd would come here. Boyd knew he was staying at the hotel across the street.

Pete sipped bourbon and played every Twist song on the jukebox. A waitress swooped by with regular refills.

A cab would pull up. Boyd would get out. He'd intimidate the desk clerk and gain entrance to room 614.

Boyd would find a note. He'd obey the instructions. He'd carry the tape recorder over here to his booth at Ray Becker's Tropics.

Pete watched the door. Every Twist tune brought Barb back that much stronger.

He called her in L.A. two hours ago. He told her the gig was blown. He told her to drive down to Ensenada and hole up at the Playa Rosada.

She said she'd do it. She said, "*We're* still on, aren't we?"

He said, "Yes."

The bar was hot. New Orleans held the patent on heat. Thunderstorms hit and burned themselves out before you could blink.

Boyd walked in. Pete screwed a silencer to his magnum and placed it on the seat next to him.

Boyd was carrying the tape recorder in a suitcase. He had a .45 automatic pressed to his leg.

He walked up. He sat down across from Pete and put the suitcase on the floor.

Pete pointed to it. "Take the machine out. It's running on batteries, and there's a tape looped in already, so all you have to do is turn it on."

Boyd shook his head. "Put the gun in your lap on the table."

Pete did it. Boyd said, "Now unload it."

Pete did it. Boyd popped the clip out of his piece and wrapped both guns in the tablecloth.

He looked soiled and haggard. The ungroomed Kemper Boyd—a true first.

Pete slipped a .38 snub-nose out of his waistband. "It's compartmentalized, Kemper. It’s got nothing to do with our other gigs.”

“I don’t care.”

“You will when you play that tape.”

They had a long row of booths to themselves. If it went bad, he could kill him and duck out the back door.

“You crossed the line, Pete. You knew the line was there, and you crossed it.”

Pete shrugged. “We didn’t hurt Jack, and Bobby’s too smart to bring in the law. We can walk out of here and get back to business.”

“And trust each other?”

“I don’t see why not. Jack’s the only thing that ever got between us.”

“Do you honestly think it’s that simple?”

“I think you can make it that way.”

Boyd unlatched the suitcase. Pete laid the machine on the table and hit Play.

His tape splice rolled. Pete turned the volume up to cover the jukebox.

Jack Kennedy said, “Kemper Boyd’s probably the closest thing, but he makes me a tad uncomfortable.”

Barb Jahelka said, “Who’s Kemper Boyd?”

Jack: “He’s a Justice Department lawyer.”

Jack: “His one great regret is that he’s not a Kennedy.”

Jack: “He just went to Yale Law School, latched onto me, and —”

Boyd was shaking. Boyd was ungroomed working on unhinged.

Jack: “He threw over the woman he was engaged to to curry favor with me.”

Jack: “He’s living out some unsavory fantasy—”

Boyd hit the tape rig barefisted. The spools bent and cracked and shattered.

Pete let him beat his hands bloody.

84

(Meridian, 5/13/62)

The plane fishtailed in and skidded to a halt. Kemper braced himself against the seat in front of him.

His head throbbed. His hands throbbed. He hadn't slept in thirty-odd hours.

The co-pilot cut the engines and cranked the passenger door open. Sunshine and steamy air blasted in.

Kemper deplaned and walked to his car. His finger wraps seeped blood.

Pete talked him out of reprisals. Pete said Ward Littell built the shakedown from the ground up.

He drove to the motel. The road blurred behind thirty-odd hours of liquor and Dexedrine.

The lot was full. He double-parked beside Flash Elorde's Chevy.

The sun hit twice as hot as it should. Claire kept saying, "Dad, please."

He walked to his room. The door jerked open just as he touched it.

A man pulled him inside. A man kicked his legs out. A man threw him prone and cuffed him facedown on the floor.

A man said, “We found narcotics here.”

A man said, “And illegal weapons.”

A man said, “Lenny Sands killed himself in New York City last night. He rented a cheap hotel room, slashed his wrists and wrote ‘I am a homosexual’ in blood on the wall above the bed. The sink and toilet were filled with burned-up tape fragments obviously taken off a bug installed in the Kennedy family’s suite at the Carlyle Hotel.”

Kemper thrashed. A man stepped on his face and held him still.

A man said, “Sands was spotted burglarizing the suite earlier in the day. The NYPD located a listening-post setup a few doors down. It was print-wiped and cleaned out, and obviously rented under a phony name, but the people running it left a large quantity of blank tape behind.”

A man said, “You ran the shakedown.”

A man said, “We’ve got your Cubans and that French guy Guéry. They won’t talk, but they’re going down on weapons charges anyway.”

A man said, “Enough.”

The Man: Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.

A man pulled him into a chair. A man uncuffed him and recuffed him to the post at the foot of the bed. The room was packed with Bobby’s pet Feds—six or seven men in cheap summer suits.

The men walked out and shut the door behind them. Bobby sat on the edge of the bed.

“Goddamn you, Kemper. Goddamn you for what you tried to do to my brother.”

Kemper coughed. His vision shimmied. He saw two beds and two Bobbys.

“I didn’t do anything. I tried to break up the operation.”

“I don’t believe you. I don’t believe that your outburst at Laura’s apartment was anything but an admission of your guilt.”

Kemper flinched. The cuffs gouged his wrists and drew blood.

“Believe what you like, you chaste little piece of dogshit. And tell your brother that nobody ever loved him more and got back less.”

Bobby moved closer. “Your daughter Claire informed on you. She told me that you’ve been a CIA contract agent for over three years. She said the Agency specifically instructed you to disseminate anti-Castro propaganda to my brother. She said that Lenny Sands told her you were instrumental in suborning organized crime figures into participating in covert CIA activities. I've taken all this into consideration and concluded that some initial suspicions of mine were correct. I think Mr. Hoover sent you over to spy on my family, and I'm going to confront him on it the day my brother forces him to resign."

Kemper made fists. Dislocated bones splintered. Bobby got up inside spitting distance.

"I'm going to sever every Mafia-CIA tie. I'm going to prohibit organized crime participation in the Cuban project. I'm going to expel you from the Justice Department and the CIA, I'm going to have you disbarred as a lawyer, and I'm going to prosecute you and your Franco-Cuban friends on weapons possession and narcotics possession charges."

Kemper wet his lips and spoke with a mouthful of spittle.

"If you fuck with my men or try to prosecute me, I'll go public. I'll spill everything I know about your filthy family. I'll smear the Kennedy name with enough verifiable filth to put a taint on it forever."

Bobby slapped him.

Kemper spat in his face.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/14/62. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript: “TAPED AT THE DIRECTOR’S REQUEST” /“DIRECTOR’S EYES ONLY.” Speaking: Director J. Edgar Hoover, Ward J. Littell.

WJL: Good morning, Sir.

JEH: Good morning. And you needn’t ask me if I’ve heard, because I daresay I know more of the story than you do.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I hope Kemper has money saved. Disbarment can prove costly, and I doubt that a man of his tastes could live comfortably on an FBI pension.

WJL: I’m certain that Little Brother won’t file criminal charges on him.

JEH: Of course he won’t.

WJL: Kemper took the fall.

JEH: I will not comment on the attendant irony.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Have you spoken to him?

WJL: No, Sir.

JEH: I’d be curious to know what he’s doing. The notion of Kemper C. Boyd without police agency sanction is quite startling.

WJL: I think Mr. Marcello will find him work.

JEH: Oh? As a Mafia back scratcher?

WJL: As a Cuban provocateur, Sir. Mr. Marcello has remained committed to the Cause.

JEH: Then he’s a fool. Fidel Castro is here to stay. My sources tell me that the Dark King will most likely seek to normalize relations with him.

WJL: The Dark King is an appeaser, Sir.

JEH: Don’t try to butter me up. You may have undergone an apostasy regarding the brothers, but your political beliefs are still suspect.

WJL: Be that as it may, Sir, I’m still not giving up. I’m going to think of something else. I haven’t given up on the King.

JEH: Bully for you. But please be advised that I do not wish to be informed of your plans.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Has Miss Jahelka resumed her normal life?

WJL: She's going to, Sir. At the moment she's on a Mexican vacation with a French-Canadian friend of ours.

JEH: I hope they don't procreate. They would produce morally deficient offspring.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Good day, Mr. Littell.

WJL: Good day, Sir.

DOCUMENT INSERTS: Consecutively dated FBI wiretap outtakes. Marked: "TOP SECRET/CONFIDENTIAL/DIRECTOR'S EYES ONLY" and "NO DISCLOSURE TO OUTSIDE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL."

Chicago, 6/10/62. BL4-8869 (Celano's Tailor Shop) to AX8-9600 (home of John Rosselli) (THP File #902.5, Chicago Office). Speaking: John Rosselli, Sam "Mo," "Momo," "Mooney" Giancana (File #480.2). Conversation nine minutes in progress.

SG: So fucking Bobby found out on his own.

JR: Which frankly, did not surprise me.

SG: We were helping him out, Johnny. Sure, it was mostly cosmetic. But the basic fucking truth of the whole thing was that we were helping him and his brother out.

JR: We were good to them, Mo. We were nice. And they kept fucking us and fucking us and fucking us.

SG: Some sort of fucking shakedown pre-pre-pre—what's that word that means set up?

JR: Precipitated, Mo. That's the word you want.

SG: Right. Some cocksucking shakedown precipitated Bobby finding out. The word is Jimmy and Frenchman Pete were in on it. Somebody got careless, and Jewboy Lenny killed himself.

JR: You can't fault Jimmy and Pete for trying to fuck the Kennedys.

SG: No, you can't.

JR: And it turned out Lenny was a faggot. Can you believe that?

SG: Who would have believed it?

JR: He was Jewish, Mo. The Jewish race has a higher percentage of homos than regular white people.

SG: That's true. Heshie Ryskind's no queer, though. He's had like sixty thousand blow jobs.

JR. Heshie's sick, Mo. He's real sick.

SG: I wish the Kennedys caught his fucking disease. The Kennedys and Sinatra.

JR: Sinatra sold us a bill of goods. He said he had influence with the brothers.

SG: He's useless. The Haircut kicked his guinea ass off the White House guest list. Asking Frank to plead our case with the brothers is useless.

Non-applicable conversation follows.

Cleveland, 8/4/62. BR1-8771 (Sal's River Lounge) to BR4-0811 (Bartolo's Ristorante pay phone). Speaking: John Michael D'Allesio (THP File #180.4, Cleveland Office), Daniel "Donkey Dan" Versace (File #206.9, Chicago Office). Conversation sixteen minutes in progress.

DV: Rumors are just rumors. You got to consider the source and take it from there.

JMD: Danny, you like rumors?

DV: You know I do. You know I love a good rumor as much as the next guy, and I don't particularly care if it's true or not.

JMD: Danny, I got a hot rumor.

DV: So tell. Don't be a fucking cock tease.

JMD: The rumor is J. Edgar Hoover and Bobby Kennedy hate each other.

DV: That's your rumor?

JMD: There's more.

DV: I hope so. The Hoover-Bobby feud is stale bread.

JMD: The rumor is Bobby's racket squad guys are turning snitches. The rumor is Bobby won't let Hoover near his fucking prospects. Furthermore, I heard the fucking McClellan Committee's gearing up to go into session again. They're getting ready to fucking keester the Outfit again. Bobby's working on turning this major informant. When the committee sessions start, this guy's supposed to come on as the starring fucking attraction.

DV: I heard better rumors, Johnny.

JMD: Fuck you.

DV: I prefer sex-type rumors. Haven't you heard any good sex-type shit?

JMD: Fuck you.

Non-applicable conversation follows.

New Orleans, 10/10/62. KL4-0909 (Habana Bar pay phone) to CR8-8107 (Town & Country Motel pay phone). Note: Carlos Marcello (no THP file extant) owns the Town & Country. Speaking: Leon NMI Broussard (THP File #88.6, New Orleans Office) and unidentified (assumed Cuban) man. Conversation twenty-one minutes in progress.

LB: So you shouldn't give up hope. All is not lost, my friend.

UM: It feels as if it is.

LB: That is simply not true. I know for a fact that Uncle Carlos is still very much a believer.

UM: He is alone, then. A few years ago many of his compatriots were just as generous as he has remained. It is troubling to see powerful friends abandoning the Cause.

LB: Like John F-for-fuckhead Kennedy.

UM: Yes. His betrayal is the worst example. He continues to prohibit a second invasion.

LB: So the fuckhead doesn't care. I'll tell you this, though, my friend. Uncle Carlos does.

UM: I hope you are right.

LB: I know I am. I have it on very good authority that Uncle Carlos is financing an operation that could blow the whole Cuban thing to bits.

UM: I hope you are right.

LB: He's bankrolling some men who want to hit Castro. Three Cuban guys and an ex-French paratrooper. The leader's an ex-FBI/CIA man. Uncle Carlos said he'd die himself just to make the hit.

UM: I hope this is true. You see, the Cause has become scattered. There are hundreds of exile groups now. Some are CIA-financed and some are not. I hate to say it, but many of the groups are filled with crackpots and undesirables. I think direct action is needed, and with so many factions working at cross-purposes, this will be hard to accomplish.

LB: The first thing somebody should accomplish is cutting the Kennedy brothers' balls off. The Outfit was very fucking generous to the Cause until Bobby Kennedy went nuts and cut off all our fucking ties.

UM: It is hard to be optimistic these days. It is hard not to feel impotent.

Non-applicable conversation follows.

Tampa, 10/16/62. 0L4-9777 (home of Robert “Fat Bob” Paolucci) (THP file #19.3, Miami Office) to GL1-8041 (home of Thomas Richard Scavone) (File #80.0, Miami Office). Speaking: Paolucci and Scavone. Conversation thirty-eight minutes in progress.

RP: I know you know most of the story.

TS: Well, you know how it is. You pick up bits and pieces here and there. What I know specific is that Mo and Santo ain’t talked to their Castro contacts since the heist.

RP: It was some heist. Something like fifteen fucking deaths. Santo said the heist guys probably ran the boat out to sea and blew it up. Two hundred pounds, Tommy. Can you estimate the fucking re-sale value?

TS: Off the graph, Bobby. Off the fucking graph.

RP: And it’s still out there.

TS: I was just thinking that.

RP: Two hundred pounds. And somebody’s got it.

TS: I heard Santo won’t give up.

RP: This is true. Pete the Frenchman clipped that Delsol guy, but he was just the tip of the iceberg. I heard Santo has got Pete out there looking around, you know, sort of informal. They both figure some crazy spic exiles were behind the heist, and Pete the Frog’s out there looking for them.

TS: I’ve met some of them exiles.

RP: So have I. They’re all fucking crazy.

TS: You know what I hate about them?

RP: What?

TS: That they think they’re as white as Italians.

Non-applicable conversation follows.

New Orleans, 10/19/62. BR8-3408 (home of Leon NMI Broussard) (THP File #88.6, New Orleans Office) to Suite 1411 at the Adolphus Hotel in Dallas, Texas. (Hotel records indicate the suite was rented by Herschel Meyer Ryskind) (File #887.8, Dallas Office). Conversation three minutes in progress.

LB: You always had a thing for hotel suites, Hesh. A hotel suite and a blow job was always your idea of heaven.

HR: Don’t say heaven, Leon. You’re giving me a pain in the prostate.

LB: I get it. You’re sick, so you don’t want to think about the thereafter.

HR: It's the hereafter, Leon. And you're right. And I called you to schmooze because you've always got your nose in other people's troubles, and I figured you could dish some gossip on some of the boys with worse trouble than me and cheer me up.

LB: I'll try, Hesh. And Carlos says hi, by the way.

HR: Let's start with him. What kind of trouble has that crazy dago hump gotten himself into now?

LB: I gotta say nothing recent. And I also gotta say the deportation thing is hanging over his head and making him crazy.

HR: Thank God he's got that lawyer.

LB: Yeah, Littell. The guy's working for Jimmy Hoffa, too. Uncle Carlos says he hates the Kennedys so much that he'd probably work for free.

HR: I heard he's a red tape kind of guy. He just delays and delays and delays.

LB: You're absolutely right. Uncle Carlos said his INS case probably won't go to trial until late next year. Littell's got these Justice Department lawyers fucking exhausted.

HR: Carlos is optimistic, then?

LB: Absolutely. So's Jimmy, from what I've heard. The trouble with Jimmy's troubles is that he's got eighty-six-fucking-thousand grand juries chasing him. My feeling is that sooner or later, somebody gets a conviction. I don't care how good a lawyer this Littell guy is.

HR: This makes me happy. Jimmy Hoffa's a guy with troubles approximating my own. Can you imagine going to Leavenworth and getting shtupped in the ass by some shvartze?

LB: That is not a pleasant prospect.

HR: Neither is cancer, you goyisher shitheel.

LB: We're pulling for you, Hesh. You're in our prayers.

HR: Puck your prayers. And give me some gossip. You know that's why I called.

LB: Well.

HR: Well, what? Leon, you owe me money. You know I'm gonna die before I collect. Give an old dying man the comfort of some satisfying gossip.

LB: Well, I heard rumors.

HR: Such as?

LB: Such as that lawyer Littell's working for Howard Hughes.

Hughes is supposed to want to buy all these Las Vegas hotels, and I heard—off the record, Hesh, really—that Sam G's dying to work some kind of an angle on the deal.

HR: Which Littell don't know about?

LB: That is correct.

HR: I love this fucking life of ours. It is never fucking boring.

LB: You are absolutely correct. Think of the tidbits you pick up in this loop of ours.

HR: I don't want to die, Leon. All this shit is too good to give up.

Non-applicable conversation follows.

Chicago, 11/19/62. BL4-8869 (Celano's Tailor Shop) to AX8-9600 (home of John Rosselli) (THP Pile #902.5, Chicago Office). Speaking: John Rosselli, Sam "Mo," "Momo," "Mooney" Giancana (File #480.2). Conversation two minutes in progress.

JR: Sinatra's worthless.

SG: He's less than worthless.

JR: The Kennedys won't even take his phone calls.

SG: Nobody hates those Irish cocksuckers more than I do.

JR: Unless it's Carlos and his lawyer. It's like Carlos knows that sooner or later he'll get deported again. It's like he sees himself back in El Salvador picking cactus thorns out of his ass.

SG: Carlos has his problems, I've got mine. Bobby's racket squad guys are crawling up my ass like the regular Feds never did. I would like to take a ball peen hammer and cave Bobby's fucking head in.

JR: And his brother's.

SG: Especially his brother's. That man is nothing but a traitor masquerading as a hero. He's nothing but a Commie-appeaser in wolf's clothing.

JR: He made Khruschev back down, Mo. I gotta give him that. Khruschev moved those goddamn missiles.

SG: That is horseshit. That is appeasement with a sugar coating. A CIA guy I know told me Kennedy cut a side deal with Khruschev. Okay, he moved the missiles. But my CIA guy told me Kennedy had to promise not to invade Cuba ever fucking again. Think of that, Johnny. Think of our casinos and wave bye-bye for fucking ever.

JR: Kennedy's supposed to talk to some Bay of Pigs survivors at the Orange Bowl in December. Think of the lies he'll tell them.

SG: Some Cuban patriot should pop him. Some Cuban patriot who don't mind dying.

JR: I heard Kemper Boyd's training some guys like that to pop Castro.

SG: Kemper Boyd's a faggot. He's got his eyes on the wrong target. Castro's just some taco eater with a good line of bullshit. Kennedy's worse for business than he ever was. Non-applicable conversation follows.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/20/62. Des Moines Register subhead:

HOFFA DENIES BRIBERY ACCUSATIONS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/17/62. Cleveland Plain Dealer headline:

HOFFA ACQUITTED IN TEST FLEBT CASE

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/12/63. Los Angeles Times subhead:

HOFFA UNDER INVESTIGATION FOR TEST FLEET JURY TAMPERING

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/10/63. Dallas Morning News headline and subhead:

HOFFA INDICTED

TEAMSTER BOSS HIT WITH JURY TAMPERING CHARGES

DOCUMENT INSERT: 6/25/63. Chicago Sun-Times headline and subhead:

HOFFA UNDER SIEGE

TEAMSTER BOSS ARRAIGNED IN CHICAGO ON SEPARATE FRAUD CHARGES

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/29/63. FBI wiretap outtake. Marked: TOP SECRET/CONFIDENTIAL/DIRECTOR'S EYES ONLY and NO DISCLOSURE TO OUTSIDE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL.

Chicago, 7/28/63. BL4-8869 (Celano's Tailor Shop) to

AX8-9600 (home of John Rosselli) (THP File #902.5, Chicago Office). Speaking: John Rosselli, Sam "Mo," "Momo," "Mooney" Giancana (File #480.2). Conversation seventeen minutes in progress.

SG: I am woefully fucking tired of this.

JR: Sammy, I hear you.

SG: The FBI's got me under twenty-four-hour surveillance. Bobby went over Hoover's head to order it. I'm out on the fucking golf course and I see fucking G-men skulking in the rough and on the fairways, and for all I know, they got the fucking sand traps bugged.

JR: I hear you, Mo.

SG: I'm woefully tired of this. So's Jimmy and so's Carlos. So's every made guy I talk to.

JR: Jimmy's going down. I can see the writing on the wall. I also heard Bobby turned a major snitch. I don't know details, but —

SG: I do. His name's Joe Valachi. He was a button man for Vito Genovese. He was in Atlanta, something like ten to life for narcotics.

JR: I think I met him once.

SG: Everybody in the Life's met everybody else at least once.

JR: That's true.

SG: As I was saying before you interrupted me, Valachi was in Atlanta. He blew his cork and killed another prisoner, because he thought Vito sent him down to clip him. He was wrong, but Vito did put out a contract on him, because the guy he clipped was a good friend of Vito's.

JR: This Valachi is one prime stupe.

SG: He's a scared stupe, too. He begged to go into Federal custody, and Bobby beat Hoover to him. They cut a deal. Valachi gets lifetime protection for ratting the Outfit en fucking masse. The word is Bobby's going to put him in front of the newly fucking revived McClellan Committee, like in September or something.

JR: Oh, fuck. Mo, this is bad.

SG: It's worse than bad. It's probably the worst fucking thing that's ever happened to the Outfit. Valachi's been a made guy for forty years. Do you know what he knows?

JR: Oh, fuck.

SG: Quit saying, oh fuck, you stupid cocksucker.

Non-applicable conversation follows.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 9/10/63. Personal note: Ward J. Littell to Howard Hughes.

Dear Mr. Hughes,

Please consider this an official business request, and one tendered only as a last resort. I hope that my five months in your employ have convinced you that I would never make an out-of-channels request unless I deemed it absolutely vital to your interests.

I need $260,000. This money is to be used to circumvent official processes and guarantee Mr. J. Edgar Hoover's continued tenure as FBI Director.

I deem Mr. Hoover's continued directorship to be essential to our Las Vegas plans. Please advise me of your decision as soon as possible, and please keep this communique in the strictest confidence.

Respectfully,
Ward J. Littell

DOCUMENT INSERT: 9/12/63. Personal note: Howard Hughes to Ward J. Littell.

Dear Ward,

Your plan, however obliquely stated, impressed me as judicious. The sum you requested will be forthcoming. Please justify the expense with results at the earliest possible date.

Yours,
HH

Part V

DOCUMENT INSERT: 9/13/63. Justice Department memorandum: Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

Dear Mr. Hoover,

President Kennedy is seeking to establish a normalization of relations plan with Communist Cuba and has become alarmed at the extent of exile-perpetrated sabotage and harassment aimed at the Cuban coastline, specifically violent actions undertaken by non-CIA sponsored exile groups situated in Florida and along the Gulf Coast.

These non-sanctioned actions must be curtailed. The President wants this implemented immediately and has mandated it a top Justice Department-FBI priority. Florida and Gulf Coast-based agents are to begin raiding and seizing weapons at all exile camps not specifically CIA-funded or vetted by established foreign policy memorandums.

These raids must begin immediately. Please meet me in my office at 3:00 this afternoon to discuss particulars and review my list of initial target sites.

Yours,
Robert F. Kennedy

85

(Miami, 9/15/63)

The dispatch hut was boarded up. The orange-and-black wallpaper was stripped into souvenir swatches.

Adios, Tiger Kab.

The CIA divested their half-interest. Jimmy Hoffa dumped his half as a tax dodge. He told Pete to sell the cabs and make him some chump change.

Pete ran the parking-lot clearance sale. Buyer-incentive TV sets were perched on every tiger-striped hood.

Pete hooked them up to a portable generator. Two dozen screens blasted news: a spook church in Birmingham got bombed an hour ago.

Four pickaninnies got vaporized. Kemper Boyd, take note.

Browsers jammed the lot. Pete pocketed cash and signed over pink slips.

Goodbye, Tiger Kab. Thanks for the memories.

Agency cutbacks and phaseouts dictated the sale. JM/Wave slogged on, minus mucho personnel.

The Cadre was disbanded. Santo said he was getting out of narcotics—an all-time epic lie.

The formal order came down last December. Merry Xmas—your elite dope squadron is kaput.

Teo Paez was running whores in Pensacola. Fulo Machado was on the bum somewhere. Ramon Gutierrez was anti-Castroizing outside New Orleans.

Chuck Rogers was phased off contract status. Nestor Chasco was dead or alive in Cuba.

Kemper Boyd was still running his Whack Castro squad.

Mississippi got too hot for him. Civil rights grief was escalating and polarizing the locals.

Boyd moved his squad to Sun Valley, Florida. They took over some abandoned prefab pads. That old Teamster resort finally saw tenants.

They set up a target range and a reconnaissance course. They stayed focused on the KILL FIDEL problem. They infiltrated Cuba nine times—white men Boyd and Guéry included.

They took a hundred Commie scalps. They never saw Néstor. They never got close to Castro.

The dope was still stashed in Mississippi. The "search" for the heist men was still in sporadic progress.

Pete kept chasing fake leads. The fear got bad sometimes. He had Santo and Sam *half*-convinced that the heist men split to Cuba.

Santo and Sam harbored lingering suspicions. They kept saying, Where's that guy Chasco?—he split the exile scene post-fucking-haste.

He kept chasing fake leads. He synced the chase to Barb's road schedule.

Langley sent him out gun running. His circuits supplied good lead chase cover.

The fear got bad sometimes. The headaches came back. He popped goofballs to insure instant dreamless sleep.

He panicked last March. He was stuck in Tuscaloosa, Alabama—with Barb's local gig stone flat canceled.

Thunderstorms flooded the roads and closed down the airport. He hit an exile-friendly bar and tamped his headache down with bourbon. Two scraggly-assed spies got shit-faced. They started talking heroin, too loud.

He pegged them as skin poppers with a dime-bag clientele. He saw a way to close the fear out once and for all.

He tailed them to a dope den. The place was Hophead Central: spies crapped out on mattresses, spies geezing up, spies scrounging dirty needles off the floor.

He killed them all. He burned his silencer down to the threads shooting junkies in cold blood. He rigged the scene to look like an all-spic dope massacre.

He called Santo with his fear choking him dry.

He said he walked in on a slaughter. He said a dying man confessed to the heist. He said, Read the Tuscaloosa papers—it's got to be big news tomorrow.

He flew to Barb's next gig. The snuffs never hit the papers or TV. Santo said, "Keep looking."

The junkies died on the nod. Chuck said Heshie Ryskind was dying—Big "H" had him phasing out on a painless little cloud.

Bobby Kennedy cleaned house last year. He initiated a shitload of non-painless phaseouts.

Contract guys got fired wholesale. Bobby sacked every contract man suspected of organized crime ties.

He neglected to fire Pete Bondurant.

Memo to Bobby the K.:

Please fire me. Please take me off the exile circuit. Please phase me off this horrible search-and-find mission.

It could happen. Santo might say, Take a rest. Without CIA ties, you're worthless.

Santo might say, Work for me. Santo might say, Look at Boyd—Carlos has kept him employed.

He could beg off. He could say, I don't hate Castro like I used to. He could say, I don't hate him like Kemper does—because I didn't take the fall that he did.

My daughter didn't betray me. The man I worshiped didn't ridicule me on tape. I didn't transfer my hate for that man to some loudmouthed spic with a beard.

Boyd's in this deep. I'm treading air. We're like Bobby and Jack that way.

Bobby says, Go, exiles, go. He means it. Jack refuses to greenlight a second invasion.

Jack cut a side deal with Khrushchev. He's phasing out the Castro War in not-too-provocative fashion.

He wants to get re-elected. Langley thinks he'll scrap the war early in his second term.

Jack thinks Fidel is unbeatable. He's not alone. Even Santo and Sam G. cozied up to the fucker for a while.

Carlos said the dope heist queered their Commie fling. The Castro brothers, Sam and Santo were now permanently Splitsville.

Nobody got the dope. Everybody got fucked.

Browsers walked through the lot. An old guy kicked tires. Teenagers grooved on the spiffy tiger-stripe paint jobs.

Pete pulled a chair into the shade. Some Teamster clowns dispensed free beer and soft drinks. They sold four cars in five hours—not good, not bad.

Pete tried to doze. A headache started tapping.

Two plainclothesmen crossed the lot and beelined toward him. Half the crowd sniffed trouble and hotfooted it off down Flagler.

The TVs were stolen. The sale itself was probably illegal.

Pete stood up. The men boxed him in and flashed FBI ID.

The tall one said, "You're under arrest. This is a non-sanctioned Cuban-exile meeting place, and you're a known habitué."

Pete smiled. "This place is defunct. And I'm on CIA contract status."

The short Fed unhooked his handcuffs. "We're not unsympathetic. We don't like Communists any more than you do."

The tall man sighed. "This wasn't Mr. Hoover's idea. Let's just say he had to go along. It's a standard, across-the-board order, and I don't think you'll be in custody that long."

Pete stuck his hands out. The cuffs wouldn't fit around his wrists.

The rest of the browsers vanished. A kid boosted a TV set and hightailed it.

Pete said, "I'll go peacefully."

The booking tank was triple-capacity packed. Pete shared floor space with a hundred pissed-off Cubans.

They were crammed into a thirty-by-thirty-foot stinkhole. No chairs, no benches—just four cement walls and a wraparound piss gutter.

The Cubans jabbered in English and Spanish. Dig the bilingual gist: Jack the Haircut sicced the Feds on the Cause.

Six campsites were raided yesterday. Weapons were seized.

Cuban gunmen were arrested en masse.

It was some sort of first salvo. Jack was out to ram all non-CLA-sanctioned exiles.

He was CIA. *He* got popped anyway. The Feds jerry-rigged a plan and went off half-cocked.

Pete leaned against the wall and shut his eyes. Barb twisted by.

Every time with her was good. Every time was different. Every place was different—two people always moving hooking up in odd locations.

Bobby never harassed her. Barb figured a fix was in. She said she didn't miss Two-Minute Jack.

She gave her sister her shakedown fee. Margaret Lynn Lindscott now owned a Bob's Big Boy franchise.

They met in Seattle, Pittsburgh and Tampa. They met in L.A., Frisco and Portland.

He ran guns. She fronted a cheap dance show. He chashed nonexistent dope thief/killers.

She said the Twist was burning out. He said his Cuban hard-on was, too.

She said, Your fear gets to me. He said, I'll try to tamp it down. She said, Don't—it makes you less frightening.

He said he did something very stupid. He said he didn't know why he did it.

She said, You wanted to force yourself out of the Life.

He couldn't argue.

Barb had a busy autumn pending. She had long club stints in Des Moines and Sioux City and a big Texas run through Thanksgiving.

She added lunch shows to her performance slate. The Twist was phasing out—Joey wanted to wring it dry.

He met Margaret in Milwaukee. She was meek and scared of just about everything.

He offered to kill the cop rape-o. Barb said no.

He said, Why? Barb said, You don't *really* want to.

He couldn't argue.

He had Barb. Boyd had hatred: Jack K. and the Beard as one fucked-up, pervasive thing. Littell had powerful friends.

Like Hoover. Like Hughes. Like Hoffa and Marcello.

Ward hated Jack on a par with Kemper. Bobby fucked them both—but they bypassed him to hate Big Brother.

Littell was Dracula's new Field Marshal. The Count wanted him to buy up Las Vegas and render it germ-free.

You could read Littell's eyes.

I have friends. I have plans. I have the Fund books memorized.

The holding tank smelled. The holding tank boomed with John F. Kennedy hatred.

A guard cranked the door and pulled men out for phone calls. He yelled, "Acosta, Aguilar, Arredondo—"

Pete got ready. A dime would get him Littell in D.C.

Littell could rig a Federal release writ. Littell could hip Kemper to the campsite raids.

The guard yelled, "Bondurant!"

Pete walked up. The guard steered him down the tier to a phone bank.

Guy Banister was waiting there. He was holding a pen and a false-arrest waiver.

The guard walked back to the tank. Pete signed his name in triplicate.

"I'm free to go?"

Banister looked gleeful. "That's right. The SAC didn't know you were Agency, so I informed him."

"Who told you where I was?"

"I was out at Sun Valley. Kemper gave me a note for you, so I went by the stand to deliver it. Some kids were stealing hubcaps. They told me the big gringo got arrested."

Pete rubbed his eyes. A four-aspirin headache started pounding.

Banister pulled out an envelope. "I didn't open it. And Kemper sure seemed anxious for me to make the transmittal."

Pete grabbed it. "I'm glad you're ex-Bureau, Guy. I might've had to stay here awhile."

"Don't fret, big fella. I have a hunch all this Kennedy bullshit is just about to end."

Pete caught a cab back to the stand. Vandals had stripped the tiger cars down to spare parts.

He read the note. Boyd cut straight to the point.

> Néstor's here. I got a tip that he was seen begging gun money in Coral Gables. My source says he's holed up at 46th

> and Collins. (The pink garage apartment on the southwest corner.)

The note meant KILL HIM. Don't let Santo get to him first.

He took bourbon and aspirin for his headache.

He took his magnum and his silencer for the job.

He took some pro-Castro leaflets to plant near the body.

He drove to 46th and Collins. He took this weird revelation with him: You might let Néstor talk you out of it.

The pink garage apartment was right there, as stated. The '58 Chevy at the curb looked like a Néstor-style ride.

Pete parked.

Pete got butterflies.

Go ahead, do it—you've killed at least three hundred men.

He walked up and knocked on the door.

Nobody answered.

He knocked again. He listened for footsteps and whispers.

He couldn't hear a thing. He picked the lock with his penknife and walked in.

Shotgun slides went KA-CHOOK. Some unseen party hit a light switch.

There's Néstor, lashed to a chair. There's two fat henchmen types holding Ithaca pumps.

There's Santo Trafficante with an icepick.

86

(New Orleans, 9/15/63)

Littell opened his briefcase. Stacks of money fell out.

Marcello said, “How much?” Littell said, “A quarter of a million dollars.”

“Where’d you get it?”

“From a client.”

Carlos cleared some desk space. His office was top-heavy with Italianate knickknacks.

“You’re saying this is for me?”

“I’m saying it’s for you to match.”

“What else are you saying?”

Littell dumped the money on the desk. “I’m saying that as an attorney, I can only do so much. With John Kennedy in power, Bobby will get you all sooner or later. I’m also saying that eliminating Bobby would be futile, because Jack would instinctively know who did it and take his vengeance accordingly.”

The money smelled. Hughes dredged up old bills.

“But Lyndon Johnson don’t like Bobby. He’d put the skids to him just to teach the fucking kid a lesson.”

"That's right. Johnson hates Bobby as much as Mr. Hoover does. And like Mr. Hoover, he bears you and our other friends no ill will."

Marcello laughed. "LBJ borrowed some money from the Teamsters once. He is well known as a reasonable guy."

"So is Mr. Hoover. And Mr. Hoover is also very upset about Bobby's plans to put Joe Valachi on TV. He's very much afraid that Valachi's revelations will severely damage his prestige and virtually destroy everything that you and our other friends have built."

Carlos built a little cash skyscraper. Bank stacks rose off his desk blotter.

Littell knocked them over. "I think Mr. Hoover wants it to happen. I think he feels it coming."

"We've all been thinking about it. You can't get a roomful of the boys together without somebody bringing it up."

"It can be made to happen. And it can be made to look like we weren't involved."

"So you're saying …"

"I'm saying it's so big and audacious that we'll most likely never be suspected. I'm saying that even if we are, the powers that be will realize that it can never be conclusively proven. I'm saying that a consensus of denial will build off of it. I'm saying that people will want to remember the man as something he wasn't. I'm saying that we'll present them with an explanation, and the powers that be will prefer it to the truth, even though they know better."

Marcello said, "Do it. Make it happen."

87

(Sun Valley, 9/18/63)

The squad shared turf with gators and sand fleas. Kemper called the place “Hoffa’s Paradise Lost.”

Flash set up targets. Laurent bench-pressed cinderblock siding. Juan Canestel was AWOL—with 8:00 a.m. rifle practice pending.

Nobody heard him drive off. Juan was prone to odd wanderings lately.

Kemper watched Laurent Guéry work out. The man could bench three hundred pounds without breaking a sweat.

Dust swirled up the main road. Teamster Boulevard was now a pistol range.

Flash played his transistor radio. Bad news crackled out.

There were no arrests in the Birmingham church bombing case. The revamped McClellan Committee was set to go to televised sessions.

A woman was found sash-cord strangled outside Lake Weir. The police reported no leads and appealed to the public for assistance.

Juan was one hour AWOL. Pete was missing for three days.

He got the phone tip on Néstor four days ago. The tipster was a freelance exile gunman. He gave Guy Banister a note to relay to Pete.

Guy called and said he delivered it. He said he found Pete at the Federal detention jail. He dropped hints that more FBI raids were coming.

A storm browned out their phone setup two days ago. Pete couldn't call Sun Valley.

Kemper drove to a pay phone off the Interstate last night. He called Pete's apartment six times and got no answer.

Néstor Chasco's death never made the news. Pete would have dumped the body in a newsworthy locale.

Pete would put a pro-Castro spin on the murder. Pete would make sure Trafficante got the word.

His morning Dexedrine surge hit. It took ten pills to kick-start the day—he'd built up a large tolerance.

Juan and Pete were missing. Juan was hanging out with Guy Banister lately—little Lake Weir drinking excursions every other day or so.

The Pete thing felt wrong. The Juan thing felt mildly hinky.

His amphetamine surge said, Do something.

Juan drove a candy-apple-red T-Bird. Flash called it the Rapemobile.

Kemper cruised Lake Weir. The town was small and laid out in a grid pattern—the Rapemobile would be easy to spot.

He checked side streets and the bars near the highway. He checked Karl's Kustom Kar Shop and every parking lot on the main drag.

He didn't spot Juan. He didn't spot Juan's customized T-Bird.

Juan could wait. The Pete thing was more pressing.

Kemper drove to Miami. The pills started to hit counterproductive—he kept yawning and fading out at the wheel.

He stopped at 46th and Collins. That pink garage apartment was right where the tipster said it would be.

A traffic cop walked over. Kemper noticed a No Parking sign on the corner.

He rolled down his window. The cop jammed a smelly rag in his face.

It felt like chemical warfare inside him.

The smell fought his wake-up pills. The smell might be chloroform or embalming fluid. The smell meant he might be dead.

His pulse said, NO—you're alive.

His lips burned. His nose burned. He tasted chloroformed blood.

He tried to spit. His lips wouldn't part. He gagged the blood out through his nose.

He stretched his mouth. Something tugged at his cheeks. It felt like tape coming loose.

He sucked in air. He tried to move his arms and legs.

He tried to stand up. Heavy ballast held him down.

He wiggled. Chair legs scraped wood flooring. He thrashed his arms and got rope burns.

Kemper opened his eyes.

A man laughed. A hand held up Polaroid snapshots glued to cardboard.

He saw Teo Paez, gutted and quartered. He saw Fulo Machado, shivved through the eyes. He saw Ramón Gutiérrez, powder-scorched from big-bore shots to the head.

The photos disappeared. The hand swiveled his neck. Kemper caught a slow 180 view.

He saw a shabby room and two fat men in a doorway. He saw Néstor Chasco—nailed to the far wall with icepicks through his palms and ankles.

Kemper shut his eyes. A hand slapped him. A big heavy ring cut his lips.

Kemper opened his eyes. Hands slid his chair around 360.

They had Pete chained down. They had him double-cuffed and shackled to a chair. They had the chair bolted directly into the floor.

A rag hit his face. Kemper sucked the fumes in voluntarily.

He heard stories filtered through a long echo chamber. He picked out three storytelling voices.

Néstor got close to Castro twice. You got to hand it to him.

A kid that tough—what a shame to put his lights out.

Néstor said he bought off some Castro aide. The aide said Castro was considering a Kennedy hit. The aide said, What's with this Kennedy? First he invades us, then he pulls back—he's like a cunt who can't make up her mind.

Fidel's the cunt. The aide told Chasco he'd never work with the Outfit again. He thinks Santo screwed him on the heroin deal. He didn't know it was Néstor and our boys here.

Bondurant pissed his pants. Look, you can see the stain.

Santo and Mo were not gentle. And I got to say Néstor went out brave.

I'm bored with this. I got to say this waiting around is stretching me thin.

I got to say they'll be back soon. I got to say they'll want to put some hurt on these two.

Kemper felt his bladder go. He took a deep breath and forced himself unconscious.

• • •

He dreamed he was moving. He dreamed somebody cleaned him up and changed his clothes. He dreamed he heard fierce Pete Bondurant sobbing.

He dreamed he could breathe. He dreamed he could talk. He kept cursing Jack and Claire for disowning him.

He woke up on a bed. He recognized his old Fontainebleau suite or an exact replica of it.

He was wearing clean clothes. Somebody pulled off his soiled boxer shorts.

He felt rope burns on his wrists. He felt tape fragments stuck to his face.

He heard voices one room over—Pete and Ward Littell.

He tried to stand up. His legs wouldn't function. He sat on the bed and coughed his lungs out.

Littell walked in. He looked commanding—that gabardine suit gave him some bulk.

Kemper said, "There's a price."

Littell nodded. "That's right. It's something I worked out with Carlos and Sam."

"Ward—"

"Santo agreed, too. And you and Pete get to keep what you stole."

Kemper stood up. Ward held him steady.

“What do we have to do?”

Littell said, “Kill John Kennedy.”

88

(Miami, 9/23/63)

1933 to 1963. Thirty years and parallel situations.

Miami, ’33. Giuseppe Zangara tries to shoot President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt. He misses—and kills Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak.

Miami, ’63. A Kennedy motorcade is scheduled for November 18.

Littell slow-cruised Biscayne Boulevard. Every inch of ground told him something.

Carlos told him the Zangara story last week.

“Giuseppe was a fucking nut. Some Chicago boys paid him to pop Cermak and take the bounce. He had a fucking death wish, and he got his fucking wish fulfilled. Frank Nitti took care of his family after he got executed.”

He met with Carlos, Sam and Santo. He bartered for Pete and Kemper. They discussed the fall-guy issue at length.

Carlos wanted a leftist. He thought a left-wing assassin would galvanize anti-Castro feeling. Trafficante and Giancana overruled him.

They matched Howard Hughes’ contribution. They added one stipulation: we want a right-wing patsy.

They still wanted to suck up to Fidel. They wanted to replenish Raúl Castro's dope stash and effect a late-breaking rapprochement. They wanted to say, We financed the hit—now, will you please give us back our casinos?

Their take was too convoluted. Their take was politically naive.

His take was minimalistically downscaled.

The hit can be accomplished. The planners and shooters can walk. Bobby's Mob crusade can be nullified.

Any results beyond that are unforeseeable, and will most likely resolve themselves in a powerfully ambiguous fashion.

Littell drove through downtown Miami. He noted potential motorcade routes—wide streets with high visibility.

He saw tall buildings and rear parking lots. He saw Office for Rent signs.

He saw blighted residential blocks. He saw House for Rent signs and a gun shop.

He could see the motorcade pass. He could see the man's head explode.

They met at the Fontainebleau. Pete ran a wall-to-wall bug sweep before they said one word.

Kemper mixed drinks. They sat around a table by the wet bar.

Littell laid the plan out.

"We bring the fall guy to Miami some time between now and the first of October. We get him to rent a cheap house on the outskirts of downtown, close to the announced or assumed-to-be-announced motorcade route—*and* an office directly on the route—once that route is determined. I cruised every major airport-to-downtown artery this morning. My educated guess is that we'll have plenty of houses and offices to choose from."

Pete and Kemper stayed quiet. They still looked close to shell-shocked.

"One of us sticks close to the fall guy between the time we bring him here and the morning of the motorcade. There's a gun shop near his office and his house, and one of you burglarizes it and steals several rifles and pistols. Hate literature and other bits of incriminating paraphernalia are planted at the house, and our man handles them to insure latent fingerprints."

Pete said, "Get to the hit." Littell framed the moment: three men at a table and hear-a-pin-drop silence.

He said, “It’s the day of the motorcade. We’re holding our man hostage at the office on the parade route. There’s a rifle from the gun-shop burglary with him, and his fingerprints are all over the stock and barrel housing. Kennedy’s car passes. Our two legitimate shooters fire from separate roof perches in the rear and kill him. The man holding our patsy hostage fires at Kennedy’s car and misses, drops the rifle and shoots the patsy with a stolen revolver. He flees and drops the revolver down a sewer grate. The police find the guns and compare them to the manifest from the burglary. They’ll chalk up the evidence and figure they’ve got a conspiracy that tenuously succeeded and unraveled at the last second. They’ll investigate the dead man and try to build a conspiracy case against his known associates.”

Pete lit a cigarette and coughed. “You said ‘flee’ like you think getting out’s a cinch.”

Littell spoke slowly. “There are perpendicular side streets off every major thoroughfare that I’ve designated motorcade-likely. They’re all freeway-accessible inside two minutes. Our legitimate shooters will be firing from behind. *They’ll fire two shots total*—which will sound at first like car backfires or firecrackers. The Secret Service contingent won’t know exactly where the shots came from. They’ll still be reacting when *multiple shots*—from our fake shooter and the man guarding him—ring out. They’ll storm that building and find a dead man. They’ll be distracted, and they’ll blow a minute or so. All our men will have time to get to their cars and drive off.”

Kemper said, “It’s beautiful.”

Pete rubbed his eyes. “I don’t like the right-wing-nut part. It’s like we came this far and didn’t play an angle that could help out the Cause.”

Littell slapped the table. “*No*. Trafficante and Giancana want a right-winger. They think they can build a truce with Castro, and if that’s what they want, we’ll have to go along with it. And remember, they *did* spare your lives.”

Kemper freshened his drink. His eyes were still bloodshot from chloroform exposure.

“I want my men to shoot. They’ve got the hate and they’re expert marksmen.”

Pete said, “Agreed.”

Littell nodded. “We’ll pay them $25,000 each, use the rest of the money for expenses and split the difference three ways.”

Kemper smiled. “My men are pretty far to the right. We should downplay the fact that we’re setting up a fellow right-winger.”

Pete mixed a cocktail: two aspirin and Wild Turkey. “We need to get a handle on the parade route.”

Littell said, “That’s your job. You’ve got the best Miami PD contacts.”

“I’ll get on it. And if I find out anything solid, I’ll start mapping out the hard logistics.”

Kemper coughed. “The key thing is the patsy. Once we get beyond that, we’re home free.”

Littell shook his head. “No. The key thing is to thwart a full-scale FBI investigation.”

Pete and Kemper looked puzzled. They weren’t thinking up to his level.

Littell spoke very slowly. “I think Mr. Hoover knows it’s coming. He’s got private bugs installed in god-knows-how-many Mob meeting places, and he told me he’s been picking up a huge amount of Kennedy hatred. He hasn’t informed the Secret Service, or they wouldn’t be planning motorcades through to the end of the fall.”

Kemper nodded. “Hoover wants it to happen. It happens, he’s glad it happened, and he still gets assigned to investigate it. What we need is an ‘in’ to get him to obfuscate or short-shrift the investigation.”

Pete nodded. “We need an FBI-linked fall guy.”

Kemper said, “Dougie Frank Lockhart.”

89

(Miami, 9/27/63)

He liked to spend time alone with it. Boyd said he was doing the same thing.

Pete laid out bourbon and aspirin. He turned on the window unit and cooled off the living room just right. He leveled off his headache and ran some fresh odds.

The odds they could kill Jack the Haircut. The odds that Santo would kill him and Kemper, deal or no deal.

All the odds hit inconclusive. His living room took on a rather shitty medicinal glow.

Littell loved Dougie Frank's pedigree. The fuck was ultra-right and FBI-filthy.

Littell said, "He's perfect. If Mr. Hoover is forced to investigate, he'll put a blanket on Lockhart and his known associates immediately. If he doesn't, he'll risk exposure of all the Bureau's racist policies."

Lockhart was holed up in Puckett, Mississippi. Littell said, Go there and recruit him.

He strolled through the main MPD squadroom last night. He saw three prospective motorcade maps. They were tacked to a corkboard in plain fucking view.

He memorized them. All three routes ran by their gun shop and For Rent signs.

Boyd said he felt awe more than fear.

Pete said, I know what you mean.

He didn't say, I love this woman. If I die, I came this far and lost her for nothing.

90

(Miami, 9/27/63)

Somebody placed a tape recorder on his coffee table. Somebody placed a sealed envelope beside it.

Littell shut the door and thought it through.

Pete and Kemper know you're here. Jimmy and Carlos know you always stay at the Fontainebleau. You went down to the coffee shop for breakfast and were gone less than half an hour.

Littell opened the envelope and pulled out a sheet of paper. Mr. Hoover's block printing explained the surreptitious entry.

> Jules Schiffrin died concurrent with your fall 1960 absence from duty. His estate house was ransacked and certain ledger books were stolen.
>
> Joseph Valachi did extensive Pension Fund forwarding work. He is currently being questioned by a trusted colleague of mine. Robert Kennedy does not know that this interrogation is progressing.
>
> The accompanying tape contains information that Mr. Valachi will refuse to reveal to Mr. Kennedy, the McClellan Committee, and indeed to anyone else. I trust Mr. Valachi to maintain his silence. He has been made aware that the

> quality and duration of his Federal relocation is predicated on it.
>
> Please destroy this note. Please listen to the tape and keep it in a safe place. I realize that the tape has limitless strategic potential.
>
> It should be revealed to Robert Kennedy only as an adjunct to measures of great boldness.

Littell plugged in the machine and prepped the enclosed tape. His hands were butter—the spool kept slipping off the spindle.

He tapped the Play button. The tape splice sputtered and hissed.

> Go over it again, Joe. Like I told you before, slow and easy.
>
> Okay, slow and easy then. Slow and easy for the sixteenth goddamn—
>
> Joe, come on.
>
> Okay. Slow and easy for the stupes in the peanut gallery. Joseph P. Kennedy Sr. was the charter bankroller of the Teamsters' Central States Pension Fund, which loans out money to all kinds of bad people and a few good people at very high interest rates. I did a lot of the forwarding work. Sometimes I delivered cash to people's safe-deposit boxes.
>
> You mean they gave you clearance to enter their boxes?
>
> Right. And I used to visit Joe Kennedy's bank regularly. It's the main Security-First National in Boston. It's account 811512404. It's like ninety or a hundred safe-deposit boxes filled with cash. Raymond Patriarca thinks there's close to a hundred million dollars in there, and Raymond should know, 'cause him and Irish Joe go back a ways. I got to say the notion of Bob Kennedy as a racket buster makes me laugh. I guess the apple does fall pretty far from the tree, 'cause Joe Kennedy money has financed one whole hell of a lot of Outfit deals. I got to say also that old Joe's the only Kennedy that knows about that money. You don't tell people, I got a hundred million

> in cash put away that my sons the President and Attorney General don't know about. And now Joe's had this stroke, so maybe he's not thinking too clear. You would sort of like to see that money put to use and not just sit there, which it might if old Joe kicks off or goes senile and forgets about it. I should also mention that every big guy in the Outfit knows how dirty Joe is, but they can't shake Bobby down with the knowledge without putting their own tits in the wringer.

The tape ran out. Littell tapped the Stop button and sat perfectly still.

He thought it through. He assumed Hoover's perspective and spoke his thoughts out loud in the first person.

I'm close to Howard Hughes. I set Ward Littell up with him. Littell asked Hughes for money to help assure my FBI directorship.

Jack Kennedy plans to fire me. I've got private taps installed in Mob venues. I've picked up a great deal of Kennedy hatred.

Littell switched back to his own perspective.

Hoover possessed insufficient data. Said data would not lead him to extrapolate a specific hit.

I told Pete and Kemper, Mr. Hoover knows it's coming. I meant it in the metaphorical sense.

The tape and note implied specificity. Hoover called the tape "an adjunct to measures of great boldness."

He was saying, I KNOW.

The tape was a device to humble Bobby. The tape was a device to insure Bobby's silence. The tape should be revealed to Bobby before Jack's death.

Jack's death would explicate the purpose of the humbling. Bobby would thus not seek to establish proof of an assassination conspiracy. Bobby would know that to do so would forever besmirch the Kennedy name.

Bobby would assume that the man who delivered the humbling had foreknowledge of his brother's death. Bobby would be powerless to act upon his assumption.

Littell reassumed Hoover's perspective.

Bobby Kennedy broke Littell's heart. Kennedy hatred binds us.

Littell will not resist the urge to maim Bobby. Littell will want Bobby to know that he helped plan his brother's murder.

It was complex and vindictive and psychologically dense Hoover thinking. A single logical thread was missing.

You haven't broken cover. Your financiers presumably haven't.

Kemper and Pete haven't. Kemper hasn't broached the plan to his shooters yet.

Hoover *senses* that you're pushing toward a hit. The tape's your "adjunct"—*if you get there first.*

There's a second plot in the works. Mr. Hoover has specific knowledge of it.

Littell sat perfectly still. Little hotel sounds escalated.

He couldn't lock the conclusion in. He couldn't rate it as much more than a hunch.

Mr. Hoover knew him—as no one else ever had or ever would. He felt an ugly wave of love for the man.

91

(Puckett, 9/28/63)

The geek wore a monogrammed Klan sheet. Pete fed him bonded bourbon and lies.

"This gig is you, Dougie. It's got 'you' written all over it."

Lockhart burped. "I knew you didn't drive out here at 1:00 a.m. just to share that bottle with me."

The shack smelled like a cat box. Dougie reeked of Wildroot Cream Oil. Pete stood in the doorway—the better to dodge the stink.

"It's three hundred a week. It's an official Agency job, so you won't have to worry about those Fed raids."

Lockhart rocked back in his La-Z-Boy recliner. "Those raids have been pretty indiscriminate. I heard quite a few Agency boys got themselves tangled up in them."

Pete cracked his thumbs. "We need you to ride herd on some Klansmen. The Agency wants to build a string of launch sites in South Florida, and we need a white man to get things going."

Lockhart picked his nose. "Sounds like Blessington all over again. Sounds also like it might be another big fuckin' buildup to another big fuckin' letdown, like a certain invasion we both remember.”

Pete took a hit off the bottle. “You can’t make history all the time, Dougie. Sometimes the best you can do is make money.”

Dougie tapped his chest. “I made history recently.”

“Is that right?”

“That’s right. It was me that bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. That Communist-inspired hue-and-cry that’s going up right now? Well, I got to say I’m the one that inspired it.”

The shack was lined with tinfoil. Dig that Martin Luther Coon poster taped to the back wall.

“I’ll make it four hundred a week and expenses, through to mid-November. You get your own house and office in Miami. If you leave with me now, I’ll throw in a bonus.”

Lockhart said, “I’m in.”

Pete said, “Clean yourself up. You look like a nigger.”

The ride back went slow. Thunderstorms turned the highway into one long snail trail.

Dougie Frank snored through the deluge. Pete caught newscasts and a Twist show on the radio.

A commentator talked up Joe Valachi’s song-and-dance. Valachi dubbed the Mob “La Cosa Nostra.”

Valachi was a big TV hit. A newsman called his ratings “boffo.” Valachi was snitching East Coast hoodlums up the ying-yang.

A reporter talked to Heshie Ryskind—holed up in some Phoenix cancer ward. Hesh called La Cosa Nostra “a goyishe fantasy.”

The Twist program came in scratchy. Barb sang along in Pete’s head and out-warbled Chubby Checker.

They talked long-distance right before he left Miami. Barb said, What is it?—you sound frightened again.

He said, I can’t tell you. When you hear about it, you’ll know.

She said, Will it hurt us?

He said, No.

She said, You’re lying. He couldn’t argue.

She was flying to Texas in a few days. Joey booked them in for an eight-week statewide run.

He’d fly in for weekends. He’d play stage-door Johnny, straight up to November 18.

They hit Miami at noon. Lockhart dosed his hangover with glazed doughnuts and coffee.

They looped through the downtown area. Dougie pointed out For Rent signs.

Pete drove in circles. The house-and-office search had Dougie yawning.

Pete narrowed his choices down to three offices and three houses. Pete said, Dougie, take your pick.

Dougie picked fast. Dougie wanted to log in some sack time. He picked a stucco house off Biscayne.

He picked an office on Biscayne—dead center on all three parade routes.

Both landlords demanded deposits. Dougie peeled bills off his expense roll and paid them three months' rent in advance.

Pete stayed out of sight. The landlords never saw him.

He watched Dougie lug his gear into the house—this carrot-topped stupe about to be world-famous.

92

(Miami, 9/29/63–10/20/63)

He memorized Hoover's note. He hid the tape splice. He drove the three routes a dozen times a day for three weeks running.

He didn't tell Pete and Kemper that there might be another hit planned.

The press reported the President's fall travel schedule. They emphasized motorcades in New York, Miami and Texas.

Littell sent Bobby a note. It stated his affiliation with James R. Hoffa and asked for ten minutes of his time.

He considered the ramifications for close to a month before acting. His walk to the mailbox felt like his raid on Jules Schiffrin's house—multiplied a thousand times.

Littell drove down Biscayne Boulevard. He timed every signal light with a stopwatch.

Kemper burglarized the gun shop a week ago. He stole three sight-equipped rifles and two revolvers. He wore gloves with distinctive cracked fingertips—filched from Dougie Frank Lockhart.

Kemper surveilled the gun shop the next day. Detectives canvassed the area and technicians dusted for prints. Dougie's cracked-finger gloves were now a matter of forensic record.

The gloves were pressed all over surfaces in Dougie's house and office.

Pete let Dougie fondle the rifles. His fingerprints were pressed to the stocks and barrels.

Kemper stole three cars in South Carolina. He had them repainted and fitted with fake license plates. Two were assigned to the shooters. The third car was for the man assigned to kill Dougie.

Pete brought a fourth man in. Chuck Rogers signed on as their fall-guy impersonator.

Rogers and Lockhart had similar builds and similar features. Dougie's most distinguishing attribute was bright red hair.

Chuck dyed his hair red. Chuck spewed Kennedy hatred all over Miami.

He shot his mouth off at taverns and pool halls. He raged at a skating rink, a gun range and numerous liquor stores. He was paid to rage nonstop until November 15.

Littell drove by Dougie's office. Every circuit gave him a brilliant new embellishment.

He should find some rambunctious kids on the motorcade route. He should give them firecrackers and tell them to let fly.

It would wear the Secret Service escort down. It would inure them to gunshot-like noises.

Kemper was working up some Dougie Frank keepsakes. Lockhart's psychopathology would be summarized in minutiae.

Kemper defaced JFK photographs and carved swastikas on Jack and Jackie dolls. Kemper smeared fecal matter over a dozen Kennedy magazine spreads.

The investigators would find it all in Dougie's bedroom closet.

Currently in progress: Dougie Frank Lockhart's political diary.

It was hunt-and-peck typed, with printed ink corrections. The race-mongering text was truly horrific.

The diary was Pete's idea. Dougie said he bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church—a still-unsolved cause célèbre. Pete wanted to link the Kennedy hit and four dead Negro children.

Dougie told Pete the whole bombing story. Pete typed crucial details into the diary.

They didn't mention the bombing embellishment to Kemper. Kemper had a quirky affection for coloreds.

Pete kept Dougie sequestered at his house. He fed him takeout pizza, marijuana and liquor. Dougie seemed to enjoy the accommodations.

Pete told Dougie that his Agency gig had been postponed. He fed him a cock-and-bull story about the need to stay out of sight.

Kemper moved his men to Blessington. The FBI was raiding non-CIA campsites—housing his team at Sun Valley was risky.

The men bunked at the Breakers Motel. They test-fired .30.06's all day every day. Their rifles were identical to the rifles Kemper stole.

The shooters didn't know about the hit. Kemper would inform them six days before—in time to stage a full-dress Miami rehearsal.

Littell cruised by Dougie's house. Pete said he always came in through the alley and never let the neighbors see him.

They should plant some narcotics at the house. They should expand Dougie's pedigree to assassin/church bomber/dope fiend.

Kemper had a drink with the Miami SAC yesterday. They were old Bureau pals—the meeting wouldn't stand out as anomalous.

The man called the motorcade a "pain in the ass." He called Kennedy "tough to guard." He said the Secret Service let crowds get too close to him.

Kemper said, Any threats? Any loonies coming out of the woodwork?

The man said, No.

Their one risky bluff was holding. No one had reported the loudmouthed pseudo Dougie.

Littell drove back to the Fontainebleau. He wondered how long Pete and Kemper would outlive JFK.

93

(Blessington, 10/21/63)

Training officers formed a cordon just inside the front gate. They wore face shields and packed shotguns filled with rock salt.

Refuge seekers slammed the fence. The entry road was jammed with junk cars and dispossessed Cubans.

Kemper watched the scene escalate. John Stanton called and warned him that the raids went from bad to godawful.

The FBI hit fourteen exile camps yesterday. Half the Cubans on the Gulf Coast were out seeking CIA asylum.

The fence teetered. The training men raised their weapons.

There were twenty men inside and sixty men outside. Only weak chain-links and some barbed wire stood between them.

A Cuban climbed the fence and snagged himself on the barbs at the top. A training man blew him down—one salt round de-snagged him and lacerated his chest.

The Cubans picked up rocks and waved lumber planks. The contract men assumed protective postures. A big bilingual roar went up.

Littell was late. Pete was late, too—the migration probably stalled traffic.

Kemper walked down to the boat dock. His men were shooting buoys floating thirty yards offshore.

They wore earplugs to blot out the gate noise. They looked like highline, spit-and-polish mercenaries.

He moved them in just under the wire. They had free run of the campsite—John Stanton pulled strings for old times' sake.

Ejected shells hit the dock. Laurent and Flash notched bullseyes. Juan fired wide into some waves.

He told them about the hit last night. The pure audacity thrilled them.

He couldn't resist it. He wanted to see their faces ignite.

Laurent and Flash lit up happy. Juan lit up disturbed.

Juan's been acting furtive. Juan's been AWOL three nights running.

The radio reported another dead woman. She was beaten senseless and strangled with a sash cord. The local cops were baffled.

Victim #1 was found near Sun Valley. Victim #2 was found near Blessington.

The gate noise doubled and tripled. Rock-salt rounds exploded.

Kemper popped in earplugs and watched his men shoot. Juan Canestel watched him.

Flash made a buoy jump. Laurent nailed it on the rebound. Juan slammed three straight misses.

Something was wrong.

The State Police cleared the Cubans out. Black & whites escorted them to the highway.

Kemper drove behind the convoy. The line was fifty cars long. The rock-salt barrage blew out windshields and stripped convertible tops.

It was a short-sighted solution. John Stanton prophesied exile chaos—and hinted at much worse.

Pete and Ward called to say they'd be late. He said, Good—I have to run an errand. They rescheduled their meet for 2:30 at the Breakers.

He'd tell them Stanton's news. He'd stress that it was strictly speculative.

The car herd crawled—both outbound lanes were jammed up bumper-to-bumper. Two black & whites drove point to keep the

Cubans boxed in.

Kemper turned onto a switchback. It was the only shortcut to Blessington proper—dirt roads straight in.

Dust kicked up. A light drizzle turned it to mud spray. The Rapemobile passed him, full-throttle on a blind curve.

Kemper hit his wipers. The spray thinned out translucent. He saw exhaust fumes up ahead—and no Rapemobile.

Juan's distracted. He didn't recognize my car.

Kemper hit downtown Blessington. He cruised by the Breakers, Al's Dixie Diner and every exile hangout on both sides of the highway.

No Rapemobile.

He grid-searched side streets. He made systematic circuits—three blocks left, three blocks right. Seven-come-eleven—where's that candy-apple-red T-Bird?

There—

The Rapemobile was parked outside the Larkhaven Motel. Kemper recognized the two cars parked beside it.

Guy Banister's Buick. Carlos Marcello's Lincoln.

The Breakers Motel faced the highway. Kemper's window faced a just-rigged State Police checkpoint.

He saw cops divert cars down an off-ramp. He saw cops force male Latins out at gunpoint.

The cops ran ID checks and INS checks. The cops impounded vehicles and arrested male Latins wholesale.

Kemper watched for one straight hour. The Staties busted thirty-nine male Latins.

They herded the men into jail trucks. They dumped confiscated weapons into one big pile.

He searched Juan's room an hour ago.

He found no sash cords. He found no perverted keepsakes. He saw absolutely nothing incriminating.

Somebody leaned on the doorbell. Kemper opened up quick to stop the noise.

Pete walked in. "Have you seen what's going on out there?"

Kemper nodded. "They were trying to break in to the camp a few hours ago. The head training officer called the Staties."

Pete checked the window. "Those are some pissed-off Cubans."

Kemper pulled the drapes. "Where's Ward?"

"He's coming. And I hope you didn't call us all the way down here to show us some fucking roadblocks."

Kemper walked to the bar and poured Pete a short bourbon. "John Stanton called me. He said Jack Kennedy told Hoover to turn up the heat. The FBI has raided twenty-nine non-Agency campsites within the past forty-eight hours. Every non-Agency exile in captivity is out looking for Agency asylum."

Pete downed his shot. Kemper poured him a refill.

"Stanton said Carlos put up a bail fund. Guy Banister tried to bail out some of his pet exiles, but the INS has put a deportation hold on every Cuban National in custody."

Pete threw his glass at the wall. Kemper plugged the bottle.

"Stanton said the entire exile community is going crazy. He said there's lots of talk about a Kennedy hit. He said there's a good deal of *specific talk* about a motorcade hit in Miami."

Pete punched the wall. His fist smashed through to the baseboard. Kemper stood back and talked slow and easy.

"Nobody on our team has broken cover, so the rumors couldn't have originated from there. And Stanton said he didn't inform the Secret Service, which implies that he wouldn't mind seeing Jack dead."

Pete gouged his knuckles bone-deep. He threw a left hook at the wall—plaster chunks flew.

Kemper stood *way* back. "Ward said Hoover sensed it was coming. He was right, because Hoover would have stalled the raids and sent out warnings to the old-boy network just to screw Bobby—unless he wanted to fuel the hatred against Jack."

Pete grabbed the bottle. Pete doused his hands and wiped them on the drapes.

The fabric seeped beige to red. The wall was half-demolished.

"Pete, listen. There's ways we can—"

Pete shoved him against the window. "No. This is the one we can't get out of. We either kill him or we don't, and they'll probably kill us even if we get him."

Kemper slid free. Pete slid the drapes back.

Exiles were jumping off the highway abutment. Cops were going at them with electric cattle prods.

"Look at that, Kemper. Look at that and tell me we can contain this fucking thing."

Littell walked past the window. Pete opened the door and pulled him in bodily.

He didn't react. He looked glazed and *hurt*.

Kemper shut the door. "Ward, what is it?"

Littell hugged his briefcase. He didn't even blink at the room damage.

"I talked to Sam. He said the Miami hit is out, because his liaison to Castro told him that Castro would never speak to any Outfit man ever again, under any circumstances. They've given up the idea of a rapprochement.

I've always considered it far-fetched, and now apparently Sam and Santo agree."

Pete said, "This is all crazy." Kemper read Littell's face: DON'T TAKE THIS AWAY FROM ME.

"Are *we* still on?"

Littell said, "I think so. And I spoke to Guy Banister and figured something out."

Pete looked ready to blow. "So tell us, Ward. We know you're the smartest and the strongest now, so just tell us what you think."

Littell squared his necktie. "Banister saw a copy of a presidential memo. It passed from Jack to Bobby to Mr. Hoover, then through to the New Orleans SAC, who leaked it to Guy. The memo said that the President is sending a personal emissary to talk to Castro in November, and that further JM/Wave cutbacks will be forthcoming."

Pete flicked blood off his hands. "I don't get the Banister connection."

Littell tossed his briefcase on the bed. "It was coincidental. Guy and Carlos are close, and Guy's a frustrated lawyer himself. We talk from time to time, and he just happened to mention the memo. What it all ties in to is my feeling that Mr. Hoover senses there's a hit plan In the works. Since none of us have broken cover, I'm thinking that—*maybe*—there's a second hit in the planning stages. I'm thinking also that Banister might have knowledge of it—and *that's* why Hoover leaked the memo in his direction."

Kemper pointed to the window. "Did you see that checkpoint?"

Littell said, "Yes, of course."

Kemper said, "That's Hoover again. That's him letting the raids happen to keep the hate against Jack peaking. John Stanton called me, Ward. There's supposed to be a half-dozen or six dozen or two dozen more fucking plots in the works, like the fucking assassination metaphysic is just out there too undeniably—"

Pete slapped him.

Kemper pulled his piece.

Pete pulled his.

Littell said, "No," VERY SOFTLY.

Pete dropped his gun on the bed.

Kemper dropped his.

Littell said, "Enough," VERY SOFTLY.

The room crackled and buzzed. Littell unloaded the guns and locked them in his briefcase.

Pete spoke just shy of a whisper. "Banister bailed me out of jail last month. He said, 'This Kennedy bullshit is about to end,' like he had some kind of fucking foreknowledge."

Kemper spoke the same way. "Juan Canestel's been acting strange lately. I tailed him a few hours ago, and spotted his car parked next to Banister's and Carlos Marcello's. It was right down the road here, outside another motel."

Littell said, "The Larkhaven?"

"That's right."

Pete sucked blood off his knuckles. "How'd you know that, Ward? And if Carlos is in on a second hit, are Santo and Mo calling ours off?"

Littell shook his head. "I think we're still on."

"What about this Banister stuff?"

"It's new to me, but it fits. All I know for certain now is that I'm meeting Carlos at the Larkhaven Motel at five. He told me that Santo and Mo have handed the whole thing to him, with two new stipulations."

Kemper rubbed his chin. The slap left his face bright red.

"Which are?"

"That we reschedule out of Miami and work up a left-wing patsy. There's no chance at a truce with Castro, so they want to build the killer up as *pro*-Fidel."

Pete kicked the wall. A landscape print hit the floor.

Kemper swallowed a loose tooth. Pete pointed to the highway.

The cops were putting on full riot gear. The cops were running strip searches in broad daylight.

Kemper said, "Look at that. That's all Mr. Hoover's chess game."

Pete said, "You're crazy. He's not *that* fucking good."

Littell laughed in his face.

94

(Blessington, 10/21/63)

Carlos arranged a liquor tray. The setting was incongruous— Hennessy XO and paper-wrapped motel glasses.

Littell took the hard chair. Carlos took the soft one. The tray sat on a coffee table between them.

“Your crew is out, Ward. We’re using somebody else. He’s been planning his thing all summer, which makes it a better all-around deal.”

Littell said, “Guy Banister?”

“How’d you know? Did a little birdie tell you?”

“His car’s outside. And there’s some things that you just tend to know.”

“You’re taking it good.”

“I don’t have a choice.”

Carlos toyed with a humidor. “I just learned about it. The thing’s been in the works for a while, which to my way of thinking increases the chance of success.”

“Where?”

“Dallas, next month. Guy’s got some rich right-wingers backing it. He’s got a long-term fall guy, one pro shooter and one Cuban.”

“Juan Canestel?”

Carlos laughed. “You’re a very smart ‘tend to know’ guy.”

Littell crossed his legs. “Kemper figured it out. And in my opinion, you shouldn’t trust psychopaths who drive bright red sports cars.”

Carlos bit the tip off his cigar. “Guy’s a capable guy. He’s got a Commie-type patsy with a job on one of the motorcade routes, two real shooters and some cops to kill the patsy. Ward, you can’t fault a guy who came up with the same plan as you fucking independent of you.”

He felt calm. Carlos couldn’t break him. He still had the chance to maim Bobby.

“I wish it could have been you, Ward. I know you got a personal stake in seeing that man dead.”

He felt secure. He felt inimical to Pete and Kemper.

“I wasn’t pleased that Mo and Santo cozied up to Castro. Ward, you should have seen me when I found out.”

Littell took out his lighter. It was solid gold—a gift from Jimmy Hoffa.

“You’re building up to something, Carlos. You’re about to say, ‘Ward, you’re too valuable to risk,’ and offer me a drink, even though I haven’t touched liquor in over two years.”

Marcello leaned in. Littell lit his cigar.

“You’re not too valuable to risk, but you’re way too valuable to punish. Everybody agrees with me on that, and everybody also agrees that Boyd and Bondurant constitute another fucking matter.”

“I still don’t want that drink.”

“Why should you? You didn’t steal two hundred pounds of heroin and shit all over your partners. You took part in a shakedown that you should have told us about, but that’s no more than some fucking misdemeanor.”

Littell said, “I still don’t want that drink. And I’d appreciate it if you told me exactly what you want me to do between now and Dallas.”

Carlos brushed ash off his vest. “I want you, Pete and Kemper not to interfere with Guy’s plan or try to horn in on it. I want you to cut that Lockhart guy loose and send him back to Mississippi. I want Pete and Kemper to return what they stole.”

Littell squeezed his gold lighter. “What happens to them?”

“I don’t know. That’s not for me to fucking say.”

The cigar smelled foul. An air conditioner blew smoke in his face.

“It would have worked, Carlos. We would have made it happen.”

Marcello winked. “You always take business on its own terms. You don’t do some regret number when things don’t go your way.”

“I don’t get to kill him. That’s a regret.”

“You’ll live with it. And your plan helped Guy set up a diversion.”

“What diversion?”

Carlos perched an ashtray on his stomach. “Banister told some nut named Milteer about the Miami job, without naming no personnel. Guy knows Milteer’s a loudmouth who’s got a Miami PD snitch bird-dogging him. He’s hoping Milteer will blab to the snitch, who’ll blab to his handler, and somehow the Miami motorcade will get canceled and divert everybody’s attention away from Dallas.”

Littell smiled. “It’s far-fetched. It’s something out of ‘Terry and the Pirates.’ ”

Carlos smiled. “So’s your story about the Teamster books. So’s the whole idea of you thinking I didn’t know what really happened from the gate.”

A man stepped out of the bathroom. He was holding a cocked revolver.

Littell shut his eyes.

Carlos said, “Everybody but Jimmy knows. We had detectives tailing you from the fucking instant you walked me over the border. They know all about your code books and the research you did at the Library of Congress. I know you got plans for the books, and sonny boy, now you got partners.”

Littell opened his eyes. The man wrapped a pillow around his gun.

Carlos poured two drinks. “You’re going to set us up with Howard Hughes. We’re going to sell him Las Vegas and keester him for most of his profits. You’re going to help us turn the Fund books into more legitimate money than Jules Schiffrin ever dreamed of.”

He felt weightless. He tried to dredge up a Hail Mary and couldn’t remember the words.

Carlos raised his glass. “To Las Vegas and new understandings.”

Littell forced the drink down. The exquisite burn made him sob.

95

(Meridian, 11/4/63)

Heroin bricks weighed down the trunk and made the rear wheels drift. A simple traffic shake would net him thirty years in Parchman Prison.

He withdrew his bank-vault stash. Some powder leaked on the floor—enough to sedate rural Mississippi for weeks.

Santo wanted his dope back. Santo reneged on their deal. Santo let certain implications linger.

Santo might have you killed. Santo might let you live. Santo might tease you with some stay of execution.

Kemper pulled up to a stoplight. A colored man waved to him.

Kemper waved back. The man was a Pentecostal deacon—and very skeptical of John F. Kennedy.

The man always said, “I don’t trust that boy.”

The light changed. Kemper punched the gas.

Be patient, Mr. Deacon. That boy’s got eighteen days left to live.

His team was out. Banister’s was in. Juan Canestel and Chuck Rogers crossed over to Guy’s crew.

The hit was rescheduled for Dallas on November 22. Juan and a Corsican pro would shoot from separate locations. Chuck and two Dallas cops were set to kill the fall guy.

It was Littell's basic plan embellished. It illustrated the ubiquitous Let's Kill Jack metaphysic.

Littell disbanded the team. Lockhart returned to his Klan gig. Pete flew straight to Texas to be with his woman. The Swingin' Twist Revue was scheduled to play Dallas on Hit Day.

Littell cut him loose. Some homing instinct drew him back to Meridian.

Quite a few locals remembered him. Some colored folks greeted him warmly. Some crackers gave him ugly looks and taunted him.

He took a motel room. He half-expected Mob killers to knock on his door. He ate three restaurant meals a day and drove around the countryside.

Dusk hit. Kemper crossed the Puckett town line. He saw a ridiculous sign framed by floodlights: Martin Luther King at a Communist training school.

The photo insert looked doctored. Someone drew devil's horns on the Reverend.

Kemper swung east. He hit the switchback leading out to Dougie Lockhart's old gun range.

Dirt roads took him right up to the edge. Shell casings snapped under his tires.

He killed his lights and got out. It was blessedly quiet—no gunshots and no rebel yells.

Kemper drew his piece. The sky was pitch dark—he couldn't see the target silhouettes.

Shells crunched and skittered. Kemper heard footsteps.

"Who's that? Who's that trespassin' on my property?"

Kemper tapped his headlights. The beams caught Dougie Lockhart head-on.

"It's Kemper Boyd, son."

Lockhart stepped out of the light. "Kemper Boyd, whose accent gets more syrupy the further south he gets. You got a chameleon quality, Kemper. Has anybody ever told you that?"

Kemper hit his brights. The whole range lit up.

Dougie, wash your sheet—you look awful.

Lockhart whooped. "Boss, you got me under the hot lights now! Boss, I gotta confess—it was me that bombed that nigger church in Birmingham!"

He had bad teeth and pimples. His moonshine breath was wafting out a good ten yards.

Kemper said, "Did you really do that?"

"As sure as I'm standing here basking in your light, Boss. As sure as niggers—"

Kemper shot him in the mouth. A full clip took his head off.

96

(Washington, D.C., 11/19/63)

Bobby made him wait.

Littell sat outside his office. Bobby's note stressed promptness and closed with a flair: "I'll give any Hoffa lawyer ten minutes of my time."

He was prompt. Bobby was busy. A door separated them.

Littell waited. He felt supremely calm.

Marcello didn't break him. Bobby was a relative child. Marcello bowed when he only took one drink.

The outer office was wood-paneled and spacious. It was very close to Mr. Hoover's office.

The receptionist ignored him. He counted down to the moment.

11/6/63: Kemper gives the dope back. Trafficante rebuffs his handshake.

11/6/63: Carlos Marcello calls. He says, "Santo has a job for you," but will not elaborate further.

11/7/63: Sam Giancana calls. He says, "I think we can find work for Pete. Mr. Hughes hates spooks, and Pete's a good narcotics man."

11/7/63: He conveys this message to Pete. Pete understands that they're letting him live.

If you work for us. *If* you move to Vegas. *If* you sell the local niggers heroin.

11/8/63: Jimmy Hoffa calls, elated. He doesn't seem to care that he's in very deep legal trouble.

Sam told him about the hit. Jimmy tells Heshie Ryskind. Heshie checks into the best hotel in Dallas—to enjoy the event close up.

Heshie brings his entourage: Dick Contino, nurses and hookers. Pete shoots him full of dope twice a day.

Heshie's entourage is baffled. Why uproot to Dallas when you're so close to passing away?

11/8/63: Carlos sends him a news clipping. It reads, "Klan Leader Murdered—Baffling Deep South Riddle!"

The cops suspect rival Klansmen. He suspects a Kemper Boyd gesture.

Carlos includes a note. Carlos says his deportation trial is going quite well.

11/8/63: Mr. Hughes sends him a note. Baby Howard wants Las Vegas like most children want new toys.

He wrote back to him. He promised to visit Nevada and compile research notes before Christmas.

11/9/63: Mr. Hoover calls. He says his private taps have picked up scalding outrage—the Joe Valachi Show is terrifying mobsters coast to coast.

Hoover's inside source says that Bobby is privately interrogating Valachi. Valachi refuses to discuss the Fund books. Bobby is furious.

11/10/63: Kemper calls. He says Guy Banister's "far-fetched" ploy succeeded: the Miami motorcade was canceled.

11/12/63: Pete calls. He reports more campsite raids and hit-plot rumors.

11/15/63: Jack parades through New York City. Teenagers and middle-aged matrons swarm his car.

11/16/63: Dallas newspapers announce the motorcade route. Barb Jahelka has a front-row seat—she's performing a noon show at a club on Commerce Street.

An intercom buzzed. Bobby's voice cut through static: "I'll see Mr. Littell now."

The receptionist got the door. Littell carried his tape recorder in.

Bobby stood behind his desk. He jammed his hands in his pockets and made no forward moves—Mob lawyers received cut-rate civility.

The office was nicely appointed. Bobby's suit was an off-the-rack sack cut.

"Your name seems familiar, Mr. Littell. Have we met before?"

I WAS YOUR PHANTOM. I ACHED TO BE PART OF YOUR VISION.

"No, Mr. Kennedy. We haven't."

"I see you brought a tape recorder."

Littell set it down on the floor. "Yes, I did."

"Has Jimmy owned up to his evil ways? Did you bring me some kind of confession?"

"In a sense. Would you mind listening?"

Bobby checked his watch. "I'm yours for the next nine minutes."

Littell plugged the machine into a wall outlet. Bobby jiggled the coins in his pockets.

Littell tapped Play. Joe Valachi spoke. Bobby leaned against the wall behind his desk.

Littell stood in front of the desk. Bobby stared at him. They stayed absolutely motionless and did not blink or twitch.

Joe Valachi laid down his indictment. Bobby heard the evidence. He did not shut his eyes or in any way discernibly react.

Littell broke a sweat. The silly staring contest continued.

The tape slipped off the spindle. Bobby picked up his desk phone.

"Get Special Agent Conroy in Boston. Have him go to the main Security-First National Bank and find out who account number 811512404 belongs to. Have him examine the safe-deposit boxes and call me back immediately. Tell him to expedite this top-priority, and hold my calls until his comes through."

His voice did not waver. He came on cast-iron/steel-plate/watertight strong.

Bobby put the phone down. The eyeball duel continued. The first one to blink is a coward.

Littell almost giggled. An epigram: Powerful men are children.

Time passed. Littell counted minutes off his heartbeat. His glasses started sliding down his nose.

The phone rang. Bobby picked it up and listened.

Littell stood perfectly still and counted forty-one seconds off his pulse. Bobby threw the phone at the wall.

And blinked.

And twitched.

And brushed back tears.

Littell said, “Goddamn you for the pain you caused me.”

97

(Dallas, 11/20/63)

She'll know. She'll hear the news and see your face and know you were part of it.

She'll trace it back to the shakedown. You couldn't compromise him, so you killed him.

She'll know it was a Mob hit. She knows how those guys snip dangerous links. She'll blame you for bringing her so close to something so big.

Pete watched Barb sleep. Their bed smelled like suntan oil and sweat.

He was going to Las Vegas. He was going back to Howard "Dracula" Hughes. Ward Littell was their new middleman.

It was strongarm and dope work. It was a boilerplate commuted sentence: death for life imprisonment.

She'd kicked the sheets off. He noticed some new freckles on her legs.

She'd click with Vegas. He'd boot Joey out of her life and fix her up with a permanent lounge gig.

She'd be with him. She'd be close to his work. She'd build a rep as a stand-up woman who knew how to keep secrets.

Barb curled into her pillows. The veins on her breasts stretched out funny.

He woke her up. She snapped awake bright-eyed, like always.

Pete said; "Will you marry me?"

Barb said, "Sure."

• • •

A fifty-dollar bribe waived the blood test. A C-note covered the no-birth-certificate problem.

Pete rented a 52 X-long tuxedo. Barb ran by the Kascade Klub and grabbed her one white Twist gown.

They found a preacher in the phone book. Pete scrounged up two witnesses: Jack Ruby and Dick Contino.

Dick said Uncle Hesh needed a pop. And what's he so excited about? For a dying man, he sure seems keyed up.

Pete ran by the Adolphus Hotel. He shot Heshie full of heroin and slipped him some Hershey bars to nosh on. Heshie thought his tuxedo was the funniest fucking thing he'd ever seen. He laughed so hard he almost ripped his tracheal tube out.

Dick bounced for a wedding gift: the Adolphus bridal suite through the weekend. Pete and Barb moved their things in an hour before the ceremony.

Pete's gun fell out of his suitcase. The bellhop almost shit.

Barb tipped him fifty dollars. The kid genuflected out of the suite. A hotel limo dropped them at the chapel.

The preacher was a juicehead. Ruby brought his yappy dachshunds. Dick banged some wedding numbers on his squeezebox.

They said their vows in a dive off Stemmons Freeway. Barb cried. Pete held her hand so tight that she winced.

The preacher supplied imitation gold rings. Pete's ring wouldn't fit on his ring finger. The preacher said he'd order him a jumbo—he got his stuff from a mail-order house in Des Moines.

Pete dropped the too-small ring in his pocket. The Till Death Do Us Part pitch got him weak in the knees.

They settled in at the hotel. Barb kept up a refrain: Barbara Jane Lindscott Jahelka Bondurant.

Heshie sent them champagne and a giant gift basket. The room-service kid was atwitter—the President's riding by here on Friday!

They made love. The bed was flouncy pink and enormous.

Barb fell asleep. Pete left an 8:00 p.m. call—his bride had a gig at 9:00 sharp.

He couldn't sleep. He didn't touch the bubbly—booze was starting to feel like a weakness.

The phone rang. He got up and grabbed the parlor extension.

"Yeah?"

"It's me, Pete."

"Ward, Jesus. How'd you get this—?"

Littell said, "Banister just called me. He said Juan Canestel's missing in Dallas. I'm sending Kemper in to meet you, and I want the two of you to find him and do what you have to do to make Friday happen."

98

(Dallas, 11/20/63)

The plane taxied up to a loading bay. The pilot rode tailwinds all the way from Meridian and made the run in under two hours.

Littell arranged a private charter. He told the pilot to fly balls-to-the-wall. The little two-seater rattled and shook—Kemper couldn't believe it.

It was 11:48 p.m. They were thirty-six hours short of GO.

Car headlights blinked—Pete's signal.

Kemper unhooked his seat belt. The pilot throttled down and cranked the door open for him.

Kemper jumped out. Propeller backspin almost knocked him flat.

The car pulled up. Kemper got in. Pete punched it across a string of small-craft runways.

A jet whooshed overhead. Love Field looked otherworldly.

Pete said, "What did Ward tell you?"

"That Juan's loose. And that Guy's afraid that Carlos and the others will think he fucked up."

"That's what he told me. And I told him that I didn't like the risks involved, unless somebody tells Carlos that we helped him out and saved Banister from blowing the whole fucking hit."

Kemper cracked the window. His goddamn ears kept popping.

"What did Ward say to that?"

"He said he'll tell Carlos after the hit. *If* we find Canestel and save the fucking day."

A 2-way radio sputtered. Pete turned it down.

"This is J.D. Tippit's off-duty car. Him and Rogers are out looking, and if they get a spot on Juan, *we* go in. Tippit can't leave his patrol sector, and Chuck can't do anything that could fuck him out of showing up for the hit."

They dodged baggage carts. Kemper leaned out the window and popped three Dexedrine dry.

"Where's Banister?"

"He's flying in from New Orleans later. He thinks Juan's solid, and if something happens and they lose him, he'll move Rogers into his slot, and go out with him and the pro shooter."

They knew Juan was volatile. They didn't have him tagged as a possible sex killer. The job was fucked up and full of holes and reeked of amateur-night on-the-job training.

"Where are we going?"

"Jack Ruby's place. Rogers said Juan likes to dig on the whores there. You work inside—Ruby doesn't know you."

Kemper laughed. "Ward told Carlos not to trust psychopaths with bright red sports cars."

Pete said, "You did."

"I've had some revelations since then."

"Are you saying there's something I should know about Juan?"

"I'm saying I quit hating Jack. And I don't really care whether they kill him or not."

The Carousel Club was midweek listless.

A stripper was peeling on the runway. Two plainclothes cops and a hooker clique sat at ringside tables.

Kemper sat near a rear exit. He unscrewed the bulb on his table lamp—shadows covered him from the waist up.

He could see the front and back doors. He could see the runway and stage tables. The shadows made him close to invisible.

Pete was out back with the car. He didn't want Jack Ruby to see him.

The stripper stripped to André Kostelanetz. The hi-fi played off-speed. Ruby sat with the cops and spiked their drinks with his flask.

Kemper sipped scotch. It jump-started the Dexedrine. He got cozy with a new revelation: You've got a chance to toy with the hit.

A dog ran across the runway. The stripper shooed it off. Juan Canestel walked in the front door.

He was alone. He was wearing an Ike jacket and blue jeans.

He went straight for the whores' table. A hostess sat him down.

He'd enlarged his prosthetic bulge. Check that shiv in his left hip pocket.

A sash cord was bunched into his waistband.

Juan bought drinks all around. Ruby schmoozed him up. The stripper tossed a few hips his way.

The cops checked him out. They looked mean and full of hate for non-Anglos.

Juan always carries a gun. They might shake him on general principles.

They might book him on a weapons charge. They might rubber-hose him.

He might betray Banister. The Secret Service might cancel the motorcade.

Juan loved to drink. He might show up for the hit hung over. He might jerk the trigger and miss Jack by a country mile.

Juan loved to talk. He might arouse suspicion between now and noon on Friday.

The sash cord leaked out his *front* waistband.

Juan is a sex killer. Juan kills with his surrogate balls.

Juan chatted up the whores. The cops kept sizing him up.

The stripper bowed and walked backstage. Ruby announced last call. Juan zeroed in on a zaftig brunette.

They'll walk out the front door. Pete won't see them. Their combustion might affect Juan's hit performance.

Kemper popped the clip out of his piece and dropped it on the floor. He left one round in the chamber—let's toy with the hit a little more.

The brunette stood up. Juan stood up. The cops looked them over.

The cops huddled. One cop shook his head.

The girl walked toward the parking-lot door. Juan followed her.

The lot fed into an alley. The alley was lined with hot-sheet-hotel doorways.

Pete was just outside.

Juan and the girl disappeared. Kemper counted to twenty. A cleanup man started slapping tables with a rag.

Kemper walked outside. A light mist stung his eyes.

Pete was pissing behind a dumpster. Juan and the whore were strolling down the alley. They were moving toward the second doorway on the left-hand side.

Pete saw him. Pete coughed. Pete said, "Kemper, what are you —?"

Pete stopped. Pete said, "Fuck … that's Juan.…"

Pete ran down the alley. The second door on the left opened and closed.

Kemper ran. They hit the door together at a full sprint.

A center hallway ran back to front. Every door on both sides was closed. There was no elevator—the hotel was one story only.

Kemper counted ten doors. Kemper heard a stifled screech.

Pete started kicking doors in. He threw his weight left, then right-clean pivots and clean flat-heel shots sheared the doors off their hinges.

The floor shook. Lights snapped on. Sad old sleepy winos cringed and cowered.

Six doors went down. Kemper crashed through number seven with a shoulder snap. A bright ceiling light caught the face-off.

Juan had a knife. The whore had a knife. Juan had a dildo strapped to the crotch of his blue jeans.

Kemper aimed at his head. His one round in the chamber went way wide.

Pete pushed him out of the way. Pete aimed low and fired. Two magnum shots blew out Juan's kneecaps.

He spun over the bed rail. His left leg dropped off at the knee.

The whore giggled. The whore looked at Pete. Something passed between them.

Pete held Kemper back.

Pete let the whore slit Juan's throat.

They drove to a doughnut stand and drank coffee. Kemper felt

Dallas ooze into slow motion.

They left Juan there. They *walked* to the car. They drove off law-abidingly slow.

They didn't talk. Pete didn't mention his toy-with-fate number.

This weird adrenaline had everything running in slow motion.

Pete walked over to a pay phone. Kemper watched him feed coins into the slots.

He's calling Carlos in New Orleans. He's pleading for your life.

Pete turned his back and hunched over the phone.

He's saying Banister fucked up. He's saying Boyd killed the henchman he never should have trusted.

He's pleading specifics. He's saying, Give Boyd a piece of the hit— you know he's a competent guy.

He's pleading for mercy.

Kemper sipped coffee. Pete hung up and walked back to their table.

"Who'd you call?"

"My wife. I just wanted to tell her I'd be late." Kemper smiled. "It doesn't cost that much money to call your hotel." Pete said, "Dallas is pricey. And things are getting more expensive these days."

Kemper laid on some drawl. "They surely are." Pete crumpled his cup. "Can I drop you somewhere?"

"I'll get a cab to the airport. Littell told that charter man to wait for me."

"Back to Mississippi?"

"Home's home, son."

Pete winked. "Take care, Kemper. And thanks for the ride."

His patio looked out on rolling hillsides. The view was damn nice for a discount motel.

He requested a southern exposure. The clerk rented him a cabin apart from the main building.

The flight back was beautiful. The dawn sky was goddamn lustrous.

He fell asleep and woke up at noon. The radio said Jack arrived in Texas.

He called the White House and the Justice Department. Second-string aides rebuffed him.

His name was on some kind of list. They cut him off midway through his salutations.

He called the Dallas SAC. The man refused to talk to him.

He called the Secret Service. The duty officer hung up.

He quit toying with it. He sat on his patio and replayed the ride start to finish.

Shadows turned the hills dark green. His replay kept expanding in slow motion.

He heard footsteps. Ward Littell walked up. He was carrying a brand-new Burberry raincoat.

Kemper said, “I thought you’d be in Dallas.”

Littell shook his head. “I don’t need to see it. And there’s something in L.A. I do need to see.”

“I like your suit, son. It’s good to see you dressing so nicely.”

Littell dropped the raincoat. Kemper saw the gun and cracked a big shit-eating grin.

Littell shot him. The impact knocked him off his chair.

The second shot felt like HUSH NOW. Kemper died thinking of Jack.

99

(Beverly Hills, 11/22/63)

The bellhop handed over his passkey and pointed out the bungalow. Littell handed him a thousand dollars.

The man was astonished. The man kept saying, “You just want to see him?”

I WANT TO SEE THE PRICE.

They stood by the housekeeping shed. The bellhop kept checking their blind side. He said, “Make it quick. You’ve got to be out before those Mormon guys get back from breakfast.”

Littell walked away from him. His head raced two hours ahead and locked in to Texas time.

The bungalow was salmon-pink and green. The key unlocked three deadbolts.

Littell walked in. The front room was filled with medical freezers and intravenous drip caddies. The air reeked of witch hazel and bug spray.

He heard children squealing. He identified the noise as a TV kiddie show.

He followed the squeals down a hallway. A wall clock read 8:09—10:09 Dallas time.

The squeals turned into a dog food commercial. Littell pressed up to the wall and looked through the doorway.

An IV bag was feeding the man blood. He was feeding himself with a hypodermic needle. He was lying buck cadaverous naked on a crank-up hospital bed.

He missed a hip vein. He jabbed his penis and hit the plunger.

His hair touched his back. His fingernails curled over halfway to his palms.

The room smelled like urine. Bugs were floating in a bucket filled with piss.

Hughes pulled the needle out. His bed sagged under the weight of a dozen disassembled slot machines.

100

(Dallas, 11/22/63)

The dope hit home. Heshie unclenched and eked out a smile.

Pete wiped off the needle. “It’s happening about six blocks from here. Wheel yourself to the window about 12:15. You’ll be able to see the cars go by.”

Heshie coughed into a Kleenex. Blood dripped down his chin.

Pete dropped the TV gizmo in his lap. “Turn it on then. They’ll interrupt whatever they’re showing for a news bulletin.”

Heshie tried to talk. Pete fed him some water.

“Don’t nod out, Hesh. You don’t get a show like this every day.”

Crowds packed Commerce Street from curb to storefront. Homemade signs bobbed ten feet high.

Pete walked down to the club. He had to buck entrenched spectators every inch of the way.

Jack’s fans held their ground. Cops kept herding avid types out of the street and back onto the sidewalk.

Little kids rode their dads’ shoulders. A million tiny flags on sticks fluttered.

He made the club. Barb saved him a table near the bandstand. A lackluster crowd was watching the show—maybe a dozen lunchtime Juicers total.

The combo mauled an uptempo number. Barb blew him a kiss. Pete sat down and smiled his “Sing me a soft one” smile.

A roar ripped through the place—HE’S COMING HE’S COMING HE’S COMING!

The combo ripped an off-key crescendo. Joey and the boys looked half-blitzed.

Barb went straight into “Unchained Melody.” Every patron and barmaid and kitchen geek ran for the door.

The roar grew. Engine noise built off of it—limousines and full-dress Harley-Davidsons.

They left the door open. He had Barb to himself and couldn’t hear a word she was singing.

He watched her. He made up his own words. She held him with her eyes and her mouth.

The roar did a long slow fade. He braced himself for this big fucking scream.

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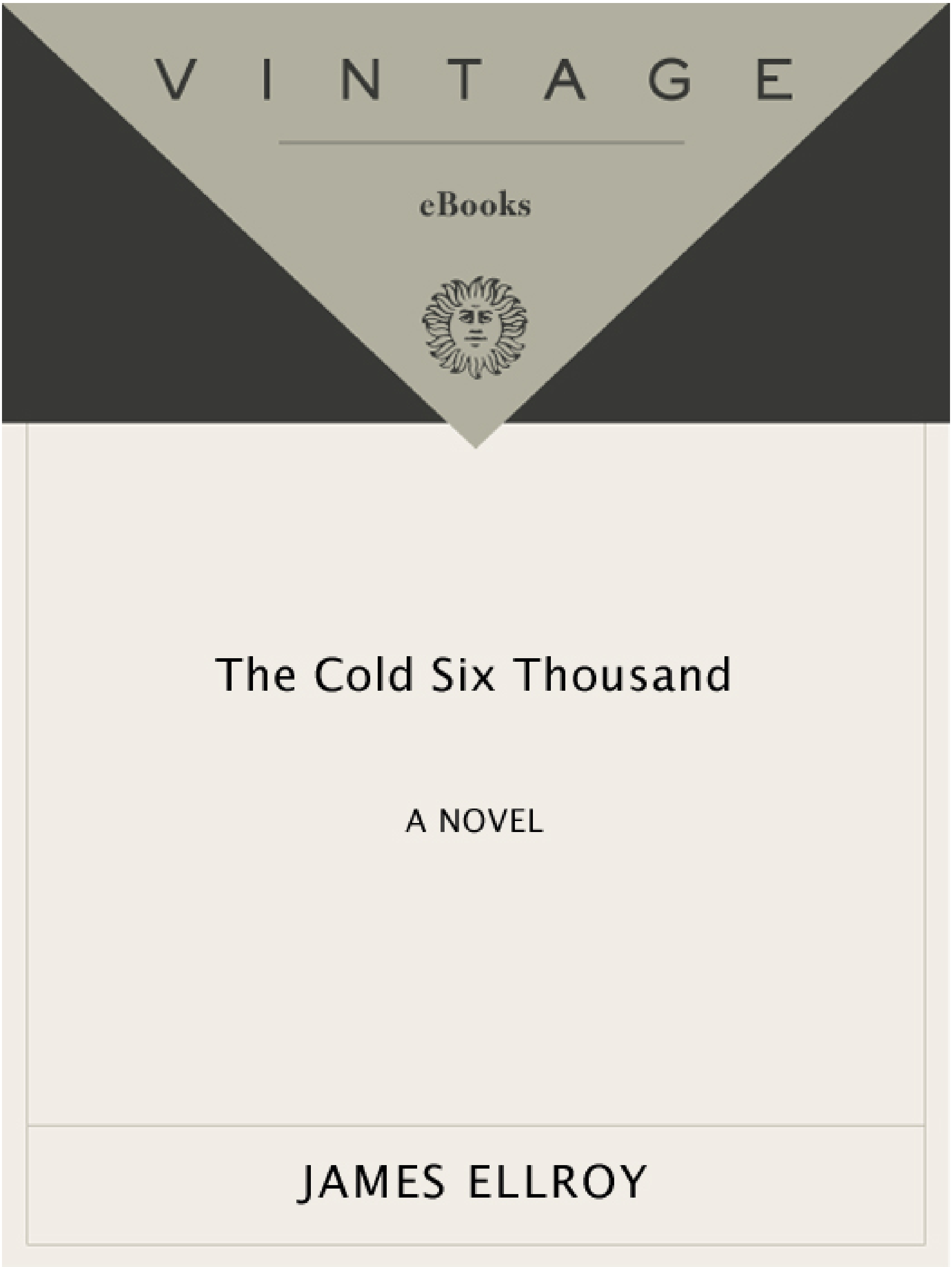

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My Dark Places

American Tabloid Hollywood

Nocturnes

White Jazz

L.A. Confidential

The Big Nowhere

The Black Dahlia

Killer on the Road

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THE COLD SIX THOUSAND

a novel

JAMES ELLROY

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A DIVISION OF RANDOM HOUSE, INC.   NEW YORK

FIRST VINTAGE BOOKS EDITION, JUNE 2002

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Vintage and colophon are registered trademarks of Random House, Inc.

The Library of Congress has cataloged the Knopf edition as follows:
Ellroy, James, 1948–
The cold six thousand : a novel / by James Ellroy.—1st ed.
p. cm.
eISBN: 978-0-307-79845-9
I. Title.
2001088561

www.vintagebooks.com

Title page photograph by Mell Kilpatrick,
courtesy of Jennifer Dumas

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To
BILL STONER

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Part I

EXTRADITION

November 22–25, 1963

Wayne Tedrow Jr.

(Dallas, 11/22/63)

They sent him to Dallas to kill a nigger pimp named Wendell Durfee. He wasn't sure he could do it.

The Casino Operators Council flew him. They supplied first-class fare. They tapped their slush fund. They greased him. They fed him six cold.

Nobody *said* it:

Kill that coon. Do it good. Take our hit fee.

The flight ran smooth. A stew served drinks. She saw his gun. She played up. She asked dumb questions.

He said he worked Vegas PD. He ran the intel squad. He built files and logged information.

She loved it. She swooned.

"Hon, what you doin' in Dallas?"

He told her.

A Negro shivved a twenty-one dealer. The dealer lost an eye. The Negro booked to Big D. She loved it. She brought him highballs. He omitted details.

The dealer provoked the attack. The council issued the contract—death for ADW Two.

The preflight pep talk. Lieutenant Buddy Fritsch:

"I don't have to tell you what we expect, son. And I don't have to add that your father expects it, too."

The stew played geisha girl. The stew fluffed her beehive.

"What's your name?"

“Wayne Tedrow.”

She whooped. “You just *have* to be Junior!”

He looked through her. He doodled. He yawned. She fawned.

She just loooooved his daddy. He flew with her oodles. She knew he was a Mormon wheel. She’d looove to know more.

Wayne laid out Wayne Senior.

He ran a kitchen-help union. He rigged low pay. He had coin. He had pull. He pushed right-wing tracts. He hobnobbed with fat cats. He knew J. Edgar Hoover.

The pilot hit the intercom. Dallas—on time.

The stew fluffed her hair. “I’ll bet you’re staying at the Adolphus.”

Wayne cinched his seat belt. “What makes you say that?”

“Well, your daddy told me he always stays there.”

“I’m staying there. Nobody consulted me, but that’s where they’ve got me booked.”

The stew hunkered down. Her skirt slid. Her garter belt gapped.

“Your daddy told me they’ve got a nice little restaurant right there in the hotel, and, well …”

The plane hit rough air. Wayne caught it low. He broke a sweat. He shut his eyes. He saw Wendell Durfee.

The stew touched him. Wayne opened his eyes.

He saw her hickeys.

He saw her bad teeth. He smelled her shampoo.

“You were looking a little scared there, Wayne Junior.”

“Junior” tore it.

“Leave me alone. I’m not what you want, and I don’t cheat on my wife.”

1:50 p.m.

They touched down. Wayne got off first. Wayne stamped blood back into his legs.

He walked to the terminal. Schoolgirls blocked the gate. One girl cried. One girl fucked with prayer beads.

He stepped around them. He followed baggage signs. People walked past him. They looked sucker-punched.

Red eyes. Boo-hoo. Women with Kleenex.

Wayne stopped at baggage claim. Kids whizzed by. They shot cap pistols. They laughed.

A man walked up—Joe Redneck—tall and fat. He wore a Stetson. He wore big boots. He wore a mother-of-pearl .45.

"If you're Sergeant Tedrow, I'm Officer Maynard D. Moore of the Dallas Police Department."

They shook hands. Moore chewed tobacco. Moore wore cheap cologne. A woman walked by—boo-hoo-hoo—one big red nose.

Wayne said, "What's wrong?"

Moore smiled. "Some kook shot the President."

Most shops closed early. State flags flew low. Some folks flew rebel flags upright.

Moore drove Wayne in. Moore had a plan: Run by the hotel/get you set in/find us that jigaboo.

John F. Kennedy—dead.

His wife's crush. His stepmom's fixation. JFK got Janice wet. Janice told Wayne Senior. Janice paid. Janice limped. Janice showed off the welts on her thighs.

Dead was dead. He couldn't grab it. He fumbled the rebounds.

Moore chewed Red Man. Moore shot juice out his window. Gunshots overlapped. Joyous shit in the boonies.

Moore said, "Some people ain't so sad."

Wayne shrugged. They passed a billboard—JFK and the UN.

"You sure ain't sayin' much. I got to say that so far, you ain't the most lively extradition partner I ever had."

A gun went off. Close. Wayne grabbed his holster.

"Whoo! You got a case of the yips, boy!"

Wayne futzed with his necktie. "I just want to get this over with."

Moore ran a red light. "In good time. I don't doubt that Mr. Durfee'll be sayin' hi to our fallen hero before too long."

Wayne rolled up his window. Wayne trapped in Moore's cologne.

Moore said, "I been to Lost Wages quite a few times. In fact, I owe a big marker at the Dunes this very moment."

Wayne shrugged. They passed a bus bench. A colored girl sobbed.

"I heard of your daddy, too. I heard he's quite the boy in Nevada."

A truck ran a red. The driver waved a beer and revolver.

"Lots of people know my father. They all tell me they know him, and it gets old pretty quick."

Moore smiled. "Hey, I think I detect a pulse there."

Motorcade confetti. A window sign: *Big D loves Jack & Jackie*.

"I heard about you, too. I heard you got leanings your daddy don't much care for."

"For instance?"

"Let's try nigger lover. Let's try you chauffeur Sonny Liston around when he comes to Vegas, 'cause the PD's afraid he'll get himself in trouble with liquor and white women, and you *like* him, but you *don't* like the nice Italian folks who keep your little town clean."

The car hit a pothole. Wayne hit the dash.

Moore stared at Wayne. Wayne stared back. They held the stare. Moore ran a red. Wayne blinked first.

Moore winked. "We're gonna have big fun this weekend."

The lobby was swank. The carpets ran thick. Men snagged their boot heels.

People pointed outside—look look look—the motorcade passed the hotel. JFK drove by. JFK waved. JFK bought it close by.

People talked. Strangers braced strangers. The men wore western suits. The women dressed faux-Jackie.

Check-ins swamped the desk. Moore ad-libbed. Moore walked Wayne to the bar.

SRO—big barside numbers.

A TV sat on a table. A barman goosed the sound. Moore shoved up to a phone booth. Wayne scoped the TV out.

Folks jabbered. The men wore hats. Everyone wore boots and high heels. Wayne stood on his toes. Wayne popped over hat brims.

The picture jumped and settled in. Sound static and confusion. Cops. A thin punk. Words: "Oswald"/"weapon"/"Red sympath—"

A guy waved a rifle. Newsmen pressed in. A camera panned. There's the punk. He's showing fear and contusions.

The noise was bad. The smoke was thick. Wayne lost his legs.

A man raised a toast. "Oughta give Oswald a—"

Wayne stood down. A woman jostled him—wet cheeks and runny mascara.

Wayne walked to the phone booth. Moore had the door cracked.

He said, “Guy, listen now.”

He said, “Wet-nursing some kid on some bullshit extradition—”

“Bullshit” tore it.

Wayne jabbed Moore. Moore swung around. His pant legs hiked up.

Fuck—knives in his boot tops. Brass knucks in one sock. Wayne said,

“Wendell Durfee, remember?”

Moore stood up. Moore got magnetized. Wayne tracked his eyes.

He caught the TV. He caught a caption. He caught a still shot: “Slain Officer J. D. Tippit.”

Moore stared. Moore trembled. Moore shook.

Wayne said, “Wendell Durf—”

Moore shoved him. Moore ran outside.

* * *

The council booked him a *biggg* suite. A bellboy supplied history. JFK loved the suite. JFK fucked women there. Ava Gardner blew him on the terrace.

Two sitting rooms. Two bedrooms. Three TVs. Slush funds. Six cold. Kill that nigger, boy.

Wayne toured the suite. History lives. JFK loved Dallas quail.

He turned the TVs on. He tuned in three channels. He caught the show three ways. He walked between sets. He nailed the story.

The punk was Lee Harvey Oswald. The punk shot JFK and Tippit. Tippit worked Dallas PD. DPD was tight-knit. Moore probably knew him.

Oswald was pro-Red. Oswald loved Fidel. Oswald worked at a schoolbook plant. Oswald clipped the Prez on his lunch break.

DPD had him. Their HQ teemed. Cops. Reporters. Camera hogs all.

Wayne flopped on a couch. Wayne shut his eyes. Wayne saw Wendell Durfee. Wayne opened his eyes. Wayne saw Lee Oswald.

He killed the sound. He pulled his wallet pix.

There's his mother—back in Peru, Indiana.

She left Wayne Senior. Late '47. Wayne Senior hit her. He broke bones sometimes.

She asked Wayne who he loved most. He said, "My dad." She slapped him. She cried. She apologized.

The slap tore it. He went with Wayne Senior.

He called his mother—May '54—he called en route to the Army. She said, "Don't fight in silly wars." She said, "Don't hate like Wayne Senior."

He cut her off. Binding/permanent/4-ever.

There's his stepmom.

Wayne Senior ditched Wayne's mom. Wayne Senior wooed Janice. Wayne Senior brought Wayne along. Wayne was thirteen. Wayne was horny. Wayne dug on Janice.

Janice Lukens Tedrow made rooms tilt. She played indolent wife. She played scratch golf. She played A-club tennis.

Wayne Senior feared her spark. She watched Wayne grow up. She torched reciprocal. She left her doors open. She invited looks. Wayne Senior knew it. Wayne Senior didn't care.

There's *his* wife.

Lynette Sproul Tedrow. Perched in his lap. Grad night at Brigham Young.

He's shell-shocked. He got his chem degree—BYU/'59—summa cum laude. He craved action. He joined Vegas PD. Fuck summa cum laude.

He met Lynette in Little Rock. Fall '57. Central High desegregates. Rednecks. Colored kids. The Eighty-Second Airborne.

Some white boys prowl. Some white boys snatch a colored boy's sandwich. Lynette hands him hers. The white boys attack. Corporal Wayne Tedrow Jr. counters.

He beats them down. He spears one fuck. The fuck screams, "Mommy!"

Lynette hits on Wayne. She's seventeen. He's twenty-three. He's got some college.

They fucked on a golf course. Sprinklers doused them. He told Janice all.

She said, "You and Lynette peaked early. And you probably liked the fight as much as the sex."

Janice knew him. Janice had the home-court advantage.

Wayne looked out a window. TV crews roamed. News vans double-parked. He walked through the suite. He turned off the TVs. Three Oswalds vanished.

He pulled his file. All carbons: LVPD/Dallas County Sheriff's.

Durfee, Wendell (NMI). Male Negro/DOB 6-6-27/Clark County, Nevada. 6'4"/155.

Pander beefs—3/44 up. "Well-known dice-game habitue." No busts outside Vegas and Dallas.

"Known to drive Cadillacs."

"Known to wear flamboyant attire."

"Known to have fathered 13 children out of wedlock."

"Known to pander Negro women, white women, male homosexuals & Mexican transvestites."

Twenty-two pimp busts. Fourteen convictions. Nine child-support liens. Five bail jumps.

Cop notes: Wendell's smart/Wendell's dumb/Wendell cut that cat at Binion's.

The cat was mobbed up. The cat shanked Wendell first. The council set policy. The LVPD enforced it.

"Known Dallas County Associates":

Marvin Duquesne Settle/male Negro/Texas State custody.

Fenton "Duke" Price/male Negro/Texas State custody.

Alfonzo John Jefferson/male Negro/4219 Wilmington Road, Dallas 8, Tex. "Gambling partner of Wendell Durfee."

County Probation: (Stat. 92.04 Tex. St. Code) 9/14/60–9/14/65. Employed: Dr Pepper Bottling Plant. Note: "Subject to make fine payments for term of probation, i.e.: every 3rd Friday (Dr Pepper payday) County Prob. Off."

Donnell George Lundy/male Negro/Texas State custody.

Manuel "Bobo" Herrara/male Mexican/Texas State cust—

The phone rang. Wayne grabbed it.

"Yeah?"

"It's me, son. Your new best buddy."

Wayne grabbed his holster. "Where are you?"

"Right now I'm noplace worth bein'. But you meet me at eight o'clock."

"Where?"

"The Carousel Club. You be there, and we'll find us that burrhead."

Wayne hung up. Wayne got butterflies.
Wendell, I don’t want to kill you.

Ward J. Littell

(Dallas, 11/22/63)

There's the limo. It's on the runway. It's late-model FBI black.

The plane taxied up. It passed Air Force One. Marines flanked the tailhatch. The pilot cut the engine. The plane fishtailed. The ramp popped and dropped.

Littell got out. His ears popped. His legs uncramped.

They worked fast. They rigged his flight plan. They flew him two-seat non-deluxe.

Mr. Hoover called him—D.C. to L.A.

He said, "The President was shot and killed. I want you to fly to Dallas and monitor the investigation."

The hit occurred at 12:30. It was 4:10 now. Mr. Hoover called at 12:40. Mr. Hoover got the news and called fast.

Littell ran. The limo driver popped the door. The backseat was stuffy. The windows were smoked. Love Field was all monochrome.

Stick figures. Baggage crews. Newsmen and charter planes.

The driver pulled out. Littell saw a box on the seat. He opened it. He emptied it out.

One special agent's shield. One FBI photo ID card. One Bureau-issue .38/holster.

His old photo. *His* old gun.

He gave them up in '60. Mr. Hoover forced him out. He had cover tools now—new and old—he had cosmetic reinstatement.

Mr. Hoover stashed said tools. *In Dallas*. Mr. Hoover predicted the hit.

He knew the locale. He sensed the time frame. He was passively complicit. He sensed Littell's involvement. He sensed Littell's need to quash talk.

Littell looked out his window. The tint made funhouse distortions. Clouds imploded. Buildings weaved. People blipped.

He brought a radio. He played it flying in. He got the basic stats:

One suspect caught—a kid—a sheep-dipped leftist. Guy Banister dipped him. The kid killed a cop. Two cops were set to kill him. Phase Two went bad. The second cop botched his assignment.

Littell holstered up. Littell studied his ID.

Cop/lawyer then. Mob lawyer now. Hoover foe to Hoover ally. A one-man law firm with three clients:

Howard Hughes/Jimmy Hoffa/Carlos Marcello.

He called Carlos. Ten a.m. L.A. time. Carlos was happy. Carlos beat Bobby K.'s deportation bill.

Bobby tried Carlos in New Orleans. Carlos *owned* New Orleans. Carlos was jury-proof there.

Kennedy hubris:

The jury acquits Carlos. Bobby sulks. Jack dies one hour on.

The streets were dead. Windows zipped by. Ten thousand TVs glowed.

It was *his* show.

He developed the plan. Pete Bondurant helped. Carlos okayed it and went with Guy Banister's crew. Guy embellished *his* plan. Guy revised it. Guy botched it.

Pete was in Dallas. Pete just got married. Pete was at the Adolphus Hotel. Guy B. was here. Guy B. was somewhere close.

Littell counted windows. All tint-distorted. Smudges and blurs. His thoughts blew wide. His thoughts cohered:

Talk to Pete. Kill Oswald. Ensure a one-shooter consensus.

The limo hit downtown Dallas. Littell pinned on his shield.

There's Dealey Plaza. The PD building's close. Look for:

The book building/a Hertz sign/Greek columns.

There—

The columns. The sign. Mourners at Houston and Elm. A hot-dog vendor. Nuns sobbing.

Littell shut his eyes. The driver turned right. The driver pulled down a ramp. The driver stopped hard and fast. The back windows slid down.

Somebody coughed. Somebody said, “Mr. Littell?”

Littell opened his eyes. Littell saw a basement garage. There’s a kiddy Fed standing there. He’s all uptight.

“Sir, I’m Special Agent Burdick, and … well, the ASAC said you should come straight up and see the witnesses.”

Littell grabbed his briefcase. The gun chafed his hip. He got out. He stretched. He cleaned his glasses.

Burdick stuck close. Burdick rode him tight. They walked to a freight lift. Burdick pushed 3.

“Sir, I have to say it’s a madhouse. We’ve got people saying two shooters, three, four, they can’t even agree where the shots—”

“Did you isolate them?”

“Well … no.”

“Who’s interviewing them?”

The boy stuttered. The boy gulped.

“Which *agencies*, son?”

“Well, we’ve got us, DPD, the Sheriff’s, and I—”

The door opened. Noise boomed in. The squadroom was packed.

Littell looked around. Burdick got antsy. Littell ignored him.

The witnesses were antsy. The witnesses wore name tags. The witnesses perched on one bench.

Thirty-odd people: Talking. Fretting. Contaminating facts.

Back-wall cubicles. Cops and civilians—holed up in interview slots. Flustered cops and civilians in shock.

Forty desks. Forty phones. Forty cops talking loud. Odd badges on suitcoats. Wastebaskets dumped. Inter-agency chaos and—

“Sir, can we—”

Littell walked over. Littell checked the bench. The wits squirmed. The wits smoked. Full ashtrays jumped.

I saw this/I saw that/his head went pop! A talkathon—bad work—pure mass-witness slop.

Littell looked for standouts. Solid types/credible wits.

He stood back. He framed the bench. He saw a woman: Dark hair/handsome/thirty-five-plus.

She sat still. She stayed calm. She watched an exit door. She saw Littell. She looked away. She never blinked.

Burdick walked a phone up. Burdick mimed "*Him.*" Littell grabbed the phone. The cord stretched taut.

Mr. Hoover said, "Be concise."

Littell cupped his free ear. The room noise half died.

"The preliminary stage of the investigation has been ineptly executed. That's all I'm certain of at this point."

"I'm not surprised and I'm not disappointed, and I'm thoroughly convinced that Oswald acted without assistance. Your job is to cull the names of potentially embarrassing witnesses who might contradict that thesis."

Littell said, "Yes, sir."

Burdick held up a clipboard. Note slips were clamped in. A witness log/clamped witness statements/driver's licenses attached.

The phone went dead. Burdick grabbed it. Littell grabbed the clipboard. It bulged. The clip wobbled.

He skimmed the slips.

Two-line statements. Confiscated DLs. Detainment insurance. Ambiguous data: 3/4/5/6 shots/1/2/3 directions.

The stockade fence. The book building. The triple underpass. Head-on shots. Missed shots. Shots from behind.

Littell checked DL pix.

Wit #6: Shots at Houston and Elm. Wit #9: Shots off the freeway. The calm woman: 2 shots/2 directions. Her stats: Arden Smith/West Mockingbird Lane.

The smoke was bad. Littell stepped back. The smoke made him sneeze. He bumped a desk. He dropped the log. He walked to the interview slots.

Burdick tailed him. The room noise doubled. Littell checked the slots.

Shoddy work—no tape machines/no stenos.

He checked slot #1. A thin cop braced a thin kid. The kid laughed. What a gas. My dad voted for Nixon.

Littell checked slot #2. A fat cop braced a fat man.

The cop said, "Mr. Bowers, I'm not disputing what you told me."

Mr. Bowers wore a railroad cap. Mr. Bowers squirmed.

"For the tenth time then, so I can go home. I was up in the tower behind that fence on the knoll. I saw two cars cruising around there about … shit … a half hour before the shooting, and two men standing right at the edge of the fence, and then just as I heard the shots, I saw a flash of light from that very spot."

The cop doodled. Mr. Bowers tapped a cigarette. Littell studied him. Littell got queasy.

He didn't know the shooter plan. He *did* know credible wits. Bowers was intractably firm. Bowers was *good*.

Burdick tapped Littell. Littell swung around. Littell knocked him back.

"*What*?"

Burdick stepped back. "Well, I was just thinking that DPD pulled these three guys, bums or something, out of a railroad car behind the fence, about a half hour after the shooting. We've got them in the tank."

Littell went more queasy.

Littell said, "Show me."

Burdick walked point. They passed the slots. They passed a coffee-break room. Hallways crossed. They veered left. They hit a mesh-front pen.

An intercom popped: "Agent Burdick. Front desk, please."

Burdick said, "I should catch that."

Littell nodded. Burdick fidgeted. Burdick took off from a crouch. Littell grabbed the mesh. The light was bad. Littell squinted hard.

He saw two bums. He saw Chuck Rogers.

Chuck was Pete's man. Wet arts/CIA. Chuck was tight with Guy B.

Rogers saw Littell. The bums ignored him. Rogers smiled. Littell touched his shield. Rogers mimed a rifle shot.

He moved his lips. He went "Pow!"

Littell backtracked.

He walked down the hall. He turned right. He hit a bisecting hall. He made the turn. He saw a side door.

He pushed it open. He saw fire steps and rungs. Across the hall: A men's room and a door marked "Jailer."

The men's room door opened. Mr. Bowers walked out. He stretched. He zipped his fly. He settled his nuts.

He saw Littell. He squinted. He keyed on his shield.

"FBI, right?"

"That's right."

"Well, I'm glad I ran into you, 'cause there's something I forgot to tell the other guy."

Littell smiled. "I'll pass it along."

Bowers scratched his neck. "Okay, then. You tell him I saw some cops rousting these hoboes out of a hay car, and one of them looked like one of the guys I saw by the fence."

Littell pulled his notebook.

He scribbled. He smeared some ink. His hand shook. The book shook.

Bowers said, "I sure feel sorry for Jackie."

Littell smiled. Bowers smiled. Bowers tipped his cap. He jiggled some coins. He ambled. He walked away slooooow.

Littell watched his back.

Bowers ambled. Bowers turned right. Bowers hit the main hall. Littell flexed his hands. Littell caught his breath.

He worked the Jailer door. He jiggled the knob. He forced it.

The door popped. Littell stepped in.

A twelve-by-twelve space—dead empty. A desk/a chair/a key rack.

Paperwork—tacked to a corkboard:

Vagrant sheets—"Doyle"/"Paolino"/"Abrahams"—no mug shots attached.

Call it: Rogers packed fake ID. Rogers booked in with it.

One key on the rack—cell-size/thick brass.

Littell grabbed the sheets. Littell pocketed them. Littell grabbed the key. He gulped. He walked out brazen. He walked to the pen.

He unlocked the door. Rogers primed the bums. He pumped them up. He went "Ssshh now." He gave a pep talk.

We got ourselves a savior—just do what I say.

The bums huddled. The bums stepped out. The bums hugged the wall.

Littell walked.

He hit the main hall. He faced the squadroom. He blocked the view. He signaled Rogers. He pointed. The fire door—go.

He heard footsteps. The bums squealed. The bums giggled loud. The fire door creaked. A bum yelled, "Hallelujah!" The fire door slammed.

Littell caught a breeze. His sweat froze. His pulse went haywire.

He walked to the squadroom. His legs fluttered and dipped. He grazed desks. He bumped walls. He bumped into cops.

The wit bench was smoked in. Twenty cigarettes plumed. Arden Smith was gone.

Littell looked around. Littell scanned desks. Littell saw the wit log.

He grabbed it. He checked statements and DLs. Arden Smith's package—gone.

He checked the slots. He checked the halls. He checked the main window.

There's Arden Smith. She's on the street. She's walking fast. She's walking *away*.

She crossed Houston. Cars swerved by her. She made Dealey Plaza.

Littell blinked.

He lost her. Jack's mourners shadowed her up.

Pete Bondurant

(Dallas, 11/22/63)

The bridal suite. The fuck pad supreme.

Gilt wallpaper. Cupids. Pink rugs and chairs. A fake-fur bedspread—baby-ass pink.

Pete watched Barb sleep.

Her legs slid. She kicked wide. She thrashed the sheets.

Barbara Jane Lindscott Jahelka Bondurant.

He got her back early. He sealed up the suite. He closed out the news. She'll wake up. She'll *get* the news. She'll *know*.

I fucked Jack in '62. It was lackluster and brief. You bugged some rooms. You got his voice. You taped it. The shakedown failed. Your pals regrouped. You killed Jack instead.

Pete moved his chair. Pete got fresh views. Barb tossed. Her hair swirled.

She didn't love Jack. She serviced Jack. She cosigned extortion. She wouldn't cosign death.

6:10 p.m.

Jack should be dead. Guy's boy ditto. Chuck Rogers had a plane stashed. The crew should be out.

Barb twitched. Pete fought a headache. Pete popped aspirin and scotch.

He got *bad* headaches—chronic—they started with the Jack squeeze. The squeeze failed. He stole some Mob heroin. A CIA man helped.

Kemper Cathcart Boyd.

They were *très* tight. They were mobbed up. They shared spit with Sam G. They worked for Carlos M. They worked for Santo Trafficante. They all hated Commies. They all loved Cuba. They all hated the Beard.

Money and turf—dual agendas. Let's pluck the Beard. Let's repluck our casinos.

Santo and Sam played both ends. They sucked up to Castro. They bought "H" off Brother Raúl. Carlos stayed pure. Carlos did not fuck *la Causa*.

Pete and Boyd stole the dope. Sam and Santo nailed them. Pete got the word. They did biz with Fidel.

Carlos stayed neutral. Biz was biz. Outfit laws overruled causes.

They *all* hated Bobby. They *all* hated Jack. Jack fucked them at Pigs. Jack raided Cuban exile camps. Jack nuzzled the Beard.

Bobby deported Carlos. Bobby fucked with the Outfit *très* large. Carlos hated Jack and Bobby—*molto bravissimo*.

Ward Littell hated them. Ward smuggled Carlos back. Ward played factotum. Ward ran his deportation case.

Ward said, Let's clip Jack. Carlos liked it. Carlos talked to Santo and Sam.

They liked it.

Santo and Sam had plans. They said let's clip Pete and Boyd. We want our dope back. We want revenge.

Ward talked to Sam and Carlos. Ward pressed Pete's case. They quashed said clip plan.

The catch:

We let you live. You *owe* us. Now whack Jack the K.

Guy Banister was working up a hit plan. His plan resembled Littell's. Hit plans were running epidemic. Jack pissed off mucho hotheads. The cocksucker was doomed.

Guy had pull. Guy knew Carlos. Guy knew Cuban exiles. Guy knew fat cats with coin. Guy dipped a geek in sheep shit. Guy preempted Ward's plan.

He pitched it to Carlos. Carlos okayed it. Carlos scotched Ward's plan. Shit went sideways. Personnel shifted. Some Pete and Ward guys joined Guy's crew.

Glitches glitched—last-minute—Pete and Boyd unglitched them.

Santo and Sam hated Boyd. They reissued their death decree. Kemper Boyd—*mort sans doute*.

Barb stirred. Pete held his breath. The aspirin hit. His headache fizzled.

Santo and Sam let *him* live. Carlos liked him. He loved *la Causa*. The Boys had plans. He *might* fit in.

He worked for Howard Hughes—'52 to '60. He pimped for him. He scored his dope. He did his strongarm work.

Ward Littell lawyered for Hughes. Hughes wanted to buy up Las Vegas. Hughes craved the Vegas Strip. Hughes craved *all* the hotel-casinos.

Hughes had a buyout plan. Said plan would take years. The Boys had a plan too:

Let's sell Las Vegas. Let's bilk Howard Hughes. We'll keep our work crews. We'll skim Hughes blind. We'll *still* own Las Vegas.

Carlos owned Ward. Ward's job to be: Broker the deal and tailor it *our* way.

The Boys owned Pete. The Boys implied:

Go to Vegas. Work with Ward. Pre-pave the Hughes deal. You know muscle work. You know heroin. We might rescind our no-dope rule. We might let you push to the spooks.

We *might* not kill you. We *might* not kill your Twist queen.

Barb left her gowns out. Blue spangles and green. Two shows tonite. His wife and her ex-hubby's trio.

A sad room. Sad Barb. Let's send one up to Jack.

Hit news preceded the hit. Outfit guys talked. Outfit guys *knew*. Hesh Ryskind checked into the Adolphus. Hesh had cancer. Hesh came to gloat and die.

Hesh watched the motorcade. Hesh died at 1:00 p.m. Hesh kicked with Jack concurrent.

Pete touched the bed. Pink sheets met red hair—one loud color clash.

The doorbell chimed—the B-flat "Eyes of Texas." Barb slept through it. Pete walked over. Pete cracked the door.

Fuck—there's Guy Banister.

Guy popped sweat. Guy was sixty-plus. Guy had heart attacks.

Pete stepped outside. Pete shut the door. Guy waved a highball glass.

"Come on. I rented a room down the hall."

Pete followed him over. The floor rugs sent sparks up. Guy unlocked his door and bolted them in.

He grabbed a jug—Old Crow bond—Pete snatched it quick.

"Tell me they're both dead, and this isn't about some fuck-up."

Guy twirled his glass. "King John the First is dead, but my boy killed a cop and got arrested."

The floor dipped. Pete dug his legs in.

"The cop who was supposed to kill him?"

Guy eyeballed the jug. Pete tossed it back.

"That's right, Tippit. My boy pulled a piece and popped him out in Oak Cliff."

"Does *your boy* know your name?"

Guy uncorked the jug. "No, I worked him through a cutout."

Pete slapped the wall. Plaster chips flew. Guy spilled some booze.

"But your boy knows the cutout's name. The cutout knows *your* name, and your boy'll name names sooner or later. Is that a fucking accurate assessment?"

Guy poured a drink. His hand shook. Pete straddled a chair. His headache retorqued. He lit a cigarette. *His* hand shook.

"We have to kill him."

Guy blotted the spill. "Tippit had a backup man, but he wanted to go in alone. It was a two-man job, so we're paying the price now."

Pete squeezed the chairback. The slats shimmied. One slat sheared loose.

"Don't tell me what we should have done. Tell me how we get to your boy."

Guy sat on the bed. Guy stretched out comfy.

"I gave the job to Tippit's backup."

Pete said, "And?"

"And he's got access to the jail, and he's mean enough for the job, and he owes some casino markers, which means he's in hock to the Outfit."

Pete said, "There's more. You're trying to sell me a bill of goods."

"Well …"

"Well, shit, *what*?"

"Well, he's a tough nut, and he doesn't want to do it, and he's stuck on a liaison job with some Vegas cop."

Pete cracked his knuckles. "We'll convince him."

"I don't know. He's a tough nut."

Pete flipped his cigarette. It hit Guy clean. He yipped. He snuffed it out. He burned his pillow.

Pete coughed. "You're the first one Carlos will clip if your boy talks."

A TV kicked on—one room down. The walls leeched sound: "Nation mourns"/"valiant first lady."

Guy said, "I'm scared."

"That's your first fucking sensible comment."

"We got him, though. We made the world spin."

The old fuck *glowed*. Sweats and shitty grins.

"Tell me the rest of it."

"What about a toast to the fallen—"

"What about Rogers and the pro shooter?"

Guy coughed. "Okay, first things first. Mr. Hoover flew Littell in as soon as he heard, and I saw him over at DPD. The cops got Rogers on a sweep, but Littell let him out and misplaced the paperwork. He was carrying fake ID, so I think we're clear there."

Glitches/reglitches—

"The pro. Did he get out?"

"Heads up on that. He got down to McAllen and walked across the border. He left a message at my place in New Orleans, and I called him and got the all-clear."

"What about Rog—"

"He's at a motel in Fort Worth. Littell said the witnesses are confused and telling different stories, and Mr. Hoover's hell-bent to prove that it was all my boy. Littell said we've only got one guy to worry about."

Pete said, "Keep going. Don't make me work so hard."

"Okay, then. Littell said a railroad man put a half-ass ID on Rogers, so it's my considered opinion that we should clip him."

Pete shook his head. "It's too close to the hit. You want him to go back to work like nothing happened."

"Then you throw some fear into him."

"No. Let the backup do it. Have him pull a cop number."

That TV blared—"Nation grieves"/"sole killer."

Guy folded his arms. "There's one more thing."

"I'm listening."

"Okay, then. I talked to the pro. He thinks there's a chance that Jack Ruby put it together."

Ruby: Bagman/pimp/Littell's old snitch/strip-club entrepre—

"I had the crew at a safe house up in Oklahoma. Rogers called

Ruby and arranged for some entertainment. The pro said he showed up with two girls and some flunky, and they saw the rifles out back and—wait now—don't get your tits in a twist—I told the backup to brace Ruby and see what he knows."

The room dipped. Crash dimensions. Pete rode out the drop.

Guy said, "We might have to clip them."

Pete said, "No."

Guy *re*glowed. Guy previewed Heart Attack 3.

"*No*? The big man says *no*? The big man says no, like he doesn't know the Boys are talking, and they're saying he's lost his taste for the Life?"

Pete stood up. Pete cracked his thumbs. Pete flexed his hands. Pete grabbed the chair slats. Pete pulled. Pete ripped the chair to sticks.

Guy pissed his britches. Guy fucking plotzed. The stain spread. His crotch seeped. He doused the sheets.

Pete walked out. The hall dipped. The walls balanced him. He walked back to his suite. He stopped ten feet short. He heard his TV.

He heard Barb sob. He heard Barb throw chairs at a wall.

(Dallas, 11/22/63)

A dog shit on the runway. A stripper dodged turds. Welcome to the Carousel Club.

Cops clapped. Cops whooped. Cops ruled the room. The club was closed to the public. The owner loved Jackie. The owner loved JFK.

Let's mourn. Let's ride out this tsuris. Let's show some respect.

You badged in. The owner loved cops. Your host—Jack Ruby.

Wayne walked in. Wayne dropped Maynard Moore's name. Ruby seated him. Dallas cops ran tall. Boot heels did it. Wayne was six-one. The cops dwarfed him.

A bandstand adjoined the runway. A sax and drum worked. Two strippers stripped. The blonde looked like Lynette. The brunette looked like Janice.

Moore was late. The club was loud. The combo played "Night Train." Wayne sipped 7-Up. The music fucked with him. The drum pops set up pix.

Pop—he caps Wendell Durfee. Pop—he plants a throwdown piece.

A stripper swayed by. She wore a pastie-patch. Her crotch stubble showed. A cop snapped her G-string. She swayed his way.

Ruby worked the room.

He dumped ashtrays. He tossed scraps. He lured his dog off the ramp. He poured drinks. He lit cigarettes. He laid out some grief.

A fuck killed his President. The fuck was a beatnik. His bookkeeper split. She blew the coop. She blew him off. She wouldn't blow his friends.

He owed the IRS. Arden said she'd help. Arden was skunk cooze. Arden lied and stole. Arden had a fake address. A beatnik shot his hero.

Maynard Moore walked in.

He whooped. He rebel-yelled. He sailed his hat. A stripper snagged it.

Moore walked up to Ruby. Ruby went oh shit. The dog jumped in. Moore grabbed him. Moore kissed him. Moore tweaked his tail.

Ruby yukked. Boychik—you slay me!

Moore dropped the dog. Moore manhandled Ruby. He shoved him. He flicked his mezuzah. He knocked off his hat.

Wayne watched. Moore *squeezed* Ruby.

He jerked his necktie. He snapped his suspenders. He jabbed at his chest. Ruby squirmed. Ruby bumped a rubber machine.

Moore dressed him down. Ruby pulled a handkerchief. Ruby pat-dried his head.

Wayne walked over. Wayne caught Moore in tight.

"Pete's in town. People ain't gonna like what you might know, so you may be owin' some favors."

Wayne coughed. Moore turned around. Ruby squeezed his mezuzah chain.

Moore smiled. "Wayne, this is Jack. Jack's a Yankee, but we like him anyway."

Moore had pressing shit in Plano. Wayne said okay. Fuck it. Let's stall—let's postpone Wendell D.

Traffic was dead. A breeze stirred. Moore drove his off-duty sled. A Chevy 409—lake pipes and slicks—Stemmons Freeway faaaast.

Wayne gripped the dash-bar. Moore sipped Everclear. The fumes stung bad.

The radio howled. A preacher proselytized:

John F-for-Fruitcake Kennedy loved Pope Pinko. He sold his soul to the Jewnited Nations. God bless Lee H-for-Hero Oswald.

Wayne doused the volume. Moore laughed.

"You got a low capacity for the truth, unlike your daddy."

Wayne cracked his wind wing. "Are all the DPD guys like you, or did they waive the IQ test in your case?"

Moore winked. "DPD runs to the right side of the street. We got some Klan and we got some John Birch. It's like that pamphlet your daddy puts out. 'Do you score red or red, white, and blue?' "

Wayne felt rain. "His pamphlets make money. And you won't see him wearing a sheet in Pigshit, Texas."

"You certainly won't, to his everlasting discredit."

The rain came. The rain went. Wayne fugued on out. The fumes tickled. The car droned. He rehashed recent shit.

West Vegas: Assault One/eight counts. A white man beats up colored whores.

He picked them up. He took them home. He beat them and took snapshots—and LVPD didn't care.

He cared. He told Wayne Senior. Wayne Senior pooh-poohed it.

Moore pulled off the freeway. Moore trawled side streets. He hit his brights. He scanned curb plates. He drove down a tract row.

He grazed curbs. He read mailbox names. He found *the* box. He pulled over and stopped.

Wayne squinted. Wayne saw the name: "Bowers."

Wayne stretched. Moore stretched. Moore grabbed a sandwich bag.

"This won't take no more than two minutes."

Wayne yawned. Moore got out. Wayne got out and leaned on the car.

The house was drab. The lawn was brown. The house had peeled paint and chipped stucco.

Moore walked to the porch. Moore rang the bell. A man opened up. Moore badged him. Moore shoved him inside. Moore kicked the door shut.

Wayne stretched some kinks out. Wayne dug on the car.

He kicked the slicks. He touched the pipes. He popped the hood. He sniffed the fuel valves. He nailed the smell. He broke down the oxide components.

You're a cop now. You're a good one. You're a chemist still.

Somebody screamed. Wayne slammed the hood. It muffled scream #2.

Dogs barked. Curtains jerked. Neighbors scoped the Bowers pad.

Moore walked out.

He grinned. He weaved a tad. He wiped blood off his shirt.

They drove back to Big D. Moore chewed Red Man. He tuned in Wolfman Jack. He mimicked his howl. He lip-synced R&B.

They hit Browntown. They found the guy's shack: Four walls—all plywood and glue.

Moore parked on the lawn. Moore grazed a boss Lincoln. The windows were down. The interior glowed.

Moore spat juice. Moore sprayed the seats good.

"You best believe they'll name a car after Kennedy. And every nigger in captivity'll rob and rape to get one."

Wayne walked up. Moore trailed back. The door stood open. Wayne looked in. Wayne saw a colored guy.

The guy crouched. The guy *worked.* The guy fucked with his TV set. He tapped the dials. He tweaked the cord. He raised static and snow.

Wayne knocked. Moore walked in. Moore scoped this shrine shelf:

A plug-in JFK. Bobby cutouts. A Martin Luther King doll.

The guy saw them. He stood up. He shivered. He double-clutched.

Wayne walked in. "Are you Mr. Jefferson?"

Moore sprayed juice. Moore doused a chair.

"He's the boy. Aka 'Jeff,' aka 'Jeffy,' you think I don't do my homework?"

Jeff said, "That's me. Yessir."

Wayne smiled. "You're in no trouble. We're looking for a friend of—"

"How come you people got all these President names? Half the boys I take down got names more distinguished than mine."

"Yessir, that's true, but I don't know what answer to tell you, so—"

"I popped a boy named Roosevelt D. McKinley, and he didn't even know where his mama stole them names from, which is one sorry-ass state of affairs."

Jeff shrugged. Moore mimicked him. He went slack. He bugged his eyes. He pulled a beavertail sap.

The TV sparked. A picture blipped. There's Lee H. Oswald.

Moore spat on the screen. "There's the boy you should name your pickaninnies after. He killed my friend J. D. Tippit, who was one dick-swingin' white man, and it offends me to be in the same room as you on the day he died."

Jeff shrugged. Jeff looked at Wayne. Moore twirled his sap. The TV popped off. Bum tubes crackled.

Jeff twitched. His knees shook. Wayne touched his shoulder. Moore mimicked him. Moore swished.

"You boys are *suuuch* the pair. You'll be holdin' hands any damn second."

That tore—

Wayne shoved Moore. Moore tripped. Moore knocked a lamp down. Jeff shook nelly-style. Wayne shoved him in the kitchen.

They fit tight. The sink cramped them. Wayne toed the door shut.

"Wendell Durfee's running. He always runs to Dallas, so why don't you tell me what you know about that."

"Sir, I don't—"

"Don't call me 'sir,' just tell me what you know."

"Sir, I mean mister, I don't know where Wendell's at. If I'm lyin', I'm flyin'."

"You're shucking me. Stop it, or I'll hand you up to that cracker."

"Mister, I ain't woofin' you. I don't know where Wendell's at."

The walls shook. Shit cracked one room over. Wayne made the sounds:

Sap shots. Hard steel meets plywood and glue.

Jeff shook. Jeff gulped. Jeff picked a hangnail.

Wayne said, "Let's try this. You work at Dr Pepper. You got paid today."

"That's right. If I'm lyin', I'm—"

"And you made your probation payment."

"You ain't woofin' I did."

"Now, you've got some money left. It's burning a hole in your pocket. Wendell's your gambling buddy. There's some kind of payday crap game that you can point me to."

Jeff sucked his hangnail. Jeff gullllped.

"Then how come I ain't at that game right now?"

"Because you lent Wendell most of your money."

Glass broke. Wayne made the sound: One sap shot/one TV screen fucked.

"Wendell Durfee. Give him up, or I tell Tex that you've been porking little white kids."

Jeff lit a cigarette. Jeff choked on it. Jeff coughed smoke out.

"Liddy Baines, she used to go with Wendell. She knowed I owed him money, an' she came by an' said he was lookin' to get down to Mexico. I gave her all but five dollars of my check."

Wood cracked. The walls shook. The floor shook.

"Address?"

"Seventy-first and Dunkirk. The little white house two up from the corner."

"What about the game?"

"Eighty-third and Clifford. The alley by the warehouse."

Wayne opened the door. Jeff stood behind him. Jeff got in a runner's crouch. Moore saw Wayne. Moore bowed. Moore winked.

The TV was dead. The shelf shrine was dust. The walls were pulp and spit.

It got real.

Moore had a throwdown piece. Moore had a pump. A coroner owed him. He'd fudge the wound text.

Wayne went dry. Wayne got pinpricks. Wayne's nuts shriveled up.

They drove. They went Darktown-deep. They went by Liddy Baines' shack. Nobody was home—Liddy, where you at?

They hit a pay phone. Moore called Dispatch. Moore got Liddy Baines' stats: No wants/no warrants/no vehicle extant.

They drove to 83rd and Clifford. They passed junkyards and dumps. Liquor stores and blood banks. Mohammed's Mosque #12.

They passed the alley. They caught a tease: Streetlights/faces/a blanket spread out.

A fat man rolled. A plump man slapped his forehead. A thin man scooped cash.

Moore stopped at 82nd. Moore grabbed his pump. Wayne pulled his piece. Moore popped in earplugs.

"If he's there, we'll arrest him. Then we'll take him out to the sticks and cap him."

Wayne tried to talk. His throat closed. He squeaked. Moore winked. Moore yukked haw-haw.

They walked over. They cleaved to shadows. They crouched. The air dried up. The ground dropped. Wayne lost his feet.

They hit the alley. Wayne heard jive talk. Wayne saw Wendell Durfee.

His legs went. He stumbled. He toed a beer can. The dice men perked up.

Say what?

Who that?

Mama, that you?

Moore aimed. Moore fired. Moore caught three men low. He sprayed their legs. He diced their blanket. He chopped their money up.

Muzzle boom—twelve-gauge roar—high decibels in tight.

It knocked Wayne flat. Wayne went deaf. Wayne went powder blind. Moore shot a trashcan. The sucker *flew*.

Wayne rubbed his eyes. Wayne got partial sight. Dice men screamed. Dice men scattered. Wendell Durfee ran.

Moore aimed high. Moore sprayed a wall. Pellets bounced and whizzed. They caught Durfee's hat. They sliced the band. They blew the feather up.

Durfee ran. Wayne ran.

He aimed his piece up and out. Durfee backward-aimed his. They fired. Blips lit the alley. Shots cut the walls.

Wayne *saw* it. Wayne *felt* it. Wayne didn't *hear* shit.

He fired. He missed. Durfee fired. Durfee missed. Barrel flames. Sound waves. No *real* sound worth shit.

They ran. They stopped. They fired. They sprinted full-out.

Wayne popped six shots—one full cylinder. Durfee popped eight shots—one full-load clip.

The flares stopped. No light. No directional signs—

Wayne stumbled.

He slid. He fell. He hit gravel. He ate alley grit. He smelled cordite. He licked cigar butts and dirt.

He rolled over. He saw roof lights. He saw cherry lights twirl. Two prowl cars—*behind* him—DPD Fords.

He caught some sounds. He stood up. He caught his breath. He walked back. His feet scraped. He heard it.

Moore stood there. Cops stood there. The dice men lay prone. They were cuffed/shackled/fucked.

Shredded pants. Pellet burns and gouges—cuts to white bone.

They thrashed. Wayne heard partial screams.

Moore walked over. Moore said something. Moore yelled.

Wayne caught “Bowers.” His ears popped. He caught whole sounds.

Moore flashed his sandwich bag. Moore spread the flaps. Wayne saw blood and gristle. Wayne saw a man’s thumb.

(Dallas, 11/23/63)

Window wreaths / flags / ledge displays. 8:00 a.m. —one day later—the Glenwood Apartments loves Jack.

Two floors. Twelve front windows. Flowers and JFK toys.

Littell leaned on his car. The facade expanded. He got the sun. He got Arden Smith's car. He got her U-Haul.

He borrowed a Bureau car. He ran Arden Smith. She came back clean. He got her vehicle stats. He nailed her Chevy.

She felt dirty. She saw the hit. She ran from the PD. That U-Haul said *RUNNER*.

She lived in 2-D. He'd checked the courtyard. Her windows faced in—no flags/no trinkets/no shrine.

He worked to midnight. He cleared an office space. Floor 3 was bedlam. Cops grilled Oswald. Camera crews roamed.

His bum ploy worked. Rogers walked. The bums escaped clean. He saw Guy B. He told him to brace Lee Bowers.

He read the wit statements. He read the DPD notes. They played ambiguous. Mr. Hoover would issue a mandate. Agents would secure it. Single-shooter evidence would cohere.

Lee Oswald was trouble. Guy said so. Guy called him "nuts."

Lee didn't shoot. The pro shooter did. Said pro shot from Lee's floor perch. Rogers shot from the fence.

Lee knew Guy's cutout. Cops and Feds worked him all night. He named no names. Guy said he knew why.

The kid craved attention. The kid was fucked-up. The kid craved the solo limelight.

Littell checked his watch—8:16 a.m.—sun and low clouds.

He counted flags. He counted wreaths. The Glenwood loved

Jack. He knew why. He used to love Jack. He used to love Bobby.

He never met Jack. He met Bobby once.

He tried to join them. Kemper Boyd pushed his case. Bobby disdained his credentials. Boyd spread his loyalty. Boyd worked for Jack and Bobby. Boyd worked for the CIA.

Boyd got Littell a job. Ward, meet Carlos Marcello.

Carlos hated Jack and Bobby. Jack and Bobby spurned Littell. He built his own hate. He fine-tuned the aesthetic.

He hated Jack. He *knew* Jack. Scrutiny undermined image. Jack was glib. Jack had pizzazz. Jack had no rectitude.

Bobby defined rectitude. Bobby *lived* rectitude. Bobby punished bad men. He hated Bobby now. Bobby dismissed him. Bobby spurned his respect.

Mr. Hoover bugged Mob hangouts. Mr. Hoover picked up hints. He smelled the hit. He never told Jack. He never told Bobby.

Mr. Hoover knew Littell. Mr. Hoover dissected his hatred. Mr. Hoover urged him to hurt Bobby.

Littell had evidence. It indicted Joe Kennedy for long-term Mob collusion. He met Bobby—for one half hour—just five days back.

He stopped by his office. He played him a tape. The tape nailed Joe Kennedy. Bobby was smart. Bobby might link tape to hit. Bobby might gauge the tape as a threat.

Do not talk Mob Hit. Do not stain the name Kennedy. Do not stain sainted Jack. Feel complicitous. Feel guilty. Feel baaaad.

Your Mob Crusade killed your brother. We killed Jack to fuck you.

Littell watched a newscast. Late last night—Air Force One hits D.C. Bobby walks out. Bobby walks calm. Bobby consoles Jackie.

Littell killed Kemper Boyd. Carlos ordered it. Littell shot Boyd on Thursday. It hurt. He owed the Boys. It cancelled his debt.

He saw Bobby with Jackie. It hurt more than Boyd.

Arden Smith walked out.

She walked out fast. She lugged a satchel. She carried skirts and sheets. Littell walked over. Arden Smith looked up. Littell flashed his ID.

“Yes?”

“Dealey Plaza, remember? You witnessed the shooting.”

She leaned on the U-Haul. She dropped the satchel. She weighed down the skirts.

“I watched you at the squadroom. You measured your chances and made your move, and I have to say I'm impressed. But you'll have to explain why you—"

"My information was redundant. Five or six people heard what I did, and I wanted to put the whole thing behind me."

Littell leaned on the car. "And now you're moving."

"Just temporarily."

"Are you leaving Dallas?"

"Yes, but that has nothing to do—"

"I'm sure it has nothing to do with what you saw in the motorcade, and all I'm interested in is why you stole your preliminary statement and driver's license from the witness log and left without permission."

She brushed her hair back. "Look, Mr.—"

"Littell."

"Mr. Littell, I tried to do my citizen's duty. I went to the police department and tried to leave an anonymous statement, but an officer detained me. Really, I'd had a shock, and I just wanted to go home and start packing."

Her voice worked. It was firm and southern. It was educated.

Littell smiled. "Can we go inside? I'm uncomfortable talking out here."

"All right, but you'll have to forgive my apartment."

Littell smiled. She smiled. She walked ahead. Kids ran by. They shot toy guns. A boy yelled, "Don't shoot me, Lee!"

The door was open. The front room was chaos. The front room was packed and dollied.

She shut the door. She squared off chairs. She grabbed a coffee cup. They sat down. She lit a cigarette. She balanced the cup.

Littell pulled his chair back. Smoke bothered him. He pulled his notebook. He tapped his pen.

"What did you think of John Kennedy?"

"That's an odd question."

"I'm just curious. You don't seem like someone who's easily charmed, and I can't picture you standing around to watch a man drive by in a car."

She crossed her legs. "Mr. Littell, you don't know me. I think your question says more about you and Mr. Kennedy than you might be willing to admit."

Littell smiled. "Where are you from?"

"Decatur, Georgia."

“Where are you moving to?”

“I thought I’d try Atlanta.”

“Your age?”

“You know my age, because you checked me out before you came here.”

Littell smiled. She smiled. She dropped ash in her cup.

“I thought FBI men worked in pairs.”

“We’re short-handed. We weren’t planning on an assassination this weekend.”

“Where’s your gun? All the men in that office had revolvers.”

He squeezed his pen. “You saw my identification.”

“Yes, but you’re taking too much guff from me. Something isn’t quite right here.”

The pen snapped. Ink dripped. Littell wiped his hands on his coat.

“You’re a pro. I knew it yesterday, and you just pushed too hard and confirmed it. You’re going to have to convince me—”

The phone rang. She stared at him. The phone rang three times. She got up. She walked to the bedroom. She shut the door.

Littell wiped his hands. Littell smeared his trousers and coat. He looked around. He broke down the room. He quadrant-scanned.

There—

A chest on a dolly. Four drawers all packed.

He got up. He checked the drawers. He brushed socks and underwear. He brushed a slick surface—card-size plastic—he pulled it out.

There—

A Mississippi driver’s license—for Arden Elaine *Coates*.

A P.O. box address. Date of birth: 4/15/27. Her *Texas* DL listed 4/15/26.

He put it back. He shut the drawers. He sat down fast. He crossed his legs. He doodled. He made mock notes.

Arden Smith walked out. Arden Smith smiled and *posed*.

Littell coughed. “Why did you watch the motorcade from Dealey Plaza?”

“I heard you had the best view there.”

“That’s not quite true.”

“I’m just saying what I heard.”

“Who told you?”

She blinked. “I wasn’t told. I read it in the paper when they announced the route.”

“When was that?”

“I don’t know. A month ago, maybe.”

Littell shook his head. “That isn’t true. They announced the route ten days ago.”

She shrugged. “I’m bad at dates.”

“No, you’re not. You’re good at them, just like you’re good at everything you try.”

“You don’t know that. You don’t know *me*.”

Littell stared at her. She popped goose bumps.

“You’re scared, and you’re running.”

“*You’re* scared, and this isn’t a real FBI roust.”

He popped goose bumps. “Where do you work?”

“I’m a freelance bookkeeper.”

“That’s not what I asked you.”

“I structure deals to get businessmen out of trouble with the IRS.”

“I asked, ‘*Where do you work*?’ ”

Her hands jumped. “I work at a place called the Carousel Club.”

His hands jumped. The Carousel/Jack Ruby/Mob guy/bent cops.

He looked at her. She looked at him. Their brainwaves crossed.

(Dallas, 11/23/63)

Shit security. Fucked-up / negligent / weak.

Pete toured the PD. Guy scored him a pass. He didn't need it. Some geek sold dupes. Said geek sold weed and pussy pix.

The ground doors stood open. Geeks hobnobbed. Door guards posed for pix. Camera cords snaked up the sidewalk. News vans jammed up the street.

Reporters roamed. Let's bug the DA. Let's bug the cops. *Lots* of cops—Feds/DPD/Sheriff's—all motormouthed.

Oswald's pink. Oswald's Red. Oswald loves Fidel. He loves folk music. He loves dark trim. He loves Martin Lucifer Coon. We know it's him. We got his gun. He did it alone. I think he's queer. He can't piss with men in the room.

Pete roamed. Pete checked hall routes. Pete sketched floor plans. He nursed a headache—a looong one—the fucker had legs.

Barb KNEW.

She said, "You killed him. You and Ward and those Outfit guys you work for."

He lied. He bombed. Barb looked through him.

She said, "Let's leave Dallas." He said, "No." She split to her gig.

He walked to the club. Biz was bad. Barb sang to three drag queens. She looked straight through him. He walked back alone.

He slept alone. Barb slept in the john.

Pete roamed. Pete passed Homicide. Pete stopped at room 317. Geeks cruised for looks. Geeks framed the door. A cop cracked it wide and obliged.

There's Oswald. He looks beat-on. He's cuffed to a chair.

The crowd closed in. The cop shut the door. Talk fired up:

I knew J.D. J.D. was *Klan.* J.D. was *not.* They got to move him soon. They sure will—to the County Jail.

Pete roamed. Pete dodged geeks with carts. Geeks sold poorboys. Geeks snarfed them. Geeks slurped ketchup.

Pete sketched hall routes. Pete took notes.

One bunco pen. One holding tank adjacent. Basement cells. A press room adjacent. Briefings/newsmen/camera crews.

Pete roamed. Pete saw Jack Ruby. Jack's hawking pens shaped like dicks.

He saw Pete. He seized up. He freaked. He dropped his dick pens. He bent loooow and scooped up.

His pants ripped. Dig those plaid BVDs.

Maynard Moore rubbed him wrong.

His bad breath. His bad teeth. His Klan repartee.

They met at a parking lot. They sat in Guy's car. They faced a nigger church and a blood bank. Moore brought a six-pack. Moore sucked one down. Moore tossed the can out.

Pete said, "Did you brace Ruby?"

Moore said, "Yeah, I did. And I think he knows."

Pete slid his seat back. Moore raised his knees.

"Whoa, now. You're crowdin' me."

Guy dumped his ashtray. "Let's have the details. You can't shut Jack up once he starts talking."

Moore cracked beer #2. "Well, everybody—the crew, I mean—is up at Jack Zangetty's motel in Altus, Oklahoma, where men are men and cows are scared."

Pete cracked his knuckles. "Cut the travelogue."

Moore belched. "Schlitz, breakfast of champions."

Guy said, "Maynard, goddamnit."

Moore giggled. "Okay, so Jack R. gets a call from his old friend Jack Z. It seems that the pilot guy and the French guy want some cooze, so Jack R. says he'll bring some up."

The pilot: Chuck Rogers. The French guy: the pro. Let's observe the no-names policy.

Pete said, "Keep going."

Moore said, "Okay, so Ruby goes up there with his buddy Hank Killiam and these girls Betty McDonald and Arden something.

Betty agrees to put out, but Arden don't, which pisses off the French guy something fierce. He slaps her, she burns him with a hot plate, then hightails. Now, Ruby don't know where Arden lives, and he thinks she's got a string of aliases. And the worst part is that everybody saw the rifles and targets, and they might've seen a map of Dealey Plaza layin' around."

Guy smiled. Guy made the finger-throat sign. Pete shook his head. Pete flashed *waaaay* back.

A bomb hits. Flames whoosh. A woman's hair ignites.

Moore belched. "Schlitz, Milwaukee's finest beer."

Pete said, "You're going to clip Oswald."

Moore gagged. Moore sprayed beer suds.

"Uuuh-*uuuuh*. Not this boy. That's a kamikaze mission that you ain't sendin' me on, not when I got an extradition job and a candy-ass partner who won't pull his weight."

Guy dipped his seat. Guy pushed Moore back.

"You and Tippit fucked up. You owe that marker, so you have to pay it off."

Moore cracked beer #3. "Uuuh-uuuuh. I'm not flushin' my life down the shitter 'cause I owe some eye-talians a few dollars that they won't even miss."

Pete smiled. "It's all right, Maynard. You just find out when they're moving him. We'll do the rest."

Moore burped. "I'll do that. That's a job that won't interfere with the other affairs I got goin'."

Pete reached back. Pete popped the rear hatch. Moore climbed out. Moore stretched. Moore waved bye-bye.

Guy said, "Peckerwood trash."

Moore shagged his 409. Moore laid rubber large.

Pete said, "I'll kill him."

Betty McDonald lived in Oak Cliff—Shitsville, U.S.A.

Pete called DPD. Pete played cop. Pete got her rap sheet: Four prosty beefs/one hot-check caper/one dope bounce.

He tapped out on "Arden." He had no last name.

He went by the Moonbeam Lounge. Carlos owned points. Joe Campisi ran the on-site handbook.

Joe owned the DPD. Cops placed bets. Cops lost. Cops made Joe's collections. Joe shylocked large—vig plus 20%.

Pete schmoozed with Joe. Pete borrowed ten cold. Pete tagged it a margin risk. Nobody said clip them. Nobody said scare them off. Nobody said shit. Guy wasn't Outfit. Guy's wishes meant shit.

Joe supplied a calzone. Pete ate on the freeway. The cheese fucked up his teeth.

He got off. He toured Oak Cliff. He found the address: A shotgun shack/dingy/three small rooms tops.

He parked. He dropped five G's in the calzone box. He schlepped it on up. He knocked on the door. He waited. He checked for eyewits.

Nobody home—zero eyewits.

He got out his comb. He flexed the tines. He picked the lock clean. He walked in and closed the door slow.

The front room smelled—maryjane and cabbage—window light squared him away.

Front room/kitchen/bedroom. Three rooms in a row.

He walked to the kitchen. He opened the fridge. A cat rubbed his legs. He tossed him some fish. The cat scarfed it up. Pete scarfed some Cheez Whiz.

He toured the pad. The cat followed him. He paced the front room. He pulled the drapes. He pulled up a chair and sat by the door.

The cat hopped in his lap. The cat clawed the calzone box. The room was cold. The chair was soft. The walls torqued him back.

Memory Lane. L.A.—12/14/49.

He's a cop. He breaks County strikes. He works *goooood* sidelines. He pulls shakedowns. He extorts queers. He raids the Swish Alps.

He's a card-game guard. He's a scrape procurer. He's Quebecois French. He fought the war. He got green-card Americanized.

Late '48—his brother Frank hits L.A.

Frank was a doctor. Frank had bad habits. Frank made bad friends. Frank whored. Frank gambled. Frank lost money.

Frank did scrapes. Frank scraped Rita Hayworth. Frank was Abortionist to the Stars. Frank played cards. Frank lost money. Frank dug Mickey Cohen's regular game.

Frank partied with scrape folks. Frank met Ruth Mildred Cressmeyer. Ruth did scrapes. Ruth loved her son Huey. Huey did heists.

Huey robbed Mickey's game. Huey's face mask slipped. The players ID'd him. Pete had the flu. Pete took the night off. Mickey told Pete to kill Huey.

Huey laid low. Pete found his pad: An ex-brothel in El Segundo.

Pete torched the pad. Pete stood in the backyard. Pete watched the house flames. Four shapes ran out. Pete shot them. Pete let them scream and burn.

It was dark. Their hair plumed. Smoke blitzed their faces. The papers played it up—FOUR DEAD IN BEACH TORCH—the papers ID'd the vics:

Ruth. Huey. Huey's girlfriend.

And:

One Canuck doctor—François Bondurant.

Someone called their dad. Someone snitched Pete off. His dad called him. His dad begged: Say NO. Say it wasn't YOU.

Pete stammered. Pete tried. Pete failed. His parents grieved. His parents sucked tailpipe fumes. His parents decomped in their car.

The cat fell asleep. Pete stroked him. Time schizzed. He dug on the dark.

He dozed. He stirred. He heard something. The door opened. Light shot straight in.

Pete jumped up. The cat tumbled. The calzone box flew.

There's Betty Mac.

She's got blond hair. She's got curves. She's got harlequin shades.

She saw Pete. She yelled. Pete grabbed her. Pete kicked the door shut.

She scratched. She yelled. She clawed his neck. He covered her mouth. She drew her lips back. She bit him.

He stumbled. He kicked the calzone box. He tripped a wall switch. A light went on. The cash fell out.

Betty looked down. Betty saw the money. Pete let his hand go. Pete rubbed his bite wound.

"There, Jesus Christ. Just get out before someone hurts you."

She eased up. He eased up. She turned around. She saw his face.

Pete hit the wall switch. The room light died. They stood close. They caught their breath. They leaned on the door.

Pete said, "Arden?"

Betty coughed—a smoker's hack—Pete smelled her last reefer.

"I'm not going to hurt her. Come on, you know what we've got

—”

She touched his lips. “Don’t say it. Don’t put a name—”

“Then tell me where—”

“Arden Burke. I think she’s at the Glenwood Apartments.”

Pete brushed by her. Her hair caught his face. Her perfume stuck to his clothes. He got outside. His hand throbbed. The sun killed his eyes.

Traffic was bad. Pete knew why.

Dealey Plaza was close. Let’s take the kids. Let’s dig on history and hot dogs.

He split Oak Cliff. He found Arden’s building. It ran forty units plus. He parked outside. He checked access routes. The courtyard ruled B&Es out.

He checked the mail slots—no Arden *Burke* listed—Arden *Smith* in 2-D.

Pete toured the courtyard. Pete scanned doorplates: 2-A/B/C—

Stop right—

He made the suit. He made the build. He made the thin hair. He stepped back. He crouched. He *looked.*

Right there—

Ward Littell and a tall woman. Talking close and closing out the world.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/23/63. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: “Recorded at the Director’s Request”/“Classified Confidential 1-A: Director’s Eyes Only.” Speaking: Director Hoover, Ward J. Littell.

JEH: Mr. Littell?

WJL: Good afternoon, Sir. How are you?

JEH: Forgo the amenities and tell me about Dallas. The metaphysical dimensions of this alleged tragedy do not interest me. Get to the point.

WJL: I would call things encouraging, Sir. There has been a minimum of talk about a conspiracy, and a very strong consensus seems to have settled in, despite some ambiguous statements from the witnesses. I’ve spent a good deal of time at the PD, and I’ve been told that President Johnson has called both Chief Curry and the DA personally, and has expressed his wish that the consensus be confirmed.

JEH: Lyndon Johnson is a blunt and persuasive man, and he speaks a language those cowpokes understand. Now, continuing with the witnesses.

WJL: I would say that the contradictory ones could be intimidated, discredited and successfully debriefed.

JEH: You’ve read the witness logs, observed the interviews and have been through the inevitable glut of lunatic phone tips. Is that correct?

WJL: Yes, Sir. The phone tips were especially fanciful and vindictive. John Kennedy had engendered a good deal of resentment in Dallas.

JEH: Yes, and entirely justified. Continuing with the witnesses. Have you conducted any interviews yourself?

WJL: No, Sir.

JEH: You’ve turned up no witnesses with especially provocative stories?

WJL: No, Sir. What we have is an alternative consensus pertaining to the number of shots and their trajectories. It’s a confusing text, Sir. I don’t think it will stand up to the official version.

JEH: How would you rate the investigation to date?

WJL: As incompetent.

JEH: And how would you define it?

WJL: As chaotic.

JEH: How would you assess the efforts to protect Mr. Oswald?

WJL: As shoddy.

JEH: Does that disturb you?

WJL: No.

JEH: The Attorney General has requested periodic updates. What do you suggest that I tell him?

WJL: That a fatuous young psychopath killed his brother, and that he acted alone.

JEH: The Dark Prince is no cretin. He must suspect the factions that most insiders would.

WJL: Yes, Sir. And I'm sure he feels complicitous.

JEH: I hear an unseemly tug of compassion in your voice, Mr. Littell. I will not comment on your protractedly complex relationship with Robert F. Kennedy.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I cannot help but think of your blowhard client, James Riddle Hoffa. The Prince is his bête noire.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I'm sure Mr. Hoffa would like to know what the Prince really thinks of this gaudy homicide.

WJL: I would like to know myself, Sir.

JEH: I cannot help but think of your brutish client, Carlos Marcello. I suspect that he would enjoy access to Bobby's troubled thoughts.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: It would be nice to have a source close to the Prince.

WJL: I'll see what I can do.

JEH: Mr. Hoffa gloats in an unseemly manner. He told the New York Times, quote, Bobby Kennedy is just another lawyer now, unquote. It's a felicitous sentiment, but I think there are those in the Italian aggregation who would appreciate more discretion on Mr. Hoffa's part.

WJL: I'll advise him to shut his mouth, Sir.

JEH: On a related topic. Did you know that the Bureau has a file on Jefferson Davis Tippit?

WJL: No, Sir.

JEH: The man belonged to the Ku Klux Klan, National States'; Rights Party, National Renaissance Party and a dubious new splinter group called the Thunderbolt Legion. He was a close associate of a Dallas PD officer named Maynard Delbert Moore, a man of similar ideological beliefs and a reportedly puerile demeanor.

WJL: Did you get your information from a DPD source, Sir?

JEH: No. I have a correspondent in Nevada. He's a conservative pamphleteer and mail-order solicitor with very deep and diverse connections on the right flank.

WJL: A Mormon, Sir?

JEH: Yes. All the Nevadan führer manqués are Mormons, and this man is arguably the most gifted.

WJL: He sounds interesting, Sir.

JEH: You're leading me, Mr. Littell. I know full well that Howard Hughes wets his pants for Mormons and has two greedy eyes on Las Vegas. I'll always share a discreet amount of information with you, if you broach the request in a manner that does not insult my intelligence.

WJL: I'm sorry, Sir. You understood my design, and the man does sound interesting.

JEH: He's quite useful and diversified. For example, he runs a hate-tract press covertly. He's planted a number of his subscribers as informants in Klan groups that the Bureau has targeted for mail-fraud indictments. He helps eliminate his hate-mail competition in that manner.

WJL: And he knew the late Officer Tippit.

JEH: Knew or knew of. Judged or did not judge as ideologically unsound and outré. I'm always amusingly surprised by who knows who in which overall contexts. For example, the Dallas SAC told me that a former Bureau man named Guy Williams Banister is in town this weekend. Another agent told me, independently, that he's seen your friend Pierre Bondurant. Imaginative people might point to this confluence and try to link men like that to your mutual chum Carlos Marcello and his hatred of the Royal Family, but I am not disposed to such flights of fancy.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Your tone tells me that you wish to ask a favor. For Mr. Hughes, perhaps?

WJL: Yes, Sir. I'd like to see the main Bureau file on the

Las Vegas hotel-casino owners, along with the files on the Nevada Gaming Commission, Gaming Control Board, and the Clark County Liquor Board.

JEH: The answer is yes. Quid pro quo?

WJL: Certainly, Sir.

JEH: I would like to forestall potential talk on Mr. Tippit. If the Dallas Office has a separate file on him, I would like it to disappear before my less trusted colleagues get an urge to take the information public.

WJL: I'll take care of it tonight, Sir.

JEH: Do you think the single-gunman consensus will hold?

WJL: I'll do everything I can to insure it.

JEH: Good day, Mr. Littell.

WJL: Good day, Sir.

(Dallas, 11/23/63)

Glut. Waste. Bullshit.

The hotel copped pleas. The hotel blamed Lee Oswald.

The joint bulged—capacity-plus—newsmen shared rooms. They hogged the phone lines. They sapped the hot water. They swamped the room-service crew.

The hotel copped pleas. The hotel blamed Lee Oswald.

Our guests mourn. Our guests weep. Our guests watch TV. They stay in. They call home. They hash out The Show.

Wayne paced his suite. Wayne nursed an earache—that muzzle boom stuck.

Room service called. They said we're sorry—we're running late. Maynard Moore *didn't* call. Durfee escaped. Moore let it ride.

Moore didn't issue warrants. Moore didn't issue holds. Moore wrote up the crap-game snafu. One guy lost a kneecap. One guy lost two pints of blood. One guy lost a toe.

Mr. Bowers lost a thumb. Wayne nursed the picture—all-nite reruns.

He tossed all night. He watched TV. He made phone calls. He called the Border Patrol. He issued crossing holds. Four units grabbed look-alikes and called him.

Wendell Durfee had knife scars—too fucking bad—the look-alikes had none.

He called Lynette. He called Wayne Senior. Lynette mourned JFK. Lynette said trite shit. Wayne Senior cracked jokes.

Jack's last word was "pussy." Jack groped a nurse and a nun.

Janice came on. Janice extolled Jack's style. Janice mourned Jack's hair. Wayne laughed. Wayne Senior was bald. Janice

Tedrow—touché!

Room service called. They said we're sorry. We know your supper's late.

Wayne watched TV. Wayne goosed the sound. Wayne caught a press gig.

Newsmen lobbed questions. One cop went wild. Oswald was a "lethal loner!" Wayne saw Jack Ruby. He carried his dog. He passed out dick pens and French ticklers.

The cop calmed down. He said we'll move Oswald tomorrow—late morning looks good.

The phone rang. Wayne killed the sound.

He picked up. "Who's this?"

"It's Buddy Fritsch, and it took me all day to get a call in to you."

"Sorry, Lieutenant. Things are a bit crazy here."

"So I gathered. I also gathered that you had a run-in with Wendell Durfee, and you let him get away."

Wayne made fists. "Who told you?"

"The Border Patrol. They were checking on your fugitive warrant."

"Do you want to hear my version?"

"I don't want to hear excuses. I don't want to know why you're enjoying your luxury hotel suite when you should be out shaking the trees."

Wayne kicked a footrest. It hit the TV.

"Do you know how *big* the border is? Do you know how many crossing posts there are?"

Fritsch coughed. "I know you're sitting on your keester waiting for callbacks that won't come if that nigger went to ground in Dallas, and for all I know you're living it up with that six thousand dollars the casino boys gave you, without doing the job that they paid you for."

Wayne kicked a rug. "I didn't ask for that money."

"No, you sure didn't. And you didn't refuse it, either, 'cause you're the type of boy who likes to have things both ways, so don't—"

"Lieutenant—"

"Don't interrupt me until you outrank me, and let me tell you this now. You can go either way in the Department. There's boys who say Wayne Junior's a white man, and there's boys who say he's a weak sister. Now, if you take care of this, you'll shut the mouths on those latter boys and make everyone *real* proud of you."

His eyes teared up. "Lieutenant ..."

"That's better. That's the Wayne Junior I like to hear."

Wayne wiped his eyes. "He's down at the border. All my instincts tell me that."

Fritsch laughed. "I think your instincts are telling you lots of things, so I'll tell you this. That file I gave you was Sheriff's, so you see if DPD has a file. That nigger's got to know some other niggers in Dallas, or my name isn't Byron B. Fritsch."

Wayne grabbed his holster. His blocked ear popped.

"I'll give it my best."

"*No*. You find him and kill him."

A door guard let him in. Some Shriners tagged along. The stairs were jammed. The halls were crammed. The lifts were sardine-packed.

People bumped. People chomped hot dogs. People spilled coffee and Cokes. The Shriners pushed through. They wore funny hats. They waved pens and autograph books.

Wayne followed them. They plowed camera guys. They pushed their way upstairs.

They made floor 3. They made the squadroom. It was *double-packed.*

Cops. Newsmen. Misdemeanants cuffed to chairs. Pinned-out ID: shields/stars/press cards.

Wayne pinned his badge on. The noise hurt. His blocked ear repopped. He looked around. He saw the squad bay. He saw cubicles and office doors.

Burglary/Bunco. Auto Theft/Forgery. Homicide/Arson/Theft.

He walked over. He tripped on a wino. A newsman laughed. The wino shook his cuff chain. The wino soliloquized.

Jackie needs the big *braciole*. Widows crave it. *Playboy* magazine says so.

Wayne hit a side hall. Wayne read door plates. Wayne saw Maynard Moore. Moore missed him. Moore stood in a storeroom. Moore cranked a mimeo press.

Wayne ducked by. Wayne passed a break room. Wayne heard a

TV blare. A cop watched a press-room feed—live from downstairs.

Wayne checked doorways. Jack Ruby brushed by—leeched to a *very* big cat. He hung on him. He bugged him. He kvetched:

"Pete, Pete, *pleeease.*"

Wayne veered by a fish tank. Fish howled within. A perv stuck his dick through the mesh. He stroked it. He wiggled it. He sang "Some Enchanted Evening."

Wayne doubled back. Wayne found the file room. A stand-up space with twelve drawers—two marked "KAs."

He shut the door. He popped the "A to L" drawer. He found a blue sheet:

Durfee, Wendell (NMI).

He skimmed it. He got repeat shit and one new KA:

Rochelle Marie Freelon—DOB 10/3/39. Two kids by Whipout Wendell. 8819 Harvey Street/Dallas.

Two file notes:

12/8/56: Rochelle harbors Wendell/the Sheriff wants him/he's got nine bench warrants due. 7/5/62: Rochelle violates *her* parole.

She leaves Texas. She drives to Vegas. She visits Wistful Wendell D. No vehicle stats/recent contact/two cubs by Wendell D.

Wayne copied the data. Wayne replaced the file. Wayne drawered loose sheets up. He walked out. He cruised hallways. He passed the break room.

The TV snagged him. He saw *something weird*. He stopped. He leaned in. He looked.

There's a fat man. He's facing a mike. One hand's in a splint. *One* hand—tight gauze—no *thumb*.

A band ID'd him: "Witness Lee Bowers."

Bowers talked. Bowers' voice broke.

"I was in the tower right before he was shot … and … well … I sure didn't see anything."

Bowers blipped off. A cartoon ad blipped on. Bucky Beaver yap-yap-yapped. The fuck hawked Ipana toothpaste.

Wayne went cold—Popsicle chills—ice down his shorts.

A cop said, "You okay, hoss? You look a little green at the gills."

Wayne borrowed a DPD car. Wayne went out alone.

He got directions. Harvey Street was Darktown. Cops called it the Congo and Coonecticut.

Bowers and Moore—reprise that—do it very slooow.

Wayne tried—it was easy—it was shortbread cake.

Moore was crazy. Moore was bent. Moore drank jar brew. He might push uppers. He might book bets. Bowers might be bent too. They fell out. Moore got pissed. Moore cut hisself a thumb.

Wayne hit Darktown. Wayne found Harvey Street. It was the shits—shacks and hen coops—connected dirt yards.

8819: Dead still and dark.

He parked out front. He hit his brights. He nailed the one window: No window shades/no furniture/no drapes.

Wayne got out. Wayne grabbed a flashlight. Wayne circled the shack. He cut through the backyard. He bumped furniture.

Big piles—yard-sale dimensions. Sofas and chairs—all cheap stuff.

He strafed it. His light roused a hen. She fluffed full. She made claws. She squawked.

Wayne kicked a cushion. A light hit *him*. A man laughed.

"It's my property now. I got a receipt that says so."

Wayne covered his eyes. "Did Wendell Durfee sell it to you?"

"That's right. Him and Rochelle."

"Did he say where they were going?"

The man coughed. "Out of your redneck jurisdiction."

Wayne walked up. The man was fat and high yellow. He twirled his flashlight. The beam jumped.

Wayne said, "I'm not DPD."

The man tapped his badge. "You're that Vegas guy looking for Wendell."

Wayne smiled. Wayne unpinned his coat. Wayne repinned his belt. The man flipped a porch switch. The yard lit up. A pit bull materialized.

Brindle flecks and muscle. Jaw power for two.

Wayne said, "Nice dog."

The man said, "He liked Wendell, so I liked him too."

Wayne walked up. The pit licked his hand. Wayne scratched his ears.

The man said, "I don't always go by that rule, though."

The pit made a fuss. The pit reared and batted his paws.

"Because I'm a policeman?"

"Because Wendell told me how your town works."

"Wendell tried to shoot me, Mr.…"

"It's Willis Beaudine, and Wendell tried to shoot you because you tried to shoot him. Now, tell me that Casino Council didn't give you some recreation money when they put that bounty on Wendell."

Wayne sat on a porch step. The pit nuzzled him.

Beaudine said, "Dogs can be fooled, just like anyone else."

"You're saying Wendell and Rochelle made a run for Mexico."

Beaudine smiled. "Them and their kids. You want my guess? They're decked out in sombreros and having a ball this very second."

Wayne shook his head. "It's bad for coloreds down there. The Mexicans hate them like some people in Vegas do."

Beaudine shook his head. "Like most or all, you mean. Like that dealer guy that Wendell cut. The same guy who won't let coloreds piss in his washroom, the same guy who beat up an old woman for selling *Watchtowers* out of his parking lot."

Wayne looked around. The yard furniture trapped dirt. The yard furniture stunk.

Spilled food. Liquor. Dog fumes. Chipped wood and stuffing exposed.

Wayne stretched. His blocked ear popped. He got This Craaazy Idea.

"Can you place a long-distance call for me?"

Beaudine hiked his belt. "Sure … I guess I could."

"The Border Patrol station at Laredo. Make it person-to-person. Ask for the watch commander."

Beaudine hiked his belt. Wayne smiled. Beaudine *snapped* his belt—hard.

Craaazy—

Beaudine walked inside. Beaudine hit some lights. Beaudine dialed a phone. Wayne nuzzled the pit. The pit kissed him. The pit swiped his tongue.

Beaudine pulled the phone out. The cord twanged. Wayne grabbed the receiver.

"Captain?"

"Yes. Who's this?"

"Sergeant Tedrow, Las Vegas PD."

"Oh, shit. I was hoping you'd call when we had some good news."

"Is there *bad* news?"

"Yes. Your fugitive, a woman, and two children tried to cross at McAllen an hour ago, but were turned back. Your boy was intoxicated, and nobody made him in time. Lieutenant Fritsch sent us a teletype with his picture, but we didn't make the connection until—"

Wayne hung up. Beaudine grabbed the phone. Beaudine snapped his belt—*hard*.

"This better be good. That was a two-dollar call."

Wayne pulled out his wallet. Wayne forked up two bucks.

"If he tries to cross again, they'll get him. But if he comes back here, you tell him I'll walk him over myself."

Beaudine hiked his belt. "Why would you take that kind of risk for Wendell?"

"Your dog likes me. Leave it at that."

The Adolphus bar—all male at midnight. The big Jack postmortem.

Pro-Jack stools. Anti-Jack stools adjacent. Youth. Outer space. *Ich bin ein Berliner*.

Wayne sat between factions. Wayne heard hi-fi bullshit in stereo sound.

Cowboy trash—faux tall—big boots don't count. They called Jack "Jack." They took liberties—like they all fucked leprechauns in Hyannis.

Fuck them. *He* slept in Jack's bed. *He* thrashed on Jack's sheets.

Wayne got drunk. Wayne *never* got drunk. Wayne drank small-batch bond.

Shot 1 burned. Shot 2 played a picture: Lee Bowers' thumb. Shot 3 gored his gonads. Dig *these* pix: Janice in halters and shorts.

Jack had hound blood. Wayne Senior said so. Martin Luther King fucked white chicks.

Shot 4—more pix:

Durfee tries to cross. The border cops lose him. Wayne fucked up. Wayne gets called home. Buddy Fritsch recruits a new man. Said man kills Wendell D.

Wayne fucked up. Fritsch fucks him for it. Fritsch fucks him off LVPD. Wayne Senior says don't fuck my boy. The fucking ascends triumphant.

Shot 5:

The thumb/the alley chase/the crap-game snafu.

Jack put a man in orbit. Jack played chicken with Khrushchev. Jack put that shine in Ole Miss.

Maynard Moore walked in. He brought company. That Pete guy—the big guy with Jack Ruby.

Moore saw Wayne. Moore detoured up. Pete tagged along.

Moore said, "Let's go find us that spook. My pal Pete hates spooks, don't you, sahib?"

Pete smiled. Pete rolled his eyes. Pete goofed on dipshit Moore.

Wayne chewed ice cubes. "Fuck off. I'll find him myself."

Moore leaned on the bar. "Your daddy wouldn't like that. It'd let him know the apple falls *real* far from the tree."

Wayne tossed his drink. Moore caught it—hard in the eyes. Bourbon burned him—hi-test sting—triple-digit proof.

The cocksucker rubbed his eyes. The cocksucker squealed.

(Dallas, 11/24/63)

Pete was late. Littell voyeurized.

His room was high up. The window framed a church. A midnight mass convened.

Littell watched. A poster marked the mass—Jack K. in black borders.

Kids defaced it. Littell watched them—late this afternoon. He went to dinner later. He saw the work up close.

Jack had fangs. Jack had devil horns. Jack said, “I’m a homo!”

Mourners filed in. A breeze dumped the poster. A woman picked it up. She saw Jack’s picture. She cringed.

A car cruised by. An arm shot out. A stiff finger twirled. The woman sobbed. The woman crossed herself. The woman squeezed rosary beads.

The Statler was low-rent. The Bureau booked cheap rooms. The view compensated.

Pete was late. Pete was with the backup cop. The cop had details. The cop had a map printed up.

Littell watched the church. It diverted him. It subsumed Arden.

They talked for six hours. They skirted IT. He coded a message: I KNOW. I KNOW you KNOW. I don’t care how you KNOW. I don’t care what you DID.

She coded a message: *I won’t probe your stake*. No one said, “Jack Ruby.”

They talked. They omitted. They codified.

He said he was a lawyer. He was ex-FBI. He had an ex-wife and an ex-daughter somewhere. She studied his facial scars. He told her flat-out: My best friend put them there.

Le frère Pete—un Frenchman sanglant.

She said she traveled. She said she held jobs. She said she bought and sold stocks and made money. She said she had an ex-husband. She did not state his name.

She impressed him. She knew it. He coded a response: You're a pro. You dissemble. I don't care.

She knew Jack Ruby. She used the word "roust." He skirted it. He offered advice. He told her to find a motel.

She said she would. He gave her *his* hotel number. Please call me. Please do it soon.

He wanted to touch her. He didn't. She touched his arm once. He left her. He drove to the Bureau.

The office was empty—no agents about—Mr. Hoover made sure. He rifled drawers. He found the Tippit file.

Pete was late. Littell skimmed the file. It rambled and digressed.

Dallas PD was far right: Klan kliques and John Birch. Diverse splinter groups: The NSRP/the Minutemen/the Thunderbolt Legion.

Tippit was "klanned up." Tippit joined the Klarion Klan Koalition for the New Konfederacy. The DPD boss was Maynard D. Moore. Moore was an FBI snitch. Moore's handler was Wayne Tedrow Sr.

Tedrow Senior: "Pamphleteer"/"Fund Raiser"/"Entrepreneur"/"Extensive Las Vegas holdings."

Unique stats—familiar—Mr. Hoover's "Führer manqué."

Littell skimmed up. Littell logged stats. Tedrow Senior ran eclectic.

He raised right-wing cash. He might know Guy B. Guy scrounged right-wing funds. Some fat cats greased the hit fund.

Littell skimmed down. Littell logged stats. Littell logged a possible connection.

Guy's backup cop—friend of J. D. Tippit—odds on Maynard D. Moore.

Odds on: Mr. Hoover knew it. Mr. Hoover guessed the connection.

Littell skimmed up. Tedrow Senior's CV expanded.

All-Mormon staff. Ties at Nellis AFB. Tight with the Gaming Control Board. One son: a Vegas policeman.

Senior withheld data from Junior. Junior worked the intel squad. Junior kept board files. Junior withheld data from Senior. Senior “assisted” Mr. Hoover. Senior “dispensed propaganda.”

Per: Martin Luther King/the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Littell skimmed pages. Littell took notes. Howard Hughes loved Mormons. They had “germ-free” blood. Tedrow Senior was Mormon. Tedrow Senior had Mormon connections.

Littell rubbed his eyes. The doorbell rang. He got up and opened the door.

Pete walked in. Pete grabbed the desk chair. Pete sprawled out tall.

Littell shut the door. “How bad?”

Pete said, “Bad. The map looks good, but he won’t pop Oswald. He’s crazy, but I can’t fault him for brains.”

Littell rubbed his eyes. “Maynard Moore, right? That’s his name.”

Pete yawned. “Guy’s slipping. He usually plays his names closer than that.”

Littell shook his head. “Mr. Hoover made him. He had a file on Tippit. He assumed that Moore had to be somewhere close.”

“That’s your interpretation, right? Hoover didn’t get that specific.”

“He never does.”

Pete cracked his knuckles. “How scared are you?”

“It comes and goes, and I wouldn’t mind some good news.”

Pete lit a cigarette. “Rogers made it down to Juarez. The pro got down, but the Border Patrol detained him and ran a passport check. Guy said he’s a French national.”

Littell said, “Guy’s talking too much.”

“He’s scared. He knows Carlos is thinking, ‘If I went with Pete and Ward’s crew, none of this shit would have happened.’ ”

Littell cleaned his glasses. “Where is he?”

“He drove back to New Orleans. His nerves are shot, and he’s popping digitalis like a fucking junkie. All this shit is on him, and he knows it.”

Littell said, “And?”

Pete cracked a window. Cold air blew in.

“And what?”

“There’s more. Guy wouldn’t be going back unless he had an excuse to hand Carlos.”

Pete flicked his cigarette out. “Jack Ruby knows. He brought one of his flunkies and some women up to the safe house. They saw the targets and guns. Guy’s saying we should clip them. I think he’ll tell Carlos that, so he can buy his way out of the shit.”

Littell coughed. His pulse zoomed. He held his breath.

“We can’t take out four people that close to the hit. It’s too obvious.”

Pete laughed. “Shit, Ward, say it. I’ve got no balls for clipping civilians, so why should you?”

Littell smiled. “Ruby aside.”

Pete shrugged. “Jack’s no skin off my ass either way.”

“The women, then. That’s what we’re talking about.”

Pete cracked his thumbs. “I’m not negotiating on that. I already warned one of them off, but I couldn’t find the other one.”

“Give me their names.”

“Betty McDonald and Arden something.”

Littell touched his tie. Littell scratched his neck. Littell made his hands quash his nerves.

He twitched. He swallowed. He gulped. The room was cold. He shut the window.

“Oswald.”

“Yeah. If he goes, this all disappears.”

“When are they moving him?”

“Eleven-thirty. If he hasn’t named Guy’s cutout by then, we can put the skids to all this.”

Littell coughed. “I’ve arranged for a private interview. The ASAC said he hasn’t talked, but I want to make sure.”

Pete shook his head. “Bullshit. You want to get close to him. You want to run some kind of fucking absolution number on him, so you can do a number on yourself later.”

In nomine patris, et filii et spiritus sancti, Amen.

“It’s nice to have someone who knows you.”

Pete laughed. “I wasn’t doubting you. I just want to work this fucking thing out.”

Littell said, “Moore. There’s no way he—”

“*No*. He knows too much, drinks too much and talks too much. After Oswald goes, *he* goes, and we draw the line at that.”

Littell checked his watch. Shit—1:40 a.m.

“He’s a policeman. He could get into the basement.”

“*No*. He’s too crazy. He’s working an extradition gig with a

Vegas cop, and he gets in the guy's face in the worst possible way. He's not what we want."

Littell rubbed his eyes. "What was the man's name? The cop, I mean."

"Wayne something. Why?"

"Tedrow?"

Pete said, "Yeah, and why do you care? He's got nothing to do with any of this, and the fucking clock is ticking."

Littell checked his watch. Carlos bought it for him. A gold Rolex/pure ostentat—

"Ward, are you in a fucking trance?"

Littell said, "Jack Ruby."

Pete rocked his chair back. The legs squeaked.

Littell said, "He's insane. He's afraid of us. He's afraid of the Outfit. He's got seven brothers and sisters that we can threaten."

Pete smiled. "The cops know he's crazy. He carries a gun. He's been all over the building all weekend, and he's been saying somebody should shoot that Commie. Ten dozen fucking newsmen have heard him."

Littell said, "He's got tax troubles."

"Who told you that?"

"I don't want to say."

A breeze kicked up. The windowpanes creaked.

Pete said, "And?"

"And what?"

"There's more. I want to know why you'll risk it, with a fucking psycho who knows both our names."

Cherchez la femme, Pierre.

"It's a message. It tells everyone who went to that safe house to run."

(Dallas, 11/24/63)

Barb walked in. She wore his raincoat. The sleeves drooped. The shoulders sagged. The hem brushed her feet.

Pete blocked the bathroom. Barb said, “Shit.”

Pete checked her ring hand. Pete saw her wedding ring.

She held it up. “I’m not going anywhere. I’m just getting used to it.”

Pete carried his ring. It came too small—fucking pygmy-size.

“I’ll get used to it when I get mine fitted.”

Barb shook her head. “Used to *it*. What *you* did.”

Pete snared his ring. Pete tried to squeeze his finger in. Pete jabbed at the hole.

“Say something nice, all right? Tell me how the late show went.”

Barb dumped his coat. “It went fine. The Twist is dead, but Dallas doesn’t know it.”

Pete stretched. His shirt gapped. Barb saw his piece.

“You’re going out.”

“I won’t be that long. I’m just wondering where you’ll be when I get back.”

“I’m wondering who else knows. I know, so there has to be others.”

His headache revived. His headache paved new ground.

“Everyone who knows has a stake. It’s what you call an open secret.”

Barb said, “I’m scared.”

“Don’t think about it. I know how these things work.”

“You don’t know that. There’s never been anything *like* this.”

Pete said, "It'll be all right."
Barb said, "Bullshit."

* * *

Ward was late. Pete watched the Carousel Club.

He stood two doors down. Jack Ruby shooed cops and whores out. They paired off. They piled in cars. The whores jiggled keys.

Jack closed up the club. Jack cleaned his ears with a pencil. Jack kicked a turd in the street.

Jack went back inside. Jack talked to his dogs. Jack talked very loud.

It was cold. It was windy. Motorcade debris swirled: Matchbooks/confetti/Jack & Jackie signs.

Ward was late. Ward might be with "Arden."

He left Ward's room. He heard the phone ring. Ward made him run. He saw Ward and Arden. They didn't see him. He told Ward the safe-house tale.

He said, "Arden." Ward schizzed. He called Ward on Ruby. Ward played it oblique.

Fuck it—for now.

Jack's dogs yapped. Jack baby-talked Yiddish. The noise carried outside. A Fed sled pulled up. Ward got out. His coat pockets bulged.

He walked up. He unloaded his pockets—rogue-cop show-and-tell.

Brass knucks/a sash cord/a pachuco switchblade.

"I went by the property room at the PD. Nobody saw me."

"You thought it through."

Ward restuffed his pockets. "*If* he doesn't agree."

Pete lit a cigarette. "We'll cut him up and make it look like a heist."

A dog yipped. Ward flinched. Pete blew on his cigarette. The tip flared red.

They walked up. Ward knocked on the door. Pete put on a drawl: "Jack! Hey, Jack, I think I left my wallet!"

The dogs barked. The door opened. There's Jack. He saw them. He said, "Oh." His mouth dropped and held.

Pete flicked his butt in. Jack gagged on it. Jack coughed it out wet.

Pete shut the door. Ward grabbed Jack. Pete shoved him. Pete frisked him. Pete pulled a piece off his belt.

Ward hit him. Jack fell down. Jack curled up and sucked air.

The dogs ran. The dogs crouched by the runway. Ward grabbed the gun. Ward dumped five shells.

He knelt down. Jack saw the gun. Jack saw the one shell. Ward shut the drum. Ward spun it. Ward aimed at Jack's head.

He pulled the trigger. The hammer clicked. Jack sobbed and sucked air. Ward twirled the gun. Ward pulled the trigger. Ward dry-shot Jack's head.

Pete said, "You're going to clip Oswald."

Jack sobbed. Jack covered his ears. Jack shook his head. Pete grabbed his belt. Pete dragged him. Jack kicked out at tables and chairs.

Ward walked over. Pete dumped Jack by the runway. The dogs yapped and growled.

Pete walked to the bar. Pete grabbed a fifth of Schenley's. Pete grabbed some dog treats.

He dumped the treats. The dogs tore in. Ward scoped the jug. Ward was a lush. Ward was on the wagon. Booze turned him to mush.

They pulled chairs up. Jack sobbed. Jack wiped his schnoz. The dogs snarfed the treats. The dogs waddled and wheezed. The dogs crapped out cold by the runway.

Jack sat up. Jack hugged his knees. Jack braced his back on the slats. Pete grabbed a stray glass. Pete dumped ice dregs and poured Schenley's.

Jack studied his shoes. Jack squeezed his Jew star on a chain.

Pete said, "*L'chaim.*"

Jack looked up. Pete waved the glass. Jack shook his head. Ward twirled the gun. Ward cocked the hammer.

Jack grabbed the glass. His hand shook. Pete clamped it down. Jack imbibed. Jack coughed and gasped. Jack held it down.

Ward said, "You've been saying someone should do it all weekend."

Pete said, "You'll do eighteen months tops. You'll get your own fucking motorcade when you get out."

Ward said, "You'll own this town."

Pete said, "He clipped that Tippit guy. Every cop in Dallas will love you."

Ward said, "Your money worries are over as of this moment."

Pete said, "Think about it. A tax-free pension for life."

Jack said, "No." Jack shook his head.

Ward waved the gun. Ward spun the drum. Ward aimed at Jack's head. He pulled the trigger *two times*. He got two dry clicks.

Jack sobbed. Jack prayed—heavy-duty hebe shit.

Pete poured him a refill—three fingers of Schenley's—Jack shook his head. Pete grabbed his neck. Pete cleared his pipes. Pete force-fed him hard.

Jack kept it down. Jack coughed and gasped.

Pete said, "We'll fix up the club and let your sister Eva run it."

Ward said, "Or we'll kill all your brothers and sisters."

Pete said, "She'll make a mint. This place will be a national monument."

Ward said, "Or we'll torch it to the ground."

Pete said, "Are you getting the picture?"

Ward said, "Do you understand your options?"

Pete said, "If you say no, you die. If you say yes, you'll have the world by the balls. If you blow the job, it's '*Shalom*, Jack,' you tried, but we don't appreciate failure, and it's too bad we have to take out your whole fucking family, too."

Jack said, "No."

Pete said, "We'll find a nice home for your dogs. They'll be glad to see you when you get out."

Ward said, "Or we'll kill you."

Pete said, "Your tax troubles will disappear."

Ward said, "Or everyone you love will die."

Jack said, "No." Pete cracked his knuckles. Ward pulled a belt sap—a hose chunk packed with double-aught buck.

Jack stood up. Pete pushed him down. Jack reached for the jug. Pete poured it out. Pete saved a chaser.

Jack said, "No. *No no no no no*."

Ward sapped him—one rib shot—whap.

Jack balled up. Jack kissed his Jew star. Jack bit his tongue.

Ward grabbed his belt. Ward dragged him. Ward kicked him into his office. Ward kicked the door shut.

Pete laughed. Jack lost a shoe and a tie clip. Ward lost his glasses.

Pete heard thump sounds. Jack screamed. The dogs woke up. Pete popped aspirin and Schenley's. The dogs yapped. The noise got all mixed up.

Pete shut his eyes. Pete rolled his neck. Pete worked his headache—*fuck*.

He smelled smoke. He opened his eyes. Smoke blew out a wall vent. Ash sifted through.

Arden.

Ward got Jack alone. Pete knew why. Do what we want/do what *I* want/don't talk about HER. He torched Jack's files. He torched HER name. He torched Arden WHO?

Jack screamed. The dogs yapped. Smoke blew out the vent. Smoke seeped and pooled.

The door popped open. Smoke whooshed out. Wet ashes flew. Sink sounds. Screams. Loose shot pellets hurled.

Ward walked out. His sap leaked buckshot. The shaft dripped blood. He stumbled. He rubbed his eyes. He stepped on his glasses.

He said, "He'll do it."

(Dallas, 11/24/63)

H*angover*.

The room light hurt. The TV noise hurt. Alka-Seltzer helped. Wayne dosed up and replayed the fight.

He swung. He hit Moore. Moore swung bourbon-blind. Pete got between them. Pete fucking laughed.

Wayne watched TV. Room service was late—SOP for the hotel.

A cop faced a mike. He said we're moving him. Clear a path now.

Willis Beaudine didn't call. Buddy Fritsch did. Buddy had an update. Buddy talked to the border cops.

Wendell Durfee: Still at large.

Wayne dropped *his* plan: I've got a car/I'll drive to McAllen/I'll liaise with the border cops there.

Fritsch said, "Take Moore with you. If you cap that nigger, you'd better have a Texas cop in your pocket."

Wayne argued. Wayne almost said it: My plan is a shuck. Fritsch said, "Take him out. Earn your fucking keep."

Fritsch won. Wayne lost. He stalled. He watched TV. He never called Moore up.

Wayne sipped Alka-Seltzer. Wayne saw cops with Stetsons. The TV picture jumped.

He slapped the box. He tapped the dials. The picture cohered.

Oswald stepped out. Oswald wore handcuffs. Two cops flanked him. They walked through the basement. They faced some reporters. They cleared a path fast.

A man jumped out. Dark suit/fedora. Right arm outstretched. He stepped up. He aimed a gun. He shot near point-blank.

Wayne blinked. Wayne saw it—oh fuck.

Oswald doubled up. Oswald went “Oooh.”

The cops blinked. They saw it—oh fuck.

Commotion. Dogpile. The gunman’s down. He’s prone. He’s disarmed. He’s pinned flat.

Rerun that. I think I—

The hat. The bulk. The profile. The dark eyes. The fat.

Wayne grabbed the TV. Wayne shook the sides. Wayne focused in tight.

Jerky shots/camera jumps/a low zoom.

The bulk grew. The profile blossomed. Someone yelled, “Jack!”

No. Asshole Jack Ruby—the dive club/the dogshit/the—

Someone yelled, “Jack!” A man snared his hat. Cops wrestled him. Cops cuffed him. Cops stood him up. Cops went through his pants.

The picture jumped. Wayne slapped the antenna. The picture went flat.

Reruns:

Moore muscles Jack. Jack prowls the PD. Jack knows Pete. Moore knows Pete gooood. Bowers. The thumb. The Kennedy hit —

The picture jumped. The tubes buzzed. The fucking phone rang.

The picture settled. A newsman yelled, “Local nightclub”—

Wayne stood up. Wayne tripped. Wayne grabbed the phone. Wayne snagged the receiver.

“Yeah, this is Tedrow.”

“It’s Willis Beaudine. Remember, you met me—”

“Yeah, I remember.”

“Well, that’s good, because Wendell’s going for that offer you made. He don’t know why you’re doing it, but I told him my dog liked you.”

The sound died. Jack moved his lips. Cops gave him the big two-cop flank.

Beaudine said, “Man, are you *there*?”

“I’m here.”

“Good. Then you be at rest stop number 10, eighty miles south on I-35. Make it three o’clock. Oh, and Wendell wants to know if you’ve got money.”

The cops dwarfed Jack—big men—boots up to six-four.

“Hey, man. Are you *there*?”

“Tell him I’ve got six thousand dollars.”

“Hey, you have to like that!”

Wayne hung up. The TV jumped. Oswald rode a white sheet on a cot.

(Dallas, 11/24/63)

He saw it live.

He'd tuned in Channel 4. He squinted to see. He broke his glasses at Jack's club.

He sat in his room. He watched the show. It capped his interview—one hour back.

He sat with Lee Oswald. They talked.

Littell drove I-35. Freeway signs blurred. He hit the slow lane and crawled.

Arden called last night. Oswald died at Parkland. Ruby was under arrest.

Oswald bit his nails. Littell uncuffed him. Oswald rubbed his wrists.

I'm a Marxist. I'm a patsy. I won't elaborate. I'm pro-Fidel. I indict the U.S. I scorn her Cuban misdeeds. I scorn the exiles. I scorn the CIA. National Fruit is evil. The Bay of Pigs was insane.

Littell agreed. Oswald warmed up. Oswald craved perspective. Oswald craved friends.

Littell faltered then. Oswald craved friends. Guy's cutout knew it. Littell shut down. Oswald caught his tone. Oswald threw it back.

Some sound facts. Some nut talk mixed in. You don't love me—so I'll kill you with The Truth.

Littell walked out then. Littell recuffed Oswald. Littell squeezed his hands.

Freeway signs blurred. Signposts popped. Exit posts slithered. Littell saw "Grandview." Littell pulled right. Littell cut down a ramp.

He saw the Chevron sign. He saw the HoJo's.

There—

The shape between them—motel rooms—one long row.

He crossed an access lane. He parked by the HoJo's. He walked by the rooms. He squinted. He saw the "14."

There—the door's ajar. That's Arden on the bed. Littell walked in.

Littell shut the door. Littell bumped a TV set. The juice was off. The box was warm. He smelled cigarettes.

Arden said, "Sit here."

Littell sat down. The bedsprings sagged. Arden moved her legs.

"You look different without your glasses."

"I broke them."

She had her hair up. She wore a green sweater-dress.

Littell turned a lamp on. Arden blinked. Littell bent the lamp down. It shaded the glare.

"What did you do with your things?"

"I rented a storage garage."

"In your own name?"

"You're being disingenuous. You know I'm better than that."

Littell coughed. "You've been watching television."

"Along with the whole country."

"You know some things they don't."

"We've got our version, they've got theirs. Is that what you're saying?"

"*You're* being disingenuous now."

Arden hugged a pillow. "How did they convince him? How do you make someone do something so crazy on live television?"

"He was crazy to start with. And sometimes the stakes are so high that they play in your favor."

Arden shook her head. "I don't want to get more specific."

Littell shook his head. "We don't have to discuss it."

Arden smiled. "I'm wondering why you're going to so much trouble to help me."

"You know why."

"I may ask you to say it."

"I will. If we go forward on this."

" '*This*?' Are we going to define *any* of our terms at all?"

Littell coughed—full ashtrays/stale smoke.

"Confirm something for me. You've been in trouble, you've run before, you know how to do it."

Arden nodded. "It's something I'm good at."

"That's good, because I can get you a completely new identity."

Arden crossed her legs. "Is there a disclosure clause in all '*this*'?
"

Littell nodded. "We can hold back some secrets."

"That's important. I don't like to lie unless I have to."

"I'm going to Washington for a few days. Then I'll be setting up a base in Las Vegas. You can meet me there."

Arden grabbed her cigarettes. The pack was empty—she tossed it.

"We both know who's behind this. And *I* know they all pass through Vegas."

"I do work for them. It's one reason why you'll be safe with me."

"I'd feel safer in L.A."

Littell smiled. "Mr. Hughes lives there. I'll need to get a house or apartment."

"I'll meet you, then. I'll trust you that far."

Littell checked his watch—1:24 p.m.—Littell grabbed the phone by the bed.

Arden nodded. He pulled the phone to the bathroom. The cord almost snapped. He shut the door. He dialed the Adolphus. The switchboard patched him through.

Pete picked up. "Yes?"

"It's me."

"Yeah, and you're the white man of the week. I wasn't a hundred percent sure that he'd do it."

"What about Moore?"

"He *goes*. I'll tail him and get him alone."

Littell hung up. Littell walked back. Littell dropped the phone on a chair.

He sat on the bed. Arden slid close.

Arden said, "*Say* it."

He squinted. Her freckles jumped. Her smile blurred.

"I've got nothing but the wrong things, and I want to take something good out of this."

"That's not enough."

Littell said, "I want you." Arden touched his leg.

(Dallas, 11/24/63)

Reruns:

The thumb. Pete and Moore. Killer Jack and Killer Lee.

Wayne drove I-35. The reruns hit. A soundtrack sputtered:

He calls Moore. He says, “Meet me. I’ve got a lead on Durfee.” He lies. He drops details. Static fries the line and blows the connection.

Moore gets the last word. Moore says, “… have us big fun.”

The freeway was flat. Flat blacktop/flat empty. Flat sand adjacent. Sand flats and scrub. Jackrabbit bones. Sand grit in circulation.

The soundtrack distorted. He’d fucked up the call. The Jack and Lee Show fucked with him.

A rabbit jumped. It hit the road. It cleared his wheels clean. A wind kicked up. It tossed scrub balls and waxed paper.

There’s the sign: Rest Stop #10.

Wayne pulled in. Wayne scoped the parking lot slooooow.

Gravel paving. No cars. Tire tracks on sand adjacent. Flat sand. Drift sand. Scrub balls hip-high.

Goooood cover spots.

A men’s room. A ladies’ room. Two stucco huts and a crawl space between. The huts fronted sand drifts. Said drifts ran way inland. The wind stirred loose sand.

Wayne parked. Beaudine said 3:00. He told Moore to meet him at 4:00. The current time—2:49.

He pulled his piece. He popped the glove box. He pulled out the money—six cold.

He got out. He walked through the men’s room. He checked the stalls gun-first. The wind kicked cellophane through.

He walked out. He hit the ladies' room. Empty stalls/dirty sinks/bugs pooled in Lysol.

He walked out. He hugged the walls. He moved around back. Shitfire—there's Wendell Durfee.

He's got pimp threads. He's got a hair net. He's got a jigaboo conk. He's got a piece—it's a quiff automatic.

Durfee stood by the wall. Durfee ducked sand. It messed up his conk good.

He saw Wayne. He said, "Well, now."

Wayne drew down on him. Durfee raised his hands. Wayne walked up slow. Sand filled his shoes.

Durfee said, "Why you doin' this for me?"

Wayne grabbed his piece. Wayne popped the clip. Wayne tucked it down his pants barrel first.

The wind tore a scrub pile. Durfee's sled got exposed. It's a '51 Merc. It's sand-scraped. It's sunk to the hubs.

Wayne said, "Don't talk to me. I don't want to know you."

Durfee said, "I might need me a tow truck."

Wayne heard gravel crunch—back in the lot. Durfee futzed with his hair net. Durfee heard shit.

"Willis said you had money."

Gravel crunch—*tire* crunch—Durfee missed the sounds dead.

"I'll get it. You wait here."

"Shit. I ain't goin' nowhere without it. You fuckin' Santa Claus, you know that?"

Wayne holstered his piece. Wayne circled back to the lot. Wayne saw Moore's 409.

It's upside his car. It's idling hard. It's throbbing on hi-end shocks. There's Moore. He's at the wheel. He's chomping Red Man.

Wayne stopped. His dick fluttered. Piss leaked out.

He saw something.

A speck—up the freeway—some kind of mirage or a car.

He anchored his legs. He walked up jerky. He leaned on Moore's car.

Moore rolled down his window. "Hey, boy. What's new and noteworthy?"

Wayne leaned in close. Wayne braced on the roof.

"He isn't here. That guy gave me a bad lead."

Moore spat tobacco juice. Moore hit Wayne's shoes.

"Why'd you tell me four o'clock, when you're here before three?"

Wayne shrugged. How should I know? I'm bored with you.

Moore pulled a knife. Moore picked his teeth. Moore sheared pork chop fat. He sprayed juice haphazard. He doused Wayne's shirt.

"He's out back. I reconnoitered a half hour ago. Now, you get your ass back there and kill him."

Wayne saw reruns—in slooooow motion.

"You know Jack Ruby."

Moore picked his teeth. Moore tapped the blade on the dash.

"So what? Everyone knows Jack."

Wayne leaned in the window. "What about Bowers? He saw Kennedy get—"

Moore swung the knife. Moore snagged Wayne's shirt. Moore grabbed Wayne's necktie. They hit heads. Moore swung the knife. His hand hit the door ledge.

Wayne pulled his head back. Wayne pulled his piece. Wayne shot Moore in the head.

Recoil—

It knocked him back. He hit *his* car. He braced and aimed tight. He shot Moore in the head/Moore in the neck/Moore with no face and no chin.

He ripped the seats. He tore up the dash. He blew the windows out. It was loud. It echoed loud. It outblew wind gusts.

Wayne froze. The 409 bounced—reverb off hi-end shocks.

Durfee ran out. Durfee lost his legs. Durfee slid and fell flat. Wayne froze. There's that speck up I-35—it's a car oh fuck.

The car drove up. The car pulled in. The car stopped by Moore's sled. Sand blew. Scrub balls bounced. Gravel scattered.

The speck-car idled. Pete got out. Pete put his hands up.

Wayne aimed at him. Wayne pulled the trigger. The pin clicked—you're empty—you're fucked.

Durfee watched. Durfee tried to run. Durfee stood up and fell flat. Pete walked up to Wayne. Wayne dropped his gun and pulled Durfee's gun. Wayne popped in the clip.

His hand slipped. The gun fell. Pete picked it up.

He said, "Kill him."

Wayne looked at Durfee. Pete said, "Kill him."

Wayne looked at Durfee. Durfee looked at Wayne. Wayne looked at Pete. Pete gave him the gun. Wayne dropped the safety.

Durfee stood up. His legs went. He fell on his ass.

Pete leaned on Moore's car. Pete reached inside. Pete flipped off the key. Wayne leaned in his car. Wayne grabbed the six thousand. Wayne coughed up gravel grit.

Pete said, "Kill him."

Wayne walked up to Durfee. Durfee sobbed. Durfee watched Wayne's hands. He saw a gun. He saw a cash bag. He saw two hands full.

Wayne dropped the bag. Durfee grabbed it. Durfee stood up. Durfee got legs and ran.

Wayne leaned on his knees. Wayne puked his lunch up. Wayne tasted hamburger and sand.

Durfee ran.

He tripped through sand drifts. He got his Merc. He gunned it. He bumped drifts. He plowed them. He made the lot. He made I-35 south.

Pete walked over. Wayne wiped his face. Wayne smeared Maynard Moore's blood.

Pete said, "You picked a good place for it. You picked a good weekend, too."

Wayne leaned on his knees. Wayne dropped the gun. Pete grabbed it up.

"There's an oil dump two miles down. You can ditch the car there."

Wayne straightened up. Pete steadied him. Pete said, "Maybe I'll see you in Vegas."

(Dallas, 11/25/63)

Jack's wake blared—epidemic boo-hoo—it cut through the bridal suite walls.

Barb said, "I'm getting the picture. The fix is in."

Pete packed his suitcase. "Some people got Christmas early. They know how things work, and they know what's best for the country."

Barb folded her gowns. "There's a catch. For us, I mean."

Pete tuned her out. He'd just talked to Guy. Guy just talked to Carlos. Carlos loved the Ruby Show. Carlos wanted to clip Maynard Moore.

Guy told Pete that. Pete ad-libbed. Pete said Moore vanished—ka-poof!

Guy spritzed on Moore's Vegas gig. Guy ragged Wayne Junior. Junior knew shit—small fucking world—Wayne Senior greased the hit fund.

Barb said, "The *catch*. Don't tell me there isn't one. And don't tell me those tickets to Vegas aren't part of it."

Pete stashed his piece. "Are you saying that two tickets was being optimistic?"

"No. You know I'll never leave you."

Pete smiled. "There's some fuck-ups I wouldn't have made, if I'd known you better."

Barb smiled. "The catch? *Vegas*? And don't make eyes at me when we have to run for a plane."

Pete shut his suitcase. "The Outfit has plans for Mr. Hughes. Ward's putting some things together."

"It's about staying useful, then."

"Yeah. Stay useful, stay healthy. If I can get them to bend a certain rule, I'd call it a lock."

Barb said, "What rule?"

"Come on, you know what I do."

Barb shook her head. "You're versatile. You run shakedowns and you sell guns and dope. You killed the President of the United States once, but I'd have to call that a one-time opportunity."

Pete laughed. Pete made his sides hurt. Pete leaked some wiiiiild tears. Barb tossed a towel up. Pete wiped his eyes and de-teared.

"You can't move heroin there. It's a set policy, but it's probably the best way I can make the Boys some real money. They might go for it, if I only sell to the spooks in West Vegas. Mr. Hughes hates jigs. He thinks they should all be doped up, like he is. The Boys might decide to humor him."

Barb got This Look. Pete knew the gestalt. *I* fucked JFK. *You* killed him. *My* craaazy life.

She said, "Useful."

"Yeah, that's it."

Barb grabbed her Twist gowns. Barb dropped them out the window. Pete looked out. A kid looked up. The blue gown hit a ledge.

Barb waved. The kid waved back.

"The Twist is dead, but I'll bet you could get me some lounge gigs."

"We'll be useful."

"I'm still scared."

Pete said, "That's the catch."

Part II

EXTORTION

December 1963–October 1964

DOCUMENT INSERT:12/1/63. Internally circulated FBI intelligence report. Marked: "Classified Confidential 2-A: Restricted Agent Access"/"Pertinent Facts & Observations on Major Las Vegas Hotel-Casino Ownerships & Related Topics." Note: Officially logged at Southern Nevada Office, 2/8/63.

The major Las Vegas hotel-casinos are situated in two locales: The downtown (Fremont Street/"Glitter Gulch") area and "The Strip" (Las Vegas Blvd, the city's main north-south artery). The downtown establishments are older, less gaudy & cater to local residents & less affluent tourists who come to gamble, enjoy low-quality entertainment & engage the services of prostitutes. Junket groups (Elks, Kiwanis, Rotary, Shriners, VFW, CYO) are frequent downtown hotel-casino visitors. The downtown establishments are largely owned by "Pioneer" consortiums (e.g., native Nevadans & general non-organized crime groups). Some of the owners have been forced to sell small (5%–8%) interests to organized-crime groups in exchange for continued "Preferential Treatment" (e.g., on-site "protection," a "service" to insure the absence of labor trouble & untoward on-site incidents). Organized-crime associates frequently serve as casino "Pit Bosses" & thus as enforcers and on-site informants for their organized-crime patrons.

The downtown area is jurisdictionally covered by the Las Vegas Police Department (LVPD). The LVPD's jurisdiction adjoins that of the Clark County Sheriff's Department (CCSD). Both agencies work within the other's jurisdiction by mutual consent. The Sheriff's Dept patrols the "Strip" area south of the Sahara Hotel. Like the LVPD, it provides investigatory services for its specific jurisdiction, with an operational mandate inside LVPD, or "City" jurisdiction. The LVPD is similarly allowed to conduct investigations inside Sheriff's Dept, or "County" jurisdiction. It should be noted that both agencies are widely influenced and corrupted by factions of organized crime. This corruption is of the type most identified with "Company Towns" (e.g., casino revenue forms the financial base of Las Vegas & thus influences the political base & law-enforcement policy). Numerous officers within both agencies benefit from organized-crime bestowed "Gratuities" (free hotel stays, free casino gambling chips, the services of prostitutes, “police discounts” at various businesses owned by organized-crime associates) & outright bribery. The LVPD and Sheriff’s Dept enforce organized-crime policies with the implicit consent of the Clark County political hierarchy & by extension the consent of the Nevada State Legislature. (E.g., Negroes are strongly discouraged from entering certain “Strip” hotel-casinos and on-site casino personnel are allowed to see to their expulsion. E.g., crimes against organized-crime-connected casino employees are frequently avenged by LVPD officers, acting on orders from the Casino Operators Council, an organized-crime front group. E.g., LVPD officers and Sheriff’s deputies are often used to track down casino card cheats, “discourage” them & run them out of town.)

The best-known hotel-casinos are situated on the “Strip.” Many of them have been infiltrated by organized crime, with percentage “Points” divvied up among the overlords of organized-crime cartels. (E.g., the Chicago Crime Cartel controls the Stardust Hotel-Casino & boss Sam “Mo,” “Momo,” “Mooney” Giancana has an 8% personal interest. Chicago hoodlum John Rosselli (the Chicago Cartel’s Las Vegas overseer) has a 3% interest & Chicago Mob enforcer Dominic Michael Montalvo aka “Butch Montrose” has a 1% interest.) (See Addendum File #B-2 for complete list of crime-cartel ownerships & percentage-point estimates.)

Smaller percentage points are traded between organized crime factions as part of an ongoing effort to insure that all factions have a stake in the expanding Las Vegas casino economy. The profit base is thus shared & faction-to-faction rivalry is averted. Thus, organized crime presents a unified face in Las Vegas. The man responsible for developing & maintaining this policy is Morris Barney “Moe” Dalitz (b. 1899), a former Cleveland mobster & organized crime’s “Goodwill Ambassador” & Las Vegas “Fix-It Man.” Dalitz owns points in the Desert Inn Hotel Casino and is rumored to have points in several others. Dalitz is known as “Mr. Las Vegas,” because of his numerous philanthropic endeavors & his convincing non-gangster image. Dalitz founded the Casino Operators Council, dictates their enforcement policies & is largely responsible for the “Clean Town” policy that organized-crime factions believe will help promote tourism & thus increase hotel-casino revenue.

This “Policy” is informally enforced & has the implicit approval of the Las Vegas political machine & the LVPD & Sheriff’s Dept. One goal is to enforce ad hoc segregation in the “Strip” hotel-casinos (e.g., admit Negro celebrities or perceived “High Class” Negroes & refuse admittance to all others) & to isolate Negro housing in the slum area of West Las Vegas. (Restrictive real-estate covenants are widely observed by Las Vegas–based realtors.) A key “Policy” dictate is the “No Narcotics” rule. This rule applies specifically to heroin. The selling of heroin is forbidden & is punishable by death. The rule is enforced to limit the number of narcotics addicts, specifically those who might support their addiction by means of robbery, burglary, “flim-flam” or other criminal activities that would sully the reputation of Las Vegas & thus discourage tourism. Numerous heroin pushers have been the victims of unsolved homicides & numerous others have disappeared & are presumed to have been killed per the aforementioned policy (see Addendum File #B-3 for partial list). The last homicide occurred on 4/12/60 & there appears to be no heroin traffic in Las Vegas as of this date. It is fair to conclude that the aforementioned deaths have served as a deterrent.

Dalitz is a close associate of Teamster President James Riddle Hoffa (b. 1914) & has secured large loans from the Teamsters’ Central States Pension Fund that have covered the cost of hotel-casino improvements. The Fund (estimated assets 1.6 billion dollars) is a “Watering Hole” that organized-crime factions borrow from routinely. Dubious organized-crime-connected “Businessmen” also borrow from the Fund at usurious interest rates that often result in the forfeiture of their businesses. It is rumored that a second set of Pension Fund financial books exists (one that is hidden from government subpoena & thus official audit). These books allegedly list a more accurate accounting of Pension Fund assets & detail the illegal & quasi-legal loans & repayment schedules.

Many of the “Strip” hotel-casinos routinely hide a large portion of their assets. (See the attached IRS-filed table-by-table profit accountings for all craps, roulette, blackjack, poker, loball, keno, fan-tan & baccarat tables, broken down by hotel.) These reported accountings are generally considered to be only 70–80% accurate. (It is very difficult to detect sustained underestimation of taxable income in large cash-base businesses.) Underestimated table profits are estimated to amount to untaxed revenue of over $105,000,000 per year ('62 fiscal estimate). This practice is called the "Skim."

Cash receipts are taken directly from casino counting rooms and dispersed to couriers who messenger the money to prearranged spots. Large-denomination bills are substituted for slot-machine coins & daily accountings are fraudulently tallied inside the counting rooms proper. Casino "Skim" is virtually impossible to detect. Most hotel-casino employees subsist on low wages & untaxed cash gratuities & would never report irregularities. This endemic corruption extends to the labor unions who supply the major hotel-casinos with workers.

The Dealers and Croupiers Local #117 is a Chicago Crime Cartel front. Its members are paid a low hourly wage & are given play chips & (presumably stolen) merchandise as bonuses. All chapters of this union are rigidly segregated. The Lounge Entertainers Local #41 is a Detroit Crime Cartel front. Its members are well-paid, but pay weekly kickbacks to crew stewards. This union is nominally integrated. Negro lounge entertainers are "discouraged" from patronizing the hotel-casinos they work in & from fraternizing with white patrons. The four building & building-supply locals who service the "Strip" hotels are Cleveland Crime Cartel fronts & work exclusively with organized-crime-connected contracting firms. The all-female Chambermaids Local #16 is a Florida Crime Cartel front. Many of its members have been suborned into prostitution. The work crews for the above mentioned locals are run by "Ramrods" who report to the Casino Operators Council.

The Kitchen Workers Union (Las Vegas–based only. There are no other chapters) is not organized-crime-connected & is allowed to operate as a sop to the Las Vegas "Pioneer" contingent & the largely Mormon Nevada political machine. The union is run by Wayne Tedrow Sr. (b. 1905), a conservative pamphleteer, real-estate investor & the owner of a bottom-rung or "Grind Joint" casino, the "Land o' Gold." The crew chiefs are all Mormons & the workers (mostly illegal Mexican aliens) are paid substandard wages & are given "bonuses" of dented cans of food & play chips for the Land o' Gold. The workers live in slum hotels in a Mexican enclave on the West-North Las Vegas border. (Note: Tedrow Sr. is rumored to have hidden points in 14 North Las Vegas "Grind

Joints" & 6 liquor store/slot machine arcades near Nellis Air Force Base. If true, these ownerships would constitute infractions of the Nevada Gaming Commission charter.)

The Nevada Gaming Commission oversees & regulates the granting of casino licenses and the hiring of casino personnel. The Commission is a "rubber-stamp" panel that does the bidding of the Gaming Control Board and the Clark County Liquor & Control Board. The same five men (the Clark County Sheriff & District Attorney & 3 appointed "Civilian" members) serve on both boards. Thus, the power to approve liquor and casino license applicants for the entire state rests solely in Las Vegas. None of the 5 board members are overtly organized-crime-connected & it is difficult to assess the level of collusion the boards engage in, because a majority of the applications they review cloak hidden organized-crime backing that is difficult to detect. There are no dossiers available on members of the above organizations. The LVPD Intelligence Unit keeps detailed files on the Gaming Control & Liquor Board men, but has consistently refused to grant the FBI & U.S. Attorney's Office access to them. (As previously stated, the LVPD is strongly organized-crime-influenced.) The LVPD Intelligence Unit operates city & countywide & is the sole such unit in Clark County. It is a 2-man operation. The commanding officer is Lieutenant Byron B. Fritsch (the adjutant of the LVPD Detective Bureau & strongly connected to the Casino Operators Council) & the only assigned officer is Sergeant Wayne Tedrow Jr. (Sgt. Tedrow is the son of the aforementioned Wayne Tedrow Sr. He is considered incorruptible by Las Vegas Police standards.)

Concluding note: Addendum Files #B-1, 2, 3, 4, 5 require duplicate authorization: Southern Nevada SAC & Deputy Director Tolson.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/2/63. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: "Recorded at the Director's Request"/"Classified Confidential 1-A: Director's Eyes Only." Speaking: Director Hoover, Ward J. Littell.

JEH: Good morning, Mr. Littell.

WJL: Good morning, Sir. And thank you for the carbons.

JEH: Las Vegas is a hellhole. It is unfit for sane habitation, which may explain its allure to Howard Hughes.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Let's talk about Dallas.

WJL: The consensus feels secure, Sir. And the Oswald killing seems to be a popular denouement.

JEH: Mr. Ruby has gotten four thousand fan letters. He is quite popular with Jews.

WJL: I'll concede him a certain panache, Sir.

JEH: Will you concede his ability to keep his mouth shut?

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I agree with you on the consensus. And I want you to include your thoughts in a detailed report on the events of that hallowed weekend. I will attribute the report to Dallas agents and submit it directly to President Johnson.

WJL: I'll begin work immediately, Sir.

JEH: The President will announce a commission to investigate King Jack's death. I will hand-pick the field agents. Your report will provide the President with a snappy preview of their findings.

WJL: Has he formed an opinion, Sir?

JEH: He suspects Mr. Castro or unruly Cuban exiles. In his view, the killing stemmed from King Jack's reckless blunders in the Caribbean.

WJL: It's an informed perspective, Sir.

JEH: I'll concede the point and concede that Lyndon Johnson is no dummy. He has a conveniently dead assassin and a citizenry avenged on national television. What more could he ask for?

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: And he's appropriately fed up with the Cuban boondoggle. He's going to drop it as a national-security issue and concentrate on the situation in Vietnam.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Your tone did not escape me, Mr. Littell. I know that you disapprove of American colonialism and consider our God-given mandate to contain global communism as ill-conceived.

WJL: That's true, Sir.

JEH: The attendant irony has not escaped me. A closet leftist as front man for Howard Hughes and his colonialist designs.

WJL: Strange bedfellows, Sir.

JEH: And how would you describe his designs?

WJL: He wants to circumvent anti-trust laws and purchase all the hotel-casinos on the Las Vegas Strip. He won't spend a dime until he settles his stock-divestment suit with TWA and accrues at least 500 million dollars. I think the suit will resolve in three or four years.

JEH: And your job is to pre-colonize Las Vegas?

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I would like a blunt assessment of Mr. Hughes' mental state.

WJL: Mr. Hughes injects codeine in his arms, legs and penis. He eats only pizza pies and ice cream. He receives frequent transfusions of "germ-free" Mormon blood. His employees routinely refer to him as "the Count," "Count Dracula" and "Drac."

JEH: A vivid assessment.

WJL: He's lucid half the time, Sir. And he's single-mindedly fixed on Las Vegas.

JEH: Bobby's anti-Mob crusade may have repercussions there.

WJL: Do you think he'll remain in the cabinet?

JEH: No. He hates Lyndon Johnson, and Lyndon Johnson more than reciprocates. I think he'll resign his appointment. And his successor may have Las Vegas plans that I will be powerless to curtail.

WJL: Specifically, Sir?

JEH: Bobby had been considering skim operations.

WJL: Mr. Marcello and the others have plans for Mr. Hughes' holdings.

JEH: How could they not? They have a drug-addicted vampire to victimize, and you to help them suck his blood.

WJL: They know that you bear them no rancor, Sir. They'll understand that some of Bobby's plans will be implemented by his successor.

JEH: Yes. And if the Count buys into Las Vegas and cleans up its image, those plans might be abandoned.

WJL: Yes, Sir. The thought had occurred to me.

JEH: I would like to know what the Dark Prince thinks about his brother's death.

WJL: So would I.

JEH: Of course you would. Robert F. Kennedy is both your savior and your bête noire, and I'm hardly the one to indict you as a voyeur.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Would a bug-and-tap approach work?

WJL: No, Sir. But I'll talk to my other clients and see what they suggest.

JEH: I need someone with a "fallen liberal" image. I may ask a favor of you.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Good day, Mr. Littell.

WJL: Good day, Sir.

(Las Vegas, 12/4/63)

They worked him. Two pros: Buddy Fritsch and Captain Bob Gilstrap.

They used the chief's office. They hemmed Wayne in. They deployed the chief's couch.

He'd stalled the meeting. He'd filed a report and filled lies in. He downplayed Moore's vanishing act.

He drove Moore's car to the dump. He stripped the plates. He pulled out Moore's teeth. He dug out his bullets. He stuffed shotgun shells in his mouth. He gas-soaked a rag. He lit it.

Moore's head blew. He fucked up would-be forensics. He dumped the car in a sludge pit. It sunk fast.

The pit steamed. He knew chemistry. Caustics ate flesh and sheet metal.

He mock-chased Wendell D. He called Buddy Fritsch and lied. He said I can't find him. I can't find Maynard Moore.

He leaned on Willis Beaudine. He told him to split Dallas. Beaudine grabbed his dog and skedaddled. He drove by DPD. He pulled some file sheets. He obscured Wendell Durfee's KAs. He buttonholed cops—you seen Maynard Moore?

Fritsch de-Wendellized him. Fritsch pulled the plug. Fritsch called him back home.

They worked him. They hemmed him in. They cracked JFK jokes. JFK groped a nurse and a nun. JFK's last word was "pussy."

Fritsch said, "We read your report."

Gilstrap said, "You must have had some time. I mean, the Kennedy deal and you trading shots with that spook."

Wayne shrugged. Wayne played it frosty. Fritsch lit a cigarette.

Gilstrap bummed one.

Fritsch coughed. “You didn’t care much for Officer Moore.”

Wayne shrugged. “He was dirty. I didn’t respect him as a policeman.”

Gilstrap lit up. “Dirty, how?”

“He was drunk half the time. He pressed people too hard.”

Fritsch said, “By your standards?”

“By the standards of good police work.”

Gilstrap smiled. “Those boys do things their own way.”

Fritsch smiled. “You can tell a Texan.”

Gilstrap said, “But not much.”

Fritsch laughed. Gilstrap slapped his knees.

Wayne said, “What *about* Moore? Did he show up?”

Fritsch shook his head. “That question is unworthy of a smart boy like you.”

Gilstrap blew smoke rings. “Try this one on. Moore didn’t like you, so he went after Durfee himself. Durfee killed him and stole his car.”

Fritsch said, “You got a six-foot-four nigger in an easily identifiable hot rod and a tristate APB out. Tell me it’s anything else and you’re stupid. And tell me the first cop who spots him won’t kill him, just so he can brag about it.”

Wayne shrugged. “That’s what DPD thinks?”

Fritsch smiled. “Them and us. And we’re the only two who count.”

Wayne shook his head. “You find the half-dozen Dallas cops who aren’t in the Klan and ask them what they think of Moore. They’ll tell you how dirty he was, how many people he pissed off, and how many suspects you’ve got.”

Gilstrap picked a hangnail. “That’s your pride talking, son. You’re blaming yourself because Durfee got away and killed a brother officer.”

Fritsch stubbed his cigarette. “DPD’s working it hard. They wanted to send one of their IA men up to talk to you, but we said no.”

Gilstrap said, “They’re talking negligence, son. You scuffled with Moore at the Adolphus, so he went out solo and got himself killed.”

Wayne kicked a footrest. An ashtray flew.

“He’s trash. If he’s dead, he deserved it. You can tell those redneck cops I said that."

Fritsch grabbed the ashtray. "Whoa, now."

Gilstrap scooped up butts. "Nobody's blaming you. You proved yourself to my satisfaction."

Fritsch said, "You showed some poor judgment, *and* you showed some stones. You did your reputation in this man's police department a whole lot of good."

Gilstrap smiled. "Tell your daddy the story. Running fire with one baaaad mother humper."

Fritsch winked. "I feel lucky."

Gilstrap said, "I won't tell."

Fritsch grabbed the chief's desk bandit. Gilstrap pulled the handle. Gears spun. Three cherries clicked. Dimes blew out the chute. Gilstrap caught them. "There's my lunch money." Fritsch winked. "You mean there's rank. Captains get to steal from lieutenants."

Gilstrap nudged Wayne. "You'll be a captain one day."

Fritsch said, "Could you have done it? Killed him, I mean."

Wayne smiled. "Durfee or Moore?"

Gilstrap whooped. "Wayne Junior's a fireball today."

Fritsch laughed. "Some folks don't think so, but I say he's his daddy's son after all."

Gilstrap stood up. "Tell true, boy. What did you spend that cold six on?"

Wayne grinned. Wayne said, "Liquor and call girls."

Fritsch stood up. "He's got Wayne Senior's blood in his veins."

Gilstrap winked. "We won't tell Lynette."

Wayne stood up. His legs hurt. He had fucking tension cramps. Gilstrap walked out. Gilstrap whistled and jiggled his dimes.

Fritsch said, "Gil likes you."

"He likes my father."

"Don't sell yourself short."

"Did my father tell you to send me to Dallas?"

"No, but he sure liked the idea."

He worked them back—bait-and-switch—diversion. His heartbeat hit 200. His blood pressure soared. "Lone assassin"—shit. I SAW Dallas.

Wayne drove home. Wayne dawdled. Fremont was packed.

Rubes waved bingo sheets. Rubes hopped casinos.

Wayne was brain-fucked. Wayne was brain-fucked off Dallas. Pete says, “Kill him.” He can’t. He runs PD checks. He gets Pete’s name. He queries three intel squads: L.A./New York/Miami.

Pete Bondurant: Ex-cop/ex-CIA/ex–Howard Hughes goon. Current mobbed-up enforcer.

He runs hotel registrations. 11/25: Pete and Frau Pete hit the Stardust. Their suite is comped. Pete’s mobbed up. *Chi*-Mob connections implied.

Car traffic was bad. Foot traffic ditto. Rubes lugged highballs and beers.

Tail Pete. Do it discreet. Hire a patrolman. Pay him in Land o’ Gold chips.

Wayne circled back. Wayne recruised Fremont. Wayne dodged Lynette and his dinner.

Lynette was running trite. Lynette ran trite lines verbatim. Jack was young. Jack was brave. Jack *realllly* loved Jackie.

Jack and Jackie lost their baby. Circa ’62. Lynette fell for them then. He didn’t want kids. Lynette did. She got pregnant in ’61.

It froze him up. It shut him down. He froze her out. He told her to get an abortion. She said no. He addressed the Latter-day Saints. He prayed for a dead baby.

Lynette caught the gist. Lynette ran to her folks. Lynette mailed off chatty letters. She came home bone skinny. She said she miscarried. He went along with the lie.

Daddy Sproul called him. Daddy waxed revisionist. Daddy dropped details. He said Lynette got scraped in Little Rock. He said she hemorrhaged and almost died.

The marriage survived. Trite shit would tear it for real.

Lynette set up TV trays. LBJ crashed their dinner. He announced some Warren probe.

Wayne killed the sound. LBJ moved his lips. Lynette toyed with her food.

“I thought you’d want to follow it more.”

“I had too much stuff going on. And it’s not like I had a stake in the man.”

“Wayne, you were *there*. It’s the kind of thing people tell their grand …”

"I told you, I didn't see anything. And we're not in the grandchild business."

Lynette balled her napkin. "You've been nothing but sullen since you got back, and don't tell me it's just Wendell Durfee."

"I'm sorry. That crack was ugly."

Lynette wiped her lips. "You know I gave up on that front."

"Tell me what it is, then."

Lynette turned the TV off. "It's the new sullen you, with that patronizing attitude that all the cops have. You know, 'I've seen things that my schoolteacher wife just wouldn't understand.' "

Wayne jabbed his roast beef. Wayne twanged the fork.

Lynette said, "Don't play with your food."

Wayne sipped Kool-Aid. "You're so goddamn smart in your way."

Lynette smiled. "Don't curse at my table."

"You mean your TV tray."

Lynette grabbed the fork. Lynette mock-stabbed him. Blood juice dripped and pooled.

Wayne flinched. Wayne hit the tray. His glass tipped and doused his food.

Lynette said, "Shit."

Wayne walked to the kitchen. Wayne dumped his tray in the sink. He turned around. He saw Lynette by the stove.

She said, "What happened in Dallas?"

Wayne Senior lived south—Paradise Valley with land and views.

He had fifty acres. He grazed steers. He butchered them for bar-b-que meat. The house was tri-level—redwood and stone—wide decks with wide views.

The carport covered an acre. A runway adjoined it. Wayne Senior flew biplanes. Wayne Senior flew flags: The U.S./the Nevada/the Don't-Tread-on-Me.

Wayne parked. Wayne killed his lights. Wayne skimmed the radio. He caught the McGuire Sisters—three-part harmony.

Janice had a dressing room. It faced the carport. She got bored. She changed clothes. She left her lights on to draw looks.

Wayne settled in. The Sisters crooned. "Sugartime" merged with "Sincerely." Janice walked through the light. Janice wore tennis shorts and a bra.

She posed. She dropped her shorts. She picked up capris. Her panties stretched and slid low.

She put the capris on. She unpinned her hair and combed it back. Her gray streak showed—silver in black—the pink capris clashed.

She pirouetted. Her breasts swayed. The Sisters supplied a soundtrack. The lights dimmed. Wayne blinked. It all went too fast.

He calmed down. He turned the car off. He walked through the house. He went straight back. Wayne Senior always perched outside. The north-deck view magnetized.

It was cold. Leaves strafed the deck. Wayne Senior wore a fat sweater. Wayne leaned on the rail. Wayne killed his view.

"You never get bored with it."

"I appreciate a good vista. I'm like my son that way."

"You never called and asked about Dallas."

"Buddy and Gil briefed me. They were thorough, but I'd still like to hear your version."

Wayne smiled. "In time."

Wayne Senior sipped bourbon. "The crap-game ruckus tickled me. You chasing that colored boy."

"I was brave and stupid. I'm not sure you would have approved."

Wayne Senior twirled his walking stick. "And I'm not sure you want my approval."

Wayne turned around. The Strip beamed. Neon signs pulsed.

"My son rubbed shoulders with history. I wouldn't mind a few details."

Cars left Vegas—the losers' exodus—southbound headlights.

"In time."

"Mr. Hoover saw the autopsy pictures. He said Kennedy had a small pecker."

Wayne heard gunshots north-northeast. Broke gambler blows town. Broke gambler pulls gun. Broke gambler unwinds.

"LBJ told Mr. Hoover a good one. He said, 'Jack was a strange bedfellow long before he entered politics.' "

Wayne turned around. "Don't gloat. It's fucking undignified."

Wayne Senior smiled. "You've got a foul mouth for a Mormon."

"The Mormon Church is a crock of shit, and you know it."

"Then why'd you ask the Saints to kill your baby?"

Wayne grabbed the rail. “I forgot that I told you that.”

“You tell me everything—‘in time.’ ”

Wayne dropped his hands. His wedding band slid. He missed meals. He dropped weight. He fretted up Dallas.

“When’s your Christmas party?”

Wayne Senior twirled his stick. “Don’t divert conversation so abruptly. You tell people what you’re afraid of.”

“Don’t press on Lynette. I know where you’re going.”

“Then I’ll go there. It’s a kid marriage that you’re bored with, and you know it.”

“Like you and my mother?”

“That’s right.”

“I’ve heard it before. You’re here and you’ve got what you’ve got. You’re not a cluck selling real estate in Peru, Indiana.”

“That’s right. Because I knew when to fold my hand with your mother.”

Wayne coughed. “You’re saying I’ll meet my Janice and walk like you did.”

Wayne Senior laughed. “Shitfire. Your Janice and my Janice are one and the same.”

Wayne blushed. Wayne’s ears fucking singed.

“Shitfire. Just when I think I’ve lost sway with my boy, I light him up like a Christmas tree.”

A shotgun blew somewhere. It roused some coyote yells.

Wayne Senior said, “Someone lost money.”

Wayne smiled. “He probably lost his stake at one of your joints.”

“*One of*? You know I only own one casino.”

“The last I heard, you had points in fourteen. And the last time I checked, that was illegal.”

Wayne Senior twirled his stick. “There’s a trick to lying. Hold to the same line, regardless of who you’re with.”

“I’ll remember that.”

“You will. But you’ll remember who told you right about the same time.”

A flying bug bit Wayne. Wayne swatted it.

“I don’t see your point.”

“You’ll remember that your father told you, and speak some godawful truth out of pure cussedness.”

Wayne smiled. Wayne Senior winked. He twirled his stick. He dipped it. He ran his stick repertoire.

“Are you still the only policeman who cares about those beat-up colored whores?”

“That’s right.”

“Why is that?”

“Pure cussedness.”

“That and your spell in Little Rock.”

Wayne laughed. “You should have been there. I broke every states’ rights law on the books.”

Wayne Senior laughed. “Mr. Hoover’s going after Martin Luther King. He’s got to find himself a ‘fallen liberal’ first.”

“Tell him I’m booked up.”

“He told me Vietnam’s heating up. I said, ‘My son was in the Eighty-Second Airborne. But don’t hold your breath for him to re-enlist—he’d rather fight rednecks than Reds.’ ”

Wayne looked around. Wayne saw a chip bucket. Wayne grabbed some Land o’ Gold reds.

“Did you tell Buddy to send me to Dallas?”

“No. But I’ve always thought a cold money run would do you some good.”

Wayne said, “It was enlightening.”

“What did you do with the money?”

“Got myself in trouble.”

“Was it worth it?”

“I learned a few things.”

“Care to tell me?”

Wayne tossed a chip. Wayne Senior pulled his hip piece. He shot the chip. He nailed it. Plastic shards flew.

Wayne walked inside. Wayne detoured by the dressing room. Janice shot him a view.

Bare legs. A dance step. Streaked-hair allure.

(Las Vegas, 12/6/63)

Dallas tweaked him. He should have killed Junior. Junior should have killed the spook.

Vegas sparkled—fuck death—should-haves meant shit. Nice breeze/nice sun/nice casinos.

Pete cruised the Strip. Pete logged distractions:

The Tropicana course. Cocktail carts abundant. Drive-ins. Carhops on skates. Uplift abundant.

Pete made two circuits. Shit popped out:

Some nuns hit the Sands. They spot Frank Sinatra. They swoon and piss Frank off. They shvitz up his Sy Devore suit.

Grief by the Dunes:

Two cops grab two spics. The spics bleed very large. The scene vibes busboy brouhaha. Juan fucked Ramon's sister. Ramon had first dibs. Shivs by the low-roller buffet.

Nice mountains. Neon signs. Jap-tourist shutterbugs.

Pete made three circuits. The Strip show wore thin. Pete re-tweaked Dallas.

BE USEFUL: Sacred fucking text. The Hughes deal would take years. Ward said so. Carlos agreed. Carlos said Pete *should* push dope in Vegas—but—the other Boys have to agree.

Ward was *très* smart. The Arden move was *très* dumb. Ward tripped on his dick—at a *très* bad time.

Ward was in D.C. and New Orleans. Jimmy H. wanted him. Carlos beckoned. Carlos wants to snip loose ends. Carlos wants Ward's take. Carlos trusts Ward—but Ward always ridicules slaughter.

Arden saw the hit team. Arden knew Betty Mac. Arden knew

Hank Killiam. A *très* safe bet: Carlos wants to clip them. A *très* safe bet: Ward calls it rash.

A bug was spreading. Call it the Mercy Flu. Call it the Me-No-Kill Blues.

He should have killed Junior. Junior should have killed the shine.

He watched Junior work. He climbed an adjacent hill. He got a covert view. Junior diced Maynard Moore. Junior cut through his brain pan. Junior pulled slugs. His knife slipped. He ate bone chips. He hacked them out and rocked steady.

He checked Junior out. Three intel squads: L.A./New York/Miami. His guys said Junior checked *him* out.

His contacts hated Junior. They said Wayne Senior was a stud. They said Wayne Junior was a geek.

Junior passed him the mercy bug. Junior let the nigger live. Junior misread his options. The nigger vibed stupe. The nigger vibed homing pigeon. The nigger might home back here.

Pete cruised. Pete checked lounge marquees. Pete got the gestalt.

Name acts. No-name acts. Dick Contino/Art & Dottie Todd/the Girlza-poppin' Revue. Hank Henry/the Vagabonds/Freddy Bell & the Bellboys. The Persian Room/the Sky Room/the Top o' the Strip.

Jack "Jive" Schafer/Gregg Blando/Jody & the Misfits. The Dome of the Sea/the Sultan's Lounge/the Rumpus Room.

Call it: Toilets and carpet joints. Some high-end rooms. Call it for keeps:

Find Barb a spot. Find her some nonunion backup. Scotty & the Scabs or the Happy Horseshitters—a fixed rate and a cut.

Pete parked in the Sands lot. Pete hit some casinos—the Bird/the Riv/the DI. He caught a lull. Shit stood out boldfaced.

He played blackjack. He observed:

A pit boss bops on a card cheat. The fuck wears a card-sleeve prosthesis. The fuck shoots cards out his cuffs.

He saw Johnny Rosselli. They schmoozed. They talked up the Hughes deal. Johnny praised Ward Littell—dig the threat implied.

Ward's crucial to our plans. You're muscle—you're not.

Johnny said *ciao*. Two call girls hovered. It vibed three-way.

Pete walked. Pete hit the Sands/the Dunes/the Flamingo. Pete dug the low lights and thick rugs.

Sparks shot off his feet. His socks bipped and buzzed.

He hit bars. He drank club soda. He honed his cave vision. He watched barmen work. Call girls ducked him. He was 6’5”/230. He vibed strongarm cop.

What’s this:

A barman pours pills—six in a shot glass—a waitress picks up.

He braced the barman. He flashed a toy badge. He growled very gruff. The barman laughed. His son wore a badge like that. His son ate Cocoa Puffs.

The man oozed style. Pete bought him a drink. The man spritzed on Vegas and dope.

Horse/weed/cocaine—verboten. The fuzz enforced the trifecta. The Mob enforced the No-“H” Law.

They tortured pushers. They killed them. Local hypes copped in L.A. Local hypes rode the Heroin Highway.

Pills were cool: Red devils/yellow jackets/high hoppers. Ditto liquid meth sans spike. Drink it—don’t shoot it—fear the spike-phobic fuzz.

The fuzz sanctioned pills. Two Narco units—Sheriff’s/LVPD. Pills got pipelined in: T.J. to L.A./L.A. to Vegas. Local quacks consigned pills. They fed barmen and cabbies. They fed pill fiends Vegaswide.

The West LV coons craved white horse. Said coons itched to ride. The No Horse Rule de-horsed them and kept them de-satisfied.

Pete walked. Pete hit the Persian Room. Pete watched Dick Contino rehearse. He knew Dick. Dick played squeeze-box gigs for Sam G. Dick owed the Chicago Cartel. The Boys attached his check. The Boys bought his food. The Boys paid his rent and bought his kids’ threads.

Dick pitched a tale of woe—woe is me—lots of woe and no tail. Pete slid him two C’s. Dick spritzed the Vegas lounge scene.

The Detroit Boys ran the local. The steward took bribes. He usurped the prime snatch. He suborned them to hook. They worked the Lake Mead cruise boats. Lounge kids kept rough hours. They ate breakfast exclusive. The lounge scene ran on Dexedrine and pancakes.

Pete walked. Pete caught Louis Prima in rehearsal. An old geek chewed his ear off.

Pops booked no-name acts. Pops father-henned the girls if they blew him. Pops told them who to avoid:

Shvartze pimps. “Talent scouts.” Cockamamie “producers.” Skin-mag men and schmucks with no address.

Pete thanked him. Pops bragged. Pops relived his salad days as a pimp. I ran trim—the best in the west—I scored for the late JFK.

Pete broke three C-notes. Pete glommed sixty five-spots.

He grabbed a scratch pad. He wrote down his phone number sixty fucking times. He hit a liquor store. He bought sixty short dogs. He grabbed his sap and drove to West Vegas.

He cruised in slow. He wore the sap. He held his automatic. He saw:

Dirt streets. Dirt yards. Dirt lots. Shack chateaus abundant.

Tar-paper pads with cinder-block siding. *Beaucoup* churches/one mosque. *ALLAH IS LORD!* signs. Allah signs revised to *JESUS!*

Lots of street activity. Jigs cooking bar-b-que in fifty-gallon drums.

The Wild Goose Bar/the Colony Club/the Sugar Hill Lounge. Streets named for Presidents and letters. Shit cars ubiquitous—ad hoc housing:

Two-tenant Chevys. Bachelor Lincolns. Bring-the-whole-family Fords.

Pete cruised slooooow. Uppity coons flipped him off. They scowled. They chucked beer cans. They dinged his fender skirts.

He stopped at a rib drum. A halfbreed served short ends. A chow line pressed in. They scoped Pete. They snickered. They sneered.

Pete smiled. Pete bowed. Pete bought them lunch.

He tipped the breed fifty. He passed out short dogs and fives. He passed out his phone-number slips.

A silence ensued. Said silence built. Said silence lapsed slooooow.

Say what, big man? Say what, daddy-o?

Pete talked:

Who sells shit? Who’s seen Wendell Durfee? Who’s hot to buck the No-Horse Law? Shouts overlapped—little gems—some nuggets in rebop & jive.

These busboys sell red devils. They works at the Dunes. Dig on fucking Monarch Cab. Them guys push whites and RDs. Monarch got soul. Monarch work West LV. Monarch go where other cabs won't.

Dig on Curtis and Leroy—they gots plans—they wants to push horse. They baaaaaaaaad. They say fuck the rules. They say fuck them wop motherfuckers.

Shouts overlapped—more rebop/more jive. Pete yelled. Pete displayed charisma. Pete restored calm.

He told the breed to call the Wild Goose. He told the spooks to call HIM.

IF you see Wendell Durfee. *IF* Curtis and Leroy move horse.

He pledged a fat reward. He got an ovation: YOU THE FUCKIN' MAN!

He drove to the Wild Goose. Some spooks jogged along. They capered and waved their short dogs.

The Goose was packed. Pete replayed his act. The coons loved it. Pete cut through jive & rebop.

He got no dish on Curtis and Leroy. He got rumors on Wendell D. Wicked Wendell—worse than his rep—a rape-o/a shitbird/a heel. A homing pigeon—Vegas born-and-bred—a Vegas moth to the flame.

Shouts overlapped. Spooks ad-libbed. A spook defamed Wayne Tedrow Senior.

Slumlord Senior stiffed him. Slumlord Senior fucked him. Slumlord Senior raised his rent. The noise got bad. Pete got a headache. Pete dosed it with pork rinds and scotch.

The Senior talk tweaked him—a gem within jive. Junior worked the intel squad. Junior had the gaming board files.

The spook gained steam. The spook digressed off Senior. The spook sparked other spooks. They aired the Spook Agenda *wiiiiide*.

Jim Crow. Civil rights. Real-estate sanctions. Praise for Martin Luther King.

The vibe went bad. The spooks vibed lynch mob. Pete caught bum looks:

WE THE MAN! YOU the ofay exploiter!

Pete walked out. Pete moved fast. Pete caught some elbows.

He hit the sidewalk. A kid buffed his car. He tipped him. He pulled out. A Chevy pulled out on cue.

Pete caught the move. Pete checked his rearview. Pete made the driver:

Young/white/cop haircut. Some kind of kid fuzz.

Pete zigzagged. Pete blew a stop sign. The Chevy stuck tail-close. They hit LV proper. Pete stopped at a light. Pete set the emergency brake.

The Chevy idled. Pete walked back. Pete twirled his belt sap. The kid cop played cool. The kid cop twirled a play chip.

Pete reached in. Pete grabbed it. The kid cop guuuulped.

A red chip—$20—scrip for the Land o' Gold. Shit—Wayne Senior's joint.

Pete laughed. Pete said, "Tell Sergeant Tedrow to call me."

(Washington, D.C., 12/9/63)

ID work—old forms and smeared ink.

Littell worked. His kitchen table creaked. He knew paper and smudge art. The FBI taught him.

He smudged a birth-certificate form. He baked it on a hot plate. He sliced pen tubes and rolled smears.

The *old* Arden Smith/Coates—now the *new* Jane Fentress.

The apartment was hot. It helped dry forms. Littell rolled ink on a seal-stamp. He stole it from Dallas PD.

Arden was southern. Arden talked southern. Alabama had a lax driver's-license policy. Applicants sent fees in. Birth certificates ditto. Written test forms went out.

They completed them. They mailed them in. They sent in a snapshot. They got their DL return mail.

Littell flew to Alabama—eight days back. Littell researched births and deaths. Jane Fentress was born in Birmingham. Her DOB was 9/4/26. Her DOD was 8/1/29.

He drove to Bessemer. He rented an apartment. He put "Jane Fentress" on the mailbox. Bessemer to Birmingham—twenty-two miles.

Littell switched pens. Littell spread fresh paper. Littell inked vertical lines.

Arden was a bookkeeper. Arden claimed credentials. Arden went to school in DeKalb, Mississippi. Let's upgrade her—Tulane, '49—let's give her an accounting degree.

He was due in New Orleans. He could visit Tulane. He could skim old catalogs. He could learn the academic terrain. He could forge a transcript. He could solicit Mr. Hoover. Local agents knew

Tulane. A man could plant the goods.

Littell lined six sheets—standard college forms. He worked fast. He blotted. He smudged. He smeared.

Arden was safe. He stashed her in Balboa—due south of L.A.

A hotel hideaway—paid for by Hughes Tool. Tool Co. ignored his expenses—per Mr. Hughes' edict.

He swapped notes with Mr. Hughes. They spoke on the phone. They never officially met. He snuck into Drac's lair—one time only—the assassination a.m.

There's Drac:

He's sucking IV blood. He's shooting dope in his dick. He's tall. He's thin. His nails curl back.

Mormons guarded him. Mormons cleaned his spikes. Mormons fed him blood. Mormons swabbed his injection tracks.

Drac stayed in his room. Drac *owned* his room. The hotel endured him—call it squatter's rights—Beverly Hills–style.

Littell spread photos out. Arden—three ways. One passport-DL shot/two keepsakes.

They made love in Balboa. A window blew open. Some kids heard them. The kids laughed. Their dog carried on.

Arden had sharp hips. He was bone-thin. They bumped and scraped and blundered into a fit.

Arden touched up her gray hair. Arden's pulse ran quick. She'd had scarlet fever as a kid. She'd had one abortion.

She was running. He caught her. Her run predated the hit.

Littell studied the photos. Littell studied *her*.

She had one brown eye. She had one hazel eye. Her left breast was smaller than her right. He bought her a cashmere sweater. It stretched snug on one side.

Jimmy Hoffa said, "I'm going *down*? After the fucking coup we just pulled?"

Littell went ssshhh. Hoffa shut up. Littell tossed the room. He checked the lamps. He checked the rugs. He checked under the desk.

"Ward, you worry too much. I got a fucking guard outside my office twenty-four hours a day."

Littell checked the window. Window mounts *worked*. Suction cups could be rigged to glass.

“Ward, Jesus fucking—”

No mounts/no glass plates/no cups.

Hoffa stretched out. Hoffa yawned. Hoffa dipped his chair and dropped his feet on his desk.

Littell sat on the edge. “You’ll probably be convicted. The appeal process will buy you at least—”

“That cunt-lapping homo Bobby F-for-Faggot—”

“—but jury tampering is not an offense that falls under Federal sentencing guidelines, which means a discretionary decree, which —”

“—means Bobby F-for-Fuckface Kennedy wins and James R-for-Ridiculous Hoffa goes to the fucking shithouse for five or six fucking years.”

Littell smiled. “That’s my summary, yes.”

Hoffa picked his nose. “There’s more. ‘That’s my summary’ is no kind of summary that’s worth a fucking shit.”

Littell crossed his legs. “You’ll stay out on appeals for two or three years. I’m developing a long-range strategy to legitimize Pension Fund money and divert and launder it through foreign sources, which should kick into high gear around the time you get out. I’m meeting the Boys in Vegas next month to discuss it. I can’t emphasize how important this may prove to be.”

Hoffa picked his teeth. “And in the fucking meantime?”

“In the meantime, we have to worry about those other grand juries that Bobby’s impaneled.”

Hoffa blew his nose. “That cunt-lapping cocksucker. After what we did to fuck—”

“We need to know what Bobby thinks about the hit. Mr. Hoover wants to know, too.”

Hoffa cleaned his ears. Hoffa shined on Littell. He gouged. He went in deep. He jabbed a pen. He prospected for wax.

He said, “Carlos has a lawyer at Justice.”

New Orleans was hot. The air hung wet and ripe.

Carlos owned a motel—twelve rooms and one office. Carlos made people wait.

Littell waited. The office smelled—chicory and bug spray. Carlos left a bottle out—Hennessy X.O—Carlos doubted his will to abstain.

He got off the plane. He drove to Tulane. He went through catalogs. He compiled a list of GI Bill classes.

He called Mr. Hoover. He asked his favor. Mr. Hoover agreed. Yes, I'll do it—I'll plant your paper.

The air cooler died. Littell dumped his jacket. Littell undid his tie. Carlos walked in. Carlos slapped the wall unit. Cold air blew high.

"*Come va, Ward*?"

Littell kissed his ring. "*Bene, padrone*."

Carlos sat on the desk. "You love that shit, and you're not even Italian."

"*Stavo perdiventare un prete, Signor Marcello. Aurei potuto il tuo confessore.* "

Carlos cracked the bottle. "Say the last part in English. Your Italian's better than mine."

Littell smiled. "I could have been your confessor."

Carlos poured two fingers. "You'd be out of a job. I never do anything to piss God off."

Littell smiled. Carlos offered the bottle. Littell shook his head.

Carlos lit a cigar. "So?"

Littell coughed. "We're fine. The commission's a whitewash, and I wrote the narrative brief that they'll work off. It played the way I expected."

"Despite some fuck-ups."

"Guy Banister's. Not Pete's or mine."

Carlos shrugged. "Guy's a capable guy, on the whole."

"I wouldn't say that."

"Of course you wouldn't. You wanted your crew to go in."

Littell coughed. "I don't want to argue the point."

"The fuck you don't. You're a lawyer."

The wall unit died. Carlos slapped it. Cold air blew wide.

Littell said, "The meeting is set for the fourth."

Carlos laughed. "Moe Dalitz is calling it 'the Summit.' "

"That's appropriate. Especially if we still have your vote for Pete's business."

"Pete's *potential* business? Yeah, sure."

"You don't sound too optimistic."

Carlos flicked ash. "Narcotics is a tough sell. Nobody wants to put Vegas in the shitter."

"Vegas *is* the shitter."

"No, Mr. I-Was-Almost-a-Priest, it's your fucking salvation. It's your debt to pay off, and without that debt you'd be in the shitter with your friend Kemper Boyd."

Littell coughed. The smoke was bad. The wall unit swirled it.

Carlos said, "So?"

"So, I have a plan for the Pension Fund books. It's long-range, and it derives from your plans for Mr. Hughes."

"You mean *our* plans."

Littell coughed. "Yes, ours."

Carlos shrugged—I'm bored for now—Carlos held up a file.

"Jimmy said you need a guy next to Bobby."

Littell grabbed the file. Littell skimmed the top page—one Shreveport PD rap sheet/one note.

8/12/54: Doug Eversall drives home. Doug Eversall hits three kids. He's drunk. The kids die. Doug's DA pal buries it.

For *his* pal: Carlos Marcello.

Doug Eversall is a lawyer. Doug Eversall works at Justice. Bobby likes Doug. Bobby hates drunks and loves kids. Bobby doesn't know Doug's a kid-killer.

Carlos said, "You'll like Doug. He's on the wagon, like you."

Littell grabbed his briefcase and stood up. Carlos said, "Not yet."

The smoke was bad. It punched up the booze fumes. Littell almost drooled.

"We got some loose ends, Ward. Ruby bothers me, and I think we should send him a message."

Littell coughed. Here it com—

"Guy said you know the story. You know, all that grief at Jack Zangetty's motel."

Chills now—steam off dry ice.

"I know the story, yes. I know what Guy wants you to do, and I'm against it. It's unnecessary, it's too conspicuous, it's too close to Ruby's arrest."

Carlos shook his head. "They go. Tell Pete to take care of it."

Dizzy—weightless now.

"This is all on Banister. *He* let them go to the safe house. *He* screwed up on Tippit and Oswald. *He's* the drunk who'll be bragging to every right-wing shithead on God's green earth."

Carlos shook his head. Carlos waved four fingers.

"Zangetty, Hank Killiam, that Arden cunt, and Betty McDonald.

Tell Pete I don’t expect a big delay.”

(Las Vegas, 12/13/63)

The Dallas paper ran it—page 6 news—NO LEADS ON MISSING POLICEMAN.

Wayne sat in Sills' Tip-Top. Wayne hogged a window booth. He held his gun—locked & cocked—the paper covered it.

The paper loved Maynard Moore. Moore got more ink than Jack Ruby. FAN MAIL FOR ASSASSIN'S SLAYER. CHIEF LAUDS MISSING OFFICER. NEGRO SOUGHT IN BAFFLING DISAPPEARANCE.

Wayne counted down. He had eighteen days in now. The Warren probe/the "Lone Gunman"/no news as good news.

He still worried Dallas. He still skipped meals. He still pissed every six seconds.

Pete walked in. Pete showed up punctual. He saw Wayne. He sat down. He smiled.

He checked Wayne's lap. He peeked and goofed. He saw the paper.

He said, "Aww, come on."

Wayne reholstered. Wayne fumbled his gun. Wayne banged the table. A waitress saw it. Wayne blushed red. Pete cracked his knuckles.

"I watched you clean up. You did a good job, but I wish you'd thought the nigger through."

Wayne felt piss pressure. Wayne clenched up downstairs.

"You're comped at the Stardust. That means the Chicago guys brought you in."

"Keep going."

"You think I owe you for that weekend."

Pete cracked his thumbs. "I want to see your gaming board files."

Wayne said, "No."

Pete grabbed a fork. Pete twirled it. Pete squeezed it and bent it in two. The waitress saw it. The waitress freaked.

She went oooh. She dropped a tray. She made a mess.

"I could go around you. Buddy Fritsch is supposed to be nice."

Wayne looked out the window. Wayne saw a two-car crash.

Pete said, "Fucking tailgaters. I always wrote up guys like—"

"I've got the files stashed, and there's no carbons. It's an old fail-safe policy. If you go to Buddy, I'll have my father intercede. Buddy's afraid of him."

Pete cracked his knuckles. "That's all I get for Dallas?"

"Nothing happened in Dallas. Don't you watch the news?"

Pete walked out. Wayne felt piss pressure. Wayne ran to the can.

(Las Vegas, 12/13/63)

One more headache/one more headache drink/one more lounge.

The Moon Room at the Stardust—low lights and moon maids in tights.

Pete sipped scotch. A moon maid fed him peanuts. Ward left him a message. A desk clerk relayed it. Wait for a Bible code—I'll Western Union it in.

Wayne Junior said no. Nos hurt. Nos fucked with him.

A moon maid dipped by—a faux redhead—dark roots and dark tan. Fuck faux redheads. Real redheads burned.

He got Barb a gig—three days ago—Sam G. pulled strings. Dig it: Barb & the Bail Bondsmen.

Permanent work—4 shows/6 nites—the Sultan's Lounge at the Sahara. Barb was rehearsing. She said the Twist was out. She said the go-go beat was in.

Nigger music. The Swim/the Fish/the Watusi. White stiffs take note.

He shitcanned Barb's ex. He shitcanned his combo. Dick Contino came through. Dick scored Barb a trio—sax/trumpet/drums—three long-term lounge denizens.

Fags. Beefcake types. USDA-certified swish.

Pete cowed them. Pete warned them. Sam G. spread the word: Barb B. was verboten. Approach once and suffer. Approach twice and die.

Barb dug Vegas. Hotel suites and nightlife. No Presidential motorcades.

West LV looked good. West LV looked contained and vice-ready.

Vice zones worked. He hit Pearl in ’42. The SPs shut down some roads and cordoned the clap. White horse would work. The niggers craved it. They’d geez up. They’d stay home. They’d soil their own rug.

A moon maid slid by—a faux blonde—dark roots and Miss Clairol. She fed him some peanuts. She dropped off Ward’s note.

Pete killed his drink. Pete went up to the suite. Pete got out the Gideon book. The code spanned the whole text—chapter and verse—Exodus to First John.

He worked off a scratch pad—numbers to letters—letters to words.

There:

“CM’s orders. Elim. 4 from motel/safe house. Call tomorrow night, 10:30 EST. Pay phone in Silver Spring, Md.: BL4-9883.”

(Silver Spring, 12/14/63)

Perfect:

The off ramp / the road / the train station / the tracks / the platform / the phone.

A freeway adjacent. Off-ramp access. Parking-lot view. Late commuters passing through—milk runs from D.C.

Littell sat in his car. Littell watched the ramp—hold for a powder-blue Ford. Carlos described Eversall. He's a tall guy. He's got one high shoe.

9:26 p.m.

The express blew by. Cars parked and split. The local should stop at 10:00.

Littell studied his script. It stressed Eversall's time in New Orleans. It stressed Lee Oswald's time there. It stressed the '63 racket hearings. It stressed Bobby's star role.

Mob panic ensues. Two months pass. JFK dies. Eversall links the dots. Eversall sees collusion.

Littell checked his watch—9:30 sharp—hold for the man with the high shoe.

A blue Ford pulled in. Littell flashed his lights. Littell strafed the windshield and grille. The Ford braked and stopped. A tall man got out. Said man swayed on a high shoe.

Littell hit his brights. Eversall blinked and tripped. He caught himself. His bad leg buckled. His briefcase balanced him.

Littell killed his brights. Littell popped the passenger door. Eversall limped up—briefcase as ballast—Eversall fell on the seat.

Littell shut the door. Littell hit the roof light. It haloed Eversall.

Littell frisked him.

He grabbed his crotch. He pulled his shirt up. He pulled down his socks. He opened his briefcase. He went through his files. He dropped the script in.

Eversall smelled—sweat and bay rum. His breath reeked of peanuts and gin.

Littell said, “Did Carlos explain?”

Eversall shook his head. His neck muscles bobbed.

“Answer me. I want to hear your voice.”

Eversall squirmed. His high shoe hit the dash.

“I never talk to Carlos. I get calls from this Cajun-type guy.”

He said it slow. He blinked in time. He blinked and ducked from the light. Littell grabbed his tie. Littell jerked it. Littell pulled him back in the light.

“You’re going to wear a wire and talk to Bobby. I want to know what he thinks about the assassination.”

Eversall blinked. Eversall st-st-stuttered.

Littell jerked his tie. “I read a piece in the *Post.* Bobby’s throwing a Christmas party, and he’s inviting some people from Justice.”

Eversall blinked. Eversall st-st-stuttered. He tried to talk. He popped *p*’s and *l*’s. He tried to say “Please.”

“I’ve prepared a script. You tell Bobby that you don’t like the proximity to the hearings, and you offer to help. If Bobby gets angry, you be that much more persistent.”

Eversall blinked. Eversall st-st-stuttered. He tried to talk. He popped *p*’s and *l*’s. He bounced *b*’s for “Bobby.”

Littell smelled his piss. Littell saw the stain. Littell rolled the windows down.

He had spare time. The pay phone was close. He cracked all the windows and aired the car out.

Trains rolled in. Women fetched their husbands. A hailstorm hit. It chipped his windshield. He tuned in the radio news.

Mr. Hoover addressed the Boy Scouts. Jack Ruby sulked in his cell. Trouble in Saigon. Bobby Kennedy bereft.

Bobby loved hard. Bobby mourned hard. *He* used to.

Late ’58:

He worked the Chicago Office. Bobby worked the McClellan Committee. Kemper Boyd worked *for* Bobby. Kemper Boyd worked *against* him. Mr. Hoover deployed Kemper wide.

Mr. Hoover hated Bobby. Bobby chased the Mob. Mr. Hoover said the Mob did not exist. Bobby humbled Mr. Hoover. Bobby disproved his lie.

Mr. Hoover liked Kemper Boyd. Boyd liked his friend Ward. Boyd got Ward a choice Bureau job:

The Top Hoodlum Program—Mr. Hoover's late retraction—Mr. Hoover's late nod to the Mob. Call it a half-measure. Call it a publicity shuck.

He worked the THP. He fucked up. Mr. Hoover kicked him back to the Red Squad. Boyd stepped up then. Boyd stepped up for Bobby. Boyd offered friend Ward a *real* job.

Covert work—unpaid.

He took the job. He culled anti-Mob data. He leaked it to Boyd. Boyd leaked it to Bobby.

He never met Bobby. Bobby called him the Phantom. Bobby logged a persistent rumor. Bobby passed it on to Kemper Boyd.

The Teamsters kept a *private* set of pension-fund books. The "real" books hid one billion dollars.

He chased the "real" books. He traced them to a man named Jules Schiffrin. He stole the "real" books—late in '60.

Schiffrin discovered the theft. Schiffrin had a heart attack. Schiffrin died that night. Littell hid the books. Said books were coded. Littell decoded one entry fast.

The code rebuked a royal clan. The code proved that Joe Kennedy was mobbed-up tight.

Joe fed the fund. Joe gorged it. Joe invested 49 million dollars. It was laundered. It was lent. It suborned politicians. It financed labor rackets.

The base sum stayed in the fund. The money notched compound interest. The money greeeeeeew.

Joe let it ride. The Teamsters held his assets. Littell did not tell Bobby. Littell did not assault his dad.

He kept the books. He ignored his Red Squad work. He befriended a name leftist. Mr. Hoover found out. Mr. Hoover fired him.

Jack Kennedy was elected. Jack made Bobby his AG. Bobby got Boyd work at Justice.

Boyd interceded. Boyd braced Bobby—employ the Phantom, please.

Mr. Hoover interceded. Mr. Hoover braced Bobby—don't employ Ward J. Littell. He's a drunk. He's a sob sister. He's a Communist.

Bobby kowtowed. Bobby cut the Phantom off. The Phantom kept the "real" books. The Phantom quit booze. The Phantom lawyered freelance. The Phantom cracked the fund-book code.

He tracked a billion dollars. He tracked intakes and transfers. He studied and extrapolated and *knew:*

The funds could be diverted. The funds could be deployed legally.

He hoarded the knowledge. He hid the books. He inked up a duplicate set. He hated Bobby now. He hated Jack K. by extension.

Boyd was fixed on Cuba. Carlos M. ditto. Carlos financed exile groups. The Boys wanted to oust Fidel Castro. The Boys wanted to reclaim their Cuban hotels.

Boyd worked for Bobby. Boyd worked for the CIA. Bobby hated Carlos. Bobby deported Carlos. The Phantom knew deportation law.

Boyd set him up with Carlos. The Phantom became a Mob lawyer. It felt morally and hatefully correct.

Carlos set him up with Jimmy Hoffa. Mr. Hoover reappeared.

Mr. Hoover made nice. Mr. Hoover praised his comeback. Mr. Hoover set him up with Mr. Hughes. Mr. Hoover shared his Bobby-Jack hate.

He worked for Carlos and Jimmy. He planned the Hughes-Vegas deal. Bobby attacked the Mob. Jack dropped the Cuban cause. Jack curtailed the hothead exiles.

Pete and Boyd stole some dope. Things went blooey. The Boys got very mad.

He braced Carlos. He said let's kill Jack. He said let's nullify Bobby. Carlos said yes. Carlos vouched the plan. Carlos brought Pete and Boyd in.

Carlos fucked them. Carlos opted for Guy B. Carlos sent Guy to Dallas.

A late bill came due. Late fees accrued. He had the "real" books. He had the data. He had them unsuspected and clean.

He was wrong. Carlos *knew* he had them. Carlos saw him ascend. Carlos called in the bill due.

Carlos said *you're* going to sell Hughes Las Vegas—and *we're* going to fuck him. *You* know the books. *You* cracked the code. *You* have money plans. *That* money. Plus the *Hughes* money. Equals *our* money—juiced by *your* long-range strategy.

He returned the books. He kept the dupes. His theft was near-open goods. Carlos knew. Carlos told Sam G. Sam told Johnny Rosselli.

Santo knew. Moe Dalitz knew. No one told Jimmy. Jimmy was crazy. Jimmy was shortsighted. Jimmy would kill him.

Littell skimmed newscasts. Littell got crossband blips: LBJ/Kool Menthol/Dr. King and Bobby.

He met Bobby—three days pre-Dallas—he mis-ID'd himself. He said I'm just a lawyer. He said I have a tape. Bobby gave him ten minutes of time.

He played his tape. A hood indicted Joe Kennedy.

For: Pension Fund fraud/collusion/long-term racketeering.

Bobby called his father's bank. The manager confirmed details. Bobby brushed tears back. Bobby raged and grieved. It felt all good then. It felt all hateful now.

The news signed off. A deejay signed on. Mr. Tunes—comin' at ya.

The phone rang.

Littell ran. Littell slid on hailstones. Littell grabbed the receiver.

Pete said, "Junior won't play. The fucking kid stalemated me."

"I'll talk to Sam. We'll make a different app—"

"I'll clip Zangetty and Killiam. That's it. I won't clip the women."

The booth was hot. The windows fogged. The storm produced steam.

"I agree. We'll have to finesse Carlos."

Pete laughed. "Don't shit me. You know it's more than that."

"What are you saying?"

Pete said, "I know about Arden."

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/19/63. Verbatim telephone call transcript. Marked: “Recorded at Mr. Hughes’ request. Copies to: Permanent File/Fiscal ’63 File/Security File.” Speaking: Howard R. Hughes, Ward J. Littell.

HH: Is that you, Ward?

WJL: It’s me.

HH: I had a premonition last night. Do you want to hear about it?

WJL: Certainly.

HH: I know that tone. Mollify the boss so he’ll get back to business.

(WJL laughs.)

HH: Here’s my premonition. You’re going to tell me that it will take years to divest my TWA stock, so I should mind my p’s and q’s and put the whole thing out of mind.

WJL: Your premonition was accurate.

HH: That’s all you have to say? You’re letting me off that easy?

WJL: I could describe the legal processes involved in divesting half a billion dollars’ worth of stock and tell you how much you’ve impeded the progress by dodging various subpoenas.

HH: You’re feeling your oats today. I’m not up to sparring with you.

WJL: I’m not sparring, Mr. Hughes. I’m observing.

HH: And your latest estimate is?

WJL: We’re two years away from a judgment. The appeals process will extend for at least nine to fourteen months. You should discuss the details with your other attorneys and move things along by pre-submitting your depositions.

HH: You’re my favorite attorney.

WJL: Thank you.

HH: Only Mormons and FBI men have clean blood.

WJL: I’m not much of an expert on blood, Sir.

HH: I am. You know the law, and I know aerodynamics, blood and germs.

WJL: We’re expert in our separate fields, Sir.

HH: I know business strategy as well. I have the assets to purchase Las Vegas now, but I prefer to wait and make the purchase with my stock windfall.

WJL: That's a prudent strategy, Sir. But I should point out a few things.

HH: Point, then. I'm listening.

WJL: One, you are not going to purchase the city of Las Vegas or Clark County, Nevada. Two, you are going to attempt to purchase numerous hotel-casinos, the acquisition of which violates numerous state and federal antitrust statutes. Three, you cannot make those purchases now. You would need to deplete the cash flow necessary to operate Hughes Tool to do it, and you have yet to ingratiate yourself with the Nevada State Legislature and the right people in Clark County. Four, that is my job—and it will take time. Five, I want to wait and follow some other hotel-chain developments through the court process and collate the antitrust rulings and precedents.

HH: Jesus, that was some speech. You're a long-winded guy.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

HH: You didn't mention your Mafia pals.

WJL: Sir?

HH: I talked to Mr. Hoover. He said you've got those guys in your pocket. What's that guy's name in New Orleans?

WJL: Carlos Marcello?

HH: Marcello, right. Mr. Hoover said he eats out of your hand. He said, "When the time's right, Littell will jew those dagos down and get you your hotels at rock-bottom prices."

WJL: I'll certainly try.

HH: You'll do better than that.

WJL: I'll try, Sir.

HH: We've got to devise a germ policy.

WJL: Sir?

HH: At my hotels. No germs, no Negroes. Negroes are well-known germ conduits. They'll infect my slot machines.

WJL: I'll look into it, Sir.

HH: My solution is mass sedation. I've been reading chemistry books. Certain narcotic substances possess germ-killing characteristics. We could sedate the Negroes, lower their white-blood count and keep them out of my hotels.

WJL: Mass sedation would require certain sanctions that we might not get.

HH: You're not convinced. I can tell by your voice.

WJL: I'll give it some thought.

HH: Think about this. Lee Oswald was a germ conduit and a deadly-disease transmitter. He didn't need a rifle. He could have breathed on Kennedy and killed him.

WJL: It's an interesting theory, Sir.

HH: Only Mormons and FBI men have clean blood.

WJL: You've got quite a few Mormons in Nevada. There's a man named Wayne Tedrow Senior that I may approach on your behalf.

HH: I've got some good Mormons here. They set me up with Fred Otash.

WJL: I've heard of him.

HH: He's the "Private Eye to the Stars." He's been running a string of Howard Hughes look-alikes all over L.A., like Pete Bondurant used to. Those subpoena servers follow them around like robots.

WJL: Again, Sir. Dodging subpoenas only prolongs the whole process.

HH: Ward, you're a goddamn killjoy.

(WJL laughs.)

HH: Freddy's Lebanese. Those people have high white-cell counts. I like him, but he's no Pete.

WJL: Pete's working with me in Las Vegas.

HH: Good. Frenchmen have low white-cell counts. I read it in the *National Geographic.*

WJL: He'll be pleased to hear it.

HH: Good. Tell him I said hello, and tell him to procure me some medicine. He'll know what I mean. Tell him my Mormons have been bringing me inferior goods.

WJL: I'll tell him.

HH: Let me make one thing clear before I hang up.

WJL: Sir?

HH: I want to buy Las Vegas.

WJL: You've made yourself clear.

HH: The desert air kills germs.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

(Las Vegas, 12/23/63)

The Party—a Vegas perennial—Wayne Senior's Christmas bash.

A fag redid the ranch house. He added ice sculptures and snow-flocked walls. He hired elves and nymphs.

The elves were wetbacks. They slung hors d'oeuvres. They wore mock-rag coats. The nymphs whored at the Dunes. They served cleavage and drinks.

The fag brought a bandstand. The fag added a dance floor. The fag hired a bumfuck quartet.

Barb & the Bail Bondsmen—a singer and three swish ex-cons.

Wayne circulated. The combo bugged him. He popped the trumpet for flim-flam. He popped the sax for stat rape.

The singer compensated—red hair and wild legs.

Lynette circulated. The crowd meshed. Cops and Vegas trash. Mormons and Nellis brass.

Wayne Senior circulated. Janice danced solo. A crowd watched her. Janice shimmied. Janice swayed. Janice dipped loooow.

Wayne Senior walked up. Wayne Senior twirled his walking stick. A Nellis one-star grabbed it.

He cued the combo. Barb tapped a beat. The combo vamped. Barb palmed maracas.

The one-star knelt. The one-star dropped the stick looooow.

Barb ad-libbed. "Vegas limbo mighty good, lady go down like she should."

Janice spread her legs. Janice rolled her hips. Janice popped looooow. The crowd clapped. The crowd stomped. Barb milked the beat.

Janice went looooow. Janice popped sequins and spangles. Janice popped seams. Her high heels snapped. She kicked off her shoes. She went under and up.

The crowd clapped. Janice bowed looooow. She ripped her dress. Her red panties showed.

Wayne Senior passed her a Salem. The lights went low. The combo vamped "Moonglow." A baby spot blinked. It focused on Janice. It swooped and caught Wayne Senior low.

They linked up. Janice held her cigarette. Smoke blew through the light.

Circle dance.

Wayne Senior smiled. Wayne Senior loved it. Janice mugged and mocked this corny shit.

They swayed. Janice dropped sequins. The spotlight jumped. Wayne saw Lynette. Lynette saw Wayne. Lynette saw Wayne ogle Janice.

He dodged her eyes. He walked outside. He paced the front deck. He smelled marijuana—pot alert below.

Janice toked up for parties. Janice shared with the help. You had zorched valets. You had a hundred cars—now check the runway:

One airplane valet-parked—one guest's Piper Deuce.

Wayne paced. Wayne walked the deck. Wayne fretted Dallas up.

Jack Ruby observed Hanukkah. The paper ran x-clusive pix. Two pages in: HOPE FADES FOR MISSING POLICEMAN.

Wayne watched the party. A glass door killed the noise. Check the wino elves—they're digging on Barb.

Wayne watched her.

Barb moves her lips. Barb bumps her hips. Barb hits the mike stand. Barb scans the room. Barb sees a face and melts.

Wayne hugged the glass. Wayne got an angle. Wayne tracked her eyes.

To Mr. Meltman—Pete Bondurant.

Barb melts. Fucking snowdrifts in August. Big Pete reciprocates.

Wayne cracked the door. Wayne caught the vocal: "I Only Have Eyes for You."

Wayne shut the door. His stomach dropped. He leaned on the glass. He caught a chill and saved his dinner.

Barb blew a kiss. Pete blew one back. Pete stretched and bumped his head on the ceiling.

Pete grinned. Pete went ooops! A man joined him—sunburned and thin—some shitkicker runt.

Wayne grabbed a chair. Wayne kicked up his feet. Wayne rocked off the rail. A match flared below him. Reefer smoke plumed its way up.

It smelled good. It sent him back. He toked once himself. Jump School at Fort Bragg. Let's jump stoned and watch clouds change colors.

The door slid open. Noise spilled out. Wayne smelled Janice—cigarettes and Chanel No. 5.

She walked up. She leaned on him. She pressed his shoulders and back.

Wayne said, "Come on, work."

Janice worked him. Janice dug in. Janice unknotted kinks.

"Something smells sweet down there."

"It smells like a felony roust, if I was inclined."

"Be nice, now. It's Christmas."

"You mean, 'It's Vegas, and the law's for sale.' "

Janice dug in. "I wouldn't be that blunt with a policeman."

Wayne leaned back. "Who's the one-star?"

"That's Brigadier General Clark D. Kinman. He has a powerful crush on yours truly."

"I noticed."

"You notice everything. And I noticed you ogle that singer."

"Did you notice her husband? The big guy?"

Janice worked his spine. "I noticed the airplane he came in, and the ankle holster he's wearing."

Wayne twitched. Janice tickled his neck.

"Did I touch a nerve there?"

Wayne coughed. "Who's the skinny guy?"

Janice laughed. "That's Mr. Chuck Rogers. He described himself as a pilot, a petroleum geologist, and a professional anti-Communist."

"You should introduce him to my father."

"I think they're fast friends already. They were discussing the Cuban cause or some such nonsense."

Wayne rolled his neck. "Who hired that combo?"

"Your father. Buddy Fritsch recommended them."

Wayne turned around. Wayne saw Lynette. Lynette saw him.

She tapped the door glass. She flashed her watch. Wayne flashed ten fingers.

Janice said, “Spoilsport.” Janice made claws. Janice goofed on draggy Lynette.

Wayne turned on the rail light. Janice walked downstairs. Sequins dropped behind her. The light made them glint.

The valets giggled. *Hola, señora. Gracias por la reefer*.

Wayne fucked with the light.

He swiveled it. He dipped it. He strafed the airplane. He caught a window. He saw shotguns and vests.

The hatch popped open. Pete B. jumped out. Wayne flashed him. Pete waved and winked.

Wayne fretted it. Wayne walked inside and rejoined the party. Midnite hit. Drunks waved mistletoe.

The eggnog was out. Ditto the prewar cognac. Ditto the pre-Castro cigars.

The elves were sloshed. The nymphs were bombed. The Mormons were blotto. The ice sculptures leaked. The manger scene dripped. Baby Jesus was slush. Said Savior played ashtray. His cradle held butts.

Wayne circulated. The Bondsmen packed up. Barb lugged mike stands and drums. Wayne watched her. Lynette watched him.

Wayne Senior held court. Four Mormon elders and chairs tucked in tight. Chuck Rogers sat in. Chuck balanced two bottles. Chuck sucked gin and blueberry schnapps.

Wayne Senior dropped names—Mr. Hoover said this/Dick Nixon said that. The elders laughed. Chuck shared his jugs. Wayne Senior passed him a key.

Chuck palmed it. Chuck stood up. The elders laughed. The elders shared frat-boy looks.

They stood up. They walked down the side hall. Chuck bird-dogged them. They rendezvoused. They all braced the gun-room door.

Chuck unlocked it. The elders piled in. The elders chortled and yukked. Chuck stepped in. The elders snatched his booze. Chuck shut the door fast.

Wayne watched. Wayne grabbed a stray drink. Wayne guzzled it. Vodka and fruit pulp—lipstick on the glass.

The pulp killed the burn. The lipstick tasted sweet. The rush hit him low.

He walked to the gun room. He heard yuks inside. He jerked the door. He popped it.

Movie time.

Chuck ran the projector. Film hit a pull screen. Tight on: Martin Luther King.

He's fat. He's nude. He's ecstatic. He's fucking a white woman hard.

They fucked. They fucked sans sound. They fucked missionary-style. Static hiss and film flecks. Sprocket holes and numbers—FBI code.

Covert work/surveillance film/some lens distortion.

King wore socks. The woman wore nylons. The elders yukked. The projector clicked. Film cut through a slide.

The mattress sagged—plump Reverend King—the woman more so. An ashtray bounced on the bed—butts scattered and flew.

Chuck grabbed a flashlight. Chuck centered the beam. Chuck palmed a 4-by-6 tract.

King thrashed—the camera panned—Trojan rubbers on a nightstand.

Chuck yelled—pipe down now—Chuck read from the tract. "Big Bertha said, 'Maul me, Marty! We shall overcoooooome!' "

Wayne ran up. Chuck saw him. Chuck gawked—what the—

Wayne kicked the projector. The spools flew and rolled. The film hit three walls and went dead. The elders backed up. The elders tripped and banged heads. The elders knocked the screen down.

Wayne grabbed the tract. Chuck backed off. Wayne shoved him and ran out. He cut down the side hall. He grazed the bandstand. He side-swiped some nymphs and elves.

He made the front deck. He grabbed the rail light. He honed it and flashed on the tract.

There—Wayne Senior's print style. The paper stock/the margins/the type.

Text and cartoons. Martin Luther Coon and the plump woman. Fat Jews with fangs.

Martin Luther Coon—priapic.

His dick's a branding iron. It's red hot. The head's a hammer-and-scythe.

Wayne spat on the picture. Wayne ripped it crossways. Wayne shredded it up.

(New Mexico, 12/24/63)

Gusts kicked in. The plane dipped resultant.

The sky was black. The air was wet. Ice hit the props. Altus, Oklahoma—due east.

Chuck flew low. Chuck flew radar-proof. Chuck flew minus landing log. No airstrip. No runway. We're heading for Jack's *rural* lodge.

The cockpit was cramped. The cockpit was cold. Pete goosed the heat. He called ahead. He played tourist. He heard that Jack Z. had three guests.

Quail hunters. Praise Jesus—all men.

Chuck knew the lodge. Chuck spent time there. Chuck knew the floor plan. Jack slept in the office. Jack parked his guests close. There'd be three rooms with through doors.

Pete checked the cargo hold:

Flashlights/shotguns/magnums. Kerosene/gunnysacks. Friction tape/rubber gloves/rope. A Polaroid camera/four straitjackets/four honey jars.

It was overkill. Carlos loved wet work. Carlos thought plans up. Carlos popped his rocks secondhand.

Chuck read a hate tract. The dashboard threw light. Pete saw cartoons and FBI text. Hate and smut—a coon named Bayard Rustin—a queer cluster-fuck.

Pete laughed. Chuck said, "Why'd we go to that party? I'm not complaining, now. I met a few kindred souls."

The plane dipped. Pete bumped his head.

"I was letting someone know that I won't go away."

"You want to tell me who and why?"

Pete shook his head. The plane jumped. Pete's knees hit the dash.

Chuck said, "Mr. Tedrow's some kind of American. That's more than I can say for his son."

"Junior's a piece of work. Don't underestimate him."

Chuck popped Dramamine. "Mr. Tedrow knows all the right people. Guy B. said he put some cash into a certain operation."

Pete rubbed his neck. "There *was* no operation. Don't you read the fucking *New York Times*?"

Chuck laughed. "You mean I was dreaming then?"

"Treat it that way. You'll live longer."

"Then I must've dreamed up all those people that Carlos wants to clip."

Pete rubbed his eyes. Fuck—Headache #3,000.

"Then I'll be dreaming when we take out Jack Z., and I'll *really* be dreaming when we find old Hank and those cunts Arden and Bet—"

Pete grabbed his neck. "Nothing happened in Dallas, and nothing's happening now."

3:42 a.m.

They touched down. The ground was glass. Chuck cut the flaps and braked. They spun. They brodied on ice. They did figure eights and stalled in tall grass.

They put their vests on. They grabbed flashlights/shotguns/magnums. They screwed on silencers.

They hiked southeast. Pete paced it out: .32 miles. Low hills. Caves set in sheet rock. Cloud cover and a high moon.

There—the lodge—down on paved land.

Twelve rooms. A horseshoe court. Dirt-road access. No lights. No sounds. Two jeeps upside the office.

They walked up. Chuck stood point. Pete flashed the door. He saw a spring lock. He saw a loose knob. He saw a workable gap.

He pulled his knife. He wedged it in. He snapped the bolt. He walked in. The door creaked. He kept his beam low.

Three steps to the counter—hold for a ledger on a chain.

He walked up blind. Chuck's floor plan worked. He bumped the counter. Eyes left—a side door wide open. Room #1—dark.

His eyes adjusted. He squinted. He caught gray tones in black.

He looked through room 1. He squinted. He saw the room #2 door ajar.

Ears left—snores in room 1. Ears front—snores behind the counter.

Pete smelled paper. Pete touched the countertop. Pete brushed the ledger. He flashed the top page. He saw three guests logged in —housed in rooms 1/2/3.

Pete leaned on the counter. Pete pulled his piece. Pete flashed his light and aimed at the snores. There's Jack Zangetty—face-up on a cot—eyes shut and mouth wide for flies.

Pete aimed off the beam. Pete squeezed a shot. Jack's head snapped. Jack's teeth exploded.

The silencer worked—sounds like a cough and a sneeze. One more now—safekeeping.

Pete aimed off the beam. Pete squeezed a shot. Pete nailed Jack's wig. Blood and synthetic hair/a cough and a sneeze.

Impact—the wig flew. Impact—Jack rolled off the cot.

Jack hit a bottle. The bottle fell. The bottle bumped and rolled.

Loud bumps. *Loud* noise. *Loud* rolls.

Pete killed his light. Pete ducked low. Knee cartilage crunched. Eyes left/ears left/catch the doorway.

There now—a man laughs/a bed squeaks.

"Jack, is that a fresh jug you got?"

Light hues in the doorway—the geek's got white pajamas.

Pete flashed his light. Pete tracked up a white swath. Pete hit the man's eyes. He aimed off the beam. He squeezed a shot. He caught the 10-ring.

Blood and white blotting/a cough and a sneeze.

The man flew. The man hit the door. The man ripped the door loose. Eyes left—there's light—the #2 doorway. Ears left—there's boot thunks and zipper snags.

Pete proned out. Pete aimed. Now—watch the door.

A man opened it. Said man paused. Said man walked through room 1. Said man crouched and aimed a 30.06.

Pete aimed his piece. The man got close. A shotgun went off. Glass shattered—from the *out*side—pellets trashed a *side* window.

Chuck popping rounds. Chuck's special load—poison buckshot.

The man froze. Glass spritzed him. He covered his eyes. He ran blind. He bumped chairs. He coughed glass.

Pete fired. Pete missed. Chuck vaulted the window. He ran up fast. He nudged the man—BOO!—he shot the man in the back.

The man flew. Pete caught shell wads and BBs. Chuck ran south. Chuck blew out door #3.

Pete ran back. Chuck hit the lights. Light hit a man under the bed. He sobbed. His legs stuck out. He wore paisley PJs.

Chuck aimed low. Chuck blew his feet off. The man screamed. Pete shut his eyes.

* * *

The wind died. The day sparkled. The cleanup dragged.

They stole the jeeps. They drove the stiffs to the plane. They found a cave and drove the jeeps in. They fucked with some bats. They hit their horns. They evicted them. The bats bumped their windshields. They ran their wipers. They bumped the cocksuckers back.

They dumped kerosene. They torched the jeeps. The fire burned and died. The cave contained the fumes.

They walked to the plane. They wrapped the stiffs in straitjackets. They gunnysacked them. They pried their jaws out. They poured honey in. It lured hungry crabs.

Pete snapped four Polaroids—one per victim—Carlos wanted proof.

They flew low. They hit North Texas. They saw small lakes forever. They dumped three stiffs. Two splashed and sunk. One cracked hard ice.

Chuck skimmed tracts. Chuck flew low. Chuck steered with his knees.

He had a master's degree. He read comic books. He blew JFK's brains out. He lived with his parents. He stuck to his room. He built model planes and sniffed glue.

Chuck skimmed tracts. His lips moved. Pete caught the gist: The KKK klarifies a kontroversy. White men have the biggest dicks!

Pete laughed. Chuck dipped over Lake Lugert. Pete tossed Jack Z. in the drink.

(Las Vegas, 1/4/64)

The Summit. The penthouse at the Dunes—one big table.

Decanters. Siphons. Candy and fruit. No cigars—Moe Dalitz was allergic.

Littell swept for bugs first. The Boys watched TV. Morning cartoons—Yogi Bear and Webster Webfoot.

The Boys took sides. Sam and Moe liked Yogi. Johnny R. liked the duck. Carlos liked Yogi's dumb pal.

Santo T. snoozed—fuck this kiddie shit.

No bugs—let's proceed.

Littell chaired the meet. The Boys dressed down—golf shirts and Bermuda shorts.

Carlos sipped brandy. "Here's the opening pitch. Hughes is non compos mental, and he thinks he's got Ward in his pocket. We sell him the hotels and make him keep our inside people. They step up the skim. He don't suspect anything, 'cause we show him some low profit figures before he buys."

Littell shook his head. "His negotiators will audit every tax return filed for every hotel, going back ten years. If you refuse to submit them, they'll try to subpoena them or bribe the right people for copies. And you can't submit doctored returns with low figures, because it will bring down your initial asking prices."

Sam said, "So?"

Littell sipped club soda. "We need the highest possible set purchase prices, with the buyout money dispersed over eighteen months. Our long-term goal is to establish the appearance of legitimately invested money, diverted into legitimate businesses and laundered within them. My plan is—"

Carlos cut in. “The plan—get to it, and lay it out in words we can understand.”

Littell smiled. “We have the buyout and skim money. We purchase legitimate businesses with it. The businesses belong to recipients of pension-fund loans. They are the most specifically profitable and cosmetically noncriminal businesses that originated with loans from the ‘real’ books. Thus, the origin of the money is obscured. Thus, the recipients are prone to extortion and will not protest the forced buyouts. The recipients will continue to run their businesses. Our people will oversee the operations and divert the profits. We funnel the money into foreign hotel-casinos. By ‘foreign’ I mean Latin-American. By Latin-American I mean countries under military or strongly rightist rule. The casino profits will leave said countries untaxed. They will go into Swiss bank accounts and accrue interest. The ultimate cash withdrawals will be absolutely untraceable.”

Carlos smiled. Santo clapped. Johnny said, “It’s like Cuba.”

Moe said, “It’s ten Cubas.”

Sam said, “Why stop there?”

Littell grabbed an apple. “For now, it’s all long-range and theoretical. We’re waiting for Mr. Hughes to dump his TWA stock and secure his seed money.”

Santo said, “We’re talking about years.”

Sam said, “We’re talking about patience.”

Johnny said, “It’s a virtue. I read that somewhere.”

Moe said, “We watch the climate south of the border. We find ourselves a dozen Batistas.”

Sam said, “Show me a spic you can’t bribe.”

Santo said, “All they want is a white uniform with gold epaulets.”

Sam said, “They’re like niggers that way.”

Johnny said, “They don’t tolerate Commies. You got to give them that.”

Carlos grabbed some grapes. “I’ve got the books stashed. You have to figure that Jimmy’ll fall for that jury-tampering thing.”

Littell nodded. “That and his other indictments.”

Sam winked. “You stole the books, Ward. Now tell us you didn’t copy them over.”

Johnny laughed. Moe laughed. Santo roared.

Littell smiled. “We should think about the inside people. Mr.

Hughes will want to hire Mormons."

Sam cracked his knuckles. "I don't like Mormons. They hate Italians."

Carlos sipped X.O. "Do you blame them?"

Santo said, "Nevada's a Mormon state. It's like New York for the Italians."

Moe said, "You mean the Jews."

Johnny laughed. "It's a serious issue. Hughes will want to pick his own people."

Sam coughed. "We can't back down on that. We've got to keep our people inside."

Littell pared his apple. "We should find our own Mormons. I'll be talking to a man soon. He runs the Kitchen Union."

Moe said, "Wayne Tedrow Senior."

Sam said, "He hates Italians."

Moe said, "He's not wild about Jews."

Santo peeled a cigar. "To me this is bullshit. I want made guys inside."

Johnny said, "I agree."

Moe grabbed the cigar. "Are you trying to kill me?"

Carlos peeled a Mars Bar. "Let's table this for now, all right? We're talking about years down the road."

Littell said, "I agree. Mr. Hughes won't have his money for some time."

Sam peeled a banana. "It's your show, Ward. I know you got more to say."

Littell said, "Four things, actually. Two major, two minor."

Moe rolled his eyes. "So, tell us. Jesus, you have to coax this guy."

Littell smiled. "One, Jimmy knows what Jimmy knows, and Jimmy's volatile. I'm going to do my best to keep him out of jail until we've started to implement our plans for the books."

Carlos smiled. "If Jimmy knew you stole the books, he'd implement you."

Littell rubbed his eyes. "I returned them. Let's leave it at that."

Sam said, "We forgive you."

Johnny said, "You're alive, aren't you?"

Littell coughed. "Bobby Kennedy will probably resign. The new AG might have plans for Vegas, and Mr. Hoover might not be able to curtail them. I'll try to do some favors for him, learn what

I can and pass it along."

Sam said, "That cocksucker Bobby."

Moe said, "The bad fucking seed."

Santo said, "That cocksucker used us. He put his faggot brother in the White House at our expense. He fucked us like the pharaohs fucked Jesus."

Johnny said, "The Romans, Santo. The pharaohs fucked Joan of Arc."

Santo said, "Fuck Bobby *and* Joan. They're both faggots."

Moe rolled his eyes. Fuck this goyishe shit.

Littell said, "Mr. Hughes hates Negroes. He wants to keep them out of his hotels, at whatever the cost. I've explained the gentlemen's agreement we've got here, but he wants more."

Santo shrugged. "Everyone hates the shines."

Sam shrugged. "Especially the civil-rights types."

Moe shrugged. "Shvartzes are shvartzes. I don't want Martin Luther King on our doorstep any more than Hughes does, but they'll get their goddamn civil rights sooner or later."

Johnny said, "It's the Reds. They agitate them and get them worked up. You can't reason with an agitated person."

Santo peeled a cigar. "They know they're not wanted. We keep the low-end spooks out and let a few uptown ones in. If King Farouk of the Congo wants to drop a hundred G's at the Sands, I say let him."

Johnny grabbed a peach. "King Farouk's a Mexican."

Santo said, "Good. If he blows all his money, we'll get him a job in the kitchen."

Sam said, "I play golf with Billy Eckstine. He's a wonderful guy."

Johnny said, "He's got white blood."

Moe said, "I play golf with Sammy Davis on a regular basis."

Carlos yawned. Carlos coughed. Carlos cued Littell.

Littell coughed. "Mr. Hughes thinks the local Negroes should be 'sedated.' It's a preposterous idea, but we may be able to turn it to our advantage."

Moe rolled his eyes. "You're the best, Ward. Nobody disputes that. But you tend to beat around the bush."

Littell crossed his legs. "Carlos has tentatively agreed that we should waive our no-narcotics rule and let Pete Bondurant sell to the Negroes here. You all know the precedent. Pete trafficked for

Santo's organization in Miami from '60 to '62."

Santo shook his head. "We were funding the exiles then. That was strictly an anti-Castro thing."

Johnny shook his head. "On a one-time-only basis."

Carlos said, "I like the idea. It's a moneymaker, and Pete's a hell of a resource."

Littell said, "Let's keep him busy. We can establish a new cash source and mollify Mr. Hughes at the same time. He doesn't need to know the details. I'll call it a 'Sedation Project.' He'll like the way it sounds and be satisfied. He's like a child in some ways."

Carlos said, "It's a moneymaker. I foresee some big profits."

Sam shook his head. "I foresee ten thousand junkies turning Vegas into a shithole."

Moe shook his head. "I *live* here. I do not want to see a big fucking influx of junkie burglars, junkie heist guys, and junkie rape-os."

Santo shook his head. "Vegas is the Queen City of the West. You don't soil a place like that on purpose."

Johnny shook his head. "You've got a bunch of hopped-up niggers looking for their next fix. You're watching *The Lawrence Welk Show* and some big spook kicks the door in and steals your TV set."

Sam shook his head. "And rapes your wife while he's at it."

Santo shook his head. "You'll send tourism into the shitter."

Moe snatched Santo's cigar. "Carlos, you're outruled on this. You don't shit on your own carpet."

Carlos shrugged. Carlos turned his palms up.

Moe smiled. "You're batting five hundred, Ward. That's a hell of an average in this room. And your long-range plan is a home run."

Sam smiled. "Out of the ballpark."

Santo smiled. "Out of the fucking galaxy."

Johnny smiled. "It's Cuba all over again. With no bearded Commie faggot to fuck things up."

Littell smiled. Littell twitched. Littell almost bit his tongue.

"I want to make sure we get a unanimous license vote from the Gaming Control Board and Liquor Board. Pete tried to get a look at the LVPD intel file and got nowhere."

Santo snatched his cigar back. "We've never been able to buy off the boards. They grant their fucking licenses by whim."

Moe said, “It’s the pioneer thing. You know, prejudice. We own this town, but they lump us in with the shvartzes.”

Johnny said, “The files are the place to start. We’ve got to find the weak links and exploit them.”

Sam said, “The cops guard that information. Pete B. couldn’t shake it loose, so what does that tell you?”

Littell stretched. “Sam, will you have one of your people make an approach? Butch Montrose, maybe?”

Sam smiled. “For you, Ward, the moon.”

Littell smiled. “I want to plant support in the state legislature. Mr. Hughes is prepared to make a series of charitable contributions and publicize them throughout Nevada, so do any of you have fav—”

Johnny cut in. “Saint Vincent de Paul.”

Sam said, “The K of C.”

Santo said, “Saint Francis Hospital. They cut my brother’s prostrate out there.”

Moe said, “The United Jewish Appeal—and fuck all you dagos.”

Dracula supplied lodging—a suite at the DI. Four rooms/golf-course access/open-end lease.

His third place.

He had a place in D.C. He had a place in L.A.—two high-rise apartments. Three homes now. All ready-furnished. All depersonalized.

Littell moved in. Littell dodged golf balls. Littell tore the phones up. Littell bugswept them.

The phones were safe. He rebuilt them. He relaxed and unpacked.

Arden was in L.A. She moved toward him piecemeal. Dallas to Balboa/Balboa to L.A. Vegas scared her. The Boys partied there. She knew the Boys. She wouldn’t say how.

She was his “Jane” now. She loved her new name. She loved her revised history.

He finished her transcript. She learned the details. An agent planted the goods. She told him Jane stories—straight off the cuff—she dropped details and recalled them days later.

He memorized them. He caught her subtext:

You made me. Live with your work. Don't challenge my tales. *You'll know me. I'll say who I was*.

Pete knew about Arden. Pete learned in Dallas. He trusted Pete. Pete trusted him. The Boys owned them both.

Carlos told Pete to kill Arden. Pete said, "Okay." Pete won't kill women. That's pure un-okay.

Pete killed Jack Zangetty. Pete flew to New Orleans. Pete briefed Carlos on it. Carlos loved the Polaroids. Carlos said, "Three more."

Pete drove to Dallas. Pete checked around. Pete called Carlos. Pete reported back:

Jack Ruby's nuts. He scratches. He moans. He talks to spirit husks. Hank Killiam split Dallas. Hank booked to Florida. Betty Mac split to parts unknown.

Arden? She vanished—that's all I've got. Carlos said, "Okay—for now."

The Summit succeeded. His plan wowed the Boys. They vetoed the dope plan. Pete logged a No. Pete braced Wayne Junior. Wayne Junior said No. Pete logged two Nos straight.

Doug Eversall called him—on Christmas Eve. Doug said, "I couldn't tape Bobby."

He said, "Keep your tape rig—and brace him again."

Merry Christmas. Don't fall off your high shoe. Don't drop your microphone.

He called Mr. Hoover. He said he had a Bobby source. He said he hotwired him.

He didn't say:

I need to hear Bobby's voice.

(Las Vegas, 1/6/64)

The heat ducts blew. The squadroom froze. Fucking igloo time.

Guys split en masse. Wayne worked solo. Wayne cleaned up his desk.

He sifted desk junk. He stacked the Dallas dailies first. He had some Ruby shit. He had bopkes on Moore and Durfee.

Sonny Liston sent a postcard. It rehashed their “good times.” Sonny foresaw a Clay fight KO.

He cleaned up one file—the West LV whore jobs/reports and snapshots. Colored whores/bad bruises/smeared lipstick and contusions.

He held the file. He read it. He looked for leads. Nothing popped out. The assigned cop hated Negroes. The assigned cop hated whores. The assigned cop drew dicks in their mouths.

Wayne stacked papers. Wayne cleared his desk. Wayne locked the file up. Wayne typed reports.

The squadroom froze. The ducts blew—brrr-fucking-brrr.

Wayne yawned. Wayne craved sleep. Lynette bugged him incessant. Lynette had one refrain: “What happened in Dallas?”

He dodged her. He split home early. He worked late. He logged lounge time. He nursed beers. He caught Barb B. He nursed this big crush.

He sat near the stage. Pete sat close by. They never talked. They both eyed the redhead.

Call it leverage. Call it a buffer zone—let’s stay in touch.

Lynette rode him. Lynette said don’t hide from me. Lynette said don’t hide with Wayne Senior.

He hid there pre-Dallas. He crushed on Janice pre-Barb. Dallas changed things. He reworked his crush time now.

He watched Barb. He played chicken with Pete concurrent. Janice played supporting crush.

He dodged Wayne Senior now. Christmas tore it. The film and the hate tracts—Wayne Senior's print style.

The oldies were one thing. "Veto Tito!"/"Castrate Castro!"/"Ban the U.N.!" It was fear shit. It was Red Tides. It was no hate overt.

He saw Little Rock. Wayne Senior didn't. The Klan torched a car. The gas cap blew. It put a colored boy's eye out. Some punks raped a colored girl. They wore rubbers. They shoved them in her mouth.

Wayne yawned. Wayne pulled carbons. The fine print blurred.

Buddy Fritsch walked up. "You bored with your work?"

Wayne stretched. "Do you care if blackjack dealers have misdemeanor convictions?"

"No, but the Nevada Gaming Commission does."

Wayne yawned. "If you've got something more interesting, I'll bite."

Fritsch straddled a chair. "I want some fresh leads on the Control Board and Liquor Board men. Everyone but the Sheriff and DA. Submit a report to me before you update your file."

Wayne said, "Why now? I update my files in the summer."

Fritsch pulled a match. His hand jumped. He missed the book. He broke the matchhead.

"Because I told you to. That's all the justifying you get."

"What kind of leads?"

"Anything derogatory. Come on, you've been there. You hold surveillance and see who gets naughty."

Wayne rocked his chair. "I'll finish my work and get on it."

"You'll get on it now."

"Why 'now'?"

Fritsch pulled a match. His hand jumped. He missed the book wide.

"Because you blew your extradition job. Because a cop went off without you and got himself killed. Because you fucked up relations between us and Dallas PD, and because I am determined to get some value out of you before you make more rank and move out of my unit."

"Value" tore it—fuck him sideways.

Wayne pulled his chair up. Wayne leaned in close. Wayne bumped Fritsch's knees hard.

"Do you think I'd kill a man for six thousand dollars and a few pats on the back? For the record, I didn't want to kill him, I couldn't have killed him, I wouldn't have killed him, and that's the best value you'll ever get out of me."

Fritsch blinked. His hands jumped. He popped big spitballs.

It played wrong. Logic 101—E follows D.

Pete wants the files. Pete knows the fail-safe procedure. One cop holds the files. Said cop probes alleged misconduct. Said cop informs the Gaming Commission.

The procedure restricts data. The procedure hinders corrupt cops. The procedure curtails corrupt PDs.

Honest cops rigged the plan—one cop/one file set. Intel cops found protégés. Intel cops passed the job on. The last intel cop died on duty. Wayne Senior pulled strings. Wayne Senior got Wayne the job.

E follows D. Pete's mobbed up. Buddy Fritsch ditto. Buddy knows the files hold *old* data. The last misconduct charge was filed in 1960.

Pete wants *new* dirt. Pete wants *hot* dirt. Pete squeezed Buddy Fritsch. Buddy's pissed at Wayne. Buddy worships Wayne Senior. Buddy knows Wayne *will* do the job.

Wayne kept his files in a bank vault. Per procedure: a safe at the main B of A.

He drove over. A clerk cracked the vault. Wayne cracked the files out. He knew the names already. He skimmed the stats and got refreshed. He wrote down addresses.

Duane Joseph Hinton. Age 46. Building contractor/Mormon. No Mob ties. Drunk/wife beater. 7/59—one accusation logged.

Hinton bribes state legislators. A snitch so states. Hinton buys them whores. Hinton gives them fight tickets. They slip him bid sheets. Thus Hinton underbids. Thus Hinton gets state building jobs.

Said tip—unverified. Case closed—9/59.

Webb Templeton Spurgeon. Age 54. Retired lawyer/Mormon. No Mob ties/no accusations logged.

Eldon Lowell Peavy. Age 46. Owner: the Monarch Cab Company/the Golden Cavern Hotel-Casino.

The Cavern drew low rollers. Monarch Cab was low-end. Cabs drove drunks to grind joints. Cabs perched at the jail. Cabs drove prostitutes. Monarch serviced West LV. Monarch drove Negroes. Monarch got cash up front.

Eldon Peavy was a fag. Eldon Peavy hired ex-cons. Eldon Peavy owned a Reno fruit bar.

Tips logged: 8/60, 9/60, 4/61, 6/61, 10/61, 1/62, 3/62, 8/62. Snitch tips—thus far unverified:

Peavy's drivers pack guns. Peavy's drivers push pills. Peavy runs male prostitutes. Peavy sells choice chicken. Peavy scouts the main-room shows. Peavy recruits dancers to fuck and suck.

They're cute. They're queer. They whore for kicks and amphetamines. They spread for male movie stars.

The last tip: logged 8/62.

Wayne worked Patrol then. Wayne made sergeant. Wayne moved to Intel: 10/8/62. The prior cop logged the tips. Said cop was bribe-proof/mean/lazy.

He crashed a market heist. He took five slugs and fed nine back. He died. He killed two wetbacks en route.

Three board men. Nine tips—unverified. Wayne checked the adjunct forms—they looked kosher.

Peavy registered his ex-cons. Peavy's tax sheets looked clean. Ditto Hinton and Spurgeon.

Wayne locked the files up. The clerk locked the vault. Wayne got some coffee. Wayne killed some time.

He dawdled. He killed more time. He drove to the station. He pulled into the lot. Buddy Fritsch pulled out. It was way weird and un-Fritsch-like.

It was 5:10. Fritsch always booked at 6:00 p.m. Fritsch booked like clockwork.

His wife divorced him—late last year. Said wife split with her dyke lover. Fritsch sulked and mooned. Fritsch grooved a cuckold routine.

He splits work at 6:00. He hits the Elks Lodge. He drinks his dinner and plays bridge.

Wayne drove past the station. Fritsch drove down 1st Street. Wayne watched him go. Fritsch turned east. The Elks Lodge was due *west.*

Wayne U-turned. Wayne laid two cars back. Fritsch hugged the curb lane. Fritsch stopped at Binion’s Casino.

A man walked up. Fritsch cracked his window. The man passed an envelope. Wayne jumped lanes. Wayne nailed a view. Wayne nailed an ID:

Butch Montrose. Sam G.’s boy. One piece of shit.

(Las Vegas, 1/6/64)

Barb did the Wah-Watusi. She sang. She shimmied. She shook.

The Bondsmen played loud. Barb missed high notes. She sang for shit. She knew it. She eschewed all airs pertaining to.

The lounge was full. Barb drew men. Call them sad sacks all. Lonely geeks and retirees—plus Wayne Tedrow Junior.

Pete watched.

Barb raised her arms. Barb threw sweat. Barb showed red stubble. It jazzed him. He loved her taste there.

Barb did the Swim. The stage light burned her freckles. Pete watched Barb. Wayne Junior watched Pete. It fucked with his nerves.

His nerves were shot. The Summit came and went. The Boys said no. Ward stated his case. Carlos concurred—let's push Big "H."

They lost the referendum—down by four votes.

He saw Carlos in New Orleans. Carlos saw the Zangetty pix. Carlos said "*Bravissimo*." They schmoozed. They schmoozed Cuba. They launched laments. The CIA shitcanned the Cuban cause. The rank & file Outfit ditto.

Pete still cared. Carlos too. The old crew found *new* work.

John Stanton was in Vietnam. The CIA was there large. Vietnam was Cuba with gooks. Laurent Guéry and Flash Elorde freelanced—right-wing muscle on call. They gigged out of Mexico City. Laurent clipped Reds in Paraguay. Flash clipped Reds in the DR.

Pete and Carlos schmoozed Tiger Kab. Good times in Miami—

dope and exile recruitment. Tiger-striped cabs/black-and-gold seats/heroin and *la Causa*.

They schmoozed the hit. Carlos brought it up. Carlos schmoozed new details. Pete keyed on the pro shooter. Chuck said he was French. Carlos had *new* details.

Laurent brought him in. Laurent went Francophile. The pro had frog credentials. He was an ex-Indochine hand. He was an ex-Algerian killer.

He tried to kill Charles de Gaulle. He failed. He hated de Gaulle. He waxed homicidal. Let's kill JFK—JFK french-kissed Charlie in Paris.

Carlos waxed mad—Jack Z.'s body washed up—the Dallas paper ran news. Jack's missing guests got bopkes. Jack was dirty. Jack ran a "hideout." Jack's death vibed "gangland job."

The wash-up felt like a fuck-up. The wash-up felt like a No. Junior said "No files." The Boys said "No dope."

Carlos said, "March." You know what I want—kill the safe-house crew.

Pete drove to Dallas. Pete fake-searched for Arden. Pete searched for Betty Mac. He tapped out. That was good. He warned Betty. Betty got smart and ran.

He got a lead on Hank Killiam. Hank was now in Florida. Hank read the Dallas paper. The Jack Z. bit scared him.

Pete called Carlos. Pete reported the lead. Pete kissed some wop ass. They schmoozed. Carlos ragged on Guy B.

Guy drank too much. Guy talked too much. Guy loved his blowhard pal Hank Hudspeth. *They* boozed too much. *They* talked too much. *They* bragged to excess.

Pete said, "I'll clip them." Carlos said, "No." Carlos changed the subject. Hey, Pete—where's that hump Maynard Moore?

Pete said a coon killed him. The DPD was pissed. The Klan kontingent issued a kontract.

Carlos laughed. Carlos howled. Carlos oozed delight.

The hit *awed* him.

They did it. They got away clean. The safe-house geeks meant shit. Carlos knew it. The hit was a kick. Let's schmooze it and relive it. Let's kill some geeks for conversation.

Pete sipped a Coke. He quit booze last week. Carlos ragged Guy. Carlos despised drunks.

Barb twirled the mike cord. Barb blew a note. Barb threw perspiration off.

Pete watched Barb. Wayne Junior watched him.

Barb gigged late. Pete went home alone.

He called room service. He stood on the terrace and dug on the Strip. He felt cold air swirl.

The phone rang. He grabbed it.

“Yeah?”

“That Pete? You know, the big guy passin’ out his number on the west side?”

“Yeah, this is Pete.”

“Well, that’s good, ’cause I’m calling ’bout that reward.”

Pete said, “I’m listening.”

“You should be, ’cause Wendell Durfee’s in town, and I heard he bought a gun off a craps dealer. And I also heard that Curtis and Leroy just brought in some hair-o-wine.”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/7/64. Covert tape-recording transcript. Recorded at Hickory Hill, Virginia. Speaking: Doug Eversall, Robert F. Kennedy.

(Background noise/overlapping voices)

RFK (conversation in progress): Well, if you think it's essen—

DE: If you wouldn't mind, I'd (background noise/ overlapping voices) (Incidental noise. Door slam & footsteps)

RFK (conversation in progress): Have been in here. They shed all over the rugs.

DE (coughs): I've got two Airedales.

RFK: They're good dogs. They get along well with children. (Pause: 2.6 seconds) Doug, what is it? You look the way people are telling me I look.

DE: Well.

RFK: Well, what? We're here to set trial dates, remember?

DE (coughs): Well, it's about the President.

RFK: Johnson or my brother?

DE: Your brother. (Pause: 3.2 seconds) It's, well, I don't like the thing with Ruby. (Pause: 1.8 seconds) I don't want to sound out of line, but it bothers me.

RFK: You're saying? (Pause: 2.1 seconds) I know what you're saying. He's got Mob connections. Some reporters have been digging up stories.

DE (coughs): That's the main thing, yes. (Pause: DE coughs) And, well, you know, Oswald allegedly spent some time in New—

RFK: Orleans last summer, and you used to work for the State's Attorney down there.

DE: Well, that's about—

RFK: No, but thanks. (Pause: 4.0 seconds) And you're right about Ruby. He walked in there, he shot him, and he looked relieved as hell that he did it.

DE (coughs): And he's dirty.

RFK (laughs): Cough away from me. I can't afford to lose any more work days.

DE: I'm sorry I brought all this up. You don't need to be reminded.

RFK: Jesus Christ, quit apologizing every two seconds. The sooner people start treating me normally, the better off I'll be.

DE: Sir, I—

RFK: That's a good example. You didn't start calling me "Sir" until my brother died.

DE (coughs): I just want to help. (Pause: 2.7 seconds) It's the time-line that bothers me. The hearings, Valachi's testimony, Ruby. (Pause: 1.4 seconds) I used to prosecute homicides with multiple defendants. I learned to trust time —

RFK: I know what you're saying. (Pause: RFK coughs) Factors converge. The hearings. The raids I ordered. You know, the exile camps. The Mob was supporting the exiles, so they both had motives. (Pause: 11.2 seconds) That's what bothers me. If that's what happened, they killed Jack to get at me. (Pause: 4.8 seconds) If that … shit … they should have killed …

DE (coughs): Bob, I'm sorry.

RFK: Quit apologizing and coughing. I'm susceptible to colds right now.

(DE laughs.)

RFK: You're right about the time-line. It's the order of things that bothers me. (Pause: 1.9 seconds) There's another thing, too.

DE: Sir? I mean—

RFK: One of Hoffa's lawyers approached me a few days before Dallas. It was very strange.

DE: What was his name?

RFK: Littell. (Pause: 1.3 seconds) I made some inquiries. He works for Carlos Marcello. (Pause: 2.3 seconds). Don't say it. Marcello is based in New Orleans.

DE: I'd be willing to contact my sources, and—

RFK: No. It's best for the country this way. No trial, no bullshit.

DE: Well, there's the Commission.

RFK: You're being naive. Hoover and Johnson know what's best for the country, and they spell it "Whitewash." (Pause: 2.6 seconds) They don't care. There's the people who care and the people who don't. They're all part of the same consensus.

DE: I care.

RFK: I know you do. Just don't labor the point. This conversation is starting to embarrass me.

DE: I'm sor—

RFK: Jesus, don't start that again.

(DE laughs.)

RFK: Will you stay on in Justice? If I resign, I mean.

DE: It depends on the new man. (Pause: 2.2 seconds) Are you going to?

RFK: Maybe. I'm just licking my wounds right now. (Pause: 1.6 seconds) Johnson might put me on the ticket. I'd take it if he asked, and some people want me to run for Ken Keating's senate seat in New York.

DE: I'll vote for you. I've got a summer place in Rhinebeck.

(RFK laughs.)

DE: I just wish there were something I could do.

RFK: Well, you made me feel better.

DE: I'm glad.

RFK: And you're right. Something about the time-line feels suspicious.

DE: Yes, that's—

RFK: We can't bring my brother back, but I'll tell you this, though. When the—(footsteps obscure conversation)—right I'll jump on it, and devil take the hindmost.

(Door slam & footsteps. Tape terminates here.)

(Los Angeles, 1/9/64)

He bought Jane a wallet. Saks engraved it.

Soft kid. A lowercase “j.f.”

Jane fanned the sleeves. “You were right. I showed them my Alabama license, and they gave me a new one right there.”

Littell smiled. Jane smiled and posed. She leaned on the window. She jutted a hip out. She blocked off the view.

Littell pulled his chair up. “We’ll get you a Social Security card. You’ll have all the ID you need.”

Jane smiled. “What about a master’s degree? You got me the B.A. already.”

Littell crossed his legs. “You could go to UCLA and earn one.”

“How about this? I could divide my studies between L.A., D.C., and Vegas, just to keep up with my peripatetic lover.”

Littell smiled. “Was that a jibe?”

“Just an observation.”

“You’re getting restless. You’re overqualified for a life of leisure.”

Jane pirouetted. Jane dipped low and stood on her toes. She was good. She was lithe. She’d studied somewhere.

Littell said, “Some people from the safe house have disappeared. That’s good news more than bad.”

Jane shrugged. Jane scissored low. Her skirt brushed the floor.

“Where did you learn that?”

Jane said, “Tulane. I audited a dance class, but you won’t see it on my transcript.”

Littell sat on the floor. Jane scissored up to him.

“I want to find a job. I was a good bookkeeper, even before you improved my credentials."

Littell stroked her feet. Jane wiggled her toes.

"You could find me something at Hughes Aircraft."

Littell shook his head. "Mr. Hughes is very disturbed. I'm working against him on some levels, and I want to keep you out of that side of my life."

Jane grabbed her cigarettes. "Any other ideas?"

"I could get you work with the Teamsters."

Jane shook her head. "No. That's not me."

"Why?"

She lit a cigarette. Her hand shook.

"It's just not. I'll find a job, don't worry."

Littell traced her stocking runs. "You'll do better than that. You'll excel and upstage everyone you work with."

Jane smiled. Littell pinched out her cigarette. He kissed her. He touched her hair. He saw a new gray.

Jane pulled his tie off. "Tell me about the last woman you were with."

Littell cleaned his glasses. "Her name was Helen Agee. She was a friend of my daughter's. I got in trouble with the Bureau and Helen was the first casualty."

"She left you?"

"She ran, yes."

"What kind of trouble were you in?"

"I underestimated Mr. Hoover."

"That's all you'll tell me?"

"Yes."

"What happened to Helen?"

"She's a legal-aid lawyer. The last I heard, my daughter was, too."

Jane kissed him. "We have to be who we decided to be in Dallas."

Littell said, "Yes."

Jane fell asleep. Littell feigned sleep. Littell got up slow.

He walked to his office. He set up his tape rig. He poured some coffee.

He nailed Doug Eversall. He called him yesterday. He threatened him. He crossed the line.

He said don't call Carlos. Don't tell him what Bobby said. Don't rat out Bobby.

He warned him. He said I'm working freelance. Don't fuck me or I'll retaliate. You're a drunk driver/killer. I'll expose you for that. I won't let Carlos hurt Bobby.

Bobby suspected the Boys. That meant Bobby KNEW. Bobby didn't say it flat out. Bobby didn't need to. Bobby sidestepped the pain.

Mea culpa. Cause-and-effect. *My* Mob crusade killed my brother.

Littell spooled the tape—tape copy #2.

He'd doctored a dupe. He pouched it to Mr. Hoover. He retained the small talk. He layered in static. He x'd out Bobby's Mob talk.

Littell hit Play. Bobby talked. His grief showed. His kindness showed through.

Kind Bobby—a chat with his clubfooted friend.

Bobby talked. Bobby paused. Bobby said the name "Littell."

Littell listened. Littell timed the pauses. Bobby faltered. Bobby *KNEW*. Bobby never said it.

Littell listened. Littell *lived* the pauses. The old fear came. It told him this:

You believe in him again.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/10/64. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: "Recorded at the Director's Request"/"Classified Confidential 1-A: Director's Eyes Only." Speaking: Director Hoover, Ward J. Littell.

JEH: Good morning, Mr. Littell.

WJL: Good morning, Sir.

JEH: Let's get to the tape. The sound quality was very poor.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: The text was unenlightening. If I wish to discuss Airedale dogs with the Dark Prince, I can dial his direct line at will.

WJL: My plant fidgeted, Sir. He moved and caused distortion.

JEH: Will you try again?

WJL: That's impossible, Sir. My plant was lucky to get one audience.

JEH: Your plant's voice was familiar. He sounded like a handicapped lawyer the Dark Prince employs.

WJL: You have a fine memory for voices, Sir.

JEH: Yes. And I have a few plants of my own.

WJL: Myself among them.

JEH: I wouldn't call you a "plant," Mr. Littell. You're too gifted and diversified.

WJL: Thank you, Sir.

JEH: Do you recall our conversation of December 2nd? I said I needed a man with a "fallen liberal" image, and hinted that it might be you.

WJL: Yes, Sir. I recall the conversation.

JEH: I'm miffed at Martin Luther King and his egregiously un-Christian Southern Christian Leadership Conference. I want to further penetrate the group, and you're the perfect "fallen liberal" to help me accomplish my goal.

WJL: In what way, Sir?

JEH: I already have a plant within the SCLC. He has established his ability to procure dossiers on policemen, organized-crime figures and other notables that left-wing Negroes might consider adversaries. My plan is to provide him with a dossier on you. The dossier will portray you as an ousted Bureau man with leftist tendencies, ones which you have frankly yet to outgrow.

WJL: You've piqued my interest, Sir.

JEH: Your assignment would be to appear sympathetic to the civil-rights cause, which I know will be no great stretch. You will donate numerous allotments of marked Mob money to the SCLC, in $10,000 increments, over a sustained period of time. My goal is to compromise the SCLC and render them more tractable. Your goal is to convince the SCLC that you have embezzled the money from organized-crime sources, in an effort to assuage your guilt over working for mobsters in the first place. This will also be no great stretch. I'm sure that you can tap the ambivalent aspects of your nature and front a convincing performance. I'm equally sure that you can justify the continued expense to your mobster colleagues, as a proactive means to avoid civil-rights trouble in Las Vegas, which will please them and Mr. Hughes.

WJL: It's a bold plan, Sir.

JEH: It is that.

WJL: I'd appreciate some more details.

JEH: My plant is an ex-Chicago policeman. He possesses chameleon qualities similar to yours. He's ingratiated himself with the SCLC very nicely.

WJL: His name, Sir?

JEH: Lyle Holly. His brother was with the Bureau.

WJL: Dwight Holly. He transferred out, I think.

JEH: That is correct. He's with the Federal Bureau of Narcotics in Nevada now. I think he finds the assignment enervating. A brisk dope trade would be more to his liking.

WJL: And Lyle is—

JEH: Lyle is more impetuous. He drinks more than he should and comes off as a hail-fellow-well-met. The Negroes adore him. He's convinced them that he's the world's most incongruously liberal ex-cop, when in fact that prize goes to you.

WJL: You flatter me, Sir.

JEH: I do anything but.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Holly will portray you as a Chicago law-enforcement acquaintance and present the SCLC with documents pertaining to your Bureau expulsion. He will point you to a Negro named Bayard Rustin. Mr. Rustin is a close colleague of Mr. King. He is both a Communist and a homosexual, which marks him as a rara avis by all sane standards. I'll send you a summary on him, and I'll have Lyle Holly call you.

WJL: I'll wait for his call, Sir.

JEH: Do you have other questions?

WJL: On this topic, no. But I would like your permission to contact Wayne Tedrow Senior, on Mr. Hughes' behalf.

JEH: You have it.

WJL: Thank you, Sir.

JEH: Good day, Mr. Littell.

WJL: Good day, Sir.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/11/64. "Subversive Persons" summary report. Marked: "Chronology/Known Facts/Observations/Known Associates/Memberships in Subversive Organizations." Subject: RUSTIN, BAYARD TAYLOR (male Negro/DOB: 3/17/12, West Chester, Pa.). Compiled: 2/8/62.

SUBJECT RUSTIN must be viewed as a cunning subversive with a significant history of Communist-inspired alliances & as a pronounced security threat, due to his alliances with perceived "Mainstream" Negro demagogues, such as MARTIN LUTHER KING & A. PHILIP RANDOLPH. SUBJECT RUSTIN'S radical Quaker background & his parents' association with the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) point out the extent of his early radical indoctrination. (See Addendum File #4189 on RUSTIN, JANIFER & RUSTIN, JULIA DAVIS.)

SUBJECT RUSTIN attended Wilberforce College (a Negro institution) 1932–33. He refused to join the ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) and led (abetted by numerous Communist sympathizers) a strike to protest the allegedly poor quality of food served to students. SUBJECT RUSTIN transferred to Cheyney State Teachers College (Pennsylvania) early in 1934. It is believed that he communicated with numerous notable Negro subversives while at the institution. SUBJECT RUSTIN was expelled in 1936. It is widely assumed that a homosexual incident resulted in his expulsion.

SUBJECT RUSTIN moved to New York City circa 1938–39. He became a member of the so-called Negro "Intelligentsia," studied the philosophy of MOHANDAS "MAHATMA" GANDHI & described himself as a "Committed Trotskyite." SUBJECT RUSTIN (a gifted musician) fraternized with numerous white & Negro subversives, including PAUL ROBESON, who have since been identified as members of 114 certified Communist-front organizations. (See "Known Associates," Addendum File #4190.)

SUBJECT RUSTIN became a member of the Young Communist League (YCL) at New York City College (NYCC)

& was a frequent visitor at a Communist cell on 146th Street. He fraternized with Communist folk singers & led a YCL-inspired campaign to protest segregation in the U.S. Armed Forces. In 1941 SUBJECT RUSTIN became acquainted with Negro labor agitator A. PHTLIP RANDOLPH (b. 1889) (see Randolph Files #1408, 1409, 1410). SUBJECT RUSTIN helped to organize the aborted 1941 Negro March on Washington & joined the socialist-pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) & the War Resisters League (WRL). During this time he became a skilled orator and disseminator of Socialist-Communist propaganda.

SUBJECT RUSTIN registered as a conscientious objector with his (Harlem, N.Y.) draft board & was ordered to appear for a physical examination on 11/13/43. SUBJECT RUSTIN sent a letter of refusal (see Addendum Carbon #19) & was apprehended on 1/12/44. He was tried & convicted of violating the Selective Serv. Act (see Addendum File #4191 for trial transcript) & sent'd to 3 yrs in the Federal Penitentiary at Ashland, Ky. SUBJECT RUSTIN led several attempts to desegregate the prison dining hall & was transferred to Lewisburg Penitentiary (Pa). SUBJECT RUSTIN was paroled (6/46) & became a traveling speaker for the FOR. In 1946 & '47 he participated in numerous Communist-inspired attempts (the "Journey of Reconciliation") to desegregate interstate bus lines. In 11/47 SUBJECT RUSTIN joined the "Committee Against Jim Crow in Military Service & Training" & counseled Negro youths to avoid military service (see Addendum File #4192 for list of members & cross-referenced Communist front-group memberships).

SUBJECT RUSTIN traveled extensively in India (1948-'49), returned to the U.S. & served a 22-day jail sentence for his subversive activities in the "Journey of Reconciliation." He spent substantial time (thruout 1950, '51, '52) in Africa & studied insurgent & Negro nationalist movements there. On 1/21/53, SUBJECT RUSTIN was arrested on a morals charge in Pasadena, California (see Addendum File #4193 for arrest rpt. & trial transcript). SUBJECT RUSTIN & 2 white youths were engaged in a homosexual tryst in a parked car. SUBJECT RUSTIN pled guilty & served 60 days in the Los Angeles County Jail. SUBJECT RUSTIN'S homosexuality is well known & is considered to be an embarrassment to the alleged "Mainstream" Negro "Leaders" who utilize his skills as an organizer & orator.

The 1/21/53 incident resulted in SUBJECT RUSTIN'S expulsion from the FOR. SUBJECT RUSTIN moved to New York City and cultivated friendships in the heavily bohemian & leftist-influenced Greenwich Village district. He rejoined the WRL & again traveled to Africa & studied Negro nationalist movements. SUBJECT RUSTIN returned to the U.S. & met STANLEY LEVISON, a Communist-indoctrinated advisor to MARTIN LUTHER KING. (See Files #5961, 5962, 5963, 5965, 5966.) LEVISON introduced SUBJECT RUSTIN to KING. SUBJECT RUSTIN advised KING per the staging of the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955–56. (See Central Index for individual files on boycott participants.) SUBJECT RUSTIN then became a trusted advisor to KING & is credited with influencing KING'S Pacifist/Socialist/Communist program of planned disruption & social disorder. SUBJECT RUSTIN drew up a document for the formation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) & KING adopted it at a (1/10-11/57) church conference in Atlanta. (See Addendum File #4194 & Electronic Surveillance File #0809.) KING was elected leader of the SCLC on 2/14/57 & has remained in power to this (2/8/62) date.

SUBJECT RUSTIN joined the American Forum (classified as a Communist front group in 1947) & planned the SCLC/NAACP "Pilgrimage of Prayer" March on Washington (5/17/57). 30,000 people attended, including numerous Negro celebrities (see Surveillance Films #0704, 0705, 0706, 0708). SUBJECT RUSTIN organized the "Youth March for Integrated Schools" in 10/58. Per this march: associate A. PHILIP RANDOLPH publicly attacked DIRECTOR HOOVER for his comment that the march was a "Communist-inspired promotion." SUBJECT RUSTIN staged a 2nd youth march in 4/59. (See Surveillance Films #0709, 0710, 0711.)

SUBJECT RUSTIN rejected (early 1960) an offer to work full time for the SCLC. He has remained to this date (2/8/62) a vociferous critic of democratic institutions & has continued to support MARTIN LUTHER KING and his socialist designs, serving as an advisor & organizer of SCLC activities. SUBJECT RUSTIN is considered the leader of the SCLC braintrust & the mastermind behind KING'S rise to prominence as a demagogue and fomenter of social unrest. He has strategized & deployed white & Negro demonstrators in the "Sit-In" & "Freedom Ride" demonstrations of 1960–'61 & has retained documented friendships with a total of 94 members of certified Communist fronts (see Known Associate Index #2). In conclusion, SUBJECT RUSTIN must be classified as a Top Priority Internal Security Risk & should be subjected to periodic surveillance & possible mail & trash cover operations. (Note: Addendum files, films & tapes require Level 2 Clearance & Deputy Director Tolson's authorization.)

(Las Vegas,1/12/64)

Tails:

Sitting tails. Moving tails. Three boring tailees. Tail work—five full days in.

Webb Spurgeon lived behind the Tropicana. Webb Spurgeon's pad brushed the golf course. Webb Spurgeon lived bland. Webb Spurgeon stayed home. Webb Spurgeon chauffeured his son.

Wayne watched his front door. Wayne fought the sitting-tail blues.

He yawned. He scratched his ass. He pissed in a milk can. The car smelled. His aim strayed. He sprayed the dash sometimes.

Spurgeon was a yawn. Duane Hinton was a snore. Eldon Peavy was a faggy snooze. The job was shit. Buddy Fritsch wanted dirt. Pete suborned him in. Fritsch met with Butch Montrose—it vibed payoff.

The job was shit. He worked it anyway. He mixed-and-matched. He juggled his tailees.

Hinton stayed home. Hinton drove to his work sites. Peavy logged time at Monarch Cab. The job was shit. Wayne worked it hard. Wayne cranked twenty hours a day.

Lynette bugged him. Lynette torqued him hard. Lynette found his Dallas paper stash. He lied. He said don't bug me. He said it's Moore and Durfee—I'm just tracking the case.

She tripped him up. She nailed his lies. She made him run. He worked his shit tail job. He gauged potential results.

Hide would-be dirt. Fuck Fritsch and Pete—file a fake report. Play ball. File the goods. Hide out at the Sultan's Lounge. Hide from your wife. Hide from Wayne Senior and his fuck film.

Wayne yawned. Wayne stretched. Wayne scratched his balls. Webb Spurgeon walked out. Webb Spurgeon locked his front door. Webb Spurgeon shagged his Olds 88.

Log it: 2:21 p.m.

Spurgeon drove south. Wayne tailed him. Spurgeon hit I-95. Wayne hit the fast lane. They both drove 50-plus.

Spurgeon signaled. His blinker blinked. He pulled off the freeway. He hit Henderson ramp #1. He drove surface streets. Wayne tailed him semi-tight.

They hit the Mormon Temple. Wayne logged the time: 2:59 p.m.

Spurgeon walked in. Wayne parked catty-corner. Time sitting-tail dragged.

Thirteen minutes. Fourteen/fifteen.

Spurgeon walked out. Wayne logged it: 3:14 p.m.

They backtracked. They hit 95 North. They jumped on two car lengths apart. Wayne hovered back. Wayne slacked his leash. Wayne tailed long-distance.

They drove back to Vegas. They stopped at Jordan High. Weird—Webb Junior went to LeConte.

Spurgeon parked. Wayne parked two slots back. Kids walked by. Spurgeon covered his face.

4:13 p.m.:

A girl walks up. Said girl looks around. Said girl gets in daddy-o's car.

Spurgeon pulled out. Wayne snapped the leash. Wayne tailed him half-tight. The girl bobbed her head down. The car swerved and weaved. The girl bobbed her head up.

She wiped her lips. She fixed her face. She teased her hair up.

They hit 95 South. They cut toward Hoover Dam. They drove through the shitkicker sticks. Traffic thinned. Wayne slacked out the leash.

Spurgeon turned left. Spurgeon hauled up a dirt road. Wayne parked by some scrub pines. Wayne grabbed his binoculars.

He tracked up. He framed shots. He caught a split-rail cabin. The car sliced into the frame. The girl got out. She was sixteen tops. She ran long on hairspray and zits.

Spurgeon got out. The girl jumped on him. They walked inside. Wayne logged the time: 5:09 p.m. Wayne logged stat rape and contributing—two Class B felonies.

Wayne watched the cabin. Wayne watched his watch. He set up his Leica. He fixed the tripod. He slapped on the zoom doohickey.

They fucked for 51 minutes. Wayne shot their exit drape. They kissed long and wet. He got their tongues in tight.

■ ■ ■

Wayne parked by Monarch Cab. Wayne logged in at 6:43.

The hut sagged. The roof drooped. Cinder blocks creaked. The lot was dusty. The fleet was old—three-tone Packards exclusive.

Wayne watched the window. Eldon Peavy ran cabs. Eldon Peavy worked a two-way box. Eldon Peavy dealt solitaire.

Drivers bopped through. Wayne made three felons—fruit rollers all. One guy beat Murder One. Said guy shivved a he-she at a drag queen ball. Said guy proved self-defense.

Cabs rolled out. The pistons knocked. The mufflers coughed. The pipes shot fumes. The Monarch logo *gleamed:*

A little man with a big crown. Red dice for teeth.

Wayne yawned. Wayne stretched. Wayne scratched his balls. He was up in North LV. The Bondsmen gigged tonite. Barb wore her blue gown most gigs.

A cab pulled out. Wayne tailed it. Rolling tails revived him. Night tails were cake. Cab tails double so—their roof lights stood out plain.

Wayne sidled close. The cab hauled out Owens. They passed the Paiute graveyard. They hit West LV.

Traffic was brisk. A car cut the cab off. Wayne swerved and hopped lanes. It was windy. It was cold. Tumbleweeds blew stray.

They passed Owens and "H." The bars rocked. The liquor stores rolled. Bottle hounds and out-the-door biz.

There—the cab's braking—upside the Cozy Nook.

The cab stopped. The cab idled. The driver tapped the horn. Wayne idled back. Wayne saw four Negroes walk out.

They saw the cab. They ran up. They flashed money. The driver dispensed packets. The Negroes paid cash. The Negroes unwrapped benny rolls.

They raised flasks. They popped pills. They did dance steps. They shucked and rehit the Nook.

The cab pulled out. Wayne tailed it. The cab hit Lake Mead and

"D." There—the cab's braking—upside the Wild Goose.

A curb line stood ready—six Negroes—all with that hophead look. The cab stopped. The driver sold bennies. The Negroes shucked and rehit the Goose.

The cab pulled out. Wayne tailed it. The cab hit the Gerson Park Flats. A man got in. The cab pulled out. Wayne tailed it near-close.

There—the cab's braking—upside Jackson and "E." The driver parked. The driver got out. The driver swished into Skip's Lounge.

The driver wore rouge. The driver wore eye shadow. The driver vibed femme fatale. The driver stayed inside. Wayne clocked his visit: 6.4 minutes flat.

The driver swished out. The driver swished and swung sacks. Said driver lugged *coin* sacks. Said driver fumbled them. Said driver tossed them in the trunk.

Call it: Backroom slots—illegal—Monarch Cab–run.

The cab pulled out. The cab hung a U-ey. Wayne tailed it close-close. There—the cab's braking—upside the Evergreen Project.

The passenger got out. The cab turned north. The headlights strafed parked cars.

There—one parked Cadillac/one white face ducked low. Fuck—it's Pete Bondurant—hunkered down low.

Wayne caught a teaser shot—that and splitsville—poof and adieu.

Wayne tailed the cab. The image stuck—Pete at the wheel. Darktown Pete—say what?—what we gots here?

The cab hauled back to Monarch. Wayne tailed it un-close. Wayne parked in his standard tail spot.

He yawned. He stretched. He pissed in his can. Time dragged. Time crawled. Time meandered.

Wayne watched the window.

Eldon Peavy shagged calls. Eldon Peavy popped pills. Eldon Peavy dealt solitaire.

Drivers clocked in. Drivers lounged. Drivers clocked out. They played cards. They rolled dice. They primped.

Time slogged. Wayne yawned. Wayne stretched. Wayne picked his nose.

A limo pulled up. Whitewalls and fender skirts/mock-leather top. Wayne clocked it: 2:03 a.m.

Peavy walked out. Peavy jumped in the limo. The limo booked south. Wayne tailed it. They hit the Strip. They stopped at the Dunes.

The limo idled doorway-close. Wayne idled three cars back. Three fags walked up. Dig their muscles and teased hair. They vibe chorus-line gash.

They scoped out the limo. They swooned and hopped in. The limo pulled out.

Wayne tailed it. They hit McCarran Field. The limo parked by the gate fence. Wayne parked four cars back.

Peavy got out. Peavy walked. Wayne had a view.

Peavy strolls. Peavy hits the main gate. A flight lands. Tourists get off.

Wayne watched. Wayne yawned. Wayne stretched. Peavy walked back. Two men walked with him. Two men walked close.

Wayne rubbed his eyes. Wayne did a double take. Fuck—it's Rock Hudson and Sal Mineo.

Peavy grins. Peavy snaps a popper. Rock and Sal snort. They grin. They giggle exultant. They get in the limo. Peavy assists them. Peavy grabs their ass cheeks and hoists.

The limo pulled out. Wayne tailed it. Wayne got tailpipe-close. A window furled down. He saw smoke. He smelled maryjane.

They hit North LV. They hit the Golden Cavern Hotel. The cuties pile out. Rock and Sal weave.

Lynette torched for Big Rock—she'd fucking shit.

Duane Hinton lived off Sahara. Wayne late-logged in: 3:07 a.m.—the late-*late* show.

He parked. He dumped his milk can. He yawned. He stretched. He scratched.

Hinton's pad was new—all prefab—one window glowed. TV test patterns—flags and geometric bands—KLXO.

Wayne watched the window. Time sluiced. Time slithered. Time slid. The pattern popped off. A room light popped on. Hinton walked outside.

Wayne clocked it: 3:41 a.m.

Hinton wore work clothes. Odds on a store run—the Food King ran all night. Hinton shagged his van. Hinton backed out. Hinton turned north.

Late tails ate shit. Wayne hated them—no traffic/no cover.

Wayne stalled. Wayne clocked off two minutes. Wayne ran up lead and leash time. 1:58, 1:59—Go—

He hit the key. He drove north. He made up time. He caught Hinton.

They passed the Food King. Wayne hovered back. Hinton cut west—Fremont to Owens.

They hit traffic. Wayne moved in close. They hit West Vegas. They hit more traffic—pimp cars and jalopies—Negro nite owls on the stroll.

Hinton stopped. There—he's braking—upside Owens and "H."

Upside Woody's Club. Famous for all-nite grease. Renowned for fried everything food.

Hinton parked. Hinton walked in. Wayne parked catty-corner. A bum walked up.

He bowed. He Watusi'd. He groomed the windshield. Wayne hit his wipers. The bum mooned him. Wino spectators cheered.

Wayne rolled down his window. P-U—the air stunk. He smelled puke. He smelled chicken grease. He rolled his window up.

Hinton walked out. Hinton held the door. Hinton squired a whore. She was dark. She was fat. She looked bombed.

They walked to the van. They got in. They drove around the corner. Wayne doused his lights. Wayne tailed them. Wayne hovered close up.

They stopped. They parked. They walked through a vacant lot. Weeds and sagebrush. Tumbleballs. A trailer on blocks.

Wayne hovered and pulled curbside. Wayne parked ten yards back. The whore unlocked the trailer. Hinton stepped in. Hinton fumbled some object.

Maybe a jug. Maybe a camera. Maybe some sex gear.

The whore stepped in. The whore shut the door. A light blipped on and blipped off.

Wayne ran his clock. Two minutes crawled. Hold for some semblance of fuck.

There—2.6 in:

The trailer rocks. The blocks sway. Both parties are fat. The trailer's thin tin.

The shakes stopped. Wayne clocked the fuck: 4.8 minutes.

The light went on. Blips blipped out a window. Blue blips—as in flashbulbs.

Wayne yawned. Wayne stretched. Wayne scratched his balls. Wayne dumped his piss cup. The trailer rocked—a minute tops—the light went off.

Hinton walked out. Hinton stumbled. Hinton fumbled some object. He cut through the lot. He got his van. He laid some good tread.

Wayne hit his lo-beams. Wayne tailed him. Wayne rubbed his eyes and yawned. The road dipped—dots hit the windshield—say what?/say what?

The car swayed. He swerved. He blew a red light. He hit his brakes. He popped the clutch and stalled the car out.

The van hit a rise. The van vamoosed. Duane Hinton—out of sight.

Wayne hit the key. Wayne punched the gas. Wayne swamped his engine too fast. He clocked two minutes. He hit the key. He kicked the gas sloooooooow.

The engine caught. He yawned and got traction. The whole world sleepytime bluuuured.

Dawn came up. Wayne got in bed dressed. Lynette stirred. Wayne played possum.

She touched him. She felt his clothes. She pulled off his gun.

“Are you having fun? Hiding out from your wife, I mean.”

He yawned. He stretched. He banged the headboard.

He said, “Rock Hudson’s queer.”

Lynette said, “What happened in Dallas?”

▪ ▪ ▪

He slept. He got two hours tops. He woke up woozy. Lynette was gone. Nothing happened in Dallas.

He fixed toast. He drank coffee. He went back out. He parked behind Hinton’s house. He scoped the backyard.

The alley was packed—construction work next door. His shit car fit right in.

He scoped the driveway. Right there per always—Hinton’s van and Deb Hinton’s Impala. Clock the tail in: 9:14 a.m.

Wayne watched the house. Wayne yawned and scratched.

Wayne pissed out his a.m. coffee. The workers hung drywall—six men with power tools—saws buzzed and jackhammers bit.

10:24:

Deb Hinton walks out. Deb Hinton splits. Deb's Impala knocks and pings.

12:08:

The workers break. They hit their cars. They grab lunch pails and sacks.

2:19:

Duane Hinton walks out.

He walks through the backyard. He lugs some clothes. He wore said clothes last night. He walks to the fence. He feeds the incinerator. He lights a match.

GOD FUCK JESUS CHRIST.

Wayne drove to Owens and "H." Wayne parked by Woody's Club.

He popped his trunk. He grabbed a pry bar. He circled the block—the street was dead—no wits out and about.

He walked through the lot. He knocked on the trailer. He looked around—still no wits out.

He leaned on the pry bar. He snapped the lock. He walked in. He smelled blood. He slammed the door shut.

He tapped the walls. He tripped a switch. He got overhead light.

She was dead. On the floor/stage-one rigor/maggots on call. Contusions/head wounds/shattered cheeks.

Hinton gagged her. Hinton wedged a handball in her mouth.

Ear blood. Socket blood. One eyeball gone. Buckshot on the floor. Buckshot in her blood.

Hinton wore sap gloves. The palm fabric broke. The buckshot flew.

Wayne caught his breath. Wayne tracked blood trails. Wayne read splash marks.

He slid on a rug. He stepped on the eyeball.

* * *

Eight assaults. One beating snuff.

He *heard* it. He thought it was fuck #2. It was Murder One. It vibed Manslaughter Two. Hinton was white. Hinton had pull. Hinton killed a *colored* whore.

Wayne drove back. Wayne thought it all through. The gist cohered.

The assault vics pressed charges. They said the assault man took pix. *He* saw flashbulbs pop. *He* knew the MO. He was fried to exhaustion. The gist flew by him.

He fucked up. *He* owed the whore. The cost meant shit.

Wayne parked in the alley. Wayne watched the house. Workmen yelled. Saws buzzed. Jackhammers bit.

Wayne pissed. Wayne missed his can. Wayne sprayed the seat.

Time whizzed. He watched the house. He watched the driveway. Time cranked. Dusk hit. The workmen split.

They grabbed their cars. They cut tracks. They blew horn-honk farewells. Wayne waited. Time labored and lulled.

6:19 p.m.:

The Hintons walk out. They schlep golf bags. Odds on night golf. The range down Sahara.

They take off. They take Deb's Impala. Duane's van stays put.

Wayne clocked down two minutes. Wayne got some nerve up. Wayne got out and stretched.

He walked up. He braced the fence. He vaulted it. He came down hard. He scraped his hands and brushed them off.

He ran to the porch. The door looked weak. The latch wiggled. He shook the door. He forced some slack. He snapped the latch off.

He opened the door. He hit a laundry room. Washer/dryer/clothesline. Window light from inside—and one connecting door.

Wayne stepped inside. Wayne shut the door. Loose floor planks popped up. Wayne stubbed his feet.

He braced the inside door. He jiggled the knob. Bingo—unlocked.

He hit the kitchen. He checked his watch. *Give it twenty minutes tops*.

6:23:

The kitchen drawers—nothing hot—flatware and Green Stamps.

6:27:

The living room—nothing hot—blond wood to excess.

6:31:

The den—nothing hot—skeet guns and bookshelves.

6:34:

Hinton's office—go slow here—it's a logical spot.

File shelves/ledgers/a pegged key ring. No wall safe/one wall pic—Hinton and Lawrence Welk.

6:39:

The bedroom—nothing hot—more blond wood excess. No wall safe/no floor safe/no loose panel strips.

6:46:

The basement—go slow here—it's a logical spot.

Power tools/a workbench/*Playboy* magazines. A closet—locked up. That key ring—remember—keys on a peg.

Wayne ran upstairs. Wayne grabbed the ring. Wayne ran downstairs. Wayne jabbed keys at the lock.

6:52:

Key #9 works. The door pops. The closet unlocks.

He saw one box. That's it, no more. Let's inventory it.

Handcuffs. Handballs. Friction tape. Sap gloves. A Polaroid camera. Six rolls of film. Fourteen snapshots:

Negro whores gagged and stomped—eight certified victims plus six.

Plus:

Unused film. One roll. Twelve exposures. Twelve potential shots.

Wayne emptied the box. Wayne cleared floor space. Wayne spread the shit out. Shoot it fast. Put it back. *Display it like you found it.*

He loaded the camera. He shot twelve exposures. They developed and popped out.

Instant prints—Polaroid color.

He grouped Hinton's pix—four separate shots—he got in tight. He got the handball gags. He got the contusions. He got the smashed teeth and the blood.

(Las Vegas,1/14/64)

Nigger Heaven: Four spooks/four capsules/one spike.

They usurped the carport. They flanked an old Merc. They laid out red devils. They dumped out the goo.

They spritzed it. They cooked it. They fed the spike. They tied up. They geezed. They dipped. They nodded. They swayed.

All riiiiiiiiiiiight.

Pete watched. Pete yawned. Pete scratched his ass. Stakeout night #6—the dawn shift—hijinx at five fucking a.m.

He parked at Truman and "J." He lounged low. He dug on the view.

That coon called and tipped him. He said Wendell be back. He said Wendell gots a gun. He said Curtis and Leroy—they baaad. They be pushin' white horse.

Check the carport. Check the Evergreen Project. Dope fiends meet there. Dice fiends too. Wendell the dice fiend soo-preem. Look for Curtis and Leroy—two fat boys—they gots big conk hairdos.

Pete popped aspirin. His headache dipped south. Six nights. Shit surveillance. Headaches and coon food. Grime on his car.

The plan:

Clip Curtis and Leroy. Appease the Boys and play civic booster. Clip Wendell Durfee. Indebt Wayne Junior thus.

You owe me, Wayne. Let's see your files.

Six nights. No luck. Six nights slumming. Six nights lounging low.

Pete watched the carport. Pete yawned. Pete stretched. Pete grew Matterhorn-size hemorrhoids.

The dope fiends swaaayed.

They fumbled Kools. They lit matches. They burned their hands. They lit filter tips.

Pete yawned. Pete dozed. Pete chained cigarettes. Whoa, what's —

Two shines cut over "J." Fat boys with big conks—big spray-can hair.

Wait—two *more* shines—full-scale shine alert.

They cut over Truman and "K." They met the conk guys. They launched some jive.

One guy schlepped a blanket. One guy schlepped dice. The dice guy schmoozed the conk guys. He called them "Leroy" and "Cur-ti."

The duos teamed up. The duos cruised the carport. The dope guys went oh shit. The conk guys evicted them. The dope guys weaved south. The conk guys threw down the blanket.

Leroy brought breakfast—T-Bird and Tokay. Cur-ti rolled. Green dice twirled. Cur-ti crapped out. Leroy rolled snake eyes.

Pete watched. The jigs whooped. The jigs shucked. The jigs stepped high.

A prowl car drove by. The cops scoped the game. The jigs paid them never-no-mind. Said prowl car split. Said cops yawned—fuck these dumb shines.

Leroy crapped out. Cur-ti exulted. The dice guys drank wine.

A new jig crossed "J." Pete made him quicksville—Wendell (NMI) Durfee.

Check his pimp threads. Check his hair net. Check that gun bulge by his balls.

Durfee joined the game. The jive multiplied. Durfee rolled. Durfee did the Wah-Watusi. Durfee slurped wine.

That prowl car reprised. That prowl car dipped by. The cops looked revitalized. Said car hovered. Said car idled. The radio squawked.

The spooks froze. The spooks went nonchalant. The cops re-revitalized. The spooks went telepathic—we sees de ofay oppressor—the spooks up and ran.

They split up. They hauled. They dispersed cluster-style. They jammed down "J" and "K."

The cops froze. The blanket guys hauled. They dumped their jugs. They moved east. They *hauled.*

The cops unfroze. The cops punched the gas. The cops laid tread and pursued. Durfee ran west. Long legs and low weight. Fat Cur-ti and Leroy pursued.

Pete punched the gas. Pete punched too hard. The pedal slipped. The engine kicked and died.

Pete got out. Pete ran. Durfee ran. Durfee outran his fat pals. The conksters waddled and huffed.

They cut down an alley—trash heaps on gravel—shacks on both sides. Durfee slid. Durfee stumbled. Durfee ripped his pants. Durfee's gun fell out.

Pete slid. Pete stumbled. Pete's belt snapped. Pete's gun fell out.

He gained ground. He stopped. He grabbed Durfee's gun. He lost ground. He gravel-slid.

A siren nudged his ass—loud and full-tilt.

Durfee hopped a fence. The conksters swung over. The prowl car swerved. It fishtailed. It brodied up. It blocked Pete off.

He dropped the gun. He raised his hands. He smiled subservient. The cops got out. The cops pulled saps. The cops raised Ithaca pumps.

They booked him—407 PC.—Clark County Sheriff's.

They dumped him in a sweat room. They cuffed him to a chair. Two dicks worked on him—phone books and verbal shit.

We traced that gun. It's hot. You're a heist man. I found the gun—fuck you.

Bullshit. Why you down here? Tell us your biz.

I crave chitlins. I crave pork rinds. I crave dark trim. Bullshit. Tell us your—

I'm a civil-rights worker. We shall over—

They swung their phone books—fat ones—L.A. directories. You're a heist man. You rob crap games. You tried to rob those coons.

You're wrong—I crave collard greens.

They whopped his ribs. They whopped his knees. They aired it out good. They torqued his cuffs two ratchets up. They let him stew.

His wrists went numb. His arms went numb. He held a class-A piss.

He ran options:

Don't call Littell. Don't call the Boys. Don't look *très* dumb. Don't call Barb—don't scare her.

His back went numb. His chest went numb. He pissed in his pants. He dug in. He dredged some juice. He snapped the cuff chain. He moved his arms and rewired his blood.

The dicks walked back in. They saw the snapped chain. One geek whistled and clapped.

Pete said, "Call Wayne Tedrow. He's on LVPD."

Wayne Junior showed up. The dicks left them alone. Wayne Junior took off his cuffs.

"They said you tried to take down a dice game."

Pete rubbed his wrists. "Do you believe that?"

Wayne Junior frowned—diva with a grievance. Wayne Junior tucked his head up his ass.

Pete stood up. Some blood rewired. His eardrums popped.

"Have they got a seventy-two-hour detention law here?"

"Yeah, release or arraign."

"I'll ride it out, then. I've been there before."

"What do you *want*? You want a favor? You want me to quit coming to your wife's shows?"

Pete jiggled his arms. Some numbness went.

"Durfee's here. He's hanging out with two guys named Curtis and Leroy. I saw them around those shacks on Truman and 'J.' "

Wayne Junior flushed—blood to his brows—blood-circuit overload.

Pete said, "Kill him. I think he came here to kill you."

(Washington, D.C., 1/14/64)

White House pickets:

Civil Rights and Ban the Bomb. Young kids on the Left.

They marched. They chanted. Their shouts overlapped. It was cold. They wore overcoats. They wore Cossack hats.

Bayard Rustin was late. Littell waited. Littell sat in Lafayette Park.

Relief pickets chatted. Shop talk swirled. LBJ and Castro. The Goldwater threat.

The groups shared coffee. Lefty girls brought snacks. Littell looked around—no Bayard Rustin yet.

He knew Rustin's face. Mr. Hoover supplied pix. He met the SCLC plant. They talked last night.

Lyle Holly—ex-Chicago PD.

Lyle worked the Red Squad. Lyle studied the Left. Lyle talked Left and *thought* Right. They shared similar credentials. They shared the same disjuncture. Lyle cracked racial jokes. Lyle said he loved Dr. King.

He knew Lyle's brother. They worked the St. Louis Office—'48 to '50.

Dwight H. was Far Right. Dwight worked kovert Klan jobs. Dwight fit *right* in. The Hollys were Hoosiers. The Hollys had Klan ties. Daddy Holly was a Grand Dragon.

They were post-Klan now. They got law degrees and became cops.

Dwight was post-FBI. Dwight was *still* Fed. Dwight joined the Narcotics Bureau. Dwight was restless. Dwight jumped jobs. Dwight craved a bold new cop gig: Chief Investigator/U.S.

Attorney's Office/Southern Nevada District.

Dwight was hard. Lyle was soft. Lyle oozed Littell-like empathy.

Lyle built the story:

Ward Littell—ex-FBI. He was dismissed. He was disgraced. He was maimed by Mr. Hoover. He's a Mob lawyer now. He's closeted Left. He's close to Mob money.

It was a sound text. Littell conceded it. Lyle laughed. Lyle said Mr. Hoover helped.

The deal was set. He had the money—Carlos and Sam donated it.

He told them straight—it's Mr. Hoover's gig—it's non-Outfit/anti-SCLC.

Carlos and Sam loved it. Lyle talked to Bayard Rustin. Lyle gushed:

Ward Littell—my old pal. Ward's kindred. Ward's got cash. Ward's pro-SCLC.

The ban-the-bomb crew walked. A YAF crew appeared. New signs: Bop the Beard and Krucify Khrushchev.

Bayard Rustin walked up.

A tall man—dressed and groomed—more gaunt than his mug shots.

He sat down. He crossed his legs. He cleared bench space.

Littell said, "How did you recognize me?"

Rustin smiled. "You were the only one not involved in the democratic process."

"Lawyers don't wave placards."

Rustin cracked his briefcase. "No, but some make donations."

Littell cracked his briefcase. "There'll be more. But I'll deny it if it ever comes to that."

Rustin took the money. "Deniability. I can appreciate it."

"You have to consider the source. The men I work for are not friends of the civil-rights movement."

"They should be. Italians have been persecuted on occasion."

"They don't see it that way."

"Perhaps that's why they're so successful in their chosen field."

"The persecuted learn to persecute. I understand the logic, but I don't accept it as wisdom."

"And you don't ascribe ruthlessness to all people of that blood?"

“No more than I ascribe stupidity to your people.”

Rustin slapped his knees. “Lyle said you were quick.”

“He’s quick himself.”

“He said you go back.”

“We met at a Free-the-Rosenbergs rally. It must have been ’52.”

“Which side were you on?”

Littell laughed. “We were shooting surveillance film from the same building.”

Rustin laughed. “I sat that one out. I was never a real Communist, despite Mr. Hoover’s protestations.”

Littell said, “You are by his logic. You know what that designation codifies, and how it allows him to encapsulate everything that he fears.”

Rustin smiled. “Do you hate him?”

“No.”

“After what he put you through?”

“I find it hard to hate people who are that true to themselves.”

“Have you studied passive resistance?”

“No, but I’ve witnessed the futility of the alternative.”

Rustin laughed. “That’s an extraordinary statement for a Mafia lawyer to make.”

A wind stirred. Littell shivered.

“I know something about you, Mr. Rustin. You’re a gifted and compromised man. I may not have your gifts, but I suspect that I run neck-and-neck in the compromise department.”

Rustin bowed. “I apologize. I try not to second-guess people’s motives, but I just failed with you.”

Littell shook his head. “It doesn’t matter. We want the same things.”

“Yes, and we both contribute in our own ways.”

Littell buttoned his coat. “I admire Dr. King.”

“As much as any Catholic can admire a man named Martin Luther?”

Littell laughed. “I admire Martin Luther. I made that compromise when I was more of a man of faith.”

“You’ll be hearing some bad things about our Martin. Mr. Hoover has been sending out missives. Martin Luther King is the devil with horns. He seduces women and employs Communists.”

Littell put his gloves on. “Mr. Hoover has numerous pen pals.”

“Yes. In Congress, the clergy, and the newspaper field.”

“He believes, Mr. Rustin. That’s how he makes them believe.”

Rustin stood up. “Why now? Why did you decide to undertake such a risk at this time?”

Littell stood up. “I’ve been visiting Las Vegas, and I don’t like the way things are run there.”

Rustin smiled. “Tell those Mormons to loosen the chains.”

They shook hands. Rustin walked off. Rustin whistled Chopin.

The park glowed. Mr. Hoover bestows all gifts.

(Las Vegas,1/15/64)

Picture loop:

The dead whore/the eyeball/Wendell Durfee with fangs.

Pictures and flash dreams. No sleep and rolling blackouts. Two fender-benders at the wheel.

The pictures looped on. Thirty-six hours' worth. Bad rain offset them.

Wayne muscled a Monarch Cab man. Wayne stole some bennies. Wayne called Lynette's school and left a message:

Don't go home—stay with a friend—I'll call back and explain.

He ate bennies. He guzzled coffee. It juiced him. It drained him. It torqued his picture loop.

He staked out Truman and "J." He ran file checks. He glommed mug shots. He got dirt on Leroy Williams and Curtis Swasey.

Pimps. Dice fools. Twelve arrests/two convictions. Vagrants with no known address.

He stayed up—half a day/a night/a full day. He watched the carport. He watched the clubs—the Nook/Woody's/the Goose.

He watched crap games. He scoped bar-b-que lines. He saw wisps. He saw Wendell Durfee. He blinked and vaporized him.

He sat in his car. He watched the alley. It paid off two hours back.

Curtis exits a shack. The rear door flanks the alley. Curtis dumps shit in a trash can. Curtis runs straight back.

He waited. He sat in his car. He watched the alley. Dig this one hour back:

Leroy exits the shack. Leroy dumps shit in a trash can. Leroy runs straight back.

Wayne ran up then. Wayne dumped the can. Wayne saw a plastic sheet. White dust was stuck to it—white powder dregs.

He tasted it. It was Big "H."

He circled the shack. Crimped foil covered the windows. He pulled a piece up. He saw Curtis and Leroy.

That was 5:15 p.m. It was 6:19 now.

Wayne watched the shack. Wayne saw wisps and light. Light cut through rips in the foil.

The rain was bad. Fucking monsoon dimensions. Pictures looped on:

Dallas. Pete and Durfee. Pete says, "Kill him"—this sound loop two days strong.

You should have killed him *then*. He's a homing pigeon. You should have *known*.

KILL HIM. KILL HIM. KILL HIM. KILL HIM. KILL HIM.

The car sat on mud. The roof leaked. Rain seeped in. He owed Pete. Pete's call saved him. Pete's call diverted him.

Fuck Buddy Fritsch—fuck his file job—Hinton pays for the whore.

He detoured once—ten hours back. He drove by the trailer. Said trailer reeked. The whore sat and decomped.

Pictures: The blood peel/the maggots/pellets caked in blood.

Wayne watched the shack. The rain blitzed his view. Time decomped. Time redacted.

The back door opens. A man exits. He walks. He walks *this* way. He gets *close*.

Wayne watched. Wayne popped the passenger door. There—it's Leroy Williams.

He's got no hat. He's got no umbrella. He's got sodden duds.

Leroy walked by. Wayne kicked the door out. It hit Leroy flush. Leroy yelped. Leroy hit the mud. Wayne jumped on out.

Leroy stood up. Wayne pulled his piece and butt-punched him. Leroy fell and grazed the car.

Wayne kicked him in the balls. Leroy yelped. Leroy thrashed. Leroy fell down. He said mothersomething. He pulled a shiv. Wayne slammed the door on his hand.

He mashed his fingers. He pinned them. Leroy screamed and dropped the knife. Wayne popped the wind wing. Wayne reached in and popped the glove box.

He dug around. He grabbed his duct tape. He pulled up a piece.

Leroy screamed. The rain ate the noise. Wayne eased off the door.

Leroy flexed his hand. Bones sheared and stuck out. Leroy screamed loud.

Wayne grabbed his conk. Wayne tape-muzzled him. Leroy squirmed. Leroy yelped. Leroy flailed his fucked hand.

Wayne taped him—three circuits—Number 2 duct. He kicked him prone. He cuffed his wrists. He threw him in the backseat.

He got in the front seat. He hit the gas. He swerved through mud and alley trash. The rain got worse. His wipers blew. He drove by feel.

He notched a mile. He saw a sign. He flashed—the auto dump—it's close—it's two clicks downwind.

He drove fifty yards. He cranked a hard right. He braked. He pulled in. He wracked the axle on the pavement.

He hit his brights. He lit the place large: Rain/epidemic rust/a hundred dead cars.

He set the brake. He pulled Leroy up. He ripped up the tape. He ripped off skin and half his mustache.

Leroy yelped. Leroy coughed. Leroy burped bile and blood.

Wayne hit the roof light. "Wendell Durfee. Where is he?"

Leroy blinked. Leroy coughed. Wayne smelled the shit in his pants.

"Where's Wendell Durf—"

"Wendell say he got somethin' to do. He say he be back to get his stuff and leave town. Cur-ti, he say Wendell got bidness."

"What business?"

Leroy shook his head. "I don't know. Wendell's bidness is Wendell's bidness, which ain' my bidness."

Wayne leaned close. Wayne grabbed his hair. Wayne smashed his face on the door. Leroy screamed. Leroy expelled teeth. Wayne crawled over the seat.

He pinned Leroy down. He taped him full-body. He grabbed his cuff chain. He popped the door. He pulled him out. He dragged him to a Buick. He pulled his piece and shot six holes in the trunk.

He dumped Leroy in. He piled on spare tires. He slammed the trunk lid.

He was soaked. His shoes squished. His feet were somewhere else. He saw wisps. He knew they weren't real.

The rain let up. Wayne drove back. Wayne parked in the same alley spot. He got out. He circled the shack. He unpeeled a foil strip.

There's Cur-ti. He's with another guy. The guy's got Cur-ti's face. The guy's Cur-ti's brother.

Cur-ti sat on the floor. Cur-ti jived. Cur-ti crimped bindles. Cur-ti cut dope.

His brother tied off. His brother geezed. His brother untied on Cloud 9. His brother lit a Kool filter-tip.

He burned his fingers. He smiled. Cur-ti giggled. Cur-ti cut dope.

He twirled his knife. He mimed a gutting stroke. He said, "Sheeit. Like a dressed hog, man."

He twirled his knife. He mimed a shaving stroke. He said, "Wendell likes it trimmed. Cuttin' on bitches always been his MO."

He said, "His and hers, man. He lost his gun, so he gets to get in close."

Wayne HEARD it. It clicked in synaptic. Wayne SAW it—instant picture loops.

He ran. He slid. He stumbled. He fell in the mud. He got up and stumble-ran. He got in the car. He stabbed with his key. He missed the keyhole.

He got it in. He turned it. He stripped gears. The wheels spun and kicked the car free.

Lightning hit. Thunder hit. He outran the rain.

He slid through intersections. He ran yellows and reds. He banged railroad tracks. He grazed curbs. He scraped parked cars.

He got home. He brodied on the front lawn. He stumbled out and ran up. The house was dark. The door lock was cracked. His key jammed in the hole.

He kicked the door in. He looked down the hall. He saw the bedroom light. He walked up and looked in.

She was naked.

The sheets were red. She drained red. She soaked through the white.

He spread her. He cinched her. He used Wayne's neckties. He gutted her and shaved her. He trimmed off her patch.

Wayne pulled his gun. Wayne cocked it. Wayne put it in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

The hammer clicked empty. He shot his full six at the dump.

The storm passed through. It dumped power lines. Stoplights were down. People drove crazy.

Wayne drove deliberate. Wayne drove very slow.

He parked by the shack. He grabbed his shotgun. He walked up and kicked the door in.

Cur-ti was packing dope. Cur-ti's brother was watching TV. They saw Wayne. They nodded. They grinned smack-back.

Wayne tried to talk. Wayne's tongue misfired. Cur-ti talked. Cur-ti talked hair-o-wine slow.

"Hey, man. Wendell's gone. You won't see us harboring—"

Wayne raised his shotgun. Wayne swung the butt.

He clipped Cur-ti. He knocked him down. He stepped on his chest. He grabbed six bindles. He stuffed them in his mouth.

Cur-ti gagged. Cur-ti bit plastic. Cur-ti bit at Wayne's hand. Cur-ti ate plastic and dope.

Wayne stepped on his face. The bindles snapped. His teeth snapped. His jaw snapped loose.

Cur-ti thrashed. Cur-ti's legs stiffed. Blood blew out his nose. Cur-ti spasmed and bit at Wayne's shoe.

Wayne goosed the TV. Morey Amsterdam hollered. Dick Van Dyke screamed.

The brother cried. The brother begged. The brother talked in tongues. The brother tongue-talked smacked-out on the floor.

His lips moved. His mouth moved. His lids fluttered. His eyes rolled back.

Wayne hit him.

He broke his teeth. He broke his nose. He broke the gun butt. His lips moved. His mouth moved. His eyeballs clicked up. His eyes showed pure white.

Wayne picked the TV up. Wayne dropped it on his head. The tubes burst and exploded. They burned his face up.

The power lines were rerigged. The streetlights worked fine. Wayne drove to the dump.

He pulled in. He aimed his brights. He strafed the Buick. He got out and opened the trunk.

He untaped Leroy. He said, "Where's Durfee?" Leroy said, "I don’t know.”

Wayne shot him—five rounds in the face—point-blank triple-aught buck.

He blew his head off. He blew up the trunk. He blew out the undercarriage. He blew the spare tires up.

He walked to his car. Smoke fizzed out the hood. He’d run it dry. The crankcase was shot.

He tossed the shotgun.

He walked home.

He sat by Lynette.

(Las Vegas,1/15/64)

Littell sipped coffee. Wayne Senior sipped scotch.

They stood at his bar—teak and mahogany—game heads mounted above.

Wayne Senior smiled. “I’m surprised you landed in that storm.”

“It was touch and go. We had a few rough moments.”

“The pilot knew his business, then. He had a planeful of gamblers, who were anxious to get here and lose their money.”

Littell said, “I forgot to thank you. It’s late, and you saw me on very short notice.”

“Mr. Hoover’s name opens doors. I won’t be coy about it. When Mr. Hoover says ‘Jump,’ I say ‘How high?’ ” Littell laughed. “I say the same thing.” Wayne Senior laughed. “You flew in from D.C.?”

“Yes.”

“Did you see Mr. Hoover?”

“No. I saw the man he told me to see.”

“Can you discuss it?”

“No.”

Wayne Senior twirled a walking stick. “Mr. Hoover knows everyone. The people he knows comprise quite a loop.”

“The Loop.” The Dallas Office file. Maynard Moore—FBI snitch. His handler—Wayne Tedrow Senior.

Littell coughed. “Do you know Guy Banister?”

“Yes, I know Guy. How do you know him?”

“He ran the Chicago Office. I worked there from ’51 to ’60.”

“Have you seen him more recently?”

“No.”

“Oh? I thought you might have crossed paths in Texas.”

Guy bragged. Guy talked too much. Guy was indiscreet.

"No, I haven't seen Guy since Chicago. We don't have much in common."

Wayne Senior arched one eyebrow—the pose meant oh-you-kid.

Littell leaned on the bar. "Your son works LVPD Intel. He's someone I'd like to know."

"I've shaped my son in more ways than he'd care to admit. He's not altogether ungrateful."

"I've heard he's a fine officer. A phrase comes to mind. 'Incorruptible by Las Vegas Police standards.' "

Wayne Senior lit a cigarette. "Mr. Hoover lets you read his files."

"On occasion."

"He permits me that pleasure, as well."

" 'Pleasure' is a good way to describe it."

Wayne Senior sipped scotch. "I arranged for my son to be sent to Dallas. You never know when you might rub shoulders with history."

Littell sipped coffee. "I'll bet you didn't tell him. A phrase comes to mind. 'Withholds sensitive data from his son.' "

"My son is uncommonly generous to unfortunate people. I've heard you used to be."

Littell coughed. "I have a major client. He wants to move his base to Las Vegas, and he's very partial to Mormons."

Wayne Senior doused his cigarette. Scotch sucked up the ash.

"I know many capable Mormons who would love to work for Mr. Hughes."

"Your son has some files that would help us."

"I won't ask him. I have a pioneer's disdain for Italians, and I'm fully aware that you have other clients beside Mr. Hughes."

Scotch and wet tobacco. Old barroom smells.

Littell moved the tumbler. "What are you saying?"

"That we all trust our own kind. That the Italians will never let Mormons run Mr. Hughes' hotels."

"We're getting ahead of ourselves. He has to purchase the properties first."

"Oh, he will. Because he wants to buy, and your other clients want to sell. I could mention the term 'conflict of interest,' but I won't."

Littell smiled. Littell raised the tumbler—touché.

“Mr. Hoover briefed you well.”

“Yes. In both our best interests.”

“And his own.”

Wayne Senior smiled. “I discussed you with Lyle Holly as well.”

“I didn’t know you knew him.”

“I’ve known his brother for years.”

“I know Dwight. We worked the St. Louis Office together.”

Wayne Senior nodded. “He told me. He said you were always ideologically suspect, and your current employment as a Mafia lawyer confirms it.”

Littell raised the tumbler. “Touché, but I wouldn’t call my employers ideological on any level.”

Wayne Senior raised the tumbler. “Touché back at you.”

Littell coughed. “Let’s see if I can put this together. Dwight’s with the Narcotics Bureau here. He used to work mail-fraud assignments for Mr. Hoover. The two of you worked together then.”

“That’s correct. We go back thirty-some years. His daddy was a daddy to me.”

“The Grand Dragon? And a nice Mormon boy like you?”

Wayne Senior grabbed a cocktail glass. Wayne Senior built a Rob Roy.

“The Indiana Klan was never as rowdy as those boys down south. That’s *too* rowdy, even for boys like Dwight and me. That’s why we worked those mail-fraud assignments.”

Littell said, “That’s not true. Dwight did it because Mr. Hoover told him to. You did it to play G-man.”

Wayne Senior stirred his drink. Littell smelled bitters and Noilly Prat. He salivated. He moved his chair back. Wayne Senior winked.

Shadows creased the bar. A woman crossed the rear deck. Proud features/black hair/gray streak.

Wayne Senior said, “I want to show you a film.”

Littell stood up. Littell stretched. Wayne Senior grabbed his drink. They walked down a side hall. The scotch and bitters swirled. Littell wiped his lips.

They stopped at a storage room. Wayne Senior hit the lights. Littell saw a projector and wall screen.

Wayne Senior spooled film. Wayne Senior set the slide. Wayne

Senior fed film in. Littell killed the lights. Wayne Senior hit the on switch. Words and numbers hit the screen.

Surveillance code—white-on-black. A date—8/28/63. A location—Washington, D.C.

The words dissolved. Raw footage hit. Speckled black & white film. A bedroom/Martin Luther King/a white woman.

Littell watched.

His legs dipped. He weaved hard. He grabbed at a chair. The skin tones contrasted—black-on-white—stretch marks and plaid sheets.

Littell watched the film. Wayne Senior smiled. Wayne Senior watched him.

All gifts. Mr. Hoover. A gift that he would regret.

(Las Vegas,1/15/64)

The cops kicked him loose.

They called around. They got his rep. They got *très* hip. He's mobbed up/he knows the Boys/the Boys dig on him.

Pete walked. Pete paged Barb at work. Pete said I'll be home soon.

He did forty-one hours. He ate jute balls and rice. His head hurt. His wrists hurt. He smelled like Chihuahua shit.

He cabbed to his car. He cabbed Monarch—the Browntown Express. The driver lisped. The driver wore rouge. The driver said he sold guns.

The driver dropped Pete at the carport. Pete's car was trashed/totaled/torched.

No windshield. No hubcaps. No tires. No wheels. The Cadillac Hotel—one wino booked in.

He snored. Bugs bombed him. He cradled Sterno and T-Bird. The car got a paint job—kustom nigger script:

Allah Rules/Death to Ofays/We Love Malcolm X.

Pete laughed. Pete fucking roared. He kicked the grille. He kicked the door panels. He tossed the wino his keys.

A rain hit—light and cold. Pete heard a ruckus close in. He placed it—way close—the shacks off "J" Street.

He walked over. He caught the grief.

Six prowl cars—LVPD and Sheriff's. Two Fed sleds snout-to-snout. Big voodoo upside a jig shack.

Arc lights/crime-scene rope/one ambulance. A cop-jig confluence—large.

Cops inside the crime-scene rope. Jigs outside. Jigs armed with

Tokay and fried chicken.

Pete pushed up close. A cop rigged two gurneys. A cop pushed them in the shack. A cop jumped the rope. A cop briefed him. Pete eavesdropped in tight.

A kid called it in. Said kid lives next door. Said kid heard a commotion. A honky do it. Honky got a shotgun. Honky get in his car and ex-cape. Said kid enters the shack then. Said kid sees two stiffs—Curtis and Otis Swasey.

The jigs pressed up. The jigs stretched the crime-scene rope. The jigs Wah-Watusi'd. A cop placed sawhorses. A cop stretched the rope. A cop eased the jigs back.

Jigs eyeballed Pete. Jigs jostled him. White Man—bad juju. White Man—go home. White Man—he kill our kin.

Odds on: Wayne Junior. Odds on: Wendell Durfee—dead and dumped *somewhere*.

The jigs huddled. The jigs mumbled. The jigs pygmy-ized. A jig lobbed a bottle. A jig lobbed a drumstick. A jig lobbed french fries.

Four cops pulled batons. Two cops rolled out the gurneys.

There Curtis—he blue—honky beat his face. There Otis—he crisp—honky torch his face baaaaaad juju.

Pete backed off. Pete caught some elbows. Pete caught some lobbed chicken wings. Pete caught some yam pies.

He walked across "J." He mingled by a cop clique. He leaned on a prowl car. A cop sat in front. Said cop worked a hand mike. Said cop talked loud.

We got another one—shotgun DOA—a coon named Leroy Williams.

Wooooooo! Blew his burrhead cleeean off! The dump guys found him inside this Buick. We got the shotgun.

Call *Leroy* Stiff #3. Wendell—where *you* at?

Pete mingled. The cops ignored him. Cops blocked traffic. Cops stood point. Cops cordoned off "J."

The rain fucking tripled. The clouds let fly. Pete grabbed a stray chicken box. Pete dumped out gizzards. Pete put it on and kept his head dry.

The jigs dispersed. The jigs booked willy-nilly. The jigs ran hellbent.

A Fed car pulled up. A big guy got out. Said guy vibed El Jefe—gray suit and gray Fed hat.

Jefe flashed a badge. Jefe got service. The point guard saluted. A baby Fed bowed. Jefe bootjacked his umbrella.

Pete circled the rope. Pete got in close. Said fuzz ignored him. Fuck you—you're a geek—you've got a chicken-box hat.

Pete stood around. His hat leaked. Chicken grease oiled his hair. The baby Fed brown-nosed the boss Fed—yessir, Mr. Holly.

Mr. Holly was *pissed*. It's *my* case. The vics pushed narcotics. It's *my* crime scene—let's toss the shack.

Mr. Holly stayed dry. The sub-fuzz stayed wet. A sergeant walked up. Said sergeant wore squishy blues.

He talked loud. He pissed off Mr. Holly. He said it's *our* case. *We're* sealing her up. *We'll* bring in Homicide.

Mr. Holly fumed. Mr. Holly fugued out. He kicked a sawhorse. He yelped. He fucked his foot up.

A prowl car pulled up. A cop got out. He gestured wild. He talked wild. Pete heard "car at the dump." Pete heard "Tedrow."

Mr. Holly yelled. The sergeant yelled. A cop raised a bullhorn. Lock her up—let's roll code 3—the Tonopah Dump.

The fuzz dispersed.

They grabbed their cars. They peeled up "J." They fishtailed in mud. They plowed through gravel yards.

One cop stayed behind. Said cop locked the shack.

He stood by the front door. He stood in the monsoon. He smoked cigarettes. The rain doused them. He got two puffs per. He gave up. He ran to his car. He rolled the windows up.

Pete ran. The rain covered him. He kicked up mud. He ran back to the alley. He circled the shack.

No cars. No back-door guard—good. Said door was locked. The windows were tinfoil-patched.

Pete reached up. Pete tore at a foil patch. Pete de-patched a window.

He climbed up. He vaulted in. He saw chalk lines and bloodstains. He saw a burned-up TV-set.

Floor debris—chalk-circled: Bindle scraps/tube glass/fried nigger hair.

Pete tossed the shack. Pete worked *rápidamente*. He grid-scoped. He saw one dresser/one toilet/no shelves.

Two mattresses. Bare walls and floors. No stash-holes inset. A window air-cooler—Frost King brand—matted screens and rusty ducts.

No cord. No plug. No intake valve. Call it dope camouflage.

Pete popped the top. Pete reached in. Pete praised Allah Himself.

White horse—all plastic-wrapped—three bonaroo bricks.

(Las Vegas, 1/17/64)

Five cops grilled him.

Wayne sat. They stood. They filled the sweat room.

Buddy Fritsch and Bob Gilstrap. A Sheriff's man. A Fed named Dwight Holly. A Dallas cop named Arthur V. Brown.

The heat went off. Their breath steamed. It fogged the mirror-wall. He sat. They stood. His lawyer stood under a speaker. His lawyer stood outside.

They popped him at home—2:00 a.m.—he was still there with Lynette. Fritsch called Wayne Senior. Wayne Senior came to the jail.

Wayne blew him off. Wayne blew off his lawyer. Dwight Holly knew Wayne Senior. Dwight Holly stressed the friendship thus:

You're not your dad. You killed three men. You fucked my investigation up.

They'd braced him twice. He told the truth. He wised up and called Pete.

Pete knew the scoop. Pete knew a lawyer. His name: Ward Littell.

Wayne met with Littell. Littell quizzed him: Did they tape you? Did they transcribe?

Wayne said no. Littell advised him. Littell said he'd watch the next go. Littell said he'd veto tape and transcription.

The veto worked. The room was cherry—no tape rig/no steno.

Wayne coughed. His breath fogged out.

Fritsch said, "You got a cold? You were sure out in the rain that night."

Holly said, "He was out killing three unarmed men."

Fritsch said, “Come on. He admitted it.”

The Sheriff’s man coughed. “*I’ve* got a fucking cold. He wasn’t the only one out in the rain.”

Gilstrap smiled. “We’ve cleared up one part of your story. We know you didn’t kill Lynette.”

Wayne coughed. “Tell me how you know.”

“Son, you don’t want to know.”

Holly said, “Tell him. I want to see how he reacts.”

Fritsch said, “The coroner found abrasions and semen. The guy was a secretor. AB-negative blood, which is real rare. We checked Durfee’s jail records. That’s his blood type.”

Holly smiled. “Look, he didn’t even blink.”

Brown said, “He’s a cold one.”

The Sheriff’s man said, “He wasn’t even crying when we found him. He was just staring at the body.”

Gilstrap said, “Come on. He was in shock.”

Fritsch said, “We’re satisfied that Durfee killed her.”

The Sheriff’s man lit a cigar. “And we’re satisfied that Curtis and Otis clued you in to his plan.”

Holly straddled a chair. “Someone hipped you to Leroy Williams and the Swasey brothers.”

Wayne coughed. “I told you. I have an informant.”

“Whose name you refuse to reveal.”

“Yes.”

“And your intent was to find and apprehend Wendell Durfee.”

“Yes.”

Brown said, “You wanted to apprehend him, to make up for not doing it in Big D.”

“Yes.”

“Then, son, here’s what bothers me. How did Durfee know that you were the officer sent down to Dallas to extradite him?”

Wayne coughed. “I told you before. I rousted him a few times when I worked Patrol. He knew my face and my name, and he saw me when we exchanged shots in Dallas.”

Fritsch said, “I’ll buy that.”

Gilstrap said, “I will, too.”

Brown said, “I won’t. I think something happened between you and Durfee. Maybe in Dallas, maybe up here before they sent you down. I don’t see him coming all the way up here, presumably to kill you and get his incidental jollies on your wife, unless he had a personal motive."

Tex was good. Tex was better than the Sheriff's man. Pete chased the dice men. The cops chased him. They popped Pete. They filed paper. The Sheriff's man knew shit-all about it.

Brown said, "Your business up here is your business. I wouldn't care about any of this, except for the proximity of a missing Dallas officer named Maynard D. Moore, who you reportedly did not get along with."

Wayne shrugged. "Moore was dirty. If you knew him, you know that's true. I didn't like him, but I only had to work with him for a few days."

"You said 'knew.' You think he's dead, then?"

"That's right. Durfee or one of his asshole Klan buddies killed him."

Gilstrap said, "We've got two APBs out on Durfee. He won't get far."

Brown hovered. "You're saying Officer Moore was in the Ku Klux Klan?"

"That's right."

"I don't like the sound of that accusation. You're defaming the memory of a brother officer."

The Sheriff's man laughed. "This is hilarious. He kills three Negroes and gets on his high horse about the KKK."

Brown coughed. "DPD has been anti-Klan from the get-go."

"Bullshit. You all get your sheets cleaned at the same laundry."

"Boy, you are wearing me thin."

"Don't call me 'boy,' you redneck faggot."

Brown kicked a chair. Fritsch picked it up.

Gilstrap said, "Come on. This line of talk is getting us nowhere."

Holly rocked his chair. "Leroy Williams and the Swasey brothers were moving heroin."

Wayne said, "I know that."

"How?"

"I saw Curtis rolling bindles."

"I've had them under spot surveillance. They were pushing in Henderson and Boulder City, and they were making plans to push in West Vegas."

Wayne coughed. "They wouldn't have lasted two days. The Outfit would have clipped them."

Fritsch rolled his eyes. “He goes from the Klan to the Mob.”

Gilstrap rolled his eyes. “You’ve got the Mob in Vegas like you’ve got the Klan in Dallas.”

Wayne rolled *his* eyes. “Hey, Buddy, who bought you your speedboat? Hey, Bob, who got you that second mortgage?”

Fritsch kicked the wall. Gilstrap kicked a chair. Brown picked it up.

Holly said, “You’re not making any friends here.”

Wayne said, “I’m not trying to.”

Fritsch said, “You’ve got the sympathy vote.”

Gilstrap said, “You’ve got the chain of events.”

The Sheriff’s man coughed. “You’re trying to apprehend a fugitive cop-killer. You learn that your wife may be jeopardized, so you rush home and find her dead. Your actions from that point on are entirely understandable.”

Brown hitched up his pants. “It’s your prior relationship with Durfee that I don’t understand.”

Holly said, “I concur.”

Fritsch said, “Look at it our way. We’re trying to give the DA a package. We don’t want to see an LVPD man go down for three murders.”

Gilstrap said, “Let’s talk turkey. It’s not like you killed three white men.”

Brown cracked his knuckles. “Did you kill Maynard Moore?”

“Fuck you.”

“Did Wendell Durfee take part in the killing? Is that what all this derives from?”

“Fuck you.”

“Did Wendell Durfee witness the killing?”

“Fuck you.”

Holly pulled his chair up. Holly bumped Wayne’s chair.

“Let’s discuss the condition of the shack.”

Wayne shrugged. “I only saw the bindles I shoved in Curtis Swasey’s mouth. I did not see any other narcotics or narcotics paraphernalia.”

Holly smiled. “You anticipated the intent of my question very nicely.”

Wayne coughed. “You’re a narcotics agent. You want to know if I stole the large quantity of heroin that you think the victims had. You don’t care about the murders or my wife.”

Holly shook his head. “That’s not entirely true. You know I’m friends with your father. I’m sure he cared for Lyn—”

“My father despised Lynette. He doesn’t care for anyone. He only respects hard-ons like you. I’m sure he’s full of warmth for your days in Indiana and your good times with Mr. Hoover.”

Holly leaned in. “Don’t turn me into an enemy. You’re getting there already.”

Wayne stood up. “Fuck you and fuck my father. If I wanted his help, I’d be out now.”

Holly stood up. “I think I’ve got what I need.”

Gilstrap shook his head. “You’re playing kamikaze, son. And you’re bombing your own goddamn friends.”

Fritsch shook his head. “You can cross me off that list. We do our best to keep Vegas clean, while you go out and kill three niggers, which is going to bring out every civil-rights chimpanzee in captivity.”

Wayne laughed. “*Vegas? Clean*?”

The cops walked out. Wayne took his pulse. It ran 180-plus.

(Las Vegas, 1/17/64)

The room was cold. A heat coil blew. It chilled down the jail.

Littell read his notes.

Wayne Junior was good. He diverted Sergeant Brown. He deflected his attack. Pete briefed Littell beforehand. Pete dropped a bomb: Wayne Junior knows about Dallas.

Pete liked Wayne Junior. Pete mourned Lynette. Pete took the blame. Pete stopped there. Pete implied a Dallas snafu.

Littell checked his notes. The smart call: Wayne Junior killed Maynard Moore. The details played schizzy. Wendell Durfee played in somehow.

Wayne Junior had the board files. Littell needed them. Littell might need Wayne Senior. Wayne Senior called him. Wayne Senior made nice. He said I want to help my son. He said I want *him* to ask.

He informed Wayne Junior. Wayne Junior said no. He told Wayne Senior that. It angered him. That was good. He might need Wayne Senior. The "no" knocked him flat.

Wayne Junior was good. Wayne Junior pissed off Dwight Holly. Littell called Lyle Holly. They talked last night. They discussed the Bayard Rustin meet. Lyle said Dwight was mad. The killings fucked with him. Wayne Junior deep-sixed his surveillance.

He chatted Lyle up. He said, "I'm Junior's lawyer." Lyle laughed. Lyle said, "Dwight never liked you."

Littell checked his notes. The room was cold. His breath fogged and steamed. Bob Gilstrap walked in. Dwight Holly followed him.

They sat down and kicked back.

Holly stretched. His coat gapped. He wore a blued .45.

"You've aged, Ward. Those scars put some years on you."

"They're hard-earned, Dwight."

"Some men learn the hard way. I hope you have."

Littell smiled. "Let's discuss Wayne Tedrow Junior."

Holly scratched his neck. "He's a punk. He's got all of his daddy's arrogance and none of his charm."

Gilstrap lit a cigarette. "They broke the mold on Senior and him. I've never been able to figure either one of them."

Holly laced his hands. "Something happened with him and Durfee. Where or when, I don't know."

Gilstrap nodded. "That likelihood is what scares me."

A vent thumped. The heat kicked on. Holly hack-coughed.

"The kid mouths off to me and passes his bug on."

Gilstrap said, "You'll survive."

Holly said, "Let's cut the shit. I'm the only one who doesn't want to bury this."

"It's not your agency he hung out to dry."

"Shit, he hung *me* out."

The room warmed up. Holly took his coat off.

"Say something, Ward. You look like the cat who ate the canary."

Littell popped his briefcase. Littell showed the Vegas *Sun*. There's a headline. It runs 40 points. There's a subhead 16:

"POLICEMAN HELD IN TRIPLE SLAYING—CIVIL-RIGHTS PROTESTS FEARED."

"NAACP: 'KILLINGS SPRINGBOARD TO EXPLICATE RACISM IN LAS VEGAS.' "

Gilstrap said, "Shit."

Holly laughed. "Big words and colored bullshit. Give them a dictionary and they think they run the world."

Littell tapped the paper. "I don't see your name, Dwight. Is that a blessing or a curse?"

Holly stood up. "I see where this is going, and if it *does* go there, I'll go to the U.S. Attorney. Civil-rights abridgement and obstruction of justice. I'll look bad, you'll look worse, the kid will do time."

A vent thumped. The heat kicked off. Holly walked out.

Gilstrap said, "The cocksucker means it."

"I don't think so. He goes back too far with Wayne Senior."

“Dwight don’t go back, Dwight goes forward. Wayne Senior could squawk and go to Mr. Hoover, who’d most likely pooh-pooh it because, according to my sources, he’s got a real soft spot for Dwight.”

Littell flipped the paper over. Littell squared the fold. There’s the hard news and AP pix: Police dogs/angry Negroes/tear gas.

Gilstrap sighed. “Okay, I’ll play.”

“Does the DA want to file?”

“Nobody wants that. We’re just afraid that we’re too far exposed already.”

“And?”

“And there’s two schools of thought. Bury it and ride out all the Commie bullshit, or file and take our lumps.”

Littell drummed the table. “Your department could get hurt very badly.”

Gilstrap blew smoke rings. “Mr. Littell, you’re leading me. You’re playing me and holding back your face cards.”

Littell tapped the paper. “Tell me Dallas doesn’t scare you. Tell me Junior didn’t fuck up there and give Durfee a motive to kill him. Tell me this won’t come out in court. Tell me you’re convinced that Junior didn’t kill Maynard Moore. Tell me you didn’t put a bounty on Durfee and pay Junior six thousand dollars to kill him. Tell me you want all this exposed and tell me Junior won’t expose it just to flush his life down the toilet.”

Gilstrap squeezed his ashtray. “Tell me Dallas PD will just go away.”

“Tell me Junior wasn’t smart enough to hide the body. Tell me the first cop who spots Durfee won’t kill him and eliminate DPD’s one potential witness.”

Gilstrap slapped the table. “Tell me how we *do* this.”

Littell tapped the paper. “I’ve read the accounts. There’s no specified sequence of events. All you have is four killings in one evening.”

“That’s right.”

“The evidence can be reworked to support self-defense. There may be a chance to divert demonstrations.”

Gilstrap sighed. “I don’t want to owe Wayne Senior.”

Littell said, “You won’t.”

Gilstrap stuck his hand out.

He brewed a plan. He called Pete and told him. Pete said okay. Pete asked one favor.

I want to see Lynette. It's *my* fault. I fucked up in Dallas.

Buddy Fritsch had morgue shots. Littell looked at them. Durfee raped her. Durfee gutted her. Durfee shaved her.

He saw the pix. He studied them. He scared himself. He put Jane's face on Lynette's body.

He sent Pete a morgue pass. Pete said he'd talked to Wayne Junior. Wayne Junior pledged him his files.

Littell called east. Littell pulled strings. Littell buzzed Lyle Holly. He said the snuffs might hurt Dwight—so hear my plan now.

Call Bayard Rustin. Offer this advice: Do not protest the killings—call Ward Littell instead.

Rustin called him. Littell lied. Littell offered a rationale. A Negro man killed a white woman. Three more killings derived. The cop killed in self-defense. It's all certified.

Rustin *got* it—don't build hate—don't martyr an angry white cop. Vegas wasn't Birmingham. Negro junkies weren't four girls in church.

Rustin was savvy. Rustin was gracious. Littell pledged more money. Littell praised Dr. King.

He met Rustin once. He charmed and entrapped him. He *used* him forthwith.

I *believe*. I have horrible debts. I'll try to help more than I hurt.

(Las Vegas, 1/19/64)

He saw Lynette.

He saw the flaps. He saw the sheared ribs. He saw where the knife snapped bone. Wayne Junior didn't blame him. Wayne Junior blamed himself.

Pete stood by the freeway. Pete ate gas fumes. Pete had a replacement sled—a boss new Lin*coon.*

A prowl car pulled up. A cop got out. He fed Pete three guns. Three calibers: .38/.45/.357 mag.

Throwdown guns. Taped and initialed: L.W./O.S./C.S.

The cop knew the plan. They had two crime scenes. They had viable blood—good Red Cross stock.

The cop split. Pete drove to Henderson. Pete hit a gun shop. Pete bought ammo.

He loaded the guns. He rigged silencers. He drove back to Vegas.

Wayne Junior was out. He saw him yesterday. The DA dumped his case. They met. They talked. They hit Wayne's bank vault. Wayne dumped his board files and briefed him.

Spurgeon dug jailbait. Peavy was larcenous. Hinton whacked a nigger whore. Three board members—swing votes plus—good news for Count Drac.

Spurgeon vibed easy. Hinton vibed tough sell. Peavy vibed grief. Monarch Cab as Tiger Kab—hold that good thought.

Wayne looked frazzled. His eyes roamed. He strafed jigaboos. They ate lunch and talked.

Neutral shit—Clay versus Liston. Pete liked Liston in two. Wayne said three tops. A shine cleared their table. Wayne fucking seized up.

Pete drove to the car dump. The cop met him there. The dump was closed. The sun was up. A breeze wafted through.

They schmoozed. They jumped the crime-scene rope. Wayne's car was gone. The Buick was cut into scrap.

The cop taped a body—white tape on cement. Pete aimed the .45.

He popped six shots. He nailed a tree. He grabbed the slugs. He gauged trajectories. He dropped the slugs. He chalked them. The cop took pix.

Pete spritzed the body tape. Pete watched the blood dry. The cop took pix.

They drove to the shack. They jumped the crime-scene rope. The cop taped two bodies. The cop spritzed the tape.

Pete shot the .38. Pete popped four rounds. Pete hit the walls and dug the slugs out. The cop bagged them. The cop lab-logged them. The cop took pix.

They drove to the County Morgue. The cop greased the attendant geek. Said geek had three fish. Said fish reposed on three trays.

Leroy had no head. Leroy wore a dashiki. The cop pulled a sap. The cop broke Leroy's right hand. The cop flexed the fingers free.

Pete rolled the fingertips. Pete smudged the magnum. Pete laid two butt spreads.

Curtis was stiff. Otis was stiff. They wore Dodger T-shirts and morgue sheets.

Pete squeezed their hands. Pete broke their fingers. Pete flexed the tips. The cop rolled prints—barrel spreads—the cop rolled the .45 and .38.

The stiffs stunk of morgue rouge and sawdust. Pete coughed and sneezed.

Ward set it up. We'll meet at Wilt's Diner—it's out near Davis Dam.

They showed early. They grabbed a booth. They cleared table space and sipped coffee. Ward propped the bag up. Tabletop center—*très* hard to miss.

Dwight Holly showed. Punctual—2:00 p.m. straight.

He parked his car. He looked through the window glass. He saw them and walked straight in.

Pete made room. Holly sat beside him. Holly eyeballed the bag.

"What's that?"

Pete said, "Christmas."

Holly made the jack-off sign. Holly spread out.

He stretched. He made elbow room. He hard-nudged Pete.

He coughed. "I caught the fucking Tedrow kid's bug."

Ward smiled. "Thanks for coming out."

Holly tugged his cuff links. "Who's the big guy? The Wild Man of Borneo?"

Pete laughed. Pete slapped his knees.

Ward sipped coffee. "Have you spoken to the U.S. Attor—"

"He called me. He said Mr. Hoover told him not to file on the kid. I think Wayne Senior interceded, and I hope you didn't run me out here to gloat."

Ward tapped the bag. "Congratulations."

"For *what*? The investigation your client fucked up?"

"You must have talked to the U.S. Attorney *yesterday*."

Holly tugged his law-school ring. "You're stringing me, Ward. You're reminding me why I never liked you."

Ward stirred his coffee. "You're the new Chief Investigator for the Southern Nevada Office. Mr. Hoover told me this morning."

Holly tugged his ring. It fell off. It hit the floor. It traveled.

Ward smiled. "We want to make friends in Nevada."

Pete smiled. "You took down Leroy Williams and the Swasey brothers. They were out on bail when Wayne killed them."

Ward tapped the bag. "The reports have been predated. You'll be reading about it."

Pete tapped the bag. "It's a white Christmas."

Holly grabbed the bag. Holly grabbed a steak knife. Holly stabbed one brick. Holly dipped one finger.

He licked it. He tasted it. He got the Big "H" bite.

"You convinced me. But I'm not done with the kid, and I don't care who he's got on his side."

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/23/64. Las Vegas *Sun* article.

NARCOTICS LINK TO NEGRO KILLINGS REVEALED

At a joint news conference, spokesmen for the Las Vegas Police Department and the Southern Nevada District of the U.S. Attorney's Office announced that Leroy Williams and Otis and Curtis Swasey, the three Negro men killed on the night of January 15th, had been recently arrested by agents of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics and were out on bail at the time of their deaths.

"The three men had been the focus of a long-term investigation," Agent Dwight C. Holly said. "They had been selling large quantities of heroin in nearby cities and were preparing to sell it in Las Vegas. They were apprehended in the early morning hours of January 9th, and three kilos (6½ pounds) of heroin were seized at their residence in West Las Vegas. Williams and the Swasey brothers made bail on the afternoon of January 13th and returned to their residence."

Captain Robert Gilstrap of the LVPD went on to clarify events on the night of January 15th. "Newspaper reporters and local television commentators have assumed that the three men killed that night were killed by LVPD Sergeant Wayne Tedrow Jr. as revenge for the murder of his wife, Lynette, who was raped and killed, presumably by a male Negro named Wendell Durfee," he said. "This is not the case. Durfee was a known associate of Williams and the Swasey brothers, and the brothers paid him to kill Mrs. Tedrow. What has not been revealed until now is that Mrs. Tedrow's death postdated the deaths of Williams and the Swasey brothers and that Sergeant Tedrow, as part of a combined LVPD-Narcotics Bureau operation, had Williams and the Swasey brothers under constant surveillance in an effort to insure that they did not abscond on their bail."

"Sergeant Tedrow heard a ruckus inside their residence, late on the evening of January 15th," Agent Holly said. "He investigated and was fired upon by the Swasey brothers. No shots were heard, because both men fired silencer-fitted pistols. Sergeant Tedrow managed to disable both men and killed them with makeshift weapons he found on the premises. Leroy Williams entered the residence at that time. Sergeant Tedrow chased him to an automobile dump on Tonopah Highway and exchanged gunfire with him. Williams died in the process.”

Agent Holly and Captain Gilstrap displayed photographic evidence compiled at both death scenes. Mr. Randall J. Merrins of the U.S. Attorney’s Office went on to say that it had been assumed that Sergeant Tedrow was being kept in custody while possible homicide charges against him were being discussed and prepared.

“This is not the case,” Merrins said. “Sergeant Tedrow was held for his own safety. We were afraid of reprisals from other unknown members of the Williams-Swasey dope gang.”

Sergeant Tedrow, 29, could not be reached for comment. Mrs. Tedrow’s presumed slayer, Wendell Durfee, was identified by fingerprints and other physical evidence found in the Tedrow home. Durfee is now the subject of a nationwide all-points bulletin and is also wanted by Texas authorities for the November 1963 disappearance of Dallas Police Officer Maynard D. Moore.

Agent Holly’s long pursuit of the Swasey brothers and Leroy Williams was praised by Assistant U.S. Attorney Merrins, who announced that Holly, 47, will soon take the position of Chief Investigator for that agency’s Southern Nevada Office. Captain Gilstrap announced that Sergeant Tedrow has been awarded the LVPD’s highest accolade, its “Medal of Valor,” for “conspicuous gallantry and bravery in his surveillance and subsequent deadly confrontation with three armed and dangerous narcotics pushers.”

Mrs. Tedrow is survived by one sister and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Herbert D. Sproul, of Little Rock, Arkansas. Her body will be shipped to Little Rock for interment.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/26/64. Las Vegas *Sun* article.

GRAND JURY CLEARS POLICEMAN

The standing Clark County Grand Jury today announced that no criminal indictments will be filed against Las Vegas Policeman Wayne Tedrow Jr. for the deaths of three Negro dope pushers.

The Grand Jury heard six hours of testimony from members of the Las Vegas Police Department, Clark County Sheriff's Department and U.S. Bureau of Narcotics. Members were in unanimous agreement that Sergeant Tedrow's actions were warranted and justifiable. Grand Jury foreman D. W. Kaltenborn said, "We believe that Sergeant Tedrow acted with great resolve and under all the due guidelines of the laws of the State of Nevada."

A Las Vegas Police Department spokesman attending the grand jury proceedings said that Sergeant Tedrow had resigned from the LVPD that morning. Sergeant Tedrow could not be reached for comment.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/27/64. Las Vegas *Sun* article.

NO PROTESTS, NEGRO LEADERS SAY

At a hastily arranged press conference in Washington, D.C., a spokesman for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) announced that that organization and several other civil-rights groups will not protest the January 15th killings of three Negro men by a white policeman in Las Vegas.

Lawton J. Spofford told assembled reporters, “Our decision is not based upon the recent decree from the Clark County Grand Jury, which exonerated Sergeant Wayne Tedrow Jr. for the deaths of Leroy Williams and Curtis and Otis Swasey. That body is a ‘rubber-stamp’ implement of the Clark County political establishment and as such has no sway with us. Our decision is based on information we have received from a friendly anonymous source, who told us that Sergeant Tedrow, under great personal duress, acted in a somewhat heedless but recognizably non-malicious manner that did not include racist designs.”

The NAACP, along with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), had previously announced their intention to stage protests in Las Vegas, in order to “shed light on a horribly segregated city, where Negro citizens live in deplorable circumstances.” The killings, Spofford said, “were to have been our point of redress and overall explication.”

Other Negro leaders present at the press conference said that they did not rule out the possibility of future civil-rights protests in Las Vegas. “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire,” spokesman Welton D. Holland of CORE said. “We do not expect Las Vegas to change its ways without some notable confrontations.”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/6/64. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: "Recorded at the Director's Request"/"Classified Confidential 1-A: Director's Eyes Only." Speaking: Director Hoover, Ward J. Littell.

JEH: Good morning, Mr. Littell.

WJL: Good morning, Sir.

JEH: You've been meeting some charming new people and rediscovering old friends. That might be a good place to start.

WJL: "Charming" might describe Mr. Rustin, Sir. "Old friend" would never describe Dwight Holly.

JEH: I could have predicted that response. And I doubt that Lyle Holly will become your lifelong chum.

WJL: We share a wonderful friend in you, Sir.

JEH: You're feeling frisky this morning.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Did Mr. Rustin bemoan my efforts against Mr. King and the SCLC?

WJL: He did, Sir.

JEH: And you were properly deplored?

WJL: Cosmetically, Sir, yes.

JEH: I'm sure you were entirely convincing.

WJL: I established a rapport with Mr. Rustin, Sir.

JEH: I'm sure you will sustain it.

WJL: I hope so, Sir.

JEH: Have you spoken to him again?

WJL: Lyle Holly facilitated a second conversation. I utilized Mr. Rustin to forestall some trouble in Las Vegas. It pertained to a client of mine.

JEH: I know elements of the story. We'll discuss it momentarily.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Do you still consider it impossible to re-tape the Dark Prince?

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I would enjoy some glimpses of his private pain.

WJL: I would, too.

JEH: I doubt that. You're a voyeur, not a sadist, and I suspect that you'll never reconcile your old crush on Bobby.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Lyndon Johnson finds him difficult to reconcile. Many of his advisors think he should include him on the fall ticket, but he hates the Dark Lad too much to succumb.

WJL: I understand how he feels, Sir.

JEH: Yes, and you disapprove, in your uniquely non-disapproving way.

WJL: I'm not that complex, Sir. Or that compromised in my emotions.

JEH: You delight me, Mr. Littell. I will nominate your last statement for Best Falsehood of 1964.

WJL: I'm honored, Sir.

JEH: Bobby may run for Kenneth Keating's Senate seat in New York.

WJL: If he runs, he'll win.

JEH: Yes. He'll form a coalition of the deluded and morally handicapped and emerge victorious.

WJL: Is he maintaining his work at Justice?

JEH: Not vigorously. He still appears to be shell-shocked. Mr. Katzenbach and Mr. Clark are doing most of his work. I think he'll resign, in a timely fashion.

WJL: Is he monitoring the agents for the Warren Commission?

JEH: I haven't discussed the investigation with him. Of course, he receives summaries of all my field agents' reports.

WJL: Edited summaries, Sir?

JEH: You are frisky today. Impertinent might describe it better.

WJL: I apologize, Sir.

JEH: Don't. I'm enjoying the conversation.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Edited summaries, yes. With all contradictory elements deleted to conform to the thesis we first discussed in Dallas.

WJL: I'm happy to hear that.

JEH: Your clients should be, as well.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: We can't send your plant in again. You're certain?

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I mourn the missed opportunity. I would like to hear a private assessment of King Jack's death.

WJL: I suspect we'll never know, Sir.

JEH: Lyndon Johnson continues to share his thoughts with me, in his inimitably colorful manner. He has said, quote, It all came out of that pathetic little shithole, Cuba. Maybe it's that cocksucker with the beard or those fucking lowlife exiles, unquote.

WJL: A lively and astute analysis.

JEH: Mr. Johnson has developed a distaste for all things Cuban. The exile cause has succumbed to factionalism and has scattered to the wind, which pleases him no end.

WJL: I share his delight, Sir. I know many people who were seduced by the cause.

JEH: Yes. Gangsters and a French-Canadian chap with homicidal tendencies.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Cuba appeals to hotheads and the morally impaired. It's the cuisine and the sex. Plantains and women who have intercourse with donkeys.

WJL: I have no fondness for the place, Sir.

JEH: Mr. Johnson has developed a fondness for Vietnam. You should inform Mr. Hughes. Some military contracts may be coming his way.

WJL: He'll be delighted to hear that.

JEH: You should inform him that I'll keep you abreast of the Justice Department's plans in Las Vegas.

WJL: I'm delighted to hear that.

JEH: On a need-to-know basis, Mr. Littell. As is the case with all our transactions.

WJL: I understand, Sir. And I neglected to thank you for your help in the Tedrow matter. Dwight Holly was determined to do the boy some harm.

JEH: You deserve an accolade. You bypassed Wayne Senior very effectively.

WJL: Thank you, Sir.

JEH: I understand that he has asked you to lunch.

WJL: Yes, Sir. We haven't scheduled yet.

JEH: He thinks you're weak. I told him that you are a bold and occasionally reckless man who has learned the value of restraint.

WJL: Thank you, Sir.

JEH: Dwight feels quite ambivalent. He got the job he wanted, but he's developed quite a dislike for Wayne Junior. My sources in the U.S. Attorney's Office tell me that he is determined to bypass Senior and do Junior some harm in the long run.

WJL: Despite his friendship with Senior?

JEH: Or because of it. You never know with Dwight. He's quite the provocateur and the rogue, so I indulge him.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: The same way I indulge you.

WJL: I caught the implication, Sir.

JEH: You dislike Dwight and Wayne Senior, so I'll give you added cause. Their fathers belonged to the same Klan Klavern in Indiana. That said, I should add that it was probably more genteel than the Klan groups currently marauding down south.

WJL: I'm sure they never lynched any Negroes.

JEH: Yes, although I'm certain they would have enjoyed it.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Most people have entertained the notion. You must credit their restraint.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: You might discuss the Indiana Klan with Bayard Rustin. I want you to make another donation.

WJL: I'll bring it up, Sir. I'm sure he'll acknowledge it as a genteel institution.

JEH: You are assuredly frisky today.

WJL: I hope I haven't offended you, Sir.

JEH: Anything but. And I hope I haven't offended you with Junior.

WJL: Sir?

JEH: I had to throw Dwight Holly a bone. He wanted Junior expelled from the LVPD, so I arranged it.

WJL: I assumed that you had, Sir. The newspapers were kind, though. They said he resigned.

JEH: Did you befriend Junior to get at his files? For Mr. Hughes' sake?

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I'm sure that Senior will enjoy Junior's expulsion. They have an odd relationship.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Good day, Mr. Littell. I've enjoyed this conversation.

WJL: Good day, Sir.

(Las Vegas, 2/7/64)

The Lincoln gleamed. New paint/new chrome/new leather.

The car jazzed him. The car distracted him. He kept seeing Lynette. Flaps and sheared ribs. Durfee's knife severed bone.

Pete cruised. Pete tried gadgets. The lighter worked. The heater worked. The seats reclined.

Vegas looked good. Cool air hits mountains and sunshine. Secure-the-Vote Day—one down so far.

He muscled Webb Spurgeon. He explained stat-rape statutes. He detailed consent laws. Spurgeon gulped. Spurgeon kowtowed. Spurgeon pledged votes.

All good so far. One down—two to go.

Pete drove by Monarch Cab. Pete got electrified. Dollar signs boogied and bipped.

Cabs peeled in. Cabs peeled out. Cabs refueled. Drivers ate pills. Drivers drank lunch. Drivers palmed waistband gats.

Monarch Cab. *Maybe:* Tiger Kab redux.

A cash base. A racket hub. Bent personnel. Monarch as Tiger—hold that heady thought.

Pete cruised. Pete meandered. Pete hit West LV. Pete checked out that vacant lot.

There's the trailer. The paint's gone. The shell's cracked. The siding's all scorched.

A kid walked up. Pete jollied him. The kid sermonized.

The trailer smell bad. That be wrong. Somethin' dead be inside. This dude torch it. The stink go. He burn the stink out. No cops come. No firemen. Somethin' dead *still* be in there.

The kid buzzed off. Pete scoped the trailer. A breeze kicked up. The trailer creaked. Paint chips cracked and blew.

Pete cruised. Pete meandered. Pete drove south. Pete hit Duane Hinton's house.

He parked. He walked up. He knocked on the door. He pulled out Wayne's snapshot.

There's a fat whore bound and gagged. She's sucking a handball.

Hinton opened the door. Pete flashed the photo eye-level.

Hinton plotzed. Pete grabbed his hair. Pete raised one knee. Pete broke his nose up.

Hinton went down. Bones cracked. Cartilage blew.

Pete decreed:

Vote our way. Do not touch whores. Do not hurt whores. Do not kill whores—OR I'LL KILL YOU.

Hinton tried to talk. Hinton gagged. Hinton bit through his tongue.

(Little Rock, 2/8/64)

Devoted wife. Schoolteacher. Loving daughter.

The preacher ran on. The casket sat ready. Lakeside Cemetery: cheap burials and segregated plots.

The Sprouls wore black. Janice wore black. Wayne Senior wore blue. The Sprouls stood alone. Wayne stood alone. Daddy Sproul watched him.

Soldier boy. Yankee. She was seventeen. You wooed her. She killed your baby. You made her do it.

Loving spirit. Sacred child. Blessed in Christ's name.

The service was short. The casket was cheap. The plot was low-rent. The Tedrows shipped the body home. The Tedrows lost control.

Lynette despised religion. Lynette loved movie stars and John Kennedy.

A chauffeur stood around. A Negro man. Tall like Wendell Durfee.

The preacher braced Wayne pre-service. The preacher counseled him.

I feel your loss. I know your grief. I *understand*.

Wayne said it: "I'm going to kill Wendell Durfee."

God's will. The ides of fate. Snatched in her prime.

The plots adjoined Central High. He met Lynette there. Soldiers and rednecks. Negro kids scared.

The chauffeur stood around. The chauffeur filed his nails. The chauffeur wore a hair net. He had Durfee hair. He had Durfee skin. He had Durfee's lank frame.

Wayne watched him. Wayne retouched his hair. Wayne retouched his skin. Wayne made him Wendell D.

The preacher prayed. The Sprouls wept. The Tedrows stood calm. The chauffeur buffed his nails.

Wayne watched him.

He burned his face. He smashed his teeth. He fed him Big “H.”

(Las Vegas, 2/9/64)

The DI count room.

Money—coin bins and hampers stuffed. A swivel spy-camera hooked up.

Your host—Moe Dalitz.

The count men were out. The camera was off. Money sat waist-high. Littell sneezed—the fumes were bad—sting off cash dye and tin.

Moe said, "It's not that complicated. The count guys are in cahoots with the camera guys. The camera goes on the fritz, accidental on purpose, so the count guys can get the skim out and retally it. You don't need a college education."

Mesh hampers—laundry-size. Forty hampers/forty grand per.

Moe dipped in. Moe snagged ten grand—C-notes all.

"Here, for your civil-rights deal. What's their fucking motto, 'We Shall Overcome'?"

Littell grabbed the cash. Littell packed his briefcase.

"The skim interests me."

"You are not alone in that. Certain Federal agencies have been known to be curious."

"Are you looking for couriers?"

Moe said, "No. We use civilians, exclusive. Squarejohns who owe casino markers. They run the skim and pay off their debts at 7½% of the transport."

Littell shot his cuffs. "I was thinking of Mr. Hughes' Mormons, or other trustworthy ones, at a 15% rate."

Moe shook his head. "I don't like to fuck with success, but I'll hear you out anyway."

Littell sneezed. Moe supplied a Kleenex. Littell wiped his nose.

"You're going to sell Mr. Hughes some hotels. He'll want his Mormons or *some* Mormons to run them. You'll want your men, you'll compromise, you'll want to escalate your skim operations."

Moe twirled a dime. "Don't be a cock tease. You've got this tendency to string things out."

Littell hugged his briefcase. "I want to enlist some Mormons, over time, and have them ready by the date you sell Mr. Hughes the hotels. You'd have a pool of potential inside men with skim experience."

"That's not enough inducement to pay 15%."

"At face value, no."

Moe rolled his eyes. "So, lay it out. Jesus Christ, don't make me coax you."

"All right. Mr. Hughes' people travel on Hughes Aircraft charter flights. I could hire some Mormons to work for Mr. Hughes now, and you could ship the skim bulk and avoid airport security risks."

Moe flipped the dime. Moe caught it heads-up.

"At face value, I like it. I'll talk to the other guys."

"I'd like to get started soon."

"Take a breather. Don't wear yourself out."

"I'm sure that's a good tip, but I'd—"

"Here's a better one. Bet Clay over Liston. You'll make a fucking mint."

"Is the fight fixed?"

"No, but Sonny's got some very bad habits."

Littell flew to L.A.

He flew solo. He booked a Hughes plane. The Hughes fleet moored in Burbank. Cessna Twins—six seats each—ample skim space.

The flight ran smooth. No clouds and desert sparkling up.

Moe took the bait. Moe missed the dodge. Moe thought the dodge was pro-Drac. Wrong—the dodge was pro–civil rights.

Call it:

Bagmen. Potential "casino consultants." *Hughes* men. All charter-flight cleared.

He could skim off the skim. He could feed Bayard Rustin. He could blunt Mr. Hoover's damage. Wayne Senior ran Mormon thugs. Wayne Senior knew bagmen types. *He* could coopt them.

The long-term goal: damage abatement.

Mr. Hoover filmed Dr. King. Mr. Hoover tried to entrap him. Mr. Hoover dirt-fed his "correspondents": congressmen/reporters/clergymen.

Mr. Hoover schooled them. Mr. Hoover taught them restraint. Let's collude and leak covert data. Let's leak it smart. Don't leak *strict* bug-and-tap data. Don't jeopardize bug-and-tap mounts.

Mr. Hoover held dirt. Mr. Hoover leaked dirt. Mr. Hoover caused pain. Mr. Hoover hated Dr. King. Mr. Hoover exposed his one weakness:

Sadism. *Sustained*. Inflicted over TIME.

TIME worked two ways. There was TIME to inflict harm. There was TIME to countermand the effects.

The skim plan might work. The skim plan sparked a question: Hughes money—a potential tithe source?

The plane banked. Littell pared an apple. Littell sipped coffee.

Pete had Wayne's files. Pete squeezed Spurgeon and Hinton. Spurgeon fed Pete some dirt. Key legislators and their pet charities—dirt per their philanthropy.

Pete said he bypassed Eldon Peavy. Peavy was cop-sanctioned. Peavy might balk at threats. Pete was disingenuous. Pete's threats *worked*. Pete craved Monarch Cab. Pete was gauging a takeover shot.

The plane dipped low. Burbank showed sunshine and smog.

He'd lunched with Wayne Senior. Wayne Senior praised him—you saved my son.

Junior declined Senior's help. Junior rebuffed his connections. Junior nixed good job offers. Junior nixed work in chemistry. Junior sought his own work. Junior found low-end employment.

The Wild Deuce Casino—night bouncer—6:00 to 2:00 a.m. The Deuce was rough. The Deuce welcomed Negroes. Junior welcomed pain.

Wayne Senior bought Littell's lunch. Wayne Senior made nice. Wayne Senior said ugly things.

Wayne Senior derided the civil-rights movement. Wayne Senior brought up the King film.

Littell smiled. Littell made nice. Littell thought *I will make you all pay*.

Jane said, “I got a job.”

The terrace was cold. The view compensated. Littell leaned on the rail.

“Where?”

“Hertz rent-a-car. I’m doing the books for the West L.A. branches.”

“Did your Tulane degree help?”

Jane smiled. “It got me the extra thousand a year I asked for.”

She used hard vowels. She eschewed slurs. She dropped her southern drawl. She’d reworked her voice and diction—he just noticed it.

She said, “It feels good to rejoin the work force.”

Hard g’s. Regionless. Pure consonants.

Littell smiled. Littell popped his briefcase. Littell pulled out six sheets.

He landed. He drove to Hughes Tool. He stopped at the bookkeeping pool and stole forms.

Invoices. Bill sheets. All standard paper.

He got in. He got out. He shaped his upcoming lie.

“Would you look at these when you get a chance? I need your advice on a few things.”

Jane scanned the sheets. “They’re all boilerplate. Cost-outs, overruns, that kind of thing.”

Hard *b*’s and *p*’s. Lazy *o*’s deleted.

“I want to discuss embezzling techniques and how to use these forms. There’s going to be a buildup in Vietnam, and Mr. Hughes will probably be awarded some contracts. He’s afraid of embezzlements, and he asked me to study up.”

Jane smiled. “Did you tell him your girlfriend’s an embezzler?”

“No. Just that she keeps a good secret.”

“God, the way that we live.”

Short *a*’s and *e*’s. Crisp inflections.

Jane laughed. “Have you noticed? I gave up my accent.”

Jane read in bed. Jane dozed off early. Littell played his tapes.

He got crazy. Two times of late. He ran two crazy risks.

He passed through D.C. He wired Doug Eversall. He squeezed him. He cajoled him. He paid him five G’s.

Eversall taped Bobby. Two more times total—two crazy risks.

Eversall balked then. Eversall cut Littell off.

That's it. Shove your threats. I refuse to hurt Bobby. You're sick. You're fucked up. Bobby's your sickness.

Littell retreated:

That's it. No more. I promise you. I'll lie to Carlos. I'll say we failed.

Eversall walked then. Eversall tripped. His high shoe buckled and slid. Littell helped him up. Eversall slapped him. Eversall spat in his face.

Littell played the 1/29 tape. Low static/spool hum.

Bobby planned trials. Eversall took notes. Bobby yawned and digressed. His potential Senate run. The VP spot. That "cornpone son-of-a-bitch Lyndon Johnson."

Bobby had a cold. Bobby waxed profane. LBJ was a "dipshit." Dick Nixon was a "numbnuts" with a "kick-me sign." Mr. Hoover was a "psycho fruitcake."

Littell pressed Rewind. The tape reversed. Littell played the 2/5 tape.

Here's Bobby—reverent now.

He toasted Jack. He quoted Housman: "To an Athlete Dying Young." Eversall sniffled. Bobby laughed—"Don't go soft on me."

A new man spoke. Static fizzed his words. Littell heard his garbled "Hoover and King."

Bobby said, "Hoover's scared. He knows King's got balls like J.C."

(Las Vegas, 2/10/64)

Monarch rocked.

The noon rush / mucho calls / ten cabs out. The hut rocked—Eldon Peavy had guests.

Sonny Liston. Four bad-boy jigs. Conrad & the Congoites or Marvin & the Mau-Maus.

Pete watched.

He dipped his seat. He ran the heat. He did arithmetic. Peavy had twenty cabs. Peavy ran three shifts. Add airport runs and deadheads.

The hut rocked. A driver hawked fur coats. The Mau-Maus mauled them. Sonny fanned a roll. Peavy peeled bills off.

The Congoites capered. They fondled fur. They manhandled mink. They chewed up chinchilla.

Sonny looked bad. The Clay fight boded. Sonny had the odds. Sam G. demurred. Sam liked Clay. Sam said Sonny had habits.

It was cold. Brrr—Vegas winters. Pete shivered and goosed the heat.

Texas was cold. Florida ditto. He just got back from his trip. He didn't find Hank K. He didn't find Wendell Durfee. He traveled alone. He schemed a trifecta.

Plan A: Find and clip Hank. Plan B: Detain Durfee. Plan C: Bring Wayne in to kill him.

No tickee/no washee. No find/go seek.

He got back. He called Ward. He pitched him: I want to buy Monarch Cab. Ward nixed it. Ward said don't bid. Ward said don't extort ownership.

We *need* Peavy. We need his *votes*. Don't scotch his gaming-board status. Sage fucking advice—Ward Littell–style.

Pete skimmed the radio. Pete watched the hut. Peavy quaffed gin. The Mau-Maus quaffed scotch-and-milk. Sonny dumped capsules. Sonny made lines. Sonny sniffed powder up.

Peavy walked out. Sonny strolled with him. The Congoites conga'd. They slurped milk. They grew white goatees. Spooks called scotch-and-milk "pablum."

A stretch pulled up. The crew piled in. The stretch pulled out. Pete tailed it slow.

The stretch hooked west. The stretch stopped quick. There—the Honey Bunny Casino.

Peavy got out. Peavy walked in. Pete idled back. Pete scoped the window.

Peavy hit the chip cage. Peavy bought play chips. The cage man filled a sack. Peavy walked out. Peavy jumped in the stretch. The stretch pulled out fast.

Pete tailed it. It cut west. It stopped mucho quick. There—Sugar Bear Liquor.

Five whores ran out—darkies all—prom gowns and heels.

They piled in the stretch. They huffed hard. The windows fogged up. The stretch wiggled and bounced.

Said whores *worked*.

The axle scraped. The shocks creaked. The undercarriage shimmied. Two hubcaps popped off and rolled.

Pete laughed. Pete fucking roared.

The whores piled out. The whores giggled and wiped their lips. The whores waved sawbucks.

Pete flashed on the dead whore. Pete smelled the torched trailer.

The stretch pulled out. Pete tailed it. They cut west. They hit West Vegas. They went in *waay* deep. There—Monroe High School.

The back gate was down. The bleachers were packed. A banner read: Welcome Champ!

Full house:

Colored kids—two hundred strong—this big schoolday treat.

The stretch parked on the football field. Pete idled by the gate. Pete kicked his seat back.

Sonny got out.

He weaved. He waved the chip sack. He faced the kids and swayed blotto. The kids cheered. The kids chanted “Sonny!” Some geek teachers watched.

The kids yelled. The kids banged their seats. The teachers guuulped. Sonny smiled. Sonny swayed. Sonny said, “Pipe down.”

The kids cheered. Sonny swayed. Sonny yelled: “Shut up, you punk motherfuckers!”

The kids shut up. The teachers cringed. Sonny dished inspiration.

Study hard. Learn good. Don’t rob no liquor stores. Play to win and go to church. Use Sheik-brand rubbers. Watch me whup Cassius Clay. Watch me kick his punk Muslim ass back to Mecca.

Sonny stopped. Sonny bowed. Sonny pulled a flask. The kids cheered. The teachers clapped demure.

Sonny waved his sack. Sonny grabbed play chips. Sonny tossed them wide.

The kids snatched them. The kids snared them. Kids bumped kids. Kids reached short. Kids fell on kids below.

Sonny tossed chips—big wads—dollar chips all. Kids reached high. Kids toppled. Kids engaged in fistfights.

Sonny raised his flask. Sonny waved bye-bye. Sonny jumped in the stretch.

The stretch pulled out. Pete U-turned and tailed it. Kids shrieked Champ bye-bye!

The stretch hauled. Pete hauled up close. They tore speed limits. They cut east and south. They hit downtown Vegas.

Traffic snarled. The stretch looped Fremont. The stretch braked and stopped.

There—

A parking lot. An army-navy store—Sid the Surplus Sergeant.

The crew piled out. The crew yukked and huddled. The crew piled in the backdoor. The driver waved—adios, Mau-Maus—the stretch vamoosed.

Pete parked. Pete locked his car. Pete dawdled and ambled up. Pete braced the backdoor.

He ambled in. He cut through a storeroom. He pushed through pea-coats on racks. He saw crates/cartons/trench tools. He caught a cosmoline stench.

He hit a hallway. He heard sounds. He followed titters and love grunts—aaooooo!

He ambled. He tracked the noise. He crouched and crept. He saw a cracked door and peeked in.

Stag-flick time. A bedsheet screen and a projector. Lez antics—young girls entwined.

The Mau-Maus tittered. Peavy yawned. The girls ran fourteen tops. Sonny cracked a red devil. Sonny powdered a palm. Sonny sniffed the shit up.

The girls strapped on dildoes. A donkey appeared. El Burro wore *diablo* horns.

Pete walked outside. Pete found a pay phone. Pete called the Stardust book. He placed a bet—forty grand—Clay over Liston.

The Deuce rolled low—nickel slots/bingo/shots-and-beer.

The dealers wore sidearms. The bar served jar brew. The cocktail chicks whored. The Deuce pandered low. You had oldsters and wetbacks. You had more spooks than Ramar of the Jungle.

The lounge supplied a floor view. Pete lounged and sipped club soda. Pete watched the floor show.

A geez pulls his air tube. He's ninety-plus. He smokes a Camel. He hacks blood. He sucks oxygen. Two fruits lock eyes. Said fruits strut green shirts. Green shirts are fruit semaphore.

Two jigs lurk. They're snatch-and-run guys. Dig their gym shorts and sneakers. Wayne walks up. Wayne wears a belt sap. Wayne wears handcuffs.

He taps the jigs. They share a look—woe-is-fuckin'-me.

Wayne slaps them. Wayne kicks them. Wayne grabs their conk napes and shoves them. They get the picture. They evict themselves—We Shall *Not* Overcome.

Pete clapped. Pete whistled. Wayne turned and saw him. He walked up. He swiveled a chair. He nailed a floor view.

Pete said, "I didn't find him. I think he's down in Mexico."

"How hard did you look?"

"Not that hard. I was looking for a guy in Florida, mostly."

Wayne flexed his hands. Knuckle cuts oozed.

"We could teletype the *federales*. They could put out their own APB. We could pay them to hold him for me."

Pete lit a cigarette. "They'd kill him themselves. They'd lure you down there, steal your money, and kill you."

Wayne watched the floor. Pete tracked his eyes. There—one coon/one whore/unruly shit pending—

Wayne stood up. Pete grabbed his belt. Pete yanked him back down.

"Let it go. We're having a conversation."

Wayne shrugged. Wayne looked aggrieved. Wayne looked fucking deprived.

Pete glanced around. "Does your father own this place?"

"No, it's Outfit. Santo Trafficante has points."

Pete blew smoke rings. "I know Santo."

"I'm sure you do. I know who you work for, so I've put that much of Dallas together."

Pete smiled. "Nothing happened in Dallas."

A whore walked by. Wayne drifted. Wayne watched the floor. Pete grabbed his chair. Pete jerked it and centered it. Pete killed the floor view.

"Look at me when I talk to you."

Wayne made fists. His knuckles popped. His knuckles seeped.

Pete said, "Don't use your hands. Use your sap if you have to."

"Like Duane Hint—"

"Can it, all right? I've had dead women up to here."

Wayne coughed. "Durfee's good. That's the part that gets me. He's stayed ahead of everyone since Dallas."

Pete chained cigarettes. "He's not good, he's lucky. He came to Vegas like a dumb bunny, and moves like that will get him dropped."

Wayne shook his head. "He's better than that."

"No, he's not."

"He can give me up for Moore."

"Bullshit. It's his word versus yours and no body."

"He's good. That's the part …"

A spook walked by. Wayne eyeballed him. He saw Wayne and blinked.

Pete coughed. "Who owns Sid the Surplus Sergeant?"

Wayne said, "A clown named Eldon Peavy. He named it after some queer buddy of his who died from the syph."

Pete laughed. "He's showing smut films there. Underaged kids, the whole shot. How big a bust is that on his end?"

Wayne shrugged. "The State Code's soft on possession. He'd have to manufacture and sell the films, or coerce and suborn the kids."

Pete smiled. “Ask me why I care.”

“I know why. You want to buy out Monarch and relive your fucking Miami adventures.”

Pete laughed. “You’ve been talking to Ward Littell.”

“Sure, client to lawyer. I asked him why you take so much shit from me, but he wouldn’t give me an answer.”

Pete cracked his knuckles. “Bet on Clay. Your boy Sonny needs more time in the gym.”

Wayne flexed his hands. “There’s a Sheriff’s Vice guy named Farlan Moss. He investigates businessmen for people who want to take over their action. He won’t fabricate, but if he gets incriminating evidence, he’ll turn it over to you and let you use it any way you like. It’s an old Vegas strategy.”

Pete grabbed a napkin. Pete wrote it down: “Farlan Moss/ CCSD.”

Wayne twirled his sap. “You’ve got this weird thing for me.”

“I had a kid brother once. Someday I’ll tell you the story.”

The Bondsmen vamped. Barb grabbed the mike. She curtsied. Her gown hiked. Her nylons stretched.

Pete sat ringside. A geek had Wayne’s seat. Wayne worked late now. Wayne caught Barb haphazard.

Ward said he talked to Wayne Senior. Senior ragged on Junior. Ward passed it on.

Junior was a hider. Junior was a watcher. Junior lit flames. Junior torched. Junior lived in his head.

Barb blew a kiss. Pete caught it. Pete covered his heart. He made two T’s—their private signal—do “Twilight Time.”

Barb caught it. Barb cued the Bondsmen. Barb kicked the tune off.

He missed her for days on. They kept diverse hours and slept diverse shifts. They stashed a cot backstage. They made love between shows.

It worked. *They* worked. It wrecked him. It *scared* him.

Barb watched the news. Barb tracked the Warren thing. Barb nursed Dallas. Barb nursed her link to Jack.

She never said it. He just *knew*. It wasn’t sex. It wasn’t love. “Awe” said it all. You killed him. The fix held. You killed him and walked.

He played *his* version. “Fear” said it all. You’ve got her. You could lose her—per Dallas.

You sweat Fear. You ooze Fear. You test the Fear logic. You know you walked because:

It was *that* big. It was *that* audacious. It was *that* wrong.

You test the logic. You fret it. You show fear. You scare people. You pass your fear on. The wrong people find you and knock.

Barb worked “Twilight Time.” Barb caressed the low notes.

Wendell Durfee knocked. Lynette paid. Dead women scared him. Lynette as Barb. Lynette as “Jane.”

He saw Lynette’s body. He had to. The picture stuck. He conjured it. He banished it. He dreamed it and tore the sheets up.

Barb kissed off “Twilight Time.” Barb did the Mashed Potato. Barb did the Swim.

The spell died. Her fast tunes deep-sixed it. A waiter schlepped a phone up.

Pete cradled it. “Yeah?”

A man said, “Carlos wants to see you.”

“Where?”

“De Ridder, Louisiana.”

He flew to Lake Charles. He cabbed to De Ridder. It was wet. It was hot. The heat spawned bugs.

De Ridder was Shit City. Fort Polk stood close. The town lived off Army handouts.

Chicken-fried-steak joints and rib cribs. Beer bars/tattoo parlors/nudie-mag stalls.

Carlos limo’d up. Pete met him. The local crackers watched. *Dumb* crackers—gap-mouthed bug-magnets all.

They drove east. They caught red clay and pine bluffs. They looped the Kisatchee Forest.

Pete raised a screen. Pete cut the driver off. Vents pumped cold air in. Dark tint killed the sun.

Carlos bankrolled a camp—forty Cubans total—would-be killer ops. Carlos said, “Let’s see my boys.” Carlos said, “Let’s talk.”

They drove. They talked. They passed Klan klonklaves. Carlos ragged the Klan—they hate Catholics—that means they hate *us*.

Pete nixed him—I’m Huguenot—you fucks fucked my kin.

They talked. They rehashed *la Causa*. Tiger Kab and Pigs. LBJ’s big walkoff. Carlos brought a bottle. Pete brought paper cups.

Carlos said, “The Outfit’s got zero affection for the Cause. Everyone thinks, ‘We shot our wad, we lost the casinos, it’s spilled milk under the bridge.’ ”

They hit a rut. Pete spilled X.O.

“Havana was beautiful. Vegas can’t hold a candle.”

“Littell’s got a foreign-casino plan. Everyone’s gaga, as well they fucking should be.”

They passed Army trucks. They passed signs. Signs ragged the ACL-*Jew*.

Pete said, “The old crew was good. Laurent Guéry, Flash Elorde.”

Carlos nodded. “Good narcotics men and good killers. You never doubted their sincerity.”

Pete dabbed his shirt. “John Stanton was a good ops man. You had the Outfit and the Agency together.”

“Yeah, like that song. ‘For one brief shining moment.’ ”

Pete crushed his cup. “Stanton’s in Indochina?”

“Don’t be such a Frenchman. They call it Vietnam now.”

Pete lit a cigarette. “There’s a cab biz in Vegas. I could turn it into a moneymaker for us. Littell wants me to hold off, because the owner’s on the license boards.”

Carlos sipped X.O. “Don’t work so hard to impress me. You’re not Littell, but you’re good.”

The troops snapped to. Pete paced the line. Pete came to critique and review.

Forty Cubanos—porkers and stringbeans—jail recruits all.

Guy Banister recruited them. Guy knew a cop in John Birch. The cop fudged his jail sheets. The cop freed prospects. Said prospects were pervs. Said prospects were “musicians”—Cugie Cugat manqués.

Pete walked the line. Pete checked guns. M-1s and M-14s—dead bugs chambered in.

Barrel dust. Mildew. Moss rot.

Pete got pissed. Pete got a headache. The head geek paced the line behind him.

An Army stupe—Fort Polk trash—some kiddie kommando. He ran a Klan klique. He ran a still. He sold oat mash. He supplied alcoholic Choctaws.

The troops sucked poodle dick. The camp ditto.

Quonset huts and pup tents—fucking Boy Scout stock. A "Target Range"—scarecrows and tree stumps. An "Ammo Dump"—made from Lego logs.

The troops snapped to. The troops shot a salute. They fumbled their rifles. They fired off-sync. Eight bolts jammed up.

They made some noise. They roused some birds. Birdshit disinterred and fell.

Carlos bowed. Carlos tossed the donation bag. The head geek caught it and bowed.

"Mr. Banister and Mr. Hudspeth will be coming in soon. They're transporting some ordnance."

Carlos lit a cigar. "That my ten grand's paying for?"

"That's correct, sir. They're my chief weapons procurers."

"They're *making money* off my donations?"

"Not in the sense you imply, sir. I'm sure they're not making a personal profit."

Prime "ordnance": One picnic table/one bar-b-que pit.

The geek blew a whistle. The troops hit the range. They fired. They shot low. They missed.

Carlos shrugged. Carlos nursed a grievance. Carlos walked off. The geek shrugged. The geek nursed hurt feelings. The geek walked off.

Pete walked. Pete checked the range. Pete checked the dump. Pete critiqued the stock.

Two machine guns—old 50s—slack triggers/loose belts. Six flamethrowers—cracked feeders/cracked pipes. Two speedboats—pull motors—lawn-mower drive. Sixty-two revolvers—corroded and fucked.

Pete found some oil. Pete found some rags. Pete cleaned some .38s up. The sun felt good. The oil deterred mosquitoes. The "troopers" worked out.

They did push-ups. They wrecked their manicures. They huffed and puffed.

He ran *ace* troops. *He* hit Cuba. *He* scalped mucho Reds. *He* killed Fidelistos. *He* went to Pigs. *He* tried to kill Fidel. They should have won. Jack the K. fucked them. Jack paid. *He* paid. It got all shot to hell.

Pete cleaned guns. He swabbed barrels. He dipped butts. He brushed cylinders. He scoured moss rot.

An old Ford pulled in. The paint job screamed RIGHT-WING NUT!

Dig it:

Crosses. The stars & bars. Inverted swastikas.

A trailer bounced behind the Ford. Gun barrels extruded. The Ford brodied. The Ford slid. The Ford grazed the bar-b-que pit.

The Ford stalled and died. Guy B. got out. Hank Hudspeth helped him up. Guy was cardiac red. Guy survived #3. Carlos said his pump was shot.

Guy looked drunk. Guy looked frail. Guy looked diseased. Hank looked drunk. Hank looked strong. Hank looked dead mean.

Guy lugged out hot dogs. Hank dumped steaks and buns. They looked around. They saw Pete. They puckered up.

Hank whistled. Guy hit his horn. The troops shagged ass up.

Hank dumped briquettes. The head geek filled the pit. Guy gas-spritzed it. They built a fire. They torched hot dogs. The troops swamped the trailer.

They whooped. They yanked guns. They dollied them over—full-drum Thompsons/one hundred plus.

Pete grabbed one. The butt was chipped. The drum was jammed. The balance was off.

Shit knockoffs—Jap stock.

The troops stacked the Tommys. Pete ignored them. The pit whooshed. Bugs bombed the chow.

Guy walked to the limo. Carlos got out. Guy hugged him and chatted him up.

The troops lined up. Hank dispensed plates. Pete grabbed a .38. Pete dry-fired it.

Carlos walked up. Carlos said, “I hate drunks.” Pete aimed at Guy. Pete dry-shot him—pop!

“I’ll clip him. He knows too much.”

“Maybe later. I want to see if we can whip these clowns into shape.”

Pete wiped his hands. Carlos palmed the gun.

“I got a lead on Hank Killiam. He’s in Pensacola.”

Pete said, “I’ll go tonight.”

Carlos smiled. Carlos aimed at Pete. Carlos dry-shot him—pop!

“Betty McDonald’s in the Dallas County Jail. She told a cop that she got warned out of town last November. I’m not saying it was *you*, but …”

(Las Vegas, 2/13/64)

They blew skeet. They shot custom guns.

They shot off the back deck. They shot custom clays. Janice slung them up. She sat below. She caught some rays. She wore a bikini swimsuit.

Wayne Senior scored persistent. Wayne missed fairly wide. He'd fucked up his hand. He beat up on coloreds. It fucked up his grip.

Janice popped a clay. Wayne fired. Wayne missed.

Wayne Senior reloaded. "You're not holding the stock tight enough."

Wayne flexed his hand. He'd fucked it and re-fucked it. It stayed fucked all the time.

"My hand's bothering me. I hurt it at work."

Wayne Senior smiled. "On Negroes or assorted riffraff?"

"You know the answer to that."

"Your employers are exploiting your reputation. That means they're exploiting you."

"Exploitation works both ways. If that sounds familiar, I got it from you."

"I'll repeat myself, then. You're overqualified for random vengeance and work as a casino bouncer."

Wayne flexed his hand. "I'm developing some new tastes. You don't know if you disapprove, or if you should take partial credit."

Wayne Senior winked. "I could help you achieve what you want, in an intelligent fashion. You'd have a good deal of latitude for individual action."

Janice moved her chair. Wayne watched her. Her top chafed. Her nipples swelled.

Wayne said, “No sale.”

Wayne Senior lit a cigarette. “I’ve diversified. You figured that out at Christmas, and you’ve started coming back for visits again. You should know that I’ll be doing some *very* interesting things for Mr. Hoover.”

Wayne yelled, “Pull!” Janice tossed a clay. Wayne nailed it. His ears popped. His bad hand throbbed.

“I’m not going to hide under a sheet and rat off mail violators, so that you can sell more hate tracts.”

“You’ve been talking to Ward Littell. You’re in a vulnerable state, and men like Littell and Bondurant are starting to look good to you.”

The sun hit the deck. Wayne squinted it off.

“They remind me of you.”

“I won’t take that as a compliment.”

“You shouldn’t.”

“I’ll say it once. Don’t be seduced by lowlifes and thieves.”

“It won’t happen. I’ve resisted you for twenty-nine years.”

Janice left for golf. Wayne Senior left for cards. Wayne stayed alone at the ranch.

He set up the gun room. He spooled the film in. He *watched.*

Said film ran high-contrast. Black and white skin/black & white stock.

King shut his eyes. King went ecstatic. King preached in Little Rock. He saw him live in ’57.

The woman bit her lips. Lynette always did that. The woman had Barb-style hair.

It hurt. He watched anyway. King thrashed and threw sweat.

The film blurred—lens haze and distortion. The skin tones blurred—King went Wendell Durfee–dark.

It hurt. He watched anyway.

(Dallas, 2/13/64)

10:00 p.m.—lights out.

The women's tier. Twelve cells. One inmate locked up.

Pete walked in. The jailer went ssshh. A Carlos guy bribed him last night.

One cell row. One side wall. Barred-window light.

Pete walked down. His heart thumped. His arms pinged. His pulse misfired. He swilled scotch outside. The jailer supplied it. He shut down. He fueled up. He carved some will out.

He walked. He grabbed at the cell bars. He anchored himself.

There's Betty Mac.

She's on her bunk. She's smoking. She's wearing tight capris.

She saw him. She blinked. I KNOW him. He warned me last—

She screamed. He pulled her up. She bit at his nose. She stabbed him with her cigarette.

She burned his lips. She burned his nose. She burned his neck. He threw her. She hit the bars. He grabbed her neck and pinned her.

He ripped her capris. He tore a leg free. She screamed and dropped her cigarette.

He looped the leg. He looped her neck. He cinched her. He threw her up. He stretched the leg. He looped a crossbar.

She thrashed. She kicked. She swung. She clawed her neck. She broke her nails. She coughed her dentures out.

He remembered that she had a cat.

(Las Vegas/Los Angeles/Chicago/
Washington, D.C./Chattanooga,
2/14/64–6/29/64)

He worked. He lived on planes. He compartmentalized.

Legal work: appeals and contracts. Money work: embezzlement and tithes.

He honed his lies. He studied Jane. He learned her lie technique. He juggled his commitments.

3/4/64: Jimmy Hoffa goes down. Chattanooga—the Test Fleet case—twelve bribe-proof jurors.

Littell filed appeals. Teamster lawyers filed writs. The Teamsters passed a resolution: We love Jimmy Hoffa. We stand behind him intact.

Jimmy got eight years Fed time. Trial #2 pends. Chicago—Pension Fund Fraud—a probable conviction.

The “real” books were safe. The Boys had them. The fund-book plan would GO.

Littell wrote briefs. Jimmy’s men swooned. Littell wrote more briefs. Littell filed more writs. Littell swamped the courts.

Let’s stall. Let’s keep Jimmy out. Let’s stall and delay—three years and up. Drac will own Vegas then. The Boys will own Drac. The fund-book plan will FLY.

He worked for Drac. He wrote stock briefs. Drac hindered him. Drac dodged subpoenas. PI Fred Otash helped.

Otash ran look-alikes—Howard Hughes clones—subpoena men served *them* thus. Otash was capable. Otash had Pete skills. Otash pulled shakedowns. Otash doped horses. Otash fixed scrapes.

Drac stuck to his coffin. Mormons tended him. Drac sucked blood. Drac ate Demerol. Drac shot codeine. Drac made phone calls. Drac wrote memos. Drac watched cartoons.

Drac called Littell frequently. Drac monologued:

Stock strategy/stock margins/the germ plague. Quell all microbes! Quell all germs! Place condoms on doorknobs!

Drac craved Las Vegas. Drac bared his fangs. Drac coveted. Drac gloated. Drac sucked blood.

He babied Drac. He coddled Drac. He bared *his* fangs. He bit Drac back.

Jane helped.

He coaxed assistance from her. He gleaned her expertise. He loved her. She loved him. He called it true. She lied to live. He lied to live. It might serve to undermine his perception.

They lived in L.A. They flew to D.C. They enjoyed work weekends. He wrote briefs. Jane wrote Hertz reports. They toured D.C. and viewed statues.

He tried to show her the Teamster building. She flushed and balked. She was *too* firm. She played him skewed. She was *mock* indifferent.

He flashed back to L.A.—one recent chat.

He said, “I can get you work with the Teamsters.” She said, “No.” She was intractable. She came off skewed then.

She knew the Boys. She avoided Vegas. The Boys partied there. They discussed it. Jane was oblique. Jane was *mock* indifferent.

The Teamsters scared her. He knew it. She knew he knew. She lied. She omitted. He reciprocated.

He studied Jane. He indulged conclusions. Her real name *was* Arden. She did come from Mississippi. She did go to school in De Kalb.

He was suspicious. She reciprocated.

She viewed some Hughes bill sheets. She studied them. She explained embezzlement detection. She wondered *why* he cared.

He lied. He *used* her. She helped him bilk Howard Hughes.

He stole vouchers. He forged ledgers. He retallied accounts. He rerouted payments. He billed to a dummy account.

His account—Chicago—the Mercantile Bank.

He laundered the money. He cut checks. He tithed the SCLC. Pseudonymous checks—sixty grand so far—more checks en route.

Penance payments. Damage control. Covert ops against the FBI.

He donated Mob money. Mr. Hoover kept tabs. He met Bayard

Rustin. He paid him.

Mr. Hoover thought he knew Littell. Mr. Hoover misread his commitments. Mr. Hoover spent phone time with Littell. Mr. Hoover misread his loyalty.

Mr. Hoover talked to his correspondents. Mr. Hoover leaked dirt off bug placements. Mr. Hoover attacked Dr. King. Newsmen received invective. They rephrased it. They printed it. They obscured the source.

Mr. Hoover talked. Bayard Rustin talked. Lyle Holly talked. They all talked civil rights.

LBJ pushed his big civil-rights bill. Mr. Hoover loathed it—*but:*

Age 70 bodes. Forced retirement bodes. LBJ says, "*Stay* and strut your stuff."

Mr. Hoover gives thanks. That means quid pro quo. LBJ says, "Now fight my Klan war."

Mr. Hoover agrees. Mr. Hoover complies. The New Klan is outré. Mr. Hoover knows it.

The Old Klan moved hate tracts. The Old Klan burned crosses. The Old Klan severed balls. Castration was a State crime. Mail fraud was Fed.

The Old Klan rigged postage meters. The Old Klan stole stamps. The Old Klan mailed hate tracts. They thus broke Fed laws.

Their mail content was legal. Their mail methods were fraud. The FBI fought the Old Klan. Their mandate was minutiae. Their anti-Klan credentials were soft.

The New Klan was arson. The New Klan was Murder One. The flash point was Mississippi.

Civil-rights kids converge. "Freedom Summer" descends. The Klan sits ready. New klaverns form. Cops join. Diverse klaverns bond tight.

The White Knights. The Royal Knights. Klextors/Kleagles/Kladds/Kludds/Klokards. Klonklaves and Klonvocations.

Church bombings. Mutilation deaths. Three kids in Neshoba County—missing and presumed dead.

LBJ mandates war. Two hundred agents descend. A hundred for Neshoba—three probable victims—thirty-three agents per vic.

Dr. King visits. Bayard Rustin visits. Bayard Rustin briefs Littell. He checks his atlas. De Kalb adjoins Neshoba. Jane's school is there.

Mr. Hoover was torn. The war vexed him. The war offended him. The war brought the FBI praise. Mr. Hoover took credit—reluctantly. The war disrupted him.

It was outré. It was invasive. It pissed off his klavernite plants. They infiltrated klaverns. They snitched off mail fraud. They were shrill. They were racist. They subscribed to Bureau "Guidelines":

"Acceptable Risk" and "Violence Permitted." "Deniable Actions defined."

Mr. Hoover was torn. The war ripped him up. LBJ bruised his racist aesthetic. He'd fight back. He'd fight Dr. King. He'd rack compensation up.

Mr. Hoover called him. They talked and sparred. Mr. Hoover mocked Bobby.

LBJ hated Bobby. LBJ *needed* Bobby. He might make Bobby his Veep choice. Bobby might seek that Senate seat.

He played his Bobby tapes. It was late-night communion. The tapes woke Jane up sometimes. Jane heard voices in her sleep.

He lied. He said you're not dreaming—I'm playing deposition tapes.

Mr. Hoover tracked Bobby's moves—Bobby the lame-duck AG. Bobby *should* step down. Nick Katzenbach *should* succeed.

Fed heat *might* descend then. Fed heat *might* hit Vegas. Mr. Hoover *might* warn him. The Boys *might* say yes—hire those skim men—Wayne Senior *might* provide said.

He lunched with Wayne Senior—once a month—they played at respect. Wayne Senior foresaw Drac's Vegas. Wayne Senior craved his own bite.

Let's confer. Let's place my Mormons near the Count. Let's bite ol' Drac.

Skim runs *might* work. *He* had his own skim plan. He craved yet *another* tithe source.

Money *owned* him. Money *bored* him. He had money alliances. He formed money bonds. He had one nonmoney friend.

Pete left Vegas—mid-February—Pete returned bereft.

Pete flew to Dallas. Pete flew back. Pete returned with burn scars and a cat. Littell bought the Dallas papers. Littell read back-page squibs.

There—PROSTITUTE DIES IN CUSTODY, SUICIDE RULED.

He called Carlos. He played dumb. Carlos brought it up. Carlos laughed. Carlos said she bit her tongue off.

That meant two down. That meant two at large—Hank K. and

Arden-Jane.

Littell talked to Pete. They discussed the safe-house hits. They discussed Arden-Jane.

Pete said, “I won’t touch her.” Pete meant it. Pete looked sad and weak. He got headaches. He’d dropped weight. He worshiped his cat.

Pete wanted Monarch Cab. Pete hired a PI. The PI surveilled Eldon Peavy. Let’s stay useful. Let’s revive Tiger Kab. Let’s help the Boys out.

Pete had money alliances. Pete formed money bonds. Pete had a new cat. Pete had a kid brother. Wayne Junior *et* Pete.

Les frères de sang. Littell, un conseiller des morts.

Everyone’s scared. Everyone saw Big D.

(Las Vegas, 2/14/64–6/29/64)

Hate.

It moved him. It ran him. It called his shots. He stayed cool with it. He stayed justified.

He never said NIGGER. They weren't all bad. He knew it and stayed justified. He found the bad ones. They *knew* him. Wayne Junior—he *baaaaaaad.*

He worked the Deuce. He threw hurt. He spared his hands and used his sap. He never said NIGGER. He never thought NIGGER. He never condoned the concept.

He worked double shifts. He stayed double-justified. The owner had rules. The pit boss had rules. Rules ruled the Deuce high and wide.

Wayne had rules. Wayne enforced said. Do not paw women. Do not hit women. Treat whores with respect.

He enforced his rules. He bridged race lines. He enforced his Rule of Intent. He predicted rude acts. He preempted them. He employed all due force.

He tracked THEM. He trailed THEM. He prowled West LV. He looked for Wendell Durfee. It was futile. He knew it. The HATE drew him there.

He got FEAR back. Said FEAR made him *stay*.

Wayne Junior—he baaad. He kill black folk. He whip dark boodie.

The Deuce showed the Liston-Clay fight. THEY attended. THEY shucked. THEY cheered.

He perceived intent. He enforced. He preempted. Some Muslims pushed tracts. He ejected them. He abridged their civil rights.

THEY called him “Junior.” It fit. It honored his HATE. It distinguished his HATE from Wayne Senior’s.

Sonny Liston passed through. Sonny looked Wayne up. Sonny knew Wayne’s story. Sonny said, “You did the right thing.” Sonny waxed pissed. Cassius Clay kicked his ass. Fuck all that Muslim shit.

They hit the Goose. They got blitzed. They drew a crowd. Sonny said he knew umpteen niggers. Said niggers prowled Niggerland. They’d shake the nigger trees and find Wendell Durfee.

HATE:

He stole play chips. He cruised West LV. He spread said chips around. He called it tip bait. He paid THEM for help to find HIM.

THEY took the chips. THEY *used* him. THEY spit on the chips and broke them.

It was futile. He knew it.

He bought the Dallas papers. He scanned every page. He got no news on Maynard Moore. He got no news on Wendell Durfee.

He read the papers. Sergeant A. V. Brown got sometime ink. Sergeant Brown worked Homicide.

Sergeant Brown knew he killed Maynard Moore. Sergeant Brown had no proof and no body. Sergeant Brown hated him. Ditto Dwight Holly.

Holly tailed him—spot tails/odd nights. Jaunts through West LV—ten minutes per.

Show tails. Overt tails and grudge tails. Fender-to-fender.

Holly tailed him. Holly knew his Darktown biz. Holly was Fed. Holly was cosmetically pro-Negro. The snuffs fucked Holly up. The snuffs fucked Holly up with Wayne Senior.

They went back. They shared laughs in Indiana. They shared their chaste brand of HATE.

HATE lured them places. HATE lured Wayne to the ranch. He prowled the ranch cyclical. He got the urge and savored it. He picked his entry shots.

Janice leaves. Wayne Senior leaves. He watches them go and walks in. He goes to the dressing room. He smells Janice. He touches her things.

He reads Wayne Senior’s files. He reads Wayne Senior’s tracts.

The Papal Pipeline. Boat Tickets to the Congo—one-way passage on the Titanic.

The tracts went back to ’52. The tracts “probed” Little Rock. The tracts “exposed” Emmett Till. The Little Rock kids spread gonorrhea. Emmett Till raped white girls.

It was bullshit. It was chaste and cowardly HATE.

Wayne Senior lied—“I ‘diversified’ last year.” Bullshit—Wayne Senior pushed *long-term* hate.

HATE tracts. HATE comic boox. HATE primers. The HATE alphabet.

Wayne read Wayne Senior’s mail file. Mr. Hoover wrote memorandums. Dwight Holly wrote notes. They were long-term pen pals—from 1954 up.

’54 rocked. The Supreme Court banned school segregation. The Ku Klux Klan rocked anew.

Mr. Hoover rocked. Mr. Hoover deployed Dwight Holly. Holly knew Wayne Senior. Mr. Hoover loved Wayne Senior’s tracts. Mr. Hoover collected them. Mr. Hoover displayed them. Mr. Hoover rang Wayne Senior up.

They chatted. Mr. Hoover bored in:

You push hate tracts. *Someone* has to. They’re harmless and fun. They appeal to the rural right. The rural right is factional. The rural right is dumb.

You have hate credentials. *You* can help me place plants. We place them in Klan groups. Dwight Holly to supervise. They snitch mail fraud. They scotch your tract rivals. They assist the FBI.

Wayne read file notes. Mr. Hoover wrote. Dwight Holly wrote. Klan klowns wrote komedy. They sucked up to Wayne Senior. They yahooed. They described their *koon*tretemps.

The mail file stopped dead—summer ’63. No Fed notes/no snitch notes/no kommuniqués: *Why that? Say what*?

Wayne loved the Fed notes. The Fed-speak glowed: “Felony guidelines.” “Acceptable acts to sustain informant credibility.”

Wayne loved the Klan notes. The text glistened. The Klan-speak glowed.

Wayne Senior suborned rednecks. Wayne Senior koddled them. They lived on Fed money. They bought corn liquor. They pulled “minor assaults.”

One note sizzled. Dwight Holly writes—10/8/57.

Holly praised Wayne Senior. Holly enthused: You toughed it out/you retained your kover.

10/6/57. Shaw, Mississippi. Six Kluxers grab a Negro. Said Kluxers employ a dull knife. They sever his balls. They feed their dogs in front of him. Wayne Senior observes.

Wayne read the note. Wayne read it fifty times. The note taught him this:

Wayne Senior fears you. Wayne Senior fears your HATE. It's unmediated. It's unexploitative. It's unrationalized.

Wayne Senior hated petty. Wayne Senior had a rationale. Wayne Senior tried to shape *his* HATE.

Wayne Senior played him a bug tape. Wayne Senior played it over drinks. The date: 5/8/64. The place: Meridian, Mississippi.

Civil-rights workers talked—four Negro males. Said Negroes defamed white girls. Said girls were "liberal cooze." Said girls were "punchboards out for black stick."

Wayne listened. Wayne replayed the tape—thirty-eight times.

Wayne Senior ran a Fed film. Wayne Senior ran it over lunch. The date: 2/19/61. The place: New York City.

A folk club/mixed dancing/dark lips and hickeys.

Wayne watched. Wayne replayed the film—forty-two times.

HATE:

He watched THEM. He found THEM. He nailed THEM in crowds. HATE moved him. HATE rejoined him with Wayne Senior.

They talked. Shit densified. Shit cohered and dispersed. Janice talked to him. Janice studied him. Janice touched him more. She dressed for him. She cut her hair. She wore a Lynette do.

Lynette lost him. She knew it. She knew Dallas cut her loose. He ran from her. He hid out. He carried sex in his head.

Janice and Barb. Snapshots from the ranch. Postcards from the lounge.

His house fucked with him. Wendell Durfee kicked the door in. Lynette died there.

He dumped the bed. He stripped the paint. He peeled the bloodstains. It wasn't enough.

He sold the house. He took a loss. He indulged a spree. He hit the Dunes and shot dice.

He won sixty grand. He rolled all night. He blew the whole stake. Moe Dalitz watched him. Moe bought him morning pancakes.

He moved to Wayne Senior's guest house. He installed a phone. He logged bullshit tips and built a tip file.

He dug his two rooms. He dug on his view. Janice strolled. Janice changed clothes. Janice chipped balls out her window.

He lived in the guest house. He played at the Sultan's Lounge. He met Pete there. They watched Barb and socialized.

Pete introduced him. He blushed. They hit the Sands. They sipped frosty mai tais. They talked. Barb got tipsy and riffed on sex extortion. Barb said, "I worked JFK."

She stopped—looks traveled—looks dispersed wiiiiiide. Barb knew about Dallas. The looks said, "We all do."

That was March. Pete and Barb were back from Mexico. Pete and Barb were tan.

They flew to Acapulco. They flew back weird. Pete was thin. Barb was thin. Pete had lip scars. They had a cat—a stripedy tom—they loved his scraggly ass.

Wayne called Ward Littell. Wayne said, "What's up with Pete?" Wayne dropped Pete's "kid brother" line. Ward explained it all:

Pete killed his brother. Pete botched a hit. Pete killed François B. accidental. That was '49. Wayne was fifteen then. Wayne lived in Peru, Indiana.

Pete got phone calls. Pete left Vegas. Wayne met Barb for lunch. They talked. They hashed neutral topics. They eschewed Pete's work. They talked up Barb's sister in Wisconsin. They talked up her Bob's Big Boy franchise. They talked up Barb's lowlife ex.

Barb teased him. Barb saw him with Janice. He copped to his sixteen-year crush.

Pete trusted him. Pete gauged his Barb crush. Pete tagged it kid stuff. Barb was great. Barb made him laugh. Barb pulled his eyes off of THEM.

He pressed Pete—find me *real* work—Pete dodged his requests. He pressed Pete on Dallas—give me more details—Pete dodged his full press.

He said, "Why are you so fucked up and stoked on a cat?"

Pete said, "Shut up." Pete said, "Smile more and hate less."

(Dallas/Las Vegas/Acapulco/New Orleans/
Houston/Pensacola/Los Angeles,
2/14/64–6/29/64)

He found the cat. He relocated him. The cat dug Vegas. The cat dug the Stardust Hotel.

The cat dug their suite. The cat dug room-service chow. Barb fucking shit. Who fucking body-snatched you?

You flew off. You flew back. You came home undone. You don't eat right. You don't sleep right. You *shudder*.

He did all that. He chain-smoked too. He gnashed his teeth. He drank himself to sleep. He reran one nightmare:

Saipan, '43. Japs. Roads rigged with slice cords. Jeeps pass by. The cords hit. Heads topple clean.

He got headaches. He popped scotch. He popped aspirin. Bedtime scared him. He read books. He watched TV. He messed with the cat. His arms pinged. He pissed more. His feet got numbed up.

He fought it. He flew to New Orleans. He rigged a slice cord. He staked Carlos out. He thought it through. He ran Yes and No lists. The Nos won in a walk.

Don't do it. The Boys would kill Barb—just for a start.

They'd kill Barb's mother. They'd kill Barb's sister. They'd kill the clan Lindscott worldwide.

He flew back to Vegas. He found a cat-sitter. Barb took a week off. They flew to Acapulco. They got a cliffside suite. They watched spics dive for tourist chump change.

He carved some nerve. He sat Barb down. He told her EVERYTHING.

François and Ruth Mildred Cressmeyer. Each and every paid hit. Betty Mac. The noose on the crossbars. Her nails at her neck.

He spilled facts. He spilled names. He spilled numbers. He spilled details. He spilled new Dallas shit. He spilled on Wendell D. and Lynette.

Barb ran.

She packed her bag. She ran from him. She moved out. He tried to stop her. She grabbed his gun. She aimed at him flush.

He backed off. She ran. He got drunk and studied the cliff. The drop ran six hundred feet.

He ran up. He swayed. He ran up ten times. He ran up sober and drunk. He punked out ten times. He dipped and caught himself. He stopped on pure lack of guts.

He scored some red devils. He slept through whole days. He dungeoned the bedroom up. He ate pills. He slept. He ate pills. He slept. He woke up and thought he was dead.

Barb was there. She said, “I’ll stay.” He cried and tore the bed up.

Barb shaved him. Barb fed him soup. Barb talked him off pills and cliff drops.

They flew to L.A. He saw Ward Littell. Ward knew about Betty. Carlos had bragged the job up.

They made plans. They schemed precautions. Ward was smart. Ward was good. Ward made an Arden a Jane.

Shit looked all new now. Ward said he understood. Vegas looked new—hard hues and hot weather.

He scored on the Clay fight. He cat-proofed the suite. He banked a six-digit roll. The cat dug the suite. The cat perched. The cat pounced. The cat killed wall mice.

Pete called Farlan Moss. Moss worked Sheriff’s Vice. Moss entrapped fruits and whores with panache. Pete hired him. The job: Sift dirt on Monarch Cab and Eldon Peavy.

Moss said he’d do it. Moss promised full disclosure. Moss promised results.

Carlos called Pete. Carlos eschewed Betty talk. Carlos made nice.

“Pete, I hope you swing Monarch. I’d love to buy in for some points.”

Pete said, “No.” Betty Mac hovered. Carlos said, “Let’s wait on Hank K.”

Pete said, “Okay.” Pete sat and waited. He shitcanned the scotch. His sleep improved. His nightmares lulled off.

He palled with Wayne. He palled with the cat. He spot-checked Monarch. He *drooled*. He called Fred Otash. He called his cop pals. They ran bulletin checks.

Wendell Durfee—where you be? Wendell be *nowhere*.

He got restless. He drove to Big D. Betty Mac hovered and laid down ghost tracks. He checked around. He checked the DPD file. He got no Durfee leads and no sightings.

Carlos called him. Carlos said, “Go. Clip Hank Killiam.”

Pete drove to Houston. Pete picked up Chuck Rogers. Chuck lived with his folks. They were dings. They wore Klan sheets to bed.

Pete and Chuck split eastward—Pensacola-bound.

They drove back roads. They dawdled. Chuck talked up Vietnam. John Stanton was there now. The CIA was in deep. Chuck knew a Saigon MP—a cat named Bob Relyea—ex-prison guard/ex-Klan.

Chuck talked to Bob. They enjoyed shortwave chats. Bob extolled Vietnam nonstop. It was *hot*. It was groovy. It was Cuba on Meth.

Chuck talked Cuba—*Viva la Causa!*—Pete ragged the De Ridder “troops.” They agreed—fuck Hank Hudspeth and Guy B. in the neck. They drank too much. They talked too much. They sold bad guns.

The South was wild—spring rains and big voodoo.

They drove through Louisiana. They bunked at exile camps. Chuck drilled the troops. Pete cleaned dirty guns.

The troops were substandard. The troops were spic trash. They split Cuba. They migrated. They scrounged right-wing welfare. They lacked balls. They lacked skills. They lacked savoir faire.

Chuck knew all the back roads. Chuck knew rib joints Dixiewide. They cut through Mississippi. They cut through Alabama. They dodged Fed cars. They hit cross burns. Chuck knew sheet boys statewide.

Nice kids—a bit dumb—a bit inbred.

They bunked at Klan kamps. They split at dawn. They passed torched churches. De-churched coons stood by.

Chuck laughed. Chuck waved. Chuck yelled, “Howdy, you-all!”

They hit Pensacola. They staked out Hank K. Hank K. stayed inside. They invaded his pad. They slit his throat. They drove his body around. They dawdled. They cruised to 3:00 a.m. They found a TV-store window.

They tossed Hank in. Hank broke the glass. Hank crashed Zeniths and RCAs.

The Pensacola *Trib*/third column/page 2: BIZARRE SUICIDE. LOCAL MAN dives to death.

Chuck flew to Houston. Pete drove to Vegas. Pete sloughed off Hank K. Hank was male. Hank knew the rules. Hank got no gender relief.

Pete killed time. Pete palled with the cat. Pete palled with Wayne. They caught Barb's gigs. They sat ringside. Wayne dug on Barb. Wayne played it straight. Wayne honored women that way.

6/14/64: Guy Banister dies. It's heart attack #4. Chuck calls. Chuck gloats. Chuck explicates.

Carlos said, "Kill him." Chuck employed excess digitalis.

Chuck laughed. Chuck said, "Don't be hurt. Carlos wanted to give you a rest."

DOCUMENT INSERT: 6/30/64. Confidential Report. From: Farlan D. Moss. Submitted to: Pete Bondurant. Topic: “Criminal Activities of Eldon Lowell Peavy (White Male/46), the Monarch Cab Business & the Golden Cavern Hotel-Casino/with Index of Known Criminal Associates.”

Mr. Bondurant,

As promised, my report & attached rap sheet carbons on Subject Peavy’s KAs. As we discussed, please make no copies and destroy upon reading.

OWNERSHIP & LICENSE/TAX STATUS OF
LEGITIMATELY OWNED BUSINESSES

Subject PEAVY is the sole owner of the Monarch Cab Company (1st Clark County Licensed 9/1/55), the Golden Cavern Hotel-Casino (Nevada Gaming Commission licensed 6/8/57), the “Sid the Surplus Sergeant” Store (business license transferred to Subject PEAVY 12/16/60) & the Cockpit Cocktail Lounge in Reno (Nevada liquor license #6044/dated 2/12/58). (Note: Said lounge is a homosexual meeting place.) All of Subject PEAVY’s state & local operating licenses are up-to-date & in good standing, as are his Federal, state & county (Clark/Washoe) business taxes, personal taxes, property taxes, workers compensation fund taxes & his registering of ex-convicts in his employ. Subject PEAVY (no doubt eager to guard his reputation & retain his seats on the Nevada Gaming Control Board & Clark County Liquor & Control Board) is a scrupulous record keeper & observer of official business codes.

ILLEGAL ON-SITE ACTIVITIES (PER ABOVE BUSINESSES)

Subject PEAVY’s four businesses sustain criminal enterprises & serve as gathering spots for known criminals & homosexuals. All four are police-agency protected, which should serve to hinder you in your takeover strategy. The Cockpit Lounge (protected by Washoe County Sheriff’s Dept.) is a distribution point for homosexual pornography (films & photographs), Mexican-made fetish paraphernalia

& amyl nitrite vials pilfered from the Washoe County Medical Center. Male prostitutes congregate on the premises & the pay phones are used as contact points for a "Date-A-Boy" service run by Cockpit bartenders RAYMOND "GAY RAY" BIRNBAUM (white male/39/see rap sheet index) & GARY DE HAVEN (white male/28/see index). Subject PEAVY allegedly receives a percentage of all profits accrued from felonious enterprises conducted on the Cockpit premises.

The "Sid the Surplus Sergeant" Store (521 E. Fremont) serves as a pick-up point for male prostitutes working out of the Glo-Ann Motel (604 E. Fremont) and as a contact point for "Chicken Hawks" (older or married homosexual men who prey on young boys) attempting to instigate assignations. Losing gamblers & male UNLV students anxious to earn money congregate in the parking lot & sleep in their cars there in hope of promoting "dates." The store manager, SAMMY "SILK" FERRER (white male/44/also a Monarch cab driver/see rap sheet index), permits said "dates" to occur in back rooms on the store premises & often surreptitiously films them thru hidden wall peeks. FERRER compiles film footage, edits it into pornographic "loops" & sells said "loops" out of the Hunky Monkey Bar, a notorious establishment catering to "rough trade" homosexuals. FERRER & Subject PEAVY also screen pornographic films (homosexual & heterosexual content) in back rooms on the premises. This is a recreational activity for Monarch Cab personnel & their favored customers. (Note: Actors ROCK HUDSON & SAL MINEO & ex-heavyweight champ SONNY LISTON are Monarch Cab/ Golden Cavern habitues & frequently view films at "Sid the Surplus Sergeant.")

The Monarch Cab Company & its office/dispatch hut (919 Tilden St., N. Las Vegas) is the hub of Subject PEAVY'S illegal (albeit protected) enterprises. Subject PEAVY employs 14 full & part-time drivers, 6 of whom are presumed homosexuals with no criminal records & no outstanding Nevada State traffic warrants. The other 8 (all known homosexuals) are:

The prev. ment'd SAMMY "SILK" FERRER; HARVEY D.

BRAMS; JOHN "CHAMP" BEAUCHAMP; WELTON V. ANSHUTZ; SALVATORE "SATIN SAL" SALDONE; DARYL EHMINTINGER; NATHAN WERSHOW & DOMINIC "DONKEY DOM" DELLACROCIO. All 8 drivers have extensive criminal records, with offenses inc. sodomy, armed robbery, flim-flam, statutory rape, male prostitution, narcotics possession & dismissed homicide charges (see rap sheet index). DELLACROCIO, BEAUCHAMP, BRAMS & SALDONE also work out of the Golden Cavern Hotel-Casino as male prostitutes. DELLACROCIO (a part-time driver & dancer in the "Vegas A Go-Go" show at the New Frontier Hotel) is also a pornographic film actor. DELLACROCIO sometimes recruits other chorus dancers to work as male prostitutes.

Monarch Cab maintains & services illegally placed slot machines in numerous West Las Vegas bars. The operation is overseen by MILTON H. (HERMAN) CHARGIN (white male/53/no criminal record), a non-homosexual & former scandal magazine writer (Lowdown & Whisper magazines), a part-time Monarch Cab dispatcher & Subject PEAVY's on-site "Executive Officer," i.e., the man who imposes order on Subject PEAVY's crew.

All 14 drivers sell prescription pills (Seconal, Nembutal, Tuinal, Empirin-Codeine, Dexedrine, Dexamyl, Desoxyn, Biphetamine) supplied to them by Las Vegas-based doctors. (Said doctors are paying off gambling markers to local hotel-casinos, as part of a reciprocal agreement between casino pit bosses & Subject PEAVY. See Known Associates Index for list of doctors & casino personnel.)

The drivers sell largely to Negroes in W. Las Vegas, Mexicans & Nellis AFB enlisted men in N. Las Vegas, lounge entertainers & Los Angeles-based homosexual junketeers who use Monarch Cab limousines for airport pick-ups & reside at the Golden Cavern. Again, this operation is LVPD & CCSD-sanctioned.

The Golden Cavern Hotel-Casino (1289 Saturn St., N. Las Vegas) is a 35-room/60-table establishment of the "Grind Joint" variety. It is properly licensed & run & caters to "low-roller" tourists & gamblers. Subject PEAVY & his on-site manager, RICHARD "RAMROD RICK" RINCON (also a part-time pornographic film actor) retain six detached bungalows as “Party” or “Orgy Pads” for visiting homosexuals, who are supplied with male prostitutes, exotic liquors, take-out food, room projectors, pornographic films & the prev. ment’d illegal prescription pills, along with amyl nitrite and marijuana. Numerous movie & TV stars are frequent bungalow residents, inc. DANNY KAYE, JOHNNIE RAY, LIBERACE, WALTER PIDGEON, MONTGOMERY CLIFT, DAVE GARROWAY, BURT LANCASTER, LEONARD BERNSTEIN, SAL MINEO, RANDOLPH SCOTT & ROCK HUDSON. A favored male prostitute of the above is driver/dancer/pornographic film actor DOMINIC “DONKEY DOM” DELLACROCIO. The Golden Cavern is well-known in the homosexual underworld & reservations are frequently secured through “Middlemen” who habituate local homosexual bar-tryst spots such as the Klondike, the Hunky Monkey, the Risque Room & the Gay Caballero.

PORNOGRAPHIC FILM BUSINESS OF ELDON PEAVY

Subject PEAVY has placed himself in his greatest business-takeover jeopardy through his funding of and participation in a pornographic film racket with origins in Chula Vista, California (a border town) & Tijuana, Mexico. The racket is implemented by Tijuana policemen who employ & frequently coerce underaged girls to “act” in them, along with male actors (of adult age) & animals used in live Tijuana stage shows. The girls are primarily runaways from California & Arizona & I have identified six of them from viewings of the films & comparisons to photographs on Missing-Persons bulletins. The girls ID’d (MARILU FAYE JEANETTE/14; DONNA RAE DARNELL/16; ROSE SHARON PAOLUCCI/14; DANA LYNN CAFFERTY/13; LUCILLE MARIE SANCHEZ/16 & WANDA CLARICE KASTELMEYER/14) appear in a total of 87 films shot in Tijuana & sold via telephone mail-order by prev. ment’d PEAVY known-associate SAMMY “SILK” FERRER (Note: these are the films shown at the “Sid the Surplus Sergeant” Store).

The films are both hetero & homosexual in content. Prev. ment’d known associate RICHARD “RAMROD RICK” RINCON appears in the homosexual films “Ramrod Man,” “Ramrod Boy,” “Ramrod King,” “Ramrod Stud,” “Naughty Ramrod” & “Ramrod Rams It Home.” Prev. ment’d KA DOMINIC “DONKEY DOM” DELLACROCIO appears in the homosexual films “Greek Man,” “BackDoor Man,” “Hung Man,” “Big Dick Man,” “12-Inch Man,” “Moby Dick Man,” “Moby Dick’s Delight,” “Moby Dick Misbehaves,” “Moby Dick’s Greek Vacation” & “Moby Dick Meets the 69 Boys.”

The films are shot on 8-millimeter film stock & shipped to “Sid the Surplus Sergeant” from the main Chula Vista post office. Prev. ment’d KA SAMMY “SILK” FERRER receives & stores the films at his apt. (10478 Arrow Highway, Henderson) & ships them from the Henderson P.O. (See index for list of films, Chula Vista & Henderson ship dates & names & addresses of recipients.)

In conclusion, I believe that ELDON LOWELL PEAVY is indictable on a total of 43 Nevada State, California State, Arizona State & Federal charges pertaining to his suborning & exploitation of minor children, his transporting of pornographic material & his conspiring to distribute lewd & lascivious products. (See attached mimeograph copies of applicable penal code sections & Fed. statutes.)

Again, please read & destroy.

(Neshoba County, 6/30/64)

The AC died. Littell dipped his window.

He drove I-20. He passed Fed cars. He passed camera vans.

Klan kars tailed them. Said kars sported decals. “AYAK” meant “Are You A Klansman?” “AKIA” meant “A Klansman I Am.”

He’d called Mr. Hoover. He’d mentioned his trip. Mr. Hoover approved.

“A salutary idea. You can meet with Bayard Rustin and observe ‘Freedom Summer’ in the flesh. I would be delighted to hear your perceptions, minus your pro-Negro views.”

He brought twenty grand. Ten for Bayard Rustin/ten for some Cuban exiles. Pete scored on Clay-Liston. Pete had his own tithe.

It was hot. Bugs bombed the car. Klan kars blew by. Klan klods sneered at him. Klan kooks flipped him off.

He looked Fed. That made him a ten-ring. He brought his gun along—safety first.

Lyle Holly called him in Vegas. Lyle Holly stressed caution. Lyle Holly ragged his planned trip.

Don’t do it. You look Fed. The Klan hates you. The whites hate you. The lefties hate your guts.

Littell passed Bogue Chitto Swamp. Littell saw drag-line crews. The kids were dead. Lyle said so. Mr. Hoover said some Choctaws found their car.

It vibed Klan. Mr. Hoover was pissed. We’ll martyr the kids now. We’ll shit on states’ rights.

Littell drove I-15. Littell skimmed the radio. Nut preachers preached. It’s a lie. It’s a hoax. Them kids are holed up in Jew York.

He'd talked to Moe Dalitz. Moe braced all the Boys. They okayed the Hughes charter plan. That meant more money—another tithe source.

Traffic stalled. Gawkers lined the roadway. Fed cars crawled. News vans crawled. Folks rubbernecked.

State troopers and crackers. Housewives and toddlers in sheets. They flashed hand signals—kall it Klan kode—konfidential konversation.

Littell jumped lanes. Littell veered hard right. There—a cross off the road. A *used* cross—last night's business—gauze on scorched wood.

A crowd gawked the totem. Feds and Negroes. Snow-cone vendors sans sheets.

There's Bayard Rustin—spiffed in a seersucker suit.

Bayard saw him. Bayard waved. Bayard walked over. A man tossed an egg. A man tossed a snow cone. They nailed Bayard flush.

They parked. They viewed a torched church.

The church was razed. The church was molotoved. Tech crews bagged bomb debris.

Littell tithed Bayard. Bayard briefcased the money. Bayard watched the techs.

"Should I be encouraged?"

"As long as you understand that it's Lyndon Johnson's doing."

"Mr. Hoover's been talking a good game."

The sun was way high. Bayard wore egg yolk and slush.

"He wants hate and resentment sustained at what he considers the proper level, and coming down on the Klan gives him a mainstream cachet."

Bayard drummed the dashboard. "Let me ask you a question. Lyle said you have some expertise."

"All right."

"Here's the situation. Martin and Coretta enter their hotel room and want to make sure their friend Edgar hasn't gotten there first. Where do they look for bugs and what do they do when they find them?"

Littell slid his seat back. "They look for small wires with perforated metal tips extending from picture frames and lampshades. They speak innocuously until they determine that there are none, and they do not pull the ones that they find, because it would anger their friend Edgar and cause him to escalate his actions against Dr. King, who is making great strides while Edgar slowly builds a file against him, because Edgar's greatest weakness is implementing institutional sadism at a sedate pace."

Bayard smiled. "Johnson's signing the Civil Rights Bill next week. Martin's going to Washington."

Littell smiled. "That's a case in point."

"Any other advice?"

"Yes. Keep your people out of areas where the Regal and Konsolidated Knights operate. They're full of mail-fraud informants, they're almost as bad as the White Knights, and the FBI will never investigate anything that they do."

Bayard popped the passenger door. The handle burned him.

Littell said, "I'll have more money soon."

The party went late.

He stayed late. He *had* to. The town exiled him. Desk clerks sized him up. Desk clerks saw his suit and gun. Desk clerks said, "No vacancy."

The party was a wake. Guy Banister—*mort*. The camp was gulfside. The Cubans perched on four acres.

Their landlord was Klan. Maynard Moore's Klarion Koalition. They were pro-exile. They spelled "Cuba" with a K. Carlos bankrolled the site. Pete passed through last spring. Pete said the troops needed work.

Littell toured the grounds. Littell dropped off Pete's tithe. Littell chucked his coat and kicked sand.

A bunkhouse. A speedboat. A Klan/exile range. Straw-man targets with cartoon faces: LBJ/Dr. King/Fidel "Beard" Castro.

A gun hut. Stacked flamethrowers. Bazookas and BARs.

The exiles were gracious—he knew Big Pete. The Klan boys were rude—he wore a Fed suit.

The sun went down. The sand dunes launched fleas. The wet air launched mosquitoes.

Bottles traveled. Toasts went up. Klansmen rigged hibachis. They served hot dogs. They overcooked. They flamethrower-broiled.

Littell played wallflower. Guests bopped by. Littell made their reps:

Hank Hudspeth—Guy's pal—kook in mourning. Chuck Rogers clipped Guy. Guy's heart attack was assisted.

Laurent Guéry and Flash Elorde—Pete's right-wing confreres. Mercs/Dallas backup/late of Pete and Boyd's team.

Laurent was ex-CIA. Laurent clipped Patrice Lumumba. Flash clipped untold Fidelistos.

The Loop. Open secrets. Things you *just knew*.

Laurent dropped hints: *Monsieur Littell, nous savons, n'est-ce pas, ce qui s'est passé à Dallas*?

Littell smiled. Littell shrugged—*Je ne parle pas le français*. Laurent laughed. Laurent praised "*le pro shooter.* "

Le pro était un français. Jean Mesplède, qui est maintenant un "merc" à Mexico City.

Littell walked off. Guéry made him nervous. Littell stopped and ate a hot dog. It was bad. It was overcooked. It was flamethrower-broiled.

Littell played wallflower. Littell watched the party. Littell read news magazines. The Civil Rights Bill/the conventions/Bobby's shot at Veep.

The party wore on. Hank Hudspeth blew a tenor sax. The Cubans blew cherry bombs.

Pete loved *la Causa*. The Cause anchored. The Cause justified. The Cause always condoned. They shared a dilemma—penance and tithe. He knew it. Pete didn't.

Littell tried to sleep. The Cubans sang songs. Cherry bombs blew.

De Kalb adjoined Scooba. De Kalb adjoined Neshoba County.

The drive took five hours. The heat sapped his car. De Kalb fit Jane's description.

A main drag. Feed stores. Segregated shade. Whites on the sidewalk/Negroes in the street.

Littell drove through town. Negroes looked down. Whites looked straight through him.

There—the school. Jane's description etched pure.

Bungalows. Walkways. Poplar trees. Pseudo-Quonset huts.

Littell parked. Littell checked his notes. The registrar was Miss Byers—in Bungalow 1.

Littell walked. Littell followed Jane's route. The bungalow fit Jane's description.

One counter. File chutes behind it. One woman—scarves and pincenez.

The woman saw him. The woman coughed.

"It's a hoax, you want my opinion."

Littell wiped his neck. "Pardon me?"

"Those boys in Neshoba. They're sipping cool ones in Memphis right now."

Littell smiled. "Are you Miss Byers?"

"Yes, I am. And you're an agent with the Federal Bureau of Invasion."

Littell laughed. "I need information on an old student. She would have attended classes in the late '40s."

Miss Byers smiled. "I've been here since this place was chartered in 1944, and in some ways the postwar years were the best we ever saw."

"Why was that?"

"That's because you had those rowdy GI Bill boys, and some girls just as rowdy. We had a girl who became a drug addict and two girls who became traveling prostitutes."

"This girl's name was Arden Smith or Arden Coates."

Miss Byers shook her head. "We've never had an Arden here. It's a pretty name, I would have remembered it. I've been the sole registrar of this institution, and my memory hasn't failed me yet."

Littell checked the chutes. Littell saw year-dated tabs. One chute per year/'44 up.

"Are your student files alphabetized?"

"They certainly are."

"Are student photographs included?"

"Yes, sir. Clipped to the very first page."

"Have you had teachers here named Gersh, Lane, and Harding?"

"Had and have. Teachers who come tend to stay."

"Could I look through the files?"

Miss Byers squinted. "First, you tell me that this big commotion isn't just a hoax."

Littell said, "The boys are dead. The Klan killed them."

Miss Byers blinked. Miss Byers blanched. Miss Byers pushed up the counter. Littell stepped through. Littell pulled the ’44 chute.

He checked the first file. He studied the layout. He saw first-page photos and class lists. He saw last-page notes: Job referrals/ placements/general postscripts.

Jane knew the school. Jane attended—or knew those who did.

Littell pulled chutes. Littell checked files. He read names. He checked photos. He worked from ’44 up. No Ardens/no Jane pix/ no Coateses or Smiths.

He read files. He reread files. He went back to ’44. He wrote names down. He checked postgrad notes.

Miss Byers watched. Miss Byers kibitzed. Littell jotted names.

Spark points. References. Jane might mention names. Jane dropped names routinely. Jane buttressed her lies. Jane sketched vivid scenes.

Marvin Whitely/’46—a bookkeeper now. Carla Wykoff—a state auditor.

Littell pulled the ’47s. Aaron/Abelfit/Aldrich/Balcher/Barrett/ Bebb/ Bruvick. Lowly jobs. Prosaic appointments. Construction firms/feed stores/labor stewardships.

Richard Aaron married Meg Bebb. Aldrich stayed in De Kalb. Balcher caught lupus. Barrett worked in Scooba. Bruvick moved to Kansas City. Bruvick joined the AF of L.

Littell checked files. Littell wrote names. Miss Byers kibitzed.

Bobby Cantwell got shingles. The Clunes sisters went chippy. Carl Ennis spread head lice. Gretchen Farr—Satan with bangs. A hophead and worse.

Littell stopped. His knees gave out. His pen ran dry.

Jane built whole worlds. Jane lied past their limits. Jane eclipsed him at lies.

Miss Byers said, “I still think it’s a hoax.”

(Las Vegas, 7/2/64)

Bad heat—pure Vegas.

Wayne cranked the AC. Wayne chilled down the room. Wayne clipped an update:

The Dallas *Morning News*—6/29—DPD CONCEDES DEATH OF MISSING POLICEMAN.

He filed the clip. He scanned his corkboard. He saw Lynette on a morgue slab. He saw a blow-up of Wendell D.'s prints.

Glossy shots all—plus some FBI pix.

The nude Dr. King. Nude and plump. Nude with a blonde in the sack.

Wayne pulled the drapes. Wayne killed the sun. Wayne killed his Janice view. Janice dressed for the heat now. Janice wore all-day bikinis.

Wayne checked his drawers. Wayne tallied weapons—throwdown shit all. Six shivs/eight pistols/one sawed-off shotgun.

He worked the Deuce. He disarmed punks. He stole their shit. He saved it to plant on Durfee. Janice loved it. Janice called it his hope chest.

He checked his tip file. He'd tallied ninety-one tips. All bullshit/all jive.

Cars pulled up outside. Doors slammed. The carport boomed loud. Your host—Wayne Senior.

Another hate-tract "summit meet." His "biggest and best"—self-described.

Ten meets in ten days. Fund meets and "summits." Tract-distributor drives. Let's fuck civil rights. Let's laud *states'* rights.

Let's push more tracts. Mr. Hoover wants speed. Mr. Hoover wants wide distribution.

Wayne Senior told Wayne that. Wayne Senior spieled EVERYTHING. Wayne Senior torqued his HATE.

He held back. *He* observed partial disclosure.

He saw Fed cars. He saw Fed surveillance. Feds perched down the road. Feds watched the meets. Feds checked license plates.

Local Feds—non-FBI—Dwight Holly's boys.

Wayne Senior was distracted. Wayne Senior was tract-obsessed. Wayne Senior missed the heat. Wayne Senior talked. Wayne Senior torqued Wayne. Wayne Senior worked to impress.

Wayne Senior knew Ward Littell now. Wayne Senior bragged it up: "Littell needs some help. I might be planting some of my people in the Hughes organization."

Wayne called Littell last week. Wayne warned him: Wayne Senior will fuck you—and Dwight Holly's acting up.

Wayne cleaned his knives. Wayne cleaned his guns. Wayne stacked shotgun shells. Janice walked in. Janice was pool-wet. Janice smelled like Coppertone and chlorine.

Wayne tossed her a towel. "You used to knock."

"When you were a boy, I did."

"Who's he got today?"

"The John Birch people. They want him to change the print style on the fluoridation tracts, to distinguish them from the racier stuff."

Her tan was uneven. Her swimsuit rode low. Some black hair showed.

"You're dripping all over my rug."

Janice toweled off. "Your birthday's coming up."

"I know."

"You'll be thirty."

Wayne smiled. "You want me to say, 'And you'll be forty-three in November.' You want to know if I'm keeping track of those things."

Janice dropped the towel. "Your answer satisfied me."

Wayne said, "I don't forget things. You know that."

"The things that count?"

"Things in general."

Janice scoped out the corkboard. Janice scoped M. L. King.

"He doesn't look like a Communist to me."

“I doubt if he is.”

Janice smiled. “He doesn’t look like Wendell Durfee, either.”

Wayne flinched. Janice said, “I have to go. I’ve got bridge with Clark Kinman.”

The Deuce was dead. Dead occupancy/dead slots/dead tables.

Wayne prowled.

He walked. He perched. He tailed Negroes. He announced his intent and deterred. They ran from him. They ignored him. They played it cooooool.

The shift dragged. *He* dragged. He sat by the teller’s cage. He cranked his stool up.

A Negro walks in. He’s got a brown bag. He’s got a jug. He hits the slots. He drops some dimes. He hits some baaaaad luck.

Forty pulls and no payoffs—righteous baaaad luck.

The guy whips his dick out. The guy urinates. The guy sprays the dime slots. The guy sprays a dykey-ass nun.

Wayne walked over.

The guy laughs. The guy breaks his jug. Glass flies. Wine shvitzes. The nun Hail Marys.

The guy laughs. I gots me a cutter. It gots a paper-bag grip.

He lunged.

Wayne stepped back. Wayne trapped his arm. Wayne snapped his wrist. The guy puked. The guy dropped the cutter.

Wayne kicked him prone. Wayne kicked his teeth in. Wayne knee-dropped him.

(Las Vegas, 7/6/64)

Eldon Peavy vibed butch. Eldon Peavy vibed mean queen.

3:10 a.m.

The hut was dead. Peavy worked solo. Pete walked right in. Peavy hinked. Peavy reached. Peavy was *très* slow.

Pete blocked the desk. Pete yanked the drawer out. Pete grabbed the gun.

Peavy regrouped. Peavy showed savoir faire. He dipped his chair. He raised his feet. He stroked Pete's thighs.

"Tall, dark, and vicious. My type to a T."

Pete popped the clip. Pete popped the shells. They bipped and flew.

Peavy smirked. "Want to audition? Kept man or geisha boy, you call it."

Pete said, "Not tonight."

Peavy laughed. "Hey, he speaks."

The desk phone rang. Peavy ignored it. He wiggled his feet. He toe-crawled. He nuzzled Pete's thighs.

Pete lit a cigarette. " 'The film racket is implemented by Tijuana policemen, who employ and frequently coerce underaged girls.' "

Peavy wiggled his toes. "Shit, you had my hopes up. You know that song? 'Someday he'll come along, the man I love.' "

Pete turned out his pockets. Pete pulled out two hundred G's—new K-notes all.

He dropped said money. He grabbed Peavy's feet. He dropped them desk-adjacent.

“We need your Gaming and Liquor Board votes, and you get to keep a 5% interest.”

Peavy pulled a comb. Peavy puffed his spitcurl.

“I know shakedowns and legal forceouts intimately, so go to the next step and say you’ll blow up my cabs.”

Pete shook his head. “If I go to the next step, you lose the 5%.”

Peavy flipped Pete off. Pete yukked. Pete showed him three pix.

Rose Paolucci: in church. Rose Paolucci: blowing a bull mastiff. Rose Paolucci with her uncle—John Rosselli.

Peavy smirked—tee-hee-hee—Peavy focused in.

He went pale. He popped sweat. He tossed his dinner. He doused the switchboard. He soaked the phone. He grabbed the money wet.

Pete snagged the Rolodex. Pete grabbed Milt Chargin’s card.

They met at Sills’ Tip-Top. They talked shit. They noshed pancakes.

Milt was hip. I’m a comic. I gig local. Call me Mort Sahl unchained.

Milt knew Fred Otash. Milt knew Pete’s rep. Milt dug the scandal-rag days. Milt knew Moe D. Milt knew Freddy Turentine. Freddy bugged fag pads for *Whisper*.

Pete leveled. Pete said I bought Monarch. Pete said I need your help now.

Milt was glad. Monarch was a fruit bowl. Monarch was a fruit cocktail. You need *some* fruits. The fruit biz rocks. You *don’t* need a froufrou aesthetic.

Pete quizzed Milt. Milt leveled.

He eschewed the fruit scene. He eschewed the smut scene. He eschewed the froufrou aesthetic. He said he’d stay on. He made some suggestions.

Peavy owns the Cavern. That homo hut hops. Let’s junket the fruits to and fro. Let’s be careful. Let’s be cool. Let’s live with *some* froufrou aesthetics.

They talked shit. They discussed Peavy’s gigs. Some to eschew/some to enhance/some to revise.

Pete quizzed Milt. Pete said strut your stuff—play Mr. Vegas insider.

“I’m on the Strip, and I want to get laid for a hundred. Where do I go?"

"Try Louis at the Flamingo. He runs a fuck pad on the premises. You get an around-the-world for a C-note."

"Suppose I want dark stuff?"

"You call Al at the chambermaids' union. It's good trim, if you don't mind shtupping in a mop closet."

"Who do I avoid?"

"Larry, at the Castaways. He runs drag queens in the guise of real women. The rule of thumb is, 'Don't trust what won't disrobe.' "

"Suppose I want a three-way with two lezzies?"

"Go to the Rugburn Room. It's a dyke den by day. Talk to Greta, the barkeep. She'll set you up with two femmes for fifty. She'll take pictures and give you the prints and negatives for an extra twenty. You know, souvenirs."

"Sonny Tufts. What's the story on him?"

"He bites showgirls on the thighs. The girls get rabies shots when they hear he's in town."

"John Ireland?"

"Whip-out man with an eighteen-inch schlong. He goes to nudist retreats and plies his trade. He creates lots of excitement."

"Lenny Bruce?"

"Junkie and snitch for the L.A. County Sheriff's."

"Sammy Davis Jr.?"

"Switch-hitter. He digs tall blonds of both persuasions."

"Natalie Wood?"

"Lez. Currently shacked with a WAC major named Biff."

"Dick Contino?"

"Muff-diver and gamble-o-holic. In hock to the Chicago Cartel."

"The best lounge show in Vegas?"

"Barb & the Bail Bondsmen. You think I don't know which side I butter my bread on?"

"Name me one Mormon fat cat. You know, the 'Mr. Big' type."

"How about Wayne Tedrow Senior? He's a dreck merchant with oodles of gelt. His kid killed three shvoogs and walked on the beef."

"Sonny Liston?"

"Drunk, hophead, whore chaser. Pal of the aforementioned shvoog-killer Wayne Tedrow Junior. Jesus, don't get me going on Sonny."

“Bob Mitchum?”

“Grasshopper.”

“Steve Cochran?”

“Rival to John Ireland’s crown.”

“Jayne Mansfield?”

“Shtupping the world.”

“Which local cab company handles the men in the State Legislature?”

“Rapid Cab. The State guys have an account.”

“What about the top guys at Nellis?”

“Ditto on Rapid. They’ve got some good fucking accounts.”

“Are they Outfit-connected?”

“No, they’re just schmucks who play by the rules.”

Pete smiled. Pete bowed. Pete displayed ten grand. Milt spilled his coffee. Milt burned his hands. Milt said, “Craaaaazy.”

Pete said, “That’s your signing bonus. You’re my new intelligence man.”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/14/64. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: "Recorded at the Director's Request"/"Classified Confidential 1-A: Director's Eyes Only." Speaking: Director Hoover, Ward J. Littell.

JEH: Good morning, Mr. Littell.

WJL: Good morning, Sir.

JEH: Describe your southern excursion. I receive updates from my field agents, but I would appreciate a contrasting perspective.

WJL: Mr. Rustin was happy to receive my donation. He appeared to be pleased about the Civil Rights Bill and praised the Bureau's presence in Mississippi.

JEH: Did you correct him and say "forced presence"?

WJL: I did, Sir. I stayed in character and credited President Johnson.

JEH: Lyndon Johnson needs wretched people to love him. He is quite undiscerning and promiscuous in his need. He reminds me of King Jack and his lack of discernment with women.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I do not share Mr. Johnson's need. I have a pet dog who fulfills my desire for unconsidered affection.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Mr. Johnson and the Dark Prince are determined to make martyrs of those missing youths. The ill-revered Reverend King must feel the same way.

WJL: I'm sure he does, Sir. I'm sure he sees the boys as Christian symbols.

JEH: I do not. I cast the State of Mississippi in the martyr's role. Their sovereignty has been abrogated in the name of dubious "Rights," and Lyndon Johnson has made me a reluctant accomplice.

WJL: I'm sure you'll find ways to make up for it, Sir.

JEH: I will, indeed. You will help me, and you will perform your own acts of penance in an unfathomable and politically suspect manner.

WJL: You know me very well, Sir.

JEH: Yes, and I can decipher your inflections and determine when you wish to change the subject.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I'm listening, Mr. Littell. Ask any question or make any statement you wish.

WJL: Thank you, Sir. My first question pertains to Lyle and Dwight Holly.

JEH: Ask your questions. I find preambles boring and taxing.

WJL: Does Lyle share his SCLC intelligence with Dwight?

JEH: I do not know.

WJL: Is Dwight formally investigating Wayne Tedrow, Senior and/or Junior?

JEH: No, although I'm sure he's keeping tabs on them in his uniquely persistent manner, an activity which I would be loath to discourage.

WJL: I may be co-opting several of Wayne Senior's Mormons.

JEH: Into the Hughes organization?

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Now, or in due time?

WJL: Now.

JEH: Expand your answers, Mr. Littell. I have a lunch date for the Millennium.

WJL: The work I have in mind is potentially risky, especially if the Justice Department should go proactive in Las Vegas.

JEH: I do not dictate Justice Department policy. The FBI is but one cog in a much larger system, as Prince Bobby has pointed out to me on several repugnant occasions.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Tell me what you want, Mr. Littell.

WJL: I would like a provisional commitment. If the Mormons incur trouble, you could assess the situation and intercede on their behalf, or use their trouble to put Wayne Senior in your debt.

JEH: Do you want me to offer the Mormons covert protection?

WJL: No, Sir.

JEH: Will you inform Senior and the Mormons of the potential Federal risk?

WJL: The job description carries its own warning. I will not gild the lily beyond that.

JEH: And who will your co-opt strategy benefit?

WJL: Mr. Hughes and my Italian clients.

JEH: Feel free to proceed, then. And feel free to rely on my potential assistance.

WJL: Thank you, Sir.

JEH: Be sure that Mr. Hughes remains convincingly unaccountable.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Good day, Mr. Littell.

WJL: Good day, Sir.

(Las Vegas, 7/14/64)

Golf bored him. Wayne Senior insisted—I'm playing the DI.

Littell stood by the drink stand. Littell dodged the heat.

Vegas heat scalded. Vegas heat singed.

Some holes ran close. Littell watched the Tedrows play 8. Janice killed Wayne Senior. Janice parred and birdied. Janice drilled shots home.

She moved with grace. She flaunted her gray streak. She moved deft like Jane.

De Kalb scared him. De Kalb taught him:

You welcomed Jane's lies. *You* set up truth points within. *You* rigged the lie game. *You* have no redress.

She trashed his lie aesthetic. She trashed embellishment. She co-opted memories. She furnished her past secondhand.

She lied. She embellished. She codified. He knew her solely through code. He couldn't brace her honestly—he'd exploited her skills. She taught him to embezzle. She helped him bilk Howard Hughes.

The Tedrows played 9. Janice birdied it. Wayne Senior shot bogey. Janice walked to 10. A caddy met her. Wayne Senior waved to Littell.

He drove his cart up. He brodied on grass. The cart awning made some nice shade.

Littell leaned in. Wayne Senior smiled.

"Do you play?"

"No. I've never enjoyed athletics."

"Golf is more of a business activity. Mr. Hughes could buy you less—"

"I want to co-opt three of your men. I can get them courier work now, and casino work when Mr. Hughes settles here."

Wayne Senior twirled his putter. " 'Courier' sounds euphemistic. Are you describing a security operation?"

"Yes, in a sense. The men would fly Hughes charters to various cities."

"Out of McCarran?"

"I was hoping to run them out of Nellis."

"For added security?"

"Yes. You have friends at Nellis, and I'd be remiss if I didn't try to arrange it."

A caddy yelled "Fore!" A ball dinged the cart.

Wayne Senior flinched. "I've got friends in food service and defense purchasing. General Kinman and I are close."

"Would you call him a colleague?"

"Colleague and conduit, yes. He's told me that Vietnam is about to get hot, and he's one who should know."

Littell smiled. "I'm impressed."

Wayne Senior twirled the putter. "You should be. There's going to be a staged naval event next month, which will help LBJ to escalate the war. Mr. Hughes should know that I know people who know things like that."

Littell said, "He'll be impressed."

"He should be."

"Have you considered my off—"

"What will the couriers be transporting?"

"I can't tell you."

"My men will tell me."

"That would be their decision."

"We're talking about accountability, then."

The awning fluttered. Littell blinked. The sun hit his eyes.

"Your men will be paid 10% of the value of each courier shipment. You can work out your cut at your discretion."

Moe agreed to 15. He could pocket and tithe 5.

Wayne Senior squeezed a golf ball. Wayne Senior chewed on a tee.

Skim.

He *knows* it. He won't *say* it. He'll stay clean. He'll risk his men instead.

Janice walked down 11. Her gray streak swirled. She dropped a ball. She set up. She winged a shot. She hit the cart clean.

Littell flinched. Janice laughed and waved.

Wayne Senior said, “I’m interested.”

(Las Vegas, 7/15/64)

The Deuce was dead.

The dealers yawned. The barman yawned. Stray dogs meandered through. They beat the heat. They scrounged cocktail nuts. They scrounged hugs and pets.

Wayne perched by the bar. Wayne nuzzled a Lab mix. The intercom kicked: “Wayne Tedrow. See the pit boss, please.”

Wayne walked over. The Lab tagged along. The pit boss yawned. The Lab pissed on a spittoon.

“You remember that colored guy? Ten, twelve days ago?”

“I remember.”

“Well, you should, ’cause you broke a whole lot of bones.”

Wayne flexed his hands. “It was a deterrent.”

“That’s your version, but the NAACP says it was an unprovoked assault, and they allegedly got two witnesses.”

“You’re saying it’s a lawsuit.”

The pit boss yawned. “I got to let you go, Wayne. They’re asking twenty grand from us and the same from you, and they’re hinting they might file on you for some other shit you done.”

“Cover yourself. I’ll take care of my end.”

Wayne Senior loved it. Wayne Senior riffed:

Pay it off—don’t call Littell—he’s on *their* side.

The deck was hot. The air stung. Fireflies jumped.

Wayne Senior sipped rum. “You disarmed him *and* knee-dropped him. I’m curious about your justification.”

“I still think like a policeman. When he broke that bottle, he signaled his intent to hurt me.”

Wayne Senior smiled. “You revealed yourself with that answer.”

“You’re saying I still need a rationale.”

“I’m saying you’ve revised your basis for action. You err on the aggressive side now, which you—”

“Which I rarely did as a cop.”

Wayne Senior twirled his stick. “I want to pay off your suit. Will you accept the favor?”

“You can’t make me hate them like you do. Will you accept that?”

Wayne Senior flicked a wall switch. Cold air hissed out.

“Am I that predictable a father?”

“In some ways.”

“Can you predict my next offer?”

“Sure. It’s a job offer. It relates to your quasi-legal union or one of the fourteen casinos you own in violation of Nevada Gaming Commission law.”

Cold air swirled. Bugs beat their wings. Bugs evacuated.

“It sounds like you’ve investigated me.”

“I burned my file when I left the PD.”

“Your file on your *fath*—”

“You used to run card cheats out of rival casinos. A guy named Boynton and a guy named Sol Durslag, who works for the Clark County Liquor Board. You’ve got some Nellis guy in your pocket. You’re selling pilfered food and liquor to half the hotels on the Strip.”

Wayne Senior stretched. “You anticipated my offer. I need someone to run shipments to the hotels.”

Wayne counted fireflies. They jumped. They lit up. They fell.

“It’s ‘yes’ to both offers. Don’t let it go to your head.”

The Rugburn Room:

A hipster hive. Six tables/one stage. A beatnik gestalt.

Milt Chargin employed a duo. They were Miles Davis acolytes. They played bongos and bass sax.

Milt drew a hip crowd. Femme dykes served beer. Sonny Liston showed and dredged some cheers up.

Sonny hugged Wayne. Sonny sat down. Sonny met Barb and

Pete. Sonny hugged them. They hugged Sonny. Sonny sized Pete up.

They arm-wrestled. Hipsters bet. Pete won two out of three.

Milt went on. Milt did Lenny Bruce shtick. Lawrence Welk auditions a junkie. Pat Nixon bangs Lester, the priapic shvoog.

The crowd laughed. The crowd toked maryjane. Sonny popped dexies. Pete and Barb declined.

Wayne popped three. Wayne got a hard-on. Wayne scoped Barb sidelong. Wayne grooved on her hair.

Milt did fresh stuff. Milt did "Fucko, the Kids' Show Clown." Milt blew up condoms. Milt tied them off. Milt tossed them high.

The crowd went nuts.

They snared the condoms. They waved cigarettes. They popped them—ka-pow!

Milt did Fidel Castro. Fidel hits a fag bar. Jack Kennedy walks in. Fidel says, "Let's party, muchacho." Jack says, "I'll meet you at the Bay of Pigs, but you've got to shtup Bobby, too."

Pete howled. Barb howled. Wayne roared.

Milt did Sonny shtick.

Sonny kidnaps Cassius Clay. Sonny dumps him in Mississippi. The Klan holds him hostage. Martin Luther King goes down.

Marty wears whiteface. Marty digs being white. It's a bold apostasy. Fuck this negroid shit.

Marty calls God up. God puts J.C. on. J.C.'s a swinger. He's gigging with Judas and the Nail Drivin' Five.

Marty says to J.C., "Listen, daddy-o, I'm having a crisis of faith here, I'm doing this revisionist number. I'm starting to think the white man's got it dicked, he's got all the bread and the white women and the hi-fi shit, and if you can't beat 'em, assimilate and stop all this civil-rights shuck-and-jive."

J.C. sighs. Marty waits. Marty waits a looooong time. Marty waits to hear his life's work affirmed.

J.C. pauses. J.C. laughs. J.C. spiels God's word on high:

NO SHIT, YOU DUMB MOTHERFUCKER!

The crowd cracked up. The room evaporated. Sonny roar-roar-roared.

Milt did LBJ. Milt did James Dean. Jimmy, the mumble-mouthed masochist. Jimmy, the "Human Ashtray."

Milt did Jack Ruby.

Jack's in the slam. Jack's pissed off and hungry. These *farkakte* *goyim* jailers don't know from good nova lox. Jack needs some food gelt. Jack breaks out and flogs Israel bonds.

Wayne cracked up. The room incinerated. Pete and Barb roar-roar-roar-roared.

They shared looks. They howled. They roared more. Sonny didn't get it. Sonny dug his shtick more.

Pete took Wayne aside. Pete said, "Let's blow up some cabs."

* * *

Rapid Cab was detached. Fourteen cabs/one hut/one lot/one block between.

Pete did the grunt work. Wayne did the chemistry. They worked at Monarch. They worked *très* late.

Pete pumped gas. Pete filled fourteen bottles. Wayne mixed nitrates. Wayne mixed soap flakes. They soaked dunk cords. They soaked feeder cords. They dipped model-kit glue.

Wayne felt giddy. Barb and Dexedrine did it. Barb split from the Rugburn. Barb hugged them. Barb left her scent.

They drove to Rapid. They parked. They cut through the fence. They dollied their shit in.

Fourteen cabs—'61 Fords—snout-to-snout rows. Ground clearance and tank space.

They laid down. They placed the bombs. They looped the cords. They dumped the gas. They soaked a fourteen-car fuse.

Wayne lit the match. Pete dropped it. They ran.

The cabs exploded. Scrap metal flew. The noise hurt. Bursts overlapped.

Wayne ate smoke. Wayne ate fumes. Glass blew across the sky.

(Los Angeles, 7/17/64)

Theft tools—paper/pencils/pen.

Littell worked. Littell cooked Hughes Tool books. He wrote an invoice. He carbon-copied it. He revised a pay sheet.

Jane was asleep. Jane logged early bedtimes. They devised a routine. They stuck to it. They coded their needs.

Jane needed early sleep. He needed seclusion. Jane sensed his need. Jane deferred to it.

Littell switched pens. Littell blotted ink. He hit snags sometimes. He needed Jane's help. He toughed it out then. He kept Jane out. He embezzled solo.

Littell ran figures. Littell tallied accounts. Jane was edgy tonight. Their dinner was tense.

She said her job bored her. She said her co-workers vexed. He threw her a curveball—the Teamsters need help.

Jane declined. Jane declined too fast. Jane laughed too slow.

He described his trip south. He abridged the text. Jane segued and riffed on De Kalb.

Miss Gersh. Miss Lane. The boy with lupus. Miss Byers mentioned said boy. Jane omitted his name from *her* text.

He asked questions. He *played* her. He played off *his* insider's text. Jane brought up Gretchen Farr. Miss Byers brought her up. Gretchen was "Satan with bangs."

Pilfered memories. Stolen reminiscence. Borrowed anecdotes.

Littell yawned. Littell worked. Littell toughed out an invoice glitch—solo.

He played the radio. He caught the news. Pundits concur—Bobby will run in New York.

Littell rubbed his eyes. Columns blurred. Numbers wiggled.

Wayne Senior sent a list—twelve Mormon thugs—all skim candidates. Littell copied Drac. Drac read the list. Drac told *his* Mormons to pick three "casino consultants."

Littell called Drac. Littell lied:

The men will fly Hughes planes. The men will tour "various cities." They'll meet "made men." They'll "form bonds." They'll "work to procure your hotels."

Drac loved it. Drac loved intrigue. Drac said, "*We're* using *them*." Drac approved the Hughes charters. Wayne Senior cleared the Nellis takeoffs.

Skim clearance—the Air Force and the Mob.

Drac waxed deluded. Drac told his Mormons to sidestep Littell. Ward's *my* boy—*he'll* run the consultants.

Littell waxed bold. Littell ad-libbed. Littell revised his skim plan.

I'll exploit Drac's hubris. I'll write fake reports. I'll ghost-write the so-called "consultants." I'll jolly Drac—"*You're* fucking the Mob—the Mob's not fucking you."

Moe D. waxed grateful. Moe revised the skim end. Moe said, "Take 5% off the top."

Thanks, Moe. Thanks for the tithe cash. I don't have to steal it now.

Made men feed the skim. Mormons fly it. Percentages fly. Cash multiplies. His cash. The Mormons'. Wayne Senior's.

It's a ground builder. It's a pump primer. Let's ford the moat. Let's storm Drac's hotels.

Littell cooked his books. Columns wiggled. Dollar signs blurred.

(Las Vegas, 7/18/64–9/8/64)

Rapid Cab—*muerto*.

The torch was impromptu. The torch was unsanctioned. He informed the Boys. He informed them post-torch. He stressed his pure motive.

WE need a cab base. WE need dirt. Let's help Drac. Let's accrue dirt. Let's deploy it.

Carlos clapped. Sam G. clapped. Moe blew kiss bouquets.

Pete braced the Rapid dispatcher. Pete greased him. Pete bought his account book. Pete bought his soul. Pete hired him. Pete resigned his accounts. Pete got nine legislators. Pete got Nellis brass and fat cats galore.

Moe fixed the torch. Moe fixed it with LVPD. Arson cops took bribe cash. Arson cops framed a wino.

Moe fixed the Rapid end. Moe fixed it post-torch. Goons fucked up the owner. Goons relocated him to Dogdick, Delaware.

Pete renamed the biz. Dig it—Tiger Kab refortifies. Tiger Kab resurrects.

He sold the old Packards. He bought twenty Fords. He hired dope-addled "artist" Von Dutch.

Von Dutch ate peyote. Von Dutch painted cabs. Von Dutch laid wiiiild upholstery. He painted tiger stripes. He scrolled kustom script. He fashioned mock-tiger-tuft seats.

Pete bought four limos—high-end wheels—Lincoon Coontinentals. They had hi-fis and recliner seats. They were mobile fuck pads.

He consulted Milt Chargin. He steam-cleaned the hut. He dumped some fruits. He hired some straight guys. He kicked two drag queens out.

He took Milt's advice—keep Nat Wershow—Nat's smart and butch. Keep Champ Beauchamp. Keep Harvey Brams. Keep Donkey Dom—Dom's a fruit magnet—Dom draws fruit biz.

He called his Teamster contact. He signed the crew on. They got pensions. They got health plans. They paid Teamster dues.

Jimmy H. got points. Jimmy was thrilled. The fruits genuflected and swished. They got the clap. They got the syph. The Teamsters now paid for their cures.

Pete hired two jigs—Sonny Liston boys. They were good drivers. They were semi-punch-drunk. They were good Browntown brawn.

Biz was strong. The cash base was strong. No Monarch clients strayed.

Pete ran the hut. Pete worked three shifts. Work drove him. Work drained him. Work killed his bad thoughts.

He lived at the hut. He brought the cat in. The cat chased wall rats. He built a straight john. He kept the fruit john. The straights refused to shit with the fruits.

The straights hated the fruits. The fruits reciprocated. Pete addressed the issue. Pete stressed coexistence. Pete enforced the Law:

No bickering. No fistfights. No factional wars. No sex jive. No queer-straight flirtation.

Both factions kowtowed. Both factions obeyed.

He cut a deal with Johnny R. He got roost rights at the Dunes. He cut a deal with Sam G. He got roost rights at the Sands.

He told the crew: I WANT DIRT.

Quiz hookers. Quiz card dealers. Glom dirt. Glom dirt on celebrity tricks and gamble-o-holics. Accrue dirt. Report dirt to Milt C.

Milt was good. Milt mediated crew complaints. Milt deflected tsuris.

Milt made airport runs. Milt drove famous fruits. Milt drove state legislators. Milt drove them to fuck pads. Milt drove them to dope dens. Milt reported his dirt.

Milt dispersed tip cash. Milt greased bellhops/barkeeps/B-girls. Milt said I WANT DIRT.

Dirt meant leverage. Dirt meant status. Leverage meant juice. Juice for the Boys and Drac Hughes.

Tiger Kab: Dirt Central. The racket hub supreme.

The fruits pulled crimes. The straights pulled crimes. They achieved détente and pulled crimes together. Pete hired drivers off rap sheets. Pete hired drivers off reps. Pete hired bent guys x-clusive.

Pete consolidated. Pete worked two main gigs. Pete worked the pill and slot-machine endeavors.

He dumped the smut gig. He dumped the mule flix. He dumped the T.J. cops. He dumped the smut kids. He leaned on Eldon Peavy. He made him quit making smut.

He hired Farlan Moss. He sent him to T.J. Moss greased the spic cops. Moss shanghaied the kids. Moss sent them home *pronto más*.

Pete stole Peavy's records. Pete logged smut transactions. Pete logged DIRT.

Peavy left town. Pete lost his cab protection. Pete called Sam G. Sam Tigerized and bought points. Sam bought in for 20%.

Sam bought protection—new and improved—Sheriff's *and* LVPD. Co-op deals meant insurance. Insurance meant safety. Safety meant anesthesia.

He shut Betty out. It worked intermittent. He notched minutes and hours and sleep. He did make-work. He did real work. He stretched the time. He cultivated distraction.

He'd get frazzled. He'd get fucked up. Betty jumped him then. It scared him. It relieved him. It said THIS IS REAL.

Betty stuck with him. Dallas faded away.

The Warren thing hits. Lee O. takes the rap. Jack Ruby goes down guilty as charged. Jack stays mute. Jack gets death. Ratfuck Bobby resigns as AG.

Barb dropped the p.m. news. Wayne dropped his Dallas questions. Carlos dropped all the hit talk. Betty took a slug. Arden-Jane dodged one for now.

Jimmy took another slug—pension-fund fraud—two five-year terms concurrent. Jimmy's fucked. Jimmy knows it. Jimmy seeks solace.

His good lawyers helped. His good Teamsters helped. Likewise Ward's fund-book plan.

Tiger was solace plus. Tiger subsumed Betty—intermittent.

Tiger roared. Tiger roamed. Tiger roved West LV. That trailer was still there. That whore decomped within.

Wayne wanted work. Wayne pressed Pete. Pete always said no. Tiger Kab hired spooks. Tiger Kab drove spooks. Wayne was spook-afflicted.

Wayne worked for Wayne *père*. *Père* tied his apron strings. *Père* had big pull. *Père* foresaw that Gulf of Tonkin thing.

Wayne was wowed—dig my dad—he's a *chingón*.

Wayne Senior pressed Wayne—let's start a snitch-Klan—the Neutered Knights of Natchez or some such fucking shit.

Wayne played along. Pete said: Don't do it—Klans just ain't you.

Wayne Senior bragged to excess. Ward Littell listened. Ward knew Wayne. Ward had pull with him. Ward could cut those strings.

Wayne Senior greased the hit fund. Wayne Senior told Ward. Wayne Senior sent Wayne to Dallas.

Wayne was naive. Wayne didn't know.

Stay naive—you'll live longer. Tiger rules. Ditch the hate and I'll find you a spot. It's elite. It's effete. It helps you shut dead women out.

(Las Vegas, 9/10/64)

Canned food and booze. Sauerkraut and Cointreau—all Air Force stock.

Wayne tossed crates. A swamper stacked them. They worked. They broiled. They hogged the DI dock.

Creamed corn and Smirnoff. Stuffed olives and Pernod. Cheez-Its and Old Crow.

Wayne worked fast. The swamper worked slow. The swamper yak-yakked.

"You know we lost some guys, including our steward. I heard your dad got them work with Howard Hughes. Some lawyer set it up."

Wayne tossed the last crate. The swamper caught it. The swamper peeled his roll and paid up.

He shuffled. He scratched. He played coy. He dragged out the transaction.

Wayne said, "What *is* it?"

"Well, it's sort of personal."

"I'm listening."

"Well … you think that Durfee guy's stupid enough to come back here?"

"I don't think he's stupid at all."

Wayne drove to Nellis.

He'd scheduled two loops. A late shot for Twinkies and Jim Beam—all Flamingo stock.

Wayne yawned. Traffic was slow. The job was soporific. The job was a soggy cream puff.

He figured it out. It took him weeks. Wayne Senior *wants* you bored. Wayne Senior has *plans*.

Said plans implied:

Go to Alabama. Stress your reputation. Drop how you avenged Lynette. Start a snitch-Klan. Recruit snitches. Work for the Feds.

He told Pete about it. Pete said, "It's cowardly shit."

He hit Owens. He hit the Nellis gates. He drove straight in. Nellis was beige—beige buildings/beige barracks/beige lawns.

Big barracks. Named for Strip hotels. No goof or satire implied.

His QM contact lived off base. His QM parked on. Wayne had dupe car keys. Wayne left his coin in the car.

He passed the "Sands." He passed the "Dunes." He passed the Officers' Club. He parked. He got out. He saw the QM's Ford.

Two rows up: A '62 Vette.

Red with white side coves. Whitewalls and chrome pipes. Janice's cherried-out car.

Janice left the ranch. Janice left at noon. Janice said she was off to play golf. Boulder/thirty-six holes/Twin Palms Country Club.

Blithe Janice. Golf—shit.

Wayne unlocked the Ford. Wayne rolled down the windows. Wayne scrunched low and tucked himself in.

Cars came. Cars went. He chewed gum. He popped sweat. He stared at the Vette.

Time chugged. Time rescinded. Some instinct said *stick*.

The sun arced. The sun hit the Ford. Wayne broiled. His gum starched and dried out.

There's Janice.

She leaves the O Club. She gets in her Vette. She kicks the key and idles it.

There's Clark Kinman.

He leaves the O Club. He gets in a Dodge. He kicks the key and idles it.

Janice pulls out. Kinman pulls out behind.

Wayne pulled out. Wayne hung back. Cut the leash/cut them some slack.

Wayne hung back. Wayne read his watch dial. Wayne ticked one full minute off.

Now—

He hauled. He closed in. He caught up. Three-car caravan—east-bound—Lake Mead Boulevard.

Janice drove point. Kinman tapped his horn. Kinman goosed her pipes. They *played.* They flirted out their windows. They *goofed.*

Wayne hung back. Wayne held two car-lengths down. Wayne sidled one lane over.

They drove east. They logged eight miles. They hit a desert patch. Motel strips and beer bars. Sand and last-chance fill-ups.

Janice signaled. Janice turned right. Kinman signaled. Kinman turned right.

There—The Golden Gorge Motel.

Gold stucco. One-story/one-room row. Twelve connected rooms.

Wayne pulled right. Wayne braked. Wayne stopped. Wayne checked his rearview.

Janice parked in the motel lot. Kinman parked in close.

They got out. They embraced and kissed. They entered room #4. They bypassed the office. They had their own key.

Wayne got butterflies. Wayne locked the car and walked over.

He stood near room #4. He loitered and listened. Janice laughed. Kinman said, “Get that rascal hard.”

Wayne scoped the lot. Wayne saw scrub balls and junk cars. Wayne saw Mexican brats.

Thin room walls. Voices *en español.* Bracero cribs. Crop-picker tenants.

Kinman laughed. Janice went “Oooh.”

Wayne loitered. Wayne listened. Wayne lurked. Shades went up. Blinds furled. Brown faces bipped out.

He saw something:

Room #5 had no windows. The door had *two* locks.

He held it back. He bypassed Wayne Senior. He ran paper. He checked Clark County deeds. He traced the motel.

Shitfire—Wayne Senior owns it.

It’s 6/3/56. Wayne Senior bids and forecloses. The motel’s a bargain. The motel’s a tax dodge.

Wayne stewed. Pete called the ranch and left messages. Wayne ignored them. Wayne surveilled the motel.

Early p.m. stakeouts. Room #4. Janice and one-star Clark Kinman. Two matinees/three hours per.

He parked down the road. He trained binoculars. He walked by. He listened. He heard Janice sigh.

The Golden Gorge ran twelve units. Beaners camped out in ten. Janice kept her key. It unlocked room #4.

Room #5 had two locks. Room #5 had no windows. Room #5 stayed empty.

The lot buzzed by day. Braceros mingled. Bracero kids yahooed and yelped. Braceros worked hard. Braceros crashed hard. Braceros crashed early.

He popped a burglar once—late in ’60. He kept his tool kit. He kept his picklocks.

Room #5 glowed. The door was green. Green like that song:

What’s that secret you’re keeping?

DOCUMENT INSERT: 9/12/64. Confidential memorandum: Howard Hughes to Ward J. Littell.

Dear Ward,

Bravo on the new casino consultants. My aides have chosen three rough and tumble, no-nonsense men from that list you submitted, and they have assured me that they are devout Mormons with germ-free blood.

Their names are Thomas D. Elwell, Lamar L. Dean and Daryl D. Kleindienst. They have extensive union experience in Las Vegas and, according to my aides, will not be afraid to negotiate and “lock horns” with those Mafia boys that Mr. Hoover tells me you have in your pocket. According to my aides, these men “know the ropes.” They did not meet with them in person, but have corresponded with your friend Mr. Tedrow in Las Vegas and have solicited his advice. Mr. Tedrow is well respected in Mormon circles, they tell me, and I confirmed that assessment with Mr. Hoover.

The new men will be traveling hither and yon to advance our Las Vegas plans, so I’m pleased that they are cutting down commercial airline costs by flying Hughes charters. I’ve sent memos to all the charter crews instructing them to have lots of Fritos, Pepsi-Cola and Rocky Road ice cream on hand, because hard-working men deserve to eat well. Also, thanks for getting charter clearance at Nellis Air Force Base, which cuts down costs as well.

Forewarned is forearmed, Ward. You've convinced me that our Las Vegas approach will take time, and I think this casino consultant plan is a winner. I look forward to receiving your first report.

All best,

H.H.

(Las Vegas, 9/12/64)

Wayne Senior said, “I know what my men are transporting.”

“Oh?”

“Yes, ‘Oh.’ They’ve explained the entire procedure.”

They sat poolside. Janice stood close. Janice sunned and putted golf balls.

“You knew at our first meeting. It was quite evident.”

“An instinct doesn’t equal a certainty.”

Littell raised one brow. “You’re being disingenuous. You knew then, you know now, and you’ve known at all points in between.”

Wayne Senior coughed. “Don’t mimic my gestures. You don’t have my flair.”

Littell grabbed his prop stick. Littell twirled it. Fuck Wayne Senior sideways.

“Tell me what you want. Be direct, and feel free to use the word ‘skim.’ ”

Wayne Senior coughed. “My men have quit the union. They refuse to pay me the percentage I requested.”

Littell twirled the stick. “How much do you want?”

“I’d be satisfied with 5%.”

Littell twirled the stick. Littell twirled figure-eights. Littell did all Wayne Senior’s tricks.

“No.”

“No?”

“No.”

“Categorically?”

“Yes.”

Wayne Senior smiled. “I have to assume that Mr. Hughes doesn’t know what his planes are transporting.”

Littell studied Janice. She flexed. She putted. She stretched.

“I would advise you not to tell him.”

“Why? Because your Italian friends will hurt me?”

“Because I’ll tell your son that you sent him to Dallas.”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 9/12/64. Dallas *Morning News* article.

REPORTER WRITING JFK BOOK; SAYS HE'LL "BLOW CONSPIRACY WIDE OPEN"

Dallas Times-Herald reporter Jim Koethe has a tale to tell, and he'll tell it to anyone who'll listen.

On Sunday evening, November 24, 1963, Koethe, along with Times-Herald editor Robert Cuthbert and reporter Bill Hunter of the Long Beach (California) Press-Telegram, visited the apartment of Jack Ruby, the convicted killer of presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald. The three men spent "two or three hours" talking to Ruby's roommate, novelty salesman George Senator. "I can't reveal what Mr. Senator said," Koethe told this reporter. "But believe you me it was an eye-opener, and it sure got me thinking about some things."

Koethe went on to say that he's done quite a bit of digging into the assassination and is writing a book on the subject. "It's a conspiracy, sure as shooting," he said. "And my book is going to blow it wide open."

Koethe refused to name the people he believes are responsible for the death of President John F. Kennedy and refused to reveal the basic motive and details of the conspiracy. "You'll have to wait for the book," Koethe said. "And believe me, the book will be well worth the wait."

Koethe's friend, reporter Bill Hunter, died in April. Editor Robert Cuthbert declined to be interviewed in depth for this article. "Jim's extracurricular activities are his business," Cuthbert said. "I wish him well with his book, though, because I love a good potboiler. Personally, I think Oswald was the lone assassin, and the Warren Report sure backs me up. Still, I've got to say that Jim Koethe exemplifies the bulldog reporter, so maybe he's on to something."

Koethe, 37, is a colorful local scribe, known for his persistence, assertive behavior and connections within the Dallas Police Department. He is reputed to be a close friend of DPD Officer Maynard D. Moore, who disappeared around the time of the assassination. Asked to comment on Officer Moore's missing status, Koethe said, "Mum's the word. A good reporter doesn’t reveal his sources and a good book writer doesn’t reveal anything.”

I guess we’ll have to wait for the book. In the meantime, though, interested parties will have to make do with the 16-volume Warren Report, which for this reporter stands as the authoritative final word.

(Las Vegas, 9/13/64)

The cat snared a rat. One chomp—adieu.

The cat prowled the hut. The cat paraded. Harvey Brams crossed himself. Donkey Dom laughed.

Milt grabbed the rat. The cat snarled. Milt dropped the rat in the shitter. The cat nuzzled Pete. The cat clawed the switchboard.

Biz was slow. The 6:00 p.m. blues descended.

Champ B. bopped through. Champ B. juked morale. Champ B. dumped some hijacked Pall Malls.

Pete bought them. Call it PR swag—potential Drac donations. *Hospital* swag—yuk-yuk—lung-ward booty.

Biz picked up. Sonny Liston called. Sonny ordered two cabs. Sonny ordered scotch and red devils.

Pete yawned. Pete stroked the cat. Wayne walked in distracted. Dom checked his basket. Dom eyeball-stroked his bulge.

Pete said, "I've been calling you."

Wayne shrugged. Wayne passed Pete a note. A news clip—two columns. A call came in. Milt plugged it. Pete steered Wayne outside.

Wayne looked frazzled. Pete sized him up. Pete stuck the clip in his pocket.

"Sol Durslag. Ring a bell?"

"Sure. He's a card cheat. He's the treasurer for the Liquor Board, and he used to work for my father."

"Did they fall out?"

"Everybody falls out with—"

"Your father owns the Land o' Gold, right? He's got covert points."

“Right. The Gold and thirteen more.”

Pete lit a cigarette. “Milt’s been digging up shit. He heard that Durslag’s been running card counters out of the Gold. I might need his help down the line.”

Wayne smiled. “My father used to run him.”

“That’s what Milt said.”

“So you …”

“I want you to muscle him. Think about it. You’re Wayne Senior’s son, and you’ve got your own reputation.”

Wayne said, “Is this a test?”

Pete said, “Yes.”

Durslag lived on Torrey. Durslag lived middle-class. Durslag lived in the Sherlock Homes tract.

Said tract was a style clash. Mock Tudors and palm trees. Mock gables and sand lots. Mixed-message *mishegoss*.

It was dark. The house was dark. Clouds draped the moon.

Pete knocked. Pete got no answer. The garage door was up. They lounged inside.

Pete smoked. Pete got a headache. Pete popped aspirin. Wayne yawned. Wayne shadowboxed. Wayne fucked with a gooseneck lamp.

Milt dished on Sol. Milt said Sol was divorced. Good news—no women.

The wait dragged. 1:00 a.m. went south. They loitered. They stretched kinks out. They pissed the walls green.

There—

Headlights/the driveway/incoming beams.

Pete crouched. Wayne crouched. A Caddy pulled in. The beams dimmed. Sol got out. Sol sniffed—

What’s that smoke sm—

He ran. Pete tripped him. Wayne threw him up on the hood. Pete grabbed the lamp. Pete whipped the neck down. Pete flashed light on Wayne.

“That’s Mr. Tedrow. You used to work for his father.”

Sol said, “Fuck you.”

Pete flashed him. Sol blinked. Sol rolled off the hood. Wayne grabbed him. Wayne pinned him. Wayne pulled his sap out.

Pete flashed him. Wayne sapped him—tight shots—the ankles/

the arms. Sol shut his eyes. Sol bit his lips. Sol squeezed up fists.

Wayne said, "Pull your crew out of the Land o' Gold."

Sol said, "Fuck you."

Wayne sapped him—tight shots—the ankles/the chest.

Sol said, "Fuck you."

Pete said, "Say yes twice. That's all we want."

Sol said, "Fuck you."

Wayne sapped him—tight shots—the ankles/the arms.

Sol said, "Fuck you."

Wayne sapped him. Pete flashed him. The bulb was bright. The bulb was hot. The bulb burned his face.

Wayne raised his sap. Wayne swung it. Pete stopped him short.

"One yes to me, one to Mr. Tedrow. Pull your crew. Do my people some liquor-board favors."

Sol said, "Fuck you."

Pete cued Wayne. Wayne sapped him—tight shots—the arms/the ribs. Sol balled up. Sol rolled. Sol clipped the hood ornament. Sol snapped a wiper blade.

Sol coughed. Sol choked. Sol said, "Fuck you, yes, okay."

Pete pulled the lamp up. The light bounced and fizzed.

"That's two 'yes's,' right?"

Sol opened his eyes. Sol had singed brows. Sol had scorched lids.

"Yeah, two. You think I want this as a steady diet?"

Pete pulled his flask—Old Crow bond—instant headache relief.

Sol grabbed it. Sol drained it. Sol coughed and flushed—Man-o-Manischewitz, that's good!

He winced. He rolled off the hood. He stood straight up. He grabbed the lamp. He bent the neck. He flashed light on Wayne.

"Your father told me some things about you, sonny boy."

Wayne said, "I'm listening."

"I could tell you some things about that sick hump."

Wayne bent the lamp down. The light bounced and fizzed.

"You can tell me. I won't hurt you."

Sol coughed. Sol hacked phlegm—thick and blood-infused.

"He said you had it bad for his wife. Like a little pervert puppy."

Wayne said, "And?"

"And you never had the gumption to act."

Pete watched Wayne. Pete watched his hands. Pete got in close.

Wayne said, “And?”

“And Daddy shouldn’t preach, ’cause he’s a sick hump as far as his wife is concerned.”

Pete watched Wayne. Pete blocked his hands. Pete closed in close.

Wayne said, “And?”

Sol coughed. “*And* Daddy has Mommy screw these guys that he wants to cultivate, *and* Mommy had this unauthorized thing with a colored musician named Wardell Gray, *and* Daddy beat him to death with his cane.”

Wayne swayed. Sol laughed. Sol flipped his tie in his face.

“Fuck you. You’re a punk. You’re a hump like your daddy.”

(Las Vegas, 9/14/64)

The Golden Gorge—11:00 p.m.

Twelve rooms. Sleepy braceros. Room #5—empty. Room #4—trysted up.

They showed at 9:00. They brought two cars. Kinman brought liquor. Janice brought the key.

Wayne watched. Wayne walked the parking lot. Wayne brought tools. Wayne brought lockpicks and a penlight.

Pervert pup. Hump like your—

The lot was dead. No loungers/no muchachos/no drunks flaked in cars. Room #5—no windows. Room #4—dark.

Wayne braced door 5. Wayne got his tools out. Wayne flashed the locks.

Eleven brown doors. One *green* door as standout. One pervert-pup joke.

Wayne worked the picks. Wayne rotated clockwise and counter. Wayne tapped both locks.

His hands jumped. He dripped sweat. He gored his thumbs. Clockwise/reverse it/go count—

The top lock snapped.

He popped one tumbler. He wiped his hands. He popped one mo—

The bottom lock snapped.

Wayne wiped his hands. Wayne leaned on the door. Wayne rode the door and stepped in.

He shut the door. He flashed the room. It was small. It smelled familiar.

Old smells—*embedded.* Wayne Senior's booze. Wayne Senior's tobacco.

Wayne flashed the floor. Wayne flashed the walls. Wayne got the gestalt.

A chair. A sideboard. One ashtray/one bottle/one glass. One mirror-peek. Room #4 access. A wall speaker/soundproof wall pads/a sound switch.

Wayne sat down. Wayne made the chair—surplus from Peru, Indiana. The peek was dark. Room #4 was dark. Wayne poured a drink.

He downed it. It singed. He rode the burn out. The peek was 3-by-3. The standard cop size—the stock mirror-mount.

Wayne hit the switch. Wayne heard Kinman moan. Wayne heard Janice moan counterpoint.

Janice moaned arch. Janice moaned smut-actress style—Stag Loop 101.

Wayne poured a drink. Wayne downed it. Wayne rode the burn out. Kinman came—ooo-ooo-ooo. Janice came concurrent. Janice came mezzo-falsetto—smut meets the Met.

Wayne heard soft talk. Wayne heard giggles. Wayne heard speaker warp. A light went on. Room #4 flared.

Janice got out of bed. Janice stood up nude. Janice walked to her side of the mirror. She lingered. She posed. She grabbed her cigarettes off a dresser.

Wayne leaned in tight. Janice blurred. Wayne leaned way back to reframe. Kinman said something. Kinman murmured sweet talk. Kinman was oblivious. Kinman knew fuck-all.

Janice rubbed her appendix scar. Janice tossed her hair.

Her breasts swayed. Her hair tousled. She raised steam. She dripped sweat. She smiled. She licked a finger. She wrote “Junior” on the mirror.

(Dallas, 9/21/64)

Jim Koethe was queer.

He bolstered his crotch. He prowled fag bars. He brought boys home. Home was Oak Cliff—bumfuck Big D. Home was the Oak View Apartments.

Three floors. Outside walkways. All courtyard and streetside views.

Pete hogged a bus bench. Pete watched the pad. Pete carried a treat bag. 1:16 a.m.—fruit alert.

Koethe had a date. Koethe poked his dates for two hours. Pete knew Koethe. Pete knew Koethe's routine.

Wayne read the Dallas papers. Wayne passed a clip on. It pertained to Koethe's "book." It pertained to Koethe's pal Maynard Moore. Pete flew to Dallas. Pete tailed Koethe. Pete played scribe. Pete called Koethe's editor.

The guy ragged Koethe. Koethe was a jack-off. Koethe was Mr. Pipe Dream. Sure—they went to Ruby's crib. Sure—they talked to his roommate. But—the talk was all bullshit. The talk was all jive.

Conspiracy—shit. Read the Warren Report.

The guy was convincing*—but—Jim Koethe knew Maynard Moore.*

A bus pulled up—some late-night express. Pete waved it on.

He killed four days. He tailed Koethe. He grooved Koethe's routine. Koethe loved the Holiday. Koethe loved Vic's Parisian. Koethe loved Gene's Music Room. Koethe sipped sidecars. Koethe prowled the johns. Koethe buzz-bombed young flesh.

Oak Cliff was the shits. Oak Cliff was a ghost zone. Betty Mac/ Ruby's pad/the Oswald-Tippit tiff.

Koethe's date walked out. Koethe's date walked bowlegged. He swished by the bench. He checked Pete out. He went uugh and swished away.

Pete put his gloves on. Pete grabbed his treat bag. Koethe lived in 306—one light extant.

Pete took the side stairs. Pete walked up slow. Pete checked the walkways. No outdoor noise/no indoor noise/no visible wits.

He walked over. He braced the door. He tapped the knob. He popped the lock-catch. He opened the door. He walked in. He saw a dark room. He caught sounds and shadows.

Shower noise—down a side hall—off a doorway. Steam and light at that spot.

Pete stood still. Pete strained his eyes. Pete got indoor sight. He saw a living room–office. He saw file drawers. He saw a kitchenette.

Down the hall: A bathroom and bedroom.

Pete dropped his treat bag. Pete crouched. Pete walked down the hall. The shower stopped. Steam whooshed out. Jim Koethe walked through it.

He wore a towel. He turned right. He walked into Pete.

They bumped. Koethe went EEK! Koethe went butch. Koethe snapped to some martial-arts pose.

His towel fell. His equipment dangled. He wore a dick extender. He wore cock rings.

Pete laughed. Pete came in low.

Koethe kicked. Koethe missed. Koethe stumbled and tripped. Pete kicked him. Pete nailed his nards good.

Koethe jackknifed. Koethe re-posed. Koethe tried some karate shit. He flailed. He threw fists. He positioned.

Pete judo-chopped him. Pete nail-raked his face.

Koethe screamed. Pete grabbed his neck. Pete held it and snapped it. Pete felt his hyoid bone shear.

Koethe gurgled. Koethe spasmed. Koethe choked on bile. Pete picked him up. Pete re-snapped his neck. Pete threw him in the shower.

He stood there. He caught his breath. He got a Godzilla-rate headache. He popped the medicine chest. He found some Bayer's. He popped half a tin.

He prowled the pad. He dumped his treat bag. He dropped treats on rugs and chairs: Dildoes/reefers/bun-boy boox/Judy

Garland LPs.

His headache dimmed—Godzilla to King Kong. He found some gin. He dosed it more—King Kong to Rodan.

He searched the pad. He tossed the pad. He faked a B&E. He trashed the bedroom. He trashed the kitchen. He searched the file sleeves. He found clips. He found notes. He found a folder marked "Book."

Sixteen pages/typed text. Conspiracy—shit.

Pete skimmed the file. The story wandered. The gist cohered.

Wendell Durfee was a "dumb pimp." He was "too dumb to kill Maynard Moore." Moore had a temp job. Moore had a partner: Wayne Tedrow Junior/LVPD.

Koethe knew Sergeant A. V. Brown. Sergeant Brown said:

"There was bad blood between Moore & Junior. They got in a ruckus at the Adolphus Hotel. Moore allegedly failed to show up for a meeting with Junior. I think Junior killed him, but I've got no proof."

Koethe knew a Fed man. Koethe quoted said Fed:

"Tedrow Senior ran snitch-Klan informants. Maynard Moore reported to him, so I think it's a hell of a coincidence that Moore and Tedrow Junior got assigned together that weekend."

Koethe riffed:

Moore knew J. D. Tippit. They were "Klanned-up." Moore knew Jack Ruby. Moore dug on the Carousel Club.

Koethe riffed *off* Ruby. Koethe quoted a "Secret Source":

"Jack brought some people by this safe house where the hit team was holed up. It might've been North Texas or Oklahoma, and it might've been some kind of motel or a hunting lodge. I think it was Jack and two women and maybe Hank Killiam. I think they saw some things they shouldn't."

Koethe riffed. Koethe listed Jack Ruby KAs. Starred names: Jack Zangetty/Betty McDonald/Hank Killiam. Koethe listed footnotes—newspaper-sourced:

Jack Zangetty disappears—Xmas '63. Jack washes out of Lake Lugert. Betty McDonald/suicide—2/13/64. Hank Killiam/suicide—3/17/64.

Jim Koethe—verbatim: "Who was the other woman at the safe house?"

Koethe riffs. Koethe thinks the "hit team" disbanded. "They had to leave Dallas. They might have crossed the Mexican border."

Koethe secures a “Border-Patrol Source.” Said source secures a passport-stop list.

The dates: 11/23–12/2/63.

Koethe works the list. Koethe taps “Secret Sources.” Koethe runs 89 names. Koethe nails “a major suspect.”

Jean Philippe Mesplède/white male/age 41. Born: Lyon, France. Ex–French Army/ex–OAS trigger.

Mesplède has “right-wing ties.” Mesplède has “ties to Cuban exile groups.” Mesplède’s current address: 1214 Ciudad Juarez/ Mexico City.

The pro shooter *was* French. Chuck Rogers said so. Chuck said he walked over the border.

Pete skimmed pages. The text decohered. Koethe’s logic went south.

Let’s link Oswald and Ruby. Let’s link Oswald and Moore. Let’s link Lady Bird Johnson. Let’s link Karyn Kupcinet.

Pete skimmed pages. Shit decohered. Let’s link Dorothy Kilgallen. Let’s link Lenny Bruce. Let’s link Mort Sahl.

Pete skimmed pages. Shit recohered—FUCK—

There’s a mug shot. It’s file exhibit A. It’s Kansas City PD sourced—3/8/56.

It’s Arden-Jane. Arden Elaine *Bruvick* then. Felony bounce —“Receipt of Stolen Goods.”

One mug shot. Attached notes. “Confidential” tips:

Jack Ruby’s bookkeeper splits Dallas. Her name is Arden *Smith*. She went to the safe house. She saw things she shouldn’t. She split Big D. for good.

Koethe worked the name “Arden.” Koethe logged tips and tapped sources. This guy knew that guy. That guy knew this. A guy glommed a mug shot. Some guys glommed some tales.

Such as:

Arden went through men. Arden had a husband. Said hubby was a Teamster. Said hubby ran the K.C. local.

Said hubby had accounting skills. Said hubby went to school in Mississippi. Said hubby was anti-Hoffa. Said hubby stole some Teamster funds.

Arden was bent. Arden trucked with whores. Arden was tight with two sisters: Pat and Pam Clunes.

The Arden notes stopped. The “Book” notes stopped. The file dead-ended. Pete felt dizzy. Pete took his pulse—1-fucking-63.

He bagged the file. He checked the drawers. He checked bookshelves and cabinets. No duplicates/no stash of loose clips.

He retossed the crib. He grid-searched it. He re-retossed it. He detossed it quick.

He trashed. He tidied. He worked fast. He worked fastidious.

He tossed the medicine chest. He restacked the shelves. He debuilt and rebuilt the toilet. He tapped the walls. He pulled up rugs. He laid them back straight. He slit-checked the chairs. He slit-checked the sofa. He slit-checked the bed.

No slits. No stash holes. No duplicates extant. No stash of loose clips.

He popped some Bayer's. He chased them with gin. He dredged up some guts. Queers overkilled queers. It was standard cop wisdom. All cops knew it.

He got a knife. He stabbed Jim Koethe ninety-four times.

* * *

South—80 miles per hour plus.

He took I-35. He cut through shit suburbs. He smelled like blood and gin. He smelled like Jim Koethe's shampoo.

He passed rest stops. He passed campgrounds. He saw kids' swings and bar-b-que pits. A car laid back—ten car lengths—it spooked him.

He ran tail riffs. He ran no-tail riffs. 4:00 a.m.—one highway/two cars.

His headache rehit. It built and mushroomed. King Kong greets Rodan.

He saw a camp sign. He pulled down a ramp. He saw a grill pit and tables. He nosed up. He killed his lights. He worked in the dark.

He dumped Koethe's file. He filled the pit. He siphoned gas and doused it. He lit a match and got a big whooooosh.

The flames built. The flames leveled off. The heat torqued his headache. It was monster. It was Godzilla-plus. It was the Creature from the Black Lagoon.

Pete ran to his car. Pete swerved up the ramp. Pete hit the highway. Let's ditch Big D. Let's sedate forever. Let's eat secobarbital. Let's geez hair-o-wine.

That car laid back. It's a spaceship. The driver's King Kong. He's got X-ray eyes. He knows you killed Koethe and Betty.

Pete got dizzy. The windshield vaporized. It's a porthole/it's a sieve. The road dropped. It's an inkwell. It's the Black Lagoon.

The Creature bit his head. Pete puked on the wheel.

There's a ramp. It's dropping. There's a sign:

HUBBARD, TEX, POP 4001.

Japs. Slice cords. Betty Mac. Slant eyes/crossbars/capris.

It came. It went. Roads dropped. Roads resurfaced. Ink blots and lagoons.

He came. *He* went. He felt Frankensteined. Sutures and staples. Green walls and white sheets.

Behold the Body Snatchers. Behold Doc Frankenstein:

You're lucky. A man found you. It's been five days now. God must love you—you cracked up near St. Ann's.

Doc had acne scars. Doc had halitosis. Doc had a drawl.

It's been six days. We cut a fat pad from your head—it was benign. I bet you had some darn bad headaches.

Don't worry now—that man in the car called your wife.

They brought him back.

Frankenstein came. Frankenstein went. Nuns fluttered and fussed. Don't hurt me—I'm Protestant French.

Frank destapled him. Nuns shaved him. He dehazed. He saw razors and hands. He rehazed. He saw Japs and Betty.

Hands fed him soup. Hands touched his dick. Hands jabbed tubes in. The haze sputtered. Words filtered through. Decrease his dose—don't addict him.

He dehazed. He saw faces:

Student nuns—the brides of Frankenstein. A slight man—Ivy League threads—John Stanton-like. Memory Lane: Miami/white horse/Outfit-Agency ops.

He squinted. He tried to talk. Nuns went ssshhh.

He rehazed. He dehazed. He dehazed for real. Stanton was real—dig his tan—dig his drip-dry suit.

Pete tried to talk. His throat clogged. He hocked phlegm. His dick burned. He pulled his catheter out.

Stanton smiled. Stanton pulled his chair up.

"Sleeping Beauty awakes." Pete sat up.

Pete stretched his IV taut.

"You were tailing me. You saw me go off the road."

Stanton nodded. "And I called Barb and told her you were safe, but you couldn't have visitors yet."

Pete rubbed his face. "What are you doing here?"

Stanton winked. Stanton popped his briefcase. Stanton pulled out Pete's gun.

"You rest. The doctor said we'll be able to talk tomorrow."

They grabbed a bench. They lugged it outside. Stanton wore a drip-dry. Pete wore a robe.

He felt okay. Headaches—adieu.

He called Barb yesterday. They caught eight days up. Barb was okay. Stanton prepared her. Barb held in tough.

He read the *Times-Herald*. He got the gist. The Koethe snuff came and went. DPD worked it. DPD hassled queers. DPD cut them loose. The case vibed open file. It's a queer job—fuck it.

The *Morning News* ran a piece. They ragged Koethe. They ragged his "wild talk." Koethe was a perennial crank. Koethe was a "conspiracy nut."

He burned Koethe's notes. The Arden dirt went up. He debated. He decided—don't tell Ward Littell.

It was *sketchy* dirt—fill it out first.

A nun walked by—a sweet number—Stanton studied her.

"Jackie Kennedy wore hats like that."

"She wore one to Dallas."

Stanton smiled. "You're a fast study."

"I took Latin in school. I know what 'quid pro quo' means."

The nun smiled. The nun waved and giggled. Stanton was cute. Stanton lived on salads and martinis.

"Did you hear about that reporter who got killed? I heard he was writing a book."

Pete stretched. A head stitch popped loose.

"Let's start over. You were tailing me. You saved my life. I said thank you."

Stanton stretched. His shoulder rig showed.

“We know that some Agency men were *at least* peripheral to the Kennedy thing. We’re pleased with the result, we have no desire to dispute the Warren Report, but for deniability’s sake, we’d like a rough sketch.”

Pete stretched. A stitch popped. Pete rubbed his head. Pete said, “Cuba.”

Stanton smiled. “That’s not much.”

“It says it all. You know who he fucked with, you know who had the money and the means. You saved my life, so I’ll be generous. You’ve met and worked with half the personnel.”

The bench was damp. The slats sustained doodles. Stanton drew stars. Stanton wrote “CUBA.”

Pete rubbed his head. A stitch unraveled.

“Okay, I’ll play.”

Stanton drew stars. Stanton put “!” after CUBA.

“Jack broke our hearts. Now Johnson’s compounding the hurt.”

Pete drew “?” Stanton crossed it out.

“Johnson’s quits on the Cause. He thinks it’s a loser and he knows it got Jack killed. He’s fucked the Agency out of our Cuban ops budget, and some colleagues of mine think it’s time to circumvent his policy.”

Pete drew “!” Pete drew “$.” Stanton crossed his legs. His ankle rig showed.

“I want to bring you to Vietnam. I want you to move Laotian heroin back to the States. I’ve got a team set up in Saigon. It’s all Agency and South Vietnamese Army. You can recruit your own team on both ends. Dope has financed a dozen Vietnamese coups, so let’s make it work for the Cause.”

Pete shut his eyes. Pete ran newsreels. The French lose Algiers. The French lose Dien Bien Phu.

Et le Cuba sera notre grande revanche.

Stanton said, “You funnel the dope to Las Vegas. I’ve consulted Carlos on that aspect. He thinks he can get the Outfit to rescind their no-dope rule, if you push exclusively to Negroes. We want you to set up a system, buy off the key cops and limit your street exposure to the last two links on the distribution chain. If the Vegas operation flies, we’ll expand to other cities. And 65% of the profits will go to worthy exile groups.”

Pete stood up. Pete swayed. Pete threw hooks and jabs and popped stitches.

A nun walked by. She saw Pete. She got spooked. She crossed herself.

C’est un fou.

C’est un diable.

C’est un monstre Protestant.

(Las Vegas, 9/30/64)

Break time—4:00 p.m. sharp.

He put his work down. He made coffee. He sat outside his suite. He played the news. He watched the course. Janice played most days.

She'd see him. She'd wave. She'd yell epigrams. She'd say, "You don't like my husband." She'd say, "You work too hard."

Janice played scratch golf. Janice moved lithe. She'd hit shots. Her skirts would hike. Her calves would bunch and stretch.

Littell watched 6. Littell played the news. LBJ barnstormed Virginia. Bobby barnstormed New York.

Janice played 6. Janice outdrove her friends. She saw him. She waved. She yelled.

She said, "My husband fears you." She said, "You need some rest."

Littell laughed. Littell waved. Janice aced a shot.

Jane feared Vegas. The Boys ran the town. Janice *was* Vegas direct. He enjoyed his glimpses. He took them to bed. He put Janice's body on Jane.

The news went off. Janice parred 6 and waved. Littell walked inside. Littell wrote appeal briefs.

Jimmy Hoffa was through. The Boys knew it. Carlos soldiered for Jimmy. Carlos dunned donations. Carlos built a Help Jimmy Fund. It was futile. It was hopeless. Their bribe roll had crapped out.

Littell put his brief down. Littell grabbed his bankbooks. Littell ran figures and totaled his tithes.

Glad tidings:

The bagmen aced Wayne Senior. The bagmen stole his skim fees. The bagmen were duplicitous. The bagmen were good. The bagmen were Mormon-rowdy.

He directed them. He ran the skim. He wrote fictive reports. He lied to Drac. He embezzled Drac. He sucked Drac's blood.

The bagmen bagged. The bagmen moved six hundred grand—two weeks' worth of skim. He took his 5%. He fed his Chicago account. He opened accounts in Silver Spring and D.C. He used fake ID. He laundered the cash. He tithed the SCLC.

He wrote tithe checks. Five grand per. He wrote them under pseudonyms. He print-wiped the envelopes.

Drac and the Boys meet Dr. King—We Shall Overcome.

His desk phone rang. He grabbed it.

"Yes?"

Static hiss—long distance. A garbled Pete: "Ward, it's me."

The hiss built. The line buzzed. The hiss leveled flat.

"Where are you?"

"I'm in Mexico City. I'm losing the fucking connection, and I need a favor."

"Name it."

"I need Wayne to cut the apron strings and come to work for me."

Littell said, "With pleasure."

(Las Vegas, 9/30/64)

Janice fucked Clark Kinman. Wayne watched.

She left the lights on. She knew he was there. She rode Kinman. She showed her backside.

Wayne braced the mirror. Wayne sipped Wayne Senior's scotch. It was her sixth show. It was his sixth hide-and-see.

He surveilled the motel. Janice fucked every night. Wayne Senior caught her most times. The gigs were synced. Ditto the arrivals.

Kinman shows at 9:00. Janice shows at 9:10. Wayne Senior shows at 9:40. Kinman comes to fuck. Janice comes to act. Kinman co-stars unasked.

She fucked in the dark for Wayne Senior. She fucked in the light for Wayne.

He thought it out.

She saw him at Nellis. She *knew* him. She *knew* he'd break in. He'd log Wayne Senior's routine. He'd seize on his off nights and LOOK.

Janice bent back. Her hair flew. Wayne saw her face topsy-turvy. The speaker popped. Kinman moaned. Kinman said dumb sex things.

Janice bent up. Janice raised her hips. Wayne saw Kinman inside her.

Sol Durslag checked out. The Vegas *Sun* ran the story. May '55—Wardell Gray/tenor sax. Beaten dead/body dumped/sand dune/DOA. No suspects—case closed.

Janice bent back. Her hair dropped. Wayne saw her eyes upside down.

Kinman moaned per I'm-coming. Kinman said dumb sex things. Janice grabbed a pillow. Janice muzzled him.

His toes curled. His knees contracted. His feet clenched. Janice rolled clear and free.

Kinman dumped the pillow. Kinman smiled and scratched his balls. Kinman tapped his Saint Chris on a chain.

They talked. Their lips moved. The speaker fuzzed sighs.

Kinman kissed his Saint Chris. "I always wear this for protection. Sometimes I think you're likely to kill me."

Janice sat up. Janice faced the mirror-wall.

Kinman said, "Wayne Senior should take better care of you. Shit, I think we've gone sixteen days straight."

Janice winked. Janice said, "You're the best."

"Tell true. Is he good?"

"No, but he's got qualities."

"You mean money."

"Not exactly."

"He's got to have something, or you'd've found yourself a steady before me."

Janice winked. "I've sent out invitations, but nobody knocked on my door."

"Some boys don't know how to read signs."

"Some boys need to look first."

"Shit, if your hubby could see you now."

Janice raised her voice. Janice talked overt slow.

"I had a thing with a musician once. Wayne Senior found out."

"What did he do?"

"He killed him."

"Are you ribbing me?"

"Absolutely not."

Kinman kissed his Saint Chris. "You'll be the ruin of me. Shit, and I thought Junior was the only killer in the family."

Janice got up. Janice walked to the mirror.

She primped. She fogged the glass. She licked a finger. She drew arrows and hearts.

A dust storm kicked through. Hot winds kicked sand and sagebrush.

Wayne drove to the ranch. Wayne walked to the guest house.

Wayne saw a stray car en route.

There's Ward Littell.

He ducked the wind. He blocked Wayne's door. He looked sandblown and storm-fucked.

He said, "Your father sent you to Dallas."

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/1/64. Covert Intelligence Dossier. From: John Stanton. To: Pete Bondurant. Marked: “Hand-Courier Only/ Destroy Upon Reading.”

P.B.,

I’m hoping this gets to you in time. It’s really no more than a highlighted summary & I’ve edited out the extraneous details. I’m routing it through the Mexico City Station to meet that deadline you requested. Note: Data culled from Interpol files in Paris & Marseilles. Agency copy file #M-64889/Langley.

Per: MESPLEDE, JEAN PHILIPPE, W.M., 8/19/22. LKA: 1214 Ciudad Juarez, Mexico City.

1941–’45: Conflicting accts. MESPLEDE (an alleged anti-Semite) was either a Nazi collaborator or a member of the Armed French Resistance in Lyon. Conflicting accts: MESPLEDE turned over Jews to the SS/MESPLEDE assassinated Nazis at a health retreat in the Arbois. Note: One Interpol wag concluded that he did a little of both.

1946–’47: Whereabouts unknown.

1948–’50: Mercenary work in Paraguay. The Asuncion Ops Station has a 41-page file. MESPLEDE infiltrated leftist student groups at the behest of the Paraguayan Association of Police Chiefs. MESPLEDE (Spanish fluent) assassinated 63 suspected Communist sympathizers per association guidelines.

1951–’55: French Army service (Indochina—now Vietnam—& Algeria). MESPLEDE served as a paratrooper, saw action at Dien Bien Phu & allegedly became bitter over the French defeat & withdrawal. Reports (unconfirmed) have him moving opium base & hashish to his next duty station in Algiers. In Algiers, MESPLEDE transferred to an occupation unit & taught torture techniques to members of a mercenary police unit employed by wealthy French colonialists. MESPLEDE (a committed anti-Communist) allegedly executed 44 Algerian nationalists suspected of Communist ties & gained a reputation as a superb wet arts specialist.

1956–’59: Whereabouts largely unknown. MESPLEDE is believed to have traveled extensively in the U.S. during this time. The Atlanta (Ga) PD has a 10/58 file note on him. MESPLEDE was suspected of taking part in the bombing of a synagogue targeted by neo-Nazis. The New Orleans PD has a 2/9/59 file note. MESPLEDE was suspected of 16 armed robberies in N.O., Metairie, Baton Rouge & Shreveport. Note: unconfirmed rpts. state that MESPLEDE traveled in Organized Crime circles during this interval.

1960–'61: Mercenary work in the Belgian Congo. MESPLEDE (a known associate of our KA LAURENT GUERY) served as an enforcer for Belgian landowners & worked with an Agency liaison in the anti-Lumumba incursion. MESPLEDE & GUERY engineered the capture & execution of 491 leftist rebels in Katanga Province. The landowners gave MESPLEDE carte blanche & told him to implement a deterrent measure to scare would-be rebels. MESPLEDE and GUERY herded the rebels into a gully & killed them with flamethrowers.

1962–'63: At large in France. MESPLEDE (who lost land holdings when DeGaulle granted Algerian independence) allegedly joined the French OAS & took part in the 3/62 & 8/63 assassination attempts on DeGaulle. MESPLEDE resurrected in Mexico City (9/63) & has allegedly been in touch with our KAs GUERY & FLASH ELORDE. MESPLEDE is known to be committed to the anti-Castro cause & as previously stated, is determinedly anti-Communist, Spanish fluent & has both probable narcotics experience & military experience in the Southeast Asian Theatre. All in all, I think we can use him.

I'm heading back to Saigon. Pouch all future communications through my P.O. box at Arlington. We'll use drops & cutout couriers from here on in. Remember: We're Stage 1 Covert, like our Tiger ops in Miami. You know the old drill: Read, memorize & burn.

Thumbs up on MESPLEDE, if you think he fits in. You can recruit the rest of the team on your own autonomy. Per MESPLEDE: Watch out. His curriculum vitae is a bit scary.

For the Cause,

J.S.

(Mexico City, 10/2/64)

A Mex brought coffee. Said Mex kissed ass. Big teeth/big bows/big compliance.

Pete lounged. Pete noshed rolls. Pete taped his piece under the table. The trigger sat flush. The silencer worked. The barrel faced the opposite seat.

Pete sipped coffee. Pete rubbed his head. Mexico City—*nyet.*

It’s a skunk zone. It’s rife with dog turds. Give me pre-Castro Havana.

He looked for Flash and Laurent. He tapped out. He dropped a note. Mesplède dropped a note back:

Let’s talk—I’ve heard about you.

He killed time. He called Barb every day. He called the K.C. Local. He dropped names. He asked questions—per Arden Elaine Bruvick.

The gist: She was Frau Danny Bruvick. Danny ran Local 602—’53-’56. Danny stole Teamster money. Danny split. Jimmy H. decreed a hit. Danny vanished. Arden stayed in K.C.

Jimmy pulled strings. The KCPD popped Arden. Arden bailed out fast. Arden split K.C.

Pete knew a KCPD guy. Pete called him. He ran Arden’s bail stats. He called Pete back.

Arden bailed out—3/10/56. The T&C Corp bailed her. Carlos M. owned T&C. T&C was his tax front.

A frayed cord. A teaser. Carlos says, “Clip Arden.” His front corp bails her.

Get more. Learn more. Don’t warn Littell *yet.* The cord felt thin. The cord could fray. The cord could strip.

A man walked in. He was fat. He wore glasses. His hands were smudged black. Odds on: French Para tattoos.

Para pit dogs—*très* French—fangs and parachutes.

Pete stood up. The man saw him. The man grabbed a front table.

Pete ad-libbed:

He crouched. He untaped his gun. He reholstered and walked over. He bowed to the man. They shook hands. The pit dogs had red eyes.

They sat down. Mesplède said, "You know Chuck Rogers."

"Chuck's a piece of work."

"He lives with his parents. A man more than forty years old."

He sounded *sud-Midi*. He looked *marseillais*. He dressed *très fasciste*—all-black ensemble.

Pete said, "He's a committed man."

"Yes. You can forgive his more outlandish beliefs."

"He's got a sense of humor about them."

"The Ku Klux Klan disgusts me. I enjoy Negro jazz."

"I like Cuban music."

"I like Cuban food and Cuban women."

"Fidel Castro should die."

"Yes. He is a *cochon* and a *pédé*."

"I saw Pigs. I ran troops out of the Blessington campsite." Mesplède nodded. "Chuck told me. You shot *communistes* out an airplane window."

Pete laughed. Pete mimed gunshots. Mesplède lit a Gauloise. Mesplède offered one.

Pete lit up. Pete coughed—it was rolled muskrat shit.

"What else did Chuck tell you?"

"That you were a committed man."

"That's all?"

"He also said that you, *qu'est-ce que c'est*?, 'snipped links.' "

Pete smiled. Pete showed his pix. There's Jack Z. trussed up. There's Hank the K. dumped.

Mesplède tapped them. "Unfortunate men. They saw things they should not."

Pete coughed. Pete blew smoke rings.

Mesplède coughed. "Chuck said the blond woman killed herself in jail."

"That's right."

"You did not take her picture?"

"No."

"Then Arden is the only one left."

Pete shook his head. "She's unfindable."

"No one is that."

"She has to be."

Mesplède chained cigarettes. "I saw her once before, in New Orleans. She was with one of Carlos Marcello's men."

"She's unfindable. Leave it at that."

Mesplède shrugged. Mesplède dropped his hands. There's the click. There's the slide. There's the hammer back.

Pete smiled. Pete bowed. Pete showed his gun. Mesplède smiled. Mesplède bowed. Mesplède showed *his* gun.

Pete grabbed a napkin. Pete draped the table. Pete covered the guns.

Mesplède said, "Your note mentioned work."

Pete cracked his knuckles. "Heroin. We move it from Laos to Saigon and funnel it to the States. It's Agency-adjunct and completely unsanctioned. All the profits go to the Cause."

"Our colleagues?"

"We work under a man named John Stanton. I've run dope and exiles for him. We bring in Laurent Guéry, Flash Elorde, and an ex-cop to do the chemical work."

A whore walked by. Said whore looked down. Mesplède flashed his tattoos. He flexed his hands. The dogs snapped. The dogs grew big *chorizos*.

The whore crossed herself. The whore buzzed off—*gringos malo y feo!*

Mesplède said, "I am interested. I am devoted to the cause of a free Cuba."

"*Mort à Fidel Castro. Vive l'entente franco-américaine.*"

Mesplède grabbed a fork. Mesplède cleaned his nails.

"Chuck described you as 'soft on women.' I will concede the unfind-ability of Arden if you further prove your loyalty to the Cause."

"How?"

"Hank Hudspeth has defrauded the Cause. He has sold faulty weaponry to exile groups and has diverted the good merchandise to the Klan."

Pete said, "I'll take care of it."

Mesplède flexed his hands. The dogs went priapic.

"I would appreciate a memento."

The setup worked—let's talk guns—my money/your stuff.

Pete called from Houston. Hank was eager. He said catch you a plane. I got a bunker near Polk.

Pete flew to De Ridder. Pete rented a car. Pete hit a Safeway. Pete bought a cooler. Pete bought dry ice.

He hit the local PO. He bought a box. He air-mail-stamped it. He wrote Jean Mesplède's address on top.

He hit a gun shop. He bought a Buck knife. He hit a camera store. He bought a Polaroid. He bought some film.

He drove north. He took back roads. He cut through the Kisatchee Forest. It was hot—80 at dusk.

Hank met him. Hank was eager—I got the stuff!

The bunker was a mine shaft. Part gun hut/part igloo. Ten steps below ground.

Hank walked ahead. Hank hit the top step. Pete pulled his piece and shot him in the back.

Hank tumbled. Pete shot him again. Pete blew his ribs out.

He turned him over. He prepped his camera. He snapped a close-up. The bunker was hot—paved walls in tight.

Pete pulled his knife. Pete stretched Hank's hair. Pete cut side to side.

He notched the blade. He hit the bone. He sheared over and up. He stepped on Hank's head. He jerked hard. He pulled his scalp up.

He wiped it off. He dry-iced it. He boxed it. His hands shook—first-timer shakes—he'd scalped a hundred Reds.

He wiped his hands. He inscribed the snapshot. He wrote "Viva la Causa!" on the back.

(Las Vegas, 10/4/64)

Janice was in. Wayne Senior was out. Wayne paced his room. Wayne groomed and primped.

He saw Pete at Tiger. They talked an hour back. Pete worked on him. Pete hit him up.

You're a chemist. Let's go to Vietnam. *You'll* cook heroin. *We'll* work covert ops.

He said yes. It felt logical. It felt wholly right.

Wayne shaved. Wayne combed his hair. Wayne dabbed a razor cut. Ward slammed him—four nights back—Ward fucked him way up.

He tracked Ward's logic. He improvised. Wayne Senior ran snitches. Wayne Senior thus ran Maynard Moore. Thus he was in on the hit.

Ward left blank spots. Wayne improvised. Wayne Senior dumped his late snitch files. Wayne Senior ran Maynard Moore *then.*

Wayne brushed his hair. His hand jerked. He dropped the brush. It hit the floor and shattered.

Wayne walked outside. It was windy. It was hot. It was dark.

There—her room/her light.

Wayne walked inside. The hi-fi was on. Cool jazz or some such shit—matched horns discordant.

He turned it off. He tracked the light. He walked over. Janice was changing clothes. Janice saw him—bam—like that.

She dropped her robe. She kicked off her golf cleats. She pulled off her bra and golf shift.

He walked up. He touched her. She pulled his shirt off. She pulled down his pants.

He grabbed her. He tried to kiss her. She slid away. She knelt down. She put his cock in her mouth.

He got hard. He leaked. He got close. He grabbed her hair and pulled her mouth away.

She stepped back. She pulled off his pants. She tripped on his shoes. She sat on the floor. She balled up a skirt. She tucked it under her.

He got down. He ratched his knees. He spread her legs. He kissed her thighs. He kissed her hair and put his tongue in.

She trembled. She made funny sounds. He tasted her. He tasted her outside. He tasted her in.

She trembled. She made scared sounds. She grabbed his hair. She hurt him. She pulled his head up.

He jammed her knees out. He spread her full. She pulled him in. She squeezed a fit. She shut her eyes.

He squeezed her brows. He forced them back open. He put his face down. He keyed on her eyes. He saw green flecks he never saw before.

They moved. They got the fit. They found the sync. They held each other's faces. They locked their eyes in.

He got close. He conjured shit up and held back. Janice buckled. Janice spasmed. Janice clamped her legs.

Wayne sweated. Wayne doused her eyes. She blinked it off. She kept her eyes locked.

A door opened. A door shut. A shadow crossed the light.

Janice buckled. Janice started to cry. Wayne got close. Wayne let go. Wayne shut his eyes.

Janice wiped off her tears. Janice kissed her fingers. Janice put them in his mouth.

They got in bed. They shut their eyes. They left the door open. They left the light on.

House sounds kicked in. Wayne heard Wayne Senior whistle. Wayne smelled Wayne Senior's smoke.

He opened his eyes. His kissed Janice. She trembled. She kept her eyes shut.

Wayne got up. Wayne got dressed. Wayne walked to the bar. Bam—there's Wayne Senior.

Wayne grabbed his stick. Wayne twirled it. Wayne did Daddy's stock tricks.

Wayne said, "You shouldn't have sent me to Dallas."

Part III

SUBVERSION

October 1964–July 1965

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/16/64. Pouch communiqué. To: Pete Bondurant. From: John Stanton. Marked: “Hand Pouch Deliver Only”/“Destroy Upon Reading.”

P.B.,

Here’s the summary you requested. As always, please read and burn.

First off, there’s a consensus among Agency analysts: we’re in Vietnam to stay. You know how far the trouble goes back—with the Japanese, the Chinese and the French. Our interest dates to ’45. It was shaped by our commitment to France and our desire to keep Western Europe out of the Red Bloc, and was spurred by China going Red. Vietnam is a key chunk of real estate. We’ll lose our foothold in Southeast Asia if it goes Red. In fact, we’ll risk losing the entire region.

Much of the current situation derives from the Viet Minh defeat of the French forces at Dien Bien Phu in March, ’54. This led to Geneva accords and the partitioning of what is now “North” and “South” Vietnam, along the 17th parallel. The Communists withdrew from the south and the French from the north. A nationwide election was called for the summer of ’56.

We installed our man Ngo Dinh Diem in the south. Diem was a Catholic who was pro-US, anti-Buddhist, anti-French colonialist and anti-Communist. Agency operatives rigged a referendum that allowed Diem to succeed Premier Bao Dai. (It wasn’t subtle. Our people got Diem more votes than the actual number of voters.)

Diem renounced the ’56 Geneva Accord elections. He said the presence of the Viet Minh insured that the elections could not be “absolutely free.” The election deadline approached. The U.S. backed Diem’s refusal to participate. Diem initiated “security measures” against the Viet Minh in the south. Suspected Viet Minh or Viet Minh sympathizers were tortured and tried by local province officials appointed by Diem. This approach was successful, and Diem managed to smash 90% of the Viet Minh cells in the Mekong Delta.

During this time Diem's publicists coined the pejorative term "Vietnam Cong San" or "Vietnamese Communist."

The election deadline passed. The Soviets and Red Chinese did not press for a political settlement. Early in '57, the Soviets proposed a permanent partition and a U.N. sanctioning of North and South Vietnam as separate states. The U.S. was unwilling to recognize a Communist state and rebuffed the initiative.

Diem built a base in the south. He appointed his brothers and other relatives to positions of power and in fact turned South Vietnam into a narrowly ruled, albeit stridently anti-Communist, oligarchy. Diem's brothers and relatives built up their individual fiefdoms. They were rigidly Catholic and anti-Buddhist. Diem's brother Can was a virtual warlord. His brother Ngo Dinh Nhu ran an anti-Viet Cong intelligence network with CIA funds.

Diem balked at land reforms and allied himself with wealthy landowning families in the Mekong Delta. He created the Khu Tru Mat, i.e., farm communities to buffer peasants from Viet Cong sympathizers and cells. Peasants were uprooted from their native villages and forced to build the communities without pay. Government troops often pilfered their pigs, rice and chicken.

Diem's actions created a demand for reform. Diem closed opposition newspapers, accused journalists, students and intellectuals of Communist ties and arrested them. At this time, the U.S. had a billion dollars invested in South Vietnam. Diem (dubbed "a puppet who pulls his own strings") knew that we needed his regime as a strategic port against the spread of Communism. He spent the bulk of his U.S.-donated money on military and police build-up, to quash Viet Cong raids below the 17th parallel and quash domestic plots against him.

In November '60, a military coup against Diem failed. Diemloyalist troops fought the troops of South Vietnamese Army Colonel Vuong Van Dong. Diem rebuffed the coup, but his actions earned him many enemies among the Saigon and Mekong Delta elite. In the north, this internal dissent emboldened Ho Chi Minh. He embarked on a terror campaign in the south and in December '60 announced the formation of a new insurgent group: the National Liberation Movement. Ho contended that he did not violate the Geneva Accord by sending troops into the south. This was, of course, a lie. Red troops had been steadily infiltrating the south along the “Ho Chi Minh Trail” since ’59.

Shortly after his inauguration, John Kennedy read a Pentagon analysis of the deteriorating Vietnamese situation. The analysis urged that aid to Diem be increased. Kennedy increased the number of in-country “advisors” to 3,000. The advisors were really military personnel, in violation of the Geneva Accord. Kennedy issued a foreign-aid order which served to increase the size of the South Vietnamese Army (the ARVN, or Army of the Republic of South Vietnam) by 20,000 men, to a total of 170,000.

Diem resented the presence of the U.S. “advisors.” Then large Viet Cong units began attacking ARVN posts. At that juncture, Diem told the advisors that he wanted to form a bilateral defense pact between the U.S. and South Vietnam.

Kennedy sent General Maxwell Taylor to Saigon. Taylor reported back and reconfirmed the strategic importance of a stand against the Viet Cong. He called for more advisors, along with helicopters and pilot-support for the ARVN. Taylor requested 8,000 troops. The Joint Chiefs and Secretary of Defense McNamara requested 200,000. Kennedy compromised and sent more financial aid to Diem.

Diem initiated the “Strategic Hamlet” program early in ’62. He detained peasants in armed stockades in an effort to thwart their susceptibility to the Viet Cong. In reality, the program supplied the Viet Cong with converts. In February ’62, Diem survived another coup. Two ARVN pilots attacked the presidential palace with napalm, bombs and machine-gun fire. Diem, his brother Nhu and Madame Nhu survived.

Ngo Dinh Nhu had become an embarrassment. He was an opium addict prone to bouts of paranoia. Madame Nhu had convinced Diem to sponsor edicts abolishing divorce, contraceptives, abortion, boxing matches, beauty contests and opium dens. These edicts spawned great resentment. The U.S. advisors noted a new groundswell of anger against the Diem regime.

Anti-Diem sentiment was building within the ARVN command. Diem's Can Lao (the South Vietnamese Secret Police) stepped up its arrests and torture of suspected Buddhist dissidents. Four Buddhist monks publicly incinerated themselves in protest. Madame Nhu praised the suicides and created more resentment. Kennedy and the new Vietnamese ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, concluded that the Diem regime was becoming an embarrassing liability, and that Ngo Dinh Nhu and Madame Nhu were the heart of the problem. Covertly, Agency operatives were told to sniff out discontent within the ARVN high command and discuss the viability of a coup.

It was determined that numerous plots already existed, in various states of readiness. Diem sensed the existing ARVN discontent and ordered a show of force against Buddhists and Buddhist sympathizers in Saigon and Hue. It was Diem's intention to turn the Buddhists against the ARVN and exploit the situation to his advantage. On 8/21/63, Diem troops attacked Buddhist temples in Saigon, Hue and other cities. Hundreds of monks and nuns were killed, injured and arrested. Riots and protests against the Diem regime followed.

The Agency learned of Diem's machinations in the ensuing weeks. Kennedy and his advisors were furious and still convinced that Ngo Dinh Nhu was the problem. Diem was instructed to get rid of Nhu. Agency operatives were told to contact potential coup leaders should he refuse, and to pledge our post-coup support.

Ambassador Lodge met with Diem. He became convinced that Diem would never drop Nhu. Lodge informed his Agency contacts. They contacted plotters within the ARVN high command. Lodge, Kennedy, McNamara and the Joint Chiefs met. They discussed the cutoff of financial aid to the Diem regime.

The cutoff was announced. The plotters proceeded. Chief among them were General Tran Van Don, General Le Van Kim and General Duong Van Minh, aka "Big Minh." Agency operatives met with General Don and General Minh and promised them continued U.S. financial aid and support. Kennedy determined that his administration would remain convincingly unaccountable and that the coup would publicly present itself as an all-Vietnamese affair.

The coup was planned and postponed throughout the early fall. Kennedy’s advisors included pro-coup and anti-coup factions. The anti-coup faction argued that the autonomous nature of the coup might lead to another “Bay of Pigs fiasco.”

Internal bickering diverted the plotters. The generals argued over which position of power they would assume in post-coup Saigon. The coup was finally scheduled for 11/1/63. It was implemented that afternoon.

Madame Nhu was in the U.S. Premier Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu hid in the basement of the presidential palace. Insurgent units captured the palace, the guard barracks and the police station. Diem and Nhu were apprehended and given “safe passage” in an armored personnel carrier. The carrier stopped at a railroad crossing. Diem and Nhu were shot and stabbed to death.

A 12-man “Military Revolutionary Council” took over and then succumbed to internal squabbles. Concurrent with this, riots swept the south and steady streams of Viet Cong infiltrated from the north. ARVN troops deserted in large numbers. Concurrent with this, Kennedy was assassinated. Lyndon Johnson and his advisors reevaluated the ambiguously defined Vietnamese policy of the Kennedy administration and decided to expand our financial-military commitment.

General Nguyen Khanh toppled the “Military Revolutionary Council” on 1/28/64. (“Bloodless” describes it best. The other generals abdicated and returned to their military fiefdoms.) Concurrently, the Viet Cong stepped up its southern incursion, defeating the ARVN in several encounters and staging a series of terrorist attacks in Saigon, including the bombing of a movie theater, where three Americans were killed. Throughout early ’64, the Viet Cong forces doubled to 170,000 (mostly recruited in the south) with a commensurate improvement in their ordnance: Red Chinese and Soviet-supplied AK-47s, mortars and rocket launchers.

Secretary McNamara visited Vietnam in March and toured the south in a propaganda effort to bolster Premier

Khanh. McNamara returned to Washington. He proposed and secured President Johnson's approval of an "action memorandum." The memorandum called for increased financial aid, to provide the ARVN with more aircraft and other ordnance. Premier Khanh was allowed to stage cross-border raids against Communist strongholds in Laos and to study the feasibility of possible incursions into Cambodia to interdict Viet Cong supply routes. Pentagon specialists started pinpointing North Vietnamese targets for U.S. bombing raids.

Ambassador Lodge resigned to pursue a career in domestic politics. President Johnson appointed General William C. Westmoreland as Commander of the U.S. Military Advisory Group (MACV) in Vietnam. Westmoreland remains committed to a greatly expanded American presence. There is now a formidable U.S. contingent in the south, among them servicemen, accountants, doctors, mechanics and sundry others involved in dispensing the $500,000,000 that Johnson has pledged in fiscal '64 aid. Much of the U.S. donated food, weaponry, medicine, gasoline and fertilizer has ended up on the black market. The U.S. presence in South Vietnam is rapidly becoming the foundation of the South Vietnamese economy.

Johnson has approved a covert plan called "OPLAN 34-A," which calls for larger incursions north of the 17th parallel, an expanded propaganda effort and covert ops to intercept Communist ships delivering material to the Viet Cong in the south. The Gulf of Tonkin incident (8/1–8/3/64, wherein two U.S. destroyers were fired upon by Communist seacraft and returned said fire) was largely a staged and improvised event that Johnson capitalized upon to get congressional sanction for planned bombing raids. The 64 bombing sorties that followed were limited to one day, so as to not give the appearance of overreaction to the Gulf of Tonkin provocation.

As of this (10/16/64) date, there are just under 25,000 "advisors" in Vietnam, and the bulk of them are, in fact, combat troops. These troops are Army Special Forces, Airborne Rangers and support personnel. President Johnson has committed to a covert escalation plan which will allow him to introduce an additional 125,000 troops by next summer. Expected North Vietnamese provocations will help him push this troop commitment through Congress. The plan will allow for a large deployment of marines in the winter and spring of ’65, and a large influx of army infantry in the summer. Johnson is also committed to sustained bombing raids into North Vietnam. The raids will begin in the late winter-early spring of ’65. Again, Agency analysts believe that Johnson will commit to Vietnam for the long haul. The consensus is that he sees Vietnam as a way to establish his anti-Communist credentials to their fullest advantage and use them to counterbalance any political dissension he creates with his liberal domestic reforms.

This overall escalation should serve to cloak our in-country activities. Opium and its derivatives have fueled the Vietnamese economy going back to its early French-colonial days. Intelligence units of the French Army ran the opium trade and managed most of the opium dens in Saigon and Cholon from ’51 to ’54. The opium traffic has financed dozens of coups and coup attempts, and the late Ngo Dinh Nhu was planning to circumvent Premier Diem’s anti-opium edict at the time of his death. Since the 11/1/63 coup, 1,800 opium dens have reopened in Saigon and 2,500 in the heavily Chinese enclave of Cholon (Cholon is 2.5 miles up the Ben Nghe Channel from Central Saigon). Premier Khanh has established a hands-off policy toward the dens, which will serve us well. It should be noted that Khanh is extremely malleable and beholden to our presence in South Vietnam. He loves American money and will not risk offending even adjunct Agency personnel such as our cadre. He is not a “puppet who pulls his own strings.” I doubt if he’ll last long, and I doubt that his successor(s) will give us any trouble.

The crop source for our potential merchandise is situated in Laos, near the Vietnamese border. The fields near Ba Na Key are rich in the limestone soil component that poppy bulbs thrive on, and dozens of large-scale farms are situated there. Ba Na Key is close to the North Vietnamese border, which invalidates it for our purposes. A strip of acreage further south, near Saravan, is limestone-rich and accessible to the South Vietnamese border. Several poppy camps are situated near Saravan. They are run by Laotian "Warlords" who employ "Armies" of overseers, who work "Cliques" of Laotian/Vietnamese "Slaves," who harvest the bulbs. I've been grooming an English-speaking Laotian named Tran Lao Dinh, and my plan is to have you and Tran purchase or somehow co-opt the services of the Laotian warlords.

The standard procedure is to refine the poppy sap into a morphine-base that can be further refined into heroin. My goal would be to accomplish that at the farm(s) and ship the base to your chemist's lab in Saigon. We could fly it or move it by PT boat, which would require a pilot-navigator familiar with Vietnamese waterways. The standard way to move morphine-base out of Vietnam is via freighter to Europe and China. That's counterproductive in our case. We need your chemist to refine it in-country, in order to reduce the bulk size and render it easier to ship to Las Vegas. Please think of a way we can courier the finished product stateside, and limit our exposure on both ends.

Some closing thoughts.

Remember, I'm in this with six other agents, and we're Stage-1 Covert, with no Agency sanction. You'll meet the other men on a need-to-know basis. You're the operations boss and I'm the personnel runner. I know you're anxious to start funneling money to the Cause, but we're going to accrue large operating expenses in-country and out, and I want to make sure we're cash fluid first. The Agency has a front-company in Australia that will trade Vietnamese piastres for U.S. dollars, and we may be able to utilize a Swiss bank-account system for the laundering of our ultimate profits.

Let me stress this now. No morphine-base or fully refined merchandise should be allowed to slip into the hands of the U.S. military—for accountability's sake—or into the hands of ARVN personnel. Most ARVNs are highly corruptible and cannot be trusted around saleable narcotics.

I think you'll like my end of the cadre. I've co-opted an Army 1st Lt. named Preston Chaffee. He's a language whiz, Airborne-certified and an all-around good scout. He's my projected liaison to the ARVNs, the Saigon politicos and

Premier Khanh.

I need to assess your projected plans and vet your chosen personnel. Can you pouch me, Vegas to Arlington?

For the Cause,

J.S.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/27/64. Pouch communiqué. To: John Stanton. From: Pete Bondurant. Marked: “Hand Pouch Deliver Only”/ “Destroy Upon Reading.”

J.S.,

I read your summary. Vietnam sounds like my kind of place.

Here’s my personnel:

1 - Wayne Tedrow Jr. U.S. Army, ’54–’58 (82nd Airborne Division). Former Las Vegas policeman. Chemistry degree/ Brigham Young University/’59.

Tedrow’s solid. He’s proficient with small arms & larger weaponry. He’ll do a solid job on the chemical side. He told me he studied “opiate balances” & “narcotic component theory” in college. His plan is to find human “test pilots” or “guinea pigs” to test maximum dosage levels on, such as junkies or opium addicts with opiate tolerances. That way he can take the refining process to the final level in Saigon & ship street-ready merchandise back to Vegas.

Tedrow’s father is a big wheel in Nevada. Tedrow’s very estranged from him, but the old man has connections at Nellis AFB that we may be able to use. More on this later.

2, 3 - Laurent Guery & Flash Elorde.

You know them from our Miami days. They’ve been merc’ing out of Mexico City since late ’63 & they’re anxious to find a permanent duty station. They’re devoted to the Cause & will fit in on the cultivation, enforcement & distribution ends. Both men have ties to gulf coast-based exiles that we’ll be able to utilize.

4 - Jean Philippe Mesplede.

You sent me his dossier, so I won’t repeat his stats. I met him in Mexico City & liked him. He’s French-English fluent & knows some Vietnamese dialect from his ’53–’54 tour. He’s got in-country narcotics experience, along with some exile ties & is solidly committed to the Cause.

5 - Chuck Rogers.

Another old Tiger ops grad. You know his stats: pilot, wet-arts, shortwave radio skills. Deep exile ties & connections on the southern gun circuit. A valuable all-around guy. He wants to distribute hate leaflets and broadcast short-wave tirades in-country, & I'll humor him on that until it gets out of hand.

6 - Bob Relyea.

I don't know him & I'm hiring him off Rogers' recommendation. (They've been shortwave buddies for years. Rogers vouches for him & he's already in-country.)

Relyea's a Staff Sgt. with the MP Brigade in Saigon. He was formerly a prison guard in Missouri & has strong right-wing ties in the south. He's allegedly a great sharpshooter & all-around weapons man.

Per my plan:

I want to get into Laos quick & have Tran Lao Dinh negotiate with the "warlords" for their poppy farms. I want to bribe the right ARVN men & other Saigon officials to procure us the right level of protection. Then I'll have Rogers fix up a small 2-engine aircraft & fly circuits from Laos to Saigon. He'll conduit the morphine-base to Tedrow's lab & double as an enforcer at the slave farm(s).

Per the stateside conduit:

I'd like to ship via Agency-courier flights to Nellis. I've got a well-placed lawyer friend who may be able to pull strings & get us clearance there. Then we'll distribute out of Tiger Kab, to (expendable) Negro pushers who'll push exclusively in West Vegas. Rogers, Guery & Elorde will funnel the final profits to exile groups on the gulf.

The team is solid. I'm confident that they'll work well together. Let's stay focused on the Cuban end of things.

Viva la Causa!

P.B.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/29/64. Pouch communiqué. To: Pete Bondurant. From: John Stanton. Marked: “Hand Pouch Deliver Only”/ “Destroy Upon Reading.”

P.B.,

I like your personnel and plan, per one proviso.

You’ll need cargo-manifest cover to land at Nellis, and it must be convincing. What do you advise?

J.S.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/31/64. Pouch communiqué. To: John Stanton. From: Pete Bondurant. Marked: “Hand Pouch Deliver Only”/ “Destroy Upon Reading.”

J.S.,

Per your last pouch:

Howard Hughes (my old boss & my lawyer friend’s current boss) wants to curry favor with politicians & military personnel in Nevada & already has Hughes Aircraft-Tool Co charter clearance at Nellis. My lawyer friend will try to convince H.H. to purchase ARVN-surplus ordnance to donate to the Nevada National Guard, as a PR ploy. This will expand his ground clearance & allow us to hide our merchandise in with the ordnance & fly it straight to Nellis & Vegas.

What do you think?

P.B.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/1/64. Pouch communiqué. To: Pete Bondurant. From: John Stanton. Marked: “Hand Pouch Deliver Only”/ “Destroy Upon Reading.”

P.B.,

Contact your lawyer friend and try to implement ASAP. I approve your selected personnel, and I’ll have Lt. Chaffee approach and detach Sgt. Relyea from his regular duties. See you in Saigon: 11/3/64.

J.S.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/2/64. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: “Recorded at the Director’s Request”/“Classified Confidential 1-A: Director’s Eyes Only.” Speaking: Director Hoover, Ward J. Littell.

JEH: Good morning, Mr. Littell.

WJL: Good morning, Sir.

JEH: The election bodes. Prince Bobby’s probable victory must hearten you.

WJL: It does, Sir.

JEH: The Dark Prince has plundered New York State with great verve. I liken it to the Visigoths storming Rome.

WJL: It’s a vivid comparison, Sir.

JEH: Lyndon Johnson was Bobby’s reluctant henchman. He told me, quote, Edgar, I hate that little rabbit-faced cocksucker, and it galls me to hustle him votes.

WJL: President Johnson has verve of his own.

JEH: Yes, and much of it is directed toward the passage of dubious legislation. I view the words “Great Society” as fresh lyrics to “The Internationale.”

WJL: It’s a deft analogy, Sir.

JEH: Lyndon Johnson will deplete his prestige on the home-front and recoup it in Vietnam. History will judge him as a tall man with big ears who needed wretched people to love him.

WJL: Said with verve, Sir.

JEH: Lyndon Johnson appreciates the verve of one Martin Lucifer King. I’ve been sending him motel-room tapes. Lucifer performs with equal verve in bed and at barricades.

WJL: Dr. King wears many hats, Sir.

JEH: Yes, and he also wears garishly patterned Fruit-of-the-Loom briefs.

WJL: You’re maintaining a close surveillance, Sir.

JEH: Yes, and I have Lyle Holly to direct me to Lucifer’s favored tryst-spots. I talk to Lyle on a near-daily basis, and he tells me that Bayard Rustin is very much taken with you and your allegedly pilfered organized-crime donations.

WJL: Mr. Rustin finds me sincere, Sir.

JEH: Because you are.

WJL: I work at verve, Sir.

JEH: You succeed.

WJL: Thank you, Sir.

JEH: I detect a shift in tone. Do you wish to ask a question?

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Ask, Mr. Littell. You know I find preambles taxing.

WJL: Do you know when you'll leak word of my donations?

JEH: When I sense that my missives on Lucifer's Communist ties and sex life have reached their cumulative peak.

WJL: That's a sound strategy, Sir.

JEH: It's an inspired strategy. It's inimical to your recent gambit with Wayne Senior.

WJL: Is he peeved at me, Sir?

JEH: Yes, but he won't tell me why.

WJL: I set up a deal for him. He facilitated some charter flights out of Nellis and wanted a higher percentage. His Mormons have cut him out of his existing one.

JEH: Percentage of what?

WJL: The casino skim his Mormons were moving.

JEH: I am as delighted by that bit of data as Wayne Senior is vexed.

WJL: I'm always pleased to amuse you, Sir.

JEH: Wayne Senior has been in a thoroughly vexed state lately. He's rebuffed all my inquiries about his son.

WJL: I'm going to raise his percentage, Sir. That should improve his mood.

JEH: Why? What do you need from him?

WJL: I need to expand my Nellis clearance.

JEH: To include?

WJL: Flights from Vietnam.

JEH: Data coheres in odd fashions. You're my second postcard from Vietnam this morning.

WJL: Sir?

JEH: Dwight Holly called. He told me that Wayne Tedrow Junior and Pete Bondurant were recently granted Vietnamese travel visas.

WJL: That is odd, Sir.

JEH: Yes, and you are being oddly and blithely disingenuous, so I'll change the subject. How are Count Dracula's colonization plans proceeding?

WJL: Very well, Sir. Pete Bondurant has purchased a taxi stand and is using it to accrue intelligence for Mr. Hughes. The drivers have picked up dirt on several Nevada state legislators.

JEH: It's ingenious. Cab drivers are night-riding denizens of the first order. They view wretched foibles from a gutter perspective.

WJL: I thought you'd appreciate it, Sir. And while we're on the topic of—

JEH: Don't lead me. Ask your favor while I'm still pixilated and bemused.

WJL: I'd like to initiate a standing-bug operation in Vegas. I want to bug the hotel rooms the legislators stay in most frequently. I'll bring in Fred Turentine to help me with the installation, and I'd like local agents to do the retrievals and forward copies to me.

JEH: Do it. I'll assign two agents from the Las Vegas Office.

WJL: Thank you, Sir.

JEH: Thank yourself. You charmed me out of a bad mood.

WJL: I'm glad, Sir.

JEH: What would Tedrow Junior and Le Grand Pierre be doing in Vietnam?

WJL: I couldn't begin to guess.

JEH: Good day, Mr. Littell.

WJL: Good day, Sir.

(Saigon, 11/3/64)

Dig it:

Rickshaw bikes and sandbags. Gun nests and frangipani trees. Grenade nets and gooks.

Saigon at high noon—Brave New Fucking World.

It's big. It's tricultural. It's hot. It's noisy. It stinks.

The limo crawled. The limo bucked rickshaws. They bumped. They slid. They locked à la *Ben-Hur*.

White buildings. Pagodas. Propaganda signs: VIGILANCE IS FREEDOM/ TREASON HAILS NORTH!

The limo crawled. The shocks creaked. The wheels slid. The cooler fan died.

Mesplède smoked. Chuck smoked. Flash smoked. The driver sold them black-market Kools. Guéry smoked a Cohiba. Chaffee smoked a Mecundo. They smoked pro-Fidel.

Wayne moaned. Wayne got green-gilled. Pete got queasy. Pete read native tongue:

A BAS LES VIET-CONG! HO CHI MINH, LE DIABLE COMMUNISTE!

Qu'est-ce que c'est, toute cette merde?

The limo crawled. They hit Tu Do Street—the Gook Sunset Strip.

Big trees and big shops. Big hotels and big traffic. Big noise *en gook*.

Pete yawned. Pete stretched. They flew nineteen hours in. Stanton set their rooms up. Hotel Catinat upcoming—sleep most ricky-tick.

The driver rode his horn. The driver clipped a rickshaw. Mesplède sniffed the air and nailed scents.

Nuoc mam—fish sauce—goat bar-b-que. Machine-gun oil/ frangipani blossoms/goat shit.

Stanton said, "You'll lay up for two days, then fly to Dak Sut. You'll cross into Laos and meet Tran Lao Dinh. An ARVN rifle squad will walk point for you. Two Hueys will meet you and fly you to a dope camp near Saravan. You'll negotiate right there."

Buddhist monks jaywalked. Traffic stalled up. Pete yawned. Pete stretched. Pete elbowed more room.

Milt C. ran Tiger now. Milt ran liaison gigs. Milt ran adjunct ops: Ward Littell to bug hotel suites. Milt to bribe hotel clerks. Milt to schmooze them. Milt to tell them: place state legislators within.

Pete's bigggg decree:

Restrict the Tiger crew. Restrict all pill ops. Rat rival pill crews. Rat said crews to Agent Dwight Holly.

Trash the Vegas pill trade. Dry up West Vegas. Deprive hopheads. Tempt taste buds. Prepare hopheads for Big "H."

Chaffee waved his ditty bag. Chaffee offered gifts. Shrunken heads—*certified*—all VC *très bien*.

Wayne tossed his out. Flash kissed his. Guéry named his "Fidel."

Pete yawned. Pete popped Dramamine. The Arden bit bugged him. It bugged him incessant. It bugged him nonstop.

He factored Carlos in. 3/56: Carlos bails Arden/Arden splits K.C.

New Orleans—'59—Mesplède sees Arden. Arden has a date. He's a Carlos man/he's a wop. 11/63: Arden visits the safe house. Carlos thus orders her clipped.

He factored Carlos in. He held back. He never told Ward. He called Fred Otash. He said call around.

Run Arden. Call your contacts. Glom me some leads. Check Arden out. Check out her ex—one Danny Bruvick.

Flash kissed his shrunken head. Flash applied some tongue. Chaffee laughed. Mesplède named his head "de Gaulle."

Chuck waved his head. Wayne grabbed it. Wayne threw it out.

Chuck said, "There's times I think we hired the wrong Tedrow."

No sleep—his head wouldn't stop.

The room was okay—*comme ci/comme ça*—likewise the Tu Do

Street view.

The bed sagged. The grenade-screen creaked. The AC sputtered. Fumes cut through—*nuoc mam* sauce—*ce n'est pas bon*.

Street noise carried up. Choppers buzzed the roof. Pete gave up.

Pete oiled his piece. Pete put out his bedside pix. Barb/the cat snarling/Barb with the cat.

Stanton set up an outing—1900 hours—Saigon by night. We'll check out the natives. We'll dig the night view.

Pete sat on the terrace. Pete dug the *now* view. Pete saw ARVN cliques. Pete saw gook cops.

Chaffee called them "White Mice." Mesplède called GIs "Con Van My."

The skyline clashed—tin roofs and spires—M-60 machine guns.

He loved war zones. He saw Pearl Harbor. He saw Okinawa. He saw Saipan. He saw Pigs. He avenged Pigs. He scalped Reds *beaucoup*.

Dusk hit. The roof crews rejoiced. They arced their guns. They shot tracer rounds. They made fireworks.

The new cadre was goooood. The new cadre was #1. Cadre with a "K" now.

Stanton liked the guys. Stanton said Bob Relyea was a "Head Man." He killed VC. He chopped their heads off. He sold them to clinics.

Flash named his head "Khrushchev." Stanton named his head "Ho." Chuck named his head "JFK."

They rendezvoused. They grabbed a stretch limo.

Bob Relyea showed up. Chuck hugged him. They laughed. They shared spit. They talked Klan.

The limo sagged—nine riders plus weight.

The kadre packed sidearms. The driver packed grenades. Relyea packed a 30.06.

They swung off Tu Do. They hit side streets. The limo flew flags: The MACV/the ARVN/the skull & bones.

Rickshaws clogged traffic. The driver rode his horn. The gooks ignored it. The driver yelled, "*Di, di!*"

Mesplède popped the sunroof. Mesplède popped a clip up. The noise was bad. The shells blew down. Flash caught them hot. The gooks heard the noise. The gooks pulled over. The gooks ducked low and booked.

The driver punched it. Mesplède flexed his tattoos. Two pit bulls grew boners. Two parachutes flew.

“You must announce your intent to these people. They understand only force.”

Reylea fanned playing cards—all ace-of-spades.

“They understand force and superstition. These cards, for instance. You drop one on a dead VC and scare off potential converts.”

Chaffee said, “Affirmative on that. I like the Viets, but they’re primitive as hell. They talk to shadows and dead chickens.”

Flash chewed a shell. “Where the GIs? I only count four men so far.”

Stanton said, “They tend to wear civvies. They stand out because they’re white or colored, and they don’t like to compound things by wearing uniforms.”

Flash shrugged. *Qué pasa* “compound”?

Pete lit a cigarette. “A six-figure troop commitment by summer. That means breathing room.”

Flash shrugged. *Qué pasa* “commitment”? Guéry shrugged. *Qu’est-ce que c’est*?

Pete laughed. Stanton laughed. Relyea cut cards. He fanned cards. He flipped cards. He pulled cards off Wayne’s shirt.

“Chuck and me got distribution plans. I been sending tracts to inmates throughout the Missouri prison system, which was my pre-U.S. Army employer. I been sending them stuck inside these Voice of America pamphlets, which means the inmates get a soft version of the truth and the real thing.”

Chuck lit a cigarette. “Aerial drops are the best. You fly low and bombard the troops.”

Relyea shook his head. “Negative on that. You waste good tracts on the nigger EM.”

Chuck winked. “Wayne’s daddy’s a tract man. He throws a good party, too.”

Wayne stared at Chuck. Wayne cracked his thumbs.

Chuck said, “Wayne’s a Martin Luther Coon fan. He’s seen all his films.”

Wayne stared. Chuck stared back. The stretch swerved. Chuck blinked first. Wayne blinked last.

The stretch swayed. The driver dodged a pig. Pete looked out. Pete looked up.

He saw tracer rounds. Tracers as firefly flares.

They cruised Khanh Hoi. They scoped the clubs. They hit the Duc Quynh.

It was small. It was dark. It was French. Banquettes/mood lights/jukebox. They got a booth. They ordered wine. They ate bouillabaisse.

Wayne sulked. Pete watched him.

Ward snipped his daddy cord. Hey, Wayne, dig this: Daddy bought you Dallas. Wayne took it hard. Wayne held his mud. Wayne waxed sullen resultant.

The food rocked—garlic and squid—*chow indigène*. Bar girls performed.

They peeled to pasties. They lip-synced tunes. They sang some Barb cover songs.

Chuck got drunk. Bob got drunk. They talked Klan shit resultant. Flash got drunk. Guéry got drunk. They talked patois.

Chaffee got drunk. Chaffee waved shrunken heads. Chaffee spooked the girls off resultant.

Stanton sipped martinis. Wayne sipped vichy. Mesplède smoked a Gauloise a minute. Pete heard bombs. Pete gauged directions.

Small bombs—two clicks over—reverb off water.

Chaffee called it—White Mice and VC. Gadfly stuff—pipe bombs *pas beaucoup*.

The club filled up. Stag GIs cruised stag nurses.

They hobnobbed. They danced. They hogged the jukebox. They played Vietrock—Ricky Nelson in gook—“Herro, Maly Roo.”

Two niggers showed up. They vibed jungle stud. They vibed plantation buck.

They hit on white nurses. They sparked rapport. They sat with them. They danced with them. They danced sloooow.

Wayne seized up. Wayne watched them. Wayne gripped the table.

They danced. They did the Stroll. They did the Watusi. Wayne watched them. Chuck caught it. Chuck signaled Bob.

They watched Wayne. Pete watched Wayne. Wayne watched the niggers dance. They worked their hips. They lit cigarettes. They fed the nurses puffs.

Wayne gripped the table. Wayne tore a plank loose. The stew pot fell. Fishheads flew.

Pete said, “Let’s walk.”

They hit the docks. They met Stanton’s ARVNs. Two *trung uys*—junior grade—first-lieutenant gooks.

The lab was close. They walked over. The ARVNs walked point. Tracers popped. Red light tinged the water.

There—

The building’s white brick. It’s smeared with gook graffiti. One nightclub/one dope den/one floor per each. *Three* floors—with lab space on top.

They walked in. They scoped out the Go-Go. There’s a bar. There’s a bandstand. There’s a shrunken-head motif.

Shrunken-head wall mounts. Shrunken-head ashtrays. Shrunken-head candlesticks.

More B-girls. More ARVNs. More GIs. More musk and more Ricky Nelson. More “Herro, Maly Roo.”

They walked upstairs. The ARVNs chaperoned them. There’s the dope den.

Floor pallets/wood planks recumbent/dope beds boocoo. Piss troughs and shit buckets. Four walls as fart envelopes.

O-heads boocoo. O-heads in orbit. Slants and some round-eyes. One jigaboo.

They walked through. They pallet-hopped. They dodged fumes. Pete held his nose. Scents sizzled and mixed.

Sweat/smoke/fart residue.

The ARVNs wiggled flashlights—you rook rook rook:

See the dope skin. See the dope eyes. See the Jockey shorts de rigueur.

Chaffee said, “The Americans are ex-Army. They got discharged and stuck around. The colored guy pimps slant girls out of the Go-Go.”

The ARVNs flashed the spook’s pallet. Said spook flew dee-luxe. Dig his silk pillow. Dig his down bed and silk sheets.

Pete sneezed. Flash coughed. Stanton squashed a turd. Chuck laughed. Guéry kicked a pallet. Guéry dislodged a gook.

Mesplède laughed. Bob laughed. Wayne watched the spook.

They walked. They hit the back door. They took side stairs up. There's the lab—dig it!

Stoves. Vats. Oil drums. Beakers/kettles/pans. Shelves. Mustard jars with taped labels.

Stanton said, "I got everything Wayne asked for."

Chaffee sneezed. "It's quality stuff. I got most of it in Hong Kong."

Coffee filters. Lime sacks. Suction pumps and extraction tubes.

Pete said, "We cook it bulk and ship it that way. Wayne and I work the in-country and Vegas ends. We follow the courier flights to Nellis and go from there."

Chuck lit a cigarette. "Ward Littell's got to get clearance, which as I understand it means he's got to brown-nose Wayne Senior."

Wayne shook his head. "He doesn't need to. There's a one-star named Kinman who can do it."

The room smelled. Caustic agents settling in. Lime dust boocoo.

Pete sneezed. "I'll call Ward and tell him."

Wayne checked the shelves. Wayne read labels:

Chloroform. Ammonia. Sulfate salts. Muriatic Acid. Hydrochloric Acid. Acetic anhydride.

He cracked jars. He smelled compounds. He touched the powder stock.

"I want to refine to the maximum viable dosage strength here. We finalize the quality here and tell the distribution guys in Vegas not to cut it any further."

Stanton smiled. "You've got your test pilots one floor down."

Chaffee smiled. "They've got opiate tolerances you can work off."

Mesplède smiled. "Inject them with a caffeine compound first. It will serve to open their capillaries and secure you a more accurate reading."

Pete cracked a window. Tracers rounds flew. Dig the streetside procession:

Slants in robes—baldies all—loud chants in sync.

Yawns went around. Looks went around. Fuck this—we're jet-fucked and fucked from no sleep.

Stanton locked the lab. Chaffee greased the ARVNs. You guard the lab/you stay all night—ten dollars U.S.

Everyone yawned. Everyone was fried. Everyone dog-yawned and stretched.

They walked downstairs. They cut through the den. They cut through the Go-Go. The Go-Go rocked anew.

More round-eyes. More GIs. Some U.S. embassy types.

The spook pimp was up. The spook pimp was de-O'd and revived.

He bossed his whores around. He made his whores strip. He made his whores hop on three tables.

They linked up. They performed table tricks. They French-kissed and went 69.

Wayne weaved. Pete steadied him. A Buddhist monk walked in.

His robe dripped. He looked stupefied. His robe reeked of gas. He bowed. He squatted. He lit a match. He gook-cooked with gas.

He whooshed. He flared. Flames hit the ceiling. The lez shows dispersed. The monk burned. The fire spread. Some clubhoppers screeched.

The barman stretched a fizz cord. The barman spritzed club soda. The barman sprayed the monk.

(Las Vegas, 11/4/64)

Bugwork.

Littell twisted wires. Littell hung microphones. Fred Turentine hung feeder cords.

They laid cords. They taped wires. They perforated wall mounts. They spackled wall plates.

The Riviera—bug job #9. A big suite—three rooms in. Bugwork—Vegas-wide. Bribed access—four hotels in.

Moe Dalitz bribed managers. Milt Chargin bribed clerks. Mr. Hoover bribed the Vegas SAC. Said SAC pledged agents. Said SAC pledged speed. Said SAC pledged copied tapes.

Tapes to Mr. Hoover. Tapes to Ward Littell.

Turentine looped wires. Littell ran the TV. The news ran on. They caught LBJ's landslide. They caught Bobby's Senate sweep.

Turentine picked his nose. "I hate spackle mounts. The fucking paste stings."

LBJ praised the voters. Ken Keating conceded. Bobby hugged his kids.

"I guess I'm lucky to get the work. It's not like the scandal-rag days. Freddy Otash had me wire every fucking toilet in L.A."

Goldwater conceded. Hubert Humphrey smiled. LBJ hugged his kids.

Turentine flicked snot. "Freddy's scuffling. Pete's got him running leads on some woman. Her husband screwed Jimmy H. on a deal."

Littell killed the sound. Humphrey went mute. LBJ moved his lips.

"Who has the old scandal-rag morgue files? Would Freddy know?”

Turentine hooked wires. “You mean the *hot* dirt? The unprintable shit that never got published?”

“That’s right.”

“Why do you—”

“The information could help us. The rags always kept stringers in Vegas.”

Turentine popped a neck zit. “If you’re willing to pay, Freddy’d be willing to look.”

“Call him, will you? Tell him I’ll pay double his day rate and expenses.”

Turentine nodded. Turentine popped a chin zit. Littell goosed the TV. LBJ praised Bobby. Bobby praised LBJ. Bobby praised the Great Society.

Littell miked a nightstand. Littell miked a couch leg. Littell miked a lamp.

Morgue dirt was old. Morgue dirt was still ripe. Morgue dirt might help Mr. Hughes. They needed dirt. Dirt incurred debt. Let’s call Moe D. Let’s call Milt C. Let’s bug more rooms yet.

Grind joints next—bedroom mounts—Milt to retrieve. Let’s bug Vegas. Let’s cull dirt. Let’s extort.

Littell miked a chair. Turentine flipped channels. There’s Mr. Hoover in the flesh.

He said, “King.” He said, “Communist sympathizer.” He looked old. He looked weak.

The news ran late. Bobby’s segments ran long.

Littell went “home.” Littell called room service. Littell ate dinner and watched TV.

Home-*suite*-home. Room service and valets.

He missed Jane. He pressed her to come for Thanksgiving. She agreed. It scared her. The Boys owned the town.

She told lies. It disturbed him in L.A. He missed her and wanted her here.

Bobby praised LBJ. Bobby praised his programs. Bobby praised Dr. King.

He played his Bobby tapes. He played them most nights. Sometimes Jane overheard. He punted. He lied. He described depositions.

Lies:

Bayard Rustin pressed him—meet Dr. King—Bayard proposed a dinner. He declined. He *lied.* He stressed nonexistent engagements. He *lied.* He never said "distance."

Distance balanced his risk. Distance balanced his commitment. He subverted King. He aided King. He worked for a balance.

Personal moments would kill it. Affection would blitz respect. Compartments would burn. The risk would grow exponential.

Bobby promised legislation. Bobby promised hard work. Bobby did not mention organized crime. Bobby did not mention Jack.

He *knew* Bobby. Bobby *knew* the Boys killed Jack. Bobby on tape: "When the time's right I'll jump on it, and devil take the hindmost."

Don't. Please. Don't risk your safety. Don't risk yourself.

Littell flipped channels. Littell saw LBJ. Littell saw Blatz beer and Vietnam. U.S. advisors. More troops pledged. Buddhist monks on fire.

Pete called him this morning. Pete pitched a plan: Call Drac/*work* Drac/help me work *this* new plan.

He agreed. He called Drac and snowed him. Drac agreed to Pete's "plan." Pete dropped the name Clark Kinman. Bypass Wayne Senior through him.

He called Kinman. He pitched a meet. He deciphered the gist of Pete's "plan."

Heroin/Vietnam. "Ordnance"/hidden dope/cosmetic donations.

It meant one thing. The Boys waived the no-dope rule. The Boys never told him.

Pete sounded happy. Pete came off engaged. Pete built airtight compartments. There's Betty Mac. There's heroin. There's the partition.

Littell flipped channels. Bobby waved. Bobby hugged his kids.

Kinman served drinks. Littell sipped club soda. Kinman sipped scotch himself.

"I know about you. You brought the Hughes charter deal to Wayne Senior."

The den was stuffy. The den was GI. Airplane models and airplane wall plaques.

Littell smiled. "I hope your compensation sufficed."

Kinman sipped scotch. “I’m an officer in the United States Air Force. I’m not going to tell a perfect stranger if, where, or how I was compensated, if in fact I was.”

Littell twirled his coaster. “You could call Wayne Senior for a reference.”

“We’re not on good terms. He told me he doesn’t like you, which refers you pretty good these days.”

A door slammed upstairs. Music kicked on. A female voice hummed along.

Littell stirred his drink. “Do you know who I work for?”

“I was informed that it was Howard Hughes, who folks say has designs on Las Vegas. I figured he was good for the town, which is why I facilitated the charter deal.”

“For which you were or were not compensated.”

The music dipped. Footsteps tapped downstairs. A woman hummed along.

Kinman smiled. “I’ve got a friend here. That means you’ve got five minutes to state your case and skedaddle.”

Littell toed his briefcase. “Mr. Hughes wants to donate U.S.-supplied Vietnamese Army surplus to the Air National Guard. He wants to publicize the donations and credit you with inspiring the gift. All he requires is expanded ground clearance for periodic courier flights from Saigon.”

Kinman chewed ice. “With no contraband checks?”

“He would appreciate that courtesy, yes.”

“ ‘That courtesy’ will cost $5,000 per month, in cash, nonrefundable.”

Littell popped his briefcase. Littell dumped forty grand. Drac gave him fifty. He kept and tithed ten.

Kinman whooped. Janice Tedrow walked in.

She limped. She swung a cane. She rubbed a scar on her lips.

(Dak Sut, 11/7/64)

Heat. Bugs. Bullshit.

Dak Sut featured peasants. Dak Sut featured clay-mud. Dak Sut featured thirty-three huts.

ARVNs called peasants *que lam*. Chaffee called ARVNs “Marvin.” Pete called them “Marv.” Chuck called them “Marv.” Bob Relyea called them “Sahib.”

Wayne itched. Wayne slapped bugs. Wayne scoped Dak Sut. He saw pigs. He saw rice bins. He saw the Dak Poko River.

A bridge. Brown water. Thick jungle ahead.

They flew up. Three Marvs came along. Chaffee hired a Huey. The pilot slurped wine. Chuck and Bob tossed hate tracts out.

Wayne itched. Wayne slapped bugs. Wayne wore fatigues and a .45. Wayne packed a 12-gauge pump.

GI gear—kadre kustomized. Dum-dums and beehive rounds—steel darts encased.

Laos was close. The Marvs knew the way. The Marvs had *their* guide—some ex-Cong stashed in a hut.

Tran Dinh camped near Saravan. Tran Dinh had men. Tran Dinh had two Hueys prepped. They’d fly to Joe Warlord’s camp. They’d “negotiate.”

Wayne itched. Wayne slapped bugs. Wayne scoped Dak Sut. Peasants hovered. Mesplède dispensed Kools. Pete hit hut 16. Pete hauled the Cong out.

Chuck deshackled him. Bob rigged a collar. The Marvs leashed him up. *Nice* collar—poodle-sized and spiked.

Chuck fucked with the leash. Chuck laid some slack in. Chuck cinched the Cong up.

Wayne walked over. The Cong wore black pj's. The Cong wore torture cuts.

Chuck said, "Bow wow."

Bob sang "Walkin' the Dog."

They moved out.

They walked single-file. They crossed the Dak Poko. They hit the province hut. The Marvs greased the hut boss—five bucks U.S. The hut boss swooned.

They hit Laos. They walked foot trails. Hills and brush cover. Krazy Glue clay.

The Cong walked ahead. Chuck snapped his leash. Chuck named him "Fido." Fido tugged. Fido walked barefoot. Fido stretched his leash.

Wayne walked rear point. My craaaazy life—Army Airborne to *this*.

He killed time in Saigon. He read his chemistry texts. He hit the USO. He ordered the Vegas and Dallas papers. He moved into the lab. He stored his Durfee file.

He filed tips. He summarized tips. He ate at the Go-Go. He dug on the weird food. He offered the owner some help.

The fried monk caused damage. The fried monk burned beams. The fried monk scorched the paint job.

Wayne repainted. Wayne redrilled beams. The pimp hung around. Wayne watched him. Wayne learned his stats:

Maurice Hardell/aka Bongo/ex-QM PFC. Stockade time and a pervert DD.

He watched Bongo. He watched the kadre men. The kadre men watched him. They knew *his* stats. They dug on them. Chuck spieled them out.

He got *their* stats. Pete supplied them:

Guéry hated Reds. Mesplède hated Reds. They killed Congo rebels. They killed Algerians. Chuck hated Reds. Chuck was ex-CIA. Chuck killed Fidelistos.

Flash hated Reds. Flash killed Reds. Flash used to pimp girls in Havana. Flash split Cuba. Flash hit the U.S. Flash robbed liquor stores.

Flash knew Guéry. Flash met Pete. Flash met John Stanton. Chuck knew Bob. Bob pushed hate tracts. Bob mailed hate tracts to prisons.

Chaffee was a blueblood. Chaffee went Army. Stanton was a blueblood. Stanton went to Yale. Stanton knew Chaffee's dad. Stanton owned United Fruit stock. The Beard kicked UF out of Cuba. The Beard fucked with their stock.

Cuba drove them. Cuba drove Pete. Cuba drove the dope plan. Cuba drove Viet ops. Something said Cuba drove Dallas.

They talked:

Guéry and Mesplède/Chuck and Pete/Flash Elorde. They spoke English. They stopped. They spoke Spanish and French. They said "Dallas" trilingual.

Dallas—a noun—a city in Texas. Dallas—the break point for *him.*

He waited since childhood. He notched a fast fuck. He dropped his Dallas punchline. He fucked Janice. He jeopardized her. They both wanted out from Wayne Senior. They fucked to burn their lives down.

He bought the Vegas papers. He checked the missing persons logs and obits. Wayne Senior killed Wardell Gray. Wayne Senior did not kill Janice.

He cut them off. He left them. He walked. He ignored them. He thought about Bongo. He thought about Wendell D.

The kadre trudged. The trail swerved. Bush hemmed them in. Chaffee read his compass. They held northwest.

They crossed clearings. They spread out. They flanked. Wayne switched positions. Wayne took Fido's leash.

Fido walked fast—good dog—most ricky-tick.

Wayne walked fast. Fido tugged. Wayne caught up and ran abreast. Fido went darty. Wayne tracked his eyes. Fido lurched. Fido weaved.

Marv One yelled, "*Chuyen gi vay*?"

Marv Two yelled, "*Chuyen, chuyen*?"

Fido yelled, "*Khong co chuyen gi het.*"

They hit a clearing. They reflanked. Fido tugged left. Fido squatted. Fido dropped his pants.

Wayne saw a turd drop. Wayne saw a tree stump. Wayne saw an X. Fido grabbed something. Fido threw something. Something blew up.

Fuck—smoke/shrapnel/gunfire.

Chaffee caught metal scraps. Chaffee went down. Two Marvs caught it tight. An arm flew. A foot flew. Stumps spattered.

Wayne proned out. Wayne rolled. Wayne pulled his .45. Pete proned out. Chuck proned out. Marv Three fired wide.

Pete fired. Chuck fired. Fido tugged his leash. Wayne dug in. Wayne pulled the leash. Wayne reeled him in.

He's close—there's his neck/there's his eyes.

Wayne aimed. Wayne popped four shots off. Fido's teeth shattered. Fido's neck blew.

Wayne heard yells. Wayne saw three VC.

They charged. They aimed carbines. They got kadre klose. Pete stood up. Chuck stood up. Mesplède waved *come on*.

Bob stood up. Bob aimed his pump. Bob shot low. A beehive blew—darts blew—darts on fire.

The spread cohered. The spread hit. The spread severed legs. Three trunk sections detached and fell.

Pete fired. Chuck fired. Mesplède fired tight. They popped full clips—.45 ACPs—they ten-ringed head shots.

Wayne walked over. Wayne kicked a loose leg. Wayne saw a Ho Chi Minh tattoo. Wayne saw needle marks.

Pete said no burials. Chuck said no evidence. Mesplède said guts lured wild pigs.

Bob disemboweled the Marvs. Pete disemboweled Chaffee. Bob disemboweled the VC. Wayne flipped a coin. Marv Three called heads. Wayne got tails—tough luck.

He disemboweled Fido. He thought of Maynard Moore. He smelled the rest stop near Dallas.

They walked away. Chuck left hate tracts. Bob left an ace of spades.

They walked.

They lost Chaffee's compass. They tracked off the sun. Dusk hit. They tracked off starlight.

A haze hit. The stars died. The foot trail bisected. They veered instinct-right. Ursa Minor broke through. They resighted and cut back.

They walked. They used flashlights. They hit undergrowth. Thick shit—leaves and roots.

They kicked through it. A haze hit. The stars died. They cut back. They fried their flashlights. They walked in the dark. They saw lights. Marv Three called it:

Two clicks over—village—*que lam beaucoup*. I go now. I get village help. I bring guide back.

Pete said go. Marv Three walked. They waited. Nobody talked. Nobody smoked. Wayne clocked off forty-six minutes.

Marv Three walked back. Marv Three brought Fido Two. An old guy—the papa-san type—Ho beard and tire-tread shoes.

Chuck leashed him up. Chuck named him "Rover." Chuck fed him cigarettes. Rover had good wind. Rover walked fast. Rover leaped limbs and brush piles.

They hit a clearing. They flanked wide. They aimed in a 360 arc. A flare popped at ten o'clock—pink light streaked and poofed.

They cut loose. They blew beehives. Darts disinterred.

Somebody yelled, "Friend!"

Somebody yelled, "Tran Dinh!"

Tran had a campsite. Pete called it Tran's Fontainebleau.

One acre. Weeds and mulched dirt. Bug nets and grenade nets. Brushed-steel lean-tos.

They slept hard. They slept late. Tran's men cooked brunch.

Tran scrounged off Stanton. Stanton scrounged the Army. Stanton scrounged pancake batter. Stanton scrounged pork rinds and Spam.

Tran had six slaves—all ARVN rejects. Tran vibed Baby Caesar. Tran vibed diva.

The slaves served chow. Flapjacks flambé—torched in T-bird wine.

Chuck loved it. Pete went yum-yum. Bob gagged. Mesplède gagged. Marv Three scarfed it up. Wayne took a bite. Wayne gagged. Wayne fed Tran's pet snake.

Tran spoke English. Tran spoke French. Tran ran the drill:

Two Hueys come. We go then. We co-opt poppy farms. We "negotiate."

Pete took Tran aside. Wayne watched the tête-à-tête. Wayne heard "improvisation." Pete grinned. Tran grinned. Tran went tee-hee. Wayne caught the gist—"negotiate," *shit.*

Chuck issued ammo. Chuck issued rules: We all carry birdshot

—beehives verboten.

Wayne dumped his ammo. Wayne reloaded. Wayne thought it through:

Short-range loads. “Improvisation.” Pete knows/Tran knows/Chuck knows. They *all* know—but *you*.

Tran gave a speech. Tran indicted the Cong. Tran indicted the French. Tran excluded Pete and Mesplède. Tran indicted Ho Chi Minh. Tran indicted Ngo Dinh Diem. Tran indicted gnarly Charlie de Gaulle.

Tran eulogized Preston Chaffee. Tran indicted the Beard. Tran extolled boss-man LBJ. Tran yelled. Tran coughed. Tran chewed an hour up and went hoarse.

Wayne heard chopper thumps. Wayne saw the Hueys.

They closed in. They hovered. They landed and perched. The doors popped. The pilot Marvs motioned them up.

Tran said a prayer. Tran issued bullet-proof vests. Wayne looked at Pete. Pete smiled and winked.

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They did staggered takeoffs. Bob took Flight #1. Bob packed a 7-65 sniper-scope.

Pete clocked off ten minutes. Flight #2 readied. Tran yelled, “All aboard!”

They climbed in. Wayne grabbed a door spot. Chuck rode the door gun. Pete got a back seat. Mesplède stuck close. Tran stuck by the Pilot Marv and Marv Three.

The Pilot Marv goosed it. The rotors whipped. They climbed. They leveled. They held.

3K level—check that green—green valleys/green hills/green brush.

Wayne looked down. Wayne saw soil rows and hollows. Wayne caught the gray tint.

Sweet soil. Good alkalines—low pH all. Poppy food. Dope slaves burn trees. Ash feeds the soil.

Calcium and potassium. High phosphate counts. Spring burns and fall plantings. Beans and corn for interim crops.

They passed Saravan. Wayne saw tin roofs and spires. Wayne saw stick figures and grids. Saravan came and went fast. The ground regreened.

Chuck got airsick. Chuck puked in a bag. Wayne looked away and looked down.

There—

Dope fields/row furrows/coolie-hat slaves.

Pete grabbed the Pilot Marv's headset. He listened. He laughed. He held three fingers up. Tran laughed. Chuck laughed. Mesplède laughed. Marv Three went bang-bang.

Wayne got the gist:

Bob's up in chopper 1. Bob's got a rifle. Bob's popping outland guards. Bob's toppled three.

The Pilot Marv banked. Wayne saw huts. Wayne saw a landing strip. He pulled his .45. He checked the clip. He jacked a round in.

The Pilot Marv leveled. The Pilot Marv rotored down.

There—

A barracks. A slave jail. A volleyball court. A welcome line—Li'l Tojo plus six. Little Laotians/fatigues and jump boots/World War II Nazi lids.

Pete laughed. Chuck pointed *way* east—check the brush/catch that glint.

Wayne looked over. Wayne caught the glint. There's Bob. There's chopper 1 perched. That glint's off a hog machine gun.

The Pilot Marv touched down. The Pilot Marv cut the props. Tojo saluted. Tojo's goons snapped to.

Tran jumped out. Pete jumped out. Chuck jumped out and tripped. The Pilot Marv jumped out. Marv Three steadied him.

Mesplède jumped out. Mesplède tripped. Wayne jumped and caught him. The ground dipped. There's seven kadre men—up against Tojo plus six.

Tran hugged Tojo. Tran played MC. Tran dropped kadre bios—all last names *di di*.

Tojo was "Dong." The Tojoettes blurred—Dinh/Minh/whoever. They all laughed. They all hugged. They all bumped sidearms and hips.

Wayne looked around. Jail slaves loitered close. They wore loincloths. They sucked pipes. It was O-head servitude.

Wayne saw Tojoette volleyball—four goons per team/a thirty-goon barracks hard right.

Wayne coughed. His vest fit tight. His breath butterflied. Tran reached in the Huey. Tran grabbed their pumps. The Tojoettes bristled uptight.

Tran passed the pumps out—all kadre/one per. Dong smiled. Dong said, "You carry guns. That all right. Guns number-one A-OK."

Tran smiled. Tran talked Viet. Dong talked Viet back. Marv Three translated—all pidgin-gook:

We get nice tour. We have lunch then. All A-OK.

Dong whistled. Dong gestured. Dong dispatched a Tojoette. He ran off. He hit the barracks. He ran back. He schlepped six M-1s.

Dong bowed. Dong issued guns—all Tojoettes/one per. Dong smiled. Dong talked Viet. Marv Three translated—all pidgin-gook:

Trust A-OK. Parity better. Lunch and peace accord.

Dong bowed. Tran bowed. Dong went you first. The kadre hiked out. The Tojoettes hiked close behind. Dong and Tran hiked back.

They cut through the dope fields—poppy stalks 4-ever—grids/rows/grid paths. Slaves raked soil. Slaves dropped seeds. Slaves trimmed stalks back.

They wore coolie hats. They wore shackles. They wore floral BVDs. They walked weird. They shuffled. Their shackles gouged bone.

It was *good* soil. It looked limestone sweet. It vibed low pH.

They hiked. The sun arced. The Tojoettes lagged behind. The Tojoettes breathed curry fumes. Wayne smelled it. Wayne gauged it—just ten feet back.

The Tojoettes had M-1s. The Tojoettes had bolt-throw rifles—one shot per throw. The Tojoettes had .38s. They were flap-holstered—slow-draw style.

Not here—not now—they won't try.

Wayne looked sideways. Pete caught it. Pete winked. Wayne read, "Your call, kid."

They had bullet-proof vests. *They* had better weapons. The Tojoettes had Nazi lids.

Wayne gulped air. Wayne stretched his vest tight. Wayne smelled fish stew.

There's the lunch hut. It's all bamboo. Four frond-and-stalk walls. Wide doorway opened up.

Wayne looked sideways. Wayne winked. Pete winked back. Wayne walked ahead. Wayne hit the hut. Wayne doorway-lounged.

The kadre caught up. Wayne bowed. Wayne went you first. The guys shook their heads. The guys aped gook manners. The guys went *you* first.

Wayne shook his head. Wayne bowed. Wayne went *you* first. The guys laughed. The guys shucked. The guys jived.

The Tojoettes caught up. The guys bowed. The guys went you first. The Tojoettes shrugged. The Tojoettes went fuck it. The Tojoettes walked straight in.

The guys blocked the door. The guys aimed. The guys jammed their backs point-blank.

Wayne shot his .45. Pete shot his pump. Bullets and bird pellets flew. The noise got four-walled—back shots/powder burns/muzzle roar.

Chuck shot. Marv Three shot—full magazines. Mesplède tripped. Mesplède shot. Rounds ricocheted.

Pete got dinged. Pete went down. Pete's vest bullet-flared. Wayne got dinged. Wayne went down. Wayne's vest popped and flamed.

Pete rolled. Wayne rolled. Dirt ate the vest flames. Recoil and reverb. Ricochets ricky-tick.

Wayne saw blood spatter. Wayne saw big stew pots. Wayne saw blood in fish stew.

He heard hog-fire—way off—Bob R. at three-o'clock high. He rolled. He pulled his vest off. He ditched his shirt.

There's Dong.

He's running. Tran's chasing him. Tran's got his hair. Tran's got him down. Tran's got a knife. Tran's waving his head.

Wayne shut his eyes. Somebody jerked him. Somebody pulled him up hard.

He opened his eyes. Pete said, "You passed."

(Saigon, 11/11/64)

Stanton said, “You fucked up.”

The Go-Go was dead. That bar-b-que’d monk deterred trade.

Pete lit a cigarette. “I didn’t feel like negotiating. Tran was up for it, so we ad-libbed.”

“ ‘Ad-lib’ doesn’t cut it. I went to Yale with Preston Chaffee’s father, and now he won’t be able to bury his son.”

Pete blew smoke rings. “Toast a monk and ship him in a body bag. He won’t know the difference.”

Stanton slapped the table. Stanton kicked a chair. It roused Bongo. It roused two whores.

They twirled their stools. They looked over. They looked back.

“A fuck-up is a fuck-up and money is money, and now I’m going to have to pay some Can Lao guys to go up to Laos to guard the fields *you* stole and replace the guards *you* kill—”

Pete slapped the table. Pete kicked a chair.

“Tran had some napalm. Chuck and Bob Relyea flew over and dropped it last night. They waxed the barracks and the ops huts at both of the camps next to Dong’s. They spared the refineries and the jails, so you tell me what the fucking upshot of all that is.”

Stanton crossed his legs. “You’re saying …”

“I’m saying we now own *the only three poppy farms* south of Ba Na Key. I’m saying we’ve got viable slaves at all three locations. I’m saying Tran knows some Chinese chemists we can bring in to work the morphine base and get it ready for Wayne. I’m saying all three camps are fucking physically connected, with forest, mountain, and river cover, and all I need from you is some warm bodies to run the slaves and work under the Laotian end of the kadre."

Stanton sighed. "Warm bodies cost money."

"The Marvins work cheap. Bob said they fucking desert a hundred a day."

"You're missing the point. Money is money, and we're stage-1 covert. I'm accountable to other Agency sources, and now I'm going to have to tell them that the cost of your escapade is coming out of the 45% profit nut that we've earmarked for the Cause."

Pete shook his head. "The Cause gets 65. You told me that."

Stanton shook his head. "There's too many hands out. The ARVN boss heard about your little adventure and upped the rent on every transport vehicle and live body he lets us have."

Pete kicked a chair. It hit the bar. It reroused the whores. They twirled their fingers. They touched their heads. They mimed he claaaazy.

Stanton smiled. "Let's hear some good news."

Pete smiled. "We took ten kilos of morphine base out of Laos. Wayne's doing tests now."

"You shouldn't have risked him on that raid. He's the only heroin chemist we've got."

"I needed to see what he had. It won't happen ag—"

"What else? Did you talk to Litt—"

"Heads up on that. Dracula gave him a hundred grand for the ordnance. It's coming in on the pouch flight at noon."

Stanton smiled. "That means …"

"Right, he swung Nellis. Five G's a month, cheap for what it gets us."

Stanton coughed. "Have you got a source?"

"Bob does. Some breed in Bao Loc. He's got some U.S. shit captured back from the Cong."

"Don't skimp. Let's make Hughes and the Air Force look good."

"You don't have to tell me that."

"I'm not so sure."

"*Be sure*. We're in this for the same reason."

Stanton leaned in. "We're *here* now. We're *not in Cuba*. When the buildup starts next year, we'll have a lot more cover to work in."

Pete looked around. The whores went you claaaazy.

“You’re right. And I’ve been in worse places.”

Bao Loc was north. 94 clicks. They limo’ed up.

Mesplède booked a stretch. Chuck and Flash reclined. The pouch flight landed early. Drac delivered. Ward delivered Drac.

Old bills—C-notes—one hundred K in all.

Pete reclined. Pete dug on the countryside.

He’d called Ward. They’d talked—Saigon to Vegas. Ward ragged him. Ward ragged on narcotics.

Flash *back*—ten months—Ward *loves* dope then. Ward lauds dope at the Summit.

Dope made money. Dope pleased Drac. Dope sedated jigs.

Flash *up*—Ward is pissed—Ward has *ideals*.

Dope is bad. Dope is crass. Dope means risk. Don’t disrupt my fund-book plan. Don’t disrupt Drac’s incursion.

Ward was Ward. Ward got pissed easy. Ward lugged a Jesus cross in his sewer.

He told Ward to visit Barb. He told Ward to watch Tiger. Check the hut/tail the cabs/vet my no-pill policy.

Pete yawned. The stretch hauled. The wheels kicked mud. Mesplède ran the radio. Chuck and Flash gawked. Dig the rivers. Dig the inlets. Dig the sampans. Dig the kute and komely gook quail.

Chuck loved Laos. Mesplède said napalm glowed. Tran said he saw a white tiger. We own it now—the Bolaven Plateau.

Three poppy farms. The Set River. Big tiger tracks.

Guéry was there now. Tran was there now. Tran ran a shorthanded crew. Six goons for three camps—slaves thus on hiatus.

The slaves survived the bombing. The old goons fried. The refineries stood untorched. Tran knew potential chemists. Tran knew potential Marv guards. Tran knew geography.

Tran say you smart. You raid Bolaven. You no raid Ba Na Key. Ba Na Key north—closed to VC—tribe farms *boocoo*. Hmong tribes. Tough. No slaves there—Hmong work *en famille*. They fight. They no hide. They no run ricky-tick.

The radio blared—discordant shit—Mesplède loved nigger jazz. The highway veered. They hit Tran Phu Street. Bao Loc—2 km.

They cut right. They passed silk looms. They passed rubber farms. They crossed the Seoi Tua Ha River. They passed beggar squads.

Mesplède tossed some chump change. The beggars descended. The beggars scratched and clawed. They passed a province hut. They passed tea farms. They passed gook priests on mopeds.

There's Bob. There's the ARVN's dump.

Dig it:

ARVN guards. K-9 Korps. Gun stacks under dropcloths—open for biz.

They pulled in. They got out. Bob saw them. Bob walked a breed up.

"This is François. He's half French, and I think he likes boys, which don't discredit all the fine shit he's got for sale."

François wore pink pj's. François wore hair curlers. François wore Chanel No. 5.

Chuck vamped him. "Hey, sweetcakes, have we met before? Did you take my ticket at Grauman's Chinese?"

François said, "Fuck you. You cheap Charlie. American Punk No. 10."

Chuck howled. Flash yukked. Mesplède roared. Pete took Bob aside.

"What have we got?"

"We got .50-caliber HMGs, MMGs up the wazoo, M-132 flamethrowers with replacement parts, .45-caliber SMGs with 30-round magazines, a fucking shitload of M-14s and 34 M-79 grenade launchers."

Pete looked over. Pete saw six pallets—fat under dropcloths.

"You figure six planeloads?"

"I figure six *big* planeloads, 'cause each stack has two stacks behind it, and we got to string out the flights to keep Wayne's shit going in."

Pete lit a cigarette. "Run down the quality."

"It's just below Army standard, which is what we want, 'cause then it qualifies as surplus, which means it won't draw no suspicion when it goes through Nellis."

Pete walked over. Pete pulled dropcloths. Pete smelled cosmoline. Wood crates/nailed planks/stencil-mark designations.

Bob walked over. "It goes to Nellis, right? Some EM unload it and drive to an Agency drop."

"Right. They won't know that they're transporting covert, so we've got to hide the shit in with some stuff they won't want to pilfer."

Bob scratched his balls. "Flamethrower parts. I got to say there ain't much demand for them in Lost Wages."

Pete nodded. Pete whistled. Pete cued Mesplède. Mesplède grabbed François and bartered in.

Pete signaled—six loads/six payments.

Mesplède bartered. François bartered. Mesplède bartered back. They talked polyglot—French-Viet—diphthongs and shouts.

Pete walked up. Pete listened. He got the *bonnes affaires*. He got the *tham thams*. He got the Lyonnaise slang.

François rolled his eyes. François stamped his feet. François steamed up his pajamas. Mesplède rolled his eyes. Mesplède balled his fists. Mesplède smoked three Gauloises.

François went hoarse. Mesplède went hoarse. They coughed. They slapped backs. They bowed.

François said, "Okay, big daddy-o."

* * *

They drove back. They talked shit. They cut through Bien Hoa. The Cong hit ten days back—mortars predawn.

The stretch got close. They saw the mess. They saw flags at half-mast.

They cut back. They laughed. They slugged Bacardi. They told tales—Paraguay to Pigs—they goofed on CIA gaffes.

It's '62. Let's pluck the Beard. Let's shave him impotent. Let's dope the water. Let's spook the spics. Let's stage a visit from Christ.

They laughed. They drank. They vowed to free Cuba. They stopped and hit the Go-Go.

There's Wayne.

He's alone—per usual. He's pissed—per always. He's watching Bongo and his whores.

(Las Vegas, 11/22/64)

One year.

He knew it. Jane knew it. They never *said* it.

Littell drove to Tiger Kab. Littell played the radio. Radio pundits assessed. One fool stressed Jackie. One fool stressed the kids. One fool stressed innocence lost.

Jane drove to Vegas. Jane holed up. Jane stayed in his suite. They called it "Thanksgiving." The date hit. They never factored it in.

The papers rehashed it. The TV rehashed it. It rehashed all day. He left early. Jane kissed him. Jane turned on the TV. He returned late. Jane kissed him. Jane turned off the TV.

They talked. They skirted it. They discussed prosaics. Jane was mad. He'd coaxed her to Vegas. He'd coaxed her for IT.

He said he had business. He kissed Jane and walked out. He heard Jane turn on the TV.

Littell killed the radio. Littell cruised by Tiger Kab. Littell perched across the street.

He parked. He watched the hut. He saw Barb B. There's Barb in lounge garb—heels put her over six feet.

Milt Chargin ran shtick. Barb laughed. Barb palmed a package. Barb grabbed an outgoing cab. Tiger stripes—Miami West—all roads to Cuba.

Littell watched the hut. Drivers walked through—fey minions of tolerant Pete. Pete collected strays. Pete ignored their faults. Pete courted diversion. Pete said he clocked Betty's visits. Pete said he clocked Betty gone.

Two hours tops—don't kill what you can't suppress.

Littell watched the hut. A cab pulled out. Littell tailed it. The cab drove west. Littell stuck close. They hit West LV.

The cab stopped—Monroe and "J"—two men got in. The cab pulled out. Littell stuck close. They hit Tonopah Highway.

The cab stopped. The men got out. The men hit the Moulin Rouge. The cab pulled out. Littell stuck close. They drove straight back to Tiger.

Memo to Pete: No pill sales/no inferred betrayal.

Littell yawned. Littell went queasy. He skipped his dinner. Jane cooked prime rib. She'd cooked all day. She'd watched TV concurrent.

He lied his dinner off. He walked out. He invented "business."

Littell skimmed the radio. Littell caught Jack's Greatest Hits: "Ask not" and "*Ich bin.*" The passed torch and more.

He killed the sound. He drove to the Sahara. The lounge was packed. He stood ringside. He caught Barb's closer.

Barb sang "Sugar Shack." Barb blew the crescendo. She saw him. She waved. She said, "Oops."

She was bad. She knew it. She goofed on it. She played off it. She ragged her shelf life as a chick.

Men loved her. She goofed on her height. She played off it and went knock-kneed. She was a con. She played to the men who knew it.

The Bondsmen bowed. Barb jumped off stage. A heel jammed. She teetered. Littell caught her. He felt her pulse. He smelled her soap. He felt her perspiration.

They walked to the bar. They got a booth. Littell faced the TV.

Barb lit a cigarette. "Pete's idea, right? Look in on me."

"Partially."

"Partially, how?"

"I'm killing time. I thought I'd kill it with you."

Barb smiled. "I'm not complaining. I've got forty minutes."

The TV blipped. Jack's Greatest Hits revived. Paris with Jackie. Touch football games. Romps with his kids.

Barb looked over. Barb saw the TV. Barb looked straight back at Littell.

"You can't run from it."

Littell smiled. "Some of us try."

"Do you think about it?"

"It comes and goes."

"I'm all right until something reminds me. Then it gets scary."

Littell checked the screen. Jack and Bobby laughed. A waitress showed. Barb shooed her off.

"Pete never talks about it."

"We're useful. He knows it comes down to that."

Barb chained cigarettes. "Wayne knows. I figured it out."

"Did you brace him?"

"No, I just put it together."

Littell smiled. "He's in love with you."

Barb smiled. "In a tolerable way."

"We're useful. Tell yourself that the next time something reminds you."

Barb stubbed her cigarette. Barb burned her hand. She flinched and cradled it. She said, "Shit."

Littell checked her eyes. Littell saw pinholes—nerves off amphetamines.

Barb lit a cigarette. Littell checked the TV. Jack laughed. Jack worked That Old Jack Magic.

Barb said, "Jane knows."

Littell flinched. "You've never met her. And Pete wouldn't have —"

"He didn't. I heard you two being oblique and put it together."

Littell shook his head. "She's back at the hotel. She's teething on it right now."

"Do you talk about it?"

"We talk *around* it."

"Is she scared?"

"Yes, because she knows who did it, and there's no way she can be useful."

Barb smiled. Barb wrote "useful" in the air.

"I got a letter from Pete. He said it's going well."

"Do you know what he's doing there?"

"Yes."

"Do you approve?"

Barb shook her head. "I like the useful part, and I don't think about the other."

"Like the notion of plundering one nation in order to liberate another?"

Barb squeezed his hands. "*Stop it.* Remember what *you* do and who you're talking to."

Littell laughed. “Don’t say you just want him to be happy.”

Barb laughed. “To a free Cuba, then.”

Janice Tedrow walked in. Littell saw her. Littell watched her. Barb watched him watch.

Janice saw him. Janice waved. Janice grabbed a side booth. She ordered a drink. She faced the TV. She watched Jack and Bobby.

Barb said, “You’re blushing.”

“No, I’m not. I’m fifty-one years old.”

“You’re *blushing*. I’m a redhead, and I know a blush when I see one.”

Littell laughed. Barb pulled his sleeve up. Barb checked his watch.

“I have to go.”

“I’ll tell Pete you’re okay.”

“Tell him ‘I’m useful.’ ”

“He knows that already.”

Barb smiled. Barb walked. Barb went knock-kneed. Men stirred. Men watched her. Littell watched the TV.

There’s Bobby with Jackie. There’s Jack in the Senate. There’s old Honey Fitz.

Littell got hungry. Littell ordered dinner—the prime rib he’d missed. The waitress was Jack-struck. The waitress perched by the TV.

Littell ate. Littell watched Janice. Janice watched the TV.

She sipped toddies. She chained cigarettes. She twirled her cane. She didn’t *know*. Wayne Senior wouldn’t tell her. He knew him well enough to say.

She looked over. She saw him watching. She got up. She maneuvered with her cane.

She cocked one hip. She stabbed her cane. She limped *con brio*. Littell pulled a chair out. Janice grabbed Barb’s cigarettes.

“That redhead played my Christmas party last year.”

“She’s an entertainer, yes.”

Janice lit a cigarette. “You’re not sleeping with her. I could tell that.”

Littell smiled. Littell twirled her cane.

Janice laughed. “Stop it. You’re reminding me of someone.”

Littell squeezed his napkin. “He used his stick on you.”

Janice twirled her cane. “It was part of the divorce settlement.

One million with no beating, two million with."

Littell sipped coffee. "You're volunteering more than I asked for."

"You hate him like I do. I thought you might like to know."

"Did he find out about General Kinman?"

Janice laughed. "Clark didn't bother him. The young man in question did."

"Was he worth it?"

"*It* was worth it. If I didn't do something drastic, I would have stayed with him forever."

Littell smiled. "I thought you had a life sentence there."

"Seventeen years was plenty. I loved his money and some of his style, but it wasn't enough anymore."

Littell spun the cane. "The young man?"

"The young man is a former client of yours, and he's currently abetting the war effort in Vietnam."

Littell dropped the cane. Janice snatched it up.

"You didn't know?"

"No."

"Are you shocked?"

"I'm hard to shock and easy to amuse sometimes."

Janice squeezed his hands. "And you've got old scars on your face that remind me of this temporary harelip of mine."

"Wayne's mentor put them there. He's my best friend now."

"He's the redhead's husband. Wayne told me."

Littell leaned back. "You're not playing golf. I've been looking for you."

"I'm retrieving my swing. I'm not going to walk eighteen holes with a cane."

"I enjoyed watching you play. I scheduled my breaks around it."

Janice smiled. "I've leased a cottage on the Sands course. Your view inspired me."

"I'm flattered. And you're right, the view makes all the difference."

Janice stood up. "It's off the first hole. The one with the blue shutters."

Littell stood up. Janice winked and walked away. She waved. She dropped her cane and left it there. She limped *molto con brio*.

He caught Barb's tenner. He stood ringside. He killed time. He ducked Jane's bedtime. He schemed up a trip.

I'll fly to L.A. You drive back. I'll meet you.

He drove home. The lights were on. Jane was still up. The TV was on. A newsman mourned Jack at great length.

Littell turned it off. "I have to fly to L.A. tomorrow. I'll be leaving early."

Jane spun her ashtray. "It's abrupt, and we're coming up on Thanksgiving."

"You should have come next week. It would have been better all around."

"You wanted me here, so I came. Now you're leaving."

Littell nodded. "I know, and I'm sorry."

"You wanted to see if I'd come. You were testing me. You broke a rule that we set for ourselves, and now I'm stuck in this suite."

Littell shook his head. "You could take a walk. You could get a golf lesson. You could read instead of watch TV for sixteen goddamn hours."

Jane threw her ashtray. It hit the TV.

"Given the date, how could you expect me to do anything else?"

"Given the date, we could have talked about it. Given the date, we could have stretched the rules. Given the date, you could have given up some of your goddamn secrets."

Jane threw a cup. It hit the TV.

"You carry a gun. You carry briefcases full of money. You fly around the country to see gangsters, you listen to tapes of Robert Kennedy when you think I'm sleeping, and *I've* got secrets?"

They slept solo.

He scooped up her butts. He packed a bag. He packed his briefcase. He packed three suits. He packed appeal briefs and money—ten grand in cash.

He made up the couch. He stretched out. He tried to sleep. He thought about Janice. He thought about Barb. He thought about Jane.

He tried to sleep. He thought about Barb. He thought about Janice.

He got up. He cleaned his gun. He read magazines. *Harper's* ran a piece—Mr. Hoover misbehaves.

He gave a speech. He fomented. He attacked Dr. King. He disrupted. He appalled. He stirred hate.

Littell turned the light off. Littell tried to sleep.

He counted sheep. He counted money. Skim cuts and embezzlements—civil-rights tithes.

He tried to sleep. He thought about Jane. He counted her lies. He lost count. He ricocheted.

Barb goes knock-kneed. Janice waves her cane. Janice smiles. Janice limps. Janice drops her cane.

He got up. He got dressed. He drove to McCarran. He saw a sign for Kool Menthol—all swimsuits and sun.

He turned around. He drove back. He drove to the Sands. He parked. He primped in his rearview mirror.

He walked by the golf course. He found the cottage and knocked. Janice opened up.

She saw him. She smiled. She plucked her curlers out.

(Saigon, 11/28/64)

White Horse—grad research.

Wayne mixed morph clay and ammonia. Wayne ran three hot plates. Wayne boiled three kilos. Shit filtered out.

Wayne dumped the ammonia. Wayne cleaned the beakers. Wayne dried the bricks.

Call it: Test batch #8.

He blew twenty bricks. He filtered wrong. He fucked the process. He learned. He added steps. He sluiced out organic waste.

Pete postponed the ship date. Pete let him learn.

Wayne boiled water. Wayne gauged it. Roger—182F.

He dumped it. He poured acetic anhydride. He filled three vats. He boiled it. He *got* it.

Roger—182F.

He measured base. He chopped it. He added it. He got the mix. He got the look. He got the smell—vinegar and prune.

He sniffed it. His nose burned. It looked good—good bonds—good reaction mix.

Call it batch #9—diacetyl morphine/impure.

Wayne sneezed. Wayne rubbed his eyes. Wayne scratched his nose.

He lived at the lab. He worked at the lab. He sniffed caustic agents. He built allergies. The kadre bunked away. He dodged them. He dodged Chuck and Bob.

They bugged him. They said go Klan. They said hate spooks. They said hate like we do.

His hate was his hate. They didn't KNOW.

He lived at the lab. He slept all day. He worked all night. Day noise bugged him. He heard mopeds and chants outside. He heard slogan gobbledygook.

He slept through it. He set his clock—tracer rounds at six.

Night noise unbugged him. He heard jukebox clang downstairs. He heard music up his vents.

He did dope work. He built shelves. He filed newspapers. He crossfiled his clips. The Dallas rag and Vegas rag—a week old here.

The Dallas rag flaunted the birthday. The Dallas rag flaunted old stuff. Sidebars and *more* birthdays—"unrelated" stuff.

Where's Maynard Moore? Where's that Wendell Durfee?

Wayne checked batch #9. There—the right smell/the right burn/the right mass. Precipitants—visible—nondiacetyl mass.

Wayne worked alone. Wayne worked kadre-adjunct. The kadre was in Laos. The kadre was overworked.

Their bomb raid killed camp guards. They needed new guards. Stanton told Pete to hire some Marvs. On-duty Marvs ran expensive. Tran hired deserters—Marvs *and* VC.

Forty-two guards/eighteen Marvs/twenty-four Congs.

They worked hard. They worked cheap. They shrieked their views: Ho versus Khanh/North versus South/Mao versus LBJ.

Pete got pissed. Pete chartered laws. Pete segregated guard crews. Pete pouched notes down—Saravan to Saigon—on CIA flights boocoo.

Pete praised the kadre. Pete praised Tran. Pete passed a rumor on: The Premier P.R.-prone. The Premier order "review."

Many dope dens exist now. Many GIs come here soon—troop buildup boocoo. Dope dens big. Dope dens *bad*. My den policy need review.

Stanton didn't buy it. Stanton knew said Premier. Said Premier was a puppet. Money pulled his strings. Said Premier *taxed* his dope dens boocoo.

West Vegas stood ready. Milt Chargin told Pete. Pete pouched word to Wayne. Milt ratted pill crews. Milt snitched to Dwight Holly. Holly told the apropos Feds. West LV stood dry. The funnel stood ready. Wayne pledged the goods:

Heroin—grade 4—ready by 1/9/65.

Wayne checked the clock. Wayne checked the vats. He measured sodium carbonate. He measured chloroform. He filled three tubes.

He locked the lab. He walked downstairs. The den was dark. The den was full. A Chinaman sold cubes. A Chinaman cleaned pipes. A Chinaman hosed stray turds.

Wayne blocked his nose. Wayne walked flashlight-first.

He walked bed rows. He stubbed pallets. He kicked piss bowls. O-heads stirred. O-heads cringed. O-heads kicked out.

He strafed their eyes. He strafed their arms. He strafed their needle tracks. Arm tracks/leg tracks/dick tracks/old tracks/test tracks.

The air reeked of smoke and piss. The light scattered rats. Wayne walked. Wayne carried tape. Wayne marked eight pallet slats.

He flashed eyes. He flashed arms. He flashed a corpse. Rats had it. Rats gnawed on the crotch. Rats lapped shit water. Rats surfed the floor.

Wayne walked. Wayne checked Bongo's bed.

Bongo snored. Bongo slept with two whores. Bongo had down pillows and silk pallet slats.

Wayne flashed Bongo's eyes. Bongo slept on. Wayne made him Wendell Durfee.

It worked. It happened. It cohered. He did it—he made white horse.

He cooked all day. He filtered. He worked carbonates. He purified. He refined. He mixed charcoal and alcohol. He hit #3—6% pure.

He walked downstairs. He selected three O-heads. He packed their pipes full. They smoked #3. They puked. They launched. They hit orbit.

He walked back up. He mixed ether. He mixed hydrochloric acid. He dissolved #3. He laced it. He mixed hydro *and* ether.

He worked all night. He waited. He watched tracer rounds. He filtered. He dried. He got precipitant flakes and got *it:* Heroin—#4—96% pure.

He mixed sugar base. He diluted it. He cut it. He prepped eight syringes. He prepped eight swabs. He prepped eight good shots.

He yawned. He crapped out. He slept nine hours straight.

Two Marvs assisted. Two Marvs marched them in. They smelled. They outstunk his ammonia. They outfumed his carbonates.

Wayne cracked a window. Wayne measured their pupils. The Marvs jabbered in Anglo-gook:

Cleanup come—buildup come—cleanup do much good.

Wayne cooked up eight shots. Wayne fed eight spikes.

Two heads ran. Four heads grinned. Two heads pumped their veins. The Marvs grabbed the runners. The Marvs pumped their veins.

Wayne tied them off. Wayne geezed them. They seized up. They shook. Wayne flashed their eyes. Their pupils contracted. Their pupils pinned.

They nodded. They weaved. They upchucked and hurled. They doused the sink. They rubberized. They zombified.

They plopped down prone. They nodded out. The Marvs grabbed the last six. The Marvs prepped them good.

They swabbed their arms. They tied them off. They pumped out their veins. Wayne geezed them six across.

They seized up. They shook. They doused the sink. They heroinized.

The Marvs cheered. The Marvs jabbered in Anglo-gook.

Dignitaries come—that mean much money—cleanup much good.

The O-heads weaved. The O-heads bumped. The O-heads swacked and swerved. Blastoff and orbit—Big “H” *très* boocoo.

Wayne greased the Marvs. Wayne paid ten bucks U.S. The Marvs hauled the O-heads out. The lab smelled. Wayne Lysoled the sink. Wayne wiped his needles blood-free.

“If there’s more of that, I’ll fly.”

Wayne turned around—whazzat?—Wayne dropped a needle tray.

There’s Bongo. He’s in bikini briefs. He’s in fruit boots.

“What kind of reading can you get off little slopes like that? You need a big guy like me to gauge the fuckin’ quality of your shit.”

Wayne gulped a tad. Wayne checked vat dregs and spoons. Wayne saw one dose tops.

He strained it. He siphoned it. He cooked it.

Bongo said, “You always starin’ at me. Then you gets to meet me formally, and you gots nothin’ to say.”

Wayne grabbed a tourniquet. Wayne fed a spike.

“There’s this rumor goin’ around that you killed these three brothers, but I don’t believe it. You more the voyeur type to me.”

Wayne grabbed his arms. Wayne pumped his veins. Wayne primed a fat blue.

“Cat got your tongue? You a fuckin’ deaf-mute or somethin’?”

Wayne tied him off. Wayne geezed him.

Bongo seized. Bongo shook. Bongo upchucked and hurled. He doused the floor. He doused Wayne’s shoes. He grinned. He weaved. He danced.

He did the Swim. He did the Wah-Watusi. He lurched. He grabbed at shelves. He stumbled out.

Wayne heard tracers. Wayne cracked his windows. There’s the arc. There’s the rush. There’s the pink glow.

Wayne cracked the vents. Music flew up. There’s “Night Train”—Sonny Liston’s song.

Bongo walked back in. Bongo brought two whores. They held him. They propped him up.

He said, “Yours, baby. Around the world, free.”

Wayne shook his head. One whore said, “He crazy.” One whore said, “He queer.”

(Saravan,11/30/64)

Mail run—Aéroport de Saravan.

Mail flew in. Mail hit Saigon. Mail hit Ops South. Marvs snatched kadre mail. Marvs called up the kampsite. Marvs pouched it up.

The airstrip reeked. Goats grazed adjacent. One runway/one hut.

Pete waited. Pete jeeped in. Pete brought two guards. Pete brought an ex-Cong kontingent.

The ex-Congs mingled. The ex-Congs disdained the ex-Marvs. The ex-Marvs mingled. The ex-Marvs disdained the ex-Congs.

Pete feared riots. Pete stole their guns. Pete issued rubber-bullet pumps. Pete neutered the guards. Pete pampered the slaves. They got fresh food and water. They got fresh chains.

Tran sacked a village. Tran killed VC. Tran stole their swag. Tran got canned goods and penicillin. Tran got methamphetamine.

The slaves were soft. The slaves were weak. Harvest time was near. Pete stole their "O." Pete fed them soup. Pete fed them franks and beans.

The slaves were sick—fevers and flu—Pete fed them penicillin. The slaves lacked will. The slaves lacked oomph. Pete fed them methamphetamine.

They worked triple shifts. They soared. The fields sparkled. The bulb yield soared. Tran hired six chink chemists. Said chinks cooked M-base. The refineries soared.

Wayne worked the base. Wayne pledged white horse. Wayne's production skills soared.

The mail plane touched down. Goats scattered. The pilot tossed mail sacks. Marvs deplaned fast. Pete's Congs shagged the pouch.

They ran it over. Pete pulled the letters. Pete read them through.

Ward wrote. Ward said he checked Tiger. Ward said Tiger looked good. Nellis looked good. Kinman looked good. Kinman pledged help. Airmen to unload crates/airmen to lug crates/airmen to drive crates to the Agency drop.

Ward said he saw Barb. Barb was lonely. Barb was good. Wayne wrote.

Wayne said we're on go: 1/9/65.

Fred Otash wrote. Fred had no Arden dope. Fred had no dope on D. Bruvick. Queries out/will continue/will update as told.

Barb wrote. Barb wrote vignettes. Her thoughts jumped. Her handwriting jerked.

I'm up. I'm down. I sleep odd hours.

"Not *our* odd hours. Not where we met & made love going & coming to bed."

She saw Ward. "He's hot for Wayne's stepmom." The cat missed him. "He sleeps on your pillow now."

She hung out at Tiger. "Milt kills me. He auditions all his shticks.

"Donkey Dom drives me to work. He wonders why he can't keep boyfriends, esp. considering his 'equipment.' I said, 'Maybe it's because you're a male prostitute.' "

The cat bit a maid. The cat clawed a couch. The cat bit her drummer.

"I miss you … I miss you … I get crazy when you're gone because you're the only one who knows what I do & so I go up & down & get a little crazy pretending I'm talking to you & wondering where I'll be in 5 yrs., when my regulars trade me in for a newer model & I'm not so useful. Have you ever thought about that?"

Pete read the letter. Pete smeared the ink. He smelled Barb. He felt Barb. "Up & down" fucked him up.

The camp soared. Pete jeeped through. Pete toured.

Kall it one kamp now. Straight acres—marked by fence posts and huts.

Forested borders. Clay underbrush. Bulb rows/furrows/walkways. Refinery huts and guard huts. Slave jails and ops huts.

Magic beasts roamed the forest. White tigers prowled boocoo.

Pete dug cats. Pete dug tigers. Pete dug nifty names. Pete konkokted "Tiger Kamp."

Flash sketched for kicks. Flash dug on tigers. Flash tigerized the huts. Flash painted tiger fangs and tiger stripes.

Pete cruised the walkways. Pete cruised the bulb rows. Pete watched.

Slaves raked. Slaves tilled. Slaves pulled rickshaws. Shackle lines—twelve slaves per—slaves fueled by meth.

Slaves worked. Slaves paused too long. Guards popped rubber rounds.

Laurent waved. Flash waved. Mesplède waved. Laurent urged speed—*di thi di*—Mesplède flexed his tattoos.

Pete counted stalks. Pete multiplied: bulbs per stalk/yield per bulb/sap-to-M-base. Stalks blew by. Pete blew the count. Pete mismultiplied.

He hit Ops North. The Congs took his jeep. He walked in. He saw Chuck and Bob. He saw their canned smorgasbord:

Chili and kraut. Franks and beans. Tokay/T-Bird/white port.

Chuck said, "We're losing Bob."

Pete grabbed a chair. "Why?"

"It's not like we're losing him altogether, it's more like he's relocating to help out a kindred soul."

Bob sipped T-Bird. "Chuck set me up with Wayne's daddy, unbe-fucking-knownst to Wayne, of course. His people offered me a chance to take over a snitch-Klan in Mississippi when the Army cuts me loose."

Chuck sipped Tokay. "The Feds are bankrolling his klavern. That means official sanction and discretionary leeway as to how much rowdy shit he can pull."

Pete cracked his knuckles. "It's bullshit. You'd give up our thing for the chance to torch a few churches?"

Chuck noshed beans. "Pete's got these gaps in his political education. He don't think much past Cuba."

Bob belched. "I like the discretionary part and the leadership part. I get to recruit my own Kluxers, pull my own shit and get me some mail-fraud indictments that can't be traced back to me."

Chuck snarfed franks. "How far can you go?"

"That's the $64,000 Question, so I gotta assume that 'discretionary' means according to the guidelines my handler sets up, along with shit he don't know about. Wayne Senior said I'm supposed to start with a show of force, you know, to establish my rep, which suits me just fine."

Pete lit a cigarette. "Don't let Wayne know that you're in touch with his father, and don't talk that Klan shit in front of him. He's off the deep end on niggers, and that kind of talk scares him."

Chuck laughed. "Why? He's a coon killer."

Pete laughed. "He's afraid he'll start liking your crazy shit too much."

Chuck snarfed chili. "Statements like that are politically suspect. I think you been spending too much time with Victor Charlie."

Rain hit. Bob shut the window.

"Here's why all this don't mean goodbye to the kadre. One, Mississippi runs down to the Gulf Coast. Two, you got lots of Cubans down there. Three, I could work liaison with Chuck, funnel our profits into guns, and shoot them down to the Gulf."

Pete said, "I like it. *If* you can get a hands-off policy going with the cops and Feds down there."

Thunder hit. Chuck cracked the window. Pete looked out. Slaves whooped. Slaves danced. Slaves did the Methedrine Mambo.

Chuck said, "This fucking 'cleanup' intrigues me. You got troops coming in, and Stanton says Khanh wants Saigon to look like Disneyland for all the fucking journalists and hotshots."

Slaves shook their chains. Slaves did the Shackle Shimmy-Shake.

Bob said, "I want to build up a roll for Mississippi. Maybe I can sell some surplus shit to the troops coming in."

Pete turned around. "No one sells to our troops. I'll kill anyone who does."

Chuck laughed. "Pete's got that World War II thing. *Semper fi*, Boss."

Bob laughed. "He *dinky dau*. He get too sentimental."

Pete pulled his piece. Pete dumped three rounds. Pete spun the chamber. Chuck laughed. Bob made the jack-off sign.

Pete aimed. Pete pulled the trigger. He shot Bob three times. The hammer clicked three times. He hit three blank chambers.

Bob screamed. Bob puked. Bob hurled franks and beans.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/30/64. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: "Recorded at the Director's Request"/"Classified Confidential 1-A: Director's Eyes Only." Speaking: Director Hoover, Ward J. Littell.

JEH: Good afternoon, Mr. Littell.

WJL: Good afternoon, Sir.

JEH: Let's discuss Southeast Asia.

WJL: I'm afraid I'm not informed on the topic, Sir.

JEH: I was informed that Pierre Bondurant and Wayne Tedrow Junior have gone on covert contract status with a stellar spy agency. Little birdies tell me things, and I would be remiss not to share them with you.

WJL: I was aware of that, Sir.

JEH: They are stationed in Vietnam, no less.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Would you care to expand your answers?

WJL: I'd rather not be too specific. I think you know enough about Pete's past dealings and Wayne Junior's chemistry background to be able to extrapolate.

JEH: I am extrapolating at warp speed. I must conclude that our Italian friends have revised their fatuously conceived "Clean-Town Policy" in Las Vegas.

WJL: Yes, but the distribution will be rigorously localized.

JEH: I see a salutary convergence. The distribution will accommodate Count Dracula's prejudices and facilitate our Italian friends' desire to bilk him.

WJL: It's an astute observation, Sir.

JEH: Our friends must bristle at the thought of Jimmy Hoffa's forthcoming doom.

WJL: They know he's finished, Sir. They know the appeals process will terminate within two years.

JEH: The attendant irony has not escaped me. A gaudy homicide served to neutralize the Dark Prince, yet the Dark Prince toppled his bete noire in the end.

WJL: I have often considered that irony, Sir.

JEH: The Prince is now a senator-elect. Have you considered how he'll fare?

WJL: I haven't given it much thought.

JEH: A barefaced lie, Mr. Littell, and wholly unworthy of you.

WJL: I'll concede, Sir.

JEH: Do you think he will sponsor anti-organized crime legislation?

WJL: I would hope not.

JEH: Do you think he will attack organized crime from the Senate floor?

WJL: I would hope not.

JEH: Do you think he learned an enduring lesson from that gaudy homicide?

WJL: I would hope so.

JEH: I will not comment on your complex relationship with Robert F. Kennedy.

WJL: Your comments to date are most eloquent, Sir.

JEH: Let's jump from the frying pan to the fire. I'm meeting with Martin Lucifer King tomorrow.

WJL: The purpose of the meeting, Sir?

JEH: Lucifer requested it. He wants to discuss my attacks in the press. Lyle Holly has informed me that Lucifer has correctly added two and two and has determined that I've run black-bag operations against him, which must vex him as well.

WJL: How did he learn? Do you suspect a leak?

JEH: No. I publicly referred to information that Lucifer disseminated in private and betrayed bug and tap placements in that manner. Those references were, of course, deliberate.

WJL: I concluded that, Sir.

JEH: Lucifer, Rustin and the others now shut their mouths in hotel rooms. Lucifer has confined his sexual antics to beds outside my electronic range.

WJL: You're implying a larger design here, Sir.

JEH: You are correct. I am going to drastically upscale my operations against Lucifer and the SCLC. You are to stop donating organized-crime money to the organization, but to continue to meet with Bayard Rustin. You will continue to portray yourself as an ardent supporter whose Mob pilfering source has run dry. You will wear wires to your meetings with Rustin. You will wheedle him into suggesting meetings. You will exploit his homosexuality and susceptibility to sincere and politically unstable men.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: This endeavor will be Stage-1 Covert. I have dubbed it OPERATION BLACK RABBIT. The title bows to the sex drive, prowess and heedlessly puerile demeanor of our long-eared friends. You will receive copies of most memoranda, because you are a deft extrapolator of complex data. Code names have been assigned to the key personnel. You will use them in place of real names. They derive from the rabbit motif and hint at the inherent psyches of the subjects.

WJL: You've whetted my appetite, Sir.

JEH: Martin Luther King will be RED RABBIT. Bayard Rustin will be PINK RABBIT. Lyle Holly will be WHITE RABBIT. You will be most appropriately known as CRUSADER RABBIT.

WJL: It's a witty touch, Sir.

JEH: I want you to learn what King has planned in the south. Your data will supplant Lyle Holly's. I'm going to launch a White-Hate Cointelpro in Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi, and I want information to complement that incursion.

WJL: You've targeted the Klan, Sir? For mail-fraud indictments?

JEH: I've targeted the most violent, inept, felony-prone and altogether outlandish Klan groups in that three-state vector. God will punish them for lynchings and castrations, should He lapse on the side of compassion and find them unjustified. I will punish them for Federal Mail Fraud.

WJL: You've divided the punishment well, Sir.

JEH: The Cointelpro will begin in June, '65. Your old chum Wayne Senior has recruited a man to form his own splinter Klan. The man will return from Army service and begin his assignment in May.

WJL: Will Wayne Senior run—

JEH: Wayne Senior will be code-named FATHER RABBIT. The Klan runner will be named WILD RABBIT. I have withdrawn the funding for all of Wayne Senior's long-standing informant Klans, with his approval. I want to consolidate my anti-Klan broadside under the banner of WILD RABBIT's stalwart group, the Regal Knights of the

KKK.

WJL: The name packs a punch, Sir.

JEH: You're being egregiously flip, Mr. Littell. I know you are delighted, and I know you disapprove as well. Do not underline the latter.

WJL: I apologize, Sir.

JEH: To continue. Both operations will be run by Dwight Holly, who will be code-named BLUE RABBIT. Dwight has resigned from the U.S. Attorney's Office and has transferred back to the Bureau. I chose him because he is a brilliant operative. He is also Lyle Holly's brother, and Lyle knows the SCLC better than any white man alive.

WJL: I'm confused, Sir. I thought Dwight was estranged from Wayne Senior.

JEH: Estrangement comes and goes. Dwight and Wayne Senior have reconciled. The Negroes that Wayne Junior killed were simply a temporary roadblock. Wayne Senior is estranged from Wayne Junior now, in the manner of the patriarchy worldwide.

WJL: Will I need to deal with Wayne Sen—

JEH: Not directly. You trumped him on your courier arrangement, and he's sustained a simmering grudge.

WJL: Dwight Holly has never been a friend to me, Sir.

JEH: Dwight acknowledges your gifts, however reluctantly. You saved him face on the dead-Negro front, which indebted him to you. That said, I must observe that Dwight Chalfont Holly hates indebtedness and was having you spot-tailed by agents of the U.S. Attorney's Office, as part of an ill-conceived plan to build a derogatory profile against you. He considered you a dangerous presence in Nevada.

WJL: Given Dwight's nature, that's a compliment.

JEH: It pained him to pull the tails. He gives up very badly. You share that trait.

WJL: Thank you, Sir.

JEH: Thank me with hard work on OPERATION BLACK RABBIT.

WJL: I will, Sir. In the meantime, would you like me to pull any of the bugs you've placed against the SCLC?

JEH: No. They might get careless and talk.

WJL: That’s true, Sir.

JEH: Lucifer has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. It infuriates me as much as I’m sure it moves you.

WJL: I’m moved, yes.

JEH: Those three words define your value to me.

WJL: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Learn your rabbit codes.

WJL: I will, Sir.

JEH: Good afternoon, Mr. Littell.

WJL: Good afternoon, Sir.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/2/64. Washington *Post* article.

HOOVER MEETS WITH KING; AIDES DESCRIBE “TENSE CONFRONTATION”

Washington, D.C., December 1.

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and Assistant Director Cartha DeLoach today met with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his aides Ralph Abernathy and Walter Fauntroy. The meeting took place in Hoover’s office at FBI Headquarters.

A range of topics were discussed, including the alleged presence of Communists and Communist sympathizers within the civil-rights movement and the FBI’s handling of police brutality charges levied by Negroes and civil-rights workers in the south. King clarified recent statements he had made pertaining to the conduct of FBI agents in Mississippi and their alleged fraternizing with local law-enforcement officials. Hoover countered with a recitation of recent FBI successes in Mississippi and Alabama.

It was expected that rumors of FBI bugs and wiretaps, allegedly deployed against King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, would be discussed. “This was not the case,” Dr. Abernathy said. “The dialogue was increasingly subsumed by Mr. Hoover’s monologues against Communists and his repeated contention that ‘in due time’ attitudes and practices in the south would change.”

“Mr. Hoover encouraged Dr. King to ‘get out the Negro vote,’ ” Mr. Fauntroy said. “He did not offer a substantive pledge of support for civil-rights workers in great peril at this very moment.”

Both aides described the meeting, which lasted one hour, as “tense.” Following the meeting, King met with reporters and stated he believed that he and Mr. Hoover had reached “new levels of understanding.”

Hoover declined to comment. Assistant Director DeLoach issued a press release that covered the topics discussed.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/11/64. Los Angeles *Times* article.

KING ACCEPTS PEACE PRIZE; EXPRESSES “ABIDING FAITH” IN U.S.

Oslo University. Oslo, Norway, December 10.

With Norwegian royalty and members of the Norwegian Parliament in attendance, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. stepped on stage to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

The chairman of the Norwegian Parliament introduced Dr. King as “an undaunted champion of peace, the first person in the western world to have shown us that a struggle can be waged without violence.”

Dr. King, visibly moved by the introduction, climbed on stage to accept the award. He said that he considered it “a profound recognition that nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral question of our time, the need for man to overcome violence and oppression without resorting to violence and oppression.”

Speaking into glaring television lights and a sea of rapt faces, Dr. King continued. “I refuse to accept the belief that man is mere flotsam and jetsam in the river of life which surrounds him,” he said. “I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daylight of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality.”

Citing the “tortuous road which has led from Montgomery, Alabama to Oslo,” Dr. King said that the Nobel Prize was really for the “millions of Negroes on whose behalf he stood here today.”

“Their names will never make Who’s Who,” Dr. King said. “Yet when the years have rolled past and when the blazing light of truth is focused on this marvelous age in which we live, men and women will know and children will be taught that we have a finer land, a better people, a more noble civilization, because these humble children of God were willing to suffer for righteousness’ sake.”

Thunderous applause greeted Dr. King’s address. Hundreds of students, carrying torches, surrounded a large Christmas tree and greeted Dr. King and his entourage as they departed.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/16/64. Internal memorandum. Marked: “Stage-1 Covert”/“Director’s Eyes Only”/“Destroy After Reading.” To: Director Hoover. From: SA Dwight Holly.

Sir,

Per our phone conversation:

I agree. In light of your recent meeting with SUBJECT KING, you should suspend all public attacks and derogatory references to him, which should serve to deepen the cover needed to mount the SCLC and WHITE-HATE arms of OPERATION BLACK RABBIT. I agree further that no memorandums should be filed by any participant and/or circulant, that a strict read-and-burn policy should be observed and that all telephone communiqués should be patched through Bureau scramblers.

Per said participants/targets and our stated objectives:

1 - BLUE RABBIT (the undersigned/SA D. C. Holly). To oversee and coordinate both operational arms and direct the activities of:

2 - WHITE RABBIT (Lyle D. Holly). Our plant within SCLC. Conduit for data pertaining to SCLC policy and exploitable personal data on TARGETS KING and RUSTIN.

3 - CRUSADER RABBIT (Ward J. Littell). Cosmetically vouched civil-rights sympathizer. Has donated $180,000 in cosmetically proffered organized-crime funds, allegedly pilfered from organized-crime sources. Our plant, charged to tape and extract incriminating, embarrassing and compromising data from TARGET RUSTIN.

4 - FATHER RABBIT (Wayne Tedrow Senior). Conservative pamphleteer, covert handler of FBI informants and long-term KKK mail-fraud operative. Our liaison to the WHITE-HATE arm of OPERATION BLACK RABBIT. Liaison to our newly recruited Klan runner. Charged to provide said runner with lists of his hate pamphlet subscribers, including those within the Oklahoma & Missouri state prison systems, and to aid said runner in his Klan recruiting.

5 - WILD RABBIT (U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Bob D. Relyea). Said Klan runner, currently on duty with Military Police Battalion 618 in Saigon, Vietnam, and on loan-out to (Stage-1 Covert) CIA operation in Laos. (Note: Sgt. Relyea

refuses to reveal the details of his current assignment and will not divulge the names of his CIA handler or ops colleagues. I did not pursue this inquiry. Sgt. Relyea is observing Stage-1 sanctions and secrecy waivers, and this speaks well of his ability to honor such.)

Sgt. Relyea is an experienced hate pamphleteer and a former Missouri State prison guard with pre-existing segregationist contacts throughout the midwest and south. He continues to mail hate pamphlets of his own design throughout the Missouri prison system. Sgt. Relyea will be discharged from the Army 5/65 and will terminate his CIA ops at that time. We can expect him to begin work on OPERATION BLACK RABBIT in early 6/65.

Per targets RED RABBIT (Martin Luther King) and PINK RABBIT (Bayard Rustin) and our objectives.

Said objectives:

1 - To discredit RED RABBIT and PINK RABBIT and undermine their subversively socialistic designs.

2 - Via the accumulating and disseminating of incriminating and/or embarrassing data pertaining to their Communist associations, hypocritical moral behavior and sexual degeneracy.

3 - To precisely orchestrate the release of said data, in order to reveal the socialistic underpinnings of the entire civil-rights movement.

4 - To create distrust within the civil-rights movement.

5 - To engender distrust and resentment against RED RABBIT within the Negro community and undercut the recent non-Negro cache that RED RABBIT has engineered.

6 - To reveal the Socialist-Communist designs of RED RABBIT, the SCLC and the civil-rights movement and influence an effective political backlash.

7 - To assail RED RABBIT's obviously disturbed and deteriorated psyche with an anonymous mail campaign.

8 - To implement the WHITE-HATE arm of OPERATION BLACK RABBIT concurrent with 1-7, in order to buttress the FBI's anti-Klan, anti-racist credentials and rebuff anti-FBI sentiment disseminated by civil-rights provocateurs and members of the liberal-socialist press.

In addition, I urge:

9- SCLC MAIL COVERS. The intercepting, reading, logging and resending of all U.S. and foreign mail sent to the main and regional SCLC Offices.

10 - SCLC TRASH COVERS. The examination, logging & evidentiary seizure of all garbage and discard material dumped in trash bins at all SCLC Offices.

11 - An anonymous letter, to be written from a Negro perspective and sent to RED RABBIT's home in Atlanta.

The letter will begin "King, look into your heart" and will recount what a "grim farce" the Nobel Peace Prize and RED RABBIT's other recent accolades are held to be within the mainstream Negro community. The letter will subtly urge RED RABBIT to commit suicide rather than risk further disfavor within the Negro community, and will include bug-tap excerpts, pertaining to RED RABBIT's promiscuity, to buttress your deliberate public statements and convince RED RABBIT that those statements are widely received and accepted by mainstream Negroes.

In closing:

Our bugs and wiretaps remain in place, although they are severely compromised. Per our last phone call, I agree with your assessment. OPERATION BLACK RABBIT must launch and sustain at Stage-1 Covert status. RED RABBIT has reached an unbearably high level of public acceptance that only our most diligent and secretive efforts will be able to dislodge.

Respectfully,

D.C.H.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/21/64. Pouch communiqué. To: John Stanton. From: Pete Bondurant. Marked: “Hand Pouch Deliver Only”/ “Destroy Upon Reading.”

J.S.,

Wayne hit paydirt. We’re on go for 1/9/65, & after final distribution, I’m predicting a net profit of $320,000. That makes the kadre’s profit nut (45%) about $150,000. Right now I’m working out the details, but the plan is unchanged.

Laurent, Chuck and Flash will purchase weapons on the right-wing circuit in Texas & the south & will funnel them to exiles on the Gulf. That’s the essential plan, with one proviso.

We’ve both been the coastal harassment route, and running missions out of South Florida & the Gulf got us nowhere. I think our exiles should take advantage of being Cuban & should conduit the weapons to anti-Castro groups inside Cuba. I’m emphatic about this.

What do you think? Please reply ASAP.

P.B.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/26/64. Pouch communiqué. To: Pete Bondurant. From John Stanton. Marked: “Hand Pouch Deliver Only”/ “Destroy Upon Reading.”

P.B.,

I approve the general outline of your plan and agree that our ultimate goal should be to provide on-island dissidents with the weapons our net profits secure. That said, I should again point out that you’re jumping the gun on the Cuban end of things. Make no specific profit distribution plans until our in-country costs can be assessed, with all monies flagged for laundering through appropriate Agency fronts. We do not want our Cuban “contributions” to be traceable back to our Las Vegas business.

To close:

The Saigon cleanup will be implemented soon. A Can Lao contingent will secure the area around Khanh Hoi, but I have been assured that the lab will not be touched. Have Tedrow secure the lab and be off the premises by the a.m. of 1/8/65.

Por la Causa,

J.S.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/6/65. Body-wire transcript. Marked: “Route to: Director/Blue Rabbit/White Rabbit/Father Rabbit/Live Tape Destroyed/Read & Burn.”

Location: Washington, D.C. (Lafayette Park). Date: 1/4/65/0842 hrs. Speaking: CRUSADER RABBIT/PINK RABBIT.

CR (conversation in progress): What I (static/ambient noise) read in the press. Dr. King sounded encour—

PR (laughing): With Martin, nonviolence extends to the absence of invective (pause/2.1 seconds). No, Hoover was rude and intractable. Martin said he was shaking.

CR: No progress, then?

PR: None. He did not affirm or deny the existence of the bugs and the taps. (Static/2.8 seconds.) Didn’t really press it. He’s so goddamn Christlike at times.

CR: Dr. King was wise not to rile him.

PR: You’re right, Ward. You have a hateful lunatic in his declining years and a hugely important figure in his ascent. You have to believe that people will see through to the gist of that.

CR: Never condescend or underest (ambient noise/2.9 seconds) abilities.

PR: That was reinforced for Martin soon after.

CR: How—

PR (interrupting): Martin received a letter, and regretfully Coretta saw it first. It was allegedly written by a Negro man, who urged Martin to kill himself. There were (static/3.3 seconds) references, and I won’t comment on their veracity, to philanderings that Martin (static/1.6 seconds) may or may not have committed. Coretta was (pause/0.9 seconds) well, she was devastated.

CR: Jesus Christ.

PR: That about says it.

(Static/ambient noise/9.3 seconds.)

PR (conversation in progress): No saint, but I never fully grasped the man’s evil nature until that moment. (Pause/4.1 seconds /PR laughs) Why so glum, Ward? Really, you’re looking positively spectral.

CR: I can’t give you any more money, Bayard. It’s getting too risky on my end. (Static/0.8 seconds) later, but not for the foreseeable future.

PR: You needn't (pause/2.2 seconds). Stop with the glum looks, child. You've done the cause a world of good, and I for one hope you'll stay in touch.

CR: I want to. You know how I feel.

PR: I do indeed. I enjoy our talks, and I rely on your perceptions of the FBI mindset.

CR: I'll continue to offer them. And I'm always passing through D.C.

PR: I'm always good for a drink or a cup of coffee.

CR (static/3.4 seconds/conversation in progress): Dr. King have planned?

PR: We've got a big push coming up in Selma, Alabama. We're making plans to reprise "Freedom Summer" in Mississippi, and we've targeted Eastern Louisiana in June.

CR: You've got a strong Klan presence there. The Baton Rouge Office has a substantial file.

PR: Bogalusa's a simmering hotbed of our pointy-headed friends. We're going to mount voter registration drives and vex them out of their sheets.

CR (laughing/ambient noise/20 seconds): Anticipate resistance?

PR: Yes, but Martin was encouraged by the FBI's presence in Mississippi last summer, and he's convinced that the evil Mr. Hoover will work for the safety of our people, however reluctant—

(Sustained static/tape ends here.)

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/7/65. Courier message: Saravan, Laos, to Saigon, South Vietnam.

To: Wayne Tedrow Junior. From: Pete Bondurant. Marked: “Hand Pouch Deliver.”

W.T.,

Be ready to follow first shipment stateside a.m. of 1/9/65. Be off lab premises by 1/8. Urgent! Respond today!

P.B.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/8/65. Courier message: Saravan, Laos, to Saigon, South Vietnam.

To: Wayne Tedrow Junior. From: Pete Bondurant. Marked: “Hand Pouch Deliver.”

W.T.,

Board up lab & vacate immediately! Urgent! Respond immediately!

P.B.

(Saigon, 1/9/65)

Let's stay. Let's get close. Let's *watch.*

The lab was secure. He pouched Chuck last night: I'll meet Pete/Tan Son Nhut Airport/flight 29. I packed the shit. I hid it—check the box marked "Flamethrower Parts."

Let's linger. Let's get close. Let's watch the "Cleanup."

The Can Lao hit last night. The Can Lao precleaned. They stink-bombed the Go-Go. They ran out the patrons. They ran out the whores. They locked up the dope den. They secured the O-heads. Said O-heads dozed on.

Wayne checked his watch—6:14 a.m.—Wayne checked his window.

Marvs draped flags. Marvs unfurled banners. Marvs muscled vendors out. Marvs stole their cash. Marvs dumped their stalls. Marvs cued hose crews up.

The crews aimed. The crews fired. Water smashed walls and stalls. Water squashed fruit. Water launched debris and scoured graffiti. Vendors flew—flyweights—hose confetti.

The Marvs raised banners. There's LBJ. Dig his big schnoz and Smile of Love. There's Premier Khanh. He's got big teeth. Dig his Big Smirk of Love.

A vendor flew. Water tossed him. Water tossed rickshaw bikes.

"You a watchin' motherfucker."

Wayne gulped a tad. Wayne turned around. Wayne saw Bongo.

In his tight fruit briefs. In his pointy fruit boots. With a chubby whore.

"You know what I like about you? It's that 'meek-shall-inherit-the-earth' thing. You like to watch, but you never say a motherfuckin' word."

The whore wore skivvies. The whore wore thigh hickeys. The whore wore cigarette burns.

"You like her? I call her 'Ashtray.' You don't need to reach for one when she's around."

Wayne shut the window. Bongo hoisted his balls. Bongo pumped up his veins.

"I figured I'd trade you for a taste. I get to geez, you get to watch Ashtray french me."

Wayne smiled. Wayne gulped a tad. Wayne unlocked his closet.

He prepped water. He prepped a spike. He prepped a spoon. He prepped horse. He cooked it. He siphoned it in.

Bongo laughed. Ashtray giggled. Wayne blocked their view. He siphoned in ammonia. He siphoned in rat poison. He siphoned in strychnine.

Bongo said, "You slow, you know that?"

Wayne turned around. Bongo looped a tourniquet. Bongo tied off a vein.

Wayne saw it. Wayne tapped it. Wayne jabbed it. Wayne pushed the plunger in sloooooow.

There now—how's that?

Bongo lurched. Bongo jumped. Bongo sprayed piss and shit. Bongo fell down and spasmed and thrashed.

Wayne stepped back. Wayne watched. Ashtray stepped up close.

Bongo coughed foam. Bongo coughed blood. Bongo bit his tongue off. Wayne stepped up. Wayne stepped on his head. Wayne cracked his skull.

Ashtray held her nose. Ashtray crossed herself. Ashtray kicked Bongo in the balls. Wayne grabbed him. Wayne dragged him. Wayne dropped him down the air vent.

Ashtray said, "Bongo cheap Charlie. Bongo number ten."

Wayne saw Leroy and Cur-ti. Wayne saw Wendell Durfee.

More cleanup—his and theirs.

Wayne cleaned the lab. Wayne watched the outside show. Marvs hosed monks. Marvs hosed walls. Marvs abridged graffiti.

The vent shook. Rats bopped through. Rats found Bongo. Rats ate him.

10:05 a.m.—flight time soon.

Theeeeere—

Voices and clumps now—two clicks downstairs. There—it's coming—you knew it would.

Wayne walked down. Wayne stood on the landing. Wayne found a shadow patch.

There—ten Can Lao goons. Two five-man teams paired off. They've got flashlights and silencered magnums. They've got hoses/flamethrowers/sacks.

They dispersed. They walked the pallet rows. They shot faces in tight.

It went soft—silencers—head shots in light.

They flashed. They shot. They dumped shells and reloaded. Heads snapped inside halos. Heads cracked pallet slats.

Opium—*hush now anesthesia*—in slow and tight.

Wayne watched. Wayne saw faces alight. B-girls and Ashtray. Uncle Ho–types.

The goons finished up. The goons regrouped in the doorway. The goons stood way back.

A goon aimed a toaster. Said goon strafed low. Said goon cooked body rows tight.

Three sweeps out and back. Flame levels in tight.

The goon turned the toaster off. A goon strafed a hose. Said goon sprayed water down tight.

Flames sputtered. Bodies flared. Pallets cracked.

Wayne watched. The goons regrouped. The goons walked and dispersed.

They took their pants off. They kicked through hose water. They lugged gunnysacks. They poured out quicklime. They perfumed bodies. They flour-dipped flesh.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/8/65. Internal memorandum. Topic: OPERATION BLACK RABBIT. To: DIRECTOR. From: BLUE RABBIT. Marked: “Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”/“Read and Burn.”

Sir,

My first summary report on OBR.

1 - CRUSADER RABBIT met PINK RABBIT on two occasions in Washington, D.C. (1/6/65, 1/19/65) and forwarded his tapes to me. Per Stage-1 Covert guidelines, I personally transcribed the tapes and destroyed the live tape copies. Tape #1 and Tape #2 transcripts are included (Addendum #A) with this memorandum. Per guidelines, please read and burn.

2 - Although there were numerous moments of poor sound quality, I feel confident in my assessment of the tapes. It is obvious that the effeminate and witty PINK RABBIT is much taken with the wit, beautifully feigned sincerity and ardently expressed ideals of CRUSADER RABBIT. You were farsighted in your instinct to match them up. PINK RABBIT accepted CRUSADER RABBIT’s stated withdrawal of “pilfered” organized-crime monies with magnanimity and both men expressed a desire to “keep in touch.” That desire, expressed on Tape #1, was confirmed by the second meeting of PINK RABBIT and CRUSADER RABBIT, recorded on Tape #2.

3 - CRUSADER RABBIT deftly questioned PINK RABBIT on both tapes. (See transcripts.) To date, however, PINK RABBIT has revealed only information already revealed by our “in-house” SCLC source, WHITE RABBIT. The broad outline includes:

3 - A: Planned agitation in Selma, Alabama (picketing, boycotts, voter-registration drives);

3 - B: A (6/65) projected school desegregation drive in Chicago;

3 - C: Early plans (but no compelling specifics) regarding SCLC participation in a second “Freedom Summer” campaign of agitation in Mississippi;

3-D: Planned agitation in and around Bogalusa, Louisiana, to commence in 6/65.

4 - I’ve reviewed the recent tapes retrieved from our remaining hotel-room bug-posts. RED RABBIT, PINK RABBIT and other SCLC members have stayed in said rooms on a total of 14 occasions from 1/1/65 to 2/4/65. No salient information was gleaned. The innocuous conversations and frequent whispers indicate that the subjects suspected the presence of electronic surveillance. Said bugs will remain in place.

5 - WHITE RABBIT reports that RED RABBIT, PINK RABBIT and other SCLC members have discussed the anonymous “suicide letter” sent to RED RABBIT and concluded that it derived from an FBI source. WHITE RABBIT further reports that RED RABBIT and PINK RABBIT have verbally attacked you on numerous recent occasions, much in the manner that PINK RABBIT attacked you on Tape Transcript #1. WHITE RABBIT stated that RED RABBIT was “very upset” by the letter, especially the “crippling effect” it had on his wife.

6 - Per MAIL COVERS. To date, assigned agents have intercepted, logged and remailed numerous letters of support, along with large and small donations to the SCLC, many of them sent by notable leftist-sympathizers, members of Communist front groups and movie stars, among them Danny Kaye, Burt Lancaster, Walter Pidgeon, Burl Ives, Spencer Tracy, Rock Hudson, Natalie Wood and numerous folk singers of lesser repute. (See Addendum List #B for details. Per guidelines, please read and burn.)

7 - Per TRASH COVERS. To date, assigned agents have collected and logged large quantities of discarded left-wing periodicals and risqué magazines with photographs of nude white women, along with innocuous and non-itemized trash. (See Addendum List #C for inventory.) (Note: An Addendum List #B inventory log will soon be compiled & stored per Stage-1 Covert guidelines. It will be used to facilitate, should you so direct, an SCLC BANK ACCOUNT COVER, to determine if the above-noted contributions were banked legally, which should help us gauge the viability of an IRS cross-check of the SCLC’s federal and state tax returns.)

In conclusion:

All COVERS to proceed as directed. A summary report on the WHITE-HATE arm of OPERATION BLACK RABBIT to follow.

Respectfully,
BLUE RABBIT

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/20/65. Internal memorandum. Topic: WHITE-HATE/OPERATION BLACK RABBIT. To: DIRECTOR. From: BLUE RABBIT. Marked: “Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”/“Read and Burn.”

Sir,

My first summary report on the WHITE-HATE arm of OBR.

1 - I have compiled, with the help of FATHER RABBIT’s aides, a list of potentially dissident Klansmen now at loose ends since FATHER RABBIT dissolved his previously funded informant Klan groups in 12/64. (See Addendum #A for list of said Klansmen.) (Note: Per Stage-1 guidelines, please read and burn said addendum. I have retained an original copy, per guidelines.)

Also, FATHER RABBIT has supplied (see Addendum #B/ read & burn) a 14,000 name list of white male hate-pamphlet subscribers in Louisiana and Mississippi, all devotees of specific segregationist/anti-Negro tract series distributed by FATHER RABBIT’s organization. A criminal records cross-check of these subscribers has yielded the names of 921 men with misdemeanor and felony arrests and memberships in extreme right-wing organizations.

2 - My plan would be to have FATHER RABBIT solicit these men by mail, under an “anonymous patriot” letterhead, and refer them by mail to WILD RABBIT, upon his (5/65) release from the U.S. Army. WILD RABBIT would assess the mail he has received, contact the most promising prospects and build the nucleus of his new Klan group on that basis. He will establish boundaries as to what and what not his recruits can do, and gather information on their previous hate-group associations. WILD RABBIT will also define their future informant duties.

3 - CRUSADER RABBIT and WHITE RABBIT have mentioned the proposed “Second Freedom Summer” agitation campaign in Mississippi and planned (6/65) agitation in and around Bogalusa, Louisiana. WILD RABBIT wants to exploit these situations, and I believe that if he delivers a properly restrained but somehow flamboyant show of force in that region at that time, he will be able to

mobilize a sizable number of recruits resultant. To further induce subservience in his recruits, WILD RABBIT will supply them with low-quality rifles and sidearms purchased by his friend CHARLES “CHUCK” ROGERS (white male/age 43), a covert CIA contract employee currently serving with WILD RABBIT in Vietnam. ROGERS has extensive gun connections among rightist Cuban exile groups in the Gulf Coast region.

4 - WILD RABBIT has also established a “Hate-Leaflet Mail Ministry” among convicts and ex-convicts he knew while working as a Missouri state prison guard, and plans to recruit from the “eager beaver” parolees who contact him upon their release. I believe that this is also a viable recruiting approach.

In conclusion:

I believe that we are theoretically operational as of this (2/20/65) date. Please respond as your schedule allows.

Respectfully,

BLUE RABBIT

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/1/65. Internal memorandum. Topic: OPERATION BLACK RABBIT/2/20/65 MEMO. To: BLUE RABBIT. From: DIRECTOR. Marked: “Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”/“Read and Burn.”

BLUE RABBIT,

Consider the proposed measures described in your 2/20/65 memo approved in full. Cold funds to follow. You may share information on a need-to-know basis with FATHER RABBIT and WHITE RABBIT. Given his suspect ideology, do not share any WHITE-HATE information or in any way contact CRUSADER RABBIT, unless so directed.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/8/65. Pouch communiqué. To: John Stanton. From: Pete Bondurant. Marked: "Hand Pouch Deliver Only"/ "Destroy Upon Reading."

J.S.,

We're operational on both ends now. Here's the summary you asked for.

It's all running smooth. A) - Milt Chargin greased cops working the Records Divisions of the Vegas PD & Clark County Sheriff's & got a list of all the previously busted colored junkies in West Vegas.

B) - I recruited 4 expendable colored pushers to work the bottom-rung distribution in West LV. They've got menial casino jobs & were happy to get the gigs. I gave them copies of the prev. ment'd junkie list & had them supply the junkies with free pops taken from our 1st stateside shipment of 1/9/65. The "free samples" got them anxious for more. I told my 4 guys to push "free tastes" on anybody who asked, colored only. They got a lot of takers & we got a lot of steady "Clients" (Milt C.'s word, not mine).

C) - I lean on the 4 guys periodically & up to now I'm convinced that they (1) haven't stolen kadre merchandise; (2) haven't sold to non-Negro clients; (3) haven't snitched off kadre or Tiger Kab personnel; (4) haven't bragged to their lowlife pals & implicated kadre or Tiger Kab personnel & will not (5) do so if they get popped, which is unlikely, because (6) Milt has greased the LVPD & Sheriff's Narco squads & has secured a hands-off policy, & if any 1 of the 4 is popped, the plan is to bail them out & clip them before they talk too much.

So, (7), everything is buffered. Tiger drivers deliver the merchandise to drop points & the pushers pick it up, distribute it & funnel the money back the same way. The drivers are all solid pros & will not talk if busted. On his one stateside run, Wayne periodically spot-tailed the pushers & determined that they weren't skimming or fucking up other ways. Wayne's got an evil reputation on the west side & it keeps the pushers on a tight leash.

D) - As you know, Wayne's made one rotation from Saigon & sent the 2nd shipment (4 lbs) stateside on 3/2/65.

Rogers, Relyea, Mesplede, Guery & Elorde remain in Laos & oversee the M-base production at Tiger Kamp (while you & the other guys who concocted this whole thing roam around S.E. Asia pulling your clandestine shit). The production level at Tiger Kamp remains high & the January-February harvest beat the chemists' estimates. Tran's methedrine ran out (mixed blessing—it killed 3 slaves) & we had a slow week (late Feb.) while the slaves smoked heavy amounts of "O" & rode out withdrawals. We've got to burn the fields in April to prepare the soil for the fall planting, but we've got enough backstock of M-base to see us through to the next harvest, because the 3 refineries were overstocked when we raided & consolidated last November. So far, my rubber-bullet policy is working, because the ex-ARVNs & ex-Congs continue to feud. Mesplede is staging weekly Cong-ARVN boxing matches (slave cornermen & referees) which helps blow off steam & boosts morale.

E) - You were right about the "cleanup." The Can Lao took out the den below the lab (& supposedly 600 others) but now that the initial troop arrival bullshit is over, things are back to normal. None of Chuck's Saravan-to-Saigon merchandise flights have been messed with at either end & Customs has not checked any of his cargoes. The den below the lab & the Go-Go have reopened & Wayne still tests dosage levels on the resident heads. Tran said Khanh's stopped making anti-dope statements & everyone in Saigon seems distracted by the troops coming in & the way the war is flaring up. You were right, it feels like the buildup is giving us added operational cover.

F) - The pipeline's running A-OK. So far, no Customs checks & glitches flying out of Tan Son Nhut & no trouble at Nellis. My friend Littell surveilled the 1/9/65 shipment from Nellis to the Agency drop-off point thru to the final "donation" point at the Nevada Guard Armory. Milt C. has been transporting the merchandise from the drop-point to Tiger Kab. It's a foolproof system & the Guard is thrilled with Mr. Hughes' "donations."

G) - Some unexpected expenses came up on Milt's end, but aside from that, we're $182,000 up from our Vegas profits on the 1/9 batch & 3/2 batch so far. I'm ready to rotate Chuck, Laurent & Flash stateside & have them scout exile camps, assess the troops & get going on an arms conduit to the ones they choose. Bob Relyea leaves the Army to work for the Feds in May, & he'll be situated near the Gulf. He'll utilize his gun connections & assist Chuck, Laurent & Flash in funneling to the exiles.

That's it. I'm anxious to move on the Cuban end. Let's put all this caution & budgetary constraint shit aside & get going.

Viva la Causa!

P.B.

(Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Miami, Washington, D.C.
Chicago, Selma, 3/21/65–6/15/65)

Penance. Tithe. Counterthrust.

He obeyed Mr. Hoover. He taped Bayard Rustin. He rab-bitized. He performed new betrayals—RABBIT ops—Mr. Hoover's counter tithes.

He traveled for work. He worked for Drac and Jimmy. He worked for Drac and the Boys. He flew D.C. to Miami. He flew Chicago to L.A.

He cruised banks. He set up new accounts. He used fake ID. He dumped cash. He cut checks. He tithed the SCLC.

Counter ops:

Skim fees. Embezzlement. Let's declaw BLACK RABBIT.

He drained Drac. He took small bites—little rabbit nips. It worked. The skim plan worked. Counter cash accrued.

He worked.

He worked for Jimmy Hoffa. He filed briefs. He fought two convictions. He dunned the Boys. He bagged two mill for Jimmy's Hope Chest.

New hope. Nonhope. No hope. There were no bribable jurors. There were no bribable courts.

Mr. Hoover had pull. Mr. Hoover liked Jimmy. Mr. Hoover could help. Don't brace him or beg him. Don't incur more indebtedness—yet.

He worked for Drac. He filed briefs. He bought time. He needed twelve months—sixteen tops.

Let Drac dump his stock then. Let Drac get his stash. Let Drac inject Las Vegas.

Fred Otash worked.

Fred Otash culled. Fred Otash sifted. Fred Otash scandalized. Let's raid files. Let's find dirt. Let's utilize.

The files existed: *Confidential/Rave/Whisper/Lowdown* and *Hush-Hush*. The files existed. The files eluded. The files dirtified.

Bugs dirtified.

Littell hung Vegas bugs. Fred Turentine assisted. They bugged hotel rooms. They trapped dirt. They trapped legislators.

Three so far—three cheaters/three whorehounds/three drunks.

Feds manned the bug posts—two agents for three months. Mr. Hoover got bored. It was dirt insufficient. Call it a dirt deficit.

Mr. Hoover pulled the Feds. Fred filled in for them. Fred dirtified. Fred stored dirt. Fred aged dirt. Fred saved dirt for Pete.

Three legislators and one Pete. Compliance guaranteed. We've got the board votes. We've got YOU now. Pledge your support.

Watch us abridge antitrust laws. Watch our Vegas spree. Watch hotel profits plunge. Watch skim ops soar. Watch Littell invest skim money.

We've got the "real" books. We've got the goods. We've got the buyout stats. We co-opt businesses. We funnel cash. We build foreign casinos.

The Boys hoard. The Boys divert. The Boys avoid obstructions —*usually*.

Sam G. was obstructed now. It was recent news. Sam was in jail in Chicago. A grand jury subpoenaed him. Bobby paneled it. Bobby was AG then.

Sam refused to testify. Sam took the Fifth. The judge cited him.

Contempt of Court—Cook County Jail—for the grand-jury term. One year—jail to spring '66.

The judge ragged on Sam. The judge aped Bobby. Bobby ragged Sam in '57. Bobby was Senate counsel then. Bobby was a senator now.

He played his Bobby tapes. He toured the Senate. He prowled the gallery. He watched Bobby. He read the Senate Record. He tracked Bobby's words through.

Bobby debunks bills. Bobby lauds bills. Bobby never mentions the Boys. Bobby presses for civil rights. Bobby lauds Dr. King.

Littell taped Bayard Rustin. Bayard praised King. Littell met Bayard sans tape. Bayard waxed sad that day. Bayard showed him the letter.

"King, look into your heart."

"King, like all frauds, your end is approaching."

"You are a colossal fraud, and an evil, vicious one at that."

"King, there is only one thing left for you to do."

They met in Lafayette Park. Bayard showed him the letter. He read it. He went queasy. He walked.

He met Bayard one more time. Lafayette Park again. They talked sans tape. It sparked him. It scared him.

Tails.

Dwight Holly had him tailed. Mr. Hoover said so. *Vegas* tails—pre-RABBIT.

Holly was BLUE RABBIT. Holly ran BLACK RABBIT. Holly hated him. Spot tails meant checks. Spot tails meant notes. Spot tails meant data accrued.

He met Jane in Vegas—that one bad time—potential tails were out. He met Janice—their first time—potential tails were out.

Holly pulled the tails. Holly pulled them pre-RABBIT. Mr. Hoover said so. Holly ran RABBIT. Holly had juice. Holly could tail-reinstate.

He met Bayard. They had two meets sans tape. He ran tail checks. None were visible. None were obvious. None were probable or certified.

Bayard said, "Come to Selma. You'll see history."

He did it.

He flew down. He used fake ID. He forged a press card. He ducked the marchers. He ducked the cops. He joined a press crew.

He watched. He fretted tails. He saw Bloody Sunday.

Highway 80. The Edmund Pettus Bridge. Sheriff Clark's posse—horses and patrol cars with rebel bumper-flags.

Clark braced the marchers. Clark said disperse in two minutes. The posse charged one minute in. They charged with tear gas and billy clubs. They charged with bullwhips and barbed-wire saps.

The posse hit the marchers. The posse cut through them. The posse mowed them down. He watched. He hid behind cameras. He saw saps rip noses. He saw whips sever ears.

He hid. Meek CRUSADER RABBIT. Unworthy of brave RED and PINK.

He flew back to Vegas. He thought about tails. He thought about Mr. Hoover. Mr. Hoover pledged memos—RABBIT details

—Mr. Hoover sent none.

Let's extrapolate. Let's grow some fear.

Mr. Hoover is busy. He's deep in BLACK RABBIT. BLUE RABBIT counsels him. BLUE hates CRUSADER. BLUE hoards memorandums. BLUE restricts their flow.

Or:

Mr. Hoover has plans. They're draconian. They supersede suicide letters. Why disturb CRUSADER? Why risk his specious reproach?

Don't tweak him with knowledge. Don't risk his betrayal. Don't test his silly ideals.

Or:

BLUE has a puppet—WILD RABBIT on strings—WILD RABBIT works alone. WILD runs Klansmen. WILD might run autonomous. WILD might run outright rogue.

Mr. Hoover knows it. BLUE knows it—so why tell CRUSADER that?

Need-to-know. Read-and-burn. Compartments. Sealed access. Love-and-hide.

He had Jane. Jane survived her Vegas trip. Jane never went back. They went back to their rules. They resealed their compartments. They hid in L.A.

They ignored their fight. They revived their game. He lied. She lied. They codified. Their code said we aired it. Their code said it hurt. Their code said we survived Dallas.

Jane knew he taped Bobby. Jane knew he bilked Howard Hughes. Jane knew the Boys. Jane knew the Life. Jane feared the Teamsters for real.

Compartments. Sealed access. Love-and-lie. The love worked. The lies hurt. The seal cracked.

He traveled. He sealed off Vegas. He compartmentalized. He met Barb. He joined her fan club. He sat ringside.

They were prom dates. Admiration and earnest chats. Chaste drinks and her show.

Pete rotated through—Vietnam to Vegas—they all socialized. Barb rotated with him. Her eyes went from pinholed to bright.

Pills. Her secret. Her Pete's-gone-rotation delight.

All men loved her. He told Pete. Pete said he knew that. Barb grew. Barb changed while he watched her. Barb changed her ridiculous lounge act.

She put out more knock-knees. She put out more ad-libs and goofs. I'm six feet tall. I can't sing. I know terrible things.

He loved her. He loved her more than Janice and Jane.

Janice was Vegas. Jane was L.A. He rotated through. Compartments: candor and lies/separate disclosures.

Janice spilled her secrets. Janice *never* lied. She bragged about sex. She proved her points. She flaunted her prowess.

She talked too much. She enticed men. She lived for the thrill. She thought she controlled men. Her stories disproved it. She confused prowess with heart.

She divorced Wayne Senior. She ditched his name. She went back to "Lukens." She earned her two million. She paid with cramps. She paid with a limp.

She fought back. She played golf. She broke par as a gimp. She never cried. She never whined. She never complained.

They met at her cottage. They made love. They talked.

Janice *talked*. He listened.

She fucked a Negro man. Wayne Senior found out and killed him. She fucked Clark Kinman. Wayne Senior watched. She fucked bellboys on dares and bets.

She fucked Wayne Junior. She paid.

She talked too much. She drank too much. She limped through A-club tennis. She was pure will unconsidered. She was inimical to Jane.

Janice talked. Janice digressed. Janice discussed Wayne Senior. He was bad. He was cruel. He'd do ANYTHING.

Janice talked. Janice scared him. Wayne Senior was FATHER RABBIT.

(Las Vegas, Miami, Port Sulphur, Saigon,
Saravan, Dac To, Dak Sut, Muang Kao,
3/21–6/15/65)

Rotation:

East to west—V to V—Vietnam to Vegas.

He flew west—rotation 1—Barb met his plane. She sparkled. She beamed. She refuted that letter.

The letter bugged him. Jerky words and the lines "up & down." He thought about pills—lounge-popcorn uppers and reds to come down.

No/nyet/nein. Noi in Viet. Barb radiated. Barb fucking glowed.

They glowed three years in. They glowed with crazy shit concurrent. Barb got better. Barb got stronger. Barb got X-ray eyes.

She saw through show people. She saw through the Life. The Life was rigged. The men took the risks. The men had the fun. The men conspired. The men served causes. The women served tea.

Barb said it: "I peaked early. I extorted JFK." Barb said it: "You've got Cuba. I've got the Sultan's Lounge."

She didn't nag him. She didn't play shrew. She just said she'd changed.

They hashed it out. He sensed cabin fever. Vegas hemmed her in. He sold dope batch #1. He bought two tickets east.

They booked to Miami. They took the cat. They booked a suite at the Doral. The cat leveled it.

He clawed the drapes. He shit on chairs. He killed terrace birds. He bootjacked their room-service food.

They caught Dino. They caught Shecky Green. They got ringside seats. They slept late and made love.

They talked. He laid out Vietnam. He lied. He downplayed the killing. He downplayed the slaves.

Barb pressed him. Barb tripped him up. Barb nailed his lies. He said fuck it. He cut loose. He disclosed.

Barb said, "All that for *Cuba*?"

They got some rays. They ran into Jimmy H. They went out for stone crabs. Jimmy fumed. Jimmy fugued. Jimmy ran nonstop boo-hoo.

His legal woes. Sam G. in stir. His ripe hemorrhoids.

Pete bored in. Pete pumped him. Pete worked his mood. Pete pumped angles. Pete pumped oblique.

It's Kansas City. It's '56. Danny Bruvick fucks you.

Jimmy cut loose—six fucks!/six cocksuckers!/six Arden cunts! Jimmy dished on Arden. Jimmy tossed a bomb:

Arden Bruvick—that cunt—she was Jules Schiffrin's ex.

Pete said, "Excuse me." Pete walked to the john. Pete found a throne. Pete sat down. Pete hashed it all through.

Jules Schiffrin—Mob money man—dead in '60. The "real" fund books—Schiffrin's property. Arden Bruvick: bookkeeper.

It's '56. It's K.C. Danny Bruvick splits. Jimmy fugues out. Cops bust Arden. The T&C Corp bails her. Carlos M. owns T&C.

Cut to:

'59—New Orleans—J.P. Mesplède passes through. Mesplède sees Arden—with some Carlos goon.

Cut to:

1960—Wisconsin—Ward Littell steals the books. Schiffrin heart-attacks and drops dead.

Cut to:

Fall '63. Carlos taps Ward. Carlos says this:

You got the books. Jimmy don't know it. The Boys and I do. We know you. We *own* you. You'll sell Drac our hotels. You'll *work* the books. You'll dredge up data. You'll funnel skim through.

Cut to:

Dallas—hit time—Arden meets Ward. She works for Jack Ruby. She keeps *his* books. She's seen the safe house. She's seen the targets. She's seen the crew.

Ward falls for Arden. Carlos wants her dead. Ward makes

Arden "Jane." Ward hides "Jane." Ward brews fund-book schemes.

So:

Did Carlos find Arden? Did Carlos pledge mercy? IF YOU SPY ON LITTELL? Arden was a bookkeeper. Arden knew Schiffrin. Arden *lived* with Littell.

Sound logic, but:

He saw Ward with "Jane." They were *real*. He *knew* it.

It scared him. He teethed on it. He riffed: *Real* deals with women could be undercut—and thus shot to shit.

Barb saw him pump Jimmy. Barb gauged his john run. Barb got halfway hip. He filled her in. He abridged it. He omitted Carlos. He omitted Big D.

Barb loved it. Barb loved secrets. Barb held them tough. They discussed it. He told her—I'll probe up more stuff.

He called Fred Otash. Otash weighed in. Otash said I'm on it—don't sweat. I'll buy *more* cops. I'll put out *more* search fees. My cops will check files and call back.

They schmoozed. Otash had news. Otash said Ward hired him. Ward craved dirt. Ward bought a dirt search—let's find the old scandal-rag files.

Pete riffed on his Arden search. Pete said don't tell Ward—don't clue Ward in. Otash played ball. Otash had Arden pix already. Otash *knew* Arden was Jane.

Pete teethed on it. Pete sifted it. Pete lived with it. Pete ran rotations.

Vegas was good—100%. White horse hits. The word expands. Clients accrue: Sniffers/tasters/junkies/skin-popper geeks.

The street pushers worked. The street pushers proselytized. They wore flash threads. They drove jig rigs. They glorified "H." They glamorized it. They accessorized it. They Tupperwared it.

They cruised the projects. They drew crowds. They sniffed powdered milk and bopped strong. They debunked that addiction jive.

They wore pendants. They wore processed hair. They carried mock-gold guns. They lied. They said spooks ran the biz. They denied that the White Man existed.

Wayne tailed them. It scared them. They knew Wayne's rep. Wayne Junior be baaaaaaaaaaaad. Wayne Junior kill our kin.

Profits accrued. Milt totaled them. Milt praised the horse epidemic. It was restricted. It was contained. No whites need apply.

A dope punk moved in. Said punk brought ambition. Said punk sniffed the air. Said punk sniffed the wrong vibration:

Horse is cool—let's sell some—the Mob don't mind.

Pete dispatched his niggers. Said niggers grabbed said punk.

Santo T. had a shark named Batista. He lived in Santo's pool. He ate burgers. He ate steak. He ate pizza.

The niggers dropped the punk in the pool. Batista ate him live.

White horse stayed west. Junkies stayed home. Junkies eschewed white Vegas. Tiger Kabs prowled west. Tiger orbs glowed.

So far:

No new pushers. No pending fuzz heat. No unbribed narcs making noise.

Tiger Kab was hip. Sonny Liston tigerized. Sonny ate at the hut. Sonny drank at the hut. Sonny went on local TV.

Sonny did ads. Sonny proselytized:

"Tiger Kab packs a knockout punch." "Tiger Kab kicks Cassius Clay's patootie."

Fag drivers drove. Straight drivers drove. Pete enforced faction détente. Fag drivers sold boys. Fag celebs bought boys. Fag drivers drove fags to hotels.

Fag clerks minced. Fag clerks smirked. Fag clerks supplied rooms. Said rooms: Bugged/tapped/extortionized.

Fag drivers drove fags. Fag drivers turned tricks. Donkey Dom tricked with Sal Mineo. Donkey Dom tricked with Rock Hudson.

Sonny said it:

"Tiger prowls 24 hours! If you don't swing, don't ring!"

Tiger Kab swung in Vegas. Tiger Kamp rocked Laos hard.

Pete rotated. Pete left Vegas. Pete cut the Barb cord. Wayne rotated. Stanton worked in Saigon. Laurent and Chuck worked in Laos.

Pete detached Flash—4/65—strict orders: Hit the Gulf. Hit exile camps. Scout for good troops.

Pete detached Mesplède—4/65—strict orders: Hit the U.S. Hit the South. Scout gun dealers out.

Bob Relyea left Laos—5/65—Bob Relyea hit Mississippi. Bob was Fed now. Bob did snitch work. It was klandestine.

Chuck to follow Bob. Chuck to hit Houston. Chuck to scout guns. Chuck to scout Gulf-close—close to Mississippi. Close to Mesplède and pal Bob.

Chuck snickered to Bob. Bob snickered to Chuck. They snickered contrapuntal. They snickered through Bob's big farewell.

They implied mischief. They indulged wordplay. They inferred klown-ery. Birmingham, Alabama. Really BOMBingham. Bogalusa—tee-hee—BOMBalusa.

Bob split for Fed work. Chuck changed roommates. Chuck bunked with Laurent Guéry now. Chuck bugged him. Chuck hassled him. Chuck harangued him:

With Klan klaptrap. With klownish klaims. With klaims of krossburns to kome.

Rotations all—Dallas to Vegas—Dallas to Vietnam. Grad-school hijinx and reunions.

Chuck shot. Chuck shot from the knoll. Mesplède shot Oswald's gun. Flash and Laurent stood in Boyd's team. They got scuttled pre-hit.

Rotations—Saigon to the Gulf—the Gulf to Cuba. Flash is Cuban. Flash is dark. Flash could get in.

The plan:

Flash goes in. Flash charts resistance. Flash finds good men. Flash smuggles them out. Flash boats them in. Flash feeds Guéry and Mesplède.

They've got a shack. It's Gulf-close. They've got electrodes. They torture the men. They test their balls. They ensure their loyalty.

Rotations—Cuba to the Gulf—the Gulf to Vietnam. *Biggggggggg* U.S. troop numbers.

Stanton logged said numbers. Stanton logged provocations. Stanton vibed a long war.

The Cong hits Pleiku. Eight Yankees die. LBJ reacts. Air strikes: Operation Flaming Dart.

The Cong hits Qui Nhon. Twenty-one Yankees die. LBJ reacts. More air strikes: Flaming Dart II.

U.S. troops arrive—"advisors"—two Marine battalions. More air strikes: Operation Rolling Thunder.

Two battalions arrive—logistical troops—20,000 men. They get deployed. They get dispersed. They get detached to Marv units.

Firefights. Dead Yanks. Incoming rotations. Buildups—

incremental—40,000 men per.

Troops hit Saigon. Troops R&R. Troop numbers swell. Long war good. Kadre like it. Buildup most boocoo.

Wayne lived in Saigon. Wayne lived in his lab. Wayne said *his* fucking world swelled. More people. More noise. More songs up his vents. More Marvs. More O-heads. More whores.

More cover. More white horse. More money.

Stanton laundered profits. Stanton fed Pete. Pete fed Mesplède. Mesplède bought righteous *guns*.

.50-calibers/Ithacas/BARs/antitank guns.

Flash found a troop site. It was Gulf-close and gooood. It was near Port Sulphur, Louisiana. It housed sixty troopers—Cubano shitkickers all.

Mesplède dropped some guns off. The shitkickers roared. Pete rotated through. Pete dug on the troops. Pete dug their maneuvers.

The troopers were hard-ons. The troopers were *très* hard. The troopers were *très sanguinaire*.

Pete rotated. Pete hit Saigon. Pete met Stanton's CIA crew. Six men plus Stanton—all Cubafied.

They talked Cuba. They talked ops. They talked polygraph tests. They'd be mandatory and random. They'd go kadre-wide. Let's ID and whack traitors. Let's uproot thieves. Let's assure loyalty.

Stanton flew to Laos. Stanton brought his poly machine. Pete tested. Pete tested clean. Tran tested. Tran tested clean.

Stanton stayed for a visit. Stanton watched the spring burn.

Guards unshackled slaves. Slaves piled brush. Guards formed a fire brigade. They stacked the piles. They positioned them—one per stalk row.

Slaves filled drums with propane gas. Guards dipped torches. Guards whooped. Guards lit torches. Guards torched brush.

The fields burned. The sky flared. The fields burned all night. Guards cheered. Slaves cheered. Tiger Kamp cinderized.

Ash blew. Ash settled. Ash nourished kamp-wide.

Stanton loved it. Stanton stayed. Stanton stayed for the Clay-Liston fight. Chuck rigged a hookup—closed-circuit shit—a feed off MACV in Saigon.

Sonny lost. The fight vibed nonclimax. Sportswriter stupes yelled, "Fix!"

Pete laughed. Fuck it—Pete *knew:*
Sonny was old. Sonny was slow. Sonny was tigerfried.

(Las Vegas, Saigon, Saravan, Bao Loc
3/21/65–6/15/65)

Let's escalate. Let's *watch*.

Khanh is in. Khanh is out. Premier Ky kreams Premier Khanh. Don't blink—koups and kream-outs kome kwick.

"Escalate"—a verb—LBJ's word: "To increase, enlarge or intensify."

The war escalated. Wayne watched.

More troops came in. More troops got pledged. Provocation meant response. More Marines came in. More Marines got pledged. More Airborne came in. More Airborne got pledged in response.

More dead:

More bomb attacks in mid-Saigon. More mid-range dead. The Brinks Hotel/the embassy—more Yankee dead.

More VC. More night patrols. More sabotage.

Pleiku—much aircraft blow—nice U.S. fleet. VC attack—most bold and sincere. VC use pole-and-satchel bombs—homemade/*très* VC. TNT/palm leaves/bamboo.

Many planes blow. *One* VC die.

Provocation meant response. Response meant bomb runs. More pilots. More troops. More artillery.

Stanton ran numbers. Provocation meets response—thus fervor meets weight. Stanton predicted two hundred K troops—in by '66.

Big numbers. Big ordnance. Big weight.

Wayne watched. Wayne dug it. Wayne missed the point. Vietnam was a shithole. The Cong couldn't lose. The Cong lived to die.

A Cong walked in the Go-Go. Said Cong wore Cong drag—black pj's deluxe. A spec-4 shot him. A chest bomb blew. Oops—Cong booby-trapped.

Six dead—all U.S.—Cong reigns six-to-one.

Stanton loved the war. Pete loved the war. Stanton and Pete loved Cuba. Cuba was a shithole. Cuba was Saigon with sand.

The kadre loved the war. The kadre kame for Kuba. Wayne came to watch.

He stayed in Saigon. He cooked dope. He watched. GIs hit the Go-Go. GIs bought whores. GIs fucked whores on floor planks.

He watched.

The O-heads decomped. Quicklime ate bone. Marvs made fertilizer. Marvs sold it discount.

He watched.

The Cong burned pylons. Saigon went dark. Pilots dropped psychedelic-tint flares.

He watched. He worked. He lived in Saigon. He cabbed to Bao Loc. He bought weapons. Said weapons were dope cover. Said weapons were donation stock.

He jeeped up and back. He tailed patrols. His standard procedure was *watch.*

4/8/65—near Dinh Quan. Rice field firefight—jarheads and VC.

A road mine popped. Wayne's jeep flew. The windshield blew up. The driver ate glass. The driver died. Wayne crouched by his stiff.

Bushes—off the road. They're moving now. They're bush-wrapped VC.

They charged. The jarheads proned out. Fair fight/no cover.

Wayne rolled free. Wayne pulled his piece. Wayne shot three VC. His shots dinged. He hit tin vests—fucking trashcan lids.

The VC fired. The jarheads fired. The jarheads aimed high and low. They shot feet. They shot legs. They shot faces. They hit vest-free zones.

The VC went down. Rounds dinged off the jeep. A medic went down with one in the neck. Wayne rolled and fired free.

He hit six VC. He notched all head shots. He double-killed.

The jarheads stood up. A jarhead tripped a punji stick. Spikes slammed him—knees to nipples—punctures and rips.

Wayne rolled to the medic. Wayne grabbed his Syrettes—pure morphine cc's.

He rolled to the jarhead. He shot up the jarhead. The jarhead convulsed. The jarhead hurled chunks of his spleen.

Wayne had white horse—one spike in his pocket—one short test dose.

He found a vein. He geezed the man. The man gasped. The man smiled. The man nodded out.

Wayne timed his death. He went out in sixteen seconds. He went out wispy and numb.

Pete was World War II. Pete had a rule: Don't sell to GIs. It was naive. It negated the real rule: provocation meets response.

"Our Boys" would fight the war. "Our Boys" would look for outs. "Our Boys" would find Big "H."

Stanton had terms: "the Agency's War" and "the Personal Commitment."

He killed Bongo. He committed. He joined the war then. He squashed a bug. It felt right. It felt impersonal. He killed Bongo. He dumped Bongo. He took his own pulse. Sixty-two beats a minute—no malice/no stress.

Rats ate Bongo. Some Marvs found his bones. A rumor spread: Chemist do it—chemist kill pimp.

Whores braced Wayne. They said be our pimp—we love you. He said no. He saw that colored whore. He saw her trailer.

The rumor spread. Chuck heard it. Chuck told Bob. Bob braced him. Bob said come south and join my Klan—we'll fuck niggers up.

Wayne said no. Bob dropped hints: I work for your dad. Wayne said no. Bob laughed. Wayne said he might come to WATCH.

He watched in Saigon. He watched in Bao Loc. He watched in Vegas. He watched the pushers. He tailed the pushers. He ensured subservience.

He watched West LV. He watched the bars. He watched that trailer. Junkies used it now. Junkies geezed within. They ignored the soot. They ignored the smell. They ignored the whore's bones.

He watched West LV. He asked around. He trawled for Wendell Durfee. The locals ignored him. The locals misled him. The locals spit on his shoes.

He logged tips. He paid rewards. He logged futile data. He hit the bars. He logged fear. He brought Sonny Liston along.

Sonny quaffed J&B. Sonny popped pills. Sonny ran riffs: Wendell Durfee went Muslim—Muhammad speaks—it gots to be!

Wendell runs a mosque. Wendell knows Cassius Clay. Wendell knew the late Malcolm X.

Storm the Nigger Mosques. Climb the Nigger Grapevine. Comb the Nigger Underworld. Patch the Nigger Switchboard. Punch the Nigger Teletype—and track that nigger down!

Sonny peeled his nigger eyes. Sonny filed his nigger claws. Sonny tapped his nigger intuition. Sonny logged tips. Sonny dished out rewards. Sonny pledged results.

Pete said Durfee was dead. DPD killed him unpublicized. They killed him for Maynard Moore.

Wayne said no—you're wrong. Wayne logged tips and WATCHED.

He logged lounge time. He watched Barb. He took side seats. He looked backstage. He got candid shots.

The Bondsmen smoked weed there. Barb popped pills. Barb popped Johnnie Black. Her eyes showed it. Her pulse showed it. She cleaned up for Pete's rotations.

He watched. He saw things everywhere. He felt invisible.

He logged lounge time. He caught Barb's gigs. He saw Janice and Ward Littell. They sat close. They held hands. They brushed knees.

He saw them. They never saw him. Sonny had a theory: Only niggers see you.

(Las Vegas, 6/18/65)

Janice hit balls.

She chipped off her porch. Said porch as golf range—tee/putting strip/net.

It was hot. Janice wore a middy blouse and shorts. Littell watched her concentrate. Littell watched her hit.

Janice teed balls. Janice hit shots. Janice stretched the net. She swiveled. Her blouse gapped. Her beating scars flexed.

She said, “I saw Wayne Senior at the DI. He was making a phone call.”

Littell smiled. “Why are you telling me this?”

“Because you hate him, and you’re curious about the men I’ve slept with.”

Littell sipped coffee. “I hope I haven’t been prying.”

“That’s impossible with me. You know how I love to divulge.”

“I do know. It’s something that separates—”

“Me from Jane, I know.”

Littell smiled. “Tell me what you heard.”

Janice teed a ball. “He was in the casino, and he was using one of those courtesy phones. He didn’t see me behind him.”

“And?”

“And he was talking to a man named Chuck. He was talking about the bad reception from Vietnam, and he was cracking jokes about Bogalusa and ‘Bombalusa.’ ”

Littell stirred his coffee. “That’s it?”

“That and the way he was gloating, with that Indiana drawl of his.”

Hold it. Stop right—

Littell stirred his coffee. Littell thought it through. Bogalusa was East Louisiana. Bogalusa was Klan kountry.

Vote drives—right now—fronted by SCLC. BLACK RABBIT on go. Wayne Senior as FATHER RABBIT.

Hold it. Stop right—

You're CRUSADER RABBIT. Bayard Rustin's PINK. You taped PINK. PINK told you about Bogalusa. You told Mr. Hoover.

Mr. Hoover knows. Mr. Hoover never calls. Mr. Hoover pledges memos. Mr. Hoover sends none.

Janice built a martini. "Is there room for two in that trance of yours, or should I leave you alone?"

Littell coughed. "Do you have any idea who Chuck is?"

"Well, I'd say he's that little man who flew a plane to Wayne Senior's Christmas party, and showed up with your caveman friend Pete."

Hold it. Stop right—

Chuck Rogers: Pilot/killer/racist nut/Dallas shooter. Vietnam and Pete's gig—covert CIA.

FATHER RABBIT runs WILD RABBIT. WILD RABBIT is Army. WILD RABBIT serves "overseas." Mr. Hoover talked rabbits. Mr. Hoover talked dates. WILD RABBIT to leave the Army—5/65. WILD RABBIT to go Klan then.

"Ward, am I going to have to do a striptease to pull you out of that trance?"

He worried it. He tested it. He dreamed RABBITS. He carried it with him. He brought it home. He slept with it.

BOMBalusa. BOMBingham: September '63. A bomb blows at 16th Street Baptist Church. Four Negro girls die.

He woke up. He made coffee. He built rationales:

Don't call Mr. Hoover. Don't raise an alarm. Don't call Pete. Don't mention Chuck. Don't breach need-to-know. Don't call Bayard. Don't probe Bogalusa. Don't sound his alarm.

Don't call BLUE RABBIT. Don't call WHITE RABBIT. Don't rouse the Holly boys. They hate Negroes. They love Mr. Hoover.

Wayne Senior's FATHER RABBIT. FATHER knows Chuck. FATHER runs WILD RABBIT. WILD RABBIT runs a klavern. The Feds fund it and impose rules:

"Operational guidelines." "Violence to sustain informant credibility." BOMBingham/BOMBalusa/BOMB—

Littell grabbed the phone. Littell called Barb. Littell ran a riff:

Laos. Pete's dope clique. Is Chuck Rogers in?

Barb said, "Yes."

Littell hung up. Littell called the switchboard. Littell braced an operator: Get me U.S. Customs—the passport office—New Orleans.

The operator ran it. Littell got the number. Littell dialed direct.

A man picked up. "Customs, Agent Bryce."

"My name's Ward Littell. I'm ex-FBI, with reserve credentials. I was hoping you'd do me a favor."

"Well, sure, if I can."

Littell grabbed a pen. "I need you to check your recently collated entries for flights from Laos and Vietnam. I'm looking for commercial or military landings at Customs-manned facilities in your jurisdiction, and I need the names on the passport-check lists."

Bryce coughed. "Can you hold? I doubt if we've had more than three or four of those, tops."

Littell said, "I'll hold."

Bryce hit a button. The connection fuzzed. Static hit the line. Littell held. Littell checked his watch. Littell counted rabbits.

BLUE RABBIT/WILD RABBIT/RED RABBIT. Three minutes/forty-two sec—

Bryce picked up. "Sir? We've only got one. I—"

"Can you give—"

"One ordnance flight. Saigon to the Air National Guard facility near Houston. The crew plus one passenger, a man named Charles Rogers."

(Saravan, 6/19/65)

Poly test—pure impromptu—John Stanton dropped in.

He cleared the hut. He rolled graph sheets. He rigged the machine. He fired the needle. He fired the pulse clip. He fired the dials.

Pete rigged a chair. Laurent Guéry sat down. Stanton rigged the blood-pressure cuff.

Stanton clamped the cuff. Pete looped the chest cord. Stanton pumped the cuff. Stanton read the dial:

Normal stats—110/80.

A wind stirred. Dope seeds blew. Pete shut the window.

Stanton grabbed a chair. Stanton pulse-clipped Guéry. Pete grabbed a chair. Pete watched the needle.

Stanton said, "Do you drink water?"

Guéry said, "Yes."

The needle bumped. The needle slid. The needle flatlined. Stanton read the cuff and clip:

Okay—normal signs.

Stanton said, "Are you a citizen of the Republic of France?"

Guéry said, "Yes."

The needle bumped. The needle slid. The needle flatlined. Stanton read the cuff and clip:

Okay—normal signs.

Pete stretched. Pete yawned—fuck this pro-forma jive.

Stanton said, "Are you a committed anti-Communist?"

Guéry said, "Yes."

Flatline.

Stanton said, "Are you pro–Viet Cong?"

Guéry said, "No."

Flatline.

Stanton said, "Have you ever stolen from the kadre?"

Guéry said, "No."

The needle dipped two inches. The needle laid swerve lines. Stanton pumped the cuff. Stanton read the dial.

Not okay—140/110—non-normal signs.

Guéry squirmed. Pete eyeballed him. Pete read his signs: Chills/goose bumps/sweat.

Stanton said, "Have you ever stolen from kadre-adjunct personnel?"

Guéry said, "No."

The needle dipped three inches. The needle laid swerve lines.

Stanton hit the intercom switch. Stanton talked gook: "*Quon, Minh. Mau len. Di, thi, di.*"

Two gooks ran in—one Marv and one Cong doubletime. Guéry squirmed. Pete read signs: Wet hands/wet armpits/crotch leaking sweat.

Stanton nodded. The gooks flanked Guéry. The gooks pulled batons.

Stanton said, "Do you have knowledge of such thefts?"

Guéry said, "No."

The needle dipped six inches. The needle laid swerve lines.

Stanton said, "Do you have knowledge that Pete Bondurant perpetrated such thefts?"

Guéry said, "No."

Needle bump. Flatline.

Stanton said, "Do you have knowledge that Jean Philippe Mesplède perpetrated such thefts?"

Guéry said, "No."

Needle bump. Flatline.

Stanton said, "Do you have knowledge that Wayne Tedrow Junior perpetrated such thefts?"

Guéry said, "No."

Needle bump. Flatline.

Stanton said, "Do you have knowledge that Chuck Rogers perpetrated such thefts?"

Guéry said, "No."

The needle dipped eight inches. The needle laid swerve lines.

Guéry squirmed. Stanton cued the gooks. They grabbed ropes.

They looped them. They tied Guéry to the chair.

Stanton pulled his piece. Stanton cocked it. Pete grabbed the field phone. Pete patched the lab.

Chuck was gone. Chuck split to Saigon. Chuck split four days back. Chuck bunked with Guéry now. Chuck hassled Guéry. Chuck drove Guéry nuts.

Pete got a dial tone. Pete got line fuzz. Pete got a click.

Wayne picked up. “Yeah?”

“It’s me. Have you seen Chuck?”

“No. Was he supposed—”

“He was supposed to go through Bao Loc and Saigon and pick up some guns.”

“I haven’t seen him at all. He always comes by the Go-Go when he’s—”

Pete hung up. Stanton cued him—go check the hooch.

Pete ran over. Pete popped the door. Pete tripped on the mat. He caught himself. He eyeball-walked. He quadrant-scanned.

Four walls/two fart sacks/two nightstands/two lockers/one shitter/one sink.

Pete dumped the nightstands. Pete combed debris. Toothpaste/rubbers/stroke books/hate tracts/*Ring* magazines.

Two passports—both Guéry’s—CIA/French.

Pete dumped the lockers. Pete combed debris. Hate tracts/bug spray/beaver pix/gun oil/*Swank* magazines.

No Chuck passports. No Chuck ID.

Pete grabbed the field phone. Pete patched Saigon direct. He got Ops South. They repatched him. He got Tan Son Nhut. They repatched him. He got static. He got Customs.

He got a gook. He spoke French. The gook spoke strict Viet. The gook repatched him. He got static. He got a white man.

“Customs, Agent Lierz.”

“This is Sergeant Peters, CID. I’m checking on a civilian who might’ve cleared Customs within the past four days.”

Lierz coughed. The line coughed. Static brizzed.

“You got a name?”

“Rogers. First name Charles.”

Lierz coughed. “I’ve got my log here. Hold on … Rice, Ridgeway, Rippert … yeah, Rogers. He flew out four days ago. He showed manifest docs, loaded explosive material and caught a transport to the National Guard strip in Houston, Tex—”

Pete hung up. Pete *got* it: Thefts/fake docs/explosives.

Guéry screamed. Pete heard it loud. It carried from forty yards up.

He ran back. He smelled smoke and piss. He cracked the door and *saw* it.

There's Guéry.

He's tied up. He's pantless. He's scared. Stanton's got the hot box. Stanton's got the switch. Stanton's got the clamps on his balls.

The gooks watched. The gooks smoked bootjack Kools. The gooks slurped gook wine.

Stanton said, "What did Chuck Rogers steal?"

Guéry shook his head. Stanton hit the switch. Stanton tossed volts. Guéry buckled and screamed.

Stanton said, "If the theft is kadre-adjunct and you didn't participate or report it, I'd be inclined to go easy."

Guéry shook his head. Stanton hit the switch. Stanton tossed volts. Guéry buckled and screamed.

Stanton said, "Where's Rogers now? What did he steal and who did he steal it from?"

Guéry shook his head. Stanton hit the switch. Stanton tossed volts. Guéry buckled and screamed.

Pete *got* it—for real now.

Chuck and Guéry worked Dallas. Stanton's got no clue. Guéry won't talk. Guéry won't rat Chuck for *anything*.

Stanton said, "Is Rogers in-country? Did he fly back to the States?"

Guéry shook his head. Stanton hit the switch. Stanton tossed volts. Guéry buckled and screamed.

The gooks laughed—he claaazy—he *dinky dau*.

Stanton hit the switch. Stanton tossed volts. Guéry buckled. Guéry screamed. Guéry yelled, "*Assez!*"

Stanton cued the gooks. The gooks pulled the clamps. The gooks untied Guéry. The gooks sprayed his balls with baby oil. The gooks fed him gook wine.

He slurped it. He stood up. He teetered. He fell back in his chair.

Stanton leaned in. "If I said it hurt me more than it hurt you, I'd be a fucking liar."

Pete sneezed—the hut smelled—fried ball hair and sweat.

Guéry said, "The ammo dump … Bao Loc … Chuck, *qu'est-ce que c'est,* burglarized bomb material … from François."

Stanton shook his head. "Did he tell you what he had in mind?"

Pete leaned in. "Chuck flew to the States. If you let me talk to him alone, I'll get the rest of it."

Stanton nodded. Stanton stood up. Stanton cued the gooks—*venez, venez*.

They walked out together. Pete grabbed the bottle. Guéry snatched it. Guéry drained it. Guéry hitched his pants up.

"I will never have children now."

"It's not like you want them."

"No. The world has become too communistic."

"I think I know why you held back."

Guéry wiped his nose. "I did not betray the kadre."

"I know you didn't."

Guéry rubbed his balls. "Chuck … *qu'est-ce* … received a letter from his parents. I think they are not sane."

Pete lit two cigarettes. Guéry snatched one.

"Chuck lives at their house. They said they found his … *journal*?"

"Journal, right."

"Which described our operation in Dallas … for which … they demanded an explanation … which … Chuck said he would fly home and … *qu'est-ce* … take care of it."

Pete kicked a doorpost. "He stole bomb ordnance for *that*?"

Guéry coughed. "No. For something else. He would not tell me."

Pete walked outside. Slaves double-timed past him. Guards popped rubber rounds.

Stanton straddled a fence rail. "How bad?"

Pete shrugged. "You tell me. Laurent said it's a family grudge, and Chuck flew out with explosives."

Stanton chewed a hangnail. "There's a courier flight leaving for Fort Sam Houston. You and Wayne go find him and kill him."

(Houston, 6/21/65)

Gulf heat:

Low clouds and thick air. Air as bug propellant.

And bug catalyst. And bug haven. And bug launching pad. Bug *heat*—80 at 2:12 a.m.

The freeway was dead. Bugs bipped off the car. Pete drove. Wayne read maps.

Chez Chuck was on Driscoll. Chez Chuck was close. Chez Chuck was near Rice U.

Wayne yawned. Pete yawned. They yawned contrapuntal. They flew eighteen hours—Saigon to Houston—they plowed six time zones.

They flew transport. They sat on crates. They ate canned corn exclusive. Stanton set a car up—a ’61 Ford—there at Fort Sam.

Bum wheels altogether. No muffler. No fucking Air King.

Stanton knew some of it. Pete said so. Pete said he withheld the key shit. Maybe Chuck’s here. Maybe Chuck’s not. Maybe Chuck’s in Bogalusa.

With Bob Relyea—kadre-ex—kurrent Klan klown. Bob ran a snitch-Klan. Wayne Senior ran Bob. That meant *he* could WATCH.

They ditched the freeway. They took side streets. They ran their high beams. Houston was the shits—brick cribs and bug lights abundant.

Stanton shot them filework: stats per Chez Chuck. Chuck’s dad and mom were Fred and Edwina. They had a ’53 Olds.

Texas plates: DXL-841.

They hit Kirby Street. They hit Richmond. They turned hard right. There—Driscoll—1780/1800/1808.

1815 was glazed brick. No palace/no slum. Two floors and no lights extant.

Pete parked. Wayne grabbed two flashlights. They got out. They circled the house. They flashed the windows. They flashed the doors.

Bugs stirred. Owls stirred. Wasps bombed a nest.

Wayne flashed the back porch. Pete flashed a hedge. Wayne caught a glint—light on steel—Pete threw his beam down.

Wayne reached in. Wayne grabbed and pulled. Wayne sliced two fingers up.

There—

One Texas license plate—stuffed in a hedge. Bingo on DXL-841.

Pete said, "He changed plates on the Olds."

Wayne sucked his fingers. "Let's go in. We might find something."

Pete flashed the back door. Wayne walked up and looked. Okay: One lock/flat bolt/wide keyhole.

Pete cupped his light. Wayne pulled his picks and jabbed at the hole. Two missed. One hit. One slid in deep.

He twisted it. He turned it. He popped the bolt. They popped the door and walked in.

They flashed the floor. They flashed a stairwell. Wayne smelled mold. Wayne smelled baked beans.

They turned left. They hit a hall. They hit a kitchen. Wayne felt trapped heat. Moonlight sieved through venetian blinds.

Pete pulled the blinds. Wayne hit the lights. There:

Sink water—dark pink—carving knives afloat. Baked beans and fruit flies on mold. Hair in a colander. Dots on the floor. Dots by the fridge.

Pete opened it. Wayne smelled it. They *saw* it:

The severed legs. The diced hips. Mom's head in the vegetable bin.

(Bogalusa, 6/21/65)

Phone work:

Room 6—the Glow Motel—direct calls out. Outside noise as direct counterpoint.

Shouts. Rebel yells. Nigger! Nigger! Nigger! We Shall Overcome!

We're in BOMBalusa now. We remember BOMBingham.

He slept with the riddle. He lived with it. He ran.

To: Marches and pray-ins and cross burns. To: Beatings and hecklings and shouts.

He assumed a Fed presence. He laid cover tracks. He called Carlos. He set up a meet. He flew through New Orleans.

BLUE RABBIT might be here. Add BLUE's Brother WHITE. Add Hoover confidants. Add local Feds.

He laid tracks. I was close. *It* was close. I had to see. I'm CRUSADER RABBIT. I'm a fool for civil rights.

Littell checked his phone book. Littell ran motels. He called the Texas DMV this morning. He got Chuck Rogers' stats.

Houston/Driscoll Street/one Oldsmobile. Texas plates: DXL-841.

He got the stats. He got the room. He called motels. Forty-two local—dull phone-book stats.

He played Fed. He dropped his stats. He checked registrations. He made 19 calls. He got all nos. He hit Clerk 20.

"You the second police type who called 'bout that Olds. Only this other guy didn't give me no DXL number, he said it'd have hot Texas plates."

He brainstormed the response. He ran RABBITS. FATHER

RABBIT's Wayne Senior. FATHER knows Chuck. FATHER runs WILD RABBIT. WILD RABBIT's close. WILD RABBIT's Klan.

There's BLUE RABBIT. He's Fed. Who *else* wants Chuck?

He called motels. He hit 28. He got nil results. The outside noise got bad—these loud Nigger! shouts.

Littell worked. Littell called motels. Littell got nil results. Motel 29. Motel 30. Motel 31-2-3.

Motel 34: "You're the second guy askin' about that Rogers an' that car, but I ain't seen him or it."

The Moonbeam Motel/the Lark Motel/the Anchor Motel—nil results. The Dixie/the Bayou/the Rebel's Rest:

"Office. May I help you?"

"This is Special Agent Brown, FBI."

The guy laughed. "You come to curtail these agitators?"

"No, sir. It's about something else."

"That's too bad, because—"

"I'm looking for a white man driving a 1953 Oldsmobile with Texas license plates."

The man laughed. "Then you're one lucky member of the Federal Bureau of Integration, 'cause he checked into room 5 yesterday."

"What? Repeat th—"

"I got it right here. Charles Jones, Houston, Texas. '53 Olds sedan, PDL-902. By my lights, he's a mean motherhumper. Probably gargles with antifreeze and flosses with razor blades."

Traffic crawled. The disruption ratched it up.

Sidewalk marches. Hecklers. TV crews out. Signs and countersigns. Shriekers with good lungs. Nonparticipants out for yuks.

Freedom Now!/Jim Crow Must Go!/Nigger Go Home! We shaaaall overcome! in re-run shouts.

Littell drove his rental car. Traffic slogged. Littell parked and walked. Egg crews roamed. White kids chucked eggs. They chucked at Negroes. They nailed perceived Feds.

Littell walked. Littell dodged eggs. Eggs hit marchers. Eggs hit picket signs.

Egg crews walked. Egg trucks roamed. Egg men trucked ammo. Eggs flew. Eggs hit doors. Eggs hit awnings and cars.

The marchers wore slickers. The slickers dripped yolk. The slickers dripped cracked shells. Cops stood around. Cops dodged eggs. Cops sucked Nehi and Coke.

Littell walked. Eggs creased him. Littell looked *all*-Fed.

He cut left. He walked two blocks. He passed two egg huts. Egg crews formed. Egg crews armed. Egg trucks loaded up.

He saw it—right there—the Rebel's Rest.

One floor. Ten rooms. All street-view units. Rebel flag and rebel sign—neon Johnny Reb.

Parking slots/outdoor walkway/the office detached.

Littell palmed a credit card. Littell cut straight over. Littell saw room 5.

He knocked. He got no answer. No car in front/no people/no Olds 88.

He faced the street. He braced the door. He worked backwards. There now—by touch:

The jamb. The bolt. Wedge the card and slide it through fast.

He did it. The door popped. He fell backwards inside. He locked the door behind him. He hit the lights. He checked the room out.

One bed. One bathroom. One closet. One overnight bag on the floor.

He tossed the bag. He saw clothes and a razor. He saw hate tracts. He checked the closet. He checked the shelf. He saw a box of fuses—half full.

He saw a Mossberg pump. He saw a .45. He saw a .357 mag.

He grabbed the pump. He dumped the shells. He grabbed the .45. He popped the hot round. He popped the clip.

He grabbed the mag. He popped the cylinder. He dumped the shells. He pulled the rug up.

He hid the ammo. He shut the closet door. He killed the room lights. He sat down. He pulled his piece. He cocked the hammer.

He leaned on the bed. He faced the door. He counted rabbits full-out.

He dozed. He cramped up. He heard chants outside. Two words—say two blocks out.

"Freedom" and "nigger"—two words overlapped.

The sun arced—light cut through window shades—shades going black.

Littell dozed. Littell stirred. Littell heard siren bursts. Short bursts—per stalled traffic.

He got up. He walked outside. Tenants mingled. Tenants rebel-yelled.

A man laughed. A man went “Ka-pow!”

A man said, “A nigger church just went ka-blooey.”

Littell ran.

He cut left. He ran two blocks. He passed the egg huts. His coat flapped. His piece showed. Some egg men perked up.

They chucked eggs. They hit him. They dosed his pants. They grazed his head.

He hit the main drag. He cut right. He pushed through pickets. He ate eggs. He ate picket signs.

He slid. He hit eggshells. He tripped. A redneck kicked him. A marcher kicked him for kicks.

Horns. Sirens. Shouts—street blockade dead ahead. Egg trucks and egg men. An ambulance stalled and bucked.

Rednecks ran over. Marchers ran over. Fat cops ran up slow. They hit the blockade. They yelled. They shoved.

The blockade held. Pushing and shoving. Horns/sirens/shouts.

Littell got up. Littell dripped eggshells. Littell ran over fast. The cops saw him. Looks traveled—check Johnny Fed.

Littell pulled his badge. Littell pulled his gun. The cops smirked. The egg men smirked. The marchers stepped back.

Louder now: Yahoos and nigger yells. Horns/sirens/shouts.

Littell grabbed an egg man. Said egg man smirked. Littell smashed his face on his truck. He hit the door. He hit the ground. His false teeth popped out and cracked.

The egg men stepped back. The cops stepped back. The cops bumped the marchers. The cops brushed picket signs.

Littell cracked the door. Littell jerked the brake. The truck rolled. The truck hit a light pole. The ambulance swerved and cut through.

Littell stepped back. Eggs hit his glasses. Tobacco juice hit his shoes.

Gutted:

Scorched timber/wet timber/wet dirt. Two dead—a boy and his dad.

The bomb hit a 4:00 p.m. service. The bomb made a floorboard blast. It reached up. Pews shattered. Wood sheared.

Littell mingled.

He saw the meat wagons. He saw the dead. He saw a boy with no toes. He saw fire trucks. He saw TV trucks. He saw some Klan youth.

They kliqued up. They klanvoked. They klowned for kamera krews.

Littell mingled.

He drew stares. He smelled like egg. He dripped shells and yolk.

Some marchers showed. Some Feds showed. The marchers consoled the victims. Folks bled and wept.

Medics hauled gurneys. Medics hauled vics. Meat wagons hauled Code 3.

Littell tailed them. Littell watched them unload. Folks limped. Folks hobbled. That boy held his toes.

The clinic was old. The clinic was unkempt. A sign read Colored Only.

Littell watched. The Feds watched Littell. Nurses pushed IV stands. A woman fell. The toe boy convulsed.

Littell drove to a liquor store. Littell bought a pint of good scotch.

(Bogalusa, 6/21/65)

Radio rock:

Hatenanny stuff. “Who Needs Niggers?” and “Ship Those Niggers Back.” Katchy. Kool kombos. Kall-ins on K-L-A-N.

Pete dipped his seat. Wayne watched the door. Door 5—the Rebel’s Rest Motel.

Chuck was out. Pete was right. Chuck shagged to Bogalusa. Chuck diced his folks. Chuck stole their car. Chuck shagged his ass here.

They tossed the house. They found body parts. They found no hit notes. They drove east. They called motels. They found Chuck.

They drove fast. They drove fried. No sleep since Saigon. They stopped in Beaumont. They scored bennies. They revitalized.

Pete told Wayne the hit story. Pete spieled full disclosure.

He named names. He dropped details. He spieled perspective. He blew Wayne’s mind. He framed Wayne’s own Dallas tale.

Wayne talked up Wayne Senior. Wayne Senior fed the hit fund. Wayne Senior ran snitch-Klans. Wayne Senior ran Bob Relyea now.

Pete said it: Wayne Senior runs *YOU*.

Radio rock: Odis Cochran/the Coon Hunters/Rambunctious Roy.

Wayne flipped the dial. Wayne caught a newscast.

“… leaky pipe explosion at a Negro church outside Bogalusa, which civil-rights agitators have called a ‘bomb blast.’ A spokesman for the Federal Bureau of Integration said that early evidence points to a faulty gas main.”

Pete turned it off. “That’s the Feds. They got to the radio people."

Wayne popped two bennies. "They know it's Bob."

Pete sipped RC. Bennies parched him bad.

"They've got a hunch, and they want to cover their bets. They didn't tell him to do it, they didn't want him to do it, but he figured he could get away with it, and if they made him for it, they'd let him slide and warn him not to do it again."

Wayne watched the doors. Night-lights bipped above them. Doorways glowed blue.

"You think Bob's with Chuck?"

Pete cracked his knuckles. "I hope not. I don't want to kill a Federal employee who's hooked up with your dad."

Wayne grabbed the RC. "I don't like the chronology. Chuck gets the letter, Chuck flies home and clips his parents. He's *probably* got the journal, and he *might've* told Bob about the hit."

Pete cracked his thumbs. "We'll ask him about that."

Wayne sipped RC. An Olds pulled up. Pete made the plates: PDL-902.

Chuck got out. Chuck picked his teeth and swaggered. Chuck entered room #5.

Wayne said, "He's alone."

Pete popped two bennies. Wayne grabbed their guns. Pete tapped the silencers. They pulled up their shirttails. They stuffed the guns down. They covered the grips.

They walked over. The room-row rocked—shitkicker tunes and full tenancy.

Wayne tried the door. It was locked. Pete shouldered it. The jamb cracked. The lock split. They rode the door in. There's this shit room—but where's Ch—

Chuck exits a closet. Chuck has two guns. Chuck aims and fires. Two hammers click. Chuck fucking plotzes. Chuck fucking *shits*.

Pete charged him. Pete grabbed him. Pete threw him down. Wayne shut the door. Wayne tossed his cuffs. Pete snagged them.

Chuck crawled. Chuck tried to run. Pete grabbed his hair. Pete banged his head on the floor.

Wayne cuffed him. Pete picked him up. Pete threw him into a wall. He hit hard. He made dents. He hit the floor.

Wayne knelt down. "Did you tell Bob about Dallas?"

Chuck dribbled blood. "I told your daddy you're a punk motherfucker."

"Did you and Bob bomb that church?"

Chuck dribbled bile. "Ask Daddy Rabbit. Tell him Wild Rabbit's his boy."

Pete grabbed a hot plate. Pete plugged it in. Pete sparked the coils.

Wayne said, "Where's the notes your parents found?"

Chuck pissed his pants. "Wild Rabbit says fuck you. Father Rabbit says he's your daddy."

Pete dropped the hot plate. It hit coil side down. It singed up Chuck's hair.

Chuck screeched. The coil sizzled. Chuck yelled, "All right!"

Wayne grabbed the hot plate. Wayne grabbed a pillow. Wayne fluffed out Chuck's hair.

Chuck dribbled blood. Chuck dribbled bile. Chuck rubbed his head on the floor.

"I … didn't … tell Bob. I … I burned them notes."

Pete cued Wayne. Wayne cranked the radio. Wayne reprised Rambunctious Roy:

"… White Man's wise to Martin Luther Coon. Eatin' watermelon in the month of June. Big teeth chompin' sweet potato pie—"

Wayne pulled his piece. Pete pulled his piece. Chuck said, "No, *please*."

The door creaked. The jamb snapped and sheared. Ward Littell walked in.

He was egg-spattered. He was blotto. He was non compos something. He put out booze breath.

Pete said, "Fuck."

Wayne said, "Jesus Christ."

Ward turned the music off. Ward walked up to Chuck. Chuck shit his pants. Chuck dribbled teeth.

Ward said, "Wild Rabbit."

Chuck coughed. Chuck dribbled teeth.

"Wild Rabbit's got the Federal pedig—"

Ward pulled his piece. Ward shot Chuck's eyes out.

Part IV

COERCION

July 1965–November 1966

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/2/65. Internal memorandum. To: Director. From: BLUE RABBIT. Topic: OPERATION BLACK RABBIT. Marked: “Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”/“Read and Burn.”

Sir,

Per the church bombing and related actions in Bogalusa, Louisiana.

Locally assigned agents have completed their internal investigation. They have reported to me orally, have filed no official reports and have confirmed the official judgment of the Bogalusa Police Department: that the “accidental explosion” was caused by a leaky pipe main. That judgment should stand as the authoritative verdict on this matter. It is crucial to the continued success of the WHITE-HATE arm of OPERATION BLACK RABBIT.

I’ve spoken to WILD RABBIT. His denials of complicity in the bombing were not convincing. I warned him that church bombings were outside his operating parameters and that no such incidents should happen again. WILD RABBIT seemed cowed and did not protest the reprimand. It should be noted that his arms bore odd bruises and that in fact he seemed to have sustained a recent beating.

WILD RABBIT refused to comment on his bruises and overall beaten appearance. I queried him on the possible presence of his known Vietnam associate Charles Rogers per the time of the church incident, and WILD RABBIT became visibly upset. It should be noted: The dismembered bodies of Rogers’ elderly parents were found in their Houston, Texas, home on 6/23, and Rogers (who cannot be located) is the leading suspect in this double homicide. I checked Vietnamese-U.S. passport records for the two weeks preceding the assumed date-of-death, learned that Rogers flew from Saigon to Houston on 6/15 and that the cargo on his flight included bomb material. It is my belief that Rogers supplied the explosives for the bombing and that WILD RABBIT assisted him in this unsanctioned provocation.

It should also be noted that local agents spotted

CRUSADER RABBIT at the Negro hospital shortly after the bombing. He was visibly distraught and of unkempt appearance. I checked region-wide flight and car-rental records and learned that CRUSADER RABBIT flew from Las Vegas to New Orleans and drove to Bogalusa. I consider it likely that he met his client Carlos Marcello in New Orleans and took advantage of its proximity to Bogalusa.

I view CRUSADER RABBIT's trip to Bogalusa as fully in character, and it does not surprise me that he wished to view the planned civil-rights agitation in person. Please respond per CRUSADER RABBIT.

Respectfully,
BLUE RABBIT

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/6/65. Internal memorandum. To: BLUE RABBIT. From: Director. Topic: OPERATION BLACK RABBIT. Marked: “Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”/“Read and Burn.”

BLUE RABBIT,

Take all measures to see that the accidental explosion verdict is sustained in the Bogalusa case. Allow WILD RABBIT to claim credit for the “Bombing” and thus gain credibility for his new Klan unit. Continue to discourage WILD RABBIT from committing acts of violence outside his operating parameters.

I agree: CRUSADER RABBIT’s presence in Bogalusa was entirely in character, albeit marginally disturbing. CRUSADER RABBIT is a close associate of Pete Bondurant, who is a close associate of Charles Rogers.

The confluence troubles me. Have Los Angeles and Nevada-based agents tail CRUSADER RABBIT at irregular intervals. Initiate trash and mail covers at his Los Angeles and Las Vegas residences.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/8/65. Internal memorandum. To: Director. From: BLUE RABBIT. Topic: OPERATION BLACK RABBIT. Marked: “Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”/“Read and Burn.”

Sir,

I’ve talked to WHITE RABBIT. He told me he’ll be taking a Las Vegas vacation soon. Should I have him meet with CRUSADER RABBIT and judiciously assess his state of mind?

Respectfully,

BLUE RABBIT

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/10/65. Internal memorandum. To: BLUE RABBIT. From: Director. Topic: OPERATION BLACK RABBIT. Marked: “Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”/“Read and Burn.”

BLUE RABBIT,

Yes. Have WHITE RABBIT contact CRUSADER RABBIT during his stay in Las Vegas.

(Port Sulphur, 7/14/65)

Prospects: Gaspar Fuentes/Miguel Díaz Arredondo. Cubano/anti-Beard/allegedly pro-*Tigre*.

Flash boated to Cuba. Flash found them. Flash boated them out. Flash praised their skills. Flash praised their pidgin English. Flash praised their balls.

The venue: a cinder-block shack/10-by-10/a heat sponge. Two electric chairs—straps and hoods—bought from Angola Pen. A dynamo/two chair feeds/two polys.

Flash strapped Fuentes. Laurent G. strapped Arredondo. Wayne and Mesplède watched.

Shots popped outside. Troopers hit targets. Tiger South—Kamp with a "K." Exiles in residence—sixty strong—kadre-adjunct/kadre-armed/kadre-fed.

Flash rigged the needles. Laurent pumped the cuffs. Wayne watched. Wayne drifted off.

We're in Port Sulphur. Go north a bit—you'll hit Bogalusa.

Littell shoots Chuck. Littell's drunk. Littell vows sobriety. Pete consoles him: I'll dump Chuck and brace WILD RABBIT. Wild Bob's Fed now. He's Wayne Senior's boy.

Flash ran the polys. Laurent ran the quiz: Do you drink water? Is your shirt blue? Do you hate Fidel Castro?

Needle dip—short—no lies.

Port Sulphur—stone's throw to Bogalusa.

They drove Chuck around. They found a swamp. They dumped Chuck in. Gators ate him. Wayne and Pete watched.

Wayne toured the hospital. Wayne saw the bomb damage. Wayne saw a boy minus toes.

Pictures. Add-on shots. Let's augment your Bongo pix. Let's augment Wendell D. Pictures: The icebox/Chuck's parents/those big gator teeth.

Flash ran the polys. Laurent ran the quiz: Are you a spy? Do you serve the Cuban militia?

Needle dip—short—no lies.

Wayne drifted. Wayne yawned. The stateside runs bored him. He missed Saigon. He missed the lab. He missed the war and the threat.

Are you anti-*Communisto*? Are you pro-*Tigre*? Will you serve *El Gato* supreme?

Needle dip—short—no lies.

Flash smiled. Laurent smiled. Mesplède up and cheered.

They unstrapped the prospects. They hugged them. Fuentes hugged Wayne. Fuentes oozed Brylcreem. Arredondo hugged Wayne. Arredondo oozed VO5.

Looks traveled. Hey—it's lunchtime—let's cook by electric chair.

They scrounged. They ad-libbed. Flash scrounged hot dogs. Laurent scrounged corned beef.

They packed them in. They stuffed the hoods. They pulled the switches. Sparks popped. The meat fried. The hoods dripped fat.

The meat cooked uneven. The concept rocked. The reality stunk.

Mesplède supplied mustard. Flash supplied buns.

(Las Vegas, 7/16/65)

Candles—a full forty-five.

Pete blew them out. One puff did it. Barb cut the cake.

"Make a wish, and don't mention Cuba."

Pete laughed. "I already did."

"So tell."

"No. You jinx it that way."

Barb cranked the AC. Barb chilled down the suite.

"Did it involve Cuba?"

"I'm not saying."

"Vietnam?"

Pete licked icing. "Vietnam's no Cuba."

Barb scratched the cat. "Tell me why. It's your birthday, so I'll indulge you."

Pete sipped coffee. "It's too big, too fucked up, and too mechanized. You've got choppers with belly lights that can flash a one-mile-square patch of jungle. You've got carpet bombing and napalm. You've got gooks with no fucking charm and a bunch of shifty little cocksuckers in black pajamas who've lived guerrilla warfare for fifty fucking years."

Barb lit a cigarette. "Cuba's got more pizzazz. It fits your imperialist aesthetic."

Pete laughed. "You've been talking to Ward."

"You mean I stole his vocabulary."

Pete cracked his knuckles. The cat humped his knees.

"Flash smuggled two guys in. They were heisting casinos and killing croupiers. In Havana, that takes balls."

"Killing unarmed men?"

Pete laughed. “Militia guys work the casinos.”

Barb laughed. “Distinction noted.”

Pete kissed her. “Nobody disapproves like you. It’s one of the ten thousand reasons why we work.”

Barb pried the cat off. Barb squeezed his knees.

“Ward said you’ve let me grow up.”

Pete smiled. “Ward gets to you. You think you know him, then he pulls out one more stop.”

“For instance?”

“He cares about people who can’t do him any good, but he’s not a sucker about it.”

“For example?”

“He got wind of some Klan shit. He pulled a stunt that nobody else would have pulled.”

Barb smiled. “Including you?”

Pete nodded. “I helped him out on the back end. I braced a kadre guy and laid down some rules.”

Barb stretched. The cat clawed her skirt.

“I had lunch with Ward. He was worried. He saw Jane going through his papers.”

Pete stood up. Pete spilled his coffee.

Fuck—

“The ARVN boss man’s getting ready to bomb Hanoi. He’s talking to his financial advisor, One Lump Sum, and his Secretary of Fruitness, Come San Chin. They’re in this chink restaurant in Saigon. Come San Chin’s snarfing a big bowl of cream-of-some-young-guy.”

Pete yukked. Pete watched the building.

He flew to L.A. He brought Milt C. for chuckles. He shagged a rental car.

He *felt* it: Jane’s bent. She’s a plant. Carlos placed her with Ward.

He called Fred Otash. He quizzed him—what have *you* got? Otash spieled a tip per Danny Bruvick—Arden-Jane’s ex.

Danny’s a boat man. Danny’s got a pseudonym. Danny runs a charter biz—“somewhere in Alabama.”

Carlos lived in New Orleans. Alabama was close.

Pete watched the building. Milt picked his nose. Ward was in

Chicago. Sam G. called him in. Arden-Jane was upstairs.

"The Rat Pack tours Vietnam. Frank's glomming all the slant-eyed trim. Dino's bombed out of his gourd. He's so blotto that he blunders behind the Viet Cong lines. This little slant comes up to him. Dino says, 'Take me to your leader.' The slant says, 'Ky, Mao, or Ho Chi Minh?' Dino says, 'We'll dance later. Right now, take me to your leader.' "

Pete yukked. Pete watched the building.

Milt bummed a cigarette. "Freddy T. sent me a tape. Three legislators and six hookers jungled up at the Dunes."

Pete stretched. Pete watched the building.

Milt blew smoke rings. "I'm doing some more TV ads with Sonny. 'Tiger Kab, the Vegas champ. Call now or I'll kick your patootie.' "

Pete yukked. Pete watched the building. Milt ditched his shoes. Milt aired out his feet.

"We've got some deadbeats. I do not see the wisdom of consigning white horse on credit."

"I'll take care of it."

Milt yukked. "Let's use Sonny. Dig, he loves fur coats, he's always buying them for his bitches, and Donkey Dom just clipped a fur shop in Reno. Dig, Sonny can do our collections, and we can pay him off in fur."

Pete yukked—Milt, you slay me. Pete saw Jane walk out.

The doorman smiled. The doorman shagged her car. She got in. She pulled out. She drove west.

Pete kicked the engine. Pete pulled out. Pete tailed her. They took Wilshire west. They took Bundy south. They took Pico west toward the beach.

Pete laid back. Jane jumped lanes. Jane pulled right. Jane signaled. Jane turned.

There: the B. of A.—West L.A. branch.

She pulled up. She locked the car. She walked in.

Milt scoped her. "Nice pins. I could dig her love in a semi-large way."

Pete lit a cigarette. Milt bummed one.

"So, who is she? You call me at 5:00 a.m. You say, 'Let's go to L.A.,' you don't explain yourself. I'm starting to think you just brought me along for the laughs."

Jane walked out. Jane lugged a coin sack. Jane walked to the parking-lot phone.

She dialed "0." She fed the slots. She talked. She listened. She cupped the receiver. The call dragged on. She jiggled coins. She refed the slots.

Pete watched her. Pete timed her: five minutes/six/eight.

Milt yawned. "I'm digging on the intrigue. It's not like she hasn't got a phone at her crib."

Ten minutes/twelve/fourteen.

She hung up. She walked to her car. She got in and pulled out.

Pete tailed her. They took Pico east. They drove six miles plus. They took La Brea north.

They crossed Wilshire. They crossed 3rd. They took Beverly east. They took Rossmore north.

There—she pulls left. She signals. She turns. She's upside the Algiers—a white-brick/mock-mosque motel.

She parked. She got out. She palmed a folder. The joint had big windows. Dig the see-thru surveillance.

She walked inside. She stopped a clerk. She passed him the folder.

Milt said, "I smell tsuris. Carlos has points in that joint."

Pete said, "I know."

He weighed it. He diced it. He fucking julienned it. Carlos had points. Carlos had *control* points. Carlos hired the crew.

They flew home. Milt buzzed off. Pete hit Tiger Kab. He rehearsed his shtick. He built some lies. He called PC Bell.

A clerk picked up. "Police Information. Who's requesting?"

Pete coughed. "Sergeant Peters, LAPD. I need the connect on a pay-phone call."

"Time, location, and origin number, please."

Pete grabbed a pen. "1:16 p.m. today. No origin number, but it's the pay phone outside the Bank of America at 14229 West Pico, Los Angeles."

The clerk coughed. "Please hold for that information."

Pete held. Pete watched the lot. Donkey Dom shot dice. Donkey Dom ogled boys. Donkey Dom adjusted his basket.

The line buzzed. The clerk coughed.

"That call was long-distance. The connect was a charter-boat slip in Bon Secour, Alabama."

(Chicago, 7/19/65)

Sam kvetched.

Per the jail food. Per the jail lice. Per his jail hemorrhoids.

Sam talked loud. The attorney room buzzed. The lice had feet. The lice had wings. The lice had fangs like Godzilla.

Littell stretched. His chair squeaked. The seat itched—lice like Godzilla.

Sam said, "I found a bug in my corn flakes this morning. He had a wingspan like a P-38. I attribute all this shit to the cocksucker who impaneled this cocksucking grand jury, that well-known cocksucker Robert F. Kennedy."

Littell tapped his pen. "You'll be out in ten months. The jury term expires."

Sam scratched his arms. "I'll be dead in six months. You can't go up against lice that big and survive."

Littell laughed. Sam scratched his legs.

"It's all Bobby's fault. If the cocksucker ever runs for President, he will rue the fucking day, and that is no shit, Dick Tracy."

Littell shook his head. "He'll never try to hurt you again. He has a different agenda now."

Sam scratched his neck. "Right. He's in bed with the nigger agitators, which don't mean his hard-on for us has subsided."

A bug cruised the table. Sam smashed it.

"One for the home team. Breed no more, you cocksucker."

Littell cleared his throat. "We're on schedule in Vegas. We've got the board votes and the legislators. Mr. Hughes should get his money sometime next year."

Sam scratched his feet. "Too bad Jimmy won't be around to see it.”

“I may be able to keep him out until after we get in.”

Sam sneezed. “So he celebrates en route to Leavenworth. We keester Howard Hughes, and Jimmy packs his pj’s for the pen.”

“That’s about it, yes.”

Sam sneezed. “I don’t like that look in your eyes. It says, ‘I got some momentous shit for you, even though *you* called *me* in.’ ”

Littell cleaned his glasses. “I’ve talked to the others. They have an idea that they think you should consider.”

Sam rolled his eyes. “Then *tell* me. You’ve got this tendency to coax things and lay out these big preambles.”

Littell leaned in. “They think you’re through in Chicago. They think you’re a sitting duck for the Feds and the State AG. They think you should move to Mexico and run your personal operations from there. They think you should start making Latin-American connections, to aid us in our foreign casino strategy, which will begin sometime after we sell Mr. Hughes the hotels.”

Sam scratched his neck. Sam scratched his arms. Sam scratched his balls. A bug leaped. Sam caught it. Sam smashed it.

“Okay, I’ll play. I know when over’s over, and I know the future when I see it.”

Littell smiled. Sam rocked his chair back.

“You still got that look. You should unload before I start itching again.”

Littell squared his necktie. “I want to oversee the buyouts for the pension-book plan, assist in the foreign casino negotiations, and retire. I’m going to ask Carlos formally, but I wanted to get your blessing first.”

Sam smiled. Sam stood up. Sam played street mime. He sprayed holy water. He gave Holy Communion. He ran the Stations of the Cross.

“You’ve got it. *If* you help us out on one last thing.”

“Tell me. I’ll do it.”

Sam straddled his chair. “We got hurt on the ’60 election. I bought Jack West Virginia and Illinois, and he sicced his cocksucking kid brother on us. Now, Johnson’s okay, but he’s soft on the niggers, and he might not run in ’68. The thing is, we’re prepared to be very generous to the right candidate, if he pardons Jimmy and helps us out on some other fronts, and we want *you* to work it out.”

Littell inhaled. Littell exhaled. Littell went dead faint.

"Jesus Christ."

Sam scratched his hands. "We want Mr. Hughes to put up 25% of our contribution. We want our guy to agree to a hands-off policy on the Teamsters. We want him to slow down any Fed shit aimed at the Outfit. We want no foreign-policy grief aimed at the countries where we plant our casinos, right- or left-wing."

Littell inhaled. Littell exhaled. Littell went faint-faint.

"When?"

"The '68 primaries. Around that time. You know, the conventions."

A bug jumped. Sam caught it. Sam smashed it.

"Breed no more, you fuck."

Charts: Profit flow/overhead/debits.

Littell read charts. Littell studied charts. Littell took notes. He worked on the terrace. The view distracted him. He loved Lake Michigan.

The Drake Hotel—two-bedroom suite—on Sam Giancana.

Littell read charts. Fund-book stats jumped. Money lent/money invested/money repaid.

Business targets. Fund-financed. Potential takeover prey. Let's extort said businesses. Let's build foreign casinos. Let's buy a President. Let's shape policy. Let's reverse 1960. Let's spread our bets. Let's cover all odds. Let's subvert left-wing nations.

That was odd—the Outfit leaned right—the Outfit bribed right per said leaning.

Chicago broiled. Wind scoured the lake. Littell ditched his charts. Littell studied briefs.

Appeal briefs—let's keep Jimmy out. Stock briefs—let's get Drac in. It was shit work. It was repetitive. It was post-dead.

He got up. He stretched. He watched Lake Shore Drive. He saw car lights as streamers.

He went by his banks yesterday. He withdrew tithe money. He cut tithe checks. He mailed them. He worried a phone call.

He called Bayard Rustin. He lied off Bogalusa. He did it to protect himself. He did it to protect Pete and Wayne.

He'd read the papers. He saw the news. The church blew "accidental." No one linked Chuck. No one linked WILD RABBIT.

He called Bayard. He dittoed the news. He said a gas main blew. He cited fake sources. Bayard expressed gratitude. Bayard expressed belief. *He* lied. *He* lied deftly. *He* acted late.

The church blew. His late fees accrued—fees for *his* dead and maimed.

He saw the maimed. Some Feds saw him. Said Feds might inform Mr. Hoover. He got drunk. He killed Chuck. He got sober. He still wanted it. He still tasted it. Liquor signs glowed.

He killed Chuck. He slept twelve hours. He woke up to this: End it. Leave the Life. Cut and run when you can.

Sam said yes. Sam gave his blessing. Sam had stipulations. Carlos might say yes. Carlos might have stipulations.

Tithes/stipulations/election years.

He served Mr. Hoover. They colluded. It spawned BLACK RABBIT. It spawned WILD RABBIT. It spawned dead and maimed. He killed Chuck. Pete braced WILD RABBIT. It was catch-up penance. It was wholly insufficient.

The lake glowed. Cruise boats cruised. He saw bow lights. He saw dance bands. He saw women.

Jane was war now. Jane outflanked him. Jane *knew* him before he *knew* her. She knew he stole. She knew he bagged money. She knew he played covert tapes.

She went through his papers. He caught her at it. They retreated. They quashed talk. They quashed confrontations.

Jane had plans. He *knew* it. She might want to hurt him. She might want to use him. She might want to know him more.

It scared him. It moved him. It made him want her more.

A boat drew close. A band played. A blue dress twirled. Janice wore dresses like that.

She was still bawdy. It was still good. She still served up stories and sex.

She dished Wayne Senior. The details scared him. Wayne Senior was FATHER RABBIT. Janice dished him. Janice loathed him. Janice still felt his hold.

The boat cruised by. The blue dress vanished. Littell called the Sands. Janice was out. Littell called the DI. Littell checked his messages.

One message: Call Lyle Holly—he's at the Riv. Shit—WHITE RABBIT wants you.

Littell got the number. Littell put the call off. Littell prepped a tape. Littell grabbed a spool.

Sam scared him. Sam waxed profane. Bobby/cocksucker/rue the fucking day.

Littell prepped his tape-rig. Littell memory-laned.

Chicago, 1960—the Phantom loves Bobby. Chicago, 1965—Bobby lives on tape.

(Las Vegas, 7/20/65)

Tiger teemed.

Scribes pressed Sonny—give us quotes—rag that punk Cassius X. Sonny ignored them. Sonny quaffed Chivas. Sonny pawed mink coats.

Donkey Dom stole them. Donkey Dom sold them. Donkey Dom name-dropped. I pop fur shops/I bone Rock Hudson/I poke Sal Mineo.

His bun boy sulked. His bun boy griped hypocritical. His bun boy pimped drag queens full-time.

Wayne watched. Barb watched.

Dom shagged calls. His bun boy buzzed drivers. They juked the noon rush. Sonny bought mink mittens. Sonny bought mink jockstraps. Sonny bought mink earmuffs.

A scribe said, “Are those furs hot?”

Sonny said, “Your mama’s hot. I’m your daddy.”

A scribe said, “Why don’t you join the civil-rights movement?”

Sonny said, “ ’cause I ain’t got no dog-proof ass.”

The scribes yukked. Wayne yukked. Barb walked out to the lot. She popped pills. She chased them. She chugged flat 7-Up.

Wayne walked out. Wayne braced her in close.

“Pete’s rotating back. You start flying the second he’s gone.”

Barb stepped back. “Think about what *you* do, and tell me you disapprove then.”

Wayne stepped close. “Look who we sell to.”

“Look at *me*. Do I look like one of the junkie whores you’ve created?”

“I’m looking. I’m seeing lines you didn’t have a year ago.”

Barb laughed. “I’ve earned them. I’ve got fifteen years in the Life.”

Wayne stepped back. “You’re dodging me.”

“No. I’m just saying I’ve been around longer, and I know how things work better than you.”

“Tell Pete that. He won’t buy it, but tell him anyway.”

Barb stepped close. “You’re hooked, not me. You’re hooked on the Life, and you still don’t know how it works.”

Wayne stepped close. They bumped knees. Wayne smelled Barb’s soap.

“You’re just pissed that there’s no place in it for you.”

Barb stepped back. “You’re going to do things that you won’t be able to live with.”

“Maybe I have already.”

“It gets worse. And you’ll do worse things, just to prove you can take it.”

Test run:

Four collections. Four junkie deadbeats. Sonny’s collection debut.

Said junkies annexed a church basement. Said junkies had squatters’ rights. Their pastor skin-popped Demerol. Said junkies geezed up in church.

Wayne drove. Sonny cleaned his nails with a switchblade. Sonny sipped scotch. West LV sizzled. Folks soaked in kiddie pools. Folks lived in air-cooled cars.

Wayne said, “I killed a colored guy in Saigon.”

Sonny said, “I killed a white guy in St. Louis.”

There’s the church. It’s dilapidated. It’s sandblasted. It’s neon-signed. Dig the prayer hands and crosses. Dig the Jesus rolling dice.

They parked. They walked back to the basement door. They picked the lock. They walked in.

They saw four junkies. They’re crapped out on car seats—scavenged off old Cadillacs. They saw spoons and matchbooks. They saw spikes and tube ties. They saw bindles and white dregs.

There’s a hi-fi. There’s some LPs. It’s all gospel wax.

The junkies reposed—one per seat—the land of Naugahyde Nod. They saw Sonny. They saw Wayne. They snickered. They giggled. They sighed.

Wayne said, “Go.”

Sonny whistled. Sonny stomped. Sonny stormed Naugahyde Nod.

“You motherfuckers have got ten seconds to quit fucking with this house of worship and pay up what you owe.”

One junkie giggled. One junkie scratched. One junkie chuckled. One junkie yawned.

Wayne turned on the hi-fi. Wayne flipped a disc. Wayne laid the needle down. It was loud shit. It was ecstatic—Crawdaddy’s Christian Chorale.

Wayne said, “Go.”

Sonny kicked the car seats. Sonny dumped the junkies. Sonny threw the junkies down. They squirmed. They squealed. They evacuated Naugahyde Nod.

Sonny kicked them. Sonny picked them up. Sonny dropped them. Sonny grabbed the car seats. Sonny aimed. Sonny dropped them on their heads.

They squealed. They screeched. They howled and bled.

Sonny slapped them. Sonny picked their pockets. Sonny tossed pocket trash. One guy turned his pockets out. One guy ran pleas.

Sonny picked him up. Sonny dropped him. Sonny kicked him. Sonny bent down. Sonny caught his pleas.

Sonny stood up. Sonny smiled. Sonny signaled Wayne. Crawdaddy crescendoed. Wayne pulled the plug and walked up.

Sonny smiled. “As of spring, Wendell Durfee was running a string of wetback whores in Bakersfield, California.”

(Bon Secour, 7/22/65)

Boats:

Charter jobs. Teak hulls and big motors. Forty slips / thirty bare / thirty boats out.

Pete strolled dockside. Pete scoped slip 19. There's the *Ebbtide*. It runs fifty feet. Dig those high gunwales.

Nice shit. Mounted poles and cargo space. Spiffy brass fittings.

A guy worked on deck. He was mid-size. He ran mid-forties. He had a bum leg. He had a bad limp.

It was hot. The air dripped. Clouds densified. Mobile Bay—Shitsville—bait shacks and congestion.

Pete strolled deckside. Pete scoped slip 19.

He traced Jane's call. He flew in. He ran checks. "Dave Burgess" owned the *Ebbtide*. "Dave Burgess" chartered out. "Dave Burgess" knew guys in New Orleans. Add 2 and 2. Add D.B. "Dave Burgess" was Danny Bruvick.

The T&C Corp owned the *Ebbtide*. Carlos owned T&C. Carlos *was* New Orleans.

He bribed a cop. He checked phone sheets. He ran phone checks. "Burgess" was good. "Burgess" used pay phones—right off the dock.

"Burgess" called Carlos. "Burgess" called Carlos frequent. "Burgess" called Carlos four times last month.

Pete walked slip 19. "Burgess" scrubbed fishhooks. Pete stepped on deck. "Burgess" looked up.

He tweaked a bit. He perked a bit. His antennae twitched.

That speargun—*watch*.

"Burgess" reached for it. "Burgess" grabbed. "Burgess" nailed the grip. Pete aimed. Pete kicked out. Pete nailed the grip.

The speargun skittered. “Burgess” said, “Shit.”

Pete walked up. Pete grabbed the speargun. Pete popped the spear out to sea.

“Burgess” said, “Fuck.”

Pete pulled his shirt up. Pete showed his piece.

“You’re thinking ‘Jimmy Hoffa sent this guy,’ and you’re wrong.”

“Burgess” sucked a thumbnail. “Burgess” flexed his hand. Pete checked the boat out. The boat enticed. The boat seduced.

Nice: Steel hull/grappling posts/fittings. *Nice:* Hardwood from the Philippines.

“Burgess” flexed his wrist. “She’s an old rum-runner. She’s got all the—”

Pete pulled his shirt up. Pete showed his piece. Pete pointed below-deck. “Burgess” stood up. “Burgess” sighed. “Burgess” squared his bum leg and limped.

He wore shorts. Dig his scars. Dig his bullet-pocked knee.

He crossed the deck. He passed the wheelhouse. He took back stairs down. Pete tailed him. Pete scoped details.

Two wheel stands/control posts/full instruments. Teak walls/hall space/rear cabins. Rear engines/rear storage/rear cargo traps.

Pete walked ahead. Pete saw an office: two chairs/one desk/one booze shelf.

He pulled “Burgess” in. He grabbed a chair. He pushed “Burgess” down. He tucked “Burgess” in. He poured a libation.

The boat swayed. Pete sloshed Cutty. “Burgess” grabbed it. “Burgess” drained it. “Burgess” liquor-flushed.

Pete poured a refill. Pete poured big. “Burgess” refueled. “Burgess” sucked Cutty up.

Pete cocked his piece. “You’re Danny Bruvick. I’m Pete Bondurant, and we’ve got some friends in common.”

Bruvick burped. Bruvick flushed. Bruvick vibed lush.

Pete twirled his piece. “I want the whole story of you, ‘Arden,’ and Carlos Marcello. I want to know why Arden is shacked up with Ward Littell.”

Bruvick eyed the bottle. Pete poured him a pop. Bruvick refueled. The boat dipped. Bruvick doused his lap.

“You shouldn’t let me drink too much. I might get courageous.”

Pete shook his head. Pete pulled his silencer. Pete tapped his piece. Bruvick gulped. Bruvick pulled beads out. Bruvick rosaried.

Pete shot the Cutty. Pete shot the Gilbey's. Pete shot the Jack D. Bottles spritzed. Teakwood cracked. Soft-points tore holes.

The room shook—sonic booms—the boat aftershocked.

Bruvick spazzed out. Bruvick squeezed his beads. Bruvick grabbed his ears.

Pete pulled his hands down. "Start with Arden. Give me her real name and lay out some perspective."

Bruvick sneezed. Gunpowder tickled noses. Gun cordite stung.

"Her real name's Arden Breen. Her old man was a labor agitator. You know, a Commie type."

Pete cracked his knuckles. "Keep going."

Bruvick tossed his hair. Glass shards flew.

"Her mother died. She got rheumatic fever. The old man raised Arden. He was a drunk and a whore chaser. He had a different name for every day of the week, and he raised Arden in whorehouses and union halls, meaning *bad* union halls, meaning the old man talked Red, but cut management deals every chance he got, which was—"

"Arden. Get back to her."

Bruvick rubbed his knees. "She quit school early, but she always had a head for figures. She met these two whores who went to the bookkeeping school I went to in Mississippi and picked up some skills from them. She kept some whorehouse and union hall books, you know, gigs her old man got her. She'd work these classier houses and spy on the johns. She'd pump them for stock tips and shit like that. She was good at anything involving numbers and ledgers. You know, money calculations."

Pete cracked his thumbs. "Get to it. You're working up to something."

Bruvick rubbed his bad knee. Scar tissue pulsed.

"She started working in some classier houses. She met this money guy Jules Schiffrin. He was tied in with—"

"I know who he was."

"Okay, so she started tricking with him regular. He *kept* her, you know, and she met lots of people in the Life, and she helped him with these so-called 'real' pension-fund books that he was working on."

Pete cracked his wrists. "Keep going."

Bruvick rubbed his knee. “Her old man got killed in ’52. He screwed Jimmy H. on a management deal, so Jimmy had him clipped. Arden didn’t care. She hated the old man for his goddamn hypocrisy and the shitty way he raised her.”

The boat pitched. Pete grabbed the desk.

“Arden and Schiffrin. Spill on that.”

“Spill *what*? She learned what she could from him and broke it off.”

“And?”

“And she started hooking freelance, and got a thing going with Carlos. I met her in ’55. We had mutual friends in those whores who went to school with me. I was working the K.C. local. We got married and cooked up some plans.”

“Like ‘Let’s embezzle Jimmy.’ ”

Bruvick lit a cigarette. “I admit it wasn’t the smartest—”

“You got caught. Jimmy put a contract out.”

“Right. Some guys cornered me and shot me. I got away, but I almost lost my leg, and the fucking contract’s still out.”

Pete lit a cigarette. “Jimmy had the K.C. cops run Arden in. Carlos bailed her out and hid you. He didn’t fuck with Jimmy’s contract, because he wanted a wedge on you.”

Bruvick nodded. Bruvick scoped the booze shelf.

“You’re a hump. You wasted my liquor.”

Pete smiled. Pete aimed. Pete cocked his piece. Pete shot Bruvick’s chair.

The legs sheared. The chair crashed. Wood shattered. Bruvick tumbled. Bruvick yelped. Bruvick rosaried.

Pete blew smoke rings. “Carlos set up your charter business. What happened to Arden then?”

The boat pitched. Bruvick dropped his beads.

“She didn’t trust Carlos. She didn’t want to owe him, so she split to Europe. We worked out a pay-phone thing and kept in touch that way.”

Pete coughed. “She came back to the States. She couldn’t give up the Life.”

“Right. She landed in Dallas. She got in trouble there, like late in ’63. She wouldn’t say what happened.”

Pete flicked his cigarette. Pete nailed Bruvick flush.

“Come on, Danny. Don’t make me get ugly.”

Bruvick stood up. His knee went. He stumbled. He braced the wall. He slid back and sat.

He rubbed his knee. He snuffed Pete's cigarette.

"That's straight. She wouldn't tell me what happened. All I know is she hooked up with Littell, then around that time Carlos found her. He said we'd both be safe if she watchdogged Littell, but he still refused to square us with Jimmy."

Solid. Confirmed. Two-front blackmail. Jimmy's contract/the safe-house snafu. Arden—that first name unique.

Carlos *knows* Arden. Carlos makes her *name*. Carlos distrusts Littell. Carlos finds Arden. Carlos plants Arden. Arden spies on Littell.

It vibed solid—90%—it vibed incomplete.

Pete said, "I don't want Littell to get hurt."

Bruvick stood up. His bad knee held.

"I don't think Arden does, either. She's playing out some weird thing with him."

He called Carlos. He got Frau M. He left a message:

I braced D.B.—Danny the boat man—tell Carlos that. Tell him I'll be by. Say I'd love to chat.

He drove to New Orleans. He stopped in libraries. He studied books en route.

Boats:

Galleys/bridges/radar/trawl decks/scuppers/masts.

He studied the nomenclature. He studied engine stats. He studied maps. Pine Island/Cape Sabel/Key West. Pit stops—Cuba due south.

He detoured. He cruised by Port Sulphur. He saw Tiger Kamp South. He saw the troops. He saw Flash and Laurent. He met Fuentes and Arredondo. They talked night raids. They talked scalp runs. They talked insurgency.

Wayne was in Saigon—one fast rotation—one scheduled run back. Wayne loves to WATCH. Wayne wants to GO. Wayne wants to SEE Cuba up close.

Flash had a plan. I'll do a speedboat run. I'll drop Fuentes and Arredondo. Fast—off the north shore—Varcadero Beach.

They reinfiltrate. They build drop zones. They recruit internal. They speedboat back. They funnel arms. They bounce off the Keys. They pull a boat hitch. They lug guns. They fly fast and low. They shuttle. They duck radar—six runs a week.

Pete said no. Pete said why: It's high mileage/it wastes two men/it's low capacity.

Flash said, "*Que*?"

Laurent said, "*Quoi*?"

Fuentes said, "*Que pasa*?"

Pete talked hold nets. Pete talked gunwales. Pete talked fuel efficiency.

Pete talked *boats*.

Carlos said, "Sure, she's my watchdog. Tell me Ward don't play angles, then tell me I don't need one."

Galatoire's was dead. They hogged a prime table. Carlos dipped his cigar. Mecundo meets anisette.

"Ward's fund-book thing is a fucking extravaganza, and Arden is a brilliant fucking bookkeeper. I'm protecting my franchise, and Ward gets some good cooze in the process."

Pete lit a cigarette. "He's in love with her. I don't want him to get hurt."

Carlos winked. "I don't want *you* to get hurt. We go back like Ward and me go back. Some guys would have been miffed at what you did to Danny B., but I am not one of them."

Pete smiled. "I copped to it, didn't I? I called you."

"That is correct. You did the wrong thing and covered your bets."

"I just don't want—"

"He won't be. They're good for each other. I know Arden, and Arden knows she can't shit me. Arden tells me Ward's not scheming against me, so I believe her. I've always had this feeling that Ward was skimming Howard Hughes, but Arden says it's not so, so I believe her."

Pete burped. Pete undid his belt—rich Creole food.

"Give me the warning. Let's get it over with."

Carlos burped. Carlos undid his belt—rich Creole food.

"Don't tell Ward about this. Don't make me peeved at you."

"*This*"—still solid—still incomplete.

A waiter cruised by. Pete nixed a comped brandy.

Carlos belched. "What's this about 'ideas'?"

Pete cleared some plates. Pete laid his map out. Pete swamped the table.

“Speedboat runs waste man-hours. You can’t move ordnance in bulk. I want to refit and camouflage Bruvick’s boat and run it out of Bon Secour. I want to move guns in quantity and pull terror missions.”

Carlos checked the map. Carlos lit his cigar. Carlos burned a big hole in Cuba.

(Las Vegas, 8/7/65)

Lyle Holly: Dwight Holly built small. BLUE to WHITE RABBIT. A Hoosier/a loudmouth/a fraud.

They met at the DI. They sat in the lounge. Lyle was blunt. Lyle was coarse. Lyle was buzzed at noon.

Lyle said, “I think I’m schizophrenic. I work for the SCLC, I work for Mr. Hoover. I’m on Black Rabbit one minute, voting-rights drives the next. Dwight says I’m psychically unhinged.”

Littell sipped coffee. Littell smelled Lyle’s scotch.

“Did Mr. Hoover send you in to spy on me?”

Lyle slapped his knees. “Dwight suggested it. He knew I was coming to Vegas, so what the hell.”

“Is there anything you’d like me to reveal?”

“Shit, no. I’ll tell Dwight that the Ward I saw is the same Ward I allegedly knew back in Chicago, except now he’s just as schizo as I am, and for all the same reasons.”

Littell laughed. Sammy Davis Jr. walked by. Lyle stared at him.

“Look at that. He’s ugly, he’s got one eye, and he’s colored *and* Jewish. I heard he gets lots of white pussy.”

Littell smiled. Lyle waved to Sammy. Sammy waved back.

Lyle sipped Johnnie Red. “Marty gives this speech in New York. He’s got a captive audience of liberal Jews with deep pockets. He starts attacking the Vietnam War and pissing all the hebes off with words like ‘genocide.’ He’s going outside his civil-rights bailiwick and biting the hand that feeds him.”

Pete was in Laos. Wayne was in Saigon. The war hid them there. He called Carlos. Carlos talked up Pete. Carlos said they’d just schemed plans for Cuba.

Littell said let me retire. Carlos said okay. Carlos dittoed Sam's consent. Carlos talked up the '68 election.

Lyle sipped scotch. Peter Lawford walked by. Lyle stared at him.

"He used to pimp for Jack Kennedy. That makes us comrades-in-arms. I get Marty all his white snatch, and sometimes I dig up young meat for Bayard Rustin. Mr. Hoover's got a photo of Bayard with a dick in his mouth. He made a dupe for President Johnson."

Littell smiled. Lyle hailed a waitress. Lyle shagged a quick refill.

"Dwight said they blew that church up with C-4 explosive. Bayard told me it really *was* a leaky gas main, which makes me think *you* told him."

Littell sipped coffee. "I told him, yes."

Lyle sipped scotch. "Crusader Rabbit's a white man. I'll tell Dwight that."

Littell smiled. Lyle grinned. Lyle pulled out a checkbook.

"I feel lucky. You think you can cash a check into play chips for me?"

"How much?"

"Two grand."

Littell smiled. "Put my initials and 'suite 108' on the check. Tell the cashier I'm a permanent resident."

Lyle smiled. Lyle wrote the check. Lyle got up and walked—half-steady.

Littell watched.

Lyle weaved. Lyle slurped scotch. Lyle trekked the casino. Lyle braced the teller's cage. Lyle passed the check. Lyle got his chips.

Littell watched. Littell let some thoughts stir—CRUSADER RABBIT/White Man/gas main.

Lyle braced a roulette stand. Lyle stacked his chips. Red chips—hundreds—two G's. The wheelman bowed. The wheelman twirled. The wheel spun. The wheel stopped. The wheelman raked chips.

Lyle slapped his forehead. Lyle moved his lips. Littell watched. Littell read his lips. Lyle said, "Oh, shit."

Schizo/comrades/young meat.

Lyle might keep *private* files. Said files might indict. Said files might indict BLACK RABBIT.

Lyle looked around. Lyle saw Littell. Lyle waved his checkbook. Littell waved and nodded.

Lyle walked to the cage. Lyle grabbed the grate. Lyle wrote a check. Lyle fumbled chips.

Their waitress walked by. Littell stopped her.

“My friend’s on the floor. Bring him a triple Johnnie Walker.”

She nodded. She smiled. Littell gave her ten bucks. She walked to the bar. She poured the drink. She trekked the floor. She hit the roulette stands. She saw Lyle and fueled him.

Lyle guzzled scotch. Lyle stacked his chips. Red chips—hundreds—big stacks.

The wheelman bowed. The wheelman twirled. The wheel spun. The wheel stopped. The wheelman raked chips.

Lyle slapped his forehead. Lyle moved his lips. Littell watched. Littell read his lips. Lyle said, “Oh, shit.”

Littell walked over. Littell passed the waitress. Littell slid her ten bucks. She nodded. She *got it*. She smirked.

Lyle walked up. Lyle killed his drink. Lyle chewed the ice.

“I’m down, but I’m not licked, and I’ve got resources.”

“You were always resourceful, Lyle.”

Lyle laughed. Lyle swayed half-blotto. Lyle burped.

“You’re patronizing me. It’s that saintly quality that Dwight hates about you.”

Littell laughed. “I’m no saint.”

“No, you’re not. Martin Luther Coon’s the only saint I know, and I’ve got some hair-curling shit on him.”

The waitress swooped by. Lyle grabbed his refill.

“Hair-curling. Or hair-*kinking*, in his case.”

Work him—slow now—ease in.

“You mean Mr. Hoover has shit.”

Lyle swirled scotch. “He’s got his, I’ve got mine. I’ve got a big stash at my place in L.A. Mine’s better, ’cause I’ve got daily access to Saintly Marty himself.”

Tweak him—slow now—ease in.

“Nobody has better intelligence than Mr. Hoover.”

“Shit, I do. I’m saving it for my next contract powwow. I tell my handler, ‘You want the goods, you raise my pay—no tickee, no washee.’ ”

Sammy Davis walked by. Lyle bumped into him. Sammy swerved. Sammy goofed—cat, you are blitzed!

Lyle swerved. Lyle slugged scotch. Lyle pinched a zit on his chin.

"White chicks dig him. He must be hung."

Fumes glowed. Mash and smoke—86 proof. Littell salivated. Littell stepped away.

Lyle pulled two checkbooks—both embossed—"L.H." and "SCLC." He kissed them. He slung them. He drew them quick-draw style. He twirled them and aimed.

"I've got a lucky feeling, which means I just might have to float a loan from the civil-rights movement."

Littell smiled. Lyle weaved. Lyle settled. Lyle walked off blitzed.

Littell watched.

Lyle braced the cage. Lyle showed a checkbook—blue for SCLC. Lyle wrote a check. Lyle kissed said check. Lyle fumbled chips.

Reds—ten stacks—five G's.

Slow now—ease in—this is for real.

Littell walked to the phone stand. Littell grabbed a booth. He picked up. The line clicked active. He got service quick.

"Desert Inn. How may I help you?"

"It's Littell, suite 108. I need an outside line to Washington, D.C."

"The number, please."

"EX4-2881."

"Please hold. I'll connect you."

The line buzzed—long-distance coming—static popped and clicked. Littell looked around. Littell saw Lyle. Lyle's at a crap table. Lyle's stacking chips.

The shooter rolls. Lyle slaps his forehead. Lyle says, "Oh, shit."

Static clicked. The call clicked in. Mr. Hoover said, "Yes?"

Littell said, "It's me."

"Yes? And the purpose of this unsolicited contact?"

"White Rabbit suggested a meeting. He arrived at the Desert Inn drunk. He's running up a casino debt with SCLC money."

The line fuzzed. Littell cleared the cord. Littell slapped the receiver. There's Lyle. Lyle's at the cage. Lyle's ecstatic. Lyle's got more chips.

Reds—high stacks—maybe ten G's.

The line fuzzed. The line popped. The line cleared.

Mr. Hoover said, "Cut off his credit and get him out of Las

Vegas immediately.”

The line fuzzed. The call faded. Littell heard hang-up clicks. There’s Lyle. Lyle’s at a crap table. Lyle’s in a crowd. Lyle’s stacking chips.

Sammy Davis bows. Sammy Davis prays. Sammy Davis rolls the dice. The crowd cheers. Lyle cheers. Sammy Davis genuflects.

Littell walked over. Littell pushed his way in.

Lyle crowded Sammy. Lyle played Sammy’s foil. Sammy goofed on the white freak. He winked at a blonde. He flicked lice off his coat. He went ick.

Red chips down—pass-line bets—all Lyle’s money. Good money —Lyle’s up twenty G’s.

Sammy gets the dice. Sammy holds them out. Lyle blows wet kisses. Sammy goofs on Lyle—he’s a Rat Pack reject—the crowd genuflects.

Sammy rolls. Sammy hits 7. Lyle hits forty G’s. The crowd cheers. Lyle hugs Sammy. Sammy grabs the dice.

Lyle blows on them. Lyle drools on them. Lyle genuflects. Sammy pulls a handkerchief. Sammy makes entertainment. Sammy wipes said dice.

Sammy rolls. Sammy hits 7. Lyle hits eighty G’s. The crowd cheers. Lyle hugs Sammy. Lyle snuffs his cigarette.

Sammy grabs the dice. Lyle shoves up close. Sammy steps way back. The blonde horns in. Sammy grabs her. Sammy rubs the dice on her dress.

The crowd laughs. Lyle says something. Littell caught “coon” or “kike.”

Sammy rolls. Sammy makes 9. Sammy craps dead out. Sammy shrugs—life’s a crapshoot, baby. The crowd claps and laughs.

The dealer raked in—all Lyle’s chips—big ten grand stacks. Lyle killed his drink. Lyle dropped his glass. Lyle sucked cracked ice. The crowd dispersed. Sammy walked. The blonde chased his back.

Lyle walked. Lyle staggered. Lyle lurched. Lyle navigated. Lyle tried handholds. Lyle grabbed at slot-machine racks.

He lurched. He made the cage. Littell cut in sidelong. Littell mimed *cut him off*. Lyle bumped the window. The cashier shook his head. Lyle kicked a slot machine rack.

Littell grabbed him. Littell steered him. Littell walked him half-slack. Lyle went limp. Lyle tried to talk. Lyle blathered mumbo-jumbo.

They crossed the floor. They got outside. They made the parking lot. Hot skies—blowtorch time—dry Vegas heat.

Lyle passed out. Littell hauled him—dead weight.

He picked his coat pockets. He checked his billfold. He got his address and car stats: Merc coupe/’61/CAL-HH-492.

Littell looked around. Littell saw the car. Littell lugged Lyle Holly slack. Lyle was small—one-forty tops—slack weight but light.

He made the car. He rolled down the windows. He rolled Lyle in and made him comfy. He pushed the seat back.

L.A.—five hours tops.

Lyle would sleep in his car. Lyle would rouse. Lyle would rouse in the DI lot. Lyle gambled compulsive. Lyle knew the drill:

First they vet you. Then you lose. Then they check your money.

Lyle lost his own coin. Lyle lost the SCLC’s. The DI calls fast. The SCLC stops payment. Lyle lives in D.C. Lyle lives in L.A. Casino collectors move. Said collectors hit L.A. first.

Said collectors break laws routinely. Said collectors seize assets. Said collectors kick ass.

Littell drove. His car overheated. Littell drove I-10 west.

He gauged time. He knew booze regimens. He knew pass-outs and wake-ups. He knew pass-out stats.

Three hours—four tops. Lyle wakes up/Where am I?/Oh fuck.

The desert torched. Heat rays jumped. The heat gauge swerved. Littell made Baker. The heat ebbed. Littell made San Berdoo.

He made Redlands. He made Pomona. He made L.A. He drove one-handed. He read street maps. He logged a route.

Lyle lived on North Ivar. It was downscale Hollywood—a cul-de-sac chute.

He ditched the freeway. He took side streets. He looped through Hollywood. There—North Ivar/2200.

Small houses. Sun-scorched awnings. Drab pastel paint. 7:10/summer dusk/quiet.

A cul-de-sac. An end-of-block barrier: a fence and a cliff.

Littell cruised slow. Littell read curb plates. Littell read numbers. Lyle’s house—there:

2209. Brown lawn. Peach paint weather-stripped.

He parked two doors down. He got out and popped his trunk. He grabbed a crowbar. He walked up. He looked around. He saw no eyeball wits.

Hardwood door/strong jambs/good fittings.

He worked the crowbar. He tapped the jamb. He leaned hard. He made slack. He wedged his blade in.

He pushed. He shoved. He applied. Wood cracked. Wood splintered. Wood sheared.

He regripped. He rewedged. He snapped the bolt. He popped the door. He stepped inside and shut himself in.

He brushed the walls. He tripped switches. He got lights.

WHITE RABBIT's den:

Dusty and musty. Beaten-down bachelorized.

Living room. Kitchen. Side doors. Gag wall prints—dogs at card games and dogs in black tie. Faux-leather couches. Faux-leather ottomans. Faux-leather chairs.

Littell prowled. Littell checked the kitchen. Littell checked the bedroom and den.

Old fixtures. Cold cuts and liquor. Ratty drawers and cupboards. Undusted shelves.

More prints—dogs at stag nights and dogs ogling chicks.

One desk. One file drawer. Please: No wall panels or safes.

Now: *Trash it first.*

Littell put gloves on. Littell grid-worked. Littell trashed systematic.

He dumped drawers. He scattered clothes. He stripped the bed. He found a German Luger. He found Nazi flags. He found Nazi hats. He bagged them in a pillowcase. They played burglar swag.

He found a Nazi dagger. He found Krugerrands. He found a Jap knife. He bagged them in a loose sheet. They played burglar swag.

He popped the fridge. He dumped the cold cuts. He dumped the booze. He swung the crowbar. He ripped up the couches. He sliced up the chairs.

He dumped the kitchen cabinet. He found a Mauser pistol. He found a Nazi knife. He bagged them in a paper bag. They played burglar swag.

He swung the crowbar. He ripped up floorboards. He tore up wall beams.

Now: the desk and file drawer.

He walked back. He tried them. They were unlocked.

He went through them. He bagged bills. He bagged letters. There: one file extant.

It was folder-sealed. It was doodled up. Lyle drew Nazi maidens and shivs.

It was marked. It was circled: "Marty."

He drove south. He got out of Hollywood. He found a trash bin. He dumped Lyle's swag.

Don't go home—Jane's there—find a motel.

He cruised south. He found a place on Pico. He booked a one-night room. He locked himself in. He skimmed Lyle's bills. He read Lyle's letters.

Bland: Phone bills/gas bills/second-mortgage strife. Flyers from gun shows/notes from ex-wives.

Slow now—here's "Marty."

He opened the folder. He saw typed notes—sixteen pages single-spaced.

He skimmed through. He got the gist. Dr. King plans. Dr. King plots. Dr. King *schemes*.

The intro—WHITE RABBIT verbatim:

"The following points detail MLK's overall designs between now (3/8/65) and the '68 Pres'l election. MLK has discussed the following topics in high-level SCLC staff meetings, has forbidden staff members to announce them publicly or discuss them outside staff meetings and has rebuffed all criticism that points out one obvious fact: The breadth of his socialistic agenda will divert his energies, deplete SCLC resources and undermine the credibility of the civil-rights movement. It will enrage the American status quo, perhaps cost him congressional and presidential support and will earn him the enmity of his 'limousine liberal' supporters. The true danger of his plans is that they may well serve to fuel and unite a coalition of hard-core Communists, Communist sympathizers, far-left intellectuals, disaffected college students and Negroes susceptible to inflammatory rhetoric and prone to violent action."

MLK on Vietnam:

"Genocide cloaked as anti-Communist consent. An evil war of attrition."

MLK plans speeches. MLK plans boycotts. MLK plans dissent.

MLK on slums:

“The economic perpetuation of Negro poverty. The bedrock of de facto segregation. 20th-century slavery, euphemized by politicians of all stripes and creeds. A cancerous social reality and a condition which mandates a massive redistribution of assets and wealth.”

MLK plans speeches. MLK plans boycotts. MLK plans rent strikes.

MLK on poverty:

“The Negro will not be truly free until his God-given rights to coexist with whites are supplanted by economic entitlements which make him the financial equal of whites.”

MLK plans speeches. MLK plans dissent. “Poor People’s Unions.” “Poor People’s Marches.” Poor people hooked on dissent.

MLK on inclusion:

“We can only topple the apple cart of the American power structure and commandeer and equitably redistribute its resources through the creation of a new consensus, a new coalition of the disenfranchised, which will not tolerate men living in luxury while other men live in wretchedness and filth.”

MLK plans speeches. MLK plans workshops. MLK plans dissent.

Summits. Workshops. Brain pools. Coalitions. War protesters. Pacifists. Leftist pamphleteers. Vote drives. Reapportionment. Resultant mainstream clout.

WHITE RABBIT cited concepts. WHITE RABBIT ran timetables. WHITE RABBIT quoted dates.

MLK prophesied. MLK decried Vietnam:

“It will escalate into the most murderous misadventure of the American 20th century. It will divide, rip asunder and produce skeptics and people of conscience in epic numbers. They will form the nucleus of the consensus that will burn America as we know it to the ground.”

Timetables. Fund drives. Operating costs assessed. Vote potentials. District boundaries. Registration stats. Tallies. Figures. Prognostications.

It’s huge. It’s grand. It’s magnificent. It’s insane. It’s megalomaniacal.

Littell rubbed his eyes. Littell fought double-vision. Littell dribbled sweat.

Sweet and blessed Christ—

Mr. Hoover would cringe. Mr. Hoover would gasp. Mr. Hoover would FIGHT.

Littell cranked a window. Littell looked out. Littell saw freeway ramps. The cars looked new. The taillights streamed. The signposts blurred bright.

He lit a match. He burned the file. He flushed the ashes down the sink. He prayed for Martin Luther King.

His words stuck.

He savored them. He replayed them. He said them in Dr. King's voice.

He surveilled Lyle's house. He parked adjacent. No Merc extant/no collectors/no movement. Say Lyle dozed late—give him time—time the collectors' approach.

North Ivar was dead. Windows glowed black & white. The glass bounced TV shadows. He shut his eyes. He dipped his seat. He waited. He yawned. He stretched.

Headlights—

They passed his car. They swiveled. They strafed Lyle's house. There—the blue Merc.

Lyle parked in his driveway. Lyle got out and walked up. Lyle saw the door crashed and trashed.

He ran inside. He hit lights. He screeched.

Littell shut his eyes.

He heard crash sounds. He heard toss sounds. He heard oh no yells. He opened his eyes. He checked his watch. He timed Lyle *seeing* things.

More toss sounds. More crash sounds—no yells or screams.

Lyle ran out. Littell clocked it: 3.6 minutes.

Lyle stumbled. Lyle looked woozy. Lyle looked unkempt. Lyle got in his car. Lyle pulled out. Lyle hit reverse and floored it.

He gunned it. He smoked tread. He smashed the barrier fence. The car flew. The car upended and flipped.

Littell heard the crash. Littell heard the tank blow. Littell saw the flames.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/11/65. Internal telephone call transcript. (OPERATION BLACK RABBIT addendum.) Marked: "Recorded at the Director's Request"/"Classified Confidential 1-A"/"Director's Eyes Only." Speaking: Director, BLUE RABBIT.

DIR: Good morning.

BR: Good morning, Sir.

DIR: I was saddened by the news on your brother. You have my condolences.

BR: Thank you, Sir.

DIR: He was a valued colleague. That makes the circumstances surrounding his death all the more troubling.

BR: I won't apologize for him, Sir. He indulged occasional binges and behaved accordingly.

DIR: The suicide aspect troubles me. A neighbor saw him back his car off that hillside, which confirmed the LAPD's findings and the coroner's verdict.

BR: He was impetuous, Sir. He'd been married four times.

DIR: Yes, in the manner of one Mickey Rooney.

BR: Sir, did you—

DIR: I've reviewed the LAPD's paperwork and I've spoken to the Las Vegas SAC. WHITE RABBIT's house had been thoroughly ransacked. A neighbor told officers that WHITE RABBIT's souvenir gun collection had been stolen, along with the contents of his desk and file cabinets. Agents questioned the collection crew at the Desert Inn. A man admitted that he broke into WHITE RABBIT's house, two days after the suicide, and that it had already been ransacked, which is undisputedly a lie. The LAPD officers who responded to the suicide call said that they found the door open and that they viewed the ransacked state of the living room.

BR: It fits, Sir. My brother had run up casino debts before, although never to such a large amount.

DIR: Did WHITE RABBIT keep a private file on the dealings of the SCLC?

BR: I don't know, Sir. He adhered to a need-to-know policy with me on most security matters.

DIR: CRUSADER RABBIT's proximity to the incident bothers me.

BR: It bothers me as well, Sir.

DIR: Was he being spot-tailed during the time preceding WHITE RABBIT's binge?

BR: No, Sir. We had already set WHITE RABBIT up to meet him, and I didn't want complications. Nevada agents had been rotating on and off of him, though.

DIR: CRUSADER RABBIT keeps popping up. He hops from catastrophe to catastrophe with rabbitlike aplomb.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: He appears in Bogalusa. Voila, WILD RABBIT's friend Charles Rogers disappears. He appears in Las Vegas. Voila, he views the prelude to WHITE RABBIT's suicide.

BR: You know my distaste for CRUSADER RABBIT, Sir. That said, I should add that he did call and warn you.

DIR: Yes, and I spoke to him yesterday. He told me that he helped WHITE RABBIT outside, and that WHITE RABBIT simply passed out in his car. His story sounded plausible, and the assigned agents have not been able to crack it. They tell me that he did terminate WHITE RABBIT's casino credit, which further buttresses his credibility.

BR: He may have somehow capitalized on the incident, Sir. I seriously doubt that he provoked it.

DIR: I'm keeping an open mind for the moment. CRUSADER RABBIT is capable of outlandish provocations.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: To digress. Tell me how WILD RABBIT is behaving.

BR: He's doing well, Sir. He's building up his Klan unit nicely, chiefly on the basis of FATHER RABBIT's recruitments. He's debriefed a number of recruits with mail-fraud information on rival klaverns and paramilitary groups. The Bogalusa incident appears to have chastened him, and he seems to be adhering to his operational parameters.

DIR: WILD RABBIT is an obstreperous bunny who has endured very obvious reprimands.

BR: That's my assessment, Sir. But I don't know who the reprimander is, and the Rogers angle eludes me.

DIR: The chain of events is seductive. Rogers kills his parents and disappears. A Negro church explodes 800 miles east.

BR: I only like riddles I can solve, Sir.

DIR: I had the Houston SAC run a passport check. Pete Bondurant and Wayne Tedrow Junior arrived in Houston shortly after Rogers. I think they killed him, but their motive flummoxes me.

BR: Again, Sir. CRUSADER RABBIT and his proximity.

DIR: Yes, an additional vexation.

BR: Sir, do you—

DIR: RED RABBIT will seek to attend WHITE RABBIT's funeral. Will you allow it?

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: May I ask why?

BR: My reason may sound flip, Sir.

DIR: Indulge yourself. Walk on the wild side.

BR: My brother enjoyed RED RABBIT, Sir. He knew him for what he was and liked him anyway. He can come and give a big oration and repeat his "I Have a Dream" speech for all I care. Lyle only made 46, so I'm prone to humor his memory.

DIR: The fraternal bond deconstructed. Bravo, Dwight.

BR: Thank you, Sir.

DIR: Has it occurred to you that CRUSADER and WHITE RABBIT share certain characteristics and a common moral void?

BR: It has, Sir.

DIR: Is your hatred for RED RABBIT escalating?

BR: It is, Sir. It was my hope that we could escalate BLACK RABBIT and recoup our loss.

DIR: In due time. For now I want to wait and assess an adjunct plan.

BR: Covert ops?

DIR: No, a formal shakedown.

BR: Run by field agents?

DIR: No, run by one Pierre Bondurant, known in unpolite circles as "Mr. Extortion" and "The Shakedown King."

BR: He's a rough piece of work.

DIR: He's close to CRUSADER RABBIT. We might learn a few things.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: Good day, Dwight. And, again, my condolences.

BR: Good day, Sir.

(New Hebron, 8/12/65)

Nigger.

He never thought it. He never said it. It was ugly. It was stupid. It made you THEM.

Wayne took back roads. Wayne saw shit shacks and crop rows. Wayne saw THEM.

They tilled dirt. They hauled brush. They dished slop. Wayne watched. Wayne made them Bongo. Wayne made them Wendell D.

Wicked Wendell—last seen in Bakersfield—redneck California. Work first/Bakersfield soon/New Hebron now.

New Hebron was redneck. New Hebron was small. New Hebron was *très* Mississippi. Bob Relyea gigged there. Bob ran Wild Rabbit's hutch. Bob ran his Klan kompound.

Bob had kadre guns. Wayne had kadre money. Kall it: Kadre meets Klan.

Wayne drove slow. Wayne watched THEM. He felt bifurcated. He felt travel-fucked.

He'd rotated west. He split Saigon. He had three weeks in. He cooked horse. He packaged horse. He followed horse west.

Pete was in Laos. Ditto Mesplède. Mesplède just rotated in. They ran Tiger Kamp. They ran slaves. They cooked base.

Pete got antsy there. Pete got bored. Pete bought a bomb raid. Pete bought some Marv pilots. Said pilots napalmed Ba Na Key.

They deforested. They depilatoried. They defoliated. They torched a dope camp. They torched a dope field. They spared the camp lab. They cued in Tran Lao Dinh. Tran sacked the lab. Tran stole M-base and equipment. Tran fed it to Tiger Kamp.

Laurent was in Bon Secour, Alabama. Ditto Flash E. Pete nailed a boat there. Flash knew boats. Laurent knew carpentry.

One charter boat—one overhaul—one war boat boocoo.

Pete's plan: You view the guns. You pay Bob. You route said guns—New Hebron to Tiger South. *You* drive to Bon Secour then. *You* play backup. *You* jam this clown Danny Bruvick.

Loops. Rotations. Travel fucks.

Flash was travel-fucked. Flash looped through Cuba. Flash dipped in via speedboat. Flash dropped Fuentes and Arredondo. They stayed there. Flash looped on back. Flash looped to Bon Secour.

Soon:

Arms run #1. The *Ebbtide* revamped—the new *Tiger Klaw* boocoo.

Wayne cut east. Wayne hit dirt roads. Wayne saw paper mills and compost burning. Wayne saw Bob's "farm."

One shack—Bob's "Führer Barn." One gun range adjacent. Klan klowns kluster. Klan klowns klique. Klan klowns klip targets.

Wayne pulled in. Wayne parked. Wayne smelled cordite and horse shit. Wayne walked in the barn. Cold air hit him—the "Führer Igloo."

He shut the door. He laughed. He sneezed.

Rebel-flag drapes. Rebel-flag rugs. Rebel-flag furniture. Tracts on a table—Wayne Senior's script—"Red Racemixers"/"Spook Coonfidential."

Ammo on a couch/sheets on a table/hoods on a stool. Dry-cleaned and folded. All cellophaned.

Wayne laughed. Wayne sneezed. The door popped open. Bob Rabbit walked in. Bob wore fatigues. Bob wore jump boots. Bob detached his Klan hood.

Wayne laughed. Bob shut the door. Bob refroze the igloo.

"It ain't *GQ*, but it works."

Wayne tapped his pockets. "I brought the money."

"Your daddy says hi. He always asks about you."

"Let's see the guns."

"Let's jaw first. 'Hey, Bob, how's the hammer hangin'?' 'Long and strong, Wayne, how about you?' "

Wayne smiled. Pete whomped on Bob. Pete boxed his rabbit ears. Pete avenged Ward Littell.

"Let's see the guns."

Bob packed his nose. Bob jammed in Red Man snuff.

"The niggers are rioting in L.A. I told my boys, 'It'd take some napalm and two hundred Wayne Juniors to stop that thing.' "

Wayne sneezed—cold air and snuff.

"Cut the shit and show me the guns."

"Let's jaw first. We discuss the nigger problem, and I show you my correspondence file from the Missouri State Pen."

Wayne said, "You're wearing me thin."

Bob rubbed his nose. "I got letters from Jimmy Ray and Loyal G. Binns. They're both good haters and pliable as shit. I think they'll join up when they get—"

Wayne walked. Wayne bumped Bob deliberate. Wayne walked to the kitchen.

A TV was on. Negroes cavorted. Negroes threw rocks. Negroes stole liquor. The sound was off. Said Negroes yelled. Their teeth glowed bright.

Bob walked in. Bob bumped Wayne deliberate. Bob popped an unplugged meat freezer.

Guns: M-14s/pumps/bazookas.

Bob pinched a nostril. Bob blew excess snuff.

"I got all the requisite ammo and eight M-132 Zippos out at the range. Some guys heisted a National Guard post in Arkansas. My contact knows them, so we got first dibs. I figure you got plenty of shit for Tiger South and your Cuban run."

"How much?"

"Thirty-five, which is a yard-sale fucking price, if you want my opinion."

Wayne grabbed a pump. Wayne checked the slide. Burn marks/no maker code.

"It's been dipped. There's no serial numbers."

"They're all that way. The guys didn't want the shit to be traced back to the heist."

Wayne grabbed an M-14. Wayne grabbed a bazooka.

"It's good ordnance. It looks too good to be Guard issue."

"Don't complain. We got a fucking bargain."

Wayne grabbed an M-14. Wayne checked the barrel lug.

"Pete wanted the serial numbers to show. It's a terror tactic. If the stuff gets captured, the Castro guys will know it's U.S. donation stock."

Bob shrugged. "It's not like you got it at Sears, with the fucking price tag attached and the lifetime warranty."

Wayne peeled K-notes—all krisp and klean/all logged and laundered.

Bob laughed. "You don't try to break one of those at your local Tastee Freez."

Wayne tapped the TV. Wayne got some sound. Guns popped. Sirens hummed. Negroes frolicked.

* * *

Boat work:

Laurent rigged the gun nests. Flash scraped the hull. They lugged tools. They dropped tools. They dripped sweat.

They devolved the *Ebbtide*. They refaced the *Ebbtide*. They re-Cubafied.

They draped nets. They smeared sails. They scraped teakwood. They camouflaged. They built a mock-Cuban boat.

Flash gripped a sander. Flash scuffed the bridge. Flash scraped mahogany. Danny Bruvick watched. Danny Bruvick moaned. Danny Bruvick sipped Cutty Sark.

Wayne watched. Wayne prickled. Wayne yawned. He drove sixteen hours. He loop-the-looped. He scoured ol' Dixie.

He split New Hebron. He popped bennies. He drove to Port Sulphur. He hit Tiger South. He dropped the guns. He drove to Bon Secour.

Flash had orders—direct from Pete.

Pete don't trust Danny. Danny's got this ex. She's shacked with Ward Littell. We brace Danny—me and Laurent—*Jefe* Carlos too. We read Danny Tiger Law. You kowtow to Tiger Kode. You kart us to Kuba.

Danny's a punk. Danny's a souse. Danny might call his ex and boo-hoo. Your job—don't let him.

Dusk hit. Flash rigged work lights. Laurent Cubafied. Wayne sipped beer. Wayne studied maps.

Sexy Cuba and Bakersfield—bumfuck California.

Boat work:

Laurent climbed masts. Laurent stitched sails. Flash tuned the engines. Danny Bruvick watched. Danny Bruvick watched blotto.

Wayne walked to slip 18. Wayne watched long-distance. Flash had new orders—direct from Pete.

The ex is named Arden. Danny's pussy-whipped. Danny might call her and sing the blues. Your job—don't let him. It pertains to Carlos—some weird gig—thus mum's the word.

Flash hauled fuel cans. Laurent soldered drums. Wayne watched. Bennies parched him dry. Wayne sipped apple juice.

A stretch pulled up and idled. A chauffeur popped the back door. Carlos got out. He's the stock *padrone*. He's got the stock sharkskin suit.

He walked slip 19. Laurent snapped to attention. Bruvick rosaried. Flash snapped to. Carlos bowed. Carlos hugged Laurent.

Bruvick snapped to. Carlos ignored him. Carlos walked below deck. Flash walked down. Laurent walked down. Bruvick limped down slow.

The boat pitched and settled. Wayne heard screams.

He found a slip light. He read his maps. The boat pitched. He heard thumps. He heard whimper-screams.

Flash walked up. Laurent walked up. Carlos swaggered à la Il Duce. They walked down slip 19. They wiped their hands on paper towels. They bagged the stretch limo.

The limo pulled out. Wayne watched the boat. Wayne checked his watch and ticked seconds.

There—

Bruvick comes topside. Bruvick limps. Bruvick deboats. He counts change. He hits the dock. He hits the pay phones.

Wayne ran over. Bruvick saw him. Bruvick said, "Fuck."

Wayne saw the hurt:

Loose teeth and fat ears. Puffed lips and abrasions.

Bon voyage.

They fueled up. They stocked transfer guns. They stocked their personal shit: Browning pumps and Berettas. Scalp knives and suppressors. One Zippo choked for big flames.

Tiger Klaw—kool kamouflaged. Guns port. Guns starboard. Six gunwale slits. Tommys below-deck—hooked to swivel tricks.

They shoved off—6:00 a.m.—south by southeast. Bruvick navigated. Laurent read maps. Flash read comic books. Wayne read street maps. Wayne studied Bakersfield. Truck farms and wetbacks. Stoop crops and Wendell Durfee.

They bucked waves. They made time. It was hot. They got spray wet. They caught glare off the sea.

They wore Coppertone. The boat pitched. They ate Dramamine. Bruvick got the sweats and shakes—forced sobriety.

Flash hid his booze. Flash said Pete loathed Bruvick. Flash said it was private shit—per Ward Littell.

Flash read compass stats. Flash read maps. Flash ran the script:

We rendezvous offshore—near Varcadero Beach. We meet our men. We grapple boats. They get the guns. We get carte blanche. We're upside the beach. We're close to a Militia post—one barracks with Beards.

Flash was happy. Flash was homicidal. Flash waxed cautionary. Flash said:

Watch for boat robbers—they kill fishermen—they got little skiffs. They steal fish. They steal boats. They sport Fidel beards.

Laurent was happy. Laurent was homicidal. Laurent pumiced his scalp knife.

Dusk hit. They made Snipe Key. They refueled. They ran their sails. They recamouflaged.

Bruvick begged for booze. Flash shackled him up. They walked off-boat. They found a crab shack. They ate crab claws and Dexedrine.

Wayne got buzzed. Flash went pop-eyed. Laurent ratched his teeth. They brought Bruvick dinner. They deshackled him. They brought him one *cerveza*. Bruvick siphoned it.

They shoved off. They ran south-southeast. They plowed currents. The boat pitched. Clouds hid the moon.

Bruvick steered. Bruvick sweated. Bruvick rosaried. Flash fucked with him. Flash issued threats. Flash mocked his rosaries.

They applied lampblack. Their hands jumped—wiiild Dexedrine. They went blackface. Laurent was tall. Laurent looked like Wendell Durfee.

Flash ran compass stats. They hit Cuban waters.

Wayne walked the bow. Wayne caught spray. Wayne ran his Bausch & Lombs. Waves jumped. Fish jumped. A flare popped and streaked. Wayne saw *the* boat. Wayne saw a boat in retreat.

Due right—four hundred yards—speck in retreat.

Flash popped a flare. The sky whooshed. Bruvick cut the boat near. There: *Their* boat/the meet.

The boats bumped. Flash tossed a grappling hook. Flash hooked a deck ledge clean. Wayne saw Fuentes and Arredondo.

They tossed their hooks. They jumped bows. They flew. Laurent grabbed them. They dogpiled. They rolled.

Wayne said, "The other boat? *La boata? Qué es esto*?"

Fuentes stood up. "Militia. They … *qué es* … checked us out?"

Arredondo stood up. "*Los putos de Fidel*. They smell our fish."

Wayne smelled fish. Wayne scoped the boat. Wayne saw their camouflage: Fish poles/fish guts/fish heads.

Flash ran up. Flash hugged the guys. Flash went effusive. Spanish flowed—"*chinga*" for "fuck." "*Puta roja*" for "whore red."

Wayne lugged weapons—plastic-wrapped/tape-sealed/heavy.

He double-timed. He hit the cargo holds. He ran the galley steps. He funneled. He made eight trips. He ran the swamp line.

He tossed. Flash tossed. Fuentes caught. Arredondo caught and stacked. Little guys—strong—good catchers.

Bruvick watched. Bruvick scratched a neck rash. Bruvick rosaried. Fuentes degrappled. Fuentes waved. Arredondo shoved their boat off.

Laurent grabbed Bruvick. Flash mummyized. He cuffed him. He taped him. He made him King Tut. He taped his mouth. He taped his legs. He mast-pole mummified.

Laurent rigged a raft. Wayne dropped anchor. Flash said, "Let's kill Communists."

They took Berettas. They took knives. They took Browning pumps. They took a plastic-wrapped Zippo. They took a raft. They oared in. They surfed swells and ate grit.

Two miles of black sea. Three miles to beach lights. There now: One barracks and one sentry hut.

Off the beach. Off loose sand. Off dirt access ruts.

They flanked. They oared left. Breakers slammed them. Wayne and Flash puked.

They cut through it. A current hit. They pulled left. They scraped sand. They capsized. They rolled.

They dragged the raft up to high sand. They scoped out the hut. Twelve-by-twelve/four men in it/forty yards up.

Beside it: The barracks/one doorway/one floor.

They shared binoculars. They honed the lens. They nailed snapshots. One open door. Two bed-rows. 2:00 a.m./thirty men/ bunks and bug nets.

Flash hand-talked. Flash said hut first. We go with silencer pops.

They checked their Berettas. They unwrapped the Zip. They bug-crawled three abreast. Laurent lugged the Zip.

Wayne wheezed. Wayne ate sand. Wayne jittered. They got close—six yards out—Wayne saw whole faces.

The Militia guys sat. The Militia guys smoked. Wayne saw four carbines stacked.

Flash lip-synced numbers—shoot prone on three.

One—they aimed prone. Two—they triggered up. They fired on three—synced silencer plops.

They hit strong. They hit main mass. They hit heads and chests. They double-tapped. They aimed up. They shot fast. They hit groins. They hit backs. They hit necks.

Two fucks fell. Two chairs toppled. Two fucks scree-screeched. Two mouths gapped. Two mouths flapped soundless—wave-noise suppressed.

Flash rolled up. Flash got close. Flash shot main mass. The bodies jerked. The bodies sponged lead.

Flash signaled. The barracks—NOW.

Laurent lit the Zippo. The cherry top flared. They crawled up. They got close. There's the target. There's the door.

Laurent stood up. Laurent braced the doorway. Laurent Zippo-ized. He strafed the beds. He strafed the bug nets. He strafed *putos Red.*

Commies burned. Commies screamed. Commies rolled out of fart-sacks. Commies tangled up bug nets and ran.

Laurent burned bed sheets. Laurent burned walls. Laurent burned men in skivvies and pajamas. Commies ran. Commies fell. Commies crashed windows out.

The barracks burned. Commies ran—Reds on fire.

They ran out the back door. They ran to the beach. They fell in the sand. They ran and hit water.

Waves doused them. Waves deflamed them. Waves sucked them in. Waves boiled. The barracks burned. Ammo ignited.

Laurent chased fireballs. Laurent strafed wet sand. Laurent cooked salt water.

Flash walked to the hut. Flash dragged two dead men out. Flash dumped them and pissed on their heads.

Wayne walked up. Wayne got stage fright. Do it. Show them. Show *Pete*.

He pulled his knife. He picked a scalp. He dug the blade in.

Bakersfield—travel-fucked. Dusty streets/dusty skies/dusty air. The San Joaquin Valley—wall-to-wall dust—farm dirt and glare.

He was travel-fucked. He jumped Cuba to Snipe Key. He jumped Snipe Key to Bon Secour. He jumped Bon Secour to New Orleans. He took three flights west. He got bad sleep. He went off Dexedrine.

He called Saigon. Mesplède patched him to Pete. He praised the run. He praised the guns. He ragged Bob's number-dips.

Pete was pissed. Pete ragged Bob. *Stamp* the numbers—*scare* the Beard—flaunt U.S. Code.

Wayne called Barb. It was tense. Tense off that fight. Barb had news. Barb had a pending gig—adjunct-USO.

We're doing Saigon. We're doing Da Nang. Please lure Pete to the show. He said sure. He said I'll be back. He said I'll be travel-fucked.

Wayne cruised Bakersfield. Wayne read his maps. He flew in. He glommed a rental car. He cruised straight back out.

Mextown ran east. The truck farms ran east. You had beer bars/trailers/motels. You had dust. You had dust bugs. You had Mex cribs galore.

He hit the bars. He sipped beer. He coaxed information. Barmen talked. Barmen travelogued.

Wetback whores? *Shit*. Wetbacks *are* whores.

They jump borders. They steal jobs. They work cheap. They overbreed. They live to fuck. They whelp like chihuahuas. They pick crops. They get paid—they fuck *real* whores then. Wetback pimps pimp wetback whores—the payday proliFUCKation.

They swarm motels. They production-fuck. They proliFUCKate. Check the Sun-Glo. Check the Vista—check the whole scene. Payday's tomorrow—the wets proFUCKate—you'll dig the scene.

Wayne dropped the name "Wendell Durfee." Wayne dredged up some shrugs.

Who's that? Some jigaboo?

That's right—he's colored. He's quite loud and tall.

Sheeeit—

Wetbacks hate jigs. Crop men hate jigs. That jig better haul.

Payday:

Wayne cruised truck farms. Wayne loitered. Wayne watched.

Wets pick cabbage. Wets yank weeds. Wets fill garbage drums. Sirens blow. The wets yell. The wets drop hoes and run.

They hit pay trucks. They line up. They shag cash and run—*families/hombres/muchachos*.

Some clique up. Some walk off. Some liiiiinger. *Hombres todos* —men with shit-eater grins.

Trucks pull up. *Hombres* greet *hombres. Hombres* dispense: Jar brew/rubbers/French ticklers/T-Bird/white port/nude Polaroids. Beaver pix of Mexi-whores—let's proFUCKate.

Wayne walked over. *Hombres* cringed. Wayne vibed *Migra* fuzz. Wayne mollified. Wayne spoke pidgin-Mex. Wayne coaxed info.

Dig:

The truck men pimped. They signed johns up early—supply meets demand. Go to the Sun-Glo and Vista. See the Fuckathon.

Wets scoped the beaver pix. Wets signed up. Wayne flashed Wendell Durfee pix and got nada. Shit—we ain't seen him/we don't know him/we hate *negritos*.

Wayne split. Wayne braced more truck pimps. Wayne got more nada. He regrouped. He read his maps. He crossed the tracks and cruised Darktown. *De facto* segregation—wets north/coloreds south.

He yawned. He fought sleep-fuckification. He slept too long last night. He slept fourteen hours. He logged some bad dreams.

Barb rags him—don't pop pills—he rags Barb back. Don't you do it—you'll age bad—I love you.

Bongo co-starred. Bongo convulsed. Bongo snitched Wendell Durfee. Wendell's in Cuba. He's got the cold six thousand. He's got a Castro beard.

Wayne cruised Darktown. Wayne hit pool halls. Wayne hit lounge spots. He vibed cop. He vibed grief. He wore his gun out.

Cops saw him. Cops waved. Cops vibed brother cop. He braced coloreds. He flashed his Wendell pix. He got huh?s. He got indignation.

You dig Watts? It could happen *here*. It could happen NOW.

He worked through it. He worked all day. He wore Darktown out. Nobody knew Wicked Wendell. Nobody knew jackshit.

Dusk hit. He drove to the Sun-Glo. He caught the Fuckathon.

Ten rooms/ten whores/ten parking-lot lines. Wets twenty-deep and pimps with stopwatches—you fuck off *my* clock.

Snack stands—all jerry-rigged/all run by *mamacitas*. They served beans. They served *cerveza*. They served *carnitas*.

It was hot. Fried pork spattered. Jalopy pipes popped.

Doors opened. Doors shut. Wayne got snapshots: Nude girls and wide-leg poses. Soiled sheets trashed up.

The lines moved fast—six minutes per fuck. Cops stood around. Pimps greased them—a dollar a fuck.

The cops ate *carnitas*. The cops worked the line. The cops sold bootjack penicillin. Wayne stood in line. Wayne drew stares. Wayne showed *his* snapshots.

Que? No se. Negrito muy feo.

Wayne braced a mama-san. Wayne waved fifty bucks. He pidgin-talked. He told her—beer on the house.

She smiled. She shagged Lucky Lagers. She served the wets. She served the pimps. She served the cops.

She praised Wayne—*gringo muy bueno*.

Wayne got applause. Wets pumped his hands. Pimps waved sombreros. He re-showed his pix. They went around. They toured all the fuck-istos. The pix circuited. The pix got pawed. The pix came back.

A cop nudged Wayne. "I ran that smoke out of town three months ago. He was trying to pimp white girls, which didn't sit right with me."

Wayne goose bumped. The cop tapped his teeth.

"I heard he was tight with a smoke named King Arthur. I think he owns a queer bar in Fresno."

The Playpen Lounge was a storefront. The Playpen Lounge sat off skid row.

Wayne drove to Fresno. Wayne polled street creeps. Wayne found it. The creeps spieled lore—the Pen's a pus-pit—all fear the King!

He's this mean swish. He's Haiti-bred. He's pure calypso. He sports a crown. He's a he-she. He's a hermaphrodite.

Wayne walked in. The decor clashed—Camelot meets Liberace.

Velvet walls. Purple drapes. Nail-studded armor. A bar and wall booths—pink Naugahyde.

A jukebox cranked. Mel Tormé crooned. The natives stirred. Wayne drew looks. Wayne drew ooh-la-las.

Colored trade—queens and jockers.

There's the King. He's got a booth. He's got his crown. He's got the pedigree: Knife scars/mashed ears/pipe-wound regalia.

Wayne walked over. Wayne sat down. King Arthur sipped a frappé.

"You're too haughty to be Fresno PD, and you're too butch to be anything but a cop."

The jukebox vibrated. Wayne reached back. Wayne grabbed and yanked the cord.

"My money. Your information."

The King tapped his crown. It was kid-pageant issue—rhinestones on tin.

"I just consulted my thinking cap. It said, 'Policemen demand, they don't pay.' "

The King lisped. The King trilled. The King sashayed. Two fags swished by. One tittered. One waved.

Wayne said, "I *was* a cop."

"Oh, pshaw, you silly savage. You didn't have to say that."

Wayne pulled out his money. Wayne fanned his money. Wayne flashed a table lamp down.

"Wendell Durfee. I heard you know him."

The King tapped his crown. "I'm getting a vision … yes … there it is … you're that Vegas cop who lost his poor wife to Wendell."

The jukebox popped. Kay Starr popped on. Wayne reached back and popped the cord. A fag grabbed his hand. A fag scratched his palm. A fag giggled lewd.

Wayne pulled his arm back. The fags giggled. The fags withdrew. They swished off. They vamped Wayne. They blew kisses.

Wayne wiped his hand. The King laughed. The King went oh, pshaw.

"I had a brief encounter with Wendell, several months ago. I bought a string of girls from him."

"And?"

"And the Bakersfield fuzz discouraged me from procuring in their jurisdiction."

"And?"

"And Wendell was looking for a *nom de pimp* with irresistible panache. I suggested the name Cassius Cool, which he adopted."

Wayne tapped the money. "Keep going. I know there's more."

The King tapped his crown. "I'm getting a vision … yes … you killed three unarmed Negro men in Las Vegas … and … yes … Wendell made your wife climax before he killed her."

Wayne pulled his piece. Wayne raised it. Wayne cocked it. Wayne heard echoes. Wayne heard hammers click.

He looked around. He checked the bar. He saw fags. He saw guns. He saw suicide.

He holstered up. The King grabbed his money.

"Wendell enticed some crackers into a rigged dice game and was firmly advised to leave Bakersfield. I heard he lit out for L.A."

Wayne looked around. Wayne saw fags with guns. Wayne saw mean faces.

The King laughed. "Grow up, child. You can't kill *all* the niggers."

(Saigon, 8/20/65)

Pete said, “Wayne took some scalps.”

Cocktail hour. Drinks at the Catinat. Grenade nets and gook brass galore.

Stanton snarfed pâté. “Cuban or Negro American?”

Pete smiled. “He’s back. I’ll tell him you asked.”

“Tell him I was pleased to learn that he’s diversified.”

The bar was packed. MACV guys hobnobbed. Trilingual talk flowed.

Pete lit a cigarette. “The Relyea thing pissed me off. I want to move recognizable U.S.-sourced guns.”

Stanton smeared toast. “You’ve made that clear. That said, I should state that Bob’s done a bang-up job so far.”

“He has, but he’s deep off in all that Klan shit, which could draw heat any fucking second. You want my opinion? We should rotate Laurent back to Laos to work Tiger Kamp, and keep Mesplède in the States permanently to shag guns. He’s got good connections, he’s willing, and he’s fucking capable.”

Stanton shook his head. “One, Bob’s got better connections, and he’s got enough FBI cover to divert any trouble he might create. Two, you brought that Bruvick guy in, which lit a fire under Carlos, who is now all aflutter for the Cause, in a way he hasn’t been since ’62. He’s *active* now, he’s the *only* committed Outfit man, and I’m sure he’s got gun sources. Three, Laurent’s tight with Carlos, which is why I want him full-time stateside, instead of Mesplède. He’s the best man to work with Carlos and funnel our weaponry.”

Pete rolled his eyes. “Carlos is a *Mob* executive. The only gun contacts he’s got are other exile groups with shit ordnance of their own. He won’t be able to shag stuff as good as that Relyea batch, and how many fucking armory heists can we count on?”

A siren blew. The room froze. The gook brass drew guns. The siren died. The all-clear blew. The gook brass stashed their guns.

Stanton sipped wine. “We’re covered as is. You and Wayne rotate, because you’re the A-level personnel and you know the in-country and Vegas ends of the business. When Wayne’s caught up at the lab, he’s free to work Vegas and the funnel, and you—”

“John, Jesus Christ, will you—”

“No, let me finish. We lost Chuck, *c’est la guerre*, but Tran and Mesplède are more than enough to run Tiger Kamp. We keep Mesplède in-country, and we leave Flash and Laurent in Port Sulphur and Bon Secour. In other words, we’re *covered*, and I don’t want you second-guessing a perfectly operational system.”

The siren blew. The all-clear blew. The AC died. A waiter cracked doors. A waiter cracked windows. A waiter rigged bomb nets.

Pete checked his watch. “I’m meeting Wayne. He’s got a lead on some donation shit in Da Nang.”

Hot air settled in. Waiters pulled fan cords.

“How many scalps did he take?”

“Four.”

“Do you think he enjoyed it?”

Pete smiled. “With Wayne you never know.”

Stanton smiled. “Will you allow me some sort of concession before you go?”

Pete stood up. The ceiling loomed. Pete dodged fan blades.

“Your shit’s operational. It’s just not as passionate as my shit.”

They flew up. MACV ran Hueys—milk flights from Tan Son Nhut.

They sat on the back slats. Some admin pogues flew along. Dig it—let’s catch this show in Da Nang.

Wayne yawned. Wayne just rotated in. Wayne was travel-fucked.

The flight overbooked. The kiddie brass partied. They made noise. They matched coins. They twirled their .45s.

The rotors whipped. The doors shook. The radio screeched. Pete and Wayne huddled. Pete and Wayne talked loud.

Agreed: Bob Relyea bites. Agreed: He's Wayne Senior's punk rabbit. Agreed: He shags good guns. Agreed: D. Bruvick's sly and yellow.

Carlos warned Bruvick. Carlos said don't call Arden—don't rat our Cuban runs. Bruvick fudged and tried to call. Wayne interdicted.

Agreed: Let's oust him. Agreed: Let's find a new boat man.

They agreed. Pete hedged somewhat. Pete said Carlos wants Bruvick. Bruvick's his inside man. Carlos distrusts everyone. Carlos plants informants.

Ergo: Bruvick makes Cuban runs. Bruvick calls Carlos. Bruvick informs on *us*.

Wayne *got* it. Wayne digressed. Bruvick's ex Arden—now with Ward Littell. She's a spy. She watches Ward. She reports to Carlos.

Right—you got it—and that's *all* you get.

Wayne said okay. Pete riffed on Carlos—the Graduate Course.

He runs people. He eats people. He's tight with John Stanton. He's greedy. He'll press John—feed me dope points. John will bow. *We'll* bow too. We owe Carlos that. Carlos braced the other Boys. They waived Outfit laws. They let us white-dust West Vegas.

Agreed: We owe Big Carlos. Agreed: We owe Blueblood John.

The flight bumped. The gun doors shook. The pogues ate Dramamine.

Agreed: Tiger ops—overhead stratospheric—the lab/Tiger Kamp/Tiger South. Bribes to ARVNs/bribes to Can Lao boss-man "Mr. Kao"/ bribes to Tran Lao Dinh.

Transport bribes. Nellis AFB bribes. Cop bribes: Sheriff's and LVPD. Ops costs: in-country and out. Ops costs transcontinental.

We ship white horse—big poundage—we dust West LV. Profits soar. Jigs love white horse. Profits dip non sequitur. Because of the fucking Watts Riot—live on fucking TV.

Jigs see the riot. Jigs exult. Monkey see/monkey do. They roam West LV. They chuck some spears. They burn some shacks. We suspend kadre business. We retrieve Tiger Kabs. Cops quell the riot. Jigs go to jail. Profits de-escalate.

Agreed: Biz is down now—we're in bear-market turf. Agreed: We'll expand—and we'll re-escalate. We'll hire more pushers—expendable jigs—we'll bull-market reintegrate.

The Huey cruised low. They saw firefights. They saw villages sacked. Wayne talked expansion—let's re-dust West Vegas. Let's pre-dust black L.A.

Pete laughed—the Boys won't vouch it—you fucking *know* that.

Know *shit*. Durfee might be there. I fucking know *that*.

Da Nang: Hot sun and hot sea winds. Spritzy sea spray.

Their gun contact no-showed. Pete got pissed. Wayne pitched diversion: Let's hit that USO show.

They rickshawed in. Their coolie pulled weight. Their coolie ran chop-chop. They raced some shavetails. Said shavetails were bombed. The rickshaw race rocked.

Pete ate Dramamine. Wayne ate salt pills. They hit access roads. They hit the naval base. They hit the bleacher setup.

The coolies saw it. The coolies braked hard. Four wheels brodied. Four wheels slid and locked.

Dead heat.

Pete laughed. Wayne laughed. The shavetails went green and upchucked.

The show was free. A crowd filed in. Pete and Wayne lined up. It was hot-plate hot.

The stage was ground-level. The bleachers ran sixty rows up. Onstage: Hip Herbie & Ho—low-rent topical yuks.

Ho was a puppet. Hip Herbie held him. Hip Herbie held a hand mike. Hip Herbie ventriloquized. Hip Herbie moved his lips. Hip Herbie vibed hophead or souse.

They found seats. They got cramped arm- and legroom. They sat ten bleacher rows up.

Stage speakers tossed sound. Ho tossed a tantrum: "GIs scare me! Me most scared! You kill Cong ricky-tick!"

It was hot. The sun torched down. Pete got queased up. The crowd yukked halfhearted. Ho wore red devil horns. Ho wore red diapers.

Hip Herbie said, "What have you got against Uncle Sam, anyway?"

Ho said, "I come to U.S.! They no let me in Disneyland!"

The crowd yukked distracted. Ho blathered: "I get revenge! I plant land mines! I kill Donald Duck!"

The crowd yukked nonplussed. A stage geek signaled Hip

Herbie—wrap this shit up.

Ho raged: “Me try sit-ins! Me try pray-ins! Me shoot Donald Duck!”

The stage geek cued a sound geek. A sax vamped low. Hip Herbie got the bum’s rush.

He bowed. Ho leaked sawdust. A curtain dropped. The crowd clapped lackluster—fuck that puppet and lush.

The sax scaled up sequential. The curtain rose. Pete saw loooooong legs furl up.

No. It can’t be. Please, yes. Slow now, in sync: The curtain and sax—both scaling up.

There—not no, it’s yes.

Pete saw her legs. Pete saw *her*. Pete caught her kiss standing up. Wayne smiled. The Bondsmen clicked in. Barb launched Viet rock.

Whistles/wolf calls/cheers—

Barb danced. Barb shimmied. Barb kicked a shoe off. The shoe sailed high. Guys grabbed and reached. Pete reached higher up.

It’s close. It’s—

His chest popped. His wind died. His left arm blew up.

It’s close. It’s high-heeled and spangled. It’s green and—

His left arm died. His left wrist torqued. His left hand blew up.

He grabbed right. He caught the shoe. He kissed it. He fell down. He squeezed the shoe. Barb blurred white white.

(Washington, D.C., 9/4/65)

Riot. Revolt. Insurrection.

NBC ran replays. TV pundits assessed.

Littell watched.

Negroes threw Molotovs. Negroes threw bricks. Negroes sacked liquor stores. Chief Parker blamed hoodlums. Bobby urged reforms. Dr. King urged dissent.

Dr. King digressed. Dr. King stressed other riots. Dr. King stressed Vegas West.

Replays: Negroes throw Molotovs/Negroes throw bricks/Negroes sack liquor stores.

Littell watched replays. Littell replayed vintage Drac:

“We’ve got to sedate those animals, Ward. We don’t want them *that* agitated *that* close to my hotels.”

Don’t say it: “Pete’s selling sedation, sir, but it doesn’t appear to be working right now.”

Ditto Pete. Barb called him last week. Barb said Pete had a heart attack.

It was bad. Pete was stable now. The old Pete was fucked. Barb came on strong. Barb begged him:

Pull strings. Brace Carlos. Make Pete retire. Bring him home. Make him stay. Do this for me.

Littell said he’d try. Littell called Da Nang. Littell talked to Pete. Pete was hoarse. Pete was tired. Pete sounded weak.

Littell called Carlos. Carlos said it’s up to Pete.

Littell killed the TV. Littell eyed his news pic. He’d clipped it. He’d saved it. He’d laminated it.

The Washington *Post:* “KING ATTENDS AIDE’S FUNERAL.” Aide Lyle Holly

—dead per suicide—FBI plant WHITE RABBIT.

King's RED RABBIT. Bayard Rustin's PINK. Brother Dwight Holly's BLUE. They all stand close. RED and PINK mourn. BLUE RABBIT smirks.

He clipped the shot. He studied it. He built some rage. He watched riot footage. He watched replays. He built more rage.

He traveled for work. He left Vegas. He drove to L.A. He saw a tail. He ignored it. He built more rage.

He knew:

Mr. Hoover doubts you. BLUE RABBIT doubts you. Said doubts plague BLACK RABBIT. WHITE RABBIT dies. You view the prelude. You spark apprehension. Mr. Hoover calls. You dissemble. He probes.

Call it a spot tail. You've seen none since. Logic meets rage.

You *were* spot-tailed pre–BLACK RABBIT. Mr. Hoover told you. Mr. Hoover pulled said tails. Mr. Hoover reinstated them—post–Lyle suicide.

Ergo:

He did not suspect you *then*. He does suspect you *now*.

He worked. He traveled—Vegas to L.A. He saw no tails en route. He saw Janice in Vegas. He saw Jane in L.A. He saw no tails at either venue.

Jane scared him. Jane *knew* him. Mr. Hoover knew about Jane. Agents planted her fake transcript. Agents gave her Tulane.

He checked for tails. He checked daily. He saw none. He replayed riot footage. He replayed Dr. King's words. He replayed Lyle's file near-verbatim.

He built a plan. He decreed escalation. He flew to D.C. He did some Teamster work. He stopped by the SCLC. He logged no tails en route.

He talked to Bayard Rustin. Bayard took a call. He excused himself. He found Lyle's old cubbyhole. He worked fast. He deployed his briefcase. He went through boxed items. He stole Lyle's typewriter. He stole Lyle's memo stack.

The office mourned Lyle. They didn't know Lyle was WHITE RABBIT.

Lyle gambled. Lyle stiffed you. You lost no respect. Lyle betrayed you. Lyle died. Now Lyle resurrects and repents.

Littell made coffee. Littell studied Lyle's memos. Littell traced the name Lyle D. Holly.

He practiced. He got it. He prepped Lyle's portable. He rolled in an envelope. He typed all caps:

"TO BE SENT IN THE CASE OF MY DEATH."

He unrolled the envelope. He rolled in a carbon sheet and paper. He squared off the SCLC letterhead.

Lyle Holly confessed.

To booze binges. To gambling. To passing bad checks. To betrayal—FBI-funded—at J. Edgar Hoover's behest.

Count 1: Mr. Hoover is crazy. He hates Dr. King. I joined his hate campaign.

Count 2: I joined the SCLC. I hoodwinked Dr. King. I hoodwinked key staff.

Count 3: I rose within the movement. I wrote policy briefs. I logged secrets shared.

Count 4: I leaked secret data. I supplied the Feds. I said tap here. I said bug there.

Addendum 1: A tap and bug list. *Certified* taps and bugs—known to Littell. Said bugs and taps—*likely* known to Lyle Holly.

Count 5: I logged Dr. King's indiscretions. I told Mr. Hoover. He penned a "suicide note." It was mailed to Dr. King. It urged him to take his own life.

Count 6: Mr. Hoover's hate grows. Mr. Hoover's hate deepens. Mr. Hoover's campaign will ascend.

Littell stopped. Littell thought it all through. Littell reassessed.

No—don't snitch BLACK RABBIT. Don't snitch BLUE RABBIT. Don't snitch WILD RABBIT's snitch-Klan. Don't exceed credibility. Don't indict yourself. Don't reveal what Lyle might not know.

Count 7: I have done great harm. I despair for Dr. King. I indulge thoughts of *my* suicide. This letter remains sealed. Staff members will find it. They will send it if I die.

Littell unrolled the document. Littell signed it Lyle D. Holly.

He rolled in an envelope. He typed an address: Chairman/House Judiciary Committee. He rolled out the envelope. He rolled in an envelope. He typed an address: Senator Robert F. Kennedy/Senate Office Building.

It was risky. Bobby ran Justice—'61–'64. Bobby ran Mr. Hoover. Mr. Hoover ran autonomous. Mr. Hoover ran his hate campaign under Bobby's flag. Bobby might thus feel guilty. Bobby might thus feel shame.

Trust Bobby. Trust the risk. Hit the SCLC. Drop the letters. Get the meter stamp.

Wait—then read the papers. Wait—then watch TV.

Bobby might report the leak. *You* could contact him. *You* could resurrect anonymously.

(Da Nang, 9/10/65)

Sickbay—pills / drips / IVs. Pete's world now—Pete the Zonked and Weak.

Wayne pulled a chair up. Pete laid in bed. Barb fluffed his pillow.

"I talked to Ward. He said he's dying to test his pull with the gaming boards. He thinks he can get you a license for a grind joint." Pete yawned.

Pete rolled his eyes. That meant Fuck You.

A nurse walked in. She took Pete's pulse. She checked Pete's eyes. She ran Pete's blood pressure. She logged it in.

Wayne checked the board. Wayne saw normal stats. The nurse split. Barb fluffed Pete's pillow.

"We could run the place together. Ward says it's a revolutionary concept. You with a legitimate source of income."

Pete yawned. Pete rolled his eyes. That meant Fuck You. His weight was down. His skin was slack. His bones jutted out.

He fell off that bleacher. Wayne caught him. Pete gripped Barb's shoe. Barb jumped off the stage. A guy caught her. Two medics showed.

One guy resuscitated. One guy grabbed at the shoe. Pete kicked him. Pete bit him. Pete kept the shoe.

Barb said, "I quit smoking. If you can't do it, I can't either." She looked frazzled. She looked fried.

She looked fragged. Call it a pill run—grief-justified.

Pete said, "I want a cheeseburger and a carton of Camels."

His voice held—good timbre/good wind.

Wayne laughed. Barb kissed Pete. Pete goosed her and went goo-goo eyed. She blew kisses. She walked out. She pulled the door shut.

Wayne straddled his chair. “Ward will make you buy a place. For Barb’s sake, if nothing else.”

Pete yawned. “She can run it. I’m too busy as it is.”

Wayne smiled. “You’re dying to talk business. If that’s the case, I’m listening.”

Pete cranked the bed up. “You’re running things until I get out of here. That means in-country and stateside.”

“All right.”

“We’ve got a backlog of shit at the lab, so we’re freed up there. I want Mesplède and Tran to run Tiger Kamp. I want you, Laurent, and Flash to handle the conduit and oversee the Cuban runs, and I want you to back Milt up at Tiger Kab.”

Wayne nodded. Wayne leaned on the bedrail.

Pete said, “I got a pouch from Bob. He’s got two truckloads of bazookas and high explosives pilfered out of Fort Polk. It’s a big haul, and it might take two boat runs. You take care of the Cuban transport, but in that case and in all future fucking cases, don’t go near the weaponry transactions and let Laurent and Flash drive the shit from New Hebron to Bon Secour. Bob’s got FBI cover, so I want him to stand as our most expendable guy. Laurent and Flash drive the guns, so they’re less expendable than Bob and a shitload more expendable than you. *You* stay safe, and *you* watch Danny Bruvick, who I do not trust worth a fucking shit.”

Wayne clapped. “Your wind is back.”

Pete checked the stat board. “Not bad. I’ll be out of here soon.”

Wayne stretched. “I talked to Tran. He said some slaves escaped with some M-base. They’re ex-VC, and Tran thinks they hooked up with some VC guys running a lab near Ba Na Key. He thinks they plan to cook up some shit and distribute it to our troops in the south, to demoralize them.”

Pete kicked the bedpost. The stat board fell.

“Have Mesplède interrogate the rest of the slaves. We might learn something that way.”

Wayne stood up. “Get some rest, boss. You look tired.”

Pete smiled. Pete grabbed Wayne’s chair. Pete snapped the back slats.

Wayne clapped.

Pete said, “Rest, shit.”

Barb danced. Barb obliged horny sailors. They swarmed her. They cut in. They swarmed three per song.

Canned songs/all staples/service club stock. “Sugar Shack”/surf shit/the Watusi.

Wayne watched. Barb’s hair bounced. Wayne saw new grays in the red. “Surf City” tapped out. Sailors clapped. Barb walked on back.

Wayne pulled her chair out. She sat down. She lit a match.

“I want a cigarette.”

Wayne plucked those new grays. Barb made an uggh face. Wayne sheared a few reds.

“You’ll get over it.”

Barb lit the grays. They poofed and burned up.

“I should go home. If I stay, I’ll start seeing things I don’t like.”

“Like our business?”

“Like the boy three wards down with no arms. Like the boy who got lost and got napalmed by his own guys.”

Wayne shrugged. “It goes with the job.”

“Tell Pete that. Tell him, ‘The next one might kill you, if the war doesn’t get you first.’ ”

Wayne plucked a gray. “Come on. He’s better than that.”

Barb lit a match. Barb lit the hair. Barb watched it burn.

“Get him out. You and Ward know the guys who can make it happen.”

“They won’t go for it. Pete’s in hock, and you know why.”

“Dallas?”

“That and the fact that he’s too good to let go.”

A sailor bopped by. Barb signed his napkin. Barb signed his jumper sleeve.

She lit a match. “I miss the cat. Vietnam gets me mushy for Vegas.”

Wayne checked her hair. Perfect—all red now.

“You’ll be home in three days.”

“I’ll kiss the ground, believe me.”

“Come on. It’s not that bad.”

Barb snuffed the match. “I saw a boy who lost his equipment. He was joking with a nurse about the Army buying him a new one. The second she walked out, he started to cry.”

Wayne shrugged. Barb tossed the match. It hit him. It stung. Barb walked. Sailors watched her. Barb walked to the john.

“Sugar Shack” kicked on. Time warp—that song on Jack Ruby’s jukebox.

Barb walked out. A sailor braced her. He was colored. He was tall. He looked like Wendell D.

Barb danced with him. They danced semi-slow. They shared some contact.

Wayne watched.

They danced nice. They danced hip. They danced by the table. Barb was loose. Barb was cool. Barb wore white dust on her nose.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 9/16/65. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. (OPERATION BLACK RABBIT Addendum.) Marked: “Recorded at the Director’s Request”/“Classified Confidential 1-A: Director’s Eyes Only.” Speaking: Director, BLUE RABBIT.

DIR: Good morning.

BR: Good morning, Sir.

DIR: Let’s discuss WILD RABBIT’s work in Mississippi. The oxy-moronic phrase “Redneck Intelligence Network” comes to mind.

BR: WILD RABBIT has been doing well, Sir. Our stipends have allowed him to recruit and secure intelligence, and FATHER RABBIT has supplied him with funds as well. He told me that he’s donating a portion of his hate-tract profits to WILD RABBIT’s incursion.

DIR: And the well-funded WILD RABBIT is achieving results?

BR: He is, Sir. His Regal Knights have been infiltrating other hate groups and supplying WILD RABBIT with information. I think we’ll have some mail-fraud indictments before too long.

DIR: FATHER RABBIT’s donations are in part self-serving. He aids WILD RABBIT’s cause and depletes the resources of his hate-tract rivals.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: Is WILD RABBIT remaining tractable?

BR: He is, although I’ve learned that he’s running weaponry to Pete Bondurant’s narcotics cadre. As I understand it, he secures the weapons from armory heists and army base pilfering, which is odd, because I haven’t been able to find any recently filed reports on such incidents, anywhere in the south.

DIR: Yes, odd does describe it. That said, do you think WILD RABBIT will retain an acceptable level of deniability pertaining to his gun-running activities?

BR: I do, Sir. But should I tell him to stop?

DIR: No. I like his connection to Bondurant. Remember, we’ll be approaching Le Grand Pierre when we move BLACK RABBIT into the shakedown phase.

BR: I heard that he had a heart attack last month.

DIR: A pity. And the prognosis?

BR: I think it's guardedly positive, Sir.

DIR: Good. We'll let him recover and then add some stress to his overtaxed arteries.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: Let's discuss CRUSADER RABBIT. Have you accrued any substantive data?

BR: Yes and no, Sir. We've gotten nothing off the spot tails and the trash and mail covers, and I'm convinced that he's too technically skilled to bug and tap. He's retained his friendship with PINK RABBIT and visits him in D.C., which is hardly incriminating, since you urged him to do so.

DIR: Your tone betrays you. You're tantalizing me. Shall I hazard a guess?

BR: Please do, Sir.

DIR: Your revelations pertain to CRUSADER's women.

BR: That's correct, Sir.

DIR: Expand your answers, please. I have a lunch date in the year 2000.

BR: CRUSADER has been seeing Janice Lukens, FATHER RABBIT's ex-wife, in Las—

DIR: We know that. Pray continue.

BR: He lives with a woman in Los Angeles. Her alleged name is Jane Fentress.

DR: "Alleged" is correct. I helped to establish her identity two years ago. A New Orleans agent planted her college transcript.

BR: There's much more to her, Sir. I think she could serve as our wedge if we need to disrupt CRUSADER.

DIR: Expand your thoughts. The millennium bodes.

BR: I had her spot-tailed. My man took a set of prints off a glass she left at a restaurant. We ran them and got her real name, Arden Louise Breen, B-R-E-E-N, married name Bruvick, B-R-U-V-I-C-K.

DIR: Continue.

BR: Her father was a left-wing unionist. The Teamsters killed him in '52, and it's still a St. Louis PD unsolved. Allegedly, the woman held no grudge against the Teamsters, allegedly because her father forced her to become a call-house prostitute. She absconded on a KCPD receiving stolen goods warrant in ’56, at the same time her husband embezzled some money from a Kansas City Teamster local and disappeared.

DIR: Continue.

BR: Here’s the ripe part. Carlos Marcello’s front corporation bailed her out on the Kansas City bounce. She disappeared then, she’s got a bookkeeping background, and she’s rumored to have had a long-term affair with that old Mob hand Jules Schiffrin.

DIR: Boffo news, Dwight. Well worth your vexing preambles.

BR: Thank you, Sir.

DIR: I think your tale boils down to one salient truth. Carlos Marcello does not trust CRUSADER RABBIT.

BR: I came to that conclusion, Sir.

DIR: Pull the tails, along with the trash and mail covers. If we need to get at CRUSADER, we’ll go through the woman.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: Good day, Dwight.

BR: Good day, Sir.

(Saravan, 9/22/65)

Torture:

Six slaves strapped down. Six Cong-symps wired. Six hot seats / six juice buttons / six testicle feeds.

Mesplède worked the juice box. Mesplède ran the juice. Mesplède asked the questions. Mesplède talked franglogook.

Pete watched. Pete chewed Nicorette gum. It was wet and hot —rainstorm boocoo. The hut sponged heat. The hut stored heat. The hut was a hot-plate boocoo.

Mesplède talked gook. Mesplède talked threat. Mesplède talked fast. His words slurred—gobbledeGOOK.

Pete knew the gist. Pete wrote the script. Pete read six faces.

Slaves escape. All pro-Cong. Who let them? I no know!—all six say it—I know no who!

It droned on—you tell me!—no no! Pete watched. Pete chewed gum. Pete read eyes.

Mesplède lit a Gauloise. Pete cued him. Mesplède hit the buttons. Juice flooowed.

Testicle ticklers—black box to balls—nonlethal volts. Gooks tingle. Gooks absorb. Gooks yell boocoo.

Mesplède cut the juice. Mesplède pidgin-gooked: Congs run! Steal M-base! Tell what you know!

The gooks buzzed. The gooks squirmed. The gooks afterglowed. Talk now! You tell me! Tell what you know! Six gooks jabbered—this gook ensemble—we no know who!

One gook squeals. One gook yips. One gook salivates. Loincloths to ankles/grounded gonads/feed plugs to feet. One gook squirms. One gook prays. One gook urinates.

Pete cued Mesplède. Mesplède hit the buttons. Juice flooowed.

The gooks buckle. The gooks absorb. The gooks gyrate. The gooks scream. The gooks thrash and pop veins.

Pete cogitated. Pete chewed gum. Pete brainstormed eyes shut.

Tran tells Wayne—slaves escape—steal M-base boocoo. They cook it. They dump it. Fuck up our GIs boocoo.

But:

You don't dump Big "H." You *sell* it.

And:

Wayne rotates home. Wayne's lab is empty. Rival dope cooks could sneak in. Said cooks could utilize. Said cooks could appropriate.

Surveille the lab—do it soon—before *you* rotate.

Mesplède coughed. "Has that chewing gum put you in a trance, Pierre?"

Pete opened his eyes. "One of them has to know something. Ask them *why* the guys ran, and turn up the juice if they shit you."

Mesplède smiled. Mesplède coughed. Mesplède pidgin-gooked. He talked fast. He blurred inflections. He fastballed his words.

Gooks listen. Good absorb. Gooks say: No No No No—

Mesplède hit the buttons. Juice flowed. Near-lethal volts. The gooks screamed. Their nuts flushed. Their nuts swelled.

Mesplède cuts the juice. Gooks absorb pain. Gook 5 talks ricky-tick. Mesplède smiles. Mesplède absorbs. Mesplède translates.

"He said he woke up and saw Tran pull them out of the hut. Tran … *qu'est-ce* … forced them to run, and he heard shots a few minutes later."

Pete spit his gum out. "Cut them loose. Give them some extra beans for dinner."

Mesplède said, "I appreciate compassion."

The hills hurt.

He breathed hard. He walked slow. He trailed back. Mesplède walked fast. Two guards flanked him.

They cut through camp. They pushed through brush. They dodged biter snakes. The rain held. Brush slapped them. Pete gobbled breath.

He took pills. They thinned his blood. They scrubbed his veins.

They sapped him. They fucked him up. They held him back.

He ran. He caught up. He gobbled breath.

They kicked through mud. The mud had weight. The weight hurt his chest. They walked two miles. They hit downslopes. His chest weight slacked off.

Pete heard grunts and oinks. Pete saw a mud pit. Pete smelled human decomp. Pete saw wild pigs root.

There:

Said mud pit. A buffet. Said pigs and boned flesh.

Pete jumped in. The pigs scattered. The mud was deep. The mud had weight. Pete bobbed for flesh.

He rooted. He flailed. He found an arm. He found a leg. He found a head. He shook off mud. He pulled off skin. He peeled off scalp flaps.

He saw a hole. It was bullet-sized. He gripped the jaws. He cracked the skull back.

Good breath. Good strength. Good outpatient stats.

A bullet dropped. Pete caught it. It was butterflied and smashed. It was a soft-point magnum. It was Tran Lao Dinh's brand.

Tran tried charm. Tran tried shit. Tran tried shuck-and-jive. Mesplède hooked him up. Mesplède hooked dual clamps—gonads and head.

The rain held. Monsoon stats—mud 4-ever.

Pete chewed gum. Pete cracked the door. Pete stirred outside air.

"Your shit's not working. Give up the details and tell us who you're in with, and I'll see what John Stanton says."

Tran said, "You know me, boss. I no work with Victor Charles."

Pete hit the switch. Juice flowed. Tran buckled. Tran clenched.

The clamps sparked. His hair sparked. His nuts spasmed. He bit his lips. He bit his tongue. He cracked his false teeth.

Pete said, "That demoralize-the-GIs story you told Wayne was bullshit. Admit it and go from there."

Tran licked his lips. "Victor Charles, boss. You don't underestimate."

Pete hit the switch. Juice flowed. Tran buckled. Tran clenched.

His bladder blew. The clamps sparked. His head twitched. His dentures flew.

Mesplède said, “*Il est plus que dinky dau, il est carrément fou.*”

Pete kicked the dentures. They hit the doorway and popped out. They hit the mud monsoon. Tran flashed his gums. Pete saw old scars—Cong torture tattoos.

“I’ll double up next time. You don’t want that. You won’t—”

“Okay okay okay. I kill slaves and sell base to ARVN.”

Pete spit his gum out. “That’s a start.”

Tran worked his chair back. Tran flipped Pete off—*le bird boocoo*.

“You French fuck number ten. You *carrément fou.*”

Pete popped more gum. “You’re in with somebody. Tell me who.”

Tran flipped Pete off. The wop stiff-arm—*il bah-fungoo*.

“Fuck the frogs. You number ten. You run at Dien Bien Phu.”

Pete worked his gum. “Tell me who’s running you. We’ll have a drink and discuss it.”

Tran wiggled. Tran worked his chair back. Tran flipped Pete off—up and rotated—you twirl boocoo.

“You French *cochon*. You fuck fat men.”

Pete worked his gum. Pete blew a bubble. It popped ka-poo.

“Who’s running you? You’re not in this all by yourself.”

Tran worked his chair back. Tran spread his legs. Tran humped his hips boocoo.

“I run your wife. I eat red pussy ’cause you homo—”

Pete hit the switch. Pete *locked* the switch. Tran buckled. Tran humped his hips. Tran worked his chair back boocoo.

He slid it. He squared it. He made the doorway. Mesplède jumped. Pete tripped.

Tran flipped them off. Tran dumped his chair. Tran went BONZAI! He hit the rain. He hit the mud. He electrified.

(Los Angeles, 9/28/65)

Mormons:

Mormon lawyers. Mormon aides. Mormon worker drones. Drac's Mormons—Latter-day Saints.

It was their summit. It was their turf. It was their hotel call. They stormed the Statler. They booked a suite. They brought their own refreshments. Their names blurred. Littell called them all "sir."

He was distracted. Fred O. just called him. Fred O. found the scandal-rag files. They're yours for ten G's. I want them/I'll meet you/they're mine.

The summit kicked off. Six Mormons hogged one table. A Mormon prepped a tape rig. A Mormon looped a tape in. A Mormon pressed Play.

Drac speaks:

"Good morning, gentlemen. I trust that you have clean air in your conference room, along with appropriate snacks such as Fritos corn chips and Slim Jim beef jerky. As you know, the purpose of this meeting is to establish ballpark price estimates for the hotel-casinos I wish to purchase, and to devise strategies to circumvent recent so-called civil-rights laws, which are in fact civil-wrongs laws, which will prove detrimental to the American free-enterprise system. It is my intention to cunningly and willfully abrogate these laws, retain segregated work crews and discourage Negroes from habituating my casinos, with exceptions to be made for stellar Negroes such as Wilma Rudolph, the so-called fastest woman alive, and the multi-talented Sammy Davis Jr. Before I turn the meeting over to my Las Vegas point man, Ward J. Littell, I should inform you that I have been studying the tax code for the state of California and have determined that it is in fact unconstitutional. It is my intention to avoid paying California state income tax for the upcoming fiscal year of 1966. I may decide to remain mobile until the time that I establish permanent residence in Las Vegas. I may travel by train, avoid undue stays in all fifty states and thus avoid paying state income tax in toto."

The off switch clicked. The tape died. The Mormons stirred. The Mormons checked the credenza.

Salty Fritos. Congealed cheez dip. Tasty Slim Jims.

Littell coughed. Littell dispensed graph sheets. Price projections/per twelve hotels. Gaming projections/per twelve casinos.

Doctored paper. Revised and cooked. Your chef—Moe Dalitz.

The Mormons read. The Mormons skimmed columns. The Mormons cleared their throats. The Mormons took notes.

A Mormon coughed. "The purchase prices are high by 20%."

Moe set the prices. Carlos consulted. Santo T. helped.

Littell coughed. "I think the prices are reasonable."

A Mormon said, "We'll need tax returns. We'll need to calibrate off reported profits, not estimates."

A Mormon said, "That part doesn't bother me. We're dealing with organized-crime proprietors, to one degree or another. You have to believe that they report low."

A Mormon said, "We can subpoena their tax returns from the IRS. That way they can't submit fakes."

Wrong. Mr. Hoover will act. Mr. Hoover will quash selectively. Mr. Hoover will pick what you see.

No oldies. No pre-64s. *Good* '64s/the Boys report high/the Boys bait-and-switch.

A Mormon said, "Mr. Hughes is adamant on the Negro issue."

A Mormon said, "Wayne Senior can help us out there. He segregates his work crews, and he knows his way around those new laws."

Littell stabbed his pencil. Littell hit his notepad. Littell broke the tip.

"Your suggestion offends me. It's unsavory and altogether repugnant."

The Mormons stared at him. Littell stared straight back.

Fred Otash was big. Fred Otash was gruff. Fred Otash was Lebanese. He lived in restaurants. He loved Dino's Lodge and the Luau. Clients found him there.

He doped race horses. He fixed fights. He brokered abortions. He traced fugitives. He pulled shakedowns. He sold smut pix. He knew things. He found things out. He charged high fees.

Littell hit the Luau. Otash was splitsville. Littell hit Dino's. Littell hit paydirt—there's Freddy O. in his booth.

He's in nubby silk shorts. He's in a hula shirt. He's got a tan. He's spearing calamari. He's skimming racing forms. He's sipping cold chablis.

Littell walked over. Littell sat down. Littell dropped the cash on the table.

Otash kicked a lettuce box. "It's all there. I photocopied the choice stuff, in case you were wondering."

"I thought you might."

"I found a snapshot of Rock Hudson browning a Filipino jockey. I sent a dupe to Mr. Hoover."

"That was thoughtful."

Otash laughed. "You're droll, Ward, but you're not my cup of tea. I've never understood your allure to Pete B."

Littell smiled. "Try shared history."

Otash poked a squid. "Like Dallas '63?"

"Does the whole world know?"

"Just some guys who don't care."

Littell kicked the box. "I should go."

"Go, then. And beware the ides of fucking September."

"Would you care to explain?"

"You'll see soon enough."

Jane was out. Littell lugged the box in. Littell checked the papers first. Three subscribed dailies: L.A. *Times*/New York *Times*/ Washington *Post*.

He skimmed the front sections. He skimmed the B-sheets. No word—nineteen days in.

The letters went out—mea culpa/Lyle Holly—postmarked SCLC. One to the House Committee/one to Bobby.

Littell skimmed the C-sheets. Littell skimmed the D. Nothing—no word yet.

He dumped the papers. He cleared some desk space. He dumped the lettuce box.

Files and carbon sheets. Photos and tip sheets. Unpublished smears—full pieces. The gamut—*Confidential* to *Whisper/Lowdown* to *Hush-Hush*.

He stacked piles. He skimmed sheets. He read fast. He rolled in dirt.

Dipsomania. Nymphomania. Kleptomania. Pedophilia. Coprophilia. Scopophilia. Flagellation. Masturbation. Miscegenation.

Lenny Bruce rats Sammy Davis. Sammy swings bilateral/ Sammy sniffs cocaine. Danny Thomas hits sepia sinspots. Bob Mitchum dips his dick in Dilaudid and fucks all nite.

Sonny Liston killed a white man. Bing Crosby knocked up Dinah Shore. Dinah got twin Binglets scraped at a clap clinic in Cleveland. Lassie has K-9 psychosis. Lassie bites kids at Lick Pier.

Paydirt: Two casino front men/one date-a-boy.

They rendezvous at the Rugburn Room. They trick at the Dunes. They party with peyote and poppers. The front men work the date-a-boy. He sustains damage and hemorrhages. The front men check the register. The front men look for doctors. The front men hit suite 302.

The doc's a drunk. The doc's a hophead. The doc's got King Kong on his back. The doc soaks his tools in vodka. The doc operates. The date-a-boy dies. The doc dips back to Des Moines. A desk clerk calls *Confidential*.

One hit. One bite for Drac. One blackmail wedge.

Littell clipped pages. Littell scanned carbons. Littell skimmed tip sheets. Payoffs/bribes/slush funds/dope cures/nut bins/car wrecks.

Johnnie Ray. Sal Mineo. Adlay Stevenson. Toilet stalls/glory holes/gonorr—

No. Wait. Ides of Sept—

Hush-Hush-10/57/unpublished. The title: RED LINK TO RACKETS.

Arden Breen Bruvick. Her Commie dad—killed in '52. "Who Iced Daddy Breen? Temperamental Teamsters? Arden or Hubby Dan?"

Arden's a party girl. Arden's a call girl. Arden fled grief in K.C. Dan B.'s a lamster. He's on the run. He split K.C.

Arden's a femme fatale. Arden has Mob ties. Arden knows

“Shifty” Jules Schiffrin.

A clipped photo/a caption/a date:

8/12/54—RED PARTY GIRL PARTIES WITH RANDY RACKETEER.

There’s Arden. She’s young. She’s dancing with Carlos Marcello.

Littell trembled. Littell got the shakes. Littell got instant DTs.

He palsied. His hands jerked. He ripped the photo. He dropped the tip sheets.

He *saw* things:

Cords stuck to walls. Cords stuck to lamps. Cords off the TV.

He *heard* things:

Tap sounds. Phone buzz. Line clicks.

His chair slid. He fell. He saw wall cords. He saw bug mounts. He saw wisps. He got up. He stumbled. He braced the walls. He saw shapes. He saw flecks. He saw wisps.

(Las Vegas, 9/28/65)

The cat abused him. He loved it. He lived for his shit.

The cat clawed his pants. The cat snagged his socks. The cat dropped turds on his shirts. He loved it. Shit on me more now. I live for your shit.

The AC dipped. Pete slapped the wall unit. The cat clawed his shirt.

Biz was slow. The p.m. lull dragged. Pete shagged calls. His drivers smoked outside.

New rules: The Tiger Kab Manifesto.

Don't smoke near me. Don't eat near me. Don't snarf fat-rich food. Don't tempt me with taste treats—let me get back.

I've got more wind now. I've got more spunk. I've got more pizzazz. I dumped the pills. They fucked with me. I let the cat do that.

Don't smoke. Don't eat bad food—the docs said that.

Okay—I'll play.

Don't worry. Don't work hard. Don't pull rotations—fuck you on *that.*

Tran iced himself. He worried it. He worked it. He hired some Marvs. They surveilled the lab. They reported:

Some Can Lao snuck in. They let chemists in. Said chemists brought M-base boocoo. Said chemists cooked white horse. Said chemists used Wayne's shit.

Pete braced Stanton. Stanton was sheepish. Stanton said: "I was going to tell you—*after* you got well."

Pete said TELL ME NOW. Stanton said the new regime's tough. You know that. No fuck with Can Lao cat Mr. Kao. He's tough.

He's greedy. He's savvy. He's cooking "H" in our lab—on Wayne's rotations. He's shipping "H" to China. He's routing "H" west. He's got a French clientele.

Pete blew up. Pete kicked walls. Pete strained arteries. Stanton smiled. Stanton jollied him. Stanton popped a ledger book.

Said book held figures. Said figures said: Mr. Kao *bought* his lab time. Mr. Kao paid big coin. The kadre made money.

Stanton reasoned. Stanton explicated. Stanton mollified. He said Kao's pro-U.S. and pro-kadre. He said Kao won't sell dope to GIs.

Pete reasoned. Stanton reasoned. They rehashed Tran's suicide.

Tran killed the slaves. Tran stole the M-base. Mr. Kao bought Tran's base ricky-tick. Tran fears Kao. Tran won't snitch Kao. Tran electrifies.

Stanton said he'd brace Kao. Stanton said he'd say this: We're your friends. Don't use us. Don't fuck us. Don't sell dope to GIs.

Pete was relieved. Pete rotated west. Pete relieved his arteries. Wayne was stateside now. Wayne was in Bon Secour. Wayne dipped south per gun-run rotations.

Pete called him. Pete spilled on Tran. Pete spilled on Can Lao Kao.

Wayne went nuts. Wayne loved his lab/Wayne loved his dope/Wayne loved his chemistry. Pete calmed him down. Pete yelled and cursed. Pete strained his arteries.

Donkey Dom swished in. The cat hissed. The cat hated fags. The cat hated wops.

Dom hissed back. Pete laughed. The phone rang.

Pete picked up. "Tiger."

"It's Otash. I'm in L.A., and I don't need a cab."

Pete stroked the cat. "What is it? Did you find anything?"

"Yeah, I did. The trouble is, I won't fuck one client in favor of another, which means I found those files for Littell, which contained some racy shit on his girlfriend and Carlos M., so I'm telling *you*, because you're paying me for some version of the same—"

Pete hung up. Pete plugged the switchboard. Pete dialed Bon Secour direct. He got dial tones. He got rings. Ward *knows* now. Ward will—

"Charthouse Motel."

"Wayne Tedrow. He's in room—"

Dial tones/clicks/rings—

Wayne picked up. “Yeah?”

“It’s me. I want—”

“Jesus, calm down. You’ll have another—”

“Lock up Bruvick. Make him call Ward at 10:00 p.m. L.A. time.”

Wayne said, “What *is* this?”

Pete said, “I’m not sure.”

(Los Angeles, 9/28/65)

Trashed: the living room/the bedrooms/the kitchen.

He saw wisps. He saw cords. They weren't there. He trashed the phones. He looked for taps. They weren't there. He trashed the TV. He looked for bugs. They weren't there.

He trashed his study. He trashed Jane's den. They were cord and bugfree. He walked to a liquor store. He bought Chivas Regal. He walked it on back.

He opened it. He smelled it. He dumped it out.

He rebuilt the phones. He reread the story. Arden Breen Bruvick/Carlos and Jane.

He clipped the piece. He cropped the pic. He taped them inside the front door. He taped them at Jane's eye-level.

Jane was late. Jane was due—Arden Breen Bruvick Smith Coates.

Littell grabbed a chair. Littell sat outside. The terrace view enticed. West L.A./count the lights/gauge that long drop.

There's the key. It's her. It's Arden Breen Bruv—

The lock clicked. The door slammed. There's the pause. There's the gasp.

She dropped her keys. She scraped a match. She's scheming. She's lighting up. She needs hand props.

Littell heard her foot scuffs. High heels tapped hardwood. Littell smelled her smoke.

There—she's behind you.

"It's not what you're thinking. There's an explanation for all of it."

His neck went warm. He felt her breath. He stared at the lights.

He hid from her face.

"Carlos protected you before Dallas. I protected you after. You went back to Carlos and started spying on me."

Jane traced his shoulders. Jane traced his neck. She probed. She worked his kinks. Geisha/spy/whore.

"Carlos found me *after* Dallas. He knew I had to be the Arden at the safe house. He lied to Pete and pretended that he didn't know who I was."

She probed. She worked his neck. Call girl/liar/whore.

"Carlos was hiding my husband. He said he'd hand us up to Jimmy Hoffa if I didn't report back on you. I'd had a thing with Jules Schiffrin, and Carlos told me about your Teamster-book plan."

Her hands *worked.* Her voice *worked.* Concubine/whore.

"But I loved you, and I loved our life, and I loved what you'd done for me."

She traced his neck. She kissed his neck. Mob slattern/whore.

"Yes, I went through your things. But I didn't tell Carlos that you were stealing from Howard Hughes, or that you were sending money to the SCLC, or that you sleep with Janice Tedrow when you're not sleeping with me, or that you hoard these pathetic mementos of Robert Kennedy."

Littell rubbed his eyes. Streetlights blurred. Littell gauged the drop.

"You've got a file. You're too good not to have one."

Jane dropped her hands. Jane went through her purse. Jane dropped a key in his lap.

"The Encino B. of A. You can have it. That's how much it means to me now."

Littell squeezed the key. Jane kissed his neck.

"I loved my father. That rumor that I hated him was nonsense. Danny and I didn't kill him. Jimmy Hoffa did."

Littell rubbed his eyes. Jane leaned in. Jane rubbed her tears on his neck.

"This all goes back to Jimmy and the Outfit. I was going to complete my commitment to Carlos and go to the FBI. I was going to give them everything I had on every Outfit man I knew, and try to cut a deal to save you."

Littell rubbed his eyes. Littell rubbed his neck. Traitor/spy/whore.

He stood up. He turned around. He *saw* Jane. He made fists. Her eyes were wet. Her cheeks were wet. She'd trashed her makeup.

The phone rang. He stared at Jane. Jane stared hard back. The phone rang. He stared. He saw:

New gray hairs. New face lines. Neck veins on a roar.

The phone rang. He stared. He saw: One hip cocked/those cheekbones/her pulse on a roar.

The phone rang. Jane broke the stare. Jane walked and got it. She said, "Hello." She trembled—pulse on a roar.

He followed her. He stared at her. He saw her neck veins and cheek veins. He saw her pulse on a roar.

She turned away. She cupped the receiver. He walked around her. He grabbed the hall phone.

He heard a man. He heard "run." He heard "blown with Littell." He heard the man falter. He heard Jane get strong.

She said, "Run." She said, "Hush now." She said, "Carlos *will* care."

She hung up. The line-click boomed. Littell dropped his phone.

He walked over. He saw her eyes start to dry. He saw her pulse ebb off that roar.

"Were we ever real?"

"I think we loved risk more than we ever loved each other."

"You were always an Arden. You were never really a Jane."

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/2/65. Atlanta *Constitution* headline:

FBI RAIDS MISSISSIPPI HATE-MAIL RING

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/11/65. Miami *Herald* subhead:

GRAND JURY INDICTS KLAN LEADERS FOR MAIL-FRAUD AND INTERSTATE COMMERCE VIOLATIONS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/20/65. Jackson *Sentinel* headline and subhead:

NEO-NAZI LEADERS INDICTED

MEMBERS BLAST “FBI POGROM”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/26/65. Mobile *Daily Journal* headline and subhead:

MYSTERY AT BON SECOUR

POPULAR CHARTER SKIPPER AND BOAT DISAPPEAR

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/31/65. San Francisco *Chronicle* headline and subhead:

VIETNAMESE TROOP COUNT AT 240,000

KING CALLS FOR PROTESTS TO INFLUENCE NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/4/65. Mobile *Daily Journal* headline and subhead:

BON SECOUR SKIPPER’S BOAT FOUND IN FLORIDA KEYS

MYSTERY DEEPENS: SKIPPER NOT ON BOARD

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/8/65. Los Angeles *Times* subhead:

RFK SAYS NO PREZ’L BID IN ’68

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/18/65. Chicago *Tribune* headline and subhead:

U.S. ATTORNEY CITES “BRILLIANT WORK” IN FBI HATE WAR

RECORD NUMBER OF MAIL-FRAUD INDICTMENTS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/20/65. Milwaukee *Sentinel* headline:

> KING ANNOUNCES “ANTI-SLUM CAMPAIGN” IN CHICAGO

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/26/65. Washington *Post* headline and subhead:

HOOVER ATTACKS KING AT AMERICAN LEGION RALLY

CALLS CIVIL-RIGHTS LEADER “DEMAGOGUE”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/30/65. Washington *Post* headline and subhead:

CRITICS DENOUNCE HOOVER ATTACK

ANTI-KING STATEMENTS CALLED “SHRILL”
AND “HYSTERICAL”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/5/65. Seattle *Post-Intelligencer* headline and subhead:

HOUSE COMMITTEE INVESTIGATING “ILLEGAL” BUGS AND WIRETAPS

CIVIL-RIGHTS LEADERS CALL “FOUL”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/14/65. Los Angeles *Herald-Express* headline and subhead:

HOWARD HUGHES AND TWA:

BILLIONAIRE RECLUSE AGREES TO DIVEST STOCK

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/15/65. Denver *Post-Dispatch* subhead:

HOFFA CONVICTION APPEALS FILED
WITH SUPREME COURT

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/18/65. Chicago *Sun-Times* subhead:

KING REVEALS DETAILS OF “ANTI-SLUM CAMPAIGN”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/20/65. New York *Times* subhead:

“CITIZENS FOR RFK” GROUP ANNOUNCES EXPLORATION OF ’68 CANDIDACY

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/21/65. Chicago *Tribune* headline and subhead:

GIANCANA STILL IN JAIL

REFUSES TO TESTIFY BEFORE GRAND JURY

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/8/66. Washington *Post* subhead:

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE TELLS HOOVER:
REMOVE ALL BUGS AND WIRETAPS NOT VETTED BY AG

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/14/66. Mobile *Daily Journal* headline and subhead:

MYSTERY CONTINUES:
WHERE IS POPULAR BON SECOUR SKIPPER?

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/18/66. Mobile *Daily Journal* headline and subhead:

MYSTERY DEEPENS:

DOES SKIPPER’S DISAPPEARANCE LINK TO ’56 CHARGES AND LONG-MISSING WIFE?

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/19/66. Atlanta *Constitution* headline:

MAIL FRAUD INDICTMENTS CONTINUE

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/26/66. Chicago *Tribune* headline and subhead:

BOLD WORDS FROM REV. KING:

“THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF THE CHICAGO FREEDOM MOVEMENT
WILL BE TO BRING ABOUT THE UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER OF FORCES
DEDICATED TO THE CREATION AND MAINTENANCE OF SLUMS”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/31/66. Denver *Post-Dispatch* headline and subhead:

JURY-TAMPERING CONVICTION UPHELD

HOFFA FACES JAIL TIME

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/8/66. Los Angeles *Herald-Express* headline and subhead:

FOES DENOUNCE HOOVER

FBI BOSS CATCHES HEAT FOR ATTACKS ON KING

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/20/66. Miami *Herald* subhead:

RFK STUMPS FOR NEGOTIATED VIET SETTLEMENT
ECHOES DR. KING'S PLEAS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/3/66. Los Angeles *Times* headline and subhead:

HUGHES DIVESTS TWA STOCK

6.5 MILLION SHARES NET $546,000,000

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/29/66. Internal memorandum. To: BLUE RABBIT. From: Director. Topic: OPERATION BLACK RABBIT. Marked: “Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”/“Read and Burn.”

BLUE RABBIT,

Pull all SCLC bugs and wiretaps immediately. Implement at Stage-1 Priority. It is imperative that this be accomplished before the Judiciary Committee begins a formal inquiry.

Initiate the first stage of OPERATION BLACK RABBIT/ADJUNCT. Pick a target and assess the health of P. Bondurant, henceforth to be known as BIG RABBIT.

(Vietnam, Laos, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Bon Secour, Bay St. Louis, Cuban Waters, 4/1/66–10/30/66)

Ghosts: Arden-Jane and Danny Bruvick.

Wayne watchdogged Danny. Danny called Arden-Jane. Arden-Jane left Ward Littell. Wayne stuck with Danny. Wayne wet-nursed Danny. Wayne worked to save Ward Littell.

Pete said guard Danny. Pete said release him. Pete said cut him two days' slack. Call Carlos then. Say Danny booked. Cite parts unknown.

He did it. He stayed with Danny. Danny boozed. Danny reminisced.

Danny loves Arden. Arden loves Ward. Arden loves Danny half-baked. Arden works for Carlos. Arden spies on Ward. Part-time spy/full-time lover/long-distance wife.

Wayne *got* it:

Danny was weak. Arden was strong. Arden hooked him on the Life. It all pertained to Teamster shit—embezzlement and flight.

Wayne waited. Danny waited. Arden came by. She chain-smoked. She den-mothered. She fussed.

She knew it was over. She said it: "I'm tired of running—and Ward knows that."

Wayne left the boat. Danny cast sail. Wayne killed two days. Wayne called Carlos up.

He said Danny split. He said Danny took *Tiger Klaw*. Coward Danny—scared of scalp runs/scared for his life.

Carlos yelled. Carlos fumed. Carlos made vicious threats. Wayne tracked newspapers. Wayne logged updates.

Tiger Klaw drifts. *Tiger Klaw* runs aground. Danny and Jane are nowhere. Carlos stays mum. Carlos stays clueless. Carlos does not brace Pete. Carlos does not brace Wayne.

Pete clued Ward to Arden. Pete bucked Carlos. Arden ran to Danny. They ran to their death. They held in strong. They did not rat Pete and Wayne. Pete and Wayne would have heard otherwise.

Pete loves Ward. Ward loves Jane the ghost. Pete knows they're dead. Pete never says it. Dead women fuck him up.

Pete loves Barb. Pete rotates home. Pete stays off rotation. Barb lured him home. Ward licensed him in.

Pete bought the Golden Cavern. Pete bought his own hotel-casino. Eldon Peavy had syph. Eldon Peavy sold cheap. Eldon Peavy dumped his fruit bowl.

The Cavern welcomed fruits. The Cavern housed fruits. The Cavern rejoined Tiger Kab. Fruit drivers drove fruit tenants. Fred T. bugged the rooms. Fruit moths were drawn to the flame.

Dirt accrued: Fruit dirt/hip dirt/pol dirt/fruit celebs/fruit hipsters/fruit politicos.

Pete installed "Swinger Suites." Fred bugged the walls. Pete drew non-fruit biz. State legislators/junket groups/Shriners on toots.

Pete accrued dirt. Pete accrued straight dirt and fruit dirt. The word spread—the Cavern's hip—dig the straight-fruit détente.

Biz boomed. Pete stored dirt and made money. Pete reprised health-wise. Pete looked good now. Pete restored his bad pump.

He stopped smoking. He dumped weight. He chewed gum incessant. He worked incessant. He ran the dope biz. He ran Tiger Kab. He ran the Cavern. He refurbished the lounge. He shot Barb a permanent gig.

Milt C. gigged with her. Milt did topical shtick. Milt had a puppet. Said puppet was a hairy ape. Milt called him Junkie Monkey. Junkie Monkey ragged celebs. Junkie Monkey ragged fruits. Junkie Monkey perved on Barb B.

Barb drew biz. Milt drew biz. Pete made *more* money.

Sonny Liston loved the Cavern. Sonny moved in. Sonny hid from his wife and helped Pete.

Sonny roamed the casino. Sonny made dope collections. Sonny muscled deadbeats. Wayne ran with Sonny. *They* made dope collections. Their reps drew heat.

Their reps clashed. They were salt-and-pepper. They were black-black and white-white. They prowled West LV. They talked Wendell Durfee. Sonny ran riffs. Sonny ran theories. Sonny dug that nom de pimp:

Cassius Cool—the ex–Wendell Durfee. I calls him Cassius X.

Wayne rotated. Wayne ran Saigon to Vegas. Wayne ran due west.

He cruised L.A. He stalked Wendell Durfee. He prowled Watts. He drew hate vibes. Call them riot aftershocks.

He hit pimp bars. He polled pimps. He polled whores. He got zero results. He palmed cops. He bought jail checks. He logged rumors. He got zero results. He prowled south. He tooled main drags. He watched faces. He got zero results.

He braced street creeps. He passed out cards. He logged jive. He got pushed. He got shoved. He got spit on. L.A. was L.A. He had no rep.

He rotated east. He rotated south. He did kadre biz. He cooked dope in Saigon. He ran dope in Vegas. He ran guns through Mississippi.

Profits were up. Kadre kosts accrued konkurrent. Guns moved south. They lost *Tiger Klaw*. They lost Skipper Bruvick. They bought a new boat. They armored it. They bought a new skipper. Dick Wenzel—seaborne merc—tight with Laurent Guéry.

Tiger Klaw II. Out of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.

Wenzel made Cuban runs. Wenzel brought Laurent. Wenzel brought Flash and Wayne. Wenzel was good. Wenzel was bold. Wenzel had boulder-size balls.

The runs went goooood. No glitches/no bullshit/no surprise attacks. They probed the coast. They grappled up. They met Fuentes and Arredondo.

They dispensed weaponry. They fed insurgents. The funnel moved inland. The coast fed the hills. The kadre fed fuel to *la Causa*.

The kadre was kautious. Pete said trust no one. Pete decreed poly tests. Laurent ran said tests. Laurent ran the Port Sulphur hot seats. Wayne tested clean. Flash tested clean. Ditto Fuentes and Arredondo.

The Cuban runs worked. Mucho runs with no glitches and shit. Bob worked. Laurent worked. They shagged guns. They hid their sources. They said they hit the Minutemen. They said they hit John Birch. They said they tapped Army QMs.

Bob played it close. Bob cited need-to-know laws and source restrictions. Bob shagged good guns. Bob made concessions.

His sources feared tracebacks. His sources dipped their guns. His sources burned serial numbers. Pete hated it. Pete craved confiscation. Let's tell the Beard that it's *us*.

Bob shagged *good* guns. Bob shagged *dipped* guns. Pete went along with it.

The funnel ran to Cuba. The funnel ran back. The funnel ran information. Fuentes reported. Arredondo assisted.

Dig it: Skirmishes/village raids/running fire. Varaguay/Las Tunas/ Puerto Guinico. Insurgents hit. Insurgents kill. Insurgents die. Insurgents find replacements.

Good, but:

No major battles *yet*. No major progress discernible. No kadre guns thus decisive.

Wayne loved the Cuba runs. Wayne ate Dexedrine. Wayne notched seven run-notches. Dick Wenzel played skipper. Pete made two runs. Flash and Laurent made seven.

They got close. They dropped guns off. They shot inland. They torched huts. They scalped Fidelistos. They saved the scalps. They dry-cured them. They burned on their initials. They tallied them. They nailed them up. They served as boat decorations.

Wayne had sixteen scalps. Flash had twelve scalps. Laurent and Pete had nine each. Pete craved more. Pete craved escalation.

The war escalated. Their crops escalated. White horse escalated konkurrent. Mesplède ran Tiger Kamp solo. Mesplède brought in reinforcements.

Chuck was dead. Tran was dead. Pete was stateside. Laurent was stateside. Flash was stateside. Wayne was on rotation. Mesplède needed help. Mesplède bought more Marvs. Mesplède bought some Can Lao goons. They backstopped him. They ran the slaves. They surveilled the chemists.

Wayne knew the Tran story. Pete told him late. Pete said it's all kool. Mr. Kao's boys *rent* the lab. They work there on *your* rotations. It's kosher. Goons guard *your* lab. Said goons pay tribute to Stanton.

The war escalated. Big troop stats swelled through '66. Kao escalated. Kao pushed horse in France. Kao pushed horse in Saigon.

To slants only. No round-eyes. No GI biz.

Kao formed a dope squad. It was all Can Lao and all klandestine. They swarmed Saigon. They trashed "O" dens. They made them horse pads.

They ran said pads. They sold horse. They kept said pads klean. They scrubbed floors and swabbed spikes.

Kao had his fiefdom. Kao had export and Saigon. The kadre had Vegas.

They shared lab space. They shared vats. They shared guinea pigs. Junkies swarmed the Go-Go. Junkies geezed upstairs. Kao's chemists *used* them. They brewed new formulas. They tested dosages. They notched fatalities.

Wayne rotated east. Wayne saw the war grow. Wayne saw horse grow konkurrent. Wayne rotated west. Wayne saw the war grow—every night on TV.

Barb saw the war. Barb loathed the war. Barb watched the war on TV. There's Barb. She's in Da Nang. She scores this white powder.

She toured Da Nang. She saw the maimed. She saw Pete fucked up. She dug pills. She craved more. She found it. She found horse. She sniffed horse. She disproved Pete's assertion: *We* control horse/we contain horse/all whites verboten.

Barb flew home. Barb brought hospital snapshots. Barb watched the war on TV.

She had Pete full-time. She loved it. Pete loves the war. Barb hates the war. Barb sparks *their* war for real.

She ragged the war. She talked antiwar shit. She rode horseback.

She took tastes. It went up her nose. It went there under Pete's eyes. She scored horse. She disproved Pete. She disproved containment.

Small tastes. No arc up to skin pops. No mainline spikes.

Wayne knew she did it. Pete didn't. Wayne looked at her closer. Wayne loved her long-distance. Wayne lived to WATCH.

He watched in Vegas. He watched in L.A. He watched in Vietnam. The war escalated. The war was the Life uncontained.

Pete was wrong. We couldn't win. We couldn't force containment. Pete was wrong. White horse would reign. White horse would smash containment. Barb proved him wrong. GIs would follow her. White horse would reign uncontained.

Wayne watched the war. Wayne read body counts. Wayne prowled dope galleries. Wayne logged rumors.

More troops were pledged. That meant more bomb runs. That meant more ground expansion.

Mr. Kao expanded. Mr. Kao bombed Ba Na Key. Dope fields burned. Mr. Kao's Laotian rivals de-expanded.

Stanton said Kao's kool. Kao won't fuck us. We're localized. We're self-contained. We're fine in West Vegas.

Wayne and Pete knew otherwise. Wayne and Pete knew this:

We're *too* localized/we're *too* contained/we're hamstrung in West Vegas.

Wayne pressed Pete. Wayne pressed the case. Let's press Stanton. Let's press Carlos. Let's tell them this: Let's push white horse in L.A.

Pete said, "Don't shuck me." Pete said, "It's about Wendell Durfee." Pete knew him. Pete knew his shit. Pete knew his dreams.

Bongo/King Arthur/Cassius Cool/black faces/white backdrops/white sheets. Cur-ti and Leroy. Otis Swasey. The dead whore/her trailer/the ball in her teeth.

The dreams reran. The dreams dredged Wayne Senior. It was dream clockwork. Dream and wake. Father Rabbit's there on your pillow.

The dreams recycled. The dreams reran. The dreams ran in rotation.

Rotate east—see Bongo—you killed him there. Rotate west—see black faces—you found them there. Rotate south—see new faces—they lynch that type there.

White sheets. Klan sheets. Bob Relyea—Wild Rabbit. Bob tweaked him.

Bob told him: Your daddy loves you. He misses you. He told me so. He digs on you. He's Daddy Rabbit. He's hip. He's cool. He funds my Klan. We fight mail fraud. We help Mr. Hoover.

We hate smart. We contain. We consolidate. We fuck the bad haters. We spread the good hate.

Dreams. Reruns. Rotations.

Sleep on planes—crash time zones—see faces. Hate smart. Consolidate. Hail Father Rabbit!

The dreams reran. The concept held. The gist accrued: He needs you. He sees you. He *wants* you.

(Las Vegas, Bay St. Louis, Cuban Waters, 4/1/66–10/30/66)

Wars:

The real war. The TV war. Barb's running fire.

They watch the news. He comments. He says we'll win. Barb says we shouldn't. Barb says we can't and we won't.

He says I've *been* there. He says I *know*. *She* says *I've* been there. She says *I* know. They escalate. They debate control. They debate containment. TV wars—parlor shit—sniper attacks.

It raged. It escalated. It stopped. Barb nuked him. Barb won.

She said, "Nobody's controlling the war, and *you* don't control the dope traffic, because *I* met a doctor in Da Nang, and *he* sends *me* little tastes, and I boot them when I get bored to death or afraid that you'll fall off a fucking boat in the fucking Cuban sea."

He flipped out. He threw shit. He taxed out his heart. He tossed chairs. He broke windows. He chucked the TV out. One hoist—two hundred pounds airborne. One badass heart-patient trick.

The TV flew. The TV dropped fourteen stories. The TV dive-bombed a blue Ford.

He raged. His veins throbbed. His pump swelled. He crashed. He dive-bombed the couch. Barb talked up a truce.

I'm no junkie. I sniff it. I taste it. I never shoot up. I hate your work. I hate the war—it covers you.

He tried to fight. He gobbled air. His pump puttered and slogged. Barb held his hands. Barb held the cat. Barb talked *très* slow.

I hate your work. I hate the Life. I hate Vegas now. We'll ride it out. We'll survive it. We'll win.

They made up. He got calm. He got some back-end wind. They made love. They wrecked the couch. The cat refereed.

Shit got said. Shit got aired. Shit went unsaid. No vows of abstinence/no vows to stop/no vows to change.

Truce.

They split the Stardust. They moved into the Cavern. They bought a new TV. Barb watched the war. Barb sulked and judged. He worked the biz. He ran dope. He ran guns.

Barb worked the Cavern. Barb wore go-go gowns. Barb showed off skin-plus. Dig it: No pinholes/no bruises/no tracks.

Truce.

They lived. They made love. He traveled. Barb flew then. He knew it. Barb flew White Powder Air.

They lived the truce. He nailed the Shit Clause:

Barb was right—the war was fucked—we couldn't win. Barb was right—they had big love—they'd stick and win. Barb was wrong—white horse had teeth—white horse bit to win.

White flag/ceasefire/truce.

He conceded points. He owed Barb. He brought her to Dallas. The truce held. The clause held. The ink ran.

You've got Barb. Jane is dead. Ward knows it. Ward said it once. Ward said Jane left me. Ward stopped short then.

Ward knew Jane's backstory. That scandal file told him. Ward could fill in the rest. Arden runs to Danny. They set sail. Gulf waters entice. They're tapped and tired—long years of flight.

Ward lost a woman. Carlos lost a boat. Carlos lost a spy. Carlos lost Danny. Carlos *killed* Danny. Carlos dropped *la Causa* flat.

The new boat bored him. The boat runs bored him. It was gadfly shit. The runs bored Pete. The runs vexed Pete. The runs stressed his pump.

Coast prowls and gun transfers—too easy. Raft runs and scalp hunts—light counts.

It's 1/66. Pete gets frustrated. Pete sends Flash in. Flash is Cuban. Flash is dark. Flash fits right in.

Flash tours Cuba. Flash meets Fuentes and Arredondo. They hit the hills. They tour kampsites. They see kadre gun-stocks.

Big kampsites. Big personnel. Big inventories stocked.

They lead a raid. They run sixty men. They blitz a Militia camp. They flank in. They lob shells. They pop bazookas. They run in under cover. They flank wide. They throw Zippo flames.

They killed eighty men. They lost three men. They shaved beards boocoo. Pete loved it. Pete revived behind it. Pete dropped pump weight boocoo.

Weight was weight. Shit was shit. Work was work. The docs said don't smoke. He did it. The docs said eat light. He did it. The docs said work light. He said Fuck You.

He worked the dope biz. He worked Tiger Kab. He worked the Cavern. The Cavern pandered. The Cavern rocked.

Hipsters loved it. Hipsters dug Milt C. and Junkie Monkey. Horn dogs loved it. Horn dogs drooled for Barb B. Sonny Liston loved it. Fruits loved it. Fruits swished in and Liberace'd.

Wayne Senior came by. Wayne Senior waxed nice. Need some help? Call if so—I know grind-joint casinos. Pete waxed nice. Pete said sure—I'll do that.

Wayne Senior came back. Wayne Senior lost money. Wayne Senior talked.

Life's cruel. Life's odd. Ward Littell's with my ex. How's my son? I know he's tough now. I know he works for you.

Pete waxed nice. Pete waxed bland. Pete waxed noncommittal. Wayne Senior talked. Wayne Senior talked truce. Wayne Senior said I miss my son—I know he's been wiiiiiild places.

Wayne Senior waxed anxious. The word was out—Drac's on his way. Drac the bloodsucker. Drac the Mob puppet. Drac the greedy centipede.

The prelude ran long. Pete worked it for three years. Pete notched some gooood benefits.

You're forty-six years old. You're a killer. You're a frog arriviste. You're rich. You're worth two million legit.

Pas mal, mais je m'en fous.

Preludes and fringe benefits. Money and debits. Barb and white horse. Barb and ennui. Barb and Vietnam.

They played a game. He got her nude. He got in tight. He checked her arms. He checked her veins. He checked her toes. He tickled her all over. He checked for needle tracks.

None.

It's contained. I control it. I taste little drops.

He checked her ankles. He tickled her. He traced her veins. She touched him. She pulled him in.

The game helped. The game hurt. The game took him back:

It's hot. His heart rips. He leaps for her shoe.

(Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Washington, D.C., Boston, New Orleans, Chicago, Mexico City, 4/1/66–10/30/66)

Mourner. Lover bereft.

She died. She left a file. She left a legacy. He tracked her southbound. He ran logic.

Logic:

Otash sees the scandal files. Otash spots Carlos and Jane. Otash calls Pete. Pete doubts Jane. Pete's doubts *pre*-exist. Jane runs. Jane finds Danny Bruvick.

He called airlines. He checked flights. He found the name Arden Breen. She flew to Mobile, Alabama. She flew to Bon Secour.

Logic:

Pete had Gulf ties. Pete ran guns. Pete gigged from Bon Secour. Pete interceded. Pete bucked Carlos. Pete made Jane run.

Carlos found Danny. Carlos found him with Jane.

That was theory logic. It was buttressed by facts. It was shaped by news clips.

She was dead. He mourned her. He worked with Carlos. They both kept mute. Carlos said nothing. Pete stayed mute. They both misread it. They both called it this way: Ward doesn't know what we know.

I know. I did the logic. I dream the gist.

Carlos kills flamboyant. His teams pack power tools. Carlos kills slow.

Chainsaws/shears/drills. Lathe chisels and fungo bats.

He dreamed it. He heard it. He saw it. He slept with it. He lived it. He didn't drink. He didn't seek numbness. He didn't anesthetize. He worked. He maneuvered. He hidey-hole stashed.

He hit the bank. He grabbed Jane's file. He studied it: six folders/typed notes/comprehensive.

Jane *knew* him. The file *nailed* him.

She predicted his embezzlements. She tracked his travels. She surmised his bank accounts. She critiqued his technique. She guessed at amounts. She assumed his guilt tithes.

She prowled his papers. She linked facts. She extrapolated lucidly. She prowled his trash. She studied said trash. She corroborated spectacularly.

She nailed his target businesses. She estimated profits. She ballparked skim flow. She predicted overhead. She guessed launder fees. She calibrated foreign currencies.

He devised the fund-book plan. *She* ran up to speed.

She tracked his travels. She tallied phone calls. She tracked his lies and omissions.

She nailed it:

The Hughes incursion. The full trust breach. The Boys sell Drac Las Vegas.

Casino profits/cash-flow charts/skim currency/front men/hidden points/rigged prices.

She took common knowledge—Hughes wants Las Vegas—she tracked back inductively.

The text jumped. The file nailed Jules Schiffrin. Jane knew Jules. Jules revealed things unwittingly. Jane extrapolated. Jane thus ascribed:

Jules builds the pension fund. Jules builds dummy books. Jules builds the "real" book scam.

Details. Facts. Guesses. Assertions. Astonishing—all *new* text—things *he* didn't know.

The text jumped. The file nailed Jimmy Hoffa.

Jimmy killed Arden's father. Eyewits spieled facts off-the-cuff. Jimmy cut management deals. Jimmy ordered beatings. Jimmy ordered hits.

Jane was smart. Jane *allegedly* hated her father. Jane lied. Jane drew heat off Jimmy. The file was Jane's revenge: long-standing/long-planned.

The text jumped. The file nailed the Boys.

Carlos/Sam G./John Rosselli/Santo/Moe Dalitz/hoods in K.C.

Details. Facts. Rumors. Assertions.

Per: Hits/botched hits/extortion. Judges bought/juries bought/cops purchased wide. Rackets developed/rackets ditched/rackets reborn and revised.

Astonishing. Incendiary. Densely inclusive.

Jane builds a testament. Jane grows weary then. Jane gets tweaked and runs.

Jane holds the file. Jane forfeits it. Jane pays off her Dallas debt. Jane pays him for two years as "Jane."

Her testament. *His* now. *His* safeguard. Tell Carlos. Tell *all* the Boys:

I've served you. I'm tired. Please let *me* run.

He picked a bank in Westwood. He rented a stash vault. He stashed the file. He mourned Jane.

He dreamed. He saw icepicks and drills deployed. He prayed. He tallied his dead from Big D on up.

He stole. He bilked Howard Hughes. He tithed the SCLC. He mourned. His grief transmogrified. His hurt grew into HATE.

Carlos killed Jane. His hate bypassed him. His hate bypassed all the Boys. His hate dispersed and coalesced. His hate found Mr. Hoover.

He watched him.

Mr. Hoover spoke in D.C. Mr. Hoover wooed the American Legion. He watched. He stood at the back of the hall.

The hall roared. Mr. Hoover sailed clichés. Mr. Hoover attacked Dr. King. Mr. Hoover looked old. Mr. Hoover looked frail. Mr. Hoover spewed HATE.

Littell watched.

Mr. Hoover ceded irony. Mr. Hoover ceded taste. Mr. Hoover relinquished control. Mr. Hoover spewed HATE. It was unassailable/unvanquishable/unmediated.

Littell gauged it.

Mr. Hoover was old. The world outgrew him. He outlived his reign of control. *His* hate dispersed. *His* hate coalesced. *His* hate found Dr. King.

Littell gauged *his own* hate.

He lived by hubris. He overcommitted. He outflanked *his* sphere of control. His hate dispersed. His hate condensed. His hate scattergunned. He outgrew his world. He retained his ideals. He outgrew his love of intrigue. His hate dispersed and coalesced. His hate found John Edgar Hoover.

He acted on it. He acted passively. Wait. Do nothing yet. Let Mr. Hoover HATE.

Let the world rock. Let Dr. King meld with Bobby. They have bold designs. They despise the war. They may collaborate.

Dr. King planned revolt. Lyle Holly detailed it. Littell destroyed Lyle's notes. Let Dr. King live the notes. Let Dr. King act *non*passively.

Peace broadsides. Voter drives. Antislum campaigns. Revolt in its early stages—planned through '68.

Wait. Do nothing yourself. Let Mr. Hoover HATE.

His hate burns. His hate shows. His hate discredits him. Dr. King plans. Dr. King schemes. Dr. King's status grows.

Don't push *too* hard. Don't push *too* fast. Don't strain credibility. Let the world rock at its own pace. Let some things go.

LBJ fights his foreign war. Mr. Hoover approves. LBJ pushes civil rights. Mr. Hoover fumes silently. Mr. Hoover spews hate.

LBJ might assess him. Edgar—you're moribund. You've got to go.

The war will extend. The war will divide. The war might derail LBJ. Bobby might run in '68. Dr. King might downscale his agenda. Bobby might endorse it.

He watched Bobby. He read the Senate Record. He tallied Bobby's votes. Bobby was smart. Bobby never said "The Boys." Bobby hated circumspectly.

Hate strong. Hate brave. Don't hate like Mr. Hoover.

Mr. Hoover called him. The phone rang in mid-July. Mr. Hoover stirred some fear.

The spot tails were gone. He *knew* it. He was safe per Chuck Rogers. He was safe per Lyle H.

Still—Mr. Hoover stirred fear.

He was brusque. He was rude. Howard Hughes and Las Vegas—update me on that.

Littell said Drac's crazy. Drac fears state taxes. Drac's booked a whole railroad train. Drac trained to Boston. Drac brought his Mormons. Drac booked a floor at the Ritz.

Drac wants hotels. I've braced the *registered* owners. It's pro forma. The Boys have the points. The Boys will rig the fees.

Mr. Hoover laughed. Mr. Hoover schemed. Mr. Hoover promised a no-skim-bust policy. Let's not stir enmity. Why stir publicity? Why sully the Count and his kingdom?

Littell digressed. Littell said Drac has a plan. He'll hit Vegas in late November.

The red tape will clear. He'll have his cash. He'll storm the DI then. He's booked a floor. He'll bring his slaves. They'll bring his blood and dope.

Mr. Hoover laughed. Mr. Hoover probed:

I pulled some bugs. I pulled some taps. A House Committee made me. I got a tip: Lyle Holly braced Bobby. Lyle sent him a posthumous "confession."

Littell feigned shock: Not Lyle H.! Not our WHITE RABBIT!

Mr. Hoover probed. Mr. Hoover ranted. Mr. Hoover steamed. He disdained WHITE and CRUSADER. He dissected their "twin moral voids." He blasphemed WHITE the betrayer.

Littell assessed the rant. Littell concluded: He doesn't suspect me/he buys the "confession"/he buys the "betrayal" that way.

Mr. Hoover digressed. Mr. Hoover attacked Dr. King. His HATE showed. His HATE beamed. His HATE crescendoed.

Littell said let me help. You know I have documents. They detail my "Mob donations."

Mr. Hoover said no. Mr. Hoover said it's too little. Mr. Hoover said it's much too late.

Littell heard hate. Littell heard resolve. Littell knew this: He's got new plans. He'll escalate.

Mr. Hoover signed off. Mr. Hoover omitted:

Mail-fraud news. News per one arm of BLACK RABBIT. A big success/gloat-worthy. A telling omission.

Littell translated said omission. Littell knew this:

He's got new plans. He'll escalate.

Wait. Do nothing. Let his hate show. Let his hate self-indict.

The Boys had plans. It's time for relocation—Sam G. leaves custody.

Littell drove him home. Sam packed his bags. They flew to Mexico City. Sam bought knickknacks. Sam bought a house. Sam discussed his schemes.

We buy the '68 election. We throw it to *our* candidate. He takes our cash. He bows. He obeys. He pardons Jimmy Hoffa. He lets us expand. He ignores our colonizations.

We move south. We colonize. We plant our casinos. Let us thrive—don't fuck with said colonies—right-*or* left-wing.

Memo: *We* buy the candidate. *We* buy the bulk of him. Drac supplies 25%. We collude. Drac gets perks—time will determine which or what.

Jimmy's through. He's dead on appeals. He'll be jailed next spring. Let him stew. Buy a candidate. Elect him.

Said candidate waits. Said candidate pardons Jimmy. We get one pardon. We get one colony policy—per nations right-*or* left-wing.

Cuba was left-wing. They couldn't plant casinos there. Their plant targets were all *right*-wing. Think back. Go back three years—fall '63.

The hit plan's on. The Boys are mad. The Boys want their Cuban casinos. They tried to kill Castro. They indulged covert ops. They failed.

Sam enlists Santo. Santo lures Johnny Rosselli. They brace the Beard. They make nice—*please* return our casinos. The Beard says no. They clip Jack. The world rocks and sways.

Then to now—plans crass and audacious.

Like the war—Big Pete's preferred misalliance.

He met Barb for lunch. They met once a week. They discussed it. Barb hated the war. Barb felt new love for Bobby. Barb assailed Pete.

Barb talked political. Barb talked lounge gossip and segued. Barb said "exploitation." Barb said "mass murder" and "genocide."

Barb was moody. Barb took pills. Barb anesthetized. They discussed Pete's business. They discussed Pete's compartments.

Barb temporized. Barb straddled fences. Barb compartmentalized: I love Pete/I hate Pete's business/I hate Pete's war.

He loved her. Wayne loved her. She knew it. All men loved her. He told her. She knew it.

She said I like it. She said I hate it. She said I outgrew it late.

She knew Jane left him. She didn't know details. She teased him per Janice. He told her flat-out. He played it blunt—Janice was diversion.

Janice was sex. Janice was style. Janice was will bravura.

Wayne Senior beat her. Janice still limped. Janice still got cramps. Janice still shot scratch golf. Janice still played A-club tennis.

She charged the net. She limped. She cramped. She slammed shots. She made points. She won by attrition.

She rebuffed Mormon goons. Said goons were putting feelers out. Wayne Senior misses Wayne Junior.

She replied one way. Her words were Get Fucked. It was her one response verbatim.

He liked her. He loved Barb. He loved Jane.

Barb got dreamy looks. She hid from Pete then. He envied her looks. He envied her sedation.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/30/66. Internal memorandum. Topic: OPERATION BLACK RABBIT. To: BLUE RABBIT. From: Director. Marked: “Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”/“Read and Burn.”

BLUE RABBIT,

I have been digesting my July phone call to CRUSADER RABBIT for some time. I could not read his response to my mention of WHITE RABBIT’s alleged confession, and perceived his mental state to be problematic.

WHITE RABBIT was, of course, your brother. I have given your repeated assertions that his confession was fabricated considerable thought. You have stated that CRUSADER RABBIT is the only one in our purview capable of such a fabrication, and I cannot in any way dispute that assessment.

CRUSADER RABBIT troubles me. As you have noted, his paramour, Arden Breen/Jane Fentress, disappeared last October and has presumably been killed by members of organized crime. I suspect that her absence and assuredly grisly fate have contributed to CRUSADER RABBIT’s funk. You have often characterized CRUSADER RABBIT as a “wimp,” but I would add that his propensity for kamikaze action marks him as the world’s most dangerous wimp.

All told, I think we should reinstate our spot-surveillance of CRUSADER RABBIT and reinstate our Trash and Mail Covers. These actions will supplant our decision to exclude him from all aspects of OPERATION BLACK RABBIT.

Per the “Shakedown” adjunct:

I veto your recommendation that we target RED RABBIT. RED RABBIT will simply be too wary of entrapment.

The target will be PINK RABBIT. His heedless pursuit of homosexual encounters marks him as more suitable and vulnerable.

BIG RABBIT seems to have recovered from his heart attack. Contact him by 12/1/66.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/2/66. Miami *Herald* headline:

KING DECRIES “IMPERIALISTIC” WAR IN VIETNAM

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/4/66. Denver *Post-Dispatch* headline and subhead:

HOFFA WITH MARCH PRISON DATE

APPEAL LAWYERS GLUM

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/12/66. Atlanta *Constitution* subhead:

WAR A “MORAL OUTRAGE,” KING DECLARES IN SPEECH

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/16/66. Los Angeles *Examiner* subhead:

NO ’68 PREZ’L PLANS, RFK TELLS PRESS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/17/66. San Francisco *Chronicle* subhead:

“DRAFT KENNEDY” MOVEMENT GROWING DESPITE
SENATOR’S STATED RELUCTANCE

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/18/66. Chicago *Sun-Times* headline and subhead:

KING SPEAKS TO DRAFT RESISTANCE WORKSHOP

HOOVER CALLS CIVIL-RIGHTS LEADER
“COMMUNIST PAWN”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/23/66. Washington *Post* subhead:

BACKLASH ON HOOVER FOR ANTI-KING REMARKS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/24/66. Boston *Globe* subhead:

HOWARD HUGHES’ BIZARRE CROSS-COUNTRY TRAIN RIDE

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/25/66. Las Vegas *Sun* headline and subhead:

HUGHES TRAIN EN ROUTE

WHAT DOES BILLIONAIRE RECLUSE BODE FOR LAS VEGAS?

Part V

INCURSION

(November 27, 1966–March 18, 1968)

93

(Las Vegas, 11/27/66)

H*e's coming.*

He's Mr. Big. He's Howard Hughes. He's the Count of Las Vegas.

Littell watched.

He joined newsmen. He joined camera crews. He joined Joe Vegas. Word leaked. The Count's coming. The train station—11:00 p.m.

He's coming. Check track 14. Behold the Drac Express.

The platform rocked. Newsmen cliqued up. Grips wheeled arc lights. Camera guys lugged film.

Littell watched.

He'd braced Drac's Mormons. They talked renovation. They said they'd hit the DI. They said they'd Draculized. They germ-proofed the penthouse. They lugged freezers in. They stocked snacks and treats.

Snow cones/pizza/candy bars. Demerol/codeine/Dilaudid.

They said we launch soon. We negotiate and bargain. We *buy* the DI. The Boys said *we* launch soon. *We* bargain and set the price.

It's large. Drac will balk. Drac will pout. Drac will pay. Drac will stump for a Mormon hegemony. Drac will shout: Mormons must run my casino!

The Boys will renavigate. The Boys will plot. The Boys will decree: Littell must brace Wayne Tedrow Senior.

They'll talk. *They'll* bargain. Small talk will run cruel. Wayne Senior will tweak him on Janice.

The platform shook. The rails shook. A train whistle blew.

He's coming.

A cop van pulled up. Cops got out. Cops hauled equipment. A cop pushed a gurney. A cop wheeled a tent. A cop slung oxygen cans.

Cops shoved newsmen. Cops shoved citizens. Cops pulled cameras back. Newsmen pushed. Newsmen jockeyed. Newsmen shoved back.

Train lights coming—that whistle full blast.

Littell stood tiptoed. A kid jostled him. Littell stepped back. Littell got perspective.

Sparks flew. The train braked. The train stopped and sat. The crowd shoved. Flashbulbs popped. The crowd scattered.

They hit the train. They cupped their eyes. They peeped window slats. Doors cranked open—up and back—the crowd tailed the cop with the gurney.

Littell laughed. Littell knew Drac strategy. Littell knew diversions.

Look:

There's gurney 2. There's tent 2. They're *all* the way back.

Mormons stepped out. Mormons signaled. Mormons dropped a ramp. Mormons formed a cordon. Mormons pushed a wheelchair. Mormons wheeled Drac.

He's tall. He's thin. He's wearing a Kleenex-box hat.

(Las Vegas, 11/27/66)

H*e's coming.*

He's off the train. He's in the car. He's got this dumb hat. Wayne walked the DI. The floor buzzed electric. Ghouls circulated. Wayne logged rumors.

He's overdue. He's due soon. He's due *now*. He's got plane-crash scars. He's got skin disease. He's got neck bolts like Frankenstein.

Ghouls positioned. Ghouls vultured. Ghouls swarmed the casino. Ghouls stood on chairs. Ghouls slung cameras. Ghouls perched with autograph books.

Ghouls swarmed outside. Wayne saw Barb there. Glass walls provided views. Barb saw Wayne. Barb waved. Wayne waved back.

Ghouls prowled. Hotel fuzz prowled. Somebody yelled, "Limos!" Somebody yelled, "*Him!*"

Ghouls whooped. Ghouls dispersed. Ghouls ran outside. Wayne checked the glass walls. Wayne caught a view.

He saw cops. He saw limos. He saw a mock Howard Hughes. He made him. He *popped* him—back in '62.

He hosted a kid's show. He flashed his dick. He groped prepubescents. Cops called him "Chester the Molester."

Ghouls jumped him. Chester posed for pix magnanimous. Chester signed autographs. A limo eased by. A window went down. Wayne caught a blip: White hair/dead eyes/dumb hat.

Somebody yelled, "He's a fake!" The ghouls up and ran. The ghouls chased the limo.

Barb walked inside. Wayne saw her. Wayne detoured up.

“Aren’t you working tonight?”

Barb laughed. “I could ask you the same thing.”

Wayne smiled. “I was thinking of Pete and Ward, and how this whole thing started.”

Barb yawned. “Tell me over coffee, all right?”

A ghoul ran by. They dodged him. They walked to the bar. They grabbed seats and faced the casino.

A waitress showed. Barb cued her. She brought coffee fast. The floor was slow. Chester shot craps. Ghouls meandered through.

Barb sipped coffee. “It’s been months, and I still want a cigarette.”

“Not like Pete does.”

Chester rolled. Chester crapped out. Chester blew money.

Barb watched him. “There’s these secrets that people know.”

“*Not everyone.*”

Barb unrolled her napkin. Barb twirled her spoon.

“To start, there’s a certain city in Texas. Then there’s the plans the Outfit has for Mr. Hughes.”

Wayne smiled. “Tell me some secrets I don’t know.”

“For instance?”

“Come on. Pete has half the rooms in Vegas bugged.”

Barb twirled her knife. “All right. Donkey Dom’s shacked at the Cavern. He’s four nights in with Sal Mineo, and they haven’t left the suite. Bellboys are bringing them poppers and K-Y. Pete’s wondering how long it can last.”

Wayne laughed. Wayne checked the floor. Chester rolled. Chester made his point. Chester made money.

Barb smiled. Barb walked. Barb hit the john. Ghouls swarmed Chester. Chester-Hughes magnetized.

Chester sponged love. Chester bowed magnanimous. Chester posed for pix.

Barb walked back. Barb walked unsteady. She sat down. Her lids dipped. Her eyes went smack-back.

She smiled. She twirled her knife. Wayne slapped her. She gripped the knife. She stabbed down. She missed Wayne’s hands.

Wayne slapped her. Barb stabbed down. The blade hit the table. It stuck. It twanged. The knife held.

Barb touched her cheek. Barb rubbed her eyes. Barb shot some tears.

Wayne grabbed her hands. Wayne bent her arms. Wayne jerked her head low.

"You're strung out. You're sticking shit up your nose and fucking over Pete every time you do it. You think you're high and mighty because you hate the war and Pete's business, but it's just a bullshit excuse, because you're a no-talent lounge chick with a dope habit and limited fucking—"

Barb jerked her hands. Barb grabbed the knife. Wayne slapped her. She dropped the knife. She rubbed her cheek. She wiped her eyes.

Wayne touched her hair. "I love you. I'm not going to let you fuck yourself over without a fight."

Barb stood up. Barb wiped her eyes. Barb walked off smack-back unsteady.

Floorshow:

Chester performed. Crowds cliqued up—all drunks and geeks. Chester posed. Chester huckstered Las Vegas. Chester ran airplane crash riffs.

Newsmen bopped by. Newsmen yukked. Fuck you—you're that kidsshow freak.

Wayne watched. Wayne scoped the floor.

He sipped bourbon. He sulked. He sniffed Barb's napkin. He smelled her hand cream. He smelled her bath oil.

Chester signed autographs. Chester riffed on Jane Russell's breasts. Chester eyed little kids.

Wayne sipped bourbon. His thoughts raced. He saw Janice walk by. She still limped. She still strutted. Her gray streak still glowed.

She walked the floor. She fed baby slots. She blew money. She nailed a jackpot. She scooped coins. She tithed a slot-machine bum.

The bum groveled. The bum gave thanks. The bum wore mismatched shoes. The bum braced a baby slot. The bum yanked the arm. The bum blew his dole.

He shrugged. He regrouped. He panhandled. He hit up Chester. Chester said, "Fuck you."

Janice limped. Janice strolled. Janice left Wayne's view. She's out the back door now—dig that golf-course view.

She's heading to Ward's suite. It's a late-night rendezvous.

Wayne sniffed the napkin. Wayne smelled Barb. Wayne got a Janice jolt. His thoughts raced. He vibed rendezvous.

He drove straight out. The road dipped. He drove eighty-proof. He walked straight in. He grabbed a jug off the bar. He walked straight through.

There's the deck. There's Wayne Senior. He's close to old now. He's sixty-plus. He's old as brand-new.

He's got the same grin. He's got the same chair. He's got the same view.

"You drink from the bottle now. Two years away gets me that."

Wayne grabbed a footstool. "You make it sound like it's the only thing I've learned."

"Not hardly. I get reports, so I know there's more."

Wayne smiled. "You've been putting out feelers."

"You've been rejecting them."

"I guess the time wasn't right."

Wayne Senior smiled. "Howard Hughes and my son the same evening. Be still, my heart."

The stool sat low. Wayne looked straight up.

"Don't labor it. It's just a coincidence."

"No, it's a confluence. Bondurant precipitates Hughes. Hughes means that Ward Littell will be begging favors soon."

Wayne heard gunshots due north. Call it cop familiar. Broke gambler blows town. Broke gambler unwinds.

"Ward doesn't beg. You should know that."

"You're leading me, son. You're trying to get me to praise your ex-lawyer."

Wayne shook his head. "I'm just trying to steer the conversation."

Wayne Senior toed the footstool. Wayne Senior toed Wayne's knee.

"Shitfire. What's a father-son reunion without a few blunt questions?"

Wayne stood up. Wayne stretched. Wayne kicked the stool.

"How's the hate business?"

"Shitfire. You're more of a hater than I ever was."

"Come on, answer the question."

"All right. I've relinquished my hate-tract business, in order to serve the cause of changing times at a higher level."

Wayne smiled. "I see Mr. Hoover's hand."

"You see twenty-twenty, which tells me the years have not dulled your—"

"Come on, *tell* me."

Wayne Senior twirled his cane. "I've been working with your old chums Bob Relyea and Dwight Holly. We've derailed some of the most outlandish overhaters in the whole of Dixie."

Wayne slugged bourbon. Wayne sucked dregs. Wayne killed the jug.

"Keep going. I like the 'overhaters' part."

Wayne Senior smiled. "You should. There's hating smart and hating dumb, and you've never learned the difference."

Wayne smiled. "Maybe I've been waiting for you to explain it."

Wayne Senior lit a cigarette—gold-filigreed.

"I fully believe that coloreds should be allowed to vote and have equal rights, which will serve to increase their collective intelligence and inure them to demagogues like Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. Your pharmaceutical endeavor gives them the sedation that most of them want and insulates them from the fatuous rhetoric of our era. My policemen friends tell me that colored crime in white Las Vegas has not increased appreciably since your operation began, and your operation serves to isolate coloreds on their side of town, where they would much rather be anyway."

Wayne stretched. Wayne looked north. Wayne checked the Strip view.

Wayne Senior blew smoke rings. "You're looking pensive. I was gearing up for a smart answer."

"I'm all out."

"I got you at the right time, then."

"In a sense, yeah."

"Tell me about Vietnam."

Wayne shrugged. "It's futile bullshit."

"Yes, but you love it."

Wayne grabbed the cane. Wayne twirled it. Wayne did dips. Wayne did spins. Wayne did curlicues.

Wayne Senior snatched it. "Look at me, son. Look at me while I say this one thing."

Look: you've got *his* face. Look: you've got *his* eyes.

Wayne Senior dropped the cane. Wayne Senior grabbed his hands. Wayne Senior squeezed them way tight.

"I'm sorry for Dallas, son. It's the one thing in this life I am truly sorry for."

Look—he *means* it—those eyes getting wet.

Wayne smiled. "There's times when I think I was born there."

"Are you grateful?"

Wayne torqued his hands free. Wayne shook some blood in. Wayne cracked his thumbs.

"Don't press me. Don't make me regret coming out."

Wayne Senior stubbed his cigarette. The ashtray jumped. His hand shook.

"Have you killed Wendell Durfee?"

"I haven't found him."

"Do you know—"

"I think he's in L.A."

"I know some LAPD men. They could issue a covert APB."

Wayne shook his head. "This is mine. Don't press me."

Gunshots popped—ten o'clock/northwest.

Wayne said, "I'm sorry for Janice."

Wayne Senior laughed. Wayne Senior howled. Wayne Senior roared shitfire.

"My son fucks my wife and tells me he's sorry. Excuse me for laughing and saying I don't care, but I always loved him more."

Look—wet eyes and laugh lines—he *means* it.

A breeze stirred. Cold air whipped. Wayne prickled.

Wayne Senior coughed. "Will you entertain an offer?"

"I'll listen."

"Dwight Holly's going to be running some very sophisticated civil-rights ops. You'd be a perfect backup man."

Wayne smiled. "Dwight hates me. You know that."

"Dwight's a smart hater. He knows how you hate, and I'm sure he knows how useful you could be."

Wayne cracked his thumbs. "I only hate the bad ones. I'm not some Klan fuck who gets his rocks off bombing churches."

Wayne Senior stood up. "You could run high-level ops. You know how the world works and how to keep things stable. You could get all this risky business out of your system, hitch your star to the right people and do some very exciting things."

Wayne shut his eyes. Wayne ran signs: *Hate/Love/Work*.

“You’re waxing pensive, son. You’ve got your daddy’s nose for opportunity.”

Wayne said, “Don’t press me. You’ll fuck it all up.”

(Las Vegas, 11/28/66)

The cat prowled. The bed was his turf.

He clawed the headboard. He clawed the sheets. He clawed Pete's pillow. Pete woke up. Pete kissed Barb. Pete saw this big bruise.

He sacked out early. Barb sacked out late. He missed her coming in.

He touched her hair. He kissed the bruise. The doorbell rang—Barb slept through it.

Shit—7:40 a.m.

Pete got up. Pete put a robe on. Pete walked out and popped the door. Shit—it's Fred Turentine.

Frizzy-haired Freddy—fucked-up and frazzled. In *his* robe. In fuzzy slippers. In fucking shock.

With a tape rig. With a tape. With the jit-jit-jit-jitters.

Pete pulled him inside. Pete grabbed his gear. Pete shut the door. Fred got his sea legs. Fred quashed his shit-shakes and jitters.

"I was at the listening post. I was running last night's tapes off the swinger suites. I heard this grief with Dom and Sal Mineo."

Hold on. What's—

Pete cleared chair space. Pete laid the gear out. Pete plugged the rig in. Pete looped the tape.

He hit the volume. He hit Play. He heard static hiss. He heard timed beeps—no voice to activate.

There—Sal's voice/the on-click/we activate.

"Dom … hey … you hump, that's my wall—"

Dom: "… not what you … just looking … that phone numb—"

Sal: “You hump. You fucking sissy cocksucker.”

Dom: “*You’re* the cocksucker. You suck my big *braciol’* every chance you get, you fucking has-been cock—”

Crash sounds/breath sounds/clatters. Kitchen noise/drawer noise/glass shatters.

Clatters. *Knife* pings. “Sal no no no.” Yelps/gurgles/choked breath.

Silence. Timed beeps. Static. Sobs. Drag sounds. Clatters.

Sal: “Please please please. God please please please.”

Sobs. Heaves. Breath and prayers—this papal shit: “O my God I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee. I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of—”

Pete got prickles. His balls contracted. His neck hair stood up. He hit Stop. He grabbed his pass keys. He grabbed his piece.

He walked outside. He checked the lot. He scoped the bungalow suites. 8:00 a.m./cars parked/all quiet.

Sal flew to Vegas. Dom drove to their tryst. Dom always drove to his shack jobs.

Dom’s T-Bird: Gone.

Pete walked over. Easy now—there’s the fuck pad. Easy now—jiggle the door.

He did it. The lock held stiff. He pulled his keys. He unlocked the door. He walked in. He saw:

Pink carpets—deep shag—blood-spritzed. Pizza boxes. Beer cans. Pizza crusts on plates. Dumped chairs. Dumped tables. White walls with red marks scrubbed pink.

Pete shut the door. Pete hit the kitchen. Pete checked the sink.

Ajax. Sponge. Clogged drain meat. *Organ* meat—hair-clotted—wop skintone meat.

Queers killed butch. Queers killed operatic. Queers killed *buon gusto*.

Pete checked the bathroom.

No shower curtain/knives in the toilet/knives in the sink. Floor dots—loose bristles—bath mats scrubbed pink.

A thumbprint on a wall. Print-points still visible. Print whorls scrubbed red into pink.

Pete walked the suite. Pete nailed the damage. Pete got the gist. Pete locked up. Pete walked back. Pete unlocked his suite.

There’s Fred T.

He’s slugging Jack Daniel’s. He’s noshing corn chips. He’s fine now. He's deshocked. He's blitzed.

Fred laughed. Fred dribbled Black Jack. Fred spewed corn chips.

"I see potential in this. Sal's an Academy Award nominee."

Pete pulled drawers. Pete grabbed his Polaroid. Pete snatched film and loaded it in.

Fred said, "I hope he saved Dom's pecker. I could use a transplant."

Barb was up. Pete heard her. Pete heard her fluff sheets.

Fred said, "I never liked Dom. He had the arrogance that always complements a big dick."

Pete grabbed him. Pete pinned his wrists.

"Talk to Barb. Keep her here while I take some pictures."

"Pete … Jesus … come on … I'm on your side."

Pete torqued his wrists. "Keep your mouth shut while I work this. I don't want any shit coming back to the Cavern."

"Pete, Pete, Pete. You know me. You know I am the Pharaoh's own fucking sphinx."

Pete let him go. Pete walked out. Pete jogged through the lot. Pete rehit the suite.

He unlocked it. He stepped in. He shot pix. Polaroids—twelve color prints.

He got the thumbprint. He got the bloodstains. He got the meat. He got the pink rugs. He got the knives. He got the spritz.

Pete shot twelve photos. The camera developed them. The camera made sounds. The camera cranked wet prints.

He grid-searched. He reloaded. He shot more pix:

Dom's thumb—drain-trapped—stuck between grates. A dildo/a hash pipe/hash dregs.

He dried the prints. He spread them out on a sofa. He grabbed the phone. He dialed L.A. direct.

Three rings—*be there*—

"This is Otash."

"It's Pete, Freddy."

Otash laughed. "I thought you were pissed at me. The Littell thing, remember?"

Pete coughed. His chest bipped. His pulse raced.

"I'm the forgiving type."

Otash yukked. "You're a lying frog fuck, but I'll let it go for old times' sake."

Pete coughed. His chest bipped. His pulse raced.

"Do you know Sal Mineo?"

"Yeah, I know Sal. I pulled him out of some grief with some high-school quiff."

"He's in the shit again. It's a two-man job, and I'll explain when I see you."

Otash whistled. "He's in Vegas?"

"I think he's driving back to L.A."

"Money?"

"We'll muscle him and work something out."

"When?"

"I'll catch a noon flight."

"My office, then. And bring some coin in case Sal craps out."

Pete hung up. The door jiggled. Lock tumblers clicked. Barb walked in. Pete said, "Shit."

Barb looked around. Barb saw things. Barb caught the drift. She toed a rug stain. She bent down. She pinched fiber tufts. She sniffed her fingers. She made a face. She said, "Shit."

Pete watched her. Barb rubbed her cheek. She looked around. She saw the wall stains. She saw the pix.

She studied them. She eyeball-cruised all twenty-four. She looked at Pete.

"Sal or Dom? Fred wouldn't say."

Pete stood up. His pulse raced. He grabbed a chair. He steadied in. He checked out Barb's cheek.

"What happened to your face?"

Barb winced. "Wayne did a good job of getting my attention."

Pete gripped the chair. Pete dug his hands in. Pete ripped fabric free.

Barb said, "I asked for it. I've asked for it from you, but Wayne cares about me in a different way, and he sees things you don't."

Pete threw the chair. It hit a wall. It gouged pink bloodstains.

"You're mine. Nobody's got the right to care for you, and nobody's seen things in you that I didn't see first."

Barb looked at Pete. Barb scoped the wall stains behind him. Barb closed her eyes. Barb ran. Barb ran straight past Pete.

Otash said, "Dom's in the trunk. I'll lay you six to one."

Car surveillance—Fred O.'s car—the seats pushed way back.

Fred O.'s farts and Fred O.'s cologne.

They lounged. They scoped Dom's T-Bird. They scoped Sal's apartment house.

Pete said, "You're on. I say he dumped him in the desert."

Otash lit a cigarette. Smoke billowed. Pete caught the backdraft.

Barb ran. He let her. She'd run straight back. Wayne hit her. Wayne loved her. Wayne's fucking cork snapped. Wayne loved weird. Wayne was fucked up. Wayne was woman-fucked. Wayne gets muscled soon. Wayne gets lectured soon. Wayne's cork gets desnapped.

Pete yawned. Pete stretched. Pete craved Fred O.'s cigarettes.

He scrubbed the suite. He wiped the walls. He burned the rugs. He called Dom's bun boy. He played dumb. He said where's Dom at? The geek said, "Huh?" The geek didn't know. The geek knew shit from Shinola.

He talked to his bellboys. They never saw Sal. Dom signed all the room-service chits. Dom booked the suite. That was good. That played their way.

Otash said, "Sal's on the skids. What kind of movie star lives in a fucking apartment?"

Pete scoped the street. We're in West Hollywood—the fucking Swish Alps.

"You mean what kind of coin can he have?"

Otash picked his nose. "Yeah, after he spends it all on fruit hustlers and dope."

Pete cracked his knuckles. "He's got a gold Rolex."

"That'll do for a start."

The sky went dark. Rain hit. Otash rolled his window up.

"You want to hear my one concern? That he's out spilling his guts to some faggot priest or the queens at the Gold Cup."

Pete cracked his thumbs. "He's out drinking. I'll give you that."

"Dom's in the trunk. I can smell his rancid ass from here."

"The desert. A hundred says so."

"You're on."

Pete peeled off a C-note. A car pulled up. Pete made the paint job—Sal's '64 Ford.

Sal parked. Sal got out. Sal walked inside. Pete cued Otash—we roll on ten.

They ticked down. They ticked slow. They hit ten. They got out. They hauled. They ran up. They made the front door. They made the main hallway.

There's Sal. He's at *his* door. He's got his mail. He's got his key.

He saw them. He dropped his mail. He fumbled his key. They ran up. Pete frisked him. Otash grabbed his key.

He popped the door. He shoved Sal in. Pete grabbed a chair. Pete shoved Sal down. Otash pried his watch off.

"This and half your pay for your next picture. Cheap for what it gets you."

Brash Sal: "This is a gag, right? The Friars Club sent you."

Pete said, "You know what it is."

Bold Sal: "Yeah. It's a fraternity stunt. You and Freddy joined Chi Alpha Omega."

Otash buffed the Rolex. "Think back, *paisan*. You'll put it together."

Wise Sal: "I get it. I split the Cavern and didn't pay the bill. You're the collection agency."

Otash said, "The Cavern. That's a start."

Cool Sal: "I get it now. I made a bit of a mess. You want a damage deposit."

Pete said, "He's getting warm."

Otash said, "He'll be hot in two seconds."

Calm Sal: "You guys make a good team. The beefcake Abbott and Costello."

Pete sighed. "The time is upon us."

Otash sighed. "Yeah, just when I started digging on the repartee."

Smart Sal: "That's a big word, Freddy. You must have learned it in goon school."

Pete said, "The trunk or the desert?"

Otash said, "We've got a bet. I say he's outside right now."

Pete said, "The desert, right? You pulled off outside Vegas."

Otash said, "There's always Griffith Park. You've got all those hills and caves."

Pete said, "I saw one of Dom's movies. That thing had to be a yard long."

Brave Sal: "Hills, yards, shit. You're talking Sanskrit."

Pete hummed "The Man I Love." Otash flopped a limp wrist.

Sharp Sal: "I didn't think you guys were that way. Jesus, that's a revelation."

Pete sighed. Otash sighed. Pete picked Sal up. Pete slapped him. Pete dropped him.

Sal spit a tooth out. Said tooth hit Pete's coat. Otash slapped Sal. Otash wore signet rings. Otash laid cuts.

Sal wiped his face. Sal blew his nose. Sal made a mess.

Pete said, "This can all go away. I work the Vegas end, Freddy watchdogs you here. I don't want bad publicity at the Cavern, you don't want a manslaughter bounce."

Sal wiped his nose. Otash supplied a hankie. Pete pulled his photos. Pete tossed them. Pete hit Sal's lap.

Dig that disarray. Dig that drain hair. Dig that blood. Dig that severed thumb.

Sal dabbed his cuts. Sal checked the pix. Sal went gray-green.

"You know, I really liked him. He was bad, but he had this sweet side."

Otash rubbed his knuckles. Otash wiped his rings.

"Us or the fuzz?"

Sal said, "You."

Otash said, "Where is he?"

Sal said, "In the trunk."

Otash drew a dollar sign. Pete paid off—the trunk/six to one.

* * *

He flew home. The ride bumped. He worried Barb and Wayne.

Barb sniffed white horse. Wayne knew it. Wayne grieved. Wayne loves Barb. Wayne eschews women. Wayne's a watcher. Wayne's a martyr. Wayne's woman-fucked.

Warn Wayne. Tell Barb soft: *I know you—just me*.

The plane landed. Vegas glowed radioactive. Pete cabbed to the Cavern. Pete unlocked the suite.

The cat jumped him. He picked him up. He kissed him. He saw the note.

It's flat on the wall. It's taped high. It's his eye-level.

Pete,

I'm leaving you for a while to sort some things out. I'm not hiding; I'll be staying at my sister's house in Sparta. I need to get away from Vegas and figure out a way to be with you as long as you're doing the things that you do. You're not the only one who knows me, but you're the only one I love.

Barb

Pete tore the note up. Pete kicked walls and shelves. Pete hugged the cat. Pete let the cat claw his shirt.

(Las Vegas, 11/29/66)

Moe Dalitz said, “Look.”

Littell checked the window. Littell saw nuts below. Ten floors down. Nuts with cameras. Nuts with kids in tow.

Moe said, “They think Hughes sleeps in a coffin. They figure he’ll wake up at dusk and sign autographs in his cape.”

Littell laughed. Littell went ssshhh. Hush now—biz-in-progress.

Ten yards up. Two tables—Mormons meet front men.

Moe grinned. “It’s my fucking hotel and my fucking king-size conference room. I’m supposed to whisper in my own joint?”

A Mormon glanced over. Moe smiled and waved.

“Goyishe shitheels. Mormons are roughly synonymous with the Ku Klux Klan.”

Littell smiled. Littell steered Moe. They walked ten yards. They bypassed three tables.

“Would you like an update?”

Moe rolled his eyes. “Tell me. Use words of one syllable only.”

“Short and sweet, then. I think we’ll get our price. They’re discussing undistributed profits tax now.”

Moe smiled. Moe steered Littell. They walked ten yards. They bypassed three tables.

“I know you don’t like him, but that well-known goyishe shitheel Wayne Tedrow Senior is essential to our plans. We need his union, and we need to keep his ex-buddies and Mormons in general running skim on those charter flights. Now, we’ve got the papers and TV bribed to do this ‘Hughes is cleaning out Mob influence in Vegas’ number, which makes me think we should recruit some *more* clean Mormon skim guys, because Hughes will insist on hiring Mormons to work the key fucking managerial positions, and I do not want any old-line skim people hanging around looking conspicuous when we can have some well-scrubbed shitheel Mormons, *especially* since the skim ante is about to go way up."

Littell brainstormed. Littell checked the window. He saw nut swarms. He saw newsmen. He saw clowns with snack carts.

"The publicity heat will be going up, too."

Moe lit a cigarette. Moe popped digitalis.

"Tell me what you're thinking. Go to two syllables if you have to."

Littell brainstormed—one quick brain draft. Propose it/convince Moe/refine the draft. Gift Mr. Hoover/earn a gift reciprocal/earn back to BLACK RABBIT.

Moe rolled his eyes. "A trance you're in. Like the Vegas sun finally got to your head."

Littell coughed. "Are you still buffered from your old-line skim people?"

"The ones we replaced? The ones we shitcanned for the Mormons?"

"Right."

Moe rolled his eyes. "We always buffer. It's how we survive."

Littell smiled. "Let's give some of them up to the Feds, as soon as Mr. Hughes takes over a few hotels. It will buttress our publicity campaign, it will make Mr. Hoover happy, it will tie the Feds here up in litigation."

Moe dropped his cigarette. Moe singed deep-pile carpet. Moe toed the butt flat.

"I like it. I like all deals that fuck disenfranchised personnel."

"I'll call Mr. Hoover."

"You do that. You say hi and give him our best regards, in your best lawyer way."

Voices boomed eight tables up—tax rates/tax incentives. Moe smiled. Moe steered Littell. They walked eight yards. They bypassed two tables.

"I know you been through this with Carlos and Sam, but I want you to hear it from my perspective, which is we do not want a fucking repeat of the 1960 election. We want to back a strong guy who'll come down hard on all this agitation and civil unrest and stand firm in Vietnam, as well as leave us the fuck alone. Now, per the aforementioned goyishe shitheel Wayne Tedrow Senior, let me say this. We've heard that he's no longer schlepping hate pamphlets, that he's cleaned up the seedier aspects of his act, and that him and his Mormons are getting tight with that well-known political retread Richard M. Nixon, who has always hated the Reds a good deal more than he's hated the so-called Mafia. We want you to talk to Wayne Senior and get an indication as to whether Nixon will run, and if he says yes, you know what we want and what we're willing to pay."

Voices boomed ten tables up—tax nuts/tax credits.

Littell coughed. "I'll call him when I get a—"

"You call him in the vicinity of the next five minutes. You meet him and lay it out. You get him to plant the seed with the Nixon people, and you tell him *you'll* be the guy to sit down with Nixon, if and when that shifty cocksucker runs."

Littell said, "Jesus Christ."

Moe said, "Your goyishe savior. A presidential cat in his own right."

Voices boomed ten tables up—Negro hygiene/Negro sedation.

The T-Bird—hole 10.

Play crawled. Duffers hacked. Oldsters bumped carts. Littell sipped club soda. Littell watched hole 9.

Women dumped shots. Women blew putts. Women sprayed sand. Ball beaters all—no Janice types.

He called Wayne Senior. He made the meet. He called Mr. Hoover. He got an aide. He promised news. He promised hard data. Mr. Hoover was out. The aide said he'd find him. The aide called back. The aide said:

Mr. Hoover's busy. Talk to SA Dwight Holly—he's in Vegas now.

Littell agreed. Littell assessed.

Mr. Hoover loves Dwight. Dwight's *his* assessor. Dwight will see you and assess. Work Dwight/work said assessment/work back to BLACK RABBIT.

A breeze strafed through. Golfers blew shots. Putts blew way wide. Littell brainstormed. Littell watched hole 9.

Work Wayne Senior. Glean data. His union broke laws. His union ignored civil-rights codes. Glean said data. Leak it to

Bobby. Maybe now/maybe later/maybe ’68.

He’d be free. He’d be “retired.” Bobby might run for Prez. Funnel the leaks/buffer the leaks/cloak the source disclosure.

Littell watched hole 9. Wayne Senior played up.

He dumped his approach. He hit the trap. He chipped out wide. He three-putted. He laughed. He left his golf pals.

He walked over brisk. Littell arranged a lawn chair.

“Hello, Ward.”

“Mr. Tedrow.”

Wayne Senior leaned on the chair. “Things run dense with you. Every word has its meaning.”

“I’ll state my case briefly. I’ll have you back on the tee in five minutes.”

Wayne Senior smirked. Wayne Senior grinned aw-shucks.

“I thought we might work at a thaw. We could commiserate over a certain woman and go from there.”

Littell shook his head. “I don’t kiss and tell.”

“That’s a shame, because Janice certainly does.”

A ball shanked close. Wayne Senior ducked.

Littell said, “My people will be needing some men to work at Mr. Hughes’ hotels, along with some new couriers. I’d like to go through your union files and look for prospects.”

Wayne Senior twirled his putter. “*I’ll* pick the men. The last time we did business, my men quit the union and I lost my percentage.”

Littell smiled. “I reinstated it.”

“You reinstated it reluctantly, and you’re the last man on God’s green earth that I’d let in my files. Dwight Holly thinks you’re a bad man to trust with information, and I would guess that Mr. Hoover concurs.”

Littell cleaned his glasses. Wayne Senior blurred.

“I was told that you’ve become friends with Richard Nixon.”

“Dick and I are getting close, yes.”

“Do you think he’ll run in ’68?”

“I’m sure he will. He’d prefer to run against Johnson or Humphrey, but he’ll buck the younger Kennedy if he has to.”

Littell smiled. “He’ll lose.”

Wayne Senior smiled. “He’ll *win*. Bobby isn’t Jack by a long shot.”

A ball rolled up. Littell grabbed it.

“If Mr. Nixon runs, I’ll ask you to arrange a meeting with me. I’ll state my clients’ requests, gauge his response, and take it from there. If Mr. Nixon agrees to honor the requests, he’ll be compensated.”

Wayne Senior said, “How much?”

Littell said, “Twenty-five million.”

(New Hebron, 11/30/66)

Klantics:

Klan klowns hauled guns. Klan klowns oiled guns. Klan klowns klipped koupons.

They sat around. They worked inside. They ducked a hailstorm outside. The Führer Bunker—ripe with farts and gun residue.

Wayne lounged. Bob Relyea dipped numbers. Bob Relyea bitched.

“My fucking contacts are getting lazy. They want to burn the serial codes as part of the deal, that’s fine with me, even though Pete don’t like it. But doing the job myself is another fucking thing.”

Wayne watched. Wayne yawned. Bob dabbed M-14s. Bob dabbed pumps. Bob dabbed bazookas. He wore rubber gloves. He swiped a brush. He smeared caustic goo.

Wayne watched. The goo ate numbers—three-zero codes.

Bob said, “My contacts boosted some Army trucks near Memphis. There’s this little town called White Haven, where all the caucasoids moved to to get away from the spooks. Half the town’s Army EM.”

Wayne sneezed. The caustics stung. Wayne lounged and drifted. Wayne Senior/job deals/“Hate Smart.”

Bob said, “What do you call a monkey sitting in a tree with three niggers? You call him the Branch Manager.”

The Klan klods howled. Bob booted snuff. Bob dipped M-14s. Pete kalled the kompound. Pete found Wayne an hour back. Pete reworked Wayne’s rotation.

Don’t surveille the gun run. Don’t boat to Cuba. Fly to Vegas/

meet Sonny/muscle a deadbeat.

Bob packed guns. Flash was due—kadre on kall. The karavan—New Hebron to Bay St. Louis.

Wayne stood up. Wayne toured the hate hut. Dig the wall-mounted shivs. Dig the Rebel drapes. Dig the wall photos: George Wallace/Ross Barnett/Orval Faubus.

Dig the group shots. There's the Regal Knights. There's a jail pic—three cons in the "Thunderbolt Legion."

Said cons wore jail garb. Said cons grinned. Said cons signed their names: Claude Dineen/Loyal Binns/Jimmy E. Ray.

Bob said, "Hey, Wayne. You ever talk to your daddy?"

He drove north. He flew Memphis to Vegas. He thought about Janice. He thought about Barb. He thought about Wayne Senior.

Janice aged strong. Good genes and will meet carnal desires. Barb aged fast. Bad habits and will meet fucked-up desires. Wayne Senior looked old. Wayne Senior looked good. Wayne Senior had hate-smart desires.

Janice limped. She'd fuck harder now. She'd outgun her handicap. She'd compensate.

The plane touched down. Wayne got off bleary—1:10 a.m.

He walked down the ramp. He trailed some nuns. He dodged skycaps with dollies.

There's Pete. He's by the gate. He's perched by some bag carts. He's *smoking*.

Wayne hitched up his garment bag. Wayne walked over bleary.

"Put that fucking cigarette—"

Pete pushed a bag cart. It hit Wayne's knees. It capsized him. It knocked him flat. Pete ran over. Pete stepped on his chest.

"Here's the warning. I don't care what you feel for Barb or what you think she's doing to herself. Hit her again and I'll kill you."

Wayne saw starbursts. Wayne saw sky. Wayne saw Pete's shoe. He sucked air. He ate jet fumes. He got breath.

"I was telling her something you won't, and I fucking did it to help you."

Pete flicked his cigarette. Pete burned Wayne's neck. Pete dropped a note on his chest.

"Take care of it. You and Sonny. Barb's gone, so we'll pretend this never happened.”

A nun walked by. Said nun shot a look—you pagans stop that!

Pete walked off. Wayne sat up. Wayne got more breath. Two punks strolled by. They saw Wayne recumbent. They giggled it up.

Wayne stood up. Wayne dodged skycaps and bag carts. Wayne hit a phone booth.

He dropped coins. He dialed. He got a buzz tone. He got three rings. He got *Him*.

“Who’s calling at this ungodly hour?”

Wayne said, “I want that job.”

(Las Vegas, 12/1/66)

Onstage: Milt C. and Junkie Monkey.

Milt said, “What’s all this tsuris with Howard Hughes?”

Junkie Monkey said, “I heard he’s a swish. He moved in to get next to Liberace.”

The crowd yocked. The crowd roared.

Milt said, “Come on. I heard he was shtupping Ava Gardner.”

Junkie Monkey said, “*I’m* shtupping Ava. She traded up from Sammy Davis. Sammy’s on the golf course. This square comes up to him and says, ‘What’s your handicap?’ Sammy says, ‘I’m a one-eyed shvartze Jew. Nobody will sell me a house in a nice neighborhood. I’m trying to effect a peace accord between Israel and the Congo. I’ve got no place to hang my Sy Devore beanie.’ ”

The crowd yocked. Milt moved his lips. Milt puppet-talked bad. Pete watched. Pete smoked. Pete mourned Barb.

She was three days gone. She didn’t call. She didn’t write. *He* didn’t call. *He* didn’t write. He braced Wayne instead.

It was bullshit. Wayne was right. He knew it. Barb split. He exploited it. He indulged. He smoked. He ate burgers. He worked the Fuck-It Diet. He boozed. He caught Milt. He caught Barb’s crew. The Bondsmen sans Barb—Shit City.

The lounge was packed. Young stuff mostly. Milt drew hip kids.

Junkie Monkey said, “Frank Sinatra saved my life. His goons were stomping me in the Sands parking lot. Frank said, ‘That’s enough, boys.’ ”

The crowd yocked. Pete smoked. A geek tapped his arm. Pete turned around. Pete saw Dwight Holly.

They hit Pete's office. They stood by the wet bar. They crowded each other. They stood in tight.

Pete said, "It's been a while."

"Yeah, as in '64. Your boy Wayne killed three shines."

Pete lit a cigarette. "And you made out."

Dwight shrugged. "Wayne fucked me up, but you and Littell set it straight. Now, ask me if I came to say thanks."

Pete poured a scotch. "You were in town, so you thought you'd drop by."

"Not quite. I'm in town to see Littell, which I'd prefer you keep to yourself."

Pete sipped scotch. Dwight tapped his chest.

"How's your ticker?"

"It's fine."

"You shouldn't be smoking."

"You shouldn't be jerking my chain."

Dwight laughed. Dwight poured a scotch.

"How'd you like to help me entrap a Commie sympathizer?"

"You and Mr. Hoover?"

"I won't say yes or no to that. Silence implies consent, so draw your own conclusions."

Pete said, "Lay it out. The money first."

Dwight swirled scotch. "Twenty grand for you. Ten each for your bait, your backup, and your bug man."

Pete laughed. "Ward's a good bug man."

"Ward's a prince of a bug man, but I'd prefer Freddy Turentine, and I'd prefer that Ward be kept in the dark about this."

Pete grabbed an ashtray. Pete stubbed his cigarette.

"Give me one good reason why I should fuck Ward over to help you."

Dwight undid his necktie. "One, all this shit is tangential to Ward. Two, it's a high-line gig that you won't be able to resist. Three, you're in the Life for life, you'll fuck up sooner or later, and Mr. Hoover will intercede for you, no questions asked."

Pete sipped scotch. Pete rolled his neck. Pete tapped his head on the wall.

"Who?"

"Bayard Rustin, male Negro, age fifty-four. Civil-rights agitator with a yen for young white boys. He's horny, he's impetuous, he's as Red as they get."

Pete tapped his head. “When?”

“Next month, in L.A. There’s an SCLC fund-raiser at the Beverly Hilton.”

“That’s cutting it close.”

Dwight shrugged. “The bait’s the only holdup. Do you think you—”

“I’ve got the bait. He’s young, he’s queer, he’s attractive. He’s got some potential cop shit hanging over him, which—”

“Which Mr. Hoover will frost out, no questions asked.”

Pete tapped his head. Pete tapped it hard. Pete sparked a headache.

“I want Fred Otash on backup.”

“Agreed.”

“Plus Freddy Turentine and ten grand for expenses.”

“Agreed.”

Pete’s stomach growled. The scotch fucked with it. Pete thought Cheeseburger.

Dwight smiled. “You bit fast. I thought I’d have to work you.”

“My wife left me. I’ve got time to kill.”

Otash said, “Sal scores tonight. I’ll lay you six to one.”

Car surveillance—Fred O.’s car—the seats pushed way back. Fred O.’s farts and Fred O.’s cologne.

They watched the street. They watched Sal’s car. They watched the Klondike Bar. Pete lit a cigarette. Pete had gas. Pete snarfed two cheeseburgers late.

“Of course he’ll score. He’s a half-assed movie star.”

He flew straight out. He called Otash. He briefed him. They checked Sal’s pad. Sal was gone. They checked Sal’s known haunts: The 4-Star/the Rumpus Room/Biff’s Bayou.

Shit—no Sal car/no Sal.

They checked the Gold Cup. They checked Arthur J’s. They checked the Klondike—8th and LaBrea.

Tilt—

Pete said, “You’re sure he won’t rabbit?”

“On *Dom*? Sure I’m sure.”

“Tell me why.”

“Because I’m his new daddy. Because I’m the guy he has coffee with every morning. Because I’m the guy who dumped Dom and his fucking car down a lime pit in the fucking Angeles Forest.”

Pete chained cigarettes. “The Vegas end’s good. No cops so far.”

“Dom was a fly-by-night. You think his pimp boyfriend will file a missing-persons report?”

Sal walked out. Sal had a date. Sal hung on some hunky young quiff.

Otash hit the horn. Pete hit the lights. Sal blinked. Sal saw the car. Sal stalled the quiff and walked over.

Pete rolled his window down. Sal leaned on the ledge.

“Shit. It’s a life sentence with you guys.”

Pete flashed a snapshot reminder. Streetlight hit Donkey Dom’s thumb. Sal blinked. Sal gulped. Sal vibed sick.

Pete said, “You like dark stuff, right? You get the urge once in a while.”

Sal weaved a hand—dark meat/comme *ci comme ça*.

Otash said, “We’re fixing you up.”

Pete said, “He’s a nice guy. You’ll thank us.”

Otash said, “He’s cute. He looks like Billy Eckstine.”

Pete said, “He’s a Communist.”

(Las Vegas, 12/2/66)

Tour time:

The DI sub-penthouse. Big Drac's sub-lair. Littell as tour guide. Dwight Holly as tourist.

Look:

There's the blood pumps. There's the drips. There's the freezers. There's the candy. There's the pizza. There's the ice cream. There's the codeine. There's the meth. There's the Dilaudid.

Dwight loves it. Dwight yuks. Dwight offends Mormons. Said Mormons scowl at said Fed.

Big Drac's incursion—now one week in.

The legislature waives anti-trust laws. The legislature delivers—go, Drac!

Buy the DI. Buy the Frontier. Buy the Sands. Buy big! Buy *laissez-faire!* Buy the Castaways. Gorge yourself. Buy the Silver Slipper.

Littell cracked windows. Dwight looked out. Dwight saw nuts with signs: "We love H.H.!"/"Wave to us!"/"Hughes in '68!"

Dwight laughed. Dwight tapped his watch—real business now.

They walked. They trekked hallways. They bagged a storeroom. File boxes hemmed them in.

Littell pulled his list out. Moe prepped it last night.

"Skim couriers. Easy litigations by any and all standards."

Dwight faked a yawn. "Expendable, buffered, non-Mormon couriers that divert heat from Dracula and ingratiate you with Mr. Hoover."

Littell bowed. "I won't dispute it."

"Why should you? You know we're grateful, and you know we'll prosecute."

Littell creased the list. Dwight grabbed it. Dwight dropped it in his briefcase.

"I figured you'd try to softsoap me about Lyle. The 'you lost a brother, I lost a friend' routine."

Littell coughed. "It was fifteen months ago. I didn't think it was fresh on your mind."

Dwight squared his necktie. "Lyle was doubling. He leaked some anti-Bureau shit to the House Judiciary Committee and Bobby Kennedy. Mr. Hoover had to pull a few bugs."

Littell went slack-jawed. I don't believe it! Littell made big eyes.

Dwight said, "Lyle, the closet liberal. It took some getting used to."

"I could have helped you."

Dwight laughed. "Yeah, you wrote the book."

"Not completely. You know I'd rather scheme against liberals than be one."

Dwight shook his head. "You *are* one. It's this fucked-up Catholic thing you've got going. You love high-level ops, you love the great unwashed, you're like the fucking Pope ashamed that his church makes money."

Littell roared—Blue Rabbit—*mon Dieu!*

"You flatter me, Dwight. I'm not that complex."

"Yeah, you are. It's why Mr. Hoover enjoys you. You're Bayard Rustin to his Marty King."

Littell smiled. "Bayard has his own ambiguities."

"Bayard's a piece of work. I ran surveillance on him in '60. He poured Pepsi-Cola on his Cheerios."

Littell smiled. "He's King's voice of reason. King's been pushing on too broad a front, and Bayard's been trying to restrain him."

Dwight shrugged. "King's a bullet. It's his time, and he knows it. Mr. Hoover's getting old, and he's letting his hatred show in the worst possible ways. King orates and pulls his Mahatma Gandhi shit, and Mr. Hoover plays in. He's afraid that King will team up with Bobby the K., which as fears go has its merits."

Blue Rabbit shows insight. Blue Rabbit shows balls. Blue Rabbit doubts Mr. Hoover.

"Is there anything I can do?"

Dwight tugged his necktie. "On the King front, zero. Mr.

Hoover thinks you were too close to Lyle's death and that Bogalusa bombing."

Littell shrugged—*moi*?—how *could* he.

Dwight smirked. "You want back in. You got cut out of BLACK RABBIT, and it's galling you."

Littell smirked. "I'm wondering why Mr. Hoover had you pick up the list, when I could have airtelled it."

"No, you're not. You know he sent me to gauge your line of shit and decode your dissembling."

Littell sighed—how *passé*—you *know* me.

"I miss the game. Tell him that for a fucked-up liberal, I'm on his side."

Dwight winked. "I was talking to him this morning. I proposed a job for you, pending my assessment."

"Which is?"

"That you're a fucked-up liberal who disapproves of bugs and wiretaps, but loves to install them anyway. That you wouldn't mind bugging sixteen Mob joints for us, just so you can stay in the game."

Littell tingled. "Quid pro quo?"

"Sure. You plant the wires. You get out. We don't tell you where the listening posts are. You deny Bureau complicity if you get caught, and you win points with Mr. Hoover."

Littell said, "I'll do it."

The door blew open. Smells blew in: burnt pizza/spilled blood/ice cream.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/3/66. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. (OPERATION BLACK RABBIT Addendum.) Marked: "Recorded at the Director's Request"/"Classified Confidential 1-A: Director's Eyes Only." Speaking: Director, BLUE RABBIT.

DIR: Good morning.

BR: Good morning, Sir.

DIR: Start with Le Grand Pierre, henceforth to be known as BIG RABBIT.

BR: He's in, Sir. Along with Fred Otash and Freddy Turentine.

DIR: Has he recruited his bait?

BR: He has, Sir. He'll be using a homosexual actor named Sal Mineo.

DIR: I'm delighted. Young Mineo was boffo in *Exodus* and *The Gene Krupa Story*.

BR: He's a talented youth, Sir.

DIR: He is talented and given to Greek profligacy. He has indulged numerous liaisons with male movie stars, among them James Dean, the "Human Ashtray."

BR: BIG RABBIT has chosen well, Sir.

DIR: To continue.

BR: BIG RABBIT has a wedge on Mineo, which he declines to reveal. He wants him protected if he's arrested by an outside agency. I think BIG RABBIT is buying himself protection, too.

DIR: He's buying, we're selling. I would be delighted to protect BIG RABBIT and young Mineo.

BR: I gave BIG RABBIT a fact sheet for Mineo to memorize. We want him to be able to convince PINK RABBIT that he's a civil-rights zealot.

DIR: That will be no great stretch. Actors are morally decentered and psychically unhinged. They cling to their scripts of the moment with great verve. It fills their voids of emptiness and allots them the will to exist.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: To continue. Describe your meeting with CRUSADER RABBIT.

BR: To start, I'll finally have to concede that he's just as gifted as you've always contended. That said, I don't know how trustworthy he is, or isn't, for that matter. He seemed sincerely shocked when I mentioned my brother's alleged leaks to Bobby Kennedy and the Judiciary Committee, but he may have calculated his response in advance.

DIR: Do you remain convinced that your brother did not write that "Confession"?

BR: More than ever, Sir. Although now I'm starting to think that it was not CRUSADER RABBIT. I think there's a fair chance that it could have been someone within the SCLC, who had a private investigator or someone of that ilk sweep and find the bugs and taps, and then decide to capitalize on my brother's death and send in the "Confession."

DIR: I will concede the possibility.

BR: I think your basic assessment of CRUSADER RABBIT is valid, Sir. He lives for intrigue, he'll betray his moral convictions for the chance to do high-level ops, and he's trustworthy and exploitable within a limited sphere.

DIR: Did you offer him the chance to install the bugs?

BR: I did, Sir. He accepted immediately.

DIR: I thought he would.

BR: I'm glad you approved my proposal, Sir. Public opinion has turned against electronic surveillance, and we need organized-crime wires in place.

DIR: I would amend your statement. We need covertly planted, deniable bugs monitored by handpicked agents in place.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: How did you describe the assignment?

BR: I said sixteen cities, Stage-2 Covert. I mentioned Mike Lyman's Restaurant in Los Angeles, Lombardo's in San Francisco, the Grapevine Tavern in St. Louis, and a few others.

DIR: Did you mention the stately El Encanto Hotel in Santa Barbara?

BR: I did, Sir.

DIR: How did CRUSADER react?

BR: He didn't. He obviously has no idea that Bobby Kennedy keeps a suite there.

DIR: The attendant irony delights me. CRUSADER

RABBIT bugs Prince Bobby's hotel digs. He's convinced the suite belongs to a prince of organized crime.

BR: It's a pisser, Sir.

DIR: CRUSADER RABBIT is an entrenched Bobbyphile. You're sure that he has no knowledge of Bobby's suite?

BR: I'm certain, Sir. I've got the manager in my pocket. He told me that Bobby's policy is never to reveal that he stays there. He'll let CRUSADER in to do his work, and he'll make sure that Bobby's personal belongings are temporarily removed.

DIR: Salutary.

BR: Thank you, Sir.

DIR: We need access to Bobby. I'm convinced that he'll form an unholy alliance with RED RABBIT.

BR: We're covered on the Bobby front, Sir.

DIR: As we'll be on PINK front, assuming that young Mineo is convincingly fetching.

BR: He will be, Sir. We hired queer to entrap queer, which should pay off in the end.

DIR: I want a duplicate copy of the film. Have it processed the morning after the fund-raiser.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: Make two copies. I'll give Lyndon Johnson one for his birthday.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: Good day, Dwight. Go with God.

BR: Good day, Sir.

(Las Vegas, 12/5/66)

Wayne picked the lock.

He worked two picks. He tweaked the bolt. He jiggled hard right. Deadbeat patrol/room 6/Desert Dawn Motel.

Sonny said, “Motherfucker’s got two last names. Sirhan Sirhan.”

The door popped. They stepped inside. Wayne toed the door shut. Check the four-wall dump-site.

Soiled bed. No rugs. Horse-race posters/jockey silks/racing forms stacked.

Sonny said, “Motherfucker’s a track nut.”

The room smelled. Scents mingled. Spilled vodka and stale chink. Stale cheese spread and cigarettes.

Wayne checked the dresser. Wayne pulled drawers. Wayne sifted junk. Acne swabs/booze empties/cigarette butts.

Sonny said, “Motherfucker’s a pack rat.”

Wayne pulled drawers. Wayne perused. Wayne sifted junk. Racing forms and tip logs. Scratch sheets and hate tracts.

Cheap-paper tracts. Non–Wayne Senior stock. Text and cartoons—anti-Jew stuff.

Dollar-sign skullcaps. Bloody prayer shawls. Fangs dripping pus. “The Zionist Pig Order”/“The Vampire Jew”/“The Jewish Cancer Machine.” Jews with claw hands. Jews with pig feet. Jews with scimitar dicks.

Wayne skimmed text. Said text waxed repetitious. The Jews fucked the Arabs. The Arabs vowed payback.

Sonny said, “Motherfucker don’t like the hebes.”

The text rambled. Typos reigned. Longhand margin notes crawled. “Kill Kill Kill!”/“Death to Israel!”/“Zionist Pig-Suckers Must Die!”

Sonny said, “Motherfucker’s got a grievance.”

Wayne dropped the tracts. Wayne shut the drawers. Wayne kicked a chair back.

“We’ll give him two hours. He owes Pete a grand and change.”

Sonny chewed a toothpick. “Barb split on Pete. Frankly, I seen it coming.”

“Maybe I got to her.”

“Maybe Pete’s evil ways did. Maybe she said, ‘Quit selling hair-o-wine to Sonny’s fellow niggers or I’ll leave your white ass, you honky motherfucker.’ ”

Wayne laughed. “Let’s call her and ask.”

“*You* call. You the motherfucker who’s in love with her and too mother-fucking scared to say boo.”

Wayne laughed. Wayne chewed his nails. Wayne tore a nail back.

The Pete thing hurt. Pete bruised his balls. Pete trimmed his balls back. He was wrong. Pete was right. He knew it.

He called Wayne Senior. They talked. Wayne Senior pledged Work. “Good work”/“in time”/“soon.” He might take it. He might not. He owed Pete rotations: Saigon/Mississippi/the funnel.

Sonny said, “Let’s go to L.A. We’ll find Wendell Durfee and shoot his black ass.”

Wayne laughed. Wayne chewed his nails. Wayne tore hangnails back.

Sonny said, “Let’s kill some street nigger and say it’s Wendell. It’ll put the fucking quietus on all that shit you carrying around.”

Wayne smiled. The door jiggled—whazzat?

The door stuck. The door popped. A doofus walked in. A young guy/all swarthy/thick rat’s-nest hair.

He saw them. He trembled. He crap-your-pants cringed.

Sonny said, “Ahab the A-rab. Where’s your camel, motherfucker?”

Wayne shut the door. “You owe the Golden Cavern eleven-sixty. Fork up or Brother Liston will hurt you.”

The doofus cringed. *Don’t hurt me*. His shirttail hiked up. Wayne saw a belt piece. Wayne snatched it fast. Wayne dumped the clip.

Sonny said, “How come you got two last names?”

Sirhan gestured. His hands moved mile-a-minute. He made geek semaphore.

"Forgive me … I take falls … race horses … many headaches … I forget I lose money if I don't take medicine."

Sonny said, "I don't like you. You starting to look like Cassius Clay."

Sirhan spieled some Arab shit. Sirhan spieled singsong. Sonny threw a left. Sonny hit the wall. Sonny tore plaster.

Wayne twirled the gun. "Brother Liston knocked out Floyd Patterson and Cleveland 'Big Cat' Williams."

Sonny threw a right. Sonny hit the wall. Sonny tore plaster. Sirhan moaned. Sirhan exhorted Allah. Sirhan dumped his pockets fast.

Booty: ChapStick/pen/car keys. C-notes/fives/dimes.

Wayne grabbed the money. Sonny said, "What you got against the kikes?"

Wayne hit the Cavern. Wayne unlocked his room. Wayne saw a letter on the dresser.

He opened the envelope. He smelled Barb straight off.

Wayne,

I'm sorry for that night & I hope it didn't cause any trouble between you & Pete. I told him you were justified, but he didn't get it. I should have told him that I tried to stab you, which might have told him how far down I'd sunk & how much sense you made.

I'm a coward for not writing directly to Pete, but I'm going to invite him to Sparta for Christmas, to see if we can work things out. I hate his business & I hate his war & I'd be an even bigger coward if I didn't say so.

I miss Pete, I miss the cat & I miss you. I'm working at my sister's Bob's Big Boy & avoiding the bad habits I picked up in Vegas. I'm starting to wonder what a 35-year-old ex-shakedown girllounge bunny does with the rest of her life.

Barb

Wayne reread the letter. Wayne caught subscents. There's the Ponds and lavender soap. He kissed the letter. He locked up his room. He walked to the lounge.

There's Pete.

He's drinking. He's smoking. The cat's on his lap. He's watching the Bondsmen—Barb's combo sans Barb.

Wayne shagged a waiter. Wayne passed him the letter. Wayne tipped him five bucks. Wayne pointed to Pete. The guy understood.

The guy walked over. The guy dropped the letter. Pete tore at the envelope.

He read the letter. He wiped his eyes. The cat clawed his shirt.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/6/66. Las Vegas *Sun* headline and subhead:

HOWARD HUGHES IN VEGAS!

EXCLUSIVE PIX OF HERMIT'S LAIR!

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/7/66. Las Vegas *Sun* headline and subhead:

NO CLUES IN DISAPPEARANCE OF DANCER-CAB DRIVER

FRIENDS APPEAL TO POTENTIAL WITNESSES

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/8/66. Las Vegas *Sun* headline and subhead:

HUGHES SPOKESMAN SAYS:

BILLIONAIRE HERMIT TO “NURTURE”–NOT “MONOPOLIZE” HOTEL SCENE

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/10/66. Las Vegas *Sun* headline and subhead:

FBI ARRESTS SKIM BAGMEN

HUGHES SPOKESMAN PRAISES DIRECTOR HOOVER

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/11/66. Chicago *Tribune* headline and subhead:

MORE MAIL-FRAUD RAIDS IN SOUTH
22 INDICTMENTS PENDING

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/14/66. Chicago *Sun-Times* headline and subhead:

KING ATTACKS FBI'S SOUTHERN MANDATE

"KLAN TERROR–NOT MAIL-FRAUD–SHOULD BE PRIORITY"

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/15/66. Los Angeles *Times* subhead:

KING INDICTS “GENOCIDA” WAR IN VIETNAM

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/18/66. Denver *Post-Dispatch* subhead:

RFK DENIES RUMORS OF PREZ’L BID

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/20/66. Boston *Globe* headline:

NIXON NON-COMMITTAL ON ’68 WHITE HOUSE PLANS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/21/66. Washington *Post* headline and subhead:

SCATHING INDICTMENT:

FOREIGN JOURNALISTS ATTACK LBJ FOR CIVIL RIGHTS-VIETNAM "DICHOTOMY"

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/22/66. San Francisco *Chronicle* headline and subhead:

HOOVER ATTACKS KING IN CONGRESSIONAL RECORD

CALLS CIVIL-RIGHTS LEADER “DANGEROUS TYRANT”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/23/66. Las Vegas *Sun* headline and subhead:

HUGHES NEGOTIATORS SWARM STRIP
HOTEL PURCHASES LOOM

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/26/66. Washington *Post* headline and subhead:

DOMESTIC STUDY GROUP VOICES OPINION:

J. EDGAR HOOVER "OUTMODED"

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/2/67. Los Angeles *Examiner* subhead:

CIVIL-RIGHTS FUND-RAISER
TO DRAW STELLAR CROWD

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/3/67. Dallas *Morning News* headline:

JACK RUBY—DEAD OF CANCER

(Beverly Hills, 1/3/67)

Signs:

Mau-Mau shit. Peace doves. Nigger hands clasped.

Said signs blitzed walls. Said walls ran high. The ballroom soared up. Said ballroom welcomed oreos—race-mixer deelites.

There's celebs and pols. There's spook matrons. There's Marty the K. There's Burl Ives. There's Banana Boat Belafonte.

Pete watched. Pete smoked. His tux fit tight. Otash watched. Otash smoked. His tux fit right.

Ballroom accoutrements—dais and lectern. Ballroom seats and ballroom fare. Steam trays leaking steam—chicken à la coon deelite.

Cops mingled. Their cheap suits stood out. Waiters roamed. Waiters schlepped trays. Waiters flogged deelites.

Pete worked the Fuck-It Diet. Pete noshed meatballs. Pete noshed pâté. Pete noshed pygmy deelites.

There's Mayor Sam Yorty. There's Governor Pat Brown. There's Bayard Rustin—he's tall and thin—dig that tartan tux. There's Sal Mineo—he's hovering—dig that swish lollapalooza.

There's Rita Hayworth. Who let *her* in? She vibes dipsomaniac.

Otash said, "Has it occurred to you that we stand out here?"

Pete lit a cigarette. "Once or twice."

"Rita looks soused. I had a two-second thing with her, about ten years ago. Redheads tend to age bad, Barb excepted."

Pete watched Rita. Rita saw Otash. Rita went ugh and stepped back.

He flew to Sparta. He spent Christmas. He shacked up with his wife. They made love. They fought. Barb ragged his "war enterprise."

Barb quit sniffing "H." Barb quit popping pills. Barb glowed non-Ritalike. Barb goosed his pulse. Barb wrung him out. Barb told him straight: I hate dope. I hate lounge work. I hate Vegas. I won't back down. I won't go back.

He regrouped. He compromised. He punted. He said I'll work in Milwaukee. I'll push white horse there. We'll live in Sparta full-time.

Barb howled. Barb said never.

They talked. They fought. They made love. He regrouped. He repunted. He recompromised. He said I'll split Vietnam. I'll dump Tiger Kamp on John Stanton. John to run it/Wayne to rotate/Mesplède to assist.

Barb tweaked him. Barb said you *love* Wayne. Barb said he hit me. Okay—he *knows* you—you win.

They talked truce. They notched points. They nailed details. He said I'll stay in Vegas. I'll run Tiger Kab and the Cavern. I won't touch the dope. I'll just surveille shipments in.

I have to—the heat's up—Drac brought publicity. I'll work in Vegas and rotate to you in Sparta.

Barb bought the plan. Said plan stressed Vietnam. Said plan stressed his exclusion.

They made love. They sealed the pact. They fucking snowmobiled. Fucking Sparta, Wisconsin—Lutherans and trees.

Pete scoped the ballroom. Pete watched the floor. Sal M. looked over. Sal M. looked away.

Dom's bun boy filed missing-persons. LVPD worked the case. It got some ink. Cops checked out the Cavern. Pete bribed them. They dumped the case resultant.

Otash watchdogged Sal. Sal learned his script. It was simple shit: I just *loooove* civil rights! Otash worked with Dwight Holly. They redid Sal's pad. They ripped out a closet. They hung 1-way glass and rigged a camera. Said camera faced Sal's bed.

Fred T. assisted. Fred T. bugged lamps. Fred T. bugged walls. Fred T. bugged mattress springs.

Pete scoped the ballroom. Pete watched the floor. Celebs hobnobbed. Celebs sucked up to King.

Otash said, "You see the paper? Jack Ruby died."

"I saw it."

"You guys went back. Sam G.'s dropped a few hints."

Sal looked over. Pete cued him—*go in strong now*.

Sal shagged a waiter. Sal cadged a drink. Sal chugalugged. Sal flushed bright. Sal mingled. Sal walked.

Fruit Alert—Bayard Rustin—fruit fly at ten o'clock high. Bayard's got backscratchers—Burl Ives plus two—Sal's moving in tight.

Sal sees Bayard. Bayard sees Sal. Two smiles and wet lips aflutter. Strings swell. "Strangers in the Night." "Some Enchanted Evening."

Burl's pissed. Who's *this* punk? *I'm* old-line Left. Sal said hi. Sal drifted off. Bayard eye-tracked his ass.

Otash said, "Contact."

A bell rang. It's chow time. Hold for pygmy banquet fare.

Cliques dispersed. The guests hit the tables. Sal eye-tracked Bayard. Sal sat nearby.

Bayard saw him. Bayard wrote a napkin note. Pat Brown passed it down. Sal read it. Sal blushed. Sal passed a note back.

Pete said, "Liftoff."

They killed time.

They walked next door. They hit Trader Vic's. They quaffed mai-tais. They noshed rumaki sticks.

Cops passed through. Cops dished updates.

Dinner's done. King's talking. King's dripping foam at the mouth. He's Red. He's a puppet. I know it. The peaceniks love him. It burns me. My son's in Vietnam.

A TV kicked on. The barman flipped channels. The barman shut off the sound. There's war news on three channels. There's choppers and tanks. There's Commie King on two more.

Pete checked his watch. It was 10:16. Hold for fruit flies on high. Otash wolfed a puu-puu platter. His cummerbund swelled.

10:28:

Sal walks in. Sal sits down. Sal ignores them.

10:29:

Bayard walks in. Bayard sits down. Bayard greets Sal: Child, how *are* you! I'm *such* a fan!

Otash got up. Pete got up. Pete grabbed a shrimp spear for the road.

Setup:

They hit Sal's pad. They aired out the closet. They prepped the camera. They loaded film. They waited. They sat still.

The closet was hot. They popped sweat. They stripped to socks and shorts.

They sat still. They killed the lights. Their watch dials ran fluorescent.

11:18. 11:29. 11:42.

Poof—doorway light. Off the bedroom—stage right.

Pete squared the camera. Otash rolled film. More light/ bedroom fixtures/beams overhead.

Sal walked in. Bayard squeezed in tight. They laughed. They touched. They brushed hips. Bayard kissed Sal. Otash went ugh. Sal kissed Bayard back.

Pete squared the camera. Pete nailed the bed. Pete got Ground Zero in mid-shot.

Sal said, "Martin gives a good speech, but you're handsom—"

Sal stopped. Sal stopped what the—

His voice fluttered. His voice echo-chambered. His voice woofered. His voice tweetered. His voice bounced high and wide.

FUCK—

Overfeed. Overamp. Microph—

Bayard tweaked. Bayard hinked. Bayard looked around fast. Bayard yodeled. Bayard yelled, "Hell-o!" Bayard got echoes back.

Sal grabbed his neck. Sal blitzed a kiss. Sal squeezed his ass. Bayard shoved him. Sal hit the bed. A mattress-mike snapped.

It hit the floor. It bounced. It rolled. It stopped.

Pete said, "Shit."

Otash said, "Fuck."

Bayard yelled—"Hell-o, J. Edgar!"—Bayard got echoes back.

Sal grabbed a pillow. Sal hid his face. Sal nellied out. Sal kicked his legs nonstop.

Bayard looked around. Bayard saw the mirror. Bayard ran up.

He hit the glass.

He gouged his hands.

He tore his hands up.

(Silver Spring, 1/6/67)

Bank work:

The B. of A. South of D.C. Tithe tunnel 3.

Littell wrote a deposit slip. Littell wrote a withdrawal slip. Littell scrawled an envelope.

Seven grand—one Drac-pilfered deposit. Five grand—one tithe withdrawn. A donation from “Richard D. Wilkins”—tithe pseudonym 3.

Littell got in line. Littell saw a teller. Littell showed his slips and bankbook. The teller smiled. The teller ran his paperwork. The teller metered his check.

He checked his book balance. He creased the check. He sealed the envelope. He walked outside. He dodged snowdrifts. He found a mail chute.

He dropped the letter. He checked for tails. Standard procedure now.

Negative. No tails extant. He *knew* it.

He stood outside. It felt good. The cold air revived him. He was tired. He’d been running—all-Bureau ops.

He toured sixteen cities. He did sixteen bug jobs. He bugged sixteen Mob meeting spots. He worked solo. Fred T. was booked. Fred T. had work with Fred O. He had off-time himself. It was Drac-approved. Drac’s Mormons filled his spot.

Said Mormons haggled in Vegas. They said sell us the DI. They said sell us more hotels.

He flew loops. He did bug jobs. He called Moe D. Moe was jazzed. Moe said we’ll bilk Drac—I *know* it.

He flew circuits. Chicago/K.C./Milwaukee. St. Louis/Santa

Barbara/L.A. He nursed plans. He hit L.A. He acted.

He went through Jane's file. He sifted dirt. He culled dirt on second-line hoods—all East Coast men.

It was prime Arden data. It detailed hijacks and Mob hits. It was non-tangential. It was non-fund-book-related. It was not related to: Carlos/Sam G./John Rosselli/Santo/Jimmy/et al.

He typed out the facts. He wrote succinct. He print-wiped the paper. He flew back out. He traveled. He bugged more meet spots. He hit Frisco/Phoenix/Philly. He hit D.C. and New York.

He stayed in Manhattan. He booked a hotel room. He used a pseudonym. He altered his appearance. He cosmeticized.

He bought a beard. It was dark blond and gray. It was superb quality. It covered his scars. It reshaped his face. It aged him ten years.

He met Bobby once. He met Bobby three days pre-Dallas. Bobby would remember him. Bobby knew his look.

He bought work clothes. He bought contact lenses. He surveilled Bobby's billet: The UN Towers/old brick/off 1st Avenue.

He braced the doorman. The doorman knew Bobby. The doorman said Bobby rotates. Bobby runs south to D.C. Bobby runs back to New York.

Littell watched. Littell waited. Bobby showed two days in. Bobby brought a young aide north.

A thin boy. Dark hair and glasses. Said boy looked bright. Said boy adored Bobby. Said boy's adulation glowed.

They walked the East Side. Constituents waved. The boy rebuffed hecklers and creeps. Littell tailed them. Littell got close. Littell heard Bobby speak.

The boy had a car. Littell got the plate stats. Littell ran them through the DMV. He got Paul Michael Horvitz/age 23/address in D.C.

Littell called Horvitz. Littell dropped hints. Littell said he had information. Horvitz bit. They arranged a meet—on for tonight in D.C.

Tellers walked out. A guard locked the bank. Snow fell. It felt cold. It warmed him.

He prepped. He worked up mannerisms. He culled a new wardrobe. He dredged up a drawl.

One tweed suit. One soft chambray shirt. Beard/lisp/fey posture.

He showed early. He named the spot: Eddie Chang's Kowloon. The lighting was murky. Said lighting would camouflage.

He got a booth. He sprawled invertebrate. He ordered tea. He watched the door. He checked his watch.

There's Paul.

It's 8:01. He's punctual. He's youthful and sincere. Littell geared up—be aged/be fey.

Paul glanced around. Paul saw couples. Paul saw one solo act. He walked back. He sat down. Littell poured him tea straight off.

"Thanks for coming on such short notice."

"Well, your call intrigued me."

"I was hoping it would. Young men like you get all sorts of dubious overtures, but this is certainly not one of them."

Paul dumped his overcoat. Paul untied his scarf.

"Senator Kennedy gets the overtures, not me."

Littell smiled. "That's not what I meant, son."

"I got your meaning, but I chose to ignore it."

Littell sprawled. Littell drummed the table.

"You look like Andrew Goodman, that poor boy who died in Mississippi."

"I knew Andy at the COFO School. I almost went down myself."

"I'm glad you didn't."

"Are you from there?"

"I'm from De Kalb. It's a smidge between Scooba and Electric Mills."

Paul sipped tea. "You're some sort of lobbyist, right? You knew you couldn't get to the senator, so you thought you'd find yourself an ambitious young aide."

Littell bowed—courtly/très South.

"I know that ambitious young men will risk looking foolish and go out on a snowy night on the off-chance that something is real."

Paul smiled. "And you're 'real.' "

"My documents are wholly real, and one thorough reading will convince you and Senator Kennedy of their authenticity."

Paul lit a cigarette. "And yours?"

"I claim no authenticity, and would prefer that my documents speak for themselves."

"And your documents pertain to?"

"My documents pertain to misdeeds perpetrated by members of organized crime. I will supplant the initial batch with subsequent parcels and deliver them to you in discreet bunches, so that you and/or Senator Kennedy can investigate the allegations at your leisure and your discretion. My only requirement is that there be no public disclosure pertaining to any information I give you until late 1968 or early 1969."

Paul twirled his ashtray. "Do you think Senator Kennedy will be President or President-elect then?"

Littell smiled. "From your mouth to God's ears, although I was thinking more of where I'll be then."

Wall vents popped. The heat came on. Littell broke a sweat.

"Do you think he'll run?"

Paul said, "I don't know."

"Does he remain committed to the fight against organized crime?"

"Yes. It's very much on his mind, but he feels uncomfortable going public with it."

Littell popped sweat. His tweeds broiled. His faux beard slipped. He splayed his hands. He cupped his chin. It played effete. It stopped the slip.

"You can depend on my loyalty, but I would prefer to remain anonymous in all our transactions."

Paul stuck his hand out. Littell passed the notes.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/8/67. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript (OPERATION BLACK RABBIT Addendum.) Marked: "Recorded at the Director's Request"/"Classified Confidential 1-A: Director's Eyes Only." Speaking: Director, BLUE RABBIT.

DIR: Good afternoon.

BR: Good afternoon, Sir.

DIR: I read your memo. You attribute the failure of a Stage-2 operation to faulty condensor plugs.

BR: It was a technical failure, Sir. I would not blame Fred Otash or BIG RABBIT.

DIR: The blameworthy one is thus Fred Turentine, the reptilian "Bug Man to the Stars," a lowly minion of Otash and BIG RABBIT.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: I gain no succor from foisting blame on a hired hand. I gain only dyspeptic fury.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: Give me some good news to allay my agitation.

BR: Otash was very good on the post-op. He leaned on Mineo and warned him to keep quiet. I would strongly suggest that PINK RABBIT will not risk personal ridicule or bad publicity for the SCLC by going public with word on the shakedown.

DIR: I was looking forward to the film. Bayard and Sal, O bird thou never wert.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: Let's discuss CRUSADER RABBIT.

BR: He did a superb job on the installations, Sir.

DIR: Did you have him spot-tailed?

BR: On three occasions, Sir. He's tail-savvy, but my men managed to sustain surveillance.

DIR: Expand your answers. I have a lunch date in the year 2010.

BR: CRUSADER RABBIT was not spotted doing anything remotely suspicious.

DIR: Besides installing illegal bug-mounts at our behest.

BR: Including Bobby Kennedy's place in Santa Barbara, Sir.

DIR: Thrillingly ironic. CRUSADER bugs his savior and my bete noire. Unwitting complicity of a high order.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: How long will it take to recruit men to man the listening posts?

BR: A while, Sir. We've got sixteen locations.

DIR: To continue. Update me on WILD RABBIT.

BR: He's doing well, Sir. You've seen the results. We keep getting mail-fraud indict—

DIR: I know what we keep getting. I know that we do not come close to getting anything remotely resembling satisfaction in the matter of one Martin Luther King, aka RED RABBIT, aka the Minstrel Antichrist. Our attempts to dislodge him and subsume his prestige have consumed tens of thousands of man-hours and have garnered nil results. He has turned us into dung beetles and rare, indigenous African birds who peck through elephant shit, and I am woefully sick and tired of waiting for him to discredit himself.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: You're a rock, Dwight. I can always count on you to say "Yes, Sir."

BR: I would like to seek more radical means to nullify RED RABBIT. Do I have your permission to bring in a trusted friend and explore the possibilities?

DIR: Yes.

BR: Thank you, Sir.

DIR: Good day, Dwight.

BR: Good day, Sir.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/14/67. Telephone call transcript. Taped by: BLUE RABBIT. Marked: “FBI-Scrambled”/“Stage-1 Covert”/ “Destroy Without Reading in the Event of My Death.” Speaking: BLUE RABBIT, FATHER RABBIT.

BR: Senior, how are you? How’s the connection?

FR: I’m hearing some clicks.

BR: That’s my scrambler. The beeps mean we’re tap-proof.

FR: We should be talking in person.

BR: I’m down in Mississippi. I can’t get away.

FR: You’re sure it’s—

BR: It’s fine. Jesus, don’t go cuntish on me.

FR: I won’t. It’s just that—

BR: It’s just that you think he’s got superhuman powers, and he doesn’t. He can’t read minds and he can’t tap scrambled frequencies.

FR: Well, still …

BR: Still, shit. He’s not God, so quit acting like he is.

FR: He’s something similar.

BR: I’ll buy that.

FR: Did he—

BR: He said yes.

FR: Do you think he knows what we’re planning?

BR: No, but he’ll be glad to see it happen, and if he thinks it’s us, he’ll make sure the investigation obfuscates.

FR: That’s good news.

BR: No shit, Sherlock.

FR: People hate him. King, I mean.

BR: Those that don’t love him, yeah.

FR: What about the bug—

BR: We’re A-OK on that front. I talked him into letting me wire sixteen spots. He’ll read the transcripts, hear the hate building and get his rocks off.

FR: There’s a scapegoat aspect here.

BR: That is correct. Guinea hoods hate coloreds and civil-rights fucks, and they love to talk about it. Hoover hears the hate, the whole thing starts feeling inevitable, pow, then it happens. The whole Mob-hate thing serves to muddy the waters and gets him thinking that it’s too big to mess with.

FR: Like Jack Kennedy.

BR: Exactly. It's coming, it's inevitable, it's accomplished and it's good for business. The nation mourns and hates the clown we give them.

FR: You know the metaphysic.

BR: We all went to school on Jack.

FR: How long will it take to get the bugs in place?

BR: About six weeks. You want the punch line? I had Ward Littell do the mounts.

FR: Dwight, Jesus.

BR: I had my reasons. One, he's the best bug man around. Two, we may need him somewhere down the line. Three, I needed to throw him a bone to keep him in the game.

FR: Shitfire. Any game with Littell in it is a game to fix from the get-go.

BR: I threw Hoover a bone. He hates Bobby K. almost as much as he hates King, and he shares all his dirt with LBJ. I had Littell bug one of Bobby's hotel suites.

FR: I'm getting chills, Dwight. You keep dropping the "Mister" off "Hoover."

BR: Because I trust scrambler technology.

FR: It's more than that.

BR: Okay, it's because he's slipping. Why mince words? King's the one guy he wanted to break the most, and King's the one guy he can't break. Here's another punch line for you. Lyle liked King. He worked against him and admired him anyway, and I'm starting to feel the same way. That grandiose cocksucker is a jigaboo for the ages.

FR: I've heard everything now.

BR: No, you haven't. Try this. Hoover's a hophead.

FR: Dwight, come—

BR: That Dr. Feelgood guy flies down from New York every day, on the Bureau's time-card. He gives Hoover a pop of liquid methamphetamine mixed with B-complex vitamins and male hormones. The old boy fades about 1:00 p.m. and perks up like a dog in heat around 2:00.

FR: Jesus.

BR: He's not God or Jesus. He's slipping, but he's still good. We've got to be careful around him.

FR: We need to start thinking about a fall guy.

BR: I want to bring in Fred Otash and Bob Relyea to help us look. I've gotten tight with Otash, he's solid, and he's got juice on the coast. Bob's your rabbit, so you know the score there. That hump knows every expendable race-baiter in the south.

FR: I've got an idea. It might help to facilitate things.

BR: I'm listening.

FR: We should do some hate-mail intercepts on King and the SCLC, to see if we can find a guy who's sent them letters. I know the Bureau's doing mail covers, so I think we should bring in a man to go through the covered mail, photograph it and return it to the covering agent, on the sly.

BR: It's a good idea, if we can find a man we can trust.

FR: My son.

BR: Shit. Don't give me that.

FR: I'm serious.

BR: I thought you and the kid were estranged. He was moving dope with Pete Bondurant, and you two were on the outs.

FR: We've reconciled.

BR: Shit.

FR: You know how he hates coloreds. He'd be perfect for the job.

BR: Shit. He's too volatile. You recall that little run-in I had with him?

FR: He's changed, Dwight. He's a brilliant kid, and he'd be perfect for the job.

BR: I'll buy brilliant. I bought him his first chemistry set in 1944.

FR: I remember. You said he'd figure out how to split the atom.

BR: You've reconciled, you trust him, I concede he'd be good. That said, we don't want him to know what we're building up to.

FR: We'll muddy things. We'll have him cull mail on King, plus one liberal and one conservative politician. He'll think I'm just building my intelligence base.

BR: Shit.

FR: He'll be good. He's the right man for—

BR: I want a wedge. I'll bring him in, as long as we've got something on him. I know he's your son, but I'm still going to insist.

FR: Let's see if we can hand him Wendell Durfee. He's allegedly in L.A., which means I could put my LAPD contacts on him covert. You know what Wayne will do if he finds him.

BR: Yeah. And I could make like I still hate him and squeeze him with that.

FR: It might work. Shitfire, it will work.

BR: Durfee's a long shot. He might take time and we might tap out on him.

FR: I know.

BR: We need to bring in our mail guy within the next six weeks.

FR: I'll bring Wayne in. We'll work on Durfee in the meantime.

BR: That fucks up the wedge aspect.

FR: Not in the long run.

BR: What are you saying?

FR: We don't need a wedge for his mail work. We've got to have one in place when I tell him he'll be there for D-Day.

BR: Jesus Christ.

FR: My son doesn't know it, but he's been waiting his whole life for this.

BR: In your words, "Shitfire."

FR: That about says it.

BR: I've got to go. I want to get some coffee and think this all through.

FR: It's going to happen.

BR: You're damn fucking right it is.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/26/67. Las Vegas *Sun* headline:

HUGHES-DESERT INN NEGOTIATIONS CONTINUE

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/4/67. Denver *Post-Dispatch* subhead:

FEDERAL INDICTMENTS ON CASINO SKIM-COURIERS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/14/67. Las Vegas *Sun* headline and subhead:

WHERE'S DOM DELLACROCIO?

VEGAS POLICE BAFFLED

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/22/67. Chicago *Tribune* subhead:

> KING PREDICTS "VIOLENT SUMMER" IF NEGROES DO NOT GET "FULL JUSTICE"

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/6/67. Denver *Post-Dispatch* subhead:

SKIM COURIERS PLEAD GUILTY

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/6/67. Las Vegas *Sun* subhead:

HUGHES SPOKESMEN CITE SKIM PLEAS
AND PLEDGE TO WORK FOR “CLEAN LAS VEGAS”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/7/67. Los Angeles *Times* headline and subhead:

HOFFA ENTERS PRISON
58-MONTH SENTENCE LOOMS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/27/67. Las Vegas *Sun* headline:

HUGHES-DESERT INN DEAL FINALIZED

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/2/67. San Francisco *Chronicle* subhead:

KING ATTACKS “RACIST” WAR IN VIETNAM

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/4/67. Bug-extract transcript. Marked: “Confidential”/“Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”: Director, SA D. C. Holly.

Location: Office/Mike Lyman’s Restaurant/Los Angeles/listening-post-accessed. Speaking: Unidentified Males #1 & #2, presumed organized-crime associates. (Conversation 2.6 minutes in progress.)

UM #1: … under Truman and Ike you had order. You had Hoover, who bore us no ill fucking will. Fucking Bobby and Jack changed all that.

UM #2: LBJ’s got schizophilia. He don’t take no shit from the Reds in Vietnam, but he sucks up to that King like he’s his long lost soul brother. The policy guys back east see this correlation. King comes to Harlem, gives these speeches and gets all the pygmies hopped up. They quit playing the numbers, our policy banks take it in the shorts, and the fucking pygmies get agitated and start feeling their oats.

UM #1: I see the correlation. They quit betting policy, their minds wander. They start thinking about Communism and raping white women.

UM #2: King likes white women. I heard he’s a pig for it.

UM #1: All the niggers want it. It’s the fruit of the forbidden fucking tree.

(Non-applicable conversation follows.)

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/12/67. Bug-extract transcript. Marked: "Confidential"/"Stage-1 Covert"/"Eyes Only": Director, SA D. C. Holly.

Location: Rec room/St. Agnes Social Club/Philadelphia/listening-post-accessed. Speaking: Steven "Steve the Skeev" DeSantis & Ralph Michael Lauria, organized-crime associates. (Conversation 9.3 minutes in progress.)

SDS: … Ralphie, Ralphie, Ralphie, you can't talk to them. You can't reason with them like they're regular people.

RML: This is not news to me. I have been a landlord for many fucking years.

SDS: You're a slumlord, Ralphie. Do not try to shit a well-known shitter like me.

RML: You're talking like that nigger fuck King, which is just the point I wanted to make. I run to my buildings on the first, the welfare checks are out and it's payday for the few shvoogies who work. Now, one old nigger lady shows me Time Magazine with King on the cover and says, "I don't gots to pay no rent 'cause the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Junior says you a slumlord who is exploiting me." This fuck two doors down demands his civil rights, which he fucking describes as "I don't have to pay no rent until all my peoples is free."

SDS: They're way out of line. As a fucking race, I mean.

RML: That King's got them hopped up. You got a whole race of overstimulated people.

SDS: Someone should clip that hump King. They should slip him a poison watermelon.

RML: We should join the Ku Klux Klan.

SDS: You're too fat to wear a sheet.

RML: Fuck you. I'll join anyway.

SDS: Forget it. They don't take Italians.

RML: Why? We're white.

(Non-applicable conversation follows.)

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/21/67. Listening-post report. Marked: “Confidential”/“Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”: Director, SA D. C. Holly.

Location: Suite 301/El Encanto Hotel/Santa Barbara/ listening-post-accessed.

Sirs,

During the 1st monitoring period (4/2/67–4/20/67), Subject RFK was not in residence at the target location. Subject RFK rents the suite on a yearly basis & it remains empty during his absences. The (voice-activated) mounts have thus far picked up only the non-applicable conversations of El Encanto caretakers & other employees. Per orders, the listening post will continue to be manned full-time.

Respectfully,

SA C. W. Brundage

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/9/67. Bug-extract transcript. Marked: “Confidential”/“Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”: Director, SA D. C. Holly.

Location: Card room/Grapevine Tavern/St. Louis/ listening-post-accessed. Speaking: Unidentified males #1 & #2, presumed organized-crime associates. (Conversation 1.9 minutes in progress.)

UM #1: … Klan’s willing to stand up and be counted, which means you’ve got to call them our shock troops.

UM #2: I’m for segregation, don’t get me wrong.

UM #1: St. Louis is a good example. One, it’s hillbilly. Two, it’s got lots of Catholics. I ain’t ashamed to say I’m a hillbilly, you’re sure as hell an Italian and a Catholic, we work together good ’cause you so-called Mafia guys are white men who worship Jesus just like me, which means we hate alike, too, so you got to concede that the Klan’s got some answers, and if they put their anti-Catholic shit aside you’d be the first to make some big donations.

UM #2: That is true. I sub-contract to you because you okies, no offense, think and hate like we do.

UM #1: If Nigger King walked in here right now, I’d kill him.

UM #2: I’d fight you for the right. King and Bobby Kennedy, those are the shitbirds I hate. Bobby fucked and fucked and fucked and fucked and fucked and fucked the Outfit until we had no place left to bleed. King’s doing the same thing right now. He’ll fuck this country in the keester and fuck us and fuck us and fuck us and fuck and fuck us and fuck us while the other boogies overbreed and turn this country into a welfare-state shithole.

UM #1: I’m 3rd-generation Klan. There, I said it, and you ain’t shocked. You may take your orders from Rome, but I don’t care. You’re a white man, just like me.

UM #2: Fuck you. I take my orders from a fat dago with a pinkie ring.

(Non-applicable conversation follows.)

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/28/67. Bug-extract transcript. Marked: “Confidential”/“Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”: Director, SA D. C. Holly.

Location: Card room/Grapevine Tavern/St. Louis/listening-post-accessed. Speaking: Norbert Donald Kling & Rowland Mark DeJohn, paroled felons (Armed Robbery/Bunco/GTA) & presumed organized-crime associates. (Conversation 3.9 minutes in progress.)

NDK: … like a kitty, I mean.

RMDJ: I get it. Guys pitch in, you watch the kitty grow.

NDK: We don’t pitch in. Guys with real coin do, until you got a big enough pot to attract a guy who can do it.

RMDJ: Right. It’s a bounty. The word goes out that it’s there, you do the job, you prove you did it, you collect.

NDK: Right. You attract a pro, and he gets away with it. It’s not like Oswald, you know, with Kennedy.

RMDJ: Oswald was a Commie and a psycho. He wanted to get caught.

NDK: Right. And people loved Kennedy.

RMDJ: Well, some people. Personally, I hated the son-of-a-bitch.

NDK: You know what I’m saying. With King you got a nigger that everyone hates. The only white people who don’t hate him are some Jews and pinkos, but every other white person knows that integration will put this country in the toilet, so you get rid of Public Nuisance Number One and nip that eventuality in the bud.

RMDJ: He’s dead, the country rejoices.

NDK: You put the word out. That’s the thing.

RMDJ: Yeah, the bounty.

NDK: We ain’t got the scratch, but there’s guys around here who do.

RMDJ: He’s begging for it.

NDK: That’s the part I like. You beg for it, you get it.

(Non-applicable conversation follows.)

DOCUMENT INSERT: 6/14/67. Hate-mail extract. Compiled by: FATHER RABBIT. Sealed and marked: “Destroy Without Reading in the Event of My Death.”

Mail sender: Anonymous. Postmark: Pasadena, California. Recipient: Senator Robert F. Kennedy. From page 1 (of 19):

DEAR SENATOR KENNEDY,

I KNOW THAT YOU & THE ZIONIST WORLDWIDE PIG ORDER HAVE PUT THE PUS IN THE JEWISH CANCER MACHINE AND GAVE ME HEADACHES, NOT FALLS FROM HORSES AS DR’S BELIEVE. YOU SAY THAT ALLAH DRIVES AN IMPALA BUT I KNOW THAT THE JEWISH CONTROL APPARATUS CONTROLS AUTOMOBILE PRODUCTION IN DETROIT AND BEVERLY HILLS. YOU ARE A PUS PUPPET IN THE CONTROL OF THE JEWISH VAMPIRE AND MUST STOP EMITTING HEADACHES IN THE NAME OF THE CHIEF RABBI OF LODZ AND MIAMI BEACH AND THE PROTOCOLS OF THE LEARNED ELDERS OF ZION.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/5/67. Hate-mail extract. Compiled by: FATHER RABBIT. Sealed and marked: “Destroy Without Reading in the Event of My Death.”

Mail sender: Anonymous. Postmark: St. Louis, Missouri. Recipient: Dr. M. L. King. From page 1 (of 1):

Dear Nigger,

You better fear the ides of July and June;
There’s going to be a bounty on you, Coon;
You’re a traitor and a Commie and an evil ape;
All you do is lie, steal and rape;
But the White Man’s wise to your evil ways;
The bounty means you’d better pray and count your days;
You can’t dodge bullets like Superman;
You can’t run away from the White Man’s Plan;
When you get this letter you better hide;
Because you can’t escape the White Man’s fearless tide.

Signed,
U.W.M.A. (United White Men of America)

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/21/67. Hate-mail extract. Compiled by: FATHER RABBIT. Sealed and marked: “Destroy Without Reading in the Event of My Death.”

Mail sender: Anonymous. Postmark: Pasadena, California. Recipient: Senator Robert F. Kennedy. From page 2 (of 16):

[And] YOU HAVE BETRAYED THE ARAB PEOPLE AND STOLEN OUR LAND OF MILK AND HONEY TO MILK PUS FROM THE WORLDWIDE ZIONIST PIG ORDER AND THE JEWISH CANCER MACHINE. BAYER ASPIRIN AND BUFFERIN AND ST. JUDE’S HOSPITAL CANNOT STOP MY HEADACHES FROM THE PUS INFLICTED BY THE JEWISH VAMPIRE AND CANNOT HEAR ME SAY RFK MUST DIE RFK MUST DIE RFK MUST DIE RFK MUST DIE RFK MUST DIE RFK MUST DIE RFK MUST DIE RFK MUST DIE!!!!!!!!!!!

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/23/67. Boston *Globe* headline and subhead:

RIOTS SWEEP CITY
ARSON, LOOTING, REIGN

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/29/67. Detroit *Free Press* headline and subhead:

RIOTS ROCK DETROIT
DEATHS AND DAMAGE MOUNT

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/30/67. Boston *Globe* headline and subhead:

KING TO PRESS:

RIOTS “MANIFESTATIONS OF WHITE RACISM”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/2/67. Washington *Post* subhead:

RIOT DAMAGE MOUNTS; POLICE CALL DISTRICT “COMBAT ZONE”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/5/67. Los Angeles *Times* headline and subhead:

KING ON RIOTS:
"THE FRUIT OF WHITE INJUSTICE"

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/6/67. Telephone call transcript. Taped by: BLUE RABBIT. Marked: “FBI-Scrambled”/“Stage-1 Covert”/ “Destroy Without Reading in the Event of My Death.” Speaking: BLUE RABBIT, FATHER RABBIT.

BR: Senior, hi.

FR: How are you, Dwight? It’s been a while.

BR: Don’t mind the clicks. My scrambler’s on the fritz.

FR: I don’t mind. I’d rather talk than mess with pouches.

BR: Have you been watching the news? The natives are restless.

FR: King predicted it.

BR: No, he promised it, and now he’s gloating.

FR: He’s making enemies. There’s times I think we might not get there first.

BR: There’s times I agree. The Outfit hates him, and every cracker in captivity has got his tits in a twist. You should hear my listening-post tapes.

FR: Shitfire, I’d like to.

BR: There’s a joint in St. Louis. A dump called the Grapevine. Outfit guys and sub-lease hoods frequent it. They’ve been talking up a fifty-grand bounty. It’s starting to feel like a giant wet dream out there in the spiritus mundi.

FR: You slay me. “Wet Dream” and “Spiritus Mundi” in the same sentence.

BR: I’m a chameleon. I’m like Ward Littell that way. I alter my vocabulary to suit the company I’m with.

FR: At least you know it. I can’t say Littell’s that much in control of his effects.

BR: He is and he isn’t.

FR: For instance?

BR: For instance, he watches for tails everywhere he goes. Mr. Hoover’s been running spots on him off and on for years, and he knows it. He catches 90% and misses 10. He’s probably got just enough hubris to think he’s batting a hundred.

FR: Hubris. I like it.

BR: You should. I picked it up at Yale Law.

FR: Boola, boola.

BR: Tell me about the intercepts. By my lights, your son should be twelve weeks in.

FR: More like eight. You know how he travels for Bondurant. It took him months to set up his system.

BR: Tell me about it.

FR: He rented a place in D.C. He's pulling mail off King, Barry Goldwater, and Bobby Kennedy. The Bureau's running normal intercepts, and all their mail comes addressed to the SCLC headquarters and the Senate Office Building. There's a four-agent team running a mail drop at 16th and "D." The night shift goes home at 11:00, so Wayne lets himself in at 1:00, pulls the mail, copies it and returns it at 5:00. He shuttles down from New York when he rotates in from Saigon.

BR: How does he get in?

FR: He made a mold of the door lock and had duplicate keys made.

BR: And he picks up at irregular intervals?

FR: Right. All synced to his rotations. He print-dusts the mail he picks up, since those hate-mail guys never put their return addresses on the envel—

BR: It's redundant. The mail teams dust the incomings. Everything's been wiped by the time he sees it.

FR: Shitfire. My boy's a chemist. He sprays the pages with some goop called ninhydrin and brings up partial prints all the time. He said he's working out his technique, and one of these days he'll be able to bring up completes.

BR: Okay. He's good. You've convinced me.

FR: And he's careful.

BR: He'd better be. We do not want it known that outside eyes saw that mail.

FR: I told you. He's care—

BR: What about prospects?

FR: None so far. All he's got are a bunch of lunatics who sound like they're one step ahead of the net.

BR: Bob's got a prospect. We might not need Wayne's help on that end.

FR: Bob should have told me. Shitfire, I'm his runner.

BR: You're his Daddy Rabbit. There's things he won't tell you for just that reason.

FR: All right. You tell me.

BR: The guy escaped from the Missouri State Pen in April. Bob knew him when he worked as a guard there. They were jungled up in Bob's right-wing foolishness.

FR: That's all you've got?

BR: Bob's pouching me a memo. I'll forward it to you.

FR: Shit, Dwight. You know I've got a veto on this.

BR: Yeah, you do, and we won't use the guy unless we both agree that he's perfect.

FR: Come on. You owe me more—

BR: He's on the lam. He was afraid to stay at Bob's compound, so he split to Canada. Bob's got a line on him. If we agree that he's the guy, I'll send Fred Otash up to work him.

FR: Hands-on? I thought we'd bring in some cutouts.

BR: I made Freddy lose 60 pounds. He was tall and heavy, now he's tall and thin.

FR: He looks different.

BR: Completely. He's Lebanese, he speaks Spanish, we can pass him off as some kind of beaner. Bob said the prospect is malleable. Freddy eats up that kind of guy.

FR: You like the guy.

BR: He's a strong prospect. Read the memo and let me know what you think.

FR: Shit. This is taking time.

BR: All good things do.

FR: Someone might beat us to it.

BR: If they do, they do.

FR: What's Mr. Hoover been—

BR: He's afraid that Marty and Bobby will team up. It's all he talks about. BLACK RABBIT's been up in the air since the shakedown flopped. Hoover knows I'm "exploring more radical means," but he hasn't asked me a single question about it since I made the proposal.

FR: That means he knows what you're planning.

BR: Maybe, maybe not. Second-guessing the old poof gets us nowhere.

FR: Dwight, Jesus.

BR: Come on. Remember what I told you? He can't read minds and he can't patch scrambled calls.

FR: Still.

BR: What about Durfee? Have your LAPD guys turned up anything?

FR: Nothing. They've got covert bulletins out, but they haven't got a single goddamn bite.

BR: First we've got to find him. Then we've got to rig it so Wayne doesn't know that we're handing him up.

FR: That's easy. We stiff a call through Sonny Liston, who's allegedly got people out looking for Durfee, not that that impresses—

BR: I want that wedge. I'm not bringing Wayne any closer without one.

FR: I owe him Durfee. I have a debt to repay to him, and Durfee will settle it.

BR: I'll put my sources on him. Between yours and mine, we might hit.

FR: Let's try. I owe Wayne that.

BR: I'm glad I never had any kids. They end up killing unarmed Negroes and pushing heroin.

FR: The Gospel According to Dwight Chalfont Holly.

BR: Enough. Let's discuss ops money.

FR: I'm in for two hundred cold. You know that.

BR: Otash wants fifty cold.

FR: I'm sure he's worth it.

BR: Bob's putting in a hundred.

FR: Shitfire. He hasn't got that kind of money.

BR: Are you sitting down?

FR: Yes. Why—

BR: I was down in New Hebron. I saw Bob dipping the numbers off some flamethrowers he was getting ready to route to the Gulf. They had triple-zero prefixes, which I just happened to know designates CIA-disbursement lots. I asked Bob about it. He lied, which was the wrong thing to do under the circumstances.

FR: You're talking Swahili, Dwight. I've got no idea where this is going.

BR: I leaned on Bob. He gave it up.

FR: Gave what up?

BR: His Cuban gun-running gig is nothing but a shuck. Carlos Marcello and that CIA guy John Stanton cooked it up. The guns have been going to Castro sources inside Cuba, with Marcello's best wishes. The Outfit's been sucking up to Castro, so he'll help them implement some plan they've got to plant casinos in Latin American countries. Castro's got juice with leftist insurgents in the countries the Outfit's looking at, and he's sending them the guns that Bob and the other guys smuggle in. That way, if the lefties implement takeovers in their countries, they'll let the Outfit in. If they don't take over, the Outfit will grease the right-wing guys still in power.

FR: I'm seeing visions, Dwight. I'm seeing all the Latter-day Saints.

BR: It gets better.

FR: It couldn't. And you don't need to warn me not to tell Wayne, because we both know this would drive the boy insane.

BR: The Outfit's covered on both ends. Castro's sacrificed X-number of Militia troops to the venture, because Bondurant, Wayne and their guys have been boating in and taking scalps with impunity. Castro's making money, it's worth a few Soldiers of the Revolution in the long run, it all goes to fuel the Commie agenda in Latin America.

FR: Dwight, I'm flabber—

BR: Stanton and the other CIA guys involved have been kicking back Bondurant's dope profits to an Agency source. He's been supplying Bob with CIA disbursement weaponry, which fucking Bob has been passing off as ordnance stolen from armory heists and Army pilferings. Stanton and Marcello have diverted millions in profit overflow, and they've paid Bob and these guys Laurent Guery and Flash Elorde percentage cuts to work the scam from the beginning. Only Bondurant, your son, and some guy named Mesplede think the whole thing is for real. They're the stupes and the true believers.

FR: My lord. All the Saints and the Angel Moroni.

BR: Bob's socked away a hundred cold. He'll kick it into our operation, if we let him shoot or play back-up to our fall guy.

FR: I wouldn't deny him. Not after a story like that.

BR: He's in, then. He kept all that covert for years, so I think we can trust him.

FR: We’ve got to keep this quiet. If Bondurant or my son find out, it all hits the—

BR: I’ve got Bob’s balls. He won’t talk to anyone else.

FR: Dwight, I should …

BR: Yeah, go. Have a drink and talk to your saints.

FR: Visions, Dwight. I mean it.

BR: I almost went into civil law. Can you believe it?

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/12/67. Pouch communiqué. To: FATHER RABBIT. From: BLUE RABBIT. Marked: “Eyes Only”/“Read and Burn.”

FATHER,

Here’s Bob’s memo. His facts & observations are based on his personal relationship with the PROSPECT & on files he stole from the Missouri State Prison System. I cleaned up his grammar & spelling & included some perceptions. READ, BURN & pouch me your response.

The PROSPECT:

Ray, James Earl/white male/5’10”/160/DOB 3-16-28/ Alton, Illinois/1 of 10 children.

PROSPECT grew up in rural Illinois & Missouri. Father was career petty larcenist. PROSPECT first arrested (1942) at age 14 (theft). Became frequenter of traveling carnivals & houses of prostitution. Became friendly with older man (German immigrant) who was pro-Hitler & member of German-American Bund. PROSPECT began to develop anti-Negro attitude at this time.

PROSPECT enlisted in U.S. Army (2/19/46) & requested Germany as duty station. Attended basic training at Camp Crowder, Missouri & assigned (as truck driver) to Q.M. Corps in occupied Germany (7/46). Later assigned as driver to MP battalion in Bremerhaven. Trafficked in black market cigarettes, frequented prostitutes & was treated for syphilis & gonorrhea. Began drinking heavily & taking Benzedrine. Transferred to Infantry Battalion, Frankfurt (4/48) & requested immediate discharge.

Request was denied. PROSPECT charged with being drunk in quarters (10/48) & held in post stockade. PROSPECT escaped, was recaptured & sentenced to 3 months hard labor. Returned to the U.S. (12/48) & given “general discharge.” Spent time at family’s home in Alton, Illinois. Hitchhiked to Los Angeles (9/49), arrested for burglary (12/9/49), sentenced to 8 months county jail time, released early for good behavior (3/50).

PROSPECT traveled east. Arrested for vagrancy (Marion, Iowa, 4/18/50), released 5/8/50. Arrested for vagrancy

(Alton, Ill., 7/26/51), released 9/51. Arrested for armed robbery (taxicab hijack, Chicago, 5/6/52, shot while attempting escape).

PROSPECT received two-year sentence. Served time at Joliet & Pontiac facilities. Established reputation as prison "Loner" & habitual user of home-brew alcohol & amphetamines. Paroled 3/12/54.

PROSPECT arrested for burglary (Alton, Ill., 8/28/54). Bailed out & absconded before trial date. Traveled east with criminal companion & shared political views (e.g., all Negroes were inferior & should be killed). Arrested (robbery of post office, Kellerville, Ill.) 3/55. Sentenced to 36 mos. Federal prison. Received at Leavenworth Penitentiary, 7/7/55. Paroled 5/58.

PROSPECT's parole jurisdiction transferred to St. Louis (family members lived there). In 7 & 8/59, PROSPECT & 2 accomplices went on supermarket robbery spree (St. Louis & Alton, Ill.). PROSPECT arrested 10/10/59. Attempted jail escape 12/15/59. Sentenced to 20 yrs. Missouri State Penitentiary. Received at Jefferson City Facility, 3/17/60.

Jeff City reputedly the toughest & most harshly run prison in the U.S. White & Negro inmates largely segregated. White inmates mostly of "Hillbilly" lineage & vocal per their hatred of Negroes. Facility had informal chapters of KKK, National States Rights Party, National Renaissance Party & Thunderbolt Legion.

PROSPECT worked in dry cleaning plant & unsuccessfully attempted escape in 10/61. PROSPECT bootlegged prison bakery goods & amphetamines, habitually injected amphetamines & frequently indulged anti-Negro tirades when "high." PROSPECT also sold & rented contraband pornographic magazines & joined informal meetings of extreme right-wing groups (attended by both convicts & guards) & often discussed his desire to "kill niggers" & "Martin Luther Coon."

PROSPECT also discussed desire to move to segregated African countries, become a "Merc" & "kill niggers." BR contends that PROSPECT was especially vituperative, even by white convict standards.

PROSPECT openly fantasized that a "White Businessman's

Association" had a $100,000 bounty out on King. This is enticing when considering recent "bounty-talk" picked up via bug at Grapevine Tavern in St. Louis. BR contends that "Bounty" concept strongly plays into PROSPECT's "get-rich-quick mentality."

PROSPECT denied parole in ′64. Attempted escape 3/11/66. Escaped 4/23/67 (hiding in an outbound bread truck).

PROSPECT stated to BR:

That he walked hill roads to Kansas City, did "odd jobs & built up a stake," bussed to Chicago & got dishwasher's job at restaurant in Winnetka. PROSPECT visited family members & childhood haunts in Alton, Quincy & East St. Louis & determined that no intensive manhunt was being conducted. PROSPECT robbed liquor store in East St. Louis (6/29/67) & stole $4,100.

PROSPECT traveled south & spent week at BR's compound (7/5–7/12/67). Grocery store near New Hebron robbed (7/8/67). BR believes PROSPECT was perpetrator. PROSPECT & BR discussed "politics" & PROSPECT apparently was not afraid that BR would report his fugitive status. PROSPECT "kept to himself," drank & took amphetamines, ignored BR's Klansmen, talked to BR exclusively & frequently stated his desire to "kill niggers," "collect nigger bounties," "hire on as a merc & kill niggers in the Nigger Congo" & "live in a white man's paradise like Rhodesia."

PROSPECT left compound (7/13/67), told BR he was driving to Canada & would call & reestablish contact. PROSPECT called 7/17/67 & gave BR phone # in Montreal.

Summation:

BR characterizes the PROSPECT as moody, acquiescent, limitedly self-sufficient and cunning, socially clumsy, easily led by stronger personalities and easily manipulated on the level of his political beliefs. His frequently stated desire to "kill niggers" and his "bounty" fixation are encouraging and serve to underline the possibility that he may require minimal sheep-dipping. The PROSPECT may be willing to shoot himself and we may be able to manipulate him into and/or control the context he shoots in.

I think he's the one. Let me know if you agree.

To digress:

I had a long conversation with Mr. Hoover yesterday. I expressed concern about the degree to which his anti-King incursions had already become public knowledge. I mentioned his statements about King, the SCLC's bug and wiretap accusations and reports on the letter which was sent to King and urged him to commit suicide, which has been detailed in several left-wing periodicals. I told him that to further protect the WHITE-HATE and anti-King arms of OPERATION BLACK RABBIT and any escalations that might arise from them, a cosmeticized, largely downscaled anti-King file should be created and stored in the FBI Archives, where it would remain and stand ready for scrutiny in the event of congressional subpoena or subpoena for civil lawsuit.

Mr. Hoover understood that this mock-file would serve to obfuscate the rowdier aspects of OBR, protect Bureau prestige and buttress the validity of his earlier, less vindictive digs at King and the SCLC. He charged me to create file entries, combine them with file entries pertaining to events within public knowledge and whip them into an overall package.

I will undertake and accomplish this over the next several months. This mock-file will, of course, serve to obfuscate our independent escalations. I'm code-naming the file OPERATION ZORRO, a reference to the fictional do-gooder with the black mask.

I'm open to suggestions per the mock-file entries. Let me know if you have any. I would strongly advise you to burn all your OPERATION BLACK RABBIT memoranda at this time, along with this memo.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/14/67. Pouch communiqué. To: BLUE RABBIT. From: FATHER RABBIT. Marked: “Eyes Only”/“Read and Burn.”

BLUE,

Per PROSPECT: I enthusiastically endorse. Has he contacted BR from his Montreal location? If so, have Otash establish contact.

Per OPERATION ZORRO: I endorse the concept and laud your farsightedness. I’ll burn my BLACK RABBIT paperwork.

I’m assuming there’s no word on Wendell Durfee. Can you have your people step up their search?

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/16/67. Pouch communiqué. To: FATHER RABBIT. From: BLUE RABBIT. Marked: “EYES ONLY”/“READ AND BURN.”

FATHER,

The PROSPECT contacted BR. Otash contacted the PROSPECT in Montreal & advises: He will sever contact until he successfully suborns or recruits.

Per Wendell Durfee: My people are still looking. They’ve brought in three more men.

READ THIS & BURN.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/22/67. Bug-extract transcript. Marked: “Confidential”/“Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”: Director, SA D. C. Holly.

Location: Card room/Fritzie’s Heidelberg Restaurant/ Milwaukee/listening-post-accessed. Speaking: Unidentified males #1, #2 & #3, presumed organized-crime associates. (Conversation 5.6 minutes in progress.)

UM #1: (And) he will rue the day he comes here and agitates, because the day he marches in the Saint-Whoever Parade is the day all the white folks put their goddamn internecine and intramural differences aside and unite.

UM #2: They think they’re white. That’s what kills me.

UM #3: I saw a nigger march in the St. Patrick’s Parade. He had this sign that said, “Kiss Me, I’m Irish.”

UM #2: King puts them up to it. They get a toe in our world, then a foot, then an ankle.

UM #1: It’s their peckers I’m worried about. Most of them bucks got ones the size of a bratwurst.

UM #2: I was talking to Phil. You know him? “Phil the Pill.” He runs semis out of St. Louis.

UM #3: I know him. Phil the Pill. He eats co-pilots like they’re popcorn.

UM #2: Phil says there’s a contract out. You know, a bounty. Like Steve McQueen in “Wanted Dead or Alive.”

UM #1: I heard that story. You clip that nigger, you make 50 grand. It’s a story I don’t believe for one second.

UM #3: That’s right. Some cracker clips King, he comes to the Grapevine and says, “Pay me.” Everybody says, “Why? It was just a fucking rumor, and the nigger’s dead, anyway.”

(Non-applicable conversation follows.)

DOCUMENT INSERT: 9/1/67. Listening-post report. Marked: “Confidential”/“Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”: Director, SA D. C. Holly.

Location: Suite 301/El Encanto Hotel/Santa Barbara/ listening-post-accessed.

Sirs,

As per the last 9 monitoring periods (4/2/67 to date), Subject RFK was not in residence at the target location. Subject RFK rents the suite on a yearly basis & it remains empty during his absences. The (voice-activated) mounts have thus far picked up only the non-applicable conversations of El Encanto caretakers & other employees. Per orders, the listening post will continue to be manned full-time.

Respectfully,

SA C. W. Brundage

DOCUMENT INSERT: 9/9/67. Bug-extract transcript. Marked: “Confidential”/“Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”: Director, SA D. C. Holly.

Location: Banquet room/Sal’s Trattoria Restaurant/New York City/listening-post-accessed. Speaking: Robert “Fat Bob” Paolucci & Carmine Paolucci, organized-crime associates. (Conversation 31.8 minutes in progress.)

RP: You are seeing the fall of civilization as we know it.

CP: It’s just a phase. It’s like the Twist and the Hula Hoop. Right now, the shvoogs want their civil rights, so they burn a few buildings and make some woop-dee-doo. You want to stop all this riot bullshit? Give every shvoog in the country an air-conditioner and some Thunderbird Wine and let them ride out the heat in style.

RP: It’s more than the heat that gets them agitated. It’s that King and his soul brother Bobby Kennedy. They get them seeing things that ain’t there. They give them an excuse that they can pin their shitty fucking lives on, like “the white man fucked you, so what’s his is yours.” You get ten million fucking people thinking like that, and maybe one in ten acts, so you got a million angry niggers out for white scalps like fucking Cochise and Pocahontas.

CP: Yeah. I see what you mean.

RP: Someone should clip King and Bobby. You would save a million white lives, minimum.

CP: I dig you. You save lives in the long run.

RP: You clip those cocksuckers. You do it and save the world as we know it.

(Non-applicable conversation follows.)

DOCUMENT INSERT: 9/16/67. Bug-extract transcript. Marked: “Confidential”/“Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”: Director, SA D. C. Holly.

Location: Card room/Grapevine Tavern/St. Louis/ listening-post-accessed. Speaking: Unidentified Males #1 & #2, presumed organized-crime associates. (Conversation 17.4 minutes in progress).

UM #1: He saw it. My brother, I mean. He’s in the National Guard.

UM #2: But that’s Detroit. You got a higher ratio of spooks to whites there.

UM #1: Don’t tell me it can’t happen and won’t happen everywhere else. Don’t tell me it won’t happen, because it will. You trace everywhere Martin Luther Coon goes and you see pins in the map that mark dead white people.

UM #2: That’s true. You got Watts, you got Detroit, you got D.C. You got riots in our nation’s capital.

UM #1: You also got the bounty. I realize that it’s something like half real—

UM #2: Yeah, at best, because—

UM #1: Because it don’t matter as long as Joe Patriot thinks it’s real and does the job.

UM #2: Pow. He does the job. That’s the goddamn thing.

UM #1: You got to believe there’s more bounties out there. Myth or not, it just takes one guy to believe.

UM #2: Coon’s a dead man. It’s—what’s that word?

UM #1: Inevitable?

UM #2: Yeah, right.

UM #1: We outnumber the niggers. Like 20 to 1. That’s why I think it’ll happen.

(Non-applicable conversation follows.)

DOCUMENT INSERT: 9/21/67. Las Vegas *Sun* headline and subhead:

HUGHES BUYS SANDS

PAYS $23,000,000 FOR HOTEL-CASINO

DOCUMENT INSERT: 9/23/67. Las Vegas *Sun* headline and subhead:

HUGHES ON ROLL

BILLIONAIRE RECLUSE EYES CASTAWAYS AND FRONTIER

DOCUMENT INSERT: 9/26/67. Las Vegas *Sun* headline and subhead:

LAS VEGANS PRAISE HUGHES:
HE’S KING 0’ THE STRIP!

DOCUMENT INSERT: 9/28/67. Los Angeles *Examiner* subhead:

KING ESCALATES ATTACKS ON “IMPERIALIST” WAR

DOCUMENT INSERT: 9/30/67. St. Louis *Globe-Democrat* subhead:

RFK ECHOES KING: DECRIES WAR IN SPEECH

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/1/67. San Francisco *Chronicle* subhead:

RFK MUM ON PREZ’L PLANS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/2/67. Los Angeles *Times* headline and subhead:

NIXON TO PRESS:
KEEPING ′68 OPTIONS OPEN

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/3/67. Washington *Star* subhead:

SOURCES CITE LBJ’S “CONSTERNATION”:
PREZ PUZZLED OVER KING’S BROADSIDES AGAINST WAR

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/4/67. FBI field report. Marked: “Confidential”/“Eyes Only”: Director, SA D. C. Holly.

Sirs,

Per spot-tail Subject Ward J. Littell.

Subject Littell continues to divide his work time between Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Washington, D.C. He is currently working on the Las Vegas end of negotiations for the purchase of the Castaways Hotel and on the Washington end of conferences pertaining to appeals on the behalf of Teamster President James R. Hoffa. Subject Littell also continues to be intimately involved with Janice Tedrow Lukens. I have concluded, along with the other assigned agents, that Subject Littell assumes the presence of sporadically initiated tails and thus drives different workday routes in order to thwart them. That said, I should also state that Subject Littell has not been seen engaging in any sort of activity that might be deemed suspicious.

Spot-tails to be continued on the ordered basis.

Respectfully,
SA T. V. Houghton

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/9/67. Hate-mail extract. Compiled by: FATHER RABBIT. Sealed and marked: “Destroy Without Reading in the Event of My Death.”

Mail sender: Anonymous. Postmark: St. Louis, Missouri. Recipient: Dr. M. L. King. From page 1 (of 1):

Here’s another ditty for you, Coon;
The Bounty Man’s going to get your black ass soon;
Fear the NSRP, John Birch and the Klan;
Fear the wrath of the righteous All-White Man;
Better get your shroud and wait for Judgment Day;
The White Man says you’ve outlived your stay;
Grab your pickaninnies, your wine and your dope;
Grab your watermelons and don’t you mope;
Better head for Africa lickety-split;
The White Man’s going to tar your hide in shit;
When that happens all the white folks will go hooray!
And say we killed that nigger who outlived his stay!

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/30/67. Hate-mail extract. Compiled by: FATHER RABBIT. Sealed and marked: “Destroy Without Reading in the Event of My Death.”

Mail sender: Anonymous. Postmark: Pasadena, California. Recipient: Senator Robert F. Kennedy. From page 8 (of 8):

THE WORLDWIDE JEWISH PIG ORDER HAS CHRISTENED YOU WITH THE BLESSING OF THE RAPIST POPE AND THE LEARNED ELDERS OF ZION WHO HAVE CAST A SPELL OF PUS OVER THE CHILDREN WHO DARED TO FIGHT THE JEW INFIDEL IN THE NAME OF THE ARAB DIASPORA. YOUR UGLY MOTHER KNOWS YOU ARE THE SPAWN OF THE HEBREW COCKSEED AND THE RABID GOAT. THE JEWISH CANCER MACHINE FEARS THE HEADACHE DOCTOR. HE SMOKES MARLBORO CIGARETTES NOT GEFILTE FISH. HE SAYS RFK MUST DIE! RFK MUST DIE! RFK MUST DIE! RFK MUST DIE!!!!!!!

(Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., New Orleans, Mexico City, 11/4/67–12/3/67)

Dominoes: the Dl/the Sands/the Castaways. On tap: The Frontier.

Ten pins: Non-Mormon skim men snitched to the Feds. Old skim hands in custody.

Littell planned. Littell sowed. The Boys reaped. Bribes/PR/extortion. Blackmail/philanthropy.

It took four years. Drac owns Las Vegas now. It’s Drac’s kingdom complete.

Three units down. More up. Eight pending. Drac buys Vegas. Drac owns Vegas—cosmetically.

The Boys exult. The Boys praise Littell. The Boys co-opt Wayne Senior. Wayne Senior deploys. Wayne Senior recruits:

Mormons for the DI. Mormons for the Castaways. Mormons for the Sands. Mormon floor men/Hughes-vetted/legit. Mormon *skim* men/non-vetted/non-legit.

More hotels on tap. More Mormon hires pending. Drac gets the inked deeds. Drac gets the glory. The Boys get the money.

Littell braced the Boys. The Boys agreed: Let’s suspend the skim. Let Drac move in. Let the ink dry. Let the shouts subside.

Skim then. Rig the vacuums. Put the hose to Drac.

Littell said we’re ready. I’ve pegged sixty-one businesses. They’re pension-fund-indebted. They’re subornable. They’re cake. We revive the skim. We suborn said businesses. We divert profits and plant foreign casinos.

It looked good on paper. It *was* good for him. It upped his retirement stakes.

Retire me. I'm stretched thin. I'm *scared*. Drac scared him. Drac talked PR. Drac talked financial disclosure.

I'll buff my image. I'll audit my books. I'll publish clean stats. *Don't* do it. *I've* pilfered. Don't disclose *my* tithe stats.

Retire me. I'm stretched thin. My love life's a mess. I dream about Jane. I make love to Janice.

Janice found work. Janice bought a golf shop. She sold golfwear at the Sands Hotel. She built a rep.

She did trick shots at her indoor range. She built a rep. She ragged herself like Barb did. She built a rep. She performed. She drew customers. She made money.

She still limped. She still cramped. She still spasmed up. She drank less now. She clowned less. She tattled less. She laid off the Tedrows. She'd outgrown their spell.

He slept with Janice. Jane shared the bed. Jane bludgeoned/ Jane shot-gunned/Jane bled.

Retire me. I'm stretched thin. It hurts to sleep. My hate life's a mess.

He worked with Wayne Senior. They haggled business points. Wayne Senior talked Image.

Shitfire—looks *count*. Screw hate tracts—*I* know Dick Nixon.

Wayne Senior talked Image. Wayne Senior talked change. Wayne Senior did not talk BLACK RABBIT. Wayne Senior performed. Wayne Senior delivered.

He saw Nixon. He passed the word. He said Dick *will* run. He said Dick wants that sitdown. He said Dick wants your cash.

Littell called Drac. Drac agreed. Drac said he'd pay that percentage. Littell called the Boys. The Boys whooped and crowed.

Dick likes money. Dick will grant "favors." Wayne Senior says so. He'll run. He'll gain ground. He'll win primaries. He'll get the nomination. He'll meet with Littell.

Retire me. I'm stretched thin. I hate Wayne Senior. I hate Tricky Dick. I love Bobby. I love Bobby's kid.

He passed through D.C. He met Paul Horvitz. He culled Jane's file. He retyped her notes. He snitched second-line mobsters to Bobby.

He met Paul four times. He delivered four parcels. Paul was wowed. Paul cited Bobby. Bobby was very impressed. They held the data. They verified facts. They withheld disclosure.

Paul said our deal holds. We'll hold your dirt—until late '68. Paul said Bobby might run. LBJ might retire. Let's await '68.

He met Paul. He played southern poof. He deployed a fake beard and drawl. They talked politics. He weaved lies. He described his life in Mississippi.

School in De Kalb. Liberal values. Southern gentility. The Klan drove him out. He moved north. Displaced aristocracy.

Paul heard his tales. Paul endured dinner dates. He's lonely. He's old. He loves Bobby.

Retire me. I'm stretched thin. I indulge fantasies.

He traveled. He worked. He tithed the SCLC. He ran tail checks. He caught tails. He diversionaried.

He calculated. He tail-scanned. He nailed the rotation: Spot tails/one day on/nine days off. He confirmed the nine to one ratio. He tail-checked accordingly.

Paranoia: valid and justified. Nine days free. One day restricted. Act accordingly.

Mr. Hoover never called. Ditto BLUE RABBIT. He did the bug jobs. Agents directed him. BLUE RABBIT disappeared. He got no pouches. He got no attaboys. He got no thank-yous. He got no welcome back. He got no tix to BLACK RABBIT.

It scared him. It said they've upscaled BLACK RABBIT. It said they're doing bad things.

He met Bayard Rustin once a month. They had lunch in D.C. Bayard said he almost got blackmailed—child, what a scene!

Bayard ran it down. Bayard described mirrors and mike plants. Bayard described a fruit squeeze. It felt like Freddy Otash. It could be Pete B.

Pete was bereft then. Barb had left him. Pete sulked accordingly. Littell tracked the date Bayard gave him. Littell tracked probability.

He was bugging Mob spots then. He braced Freddy T. Freddy declined work. Freddy *had* work. Freddy said Fred O. gigs me.

Don't ask Pete. He might say yes. He might say I pulled that queer squeeze.

Retire me. I'm stretched thin. My friends frighten me.

He met Bayard. Bayard talked. Bayard said Martin scares me. He's making plans. They're his boldest yet. He'll make more enemies.

Rent strikes/boycotts/poor people's unions/poor people's marches/poor people's heresies.

Littell heard it. Littell remembered—it's Lyle Holly's prophecy.

Bayard was scared. Martin was crazed. Martin breathed enmity. His plans would shock. His plans would divide. His plans would stir enmity. His plans would trash his triumphs. His plans would spark backlash. His plans would build heresy.

Littell *saw* it:

It's Martin Luther/1532. It's Europe aflame. There's the Pope. He's Mr. Hoover. His old world's aflame.

Retire me. I want to watch. I want to watch passively.

Jimmy Hoffa's in jail. I'll file his appeals. Retire me. I travel to excess. I country-hop. Please retire me.

He flew south. He hit Mexico City. He made four trips and met with Sam G. They talked colonization. Sam talked travel spree.

Sam toured Central America. Sam toured the Caribbean. Sam brought interpreters and money. Sam talked to dictators. Sam talked to puppet thugs. Sam talked to rebel fiends.

Sam did gruntwork. Sam did groundwork. Sam laid seeds. Sam said I love your cause. I support it and pledge fraternity. Here's some money. There'll be more. You'll hear from me.

Sam spread seed money. Sam seeded all ideologies. Plant seeds—sow revolt and repression—casino ideology.

Retire me. I get airsick. Casino smoke sickens me. Retire Pete. He's tired too. His work sickens me. I disapprove—I've got no right—it's hypocrisy.

Pete sold dope. Pete ran his cab stand. Pete ran his hotel-casino. Pete had Cuba. Pete had Vietnam. Pete had two-front lunacy. Pete missed Vietnam. Pete missed Barb more. Barb made him stay home. Pete curtailed his lunacy.

Pete stayed home. Pete travel-spreed. Pete went to Barb's turf. Pete went to smalltown Wisconsin.

Pete called him. Barb called him. He got two versions. Vegas to Sparta—Pete leaves expectant—Pete returns whipped.

Pete worked his scams. Pete praised the war. Pete indulged habits. Barb slung hash. Barb reviled the war. Barb eschewed habits.

Love as stasis. Two takes. His-and-hers.

Retire Pete. Upgrade Wayne—*le fils de* Pete.

Pete had nightmares. Pete described them. Betty Mac/the crossbars/the noose. Pete had real pictures. *He* didn't. That made it worse.

There’s Jane Fentress—Arden Breen/Bruvick/Smith/Coates. She’s dead by knife/dead by cudgel/dead by steel sap.

The pictures varied. One soundtrack held in. Mr. Hoover’s letter—addressed to Dr. King.

“What a grim farce.” “One way out.” “A liability.”

Retire me. I’ll try to live idle. I might not succeed.

(Vietnam, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Bay St. Louis, Cuban Waters.
11/4/67–12/3/67)

More:

Troop infusions. Troop movements. Troops dead.

More:

Bomb raids. Ground raids. Resistance.

Resistance in-country. Resistance at home. Resistance worldwide. The war was MORE. The biz was LESS. Wayne knew it.

Less:

Territory. Profit growth. Potential.

The kadre shared lab space. The Can Lao co-opted. Why do it? The Can Lao shipped to Europe. The kadre shipped to Vegas. Note the dichotomy.

The kadre did good biz. The Can Lao did great biz. Note the discrepancy. The war defined MORE. The biz defined LESS. Note the inconsistency.

Their turf was restricted. West Vegas was sapped. They had no growth room. Pete pouched Stanton. Pete pouched once a month. Pete said let us GROW.

Out of Vegas. Into L.A. Into Frisco.

We've got Tiger Kamp. We've got poppy slaves. We've got dope fields boocoo. We can GROW. We can earn MORE. The Cause will GROW.

Stanton said no. Stanton insisted. Wayne read his tone. Said tone was hinky. Said tone was quasi-weird. Pete wants MORE. Stanton wants LESS. Note the entropy.

Wayne wanted MORE. Wayne rotated east. Wayne saw more incessant. More troops smoking weed. More troops popping pills. More troops scared incessant.

Big “H” killed fear. They’d find it. Wayne knew.

The war thrilled him. The war rocked. The war grew. The “Cause” bored him. The “Cause” vexed. The “Cause” entropied.

Log it: Cuban runs/forty-plus/no at-sea resistance. It was boring now. It was impotent. It was quasi-weird.

The Cause was flypaper. Pete was a fly. Pete was stuck on 1960. Laurent was a fly. Flash was a fly. They buzzed Cuba persistent.

They talked stale shit. They talked coups and Reds. They talked domino jive. Bob talked stale shit. Bob talked race and Reds. Bob talked domino jive.

Bob vibed hinky. Bob vibed it weeks running. Bob vibed quasi-weird. Bob vibed anxious. Bob vibed scared. Bob vibed jazzed.

Bob vibed stuck. Cuba is flypaper. Cuba is quicksand. Cuba is glue.

Vegas is quicksand. Barb knows it. Barb extricates. Pete knows it. Pete stays.

Pete hit Wayne. Wayne took it. Pete apologized. Pete was frayed. Barb was in exile. The biz was exiled.

Pete wants MORE. Pete’s frustrated. Stanton’s entrenched. Pete’s stuck. Pete’s impeded. Pete’s fuse might fry.

Pete and Barb cut a truce. Said truce was a travel ban—Vietnam *nyet*. Pete was stuck. Pete was truce-restricted. Pete talked truce overrides.

I’ll fly to Saigon. I’ll brace Stanton. I’ll demand MORE.

And Stanton will wink. And Stanton will smile. And Stanton will mollify.

The war was MORE. The biz was LESS. Wayne Senior was MORE plus. They were equals now. Friends of sorts. Friends with non-Pete dimensions.

Pete seeks MORE. Pete seeks more dope turf and money. Wayne Senior seeks MORE. Wayne Senior dumps his hate biz. Wayne Senior disdains more money. Pete finds frustration. Wayne Senior finds Dick Nixon.

Pete hobnobs with pushers. Pete schleps cab calls. Pete walks flypaper. Wayne Senior plays golf. Wayne Senior shoots skeet. Wayne Senior drinks with Dick Nixon.

He worked for them. They were inimical types. They ran real to putative father. He loved both their women. He lived sans women. Wendell D. and Lynette made that fly. He head-tripped women. He head-tripped Barb mostly. He head-tripped Barb until then.

He hit her. She grabbed a knife. She ran from him and Pete. She grabbed the war. She sifted shit through.

Pete. Pete's gigs. The Life.

She kicked dope. She kicked the Life. She ran smug now. She jumped off flypaper. Her shit cohered. She lost her allure. He loved her more. He liked her less. His torch fizzled.

He head-tripped Janice. It ran twenty years now. He fucked her for payback on Dallas. He extricated. She paid.

She still limped. She still cramped. Her breath still spasmed. He saw her in Vegas. He saw her with Ward and solo. She saw him watching sometimes. She always smiled. She always waved. She always blew kisses.

It took him back. Old glimpses in windows. Peeks through cracked doors.

She was forty-six now. He was thirty-three. Her hips cocked funny. She had limp side-effects. He wondered how far her legs spread.

Relight the torch. Dig the glow. Groove on the cause-and-effect. She's real again. She's in your head—because you're back with Wayne Senior.

Grunt work. Hate-mail duty. Let's study hate. Let's see how it works. Let's see what it says.

Wayne Senior said I'm storing intelligence. I'm skimming data off the FBI. I'm polling resentment. I'm taking its pulse. It's academic for now.

Wayne Senior spoke lofty. Wayne Senior spoke abstract. Wayne Senior spoke with forked tongue.

Wayne knew:

He's teaching you. Read the hate. Don't hate fatuously.

He rotated. He ran Saigon to D.C. He pulled intercepts. He did sneak-ins. He bagged mail. He mimeographed. He print-dusted. He got zero. He ran ninhydrin tests. He got loop whirls and partials. He learned the Hate Alphabet.

He did re-sneaks. He replaced the mail. He savored the Hate Alphabet.

A for Anger. F for Fear. I for Idiocy. D for Dumb. R for

Ridiculous. J for Justification.

Coloreds mock order. Coloreds foist chaos. Coloreds breed lunacy. The haters knew it. Wayne Senior knew it. *He* knew it. The haters lived to hate. That was wrong. *That* was lunacy. The haters lived disordered lives. The haters thrived on chaos. The haters mimed the hatees.

S for Stupid. R for Resentful. W for Weak.

He learned his lessons. He took Wayne Senior's Hate Course. He searched for Wendell Durfee.

He rotated south. He made Cuban runs. He rotated west to L.A. He prowled Compton. He prowled Willowbrook. He prowled Watts.

He watched Negroes. Negroes watched him. He stayed cool. He stayed calm. He knew his ABCs. Wendell was nowhere. Wendell, where you be? I hate you. I'll kill you. Hate won't hinder me.

Hate smart—like Wayne Senior. P for Poised. B for Brave. C for Collected.

He did intercepts. He culled hate. He caught lunacy.

Weird:

He muscled a deadbeat. It was late '66. The clown was named Sirhan Sirhan. Sirhan had hate tracts. RFK got some hate notes. They were margin scrawled the same way.

All cap letters/headaches and pus/"Jewish Cancer Machine." Sirhan drools. Sirhan hates stupid. Sirhan foists lunacy.

Don't do it. It's counterproductive. It's dumb. It's insanity.

Hate smart. Like Wayne Senior. Like me.

(Las Vegas, Sparta, Bay St. Louis, Cuban Waters, 11/4/67–12/3/67)

You're homeless.

You're a Vegas transient. You're embargoed at home. You're a fucking refugee.

It's jail. It's Skid Row. It mocks rotation. It's Splitsville. It's mock-divorce. It's past separation.

Barb split. Pete traveled—all-love rotations. Pete flew back alone—non-love rotations. The trips trashed him. The trips taught him. The trips made him see: You hate Vegas now. Without Barb it's shit. You're Joe Vegas Refugee.

He had the trifecta. It was all Vegas-bred—Tiger/the dope biz/the Cavern. He couldn't split. The Boys held his lease. It was sealed and marked "Dallas."

He loved the trifecta. He hated the venue. They all intertwined.

Stateless.

He met Barb. She slung plates. No high heels/no spangles. Her sister worked her. Her sister lubed her—goooood profit perks. Barb B.—ex-lounge queen. Waitress/restaurateur.

He couldn't have her. He couldn't have her on his terms. He couldn't have her at *his* location.

He hubbed in Vegas. He flew to Mississippi. He hated it. Dumb crackers and dumb niggers. Bugs and sand fleas.

He made boat runs. He got seasick. His pulse raced. He snarfed Dramamine. The runs bored him. Stealth and scalps and nothing more. No good resistance.

He was a transient. He was travel-screwed. He was a rotation refugee.

You want things. You can't have things. You can't give things up. You've got habits. You don't need them. You can't give them up.

Cigarettes. Pizza pie and pecan pie. Stiff drinks and steak.

He hid his habits in Sparta. Barb never saw. He flew out. He de-purified. He binged on rotations.

Transient. Glutton. Exile. Exiled on boat runs/exiled down south/exiled in Vegas.

Drac's town now—Drac's town cosmetic.

He knew Drac. They went back. They met in '53. He worked for Drac. He scored Drac dope. He scored Drac his women. Drac was a glutton then. Drac was a glutton still.

He cruised the DI. He bribed a Mormon for a look-see. He bought a looooong look.

Drac dozed. Drac wore drip cords. Drac got a transfusion. Mormon blood/hormone-laced/pure. Drac was gaunt. Drac was svelte. Drac was chic. Drac wore a Kotex-box hat and Kleenex-box slippers.

Drac was on dope. Barb was off dope. Pete pushed dope non-boocoo. Pete was hamstrung. Pete was profit-screwed. Pete was a dope refugee.

He begged Stanton. He said *let me expand*. Stanton always refused. He pouched Stanton. He pleaded and begged. Stanton always refused. Stanton always cited Carlos. Stanton always cited the Boys.

They don't want it. Live with it. It stands as their call. He lived with it. He hated it. He felt refugized.

He got ideas.

I'll fly to Saigon. I'll brace Stanton. I'll break the truce. I'll tell Barb to stamp my visa. I'll make her unleash my gonads.

I'll tell Stanton to expand the biz or shove it up your ass. Stanton would shit. Carlos would shit. The Boys *might* temporize.

It might work. It might shake them. It might serve to de-refugize. He needed it. He needed something. He needed MORE.

He got bored. He got crazed. He fretted shit.

Like: Cuba—*mucho* boat runs—no at-sea resistance.

Like: Bob Relyea—nervous and hi-amped.

He's talking trash. He's saying our work's dead. He's saying I've got work transcendent.

He went by Bob's kompound. He saw Bob with guns. He saw

Bob burn three-zero codes.

Huh? What? Don’t grab at straws. Don’t be this skittish refugee.

He got bored. He got crazed. His pulse skipped.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/3/67. Bug-extract transcript. Marked: “Confidential”/“Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”: Director, SA D. C. Holly.

Location: Card room/Grapevine Tavern/St. Louis/listening-post-accessed. Speaking: Norbert Donald Kling & Rowland Mark DeJohn, paroled felons (Armed Robbery/Bunco/GTA) & presumed organized-crime associates. (Conversation 14.1 minutes in progress.)

NDK: And people hear, you know. Word goes out.

RMDJ: It’s like the name of this place. The Grapevine.

NDK: Yeah. The grape for the ape.

RMDJ: Guys come through, they hear, they start thinking.

NDK: They think, shit, 50 G’s for a good deed, and it don’t go unrewarded.

RMDJ: You do it down south, no jury would convict you.

NDK: You’re right. It’s like those guys in Mississippi. They wax those civil rights humps and walk scot-free.

NDK: You know who I saw here? Like in May?

RMDJ: Who?

NDK: Jimmy Ray. I bought goofballs off him in Jeff City.

RMDJ: I heard he broke out.

NDK: He did. He breaks out, then he’s disappointed that there’s no big manhunt.

RMDJ: That’s Jimmy in a nutshell. Hey, world, notice me.

NDK: He hates niggers. You got to give him that.

RMDJ: He was tight with the guards. At Jeff City, I mean. I never liked that about him.

NDK: The guards were klanned-up. That was the attraction to Jimmy.

RMDJ: That one guard was a pisser. Remember him? Bob Relyea.

NDK: Bob the Brain. Jimmy called him that.

RMDJ: I heard he’s klanned-up down south now.

NDK: Klanned-up and a snitch is what I heard. As in, he works for the Feds.

RMDJ: That could be. Remember, he left Jeff and joined the Army.

NDK: Jimmy said he might go see him.

RMDJ: Jimmy’s a talker. He always talked about a whole lot of things.

NDK: He heard about the bounty. He nearly bust a gut talking about that.

RMDJ: Talk's talk. Jimmy said he fucked Marilyn Monroe, which don't mean he really did it.

(Non-applicable conversation follows.)

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/3/67. Bug-extract transcript. Marked: “Confidential”/“Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”: Director, SA D. C. Holly.

Location: Office/Mike Lyman’s Restaurant/Los Angeles/ listening-post-accessed. Speaking: Unidentified Males #1 & #2, presumed organized-crime associates. (Conversation 1.9 minutes in progress.)

UM #1: … you’ve heard the stories, right?

UM #2: Just glimmers. Carlos knows they’re on the boat, so he sends some guys to the Keys.

UM #1: Not just any guys. He sends Chuck the Vice and Nardy Scavone.

UM #2: Oh, Jesus.

UM #1: You have to assume that he wanted to prolong things. It is well known that Chuck and Nardy work slow.

UM #2: I have heard the stories, believe me.

UM #1: Here’s the good part. You’ll like it.

UM #2: So tell me. Don’t be a fucking cock-tease.

UM #1: Okay, they spot the boat. It’s docked someplace quiet. They sneak up quiet and climb on board.

UM #2: Come on, don’t string it—

UM #1: Arden and Danny see them coming. Danny starts bawling and saying rosaries. Arden’s got a gun. She shoots Danny in the back of the head to put him out of his misery. She aims at fucking Chuck and Nardy, but the fucking gun jams.

UM #2: Fuck, that is rich. That is just—

UM #1: Chuck and Nardy grab her and tie her down. Carlos wants to know why they rabbited and did someone tip them off. Chuck’s got his vice in a toolbox. He puts Arden’s head in. He leans on the handle, but Arden won’t give it up.

UM #2: Jesus.

UM #1: He cracked all her teeth and broke her jaw. She still wouldn’t talk.

UM #2: Jesus.

UM #1: She bit her tongue off. She couldn’t talk if she wanted to, so Nardy capped her.

UM #2: Jesus.

(Non-applicable conversation follows).

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/3/67. Pouch communiqué. To: Dwight Holly. From: Fred Otash. Marked: “Conñdential”/“Eyes Only”/ “Read & Burn Immediately.”

DH,

Here’s the summary on my dealings with the PROSPECT to date, including my reasoning on why I think we should use him. I hate writing things down, so READ & BURN IMMEDIATELY.

1 - Contact with PROSPECT established 8/16/67, at bar (“Acapulco”) downstairs from PROSPECT’s residence (“Har-K Apts”) in Montreal. PROSPECT was using alias “Eric Starvo Galt.” I utilized my fake appearance & Latin accent & used the alias “Raul Acias.”

2 - At Acapulco I sold PROSPECT amphetamine capsules & posed as smuggler with segregationist leanings. PROSPECT & I met at Acapulco & Neptune Tavern over next several nights & discussed politics. PROSPECT admitted 2 recent robberies in states (East St. Louis, Ill. & New Hebron, Miss.) but did not mention his 4/23/67 prison escape. PROSPECT stated that he also robbed a prostitute & pimp at a “fuck pad” in Montreal shortly after his arrival. He got $1,700 but was spending $ fast & would “soon be broke.”

3 - PROSPECT discussed his need to secure ID which would allow him to get a Canadian passport & thus travel to other countries. I told him I had connections & would help him. I lent him small amounts of money, supplied him with amphetamines & discussed politics with him. He frequently mentioned his hatred of M. L. King & desire to “kill niggers in Rhodesia.” I stalled him per the ID papers & continued to lend him $. PROSPECT became nervous & stated his desire to return to the states, go to Alabama & “Maybe go to work for Governor Wallace.” I saw that he was determined to go & improvised a plan.

4 - I told him I had some narcotics for him to drive across the border & would pay him $1,200. He agreed to do the job. I filled a briefcase with sand, locked it & gave it to him, then met him on the American side. This was a test to see if he would steal the briefcase or would prove to be as compliant as I thought he would be.

5 - He passed the test & made 2 other “narcotics runs” for me. I saw that he was determined to drive to Alabama & told him I would get him his ID, a new car & more $, because I had more “jobs” for him to do. PROSPECT stated that he wanted to spend time in Birmingham, because of its history of “nigger bombings.” I gave him $2,000 & told him to wait for a letter at Birmingham General Delivery. I also gave him a phone-drop # to call me at in New Orleans.

6 - This was the risk part of the operation, because there was a chance the PROSPECT would ditch out on me. If he didn’t, it would confirm his pliable nature & suitable nature for our job.

7 - PROSPECT called phone-drop on 8/25 & gave his address as “Economy Grill & Rooms” in Birmingham. I mailed him $600 & a small supply of biphetamine capsules, flew to Birmingham & surveilled him from discreet distances. PROSPECT visited the National States Rights Party HQ, purchased right-wing leaflets & bumper stickers & holed up in his room. I called him (allegedly long-distance) & agreed to give him $2,000 (advance against future jobs) so he could buy a new car. I wired the $ to him & surveilled his purchase of a 1966 Mustang.

8 - PROSPECT secured an Alabama driver’s license (9/6/67) under name “Eric Starvo Galt” & registered the ’66 Mustang. I met PROSPECT in Birmingham, drank & talked politics with him & told him to buy some camera equipment to sell in Mexico. PROSPECT purchased $2,000 worth of equipment, which I told him to “sit on.”

9 - PROSPECT remained in Birmingham, took a locksmith’s course & dance lessons & surreptitiously filmed women from his rooming-house window. I remained in Birmingham & took pains never to be seen with him. My plan was to situate PROSPECT in various places & give him orders that would sound ridiculous should he be captured & interrogated after our operation. PROSPECT’s need for $ & amphetamines kept him beholden to me.

10 - I wrote PROSPECT on 10/6/67 & told him to meet me in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico with the camera equipment. PROSPECT agreed to meet me after he “fenced the goods.” Again, I promised to secure him valid ID papers & added

that I could get him a Canadian passport. PROSPECT met me in Nuevo Laredo with $ from the equipment he fenced, at a loss. I told him I was not mad & had more "narcotics runs" for him. PROSPECT was mad that I had not yet secured papers for him, but agreed to stay in Mexico & wait for my calls.

11 - PROSPECT traveled throughout Mexico by car & called me at phone-drop in New Orleans. I forwarded sums of $ to him at American Express offices & paid him for 4 "narcotics runs" from McAllen to Juarez. I met with PROSPECT 4 times from 10/22/67 to 11/9/67 & drew him out on political issues. PROSPECT described a "Bounty" offered thru the Grapevine Bar in St. Louis ($50,000 to kill MLK), which sounded like a fantasy but indicated that he might be willing to step up for D-Day, which would upgrade his role in our plan. PROSPECT was drinking heavily, taking amphetamines & smoking marijuana in Mexico & while there got into altercations with prostitutes & pimps. PROSPECT drove to Los Angeles (without calling me) & called with address on 11/21/67. He stated he wants more work from me, is taking self-hypnosis & self-improvement courses & is visiting "segregationist bookstores." He urged me to get him his passport papers as an "advance against future jobs."

12 - PROSPECT remains in L.A. I'm L.A.-based, so I'll be able to surveil him. PROSPECT remains pliable & I'm convinced he'll work for us. Have we got a date & or location yet?

I'll pouch again when required. Again, READ & BURN.

F.O.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/4/67. Pouch communiqué. To: Fred Otash. From: Dwight Holly. Marked: “Confidential”/“Eyes Only”/“Read & Burn.”

F.O.,

No date or location yet. Continue with PROSPECT. Will try to secure RED RABBIT’s travel plans.

READ THIS & BURN.

D.C.H.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/4/67. Atlanta *Constitution* headline and subhead:

KING ANNOUNCES "POOR PEOPLE'S MARCH" ON WASHINGTON

PLEDGES TO WORK FOR "REDISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH"

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/5/67. Cleveland *Plain Dealer* headline and subhead:

KING ON SPRING MARCH:

“TIME TO CONFRONT POWER STRUCTURE MASSIVELY”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/6/67. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: “Recorded at the Director’s Request”/“Classified Confidential 1-A: Director’s Eyes Only.” Speaking: Director Hoover, President Lyndon B. Johnson.

LBJ: Is that you, Edgar?

JEH: It’s me, Mr. President.

LBJ: That goddamn march. It’s all over the news.

JEH: I’ve read the announcements. They’ve fulfilled my very worst fears and apprehensions.

LBJ: That son-of-a-bitch is bringing an army to protest me, after all I’ve done for the Negro people.

JEH: The march will unleash a bloodbath.

LBJ: I asked him to call it off, but the son-of-a-bitch refused. He’s killing my chance to get reelected. He’s in cahoots with that spoon-fed cocksucker, Bobby Kennedy.

JEH: I will let you in on a little-known fact, Mr. President. Bobby allowed me to tap and bug King himself, back in ’63. He has forgotten his initial misgivings in his rush to embrace that Communist.

LBJ: The cocksucker wants my job. King’s creating the fucking dissent that will get it for him.

JEH: I’m putting 44 agents on King. They will disseminate derogatory data nationwide. I will do everything in my power to subvert this march.

LBJ: Edgar, was there ever a better friend to the Negro people than me?

JEH: No, Mr. President.

LBJ: Edgar, has my legislation improved the lot of the Negro people?

JEH: Yes, Mr. President.

LBJ: Edgar, have I been a friend to Martin Luther King?

JEH: Yes, Mr. President.

LBJ: Then why is that cocksucker trying to cornhole me when I’ve bent over backwards to befriend him?

JEH: I don’t know, Mr. President.

LBJ: He’s a worse bane to my fucking existence than this fucking war I’m fucking knee-deep in.

JEH: I’m going to plant a Negro in the SCLC. He used to work as my chauffeur.

LBJ: Tell him to chauffeur King off a cliff.

JEH: I understand your frustration, Sir.

LBJ: I'm getting fucked from two flanks. I'm fighting a two-front war against a King and a fucking Kennedy.

JEH: Yes, Mr. President.

LBJ: You're a good man, Edgar.

JEH: Thank you, Mr. President.

LBJ: Do what you can on this, all right?

JEH: I will, Sir.

LBJ: Goodbye, Edgar.

JEH: Goodbye, Mr. President.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/7/67. Los Angeles *Examiner* subhead:

BUSINESS COMMUNITY ATTACKS KING FOR “POOR PEOPLE’S MARCH”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/9/67. Dallas *Morning News* subhead:

SPRING MARCH ON WASHINGTON "SOCIALISTIC,"
BUSINESS LEADERS CHARGE

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/17/67. Chicago *Tribune* headline and subhead:

NIXON IN ’68?

EX-VEEP TO ANNOUNCE CANDIDACY?

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/17/67. Miami *Herald* headline and subhead:

CLERGYMEN ON WASHINGTON MARCH:

“A CALL TO ANARCHY AND RIOTS”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/18/67. Chicago *Sun-Times* subhead:

RFK PRAISES WASHINGTON MARCH
MUM ON WHITE HOUSE PLANS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/18/67. Denver *Post-Dispatch* headline and subhead:

WILL HE OR WON'T HE?
PUNDITS ASSESS LBJ'S REELECTION PLANS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/20/67. Boston *Globe* subhead:

KING CALLS FOR WAR PROTESTERS TO EMBRACE POOR PEOPLE'S MARCH

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/21/67. Sacramento *Bee* subhead:

EXPECT NIXON TO RUN, GOP INSIDERS SAY

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/22/67. Los Angeles *Times* subhead:

RFK, HUMPHREY PLAYING COY?AWAITING LBJ'S DECISION?

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/23/67. Kansas City *Star* subhead:

ROTARY PRESIDENT CALLS
KING MARCH “COMMUNIST INSPIRED”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/28/67. Las Vegas *Sun* headline and subhead:

FRONTIER HOTEL FALLS TO HUGHES
BILLIONAIRE’S VEGAS ROLL CONTINUES!

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/4/68. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. (OPERATION BLACK RABBIT Addendum.) Marked: “Recorded at the Director’s Request”/“Classified Confidential 1-A: Director’s Eyes Only.” Speaking: Director, BLUE RABBIT.

DIR: Good morning.

BR: Good morning, Sir.

DIR: RED RABBIT is misbehaving. He’s being a very bad bunny.

BR: I’ve been reading the newspapers, Sir. I think he’s stepped over the line.

DIR: He has, but not to the extent where he’ll discredit himself finitely. He is immune to that form of censure. He is riding a wave of unjustified discontent that is bigger than any of us.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: Lyndon Johnson is furious. He despises himself for the way he’s coddled RED RABBIT. He knows that this wave of silly discord is partially of his manufacture.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: I’ve planted a Negro within the SCLC. My former chauffeur, no less.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: He’s a sensible Negro. He despises Communists more than the white power structure.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: He tells me the SCLC is in a state of great disarray. They are attempting to recruit an army of the wretched to compete with Hannibal’s hordes.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: They will storm our nation’s capital. They will urinate and fornicate with abandon.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: This display of pique will be a catastrophic disaster. It will encourage the unruly and criminally prone and give them an unprecedented license. The ramifications will be severe and nihilistically defined.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: I am at my wits’ end, Dwight. I do not know what more I can do.

BR: There's a counter-consensus brewing, Sir. I know you've been reading the bug transcripts.

DIR: I would define that consensus as too localized, too little, and too late.

BR: Some men are offering a bounty.

DIR: I would not be overly perturbed to see it happen.

BR: The concept is very much out there.

DIR: I would not like to be stuck with the task of investigating such an incident. I would be inclined to work for brevity and do what was best to put it behind us.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: Unreasonable actions and unjustified rage serve to spark reasoned and measured responses.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: I take comfort in that.

BR: I'm glad to hear it, Sir.

DIR: Is there anything I can do for you, Dwight?

BR: Yes, Sir. Could you speak to your contact and pouch me RED RABBIT's itinerary for the next several months?

DIR: Yes.

BR: Thank you, Sir.

DIR: Good day, Dwight.

BR: Good day, Sir.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/8/68. Pouch communiqué. To: Fred Otash. From: Dwight Holly. Marked: “Confidential”/“Eyes Only”/“Read & Burn Immediately.”

F.O.,

On go. Send update on PROSPECT. RED RABBIT’s travel plans to follow.

READ & BURN.

D.C.H.

> DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/18/68. Pouch communiqué. To: Dwight Holly. From: Fred Otash. Marked: "Confidential"/"Eyes Only"/ "Read & Burn Immeidately."

D.H.,

Per PROSPECT's activities from 12/3/67 to present date.

1 - I met with PROSPECT 6 times. I continued to give him $ as advances "against future jobs." We discussed politics & PROSPECT frequently mentioned Geo. Wallace's presidential campaign, "niggers" & "the bounty on Martin Luther Coon." PROSPECT continued to press me for travel papers & as previously I stalled him. PROSPECT divided his time between his apt (1535 N. Serrano, Hollywood), the Sultan's Room at the St. Francis Hotel-Apts (Hollywood Blvd) & the Rabbit's Foot Club (appropriate!!!!) also on Hollywood Blvd. PROSPECT continued to discuss his plans to travel to Rhodesia & on 3 occasions said he might "kill Coon, collect the bounty & seek political asylum in Rhodesia."

2 - PROSPECT became involved with woman at Sultan's Room, who talked him into driving her brother to New Orleans to "pick up her friend's kids." PROSPECT told me about this & asked for travel $. I gave him $1,000 & told him I would meet him in N.O. PROSPECT & woman's brother drove to N.O. (12/15/67), arrived on 12/17 & stayed at the Provincial Motel. I met PROSPECT 3 times, gave him $ & promised future jobs. PROSPECT remained in N.O. & frequented pornographic bookstores. PROSPECT, woman's brother & 28-yr-old girls left N.O. on 12/19 & arrived in L.A. on 12/21.

3 - PROSPECT settled into L.A. routine. I spot-tailed him on 6 occasions & met with him on 6 more. PROSPECT visited pornographic bookstores, took hypnosis courses & told me he intended to hypnotize women into acting in porno films that he would direct. PROSPECT frequented the Sultan's Room & the Rabbit's Foot Club, drank habitually & habitually used amphetamines. He frequently discussed the "bounty" & his plans to "escape" to Rhodesia. During this period PROSPECT visited the office of the L.A. Free Press & placed a classified ad seeking women for oral sex.

PROSPECT also purchased liquid methamphetamine at the Castle Argyle Apts (Franklin & Argyle). He routinely stays up for 2 & 3 days at a time & I have noticed recent needle tracks on his arms.

4 - PROSPECT stated (4 occasions) that his intentions are to stay in L.A. & “do jobs” for me, join a swinger’s club & figure out a way to “get the bounty & shag to Rhodesia.” I’ve started talking about the bounty & ways to get at MLK & PROSPECT has not noticed any shift in my tone or personality, because (a) he’s seriously disturbed & extremely self-obsessed; (b) he’s beholden to me for $ & narcotics; (c) he’s strung out & impaired by his liquor & drug use.

5 - I think I can keep him in L.A. until our go-date & then get him to the spot to either participate or work the fall-back slot. We need his prints on a rifle & some other things, which should be easy to do.

6 - He’s the guy. I’m sure of it. We’re buffered on him (nobody will ever believe his “Raul” stories) & we’ll never let him get into custody anyway.

READ THIS AND BURN. Pouch me if you need further updates. F.O.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/21/68. Boston *Globe* subhead:

MARINES IN LIFE-OR-DEATH SIEGE AT KHE SANH

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/24/68. New York *Times* headline and subhead:

TET OFFENSIVE SHOCKS U.S. FORCES

LARGEST BATTLES OF WAR RAGE

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/26/68. Atlanta *Constitution* headline:

KHE SANH—THE BLOODY SIEGE CONTINUES

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/27/68. Los Angeles *Examiner* subhead:

MASSIVE VIET BATTLES SPARK U.S. PROTESTS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/30/68. Chicago *Sun-Times* headline and subhead:

KING CITES TET HOLOCAUST

CALLS FOR UNCONDITIONAL U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWAL

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/2/68. Los Angeles *Times* headline and subhead:

NIXON ANNOUNCES PREZ'L CANDIDACY
PLEDGES TO WORK FOR "HARDWORKING, FORGOTTEN MAJORITY"

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/6/68. Sacramento *Bee* subhead:

KING IN MOBILIZING EFFORT FOR POOR PEOPLE’S MARCH

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/8/68. Houston *Chronicle* headline and subhead:

RFK IN HEATED ATTACK ON WAR

CALLS FOR NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/10/68. Cleveland *Plain Dealer* subhead:

HOOVER WARNS OF BLOODSHED IF MARCH PERMITTED

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/18/68. Miami *Herald* headline and subhead:

HUGE NIXON CROWDS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

EX-VEEP ASSUMES FRONT-RUNNER STATUS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/2/68. Boston *Globe* headline and subhead:

U.S. CASUALTY RATE MOUNTS IN VIETNAM

KING BLASTS “FUTILE” CONFLICT

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/11/68. Tampa *Tribune* headline and subhead:

WILL HE OR WON’T HE?
RFK ISN’T SAYING

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/13/68. Bug-extract transcript. Marked: “Confidential”/“Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”: Director, SA D. C. Holly.

Location: Office/Mike Lyman’s Restaurant/Los Angeles/ listening-post-accessed. Speaking: Charles “Chuck the Vice” Aiuppa & Bernard “Nardy” Scavone, organized-crime associates. (Conversation 6.8 minutes in progress.)

CA: It’s what you call a coalition. Bobby’s the president, but he needs the head ape to mobilize all the little apes and put him in power.

BS: Do the arithmetic, Chuck. They don’t have the votes.

CA: Then you add the Jews, the college kids, the comsymps and the welfare creeps. It gets to be a very tight race with those forces in play.

BS: Bobby scares me. That I will readily admit.

CA: Bobby needs the head ape to create the unrest. Then he comes in and promises all the fucked-up people the moon.

BS: Bobby would fuck us, Chuck. He’d fuck us like he fucked us when he was AG and Jack was the prez.

CA: Bobby’s only happy when he’s got some made guy’s dick in the vice.

BS: Watch it, Chuck. You say “vice,” you give me these urges.

CA: Control yourself. There’ll be more. Uncle Carlos has always got work.

BS: I’d like to put the head ape and Bobby in the vice. One squeeze and arrivederci.

(Non-applicable conversation follows.)

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/14/68. Bug-extract transcript. Marked: “Confidential”/“Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”: Director, SA D. C. Holly.

Location: Card room/Grapevine Tavern/St. Louis/ listening-post-accessed. Speaking: Norbert Donald Kling & Rowland Mark DeJohn, paroled felons (Armed Robbery/ Bunco/GTA) & presumed organized-crime associates. (Conversation 0.9 minutes in progress.)

NDK: This is rich. I grab the pay phone this morning and who do I get?

RMDJ: Jill St. John?

NDK: No.

RMDJ: What’s her name? That cooze with the go-go boots.

NDK: No.

RMDJ: Norb, shit—

NDK: It’s Jimmy Ray. He starts talking shit and says he joined a French cult in L.A. He dives muff and gets sucked off all day, and he needs money to support all his slaves, and did I know if there was a time limit on the bounty, ’cause he’s got his hands full with his slaves right now and he don’t know when he can get free.

RMDJ: That is hilarious. Jimmy’s got his hands full, all right.

NDK: One hand, at least. At Jeff City he’d geez meth and jack off for two days at a pop. He’d read these fucking pussy books and orbit. He said the fucking pictures were talking to him.

RMDJ: Jimmy’s got delusions of grandeur.

NDK: Yeah, but he hates niggers.

(Non-applicable conversation follows.)

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/15/68. Bug-extract transcript. Marked: “Confidential”/“Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”: Director, SA D. C. Holly.

Location: Suite 301/El Encanto Hotel/Santa Barbara/ listening-post-accessed. Speaking: Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Paul Horvitz (senate staff mbr.), Unidentified Male #1. (Conversation 3.9 minutes in progress.)

RFK: … simple and matter-of-fact. That’s the way my brother announced. (Pause/3.4 seconds.) Paul, you time the statement. Read it aloud, but don’t try to imitate me.

(Laughter/2.4 seconds.)

PH: About the position paper. Do we publish—

UM #1: You want the abbreviated version, right? The long form’s too dense, and the press guys will have to cut too much.

RFK: Condense it and let me read the final draft. And be damn sure there’s nothing in there about organized crime.

PH: Sir, I think that’s a mistake. It undercuts your credentials as Attorney General.

UM #1: Bob, shit. You know you’ll go after those guys ag—

RFK: I intend to, but I don’t intend to broadcast it.

UM #1: Shit, Bob. Good foes make for good campaigns. The war and Johnson are one thing, but—

PH: The Mob’s dead as a campaign issue, but—

RFK: I’ll do what I do, when I do it, but I’m not going to broadcast my intentions. Think “social justice,” “end the war” and “unite the country” and forget about the goddamn Mafia.

PH: Sir, do you think—

RFK: That’s enough. I’ve got enough on my mind without worrying about those sons-of-bitches.

(Non-applicable conversation follows.)

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/16/68. Bug-extract transcript. Marked: “Confidential”/“Stage-1 Covert”/“Eyes Only”: Director, SA D. C. Holly.

Location: Suite 301/El Encanto Hotel/Santa Barbara/ listening-post-accessed. Speaking: Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Paul Horvitz (senate staff mbr.), Unidentified Male #1. (Conversation 7.4 minutes in progress.)

RFK: … a litigator I had at Justice. He was there for most of my moves against Carlos Marcello.

UM #1: Uncle Carlos. You deported him.

RFK: I dumped his fat ass in Central America.

PH: You’re tipsy, Senator. You rarely say “ass” when you’re sober.

RFK: I’m getting tipsy now because I won’t be able to get tipsy until November. (Laughter/6.8 seconds.)

RFK: I’m starting to feel like a fighter before he goes into training. I’m dumping all the stuff I won’t be able to talk about during the campaign.

PH: That litigator. What ab—

RFK: We were talking about the Outfit. I told him that one day I’d get my second shot, and devil take the hindmost.

PH: Is that from Shakespeare?

RFK: It’s from me. It means I’m going to make those sons-of-whores pay.

(Non-applicable conversation follows).

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/17/68. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. (OPERATION BLACK RABBIT ADDENDUM.) Marked: "Recorded at the Director's Request"/"Classified Confidential 1-A: Director's Eyes Only." Speaking: Director, BLUE RABBIT.

DIR: Good afternoon.

BR: Good afternoon, Sir.

DIR: You pulled me out of a meeting. I assume you have news of some import.

BR: We hit on CRUSADER RABBIT. One of my men tailed him to a bank in Silver Spring, Maryland. He has a dummy account there. I got a bank writ and checked his transaction record.

DIR: Continue.

BR: The account was opened under a pseudonym. CRUSADER uses it for one purpose, to send checks to the SCLC. I cross-checked our bank-account covers on the SCLC and determined that checks from four other accounts, in different cities and states, have been regularly sent in. They go back to '64 and they all bear CRUSADER's handwriting. He's got a different alias for each account, and he's donated close to a half million dollars total.

DIR: I am astounded.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: He's embezzled the money or stolen it from some convenient source. His salaries would not sustain that degree of largesse.

BR: Yes, Sir.

DIR: He's indulging the Catholic concept of penance. He's atoning for the sins he's committed under my flag.

BR: It gets worse, Sir.

DIR: Tell me how. Fulfill my worst fears and most justified suspicions.

BR: An agent spot-tailed him in D.C. two days ago. He was heavily disguised and almost unrecognizable. He met a Kennedy staffer named Paul Horvitz at a restaurant and spent two hours with him.

DIR: More atonement. A roundelay that will not go unpunished.

BR: What do you want me—

DIR: Let CRUSADER continue to atone for his sins. Send copies of the March 15th and March 16th El Encanto bug tapes to Carlos Marcello, Sam Giancana, Moe Dalitz, Santo Trafficante and every other Mob patriarch in the United States. They should know that Prince Bobby has long-range plans for them.

BR: It's a bold and inspired gambit, Sir.

DIR: Good day, Dwight. Go with God and other felicitous sources.

BR: Good day, Sir.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/18/68. New York *Times* headline:

RFK ANNOUNCES BID FOR DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION

Part VI

INTERDICTION

March 19, 1968–June 9, 1968

(Saigon, 3/19/68)

You're back.

It's vivid. It's vicious. It's Vietnam.

See the troop swarms. See the displaced slopes. See said gooks talking Tet. See the boarded temples. See the truck convoys. See the antiaircraft guns.

You're back. Dig it. Saigon '68.

The cab crawled. Trucks hemmed it in. Gun trucks/food trucks/troop trucks. Tailpipe fumes windshield-high. Fume grit in your eyes.

Pete watched. Pete smoked. Pete chewed Tums.

He breached the truce. He flew overnight—Frisco/Tan Son Nhut. He lured Barb to Frisco. He pitched it as romance. He cloaked his truce override.

She nailed him. She said you're going back—I know it. He copped out. He said let me go. He said let me brace Stanton.

She said no. He said yes. It went waaaay bad. They yelled. They threw shit. They gouged walls. They scared the desk clerks. They scared the bellboys. They scared the hotel staff.

Barb split to Sparta. He roamed San Francisco. The hills bonked his heart. He drove to the airport. He sat in the bar. He saw some Carlos cats: Chuck "the Vice" Aiuppa and Nardy Scavone.

They hailed him. They bought him drinks. They got tanked and bragged. They said they clipped Danny Bruvick. It was a twosky. They clipped Danny's ex Arden-Jane. They supplied details. They supplied sound effects.

Pete walked out. Pete caught his plane. Pete ate Nembutal. He slept. The plane pitched. He saw vices snap heads.

The cab crawled. The driver grazed monks. The driver monologued: Tet kill many. Tet fuck things up. Tet kill GIs. Victor Charles naughty! Victor Charles evil! Victor Charles *baaad!*

The cab pitched. The cab lurched. Pete gagged on truck fumes. Pete's knees bumped his head.

There's the Go-Go. It's still gook graffitied. You're back. It's still ARVN-guarded. There's two Marvs door-posted. You're back.

Pete grabbed his duffel. Pete grabbed Wayne's satchel—beakers and test tubes prewrapped. Drop them off/check the lab/hit Hotel Catinat.

The driver braked. Pete got out and stretched. The Marvs snapped to. Said Marvs knew Pete—*le frog grand et fou.*

They saluted. Pete walked in the Go-Go. Pete smelled white horse residue. Piss and sweat/stale excrement/cooked dope residue.

The niteclub was *mort*. The niteclub was a dope den. It was ground-floor Hades. It was the river Styx boocoo.

Slopes on pallets. Tube tourniquets. Lighters. Cooking spoons. Dope balloons. Spikes. Fifty junkies/fifty dope beds/fifty launch pads.

Slopes cooked horse. Slopes tied off. Slopes geezed. Slopes swooned. Slopes grinned wide. Slopes sighed.

Pete walked through it. Marvs and Can Laos sold balloons. Marvs and Can Laos sold spikes. Pete walked upstairs—dig it—there's the river Styx revived.

More slopes on pallets. More tube ties. More needles. More toe-crack injections. More arm and leg pops.

Pete walked upstairs. Pete hit the lab door. Pete saw a Can Lao cat. He saw Pete. He knew Pete—*le frog fou.*

Pete dropped the satchel. Pete talked Anglo-gook:

"Equipment. From Wayne Tedrow. I leave with you."

The Can Lao smiled. The Can Lao bowed. The Can Lao reached and grabbed.

Pete said, "Open up. I check lab now."

The Can Lao bristled. The Can Lao blocked the door. The Can Lao pulled a belt piece. The Can Lao snapped the slide.

The door popped open. A gook stepped out. Pete caught a view: trays/sorting chutes/bindles prepacked.

The gook bristled. The gook slammed the door. The gook blocked Pete's view. The gook braced the Can Lao. They jabbered *en gook*. They eyed *le frog fou*.

Pete got goose bumps. Pete hinked out. Pete hinked out boocoo.

They sold balloons downstairs. They packaged two ways upstairs. They sold bindle pops too. That implied wiiiiide distribution. That implied upscale use.

The gook walked downstairs. The gook walked fast. The gook slung a duffel bag. The Can Lao re-bristled. Pete bowed and smiled. Pete pidgin-gooked:

“Is alright. You good man. I go now.”

The Can Lao smiled. The Can Lao de-bristled. Pete waved bye-bye.

He walked downstairs. He held his nose. He grazed pallets and squashed turds. He walked outside. He looked around. He saw the gook.

He’s on the street. He’s walking south. He’s got that duffel bag.

Pete tailed him.

The gook walked the dock. The gook cut inland. The gook walked Dal To Street. It was hot. The street teemed. It’s a slopehead ant farm run amok.

Pete stood out. Pete duck-walked low. Pete shaved half his height. The gook walked fast. The gook plowed monks. Pete huffed keeping up.

The gook cut east. The gook bopped down Tam Long. The gook swung down a warehouse block. The sidewalk narrowed. Foot traffic thinned. Pete saw Can Laos straight up.

Can Lao classics—goons in civvies—perched outside a warehouse. Cabs out front—good numbers—cabs perched down the block.

The gook stopped. A Can Lao checked his duffel. A Can Lao got the door. The gook walked in the warehouse. A Can Lao slammed the door. A Can Lao double-locked.

Six buildings down. Side alleys between each one. One connecting alley in back.

Pete walked.

He cut sideways. He hit the back alley. He cut down six buildings. He walked half a block.

Six warehouses/all glazed cement/all three-story jobs.

He cut back streetside. He saw first-floor windows. He heard the Can Laos out front. The windows were covered/mesh over glass/burglar-proof stuff.

Pete checked a window. Pete saw light through glass.

He took a breath. He grabbed the mesh. He pulled it back. He made a space. He made a fist. He punched the glass out.

He saw pallets. He saw tourniquets. He saw white arms tied up. He saw GIs buy bindles. He saw GIs cook horse. He saw GIs shoot up.

He slept bad. He slept weird. Jet lag plus Nembutal. He dreamed bad. He saw vices and crossbars. He saw white kids geezing up.

He woke up. He got some focus. He de-raged. He called John Stanton. He said I'm fried. I can't see straight. Let's meet tomorrow night. Stanton laughed. Stanton said why not?

Pete sedated. Pete reslept. Pete roused and jumped up. Dream shots reran wide awake—all broken-glass shots.

That boy with the tattoos. That boy with the gone eyes. That boy with the spike in his shvantz.

Pete hired a cab. Pete hunkered low. Pete ran tail ops. Cab stakeout by Hotel Montrachet—John Stanton's billet-drop.

He got more focus. The sleep helped. He totaled it all up. One GI dope den/one *at least*—kadre kode breach.

Don't sell to GIs. It's sacrilege. Sell and die hard. Stanton knew it. Stanton cosigned it. Stanton said Mr. Kao agreed. Ditto all the Can Lao.

Stanton assured Pete. Stanton assuaged Pete. Stanton puffed and mollified.

Mr. Kao ran dope Saigon-wide. Mr. Kao ran the Can Lao. Stanton knew Kao. Stanton quoted Kao: Me no push to GIs!

He had that much. That to start. "That" could go wide.

It was hot. The cab broiled. A dash fan swirled. It stirred hot air. It stirred gas fumes. It stirred tailpipe farts.

The Montrachet boomed. The MACV brass loved it. Dig the bay windows with grenade nets.

Pete watched the door. The driver ran the radio. The driver played Viet rock. The Bleatles and the Bleach Boys—all gook redubbed.

9:46 a.m. 10:02, 10:08. Fuck, this could go on—

There's Stanton.

He's walking out. He's got a briefcase. He shags a cab quick. Pete nudged his driver—tail that cab quick.

Stanton's cab pulled out. Pete's cab pulled up. A cab pulled between them. Cabs boxed them in. Cab traffic stalled and sat.

Traffic moved. They got free. They drove south. They drove slow. They snail-trailed.

The driver was good. The driver stayed close. The driver laid back discreet. They drove south. They hit Tam Long Street. They hit that warehouse block.

Stanton's cab braked. Stanton's cab stopped at *the* warehouse. Two Can Laos walked straight up.

They saw Stanton. They heel-clicked. They passed an envelope. Pete watched. Pete's cab hovered back.

Stanton's cab gunned it. Stanton's cab hauled south. Pete's cab pulled out and tailed back. A truck cut between them. Stanton's cab cut west. Pete's cab blew a red light.

Stanton's cab stopped. It's halfway down a side street. It's an all-warehouse block.

A short street/six warehouses/good warehouse block.

All Can Lao–guarded. Cabs perched curbside. Cabs perched down the block.

Pete watched. His cab idled. His cab hovered back.

The Can Laos ran up. The Can Laos swarmed Stanton's cab. The Can Laos dropped envelopes. A warehouse door popped. Four GIs walked out. Four GIs weaved on white horse.

Stanton's cab U-turned. Stanton's cab passed Pete's cab. Pete hunkered waaay low. Stanton's cab turned east. Pete's cab tailed it. Pete's cab tailed discreet.

Traffic slogged. Snail trail. Fucking turtle speed. Pete prickled. Pete chain-smoked. Pete chewed Tums.

They hit Tu Do Street. Stanton's cab stopped.

Pete knew the spot. One TV supply store/one CIA front. One door guard/one jarhead PFC/carbine at high port.

Stanton got out. Stanton grabbed his briefcase. Stanton walked in. Pete grabbed his binoculars. Pete framed the door.

The cab idled. His view bounced. His view settled flat. He checked the window. He saw drapes. They blocked his view.

He caught the jarhead. He got him in close. He got his carbine. He got the barrel. He got a stamped code.

He resighted. He got in *close-close*. Weird—a three-zero code—

per Bob Relyea's stock.

The driver cut his engine. Pete timed Stanton's trip. Ten minutes/twelve/fourt—

There:

Stanton walks out. Stanton shags his cab. Stanton takes off.

Pete nudged the driver—you stay here now. Pete walked to the shop. The jarhead saw him. The jarhead snapped to.

Pete smiled. "It's all right, son. I'm Agency, and all I need are directions."

The kid unsnapped. "Uh … yessir."

"I'm new here. Can you point me to the Hotel Catinat?"

"Uh … yessir. It's straight left down Tu Do."

Pete smiled. "Thanks. And by the way, that code stamp on your rifle intrigues me. I'm ex-Corps myself, and I've never seen that designation."

The kid smiled. "It's an exclusive CIA allotment designation, sir. You'll never see it on regular military ordnance."

Pete got pinpricks. Pete got goose bumps. Pete got this cold flush.

He held it close. He held it calm. He didn't blow up. He hit the Catinat. He chained coffee and cigarettes. He racked logic up.

Call it:

The three-zero code/strict CIA/non-military.

Bob Relyea lied. Bob Relyea konned the kadre. John Stanton helped him. Bob's gun heists and "pilferings": bullshit.

Call it:

Stanton got the guns. Per some kickback scheme. His CIA pals helped. They took dope profits. They fake-purchased guns. They laundered dope cash. They paid a CIA source. Said source supplied guns. Stanton and *who else* made money?

Stanton and Bob. Carlos logically. Trace it back. Track the time line. Trust the time line logically.

Stanton knows Mr. Kao. Mr. Kao pushes white horse. Mr. Kao shares kadre lab space. Kao runs dope camps. Kao ships to Europe. Kao exports there exclusively. Kao runs Saigon dope pads. Kao excludes GIs. Kao pushes to gooks exclusively.

Bullshit.

Kao and Stanton were jungled up. They ran Saigon dope properties. Said properties serviced gooks. Said properties serviced GIs.

Warehouse dope pads/seven minimum/kadre kode breach. Death sentence/no recourse/kadre kode breach.

Backtrack:

It's 9/65. Kao starts selling dope. Kao tells Stanton this: Me bossman. I run Can Lao. We share lab space. I no hook GIs.

Stanton kowtowed. Kao *bought* lab space. Stanton told Pete. Stanton showed Pete a ledger for proof.

Stanton lubed Pete. Stanton supplied facts and figures. Stanton supplied phony proof.

Backtrack:

Tran Lao Dinh kills dope slaves. Tran Lao Dinh steals M-base. Tran Lao Dinh resists torture. Pete fries his gonads. J. P. Mesplède assists.

Tran said I steal dope. I sell to Marvs then. That all I do. Pete persisted—give me more details—Mesplède shot Tran some juice.

Tran ad-libbed then. Tran dumped his hot seat. Tran electrified.

Pete talked to Stanton. Pete told Tran's story. Pete logicked it through:

Tran stole the base. Tran sold it to Kao. Tran did not snitch Kao. Stanton bought Pete's logic. Stanton praised Pete's logic. Stanton signed Pete's logic through.

Make the jump:

Tran worked for *Stanton*. Tran roamed Tiger Kamp. Tran was *Stanton's* pet gook. Tran steals base on Stanton's orders. Tran supplies Kao. Tran fears *Stanton*. Tran won't snitch *him*. Tran fries with glee.

Kall it kold—Stanton and Kao are kolleagues. It goes back to '65. Kadre kode breach/death decree/retroactive.

Jump two:

Pete rotates. Wayne rotates. Pete moves stateside. Laurent's there. Ditto Flash. They funnel stateside. Stanton stays in-country. Ditto Mesplède. Tiger Kamp runs low-supervised. The war escalates. More troops pass through. The kadre hits Saigon half-assed.

Shit percolates. It's outside their view. It's covert supervised. Thus Stanton-vetted dope pads sell dope to GIs.

Two years in? Maybe one. Maybe Tet-time stuff.

Bogus gun sales. GI dope sales—kadre kode breach. Stanton's nailed. Bob's nailed—kadre kode breach. Who else made money? Who else gets breached?

Pete chained cigarettes. Pete sweated gobs. Pete mainlined caffeine. He brainstormed in bed. He sopped up his clothes. He soaked up the sheets.

His logic felt strong. His logic felt big. His logic felt incomplete. His pulse raced. His chest pinged. He got bips to his feet.

Stanton said, "You look tired."

Drinks at the Montrachet. Code 3 Tet Alert. More door guards. More bomb nets. More fear.

"Travel fucks with me. You know that."

"Unnecessary travel, too."

Pete seized up. Pete juked his performance. Get mad/stay mad/reveal shit.

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying I've got eyes. You flew over to convince me to expand the business, but I'm going to say no and go you one better. I'm glad you're here, because I owe it to you to tell you to your face."

Pete flushed. Pete felt it—blood to the face.

"I'm listening."

"I'm disbanding the operation. The whole funnel. Tiger Kamp through to Bay St. Louis."

Pete flushed. Pete felt it—cardiac hues.

"Why? Give me one good fucking reason."

Stanton stabbed his swizzle stick. A piece broke off and flew.

"One, the Hughes thing has brought too much attention on Vegas, and Carlos and the Boys want to reinstate the no-dope rule. Two, the war's out of control, and it's become too unpopular at home. There's too many journalists and TV people in-country who'd love to nail some rogue CIA men for doing what we do. Three, our on-island dissidents are getting nowhere, Castro's in to stay, and my Agency colleagues all agree that it's time to pull the plug."

Pete flushed. Pete felt it—deep purple hues. *Be shocked/be pissed/be irate.*

"Four years, John. Four years and all that work for *this*? "

Stanton sipped his martini. "It's over, Pete. Sometimes the ones who care the most are the ones least able to admit it."

Pete gripped his glass. Pete snapped the rim. Ice chips spritzed and spewed. He grabbed a napkin. He blotted blood. He stanched cut residue.

Stanton leaned in. "I cut Mesplède loose. I'm selling Tiger Kamp to Mr. Kao, and I'm leaving for the States tomorrow. I'm going to disband the Mississippi end of the team and make one last Cuban run to pacify Fuentes and Arredondo."

Pete squeezed his napkin. Scotch burned the cuts. Glass shards worked through.

Stanton said, "We did what we could for the Cause. There's some consolation there."

Cab stakeout 2. 6:00 a.m./the Montrachet cab line/heat and cab fumes.

Pete hunkered low. Pete watched the door. Pete ran logic through: Stanton's disbanding/Stanton's regrouping/Stanton's kutting kadre kosts and konnektions.

Pete yawned. Pete got zero sleep. Pete prowled bars past 2:00. Pete found Mesplède. He was pissed and drunk. He was fried on his frog ass boocoo.

Stanton sacked him. Mesplède raged—*le cochon/le putain du monde.*

Pete gauged Mesplède. Mesplède gauged sincere. Mesplède gauged non-Stantonite. Pete rigged a test. Pete rigged a tour.

They drove by the dope cribs. They saw cabs pull up. They saw GIs walk out. They saw GIs bop zombified.

Mesplède was shocked. Mesplède vibed *très* sincere and *très* horrified. *On va tuer le cochon. Le cochon va mourir*.

Pete said yes. Pete amended. Pete said Die Tough.

It was hot. It was a.m.-sticky. The dash fan puffed. Pete hunkered low. Pete watched the door. Pete chewed Tums.

6:18. 6:22. 6:29. Fuck, this could go on—

There's Stanton.

With a suitcase. Errands first? *Then* the airport?

Stanton got a cab. The cab pulled out. The cab pulled out slow. Pete nudged his driver—tail that cab fast.

The driver gunned it. A cab cut him off. The driver swung around fast. Tu Do was busy. Gun trucks goosed traffic chop-

chop.

Stanton's cab cut south. Pete's cab bird-dogged it. Pete's cab stuck two car lengths back. A rickshaw cut in. A coolie lugged cargo—tail cover boocoo.

Traffic slowed. They drove south. They bopped toward the docks.

Pete's cab goosed the rickshaw. The driver rode his horn. The coolie flipped him off. Pete sighted in. Pete watched Stanton's cab antenna. It wiggles/it weaves/it tracks good.

They hit the docks. Pete saw warehouse blocks. Pete saw loooong buildings laid out. Stanton's cab braked. Stanton's cab stopped. Stanton got out.

The rickshaw passed him. Pete's cab passed him. Pete ducked and looked back. Stanton grabbed his suitcase. Stanton walked. Stanton unlocked a warehouse.

He did it mock-cool. He looked around. He stepped in. He pulled the door shut.

Stanton's cab waited. Pete's cab U-turned. Pete's cab parked down the block. Pete swiveled the fan. Pete ate hot air and watched.

Time the visit. Do it now. Run your time clock.

Pete checked his watch dial. The second hand swept. Six minutes/nine/eleven.

Stanton walked out. Stanton still had his suitcase. Stanton locked the door up.

He shagged his cab. He stretched and yawned. The cab took off north-bound—toward Tan Son Nhut.

Pete paid his driver. Pete got out and walked. The cab peeled off.

The warehouse stretched. It ran two football fields plus. One story/one steel door. Side walkways adjacent. Mesh-covered windows inset.

Pete pushed the buzzer. Chimes ricocheted. No footsteps/no voices/no peephole slid back. Two walkways. Side windows. No witnesses out.

Pete cut south. Pete hit the near walkway. Pete took his coat off.

He found a window. He flexed his hands. He peeled the mesh back. His bad hand tore. Glass specks got reimbedded.

He made a fist. He wrapped it up. He made a coat-fabric glove.

He punched out the window. Glass blew inward.

He hauled himself up. He squeezed through the frame space. He rolled to the floor. His hand throbbed. He squeezed blood out. He patted the wall. He caught a switch. Lights went on—two football fields plus.

He saw a space. He saw a floor. He saw *merchandise*. He saw swag. He saw rows and rows. He saw piles and piles.

He walked. He touched. He looked. He counted. He inventoried. He saw:

Sixty boxes stuffed with watches—pure gold waist-high. Mink coats dumped like trash—forty-three piles hip-high. Six hundred Jap motorcycles—laid side to side. Antique furniture—twenty-three rows stretched wide.

New cars—parked side by side. Thirty-eight rows/twenty-two cars per/stretched out lengthwise.

Bentleys. Porsches. Aston-Martin DB-5s. Volvos/Jaguars/Mercedes.

Pete walked the rows. Pete ID'd booty. Pete saw export tags attached. Point of shipment: Saigon. Point of entry: U.S.

Kall it easy. Kall it kold. Kall it dead:

Swag. Black-market-purchased. Non-U.S.-derived. Swag from Europe/Great Britain/the East.

Stanton ran the gig. His CIA pals helped. They bootjacked kadre money. They laundered it. They glommed luxury shit.

Stanton's disbanding. They ship the goods now. They ship duty-free. The Boys help them. Carlos walks point. They resell near-retail. Carlos takes points. Carlos pays the Stanton guys. Cold millions accrue.

The dope plan. The funnel. Cash for the Cause. Wrong—the Cause was THIS.

Pete walked the warehouse. Pete kicked tires. Pete smelled leather seats. Pete flicked antennas. Pete buffed rosewood. Pete fondled mink.

THIS.

He tracked logic. He looked for loopholes. He got none.

And:

Stanton stopped here. Stanton lugged in his suitcase.

Why?

He dropped something off. He picked something up.

Which?

Pete walked the walls. Pete tapped the walls. Pete tapped whole cement. No wall panels or hidey holes—shit.

Pete checked the floor. Pete looked for chipped paint. Pete looked for off-color streaks. Pete got whole cement/solid/no streaks.

Pete checked the ceiling. It was solid cement. No patches/no caulking/no streaks.

No bathroom. No storerooms. No closets. Four walls/one looooong strrrretch/two football fields plus.

Something was somewhere. Something was here.

Cars/minks/watches. Motorcycles/antiques. It's a day's work. It's needle meets haystack. It's do it anyway.

He walked the rows. He plowed watch piles. He dug through mink. He grabbed. He touched. He fished.

Forty-three piles/sixty boxes—shit.

He walked the rows. He popped antique drawers. He rifled and dipped.

Twenty-three rows—shit.

His stomach growled. Hours flew. No food and no fucking sleep.

He checked the motorcycles. He opened saddle bags. He popped gas caps and peeked.

Six hundred bikes—shit.

He checked the cars. He checked row by row. He checked twenty-two times thirty-eight.

He popped hoods. He popped glove compartments. He popped trunks. He checked under rugs. He checked engine mounts. He checked under seats.

Porsches first. Bentleys next—shit.

The space went dark. He worked by touch. Volvos/Jaguars/DB-5s. He got the feel. He worked fast—Braille by necessity.

Five models down. One left: Mercedes.

He hit the top row. He braced the first car. He snapped the hood. He touched the valve covers. He touched the air cleaner. He brushed a cylinder ledge.

Wait—feel the bump—Braille by necess—

He felt the bump. He felt tape. He pulled. Something tore loose. Said something was textured and flat.

Rectangular. Paged. A long book.

He grabbed it. He reached up and popped a wind wing. He tapped the key and headlights. Good kraut autowerk—fog lights beamed out.

He got down. He turned pages. He read by fog light. One cross-columned listing ledger—names/money/dates.

Key dates. Back to late ’64. The kadre ops inception.

Names:

Chuck Rogers. Tran Lao Dinh. Bob Relyea. Laurent Guéry. Flash Elorde. Fuentes/Wenzel/Arredondo.

Payouts/monthly stipends/covert. Odd spic names/cross-columned/starred with “CM”s.

Kall it: CM for Cuban Militia. Cuban passage paid in full.

Pete scanned columns. Pete scanned dates. Pete scanned names. Names stated/names absent/names unindicted: His name/ Wayne’s/Mes-plède’s.

Money paid out. Loyalty purchased. Kadre kode breach.

Guéry and Stanton ran poly tests. They were all *lies*. Flash snuck into Cuba. It was a *lie*. Cuban dissension—one sustained *lie*. Safe runs to Cuba—one prepaid *lie*. Cuban Militia sold out as fodder—part of the *lie*. Guns sent to Cuba—funneled to where?—key to the *lie*.

Cars.

Watches.

Furs.

Jap motorcycles.

Faggot antiques.

Years gone. One heart attack. THIS.

Pete dropped the ledger. Pete flipped the car key. Pete killed the fog lights.

The dark felt right. The dark scared him. IT WAS ALL A BIG FUCKING LIE.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/25/68. Telephone call transcript. Taped by: BLUE RABBIT. Marked: "FBI-Scrambled"/"Stage-1 Covert"/ "Destroy Without Reading in the Event of My Death." Speaking: BLUE RABBIT, FATHER RABBIT.

BR: It's me, Senior. You hear those clicks?
FR: I know. Scrambler technology.
BR: Are you ready for some good news?
FR: If it relates to D-day, I am.
BR: It's connected. That's for damn sure.
FR: Have we got a date? Have we got a loc—
BR: My men found Wendell Durfee.
FR: Oh, sweet Jesus.
BR: He's in L.A. He's got a room on skid row.
FR: I hear the saints, Dwight. They're singing hymns all for me.
BR: My men make him for some rape-snuffs. You think he developed a taste with Lynette?
FR: How could he? She always struck me as frigid.
BR: RED RABBIT's on the move. I'm looking at D-day for sometime next month.
FR: Shitfire. Let's bring Wayne in, then.
BR: My guys have got Durfee staked out. I'll wait a few days, then have some jig stiff a call through Sonny Liston.
FR: Hymns, Dwight. I mean it. And all in stereo.
BR: You think Wayne's ready for this?
FR: I know he is.
BR: I'll patch you when I've got more news.
FR: Make it good news.
BR: We're close, Senior. I've got this feeling.
FR: From your mouth to God's ears.

(Mexico City, 3/26/68)

Show-and-tell:

Sam G.'s villa / the rumpus room / drinks with umbrellas.

A valet toiled. Said valet dished hors d'oeuvres. Said valet built gin slings.

Littell ran charts. Littell ran easel graphs. Sam watched. Moe watched. Carlos twirled his umbrella. Santo and Johnny yawned.

Littell jabbed a pointer. "We're getting our prices. Mr. Hughes should have all his hotels by the end of the year."

Sam yawned. Moe stretched. Carlos ate quesadillas.

Littell said, "There's a garbage-hauling business in Reno that I think we should take over first. It's nonunion, which helps. All told, we're on schedule in every area except one."

Moe laughed. "That is vintage Ward. Lay out this big preamble and stop short of the point."

Sam said, "Ward's a cock tease."

Santo said, "Ward dropped out of the seminary. They teach you to string things out there."

Littell smiled. "Mr. Hughes is insisting that we enforce a 'Negro sedation policy' at his hotels. He knows that it's unrealistic, but he's dug in."

Moe said, "The shvartzes need sedation. They're creating too much social unrest."

Sam said, "You don't rape and pillage when you're sedated."

Carlos said, "The sedation concept is stale bread. We're closing down Pete's business."

Littell coughed. "Why? I thought Pete's thing was solvent."

Sam looked at Carlos. Carlos shook his head.

"Solvent is as solvent does. It got us what we wanted, so we're cutting it loose."

Looks passed: Johnny to Santo/Santo to Sam.

Sam coughed. "We're covered in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, and the D.R. These guys I greased did not need a road map."

Santo coughed. "The U.S. dollar is the international language. You say 'casino gambling' and it paints a big picture."

Johnny coughed. "The U.S. dollar buys influence on both sides of the political line."

Santo coughed. "We've got our bearded pal to thank for that."

Moe looked at Santo. Sam looked at Santo. Santo went oops. The Boys regrouped. The Boys sipped drinks. The Boys snagged hors d'oeuvres.

Littell flipped graph sheets. Littell gauged the gaffe.

They screwed Pete. They screwed Pete per his Cuban deal—*somehow*. Guns to *Castro? Not* rightists? *Perhaps*. They greased leftists—said "Influence"—Pete's usefulness lapsed. *Maybe/somehow/perhaps*.

I won't tell Pete/they know it/they trust me/they own me.

Sam coughed. Sam cued the valet. Said valet split *rápidamente*.

Carlos said, "We're still waiting to see if LBJ runs again, but we're 99% committed to Nixon."

Santo said, "Nixon's the one."

Sam said, "LBJ can't change Justice Department policy like a new man can."

Johnny said, "Humphrey's too soft on the spooks. I can't see him or LBJ granting that pardon to Jimmy."

Santo said, "Nixon's the guy. He's a shoo-in for the nomination."

Carlos said, "You sit down with him in late June, Ward. Then you can retire."

Santo smiled. "I know someone else who's going to retire."

Sam smiled. "Yeah, per that little box of goodies we got in the mail."

Looks passed: Carlos to Santo/Moe D. to Sam. Santo flushed. Sam went oops.

The plane soared. Air Mexico—Vegas nonstop.

The summit soared. The Boys vouched his plans—no rebuttals/no controversy. The Boys made gaffes. They were niggling for him. They were troubling for Pete.

They dropped the dope biz. That implied trouble. That implied a pissed Pete. No more Cuban runs or Viet ops—*probably*.

The plane banked. Littell saw clouds. White puffs laced with grimey debris.

He called Janice. They talked last night. She was scared. Her cramps were worse. She saw a doctor. He ran some tests.

He cited trauma. It went long untreated. It was Wayne Senior's work. It masked her symptoms. It masked internal damage. It was cancer *possibly*.

She talked scared. She talked strong. She ran litanies: I'm young/it's not *that*/it can't *be*. He calmed her down. He said goodnight. He prayed for her. He said rosaries.

The plane leveled off. Littell shut his eyes. Littell saw Bobby.

Bobby announced. Bobby met the press nine days ago. Bobby said I want it. Bobby voiced policy.

Let's end the war. Let's work for peace. Let's end poverty. Domestic reforms. Peace accords. No *stated* Mob policy.

Prudent Bobby. Sage Bobby. Sound policy.

Barb called him last week. She saw Bobby announce on TV. They talked. They got misty on Bobby.

Barb met Bobby once. It was spring '62. Peter Lawford threw a party. Barb talked to Bobby. Barb liked Bobby then. Barb loved Bobby now. Pete deployed Shakedown Barb. Barb slept with JFK.

Barb laughed. Barb praised Bobby. Barb said he'd kick Dick Nixon's ass. Barb predicted a victory.

A stew walked by. Said stew pushed a snack cart. Littell grabbed a club soda. Littell grabbed the L.A. *Times*.

He creased it out. He saw war headlines. He flipped the fold. Columns jumped. He saw "Poor People's March"/"planning stages"/"momentum." He flipped to page 2. He saw Bobby.

There's Bobby caught candid. He's standing by a putting green. He's near some bungalows. The backdrop's lush. The backdrop's familiar.

Littell squinted. Wait now, what's—

He saw the pathway. He saw the door. He saw the "301." It's the bungalow. It's the "Mob meet spot." It's his gig for Dwight Holly.

Littell dropped the paper. Thoughts jumped and garbled. The Boys/that gaffe/“box of goodies.”

(Los Angeles, 3/30/68)

Death kit:

Four hypos / full loads / premixed: Big “H” and Novocain anesthetic.

One .44 mag. One silencer. One roll of duct tape. One paper-bag carryall. One pack of moist towelettes.

We’re here. We’re at 5th and Stanford. It’s Skid Row. It’s Bum Hell.

Wayne lounged. Wayne watched the hotel. Wayne jiggled his sack. He stood outside a blood bank. Bums hobnobbed. Nurses culled donors up.

He’s there. He’s in the Hiltz Hotel. He’s in room 402. It’s four floors up.

Wayne watched the front door. Wayne savored. Wayne stalled.

He’d rotated south. He hit Bob’s kompound. He found it cleaned out. It vibed raid. It vibed heedless. It vibed state cops. Bob had friends. Bob was Fed-vouched. It vibed *dumb* state cops.

Wayne flew to Vegas then. Wayne checked the Cavern. Wayne picked messages up:

Call Pete. He’s in Sparta. Call Sonny.

He called Pete. He got no answer. He called Sonny. Sonny was jazzed. Sonny said, “This nigger called me.” Sonny cited said nigger source.

Bam:

Sonny’s guy saw Wendell. Wendell was nom-de-plumed. Wendell’s now Abdallah X.

It was warm. It was eighty at noon. Skid Row was crammed up. Winos/amputees on skateboards/he-shes rouged up.

They jostled Wayne. Wayne felt zero. Wayne felt ate up. His skin buzzed. He rode eggshells. His bloodstream froze up.

He walked over.

He walked through the front door. He passed bums in the lobby. He passed a TV cranked up.

'68 Novas! Buy now! *Se habla español* at Giant Felix Chevrolet!

A wino convulsed. Wayne dodged his legs. Wayne took side stairs up. He lost his feet. He lost *his* legs. He fought gravity.

He hit the fourth floor landing. He saw the hallway. He saw wood doors inset.

He passed 400. He passed 401. He hit 402. He touched the knob. He turned it. The door popped.

He's right there. He's backlit. You've got window light. There's Wendell in a straight-back chair. There's Wendell with a short-dog.

Wayne stepped inside. Wayne shut the door. Wayne almost threw up. Wendell saw him. Wendell squinted. Wendell grinned all fucked up.

Wayne stood there.

Wendell said, "You looks familiar."

Wayne stood there.

Wendell said, "Give me a hint."

Wayne said, "Dallas." Wayne almost threw up.

Wendell slurped wine. Wendell looked bad. Wendell wore injection welts. Wendell wore needle tracks.

"That's a good hint. Makes me think you a certain husband with a grievance. I've fucking widowered more than a few of them, so that narrows it down somewhat."

Wayne scoped the room. Wayne saw empty short-dogs. Wayne smelled wine upchucked.

Wendell said, "That was some weekend. Remember? The President got shot."

Wayne moved. Wayne took two steps. Wayne kicked out and up. He hit the chair. He hit the jug. He knocked Wendell flat.

Wendell puked wine and bile. Wayne stepped on his neck. Wayne full-weight-pinned him. Wayne dug through his sack.

He grabbed a hypo. Wendell thrashed. He shot his neck up. Wendell de-thrashed. Wendell soared. Wendell went smack-back.

Wayne dropped the hypo. Wayne grabbed a hypo. Wayne shot his hands up. Wendell shuddered. Wendell resoared. Wendell went more smack-back.

Wayne dropped the hypo. Wayne grabbed a hypo. Wayne shot his hips up. Wendell grinned. Wendell soar-soared. Wendell went waaay smack-back.

Wayne dropped the hypo. Wayne grabbed a hypo. Wayne shot his knees up. Wendell grinned. Wendell soooooared. Wendell smaaacked out and up.

Wayne dropped the hypo. Wayne grabbed the tape. Wayne pulled a strip up. He taped Wendell's mouth. He rolled three loops dense. He cinched Wendell's neck up.

He dropped the tape. He grabbed the mag. He cocked it back. He fixed the silencer. He bent low. Wendell's eyes rolled back.

Wayne grabbed his right hand. Wayne shot off his fingers. Wayne shot off his thumb. Wendell squirmed. Big "H" constrained him. His eyes rolled *waaaay* back.

Wayne dumped the shells. Wayne reloaded. Wayne cocked his piece back. He grabbed Wendell's left hand. He shot off his fingers. He shot off his thumb.

Wendell squirmed. Big "H" constrained him. His eyes rolled *mooooore* back.

Wayne dumped the shells. Wayne reloaded. Wayne cocked his piece back. Wendell puked. Bile blew out his nostrils. Wendell shit in his pants.

Wayne leaned down. Wayne aimed tight. Wayne shot his legs off at the knees. Blood spritzed. Bone chips flew. Wayne grabbed the towelettes.

Wendell's stumps twitched. Wayne grabbed a chair. Wayne watched him bleed to death.

The flight ran late. He flew numb. He dozed L.A. to Vegas. He smelled things that weren't there.

Cordite and blood. Cheap wine. Burned silencer threads.

The plane landed. He got off. He smelled things that weren't there.

Burned bone and vomit. Scented towelettes.

He walked through McCarran. He found a phone. He got an operator. She patched Sparta direct.

He heard eight rings. He got no answer. No Barb and Pete there.

He walked outside. He veered toward the cab line. Two men walked up. They flanked him. They braced him. They slammed a two-cop press.

It's Dwight Holly. It's a swarthy guy. It's that guy Fred Otash.

Shakedown Fred—skinny now—this cadaver.

They grabbed him. They led him. He felt limp. He felt numb. He saw two cars double-parked. He saw a Fed sedan. He saw Wayne Senior's Cadillac.

They stopped between cars. They patted him down. They let him go slack. He stumbled. He almost fell. He smelled Wendell dead.

Holly said, "Durfee wasn't for free."

Otash said, "We stiffed that tipoff through Sonny."

Holly said, "I've got a print transparency on you. If you say no, I'll have a guy roll it around Durfee's room."

Wayne looked at them. Wayne *saw* them. Wayne got *IT*. Wayne Senior/his hate talk/the hate-mail intercepts.

Wayne said, "Who?"

Holly said, "Martin Luther King."

(Sparta, 3/31/68)

TV news—breaking:

LBJ's out. The war fucked him up. He won't seek Term Two. It's Humphrey v. Bobby. The race looks tight.

Barb watched the news. Pete watched Barb. Barb dug on the Bobby aspects. The house was cold. Barb's sister was cheap. Barb's sister skimped on the heat.

He flew Saigon to Sparta. Barb welcomed him reluctant. Barb ragged him incessant. Barb ragged his travel-ban breach.

Barb flipped channels. Barb caught war news. Barb caught some Memphis strike.

Trash workers. A support march. One riot so far. Sixty injured/looter damage/one nigger kid dead. Crazy King's there. Crazy King's *between* riots. One "Poor People's" riot on tap.

Barb watched the news. Pete watched Barb. Barb watched the news rapt. Pete popped gum. Pete obeyed Barb's rule—don't smoke inside.

He chewed gum. He chewed double sticks. He fretted shit. He called Bob's kompound. He got a weird tone. It vibed disconnect.

He called the Cavern. He left Wayne a message. Wayne never called back. He punked out. He stalled his speech. He set his flight back.

Barb flipped channels. Barb caught Bobby. Barb caught Crazy King. Pete stood up. Pete blocked the screen. Pete turned off the set.

Barb said, "Shit."

Pete popped his gum. "Hear me out on some things. You'll like part of it."

Barb smiled. “You’re getting ready to snow me. I can tell.”

“Here’s the good part. The Boys want to scuttle the biz, the funnel, and the whole operation. I’m going along with it.”

Barb shook her head. “If that was most of it, you’d be smiling.”

“You’re right. There’s mo—”

“I know there’s more, I know it’s bad, so tell me.”

Pete gulped. Pete swallowed. Pete choked his gum back.

“Part of it went bad. I’ve got to pick Wayne up in Vegas and make one more Cuban run. I need you to hole up somewhere until it’s over and I cut some kind of deal with the Outfit.”

Barb said, “No.”

Boom—case closed—like that.

Pete gulped. “I’ll dump Tiger Kab and the Cavern then. We’ll go someplace else.”

Barb said, “No.”

No drumroll—no pause—no inflection.

Pete gulped. “I can finesse it. There’s some risk, sure, but I wouldn’t do it if I didn’t think the Boys would buy my explanation.”

Barb said, “No.”

No fanfare—all deadpan—no shit.

Pete gulped. Pete coughed his gum up.

“If I don’t pay this off, the word will go out. The wrong guys will think, ‘He knew the story and let it all go.’ They’ll start thinking I’m weak, which will cause us trouble somewhere down the line.”

Barb said, “No. Whatever *it* is is bullshit, and you know it.”

No recourse—I *know* you—that’s that. No tears yet—tears pending—eyes wet.

Pete said, “I’ll be back when it’s over.”

Charter flight: La Crosse to Vegas. Junket geeks/smoky cabin/cramped seats.

The geeks were insurance men. The geeks were Shriners and Moose. They drank. They swapped hats. They cracked jokes.

Pete tried to sleep. Pete fucked with IT.

He’d called Stanton. He called loooong distance. He called Saigon to Bay St. Louis. He brought up the Cuban run. He said I want to go. Please let me say adios.

Stanton said yes.

He mopped up in Saigon. He laid cover tracks. He bought weapons. He fixed the warehouse window. He worked on the QT. He installed new glass/new mesh. He called Mesplède. He said *I'll* handle it. He said *I'll* breach the breach.

He bought three guns: one Walther and two Berettas. He bought three silencers. He bought three inside-the-pants rigs.

Booty. Swag. Cars/furs/watches/antiques. THE BIG FUCKING LIE revealed.

The flight bumped. They ran low-pressure sweeps. The junket geeks pawed the stews. The junket geeks laughed. The junket geeks preached.

Pro-war stuff. All clichés. We can't pull out. We'll forfeit Asia. We can't look weak.

Pete shut his eyes. Pete *heard* the geeks. Pete *saw* home movie flicks.

There's Betty Mac. It's visit twelve million. There's Chuck the Vice Freak. There's Barb. She says, "No"—eyes working on tears.

We stand firm. We bong the Cong. We never surrender. We stomp the peace freaks.

It droned on. It went stereophonic. He tried to sleep. He failed. He fought this exhaustion. He got this idea:

Fuck it all. Fuck it now. Forfeit the kadre kode breach.

The plane touched down. Pete got off. Pete walked to Air Midwest.

He bought a ticket. He splurged. He booked first-class to Milwaukee/connector to Sparta/two flights one-way.

He had a layover. He had four hours to kill.

He walked to the gate lounge. He schlepped his gun bag. He sprawled across four seats. He fell. It was soft and dark. He had newspapers as sheets.

He opened his eyes. He saw ceiling lights. He saw Ward Littell. Ward had his ticket. Ward flicked the edge.

"You were going back. Barb will like that."

Pete sat up. His newspaper sheets fell.

"Jesus, you scared me."

Ward cleaned his glasses. "Barb called. She said you were going south on some insane errand, and could I stop it."

Pete yawned. "And?"

"And I put a few things together and called Carlos."

Pete lit a cigarette. It was 6:10 now. His flight left at 7:00.

"Don't stop there. I want to see where this is going."

Ward coughed. "Part of it is from Carlos, part of it I put together my—"

"Jesus, just tell—"

"Carlos is cutting off your business. It was part of a ruse to get weapons to Castro, so that he could funnel them to rebels in Central America. It all played into my foreign-casino plan, and I never knew anything about it."

Fill-in/paint-by-number/link-the-dots diverse. Stanton and Carlos/the fake funnel/the BIG LIE complete.

"It was a shuck, Ward. The whole thing."

"I know."

"Bob Relyea. What about—"

"He dropped his Klan gig and went off on another operation. Wayne's working with him, and Carlos said that's all he knows."

Pete grabbed the ticket. Ward grabbed it back.

"You flew to Saigon. You put some things together. I'm going off what you told Barb."

Pete grabbed his bag. The guns rubbed and scraped.

"You're leading me. You talked to Barb, you talked to Carlos, you found me. Let's start there."

Ward squared his glasses. "Carlos learned that Stanton, Guéry, and Elorde have been skimming off his portion of the profits. He actually *wants* you to take them and their Cuban contacts out. He said if you do that and another 'small favor,' he'll retire you."

A speaker popped. Flight 49—nonstop to Milwaukee.

"Do you think he means it?"

"Yes. They want to clean this thing up and move on."

Pete checked the gate. The flight crew stood there. Baggage carts rolled.

"Call Barb. Tell her I almost came home."

Ward nodded. Ward crumpled the ticket.

"There's one more thing."

"What's that?"

"Carlos wants you to scalp them."

(Memphis, 4/3/68)

Rabbits:

WILD RABBIT. RED RABBIT. DEAD RABBIT soon.

Wayne pulled curbside. Wayne parked. Wayne watched the New Rebel Motel.

The Mustang pulled up. Fred O. walked over. The shooter got out. There's skinny Fred O. He's starved to look different. There's skinny Jim Ray. He's starved off crystal meth.

They laughed. They huddled. Fred O. passed the box. It was long and bulky. It contained a 30.06.

Hi-end scope. Geared for soft-point bullets. Contact spread/ blunt impact/bad for ballistic IDs.

Jimmy had his rifle. Bob had the same one. Fred O. had rifle 3. It was one-shot test-fired. It was print-smeared by Jimmy.

D-day was tomorrow. Jimmy might shoot. Jimmy might punk out. Bob *will* shoot instead.

Fred O. ran Jimmy. Fred O. said he'd shoot. Fred O. was sure.

The Plan:

There's a rooming house. It's a wino pad. It's across from the Lorraine Motel. King's at the Lorraine. He's in room 306. It's off a balcony. There's a wino pad vacancy. Fred O. made sure. Fred O. held said flop for a week.

He "checked in." He stayed away. He'll "check out" tomorrow. Jimmy will check in. He'll get that room. It's near a bathroom perch-site.

He might shoot. He might punk out. Thus Bob shoots instead.

There's a brush patch by the wino pad. It supplies cover. It supplies trajectory. The wino pad runs back to Main Street. The

Lorraine's on Mulberry.

Jimmy shoots. Jimmy exits—way *off* Mulberry. He wipes his rifle. He drops the rifle. He drops it in a doorway.

Fred O. lurks near. Fred O. grabs the rifle. Fred O. drops rifle 3. It's print-smeared. It's smeared by Jimmy. It's smeared by transparency.

Jimmy splits. Jimmy drives to the safe house. Wayne's waiting there. It's a cheap apartment. It's furnished.

With booze empties/dope baggies/needles. With white powder/dope fits/crystal meth.

With a suicide note—forged by Fred Otash.

I flew on meth. I killed Nigger King. I'm scared now. I escaped Jeff City. I refuse to go back. I'm a hero. I'm a martyr. Hey, World, take that.

Wayne waits. Wayne geezes Jimmy up. Wayne shoots Jimmy then. Jimmy dies on a speed rush.

Panic. Suicide. Your stock "lone assassin"—gone on crystal meth.

Wayne watched the New Rebel. Fred O. stood outside. Jimmy walked in. Fred O. looked over. Fred O. saw Wayne and winked.

Wayne winked back. Wayne shoved off. Wayne drove to the Lorraine Motel.

He parked close in. He checked the lot. He checked the balcony. He checked the wino pad. He checked the brush patch. He checked the street.

The patch was thick. It flanked a cement wall. A passageway led to Main Street. They perch in the patch. They shoot or don't shoot. They walk to Main Street.

Wayne watched the motel. Negro men hobnobbed. They stood on that balcony.

No cops attendant. Dwight Holly confirmed said. Dwight Holly tapped cop frequencies. Memphis was uptight. They had riots and marches. They had cops alert on Code 3. More shit was planned. One more march boded. It was set for April 5th.

He'd be dead. Memphis would burn. Wayne *knew* it. Jimmy would shoot. Fred O. said so. Fred *knew* it.

Fred O. ran Jimmy. Jimmy ran L.A. to Memphis. Jimmy made stops in between. Jimmy was wacked. Jimmy took hypnosis courses. Jimmy went to bartender's school. Jimmy shot meth. Jimmy bought skin mags. Jimmy jacked off and read porno books.

Jimmy joined the Friends of Rhodesia. Jimmy placed swinger ads. Jimmy got rhinoplasty. Jimmy stalked Dr. King in L.A. Jimmy stalked March 16/17.

Fred O. surveilled him. Fred O. *knew then:* He'll shoot proactively. Fred O. recruited him *proactive*. Fred O. was cloaked as "Raul."

Fred had King's travel plans. Dwight Holly pouched them. They came from an FBI source.

King went to Selma. He arrived on 3/22. Fred O. and Jim Ray were there. The conditions were sub-par. Fred O. stalled D-day.

King stayed in Selma. Jimmy drove to Atlanta. He knew King lived there. King foxed him. King flew to Jew York. King had business there.

Dwight got a tip. His Fed source pouched it. RED RABBIT to Memphis. Arrival 3/28. There's a garbage strike there.

Dwight recruited Wayne on 3/30. "Raul" goosed Jimmy Ray. Cash perks and meth—Memphis dead-ahead.

It was NOW. Fred said so. Fred knew it. Jimmy was strung out. Jimmy craved the "Bounty." Jimmy craved this mock Holy Grail.

Wayne watched the balcony. Wayne saw activity.

Dwight ran death-threat checks. The Memphis Feds supplied facts. King logged eighty-one death threats. Klan threats mostly.

King blew them off. King shined them on. King scorned security.

Wayne watched the balcony. Wayne saw Dr. King. They went back. They intertwined. They had symmetry.

He went to Little Rock. He enforced integration. He saw King there. He saw that fuck film. It was FBI-shot. He saw King there. He killed three coloreds. King indicted Las Vegas. King almost went there. He killed Bongo in Saigon. King hated his war. He killed Wendell Durfee. Wayne Senior found Durfee. King served his vengeance cause.

Wayne Senior knew:

You *want* it. I *made* you. It's *yours*.

He killed Durfee. Dwight suborned him. He joined Wayne Senior's cause. It's Wayne Senior's Hate School. It's the postgrad course. Coloreds foist chaos. Coloreds breed discord. Coloreds spawn doss.

Wayne Senior said you learned. Wayne Senior said you paid.

Wayne Senior said you earned this shot.

Wayne Senior bragged:

Ward Littell's retiring. Mormon heavies love me. *I'll* get his Hughes spot. It's certain. I know. I was told.

Carlos Marcello called me. We talked. We discussed Littell's retirement. We discussed general business. We discussed the Hughes spot.

Carlos said this:

Littell worked for Hughes *and* me. *You* take that full spot. Littell suborns Nixon. Littell retires then. *You* go from there. *You* work with Nixon. *You* secure our requests. *You* insure our warranty.

Wayne Senior said this:

My son the chemist. You know him. *I* know he's outgrown Pete B.

Carlos said this:

We'll find a spot. We'll bring Wayne in. It's adios to Pete B.

Wayne watched the balcony. Wayne saw King laugh. Wayne saw King slap his knees.

I hate smart. I've killed five. You can't outhate me.

(Bay St. Louis, 4/3/68)

Castoff—9:16 p.m. Light wind. Course south-southeast.

The last gun run. The kadre kurtain kall.

Pete walked the deck. His pants fit tight. He wore three guns in. He wore his shirt out. His gut bulged. The silencers chafed.

He flew in. They held castoff. He flew in late. He looked for Wayne in Vegas. He tapped out. Carlos called him.

Carlos was Carlos. Fuck the Big Lie. Carlos was brusque:

“You found some things out. So what? You were never dumb, Pete.”

“Bob’s off somewhere. He’s working with Wayne. He don’t get hurt like the rest.”

“Don’t act aggrieved. Bring me some scalps. Remember, you owe me for Dallas.”

The boat pitched. The boat dipped. The boat leveled. Pete walked the deck. Pete thought it through. Pete fought butterflies.

They’re below deck. Get them alone/get them together. Hit the arms locker. Get a shotgun. Choke a tight spread.

Pilot the boat. You know how to. Head for Cuban seas. Lure Fuentes on. Lure Arredondo. Kill them/scalp them/dump them. Scalp and dump the rest.

Six snuffs. Butch haircuts. Scalped per kadre kode breach.

The boat ran smooth. Automatic pilot. Glassy Gulf seas.

Pete climbed the bridge. Pete read dials. Pete ran instrument checks. It’s OK. You know how. You’ll do it.

He walked below. He got flutters—biiiiiig butterflies. The main cabin stood full: Stanton/Guéry/Elorde/Dick Wenzel.

Pete jittered. Pete twitched. Pete bumped his head on a beam.

Stanton said, “They don’t build these boats for giants.”

Guéry said, “Which is my problem, too.”

Flash said, “I do not have that problem.”

Wenzel said, “You’re a shrimp, but you’re dangerous.”

They laughed. Pete laughed. Pete went lightheaded.

Four men/no sidearms/good. All relaxed/sipping scotch/good.

Note this oversight. Note this fuck-up and glitch:

You *could* have brought Seconal. You *could* have spiked the scotch. You *could* have killed them asleep.

Stanton said, “We’ll refuel at Snipe Key.”

Wenzel said, “They’re meeting us eighty knots out. It’s the only way to rendezvous before dawn.”

Pete coughed. “It’s my fault. I was late.”

Flash shook his head. “The last time. We no go without you.”

Guéry shook his head. “You were always the one with the … *qu’est-ce que* … ‘greatest commitment.’ ”

Wenzel slugged scotch. “I’ll miss the runs. I hate the Reds as much as the next white man.”

Flash smiled. “I am not white.”

Wenzel smiled. “In your heart you are.”

Pete faked a yawn. His chest pinged. His pulse raced.

“I’m tired. I’m going to lie down for a bit.”

The guys smiled. The guys nodded. The guys grinned and stretched. Pete walked back. Pete shut the door. Pete ran a cabin check:

Four units/low bulkheads/four sleeping sacks. Please get drunk. Please crap out. Please crap out in shifts.

He opened the cargo hold. The boat rolled. The boat rolled *très* light. It rolled too drifty—sans-gun-ballast light.

He popped the storage door. He looked in. He hit the light.

Bam:

Empty/*no* guns/*no* ordnance packed tight.

He got butterflies. Huge now. Sized like King Kong.

No guns. *No gun run*. Loose ends scheduled up. *They* kill *you*. They dump *you*. They kill Fuentes and Arredondo.

The boat pitched. Pete dug his legs in. Pete popped the shotgun rack. He got moths—big fuckers—way up in his chest.

He pulled shotguns. He worked slides. He popped the shells chambered in. Butterfingers: four shotguns/shells popping/no hands to catch said.

Shells dropping. Shells spinning. Shells hitting the floor deck. Shells skitting and rolling free.

He grabbed them. He stuffed his pants. He stuffed his teeth. He fumbled the shotguns. He refilled the rack. He heard the cargo door creak.

He turned around. He saw Wenzel. He looked dumb. He looked *caught*. He had shells in his teeth.

Wenzel shut the door. Wenzel stepped close. Wenzel made fists.

"What the fuck are—"

Pete looked around. Pete saw the flare gun. It's close. It's on a wall hook.

He spit the shells out. He stepped back. He grabbed it and aimed. He pulled the trigger. The flare ignited. The flare hit Wenzel's face. Wenzel screeched. His hair burned. He batted his face.

The flare dropped. It burned Wenzel's clothes. It shot flames chest to feet.

Pete stepped in. Pete grabbed Wenzel's neck. Pete snuffed hair flames. He snapped left. He burned his hands. He snapped right.

Wenzel convulsed. Wenzel went limp. Wenzel's eyebrows shot flames. Pete threw him down. Pete ripped his shirt off. Pete snuffed the flames.

The flare fizzled out. The door stayed shut. *Contained* stink and flames.

Pete flexed his hand. Burn blisters popped. Pete anchored his legs.

Now.

They'll miss him. They'll need him. They'll yell. The boat's rolling. It's on auto pilot. Wenzel stays on call.

Now.

Pete clenched up. Pete listened—ear to the door.

Nothing.

He pulled his Walther. He cocked it. He opened the door. One walkway/four cabins/two per side wall.

Ten yards up: the main cabin/set perpendicular/with the door shut.

Pete inched up. Pete took baby steps—slow. He hit cabin 1. He looked in. He braced the door.

Nobody.

Pete inched up. Pete took baby steps—slow. He hit cabin 2. He looked in. He braced the door.

Nobody.

Pete inched up. Pete took baby steps—slow. He hit cabin 3. He looked in. He braced the door.

There's Flash. He's sacked out asleep.

Pete walked up. Pete aimed close. Muzzle to hairline/silencer tight. He shot once. His piece went pffft. Brains doused the bed.

Pete walked out. Pete took baby steps—slow. He hit cabin 4. He looked in. He braced the door.

Nobody.

Pete inched up. Pete ate jumbo moths and butterflies. Pete popped the main cabin door.

Nobody—all hands on deck. *Slow now*—with a deeeeeep breath.

He did it. He walked topside. He took baby steps. He got fifty-foot butterflies. His breath tugged. His hands shook. His sphincter blew. He smelled his shit. He smelled his sweat. He smelled cooked silencer threads.

Baby steps—three more now. Make the deck/watch your feet.

He pulled one Beretta. He cocked it. He climbed two guns out. His breath tugged. Baby steps slow and—

He hit the deck. His breath stopped. His left arm ripped. Pain shot heart to arm—fucked arteries.

He gulped air. He sucked spray. He fell to his knees. He dropped his left-hand gun. It clattered on teak.

He made noise. Somebody yelled. Noise boomed behind him.

Stanton.

Stanton yelled, "Dick!" Stanton yelled, "Pete!"

Down the deck. Forty feet. The aft rotor-seats.

Pete pitched forward. His left arm blew. The deck cracked his teeth. He rolled over. He gulped breath. He spit out cracked teeth.

He heard Guéry—aft and left—"I don't see him."

He heard Stanton—back-stairs aft—"I think he got Dick."

He heard slides click. He heard hammers cock. He heard rounds snap in. His left arm exploded. His left arm died. His left arm flopped free.

He sucked air. He sucked hard. It hurt bad. It burned bad. He lodged some breath free.

He crawled.

One-handed. One-armed. At one-arm speed. He brushed a rope stack. It was cover. Thick ropes stacked deep.

He heard foot scuffs. They scuffed mid-deck left. He saw pantlegs and feet.

Guéry—fast-walking—*his* way.

His breath crimped. He saw starbursts. He saw twelve legs and feet. He aimed off the ropes. He aimed low. He fired.

He popped six shots fast. He got six muzzle bursts. Double vision/tracer zips/spider legs and feet.

Guéry screamed. Guéry dropped. Guéry grabbed his feet. Guéry fired way high. Shots ripped a mast sheet.

Pete sucked air. Pete *got* air. Pete got a bead. He aimed head high. He pulled slooow.

The slide jammed. Muzzle light dispersed. He saw Guéry with stump feet.

He heard foot scuffs. They scuffed way aft. They scuffed the back stairs clear. He pulled gun 3. His pump lurched. He dropped it.

Guéry fired. Shots hit the ropes. Shots ricocheted.

Pete rolled free. Pete crawled. Pete crawled with one arm and two feet. Guéry saw him. Guéry stretched prone. Guéry fired.

Tracers—loud and close in. Over his head. Scraping the gunwales. Ripping through teak. Six shots/seven/full clip.

Guéry dropped the gun. Pete got close. Pete one-arm leaped.

He bared his teeth. He bit down. He got Guéry's cheek. He raked his fingers up and out. He gouged an eye free.

Guéry screamed. Guéry swung a fist. Guéry hit bared teeth. Pete bit down. Pete snapped bone. Pete made his good hand a V.

Guéry screeched. It was high-decibel. It was half whine/half screech.

Pete drove his hand up. Pete ripped throat tissue. Pete smashed neck bones. Pete drove up to bridgework and teeth.

Guéry spasmed. Pete yanked his arm out. Pete made a hole elbow-deep. Guéry spasmed. Pete rolled back. Pete dug in and shoved with his feet.

He kicked Guéry. He kicked hard right. He kicked him off the deck. He kicked him into the sea.

He heard a splash. He heard a scream. He sucked breath. He *got* breath. He crawled free.

He crawled. He crawled one-armed. Noise cut through deck teak.

It’s Stanton. He’s below deck. That’s steel gnashing steel. He’s in the cargo hold. He’s loading shotguns. Steel’s jamming on steel.

Pete sucked air. Pete rolled up. Pete made his knees. His bladder blew. His breath stopped. He sucked air in deep.

He walked. He staggered. He threw lopsided weight. He made the back steps. He smashed at the door. He threw lopsided weight.

Zero—*weak* weight—no give.

He kicked the door. He shoved the door. He threw lopsided weight.

Zero—*weak* weight—no give.

Barricade/smashproof/blocked stairs below.

Pete kneeled down. Pete laid down lopsided. Pete got echoes off the deckwood. Pete heard steel gnash steel.

It’s about three feet over. It’s about ten feet up. The deck’s scuffed there. It’s threadbare. It’s breakable teak.

Pete hauled his weight up. Pete heaved for breath. Pete made his knees.

He crawled. He knee-walked. He hit the anchor hub. He stood up. He invoked Barb. He did a dead squat. He threw his right arm out. He wrapped the anchor stem. He jerked and stood up.

His breath exploded. His breath held. His left arm burned up.

He stumbled. He weaved four feet starboard. He reared up to six-five plus. He let the anchor drop.

It cracked the deck. It shattered loud. It snapped threadbare teak. It fell below. It dropped straight down. It smashed John Stanton flush.

(Memphis, 4/4/68)

Countdown:

It's 5:59. We're heading for checkmate—pawn to RED KING. We're close. King's outside. King's on the balcony.

He's by the railing. He's with a Negro man. Negro men mill below. King's talking to them. It's jovial. Cars sit below.

Jimmy's in the wino pad. Fred O. said so. Jimmy *will* shoot. Fred O. said so. Jimmy *will* split. I'll drop gun 3. Fred O. said so.

Wayne watched the balcony. Brush covered him. Bob Relyea ditto. Bugs crawled. Ants swarmed. Pollen spritzed.

Bob held gun 2. It was aimed up and out. It was eye-sighted in. Wayne held binoculars. Wayne zeroed in tight.

He held on King. He got King's eyes. He got King's skin.

Bob said, "He ain't walking downstairs. If Jimmy don't shoot inside a minute, I do."

Code Red/all systems clear/all systems GO. No security extant/no cops visible/Feds and Fed cars ditto. Their car was parked on Main Street. Fred O.'s car ditto.

Bob shoots or Jimmy shoots. Jimmy runs then. They run faster. They run zippo. They run through the same passageway. They're younger and swift. They cut through the wino-pad wings.

They bag their car. They split. Jimmy bags his car. Jimmy splits. Fred O. drops gun 3 in a doorway—upside Canipe Novelty.

Wayne hits the safe house. Jimmy shows up. Jimmy suicides.

Countdown—6:00 p.m. sharp—pawn to RED KING.

Wayne honed his binoculars. Wayne got King's eyes. Wayne got King's skin.

"I'm on him. If Jimmy misses or wounds, I'll tap you."

"I want him to punk out. You know that."

"Otash says he's solid."

"He's a fruitcake. Always has been."

Wayne watched King. Wayne ran outtakes. Wayne saw that fuck film. The mattress jiggles. King's flab rolls. That ashtray drops.

Wayne tingled. Bob tingled. Wayne saw his veins pop. They heard a shot slam. They saw red blood on black skin. They heard concurrent pop.

Wayne saw the impact. Wayne saw the neck spray. Wayne saw King drop.

The safe house:

A two-room apartment. Bargain-basement furnished. Three miles off South Main.

Wayne dropped Bob off. Wayne went there. Wayne sat. Fucking Jimmy schizzed out. Fucking Jimmy no-showed.

Fred O. said go there. Fred O. said meet my friend. He's got the bounty. He's got your visa. He's got your Rhodesian passport.

Wayne sat. Wayne waited. Wayne shagged walkie-talkie reports. Fred O. buzzed. Fred O. talked. Fred O. culled juicy cop talk.

He dropped the gun. He did it unseen. Jimmy bagged his sled and took off. The cops showed. The cops found the gun. The cops checked it out.

They talked to folks. They got descriptions. They put broadcasts out. Look for a white man. He's got a white Mustang. Wrong. Jimmy's 'Stang was yellow.

Fred O. buzzed. Fred O. fretted. He's gone. He smelled shit. He shut "Raul" off. The cops have the plant gun. The Feds will take over. The Feds will obfuscate.

Soft-point bullets. Hard to ID. Ballistic holocaust. It's a 30.06. It's the murder weapon. We know that's a fact.

Trust Mr. Hoover. He'll extrapolate. Big Dwight says so. Wayne agreed. Wayne said we're covered. We *both* say so.

Bob was crushed. Bob didn't shoot. Bob the Klansman bereft. Bob laughed and hailed a cab. Bob booked for West Memphis, Arkansas. Wayne sat. Wayne waited. Wayne gave Jimmy up. He burned the suicide note. He flushed the crystal meth. He smashed the hypodermic. He put gloves on. He wiped the pad. He played the radio.

He heard eulogies. He caught breaking news. He heard Negroes-in-the-street bereft. Riots in progress/nationwide chaos/arson and sack.

Wayne popped a window. Wayne heard sirens. Wayne saw flames sweep and crack.

Wayne thought *I Did That*.

(Washington, D.C., 4/6/68)

Updates—live on TV.

Littell watched NBC. Littell caught riots and mourning. Littell watched all-day TV.

Riot dead: four in Baltimore/nine in D.C.

Riots: L.A./Detroit/St. Louis. Chicago/New York. Outrage/chain reaction/big damage stats.

Littell cracked a window. Littell smelled smoke. Littell heard bullets smack.

A newsman pitched a D.C. update. This just teletyped: Negroes see a white man. Negroes swamp his car. Negroes kill said white man. Other Negroes watch.

Littell watched TV. Littell kept a vigil. It ran forty-eight hours plus. He flew to D.C. He did Teamster work. He got the news. He holed up in his apartment. He lived by his TV.

He mourned. He watched TV. He ran scenarios: Mr. Hoover/Dwight Holly/BLACK RABBIT.

The Rustin shakedown. Attendant frustration. The Poor People's March provokes. Time lines/event chains/conclusions pro and con. The FBI investigates/cover-up pro and con/empirical lessons from Dallas.

He holed up. He wept some. He wondered:

The El Encanto bug. The Boys' "goody box." Bobby's bugged suite. Access to Bobby's campaign.

He ran scenarios. He connected them—King to Bobby. He watched TV. He debunked scenarios—King to Bobby. He stayed inside. He stayed safe. He called Janice.

She got the word. She learned eight days ago. The doctors said it's cancer.

It's in your stomach. It's spreading slow. It's in your spleen. Your cramps masked the symptoms. Your cramps cost you time. Your cramps skewed early detection.

You might live. You might die. Let us operate. Janice said maybe. Janice said let me think.

He told her:

You love the DI. Move in with me. Relax and play the golf course.

Janice did it. Janice moved in. They talked. Janice blasted Wayne Senior.

Janice wept some. Janice said he talked in his sleep. He asked what he said. She said you reach out for "Bobby" and "Jane."

She said no more. She zipped her lips and played coy. He consoled her. He convinced her—let them operate.

Janice showed courage. Janice said yes. Janice faced the knife next week.

Sick list:

Janice was gravely ill. Pete almost died. Heart attack/on his boat run/well out at sea.

Pete killed four men. Pete dumped the bodies. Pete turned the boat back. Pete radioed Bay St. Louis. Pete said call my friend in D.C.

Littell got the message. Littell called Carlos. Carlos pledged a cleanup crew. Pete got the boat in. Pete got lucky. No one saw *five* men embark.

The cleanup men got on. The cleanup men cleaned up. The doctors got Pete. The doctors operated. The doctors patched his heart.

Coronary thrombosis. Mid-range this time. You were lucky.

Pete rested. Littell called him. Pete said he got four. Pete said he missed the last two.

Littell called Carlos. Littell relayed the message. Carlos said fuck it. Carlos reprieved the last two.

Pete called Littell back. Pete asked favors. Don't tell Barb. Don't scare her. Let me get my shit back. Call Milt Chargin. Say I'm okay. Have him mind the cat.

Littell agreed. Littell called Pete. Littell called one hour back. A nurse came on. She said Pete checked out—"Against doctor's advice."

Pete had a visitor. Said visitor spooked him. It was "Carlos Somebody." It was four hours back.

Littell flipped channels. Littell saw Bobby. Bobby was solemn. Bobby condemned racial hate. Bobby mourned Dr. King.

The scenarios kicked in: bug jobs pro and con/collusion widespread. It got bad. It got wild. It got *real.*

Littell grabbed his Rolodex. Littell found Paul Horvitz.

He made the meet. Paul said he'd risk it. See you at 6:00 p.m.—Eddie Chang's Kowloon.

Littell weighed *his* risk.

The hotel bug. Potential upshots exponential. Risk it. Tell Paul. Have him warn Bobby.

Littell dressed up. Littell wore his beard and tweeds. Littell walked out.

He walked. He broke curfew laws. He heard sirens. He saw D.C. locked down tight. He saw flames two miles over. He heard klaxons overlap.

He walked fast. He broiled in tweed. A breeze blew soot flakes. A car eased by. A Negro yelled. He heard race obscenities.

A Negro hurled a beer can. A Negro dumped an ashtray. Cigarette butts breezed.

Littell hit Conn. Ave. Water mains erupted. Firemen lugged hoses. Cops stood by fire trucks.

The Kowloon was open. Eddie Chang was feisty. Eddie Chang fed local cops.

Littell walked in. Littell grabbed the back booth. The barman turned the TV up.

Live local feed. Negroes with gas cans. Cars belly-up.

Three men watched. They were bluff-hearty types. They had hardhats and beer guts.

One man said, "Goddamn animals."

One man said, "We gave them their civil rights."

One man said, "And look what we got."

Littell sprawled. Littell went invertebrate. Littell culled Deep South anecdotes.

Paul Horvitz walked in.

He saw Littell. He brushed his pants off. He walked over. He shook his coat sleeves. Ash dropped and whirled.

He dug his feet in. He spanned the booth. He gripped two hat posts.

“An FBI man talked to Senator Kennedy, an hour ago. He showed him a photograph of a man who looked very much like you, without your beard. He said your name was Ward Littell, and he called you a ‘provocateur.’ The senator heard that name and saw that picture and almost freaked out.”

Littell stood up. His knees shook. He banged the tabletop. He tried to talk. He went cottonmouthed. He st-st-st-stuttered.

Paul grabbed his coat. Paul pulled him close. Paul tore his beard off. Paul slapped him. Paul shoved him. Paul knocked his glasses off.

Littell fell back. Littell dumped the table. Paul fast-walked out.

The hardhats twirled their stools. The hardhats looked over. The hardhats flashed shit-eating grins.

One man flashed a Fed badge.

One man said, “Hi, Ward.”

One man said, “Mr. Hoover knows all.”

(Los Angeles, 4/8/68)

Some crazy A-rab. Two names the same.

Wayne brought him up. Wayne said he muscled him. The A-rab stiffed the Cavern. The A-rab packed hate tracts. The A-rab packed a piece.

Wayne got his hate-mail gig. Wayne pulled hate letters. Guess what? The A-rab sent Bobby K. notes.

Craaaazy shit. “Jew Pigs”/“RFK Must Die.”

Pete drove freeways. Pete looped L.A. Pete drove old-man slow.

He felt weak. He felt sapped. He felt drained. He took midget steps now. His breath sputtered. He carried a cane. He measured his steps. He got minor satisfaction. He got more wind each day.

You’re young. You’re strong. The docs said so. The next one kills you. The surgeon said so.

They split your chest. They cleared your tubes. They stitched and stapled you. You checked out. You bought surgical clippers. You de-stitched yourself slow. You used scotch for disinfectant. You used scotch for anesthetic. You used scotch for the pain.

Pete drove freeways. Pete looped downtown L.A. Pete drove old-man slow.

Carlos bopped to his bedside. Carlos said the boat job—bravo. Carlos mentioned the “small favor.” I know you know about it. I know Ward told you.

Pete said sure. You get a favor. I get retirement.

Carlos said go to L.A. Find Fred Otash a stooge.

Carlos said I like Fred. Wayne Senior referred him. I like Wayne Senior too. He’s classy. He’ll get Ward’s job. Ward retires soon.

Pete left the hospital. Pete flew to L.A. Pete saw Fred O. Fred

O. was skinny. Fred O. said why.

He ran a stiff. He ran him for eight months. He ran the King fall guy.

Bob Relyea worked the gig. Dwight Holly played ramrod. Wayne Senior ran ops. Wayne Junior was sequestered now. Wayne Junior worked backup.

He killed Wendell Durfee. The LAPD caught it. They had questions still. The snuff vibed revenge/the vic killed your wife/we'd like to talk to you.

Pete weighed the details. Pete gauged Fred O. Pete tore the "small favor" up.

Oh shit. The Boys need a stooge. It's a Bobby hit.

Fred O. confirmed it. Fred O. named no names. Fred O. confirmed implicit. Pete recalled the A-rab. Fred O. was Lebanese. Call it synergy.

Pete dished on the A-rab. Pete dished partial stats. Fred O. fucking drooled. Pete flew to Vegas. Pete kissed the cat hello and goodbye. Pete tossed Wayne's Cavern room.

He found his hate-mail copies. He went through them. He found the A-rab's notes.

RFK MUST DIE! RFK MUST DIE! RFK MUST DIE!

He called Sonny Liston. He said where'd you brace that A-rab? Sonny said the Desert Dawn Motel. He hit the Desert Dawn. He bribed the desk clerk. He checked registration stats.

Bam: Sirhan B. Sirhan/Pasadena, California.

He flew back to L.A. He called the DMV. He got Sirhan's full stats. He called Fred O. He said sit tight. He said I'll stake him out.

Carlos called last night. Carlos waxed sly. You figured it out. Fred O. said so. You know, I'm not surprised.

Carlos waxed assertive then. Carlos said this:

Ward's soft on Bobby. You know Ward. He's liberal martyr Littell. Sever contact for now. Ward's smart. Ward smells things. Conniver Littell.

Pete said sure. I'll do it. You know I want out.

Carlos laughed. Pete saw Big D. Jack's head goes ka-blooey. Jackie dives for scraps.

Chez Sirhan: A small crib/old wood-frame/near Muir High

School. Car Sirhan: A jig rig/spinners and skirts/a coon maroon Ford.

Pete pulled up. Pete parked. Pete waited. Pete chewed Nicorette gum.

He thought about Barb. He ran the radio. He got some Barb tunes. He got the news—dig it—King Killer at Large!

He thought about Wayne. Wayne the spook assassin. Jigs from Wendell Durfee on up. He ran instincts. He laid bets. Wayne Senior sandbagged Wayne. Wayne Senior recruited him. It was fucked-up daddy stuff.

He ran the dial. He got more King. He got Bobby campaign stuff.

Sirhan walked out.

He darted. He walked funny. He smoked. He skimmed a racing form. He sideswiped a tree. He face-plowed a hedge.

Two kids walked by. They ogled Sirhan—dig on *that* freak!

Sirhan walked funny. Sirhan looked funny. Sirhan had wild hair and big teeth. Sirhan dropped his cigarette. Sirhan lit a cigarette. Sirhan flashed yellow teeth.

Sirhan got in his car. Sirhan U-turned. Sirhan drove southeast.

Pete tailed him. Sirhan was a track nut. Odds on Santa Anita. Odds on the spring meet.

Sirhan drove funny. Sirhan waved his hands. Sirhan straddled lanes. Pete tailed him close. Fuck the laws of tail work. Sirhan was stone nuts.

They drove southeast. They hit Arcadia. They hit the track lot. Sirhan brodied. Sirhan parked erratic. Pete parked close up.

Sirhan got out. Sirhan pulled a pint of vodka. Sirhan took little pops. Pete got out. Pete tailed him. Pete dogged him cane-first.

Sirhan walked funny. Sirhan walked fast. Pete walked heart-attack slow.

Sirhan hit the turnstiles. Sirhan dropped change. Sirhan said, “Bleacher seat.” Pete bought a cheap seat. Pete huffed for breath. Pete tailed Sirhan slooooooooooow.

Sirhan pushed through people. Sirhan pushed funny. Sirhan used darty elbows. People gawked—check that clown/what a freak!

Sirhan stopped. Sirhan pulled out his scratch sheet. Sirhan cognified.

He studied the sheet. He picked his nose. He flicked snot. He licked a pencil. He circled nags. He jabbed at his ears. He dug earwax. He sniffed it. He flicked it off.

He walked. Pete cane-walked slow. Sirhan pulled a wad of dollar bills. Sirhan hit the two-dollar window.

He bet six races. He bet all longshots—two dollars per. He talked funny. He talked stilted. He talked fast.

The cage man passed him tickets. Sirhan walked. Pete tailed him slow. Sirhan walked fast. Sirhan pulled his jug every six steps.

He took a pop. He took six steps. He imbibed again. Pete counted steps. Pete tailed him. Pete yukked.

They hit the bleachers. Sirhan studied faces. Sirhan studied faces slooooow. He stared. His eyes darted. His eyes flared and flashed.

Pete *got* it:

He's looking for demons. He's scouting for Jews.

Sirhan stood still. Sirhan stared. Sirhan saw big beaks. Sirhan smelled Jew.

Sirhan walked. Sirhan grabbed a seat. Sirhan perched by some groovy girls. The girls checked him out. The girls went ugh. The girls went P-U.

Pete took a seat. Pete sat one bleacher up. Pete checked the view: the paddock/the track/the nags at the gate.

The bell rang. The nags tore ass. Sirhan went nuts.

He yelled. He shrieked go go go. His shirttail hiked up. Pete saw a bullet pouch. Pete saw a .38 snub.

Sirhan slurped vodka. Sirhan yelled in Arabic. Sirhan beat his chest to a pulp. The girls moved. The nags crossed the finish line. Sirhan tore a bet-stub up.

Sirhan sulked. Sirhan paced. Sirhan kicked paper cups. He studied his scratch sheet. He picked his nose. He flicked hunks of snot.

Some guys sat down—jarheads in dress blues. Sirhan slid close. Sirhan talked shit. Sirhan offered his jug.

The jarheads imbibed. Pete listened. Pete heard:

"The Jews steal our pussy."

"Robert Kennedy pays them."

"That is no shit I tell you."

The jarheads yukked. The jarheads goofed on the spastic. Sirhan got pissed and reached for his jug. The jarheads tossed it over his head. The jarheads goofed double-hard.

They stood up. They stretched tall. They tossed the jug high. Sirhan was short. They were tall. They made Sirhan leap.

Keep away—*Semper Fi*—three-handed.

They tossed the jug. Sirhan leaped. Sirhan lunged and jumped. Keep away/hot potato/three hands.

The jug traveled. The jug flew shell-game fast. The jug fell and broke. The jarheads laughed. Sirhan laughed—à la Daffy Duck.

An onlooker laughed. He was fat and frizzy-haired. Dig his beanie and mezuzah.

Sirhan called him a "pussylicker."

Sirhan called him a "vampire Jew."

Pete watched the races. Pete watched The Sirhan Sirhan Show.

Sirhan noshed candy bars. Sirhan picked his teeth. Sirhan lost bets. Sirhan sulked. Sirhan picked his toes. Sirhan hassled blond girls. Sirhan dug earwax. Sirhan talked shit.

Jews. RFK. The pus puppets of Zion. The Arab revolt.

Sirhan trawled for Jews. Sirhan scratched his balls. Sirhan aired his feet. Sirhan walked to the paddock. Pete tailed him close. Sirhan hassled jockeys.

I was jockey once. I was hot walker. I hate Zionist pigs. The jockeys razzed him—fuck you, Fritz—you're a *camel* jockey.

Sirhan walked to the bar. Pete tailed him. Sirhan drank vodka shooters with candy-bar chasers. Sirhan chomped ice cubes.

Sirhan trawled for Jews. Sirhan fixed on big schnozzolas. Sirhan jumped stools. Sirhan walked to the john. Pete tailed him. Sirhan trawled urinals.

Sirhan bagged a toilet stall. Pete loitered close. Sirhan shit long and loud. Sirhan walked out. Pete walked in. Pete saw toilet scrawls:

Pigs of Zion!

Blood Licker Jews!

RFK Must Die!

Pete called Fred O. Pete said, "He looks good." Pete drove downtown. Pete hit the Hall of Justice. Pete hit the state horse race board.

He flashed a Rice Krispies badge. He conned a clerk. He cadged an employee file check.

The clerk showed him a file bank. He saw six drawers alphabetic. The clerk yawned. The clerk split. The clerk took a java break.

He pulled the S drawer. He finger-walked. He found "Sirhan, Sirhan B." He skimmed two pages. He got:

Sirhan *was* a hot walker. Sirhan fell off horses. Sirhan bonked his head repeatedly. Sirhan drank too much. Sirhan gambled too much. Sirhan defamed Jews.

He found a memo. The board sent Sirhan to a shrink. A pork dodger/Dr. G. N. Blumenfeld/out in West L.A.

Pete laughed. Pete walked. Pete found a pay phone. He called Fred O. He said, "He looks great."

He tired fast. He tired hard. It killed him. The *day* fucking killed him. Cane tails at age forty-seven.

He hit his motel. He took his pills. He snarfed his blood-thinning drops. He chewed Nicorette gum. He ate his rabbit-food dinner.

He was shot. He was dead whipped. He tried to sleep. His circuits disconnected. Recent shit recohered.

Barb/the boat/the Big Lie. Wayne/the King hit/Bobby.

Barb made sense. Nothing else. Barb dug on Bobby. Barb would mourn Bobby. Barb might link him to the hit. She might do a "Not Again" number. She might freak and split. She might leave him for Bobby *and* Jack.

It scared him. Nothing else did. No outrage or fugue for *la Causa*. No fear outside that.

My shit's too exhausting. I'm dispersed and dead whipped. I'm shot.

He checked the Yellow Pages. He got the shrink's address. He slept.

He got six hours. He revived. He went out sans cane. G. N. Blumenfeld/office on Pico/out in West L.A.

2:30 a.m.—sleepytime L.A.

He drove out. He parked curbside. He checked the building: Stucco/one-story/six doors in a row.

He grabbed his penlight. He grabbed a pocket knife. He grabbed his Diners Club card. He got out. He tilt-walked. Where's my fucking cane?

He made the door. He flashed the lock. He tapped the keyhole. Go—the knife blade/the card/one sharp twist.

He got leverage. He applied force. The door popped.

He tilt-walked inside. He caught his breath. He pulled the door shut. He flashed the waiting room. He saw clown prints. He saw one desk and one couch.

He flashed a side door. He saw a caduceus. He saw G. N. BLUMENFELD. He walked over. He braced off the walls. His breath snagged and huffed.

He tried the door. It was unlocked. There's the shrink chair. There's the file bank. There's the shrink couch.

His breath jerked. He got dizzy. He stretched out on the couch. He laughed—I'm Sirhan Sirhan—RFK watch out!

He got his breath. He stowed the yuks. His pulse leveled out. He flashed the file bank: A to L/M to S/T to Z.

He got up. He pulled drawer handles. The file drawers slid out. M to S—be there, you fuck.

He pulled drawer 2. He finger-walked. He found him: one folder/two pages/three-visit summary.

He flashed the pages. Quotes leaped:

"Memory loss." "Fugue states." "Disoriented condition."

"*Overdependence on supportive male figures.*"

Boffo quotes. Fred O. would swoon. Hello, you camel jockey!

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/11/68. Atlanta *Constitution* headline and subhead:

SEARCH FOR KING ASSASSIN BROADENS

FBI IN MASSIVE HUNT

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/12/68. Houston *Chronicle* headline and subhead:

LAUNDRY-MARK CLUE ID’S ASSASSINATION SUSPECT
SEARCH WIDENS IN LOS ANGELES

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/14/68. Miami *Herald* subhead:

RIOT DAMAGE ASSESSED IN WAKE OF KING ASSASSINATION

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/15/68. Portland *Oregonian* headline and subhead:

ASSASSIN’S CAR FOUND IN ATLANTA
SEARCH FOR SUSPECT GALT BROADENS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/19/68. Dallas *Morning News* subhead:

HUNT FOR KING ASSASSIN “#1 PRIORITY,” HOOVER SAYS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/20/68. New York *Daily News* headline and subhead:

FINGERPRINT CHECK YIELDS PAYDIRT!
“GALT” REVEALED AS PRISON ESCAPEE!

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/22/68. Chicago *Sun-Times* headline and subhead:

RFK IN HUGE INDIANA PRIMARY PUSH

CITES LEGACY OF DR. KING

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/23/68. Los Angeles *Examiner* subhead:

SKID ROW MURDER VICTIM DURFEE REVEALED AS LONG-SOUGHT RAPIST-KILLER

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/7/68. New York *Times* headline:

RFK WINS INDIANA PRIMARY

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/10/68. San Francisco *Chronicle* headline:

RFK WINS NEBRASKA PRIMARY

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/14/68. Los Angeles *Examiner* subhead:

SEARCH FOR KING ASSASSIN SHIFTS TO CANADA

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/15/68. Phoenix *Sun* subhead:

RFK IN OREGON-CALIFORNIA CAMPAIGN PUSH

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/16/68. Chicago *Tribune* subhead:

HOOVER SAYS KING ASSASSINATION “NOT A CONSPIRACY”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/22/68. Washington *Post* headline and subhead:

LOW TURNOUT FOR POOR PEOPLE'S MARCH

KING'S DEATH CITED AS REASON

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/26/68. Cleveland *Plain Dealer* subhead:

HUNT FOR SUSPECT RAY WIDENS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/26/68. New York *Daily News* subhead:

RAY DESCRIBED AS “AMPHETAMINE ADDICT-LONER”
WITH BENT FOR “GIRLIE” MAGAZINES

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/27/68. Los Angeles *Examiner* subhead:

FRIENDS CITE RAY’S RACE-HATE HISTORY

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/28/68. Los Angeles *Examiner* subhead:

NO LEADS IN HUNT FOR SKID-ROW KILLER
LAPD LINKS VICTIM TO RECENT RAPE-MURDERS OF THREE WOMEN

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/28/68. Portland *Oregonian* headline and subhead:

RFK LOSES OREGON PRIMARY
MOVES CAMPAIGN TO CRUCIAL CALIFORNIA TEST

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/29/68. Los Angeles *Times* subhead:

HUGE CROWDS AS RFK STORMS STATE

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/30/68. Los Angeles *Times* subhead:

RECORD CROWDS CHEER RFK'S PLEDGE TO END WAR

DOCUMENT INSERT: 6/1/68. San Francisco *Chronicle* subhead:

RFK SETS BREAKNECK PACE IN CALIFORNIA CAMPAIGN

(Lake Tahoe, 6/2/68)

The hole-up:

Wayne Senior's cabin / four rooms / secluded. Up mountain roads. Wide views and trout streams.

Home for now. Home since Memphis.

He had a scrambler phone. He had a food stash. He had a TV. He had shit to sort out. He had time to think.

Let's wait. The Feds will get Jimmy Ray. LAPD will give up on Durfee.

Bob Relyea had his hole-up. Bob had some shack near Phoenix. Wayne got better lodging. Wayne made phone calls. Wayne watched TV.

The Feds traced Ray to England. The search tapped out there. They'll get him. They'll kill him or bust him. He'll give up "Raul." They'll say you're crazy. They'll say there is no "Raul."

The TV spieled news. Wayne Senior called daily. Wayne Senior spieled gossip.

I work with Carlos now. Carlos said he got some tapes. Mr. Hoover sent them. The tapes scared him. Bobby K.'s out to fuck us. Let's clip him fast.

Wayne Senior tattled. *See what I know*? Wayne Senior bragged.

Fred O.'s gigging it. He runs the new shooter. Pete B. runs backup. Wayne Senior gloated. *I'm an insider*. Wayne Senior bragged.

Pete killed some kadre men. Pete klipped loose ends at sea. Carlos told me that. Wayne Senior tattled. *Your daddy hears things*. Wayne Senior bragged.

The kadre biz was a shuck. The Boys fucked the Cause. Carlos told me that. Wayne hashed it out. Wayne came to this: I just don't care.

He watched TV. He caught the war. He caught politics. Wayne Senior puffed. Bobby's a dead man. I'll set Nixon up with the Boys.

Wayne hashed it out. It felt felicitous. Wayne grooved the details. Wayne foresaw the balance.

King's dead. Bobby soon. Shit will peak and resettle. The Poor People's March tanked. The riots upstaged it. Fools popped their rocks and resettled. Chaos is taxing. Fools tire quick. King's death let them roar and resettle. Bobby will go. Dick Nixon will reign. The country will roar and resettle.

The fix will work. Peace will reign. His type will run things. He saw it. He felt it. He *knew*.

And:

You'll step up. You'll get *your* piece. You *know* it. You're making calls. You're listening. You're *thinking*.

He called Wayne Senior. He let him talk. He let him tattle and puff.

Wayne Senior said this:

Littell will retire. I'll get his job. I'll span Howard Hughes and the Boys. Dick Nixon and *me*. Dick and the Boys—shitfire.

Wayne listened. Wayne prompted. Wayne dropped soft tell-me-mores.

Wayne Senior said:

I ran Maynard Moore. He was my snitch. I bankrolled most of Dallas. I sent you there. I got you close. I bought you history. You killed Moore—*didn't you*?—you *lived* history.

Wayne dodged the probe. Wayne rethought Dallas. Moore and the bankroll were old news. The hot news was contempt and hubris.

Dallas derailed your life. Dallas killed your wife. Dallas almost killed you. Wendell D. was there. You weekended with him. Cut to your last rendezvous.

Wayne Senior found Durfee. Dwight Holly helped. They found him and staked him for you. Durfee killed three more women. He killed them during that interval—*before* your last rendezvous.

Wayne Senior gloated. *Hear this now*. Wayne Senior bragged. Pete killed the kadre men. Carlos vouched the job. Carlos said Pete could "retire." Carlos lied to Pete. Carlos told Wayne Senior why.

Pete was impetuous. Pete was erratic. Pete had ideals. Pete and Barb go. Pete and Barb go after Bobby. Carlos has a guy. His name's Chuck the Vice. Chuck kills shitfire. Carlos will call Chuck *après* Bobby.

Hubris. Miscalculation. Pure contempt for YOU.

He had time. He had the phone. He had scrambled frequencies. He called out. He didn't call Barb. He didn't call Pete.

He called Janice. He listened. She talked.

She had cancer. They cut some out. Most of it spread. She had six months tops. She blamed herself. Her cramps hid the symptoms. Said cramps were Wayne Senior–derived.

She hid the prognosis. She never told Ward. She moved into his suite. She still loved the golf course. She still hit shag balls.

She was fading. Ward never sensed it. Ward was soooo Ward. Ward talked in his sleep now. Ward invoked "Bobby" and "Jane."

Ward studied ledger books. There were two separate sets. Ward had them hidey-hole stashed. Ward was secretive. Ward was heedless. She found the stash.

Teamster books. Figures and code names. One set. Anti-Mob books. Typed pages with hand scrawls. One set.

Feminine scrawl. Probably scrawled up by "Jane."

Ward mimeo'd the Jane sheets. Ward wrote cover notes. Ward filled envelopes. Ward was secretive. Ward was heedless. She watched him. She peeked and saw.

She did the pencil trick. She traced a scratch-pad sheet. She bagged a cover note verbatim. Ward wrote to "Paul Horvitz." He was on Bobby's staff. Ward pleaded. Ward groveled. Ward pressed. Ward said here's more dirt. Ward said I'm not a spy. Ward said *please don't hate me.*

It was pathetic. Janice said so.

He called her again. She disdained cancer talk. She talked about Ward.

He's guilt-wracked. He's paranoid. He's confused. He's talking crazy. He says the Feds are on me. He says the Boys might be out for Bobby.

He plays Bobby tapes. He plays them late at night. He thinks I'm asleep. He sleeps fitful. He prays for Bobby. He prays for Martin Luther King. He split ten days ago. He hasn't called. I think he wigged out.

I miss him. I might burn his stash pile. It might drive some sense home. It might wake him up.

Wayne said don't do it. Janice laughed. Janice said it was just talk. Wayne proposed a date. He said I'll pass through Vegas soon. We'll meet at Ward's suite.

Janice said yes.

He wanted her. Dying or not. He knew it. Janice got him thinking. *Everything* did.

He got an urge. It was time-travel stuff. It reached back fourteen years. He called his mother in Peru, Indiana.

The call shocked her. He let her calm down. They broke some ice. They bridged some pauses. They talked. He lied his life off. She said all good things.

You were a tender child. You loved animals. You set trapped coyotes free. You were a brilliant child. You learned complex math. You excelled at chemistry. You carried no hate. You played with colored children. You loved righteously.

I was pregnant once. It was '32—two years before you. Wayne Senior had a dream. He saw the baby as a girl. He wanted a boy.

He beat my stomach in. He used brass knuckles. The baby died. Wayne Senior was right. It was a girl. The doctor told me.

Wayne said goodbye then. His mother said God bless.

Wayne thought it through. Wayne called Janice. Wayne set up their date.

(Long Beach, 6/3/68)

Bobby! Bobby! Bobby!

The crowd chanted it. The crowd went nuts. Speak Bobby speak!

Bobby climbed a flatbed truck. Bobby grabbed a microphone. Bobby rolled up his sleeves.

The Southglen Mall. Three thousand fans—Speak Bobby Speak! Parking-lot frenzy. Kids on daddies' shoulders. Sound speakers on stilts.

The fans loved Bobby. The fans fucked up their vocal cords. The fans fucking shrieked. Watch Bobby smile! Watch Bobby toss his hair! Hear Bobby speak!

Pete watched. Likewise Fred O.

They watched Bobby. They watched his bodyguards. They watched the cop crew. The numbers were low. Bobby loved contact. Bobby shined on security.

Fred watched cops move. Fred watched cops scan. Fred watched cops flank. Fred nailed details. Fred memorized.

Fred met Sirhan. They "met" at the track. They "met" six weeks back. Fred staged a play for Sirhan. Fred beat up a Jew.

He was a big man. He had a big beak. He wore a big beanie. He was a *very* big Jew.

Fred kicked his ass. Sirhan watched. Sirhan dug the show. Fred dished rapport—I'm Bill Habib—I'm Arab too.

Courtship/subornment/recruitment/sheep dip.

Fred palled with Sirhan. Fred bought him booze. Fred ragged the Jews. They met every day. They worked up a mojo. They ragged Bobby K. They met semi-private. Fred stayed skinny. Fred stayed camouflaged.

Fred tweaked Sirhan. Fred studied Sirhan. Fred learned:

How far to push him. How much booze to pour him. How much hate to stoke. How to get him talking. How to get him fuming: Kill RFK!

How to get him blackout drunk. How to get him fucked-up blotto. How to push him to memory loss. How to get him stalking rallies. How to get him talking death. How to get him talking fate. How to get him target shooting out in the hills—blasting at mock–Bobby K.'s.

Fred gauged Sirhan. Fred said:

He's drinking hard. He's drinking every night. He's drinking with and without me. He's hitting rallies. He's rally-hopping countywide. He always packs his piece. I've tailed him. I've seen it. I *know*.

He hates Bobby. His logic's warped. It's misdirected and rationalized. He hates the Jews. He hates Israel. He hates Zionist Bobby. He hates Bobby because Bobby's a fucking *Kennedy*.

He's primed now. He's ready now. He's psycho. He's blackout-prone. He's booze-atrophied.

Fred picked the spot. Fred told Sirhan. Fred made Sirhan drink. Sirhan *picked* the spot. Sirhan picked it two bottles later. Sirhan usurped the idea. Sirhan thinks it's *his* idea. It's his booze epiphany.

Tomorrow night. The Ambassador Hotel. Bobby's victory gala. Bobby to shout victory.

Bobby will be fried. Bobby will be torched and zorched—cumulatively. The kitchen's the way out. It's short and fast—serendipity. Sirhan's there. Sirhan's primed—tenaciously.

Fred knew the kitchen. Fred checked it out. Fred pumped rent-a-cops. Said cops pledged this:

Tight spaces/armed guards/tight security. That meant potential combustion/potential confusion. That meant potential insanity.

Fred's suggested drama/Fred's *predicted* lunacy:

Men draw their guns. Men shoot Sirhan. Shots bounce and hit Bobby K. Fred said he *will* shoot. Fred knew the nut turf. Fred-"Raul" ran James Earl Ray.

Pete looked around. The crowd yelled. The crowd went nuts. The crowd out-yelled Bobby.

The speakers backfired. Reverb blew wide. Bobby spoke basso-falsetto. Pete heard platitudes. Pete heard “end the war.” Pete heard “King’s legacy.”

Barb dug Bobby. Barb dug his antiwar shit. He hadn’t called her. She hadn’t called him. She never wrote. No contact since Sparta. No contact post-boat trip. No contact post-coronary.

The crowd yelled. Pete looked around. Pete saw a pay phone. It was streetside. It was away from the noise. It was away from Bobby.

He pushed over. People stepped aside. People saw his cane. He made the booth. He caught his breath. He fed quarters in.

He got an operator. She patched the Cavern. He got the switchboard. He shagged his messages.

No message from Barb. One message from Wayne: Call me/Lake Tahoe/urgent/this number direct.

Pete dropped quarters. Pete got an operator. She patched Tahoe direct. Pete heard two rings. Pete heard Wayne:

“Hello?”

“It’s me. Where the hell have—”

“Littell’s on to the hit. Grab him and bring him here. And tell Barb go someplace safe.”

(San Diego, 6/3/68)

Bobby soared.

He jabbed the air. He tossed his hair. He praised Dr. King. He co-opted him. He out-orated him. He made his praise sing.

It all worked. It all sang—the sunburn/the bray/the rolled sleeves.

The crowd soared. The crowd roared. The crowd cheered in sync. Two thousand people/crowd ropes up/parking-lot streams.

Littell watched. Littell willed Bobby: *Please look at me*.

See me. Don't fear me. I won't hurt you again. I'm a pilgrim. I fear *for* you. My fear's justified.

Bobby stood on a flatbed. The tailgate shook and dipped. Aides stood below him. Aides steadied him.

Look over. Look down. See me.

His fear boiled over. It popped two weeks back. His fear stretched and peaked. He linked fear dots. He plumbed fear lines. He read fear hieroglyphs.

The news pic/the El Encanto/suite 301. The Sam line: "Box of goodies." The Carlos line: Pete's "small favor." Fear connections/hieroglyphs/puzzle chips.

It got bad. It ate him up. It ruined his sleep. He split Vegas. He flew to D.C. He called Paul Horvitz.

Paul hung up. He called Mr. Hoover. He called Dwight Holly. They hung up. He drove to the Bureau. Door guards ejected him.

He flew to Oregon. He approached campaign staffers. Staff guards restrained him. He saw his name on a list—all "Known Enemies."

He told the guards I *sense* things. He said *please* talk to me.

They said no. They manhandled him. They ejected him.

Chips dovetailed. He sensed things. Mr. Hoover *knows*—just like he knew about Jack.

He flew to Santa Barbara. He got a hotel room. He staked out the El Encanto. He watched 301. He followed wires. He found the listening post.

Suite 208/fifty yards up/manned twenty-four hours per day.

He staked it out. He wore disguises. He worked six days and nights. He waited. The post stayed manned—all day/all night.

He went schizzy. He gave up sleep—six days/six nights. He lost weight. He saw goblins. Spots torqued his eyes.

It rained on day 7. One agent stayed on-post.

Luck:

Said agent goes off-post. Said agent visits suite 63. Said agent has a prostitute.

Littell hit 208. Littell picked the door lock. Littell locked himself in. Littell tossed the post.

He found a transcript log. He found a routing log. He found transcripts stacked. He skimmed back through mid-March. He saw:

March 15/16. Two three-way talks transcribed. Bobby plus Paul Horvitz. One man un-ID'd. Bobby's voluble. Bobby's effusive. Bobby talks anti-Mob.

He skimmed the routing log. He hit 3/20. He saw tape copies routed. The tapes for March 15/16. Said tapes routed to the Boys.

To Carlos. To Moe D. To John Rosselli. To Santo and Sam G.

That was this morning. That was twelve hours back.

He tracked Bobby's schedule. He drove south. He hit San Diego. He called the Bureau office. The ASAC hung up. He called SDPD. He told his story. A sergeant blew up.

The sergeant yelled at him. The sergeant said, "You're on a list." The sergeant hung up.

He drove to the rally. He got there early. He saw sound men set up. He braced them. He braced staffers. He got the bum's rush. He left. He came back. The crowd ate him up.

Littell watched Bobby. Littell waved his hands. *Look at me please*. Bobby soared. Bobby waved. Bobby loved up the crowd. Bobby spread contact thin.

Littell waved his hands. Something jabbed him—a needle/a pin/a stick. He went woozy—BOOM like that—he saw Fred Otash thiiiiiinnn.

(Las Vegas, 6/4/68)

Wild Janice—frail now.

More gray hair. More black eclipsed. More lines and hollows.

Wayne walked in. Janice shut the door. Wayne embraced her. He felt ribs. He felt hollows. He felt her curves slack.

Janice stepped back. Wayne took her hands.

"You look pretty good, considering."

"I wasn't going to put on all that powder. I'm not dead yet."

"Don't talk like that."

"Let me indulge myself. You're my first date since Ward deserted me."

Wayne smiled. "You were my first date, ever."

Janice smiled. "Are you talking about the Peru Cotillion of 1949 or the one time we did it?"

Wayne squeezed her hands. "We never got a second shot."

Janice laughed. "You weren't looking for one. It was just your way to cut loose of your father."

"I regret that. That part of it, I mean."

"You mean it was good, but you regret the timing and your motive."

"I regret what it cost you."

Janice squeezed his hands. "You're leading up to something."

Wayne blushed. Shit—you *still* do that.

"I was hoping there'd be one more time."

"You can't mean it. With me like *this*?"

"You never get things right the first time."

■ ■ ■

It went soft. It went slow. It went like he wanted. It went like he planned.

Her body showed the hurt. Sharp bones over skin. Gray tones over white. Her breath tasted bitter. He liked her old taste—Salem Menthols and gin.

They rolled. Her bones scraped him. They touched and kissed long. Her breasts fell. He liked it. Her breasts used to stand.

She still had strength. She pushed him. She clutched and grabbed. They rolled. He tasted her. She tasted him.

She tasted sick. It stunned him. The taste settled in. He tasted her inside. He kissed her new scars. Her breath fluttered thin.

He got her close. She pulled back. She guided him in. He reached over. He turned on the bed lamp. The beam settled in.

It caught her face. It bounced off her gray hair. It caught her eyes flush.

They moved together. They got close and held. They locked their eyes up. They moved. They peaked close together. They let their eyes shut.

Janice played the radio. KVGS—all lounge stuff.

They hit some Barb songs. They laughed and rolled. They kicked the sheets up. Wayne dimmed the volume. The Bondsmen purred. Barb sang "Twilight Time."

Janice said, "You love her. Ward told me."

"I outgrew her. She grew up and messed with my crush." Barb segued upbeat—"Chanson d'Amour." Janice dimmed the volume. Barb blew a high note. The Bondsmen cued her back up.

"I ran into her, about two years ago. We had a few drinks and discussed certain men."

Wayne smiled. "I wish I could have been there."

"You were."

"That's all you're saying?"

Janice zipped her lips. "Yes."

Barb segued dreamy—Jimmy Rogers' "Secretly."

Janice said, "I love that song. It reminds me of the man I was with then."

"Was it my father?"

"No."

"Did he find out?"

“Yes.”

“What did he do?”

Janice touched his lips. “Be still. I want to listen.”

Barb sang. Her voice held. She segued. She went upbeat. Reverb killed the mood.

Wayne killed the volume. Wayne rolled close to Janice. He kissed her. He touched her hair. He got her eyes close up.

“If I told you I could help you settle the one score that counts, would you want to do it?”

Janice said, “Yes.”

She slept.

She ate pain pills. She drifted off. Wayne fluffed her hair on a pillow. Wayne pulled a quilt over her.

He checked his watch. It was 6:10 p.m.

He walked to his car. He grabbed two laundry bags. He grabbed a scratch pad and pen. He walked back. He bolted the door. He walked the living room. He pat-checked the walls. He patted and touched.

No hollow thunks/no wall seams/no panels.

He walked the bedroom. He worked around Janice. He patted and touched. No hollow thunks/no wall seams/no panels.

He walked Littell’s study. He slid out a cabinet. He saw a wall seam. He found a catch and flipped it. A panel slid back.

He saw shelves. He saw a .38 snubnose. He saw ledgers stacked.

He opened the blue ones. He saw Teamster nomenclature. He opened the brown ones. He saw typed notes and hand scrawl. He skimmed the text.

Arden-Jane indicts Teamsters. Arden-Jane indicts mobsters. Arden-Jane culls anti-Mob facts.

Book 2—page 84:

Arden-Jane rats “Chuck the Vice” Aiuppa. Arden-Jane rats Carlos M. She heard a rumor. She confirmed it. She transcribed.

March ’59. Outside New Orleans. Carlos gives “Chuck the Vice” work. A “cajun fuck” fucked Carlos. Carlos says clip him.

“Chuck the Vice” obeys. “Chuck the Vice” kills said fuck. “Chuck the Vice” buries him.

Across from Boo’s Hot-Links—six miles from Fort Polk. Look there—you'll find the bones.

Wayne pulled page 84. Wayne grabbed his scratch pad. Wayne wrote a note:

Mr. Marcello,

My father bought Arden Breen–Jane Fentress's file from her before she left Ward Littell. Ward has no idea that such a file exists.

My father plans to extort you with information contained in the file. Can we discuss this? I'll call you within 24 hours.

Wayne Tedrow Jr.

Wayne checked Littell's desk. Wayne found an envelope. Wayne dropped the page and note in.

He sealed the envelope. He addressed it: Carlos Marcello/ Tropicana Hotel/Las Vegas.

He grabbed the ledger books. He filled a laundry bag. He walked out. He killed the bedroom lights. He kissed Janice.

He touched her hair. He said, "I love you."

(Lake Tahoe, 6/4/68)

News flash! It's over! Bobby K. wins!

The TV ran figures. Percentage points and precincts. It's Bobby decisive. It's Bobby's big win.

Pete watched. Ward watched near-comatose. Ward watched shell-shocked.

They got Wayne's tip. They jumped him. They spiked him with Seconal. Pete drove him up. They hid in Wayne Senior's lodge.

Wayne was in Vegas. Fred O. was in L.A. Fred O. was priming Sirhan.

Ward slept crypt-style. Ward slept sixteen hours. Ward slept cuffed to a bed. He woke up. He saw Pete. He *knew*. He refused to talk. He said zero words. Pete knew he'd want to *see*.

Pete cooked pancakes. Ward ate zero. Pete ran the TV. They waited. Ward watched election news. Pete twirled his cane.

He'd called Barb. She said Fuck You. I won't run. I won't hide.

Pete babied Ward. Pete said talk to me please. Ward shut his eyes. Ward shook his head. Ward cupped his ears.

News flash! The Ambassador live! Bobby proclaims victory!

A camera cut to close-up. Bobby's all tousle-haired. Bobby's grinning all teeth.

The phone rang. Pete grabbed it.

"Yeah?"

Wayne said, "It's me."

Pete watched the TV. The picture skipped and settled. His pulse skipped. Bobbyphiles cheered Bobby.

"Where are—"

"I just talked to Carlos. He had plans for you and Barb, but I talked him out of it. You're free to do whatever you want, and Ward is retired as of now."

"Jesus Chr—"

"Dallas and up, partner. I pay my debts."

The picture skipped and settled. Pete put the phone down. Pete felt his pulse skip.

Bobby splits the podium. Bobby waves. Bobby steps away. The camera pans a doorway—Bobby adieu—the camera cuts back.

The camera pans Bobbyphiles. A mike gets the gunshots. A mike gets the screams.

Oh God—

Oh no.

No not that—

Senator Kennedy has been—

Pete hit the remote control. The TV bipped off.

Ward cupped his ears. Ward shut his eyes. Ward fucking screamed.

(Lake Tahoe, 6/9/68)

Reruns:

The eulogies. The High Mass. The funeral scenes. Wakes plural—King and Bobby.

He watched. He watched all day and night. He watched four days on.

Reruns:

The kitchen chaos. The cops with Sirhan. The Feds with James Earl Ray. Caught in London. “I’m a patsy.” A familiar theme.

He watched TV. He watched four days on. It would end soon. The news would shift. The news would move on.

Littell flipped channels. Littell saw L.A. and Memphis.

He was hungry. His food was gone. Pete stocked for two days. Pete left four days back. Pete cut the phone lines free.

Pete said walk to Tahoe. It’s six miles tops. Catch a Vegas train.

Pete was disingenuous. Pete knew he wouldn’t. Pete knew he’d stay. Pete caught the drift. Pete left his gun behind. Pete told him straight:

They killed King too. You should know that. I owe you.

Littell said goodbye. One word and no more. Pete squeezed his hands. Pete walked away.

Littell flipped channels. Littell caught The Triad: Jack/King/Bobby. Three funeral shots. Three artful cuts. Three widows framed.

I killed them. It’s my fault. Their blood’s on me.

He waited. He watched the screen. Let’s try for all three. He flipped channels. He got one and two. He lucked on all three.

There—old footage. It’s pre-’63.

They're in the White House. Jack's at his desk. King's standing with Bobby. The image held. One picture/all three.

Littell grabbed the gun. Littell ate the barrel. The muzzle roar shut off all three.

(Sparta, 6/9/68)

The cat hissed. The cat snarled. The cat paced his cage.

The cab hit ruts. Pete bounced. His knees bumped the cage. Sparta in bloom. Mosquitoes meet Lutherans and trees.

He flew unannounced. He brought truce papers. He brought seller's deeds. He sold the Cavern. He took a loss. He sold Tiger Kab to Milt C.

The cat hissed. Pete scratched his ears. The cab cut due east.

His wind was back. He ditched his cane. He still tired easy. He was fried/fragged/*frappéed*. He was frazzled and free.

He tried for regret. He fretted the bad shit on Ward. He ran his fears for Wayne T. Nothing jelled persistent. You're fried/fragged/*frappéed*. You're frazzled and free.

The cat snarled. The cab cut south. The driver read address plates. The driver pulled over. The cab grazed the curb.

Pete got out. Pete saw Barb. She's pruning fucking trees. She heard the cab. She looked over. She saw Pete.

Pete took one step. Barb took two steps. Pete jumped and took three.

(Las Vegas, 6/9/68)

He's home.

The lights are on. The shades are up. One window's cracked free.

Wayne parked. Wayne walked up. Wayne opened the door and walked in.

He's upside the bar. It's ritualized. He's got his nightcap. He's got his stick.

Wayne walked over. Wayne Senior smiled. Wayne Senior twirled his stick.

"I knew you'd be by."

"What made you think that?"

"Certain allegedly unrelated events of the past few months and how they relate to this burgeoning partnership of ours."

Wayne grabbed the stick. Wayne twirled it. Wayne did a few tricks.

"That's a good place to start."

Wayne Senior winked. "I'm sitting down with Dick Nixon next week."

Wayne winked. "No, I am."

Wayne Senior laughed—faux rube/yuk-yuk.

"You'll meet Dick in good time. I'll get you a box seat at the inauguration."

Wayne twirled the stick. "I've spoken to Carlos and Mr. Hughes' people. We've come to some agreements, and I'm assuming Ward Littell's position."

Wayne Senior twitched. Wayne Senior smiled in slow-motion. Wayne Senior built a slow-motion drink.

One hand's clenched. It's on the bar rail. One hand's pure free.

Their eyes met. Their eyes held. Their eyes locked shitfire.

Wayne pulled his cuffs. Wayne freed a ratchet. Wayne snared one wrist. The cuff snapped on. Wayne Senior jerked back. Wayne jerked him back in.

Wayne flicked the spare cuff. Wayne freed the ratchet. Wayne cuffed the bar rail crisp.

Good cuffs/LVPD/Smith & Wesson.

Wayne Senior jerked. The cuff chain held. The bar rail squeaked. Wayne pulled a knife. Wayne flicked the blade. Wayne cut the bar phone cord.

Wayne Senior jerked the chain. Wayne Senior dumped his stool. Wayne Senior spilled his drink.

Wayne twirled the stick. "I reconverted. Mr. Hughes was pleased to know that I'm a Mormon."

Wayne Senior jerked. The ratchets scraped. The bar rail held strong. The chain links went *screeee*.

Wayne walked out. Wayne stood by his car. The Strip lights twinkled waaay off. Wayne saw incoming beams.

The car pulled up. The car stopped. Janice got out. Janice weaved and anchored her feet.

She twirled a golf club. Some kind of iron. Big head and fat grips.

She walked past Wayne. She looked at him. He smelled her cancer breath. She walked inside. She let the door swing.

Wayne stood tiptoed. Wayne made a picture frame. Wayne got a full window view. The club head arced. His father screamed. Blood sprayed the panes.

BLOOD'S A ROVER

A NOVEL

JAMES ELLROY

A KNOPF e BOOK

BY JAMES ELLROY

THE UNDERWORLD U.S.A. TRILOGY

American Tabloid
The Cold Six Thousand
Blood's A Rover

THE L.A. QUARTET

The Black Dahlia
The Big Nowhere
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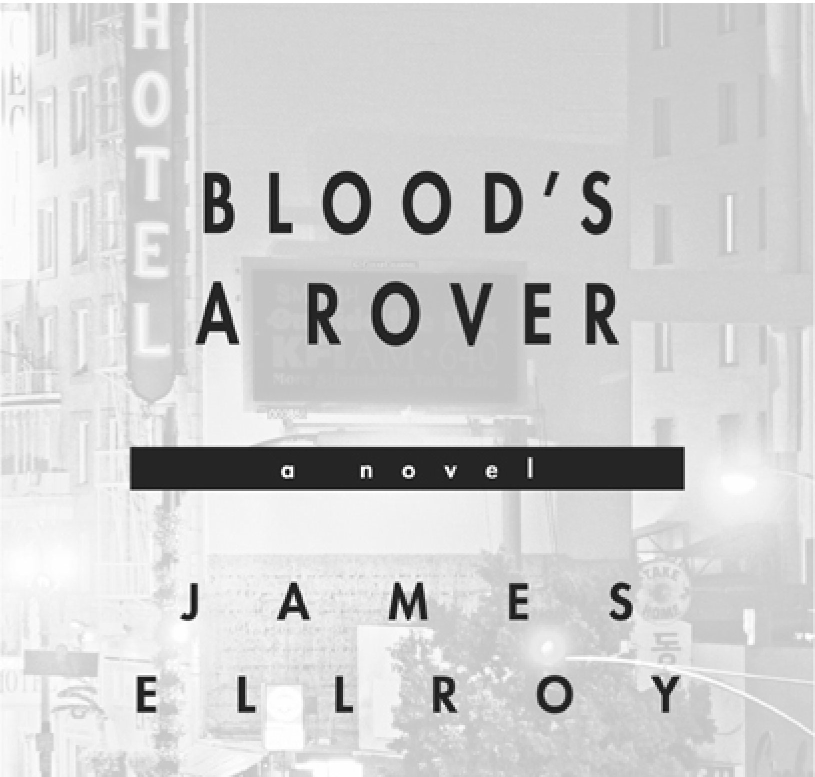

BLOOD'S A ROVER

a novel

JAMES ELLROY

ALFRED A. KNOPF
New York
2009

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PUBLISHED BY ALFRED A. KNOPF

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www.aaknopf.com

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A portion of this work originally appeared in *Playboy*.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Ellroy, James, [date]
Blood's a rover / by James Ellroy.—1st ed.
p. cm.
eISBN: 978-0-307-27303-1
1. Nineteen sixties—Fiction. 2. Los Angeles (Calif.)—Fiction. 3. Noir fiction. 4. Political fiction. I. Title.
PS3555.L6274B57 2009
813'.54—dc22 2009024460

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

v3.1

To

J.M.

Comrade: For Everything You Gave Me

Clay lies still, but blood’s a rover;
Breath’s a ware that will not keep.
Up, lad: when the journey’s over
There’ll be time enough to sleep.

A. E. Housman

THEN

Los Angeles, 2/24/64

S*UDDENLY:*

The milk truck cut a sharp right turn and grazed the curb. The driver lost the wheel. He panic-popped the brakes. He induced a rear-end skid. A Wells Fargo armored car clipped the milk truck side/head-on.

Mark it now:

7:16 a.m. South L.A., 84th and Budlong. Residential darktown. Shit shacks with dirt front yards.

The jolt stalled out both vehicles. The milk truck driver hit the dash. The driver's side door blew wide. The driver keeled and hit the sidewalk. He was a fortyish male Negro.

The armored car notched some hood dents. Three guards got out and scoped the damage. They were white men in tight khakis. They wore Sam Browne belts with buttoned pistol flaps.

They knelt beside the milk truck driver. The guy twitched and gasped. The dashboard bounce gouged his forehead. Blood dripped into his eyes.

Mark it now:

7:17 a.m. Winter overcast. This quiet street. No foot traffic. No car-crash hubbub yet.

The milk truck heaved. The radiator blew. Steam hissed and spread wide. The guards coughed and wiped their eyes. Three men got out of a '62 Ford parked two curb lengths back.

They wore masks. They wore gloves and crepe-soled shoes.

They wore utility belts with gas bombs in pouches. They were long-sleeved and buttoned up. Their skin color was obscured.

Steam covered them. They walked up and pulled silencered pieces. The guards coughed. It supplied sound cover. The milk truck driver pulled a silencered piece and shot the nearest guard in the face.

The noise was a thud. The guard's forehead exploded. The two other guards fumble-grabbed at their holsters. The masked men shot them in the back. They buckled and pitched foreword. The masked men shot them in the head point-blank. The thuds and skull crack muffle-echoed.

It's 7:19 a.m. It's still quiet. There's no foot traffic and car-crash hubbub yet.

Noise now—two gunshots plus loud echoes. Muzzle flare, weird-shaped, blasts from the armored car's gun slit.

The shots ricocheted off the pavement. The masked men and the milk truck driver threw themselves prone. They rolled *toward* the armored car. It blitzed firing range. Four more shots popped. Four plus two—one revolver load.

Masked Man #1 was tall and thin. Masked Man #2 was midsized. Masked Man #3 was heavyset. It's 7:20 a.m. There's still no foot traffic. This big blimp up in the sky trailed department-store banners.

Masked Man #1 stood up and crouched under the gun slit. He pulled a gas bomb from his pouch and yanked the top. Fumes sputtered. He stuffed the bomb in the gun slit. The guard inside shrieked and retched very loud. The back door crashed outward. The guard jumped and hit the pavement on his knees. He bled from the nose and the mouth. Masked Man #2 shot him twice in the head.

The milk truck driver put on a gas mask. The masked men put gas masks on over their face masks. Gas whooshed out the back door. Masked Man #1 popped gas bomb #2 and lobbed it inside.

The fumes flared and settled into acid mist—red, pink, transparent. A street hubbub started perking. There's some window peeps, some open doors, some colored folks on their porches.

It's 7:22 a.m. The fumes have dispersed. There's no second guard inside.

Now they go in.

They fit tight. It was a cramped space. Cash bags and attaché cases were stacked in wall racks. Masked Man #1 made the count: sixteen bags and fourteen cases.

They grabbed. Masked Man #2 had a burlap bag stuffed down his pants. He pulled it out and held it open.

They grabbed. They stuffed the bag. One attaché case snapped open. They saw mounds of plastic-wrapped emeralds.

Masked Man #3 opened a cash bag. A C-note roll poked out. He tugged on the bank tab. Ink jets sprayed him and hit his mask holes. He got ink in his mouth and ink in his eyes.

He gasped, he spit ink, he rubbed his eyes and tripped out the door. He shit in his pants and stood around flailing. Masked Man #1 stepped clear of the door and shot him twice in the back.

It's 7:24 a.m. *Now* there's hubbub. It's a jungle din confined to porches.

Masked Man #1 walked toward it. He pulled four gas bombs, popped the tops and lobbed them. He threw left and right. Fumes rose up red, pink and transparent. Acid sky, mini–storm front, rainbow. The porch fools whooped and coughed and ran inside their shacks.

The milk truck driver and Masked Man #2 stuffed four burlap bags tight. They got the full load: all thirty cash sacks and cases. They walked to the '62 Ford. Masked Man #1 opened the trunk. They dumped the bags in.

7:26 a.m.

A breeze kicked up. Wind swirled the gas clouds into wild fusing colors. The milk truck driver and Masked Man #2 gawked through their goggles.

Masked Man #1 stepped in front of them. They got pissy—*Say what*?—don't block the light show. Masked Man #1 shot them both in the face. Slugs blew up their goggle glass and gas-mask tubes and doused their lights in a second.

Mark it now:

7:27 a.m. Four dead guards, three dead heist men. Pink gas clouds. Acid fallout. Fumes turning shrubs gray-malignant.

Masked Man #1 opened the driver's side door and reached under the seat. Right there: a blowtorch and a brown bag stuffed with scald-on-contact pellets. The pellets looked like a bird feed/jelly bean hybrid.

He worked slow.

He walked to Masked Man #3. He dropped pellets on his back and stuffed pellets in his mouth. He tapped his blowtorch and blazed the body. He walked to the milk truck driver and Masked Man #2. He dropped pellets on their backs and stuffed pellets in their mouths and blowtorched their bodies.

The sun was way up now. The gas fumes caught rays and made a small stretch of sky one big prism. Masked Man #1 drove away, southbound.

He got there first. He always did. He bootjacked niggertown robbery squawks off patrol frequencies. He packed his own multiband squawk box.

He parked by the armored car and the milk truck. He looked down the street. He saw some coons eyeballing the carnage. The air stung. His first guess: gas bombs and a faked collision.

The coons saw him. They evinced their standard "Oh shit" looks. He heard sirens. The overlap said six or seven units. Newton and 77th Street—two divisions rolling out. He had three minutes to look.

He saw the four dead guards. He saw two scorched dead men near the east curb back a few car lengths.

He ignored the guards. He checked out the burned men. They were deep-scorched down to crackle skin, with their clothes swirled in. His first guess: instant double cross. Let's fuck up IDs on expendable partners.

The sirens whirred closer. A kid down the street waved at him. He bowed and waved back.

He had the gestalt already. Some shit you wait your whole life for. When it lands, *you know*.

He was a big man. He wore a tweed suit and a tartan bow tie. Little 14's were stitched into the silk. He'd shot and killed fourteen armed robbers.

NOW

AMERICA:

I window-peeped four years of our History. It was one long mobile stakeout and kick-the-door-in shakedown. I had a license to steal and a ticket to ride.

I followed people. I bugged and tapped and caught big events in ellipses. I remained unknown. My surveillance links the Then to the Now in a never-before-revealed manner. I was there. My reportage is buttressed by credible hearsay and insider tattle. Massive paper trails provide verification. This book derives from stolen public files and usurped private journals. It is the sum of personal adventure and forty years of scholarship. I am a literary executor and an agent provocateur. I did what I did and saw what I saw and learned my way through to the rest of the story.

Scripture-pure veracity and scandal-rag content. That conjunction gives it its sizzle. You carry the seed of belief within you already. You recall the time this narrative captures and sense conspiracy. I am here to tell you that it is all true and not at all what you think.

You will read with some reluctance and capitulate in the end. The following pages will force you to succumb.

I am going to tell you everything.

THEN

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A Note About the Author

Part I

CLUSTER FUCK

June 14, 1968–September 11, 1968

1

Wayne Tedrow Jr.

(Las Vegas, 6/14/68)

H*EROIN:*

He'd rigged a lab in his hotel suite. Beakers, vats and Bunsen burners filled up wall shelves. A three-burner hot plate juked small-batch conversions. He was cooking painkiller-grade product. He hadn't cooked dope since Saigon.

A comp suite at the Stardust, vouchered by Carlos Marcello. Carlos knew that Janice had terminal cancer and that he had chemistry skills.

Wayne mixed morphine clay with ammonia. A two-minute heating loosened mica chips and silt. He boiled water to 182°. He added acetic anhydride and reduced the bond proportions. The boil sluiced out organic waste.

Precipitants next—the slow-cook process—diacetyl morph and sodium carbonate.

Wayne mixed, measured and ran two hot plates low. He glanced around the suite. The maid left a newspaper out. The headlines were all *him*.

Wayne Senior's death by "heart attack." James Earl Ray and Sirhan Sirhan in stir.

His front-page ink. No mention of him. Carlos had chilled out Wayne Senior. Mr. Hoover chilled out the backwash on the King/Bobby hits.

Wayne watched diacetyl mass build. His blend would semi-anesthetize Janice. He was bucking for a big job with Howard Hughes. Hughes was addicted to pharmaceutical narcotics. He could cook him up a private blend and take it to his interview.

The mass settled into cubes and rose out of the liquid. Wayne saw photos of Ray and Sirhan on page two. He'd worked on the King hit. He'd worked it high up. Freddy Otash ran fall guy Ray for King and fall guy Sirhan for Bobby.

The phone rang. Wayne grabbed it. Scrambler clicks hit the line. It had to be a Fed safe phone and Dwight Holly.

"It's me, Dwight."

"Did you kill him?"

"Yes."

" 'Heart attack,' shit. 'Sudden stroke' would have been better."

Wayne coughed. "Carlos is handling it personally. He can frost out anything around here."

"I do not want Mr. Hoover going into a tizzy over this."

"*It's chilled.* The question is, 'What about the others?' "

Dwight said, "There's always conspiracy talk. Bump off a public figure and that kind of shit tends to bubble. Freddy ran Ray covertly and Sirhan up front, but he lost weight and altered his appearance. All in all, I'd say we're chilled on both of them."

Wayne watched his dope cook. Dwight spieled more news. Freddy O. bought the Golden Cavern Casino. Pete Bondurant sold it to him.

"We're chilled, Dwight. Tell me we're chilled and convince me."

Dwight laughed. "You sound a little raw, kid."

"I'm stretched a bit thin, yeah. Patricide's funny that way."

Dwight yukked. The dope pots started boiling. Wayne doused the heat and looked at his desk photo.

It's Janice Lukens Tedrow, lover/ex-stepmom. It's '61. She's twisting at the Dunes. She's sans partner, she's lost a shoe, a dress seam has ripped.

Dwight said, "Hey, are you there?"

"I'm here."

"I'm glad to hear it. And I'm glad to hear we're chilled on your end."

Wayne stared at the picture. "My father was your friend. You're going in pretty light with the judgment."

"Shit, kid. He sent you to Dallas."

Big D. November '63. He was there that Big Weekend. He caught the Big Moment and took this Big Ride.

He was a sergeant on Vegas PD. He was married. He had a chemistry degree. His father was a big Mormon fat cat. Wayne Senior was jungled up all over the nut Right. He did Klan ops for Mr. Hoover and Dwight Holly. He pushed high-line hate tracts. He rode the far-Right zeitgeist and stayed in the know. He knew about the JFK hit. It was multi-faction: Cuban exiles, rogue CIA, mob. Senior bought Junior a ticket to ride.

Extradition job, with one caveat: kill the extraditee.

The PD suborned the assignment. A Negro pimp named Wendell Durfee shivved a casino dealer. The man lived. It didn't matter. The Casino Operators' Council wanted Wendell clipped. Vegas cops got those jobs. They were choice gigs with big bonus money. They were tests. The PD wanted to gauge your balls. Wayne Senior had clout with the PD. He had JFK hit knowledge. Senior wanted Junior there for it. Wendell Durfee fled Vegas to Dallas. Senior doubted Junior's balls. Senior thought Junior should kill an unarmed black man. Wayne flew to Dallas on 11/22/63.

He did not want to kill Wendell Durfee. He did not know about the JFK hit. He got paired up with an extradition partner. The cop's name was Maynard Moore. He worked Dallas PD. He was a redneck psycho doing gofer jobs on the hit.

Wayne clashed with Maynard Moore and tried not to kill Wendell Durfee. Wayne blundered into the hit plot in post-hit free fall. He linked Jack Ruby to Moore and that right-wing merc Pete B. He saw Ruby clip Lee Harvey Oswald on live TV.

He knew. He did not know that his father knew. It all went blooey that Sunday.

JFK was dead. Oswald was dead. He tracked down Wendell Durfee and told him to run. Maynard Moore interceded. Wayne killed Moore and let Durfee go. Pete B. interceded and let Wayne live.

Pete considered his own act of mercy prudent and Wayne's act of mercy rash. Pete warned Wayne that Wendell Durfee might show up again.

Wayne returned to Vegas. Pete B. moved to Vegas for a Carlos Marcello gig. Pete followed up on Durfee and logged tips: he's a rape-o shit-bird and worse. It was January '64. Pete heard that Wendell Durfee had fled back to Vegas. He told Wayne. Wayne went after Wendell. Three colored dope fiends got in the way. Wayne killed them. Wendell Durfee raped and murdered Wayne's wife, Lynette.

It was his very own free fall. It started in Dallas and spun all the way up to Now.

Wendell Durfee escaped. Wayne Senior and the PD worked to get Wayne a walk on the dope fiends. Mr. Hoover was amenable. Senior's old chum Dwight Holly was not. Dwight was working for the Federal Bureau of Narcotics then. The dope fiends were pushing heroin and were targeted for prosecution. Dwight squawked to the U.S. attorney. Wayne Junior fucked up his investigation. He wanted to see Wayne Junior indicted and tried. The PD fabricated some evidence and snowed the grand jury. Wayne got a walk on the killings. It left him hollow. He quit the PD and entered The Life.

Soldier of fortune. Heroin runner. Assassin.

Lynette was dead. He vowed to find Wendell Durfee and kill him. Lynette was his best friend and sweetheart and the wall to shut out his love for his father's second wife. Janice was older, she watched him grow up, she stayed with Senior for his money and clout. Janice returned Wayne's love. The longing went both ways. It stayed there and plain *grew*.

Wayne fell in with Pete and his wife, Barb. Pete was tight with a mob lawyer named Ward Littell. Ward was ex-FBI and the point man for the JFK hit. He was working for Carlos Marcello and Howard Hughes and playing both ends back, front and sideways. Wayne had Pete and Ward as teachers. He learned The Life from them. He blew through their curriculum at a free-fall pace.

Pete was hopped up on the Cuban exile cause. Vietnam was getting hot. Howard Hughes was nurturing crazy plans to buy up Las Vegas. Wayne Senior got in with Hughes' Mormon guard.

Ward Littell developed a grudge against Senior. A rogue CIA man recruited Pete for a Saigon-to-Vegas dope funnel, profits to the Cuban cause, vouchsafed by Carlos Marcello. Pete needed a dope chemist and recruited Wayne. Ward's hatred of Wayne Senior grew. Ward fucked with Senior. He informed Wayne that his father sent him to Dallas.

Wayne reeled and grabbed at air and barely stayed upright. Wayne fucked Janice in his father's house and made sure that Wayne Senior saw it.

"The Life," a noun. A haven for Mormon burnouts, rogue chemists, coon killers.

Wayne Senior divorced Janice. He beat her with a silver-tipped cane to offset the cost of the settlement. Janice limped from that day on and still played scratch golf. Ward Littell sold Howard Hughes Las Vegas at the mob's inflated prices and began a sporadic love affair with Janice. Wayne Senior increased his pull with Howard Hughes and sucked up to former veep Dick Nixon. Dwight Holly left the Bureau of Narcotics and went back on the FBI. Mr. Hoover directed Dwight to disrupt Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement. Dwight deployed Wayne Senior in anti-Klan mail-fraud ops, a sop to sob sisters at Justice.

Wayne cooked heroin in Saigon and ran it through to Vegas. Wayne chased Wendell Durfee for four years. The country blew up with riots and a shitstorm of race hate. Dr. King trumped Mr. Hoover on all moral fronts and wore the old man down just by *being*. Mr. Hoover had tried everything. Mr. Hoover whined to Dwight that he had done all he could. Dwight understood the cue and recruited Wayne Senior. Wayne Senior wanted Wayne Junior to be in on it. Senior thought they needed a recruitment wedge. Dwight went out and found Wendell Durfee.

Wayne got a pseudo-anonymous tip. He found Wendell Durfee on L.A. skid row and killed him in March. It was a put-up job. Dwight gathered forensic evidence and coerced him into the hit plan. Wayne worked with his father, Dwight, Freddy Otash and pro shooter Bob Relyea.

Janice was diagnosed with last-stage cancer. Her beating injuries cloaked early detection of the disease. The Saigon dope deal factionalized and blew into chaos. On one side: mob ghouls and crazy Cuban exiles. On the other: Wayne, Pete and a French merc named Jean-Philippe Mesplede. April and May were pure free fall. The election hovered. King was dead. Carlos Marcello and the boys decided to clip Bobby Kennedy. Pete was coerced in. Freddy O. waltzed over from the King hit. Ward Littell was still working angles on Carlos and Howard Hughes. Ward had inherited an anti-mob file. He left it with Janice for safekeeping.

Wayne went to see Janice on June 4. The cancer had taken her strength and her curves and had rendered her slack. They made love a second time. She told him more about Ward's file. He searched her apartment and found it. The file was very detailed. It specifically indicted Carlos and his New Orleans operation. Wayne sent it to Carlos, along with a note.

"Sir, my father was planning to extort you with this file. Sir, could we discuss that?"

Robert F. Kennedy was shot two hours later. Ward Littell killed himself. Howard Hughes offered Wayne Senior Ward's job as mob fixer/liaison. His first assignment: purchase the loyalty of GOP front-runner Dick Nixon.

Carlos called Wayne and thanked him for the heads-up. Carlos said, "Let's have dinner."

Wayne decided to murder his father. Wayne decided that Janice should beat him dead with a golf club.

Carlos kept a mock-Roman suite at the Sands. A toga-clad geek played centurion and let Wayne in. The suite featured mock-Roman pillars and sack-of-Rome art. Price tags drooped from wall frames.

A buffet was laid out. The geek sat Wayne down at a lacquered table embossed with SPQR. Carlos walked in. He wore nubby silk shorts and a stained tuxedo shirt.

Wayne stood up. Carlos said, "Don't." Wayne sat down. The geek spooned food on two plates and vanished. Carlos poured wine from a screw-top bottle.

Wayne said, "It's a pleasure, sir."

"Don't make like I don't know you. You're Pete and Ward's guy, and you worked for me in Saigon. You know more about me than you should, plus all the shit in that file. I know your story, which is some fucking story compared to the other dickhead stories I heard lately."

Wayne smiled. Carlos pulled two bobbing-head dolls from his pockets. One doll represented RFK. One doll represented Dr. King. Carlos smiled and snapped off their heads.

"*Salud*, Wayne."

"Thank you, Carlos."

"You're looking for work, right? This ain't about a handshake and a thank-you envelope."

Wayne sipped wine. It was present-day liquor-store vintage.

"I want to assume Ward Littell's role in your organization, along with the position in the Hughes organization that my father has just inherited from Ward. I have the skills and the connections to prove myself valuable, I'm prepared to favor you in all my dealings with Mr. Hughes, and I'm aware of the penalties you dispense for disloyalty."

Carlos speared an anchovy. His fork slid. Olive oil hit his tux shirt.

"Where's your father going to be throughout all of this?"

Wayne toppled the RFK doll. A plastic arm fell off. Carlos picked his nose.

"Okay, even if I'm fucking susceptible to favors and prone to like you, why should Howard Hughes go outside his own organization full of suckasses he feels comfortable with to hire a fucked-up ex-cop who goes around shooting niggers for kicks?"

Wayne flinched. He gripped his wine glass and almost snapped the stem.

"Mr. Hughes is a xenophobic drug addict known to inject narcotics into a vein in his penis, and I can concoct—"

Carlos yukked and slapped the table. His wine glass capsized. Pepper chunks flew. Olive oil spritzed.

"—drugs that will stimulate and sedate him and diminish his mental capacities to the point that he will become that much more tractable in all his dealings with you. I also know that you have a very large envelope for Richard Nixon, should he be nominated. Mr. Hughes is putting in 20%, and I plan to raid my father's cash reserve and get you another five million cold."

The toga geek walked in. He brought a sponge and swabbed the mess presto-chango. Carlos snapped his fingers. The toga geek disappeared.

"I keep coming back to your father. What's Wayne Tedrow *Senior* going to be doing while Wayne Tedrow *Junior* sticks him the big one where it hurts the most?"

Wayne pointed to the dolls and back up to heaven. Carlos cracked his knuckles.

"Okay, I'll bite."

Wayne raised his glass. "Thank you."

Carlos raised his glass. "You get two fifty a year and points, and you jump on Ward's old job straight off. I need you to oversee the buyouts of legitimate businesses started with Teamster Pension Fund loans, so we can launder it and funnel it into a slush fund to build these hotel-casinos somewhere in Central America or the Caribbean. You know what we're looking for. We want some pliable, anti-Communist *el jefe* type who'll do what we want and keep all the dissident hippie protest shit down to a dull roar. Sam G.'s running point now. We've got it narrowed down to Panama, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. That's your main fucking job. You make it happen and you make your hophead pal keep buying our hotels, and you make sure we get to keep our inside guys, who just might help us out with some skim."

Wayne said, "I'll do it."

Carlos said, "Daddy won't see you coming."

Wayne stood up too fast. His mock-Roman world swirled. Carlos stood up. His shirt was spattered working on soaked.

"I'll see that you're covered on it."

Janice kept a mock-casbah suite at the Dunes. Wayne supplied round-the-clock nurses. Janice stuck to the hotel now.

The p.m.-shift nurse was on the terrace, smoking. The view was half light show, half desert haze. Janice was bundled up in bed, with the air conditioner blasting. Her system was schizy. She either half-froze or half-broiled.

Wayne sat with her. "There's some golf on TV."

"I think I've had all the golf I can take for a while."

Wayne smiled. "Touché."

"The Hughes meeting. Isn't that coming up?"

"In a few days."

"He'll hire you. He'll figure you're a Mormon, and that your father taught you some things."

"Well, he did."

Janice smiled. "Who are you meeting with? The Hughes man, I mean."

“His name’s Farlan Brown.”

“I know him. His wife was the club champ at the Frontier, but I closed her out nine and eight the one time I played her.”

Wayne laughed. “Anything else?”

Janice laughed. It made her cough and sweat. She tossed off her covers. Her nightgown flew up. Wayne saw new slack spots and hollows.

He wiped her brow with his shirtsleeve. She nuzzled his arm and play-bit it. Wayne made a play Ouch! face.

“I was about to say that he drinks and chases women, like all good Mormons. There’s a trinity for men like that. Showgirls, cocktail waitresses and stews.”

The room was ice-cold. Simple talk had Janice soaked. She bit her lip. Her temples pulsed. She touched her stomach. Wayne tracked the circuit of pain.

Janice said, “Shit.”

Wayne opened his briefcase and prepped a spike. Janice held her arm out. Wayne found a vein, swabbed it and made a hand tourniquet. Needle and plunger, there now.

In one beat—

She tensed and lulled. Her eyelids fluttered. One yawn and out.

Wayne took her pulse. It tapped light and ran steady. Her arm weighed almost nil.

The *L.A. Times* was open on the nightstand. It showed a photo triptych: JFK, RFK, Dr. King. Wayne folded them out of sight and watched Janice sleep.

2

Don Crutchfield

(Los Angeles, 6/15/68)

W*OMEN:*

Two bevies walked by the lot. The first group looked like shop girls. They wore Ivy League threads and modified bouffants. The second group was pure hippie. They wore patched-up jeans, peacenik shit and long straight hair that swirled.

They came and went. The wheelmen waved. The shop girls waved back. The hippie chicks flipped off the wheelmen. The wheelmen wolf-called.

The Shell Station lot, Beverly and Hayworth. Four pumps and a service bay/office. Three wheelmen sprawled in their sleds.

Bobby Gallard had a Rocket Olds. Phil Irwin had a 409 Chevy. Crutch had a ’65 GTO. He was the rookie wheelman. He had *the* boss ride: 390, Hurst 4-speed, coon maroon paint.

Bobby and Phil were midday-blitzed on high-test vodka. Crutch was residual torqued on the girl show. He scanned the street for more walk-bys. Ziltch—just some old hebes loping to shul.

Back to the paper. Yawn—more jive on James Earl Ray and

Sirhan Sirhan. Snore—"America Grieves"/"Accused Assassin's Lair." Ray vibed pencilneck. Sirhan vibed towelhead. Hey, America, I got your grief swingin'.

Crutch flipped pages. He hit flyweights at the Forum and a grabber—*Life* magazine offers million scoots for Howard Hughes pix! A redhead walked by. Crutch waved at her. She scowled like he was a dog turd. Wheelmen emitted *baaaad* vibes. They were low-rent and indigenously fucked-up. They perched in the lot. They waited for work from skank private eyes and divorce lawyers. They tailed cheating spouses, kicked in doors and took photos of the fools balling. It was a high-risk, high-yuks job with female-skin potential. Crutch was new to it. He wanted to groove the job forever.

The paper called Howard Hughes a "billionaire recluse." Crutch got a brainstorm. He could starve himself down to bones and shimmy up a heat shaft. Snap—one Polaroid and vamoose.

The lot dozed. Bobby Gallard skimmed beaver mags and slurped Smirnoff 100. Phil Irwin wiped his 409 with a chamois cloth. Phil worked tail jobs and stooge gigs for Freddy Otash. Freddy O. was a shakedown artist and freelance strongarm. He was ex-LAPD. He lost his PI's license behind some horse-doping caper. Phil was his pet wheelman/lapdog.

The lot dozed. No work, no walk-by cooze, gas station ennui.

It was hot and humid. Crutch yawned and aimed the AC vent at his balls. It perked him up and got him head-tripping. Gas station blahs, adieu.

He was twenty-three. He got expelled from Hollywood High for candid-camera stunts in the girls gym. His old man lived in a Goodwill box outside Santa Anita. Crutch Senior panhandled, bet all day and ate pastrami burritos exclusive. His mom vanished on 6/18/55. Crutch was ten. She up and split and never returned. She sent him a Christmas card and a five-spot every year, different postmarks, no return address. He built his own missing person file. It filled up four big boxes. He killed time with it. He called around the country and ran PD checks, hospital checks, obit checks. He kicked off the quest in junior high school.

Nothing—Margaret Woodard Crutchfield was still stone *gone*.

The wheelman gig fell on his head. It happened like this:

He kept up with his high-school pal Buzz Duber. Buzz shared his passion for pad prowls. *Soft* prowls, like this:

Hancock Park. Big dark houses. Preppy girls' lairs. Knock, knock. Nobody's home? *Good.*

You enter undetectably, you carry a penlight, you dig some plush cribs. You walk through girls' bedrooms and exit with lingerie sets.

He did it a few times with Buzz. He did it *a lot* by himself. Buzz's dad was Clyde Duber. Clyde was a big-time PI. He did divorce jobs and got celebs out of the shit. He installed college kids in left-wing groups and got them to rat out subversion. The fuzz popped Crutch on a panty prowl. They snagged him with some black lace undies and a sandwich he glommed from Sally Compton's fridge. Clyde bailed him out and got his record expunged. Clyde got him wheelman and chump surveillance gigs. Clyde said window-peeping was kosher, but nixed B&E. Clyde said, "Kid, I'll *pay* you to peep."

The lot dozed. Bobby Gallard spray-painted an iron cross on his Olds. Phil Irwin popped some yellow jackets with an Old Crow chaser. Crutch daydreamed per Howard Hughes. Brainstorm: assault his swank penthouse! Gain entry by grappling hook!

An unmarked cruiser pulled in. The lot revitalized. Crutch caught a flash of a red tartan tie and smelled pizza.

Beeline—Crutch followed Bobby and Phil. Scotty Bennett got out of the car and kicked blood in his legs. He was six-five. He weighed 230. He worked LAPD Robbery. His tie had 18's stitched in the weave.

The backseat was stuffed with six-packs and pizza. Bobby and Phil jumped in and helped themselves. Crutch looked in the car and checked the dashboard. Still there: the crime-scene photos, all taped up and yellowed.

Scotty's fixation: that big armored-car job. Winter '64. Still unsolved. Dead guards and scorched heist men—still unidentified. Looted cash bags and emeralds.

Scotty pointed to the photos. "Lest I forget."

Crutch gulped. Scotty always *loomed.* He carried two .45's and a beaver-tail sap on a thong. Bobby and Phil guzzled beer and snarfed pizza. They turned the backseat into a zoo trough. Crutch pointed to Scotty's tie.

"You had 16's last time."

"Two male Negroes robbed a liquor store at 74th and Avalon. I just happened to be in the back, holding a Remington pump shotgun."

Crutch laughed. "It's the record, right? Fatal shootings in the line of duty?"

"That's correct. I'm six up on my closest competitor."

"What happened to him?"

"He was shot and killed by two male Negroes."

"What happened to *them*?"

"They robbed a liquor store at Normandie and Slauson. I just happened to be in the back, holding a Remington pump shotgun."

The air smelled like ripe cheese and sud spray. Scotty wrinkled his nose. Phil was hunkered down to nosh, legs on the pavement. His pants rode low. His ass crack was exposed. Scotty pulled him up by his waistband.

Phil went airborne. Phil got that "Save me" look that Scotty inspired. Phil came to earth feetfirst and snapped to attention. Bobby gulped and snapped to. Scotty winked at Crutch.

"I'm looking for two male Caucasians driving a powder blue '62 T-Bird with dark blue fender skirts. They're clouting steak houses, they're robbing cash receipts, they're holding patrons hostage and forcing women to give them blow jobs. I'd appreciate it if you'd keep your eyes peeled."

Crutch said, "Physical descriptions?"

Scotty smiled. "They wore masks. The female victims described them as being 'normally endowed.' "

"Endowed"—*huh*?—Bobby and Phil slack-jawed it. Crutch smirked. Scotty grabbed the beer and pizza debris and fobbed it off on him. A sausage morsel hit Scotty's suit coat. Phil trembled and flicked it off.

Scotty got in his car and peeled out eastbound. Crutch eyeballed a blonde at the gas pumps.

Phil said, "He thinks he's tough, but I know I could take him."

The lot re-dozed. Bobby landed a rope job. His pet Jew lawyer came by and fed him the gist. It's a horny hubby-hooker parlay. The wife's the client. Rent a hot-sheet room and find hubby at his favorite gin mill. Facilitate a chance meeting. Get me snapshots and film.

Buzz Duber cruised by. Crutch ran the Hughes deal by him. Buzz got a brainstorm. He said he knew this nigger midget. The guy played pygmies in jungle flicks. They could send him up to Howard Hughes' lair in a room-service cart.

Freddy Otash cruised by. He'd lost some weight. He bragged up this low-roller hotel he'd bought in Vegas. He threw Phil a tail job. Phil drove off, half-blitzed.

Crutch and Buzz got dozy from too much beer and pizza. Crutch got doze blips of Dana Lund, softly window-lit.

A horn blared way too loud. Crutch opened his eyes. Shit—there's Phil's pet shyster, Chick Weiss.

With his kike-kayak Cadillac. With his frizzy-ass hairdo and his British fop suit. With his fucked-up Caribbean-art fixation.

Weiss said, "I got a fruit gig for you. The guy likes to brown well-hung Filipinos, and I got a mutant packing 10½ inches. The wife wants a divorce, and who can blame her?"

The hubby had a fuck pad at the Ravenswood. Crutch brought a Rolleiflex with a flashbulb bar. Buzz wore door-kicker shoes.

The Mutant met them in the lobby. He had a door key. Crutch was miffed. He craved some kick-the-door-in action. They huddled. Crutch told the Mutant to get hubby in the sack pronto. Buzz told him to provide decent lighting. The Mutant told them to get his *schvantz* in the pix. He serviced spouses of both genders. He wanted more divorce work. He wanted his heavy-hung status proclaimed.

They cooked up a four-minute countdown. The Mutant skedaddled to apartment 311. Crutch futzed with the camera and secured it A-OK. Buzz ticked seconds off on a stopwatch.

10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1—*go*.

They ran up the stairs. They cut down hallways and found 311. Buzz opened the door. Crutch hoisted the camera. They followed love grunts to a doorway and let fly.

It was all Greek. The Mutant poured hubby the pork with his monster meat in plain view. Crutch tripped the shutter. *Pop pop pop pop*—the bedroom went flashbulb-white blind. Hubby wailed the fruit-gig standard How Could You? blues. The Mutant pulled on his pants and went out the fire escape. Buzz saw a bag of weed on the dresser and swiped it. Crutch thought, *This is the life*.

Buzz said, "It had to be a yard long."

Crutch said, “Under a foot. Remember, Chick Weiss gave us the measurement.”

Clyde Duber said, “We could use him again. Did you get his number?”

Buzz said, “We can find him through the Screen Actors Guild. He’s playing the sidekick on some TV show.”

Clyde Duber’s office, Beverly Hills. Knotty-pine walls, golf trophies and red leather. Dig the wall frieze:

It pertained to that big armored-car heist. Clyde grooved on it. The case was one big bug up his ass. There’s an ink-stained bill behind glass. There’s framed photos of blowtorched stiffs and loose emeralds. There’s Sergeant Scotty Bennett. He’s manhandling two male Negroes.

Clyde kept an amateur file on the case. It was his pet project. Scotty indulged him with knickknacks. Clyde loved Scotty’s sweat-room tapes. They featured male Negroes screaming.

Crutch said, “Freddy Otash bought some hotel in Vegas.”

Clyde poured a triple scotch. “Freddy’s a dipshit. Rumors are circulating, and that’s all I can say about that.”

Buzz said, “Tell Dad about the Hughes deal.”

Crutch scratched his balls. “*Life* magazine’s offering a million bucks for a photo of Howard Hughes. I think we can do it.”

Clyde made the jack-off sign. *Kids*—this white man’s burden. Kid wheelmen, kid infiltrators, kid stakeout geeks.

Buzz nudged Crutch. “You got plans tonight?”

“I thought I’d drive around.”

“Shit, you’re going to peep Chrissie Lund.”

Clyde said, “Who’s Chrissie Lund?”

“She’s USC frosh. She’s got Crutch all wired.”

Clyde sipped scotch. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do. Like 459 PC, breaking and entering.”

Crutch blushed and checked the wall frieze. Memo: buy some tartan bow ties and get a Scotty Bennett crew cut.

Buzz seltzer-spritzed his scotch. “Get us a decoy job, Dad. Send us in to some Commie group.”

“Nix that. You’re too green and you look too square. You’ve got to be able to talk Commie lifestyle shit to make those gigs work. You kids don’t know from social upheaval. All you kids know from is this college-girl gash you can’t get.”

Buzz laughed. Crutch blushed. Memo: study your file and prowl for Scotty's blow-job freaks.

"Who commissions those infiltration jobs?"

Clyde kicked his chair back. "Right-wing nuts with gelt. They're all doctors and kings. You've got Dr. Charles S. Toron, the Eugenics King. You've got Dr. Fred Hiltz, the Hate-Pamphlet King, and Dr. Wesley Swift, the Nazi-Bible King."

Buzz said, "Dr. Fred's a dentist. The other guys have mail-order degrees, like all those coon preachers."

Clyde said, "*Defrocked* dentist. He got strung out on anesthetic cocaine and started fucking peoples' teeth up."

Crutch thought of Dana Lund. Memo: bring a soft-focus lens. Buzz whipped out that bag of weed. Clyde rolled his eyes—*kids*.

"That reminds me. Dr. Fred's got a job for us. A woman stole some money from him and absconded."

Buzz looked at Clyde. Crutch looked at Clyde. Both looks said *Me*. Clyde flipped a coin. Buzz called tails. The coin hit the floor heads.

Crutch had a flop at the Vivian Apartments. It was a walk-up dive just south of Paramount. Grips and stagehands lived there. Bit players turned lunchtime tricks in a jumbo mop closet. Crutch crammed all his shit into two rooms.

His file shit, his camera shit, his car shit, his bug-and-tap shit. Clyde taught him surveillance. He had phone cords and wire mounts up the ying-yang. He had a full run of *Playboy* magazine. He had *Car Craft* back to '52. His wallpaper was forty-one Playboy Playmates.

He settled in for the night. He updated his notes on his mother's last known location. Christmas '67—Margaret Woodard Crutchfield writes from Des Moines. Every known records check—zero. Backtrack to '66—a Christmas card from Dubuque. Every in-between town, full records checks, zero.

Crutch got antsy. Buzz was who-knows-where, blitzed on who-knows-what. Buzz had this mean streak that he lacked. Buzz carried a fake cop's badge and coerced head out of hookers. Nix that. Holding it in was better.

It was warm out. A summer storm brewed. Crutch took a drive. He circled up to Hollywood Boulevard and out to the Strip. He looked at people. The longhaired girls jazzed him and the longhaired guys rubbed him wrong. He trawled for that ’62 Bird and Scotty’s blow-job bandits. He saw two fags in a ’61 Bird and no more.

He drove east to Hancock Park. He cut his lights and perched at 2nd and Plymouth. That big Spanish house held him.

Window glow flickered, upstairs and down. He saw Chrissie in USC sweats—one glimpse and gone. He saw Dana tie her hair back in the kitchen.

Buzz didn’t get it. Nobody got it. That’s why he never told anyone. It wasn’t Chrissie Lund. It was always Dana Lund, and she was fifty-three years old.

3

Dwight Holly

(Washington, D.C., 6/16/68)

S*POOKS:*

The restaurant was thick with them. Mr. Hoover ran a head count. Dwight watched his eyes click. Colored waiters, colored lobbyist, colored baseball ace. The old poof was frail. He slurped his soup palsy-style. He'd lost some beats, his brain still sparked, his circuits cranked on *HATE.*

Harvey's Restaurant, midtown D.C., the big lunch rush. A big be-seen spot. Big eye-click action.

Mr. Hoover said, "Did Wayne Tedrow Jr. kill Wayne Tedrow Sr.?"

"Yes, Sir. He did."

"Extrapolate, please."

Dwight pushed his plate back. "Carlos Marcello bought off LVPD and the Clark County coroner. A blunt-force trauma homicide was ruled a heart attack."

Mr. Hoover smiled. "Stroke would have affirmed the golf aspect."

Dwight lit a cigarette. “I won’t ask for more details, Sir. I’ll commend your sources and move on.”

“Captain Bob Gilstrap and Lieutenant Buddy Fritsch viewed the crime scene. They were aware of the animus between Tedrow *père* and *fils*, and both officers are beholden to Mr. Marcello.”

“Mr. Marcello is a wonderful friend to the Nevada law-enforcement community, Sir. He sends lovely gift baskets at Christmas.”

Mr. Hoover *beamed*. “Really?”

“Yes, Sir. The false bottoms cover casino chips and hundred-dollar bills.”

Mr. Hoover *glowed*. “Did Junior take part in any recent Memphis operations that you might have heard about?”

Dwight winked. My lips are sealed. Mr. Hoover snagged a toast point and shooed off a waiter.

“You are an eloquent man, Dwight. You understand your audience and play to them inimitably.”

“I rise to the occasion of you, Sir. There’s no more to it than that.”

Spook action stage left. A spook waiter sucked up to the spook baseball cat. Mr. Hoover tuned the banter out and tuned in to the spooks. He was seventy-three. His breath reeked. His cuticles bled. He lived off digitalis and skin-pop amphetamine. A Dr. Feelgood supplied daily injections.

Click—he’s back again. Click—he’s back to *you*.

“Our other homicides. The gaudier and more scrutinized ones likely to inspire loose talk.”

Dwight stubbed out his cigarette. “Ray and Sirhan are psychopaths, Sir. Their statements confirm their paranoia, and the American public has come to expect grandstanding delusion in its assassins. There *will* be loose talk, but it will be replaced by public indifference over time.”

“And the Tedrows? Are we exposed there? Reassure me in your most bluff-hearty manner.”

Dwight said, “Senior’s death is in no way suspect. Yes, he ran Klan ops for us, but it’s never become public knowledge. Yes, he peddled hate pamphlets, but he was never as publicly voluble as our hate-pamphleteering chum, Fred Hiltz. Yes, he was slated to take over Ward Littell’s job for Howard Hughes, which might have created speculation. Yes, I think Junior will get the job now.

No, I don't think that any of it will serve to expose us in any significant way."

Mr. Hoover speared his last toast point. His hand trembled. Some table-hopping pols eyeballed him.

"Power. Was that Junior's motive?"

"I've known him all his life, Sir. I think 'fully justified hatred' describes it best."

A spook preacher braced the pols. Yuks and backslaps circulated. The guy wore cowboy boots with his clerical suit. Dwight recognized him. He hosted telethons for some spook disease and espoused leftist shit.

Mr. Hoover said, "Prince Bobby and Martin Lucifer King have departed, leaving the morally impaired disconsolate and providing the sane with dear relief. Operation Black Rabbit did not achieve the results we had hoped for, and toxic clouds of black nationalism are quite evidently aswirl. I would like you to assess the Black Panther Party and the United Slaves, also known as 'US,' as potential targets for a disruption program. I am thinking of a full-scale Cointelpro. There are also two lesser known cabals in Los Angeles that may also require scrutiny. Mark their lurid names: The Black Tribe Alliance and Mau-Mau Liberation Front."

Dwight got goose bumps. "I have an informant in L.A. I'll fly out and talk to her."

"*Her*, Dwight? Confidential Bureau informant number 4361?"

Dwight smiled. "Yes, Sir. We may be looking for an inside plant, and she knows every duplicitous left-winger in captivity."

"All left-wingers should reside in captivity."

"Yes, Sir."

"Stop by Las Vegas as well. Assess Wayne Tedrow Jr.'s mental health."

"Yes, Sir."

"The Mau-Maus were an African cannibal sect with no valid grievance. They diddled baboons and ate their own young."

"Yes, Sir. I know about them."

"Your knowledge does not surprise me. You're my obedient Yalie thug."

He lived in hotel suites. Roving agents had Bureau-vouchered digs nationwide. He liked the Statler in L.A. and the Sheraton Chicago. The D.C. Mayflower was dud-ritz. The room service tanked, the pipes hissed, the bed creaked.

His study files and plane tickets were there on the desk. Mr. Hoover had them sent during lunch. Panthers/US/Mau-Mau/Tribe. *Mr. Hoover wanted this*. His L.A. flight left in two hours.

Dwight buffed his shoes, cleaned his gun and did doorway-bar chinups. Bullshit tasks quashed his nerves and kept him at one drink a night. *It was chilled*. RFK was all on Carlos. It was *his* wet dream. Sirhan Sirhan practically drooled. He'd never ID Otash credibly. Jimmy Ray got popped at the London airport. Extradition woe would extend. Jimmy would talk—that was certain. Otash ran him in circles. Jimmy's story would play as cracker fantasia.

Pete would hold. Otash would hold. The lone-nut consensus would kick in. Mr. Hoover would short-shrift all divergent queries. The one wild card was the kid.

"I've known him all my life, Sir."

And his daddy and my daddy and Indiana long gone.

His daddy was "Daddy" Holly, an upstart nativist and Klan huckster. Daddy Holly got rich selling Klan kitsch in the '20s Klan heyday. Daddy hatched his sons Dwight and Lyle out of wedlock and sent Louisa Dunn Chalfont back to Kentucky. Dwight and Lyle grew up in Klan kampgrounds.Daddy taught them to spell all hard "C" words with a "K." Daddy hated Jews, Papists and niggers and understood that the Klan was a shuck.

Daddy rose to Exalted Cyclops standing. Daddy sold kustom Klan robes, Klan kid's klothes and kanine kouture. Daddy got rich. The '20s boom sustained him. A rape-suicide scenario derailed him. His Grand Dragon mentor assaulted a young woman on a train. She drank mercury and killed herself. The story got massive ink. Rabid censure swept the Klan out of favor. Klan-backed politicians were ousted en masse. Daddy looked for new opportunities and invested heavily in stocks. His wealth grew straight up to Black Tuesday.

Dwight was twelve then. Lyle was nine. They lost their big house in Peru, Indiana, and moved to Shitsville. Daddy started ignoring them. Daddy found a protégé: a younger man named Wayne Tedrow. They dreamed up get-rich-quick schemes and hawked hate tracts. Dumb-fuck Hoosiers dug the kaptioned kartoon texts and katkalls at Franklin Double-Cross Rosenfeld. Wayne Tedrow hatched a son with a local girl, circa ’34. Wayne Junior was a brilliant kid with a chemistry bent. Dwight dug him as a kid brother/son from the get-go.

Daddy Holly crapped out in ’39. Cirrhosis took him down. Wayne Senior raised Wayne Junior in Peru. He ditched his first wife and married a fast skirt named Janice Lukens. Dwight and Lyle worked dead-dog jobs and put themselves through college. Dwight went on to Yale Law School. Lyle went on to Stanford Law School. Wayne Senior moved his family to Nevada and got rich off hate and real estate. Dwight joined the marines, got commissioned and killed Japs on Saipan. Lyle joined the navy, got commissioned and killed Japs on boats. Dwight joined the FBI in ’46. Lyle joined the Chicago PD in ’47. They both kept in touch with the Tedrows.

Wayne Junior grew up studious and wild. He served with the 82nd Airborne in the mid to late ’50s and got a chemistry degree. Dwight worked hot-desk Bureau jobs and developed a rapport with Mr. Hoover. He almost bellied up in early ’57. Mr. Hoover allotted him a brief rest reprieve. Lyle quit the Chicago PD. Mr. Hoover gave him a full-time assignment.

Get next to Martin Luther King. Infiltrate and subvert the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Lyle did his best. Lyle failed. Lyle failed because he rather liked Martin Luther King and because Martin Luther King was unstoppable.

Wayne Junior joined the Las Vegas PD. Dwight transferred to the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. He worked the Southern Nevada Office and spent time with Wayne Senior. Wayne Junior’s life imploded in Dallas. A big coon hunt resulted. Wayne Junior waxed three shines that Dwight was set to prosecute. Yeah, he cared for the kid. But no passes for old friendships. You do not cross Agent Dwight C. Holly.

He went after Wayne Junior. Ward Littell and Pete Bondurant interceded. Wayne Junior waltzed on the spooks. Ward and Pete pulled strings *for* Dwight and forged a tenuous truce. Dwight was named chief investigator for the Southern Nevada Office. He didn’t stay long. The job bored him. Mr. Hoover lured him back to the FBI.

Lyle killed himself in August ’65. It was slightly hinky. Ward

Littell was embroiled with Lyle then. Ward spread grief wherever he went and sometimes turned minor grief fatal. Lyle Dunn Holly, dead at forty-five. A boozer, a gambler and a womanizer. A sweet-natured hump spread too thin.

Dr. King had Mr. Hoover spread wafer-thin. It was a fucking grizzly bear versus a Chihuahua. Dr. King was a stone Commie. Mr. Hoover was a stone Tory. Dr. King fucked women with gusto. Mr. Hoover collected antiques and vintage pornography. History welcomed Dr. King. History withdrew the welcome mat and put Mr. Hoover flat on his ass. He concocted Operation Black Rabbit and tried *everything*.

Bug jobs, tap jobs, black-bag jobs, shakedowns, poison-pen campaigns. Tail jobs. Newspaper slander. Innuendo, coercion, plants, cutouts, propaganda, psych warfare. Black Rabbit went on for three years. The key personnel had rabbit names. Dr. King was Red Rabbit. Dwight was Blue Rabbit. Lyle was White Rabbit for a spell. Red Rabbit had a fag adviser code-named Pink Rabbit. Wayne Senior was Father Rabbit. The operation was a rabid rabbit hutch and a dead-end cluster fuck. Dr. King soared as Mr. Hoover withered. Dr. King had his nigger-florid “I have a dream” shtick. Mr. Hoover told Dwight that *he* had a dream without ever stating the words. He stayed out in the dream ether. Blue Rabbit made the dream cohere in Memphis. Blue Rabbit watched the resultant riots live on TV. Blue Rabbit saw a little colored girl dead from a stray bullet.

Dwight did fifty chin-ups total. He made himself all sweat and muscle ache. He showered, dressed and packed. He got out his anonymous check-writing kit.

One postal money order and one envelope. $300 to Mr. George Diskant in Nyack, New York.

Dwight wrote the check, sealed the envelope and wiped it fingerprintfree.

The flight left Dulles late. Dwight ate salted nuts and read black-militant memoranda.

The Black Panthers. Cool name, cool mascot. Founded in ’66. Exconvict and aggrieved-spook membership. Lots of meetings, lots of whoop-de-doo, exponential growth assured. Cop-haters. Celebrity “Brothers” Eldridge Cleaver, Huey Newton and Bobby

Seale. “Off the Pigs!” rhetoric. Non-fatal cop snipings. A fatal shoot-out in Oakland, California—10/28/67.

Huey Newton wounded. One policeman dead. Criminal proceedings pending.

The Panthers hated the United Slaves. It was jig factional jive. US had a catchy motto: “Wherever you are, US is.”

Fatal shootout—4/6/68—two days post-Memphis. Oakland again—this honky-hater hot spot. The Panthers called it an ambush. The cops called it “tactical surveillance.” One Panther was killed. Eldridge Cleaver was wounded. Footnote: Brother Cleaver was a convicted rapist.

Dwight flipped pages. Most big-city PDs had files on the Panthers and Negro informants placed. Food drives, educational programs, black-culture rebop. Burgeoning numbers, hip cachet, minor newspaper clout.

An instinct: *the Panthers are too well-known to full-on operate*.

The Bureau ran a half-assed Cointelpro last summer. The goal: create Panther-versus-US dissension. Some San Diego agents circulated custom hate lit. The Panthers called US “chitlin chumps.” US called the Panthers “pork-chop niggers.”

An instinct: *US was too well-known to full-on operate*.

Note to Mr. Hoover: do not increase pressure on Panthers or US. Status-quo existing operations. Both groups will discredit themselves over time.

Dwight flipped pages. He hit sheets on the Black Tribe Alliance and Mau-Mau Liberation Front. They were garish, outlandish and distinctly criminal.

Darktown L.A. Rival storefront operations. Small membership stats in gradual ascent. Both groups: “Allegedly seeking to sell narcotics to finance their activities.”

No known informants placed. Nomenclature out of *Amos ’n Andy*. “Lord High Commissioner,” “Propaganda Minister,” “Pan-African Ruler.” Rat jackets on the key players:

A geek with four dope busts. A faggot carhop with two armed-robbery jolts. A bunco artist/voodoo priest. A card shark with ninety-one arrests and a phone book–size rap sheet. A “politically motivated” rape-o. Arrivistes, opportunists, Black Panther manqués. Buffoons prone to whimsy and carnage.

Dwight got goose bumps. Dwight fretted his law-school ring and read more pages.

More names, dates and locations. More details on BTA/MMLF brouhahas. A note from LAPD Sergeant Robert S. Bennett: "Per the armored-car robbery-homicides of 2/24/64, rumors of BTA & MMLF participation cannot be substantiated."

Street-corner agitation. Fistfights, drunk-driving beefs, Mickey Mouse rousts. The faggot carhop pimped drag queens. The card shark pimped his wife to cover his gambling debts. The Pan-African Ruler owned a porno bookstore and keestered his neighbor's pet goat.

His goose-bump count *zoooomed*. His nerves jumped. He ordered his one drink a night early. There, now—put your seat back and trip on Karen.

Confidential Bureau informant #4361—Karen (NMI) Sifakis. DOB 2/1/25, New York City. Fellow Yalie, history prof, Quaker-leftist subversive.

He brought her file with him. He loved the old surveillance pix and mug shots. There's Karen in '49, at a Paul Robeson bash. There's Karen outside Sing Sing—the Rosenbergs just got it. L.A., 3/12/61—Karen at a ban-the-bomb rally. His favorite: Karen composed in prayer as Berkeley cops bash heads all around her.

She taught history at UC Santa Barbara. Her husband was a lefty lawyer in Jew York. He rotated west two weeks per month. They quit fucking four million years ago. They stayed together for obscure Commie reasons and for the sake of their two-year-old daughter. Karen disdained violence. Karen built bombs, blew up monuments and always made sure that no human beings or watchdogs got hurt. She operated under the direct sanction of Special Agent Dwight C. Holly.

Quid pro quo. He let her destroy jingoist statuary. He pulled her activist chums out of the shit with some regularity. She ratted Reds who exceeded her low threshold for physical hurt. She was pregnant again now, at age forty-three. It was some kind of jack-off-in-a-jar/test-tube job that required hubby's assistance. Karen Sifakis—Jesus Fucking Christ.

They met at Yale. It was fall '48. He was a rookie Fed. She was a Smith College/Yale trial coed. They had a two-hour pub chat. They killed a bottle of scotch and a pack of cigarettes and made everlasting impressions. He dug her looks. She dug his looks. He didn't know it was mutual until three years back.

L.A., August '65. The Watts riot—crazy nigger shit ascendant.

Mr. Hoover was aghast. He ordered file checks on all the college profs who signed pro-spook petitions. Dwight did a full week of file work. There's Karen's name. There's Karen's picture. Fuck—it's that tall, red-haired Greek girl from Yale.

He did some research. He learned that Karen wrote her doctoral thesis on the Indiana Klan. Prominently mentioned: Walter "Daddy" Holly himself.

He conducted some interviews. He learned that some Indiana Klan klowns lynched Karen's Greek immigrant granddad. It was 1922. Daddy Holly ran a klavern two counties south of the lynch site.

He did more research. He pulled Karen's FBI file from the Central Records. He got her protest-march arrest records expunged in nine cities. He climbed a big limb to get her granddad some late justice.

One of the lynch guys had spawned a neo-Nazi grandson. Dwight tracked him to a county jail in Ohio. The guy was an evil sack of shit. Dwight got him moved to an all-nigger tier. The spooks gave him a come-to-God whipping.

He flew out to L.A. and knocked on Karen's door. She recognized him seventeen years later. He told her what he'd done and that his father was Daddy Holly. She asked him why he did it. He told her that he wanted to give her something that no one else ever could.

She invited him in.

They developed an arrangement.

He's black-bagged her house. He's read her journal. She describes her fascist-toady lover tenderly.

She always tells him, "We're too circumspect to self-immolate." He always tells her, "We're too tall and good-looking to lose." Sometimes he snaps out of nightmares and finds himself coiled in her arms.

The flight got bumpy. The seat-belt warning flashed. Dwight jotted notes on a file card:

"BTA & MMLF best bets. Check various police agcy files & hate-mail subscriber lists (left-wing, anti-white mailings) for leads on possible plant (Wayne Sr.'s stash/Dr. Fred Hiltz)."

The bumps leveled off. The plane descended. There's that big wide light. Jesus, L.A. looked good.

The bedroom was hot. The window unit went on the fritz and pushed stale air around. They'd sweated the sheets through to the mattress. Karen called it a "sauna fuck." Dwight kissed her wet hair, sheened up all the more red.

The husband was back east. He had a name, but Dwight never said it. Dina was out at nursery school. They had three hours.

Karen rolled on her back. She was three months pregnant. She showed a little. Her litheness was filling out into curves.

She stretched. She grabbed the bed rails and arched off her back. Dwight put a hand on her belly and eased her down slow. She rolled into him. He hooked a leg over her and drew her in close.

"Are you sure it's not mine?"

"Yes. It was a procedure, and you were nowhere near the receptacle."

Dwight smiled. "It's a girl."

"Not necessarily."

"Girls are less trouble. Any male being you create will mean problems for me. I'll spend the rest of my career redacting his files and busting him out of jail."

Karen lit a cigarette. "Dina will blow up Mount Rushmore. She's starting to put out a vibe."

"Dina will marry a Republican. You know how I know it? She always wants me to show her my badge."

The window unit buckled. Icy air hit them. Karen shivered and nuzzled into him.

"A colleague of mine needs some help. He's being assessed for tenure, but he was blacklisted from '51 to '54. The chairman of the tenure committee hates him, and he's not above using that as a wedge."

Dwight laughed. "I thought all college professors were high-minded Commies above shit like that."

"I am, but they're not."

"I'll misplace his file or do some redactions. Let me know what you need."

Karen blew smoke rings. They hit the cold air and dispersed. Dwight took the cigarette and put it out.

"Smoking's bad for pregnant women."

"One a day, and only when we're together."

"I need some help."

"Tell me."

"I might be running a Cointelpro on some black-militant groups. I'll find the plant on my own, but I might need help finding an informant."

Karen kissed his neck and traced the knife scar on his shoulder.

"Why should I help you with something like that? Give me the rationale and explain how it conforms to our arrangement."

Dwight put his head up against hers. Their eyes were close. That odd blue all dark-flecked—some goddamn Greek.

"Because they're out to sell dope and cash in on social protest. Because they're shitbirds who abuse women. Because they'll get a lot of very impressionable young black men fired up to do crazy shit that will derail their fucking lives forever, and the overall social benefit that they'll create from being in business will be down around zero."

Karen kissed him. "All right. I'll think about it."

"I'm right on this one. You could help me out and do some good here."

Karen chewed her lips. Dwight kissed her and stopped it. They went telepathic. Karen said their credo.

"I will not further comment on the usurious nature of our relationship, lest I indict myself as a fascist collaborator and run from you screaming."

On cue, perfect timing, straight off a kiss. More than deadpan, less than droll.

Dwight went into a laugh fit. Karen clamped his mouth. He nipped her palm and made her stop it. She pointed to his clothes. His checkbook had dropped from his suit coat.

"Those anonymous checks. You've never told me *why.*"

"I've told you I send them."

"You tell me just so much, and no more."

"You're the same way."

"It's how we stay safe together."

Their faces were close. Karen leaned in and got their eyes closer.

"You've done something terribly wrong. I won't ask, but you should know that I know."

Dwight shut his eyes. Karen kissed them. Dwight said, "Do you love me?" Karen said, "I'll think about it."

4

(Las Vegas, 6/17/68)

The Sheriff's blocked off Fremont. The low-roller casinos flew flags at half-mast. A lackluster motorcade slogged through.

Dig: a memorial parade for Wayne Tedrow Senior.

Noon in Vegas, 109° and climbing. City fathers in cowboy hats and broil-inducing suits. The mayor's last-second brainstorm. Senior was a heavyweight. Let's dispense respect.

The car procession crawled. The standing spectators sizzled and gaped, sun-stupefied. Some kitchen workers waved placards and booed. Wayne Senior ran their union and fucked them over with management side deals.

The LVPD sent an honor guard. Wayne stood on a platform with Buddy Fritsch and Bob Gilstrap. Buddy was *nervous*. He radiated *I need a drink*. He probably saw Wayne Senior's body.

Snail trail—the cars moved bumper-lock slow. Tourists capered and waved chip cups and beers. Negro protestors lugged anti-cop signs. A subgroup taunted Wayne. He heard muffled chants of "Honky killer!"

Sonny Liston bopped up to the platform. A dumb shit yelled, "Ali kicked your ass!" Sonny flipped him off. It got some laughs. Sonny sucked on a half-pint of Everclear. Buddy and Bob shied away from him. Wayne stepped off the platform.

Sonny said, "Did you kill him?"

Wayne said, "Yes."

Sonny said, "Good. He was a racist motherfucker. *You* a racist motherfucker, but you only kill niggers who deserve it."

That stupe yelled, "Ali kicked your ass!" again. Sonny chucked his jug at him and chased him. The crowd geared up for some fun. A Caddy ragtop inched by. The backseat was packed with showgirls. They smiled, waved and caught themselves—oops, we're supposed to look sad.

Wayne saw Carlos Marcello across the street. They exchanged smiles and waves. Wayne got jostled. The crowd swelled and pushed him into the platform. They looked pissed. Wayne saw why: Dwight Holly was shoving through with his badge out.

Wayne stepped over to a shady spot. It was semi-private. Dwight found him fast.

"Condolences for your father, but I'd have killed him, too, if I were you."

"I appreciate the comment, but I'd like to cut the topic off there."

"We go back, son. You shouldn't mind some ribbing."

"We share a history. You'd call it affectionate, I wouldn't."

Dwight lit a cigarette. "Tell me it's chilled."

"You mean tell Mr. Hoover."

Dwight rolled his eyes. "Don't nitpick me, Wayne. Tell me it's chilled and I'll pass the message along."

"It's chilled, Dwight. Tell me we're chilled on Memphis and we'll call it even."

Dwight stepped in close. "We've got a little seepage there. I'll tell you about it in a second, but you've got to hear the lecture first."

Wayne weaved a tad. A protestor spotted him and did the clenched-fist thing. Dwight pulled him behind the platform.

"You're juiced now. You're in with Uncle Carlos and you may get in with Hughes. I'd be a piss-poor friend if I didn't tell you to be careful."

Wayne stepped in close. " 'Friend'? You fucking coerced me into Memphis."

Dwight stepped closer. He bumped Wayne into a lightpost and pinned him there.

"Wendell Durfee came with a price, son. And don't tell me that you didn't want the job on some level."

Wayne pushed Dwight back. Easy hands, don't rile him. Dwight made nice and brushed off Wayne's coat.

"Give me an update on Carlos. Something to keep the old poof happy."

"It's stale news. The Boys want to sell Hughes the rest of their hotels and keep their skim guys inside. Hughes wants a peaceful town. Someone has to fill Ward Littell's shoes, and it's me."

"*Senior was a racist! Junior is a killer!*"—Wayne heard faint shouts.

"The envelope for Dick Nixon. Tell me about that."

"How did you—"

"We've got his pad in Key Biscayne bugged. Nixon mentioned it to Bebe Rebozo."

Wind blew bunting off the platform. The Senior/Junior chant grew.

"The Boys want to build some casinos in Central America or the Caribbean, and they want things slowed down at Justice. They'd like a pardon for Jimmy Hoffa by '71. They think Nixon will win the election and be amenable."

Dwight nodded. "I'll buy that, for now."

"The 'seepage'? *Memphis*? You were going to—"

"I'm trying to run down some hate-mail subscribers. I'd like to get a look at your father's lists."

Wayne shook his head. "*No*. I'm out of the hate business. Talk to Fred Hiltz."

"Shit, Wayne. I'm not asking you for the world, I'm just asking for—"

"*Seepage? Memphis*? Come on, don't string me out on that."

Dwight reached for a cigarette. The pack was empty. He threw it into the crowd.

"The St. Louis SAC called me this morning. There's talk coming out of the Grapevine Tavern."

"I don't follow you."

"It's a shitkicker joint. One of Jimmy Ray's brothers owns a piece. I had it bugged. A bullshit rumor was circulating there, and

Jimmy bought into it. A fifty-grand bounty on King. Otash lured Ray in off the rumor and worked him behind it."

"*Senior/racist, Junior/killer, Senior/rac—*"

"Keep going. I didn't work that part of the job."

"Some rednecks found the bug. They figured out that it was FBI-issue, and now there's talk that the hit was Bureau-adjunct."

Wayne prickled. "Talk's talk, Dwight. Rumors are rumors."

"Yeah, but it's a little too close to Jimmy and these crazy stories he's telling."

"Which means?"

"Which means it might or might not go away, and if it doesn't, we'll have to do something about it."

" '*We'* or *you*?"

Dwight grabbed his necktie. "*Us*, son. Wendell Durfee wasn't for free."

The IV drip had run out. The nurse was on the couch, sleeping. Janice fell asleep watching TV.

Wayne checked her pulse. It ran weak-normal. The p.m. news was on, with the sound low. A reporter did the standard King/Bobby number and segued to Nixon and Humphrey.

Upcoming conventions: Miami and Chicago. Two first-ballot nods assured. Potential protests at both convention sites. The Nixon-Humphrey poll status—now a dead heat.

Wayne watched Tricky Dick and Hearty Hubert strut and mug. He had Farlan Brown on tap. The Grapevine news torqued him. "Talk" and "Rumors" might mean witness trouble. Dwight wanted to see Wayne Senior's mail lists. They were stashed in a bunker outside Vegas. Senior always called it his "Hate Hut." A shitload of hate lit was stored there.

Janice stirred and winced. Wayne rigged a fresh IV bag. Nixon and Humphrey talked blahblah. Janice opened her eyes.

Wayne said, "Hi."

Janice pointed to the TV. "They're homely men. If I'm alive, I won't know who to vote for."

Wayne smiled. "You've always erred on the side of looks."

"Yes. Which explains my bad luck with men."

The bag started draining. The juice hit the tube. Wayne flicked the dial and regulated the flow. Janice shuddered. The juice hit her arm and fed her a slight burst of color.

She said, “Buddy Fritsch called today.”

“And?”

“And he’s scared. He said there’ve been some rumors.”

Wayne turned the TV off. “About that night?”

“Yes.”

“And?”

“And Buddy said some neighbors have been talking. They said they saw a man and woman outside the house.”

Wayne took her hands. “We’re covered. You know who I know, and you know how these things get taken care of.”

Janice shook her head and pulled her hands free. She got some strength up. The bed slid. Wayne clamped her arm to keep the needle in.

“I’ll be gone soon, but I don’t want people to know that we did it.”

“Sweetheart …”

“We shouldn’t have done it. It was hateful and vindictive. It was wrong.”

Wayne flicked the dial. The bag puckered and fed the tube. Janice went out in an instant.

He took her pulse. It ran short of weak-normal.

Farlan Brown said, “I was sorry to hear about your father.”

“These things happen, sir. He had a bum ticker and indulged bad habits.”

“ ‘Bad habits’? A clean-living Mormon man like that?”

Wayne smiled. “Mormons drink and fuck more than the rest of the world combined, as I’m sure you know from personal experience.”

Brown slapped his knees. He was tall and faux-hayseed friendly. His Michael Caine glasses magnified bad eyes. His suite was done up mock-Tudor. The Hughes group had the top six floors of the D.I. The big guy reposed in the penthouse.

Brown said, “You’re a hot sketch, sir.”

“Just think of me as my father’s son. Give me the job, and I’ll take it from there.”

Brown lit a cigarette. “Tell me why I should give you the job, and convince me in under one minute.”

Wayne said, “Collusion.” Brown tapped his watch. Wayne shot his cuffs and displayed his gold Rolex. Wayne Senior taught him the trick.

“Howard Hughes is a delusional xenophobe addicted to pharmaceutical narcotics and vitamin-laced blood transfusions. His employees refer to him as ‘Dracula.’ Mr. Hughes relies upon lucid men like you to mediate the world for him and to facilitate his dealings with the venal politicians and organized-crime figures who run the state of Nevada and, arguably, the whole country. I am Carlos Marcello’s liaison to the business community. I am a brilliant chemist who can cook up compounds that will zonk Dracula out of his fucking gourd. I will be Mr. Marcello’s bagman to Richard Nixon and hopefully to the Nixon presidential administration. Dracula is bribing Mr. Nixon to the tune of five million dollars, and I will raid my late father’s assets to match that amount. I will deliver it, along with Mr. Marcello’s fifteen million, to Mr. Nixon personally, at the GOP Convention. I am charged with overseeing the upcoming grand design of Mr. Marcello and his organized-crime cohorts, which is the building of lavish hotel-casinos in a friendly, dictator-run banana republic somewhere south of here, and I will guarantee you that Hughes Airways will have the exclusive rights to fly the suckers in. You should carefully consider me for the job, because you know who I know and what I know, and because you have the utilitarian common sense to know that I will make *you* look good at all junctures.”

Brown checked his watch. “Fifty-six seconds. You had the edge with Mr. Hughes going in, and now you’ve got the edge with me.”

“Why did I have the edge with Mr. Hughes?”

“Because you shot some burrhead dope fiends in 1964, and Mr. Hughes thinks you’d be a good man to scare the coloreds out of his hotels.”

Wayne said it *soft*. “I’m out of the hate business, sir. Please tell Mr. Hughes that I won’t be willing to do that, and please tell him that I’ll require an in-person meeting with him before you hire me.”

Brown said it *soft*. “Sir, you are drastically impaired at this moment.”

Wayne tossed four capsules in his lap and walked out of the room.

Two hours. Three tops.

He went back to his suite and stretched out. He pictured Dracula twirling around the rings of Saturn and moon-hopping Jupiter. Maybe he's flying or crashing airplanes. Maybe he's fucking Kate Hepburn on the back lot at RKO.

The phone rang. Wayne picked up. Brown cut him off at "Hello."

"The job is yours. And Mr. Hughes *will* see you."

5

(Los Angeles, 6/18/68)

"Clyde tells me you like looking for women."

Bam—the Hate King's first words. *Bam*—at the door, no handshake or introduction.

Crutch said, "Yes, sir. That's true."

Dr. Fred Hiltz laughed. "He said, 'Looking *at* women,' but I won't press the point."

The Hiltz hate hacienda—a big Spanish manse. Beverly Hills, prime footage, Jew neighbors galore. A jumbo sunken living room festooned with hate art.

Fine oils. The masters reconsidered. A van Gogh lynching. A Rembrandt gas-chamber tableaux. Matisse does Congolese atrocities. Paul Klee does Martin Luther King charbroiled.

Crutch scoped the walls. Man Ray did Bobby Kennedy dead on a slab. Picasso did Lady Bird Johnson muff-diving Anne Frank.

Fuck—

Crutch fought off a dizzy spell. Hiltz said, "I met a cooze at Lawry's Prime Rib. Her name was Gretchen Farr. She shot me some trim and got me addicted. She stole fourteen grand from the bomb shelter in my backyard. You find her, you get me back my money."

Devil-horned kikes by Frederick Remington. Grant Wood does LBJ drawn and quartered.

"Description? Last known address? A photograph, if you've got one."

Hiltz fast-walked Crutch out back. The bum's rush: *Raus! Mach schnell!* They cut down long corridors. They dodged cats and cat boxes. JFK morgue pix were taped to the walls.

The yard featured a statue garden. A wetback hosed down a life-size Klan-klad Christ. Hiltz said, "I've got no pictures. Gretchen was photophobic. She's a tall, stacked cooze with a slight Latin tinge. She was staying at the Beverly Hills Hotel, so I made her as kosher. I put Phil Irwin on her, but he went on a bender and blew me off. I tried to hire Freddy Otash, but he's not taking skip jobs these days."

The wetback hose-spritzed Hitler and Hermann Goering. Bird shit and dirt decomposed.

"What else can you tell me about her?"

"*You're not listening*. I know *buppkes*. I lead with my *schvantz* and it cost me fourteen big ones. *Get it? I'm* hiring *you*, because *you* know how to find people, and *I* don't."

A cat scaled Mussolini and sat poised for birds. Hiltz quick-marched Crutch over to some underground steps and shoved him down them. They hit a steel-reinforced door. Hiltz unlocked it and tapped a light switch. Fluorescent bulbs lit a twelve-by-twelve hate hive.

Hate-tract wallpaper. Hate-niggers, hate-Jews, hate-Papists, hate-Japs, hate-Chinks, hate-spics, hate-Commies, hate-the-muthafuckin' white oppressor. Hate placards stacked on the floor. Boxes full of Nazi armbands. Hate voodoo-doll pincushions: Jackie Kennedy Onassis, Pope Paul, Martin Luther Coon.

Hiltz grabbed a placard. A giant buck slave stabbed a cowering Jew merchant. The buck had a mammoth crotch bulge. The hebe had clawed feet and a rat tail. The banner read GENOCIDE IS THE SACRED MANDATE OF ALLAH!!!!!

"The *schvartzes* eat this shit up. You wouldn't believe the market all this black-militant *tsuris* has created. I've got a whole sideline going. It's *shvoogie* prison tracts, allegedly written by these radical shines in San Quentin. You know who really writes them? This kike nigger-lover guy I play golf with."

Crutch sneezed. The hate hive reeked of mildew and cat piss. That dizzy spell revived.

"Gretchen Farr. Tell me what you talked about. Tell me what she told you about herself. Tell me—"

"We didn't talk, we *shtupped*. We went *soixante-neuf* and did the beast with two backs. We did not waste appreciable time with discussion."

"Sir, can you give me *anything* I can—"

Hiltz pulled the lid off a king-size clothes hamper. The inside was crammed full of C-notes. The tally had to veer toward a half mil.

"Here's the enduring mystery, *schmendrick*. She only nailed me for fourteen G's. I know, because I count my gelt every night. You want my opinion? Gretchen was subtle. The cunt ganef nailed me for what she thought I wouldn't miss."

Crutch looked in the hamper. Hiltz grabbed a bill and stuffed it in his shirt pocket.

"Lunch is on me. Find her, and I'll get you a threesky with Brigitte Bardot and Julie Christie. Believe me, I've got that kind of clout."

Schvartzes, schvantz, shvoogies, the beast with two backs. A potential threesky. A time-clock gig for Clyde Duber Associates.

Crutch drove to the lot and braced Phil Irwin. Phil was huddled up with Chick Weiss, per some divorce job. Crutch took him aside and asked the standard skip-job questions. Phil was blurry on Gretchen Farr. No shit—Phil was blurry after 10:00 a.m. daily. Yeah, Dr. Fred hired him. Yeah, he called LAPD and Sheriff's R&I and learned that the Farr snatch had no rap sheet. He chatted up the desk guy at the Beverly Hills Hotel. The desk guy refused to check his guest file. He went on a bender in T.J. then. He took a Rotary group down to catch the mule show. Dr. Fred fired him.

Crutch asked the *big* question: Is Dr. Fred a Yid? Phil said, "No, but all his ex-wives are Jewish."

Scratch Phil. Next stop: the Beverly Hills Hotel.

Crutch drove there and got situated. He whipped his fake cop's badge on a fruit bellhop and made a sound impression. The fruit bellhop fetched the fruit desk guy. The fruit desk guy looked askance at Crutch's low-rent attire. Crutch told him he worked for Clyde Duber. The fruit desk guy dug on that. Clyde had panache and je ne sais quois. Okay, kid, let's talk.

Crutch asked the standard skip-job questions. The fruit desk guy responded. He called Gretch Farr "dicey." She rented bungalow #21 for three weeks. He wondered where she glommed the bread. She tricked with wealthy European and Latin guests of both genders. She paid cash for her flop and extra charges every morning. Gretch supplied one check-in referral: a phone drop called "Bev's Switchboard." It was a message pickup service for the fly-by-night crowd. Gretch was a quintessential fly-by-night chick.

That was it. The fruit desk guy sashayed off to fawn on some dowagers with poodles. Crutch hit the phone bank and called information. Bev's Switchboard: 8814 Fountain, West Hollywood.

He drove there and got situated. The address was a storefront adjoining a quick-script pharmacy. All the wheelmen copped uppers there.

He parked. He combed his hair. He pinned his bogus badge to his coat front and chewed some Clorets. He practiced winking à la Scotty Bennett. Memo: buy some tartan bow ties.

He walked in. An old girl was working a for-real switchboard. The place was claustrophobic—twelve by fourteen tops. Crutch caught a whiff of bug spray.

The old girl noticed him. He made her belatedly. Blow-job Bev Shoftel. An L.A. legend. She dispensed snout to all the big stars back in the '30s.

She said, "The badge is a fake. I eat my Rice Krispies every morning, so I know from giveaways."

Crutch said, "I'm a private investigator. I work for Clyde Duber."

Bev unhooked her headset and fluffed out her hair. Dandruff flakes flew.

"I blew Clyde Duber before you were born. I blew Buzz Duber on his twelfth birthday, so don't think you're intimidating me."

Crutch winked. His eyelid twitched and spasmed. Blow-job Bev whooped.

"The answer is no. Whatever you want, that's what you're getting."

"Gretchen Farr. I heard she's dicey, and I need a little peek at her caller file."

Bev said, "*Nyet*. And don't even think of asking for a header, 'cause I'm sixty-three years old and out of the biz."

"I could help you, babe. Believe me, I've got that kind of clout."

Bev whooped anew. "The comedy hour's over, *babe*. But you made me grin, so I'll shoot you a freebie. I overheard Gretchie speaking Spanish on the phone."

A call hit the switchboard. Bev popped on her headseat. Crutch said, "Please." Bev said, "Scram."

Blow jobs. Blow-job Bev blows Buzz and Clyde. Buzz coerces blow jobs now. Scotty's blow-job thieves.

It was too much. Crutch churned with it. He couldn't situate himself.

He hit the quick-script pharmacy and scored some Dexedrine. He popped four with coffee, de-churned and re-churned. He drove to his pad and skimmed a few *Playboys*. He bopped up to the roof and eyeballed a girl sunbathing. The dexies coaxed memories. There's Dana Lund poolside, in a strapless one-piece. There's Dana playing chaperone at a prep school bash.

Dana. Gretchen Farr. Hotel assignations. Gretchen swings with men *and* women.

Crutch got that *ooooold* feeling and grabbed his *ooooold* tools.

The pharmacy was closed. Ditto Bev's Switchboard. A walkway led back to a rear parking lot. Clouds absorbed moonlight. The side door looked weak.

Crutch stuck a #4 pick in the keyhole. Two jiggles eased the main tumblers back. He pushed a #6 in. He twisted in unison. The lock button slid. The door snapped.

He let himself in and shut the door behind him. Bug-spray fumes made him sneeze. He got out his penlight and adjusted the beam to shine narrow. He saw a file cabinet up against the switchboard-outlet plugs.

Three drawers set on sliding runners. Marked: "A to G," "H to P," "Q to Z." He pulled the handles. All three were locked.

He zeroed in on the "A to G" lock. He punched a #5 pick in back to the drill point. One push and *pop*—

"A to G." Aaronson, Adams, Allworth. Some *B*'s, *C*'s and *D*'s.

Echert, Ehrlich, Falmouth. There, Gretchen Farr.

Crutch held the penlight in his teeth and grabbed the folder two-handed. It was skinny. It held one page. He quick-skimmed it. The call log went back three weeks, to late May ’68.

No address notes or personal stats on Gretch Farr herself. Just incoming calls listed.

Avco Jewelers, Santa Monica—four calls total. Six calls from foreign consulates: Panama, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic. Huh? *Whazzat*?—this wild brew so far.

Three men first name–listed: “Lew,” “Al,” “Chuck.” A bunch of call-me-back calls to Gretchen—L.A.-prefix numbers all.

Du-32758/”Wouldn’t give name.” Sal/No-52808. *He* knew that name and number: Clyde’s actor pal.

Crutch got out his notepad and copied it all down. He got B&E sweaty. Bug-spray fumes tickled his nose. The fucking penlight hurt his teeth.

The Klondike Bar, 8th and La Brea. A Greek grail and a lavender lodestone for the limp-wristed set.

Crutch called Buzz from the outside pay phone. The sidewalk was a big K-Y cowboy cattle call. Crutch ran Du-32758 by Buzz and told him to check the reverse book. Buzz shagged the book, skimmed it and told Crutch “No sale.” Crutch told him to call P.C. Bell and request a bootleg-number trace.

The sidewalk action got too gamy. Crutch sat in his car and scoped the door. Sal’s Lincoln was back in the parking lot. Sal *lived* at the Klondike. He’d walk out sooner or later, with or sans the night’s quiff.

Sal Mineo. Paid informant for Clyde and Fred Otash. Two Oscar nominations and Skidsville. One trouble-prone fruit fly.

Crutch got re-situated. The dexies had him head-tripping. The Toho Theatre was just south. Hip couples were lined up for a doofus art flick. The girls had that long, straight hair. Every little head movement sent sparks aloft.

Someone drummed on his windshield. Crutch saw Sal Mineo—all spit-curled and tight-jeaned. He popped the door. Sal got in. He wore this look of wop-fruit enchantment.

Crutch pulled around the corner and re-parked. Sal said, “You could have come inside. You didn’t have to lurk all night.”

“I wasn’t lurking.”

“You always lurk.”

“Shit, man. I was *waiting.*”

“You were *lurking.*”

Crutch laughed. “Okay, I was lurking.”

Sal laughed. “Clyde wants something, right? You’d be lurking outside some chick’s window if you were on your own dime.”

Crutch gripped the wheel white-knuckled. Sal raised his hands —hey, no harm meant.

“Okay, I’ll start over. What can I help you and Clyde out with?”

“Gretchen Farr. She took one of Clyde’s clients for some money, and I know you know her.”

Sal lit a cigarette. “Sure, I know her. I know that she fucks strings of men and rabbits with their money routinely, but I don’t know how you traced her to me. If you explain that to me convincingly, I’ll tell you what you need to know.”

That pout, that greasy dago hair—Crutch balled his fists.

“I ran a phone check. You called her service two weeks ago.”

Sal cracked the window and de-smoked the car. Sal tucked up his knees and went doe-eyed.

“I’d say Gretchen Farr is an alias. Don’t ask me how I know, I just do. I don’t have a line on her whereabouts, because she never tells people where she lives. As I said, she fucks strings of men, steals or borrows coin from them and disappears. I called her service because she called my service. We didn’t actually speak. I’ve steered her to men before, but she usually develops her own prospects. She’s *veeeery* careful, our Gretch. She always makes sure that her fuckees don’t truck in the same circles.”

Fuck gigs, fuck strings, fuckees—

“Photographs?”

Sal shook his head. “No. The most camera-shy girl this girl ever met.”

“The ‘fuckees.’ Give me some names.”

“*No*. I am *truly* drawing a blank, and Gretch *paid me* to steer her, and I promised I wouldn’t tell on her, cross-my-heart, hope-to-die.”

Crutch slapped the wheel. Crutch slapped the dashboard. Sal made with the doe eyes and never flinched.

“Feel better, sweetheart?”

Crutch flexed his hands. His fingers and palms stung. Sal twirled his spit curl and sighed.

Crutch said, “Why do you think Gretchen Farr is an alias?”

“She’s too spic-looking to be a Farr. She’s a Spanglo type if she’s anything.”

“And she doesn’t *live* in L.A.?”

“No, she just passes through, causes travail and moves on.”

“Known associates? Do you know *anyone* who knows her?”

Sal doe-eyed him. “You sound resigned, so I’ll give you a nibble. I set Gretchie up with a realtor named Arnie Moffett, who is a *horrible* man who used to pimp for Howard Hughes. He bought a string of Hughes’s old fuck-pad houses in the Hollywood Hills, so maybe Gretchie is staying in one of them.”

Crutch cracked his knuckles. His head hurt. He couldn’t get situated. His thoughts jumbled and veered.

Sal said, “I’m waiting for the day, sweetheart.”

“What day?”

“The day that you figure out you’re not at all tough.”

Those caller-log names: “Al,” “Lew” and “Chuck.” They might be Gretchen fuckees. They might re-situate him. They might seed brainstorms.

Crutch de-torqued the dexies with red devils and Old Crow. He slept and called the three guys in the a.m. He dropped Gretchen’s name. He spooked them. He set up meets at the Carolina Pines—three fuckee prospects one hour apart. He hit the Pines early and hogged a back booth. He scarfed pancakes and coffee and re-cleared his head.

Al showed on time. He was pissed. Shitbird, I’m married. You lured me here to grill me on some illicit snatch I promoted. Crutch badgered Al. Al revealed this:

He met Gretch at Trader Vic’s. They had some nooners at his place and her place. She had a crib in Beachwood Canyon. Don’t ask me where, I always went there half in the bag.

Gretchie said she had resources. She mentioned import-export gigs. She hit him up for five G’s. He considered the request. He almost bounced. Something deterred him.

She emitted this stealth vibe. He snuck a look at her purse. He saw four different passports. He declined to front her the bread.

Passports for what countries? Jesus, I don’t know. Known associates? People she talked about? Kid, we just *fucked*.

Crutch pledged silence and told Al to split. Al split. Lew showed up. He was pissed. Dickhead, I'm married. You lured me here to grill me on some illicit snatch I promoted. Crutch badgered Lew. Lew revealed this:

He met Gretchen at Stat's Char-Broil. They got a thing going. He drilled her at the Miramar Hotel and at some pad up by Beachwood Canyon. She tapped him for five grand. She splitsvilled. He tried to find the canyon pad. He failed. He was blotto every time he was there. He couldn't find the goddamn place.

Known associates? Passports? Topics of talk? Kid, you're not getting me—we hardly yakked.

Crutch pledged silence and told Lew to split. Lew split. Chuck showed up. He was pissed. Dipshit, I'm married. You lured me here to grill me on some illicit snatch I promoted. Crutch badgered Chuck. Chuck revealed this:

He met Gretchie at the Westward Ho Steak House. He boned her at a house a mile east of Beachwood Canyon. It was a rental deal. Price tags were still stuck to the furniture—I should have known.

He lent Gretchie five G's. She absconded on him. He called that Bev's Switchboard place and tried to find her. Old Bev was a sphinx. She rebuffed him. He got a gift in the mail the next day.

A Polaroid pic: Chuck and Gretchie Farr fucking. Chuck got the point: desist or your frau receives *this*.

Chuck desisted. Chuck knew goose egg about passports and known associates. What did you talk about? Kid, we just *screwed*.

Crutch pledged silence. Chuck split. Crutch bugged his waitress for a pencil and paper. She brought them. Crutch drew and re-drew Gretchen Farr.

The fuckees gave him slightly different descriptions. An Anglo with spic blood? Sure, maybe, maybe not. Bev heard her talk Spanish. She got calls from three consulates: Panama, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic. Latin countries. Spicfest '68. She's wild, she's dark-haired, she's pale working on dark—go, pencil, go.

He drew Gretchie six ways. He gave her different hairstyles and made her smile and frown. He felt some wild spirit guiding him. His pencil broke. He got choked up and fucked-up when he saw where it all went.

He drew Gretchen Farr as Dana Lund, six times over. Gretchie was Dana writ dark.

Avco Jewelers was out at the beach. The window display featured high-line watches laid out on velvet blocks. Crutch perched under a striped awning. He was amped up. He was running on greasy pancakes and dope residue.

He walked in. A fussbudget type stood behind the counter, messing with some pearls. He sized Crutch up. Navy blazer and gray slacks—okay, you'll do.

"Sir?"

"I had a few questions, if you'd be so kind."

"Certainly. Is there a piece you had in mind?"

"Piece" hit him weird. "Gretchen Farr"—he just blurted it.

The fussbudget fussed with his pearls. "And this pertains to?"

"It's an inquiry."

"I gathered that, but you seem too young to be a police detective."

"I'm a private investigator."

"Dubious, but I'll give you the benefit of the doubt."

Crutch got heat-prickly. "Look, someone called her answering service from your number. I'm just trying to—"

The door chime rang. An old lady waltzed in, swaddling a Chihuahua. She vibed hot-prospect-hot-for-some-pearls.

The fussbudget whispered. "Miss Farr came in two weeks or so ago, while I was out. She left a message for me to call her, which I did. We exchanged phone calls. She wanted advice on the recutting of a number of valuable emeralds she had in her possession. I asked about the provenance of the stones. She had no answer ready for me, which I found odd."

The old lady de-swaddled the Chihuahua. The cocksucker hit the ground yapping. The fussbudget stepped around the corner and swooned.

Buzz dubbed the Hiltz job "the case." Crutch dubbed it "my case" in his head. Dr. Fred had the bread to wind up Clyde's time clock. *Cherchez la femme*—the Hate King had the big bone for Gretchie. Buzz called P.C. Bell and bribed a drone to trace that bootleg number. So far, no make. Buzz tapped Clyde's cop contacts for dope on *la belle* Farr. So far, no make. Arnie Moffett was their one lead outstanding. Buzz called it "hot." Crutch called it "a scorcher."

They stood on the roof at the Vivian and hashed it all out. It was twilight. It was hot. A late sun fuzzed the sky moss green. Buzz smoked a joint and talked a blue streak, all cars and cooze. Crutch messed with his telescope.

He caught an extra call at Paramount—slick dance-hall girls. He caught Lonnie Ecklund working on a '53 Merc. He saw some drunks weaving out of the Nickodell. He saw Sandy Danner sneaking a cigarette on her mom's back porch. Lonnie/Sandy/ Buzz/ Crutch—Hollywood High, '62.

Dana Lund was out of range. Crutch swiveled the telescope west. He caught Barb Cathcart grilling hot dogs. She wore a tie-dyed top and a peace medallion. Her freckly cleavage showed. Barb sang with a group called The Loveseekers. They lost every Battle of the Bands that they played. Barb beaver-flashed him at Le Conte Junior High, spring '58. His world de-centralized then. Barb's brother Bobby was a call boy. He allegedly possessed a fourteen-inch dick.

Emeralds, fuck pads, fuck lists, fuck logs, fuckees—

Buzz said, "You're a bigger freak than I am."

Crutch said, "Let's lean on Arnie."

Speedballs supplied oomph. Four dexies, two reds and firm jolts of Jim Beam. They *levitated* to the Miracle Mile. Crutch felt his eye sockets expand.

Moffett Realty was a hole-in-the-wall. It was right beside Ma Gordon's Deli, the "Home of the Hebrew Hero." The door was open. The lights were on. A skinny guy was kicked back at the one desk. He wore a red bowling shirt with a stitched-on ARNIE.

He was embroiled. He was staring into a swivel mirror, squeezing his blackheads. Crutch cleared his throat. Buzz cleared his throat. Arnie stayed transfixed.

Buzz said, "Uh, sir?" Crutch shushed him. Arnie said, "Frat boys, right? You want to rent one of my dumps for a kegger and lure in some gash."

The room de-situated. Funny lights swirled. Crutch said, "We're private detectives."

Arnie stood up. Arnie grabbed his crotch and said, “Detect this.”

Crutch saw *RED. RED room, RED* room lights, *RED* world. He kicked Arnie in the balls. He jackknifed him. He rabbit-punched him. He threw him on the floor face-first. Arnie’s nose cracked. Blood spattered. Arnie flopped and flailed for his desk phone. Crutch pulled the cord out of the wall and threw the fucking phone across the room.

Buzz trembled. His lips did funny things. Crutch saw the piss stain on his jeans and smelled the shit in his shorts.

Arnie flailed. Blood pooled off his nosedive. Crutch put a foot on his neck and de-flailed him. Crutch said, “Gretchen Farr.”

Arnie gurgled. Buzz ran for the john, making like upchuck. Crutch threw down a handkerchief. Arnie rolled on his back, covered his nose and stanched the blood flow. Crutch pulled out his short dog. Arnie made a gimme sign and tilted his head. Crutch fed him little pops. Jim Beam,100 proof.

Arnie sucked, gasped and coughed. Arnie dredged up savoir faire. Arnie said, “You evil little shit.”

Crutch squatted. He kept himself clear of the blood mess. He was all re-circuited while the room leaped and whirled.

“Gretchen Farr.”

“She’s a Commie. She’s some kind of left-wing transient with more names than half the world.”

“Keep going.”

“She heard I used to score snatch for Howard Hughes.”

Crutch said, “Keep going.” Arnie made the gimme sign. Crutch fed him three pops. Arnie sucked down blood-laced bourbon and took a big breath.

“She rented one of my pads. The Hollywood Hills, a half-ass little house. Two-week rental, in and out.”

“Keep going.”

“They’re skeeve pads. Fuck-film sets, keg-bust spots, short-term rentals.”

“Keep going, Arnie. The quicker you tell me, the quicker I’m gone.”

Blood soaked through the handkerchief. Arnie tossed it and wiped the excess spill on his pants. Buzz walked up, zipping his fly. He looked psychedelicized green.

Crutch said, “Give, Arnie.”

“Give *what*? She’s a Commie with some fucked-up agenda.”

“*Arnie* …”

“Okay, okay. She pumped me for dope on the Howard Hughes organization. She said she wanted to get next to a guy named Farlan Brown. I said I knew him. He’s this cunt man who plays Mormon to stay kosher with Hughes. When he passes through L.A., he always hits Dale’s Secret Harbor.”

TILT: Hughes, Gretchie, emeralds and that million-dollar—

“Dupe keys, Arnie. For the house Gretchen rented and all your other dives.”

Arnie nodded and stood up. Crutch steadied him. Arnie weaved for a full minute. Crutch dug his legs in and steadied himself. His Red World veered and swerved.

Buzz split to change clothes and hit Dale’s Secret Harbor. Crutch stayed swervy. He got the notion to re-brace Phil Irwin and run a driver’s license check. He stopped at a pay phone and called the DMV police line. He dropped Clyde Duber’s name and Gretchie’s approximate stats. Zero—just one eighty-two-year-old Gretchen Farr, up in Visalia. He called Dale’s Secret Harbor and paged Buzz. Buzz reported: Yeah, he asked around. He learned that Farlan Brown *was* a Hughes biggie. Hughes Airways was his main gig.

It was late. Crutch drove by the lot. Phil’s 409 was gone. Crutch got re-situated. His swerve was mutating to bad nerves and yawns. He tried Canter’s Deli, Linny’s Deli and Art’s Deli—Phil always late-nite noshed with Jew lawyer Chick Weiss.

Three stops, no Phil. He drove to Tommy Tucker’s Playroom, Washington and La Brea. Phil was a mud shark. He craved colored trim. The Playroom fronted a coon whorehouse. Phil might be there.

Yeah, he was. There’s his car by the back door. It’s parked. It’s rocking. There’s his white ass exposed in the backseat. There’s some fat dark legs spread wide.

It went on and on. Crutch parked and looked away. Phil and the spade chick supplied an “Oh, Baby” soundtrack. Crutch covered his ears at the crescendo. The spade chick climbed out of the car. She wore an Afro do and ran 220. She ambled back to the Playroom. Phil *fell* out of the car. He got up and homed in on

Crutch's GTO. Hey, I know that sled.

Crutch got out and stretched. Phil teetered up. His Dodger sweatsuit was all disheveled.

"Have you been tailing me?"

"Well, looking for you."

"At 1:00 fucking a.m.?"

"Come on. Guys like us don't keep regular hours."

Phil lit a cigarette. It took four match swipes. He reeked of the spade chick's perfume.

"We've got a job, right? We've got some work, and you went looking for me."

Crutch shook his head. "No, it's just a re-interview. I wanted you to run the Gretchen Farr gig by me again."

Phil blew a weird-shaped smoke ring. "Okay, twenty bucks."

"*Twenty bucks*?"

"Right. I keestered Dr. Fred on the job, and I'll spill the straight dope for twenty."

Crutch pulled out his roll and forked over two tens. Phil flicked his cigarette at a '64 Olds. It smudged the nigger pink paint job.

"Okay, so I filed a couple of 'no lead' reports with Dr. Fred, chiefly because I didn't feel like chasing this fly-by-night Gretchen twist all over hell-and-gone and because I got bought off the job."

"By who? Who paid you?"

"It was a cash deal. Anonymous. A messenger service sent me the bread, and I ran a trace on the sender. Dig, it was the Hughes Tool Company. I thought, Jesus, *that's* interesting, then I lost interest myself and went on that bender."

Hughes again. Hughes man Farlan Brown. The Red World re-swerved.

Phil yawned. "That whole shot of time is fuzzy for me, but I've got this idea that I actually *saw* Gretchen Farr, somewhere up in the Hollywood Hills. She was with this older chick with a knife scar on her right arm. I'm also seeing a '66 Comet, maybe white … partial plate ADF2 … Fuck, what do I know? I was stinko."

The Hollywood DMV ran a records desk twenty-four hours. Cops could scoot by and do file checks at whim. Crutch dropped twenty clams and Clyde Duber's name on the night clerk. The guy let him into the file room.

He had the year and model, plus *partial*-plate stats. That meant no quickie ID. Phil was a dipso. His memory was suspect. The Comet might be non-California registered. The registration cards were stuffed in large boxes. They were marked by county of origin and filed by the registree's name. Start at L.A. County, *F* for Farr, *go*.

Crutch hauled boxes down and finger-walked through them. No Gretchen Farr/'66 Comet in L.A. County—let's go on from there.

He worked. He pulled cards all night. He went county-to-county. He started at *F* for Farr and worked backward and forward. Gretch probably employed false names. Farr could be name sixteen or name forty-two. Dope dregs drizzled out of his system. He felt like one big ache and yawn. Cobwebs stuck to his hands. Mildew clogged up his head.

He saw dawn out the window. He got to Kern County. No *F*-for-Farr listing, let's go to *G* and *H*. He hit a run of Hertz rent-a-cars, dispersed to offices statewide. He hit *paydirt*.

White '66 Comet, ADF-212. Registered out of Kern County and sent to L.A. County. Rented out of the Sunset-and-Vermont office.

Crutch pulled the card and ran outside to a pay phone. He called the Hertz number. He ID'd himself as Sergeant Robert S. Bennett, LAPD. The Hertz geek bought it. Scotty/Crutch laid out a spiel on the '66 Comet and Gretchen Farr—"What can you give me on that?"

The geek shuffled papers. The geek nixed Gretchen Farr—no surprise. Scotty/Crutch said, "Who's had the car lately and who's got the car now?" The geek said the Comet was due back at 10:00 tonight. Two-week rental. The rentee: a woman named Celia Reyes. Local address: the Beverly Hills Hotel. Driver's license from the Dominican Republic, the Caribbean hot spot, the Swingin' D.R.

Crutch parked outside the Hate Hacienda. Shrieky opera blasted from the backyard. He walked down the driveway. The gate was unlocked. Birds nested on the dictator statues. The music blared out the bomb-shelter door.

He walked over and popped down the steps. He made noise on purpose. Dr. Fred was at a draftsman's desk, drawing a cartoon. Dig that crazy jigaboo with the watermelon head.

Dr. Fred wore a Klan robe and sandals. A Luger on a gun belt bunched up his sheet. The music was earsplitting loud.

He saw Crutch. He hit a desk switch and killed an aria mid-shriek. He quick-drew the Luger and did some gunslinger shtick.

"You've got brown eyes. Are you Jewish?"

"You've got brown eyes, too."

"Yes, but I *know* I'm not Jewish."

Crutch rubbed his ears—the shriek reverb lingered. Dr. Fred said, "You've got blood on your pants."

"It was on your time card, sir."

"You're dying to tell me something. You want my opinion? I think you smell money."

The *shelter* smelled: must, mildew, money for sure.

"Gretchen, Arnie Moffett and Farlan Brown. Tell me what you haven't told me."

"Why should I do that, *schmendrick*? You know what *schmendrick* means? It's a synonym for *schlemiel*."

"I'm trying to help you, sir. I'm just—"

"—a kid adventurer who fell into some shit with Clyde Duber. And now you've fallen into some shit with me. Clyde's paying you six dollars an hour, but I'm going to split a full million with you."

A squirrel sat on the steps. Dr. Fred aimed the Luger and plugged it. The shot sonic-boomed the shelter. The squirrel vaporized. Dr. Fred snagged the ejected shell in mid-twirl.

"I knew Gretchen was working me, but I didn't think she'd steal from me. A snatch is a snatch, but a ganef's a ganef."

Crutch rubbed his ears. "There's more to it than that."

"Why do you say that? You're a *schmendrick*. You're Phil Irwin minus the snootful of juice."

"Don't shit a shitter, sir. I'm putting some names together, and they're all going one place."

Dr. Fred said, "Dracula." Crutch went *huh*? Sonic-boom remnants banged his eardrums.

Dr. Fred re-holstered. "So, I got suspicious of Gretchie. So, I rifled her purse and found Arnie Moffett's number. So, I called Arnie. So, Arnie was pliable. So, I paid him for the scoop on Gretchie. So, he told me that Gretchie was trying to get next to a

Howard Hughes *macher* named Farlan Brown."

Crutch said, "So?" A last boom-warble faded.

"So, *I* wanted to get next to Hughes. We've got the same racial sensibility, and I've got a purification plan he can bankroll. I had a rival named Wayne Tedrow Senior. Between the two of us, we had the hate-tract biz dicked. He just died, and his numbnuts kid Wayne Junior may be Dracula's new point man. I want to get my hands on Senior's hate-mail stash and get next to Dracula, and I'm thinking this Mormon hump Farlan Brown is the key. I'm too controversial to make the approach, but a kid loser like you could breeze in innocuous. *Life* magazine is offering a million bucks for a snapshot of Hughes, and a kid opportunist like you could get close."

Tilt, swerve, veer and blood on his pants—Crutch said, "Yessir."

6

(Las Vegas, 6/20/68)

Another hotel suite. Another bum room-service meal.

Mr. Hoover told him to stay perched in Vegas. The Wayne Senior snuff vexed him. He wanted Wayne Junior mollified and assessed. Thus the bullshit layover. Thus the time at LVPD. Thus the limp salad and gristly steak.

Dwight pushed his plate away. Food taxed him. It slowed him down and sapped the jolt he got off nicotine and coffee. The Chicago guys owned the Stardust. The FBI was allegedly anti-mob. They kept a vouchered suite there anyway. Mr. Hoover had no beef with organized crime. That was strictly Bobby K.'s bête noire and downfall. Mr. Hoover hated Commies, jigs and lefty gadflies. Mr. Hoover probably *loved* limp salads and gristly steaks.

The fucking Stardust. Four thousand slot machines and velvet-flocked suites. The Chicago guys were hot to dump the joint on Howard Hughes. Count Dracula was hot to buy it. The guys would skim the Count blind.

And Wayne Tedrow *Junior* is facilitating it. Wayne's fucking his dying stepmom. They killed Wayne *Senior*. Dwight and Senior went *waaaaay* back. Dwight grooved Junior as a *wiiiiild* piece of work. Now he's out to get Junior a skate on Murder One.

Cluster fuck.

It was 114° outside. The wall vents spritzed ice. Dwight got that hotel-captive feeling and paced the suite.

Shit kept crisscrossing. Buddy Fritsch was *too* nervous. The Vegas SAC said Junior-killed-Senior rumors were fouling the desert air. Mr. Hoover was losing it. Mr. Hoover still *had* it to some degree. Sirhan Sirhan was foaming at the mouth in L.A. Jimmy Ray was foaming and fighting extradition. The Grapevine Tavern issue was percolating. He saw an ATF teletype this morning. Mr. Hoover telexed it in a tizzy. ATF might put the Grapevine under surveillance. Cracker habitués were moving dope and guns. Interagency grief. The Grapevine bug backfired and inspired conspiracy talk. Most conspiracy talk was dismissible. This might not be. It might require interdiction. Interdiction would *not* work with ATF hovering.

Proximity. Jimmy Ray's loose talk. Loose talk at the Grapevine. *Valid* loose talk—Jimmy Ray's brother owned a piece of the place.

Cluster fuck.

His nerves were frayed. His sleep was thin. Memphis spiked through at 3:00 a.m. nightly. Car noise sounded like gunshots. Little bed aches felt like someone hitting him.

Dwight walked to the bedroom window. Hotel suites made him miss Karen. Hotel suites got him torqued for real bedrooms. He'd black-bagged Karen's house a half dozen times. He wanted to stand still there with her absent. He wanted instinctive evidence that she had no other lovers. He found the quiet he was looking for and got his evidence confirmed. She tapped his D.C. suite once. He found some entry signs, rolled for prints and got two Karen Sifakis latents. She saw his anonymous check-writing kit. She read through his journal. He wrote "I fucking love her" just two days before.

They've told each other "I've prowled you" obliquely. He's read her journal. She probably hides the pages she doesn't want him to see. She's pestered him about the checks. He might tell her one day.

Dwight poured his one drink a night early. Twilight came and went. The dark sky pulsed and clashed with all the Vegas neon.

January ’57. Icy roads on the Merritt Parkway. He was working the New York City office. He was driving a Bureau car, blitzed. He was en route to a Cape Cod weekend with his girlfriend. He plowed a divider and hit an oncoming car. He killed the two teenaged daughters of Mr. and Mrs. George Diskant.

He suffered minor injuries. Mr. Hoover chilled all inquiries with the Connecticut State Police. He checked into a sanitarium near New Caanan. He segued from sobbing fits to long stints of silence. He stayed at Silver Hill for one month and four days. He got his nerves back and returned to work. He stayed away from women until Karen.

Dwight sipped his one drink slowly. The sky show started chafing him. He got out his black-militant file and read through it.

The second read confirmed the first. The Panthers and US—too known and too infiltrated. The Black Tribe Alliance and Mau-Mau Liberation Front—obscure, with big exposure potential.

Karen could find him an informant. He or she could be white or Negro. He or she could rat out both groups politically. The infiltrator had to be a male Negro. He could rat out all criminal actions justified politically.

Maybe a cop. Maybe an ex-cop. Maybe a cop or ex-cop with a dicey past. Again, that notion: check hate-mail subscriber lists.

Wayne Junior had access to Wayne Senior’s lists. Wayne Junior said he was out of the hate biz. Dr. Fred Hiltz was a Bureau informant. He was tight with that L.A. private eye Clyde Duber. Clyde was tight with the L.A. SAC.

A doorbell rang down the hallway. Dwight jumped out of his skin.

7

(Las Vegas, 6/20/68)

The Count chased pills with a red drink concoction. It looked like fruit juice and blood. He wore surgical scrubs and Kleenex-box shoes. His hair was long. His nails were claws. He wore a wool watch cap and a card dealer's shade.

Wayne made eye contact. It was rough. Farlan Brown made eye contact. He had more practice. He emceed the interview.

The Desert Inn penthouse. Chez Dracula. A hospital room with big wall-to-wall TV sets. Three screens of news chat. Martyred legends. Accused assassins. Nixon versus Humphrey and flashed-on poll stats.

The sound murmured low. Wayne tuned it out. His chair abutted Drac's bed. He smelled industrial-strength disinfectant.

Brown said, "Mr. Tedrow knows you have questions."

Drac slipped on a surgical mask. His voice eked through.

"Sir, do you believe that a lone gunman shot President John F. Kennedy?"

"Yes, sir. I do."

"Do you believe that a lone gunman shot Senator Robert F. Kennedy?"

"Yes, sir. I do."

"Do you believe that a lone gunman shot the Reverend Martin Luther King?"

"Yes, sir. I do."

Dracula sighed. "He's a realist, Farlan. He's a stout Mormon, and he's not prone to whimsy."

Brown folded his hands prayerlike. "You picked wisely, sir. Wayne has all the right skills and knows all the right people."

Drac coughed. His mask puffed. Phlegm dripped down his chin.

"You know our Italian friends. Is that true?"

"It is, sir. I know Mr. Marcello and Mr. Giancana quite well."

"They've sold me some wonderful hotel-casinos, and I intend to purchase several more."

"They'll be happy to sell them to you, sir. They welcome your presence in Las Vegas."

"Las Vegas is a breeding ground for Negro bacteria. Negroes have high white-cell counts. You should never shake hands with them. They emit pus particles through their fingertips."

Wayne deadpanned it. Seconds crawled. Brown smiled and stepped in.

"Wayne is matching your contribution to Mr. Nixon, sir."

Drac nodded. "Slippery Dick. I lent his brother some money in '56. It came back and bit Dick on the ass. It might have thrown the election to Jack Kennedy."

Wayne said, "I'll deliver the envelope at the convention. Mr. Marcello wants to be sure he has the nomination cinched."

Brown smiled. "I'm a delegate. Miami in August, my Lord."

Drac said, "The Negroes will riot and will require mass sedation. Animal tranquilizer might be the ticket. Mr. Tedrow could oversee the manufacture of the formula and test the dosage out on some Negro derelicts already in custody."

Wayne deadpanned it. Seconds slogged. Brown smiled and stepped in.

"Wayne has said that he'll monitor the convention for us. That's affirmative, isn't it, Wayne?"

"It is. I'd be happy to look around and do what I can to protect our interests."

Drac sipped his red drink. "It's Chicago that concerns me.

Youth factions are mobilizing to create mass dissension that will discredit the Democrats. Would you be willing to help them play a few tricks?”

“With pleasure, sir.”

“Hubert Humphrey is dough-faced and porcine. I would guess that he has a high white-cell count. He was born to lose presidential elections and die of leukemia.”

Wayne nodded. Brown nodded. A male nurse entered the room. He placed a piping-hot pizza pie on Drac’s bedside table. Brown shooed him off.

“Sir, did you read my memo? Our Italian friends are developing a hotel-casino plan for Central America or the Caribbean. Wayne will be overseeing it, and Hughes Air will have the exclusive charter rights.”

Drac sniffed the pizza. “Which countries?”

Wayne said, “Panama, Nicaragua or the Dominican Republic.”

“Good locations. Low cell-count zones all. Mr. Tedrow, will you confirm or refute a rumor I’ve been hearing? It’s been troubling me.”

Wayne smiled. The pizza pie bubbled. Drac said, “Was your father murdered?”

Brown squirmed a little. Wayne said, “Emphatically not, sir.”

8

(Los Angeles, 6/20/68)

Stakeout:

The Hertz parking lot. 9:56 p.m. Brisk drop-off biz running late. The ’66 Comet: due in four minutes or penalties would accrue.

Crutch sat in his GTO. He wore a tartan bow tie and a Scotty Bennett hairdo. He bought the tie and got the crew cut today. They celebrated his case and the Dr. Fred deal. They honored last night’s ass-kicking.

He held his zoom-lens Rolleiflex. He had Arnie Moffett dupe-key fob. The tie clashed with his polo shirt. The haircut clashed with current trend. L.A. guys wore their hair long. Fuck that shit—he and Scotty were avant-garde.

It was hot. He ran the AC and aimed the air at his balls. He talked to Buzz an hour back. Bad news: no trace on that bootleg number yet. Memo: Don’t tell Buzz or Clyde about the Dr. Fred deal. Get the Hughes pic and cut them in then.

Cars hit the lot: Buicks, Fords, Dodge Darts. People got out and schlepped their keys into the office. Countdown: 9:57, 9:58, 9:59. On time by seconds: that Comet, ADF-212.

It pulled in off Sunset eastbound. Steam whooshed out the hood slits. The radiator probably blew.

Two women got out. Crutch zoomed his lens and got them up close.

Gretchen Farr/Celia Reyes—tall and Latin-tinged. It had to be her. She was white, with that spic-pizzazz Something. She wore a tan shirt and flared jeans. She was stunning and stacked-statuesque. About thirty-two. Overmatched by her companion.

Maybe ten years older. More of *all* Somethings. Smaller, with a rolling-slouchy walk. Pale. Glasses. Near-black hair with gray streaks. Bare arms and a knife scar—Phil Irwin caught that.

They walked into the office. Crutch snapped photos. High-speed film—six frames walking in, six frames walking out.

They got into a ’63 Fairlane. Crutch zoomed in *ultra-close*. Mud streaks on the license plate, no way to read numbers. *Why switch cars? They’re vibing pros*.

The car pulled out on Sunset westbound. Crutch tailed it. He drove one-handed. He leapfrogged. He changed lanes and let a cab get between them. The car cut north on Berendo, west on Franklin, north on Cheremoya. Crutch hit the turn too close and double-clutched too fast. He stalled out. The Fairlane sped away, northbound.

He kicked the engine, tapped the gas too fast and flooded the carbs. *Easy now*—don’t blow this. He waited a full minute. He checked out the addresses on Arnie’s key fob. Gretchen Farr’s ex–rental pad was one mile up the hill. Three more party pads were laced within a half-mile radius. The Gretchie pad was one of the four.

Easy now. Re-situate. Turn the key *sloooooow*.

He did it. The engine caught. He drove up into Beachwood Canyon and window-peeped en route. He saw loads of TV glare. He saw a pot party. He saw a flower-power chick doing the wah-watusi all by herself.

Snaky roads up the canyon. First address: 2250 Gladeview. There it is—a small Craftsman-style house.

Dark. No lights, no ’63 Fairlane. Hit the other party pads—*they drove up here for a reason*.

The closest pad was six blocks southwest. Crutch drove there and idled at the curb. Shit—no lights, no Fairlane. He swung down to the next pad—four blocks due south. That’s it—a small stucco house. There’s window light and the sled in the driveway.

He parked curbside and walked over. The front window was curtained up. Dull light filtered through. He saw shapes moving. He cut down the driveway and eyeball-tracked them toward the back of the house. The side windows were cracked for air and uncurtained. He hunkered below the sills and followed shadows.

He heard muffled words. Word stew: “Tommy,” “grapevine,” “plant.” Shadows hit the last window. The two women showed. They shared a look. They embraced and kissed.

Crutch blinked. It isn’t real—yes it is. The image held and burned.

Gretchen/Celia ran her hands under the knife-scar woman’s shirt. The knife-scar woman untied her hair and tossed it. Window light beamed off the gray streaks.

They stepped back toward the hallway. They became shadows again. Crutch blinked and walked window-to-window. He ducked low. He saw shadows melded, but no flesh-and-blood *them*.

He walked back to his car and waited. He couldn’t get re-situated. His breath and pulse kept re-circuiting.

They walked out a half hour later. They carried luggage to the Fairlane and placed it in the trunk. Moonlight gave him some detail. Gretchen/Celia looked dreamy. The knife-scar woman had kissed all her lipstick off.

They got in the car and drove away. It was late. There was no cover traffic. He couldn’t tail them. He just sat there and watched their lights disappear.

There was nothing he could do.

They just left him.

He knew he’d never sleep. He decided to keep moving. He drove by the other party pads and saw keg bashes starting up. It was a mélange: hip kids, college kids and long hair all around. He drove back to the stucco place, picked a side-door lock and entered. He felt brazen. He turned the inside lights on.

The bedroom drew him first. The bed was warm. He touched the pillows and imagined their shapes on the sheets. He saw a single gray hair on the coverlet. He pressed his cheek to it and let it rest.

Something told him to go then. He left the house, got his car and just drove. He stayed up in the canyon. He did lazy figure eights all around the stucco pad. Time de-materialized. His beams hit a white Spanish house. The front door was wood-paneled and covered with strange markings. Something told him to get out and look.

He did it. He parked curbside and walked up. He ran his penlight over the door and studied the markings. Wild: geometric patterns etched in dark red.

Vertical lines down to the porch. A ripped-apart bird on the doormat.

You belong here. This could be yours.

Something told him the door would be open and to turn right inside. He did it. The living room was pitch-dark and musty. Plastic sheaths covered the furniture. He followed a metal-chalky smell to the kitchen. His breath went haywire. His hands shook. His penlight jerked. He steadied the beam with two hands and saw it.

The entrails in the sink. The severed arm/the missing hand/the brown skin, pure female. The geometric tattoo on the biceps. The deep gouge through and beside it. The crumbled green stones embedded bone-deep.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 6/21/68. *Los Angeles Herald Express* headline and subhead:

PRE-TRIAL MOTIONS IN KENNEDY CASE
ACCUSED ASSASSIN SIRHAN: "I'M A POLITICAL PRISONER"

DOCUMENT INSERT: 6/24/68. *Milwaukee Sentinel* headline and subhead:

BRITISH CUSTODY FOR KING SUSPECT RAY
FBI CALLS HIS CONSPIRACY TALK "FANCIFUL"

DOCUMENT INSERT: 6/27/68. *Los Angeles Times* subhead:

"ZIONIST GUARDS POISONED MY FOOD," ACCUSED ASSASSIN SAYS

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/2/68. *Hartford Courant* headline and subhead:

RAY'S EXTRADITION LIKELY

ACCUSED KING ASSASSIN DESCRIBES "WIDESPREAD CONSPIRACY TO EXPLOIT ME"

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/8/68. *San Francisco Chronicle* subhead:

FBI ASSURES PRESIDENT: KING ASSASSINATION WORK OF LONE GUNMAN

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/12/68. *Nashville Tennessean* subhead:

HOOVER TO AMERICAN LEGION: "RAY WAS THE LONE GUNMAN, PURE AND SIMPLE"

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/13/68. *Des Moines Register* headline and subhead:

NIXON-HUMPHREY RACE TIGHT

CONVENTION OFFICIALS PREDICT TROUBLE FROM "SUBVERSIVES AND HIPPIE YOUTH"

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/16/68. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* headline and subhead:

NIXON VS. HUMPHREY—IT'S TIGHT

MIAMI AND CHICAGO GEAR UP FOR "CONVENTION HIJINX"

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/18/68. *Las Vegas Sun* article:

COLORFUL FREDDY O.

He's been a Los Angeles policeman and a celebrity private eye, as well as a World War II marine drill instructor. The plucky Lebanese-American kid from small-town Massachusetts has lived more than nine lives in his 46 years, and now he's starting out Life Number Ten as the owner-operator of the Golden Cavern Hotel-Casino.

Welcome to Las Vegas, Mr. Fred Otash!

He bought the Golden Cavern from "Big" Pete Bondurant, quite a colorful character himself, also a former L.A. cop, private eye and soldier of fortune. "Pete B. wanted to retire," Otash told this reporter. "I picked up the Golden Cavern for a song, and that song is 'Vegas Is My Lady.' "

Freddy O. has worn many hats in his lifetime. "That's true," he said. "And I've had a few hats knocked off my head." When asked to explain, he replied, "I was run out of the LAPD unjustifiably. I got my PI's license and verified scandal stories for *Confidential* magazine, but *Confidential* went down behind libel suits. That rumor that I doped a racehorse named Wonder Boy?—100% false. Yeah, I lost my license behind it, but when Hollywood celebs are in a jam, they still yell, "Get me Otash!," so I'm still the man to see in L.A."

Beverly Hills divorce lawyer Charles "Chick" Weiss confirms Freddy O.'s statement. "Freddy's the king of the L.A. private eyes, even though he lost his license and has gone into the hotel biz now. Listen, I do divorce work, and sometimes it's not pretty. Freddy's my liaison to the wheelman community, these hot-car guys who tail the cheating spouses to their extramarital rendezvous. He's a battle-trained urban warrior, just the kind of guy to make it big in a high-stress burb like Las Vegas."

"Howard Hughes can buy up all the big joints on the Strip and Glitter Gulch," Otash told this reporter. "I'm here to play to the junket crowd and the working Joe who wants to have fun without losing his shirt. Don't call my place a 'carpet joint' or a 'low-roller joint,' either. Call me the friend of the discerning gambler on a budget who appreciates a bang for his buck."

Los Angeles private investigator Clyde Duber offers a dissenting view of Fred Otash, which he claims is *not* the minority one. "Freddy is strictly shakedown," he said. "His only friend is the almighty dollar, so you might say that Vegas is the perfect place for him."

Ouch! Tell me, Fred O., what do you say to *that*?

"Clyde's just jealous," Otash said with a grin. "He always played second banana to me, and it's always rankled him. Yeah, I'm colorful, and I've got a few rough edges. You know my motto? 'I'll do anything short of murder, and I'll work for anyone but Communists.' How can you quibble with that?"

How indeed—and spoken like a true Las Vegan! So, once again, welcome to the Jewel of the Desert, Mr. Fred Otash!

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/20/68. FBI telex communiqué. From: SAC Wilton J. Laird, St. Louis Office. To: Special Agent Dwight C. Holly. Marked: “Confidential 1-A: Recipient’s Eyes Only.”

SA Holly,

Per our phone conversation and your preceding memo (Confidential 1-A memorandum #8506) requesting an update on rumors pertaining to the M. L. King homicide circulating at the Grapevine Tavern, St. Louis, the following may warrant your attention:

1.—Electronic surveillance equipment, perhaps of Bureau manufacture, was discovered on the premises at the Grapevine Tavern in early to mid-June of this year. Confidential Bureau informants frequenting the tavern have reported that the apparatus was discovered by NORBERT DONALD KLING & ROWLAND MARK DE JOHN, convicted felons and tavern habitués and the acknowledged “leaders” of several other tavern habitués (CLARK DAVIS BRUNDAGE, LEAMAN RUSSELL CURRIE, THOMAS OGDEN PIERCE & GEORGE JAMES LUCE), all convicted felons active in numerous far-Right paramilitary organizations.

2.—The discovery of the apparatus has led to growing conjecture among the above mentioned. IE: that the apparatus was part of a monitoring process developed to lure accused King assassin JAMES EARL RAY into a “FBI-mandated” King assassination plot. While obviously preposterous, it should be noted that this rumor might prove to be damaging to the Bureau’s prestige, given Mr. Hoover’s many recent derogatory comments about King, and given that Ray’s brother CHARLES ELDON RAY is a part owner of the tavern.

3.—This office had no part in installing electronic surveillance apparatus, if indeed it was Bureau-manufactured equipment that was discovered on the tavern premises. If some other Bureau field team installed the equipment, I did not know about it personally, nor was such equipment installed by any agent under my command.

4.—According to statements made by the above-referenced tavern habitués, there was frequent discussion of a $50,000 "bounty" on King, allegedly to be paid by a cabal of wealthy segregationists to any "White Race Warrior" who would "buck LBJ's liberal hegemony to off Martin Luther Coon." This preposterous line of talk was frequently indulged by numerous tavern habitués in the months preceding King's death.

5.—The "FBI hit plot" rumors are growing in both virulence and frequency. Alarmingly, confidential sources within the St. Louis Office of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms have informed me that the tavern will soon be placed under ATF surveillance, pertaining to evidence of gunrunning taking place on the tavern premises proper. The above-referenced tavern habitués are not gunrunning suspects, but I find ATF's proximity to the tavern disturbing, given the virulence and frequency of the anti-Bureau rumors & CHARLES ELDON RAY'S part ownership of the tavern.

Respectfully, SAC Wilton J. Laird, St. Louis Office/EYES ONLY/ PLEASE DESTROY UPON READING.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/26/68. *Los Angeles Herald Express* article:

STILL A BAFFLER: "THE BIG HEIST" AND THE COP STILL OBSESSED

Tuesday, February 24, 1964. It was chilly in Los Angeles, with storm clouds hovering. The early morning silence was shattered by the collision of a milk truck and a Wells Fargo armored car carrying a multimillion-dollar cargo of U.S. currency and priceless emeralds. The quiet corner of 84th and Budlong streets became the scene of a holocaust, and within minutes four armed guards and two members of a daring robbery gang were dead—the latter obviously betrayed and shot by a fellow gang member—and the robbery-murder case has remained unsolved for four and a half years now.

"Not exactly," Sergeant Robert S. "Scotty" Bennett stated at Piper's Coffee Shop. "It's been four years, five months and two days."

One does not quibble with Sergeant Bennett on anything pertaining to the case he has worked on so hard and for so long. He has been the lead investigator since that bloody morning, and his determination to crack the case has become legend within the Los Angeles Police Department. The man, all six-foot-five of him, is a legend himself. He has killed 18 armed robbers in the line of duty and commemorates the LAPD record with small 18's embroidered in the Scottish-plaid bow ties he always wears. When asked about those shootings, he replied, "When you let that buckshot go, there's no taking it back."

It's a funny line with a harrowing truth behind it: detectives working the LAPD's Headquarters Robbery Squad go up against armed-and-dangerous criminals routinely, and they are a determined breed of man proud to be wearing "211" tie bars, the number noting the California Penal Code designation for armed robbery. "The Heist," as it's known around the Robbery Division squadroom, is a near-constant topic of speculation, and Scotty Bennett addresses it with great relish. "It was planned down to a 'T,' " he said. "The fake milk-truck collision was very forceful and potentially fatal, which obviously convinced the guards that it was real. The robbery gang knew what the armored car would be transporting, and we've never determined exactly how they got that information. More importantly, we've never determined whether the heist gang was comprised of white men or Negroes."

Sergeant Bennett sipped coffee and continued. "The heist was conceived and executed boldly," he said. "And I believe that the leader of the gang decided beforehand to kill his underlings at the scene and obscure their identities, and their races, by burning their bodies past recognition. All fine and good, but obscuring racial identification requires more than burning the surface of the skin, and the man first dosed the bodies with a chemical accelerant that greatly enhanced the tissue damage of the burning. We've never been able to identify the chemical that he used, which is another reason why the heist has remained such a baffler."

Some other reasons?

"Well," Sergeant Bennett said, "we know that many of the cash stacks stolen from the armored car were wrapped with ink-exploding bands, and ink spill was found at the crime scene. Also, ink-stained bills have surfaced periodically in south Los Angeles, so I'm convinced that there was at least a partial Negro component to the gang. Also, the origin of the emeralds remains undetermined. It was a very valuable cargo, and intermediaries for the consigner and the consignee signed secrecy waivers with Wells Fargo, which has impeded the investigation."

And the persistent rumor that the emeralds hailed from Central America or the Caribbean?

Sergeant Bennett said, "Just that, a rumor. Entirely unsubstantiated."

And the rumor that black-militant organizations plotted and executed the heist?

Scotty Bennett laughed heartily. "Why mince words? Black militants are grandstanders who always claim credit for their deeds. The Panthers and US are informant-infiltrated, and we would have picked up leads by now. We've got two rowdy militant groups causing woo-woo in L.A. now, the Black Tribe Alliance and the Mau-Mau Liberation Front, but for the life of me I can't see them executing anything more complex than a liquor-store job or a purse snatch."

And the leader of the gang? The ruthless mastermind who killed his own men at the scene?

Scotty Bennett laughed even more heartily. "Tell him this," he said. "When I let that buckshot go, there's no taking it back."

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/27/68. Internal FBI memorandum. Marked: "Stage-1 Covert"/"Director's Eyes Only"/"Destroy After Reading." To: Director Hoover. From: SA Dwight C. Holly.

Sir,

The following states the design and goals of our COINTELPRO aimed at discrediting and disrupting the black-militant movement at large and more circumscribed and localized black-nationalist groups in specific. Pending your approval, I have named the program OPERATION BAAAAD BROTHER. It is a nod to our less-than-successful OPERATION BLACK RABBIT and ironically celebrates the Negro verbal tic of using "bad" to mean "good." Male Negroes often address each other as "brother," which I thought you might appreciate. As I'm sure you know, a Negro extremist group called the "Black Nationalists of New Libya" precipitated racial violence in Cleveland, Ohio, this past week that left eleven dead, including three white policemen. This is the perfect time to initiate a physically small-scaled COINTELPRO that may well achieve large-scale national results.

It is my firm belief that both the BLACK PANTHER PARTY(BPP) and the UNITED SLAVES (US) are too well known and well infiltrated already. I believe that our goals would be better served by operating the Los Angeles–based BLACK TRIBE ALLIANCE(BTA) and MAU-MAU LIBERATION FRONT (MMLF). Our COINTELPRO could put them on the map and wholly discredit them concurrently. By controlling the public perception of two lesser-known groups at the outset, we would also discredit the black-militant movement as a whole. I have studied the initial Bureau intelligence reports on the BTA and MMLF that you sent me and have requested Intel Division dossiers on their members from LAPD. I firmly contend that they are perfect COINTELPRO targets and that their destruction should be the ultimate goal of OPERATION BAAAAD BROTHER. I believe our goal should be accomplished in this manner:

1.—Both groups are rumored to be considering the sale of narcotics as a means to finance their activities, which might provide us with avenues to exploit their inherent criminality and publically underscore the point that criminal activity and subversive political activity are one and the same thing.

2.—We must find a high-caliber confidential informant who will ingratiate him or herself with one or both groups and report back with assiduously detailed briefs on their political activities. I believe that a female informant would be the most effective. A woman schooled in left-wing-revolutionary jargon would have a greater chance of eliciting confidences and inspiring indiscreet conversation and would most likely be better able to maneuver between the two (male-dominated) groups without creating rancor. Toward the end of recruitment, I have confidential Bureau informant #4361 assisting me.

3.—The linchpin of the incursion should be the placement of a male Negro infiltrator, mandated to uncover and report the criminal activities of the BTA and MMLF. Ideally, the infiltrator should have had police experience. Also ideally (but much more unlikely), he should possess a past history of racial animus for whites. Toward that possibility, I have requested a wide array of police agency personnel files and am currently seeking to secure a viewing of the hate-mail subscription lists of the late Wayne Tedrow Sr. and Bureau confidential informant Dr. Fred Hiltz. Wayne Tedrow Jr. has refused to grant me access to his father's lists, but I will persist with him.

4.—Pending your consent, I would move to Los Angeles and establish a full-time temporary residence there, along with a cosmetically obscured front office for OPERATION BAAAAD BROTHER. Per initial operating expenses, I would request $60,000 in cold funds.

In conclusion:

I strongly believe that the BLACK TRIBE ALLIANCE and MAU-MAU LIBERATION FRONT offer us an unparalleled opportunity to disrupt and discredit the subversive designs of the black-militant movement at large. I await your appraisal and response.

Respectfully,

SA Dwight C. Holly

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/28/68. FBI telex communiqué. From: SAC Marvin D. Waldrin, Las Vegas Office. To: Special Agent Dwight C. Holly. Marked: "Confidential 1-A: Recipient's Eyes Only."

SA Holly,

Per your preceding memo (Confidential 1-A memorandum #8518) requesting information on rumors pertaining to the 6/9/68 death of MR. WAYNE TEDROW SR., I have developed the following information:

A.—Rumors that MR. TEDROW'S death was in fact a homicide, all unsubstantiated, are circulating, according to Bureau informants within the Las Vegas Police Department and Clark County Coroner's Office.

B.—One source would seem to be an LVPD officer who allegedly saw MR. TEDROW'S body on the night of his death.

C.—A coroner's assistant told our informant, "It wasn't any heart attack, not with his head caved in like that."

D.—Eyewitness neighbors of MR. TEDROW allegedly told canvassing officers that Mr. Tedrow's son and ex-wife (former LVPD SERGEANT WAYNE TEDROW JR. and JANICE LUKENS TEDROW) were seen near MR. TEDROW'S home on the p.m. of 6/9/68.

Will forward all future data on this matter per Conf 1-A guidelines.

Marvin J. D. Waldrin, SAC, Las Vegas. Eyes Only/Please Destroy Upon Reading.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 7/30/68. FBI telex communiqué. From: SAC Wilton J. Laird, St. Louis Office. To: Special Agent Dwight C. Holly. Marked "Confidential 1-A: Recipient's Eyes Only."

SA Holly,

Per Conf. 1-A memo #8506: rumors of the "FBI bugging" & "FBI-mandated hit" on Rev. M. L. King are growing in both virulence and frequency, according to informally placed sources frequenting the Grapevine Tavern.

Respectfully,

Wilton J. Laird, SAC, St. Louis. EYES ONLY/PLEASE DESTROY UPON READING.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/1/68. FBI telex communiqué. From: SAC Marvin D. Waldrin, Las Vegas Office. To: Special Agent Dwight C. Holly. Marked: "Confidential 1-A: Recipient's Eyes Only."

SA Holly,

Per #8518 & my 7/28/68 response, an addendum:

A—Sources outside LVPD & CCCO are now reporting "rife" & "widespread" rumors of homicide per the death of WAYNE TEDROW SR.

B—Confidential Bureau informants at the *Las Vegas Sun* report that the newspaper may be considering an inquiry, chiefly because of the "checkered past" of WAYNE TEDROW JR. and his alleged current involvement with JANICE LUKENS TEDROW.

Will forward all future data per Conf. 1-A guidelines.

Marvin D. Waldrin, SAC, Las Vegas. EYES ONLY/PLEASE DESTROY UPON READING.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/3/68. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: “Recorded at the Director’s Request”/“Classified Confidential 1-A: Director’s Eyes Only.” Speaking: Director Hoover, Special Agent Dwight C. Holly.

JEH: Good morning, Dwight.

DH: Good morning, Sir.

JEH: Before you ask, the answer is yes. Expedite OPERATION BAAAAD BROTHER in the manner you described in your memo.

DH: Thank you, Sir.

JEH: The title possesses a sublime jungle quality. As in “That brother John Edgar Hoover, he *baaad.*”

DH: You are *baaad*, Sir. And I might add “inimitably so.”

JEH: You might, and you should. And, on the topic of jungle artistry, I heard a very disquieting song on the radio this morning.

DH: Sir.

JEH: It was called “The Tighten Up.” A Negro ensemble named Archie Bell and the Drells performed it. The song carried the air of insurrection and sex. I’m sure that white liberals will find it authentic. I told the Los Angeles SAC to open a file on Mr. Bell and to determine the identity of his Drells.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Enough bonhomie. Dwight, I am very disturbed by the Wayne Senior and Grapevine Tavern chatter. I’ve been reading the applicable communiqués, and I take this confluence of loose talk as both a personal insult and an affront to the Bureau. Wayne Senior was an FBI asset and James Earl Ray killed Martin Lucifer King without help from you, me, this agency, Wayne Senior, Wayne Junior, Fred Otash, the redneck sharpshooter Bob Relyea, or any other outside source. Do you understand me, Dwight?

DH: Yes, Sir. I do.

JEH: Make the rumors stop, Dwight.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Good day, Dwight.

DH: Good day, Sir.

9

(Miami, 8/5/68)

Collins Avenue was wall-to-wall elephants. They wore GOP banners and flailed their trunks in the heat. A carny crew herded them with switches. *They* wore top hats dotted with Nixon buttons. One guy fed the beasts peanuts. One guy urged gawkers to cheer.

The noise was big. Wayne dodged sign-wavers. Nixon signs bobbed upside his face. He lugged two big steamer trunks. Nixon was at the Fontainebleau. He had to walk. He couldn't drive. The elephant stampede shut traffic down.

The convention had just started. It was thick-aired and 94°. The air sealed an elephant-shit aroma. Wayne's suit wilted. Wayne's stomach queased.

More sign fools hit the sidewalk. Cuban chanters showed up—"*Cas-tro out! Cas-tro out! Cas-tro out now!*" They looked riot-ready. Wayne saw saps in their pockets. The Nixon chumps gave them some space.

The Fontainebleau loomed. Two big men spotted Wayne and cut through the crowd. They wore dark suits and earpieces. They carried walkie-talkies. The crowd caught the gist and let them through quick.

They made it over. They grabbed the trunks and whisked Wayne off in a VIP swirl. It was two minutes all topsy-turvy. They hit the hotel. A side door opened, kitchen help dispersed, an elevator appeared. They whooshed way up. They floated down a thick-carpet hallway and sent sparks off their shoes. The big guys bowed and vanished. A bigger guy opened a door and vanished double-time quick.

Wayne blinked. Zap—there's ex-Veep Dick Nixon.

In topsy-turvy Technicolor. In chinos and a Ban-Lon shirt. In need of a 1:00 p.m. shave.

He said, "Hello, Mr. Tedrow."

Wayne quashed a blink. Nixon walked up to him, hands in his pockets, no shake.

"I was sorry to hear about your father. He had become quite a good friend."

Wayne nodded. "I appreciate the sentiment, Sir."

"And the lovely Janice? How is she?"

"She's dying, Sir. She's quite ill with cancer."

Nixon made a sad face. It flopped. No sale for Mr. Sincere.

"I'm very sorry to hear that. Please extend my best wishes."

"Thank you, Sir. I will."

Noise boomed outside. Wayne heard "*Nix-on!*" and elephant bleats.

"I won't take up any more of your time, Sir."

"No, but I'm sure you'd like some form of acknowledgment."

"I'd like to pass it along, Sir. That's true."

"You want me to say that I'll sing for my supper."

Wayne looked away and scanned the suite. Presidential seals and knickknacks ran rampant. The ex-veep booked the Big Room preemptive.

Nixon said, "My Justice Department will not go proactive against your people. I understand that you have designs in Latin America or the Caribbean, and my policy for the country you pick will accommodate it. If the election appears tight, I'd appreciate some help at the polls."

Wayne bowed. Nixon wrinkled his nose.

"My wife went for a walk this morning. She said the beach was covered with elephant shit.”

“It’ll be donkey shit in Chicago, Sir.”

“Hubert Humphrey is a dough-faced, appeasement-minded cocksucker. He is unfit to lead this country.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“The hippies are mobilizing for Chicago.”

“They are, Sir. And I’ll be there to lend them a hand.”

Carlos had a condo on Biscayne Bay. Wayne had time to kill. He rent-a-car-cruised Miami.

A street map got him west of the elephants. He couldn’t dodge convention hoo-haw altogether. The city was infested.

Placard clowns everywhere. Pick your grievance: Vietnam, welfare, Cuban policy. Longhaired kids defamed Tricky Dick and mourned Dr. King. Fiesty Latins wanted “*CASTRO OUT NOW!*”

Five- and ten-car motorcades. Floats with children and dressed-up dogs. Inflated elephants leashed to car antennas. Fools with bullhorns spouting gobbledygook.

Red, white and blue balloons. A Nixon banner epidemic. Favorite-son banners—low numbers beside the ex-veep. A twelve-wheelchair nursing-home motorcade—old girls sapped by the heat.

Twelve Nixonites. Balloons and wheelchair bunting. Four old girls with oxygen masks. Four old girls smoking.

Janice was dying. He watched her fight to live and wish to die in in-and-out blips. He cooked dope for her. She lived for the IV drip and fought her way out of stupors. He cooked dope for Dracula. He’d had three more meets with Drac and Farlan Brown. Farlan was due at the convention. They’d scheduled a meet.

Drac wanted to own Clark County, Nevada. The Boys wanted to sell him their share at usurious rates. Feed the cash funnel. Scour the Teamster Pension Fund books for loan defaulters. Usurp their businesses. Grab them, sell them and feed the cash funnel. Castro kicked the Boys out of Cuba. Find a new Latin hot spot, entrench and rebuild.

More banners. More motorcades. Another wheelchair brigade—crippled Vietnam vets.

Wayne looked away and cut down a side street. He cooked heroin in Saigon. He saw the war waste lives. The anti-Castro cause vexed him. His weekend in Dallas launched that distrust.

Dwight kept calling him. A persistent Dwight Holly was a fucking full-court press. His big-brother act doubled the grief. Dwight said the Grapevine was still brewing. Dwight said Vegas was brewing up evil chitchat on Wayne Senior's death. Dwight wanted to see Senior's subscription lists. He kept refusing. Dwight kept up the press.

Wayne crossed a long causeway and hit surface streets. He thought he saw—

A tail car. A leapfrogger. A blue sedan sticking close and dropping back.

He made three right turns. He lane-weaved. He hit a two-lane street and eliminated tail cover. The blue sedan fell back, stuck close, fell back. He got blips of the driver: a big, fat-neck type.

There's an alley—

Wayne cranked a left turn. The tail car braked, skidded and plowed some trash cans. Wayne crisscrossed two more alleyways and lost him.

• • •

It was a party. Sam Giancana called it a "buy Nixon" bash. Santo Trafficante laughed and shushed him. Carlos roasted a pig on the terrace. Droves of flunkies and call girls. Fools with noisemakers. Convention delegates with Italian surnames. Three bars and a mile-long buffet.

Wayne circulated. The condo was bigger than the Orange Bowl. He walked room-to-room and got lost twice. It was old home week. He saw a hood he popped for flimflam, circa '61. He saw a fruit actor he popped at a glory-hole stall. He saw a bevy of Vegas-transplant hookers.

Sam G. waltzed a woman by. Wayne caught "Celia" and "*hola*" instead of "hello." Carlos waltzed by and tapped his watch. Wayne caught "den" and "five minutes."

Wayne circulated. A commotion occurred. Flames shot off the terrace grill and ignited some curtains. A stooge put the blaze out with a seltzer spritzer and promoted a big round of applause.

A call girl walked Wayne to the den. Carlos, Sam and Santo were already ensconced. The walls were plywood-paneled. A photo frieze showed Carlos playing golf with Pope Pius.

The call girl split. Wayne sat down. Sam said, "Did he say 'Thank you'?"

Wayne smiled. "No, but he called Hubert Humphrey a 'dough-faced cocksucker.' "

Santo laughed. "He is absolutely correct there."

Carlos said, "Humphrey can't win. He takes the soft line on social chaos."

Sam said, "He's a pinko. He came out of the Farmer-Labor movement in Minnesota. They are 100% Red."

Santo sipped Galliano. "Howard Hughes. Tell us the latest and greatest."

Wayne said, "He wants to buy the Stardust and the Landmark. I assured him they're for sale. Farlan Brown thinks he may be breaching anti-trust laws, which might push the purchases off until next year."

Carlos sipped XO. "The cocksucking Justice Department."

Santo sipped Galliano. "Yeah, but lame duck. And I have to say that our boy Dick will not let shit like that impede us."

Sam sipped anisette. "The inside guys. That's what concerns me. We have to keep our people on the premises."

Wayne nodded. "Mr. Hughes agrees. I've convinced him that the transition will run much smoother that way."

Carlos switched to Drambuie. "The Fund books. What's going on there?"

"I want to buy out banks and loan companies, so they can earn marginal profits and double as laundry fronts. There's a Negro-owned bank in Los Angeles that interests me. Hughes Air is in L.A., and we need a funnel close to the border."

Sam shook his head. "I don't like dealing with niggers."

Carlos shook his head. "They're impetuous and get agitated too easy."

Santo shook his head. "They've been demoralized by welfare."

Sam sipped anisette. "Which our boy Dick will put the skids to."

Wayne prickled. His skin itched. His ears throbbed.

Santo said, "Wayne's having an adverse reaction to this conversation."

Sam said, "Wayne's an open book in some ways."

Santo sipped Galliano. "What's the book? *Jungle Bunnies I Have Slain*?"

Carlos said, “Wayne’s a coon hunter from way back.”

Sam yukked. “So maybe therein lies the rub?”

Santo said, “What’s the ‘rub’? You sound like a faggot talking like that.”

Carlos looked at Wayne. Carlos raised his hands and eased his palms down—*whoa, now, whoa, whoa.*

Santo coughed. “Okay, let’s change the subject.”

Sam coughed. “Okay, how about politics? Me, I’m voting for Dick.”

Carlos coughed. “How about your scouting trip? Let’s hear about that.”

Sam switched to XO. “I been to all three places. To me, they’re apples and oranges. Panama’s got the fucking canal, Nicaragua’s got the fucking jungle, and the D.R.’s got the fucking island breeze. They all got right-wing guys with their hands out pulling the strings, which is the most important thing. My friend Celia’s from the D.R., so she’s been lobbying for it.”

Carlos made the jack-off sign. “Sam’s pussy-whipped.”

Santo made the jack-off sign. “Celia this, Celia that. Sam’s got heatstroke from that island pussy.”

Sam flushed. Carlos raised his hands and eased his palms down —*whoa, now, whoa, whoa.*

Santo switched to Drambuie. “The front team. Let’s talk about that. Once we pick our spot, we’ll have to send some guys down.”

Wayne coughed. “I want to bring in Jean-Philippe Mesplede.”

Carlos gulped. Santo gulped. Sam gulped. Looks traveled three ways. Mesplede fucked Carlos on the Saigon “H” deal. He was a French-Corsican merc. He was an anti-Castro militant. He was in Dallas that weekend. He shot from the grassy knoll.

Sam sighed. “I’ll admit he’s a good choice, but we got problems with him.”

Santo said, “I heard he’s here in Miami. Wherever you got anti-Fidel shit, you got Jean-Philippe.”

Sam said, “Is this where we all say ‘Let bygones be bygones’?”

Carlos sipped Drambuie. “Three names keep popping into my head. A little birdie keeps telling me that Mesplede wants to clip them.”

Bob Relyea. Gaspar Fuentes. Miguel Díaz Arredondo.

A redneck shooter and two Cuban exiles. Part of the Saigon cabal. Relyea sided with the Carlos faction and fucked over

Wayne and Mesplede. Relyea joined the Memphis team and dropped Dr. King. Fuentes and Arredondo were anti-Wayne and anti-Mesplede. They plain disappeared last spring.

Santo sighed. "I'll concede he's a good choice."

Sam sighed. "I know he speaks Spanish. 'Let bygones by bygones'? I don't know, you tell me."

Wayne said, "I want him."

Santo sipped Drambuie. "He'll want to clip those guys."

Carlos said, "It's your call, Wayne."

Wayne cruised Little Havana. It was all-night, bug-brigade hot. Bug swarms, bug bombardments. Bugs bigger than Rodan and Godzilla. Bugs hit his windshield. He tapped his wiper blades and mulched them to bug juice. Little Havana was *HOT*.

He cruised. He eyeballed the sidewalk action. Bodegas, fruit stands, vendors selling shaved-ice treats. Leaflet distribution. Pamphlet-packing punks in "Kill Fidel" T-shirts. Political offices: Alpha 66, Venceremos, the Battalion for April 17. He turned off Flagler Street and scoped out rows of houses. He checked his rearview mirror every few seconds. Yes—there's that blue sedan again, leapfrogged two cars back.

He floored the gas, made four crazy turns and found a parking space on Flager. No blue sedan, okay.

Wayne went walking. His suit instantly rewilted. Street fools jostled him. He got weird looks—Joo ain't *Cubano*, joo white. The sky exploded. Dig those lights! Wayne made the source: fireworks from the convention.

People stood and gawked. Papas held their kids up. A street-corner fistfight froze in mid-blow.

Wayne watched. A leaflet-distribution guy waved a little flag. Wayne glanced in a coffee-bar window and saw Jean-Philippe Mesplede.

The glance flew two ways. Mesplede stood and bowed. *Le grenouille sauvage—habille tout en noir*. Black shirt, black coat, black pants—*le grand plus noir*.

Wayne walked in. Jean-Philippe hugged him. Wayne felt *at least* three handguns under his clothes.

They sat down. Mesplede was halfway through a fifth of Pernod. A waiter brought a fresh glass.

"*Ça va*, Wayne?"

"*Ça va bien*, Jean-Philippe."

"And your business in Miami?"

"Political."

"*Par example, s'il vous plait*?"

"For instance, I was looking for you."

Mesplede flexed his hands. His tattooed pit bulls grew snarls and erections. He was an ex–French para. He went back to the Algerian War and Dien Bieu Phu. He pushed heroin wherever he went.

They switched to French. They sipped Pernod. Fireworks lit windows all around them. They rehashed Vietnam and their ops deal. Mesplede cursed Carlos, *le petit cochon*. Wayne did a riff on strange bedfellows. Bygones as bygones. Carlos had work for them. Let me tell you.

Ça va, Wayne. Okay.

Wayne described the casino plan and laid out the territorial options. Mesplede riffed on the geopolitics of Panama, Nicaragua and the D.R. Trade and agriculture. Current despots out to quash dissent and Red countermovements. Wayne sipped Pernod and got a liqueur-language buzz. Mesplede routed the riff to Cuba. He remained committed to the Cause. LBJ, Nixon, Humphrey—Castroite *cochons* all. The election meant *merde*. The hands-off Cuba policy would continue. They sparred on that, *un peu*. Mesplede knew *la Causa* vexed Wayne. He hated dope peddling. Their ops stint turned him against it. Strange bedfellows—*oui, oui*.

They got to the yes-or-no stage. Mesplede said maybe. He had pressing business first. Wayne raised three fingers. Mesplede nodded. Wayne said that he'd spoken to Carlos. It's *my* call now. I'll let you kill two out of three.

The fireworks went out with a flourish. *Wham*—high noon at midnight. The window light died. Mesplede switched to English.

"Who is allowed to live?"

"Bob Relyea."

"I know why, but please inform me precisely."

"He was in on a big job in April. He's too close to some people I'm with."

"Memphis."

"Yes."

"You were there, too."

Wayne prickled. "Yes, I was."

Mesplede spit on the floor. "Shameful. A horrible blow to the American Negro. I sympathize with them, because I revere their jazz artistry."

Prickles, heat bumps, heatstroke pend—

"You can take out Fuentes and Arredondo. That's as far as I can let it go."

Mesplede shrugged and bowed. "They may be here in Miami."

"Let's go find them."

They took Wayne's rent-a-car. Mesplede fouled it with French cigarettes. They drove. They got out and hit cocktail bars and all-nite bodegas. They dispensed cash tips and inquired about Fuentes and Arredondo. They got zero.

Wayne rode a buzz off the Pernod. He kept checking his rearview. He didn't see the blue sedan. He *thought* he saw a tan coupe leapfrogging. It got close, fell back, got close. The driver: a crew-cut kid, early twenties.

It schizzed him. He took evasive turns and made Mesplede carsick. The tan coupe vanished. They circled back to Flagler and rewalked it. The storefront offices stayed open late. Cuban Freedom Action Committee, Cuban Freedom Caucus, Cuban Freedom Council. Mesplede loved it. He spoke Spanish and captivated a slew of late-night loafers. They bummed cigarettes. Mesplede pressed his case. He logged three tips total.

Tip #1: Fuentes and Arredondo booked to the Midwest. Tip #2: They might be heisting department stores. Tip #3: They might be heisting gas stations in Chicago.

It was 4:00 a.m. Mesplede fell asleep in the car. Wayne woke him up and dropped him at his rooming house. He drove back to his hotel, near woozy. Elephants and Dick Nixon. Cuba, tail cars, mob ghouls, bugs like Rodan.

He unlocked the door. The room light was on. The blue-sedan man was sitting in the one chair. He was holding a .38 Smith. A Nevada AG's badge was pinned to his coat.

Wayne shut the door and leaned on it. The guy pointed to his gun bulge. Wayne tossed his .45 on the bed.

The guy said, "Chuck Woodrell."

Wayne *yawned*. “Tell me what this is. I know, but tell me anyway.”

Woodrell *yawned*. “You and your stepmom killed your daddy. The AG knows it’s a homicide, and he’d like to prosecute. He’s aware that you work for Uncle Carlos and Mr. Hughes, and he *still* doesn’t care, because he’s a ballsy kind of guy. We’ve got a bloody print on Janice. Eight comparison points, so it’s a clincher. We don’t want to file on a dying woman, but business is business.”

Wayne rubbed his eyes. “How much?”

Woodrell yawned and stretched. “Why don’t you and Buddy Fritsch find me a suspect? That and fifty grand chills it.”

10

(Los Angeles, 8/6/68)

The drop-front came furnished: three rooms in Naugahyde and scuffed chenille. The air conditioners worked. The couch folded out to a bed. It was ample space. Dwight figured he could live there full-time.

Silver Lake. A Bureau-vouchered office suite at Sunset and Mohawk. A barber college, fruit bar and porno bookstore downstairs.

Karen lived a mile northwest. It was a good spot for spontaneous nooners. He listed the office as “Cove Enterprises.” It was fittingly bland. It winked at Karen’s crib at Baxter and Cove.

Dwight moved in. He placed his clothes in the closet and set up a hot plate and coffee gizmo. He wired two standard phone lines and a secure scrambler line. He unloaded his surveillance equipment. He locked a box of throwdown guns in the safe.

He was fucking dog-tired. He’d caught the redeye in from D.C. His seat was midget-size. His legs were jammed to his chest. His one drink and one pill got him one hour’s sleep full of nightmares.

Mr. Hoover okayed a wire transfer: sixty cold to a bank downtown. It was his six-month budget. Upkeep, informant fees and miscellaneous expenses. OPERATION BAAAAD BROTHER, on-go.

Dwight cranked the window units and produced that igloo effect. *Aaaah*, L.A. in August—hot, with no letup. He had three window views, all north-facing. Taco joints, cholos, smog in CinemaScope.

Mr. Hoover was riding him roughshod. The old poof was in a nitpicking frenzy. Rumors in stereo: the Grapevine and Wayne Junior. He told Mr. Hoover they were chilled. It was a flat lie and a time-buyer. ATF was circling the Grapevine. He sent Fred Otash to St. Louis to check it out. The Wayne Junior deal could blow in an instant. Wayne refused to kick loose Wayne Senior's hate lists. Ditto Dr. Fred Hiltz.

Wayne said he was out of the hate biz. Dr. Fred wanted too much cash. Dwight stiffed a check-in call to the L.A. SAC last night. Jack Leahy ran mordant per Mr. Hoover, almost recklessly so. Jack called the old poof "Amphetamine Annie." Dwight yukked and recalled their last phone chat. Mr. Hoover raged, pouted and pranced. Mr. Hoover ran two beats short of normal now. Mr. Hoover listed the Memphis personnel just to say I KNOW.

Dwight got the heebie-jeebies. The igloo got *too* cold.

Let's check out Niggertown.

Malt-liquor signs marked the border. Menthol cigarettes followed. Schlitz, Colt .45, *Nig*ports and Kools. Coon consumerism. Afro pride. Slick spades with white features and negroid hair.

Dwight drove south. His Fed sled drew scared looks and sneers. It was hot. Smog hovered low. Lots of *baaaad* brothers be out. Jive sessions and parking-lot crap games. Lots of hair nets. Lots of stingy-brim porkpies atop gassed hair. Lots of LAPD street rousts.

He drove by the Panther HQ. The outdoor mural soared. Two black cats disemboweled a bleeding pink pig. The pig wore a badge marked FASCIST OPPRESSOR. The backdrop was the Last Supper. Huey Newton played Jesus. Eldridge Cleaver and Bobby Seale played key disciples. The other disciples wore "Free Huey"

T-shirts.

The US HQ was close. The door guards wore lacquered shades and black berets. They flanked a hi-fi plopped down on the sidewalk. Gibberish sputtered. Bongos banged the beat. Dwight heard "Instill the White Insect with Insecticide."

Enough. Dwight cut west. The Black Tribe Alliance had a storefront at 43rd and Vernon. Their door crest featured black fists, guns and white-pig cops with small peckers. The Mau-Mau Liberation Front—four blocks south. Cannibal wall art—white cops screaming in stew pots as black dudes seasoned and stirred.

Enough. It was Chairman Mao meets Minstrel Mike, spliced with Ramar of the Jungle. Dwight cut west. He passed the Peoples' Bank of South Los Angeles. He recalled his file notes. It was allegedly a money-wash joint.

Karen was guest-lecturing at USC. He cruised by on a timing hunch and caught her class filing out. The kids were longhaired and unkempt. They saw his gray suit and belt gun and went *eek*. The lecture hall was big. Karen lingered by the dais. Dwight jumped onstage and created sound waves. Karen looked up and smiled.

They kissed over the dais. A few students caught it and went *Huh*? Karen held a photo slide up to the light. Dwight looked at it. It was Mr. Hoover, circa '52.

"Don't tell me. You're teaching the blacklist again."

"Don't tell me you think it was justified."

"Don't tell me I haven't helped some of your Commie chums get their jobs back."

"Don't tell me I haven't reciprocated with favors."

Dwight smiled. "Is What's-His-Name in town?"

"Yes."

"When does he leave?"

"Tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow night, then?"

"Yes, that sounds lovely."

They sat on the stage and let their legs dangle. They were tall. Their feet scraped the floor. Karen pulled his cigarettes out and lit up.

"One a day, right?"

"Yes, and only when we're together."

"I'm not sure I believe you."

"All right. Occasionally, after breakfast."

Dwight touched her belly. "You're showing more."

Karen touched herself. "That's Eleanora."

"Suppose it's a boy?"

"Then it's What's-His-Name or Dwight."

"And you're sure it's not mine?"

"Sweetie, it's not an immaculate conception, and you were nowhere near the receptacle."

Dwight pulled his legs up and stretched out on the stage. He yawned. He got half-second dizzy.

Karen said, "How's your sleep?"

"Shitty."

"Bad dreams?"

"Yes."

"Any horrible Bureau-sanctioned deeds that you'd like to confess?"

"Not right now."

Karen tossed her cigarette and stretched out beside him. He touched her hair. He counted the dark flecks in her eyes.

"Any new ones?"

"No."

"A person's eyes change as they age. It's perfectly normal, so you shouldn't fret over it."

"I fret over everything."

Karen touched his hair. "I wasn't accusing you. I was just commenting."

Dwight moved closer. Their heads touched. He smelled almond shampoo.

"Find me that informant. A woman. I'll operate her and my infiltrator, and I'll keep them separate."

"I'll think about it."

"You could do some good here. Both of these groups are uninfiltrated, which means they've got all kinds of latitude to pull bad shit."

Karen burrowed in a little. "Quid pro quo?"

"Sure."

"There's a rally here next week."

"Against the war?"

"Yes."

"Don't tell me. You'd like me to pull the photo-surveillance team.”

“Would you?”

“Sure. I’ll call Jack Leahy.”

Karen rolled on her back and stretched. Dwight touched her belly. He thought he felt Eleanora kick.

He said, “Do you love me?”

Karen said, “I’ll think about it.”

They sat in the den. Dwight insisted. It was hate art–free. The rest of Hate House jangled him.

Dr. Fred said, “A hundred G’s. That and a little favor gets you a thorough perusal of all of my lists.”

Dwight yawned. “What’s the favor?”

“Help me find this woman. She dinged me for fourteen G’s and split-skied.”

Dwight shrugged. “Call Clyde Duber. He’ll set you up.”

“He did. I got this numbnuts kid working for me. He’s in Miami now, but I don’t know if he’s worth a shit. Come on, Dwight. The cash and one little favor.”

Dwight shook his head. “Ten cold and a pound of cocaine I’ve been holding. It’s superlative shit. You’ll have the time of your life, until it kills you.”

The phone rang. Dr. Fred picked up, mumbled and listened. Dwight heard *scree-scree* noise. It sounded like a Bureau patch call.

Dr. Fred nodded. Dwight grabbed the phone. The *scree-scree*s faded to an Okie twang. The caller said, “Dwight, it’s Buddy Fritsch. I got me a cluster fuck here, and you better come.”

A puddle jumper got him into McCarran. He cabbed downtown to LVPD. Buddy was holed up in his office. He was half-tanked. He was pacing. Three cigarettes burned in one ashtray.

Dwight shut the door and locked it. Buddy quit pacing and noticed him.

“I got this AG’s man squeezing me. He’s got a print on Janice, and he’s rolling the dice. Okay, he offered me money, but I still can’t see no way out, except to hand up Wayne and—”

Dwight grabbed him. Dwight threw him over the desk and dumped a file cabinet on him. Dwight pulled the air conditioner off the wall and dropped it on his back. Dwight kicked him in the balls three times.

“You get me a freak to hand up for Wayne Senior, and you do it now.”

11

(Miami, 8/8/68)

Bug work:

The wires, the pliers, the screwdrivers. The drills, the mounts, the baseboard dust. Butterfingers: sweaty hands on gnat-size devices.

The Eden Roc Hotel. Drill job: suite 1206 into suite 1207. Crutch worked with Freddy Turentine. Freddy was the “Bug King.” Freddy’s bug résumé astounded. Freddy was on loan to Clyde Duber Associates. Freddy usually worked for “Shakedown King” Fred Otash.

They drilled. 1206 was their listening post. Farlan Brown was due in 1207 shortly. Time clock: the Find Gretchen Farr gig was moving way into five figures.

They drilled. They bored through to 1207 and pushed wires in. Crutch picked the door lock. They got full-suite access. They miked up the bedroom lamp shades. They tapped the two phones. They Spackle-covered the wall wires and applied touch-up paint. They stuffed baffling in the bore-through holes and sanded the rough spots down smooth. They swept up all the baseboard dust and zoomed back to 1206.

Finger-cramping drudge work—four full hours. Crutch was grit-encrusted. His fingers hurt. He had Spackle dust in his ears, eyes and nasal nooks. He took a shower and cleaned up. Freddy went to his room to snooze. Crutch turned the living room TV on and put the sound low. The screen faced the bug-tap receiver. He grabbed a chair, hooked on headphones and listened to dead air next door.

The TV half-ass absorbed him. Nixon got the nod, first ballot, yawn/snore/soporific. Nixon emitted stupe vibes. He did that V-for-victory thing and looked like a rube robot. The news cut to riot footage. The Miami Congo blazed. It derived from a spook housing-project brouhaha. Spooks were stoning and sniping white motorists. Nigger mobs, arson, looting. Hot-weather action. Groovy footage.

Crutch yawned. He was running on six-week sleep deficit, all per HIS CASE.

HIS case. Not Clyde or Buzz Duber's. *HIS* side deal with Dr. Fred. *HIS* shot at the million-dollar Hughes deal. *HIS* side deal side deal: Gretchen Farr as Celia Reyes. Add the knife-scar woman. Add the house with the door markings and the body parts in the kitchen.

HIS CASE.

Farlan Brown was Miami-bound. Wayne Tedrow Jr. was here already. Junior had Senior's hate-mail stash. Dr. Fred wanted it. Junior worked for Farlan Brown and Dracula Hughes. Dr. Fred wanted to sell Drac his racial-purity plan. Crazy shit—sure. But crazy shit with dollar signs attached.

$$$$$$$$$—

He's hoarded his secret knowledge. He's held it back from Clyde, Buzz and Dr. Fred. They don't know about Gretchen as Celia. They don't know about the knife-scar woman or the Horror House on North Tamarind.

HIS CASE—now six weeks in.

His pad was file-crammed already. His mother's file ate up most of his floor and shelf space. He rented a second file pad downtown. The Elm Hotel—twelve scoots a week. A piss-in-the-sink dive for rum-dum pensioners. He laid in some file boxes and reams of file paper. He's on the job full-time.

Filework: lead file, car file, forensic file, file on 2216 North Tamarind.

He researched the Horror House. It was *not* an Arnie Moffett party-rental crib. It was *near* the Gretchen/Celia-rented house and the other party cribs. Proximity did not equal connection. Yeah, but—the weird thrust of that night made *everything* seem connected. It was like a dream state. Gretchen/Celia and the knife-scar woman kiss—and his world re-situates.

House research. Paydirt: the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce owned Horror House and used it for fund-raisers. It stood unoccupied since mid-'67. He snuck in again and rolled every goddamn room for prints. He got nothing but smudges and bullshit partials. The Chamber let him look at their fund-raiser file. Groups were listed, guest lists were not. *There was no way to know who had been in the house*. The girl at the Chamber told him one blood-churning thing: sleazoid hippies broke in and squatted there sometimes. Question: what were Gretchen/Celia and the knife-scar woman *still* doing in the Moffett house? Easy answer: squatting rent-free after their real rent expired. Question: who bought Phil Irwin off the Find Gretchen gig? Possible answer: Farlan Brown, via Hughes Tool Co. Brown got wind of the gig. Brown wanted Gretchie un–fucked with. His motive? Who fucking knows?

House file to car file.

He bribed a clerk at Hertz Rent a Car. Gretchen/Celia returned the '66 Comet with the radiator blown. That mandated a no-rental stint. Thus, the Comet stayed untouched since the drop-off night. Crutch re-bribed the Hertz guy and got two hours alone with the Comet. He print-wiped and got one latent. He spent five weeks hand-checking female print cards at the L.A. County Sheriff's Department and LAPD. So far, no match.

Car file to forensic file.

Clyde had dirt on the county coroner, "Tojo" Tom Takahashi. Tojo Tom was a jailbait Johnny with a yen for young Jap cooze. Crutch leaned on him and told him to keep mum with Clyde on all this. Tojo Tom agreed. Crutch waltzed him into Horror House two nights after his first entry. They split a pint of Jim Beam and tamped down their nerves. They worked by Coleman lantern light. Crutch took photos. Tojo Tom examined and bagged the body parts and took blood and tissue samples. Crutch got pix of the tattoo on the arm and the geometric wall markings. Tojo Tom removed the crumbled green stones from the arm gouge and separately bagged them.

It took hours. The smell was foul. Crutch held the lantern while Tojo Tom brushed maggots off. Tojo Tom called it an "evisceration snuff." The victim was a young Latin woman. He had her blood analyzed and called Crutch with the results. It was type O+, very common, no outstanding characteristics. He found odd powder fragments in the gouged tissue and had them analyzed. Very odd: there was no toxicology make. Crutch had a gemologist analyze the green stone fragments. Emeralds? No, just green glass.

Forensic file to tattoo file. Canvassing from there.

Crutch hit a total of forty-seven tattoo parlors in and around L.A. He showed his photo of the partial tattoo to endless tattoo freaks. So far, no make. Tattoo file to lead file. He hit LAPD and Sheriff's R&I again. He checked mug books, teletypes and occurrence-field interrogation files for mentions of Gretchen/Celia and got zero. Cop files to INS files. He scanned photo sheets for every female immigrant from every Latin American country extant and got zero on Gretchen/Celia. He remembered Bev's Switchboard. Gretchen/Celia got calls from three foreign consulates: Panama, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic. He called all three and got three more zeros: no records of calls to Gretchen/Celia. Her Dominican driver's license turned out to be a phony. The Dominican national DMV had no listing. That bootleg-number call to Bev's Switchboard? No make on it yet.

$$$ to ??? and back again—dollar signs, question marks and zeros.

The kiss. The shadows in and out of his vision. The knife-scar woman's gray-streaked hair. She didn't have a name. Gretchen/Celia had two. *He wanted to know that woman's name*. He drew pictures of her and papered his walls with them. He gave her her own real features, not Dana Lund's.

Their talk—"Grapevine," "Tommy," "plant"—what did it mean? He checked city directories nationwide. He found listings for 216 Grapevine restaurants, hotels, motels and bars. He didn't know where he should start checking or *if* he should start checking or if it meant anything.

So, Gretchen/Celia fucked men and stole their money. "Al," "Chuck," "Lew," Dr. Fred, Farlan Brown potentially. Sal Mineo spilled all that *he* knew. Gretchen/Celia was allegedly left-wing.

What did *that* mean? She wanted to "get next to" Farlan Brown—say what? on that. The knife-scar woman—how did *she* play in? The dead woman in the Horror House—was *she* connected?

Crutch brain-looped and watched TV. He got nigger-riot visuals and headphone fuzz next door. *Dead* air—Farlan Brown's suite was still still.

Avco Jewelers. Gretchen/Celia gets advice on re-cutting emeralds. The green glass shards in the dead woman's arm.

Question marks, dollar signs—

He looped through Las Vegas six times. He spot-tailed Farlan Brown and Wayne Tedrow Jr. He saw them at the D.I. They took the private elevator up to Dracula's lair. Brown has *not* seen Gretchen/Celia in Vegas. He's sure of it. Maybe she never hooked up with him. Maybe she ripped him off in L.A. and split. He ran a Miami phone book/airline check on the names Gretchen Farr and Celia Reyes. He got zero Gretchens. He got nine Celias and ran driver's license checks on them all. None of them were *her*.

He ran a Miami-airline check on Wayne Tedrow Jr. and hit positive. He ran a hotel check and located him at the Doral. He tailed Wayne Junior three times. Wayne Junior might have tail-spotted him. The Clark County D.A. passed a Vegas rumor on to Clyde Duber: Wayne Junior might have offed Wayne Senior in June.

It was all dizzying. It was re-situating, re-wire-all-your-circuits shit.

The tails went A-OK. Wayne Junior met a black-clad, foreign-looking guy twice. Crutch hit his rooming house and records-checked him. Jean-Philippe Mesplede, French merc, age forty-five. Mesplede and Wayne Junior combed Little Havana twice. Crutch followed up. The deal: they were looking for two Cuban men named Gaspar Fuentes and Miguel Díaz Arredondo.

The nigger riot heated up. The TV screen almost throbbed. Spooks lobbed Molotov cocktails. Spooks chased honkies with two-by-fours. Crutch heard movement next door.

Yeah, it's Farlan Brown's voice. That's him tipping the bellman. There's the door again. The bellman's gone. There's phone-dial noise. Yawn—there's Brown on the horn with his wife.

Blah, blah—the kids are fine, the dog has fleas, I love you, too. Hang-up noise. Door-opening noise. A young woman's voice.

Yeah, dig it—

They negotiated—fifty for French, a yard for half and half. Brown took the latter. The bed was by the wall unit. Air hum drowned out most of the trick. The climax came in fuzzy.

Brown bragged post-coital: I'm a big cheese with Howard Hughes. The call girl said, "Is that so?" Brown blathered. I'm hip, I'm cool, I swing. I run Hughes Airways. I'll be running Hughes charter flights to some rocking new mob resorts.

The call girl stifles a yawn. The bedsprings creak. A zipper threads. Bye, bye, baby—she's out the door.

Brown got back on the horn. Crutch hit console buttons and activated the tap line. He got garbles and a dial tone. He heard a gruff "Hel-lo."

Brown said, "Freddy, it's Farlan." A man said, "What's happening, *paisan*?" Crutch made the voice: Shakedown Fred O.

He hit his tape feed. The spool turned. He got garbles and voices verbatim.

Brown: … Miami. You know, for the convention.

Otash: Nixon. Jesus, that fucking retread has got nine fucking lives.

Brown: This one's a keeper. He's going to win.

Otash: I've got a sports book at the Cavern. My guy's calling the race even money.

Brown: I'll take those odds.

Otash: Then place a bet, you cheap Mormon cocksucker.

Brown: A grand on Dick. For real, Freddy. I smell victory.

Otash: I smell you trying to Jew me down on a room rate. That's it, right? Your old buddy Freddy's an innkeeper now, so let's put the boots to him.

Laughter—six seconds' worth.

Brown: … Freddy, you're a pistol.

Otash: I've *got* a pistol. I'm a well-hung American of Lebanese descent.

Laughter—nine seconds' worth.

Brown: Okay. I need a big suite at the Cavern. It's a party for some Democratic delegates, right before the convention. Booze and girls, Freddy. You know my MO.

Otash: When?

Brown: August 23.

Otash: I'll give you 308. It's my private spot, so treat it nice or I'll sic Dracula on you.

Brown: Wooo! I don't want that!

Otash: You *got* that, you Mormon cocksucker.

Brown: Cocksuckee, you mean.

Otash: So, confirm or deny a rumor for me.

Brown: Sure.

Otash: Tell true. Is Wayne Junior working for the Count?

Brown: He is. And high up at that.

Otash: Fucking Junior always lands on his feet.

Brown: Care to elaborate?

Otash: No comment.

Brown: On that note …

Otash: Yeah. See you on the 23. Thank you, fuck you, and good-bye.

Two hang-up clicks—Miami and Vegas. Crutch switched to the bug line. There: yawns, bed creaks, silence and snores.

He hit switches and shut down the feed lines. It was 1:14 a.m. His stomach growled. He'd surveilled his way through dinnertime and then some. He called Freddy Turentine's room and roused Freddy. He said they had a bug job in Vegas—a hotel suite by August 22. Freddy said, "Remind me tomorrow," and hung up.

The TV was still on. Nixon did the V-for-victory thing. What a geek. He always needed a shave.

Crutch yawned and got antsy concurrent. He popped four dexies and snagged his rent-a-car keys.

Wrong turns and U-turns de-situated him. The Doral was near the Eden Roc. Wayne Junior's hotel—just two minutes out. One-way streets put him on a causeway. The bay water churned with confetti and floating Nixon signs. The exit markers confused him. Side streets sidetracked him. He smelled smoke. He heard gunfire.

Neighborhoods devolved into shine shantytowns. He saw two spooks torch a ’59 Plymouth.

The spooks saw him—Honky! Honky! Honky! Crutch gunned it and hung a Uey. The spooks chased his car. A tall spook lobbed a cinder block and hit his back window. The block decomposed. The window stayed intact. The spooks yelled spook-outrage slogans and spooked on back to the Plymouth.

Crutch got his bearings. He drove fast and steered clear of smoke stench and flames. The roving spook quotient upgraded to spook winos and porch loafers. He hit a spook-free zone and made it back to the causeway and Miami Beach proper. The detour got him finger-popping *alive*. He skimmed the radio and found a soul station. He grooved on Archie Bell and the Drells with “The Tighten Up.”

He parked outside the Doral. He eyeballed the door and played the soul station. The DJ talked pro-riot Commie shit with cool spook music mixed in. Wayne Tedrow Jr. walked out at 2:49 a.m. He shagged *his* rent-a-car. Crutch tailed him.

Convention traffic was still steady. Tail cover was good. Crutch hovered two car lengths back. Wayne Junior stuck to spook-free zones and booked to Little Havana. He swooped by Jean-Philippe Mesplede’s rooming house and picked up the Frogman. Crutch vibed it: another trawl for Gaspar Fuentes and Miguel Díaz Arredondo.

Flagler Street hopped. The coffee bars were open late. A radio guy did man-in-the-street interviews. Arson outside the Cuban Freedom Council—some beaners burning a straw Fidel.

Mesplede and Wayne Junior did their thing. Crutch knew it now. They ditched the car, walked storefront-to-storefront and asked questions. Crutch stayed mobile. He slow-trawled Flagler and *looked*. Mesplede and Wayne Junior did a one-hour loop and re-mobilized. Traffic was thin. Crutch hovered four car lengths back.

Wayne Junior pulled to the curb and walked to a pay phone. Mesplede stayed in the car. Crutch hit the brakes and pulled over *eight* car lengths back.

He got out his binoculars and zoomed in. Wayne Junior fed quarters to the phone slot—long-distance, for sure. Crutch got in *clooooose*. Wayne Junior’s lips moved. Two seconds and *halt*—Wayne Junior just listened.

And trembled. And went pale. And hung up, walked back to the car and leaned in Mesplede's window.

More lip movement. Crutch zoomed in *très* close. The talk looked panicky. Mesplede slid behind the wheel and pulled out, peeling rubber. Wayne Junior walked to a parked taxi cab and got in the back.

The cab pulled out. Crutch tailed it. Traffic was too sparse to get close. Crutch killed his headlights and cued on the cab's taillights. They cut across this *biiiiiig* swath of Miami.

The terrain got rural. The roads got rough and swervy. The cab pulled ahead. Crutch turned his lights on just to *see*. Dirt roads swerved up to a rinky-dink airfield. Crutch saw a two-seater prop job on the runway.

He stopped the car. He couldn't see the cab. He got out and squinted in the dark. He was discombobulated. He couldn't see shit.

Floodlights snapped on. Crutch got glare-blinded. He blinked. He rubbed his eyes. He got some sight back. He saw Wayne Junior, standing by the airplane, looking straight at him.

12

(Las Vegas, 8/9/68)

Buddy Fritsch said, “I got us a suspect.”

His den was polar-cold. He served highballs and Fritos. Chuck Woodrell had the flu and kept sniffling. Dwight kept tugging at his law-school ring. Wayne was frazzled—that bumpy flight and thirty-six sleepless hours.

It was 9:00 p.m. Miami felt like a fever dream. His time zones were stretched disproportionate.

Fritsch passed around a mug-shot strip: three views of a male Negro. Sylvester “Pappy” Dawkins, age forty-eight. A lean man with a fuck-you demeanor. Inked on the back: burglary raps from ’42 up.

Woodrell said, “Woooo, boy.”

Dwight said, “Hide the kiddies.”

Fritsch said, “He’s a residential burglar with rape-o tendencies. He was in custody near Barstow on the night Wayne Senior died, which don’t make no difference to us. He’s got no alibi for that night, and it’s a little two-man PD. I can buy both them boys off.”

The strip recirculated. Woodrell said, “Katy-bar-the-door.”

Dwight said, "Electric chair, sweetheart." Wayne shut his eyes and passed the strip back.

Fritsch slurped his highball. "Washoe County makes him for two burglary snuffs, so it ain't like he's a contributing member of society. He pulls B&Es all messed-up on goofballs, so he'll make a piss-poor witness."

Woodrell nibbled Fritos. "I like him. He's five seconds out of the trees."

Fritsch said, "I got a print transparency. We can roll it through a blood sample and pre-date it."

Dwight rubbed his neck. "How much?"

Woodrell said, "Fifty on my end."

Fritsch squirmed. "Uh … twenty for me? And I'll take care of the Barstow boys out of that?"

Dwight nodded. "I'll tap you-know-who. He wants to see this covered."

Wayne said, "No."

Fritsch froze mid-slurp. Woodrell froze mid-bite. Wayne said, "No more."

Woodrell sighed. "This is just about the biggest favor you'll ever get in this lifetime."

Fritsch sighed. "Don't be a Bolshevik, son."

Woodrell laughed. "Mr. Sensitive. With the niggers he's got on *his* résumé."

Wayne looked at him. "Stop right there. Don't make me take this any further."

Woodrell flushed and got shaky-kneed. Fritsch said, "Sweet Jesus." Dwight pointed to the two of them and the door. They caught the gist and walked out. Dwight stood up and hauled Wayne upright. Dwight grabbed his shirtfront and slapped him.

It stung. It raised blood dots. Wayne popped pain tears. It was a love tap by Dwight Holly standards.

"It's for Janice. It's for both of us and everything you've put your hands on. It's for this fucked-up hole we're both in."

Wayne wiped his nose. Blood pooled in his mouth. His tears dried quick.

"This has to happen, so you let it happen, *and you do not fold on me*. I need that from you, and I may need you for the Grapevine. Otash went to St. Louis, we'll need to talk to him about it, and we might have to go in at some point."

His blood tasted funny. Dwight held him up. His legs were gone.

"I need you to stand in. I need your father's mail lists, and if push comes to shove with the Grapevine, I want you there."

Wayne nodded. Dwight let his hands go. Wayne weaved and stayed up.

The sheets were moist. Her gown was damp. Her pulse ran weak-steady. Wayne flicked the dial and fed dope to the tube.

Heroin. His compound. A morphine-base synthetic.

Janice unclenched. Wayne wiped her brow and toweled the sheets half-dry. The night nurse was sleeping in the living room. Janice was all sweat and chills.

Wayne took her hands. "There's something that has to be done to give us some safety. When you hear about it, you'll know. It wasn't my idea, and there's no way around it."

Janice shut her eyes. Tears leaked. She pulled her hands free. They felt weightless, all veins and bone.

Wayne flicked the dial. Dope flowed bag to tube to vein. Janice went out, shuddering.

Her pulse was weak-normal. Wayne arranged her hair on the pillow. He grabbed the bedside phone and dialed Mesplede in Miami.

Three rings. A sleep-slapped "*Oui*?"

"It's Wayne."

"Yes, of course. My American friend in duress."

"Do something for me."

"Of course."

"There was a kid tailing me in Miami. I don't know what it's about, but it's trouble."

"Yes? And your wish?"

"Early twenties, medium-sized, crew cut. He's driving an Avis rent-a-car. The plate number is GQV-881."

"Yes? And your wish?"

"Find out his business and clip him."

The vault was twelve miles east of Vegas. Wayne Senior had dubbed it the "Führer bunker." It was a scrub-covered cement square sunk in a sand drift. It was straight out I-15.

Wayne brought a flashlight, a gas can and a Zippo lighter. The location was a mile off the interstate. The vault held copies of all Senior's hate tracts and his subscriber lists.

Wayne parked on a turnaround near a Chevron station and walked into the desert. It was 106° at midnight. Sand sucked at his feet and slowed his walk to a trudge. It was slow slow motion. He thought about Dallas the whole time.

He got there. He pulled off scrub branches, unlocked the door and hauled hate lit out. Titles jumped off covers. He saw *Miscegenation Generation* and *Jew Stew: A Recipe Book*. He saw *Pope Pontius: How Papists Rule the Jewnited Nations*. He saw doctored pix of Dr. King and little Negro kids. He saw facsimile editions of vintage Klan kodebooks.

He stripped the shelves. He lugged paper and ink-smudged his arms black. He saw hate headlines. He saw pornographic hate cartoons. He saw lynching photos with gag captions.

He built a big hate pile. It stood eight feet high. He doused it with gasoline. He sparked the Zippo and put the flame down.

The pile flared straight up and out. The big black sky went red.

13

(Las Vegas, 8/10/68)

The sky went red to orange. Dwight stood by the service pumps and watched.

The blaze backlit the desert floor and the highway. He saw Wayne's car on the turnaround. His tail-job-on-instinct got him *this*.

Two pump jockeys stood around, gawking. A hot wind blew smoke their way. Dwight walked to a pay phone, fed the slot quarters and dialed direct to L.A.

The smoke was thick with paper bits. Dwight felt the sting. Karen picked up immediately.

"Hello?"

"It's me."

"You're not supposed to call when he's in town, goddamnit."

Dwight said, "Talk slow to me. Just a minute, please."

Karen said something back. He didn't hear it. His eyes were all wet and fucked-up. He couldn't tell if it was the smoke or his crazy love for Wayne.

14

(Miami, 8/10/68)

Smoke and fire. The spooks refused to quit. Gunshots, sirens and a 4:00 a.m. light show.

Crutch pulled into the Avis lot. The clutch on his rent-a-car blew. The gears were stripped. The car lurched and lugged. He called ahead. The desk guy said, Screw the riot. You come right in.

Half-tracks rolled down Biscayne Boulevard. The governor called in the Guard. There's a string of cop cars and a six-seater Jeep. Fuck, the driver's smoking a joint.

Smoke and fire. Swamp heat. This orange sky edging toward mauve.

The car lurched and died by the gas pumps. Crutch got out and stretched. Heat and fumes smacked him. His head hurt. He'd been working the bug post full-time. He'd been up since God knows—

Someone/Something pushed him. He tumbled back in the car. His head hit the shift knob. His arms hit the dashboard. The Someone/Something pinned him down. He/It was all black.

Then the knee on his back. Then the gun in his face. With the silencer barrel-threaded and the hammer half-back.

"Why are you surveilling Wayne Tedrow? Be honest. Evasion will decree an even more horrible death."

The French accent. The Frogman. Frog couture all black.

"I repeat. Why were you surveilling Wayne Tedrow?"

Crutch tried to pray. The words hit his brain jumbled. His piss tubes swelled. He held it in. The weight on him helped. He remembered his lucky rabbit's foot and obscure Lutheran Church lore.

"I repeat."

His shit chute swelled. He held it in. The weight on him helped. He opened his mouth. He squeaked and got some sounds out. God or some unseen fucker fed him word soup. He saw his mother. He heard "Dr. Fred," "Howard Hughes," "Grapevine plant," "million dollars." He heard "Dead woman," "missing woman," "knife-scar woman," "green stones." He heard "Please don't kill me" six billion times in six seconds.

He shut his eyes. His tear ducts swelled. He held it in. Biting his tongue helped. Six billion years went by in six seconds. He saw his mother and Dana Lund six billion times. He tried for prayers and dredged up hymns.

The weight eased up. He clenched his tubes, chutes and ducts and stayed dry. He smelled brandy. The scent touched his lips strong. He opened his mouth. He dipped his head and took the pour. His throat constricted. He opened wider and let it roll in. He opened his eyes and saw the Frogman.

"I have been prone to sympathetic lapses before. You must affirm my perception of your youthful willfulness and capacity for acquiescence."

Crutch crawled into the passenger seat. His heartbeat kept multiplying. He was head-to-toe sweat. The Frogman stretched out in the driver's seat. He nipped off the flask and passed it back. Crutch chugged brandy and looked out the window. There's more smoke, sirens and riot cops—the spooks just won't quit.

Mesplede said, "I may ask you to report information to me."

Crutch nodded—yessir, yessir, yessir.

The flask went back and forth. A sync settled in. Their eyes stayed locked while the Frogman monologued. It was all CUBA. It was *le grand putain* Fidel Castro and the Cuban Freedom Cause. There was JFK's Bay of Pigs betrayal. There was LBJ's Commie appeasement. There was America’s sissified accommodation and the Caribbean as a Spreading Red Lake. There were brave men willing to die to quash the Red Tide.

The flask went back and forth. The oration continued. Crutch rode the world’s greatest buzz.

15

(Las Vegas, 8/10/68)

The night nurse took a break to play the slots downstairs. Wayne ran into her in the casino. She said, “You look ill—I’ll bring you something.”

He took the stairs up and burned off excess steam. He still smelled like charred paper. The suite was unlocked. He walked into Janice’s bedroom.

The lights were on. The IV pole and drip bag were down on the floor. The tube was still attached to Janice’s arm. The needle was half in, half out.

Two empty vials on the nightstand. Seconal and Dilaudid. A brief note: “Whatever your plan—please, not on my behalf.”

Wayne sat with her. Her nightgown was still damp. The picture blurred with ’64. He came home and found Lynette. Wendell Durfee had come and gone. A winter storm leveled Vegas. He sat with Lynette and listened to the rain.

Janice died clutching the bedsheets. Wayne pried her fingers loose and folded them on her chest.

West Vegas hopped at 2:00 a.m. The bars were air-cooled. The shacks weren't. Folks stayed out late to cool off.

Wayne cruised in. He passed the Wild Goose, the Colony Club and the Sugar Hill Lounge. Memory Lane. The ALLAH IS LORD signs. Night owls cooking bar-b-q in fifty-gallon drums. Streets named for presidents and designated by letters.

He had Pappy Dawkins' address. It should be off Monroe and J. He scanned faces. Everybody was black. Parked cars with running headlights. Air-conditioned junkers. Beat the heat. Run the vents all night and sleep.

There's the place: a fuchsia-colored cinder-block dump on plywood struts.

Wayne parked and walked up. The lights were on. The door was open. The front room was furnished with scavenged car seats. A dozen fans pushed air around.

Two Negro men sat there. They were side by side on Chevy leather. Pappy looked older than his mug shots. The other man ran fifty-plus and wore a clerical suit.

They noticed him. They made him. Wayne made their little blinks. The fans churned up a stink: cat piss and stale marijuana.

Wayne shut the door. The smell compounded. Pappy said, "Sergeant Wayne Tedrow Jr."

Wayne coughed. "Not any longer."

"You mean you ain't with the police or you the only Wayne Tedrow left?"

"Both of those."

The other man said, "He wants something. You should let him get to it."

Pappy twirled an ashtray. "Reverend Hazzard's trying to reform me. He visits me once a month, whether I asks him to or not. I say to him, 'This white motherfucker here killed three brothers awhile back,' he probably say, 'Turn the other cheek.' "

Wayne spoke to Hazzard. "This won't take but a minute."

Pappy hurled the ashtray. It knocked a fan over. The breeze went haywire. Some nesting moths stirred.

"Reverend Hazzard believes you turn the other cheek, but I most emphasizedly do not, unless you wants to bend down and kiss the cheeks of my coal black ass."

Hazzard touched Pappy's arm. Pappy grabbed a stray shoe off the floor and hurled it. A fan capsized. A breeze hit the back wall.

A Scotch-taped pic of Malcolm X flew.

“Reverend Hazzard says, ‘Forgiveness be next to godliness,’ but I most emphasizedly do not, unless you wants to start by apologizing for killing Leroy Williams and the Swasey brothers and any other extraneous niggers that you also might have killed along the way.”

Hazzard said, “Pappy, please.”

Wayne said, “Sir, I apologize.”

Pappy grabbed another shoe. “And that’s all you got to say?”

“No, there’s more.”

“Which includes what?”

Wayne’s legs fluttered. “Some cops are trying to hang a case on you. I don’t want to see it happen. I’ll get you some money, but you’ve got to get out of Vegas.”

Pappy whooped. “Leave all *this*? On your white motherfucking say-so?”

Hazzard said, “Pappy, let him talk.”

Pappy whooped falsetto. “Not until I’ve had my fun and extricated my pound of flesh, starting with, ‘Hey, Junior, you apologize again.’ ”

Wayne said, “Sir, I apologize.”

Whoop—“One more time now. I’m starting to enjoy this.”

Wayne shook his head *no*. His legs almost caved. Pappy threw the shoe *at* him. He stepped aside. Pappy reached in his pocket. Wayne threw himself on the floor.

Metal flashed. Wayne ate rug grit and pulled his ankle piece. Pappy fumbled a snub automatic. Reverend Hazzard froze. Pappy rolled off the car seat and aimed down at Wayne.

They fired simultaneous. The floor exploded by Wayne’s face. He aimed through plaster dust and *squeezed* the trigger *slow*. He hit Pappy mid-chest. Pappy spun and jerked the trigger. His hand spasmed. He sent shots every which way.

They hit the fans. Soft points—the blades diced and ricocheted them. Bullet shards became shrapnel pellets. They burst wide and tore out Hazzard’s throat. He gasped and pitched off the car seat. Wayne aimed up and *squeezed slow*. The shot hit Pappy mid-face. He fell backward. His head hit a whirring fan and sent red up and out.

16

(Las Vegas, 8/10/68)

The squadroom was dead. LVPD ran a light crew from midnight on. Four detectives caught citywide squeals. They got paid to doze at their desks or shag ass.

They slept. Dwight couldn't sleep. The desert fire still torqued him. He went by the Golden Cavern an hour back. Fred Otash was still up. They discussed his St. Louis trip. Freddy spent time at the Grapevine. The hit rumors: still escalating. The purveyors: six right-wing fucks. The ATF surveillance: intermittent, but sustained. The upshot: we can't go in with ATF hovering. We hold for now.

Dwight yawned. Late-night squadrooms consoled him. They were cop still-life tableaux. The St. Louis SAC pledged a late-night teletype. Dwight chair-perched by the machine.

The squadroom was quiet. The cops dozed. The detention-cage winos snored. The teletype machine rattled. Dwight pulled a sheet out.

Terse and shitty news. Be advised: ATF has Grapevine Tavern under lockstep surveillance.

Dwight tore the sheet up and trash-canned it. A patrol cop ran in. He was a beanpole rookie type in a lather. He yelled his good news and woke the crew up.

Body count! Somebody nailed that hump Pappy Dawkins and some shine preacher!

• • •

The street was sealed. Dwight badged the perimeter cop and pulled right up to the tape. Inside it: three patrol cars, one coroner's car and two dead jigs on gurneys.

Live jigs outside the tape: geeks in nightgowns, skivvies and pajamas. A fatso was snarfing chicken wings at 4 fucking a.m.

Two patrol cops by the house. Buddy Fritsch in civvies, looking justifiably freaked.

Dwight whistled long and shrill. Fritsch heard it and looked over. Dwight pointed to his Fed sled. Fritsch blew off the patrol cops and walked straight up.

Dwight opened the back door. Fritsch got in. He had the shakes. He pulled a hip flask and took two maintenance pops. Dwight got in and shut the door. Two tall men—their knees brushed.

"So?"

"So, who do you think? I got me four eyewits. White man walks in, shots fired, white man walks out. He's six-one, one eighty, pale, with dark hair. Sound like anyone we know?"

The flask booze smelled good—heavy-sweet bourbon. Fritsch took two more pops.

"Wayne blew his cork again. When that boy don't know what to do, he just goes out and hunts niggers."

Mumbo jumbo down the block. Dwight looked over. Fatso led some Zulus in a black-power cheer.

Fritsch sucked on his flask. "To boot, I got me a morgue call. Janice Tedrow took some pills and checked out."

Dwight said, "How much?"

"No, siree. I'm sorry, but there ain't no buyout on this one."

"How *much*, Buddy? You, Woodrell, the AG and anyone else we need to square this."

Fritsch shook his head. "Uh-uh. No sale. Your boy don't get no walk on this one."

Dwight tugged at his law-school ring. "Give me a figure. Be generous with yourself. I'll get you the money and let you grease everyone else."

Fritsch shook his head. "Uh-*uh*. No sale. Sorry, Wayne, but you killed two coons too many. This is 1968, son. 'The times, they are a-changin'.' "

Dwight laughed. Fritsch laughed. Dwight said, "Pick a figure."

"Uh-*uh*. No sale. This is one that you and Mr. Hoover can't buy Junior out of."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure I'm sure. I am absolutely, positively goddamn sure that there's no price tag on this one."

"One last time, then. For the record."

Fritsch jabbed Dwight's chest. "For the record, *no*. For the record, you put some hurt on me a little while back, and that's all the guff I'm taking from you. You may be Mr. Hoover's number-one goon, but I am a ranking police officer and a decorated World War II vet, and I am not eating any more shit dispensed by some Hoosier hard-on who thinks he's tough shit 'cause he went to Yale."

Dwight smiled and pointed to the flask. Fritsch smiled and passed it over. Dwight took a big pop and passed it back. Fritsch grinned and stretched. His suit coat gapped. Dwight pulled off his belt gun and stuffed it under the seat. Fritsch swallowed. His Adam's apple bob-bob-bobbed.

Dwight pulled his Magnum, popped the cylinder and dumped five shells. Fritsch rolled his eyes—don't shit a shitter. Dwight spun the cylinder and snapped it shut. Fritsch said, "You're bluffing."

Dwight put the gun to his head and pulled the trigger. The hammer hit an empty chamber.

"How much?"

"Fuck you. You bluff, I call. I am a ranking police officer, and this is my crime scene."

Dwight put the gun to his head and pulled the trigger. The hammer hit an empty chamber. Buddy Fritsch shit his britches. Dwight caught the stench.

"How much?"

"Fuck you."

Dwight put the gun to his head and pulled the trigger. The hammer hit an empty chamber. Buddy Fritsch pissed his pants. Dwight watched the stain spread.

"How much?"

"*Fuck you fuck you fuck you fuck you.*"

Dwight put the gun to his head and pulled the trigger. The hammer hit an empty chamber. Buddy Fritsch sobbed.

Dwight said, "How much?" Fritsch kept sobbing. Dwight rolled down the window. He heard black-power chants and saw black fists raised.

Fritsch said, "Two hundred."

Dwight said, "It's yours."

It required a proactive phone call. It recalled January '57. He left two dead on the Merritt Parkway. Mr. Hoover rescued him.

Dwight called from his hotel suite. He got two rings and "Yes?"

"It's Dwight Holly, Sir."

"Yes? And the most pressing emergency that you wish to discuss?"

"Wayne Tedrow killed two Negro men. I need a good deal of money to cover it, and I'd be grateful for your help."

Mr. Hoover coughed. "And the amount?"

"Two hundred cold."

"Is Junior in custody?"

"No, Sir."

"And where would he be?"

"I would guess Wayne Senior's cabin in Lake Tahoe."

"Does he usually repose there after he kills male Negroes?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Does he watch the *Soul Train* TV show for upbeat entertainment and to expiate his guilt?"

"I would guess that he brews up narcotic compounds for the purposes of sedation and sleep."

Mr. Hoover worked for breath. "You haven't called me in a very long time, Dwight. It was January '58, I believe."

"You're close, Sir. It was '57."

"Are you questioning my memory, Dwight?"

"No, Sir."

"It was January of 1958. It was unseasonably warm that day on the Cross County Parkway."

That *night*, icy roads, the Merritt—

"That's right, Sir. I'd forgotten. It was so long ago."

"I'll wire the funds, Dwight. I'm as soft for you as you are for Junior."

"Thank you, Sir."

"The Grapevine Tavern, Dwight. Outlandish talk is circulating. ATF cannot lockstep the location forever. That outrageous chatter will have to be muffled at some point."

"I understand, Sir."

"Good night, Dwight."

He started to say "Good night, Sir." Coughs and a hang-up click stopped him.

The kid had lost weight. His hair had thinned. Some fresh gray was there with the brown. He went fit to gaunt in a week.

The funeral home smelled like spearmint. Dwight caught embalming fluid as the underscent. Wayne sat beside Janice's casket. The lid was closed. It was lustrous mahogany.

Dwight pulled a chair up. Wayne looked at him.

"Her golf clubs are in there."

Dwight smiled. "She'd appreciate the touch."

"I tried to warn him."

"I figured it was that."

"She was forty-six years, nine months and sixteen days old."

"You're a chemist. You'd know something like that."

"You're a lawyer. Tell me what this is about."

Dwight said, "It's chilled. I went to Mr. Hoover. If I went to Carlos, he'd have figured you'd lost it. Everyone will know sooner or later, so you'd better get back in the game."

Wayne stood up and flanked the casket. He hovered and ran his fingers over the grain.

Dwight said, "We've still got the Grapevine."

Wayne said, "I understand."

17

(Los Angeles, 8/19/68)

Scotty Bennett said, “I like your tie and your hair.”

Crutch blushed. The tartan and the crew cut were his lucky charms. He got them the same day he saw Horror House. They prophesied all his magical shit.

Scotty loomed. They stood in the latent-prints room. Crutch was hand-checking print cards. He’d been at it two months.

“Run this by me again. You saw a girl at Woody’s Smorgasburger. She drank a 7UP and left her prints on a glass, and you’ve been trying to ascertain her identity ever since.”

Crutch blushed. “Right. I’ve been on a job for Clyde, and I’ve been ducking over here whenever I get a chance.”

Scotty roared—kid, you slay me. He tucked a ten-spot in Crutch’s pocket. He adjusted his tie and rubbed his crew cut.

“I’m forty-seven, you’re twenty-three. I’m a policeman, you’re not. Lose the tie and let your hair grow. You may get some.”

The ten-spot dangled there. Scotty said, “Call Laurel. Webster-64882. Tell her I said to be kind.”

Crutch re-blushed. Scotty winked and waltzed to the Robbery pen. Print cards jumped up and yelled *Study me!*

Back to work.

Lay out the photo blowup. Grab the magnifying glass. Lay out the next print card and notch comparison points. He had the rent-a-car print memorized. He knew every loop and whorl. He'd been through six zillion print cards since June 21.

He studied, he tossed cards, he yawned, he stretched, he blinked. Eyestrain goo pooled on his eyeballs. He hit a fast stretch—a card a minute and—

Then:

A fresh card. Familiar loops and whorls. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 comparison points—a courtroom-valid tally.

Crutch studied the card and the blowup. He wiped his eyes, he squinted, he *looked.* 11, 12, 13, 14—a perfect match.

He turned the card over. He read the stats:

"Klein, Joan Rosen/WF/DOB 10/31/26, New York City. 5′4″, 120, brown eyes/dark brown & gray hair. Distinguishing marks: Knife scar on upper right arm."

Her, she, that woman. She had a name: JOAN.

She was forty-one. She was born on Halloween. Her rap sheet looked like a partial. Crutch saw arrests and no convictions. Commie beefs. Alien and Sedition Act violations, back to '44. Two armed robbery busts—'51, '53—no D.R. numbers for conviction.

Commie beefs. Heists. No attached mug shots. Crutch ran to the photo lab—

His new file room was cramped already. File boxes, file stacks, the big wall graph. He had two pads in one city. He slept in them both. He kept his mother's file at the Vivian Apartments. He kept his case file at the Elm Hotel. He kept hot-plate chow and shaving gear at both locations.

Crutch split to the Elm. The graph drew him first thing. He'd Scotch-taped masking paper up at eye level. He doodled on it. He drew lines and arrows and wrote daily progress and summary reports.

He got out his grease pen and found a fresh spot. He wrote "Joan" and circled it. He drew some arrows with black feathers and sharp little points, leading to:

"Farlan Brown leads going nowhere to (8/10/68) date. Brown meet at Golden Cavern (8/23/68). F.T. to wire suite."

"Gretchen Farr/Celia Reyes: all records checks negative to (8/10/68) date."

" 'Grapevine,' 'Tommy' & 'plant': what do they mean?"

"Tattoo ID, wall markings & powder on body parts: no make as of this (8/10/68) date."

"Bootleg phone #: phone co. trace in progress."

Crutch scanned the graph. Crutch drew arrows pointing to "Joan." Crutch circled the name with big question marks.

He flopped on the bed. He studied the photo-lab pix. A single mug-shot strip. One full-face shot, two profiles. Joan Rosen Klein wearing a neck board.

The board numbers supplied a date: 7/12/63. He knew the booking-number prefix. It meant "detained for suspicion." That probably meant a street roust or wrong-place-at-wrong-time grief. Joan was a Commie and a two-time robbery suspect—she'd attract heat.

She was thirty-six then. She looked the same now. She wore glasses. She smiled into flashbulb glare. That near-black hair with the gray streaks. That wide and harsh jawline. That composed set to her face.

Crutch shut his eyes, opened his eyes and studied the pictures again. He saw gray streaks that he'd missed the first bunch of times.

The bed was covered with library books. He'd checked them out post-Miami. They covered one topic: Cuba.

He kept in touch with Jean-Philippe Mesplede. The Frogman was his friend now. They talked long-distance, L.A. to Miami. The Frogman liked him. The Frogman thought he was a punk kid in over his head and refused to take his case seriously. Fuck him on that—let him think it. The Frogman thought it was just a thieving-girlfriend caper. Crutch held back the wild-ass dimensions.

Wayne Tedrow Jr. wanted Donald Linscott Crutchfield dead, but Jean-Philippe Mesplede relented. The Frogman called Wayne Junior "unstable and politically suspect." Wayne Junior sustained right-wing alliances and suppressed his left-wing tendencies. Froggy could not commit murder for such a compromised man.

So Crutch got to live and work his case and magnetize all his magical shit.

Their phone calls were all Cuba. A gorgeous island. A tourist mecca. A paradise raped by the Reds. Jack Kennedy betrayed the Bay of Pigs invasion. LBJ appeased Castro. The next prez would ditto his rat-fink policies. The Frogman raged to ravage Reds and reclaim the Caribbean cornucopia. White sands. Swank casinos "nationalized" and turned to Third World troughs. Brown women in pink bikinis.

Crutch skimmed library books and ripped out key photos. Dig it: Fulgencio Batista draped all over Jane Russell. Dig it: the roof pool at the Capri. Dig it: peons pulling fat cats in rickshaws.

He taped the pix to the wall. He ripped out a pic of Fidel Castro fomenting. The Frogman called Castro "The Beard." His facial hair harbored nests of Red lice.

Crutch taped the Castro pic to the wall and tossed his pocketknife at it. He nailed The Beard four times out of six. The picture started to shred.

The phone rang. Crutch jugged the receiver and caught it. He said, "*¿Hola*? *¿Qué tal*?" The caller went, "Huh?"

The knife fell off the wall. Fidel was now *mucho* tattered. The caller said, "It's Larry from P.C. Bell. Buzz Duber said I should call you. I got a trace on that bootleg number."

Crutch grabbed his scratch pad. "Shoot."

"It's a house on Carmina Perdido in Santa Barbara. The renter's name is Sam Flood. That's all I've got."

It was plenty. "Sam Flood" was Sam Giancana's squarejohn name. Clyde told him that. *Sam G. called Gretchen/Celia at Bev's Switchboard.*

Larry blathered—Hey, fool, where's my bread? Crutch hung up and wrote "Bootleg #/Giancana" on his wall graph.

The words vibrated. Crutch drew little question marks around them. He got the urge to draw Joan. He taped her mug-shot strip to the graph paper and cut loose with paper and pen.

He got her hardness and her softness in alternating portraits. He never got the full her in one take. He gave her different hairdos. He de-swirled and re-swirled the lovely gray streaks every time.

18

(Las Vegas, 8/19/68)

The service was brief. The minister rushed. Storm clouds meant rain any second. The eulogy featured heaven–golf course metaphors.

Janice Hartnett Lukens Tedrow: 1921–1968.

Carlos Marcello and Dwight Holly attended. Farlan Brown was there. Dracula sent five grand in flowers. Half the caddy crews from the Dunes and the Sands showed up.

Wayne stood at the back. The dry air started seeping. The cemetery was segregated. A road bisected the white and Negro sections. White diggers worked the white side. Negro diggers worked the Negro side. The Tedrow-service diggers were off-duty blackjack dealers. They wore red vests, bow ties and eyeshades. The rain threat made them fidget.

The heaven–golf course shtick was protracted. Wayne looked across the road. A large service was beginning. Limousines, a hearse, a flatbed truck filled with roses. Scores of black people in black.

Wayne walked over. The people paid him no-nevermind. He saw a sign affixed to an easel. It stated the date and the name of the decedent: the Reverend Cedric D. Hazzard.

The hearse was parked nearby. Four men removed a casket. A minister walked up and opened the passenger door. A Negro woman got out. The minister fawned over her. She put him off with small smiles and gestures.

She wore a black crepe dress, a pillbox hat and no veil. She glanced at the road and saw Wayne. They shared a look for one second.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/20/68. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* headline and subhead:

NIXON SURGES IN POST-CONVENTION POLLS
EX-VEEP LENGTHENS LEAD OVER PROBABLE DEM CANDIDATE HUMPHREY

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/20/68. *Milwaukee Sentinel* headline and subhead:

1st BALLOT NOD FOR HUMPHREY PREDICTED
"EXPECT HIPPIE TROUBLE AT CONVENTION," TOP CHICAGO COP TELLS ROTARY

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/21/68. *Des Moines Register* subhead:

"HIPPIES," "YIPPIES," "SCHMIPPIES": BEAT COPS SAY THEY'RE PREPARED

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/21/68. *Las Vegas Sun* article:

GREAT GOLFER, GREAT LADY

Janice Tedrow was laid to rest at Wisteria Cemetery Monday morning. The flags at every country club in Las Vegas were lowered to half-staff in honor of the woman who was the Thunder-bird ladies' club champion 9 times, the Sands ladies' club champion 6 times, the Riviera ladies' club champion 14 times and the winner of the Clark County Polio Drive Scramble every year from 1954 on.

“Janice Tedrow played near-scratch golf even as she suffered from terminal cancer,” her physician, Dr. Steve Mandel, said. “That’s talent and willpower.” And when the mourning ranks at her funeral service swelled to the seams with local caddies, you know that they came because the woman was a true champion with the common touch.

Janice Lukens hailed from small-town Indiana. She married investor/real estate entrepreneur Wayne Tedrow in 1947 and soon made her way to the Queen City of the Desert, where she served on numerous charitable committees and played the meanest woman’s golf game the state of Nevada has ever seen. 1968 has been a tragic year for the Tedrow clan. Wayne Tedrow died of a heart attack in June, and now the 46-year-old Janice’s untimely death.

“God works in mysterious ways,” the Reverend G. Davis Kaltenborn told this reporter after the funeral service. “That’s why I chose golf as the central theme of my tribute. Life is an unpredictable trek toward an uncertain conclusion. I shared this insight with Mrs. Tedrow’s stepson after the service, and he told me he understood that very well.”

R.I.P., Janice. The starter at the Dunes told me you got six birdies the very last time you played golf on this earth. I see lots of sub-par rounds up there in the clouds for you, as well.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/21/68. *Las Vegas Sun* article

MURDER-SUICIDE SHOCKS NEGRO COMMUNITY

Sylvester “Pappy” Dawkins was 48 years old, a two-time convicted burglar and a reputed drug addict. The Reverend Cedric D. Hazzard was 52 years old and was the pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church in North Las Vegas. A stalwart of the Negro community in the Queen City of the Desert, he was as respected as Pappy Dawkins was disdained.

Yet the two men were friends of sorts. They would often meet at Dawkins’ unkempt little house in West Las Vegas and talk until the wee hours about all manner of things. Now, in its grief, Las Vegas Negroes are wondering what the topic of conversation was right before it all went so terribly wrong on the night of August

10.

“We don’t really know what precipitated this horrible tragedy,” Lieutenant Byron Fritsch of the Las Vegas Police Department told reporters. “We only know that Pappy shot the Reverend Hazzard and then turned the gun on himself.”

Horrible tragedy indeed. For many members of the Reverend Hazzard’s congregation have movingly described their late pastor’s diligent efforts to bring the word of God to Pappy Dawkins and to help him restore his moral equilibrium. “Ced was just that kind of a guy,” Kenneth S. Wilson, a deacon at New Bethel Baptist Church, said. “Ask anyone who knew him.”

“My late husband was a brave and true man who led with his heart,” the Reverend Hazzard’s widow, Mary Beth, said. “He was committed to goodness and social justice.” Mrs. Hazzard, 44, is the lead steward for the Las Vegas Hotel Workers’ Union, and has spearheaded many charitable drives in the local Negro community. She is doubly bereft now. In December of 1963, her son Reginald, then 19, vanished and was never seen again. Reginald was a former straight-A student at Seminole High School and had won science-fair awards in chemistry. The trials of Job have visited themselves upon Mrs. Hazzard, but she remains optimistic. “Yes, my son is long missing and my husband is dead,” she said. “I considered Cedric’s mission to reform Pappy Dawkins to be rash and imprudent, however heartfelt, but he died in the act of dispensing compassion. I revere him for that. As for me, no, I will not succumb to defeat or despair. I have duties to discharge, and I will not be deterred.”

The Reverend Hazzard’s funeral drew over 300 mourners. An estimated $10,000 in floral tributes was received at Wisteria Cemetery. Mrs. Hazzard and members of the New Bethel congregation distributed them to patients at local hospitals.

The Reverend Cedric Douglass Hazzard: 1916–1968. Rest in peace.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/22/68. *Las Vegas Sun* headline and subhead:

HUGHES EYES STARDUST

WILL ANTI-TRUST LAWS THWART THE KING O’ THE STRIP?

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/23/68. *Las Vegas Sun* headline and subhead:

BILLIONNAIRE RECLUSE TO CLARK COUNTY: "I WANT TO BUY YOU!"

HUGHES SEEKS TO CONTINUE HOTEL-BUYING SPREE

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/23/68. Telex communiqué. From: Supervisory Unit, St. Louis Office, Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. To: Field Unit #112, all personnel. Topic: Grapevine Tavern surveillance.

Gentlemen,

Continue 24-hour surveillance of location, per all precedingly filed directives.

Thomas T. Wiltsie, Agent-in-Charge.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/24/68. Office-filed memorandum. From: Fred Turentine. To: Clyde Duber Associates (Attn: Clyde Duber, Buzz Duber, Don Crutchfield). Topic: Electronic surveillance of Suite 308, Golden Cavern Hotel-Casino, Las Vegas (Ref: Dr. F. Hiltz–Gretchen Farr investigation).

> C.D., B.D., D.C.,
>
> I got almost nil from yesterday's wire at the Cavern. I'll be frank: it was nothing but rich Mormons & hookers & chitchat about the Dem. conv. in Chicago. Farlan Brown was talking up his plans to be there (the Hughes org. is covering their pol. bets by sucking up to the Humphrey org). Nothing pert. to Dr. Hiltz & G Farr was discussed. I picked up a 1-way partial of Fred Otash talking on phone about a 8/30/68 meet with Wayne Tedrow & "perhaps others," but that was it. All in all, a bust. D.C. will be in Chi. for conv., so he can follow up there. The bug is now deactivated, but is still in place. I'll pull it when I get a shot at the suite vacated.
>
> Best,
>
> F.T.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/25/68. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: “Recorded at the Director’s Request/Classified Confidential 1-A: Director’s Eyes Only.” Speaking: Director Hoover, Special Agent Dwight C. Holly.

JEH: Good morning, Dwight.

DH: Good morning, Sir.

JEH: It’s been too long.

DH: I agree, Sir.

JEH: Wayne Tedrow Jr. Give me the upshot of his latest Congolese misadventure.

DH: It’s covered, Sir. The coroner’s inquest ruled homicide-suicide, and the papers have reported it as such.

JEH: I’m gratified. And the Grapevine Tavern? Is it still a Pandora’s box of anti-Bureau chatter?

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: And ATF? Are they still perching?

DH: For now, Sir.

JEH: They cannot perch forever.

DH: I’m aware of that, Sir.

JEH: Let’s discuss OPERATION BAAAAD BROTHER. Wayne Junior’s dead Negroes have whet my appetite.

DH: I’ve secured a copy of Fred Hiltz’s subscriber lists. I’m looking through them for leads on possible infiltrators.

JEH: And you paid him out of the cold funds I supplied you with to rescue Junior.

DH: Yes, Sir. Ten thousand cold and a pound of cocaine.

JEH: His poor sinuses. I shudder to think.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: And you’re still looking for an informant? Preferably a woman?

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: And informant number 4361 is pondering referrals?

DH: She is, Sir.

JEH: Aaah, Dwight. Your wistful inflection on the word *she* speaks puerile volumes.

DH: Some things can’t be disguised, Sir.

JEH: The Klansman’s son and the Quaker pacifist. God himself must marvel at your pillow talk.

DH: It’s lively, Sir.

JEH: Am I ever discussed?

DH: Contentiously, Sir.

JEH: Does it perturb you that she might record your dubious liaison for posterity? Her curriculum vitae lists her as a daily journal keeper. She may well have jotted notes on her suppression-minded lover.

DH: I've black-bagged her, Sir. Her notes to date have been laudatory.

JEH: And rightly so, I'm sure.

DH: Thank you, Sir.

JEH: I'm slipping, Dwight. I know it, and I know that you know it. I am a boxer who has been in the ring for a very long time, but I remain dangerous because of and not in spite of it.

DH: I understand that fully, Sir.

JEH: Good day, Dwight.

DH: Good day, Sir.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/25/68. Extract from the privately held journal of Karen Sifakis.

Los Angeles,
August 25, 1968

I should be in Chicago. What's-His-Name is passing through en route to Philadelphia and will be calling me with reports. It's going to be bad; everyone knows it; everyone knows that Nixon v. Humphrey is no choice at all and that the war will continue regardless of the outcome in November. This entry and any other entries I may write during the convention will be ascribed here in my second journal, the one I hide at school and that Dwight must never see. It's the names I might record. Mr. Hoover (and Dwight by extension) is file-happy and thinks that everyone in the movement knows everyone else and has thus colluded across a wide spectrum of political activity. Of course, that's not true. Love affairs—usually brief and passionate and doomed by factional issues—may occur that pervasively, but not prosecutable political conspiracy. Paranoia defines the Right (although Dwight tends to eschew it and occasionally critiques it with sardonic humor) and the Left as well. Everyone knows everyone else and suspects everyone else and *needs* everyone else as well. Political agendas and personal agendas shift along those lines, which certainly defines the inimical worldviews, collusive agendas and deep comradeship of Dwight and me.

God, Dwight Chalfont Holly and “comrade” in a single sentence!

Chicago is going to be bad. Danny T. and Sid F. have called with advance news. They are Marxist Nixonites in their determination to fuck up Hubert Humphrey and elect the man who will instill greater repression and provide a clearer shot at revolution at some ambiguously perceived later point. Of course, lives will be shattered and lost in the process and only utilitarians like me (and dare I say it, D.H.) understand that purely destructive folly.

Dwight can talk me into almost anything if he can convince me that it will divert destruction and death in the moment. Chicago feels like a widely willed moment of sincere outrage and horrible hatred that is politically and spiritually mandated beyond all utilitarian considerations, which is what scares me.

The convention-hall fence is topped with barbed wire and 5,000 riot troops have been flown in, with 5,000 more on call. W.H.N. (who secretly and ghoulishly loves weaponry) said that Maury W. saw boxes of rocket launchers being unloaded at O’Hare. There’s a taxi-cab strike in progress; a large bus drivers’ local stands ready to strike; the IBEW began striking on May 8 and thus telephone service within the city and environs is a complete mess. W.H.N. predicts a radical or radical-aligned (largely fool mischief-makers of the counterculture and fatuous Left) presence of 100,000 people. It is going to be bad because it’s overdue to be bad and the statement needs to be made at a horrible and horribly attention-getting cost, which makes the whole thing all the more complexly deplorable to me.

So I will pray for peace and feel Eleanora grow within me and make love with Dwight, who knows many of the things I do but cannot confront them because the moment of moral explication would drive him insane.

As always, I will marvel in the aftermath of my prayers and ponder how much or how little quantifiable good our odd comradeship of conflicting ideology gives to the world. Mutual benefit. It sounds viciously capitalistic, but it is wholly egalitarian within that compromised context.

Dwight needs an informant to work the BTA and MMLF. He's got me half-convinced that both groups are viciously self-serving, ideologically unsound and destructive. Should I introduce him to Joan?

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/25/68. *Los Angeles Times* headline and subhead:

DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION SET TO CONVENE
PROTEST TROUBLE LOOMS IN WINDY CITY

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/25/68. *San Francisco Examiner* headline and subhead:

TROOPS ARRIVE IN CHITOWN
TENSION SIMMERS AS PROTEST YOUTH MOBILIZES

DOCUMENT INSERT: 8/25/68. Telex communiqué. From: Supervisory Unit, St. Louis Office, Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. To: Field Unit #112, all personnel. Topic: Grapevine Tavern surveillance.

Gentlemen,

Grapevine investigation to terminate 9/1/68. Discontinue all surveillance on that date. The U.S. attorney has deemed insufficient grounds to prosecute.

Thomas T. Wiltsie, Agent-in-Charge

19

(Los Angeles, 8/25/68)

Lists:

Hate-mail subscribers, hate-meeting attendees, hate-cartoon devotees.

Cross-referenced to:

Rap-sheet lists, DMV lists, subversive-group lists.

Cross-referenced to:

The hate lit itself. Sample copies. All hate-the-white-man shit. Negro mailees cross-referenced back to all the fucking lists.

Dwight worked in the drop-front. He built paper piles from Dr. Fred's stash and carbons from LAPD and the California DMV. Hate, hate, hate. Big paper piles—the Himalayas of Hate.

He'd been at it since his Vegas jaunt. He started with municipal PD intelligence files. He looked for male Negro cops with infiltration experience. He got no names. He went back to the subscriber lists then. He secured paper and culled paper and built shelves to rein paper in. It was a Negro name hunt. Find a male Negro hate bunny. Recruit him, coerce him, or entrap him—and teach him how to *re*-hate.

The glut of names was engulfing. The hate lit and hate pix supplied yuks. White men had small dicks, black men had big dicks, the dick-size diaspora defined black history. Jew doctors spread sickle-cell anemia. Audrey Hepburn had Jim Brown's black baby. Lawrence Welk was really black. Count Basie was really white. John Glenn was the world's first nigger astronaut.

Dwight name-hunted. *A* to *Z* and back again. Pebble-in-an-avalanche dreck. *U, V, W, X, Y, Z* and back to *A*.

Arthur Atkinson was a black Nazi. Willis Barrett subscribed to *Honky Hunter* magazine. Ricky Tom Belforth subscribed to *Beg for It Black: White Wenches Wail for Real Men!* Bistrip, Blair, Blake, Bledsoe—stop, what's this?

Marshall E. Bowen/5652 South Denker, Los Angeles. Anti-Jew hate-tract subscriber, '65–'66.

The name hit familiar. Dwight hit the DMV lists and flipped to the B's. There: Marshall *Edward* Bowen/male Negro/5′11″, 175, DOB 5/18/44. CDL# 08466. Former address: 8418 South Budlong. DMV file note: background check for admittance to the LAPD Academy, 3/11/67. Current address, bingo: 5652 South Denker again.

Anomaly. Incongruity. Anti-white hate-tract subscriber, potential L.A. cop.

Yes, and the name re-hit familiar.

Dwight hit the subversive-group list. Bingo #2: There's Marshall E. Bowen again.

At Black Muslim meetings. At Black Snake Bund powwows. *Oooooh, Baaaaad Brother!*

Dwight called LAPD. He knew a guy in the Personnel Office. The guy kicked loose confidential stats on the QT. Dwight got him on the line and laid out Marshall Bowen. He applied to the Department in 3/67. Did he get on?

The guy said he'd check. Dwight held the line for six minutes. The guy came back on, all excited. Bingo #3: Marshall E. Bowen made it on LAPD.

Academy graduate, 6/67. Assigned to Wilshire Patrol. Still at Wilshire. Class-A fitness reports.

Marshall, you *baaad.*

Because:

You subscribed to hate lit. *You* went to Commie meetings. Brother, this be *baaad* behavior. They could kick yo black ass off LAPD.

Because:

Your background checkers fucked up and missed your hate history. Left-wing honky-haters are summarily excluded from LAPD.

You *baaaaaaad*. You exploitable, coercible and lose-yo-jobable. Yo black ass belongs to me.

Dwight called Freddy Otash in Vegas. Freddy was ex-LAPD. Freddy knew his LAPD shit.

The phone rang nine times. Otash picked up, brusque. “Who’s this?”

“It’s Dwight, Freddy.”

Otash said, “Oh, shit. Don’t tell me. The Grapevine.”

Dwight laughed. “ATF’s pulling out on the first. I think we’ll have to go in then.”

“And we’re meeting with Wayne on the thirtieth?”

“Right, and I think you and I should get together before then.”

Otash sighed. “Is Wayne ready for this?”

Dwight said, “I think so.”

“Jesus, Wayne Junior. You can’t count him in, you should *never* count him out.”

Dwight lit a cigarette. “I had a question about LAPD.”

“I’m listening.”

“The background-check process. I’m looking at a colored kid named Marshall Bowen. He went to Commie meetings and got on LAPD last year. Tell me how that Commie shit could fall between the cracks.”

Otash yawned. “I *know* the Bowen kid. He was a plant for Clyde Duber. Clyde sheep-dipped him and put him in with some Red groups.”

Dwight said, “Freddy, you’re a white man.”

Otash said, “No, I’m not. I’m a fucking Lebanese.”

Marshall Bowen, you *baaaaaad*.

Clyde pointed to his wall frieze. Dwight tracked the pictures. They showcased that L.A. armored-car job. Burned bodies, inked bills, emeralds. A big cop mauling two Negroes.

Dwight sneezed. Clyde’s office was sub-polar. The easy chair induced pangs for sleep.

Clyde said, “That case. It’s a hobby of mine, and it’s how I met

Marsh."

"I know a little about it. Jack Leahy ran the Bureau's end for ten seconds."

"Right. It's still unsolved, and ink-stained bills have been turning up in the ghetto ever since. Sometimes LAPD leans on the people passing the bills, just to keep their hand in. That's what happened with Marsh. He innocently passes a double saw, and, oops, there's Scotty Bennett."

Dwight yawned. His ass was dragging. The goddamn chair was a sleep cloud.

"Don't stop there."

Clyde blew smoke rings. "So Scotty shagged Marsh and leaned on him, and Scotty B. leaning on you is a very unpretty sight. Marsh called a friend of his, who called me. I pulled Marsh out of the shit with Scotty, and I turned him out as an infiltrator. I put him into a half-dozen cockamamie pinko groups and colored groups, and Marsh was a damn good mole. He loves action, so he applies to LAPD, and he gets on over Scotty's protests."

Dwight yawned. "Tell me about his politics. He can't be a lefty or a hate-honky type, or LAPD wouldn't have taken him."

Clyde chained cigarettes. "What politics? He's a player. He lives for the game, and it's all a game, and the only fuckers who don't know it's a game are these rich right-wing nuts who pay me to dip the moles. *It's a gold mine*. I'm pulling in seventy-five G's a year off Fred Hiltz and Charlie Toron."

Dwight rubbed his eyes. "I just did some biz with Dr. Fred."

"My guy Don Crutchfield's tracking some Mormon hump for him in Chicago now."

"Left-wing Mormon?"

"Right-wing Mormon snatch hound who was dipping it to some snatch Fred was dipping it to. Jesus, don't ask. It's been going on all summer, and I'm thirty-two grand up on it alone."

Dwight picked up the desk phone. Clyde nodded go ahead. Dwight called his LAPD Personnel guy. The guy still had Marsh Bowen's file out. Dwight asked for his current duty schedule. The guy said Bowen was in Chicago, visiting his sick dad.

Clyde blew touch-the-sky smoke rings. Dwight put the phone down.

"He's in Chicago, and I can't get away. Can you have your guy Crutchfield put a spot tail on him? I want to get a handle on him before I make an approach."

"Sure, but I wouldn't mind knowing what all this is about."

"Mr. Hoover wants to stir up some shit with the niggers."

They ate dinner by the TV set. Pre-convention coverage covered the dial. It was a ghoul show. Mayor Daley looked cosmically pissed. Hubert Humphrey looked preemptively doomed. The camera cut to longhaired kids outside the hall. They looked malevolent. They catcalled flanks of riot cops. The cops looked like gargoyles perched.

Karen watched, all intent. Dwight picked at his food. Dina drew in a coloring book. She always drew choppers and police cars. It drove Karen batshit.

The footage droned. The ghoul chants sounded like Mixmasters on the fritz. The camera panned over boocoo Negroes. One woman wolfed french fries.

Wayne was in Tahoe, en route to Chicago. He was Mr. Trickster. Dracula and Farlan Brown were mischief-minded elves. Mr. Trickster was a trouper. The show must go on. He'd surmount his latest coon snafu and perform.

The footage droned. Dina colored in a smiling dog and drew fangs on him. Karen squeezed his knee and tried not to smoke.

A fat Negro eulogized Dr. King. The confab erupted. The lights went down for a slide show. King's picture hit the screen. Dwight shut his eyes. His pulse raced. He took some deep breaths and tried to rewire. Karen leaned into him.

"You've been anxious lately."

"My sleep's in the shitter."

"When you're anxious, I'm anxious."

Dwight opened his eyes. "Don't be, all right?"

Karen smiled. "Tell me how I accomplish that."

Dwight hit the remote-control button. The TV bipped off. Dina didn't notice it. Karen ran her hand up his leg.

"I should be in Chicago."

"Jesus, babe."

"I feel like blowing up some fascist statues."

"Don't let me stop you."

"I may have an informant for you. There's this woman named Joan."

20

(Chicago, 8/25/68)

The Loop was hot. A choppy lake breeze goosed the thermometer. The cops wore helmets and short-sleeved shirts. They packed nightsticks and saps. The hippies wore deface-the-flag garb. They packed Coke bottles and rocks.

Potential fracas. Both groups spoiled for it. The night heat said GO—you know you want this.

Crutch watched. He clutched his grocery bag and stood out of range. His crew cut and square threads camouflaged him. The longhairs would ignore him. The fuzz would find him simpatico.

Shit fuck. Miami to *this*.

Face-off. The cops moved up two inches. The hippies moved up three. The gap shrank and got claustrophobic.

Crutch watched. Dexedrine and coffee had him psychedelicized. He'd been up thirty-six hours. He'd been running the listening post at the Ambassador East. Farlan Brown was hosting a party suite next door. Booze, girls and political rah-rah. Brown fucked the girls and greased the delegates. Brown promised them Hughes Air charters. Brown pressed them for details on Humphrey's campaign travel, so Wayne Tedrow and company could fuck Hubert up.

The cops moved two inches. The hippies moved three. The gap shrank. The hate intensified.

Crutch watched. The face-off got him antsy. Clyde overbooked him. He had the listening-post gig and an adjunct job: tail this L.A. cop in town. Buzz was on that gig now.

The cops moved up. The hippies moved up. A fat freak yelled, "Pig!" The cops charged. The hippies faltered. A frizzy-haired guy chucked a rock. It bounced off a skinny cop's helmet. The cops hit the line, nightsticks first. The hippies had no turnaround or hurling range. Mow-down: the cops trampled and kicked and nightstick-knocked heads on the pavement.

A car pulled up to the fracas. Something flared red. Two spades lobbed a flaming-dogshit bomb at the cops. It fell short. The bag broke and dung-scorched some trample-assed kids. The spades did that clenched-fist thing and peeled out.

Crutch ran back to the hotel and bopped to the listening post. He had a southbound view of car fires and flame glow off the lake. The bug-tap console faced the north wall. He heard fuck-suck sounds through the speakers. He put on headphones. He heard the fuck-suck sounds louder. This part of the Dr. Fred job was pure bullshit.

It ran up Clyde Duber's time card. It yielded ziltch on Gretchen/Celia and Joan Rosen Klein. Clyde was juking that time card. Clyde told him not to brace Farlan Brown in person. All this jive was tangential to the women.

It was 1:00 a.m. Crutch noshed two cupcakes to downgrade his speed jolt. He placed Joan's mug-shot strip on the console. He kept looking at Joan and seeing new things.

His case was dead-stalled. Sam Giancana or someone close called Gretchen/Celia. That was a big lead and a dead-staller. You don't brace a heavy like Sam G.

He B&E'd Arnie Moffett's realty office on his way to the airport. He found no further notes on Gretchen/Celia. He checked LAPD and Sheriff's missing person files for notes on tattooed Latin chicks. He got zero there. He ran Joan Rosen Klein's name and stats by cop contacts nationwide. Fourteen PDs, fourteen cops. Robbery-unit cops, subversive-squad cops, intelligence-squad cops. Nobody knew shit per Red Joan.

She might have a Fed file. That approach was dicey. He'd have to tap Clyde to tap his Fed contacts. Joan was all his for now. He held the lead as his exclusive.

The fuck-suck noise died out. Pay me, pay me noise replaced it. Crutch skimmed a library book. It was all about Cuba. Rebel raids, burning cane fields, the Bay of Pigs rout. He kept reading books. He kept calling the Frogman long-distance. Mesplede was still looking for exile turncoats Fuentes and Arredondo. They betrayed *le sacré la Causa*. They were heist men. They might be clouting department stores in Des Moines or Duluth. The Frogman was his no-shit mentor. The Frogman worked with Wayne Tedrow, but stayed hinky on him. Froggy and Wayne were time-clocking for Count Dracula now. Their mandate: tricksterize at the convention and sodomize Hubert Humphrey's fall campaign.

Freddy Turentine filed a report on the Golden Cavern bug op. It was a bust—just whores and Mormons. *But,* Fred T. heard Fred O. mention an 8/30 meet with Wayne Tedrow and "perhaps others." That could be good. Wayne might say something or provide a lead on Dracula's lair. One photo/one million bucks—*Life* magazine's standing offer. The Frogman said *he* might request hot scoop on Wayne. Crutch said he'd provide it. Brainstorm: call Fred T. and tell him to keep the bug-tap gear in place.

The phone rang next door. Crutch switched to the tap-feed headphones. Static and voice garbles fuzzed up the line. He jiggled switches and got Farlan Brown.

"… Wayne, hi. Jesus, what time is it? I haven't opened the curtains since Coolidge was in office."

Wayne Tedrow: "It's 1:20."

Brown: "A.m. or p.m.?"

Tedrow: "Morning. I'm at O'Hare now. I'm waiting for that man I told you about. He's flying in from Sioux Falls."

Brown: "A French mercenary and Sioux Falls, South Dakota. That's a new one on me."

Tedrow: "He's trying to locate some long-lost chums."

Brown: "He won't find them in Chicago. All we've got here is class warfare."

Tedrow: "The airport's a mess. It's nothing but hopped-up kids and reporters. It's like one big staging ground."

Brown: “Hubert’s fucked. Dick’s going to make hay out of this one.”

Buzz walked into the suite. Crutch waved to him.

Tedrow: “We’ll need to get some sleep. We’ll see you in five or six hours.”

Brown said something. Static ditzed the line. Crutch dumped the headphones.

Buzz said, “Bowen’s from hunger. He doesn’t drink or chase pussy. He may be the world’s most uptight jungle bunny. He goes to fucking museums and cheese shops.”

Crutch snarfed a cupcake. “I’ll take over now.”

“Take over *what*? It’s 1:30 a.m. Bowen’s home with daddy, and the whole fucking city’s going nuts.”

“I’m restless.”

“You’re always restless.”

Crutch snarfed cupcake #4. “I’ll be back in five or six hours.”

Buzz checked his notebook. “This fucker is uptight. 11:16 p.m. He bypasses two rib joints and a topless bar called the Honey Bunny. Where does he go? To Mr. Sid’s All-Nite World of Books.”

Crutch yukked. Buzz dropped his head on his chest and went ZZZ-ZZZ-ZZZ. Something exploded outside. Crutch looked out the window and saw a cop car ablaze.

Late-night Chi-town hopped. Longhair legions roved. That lake breeze had their red flags swirling. Cops roved in flanking movements. It all looked synchronized. Mounted cops popped out of alleys. Their horses shit on the sidewalk. People threw things out of windows. Fruit and bric-a-brac rained down. It always missed the cops *and* the hippies. It felt like a general statement. You couldn’t tell who the targets were.

Crutch rent-a-carred through it. The traffic was sub-snail-paced. Fender benders abounded. Marshall Bowen’s daddy lived at 59th and Stony Island. It was middle-class colored—two-story houses up close to the street.

Clock in—2:41 a.m.

Crutch parked outside the house. One upstairs light was on. He put his Joan pix up on the dashboard and squinted at them.

He waited. He got a little squirrelly. His brain said *Go* while his body said *Sleep*. Marshall Bowen stepped out the door at 3:09.

He walked to the corner and hit a main drag. Crutch cut him ten seconds' slack. He U-turned the car and made the intersection. Bowen was three storefronts down on the left.

Crutch idled the car and watched. Foot traffic was brisk. Bowen poked his head in cocktail-lounge doors and kept walking. Some cops were out, smoking and lounging. Some longhairs turned the far corner and saw them. Crutch got a good view of it.

Bowen looked in windows and dawdle-strolled. A longhair held up a Coke bottle. A longhair stuffed a rag into it and lit it. All the longhairs tripped on the flame. A longhair hurled the bottle straight at the fuzz.

It broke short of them. The explosion was a dud. The longhairs yelled "Off the Pigs!" jive and ran away, laughing. Marshall Bowen turned around—Hey, now, what's this?

The cops charged him. He put his hands up—*no, please*. The cops hit him and pummeled him in one big blur.

21

(Chicago, 8/26/68)

Chemistry set.

Wayne stood in Farlan Brown’s bathroom. Mirrored walls threw his own image back. He looked all wrong. You’re too old, too thin, too trashed.

He grabbed a sink cup. He mixed airline scotch with opium chunks and a crumbled Valium. He stirred it with a toothbrush end and quick-guzzled it.

The effect hit him mid-body and worked its way up to his head. The required tingle occurred. He braced himself on the sink ledge and checked the mirrors. The required reversal occurred.

He walked into the living room. Drac’s elves were all there. Head count: Brown and Mesplede. Six strongarm guys for Sam Giancana and eight off-duty cops. On the floor, dead center: a big steamer trunk full of hurt.

The goons and cops sat mingled. Brown and Mesplede stood behind the wet bar. They sipped breakfast Bloody Marys topped by celery sticks. Mesplede had passed out French cigarettes. The whole suite was smoke-swirled.

Brown nodded—your show, Wayne.

“Amphetamines, hallucinogens and hashish. Get it to the kids and make sure there’s no reporters around when you do it. There’s some plant evidence. You’ve got subversive literature and bomb-making diagrams. There’s at least fifty Class-A felony pops in that trunk, every kid you pop will roll over on two dozen more, and you’ll all get back at the Democrats for having their show in your city.”

A few cops clapped. A few goons whistled. A cop passed Mesplede a file and mouthed the words “They’re here.” An obese goon cracked his knuckles.

Brown slapped his knees. Mesplede waved his celery stick.

Chemistry set—Wayne mixed a bedside cocktail. Nembutal and Jack Daniel’s—a pro chemist’s assuredly safe dose.

It went down warm and sat there. He stretched out to wait for the curtain. It was his sixteenth calculated dosage since West Las Vegas.

He’d stop soon. The compounds he cooked at Lake Tahoe would last him through next week. He was tapering his sleep jaunts off now. Tahoe topped out at twenty hours–plus. He kept up with Carlos and the Hughes group by scrambler phone. I’m recuperating in the woods. I’ve got a bum disk.

They bought it. They attributed his missing beats to illness. Dwight sealed the output on the killings. Word would seep over time. Two more dead shines—no one would care.

The curtain started spreading up. He saw the black woman dressed in black as the light slipped.

22

(Las Vegas, 8/26/68)

Freddy O. described the Grapevine gestalt.

It was a shitkicker joint with a north-woods ambience suffused with far-Right detail. Glowing Hamm's beer signs. Polyester-flocked fir trees. Beaver pix taped above the urinals. Gun mags stacked everywhere. Racist-cartoon napkins—Sambo, stay out.

Dwight and Freddy floated in the Golden Cavern pool. The water was fjord-cold. They had the deep end to themselves. Freddy described the loose-talk gestalt.

It emanated from six lowlifes: Brundage, Kling, DeJohn, Currie, Pierce, Luce. They were stickup guys and pill pushers prone to right-wing hijinx. They were stone juicers and dope fiends. They stuck to themselves. They closed the Grapevine every night and stayed after hours to talk shit. They had keys to the joint. The proprietors trusted them to leave cash for their booze and lock up when they left. They were *not* ATF surveillance targets. That was good. ATF would not investigate their mass homicide.

A waiter brought Freddy a Cuba Libre and Dwight an iced tea. They floated and talked. Freddy said it's a three-man job. Dwight said no, four. Wayne knows a French-Corsican merc. The guy sounds perfect. Let's bring him in.

Freddy agreed. A zaftig blonde slinked by and provided diversion. Dwight slathered on more suntan oil. They discussed the meet on the thirtieth. We'll have Wayne and the merc then. We'll finalize.

Dwight said, "It has to be self-contained. Those six fools and nobody else. It's late, they're there alone, they're talking crazy political woo-woo and it all explodes."

Freddy said, "I agree. St. Louis PD comes in, works the crime scene, does the tests and says, 'That's that.' All the numbers match."

Dwight said, "We'll have to fire audibly. We want a barrage of overlapping shots to be heard and noted. We can't use silencers, because they'll leave tube fragments on the spent rounds."

Freddy said, "I agree. They all carry pieces routinely, but we won't have time to disarm them and kill them with their own guns. We'll need to bring in weapons with a traceable St. Louis origin."

Dwight said, "I agree, and that's your job. You're the St. Louis guy on this, so you 459 a few gun stores or pawnshops and steal some pieces the investigators can trace back. And revolvers, Freddy. I don't want any automatics jamming up on us."

Freddy sipped his Cuba Libre. "I agree. We pop them, we plant the guns they shot each other with, we pull their existing guns and move the bodies around to match the blood spill. That part of it is all crystal clear."

Dwight sipped iced tea. "We're in and out in under four minutes. You said they always blast the jukebox, right?"

"Right. The world's worst Okie music, and loud."

"That's good. It's partial cover on the shots, and the neighbors are used to racket at all hours. We goose the volume on our way out, which ups the chance that some local will stiff a noise-complaint call and some doofus patrol cops will respond and find the bodies."

Freddy hovered under the diving board. "We need one more key detail."

Dwight said, "Cocaine. They scored some pure shit and went nuts behind it. We leave some lines on the counter. We get Wayne to liquefy a portion of it. We get some small-gauge insulin needles and stryinges and boot them full of coke postmortem. We can inject them between their toes, and the marks will be too small to be noted at autopsy."

Freddy said, "It's tight and localized. It's a categorizable white-trash multiple homicide for all fucking time, and it's 'case closed' in twelve hours tops."

Dwight nodded. "We'll make it convincing. And don't worry about Wayne, he's solid."

Freddy laughed. "We're worried about him, but he's the stone killer."

Dwight laughed. "We're just lucky the dipshits are white."

A waiter walked a blinking phone up. Freddy got out of the pool and futzed with the cord and receiver. Dwight shut his eyes and tuned out the sun.

Freddy said, "It's for you. Your guy Bowen's in custody in Chicago."

23

(Chicago, 8/26/68)

The Frogman slipped Crutch a hash brownie. Their driver was an *on*-duty cop. The riot-zone Chicago tour boded all-time blast.

It was Mesplede's idea. He ran into Crutch in the lobby. Crutch was up for it. Bowen was in jail. Buzz was working the listening post. Observe History, sure.

Mesplede told him to steer clear of Wayne Tedrow—"You should be dead, *mon ami.*" Crutch agreed. Mesplede reasserted: "I may ask you for bug-tap dirt on Wayne someday." Crutch re-agreed. History kept finding him: Miami, now *this*.

The red-flag boys. The no-bra girls. The cops with stubbed cigars. The nymph chicks tossing bouquets at National Guardsmen.

The cop driver swigged Old Crow. His cruiser was air-conditioned. They got the picture show devoid of night heat.

The street brawls. The hurled rock/nightstick action. The longhaired kids all bloodied. The kid minus one eye. The kid holding his teeth.

Mesplede said, “I will concede the war is unpopular. I will concede its protracted nature, but I will never concede its utter necessity.”

Crutch looked out the window. A hippie boy flipped him off. A hippie girl flashed her tits.

Mesplede said, “Donald, do you believe in a free Cuba?”

“Yeah, Boss. I do.”

“Do you believe that the perfidy of the Bay of Pigs demands a continued response?”

“Yeah, Boss. I do.”

“Do you believe that Fidel Castro must be overthrown, and that the fifth columnists who have supported his regime must suffer the severest of penalties?”

“You know I do, Boss.”

The cop driver brought a portable radio. Mesplede reached over the seat and hit the Play button. The cop-driver skimmed the dial and found a country station. A redneck tenor sang, “I love flags and corn liquor. Peaceniks and pot ain’t for me.”

Mesplede made an *ugh* face and flicked the dial. Discordant jazz—aaah, *oui*. Crutch made an *ugh* face. It sounded like a stripped-gear symphony. The hash brownie smacked his head. The outside colors shifted. Tendrils and double images appeared.

The cop driver turned onto a side street. The big-street action disappeared. Little one-story houses, all dark and sleepy.

Mesplede turned off the radio. The cop driver pulled over and stopped. Crutch was seeing single things as twos and threes. Mesplede got out and motioned Crutch to follow. Crutch got out and tested the sidewalk. The twos and threes returned to ones. The sidewalk firmed up his slack limbs.

He followed Mesplede. They walked up to the door of a dank little crib. Mesplede picked the lock. Crutch dug his prowess—two jiggles off a #4 pick.

They walked into the house. It was all dark. Air-cooler noise covered their footsteps. Crutch went straight to WOMEN in his head.

He followed Mesplede. The air-cooler hum increased. They hit a hall and walked down it. They stopped at a doorway. Mesplede hit a switch. Light hit two spic guys asleep in twin beds.

They stirred a little. One guy grumbled. Mesplede said, “Communists and Cuban traitors. Please kill them for me.”

The gear music flared. Colors flared and receded. Crutch felt something cold in his hand. Crutch saw the spics all tendriled up as twos and threes.

The other spic grumbled. Both spics opened their eyes and looked at the doorway. Both spics fumbled at their nightstands.

Crutch raised the gun and aimed. Single images cohered. He fired with his eyes shut. The clip kicked off full automatic. He sprayed the bed. He heard silencer thunks. He smelled the blood with his eyes closed. He opened his eyes and saw two men with no faces trying to scream.

24

(Chicago, 8/27/68)

The lockup was SRO. Radicals and freaks crammed up the tank space. The jail usually ran all jig. The riot had the race quotas flip-flopped.

A jailer led Dwight down the catwalk. He inspired lots of clenched fists and "Off the Pigs!" chat. The interview room was two doors down a perpendicular hallway. Marshall Bowen was waiting for him.

Not bad. Fit, thoughtful-looking. A good pseudo-firebrand.

The jailer left them alone. Dwight tossed a pack of cigarettes on the table. Bowen shook his head and slid his chair back.

Dwight turned the spare chair around and straddled it. The pose backfired. Bowen pulled his chair closer in.

"You're not a lawyer. You're a policeman."

Dwight lit a cigarette. "I'm both."

"FBI?"

"That's correct. My name is Dwight Holly, by the way."

Bowen bowed mock-humble. "You're with the Chicago office?"

"No. I'm a national field agent."

“And you’re concerned that a Los Angeles policeman got severely beaten for no justifiable reason?”

Dwight smiled. “I see no visible injuries. ‘Severe’ is an exaggeration, and you know it. You also know that you can’t file suit against the Chicago PD and win, and if you do sue, you’ll *severely* damage your reputation within LAPD.”

Bowen smiled. “The booking officer saw my badge. If all this craziness hadn’t messed things up, I’d be out by now.”

Dwight tossed a bag of weed on the table. “Did he see this?”

Bowen balled his fists. Bowen smirked to say *I get it.* The reaction went levels deep.

“There’s a threat. That means there’s an offer coming.”

Dwight put out his cigarette. “Clyde Duber says hello.”

“So it’s an infiltration job?”

Dwight shook his head. “Answer some questions.”

“All right.”

“Tell me your reaction to all this craziness.”

“It inconvenienced me. I’m personally more than politically affronted.”

“And the raw deal the Negro people in this country have received? Can you describe your take on that?”

“I don’t think much about the Negro people. Do you?”

“I think about them more than I should.”

Bowen laughed. “And why is that?”

Dwight shook his head. “Black militancy. You must have some opinions.”

Bowen shrugged. “It’s understandable, it’s historically if not legally justified, it’s ambiguously commendable, it provides opportunities for dubious ideologues and criminal entrepreneurs.”

Dwight bowed. “Why did you become a policeman?”

“For the excitement.”

“Are you enjoying your duties at Wilshire Patrol?”

“I’m a little bored.”

“Who do you hate more? Hard-charging white cops like me or the worthless niggers who make up the bulk of your people and who you have always felt so fucking superior to?”

“It’s a toss-up.”

Dwight grabbed two chair slats and snapped them off clean. Bowen did not blink.

“I want to sheep-dip you. I want to create a scenario for your

LAPD expulsion and put you into the Black Tribe Alliance and/or the Mau-Mau Liberation Front, in order to create political and criminal dissension. You will be required to work the assignment, under my direction, for any length of time that I choose. At the conclusion of the assignment, you will have the option of joining the FBI at a G-4 pay rate or of returning to the LAPD with a sergeantcy, in-grade pay status and a triple-A appraisal of promotability to lieutenant. A very wise Quaker woman once told me, 'Take note of what you are seeking, for it is seeking you.' If you are looking for excitement, this job will provide all you can stand."

Bowen said, "I'll do it."

Then he blinked, fluttered and flinched.

25

(Chicago, 8/28/68)

O'Hare was bad. Big arrival numbers, big departure numbers, big get-into-town/get-out-of-town volume. The terminals were refugee camps. The check-in lines and baggage lines were stay-all-day propositions. Tantrums flared. Epithets flew. Little shoves snowballed into fistfights.

News vendors made out. Everyone read the *Trib*. Dig the Lincoln Park riot. Dig the Grant Park riot upcoming. News pics captured mouths poised to scream.

Wayne read the *Trib*. Reporters and left-wing priests jostled him. They were baggage-line comrades. They'd spent two hours together. Let's talk outrage—we'll be here nine more.

The *Trib*, page six: "Radicals captured with bomb diagrams. Sedition charges discussed."

Wayne balled the paper up and tossed it. A dykey nun with a peace-dove button scowled at him. He was trashed. The Golden Cavern meet was two days out. The Grapevine felt imminent.

Cabs dumped outgoing passengers and snagged incoming meat.

Wayne glanced around. This one kid looked familiar—the dumb bow tie and crew cut.

Wayne made him. The Miami tail kid, looking raw now. He told Mesplede to clip him.

He didn’t see Wayne. The dykey nun got aggressive. She motioned two Negro nuns to cut in front of him.

Wayne let it go.

26

(Las Vegas, 8/29/68)

Butterfingers. The wires kept slipping and missing the holes. His hands were that trembly. His brain was that cooked.

Fred Turentine said, “You got the yips, son.”

Crutch tried to re-concentrate. Bug work: suite 307 at the Golden Cavern Hotel. The Otash/Tedrow meet was tomorrow. This was their final spot check.

He pushed wires up the lamp base and crimped them. The pliers slipped. The lamp jiggled and almost toppled. Fred T. went whoa, son.

He killed two men. He wasn’t quite straight with it. The Frogman was back in Miami now. He kept calling him. The phone just rang and rang. The dead spics were Commies and Cuban Cause traitors. They took lives and he took theirs, and that part didn’t hurt. The picture replay hurt. He was zorched then. The replay ran in VistaVision and Cinerama. His world was double-imaged. The pictures re-ran with double clarity and at half the speed.

Fred caught a loose wire and re-taped it. Crutch fumbled the toolbox.

He couldn’t sleep. He couldn’t think about his case. He kept looking at the pictures of Joan.

27

(Los Angeles, 8/29/68)

The ceiling fan fluttered the sheets. The cool air gave them goose bumps. Dwight felt a contraction. He knew why—Eleanora just kicked.

Karen said, “I should be in Chicago. I shouldn’t be in a folding bed in an FBI drop-front.”

She was fuller now. Her nipples were bigger. Her hipbones had disappeared.

“It was bad. I’m glad you didn’t go.”

“What’s-His-Name was at Lincoln Park. He called it a ‘massacre.’ ”

Dwight grabbed his cigarettes. Karen looked tempted. Dwight put them back down.

“Don’t make me jealous, or I’ll hang a sedition case on him.”

Karen laughed. “Did it feel inevitable to you?”

“If you mean preordained and mutually agreed upon, yes.”

“You’re very religious, you know. You understand your personal responsibility to God, but you’re remiss and outright negligent in your secular practice.”

Dwight smiled. “I rely on you for these perceptions. And I quoted you to a man in Chicago two days ago.”

“How did you describe me?”

“As very wise.”

“Not as duplicitous and compromised in my affections?”

“We didn’t get that far.”

Karen kissed his shoulder. “Did you find your infiltrator?”

“Yes.”

“Then something’s wrong.”

“Why do you say that?”

“You’re tense, but you’re trying not to appear tense. You always do little things with your hands when you’re trying to convince me that things are all right.”

Dwight flexed his hands. His law-school ring fit loose. He was missing meals and running on coffee. “Okay, you’re right.”

“Is it some bad thing you’ve done or some bad thing you’re planning?”

Dwight gave Karen the look—case closed on that. She rolled onto her back and cupped his hands on the swell of Eleanora.

“I’ve got my infiltrator. He’s brilliantly good, but that’s all I can tell you right now.”

“All right. And now you need an informant.”

“Right. And you know that woman Joan.”

Karen stretched. “I’ll have to ask around. I don’t know her personally. Someone will have to find her for me.”

He felt a pulse on his hands. Soft—like Eleanora had moved more than kicked.

Karen reached for his cigarettes. Dwight grabbed them and threw them on the floor. Karen laughed and made her belly jiggle. *Then* Eleanora kicked.

Dwight said, “Do you love me?”

Karen said, “I’ll think about it.”

28

(Las Vegas, 8/29/68)

It was her. He knew it would be. He got the picture just to see her again.

It was a Nevada DMV photo. Mary Beth Hazzard sat posed for her driver's license shot. She was born 6/4/24. She was ten years, one month and fourteen days older than him.

Wayne sat in his car, outside the DMV. He'd bribed a clerk for a copy of the woman's driver file. License since 6/4/40. No moving violations. "Must wear corrective lenses to drive."

He read that newspaper piece. He saw her at the funeral. The widow Hazzard. The missing son. I got your husband—

She ran the Hotel Workers' Union. The union was fighting the Hotel Owners' Council. The issue was segregation. Dracula owned a score of union-targeted hotels. Picketing was going down at a dozen locations. The LVPD was monitoring it.

Wayne looked at the picture. He couldn't peel his eyes back. He liked the shape of her face and the flow of her hair.

29

(Las Vegas, 8/30/68)

The feed lines worked. The 307 to 308 wiring laid firm. Crutch bored a tiny spy hole through the wall yesterday. Sight and sound access, confirmed.

The console faced the connecting wall. Crutch settled in with his headphones. Fred T. was back in L.A. This gig was his solo.

The Frogman called him last night. Their talk calmed him down. Fuentes and Arredondo were rogue and Deep Red. The Chicago PD would short-shift their inquiry. The Frogman praised his balls and described a plan he was hatching.

Sabotage runs. Island hops with flamethrowers and C-4 explosives. Raids on Castro militia camps. Propaganda-leaflet runs. A heroin biz to finance the operation.

Froggy laid out the vile deeds of Fuentes and Arredondo. They were Red lice nesting in *putain* Fidel's beard. Crutch started grooving on his Commo kills. He went to a seamstress and got little 2's embroidered in his tartan bow tie.

The 308 door opened. *Click/thump*—that's the sound. Crutch checked the spy hole. On time: Fred Otash and Wayne Tedrow.

They sat down. They chitchatted. They sat away from the lamp feed. Their voices were dim.

Click/thump—the door again. This time: a tall, gray-suited man. Crutch heard garbles and read lips. Fred O. and Wayne called the man Dwight.

The console-to-spy-hole cord was stretched taut. Crutch pulled up a chair and got adjusted. Note: re-spackle the spy hole tomorrow.

The doorbell rang. Fred O. opened up. *Sacre Frog*—there's Jean-Philippe Mesplede.

Confluence. Clyde Duber's word. It's who you know and who you blow and how you're all linked.

Wayne introduced Fred O. to the Frogman. They spewed some stat-icky talk. Fred O. introduced Dwight to the Frogman and spieled his last name as Holly.

Confluence. Dwight Holly knew Clyde. Dwight Holly tapped Clyde to tail Marsh Bowen in Chicago.

Crutch got situated. His headphones fit tight and the spy hole was there at eye level. The 308 crew pulled chairs up close to the lamp feed. Fred O. bopped to the wet bar and came back with highballs and chips. Dwight Holly declined the drink. The other guys dug in. Crutch got a vibe: this had nothing to do with his case.

Clock it—3:18 p.m. Roll the tape, live.

The guys settled in. Sentence fragments overlapped. Dwight and the Frogman lit cigarettes. Fred O. looked plump and sassy, back to his normal bulk. Wayne looked raggedy-ass and too thin.

Fred O. said, "Enough bullshit," pitch-perfect headphone sound.

Dwight Holly said, "There'll be six men. They always stay after hours. It's always them and just them, and I don't think they'll vary the routine on the night we go in."

Wayne said, "When?"

Fred O. said, "We're set on my end. I've got the plant guns, Dwight's got the dope. I think we can be in and out in five minutes."

Dwight Holly said, "Four. The takedown will be easy. They'll be blitzed and they'll be surprised. It's all about rigging the forensic. St. Louis PD has a shit crime lab, but I still want the wound spill and trajectories to make some kind of sense."

Crutch started sweating. His earphones wetted up and produced crackle hiss. “Six men,” “plant guns,” “wound spill”—

Mesplede said, “ ‘Grapevine.’ That is an American colloquialism, correct? It means ‘a source of information.’ So, it is idiomatic. And in that manner, it becomes the name of a hoodlum’s meeting place.”

Fred O. yukked. Ditto Dwight. Wayne flinched. Crutch caught it late.

June 20. THAT NIGHT. Talk fragments—grapevine/Tommy/plant—Joan and Gretchen/Celia.

The headphones *pooled* sweat. Crutch whipped them off, wiped them dry and put them back on. He got four-way garbles, fuzz, bips, pops, line hiss. Sweat-clogged feeder lines, *shit.*

More bips and line hiss. Food noise—Fred O. and the Frogman snarfed chips. Crutch took the headphones off, shook them dry and put them back on. He pressed up to the spy hole. He squinted. He tried to read lips and gestures and sync them to hiss. He got squeaks, he got crackle, he got words here and there in the mix.

He heard “Memphis.” He saw Wayne twitch. He heard “patsy,” “King,” “Ray.” Dwight Holly and Wayne shared queasy looks. He heard food noise. He squinted harder. He breathed harder. He fogged up the spy hole. He lost a full minute to *bip-bip-bips*.

He heard “witness.”

He heard “grapevine” again.

HE STARTED TO GET IT.

Fred O. ran a monologue. His bass voice cut down line hiss. Crutch heard “Sirhan.” Crutch heard “Bobby K.” Fred O. mimed a shooting—bam, bam, you’re dead. Wayne and Dwight H. shared a *très* queasy look.

HE GOT MORE OF IT. His bladder almost blew. He clenched up, sucked up and kept it in.

The spy hole was fogged. The bug line was clogged. Fucking potato chip–chomping noise fucked it up worse. Crutch took the headphones off, shook them and put them back on. Crutch spit on the spy-hole glass and shirt-wiped it clean.

He got more sight. He got more sound. He saw the Frogman’s lips move. He heard incoherent yak-yak and “Dallas.” He heard Frenchy word cuisine, “Cuba,” “revenge.”

The sound died altogether. Crutch shook his head. The phones cleared and the bug line re-fed. He got hiss, snap, crackle, pop, buzz, fuzz, bips. He heard "*Le grand putain* Jack." He saw Jean-Philippe Mesplede assume a rifleman's pose.

And he pissed in his pants.

And he shit in his pants.

And he vomited and gasped.

He pulled off his headphones. He ran to the console, pulled the main wire and ripped Spackle out of the wall. He made a small through hole. It fed into 308, all wire-free. The Spackle blew back into his suite. He squinted and put his ear to the hole—God, please please please.

The meeting was done. The men stood at the door. Dwight Holly said, "One last thing."

The other men nodded. Dwight Holly said, "No women. If there's women there, we pull out."

Fred O. nodded reluctant. Mesplede rolled his eyes. Wayne Tedrow clutched Dwight Holly's wrist.

30

(St. Louis, 9/3/68)

Throwdown guns—check. Insulin needles—check. Liquid cocaine—check. One last mug shot–memorization look.

Brundage, Currie, Pierce. Kling, DeJohn, Luce.

They were all inside. They were all armed. They were all blitzed. They entered between 10:41 and 12:49. Dwight played inside man and observed them. He chatted up Pierce and laid some groundwork. I'm a Schenley's sales rep. I do the deliveries. Sometimes they go late.

It was 3:10 now. They were still in there. Otash made a wax fit of the back-door lock yesterday. It was a clean walk-in. The Schenley's man and his pals with booze. Hey, Tommy Pierce—long time no see.

They parked behind the Grapevine. They wore jeans and duck-blind windbreakers—Okie hunter gear. They had four Schenley's boxes.

Dwight had a vented .45. Wayne had a .38 snub. Otash had a Colt Python. Mesplede had a long-barrel .32.

The van was stolen. Mesplede clouted it. They wore gloves for the ride over. Dwight felt calm. Otash and Mesplede looked calm. Wayne looked *too* calm—Dwight figured he was on something.

Music inside—hee-haw/hoedown shit. A country fiddle brayed and screeched.

Dwight tapped his watch. They got out of the van. Mesplede leaned in and dispensed the boxes. Otash walked over, unlocked the back door and left it ajar. A storeroom light was on. Dwight saw canned goods on shelves. High-pitched fiddle chords scraped.

Dwight tapped his watch—*now*.

They pulled out their guns and held them under the boxes. They clumped and made he-man grunts and nonchalantly walked in.

The storeroom led to the tavern proper. Their big-boot clomps and macho groans pre-announced them. The six fucks were sitting on two dumb leather sofas. They faced each other. A plank table was plopped down between them. It was covered with bottles, glasses and junk-food debris.

Dwight yelled, "Hey there, Tommy." Heads turned their way. Dwight head-counted and got seven, not six.

An extra man. Fortyish and curly-haired. Interloper/sorry, pal/it's just too late.

Looks traveled quick. Tommy Pierce cued the guys—this is okay. Dwight huffed and puffed over. Otash, Mesplede and Wayne were bunched behind him. It was a left-side, front-entry-wound, in-tight approach. *The seven fucks just sat there*. Dwight dropped the cue line: "Yeah, I know it's late."

Off that last syllab—

They dropped the boxes. They aimed and fired down. They emptied their guns at their pre-assigned targets, all body mass and face. *The fucks just sat there*. The shots swallowed them up. They pitched and jerked and bounced and stayed in their seats.

The noise was loud overlap and reverb. The cordite stink was bad and the barrel smoke was thick. The music went inaudible. Blood blew out their backs and pooled on the sofas in one continuous sweep.

Gurgles, belches, neck-wound coughs, shudders and gasps. Seven dead in one twitching sweep.

Dwight tapped his watch—*go*.

They put on rubber gloves.

They pulled belt-concealed guns off the dead men and paper-bagged them. Dwight checked out the seventh man. He was unarmed. Dwight went through his wallet. Fourteen bucks and a New York driver's license: Thomas Frank Narduno, almost forty-six.

He put the wallet back. Wayne got out the liquid coke and syringes. Blood leaked on the floor. They all looked down and stepped way clear of the spill.

Dwight knocked over the table. The booze and food debris blended in with the spill.

Otash arranged the bodies: three on the floor, four on the sofas.

Mesplede planted the throwdown guns. Three in their hands, three near their bodies.

The blood spill expanded. They all kept looking down and stepping clear of it.

Dwight pulled off their shoes and socks.

Wayne injected them between their toes and cotton-swabbed the blood drips.

Otash pulled their socks back on. Mesplede relaced their shoes.

Fiddle music brayed and screeched. The walls absorbed the gunshot noise—Dwight knew it.

They stepped waaaaay back from the blood spill. Dwight framed the scene. Sofa springs exposed. Kling's missing finger. Booze, cocaine, a group tantrum. Pierce's coughed-out dentures. DeJohn's shattered glasses.

Dwight tapped his watch—*out*. Wayne looked at him. Dwight couldn't detect anything.

Otash grinned. Wayne poured powdered cocaine on the bar.

Mesplede grabbed some blood-free potato chips.

31

(Las Vegas, 9/6/68)

You look *through* him.

It subsumes the shock and diverts the titillation. It deflects the insanity. It was his sixth face-to-face meet with Dracula. Wayne just discovered the trick.

"It's a pleasure to see you, sir."

Drac said, "Humphrey is very far behind in the polls. The hippies and yippies did him in."

Farlan Brown coughed. "Wayne and I were there, sir. We gave them quite an assist."

The trick worked with Drac himself. Castle Drac details remained. The condom-wrapped doorknobs, the Kleenex-box piles, the wall pix of Jane Russell's breasts.

Drac said, "On to November. Every Humphrey campaign stop must be a miniature Chicago. May I have your guarantee, Mr. Tedrow?"

"I'll try, sir."

Brown coughed. "Wayne's being modest, sir. When he says, 'I'll try,' he means 'I'll succeed.' "

Drac said, "Don't cough again, Mr. Brown. You're creating an unsanitary environment. If you cough again, I will terminate your employment and buy out your contract for five cents on the dollar."

Brown got up and left the room, waving a handkerchief. Wayne looked through Drac. Fresh details: plates covered with leftover food. Bugs scattered on pizza-pie crusts.

"You've lost weight, Mr. Tedrow. Have you been ill?"

"I had extensive dental surgery, sir. I've been unable to eat solid food for three weeks."

"Was the surgery performed under sanitary conditions?"

"Yes, sir."

"How old are you?"

"I'm thirty-four, sir."

"I'm sixty-one, sixty-two or sixty-three. I've sustained head injuries from my numerous airplane crashes and have lost some memories."

Wayne smiled. "You were born in 1905, sir. You're sixty-two years old."

Drac coughed. "Did you look me up in the *Farmer's Almanac*?"

"*Encyclopedia Britannica*, sir."

"Did it state how many women I have fucked?"

"It omitted that detail, sir."

"I have fucked countless women. Ava Gardner gave me both tertiary syphilis and the bubonic plague. Between my head injuries and those other maladies, I suffer constant pain. I am thus very grateful for your adroit skills as a chemist."

Wayne faux-beamed. "I'm very pleased that you feel that way, sir."

"Gain some weight, though. It pains me to look at a young man so gaunt."

"I'm going back on solid food tomorrow, sir."

"Good."

Wayne leaned in and stared *at* Drac. The filmy eyes and chancre sores got him this time.

"Mr. Hughes, may I ask a favor of you?"

"Yes. I rarely grant favors, but I'll permit you to ask."

"Sir, I'd like you to reinstate the Hotel Workers' Union at all your Las Vegas locations. I would also request that you brusquely tell the Hotel Owners' Council that they should drop the implicitly enforced employment color line that they have long adhered to.”

Fresh details: tremors and puffs of dry spit.

“How firm a request is this?”

“It’s a polite request, sir.”

“Is it an ultimatum?”

“No, but it’s a vouchsafe on my future as your business intermediary and chemist.”

Drac shuddered. His jaw dropped. He had for-real fangs.

“Very well. I’ll grant your request.”

At least they were vicious. *At least they were white.*

It was his post-Grapevine mantra. He employed it along with opiate compounds. It got him through the flight back and the Hughes meet.

He was tapering off. He was sleeping better. Dwight called last night. St. Louis PD tagged the Grapevine their way.

Spontaneous combustion. Toxic booze/dope levels cited. A quickie coroner’s inquest stamped it case closed.

He was feeling better. His appetite was returning. The throbs and kinks all over his body were starting to abate.

Wayne cruised the Strip. It was dusk and too hot to live. He saw heat-dazed picketers outside the Dunes and the Sands. He saw picketers waving their signs outside the Frontier. Most were black, some were white, all were plain thrilled.

He parked and walked to the picket line. He caught snippets of a joyous gobbledygook.

The Hotel Council caved. It was sudden—who knows why—it allegedly came from Howard Hughes.

Wayne stood there. The picketers ignored him. An LVPD goon squad lounged at the curb. They wore helmets and twirled their nightsticks. They plain seethed. Buddy Fritsch kicked at scattered cigarette butts and seethed the worst.

The picketers whooped and leaped and tore the tops off their signs. Wayne saw Mary Beth Hazzard raise one fist.

Buddy Fritsch saw him and teetered on over. He reeked of afternoon vodka and breath mints.

“Hey, killer. Want to smoke a few jungle bunnies while you’re here?”

Wayne winked at him. Buddy winked back. The picketers looked over. They started nudging each other. Wayne smiled at Buddy and let the moment build.

“Times like this make me wish you were back on the ’ole LVPD. We could use a coon kill—”

Wayne gut-punched him. Buddy gasped and folded and went green in the face. The other cops froze. The picketers froze. Wayne grabbed Buddy’s necktie, pulled him close and elbow-slammed his face. Wayne ripped his badge off his shirt and hurled it.

Buddy wobbled and stayed up. His face was all blood. Wayne let go of his tie. Buddy hit the pavement face-first. A bunch of the picketers cheered.

The cops stayed frozen. Wayne looked at the picketers. Mary Beth Hazzard stared dead at him. Wayne blew her a kiss.

32

(Los Angeles, 9/8/68)

Crutch Senior lived behind Santa Anita. He ruled a cardboard-box encampment. Winos and racetrack bums. Hooverville updated. Bet all day, booze all night. The California Lifestyle Supreme.

Crutch came with gifts: a good-bye C-note and a Reuben sandwich. Hey, Dad—I'm a dead man. I know all this top secret shit.

Fred Turentine called him yesterday. Fred Otash found some bug-tap debris in suite 307 and traced it back to him. Fred O. leaned on Fred T. Fred T. gave Crutch up for the bug job. Fred T. convinced Fred O. that *he* wasn't there, it was only doofus Crutchfield. Fred T. showed Crutch his broken fingers. "Kid, I don't know *what* you heard, but you better run."

He read the St. Louis papers. Seven dead at the Grapevine. Tavern "Hoodlum brawl escalates." He did some checking. James Earl Ray's brother was part owner. Killers. His Frogman pal on the grassy knoll. Bug talk: Sirhan & King, Memphis & Dallas.

The campground was behind the parking lot. The geezers lived in stereo boxes rain-treated with shellac. A big tarp covered twenty-odd Magnavox Mansions. Empty bottles covered the common yard.

Crutch knocked on Crutch Senior's box. Crutch Senior crawled out with a racing form and a short dog. Crutch gave him some room. Crutch Senior stood up, whipped it out and took a big piss. He aimed straight at Crutch's shoes.

"Hello, Dad."

Crutch Senior squinted. "Donald, right?"

"Right."

"The kid I had with Maggie Woodard."

"That's me."

"I remember Maggie. She was from Bumfuck, Wisconsin."

"Yeah, she's the one."

"She was a good lay."

"Come on, Dad. That's not nice."

Crutch Senior re-zipped. He was fifty-four. He wore a sweat-soaked Beatle suit and a Beatle wig. He was half-dead from open-sore cancers.

"You're in the shit and you need a touch. Sorry, but I'm tapped."

Crutch displayed the C-note and Reuben. Crutch Senior grabbed the bill and ignored the sandwich. He killed the short dog and tossed it on the empty pile. He swung the racing form and swatted Crutch in the face.

"You never found Maggie. You told me you would, and you didn't. I laid her the first time on Pearl Harbor day, and you never found her."

Bluff.

He worked out the plan yesterday. It predicted the knock on his door and the death sentence. Yeah, he put it all together. But, it was all instinct. Bug sputter, squelch, static and some words mixed in. He knew. They knew he knew. Fred O. would tell the others. Wayne would be pissed at the Frogman. Froggy let him live. It would blow up from there.

It was too big and played too preposterous. Clyde wouldn't believe him. Scotty Bennett wouldn't believe him. He could go on *The Joe Pyne Show* and air his inside scoop from the Beef Box. Joe

Pyne would scoff at him. Some left-wing Jews and paranoid hippies *might* believe him. The hebes would turn on him in a hot tick. He was pro–Cuban Freedom Cause. The hippies would scoff at his crew cut and Scotty Bennett tie. No hippie girls would shoot him some trim.

Bluff.

He put the fail-safes in place yesterday. He devised the plan off his one ray of hope. *They didn't know his bug gear was defective. They knew they talked assassination. They would not recall exactly what they said. They did not know how credible his testimony would play*.

Crutch waited at the Vivian. The pad was near-empty. He moved his mother's file and his personal shit to the Elm Hotel yesterday. His case file was there. Buzz knew the location. He'd find the files and pursue or not pursue all relevant leads.

He waited. He skimmed old *Car Crafts* and *Playboys*. He went to I. Magnin's yesterday. He bought Dana Lund a beautiful cashmere sweater. He had it gift-wrapped and placed a valentine card in the box. He didn't sign his name. He told Dana that he'd always loved her. He had to run now. He killed two men and knew some things that he shouldn't.

Magnin's delivered the gift. He parked across the street. He watched Dana open the box and read the card. The sweater delighted her. The note seemed to scare her. She looked around and slammed her door in a rush.

Joan Rosen Klein was out in the ether. He couldn't get her a good-bye gift. It broke his fucking heart.

Crutch skimmed the November '67 *Playboy*. Kaya Christian smiled from the foldout. She was his aptly named sweetheart. He knew her from Trinity Lutheran Church a million years back.

The southbound view beckoned. Crutch walked to the window and looked out. He saw Sandy Danner's house and Barb Cathcart's house and Gail Miller on Lon Ecklund's front porch.

All those shrubs that served as his perch spots. New shrubs blocking windows he'd peeped.

He leaned out the window. He caught smog in the air. He leaned too far. He started to drop. He heard noise behind him. A force slammed him down and pulled him back up.

He was on the floor. He was foot-pinned. He was blurry-eyed, half there and half not. He smelled oil on metal and knew they'd greased the door lock.

The half there expanded. The blur decreased. A full there came on. He saw Wayne Tedrow with a silencered gun and the Frogman holding a pillow. He clutched his Saint Christopher medal and prayed the Gloria Patria.

Their feet were dug in. The Frogman sweat-oozed nicotine. Wayne said, “You dipshit cocksucker.”

Froggy dropped the pillow on his head. Crutch thrashed it off and gulped in air to say it.

“I’ve got four tape copies, plus depositions. Four bank safe-deposit boxes. I show up in person, six-month intervals. They verify me at the sites with photo and fingerprint checks. If I don’t show, you know what.”

Wayne looked at Mesplede. Mesplede looked at Wayne. Wayne picked up the pillow and foot-mashed it down on his head. He couldn’t see. He couldn’t hear. No voices, no gunshot, no pain or white clouds. Breath spurts and heartbeats—dear God, am I dead?

Then light and air and the model airplane dangling from his ceiling. Then some breath. Then Wayne’s gun with the silencer untapped.

A red Fokker triplane. Historically cool. He built it and sniffed the glue the day JFK got whacked.

Crutch said, “I want in. I’ll take whatever you’ve got.”

33

(Los Angeles, 9/10/68)

"You were talking in your sleep."

"What was I saying?"

"I thought I heard 'at least' and 'vicious.' "

Dwight rubbed his neck. It always knotted at the same spot. He got a dream aftershock: Memphis and blood spray redux.

Karen sat up and leaned over him. She was sleep-puffed and lush. She crossed her legs and sat Indian-style. He scooted down and kissed her knees. He heard Dina one room over, talking to her stuffed frog.

"Tell me again, and convince me. My simple presence here is not screwing that little girl up forever."

Karen took his hands. "Only if she grows up and joins the FBI."

"There's some left-wing parenthood thing going on here that eludes me."

"She likes you more than she likes What's-His-Name. Let it go at that."

"I don't understand the fucking world you live in."

Karen kissed his fingers. "You understand it all too well. Your accommodations acknowledge my world and grant it an offhanded respect.”

Dwight reached for his cigarettes. Karen grabbed the pack and tossed it on the dresser.

“Don’t tempt me.”

“All right.”

“And explain yourself. Connect ‘at least’ and ‘vicious.’ ”

That knot again—Dwight kneaded and rubbed.

“A friend said it. The full quote was ‘At least they were vicious.’ ”

“Who was he referring to?”

“Babe, please.”

“Mr. Hoover? The cops in Chicago?”

Dwight laughed. It made his neck throb. Karen tickled his legs and built on the laugh and made the hurt stop.

“All right, I’ll tell you. He was referring to a dissolute band of right-wing thugs.”

Karen grinned. “I like your friend. What’s his name?”

“No comment.”

“Is he a cop?”

“He used to be.”

“Is he as tall and good-looking as you?”

Dwight grinned. “Emphatically not.”

Dina said good night to the frog. It came through the wall plain. Dwight knew she wanted them to hear it. Karen bowed and put her hand on her heart.

“I think I’ve got a line on Joan.”

“Quid pro quo, then. Blow up an extra monument and try not to get caught.”

Karen curled around him. Dwight pulled off her barrette and let her hair go. He said, “Do you love me?” She said, “I’ll think about it.”

34

(Las Vegas, 8/11/68)

The union folks congregated at Sills Tip-Top. Wayne studied their MO. She'd show there sooner or later. It took him four cruise-bys.

Sills was crowded—the lunch trade and no empty booths. It was up in shitsville North Vegas. The color line was blurred there. The joint was quasi-segregated. Whites ate on one side, blacks on the other.

Wayne walked in. Mary Beth Hazzard was over on the black side. She was sitting with four union friends. They were all black. Wayne recognized them from his picket-line show.

Two people noticed him. A man nudged Mary Beth. She noticed him and whispered all around the booth. The people got up and walked out. They passed Wayne en route. They lowered their eyes.

Wayne walked over and put his hand out. Her hand was firm and dry. He said, “Mrs. Hazzard.” She said, “Mr. Tedrow.” Her eyes clicked to the opposite seat. Wayne took the cue and sat down.

They looked at each other. It was still. It made the restaurant noise subside. People started looking at them. *It* was still. Eyes just clicked their way.

Mary Beth touched her coffee cup. "I read about your father. You have my condolences for your loss."

The union folks had left their coffee cups and saucers behind. Wayne cleared a space for his hands.

"Thank you. My father treated union people horribly, so your condolences affirm your good manners very nicely."

"I wasn't fishing for compliments, Mr. Tedrow."

"I know. I'm just hoping you'll accept the one I gave you, and not consider it condescending."

Mary Beth smiled. Wayne felt a million eyes click.

"And my condolences for your husband."

"Condolences accepted. But in the spirit of candor, I'll add that Cedric was recklessly fervent and had no business being alone with Pappy Dawkins at 2:00 a.m."

Wayne glanced around for a waitress. Two waitresses caught it and looked away. A little black boy draped himself over his booth and stared at them. Two little white girls pointed.

"You're very nervous, Mr. Tedrow. If you're thinking of ordering coffee, you might want to reconsider."

Wayne smiled. "And besides, they won't serve me."

"They will if you make a big-enough fuss."

"Or put on a big-enough show."

Mary Beth smiled. "Your show at the picket line was memorable. It begs the question of what you were trying to say, but I won't press you on that."

Wayne fidgeted. Mary Beth pushed her coffee cup over. Wayne warmed his hands on it.

"I want to thank you for your part in settling the strike, Mr. Tedrow. The rumor is that you convinced Mr. Hughes."

Wayne said, "Yes, I did."

"And your motive?"

"You mean, my motive given my history?"

Mary Beth touched the coffee cup. "I don't judge your history as harshly as most black people around here would."

Wayne touched the coffee cup. His hands almost touched hers. She left her hands there. He pulled his back.

"And why is that?"

“You killed those men while you were looking for Wendell Durfee, so you get a pass from me on that one.”

Peeple looked at them. A big fat black guy and a tall, skinny white guy flat-out fucking gawked.

“Why, Mrs. Hazzard?”

“Because Leroy Williams and the Swasey brothers supplied the dope that killed my sister. Because Wendell Durfee raped me on April 19, 1951, which makes me inclined to forgive your rash behavior and like you just fine.”

Wayne looked at his hands. They jerked and spun the coffee cup. Some coffee spilled on Mary Beth’s hands. She didn’t seem to notice. She kept her hands there.

“I read about your son. The missing-person part, I mean.”

“He was a brilliant boy. He knew a great deal about chemistry.”

“I’m a chemist.”

“Yes, I was told that.”

“Were you inquiring about me?”

“Yes, I was.”

“Why?”

Mary Beth pulled her hands back. “You’re pushing me. Don’t ask me to say things I’m not ready to.”

Wayne looked around the diner. The whole goddamn room was looking their way.

“You described your son in the past tense. Do you think he’s dead?”

Mary Beth shook her head. “There’s times I do, there’s times I don’t. Sometimes dead’s easier, sometimes it’s not.”

“Do you miss him?”

“Yes, I miss him terribly.”

Wayne said, “I’ll find him for you.”

Part II

SHIT MAGNET

September 12, 1968–January 20, 1969

DOCUMENT INSERT: 9/12/68. Internal FBI memorandum. Marked: “Stage 1 Covert”/”Director’s Eyes Only”/“Destroy After Reading.” To: Director Hoover. From: SA Dwight C. Holly.

Sir,

OPERATION BAAAAD BROTHER now stands at the on-go stage, with the drop-front and preliminary operating funds secured, police agency paperwork on our target groups and their members assessed and our infiltrator selected and ready to be placed in an operational context both plausible and provocative. Bureau informant #4361 has supplied me with the name of a potential confidential informant (female), and I have requested her Bureau file from Central Records and will study it thoroughly before any attempt is made to facilitate a meeting. THE BLACK TRIBE ALLIANCE (BTA) and MAU-MAU LIBERATION FRONT (MMLF) occupy the identical political and criminal universe, which I will summarize, along with criminal/political summaries of the groups’ “leaders.” As previously stated, the groups are criminally inclined, staffed with career criminals and are determined to achieve their goals through criminal means. They are political rivals, and as such, our goal must remain fixed: to create inter-group dissension that will result in criminal charges and serve to discredit the entire black-nationalist apparatus.

1.—Both groups operate along near-identical lines. They employ storefront offices that serve as recruitment hubs, social clubs and gathering places for local Negroes and visiting radicals, thus photo surveillance may prove useful at some point. Both groups distribute anti-white, anti–Los Angeles Police Department literature and hate literature besmirching rival black-militant groups, most often vulgar pamphlets in the comic-book style. Both organizations recruit on campus at local high schools and junior high schools. Both organizations extort local merchants for food to deploy in their Feed the Kiddies programs and liquor for their weekly pay-to-attend “political mixers,” in reality drunken parties that often result in brawls. Both organizations have female followers—i.e., “groupies,” who act as prostitutes and donate most of their earnings to the “cause.” Both organizations are rumored to have “safe houses” where visiting radicals and members fleeing criminal proceedings are allowed to hide out.

Unlike the BLACK PANTHERS and US, there have been no known instances of BTA and MMLF violence directed at police officers. I will direct both our infiltrator and informant to notify me immediately should they learn of any such planned provocations. Both organizations are rumored to be planning excursions into the narcotics trade, although I seriously doubt that they possess the expertise required to be successful at it. They are both, to date, small-time in their *organized* criminal designs, although their individual "leaders" and followers quite often possess major felony records. BTA members are suspected of burglarizing a series of pornographic bookstores in the LAPD's Wilshire Division; MMLF members are suspected of participation in a series of employee-assisted faked robberies of all-night Jack in the Box drive-in locations. The profits from these criminal actions were allegedly donated to BTA and MMLF operating accounts. A BTA member allegedly operates a still and produces 190-proof corn liquor; an MMLF member allegedly scalps counterfeit tickets to the local games of the Los Angeles Dodgers and Los Angeles Rams. Again, these criminal enterprises create operating expenses for the BTA and MMLF and spotlight the inherent criminality of their members. The exposure of endemic criminal activity is essential to our derogatory profile of the groups and will provide a pithy courtroom commentary when our operation concludes and highly publicized legal proceedings begin.

2.—Per the "leaders," some key details:

A—EZZARD DONNELL JONES, male Negro, DOB 8/24/37. Two convictions for possession of narcotics (1957, 1961). Has a mail-order divinity degree and solicits funds at southside Los Angeles churches. JONES is the "Exalted High Commissioner" of the BTA.

B.—CORNELIUS "BENNY" BOLES, male Negro, DOB 1/11/40. One conviction for armed robbery (1964). Works as a carhop at Delores's Drive-In in Beverly Hills. A purported homosexual and a suspect in the unsolved 1958 slaying of a male prostitute in West Los Angeles. BOLES is the "Assistant Lord High Commissioner" of the BTA.

C.—LEANDER JAMES JACKSON, male Negro, DOB 5/4/38. No discernible criminal record. Rumored to be Haiti-born and a practitioner of Haitian voodoo. Allegedly a bunco artist (selling fake magazine subscriptions, phony land deals, no-show construction contracts), a forger (welfare checks, money orders and basketball tickets), and an arms smuggler (unsubstantiated rumors of ties to violent leftist groups in the Caribbean). JACKSON is the “Armorer” of the BTA.

D.—JOSEPH TIDWELL McCARVER, male Negro, DOB 7/16/37. Alleged residential and pharmacy burglar, rumored to have committed over 100 burglaries since 1955. Inveterate gambler, with 26 arrests and no convictions for flimflam and bookmaking offenses. Runs a weekly dice game out of a black separatist church, with proceeds going to the MMLF. McCARVER is the “Pan-African Ruler” of the MMLF.

E.—JOMO KENYATTA CLARKSON, male Negro, DOB 3/4/29. No criminal record, but rumored to be a skilled, job-selective armed robber. A cartoonist and the author of the anti-white, anti-BTA hate comic books sold by the MMLF. Works as a dispatcher for the Black Cat Cab Company in South Los Angeles. Rumored to have committed numerous “politically motivated” rapes as an “expression of solidarity” for “Brother” Eldridge Cleaver of the BLACK PANTHER PARTY. CLARKSON is the “Propaganda Minister” of the MMLF.

F.—CLAUDE CANTRELL TORRANCE, male Negro, DOB 11/29/46. Numerous misdemeanor arrests: drunk driving, drunk and disorderly, petty theft, non-payment of child support, defrauding an innkeeper, vagrancy, impersonating a police officer and various gambling-related offenses. The principal player in MMLF’s Feed the Kiddies program. TORRANCE is both the “Minister of Finance” and “Minister of Extortion” for the MMLF.

3.—Known haunts of the BTA and MMLF include the dispatch hut of the BLACK CAT CAB COMPANY, originally financed by a (allegedly in arrears) loan from the Teamster Central State Pension Fund, which marks it as a criminally defined enterprise; SULTAN SAM’S BARBER SHOP; SULTAN SAM’S SANDBOX (a cocktail lounge, Teamster loan–financed); SULTAN SAM’S PINBALL PARADISE (a game arcade/pornographic bookstore); CALVIN’S ADULT EXTRAVAGANZA (a pornographic bookstore); and the following bars and after-hour clubs: NAT’S NEST, MR. MITCH’S ANOTHER WORLD, RAE’S RUGBURN ROOM a lesbian bar owned by JOSEPH TIDWELL McCARVER’S sister RAE CHANTAY McCARVER (Teamster Fund–financed), THE SNOOTY FOX, THE SCORPIO LOUNGE, TOMMY TUCKER’S PLAYROOM and the CAROLINA PINES COFFEE SHOP on Imperial Highway. It should be prominently noted that the key BTA and MMLF personnel are rumored to have ties to THE PEOPLES' BANK OF SOUTH LOS ANGELES, rumored to have been initially seeded by a Teamster Pension Fund loan (allegedly in arrears) and long suspected of being a money-laundering front for Negro criminals. The bank's longtime president, LIONEL DARIUS THORNTON, male Negro, DOB 12/8/19, has no criminal record, is a noted civic booster in the Los Angeles Negro community and has long been suspected of organized-crime ties.

4.—As I detailed in my previous confidential telex, our infiltrator will be LAPD OFFICER MARSHALL E. BOWEN, a gifted impersonator with previous subversive-group penetrations financed by CLYDE DUBER ASSOCIATES. I am currently creating a scenario for OFFICER BOWEN'S cosmetically proffered expulsion from the LAPD, perhaps to be shaped by OFFICER BOWEN'S hostile relationship with SERGEANT ROBERT S. BENNETT, an LAPD Robbery Division detective much feared and despised in South Los Angeles. I have researched SERGEANT BENNETT and consider him to be the perfect foil for this scenario. I have set up a meeting with LAPD CHIEF TOM REDDIN and LOS ANGELES SAC JACK LEAHY to discuss OFFICER BOWEN'S expulsion/immersion. Along with us, they will be the only law-enforcement personnel privy to this information.

OPERATION BAAAD BROTHER now stands at on-go status. I await your comments.

Respectfully,

SA Dwight C. Holly

35

(Los Angeles, 9/13/68)

Dwight read files. A radio spritzed the news. Nixon and Humphrey grubbed for votes and seesawed poll-wise. Jimmy Ray and Sirhan Sirhan fomented in custody. Local grief: two ski-masked coons robbed a Brentwood home of cash and jewels.

The drop-front was file-full. It was file-saturated and file-fucked. He needed four more cabinets. He was file-fucked dick-deep.

He read carbons from the ATF and St. Louis PD. Confirmed anew: the “Grapevine Tavern Slaughter,” case closed. One non sequitur: that surprise victim.

Thomas Frank Narduno, forty-five years old, out of New York. The odd man there. Bug devices found on his body.

Dwight checked Narduno’s FBI file. It was sketchy. Narduno traveled in lefty circles. He was a two-time robbery suspect: Ohio and New York. No arrests, no convictions. He vibed fringe fool or Red recidivist. His Grapevine connection was superfluous now.

Relief.

He was relieved. Mr. Hoover was relieved. Mr. Hoover was still pissy underneath it. He kept rehashing Dwight's rest cure. Silver Hill, '57. The old poof was *three* beats off now. He called it "Happy Hills, '58." It didn't matter. The old poof had a file on it—stashed, indexed and extortion-ready.

He had a file coming: Joan Rosen Klein, potential informant. Central Records was telexing it. The pages were heavily redacted. Fat ink strokes blotted names, dates and locations. Karen implied that Joan might be difficult. Forewarned is forearmed: see the file before you meet her.

Dwight yawned. His sleep was shot, his nerves were thin, nightmares revived as daytime vignettes. He raided a Bureau evidence room and copped some sedatives. They goosed his one drink a night and one pill a night only. It fucking helped.

The chief was late. Dwight schmoozed with Jack Leahy. Jack did Mr. Hoover shtick. The old girl was buying antiques with lover boy Lance. Jack was spot-on. He had the mince and the wrist action. It was risky shit. Jack was a tough read. He was half G-man, half Mort Sahl.

Dwight laughed. "Guerrilla humor. Funny shit at the Improv, risky shit at the L.A. office."

Jack cleaned his glasses. "Twenty years and civil service. I'm snitch-proof."

"I saw you do Hoover as Oscar Wilde when you were a rookie."

"Then, I guess I'm just lucky."

Dwight smiled. "Or you've got an agenda, or you're just a fucking kamikaze."

The office was cop-blah: gray walls and flags up the ying-yang. Reddin pre-announced himself with Aqua Velva fumes. He was a big guy. He slapped backs and crashed behind his desk.

"Jack, it's been too long. Mr. Holly, I've been hearing about you for years."

Jack lit a cigarette. "Dwight 'the Enforcer' Holly. A blunt man with a politically dubious girlfriend."

Reddin yukked and waved faux wolfsbane. Jack winked. Dwight figured *el jefe* was good for five minutes.

"We want to sheep-dip one of your Negro officers, Chief. A young Wilshire Division patrolman named Marshall Bowen. My intention is to put him into the Black Tribe Alliance and/or the Mau-Mau Liberation Front. It's a long-term Cointelpro aimed at discrediting the black-militant movement. I'll be running it autonomously. Apologies in advance, but Mr. Hoover wants you bypassed on summary reports and memoranda."

Reddin flushed. "I like to know what's going on with my men."

Dwight lit a cigarette. "Mr. Hoover insists, sir."

Jack said, "He'll be working out of my jurisdiction. This is a bit of a slap in the face."

Reddin drummed his desk. "We've got plants in the Panthers and US. We share our intelligence with outside agencies when requested, which leads me to say I don't like the one-way aspect of this."

"Again, sir. Mr. Hoover insists."

Jack went limp-waisted. "If Mr. Hoover insists, Mr. Hoover insists."

Reddin smirked. "I've read Intel sheets on the BTA and MMLF. They're buffoons."

Dwight grinned. "We'll paint them with a broad brush. The Panthers and US will get tarred, as well."

Reddin lit a cigarette. "They're all tar babies."

Dwight laughed. Jack futzed with his ashtray. Reddin said, "All right. You're saying it's a publicized expulsion scenario, which will hopefully drench your boy in ghetto cachet."

Dwight nodded. "Right, and I'm thinking it will derive from a pre-existing personal feud between Officer Bowen and Sergeant Robert S. Bennett."

Reddin rolled his eyes. "Oh, Jesus, Scotty."

Jack said, "That psycho cocksucker."

Reddin slapped his knees. "Jack doesn't like Scotty. Scotty threw his weight around on that armored-car job we had a few years back, and it ruffled Jack's feathers."

Dwight put out his cigarette. "Give it up, Jack. You ran the Bureau's end for a week."

Reddin said, "With Scotty, a week can be an eternity."

Jack rubbed his eyes. "Why Bennett and this Officer Bowen? What sort of 'pre-existing feud'?"

Dwight rocked his chair back. "Some ink-stained bills from the armored-car job were circulating in the ghetto. Marsh Bowen innocently passed one, so Bennett leaned on him. Bowen got on LAPD over Bennett's objections."

Reddin said, "Jesus, Scotty and that case."

Jack said, "All right, I'll concede the viability of the context. The cast is great, and the script options are enticing."

Dwight smiled. "Here's the kicker. I don't want Bennett informed. The scenario has to play out without his knowledge."

The desk phone rang. Reddin took the call sotto voce. Jack said, "You'll copy me. Right, Dwight? For old time's sake?"

Dwight said, "No."

Tail job—all Niggertown.

Dwight drove a rent-a-car. Scotty Bennett drove an unmarked cruiser. It was a comb-the-Congo caper. Scotty threw his weight around. He exuded white-oppressor panache.

The fucker was huge. The bow tie and crew cut were a swinging caveman touch. Dwight frogged four car lengths back. Scotty canvassed liquor stores and scrounged free booze. Scotty waved to hookers and tossed Tootsie Rolls to little colored kids. Scotty drove by the Panther HQ and zoomed up on the sidewalk. A spear-chukker clique ran inside.

Scotty hit a parking-lot crap game and shuck-and-jived with the brothers. Scotty logged ghetto scuttlebutt. Scotty dispensed chump change to winos. Scotty greased his snitches with ten-spots and pistol-whipped a freaky nigger hassling an old lady. Scotty donated a case of gin to the Mighty Redeemer Church. Scotty frisked an informant, found a hypo kit and beat his black ass with a beaver-tail sap.

Darktown sizzled. It was mid-September hot. The shines wore warm-weather plumage. Lots of tank tops, porkpies and purple newsboy caps. Listless layabouts lapping up Schlitz Malt Liquor.

Scotty cruised by the Peoples' Bank of South Los Angeles. Dwight saw the prexy: Lionel Darius Thornton. Scotty drove by the BTA and MMLF fronts. The badass door guards wilted.

The hump sucked up fear and hate wholesale. He was a stone shit magnet.

The tour wound down at 4:00 p.m. Scotty hit the Harbor Freeway, the 101 and the Western Avenue exit. He double-parked outside a topless dive called the Rabbit's Foot Club. Dwight single-parked and foot-tailed him in.

A stacked redhead gyrated onstage. Pensioners and hippie boys leered at her. Scotty bowed and waved. The redhead walked backstage. A stacked blonde replaced her.

Scotty walked backstage. Dwight walked back and lingered by some curtains. He heard small talk and an unmistakable blow job. He walked back to his rent-a-car and waited. Scotty split the Rabbit's Foot Club nine minutes later. He shagged his cruiser and U-turned eastbound.

Dwight frogged him. Scotty took Hollywood Boulevard to Sunset to Alvarado south. Bam—east on 7th Street. Next stop—Vince & Paul's Steak House, 7th and Union.

Scotty parked and walked in. Dwight cut him eight minutes' slack. The bar was packed: wall-to-wall cops in civvies, juicing.

Dwight nursed a 7UP and tried to look un-coplike. Scotty glad-handed, raconteured and fondled a stacked brunette.

Scotty boozed. Scotty snarfed the free fried shrimp and rumaki. Scotty waltzed the brunette back to a storage room. Dwight lingered by the door. He heard small talk and an unmistakable blow job.

Enough.

Dwight walked back to his rent-a-car and waited. Scotty exited Vince & Paul's eighty-three minutes later. Dwight tailed him home to Pasadena. His family met him on the porch. Mrs. Scotty was a stacked blonde pushing fifty. Scotty had two teenaged sons and two teenaged daughters. The kids were *très* tall and looked just like Scotty.

"Do you hang out at Vince & Paul's?"

"Black cops aren't welcome there."

"What happened to 'Negro'?"

"It went out last year. 'Black' is more bold. It's got that tell-it-like-it-is quality that my people revere."

Dwight pushed his plate back. Ollie Hammond's Steak House outclassed Vince & Paul's. Their booth was secluded. Marsh Bowen picked at a salad.

"It's Scotty Bennett's hangout. Is that why you asked me?"

Dwight popped an antacid mint and lit a cigarette. His food had gone cold.

“I can read people, Mr. Holly. I know you’ve been mulling over Scotty.”

“Don’t fish for compliments. If I didn’t consider you smart and perceptive, you wouldn’t be here.”

“But you’re wondering how adaptable I am.”

“That’s correct.”

“I’ll consider that a compliment and move on, then.”

Dwight tugged at his law-school ring. “The inked-cash thing. How brutal was he?”

Marsh toyed with his fork. “He asked me questions with exaggerated courtesy and hit me with a phone book when he disapproved of my answers.”

“Does he hate Negroes?”

“It’s ‘black,’ Mr. Holly.”

“Don’t correct me, Officer.”

No twitch or flinch. Spreading goose bumps and a forehead vein tapping.

“*Does he hate Negroes*?”

“More than you, but less volubly. And I’m sure he’s killed a few more than you have.”

Dwight flinched. “He seems to relish his time on the southside.”

“He does, yes. He’s ‘Mr. Scotty’ south of Washington Boulevard.”

“This decorously expressed hatred of his. Is he well known for it?”

“Oh yes.”

Dwight cracked his knuckles. “Scotty’s the bait in your expulsion scenario. Tell me how you think we should play it.”

Marsh did a pantomime. He squinted through a viewfinder. He framed the shot. He spoke through a megaphone.

“Vince & Paul’s Steak House. The bar in full swing. Officer Marshall E. Bowen hits on Sergeant Robert S. Bennett’s torrid waitress girlfriend with the man himself right there.”

Dwight stuck his hand out. Marsh let it hang there. The moment built and fizzled. They both saw how dumb it looked. They laughed at the same time.

36

(Las Vegas, 9/14/68)

How *suite* it is.

His killer pals lived in hotel suites. Freddy O. had the Cavern. The Frogman had new Fontainebleau digs. Wayne Tedrow had this spread at the Stardust. Dwight Holly crashed in suites nationwide.

Crutch waited for Wayne T. *His* suite featured four rooms and a chemistry lab. His killer pals had college degrees. *He* got expelled from high school. He snapped that pic of Gail Miller's bush and blitzed his shot at a higher education.

Crutch waited. The foyer was velvet-flocked and gilt-mirrored. Caustic fumes wafted from the next room. The Vegas paper sat on a table. Wayne made the headline, secondhand.

The LVPD hung a posthumous beef on a shine named Pappy Dawkins. Said beef: the Wayne Senior snuff. "Heart attack"—bullshit. It was a sop to appease the family.

His killer pals made headlines. His killer pals *rigged* headlines. The inside rumor: *Wayne* offed his old man.

Crutch leaned against the wall. The flocking made him sneeze. Wayne and Froggy let him live. Yeah, he bluffed them. Yeah, he built the fail-safes. But, he had to *spill.*

He'd spilled *partial.* He spilled that Dr. Fred Hiltz hired him. Go, kid—goose Farlan Brown and Count Dracula. It's a thieving girlfriend gig. They grokked that part of it and believed him. He did not spill on Gretchen Farr as Celia Reyes or on Joan Rosen Klein. He did not reveal the foreign passports or Sam G.'s calls to Gretchen/Celia or the dead woman in Horror House.

Wayne opened the door and walked past him. No nod, fuck you, you're this bug I don't see. Crutch chased his shadow. A stink announced the chem lab. It was all vats and beakers on shelves.

Crutch hovered in the doorway. Wayne pressed a beaker up to his hairline. It was a *Shit, I've got a headache* thing.

"You wanted in. Okay, you're in. If you do what Mesplede and I tell you to do, you *may* survive. If you lie to us or steal from us or double-deal us or withhold information from us, we will kill you and bluff our way out of the jeopardy that you placed us in."

Crutch gulped. His Adam's apple popped. He stretched out his tie. Let those little 2's show.

"I've killed two men. I'm committed to the Cuban Freedom Cause."

Wayne gave him This Look. "The 'Cuban Freedom Cause' is right-wing bullshit. Mesplede is a deluded firebrand, I am not, and I would advise you not to become one. If indeed you did kill two men, it was out of your kid desire to suck up to Mesplede or your fear that *he* would kill *you* if you disobeyed him. Don't jerk my chain with your kid bullshit. Don't give *me* a reason to kill *you.*"

Crutch said, "Okay." He smirked like Scotty B. He willed his voice octaves deep.

Wayne said, "You work with Mesplede. Your job is to disrupt Hubert Humphrey's campaign rallies, for three hundred dollars a week. Humphrey's travel schedule is coming, so you talk to Clyde Duber, get a left-wing front list and find some politically motivated fools to help you out. You do not indulge your extracurricular kid activities on my time card. Do you understand me?"

Powder fumes swirled. The lab felt toxic. Crutch wiped his nose. Wayne laughed at him.

"I talked to Farlan Brown this morning. He's willing to forgive you for any kid shit you might have pulled while you were working for Fred Hiltz. He told me to tell you that Gretchen Farr took him for $25,000, and you can keep half if you find her and make restitution. He told me that at one point he bribed an alcoholic chum of yours off the case with an anonymous payment, because he feared unfavorable publicity, but now that you're working for me, you might as well stick with it, on a contingency basis."

Crutch grinned. Wayne revived This Look. Crutch *un*-grinned quick.

Wayne swallowed three aspirin. "Brown told me to forward this information to you. He said he got suspicious of Gretchen once and went through her closet. He saw an airline stewardess' uniform, with no airline designation and a name tag with the first name Janet. That's all he told me, and now I'll tell you. Do what you want with this, on your own time. Do not neglect your duties for me, and tell Dr. Fred and Clyde Duber that you're withdrawing from this idiot 'case' as of now."

Crutch held off a sneeze. Wayne said, "Get out of here. Common sense keeps telling me to kill you."

"Work F.B.'s stewardess lead."

"Giancana bootleg #—???"

"To date: no viable police paperwork on GF. Can't ask Scotty B. about JRK's ('51 & '53) armed-robbery arrsts (no #s to indicate convictions) without alerting Clyde. Likewise, can't request JRK Fed file. Per GF/CR: check nationwide birth recs or assume foreign parentage?"

"GF/CR & victim: check local PD Intelligence, Vice & missing person files while on campaign trip."

Crutch drew on his wall graph. His head bounced—L.A. to Vegas and back in four hours. His nose still itched. Wayne dismissed him with "Good-bye, Dipshit."

He needed more graph paper. He needed more file boxes. He might need a *third* file pad. Wayne warned him: do not withhold information. His case was high-risk now.

Crutch scanned the graph. Words swam. Through lines and clue nuggets cohered. He studied Joan's mug shots. He pulled a floor lamp up and made her gray streaks glow.

Brainstorm.

He got out his sketch pad. He drew a facial likeness of Gretchen Farr/Celia Reyes. He added an airline stew's outfit with the Janet name tag.

The Yellow Pages—there by the phone.

Airlines. Compile a list. Canvassing duty on tap.

Something was fucked. It was Beverly Hills, it was 2:00 p.m., it vibed major grief.

A bottleneck in Fat City. BHPD black & whites peeling out, lights and sirens. Two K-cars, two meat wagons, two news vans.

Crutch followed the cop cars. They peeled up through the biz district and hit the rare-air zone. The grief vibe intensified: more K-cars, choppers, cops with leashed bloodhounds. He cut west on Elevado. Traffic was dead-stalled. He saw a big bluesuit swarm outside Hate House.

He ditched his car and ran there. He dodged stalled cars and cut across front lawns. He sprinted down the neighbor's driveway and monkey-climbed the fence. The bluesuit swarm expanded. There's the statues and the bomb shelter and Dr. Fred. He's on a blood-soaked gur-ney. He's got shotgun pellets and scorched bone for a face.

The bluesuits saw him. He recognized some guys. Someone yelled, "Crutchfield, go to the station!"

Clyde was there. Ditto Phil Irwin. Ditto Phil and Clyde's Jew lawyer, Chick Weiss.

The Detective Bureau hall was packed. BHPD murders ran one per decade. It was a roundup. The fuzz were hauling in Dr. Fred's KAs.

Clyde said, "It's just routine. They saw my name, Phil's name and Crutch's name in Dr. Fred's appointment book."

Chick said, "It's got to be one of his ex-wives. He was married seven times. I did all his divorces. He was the biggest alimony defaulter on the planet."

Phil said, "Live by the sword, die by the sword. I think it's black militants. He wrote all these anti-coon tracts, so the coons waxed his hate-monger ass."

Crutch flashed on Gretchen/Celia. Crutch flashed on Joan.

Crutch flashed on the cash-stuffed clothes bin.

Clyde said, "Nix on the militants, but it plays like a shine caper. I talked to the watch commander. He thinks it's that boogie heist team that robbed those people in Brentwood."

Chick said, "I'm a boogie art connoisseur. I dig Caribbean statuary. That doesn't mean I dig boogie 211 PC's."

Phil said, "Live by the sword, die by the sword."

Clyde rolled his eyes. Chick said, "As your lawyer, my advice is don't reveal shit. Dr. Fred was dirty in countless fucking ways. You don't want guilt by association."

The intercom buzzed: "Donald Crutchfield. Captain's office, please."

Crutch walked over. The door was ajar. He stepped inside. Dwight Holly was standing there.

"Hello, Dipshit."

Crutch shut the door. *Confluence*, Clyde's word, *it's who you know and who you blow and how you're all linked*.

"People keep calling me that. I keep trying to show them otherwise."

"It's the bow tie with the polo shirt. It's hard to see through to the real, dynamic you."

Crutch leaned on the door. His chest throbbed. Bile crept up. He felt like he looked green. Dwight Holly tossed him an antacid mint. He caught it and popped it. Dwight Holly winked.

"Wayne explained the stalemate you created. I said, 'Let's kill him anyway,' but softer minds prevailed. If you want to look for that woman who skimmed Farlan Brown, swell. Obey orders, you live. Disobey them, *c'est la guerre*."

Crutch shut his eyes and saw Dr. Fred faceless. Triple-aught buckshot. Big game–stopping loads. He tasted blood in his mouth. He'd bit his gums raw.

Dwight Holly said, "Mr. Hoover wants this homicide short-shrifted. Some jigs pulled a robbery and it got out of hand. Dr. Fred was a Bureau informant, a hate peddler, a dope fiend and a compulsive pussy hound. It was a high-risk lifestyle, and the world will not mourn. Are you starting to see your role in this?"

Crutch opened his eyes. "He had a bomb shelter. There was a big hamper full of—"

"The shelter was ransacked and the money is gone. *Some jigs pulled a robbery and it got out of hand*. They'll blow the money on dope, Cadillacs and mink coats for their bitches, they'll continue pulling robberies until some white cops shoot and kill them. Now, are you starting to see your—"

"Don't tell BHPD about the Gretchen Farr gig. Don't mention Dracula or Farlan Brown. Lie. Dissemble. Prevaricate. Don't bring up you, Wayne, Freddy O., Mesplede, or any other dipshit-killer friends you might have. Don't embarrass your pansy boss, Mr. Hoover."

Dwight Holly grinned. "I thought I detected a brain there."

Crutch swallowed some blood. Dwight Holly tossed him another mint. It fell short and hit the floor.

"May I ask you a question about your tie and your haircut?"

"Sure."

"Do you have an unseemly crush on Sergeant Robert S. Bennett?"

Crutch said, "Fuck you."

Dwight Holly roared.

37

(Las Vegas, 9/15/68)

Files, graphs, lists. His suite was a chem lab/paper mill.

Teamster Fund book loan defaulters. Deadbeats and stiffs. Transaction files and credit sheets. Debit-projection files and cost-analysis studies.

Wayne read files and jotted figures. He worked with a scratch pad and three different pens. His back hurt from hunkering down and his fingers hurt from writing. His eyes hurt from file reads and column-figure scans.

Let's co-opt the Steve's Kingburger chain in Akron, Ohio. Let's buy a mall site in Leawood, Kansas. Let's co-opt the Pizza Pit chain and wash casino skim through it. Let's annex three low-life clubs in South L.A.: The Scorpio Lounge, Sultan Sam's Sandbox and a dyke den named Rae's Rugburn Room. Let's grab the Peoples' Bank of South Los Angeles, for its laundry potential. Let's usurp Black Cat Cab. It's an all-cash biz, it's near the Peoples' Bank, it's close to the border and our foreign-casino sites.

Wayne put his pen down. He was wiped. He got off the dope that got him through West Vegas and the Grapevine. He got through his sobbing fits over Janice. He was getting fit again. He was getting impervious, because—

He was working.

He was mediating and colluding. He was working for Carlos Marcello and for and against Howard Hughes. Drac's hotel spree was forestalled by Justice Department edict. Tricky Dick would put the skids to that, should he prevail at the polls. His dirty-tricks squad would lend support.

He was dispatching. Jean-Philippe Mesplede was set to scout casino-site countries. Mesplede was a mixed-bag *grande plus*. He was tireless and competent and prone to sentimental gaffes. He let the numbnuts kid live. The kid's fail-safes were borderline sound. Borderlines were tenuous. He projected Dipshit's life span as roughly six months.

The kid was a shit magnet. So was he. So was Dwight Holly.

Dwight called him yesterday. His news: the Fred Hiltz homicide. Mr. Hoover wanted it entombed. That was good: Drac and Farlan Brown might get offshoot publicity. He told Dwight his Don Crutchfield story. Dwight said, "Should I kill him?" Wayne said, "Not yet."

He yawned and grabbed *The File*. It ran four pages. Dwight pulled strings and shagged it for him.

LVPD–Clark County Sheriff's: Missing Person Case #38992. Reginald James Hazzard/male Negro/DOB 10/17/44.

Scant and bleak. Pro forma: missing colored kids rated zilch.

Reginald Hazzard was a high school honors grad. He took college classes, worked in a car wash, kept his snout clean. The cops interviewed a few neighbors, learned zero, case closed.

The folder was unscuffed. The paper smelled new. It was an un-visited and un-mourned document.

He'd called Mary Beth three times. She never answered. He called at one-day intervals and let the phone ring twenty times.

He put the file down. He hesitated. He dialed her number again. He got four rings and her near-brusque hello.

"It's Wayne Tedrow, Mrs. Hazzard."

She near-laughed. "Well, it's good to hear from you, but I can't say I'm surprised."

"Can we get coffee?"

"All right, but I'll bring it."

"Where?"

“That first rest stop on I-15. I shouldn’t be seen with you.”

The then to now blurred. This rest stop and the rest stop near Dallas. Sand drifts and scrub balls then. Desert grit now. Wendell D. in pimp threads. Similar rest-room huts blurred seamless.

Wayne pulled in. Mary Beth sat in a ’62 Valiant. It was midday and crowded. She’d parked away from the other cars. Wayne leaped in her car. She smiled and slapped the steering wheel. The horn beeped. Wayne banged his knees on the dashboard.

“We’re not fugitives, you know.”

Wayne said, “You could make a case for it.”

She handed him a paper cup with a napkin attached. The bottom was seeping.

“I forgot to ask for cream and sugar.”

“Any way’s fine with me.”

“Are you always so accommodating?”

“No, I tend to be a bit peremptory.”

Mary Beth smiled. “I know. I saw Buddy Fritsch on Fremont Street yesterday. He was wearing a splint on his nose.”

Wayne held the cup two-handed. The coffee was too hot. He sipped it slow. It was pure busywork.

“My friends think you’re crazy.”

“What do you say to them?”

“That men who want things from you usually give you things or show you things, which is the same as telling you things flat out. I say, ‘Mr. Tedrow has something to tell me, and he doesn’t have the words, but he sure knows a gesture.’ ”

Wayne put his cup on the dashboard. It rocked and sat still. He turned toward Mary Beth and laced his hands over one knee.

“Tell me about your son.”

“He made me wish there were two or three more of him, which coming from a busy-making person like me says quite a bit.”

“That describes your feeling for him. I was thinking of your assessment of him as a young man.”

Mary Beth sipped coffee. “He was a reader and a chemistry dabbler. He went on binges with books and his chemistry sets. He was trying to figure out the world with his mind, which I respected.”

A car pulled up next to them. A white couple gawked. Wayne said, “And the police investigation?”

“About what you’d expect. It came and went in about half a day, so Cedric and I hired a private detective. His name was Morty Sidwell, and I think he did an adequate job. He checked death records and police and hospital records all over the country and became convinced that Reginald was still alive. We ran out of money after a while, so we had to let the whole thing go.”

The white people kept staring. Wayne kept looking over. Mary Beth said, “Let it go. I don’t think I can take another gesture from you.”

Wayne hitched his seat back. It freed up his legs. Mary Beth put her cup on the dashboard.

“President Kennedy was killed a few weeks before Reginald disappeared. He was very upset.”

The white people drove off. Dad did some double-clutch thing and kicked gravel their way.

“Do you remember where you were that weekend?”

Wayne looked at her. “I was in Dallas.”

“Why?”

“I was trying to find Wendell Durfee.”

“And?”

“And I found him, and I let him go.”

More cars pulled in. It got claustrophobic. Wayne jittered up and broke a sweat. Mary Beth put her hand on his knee.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 9/16/68. “SUBVERSIVE PERSONS” Summary Report. Marked: “Chronology/Known Facts/ Observations/Known Associates/Memberships & Organizations.” Subject: KLEIN, JOAN ROSEN/Numerous Unknown Aliases/white female/DOB 10/31/26, New York City. Compiled: 3/14/67.

1.—Summation: SUBJECT JOAN ROSEN KLEIN must be viewed as a seditiously anti-American figure with pervasive connections to dangerous radical organizations across a wide left-wing ideological spectrum dating back over 20 years. She has been a “community organizer,” a planner of “protest marches” for numerous subversive causes, an instructor at dubious “Freedom Schools” that espouse Communist Party–line doctrine, and, most pertinently, a strong ally of radical-Left groups that have advocated the violent overthrow of the United States government —i.e., THE SOCIALIST WORKER’S PARTY, THE STUDENTS FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY and THE REVOLUTIONARY ACTION MOVEMENT. These organizations have announced their solidarity with violent black-nationalist organizations, the BLACK PANTHER PARTY and US, marking them as Level-4 security risks. SUBJECT JOAN ROSEN KLEIN has also been suspected (unproven) of participation in armed robberies in Los Angeles in 1951 & 1953/no further information available, and of two 1954 armed robberies in Ohio & New York/no further information available.

SUBJECT JOAN ROSEN KLEIN’S grandfather, ISIDORE HERSCHEL KLEIN (1874–1937), was a wealthy emerald merchant and left-wing polemicist who donated large amounts of money to anarchist groups, radical pro-labor groups & Communist Front causes. His son JOSEPH LEON KLEIN (1902–1940) was a confirmed radical zealot, as was his wife HELEN HERSHFIELD ROSEN KLEIN (1904–1940). Their 1940 deaths left SUBJECT JOAN ROSEN KLEIN orphaned. She resurfaced during the war years and was detained for Alien and Sedition Act violations, disorderly behavior at Communist-organized protest rallies and was photo-surveilled at nationwide meetings of the COMMUNIST PARTY USA, SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY, STUDENTS PEACE UNION, LEAGUE FOR INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY, TRADE UNION UNITY LEAGUE, and at various rallies for exiled

Communist sympathizer Paul Robeson. SUBJECT JOAN ROSEN KLEIN is rumored to have authored the most virulently anti-American literature distributed by the above-referenced organizations.

2.—SUBJECT JOAN ROSEN KLEIN considers herself to be an itinerant academic by trade and recently (1962) taught at a radically funded "Freedom School" adjunct of the University of Southern California, where she allegedly mentored Negro students in chemistry and physics. She has heavily cloaked relationships and mail-drop correspondences with numerous left-wing college professors who serve to facilitate her meetings with other like-minded subversives inhabiting the Communist/Socialist/Radical underground. SUBJECT JOAN ROSEN KLEIN travels extensively abroad (most likely under false passports), has allegedly spent time in Communist Cuba (in violation of travel-ban edicts) and allegedly has ties to the Communist-backed 6/14 Movement in the Dominican Republic and has written anti-American, anti-Dominican polemics excoriating the alleged mistreatment of Haitian peasants by "U.S.-backed fascist interests colluding with Dominican despots in the genocidal war against Haiti." These polemics were allegedly co-authored by a Dominican woman known only by the first name of "Celia."

3.—SUBJECT JOAN ROSEN KLEIN is known to have traveled extensively within the continental United States and is often flown (by wealthy fellow travelers) to insurrectionist hot spots to confer with radical leaders and advise them how to best achieve their ends. Her sub-specialty is the recruitment of the naïve college students who attend her "Freedom School" classes, and she has been rumored to have assisted many young people in "dropping out" and assuming "underground identities." Subversive-meeting-group index logs and photo-surveillance logs note SUBJECT JOAN ROSEN KLEIN'S attendance at loyalty-oath protest meetings in Los Angeles on 8/30/50; Free the Rosenbergs rallies in New York City in 6/52; rallies of the INDEPENDENT PROGRESSIVE PARTY in Boston in 11/51. SUBJECT JOAN ROSEN KLEIN was also spotted at Communist-backed rallies for the Stockholm Peace Petition in 14 U.S. cities in 1950.

4.—More recently, SUBJECT JOAN ROSEN KLEIN has mediated "peace pacts" between rancorous left-wing factions and (primarily white) groups allied with black-militant groups. She was allegedly the author of a 200-page pamphlet advising the YOUNG SOCIALIST ALLIANCE in their “Violent Workers War to Overthrow the State of Indiana.” SUBJECT JOAN ROSEN KLEIN has (1966) worked as a “disk jockey” at the left-wing radio station Radio-Free Dixie and was recently spotted (photo-surveillance) with members of the violent radical group the WEATHER UNDERGROUND. Four issues of their Communist-influenced newsletter, “The Weather Report,” bear her byline. SUBJECT JOAN ROSEN KLEIN is also rumored to be adept at maintaining “safe houses”—i.e., hideouts for violent fugitive radicals.

5.—Known Associates: [redacted]

6.—SUBJECT JOAN ROSEN KLEIN (current whereabouts unknown) must be considered a Level-4 security risk and should be put on the all-city alert for frequent mail intercepts, photo surveillance and possible regular stints of 48-hour detention. (Periodic updates to follow as new information accrues.) Routing #1499684/Central Records/Washington, D.C. SA Holly: please return by Inter-Bureau mail cover.

38

(Los Angeles, 9/19/68)

I*t's her hair.*

The gray streaks. No concessions for forty-one. Her bare arms to spotlight the knife scar. She vibed her age, she dressed mature, she eschewed kid aesthetics. The scar was sufficient Fuck You.

They lit cigarettes. Their booth was big and wraparound. Ollie Hammond's was pre-lunch slow.

Joan Klein said, "You haven't mentioned the pay."

Dwight sipped coffee. "A thousand a month, cold. Spend a hundred a week getting next to our targets. Buy food for the Feed the Kiddies scams, so the brothers can allot more money for guns and dope."

"And my duties beyond that?"

"Report in full, be discreet, don't forward information that could only have come from you. *Protect your informant status*. Warn me in advance of potential violent crime and any specific talk of actions against police officers."

Joan smiled. "Beyond the usual 'kill the pigs' chatter?"

Dwight smiled. "Specific pigs, tell me. Nebulous, honky-pig-motherfucker bullshit, I can do without."

It's her glasses.

The black frames, the loose fit, the dips down the bumps on her nose.

Dwight said, "You know Karen Sifakis."

"I know *of* a woman named 'Karen the Bombmaker.' She knows people who know people who know me. *You* know all about cutouts, mail drops and dead-letter fronts."

Heartburn—Dwight popped two mints. A persistent waiter hovered. Dwight glared him off.

"I've read your file."

"I figured you had."

"It's threadbare and full of inconsistencies. I can't tell if you're a red-diaper peacenik or an armed-robber manqué."

Joan blew smoke rings. "Assume both and there'll be fewer surprises."

Dwight stubbed out his cigarette. "No court filings, no paperwork. Four suspicion rousts, no DR numbers to indicate dispos—"

"Four robberies in cities undergoing labor strikes. Random roundups of Smith Act violators, names on Red Alert sheets, cops out for some fun."

Dwight poured them fresh coffee. "Did you roll over on any of your comrades?"

"No."

"How long were you detained?"

"It varied."

"Were you physically threatened?"

"A cop in Dayton, Ohio, hit me with a phone book."

"Your reaction?"

"An injudicious comment about his mother."

Dwight laughed. "And then?"

"They put me in a tank with some bull daggers. One girl was cute. I liked the kisses, but she moved a little too fast to suit me."

She spoke precisely. New York lurked in her vowels. She shifted her voice patterns—a skilled dissembler's trait.

Dwight said, "I've never rebuffed an amorous dyke in a holding tank."

Joan said, "I stabbed her with a fork. The tines cut through her cheek and lodged in her upper palate."

Dwight quashed a grin. Joan sipped coffee. She had a gaunt up-all-night look.

"How will we communicate?"

"Phone drops for now. Tuesdays at 10:00 a.m. The pay phone at Silver Lake and Effie."

"I have a teleph—"

"You're being disingenuous, Miss Klein. I don't want to know where you live, and I'll find you when I need you."

"Will you guarantee me no random detentions and no photo-surveillance hassles?"

Dwight shook his head. "No. If I ask that favor, the other L.A. agents will know you're working for me. I've already flagged your file with a false listing. As of last week, you were creating woo-woo with some militant fucks at UC Davis."

She didn't smile. He wanted her to. Her smiles leveled her harshness.

"May I tell you what I won't do?"

"I'm listening."

"I won't inform on young people who come in for a lark and get out when things get ugly."

"You're assuming they'll get ugly?"

"Yes, aren't you?"

Dwight said, "Not like you might wish. I don't foresee armed revolution in America, I don't see street-corner punks like the BTA and MMLF as the vanguard of anything more than a few fistfights and pimp rousts."

Joan smiled. Her harshness leveled *up*.

"Then why are you working so hard to suppress them?"

"Because they're driven by criminal design, because I despise disorder, because Mr. Hoover told me to."

"Because their antics will discredit the black-power movement at large. Because the better-known groups are more of a threat, but they've ingratiated themselves with the press. Because black militancy has achieved a degree of mainstream acceptance and you're trying to take it back to the gutter."

Dwight looked at her. She smiled for him. Her teeth were lipstick-smeared.

"I haven't asked you why you're doing this."

"For the money? Because suppression never works in the end? Because I'll find some people and shape their views in ways you'll never be able to assess, and Mr. Hoover will be paying me to create revolution on an undetectable level that will never make its way into any file he can gloat over at 3:00 a.m., when warm milk, cookies and Seconal don't work."

Dwight smiled. "You're very well informed."

Joan smiled. "One of Mr. Hoover's former housekeepers has a son in the Panthers. He's a gifted cartoonist. He did four panels on Mr. Hoover at bedtime. He peruses surveillance photos of well-oiled young black men sunbathing, and Aunt Jemima has to knock before she brings in her goodies."

Dwight slapped his knees. His elbows banged the table and dumped a glass. A waiter zoomed up and blotted the spill.

Joan said, "It wasn't that funny."

"I'll disagree there."

"You're very impolitic."

"Mr. Hoover and I share a history. Humor helps sometimes."

"Tell me about it."

Dwight shook his head. "Tell me about that scar on your arm and why you're so proud of it."

Joan shook her head. "I'm working on a new version. Something subtle and racist-inspired. Something the BTA and MMLF will groove on."

"You could tell me the truth."

"Utilitarian fictions are more my style."

His stomach churned. Dwight chased two mints with coffee.

"Who redacted your file? Your 'Known Associates' section has been inked, so you must have informed Federally."

Joan lit a cigarette. "I've informed, yes. I've never informed Federally, so there must be some names in there that some other Federal handler wanted deleted."

Dwight said, "I'm not sure I buy that."

"I don't care what you buy, Mr. Holly. We're both here to buy and sell, and I'm sure we'll create repression and revolution in a fucked-up, but somehow complementary fashion."

It was her smell. She was sweating. Her soap scent was gone. Her armholes were damp.

"I have a few specific questions, Miss Klein."

"All right."

"How will you get next to the BTA and MMLF?"

"I run a safe house. I've already made arrangements for the BTA to stash some guns there."

"And you won't tell me the address?"

"No."

Dwight said, "Here's your first test. You borrow the guns, fire them into acoustical baffling and bring me the spent shells. You replace the guns, so that I have the spents to run comparisons on."

Joan said, "No."

Dwight said, "Then there's no deal. Then I run a fifty-state detention sheet on you."

She squeezed the table ledge. Her fingers throbbed. The whole table shook.

"I won't reveal the location of the house, but I'll get you the shells."

"How do I know they'll be the right ones?"

Joan smiled. "Because you trust me?"

Dwight placed a plastic-wrapped block of cocaine on the table. Powder puffed out a stretch hole.

"Make some Commie spooks as happy as you've just made me."

Karen said, "I've never met her, but I've heard about the scar."

They were in bed. Karen was showing full-on. Dwight put a hand on her belly. Eleanora kicked twice.

"Tell me."

"It was that riot at the Paul Robeson concert in Peekskill. I think it was '49. Joan tangled with some Legionnaires."

Dwight turned on the desk fan. The bedroom air churned and stayed warm.

Karen said, "I saw a news spot on Dr. Hiltz. Remember, you told me you knew him."

Dwight nodded. "The Bureau bootjacked the investigation."

"Why?"

"He was a paid informant."

"Like me?"

"Less effective, more volatile and capricious, less politically astute."

Karen smiled. "That's one of the sweetest things you've ever said to me."

"You must love me, then."

"Well, I'll think about it."

They fell toward each other and found the fit. Dwight drifted with that smell, that harsh smile, that gray hair.

39

(Minneapolis, 9/22/68)

HHH in ’68! HHH in ’68! HHH in ’68!

The Twin Cities were Hubert turf. Scando types jammed the Berglund’s Bazaar lot. Four hundred hayseeds. A good midday toll.

Fifty hippies stirred up shit. They were Clyde Duber recruits. They jabbed horror placards high. Dig it: gooks on fire, napalmed kids and U.S. jets trailing ooze.

Cheers and jeers: HHH! and hippie hate. Peace doves and slant kids with flame-flecked hairdos.

Crutch and the Frogman watched. They glommed the protest punks off Clyde’s left-wing front list. They paid them with maryjane and ten-spots. They hosted a poster party last night. Froggy served pizza, beer and weed. Crutch was the art director. He cut up magazines and found some swinging fascist pix.

The rally droned on. The roar accelerated: HHH! HHH! HHH!

Security guys plowed a path to the bandstand. Humphrey and some fatso pols wobbled between them. Crutch yukked. Froggy grinned. Dig it: we slipped THC in your breakfast coffee.

Humphrey charged up the steps and caught his foot on the platform. A security geek rescued him. The veep got his legs. He had blissed-out eyes. His fly was down. His BVDs showed. Chuckles circulated. Hubert addressed the crowd. He slurred his words. He said something like, “My fellow Abyssinians.”

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They had a two-bedroom suite in St. Paul. It was full-boat on Howard Hughes. Room service ran twenty-four hours. They noshed New York strips, stuffed mushrooms and peppermint ice cream. The Frogman served Pernod and THC-laced cookies. They always got zorched and talked CUBA.

Mesplede was a broken record. Yeah, but that record *spun*.

LBJ, Nixon, Hubert—sissified sob sisters all. *Heroin*. We sell it, we buy guns, we depose Fidel. It worked in Vietnam. Betrayals deep-sixed Tiger Kadre. They’d run a tighter Krew now. Froggy was Wayne Tedrow’s casino front man. He’d be cruising for the right right-wing country. Their sites would be Cuba-close.

We sell Big “H.” We hook an island clientele. We make gun money and run speedboat missions. We rape the coast and kill Reds.

Crutch said, “I want in.”

Froggy said, “My friend, I guarantee it.”

Crutch pointed to his bow tie. Froggy said, “Your numbers will increase, once we determine our casino-site location.”

Crutch swilled Pernod then. His peripheral vision fritzed. Froggy showed him his scalping knife. He’d scalped thirty-one Castroite fucks.

Travel lodging. He festooned the bedroom walls for his two-night stays. He kept his Joan Klein pix in his wallet. He taped up a big Cuba map and tossed darts at militia installations.

Crutch tossed and missed, tossed and hit. The surrounding walls got dart-dinged and pocked. He’d memorized most of the village names and all the roads into Havana. Memo: buy a scalping knife, just like Froggy’s.

Crutch stared at the Joan pix. His Pernod/cookie buzz had him seeing new things. He’d talked to Clyde. Clyde’s take: the Dr. Fred snuff did not play into the Gretchen Farr caper. The Feds usurped the inquiry. Jack Leahy was running it. Jack's take: it's that jig heist gang. They robbed that Brentwood house, they hit Dr. Fred next.

Crutch got panic pangs. Dwight Holly said, "Is there anything you're not telling me?" Crutch lied and said, "No." *Nobody knows about Horror House. Nobody knows about Gretchen Farr as Celia Reyes or about Joan Rosen Klein.* He clued Buzz Duber in to one lead: Farlan Brown's airline-stew revelation. Buzz was working that lead in L.A. now. He was checking airline offices with Crutch's sketch.

Pernod and THC. The bedroom walls wafting peach to magenta. Still no make on the dead woman's tattoo. Still no make on the wall markings. He broke into Arnie Moffett's office again, en route to the airport. He reransacked the house-rental files. He got more zero on Gretchen/Celia and Joan. He'd leaned on Arnie *baaaaaaad*. The cocksucker probably dumped their file post-beating.

His fuck-up-Hubert gig was now three cities in. He'd checked three local PD Intel and Robbery files. Zero—no mentions of Joan Rosen Klein.

Crutch dart-bombed the Bay of Pigs and Havana. His weird high got him all swelled up and misty. He taped the Joan pictures above his bed. The wall colors shifted—magenta to tropic sunrise.

Another shopping mall lot today. Last night's news: "Exhausted Humphrey makes policy gaffes." This gig was that gig re-psychedelicized. Froggy said he learned some shit in Chicago.

The crowd ran three hundred. They ran porky and Minnesota blond. They were noisy. They talked liberal rah-rah. HHH emoted on placard fronts. He tried to look studly. He failed. He looked like your pedophile coach.

Crutch and the Frogman stood beside the speaker's platform. A cheer went up: *He's coming! He's coming! He's coming!* Crutch saw Humphrey and some flunkies approaching, stage left. Four cops trailed them by four paces. Mesplede waved three fingers. Three moonlighting Teamsters waved back.

They opened canisters on the QT. They squatted on the QT. They poured liquid wax on the ground beside the platform. The shit was neutral-colored. It slithered and spread.

Four paces, three, two, one—

Humphrey and his flunkies slipped, slid and slalomed up the platform steps. Hubert did Frug and Wah-Watusi moves just to stay upright. The crowd yukked. Two cops pratfalled. The crowd re-yukked. A fat cat hugged Hubert. Hubert's look said "What's *this* shit?" The fat cat spoke into the microphone. More yuks leveled his spiel. Crutch signaled a guy by the platform. The guy toppled and mock-convulsed. The fucker was double-jointed. He kicked his arms and legs out at right angles. Alka-Seltzer foam dripped from his mouth.

Hubert fans yelled for help. Seizure Sid did his shtick. A fat babe jammed a frozen Mars bar over his tongue. Some chumps yelled, "Get a doctor!" and "Man down!" The crowd dispersed. Hubert fumed and tried to express compassion. The fat cat futzed with the platform mike. Reverb went *screeeee*.

Crutch signaled three groups in mid-crowd. Three fistfights broke out. The crowd *re*-dispersed. Two skinny nuns bopped the fighters with their PEACE NOW! signs.

Hubert stamped his feet. The cops flailed on liquid wax. Their fat jiggled. They looked like honky pigs in nigger hate cartoons. Hubert did that V-for-victory thing.

Froggy signaled a blonde in go-go boots and tight jeans. Crutch handed her a Nixon sign and boosted her up onstage. Froggy waved to three groups of men. They started whistling and chanting, "Take it off!"

Hubert stood there. The fat cat dry-popped Digitalis. Some fresh cops charged the fistfighters. The peacenik nuns got trampled. Cops charged the platform. Liquid wax sent them sprawling. The blonde waved her Nixon sign. The crowd went nuts. "TAKE IT OFF!" went epidemic. The blonde pulled off her shirt and bra and did the Swim, the Fish and the Mashed Potato topless. Crutch kicked on a hi-fi gizmo under the stage. Dig it: Archie Bell and the Drells with "The Tighten Up."

A fuckload of cops charged the platform. Mesplede walked away. Crutch grabbed the discarded bra and sprinted.

Back to L.A.

Crutch killed time at the airport. The Frogman split to Miami on an earlier flight. The boarding gate featured a phone bank.

Crutch called Clyde Duber Associates collect.

The secretary put Buzz on. Buzz said, “We got a lead.”

“What are you—”

“That picture you drew. I got a make. PSA Airways, the fourth place I hit. The personnel director said, ‘Bingo, that’s Janet Joyce Sherbourne, and she was one all-time no-goodnik.’ ”

Crutch got out his notepad. “Slow, now. Tell me the story.”

“It’s some story, and it hooks in to the Dominican Republic. Remember? Gretchen Farr got those answering-service calls from the Dominican consulate.”

Buzz knew *that* part. Buzz knew shit per Gretchen as Celia or Celia’s Dominican—

“Hey, are you there?”

“I’m here. Come on, tell—”

“Okay, the Sherbourne cooze was a bilingual stewardess. She worked the L.A. to Santo Domingo run exclusively, right up until that fucked-up little war in ’65, when LBJ sent the marines in. Okay, so there’s a layover in Mexico City, and the Sherbourne cooze gets caught with a gun and a half-dozen fake passports. Okay, she fucking wiggles out of custody, and nobody knows *how*, and *then* she vanishes off the face of the earth. *Now*, here’s the good part, the part that is just so fucking perfectly Gretchie. It turns out that the cooze’s job application was a complete fake, her fucking address was some kind of Commie safe house, and her personnel file got snatched from the PSA office.”

Crutch let the phone drop. Buzz talked to dead air. Things went haywire. He saw Joan kiss Gretchen/Celia in slow motion.

The downtown library was near his file pad. The books were too big to steal. The Dominican Republic: maps, pix, history.

Memo: the D.R. was close to Cuba. Memo: the mob grooved the D.R. as a would-be gambling site.

Crutch lugged books over to a table. Dozing winos competed for space. He scoped out the map pages. He grokked the layout. The island of Hispaniola. The D.R. and Haiti on one slab of land. The Caribbean Sea, close to Cuba and Puerto Rico. Close to Jamaica and the Turks and Caicos Islands. *The Dominican connection: all over his fucking case*.

The D.R. bordered Haiti eastbound. The Massacre River formed the dividing line. Inlets dotted the coasts of both countries. All the city names were spooky spic and frog.

Crutch skimmed summary chapters. The race shit hit him quick. The Dominicans were light-skinned beaners. They grooved on their Spanish roots. Dark-skinned Dominicans were déclassé. It was like the U.S.: *white is all right!*

Rafael Trujillo had long political legs. He ruled from ’30 to ’61. He quashed dissent. He oppressed Haitians and slaughtered the fuckers en masse. He was pro-U.S. and anti-Red. He fucked lots of women and tortured and suppressed his political rivals. A Commie group called the 6/14 Movement tried to oust his ass in ’59. Their “revolution” went *pfft*. Trujillo went schizo and veered out of line. He was sacking the country too overtly. JFK and the CIA thought he might go Red. The CIA whacked him in ’61. The Frogman allegedly assisted. A less garish despot named Juan Bosch took over. “Free elections” and all the standard spic-reform bullshit. It looked like Bosch was veering Red. LBJ sent some marines in and nipped that shit in the bud. The current despot was a pint-size punk named Joaquín Balaguer. The D.R. was nothing but coups, revolts, plots, intrigue, slaughter.

Crutch hit a section on Haiti. *Woooo!—baaad nigger juju!* French-speaking spooks. Dictator “Papa Doc” Duvalier—Godzilla to Trujillo’s Rodan. More oppression, coups, revolts, plots, intrigue, slaughter. Voodoo—oh, yeah!

Voodoo rites, voodoo rituals, voodoo curses, voodoo priests. Mind-blowing voodoo liquor and voodoo herbs. American spooks *ate* fried chicken. Haitian spooks fucked chickens and drank their hot blood.

Woooooo!

Crutch flipped pages. This voodoo shit was a gas. He hit a photo section. Spooks were capering and bopping around in chicken-feather hats. *Woooo, then there’s this*—

This photo. This light-skinned Negro guy. This weird tattoo on his right arm.

Geometric patterns. Crosshatched. Like the tattoo on the dead woman in Horror House—

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(Las Vegas, 9/26/68)

The Boys sported golf shorts with high black socks. They wore their cleated golf shoes indoors.

Carlos set the trend. It was *his* mock-Roman suite. He paced and punctured the carpets. Sam G. had dull cleats. He did minor damage. Santo T. had sharp cleats. His spikes raped the rugs.

Wayne stood by a covered easel. The Boys sat with 10:00 a.m. Kahlúas. Carlos twirled a five-iron. Wayne caught the Wayne Senior subtext.

Sam said, "We've got a 10:40 tee time."

Santo said, "Carlos, put the club down. Do not drag Wayne through memory lane in a way that might tend to torment him."

Carlos said, "I have no such intention. I'm just loosening up my fibular bones."

Sam said, "Have two more drinks. You'll leave your swing on the driving range and a grand a hole in my pocket."

Santo said, "Chop, chop, Wayne. You've got this tendency to perch, like there's a dark cloud over your head at all times."

Sam said, "There is. As much as I admire his rough edges, Wayne is a shit magnet."

Carlos twirled his club. "Go, Wayne. We came to listen."

Wayne cleared his throat. "The fall is going our way. Nixon's ahead in the polls, our dirty-tricks squad is doing good work, Mr. Hughes is pleased with his hotel purchases and is waiting for Mr. Nixon's Justice Department to loosen up a few anti-trust statutes, so that he can buy some more. Jean-Philippe Mesplede is ready to start scouting casino sites, so we're on-go there."

Sam said, "My friend Celia keeps lobbying for the D.R. She's relentless on the topic."

Carlos said, "Sam's relentless on the topic of that island-bred snatch."

Santo said, "Sam's relentlessly pussy-whipped. It's a disease of the weak mind and spirit."

Sam grabbed his crotch. "I got your disease hanging ten inches."

Wayne undraped the easel. The graph was cross-columned. It listed buyout businesses linked to profit projections.

"Three supermarket chains, all in the Midwest, all owned by the in-laws of made men and Teamster stewards. We purchase at five cents on the dollar and sell the land to mall developers. I think we'll realize fifteen million in profit."

Sam clapped. Santo clapped. Carlos twirled his golf club.

Wayne said, "The Peoples' Bank of South Los Angeles. They're way in arrears, but I think we should let them continue to operate, while we take a greatly enhanced profit percentage. One, it's a money-laundering front. Two, they can launder *our* money. Three, Lionel Thornton, the president, is mobbed up all over the map, and I think we can control him. Four, it's close to the hub for the Hughes flights to our casino sites, so we can fly cash straight in, unimpeded."

Carlos said, "I like it."

Santo said, "I like it, but I don't like the jungle-bunny aspect."

Sam said, "I like it, with a proviso. We keep Wayne off the premises, so he don't shoot all the customers."

Wayne flushed. Santo and Sam laughed. Carlos twirled his golf club.

Wayne tapped the easel. "Two more South L.A. businesses, with on-site illegal gambling that we can take *at least* 50% of, while resuming ownership of both enterprises. The first one is a nightclub named Sultan Sam's Sandbox. The second is a lesbian bar named Rae's Rugburn Room."

Sam yukked. Santo yukked with "nigger something" mixed in. Carlos poked him with the golf club. Santo shut up.

Wayne picked up a pointer and tapped the column lines. A toga fool brought in three fresh Kahlúas. The Boys imbibed. Carlos poked the toga fool with the golf club. The toga fool vamoosed.

The booze smell made Wayne queasy. Sweat pooled on his shirt.

"Black Cat Cab. South L.A., as well. Tiger Kab served us handsomely in Miami and Vegas, and Pete B. sold the Vegas end to Milt Chargin last summer. We'll use it for cash flow, cook the books and launder low-end skim through it. I think I can talk Milt into coming to L.A. to run the place. Beyond that, I've got a friend on the Feds who's running a Cointelpro in the area, and we'll have Milt log tips and feed them to him, which will keep Mr. Hoover on our side."

Sam said, "I know your friend."

Santo shuddered. "Dwight 'the Enforcer' Holly."

Carlos sipped Kahlúa. "A man with coon-hunter credentials of his own."

Sam said, "Yeah, which is not to say that he's in Wayne's league."

Santo sipped Kahlúa. "*Nobody's* in Wayne's league."

Carlos said, "Dwight's a white man."

Sam sipped Kahlúa. "So's Milt Chargin, for a fucking Jew."

Carlos sipped Kahlúa. "Milt's an amateur comedian. He'll be hobknobbing with the shines and having a high old time."

Sam said, "Milt told me a good one. 'What do you call a naked nigger sitting alone in a tree?' "

Santo sipped Kahlúa. "So tell us the punch line, dickhead."

Sam said, "The branch manager."

Santo howled.

Carlos twirled his golf club. "What's the matter, Wayne? You're not laughing."

Morty Sidwell had an office at 2nd and Fremont. He did bail bonds, divorce, missing persons. LVPD considered him kosher.

Wayne drove over. He was tracking Reginald Hazzard part-time now. A cop pal ran a fifty-state dead-body check. It hit negative. Ditto for arrest reports. Ditto for male Negro John Does, late ’63.

Reginald was bookish. Mary Beth told him that. Wayne combed the checkout files of all the Vegas libraries. *Bam*—the kid checked out twenty-nine books in fall ’63.

Advanced-chemistry texts. Books on left-wing political theory. Odd books on Haitian voodoo herbs.

Sidwell’s office was above a topless joint. Wayne parked out back and took the exterior stairs. The club noise was brutal. Amplifier hum shook the walls. Bass thumps pulsed the floorboards.

Morty was sprawled on the couch. The office was hot. Morty wore a washcloth on his forehead. He saw Wayne and went *oy vey*. The walls featured Morty-and-friends art. There’s Morty with Dino, Morty with Lawrence Welk, Morty with the late JFK.

Wayne straddled a chair. Reverb wobbled the slats. It was a social-protest song with a sexy dance beat.

Morty adjusted his washcloth. “Earplugs don’t help, so I tried acoustical baffling. The owner and I settled on a compromise. Once a week, he sends one of the girls up. I get a sponge bath and a header. It’s beneficial to my overall health.”

Wayne said, “My name is—”

“I know who you are. Your daddy hired me to run a *schvartze* bongo player out of town in ’58. He was a one-hit wonder. ‘Bongo in the Congo’ and no more. He was *shtupping* your stepmom, Janice, at the Golden Gorge Motel.”

Wayne laughed. Morty said, “Condolences, though. I know they both passed away last summer.”

Wayne shut his eyes and popped two aspirin. The chair slats rattled. The floorboards jumped.

Morty said, “Normally, I’d say ‘How’s tricks,’ but with you I know they’re always tricky. This tempts me to say, ‘What do you want?’ ”

Wayne opened his eyes. “Reginald Hazzard. It was almost five years ago. The kid disappeared, the parents hired you to find him.”

Morty yawned. “Yeah, I remember. Nice colored folks. Cedric and Mary Beth. Cedric got offed by a *shvoogie* hump named Pappy Dawkins. It’s a real load of joy you’re bringing me, I got to say.”

“What happened with the investigation?”

"It went nowhere and my clients ran out of money. I ran some DB checks and told them that, to the best of my knowledge, the kid was still alive. That's it, over and out."

Tick, tick, tick—his old cop shit detector.

Wayne said, "There's more."

Morty said, "Nix."

"There's more, you know there's more, I know it, I'm not leaving until you tell me."

Morty pulled the washcloth over his eyes and held up three fingers. Wayne dropped three C-notes on his chest. The amplifier hum accelerated. The JFK picture shook.

Morty said, "The Hazzard kid hitchhiked out of Vegas. I'm talking like Christmas '63 or into the new year. He gets popped for vag at some little pissant shitkicker town on the California border, and don't ask me the name, because there's a zillion little bumfuck towns like that and I really can't remember. Sooo, Reggie's got a gun on him. Sooo, the cops book him for vag and a gun charge and beat the piss out of him. Soooo, this white woman shows up and bails him out, and Reggie and the white woman abscond, never to be seen again. It was a cash bail and a fake ID, and the case went cold and Cedric and Mary Beth ran out of coin. I told Cedric this, but he said, "Don't you tell Mary Beth, 'cause all of this would just kill her.' "

Wayne said, "More details." Morty held up two fingers. Wayne dropped two yards on his chest.

Morty chewed a hangnail. "Soooo, it's a fucked-up little redneck PD. They don't keep records. The cops come and go and run wetback fruit-picking crews on the side. They live to drink home brew and beat up beaners and coloreds, and whatever paperwork they had got lost, misplaced or stolen. Those cops comprised a grim experience for me, and that's all the news that's fit to print."

Wayne stood up. "Did you get a description of the white woman?"

"That I can give you. She was supposedly pale and in her late thirties, she wore glasses, had long dark hair with gray streaks, and a cop said something about a bad scar on one of her arms."

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(Los Angeles, 10/1/68)

Minstrel Show.

Marsh Bowen worked. He *owned* Vince & Paul's. The white cops' bar done got BAAAAAAAAD BROTHERED.

Marsh was seven nights in. He spawned racial *tsuris* with soulful aplomb. The white cops knew *he* was a cop. That got him in. That did not excuse his black-power stud behavior.

Marsh with the muscle-man tank top. Marsh with the modest Afro. Marsh all over the white chicks—but no hard moves yet.

Dwight watched.

It was his seventh night. He perched near the bar and played tourist from Des Moines. No cops recognized him. Who's that big goofball? He sure likes this place. He wears sandals and high-water pants.

Hate was building. Dwight tracked it. *Who dat bell-bottomed Mandingo*? Scotty Bennett showed up every night. Scotty boozed, Scotty eyeballed Marsh, Scotty acted covetous and puerile. Scotty radar-tracked Marsh and his barmaid girlfriend every spare moment.

Dwight picked at a cheese puff. Marsh chatted up two cop-groupie stews. He shagged hors d'oeuvres off their plates and sipped their drinks uninvited. The girls *looooved* it.

Dwight watched. The Marsh Bowen gestalt intensified. Marsh was a preener and a player. Marsh might be duplicitous. Marsh should be preemptively spot-tailed. Tail-job prospect: that half-smart Crutchfield kid.

Dwight yawned. His stomach growled back. Food fucked with his mental momentum. Niggertown was seething. Jack Leahy fed him gossip. All this militant shit gored the LAPD's gonads. Off-duty cops were indulging klantics. Station-house tune-ups. Panthers waylaid and shit-kicked. Trumped-up dope busts, trumped-up drunk rousts, trumped-up warrant checks and—

A woman walked into the bar. Dwight saw gray streaks and glasses and clenched up. It kept happening. Wisps, blips—and it's never *Her*.

Marsh walked toward Scotty's girlfriend. He touched his chin—*the signal/it's now*. Scotty was eye-locked: back and forth, his babe/the buck slave.

Dwight got up and stood closer. Marsh swooped on the girlfriend. There, he's nuzzling her neck. There, he's licking her ear. There, he's tugging her earring with his too-bright teeth.

Scotty ran up behind him and grabbed his hair. Scotty kidney-punched him, two-handed. Marsh doubled over and spun around with an arm bar raised. He caught Scotty moving in. The jolt knocked him into the bar. Scotty grabbed his neck and sucked air in. He kicked out. He missed Marsh. He flailed at the bar top and grabbed a steak knife. Marsh stepped directly in front of him. Marsh smashed his nose with one flat palm and sent blood pluming. Dwight heard bones break. Scotty dropped the knife, wiped his eyes and came at Marsh biting. A dozen white cops got to him first.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/16/68. Extract from the journal of Marshall E. Bowen.

Los Angeles,
October 16, 1968

I've tasted Scotty Bennett's blood now. It was a much-belated revenge for the whipping Scotty put on me in April of 1966, a year before I joined the LAPD. I provoked that beating by passing several ink-stained bills from the robbery, and I provoked this beating of Scotty and my subsequent beating by his LAPD comrades under the flag of Special Agent Dwight C. Holly. On both occasions I assumed the dual roles of victim and provocateur. Two events, with two and a half years between them. The defining event of the robbery-murders, now four years and eight months in the past. Two confrontations fueled by one motive: I want to solve the robbery-murder case anonymously and keep the remaining cache of money and emeralds for myself.

I have never told a soul about my intention and have deliberately delayed the commitment of writing a journal. I was awaiting the fortuitous moment where my quest might appear truly feasible. That moment is now. I could have described my immersions in left-wing organizations for Clyde Duber, where I learned the acting skills, dissembling skills and poise that brought me to this point, but I'm pleased that I did not indulge that level of self-congratulation. I've always enjoyed being an underestimated black man, and now I'm a locally famous and somewhat over-praised and over-scrutinized black man. This is the adventure that I want to describe and dissect as I live it; this current confluence of events is surely the one story I have to tell.

I was severely beaten by somewhere between twelve and sixteen of my brother LAPD officers and spent four days at Central Receiving Hospital. My broken nose, facial lacerations and asymmetrically bent ears have enhanced my rather bland good looks and have added to my incipient black-militant cachet. I have Mr. Holly to thank for that. Mr. Holly sensed my gameness and willingness to play, and I will reward him with hard work and a very commanding performance as I pursue my own goals within the context of this operation.

The local newspapers, radio and television picked up the story of the horrible fracas between a black and a white policeman at a "convivial watering hole frequented by LAPD personnel." Mr. Holly served as the unseen publicity director for this event. The LAPD launched an internal investigation, and—of course—all the eyewitnesses lied, stating that I sexually accosted the barmaid and attacked Sergeant Robert S. Bennett proactively. Scotty got a broken nose and one week's "compassionate leave"; I was bound over for an interdepartmental trial board—i.e., a kangaroo court. Mr. Holly hired me a jabbery and flamboyant black lawyer reminiscent of Algonquin J. Calhoun of *Amos 'n Andy* fame. The lawyer spouted more racially charged malapropisms than the worst mail-order black preacher ever to bang a pulpit for power and profit. I was hosannaed as the "Black Jesus"; Scotty Bennett was excoriated as the "White Judas Iscariot." I was, of course, summarily fired from the Los Angeles Police Department. Mr. Holly later told me that the lawyer was a defrocked minister with a sinecure as a public defender in Visalia County. Gorgeous black-and-white collusion: white judges and prosecutors hire this man to assure the convictions of black clients they need to get off the streets.

I then became an oracle of racial bias, memorizing the blindingly articulate scripts that Mr. Holly wrote for me, withering critiques of institutional racism and the authoritarian mind-set—full of indignation, social rigor and righteous fury, all penned by a white lawyer cop with roots in the Ku Klux Klan. Mr. Holly read me through the scripts, well in advance of my speaking them. I was astonished and almost swoony. Mr. Holly is a big, handsome man and a powerful public speaker. I got the uncanny feeling that he actually believed the words he wrote as he was speaking them.

Mr. Holly is a very difficult man to decipher. He understands racial bias and says "jungle bunny" routinely.

I was invited to a fund-raising party for Senator Hubert H. Humphrey at a big home in Beverly Hills. Mr. Holly told me to go, so I did. I was quite the center of attention, until some movie stars arrived and eclipsed me. Natalie Wood made a fuss over my facial wounds and slipped me her phone number; Harry Belafonte shook my hand; numerous liberals boo-hooed the recent passing of Senator Kennedy and Dr. King. People looked to me for expressions of political outrage. I had none to give them, because

I now require Mr. Holly's script-writing services in order to sound properly enraged. I will soon be a wonderfully apostatized black-militant convert, because a Klansman's son will fuel my anger with his radical perceptions, leaving me to wonder at their origins and marvel at the man himself all over again.

Mr. Holly gave me $8,000 in cold FBI funds and told me to move farther south into the "Congo." I should start frequenting the "jig joints" where my "soul brothers" congregate, to see what kind of "shine action" I draw.

Mr. Holly calls me a "shit magnet," and I think he's rather suspicious of me. I'd like to indulge "the Bent" right now, but I can't. Mr. Holly might be having me spot-tailed. I have to keep my personal pleasures on hold until I feel more secure in my role.

I have an entirely new life now. My mother is dead; my father is elderly and living in Chicago. I have no real friends and my relationship with Mr. Holly is mutually usurious. I now have a dauntless and implacable enemy in Scotty Bennett. I'm sure that I know more about Scotty than Scotty knows about me. I have read the sanitized official reports on the eighteen armed robbers Scotty has killed in the line of duty. They were all black men. They were all summarily executed, per the unspoken LAPD mandate that armed robbers must die. The policeman in me condones this sanction; there is a large body of empirical data that states that most armed robbers take innocent lives and must be preemptively interdicted. It is the ghoulishly cherry-picked "male Negro" armed robbers that makes Scotty so unique. Other hard-charging Robbery cops have a middling "equal-opportunity" mélange of white and Mexican kills. Not our Scotty. Oh no.

Last August 5, two University Division officers shot it out with four Black Panthers. The officers survived, but the Panthers did not. Two days later, Chief Reddin sent Scotty down to the Panther headquarters with pizza, beer and a pound of confiscated marijuana. Scotty was, by all accounts, courtly. The Panthers welcomed him with apprehension and seemed befuddled by his gifts. Scotty advised them not to shoot at Los Angeles policemen again. Should they do so, reprisals would be instantaneous and brutal. For every L.A. cop shot at, wounded or killed, LAPD would kill six Black Panthers.

Scotty walked out then. He did not take questions or linger for a slice of pizza and an ice-cold brew.

My admiration and hatred of Scotty Bennett run roughly equal. He was there on February 24, 1964. He has no idea that I was there, too.

I was nineteen. I had graduated Dorsey High School two years earlier and was living with my parents at 84th and Budlong. The sky was the first thing I saw. There were weird prisms of color and a gas stench in the air. I stood on the roof of my house and saw streams of police cars approaching. The siren noise was near deafening. I saw a crashed-up armored car and a milk truck and dark shapes emitting fumes on the ground. I saw a very tall man in a tweed suit and bow tie drive up and survey the scene.

My father made me abandon my perch. Three dozen policemen roped off the street. Rumors soon flooded the neighborhood: the dead robbers were white; the dead robbers were black; the bodies were scorched past recognition and were racially unidentifiable. The absence of the robbers' vehicle meant that at least one man got away.

Two men got away. I know this as fact. Scotty Bennett may know it, as well. I cannot prove Scotty's knowledge. I simply sense it.

LAPD was out in brutal force. Scotty was running viciously indiscriminate roundups of local "suspects" at 77th Street Station. The local citizenry was outraged. *I* was outraged. I went roaming the alleyways behind my house, a kid looking for adventure, coveting my proximity to history. That is when I saw the second man.

He was hiding behind a row of trash cans. He was young, in his teens or early twenties, and he was black. His face was chemically scalded, but extra precautionary gauzing, a mouthpiece and a bulletproof vest had saved his life. I took the man to an elderly doctor neighbor; he was in shock and refused to discuss the robbery-killings at all. The doctor treated the man's burns, fed him morphine and let him rest. Scotty continued to steamroll his investigation. Detained and released "suspects" came home bruised and pissing blood. The doctor decided not to turn the wounded man over. He had saved the man's life and could not now condone physical abuse that might well result in his death.

The man left the doctor's house after two days of care and never divulged his identity. He left the doctor with $20,000 in ink-stained cash. The doctor deposited it in the Peoples' Bank of South Los Angeles and told the manager, Lionel Thornton, to leak it back to the community in charity donations, if it could be done safely, with no harm to the recipients. Thornton somehow found a way to partially obscure the ink markings; the bills surfaced sporadically in southside Los Angeles. Scotty Bennett tracked that money assiduously. He detained and leaned on the innocent people passing the bills in his unique and uniquely persistent manner. The case remained unsolved. The racial identity of the heist gang's leader and the other dead heist men has never been determined. Scotty had become obsessed with the case, and so had I.

The doctor died in '65. The ink-stained bills continued to circulate through southside L.A. I maneuvered my way into a menial job at the Peoples' Bank, learned nothing substantive and quit. Scotty Bennett fascinated me. I wanted to test my courage by going up against him and to see if he would reveal information within the brutal context of a back-room interrogation. I had pilfered a stack of ink-stained twenties from the bank and began passing them. Scotty found me, toot sweet.

The room was ten by ten feet and walled with soundproof baffling to keep screams at a dull roar. I protested my innocence. Scotty was genial when he wasn't beating me. He deployed a phone book and a rubber hose; he loosened my teeth and decimated my kidneys. I stoically asserted my innocence. Scotty revealed no inside knowledge of the case. I refused to scream. After two hours, I got my pro forma phone call. I called a friend; the friend called his friend Clyde Duber; Clyde made some calls of his own and got me out.

Clyde liked me. Clyde had his own fixation on "the Case." It's a hobby for him, no more. It's a consuming quest for Scotty and me.

I entered Clyde's kid-private-eye world and began infiltrating left-wing groups for his rich and richly paranoiac right-wing clients. I became a fine actor, prevaricator, dissembler, spy and snitch. I learned how to improvise, extrapolate and work off of Clyde's rough scripts. I have never had a role as demanding as the one Dwight Holly has prepared for me, and I have never had a scriptwriter as brilliant as Mr. Holly.

I joined the Los Angeles Police Department in 1967. Scotty tried to quash my appointment and failed. “The Case” remains unsolved. I remain determined. I’m convinced that the answer resides in southside L.A. I choose to believe a persistent ghetto legend: here and there, black folks in trouble receive a single, very valuable emerald anonymously in the mail.

I think Scotty knows more about the events of 2/24/64 than the rest of the LAPD combined. I think he wants the money and the lovely green stones for himself. I view OPERATION BAAAAAD BROTHER as nothing but a godsend, despite Mr. Hoover’s draconian intent. I have the perfect southside cover now. People will tell a radically reconfigured black militant things that they would never tell a cop. I must be very bold and very cautious, and work my way around Mr. Holly with the utmost circumspection.

42

(Los Angeles, 10/18/68)

Spot tail:

Marsh Bowen's pad, 54th and Denker, lace-curtain Niggertown.

It was Night #6. Dwight Holly hired him, through Clyde Duber. Clyde was unsure of Big Dwight's motive. Maybe Bowen vibed comsymp or security risk.

Bowen's sled was out front. He drove a '62 Dodge. Candy-ass wheels. Bowen was a nosebleed. He went to doofus parties and played Zulu chief. Bowen fucked with Scotty Bennett and got sacked off LAPD. It got him clout with loser liberals and showbiz Jews.

Crutch yawned. He'd clocked in at midnight. It was 2:06 now. He tilted the car seat back and scoped his dashboard frieze. He got the idea from Scotty.

Scotty had his heist pix all taped up. Crutch rigged his own version. There's Joan, there's a groovy D.R. beach, there's voodoo-vile spooks in Haiti.

The Bowen job torqued him and distracted him. It diverted work on his case and his dirty-tricks gig with Mesplede. Bowen was half-ass tail-savvy. It was like he sensed a car frogging him.

Crutch played the radio low. The tunes vexed him. It was all peacenik pap and jungle jive. Brainstorm: rig Bowen's car with a voice box and night-light.

He got out his toolbox, squatted down and ran over. He took a corkscrew and popped a hole in the left taillight. He taped a 9-volt battery voice box under the right wheel well and flipped the dial to Frequency 3. He ran back to his car and got out the receiver. Click—there's Channel 3 and current ambient sounds.

Crutch re-settled and re-zoned his head. He shined his penlight on the Joan pix. He had the knack now. He knew how to make those gray streaks glow.

Bowen walked out and got in his car. Night owl—2:42 a.m.

He pulled out. Crutch long-distance frogged him. That taillight hole supplied range and direction.

They drove. Crutch hovered six car lengths back. Coontown hopped. Bowen slow-cruised all-night rib cribs and bars locking up. LAPD was out BIG. Sidewalk dice games vaporized as The Man passed. Bowen drove by two black-power storefronts—BTA and MMLF. *You be window-shoppin? What be wrong wid you*?

Street noise bopped off Channel 3. The jungle be late-nite loud. Bowen U-turned and shagged ass westbound on Slaus on and northbound on Crenshaw.

Now, it's more white. Now, it's more civilized. Channel 3 is amping down. He's heading west on Pico, north on Queen Anne Place, right by the park.

Bowen bumped the curb and took the center walkway. Fuck—no way to frog close.

Crutch doused his lights and perched at the east curbside. The park was all wet grass, shrubs and trees. He eyeball-tracked the taillight hole and saw Bowen slow-weaving.

The light went off. The car sounds died. Crickets chirped on Channel 3.

Silence. Bowen's car door opening and closing. It's dark. It's all audio now.

More silence. Then two male voices. Then zippers snag and belt buckles rattle and all these scary moans.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/19/68. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: “Recorded at the Director’s Request”/”Classified Confidential 1-A: Director’s Eyes Only.” Speaking: Director Hoover, Special Agent Dwight C. Holly.

JEH: Good morning, Dwight.

DH: Good morning, Sir.

JEH: Do you feel like some campaign chat? The swing states appear close, but our boy Dick seems to be surging.

DH: I think he’ll win, Sir.

JEH: He applied to the Bureau in 1939. I saw his application photo and thought, That young lawyer did not shave closely this morning.

DH: And you altered the course of American history in the process, Sir.

JEH: I alter the course of American history every day, Dwight.

DH: You certainly do, Sir.

JEH: Update me on the shenanigans of our murderous French bonbon J. P. Mesplede and Clyde Duber’s upstart charge Crutchfield.

DH: They’re effective in a gadfly way, Sir. They’re due in Miami next, and I’m sure Mesplede will not be able to resist the lure of that pissant island 90 miles offshore.

JEH: You consider the Cuban Cause to be entirely moribund and existentially futile, don’t you, Dwight?

DH: Yes, Sir. I do.

JEH: I most assuredly do not. Castro has been in power since 1926, and he is a worse tyrant than his predecessors Chaing Kaishek and Cardinal Mindszenty.

DH: Uh, yes, Sir.

JEH: You sound dubious, Dwight. You do not normally falter during our snappy repartee.

DH: I’m fine, Sir.

JEH: You subsist on coffee and cigarettes. They have dulled your memory for established historical facts.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Would another rest cure at Silver Hill suit you? You might recall the first one. I pulled you off the Dillinger case in ’34. You were drunk and killed those Negro tourists from

Indiana.

DH: Uh, yes, Sir.

JEH: "Uh" twice in one conversation? I think you do require a rest cure of some sort.

DH: I'm fine, Sir.

JEH: Moving along, then. Please update me on the Dr. Fred Hiltz case.

DH: It's covered, Sir. Jack Leahy is overseeing the investigation for the Beverly Hills PD. There's no way the Bureau will be embarrassed.

JEH: I think the robber-killers are black militants on a rampage. They may well be consorts of a criminal cartel called Archie Bell and the Drells.

DH: I don't think so, Sir. Archie Bell and the Drells are a musical ensemble, and Jack Leahy thinks—

JEH: Jack Leahy is a duplicitous agent with a seditious sense of humor reminiscent of the late heroin addict/ comedian, Lenny Bruce. I track cocktail-party chitchat, you know. When I went in for my gallbladder operation, Jack Leahy told a Chicago agent that I was having a hysterectomy. This was in 1908, and I remember it well.

DH: So do I, Sir.

JEH: I know you do. You were working the Cleveland Office, then.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: And OPERATION BAAAAAD BROTHER? Unwittingly facilitated by the fearsome Sergeant Robert S. Bennett?

DH: My infiltrator and informant are both in place, Sir. I'm sure they'll be approached soon. I don't think my infiltrator is entirely trustworthy, so I've had Don Crutchfield spot-tailing him. Bowen's done nothing irregular, so I'm pulling the tail as of tonight.

JEH: Ah, young Crutchfield. Clyde Duber's most persistently voyeuristic foundling.

DH: He is that, Sir.

JEH: And Wayne Junior? Persistently homicidal and racially unlucky? How is he faring?

DH: I'm seeing him tomorrow, Sir. I would guess that he's grappled with this most recent mishap and has moved on.

JEH: We must all move on. Persistence and tenacity cure all one’s ills in the end.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Good day, Dwight.

DH: Good day, Sir.

43

(Las Vegas, 10/20/68)

S*he looked through you and saw you anyway. She made you look back.*

He told her his Morty Sidwell story. He stressed the redneck jail, the bailout, the scarred woman. Reginald's gun charge. Reginald's books. Her son's troika: chemistry, left-wing texts, Haitian voodoo herbs.

They perched at the rest stop. They sat in Wayne's car for more legroom. Mary Beth brought sandwiches and coffee. It was pouring. The rain covered them—nobody shot them cheap looks.

Mary Beth said, "What will you do now?"

"Keep going. Build a file. Learn what I can about this secondary life your son had."

"You wanted to say 'secret life.' "

"Yes, I did."

"Because you've got one yourself?"

Wayne sipped coffee. The cup burned his hands. Mary Beth got it fires-of-hell hot.

"I was reading you the whole time. The entire story was news to you."

“We’ve never discussed your occupation. You talked to Howard Hughes and broke the color line, but I don’t know what you do the rest of the time.”

A gust hit them. The car swayed. Mary Beth grabbed the dashboard bar.

Wayne said, “I facilitate things for Mr. Hughes and some gentlemen with similar interests. I spend a fair amount of my time with police officers and political operatives.”

Mary Beth sighed. “ ‘Secret life’ is a euphemism. I’m seeing a secret world here.”

“I can’t tell you much more than that.”

“You deal with people I’d disapprove of. Let’s leave it there.”

Wayne messed with the defroster. It was a jumpy-hands task. The car got too cold or too hot. Mary Beth hit the Off slide and held his hand there.

“Last summer?”

“Yes.”

“Three of our loved ones died. The man who killed my husband was posthumously indicted for killing your father.”

Wayne slid his hand back. Mary Beth pinned it there.

“We never discuss it. You always bring up Reginald. You haven’t allowed me to mourn, and you haven’t done much mourning yourself.”

Wayne coughed. Mary Beth laced their fingers up. His legs fluttered.

“I don’t want us to live with all these dead people. We’ve had too much of that. I’ll be spending some time in southside L.A. soon, and I’ll be putting out some feelers on your son. He’s nineteen, he’s armed, he gets popped at a town on the Nevada-California border. My instincts are telling me L.A.”

Hailstones hit the car. Wayne jumped. Mary Beth said, “Why are you so afraid of me?”

Dwight said, “Hoover’s slipping. The old girl is in precipitous fucking decline. He’ll be shacking up with Liberace by this time next year.”

Wayne smiled. “You could retire and go into corporate law.”

Dwight smiled. “You could retire and teach basic chem at BYU.”

The Dunes lounge was mock-soothing. The mock-oasis look cohered. Mock sand drifts, mock camels at a chlorinated spring.

Wayne said, “The Dr. Fred job. What’s the status on that?”

Dwight tiki-torched a cigarette. “The same jigs robbed a house in Newport Beach. No fatalities, but the same glove prints and identical fibers at the scene. I think they saw Dr. Fred’s anti-spook shit. Things just escalated from there.”

Wayne sipped club soda. “I could use some help on the L.A. end of my business. The Peoples’ Bank and Black Cat Cab have defaulted their Teamster loans, so we’re taking them over. I think Black Cat would be a good informant hub for you. I was thinking you could get Mr. Hoover to frost potential trouble there.”

Dwight stood up. He was losing weight. His belt gun drooped to one side.

Wayne said, “No racial slurs around me, Dwight. I’d very much appreciate it.”

“Sure, kid. I’m not out to hurt you.”

Home was the Stardust. He had his living suite/chem lab upstairs. He’d need to rig a missing person file space soon. He ate in the downstairs coffee shop most evenings. It brought back Janice and his night-watch cop days.

Wayne worked on a cheeseburger. The coffee shop was integrated now. He coerced Dracula into compliance. Drac was devolving à la Mr. Hoover. Call it dope and longtime lunacy accruing. Farlan Brown confirmed the prognosis. LBJ thwarted Drac’s Vegas designs. Tricky Dick would comply. Farlan passed along gossip: the Count just suborned some key Humphrey aides. It covered him, poll-wise.

The burger was overcooked. The black folks two booths over got rude service.

Mesplede and Crutchfield were tricksterizing in Miami. Sam G.’s lawyers were buying out the defaulting market chain. He called the boss at Black Cat Cab this morning. A buyout chat was set for next week.

A black family walked in. Two white waitresses vanished. The hostess pretended they weren’t there.

Wayne walked up to his suite. The door was ajar. He pulled his ankle piece and eased the door open.

The living room lights were on. Mary Beth was on the couch. She wore a lovely beige dress.

“Ghetto skills and union connections. I bribed a chambermaid.”

Wayne reholstered. Mary Beth said, “Your laboratory smells more toxic than Reginald’s ever did.”

Wayne shut the door and pulled a chair up. Their knees were close. He slid the chair back. Mary Beth moved closer in.

“Why do you carry a gun?”

“I wish I didn’t have to.”

Mary Beth opened her purse. “I got something very strange in the mail today. It was sent anonymously. The oddest thing. It was wrapped in a newspaper clipping about my husband and Pappy Dawkins.”

The names burned for a second. Wayne held on her eyes. Mary Beth pulled out a wad of newspaper and unwrapped it. A green stone was tucked in the middle. It looked like an emerald.

It sparkled and glittered. Wayne stared at it. He leaned in to look closer. Mary Beth put her face up to his.

“We can’t hold hands outside or do public things. I don’t want to know about the bad things you do.”

They were close. He lost her eyes getting closer. She touched his lids and shut them for him. Their noses bumped as she brought him in for the kiss.

44

(Los Angeles, 10/22/68)

NEGROFICATION:

The sartorial arm of OPERATION BAAAAD BROTHER. Marsh Bowen needed fashion tips. His colors clashed. He looked like a sepia lollipop. Evil niggers dressed all *Black*. It covered them by nightfall and offset their bright teeth.

Dwight slipped Marsh three C-notes. “New threads. I want to see you with that Eldridge Cleaver look. You be steppin’ out o shadows like fuckin’ Dracula to announce yo wicked intent.”

Marsh palmed the money. They idled outside the observatory. A telescope bank looked south. L.A. was smoggy and harshly lit. Griffith Park broiled.

“You’re a fine mimic, Mr. Holly.”

“Your people make it easy.”

“I’ll take that as a personal complim—”

“Here’s the compliment you’ve been so persistently anxious to receive. You have acquitted yourself brilliantly to this point, chiefly because your altercation with Scotty Bennett had mo muthafuckin’ soul than I ever could have hoped for, and as such you are the heroic black man of the L.A. ghetto moment, which allots us a very short interval for you to be recruited by the BTA and/or the MMLF. You cannot join up, Officer. Your actions must draw them to you or you will arouse an undue level of suspicion. *You're an actor*, Officer. You have the actor's instinctive need to ingratiate, so you require stern direction to shape your performance. I doubt that you possess a moral core, so let me bypass the idea of that sort of compass to guide you. You must appear bold and exercise great caution. You must judiciously rat out your new friends and benefactors and make sure that there are other snitch suspects for the information you have proffered. Use your discretion pertaining to any lowdown you might have on major crime pending. No homicide, no armed robbery, no sex shit on women or children. And do not give your former brethren in the LAPD a context in which to kick yo black ass, because they most assuredly will."

Marsh swiveled a telescope and looked southbound. He always made his face blank and rode out confrontations. He always did offhand shit to hide his fear.

Dwight jerked the telescope. The eyepiece banged Marsh. He regrouped and went instant blank-faced.

"Here's your target list. Get next to Ezzard Donnell Jones, Benny Boles, Leander Jackson, J. T. McCarver, Jomo Kenyatta Clarkson and Claude Torrance. Call me every fourth day at the phone drop until I find you a cutout. Start hanging out at Black Cat Cab and Sultan Sam's Sandbox, start attending the Friday night crap game at the barbershop on 58th and Florence."

Marsh smiled. It verged on a simper. I'm above all this.

"Is there anything else?"

"Yes, there is."

"And that is?"

"It's this. You're undoubtedly the luckiest nigger on God's green earth."

"Because you're my director?"

"Because you're too publicly notable for Scotty Bennett to kill."

Joan handed him the shells. Six spents with baffling treads attached. She drove a '61 Karmann Ghia. The plates looked counterfeit. The headliner was trashed from poor upkeep or backseat fucking.

The Elysian Park cutoff. Near the LAPD Academy. A sweet view and an implied threat.

Dwight said, “How do I know they’re the right shells?”

“Because you trust me?”

It was chilly now. Joan wore long sleeves. Her knife scar was covered. Dwight missed the stimuli.

“You were on it faster than I thought you’d be.”

Joan lit a cigarette. “I thought you’d appreciate that.”

“I do.”

“I’m sleeping with Ezzard Jones’ girlfriend. She’s skeptical of the BTA. You’ll hear all about it.”

A spring-loaded sap was jammed between the front seats. The backseat was packed with leftist screeds. He smelled Joan’s shampoo and stale marijuana.

Joan said, “I consigned the cocaine to Leander Jackson. He’s a lovely Haitian man with an unseemly fixation on voodoo. He sold a few grams already. I gave my share to the MMLF’s breakfast program. Claude Torrance was grateful. He’s invited me to a series of fund-raising parties.”

Dwight smiled. “There’ll be brawls.”

“I know.”

“You’ll be groped, in a demeaning fashion.”

“I count on it.”

“Why?”

“I’ll stab the man who gropes me, with female witnesses present. They’ll groove on me and tell me stories about the men. It’s an MMLF party. Leander’s beholden to me now. He’ll be pissed when he hears I’ve been associating with the MMLF, but he won’t cut me loose, because he’ll dig the stabbing story and I’ll be the only female hanger-on who can score dope.”

Dwight grabbed his cigarettes. The pack was empty. Joan lit one of hers and passed it to him. Dwight smelled her hand cream.

She wore black boots. Her dress buttoned down to the hemline. The car was hot. Sweat pooled at the neckline.

Dwight said, “Who else have you informed for?”

Joan said, “I’m not telling you.”

“Why is your file so heavily redacted?”

“I’m not telling you.”

“Were those simply pro forma roundups, or were you at one time an armed-robbery suspect?”

"I'm not telling you."

"Give me the names of some known associates. I won't move on them. I'm just trying to get a handle on your history."

"Under no circumstances."

Dwight popped two aspirin. Joan pushed her seat back and rested her legs on the window ledge. An ankle bracelet rode up her calf, over the boot top. A little red flag on a gold chain.

Dwight smiled. Joan smiled. They blew lousy smoke rings and fumed up the car. Two LAPD sleds zoomed by. Black dudes were cuffed in the backseats.

Joan said, "There's a gym teacher at Manual Arts High School. His name is Berkowitz. He's a pedophile. I think you should reprimand him."

"Is this related to our operation?"

"Yes."

"I'd like more of an explanation."

"People tell me things that require me to respond. In part, that's why I'm working for you. I'm hoping you'll be amenable."

Dwight said, "I'll take care of it."

Joan said, "I'd like to see proof."

Dwight nodded. Joan drew her legs up and banged the horn by mistake. The noise was startling. They both laughed.

They met at a coffee cave on Hillhurst. It was near Karen's pad and the drop-front. It featured a kid's play alcove. Dwight dug it. It made him feel quasi-married.

Dina lounged in the alcove. Kids brought their stuffed animals. Karen kvetched her fate as the world's oldest mother. Dwight chewed gum. He quit smoking around Karen. It tempted her. He didn't want to mess up Eleanora.

Karen held her belly. She looked incongruous—this lean woman with this big bulge.

Dwight crumbled two aspirin and dropped them in his coffee. A new approach to stress headaches. Jack Leahy explained it. Vascular constriction, blah blah.

Karen said, "Nixon's going to win. He won't institute instant repression or do much of anything, which will infuriate my comrades fucking up the Humphrey campaign."

"It's all a little too convoluted for me."

Karen nibbled a sweet roll. “It’s entirely understandable to you, which means that something’s on your mind, or you wouldn’t be making such blandly disingenuous comments.”

Dwight laughed. “My infiltrator is running cocky. I’m going to have to knock him down a notch or two.”

Karen crossed herself. Hybrid faith. The Greek Orthodox girl gone Quaker. A waiter brought fresh coffee. Dwight crumbled fresh aspirin.

“Why’s Joan’s file so heavily redacted?”

“I don’t know. Have you asked her?”

“She won’t tell me.”

“Then let it go.”

“Her entire KA section has been blacked out.”

“Then some handler in her past did her a favor.”

“She said she’d never informed Federally before. There’s things she won’t tell me, something about—”

Karen knocked over his coffee cup. His hands got doused. His aspirin tin went flying.

“You’re tweaked on that woman. I know you. I’ve been reading you for months. Every instinct I have tells me that you’ve done some very bad shit lately, even by your fucked-up fascist stand—”

Dwight heard Dina crying. She’d heard Karen yell. Dina kicked at a mound of toys and ran from the other children. Karen chased after her.

45

(Miami, 10/23/68)

Hubert Humphrey deployed pidgin Spanish. Bilingual pols urged him on. The crowd was half white, half spic and all nonplussed. They were heat-wilted. The parking lot was sun-smacked and Hubert was a noon snooze. They craved cold beer and some yuks.

Mesplede stood mid-crowd. Crutch stood at the rear. They waved to the driver of a tarp-covered truck.

The truck pulled up to the edge of the parking lot. Crutch cued the driver. Three, two, one—the invasion force rolls out.

Two dozen out-of-work actors. More Clyde Duber plants. “Guerrilla Troupe” hambones done up as Fidel.

The beard, the boots, the green fatigues, the fat cigars—

“*Fidel loves Hubert! Fidel loves Hubert! Hubert loves Fidel!*”

Hubert stood there with his thumb up his ass. Eight Nixon-shirt guys jumped out of the truck and dispensed free beers. The Fidels circulated and passed out free cigars. The crowd went nuts. Crutch and Mesplede howled.

CUBA, CUBA, CUBA—Froggy talked it trilingual and *très grande* non-stop. Crutch kept thinking *D.R.* They rent-a-carred through Little Havana. They shared a reefer. Froggy kept saying "Cessna" and "coast run." Crutch kept seeing that photo in the library book.

The voodoo guy. The tattoo. The pattern like the dead chick in Horror House.

Mesplede passed the reefer back. Crutch took a last hit and ate the roach. They hit Flagler Street. The exile storefronts flew Cuban flags. Straw Castros hung from lightposts. Kids ran up and stuck pocket-knives in.

Crutch kept it zipped. He'd been talking D.R. like Froggy talked Cuba. "Keep it zipped." Dwight Holly told him that. He obeyed, so far. Marsh Bowen was a fruit. He kept *that* zipped. He bombed by Miami-Dade PD last night. He did file checks on Gretchen/Celia and Joan Rosen Klein. Froggy asked him where he went. He kept it zipped.

He was learning. His killer pals would respect that.

They drove to a rinky-dink airfield outside Miami. The crew was all Cuban. They were all diced and sliced from sugarcane work. Mesplede signed some papers and rented a two-seater plane. They took off and torched a joint at three thousand–plus feet.

Crutch got scared. The altitude cross-wired his high to acid-trip dimensions. He kept seeing people who weren't there. His mom did the Twist with Dana Lund. Blow-job Bev Shoftel blew Sal Mineo.

They flew low over Little Havana. Mesplede hit a lever and cut five thousand Nixon signs loose. Kids plucked them out of the air and flipped the plane off. Misplede dipsy-doodled south. They flew over a string of bridgeways and keys. Mesplede served Dexedrine chased with hash-spiked schnapps. Dig those brown cubes floating in white liquid.

Crutch imbibed. The cocktail re-cohered him. They flew out over the Caribbean. They passed two refugee rafts and dumped Nixon signs on them. The cocktail kept Crutch un-airsick. Mesplede pointed behind the seats. Crutch saw a Tommy gun with a hundred-round drum. He popped a bullet out. The tip had been dumdum-gouged and stuffed with rat poison.

Crutch got flutters. The cocktail had him anesthetized short of real fear. This big brown shape loomed. Froggy grinned at him. Crutch blinked. Now the shape's a pancake-flat island.

Froggy pushed the stick and brought them in low. They skimmed waves and water-bumped their wheels. Crutch saw the beach and some brownshirt spics ringed by sandbags. The spics were hunched over a .50-caliber machine gun. The thing had a vented barrel, feeder belts and a 360 swivel.

Froggy diversion-dipped and dove straight at them. The spics fired over, under and wide. Froggy came in ultra-low. The spics swiveled, re-swiveled and sent off panic shots. The noise was like typewriter clack meets the A-bomb.

Crutch rested the Tommy gun on his window ledge. Froggy got see-their-eyes low. Crutch head-counted eight. They were ducking and trying to swivel their machine gun in tight.

Crutch fired. He saw two heads explode. He saw one guy's ribs blow out of his chest and blood-blast a sandbag. Froggy cut through some low trees. Fronds buffeted the airplane and blocked their frontal view. Crutch fired behind him. Stitch shots, very precise. He got four guys standing together. He saw a tall guy's glasses shatter as his head pitched off.

Froggy pulled the stick back. Crutch saw Cuba upside down and held in his cookies. They flew backward over the ocean. He saw his eight new kills and that guy's head rolling toward the surf line.

Hangover. Blackout.

He didn't remember the flight back or the ride to the hotel. He woke up in his bed. Mesplede was still asleep. He walked down to the restaurant and sat outside. He ordered pancakes and a Bloody Mary and kept it all down. He re-wired his head and grooved the awe of it. He killed two Cuban Reds in Chicago. He'd just killed eight more. Two plus eight was ten. He was moving toward Scotty Bennett's toll.

A shade tree loomed over his table. Lovers had carved initials and honeymoon dates on it. Crutch got out his pocketknife and stabbed in "D.C." and "10."

He walked back upstairs. His bedroom door was open. Mesplede was sitting on the bed. His briefcase had been pried open. The summary report on his case was out in plain view.

Mesplede was on page 43.

Froggy had his gun out. Crutch gulped and brain-stalled for some lies. Froggy said, “You’ve withheld information twice. Your fixation on the Dominican Republic was a non sequitur that aroused my suspicion, so now you must tell me everything.”

So he did.

He started with the Dr. Fred/thieving girlfriend caper. He layered in Farlan Brown, Gretchen/Celia and Joan. Add Horror House. Add all his futile cop work. Add Celia’s Dominican roots and Haiti. Add the dead woman’s tattoo and the tattoo on the voodoo guy in the picture book.

Mesplede pulled out Crutch’s pocket atlas. It was open to the Caribbean page. He said, “Our agendas merge.” He drew a straight line between the D.R. and Cuba.

46

(Los Angeles, 10/25/68)

Black Cat Cab featured black velvet walls and a black-history tribute. The time line spanned the Black Jesus to the Black LBJ. The flocked-on icons were peeling. The air conditioning ran twenty-four hours and messed with the motif. The boss weighed 428 pounds. The hut was stalactite-cold, per his orders.

Cordell "Junior" Jefferson: entrepreneur, Teamster-loan defaulter.

Wayne said, "The Boys are calling in their paper, Mr. Jefferson. There's some good news within that context."

Jefferson squirmed in his chair. It was triple-wide. The room ran 50°. He was sweating.

"You're tellin' me I'm about two months behind, so I gots to take this?"

Wayne shivered. "You're three years behind, sir. Three years, but my news is not all bad."

Jefferson spooned ice cream from a half-gallon drum. Some

Panther types walked through the hut and evil-eyed Wayne. A big white man followed them. He radiated *Cop*. He wore a gray suit and a plaid bow tie.

Jefferson waved his spoon. “What’s all this motherfuckin’ good news you talkin’ about, while you tryin’ to pull the motherfuckin’ rug out from under me?”

Wayne opened his briefcase and tossed ten grand in Jefferson’s lap. Jefferson fondled it, smelled it and rubbed his face on it.

He snapped the rubber band holding it. He squeezed it into the world’s fattest flash roll.

Wayne said, “You hold the deed on the biz. We bring in a white guy named Milt Chargin to help you run things, you help some cop friends of mine out with information and dry-clean some cash, for which you get 7% of the action.”

“Suppose I says no?”

“Sir, you’re smarter than that.”

Jefferson ate ice cream and ruffled the roll. Wayne checked out the wall icons. He recognized the Black FDR and nobody else. A man with a triple-wide Afro walked in. He sneered at Wayne and went to the switchboard. Wayne pulled out a snapshot of Reginald Hazzard and flashed it at Fats. Fats shook his head no.

The Afro man tossed Fats a fresh tub of ice cream. Fats said, “Big Boy Cab is crowding *my* business. If *my* business is *our* business, then I could use some of *your* help.”

Wayne smiled.

Mary Beth was asleep. The covers were up over her back. One leg was exposed.

Wayne watched her. She always fell asleep before he did. She kissed him and burrowed off by herself and gave him something to see.

He pulled a chair up to the bed and touched her knee. He waited. He liked to see her turn her head on the pillow.

The lab phone rang. Wayne got up and ran for it. He grabbed the call two rings in.

“Yes?”

“It’s Dwight, Wayne.”

“Yes, and at midnight.”

“I’ve got a chemistry question.”

“All right.”

“Can redacted file paper be stripped to expose the typed words underneath?”

Wayne leaned on a shelf. It was crammed with heroin components.

“Maybe. I’ll try, if you get me some C-4 explosive.”

47

(Los Angeles, 10/26/68)

Darktown—85th and Central. An Afro-pride strip. A night club, a hair salon, a mosque. Street loafers at 2:14 a.m.

Among them: Jomo Kenyatta Clarkson.

Male negro, age thirty-nine. MMLF stalwart. Black Cat Cab dispatcher. “Propaganda Minister.” Hate-lit scribe. Suspected rapist/armed robber.

Jomo’s jiving with three male Negroes. They’re slurping peach liqueur and smoking Kool cigarettes. They just had their hair frizzed at Sister Simba’s shop.

Dwight was three stories up and directly across Central. The building was empty. He climbed the fire stairs and crouched behind a signboard. He held binoculars and a Poloroid pic.

The photo was Joan’s proof. He waylaid the pedophile gym teacher and did some sap work. Joan’s revenge or Joan’s deterrent. He didn’t care—it was the Joan Zone. Stray women were starting to look Joan-like. She was always Joan. She was never Confidential Informant #1189.

Dwight looked southbound. There's Marsh Bowen on his mandated late-night stroll. Dwight looked northbound. There's unit 4-Adam-29, slow-cruising.

Two white cops. Scotty Bennett idolaters. A C-note apiece.

On cue:

The cops sniff the Afro-pride strip. Jomo and the Jivehounds hide their jug. The cops cruise on. The jug reappears. Jomo and the Jigmeisters re-jungle-ize.

The cops see the lone male Negro. Shit, it's Marsh Bowen. *That's a good roust.*

The cops U-turn and pull over. The Afro-pride strip perks up. Party! Party! Let's groove social outrage and hate up The Man!

Sister Simba's empties out. Likewise the Scorpio Lounge. Jomo and the Junkyardogs electrify. Their Brillo-pad hairdos sizzle.

The cops exit their car. Marsh walks on by. One cop whistles, one cop yells, "Get back here." The spectators start making pig sounds.

Dwight's view was good. His soundtrack was bad. It was pig-snorted past comprehension.

Marsh walked back. Dwight saw the cops spread-search him and frisk him. He thought he heard "nigger" and "Scotty Bennett sends regards." He heard overlapping oinks, snorts and bleats. The cops emptied out Marsh's pockets. The cops goofed on his Afro comb. The spectators started chanting "Go, brother!" One cop shoved Marsh and jabbed at his chest. One cop yelled in his ear. The spectators cranked up their pig act. The verbal cop sprayed spit and goosed the volume. Dwight heard "nigger," "traitor," "nigger motherfucker" and "faggot."

Marsh lost it. He headlocked the verbal cop and ran him into a streetlight. The spectators clapped and Go, brothered. The pig noise went hi-fi. The verbal cop spun Marsh around and flipped him up on the patrol car. The other cop pulled his baton and started banging his head and his kneecaps. Marsh took a *BAAAAAAD BROTHER* beating. Jomo and the Junglejivers saw the whole thing.

48

(Los Angeles, 10/28/68)

Two dozen cabs. All bumper-locked, in rows. All with the Big Boy logo: a dinge in a fez like that dictator dude Sukarno.

The dispatch hut was off-site. The lot was half a city block. An all-night guard patrolled the premises. He always drank his dinner at Sultan Sam's Sandbox. Froggy slipped two yellowjackets into his last scotch. The guy was snoozing in a Dumpster behind Sultan Sam's now.

Wayne and Froggy called the shots. Crutch did the shitwork and took orders.

Wayne molded the C-4 and placed it in the wheel wells. Froggy set up the detonator. Crutch rigged the cords cab-to-cab.

The setup took hours. They worked from midnight to 4:00 a.m. Crutch got cramps from squatting down and duck-walking. They all sweated bad and carried towels to get some dryness. The C-4 looked like Play-Doh and smelled like burned oil. The cords abraded your hands.

All done—4:11 a.m.

They walked out to the street and toweled off. Wayne looked grim, per always. The Frogman was smiling. Crutch felt prom-date swoony.

Wayne pushed the plunger. The fucking cabs exploded and jumped off the ground. The noise was immense. A dozen shades of red and pink erupted. Glass blew across the sky.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/29/68. *Los Angeles Herald Express* headline and subhead:

NIXON-HUMPHREY RACE TIGHT
EX-VEEP HOLDS LEAD IN KEY STATES

DOCUMENT INSERT: 10/30/68. *San Francisco Chronicle* headline and subhead:

NIXON VS. HUMPHREY: POTENTIAL SQUEAKER?
PRANKSTERS DISRUPT HUMPHREY RALLIES;
AIDES ACCUSE NIXON CAMPAIGN

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/1/68. *Los Angeles Times* article:

MURDER OF HATE MERCHANT STILL UNSOLVED

The victim himself called his palatial Beverly Hills home "the House That Hate Built," so it's no surprise to many that Dr. Fred T. Hiltz, 53, former dentist, former golf professional and alleged FBI informant, should come to a horrible end in that very place itself.

On September 14 of this year, Dr. Hiltz was shotgunned in his backyard bomb shelter, and the crime has remained unsolved. There are suspects: a robbery gang who held wealthy families hostage in Brentwood and Newport Beach. But some local journalists and many assassination buffs take issue with that. Dr. Hiltz was a well-known purveyor of viciously worded hate pamphlets that attacked Caucasians as well as racial minorities, was rumored to have a backyard hidey-hole stuffed with cash, had been married numerous times and allegedly indulged in scores of liaisons with provocative women. Beverly Hills Police Captain Mike Gustodas told reporters, "Dr. Hiltz had volatile relationships, was in a dirty business and cut our work out for us, that's for sure."

Yet, it's the Los Angeles FBI Office that's doing the bulk of the work on the Hiltz investigation, and that fact is what so intrigues certain journalists and conspiracy theorists. Captain Gustodas had no answer to address that issue; he simply stated that the FBI had usurped BHPD's case for "national security reasons."

John Leahy, Special-Agent-in-Charge of the FBI's Los Angeles Office, told reporters, "Yes, it's a politically sensitive case, and there is a national security aspect, albeit a minor one. I'm not at liberty to divulge the details just yet, but there will be a full recounting when and if this agency makes an arrest."

An especially persistent rumor is that Dr. Hiltz was murdered by members of a black-militant group, as a political statement. SAC Leahy had no time for that theory. "I think it's ridiculous," he said. "No black-militant groups have claimed credit, and I also think that the danger of black militancy has been grossly overreported by the press."

Meanwhile, the Hiltz investigation continues.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/2/68. *Dallas Morning News* headline:

NIXON-HUMPHREY RACE DOWN TO WIRE

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/3/68. *Hartford Courant* headline:

NIXON, HUMPHREY IN LAST BARNSTORMING EFFORT

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/4/68. Extract from the privately held journal of Karen Sifakis.

Los Angeles,
November 4, 1968

Nixon's going to win. Humphrey is saddled with the attenuated onslaught of LBJ's war and the American people want a credible dialogue on the end of the war suffused with reactionary pap that will make them feel good about leaving (and, in fact, losing) the war, and Nixon is telling them exactly what they want to hear. Chicago was a disaster, not because it secured Nixon's victory, but because it made the Left appear rancorous, petty, vicious, divisive and buffoonish. *The sin of self-indulgence*. I must take note of my self-indulgent tendencies, and I should begin by classifying them as misconduct and thus drawing a clear moral line to interdict their practice.

Dina has started asking me the inevitable bright-little-girl questions about Dwight and W.H.N. and my relationship to the two men. Of course, I cannot tell her that W.H.N. and I are politically compatible, but not comrades, and we have never had a fully passionate relationship, but are friends in certain shared ideals and the business of parenthood. W.H.N. knows about Dwight, but never mentions him; the prescient and too-worldly Dina never mentions Dwight to W.H.N. because she knows it would hurt him and because she understands that it might adversely affect my relationship with Dwight. Dina will become a compartmentalizer (as I am) and may/will inherit my penchant for dramatic and dubious men. Dina likes Dwight more than she likes her father, because he is fierce with the world, but very soft with her, because he carries a gun, because I am demonstrative with Dwight in a way that I am not with her father and it makes her feel properly loved as a child and thus feel safe. And—brilliant girl—she understands something that I just figured out: that Dwight and I truly are comrades.

It's our lovers' passion and the tender barter of our antithetical roles and ideals. It's that we both want something (beyond each other) very deep and pure, and that I have a language for it, while he does not.

I keep thinking of troikas. Dwight, my largely absent husband and I are one. And, I now form the spark point of Dwight and Joan Klein. I'm not jealous, but Dwight is powerfully compelled by her. I have been less than truthful about my relationship with Joan, because I did not know how much of Joan's various real and rumored histories I should reveal to a man who is, at day's end, a police officer and a right-wing thug. Dwight told me early on: informants and operators withhold information to ensure their own safety and the safety of those close to them. That idea guides me in my lies by omission. Joan *was* an FBI informant at one time, but I don't know her operator's name or if he redacted her file. I have known Joan deeply for many years. Politically, I do not trust her any more than I trust Dwight.

I'm somewhat worried about Dwight. He's losing weight, is sleeping ever-more poorly and mumbles in his sleep. I keep jokingly asking him if I can blow up Mount Rushmore and he keeps *half*-jokingly telling me, “Yes.” He’s giving me too much latitude. Is it out of guilt? I keep thinking there must be some immeasurably horrible deed weighing on him that I must never know about, lest it destroy my love for him or make me love him that much more. I wonder how old Dina (and Ella inside me) will be when they discover that truth of women and men.

Dwight and I have our barters. I wonder what form Dwight’s barters will take with Joan. Our shared world is humanly unquantifiable and ideologically confused. Which one of them is capable of implementing the most recognizable harm or good?

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/5/68. Extract from the journal of Marshall E. Bowen.

South L.A.,
November 5, 1968

It was my second beating at the hands of my former—and future, once this operation has concluded—LAPD brethren. I fared better at my first one, for Mr. Holly’s script had prepared me. Mr. Holly failed to witness this second encounter, and my wounds will have healed by the next time we meet face-to-face. I may or may not tell him of the incident, critique my spontaneous performance and request that he not discipline the officers involved. I may or may not tell him that the incident resulted in my making some wonderful new friends.

My unlikely rescuer was Jomo Kenyatta Clarkson, Propaganda Minister for the preposterously named Mau-Mau Liberation Front, along with his friends Shondell and Bobby. Jomo is garrulous and recognizably psychopathic and continues to break the world’s land speed record for use of the word “motherfucker” in a single sentence. His arms bear self-inflicted machete scars as a tribute to the real Jomo Kenyatta’s slaughter of British settlers in Kenya, circa 1947. Jomo and friends took me to Morningside Hospital, where a friendly white doctor, who treated Jomo for his most recent gunshot wound, treated my wounds and injected me with Demerol. The injection dulled my pain, lifted my spirits and allowed me to stop replaying the words “Scotty Bennett sends regards” in a near-continuous loop. I wanted to go home and rest then. Jomo wouldn't hear of it. He decided we should go pub-crawling.

We visited a series of after-hours clubs. I met numerous black males in the all-black attire that Mr. Holly has urged me to purchase, found it fetching on them, but decided that it wasn't really my style. I witnessed a live lesbian sex show at Rae's Rugburn Room and was generally shown off by Jomo at Sultan Sam's Sandbox, Mr. Mitch's Another World and Nat's Nest. I geared up and performed; Mr. Holly would have been proud of me. I repeatedly described my beating by the "LAPD pigs" and never had to mention my ex-pig status, because I am a local celebrity and my former occupation subtextually pre-exists in the ghetto *spiritus mundi*. I kept saying ridiculous things like "Tell it like it is" and "Right on, brother" and never once burst out laughing. The rest of the night, following day and night are blurry. Jomo took me by his place of employment, the Black Cat Cab Company, where I watched the very fat owner eat an entire gallon of ice cream. I started to fall asleep at one point. Jomo force-fed me several spoonfuls of cocaine, which got me talking. It felt like an out-of-body experience spawned by alcohol, drugs, sustained shock and many weeks of barely controlled stress, excitement and wonderment, all filtered through what Mr. Holly has described as my "innate actor's instinct and flair." I critiqued the institutional racism of the LAPD specifically and white racist America in general and was conscious that I was shucking Jomo and his friends as I did it, as I concurrently believed it and did not believe it, as yet another part of me was off at another level of bifurcation, directing the performance and goofing on the whole thing. I can't recall exactly what I said, but I do know that I was speaking at the limits of my mental capacity and powers of articulation. In retrospect, it felt like demagoguery, social analysis and apostalic fervor all rolled into one. And the amazing thing to me—that Mr. Holly would not find amazing at all—is that I don't know whether or not I believe a word of it.

Black Cat Cab was followed by a visit to Jomo's "crib" on East 89th Street. Many people, all black, were there. I heard six dozen hate-the-fuckin'-LAPD-pigs stories, told that many myself, and met two men whose armed-robber brothers were shot and killed by "King Pig" Scotty Bennett. Jomo tried to pass a shapely toffee-colored girl with a tinted Afro off on me, but I excused myself with something about my “main bitch.” Jomo ensconced me in a room festooned with revolutionary wall posters and filled with stacks of fatuous polemics, and I fell asleep for a very long time.

My dreams were my standard ones and easily explained, given my life’s overweening fixation. There were the shapeless waves of green representing the emeralds and the odd spatial doublings and triplings of prone shapes, my persistently unconscious urge to discover what truly happed on 84th and Budlong that day. At one point, I thought I saw a white woman with dark, gray-streaked hair looking in on me, but she/it was just a wisp.

Two dozen people were sitting in Jomo’s living room when I stumbled out however many hours later. They gave me a standing ovation. It was a superlative reward for my performance.

I’ve moved to a dingy crib on the Watts border.

I’ve started spending time at Black Cat Cab.

My MMLF and/or BTA recruitment is imminent, but I am not rushing into anything.

I want this performance to last. It’s my circuit back to February 24, 1964. Every disenfranchised part of me knows this to be true.

49

(Las Vegas, 11/5/68)

Tricky Dick won. Close, but no squeaker. More than a rat's-cunt-hair win.

Carlos threw a bash. His mock-Roman suite, mobsters and Mormons, election returns on TV. Call girls told I-blew-JFK stories. Farlan Brown said Dick was no headman. He was more like an S&M slave. He'd get stinko and bomb some Third World shithole. He'd fry some little kids and get all misty then. He'd bring in a sick chick with a whip to retool him.

Sober guests waved little flags. Drunk guests wore elephant hats. The Hughes hotels shot off fireworks: Viva Nixon! in red, white and blue.

Wayne circulated. Farlan Brown showed him Dracula's thanks note. Drac praised Wayne's hard work and chemical assistance. He mentioned the Hughes charter flights to the foreign casino sites—let's get started soon.

More fireworks. The Landmark scrolled a neon Nixon face on their marquee. Farlan said, "The cocksucker still needs a shave."

Sam G. said, "The casino sites. We've got to send Mesplede down soon."

Santo T. said, “Nicaragua has this tendency to go Red.”

Carlos said, “Dick will put a pro-U.S. puppet in place. He knows you need a strongman to put the quietus on the Reds.”

Sam said, “The D.R.’s the ticket. They’ve had a stable government since the ’65 war. The new *jefe* is a fag midget. All he wants is some U.S. gelt and a nice pair of elevator shoes.”

Santo said, “Sam’s got this Dominican girlfriend leading him around by the *schvantz*. She’s got him thinking Dominicans are white.”

Carlos said, “Celia’s a coal burner. She crosses over into Haiti and gets that black stick.”

Sam grabbed his crotch. “Italians are built bigger than the moolies.”

Carlos said, “Where’d you get that?”

Santo laughed. “Pope John the XXIII told him. They were hanging out at a cathouse with some nigger nuns.”

Carlos handed Wayne a doughnut box. “Thanks for everything, *paisan*. Hughes, Nixon, the whole deal.”

The ride back took forever. The hotels went Nixon-nuts and put dumb signs up. Traffic jams resulted. Tricky Dick was Mormoned-up and mobbed-up. He was good for biz. The Boys bought themselves four fat years.

The Stardust was Nixon-numb. Legislators told I-know-Dick stories and puked into slot-machine cups. Wayne took the stairs up. He heard the phone ringing in the hallway. 3:00 a.m. calls—oh, shit.

He ran and grabbed it. He heard Mary Beth in the bedroom.

“Wayne Tedrow. Who’s this?”

“Long-distance, sir. Will you hold for President-elect Nixon?”

Wayne gulped. The line clicked twice. Wayne heard background hubbub and the Man’s voice.

“Thank you for all your hard work. Be assured of my cooperation.”

Click. What? Was it real?

Wayne walked into the bedroom. Mary Beth was watching TV. The Man did V-for-victory. A shirt button popped.

She killed the sound. “Who called so late?”

“You wouldn’t believe me.”

She smiled and pointed to the doughnut box. Wayne dumped it on the bed. Fifty grand fell out. Mary Beth whooped and covered her mouth.

“That’s my find-your-son fund.”

That lovely emerald was there on her pillow. Mary Beth threw it in with the cash.

50

(Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Washington, D.C., 11/6/68–12/24/68)

Nerves, brain loops, sleep on and off. Memphis kaleidoscopes mixed in.

One drink and one pill ran on-and-off insufficient. The Lorraine Motel shape-shifted. Hate cartoons transmogrified. Black gargoyles wearing Klan hoods.

Karen was concerned. She saw him running raw and couldn't stop it. What's-His-Name kept passing through and blitzing their time. Her pregnancy was advancing, she had more doctors' visits, she took her family back east for Christmas. She was tweaked on his tweak on Joan Klein.

Wayne was working on Joan's file redactions. The kid was a genius—maybe *he* could burn through black ink. He showed Joan the snapshot of the kicked-to-shit pedophile. Joan quid-pro-quo'd him à la Karen Sifakis. She gave up a Cleveland mail-bomb gang, a multi-indictment chart topper. He said, "Thank you, Miss Klein." She said, "You're welcome, Mr. Holly."

The snitch-out thrilled Mr. Hoover for six seconds. His attention span had shrunk to comic-strip dimensions. His monomania had grown to Russian novel–size. He hated black militants like he hated Reds in 1919. He talked black-militant woe real and largely imagined. He sent himself into coughing fits and fey tizzies. Dr. King was laughing his saintly black ass off in heaven. The boss nigger got resurrected as all niggers real and imagined and the old girl was powerless.

But he was still dangerous. But he still had dirt files on the whole fucking world—Dwight "the Enforcer" Holly included.

Mr. Hoover was pleased with OPERATION BAAAAAD BROTHER. Dwight told him that Marsh Bowen was being courted by BTA and MMLF. He did not tell Mr. Hoover that he paid two cops to kick Bowen's black ass. Bowen did not tell *him* about the beating and avoided face-to-face meetings until his injuries had healed. *Vanity* was the key to Brother Marshall E. Bowen. *Contempt* defined Brother Bowen secondarily. He was the diva with the abject need for an audience and the commensurate disregard. He was a brilliant and brilliantly complex actor. He would seduce, betray and entrap with insolence and show-must-go-on savoir faire.

The beating seemed to fracture his ego and instill a greater circumspection. The beating brought Brother Bowen some soulful southside strut. Now needed: a cutout to work Brother Bowen on a daily basis. He pulled Don Crutchfield's spot tails—Brother Bowen was toeing the line. The current boding question: will Brother Bowen cross paths with Comrade Joan Klein?

He called her "Miss Klein." He thought of her as "Joan." She possessed an eponymous quality. The gaps in her file and her reluctance to discuss her past enhanced his curiosity. She had traveled extensively. She facilitated left-wing woo-woo worldwide. Organizer, facilitator, armed-robbery suspect. Pamphleteer, informant, renegade academic.

Tell me what I want to know.

I don't know why I need it.

He gave Joan a scrambler phone. It let her call him untraced. She called him most nights. They observed informant-operator protocol while discussing their personal lives. He did not describe the full extent of his relationship with Karen Sifakis. Joan did not mention Karen at all. They did not talk business. They saved those discussions for their phone-drop chats. Joan told him that she had some money for him. He said, "What money?" She told him that Leander Jackson made a profit on Agent Holly's cocaine.

Comrade Klein felt that she should return her percentage. He told her to keep the money. She thanked him. It was all so fucking gorgeously decorous.

They sparred and talked politics. He paved roundabout queries on her past life and associations. Joan rebuffed them with occasional brusqueness and a harsh humor. The cop part of him was all over her. The rest of him was a faltering half step behind. Joan had run safe houses. They had to have been upscale and well camouflaged. She had avoided prison time. There should be more police paperwork on her. He scoured for paperwork on her left-wing ancestors and found none.

Karen shared her scant Joan knowledge with a distancing resentment. He was certain that Joan knew more about him than he knew about her. The disparity had him running breathless.

He was making coontown inroads. Wayne brought Milt Chargin in to help Fatso run Black Cat Cab. The white shtickster and the black behemoth clicked as a business team. LAPD chilled out the Big Boy Cab bombing—the owner was a hot-car fence they wanted nullified. The Dr. Fred snuff faded to back-page status. Jack Leahy greased some reporters with Bureau cash and said, "Let this go, all right?" That *L.A. Times* piece was the last major mention. Wayne scheduled a meeting with the Peoples' Bank prez. It might get ugly. The Boys wanted their bank back. The Feds wanted information.

He cruised darktown some nights. It wired him up and induced exhaustion and occasional pre-dawn sleep. Late-night ghetto life was deadpan seductive. Vice cops donned rubber gloves to manhandle tranny whores. Record stores played Zulu music and sold LAPD pig dolls. Cops bought the bulk of them and stuck them on their car antennas. He listened to revolutionary radio. Bootleg-band stations were broadcasting out of bars and Muslim mosques. He told Joan that his favorite song was "Blue Genocide" by Muhammad Mao and the Pig Hunters. Joan said, "Comrade Dwight, *you're learning.*"

He saw Scotty Bennett out cruising sometimes. Scotty loved soul food. Sister Sylvia's Kitchen fed him for free. Scotty always tipped lavishly.

There must be a BTA and MMLF war. Marsh Bowen must facilitate it. Narcotics must figure prominently. It has to stay short of catastrophe, or Karen will not forgive him. It has to get fierce. It has *to get him his mandated results and further Comrade Joan’s agenda. It has to take them both to the identical place—so that she will tell him where she’s been and what she knows.*

51

(Los Angeles, 12/24/68)

Merry Christmas.

He got the standard card and five-spot from his mother. This one: postmarked Racine, Wisconsin. He brought his dad the standard C-note and Reuben sandwich. Dad did his fuck-off number and pissed on his shoes.

Memo: work on your mother's file. Query the Racine PD. Memo: your case file is updated. Your case is dead-stalled. Memo: get your ass to the rockin' D.R. and voodoo-vamped Haiti.

Christmas Eve, the wheelman lot, Clyde Duber's yule bash. Deli food and keg beer. Cocktails by the gas pumps, free uppers from the quick-script pharmacy.

Crutch circulated. He was amphetamized and holiday-lonely. Wayne sent Froggy to Panama. Fuck that place. All roads led to the D.R. All front-man reports would point there.

Phil Irwin was poking a spade chick on the service lift. Scotty Bennett brought some go-go girls in to give snout. Buzz Duber's car was Santa's Blow Job Zone. Fred Otash dispensed free play chips for his Vegas dive. Bobby Gallard shot craps with Clyde and Chick Weiss. They used Scotty's pissed-on Vietcong flag as a blanket.

Crutch re-circulated and got re-blue. He was bored. Dwight Holly pulled him off the Marsh Bowen gig. He kept mum on Bowen's fruitness and held it as a hole card. He kept up the spot tails anyway—they might go somewhere. Clyde had him working divorce gigs full-time. Buzz gave up on "the case." He never had full-scale knowledge or full-on balls for the job. Buzz was a yuks & fucks guy. Donald Linscott Crutchfield killed ten Communists. Arland "Buzz" Duber extorted hookers for skull.

Scotty drifted by. Bobby Gallard schmoozed him up. Hey, boss—that Bowen chump got famous off that shit he pulled with you.

Scotty smiled and winked.

Scotty pointed to the 18's stitched on his tie.

Scotty scrawled 19 in the air.

Peeper Christmas.

Crutch drove by Julie's house, Peggy's house and Kay's house. The girls were his age. They always exchanged gifts after dinner. Dad rigged the same outside lights every year. Crutch knew the routine.

Julie's window view was better than last year. Julie's folks gave her geek boyfriend some geek reindeer socks. He got that "Oh shit" look. Julie nudged him—be nice, now.

The family knocked back eggnog. Dad got sclerotic-flushed. The geek shuffled his feet and displayed a wedding ring. Mom and Dad boo-hooed. Everybody hugged. Julie's brother Kenny died at 1st and Arden. Two-car wipe-out, late '62. Kenny was a glue-sniffer and a whip-out artiste. He whipped it out on Buzz's girlfriend, Jane Hayes. Buzz and Crutch kicked his ass, circa '61.

The Julie Show bombed. You'll be so happy, boo-hoo. Crutch drove by Peggy's house and Kay's house. The window curtains were drawn. Next stop: 2nd and Plymouth.

Bright windows. No lawn manger—Dana Lund had taste. He killed his lights and waited. He shined his penlight on the dashboard and Christmas-lit Joan. He brain-tripped: Joan's face and Dana's story.

Her husband, Bob, died in Korea. Chrissie was four then. Dana went back to nursing and sold real estate part-time. She was born in 1915. She'd be fifty-four in March. She dated rich stiffs intermittently. She started touching up her gray hair in mid-’64. Crutch noted it then.

Chrissie walked through the living room. Dana followed her. Crutch choked tears back. Dana was wearing the sweater he bought her on the day he thought he would die.

Options: Trinity Lutheran Church or Marsh Bowen’s new pad. Midnight services de-blued him sometimes. Nix that: the pastor knew his peeper rep and hated him. He was still wired. That meant Niggertown by default.

Marsh Bowen was racially regressing. His pad on Denker was jig-upscale. His pad on East 86th was a coon cave. Cinder-block struts, window bars, spookedelic paint.

Clock in: 12:51 a.m.

Crutch parked and waited. The radio supplied distraction. He got Christmas carols and Brother Bobby X, live at Rae’s Rugburn Room. Brother Bobby ragged on the Jews and wished black folk an off-the-pigs New Year. Marsh Bowen walked out at 1:14 a.m. New vines: trim-cut and all *blaaaaack*.

Bowen walked past his car and schlepped it down to Imperial Highway. Bright lights there: all-night gas stations and coffee shops.

Cut him slack, he’s too close, he’ll see you.

Crutch waited two minutes and jammed southbound. He hit the corner and looked both ways. No pedestrians. He slow-cruised Goody-Goody’s and the Carolina Pines, big windows at both locations. There’s Bowen in the Pines, drinking coffee solo.

The place was semi-deserted. Crutch parked and ambled in slow. Fruit Alert: Bowen eyeball-trolled all the single men.

Walk in, get close, within eavesdrop range.

Crutch shagged a table two over. It provided a back view of Bowen. A waitress brought coffee. *Aaaahhh*, good—re-fuel those jets.

Bowen fidgeted and checked his watch. Fruit Alert: a fat Mex smirky-eyed him. Bowen shuddered and looked down.

Crutch checked the door. It popped open. He blinked. It can’t be. He rubbed his eyes—yes, no, *yes*.

Joan Klein walked in and sat down with Bowen. She removed her overcoat. She smiled. She took off her beret and shook out her hair.

She cleaned her glasses on a napkin. She looked older without them. She wore a black knit dress. Her knife scar was covered. Crutch went hot/cold/hot/cold/hot/cold.

Joan and Bowen talked. It was sotto voce. Crutch peeled and re-peeled his ears and couldn't hear shit. Bowen sipped coffee. Joan sipped coffee and smoked. A white couple gave them a pissy mixed-couple look. Joan touched Bowen's arm—one time, two times, three. Bowen three-time flinched. Crutch picked up sound waves. He got Joan's husky voice. It burned straight through him.

He kept his head down. Their eyes never clicked. Joan's talking more, Joan's on the make, Bowen's homo-reluctant. Joan kissed Gretchen/Celia at the rental house that night.

Crutch leaned closer. His ears throbbed. He couldn't read Joan's lips. Bowen coughed and said, "Weird dream of you." Joan spoke a little louder. She said, "Safe house."

That's it, no more, back to soft talk and—

Crutch got *un*-wired and *re*-circuited and *re*-wired.

Safe house, rent house, fake stewardess Gretchen/Celia. Fake address: "*Some Commie safe house.*"

Crutch put a dollar down and walked out *slooooow*.

Safe house, rent house, death house. Confluence, proximity—

His tools got him in. Horror House: the third tour.

No hippies or winos residing. Unchanged since last time. More dampness, new winter stench, accelerating decay. The floorboards creaked louder, the cold air stung more.

His last tour. He had to do visible damage. He couldn't come back. Her presence here was a long shot. He had to try.

Lock picks, pry bar, crowbar, flashlight, penlight. Burglar's jerry-rigged stethoscope, three hours to dawn.

He walked the house top-to-bottom. He opened every drawer and scanned every shelf. He cut open every piece of upholstered furniture. He looked behind every framed picture and pulled up every rug.

The house was cold. Cold sweat drenched him. He dropped his tools, wiped his hands dry and kept going.

He climbed ladders and checked every wall and ceiling beam. He beat rats to death with a shovel in the attic and combed every inch. He pried off the downstairs floorboards and poked through cobwebs, insect nests and dirt.

It was raining. Dawn was breaking slow. That gave him more time. He was dirt-caked. His sweat turned it to a thin mud.

He tapped every wall panel. He put his ear to the stethoscope and listened for hollow thunks.

It was Christmas morning, he heard church bells, he almost cried.

Clouds passed outside. Some daylight streaked in. He saw a loose step near the top of the staircase.

He walked over. It was the upper part of the step. The nails were loose. The two pieces wobbled.

A one-inch gap showed. He pried the piece of wood off and saw a hidey-hole. It was two feet long and half a foot high. Inside it:

A rusted-out .38 snubnose. Rusty pistol ammo. Four mildewed pro-Castro pamphlets. Nine pro-wetback flyers. A U.S. OUT OF VIETNAM poster. A small notebook—stapled pages, smudged ink and eroded text throughout. One visible date: 12/6/62.

Crutch held his penlight up to the pages and squinted. He couldn't discern words. He saw numbers and got an instinct: foreign cash-exchange rates. He got the general format: meeting minutes for some Commie powwow.

The page-by-page text devolved into blurs. The last page held three clear signatures at the bottom.

Terry Bergeron, Thomas F. Narduno, Joan R. Klein.

HER.

Crutch touched her name. He was sweating and dripping mud. The page fell apart in his hand.

Something else tweaked him. "Thomas F. Narduno," brain tease.

It took some time just standing there. It came in a burst.

The St. Louis papers. The piece on the Grapevine killings. The odd left-wing victim: Thomas F. Narduno.

He cleaned out the hidey-hole. He put everything in his toolbox. He heard the church bells again. He walked outside and stood gasping in the rain.

52

(Los Angeles, 12/26/68)

Wayne said, “You have options within the ultimatum, sir. We’re allotting you considerable autonomy.”

Dwight rolled his eyes. “You’re a stalwart of the local Negro community and a Democratic Party bagman, I’ll grant you that. *Beyond that*? You’re a mobbed-up money washer in hock to the Boys, and all we’re asking you for is more of the same.”

The office was oak-paneled. The chairs were green leather. The MLK oil portrait overruled the room. Wayne willed his eyes away.

Dwight said, “The brothers around here call you ‘Lionel the Laundryman.’ You’re like that guy on the detergent box. They call you ‘Mr. Clean.’ ”

Lionel Thornton smirked. He was five-three. His desk was seven-three. Wayne and Dwight had small chairs. He had a throne. Wayne and Dwight were big white men. He was a small black man. He wore the world’s sharpest chalk-stripe suit.

Wayne said, “You wash some foreign-bound construction money and casino skim. You stay on as the bank’s president. You help Mr. Hoover and Agent Holly out with information as requested, which allows you to personally keep 3% of every dime you wash."

Thornton smiled. Dwight hummed the Mr. Clean jingle. Wayne peeled his eyes off Dr. King.

Dwight pulled out his cigarettes. Thornton shook his head. Dwight started to light up. Wayne stopped him.

"I'll go to 3½%, a 5% pay raise for your employees and a 15% salary raise for you. There's twenty thousand dollars in my briefcase. That's your bonus for cooperating."

Thornton lit a cigarette and blew smoke Dwight's way. Dwight stood up. Wayne nudged his foot. Dwight sat back and folded his hands.

Dr. King in burnished oils—more handsome than in real life.

Thornton said, "Give me the briefcase, too."

Wayne bowed. Dwight smiled. A gunshot popped outside. Dwight jerked and touched his belt gun. That goddamn portrait. Oak panels in a black slum.

Thornton said, "Mr. Hoover has an operation going. Mr. Holly's presence today attests to that. My guess is that you're hassling some deluded black militants. I'll wish you well and leave you to it, but I cannot inform for you or offer you on-premises oversight, or keep separate books for you."

Wayne nodded. Dwight's chest was pounding—Wayne saw his shirt move. Thornton stood up and teetered on platform shoes.

"One last favor. For Mr. Holly, I think. I noticed the sap in his waistband."

Gunshots overlapped—closer this time.

"My wife's ex-husband is bothering her. I'd like him to desist."

An intercom buzzed. Wayne and Dwight stood up. Thornton pointed to the portrait.

"Vicious white motherfuckers like you killed him, but his voice will prevail in the end."

Wayne said, "Sir, I hope so."

He refurbished the lab. He dumped the heroin makings and added a collage. Reginald Hazzard photos four-walled him.

Partitions set off a file space. He brought in file boxes and reams of paper. He'd worked LVPD Intelligence. He knew how to build case files and log information. Mary Beth bought him a cashmere sweater for Christmas. He told her he *really* wanted a Teletype machine.

Mary Beth said, “You’ve got all these pictures of my son but no pictures of me.” He told her he wanted to find her son because he’d already found her. She told him to keep going. He said she looked different every time he saw her, so pictures would spoil the surprise. She told him to keep going. He said they never met outside his hotel suite. He enjoyed imagining the ways she looked in the world.

The file space had potential. The lab was small and well equipped. He had a spectroscope, a fluoroscope and the proper chemicals to work on Dwight’s pages.

Wayne unplugged the telephone and sat down to work. He talked to Carlos and Farlan Brown earlier. His news: Lionel Thornton folded. Farlan’s news: the prez-elect was sending permission letters for the casino-site team. Also included: passes to the inaugural hoo-haw. Funny, but: Mesplede wanted Dipshit Crutchfield on the team. Wayne relented. Dipshit worked cheap and might mandate a nuisance hit at some point. Keep the punk short-leased.

Dwight’s chem job was improbable and exacting. The file pages were carbon acid–based and burned under caustic applications. He’d been at it part-time for two months. He’d destroyed two-thirds of the Joan Rosen Klein file and failed to peel through a single line of redaction. A notion hit him this morning. Throw spectroscope and fluoroscope light on the typewriter marks. Bombard the ink lines with contrasting rays. Dab high-pH hydroxic acid on the perceived letter shapes and see what forms and what erodes.

He rigged his light bars, documents, acid base and swabs. He wore tinted magnifying goggles. He slid a redacted sheet on an absorbent blotter. He let the lights fly. He squinted and *thought* he saw a capital *S, J, R* and *K* near-microscopically outlined. He realized that he’d extrapolated. He knew FBI file parlance. He’d *thought* his way through to “SUBJECT JOAN ROSEN KLEIN” and no more.

BUT:

He could sacrifice that ink line. He could look for the other logically following boldface letters. He could refine his light and application technique that way.

More light now. Different angles. More hydroxic acid, more/less/more/less—

He burned through the possible “JOAN ROSEN KL”—fizz straight onto the blotter.

The acid pooled and bubbled.

An ink line blurred and faded.

The typewriter marks for “EIN” showed up faint on the page.

Wayne trembled. He pulled out the test page and slid in the page marked “Known Associates.” He counted fourteen black-inked lines and brought down the lights. He dabbed hydroxic acid. He burned ink lines, he faded ink lines, he blurred ink lines and got typewriter marks pure unreadable. He squinted. He refocused his lights and singed paper. He refocused and got blots. He refocused and redabbed and got the visible numbers “7412.” More burns, more blurs, a *U*, an *L*, a *T*. He refocused and dabbed again. He got the blur-faded, typewritten-marked “Thomas Frank Narduno.”

53

(Los Angeles, 12/27/68)

Sap gloves broke bones and spared your hands. They maximized hurt and minimized self-damage.

Dwight beat on a bantamweight Negro named Durward Johnson. Lionel Thornton watched. Johnson looked like Billy Eckstine, minus the mustache. The gig went down behind Johnson's house. Baldwin Hills was high-end colored. The alley was paved. Christmas lights lined the fence tops.

Dwight pulled his punches, went in light and broke bones regardless. Thornton stipulated face work. Johnson grasped a fence link and kept himself upright. Thornton stood out of spray range.

Jabs and right crosses. The cheeks and the jaw—don't fuck with his eyes or his brain.

His nose broke audibly. His teeth dribbled off his split tongue. Dwight's glove seams popped and leaked ball bearings. Johnson's toupee flew off his head.

He stayed upright. He spit out cracked bridgework and hit Thornton's shoes. Thornton smirked. Johnson said, "I fucked your wife, nigger."

Dwight threw a big right. Johnson grasped the fence two-handed. Dwight stumbled and fell into the punch. It landed full force. It took Johnson and a stretch of fence links down. Dwight fell along with them.

The world went upended. Christmas lights blinked *above* him. He got up and helped Johnson up. Thornton was gone. Johnson weaved into a neighbor's backyard and crashed in a pool chair.

Dwight pulled the gloves off and walked back to his car. A business card was stuck under the wiper blades.

Sergeant Robert S. Bennett/Robbery Division/LAPD. Below that: "Vince & Paul's, 1 hour."

That pedophile was nothing. The guy fucked with kids and Joan wanted him hurt. He showed Joan the Poloroid. The perv was beat to shit. She touched his arm then. He leaned into her and let their hands brush. They held the pose to tell each other something.

Durward Johnson was shitwork. Thornton was a maladroit dwarf. It was ugly. His hands ached. It gave him that hide-out-and-drink-yourself-well-again thirst.

Dwight flexed his hands. He had two sprained fingers. His cuticles bled. Ball bearings were jammed under his nails.

He called Joan before the Johnson job. They discussed Nixon's inaugural. She said some rogue Reds were flying to D.C. They had guns traceable to a Florida bank job. They planned to wear Nixon masks and clout three banks on inauguration eve. Joan provided their names and addresses.

He called the Miami Office. The bank team nailed the fucks at the airport. They were en route to Austin, Texas. They planned to clout three banks dressed as LBJ.

He called Karen then. He offered her a monument bombing to celebrate the bust. Karen was headed to the hospital. Eleanora wanted out *now*. Dwight heard What's-His-Name in the background.

Vince & Paul's was slow. The waitresses wore Santa's wench garb. Dwight squeezed three ball bearings out of his hands and bloodied the tablecloth. He ordered just-this-one-drink-and-no-more.

The waitress brought him a double scotch. The first sip warmed him, the second sip blared an alarm. He felt his legs return. Scotty Bennett slid into the booth.

"You should have told me."

Dwight stirred his drink. "Who, in fact, did tell you?"

"Those cops you paid to whip on Bowen."

"I'll apologize in advance, then. It's Mr. Hoover's operation. He wanted you bypassed."

Scotty sipped his bourbon-rocks. "You're sheep-dipping Bowen. The Panthers and US are too well infiltrated, so you're sending Bowen in to work the BTA and MMLF."

Dwight said, "Off the record, yes. On the record, our greatest chance at success stems from Bowen's altercation with you."

Scotty chewed an ice cube. "Let's get this back on the right footing. I want to see all Bowen's reports and all the filed Bureau paperwork."

Dwight said, "No." Scotty killed his drink. His barmaid girlfriend brought him a refill.

"The BTA and MMFL are clowns. They're not worth working. They couldn't find their ass on a toilet seat."

Dwight shook his head. "I disagree."

"Why?"

"They're career criminals with a valid grievance. A fair segment of this society condones their actions. There's a rule of thumb to organizations like these. The most forceful psychopath assumes leadership and creates the agenda, and the BTA and MMLF have some doozies."

Scotty smiled. "You talk like a lawyer."

"I am a lawyer."

"And you know about psychopaths, because you've spent twenty years doing strongarm jobs for Mr. Hoover."

Dwight raised his drink—touché.

"It's that 'valid grievance' line I'm not buying."

"Come on, Sergeant. We're both white cops. We didn't create the world, but we both know how it works and we both know you can't let pissed-off coloreds cash in and fuck up the world because their people got a raw deal and some hopped-up white kids think they're cool."

Scotty cracked his knuckles. "If Bowen goes bad, on his own or in a context you placed him in, I will not hesitate to take him down for it. That means any and all criminal actions. That means I'll go in unilaterally, without fear of you, Mr. Hoover, Chief Reddin or anyone else involved in this operation."

Dwight cracked his knuckles. His shirt cuffs were exposed. They were blood-soaked.

"Will you keep quiet about this operation?"

"Yes."

"Will you refrain from entrapping Marsh Bowen or going after him proactively?"

"Yes."

"Will you inform me of any tips you may have picked up on the BTA or MMFL?"

"No."

"Will you maintain a hands-off policy on the BTA and MMLF during this operation?"

"No."

"Suppose I go over your head and talk to Chief Reddin?"

Scotty smiled. "You won't do that. We both know where it would take us."

Dwight smiled. "Let's step back and give each other one concession."

Scotty said, "I'll go first. Will you inform me of any pending armed robberies to be performed by BTA or MMLF members?"

"Yes. My operating parameters are very strict on that. Bowen will inform me of pending robberies, and I will inform you."

"And if Bowen has no knowledge and I learn of pending robberies on my own?"

Dwight raised his glass. "Then embellish your reputation and kill the motherfuckers with my best wishes."

Scotty raised his glass. "What's my concession?"

"Talk up your hatred of Bowen to cops, your informants, anyone who'll listen to you. The more you hate him, the more clout he'll have with the brothers."

Scotty shrugged. "That's not much of a concession. I'm doing it anyway."

The jukebox snapped on. The music went *LOUD*. Dwight pulled the cord out. The music swooped and died. Dwight got a range of schizzed looks.

Scotty stretched. His shit got exposed: belt gun, shoulder gun, toad-stabber, knucks.

"It's Christmas. Ask Santa for another concession."

"Try not to kill Marsh Bowen. It goes against your nature, but it's the white thing to do."

Scotty said, "Deal." His barmaid girlfriend walked over. Scotty motioned her away.

"You know, I have quite a few southside informants."

"Yes, you do."

"I picked up a nice tip today."

"I'm listening."

"Marsh Bowen is a faggot."

The hospital sent a telegram to the drop-front. Eleanora Sifakis, seven pounds and four ounces, healthy. "Mother will call soon."

Dwight poured himself just-one-more-drink and ice-packed his hands. His head swerved—Karen/Joan, Karen/Joan, Karen/Joan.

He sipped his drink. He salved his fingers. He swerved with Eleanora on earth and Marsh Bowen as a queer. The phone rang at 11:14 p.m.

He picked up. Wayne said, "I burned through most of the file pages, but all I got was one KA name. Thomas Frank Narduno. It sounded familiar to me, but I couldn't place it. Ring any bells?"

Big bells:

The lefty Grapevine vic. Heist suspect: New York and Ohio. Bug devices found on his body.

Wayne said something about fluoroscopes and hydroxic acid. Dwight hung up and poured just-one-more-drink.

It burned and brought up shudders. Dwight dialed the scrambler-phone number.

No rings on scramblers. Just faint hiss and "Hello, Mr. Holly."

"May I sleep with you tonight?"

Joan said, "Yes."

54

(Cuban Waters, 12/27/68)

Fins and churned waves. Mesplede tossed chum. Sharks hovered and snapped high for it. Bright moonlight made them glow. The speedboat launched from Boca Chico Key. Destination: Varadero Beach, Cuba.

Mesplede had called him in L.A. Wayne approved him for the Nicaragua and D.R. trips next month. Froggy filed a negative Panama report. Panama was out. Nicaragua would get nixed. The D.R. would get the nod. Cuba was close. His case was all there.

Crutch ate Dramamine. He was seasick green. He wanted to fortify: booze, pills, hash. Froggy said *nyet.*

“This will be intimate, Donald. I want to see how you perform.”

They were forty miles out. They wore lampblack and frayed fatigues. They carried combat knives and silencer-tapped Magnums wrapped in plastic.

The shark escort bobbed and snapped. Mesplede baby-talked them. The chum was all cat innards. Mesplede had a pal with a cat-killing pit bull named Batista. Batista was a Bay of Pigs K-9

Korps vet. He raged to kill cats in a free Cuba.

The speedboat zoomed and crunched waves. Crutch fought flashbacks: Horror House, the meeting list, Joan Klein and Thomas Frank Narduno.

A shark brushed the boat. Mesplede *petted* him. The chum smelled ten times worse than cat shit. They hit the ten-mile point. The chum ran out. Mesplede cut the motor and let waves push them in.

Swells rode them toward shore. It was bumps and chop and water knee-high in the boat. Crutch ate more Dramamine and took deep breaths.

They saw the shore. They dropped anchor by some shoals sixty yards from the beach. They had infrared binoculars. They saw five militia guys playing cards at a picnic table.

Exile intelligence. A guy in the Cuban Freedom Council tipped Froggy. The cardplayers: all torturers at La Cabana prison. They castrated rightist insurgents. They walked from their barracks and played cards Tuesday nights.

The boat was moored. Gull noise killed the scrape-against-rock sound. Crutch put on goggles. Mesplede wore a mask. Their weapons were triple-plastic-wrapped.

They rolled into the water. It was freezing cold. They swam diagonally. A beachfront tree line covered the moon. The cardplayers smoked. Cigarette tips glowed—little sighting devices.

They reached the beach and *rolled*. Dark sand and white sand dusted them. They dumped their headware. They got more breath. Crutch ate sand and willed back stomach cramps.

Ten feet to the table. Two shapes sand-drift *rolling*. Five targets, twelve bullets, close range.

Mesplede gave the signal. They positioned themselves prone, two-hand aimed and fired. Their muzzles flashed, their silencers thunked, they heard body impact. Table chunks shattered. They saw cigarettes drop. They heard skull-crack impact and saw two men pitch forward.

Three men stood up—big body-mass targets. Three men jabbering and unsnapping holsters.

Mesplede fired. Crutch fired. They took their legs out, knocked them down and gut-shot them. Crutch buried his head and sucked sand.

Silencer echo and wave noise. Gulls squawking and no return fire.

Crutch pulled his head up. Mesplede was standing by the table. His flashlight was out. Crutch weaved over.

Five dead men. Three cigarette tips still glowing.

Froggy said, “Scalp them.”

Crutch shook his head. Froggy grabbed his hair and yanked him into the table. Crutch banged his knees and went down in the sand. He was kiss-close to a faceless man. The man’s hairline was powder-scorched. A flap of skin dangled.

Froggy watched. Crutch pulled his knife. He said some kind of dumb-kid prayer and jammed the blade down. He missed the flap and yanked up from the eye socket.

55

(Las Vegas, 12/27/68)

Mary Beth wore his Christmas-gift sweater to bed. It was way too big. She tucked her chin under the turtleneck and goofed on him. She pulled the cuffs over her hands.

"There's no guarantee that you'll find my son, but you're determined to spend all that time and money anyway."

The bedroom drapes were open. The Nixon signs were down. The hotels were hawking yuletide cheer now. The green bulbs reminded him of that emerald. It was like a dream revived.

"There's no guarantee that I'll find him, but my instincts keep telling me L.A. I'm building an informant network there, so there's always the chance that something will pan out."

"Have you done something like this before?"

Wayne rolled away from her. He smelled her shampoo on the pillow. He took a breath of it.

She said, "You found Wendell Durfee, didn't you?"

Wayne looked at her. "Yes, I did."

"And you killed him?"

"Yes."

She pulled the pillow over and got their eyes close. She did that a lot. She said they both had these green flecks.

"Sweetie, I already figured that out."

56

(Los Angeles, 12/27/68)

The Bureau kept a suite at the downtown Statler. Karen's baby was just born four blocks away. Joan wore a red dress. Dwight wore his most-Fed gray suit.

Christmas lights blinked on Wilshire. The prior tenant left a bottle of Ten High. Joan saw Dwight's ratched hands and dosed them with bourbon on a washcloth. It stung. Dwight held tears back. He thought of Thomas F. Narduno and wondered what Joan knew about everything. He thought of Karen and Eleanora.

Joan said, "Save your hands. You're fifty-two years old."

"How do you know that?"

"I'm not telling you."

"What do you want from all this?"

"Tell me what 'all this' means."

"The job. The oper—"

Joan touched his lips. "I'm here because I want to be. I would have asked you if you hadn't asked me."

His hands burned. Some tears leaked. Joan stood on her tiptoes and kissed them off his cheeks. The outside lights shaded them weird colors.

They fell on the bed. Joan held his head and kissed him. Her breath tasted like cigarettes and dry wine. She wiped off his tears with her thumbs.

He held her in with his arms. His hands were useless. He wanted to grab her hair. He knew it would kill his hands. He couldn't stand this wet-eyed thing. If he touched her hair, he'd hurt himself and never want it to stop.

She pushed his head back. She kissed him. She leaned over him and pinned his wrists and let her hair fall on him. He nuzzled the dark parts and bit at the gray streaks and forced her legs apart with his knees. She pulled his arms up and pinned his wrists above his head. Lights played over her underarm stubble and her knife scar. She saw that he wanted it. She let his wrists go and let him roll into her sideways. She held her arms up and let him kiss her there. He heard himself gasping and saw them both naked and knew he'd lost track of the time. She said things. They weren't quite words. She might have said his name. She held him softly. She took his hands softly and let them brush here, here and here. He kissed all the places his hands touched. She held his hands and held his head there every moment. She spread her legs for him to touch and taste and be held there. She gasped as he gasped and his eyes burned from all the tears and his hands didn't hurt at all.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/12/69. Extract from the journal of Marshall E. Bowen.

January 12, 1969

I'm being courted. The pace is slower than Mr. Holly would like. Both the BTA and MMLF have found me, along with the Panthers and US. Eldridge Cleaver invited me to lunch. He brought with him a dubious literary agent, who wanted me to write a memoir entitled *Brother Pig: An Ex-Cop Tells It Like It Is Within the Genocidal LAPD*. I declined. Mr. Cleaver looked at me suspiciously. The ghetto rumor is that Mr. Cleaver is a very well-placed informant himself and reports to cutouts at various Federal crime commissions that no longer trust Mr. Hoover to rationally assess information. Brother Cleaver had the look of informant/arriviste, and I think he may have seen it in me.

I've nixed the Panthers and US. My relationship with Jomo Clarkson has me leaning toward the MMLF. Jomo is rumored to be heisting liquor stores; if I come across anything more specific on that, I'll report it to Mr. Holly.

The southside clubs are the chief recruiting arms of both organizations. If one spends time at Sultan Sam's Sandbox, Rae's Rugburn Room, Nat's Nest, Mr. Mitch's Another World, the Snooty Fox, Tommy Tucker's Playroom and the Carolina Pines on Imperial Highway, one will be approached by BTA/MMLF brothers, who will speak injudiciously, suck up a bit and urge you to attend rallies and other planned activities. These men love to talk and describe their criminal actions. I have met pimps, ticket scalpers, the burglars of pornographic bookstores. A BTA member fed me 190-proof liquor from his basement still and took me to a Lakers game with counterfeit tickets. BTA kingpin Ezzard Jones—replete with bogus divinity degree—solicits funds with limited success at southside churches and complains that his girlfriend is getting it on with that persistent white woman, Joan. Benny Boles cruised me at a BTA bar-b-q and pushed all my danger buttons. He has an armed robbery conviction ('64) and alledgedly killed a male-prostitute lover in '58. Leander Jackson is charming with his Haitian lilt, vexing with his voodoo talk and hard to picture as an arms dealer, former member of the Tonton Macoute Haitian secret police and heavy conduit to leftist groups in the Caribbean.

J. T. McCarver runs dice games for the MMLF, is a reputed pharmacy burglar and deals goofballs to Jordan High School students while Claude Cantrell Torrance, the MMLF's Minister of Finance and Minister of Extortion, deals to the Manual Arts student body. (Note: The MMLF are Manual Arts football fans; the BTA are Jordan High fans, and both groups push hate-whitey and kill-the-pigs pamphlets on and off the two campuses.)

Both groups front programs to feed wholesome breakfasts to impoverished ghetto children. White liberals find this fetching and donate money that the MMLF and BTA spends on hate-lit supplies, guns and dope. The breakfasts are homey affairs, often written up and photographed by a doting media. The breakfast food is extorted from local merchants and the children are fed sugar-packed concoctions like Fruit Loops, Cocoa Puffs, Trix, Crispy Critters and Puff-and-Stuff Pals. Sunday breakfasts are often followed by "media mixers," featuring Bloody Marys, soul food and reefer. These are hilarious, mixed-message, mixed-race moments. Yeah, we wants to kill all de pigs and destroy de white power structure, but we thinks *you* cool.

And these dumb white motherfuckers think they *are* cool. And these dumb white motherfuckers feel exalted in the presence of swinging black militants.

So, the BTA and MMLF are rivals, and I bop between both groups and keep my eyes open. Individuals are viciously bad within both groups, but I do not see a percolating or slowly assertive group viciousness in ascent. Both groups have guns stashed in safe houses (Joan Klein allegedly holds guns for BTA members), but both groups are primarily in love with guns for their implied statement of masculinity and rarely carry them, for fear of LAPD street rousts. There is much talk of dealing heroin to finance revolution, but "revolution" is a comic-book, racist-polemic pipe dream to these people, and I doubt if they could put together the seed money necessary to buy heroin in significant quantity.

So it's pamphlet sales, parties, pub crawls, rallies and big talk in great quantity. Both groups peddle bootleg editions of Mao's *Little Red Book* and Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. I've read both books. They both contain wisdom. Given my life in Los Angeles, my parents' horrible tales of life in the South, my own LAPD experience and my two auspicious beatings by LAPD, I empathize as much as my compartmentalized psyche and soul will let me. But *revolution? Accomplishing anything other than a glancingly ephemeral social good*? These people are lost in the overall puerile, selfish, ride-the-zeitgeist game of it, things will go wrong in the end, and my efforts of suppression and interdiction may provide my own brand of glancingly ephemeral social good.

I can only allot "social good" a smidgen of ink. I'm here for the adventure and to solve the armored-car heist case and accrue all financial benefit.

I'm being courted. I'm listening, I'm learning. I think I'll be specifically recruited for criminal enterprises—based on misreadings of my ex-cop status—before too long.

I see Scotty Bennett out cruising sometimes. We always wink and wave at each other, because we're both addled by the notion of stoicism and acting cool while you harbor big emotion and hate. Scotty bought me the key to the ghetto, and I'm grateful to him for that.

I've got both beatings in perspective now, I think. I sense that they are bringing me closer to the money, the emeralds and the secrets of 2/24/64.

Mr. Holly and I continue to talk via phone drop every third or fourth day. He's looking for a cutout to work me on a more regular basis, while he continues to run the operation. I've indulged the Bent at Queen Anne Park a few times since Christmas, and I must remind myself to be more cautious and discreet. I had coffee with Joan on Christmas Eve. She seemed to be coming on to me—sorry, no sale—and working me on some level. I either dreamt of her or saw her that night I slept at Jomo's crib, which is odd in itself. Women are, by and large, difficult for me, and I find Joan unsettling and a little frightening. I may write up my perceptions and get them to Mr. Holly.

Mr. Holly continues to trouble me. I find myself thinking about him much more than I should.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/16/69. Extract from the privately held journal of Karen Sifakis.

January 16, 1969

Eleanora is squalling and keeping me up all night and I'm realizing that the joy of Dina as a full-fledged child and a developing moral being had blunted me to the debilitating regime of new motherhood, this time at age forty-three. I'm not sleeping, W.H.N. is staying in L.A. full-time to help, his constant presence hinders my internal life and in no way compensates for the assistance he's giving me with Ella. I haven't seen Dwight since Ella was born; W.H.N.'s presence has effectively quashed that. Dina misses Dwight and asks about him when W.H.N. is out of earshot; I assure her that he'll be back soon, to tell her wonderfully sanitized tales of his adventures with the FBI.

She was asking me questions about J. Edgar Hoover last night. Her father had told her (too vividly) stories of Hoover's cowardly actions during the 1919–1920 Red Scare. Dina asked me (again, out of earshot of What's-His-Name) why her father hated Hoover so much, while Dwight held him in such high regard. I did not tell her that Dwight and Hoover share a complex moral history, that her father is an intractably aggrieved ideologue and that Dwight is punch-drunk behind all his conflicting notions of authority and considers it best to tell little children comforting tales. Dina wouldn't get it, and I wouldn't blame her. I keep wondering just how far Dwight has gone to appease Mr. Hoover in repayment of the debt he carries for the man.

I have brought Eleanora into a chaste and duplicitous marriage and into a troubled world, with Richard Nixon poised to assume the White House. Dwight will be buying her odd stuffed animals soon, like the alligators he bought Dina, and she will grow up thinking that predators (like Dwight!) are soft and cuddly. At some point she will point to me for confirmation of this. If I am the least bit candid, I will concede my great love for the man, which will in some small way explain why the teddy bears her father bought her hold no great emotional sway.

I miss Dwight. I'm going to boot What's-His-Name out of town soon, so we can spend time together and Dwight can meet Ella. He's fixated on Joan Klein—I can sense it. As always, I pray that my maneuverings and the connections that I facilitate cause more good than harm.

57

(Washington, D.C., 1/20/69)

“We have endured a long night of the American spirit. But as our eyes catch the dimness of the first rays of dawn, let us not curse the remaining dark. Let us gather the light.”

They had boxed seats for the big speech. They had preferred paraderoute passes. They had tickets for six inaugural balls.

The new prez soaked up applause. Froggy said, “He is a bland man. We must circumvent his lack of commitment to the Cuban Cause.”

Crutch touched his lapel pin—a solid gold 15. He took the scalps and kept his lunch down. Froggy bought him the pin. It honored his close-range-killer status. He still had nightmares per that eye socket.

“Our destiny offers, not the cup of despair, but the chalice of opportunity. So let us seize it, not in fear, but in gladness—”

There’s LBJ—exhausted and vicious. There’s Earl Warren, there’s Dick’s frau, Pat, there’s ex-Veep Humphrey. Hey, Baldy—Froggy and I keestered you!

Nixon shut it down to cheers and a standing ovation. Froggy mimicked snores. Senator Charles H. Percy scowled at him.

Everybody stayed standing and milked the moment. Crutch memorized details. LBJ's heifer daughters. Some stray Kennedys. Hey, fuckers—Froggy shot your Uncle Jack!

Crutch stood there, clapping. People walked by him. He thought of his mother and Dana Lund. He touched his lapel pin. He thought of Joan. He thought of his case and the D.R. upcoming. The Nixster walked past. He'd shaved close this morning. Nixey sat out World War II on some Jap-free atoll. *He* killed Commies close range. Jack the K. killed Japs on PT-109. It was a shuck. Boats didn't count. Jack was no close-range killer.

The crowd thinned out. Crutch re-memorized. Mesplede said, "Enjoy your extremely minor role in this, Donald. But remember that our destiny lies south of here."

"Tell me again, Froggy. I dig the repetition of it."

"What is that?"

"Tell me how we're going to make the money to buy the guns to kill the Castro guys."

"We are going to sell heroin."

They ball-hopped. D.C. was all limos and floodlit monuments. The air was gunpowdered. Fireworks caused most of it. The rest was coons shooting guns off in coontown.

Yippies in Nixon masks weaved in and out of traffic. Crutch saw a mugging by the Lincoln Monument. They shared a limo with some GOP stiffs and Ronald Reagan. Crutch told Reagan he dug *Hellcats of the Navy*. Governor Ronnie grooved on Crutch and called him "young fellow."

The ball-to-ball action was blurry. Crutch saw a million famous faces. Mickey Mantle, Floyd Patterson, some TV-show babes. Mummylike J. Edgar Hoover.

They got a tip on a bash at the Hay-Adams. They flagged down a gypsy cab and spent two hours driving six blocks. The driver was a Jamaican dinge with braided hair and a crocheted beanie. He said he was Pat Nixon's lover. He had some homegrown *ganga*. They toked up and listened to a long travelogue. The dinge extolled the fine Dominican gash and warned them about Haiti. Voodoo be real. You got to bring good *gre-gre*. You put a virgin's snatch hair in a locket and dangle it on your dick. You swear fealty to Baron Samedi.

They got to the Hay-Adams. The bill was two C-notes. The hotel looked familiar. Crutch got the gist: the dinge drove them in circles.

The lobby was plush. Mesplede saluted General Curtis LeMay. LeMay waved his cigar back. Crutch *re*-re-memorized. Open doorways/loud music/Lucy Baines Johnson and a stone swish actor doing the dirty-dog Twist.

The bash was in 1014. The doorway was open, the noise was big, the census was mob guys and pols. Crutch looked left and saw Bill Scranton and Carlos Marcello. Crutch looked right and saw Sam Giancana, snaked up with a tall brunette.

She turned their way. It was oh-my-fucking-God Gretchen Farr/Celia Reyes.

Part III

ZOMBIE ZONE

January 24, 1969–December 4, 1970

58

(Los Angeles, 1/24/69)

Black Cat bopped. It was redecorated and biracial now. Black personnel, white co-boss Milt Chargin. Scratch the velvet walls. Dig the orange-and-black striping.

It was Sam G.'s idea: let's revive Tiger Kab. Miami and Vegas, the anti-Castro days. Wayne, it's your job. Tigrify those cabs and make the shines like it.

Junior Jefferson noshed ice cream. "Tigers are okay, but panthers got more soul."

Milt Chargin said, "I detect a political statement there."

"It ain't politics. I'm just seeing two more white dudes than I usually see, which is contributing to the headache I gots from that strippedy-ass wallpaper."

The hut was SRO. The co-bosses sat in scuffed BarcaLoungers. Wayne perched on the window unit. Two men stood by the switchboard. Wayne ID'd them from file pix: Marshall Bowen and Jomo Kenyatta Clarkson.

Milt said, "The car painters are coming in today. You'll groove the new look. They’re attaching tiger tails to the rear bumpers.”

Jomo said, “This is jive honky bullshit. You’re appropriating the racial identity of this business. Tigers are faggoty animals that punks dig on. Panthers are deadlier, but they got a distinction that makes you white fuckers squirm.”

Wayne yawned. He was sleep-shot. Two calls rocked him last night. Sam said, “You’re the Tiger Kab overseer.” Dwight said, “I’ve got a job for you.”

“Racial identity is one thing, Mr. Clarkson. Comfort’s another. I’ve ordered air-conditioning units for the whole fleet.”

Jomo picked at his machete scars. Political, self-inflicted. Marsh Bowen wore an all-black ensemble. He failed to look sinister. He looked like a male model slumming.

Junior said, “I likes that. Fat folks tend to sweat.”

Milt lit a cigarette. “You’ve got to lose weight, schmuck. Obesity comes back to haunt you later in life.”

“Ain’t gonna be no ‘later in life’ for me. A race war’s coming, and I just hope I ain’t too plump to run.”

Milt sighed. “If a race war is coming, why are you having such a good time with me?”

“ ’Cause you a funny old kike motherfucker, and you makes me laugh.”

Jomo glared at Wayne. Junior passed him a full-page cartoon. It was a mimeo sheet, all reprint-blurred. LAPD pigs butt-fucked Black Panther leaders while Richard Nixon watched and jacked off.

Junior slurped ice cream. “Maybe the brothers in US are putting that shit out to discredit the Panthers.”

Milt said, “The world does not need more hatred. The world needs more love. Inter-racial fucking and sucking would revitalize our great nation and spare us all lots of grief.”

Junior yukked, Wayne laughed, Marsh Bowen grinned. Jomo *glaaaared* anew. A switchboard call came in. Jomo ignored it. Tires screeched outside. A shotgun blast and glass explosion followed. Wayne pegged the distance: one half block.

“New ownership means new rules. That doesn’t mean I’m here to put the skids to everything you’ve got going on the side. Minor crime, fine. Politics, sure. Dealing weed and pills, fine by me. No heroin, no violent crime, no armed robbery. The Boys don’t want it and I won’t tolerate it. I’m ex–law enforcement, so you’ll just have to get used to the way things are being run now."

Junior shrugged. Milt gulped. Marsh went blank-faced. Jomo pulled out a knife and carved "MMLF" on the wall.

The blade cut down to the baseboard. Plaster crumbled. Tiger-striped flocking peeled.

Wayne smiled at Jomo. "I'm glad you brought it up. From this point on, 2% of the Tiger Kab profits will go to the MMLF's Feed the Kiddies program."

Milt and Junior split outside. Marsh stepped aside. The knife was stuck in the wall. The handle wobbled from the thrust. Jomo picked his teeth with a diamond stickpin.

Wayne walked up and pulled the knife out. He wiped the blade on his pants leg and placed it on the switchboard.

Jomo picked his teeth. The stickpin jumped and drew blood. He slow-pivoted and walked off.

Wayne passed Marsh a note. It read: "I'm your cutout. France's Drive-In in one hour."

Dwight laid it out: Bowen was an FBI entrapper. His job: take down the BTA and MMLF. Dwight provided the case file and described the incursion to date. Dwight's specific plan: *heroin.*

Wayne was appalled. He cooked "H" and ran "H." He saw it fuck up the Vegas ghetto and the U.S. troops in Saigon. Dwight used the phrase "non-lethal dope war." It was Fed triplespeak. Passive FBI sanction of a localized narcotics trade. Interdiction and prosecution for a media effect.

Dwight said, "Sure, you hate narcotics. But this settles all your old debts." Dwight said, "You're a badass ex-cop. I'm betting the brothers will get their rocks off on you. Tell Bowen to spread the word on your Vegas shit. I want to create an ambivalent reaction.

"And by the way—Bowen is queer."

Wayne looped through the southside. It was smoggy. Street billboards magnetized him. Black models hucksterized. Be black and smoke cigarettes, be black and drive garish cars, be black and drink top-shelf booze. He drove slow. Pedestrians eyed him. He tried to read faces in split-second views.

He belonged here. He had business here. Reginald might have passed through here. He was building a file. He requeried the

Clark County Sheriff's and found more paperwork. They'd be sending him report carbons soon.

He had L.A. work and Vegas work. The Boys kept suites in the Count's hotels. Nixon was prez now. He overturned LBJ's anti-trust injunctions fast. The Boys sold Drac the Landmark Hotel and two thousand prime Vegas acres. Drac's new fixation was atomic waste. Underground tests scared him shitless. He called Wayne in to explain nuclear fission. Drac believed that A-bomb rays enhanced the black sex drive.

Work was delegation. He sent Mesplede and Dipshit south. Mesplede nixed Panama as a casino-site location. Next stop: Nicaragua. Work was vexing. Mary Beth kept pressing him for details. He put her off and pressed on *her* work. She described paltry pay rates, management hassles and fly-by-night health-plans. He listened for short bursts of time and got all bollixed up. It was his world versus her world. It got his head racing.

He met with Lionel Thornton again. They discussed money transfers and the final wash of assets. It was tense. Thornton sat him face-to-face with the Dr. King portrait. Some world-clash thing resulted.

Thornton was pissy and treated his workers like shit. Wayne told him to bring in a union maintenance crew and toss the scab crew out. Thornton fumed. Wayne told him to square the debt to his employees' credit union. Thornton pounded his desk. Wayne told him the mail room pipes were leaking asbestos. That constituted a health risk. Please address the issue now. Thornton kicked his desk and ratched his shoes. Wayne saluted the portrait.

"What do you know about me?"

"I know you killed three black junkies under dubious circumstances when you worked LVPD."

"Beyond that?"

"Beyond that, I know that you were looking for a man named Wendell Durfee, who had raped and murdered your wife."

"You're correct so far. Do you know what happened to Wendell Durfee?"

"He was murdered here about a year ago. It's a Central Division unsolved. I wouldn't be surprised if you told me you did it."

The drive-in was an Oreo spot on the race border. A jazz hut stood at the rear. The carhops were black *and* white—pretty girls on skates.

They sat in Wayne's rental car. The bolt-on trays cramped them and made them sit sideways.

"I did it."

"I figured you had. Is there anything you'd like me to do with the information?"

Wayne stirred his coffee. "Spread the word judiciously. You were on LAPD then. Describe your presence at the crime scene. It was brutal beyond words. The investigators made me for it, but my father had too much clout."

Marsh stirred his coffee. "What do you know about me?"

"Dwight Holly briefed me and telexed me the master file. I know about Scotty Bennett, your work with Clyde Duber and the operation to date."

"And your assessment?"

"I disapprove of the heroin aspect, but it's viable within the overall context."

"*Dramatically* viable? Like your racial baggage in plain view for the brothers to see?"

Wayne smiled. "Tell me some things. Rumors, perceptions, how you see it so far."

Marsh tried to cross his legs. The car tray stopped him. He almost looked un-cool.

"Both groups are courting me. I doubt that they can score narcotics, so that strategy may prove problematic. There's been a series of southside liquor-store robberies with attendant rumors of black-militant suspects, but nothing more substantive than that. You know about those hate cartoons. It's either the Panthers versus US or vice versa, although my more conspiracy-minded brothers think it's the FBI. Mr. Holly has assured me that it is not."

A carhop skated by and waved at Marsh. She looked like a younger Mary Beth.

Wayne said, "There's an outing tonight. Let's call it a get-acquainted party for the Tiger Kab crew. I want you there. You convince Jomo and at least one BTA man to come. There's some after-hours clubs I want to buy. I wouldn't mind stirring up some political shit with witnesses around."

That carhop skated by again. Marsh threw her a faux-lusty grin.

Wayne pulled out his show pic of Reginald Hazzard. Marsh studied it and blinked.

"Have you seen him?"

"No. Who is he?"

"A young man I'm trying to find. He's seventeen in the picture, but he'd be twenty-four now."

Marsh smirked. Actor's gaffe, red flag—Wayne caught it.

"Tell me what you were thinking. Be candid, or this deal of ours won't work."

"I was wondering if you planned to kill him."

Wayne looked at the carhop. She had Mary Beth's eyes.

"I'm out of that line of work now."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"Have you ever heard of black people recently in the news getting emeralds anonymously in the mail?"

Marsh blinked and said, "No."

The painters striped a '63 Lincoln limo. The JFK Deathmobile as jungle barge. Southside L.A. as the River Styx.

The backseats faced each other. The guys sat knee-to-knee. Wayne, Marsh, Junior, Milt. Jomo and BTA armorer Leander James Jackson.

Smoked windows. Backseat stereo. Archie Bell and the Drells on six speakers. 151 rum and hash-spiked Kool filters.

The barge embarked from the Tiger Kab lot. Junior's skinny brother Roscoe X drove. Wayne stayed sober. The other guys indulged. Milt did shtick. Nixon pimps his plain-Jane daughters to cover his campaign nut. Gay Edgar Hoover craves black schlong. Junior snarfed Eskimo pies and chocolate-dipped bananas. Jomo and Leander worked up an I-hates-you glare. Marsh checked out Wayne sidelong.

They drove by LAPD rousts. Jomo rolled down his window and made pig noise. They hit the Snooty Fox. A Moms Mabley type did ridicule patter and insulted the audience. She singled out Milt and Wayne. They were ofay mud-shark motherfuckers out to muff-dive black chicks on the rag. This vampire cat beat them to it. He done cunnilingized the southside dry and be snoozin' in his coffin as we speaks.

Wayne checked out Marsh sidelong. Marsh emitted ghetto laughs convincingly. File faces popped to life. There's Benny Boles. He's a fruit. He's trolling. He's checking out Roscoe X. There's Joseph Tidwell McCarver. He's the MMLF's "Pan-African Ruler." He's with three whores. He's trading clenched-fist greetings with Jomo.

A junkie combo replaced the comic. The piano man nodded out and banged his face on the keys. The crew split. The barge dropped them at Rae's Rugburn Room. The floor show featured hooded women with dildos. Strobe lights played over insertion points. The soundtrack featured the Beatles with "All You Need Is Love."

Milt and Jomo dug it. Leander and Junior looked away. Wayne decided to buy the place. It was packed. It had money-wash potential.

Next stop: the Scorpio Lounge. A soul-food buffet and a low-stakes dice game. The croupier was a topless chick with a two-foot Afro. Afro-heads bobbed in back booths. Blow jobs went for ten dollars per.

Jomo and Leander fueled up That Glare. Marsh and Wayne watched. They exchanged little nods. They exchanged telepathic waves—Marsh, it's on you.

Let's buy the place. It's a cash cave. Mr. Clean will make that green glow.

The crew rolled to Sultan Sam's Sandbox. Wayne got a contact buzz from the hash smoke. Buy the place—easy call—it's 1:00 a.m. packed. The joint had a Far East motif. The waitresses wore turbans and see-through saris. The walls were studded with big colored stones. The green ones reminded Wayne of that emerald. It was like a dream revived.

He trolled for file faces. He snagged one close by. Ezzard Donnell Jones, BTA bossman. He was with a white woman. Wayne caught a back view. She had dark, gray-streaked hair. Perfect smoke rings dispersed above her.

The crew sat at three tables. Wayne watched Marsh cup his hands and work quick. He crumbled two Benzedrine rolls into powder. He scooped it up, table-hopped and did some buddy-buddy drapes. He dropped powder in Leander's scotch and milk. He jiggled the glass and sidled over to Jomo. Jomo worked on bourbon with a malt-liquor chaser. Marsh distracted him and powdered up both drinks.

Wayne nodded. Marsh nodded back. Wayne touched his wristwatch. Marsh flashed ten fingers.

It was 2:00 a.m. The crew was yawning. Milt mentioned food. Junior said, "I hear *that.*" The gestalt circulated: the Pines on Imperial Highway.

The chow consensus built. They booked to the barge. Milt and Junior plopped in first. Wayne and Marsh hovered. Jomo and Leander got squished in together. They bristled at the contact.

The barge pulled out. Jomo and Leander got jostled in tight. They squirmed apart. They shoulder-rolled and got themselves a few inches. Wayne and Marsh sat facing them. Milt and Junior dozed. Jomo looked sulky and blurry. Leander started to get bennie-bipped.

His mouth twitched. His hands talked. Little plucks at his trousers, little puckers and grins. He bumped Jomo. Jomo pulled away. Their feet bumped. They scuffed each other's shoes. Fucker, don't invade my space.

Jomo started to get big-eyed. Say now, what's *this*? He scratched, he stretched, he bumped Leander's foot. Wayne nudged Marsh—*that's it.*

Marsh said, "Hey, Leander. I'm not sure I buy all that Tonton and voodoo shit you've been talking. Run that by me again."

Jomo said, "That shit don't fly with me. All forms of mystical jive keep the black man enslaved. Haiti is a sissified, punk-ass place. Voodoo was invented by the French white man to keep the black man shackled up and fucking dead chickens."

Leander lit a Kool king-size. He inhaled and torched it all the way down in one breath. He exhaled through his nostrils. The whole backseat smoked up.

"Voodoo give me the power to do that. Dragon breath. Papa Doc can do that, so could half my friends on the Tonton. You think 151 is strong? You try klerin liquor. You try herbs and blowfish toxin. You want to fuck with the white man? You get a *bokur* to zombify him. *Bokur* put a spell on that Dominican fuck Trujillo. CIA hit, bullshit. You slaughter Haitian people, zombies come for you. That is the pure truth, baby boy."

Jomo lit a Kool king-size. He inhaled and coughed and dropped the cigarette in his lap. It burned his pants. He went *shitfuck* and swatted out the flame.

Leander laughed.

Leander said, “MMLF fucks dead chickens. BTA fucks beautiful black sisters.”

Jomo pulled his knife. Leander pulled his knife. They both reared back for more stab room. Their arms hit. They twisted clear. They stabbed simultaneous, chest-high, full-force.

Fabric ripped. The blades cut through overcoats and suitcoats and hit blunt. Jomo’s blade snapped off. Leander’s blade twisted sideways. It gouged Jomo’s arm and stuck in the seat back.

They both went in clawing and gouging. Leander showed his teeth and snapped at Jomo’s neck. Wayne gave it two more seconds. Marsh jumped in telepathic. Milt and Junior dozed on. Roscoe X ran the barge off the road.

59

(Los Angeles, 1/26/69)

Picture spray:

Wayne Tedrow kissing a black woman. An ad-libbed FBI shot. A Vegas agent snapped it outside Wayne's hotel suite.

Photo #2: one-month-old Eleanora Sifakis. A future bomb maker in swaddle cloth. She looks like Karen—not her cashew-dick hubby.

Mr. Hoover *loved* the Wayne photo. Insane Wayne: the woman and cutout ascendance. An inter-group knife fight his first day.

Dwight kicked his chair back. The drop-front was musty. L.A. was rainy and warm. The air was thick. He was smoking more. His desk was cluttered. The Thomas Frank Narduno file was all over it.

The file was innocuous. Suspicion rousts, lefty leanings, no "Known Associates" list. Narduno—dead at the Grapevine. Narduno—the one *visible* name on Joan's KA list.

Thomas Frank Narduno: robbery suspect in New York and Ohio. No convictions, no Ohio or New York paperwork extant. Joan Klein: robbery suspect in New York and Ohio. No convictions, no Ohio or New York paperwork extant. No dates listed in Narduno's file. Ohio dates listed in Joan's file: both 1954. Also listed: two L.A. robbery rousts, '51 and '53. No DR numbers or other paperwork extant.

Dwight placed Joan's file by Narduno's file and read both files again. Nothing went Boo! He'd telexed every big-city and mid-city PD in New York and Ohio. He got zero on Joan Rosen Klein and Thomas Frank Narduno. Joan told him a cop beat on her in Dayton, Ohio. He'd queried Dayton PD on their unsolved heists, circa '54. There were two payroll jobs, netting sixty grand total. Masked men, no women, case closed. He'd had the file telexed. There was no mention of Narduno, Joan or left-wing suspects. Joan's "random roundups" statement? Maybe true.

Dwight lit a cigarette and cracked the window. Wind and rain messed with his pages. He propped Eleanora up on his desk lamp.

Fuck—Joan Rosen Klein and Dwight Chalfont Holly.

A month now. The Statler, the Ambassador, the Hollywood Roosevelt. Neutral spots. The drop-front was Karen's.

They talk and make love. They discuss the operation and avoid *What Do You Want*? It's informant protocol and implicit lovers' pact.

Joan was getting tight with the BTA. Marsh was BTA- *and* MMLF-friendly. They were both torqued on those cartoons flooding the Congo. Joan made the FBI for it, *BAAAAAD BROTHER*–adjunct. She was wrong. Most of the cartoons defamed the Panthers and US. Some defamed BTA and MMLF. He made it as amateur street art. It didn't play as planned provocation.

Hate.

The Dr. Fred snuff—still unsolved and stonewalled by Jack Leahy. Hate and *dope*—the jungle was "H"-dry. Marsh Bowen *dryly* credited black-power consciousness.

Wind toppled Eleanora. Dwight shut the window and put her picture back up. He missed Karen. Eleanora devoured her time. What's-His-Name was back in L.A. to assist. Karen didn't know the whole Joan story. She might sense it. He didn't feel guilty. He felt stretched. It was one more seeping compartment.

He grabbed the wastebasket and pulled out the Wayne photo. He did some DMV research and ID'd the woman last week. Mary Beth Hazzard. Wayne's West Vegas snafu. The widow of the dead preacher.

He got her DMV file. He compared her driver's license photo to the kiss shot. It was a drop-dead all-time moment. It brought him back to Joan in a rush.

“What are you thinking about?”

“A friend of mine and the woman he’s with.”

“Tell me about him.”

“He’s in The Life reluctantly. He’s brilliantly skilled and competent and prone to catastrophe.”

“Where is he now?”

“I don’t know.”

“Are you comfortable with telling me more?”

“No.”

“You’re usually the one asking me all the questions.”

“I know, that’s true.”

A trade show full-booked the Statler. Doors slammed down the corridor. Loud revelry persisted.

It was raining hard. They kept the windows open for the breeze. The room heat kicked in at odd intervals. They pulled the sheets on and off.

“Leander Jackson and Jomo Clarkson had an altercation.”

“I know. I picked Leander up at the hospital.”

“He called you?”

“Yes.”

“You’re strictly BTA now.”

“Not entirely.”

“Tell me about it.”

“I’m not going to.”

“*Yet*?”

“Yes, yet. I need a moment to work something out. I’ll let you know when it’s settled.”

Dwight yawned. His pill/drink quota hit him early. Joan said, “You should try to sleep.”

He turned off the lights. He kicked his feet out of the sheets for some coolness. Joan tossed her hair and draped a leg over him. Her head fit snug on his shoulder. He reached around and cupped her knife scar.

Four hours, dreamless. A record these days.

Joan was gone. She never left good-bye notes—just lipstick prints. This one: on their spare pillow.

He picked up the nightstand phone. He needed room-service coffee and a line to D.C.

He heard receiver clicks. He pushed the disconnect button and got three more, faint.

Dwight smiled. Bug-and-tap skills. Her curriculum vitae expanded.

He walked to the window and looked down. The porte cochere was busy. He saw a shadow dissolve. He saw smoke rings drift above the awning.

60

(Managua, 1/28/69)

This beaner bin on a lake. Statues of notable führers. Peasants, urban spics and cops with Sten guns. Threadbare overall.

No Hughes flights in. They took La Nica Air to Xolotlán Airport. It was winter muggy. Kids swarmed the cab and hawked baseball cards. Parrots swerved and shit-bombed monuments.

Traffic was slow. Exhaust fumes were thick. The cars ran to pre-’60s belchers. Most street names noted dates: Calle 27 de Mayo to Calle 15 de Septiembre. Froggy said it all pertained to quashed revolution.

Side show, getaway, breather. Nicaragua was a no-sale deal and a sterile stopover. The D.R. was next.

One bright spot loomed. Froggy had a line on an ex–marine colonel. The guy was here now. He lived in the D.R full-time. He’d been in Santo Domingo since the ’65 war. Froggy’s merc network set up a meeting later.

The guy’s name was Ivar Smith. He agreed to write the pro-D.R. report to Wayne and the wops. Smith called the Frogman yesterday. He said he knew four anti-Castro Cubans. They were *eeeeevil*. They'd *looooove* to do wet work out of the D.R.

The cab swerved around a peon with an oxcart. Froggy picked his nose and tossed chump change at beggars. Crutch fingered his lapel pin and re-ran some recent head tapes.

D.C., inauguration night, the Hay-Adams. There's Sam G. and Gretchen/Celia. Mesplede knows Sam. Mesplede does *not* know her. Two-second intros, *auf wiedersehen*.

He told Froggy later: *it's that thieving babe*. Froggy shrugged and said the one word: "Cuba."

A parrot zoomed down and landed on the window ledge. Crutch fed him Fritos out of the bag. He re-punched his replay button and spooled back to Christmas Eve.

Horror House, the hidey-hole, the Commie meeting ledger. The date: 12/6/62. The names: Bergeron, Narduno, *Joan*.

The Hollywood Chamber of Commerce owned the house then. Three Commies got access. He went by the Chamber and chatted up a clerk. Bum news: the house went unrented in fall/winter '62.

The parrot ate all the Fritos and squawked for more. Crutch tried to pet him. The cocksucker bit his hand and flew off.

He foot-tailed Sam and Gretchen/Celia to the Willard Hotel. They had separate suites there. He burgled Gretchen/Celia's suite the next day. He located her address book. He brought an evidence kit and dusted the cover right there. He got one Joan Rosen Klein latent.

The book pages were coded: weird letters, numbers and symbols. He Minox-photographed every page and put the book back where he found it. He took a *biiiiig* risk and told Froggy what he'd done. Froggy called a CIA pal in Virginia. A code-breaking manual should arrive in Managua this week. He checked outbound D.C. flights. Sam went back to Vegas. Celia Reyes: Santo Domingo–bound.

"Donald, your hand is bleeding."

"A parrot bit me."

"Was it red?"

"Yes."

"Then you should have killed it."

The Hotel Lido Palace was lake-close. United Fruit guys hogged the bar and talked golf and oppression. The jukebox played the Chiquita banana song non-stop. UF ran Nicaragua and deployed their Somoza-family puppets. Dissent was a persistent woe akin to parrot shit. UF had a snitch network and a police force. Their mandate: rebuff Red revolt.

Crutch and Froggy settled in and moseyed down to the bar. The waitresses wore hoop skirts and banana-bunch hairdos. Froggy said the country was on Red Alert. Commies were bug-bombing fruit fields. Puppet Man Somoza had pledged reprisals soon.

They glommed an outside booth by a koi pond. Cats perched and drooled for fish dinners. They pawed and snapped and never got close. The koi had sonar and radar.

Ivar Smith was a tall guy in golf togs. He was a gasbag right-winger fueled on pre-noon Singapore Slings. He was the D.R.'s boastmaster general and welcome wagon. He ran a security firm. It assisted Bossman Balaguer's goon squads. Balaguer craved those U.S. casinos and ached for a fat tourist trade. Yeah, I'll write that report. The D.R. is ripe fruit. *Yanqui, sí, Commie, no*. We want your biz.

Pay me. I'm the conduit. I'll grease Balaguer. The CIA contingent—all boozed-up snatch hounds. Balaguer was a subtle *fascisto*. He raped pubescent tots in private and evinced public decorum. He was anti-Trujillo that way. The D.R. boded tourist bonanza. Smith's boys and the La Banda thugs ran pesky jigs back to Haiti routinely. Balaguer had a dual agenda: circumvent due process and eugenically bleach the country three shades lighter. The casinos would attract the swells. Smith's boys and La Banda would serve as street cleaners and dump trucks.

Yeah, Haiti was close. The Massacre River formed the aptly named dividing line. Smith riffed off Haiti and voodoo. Papa Doc Duvalier raped Haiti like Trujillo raped the D.R. They called Trujillo "the Goat." He blitzkrieged Haitian settlements within the D.R. It was race shit. Pale-skinned Dominicans have Spanish roots. They hate ink-black Haitians, with their chicken-fucking religion and French affect. The Haitians have leftist allies. There's a Commie group called the 6/14 Movement. Smith and La Banda suppress it for kicks and grins.

Wooooo—six Singapore Slings and still on!

There's a small town on the north D.R.-Haiti shore. A corrupt Tonton Macoute man runs it. It's a good Cuban-ops staging point.

Secluded inlets up the wazoo.

Smith segued to those *eeeeevil* Cubans. They were in Managua now. They were all stone killers. They've got a boocoo heroin CV. They conduit stolen pharmacy dope through a group of UF stockholders in Miami. There's some ex-CIA in the group. A big member: Dick Nixon's pal, Bebe Rebozo.

Bad apples. They target pharmacies owned by comsymps. They pulled jobs in Guatemala and Honduras. They're allegedly ripping off a pharmacy here tonight.

Smith faded out talk-wise. His face went rumdum red. Mesplede took over.

I want to meet the Cubans. I can get them construction-boss jobs. I have heroin credentials. I want to stage anti-Castro ops.

Smith staggered out of the bar. He pulled a banana off a waitress's head and bit in, peel and all.

• • •

The phone book was *en español*. Crutch pulled out the page listing *farmacias*. Managua was Podunk-size. Six drugstores, *no más*. The city was laid out grid-style. *Calles* and *avenidas* crossed. He'd never seen a pharmacy rip-off. Froggy was snoozing. Let's check out the Cubans at work.

The desk clerk gave him a street map. Downtown Managua was small and walkable quicksville. It was peon-packed. *Mamacitas* cooked meat pies on bar-b-q's built from chain links and trash cans. It was pigeon meat. Pigeons perched everywhere. Kids shot them with BB guns and tossed them in paper sacks.

Some nice trees, a lake breeze, garish-colored buildings. Jackbooted cops with barbed wire–wrapped saps.

The grid made it easy. Crutch found four pharmacies fast. They looked innocuous: bright walls, narrow aisles, white-coat spics at back counters. Big cardboard ads for Listerine and Pepsodent. No rob-me vibes.

Crutch schlepped down Calle Central to Avenida Bolívar. Little spic-lets waved dead pigeons. Crutch tossed them American dimes and watched the brawls that ensued.

Número 5: a joint with a big red cross and a jumbo Coke machine. No vibe. It was pushing 6:00, closing time—*trabajo, finito*.

Crutch turned down an alley. Eye magnet: Gonzalvo Farmacia. A quiet little place with a big, loud poster.

Diseased kids begging. Nixon with fangs. Bright red Commie slogans. *Mucho* exclamation points.

Four *cholos* across the street, in a ’55 Merc. Yeah, they look *eeeevil*. Their sled looks *satanic*. Lake pipes, fender skirts, car-antenna scalps.

The *reeeeall* thing. Dark Latin hair, rawhide-cured, stitching on the skin flaps.

Crutch cut back to the main drag. He reconnoitered and found a walk path behind the building row. Four down to the pharmacy, maybe a side window loose.

He got low and crouch-walked. He hit the rear of the pharmacy and peeped windows. The back ones were barred. He saw the dope shelves and three pharmacists working. The side windows were un-barred. One was air-cracked. A big cardboard sign on an easel covered it.

Crawl space, hiding place.

Crutch cracked the window two more inches and vaulted in. His knees banged the sign. He grabbed the easel part and kept it upright.

He peered around it. The sign was for Noxzema skin cream. A good-looking chiquita salved her bare arms and went ooh-la-la. A boss type shooed out two customers. The three pharmacists stood at the counter and tallied receipts.

Prime view. There’s the clock, it’s 5:58, the four *bandidos* walk in.

The boss type looks pissed. The guys fan out. One guy scopes the Brylcreem, three guys walk to the rear. The boss type turns his back and tidies the candy shelf. The Brylcreem guy pulls a silencered revolver and walks straight up. The boss type turns around and goes “Oh.” The Brylcreem guy sticks the barrel in his mouth and blows off the top of his head. Silencer thud, brain and skull spray. No crash—the boss type just slides down the shelf row and dies.

The pharmacists keep working. One guy walks up with Ipana toothpaste. One guy walks up with Clearasil. One guy walks up with Vick’s VapoRub. The pharmacists catch the drift. One man starts weeping. One man clutches his saint’s medal. One man tries to run.

The Ipana guy pulled his piece and shot them all twice. They fell in a clump. Their shrieks and gurgles got jumbled up. The Clearasil guy jumped the counter and made for the heavy-dope vault.

Blood dripped off a shelf of asthma products. The VapoRub guy dipped his finger in. He found a white wall space. He wrote "*MATAR TODOS PUTOS ROJOS.*"

Crutch walked back to the Lido Palace. Wobble legs got him there. The heist guys were in and out quick. He left his hiding spot shaky and sobbing. He stole a Coke and some Bromo and chugged it to keep his bile down. He wobble-walked to the bar, had three scotches and weaved up to his room.

Someone had placed a brown-wrapped box on the bed. The postmark was Langley, Virginia. He unwrapped it. Froggy delivered—here's the code-breaking book.

He got out his pix of Gretchen/Celia's address book. He arrayed them on the desk. He skimmed the codebook and turned to the table of contents. He saw a "Symbol Index" listed. He turned to it. Lots of fucking symbols, alphabetically described. The geographic and political distinction in bracketed text.

Crutch scanned his Minox pix. Gretchen/Celia's symbols: stick figures circled with *X* marks and artful slashing backgrounds. He skimmed the codebook. No numbers or letters corresponded to Gretchen/Celia's numbers and letters. He went back to the "Symbol Index" and started at *A*.

He hit the *H* listings. He saw "Hexes" and "Haitian Voodoo." He saw numbers linked to drawings linked to letters. A few of the numbers and letters matched Gretchen/Celia's shit. He saw variants of her stick figures and *X* marks. He read the text: "The voodoo priest's depiction of spiritual chaos while a subject/victim is hexed."

Horror House, last summer. The markings there, the symbols here, the derivation expressed.

Call it: Gretchen/Celia's pages were a paper curse and a voodoo book of the dead.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 1/29/69–2/8/69. Extract from the journal of Marshall E. Bowen.

Los Angeles

It was a minor knife fight with major political implications for two extremely minor political groups. But, I facilitated it and it occurred on Wayne Tedrow's first day as my cutout.

Jomo suffered minor lacerations and Leander received chest bruises when Jomo's knife blade snapped off. Wayne got Jomo to Daniel Freeman Hospital; he was stitched up and released within a few hours. I got Leander to Morningside Hospital. He confounded the doctors by swallowing several Haitian herb pills in the emergency room. The placebos calmed him down somewhat. Jomo is MMLF; Leander is BTA. Which way do I jump? My personal dilemma, certainly. As always, I abut that maddening disjuncture: the viable construction of black identity and the dubious construction of revolution, as implemented by criminal scum seeking to cash in on legitimate social grievance and cultural trend.

I now sense this: Mr. Holly knew I would succeed as his infiltrator because I am too smart to accede to the rhetoric of revolution and too hip to buy the simpleminded reactionary response. Mr. Holly understands that ambivalence shapes performance and that actors are, in the end, self-centered and solely concerned with their performing context. He'll let me walk a thin ideological line and actually risk a black-militant conversion, because he knows how selfishly motivated I am. Brilliant Mr. Holly. A nonpareil talent scout with a superb eye for acting ensembles. Casting Wayne Tedrow as my cutout plays to my strengths and Wayne's strengths and has paid off immediately. An ex-cop with enormous racial baggage is overseeing Tiger Kab; the brothers think he's rogue and rather dig him. And nobody suspects that he's FBI-adjunct.

Both men are pressuring me: Wayne wants me to align myself unilaterally with either the BTA or the MMLF; Mr. Holly wants me to somehow facilitate the dope-pushing arm of OPERATION BAAAAAD BROTHER, an aspect of my duties that Wayne disapproves of with almost Calvinistic fervor. Heroin is scarce around here; I credit some form of black consciousness for its relative scarcity, if not black militancy itself. Thus, I cannot rat out BTA or MMLF members for the procurement or sale of it anytime soon. There have been more southside liquor-store robberies, replete with rumors of black-militant suspects, but my subtle queries on that topic have yet to turn up names. I'm hoping the Jomo-Leander fracas will fester among the BTA/MMLF leadership and produce some exploitable discontent. In the meantime, I'm making the scene.

I have party-crashed a mélange of political poseurs. They are recreating a dank form of New York café society, circa 1930. El Morocco, the Stork Club and '21' then; Sultan Sam's Sandbox, the Scorpio Lounge and Rae's Rugburn Room now. The skin tone has darkened, the fashions have changed, the cultural bar has been vulgarized and revitalized. These people love to see and be seen. Ezzard Donnell Jones, Joan Klein, Benny Boles, Joe McCarver and Claude Torrance club-hop most evenings. I always rate a "Right on" or "Hey, brother," because I am a celebrity, martyr and prized commodity in one package. They sense that I want to be one of them, and I think they see my lack of one-group allegiance as a sign of coyness and of understandable reluctance. *We gots to let the brother choose. Sheeeeit, brother was a motherfuckin' pig just a few months ago*.

There has been an unsettling barrage of hate cartoons flooding the southside for the past several weeks. The chief targets have been the Panthers and US, along with street-art salvos directed at BTA and MMLF. My cartoonist and hate-tract writing friend Jomo ridicules the artistry and has convinced me it did not spring from his hand—"Not my style, brother. This is Mr. Hoover's work for goddamn sure." Mr. Holly disputes that—convincingly—because he's given to blunt confirmations or denials, sees me as a brother cop on his side and would not try to disingenuously assert that the Bureau is above such tactics. Dwight Chalfont Holly, social realist, a man who calls a spade a spade and sometimes a spook, shine, dinge, coon, jungle bunny or smoke. The master of the mixed message. A critic of the LAPD's vilely abusive conduct on the southside. A man who sadly admits that suppression never works, expresses a rather haunted respect for Martin Luther King and enjoys making me the straight man in impromptu *Amos 'n Andy* routines. I despise the hackneyed expression "a piece of work," but that is Mr. Holly defined. The same phrase applies to his tortured aide-de-camp and quasi–kid brother, Wayne Tedrow—perhaps even more so. How odd that Wayne is the true killer of the two; how odd that he seems to be much less driven by racial animus and appears to be more capable of sustaining equitable relationships with blacks. I like Wayne; I've enjoyed the several cutout/operatee meetings that we've had. I've spread the word on how he killed the three black junkies and psycho rapist Wendell Durfee. Of course, the brothers *loved* it. Wayne has become the stuff of ambiguous ghetto lore already. Ooooh, that Wayne T.—he *baaaaad*.

And something else.

I arrived early for one of our meetings. Wayne was caught unprepared. I saw him looking at a photograph of a black woman. Wayne was quite obviously embarrassed. He put the photo down and gave me a look that brusquely stated *Don't Ask*. I didn't ask Wayne; I asked Mr. Holly, who replied, "Wayne goes deep with you dark motherfuckers," and cut the topic off there.

I did some Las Vegas newspaper research and identified the woman as a union steward named Mary Beth Hazzard. She's a decade older than Wayne and is the mother of a long-missing son named Reginald. Reginald Hazzard is the young man in the photograph that Wayne showed me on the day we met; Wayne has been showing the photograph to almost everyone he encounters on the southside and seems determined to find the young man, come hell or high water. My newspaper research also revealed this: a West Las Vegas dope addict killed Mrs. Hazzard's minister husband last year, then killed himself. Astonishingly, the dope addict was posthumously indicted for the murder of Wayne's father in June of '68. More astonishingly: the Vegas rumor is that Wayne and his late stepmother/lover killed Wayne Senior themselves.

Wayne and Mr. Holly absorb me on several levels. They are not rogue cops à la Scotty Bennett—they are rogue authoritarians. And Wayne miraculously entered my life just as all my subtle queries on the armored-car heist had panned out fruitlessly and I found myself once again at the start-over point. In that moment, I meet Wayne. He casually asks me if I've heard stories of black folks receiving emeralds anonymously. He shows me a photograph of the young black man he's looking for. The young man vaguely resembles the burned-faced man I met on 2/24/64. I feel like I'm entering a serendipitous dream state. What does all of this mean?

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/11/69. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: "Recorded at the Director's Request"/"Classified Confidential 1-A: Director's Eyes Only." Speaking: Director Hoover, Special Agent Dwight C. Holly.

JEH: Good morning, Dwight.

DH: Good morning, Sir.

JEH: Wayne Tedrow and the sullen Negress Mary Beth Hazzard. I would be remiss in not expressing my horror and delight.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Guilt assumes many forms. Mrs. Hazzard is not a comely Negress in the Lena Horne mode. She is undoubtedly given to phrases like "power to the people" and predisposed to the music of Archie Bell and the Drells.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: You are being deliberately obtuse this morning, Dwight. You went through a spell like that when I deported Emma Goldman in 1919.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Sirhan Sirhan is on trial and the formal James Earl Ray proceedings should begin in April. Would you say the Bureau is covered there?

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: And the Dr. Fred Hiltz homicide?

DH: Again, Sir. We're covered. Jack Leahy has the case buried.

JEH: Jack Leahy is the Alger Hiss to my HUAC and the Costello to my Abbott. He is a traitor and an unfunny nightclub comedian who has ridiculed my penchant for antiques.

DH: Yes, Sir. No one has ever quite figured Jack out.

JEH: He was your partner in '23. You worked the Milwaukee Office with him.

DH: Yes, Sir. I remember.

JEH: I'm appalled by those hate cartoons circulating in

South Los Angeles. I want you to determine their origin immediately and send me copies of all such works of filth extant.

DH: I'll get on it, Sir.

JEH: Wayne Tedrow as Marshall Bowen's cutout. Do you still defend the choice?

DH: Vehemently, Sir.

JEH: Why, pray tell? Because the dusky widow of the preacher he killed has imbued young Wayne with a surfeit of soul?

DH: Yes, Sir. In part.

JEH: And our Congolese cuties the BTA and MMLF? Will they cooperate with our agenda and push heroin sooner or later?

DH: I think they will, Sir.

JEH: And the infant daughter of informant 4361?

DH: Lively and healthy, Sir.

JEH: And your newer informant/inamorata?

DH: She's in my thoughts, Sir.

JEH: As you are in mine, Dwight.

DH: Thank you, Sir.

JEH: Good day, Dwight.

DH: Good day, Sir.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/13/69. Pouch communiqué. To: Wayne Tedrow. From: Colonel Ivar S. Smith, USMC (Retired). President, ISS Security Limited, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Marked: "Hand Pouch Deliver Only"/"Destroy Upon Reading."

Dear Mr. Tedrow,

This letter follows up your colleague Jean-Philippe Mesplede's recent trip to the D.R. to view casino-site locations and to discuss the possibility of building said hotel-casinos in this country. I am pleased to tell you that President Joaquín Balaguer is very anxious to have your businesses here and has pledged considerable resources in an effort to convince you to come. A brief history will give you a sense of the D.R. and our island neighbor Haiti and will, above all, convince you that this is a safe place for American tourists and your overseers and their hotel-casino personnel.

The D.R. comprises the eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola, and Santo Domingo, discovered by Columbus in 1492, is considered to be the oldest city in the Western world. Innumerable coups involving Spain, France and Holland led to the current Dominican secession from Spain; numerous battles between indigenous Negroes and the French resulted in independence for Haiti. Relations have remained strained between the D.R. and Haiti; this stands as the case today. Haiti, however, exists in a state of dire poverty, while the D.R. is developing into the very model of a safe and sane, pro-U.S., anti-Communist republic. The Haitian border is heavily patrolled by Dominican forces, assisted by agents of President Balaguer's personal intelligence unit La Banda, in collaboration with my security firm. Informant networks have been recruited by the above agencies; the Haitian population of the D.R. and illegal Haitian immigration into the D.R. has been well interdicted and suppressed. The Haitians are a primitive race of people, heavily reliant on their practice of voodoo and made tractable by their addictive use of klerin liquor and mind-altering herbs. The president of Haiti, François "Papa Doc" Duvalier, came to power as a voodoo proponent and keeps his people suppressed by allowing voodoo to flourish. His private police force, the Tonton Macoute, are recruited from voodoo societies and enforce voodoo as President Duvalier's chief means to retain the societal status quo and keep himself in power. Under Dominican President Trujillo's rule (1930–1961), there were several Dominican army slaughters of unruly Haitian émigrés; on June 14, 1959, a Castroite group called the 6/14 Movement staged a failed invasion of the D.R.'s shores. The brief 1965 Civil War was, in fact, a farce, sternly resolved when President Johnson sent in a marine contingent to restore order to a nation seeking to establish free elections. A leftist named Juan Bosch was fraudulently elected and held power briefly. A truly free election was held in 1966. Bosch was deposed and pro-U.S. President Balaguer was honorably elected. The last official marine unit withdrew from the D.R. on 8/19/68.

President Balaguer is no flamboyant Rafael Trujillo, but President Balaguer knows how to keep dissent at a low roar and understands the importance of maintaining a tidy nation that

American and European tourists will want to visit. He is on superbly good terms with the military, should crack-downs or clean-ups of Haitians or left-wing insurgents be required. And President Balaguer is willing to proactively invest in your hotel-casino foray by pledging land free of charge for casino sites in Santo Domingo proper and outside of it (see addendum report for structural studies and soil-composition studies). He will grant Hughes Air the exclusive flight rights to reserved VIP landing strips at the Santo Domingo Airport, will build extra runways for the increased air travel free of charge and will supply un-skilled Haitian and Dominican peasant workers for the casino build. A construction company that he is part owner of will supply building materials at a reduced cost and my security firm and La Banda stand ready to provide 24-hour security for the building sites. I am recommending four Cuban men—WILTON MORALES, FELIPE GÓMEZ-SLOAN, CHIC CANESTEL and CRUZ SALDÍVAR—as casino-site work bosses. They are Cuban mercenaries, Spanish- and English-fluent, and have pre-existing work relationships with the operatives in my security firm and the agents in La Banda. Again, I will stress: the threat of revolt or the shenanigans of left-wing gadfly groups will pose no threat to the casino build, and the presence of unruly Haitian émigrés and Dominican peasants will be curtailed before it can reach the point where it might upset visiting tourists. As of this writing, President Balaguer is preparing an addendum incentive package as his way to say "*¡Bienvenidos!*" to you and your investors' group.

In summation, I can only state that you and your people would be well advised to say "*¡Sí!*" to our proposal. You will be welcomed to a country with a stable political climate, a solid economy and a leadership anxious to lend a helping hand.

Sincerely,
Ivar S. Smith, USMC (Retired)

61

(Las Vegas, 2/16/69)

The Clark County Sheriff's sent more paperwork. Wayne went through the folder and pinned documents to the wall.

Interview notes—LVPD file repeats. Repeat dispo reports, smudged file carbons.

The file alcove was overpacked—let's move chem bins for more shelf space. Stop, here's something—

Wayne pinned it up. A parking ticket, 11/29/63. Fire-hydrant obstruction. 2082 Monroe Street, North Vegas. Reginald Hazzard got tagged the week before he disappeared.

It was tri-racial turf. Nellis AFB decreed that. The commercial strip was all slot joints and one-buck buffets. They were one-race-only deals. Whites had the Shamrock, blacks had Monty's Mosque, the Mexicans had Al's Alamo.

The residential streets were mixed and cut through diagonally. Wayne parked on Monroe and went walking. He'd read Ivar Smith's report and summarized it for the Boys. The soil and structural stats were superb. Balaguer wanted their biz. He was *paying* them to come and build. The Boys said let's go. Wayne called Smith in Santo Domingo. Smith said Balaguer wanted fifty grand a month personal. Wayne said okay. The Boys said okay. Wayne proposed a hands-off chit from Dick Nixon. Farlan Brown said we need a phone-chat liaison. Wayne's candidate: Dwight Holly.

The prez was a cop buff and an FBI washout. He loved to schmooze with tough-guy Feds. Dwight "the Enforcer"?—none better.

The houses were all ant-sized and eroded cinder block. Windows were foil-crimped to beat the heat. Wayne started at 2082 and knock-knocked. It was 4:10 p.m. He got tri-racial residents off shift at Nellis. He smiled, he said hello, he showed Reginald's picture. He got four no answers and fourteen straight nos.

He kept walking. A North Vegas PD car cruised by. A cop recognized him and went Pow!

He got three more no answers and nine more nos. He walked by a house with an open garage adjacent. He saw a black man vat-boiling on a hot plate. He smelled tropical plants and ammonia base.

The man waved to him. Wayne walked up. The vat fumes knocked him back. The man laughed and laughed.

They shook hands. The man squeezed words out between chuckles. He had a French island lilt. Wayne scoped the garage. It was *his* lab unkempt—cheap gear and tape-marked bottles.

Urera baccifera. Diodon holacantheus. Crapaud blanc. Theraphosidae E., *Anolis colestinus, Zanthroxyllum matinicense*.

Spiny plant powders, topical irritants, ground tarantulas, lizards and toads.

The man smiled. Wayne said, "Tetrodoxin posioning."

The man bowed. "You are a chemist?"

"Yes."

"Have you other things to tell me?"

Wayne scanned labels. *Tremblador, Desmembres,* puffer fish, stinging nettle. *Diffenbachia seguine*—a prime spiny plant.

"I hope you're using these compounds for a beneficial purpose."

"Oh yes. If eliminating an infestation of rabid gophers in my backyard can be considered that."

Wayne smiled. "Then my best advice is to add more ammonia and cook the powder into an emulsion paste."

The man grabbed a pen and wrote French on a scratch pad. Wayne ID'd scents: alkalines mixed with herb residue.

He pulled out his show picture. The man put on glasses and bent down a gooseneck lamp.

"Yes, I have met this young man."

"When?"

"I vividly recall it. It was right after the president was shot."

"And the circumstances?"

The man dabbed ointment on a finger cut. The skin puckered and closed in an instant. Wayne smelled caustic hydroxide and something all new. The effect stunned him flat.

"He was a pleasant young man and a knowledgeable amateur chemist. He had heard of me. He was curious about the anesthetic qualities of Haitian herbs, particularly their pain-killing and flame-retardant potential."

62

(Los Angeles, 2/18/69)

Emma Goldman, Moscow, Archie Bell and the Drells. Clogged veins abet Looney Tunes.

The old girl was gonesville. How long could he last? How much shitwork could he assign?

Race shit abets hate shit. Dr. King had a dream. Mr. Hoover had a comic-book jones.

Hate cartoons and hate sonnets. “This little piggie went to market. This little piggie stayed home. This little piggie got offed by a Panther, after he sucked his big bone.”

Dwight drove print shop to print shop. He worked off a phone-book list. A pro printed this shit. It was print-shop quality.

It was raining. He’d hit sixteen print shops. He displayed his hate shit and ruined moods en masse. His badge and nerves induced freakouts. Numbnuts clerks flashed the peace sign.

Mr. Hoover dug the peace sign. It was the “footprint of the American chicken.”

Dwight drove northeast. He was five hours in. The southside and the Miracle Mile were kaput. Hollywood was next.

He hit a print shop on Fountain and a print shop on Cahuenga. He played his police radio between stops. The LAPD band hopped. A Stop the War march downtown. A fruit-picker march in Boyle Heights. Lots of mon-keyshines due south.

He got "No" and "No, sir." He headed east. He hit a print shop on Vine and a print shop on Wilton. A zit-faced kid yukked at the hate shit. A hippie chick went, "Om."

He hit a print shop on Vermont. He smelled maryjane and incense. Two counter kids weaved and goof-grinned. They saw him and grokked his occupation. A joint passed girl to boy. The boy ate the roach.

Dwight flashed his hate spray. The boy said, "So? It's not illegal." The girl tee-heed.

They perused the shit. Dwight spread it out for a better look-see. The girl focused on the heavy-hung buck. The boy said, "It's a free country."

"Did you print this material?"

"Yeah, sure. It's a free country."

The girl tee-heed. "Well, sort of."

"Who brought it in? What did they look like? Who picked it up? How did they pay and/or where was it sent?"

The girl said, "This is censorship." The boy said, "It's a free country."

Dwight walked to the door, threw the bolt and walked back to the counter. The girl chewed her lip. Dwight flexed his hands.

The boy wilted. "It was a cash sale and a delivery to a place in Eagle Rock. This woman, strong-looking, you know, like a ball-buster chick you don't want no part of."

Dwight smiled. "Early forties, dark, gray-streaked hair, glasses. A knife scar on one arm."

The kids slack-jawed him. Dwight said, "Tell me her name." The girl said, "Joan."

The neighborhood was hilly and semi-low-rent. You got some big vistas and snaked freeway views. White stiffs and beaners co-existed. WALLACE FOR PRESIDENT bumper stickers and taco wagons chopped low.

The address was a bungalow court with a mottled paint job. Some hun-yuck had raped white stucco for a tie-dye effect. Eight apartments with built-in mail slots. Snooze-quiet at 3:00 p.m.

Dwight rang the door buzzer. It was wake-the-dead shrill. He put his ear to the hinge crack and heard empty-room air. He waited thirty seconds and wedged his pocket shim in the lock jamb. The door popped easy.

Too easy, un-Joan.

He walked in and chain-locked the door. He turned on the ceiling light and got the whole pad in a glance. A living room–bedroom, a bathroom-kitchenette. A pop-up wall bed unfolded.

A runner's roost—not a safe house. A short-term place—a fugitive's stopgap.

Dwight walked through. He knew he'd find canned goods in the kitchen. He knew he'd find cheapo toilet gear in the can. He knew he'd find clothes he'd never seen her in. He saved the dresser for last.

Faded jeans, boots, summer dresses styled to offset her bare arms.

He touched everything. He'd black-bagged Karen's place a dozen times. He never touched her softer things.

Dwight sat on the bed. Two pillows were placed against the railing. The rain kicked up again. The roof leaked a few feet from him. He tossed the pillows. Of course: a Magnum and a diary underneath.

The gun had rubber-band grips. They were non-print-sustaining and steadied your aim. The diary was black leather and almost weightless. That implied new pages.

He opened it. A Polaroid snapshot fell out. It was him, sleeping. The backdrop was their Statler room. He was curled toward Joan's side of the bed.

He put the photo down. His hand trembled. He gripped it calm again on the bedrail. He pulled the one page out. It was handwritten—Joan Rosen Klein's slashing block print.

> WE ARE DETERMINED TO ACHIEVE THE SAME RESULTS AND ARE DRIVEN BY A NEAR-IDENTICAL UTILITY. OUR SHARED GOAL IS TO PERPETRATE A CONTAINABLE CHAOS. DWIGHT IS COMMITTED TO FURTHERING THE FBI'S SHORT-TERM ENDS. I WANT TO CREATE THE ILLUSION THAT THE OPERATION HAS REACHED ITS LOGICAL AND SUCCESSFUL POINT OF TERMINATION. DWIGHT BELIEVES THAT THIS CONCLUSION WILL DERAIL THE BLACK-NATIONALIST MOVEMENT. I BELIEVE THAT THE BLACK-NATIONALIST MOVEMENT WILL BE ONLY MOMENTARILY DISCREDITED. DWIGHT WILL HAVE DONE HIS JOB AND WILL HAVE SEEN HIS ASSIGNMENT THROUGH TO A COSMETICALLY VOUCHED END. THE REBUTTAL TO THAT NON-END WILL BE A CONTINUOUS AND CONTINUOUSLY GROWING LEVEL

> OF DISBELIEF, MORAL HORROR AND UNOFFICIAL CENSURE THAT WILL LEAD IN TIME TO AN AS-YET-UNIMAGINABLE PLANE OF LIBERATION. THE FBI WANTS THE BTA AND MMFL TO MOVE HEROIN. THEY BELIEVE THAT IT WILL EXPOSE BLACK NATIONALISM AS INHERENTLY CRIMINAL AND REVEAL BLACK PEOPLE AT LARGE TO BE INHERENTLY DEPRAVED. THE FBI'S SHORT-TERM GOAL IS A SEDATED BLACK POPULACE; ITS LONG-TERM GOAL IS THE PERPETUATION OF RACIAL SERVITUDE. I WANT THE BTA AND MMLF TO MOVE HEROIN. I WILL RISK THE SHORT-TERM PROBABILITY OF SQUALOR IN FERVENT HOPE THAT THE SUSTAINED DEPRAVITY OF HEROIN WILL LEAD TO A RICH EXPRESSION OF RACIAL IDENTITY AND ULTIMATELY TO POLITICAL REVELATION AND REVOLT. IN THAT SENSE, I SEE HONOR, HOPE AND BEAUTY WHERE DWIGHT DOES NOT. OUR GOALS ARE BOTH INIMICAL AND FULLY SYNCHRONOUS. WE DIVERGE AND COHERE IN EQUAL MEASURE. WE ARE DEVOUT UNION AND MISALLIANCE. I HAVE BEGUN A POWERFUL PATH WITH A RACIST PROVOCATEUR WHO HAS GIVEN ME SOMETHING UNFATHOMABLE AND PRECIOUS. I WILL PUT MY GOALS ABOVE HIS AT ALL TIMES AND WILL CONCEDE THAT I CANNOT FORESEE THE SPECIFIC DETAILS OF OUR JOURNEY.

A gust hit the window screen. The pages blew out of his hand. The word *comrade* roared through his head.

63

(Santo Domingo, 2/26/69)

Drac flew them down. El Jefe sent a stretch. The runways were fresh-poured blacktop. Peons toiled up through the landing.

Aeropuerto de las Américas—strictly bush league. *Bienvenidos:* cardboard cutouts of Joaquin Balaguer beside the customs hut.

Crutch and Froggy de-planed. It was smack-your-head hot. Two Policía Nacional cops lugged their luggage to the limo. Four Harleys rumbled over. The stretch was ’56-vintage. The choppers pre-dated it. The cops wore puffed jodhpurs and stormtrooper boots. The D.R., Take 1: We’re low-rent, but we try. Don’t fuck with us. We’ll kill you or suck up to you, according to whim.

The escort pulled out. The backseat was pre-cooled. Flags snapped off giant whip antennas. Crosses, ribbons, “*Dios Patria Libertad.*” Canned cocktails poked out of an ice chest. Crutch and Froggy popped daiquiris and worked up a buzz. Balaguer was throwing a lunch bash in their honor. The Presidential Palace, upcoming.

Crutch looked out his window. Some fucking island. The beach was no beach. Bare rocks dropped off at the surf line. The Malecón was a downmarket palisades. The bluffs were rocky and brown-grassed. The boulevard was half pavement, half gravel. Froggy said, “We are needed here. We will further our personal agenda and revitalize the economy.”

Slums. Lots of spooks and spook-spic hybrids. Tin-roof buildings: ancient and cracker box–new. Boing-your-eyes paint jobs: hot pink, lime green, canary yellow.

They de-limo’d at the El Embajador. It was a cut-rate Fontainebleau upside a cut-rate Miami. A polo field adjoined it. Light-toned beaners rode white horses and banged around white balls. Light-toned women scoped the action from golf carts. They wore summer dresses and slathered on suntan oil.

Hotel slaves fawned and whooshed them up to their rooms. They were full bar- and goody basket–equipped. Crutch had a view: pastel pads, sludgy rivers, dilapidation. Statues and droopy power lines.

Pinch me—I’m here.

He changed into a seersucker suit. He was going for that Ivy League/white kahuna effect. He walked back down. Mesplede was black-suit spiffy. Ivar Smith met them in the lobby. He was slurping a liquor-laced sno-cone. It smelled like crème de menthe.

They re-limo’d and took off. Crutch and Mesplede switched to canned martinis. The streets were narrow and ground down to soil. Foot traffic was two-thirds light spic and mulatto. The real darkies had a voodoo vibe. Crutch re-spun his head tape to Managua.

That codebook, that address book, the voodoo symbols crisscrossed. Twenty-odd days of code work. No make on Gretchen/Celia’s numbers and letters.

Tin-roof shantytowns and heat-wilted lowlifes. *Calles* and *avenidas* named for sugarcane kings. Streets named for dates, à la Managua.

Mucho vacant lots. Potential casino sites all. Two on Avenida Máximo Gómez, two on Calle 27 de Febrero. The escort was an onslaught of muscle. The choppers were un-mufflered. Their motors revved loud.

Smith said, “I’m lining up the work crews. They’ll sleep in tents on the sites and work twelve-hour shifts. The Cubans will meet you at the hotel tonight. They want to drive up to the north shore and look at staging points for your other business."

They cut down Avenida San Carlos. The street was full-paved. The Palacio Nacional loomed. It was high-domed and built from roseate marble. It was a mini–White House, peach ice cream–colored.

Some ragtag kids loitered across the street. They held placards topped with red flags. They were mostly spook-spic crossbreeds, à la Harry Belafonte.

The palace gates opened. The limo braked and slowed. Smith cracked his window and pointed. It unleashed a rout.

There's a parked van near the kids. On cue—four hard boys roll out. They're all light-skinners. They've got piano-wire saps.

They charged. The kids ran. They caught them and trampled them and truncheoned their legs raw. The kids were too wire-whipped and bloody to stand up. They knee-walked and crawled to an alleyway. It took ten seconds tops.

Smith slurped his sno-cone. "The good guys are La Banda. They're Jefe's personal guys who work with my guys. The bad guys are 6/14. They have yet to figure out that dissent comes with a price."

El Jefe was a midget. He ran five-one maximum. He *mi casa es su casa'd* them with no sincerity.

Balaguer knew their names in advance. He called them Señor Mesplede and Señor Crutchfield. He sent his regards to Señor Tedrow and his investors' group. He did not say "the Boys," "the mob," "the Outfit." Smith called Balaguer "Jefe." Balaguer *scaaaared* him. Jefe sniffed his breath and smirked. Smith popped Clorets on the sly.

A palace tour followed. Smith slipped a Jefe stooge a satchel. Crutch knew the contents: fifty G's U.S. The tour was all statues and jingoist oils. Recent Führer Trujillo was omitted. Froggy was in on the Trujillo hit. The Midget was clueless. Crutch dug on that.

Lunch was seafood salad and paella. Three light-skinned women and the local CIA boss showed up. The chiquitas were courtesans brought in to un-stag things. Crutch sat down in eyeball range. The CIA guy and the Midget flanked him.

He kept it zipped and peeped cleavage. Mesplede amused the women with his pit-bull tattoos. The CIA guy's name was Terry Brundage. He boozed and talked at Ivar Smith's gasbag pace. He was a kidder. He joked at Mesplede's expense. Your buddy wants to buy a PT boat. Did he serve with JFK? Has he ever been to Dallas? You're not dope-peddlers and anti-Castro brigands, are you?

Crutch kept it zipped. The term *open secret* bonked him. A woman nailed his peeper act. She waved her napkin—shoo, you.

The Midget bloviated in English. He announced his spiels with little coughs that amounted to *ACHTUNG!* He talked up his Rural Development Plan. He told a joke about Papa Doc Duvalier and a chicken. He extolled his Urban Development Plan. Let's build some pre-fab shacks to house the poor and lower the crime rate. Let's build high rises to shield them from view.

Dessert was rainbow sorbet. The Midget spoke straight at Crutch.

"What is the intended meaning of your lapel pin?"

"I've killed fifteen Cuban Communists, sir."

The Midget weaved a hand—*comme ci, comme ça*. Crutch froze with his spoon raised. Sorbet dripped on his suit.

"There is a term for young men like you, Mr. Crutchfield. It is *pariguayo*. The literal meaning is 'party-watcher.' It derives from the time the United States Marines interdicted the spread of communism in my country. It describes the young marines' reluctance to ask our girls to dance."

THE EYE.

He hears "Scalp them." He can't do it. He's hurled in the sand. The dead man's face is powder-burned. A skin flap is loose. His knife slips into the eye socket. His grip falters. The blade severs the eyeball. He shuts *his* eyes. He can't look. A two-handed thrust cracks ocular bones. He puts a foot on the dead man's neck and steadies his work plane. His knife blade is serrated. He saws through to the scalp flap. Foot pressure forces blood from a neck wound. It soaks his boots. He's a pump station now. The scalp removal takes ten minutes. Foot pressure re-routes the blood through the nostrils, eye sockets and ears.

Then crackle sounds and smoke and—

That's wrong. I always get the scalp and wave it. Froggy always applauds me.

Crutch woke up. He was steam-room wet. Smoke poured from the air conditioner. He grabbed a soda siphon and spritzed out the fire. Sparks crackled and fizzed. The smoke dissipated and left a muck residue.

The room was broiling. He opened the windows and let air in. He stripped the bed and soaked the sheets in cold bathtub water. He rigged a wall-to-wall clothesline with some mason's cord from his suitcase. He hung the sheets up and turned on a desk fan. It created a cool breeze.

The Eye, The Dream. His sixth or seventh re-run.

He got out his codebook and work sheets. He got out Gretchen/Celia's address book. He started counting letters, numbers and the spaces between assumed words. A month's work. Substitution code. The letters *K* and *S* identified. Gobbledygook. No make on full-length words.

Crutch studied and drew theoretical lines. The sheets puffed. The fan rearranged grit in the air.

The phone rang. Crutch picked up. Mesplede said, "The Cubans are here."

Partners now—the drugstore killers.

The Brylcreem guy was Wilton Morales. The Ipana guy was Chic Canestel. The Clearasil guy—Cruz Saldívar. Vick's VapoRub—Felipe Gómez-Sloan.

Everybody swapped handshakes and backslaps. The guys looked similar and blurred into one spic. Four mid-sized men. All fortyish, all fit. All bulged up from concealed weaponry.

It was 8:00. The mandate was night ride. Mesplede mentioned coffee. Canestel proposed speed.

Saldívar pulled out six vials. Morales said they'd clouted a Rexall in Miami. Look: Mollencroft liquid methedrine, a potion for narcolepsy.

They fueled up in the parking lot. The dope was acidic. Pepsi chasers kept it down. Gómez-Sloan had a '62 Impala. It had Jeep tires and an off-road transaxle. They piled in and drove north.

They hit the Autopista Duarte. It was two lanes, undivided. The city dissolved into scrubland and cane fields fast. Darkies cut cane under arc lights. Pale-skinned guys on horseback bossed them around. The lights made whole rural sweeps glow.

Signs announced the Plaine du Massacre. The river divided the D.R. and Haiti in the northwest. “Massacre” meant more than carnage in pure French. Froggy dug the irony. Trujillo massacred boocoo Haitians up to ’60.

The meth hit home. Crutch went head-to-toe orgasmic. It hit the other guys. They talked blue streaks verging on purple. It was all French and Spanish. Crutch tuned it out and brain-screened womens’ faces. Closed loop: Dana Lund, Gretchen/Celia, Joan.

There was no other traffic. It was jungle-dark. Gómez-Sloan ran his brights full-time. The terrain shifted. They went up over hills. Mountain ranges hemmed them in—the Cordillera Central and the Cordillera Oriental. They climbed steady and strong. The Chevy had a giant tank full of high-test gas. They cut through towns: Bonao, Abajo, Jarabacoa. They saw scroungers combing garbage dumps. They were all black. Mesplede called them “Haitian arrivisites.” They had voodoo amulets around their necks. One guy wore a bird-wing headdress. One guy had a blood-painted face. Froggy switched to English and laid out his Trujillo hit tale.

It was early ’61. The Goat was drinking at the Red Trough and nipping at Russia’s Red Tit. JFK said enough. Likewise the Dominican army boss and the D.R. gentry. Terry Brundage hired the crew. Two crash cars, one escape car, four shooters. It was a pincer movement/auto wreck outside Santo Domingo. The Goat and his bodyguards came out blazing. The inclose shooters killed the bodyguards. Mesplede sniped the Goat from an off-road perch.

The Chevy climbed. The air got thin. They cut west at Moca. The Río Yaque del Norte was due west. Haitian wetbacks ran across the road with squishy tennis shoes and soaked trousers. One guy was handcuffed. A cop on horseback chased him. More horse cops popped out of the brush. The darky weaved and ran straight into a dog pack trailing leashes. The dogs leaped and went at his face. The Chevy topped a hill. Crutch heard howls and screams and no more.

They cut back north. Dawn came up. They hit the shoreline outside Puerto Plata. Still: no fucking beaches, just rocks to the surf. Mesplede said they needed a safe inlet. We stash our boat there. It must be Haiti-close and thus Cuba-accessible. The

Windward Passage separates Cuba from Haiti. The Mona Passage separates Puerto Rico from the D.R. We score heroin in Puerto Rico and sell it in Haiti. We stage Cuban coastal runs off the north shore. We are south of U.S. Coast Guard patrols. The Haitian and Dominican navies are moored on the Caribbean. We have the north-shore Atlantic to roam.

They got out, stood on the rocks and pissed in the ocean. They were speeding at six thousand rpm. The tri-lingual chatter was parrot squawk. Crutch kept it zipped.

Morales said, “The Crutchfield boy never speaks.”

Mesplede said, “No, but he is competent and persistent.”

Canestel zipped his fly. “He is a *pariguayo.*”

Crutch laughed. The other guys laughed. They stood on the rocks and bullshitted. The Cubans told Bay of Pigs stories. Crutch talked up his wayward-spouse gigs. Mesplede riffed on the Tiger Mystique.

The origin: Tiger Kab in Miami. Garishly painted taxis and anti-Castro ops. The mob’s Saigon-to-Vegas dope funnel. Tiger Kadre/Tiger Krew, *arriba!* Cuban runs off the Florida Keys in the vessel *Tiger Klaw*.

Tiger Kab was in L.A. now. It washed casino-build money. Tigers were fierce and beautiful creatures. We must honor their impeccable dignity and our symbiosis with them.

Saldívar tiger-growled and batted Gómez-Sloan. Morales and Canestel tiger-hissed.

Mesplede said, “We are the new Tiger Krew. Our PT boat will be the new *Tiger Klaw*. We will paint tiger stripes on the hull and fly Castroite scalps from the radio antenna. The numerical designation will be PT-109, to ironically defame the man I killed in Dallas.”

64

(Las Vegas, 3/3/69)

Wayne cooked herbs. Tree-frog glands and alkaline solutions. *Ocimum basilicum*. Tetrodoxin poisons—all Haitian strains. Lizard powder and a polychaete worm.

He juggled vats and boiled powder into paste. The Haitian man gave him herb packets. He trapped some lizards in the desert and dissected them. He removed their gallbladders and salivary glands.

He was retracing Reginald Hazzard. Reginald braced the Haitian man, late ’63. He had minor knowledge of Haitian herbs. He had queries on their pain-killing and flame-retardant potential. The man gave Wayne the same advice he gave Reginald. Wayne followed the man’s instructions, with nil results.

He created the paste. It *enhanced* pain and *jump-started* small fires. It burned through treated fabric quickly. That might mean flawed advice and overall specious knowledge. Reginald might have worked to the same chemical end or might have fully succeeded. The Haitian man might be a loony. He was a mystic.

He believed in zombificaton. He held that voodoo enhanced chemical efficacy.

Wayne poured the paste in a jar and went back to reading. He borrowed the library books that Reginald borrowed, fall ’63.

Haitian chemistry: klerin liquor, herbs, blowfish toxin. Left-wing theory: Marx, Franz Fanon, Herbert Marcuse. The science felt unsound. There were no controlled results. The described results read like a form of religious lunacy. The left-wing thinkers went long on theory and fell short on precedents. Their case was revolution. Every theory looped back to its sure necessity. Reginald was nineteen and looking for answers. He found politics and magical chemistry.

A Haitian fixation. An odd coincidence. The advance team was in the D.R. now.

Wayne walked to his file space and skimmed odd note sheets. His time line was incomplete and ended abruptly.

“*White woman bails RH out of jail, not seen since.*”

He stared at the time line. He scrawled question marks beside it. He wrote, “*Did Marsh Bowen blink at RH photo? Very unlikely.*”

He got up and washed his hands in the lab sink. Toad particles stung his skin.

“You’re shitting me.”

“No, I’m not. Farlan Brown set it up.”

“Jesus Fucking Christ.”

“No, Richard Milhous Nixon.”

Dwight dined on Bromo-Seltzer and aspirin. The Dunes Lounge was a tomb. Jody and the Misfits played stale oldies. Patrons shagged back to the slots.

Wayne said, “It’s a pro forma deal. You reassure the president, I’ll reassure the Boys. The D.R.’s a sweet spot, we’re all A-OK.”

“Mr. Hoover will want me to report back. I’ll keep things light and tell him what he wants to hear.”

“Which is?”

Dwight lit a cigarette. “That Nixon’s as absorbed with black militants as he is. That he understands the national security threat of Archie Bell and the Drells.”

A drunk careened by their table. Wayne pulled his chair closer in.

“The knife fight. Did you get feedback from your informant?”

Dwight shrugged. “She said the BTA brothers hate the MMLF brothers a whole lot more now. She didn’t mention our boy Marsh in the middle.”

“I know Clarkson, but I’ve hardly met Jackson. He’s Haitian, right?”

“Right. He’s got no rap sheet, but he was allegedly a Tonton Macoute cop in Haiti. He emigrated, changed his name and became a black-militant asshole. Why are you asking? He’s not as bad as most of those fucks.”

Wayne shrugged. “Coincidence. Idle curiosity.”

Dwight cracked his knuckles. “ ‘Idle,’ shit. The guy who’s idle is Marsh. I want you to jerk his leash. Tell him he has to join the BTA or MMLF and hand up some snitches on collateral groups to keep the old girl wetting her panties.”

Wayne smiled. “I’ll tell him.”

“And tell him to score some heroin while he’s at it.”

Wayne squeezed his water glass. The edges almost snapped. Dwight said, “Get off your high horse, son. It’s not like you haven’t cooked it, run it and sold it to black folks yourself.”

He needed air. He walked the Strip in a rainstorm.

Dwight had his shit pegged. Dwight knew how to make him work and how to wet down his fuse.

It was cold. The rain carried ice chips. The hotel marquees fritzed and lost letters.

The Boys overbooked him. The Teamster loan buyouts devoured his time. He’d purchased thirty-four busted businesses since New Year’s. The L.A. money wash was all systems go. The Peoples’ Bank was the main laundry chute. Tiger Kab and the low-life clubs washed residual green. Mesplede and Dipshit were in the D.R. Hughes Air took them down.

Drac was tailspinning at Gay Edgar’s rate. Wayne met him in private hospital rooms and assuaged his fear of the Bomb. Drac wanted to curb black breeding. His solution: put fallout in the collard greens at soul-food restaurants. Drac got two blood transfusions daily. Drac bought eight gold mines, two silver mines and a golf course since New Year’s. His lawyers were filing injunctions against the state of Nevada. Drac wanted to ban all A-bomb testing. Farlan Brown said his legal bills ran fifty grand a month. Farlan asked about Dipshit—is he still looking for that cooze rip-off chick? Wayne said probably. Dipshit follows women around when he doesn't know what else to do.

The rain turned to hail. Wayne ducked into the Top O' the Strip. Art and Dottie Todd sang "Chanson d'Amour" for the twelve thousandth time. The bar revolved and gave revelers a 360 view. Ice came down in sheets.

Sonny Liston was defacing publicity pix of Muhammad Ali. The going rate was ten scoots apiece. White losers bought them and displayed them in their dens. Sonny wrote "Draft Dodger" and drew devil's horns on Ali. Drac had a half-dozen. Farlan Brown sent the prez a Liston special: Ali sucking LBJ's dick.

Wayne waved. Sonny ditched the losers and came over. A waiter brought Wayne a Coke and Sonny a scotch-rocks. They schmoozed up the old days.

Sonny was a Tiger Kab alumnus. Wayne told him the biz had just moved to southside L.A. Sonny said he'd beat feet and lend support to the brothers. Wayne said he'd appreciate it. Sonny said he'd heard a rumor—you and this black woman.

Wayne admitted it. Sonny brought up Wendell Durfee. Wayne said he was looking for the woman's missing son. Sonny laughed for two minutes straight. It galvanized the whole room. People looked over. Wayne glared them off. Sonny caught his breath and drained his cocktail.

Wayne said, "Are you finished?"

Sonny said, "You and your nigger quests."

Graph boxes, arrows. Connecting lines to and from.

A box marked "Library Books." Connection points: the boxes marked "Political Texts" and "Haitian Herbs." A box marked "Parking Ticket." Connection point: the box marked "Haitian Herb Man." A box marked "Jail." Connection point: the box marked "White Woman/Bail."

The graph helped him think. The wall placement let him think sitting and standing. It supplanted and reduced his file work.

Wayne scanned boxes. The LVPD summary sheet said *Read Me*. He sat down and skimmed it again. It summarized Reginald's loneliness. High school, J.C., the car-wash job. Nobody really knew the boy. Piss-poor acquaintances and no friends.

"Before you ask me for the dozenth time. No, we never discussed Haitian herbs or left-wing political texts."

Wayne swiveled his chair. Mary Beth put her hands on his shoulders and straddled his lap.

"I wouldn't have given you a key if I knew you'd use it to torment me."

"You're prone to torment, so I'm only checking in as usual."

Wayne pulled her shirttail out. "We could lie down for a while."

She touched his lips. "We could and we should, given that you've got that policeman-with-routine-questions look on your face."

"They're not routine."

"I know that, sweetie. I'm just teasing you. It's just my way of curbing my tendency for brusqueness."

"Which means?"

"Which means I'm here at this moment, and Reginald's not."

He kissed her. She traced his jawline. There's her eyes. As always, those green flecks.

"The emerald. Remember, you said you'd—"

She covered his mouth. It always meant *You hush*.

"Yes, I asked around. I learned nothing of specific value, which didn't surprise me. What I *did* learn was that there is a persistent and persistently amorphous myth that black people in dire need get emeralds anonymously in the mail."

Wayne stood up. Mary Beth held on and stayed in his lap. She laughed. He carried her into the bedroom and dropped her on the bed.

She bounced a little. She kicked off her shoes and pulled off her socks.

"I don't want to spoil the mood, but I remembered something."

Wayne took his shirt off. "About Reginald?"

"Yes."

"Tell me. Don't spoil the mood, but—"

"I found some of his old school clothes, so it jogged my memory. It was the spring of '62. Reginald took a field trip to Los Angeles. It was a science fair at USC. He told me he went to a few classes at a 'Freedom School.' They had a little makeshift office on the campus."

Something went *click*. He couldn’t place it. He went blank in dead sync. Mary Beth threw a shoe at him.

“*I’m here. My son is not.*”

65

(Washington, D.C., 3/17/69)

Nixon said, “Look at the rug. It’s the details that get me. The goddamn bird has all those arrows and leaves in his claws.”

Dwight looked at the rug. Likewise Bebe Rebozo. The Oval Office, 6:00 p.m. drinks. Nixon on his third old-fashioned.

Bebe said, “Mr. Hoover had a radio show back in the ’30s. I was a youngster in Havana then. There was a 200,000-watt station that broadcast it out of Miami.”

Nixon pulled the cherry out of his glass. “Agent Holly doesn’t give a shit about rugs or Mr. Hoover’s salad days. He wants to put the quietus on all this goddamned black-militant nonsense that’s been going around.”

Dwight said, “That’s correct, Mr. President.”

“And he’d like my word that I’m not plotting any upheaval in the Dominican Republic.”

Dwight nodded. Bebe went ooh-la-la. The prez and the First Friend looked fraternal. They were swarthy. They wore mauve alpaca sweaters with the presidential seal. The Rotary meets the

Rat Pack.

Bebe lit a cigarette. “The D.R. and I go way back. I owned some cane fields there in the ’40s. There’s this exile group I toss a couple of shekels at. They’re operating out of there now.”

Nixon coughed. Bebe snuffed out his cigarette and fanned the air. It was snowing. Windows showed off a portico and a huge lawn.

Bebe said, “My guys used to sell heroin. It’s a quick turnaround on your investment. If you want to fight communism, you’ve got to get down to the nitty-gritty.”

Nixon stirred his drink. “Tell it like it is. Heroin has financed every Third World coup since God was a pup. Right, Mr. Holly?”

“That’s correct, Mr. President.”

“Farlan Brown said you went to Yale. How come you’re the one with the badge and I’m the one with all the headaches and this goddamned silly sweater?”

Dwight smiled. “It’s the vicissitudes of fate, Sir.”

“ ‘Vicissitudes,’ shit. That Irish cocksucker Jack Kennedy stole the ’60 election from me. *That’s* a ‘vicissitude.’ What I’ve got now is the goddamned last laugh.”

Bebe ate his cherry. “I like Dwight, Mr. President. You should appoint him attorney general.”

Nixon chortled. “Hoover’s got too much dirt on me. He’d never go for a hatchet man like Dwight calling the shots.”

Bebe said, “Are you a hatchet man, Dwight?”

“Yes, sir. I am.”

Nixon picked at a hangnail. “Where does Hoover stash his secret files? I had an aide who said he kept a vault at the Willard.”

“The basement of his house, Mr. President. It’s moisture-sealed and fireproof.”

Bebe snorted. “He’s got nothing on the president that the man himself has not volunteered to the public.”

Nixon rolled his eyes. Bebe stammered. Dwight examined his drink coaster. It featured the same pissed-off bird.

Bebe said, “The D.R.’s a toilet. Your investors will have to upgrade the appearance of the place if you want to lure tourists down. I just visited my exile group and took a little look-see. Balaguer’s solidly pro-U.S., but the CIA guys are all drunks and gash men. There’s a retired marine colonel named Smith who buffers Balaguer on most of the dirty work."

Nixon said, "Accountability. You put a straw man out in front of you. When the shit hits the fan, you're out of range. *Me*? I was at a Red Sox game or grinding the old lady."

Dwight laughed. Bebe futzed with the emerald ring above his wedding band.

"My group's got two new hard-ons. This French merc and his kid buddy. They may not oust Fidel, but they'll die trying."

Nixon yawned. "Castro's got legs. The American electorate has had it up to here with Cuba. I'll let the exiles pull their stunts as long as it doesn't come back to haunt me at the polls."

Bebe acted hurt. Darling, how could you? Dwight looked away.

Nixon said, "Dwight, let's talk turkey."

"I'm all ears, Sir."

"Describe Hoover's mental state. Assume that I'm an insider with some previous knowledge and that nothing leaves this room, be assured that candor will serve you in the long run and tell it like it is."

Dwight shot his cuffs. "He's in exceedingly poor physical and mental health. He's obsessed with black crime, black mating habits, black political activity and black hygiene. His judgment is questionable at all levels. He is very obviously impaired. He is hemorrhaging prestige in the law-enforcement community. He's prone to embarrassing gaffes. He makes intemperate and highly impolitic remarks routinely. He's vituperative in the extreme. He's hanging on with brute will, hatred and daily injections of amphetamine in the keester. Despite this great wealth of infirmity, he remains tenuously lucid and must be considered a deadly adversary and thus a significant and utterly essential friend."

Bebe whistled. "Tell it like it is, baby."

Nixon whistled. "Amen, brother."

Dwight felt his pulse race. Nixon winked. It flopped as a you-my-man ploy.

"Keep me updated on that. Will you, Dwight?"

"Yes, Sir. I will."

Bebe flashed his emerald ring. "Nice, huh? I got it in the D.R."

Echo Park was flooded. The rent-a-boats were moored and tarp-covered. The rain was incessant. The ducks were off hiding. He bought popcorn for nothing.

He was dead. He took the D.C.-to-L.A. red-eye, squashed between Buddhist priests. They saw his gun and om-cleansed his aura. His pills and drinks uncleansed him. He got an hour's sleep.

He called Mr. Hoover and reported the Nixon meet. He described it as "perfunctory." The old girl was enraged. Dwight mollified him. Hoover launched a fourteen-minute anti-Nixon rant. He wanted news on the hate cartoons. Dwight said his leads dead-ended.

Two nights, three hours' sleep. Back-to-back MLK nightmares. Dr. King sermonized. Dwight watched from a back pew.

Karen walked up. She had Eleanora swaddled. They stood under the boathouse awning. The baby was triple-wrapped, warm and safe.

Dwight said, "She looks like me."

Karen smiled. "It was a procedure, and you were nowhere near the receptacle."

Eleanora had Karen's hair and bone set. She slept through the storm noise.

Dwight said, "It's been a while."

"It has. I've had Ella and you've had the operation."

"What's-His-Name is leaving soon, right?"

"Yes."

"We can log some time in then. I got you a key to the drop-front."

Karen stepped away. "That's an I've-got-nothing-to-hide gesture."

"Point taken, but it's true."

"You're ducking the issue."

"Say her name, then. Accuse me of something. Give me the chance to confirm or deny."

Karen lit a cigarette. Her hand trembled. Dwight held Eleanora while she smoked.

"Mr. Hoover called Bayard Rustin a 'prehensile-tailed night creature' at the American Legion."

Dwight said, "I know."

"His remarks regressed from there."

"I know. Jack Leahy showed me a copy of the speech."

Eleanora kicked. Dwight rocked her back to sleep. The awning leaked. Water dripped near their feet.

Karen said, “There’s a safe house near Cal Riverside. I’ve been in it. There’s a closet with four pump shotguns and a box of hand grenades. A man with a Mao Tse-tung mask and a shotgun has robbed four markets in San Bernardino.”

Dwight studied Eleanora. Her feet kicked while she slept.

“I’ll always take armed robbery. What can I do for—”

“The Philadelphia Office has my husband’s file under review. Agents have been pestering the dean. One man got quite bold and risqué. ‘You college folks get around a lot. I heard the wife’s been playing footsie with Mr. Hoover’s number-one hard boy.’ ”

Dwight kicked the wall. The impact disturbed Eleanora. Karen tossed her cigarette and took the bundle back. Ella cooed and shut her eyes.

“Mr. Hoover told that agent about us, Dwight. It violates the agreement we’ve had from the beginning.”

“I know.”

“Mr. Hoover called Coretta Scott King ‘a diseased go-go girl’ on national TV.”

“I know.”

“Can you please say something more than that?”

“Mr. Hoover is losing his mind. He’s old and he’s sick. No one has the balls to pull the plug on him, because he’s got dirt files on the whole fucking world.”

“Including you?”

“Yes.”

Karen rocked Eleanora. The clouds went double dark and kicked loose a downpour.

“There’s times I can’t run from it, Dwight.”

“Run from *what*?”

“From the things you never talk about. From how far you’ve gone for that man. From every horrible thing that you’ve done.”

Dwight reached for Eleanora. Karen pulled her back. Dwight walked out into the rain.

Three pills and drinks failed him. His circuits sparked and kept him awake. Adrenaline ate through the sedation. He got dressed and drove to Eagle Rock.

It was midnight. The courtyard was quiet. The rain brought red flashes and thunder peals. Dwight picked the lock and let himself in.

He hit the lights. The pad looked identical. He walked to the bed and tossed the pillows. He found the same gun and diary. He opened it and found new sheets.

> MY SHORT-TERM AIMS AND DWIGHT'S SHORT-TERM AIMS HAVE BLURRED. I HAVE COME TO SHARE DWIGHT'S VIEW OF THE BTA AND MMLF. THEY ARE CRIMINALS DRIVEN BY PERSONAL ANIMUS AT THE EXPENSE OF POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS. DWIGHT CREDITS THEM WITH NO CONSCIOUSNESS; I CREDIT THEM WITH DAWNING CONSCIOUSNESS BLUNTED BY THE SELF-SERVING PATHOLOGY OF ANGRY MALES IN GROUPS. THESE MEN MUST PUSH HEROIN AND FACILITATE A DEFINABLE SQUALOR. IT MUST BE THE CONTAINED CHAOS THAT DWIGHT AND I BOTH DESIRE. THE DAWNING OF CONSCIOUSNESS MUST BE PROVOKED THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF MORAL TERROR. DWIGHT AND MR. HOOVER BELIEVE THAT THE STIMULUS OF HEROIN WILL PROVE OVERPOWERING TO BLACK MILITANTS, THEIR FOLLOWERS AND THE UNCOUNTABLE BLACK PEOPLE MOVED BY THEIR RHETORIC. THEIR MASS CAPITULATION WILL CONFIRM VILE RACIST CARICATURE, DISCREDIT BLACK RADICALISM AND SUPPRESS ITS EMERGING MAINSTREAM APPEAL. I BELIEVE THAT THE DAWNING OF POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS WILL SERVE TO CONFRONT AND TRANSCEND THIS OBSTACLE, REINVENT THE FORMERLY CRIMINAL AND CAST THEM IN THE HERO ROLES THEY NOW SO SELFISHLY AND FATUOUSLY SEEK. THIS CONTROLLED CHAOS WILL NOT CONCLUDE IN POLITICAL DISSOLUTION. THE CHAOS IS TOO STEEPED IN THE HORRIFYING CONTEXT OF WHITE NEGLECT AND INJUSTICE TO BE ANYTHING BUT LIBERATING. I HAVE SEEN AND DONE HORRIFYING THINGS IN MY LONG REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE; MY DEPLOYMENT OF HEROIN IN ALGERIA IN '56 PROVED AMBIGUOUS. I STERNLY TRUST THAT ANY AND ALL CONFLICTS IN THIS JOURNEY WILL RESOLVE IN MY FAVOR, NOT DWIGHT'S, AND THAT NO HUMAN BEINGS WILL DIE.

Dwight reread the pages. He skimmed and jumped and hopscotched the text. The printing blurred. The booze and pills kicked in late. He saw spots and ink wisps. The floor rolled. He lay down and shut his eyes.

The bed rolled. The floor dipped. He didn't know if he was awake or asleep or someplace in between. He drifted. It was scary and peaceful. His head and limbs felt funny. He went blank for a while. He opened his eyes and saw Joan.

She sat on the bed. One leg was cocked. Her knee brushed his hip. She wore boots over black nylon stockings full of runs. Her hair was tied back.

"How did you find it?"

"The cartoons you had printed. You left an easy trail."

"The cartoons were a bust. It won't happen again."

"Who drew them?"

"An old Freedom School student of mine."

Dwight sat up. Dizziness slammed him down. Joan squeezed his knee. Dwight traced her stocking runs and found some bare leg to touch.

She said, “Heroin.”

“They can’t score it. They won’t be able to deal it for ten seconds without getting popped.”

“I could help them.”

“I’ll consider it.”

Joan laced up their fingers. Dwight tore out a stocking run and cupped her whole leg.

“How many of these places do you have?”

“I’m not telling you.”

“You left the diary out for me to find. Did you get the idea from Karen Sifakis?”

“Karen’s a mail-drop friend. I don’t actually know her.”

“Did you leave the diary out for me to find?”

Joan nodded. Dwight said, “Nobody dies.” Joan took his face in her hands.

The dizziness faded out. He felt his body again. Her hands steadied him.

Joan said, “What do you want?”

Dwight said, “I want to fall. And I want you to catch me on the way down.”

66

(Santo Domingo, 3/20/69)

His eyes hurt. He kept seeing word prisms. His fingers were paper-cut.

A month of code work. Maybe some progress. Making words out of numbers, letters and spaces.

Tiger Krew bombed up Autopisa Duarte. Ivar Smith sold them a Dominican army half-track. Saldívar and Canestel tiger-striped it. Morales painted on a big tiger paw. They headed for Piedra Blanca and Jarabacoa. Slave crews were breaking ground on their sites. The Midget sold them the two rural lots and two lots in Santo Domingo. La Banda recruited work crews from La Victoria prison. The jailbirds got sentence reductions if building deadlines were met.

Balaguer's construction firm stood ready. La Banda evicted paupers from the out-of-town sites. The casino build was *on*. The PT boat was ordered. They were meeting a Tonton Macoute guy to discuss the dope biz later.

Crutch Murine-dosed his eyes. The half-track treads chewed up pavement. Froggy drove. The Cubans perched above the wheel wells. Crutch sat in the machine-gun nest. They passed through cane fields and glades. Crutch blasted tree stumps for kicks.

Wetback Haitians ducked across the road. Morales fired at their feet. Crutch yawned and stretched. The code work induced a boocoo sleep deficit.

Voodoo. The probable book of the dead. Letters, numbers, symbols and mathematics. It's a Horror House murder lead. Book symbols match the Horror House symbols. It's Gretchen/Celia's book. Fuck—he *still* can't see Joan and Gretchen/Celia as killers.

He's giddy with it. He thinks Gretchen/Celia is in-country. He's combed every records-check resource and can't find her. Mesplede told him not to brace Sam G. "Your 'case' is all frivolity. We are here to move heroin and depose Fidel Castro."

The terrain was steep. The half-track mulched fallen tree bark. Crutch practiced stitch shots. He aimed at trees and severed limbs with .30-caliber fire.

Wayne Tedrow was coming soon. The Boys told him to cinch the deal with the Midget. Geologists bagged soil at all four sites. They said it would sustain heavy building. Mesplede found a shore spot on the D.R.-Haiti border. It was near Cap-Haitïen. Their Tonton guy was Mr. Big around there.

Tiger Kart rolled into Piedra Blanca. Local peons saw the beast and hightailed it. The site rocked. Bulldozers plowed shacks. Policia Nacional guys detained the dispossessed. They spoke Spanish. Morales translated for Crutch. It was eminent domain. Jefe needs your house. You get forty bucks and a food chit.

Some evictees wept and glared. La Banda guys flanked the bulldozers. They stood at parade rest and carried carbines at port arms.

The construction boss moseyed over. He told Gómez-Sloan the land was sound. La Banda would bring some prisoners up to clear brush. His crew would build a pre-fab bunkhouse. The prisoners would sleep shackled. Cop crews with bullwhips would oversee their work.

On to Jarabacoa.

Crutch got road-sick. Tiger Kart tread-crunched everything in its path. It was 2:00 p.m. and hell-hot. Suntan oil dripped down his neck. His head was back in Santo Domingo. His torch for Joan and Gretchen/Celia burned strong. He saw them as Commies. He didn't see them as killers. The matching symbols might not mean

Murder One.

Santo Domingo was on-the-whole shitsville. The Gazcue section was Hancock Park for spics. It was a light-skin zone. He started peeping there last week. He looked for Joan and Gretchen/Celia. He settled for random women. He followed them from parks to restaurants. He followed them home. He peeped bathroom and bedroom windows.

Tiger Kart rolled into Jarabacoa. The town was full of tin-roof huts and jungle plumage. The site was two roads down. Crutch heard bulldozer crunch. Three kids ran out of the brush. They wore masks and Uncle Ho shirts and carried flame-topped bottles. Get it? *Molotov cocktails*.

They hurled them. The bombs hit Tiger Kart and made pissant explosions. Crutch swiveled his machine gun and fired their way. He cut down some cane stalks and missed the fuckers.

The kids got away. Jungle brush covered them. Tiger Kart rolled to the site. Shackled-up workers lugged debris. Bulldozers blitzed foundations. A four-jailbird crew hauled discarded-roof sections and cut up their hands. A cop on horseback whipped a slow guy.

The straw boss waved. The Krew tiger-growled back. Crutch heard three gunshots on the Autopista.

Tiger Kart cut back and rolled northbound. They saw the Molotov kids, dead in a ditch. They were head-shot point-blank. Their Uncle Ho shirts were slashed. Their hands and feet were severed.

A La Banda guy stepped out of the brush and waved.

Ivar Smith stashed a Jeep for them. Tiger Kart was too big for the border river crossings. The Plaine du Massacre was close by. Morales sniffed the air. He said he smelled the Goat and the soul husks of slaughtered Haitians. Crutch saw blood drawings on tree trunks. He got a vile voodoo vibe.

The Jeep was full-gassed. A canvas top beat the sun out. Dirt roads got them to the river. Tonton guys perched by the bridge. They wore stovepipe suits, wraparound shades and straw porkpies. They waved the Jeep across. They exuded French savoir faire and black hipster cool.

The river was muddy and eighty yards wide. Spades popped out of the water holding crawfish. They crossed and took dirt roads to the Cordillera Central. The ride was all swerves and plows through fallen brush. Morales puked in a paper bag. Froggy cranked it in low gear, forty mph–plus.

Pauper pads whizzed by. Tin-roof shacks plaster-laced with giant rhinestones. Wood shacks with pix of voodoo priests on the doors. Tree branches hung over the roadway. Lynched chickens dangled from them. A few leaked fresh blood.

They hit the peak and descended. Flat roads led to the north shore. A spook in a dead-bird hat hexed them from the roadside. Gómez-Sloan shot at him and missed.

The terrain was tropical forest. The air smelled like salt water and dirt. Every half-ass tree was blood-marked. Beware the Zombie Zone.

They hit the shore. The salt air heated up. Froggy consulted a map and slalomed on rock-strewn sand. Crutch saw an inlet. A wild-ass jigaboo popped out of nowhere and stepped in front of the Jeep.

He was six-eight. He ran 140. He had a Fu Manchu stash. He wore a purple porkpie and a madras suit. Two .45's, two emerald rings, a crystal neck pendant filled with blood.

Froggy braked. The jig beamed and tossed rose petals in the Jeep. They were scented. They drifted down and perfumed up the Krew.

"I am Luc Duhamel. Welcome to my kingdom, baby boys."

His palace was a stone hut with a BAR placement and a barbed-wire fence. A speedboat was moored in the water. A golf cart was tethered to a flagpole. Three voodoo-sect flags flew. The yard was strewn with dead rodents. Carnivore birds swooped and gorged.

Luc sat them down inside. The walls were sequined. Everyone got their own faux-mink chair. Luc served klerin liquor in rhinestone goblets. Everyone sipped hesitant and swallowed it intact.

Luc took his coat off. His skinny arms were needle-tracked. Crutch got big-eyed. Mesplede and the Cubans deadpanned it.

Mesplede said, "*En français*?"

Luc shook his head. "English, baby boy. There is no challenge in speaking one's native tongue."

Saldívar said, “Heroin.” Gómez-Sloan said, “Smack.” Morales said, “The beast from the East.”

Canestel rubbed a fake beard—the kill-Castro code. Luc said, “Yes, Colonel Smith informed me. He said these men will become your *bons frères*.”

Froggy sipped klerin liquor. “We are purchasing a PT boat. It can do forty knots.”

Saldívar sipped klerin liquor. “Colonel Smith said you have a heroin source in Puerto Rico.”

Morales gagged on klerin. “It is a U.S. protectorate, but *Tiger Klaw* will be very fast.”

Gómez-Sloan said, “We understand that President Duvalier must be compensated.”

Canestel *sniffed* his klerin. “It is a three-island parlay. We will profit and Cuban Communists will die.”

Luc looked at Crutch and pointed to his goblet. Crutch guzzled the whole thing and saw stars.

“And you, baby boy? Have you anything to say?”

“Sir, I’m just happy to be here.”

The Krew ate dinner in Gazcue. Ivar Smith and Terry Brundage joined them. Dominicans dined late. It was pushing midnight. Crutch was achy from the ride back. He was amphetamized. He kept brain-screening the dead kids. Three gunshots, no hands and feet.

The restaurant was open-air and right off the Malecón. Salt air had the wallpaper withered down to strips. The other guys talked death shit and chowed with gusto. Crutch poked at a squid and eyed women.

They were dining upscale. It was light-skin turf. He had a good range of Spanish land-grant types. His daily rev was incessant. Late-night uppers weirdly re-volted him and put certain women in slow motion. His brain camera clicked for stills and panned for sensuous movement. Women ate, talked, laughed and touched their friends or escorts. He knew when to look and how to go with the swirl.

A La Banda dude dropped by the table. Ivar Smith palmed an envelope. The dude said, “From Bebe Rebozo.” Smith rubbed his fake beard. Crutch zoned them out. Morales nudged Gómez-

Sloan. They said, "*Pariguayo*" in sync.

Crutch smiled and played with his food. The swirl re-adjusted peripherally. A woman crushed out a cigarette, tossed her head and exhaled. Her hair flew. A ceiling fan churned her smoke. She wore buckled high-heel shoes and a pale green dress. She raised her arms and tied her hair up. Dark stubble, beaded sweat. She was pale, with brown freckles. She wore a man's wristwatch.

Crutch walked to the john. The woman adios'd her friends and went out the front door. Crutch ducked through the kitchen, cut down an alley and hit the street ten yards behind her.

She took Calle Pasteur to Avenida Independencia. She took Máximo Gómez to the Malecón bluffs. A sea breeze tossed her dress up. She pushed it down like it was funny. Crutch fell back to twenty yards and reframed his shot. She walked *fast*. His head processed it *slow*.

She turned back on a no-name street. The sea breeze evaporated. The turf went residential. She smoked. Window light caught her plumes on the updraft.

Crutch fell back five yards. The neighborhood was swank—ancient houses, eggshell white, no loud colors. She cut left on Avenida Bolívar. She unlocked the door of a slick two-story pad.

Crutch stood across the street and framed window lights. A blond woman tidied books on a shelf. His woman walked up behind her. The blond woman turned around. They smiled at the same moment and fell into a kiss.

The moment went fluid and held. Crutch watched. Their bodies merged and filled the window frame. Their hands went here and there and enhanced the embrace. The kiss *held*. They made it go *faster*, he made it go *slow*.

The light went off. His woman hit a switch. He strained to hear voices and heard none.

• • •

He called in sick. Froggy said, "*Ça va*" and "bad timing." "*Tiger Klaw* is in dry dock at St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica. You will miss her arrival."

He laid in supplies: uppers, coffee, scratch pads and pens. He brought in three auxiliary fans. He attacked the code.

He started with the letters *S* and K. He gleaned them from CIA substitution-code study. Three-number designations announced each *S* and K. Each number required subtraction and multiplication tolls. Sums designated letters of the alphabet. It was arbitrary. The sum stages varied at different tabulation points. The code-breaker's job: form words and letters from number gibberish.

Numbers, letters, *symbols*. Let's assault the symbols first.

They were squiggles, stick figures and *X* marks. They dotted Gretchen/Celia's address book at irregular intervals. The CIA codebook listed them as voodoo-derived. "The voodoo priest's depiction of spiritual chaos while a victim is hexed."

Symbols—go. Do not move on to letter numbers until you know.

He ate uppers, he drank coffee, he ran three fans plus the AC. He stared at the forty-nine symbols in Gretchen/Celia's book. He poured sweat in an igloo.

Three symbols repeated: squiggle, stick figure, *X* mark. They had to have the same *repeated* meaning. He stared at the book for nine straight hours. His brain jumped to this:

Repetition meant banality. It meant boredom on Gretchen/Celia's part. She spiced her narrative up to amuse herself and to confuse potential readers. The symbols did not bode portent. They were innocuous.

His second jump: they were abbreviations. His third jump: the explicated text would be coherent, but shorthanded. Gretchen/Celia's cursive writing was fevered. She was anxious, she composed in haste, the code work absorbed her energy. His fourth jump: the symbols were substitutes for *and, the* and *to*.

He crossed the symbols out and added those words on his copy sheet. It felt coherent. The placement felt correct.

His chest hurt. His heart banged blood to his rib cage. He heard voices in his head. He saw *THE EYE* and the *SEVERED HANDS AND FEET* without conjuring them. He hemorrhaged weight and felt his trousers go slack.

Two days in. Additions, subtractions and multiplications brain-broiling. He passed out, despite the uppers. He woke up seeing numbers. He developed a tremor in his writing hand. He wasn't sure of what he had. He decided to call repeated sums vowels. He thought he got *L* and *T*. He kept getting the sum 14. His world went tilt.

The Fourteenth of June Movement, aka 6/14. Castro-backed

Reds invade the D.R.

And:

The preceded each 14. His code break was valid so far.

That gave him the *O* and the *F*. That gave him the *J*, the *U* and the *N*. Re-tilt: the vowel *E* was always in the right place.

He ate more uppers, he drank more coffee, his piss turned near brown. His skin hugged his bones like a junkie's. He got six more number-letter sums that felt right on. He passed out for five hours. He woke up woozy and *prayed*. He forced himself to eat an apple. He chased it with a handful of ups. He got re-re-re-re-re-re-vitalized and started building words on code work and instinct.

It took eleven hours. It confirmed Managua. Yes, it's a paper curse and a book of the dead. No, it's much more.

Abbreviations, omitted words, fractured text. Fully coherent despite it. The story of 6/14/59 inside out.

It's 6/13/59. The movement is Castro-backed and based in the Beard's captive Cuba. Two converted yachts sail the Windward Passage to the north D.R. shore. Two hundred rebels are aboard. They've got M1 Garands, bazookas and machine guns. It's all men minus two: Joan Klein and Celia Reyes.

The force lands at Estero Hondo and Maimón. Dominican Army sharpshooters are waiting. All the rebels are captured or killed.

It's 6/14/59. A DC-3 departs from Cuba's Red Shore. Eighty armed men are poised. They wear the armbands of the Unión Patriótica Dominicana. The plane flies under-radar low and lands outside Constanza. The rebels kill soldiers guarding the airfield and steal their vehicles. They race into town, kill more soldiers, run to nearby mountain ravines and hide.

Army patrols scoured the hills and captured or killed the rebels. Seaborne and airborne rebels were held at the San Isidro Air Force Base and at Trujillo's torture chamber, La Cuarenta. Trujillo's personal goon squad hacked them with machetes and fried them in electric chairs. The Goat ordered huge roundups of suspected 6/14 sympathizers. Simpatico government figures were assassinated. Comsymps were tortured, killed, reluctantly released. The 6/14 Movement was truly born in the Goat's prisons. The Beard brooded over the gone-bust invasion. Anti-Fidel sentiment swept the D.R. Right. The Goat was offed in '61. The Beard staged a second invasion on 11/29/63. This group was formally called the Agrupación Política Catorce de Junio. The rebels numbered 125 this time. They landed at six north-shore locations, shot some soldiers and fled to the hills. Interim prez Juan Bosch ordered a "rabbit hunt." Soldiers combed the hills and wiped out the rebels. A few survived. They infiltrated the D.R. Left and made revolutionary woo-woo anonymously.

Crutch read Gretchen/Celia's pages. He kept jumping ahead of the decoded text. He was voodoo-vexed and amphetamized. His head banged blood to his rib cage.

The base narrative stopped. An "Expression of Solidarity" with slaughtered Haitians followed. The Goat and the Midget were accused of genocide.

Lists: the Trujillo Haitian dead, the Balaguer Haitian dead, 6/14 sympathizers abducted and killed by La Banda. List: "Excommunicated" 6/14 traitors killed by the members themselves. Lists: names, dates and death locations.

There's a single name at the bottom: María Rodríguez Fontonette.

Her monicker/nickname/political alias is "Tattoo."

Her date of *disappearance* is June '68. She *vanished* in Los Angeles.

The tattoo, the skin color, the location/date.

It's that night.

It's Horror House.

It's the night he saw Joan and Gretchen/Celia kiss.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/29/69. Extract from the privately held journal of Karen Sifakis.

March 29, 1969

Eleanora rules my days. She is a mighty empress and imperious ruler of my heart, as well as an exhausting bundle of ceaseless energy and need. She focuses me and deflects my actions and thoughts not directly related to her. My husband is back in Philadelphia now; his months-long presence here amounted to indentured servitude, as well as assisted me in the prosaic tasks of new motherhood and kept me away from Dwight. Now, I am alone with Eleanora—and, in fact, besieged by her—and Dwight is back with a besieging force.

Our fight at Echo Park was horrible; I have no right to question his actions with Joan, for our very union is duplicitous and a grave misdeed in and of itself. One difference between Dwight and me: adultery is hardly as onerous as spawning political chaos. Another difference: I wish to skate by with my misdeeds, while Dwight harbors the buried urge to be punished for his. That is a succinct primer on my love for him.

I see political misdeeds escalating and find myself reflexively attributing them to the FBI, Mr. Hoover and, by extension, Dwight. Two Panthers were shot and killed at UCLA in January. The killings allegedly derived from a long-standing Panther-US grievance and came to a head over the creation of an Afro-American Studies Center on campus. I know that the Bureau has double agents in both organizations and is committed to spawning inter-group discord. A Panther spokesman called the killings “political assassinations carried out by US on orders by the pig power structure.” I have come to hate the word *pig* as much as I hate the word *nigger* and find myself damning Dwight for his perception of ingrained criminality in the black-nationalist movement. Indictments are pending against numerous Panthers in New York City for an alleged plot to dynamite-bomb the Penn Central tracks at rush hour. Are they insane? Don’t they know *black people* would have been killed? I bomb monuments and have never physically damaged a human being. Am *I* insane to be doing this under Dwight Holly’s sanction? What horrible price will I pay for my role in assuaging this man's guilt, and where does that guilt specifically come from?

Mr. Hoover seems determined to go out in a psychotically hateful blaze of glory, and he has found an unrelenting minion in Dwight, who now has Joan Klein to aid and abet and perhaps comfort him. I am afraid that Dwight will passively permit or actively suborn the BTA and MMLF in the sale of narcotics and that he has found a willing accomplice in Joan. Joan understands the concept of narcotics as a tool of revolution and has deployed it before. I fear that Joan and Dwight seek the same physical end for antithetical political motives. They want to bring the BTA and MMLF to a point of public censure and blithely underestimate the human cost.

I've told Joan intimate things about Dwight. She knows that Dwight has burgled my home on occasion and that I leave a much less candid and controversial journal out for him to peruse. I'm afraid that expressions of my troubled love for Dwight have pushed Joan toward him in the effort to further her own political goals.

Joan has been to dauntingly dangerous places of revolution and has committed deeds—and, yes, misdeeds—that I am both thankful and regretful I am incapable of. I do not doubt her sincerity or utter commitment and have seen her in moments of frank goodness—our shared teaching duties at the Freedom School in '62 was one instance—but I utterly fear her fury and will. She and Dwight possess a blindsiding like-mindedness and emotional hunger. I pray that it will not supersede their utilitarian instincts and cause dire harm.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/2/69. Extract from the journal of Marshall E. Bowen.

Los Angeles,
4/2/69

I'm in trouble. The incident last night may get back to Scotty Bennett. The consequences may fuck up the balance of my personal life and the operation and thus my search for the armored-car money and emeralds. Mr. Holly has been pressing me for snitch-outs and Wayne has been pressing me to fall in with either the BTA or MMLF exclusively. When pressed, I vacillate and consider my options. Rarely do I vacillate to the point of stunned inaction. Last night I did.

Wayne has become a southside regular. He's been buying cocktail lounges and after-hours clubs and has been making the scene at Tiger Kab. Of all people, Wayne has brought ex–heavyweight champ and self-described "chump" Sonny Liston into the Tiger Kab fold. Sonny is a boozing, pill-popping, whore-chasing fool. The brothers are afraid of him and afraid to admit that they dig him. Sonny is very right-wing. He hates Muslims and militants and grooves Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War. His two losses to Muhammad Ali, combined with his chemical intake, have stretched his brain cells thin. He is, however, funny, unlike Tiger Kab ko-kaptain Milt Chargin, who will go to any and all degraded lengths to make black people laugh and to appear cool. Tiger Kab is now *très* au kourant. The Krew is picaresque working on combustible. We are riding the black-nationalist zeitgeist. The Panthers get the headlines while the BTA and MMLF make the scene with the fervor of Stork Club nobodies seeking out Walter Winchell. Please notice us: we're black, we're violent, we're trying to score dope and we're *cool*.

I vacillate and visit both the BTA and MMLF headquarters; I endure constant LAPD surveillance and three or four street rousts a week. My ex-LAPD status enrages southside bluesuits. They've taken to calling me "boy" and detaining me for twenty-minute spells while they run radio warrant checks. I always turn up clean; they always release me with jabs in the chest and parting epithets. I am quietly enraged and say nothing.

I can't exercise the Bent. I'm afraid to, I'm speciously famous now, any assignation might result in a roust or a phone call to LAPD. I have to put my intimate urges on hold while I assess, while Mr. Holly and Wayne press me, while the BTA and MMLF brothers tap their black-booted feet impatiently and urge me to choose sides.

I have subtly pumped every southside acquaintance, fool and boon companion I know and spontaneously meet for information on the heist and have learned nothing. I see Scotty Bennett around the southside constantly. He always doffs his black-style-conscious porkpie hat and *winks* at me.

Scotty knows a great deal about the heist. I know that. He's the brilliant lead detective with five years of knowledge stored. I strongly sense that he's hoarding knowledge from the LAPD at large.

It's as if Scotty is taunting me and pressing me as Mr. Holly and Wayne taunt me and press me with their powerfully masculine and obdurately circumscribed wills. I keep thinking of Mr. Holly with women and what it would look like, until the images begin to vex me and hurt. Wayne is guilt-tripping with a black woman and providing me with a similarly erotic picture show. He's looking for the woman's missing son, who bears a minor resemblance to the surviving robber from the heist. I don't consider it a true lead; the robber's face was badly burned and Reginald Hazzard was a mere nineteen then. It's more like an affirmation of the dream-state aspect of my life now, with all the new figures weaving through and beckoning.

Benny Boles has been cruising me quite boldly; he's as out as I am euphemized and will probably pounce if I go with the BTA. He's a murderer and recognizably psychopathic, which may account for his confidence in his masculinity. I see Joan Klein at the clubs regularly. She quite consciously beckons. She's a voraciously sensuous dancer, concurrently in and out of sync with her male and female partners. She glimpses me in the shadows, bestows eye contact and acknowledges me without ever losing the music's beat. It's as if she's telling me things about myself that she's gleaned from her dream state. I've found myself bringing fantasies of Joan and Mr. Holly to bed with me. They don't know each other in the real world, but I know them both there and they've converged within my psyche.

And Jomo.

He's certainly scum, but I have been charged to fraternize with and entrap scum, and I like him anyway. We've been spending time together at Tiger Kab, MMLF and the clubs; Jomo has gotten more at ease with me since his knife fight with Leander Jackson. He's been talking up a significant roll that he's accrued, and I've been very cautiously grinding him for details to give to Mr. Holly. I was at that task up to moments before the incident last night.

We had been on a grocery-store extortion run. It was connivance and implied threat: we wanted boxes of Cocoa Puffs for the children attending the MMLF's Feed the Kiddies soirees. From there we went to an MMLF-sponsored bar-b-q and pamphlet giveaway at Foshay Junior High. Jomo was decorous with the kids. It was both ghastly and heartwarming, given the man's nature. I'm sure his dope balance had something to do with it: he had been snorting coke/Seconal speedballs all day.

We left Foshay, drove toward Jomo's pad and stopped at a liquor store on Florence Boulevard to buy cigarettes. Jomo staggered and bumped a potato-chip rack. The proprietor was black and took offense. He said, "Nigger, what's wrong with you?"

Jomo vaulted the counter and pistol-whipped the man, as I froze and did nothing. Jomo then stole two bottles of J&B scotch and three cartons of Kool cigarettes.

I did nothing. Jomo kicked the man and shouted anti-BTA epithets. I'm sure the proprietor recognized me. I'm an ex-policeman, a celebrity brother and a notable southside cat-about-town.

67

(Los Angeles, 4/3/69)

Milt C. had a puppet named Junkie Monkey. He did dreary shtick with him. It regaled the brothers. Sonny and Jomo howled on cue.

The switchboard was flooded. Jomo juggled calls. Jordan High was battling Washington. All-city cager—folks needed kabs.

Junkie Monkey wore a pimp hat and a checkerboard suit. A dope spike dangled from one arm. Milt moved his ape lips.

"Dese LAPD pigs hassle me. I be smack-back on ma fron' porch, an' it be a muthafuckin' humbug roust. Dey say, 'What you doin' wid dat hypodermic needle?' An' I say, 'You white muthafuckas got de needle *dicks*, an' I gots dat tar paper throbbin' a hard fuckin' yard.' "

Junior yukked. Jomo plugged calls and yukked. Sonny said, "Junkie Monkey's a jallhouse sissy and a draft dodger. Muhammad Ali fucked his simian ass."

Wayne checked his watch. Marsh was due *now*. He just got a phone-drop message. Another brain *click* clicked him. More memory loss and tug.

A month ago. The fight with Mary Beth. Reginald, the "Freedom School," why that soft *click*?

He was swamped. Drac and the Boys overbooked him. His cutout job added to it. He couldn't work on the *click* just yet.

Junkie Monkey said, "The Beatles bop down to da muthafuckin' ghetto to score some black trim. Dey meets dese two unhealthy-lookin' sistahs name of Carcinoma an' Melanoma an'—"

Wayne looked out the window. Marsh walked by outside. Wayne got up and followed him back to the fleet lot. Sixteen Tiger kabs glowed.

Marsh was cool-day sweaty. Wayne gave him his handkerchief.

"Tell me."

"I was with Jomo two nights ago. He beat up the counterman at a liquor store and 211'd him. I'm fairly sure the man recognized me."

"Why'd you wait this long to tell me?"

"It's my tendency. I tend to wait things out."

"What were you waiting for?"

"Scotty. Every liquor-store proprietor on God's green earth knows him and owes him."

Motown blared. Some fool goosed the dispatch-hut hi-fi. Wayne steered Marsh over to the alley fence.

"He hasn't called Scotty. You'd have heard by now."

"Yes. That's what I'm thinking."

Wayne said, "Give me something."

Marsh wiped his forehead. "What do you mean?"

"Give me a lead for Dwight. Tell me something to convince him you're working."

Marsh sighed. "Liquor-store heists. There's been a bunch of them."

Wayne mimicked the sigh. "We're back to liquor stores?"

"That's not what I mean. I'm saying I may have something."

Wayne sighed harder. "Liquor-store jobs in South L.A. with *black suspects*? Can you give me something more original than that?"

Marsh wiped his forehead. "Jomo's been talking up this big coin he's got, but he won't reveal the source."

Wayne shook his head. "That's insufficient. I'll frost your deal two nights ago, but you're going to start working harder."

"*Jesus, Wayne.*"

Wayne pushed him into the fence. “You’re going with BTA. You’re going to suck up to Leander Jackson and pick a public fight with Jomo. I’m going to the Dominican Republic. We’ll stage it when I get back. You’re going to level Jomo over the liquor-store deal. You’re going to call him a ‘punk-ass, evil, no-account nigger,’ and I’ll be there to watch you do it.”

“*Jesus. Just give me—*”

A kab pulled in and up. Wayne stepped back and cleared a space.

“You’ll do it. I’ll tell the world that you’re a faggot if you don’t.”

The liquor store was close by. The counterman was bandaged from the eyebrows up. Wayne walked in and bought a bag of potato chips. The man sniffed fuzz. “LAPD?”

“Ex-LVPD.

I retired.”

The man rang the sale. “Why’d you retire?”

“I shot some unarmed black guys and it got out of hand.”

“Did they deserve it?”

Wayne gave him a dollar. “Yes.”

The man gave him change. “Did you feel bad about it?”

“Yes, I did.”

The man smiled. Wayne pointed to his bandage and tossed him a cash roll. Two grand in fifties, rubber band–wrapped.

“Did you call Scotty?”

“I was thinking about it.”

“That Scotty’s a pisser.”

“He’s all of that. These same brothers robbed me on six different occasions, so I called up Scotty, independent. I told him the regular LAPD wasn’t doing their job. Scotty said he’d take care of it, which he did.”

“That must have been some sight.”

“It was. They came in with ski masks and went out under sheets. Scotty shoots double-aught with little spiky things attached. Wasn’t much left of them.”

Wayne ate a potato chip. “You’ve got a certain loyalty to Scotty.”

“Yeah, like I suspect you got for that Marshall Bowen guy.”

Wayne tossed cash roll #2. The man fanned it.

“Bowen must be jungled up with some money guys. ‘High-level informant.’ Does that sound right?”

“Your mortgage is way in arrears. I’m prepared to cover it.”

“My electric bill’s behind, too.”

“Anything else?”

“Yeah, one more thing. I want one of those tiger limousines for my daughter’s sweet sixteen.”

USC was close by. His schedule was tight. Drac had requested a phone chat. Yes, sir. Nuclear fallout will kill you. No, sir—no time soon. Yes, we should ban the Bomb. No, the world powers will not accede on your say-so.

Wayne parked and strolled the campus. The student body was half square kids, half longhairs all aggrieved. Left- and right-wing flyers covered signboards. YAF vs SDS, VIVA vs SNCC. Kids with guitars, kids in letter sweaters, a few black kids in dashikis.

Wayne walked and braced passersby. The “Freedom School”? Beats me. He checked the campus directory. No, no listing.

He kept at it. He pay-phoned Farlan and postponed the Drac chat. He saw some custodians on a smoke break and walked over.

They were black. They sniffed cop. Wayne sniffed ex-con labor. He laid out ten-spots and pitched them, smiling.

“There was something called the ‘Freedom School.’ It was here on campus six or seven years ago.”

Three guys blank-faced it. One guy said, “Defunct, man. Tapped out before the Watts uprising.” One guy said, “There’s some bungalows catty-corner from the rec center. Nobody uses them. Look for this dusty old door with this faded-out poster.”

Wayne said thanks and strolled. The walkways were tree-lined. Clandestine pot fumes swirled here and there. He found the rec center and the bungalows. He saw the postered door.

Fall, ’64. *SAVE THE RUMFORD FAIR-HOUSING ACT! “PROPERTY RIGHTS” MEANS “RACISM”!!!!*

The door looked flimsy. Wayne shoulder-popped it easy. He stepped in. A back window provided light. The room was wall-to-wall boxes.

He went through them. They held stacks of flyers and polemics. *¡Huelga!*, Hands Off Cuba!, fruit-picker strikes. Support Al Fatah, the PLF, the 6/14 Movement. Remember Leo Frank, Emmett Till and the Scottsboro Boys. Civil-rights rants, black-power screeds. Malcolm X, Franz Fanon, Free the Rosenbergs. Free Algeria! Free Palestine! Down with the evil Goat Trujillo, Uncle Sam's insect. United Fruit: *Do you know what that banana on your plate just cost*?

He hit a group photograph. It was dated 9/22/62. It looked like a faculty shot.

Seven men and women outside the bungalow. Three are white, four are black. Two white women off to the side. One woman is tall and red-haired. The other woman is shorter. She's mid-to-late thiryish. She has dark, gray-streaked hair and black-framed glasses.

Click. *Blip*. Maybe, probably, not quite.

The *click* clicked on and clicked off short of *Eureka!* The *blip* took a weird form. Sultan Sam's Sandbox, three months ago. Smoke rings and a back view of streaked hair just like that.

Wayne squinted at the photo. The woman wore long sleeves. No scars stood out. Reginald went to this school. Reginald got popped in the redneck town. *Maybe, not quite probably*—the woman bailed him out.

Drac Air flew him in. The plane landed on the private Hughes runway. Cops with bullwhips supervised the VIP lounge build.

Joaquín Balaguer sent a limousine and four flanking motorbikes. The vehicles were mid-Trujillo vintage. All five were jackhammer-loud.

They drove into Santo Domingo. The windows were smoked. Bright colors filtered in monochromatically. The limo lurched through traffic. The pictures were sepia-soaked. It was a pauper-nation newsreel. Kids pulled rickshaws, beggars begged, goons chased sign-waving youths. It was a quick-shutter slide show. Blink and you see oppression. Blink and it's gone.

Wayne was bleary-eyed. Slide show: he kept seeing that woman's face. The glasses, the streaked hair—the slide jammed and re-ran her image. He read the 6/14 tract on the airplane. It decried Dominican despots and innocent Haitians slaughtered. It prophesied future despots more savvy than the Goat. It predicted U.S.-Dominican collusion in the interest of a Yankee tourist trade.

Reginald meets the Haitian man. They discuss voodoo herbs.

Click—memory tug and loss. The woman, the "Freedom School," mental gears stripped short of connection.

Wayne rolled down his window. The monochrome newsreel went eye-burning bright. The colors assaulted. The salt air burned. Cops chased protestors down a dead-end alley and pinned them to a wall. Wayne saw a single nightstick raised and heard a single scream.

The limo dropped him at the El Embajador. A toady ensconced him in a plush suite. He had a wide view. The Río Ozama was due west. Black kids dove and fought each other for fishing-boat chum. The skin tone shifted district to district. He saw occasional red flags on sticks.

He walked down to Mesplede's suite, knocked and got no answer. He walked to Dipshit's suite and saw the door ajar.

He breezed in. It was a kid's crib. Magazines were tossed pell-mell. Dipshit dug *Playboy* and *Guns & Ammo*. Dipshit was a picture punk. He had a Polaroid camera. He had ad-lib pix of women up the ying-yang.

Brown bottles on a nightstand. White-labeled, what's—

Sulfur oxide precipitant, ammonia, acetic anhydride.

"Hi, Wayne. What's shaking?"

Dipshit wore a Colt Python with Bermuda shorts. Dipshit licked an ice-cream cone. Dipshit had acne.

Wayne smiled and walked up. Dipshit stuck his hand out. Wayne bent his fingers, proned him out and kicked him in the balls. Dipshit dropped his ice-cream cone and went blue.

"No heroin. You don't make it, you don't buy it, you don't sell it. I'll kill anyone who does."

Dipshit puked butter brickle and cone shreds. A shadow hit the wall.

"*Ça va,* Wayne. *C'est fini, l'héroïne.*"

Balaguer negotiated. The payouts and contingency plans favored the Führer. The overall deal favored the Boys. Balaguer haggled and conceded. Wayne took the same tack. They chatted in a parlor at the Palacio Nacional and worked from scratch sheets. Mesplede and Dipshit were off boozing. Smith and Brundage were off golfing. The Cubans were off whoring.

Building costs, labor costs, airport kickbacks. Reduced fares for

U.S.-D.R. flights. Incentive payments. No-customs-interference chits. Stateside money-wash details. Inspection tours by Dwight Holly, President Nixon's liaison.

The last point bugged Balaguer. Wayne mollified him. Sir, the tours would be by and large cosmetic.

Der Führer liked that. Wayne bait-and-switched behind it. Tourism only works in peaceful settings. Too much evidence of poverty will turn tourists off. President Nixon understands that, sir. He is your typical tourist writ more politically astute. Visitors will find your enforcement efforts confusing. Goon squads and roving dissidents are greek to them. They cannot extrapolate. They will be shocked by what they see.

Balaguer bristled through the discourse. Wayne forfeited three money points to cut him slack. The chat took six hours. Balaguer stood up to bid adios.

Wayne said, "No whips, sir. I'm afraid I have to insist."

Cosmetic.

He saw it fast: food giveaways and less hurt from La Banda. The slide show felt marginalized. His shutter popped quicker. He saw or didn't see at an accelerated rate. The monochrome view helped: Mesplede's car had smoked windows.

The Santo Domingo sites were plowed and construction-ready. They were police-guarded. They were in half-decent areas. Airport shuttles could take tours through good neighborhoods. Tour packages would be all-inclusive. Guests would be urged to stay inside and spend.

Santo Domingo was Jim Crow. Light-skinned people, dark-skinned people and a stratified mix. Wayne remembered Little Rock, '57. The 82nd Airborne and forced desegregation.

Mesplede drove and chain-smoked. Dipshit sat in the backseat and worried his dipshit lapel pin. Radio music stifled conversation. Caribbean jazz, brassy and repetitive.

The Autopista ran them north. The road was bad. The cane fields and glades de-saturated the existing monochrome. Black people ran across the road. Mesplede swerved around them.

The Piedra Blanca site was construction-vetted and guarded. The high-rise view would take in a few shacks and encompass wide greenery. The site felt rapidly vacated. Wayne saw bloodstains on a discarded two-by-four.

They stayed a few minutes and split for Jarabacoa. *C'est fini, l'héroïne*—nobody talked.

The ride took three hours. Wayne rolled down his window and de-smoked and jazzed the car. The bright colors hurt his eyes. He smelled jungle rot and gunpowder.

Jarabacoa was identical. The guards were servile and offered them *cervezas*. Wayne saw a bullwhip stashed behind a bush.

A black man sprinted past a cane field. His face was all open-sored ooze.

Wayne said, "Jean-Philippe, you go back. Crutchfield, you're driving me into Haiti."

Mesplede tossed his cigarette. "We have only the one car, Wayne."

"There's a bus station a mile back. We'll drop you."

The air conditioner tanked. They climbed the Cordillera Central in a mobile sauna. The open windows got them hot air and bugs like Godzilla. They crossed south of Dajabón. A wobbly pylon bridge spanned the Plaine du Massacre. *Fascisto* border guards waved good-bye and hello. Gators sunned on the Haitian banks, surrounded by leg bones.

Skin tone darkened. The bright colors held as the poverty index spiked. Rusted tin-roof shacks and mud huts. Blood-marked trees and lynched roosters dripping entrails.

Dipshit drove. His hand trembled on the shifter. Wayne shut his eyes and put his seat back full supine. The upholstery was sweat-slick. Moisture pooled at the piping.

"No more fuckups. I'll kill you next time."

Dipshit said, "Okay."

"Your fail-safes are bullshit. Nobody would believe you. You're a jerkoff. You eat ice-cream cones and perv on women. Mesplede's soft for you, but I'm not."

Dipshit said, "Okay." His voice squeaked and broke.

"I'll say this once. You don't get out of The Life unmaimed or alive. Killing Communists and working for guys like me gets you nothing but your next nightmare."

Dipshit said, "Sure"—this whisper-squeak.

Wayne opened his eyes. The road was dirt now. Jalopies, oxcarts and a village: thatched huts and pastel cubes flying voodoo-sect flags.

Rhinestone-rock walls. Murals on easeled signboards. A tavern called Port Afrique.

Wayne said, “Stop the car.”

Dipshit pulled over. Wayne got out. Black folks milling about got magnetized.

“Go back to Santo Domingo. I’ll get back on my own.”

Dipshit shrugged and screeched off. Wayne walked into Port Afrique. He smelled ammonia base, semi-toxics and untreated alcohol. The place was rectangular. There was a stand-up bar with bottle shelves behind it and no more. French slogans covered the side walls: “By the power of the saint star, walk and find.” “Sleep without knowing or sleeping.” The barman looked at him. Three other men followed his eyes. They held sequined goblets. Fumes rose out of them. High acidity, low alkaline content. Klerin liquor, certainly. Odds on semi-poisonous reptile-gland compounds.

Wayne walked to the bar and bowed to show respect. The three men walked away. The shelf bottles were transparent and tape-marked in French. Colored talc, tree bark, pharmacologically active snake powder.

The barman bowed. Wayne pointed to an empty goblet. The barman’s look said *Are you sure*?

“*S’il vous plaît, monsieur. Je suis chimiste, et voudrais essayer votre plus potion.*”

The barman bowed. “*Comme vous voulez, monsieur. Mais vous comprenez q’il y a des risques.*”

Wayne said, “*Oui.*” The barman opened bottles and dipped a spoon. Fungible plants, bark, puffer-fish liver. *Bufo marinus:* a sea snake’s porotoid gland. Klerin liquor from a siphon. An unknown liquid that made it all foam.

The fizz increased. It smelled like a volatile component bond. The barman served the goblet with blessing gestures. Wayne bowed and placed U.S. cash on the bar.

The three men walked over. One toasted him, one blessed him, one handed him a sect card. The foam burned the air all around them. Wayne drank the potion in one gulp.

It scorched his throat and shuddered through him. The barman said, “*De rien, monsieur. Bonne chance.*”

He found a shady spot outside the village. He stood there and turned off external noise. He heard the air breathe and knew he brought belief to the moment. He felt the soil under him swirl.

His pulse beat and wired his limbs to the trees surrounding him. His peripheral vision expanded and allowed him to see from the back of his head. His eyes watered. He saw Dr. King and the Reverend Hazzard swimming. Dr. King had Mary Beth’s coloring. The pastor had Marsh Bowen’s eyes. Birds perched inside him. Their chirps resounded as those mind clicks he kept hearing back in the world. The sun turned into the moon and dropped into his pocket. He kept seeing the woman with the dark, gray-streaked hair.

68

(Los Angeles, 4/10/69)

Scotty said, "Marsh fucked up. He witnessed a 211 and didn't report it."

Dwight lit a cigarette. "I know."

"Marsh copped to it?"

"He told his cutout."

"You mean Wayne Tedrow?"

"That's right."

Scotty laughed. "Inspired casting. The spooks are afraid of him, so they adore him. Nobody suspects that he's FBI-adjunct, because he's working for the Boys."

Piper's Coffee Shop on Western. The 1:00 a.m. clientele: cops and Schaeffer's Ambulance ghouls.

Dwight said, "Who told you about Wayne?"

"One of my numerous southside informants."

"The liquor-store guy?"

"My lips are sealed."

Dwight rubbed his eyes. "Let's talk about Jomo."

"Give me a concession first."

"All right. I'll let Jomo go if you let Marsh slide."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning, you can have Jomo independent of my operation. Meaning, he's my best black-militant psycho, but I can live without prosecuting him. Meaning, you've got something going that you won't talk about, because you didn't call me at midnight for a nigger-strongarm roust."

Scotty cream-dosed his coffee. "Correct on all counts. Jomo's got a lot of bread, and I think I know where he got it."

"And if you need Marsh as a witness, you'll call him in."

"That's correct."

Dwight chained cigarettes. "Will you promise not to reveal Marsh's Bureau status?"

Scotty bummed a cigarette. Dwight lit it for him.

"Yes. Will you promise not to pop Jomo for any and all Federal offenses while I build my case?"

"Yes."

Scotty took one drag and stubbed out his cigarette. Two cops walked by and saluted. Scotty winked at them.

"Thanks for coming out. I realize it was short notice."

Dwight stretched. "It's all right. I couldn't sleep, anyway."

"There's always booze."

"It quit working for me."

"There's always women."

Dwight said, "I'm stretched a bit thin there."

69

(Mona Passage, 4/10/69)

"C*'est fini, l'héroïne.*"

"You're a jerkoff."

"*Allons-y, l'héroïne—oui!*"

Tiger Klaw pushed waves. Destination: Point Higuero, Puerto Rico. Saldívar manned the turbines. Froggy manned the bridge. Gómez-Sloan and Canestel manned the torpedo drops. Morales read the owner's manual.

Crutch manned the fore machine-gun placement. Luc Duhamel manned the aft. They launched from Luc's private inlet. They skirted the north coast to the passage unobstructed. It was death-defying shit.

That bankroll clique bought the boat. Bebe Rebozo supplied the bulk of the bread. Luc knew a dope cadre in Point Higuero. *Tiger Klaw* sidled the night side. Their *baaaad* baby made four sabotage runs to date.

Luc's inlet to the Windward Passage and Cuba's Red Reefs. Two militia launch docks destroyed and thirty Fidelistos *mort.* "You eat ice-cream cones and perv on women." Yeah, but nineteen

Commies rot dead.

Tiger Klaw: wood-hulled and World War II vintage. Tiger-striped, tiger-pawed, christened “109.” *L’hommage à le grand putain Jack*.

Crutch ate Dramamine. *Tiger Klaw* wah-watusi’d in choppy waves. Dusk doused the sun and freon froze the water. Land approached starboard. Saldívar spotted semaphore blinks. Froggy steered *Tiger Klaw* toward a cove. Shoals hemmed them in. Lantern light strafed the bow. Crutch saw four spics with Tommy guns.

The spics grapple-hooked the bow and tied *Tiger Klaw* tight. The fit held: machine-gun mounts cinched to rock fissures. The Krew hopped off. Sand sucked at their socks. The P.R. spics looked like the Cubans. They all had that macho-maimed visage. Names went around. Crutch kept it zipped. The spics bowed to Luc. It was his pedigree. Six-foot-eight voodoo priest and Tonton cop. Luc was an all-time rare turd.

The Krew followed the spics. Jungle brush pressed up to the beach. Night bugs swarmed. The lantern light killed most of them dead in the air. Crutch saw a fishing shack. Two spics door-guarded it. The inside was eight by eight. Powder bricks sat on a table.

Saldívar brought the money in a knapsack. Luc brought sucrose filler, a razor blade and a hypodermic syringe. The spics crossed themselves and blessed his test flight.

Gómez-Sloan slit the bricks. Saldívar spooned powder into a purple solution. It turned yellow. Froggy went *voilà!* The spics went *¡arriba!* Luc swabbed his spike, stretched a tourniquet and geezed up.

All eyes on Luc. He’s at Cape Coonaveral. He’s heading for liftoff.

Luc tapped the plunger. Blood hit the syringe. Luc listed, lulled, levitated and left them for Cloud 9.

The water was cold. Waves banged the hull and sudsed the foredeck. Crutch had watch duty. He had to get wet. He brain-tripped. The Dominican women kiss. It takes him back to Joan and Gretchen/Celia and their kiss last summer.

The voodoo death book. Tattoo vanishes that summer. She’s a

6/14 traitor. Joan and Gretchen/Celia *want* her dead. Slasher homicide—or maybe something else.

"*You perv on women.*"

The Cubans didn't scare him. Luc didn't scare him. Froggy, Scotty and Dwight Holly—nix. Wayne *scared* him. Wayne didn't scare the other guys. Froggy defied Wayne. Froggy said they could keep the dope biz clandestine. Wayne killed Martin Luther King and several lesser-known niggers. Wayne had a black girlfriend. Wayne was scary because he processed evil shit and fed it back to you, uninvited.

He dropped Wayne off in hellhole Haiti. Wayne came back three days later, gaunt and head-tripped. He okayed a transfer: bucks from the Boys to the Midget. The jail crew and slave crew were working now. The Cubans and La Banda cracked the whip. Tiger Krew's work ran non-stop. They supervised the sites. They maintained *Tiger Klaw*. They straw-bossed the build on a full-mooring berth. Luc's voodoo slaves were gouging an inlet space. Froggy called it "Tiger Kove." Luc had dope *coon*ections in Port-au-Prince. Tonton spooks would lay the smack on the dealers. Boss spook Papa Doc would glom a big cut.

Wayne said no smack. The Krew contradicted. Wayne *scared* him. He *hated* Wayne. He had a picture of Wayne shaking hands with the Midget. Luc taught him a voodoo hex. He cursed Wayne with it. He stuck pins in a dead chicken. He drew his blood and stuck the pin in Wayne's picture face.

A wave doused him. It fucked with his brain pix. Crutch fired tracer rounds at the sky.

The CIA guys were golf nuts. Terry Brundage shot scratch. His flunkies had low handicaps. Their office was the ex–caddy shack on the Midget's private golf course. La Banda ran a torture bunker under the ninth hole.

Crutch walked in. The floor was synthetic grass. Cocktail glasses served as golf holes. Terry and his flunkies wore T-shirts and nubby-silk knickers.

Terry said, "*Hola, pariguayo.*"

Crutch laughed. One flunky blew a putt. One flunky sunk a *loooong* one. The place was messy. Three desks, short-wave radio, teletype machine. A file bank with drawers overstuffed.

The watercooler held a cup dispenser and pre-mixed daiquiris. Crutch grabbed a cup and pulled a short slurp.

Terry twirled his putter. "Did Mesplede send you?"

"No, it was my idea. I thought I'd check your dissident file. I think there's been some Commies nosing around the sites."

The flunkies packed their golf bags. They shoved shotguns in with their sticks.

Terry filled a thermos with rum goo. "There's some skin mags in the john. If you're looking for chicks, you'll be better off there."

The file bank was chaos. Four cabinets, sixteen drawers, no system. Dumped folders, loose snapshots. No tracking or routing numbers. Nothing alphabetized.

Crutch worked drawer-to-drawer. He locked himself in the office. He had four hours. Golf and boozy hoo-haw took that long. He dumped drawers and skimmed documents. He scanned for *anything* Joan Klein/Celia Reyes/6-14–related. He got name lists, membership lists, suspect lists, interrogation lists and assumed-dead lists. He saw a shitload of Commie acronyms and lists in Spanish. He saw a *fourteen-thousand-name* enemy list for Rafael "the Goat" Trujillo. He saw a list of suspected safe houses in Santo Domingo and half-ass memorized it. He saw *fragments* of a 6/14/59 time line. The narrative was fractured. Half the pages were missing.

He knew the basic facts already. The new shit was horrific. The Goat machete-murdered 6/14 sympathizers en masse. He wiped out border villages. He fed children to the gators in the Plaine du Massacre. A list followed: 6/14 members captured. No Joan, no Gretchen/Celia, no María Rodríguez Fontonette.

The narrative ended. Non sequitur pages followed. Crutch dumped three more drawers and got this:

A fractured string of paragraphs on an un-numbered page. The name María Rodríguez Fontonette. Her moniker, "Tattoo."

She's 6/14. She's a turncoat. She ratted out the invasion. La Banda knew. Countermeasures were swiftly prepared and effected. A Tonton Macoute traitor assisted the rebels and escaped to parts unknown. His name: Laurent-Jean Jacqueau.

Crutch re-read the page. He read the pages following it and behind it and re-skimmed every page he'd read already. Nothing revised or enhanced the fractured narrative. Three and a half hours to *this*.

He dumped four more drawers. He got more names, names and names. He dumped two more drawers. He saw a file folder. "Reyes, Celia" was typed on the front. The folder was empty.

He slurped rum goo straight from the spout. He dumped another drawer. He saw a million photos of Commie-looking spics. He saw a pic marked 6/14/59. He heard screams somewhere under the golf course. The room light dimmed for two seconds and came back on strong.

He turned the photo over. It's an aerial shot. There's a rocky beach. Soldiers hold guns on scruffy rebels.

He blinked and squinted. He looked very close. He saw one woman in with thirty-odd men. It was Joan Rosen Klein. Her right fist was raised.

Smoke whiffed out a cooling shaft. A stink followed. The invasion was ten years ago. Joan's hair was all dark.

More smoke and stink. Another scream—pure Kreole French. More stink—pure scalded flesh.

70

(Los Angeles, 4/13/69)

Junkie Monkey ragged Sonny Liston. It pushed Sonny's buttons. Sonny shot his wad on drag queens and had no oomph for Ali. His manhood got de-jizzified.

Jomo plugged calls. Junior snarfed cognac-dipped moon pies. Milt's shtick was protracted. Wayne and Marsh watched Sonny seethe.

It was raining. The roof leaked. The stripedy wallpaper peeled. A Dr. Feelgood owed Tiger Kab 350. He paid off in Desoxyn and Dilaudid. Sonny and Jomo were speedbally pissed.

Junkie Monkey was fey today. Junkie Monkey preened his Afro and pursed his lips.

"Ali be so *pretty*. That young man can rhyme and play the dozens like no one else this girl has ever seen. 'Liston's gonna flee. He'll go down in three.' 'This ain't no jive. He be out by round five.' 'He can't last to four, 'cause he be out fuckin' whores.' 'He ain't got no hope with his arm full of dope.' "

Sonny sipped rocket fuel—liquid meth and Everclear. Sonny lit a Kool filter king.

"It ain't funny. Do the one where Lady Bird Johnson sucks my dick."

Junkie Monkey pouted. "This simian sister is *soooooooo* tired of your reluctance to acknowledge that pretty young man who has brought colored folk into the Age of Aquarius, while you be actin' as the organ-grinder's monkey for the pig power structure and the mob."

Sonny balled his fists. His cigarette crumbled. Marsh looked at Jomo. Wayne looked at Marsh. Junior waddled to the john. Milt taped a plastic cigarette to Junkie Monkey's lips.

" 'He'll be seein' heaven when he goes down in seven.' 'If he last to nine, his punk ass is mine.' "

Jomo said, "That's enough. That shit is wearing me thin."

Wayne nodded. Marsh caught it—*we're close.*

Junkie Monkey preened. "And this girl is *soooooo* tired of you poseurs who don't know Eldridge Cleaver from Beaver Cleaver and Franz Fanon from my fat fanny, you silly—"

Jomo said, "Shut up, pops. That's the last time I'm saying it."

Wayne signaled Marsh—now.

Marsh said, "Easy, brother. Let the monkey do his thing."

Jomo popped his knuckles. All eight—slow and loud.

Wayne signaled Marsh—more.

Marsh walked to the switchboard. Jomo was close. Marsh leaned on a chair.

"What gives you the right to push old men around? I'm talking about you, nigger. I'm talking about that poor liquor-store man you whupped on, who did you no motherfucking—"

Jomo stood up. Marsh moved close. They both grabbed chairs. Jomo swung wide and missed. Marsh ducked. The chair hit the switchboard.

The legs snapped. The console shattered. Call plugs dropped to the floor. Marsh swung tight. He caught Jomo's back, he caught Jomo's legs, he grazed Jomo's head and carved half an ear off. Jomo stumbled and hit the console. Marsh uppercut him. He aimed crotch-high and jammed a chair leg into his balls.

Jomo screamed. Marsh ran outside and screamed in the rain. It sounded like one word repeated. Wayne jammed up a window to hear.

It was *BTA! BTA! BTA!* Marsh jabbed the chair in the air and kept shouting it. People poured out of storefronts. Some people cheered.

He went trolling. It was trolling with intent. It pertained to that recurring *click*.

He'd argued with Mary Beth. She told him about the "Freedom School." He went there and saw the faculty photo. The woman with the gray-streaked hair. The *click* he couldn't place. The semi-*click* back to that pub crawl.

Three months ago. The first Tiger Kab bash. The back view of a woman with that same hair.

His mindscape in Haiti. The herbs and her shape-shifting picture.

Wayne cruised the southside. His phone fight with Mary Beth echoed. She pressed him on his trip. He lied—the D.R. and Haiti aren't that bad. My investors will boost the economy. Balaguer isn't Trujillo. Please believe that things will improve. Mary Beth scoffed. I know better, babe.

Wayne turned down Central Avenue. The clubs were zooming. He saw that woman at Sultan Sam's Sandbox. She might be there now. It was a slim-chance long shot.

He'd spent three days in Haiti. He dope-tripped non-stop. He kaliedo-scoped his whole life. Faces grew out of trees and stream water. The herbs burned through his system. It was a zombie state. He had to sit still and listen. He didn't have the will to create thought or run. He fell asleep after a million hours tripping. The real world returned to him, changed.

Wayne cut east on Slauson. He saw dope buys outside a gumbo stand. Tiger Krew wanted to push heroin. He quashed it. They wouldn't betray him. They feared his clout with the Boys. The Krew would probably make Cuban runs. Cuba: the nut Right's idée fixe.

Some BTA poseurs walked by. They wore cossack hats and slim-cut black suits. Marsh delivered. He was Mister BTA now.

A crowd stood outside Sultan Sam's. Wayne double-parked and walked to the head of the line. The bouncers called him "boss." The Boys owned the place now. The black people behind the rope cold-eyed him.

He opened the door and looked inside. Everybody was black. No white woman with gray-streaked hair.

He drove to Rae's Rugburn Room and played big white bwana. He got more cold eyes and heard some pig noise. She wasn't there. He hit the Snooty Fox, Nat's Nest and the Klover Klub. The pig noise escalated throughout.

Cherchez la femme. La femme n'est pas là.

Wayne drove to Mr. Mitch's. He didn't own the place. He greased two bouncers for a VIP entry. A black man flamboyantly oinked him.

The interior was cave-dark. The hostess seated patrons with a flashlight. She walked Wayne to a table. He saw Sonny ensconced with Junior Jefferson. Two booths up: Ezzard Donnell Jones and the woman.

Wayne joined Sonny and Junior. They were bombed on Mr. Mitch's jet fuel. The bottle radiated.

Sonny said, "Jomo's gonna be carrying his balls around in a wheelbarrow."

Junior snarfed lychee nuts. "Marsh be best advised to keep himself scarce the next few days."

Sonny sipped brew. "You too fat and Wayne too skinny. Every time you reach for a moon pie, hand one to him."

The woman smoked. The woman tossed her hair. The woman swayed to a canned-music beat.

Wayne pointed over. "Who is she?"

Sonny said, "She hangs out with the BTA and she dances up a storm. I don't like them glasses, though."

Junior said, "I think her name is Joan."

Wayne watched Joan. Sonny and Junior ignored him. He built himself a head space. The club went quiet. Wayne synced the music to her movements. He thought he tasted voodoo herbs and klerin booze. Sensory wisps—a flashback for sure.

Joan cleaned her glasses on her shirttail. Her eyes went soft without them. A shiv extended out from one boot.

She slouched a little. Her movements were fluid. She blew artful smoke rings.

The music tone shifted. Joan stopped swaying. She put money on the table, got up and split.

Wayne got up. Darkness covered him. He followed Joan out to the rear parking lot. She got into a '59 Chevy. The plates were mud-streaked. She was a tail-savvy pro.

She pulled out and hit Manchester westbound. Wayne shagged his rental car and idled forty yards back. Joan drove middle-lane slow. She deployed her signal lights and played good citizen. She turned onto the Harbor Freeway northbound. Wayne zoomed up and dawdled back.

It was late. Traffic was scarce. Wayne leapfrogged to look innocuous. They passed through downtown and Chinatown. The Pasadena Freeway ran them north. Joan cut onto the Golden State westbound. Wayne caught up and fell back. Joan bombed through Atwater and skirted the Glendale off-ramps. She veered right and hit an Eagle Rock exit. Wayne laid back and watched her taillights. She stopped outside a bungalow court on a hill.

Wayne stayed put. Joan parked the Chevy at the curb and unlocked the Dodge next to it. The lights went on. She U-turned and headed straight at him. He saw her face in the windshield. The front plate was mud-smeared.

Her turn signal flashed. She cut east on Colorado Boulevard. Wayne lagged slow, caught up and fell back. They drove through Pasadena. Joan turned north on Lake Avenue. Pasadena bled into Altadena. They ran up toward the San Gabriel Hills. Wayne let two cars buffer-zone them. He stuck his head out the window and fixed on Joan's taillights.

She turned left on a side street. Wayne floored it, turned and braked back. Joan parked and walked up to a small shingle house. Someone opened the door and let her in. The Eagle Rock location vibed *safe house*. Ditto this pad.

Wayne parked and ran over. The house lights were on. He squatted and ducked around to the driveway. He caught shadows inside. The window shades were half up. He stood and looked in.

A small living room. Stacks of rifles and handguns piled on furniture. Blankets draped over them.

Carbines, M14's, scope-mounted Rugers. Automatics and revolvers in a box.

Jomo Clarkson walked in. His head was sutured and gauzed. Joan followed him. They talked soundless. He looked agitated. She looked calm. The closed window killed audio.

Joan took off her coat. Wayne saw the knife scar on her right arm.

CLICK:

That file Dwight sent him. No picture attached. He burned through redacted type. He found one KA name and told Dwight.

He shredded the file. He couldn't recall the KA name. The *CLICK* felt solid and *INCOMPLETE*.

Joan and Jomo talked. Wayne pressed up to the window. He caught audio hum, no words formed, he couldn't read lips.

He saw a gas station down the block. He ran for the phone booth—

Dwight sipped coffee. "The late-night call-out. I'm starting to get used to it."

Canter's Deli on Fairfax. The 3:00 a.m. clientele: cops and ultra-soiled hippies.

Wayne said, "Who's Joan?"

Dwight raised his hands—beats me—disingenuous, unconvincing.

"Is she Joan Rosen Klein? I treated the redactions on her file last year, but I never saw her picture."

Dwight reprised beats me. Wayne slapped the table. Their coffee sloshed and spilled.

"Tell me about her."

Dwight shook his head. Wayne slapped the table. The bread basket flew.

"She's got a knife scar on her right arm."

Dwight fucking smiled. Wayne balled his fists. Dwight touched his hands—son, don't do this.

"I saw her with Jomo Clarkson. 1864 Avondale in Altadena. It's a safe house. There's a fuckload of guns."

Dwight fretted his law-school ring. It dropped off and fell in his lap.

"Keep going."

"Jomo's been talking up a roll he's got. He's a heist man and an anti-white-tract writer. Fred Hiltz, remember? The hate-tract king gets offed, and BHPD tags it 'unknown black suspects.' "

Dwight got up and ran. Wayne grabbed his ring off the floor.

71

(Beverly Hills, 4/14/69)

BHPD let him read the file. Hoover's pet thug at 4:00 a.m.? The watch commander complied.

Dwight sat in the muster room. The file was abbreviated. Mr. Hoover short-shifted the case. Jack Leahy had shitcanned it, per his dictate.

One folder, nine pages, a four-page lead sheet. Numerous male Negroes listed. Mostly rat-outs by police informants and pissed-off loved ones. A general tally of male Negro heist men. No Jomo Kenyatta Clarkson, no black-militant fucks et al.

Dwight read the crime-scene report and autopsy protocol. Eyewits reported two masked Negroes. Cause of death: massive shotgun wounds. Also listed: four .38-caliber slugs lodged in the head.

Hold it—

The protocol included bullet pix. The lab tech said all four shots blew from one gun. Soft-points, six lands, eight grooves, semi-flat projectiles.

Hold it right—

Joan fired safe-house rounds into baffling. *He* told her to. Spent shells—right there in his briefcase.

Dwight popped it open. The bullet pile was plastic-wrapped. He found one dented .38. He grabbed the photos and ran down the hall to the crime lab.

The door was open. Nobody was there. Candy-ass PDs were like that. Dwight looked around. By the back wall: a ballistics microscope.

He walked over and put his shell in the holder. He laid the photos on the counter. He tweaked the dial and squinted. He got in close. He got a six-land, eight-groove spread and a near-identical flathead. He checked the photos. The same gun fired both bullets, dead cert.

He heard sirens outside. He heard a radio call one room over: *Code 3, all K-cars, Altad—*

Mob scene:

The L.A. Sheriff's, BHPD, twenty black & white and plainclothes units. Bluesuits hauling out blanket-wrapped guns.

Dwight pulled up to the barricades. The street was arc-lit pink-white. Squares milled around in their pj's. Cops poured in and out of the target pad. Safe house, no shit.

The barricade guard walked up. He was a Sheriff's geek with post-teenage acne. Dwight stepped out of the car and badged him.

"Come on, give."

"Uh … sir?"

"Tell me what we've got here."

The geek snapped to. "Well, we got a tip on a gun stash and that homicide of that hate guy last year. It's BHPD's case, so we called—"

"Jomo Clarkson. *Where is he*?"

The geek stepped back. "Well, LAPD shagged him out from under us. This Robbery bull showed up with a peremptory warrant. He took the guy to 77th Street Station."

Dwight got light-headed. "Is there anyone else in custody? A white woman? Did LAPD pop a woman with the black guy?"

"No, sir. This detective just hustled the colored man off real quick. We've sure got the guns, but I don't know anything about a woman."

Dwight got in his car and burned tread in reverse. He banged the curb off a U-turn and looped side streets to the Pasadena Freeway. He attached his gumball light and hit 120. The run downtown took six minutes. The Harbor Freeway got him to the Congo. The station was a quick jump off the exit.

He parked in the patrol lot and pinned his badge to his coat. He walked past the front desk. The duty sergeant was snoozing. He heard inebriated jigs howling back in the jail.

The squadroom was upstairs. Dwight jumped the steps three at a time. The bullpen was wall-to-wall desks and walk spaces. The morning-watch cops read teletypes and hunt-and-peck typed. They looked bored. One guy waved. Dwight cut down a bisecting hallway. Sweat rooms lined the right wall.

There's Scotty.

He's eating an apple. He's wearing a brown suit and a plaid bow tie. He's looking in a double-front window.

Dwight walked over. Scotty winked. Dwight looked in the window. There's Jomo, cuffed to a chair.

Scotty said, "Don't tell me. Mr. Hoover wants the Hiltz thing chilled."

"Why tell you? It wouldn't do me any good."

Scotty laughed. "Would you like to watch?"

"Yes. Will you give me a concession first?"

"Yes."

Dwight pulled out his cigarettes. Scotty took two and lit them both up.

"What happened? Tell me why we're standing here."

Scotty tossed the apple in a trash can. "Your boy Marsh called me and snitched Jomo for some liquor-store 211's. I grabbed him before BHPD could glom him for the Hiltz job, which I think he's good for. Funny thing, though. I talked to Marsh on the phone, and it sure didn't sound like him. More-fucking-over, it sounded like a woman was whispering in the guy's ear and telling him what to say."

Dwight touched his ring. It was gone. Scotty stubbed his cigarette out on the wall. Jomo spat at the mirror space. The glob hit a bolted-down table. Jomo squirmed in his bolted-down chair.

Scotty opened the door. Dwight followed him in. They pulled chairs up and loomed over Jomo. The fucker was floor-bolted and chair-cuffed in tight.

"I want to talk to a lawyer. Get me one of them frizzy-haired Jewish guys that work for the Panthers."

Scotty said, "Mr. Holly's a lawyer. He'll advise you of your rights."

Dwight said, "You have the right to confess and avoid physical punishment. You have the right to tell Sergeant Bennett exactly what he wants to know. I'll require prompt answers to my questions, as well. If you cooperate, we'll give you a pack of cigarettes and a candy bar. If you resist, we'll kick the shit out of you and dump you in the queen's tank."

"This is fucking humbug shit! I know the law! *Miranda-Escobedo* passed in 1962!"

Scotty said, "*Miranda-Escobedo* doesn't apply here. This is a kangaroo court, and you're the kangaroo."

Jomo spat on the table. Scotty pulled a rubber-hose chunk from his waistband. It was ten inches long and friction tape–gripped.

"Over the past seven months fourteen liquor stores have been robbed in southside Los Angeles. You match the general description of the suspect. A confidential police informant called me today. He gave you up for the crimes, and I found him credible. I would advise you to confess. If you require legal counsel, you may address your attorney."

Dwight said, "Confess."

Jomo said, "Marsh Bowen snitched me. First, he whups me, then he snitches me. You see the stitches on my head? That ex-pig motherfucker did that. You think I'm not gonna get no get-back when I get out of here?"

Scotty flexed the hose chunk. "Son, I would love to see that happen. Marsh put some hurt on me as well, and I would love to see him get his comeuppance."

Jomo squirmed. His cuff chain rattled. The cuffs were tight-ratcheted. His wrists bled.

"Marsh snitched me, right?"

Scotty said, "That's correct."

"So let me out of here. Give me a skate on them chump-change 211's and I'll get us both some get-back."

Dwight said, "Confess first. We'll get you a day pass to get your shit in order. I've got a Jew lawyer buddy. He'll plead you out. You'll do a year at the honor farm, tops."

Jomo spat on the table. “Fuck your mother. You a fascist cockroach and a minion of the pig power structure. Your mama sucked my big black dick.”

Scotty winked at Dwight. Scotty circled the table and stood behind Jomo. Scotty stroked Jomo’s Afro with the hose chunk.

“Confess, son. It’s in your best interest to do so.”

Jomo said, “Fuck you.”

Scotty swung the hose chunk. Jomo screamed. Perfect kidney shot.

Dwight said, “Confess.” Jomo spat on the table. Scotty swung the hose chunk. Jomo screamed louder. Perfect kidney shot.

Dwight said, “Confess.” Jomo retched for air. Scotty placed a sheet of paper on the table. Dwight skimmed it. The fourteen 211’s were listed.

Scotty said, “Look at the list and nod your head. We’ll consider it a confession.”

Jomo spat on the table. Jomo said, “Fuck you.”

Scotty swung the hose chunk. Jomo screamed. Perfect kidney shot.

Dwight said, “He looked at the list. As his lawyer, I’m calling it a confession.”

Scotty bowed. “I agree. I’ll write it up later, and Mr. Clarkson can sign it when he’s capable of holding a pen.”

Jomo dripped bile. Blood was laced in. His head lolled. His cuffs cut deep. His eyes did funny things.

Scotty said, “I have a good deed in mind.”

Dwight said, “Tell me.”

Scotty fondled the hose chunk. “We could get BHPD a clearance on an old case of theirs. We could get you a clearance on that safe house and those guns.”

Dwight thought of Joan. “Forget the safe house. My people might get compromised. Let’s concentrate on the Hiltz job.”

“Hiltz job” tweaked Jomo. *Say what? Whazzat? Don’t know no Hiltz job*.

Scotty said, “Last September 14, two male Negroes pulled a string of residential robberies and in the process killed a wealthy hate pamphleteer named Dr. Fred Hiltz. I believe that you were Male Negro #1. I think you should confess to those crimes and reveal the identity of Male Negro #2. Mr. Holly, how would you advise your client?”

Dwight said, "Confess."

Jomo spat blood on the table. Jomo said, "Fuck you."

Scotty swung the hose chunk. Jomo screamed. Perfect kidney shot.

Dwight said, "Confess."

Scotty said, "Confess."

Jomo spat blood on the table. Jomo *gasped*, "Fuck you."

Scotty swung the hose chunk. Jomo screamed.

Dwight said, "Confess." Scotty said, "Confess."

Jomo spat blood on the table. Jomo *sobbed*, "Fuck you."

Scotty swung the hose chunk. Jomo screamed.

Dwight said, "Confess."

Scotty said, "Confess."

Jomo spat blood on the table. Tissue chunks were laced in. Jomo rolled his head upright and took a big breath.

"Okay, I did them jobs. Me and a nigger named Leotis Waddrell. Leotis ripped me off. Went to Vegas and blew our stash on coke and roulette. I snuffed him. He's out in the desert. You let me cop to Homicide-Two, I give you the fucking body."

Scotty said, "He confessed."

Dwight said, "I'll verify it."

Scotty said, "I've got a few more questions."

Dwight shook his head. "Get him an ambulance. He tried to escape and you nailed him. You can post-date the confession."

Scotty shook his head. Scotty tickled Jomo's chin with the hose chunk.

"February 24, '64. The armored-car heist on 84th and Budlong. I'm sure you've heard about it. Dead guards, dead robbers, a very large take in cash and emeralds. The lead robber killed his own men and burned their bodies past recognition. He got away, and I'm halfway convinced that a second man may have gotten away, as well. While I have you here, may I ask if you know anything about that?"

Dwight blinked. It didn't track, it didn't play, it didn't pertain—

Jomo blinked. Blood dripped down his chin.

"Man, why you askin' me this? That case is age-old stale bread."

Scotty swung the hose chunk. Jomo screamed. Perfect kidney shot.

Dwight stood up. Jomo lolled his head on the table. Scotty grabbed his hair and jerked it. The tabletop was blood-smeared.

"Rumors, scuttlebutt, anything you might have heard. I asked a civil question and I expect a civil answer."

Jomo pulled his head away. His Afro came loose. It was a paste-on wig. Scotty laughed and threw it on the floor.

"One last time. The events of February 24, 1964. Tell me what you know about—"

"Man, I don't know shit! Rumors is rumors! Maybe it's BTA before they was BTA, maybe it's white guys! Man, I don't fucking know!"

Scotty stroked Jomo's scalp with the hose chunk. Dwight said, "Enough."

Scotty stuck the hose chunk in his waistband. Scotty said, "As you wish."

"Call an ambulance. Get him to Morningside."

Scotty winked. "Sure, Dwight. I'll call an ambulance, and we'll say good night now."

Dwight walked to the door. His ring was gone. His feet were numb. He smelled bile and blood.

Scotty said, "I still owe Marsh Bowen one."

Dwight got out the door and downstairs. His feet were gone. He hit the parking lot shaking. Joan was leaning against his car.

Dawn at the fascist cop shop. Black & whites parked all around her. The Red Goddess in a pea coat and scuffed boots.

"I'm as good as you are. Are you convinced now?"

Dwight said, "Yes."

It was cold. Joan shivered and jammed her hands in her pockets.

"Word will spread. Marsh handed up Jomo. We certified Marsh and got Jomo off the street in one go. It's why I let the MMLF store guns in a BTA safe house. The BTA and MMLF will take it from there."

"You knew Marsh was my infiltrator."

Joan nodded. "*Off a fight with Scotty Bennett*? It was so fucking bold that it had to be you."

Dwight shivered. " 'Nobody dies.' Remember?"

"There's some guns that won't hurt anyone."

"It might not be that simple."

"Which should not impede our actions."

Two cops walked by. Dwight stepped toward Joan. He took her hands with his cop world in view.

“Why this? And why now?”

“We both have blood on our hands. Maybe I’ve got more than you.”

“What do you mean?”

Joan said, “There’s things I know about you.”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/21/69. Extract from the privately held journal of Karen Sifakis.

Los Angeles,
April 21, 1969

The outside world infringes on the quiet home life I've tried to create for my children. The newspaper lands on my door every morning, and I can't help but look. Then Dwight knocks on my door and tells me what the newspapers have omitted.

Two Panthers were charged with non-fatal assaults on two police officers in Brooklyn; legal actions against the Panthers are proceeding in a dozen cities. Dwight thinks the Panthers are self-destructing. They are riddled with FBI and municipal police informants, who are creating internal discord, which leads to intra-group violence, which gets large-scale publicity, which leads to large-scale public censure, which leads to more publicity-seeking violence. The Panthers, and occasionally US, get the headlines, while Dwight continues to hammer at the lowly BTA and MMLF, because he considers their antics to bode as a fully contained media event that he can orchestrate at whim. In that sense, he is the quintessential "Man with a Job," and "the Job" appears to be getting to him.

The newspapers tell me that "black-militant firebrand" Jomo Kenyatta Clarkson, "who admitted to a daring series of liquor-store holdups," committed suicide while in custody at the Los Angeles County Jail. The incident has sparked a revitalized hatred between the BTA and MMLF. I've heard street talk about this. It's considered gospel: ex-policeman Marshall Bowen, now an avid BTA supporter, ratted off Clarkson for the robberies. I came to a realization belatedly: Bowen must be Dwight's infiltrator.

Dwight has never named the man. He protects the identities of his cutouts, infiltrators and informants. He has done that with me, although Mr. Hoover, in his declining state, has spoken injudiciously about my relationship with Dwight. Mr. Hoover is a celibate homosexual prone to crushes on rugged and assertive men. My intimate accord with Dwight, suffused with conflicting ideology, must confuse and appall the old man no end.

The Clarkson matter weighs on Dwight. The machination—whatever went down with Clarkson and Bowen—had to have been at Dwight's instigation, perhaps with Joan Klein's involvement. I've seen Dwight twice recently. We made love, but he seemed to want the consolation more than the sex. He kept bringing up the topic of heroin and how leftist radicals view it as a political tool. I smelled Joan all over that construction.

Dwight sleeps even more fitfully now. I can feel him twitching his way through nightmares. When he awakens, he peers at me almost suspiciously. It's as if he's wondering what I know about him and what I've told other people. We've burgled each other's homes. He's read my much less candid journal. I've seen his check-writing kit, and have mentioned it to him elliptically. My black-bag jobs are a subtext of our relationship, one that Dwight accepts. I've often wondered about the specific nature of Dwight's debt to Mr. Hoover. Last week, I did some checking and came up with an answer of sorts.

I recalled the starting date of Dwight's check ledger: spring 1957. I knew the check recipient's names: Mr. and Mrs. George Diskant of Nyack, New York. I did some newspaper microfilm research then, and learned the story.

It was January '57. A man traveling north on the Merritt Parkway hit a center divider. He was drunk. The collision killed Mr. and Mrs. Diskant's two teenaged daughters. The man was not named, nor was he ever criminally charged.

I can only assume that Mr. Hoover pulled strings. I would also be foolish to assume that Dwight's horrible bond with that man was shaped by a single incident and no more.

Joan has told me that she knows things about Dwight. She leaves it at that. I wonder if she knows more about him than I do, despite their shorter-term dealings. I may be granting Joan a prescient quality that she does not really possess. Still, I swear that I can smell her on Dwight.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/1/69. Extract from the journal of Marshall E. Bowen.

Los Angeles,
5/1/69

It's May Day. I'm standing on the roof of my building, observing traffic jams on the San Diego and Harbor freeways and an anti-war march downtown. The BTA and MMLF are passing out leaflets along the march route. I declined to participate. I expect that there will be skirmishes and that I will be viewed as the cause.

I'm very frightened. It's an escalating feeling that has me coming out of my skin. It started last month, when Wayne told me to confront Jomo—"I'll tell the world that you're a faggot if you don't." Oh, yes, the threat worked. I confronted Jomo and Jomo is dead, and I'm a direct link in the cause and effect.

If Wayne knows, who else knows and how did they find out? Does Mr. Holly know? Do Scotty Bennett or the LAPD at large know? Does the FBI know? Do men within the BTA and MMLF know?

How did I reveal myself? Was it the absence of women in my life that led Wayne to an informed supposition? *I am not in the least effeminate and have always gone to great lengths to rid myself of the affect that men with the Bent generally possess. Do I swish? Do I assume hands-on-hips poses unconsciously? Do I lisp? Are my shit-kicking/black male mannerisms butch queer in some codified manner? Has some two-second anonymous trick out of my very circumspect past come forth to recognize me as a local celebrity and rat me off for police favors? Do people simply sense auras in the sexually charged/dream-state world I inhabit*?

All of this frightens me. The upshot of the Jomo situation is much more perilous.

Scotty Bennett popped Jomo for that liquor-store spree that I suspected him of. Mr. Holly, who appeared oddly shocked by the incident, told me that Scotty beat Jomo half-dead at 77th Street Station and sent him to Morningside Hospital with severe kidney damage. Jomo hung himself in his cell several days later. That latter part of the story made the papers and got brief coverage on TV. Mr. Holly told me the story that never received public exposure: that Jomo confessed to a series of high-stakes residential robberies and the Dr. Fred Hiltz murder of last year.

The crimes netted an estimated $750,000 and were committed with a partner in no way aligned with the BTA or MMLF. The man blew all of the money on cocaine, gambling and prostitutes in Las Vegas. Jomo learned of this, killed the man and body-dumped him in the desert. Mr. Holly interviewed Jomo in the L.A. County Jail the day before he killed himself. Jomo told Mr. Holly that his half of the robbery take was earmarked for a "buy heroin" fund for the MMLF. Vicious and hapless criminal fools: Jomo pulls daring high-line jobs *and* clouts liquor stores. Jomo trusts his whore-chasing, dope-fiend partner. The MMLF's dope seed money is squandered. I beat up Jomo, Jomo gets popped tangentially and offs himself. I should be grateful that Scotty busted Jomo—because Jomo would have come after me sooner or later. Jomo's *dead*? All the better. Unfortunately, it's playing out much differently.

The word is out: I gave Jomo up to Scotty.

It isn't true.

Everyone who counts believes it anyway.

My new BTA brothers are glad. Right on, Brother Marsh: that nigger Jomo was stone-*baaaad* and stone-anti-BTA. I'm covered with them and uncovered everywhere else.

I told Wayne I didn't snitch Jomo. He said he believed me, but I'm not sure he does. I told Mr. Holly I didn't do it. Mr. Holly said he *didn't* believe me, but his disbelief was not fully convincing. Scotty knows I'm not the informant, but he came by Tiger Kab yesterday and *hugged me* in full view of the crew.

Scotty wants people to think it. I've lost all sane track of what Wayne and Mr. Holly want people to think.

I've been hung out to dry. I don't know who did it. I don't think Scotty simply attributed the snitch-out to me as a means to avenge Mr. Holly's staged beating. Somebody did this to me. I don't know who, but it has to be politically motivated. Nobody knows I'm a plant, except Wayne, Mr. Holly and a very few people in the FBI and on LAPD.

It could be any black-militant street fool or fool ideologue. It could be some marginalized or factionalized BTA or MMLF fool with a fool's gut instinct.

I've started wearing a bulletproof vest. The MMLF allegedly has a "bounty" out on me. Some MMLF fools saw me on Central Avenue and tossed brim-full malt-liquor cans at me.

I'm frightened. I wear that vest and spend hours standing in front of my bedroom mirror, perfecting mannerisms. *Have I betrayed the Bent unconsciously? I am not in the least effeminate. Did someone prescient within my overall dream state simply discern the*

Bent in me?

I’ve stopped making queries on the armored-car heist. My lust for the money and emeralds has been subsumed by a survivor’s instinct. I’m sitting still for now, but Wayne and Mr. Holly are demanding results. Mr. Holly has been talking up the BTA as a heroin conduit. He wants me to proffer the notion to my BTA brothers, who are too motherfucking dumb to score heroin at a yard sale at a poppy farm in Thailand, which Mr. Holly can’t quite grasp.

I’m scared. I’m sitting still. I’m waiting. I’m wearing that vest. I’m studying dead-straight men and practicing their moves and masculine craft in my mirror.

Per dead-straight, there’s one bright spot in my life right now: my crazy Haitian friend, Leander James Jackson. Leander loves me, but he’s *stone* straight, so tough luck there. He had that knife fight with Jomo—which Wayne and I provoked—so he *loves* me for my alleged snitch-out, which resulted in Jomo’s death. I told Leander that I didn’t do it. Leander laughed and said, “Baby boy, I don’t believe you.”

Leander loves 151 rum and reefer and enjoys recounting his days in *la belle* Haiti. He tortured dissidents for the Tonton Macoute, practiced voodoo and took a sharp left turn. He assisted a group of rebel invaders and fled the island one step ahead of the noose. I wish I could tell him, “Baby boy, I’m frightened, so I’m sitting still these days.”

I have one friend, many nameless enemies and two enemy friends hovering close. Wayne knows that I have the Bent. I don’t want Mr. Holly to know it, or to know that pictures of him and that strange woman Joan haunt my dream state. It would kill me if Mr. Holly knew.

72

(Santo Domingo, 5/3/69)

E*LECTRIC CHAIR*.

He couldn't shake the picture. Shit kept reminding him. He found that golf-course bunker. La Banda left a black guy strapped in. His palms had melted on the electrodes. The restraints burned him bone-deep.

Crutch waited at the airport. Sam G.'s flight was due. The VIP lounge was up and going. The seats were thronelike. They had that *ELECTRIC CHAIR* look.

The flight was late. Drac Air always ran tardy. The lounge featured Führer art. Oil paintings of the Midget hogged wall space.

Crutch fretted. Wayne was due back soon. He had skim money for the casino build. Wayne laid down that no-dope law. Tiger Krew defied it four times. Four runs to Puerto Rico. Four layoffs to Luc's guys in Port-au-Prince. Subsequent sales to Haitian hopheads.

Sam's flight was late. Sam might have Gretchen/Celia in tow. Crutch volunteered for the chauffeur gig. Froggy found that hinky.

His case was popping. He ID'd his murder vic: María Rodriguez Fontonette, aka "Tattoo." He saw that list of massacred Haitians. He memorized the names. It might supply leads. He gave Froggy an update. Froggy scoffed at him. "This is simply your voyeur fixation run amok. Kill more Communists and obsess on fewer women."

The Drac Air flight descended. Little kids ran up and tossed leis. It was the Midget's idea. He went to Hawaii once.

A baggage cart whizzed by. It looked like a mobile *ELECTRIC CHAIR*. The electrodes *liquefied* the guy's skin. Rich beaners played golf overhead.

His case was all voodoo. That be *baaaad* juju. Beware the Zombie Zone.

Sam G. said, "For all his crazy nigger shit, Wayne is a fucking white man. He's got the stateside funnel running like a charm. We're pushing skim from our Vegas hotels through this nigger-owned bank in L.A. We've got Tiger Kab and the jig clubs for the residual wash. Wayne's been keestering Hughes and running our Teamster buyout gig like a fucking virtuoso."

No Gretchen/Celia—that was a bust. The caffeinated Sambo was an equal drag. They toured the Santo Domingo sites. Sam was impressed. The foundations were poured. The first two floors were erected. La Banda bullwhipped the slaves and fed them bennie-laced Kool-Aid. Work proceeded *faaaast.*

They drove up to Jarabacoa. The Autopista was rife with rickshaws and Haitian refugees. Sammy got spooked. The shines were machetemauled and wore chicken-head hats. Luc and the Cubans waited in Jarabacoa. Crutch pre-warned them: Don't mention Big "H" to Big G.

Sam said, "I'm having dinner with Balaguer, and I'm going to have to castigate him about all these evil boogies in plain view of the tourist trade. Batista was excellent in that regard. The downtrodden knew not to fuck with the white visiting class and the light-skinned beaners who ran the show. I am going to make that precise comment to El Jefe."

Headless hens impaled on cane stalks. Blood-marked trees. D.R. cops with leashed mastiffs. Wetback spooks sprinting.

Sam said, "This needs to be curtailed. If folks want a scary thrill, they can take the Mr. Toad ride at Disneyland."

A shine in a chicken hat hitchhiking. He's got zombie eyes. He's jacking off. He's got a two-foot dick.

Sam pulled Crutch's sidearm and fired at him. The shot blew wide and nailed a tree-lynched bird.

Crutch kept it zipped. Sam said, "This country needs a Billy Graham Crusade. You bring the Reverend Graham in to create a sanctified mood, then all the converts backslide at the crap tables. Shit like that can flourish in a properly suppressed climate."

Jarabacoa was a-go-go. Three floors were up. The slaves worked *rápida-mente*. The Midget's contractors pushed them. The Cubans dispensed discipline. The whole group swigged Kool-Aid. It created conviviality. Luc brought his three pit bulls. They wore sequined collars and pointy voodoo hats attached with strings.

Crutch slurped Kool-Aid. The buzz hit him quick. The Krew lounged at a picnic table. Luc nuzzled his dogs. Sam pointed to Luc's emerald ring.

"What is it about emeralds?"

Luc said, "Say what, baby man? Please tell me what you mean."

Sam yawned. "I mean, there's people who dig gemstones in general, and people who only dig emeralds, and when they dig emeralds, they dig emeralds in a big way."

Luc smiled. "I understand this. There is a tradition of emerald worship both in Haiti and the D.R. Emeralds represent 'Green Fire' in voodoo text. They shine light on a dark history."

Sam yawned wide. "My girlfriend Celia's Dominican. She can talk emerald lore up the ying-yang."

Crutch volted off "Celia." Luc bristled weird.

"And what is Celia's surname? *Je m'appelle* Celia who?"

Sam said, "Celia Reyes. She's meeting me at the hotel later, which means I should scram."

Luc *re*-bristled. Crutch *re*-volted. A pit bull went aaaa-oooo!

THE EYE, THE HANDS AND FEET.

The melted skin, the bloody stumps, the knife blade. The Cuban beach and the dead kids' faces. The wires crack. The lights go out. The black guy screams.

He woke up in a new locale. Sweat pooled in his headphones. It was dark outside. He checked his watch—8:14 p.m.

Bug job—quick and ad lib.

He got Sam back to Santo Domingo. He had booked him at the El Embajador. Sam got suite 810. Sam popped a Seconal and hit the bedroom. Crutch booked suite 809, high-risk.

He bored a hole through to the 810 living room. He ran a wiggle wire in. He bored a second hole and wall-clamped it. He attached a mini-mike. The baseboard dust blew back into *his* suite. The wire/mike was minuscule. It looked like spic maintenance on the fritz.

Celia was due soon. Luc hinked on her name. Emeralds. Green glass on the body of María Rodríguez Fontonette.

Crutch yawned. He was whip-whoozy. He did his work and Seconaled off the Kool-Aid for a nap. Note to Sam and Celia: if you talk in the bedroom, I'm fucked.

He fucked with his amplifier. He got next-door static and ten minutes of zilch. There—*click*—the bedroom door opens.

Sam yawned. Sam did that *oh my cabeza/I'm jet-lagged* thing. Click—the TV's on. Spanish jabber, fuck that, he turns it off.

Crutch adjusted his headphones. Sam yawned—*oh my cabeza, sleeping pills come with a cost.*

Pop—a door opens. Squeals, baby-baby's and huggy-kissy sounds. Spanish words—the bellman bows and scrapes. *Pop*—he's out the door. Voice garbles—Sam and Celia. *Fizz/pop*—someone opened champagne.

Glasses clink. Plop-on-couch sounds. Two minutes of oh-baby garbles and smooches. Celia's *looooong* breath of it.

Crutch readjusted his headphones. He got static, squelch and Sam: "Emerald," "colored guy," "called it 'Green Fi—' "

The feed fritzed. Shit—all undertones. Crutch perked his ears and got half-audibles. He started to get a subtext.

Sam's pussy-addled. He's thirty years older, he's a wop doofus, Celia's playing him.

Glasses clink. A match scrapes. Celia coughs and exhales. Sam puts out half-audibles. Sam says, "Your silly emerald thing." His tone's patronizing. Celia puts out *third*-audibles. She says something garbled and "emerald intrigue."

Crutch pulled off the headphones and stuck the wire points in his ears. He got a volt charge and more volume. Celia said, "The construction sites. How's the work going?" Sam bragged and monologued. No full words formed. His tone said it plain.

Celia's tone ditto. She's probing, she's mollifying, she's leading him. Three words in six minutes: "footage," "access," "security."

The audio died. Crutch eyeballed the wire hole. He had to *see*.

Tiger Klaw lolled in Luc's inlet. The voodoo slaves built a nice berth for her. Luc lounged on the foredeck. His dogs snoozed under the bridge. Scalps drooped from the front antenna. They bore the Tiger Krew paw brand.

Crutch hopped on board. Luc was effusive. He was snorting smack and voodoo-herb speedballs. Crutch perched by the machine-gun nest. Luc flexed his nostrils and fed his head.

Crutch said he couldn't sleep. He was in the neighborhood, blah blah. Luc said, "You are *pariguayo*. You are always looking and thinking. This means you think of questions to ask. You are a very young man out of his depth in a horrifying region, where your questions will often be met with unpleasant answers. I do not begrudge you a very long drive at a very late hour to talk to me, baby boy."

A dog ambled over. Crutch ruffled his coat. The dog nuzzled him.

"I'm a bit of a history buff, and I know you've been here quite a while."

Luc wiped his nose. "I have been here since time began. I have carried the visage of dogs, chickens and men. I know the histories of both countries on this island and would be happy to share my knowledge with you. Was there some knowledge you specifically require?"

"I was thinking of the 6/14 invasion. I know there's a story there."

"I know the story. Take a drive with me and I'll tell it to you."

Luc owned a '61 Lincoon. The paint job was a Haitian history show. Black demons impaled white Frenchmen. Luc's dogs raped their wives. Baron Samedi's cloak covered the hood and wheel wells. Papa Doc Duvalier smiled on the trunk.

It was hot. Luc put the coonvertible top down and ran the air coonditioning. Bugs bombed the car. Luc offed them with voodoo-herb bug spray. One puff killed the cocksuckers. Two puffs vaporized them.

They drove through inner Haiti. Villages blipped and vanished. Darkies in whiteface blipped out of the haze.

Luc ran his brights. The Lin*coon* had heavy-duty tires. They kicked big rocks out of their way.

Crutch shut his eyes. He kept seeing demon wisps in the shadows. Luc motor-mouthed.

"The 6/14 insurgents were skilled in Haitian voodoo and had voodoo-chemistry skills. A Marxist ideologue named María Rodríguez Fontonette was supposed to dose the water supply near the invasion sites along the D.R. coast, in hopes that it would induce a mass spiritual awareness in the Dominican peasantry. Herbs and blowfish toxins in non-lethal quantities, baby boy. She wanted to bring ecstasy to the peasants and create spiritual chaos with the police and army contingents. Alas, she betrayed the rebels to the Tonton and the Policía Nacional. Thus, we were able to quash the invasion. Most of the insurgents were killed. Some were captured, imprisoned and executed, a very few escaped."

Crutch opened his eyes. A whiteface ghoul capered in their headlights. Crutch shut his eyes quick.

"There was a woman named Celia Reyes, right? I saw how you reacted when Sam mentioned her. She had a friend. An American woman with dark, gray-streaked hair."

Luc lit a cigarette. "Oh, they escaped, baby boy. They were among the few."

"Emeralds. Sam said Celia loves emeralds, and you said emeralds have this significance."

Luc turned on the radio. A low chant in French built. Luc said, "Emeralds do as emeralds do, baby boy. They are a power unto themselves."

Crutch opened his eyes. They bombed south. The coast air evaporated. The bugs got bigger. Luc drove with his knees and bug-bombed them two-handed. The bugs dropped dead all over Crutch. He went *eek* and tossed them out of the car.

They entered a village. It was small: two mud huts, six graveyards, two taverns. Luc said, "We should visit a friend of mine. He is a *bokur*. He would enjoy meeting you, baby boy."

Crutch said, "Groovy." Luc slowed down and idled up to a tavern. A light was on. A voodoo-sect flag flew out front. It matched the flag on Luc's Lin*coon*. Luc parked and ushered Crutch inside.

A fat darky stood at a tonic bar. He had two Mixmasters churning goo and four hot plates stewing shit in saucepans. Luc bowed to the darky. The darky bowed to Luc. They spoke in French. They touched emerald rings. Luc said, "*Il est 'pariguayo.'* "

The darky poured steaming brew in a goblet. Crutch grabbed it and chugalugged.

It burned. It tasted like dead leaves and fungus. His vision blurred and came back 20-20. He burped odors from his last ten meals and stumbled over to a chair.

The room went round, square and rectangled. Fun-house mirrors warped out of the walls. They rolled pictures at him. He couldn't discern details. Luc laughed. The darky said, "*Pariguayo, oui.*"

Crutch squinted. His eyes framed a back wall. It was plastered with anatomy charts. Internal organs were highlighted. Pins extended from them.

Crutch re-squinted. A skull morphed into Wayne Tedrow's face. He got up to jab pins in Wayne's eyes. His arms and legs wouldn't move.

Luc laughed. The darky laughed. Luc said, "*Le pauvre pariguayo.*"

He saw his mother's face and Dana Lund's face. He saw Dana naked with Chrissie Lund's eyes. He saw *THE ELECTRIC CHAIR, THE HANDS AND FEET AND THE EYE*. He tried to talk. His vocal chords froze. He tried to stand. His legs walked away from his body and ran outside. He tried to move his hands. His fingers melted. He saw ten thousand snapshots of Joan.

Luc said, "*Pariguayo.*"

The darky said, "*La poudre zombie.*"

Crutch tried to scream. His mouth dissolved into the 3rd Street tunnel under Bunker Hill. Luc and the darky grabbed him and dragged him into a back room. He tried to resist. His arms turned into bird's wings. They dumped him. They locked the door behind him. Rats roamed the floor. He tried to roll away from them. They crawled on his back and pinned him prone. He saw Joan. He started crying. His tears turned different colors. The rats scurried to his face and started licking. He saw their fleas and the open sores on their bodies. Their tails coiled and flicked saw teeth at him.

He couldn't move. *La poudre zombie*. He saw Joan. He heard mumbles next door. Words in French formed. He saw the girls in his high school French class. His teacher said, "Donald, you're a bright boy. Learn to listen, learn to speak."

The rats nibbled at him. He saw printed French words and heard Miss Boudreau translate. He heard "emeralds," "suspects," "kill him." He heard "Laurent-Jean Jacqueau," "America," "changed name."

"Trujillo and Duvalier." "Emeralds." "Lost in America." "Celia." "1964." "The boy wants the stones."

The words stopped, the mumbles re-started, black-and-white pictures appeared. Clyde Duber's office, Scotty Bennett's dashboard frieze. Crime pix—*THE ARMORED-CAR HEIST*.

Crutch heard footsteps. Crutch heard a gun hammer cock. A rat walked over his face. Crutch willed his mouth open. The rat looked inside. Crutch pressed down and bit its head off.

The rat thrashed. Crutch kept biting. The blood and fur taste did something to him. The door opened. Luc and the darky walked in. Luc's .38 was pressed to his leg.

Crutch laid there. The rat squirmed and died in his mouth. Luc and the darky got close. Crutch reached up and grabbed the gun. Rats skittered all around them. Luc and the darky froze. Crutch aimed and blew their nigger brains out.

73

(Santo Domingo, 5/6/69)

Joan.

The plane taxied in.

Backdraft toppled the Midget's welcome signs. Wayne woke up. He still had his satchel—four hundred grand cuffed to his wrist.

The dream was fragmented. He saw Joan three weeks back. The dream played most nights since. Factual club noise and music. Fictive knife-scar imagery.

He returned Dwight's ring. Dwight refused to discuss Joan. His guess: she was his informant. Joan taught at the "Freedom School." Reginald Hazzard attended. Wayne went back to the Freedom School and re-checked the records. There was nothing on Reginald. His little *click* clicked in, finally.

The Freedom School was listed in Joan's Fed file. He'd shredded the file. Dwight refused to get him a new copy. Another *click* clicked. There was something else he'd forgotten or missed.

Wayne deplaned. His limo was waiting. The smoked windows shut out Tijuana-by-the-Sea. He ran a national records check on Joan Rosen Klein and got nothing. He laid out southside queries. The consensus: she's a BTA hanger-on and a boss chick with a past.

The limo crawled. Balaguer's "Urban Renewal Plan" flatlined traffic. The ditchdiggers wore jail denims. They took mincing steps. Their shackled ankles bled.

Mary Beth was problematic now. His workload kept them parted. His search for Reginald torqued her. She was up front. You work for the Boys. You run bag to dictators. He cajoled and mollified her. He euphemized and lied. She just plain seethed.

Dwight was problematic. Jomo Clarkson suicided in custody. Marsh was terrified and denied that he ratted Jomo out. The snitch-out bored Dwight. The stance was weirdly un-Dwight.

The limo cut down the Malecón. Signs announced the Midget's food giveaway. A flatbed was parked. Dark- and light-skinned paupers lined up. Two La Bandaites tossed paper bags at them. The bags broke. A mini–race riot ignited. The bags contained meat scraps and dented dog-food cans.

Marsh was scared. Wayne and Dwight agreed: he's volatile and might double-deal. Let's have Dipshit rotate stateside and hot-wire his crib.

Haiti sideswiped him. The herb trip recircuited his memory. He saw through the ground and tracked tree roots. He saw magic creatures at play.

Horn blare doubled and tripled. A foot chase stopped traffic flow. Kids with leaflets. Sprints down the street and end-run zigzags. La Banda goons peeled out. One kid group, two goon flanks. Pincer movements, no exit/dead end. The kids ran straight toward a cop line: Policía Nacional guys with plastic shields and clubs.

The pincers pressed. The brownshirts absorbed the kids. Their clubs were spike-pointed. Light blows tore flesh.

The kids tried to run into buildings. Foyer guards saw them and locked their doors up. A kid ran beside the limo. He was shirtless. One eye gushed blood.

Wayne opened his door. The kid tried to hurdle it. He hit the sill and went flying. Wayne grabbed him and threw him in the backseat. The kid resisted. Wayne pinned him and yelled at the driver. The kid caught the gist and yelled in Spanish. Wayne heard numbers and "Calle Bolívar." The driver U-turned and bombed down an alley.

Wayne popped his suitcase and pulled out a shirt. The kid held his eye socket. Blood poured through his fingers. Wayne tilted his head and reversed the flow.

The limo hit a clear stretch. The driver gunned it and rode his horn. Their antenna flags got them through bottlenecks and red lights. Calle Bolívar popped up. The driver downshifted and brodied to a small house mid-block. The kid was passed out. Wayne picked him up and carried him inside.

The office was small. The furniture was scuffed and mismatched. It looked like a sub-rosa Commie medical source. A nurse and doctor grabbed the kid. They seemed to know him. They ran him straight into a back room and shut the door.

Wayne sat in the waiting room. The satchel cuff gouged his wrist. The phone rang every ten seconds. The walls closed in a little. He thought of Haiti and Mary Beth.

The phone kept ringing. An hour ticked off. The doctor walked out. His gown was bloody. His hands were rubber-gloved.

"I saved the boy's eye."

"I'm glad."

"You are?"

"My name's Wayne Tedrow."

"I would guess that you are at the El Embajador."

"That's right."

"You have my thanks. You performed a brave deed."

He went by the Santo Domingo sites. They were cosmeticized.

Two more floors were up. It was too fast. The workers greeted Jefe Tedrow. They were ringers. They looked like actors from a plucky peasant script. No whips or guns visible. Leg chains haphazardly stashed.

The limo ran him north. The rural sites were identical. The Jarabacoa site included a lunch buffet. The fat and sassy workers dined with the bosses. Wayne shimmied up a tree and scoped the area. Forty yards off: La Banda fucks and the real workers chained.

Wayne dozed en route to the Tiger Krew inlet. The smoked windows provided a shut-out-squalor view. He woke up and saw Dipshit outside the encampment. The punk Commie hunter looked halfway distraught.

The driver slowed. Wayne tapped him and motioned him to stop. Dipshit looked up. Wayne said, "You're flying back to L.A. with me. Dwight and I want you to hot-wire Marsh Bowen's place."

Dipshit nodded. It was half eager, half numb. Wayne tapped the driver. The limo pulled into a clearing. Mesplede and the Cubans were there. The Cubans were interchangeable. He never got their names straight. One litter, four mean cubs.

They saw the limo and waved. Wayne got out and walked up. They were hanging things on a line strung between two tree trunks. Wayne smelled decomposition.

Mesplede walked up. Wayne pushed him aside. There: five scalps, Tiger-paw marked.

The Cubans posed—feet dug in, smirks, bandoliers and gun belts. Mesplede hovered. He wore his scalping knife on a thong.

Wayne said, "No more runs. No political bullshit while you're working for me. One more infraction and *muerto.*"

The Cubans readjusted: smirks, thumbs in their belt loops, feet dug in wiiiiide. Mesplede knife-scratched his neck.

Wayne plucked the scalps off the clothesline. Wayne walked merc to merc. Wayne mashed the scalps in their faces.

"Viva Fidel, you fucking lowlifes."

The suite phone rang at midnight. It jolted him up. He fell asleep with the lights on. Santo Domingo was a window blur. He thought about the gashed-eye kid straight off.

"Hello."

"Did I wake you?"

"Yes and no."

Mary Beth said, "I hope you weren't dreaming."

"Well, yes and no."

"I'd ask you how things are going, but I'm not sure I want to know."

Wayne rubbed his eyes. "I got a lead on the woman who bailed your son out of jail."

"Sweetie, I wasn't talking about Reginald."

Wayne looked at his briefcase. "I know you weren't. I told you because it's about you and me, and not about what I do for a living."

"Or about the people you work for?"

Wayne sighed. "Babe, please don't do this. Not on the telephone."

Mary Beth sighed. "It'll be worse in person."

"Then let's be fucking civil and not do it at all."

"We should say good night now."

"Yes, I think we should."

The line clicked and disconnected. Wayne looked out the window. The sky was neon-free. The Midget told Sam G. he wanted *mucho* neon. Sam said they'd provide some.

The buzzer rang. Wayne got up and opened the door. It was Celia Reyes. He met her in convention-time Miami. She was Sam's consort then.

She said, "Hello, Mr. Tedrow." She wore a white dress and a linen blazer. She extended her hand. He stepped aside and held the door open. Celia sat on the couch.

"I wanted to thank you for my friend Ramón. The doctor said you gave generously of your time."

Wayne pulled a chair up. "I'm glad he'll be all right."

"The doctor said it was quite a sight. You carrying Ramón, with a briefcase attached to your wrist."

The briefcase sat between them. Wayne pointed to it.

"It was unwieldy, yes."

Celia smiled. "You're not questioning my presence here."

"I half-expected some sort of approach."

"Why is that?"

"You could make the point that I wanted it."

"I have a friend. We think you may be sympathetic to our work."

Wayne smiled. "Yes, that may be true."

"Would it upset you if I told you that we knew some things about you prior to your actions today?"

"People tend to know things about me. It tends to do me more harm than good."

"May I inquire about your beliefs?"

Wayne said, "I'm following signs. I'm beginning to think that I may have a purpose that exists beyond my will to comprehend it."

Celia pointed to the briefcase. "The contents?"

"$400,000."

"May I have it?"

"Yes."

"Will there be more?"

"Yes."

Celia picked up the briefcase and walked to the door. Wayne opened it. A shadow flicked down the hallway. A smoke ring evaporated. Wayne knew it was *her*.

"*Celia said you were quite gracious.*"

"*She caught me at the right moment.*"

"*I won't press you about that.*"

"*You could. I'd be candid. I'd press you on a few topics and hope you'd be candid in return.*"

"*You can ask me anything. I'll give you answers or I won't.*"

"*I was going to ask you about your relationship with Dwight Holly and about a young man you knew at the Freedom School and almost certainly rescued from harm a year later.*"

"*I'm not telling you.*"

"*That's a direct answer.*"

"*I told you it would be.*"

"*Yes, you did.*"

"*I hope my bluntness won't terminate our working together.*"

"*I won't permit it. I'm a very blunt ex-policeman, and I tend to get the answers I want.*"

"*You haven't asked me what Celia and I know about you, which is a more pressing question to ask.*"

"*I'll assume you know everything, and let it go at that.*"

"*I've enjoyed talking to you, Mr. Tedrow.*"

"*Thank you for calling, Miss Klein.*"

Wayne woke up over Texas. Airplane scotch and voodoo herbs put him out from takeoff.

Dipshit was reading *Playboy*. The little hump looked haggard and scared.

Deep-gouged bluffs loomed below them. Trees stuck out sideways. Storm clouds made them vanish.

Wayne thought, *This Is All Magic*.

Wayne thought, *I've Gone Red*.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/13/69. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: "Recorded at the Director's Request/Classified Confidential 1-A: Director's Eyes Only." Speaking: Director Hoover, Special Agent Dwight C. Holly.

JEH: Good morning, Dwight.

DH: Good morning, Sir.

JEH: Your telex implied that you have bad news. "Tell it like it is," as President Nixon often states in his fawning efforts to sound au courant with longhairs and insurrection-seeking Negroes.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: There's also "Can you dig it?" and "Are you cool with it?" which are new favorites of the white radio personalities who have taken up the chant that I am too old for this job.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: "Right on, brother" is an expression that is considered "in the groove" these days. I addressed Vice President Agnew in that manner last week. He gave me a clenched-fist salute. I was deeply gratified. It was akin to receiving the French Legion of Honor.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: You're stalling, Dwight.

DH: Chief Reddin called me, Sir. He told me that he had taken Marsh Bowen off roster. He's been fired from LAPD, so LAPD is in no way accountable for his actions. The firing was clandestine, which protects us at least so—

JEH: OPERATION BAAAAAAD BROTHER must not be derailed or in any way diverted. Bowen must not know that he's been fired. Why did this occur? Tell it like it is.

DH: I think Scotty Bennett went to Reddin and offered a rationale for the firing. I believe that Bennett's personal animus precipitated this action.

JEH: Bennett has favored us in at least one regard. He did not expose the late Jomo Kenyatta Clarkson and his late crime partner as the killers of the late hate merchant Dr. Fred Hiltz, which has spared the Bureau a great deal of ape-inspired scrutiny.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Jomo Kenyatta Clarkson has fucked Pat Nixon on numerous occasions. A confidential informant in the Hollywood community informed me of this fact. They were under the influence of the drug Quaaludes, commonly known as "ludes."

DH: Yes, Sir. I was think—

JEH: There will be Bureau raids on Black Panther offices in Denver, Chicago and Salt Lake City during the first week of June. I am grateful for it, but it lacks the illuminating pizzazz of our operation, which is a fully formed explication of Negro criminality and indigenous moral sloth. I want the BTA and/or the MMLF to sell heroin. The public has been numbed to death and charmed to sleep by the Panthers. They need evil apes they can sink their teeth into. I assure you that I am telling it like it is.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: The honorary Negro Wayne Tedrow. Lay it on me, brother.

DH: He's status quo, Sir. He was in the Dominican Republic nec–

JEH: Dick Nixon is peeved at Wayne, once removed. Wayne pulled the plug on a plucky little group of anti-Castro brigands that Bebe Rebozo was bankrolling. Bebe is determinedly anti-Communist. I respect him for that.

DH: I'll be speaking to the president tomorrow night, Sir. I'll advise him on the Wayne matter as you advise me.

JEH: Do what you like. Tell it like it is, because I'm cool with it.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Nixey boy has never learned the rudiments of achieving a close shave. I use Wilkinson Sword blades. My personal file on Nixon would ruin him. The files in my basement would create Armageddon instantaneously.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: The BTA and/or the MMLF must push heroin. We must create a properly controlled chaos.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I dream of Martin Lucifer King quite often. He invariably wears a red-devil costume and carries a pitchfork.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Do you dream of him?
DH: Frequently, Sir.
JEH: And how is he attired?
DH: He always wears a halo and wings.
JEH: (Abrupt and muffled comment/phone transcript terminates here.)

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/14/69. VERBATIM STAGE-1/CLOSED CONTACT/TOP-ACCESS ROUTING telephone-call transcript. Closed file #48297. Speaking: President Richard M. Nixon and Special Agent Dwight C. Holly, FBI.

RMN: Dwight, good evening.
DH: Good evening, Mr. President.
RMN: You're not taping this, are you, Dwight?
DH: No, Sir. Are you?
RMN: Yes, I am. I've got a device that records my calls automatically, but one of my slaves comes by and dumps the tapes in a vault. They'll never see the light of day, and we'll be pushing up daisies if they do.
DH: I'm cool with it, Sir.
RMN: I can dig it. Did you vote for me, Dwight?
DH: I'm not registered to vote, Sir.
RMN: You're a bad citizen. You're like your friend Tedrow, who messed with my friend Bebe. He's the First Friend, Dwight. I enjoy these talks of ours, and Wayne has been instrumental in facilitating our arrangement with the Italians, but Bebe is Bebe and Wayne fucked with him.
DH: May I make a few blunt comments, Mr. President?
RMN: Tell it like it is.
DH: Wayne Tedrow is a very competent man given to the occasional extravagant gesture. The foolishness that he interdicted may have proven detrimental to the casino build in the D.R. Mr. Rebozo's pet exile group is composed of dubious far-Right ideologues with a giant oozing hard-on to depose Fidel Castro, and as you once told me, Sir, the fucker is here to stay. I would describe Mr. Rebozo's exile comrades as heedless and whimsical at best, gratuitously psychopathic at worst. Wayne did the prudent thing, Sir.

RMN: You're absolutely correct, Dwight. Moreover, the D.R. is a shithole, the Boys may take a bath on their hotels, and Joaquín Balaguer is solidly anti-Red and a good deal more tractable than Rafael Trujillo. That cocksucker was a nightmare. You wouldn't believe the CIA file on him. The shit he pulled with his so-called bitter rival Papa Doc Duvalier was horrific. They looted land, smuggled emeralds, and foreclosed banks and split the profits. While they're doing this, the Goat is slaughtering Haitian refugees and Papa Doc is fucking half of his girlfriends.

DH: Strange bedfellows, Sir.

RMN: On that note, let's talk about you-know-who. I was listening to the radio today. A disc jockey called him "Gay Edgar."

DH: The media has been unkind lately, Sir.

RMN: Do you think he takes it up the keester?

DH: I think he finds the closet too confining for that, Sir.

RMN: A little schlong would make him less uptight.

DH: Yes, Sir.

RMN: He's losing it. Right, Dwight?

DH: Yes, Sir. But, again, he's utterly dangerous and should be handled delicately.

RMN: And he's got those goddamn files.

DH: He does, Sir.

RMN: And they're wildly revealing and impolitic.

DH: Not as much as this conversation, Sir.

RMN: Dwight, you're a pisser. It's fun to belt a couple and jaw with salty guys like you.

DH: Sir, I enjoy our chats very much.

RMN: That Irish cocksucker Jack Kennedy stole the 1960 election from me.

DH: Yes, Sir.

RMN: The cocksucker is dead and I'm the president of the United States.

DH: Yes, Sir.

RMN: Keep tabs on you-know-who for me. Will you do that, Dwight?

DH: Yes, Sir. I will.

RMN: Good night, Dwight.

DH: Good night, Mr. President.

74

(Los Angeles, 5/16/69)

Dwight said, “You’re afraid of something. Your hands are shaking.”

Dipshit slid a wire through a bore slot. His pliers jumped. Marsh Bowen’s pad was bug-tap-amenable. The phones were big and old-fashioned. The wall molding was soft.

“Don’t mess with me. I can’t concentrate.”

Dwight smiled. “It’s a periodic. Wayne will rotate through and check the listening post. He’ll tally the calls.”

The job entailed drill work. Dipshit was good. He laid down a drop cloth and kept his space tight. Marsh was at a BTA gig. They had three hours.

“How many Communists have you killed now?”

“More than you.”

“Are you still peeping?”

“I peeped your mother. She was turning tricks on skid row.”

Dwight laughed and checked out the living room. Marsh employed the Stanislavski Method. The crib was in character. Black-power posters, pix of foxy black chicks with guns.

“I was talking to President Nixon about you.”

Dipshit spackled a drill hole. His hand shook and held firm. He wore a tool belt and magnifier. The loser kid as bug pro.

"Don't mess with me. We're running late."

"You and Bowen are soul brothers. You're scaredy-cats, but you damn well persist."

"Bowen's your coon daddy. Come on, let me work."

"How many Communists have you killed?"

"Jesus, man."

Dwight checked his watch. It was midnight. Jig soirees ran to the wee small hours. Reefer and speeches, gasbags and demagogues.

Dipshit finished up. Hot-wired: two lamps, three wall panels, two phones. Dipshit was sweaty and dust-caked. Dwight tossed him a towel.

"How's tricks in the D.R.? Are you peeping down there?"

Dipshit toweled off. "Quit riding me."

Dwight walked the pad—final look-see, no loose ends. Marsh breathed the Method. Commie books, ribs in the fridge, no telltale cop or queer shit.

The job was good. No dust sprays, no mounts or wires loose.

Dipshit was nerve-knocked. His breath spurted. His legs fluttered. The tool belt jiggled on his hips.

Dwight said, "Don't fuck up. Wayne's looking to kill some fool right-winger."

"He did not call JFK a cocksucker."

Dwight did the hands-on-heart thing. "I'm not lying to you."

Norm's on Vermont. The 1:00 a.m. clientele: pot-smacked kids noshing budget steak meals.

Karen brought Eleanora. She snoozed in her car seat. Dwight kept staring at her.

"She looks like me."

"No, she doesn't. It was a procedure, and you were nowhere near the receptacle."

Dwight yukked and sipped coffee. Karen lit a cigarette. Dwight propped up a menu and shielded Ella from the smoke.

"You like Richard Nixon. I can't believe what it says about you."

Dwight smiled. "You love me. What does that say about you?"

Karen twirled her ashtray. “I have some friends in the San Mateo County Jail. They’re being denied habeas.”

“I’ll take care of it.”

“How’s Mr. Hoover?”

“A little uptight.”

“Is Marshall Bowen your infiltrator?”

“No comment.”

“Is Joan as good an informant as I am?”

“Time will tell.”

Ella stirred. Dwight rocked the car seat. Karen peeked over the menu. Ella grinned and went back to sleep.

“You’re too thin, Dwight.”

“I’ve heard that before.”

Karen smiled. “Bad dreams?”

“You know the answer to that one.”

“I’ll qualify it, then. ‘Bad dreams born of a guilty conscience?’ ”

Ella kicked her leg out of the car seat. Dwight tucked it back in.

“I love her, you know.”

“Yes, I know that.”

They laced up their fingers. Dwight said, “Do you love me?” Karen said, “I’ll think about it.”

He dawdled at Norm’s. The geek show was a riot, the drop-front was musty, he wouldn’t sleep anyway.

Cops and peaceniks. Late-night film buffs. Stragglers from the porno book bin next door.

The waitress kept bringing coffee. Dwight smoked in sync with her. Time metastasized.

Wayne walked in and sat down. He was too thin. He had new gray hair.

Dwight said, “You’re the bad penny.”

“You know why I’m here.”

“We’ve been through this. I’ll admit that she works for me, but that’s as far as I’ll go.”

Wayne brushed off the waitress. “I saw a tall red-haired woman with a baby walk out of here an hour ago. I ran her plates and got her name, and I’m assuming that she was here with you.”

Dwight lit a cigarette. “Why did you assume that?”

“Because I don’t believe in coincidences.”

Dwight worried his law-school ring. It rolled across the table. Wayne rolled it back to him.

"I saw a photo of the faculty at a left-wing 'Freedom School.' Karen Sifakis and the woman we're discussing were standing together."

Karen said she never met Joan in person. She said they were mail-drop comrades. Joan said the same thing.

Dwight shrugged. Wayne said, "Tell me." Dwight said, "I'm not going to."

A gaggle of drunks walked in. Two cops at the counter bristled.

"Say her name, Wayne. I want to hear you say it."

Wayne said, "Joan."

Dwight did the hands-on-heart thing.

75

(The Dominican Republic, Haiti, Caribbean Waters, Los Angeles,
5/16/69–3/8/70)

R*otations:*

The D.R. to L.A. and back. The casino build, the smack biz, Cuban coastal runs. His case wedged in.

He offed Luc Duhamel and the *bokur* and kept it all zipped. He torched the shack and Luc's Lin*coon* and night-walked back to the D.R. Luc plain vanished. Some Tonton ghouls braced Tiger Krew with routine questions. Crutch toughed it out. Word surfaced: Luc got snuffed in a voodoo-sect war. Reprisals followed: spells, machete massacres and zombifications. Crutch laid low and rode it out. His nerves had him noggin-nudged and gored out of his gourd. He had nightmares in Voodoo VistaVision.

He found good homes for Luc's dogs. Froggy found some Tonton guys to run the Haitian end of the biz. Luc's inlet remained Tiger Kove. *Tiger Klaw* was moored there. The Puerto Rican and Cuban jaunts launched from Luc's old turf.

Work was full-time. His case was part-time. There's the voodoo-shack epiphany. He's zombified. His brain broils as his body is bokur-bound and immobile. Emeralds/1964/Celia. Laurent-Jean

Jacqueau/America/changed name. His mind melts and morphs to the *ARMORED-CAR HEIST*.

He tracked the epiphany and validated it. He B&E'd the La Banda ops office and found some paperwork. It was cryptic and written in Spanish. He took Minox pix, developed the film and pidgin English–translated. An emerald shipment left Santo Domingo, 2/10/64. Destination: L.A. The sender and recipient—not listed. No mode of transport listed. No names to latch on to. The paper trail dead-ended there.

He tried to track Tonton turncoat Laurent-Jean Jacqueau. He took 6/14/59 as his disappearance date and extrapolated. He checked outbound emigration records. He got nothing. He checked incoming U.S. émigrés and got nothing. He started with Jacqueau's real name. That didn't work. He tried his initials. That didn't work. He expanded from there. He checked intake sheets on all Negro Caribbean males and got nothing.

All he got was scuttlebutt and oral history. The Goat and Papa Doc were emerald fiends. He got that and no more. Likewise emeralds and Laurent-Jean Jacqueau. Likewise emeralds, Celia Reyes and Joan Rosen Klein. He raided three file troves: the CIA, La Banda and Ivar Smith's group. He saw no target names listed. He got no Green Fire leads.

Rotation.

He made sixteen Cuban runs and eight dope runs, all top secret. All accomplished in defiance of Wayne T. Wayne paid Ivar Smith to surveil Tiger Krew and report back to him. Ivar told Froggy this. Froggy and Ivar countermanded Wayne. Ivar double-dealt Wayne for a cut of the dope biz. They developed a warning system. Ivar pre-announced Wayne's visits. The dope biz and Cuban runs were curtailed then. Tiger Krew anti-Castroized and dope-dealt while Wayne was gone. *Tiger Klaw* launched from seclusion. The Puerto Rican runs were clandestine. The Tonton spooks ran the conduit to Port-au-Prince.

His dead-Commie count stood at twenty-four now. The coastal runs entailed torpedo lobs. *Tiger Klaw* slipped in and bomb-slathered the coast. Moored boats went down with scorched Reds on board. The scalp runs got to him more. The body counts were lower and high nightmare quotients resulted. All the runs were nerve-knocking. He fueled up on voodoo herbs. Froggy and the Cubans never suspected.

Le poudre zombie almost killed him. The heist revelation issued from that altered state. He trusted the moment and kept trying to re-capture it. Most voodoo herbs were brain-bracing and benign. He logicked that one out. He snuck into Haiti and scored herbs to rev him *and* calm him. The shit worked. It buttressed his balls and got him to Cuba and back. It never revived revelations per his case. It helped with his nightmares.

ELECTRIC CHAIR, THE HANDS AND FEET, THE EYE.

Bad dreams kept him up. He dosed himself with voodoo herbs and went peeping. It wore him out. Woman imagery subsumed his dreams most nights.

He dug on voodoo. He didn't believe in it. He hexed Wayne a million times, anyway. He grooved the ritual. Wayne was too big to fuck with. Voodoo had a power beyond his volition. He grokked that aspect of it.

His life was work. The casino build was go, go, go. Twelve floors were up at all four locations. Heavy rains slowed things down. Slaves died from overwork and required replacement. Froggy and the Cubans bossed the work crews. La Banda goons assisted. Ivar Smith warned them of Wayne's visits. Froggy brought ringer work crews in. Wayne brought bribe and construction cash. Crutch steered clear of him and hate-hexed him. Froggy and the Cubans oozed mock innocence. They hated Wayne. Wayne required big-time connivance and kid gloves.

Rotation.

Crutch worked in the D.R. and L.A. His case was bifurcated: the María Rodriguez Fontonette snuff and the armored-car heist. Celia blew in and out of Santo Domingo. He couldn't track her down. He ran more paper checks. He surveilled the known safe houses on the La Banda list. He tailed Commie punks from CIA dissident lists in the dumb hope that they knew her. It was futile. He got diverted by random women. Window glimpses swerved him for days at a pop. He had to find Celia. She was his spark point to Joan.

Rotation.

Crutch lied to Froggy. He laid out "Clyde Duber needs me in L.A." tales. Froggy said sure. He flew to L.A. and prowled. He read Clyde's heist file a dozen times, got the gist and no more. He called Wells Fargo. He tried to track the emerald shipment and got rebuffed. He went back to Clyde's file. Scotty Bennett's obsession with the case was confirmed. That was old news. The *new* news: Scotty's filed reports were threadbare.

Omissions. A paper dearth. He *knew* Scotty. They bullshitted at the wheelman lot. Scotty showed him reports on minor heists—always detail-packed. His reports on 2/24/64—slight by comparison.

He tried to pump Scotty. He came on *suuuubtle*, but Scotty did not reveal shit. He didn't tell Scotty that he'd hot-wired Marsh Bowen. Scotty would slam Bowen at the proper time.

A ripe rumor rippled: Bowen snitched a spade named Jomo for some liquor-store jobs. Jomo offed himself in jail. Scotty told Crutch that he was spreading the rumor. Safe bet: Bowen's queer ass was cooked.

Rotation.

The island was a Zombie Zone. L.A. was a safe zone. He dropped by the wheelman lot and brought beer and pizza. He went by his pad at the Vivian and his downtown file pad. He read his mother's missing person file. It helped smother his nightmares.

His mother sent him five bucks and a Christmas card. This one was postmarked Kansas City. She split in 1955. She sent her first card that year. She sent a card for Christmas '69. It was 1970 now.

She was still alive. Like Celia and Joan. Like Dana Lund and all the Hancock Park girls in windows. His case was stalled. Scotty had to have more paperwork. Dana Lund had new gray hair. She wore the cashmere sweater he'd bought her at Christmas.

Dana's gray streaks looked like Joan's. It was all a fucking knife to the heart.

76

(Las Vegas, Los Angeles, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, 5/16/69–3/8/70)

Dream State.

It was Bowen's stated concept. It was his life now. It was unquantifiable. It reminded him of his early chemistry studies. Some experiments brought assured results. Many did not. He took greater risks and became more attuned to uncertainty. A world existed beyond his comprehension. The notion drove him and consoled him, then and now.

His herb trips clarified his dream state. They brought him an unforeseeable hope. They dulled his sense of risk more.

He flies to the D.R. and detours into Haiti. He hires Tonton thugs to protect him as he chemically dallies. He brings money for Celia and Joan. He tells Celia to deploy the money and spare him the details. She has pledged to leave the building sites alone. He has donated $1,649,000. The results are unquantifiable.

Dream State.

He liquidated his father's estate and reimbursed Balaguer's construction firm. That covered his first impromptu tithe. He became an embezzler then.

The Boys trusted him with quickly tallied and un-vouchered cash. They knew he loved power and gave little thought to financial remuneration. He skimmed skim off Drac's hotels. He diverted payments from Teamster-book buyouts. He cooked the books at Tiger Kab and the southside clubs. He quick-wash-and-dried funds through the Peoples' Bank. He delivered monthly stipends to Balaguer and near-equal funds to Celia.

He asked to speak to Joan. It pertained to a young man she knew at one time. Celia said, "Under no circumstances" and "Please don't ask me again." He refrained from further requests. He chased Joan and the ghost of Reginald Hazzard back to L.A.

Dwight refused to discuss Joan. Wayne submitted a Federal file request through a friend on LVPD. Joan's file was missing from Central Records. The Bureau had no file on Joan's colleague Karen Sifakis. Dwight pulled both files. He was sure of that. He ran a nationwide PD check on both women and got nothing. That second little *click* kept *clicking* him. He did anti-redaction work on Joan's file. His memory *clicked* and stalled out there.

He scoured South L.A. He couldn't find Joan. He built a partial Joan-Reginald time line. The Freedom School, '62. The jail bailout, '63. He scoured files in the D.R. Joan: tied to Celia Reyes and embroiled in Dominican revolt. Joan: one file photo. The 6/14 invasion and a younger woman with a fist raised.

Late '63: Reginald studies Haitian herbs and hard-Left politics. Joan's a renegade professor. It's a wild tutelage. The Haitian connection—jump then to now.

Joan is BTA-tight. The BTA "Armorer": Haitian hellion Leander James Jackson. Brother Jackson had a knife fight with the late Jomo Clarkson. Wayne and Marsh Bowen provoked it. Jackson was allegedly ex–Tonton Macoute. Wayne tried to run a Tonton records check on him. The Tonton kept no written records.

More file checks, more dead ends.

No file on Leander James Jackson. No immigration files on men with those three initials. No Fed or muni-PD files extant.

Jackson: most likely unrelated to Reginald and Joan. He considered bracing Bowen on Jackson and decided against it. Bowen would probably double-deal confidential information.

Dream State.

He cruises southside L.A. He looks for people who aren't there. He's got Tiger Kab and the clubs as information hubs. Nobody knew Reginald then or knows Reginald now. He's hand-checking LAPD and Sheriff's station files. He's looking for one name in millions of words.

I will find Reginald Hazzard just as I found Wendell Durfee. I will impart mercy as I once imparted death.

His dream state imposed clarity. It seamlessly bridged L.A. and the D.R. The hotel-casinos were going up. It was a controlled experiment with quantifiable results. He was tithing revolution at a consistently opposing rate. Ivar Smith was watch-dogging Tiger Krew. The fucks were abstaining from Cuban runs and had scotched their dope biz. *That* was quantifiable. *That* controlled experiment worked. He visited Tiger Krew. He soaked up their hatred and fear. The RED borders of his U.S.-Caribbean junkets blurred.

The Boys loved him. He hated them and sucked up to them and bilked them. The Boys knew he was with a black woman. They kept quiet because they needed his skills. He spends time with them. He fraternizes with queer black militants. He's riding his dreamscape through a zeitgeist with an off-RED flag aswirl.

Marsh Bowen was full-time wired. Wayne checked the listening post every third day. Marsh and his pals talked revolutionary shit and never *did* shit to create revolution. They can't score heroin. Half of them don't *want* to score heroin. A few have tenuous moral qualms. Most just fear the fuzz. Chicago cops killed two Panthers in December. The Panthers shot it out with LAPD the same month. It was a non-fatal/let-off-steam/could-have-been-us moment. *Whew! Heroin*? Brother, I'm not sure.

It frustrated Dwight. It delighted Wayne. He smoked weed with Marsh once. They again discussed the dream-state concept. Marsh didn't know he was wired. Marsh didn't know that LAPD bagged his ass. They stood in the Tiger Kab lot. Wayne got this nutty idea: *I'll tell him I killed Martin Luther King and see how he takes it.*

Dwight didn't trust Marsh. Dwight was right—he's a time-buyer and a favor-doer lost in compliant calculation. Marsh bailed Ezzard Donnell Jones out of lockup twice—77th Street and University stations. Marsh was afraid of MMLF reprisal and BTA whiplash. Marsh's mindscape was all stasis and circumspection.

Dwight's brainscape was all machination. He was losing weight. He was boozing to suppress his nerves and notch some sleep. Dwight said Mr. Hoover was reaming him for results.

Wayne said, “How?” Dwight mimicked a junkie shooting up.

The pantomime was spooky. Wayne got chills. Dwight said, “Son, you cannot fuck with me on this.”

Dream State.

He did not tell Mary Beth about his tithing. She would consider it stealing. She would critique his guilty conscience. She would disapprove of his herb trips. She would view his experiment theory as a fatuous riff of the times. Her resentment was an indictment. She brought it to bed with them. He brought images of Joan for fire and consolation. She considers his quest to find her son grandiose and self-serving. She cannot comprehend the scope of his debt.

77

(Los Angeles, the Dominican Republic, 5/16/69–3/8/70)

S*he's gone.*

She left him with nineteen file cards and no good-bye note. She left a lipstick smear on her pillow.

The cards listed snitch-outs gleaned from the BTA. Joan gave up six armed-robbery teams, two kidnap gangs and eleven mail-bombing leftists. Dwight attributed the work to Marsh Bowen. It bought the time-buyer more time and wowed Mr. Hoover. The old girl ordered the Federal raids herself.

A brief return to form, followed by more slippage.

"Dwight, those prehensile-tailed creatures must sell heroin. I fear that they will not accomplish this in my flickering-out lifetime."

He mollified the old girl. The old girl responded with a daily telex barrage. Racist doggerel and hate cartoons, sent through the FBI mail flow.

Pat Nixon pulls a train for Archie Bell and the Drells. Slippage verging on breakdown.

He walked away from it. He tried to find Joan.

Phone checks, records checks—nothing. Subtle probings with

Karen—no go. Wayne nailed that "Freedom School" lead. It proved that Joan and Karen lied to him. Wayne redacted Joan's file. He told Dwight that a little *click* kept eluding him. Dwight knew what it was. Wayne stripped inked paper and got the name Thomas Frank Narduno. The man knew Joan. They were comrades. Dwight and Wayne's gang killed Narduno at the Grapevine Tavern. It begged the biggest questions of their lives:

What does she want? What does she know? Why have we let her in?

Dwight print-dusted the Eagle Rock and Altadena pads. No prints, no diary notes, no guns under pillows.

She's gone.

His nerves are stripped gears. He stares at the drop-front walls and lets time evaporate. He takes more pills with more booze and sleeps worse commensurately.

He filled the Joan void with Karen. Joan gave him nineteen snitches. He gave Karen the quid pro quo benefit. He bailed her friends out of jail in record numbers. Karen pulled more Quaker woo-woo than ever before. He has Dr. King nightmares. Karen gets a monument-bombing chit the next day. He keeps thinking of Silver Hill. The doctors told him not to think. He stared at the walls and thought anyway.

She's gone.

He's got more time to think and stare at walls and wait for the walls to speak back. OPERATION BAAAAD BROTHER was in a soul coma. The BTA and MMFL brothers were losing their fire *fast*. October 18, '69. The Panthers ambush two L.A. cops. One cop is wounded, one Panther is wounded, one Panther is dead.

December 8, '69: The big pig-Panther shoot-out at Panther HQ. Woundings, no deaths. LAPD reprisals?—probably. Most likely implemented by Scotty B.

Marsh Bowen was useless. The wire was useless. The talk was Revolution 101 for burrheads and dupes. His new Marsh vibe: the fuck had an agenda. The fuck was lying in wait. He should have produced more or plain rabbited from the Jomo thing.

Scotty weighed on him. Scotty had an agenda. Scotty got LAPD to fire Marsh. Scotty put out the word: no reprisals on Marsh. He snitched Jomo, I don't care, don't fuck with him or I'll fuck with you.

The sweat-box room, the hose shots, the Q&A. *Why the grilling* *on that armored-car heist*?

Suspicion.

It kept aging cops up nights. Their brain compartments seeped. They saw shit that wasn't there and missed the shit that was. He had phone chats with President Nixon and Mr. Hoover. President Nixon feared Mr. Hoover's file stash. Mr. Hoover feared President Nixon's soft line on black militants and Commies. Mr. Hoover was obsessed with Wayne's black girlfriend and feared that coon-killer Wayne had gone Red. Nixon sent Dwight on a scouting trip to the D.R. He wanted Dwight's take on the Midget. He wanted to make sure his mob deal wouldn't boomerang. Dwight dipped down to Santo Domingo. The casino build was going strong. The Midget gave good lunch. La Banda gave good oppression. He called the prez and told him the D.R. looked kosher.

Suspicion.

He called Mr. Hoover and reported the trip. Mr. Hoover was *suspicious*—"Dwight, did Nixon talk about me?"

Dwight said, "No, Sir. He didn't." Mr. Hoover was aghast and relieved. He told a *fourteen-minute* joke about Dr. King and Lassie. He told a *sixteen-minute* joke about the prez and Liberace.

Suspicion.

He had downtime in Santo Domingo. He hobknobbed with Tiger Krew and felt shit percolating. His hunch: they were moving smack behind Wayne's back. He didn't tell Wayne. Why promote chaos?

The D.R. felt creepy-crawly. L.A. felt good on the rebound.

She's gone.

His birthday was last week. He turned fifty-three. The prez called and requested a D.R. backup trip. Karen bought him dinner at Perino's. He got a plain white envelope in the mail.

It came to the drop-front. His name and address were typed on. There was no return address.

He opened the envelope. Inside: a little red flag on a stick.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/8/70. Extract from the privately held journal of Karen Sifakis.

Los Angeles,
3/8/70

My daughters are playing in the next room. Four-year-old Dina is watching fifteen-month-old Eleanora steady herself on a large rubber beach ball and teach herself to walk. At some point, she'll become jealous of Ella's rapid progress and push her to the floor; Ella will cry, get up and keep going. It will be the third or fourth time this has happened. I reprimanded Dina the first time. She blamed Dwight for her actions. She had overheard Dwight telling me that Ella was quickly becoming the dominant little girl, and Dina had better "log some payback while she's able."

I should have reprimanded Dwight for the statement. He said those words some months ago, and it's too late for reprimands now. I'm looking back at the past year's journal pages and feeling disparate events cohere. Dwight has been affording me greater and greater latitude in my political actions and has been bailing out my politically jailed friends at an ever-accelerating pace. The matchup of dates makes it all the more evident: Dwight's remarkable generosity begins the moment he tells me that Joan has disappeared.

Of course, they are lovers. Of course I could not tell Dwight that Joan's vanishing acts are very well established, because I have lied to him about the breadth of my friendship with Joan. Dwight asked me about Joan and the USC Freedom School several months ago. Of course I lied about it; of course Dwight knew I was lying. We are in far too deeply with each other to issue reprimands or otherwise revise the rules of a duplicitous, usurious and compartmentalized union. The odd thing? I find myself approving of Dwight and Joan as lovers. I love Dwight more than I ever have, because Joan has served to instill doubt in him. Dwight is beginning to erode. I pray that the process will extend and change him gently, and not take him to grief and madness. A very real fear attends this prayer offering. I am more fully realizing that Joan manipulated me into a meeting with Dwight. Toward what end? This prayer must include all other persons who inhabit their hellishly self-willed orbit.

I had lunch with Joan shortly before she went away. She hinted at a tropical destination and told me she had left Dwight some paperwork. She said that she hoped it wouldn't go bad, like '51, '56 and '61. I did not ask Joan to embellish her statement. I mentioned Dwight and his penance money and hinted at his personal catastrophe in 1957. Joan told me that she knew the story, but refused to tell me how she knew. And in that moment, I knew that Joan loved Dwight sans all political agendas.

I cried a little. Joan hugged me and gave me a beautiful emerald.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/8/70. Extract from the journal of Marshall E. Bowen.

Los Angeles,
3/8/70

Fear time.

It's fear time now, and it's been fear time for a while. I've been fearful for so long that it's become almost banal. I'm now hyperalert to the signs of panic expressed by my body. Months of general fear have made me more sensitive to acute and justified fear. I've been surviving and buying advantage moment to moment.

An anonymous informant bought me time with Mr. Hoover and Mr. Holly. A nineteen-snitch package, graciously attributed to me. It bought Mr. Holly time with Mr. Hoover, I'm sure of that. It validates OPERATION BAAAAAD BROTHER, which buys me more time to pursue armored-car heist leads. The MMLF has lost interest in me over time. MMLF members see me at the clubs, alone or with my BTA brothers. They avert their eyes, spit on the floor or make obscene gestures. There are shoving matches as both groups co-opt space at peace marches. I'm apprehensive more than fearful in those contexts. I monitor my body for signs of panic and realize that I've been granted time.

Time liberates me and constrains me. A friend on LAPD told me that LAPD had secretly terminated my employment. Mr. Holly and Wayne obviously knew this and never told me. This makes me a Federal operative with no police sanction and no assured position within law enforcement once my assignment concludes. Last week, I found bug wires in my apartment. I did the prudent thing: I let them sit. It had to have been instigated by Wayne and Mr. Holly. They do not trust me. Their distrust is fully justified. I have been very careful in whom I talk to in my home and what I talk about, in person and on the telephone. The discovery of the bug-tap apparatus vouched my justified paranoia and confirmed me in my role of apostatized ex-cop black militant. I assumed that role the moment I rented this apartment and have embellished it with greater and greater flair every moment since. Men with the Bent have to be cautious. I behave as if I do not have the Bent and have done so since Wayne made his "faggot" remark. In my heart, I feel like a radicalized ex-cop, weighing his options in all arenas. My actor's sense of time and identity has proven invaluable here.

Wayne and I have smoked dope a few times. We discussed the oddly different and oddly similar metaphysical states of our lives. It was in many ways the most beguiling interchange of my life.

Time has been bestowed on me. I am probably ghetto-safe because Scotty Bennett wants me ghetto-safe. The revised ghetto word is that I may be a police informant. This is Scotty's protracted vengeance on me, I'm sure. The worrisome thing is that I see no vindictive punch line or conclusion in sight. Scotty greatly enhanced his ghetto-legend status late last year. In the process, he dealt a severe blow to black nationalism in Los Angeles and bought me more time on the score-heroin front. There were Panther-pig dustups in October and December. Both incidents received wide publicity. A full dozen Panthers have now disappeared, six per incident. Scotty fulfilled his promise of August '68. Reprisal, deterrent, vengeance enacted and time purchased for me. The upshot? More BTA bewilderment, fear and indecisiveness. The growing notion that smack is heat we don't need. I've got the sense that MMLF is reacting similarly. And, nuggets of gold in with the dirt: more and more rank-and-file brothers think that dealing smack is *wrong*.

With gifts of time handed me, I stepped up my queries on the heist. I must have said, "Say, man, you remember that armored-car job back in '64?" a million times and received a million dumbstruck looks and bullshit answers. I have mentioned Reginald Hazzard and described his tenuous resemblance to the burned-face robber an equal number of times, with the same results. Then two things clicked, independently.

I was engaged in a routine phone-drop talk with Mr. Holly. He casually mentioned Scotty's brutal grilling of Jomo Clarkson.

Scotty asked Jomo a string of pointedly non sequitur questions pertaining to the heist. Mr. Holly found this confusing.

It sat with me for weeks. Aaah, Scotty—what do you know and what aren't you telling us? Shortly after that, I bailed Ezzard Jones out of jail twice. The first time was a drunk-driving beef. I pulled Ezz out of 77th Street Station and took him out drinking from there. A week later, Ezz was popped for drunk-and-disorderly. I filled out paperwork in the University Station squadroom, was left alone briefly and took advantage of it.

I checked the Unsolved 211 file cabinet and found a routing sheet for the heist. I memorized the divisional record number, called LAPD R&I and impersonated a cop. The clerk consulted the master file and came back on the line. She said, "I'm sorry, Officer. No such DR number exists."

And I knew then:

Scotty had a private file stash. He was pulling filed reports in from throughout the LAPD's geographical divisions and was hoarding the information for himself.

I am certain of it. There can be no other explanation.

78

(Jarabacoa, 3/12/70)

Heavy rain stalled out work. The thirteenth-floor framing dragged. All four sites dipped behind schedule. A few slaves escaped.

La Banda reacted. They combed the crews and drew torture lots. “Hate-ins”: lashings and slaves screaming in the rain.

Crutch watched the latest. A monsoon just passed over. The ground was ankle-deep mud. The site was packed with sodden lumber and equipment. It was all miasma and muck.

The La Banda guy used a tassel whip. Little bulbs supplied extra pain. Crutch bopped behind voodoo herbs. It focused him and zoned the ugly shit out.

The slave was strapped to a bulldozer. His shrieks boomeranged. The lash-to-lash echoes overlapped.

The whip man was good. The tassels cut down to the rib bone. The slave crew watched. Crutch shut his eyes.

The slave collapsed. A La Banda guy bug-sprayed his wounds for added hurt and disinfection. The slave ate mud. It muffled his screams.

A horn honked. Crutch looked over. Froggy had a new '59 *Cadiblack*. It was de rigueur striped. Froggy called it "Tiger Kar."

The Cubans were crammed in with Tommy guns. Canestel pointed north—*Tiger Kove now*.

Crutch got queasy. Tiger Kar ran rough roads on soft suspension. He was squished between Morales and Saldívar. His brainpan popped. He kept checking the rearview mirrors. He'd had this surveillance vibe. He couldn't validate it. *Hell hound on my trail.*

They hit Tiger Kove at dusk. *Tiger Klaw* was gassed to go. The storm had passed over. Residual chop pushed them east. The north shore and the Mona Passage—one big whitecap. They made Point Higuero early. They smoked weed to kill time. The Puerto Rican spics trusted them now. Froggy called them their "Tiger *Kompañeros.*"

Crutch heard onshore movement. The spics popped out of the brush. They lobbed the dope suitcase on board. Gómez-Sloan lobbed the cash suitcase at them. It was kwick and kompanionable.

The Krew unmoored the *Klaw* and sailed away, kove-bound. White-caps bucked them. Crutch launched a torpedo for kicks. It hit a shit-flecked atoll and exploded.

They moored and draped *Tiger Klaw* with camouflage netting. They took Tiger Kar back to Santo Domingo. Crutch dozed off his dope jolt. Mosquitoes buzzed into his mouth and woke him up periodic.

It was dawn. The Krew decamped at the El Embajador. Froggy told Crutch to hold the suitcase. The Tonton guys would shag it to Port-au-Prince tomorrow. Crutch yawned and elevatored up to his suite.

He opened the door. He re-caught the vibe. He smelled cigarette smoke. He saw a tip glowing.

The light snapped on. There's Dwight Holly on the couch. There's some shit on the coffee table.

A paint can and a paintbrush. A syringe and a morphine Syrette.

Crutch shut the door and dropped the suitcase. Dwight pulled out a pocketknife.

"How much are you holding?"

“Three pounds.”

“That’ll do.”

His mouth dried up. His bladder swelled. The walls loop-de-looped.

Dwight said, “Take your shirt off.”

“Man, you can’t—”

“*I’m not saying it again*. You’re taking your shirt off, I’m taking the suitcase. I won’t stop you from running out the door. I’ll call Wayne and rat out your dope business the moment you do.”

Crutch pulled his shirt off. His sphincter almost blew. Dwight opened the paint can and dipped in the brush. The paint was bright red.

He walked the walls and pulled off the artwork. He painted “6/14” above the couch. He re-dipped his brush. He painted “6/14!!!!” above the wet bar. He re-dipped his brush. He painted “Death to Yanqui Dope Peddlers” beside the door.

Crutch prayed and tried not to cry. Dwight popped the Syrette and plungered the syringe. Crutch held his arm out. Dwight clamped his biceps and brought up a vein.

Crutch squeezed his Saint Chris medal. It snapped off his neck. Dwight poked the vein and geezed him up.

He went loosey-goosey. His bladder blew. He didn’t care. His eyes rolled back.

Dwight flicked his lighter and warmed up his knife. Crutch braced his hands on the door. Dwight carved “6/14” on his back.

79

(Las Vegas, 3/14/70)

Wayne linked boxes. His wall graph was Op Art. Boxes and arrows off at odd angles. Boxes and arrows. Reginald to Joan to the Haitian herb man.

Graph boxes and boxed carbons—LAPD and the L.A. County Sheriff's. His LVPD contact secured them. Call it a dim long shot. Occurrence reports, field-interrogation cards. The L.A. cops hard-rousted black kids routinely. Reginald's name might be there.

Wayne checked his watch. He had an hour, tops. His bags were packed. He had skim cash for Celia. He booked a red-eye to the D.R.

Arrows and boxes. "Library Books" to "Bailed Out of Jail." A new box: "Leander James Jackson/BTA/Tonton Macoute."

The hallway door creaked. He heard Mary Beth in the living room. Her keys jiggled. She dropped bags on a chair. She exhaled like she was pissed.

He stared at the graph. He locked his satchel and attached the handcuff chain. He check-marked "Leander James Jackson."

"I want you to stop all this."

Wayne turned around. Mary Beth stared at the satchel.

"I don't want you to find my son. He doesn't want to be found. If he's alive, he made that decision of his own free will, and I will not dishonor him by forcing a reunion."

Wayne jammed his hands in his pockets. Voodoo-herb residue made his eyes run.

Mary Beth stepped close. "Whatever you've done in the past, I'll forgive you. Whatever you're doing now, I'll forgive you. I'll forgive you for not trusting me, because you don't want to be forgiven, you just want to create more risk and intrigue and buy yourself more punishment."

Wayne left-hooked the wall. He dented the molding, his knuckles bled, his wristwatch face shattered.

Mary Beth said, "*Who have you hurt? What have you done*?"

He walked to the safe house. Santo Domingo looked different. The visit was ad-libbed. He didn't call Ivar Smith or the Boys. He just wanted to *see*.

It felt like wide-screen hi-fi. He usually limousined. It bought him eyeball relief and less volume. This was the shit. The sewers reeked, the noise peaked, the cops perched and pounced.

It was winter-warm/night-air sticky. Wayne wore a sport coat over his cuff chain. The address was in Borojol. The district was all go-go bars and low-peso hotels. Haitian vendors sold klerin-laced ice cream.

Wayne found the address: a pink cube off the main drag. His free hand ached from the wall punch. He banged his bracelet on the door. Celia opened up.

She wore a bloody smock. The space behind her was crammed with cots and fluid-drip stands. Four boys and two girls were head-sutured. Barbed-wire sap wounds—Wayne saw the stitch cuts oozing.

He saw the doctor he met last year. Two nurses changed bedpans. One boy had a foot stump. One girl had a bullet crease down to her cheekbone.

A back window framed an alley space. Wayne saw Joan outside, smoking. Scalpels poked out of her boot tops.

Celia pointed to the satchel. Wayne unlocked it. His hand throbbed. Celia scooped out the money.

"How much?"

"One forty-eight."

"I spoke to Sam. He told me that Balaguer has agreed to four more casinos. They'll have to burn or flood Haitian villages before the building can begin."

Wayne shut his eyes. His senses reloaded. He smelled the skin rot there in the room.

He opened his eyes. Celia repacked the satchel and slid it under a cot. A boy screamed in Spanish. A girl moaned in Kreole French. Joan turned around and saw him. Wayne sidestepped cots and walked out to her.

Her hair was tied back. Her glasses fit crooked. She had small, rough hands.

"Did you bring a donation?"

"Yes, but not quite as much as last time."

"I'm confident that there'll be a next time."

"Yes, there will be."

Joan lit a cigarette. Her fingernails were blood-caked.

"How real is all of this to you?"

"Tell me what you know about me. Tell me how you know."

"I'm not going to."

A gunshot cracked somewhere. A man dog-bayed. Joan said, "The doctor should look at your hand."

Wayne shook his head. "I tried to find you in L.A."

"Yes."

"I wasn't the only one looking for you."

"I'll find the man we're discussing when it becomes necessary."

The dog man bayed. Two more dog men piped in. A dog woman bayed from the opposite direction.

Wayne said, "There's some things you could tell me."

"I'm not going to."

The dog pack bayed and threw bottles at walls. Glass shattered in stereo.

"You haven't answered my question."

Wayne flexed his hand. "Some people you wait your whole life for. They send you someplace you'd be a fool not to go."

Joan reached in her pocket. Wayne noticed tremors. She pulled out a small red flag on a stick.

Wayne said, "Get me a silencer threaded for a .357 Magnum revolver."

The Santo Domingo sites were back from the street and one-man-guarded. The guards knew him. The crews slept in tents thirty yards adjacent. The demolition shacks abutted the foundation struts. The interior walls were baffle-wrapped and unleaded. Dynamite, C-4, nitro. All pure flammables.

The surrounding ground was rain-damp. The work bosses talked site-to-site via pay telephone. Soak a tight synthetic cord and plastic-sheath it. Allow enough circumference to air-feed the flame. Rig the phones and call the phones and pray for a simple ignition.

The rural sites would be harder. They were sixty miles apart. That might mean a bomb-toss gambit.

Wayne found an all-night auto-parts store. He bought the tools and two acrylic-pad car seats. He bought a thick plastic hose at a hardware store and went back to his hotel.

He cut the seats down to fabric strands and gasoline-soaked them. He memory-measured. He cut the hose sections down to an approximate length. He perforated them and created flame-feeders. The pay phones stood on loose dirt. The wire rigs should be easy. The phone-call currents might or might not ignite.

A boy delivered the silencer. Wayne worked all night. He turned his suite into a workshop. He called the desk and rented a car for tomorrow night. He dosed himself with voodoo herbs and slept through the day.

His dreams were mostly peaceful. Dr. King, sermonizing and laughing.

He got up and made himself eat. He packed his rental Chevy and drove to the first site. His hand didn't hurt. He couldn't hear external sounds or feel his feet on the pedals. He was way-inside-his-head calm.

11:26 p.m.

He parked across the street. The guard was pacing and smoking. The slave tent was dark.

Wayne jammed a pair of tin snips down his waistband. The guard walked to the gate and came on nosy. Wayne rolled down his window and yelled "*Hola.*" The guard recognized him and unlocked the gate.

Wayne got out and walked over. The guard did *You el jefe* shtick. Wayne pointed to the moon. The guard turned his back. Wayne put the Magnum to his head and fired once.

The silencer worked. The soft-point bullet pierced and spread. The guard fell dead with no exit spray.

Wayne walked to the car and got out the tubing. He walked back and dug the dirt trench with his hands. He pulled keys off the guard's belt and unlocked the explosives shack. He unscrewed the back of the pay phone, unfurled the wires and clamped them to the edge of the tube.

Sixteen minutes.

He unrolled the tubing, end to end. He filled the trench with it, phone to shack. He ran to the slave tent and tapped the floodlight by the entrance.

The slaves stirred. They were shackled cot-to-cot. Most were black, some were light, most looked Haitian. They stared at him. They saw the gun in his belt and genuflected. The postures got them caught up in their chains. Wayne pulled out his tin snips. They started screaming. Wayne grabbed the nearest man and cut his wrists free.

The man just looked at him. Wayne stepped back. The man jumped up and down and waved his free hands. The other men stared at Wayne and *Got It*.

They raised their hands in unison. Shackle chains linked them together. Wayne walked man to man and cut them free. They swarmed him and lifted him high. He memorized their faces as they ran.

• • •

The second site was two miles off. The gate was unlocked. The guard snored in a sleeping bag by the pay phone. Wayne shot him in the head and lugged up his tools.

The ground was soft, the trench laid flat, the work went fast. The job ran nine and change.

The slave tent was made from near-transparent gauzing. It was rain-soaked and heat-absorbent. Four all-night floodlights baked it.

The slaves were awake. Their cots were sweat-soaked and dipped to the ground. They saw Wayne and just lay there. Murmurs built and stayed short of shouts. Wayne walked cot to cot. The first slave pulled his hands back. Wayne grabbed his wrists and cut his chain off. The other slaves got the picture. They held their wrists up.

Wayne worked man to man. They got up slowly. They stumbled and hobbled. Nobody looked at Wayne. A man did a voodoo benediction. Two men tore through the gauzing and ran.

Wayne watched them. They sprinted to a small hut and kicked and shouldered the door. It fell off its hinges. They grabbed the rifles and Sten guns inside.

The Autopista ran straight north. He needed a view. Elevated and within his sight range.

A gas station popped up at Reparado. Foothills and a downslope horizon. A single phone booth. A big nightscape frame.

The calls would be short of long-distance. No operator patch-through. It might or might not work.

Wayne double-dipped the coin slot and dialed the first site phone. He got sixteen rings and nothing. Ring seventeen echoed and brought a pink glow. Ring eighteen whooshed a big red-streaked sky.

He dropped coins and dialed the second number. The flame burst on the second ring. The red patches merged.

The rural sites troubled him. The phones and shacks were badly spaced. The slave tents were foundation-flush. That meant casualties.

The Midget knew by now. La Banda knew. The rural sites would get fast reinforcement.

Wayne parked in a thicket outside Jarabacoa. He ate herbs and willed himself not to think. Tree branches lifted his car. He saw ten million stars. Constellations moved at his fingertips. He heard sounds that could have been gunfire and could have been drums.

Coins dropped from the sky. He opened his mouth to taste them. Dial tones rang and sparked light shows. The colors lulled him someplace safe.

The sun woke him up. Windshield glare hit him. His eyes blurred. He saw flames and smelled smoke.

He started the car and took back roads. He passed a fire truck and two Policía Nacional cars. The flames shot up over a tree line. He saw the Jarabacoa site burn.

Show me more—

He stopped the car. He got up and stood on the roof. He saw two site guards lynched from tree limbs. He saw “6/14” smeared on a foundation block and a discarded Sten gun.

Show me—

He jumped onto a tree branch and climbed to a summit perch. The world expanded. Foliage swirled somewhere close. He saw light-skinned kids and black men running with guns.

Show—

He looked south. The world re-expanded. He did spontaneous math and geometry. Coins dropped. The sky exploded where the other site should be.

80

(Los Angeles, 3/19/70)

Stragglers left Sultan Sam's. Sambo locked up. Dwight perched in the rear lot.

Afro music pulsed inside. A copmobile cruised Central. The stragglers oink-oinked. The cops let it slide. The spooks outnumbered them.

Dwight checked his watch. Joan phone-dropped him. The lot at 2:00 a.m. That made her eight minutes late.

The music downshifted to bebop. Dwight laid his piece on the briefcase. He got the shit through customs. He split the D.R. in short-hair sync.

His White House contact called. Nixon was agitated, verging on pissed. Some Commies sabotaged the casino sites. La Banda tagged it 6/14.

Dipshit got out in pre-sync. Dwight carved him and robbed him and told him how to lie. Get to L.A. and work the Bowen wire. Let Mesplede mourn the dope. Tell him Clyde Duber needs you.

Dwight rolled up his window and earplugged the bop. He hit L.A. and put out feelers. Tell her we're on, she'll get it, she'll know. He braced every left-wing denizen on Planet Earth. It took six full days.

Headlights strafed him. A ’63 Dodge pulled into the lot. Dwight blinked his brights. The Dodge blinked back. Dwight grabbed his shit and got out of the car.

Joan pulled up beside him. She doused her lights and kept the motor running. An alley lamp backlit her. She looked done in, verging on fraught.

“You never said good-bye.”

“It didn’t seem necessary. I knew we were incomplete.”

“Where were you?”

“I’m not telling you.”

“Tell me what’s wrong.”

“No. I’m not going to.”

Dwight touched her hair. Joan leaned into his hand for a heartbeat.

“We’re on?”

Dwight passed her the briefcase. “Get it to BTA through a cutout. Keep your name out of it if you can. We want Bowen to think it’s a windfall. Kid, we got lucky, it just dropped on your head.”

A horn honked. Dwight aimed at the sound. Joan reached out and eased down his gun hand.

“I need you to say it.”

Dwight leaned into the car. Joan pressed his hand to the doorsill.

“We should say it. Belief works that way.”

Dwight said, “Nobody dies.”

81

(Los Angeles, 3/19/70)

Dead air. Dawn air and insomnia—the shits.

The bug post was a shine shack on Marsh Bowen's block. The feed lines ran through overhead phone wires. Extraneous calls popped in. You heard a coon cacophony.

Funny and diverting. Non-lethal. Lots of pimp talk and holy roller spiel.

Crutch yawned. He was jet-lagged four days on. Big Dwight scripted him. Froggy saw his carved-up back and fucked-up room and bought it. Clyde needs me, Boss. Go, my son. You will be avenged.

Convergence: a faux-Commie dope rip-off and real sabotage.

Froggy called and broke the news. The 6/14ers torched the sites. The Midget was prepping a Big Red Roundup.

Crutch shifted his headphones. A call hit the air: the asthmatic biddy next door.

Mama wheezed and ragged Governor Ray-gun. Crutch rode out a nerve jolt. He bugged Sam G.'s suite. He heard Sam and Celia talking. She pumped him on the casino sites. He remembered high school Latin. *Post hoc, propter ergo hoc*. After this, because of this.

Yeah, but:

It felt dumb, it felt wrong, it felt un-Celia and un-Joan.

Mama wheezed—Ray-gun cut my welfare check. Crutch got antsy. He dumped the headphones and pulled off his shirt.

A wall mirror faced the console. Crutch stood up and craned for a look. The wound was scabbed over and peeling. Scar lines extended. The numbers were visible, the branding might stick.

He kept looking. He glanced at the console. His Joan pix were there on the ledge.

The math came to him. One year, eight months and twenty-seven days. He had tracked her that long.

The red light blinked. Bowen—incoming call.

Crutch slipped on his headphones. He heard Bowen, yawn-voiced. He heard "Marsh, it is Leander James Jackson."

A happy cat. Cheery. Big Haitian lilt.

Greetings ping-ponged and devolved into off-the-pigs chat. That Haitian sound. "Baby boy"—the late Luc's verbal tic.

Wait—

Leander James Jackson. Laurent-Jean Jacqueau. The same initials.

Haitian men. Jacqueau, the Tonton traitor. Jacqueau, the 6/14 convert. Jacqueau, unfindable in the U.S.

Line static, feeder fuzz, reverb and squelch.

Bowen: inaudible/"Have to score smack."

Jackson: squelch/"In my country, it is known as the 'beast from the East.' "

Squelch/fuzz/static. A stray call cuts in. Wheezy Mama's back. Ooooh, that Ray-gun.

Big Dwight. The bootjacked dope. The black-militant gig—

File work.

Read files when tweaked. Read files when bored. Read files when up all night, hammered. "Read files" was his mantra. It consoled his ass and work-supplied him.

It was 7:10. Crutch bombed to Clyde Duber Associates and let himself in. Clyde and Buzz showed up nineish. That gave him file time.

Clyde's hobbyhorse—the armored-car job. Four file cabinets.

Crutch pulled up a chair and pulled folders. They were *re*-pulls. He knew the file sideways and backward. Old facts hit him: names, dates, locations. Forensic stats, scorched bodies. Did a second heist man ex-cape? Photos: Scotty B. scowling. Scotty hard-nosing male Negroes.

A loose sheet fell out. Crutch unfolded it. A hand-drawn street map. 84th and Budlong, 2/24/64. *X* marks for the slaughter. Little houses street-numbered and sketched to scale.

Crutch studied the map. Something skimmed his skull. Some other file, some other fact, some complementary numb—

Oh, yes. That's it. Safe guess: Clyde doesn't know.

Marsh Bowen lived on that block then. He was nineteen. He was fresh out of Dorsey High. He lived with his mom and dad.

File work.

Read files when bugged. Read files when buzzed. Read different files when other files scorch you.

Crutch holed up at the Vivian. He studied his mother's file. He picked at his 6/14 scabs and grooved on the scarring. Zombie Zone outtakes zapped him.

THE ELECTRIC CHAIR, THE EYES, THE HANDS AND FEET. La Banda stunts and the black guy's hands melted.

He got scared. He popped two red devils with an Old Crow chaser. It un-scared him. He grabbed his binoculars and aerial-peeped.

Barb Cathcart watered her front lawn. She wore a shift dress. A cool wind gave her goose bumps. Gail Miller's mom breezed with the mailman. Old lady Miller hated him. He picture-peeped Gail and snapped a shot of her bush. He got kicked out of Hollywood High.

The phone rang. Crutch jumped on it.

"It's Crutchfield."

"Donald, I am outraged."

Cool it—*he doesn't know/he can't know*.

"What happened, Froggy? Tell me."

"Wayne performed the sabotage. He was seen purchasing explosive material. He desecrated the northern sites in order to blame 6/14. He very obviously enlisted Communists to assist him. I think his *putain Rouge* comrades are the ones who robbed you."

"Froggy, tell me—"

"Balaguer has made an expediently reasoned decision. He has decreed no reprisals on Wayne. He has decided that 6/14 should pay and that future dissidents should be taught a lesson. Tiger Krew will be part of this, which mandates your immediate return."

He got sweaty hands. The phone slipped. It hit the floor. The receiver cracked.

The red devils hit full-on. He hated-hexed Wayne, pins to eyeballs. He got this voodoo-vile idea.

He knew her name and her job stats. He wrote the note at the Barstow rest stop. He used the hood of his car as a desk.

> Dear Mrs. Hazzard,
>
> I work for your friend Wayne Tedrow in numerous illegal capacities. He routinely underestimates me and refers to me as "Dipshit." I suspect that Wayne has been less than candid about events in his recent past and that you may have doubts about his stability and moral character.
>
> Your doubts are fully justified. Wayne was involved in the murder of Rev. Martin Luther King in April 1968, and was a suspect in the murder of his own father two months later. It is highly probable that he was involved in the tragic shooting deaths of your husband and a West Las Vegas criminal later that summer. You deserve to know these things. I intend you no harm; I only want to set you straight.
>
> Yours truly,
>
> A Friend

Hot potato.

The union was just off Fremont. His buzz was waning. Drop it, hex him, don't candy-ass.

The office crew was filing out. People fast-walked to their cars. Crutch double-parked and scanned faces. He saw the woman approach an Olds 88.

He got out and sprinted at her. People ducked and went *What*? She turned around and saw him. He quick-read her eyes. *Who's* *this crazy young man*?

He dropped it on her and ran around the corner. He ducked into a carpet joint and had three quick belts. It glued his shit together. He got this devil-may-care rush.

Fremont ran one way. The window overlooked the street. She had to drive by. Where’s that Rocket 88?

He waited twenty minutes and walked back to his sled. He gave the parking lot a look-see.

She was braced up against the Olds, sobbing. Her fingers were bloody. She was grabbing at the doorsill to hold herself up.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/21/70. Extract from the journal of Marshall E. Bowen.

Los Angeles,
3/21/70

It happened just this morning. It was the single most shocking event of my life, both eclipsing and enhancing that day six years and one month ago. I have memorized it instant to instant and will extend the process of mindscaping it, so that I never forget.

I woke up later than usual; late fragments of a dream were passing through my head. The backdrop was an amalgam of the clubs on Central Avenue, replete with posing black militants and white hangers-ons. Benny Boles, Joan Klein and the late Jomo were in the mix; I cannot specifically recall anyone else. Music was playing—hard bop—and it faded into police-band radio crackle. I sat up in bed and realized that the pigs were parked in the driveway outside my apartment door.

I put on a robe, walked to the door and opened it. Scotty Bennett was standing there. He was wearing a tan poplin suit, a plaid bow tie and a straw porkpie hat. He handed me a bottle of Seagram's Crown Royal with a red ribbon tied around the neck. He said precisely this: "Don't say I never gave you anything but trouble."

It wasn't horrifying or intimidating or in any way erotic. Scotty smiled and said, "Let's talk about the heist. There's what you know and what I know. Let's make up and make some money. Let's get you back on LAPD."

The doorjamb kept me upright as I went light-headed. Scotty said, "I picked up a tip. Some Commie woman wants to unload three pounds of junk on the BTA. Let's see if we can make you a hero on that one."

The word *hero* was transformative; the most vicious killer pig of his era grew a halo and angel's wings. Scotty winked at me. I faltered at winking back and stuck out my hand. Scotty hugged me instead.

82

(Las Vegas, 3/22/70)

The Boys kept calling. Ivar Smith backstopped them. It was all anti-Red rage.

6/14 torched the sites. Prescient—the Midget just okayed four more builds. Wayne took the calls: Carlos, Santo, Sam. Terry Brundage called. Mesplede called. The rage level built. The calls stopped dead two days back.

He played along. He expressed his own faux rage. *Dream State*.

Wayne studied his wall graph. The Leander James Jackson box grabbed him. He stared at it. He drew connecting lines. He recalled his trip out.

The roundups were starting. He called Celia. She said his work inspired their work. Safe houses were hiding their people. La Banda would find people to interrogate and maim. There would be a fearful cost. We have to say it—belief works that way.

Airport security was threadbare. The customs crew got pulled for the Red raids. He flew out easy.

Wayne drew lines. The re-*click* clicked. Memory tug and loss. It clicked to Joan's redacted file. It was a brain tweak. He got that tug and no more.

He stepped back and reframed the wall. He took in broad data. He saw a tacked-on note slip off to one side. He knew it wasn't his.

"Dear Mrs. Hazzard." Dipshit's indictment. Mary Beth's response scrawled below.

"I find this fully credible. If you had told me yourself, I might have forgiven you."

• • •

He signed papers at his lawyer's office. He went by the Hughes Tool Company and cashed out a bank draft. He flew to L.A. and drove to the Peoples' Bank. Lionel Thornton let him into the vault. He bagged $1.4 million in casino skim, Tiger Kab receipts and after-hours club profits. He filled three briefcases. He called Hughes Charter and booked a Santo Domingo flight.

Trees grew upside down. Joan tossed emeralds and seeded clouds. Each raindrop was a mirror.

He saw his childhood in Peru, Indiana. He saw Dwight and Wayne Senior and the Klan in disarray. His mother walked into a raindrop. He learned chemistry at BYU. Molecular charts etched themselves green. Tree roots reversed their growth. They held his eyes and let him look in. He saw Little Rock '57 and Dallas '63. JFK waved good-bye. Wendell Durfee laughed. He apologized to Reginald Hazzard for not finding him.

The air melted. Moist particles produced snow. Dr. King whispered chemical equations. The world made sense for an instant. Joan rubbed emerald dust on her knife scar and watched it heal. Janice told him not to worry. The planets realigned themselves and explained physics as whim. He heard "belief works that way" and let his eyes rest on the sun.

A cab ran him to Borojol. The driver was spooked. Red alert—you could see it.

The door knocks, the traffic stops, the street roust/shakedowns. The cops on rooftops with binoculars. The cops scanning crowds and mug-shot sheets.

The cab dropped Wayne at the safe house. A window was half-cracked. He smelled blood and disinfectant and heard half a scream.

Joan appeared in the window. They looked at each other. She saw his suitcases and gestured to someone inside. The door opened. Wayne turned that way. A young man grabbed the suitcases and ran back in.

Wayne looked in the window. Joan placed her hand on the glass inside. Wayne placed his hand over hers. The glass was warm. Their eyes held. Joan walked away first.

A cab dropped him at the river. He crossed the bridge into Haiti at dusk. A Tonton man recognized him—*ça va,* boss.

Wayne walked into a village. Masked revelers danced through a graveyard. Men sat propped up on tombstones. They were motionless. *Le poudre zombi*—goblets rolled off their laps.

The revelers wore machetes in scabbards. Their masks were blood-smeared. The air was scent-thick: reptile powder and poultry musk.

Wayne walked into a tavern. Bizango-sect banners created a mood. He attracted a range of looks. He pointed to bottles and created a concoction he'd never tried before. The barman built his drink. A green foam burned his eyes as he drank it. He left much too much money on the bar.

Two graveyards bisected the next tavern stretch. Wayne walked across them and read headstones in French. His ancestors reburied themselves under his feet. He saw a zombified man convulse. He tasted the gunpowder and tree-frog liver in his drink.

Masked revelers followed him. A dog wearing a pointed hat bit him and ran off. He eyeball-tracked constellations. He fluttered his lids and made meteors arc.

The *click* revealed itself. Thomas Frank Narduno, dead at the Grapevine. Joan's known associate. A Joan-to-Dwight motive yet to play out.

He entered a tavern and ordered a potion. Six *bokurs* watched him drink it. Two men offered blessings. Four men waved amulets and hexed him. He left much too much money on the bar.

He walked outside. The sky breathed. He felt the moon's texture. Craters became emerald mines.

An alleyway appeared. A breeze carried him down it. Leaves stirred and sent rainbows twirling. Three men stepped out of a moonbeam. They wore cross-draw scabbards. They had bird wings where their right arms used to be.

Wayne said, "Peace."

They pulled their machetes and cut him dead right there.

83

(Los Angeles, 3/25/70)

"BTA scored some smack. It was an old-prison-buddy deal. Ezzard Jones put it together."

Dwight said, "Keep going."

"It came out of nowhere. A bunch of Panthers turned tail to Oakland after the December thing. A big connection got stiffed. His guys are willing to lay the stuff off on consignment."

The Carolina Pines on Sunset. The 8:00 a.m. clientele: drowsy whores and Hollywood High teachers.

Dwight lit a cigarette. "Keep going."

Marsh twirled his fork. "BTA's got a pound and a half. The funny thing is that the lay-off guy dumped an equal amount on MMLF. I don't know how it went down, but it was some kind of consensus. 'Let's have a powwow so our shit don't go bad, brother.' I'm supposed to mediate a 'summit meeting' next week."

Fucking Joan. Stone-brilliant. She spread the wealth and doubled the indictments.

Dwight blew a Joan-style smoke ring. It came out blurry and dispersed too quick.

“Do it. Make it happen as fast as you can.”

Dwight went back to the drop-front. It was musty. He opened the shades and cracked the windows. He pulled a telex out of the tray.

> D.H.,
>
> The Dominican embassy contacted me a few moments ago. Regretfully, I must inform you that Wayne Tedrow was murdered in Haiti sometime within this past week. The crime appears to have been motivated by political and racial grievance. The body was disposed of on the Dominican side of the Plaine du Massacre. Pieces of paper scrawled with garish symbols and anti-American slogans were found in the victim’s pockets. Please assess this situation per the victim’s dealings with RMN, Mr. Hughes and our Italian friends, et al. Call me upon receipt of this communiqué.
>
> JEH

The dark room helped. The walls enclosed him. Street noise was steady. He ran the window unit and leveled out the hum.

He pressed himself into small spaces. His desk cubbyhole and the closet felt safe. He tucked up his legs and rode out the cramps. He covered his head for more darkness. He threw his gun down a heating shaft so he wouldn’t shoot himself. His shirt was soaked from sobbing all wrapped up.

Time drilled a hole someplace. He dumped his booze and pills down the shaft so he wouldn’t run to sleep. The phone rang and rang. It was all gunshots. He covered his ears. The phone kept ringing. He crawled out of his nest and threw the phone on the floor. The receiver was close, the line crackled, he heard her voice.

The hole expanded. He grabbed the phone. He got out “Yes?” and “You never called me here before.” His voice was Wayne’s.

The line fuzzed. He lost her voice. The line cleared. He got her again.

“Balaguer’s rounding up and torturing people. Wayne bombed the sites. Balaguer’s making a statement.”

Dwight coughed. The line fritzed and died. He cracked the shades and got sight back. His eyes swirled. He called his L.A. patch-call guy. A recorded message rolled. He asked for a callback: one minute with The Man.

The light hurt. He pulled the shades back tight. Blackout curtains and time travel: Wayne with his first chemistry set and his Scottish immigrant grandfather.

Peru, Indiana. Spring ’48. Wayne mixes powders and builds a rainbow.

The phone rang. He grabbed the receiver. A flunky said something. Dwight wiped his eyes. The line clicked. Richard Nixon said, “You’ve got balls to call me out of the blue.”

“Wayne Tedrow’s dead. Balaguer’s going nuts and rounding up people for some shit that Wayne pulled. We all go back with Wayne, Sir. With all due respect, this has to stop now.”

Nixon whistled. “Sure, Dwight. I’ll call the little prick. Jesus, those fucking Nevada Mormons are crazy.”

84

(Santo Domingo, 3/26/70)

Street view, mirror view. He couldn't stop looking.

His suite was penthouse-high. The vista was wide. The fuzz kicked Red ass across a *biiiiiig* plane. The show was a week running. Roundups, hassles, brawls. Skirmishes up the ying-yang.

The window show got to him. His carved-up back, ditto. The 6/14 brand was a keeper. The scar was permanent. He *sort of* dug it. It astonished him and made him *look*.

Crutch walked mirror to window. He was shirtless, he was sweaty. Heart pings—*bip, bip, bip*.

Ivar Smith just called him. The Crutchfield hex worked. Some voodoo niggers whacked Wayne Tedrow's nigger-lover ass.

His head hurt. His vessels vibrated. It was a top-ten Richter-scale migraine. L.A. scared him back here. L.A. was *worse*. He read the signs: Dwight Holly and Marsh Bowen had some fucked-up dope thing going.

Tiger Krew dope. *His* dope. One fucking obvious conclusion.

Crutch stared out the window. Shit perked far and near. It was an ant show. The street was an ant farm. Cops and Commies skittered.

Sirens blared. It was earache-loud and stereophonic. The sound felt citywide. Spic ant groups froze.

He walked to the mirror. His scar was pink and creased. 6/14, *por vida*.

That heist lead torqued him: Leander James Jackson as Laurent-Jean Jacqueau. He located Jackson in coontown and spot-tailed him. He learned *buppkes*. He spot-tailed Marsh Bowen. Paydirt: Marsh meets Scotty Bennett at Tommy Tucker's Playroom.

Hated rivals—*très* chummy. *Say what*?

Crutch walked to the window. His head hurt. He sweated. He panted and fogged up the glass.

He wiped it clear. He blinked and squinted. The ant show was gone.

Coffee sounded good. Bop to Gazcue and slurp java. Re-calibrate and re-cogitate. Groove on the hex. Recap and reconsider the case.

Crutch strolled. He cut across the polo field. He scoped women at the paddock. He hit Calle Bolívar and made for the Malecón.

No fuzz, no ant farm. That siren blare was some kind of all-clear.

His head still hurt. The pain re-circulated and stung. He heard a car idling behind him. He heard foot slaps on pavement. He saw shadows up ahead.

Pile drive:

Two guys behind him, two guys up front. They've got bandanna masks, one's slipping off, it's Felipe Gómez-Sloan.

They slammed him. He flailed. He got clotheslined, he got rabbit-punched, he got tape slapped on his mouth. He got an arm free and ripped Canestel's mask off. The street flipped, the sky hit him, he saw Tiger Kar.

They dumped him in the trunk and threw the lid down. He pulled the tape off. He kicked at the latch point and gagged on stale air. Tiger Kar peeled out. He heard backseat banging. The trunk lining ripped and let air and light in. A knife blade stabbed and carved space.

There's more light. There's a hand. There's Froggy's pit-bull tattoos.

Froggy yelled. It was word bouillabaisse. *Cochon, pédé, putain Rouge. "L'héroïne" en français,* "cocksucker" in English.

The blade kept stabbing. Crutch squirmed away from it and kicked out. He hit Froggy's hand. The blade ripped his tennis shoe. He contorted and pulled his feet back.

Fumes filled the trunk—five fuckers smoking. Crutch saw Froggy's eyes in the trunk hole.

"It was not 6/14. It was Dwight Holly. There was a security camera in the lobby at the hotel. The camera was equipped with a timer. It cannot be anything else."

The Cubans tiger-hissed. Saldívar blew smoke in the trunk. Crutch gagged and kicked at his face.

Froggy laughed. Crutch squirmed against the truck latch. Cigarettes bombarded him. He swatted out the coals.

He prayed. His headache lodged behind his eyes and white-bordered things. Froggy said, "The bombings have greatly upset Sam and Carlos. Sam and Carlos do not know of your part in this, although I have told them you may well be soft on Communists. I doubt that President Balaguer will risk another round of construction and potential sabotage. Sam and Carlos think you should embellish your anti-Communist credentials."

Tiger Kar zoomed. It felt like the full-bore Autopista. Crutch prayed. He zoomed through the psalms and the Gloria Patria. His head pounded. His eyes burned. He saw Jesus and Martin Luther at Wittenberg. Smoke filled the trunk. Cigarette butts followed. Tiger hisses, tiger growls, mugging faces at the hole.

Pariguayo, pariguayo, pariguayo.

Crutch vomited and gasped. Road bumps sent Tiger Kar swerving. Crutch pressed his face to the trunk hole and sucked air in. Gómez-Sloan jabbed a cigarette at his nose.

He screamed and rolled away from the hole. He heard *pariguayo, pariguayo, pariguayo*. Tiger Kar braked and brodied. The doors slammed. The trunk lid popped and let I-see-Jesus light in. Hands grabbed him and placed his feet on the ground.

It's a shit-ass place. It's a garbage dump with six shacks adjacent.

Paper refuse and mulch. Fifty tons of ground *something*. Bones poking out of an ash mound. Wiggles inside it—gator tails snapping through.

Pariguayo, pariguayo, pariguayo.

The sun burned his headache out through his eyes. The grabbing hands held him and walked him. Somebody strapped a big weighty thing on his back. The thing had a hose, a nozzle and a trigger. Somebody put a spout thing in his hands.

Pariguayo, pariguayo, pariguayo.

It was L.A. or the D.R. It was the Boyle Heights dump or Watts swampland or some 6/14 deal. The sun melted the spout thing into his hands. Other hands pushed him to an open-front shack. Two dozen people were bound and tape-gagged.

Black people. Men, women and kids—bone-thin and squirming. Pus-packed sores. Yellow eyes jumping and glazing.

The spout thing smelled like gasoline. The yellow eyes talked to him. It was L.A. or Haiti. The people were darktown riffraff or voodoo lords. The psalms kept replaying.

Hands steadied him. Hands flexed his hands on the spout thing. Clouds doused the sun for a moment.

He stepped forward and turned around. He saw all five of them and got their names straight for the first time. The sun re-eclipsed and winked at him. He tapped the trigger.

The flame tore up and out. They screamed and went spastic on fire.

The ammo on their belts blew up. Pieces of them exploded.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/30/70. Extract from the journal of Marshall E. Bowen.

Los Angeles,
3/30/70

"Black-militant summit": savor the concept.

I was to be the facilitating agent. Leander James Jackson would represent the BTA and Joseph Tidwell McCarver and Claude Cantrell Torrance would negotiate on the MMFL's behalf. This august event was couched as an afternoon bar-b-q at Joe McCarver's crib. There would be ribs, chicken, greens, booze, reefer and sweet-potato pie. Joe's backyard would be festively decorated. His four-year-old daughter and six-year-old son would provide diversion and perhaps serve to squelch overuse of the word *motherfucker*.

I had possession of the dope. I would be in charge of negotiating the BTA/MMLF percentage cut and the ultimate splitting of profits. Most importantly, this was where I would shift my allegiance from Mr. Holly to Scotty.

The plan resulted from Bowen-Bennett summitry at Tommy Tucker's Playroom. We determined that immediate action would be required. The dope split would be accomplished; the BTA and MMLF fools would leave the pad holding big poundage; Scotty would swoop down for the bust. It meant betraying my FBI-infiltrator status prematurely, thus shafting Mr. Holly and Mr. Hoover, with hopes of getting back on LAPD in a flash. If the plan meshed, both the BTA and MMLF would be fully discredited, the Feds would get their indictments and I would be reinstated to LAPD. Mr. Hoover and Mr. Holly would be furious. I had unilaterally terminated the operation, with Scotty's assistance. Resentment would simmer and then dissipate. Scotty and I would then be free to pool our information on the heist. We would form a powerful two-man team to go after the money and emeralds; OPERATION BAAAAAD BROTHER would be considered a success. This wild swath of my young life, with all its attendant mindscapes, would assume an entirely new dimension.

I asked Scotty how he knew of my fixation with the heist, enough so to brace me on it. Scotty told me he had picked up tips that I had been making subtle queries, going back months. On instinct, he did a background check on me. Bingo: my 84th and Budlong address showed up on an old driver's license.

Joe McCarver owned a small stucco house off 68th and Slauson. The day was warm. The backyard was comfortably strewn with lounge chairs; the kids splashed around in a wading pool. Scotty was parked in an unmarked unit, two blocks away. He had a two-way radio with dial-in capacity. All I needed was four seconds with Joe's bedroom phone.

"This be good like a *motherfuuuuucker*,"Claude Torrance said as we sat down. The dope sat in the middle of a long picnic table, as if it were an altarpiece. Intergroup tension needed to be brooked before we began the negotiation, so 151 rum and spike-laced grass was served. I partook sparingly. The other three men consumed a full bottle of the rum and smoked several reefers. Joe attacked the food; I prepared the opening remarks of my mediation. Then Claude started fucking with my head.

"Brother, an' I calls you 'brother' with a big muthafuckin' grain of salt, let me ask you, *brother*, why'd you rat out Brother Jomo Kenyatta Clarkson to the muthafuckin' pigs last year?"

I said something neutral. I did my conciliatory "Hey, brother, be cool" thing.

Leander stepped in; I'm sure he considered my response sissified. He said, "Listen to me, baby boy. I put a knife in Jomo and saw him bleed weak blood. He was anemic from weak thoughts and a strong appetite for evil. I put a hex on his nigger soul, and he die the next day. I have connections to Bizango-sect *bokurs* and the ghost of Baron Samedi. They *make* Jomo off himself. They send legions of red ants up the hole in his dick to eat out his eyes and his brain. That is the pure truth, baby boy."

I held my breath.

Joe put down a chicken wing and cracked his knuckles.

Claude said, "Baron Samedi sucked my big black dick," and spit on Leander's shoes.

Then:

Leander pulled a gun. Joe pulled a gun. Claude pulled a gun. There was the briefest of pauses where they might have stepped back. A strong wind whipped through the backyard. A bottle toppled. The noise rang loud. That did it.

All three men had fat-clip automatics. They all fired at once, as

I ducked under the table.

It was very close range. The noise was horrible. Leander shot and killed Claude. Joe shot and killed Leander. Leander shot and killed Joe as he was going down. The three men were on the ground by the table. They were technically dead, but still twitching. They kept firing and sending shots out. The children screamed and tried to run. Stray shots and ricochets hit them. I saw the little girl's brains blow back into the wading pool.

I curled up, covered my head and waited for more shots or death-throe noise. There was none. I looked around and saw the three dead men and two dead children. It was over in less than ten seconds. I had an epiphany. It was instantaneously realized mindscaping. I immediately prepared a tableau for my heroic, trial-by-fire redemption.

The house and backyard were flanked by vacant lots on three sides, which gave me both privacy and time to work. Calmly, I pulled my gun and shot the dead Claude Cantrell Torrance in the head. Just as calmly, I shot the late Joseph Tidwell McCarver and Leander James Jackson. Finishing up, I took the three guns out of their hands and fired off random shots. I smudged the grips, then calmly placed the guns back in their hands.

Sure—they fired on each other. But I assumed control and took them all out. Too bad about the kids. I tried to sweep them to safety, but ricochets caught them first.

I walked through the yard and stretched the bodies out in convincing cross-fire positions. I wiped up the drag marks with paper towels and checked out the scene. I ran into the house and stiffed a faux-panicked call to Scotty.

His siren kicked on instantly; I heard it from two blocks away. I walked slowly back to the yard.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/1/70. Los Angeles *Herald Express* article.

BLACK-MILITANT BLASTOUT

Two days ago, a backyard barbecue in South Los Angeles erupted into violence and three men and two children lay dead. Initial news reports attributed the killings to a high-stakes narcotics deal gone bad. It now appears to be much more than that.

The three adult victims—Leander James Jackson, age 31, Joseph Tidwell McCarver, age 32, and Claude Cantrell Torrance, age 23—were rabid black-militant activists, LAPD Sergeant Robert S. Bennett told reporters at a press conference. The two murdered children—Theodore and Darleen McCarver, ages six and four, were McCarver's two offspring with his common-law wife. Sergeant Bennett went on to reveal that there was a sixth person in Joe McCarver's backyard: former LAPD Officer Marshall E. Bowen.

"You may recall Officer Bowen from an encounter he had with me on October 1, 1968," Sergeant Bennett said. "Officer Bowen's actions resulted in his being fired from LAPD. In reality, the encounter and the subsequent firing were just a ruse to allow Officer Bowen to convincingly infiltrate the Black Tribe Alliance and Mau-Mau Liberation Front, two deadly black-nationalist groups intent on selling heroin to finance their subversive activities."

Officer Bowen assumed the microphone. "Jackson, McCarver and Torrance had extensive criminal records and Communist ties," he said. "I had been gathering evidence against them since my fake firing from LAPD a year and a half ago. The purpose of the barbecue was a 'dope summit meeting' and the culmination of my work as an FBI infiltrator. Regrettably, a verbal argument escalated into a gunfight. I ran in and attempted to lead the two children to safety, but stray bullets got to them first. At that point, I entered into gunfire with Jackson, McCarver and Torrance, as they were firing at one another."

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover praised Officer Bowen's "brilliant work in throwing a monkey wrench into the activities of two Communist-aligned organizations." Newly installed LAPD Chief Ed Davis announced that Officer Bowen will return to the Los Angeles Police Department as a sergeant and will receive the LAPD's highest award: the Medal of Valor.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/2/70. Milwaukee *Sentinel* article.

ODD RUMORS FROM DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The Dominican Republic has been comparatively peaceful since the 1965 civil war, a brief military engagement that ended nearly five years ago. The U.S. Marines, satisfied at the quashing of potential Communist revolt on the island, had left. An interim leftist dictator had been deposed, and centrist-reformer Joaquín Balaguer has been in power since 1966. But for the past several weeks, dire rumors have resounded from within the "D.R.," as it is popularly known.

None of the rumors have been factually substantiated, but they have been persistently similar, leading some American journalists to wonder if the events are connected.

There has been a rash of demonstrations by left-wing groups in Santo Domingo, most particularly the Castroite "6/14 Movement." Government sources have said that this is not unusual; free speech is encouraged within the D.R. and thus the demonstrations are in no way anomalous. The sites of four hotel-casino buildings financed by U.S. interests were rumored to have been sabotaged two weeks ago, which government sources also denied. Add on the murder of an American man by members of an anti-Dominican voodoo sect and the discovery of the charred bodies of one French man with radical right-wing ties and four Cuban exiles allegedly backed by wealthy Americans in the Miami-based exile community, and you have the stuff of great conspiracy talk.

CIA Station Chief Terence Brundage told correspondents: "It's just that. Talk, and nothing else. You've got a bunch of unrelated rumors and no more."

This assessment was seconded by a spokesman for President Balaguer. "All poppycock," he said. "The casino sites were not sabotaged. Structural flaws brought them down, and we are back in discussion with our American investment group, which is anxious to start rebuilding soon."

DOCUMENT INSERT: 4/3/70. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: "Recorded at the Director's Request/Classified Confidential 1-A: Director's Eyes Only." Speaking: Director Hoover, Special Agent Dwight C. Holly.

JEH: Good morning, Dwight.

DH: Good morning, Sir.

JEH: You sound glum, while I am elated. I have not been in such a mood since 1919. You were there at the dock with me, Dwight. We waved bye-bye to a truculent Emma Goldman.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Young Bowen soared in the end. And I do not condemn him for his "end run" with the LAPD and the outsized Sergeant Robert S. Bennett. Our sepia seducer wanted his job back, and who can blame him for that?

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: The BTA and MMLF have momentarily eclipsed the Panthers. The Bureau has gotten a million vats of good ink. Both groups are headed toward mass indictment. It is a vivid explication of Negro moral turpitude, replete with dead pickaninnies to tug at your heartstrings.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: You sound glum and screechily high-strung, Dwight. You should—

DH: I need to foist a bluff under your name and President Nixon's, Sir. If it comes back to you, I'd very much appreciate it if you'd offer confirmation. And I will never ask you for another favor.

JEH: Glum and impertinent. A Dwight Chalfont Holly that I have never heard before.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I'm flying high, Dwight. My answer is resultantly yes. We put the BTA and MMLF down like foaming-mouth dogs. I'm telling it like it is.

DH: Thank you, Sir.

JEH: Good day, Dwight.

DH: Good day, Sir.

85

(New Orleans, 4/4/70)

U-turns and wrong turns. Mis-marked cul-de-sacs. The road map was ten years outdated.

Signs sent him down exits and back to cloverleafs. He dodged road debris and loafing hard hats. It was hot. Things looked florid. The world moved slow as he ran breathless.

Dwight cut down an access road. Finally—signs to the Town & Country.

He was full-fucked shot. He stayed alone with it. Karen was back east and Joan vanished. It was full-time overtime. He saw the crime-scene pix. They looked bogus. LAPD bought or went along with Marsh Bowen's version. Dipshit sent him a note.

"Dwight—I saw Marsh with Scotty B., two nights before the shootings. They looked friendly. It surprised me, so I thought you should know."

The road was potholed. Wetlands pressed up on both sides. Dwight pulled into a clearing. The motel was L-shaped and sandblasted pink. Three golf carts sat outside the office.

Dwight parked beside them. The office door was open. A golf ball dribbled out and rolled down the steps. It was a stop frame. It ran heat-sapped slow. Everything he saw looked scary.

He locked up the car and walked over. His suit wilted. He saw Santo, Sam and Carlos in golf duds.

The office was knotty pine. The Boys sat in beanbag chairs and poured liqueurs from cut-glass decanters. Carlos pointed to a chair and the door. Dwight complied. Santo slapped a wall unit and roused cold air.

Sam said, "Dwight's too thin."

Santo said, "This is not a man bearing glad tidings."

Carlos said, "We've got good news. Let's hope his bad news don't intervene."

Dwight sank into his chair. Air swooshed out of it. He felt weightless.

Santo sipped anisette. "Dwight H. at a loss for words. What's this I'm seeing?"

Sam sipped Galliano. "He's been eating crow. He's lost weight on the all-crow diet."

Carlos sipped XO. "He's a man who's suffered a loss. Wayne T. torched the building sites and robbed us blind for God knows what reason. He's coming to grips with all the grief caused by that Mormon cocksucker."

Dwight said, "I know you have plans. I only need a few minutes of your time."

Santo sipped anisette. "You're right in that regard. Time is a commodity we are currently short of."

Sam sipped Galliano. "I'm writing a book about Wayne. It's called *Death of a Coon Hunter.*"

Carlos sipped XO. "Some Reds fried Tiger Krew. I'm betting they went out shooting."

Santo switched to Drambuie. "They were too zealous for my taste. Tell it like it is. They were right-wing nuts."

Sam switched to schnapps. "Dipshit is the last man standing. He was off peeping windows when the Krew got barbecued."

Carlos sipped XO. "Why mourn recent history? Balaguer's back in the fold and picking our pockets anew. This time we won't hire nigger-lovers or neo-Nazi mercs with sidebar agendas."

Santo sipped Drambuie. "White stiffs love to lose money in lush tropical locales. It's the Age of Aquarius, baby."

Sam said, "Let the sun shine in."

Carlos said, “Right on, brother. Let it all hang out.”

Dwight shook his head. “No foreign casinos. That’s straight from President Nixon. The D.R. was a goddamn big fuckup. It’s not going to happen again. The president is emphatic. You’ll find him cooperative in every other way, but your casino plan is dead as of now.”

They stared at him. They did double takes. It went stop frame and triple time.

Carlos threw his glass at him. It hit the wall and cracked. Santo and Sam threw their glasses. They fell short of the chair. Too-sweet booze splashed him.

Dwight got up and walked out. His legs caved. He fell into the car. He saw a bed and a lawn at the end of a tunnel.

86

(Los Angeles, 4/5/70)

The lot.

Old home week.

Back in the fold.

Dipshit, pariguayo. You killed the guy who killed JFK. You offed umpteen Reds and had boocoo adventures. You're twenty-five. You've got gray-flecked hair and lines on your face. Your back is all sliced up.

Crutch sat in his sled. The old crew circulated. Clyde and Buzz Duber, Phil Irwin and Chick Weiss. Bobby Gallard and Fred Otash.

He got more are-you-all-rights and you-don't-look-so-goods. Fred O. evil-eyed him. Freddy was in on the King-Bobby hits. Freddy knew he knew. It was all stale bread now.

Biz circulated. Chick sent Bobby and Phil out on a rope job. That producer at the Ravenswood was priapic. Wife #3 craved Splitsville while hubby craved Greek meat.

Hey, man. Weren't you embroiled in some cool shit in the Caribbean?

Not so cool. I should have stayed home.

He cut the villagers loose. They did a big-white-bwana number and ran into the brush. He torched Tiger Kar and walked back to Santo Domingo. He packed up and got the fuck out of Dodge.

The Boys never braced him. He got to L.A. and dismantled the fail-safes. He re-clicked with Clyde and Buzz and went back to tail jobs. Buzz buzz-bombed him with questions. He downplayed everything. Buzz asked him about his case. He said he gave it up.

A rainstorm came on. The guys perched in their cars. He was eight days back. Clyde saw that he was fucked-up and ladled work on him. He deployed that heavy-hung Filipino across all gender lines. He kicked in doors and snapped *mucho* pictures. Sal Mineo needed gelt and consented to pork a woman. The deal died with Sal's soft dick. It felt wrong. It should have jazzed him. It scared him, instead.

Everything scared him.

Nothing clicked in *safe*. He had his pad at the Vivian and his file pad downtown. They felt unsafe. He picked at his mother's file and his case file. That felt unsafe. He peeped Hancock Park. Julie Smith was married, pregnant and out of the house. Dana Lund had a dimwit boyfriend. She'd aged as much as he had.

Crutch tapped the ignition and ran the radio. He heard a song burst: "Faces come out of the rain." It spooked him. It was voodoo-derived. The song was aimed *at* him. It was raining now. He squinted out the windshield and tried to read faces. Zilch—just pedestrians with umbrellas.

He sees signs everywhere. He stays up all night or sleeps too long. He has these kid crying jags—*Dipshit, pariguayo*. He sees shit involuntarily. They're Zombie Zone re-takes with L.A. backdrops.

His case was deactivated somewhere in his head. It was there, back burner boiling. Leander James Jackson was Laurent-Jean Jacqueau, but both guys were dead. Gretchen/Celia was somewhere. It hurt to think about Joan.

The rain came down zigzagged. Crutch saw two fender benders. Radio news blah-blah'd: Hanoi Jane Fonda and James Earl Ray.

Crutch doused it. A black chick walked down Beverly. The hex backfired—he thought about Wayne.

You tried to tell me, I didn't listen, I ratted you out. You're dead inside days and I'm here. Fucker, you re-hexed me. I can't keep food down. I'm afraid to be alone and I schiz around people. I went to *church this morning. I wanted to revoke the hex. The pastor kicked my peeper ass off the pew.*

Pariguayo in English: “party-watcher.”

Clyde took him to a big LAPD bash. Jack Webb served as emcee. Marsh Bowen got the Medal of Valor.

Marsh was a fruit. Who knew and who didn’t? Who did and didn’t care? Marsh posed for pix with Scotty Bennett. They were salt-and-pepper pals now. The “Black-Militant Blastout”?—a righteous Fed snafu. Big Dwight’s operation backfires and the fuzz make hay. Dwight was off somewhere. He called the drop-front a bunch of times and got no answer.

Thunder and lightning cracked. The sky went flamethrower red. Crutch got a fear jolt. He ran to the service bay and stood under the roof.

Two mechanics worked on a ’62 Olds. Crutch watched them pull the flywheel and re-fit the clutch. A newspaper was creased flat on the workbench. Crutch checked it out.

The *Vegas Sun*. A piece on Wayne’s funeral. A photo of Mary Beth Hazzard, black-veiled.

She wept. *She believed what he told her and grieved nonetheless*.

The Stardust was mid-Strip. Wayne’s suite had an easy-shim door. He’d read a book on voodoo. Hex removal was a snap. You touched the victim’s belongings and retrieved your thoughts. He didn’t believe it. It was Lutheran text removed a million heartbeats. He figured he owed Wayne.

The drive took six hours. The rain never let up. Faces came and went with the radio music. He parked underground and elevatored to Wayne’s floor. Nobody answered his door knock. He shimmed the door and got in.

The suite looked the same. The same furniture, the same caustic stink. The place looked preserved.

He walked back to the lab. A file space was built right beside it. Paper stacks, boxes, wall graph. A replay of *his* file nooks.

The arrows, the connecting lines. The neat handwritten notes.

He followed lines and arrows. Facts, logic, conjecture. It all made perfect sense.

Mary Beth’s missing son. Emeralds. Haiti and Leander James Jackson. The woman with the dark, gray-streaked hair.

Celia, leftist firebrand. A hint of Joan and Dwight Holly in love.
His case and Wayne's—indivisible.
Dear God, that little red flag.

87

(Silver Hill, 4/5/70–12/4/70)

The bed, the lawn. The white buildings, the injected sleep.

Coercion got him in. He spent thirty days then. He stayed eight months now. Thirteen years of penance tithes formed his time between stays. His first visit was happenstance. The context was drunken neglect. The issues raised were guilt payments and abstinence. This stay resulted from reckless intent and cruel political thinking. The death toll was uncountable. The mind-set that created the actions mandated a conscious address.

He was here. She was wherever she went when she vanished. She knew she was complicit. Her heedlessness had spawned chaos on other occasions. She went away to build the will to return.

Silver Hill was beautiful. His stay covered three seasons. He got spring blaze, summer glow and snow.

He sent Mr. Hoover a telex. It stated his need for a long rest and did not state his location. Mr. Hoover knew he'd be here. A card arrived a month later.

Take as much time as you need. I have a new job for you. It's in Los Angeles. You'd start in January.

"File superintendent." "Dirt-digger," euphemized. Hoard gossip and scandal skank. Feed the old girl's private stash.

Low-risk work. A non-death-causing assignment.

L.A. was L.A. He might feel safe north of the southside. Karen was there. Joan might surface and find him.

He collapsed in New Orleans. He chartered a Bureau plane and flew straight here. Doctors examined him and found him physically sound. They force-fed him big meals and put proper weight on his frame. They sedated him. He slept eighteen hours a day for six weeks running. He woke up startled. He saw his lost ones the moment he opened his eyes. He sobbed. He segued into panic jolts and threw himself at walls. Male nurses shot him up. He went back to sleep and did it all over again.

His bedroom walls were padded. The throws didn't hurt. He wanted to cause pain. He thought it would blur the dead people's faces.

He got through that part of it. Repetition burned it out. The docs decreased his sedation. He avoided the head-shrinkers and the other patients. He spent time with a flock of tame goats. They lived protected on the grounds. They were there to console the burnouts.

He fed them and petted them. He mail-ordered stuffed animals and sent them to Karen's kids. He pretended that the kids were his kids and that he had a life where nobody got fucked over and hurt. Those thoughts killed him. He'd lose it and weep and get afraid that he could never go out in the world again.

His lost ones came at him. He'd sit still with them. He spent weeks listening to them and weeks talking to them. He got to where they could coexist.

They came and went. He started to see what they wanted and what he owed them. They gave him his mind back on a consignment basis.

Karen sent him notes full of Quaker prayers for peace. The girls sent thank-you cards for the stuffed animals. Karen sent a photo of all three of them. Their address and phone number were scrawled on the back. Dina wrote above it: "If this man is lost, please return him."

He carried the photo. He spent hours with his goats. He thought all of it through and began to see it.

A detailed operation. A multicontext design. An explicative scenario. Tell it like it was then and how it is now.

Mr. Hoover's racial lunacy. The FBI's war on the civil rights movement. Its calamitous faux pas with black-militant groups.

A huge feat of exposition. A densely packed indictment. A treatise on the collusive mind-set. JFK, RFK and MLK are dead. Let me tell you how.

A big social document, with key players brightly lit. Marsh Bowen: a duplicitous homosexual and merciless provocateur. Mob figures with vile ghetto ties. Mr. Hoover's orbit of hired guns. Special Agent Dwight C. Holly—called forth to confess.

An event of gravely stern measure. A grand idea culled from Mr. Hoover's file mania. An epic of malign paperwork rendered banal by the staggering weight of its emptiness. A text so deep that it would defy all easy reading and inspire contentious study for all motherfucking time.

He saw it all. He wrote nothing down. He rested and nuzzled his goats.

Karen sent him a peach pie for Thanksgiving. He shared it with his goats. He got fretful about them. He braced an administrator.

The man said, "They'll never be hurt, Mr. Holly. They'll be here for life. They're here for people like you."

He rested. He slept. He had some peaceful dreams about Wayne. He revised and embellished his idea. He could tell her soon. He knew he couldn't find her. He sensed that she'd find him in L.A.

He was wrong. It happened abruptly. She found him there with his goats.

He heard footsteps. He turned around and saw her. She looked more fierce and breathtaking than he had ever seen her. She had carried every bit of her weight.

He said, "Hello, comrade." He pulled out the little red flag.

She said, "What are we going to do?"

He said, "Let me tell you."

Part IV

COON CARTEL

December 5, 1970–November 18, 1971

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/5/70. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: "Recorded at the Director's Request/Classified Confidential 1-A: Director's Eyes Only." Speaking: Director Hoover, President Richard M. Nixon.

RMN: Good morning, Edgar.
JEH: Good morning, Mr. President.
RMN: How are you feeling? You looked a little under the weather at the American Legion brunch.
JEH: I assure you that I am fit as a fiddle, Mr. President. And, as you know, I am always "ready to sing."
RMN: "Sing for your supper." You understand that old saw when you run the goddamn country.
JEH: Yes, Sir. And, while we're on the topic, let me state that I would devoutly hope that I would be able to sing well into your second term.
RMN: Edgar, you're a rare old turd. Anyone who underestimates you should have their head examined.
JEH: Thank you, Mr. President. I would also add that we have been friends since 1914.
RMN: I was born in 1913, Edgar. We must have met at a party in my bassinet.
JEH: (Six seconds' silence.) Well … er … yes, Sir.
RMN: You've probably got a file on it. You open a file every time some left-winger cuts a fart.
JEH: If I consider the person subversive, then, yes.
RMN: What's shaking in the black-militant universe? My guys at Justice are saying that that foolishness is on the wane.
JEH: Perhaps so, Sir. The Panthers and US are heavily infiltrated and caught up in litigation, and the admittedly minor BTA and MMLF are kaput. Sixteen felony indictments, Sir. A small FBI operation, but a gem.
RMN: That "Blastout" was a home run.
JEH: Yes, Sir. And I would have called it a grand slam.
RMN: Hmmm.
JEH: (Coughing spell/eight seconds.)
RMN: Are you all right, Edgar?
JEH: I'm getting over a cold, Sir.
RMN: I wasn't exactly thrilled with the congressionals last

month. You lose a seat here, a seat there, and before you know it, they add up. I might ask you for a little help before the ’72 general rolls around. The Democrats will field a good team. I’d like to get some derogatory poop on them in a timely fashion.

JEH: Uh … what type of—

RMN: “Black-bag job,” Edgar. Don’t go coy on me. Don’t pretend you didn’t pull that shit with Lyndon Johnson.

JEH: Uh … yes, Sir.

RMN: Dwight Holly would be a good man for that.

JEH: Dwight proffered a bluff in our names, Sir. He advanced a no-foreign-casinos edict to our Italian friends. The notion is sound, but the very act itself was quite cheeky.

RMN: Dwight’s my main man. We jaw on the phone sometimes. You’re right, the plan is A-OK. I keep the Boys at arm’s length and pardon their guys out of jail at the proper intervals. It’ll all look kosher that way.

JEH: Yes, Sir. I agree.

RMN: Big Dwight’s a pisser. You said he’s taking some kind of rest cure, right?

JEH: That’s correct, Mr. President. He’ll be returning to the Los Angeles Office next month.

RMN: Dwight’s salty. I like that about him.

JEH: (Coughing spell/fourteen seconds.)

RMN: Are you all right?

JEH: Yes, Sir. I’m fine.

JEH: (Coughing spell/twelve seconds.)

RMN: Jesus, Edgar.

JEH: I assure you, Mr. President. I’m in the pink.

RMN: If you say so.

JEH: I should be run—

RMN: Bebe Rebozo told me a pisser of a story the other day. He was hobknobbing with some pols in Paraguay. They told it to him.

JEH: Uh, yes, Sir.

RMN: It’s some kind of myth. This secret stash of emeralds has been financing right-wing coups since God was a pup. Have you ever heard—

JEH: (Coughing spell and muffled comment/transcript ends here.)

88

Scotty Bennett

(Los Angeles, 12/7/70)

"Among the many things I learned during my time undercover is that inherent criminality is inherent criminality, regardless of the racial or political grievance that serves as its justification, regardless of the soundness or unsoundness of the ideology expressed."

The spiel got applause. Mayor Yorty and Chief Davis clapped. Scotty clapped along. Marsh looked good. Sergeant's stripes on new blues. A close-cut Afro.

Full house: the Academy gym, cops and politicians. No Feds—big surprise there.

"The LAPD has superbly interdicted the criminal aspects of black nationalism as it has honored the legal right of black-nationalist civil address, while concurrently opening its arms to a new generation of minority police officers."

Scotty yukked internal. He hit up Marsh back in March. He let time simmer. Today was the day: the big heist summit.

The fucker could speak. He chose his words and rocked with the rhythm. He eschewed a homo aesthetic.

The chief dug him. Rank and filers resented him. Sam Yorty grooved his Uncle Tom act.

Marsh cranked it. *Woooo*, some crescendo! He stabbed the air like JFK. He hit the MLK note of redemption. He got a standing ovation.

The audience swarmed the lecturn. Marsh was Mr. Gracious. Scotty winked on his way out.

• • •

Armed Robbery—211 PC. His den treasure-troved it.

Eighteen wall pix. Eighteen kills documented. The twelve Panthers went unsung. You can't photograph the dead-and-buried.

Liquor-store jobs and market rips. Sitting-duck ambushes and shoot-outs. Eighteen dead male Negroes.

Marsh thought he hated black folks. Marsh was wrong. He never said the word *nigger*. He hated killers, dope-pushers and heisters. Black militants were up there. His all-black kill sheet was luck and demographic. Shit played out that way.

Ann and the kids were in Fresno. The house was a stag-party zone. Scotty laid out booze, dip and Fritos. Scotty pulled all his files out.

Marsh Bowen tweaked him from the get-go. Marsh passed that ink-stained cash. Marsh worked at the Peoples' Bank briefly. Marsh got on LAPD. All tweakers, but inconclusive.

Then Marsh goes Fed and fucks him. Then Marsh starts making heist queries. Then he runs a DMV check and gets 84th and Budlong.

Scotty snarfed Fritos and bean dip. The wall photos spoke.

Rydell Tyner said, "Jesus, Scotty." He said, "Son, I warned you."

Bobby Fisk bled out at All-American Liquor. He gave Bobby's flash roll to his grandma.

Lamar Brown had a pencil neck. Triple-aught buck severed his head.

The basement bell rang. Scotty opened up. Marsh was back in civvies.

"Hello, partner."

“Hello, Scotty.”

“Make yourself at home. If you show me yours, I’ll show you mine.”

* * *

Then to now: six years and ten months. Marsh kicked it off. He was there that day.

There *was* a third robber. He was black. The lead guy shot him, chemically scalded him and left him for dead. The third man crawled to an alley and hid. Marsh lived on that block then. He saw the third man. He saw his bulletproof vest and extra precautionary gauzing. He figured it saved the man’s life. LAPD was out *bruuutal.* Marsh was outraged. He took the man to a doctor neighbor’s house and hid him there. The doctor treated the man’s wounds and burns. The man refused to discuss the heist-killings and never revealed his identity. He left two days later. He gave the doctor twenty thousand dollars in ink-stained cash. The doctor deposited it in the Peoples’ Bank of South Los Angeles. He told Lionel Thornton to leak the cash back to the community. Charity donations: do it prudently. Small amounts of cash surfaced in the black community. Scotty leaned on the passers. The doctor died in ’65. Marsh got obsessed with the case. He got a job at the bank, learned zero and quit.

Scotty took over. *He* was there that day. He sensed the case as The Case from Jump Street. He beat the bluesuits to the crime scene. He found nicked shells from a jammed automatic and pocketed them. The armored-car guards fired revolvers. Likewise the milk-truck driver, the lead guy and the two dead heist men. Thus: a third man had come and gone. *He* fired with the jammed automatic.

A third man—logic now physically confirmed.

Scotty walked the crime scene. He saw a blood trail leading away from it. The trail stopped near that alley. He blotted up a blood sample and got enough to type. He found some chemical-scalding pellets a few feet away. They were saliva-coated. He figured the third man spat them out.

They both knew that day: a third man escaped.

Scotty had the blood tested, covertly. The type: rare AB–. The other dead men had different blood types. The nicked shells: no go, brother. He jam-tested and test-fired every automatic in LAPD custody. Then to now: every booked-in mid-size auto. The results: all negative. He had the pellets tested. Shit—no chemical make.

Marsh jumped ahead. I've got a new lead. I'll tell you at the wrap-up. I'll drop some confirmation now. I checked the files at University and 77th. I discovered bogus routing numbers. I know you've got a private paper stash.

Scotty pointed to his file trove. Scotty refueled their drinks and took off.

He tracked the emerald shipment and made some progress. It started in the Dominican Republic, all government-vouched. The government stonewalled LAPD. Scotty tried everything. Other cops tried with less gusto. Nobody could track the stones' provenance. Scotty's take: the origin was dirty, the jewels were rogue. The senders decided against diplomatic-courier shipping. They chose Wells Fargo instead.

And:

The shipment records vanished from the Wells Fargo office a week after the heist. It was a pro B&E. The Wells Fargo execs went stonewall. They refused to talk to LAPD at all.

Marsh cut in. He'd heard rumors—black folks in need receive emeralds, anonymously. Scotty knew the rumors. Ghetto legend, who knows, I can't verify it.

Scotty revved up to the good part. This is the glue. It all sticks together here.

He glommed a partial eyeball witness six months after the heist. The guy said the lead robber was *white*. Okay, he's Caucasoid. Okay, there's the black robber rumors. Oreo teams in '64—*veeeeery* rare indeed. The witness had no further description. Scotty got frustrated there. You win, you lose. He built a lead sheet on a Wells Fargo exec. It never bloomed past speculation.

The guy's name was Richard Farr. He disappeared after the heist and the Wells Fargo B&E. Farr was half Anglo, half Dominican. Scotty culled paper on him. No lead tweakers resulted. The D.R. connection was a tweaker. Sub-tweaker: Farr might be some kind of Commie.

Scotty poured refills. Marsh took on a schoolboy look—sir, please teach me.

The investigation sandbagged. Nothing popped. Leads melted to sludge. Scotty worked the ID angle. It took years. He brought in his coroner pal, Tojo Tom Takahashi.

Tojo Tom froze flesh grafts from the scorched bodies. He isolated skin cells off one guy and lab-tested them. He found diseased leukocytes. The disease was indigenous to white men only.

Scotty did a fifty-state paper check. It took years. Paydirt, late ’69. The place: Dogdick, Alabama. The man: Douglas Frank Claverly.

Dougie had that skin disease. Dougie was a Klanned-up ex–armed robber. Exhaustive background check—zero. Yeah, but: Dougie disappeared in 1/64—one month pre-heist.

Scotty redeployed Tojo Tom. Tojo ID’d the bogus milk-truck driver. A melted good-luck ring did it. The ring was embedded in a skin cavity.

Tojo extracted the ring and lab-tested the skin cells attached. Okay, it’s a black guy. Tojo brought in chemicals and microscopes and raised words off the ring: JJL & CV.

Scotty traced the ring to Modesto. It took fucking weeks. Jerome James Wilkinson ordered the ring. He was a male Negro. He had no criminal record and no family. He worked as a strikebreaker. He vanished 1/64, one month pre-heist.

Enter Dr. Fred Hiltz. Punch line: the emeralds were going to *him*.

Marsh drop-jawed that one. He used to work lefty groups for Dr. Fred and Clyde Duber. Scotty said he knew that. Scotty contradicted long-held heist text.

The stones were allegedly headed to a Wells Fargo vault. The cash was a bank-deposit load. The stones were *really* being sent to Dr. Fred himself. A dummy corporation would hold them. A Dr. Fred stooge would play courier. Dr. Fred *craaaaved* the stones. There was some nutso right-wing emerald myth he creamed for.

Dr. Fred was offed in ’68. Marsh said he knew the basic facts. Scotty laid out the inside scoop.

He popped Jomo C. for that liquor-store spree. Someone pretended to be Marsh himself. The fake Marsh offered up the liquor-store snitch and a snitch on a major gun stash. That shit brought Marsh ghetto peril. Marsh knew that all too well. Marsh knew that Jomo confessed to the Dr. Fred snuff and to whacking his crime partner. Here’s the shit Marsh didn’t know.

Scotty Q&A’d Jomo with Dwight Holly present. Big Dwight heard Jomo’s Hiltz-case confession. He did not see Scotty’s second go-round.

The L.A. County Jail. The isolation cell block. Jomo's one-man cell.

Jomo feared him now. Jomo called him "Mr. Scotty." Jomo folded from two kidney shots.

He said a "cutout" fed him the Hiltz heist. You'll find a bomb shelter. Steal the cash. Don't kill Dr. Fred. *Warn Dr. Fred.* Tell him not to reveal shit per February '64. He'll know what you mean.

Jomo had no heist knowledge. Scotty determined that. Jomo clammed up. Jomo refused to state the cutout's name. *Cutout:* an intelligence-agency term.

Scotty pressed. Scotty rubber-hosed Jomo. Jomo screamed and held his mud. Scotty hit Jomo too hard and killed him. Scotty rigged a toilet water–soaked bedsheet and faked a suicide.

Marsh got the shakes. Son, did I scare you? Scotty built him a highball and dumped fresh chips on his plate.

It fortified him. He spilled the rest of his tale.

Guilt-tripper Wayne Tedrow. His Find Reginald Hazzard quest. The boy looked like the third man. Marsh just checked an LVPD file. The kid had chemistry knowledge. Marsh thought about it. An old vibe resurfaced: the deep-burned bodies meant chemical skills. The pellets and chemical scaldings—Scotty agreed.

He dipped a Frito. "We have to make the Hazzard kid's blood type."

Marsh air-drew dollar signs. Scotty air-drew 50-50. Marsh said, "This should be fun."

89

(Los Angeles, 12/8/70)

Chick Weiss dug Negro art. Afro stuff and island stuff. Virility statues and armless spirit guards with wings.

They cluttered up his office. Doorstops and desk knickknacks. Carved wood with deep eyes sunk in.

Crutch and Phil Irwin pulled chairs up. A Zulu god stood between them. He was half life-size. His dick was three-headed. His rhinestone eyes looked cheap.

Chick prepped a panatela. He had a black-goddess cigar prop. He spread her legs, stuck the cigar in and severed the tip. He pushed a button. Her mouth wooshed out a flame.

Phil dug it. Crutch looked away. Chick cleared space and dumped his feet on the desk.

"Camera job. Papa's a billboard mogul and mama's a flower-power chick. Papa's tight with LAPD. One of his guys showed him a surveillance tape of that Griffith Park love-in. Mama's blowing a guy by the merry-go-round. Papa hired Clyde to get the goods on him. They're shacking at the Sunset Breeze Motel on alternate Tuesdays. I want you to get in subtle. Live film, *bubbies*. No hit-

and-run snapshots on this one.”

Crutch stood up. Phil stood and hangover-weaved. He bumped the Zulu god. Some sequins dropped off his dick.

Chick said, “Go, you fucking heathens. This is priceless art you’re so frivolous to.”

• • •

The day was hot. Phil bribed the desk guy. Crutch B&E’d the tryst room and fucked up the AC. They air-cracked the window. The camera lens would fit in. Phil said Chick was perved on surveillance film. He had a full library. He loved to watch plain-Jane chicks and chump Charlies fucking. It was illegal and unethical. Chick didn’t care. He had clout. He threw perv-film parties for the L.A. elite.

They car-staked the lot. Phil pressed Crutch on his recent shit. He kept it zipped. Unit 6 was their target. The flanking units were hippie hives. The geeks blasted loud rock all day. That meant air cover.

Crutch sipped coffee. Phil sipped 151. They schmoozed gossip and Mando Ramos at the Olympic. Freddy O. bought Tiger Kab—what a fucking hoot.

Phil loaded the camera. The target car pulled up. The wife and the hippie stud entered Room 6.

Crutch flash-shot them. His camera date-scrolled the arrival time. Phil lugged the film camera up to the window crack.

He poked the lens in. He hit the On switches. The film cans were full. Roll it, C.B.

The camera ran soundless. It was cool. Visuals sufficed for California divorce. The wife and the hippie were *loud*. Crutch heard it over the rock noise. Cameraman Phil popped in earplugs.

Crutch tried to doze. Fuck me, fuck me’s killed it. Chick’s goddamn statues. Red rhinestone eyes. Wings where arms should be.

The love-nest door opened. Phil pulled out the camera and crouched. The wife and hippie shagged their sled and split. Phil carried the camera over.

“They went sixty-nine. I got the setup shot and the whole thing in one take. Chick will groove it.”

Crutch said, “You’re a loser.”

Phil grabbed his crotch and grinned.

She sent her card early. Christmas was weeks off. This one: postmarked Amarillo, Texas.

Crutch pocketed the five-spot. Crutch placed the card in his file box. ’55 to ’70—sixteen cards total. Margaret Woodard Crutchfield covers half the U.S.

His closet was file-stuffed. He hung his clothes in the bathroom. His case file ran six boxes here. He had nine boxes stashed downtown.

He looked out the window. Christmas lights were up. Yeah, it’s a ritual. Yeah, you should go.

• • •

He stole the red flag from Wayne’s file cove. He taped it to his dashboard. He’d ripped up his Joan pictures. It was a de-hexing move. Hancock Park was dead without the Joan pix. He needed her for juxtaposition.

Eight months home. Residual shell shock. He still can’t sleep. He can’t work his case. His nightmares are banal now. Barbiturates subsume them. He works for Clyde and chauffeurs part-time. Freddy Otash bought Tiger Kab. Wayne Tedrow had cash-drained it. Freddy got it cheap.

It’s a black lifestyle hub. It panders to hepcats, militants, and Motown fools slumming. Sonny Liston makes the scene. Rock Hudson trolls for dark dick in tigrified limos. Redd Foxx brings cocaine and moon pies. The white drivers wear tiger-stripe tuxes. The spades dig the slave roles reversed.

His case, Wayne’s case, the heist. Three cases united. He saw Wayne’s trove in April. He’s been immobilized since then. He thinks about it. He follows the loop.

L.A. to the D.R. and Haiti. Back here again. He’s tracking Gretchen Farr. She ripped off Fred Hiltz. She’s aka Celia Reyes. She kisses Joan. He sees Horror House. Body parts, voodoo powder, green glass. Celia’s linked to the D.R. Celia’s got a codebook. Months of code work. Success. Book symbols match the death-house signs. He ID’s the victim: María Rodríguez “Tattoo” Fontonette.

Joan and Celia are deep Red. Tattoo betrays the Cause. She ends up dead at Horror House. Celia's embroiled with Sam G. She wants to fuck up the casino sites. Crazy Wayne gets there first. *He* gets mobbed up. He bugs Sam's hotel room. He's pushing dope with Luc Duhamel. Luc zombifies him. He hears "loose emeralds," "1964," "Laurent-Jean Jacqueau." *It's all connected.*

He's back in L.A. He's adjunct to Dwight Holly's Fed gig. He's bugging Marsh Bowen. "Marsh, it is Leander James Jackson." That means it's Laurent-Jean Jacqueau.

It's all connected. Marsh lived at 84th and Budlong *Then*. Marsh is tight with Scotty B. *Now*. Their peace pact preceded "the Black-Militant Blastout."

Wayne's file. Weird emerald giveaways. Reginald H., long missing. Reggie splits Vegas *two months* pre-heist. The kid knows chemistry. The kid studied *Haitian* herbs. Joan taught Reginald at the Freedom School. Joan bailed him out of jail. It's December '63. The heist bodes.

Joan's omnipresent. She's Dwight Holly's snitch and probable lover. Dwight's rubber room–resting. *Where's Joan and why can't I find her*?

Crutch drove to 2nd and Plymouth. Dana's Christmas lights were up. Her tree filled the front window. Gift boxes were stacked branch-high.

Corny music—Ray Conniff—her usual yule slush.

He bought her a cashmere sweater at Bullock's. It was black and cable-knit. Elk horns fit through little toggles.

It was Christmas-wrapped. He walked up and placed it on the welcome mat. He rang the bell and vamoosed.

Radical chic:

Four Tiger kabs peeled out of the lot. Crutch saw François Truffaut, some black dudes and Hanoi Jane herself. A Tiger stretch rumbled up. Phil Irwin drove it. His tiger tux shed faux fur all over the seat. His passengers: Chick Weiss, César Chávez and Leonard Bernstein.

The stretch bombed southbound. Crutch walked into the hut. Fred O. worked the switchboard. Redd Foxx sniffed coke. Milt C. had Junkie Monkey up on his lap. Sonny Liston was toking maryjane.

Junkie Monkey said, "March 8, Jew York City. Muhammad Ali versus Smokin' Joe Frazier. See it on closed-circuit TV at Tiger Kab, the home of the Coon Cartel."

Sonny blew smoke in Junkie Monkey's face. Milt made the Junkster gag and cough.

"Ali is a sissified draft dodger. Islam is a gutter religion. Ali takes it up the shit chute from Gamal Abdel Nasser and the dishonorable Elijah Muhammad."

Redd Foxx howled. White powder and snot flew. Fred O. yukked. Crutch haw-hawed.

Sonny unwrapped a morphine suppository. Quick hands: he dug into his pants and popped it up his ass.

"Come on, kid. You're driving me to Vegas."

The champ nodded out at San Berdoo and passed out at Barstow. Crutch Dexedrine-all-nightered. I-15 was dead. Crutch drove 105. The desert was dead cold. Six zillion stars burned.

The radio hummed low. Mountain ranges broke up reception. Crutch caught an oldie string. Circa '60 prom songs. The Peeper Magical Mystery Tour.

The music re-sputtered. Crutch flicked off the dial. Sonny yipped like a dog in a dream.

Crutch checked the rearview. Sonny was prone, with his feet out the window. Sand blew into the car. Sonny said, "Shit."

"Are you okay, champ?"

"Don't call me 'champ.' 'Champ's' what you call all them stumblebum sparring partners you see on skid row."

"Okay, boss."

Sonny lit a cigarette. He torched the filter, dropped the match and tried again. Six more swipes got him combustion.

Crutch said, "I saw you fight Wayne Bethea. You kicked his fucking ass."

Sonny dog-yawned. "I knew a cat named Wayne. He kept killing black guys he didn't want to. That boy just didn't have no hate for anybody, but shit kept finding him. He kept trying to find niggers to kill and niggers to save, and this woman of his thought it was all the same goddamn thing."

They hit a rise. The Vegas Strip emanated. Colored lights compressed by darkness.

Sonny said, "Drop me at the Sands. I'm meeting some people."

Crutch goosed the gas. He felt re-hexed and de-hexed. Sonny dropped three RDs in his tux pocket. His tiger koat was all pilled—fur balls up the wazoo.

"Don't deadhead back. Park somewhere and rest up."

It was 4:00 a.m. The Strip was a-go-go. Lots of cabs and golf-cart travel. The carts were wet bar–fitted. The passengers quaffed cocktails, the drivers swerved.

Crutch pulled up to the Sands. Sonny laid a C-note on him and ruffled his hair. The coffee shop was glass-fronted. People saw the crazy limo and howled.

Sonny got out. People waved. He weaved into the coffee shop. Mary Beth Hazzard walked over and hugged him.

The dexies fought off the RDs. He parked the limo under the Stardust and thrashed until noon. His tiger tux shed. Fur threads tickled his snout. He felt full-force-fucked in the soul.

He gave up on sleep and opted for pancakes. A short stack and coffee re-vivified him. Do it, fucker. You'll get re-zombified if you don't.

He drove to the Hotel Workers' Union. The limo took up two parking slots. He got some pissy looks. They turned to yuks quick. His tiger tux was a roar.

A janitor gave him directions. He was all pins and needles. Her office door was open. She looked up from her desk.

He said, "I'm sorry about Wayne."

She put down her pen.

He said, "He tried to warn me about some things."

She straightened her desk blotter.

He said, "I see things that other people don't see. I know how to find people."

She opened her purse and pulled out a key ring.

90

(Los Angeles, 12/11/70)

The girls chased a neighbor's dog. He watched from two houses down.

Dina had speed. Ella had a toddler's gait. The dog ran in elusive circles. Ella charged, fell and got back up. The front yard contained them. His stuffed animals were there on the porch.

Dwight pushed his seat back. The car was packed: tinctures, solvents and brushes. Notepaper of varied stock.

He left Silver Hill early. He started his Bureau work next month. Joan understood his plan. She signed on with blood-deep support—belief works that way.

Nixon called him yesterday. How was your rest? Welcome back—and, by the way …

The prez was building an ops squad—four black-bag men. Dwight declined. The prez acted hurt. Dwight recommended Howard Hunt at CIA.

Ella caught the dog. He pushed her down with his paws and licked her. Ella grinned and laughed.

Karen got in the car. They knocked up their arms embracing sideways. They kept banging their legs.

They found a fit and stayed with it. The girls looked over and waved.

Karen held his face. “You look the same.”

“You look better.”

“I thought you’d be fat from all that pie I sent you.”

“My goats ate most of it.”

Karen tucked her knees up. “My husband’s in the backyard. I’ll have to go in a minute.”

“Later this week?”

“Yes.”

“The Beverly Wilshire?”

“I’ll never say no to that.”

They laced hands on the steering wheel. Karen said, “Mr. Hoover’s new dirt-hoarder. I’ll be begging you to delete files inside of ten minutes.”

“What’s wrong with five? You know I’ll do it.”

Karen laughed. “You want something. This impromptu visit after so many months just isn’t you.”

Dwight rubbed her knees. “I think you should put together a team. There’s a Bureau Records Center in Media, Pennsylvania. I think you should tap it in early March. There’s at least ten thousand surveillance files there. You could steal them and expose the Bureau’s harassment policies in one go.”

Karen lit a cigarette. “I don’t believe what I’m hearing.”

“You should.”

“And this is *your* idea? It didn’t come from—”

“Not now, please.”

“No weapons, in and out.”

“That’s right.”

“And you’ll tell me more. ‘Need-to-know’ basis?”

Dwight nodded. “Yes, and soon.”

Ella fell and scuffed her knees. She started crying. Karen said, “I have to go.”

Dwight said, “Do you love me?”

Karen said, “I’ll think about it.”

Files:

The file room was back lot–size. High shelves, deep shelves, rolling-ladder access. Political files, criminal files, civil files.

Informant files. Surveillance files, gossip files and general-sleaze files. 600,000 files total.

All indexed. Chained index binders at every shelf front.

Dwight walked the shelf banks. The ladders ran on greased casters. Twelve-foot-high, floor-bolted structures. Twelve shelves per bank. Twenty-four banks total.

"You're early. Almost a month, in fact."

Dwight turned around. Jack Leahy leaned on a ladder.

"You'll hate the job. These files do not represent Mr. Hoover at his best."

"The Bureau's most impolitic SAC. How have you lasted this long?"

"Lawyer's luck. And civil law compared to *this*? Come on."

They shook hands. Jack sat on a ladder rung.

"I haven't seen you since the Hiltz case and the start-up of BAAAAD BROTHER."

"Well, two times lucky, and two times unexposed."

"Yeah, but at some goddamn price." Dwight shook his head. "I'd rather not talk about it."

"I don't blame you. The old girl, third-rate militants and Scotty Bennett in one go? I'd have called in a rest break before you did."

"Can it, Jack. It's old news now."

Jack coughed. "Well, shit, you know the drill. You monitor the general dirt files and supplant them with informant pieces. You've got cops, criminals who want favors, newsmen, bug men, waiters, doormen, wheelmen, repo men, hotel clerks, barflies and the aggrieved great unwashed of the universe. Try to *underpay* for your dirt. The old girl wants the shit, but she wants it at bargain-basement prices."

Dwight sneezed. The file room was overcooled. Dry air fought off paper rot.

"Are you running standing bug posts?"

Jack rolled his eyes. "We've got bugged fuck pads and hotel suites. Duke Wayne blows into Chicago. The doorman at the Drake calls the Chicago SAC. Before you know it, the Duke's upgraded to the penthouse. Too bad it's hot-wired. The Duke's a cross-dresser, by the way. He wears a size-fifty-six extra-long muumuu."

Dwight laughed. "Anything else I should know?"

"Half the fruit bathhouses in L.A. are wired. The old girl caught a city councilman at a joint on La Cienega once, so she's running nine listening posts full-time."

Dwight plucked a file and skimmed it. Johnnie Ray sucks dick in Fern-dell Park. The suckee is an FBI informant. Lana Turner dives dark sisters, circa '54. A snitch calls from Sultan Sam's Sandbox.

Jack said, "How's the old girl's health? I saw her in D.C. last month. She looked positively spectral. I had an informant once named 'Jean the Mean Queen.' She had to be the old girl's long-lost sister."

Liberace's all-boy cathouse. Scopophile Danny Thomas, nympho Peggy Lee. Muff-diver Sol Hurok. Masochist James Dean —the "Human Ashtray."

Dwight replaced the file. Margin notes lingered. Ava Gardner and Redd Foxx. Jean Seberg and half the Black Panthers.

"Have fun, Dwight. I told the old girl it's a swinging new world, but she didn't believe me."

• • •

He rented a fallback. It was a work space/crash pad. It was close to the drop-front and Karen's place. He and Joan had keys. They kept their gear there. The bungalow overlooked Karen's street. He could watch the girls play.

Baxter and Cove was close. Two blocks and binocular range.

Dwight parked and lugged in boxes. He had brooding time. He was meeting Joan at the Statler later. The fallback was a plotter's den. Living room, kitchen, bathroom, mattress for naps.

He pulled a chair out to the terrace. He pointed his Bausch & Lombs south. Karen walked across her yard. Dina and Ella chased cats.

Karen looked haggard. His offer stunned her. She knows it's an adjunct op. She knows the main op is big. He can't tell her the gist. We're going to kill Mr. Hoover and frame Marsh Bowen for it.

They'll manipulate a convergence. Marsh will be pre-indicted by forged document trails. They will lead back to the year zero and extend beyond 2000. They'll recruit a pro shooter. Bob Relyea shot MLK. He should shoot again. The assassin is a homosexual black policeman. He kills the era's prime symbol of white authority and ends his own life immediately. Planted paperwork reveals public policy gone bad. Marsh Bowen has been consumed by a politically incubated madness. The FBI suborns him and sends him undercover. He undergoes a radical transformation. He concurrently attempts to exploit his situation. He's beset by sexual demons that induce a harrowing shame. The "Black-Militant Blastout" leaves two children dead. Marsh Bowen resumes his police career with honors derived from innocence slaughtered. Mr. Hoover created the overall context. Special Agent Dwight C. Holly implemented it.

They will create a Marsh Bowen diary. It will detail a brilliant black man's rising tide of conversation and psychic disjuncture. Entries will describe his odd friendship with Special Agent Holly. Agent Holly unburdened himself to Marsh Bowen. He laid out the FBI's war on the civil rights movement and described Mr. Hoover's rabid racial animus.

The King hit plot would not be mentioned. It would eclipse the shock of Mr. Hoover's death and spawn apocalypse. The fictional Holly-Bowen friendship would be deeply etched. It would encompass a world of guilt and hope. The diary would form a syllabus. It would bring readers to a copious glut of pre-existent FBI paper. The paper would form a narrative of banal minutae that would attenuate into horror. Grand juries would indict Marsh postmortem. Conspiracy talk would engulf the body politic. Every real and concocted trail would lead back to Mr. Hoover and his legacy of hate.

Mr. Hoover was partially discredited now. His anti-King salvos had become public fare. They were negligible compared to this. They lacked hardcore shock value. This would be a huge event. It would spawn waves of disbelief and tragically resigned acceptance.

He would be the trigger man. He would sit in committee rooms and grand-jury chambers. He would stand on the U.S. Senate floor. He would describe his exploitation of Marsh Bowen. He would detail his own lifetime of racial rancor, minutely outline his black-militant faux pas and chart the human cost. He would reveal his friendship with Marsh and paint a vivid picture of a white man and a black man as mirror-twinned souls in duress. He would embrace Marsh with forgiveness and the distanced love you feel for those you refract. He would tell the story of his crack-up. He would resign himself to an invasively scrutinized life.

Karen’s house was a stone’s throw. Dwight trained his binoculars. Ella threw building blocks at Dina. Big sister laughed and ran.

He told Joan the plan. They were in bed. They rented a guest house near Silver Hill. She trembled the way he trembled routinely. He struck the awe in her that she had always struck in him.

He’d go to prison. Four to six felt right. Protective custody, tennis courts, Fed-informant perks. There might be some animals he could care for.

Joan said, “Take these. They’ll help you sleep.” Two brown herb capsules.

They didn’t put him out. They put him in between. Joan guided him places. She put her hands on his chest and made him breathe in sync. She started out in French and Spanish. He caught most of it. *Cap-Haïtien, Cotuí, Pico Duarte. Puerto Plata, Saint-Raphaël, El Guyabo.*

Breathe through, I’m here, you’re safe now. I’ll tell you what we did with Wayne’s gifts.

It was the Statler. He knew that. They had Bureau-vouchered digs. Joan covered his eyes and told him to go where she said.

Every dime went to the struggle. We refurbished four safe houses and bought black-market medicine. Celia painted the walls. Balaguer planned to turn Tiger Klaw into a pleasure yacht. Four comrades dynamited the hull in dry dock.

We airlifted food and medicinal herbs to the slums outside Dajabón. A small sect there has canonized Wayne Tedrow. They wear newspaper photos of him, attached to pointed hats. A dream myth exists about Wayne now. People believe that winged men murdered and martyred him.

Be still now, I know you see it, I know you loved him. We honor the dead through imagery. Belief works that way.

Celia ran an arms funnel. We purchased weapons in Cuba and shipped them to Port-au-Prince. I bought inmates out of La Victoria prison and got them forged ID cards and guns. Money went to converts in La Banda. They left jail doors open and shredded documents. A young man whom Wayne rescued from harm repaid his *debt in full. He killed six La Banda torturers at a whorehouse in Borojol. Celia blew up the torture chamber under El Presi-dente's golf course.*

We lost some of ours. Random reprisals were inevitable and cost us dearly. El Jefe muzzled published and broadcast accounts of our actions. Word spread through printed leaflets and secret-band radio.

Many of the slaves Wayne freed have joined us. Some of them wear his picture around their necks. There have been skirmishes on the north D.R. coastline. A 6/14 demolition team blew up Tiger Kove. Many voodoo sects hold the building sites to be sacred ground. Many people refuse to walk across them. We shotgunned two Tonton Macoute leaders and three vicious bokurs on a golf course near Ville-Bonheur. Celia is lost somewhere in the D.R. or Haiti. She has been unreachable for months. I cannot find her and cannot conscionably continue my search with our work still to do. If you have seen some of this or all of this and my pictures have guided you, you should now try to sleep.

The Statler supplied guest robes. One size fits all. His fit too small, Joan's engulfed her.

She was up first. Room service had come and gone. Dwight poured coffee. Joan examined paper stock. The room-service cart was a workbench. The couch was a study perch.

"How do we age the documents?"

"Two runs in a convection oven. You chemically treat the paper and cook it. You add the ink or type the text on later."

"How do we differentiate the printing and cursive styles?"

"We cut stencils and print or write longhand within the boundaries."

Joan lit a cigarette. Her eyes were red—late nights and heavy smoking.

"The diary is the big thing. It's our basic text, so it has to be found."

Dwight sat on the couch. "We have to be sure that he doesn't already have a diary. We've got to locate it, so that we can snatch it and replace it, right before the convergence."

"Typed, right? We don't want to hand-forge a document of that length."

Dwight sipped coffee. "Right. If he has a typewriter, we'll purchase an identical one and go from there. I'll get a typeface sample on my first B&E."

Joan took his hands. "Scotty Bennett? He's tight with Marsh now."

Dwight shrugged. "Scotty's a wild card. He's a decorated cop on the one hand, a brutal fuck on the other. The important thing is that he densifies the overall text. He's killed eighteen armed robbers and at least a dozen Panthers, and it will either come out or be stonewalled to the extent that it looks very goddamn bad for LAPD."

Joan smiled. "How were your dreams?"

Dwight smiled. "Vivid, while you were talking. A little raw after that."

Joan pointed to a matchbook pile. Fruit joints all. The Tradesman, the Jaguar, the Falcon's Lair. Marsh cruises Hollywood. Marsh keeps amyl-nitrate poppers in a hidey-hole.

"He might have a lover who would contradict our profile."

Dwight shook his head. "He's a loner, he's discreet, he's especially circumspect now that he's celebrated. He's on the cover of *Ebony* magazine this month."

Joan stubbed out her cigarette. "Who shoots?"

"A Klansman I've dealt with before."

"Competent?"

"Yes."

"The hard part will be putting them together."

Dwight sipped coffee. It killed a headache tapping in.

"Marsh has to be secluded. It won't work unless he fires from a distance. The shooter can fire, kill Marsh and plant the throwdown. It's all about manipulating a proper convergence and rigging a workable line of sight."

Joan nodded. "It's all pretext. It's giving Marsh a reason to be there."

Dwight said, "Yes, and L.A. would be the best location. One, Marsh is here. Two, LAPD would be working the case full-tilt, as it tries to bury anything that might embarrass them. Jack Leahy would roll out for the Bureau, and Jack's a mordant piece of work with a weird take on Mr. Hoover."

Joan rubbed his temples. She kneaded a bulging vein flat.

"It's going to take months."

"It's all about creating the levels of subtext. We have to layer in misinformation at the start."

"Incoherence will inspire a more rigorous scrutiny."

"And a greater degree of paranoia and a more desperate mass desire to make it all fit."

Joan said, "That precipitating event. Have you thought about it?"

Dwight cracked his knuckles. "I've gone ahead. The Bureau has a Records Center in Media, Pennsylvania. There's 10,000 surveillance files stored there. It's an easy black-bagger."

Joan smiled. "A publicized B&E?"

"Yes, a pre-announcement. Hopefully, it creates a public expression of outrage and becomes a primer on file work that will serve to make our event that much more accessible."

"The more people go to the files, the more they'll see and won't see. They won't really know what they're looking for, so they'll study harder and the process will fracture and attenuate."

Dwight stretched. His neck hurt. He'd slept curled into Joan.

"Karen."

Dwight said, "Yes. She's taking the team in."

Joan pulled her hair back. "Well, she's very good."

"Yes."

"You cannot tell her what we're doing."

"I know that."

"There's two sets of ethics at work here."

"I know."

Joan lit a cigarette. Dwight studied her face. More stress lines. More gray hair than dark now.

"Who redacted your file?"

"I'm not telling you."

"Tell me how things have gone wrong for you. Tell me how you got through it and how you got it up for all this."

"I'm not telling you."

Dwight cracked his thumbs. "You knew Tommy Narduno. He was killed at the Grapevine Tavern."

Joan stared at him. "Yes, he was. I'm sure that you and your colleagues killed him, just as he was sure that you ran the King operation."

Dwight stared back. "Tell me how he knew."

"He saw you in Memphis two days before. He knew what you were to Mr. Hoover. He saw you distributing envelopes to some

Memphis cops.”

Dwight blinked. Smitty’s Bar-B-Q. A cop spits tobacco juice, a cop fans C-notes, a cop wolfs burnt ends.

“What else?”

“Karen said you were in bad shape that whole spring.”

“The ‘Freedom School.’ You and Karen go back.”

Joan leaned into him. He was sweating. His robe was full wet.

“Karen and I go back further than you know.”

“And you manipulated her in order to meet me.”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because I just knew.”

“That’s not an answer.”

“Because I sensed a shared agenda. Because I thought you might help me kill Mr. Hoover.”

Dwight stared at her. She touched his leg. Wayne smiled from somewhere. *Look, Ma. No fear.*

Joan said, “We came up with the same idea independently. I’ve wanted to kill him since I was a child, and I won’t tell you why.”

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/16/70. Extract from the privately held journal of Karen Sifakis.

Los Angeles,
December 16, 1970

Of course, I'm going to do it. I'll entrust the job to my closest and most prudent comrades; no one will be hurt in the performance of the act. Dwight has gotten me a schematic drawing of the Records Center and has convinced me that the building will be unguarded. The alarm system is outmoded and the building itself is fairly secluded. Bill K., Saul M. and Anna B.-W. have agreed to take part. Dwight calls it a "feat of explication, in and of itself." Of course he's being disingenuous; of course, he knows that an opportunity to fully expose the FBI's illegal surveillance practices is too great for me to resist. He's set the date of March 8. The Muhammad Ali–Joe Frazier boxing match takes place that night. Dwight thinks the local cops will be popping into taverns to listen to it on the radio and watch it on bootleg TV, so their powers of concentration and will to proactively seek out unusual occurrences will be diverted.

My comrades are committedly non-violent. I cannot say that wholeheartedly about Dwight. He suffered a nervous collapse in the wake of the black-militant madness and feels complicit. I see it in his ever-more-tender regard for my children. Should I reveal a certain secret there? Two children died in the course of that drug deal. That particular shock seems to drive him. I see him doing what I do. I compartmentalize my children and work assiduously to assure their safety as I comport myself with considerable recklessness in the world. I exemplify hubris in a manner that Dwight does not; his recklessness is traumatically defined, while mine is cloaked in spiritual trappings and may even be considered a puerile lifestyle choice.

Ella is almost two now. She carries the stuffed animals that Dwight bought her everywhere she goes. Like Dina, she now knows that she has two part-time fathers and has hit the jackpot in the delighted dad department. When they're older, they'll ask me to explain it. I'll say, "It was a wild time," and feel like a fool.

This is my first journal entry since last March. In it, I described my lunch with Joan and her gift of the beautiful emerald. I've been more and more frequently recalling our conversation of that day. Joan spoke of dreams as an interconnected state of consciousness, a virus that passes between like-minded people who cannot concede their like-mindedness for fear of the forfeiture of self. It made sense to me, although the mystical aspects seemed very un-Joan. Many strange and strangely surreal things make sense these days, because "It's a wild time." In that regard, both Joan and I are Dwight's dream guides. I attempt to bring him the dream of peace and I am jealous that Joan may have brought him the dream of a fiery conversion of thought.

And thought to Dwight always results in action.

My husband left town four days ago. Dwight has been coming over on alternating nights. I'm sure he's sleeping with Joan on the nights we're not together. And he's calling up to talk politics at least once a day. He tries to sound utilitarian, but idealistic perceptions keep creeping in.

I've been noticing binocular glint at all hours, coming from a high summit on Baxter Street. I back-tailed it to a small bungalow and snuck in. I recognized the clothing in the closet. It was Dwight's and Joan's, of course.

I noticed document-forging tools on a table and boxes full of chemicals and paper. I pray that my dreams of peace may intersect with their dreams and keep them from creating more harm.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/18/70. Extract from the journal of Marshall E. Bowen.

Los Angeles,
December 18, 1970

I rousted a black street fool for vagrancy last week. He had misdemeanor warrants in the system and possessed no visible means of support. I was about to arrest him, when he screwed his face up in recognition. He smiled and stated quite flatly: "You The Man."

He was right: I *am* The Man. I am a highly decorated ranking officer on LAPD; I am, according to *Ebony* magazine, “an icon of the new black masculinity,” and “odds-on for chief of police one day.” Political office should not be ruled out, nor should a career in television journalism. I am a magazine cover boy; *Ebony* and *Jet,* with *Sepia* soon to follow. I am permitted to be magnanimous, given the new bounty of my life. So I told that street fool, “You’re right, brother. I *am* The Man,” and cut him loose.

I’m working the Hollywood Division Detective Bureau. I drive a nightwatch K-car and coordinate felony-level investigations at their inception. I get awed looks and resentful looks from criminals of all stripes and awed and resentful looks from my brother officers. I’m twenty-six years old, with three years on LAPD. I’m a sergeant working a prestigious detective-division assignment. I’m the heroic black man who went undercover and broke the backs of two vicious, dope-dealing black-militant groups who were really *anti*-black at their core. I am no longer a downscale brother slumming for cosmetic effect. I’ve moved from a dingy crib in Watts to a nice house in Baldwin Hills. Allow me to say it again: I am most assuredly THE MAN.

I cashed in on the black-militant zeitgeist, the biggest and the best. The black-nationalist movement is in disarray. It’s a nationwide cavalcade of indictments, trials, convictions and sundry legal hassles, the result of years of police infiltration and inter-group squabbles. Eldridge Cleaver is hiding in Algeria. The Panthers and US have exploded behind petty turf wars, general ineptitude and native fractiousness. The BTA and MMLF are kaput. My testimony put my dope-smoking, booze-guzzling, whore-chasing comrades in prison. Wayne Tedrow sought death by grandiose gesture and found it in Haiti. Mr. Holly had a nervous breakdown. I’m *feared* in the ghetto now. I’m a known snitch, a celebrated turncoat and a hard-charging cop.

“You The Man.” Yes, I certainly am.

I’ve been hanging out at Tiger Kab. The new owner is a man named Fred Otash. “Freddy O.” is ex-LAPD, an ex–private eye, a mobbed-up soldier of fortune and a magnet for unsubstantiated rumors. Freddy pulls shakedowns, Freddy dopes racehorses, Freddy was in on the MLK and RFK hits. I believe none of it and all of it. I’m *The Man.* I’ve got the recent verifiable history and much more current cachet.

Sonny Liston remains a Tiger Kab regular. We spend time together. He loves authority and loves it that I was a fink the entire time that he's known me. Sonny has quite a bad heroin habit and misses his friend Wayne very much. He speaks wistfully of Wayne; I often commiserate with him, for I cared for Wayne, as well. Sonny knows that I knew Wayne at Tiger Kab; Sonny does not know that we were collusive partners. I miss my conversations with Wayne more than anything. Our dream states meshed for a few sweet moments, and we tried to decipher what it all meant.

I don't miss Mr. Holly. We haven't spoken since that last time before the "Blastout." He knows the sanitized version of events that day, and that I've profited from them. He doesn't want to see me, nor do I want to see him. Mr. Holly reminds me of the football coach I had a crush on at Dorsey High. I feared him and craved his respect and affection. I entered an arc of self-recognition and outgrew him over time. Mr. Holly, adieu. You taught me things. Thank you for the ride.

I exercise the Bent discreetly and only well out of town. Ventura and Santa Barbara are cool for that. I roust fags on Selma Avenue and Hollywood Boulevard, and carry weighted sap gloves for the task. I have a rule: any fag who lisps or swishes too persistently in my presence receives a beating.

I'm a cop. I attract a range of enmity in my white cop brothers. It doesn't matter. I'm tight with the only white cop who counts.

Scotty asked me if the dead children got to me. I said, "Not much." We'll never truly trust each other, but we like each other just fine. We've pooled our heist information and have agreed: we must find Reginald Hazzard. I called Mary Beth Hazzard in Las Vegas yesterday. I laid on my noble black man charm, cited my friendship with Wayne Tedrow and explained that I knew about Wayne's search for her missing son. I cited my LAPD connections and volunteered my help. Did Wayne keep a file on the matter? Did he discuss the case with her?

Mrs. Hazzard was polite. No, they did not discuss Reginald's disappearance. She threw out the file after Wayne's death. She didn't read it. She didn't want to know.

I called Scotty. We wrote the file avenue off. I checked Vegas hospital records and learned Reginald Hazzard's blood type. Yes, it was AB-. Yes, it matched the escaped robber's blood.

Scotty ran a nationwide records check on Reginald and learned nothing. We agreed: he might be dead or he might have left the country. Scotty is running a passport check now.

We've scheduled a second strategy meet. Scotty told me the prophetic last words of a cocktail-lounge heister he shotgunned in 1963. The man stuck up the Silver Star Bar on Oakwood and Western. Scotty shot him in the back going in. The man had a very few moments to live. He said, "Scotty, you The Man."

That makes two of us.

91

(Los Angeles, 12/19/70)

Customs kicked loose.

Rejected passport app. #1189, 3/14/64.

It's two and a half weeks post-heist. Reggie's in New Orleans. He applies for a passport, under his own name. He's got bogus ID and gets nixed. The New Orleans office: *known* to be lax. The ID: forged, for sure.

Scotty put the phone down. The squadroom was quiet. His cubicle was clutter-free. He took two drags off a cigarette and stubbed it out. He started brain-jamming.

Reggie's the linchpin. Reggie tries to split the country. He gets rebuffed in New Orleans. Did he try again? Did he *get* the passport and split successfully?

Jomo Clarkson, *baaaad* Negro. Jomo's fed dope on Dr. Fred Hiltz. You heist that racist mofo. You *scare* him per 2/64.

Jomo said a "cutout" fed him the dope. "Cutout": pure intelligencese. Jomo died abruptly, but try all this:

A *woman* prompted the fake Marsh Bowen. She told him to snitch Jomo. A *woman* phone-ratted Marsh as a queer. Dwight Holly observed his first Jomo grilling. The word *woman* quasi-torqued him.

Scotty lit another cigarette and took two more hits. His brain jam accelerated.

Junkie Monkey said, “I smells pig. I sees me a giant pork roast on two feet. Why dat porcine motherfucker wearing dat funny little tie?”

The loafing brothers chortled. Scotty doffed his hat and bowed. Sonny Liston froze, snorting. The dispatch table was all powdered up.

Fred O. plugged switchboard calls. Scotty pointed him out back. They worked Central nightwatch in ’52. Freddy could carve a buck. Freddy had secret skills.

The lot needed a sweep-up. The discarded rubbers and malt-liquor cans offended him. Fred O. said, “Get my interest. It’s costing me money to talk to you.”

Scotty popped a Tums. “Fruit squeeze. There’s a homo I *do not* trust.”

Fred O. poked his ears with a Q-tip. “It’s an expensive proposition. You’ll need the bait, a bug man and a watchdog.”

“I can get you five grand.”

Fred O. pointed upward. Scotty said, “Ten.”

“Fifteen. Final call. Since we’re old-soldier buddies, I’ll get going on it and give you time to rouse the bread.”

Scotty said, “Okay.”

Fred O. said, “I worked a fruit squeeze with Pete Bondurant back in ’67. We put the boots to a civil-rights cat. It was Fed-adjunct. A guy named Dwight Holly financed it.”

Scotty rolled his eyes. “I know Holly. I don’t want him privy to this.”

“Fine by me.”

“Give me the personnel.”

“Pete and I had a homicide wedge on Sal Mineo. He got miffed at his pansy boyfriend and sliced him. Fags dig his action. We could use him again.”

Scotty chewed his Tums. “I’ve met Sal. If it’s male, he’ll fuck it. He was a movie star for six seconds. My mark might go for that.”

Freddy lit a cigarette. “Fred Turentine for bug man and Phil Irwin for watchdog. Fred T.’s the best in the West. Phil’s a damn good wheelman, and he's driving part-time for me."

Scotty shook his head. "Phil's an alky and a mud shark. Every gin joint and black girl he sees distracts his attention."

Freddy shrugged. "Okay, the Crutchfield kid. He knows Sal, via Clyde Duber. He's got balls in his own pervert way."

Scotty bummed a cigarette, took two hits and tossed it.

"All right, I'm in. There's three caveats at the start, though. One, this is an ace-in-the-hole gig for me. Two, I want to hold all the film and the snapshots. Three, I control the threat of exposure."

"Sure. I'm cool with that. It's your money, it's your call."

A Tiger kab peeled out. Wilt Chamberlain rode shotgun. The headliner smooshed his Afro.

"The mark's a cop. We've got to be very careful. He's not some silly faggot you can ride roughshod."

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"So Reggie files out of New Orleans and gets rejected. Let's assume he files out of other offices with better ID or fake-name ID and gets rejected or accepted then. Another run of phone calls won't cut it. We need to see the fucking reject files, because they've always got pictures. I've done some research. The most lax customs offices are Milwaukee, St. Pete and Lynn, Mass. Fucks with bum IDs or forged IDs hit those places first. You've got leave time accrued. You go there, you get badge-heavy, you check out the files."

Pipers on Western. The 4:00 p.m. clientele: ambulance fools slurping coffee.

Marsh said, I'll do it."

Scotty said, "Right on, brother."

"What about the Peoples' Bank? I'm thinking we could brace Lionel Thornton."

Scotty shook his head. "It's too dicey. One, he's up the ass of every L.A. politician worth half a shit. Two, you had a job there and learned nothing. Three, I put kid-cop plants in the bank in '66 and '67, and *they* learned nothing."

Marsh picked at his food. He was finicky. He *allllllllmost* vibed swish.

Scotty ketchup-doused his french fries. "Okay, it's '64. Dr.

Fred's looking to glom those emeralds. Now, it's '68, and Dr. Fred gets 211'd and offed. Now, it's '69. Jomo tells me that a 'cutout'—his fucking term—told him to warn Dr. Fred about February '64."

Marsh nodded. "Keep going."

"Okay, *you* snitch Jomo, but it's not really you. It's spring '64. The Fed gig is hopping and you're Dwight Holly's plant. Wayne Tedrow's *your* cutout, he's looking for Reggie, too bad Reggie's mama tossed his file, it's water under the bridge and I'm betting Wayne was stretched too thin work-wise to make much progress on the search front. It's the term *cutout* that keeps coming back to me. *It's stone intelligence-cop slang*. I'm thinking there's some kind of left-wing/right-wing/cop-confluence thing going on here."

Marsh nodded. Scotty said, "*Cherchez la femme.*" Marsh shrugged. Brother, what you mean?

"There was a *woman* whispering to the fake you. Big Dwight hinks when I mention it. Let's go to last March now. I get a tip that some Commie *woman* wants to unload three pounds of junk."

Marsh scrunched his face up. Marsh *smoooothed* his face out. Instant reversal. Brother, dat vibes wrong.

92

(Los Angeles, 12/20/70)

B*lak-O-Rama:* “the New Afrodesi-essence.”

Crutch skimmed the debut issue. Phil Irwin and Chick Weiss laid it on him. Phil dug the spade babes with wide-wing hair and crocheted bikinis. The lead piece ballyhooed Tiger Kab. It was “the hip hub of the New Black Masculinity.” It was a “social laboratory that shows that integration can work.”

Biz was slow. Crutch perched in a Tiger limo. His tiger tux had dandruff. The tiger seats had the mange. He had *baaaaad* eye strain. He’d read Wayne Tedrow’s file six times.

He stashed the file at his downtown pad. The new boxes engulfed the place. The read-throughs taught him this:

Wayne did not connect Reggie Hazzard to the armored-car heist. Wayne did not know that the heist linchpinned the whole thing. Wayne did not heist-connect Joan Rosen Klein. Wayne did not *fully* connect Laurent-Jean Jacqueau/Leander James Jackson. Wayne did not determine *which* tank-town jail Joan bailed Reggie out of. Wayne died before the “Black-Militant Blastout.” Wayne did not know that Scotty B. and Marsh B. were now partners.

Wayne did not make the heist connection at all.

Crutch skimmed *Blak-O-Rama*. Key clients offered quotes. Wilt Chamberlain said, "Finest rides in L.A., baby." Archie Bell said, "Tiger Kab sticks it to The Man." Allen Ginsberg said, "Tiger Kab is multiracial avant-garde."

Phil Irwin brodied into the lot. He kabbed Chick Weiss and a Cuban whore. Chick was wild-eyed off ludes. Buzz Duber brodied out of the lot. He kabbed Lenny Bernstein and a he-she mulatto.

It's the hip new hub. Moonlighting wheelmen and dexie-drenched coffee. Tiger Kab rocks round the clock.

Crutch de-limo'd and walked the lot. Lenny the B. checked out his basket. Chick and Phil popped ludes and went *aaaah*.

Chick said, " 'No-fault.' You heard it here first. It spells the death knell for you loafing cocksukers."

Phil said, "It's coming in. It's part and parcel to all this permissive hippie shit that's sweeping the country. You don't have to show cause for divorce no more."

Chick said, "That means shysters like me don't pay perverts like you to kick in doors and peep windows."

Phil said, "*Perverts*? That's the pot calling the kettle black." Chick shushed him. Lenny the B. popped a lude and went *aaaah*.

Crutch flipped them off and hopped into the hut. The Coon Cartel was up and at it. Milt C., Fred O., stray Panthers and cops. Sonny Liston, on a toot.

He held up the *Vegas Sun*. He quoted it *loud*.

"Ex-champ on skids. Former heavyweight kingpin residing in Brokesville. Numerous confidential sources have told this reporter that local resident Sonny Liston, onetime world heavyweight boss and fierce fistic fountainhead, may be filing for food stamps or looking for a Joe Louis–like casino-greeter job soon. His coin is rumored to be going, going, gone, the result of hellacious habits, and talk of a third fight with Muhammad Ali, should he survive his March 8 title tiff with Smokin' Joe Frazier, is considered by fight pros to be no more than a passing pipe dream."

Redd Foxx said, "Sounds true to me." Junkie Monkey said, "I turn your sweet ass *out*. You *never* be broke if you peddlin' that big black booty for *me*."

Sonny said, "This is fucking bullshit. I got fourteen G's in Kellogg's Rice Krispies stock and six G's in my pocket."

Freddy signaled Crutch. They walked into the can. Freddy bolted the door.

"How'd you like to work a fruit shake? I'll pay you two grand."

Crutch swooned. "Shit, yeah. I'll do it."

"We want Sal Mineo for the bait. You know him, so you recruit him. He gets three and a half and no right of refusal. Mention my name, which should quell any protests."

Crutch gulped. "Who's it for?"

"Scotty Bennett."

Crutch re-gulped. "Who's the mark?"

Freddy laughed. "That cop Marshall Bowen. Badass spade's a rump ranger."

• • •

Sonny geezed in the backseat. They were halfway to Vegas. Christmas was five days hence. The Tiger Krew wore Santa Claus caps.

Crutch took his off. It clashed with his tiger tux. Midnight evaporated—another deadhead.

Fruit shake. Trouble in paradise. It's got to be heist-derived.

Sonny untied his arm. "I gots the word on you, Peeper. You tattled Wayne's shit to Mary Beth. Santa's elves told me *alllllll* about it. That means I be watching you."

Crutch palpitated. A coyote ran across the road. He lost the wheel and almost plowed it.

The radio re-kicked. Mountains killed the signal forty miles back. Brenda Lee with "Jingle Bell Rock."

Crutch checked the rearview. His pulse topped two hundred. Sonny was smack-back. His dentures had slipped halfway out.

Yule songs consoled him to Stateline. Diversion therapy meets memory lane.

Christmas, '54. Granny Woodard's in from Ortonville, Minnesota. She strokes out in March. His mother splits in June.

Christmas, '62. Paul McEachern kicks his ass. Christmas, '66. He steals Dana Lund's boyfriend's car and cherry-bombs the gas tank.

Sonny stirred. What dat needle doin' dere? Crutch kept it zipped. Vegas loomed thirty miles up.

Sonny said, "I ain't broke and I ain't no charity case. *Vegas Sun* runs some jive piece and some anonymous fucking fool sends me a green-ass emerald in the mail. Wraps the fucking thing up in the fucking newspaper, so's I get the fucking point."

Body shot—Crutch went airless and double-visioned. The road dipped. He clipped a fence post. The moon did a hop, skip and jump.

Sonny gripped the door ledge. Crutch steadied the wheel. The moon halfway re-settled.

"Can I see the envelope and the emerald?"

"No, Peeper. You can't. You can get me to Vegas in one motherfucking piece and leave me the fuck alone."

Emeralds, fruit squeeze, the Coon Cartel connection. It is all one.

He dosed himself asleep in the Sands parking lot. He woke up and re-dosed with waffles and Bloody Marys. Redd Foxx sold Sonny four bags in L.A. Sonny geezed one bag in the limo. Sonny should be comatose as we speaks.

Crutch staked his crib out. The Tiger stretch drew riveted looks. The crib was upscale by colored standards. The neighborhood was half ofay.

Now or never.

He had a wiggle shim and his lock picks. Sonny's road-hog Buick was parked out front. The door knocker was a brass boxing glove.

Raise the dead. You don't want errors here.

Crutch banged the knocker, rang the bell and kicked the door. He got no response and re-did the sequence. The dead air intensified. He wiggle-shimmed the door and walked straight in.

Snores hit him. Sonny was gaga on a Naugahyde couch. He used a bungee cord as a tourniquet. The spike was loose in his fist.

"Champ on skids?" Yeah. The crib was over-soiled and under-furnished. The ceiling leaked sawdust and freon juice. Dog dishes collected it.

Quick toss—no fuckups here.

He pre-walked the pad. Living room, kitchen, two bedrooms. No bookshelves, no dressers, clothes paper-sacked. Hit the kitchen built-ins first.

He went through the trash. He found scorched TV-dinner tins and pint-vodka empties. He went through the kitchen drawers—eureka, that's it.

Plain white envelope, standard size, no return address. Sonny's name and address block-printed. L.A. postmark, the clipping inside, no greenass emerald.

Crutch grabbed the envelope by the edges. He dropped it in a plastic bag and put a scrawled envelope down in its place.

Sonny dog-yipped in his sleep.

Clyde wired him three grand, c/o the Dunes. He ran it up to five at the wheel. He had his Reggie Hazzard pic. He bought a Nevada-California road map. He called in sick at Tiger Kab. He tucked the Tiger stretch in a day garage so he wouldn't look like a geek.

He rented a Ford sedan. He dumped his tiger tux and bought a sport coat. He went out to grease shitkicker cops. Wayne should have done it at the get-go.

Tank towns. Border burgs and agri-dumps. Desert dots with six-, eight- and twelve-man PDs.

Rainbow Hill, Crescent Peak, Dyer, Daylight Peak. Woodford, Minden, Pahrump, Salisbury, Mid-Lockie. Fourteen towns with "Cal-Nev" in the mix.

He drove tank town to tank town. He flashed his photo attached to a C-note. He lubed redneck cops, straw-boss cops and wetback smuggling freaks. He stressed December '63. He described Joan. He mentioned the bail jump—may I check your records, please?

Some cops blew him off. Most cops took the cash. Some cops said they shitcanned their skip sheets. Most cops cited turnovers and plain stonewalled him.

He worked it for three days. He went through $3,400. He slept in cheap motels and had Joan dreams. He hit nine-tenths of the road-map towns. He worked his way back to L.A.

He hooked off I-15 at McKendrick. The PD was a Quonset hut upside a lettuce field. Jail trustees did stoop labor. The motor pool was four old Fords and sixteen horses. The lettuce pickers wore stenciled denims. The cops drove golf carts and quaffed brews.

Crutch parked beside a tethered roan. A sunburned cop walked up. He had malignant sores like Crutch Senior.

“Help you, young man?”

“I had a few questions, if you’d be so kind.”

The cop stuck his hand out. “Kindness costs money. Let’s not pretend that it don’t.”

Crutch threw him fifty. “A vag and gun-possession bust. December ’63. A black kid got popped and a white woman with dark, gray-streaked hair bailed him.”

The cop stuck his hand out. Crutch shook his head. The cop said, “I was there that day. Kindness ain’t for free.”

Crutch forked over two fifties. The cop snapped his fingers. Crutch re-forked two more.

The cop picked a nose scab. “Nigger boy and a Jew broad. Absconders. Don’t ask to see records, because there ain’t any. The kid left some Commie books and chemistry books in his cell, might still be in Property.”

Tools:

Print powders and brushes. Print-transparency tape. A magnifying glass and Joan Rosen Klein’s print card.

Targets:

Sonny Liston’s envelope. Magruder’s *Basic Chemistry*. Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*.

He worked at the Vivian. He set aside desk space and laid it all out. His big gooseneck lamp supplied light.

The book pages were porous. They wouldn’t sustain prints. The dust jackets were glossy and would. The envelope was slick and smooth-surfaced. The print-lift odds were good.

Crutch dipped a brush in red powder. The dust jackets were white and light beige.

He put on rubber gloves. He folded the books open with the jackets in place. He got near-flat planes: front covers, back covers, spines. He placed the envelope to one side.

Deep breath now.

He light-dusted the books and the envelope. He got smudges, swirls and smears. He added a second dust coat. He got two viable prints on the Commie book. He got two viable prints on the envelope.

Deep breath now.

He grabbed the magnifying glass. He studied the book prints and Joan's print card. One print looked good straight off.

Whorls, swirls and inversions. Comparison points: 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9—

Match.

Joan touched the Fanon book with her right-hand forefinger. It occurred 12/63 or before. The book was held by McKendrick PD since then.

Crutch studied the second book print. Do it—brain-stamp every bit.

He memorized it. He studied Joan's print card and ran the magnifying glass back and forth. No—no second print match.

He laid down the transparency tape. He lifted the unknown print clean. He reinforced it with a black plastic strip. The print showed in exact detail, white on black.

Deep breath—one to go.

He switched to the envelope. He studied the two prints. He memorized them. He re-studied Joan's print card. He squinted through the magnifying glass. No—no match.

He laid down two strips of transparency tape. He lifted the unknown prints clean. He reinforced them with black plastic strips. The prints showed in exact detail, white on black.

He laid the two envelope strips beside the one book strip. He ran the magnifying glass back and forth. One print strip was markedly different. One print strip matched perfectly.

That meant this:

Joan touched the Commie book in 1963. A second person touched the book then. The same person touched Sonny's envelope, late 1970.

It couldn't be the McKendrick cops. Wild guess: Reggie Hazzard.

Reggie had no rap sheet. That meant no print file extant. Reggie had a Nevada driver's license. The Nevada DMV did not require fingerprints.

The envelope was L.A.-postmarked. Was the emerald sent from there? Was it *sent* to L.A. to send?

It's not a *real* print make. It's all suppositional. There's still that second envelope print.

Deep breath now—more fucking work.

Christmas came and went. New Year's blurred by in rainstorms. Sonny Liston OD'd a week later. The Tiger Kab wake was a happening.

Redd Foxx and Milt C. performed. *Blak-O-Rama* gave it feature ink. Fred O. supplied booze. Chick Weiss supplied dope and island-bred hookers. The Duber boys showed up. The drivers formed a kab kortege and bombed through darktown. Panthers and pigs noshed "Q" in perfect peace. Lenny Bernstein quoted Krishnamurti. Scotty Bennett sparred with Jerry Quarry. They traded for real. It almost got ugly.

The fruit squeeze was on hold. Freddy wanted fifteen grand. Scotty tried to Jew him down to ten and got nowhere. Scotty was hustling the gelt. Freddy told Crutch not to brace Sassy Sal just yet.

He did divorce jobs for Clyde. He sent Mary Beth Hazzard queries: did Wayne leave more paperwork? He part-time Tiger-kabbed. He studied print cards every night at the downtown DMV.

Insomnia and eye strain. Vials of Nembutal and vats of Visine. Handcheck print cards. Compare them to the two plastic strips.

He kept a head tally. He lost count at ten thousand. He kept a card-per-night tally. He lost track on January 6.

He showed up late on the seventh. He bribed the night clerk, SOP. He brought his print strips, his magnifying glass and his Visine.

He opened a new box. He went through eleven no-gos. He hit print card #12. The swirls talked to him.

Deep breath now. The second envelope print. No, yes, no—maybe.

Points: 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9—up to 14—good measure.

Perfect matchup. *Fuck—a name he knew*.

Lionel Darius Thornton, male Negro. Born 12/18/19.

The Peoples' Bank dude. Lionel the Laundryman. The Coon Cartel *consigliere*.

93

(Los Angeles, 1/9/71)

Chez Marsh: cultured and nonmilitant.

He got in with tungsten bolt-tappers. Infrared shades induced night sight. Leave the lights off to de-saturate.

Baldwin Hills. A one-level ranch off Stocker. Black bourgeoisie. Tubular furnishings. A *cooooooool*-school aesthetic.

Dwight moseyed through. It was 9:49 p.m. Marsh had a keynotespeech engagement. GOP heavies dug him. He was up-by-his-bootstraps. Governor Reagan got him the gigs.

It's a first walk-through. Let's learn the spread.

Dwight snapped pictures. His Minox shot bright-light flashless. The fallback had a darkroom. Joan could develop film there.

Rauschenberg and Rothko in brushed-steel frames. A severe space, overall. A metal womb.

He tapped wall panels. He went through shelves and file drawers. He saw art books, tax records and blank stationery. Marsh was a paper-hoarder. He thought that. Joan called him a "clandestine diarist."

Dwight walked through the bedroom. The tube motif extended.

Marsh loved brushed metal. It was functional and harsh. It exuded male odor and excluded feminine scent. Marsh was all refined obduracy.

Marsh was the all-new malcontent assassin. This was his psychopath's lair. It was cold and prim. It must go to *horrifying* from there.

Dwight examined the nightstand drawers. He went through Marsh's address book and snapped every page. He saw first-name-only men listed. He saw numbers for the Klondike, the 4-Star, the Tradesman, the Spike. Marsh felt safe now. His ops pad was Actors Studio. This pad was fag reference–rich.

They needed plant spaces. Marsh, the queer pack rat with the chaste art-school taste. The house was a beautiful picture. Let's supply an eroding frame.

Plant fruit-bar matchbooks here. Plant sodomy pix there. Semen-streak the sheets pre–hit day. Hide shit-caked dildos in the bathroom.

The house would attract astounding scrutiny. The façade had to crumble slowly. The terror had to slowly accrete.

Dwight tapped wall panels. No telltale thunks perked yet. *Plant spaces*. Subversive lit and poli-sci porno. Joan's instinct: he keeps a diary, locate it, we'll pull it and insert ours pre-hit.

An Underwood electric. Typewriter paper stacked beside it.

Dwight rolled in a sheet and typed out all the letters, numbers and symbols. They looked naked eye–correct. He photo-snapped the keyboard and the strike pads. There might be strike-pad flaws. They would have to tool mark–duplicate them. Forensic teams would examine the machine. They had to create a sound verisimilitude.

He tapped more wall panels. He got no hollow sounds. It was a first prowl. He didn't trust his ears yet.

Hiding spots. The forensic teams would tear up the place. Marsh must be pungently revealed postmortem. He was wildly ingenious and resourceful. The pad should explode with late-breaking finds.

Plant paper here. Plant paper there. It's *his* life refracted. He hoards paper for Mr. Hoover. He looks for paper-plant slots on the job.

He was a month in. Mr. Hoover gave him a pay-level raise. The file section was all scandal skank. Most of it was L.A.-based. Marsh was an L.A. native. Every L.A. Office file would be combed for mention after his death.

He skimmed files and looked for data-insert points. It was operational subtext. You hide age-yellowed data. It implies an emerging political imbalance and closet-queer pathology. The FBI's file mania indicts Marshall Bowen. Non sequitur files are combed diligently. Mr. Hoover is postmortem-indicted. The file compilation is prissy tedium and officially sanctioned scatology. Moral horror and titillation will war in the public arena. Special Agent D. C. Holly will state what it all means.

He spent hours in the file-storage unit. Jack Leahy found it odd. He found Jack odd. Jack was always cracking wise about the old girl's health. Jack didn't know that she was still more lucid than not.

Files:

Joan disdained the Records Center raid in Pennsylvania. She thought it would exposit file mania too soon. She thought he was exploiting Karen. She was making a Quaker pacifist a death accessory.

They stopped discussing it. It just sat there, unsaid.

Dwight went through hall closets. He saw Marsh's pressed uniforms and a gun belt rolled up on a shelf.

Find some actors. Cop-dress one up. Grab a patrol car. Rig a Griffith Park backdrop. There's a fake Marsh in uniform. His head is averted. A handcuffed suspect is blowing him. Marsh has a gun to his head.

Age-fade the snapshot. Drop it in a frayed uniform. It's a forgotten knickknack.

Score some street uppers. Tuck them behind his underwear. Marsh is jacked-up on duty and cruising for sport.

Dwight walked out the back door. Marsh had a lovely view. The location was sweet. Marsh was twenty-six. He had a year to live, tops.

Room service brought New York steaks and a too-fat Bordeaux. He was drinking less. Joan was drinking more. Their sleep stints had reversed.

They ate in their robes. Fat rain drummed the windows. They burned a synthetic log in the fireplace.

Joan said, "I don't like the break-in. It's precipitous."

"You're worried about the convergence."

"Yes, I am."

"It's the one thing we can't force."

"They have to be voluntarily in the same place at the same time."

Dwight slouched in his chair. "The same *city*, with the perch pre-established. It should be in L.A. He's stayed at the Beverly Wilshire the last six times he's been here. He always requests a suite with a north-window view. You've got seven two- and three-story buildings directly across the street. Two have office-rental signs up. The other buildings are boutiques and restaurants. They have second- and third-floor storage rooms facing the hotel."

Joan lit a cigarette. "Keep going. Tell me what you're thinking."

"I'm thinking we should find a black kid about Marsh's age. A close resemblance is crucial. He should rent an office and we should decorate it. It's where he goes to fuck boys, use drugs and hoard guns. I'll steal semen tubes from a hospital. We'll lay in the fluids gradually. Marsh is cracking up. His drug use is escalating. I'll have the shooter skin-pop him full of coke on his way out. I'll show him how to boot toxins into his liver to approximate long-term drug abuse."

Joan blew a smoke ring. "You are so astonishingly gifted, comrade."

Dwight took her hands. "You're worried about Celia."

"I don't want to talk about it. She's always understood the risks."

"I could make a few phone calls."

"I don't want you to."

Dwight smiled. "When I connected you to Tommy Narduno, I thought you were coming after me."

Joan smiled. "I considered it. Tommy thought he could reveal the Grapevine aspect of your operation and create a media ruckus. He was always naïve that way. He was a muckraking journalist at heart. He was wearing a wire on the night you killed him."

Dwight trembled. Joan pointed to the wine. Dwight shook his head.

"What convinced you to pass on it?"

"Karen convinced me. She implied that you were ready. She quoted Goethe at one point. The phrase she used was ‘the fall upward.’ ”

Dwight opened a window. Hailstones brushed his face.

“Jomo and the thing with Marsh. What was your reasoning?”

A gust shook the panes. Joan turned her chair and let the wet hit her.

“There were your ends and my ends. They were both synchronous and inimical. I knew that Marsh had to be your plant. Your pathology showed itself in your choice. It was bold, grandiose and self-destructive. I spent time with Marsh and found him to be weak and almost fawningly self-serving. He cruised men when he thought I wasn’t looking, which was true actor’s faux pas, dramatically unsound and narcissistic. So, I called Scotty Bennett and revealed his inclination. So, I called Scotty again and mediated Marsh’s betrayal of Jomo Clarkson. It was a two-fold strategy. I wanted to put Marsh in jeopardy and force him into allegiance with the BTA. I considered Jomo to be evil, and I was fairly sure that Scotty wouldn’t be able to resist killing him.”

Wind tossed the tablecloth and dumped the Bordeaux. Dwight pulled Joan out of her chair.

Puckett, Mississippi. Six trailer parks and nine Klan kampgrounds.

Bob Relyea ran the Exalted Knights Klavern. He pandered to the local cops and snitched to ATF. He sold magic mushrooms and hate tracts. He robbed gas stations. Bob was ex–Tiger Krew. He pushed heroin in Saigon and worked with Wayne Tedrow. He shot Martin Luther King.

It was kool and klear. The kampground konsisted of a korrugated bunkhouse and a K-9 kennel. Four fucks stood around the shooting range. The targets were department-store dummies. They wore Eldridge Cleaver masks.

Bob saw the car pull up. Dwight braked and stopped short of the kampground. Bob jogged the rest of the way.

Dwight popped the passenger door and the glove box. A C-note roll rolled out. Bob caught it and tucked it under his sheet.

“And that’s just for talking?”

“That’s right.”

“Don’t tell me. If I shoot somebody, there’s lots more where that came from."

Dwight said, "That's right."

Bob said, "Wooo, boy."

Dwight lit a cigarette. "You get fifty thousand. You take out the target and the fall guy right there. It's two easy shots. That part doesn't worry me at all. It's bringing the two together. I'll abduct the fall guy and position him if I have to, but I'd rather not."

Bob picked his nose. "The target guy's a big deal?"

Dwight winked. Bob said, "Talk's gonna bubble."

"I want it to. There's a subtext here."

"Who's the target?"

Dwight laughed. "You'll know him when you see him."

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/6/71. Extract from the privately held journal of Karen Sifakis.

Los Angeles,
February 6, 1971

I'm going through with it, whatever it abuts, facilitates or foreshadows on Joan's and Dwight's end. I am taking the risk of implementing violence. I feel loyal to Joan and am grateful to her for the change she has created in Dwight. We have traveled a long road together. It would not be bragging for me to assert that my pacifism has mitigated Joan's violent actions over the years. It is surely true that her brash being has sporadically brought me closer to God and non-violent confrontation. She is *of* me and I am *of* her and Dwight is *of* both of us. There is deep alchemy in where we connect and where we diverge. I continue to trust in our dialogue as much as I fear potential outcomes. My horrible fight with Dwight has forced me to admit the arrogance and speciousness at the core of my moral logic. The fire of his conversion has convinced me of the necessity of this risk.

Dwight now knows the length and breadth of my relationship with Joan, if not the specific details. Joan has laid hints, or has revealed the friendship in looks and asides that the brilliant and brilliantly paranoic Dwight has seized upon and brought to mental certainty. I have lied to Dwight by omission; I am now certain that Joan used me in order to get to him; now Dwight and Joan lie to me by withholding the details of their "Operation." I am fully culpable for the creation of the Dwight-Joan bond. I should have told Dwight that Joan has deployed fake identities and that they have cloaked much of her subversion. I should have told Dwight that Joan had planned a series of armed robberies back east. I should have told him that we were in Algeria together and that I held a prayer vigil for the French paratroopers that Joan and her comrades ambushed outside Béchar. I should have told him that I was part of the 6/14 invasion, in a non-violent planning role. I did not tell him these things, because I ghoulishly desired the conflagration of *Them*, because I wanted to unleash *Them* to fulfill some buried rage in *Me*, to inflict *Them* on the circumspect, ideologically compromised, radically chic and ever-so-careful world I live in with the unique fury I knew *They* would evolve.

Now I must live out my creator's role in this, play my supporting part, damn the vicissitudes of radical lifestyle as I pray for peace. I will break and enter, steal files, explicate the file-hoarding practices of an oppressive bureaucracy and hope that a much-anticipated boxing match between two gifted black fighters does not push my actions to back-page status. Irony: Dwight has called the break-in a "media event." The Records Center is in Media, Pennsylvania.

The fight with Dwight took place here in my home; Dina and Ella heard the flare-up and storming-out conclusion. It was an altercation I spawned from my own hubris. I overestimated my influence on Dwight and belittled Joan's influence. I was shrill, petty, jealous and philosophically unsound. Dwight came at me with a convert's and converted lover's fury. "You blow up things, you destroy symbols, you attack sympathetic portrayals of institutions forty fucking times removed," he said to me. "It allows you to feel smug while people suffer and die, you'll continue to do it until a chunk of exploding plaster from a Confederate monument puts out a black kid's eye, then you'll come back here and mope and pray and figure out something spectacular and Quaker-correct to do to put yourself back in the game you so dearly love, which is violent by its own basic nature."

And he was right.

And then he said, "And do not ever patronize Joan Rosen Klein, because you gave her to me."

And he was right. And so I will go forth with the task that he and Joan have assigned.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 2/21/71. Extract from the journal of Marshall E. Bowen.

En route to Boston,
2/21/71

I have been traveling and tracking potential leads since my last meeting with Scotty. My accumulated work-leave time has served as a cover. I have allegedly been on a cross-country auto trip. I have now laboriously hand-checked the passport acceptance files and reject files in New Orleans, St. Petersburg and Milwaukee, with Lynn, Massachusetts, upcoming. These are the cities that Scotty has deemed to be the most lax, permissive and incompetent in their passport-issuing practices. I have indulged the Bent in those cities and have reveled in the freedom of cavorting in nonlocal-celeb locales. Reginald Hazzard was not issued a passport in those cities and was not to be found in the reject files. His photograph—with and without medically addressed burn scars—was not attached to any of the thousands of application cards I have scanned.

So, I've been traveling and enjoying my time outside of L.A. I've been calling Scotty every few days, to report "no luck." I've been mindscaping, having very vivid dreams and pondering Scotty's "*Cherchez la femme*" remark a great deal.

It was a woman who ratted me out to Scotty. Dwight Holly reacted strangely when Scotty mentioned that fact to him. I'm becoming convinced that the woman is Joan Rosen Klein.

Joan cultivated me in late '68 and early '69. I was Dwight Holly's infiltrator, and I knew that Mr. Holly had an informant in play. Joan was very worldly and seemed overqualified for the low-rent black-militant world. She was very persistent in her approach of me, she may have been trying to seduce me, but her finely tuned predator's sense told her she'd have no luck there. It all felt mindscapingly right to me, up until the moment I ran into Junior Jefferson, shortly before I left on this trip.

Junior was gobbling chicken and waffles at Tommy Tucker's Playroom and was grousing about the fate of Tiger Kab. First, the Boys buy Black Cat Cab away from him and rename it after that faggoty animal. Then the late Wayne Tedrow embezzled all the Tiger Kab cash and the Boys sold the biz to Freddy Otash. So, Freddy fires him and 86's him from the premises. Now, Tiger Kab is the swingingest place on Planet Earth, they're showing the Ali-Frazier fight on closed-circuit TV—and he can't come.

We continued to commiserate. We talked up the "Blastout" with a certain wonderment. Junior said, "You was a fuckin' FBI pig-snitch the whole time." I admitted that was true. Junior said he was cool with it and very casually mentioned that he saw

Dwight Holly and that “Joan Jew-Commie babe” holding hands at a chink joint on Pico last week.

Cherchez la femme.

Lynn is a dingy shoe-factory town amid scores of dingy towns of the same size, and I found the customs office to be dingy as I walked in. A florid Irishman was working the desk. He almost shit when a well-dressed black man flashed an LAPD sergeant’s badge. I’ll credit him with wit, though. After I explained the purpose of my visit, he said, “You don’t look like Jack Webb, Sergeant,” and led me back to the file stacks.

It was the sixth card in the fourth box I went through. The photo was of Reginald Hazzard, with a severely burn-scarred face. The name beside it was ink-smudged and unreadable. The routing stamp on the back was crystal-clear.

Reginald was granted a visa to travel to Haiti, 6/11/64.

It came to me instantly: I will not tell Scotty this.

94

(Los Angeles, 3/1/71)

Scotty said, "I got the bread."

Fred O. said, "He robbed a liquor store. He's got expertise in that regard."

Fred Turentine said, "I hate fruit bugs. The audio tracks are unsavory."

Barone's Pizza on Ventura. A noted Valley grease spill. They had a private room. It featured photos of notable wops.

The beer was scald-your-teeth cold. The pizza was burn-your-mouth hot. Scotty tossed the envelope on the table. The Crutchfield kid had ants in his pants. He kept scratching his balls.

Scotty poured brews. "Let's talk about results. I second-mortgaged my house, so I'm not looking for big delays or fuckups."

Fred O. knife-shaved the foam off his glass. Suds flew on the floor.

"I ran a fruit shake for Dwight Holly a while back. He's a white man. We could use him for some added oomph."

Scotty said, "*No*. Dwight and I clashed on his Fed thing. I don't want him to know about this."

Fred T. shagged a slice with anchovies. *Ooooh*, that's hot.

"I'd just as soon avoid the guy. I heard he's working the file slot at the L.A. Office. He had some kind of crack-up."

Scotty sipped beer. "I want vivid shit. Snapshots, film, varied sex acts. The kid brings Sal in. Sal and Marsh get a hot thing going. I want fuck-and-suck action with different backdrops."

The kid said, "I'll locate Sal."

Fred T. said, "Hey, he speaks."

Fred O. said, "Draw your shades. The peeping panther is loose."

Scotty panther-growled and winked. Canned music hit the room. Dino warbled, "That's amore."

"*Vivid shit.* Remember, it's not a cash shakedown. It's a threat if push comes to shove."

The crew was good. The pizza was shitty. His beer-burned teeth still stung.

Marsh was back. His customs-office tour went poof. The passport angle was dead. Reggie Hazzard: back to square one.

The gas gauge hit empty. Scotty eased off the freeway. There's a Richfield with a phone booth up ahead.

He pulled in. He told the pump jockey full service. He dumped his chump change in the phone slots and called Marsh.

"Hello?"

"The Reggie bit is dead for now. I'm getting frustrated."

"That's two of us."

"I'm thinking we should brace Lionel Thornton."

"I don't disagree."

Scotty rubbed his teeth. "Be less equivocal. You won the fucking Medal of Valor. You're Ramar of the Jungle now."

Marsh laughed. "You're right. We should do it."

"When?"

"March 8. Thornton launders the Tiger Kab money. They're showing the Ali fight. Thornton will be there and take the money back to the bank."

Scotty said, "I dig it. We'll grab him en route."

95

(Los Angeles, 3/4/71)

Fruit loop:

He'd hit the Manhole, the Cockpit, the Anvil, the Tradesman, the Forge. It was Creeps-ville. Sicko Sids ogled his booty. Amyl-nitrate poppers, leather, bare chests in chain mail.

Sal was never home. Sal habituated homo hives and all-nite coffee shops. Pancake loop: the Pines, Arthur J.'s, Biff's Char-Broil.

Crutch drove back to the Klondike. It was Sal's home base. The barman cashed his residual checks. Sal got his regular schlong there. He was banging the owner, two busboys and the fry cook.

Crutch double-parked out front. Lounging fags swooned for his kab. Lenny Bernstein walked out with two sailors. Fags called sailors "sea food."

Lenny waved to Crutch. Crutch waved to Lenny. Crutch thought, It all started here.

Summer '68. Dr. Fred hires him. Find me Gretchen Farr. His case is almost three years old. It might be breaking.

Fingerprints. Joan touched one of Reggie Hazzard's books. That's validated. A second person touched the book and Sonny's envelope. Good guess: Reggie H. A third person touched the envelope. Print confirmed: Lionel Thornton.

Question:

Does Reggie forward the emeralds to the black folks in need?

Answer:

Probably, yes.

Reggie survived the heist. Reggie had a portion of the cash and the emeralds. Reggie doesn't live in L.A. Reggie's elsewhere or Wayne would have found him. Reggie's secretive. L.A. postmarks might attract heat. Reggie's long gone.

A *biiiiiig* lead—now cluster-fucked by the fruit squeeze.

Crutch watched the door. Rock Hudson walked out with Arthur-Arlene Johannsson. Arthur-Arlene pushed Dilaudid and maryjane brownies. Chick Weiss did all his divorces. The *wives* paid alimony. You married a *drag queen*? Fuck you.

Rock waved to Crutch. Crutch waved to Rock. A Tiger kab pulled up. Phil Irwin drove. Chick Weiss rode shotgun. Arthur-Arlene pushed Rock in the back. His pressed-hair wig was askew.

Crutch twirled his red flag. Joan was gone. He couldn't find her. He got a she's-in-L.A. gestalt anyway. L.A. was L.A. L.A. was the Joan Zone. He tailed Dwight Holly twice. Dwight might be Joan's lover. Dwight was tail-savvy and lost him.

There's Sal. He's got Natalie Wood and a butch bitch in tow. Natalie was a show lez. She muff-munched at Hollywood parties. Clyde rescued her from a dyke slave den, circa '60.

Crutch whistled. Sal caught it and walked over. Natalie and the dom dyke French-kissed. Two limp-wristed lover boys clapped.

Sal leaned in the kab. "Don't tell me. Clyde's got a rope job."

"Not exactly."

"No girls. We tried that once, remember?"

Crutch said, "Freddy Otash. I know he's got something on you, so it's not like you can say no."

Sal sighed. His spit curl wiggled. Crutch popped the door. Sal got in and lit a Kool menthol. Crutch smelled the hash/mint blend.

He pulled around the corner and parked. Sal said, "I hope he's hung."

"You get three and a half."

Sal toked his quasi-joint down to the filter. Sal did his doe-eyed thing.

"We've been here before. I've parked with lots of men, but with you it wasn't the least romantic."

Crutch said, "Don't start with me."

"Believe me, I'm not."

"The mark's a guy named Marshall Bowen. He's that cop who's half-assed famous."

Sal groaned. "Another spade. With Freddy, it's always a spade. I like dark meat, but not as a steady diet."

Crutch popped the glove box and pulled out his flask. Sal grabbed it and snatched a quick hit.

"So, sweetie. Did you ever find the erstwhile Gretchen Farr?"

Crutch re-grabbed the flask. "No. Close, but no cigar."

Sal grabbed it back. He took a hit and re-passed it. Crutch took a hit. Sal re-grabbed it and held it in his lap.

"I haven't seen her, either. Gretchie was strictly fly-by-night, in her own unique way."

Crutch grabbed the flask. Sal relinquished it, reluctant.

"You told me everything you knew, right?"

"Well …"

"Come on, man."

"Well …"

Crutch balled his fists. Sal went *oooo, I'm scared.* Crutch drained the flask. Sal rubbed his thumbs and forefingers. Crutch laid out a yard. Sal held up two fingers. Crutch re-dipped his wallet and re-laid him.

Sal cranked the seat back and stared at the headliner. He snuggled and futzed with his spit curl.

"Well … you know our Gretchie's MO. She fucked strings of men, borrowed bread from them and disappeared. Are we up-to-date now, sweetie?"

Crutch nodded. "Yeah. You introduced her to guys, but you can't remember their names. She was always careful not to bang guys in the same social circle, so they couldn't compare notes."

Sal nodded. "That's *riiiiiiight.*"

Crutch punched his seat bolster. Sal jiggled. It made him *laaaaaugh.*

"You don't *scaaaare* me, Crutchy. And, frankly, I don't believe all those silly rumors about those Communists you killed."

A headache freight-trained him. Behind the eyes, a beaut. He dug out his aspirin and dry-popped three. *Keep it zipped/do not* *fucking blow this*.

Sal kicked off his sandals and toe-curled the dash. Miss Froufrou had big, smelly feet.

"So, right before we talked about her the first time, I saw Gretchie at a party. I didn't tell you about it because it all seemed so unreal."

"And?"

"Well … Gretchie said there was this chick named María, also known as 'Tattoo.' She bought her way out of the 'book of the dead,' she betrayed "the Cause," but she 'did penance.' Believe me, none of it made the *leeeeast* bit of sense to *this* girl, until Gretchie told me that María was coming to L.A., she was 'wild,' could I set her up with some movie-biz guys? That was more my language, so I said I'd ask around, which I did *not* do, because Gretchie owed me money for some referrals I gave her, but she never paid me, so where was the incentive if she was just going to rip me off again? *Soooo*, it all just went away. Gretchie never mentioned María again, but she *sort of* paid me for the referrals. She gave me this teeny little emerald and this herb stash. It was Haitian dope, and it was a bummer."

Deep breath now.

Sal said, "*Really*, dear heart. Have you ever heard such fantasia?"

96

(Los Angeles, 3/6/71)

Print work and ink work. Get the details.

Homo napkin notes. Fake diary excerpts. Print transfers to fag porn novels and propaganda texts.

The fallback was quiet. Dwight worked alone. He bar-hopped last night. He hit the Jaguar, the Tradesman and the Falcon's Lair. He laid down dollar bills and snatched the napkins. The fruits smelled fuzz en masse.

He printed herky-jerky. "Love your hair!"

"Anytime, sweet" and a phone-number smudge. "I saw you on TV!!!! Can't believe I saw you here!"

Varied print styles. Crinkly paper. Pocket debris, lifestyle minutae.

"The Hard and the Hung" by Lance Greekman. "AmeriKKKan Gestapo" by Richard T. Saltzman, Ph.D. "Blow the Man Down" and "Semen Demon." Dissertations on Mr. Hoover's war on Dr. King.

Dwight applied print strips. Marsh mock-touched book covers. Dwight wrote queer crush notes. Smeared phone numbers, napkin rips, words half-obscured. Marsh: “I’ve got 9 inches. How about you?”

He kept his desk neat. He worked with rubber gloves. He plastic-bagged his piecework. He brainstormed a fake diary entry.

Think it through. Type it in. You’ve got an identical Underwood. Remember: tool-gouge the small *C* and *J*.

You’ll be there at the convergence. Joan will insert the fake diary.

That means more B&E runs. He might have a real diary.

Dwight cleared desk space. He bagged the books and notes and got out a scratch pad. The Silver Hill photo was up against a lamp. Karen, Dina, Ella. Their address/phone number. “If this man is lost, please return him.”

He covered it with a handkerchief. He mock-Marsh-ascribed:

“My process of radicalization truly began when I realized I could not control my perceptions. Physical symptoms manifested in direct proportion to my attempts to keep them suppressed. It was as if a virus had swept through me. It was significantly more discomfiting than the panic I endured when I became fully aware of my homosexuality a decade ago. A self-hatred took hold then and a politically defined and outwardly directed hatred has taken hold now. My hatred has lingered on immediate targets—the brutish Scotty Bennett, the imperviously exploitative Agent Holly and my racist alma mater, the LAPD—and it has gradually and inexorably ascended to an ineluctable plane. I cannot halt the spread of the virus until I dose myself with the anti-toxin that only JEH’s death will create.”

He read it through again. He covered the desk with a drop cloth and walked out to the terrace.

Clouds top-framed Silver Lake. A haze covered Karen’s house. Their fight rescrolled. It scared Dina. Ella seemed to study it. He kicked around a notion. Ella knew things that he didn’t. Ella got them from Joan.

Shit stirs in the *spiritus mundi*. Karen tells Joan about him. Comrade Tommy’s in Memphis hit day. Karen read his dreams and held him through his nightmares. *Joan just understood*.

A squirrel perched on the terrace ledge. Dwight soft-lobbed him acorns. He shagged them with his paws and skedaddled.

The door gizmo buzzed. Dwight looked through the side window. Eleanora hopped on the porch.

Dwight ran through the front room and opened the door. Ella stormed his legs. He scooped her up with one arm. Ella play-bit his neck.

Karen leaned on a porch post. Dwight said, “You could have broken in.”

“I was saving it for Media.”

“Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it.”

Ella wriggled. Dwight put her down. She ran into the front room.

“How’d you find it?”

Karen stepped inside. “I tracked the binocular glint. I thought, I detect a voyeuristic presence, and applied spatial geometry.”

Dwight laughed. Karen draped an arm around him. He walked her away from the desk. Ella peeked in a cardboard box. Dwight grabbed her and whisked her off.

She broke free and pointed. She made a *What*? face.

Dwight said, “They’re throwdown guns, sweetie.”

Karen dropped her purse and kicked it. Dwight said, “Do you love me?” Karen said, “Yes, goddamn you.”

Inserts:

He worked in the file section. He kept loose inside. He was nonchalant and late-night-clandestine.

He pulled Vice files and tattle files. He found field interrogation cards and inked in Marsh Bowen’s name. Marsh at three fruit-bar sweeps, Marsh at a drag ball, Marsh at a hate-whitey bash.

He walked to the subversive-file bank. He dropped in a chemically aged file.

Joan created it. He supplied the perspective. A now-dead agent wrote the file, late ’66. Marsh worked for Clyde Duber then. Marsh worked against Clyde for the Black Muslims. The agent had suspicions. Clyde never knew.

He cashed in stock. He secured Bob Relyea’s down payment. He needed Mr. Hoover’s travel schedule. Tomorrow a.m.: he flies to Media.

He skimmed the snitch-file index. Names sideswiped him. Bill Buckley snitched neocons. Chuck Heston snitched potheads. Sal Mineo snitched rump rascals wholesale. Salacious Sal: botched bait for the Bayard Rustin squeeze.

He found more F.I. cards. He blue-inked one in cursive. He block-printed two in black. Busy bee Marsh—'66 and '67. Fistfights at the Klondike. Lewd shit with hippie boys at Griffith Park love-ins.

Dwight packed up his briefcase and walked out. He saw Jack Leahy at the elevator.

"Don't tell me. You can't sleep, and you're starting to dig on the files."

Dwight smiled. "You're the only Fed on earth who has ever said the words *dig on.*"

"True enough, but you haven't answered my question."

Dwight pushed the down button. "Dirt files are addictive. Ask you-know-who about that."

Jack laughed. "I haven't spoken to the old girl in a dog's age. I outrank you, but she talks to you much more than to me."

"You're being impolitic, Jack. You're forgetting who you're talking about and who you're talking to."

The doors opened. They stepped inside. The doors jerked and shut.

"Is there a spot tail on me, Jack? As long as we're being insubordinate, I'd appreciate an answer."

Jack shook his head. "Dwight 'the Enforcer' Holly. Buzzed on coffee and cigarettes for the twenty years I've known him, and finally starting to see things."

He walked into the drop-front. The phone was ringing, persistent. He dumped his briefcase and fumble-caught the receiver in the dark.

Karen said, "Nobody dies," and hung up.

97

(Los Angeles, 3/8/71)

Ali! Ali! Ali!

The Congo coursed with it. Bootleg broadcasts beamed from liquor stores and pool halls. They got the full TV monte. Sidewalk gangs got portable-radio squelch. Jugs and joints circulated. The groups ran ten to one hundred. Central Avenue was cooncaphony.

Cathode light bounced out windows. Pirate hookups: Mosque 19, Sultan Sam's, Cedric's Hair Process. The scene ran inside and outside. Parking-lot action boomed. Stacked-heel pimps laid down round-by-round bets.

Scotty cruised by Tiger Kab. The hut was SRO and boob tube–bright. The Krew was rapt. Fred O., Milt C., Peeper Crutchfield. Countless southside Zulus. Junkie Monkey in boxing mitts, atop the TV set.

And Lionel D. Thornton—with a zippered cash sack.

Scotty idled by the lot. Marsh got in. He wore crepe-soled shoes and gloves. Scotty grabbed his gloves off the dashboard. They eyeballed the hut.

The radio fluttered. The signal cut in and out. Marsh tweaked the dial. Static and verdict—Frazier gets the nod.

Marsh turned it off. Scotty said, “He’s got a piece.”

“I know. Small revolver, back waistband.”

“He’ll walk. I don’t see his car.”

“It’s six blocks to the bank.”

Scotty passed his flask. Marsh took a nip.

“I lost a hundred.”

Scotty said, “I’ll underwrite you. I won three bills.”

“You bet against Ali?”

“I was at Saipan. Draft dodgers fuck with my head.”

Marsh passed the flask. “Give me the count. Jap infantry or 211 guys. Who gets the nod?”

Scotty took a nip. “I torched an ammunition bunker. I fried a hundred Japs in their sleep.”

“Did you win a medal?”

“The Navy Cross. Nice, but not as big as your deal.”

Marsh smiled. The flask moved contrapuntal. Lionel Thornton walked out.

He hoofed it southbound. The bank doors were side-street/south-facing. Scotty said, “We’ll take him there.”

Hut action exploded. Fuckers screamed, “Frazier.” Fuckers screamed, “Ali.” Two brothers traded blows. Fred O. broke it up. The TV set toppled. Junkie Monkey hit the deck.

Scotty hauled westbound and cut south on Stanford. He cut east on 63rd Street and parked across the street.

Marsh said, “That storage door just west of the main doors. He won’t see us there.”

Scotty put his gloves on. “He’s four minutes out.”

Marsh gulped. He was racy and a tad damp. Scotty sensed his pulse.

“How’s your wig, brother?”

“It be tight, brother. *You knows I wants this.*”

Scotty winked. “Let’s go, then.”

They walked across the street. The door well concealed them. Marsh checked his watch. Scotty heard footsteps.

Closer now. Louder. There’s his breath, there’s his shadow, there’s the jangle of keys.

There’s the key in the lock, there’s the click, there’s the door sweep.

They jumped.

They smothered him. They dog-piled him. They pushed him inside. The cash sack flew. Scotty hand-muzzled him. Marsh grabbed his piece. Thornton kicked and wriggled. Marsh caught a shoe in the face.

Thornton tried to bite. His mouth couldn't move. Marsh rabbit-punched him. Thornton lost all breath. Marsh grabbed the keys and inside-locked the doors. Thornton kept thrashing. Scotty swooped him over his head and threw him twenty feet.

The cocksucker flew. His whole body cartwheeled. His feet brushed the ceiling. He landed by the front teller's cage.

He screamed. Marsh pulled a standing lamp over and tossed light on his face.

The floor was dark. The lamp was a funnel spotlight. You got Thornton's face, that's it.

He screamed. Scotty stepped on his neck. He stopped screaming. His mouth was bloody. The crash landing took out his front teeth.

Scotty nodded. Marsh said, "We're interested in the ink- and non-ink-stained cash and the emeralds. You know what we mean. We think you have information that might assist us."

Thornton thrashed. Scotty stepped down harder. Thornton stopped thrashing. Scotty pulled out his reserve flask. Pastor Bennett's confession brew: bourbon and Valium chips.

Marsh palmed it. Marsh grabbed Thornton's hair and jerked. Thornton's mouth went wide. Marsh poured him a jolt. Thornton almost tossed it. Marsh stepped on his face and kept it in.

Scotty nodded. Marsh withdrew his foot. Thornton gulped air. Thornton said, "No."

Marsh slapped him. Thornton bit at his hand. Scotty grabbed his hair and pulled him behind the teller's cage. Marsh unfurled the cord and carried the lamp over.

The teller's cage was dark. The lamp was a funnel spotlight. Marsh framed Thornton's face. The cage row got backlit.

Scotty said, "You can't win here. You can make this easy or hard."

Thornton dribbled blood on the floor. A bug skittered over. Marsh stepped on it. Thornton sucked in a breath.

"White-trash cracker. Uncle Tom piece of shit."

Scotty nodded. Marsh pulled a sap and whipped Thornton's knees. Thornton bit through his bottom lip and stifled a scream.

Marsh said, "Sergeant Bennett and I have pooled our information on this matter. We *know* that you've laundered at least a small portion of the heist money. Would you care to comment?"

Thornton spat blood and loose tissue. Thornton crawled to a wall post and propped himself up. Thornton shook his head—no, ixnay, fuck you.

Scotty pulled the lamp closer. Marsh tilted it for more glare. Thornton was mouth flap–bloody. Marsh grabbed the flask and poured in a jolt.

Thornton tried to retch. Scotty grabbed his hair and pulled his head back. Marsh relubed him.

Gargles now—blood, bile and blend. It started to seep out. Marsh mouth-clamped Thornton and forced it back in.

He shook his head—*nyet, nein, no*. Marsh removed his mouth clamp and sap-whipped his legs.

"Sergeant Bennett and I have developed separate information that we've decided to share. We were both there that morning. It would be foolish for us not to cooperate."

Thornton shook his head. A loose tooth flew. Scotty unclamped his hair. Thornton proned out and back-swallowed blood. He shook his head—*nein, nyet, nyet*.

Marsh said, "I had a neighbor. He was an elderly black physician. He attended to a heist-gang member who had been left for dead by the leader of the gang. The doctor received twenty thousand dollars in ink-stained cash as a payment for his services. He gave the money to you and told you to leak it prudently out to the community. The surviving gang member recovered and has not been seen since. Would you care to comment?"

Thornton wide-eyed it. His brain pulse went visible. Fucking brilliant Marsh. Scotty thought, *Oh, you kid*.

The cage was hot. Scotty was wet. Marsh was wet. Scotty saw a wall unit and hit the switch.

Cold air whooshed. Thornton sucked it up. Marsh sapped his knees. Thornton screamed. The wall-unit rattle blended in.

Marsh raised the sap. Scotty shook his head. Thornton blinked lamp glare out of his eyes. Scotty moved and provided shade. Marsh squatted by Thornton and sap-tickled his chin.

"Sergeant Bennett and I believe that the surviving gang member was a young chemist named Reginald Hazzard. I have a theory that I have not yet shared with Sergeant Bennett. I think that perhaps young Hazzard found a way to partially or fully obscure the ink markings and that perhaps *you*—a seasoned money launderer—ended up with the laundry list for *all* of the cash. Would you care to comment?"

Thornton *wiiiiiiide*-eyed it. It was truth serum–valid. Marsh, you genius cocksucker. *The gang leader braced the Laundryman independently*.

Thornton pissed his pants and shit his pants. Fey Marsh stood up and went *phew*.

Scotty winked. The wall-unit blew ice chips. A cockroach dipsey-doodled through the blood spill.

Marsh said, "Reginald Hazzard."

Thornton sobbed and spit blood.

Marsh said, "Who sends the emeralds to the black people in need?"

Thornton rolled out of the lamplight. Marsh kicked him in the back. Scotty shook his head. Marsh went *What now*? Scotty pulled his penlight and wide-dialed the beam.

Marsh pulled out a roll of duct tape and sealed Thornton's mouth. Scotty cuffed his right wrist to a wall pipe. It went telepathic: let's toss the place.

They worked with two penlights and Thornton's master keys. They sifted, dug, pored, overturned and upended. They *triple*-tossed the place.

They opened every office drawer and cash drawer.

They checked every cupboard.

They scanned every shelf.

They pulled up every rug.

They cut open every padded chair.

They went through every closet.

They broke every light fixture.

They scanned every surface, plane and cubbyhole for vault-combo stats.

They did it once, twice, three times. They mini-checked all the fucked-up debris.

Marsh said, "There's nothing here."

Scotty said, "Yes, there is."

"Man, he's not that stupid. He's got a spot at his house or a stash hole someplace."

Scotty shook his head. "He's complacent. He launders out of here. He's got to have records he can tap into. He's got a vault somewhere."

Marsh ran back to Thornton. He *was* Mr. Clean and the Laundryman. *Now* he's all shit, blood and piss.

Marsh slipped on sap gloves. Twelve ounces per—lead palm and finger strips.

Marsh said, "You tell me now." Marsh flexed his hands. Marsh punched Mr. Clean in the back.

Thornton sobbed and curled up tight. Scotty ran over and eased Marsh back.

"No. Don't. Be calm now, brother. We hit the walls first."

Marsh went limp. Yes, brother—okay—yes, yes.

Scotty let him go. Marsh crashed into the wall unit. Scotty ran to the storage closet and grabbed a crowbar. Marsh goofy-grinned.

They banged the walls.

They ripped and gouged the walls.

They took turns swinging.

They threw sweat. They got drenched. They took turns to catch their breath and kept swinging.

They hit Thornton's office walls and the break-room walls and the teller's cage walls. They hit the bank proper walls and kept swinging. They ripped out baseboard and timber. They ate plaster dust and chips. They heard Thornton moaning and coughing. They swung and ripped and traded shots and weaved on their feet.

They hit the rear hallway. Scotty leaned back, dead limp. Marsh took the first swing. A wall chunk fell out. A cloth ledger dropped in his hands.

It was plastic-wrapped and tape-sealed. It was twelve-by-eight and paper-packed. Scotty tore the cover off. Marsh scanned the first page. It was all bisecting columns and numbers. Dates on the far left. The first one: 4/64.

They wiped their eyes. They turned the pages. They saw dates, figures and number-coded designations. They saw the day-by-day/held-at-bank sums. Final figure: seven mil plus.

Marsh said, "The heist cash was seed money. He launders it and lends it. They started with two, and it stands at seven now. That's what they've got here. It's an on-the-premises tally."

Scotty said, "There's a vault."

The ledger was leather-lined. Marsh knife-slashed the edges and reached in and around. A piece of paper slid out.

Schematic drawing. A black box. Numbers noting size and placement. A tuck-away. Maybe here, maybe not. A secret vault. *Not the main vault.*

They walked back to Thornton. He was sitting up. His blood was sticky-thick and crusting. He made a little tooth pile. Plaster dust covered him. His sweat made it mud.

Scotty said, "Where's the vault?"

Thornton shook his head.

Marsh held up the drawing. "The vault. The combination."

Thornton said, "No."

Scotty kicked him in the leg. Thornton flipped him the bird. Marsh bent the finger back and broke it. Thornton mouth-muzzled a scream.

Marsh grabbed the crowbar and ran to the hallway. Scotty checked his watch—three hours inside. Thornton spit a tooth in his lap. Scotty winked at him.

"I'm always amazed when bright guys like you go the hard way. We should all be celebrating now."

Thornton said, "Fuck your mother. White-trash, peckerwood scum."

Wall knocks started up. Marsh swung hard and fast. More dust and mortar shards blew. More mulch fallout settled.

Marsh kept it up. Thornton spat dust-thick blood. Scotty sat down and shut his eyes. He was all-over ache.

The banging stopped. Marsh went, "*Wooooooooo!*" He ran over. Scotty kept his eyes shut. The lids weighed ten thousand pounds apiece.

"It's a clip file, brother. It goes back to spring '64. You've got the clips on the beneficiaries and a list of their names and addresses. It's History, man. There's the families of some guys who got lynched in Mississippi, the church girls from Birmingham, this woman who lost her son in the Watts riot."

Scotty opened his eyes. Marsh was cradling paper scrolls and news clips. Thornton gritted his mouth. His teeth were gone. It was a gum-to-gum grit.

Marsh dropped the paper load. It fell short of a blood spill. The chilled air fluttered it.

"Hundreds, partner. Police-shooting victims, sick people, protesters shot down south. You've got Mary Beth Hazzard and her dead husband all the way up to 'Ex-Champ Liston on Skids.' "

Scotty love-tapped the Laundryman. "Tell me the combination."

Thornton shook his head.

Scotty said, "Are the emeralds on the premises?"

Thornton said, "Fuck you." Marsh grabbed his right thumb and broke it.

THAT'S a scream—ten seconds long.

Scotty said, "Tell me how well you know Reginald Hazzard." Thornton said, "Fuck you." Marsh grabbed his right pinkie and broke it.

THAT'S a shriek—twelve seconds long.

Scotty said, "Are the emeralds on the premises? Do you send them out? Are they sent to you to send? Is Reginald overseas somewhere? Who else is involved in all of this?"

Thornton said, "Fuck you."

Marsh grabbed his left thumb and broke it.

Screams and shrieks. Earsplitting shit—a full minute.

Scotty pulled out his confession flask. Marsh grabbed Thornton's hair and jerked. Thornton opened up wide. Thornton sucked like he wanted it. His eyes said *Refill.*

Sure, Boss. It's on the house.

Thornton retched and kept it down. Scotty checked his watch. One minute to let it *seeeeeep*.

Thornton flushed and flexed his hands. Thornton kneaded fucked-up body kinks. Liftoff at forty-three seconds.

"I don't know where Reggie is. I get mail drops from overseas. They're sent under mail cover from different locations. I forward the emeralds, but they come to me through a cutout."

"*Cutout"—woooo—mother dog!*

Scotty said, "Name the 'cutout.' "

Thornton coughed. "I don't know her name."

Scotty said, "*Her*?"

Marsh said, "Describe her."

Thornton dry-coughed. "White, in her forties, glasses. Dark hair with gray patches."

Marsh did a double take. Scotty read it. *Brother, I knows you.*

Thornton wet-coughed. Blood dripped down his chin.

"Where's the vault?"

"I'm not telling you."

"Give me the combination?"

"I'm not going to."

"Put this thing together for us. We've got time to listen."

"I'm not going to."

"Explain the business code in the ledger."

"I'm not going to."

Marsh flexed his sap gloves. Scotty jerked his arms back.

"Go in his office and get his address book. It's in the top right-hand drawer."

Thornton leaned back and trembled. Marsh ran off, scanning his penlight. Scotty checked Thornton's handcuffs. His wrists were ratchet-gouged deep.

Marsh ran back. Scotty skimmed the book name by name. They read by penlight. Marsh hovered over him. "A" to "K"—two women. Janice Altschuler, April Kostritch. A tweaker at "L"—SAC John Leahy/FBI #48770.

Two more women: Helen Rugert and Sharon Zielinski. Cutouts? Basic vibe: *no*.

Scotty tossed the book. Marsh said, "Altschuler, Kostritch, Rugert, Zielinski."

Thornton hack-coughed. "Those women are city council staffers and lawyers. I told you, I don't know the cutout's name."

Scotty cracked his knuckles. "Where do you call her?"

"I *don't*. She calls me."

Marsh picked the book up and thumbed through it. Scotty cracked his knuckles loud, upside Thornton's face.

"Why is Jack Leahy's name in your book?"

"We're friends. We play golf."

"Are you an FBI informant? Is 48770 your confidential Bureau number?"

"No, we play golf!"

Scotty slapped him. Thornton thrashed his head. Scotty wiped blood and snot on his pant leg.

"Are you a confidential Bureau informant?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever know or work with the late Dr. Fred Hiltz?"

"The fucking 'Hate King'? Why would I?"

Truth serum—I'll buy it.

"Who do you snitch to Jack?"

“Ghetto scum, man. Dope-pushers and Panther-type fools.”

Marsh dropped the address book. Scotty penlight-signaled him. Marsh signaled him back. They got each other’s eyes. They telepathized.

Scotty said, “Where’s the vault, Mr. Thornton?”

“I’m not telling you.”

Marsh said, “What haven’t you told us that you should have told us in the name of full disclosure?”

Thornton laughed. “Man, you are nothing but a nigger full of fourdollar words.”

Scotty said, “Please take us to the vault.”

“I’m not going to.”

Marsh said, “Where are the emeralds?”

“If I knew, I wouldn’t tell you.”

Scotty shrugged.

Marsh shrugged.

They penlight-drilled Thornton’s face. They got a big funnel target. Marsh pulled a throwdown piece and capped him.

98

(Los Angeles, 3/8/71)

Sassy Sal loved soul food. He dive-bombed the post-fight buffet and out-snarfed the brothers. He was reefer-ripped. He was libido-lashed. He wolfed chicken wings and grooved low-life maleness. Marsh Bowen was missing. Crutch wanted Sal to see him. Sal’s job: kickstart their vibe.

The party poked on. The re-hash ran sans pithy perception. Panther pedantry. Fractious Frazierites and mongoloid Muslims.

Fools milked the moment. The cover price included chow and a dope smorgasbord. Big Mama’s Kitchen catered. Fred O. supplied pharmaceuticals. On-site consumption raged. Geeks crawled into Tiger kabs and passed out.

Where’s Marsh?

Crutch yawned. He was nerve-numb. *His* re-hash ran rampant. Tattoo wants to meet movie men. She’s been de-hexed. The envelope prints: possibly Reggie Hazzard’s, for sure Lionel Thornton’s.

Sal noshed collard greens. Crutch yawned anew. He’d been reading. His new kick: chemistry and left-wing dialectic.

He was in his Reggie Hazzard head. He sent Mary Beth another file-request letter and got no answer. He was reading Reggie's books. He performed some simple experiments, per instructions. He liquefied two powders and blew up a trash can. He learned about United Fruit in Guatemala. He went with the narrative. Good guy/bad guy roles got reversed. He got eyestrain. He started seeing *RED*.

Marsh walked into the hut. He looked shivery-shaky. What's that trouser stain?

Sal noticed him. Sal made an ooo-la-la face. Marsh walked back to the can. Crutch tailed him. Marsh left the door cracked.

Marsh washed his hands. Dark smudges went light red and pink. He doused his shirt cuffs and wrung the fabric. Crutch smelled blood.

Marsh wiped his face. Marsh pulled out a pen and wrote on his left arm. Crutch squinted and caught it.

FBI/48770.

99

(Media, 3/8/71)

Resident Agency. A two-room records drop. One office in a four-story building.

Media was Snoresville. A trolley ran twelve miles to Philly. The front door was made for thin-head pry bars.

It's 11:49 p.m. The world's abuzz: Frazier takes Ali.

Dwight parked on a side street. He had a near-diagonal view. He saw the front door and the office windows.

Karen ran him through it yesterday. They discussed outcomes.

His take: Mr. Hoover will stonewall it. That meant newspaper leaks. Go to the *biiiiiiig* dailies. Include documents. Tweak some muckraking journos. Let it build on its own. Leak the file pages through cutouts. Invent a name for a lefty group. Claim the B&E under their flag.

Joan disagreed. Her take: we're robbing the big revelation. His take: this is the prelude and primer. The Media files are *bland*. They detail prosaic hassles and routine surveillance. The juicy shit is elsewhere. *Our* operation will reveal it. The post-Hoover FBI cannot stonewall it. Media will have exposited the term

COINTELPRO. Fed-speak will distort the truth. *I* will tell the world what it really means. The Bureau cannot regroup post-hit. Media will have created a file hue and cry. Obfuscation will not work post-hit. *I* will be found. *I* will break ranks. *I* will step forth to testify.

Dwight held up binoculars. A van entered his sight line.

Four people got out: two men, two women. They dressed like middle-aged squares. The women carried bulging purses stuffed with laundry bags. Karen wore a suburban-mom pantsuit.

They had his dupe key. They slow-walked to the front door and unlocked it. Karen pick-gouged the lock housing to simulate a B&E.

They shut the door. It stayed dark. Penlight bips reflected. Take the back stairs. Don't risk the lift.

Dwight checked his watch. It hit midnight. He watched the four windows. A half minute elapsed. Penlight beams strafed.

A car passed the building. Late-model Merc, dud mom and dad, the country club set. Pops ran the radio. Dwight heard "Ali."

The beams kept strafing. The windowpanes flickered. A black & white passed the building. Two fat cops yawned.

Dwight counted watch minutes. The second hand crawled. The windows stayed dark for a forty-eight-count. Okay, that's it.

He watched the lobby. There they are. The laundry bags are bulging. Go out the door. Get the van and take off.

The other three walked ahead. Karen stood on the sidewalk and faced him. He kissed his fingers and touched the windshield. Karen raised a clenched fist.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/12/71. Los Angeles *Herald Express* article.

SHOCK WAVES FROM SOUTHSIDE ROBBERY-MURDER

COMPLEX PORTRAIT OF VICTIM EMERGES FROM INVESTIGATION

Lionel D. Thornton, 51, the president of the Peoples' Bank of South Los Angeles, died a horrible death Monday night. Returning from a viewing of the Ali-Frazier boxing match at a popular local taxicab stand, he was waylaid outside the bank and forced inside. He was subsequently robbed of his cab-stand receipts, tortured and killed. Preliminary investigation by the Los Angeles Police Department has revealed that the robber-killer or killers went through the bank in a fit of rage, perhaps looking for a hidden vault or perhaps currency secreted by Mr. Thornton on the premises. Sadly, the crime may have derived from never-substantiated rumors pertaining to Mr. Thornton himself.

"I've got nothing but good things to say about Mr. Thornton," the lead investigator, Sergeant Robert S. Bennett, told reporters at a hastily called press conference Tuesday afternoon. "He's been a mainstay of the local black community for many years, as one can feel in the outpouring of grief over his death and in the number of glowing tributes we have heard since the news broke this morning."

Sergeant Bennett, 49, is overseeing six full-time detectives charged with solving the case and bringing the suspect or suspects to justice. "I personally believe Mr. Thornton to have been a blameless individual," he told reporters. "That stated, I believe that this crime stems from the long-held southside rumor that perhaps Mr. Thornton had organized-crime ties and was hoarding laundered money on the bank's premises. I do not believe the rumors. I believe that the crime stemmed from persistently held misinformation. The tragedy is that Mr. Thornton gave his life for $2,000 in cab receipts, and that the suspect or suspects killed him and decimated the bank interior in a search for something that was not there."

The investigation continues. Sergeant Bennett and his six-man team will spearhead the drive to apprehend the slayer or slayers of Lionel D. Thornton. A backup investigation will be fielded by the Los Angeles Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, supervised by Special-Agent-in-Charge John C. Leahy.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/12/71. Verbatim FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: “Recorded at the Director’s Request/Classified Confidential 1-A: Director’s Eyes Only.” Speaking: Director Hoover, Special Agent Dwight C. Holly.

DH: Good morning, Sir.

JEH: It is decidedly not.

DH: Sir?

JEH: The Resident Agency in Media, Pennsylvania, was burglarized Monday night. A great many files were stolen.

DH: Is it secured, Sir? And forgive my ignorance, but I don’t know where Media is.

JEH: It’s a two-man office space near Philadelphia. The file bank holds overflow from the New York, Boston and Philadelphia offices. The break-in occurred while local police officers were at Shakey’s Pizza Parlor, watching replays of the Cassius Clay–Smokin’ Joe Frazier Battle of the Apes.

DH: Sir, is it secure?

JEH: It is. The break-in was discovered by the agents themselves. They bypassed the Media PD and called the Philadelphia SAC. Media has not yet made the media.

DH: The files, Sir?

JEH: Bland, by your Los Angeles Office standards. Damning by the standards of addlepated civil libertarians. We lost adjunct surveillance files, tap files and COINTELPRO addendum sheets.

DH: It’s a shocking breach, Sir.

JEH: You are muddle-headed and swoony with emotion today, Dwight. Extended stays in sanitariums undermine strong people. They confuse their emotional states with the world.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: That’s better. The old “Enforcer.” Hard-edged and submissive.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Better yet.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I'm sure we're thinking along similar lines. Which lunatic fringe group will claim credit? Will they release the files? Which treasonous leftist rag will they release them to?

DH: How many agents are on it, Sir?

JEH: Forty-six, full-time. Of course, there are no witnesses and the thieves left no physical evidence.

DH: I'll query my informants, Sir.

JEH: Do that. Offer cash incentives and employ your generally intrusive methods with my full sanction.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I have sent out a general memo to all our field offices. The file sections are being security enhanced at this very moment.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Do not underestimate my resolve to forestall future break-ins. Do not underestimate the robust state of my health. My physician, Dr. Archie Bell, considers me to be an outstanding specimen.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: President Nixon is mentally ill. He refuses to inform me that he will reappoint me as director after his fait accompli reelection next year. I'm telling it like it is, Brother Dwight. Tricky Dick has asked me to black-bag the major Democratic candidates, which I have declined to do. I'm dragging my heels. Nixey boy is starting to sweat.

DH: I can dig it, Sir.

JEH: I'm sure you can. And your mental health? Have you regained your brusque grasp of life?

DH: In spades, Sir.

JEH: We lost some files, but we will prevail in the end. The files in my superbly secure basement would bring down the world.

DH: Right on, Sir.

JEH: Good day, Dwight.

DH: Good day, Sir.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/12/71. VERBATIM STAGE-1/CLOSED CONTACT/TOP-ACCESS ROUTING telephone call transcript. Closed file #48297. Speaking: President Richard M. Nixon and

Special Agent Dwight C. Holly, FBI.

RMN: Good evening, Dwight.
DH: Good evening, Mr. President.
RMN: It's been too long, my friend.
DH: I agree, Sir.
RMN: Are you keeping busy?
DH: I certainly am, Sir.
RMN: That's the ticket. Keep going until your hat floats.
DH: That is very sage advice, Sir.
RMN: It is. On that note, I would have to say that you-know-who must be very busy fretting over that break-in.
DH: He is, Sir. We were discussing it this morning. May I ask if he was the one who informed you?
RMN: The attorney general called me. He said, "The old girl may have her dick in the wringer."
DH: May I be blunt, Sir?
RMN: By all means, Dwight. Why mince words? I only call you when I've been belting a few and I've got a yen for bluntness.
DH: The burglars will or will not claim credit and may or may not leak the files. Parenthetically, I would add that Media, PA, is the Siberia of file holes and that all the data in the files pre-dates your administration.
RMN: I like that.
DH: I thought you might, Sir.
RMN: Here's my fear. I'm thinking what's-her-name may be infirm to the point where she'll deploy her files on me to keep her job.
DH: You'll be reelected next November, Sir. Inauguration Day 1973 sounds like a good time to cut your losses.
RMN: I like that.
DH: I thought you might, Sir. And please let me add that should the break-in be claimed and the files go out resultantly, it will make you-know-who quite circumspect about releasing files in any sort of derogatory manner.
RMN: Dwight, you my main man.
DH: Thank you, Sir.
RMN: Per next year's election, then. The old girl has been dragging her heels on a certain front. "Black-bag job." It's

got soul as a concept, don't you think?

DH: Frankly, Sir, it's ghetto. I appreciate it that way myself.

RMN: Dwight, you're a sketch. Let's talk about that again next time.

DH: Yes, Sir.

RMN: Anything I can help you with?

DH: One thing, Sir.

RMN: I'm listening.

DH: The L.A. Office is security-fitting the file section. The agents are afraid you-know-who will show up unannounced before it's finished. Will you get me his travel schedule from someone at Justice?

RMN: Sure, Dwight. On the QT, baby. Just like all our chats.

DH: Thank you, Mr. President.

RMN: Straight ahead, kid.

100

(Los Angeles, 3/13/71)

Scotty doodled.

His cubicle was three-wall-wrapped. He drew little emeralds. He added that Greek gender symbol. It meant "*Who's the Woman*?"

It was early. The night-watch shift left a mess. He connived the job. He sent his backup guys down dead-end roads. He oversaw the first forensic. They covered their tracks. The tech team got no leads off one walk-through. That meant one more to go.

They stole the Tiger Kab receipts and no more. Jack Leahy was running point, FBI-adjunct. Mr. Clean was a Fed snitch. Circle-jerk aspects overlapped.

That hidden vault. So far, unfound. The conduit. Brother Bowen, hanging in strong.

Scotty scanned a list. Fred O. telexed it. The Tiger Kab fight guests, alphabetized.

Milt C. and Fred T. Lenny Bernstein and Wilt Chamberlain. There's Sal Mineo—c/o Peeper Crutchfield. Sissy Sal was supposed to meet Macho Marsh that night.

Scotty skipped down the list. Aha: Marcus and Lavelle Bostitch.

They lived in Watts. They had a squatter's shack behind Mumar's Mosque #2. Junkies, heist guys, pedophiles. Nobel Peace Prize candidates.

The Bostitch boys bopped carless. They were legendary that way. They rode Schwinn Sting-Rays with gooseneck risers and banana seats.

The bikes were gone. The door was unlocked. The mosque Moors were loudly absorbed with Allah. Scotty walked right in.

He brought an evidence kit. He carried a pocketknife and three tiger-band cash rolls. He brought print cards, print tape, print powder and six plastic bags.

The pad stunk. It was junkie stench. Poor hygiene and suppuration. He walk-tossed the place. No guns on the premises. That meant nothing.

Two upholstered chairs, linoleum floor, one mattress. No bathroom, kitchen, cupboards or shelves.

Let's work.

Scotty slit the bottom of the mattress and tucked three cash rolls in. Scotty opened a plastic bag and sprinkled wall debris from the bank. Scotty pulled kinky hairs off a window ledge and bagged them.

He print-dusted the doorways and four touch-and-grab planes. He got two latent print sets. He card-compared them. The Bostitch boys, ten points apiece.

He tape-transferred them and secured them in print tubes. He bagged chair fibers and more hair. He bagged dirt and dust residue. He tucked a throwdown gun in a mattress slit.

The heathens were still chanting. Scotty walked by the mosque and shagged his car. A spade in a fez prayer-bowed to him. Scotty prayer-bowed him back.

Crime scene: LAPD/FBI. Yellow tape and point guards all around the bank.

Scotty badged the door guy. The guy let him in. The floors were drop-clothed. Sifting screens were stacked waist-high. Collected grit filled giant Baggies. The teller's cage reeked of Luminal. They were going for blood type. Maybe Thornton cut the killers as they cut him.

Wrong.

Scotty walked into Mr. Clean's office and inside-locked the door. He transferred the print strips to wall surfaces and shelves. He sprinkled hair, dirt and dust. He tucked a bloody C-note under a carpet pad.

He unlocked the door and walked outside. A lunch truck was feeding the point cops. Jack Leahy was lounging in a Fed sled.

Scotty walked over. "Let me guess. The Laundryman had some connections you need to be wary of. Mr. Hoover said take a look-see."

"In a nutshell, yes."

"It's a mess in there. SID got nothing on the first roll. I've ordered a second."

Jack said, "You were always thorough that way."

Scotty smiled. "Mr. Clean deserves the best. I won money on Frazier, so I'm feeling generous."

Jack polished his glasses. "Suspects?"

"Two male Negroes. They were at Tiger Kab for the fight. I think they followed Thornton here and jumped him."

A jalopy rolled down the street. Two brothers clench-fisted the fuzz.

Scotty laughed. "This is starting to remind me of the Fred Hiltz job."

Jack said, "I'll concede that."

"You took that one over, but I won't permit it here."

Jack said, "For now, I'll concede."

"Hiltz was a Bureau informant. I'm thinking Mr. Clean was, too."

Jack said, "No comment."

Mumar's Mosque was closed for the night. The two Schwinns were outside.

Jungle rides. Mock-croc saddlebags and mud flaps. Cheater slicks and aaa-ooo-gaaah horns.

Scotty looked in the window. Ah, brothers—how kind of you.

They were insensate. They were tourniquet-tied and nipping at Neptune. Spoons, spikes and white horse were out in plain view.

Scotty put on gloves and walked in. Marcus and Lavelle dozed in side-by-side chairs. Scotty pulled out two throwdowns. Marsh shot Mr. Clean with gun #1. Gun #2 was a dope-bust steal, circa

’62.

Peace, brothers.

Scotty placed gun #1 in Marcus’ right hand and laid his right forefinger on the trigger. He raised the gun and placed the barrel against Marcus’ right ear. He placed his own finger over the trigger and squeezed.

The shot was loud. Marcus pitched back, dead. The bullet stayed inside his head. Scotty let his gun arm drop. The gun fell close to his hand.

Scotty placed gun #2 in Lavelle’s right hand and laid his right forefinger on the trigger. He raised the gun and placed the barrel against Lavelle’s right ear. He placed his own finger over the trigger and squeezed.

The shot was loud. Lavelle pitched back, dead. The bullet stayed inside his head. Scotty let his gun arm drop. The gun fell close to his hand.

Nice powder burns. Empirically correct and textbook-consistent. Nice mouth trickle. Late seepage out through their eyes.

101

(Los Angeles, 3/14/71)

F*BI/48770.*

Blend in. You're a worker. You'll make it fly.

He studied the crew yesterday. They wore jumpsuits and lunchboxed it on the Fed Building lawn. Agents head-counted them in the a.m. The afternoon—nix. You're just another tool-belted geek.

Clyde said the Feds got B&E'd outside Philly. It mandated a file-room blitzkrieg. Clyde said five-digit numbers were snitch codes. Shit/fuck—let's try.

Crutch ate a salami hero. The crew guys ignored him. *It is all one*. Mr. Clean dies. Marsh with bloody hands. Scotty gets the case, junkie suicides, case closed.

A whistle blew. The crew stood up and stretched. Six guys plus him. Please, no head count.

Crutch blended in. Nobody said boo. He had a two-day growth and a painter's cap pulled low. He paint-smeared his face.

They entered the lobby. A Fed keyed the elevator. Crutch crouched between two fat Polacks. Nobody said shit.

The elevator stopped at floor 11. The Fed led them down a hallway. Dwight Holly walked by, with a clipboard. He didn't see shit.

The file section was off the main squadroom. It was airplane hangar–size.

The Fed waved bye-bye. The crew dispersed. They went around unscrewing shelf runners. Crutch moved six aisles down and mimicked them.

He worked slow. The other guys schlepped around panels. *Now I get it. Cover the file shelves. Gain access by lock and key*.

File shelves, file banks, file rows. Chained binder directories. “CBI.” Abbreviated Fed-speak: “Confidential bureau informants.”

The real workers *worked*. Panels and lock placements went up *faaaaast*. Crutch quick-walked. Look officious now. Tighten some screws.

He walked away from the other guys. He flipped open binders. He hit sixteen file rows. Abbreviations blurred. Number 17: “CBI/00001.”

He gulped. He looked up. He counted numbers and shelves to the ceiling. Motherfucker—the high-4 series was up at the top.

No shelf ladders here. You’ve got to shimmy up.

He climbed. The shelves wobbled. He fucking monkey-grabbed, hoisted and pulled. He reached the summit. The ceiling loomed.

He crawled. He ate dust, rubber bands and age-old dead bugs. He peeked over the side and saw file tabs. He got the 4–5’s, the 4–6’s, the 4–7’s. He stifled sneezes. The shelf shimmy-shimmied. He hit the 4–8’s. He saw the red tab for the *one*.

He plucked it.

He read the first page.

The Black Pride Laundryman—craven Fed snitch.

He snitched heist guys exclusively. He reported to the office boss, Jack Leahy. The relationship started back in ’63. The robbers’ names were inked over. *It’s all too close, it’s all as one*. Nothing’s tangential—it’s all right here in my fist.

The shelf wobbled. Crutch almost blew lunch. Robbery rat-outs. Dissemination and disinformation. It had to be.

Crutch sneezed. The shelf dipped. He almost dropped the file. A page fell out. He saw a black-inked paragraph. God spoke to him: Jack Leahy redacted Joan Rosen Klein.

102

(Los Angeles, Rural Mississippi, 3/15/71–11/18/71)

T*he Operation.*

They never named it. They didn't need to or want to. They never exchanged memoranda. There was no need to paper-reference their tasks. Acronyms were self-indulgent and satirical. They reeked of puerile Feds fucking the disenfranchised for kicks.

He worked his file-room job in a perfunctory manner and worked the Operation full-tilt. A Nixon aide sent him Mr. Hoover's travel list. The old girl was frail. She was traveling less. There were no planned L.A. trips this year.

His sleep was good. His nerves were sound. He chucked his booze and sleeping-pill stash. He imagined spot tails. He took evasive action. The tail cars disappeared. It was just residual fear.

The old girl trusted him. The Operation was secure. The fallback was inviolate. There was no surveillance.

He gave up the tail checks and drove place to place. He was post-crack-up now. He went task to task, un-paranoic. The Operation was incomprehensible. Nobody would suspect their goal or dispute the outcome. A paper avalanche would follow. Media preannounced it. The Event was inevitable.

Joan worked with him, task by task. She understood the level of detail required. They talked, they plotted, they built a giant paper maze. Joan refused to embellish her astonishing statement.

"*I've wanted to kill him since I was a child, and I won't tell you why.*"

He did not ask her again. He did not ask Karen. He ran more records checks on her known family members. Every file had been lost, misplaced, diverted, destroyed or stolen. He gave up. He wasn't supposed to know. She'd tell him or she wouldn't. He found himself less curious. The Operation was theirs. Its brutal scope was their bond.

The Media break-in worked. Karen and her team stayed anonymous. She leaked files through a series of cutouts. The *Washington Post* hit on March 24. The *New York Times* and *Village Voice* followed. A hue and cry escalated. Karen attributed the leaks to the "Citizen's Committee to Investigate the FBI." Joe Public got a gander at bland surveillance files. Jane Public got hip to COINTELPRO. Mr. Hoover made flabbergasted remarks. The prez was relieved. The files revealed only pre-Nixon chicanery.

It worked. Joan conceded the point. The event faded in and out of public play. Lefty journos kept teething on it. COINTELPRO was subtextually planted. The Event would etch the concept in blood.

Work was tense. The Operation sustained him ideologically. The Operation drove Joan in a wholly vindictive manner. She saw it as a vendetta. She would not reveal the origin of her journey of revenge. She was running haggard. Lionel Thornton's death disturbed her. He was a money washer at worst and a political bagman at best. Joan wouldn't talk about it. She always said what she always said: "I'm not going to."

Joan slept with him in hotel suites and worked with him at the fallback. She stayed in safe houses the nights he slept with Karen. She was worried about Celia. She was making phone calls and trying to find Celia in the D.R. She refused all his offers to help.

She'd sit by herself on the terrace. She'd sip tea and take herbal capsules. He stole a few and had them analyzed. They were Haitian fertility potions. Joan was almost forty-five and was trying to get pregnant. Her child, his child—it astounded him. There was no chance of conception. He knew it. He never said it. He never mentioned the potions. He watched her face recast itself as she tried to will her body. He reveled in the mad task and in her obduracy.

Karen's house was down a steep hillside. He trained his binoculars and watched the girls play. Karen debriefed him on Media and told him no more. They formally terminated their snitch relationship. He accepted it. Karen described Media as a debt to Joan and him and respectfully asserted that she had paid it. He said she had. She never returned to the fallback. He carried the picture of her with the girls. She sent him coded night messages. She'd sense him on the terrace and blast Beethoven string quartets. She'd leave a kitchen light on to pinpoint the sound.

The music invaded his dreams. Wayne replaced Dr. King. Crocodiles and rivers in Haiti. Explosions in the D.R. and gaunt black men with wings.

The Operation proceeded. Convergence remained the one obstacle. He flew to Mississippi four times. Bob Relyea remained committed. Bob was training. Bob would keep his mouth shut. Bob would not know the target until hit day.

He B&E'd Marsh Bowen's house six more times. He searched for a hidden diary and found none. Joan was certain that Marsh kept a candid daily journal. His actor's self-absorption fairly screamed it. Their fake diary was the deus ex machina of the Operation. They had to be certain that a real diary would not be found.

Marsh worked night-watch shifts and gave motivational speeches. Dwight black-bagged him and prowled. Trash runs, desk and drawer runs, fake-panel taps. Numerous art books and Haitian travel brochures. No diary yet.

The file section was now security-fitted. It was a post-Media precaution. It didn't matter. He was an FBI agent. He had file-shelf keys. Marsh Bowen was now deeply file-inserted. Sergeant Bowen was injudiciously promiscuous. Sergeant Bowen was politically unstable, going back years.

He spent late nights at the office. He chatted with the mordant Jack Leahy. Jack was fixed on the old girl in gasping decline. Media was a pisser. Jack considered it predictable. He was pension-secure and raucous by nature. He didn't seem to give a shit.

Dick Nixon got raucous behind two highballs. He called Dwight twice a month. Mr. Hoover called twice as much. Nixon was

Hoover-tweaked. Hoover was Nixon-tweaked. The prez got half-gassed and vented his frustration. Hoover raged for reassurance amid mental gaffes. Both men found the Enforcer consoling. He was the gunslinger, back from a crack-up.

His consolation? Marsh's diary.

He's creating a world of troubled men in extremis. He attributes his dreams to Marsh. Marsh's discourse is shaped by his discourse with Karen and Joan. Marsh's diary feels almost utopian. It rebuts the world that is and prophesies the world that could be. The entries cover the inception of BAAAAD BROTHER and run to the present. Marsh carries guilt for exploiting the "Black-Militant Blastout." He is determined to kill J. Edgar Hoover. His cop-actor's role won him glory and spawned death. His moral confusion counterpoints his tortured inner life and day-to-day indulgence of perversion.

He's added details from his own breakdown. Marsh's crack-up is his crack-up, hyper-radicalized. He's created a Holly-Bowen bond that did not exist. The two men discuss crack-up as a call to violent arms and the means to transcend self-serving pathology. He portrays public policy as private nightmare and vehicle of atonement. What it's like to have to *do* something so you won't go insane. His story and Marsh's story regained.

He's come to care for Marsh. He won't regret killing him.

103

(Los Angeles, 3/15/71–11/18/71)

Frustration. Fucking ceaseless, day by day.

The county grand jury nailed the Bostitch boys posthumous. Scotty breathed easy then. The brothers snuffed Mr. Clean and formed a suicide pact. Nice, but the heist gig was stalled flat.

Who's the Woman?

She was Thornton's emerald conduit and cutout. A *Woman* pervaded the Jomo offshoot. Marsh perks when he says *Woman*. Marsh comes on bifurcated. He's solid *and* untrustworthy.

Who's the Woman? His notion: she was in with OPERATION BAAAAD BROTHER. Dandy, but:

He can't brace Dwight Holly. Dwight is dead smart and subtle and would brace him right back. He can't brace Jack Leahy. Jack knows about BAAAAD BROTHER. Jack is dead smart and subtle and would brace him right back.

Frustration. Mind-bending, night after night.

They stole the emerald-disbursement clip file and the coded ledger. He tried to crack the code. He spent months on it. He thought about hiring a cryptographer. A pro might crack the code. He finally nixed the idea. The code guy would *know* then. One more loose end would unfurl.

Federal bank examiners tossed the Peoples' Bank. Scotty went with them and Jack Leahy. They tore the walls, floors and roof to shreds. They found the vault from Mr. Clean's drawing. Inside: a dope stash and $89,000.

Cat's-paw. Long-term stopgap. A hedge against possible exposure.

The money and remaining emeralds were stashed elsewhere. Thornton was smart. He didn't give up the vault. He played the "I don't know" card. He knew he was dead, anyway. Theory: the money and gems *were* in the vault. The heist guys knew it. They pulled them before the bank team went in.

Where's Reggie? *Who's the Woman*? Who'll disburse the emeralds with Mr. Clean dead?

Frustration. Night sweats. *Noooooo*, toss the sheets.

Marsh was frustrated. He's read all their files. He reads them and nit-picks the details. They're the world's greatest rogue cop salt-and-pepper team. They're years in and still short of the rainbow.

Frustration meant backlash. Scotty fucked his wife and girlfriends more and lived for stakeouts. He nailed two cholos outside a Boyle Heights bodega in May. Marsh loved it—at least they weren't black. He 86'd two neo-Nazis a week later. They robbed a black-owned market on Vermont. He blew one cracker's arm off. He pulled a black tot to safety. Marsh *loooooved* it. Marsh had clout with the NAACP. They might give him a medal.

Marsh let steam off *his* way. Do your own thing? Sure. Marsh vanished three times in eight months. He *said* he took car trips, to re-wire his head. It had to be fruit shit. Fruit junkets, fruit trysts, fruit excursions.

Frustration. You want *goooooood* booty? Let Pastor Bennett and Peeper Crutchfield pimp for you.

Sissy Sal crush-crawled all over Macho Marsh. Marsh won't jump his bones back. It was driving him *nuts*. Ditto Peeper, Fred T. and Fred O.

Frustration. *Who's the Woman*?

He's sniffed all over darktown. He's gotten nothing substantive. The description rings bells. Some geeks seem slightly spooked. One guy said she might be black militant–connected. He queried his Panther and US contacts and got shit. The BTA and MMLF geeks were all off in prison. He couldn’t brace them there. His visits would be noted. Stray talk would disperse.

The case was all *Her*. The woman with the gray-streaked hair was *Everything*.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 11/18/71. Extract from the privately held journal of Karen Sifakis.

Los Angeles,
November 18, 1971

Media was eight months ago. My comrades and I have remained unapprehended; no one has broken ranks; the FBI's illegal surveillance of political organizations, civic groups and protest-inclined individuals has been revealed in a flurry of news reportage, angry editorials and television and radio airtime. The revelation has come and gone. The concept of the COINTELPRO has been introduced to the American people, who have largely chosen to ignore it. The FBI's more draconian undercover operations were not mentioned in any of the released files. Dwight and Joan seemed pleased by this. I am quite capable of discerning Dwight's unspoken thoughts. He's happy that the FBI's specific war on the civil rights movement and black-militant groups has not been preemptively placed under the COINTELPRO umbrella.

I don't want to know what Joan and Dwight are planning; I suspect that I will learn of it in the public arena and am beginning to nurture a sense of it as a grandiosely large event. Media was a diversionary tactic and/or a setup. The ramifications of my one proactive salvo for Dwight and Joan will become apparent over time. I don't want to know. They know that and withhold their plans from me. I have prayed over this and have made a vow to continue to love them, regardless of any horror and chaos they may perpetrate.

We never meet as a group of three. Joan has resurfaced in my life; we meet for coffee or lunch two or three times a week, always here in Silver Lake or Echo Park. We discuss politics incessantly. Nixon, Vietnam, labor issues and the black-militant movement in decline can engross us for hours. Joan is gaunt and speaks in nervous, yet fully coherent bomb bursts of invective, with perceptive flows of political monologue mixed in. The lovely and defining gray patches in her hair are turning white and are streaking through the overall black. I'm afraid she's becoming paranoid—she says she's had an intermittent sense of being followed—and she often speaks of her lover/comrade Celia, out of touch in Haiti or the Dominican Republic. Celia once told Joan not to try to find her should she go missing. How many times has Joan told lovers or lover/comrades the same thing? Now, Joan is the one bereft, and it is her bond with Dwight Chalfont Holly that has taken her to this point where she cannot suppress grief.

Joan smokes constantly and drinks pots of self-brewed Haitian herb tea. She swallows Haitian herb capsules with all her meals, at precisely timed moments of the day. I asked her about it. She said she was trying to get pregnant. She wanted to have a child.

I didn't question her motive. I knew not to ask "Why?" Joan would simply say, "I'm not telling you." A woman her age cannot will a child. Joan doesn't seem to know how improbable it is. It continues to remain unspoken, albeit ineluctably true. She wants to have this child with Dwight.

Joan and I have always withheld from each other. We are individually compromised and duplicitous; we live in a mendacious world we have been morally charged to undermine and subvert. I could tell Joan the one thing I have never told Dwight. It might or might not hurt her. I know what it would do to Dwight. I fear the further breakdown that it might engender and the deep resolve it would certainly create.

DOCUMENT INSERT. 11/18/71. Extract from the journal of Marshall E. Bowen.

Baldwin Hills,
11/18/71

I thought the murder would hurt me more and would more hurtfully invade my body and mind. It hasn't. I assumed the role of murderer and behaved in the manner of a first-time killer determined to survive. It took a few days for my mental equilibrium to adjust. I mindscaped the possible upshot of my actions as Scotty took care of business. I met him for a series of late-night dinners at Ollie Hammond's. We boozed a bit and ate steak sandwiches. Scotty preached. In the end, you'll survive. You did what was necessary; you'll do it again if you have to. Feel better now?

I did then, I do now. I have the upper hand in the partnership. I know two things that Scotty doesn't: Reginald Hazzard and the emeralds are in Haiti. The woman is Joan Rosen Klein.

My life is a series of shadow plays and non sequiturs. I work the detective bureau at Hollywood Station. I go to movie-biz cocktail parties and enjoy the ambivalent responses that my presence there provokes. Three years ago, I was a policeman who had been beaten, ostracized and converted to the black-militant faith. *That* inspired film-biz cachet. Now, I am a policeman revealed to have been a planted informant; a policeman who extolls authoritarian values in prestigious speaking engagements and stands tall in LAPD dress blues. The film-biz folks would love to hate me as a sellout, but they can't. I won the game and I look too good.

I've been party-hopping and meeting people, including the very attractive actor Sal Mineo, who starred in several notable angry teenager films in the '50s. Sal has the Bent and has determined that I share it. Sal's tweaked on me; we run into each other; we talk on the phone, flirt, go out for coffee, but don't *do* it. Sal's very persistent, *and* he's a sweetheart, but my plate is too full to accommodate a part-time or full-time squeeze. It's funny. It's mindscape. I talk to Sal and hang up; Scotty calls five minutes later. Scotty took care of the Thornton/Bostitch brothers business with great panache and leaked a series of Intelligence Division files showing Mr. Clean to be, in fact, a mob stooge. Crusading journalists picked the story up; articles have appeared in Los Angeles and have gotten prominent nationwide ink. Scotty slanders our dead as we grasp for leads on our living. We've considered making an attempt to grab Thornton's Fed-snitch file, but Scotty thinks it's too risky. *I've* thought about trying for an independent look, but haven't figured out how.

I'm holding back Reggie in Haiti and *the Woman* as Joan. She's Dwight Holly's lover. That makes her unapproachable. Dwight Holly fucked with could blow our deal sky-high.

Mindscapes: feints, jabs, withholdings and deceptions.

I'm holding back from Scotty. I've made stabs at getting *full* customs files on Reginald Hazzard and have failed. Access requires legal warrants. My hold-backs are motivated by pure hubris and pure race hate. I learned some things from

OPERATION BAAAAAD BROTHER. Kudos to Mr. Holly: I did, in part, transcend my self-serving actor's pathology. I *did* become radicalized.

Scotty Bennett represents the white world out to level me with indifference. I cannot let that be. Scotty is the white oppressor, and I will not knuckle down to him. Scotty will not split the money and emeralds. I must get to them first and kill Scotty before he kills me.

I've made three trips to Haiti. I've synced them to Scotty's boozy weeklong fishing trips with his cop pals. Sal had been to Haiti on a film shoot and shared his knowledge of that wondrous and atavistic place. I flew to Port-au-Prince. I toured Haiti as a middle-class, French-fluent black man. I displayed my Reggie Hazzard photograph and asked questions. I learned nothing substantive and smelled the obvious fact that Reginald had to be here.

Haiti was primitive and seductive. I felt like I was regressing. It was an actor's immersion process. I visited voodoo-sect taverns and drank klerin alcohol. I dreamt of armless men with wings. I attended a few voodoo ceremonies and ate handfuls of herbs. I came out of trances and found myself dancing with wooden-masked men. I awoke from an herb trip and saw that I had blood on my hands. The man in bed beside me said I had eaten a fresh-killed chicken.

My shape-shifting personality served me well in Haiti. I pretended to be a French tourist, which assisted me in my queries on Reginald. Nobody knew Reginald. Many people told me tales of the late Wayne Tedrow and his brave pro-Haitian acts. What would poor Wayne say to that? People walk around with photographs of him attached to their necks. I heard the story of Wayne's death twenty or thirty times. The details varied. Several people told me that winged men came for him. Wayne and I shared the dream-state concept. He related it to chemistry. It was all about fated souls in flux.

I've been to Haiti three times. I'll be back. Reginald Hazzard has to be there.

104

(Los Angeles, 3/15/71–11/18/71)

P*eeper*.

It's his old name and his new name re-discovered. Guys used to call him Dipshit and *pariguayo*. He asked Clyde about it. Clyde said, "You've been around awhile. People in The Life know you. There's rumors about you. Some guys believe them, some guys don't. If a handle sticks to you, you've got to figure there's some truth in it."

He let it go. He didn't mention his JFK/MLK/RFK hit knowledge. He didn't mention his Commie kills or his case. He didn't mention his nightmares or the shit he saw and did on that island.

Peeper—sure, it's true. Peeper—it's okay for now.

He tail-jobbed for Clyde and Chick Weiss. He entrapped cheating spouses. He kicked in doors and peered in windows.

Peeper, sure. Reader, too. Part-time student—that fits.

He read some more chemistry books and left-wing-theory books. He mixed a sulfur paste and blew up a street sign at 1st and Oxford. He learned about the Wobblies and the *L.A. Times* bombing. He mixed fertilizer paste and blew up a VIVA VIETNAM sign.

There was a dream movement inside of him. It was like he was becoming Reggie and Wayne.

He studied. He learned. He part-time Tiger-kabbed. He drove to Vegas and tried to find the Haitian herb man. The guy was gone. He asked around and found some other herb guys. None of them knew Reggie. They all knew how to cook herbs and induce wild shit.

They said they'd teach him. He spent two weeks in Vegas and learned tricks. They taught him how to mix toad organs and blowfish toxins. They showed him how ferns and tree-frog livers caused heart attacks. He learned zombification. He mixed grand mal seizure potions. He learned some dope-trip formulas. He bought herbs, tubes and beakers. He learned some Kreole French.

He blew up a Nixon sign in East L.A. He popped herbs, drove around and peeped windows. He tried leapfrogging Dwight Holly again. Dwight lost him three times running. He lucked out on tail #4.

Dwight drove to a bungalow in Silver Lake. He perched and peeped. Dwight stayed inside for long stretches. Dwight took breaks and walked to a house down the street. A tall woman and two little girls lived there. A part-time hubby showed on occasion. He checked house-sale records and got the woman's name: Karen Sifakis.

He did more checking. He stiffed a call to Clyde. Clyde said Karen S. was a college prof and a Fed snitch. She was Big Dwight's lover. Big Dwight back-doored the hubby. It was going on five or six years.

He popped herbs and surveilled the bungalow. It was file-packed, like his pads. He thought about breaking in. He couldn't do it. The thought immobilized him. He'd learned all this new shit. It made him sit still and just *look*.

Then she was there.

She was older and more gray and even more fierce. Her glasses still fit crooked. Her slouchy walk was the same. He perched out of sight and watched her arrive for twenty days straight. He anticipated what she'd wear. Some days he saw her knife scar, some days he didn't. He still had the 6/14 scar on his back.

He watched her come and go. He started to get a sense of what it all meant.

He's the nexus of great and startling events. Nobody knows and nobody cares. He has linked a series of baffling crimes. Nobody knows and nobody cares. Scotty Bennett and Marsh Bowen killed Lionel Thornton and are chasing the armored-car swag. He knows this. Nobody else knows and nobody else cares.

Scotty distrusts Marsh. Scotty is levying a fruit squeeze. Sal cannot seduce Marsh. He knows this. Nobody else knows and nobody else cares.

Jack Leahy redacted Joan Rosen Klein's file. Nobody knows and nobody cares. He tailed Joan to Jack and surveilled three of their lunch dates. He hovered close by. He heard them discuss Celia, lost in the D.R. He heard the word *Haiti*. Reggie was living in Haiti. He sensed it quite strongly. Reggie sends out the emeralds. Nobody else knows and nobody else cares.

He's alone in his quests. Joan and Jack were in on the heist. He accepts that conclusion as fact. Marsh and Scotty know more and less than he does. He has worked this case for a very long time. It is all unprovable. His paper trials are logically inviolate and specious. It is all in his head.

The island terrifies him. He's afraid to go back. He might become that monster child again and lose everything he has.

He's a kid chemist and a kid Red now. He reads files and books and passes out in paper. His mother's file, Wayne's file, the file on "Tattoo." He gets lost in logical surety and inconsistency. Nobody knows how hard he works and nobody cares.

Tattoo wanted to meet film-biz men. He didn't know *who* she met. His suspect pool was large. Joan did not kill Tattoo. It consoled him. It allowed him to track her and live that much more with her.

Joan has lunch with Karen Sifakis. He observes them. He knows they share a love for Dwight Holly. They never mention Dwight. He's the third party hovering. Only peepers know how this works.

He follows Joan. He lives in the hope that she will lead him somewhere. It must justify all the time he has spent with her. She must do something or say something that will let him rest and give this all up.

I have been following you for three years, four months and twenty-nine days. I know you have a story you can only tell to me.

Part V

THROWDOWN GUN

November 18, 1971–March 26, 1972

105

(Puckett, 11/18/71)

"So, who'm I gonna kill?"

"You'll know him when you see him."

"You picked a date yet?"

"Next summer's our best shot. It has to happen in L.A."

"These political hits stir up lots of shit. Various patriotic groups get scrutinized pretty good."

The kampground was krowded. *Mi kasa es su kasa*. The Exalted Knights invited some kolleagues. Sleepover kamp. Klan klods, Cuban exiles, South American *fascistas*.

The bunkhouse was full. The gun range did brisk biz. The county sheriff dressed a four-point elk. His deputies built a cook pit.

Bob said, "You *want* the conspiracy talk. I'm just afraid my name'll pop up on the suspect list."

Dwight shook his head. "It won't. The fall guy's taking all the bows on this one. Nobody will want to look past him. We've built him from the ground up. The more you look, the more you'll want to keep looking."

Bob got sulky. He scooched low in his chair. His sheet brushed the dirt. It was mid-fall hot. Dusk came on. Exiles propped up arc lights. Some beat-on Klan frau prepped a buffet.

Dwight shut his eyes. It cued Bob to split. You're a loser assassin, please go away.

Bob meandered. Dwight opened his eyes. The kampsite was deklassé. His daddy's Klan was high-swank compared to this. Indiana, the '20s. Nativist gabfests and pyramid schemes. Eugenics readings. A ladies' string kwartet.

Full night hit. Bugs bombed the arc lights. The roast elk smelled good. The nuts hit the snack buffet for sour mash and Cheetos.

Dwight walked away from the party. The arc lights glowed wide and hot. The kampsite was dirt-floored. The Klan klowns mingled. Their sheets were soiled to the knees.

Joan worried him. She was haggard. She was chain-smoking and knocking back double scotches at night. She was vicious per Mr. Hoover. It was un-utilitarian and very un-Joan. She refused to explain her invective. She stonewalled his queries with looks and "I'm not telling you." It was frustrating. Their time frame was "insanely protracted." She knew Mr. Hoover was elderly and traveled far less. He had been somewhat discredited. He did fewer public gigs. Doctor's visits preempted his recent jaunts. The White House was telexing an updated schedule. Joan was worried about Celia. He stiffed an unscheduled call to the prez and requested help. Nixon rebuffed him. "You've been to that well, kid. You can't keep coming back."

Odd things moved her. Lionel Thornton's death stuck and held. She refused to say *why*. Scotty Bennett worked the case and closed the case, toot sweet. Scotty vaguely troubled him. Scotty had a tweaky friendship going with Marsh. Peeper Crutchfield reported it before the "Blastout." Marsh's life would be fine-tooth-combed postmortem. It begged a question: should they insert Scotty in the fake diary?

Flying bugs bombed the arc lights. The nuts ate, drank and ignored him. They knew he was FBI. Their bias was misdirected. They were punk punsters. FBI: Federal Bureau of *Integration.*

The diary defined the Operation. He worked on it while Joan or Karen slept. He utilized Marsh's verbal style and emphasized a political language he'd evolved in his head. He attributed his own childhood memories to Marsh. Alchemy and transposition. He was a sand-kicking Klan kid. Marsh was a sand-kicked-in-the-face black boy. He was building a sympathetic portrait. He was creating Marsh's non-existent crush on Agent Holly himself. It was distorting Marsh's work on OPERATION BAAAAAD BROTHER. He knew nothing of the Marsh-Scotty relationship. The diary must etch Scotty with verismo. The Scotty sections must withstand public scrutiny and Scotty's bellicose rebuttals. The theme should be authority. Marsh hates it ideologically, but cannot let it ago. He's like his old chum Mr. Holly that way.

The Klanfest picked up steam. Story fragments drifted over. Emmett Till was a Commie agent. Rosa Parks turned tricks for a Zionist cabal. Dr. King was a hermaphrodite.

A Klan tot brought Dwight food and a Jax lager. He thanked her and watched her skip off. Fat spritzed off the elk meat and killed his appetite. He lit a cigarette.

Joan kept taking the fertility pills. He never told her that he'd had them analyzed. She turned forty-five last month. It couldn't happen. He fucked with the notion, despite that. It was a pipe dream. It felt good for a while. It ran in shorter and shorter arcs. It reminded him what his life was. It took him to Karen's kids and dropped him somewhere cold in the rain.

Klan kliques pulled chairs up nearby him. They balanced paper plates and told tales. A guy sold Che Guevara's dick to Josef Mengele. The Fourth Reich would rise from Paraguay. A guy told a story of right-wing coups and mystic emeralds.

Joan drank tea in bed. The herbs flushed through her skin, bitter. He noticed new gray in her eyebrows.

Her robe was open. The herbs made her sweat. Dwight kissed the sheen off her breasts.

"Tell me what you're thinking."

"That I should relent. That you should call your phone pal and have him make some calls for Celia."

Dwight shook his head. "I called from Mississippi. He said no."

Joan rolled away from him. He pulled off their robes and curled around her. She put his fingers in her mouth for a second and tucked his hand under her head.

"It's all taking too long."

“He’ll probably be in L.A. next summer. I’ll be getting his revised schedule soon.”

“Suppose he doesn’t stay at the Beverly Wilshire?”

“He will. We’ll have to lease the perch soon, and start laying in the evidence.”

Joan coughed. “The black kid who leases it will be a witness.”

“We’ll work him through a cutout. If he comes forward, he’ll be considered a nut. People want to crash history. There were four-thousand-odd false witnesses on Jack alone.”

Her pillow was sweated through. Dwight pulled it out and tucked a fresh one under her head.

Joan grabbed a capsule off her nightstand. Dwight passed her his water glass.

She swallowed the capsule. Her hair was wet. Dwight stroked it dry with a bedsheet.

She started dozing. She fell asleep tucked into his hand.

• • •

He worked late. Midnight meant Marsh-as-me time. He recalled a cop barter, 1953. Cleveland PD wanted a Fed file. A grand larceny suspect was Red-tinged. The SAC refused a file trade. The PD sent a cop’s ex-wife to lube the Enforcer. She liked random men. He liked random women then. They spent the night at the Shaker Heights Plaza. She brought champagne. He brought the file. They enjoyed each other. She read the file in the morning. Cleveland PD nailed the guy—six-count indictment.

Okay, now—Marsh Bowen’s perspective.

The time was now. Marsh is working the Hollywood night car. He’s alone. He’s trolling. Marsh shits where he eats. He spots a hunky male prosty. He pat-searches him and gets a hard-on. The prosty notices it.

Marsh F.I.-cards the kid and warrant-checks him. He comes back dirty: possession and deuce. Marsh says, “How do you want to handle this?” Fade to the crude back-alley embrace.

He couldn’t sleep. Joan was dead out. Marsh was sleeping over in Ventura. The Black Leadership Council brought him up. Keynote speech: “The Minority Officer’s Role in Team Policing.”

It was 2:14 a.m. He got in with tungsten bolt-snaps and wore infrared shades. He carried his Minox mini. He prowled in rose-tinted dark.

He opened drawers and tapped panels. He got status quo. He scanned the bedroom walls. Marsh had a new Rothko print. He checked the stereo rack. New sides by Chet Baker and the Dresden Stattskapelle. He checked the kitchen trash. Marsh had a new yen for gourmet TV dinners. There's an airline boarding ticket. Marsh recently traveled to Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Educated guess: he shits *out* of harms way. Afro fruit retreat.

Dwight walked back to the living room. More status quo. The steel-brushed frames, the neat work desk, the address book by the phone.

He skimmed the pages. Ah, at *B:* Scotty's home and work numbers. He skimmed *C* to *M*. Ah, there's a new one.

Sal Mineo. A West Hollywood–prefix listing.

Logical: Sal's a fag, Sal's a horndog, Sal's got a well-traveled chute.

But:

He deployed Sal in a fruit squeeze, four-plus years ago. He saw Sal's name on a Bureau snitch roster.

Status quo? Probably, but—

One agent dozed in the squadroom. The file keys were hooked to a cork-board. Dwight grabbed them and walked straight back.

The CBI files were five-digit-coded and ran ceiling high. Dwight skimmed the directory. There: "Mineo, Salvatore"/02108. There: third shelf up, two rows over.

Dwight unlocked the panel, stood on his tiptoes and snagged it. It was skimpy. Four pages total. Simple narrative gist.

August, '66. Sal's got a co-star gig. He's the sidekick in a crime turkey. It's called *Southside Crackdown*. It plays low-rung drive-in circuits and disappears. It's loosely based on the famous 1964 heist.

So far—snore.

Jack Leahy visits the set. Jack braces Sal and the rest of the actors and crew. Suspicious guys loitering? Suspicious queries on the real-life heist?

Sal knew *buppkes*. Ditto everyone else. Jack charmed Sal and popped his snitch cherry. Sal ratted out queer actors for occasional chump change.

Snore, yawn, status quo—but don't dismiss it yet.

Dwight stood there. Dwight heard a whole box of pins drop.

The Bureau worked the heist *for ten seconds*. It was LAPD's case and Scotty B.'s fixation. Scotty and Marsh, tight now. The heist: Clyde Duber's soft-line fixation. Marsh worked for Clyde. Scotty grilled Jomo C. about the heist. It made no sense then. It might make sense now. Jomo killed Fred Hiltz, Jomo's a heister. There's Joan hovering. She false-snitched Jomo. She ratted Marsh's fruitness. What do Marsh and Scotty want? Red file tab, red flag. The Marsh-Scotty bond must not impede the Operation.

Dwight put the file back. The pin drop went to pins and needles.

Sicko Sal never slept. He closed fruit bars and debriefed in coffee shops. His milieu was the pre-dawn hen party. The fry cook at the Klondike said try Arthur J.'s.

Dwight bombed over. Sodomy Sal was ensconsed with three trannies. He was tattling. I browned James Dean on *Rebel Without a Cause*. He was hung like a light switch. I packed him the pork till he squealed.

The trannies tittered. Salacious Sal ragged on Rock Hudson. He was hung like a microbe. I tickled his tonsils till he trilled.

Dwight loomed by the table. The trannies gulped and get-awayed. They left their coffee and pancakes. Dwight helped himself.

Sal fondled his spit curl. "Hello, Mr. Holly."

"What's shaking, Sal?"

"Not you again, I hope."

Dwight poured coffee. "Nothing like that."

"No entrapment? No victimizing some poor champion of social justice who just happens to dig boys?"

Dwight wiped lipstick off his coffee cup. "Summer '66. You were working on *Southside Crackdown*. Jack Leahy came around with some questions."

Sal buttered his hash browns. "So? We're dealing with ancient history. That flick was a loser. I had to sue to get my per diem."

"You started informing for Jack."

"Well …"

Dwight snagged a bread stick and scratched his neck. Redd Foxx and that shyster fuck Chick Weiss walked in. A Tiger Kab geek propped them up.

"So, I'm assuming there's more to the story. 'Jack Leahy came around.' You take it from there."

Sal shrugged. "So, another cop comes around, asking the same kind of questions."

Dwight said, "Scotty Bennett?"

Sal rolled his eyes. "Oh, yes. Scotty."

Dwight snapped the bread stick. "Let me drop a name on you. I want to see how you react."

"It's a little *early* for name games, but I'll play."

Dwight said, "Marshall Bowen." Servile Sal seized up and queased up. Oh, yeah—he's green at the gills.

"Tell me about it."

Sal fucked with his spit curl. "Why should I?"

"I'll buy you breakfast if you do. I'll hang stat rape on you if you don't. There's a perv honking boys at Berendo Junior High. You match the description."

Sal popped a Valium and coffee-chased it. Sal took a get-it-over-with breath.

"Okay, sweetie. I've got another fruit shake going. Freddy O. recruited me. A cop's bankrolling it, but I don't know his name. Bowen's the mark, but I *cannot* get him to loosen his wig and rock 'n' roll with me. Some guys are just like that. I'm *dying* to give up some prime slash, but the boy just will not bite."

Scotty B. Marsh. Running ubiquitous now.

"Who else is in on it?"

"Fred T.'s the bug man. The charmless Peeper Crutchfield is watch-dogging me."

"Bowen. What's going on there?"

Sal rolled his eyes. Sal tossed his spit curl. Sal did fag exasperation shtick.

"He just won't *biiiiite.* I've got plenty to bite onto, but he just *wooooooon't.* It's *craaaaazy*. Marsh is sure-as-shit gay, but he just won't *plaaay*. He's *sooooo* weird. He just sits there or runs all these weird riffs on *Haiti,* of all fucking places."

Dwight rubbed his eyes. His feelers twitched. More pins dropped, more pins stuck and held.

Okay, Jack Leahy. He knows about Marsh and BAAAAAD

BROTHER. Jack's tweaked on Mr. Hoover. It's untoward and impolitic. He just B&E'd Marsh Bowen's pad. He saw plane tix to *Haiti*. Joan's *Haitian* herbs. The recent shit in the D.R. and *Haiti*. Celia's there. Peeper Crutchfield *was* there. The persistent Peeper rumor: he's searching for some runaway woman. She bilks men. She may have *Red* ties. Peeper's a loser, let him do his own thing.

Tie-in: Celia as the bilker. Toss the net, take the leap. Wider now, say it.

Joan's 211 background. The things she won't say. Wider, now: Jack redacted Joan's file. They were in on the armored-car heist.

A rainstorm hit. The windows drummed. Raindrop-pins fell. Three drag queens walked in. They wore soaked-through prom dresses. Their chest hair showed. They saw Sal and waved. They saw Dwight and ran away.

Sal pouted. Sal scolded Dwight with his fork.

"Mr. Holly, you are fucking with my love life."

106

(Los Angeles, 11/22/71)

The bar TV blared. America mourns JFK, eight loss-looped years later. We were innocent then. The world hates us now.

Scotty signaled the barman. The barman switched channels. Bucky Beaver huckstered Ipana toothpaste. Scotty resignaled the barman. The barman pulled the plug.

Marsh said, "You're fried, brother. Go out and waste a few heist guys. You'll feel better then."

The Kibitz Room at Canter's Deli. The 6:00 p.m. clientele: alky hebes bopping home from shul.

Scotty lit a cigarette, took two hits and snuffed it. Scotty ate a bite of kreplach and pushed his plate back.

"We keep hitting dead ends."

"Scotty, it's over. The bank examiners got the vault stash, and they're not letting on. We can't find Reggie, we can't find the emeralds, and there's nothing more we can do."

"*It's not over*. We've got to find the woman. We brace her, she'll talk, we'll take it from there."

Marsh shook his head. Condescending, patronizing, noble-negro shit.

“You check steamship companies. You go through their work passage lists. You work it from spring ’64 through the end of the year. You work every major port and overseas destination. You fucking do it, and you fucking do it now.”

107

(Los Angeles, 11/26/71)

A box arrived at the Vivian. It was parcel-posted Las Vegas. The contents rattled. It weighed a fucking ton.

He paid off the postman and lugged it inside. Return address: Mary Beth Hazzard, P.O. Box 19. An envelope taped on.

Fuck—she answered his queries. Fuck—she found more—

He opened it up. Mary Beth Hazzard wrote:

> Mr. Crutchfield,
>
> A police officer in Cleveland, Ohio, sent this in response to one of Wayne's numerous queries. It is an updated FBI file on a woman named Klein that Wayne was suspicious of. As you can see, apart from the heading and various routing numbers, the actual text has been blacked out. Wayne told me that he had had very limited success in chemically stripping ink, but I have included the tools and chemicals he told me he used.
>
> My best to you,
>
> M.B.H.

The file was updated: 12/8/68. SUBJECT KLEIN, JOAN ROSEN, routine numbers, adios. Six full redacted-ink pages.

One file. Sent to a dead man. The fucking genius chemist: “Very limited success.”

And a spectroscope.

And a fluoroscope.

And high-pH hydroxic acid.

And Wayne’s notes on contrasting-ray bombardment.

He laid everything out. He skimmed his chem books and got proportion stats on hydroxic acid. He got zilch on spectroscopes and fluoroscopes. He hooked the gizmos up to a wall plug and positioned them on his desk. He grabbed some Q-tips and put on rubber gloves. He laid out the inked pages.

He hit the On switches. Blue and pink lights beamed. “*Bombardment*”—huh?—you mean mix and match?

He tried it. He craned the gizmos and let the beams crisscross. The first four times, it blackened the black. The second two times, it lightened the black. He dabbed *smiiiiidgens* of hydroxic acid on the lighter ink. It burned the paper through to his desk.

Re-adjust the beams. Dab the dark ink now.

He did that. He dabbed heavy, he dabbed light. He burned the paper through to his desk.

He stopped. *Deep breath now*. He tried the blue-beam gizmo and heavy dabs. He burned the paper through to his desk. Let’s start over. He tried the pink-beam gizmo and light dabs. He burned the paper through to his desk.

His hand jerked. The bottle fell. Acid spilled out. Four full pages burned through to his desk.

Start over. Deep breath now. Brother Wayne, I’m trying. We’ve got two pages left.

He blotted up the acid spill. He crisscrossed the beams again. He got *all* lighter-type lines. He dabbed them *exxxtra light*.

The paper sizzled and bubbled. The lines burned all the way through to his desk.

Last page.

His desk was burn-scarred. He toweled it off. He centered the page. He futzed with the beams. He got some all-new pink-blue hybrid. He got dark-ink lines and light-ink lines and saw something else.

Little typewriter marks. Right there under the ink.

He squinted at them. He got his magnifying glass and held it down close. He couldn't make out the ink-covered words.

Deep breath now. Don't dab, daub, burn, scald, scorch just yet.

Yes, try this.

He walked into the kitchen. He emptied out a spritz bottle of Windex window spray. He rinsed the inside with mild detergent. He let it dry. He carried it into the living room and placed it on his desk.

He poured in the hydroxic acid. He screwed on the top. He test-spritzed the acid and got a fine mist.

The air stung his eyes. He let the mist dissipate. He centered the page under the pink-and-blue beams. He *very lightly* sprayed the ink lines, top to bottom. The ink dissolved in random streaks. He saw words and word fragments underneath.

"SUBJECT JOAN ROS"/"has dep"/"various ident"/"Williamson, Margaret Susan/Broward, Sharon/Goldenson, Rochelle/Faust, Laura"/"B," "D," "L," "Q," "A," smudged word stew.

"Suspected of participation"/"payroll," smudges, "eries," "since 194," "donated," smudges, "wing causes."

"SUBJECT JOAN ROSEN KLEIN," parenthesis, smudges, parenthesis. "Celia Reyes, aka Gretchen Farr"/"6/14 Movement," smudges and blurred text. "As of this (12/8/68) writing SUBJECT REYES-FARR reported by CBIs to be searching for assumed killer of Dominican-Haitian woman known as 'Tattoo' (no real surname known) allegedly missing in Los Angeles since summer '68. Also reports that SUBJECT REYES-FARR enlisted aid of (assumed black militant) LEANDER JAMES JACKSON in this venture."

"SUBJECT," smudges, "EIN," "susp," "rev," smudges, "ment," "Algeria," "Palest," "Carrib."

Oh, shit. There's full lines. Addresses in Spanish. Safe houses in the D.R.

"One persistent rum," smudges, "alleg," "seeking to interdict a flow of contraband emeralds rumored to have financed," smudges, smudges, "coups."

The print started fading.

He lost letters and whole words A sentence blurred to white. He blinked. He rubbed his eyes. He lost a whole paragraph. He lost the word "JOAN."

He sprayed the page. He sprayed too hard. The mist came out a gush. Words vanished. The air burned. The page went aflame.

108

(Los Angeles, 11/26/71)

The plane rolled in. Dwight had a crimped center seat. Dogdick, Mississippi, and back in seventeen hours.

The trip was ad-lib. Beb Relyea threw a fit. Dwight, a man likes to know who he's killin'. Bob, I ain't sayin'. Here's five grand. Go push some hate tracts and clout some pharmacies.

The gate was by the parking lot. Dwight deplaned, got his car and cut for the freeway. It was 9:16 p.m. Joan was at the fallback. Marsh was in Oxnard. The Black Pride Caucus invited him. That Brother Bowen—he can speechify.

Dwight swung over to La Cienega and climbed the Stocker Pass. He was frayed. His bad nerves and bad sleep had reprised. The Sal Mineo deal head-slapped him. He hadn't seen Joan since then. They hadn't talked at all. He was full-court-pressing. The prez was sending a Hoover travel update. He had to go to D.C. Nixon wanted a black-bag summit. The Enforcer and Howard Hunt, old Agency hand. Karen and her kids would be there then. Show the girls some monuments. Teach them explosives later.

The Joan/Jack Leahy theory torqued him. His first Joan suspicion: she's got a Fed friend. Three years later, he *tenuously knows*.

Peeper Crutchfield torqued him. The meddlesome little cocksucker. Fucking prescient and super-human persistent. *They let him live*. He knew everything *then*. Who knew what he knew now?

The big issue: convergence. The sub-issue: the Marsh-Scotty bond. The big question: does the fruit shake mean we abort?

Dwight chased three aspirin with coffee. Auspicious: his first migraine since Silver Hill.

The bolt slides always worked. The oil coating never left tool marks. His shades supplied haunted-house light.

Dwight locked the door behind him. The living room smelled ripe. Incense dregs lingered. Marsh splurged on a new Kandinsky. It fucked up the north-wall symmetry.

Dwight prowled. It was B&E #6,000. Futile repetition cop work—he loved that shit.

He tapped panels, he opened drawers, he reached under couches and rugs. He saw dust leak from a ceiling beam. The beam was smooth-finished. That shouldn't be.

He pulled a chair over and stood on it. He squinted. He saw faint markings on one side of the beam. The dust leaked from a near-invisible seam.

He pushed against it. The wood piece opened inward. A tiny hinge and runner squeaked. The door was near invisible and rectangular. The dimensions were eight by ten.

Paper scent. Right off—the very first thing.

He reached in. It was leather-bound. Stylish Marsh—raw-cut pages.

He pulled it out and stepped off the chair. He prepped his Minox. He carried it to Marsh's desk and read.

He *knew* Marsh. The diary confirmed it straight off. Their narrative styles were similar. They both knew how smart they were. They both had the same dry wit. They both worshiped ruthlessness. Marsh was new to it and in awe of it. Oh, you kid. Oh, my brother. You don't know what it costs.

It was 10:21. He had twelve rolls of film. He could shoot most of the text.

It was cumbersome. Fold the pages, aim the camera, shoot. He got in close and read as he snapped. It was all there. It was his world and Brother Bowen's world combined.

The heist as Holy Grail. His kid crush on D. C. Holly. His duplicitous union with Scotty B. Wayne Tedrow and long-lost Reggie. Reggie as heist survivor and emerald conduit. The Lionel Thornton snuff. The three Haiti trips. Marsh ID's Joan as the Woman. He withholds it from Scotty.

He shot seventy-three pages. He ran out of film. He memorized most of the text. He replaced the diary and cleaned up the dust. He left the room pristine.

His migraine was gone. The Operation was in jeopardy. He felt calm and light and something else.

The fallback was dark. Joan was out. Karen played the *Grosse Fuge* at full volume. He walked to the terrace. Karen's bathroom light was on. The music roared from a bright little square.

The darkroom was fully equipped. Joan developed film better than he did. He knew the basic drill. He red-lit the space, filled the trays and unfurled his film rolls. It was four full hours' work.

He cut film strips, dunked them and pinned them up. He watched words on paper appear. He took a break and called Peeper. The punk never got a word in. He dropped hints about emeralds, Joan Klein and the heist. *Do nothing, Dipshit. Do you understand*?

Peeper gulped and said, "Yes." Dwight went back to work.

He finished the film dunks. He clotheslined all the photos and let them drip dry. He pulled them and carried them into the living room.

Let's create a narrative. Let's expose it eye level. Let's shape a scan-and-read.

He pinned the photos. It told Marsh's story and their story. He told it in three around-the-wall strips.

The photos were slightly dark and buckled. It didn't matter. The living room lights were fine.

He walked out to the terrace. Karen's bedroom light was still on. He trained his binoculars. Dina ran into the room, crying. Karen picked her up and held her. Dear child, bad dream.

The lights went out. He waited for the bathroom light and more music. He didn't get it. Skyscraper lights blinked downtown.

A key went in the front-door lock. The door swept and slammed. Her footfalls were too light. She didn't hurl her handbag.

He waited. He scanned the sky and saw City Hall. It was '51. LAPD was headquartered there. He saw a young cop manhandle a suspect. Six-five, crew cut—Scotty B. presaged.

He saw her shadow and smelled her hair. He leaned into the terrace rail. She walked up and leaned into him.

"I haven't ever lied to you or betrayed you."

"I know that."

"Marsh has put a good deal of it together."

Dwight turned toward her. She embraced him. His chin brushed the top of her head.

"I recruited Reginald Hazzard. Jack and I have been friends for many years. We planned the robbery together. Reginald has been in Haiti for a very long time."

Dwight touched her hair. Last week's black was gray and gray was white.

"The heist gives this a whole new dimension. Scotty knows that Marsh is not the lone-assassin type. It's a level of scrutiny we can't afford. Scotty will know that we're behind it in a heartbeat."

Joan said, "I disagree."

Dwight shook his head. "They're shafting each other. Scotty's pulling a sex shakedown on Marsh. Marsh knows your name and knows that you were my informant. They killed Lionel Thornton. Marsh is not going to walk into a sniper's perch with all this going on."

Joan said, "I disagree." Dwight balled his fists. Joan cupped them and placed them on her chest.

"It densifies every level of our subtext. It indicts Scotty Bennett and facilitates the need for an LAPD cover-up, which will extend the paper trail and greatly increase the degree of public exposure. We can combine the diaries. We can remove the references to Jack Leahy, Reginald Hazzard and me. We can edit out the references to Lionel Thornton, so that his people don't get hurt. Think of this as a social document that unfailingly takes us back to Mr. Hoover and every evil thing that he's done. The heist will muddy the trail and enhance the overall readership and scholarship. The Bennett-Bowen friendship explicates every point about hatred and greed that I've ever wanted to make."

Dwight pulled away. Karen's bathroom light went on. He strained his ears. No music played.

"Tell me about Lionel Thornton."

"He was a comrade of sorts."

"He laundered the money for you and Jack."

"Yes."

"Jack went in with the bank examiners. He got the basic sum out beforehand. He left some money behind to be found."

Joan said, "Yes, you've got all of it, but there's the thing you haven't said and the question you haven't asked."

Dwight looked at her. "I don't blame you for any of it. Given what I've done, I simply can't."

"And the question?"

"The question is, 'Who got the money?' The answer is, 'It's all been going to the Cause.' "

The music started low. Dissonant strings. It was very late. She wanted them to hear it soft.

Joan said, "I don't want to lose this."

Dwight strained for the music. A low wind obscured it.

"Marsh knows about you, Scotty *could* learn about you. You'd be in danger then, and your name would be revealed in the end."

Joan shook her head. "Scotty doesn't know about me. Marsh won't tell him or anyone else. He's a greedy, covetous little man. He wants everything for himself. *You* saw the diary pages. No one else did. I'll be kept out of it, and no one will believe anything that Scotty says about you. He's the faggot nigger's white cop buddy, and you're the government's star witness who cracked up and has to confess."

Dwight brushed tears from his eyes. Joan squeezed his hands, white-knuckled.

"Tell me what Mr. Hoover did to you."

Joan said, "No. I'm not going to."

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/3/71. Telex communiqué. Marked: "Access Code 1-A/Recipient's Eyes Only. Destroy Upon Reading." To: SA Dwight C. Holly. From: Travel-Scheduling Office, Central Communications Center, Washington, D.C.

Sir,

Per your last telephone request, please be informed that SUBJECT'S travel schedule has been reduced, due to recent recurrences of poor health. As of this date, SUBJECT will be traveling to Miami on 4/14/72, Cleveland on 5/5/72 and Los Angeles on 6/10/72. Any changes or updates will follow, per your request. As always, please destroy upon reading.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/4/71. Official FBI telephone call transcript. Marked: "Recorded at the Director's Request/Classified Confidential 1-A. Director's Eyes Only." Speaking: Director Hoover, Special Agent Dwight C. Holly.

JEH: Good morning, Dwight.

DH: Good morning, Sir.

JEH: (Coughing fit: twelve seconds.)

DH: Good morning, Sir.

JEH: Don't repeat yourself.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: I don't know why I continue to talk to you.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: Stop repeating yourself. I'm not senile. I'm in perfect health.

DH: Yes, Sir.

JEH: You did it again. Stop it. I'm telling you not to respond.

(Silence: fifty-three seconds.)

JEH: Slippery Dick asked me to black-bag the Watergate Hotel. I declined. I'll keep my job as long as I string him along. I'm a cock-tease. I'm stringing that cocksucker along. He called me a sissy. He called my hemorrhoid surgery a "hysterectomy."

(Coughing fit: nine seconds.)

JEH: I've got a file on Slippery Dick. He called me a sissy. My basement is reinforced with Kryptonite. No file thief on earth could break in.

(Coughing fit: sixteen seconds/phone transcript terminates here.)

109

(Los Angeles, 12/5/71)

"Sal, you're a cute side of beef. Why can't you land this chump in the sack?"

Fruit squeeze summit #2. Sergeant Robert S. Bennett, presiding. Also there: Sal, Fred O., Peeper Crutchfield.

"Listen, there's guys who just won't bite. Sometimes they're Little-Miss-Hard-To-Get, sometimes they just don't crave stick."

The Silver Star on Western. Scotty dined gratis there. The owner was stickup-prone. He called Scotty direct.

A waiter served gin fizzes and pretzels. Their booth faced the door. Scotty insisted. He knew faces quicksville. He had cop total recall.

Fred O. picked a hangnail. Peeper scratched his balls. Silky Sal was depressed. He was a coal burner. He craved Marsh's deep mine shaft.

The waiter split. Sal said, "I met you before, Sergeant. It was on this movie shoot."

"I know. *Southside Crackdown*. I took my kids to see it. My daughter had the hots for you. I told her, 'That guy's a fruit fly, you're shit out of luck.' "

Sal yukked. Fred yukked. Peeper did not. Peeper was always off in his head. Yonder windows loomed.

Scotty snarfed pretzels. "Lay it on me. Why won't this stupe come around?"

Sal shrugged. "Marshey's a tough nut. He's got his tight little world all figured out, and he doesn't appreciate interruptions. He's got his cop thing and his speech thing and his art thing. And now all he talks about are these trips he took to Haiti."

Hel-lo.

Softball. Easy lob, easy catch. Marsh was holding back. Haiti adjoined the D.R. The emeralds shipped from there. Haiti meant Reggie and the stones.

Sissy Sal blathered. Scotty tuned him out. Peeper fidgeted. Note the sweaty hands and neck.

Scotty chugalugged his drink. "You keep pressing, Sal. I'll get you some Quaaludes. A little Soul Train on the stereo and va-va-va-voom."

Sal tee-heed. "It's not like *I* don't want it. Marshey is a stone fox. I call him 'the African Queen.' "

Fred O. clutched his belly. Peeper howled out loud. Pretzel gack flew.

Scotty said, "This is all between us white men. You cannot go to Dwight Holly. This is *our* fruit shake. *His* fruit shake is old news."

Hel-lo.

Sal flushed at "Dwight Holly." Peeper residual twitched.

Sal twirled his spit curl. "I only saw Mr. Holly way back when. *My* Fed guy was always Jack Leahy. He was bugging me with questions on *Southside Crackdown*. Remember, Sergeant? You were, too. Armored-car heist this, armored-car heist that, as if this girl would know *anything* about that kind of action."

Hel-lo.

Peeper blinked at "Leahy." Peeper blinked at "heist." There's Peeper's darty eyes and light sweat.

Scotty glared at Sal. Sal wet his lips and smirked. Fred O. picked his hangnail. The charged air whizzed by *him*. Peeper gulped and *re*gulped. His Adam's apple did the Frug and the Peppermint Twist.

Scotty walked to the can. The cold tiles beckoned. He leaned his head on the wall. Okay, okay, okay—let’s logic this out.

Leahy. Heist questions *then*. Peoples’ Bank ruckus *now*. Jack went in with the bank team. He was in on the heist. He’s got the big money now.

“*Haiti*” *meant Marsh goes*.

110

(Los Angeles, 12/5/71)

Dashboard frieze: all-new photos.

His ink-scorch spree got him one hot lead and four fake IDs. He tracked the names to mug-shot numbers. He got four new Joans.

Williamson, Goldenson, Broward and Faust. Joan in 1949. Joan three, five and seven years later.

She's younger, she's darker-haired, she's still short of fierce. She's always defiant. She's blinkyeyed sans glasses. Her shoulders are smoother. Her jaw hasn't set in as harsh.

Crutch stared at the pictures. The summit just concluded. He tracked Scotty's brain waves. Scotty picked up on Haiti and Marsh.

He kicked the key and cruised south. Clyde had work. He had Tiger Kab gigs. His case was breaking out and breaking back in on him.

Dwight Holly called and warned him. Do nothing, Dipshit. Celia was looking for Tattoo's killer, just like him. Scotty was going after Marsh, post-fucking-haste.

He drove through Hancock Park. He daylight-peeped windows.

There was no kick extant.

Christmas was coming. His mother would send a postcard and a five-spot. He'd buy Dana Lund a gift.

He drove by the wheelman lot. Phil Irwin and Buzz Duber waved. Chick Weiss pawed a mulatto whore.

The babe limped to the service bay. Mud-shark Chick scowled at her. Crutch pulled up and idled. Chick leaned in the car.

"You look blue, boychik. You should join Voyeurs Anonymous."

"Fuck your mother."

"I tried to once. She rejected me and packed me off to law school."

A warm wind kicked on. Crutch aimed the AC vent at his balls.

"Get me a rope job."

Chick said, "Nix. Phil's my guy. I've got that donkey-dick Filipino on retainer, so I can't stretch my overhead to accommodate your ennui."

Crutch laughed. Chick said, "Get out of here. Do something dumb and brave, so the world will think you get laid."

He drove by Tiger Kab. LAPD had some jail trustys there. They wore tiger-striped jumpsuits. They did coerced wash-and-wax jobs. Redd Foxx served them soul-food plates.

He was avoiding it. He couldn't just let it go.

Milt C. saw him and waved. Junkie Monkey waved one paw. Crutch waved back and cut west to Stocker.

The pad was nice. Baldwin Hills was top-end colored. Ray Charles and Lou Rawls lived down the street. He Tiger-kabbed them both.

Crutch got out and rang the doorbell. Marsh Bowen opened up. He was in uniform. His Medal of Valor pin glowed.

Marsh did a double take. Oh, yeah—Clyde Duber's kid.

Crutch said, "Scotty knows you went to Haiti. I think you'd better run."

111

(Washington, D.C., 12/7/71)

Harvey's was packed. He waited at the bar. Howard Hunt was late. The lunch crowd table-hopped.

Ted Kennedy and John Mitchell. Veep Agnew with a multi-table joke. Dwight caught fragments. A lion was fucking a zebra, ha ha.

He was jet-lagged and up-for-days shot. He had lunch with Jack Leahy yesterday. It was nails-on-blackboard raw. They did not discuss the Operation. Joan told him about it. He approved of it and wanted it. His looks signaled sanction. That much was clear.

Jack came to talk—his terms solely. He said he went back with Joan. He said he got the money out. They did not discuss the heist. Jack said he hated Hoover like Joan did. Dwight asked him why. Jack said, "I'm not telling you."

Hunt was late. It pissed him off. Karen and the kids were here. Dwight sipped coffee and scanned the restaurant. Ronald Reagan walked in. He got ooohs, aaaahs and jeers.

He'd worked three days straight with Joan. They combined the fake-diary excerpts with Marsh's real-life text. It was now seamless. They deleted the Lionel Thornton murder. It would throw huge heat on Scotty and induce him to talk. The omission might convince him to stay silent. Joan had been close to Lionel Thornton. The omission would spare his family.

The new text revealed Marsh's heist fixation. He partnered up with the equally fixated Scotty and pursued fruitless leads. Marsh was now all greed and perversion. He came to political grievance late. He was pawn and puppetmaster. His psyche had disarticulated sixteen million ways. Cops took him in and gave him an identity. Cops told him to retain it while he assumed an antithetical one. The search for the money and emeralds went nowhere. He didn't know who he was, where he was or what to do. He decided to kill a public figure to make it all click.

Howard Hunt walked in. Dwight waved him over. The barman saw him and built a martini.

He took two sips and packed a pipe. He cleaned his glasses with his necktie.

"I can't stay for lunch."

"I didn't expect you to."

"It's warm out. The spring's going to be a bear."

Dwight passed him an envelope. Hunt palmed it and lit his pipe.

"So?"

"This summer. The Watergate. Your call on the exact timing and the personnel."

"The old girl turned him down. I've heard rumors."

"The Man likes me. Let's leave it at that."

Hunt drained his martini. "You're in charge?"

Dwight shook his head. "Look in the envelope. There's a drop-phone you can call. The Man has a thing for Cubans. You've been here before. It's all drops, cutouts and flash paper. I'm walking away from it now."

Hunt put down a five-spot. Dwight handed it back.

"It's on me."

"Dwight 'the Enforcer.' Ever the gent."

"Nice seeing you, Howard."

Hunt put on a golf cap and walked outside. The door swung wide. Sunshine hit the bar and the table floor. Two big guys ushered in a frail old man.

He shuffled. His clothes fell off him. His glasses slipped down his nose. Liver spots, palsy, slack neck. Half-inch mincing steps.

The old man looked over and saw him. He had filmy dark brown eyes. Nothing clicked outward. Dwight blinked and refocused. Mr. Hoover dead-eye stared.

The bodyguards eased him to a table. It took three minutes to walk fifteen yards. He looked around the restaurant, unfocused. Nobody noticed him. People table-hopped around him. A waiter brought pre-cooked food out.

Dwight had him head-on. A short space stood between them. He stepped away from the bar. He built a big, simple frame.

Mr. Hoover looked over. Dwight waved. Mr. Hoover stayed blank.

One bodyguard cut up his steak. One bodyguard fed him. Ted Kennedy noticed him and looked away. Ronald Reagan smiled and waved his way. Mr. Hoover dead-eyed it. Saliva dripped down his chin.

Dwight walked three steps closer. It built a clearer frame. Mr. Hoover coughed. Saliva pooled on his plate. A waiter pounced and snatched it. Dwight stepped forward. He hovered now. Mr. Hoover was very close. He looked straight at Dwight and never saw him.

The girls skipped around the monument. Dwight and Karen held hands on a bench.

"Have you told them Washington was the father of our country?"

Karen smiled. "Your American history is not my American history."

"I might dispute that now."

"Given recent events, I might concede the point."

The lawn was full of nannies with strollers and kids kicking balls. A little boy saw Dwight's belt gun and grinned.

Karen said, "We've been together for seven years."

"I know. You'll be forty-seven in February."

"Take me somewhere for a weekend. I'm bracing myself all the time. You're doing something irreparable. I want a few moments with you first."

Dwight tucked a knee up and faced her. Karen looked at him. He held her face. Some tears rolled. He brushed them off with his thumbs.

“I’m not doing it.”

Karen leaned away from him. Her tears rolled crazy. She took off her sweater and blotted her eyes.

The mauve cashmere cardigan. His first Christmas gift. She’d said, “What? You didn’t buy me *red*?”

“Why?”

Dwight said, “Nobody dies.”

He had a big suite at the Willard. Bureau-vouchered digs. The bathroom featured a walk-in shower.

Room service sent up a bottle of bourbon. It made him salivate. He carried his briefcase and the jug into the bathroom. He dumped the diary pages in the shower and poured the bourbon on top.

He lit a match and dropped it. The shower stall contained the blaze. He let the flames leap way up.

The nozzle dangled outside the stall. He kicked on the water and sprayed it all out. The pages crackled down to black muck.

A wall phone was clamped above the toilet. Dwight dialed the fallback direct. He got three rings and “Yes?”

“We’re pulling out. I can’t do it.”

Joan said, “No,” and hung up.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 12/8/71–1/17/72. Extract from the journal of Marshall E. Bowen

I always know when something has ended. I opened my door, saw that silly boy on my porch and realized that many threads of my life had fully run their course. I did not ask him to elaborate on his statement; I did not tell him that I had glimpsed him here and there enough to know that he had to be a deft surveillance artist with considerable knowledge of me. His car was parked in my driveway. I walked over to grab the day's newspaper off my lawn and saw that the boy had photographs of Joan Rosen Klein taped to the dashboard. In that instant, I knew: it is over.

He drove off. I grabbed my journal from its hiding place, liquidated my bank account, packed a bag and flew here. I doubted that Scotty would come here or risk exposure of our many crimes by siccing the LAPD on me. Instinct told me that the money was in Los Angeles and Reginald and the emeralds were here. Thus, I got on an airplane and flew to Port-au-Prince.

It is very black. I am a French-fluent black man, an American, a policeman. I have the gifted actor's flair for assimilating language. I could never pass myself off as purely Haitian, but I have become proficient in Kreole French. Native people feel honored when foreign rubes attempt to speak their tongue and actually succeed at it. My proficiency and natural charm have given me carte blanche to indulge and observe.

I travel by foot and bicycle and stay in small hotels. I ask questions about Reginald Hazzard in French and English wherever I go. I describe the young black man with the burn-scarred face; I sometimes display my police credentials. Many people recall having seen Reginald, but no one knows where he is. I have all the time in the world to find him. I am not going back to America.

The Tonton Macoute has surveilled me on many occasions and has interrogated me four times. My American-cop status flummoxes them. They are *all* rogue cops and sense that I am one, as well. They have seen me distribute cash for tips on Reginald. I am certain that they know who he is and perhaps where he is now. Tonton men have told me the cautionary tale of another American policeman who felt compelled to explore rural Haiti.

Wayne Tedrow was white and lacked my protective coloration. The Tonton men have never threatened me; they have implied that black Americans with financial resources can buy their way into anonymous security and live safely in Haiti as long as their money holds out. They have further implied that this may be the case with Reginald Hazzard and have yet further implied that perhaps I should go home.

I'm staying. The Tonton men accept it with some reluctance—because Haiti is a dangerous place, I'm a black cop who speaks their language with no small flair and because they seem to like me. A Tonton man told me that LAPD had queried them about my whereabouts. The Tonton had not yet responded. It had to be a secondhand query initiated by Scotty. I gave the man some money and told him to rebuff the query. He told me he would.

I am always jaunting about Port-au-Prince, the larger nearby towns and more remote villages. I drink klerin and trip on all manner of Haitian herbs. I herb-tripped and retraced Wayne's last day on earth. A *bokur* mixed me a potion named after Wayne. It is the most breathless mindscape. I often see faces out of my past in entirely altered forms. I think of my life as a middle-class black kid, a left-wing poseur, a policeman, a homosexual, a faux black militant and a killer. I live in a contemplative and unburdened state. February 24, 1964, and everything I have done to claim profit from it feels entirely irrelevant.

I occasionally think of Scotty. I think of Wayne frequently and Mr. Holly most of all. I loved him in the manner that the morally afflicted love those people who most exemplify their complex will to assert and to survive. I think we knew each other. In the end, it led to nothing more than that. Given who I am, he is and we are, it was a bond of some solvency—and, on my part, affection. I am oddly nurtured by it now.

Rural Haiti compels me. It is akin to a rough-trade zone in East Hollywood. I have attended a number of voodoo ceremonies. I have seen men and women zombified. Groups of men follow me sometimes, but I never feel threatened. I think of Wayne and our discourses on the dream state. I want to be physically immobilized so that I can be utterly still and devoid of the will to summon conscious thought and reaction. I have a stash of wildly powerful herbs and blowfish toxin that I've been saving for a special occasion. I carry it with me at all times. I seek stimulation and stimulation seeks me. I want to be chemically prepared to enhance any state of revelation that I may find myself in. I often recall my first conversation with Mr. Holly. It was during the Chicago police riot of summer ’68. I was in a southside lockup, a racist-cop casualty who also happened to be a cop. Mr. Holly was in the early stages of entrapping me for OPERATION BAAAAD BROTHER. He quoted “a very wise woman,” whom I later learned was his Quaker leftist girlfriend. “ ‘Take note of what you are seeking, for it is seeking you,’ “Mr. Holly said to me. It was an immediate recognition of my life to date and a spellbinding prophecy of my future. I was sitting on the bench at Cayes-Jacmel yesterday. I was mindscaping that very thought and looking out at the Caribbean. It was sunny and not quite hot. A vendor had sold me a shaved-ice treat laced with klerin liqueur. It was fruit-sweetened, with a bitter aftertaste. Reginald Hazzard walked up and sat down next to me.

I recognized him from that day nearly eight years before. Wayne’s photograph was a flat, pre-disfigured image. This man was the man my doctor neighbor and I rescued from the robbery and the vicious police aftermath.

We said hello to each other. Reginald’s burn scars had faded and had left his dark skin blotched pink-white. He thanked me for saving him and told me he had heard rumors that a policeman had been asking questions. I was pointed out to him three weeks earlier. He had been following me since that time. He knew who I was at once. It took a long period of study for him to determine that I meant him no harm.

He had a bottle of klerin. We passed it back and forth. I did not press him for details on the robbery; he did not press me for details on my police career or my recent hometown celebrity. He knew a great deal about me. I sensed it readily and knew it would be ungracious to seek affirmation or in any way pry.

I asked Reginald if he felt safe in Haiti. Reginald said that he did, but added that he missed his mother a great deal. I did not mention his father’s death in the summer of ’68, with Wayne Tedrow very much in its orbit. I did not mention Wayne as Haitian folk hero. I did not mention Wayne’s union with Mary Beth Hazzard or his quest to find the boy who so easily found me. He knew all of it, none of it, part of it or most of it. I understood that and again behaved decorously.

The sun fell low on the water. We sat silently much more than we talked. Reginald asked me if I had met Joan. I said that I had. Reginald placed an emerald in my hand and told me it was the very last one. I thanked him. He got up and walked away from me.

• • •

I bicycled into the Haitian interior. Villages were scattered along low mountain ridges and brush-covered plains. Fallen branches and sharp rocks shredded my tires. I continued on foot. The night grew darker. I sensed groups of men following me.

The moon gave me sight at odd moments. I got glimpses of far-ranging crocodiles and blood-marked trees. I felt the groups behind me expanding. I came up to a small village with a very small hotel. Car lights strafed me. I waved to the driver. He was wearing a white wooden mask.

I swallowed my special stash of herbs and entered the village. A dog wearing a pointed hat ran up and bit me. I walked into the hotel and spoke French to the desk clerk. He rented me a second-floor, street-facing room.

It was low-ceilinged and narrow, with just a sink, a chair and a bed. I turned the lights off. I held Reginald's emerald and stood in front of the window. The herbs took effect. The moon made the green stone a prism. People passed in and out of the rays and said astonishing things to me.

A group of men is forming outside now. They are looking up at me. There are three of them. They are carrying machetes in scabbards. They have left arms and wings where their right arms should be.

I'm becoming immobilized. My thoughts are dispersing as I start to form them. I will drop the pen I am writing with in a moment. The winged men are entering the hotel now. I have left the door unlocked for them.

112

(Los Angeles, 1/22/72–3/18/72)

He got the word late. It knocked him down. It sent him sideways.

He'd spent weeks running one way. It sent him running back and running out and sitting still to think. He missed him more than anything. He had a friend in this. The friend fucked him and ran. He missed him anyway.

Marsh got snuffed in Haiti. He knew that he'd fled there. He stiffed an LAPD query and got a late response. *He* couldn't go there. His white-pig status would deep-six him. Extradition was out. Marsh was AWOL, but Marsh was clean. IA cops searched his house. They found fruit-bar listings in his address book. They interviewed Scotty. You and Marsh clashed in '68—tell us about it.

He tattled Marsh's Fed-plant deal. The IA guys jumped on it and braced Dwight Holly. Dwight told them Marsh did an outstanding job. The IA guys laid out dumb-ass theories. Marsh ratted black militants. It might be belated revenge.

Scotty pooh-poohed it. Haiti—who cares. Let it go. Call it a fag junket. Don't reveal his fruitness. Don't soil LAPD. Don't shit on his elderly dad.

Marsh might have left a diary. That prospect gored him. He tossed his crib and found a stash hole in a ceiling beam. It reeked of leather and paper. Obvious—Marsh took the diary with him. IA decided to drop the case. It was best all around. The "Black-Militant Blastout" cop's a swish. He won the Medal of Valor—go figure *that.*

The news curveballed him. He'd been hamstrung and schizzed all the preceding weeks. He brooded in his den. He worked stakeouts. He took Ann and the kids to Disneyland. He took four of his girlfriends to Vegas on consecutive weekends. He spread tip cash around darktown and waited for callbacks. Who's the Commie woman?

Marsh was always secretive. They pulled outrageous shit together. Marsh rabbited *and* held his mud. He respected him for it. *He* walked on their shit. Marsh died behind it. Fucking Haiti—flying centipedes and voodoo. Marsh was a closet mystic. He talked that jive sometimes. Reggie and the emeralds—a dead-issue bust. The money was another thing.

Somebody tipped Marsh. The fruit summit had just ended. Suspects: Sal M., Fred O., Peeper C. Sal and Fred had no motive. That left Peeper. He spent weeks thinking it through.

Peeper was ubiquitous. He drove around and peeped and kept his yap zipped. Fred O. implied that he *knew* things. He's *seen* shit and *done* shit—don't short-shrift that kid.

Peeper lived in his head. So did he, lately. The heist lived all in his head now. Marsh was *there* that day. So was he. *They* knew what it meant and why they had to have it. No one else did.

He postponed the Peeper issue. He cruised by the wheelman lot and induced fear. Pieces fell together at the summit. It came down to this:

Jack Leahy worked the heist. The details didn't matter. He went in with the bank team. He got the money out first.

It's a soft confrontation. He'll see the light and okay the split.

He saturated the southside. Mr. Scotty *spreeeeads* that long green. He got big consensus leads last week.

The probable call: Joan Rosen Klein. She's got a hard-Left pedigree. There's missing cop files. There's 211 rumors. She's a Federal informant. She might be Big Dwight's squeeze.

He tallied all his tip sheets. He chewed breath mints and worried it. It felt kosher. She's Red, she's wrong. She's been margin-hopping black-militant shit since '68.

She mandates a rogue-cop summit. One order of business: the extended cash split.

It supersedes all agendas. It's essentially left-wing. Let's share the wealth. I don't want to cause pain.

He taps Dwight. Dwight taps Jack and Joan. The dollar count depletes. It's big coin just the same.

He missed Marsh. It stuck with him. He did this grand-gesture thing.

The fruit gig went kaput. Fred O. returned half of his money. He cut a check and sent it to Marsh's dad in Chi-town.

Hey, pops. Our deal went south, but I was fond of your kid.

113

(Los Angeles, 1/22/72–3/18/72)

S*afe House.*

It’s a radical term. It’s Joan Zone nomenclature. He’s got his own variation on it.

He needed a safe house. He was a half-assed Red. He had spooky knowledge and a chemistry set. He had some new ideas. He had a right-wing white man out for payback.

Scotty came by the wheelman lot and winked at him. Scotty got his bruiser sons part-time Tiger Kab jobs. Bruiser One and Bruiser Two were Scotty-sized. They winked *and* smirked.

Dipshit, Peeper, *pariguayo*. Add “snitch” to that. Scotty knew he’d tipped Marsh Bowen. The winks meant you’re dead—but not yet.

Safe House.

He rented a shack in the Hollywood Hills. He stored his files, books, herbs and chemical gear there. It’s *safe* there. He’s not *safe* there. He flops at the Vivian and his downtown pad sporadic. He sleeps in his car. He rents motel rooms ad hoc. He does rope gigs for Clyde and Chick. He feels *safe* when he’s following people. He feels *un-safe* when he stops.

Marsh went somewhere. He cruised Baldwin Hills all winter and saw surveillance traffic galore. Scotty staked out Marsh's house. Dwight staked out Marsh's house. Some IA cops scoured the crib in late January. Dwight warned him: Do nothing, Dipshit. Dwight knew most of what he knew. Dwight might or might not kill him. Scotty sure as shit would.

Safe House.

Deferred execution.

He couldn't run. L.A. was L.A. He only felt *safe* here. His case was *here*. He kabbed people and followed people *here*. He blew up right-wing street signs *here*. He knew how to live *here*. He couldn't run anywhere else. L.A. always gave him urgent shit to do.

Gretchen/Celia tried to track Tattoo's killer. The late Leander James Jackson helped her. He found four of Jackson's known associates. They said Leander was hipped on the case. They said he kept no records. A chick named "Celia" shared his fixation. They phone drop–communicated. The Tattoo deal commenced with bad Haitian *gre-gre*.

Safe House.

His gear is safe there. He's not. It's funny and fucked-up. He just turned twenty-seven. He looks way older. He's got gray-streaked hair and a Commie brand on his back. He can't talk to the people he cares for. He follows them instead.

He follows Dwight Holly. Joan seems to have left him. Dwight sits in the pad near Karen's house, for days at a stretch. The boxes and gear are gone. Dwight waits by the phone. He picks up the receiver every half hour. He watches Karen's house with binoculars. He lights up on her little girls.

Dwight stays immobile. He's got to stay moving. He follows Karen sometimes. She's led him to lunch dates with Joan.

Following was easy. Mobility was his strong suit. Cars were camouflage. His zhlubby kid look supplied cover. Bug-tap jobs were easy. He knew how to drill, bore and thread. Eavesdropping was tough. People could see you and sense your intent.

He got close to Joan and Karen. They sipped coffee and chain-smoked at a joint on Hillhurst. Joan said she had "the money." That encouraged her. She was worried. Celia was lost in Haiti or the D.R. Joan had severed ties with Dwight. It pertained to "the Operation." The phrase made Karen wince. Joan said "safe house” twice. Joan said Dwight would never be able to find her.

They were such good friends. He heard New York in their voices. Karen was red-haired and didn’t look Greek. It was cold lately. Joan wore sweaters. He couldn’t see her knife scar.

He snapped a sneak photo. Joan was forty-five years, four months and seventeen days of age.

He taped it to his dashboard. He’s always moving. All of his pictures are safe.

114

(Los Angeles, 1/22/72–3/18/72)

G*one.*

Joan took their forged documents and marking tools. Jack retired from the Bureau. He posted his resignation letter in the squadroom. It was respectful. It thanked Mr. Hoover and praised his leadership. Please send my pension checks to my P.O. box in rural Oregon.

Marsh ran to Haiti and was murdered there. LAPD IA questioned him. He did not mention Sergeant Robert S. Bennett. He praised Sergeant Bowen's performance on OPERATION BAAAAD BROTHER. The cops said Marsh was a homosexual. Dwight acted surprised.

They're gone. She's gone. She cleaned out the fallback and left the phone line intact. It's a bootleg listing. She's the only one with the number. If the phone rings, it's her.

Tell me things.

Tell me what that man did to you.

No, I'm not going to.

Her hatred superseded the heat of his conversion. Jack held whatever hate he had close. Their rage eclipsed his shame and guilt. Their hurt cut deeper. He couldn't kill the man. They went off to do it their way. They couldn't use Marsh. They'd find a new fall guy or do it sans subtext. He won't intercede. They know it. If Joan calls, he'll say it.

He black-bagged chez Marsh one final time. He checked the hidey-hole. The diary was gone.

He called Bob Relyea and told him they'd aborted. Keep the money and buy yourself a new sheet. Bob was relieved. Dwight, it had snafu written all over it. Bubba, it's still percolating. Stick close to your TV.

He kept replaying D.C. It helped that Karen was there. He saw Mr. Hoover. He forgave Marsh for what the man made him. *Nobody dies* was no leap.

He goes to the office. The fallback phone and the drop-front phone never ring. Mr. Hoover hasn't called. Nixon hasn't called. Peeper Crutchfield tails him and loiters outside. The kid knows everything except *It's All Over*. Son, I don't have the will to kill you.

He took Karen away for her birthday weekend. They stayed at a cottage and made love a great deal. She'd seen Joan. He knew it. She never mentioned her name.

She plays the string quartets every night. He stands on the terrace and listens. He holds Joan's red flag. Karen leaves a light on for him.

115

(Los Angeles, 3/19/72)

Sultan's Sam's. The Sandbox at 8:00 a.m.—far-out surreal.

Scotty had a key. Sambo snitched for ATF and LAPD. Sambo hosted retirement bashes. Redd Foxx performed for instant bail release. Redd worked the room like a mofo. He was a closet white-pig groupie.

The booth section needed a sweep-up. The bandstand was a scrap heap. The Soul Survivors left all their shit onstage. The walls were lime velour. They absorbed cigarette smoke. The rugs were deep shag. They absorbed piss.

Keep it short. Summitry was brevity. Hold your nose, shake hands and split.

Scotty sat in a back booth. He lit a cigarette, took two hits and snuffed it. He left the door ajar. Dwight Holly walked in.

The dim light hit him. He eye-adjusted in the doorway. He got his bearings. He saw Scotty and joined him.

Their knees brushed under the table. They scooched around and created some space.

"Thanks for coming."

“I wouldn’t have missed it.”

“It won’t take long.”

Dwight said, “We’re both good negotiators. I think we’ll get there fairly quick.”

Scotty twirled an ashtray. Leftover butts spilled.

“You’ve told the others, right? You’re negotiating for them?”

Dwight shook his head. “We’ll cut the deal. I’ll make sure that they accept it. We all know it has to end. If you’re reasonable, we’ll get it done today.”

Scotty tipped his hat. “I thought you’d pat me down for a wire.”

“I thought you’d feel me up for an ankle piece.”

Scotty laughed. “It took so goddamn long for it all to fall together.”

“Mr. Hoover got some things going. I’ll concede that.”

“Just to let me know I’m not crazy. The heist was Jack Leahy, Joan Klein and that burned-up colored kid. It was all nutty political shit.”

Dwight smiled. “That’s about it.”

Scotty said, “I’m giving you a walk on the emeralds.”

Dwight said, “That’s white of you.”

“Leahy got the cash out.”

“Yes.”

“How much?”

“Slightly more than seven million.”

Scotty cracked his knuckles. “It’s all been washed? There’s no more ink stains?”

Dwight nodded. “Clean, non-consecutive bills. Fives up to hundreds. It’s the best-looking money you’ve ever seen.”

“I want half.”

Dwight shook his head. “40%.”

Scotty said, “45.”

Dwight said, “Deal.”

The room felt itchy and toxic. The velour was shredded. Scotty felt particles eat his skin.

“Let’s talk about Peeper. He’s a side issue here. I think he knows a lot of it.”

Dwight said, “I’m sure he does.”

“He’s been around forever. He knows all the players. He’s potential grief we don’t need.”

Dwight nodded. Scotty said, "He goes." Dwight said, "No sale. I'll up you to 50, but I don't want him hurt."

"Lets rethink this. The 50 is generous, but I have to insist."

"No sale. I'll give you another concession, but I'm not folding on him."

A horn blared outside. Dwight jerked a bit. He was thin. His chest was bulked off-size. Odds on a load-stopper vest.

"We can't have him peeping around and coming around with his hand out. The little fucker just will not desist."

Dwight said, "No." He jerked a little. His shirt stretched. The vest fabric showed underneath.

"I have to insist. It's a rough go now, but you'll thank me some day."

"No. Let's start over again. I'll up you to 55 and give you one more free one. I step up, you step back, it all works."

A horn blared. Dwight jerked. His hand dipped under the table. Scotty gripped the table ledge. Dwight watched his hands. Scotty read his mind. *He's thinking cross-draw or side-draw/vest or no vest*?

Their eyes clicked. Their eyes held. Their hands disappeared.

Dwight fired. The shot ricocheted under the table. A seat cushion exploded. Scotty ducked and rolled low. He saw Dwight's legs and gun hand. He pulled two throwdowns. Dwight fired twice. He hit the booth post and Scotty's vest. Scotty flew back and bounced forward. The impact double-visioned him. He pushed the table up and over. Dwight fired. The bullet caromed and tore out his neck. The table fell on him. He gouted blood and shot wide. Scotty rolled out of the booth and fired two-handed. He hit Dwight in both legs and the groin. He shattered Dwight's gun hand.

Dwight fired. A wall section ripped. Dwight dry-fired. His fingers didn't work. The gun didn't work. Blood covered the cylinder and the trigger. Scotty rolled close and kicked the gun out of his hand.

Dwight spat blood in his face. Scotty pulled his vest up and gut-shot him. The air was cloud-thick. The cordite fumes stung.

Scotty got his breath and his legs. He pat-checked himself. Okay—no grazes, no hits. They both shot revolvers. No stray shells extant.

He pulled out a roll of tiger-band C-notes. He tucked it in Dwight's coat pocket. He rubbed his own chest. He felt the slug vest-embedded. Okay—you can walk now.

He did it casual. He *strooooooled*. He saw the mailbox on the corner and dropped the envelope in.

Snitch-out. Anonymous. Written in ghetto-ese. The L.A. Office would get it. Jack Leahy would *see* it. Rogue Fed D.C. Holly. He suborned and offed the Bostitch brothers. Look close, don't act. The Enforcer's good for the Peoples' Bank.

Low clouds over darktown. Powder fumes out the door. A rainbow due south.

Lawdy—it's 2/24/64 redux.

116

(Los Angeles, 3/19/72)

He was running prone or rolling aloft. His back grew legs and propelled him. He didn’t know how this could be.

Green walls tumbled. A red film held his eyes away. His right arm pulsed. A green man ran with a bottle and stayed in front of him.

I think I get it.

He remembered crawling and the sidewalk and the old black guy. The picture in his pocket. Her phone number on the back.

The green walls grew white lights. His legs were wheels. The red film dissolved and let faces in. More green men with bottles. Not the faces he wanted to see.

You know who you are. One last time, please.

He started grabbing and blinking. The red returned. He brushed things and knocked over things. He heard them crash. His hands were weightless. They were more like wings.

His legs stopped rolling him. Someone wiped the red away. Someone grabbed his hands and squeezed life in them. He saw river borders around Karen.

She said, “They are your children, Dwight. I swear it is true.”

The rivers compressed and swam over her. She pushed through them and held in close. He reached for it and found it and got it out full voice.

“Do you love me?”

The rivers came in darkening. The green walls faded to pinpoints. She said, “I’ll think about it” as the lights stopped.

117

(Los Angeles, 3/23/72)

Uncle Gibb's Liquor—*again.*

The southside record holder. Twenty-nine 211's since 1963. Old Gibb always shook his head. "Mr. Scotty, I gots a dark cloud over me."

The tip came in an hour back. It was a solid phoner. A colored lady heard street talk. Two no-good boys with shotguns. Mr. Scotty, you stop this.

Scotty perched in the alley. The back door was adjacent. He brought his civilian wheels. He'd bag them going in.

His letter ploy worked. Dwight Holly's death went unreported. The bank cash and Jack Leahy, the Enforcer's low-down past. As planned—the Bureau buried it.

Joan soon. She'd be tractable. He'd sidestep Jack and approach her direct. She'd see the sense in the split.

It was misty. The windshield beaded over. Scotty kicked the ignition key and ran the wiper blades.

A woman walked up. She was tall and red-haired. She didn't quite look lost. She looked darktown-out-of-place.

He rolled down his window. She came around the car and leaned in. He prepped a baby-you’re-lost spiel. She put her hand on the window ledge. She clicked as off-kilter then.

She raised a little snubnosed revolver. She shot him six times in the face.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 3/24/72. Extract from the privately held journal of Karen Sifakis.

The following pages will serve as my confession, should it come to that. I am not going to run. I am not going to lie if I am officially confronted. I am not going to offer personal or political justifications for the horrible thing that I did. I did it because I loved Dwight Holly to the bottom of my soul and because the other children's name. woman he loved lacked the will to do it. I am determined to survive without Dwight and pray for the strength to do so, in our

I performed the act in a state of rage. I did not pause to pray or summon moments of reflection. I walked to Dwight's little bungalow and found a single throwdown gun in a box. I killed in the spirit of wanton apostasy. I refuse now and will always refuse to abdicate my personal responsibility for this act. Dwight scuttled his operation and spared a life. My persistent preaching of non-violence influenced his decision. His deeply sure rebuke of his own vile deeds compelled me to violently acknowledge the price he paid to revoke his past and seek transcendence. I could not have lived with myself had I not formed a circle back to that brave man and the woman I sent forth to teach him. The bond of the three of us must continue to flourish within me. My action was an attempt to settle all debts and hold us together, with one of us now incapacitated and one of us dead. I see through the grandiosity and speciousness of these statements even as I write them. I am past caring at this moment. I will always stand by what I have done.

I feel the urgency of Dwight's patrimony now. I will not dwell on whether I should have told him earlier. He knew for a conscious flicker and he will know in the world that follows this one. I will change our daughters' names to Holly at an appropriate time.

Dwight cared more for Marshall Bowen than he ever admitted. Bowen died in Haiti a few months ago. I am going to have his body shipped to the States and interred with Dwight's. I will be sure that they are laid to rest near some tame goats.

118

(Los Angeles, 3/26/72)

She was inside. She never left. He'd been watching for days.

He talked to Clyde last night. Scuttlebutt was raging. Dwight Holly was dead. Some heist men shot Scotty. Clyde ran down all the theories. They were bogus. *He* had X-ray eyes. Only *he* knew what it meant.

She stayed inside. He slept in his car and watched the windows. He saw her once, two days ago. She looked in the closet where the boxes used to be. She wore frayed jeans and one of Dwight's suit coats.

He started counting the days since he first saw her. He stopped at one thousand. He looked at the dashboard pix and got all raw. He ran up and jiggled the door.

It swung open. She was sitting on the floor. Her face was blotchy and tear-streaked. She'd twisted some strands of her hair out. Her wrists were blood-crusted. A knife was stuck in the far wall. She wrote the word *No* in blood beside it.

He almost stepped on her glasses. She squinted at him. He picked her glasses up and walked over. She pushed herself away from him and braced her back on the wall.

He handed her the glasses. She put them on. Her eyes focused past her tears. She looked up at him.

“Miss Klein, my name is Donald Crutchfield. I’ve been following you for a very long time, and I’d be grateful if you’d talk to me.”

Part VI

COMRADE JOAN

March 26, 1972–May 11, 1972

119

Joan Rosen Klein

(Los Angeles, 3/26/72)

She'd seen him. He was a pop-up face and a blur, persistent. It was intermittent. He felt like a shape-shifter. He'd go away and reappear, changed.

So I'll tell you. It's the story I should have told him.

She cleaned up and bundled into Dwight's tweed coat. She made them a pot of tea. Clouds rolled in low. A spring storm hovered.

It began with the stones. "Green Fire," "Green Death." Colombia, mid-15-something. Spanish settlers conquer the Muzo Indians and rape their emerald mines. The Spanish become Colombians. The Muzos become slave labor. The tradition extends to now. Mining companies rape the Itoco Mountains. They're near Bogotá.

Her grandparents were German-Jewish émigrés. They came to America and settled in New York. Isidore Klein traveled to South America and became immersed in Green Fire lore.

He was a borderline mystic. He was every inch a Red.

Red bandits hit the Muzo Valley mines. The men called themselves *quaqueros*. It meant "treasure hunters." They dug tunnels into the mining companies' tunnels and dug out stones for themselves. They warred with company goon squads. They looted emeralds routinely and were routinely trapped, tortured and killed. There were dozens of *quaquero* bands. Some were politically identified. Isidore Klein bought his emeralds exclusively from them. He earmarked a portion of his ultimate profits to South American insurgent groups. He sold his emeralds in fine jewelry stores throughout the United States. He grew wealthy. He gave away small fortunes to anarchist cabals and left-wing labor organizations. He lived comfortably. He lived more modestly than other immigrant arrivistes. His rise to wealth matched a young lawyer's rise to power. The man's name was John Edgar Hoover. He was a Justice Department drone. He was brilliant and sensed opportunity in wildly unfolding events.

The post–World War I Red Scare granted him History. The attorney general's home was bombed. Hoover took it from there.

The Red Raids. Civil liberties suspended, abrogated, quashed, interdicted, suppressed. First Amendment rights shat upon. Political roundups, false imprisonings, deportation at whim. A concurrent resurgence of nativist groups and the Klan. John Edgar Hoover saw the force of fear and exploited it. His power grab succeeded commensurately.

Isidore Klein had one son. His name was Joseph. He was born in 1902. Isidore raised him *RED*. Joseph married Helen Hershfield Rosen in 1924. Helen had been raised *RED*. Their daughter Joan was born on Halloween night, '26. Her parents and grandfather raised her *RED*.

The FBI was recently chartered. The old Bureau of Investigation had been deemed moribund. J. Edgar Hoover took over. He was an organizational genius and a PR whiz. His mandate was smother dissent. He honed his techniques during the madcap boom decade. He understood the metaphysical value of the Enemy. He knew that Reds could serve in that capacity. Gangsters were picaresque touchstones for the public imagination. They lacked the pervasive force of the Reds. The boom became the Depression. The American Left mobilized. Hoover sensed an insurgent shift and reacted. He stepped into the public arena with flair. He preached an anti-Red message and ignored organized crime. He made himself a national hero. He unleashed a tidal wave of illegal surveillance, official scrutiny and false arrest. Isidore Klein took full notice of him.

The name Hoover reigned ubiquitous. He recalled the name spoken by savaged comrades in 1918. He began to study Hoover. He developed a sense of Hoover as his personal enemy. He acted in the public arena. He utilized the stones.

He bought subversives out of stir. Small and large emerald gifts unlocked jail doors. Emeralds supported Joseph, Helen and the child Joan. They camped in socialist meeting halls and distributed leaflets in bread lines. They housed and fed fugitive leftists. They skirmished with goons on picket lines and endured three- and four-day detentions. They fought *their* war. Isidore Klein fought an increasingly recognized war against J. Edgar Hoover.

His weapon was words. Emeralds bankrolled the clandestine publishing of anti-Hoover tracts. Isidore Klein pushed the tracts in significant quantity. Mr. Hoover took enraged note of it and began a lockstep surveillance. Isidore's printing operations were repeatedly raided and Isidore was repeatedly jailed. Emeralds bought him out of custody. The stones were trinkets, talismans, keepsakes and bribes. The Depression raged. A small emerald carried a cop's family for months. Green Fire was the flame of magic and revolution. Mr. Hoover knew it. He failed to interdict the flow of the emeralds and thus the flow of the tracts. He believed that Isidore Klein held an emerald stash at his home on East 63rd Street. He ordered a squad of New York City agents to ransack the house and steal them. It was 1937. Joan Rosen Klein was ten years old.

The squad was led by Special Agent Thomas D. Leahy. He was a widower with a sixteen-year-old son named John. The squad tore Isidore's home apart. They found twenty-three pounds of the highest quality Muzo emeralds and stole them. Isidore arrived later that night. He discovered the theft and suffered a fatal heart attack.

Joseph and Helen Klein were now without resources. They knew that Hoover directed the burglary and told Joan the story in full detail. Hoover kept the emeralds. He dispensed small quantities to his toadies as quid pro quos. The *quaqueros* found less controversial gemstone importers. Hoover emerald-gifted strikebreak captains and subversive-group infiltrators. He hoarded the sum of the stones for himself.

Isidore Klein's death devastated Tom Leahy. He became horrified of Mr. Hoover. His fear and revulsion ran equal with his guilt and self-disgust. A gear clicked the wrong way or the right way inside him. He became radicalized.

He covertly assisted left-wingers and warned them of impending Fed raids. He acted with great caution and covered his tracks. Agent Tom became a cherished secret of the leftist underground. The Kleins had heard of him. No one knew that he'd led the emerald raid. Hoover had quashed all public mention of it. Agent Tom confessed the deed to Joe and Helen Klein and their daughter. Joe and Helen forgave him. A deep friendship evolved. Agent Tom took their forgiveness to heart. It spawned inspiration. He was a gifted lawyer and criminal investigator. He knew how to log information and build information to the indictment stage. He decided to build a massive file on J. Edgar Hoover and take it public.

He queried other agents, Hoover's minions, law-enforcement colleagues and rivals. He took depositions from witnesses to Hoover's negligence and planned obfuscation. The file grew to several thousand pages. It catalogued covetousness, pettiness, the large-scale violation of civil liberties and rampant power abuse. Joe and Helen Klein read the file. The young Comrade Joan read the file and became enraptured and enraged.

It was now fall 1940. Joan was fourteen. Tom Leahy's son Jack was now almost twenty. Tom Leahy was a Red with an FBI badge. He was grooming Jack to become a cop revolutionary. Mr. Hoover was forty-five years old. He had the emeralds. He was ascendant. He possessed the power he had always craved.

He had created a myth. Newsprint and radio waves spread it for him. He adroitly read the times he lived through. He created a tale of moral sureness and his own supremacy. It was tailor-made for the Depression and the onset of World War II. It posited the unseen other as epidemically everywhere. It vouchsafed the FBI and his stewardship for as long as he could render the myth real.

Hoover had informants everywhere. He learned of Red Tom's betrayal and the anti-Hoover file. He heard that Leahy was off taking depositions. Leahy was isolated at a leftist campground in the Catskills. The moment was perfect.

He paid off a squad of New York State troopers. They were expedited with parcels of emeralds, no cash. The troopers raided the campground. Several inhabitants resisted. The troopers rounded them up and burned down the women's bunkhouse.

Joseph and Helen Klein resisted. They were arrested and severely beaten at a state police jail near Poughkeepsie. They died from their injuries.

Joan was home in Brooklyn that weekend. A veil of rage and horror fell over her.

New York City agents stormed Tom Leahy's apartment. They found his file. Hoover read it and burned it. His informants helped him build a sedition case against Tom. The war was newly raging. Hoover played a trump card: "national security." He had Tom Leahy arrested and tried sub rosa. Tom was convicted by a hastily impaneled judge and jury. He was sentenced to six years at Sing Sing.

Tom Leahy's file was comprehensive. It was diligently annotated and superbly constructed. It begat Mr. Hoover's devouring file lunacy.

FBI paperwork accrued to ten tons yearly. Tom Leahy died in prison in 1943. He drank himself dead on rotgut toilet brew. He had been repeatedly beaten. The guards who beat him all wore emerald rings.

Tom's son Jack disappeared and lived anonymously. He attended college and served in the U.S. Navy. He entered Notre Dame Law School. He was wholly and committedly *RED* and equally committed to sustained vengeance. He laid out a paper trail of obscure name changes and came all the way back to the defiant John Leahy. The trail was built from his date-close birthday up. His father's file taught him how to build paper. His father's access to Hoover's files taught him to build paper fraudulently. He got through the FBI background-check process. He was appointed to the Bureau in 1950.

Special Agent John C. Leahy—*RED*.

He worked routine Bureau assignments. He kept up with his father's subversive friends. He covertly redacted his comrades' files and diverted FBI interference. Jack Leahy: Fed toady by day. Jack Leahy: *RED* provocateur by night.

Jack reconnected with Joan. She had gone underground and gone criminal. Her sense of vengeance had gone scattershot. She had remained fixedly *RED*.

She recruited on college campuses. She proudly retained her own real name, much as Jack did. The sporadic use of aliases muddied her trail. She met Karen Sifakis. Their deep friendship began. A floating dialogue defined it. Karen advocated non-violence. Joan nearly always disagreed.

A strikebreaker pulled a gun on her. She hit him with a two-by-four. She sustained a scarring knife wound.

Two Legionnaires cornered her at that Paul Robeson concert. She took a savage beating. She waited nine years. She shot and killed the two men in their sleep.

She loved the thrill of armed robbery. She planned the jobs and steered clear of the jobs as events. She was conscious of herself as a woman. She crouched in certain shadows as she raged *RED*.

Jack fed her inside scoop on payroll jobs and bank vaults. She always donated her heist takes to the Cause. Joan and Jack became comrade-lovers. They shared a family story and a family hatred. They moved together and in circles overlapping. Joan became Williamson, Goldenson, Broward and Faust and always returned to Klein. Jack remained a G-man under his real and entirely fictive name. Jack got Joan out of jail. Jack utilized municipal PD contacts for criminal-records deletes. Joan conceived two textile-plant jobs in L.A.—’51 and ’53. Dragnets caught her up. Jack got her out and blitzed file reports. Joan conceived a heist in Dayton, Ohio. Jack bought off key investigators and got most of the paperwork expunged.

Joan roved and toured revolutionary hot spots. It was a breathless errand and a blood duty of great urgency. Her dialogue with Karen Sifakis curtailed her worst urges. A lust peaked and sent things bad: ’51, ’56, ’61. Only Karen knew the details. Only Karen knew the price she paid to continue at her mad pace.

She moved heroin to finance left-wing coups. She fomented revolt in Algeria and Cuba. She was heedless, reckless, vindictive and in many ways ideologically unsound. The death of her great love Dwight Holly taught her things. Her arc left matched his arc right in hate and specious rigor. She should have told him that before she ran from him.

She roved. She ran from and toward J. Edgar Hoover. She thought about the emeralds near constantly. She heard out rumors and cribbed lore and supposition. She exerted common sense and followed the trail.

Jack followed it with her. They shared information and came to this:

Hoover sold the stones to a Paraguayan fascist after the war. It was greed and political payback. *El jefe* hid Nazi scientists the U.S. wanted. *El jefe* knew brilliant gemologists. They knew *of* the stones and had their own designs.

They studied the emeralds. Their findings comprised a thesis on exploitative mining techniques. A straight bore-through-rock technology evolved. It was successfully employed and brought an end to the *quaquero* raids. *El jefe* was afraid of overt *quaquero* vengeance and ordered massacres. Scores of *quaqueros* were slaughtered.

The bore-through-rock technology caused massive worker layoffs. Enhanced emerald profits financed right-wing coups throughout South America and the Caribbean.

Green Fire served to sustain Rafael Trujillo's power. The Goat became obsessed. He had to own the initial Muzo-Klein stones outright. The provenance consumed him. He wanted the story to end with him.

Trujillo hoarded Dominican money and grabbed Haitian-owned land. Papa Doc Duvalier had been emerald-financed and wanted the gems for himself. Trujillo and Duvalier hated each other. Trujillo murdered Haitian refugees. Duvalier enacted reprisals. The two führers discovered their mutual longing. They decided to trust each other on the acquisition of the stones and nothing else. Joan tracked the arc of the emeralds to this point and no further. She went to the D.R. in early '59.

She found a country ripe for revolt. She found Celia.

A leftist network supplied the introduction. Celia was a gone-bust United Fruit heiress. She was half American, half Dominican, all old money. She used her father's surname of Farr and her mother's maiden name of Reyes interchangeably. Gretchen and Celia came and went at whim. Joan preferred the latter name. Celia was a casualty of revolution, left- and right-wing. Castro nationalized the cane fields and bankrupted her father. The Goat robbed her mother in a recent land grab. Celia was a nationally ranked polo player and a bunco artist extraordinaire. She was omnivorously intelligent and not quite brilliant. Joan considered her ripe for conversion. One thing told her this.

The emeralds. Celia was crazed over them.

They became comrade/lovers. Celia was headstrong and tractable, independent and willfully submissive to the concept of revolt. Celia was a mystic. Joan was not. Celia dabbled in Eastern philosophy and more than dabbled in voodoo. Celia believed in the spiritual force of the emeralds. Joan did not. They reconciled their differences and traveled to Castro's Cuba. They began plotting the 6/14 invasion.

The invasion failed. A rebel named María Rodríguez Fontonette betrayed the Cause. A Tonton Macoute man named Laurent-Jean Jacqueau assisted the Cause. Jacqueau secretly emigrated to America and changed his name to Leander James Jackson. Joan and Celia were captured, imprisoned and bribed free. Joan had stashed a robbery take in an L.A. bank vault. Jack Leahy tapped the cash and found the right officials.

Joan and Celia flew to America. The Goat was assassinated. Juan Bosch and Joaquín Balaguer succeeded him. They were repressive and much less garish rulers. Balaguer inherited the Goat's emerald fixation. He was then a government lawyer eyeing the presidency. Papa Doc remained in power and remained emerald-fixed.

The men found each other. They collaborated and cut a side deal. They learned the identity of the Paraguayan *el jefe*. They gave him a down payment on the Muzo-Klein emerald stash. *El jefe* was near-broke and in poor health. He wanted to sell. It was December '63. Fate intervened and fucked it all up.

Balaguer had a financial setback. Papa Doc had a financial setback. They lacked the cash to outright buy the stones. They looked for a rich American to consign them to.

The right-wing grapevine supplied a name: Dr. Fred Hiltz. He was a hate pamphleteer and an emerald-myth worshiper. They contacted Dr. Fred. He paid off *el jefe* with a bank draft. The stones were messengered to Santo Domingo. Balaguer and Papa Doc met there *just to touch them*. They did not trust messengers to hand-deliver the stones. Dr. Fred insisted on an armored-car drop. A Haitian man was hired to fly the emeralds to L.A. It was now 1/16/64. He could not leave until 2/21/64. Balaguer and Papa Doc enjoyed the delay. *They got to touch the stones more.*

SUDDENLY:

A Tonton Macoute thug learned of the shipment. He contacted his old Tonton *frère* Leander James Jackson. Leander knew his old comrades 0Joan and Celia. Serendipity: Celia's brother Richard Farr worked at Wells Fargo in L.A.

Jack Leahy ran the FBI's L.A. Office. Richard knew the armored-car route. Richard predicted the cash take along with the stones. Jack knew expendable criminal scum to leave dead at the scene. The greatest hurdle was obscuring their IDs. Joan knew a brilliant chemist named Reginald Hazzard. She had mentored him at the Freedom School. She had bailed him out of jail the month before.

The plan was developed. Reginald concocted a bone-deep burning solution. Jack recruited an expendable Klansman named Claverly and an expendable hood named Wilkinson. The plan was now fully formed, *but:*

Reginald wanted to *be there*. He told Joan and Jack this. Joan and Jack conferred and tried to dissuade him. Reginald insisted. He thought his chemical expertise marked him invaluable and immune to deceit. He was right and he was wrong. Joan and Jack argued. Jack argued for compliance as Joan argued for termination. Jack won. Reginald would go in and Reginald would survive. The plan was now fully formed, *but:*

Reginald feared a double cross. Reginald harbored a hurt-child resentment. His comrades trusted him to develop deep-burning compounds, but not to be there. *He was there that day*. He impulsively popped a bank tab and let loose jets of ink. Jack impulsively shot him.

His flame-retardant precautions saved his life. Soft-point bullets hit him, regardless. His chemical compounds worked erratically. The palliative pellets in his mouth circumvented damage. The anti-flame chemicals enhanced flames paradoxically.

So he lived. So Marsh Bowen and the doctor saved him. He grabbed handfuls of inked cash as he went down. He gave them to the doctor.

He hid in East Los Angeles. Scotty Bennett led the LAPD Task Force. Jack worked FBI-adjunct. The newspaper accounts and crime-scene reports shocked him. There were *two* dead robbers at the scene.

Jack wanted to find Reginald and kill him. Joan told him, "No." The debate raged for days. Comrade Joan won. She searched for Reginald and found him. She begged for his forgiveness. He told her he wanted to live in Haiti and study herbal chemistry. She gave him the emeralds and told him to serve the Cause.

Joan and Jack now possessed millions of dollars. A dozen ink bindles had leaked. Stains rendered the cash unpassable for some time. They waited. Jack heard a rumor: pilfered heist cash had been laundered through the Peoples' Bank. He told Joan. She asked around about Lionel Thornton. She learned that he was mobbed up. She learned that he came out of the Detroit labor struggle, circa '40. She arranged a meeting with him.

The meeting went well. It was instinctively collaborative. A level of trust built both ways. Thornton was politically versed and self-interested. Joan got dirt on him as an insurance policy.

She gave him the stained and non-stained cash. Reginald developed a compound to obscure the ink markings. She let Thornton trade the money up, down and sideways. The base sum grew in a hidden bank vault. She let him implement Reginald's emerald-disbursement plan. The green stones formed a circuit back to Isidore Klein and his struggle. That gave Joan a bare semblance of peace.

Thornton did his job and kept his word. Scotty Bennett and Marsh Bowen killed him. He did not reveal Jack's name or hers.

Reginald remained in Haiti. He was still there. His exact whereabouts were unknown. He forgave Joan and Jack. He was nineteen, he was eager, he was easily led. He was passively complicit and as guilty as they were. He bought revolution unblinkingly and never saw through to the cost. Joan understood a bit of that now. She was thirty years in the game.

The heist aftershocks subsided. Joan rode the '60s zeitgeist. Jack stayed with the Bureau. He disseminated information. He redacted and misplaced their comrades' files. Joan kept up with Karen Sifakis. Karen described her love affair with a rogue Fed named Dwight Holly.

Dwight did terrible things for Mr. Hoover. Dwight was dead-wrecked in the spring of '68. Tommy Narduno sensed the FBI behind the King hit. Tommy saw Dwight in Memphis a few days before. Joan kept Tommy's thoughts from Karen. Karen said Dwight was planning a COINTELPRO. He needed an informant. Joan knew it had to be her.

BAAAAAAD BROTHER entered the planning stage.

A non sequitur clash occurred. Jack called Joan and reported rumblings.

It was Dr. Fred. He put together some leads on the heist, gleaned from Clyde Duber's file. He wasn't looking for revenge. Balaguer and Papa Doc had refunded his money. He wanted a second shot at the stones.

Hiltz wanted to run his heist leads by Mr. Hoover. He was a trusted CBI and a Hoover phone-chat pal. Joan summarily acted.

She knew about Dr. Fred's bomb-shelter stash. Leander knew of Jomo Clarkson, via the black-militant grapevine. Joan cutout-worked Jomo and fed him the plan. Steal Dr. Fred's money. Don't hurt him. Scare him into silence per 2/64. He'll fold off that.

She didn't want more death. She got it anyway. Jomo and his partner killed Dr. Fred. The partner absconded. Jomo found him and killed him.

BAAAAAAD BROTHER went forth. Joan became Dwight's informant and lover. The wild-card clash of Marsh Bowen and Scotty Bennett occurred. Joan and Dwight did not know the extent then.

Marsh and Scotty wanted the money and the emeralds. They colluded and betrayed each other and died for *their* cause. Dwight and Joan colluded and conspired. She betrayed him only by her silence. They had crafted an operation that would serve to right all their wrongs. Dwight pulled out, unilaterally. Their paperwork was stashed at a comrade's house. She'll honor Dwight's decision to abort their plan. She lacks the requisite will.

Celia was lost on that island. La Banda and the Tonton had X-marked her. The warrants derived from her work with Wayne Tedrow. Celia was past reason in some regards. María Rodríguez Fontonette was almost certainly murdered in L.A several years back. Celia felt complicitous. She had hexed Tattoo. It was preposterous. Voodoo was barbarous capitalism cloaked in magic. Celia thought otherwise. It didn't matter. Celia was courageous beyond ideology. Belief works that way.

She should have told Dwight the story. One thing hexed her, still. Her last word to him should not have been "No."

The clouds broke and spilled rain. The boy looked different. The length of her tale matched the breadth of his surveillance. That pop-up face always there.

I know you want to touch me.

So I'll let you.

He caught the signal and leaned in. She thought he'd be clumsy. He brushed dried blood off her wrists and kissed the part in her hair.

120

(Los Angeles, 3/27/72)

T*HE ELECTRIC CHAIR, THE HANDS AND FEET, THE EYE.*

The fried skin, the stumps, the flamethrower stink. Cinerama and Smell-O-Vision. Wait—there's a dog in a voodoo hat and a palm tree on fire.

Crutch woke up. The barking dog was a dog outside. The flames were a 6:00 a.m. sun.

He got his bearings. It was pad #3/safe house #1. Scotty was dead. He didn't have to hide.

You have to go back. There's where she took you. It cost her everything. She punched your surveillance card. You clocked out at three years and nine months.

Crutch made coffee and wrote out a question list for Celia. She knew things about Tattoo. He wondered if she still cared.

He fucked with his chemistry set. The story kept re-spooling. The tape jammed here and there.

The Operation. Joan and Dwight's plan. It could only be *That.*

Crutch drove to Clyde Duber Associates and let himself in. It was 7:10. He could log private time.

He read Clyde's heist file and Marsh Bowen's personnel file. He had Joan's story now. Facts clicked in, redundant. Who gives a shit?

Farewell tour. You can't peep and prowl paper the rest of your life. You're fucked-up in the head.

Crutch split and cruised by the wheelman lot. Phil Irwin and Bobby Gallard snoozed in their sleds. Clyde was throwing a wake bash for Scotty. The lot would be tartan bunting–draped and lit up.

Joan had gotten a second wind and riffed before he left. She told him about the blacklist and all the people Hoover trashed. He memorized their names. He wanted to touch her scar and show her the scar on his back.

He cut east. He parked in front of the fallback and walked up the steps. The buzzer didn't work. He knocked a bunch of times, loud. The lock was too lame not to pick.

She'd made a nest on the floor. Dwight's jackets and sweaters, Dwight's Fed suits. He smelled her cigarette smoke and Dwight's aftershave. The suits were blotched up with it. She'd doused them good.

Crutch walked out to the terrace. A cool pair of Bausch & Lombs sat on the ledge. He adjusted the sights and looked down at Karen's house. Karen and Joan were burning paper in the backyard bar-b-q. Joan had bandaged up her wrists.

The little girls played catch. A blood-crusted towel was draped over a chair back. He zoomed in very close. Joan almost smiled and laughed.

He got *AN IDEA*. He didn't hex it by stating it, inside or outside of his head. His chemical shit was stashed at pad #3. He Walpurgisnacted and worked till he dropped.

Blowfish toxin and stinging nettle. Tree-frog livers from his icebox. Rigorous formulas, potpourri and improvisation. Three hot plates boiling and mushroom clouds like Hiroshima.

Build, reduce, enhance, revise, re-calculate and re-try. It's like Brylcreem: "A little dab'l do ya." Re-formulate and get it down to sub-atomic size.

He got close. Eyedrop portions burned paper and wood. He recalculated and re-tried. He futzed with endless molecular strings and brought down the dose. He thought he got sub-ultra-close and miscalculated. He got closer than that first close and yelled *Halt!* before he collapsed.

He squeezed a particle on a piece of cheese and left it on his back porch. He popped two red devils and slept it all off.

Sedation. No nightmares. No Zombie Zone flashbacks.

Bird noise de-comatized him. He lurch-walked out to the back porch.

There's the cheese and a dead rat. A minuscule nip chilled his rodent ass flat out.

121

(Los Angeles, 3/28/72)

“Who killed Scotty Bennett?”

“I’m not telling you.”

“I remember the first time you said that.”

“It was 1944. You asked me if I was sleeping with the boy from the Young Socialists’ Alliance.”

“Were you?”

“I’m not telling you.”

They sat in Jack’s car. Elysian Park was still rain-wet. She met Dwight there early on. Stone’s throw: the LAPD Academy. Dwight’s intimidation spot.

Jack said, “Did you destroy the file?”

“Karen and I burned it yesterday.”

“Had she read it?”

Joan lit a cigarette. “She didn’t have to. She knew it couldn’t be anything else.”

A black & white rolled by. Joan watched it. Jack said, “We could have leaked some pages on Bowen and BAAAAD BROTHER.”

“Not without hurting Dwight.”

“Dead’s dead. Lost comrades serve the Cause from the grave routinely. ‘Don’t mourn. Organize!’ Don’t tell me you haven’t heard that one.”

“Things have shifted.”

“You and the ‘Enforcer.’ ”

“ ‘Some people you wait your whole life for.’ Wayne Tedrow told me that.”

Jack lit a cigarette. The sun hit his eyes. He pulled the visor down.

“IA’s buried Scotty. They found his file, with Bowen all over it. They made Scotty and Bowen for the Thornton job, belatedly. We weren’t in the file. I’d have heard if we were.”

Joan cleaned her glasses on her shirttail. Jack did the same thing. She remembered the first time: Brooklyn, ’46.

“We have seven million dollars.”

“I know.”

“I miss Celia. I’m too well known to go back to find her.”

Jack said, “She knew the risks. You instilled them in her. She told you not to find her if this happened. You have to respect that. It’s how our world works.”

Joan tossed her cigarette. “You could go back.”

“I’m not going to.”

“On principle?”

“Yes.”

“Solely on principle?”

Jack squeezed her arm. It hurt. It was a jilted comrade/lover’s move, ’46.

“*You* called off the Operation. *I* did not. *You* had a sentimental lapse. *You* put a personal relationship before a duty, and *I* did not.”

Joan looked out her window. A young cop waved to her. She waved back.

Jack said, “I picked up a tip.”

“I’m listening.”

“Dwight put a black-bag team together for Nixon. We could capitalize on it.”

“No.”

“Why?”

“I’m not telling you.”

Jack laughed. Joan dry-popped two pills.

"We should have had a child together."

Jack squeezed her arm, soft. "I remember the first time you said that."

"When was it?"

"Fall '54. The Army-McCarthy hearings were on TV."

"Why do we remember things that way?"

"Pure arrogance. We're self-absorbed and confuse our lives with History."

Joan smiled. Jack opened his briefcase.

"I've got a file on your new friend. It was in Dwight's desk. Clyde Duber built it. He thought the kid might get out of line one day."

• • •

DONALD LINSCOTT CRUTCHFIELD. Born Los Angeles, 3/2/45. Brown hair, brown eyes, 5′9″/158.

Joan read at the fallback. The clothes nest smelled like her now. She caught less and less of Dwight.

Clyde Duber cribbed from PD reports and typed in his own notes. A Fed CBI carbon was clipped at the back. The persistent blur takes shape.

The racetrack-bum father. The missing mother. The boy at age ten. She sends him five dollars and a card every Christmas. The boy investigates.

Clyde Duber's postscript:

He located Margaret Woodard Crutchfield, May '65. She drank herself to death in Beaumont, Texas. He couldn't break the kid's heart. He tapped old pals nationwide. They continued the Christmas-gift tradition. The search gave the kid a non-perv task.

The kid was deft. "Voyeurs make good wheelmen and sometimes good investigators." Clyde got the kid out of trouble and gave him work. He noted his intransigence and invisibility. He feared his "weird tendencies." He noted the Dr. Fred Hiltz/Gretchen Farr case.

So it started then. You found me there.

Celia was Gretchen that summer. She was near mad in that guise. She was bilking men and taking drugs and transporting cocaine in rented airplanes. She was off in a mystic phase.

Revolution bored her. King's death and RFK's death produced vile hippie pranks. She was worried about Tattoo. She had hexed and de-hexed her. She devoutly believed that Tattoo was in jeopardy. *Summer '68. The boy sees you.*

The Duber typescript ended. Joan hit the CBI report. The boy knew a wheelman named Phil Irwin and a divorce lawyer named Charles Weiss. Irwin was an FBI informant. He snitched cheating spouses from his rope jobs. His FBI handler quoted him:

"Yeah, I'll admit it. My buddy Chick and I like to peep. We studied under the best, Crutch Crutchfield. There ain't a window in Hancock Park that that twisted cocksucker ain't put his snout up to. He never knew it, but Chick and I used to tail him and study his technique. Chick said he 'scaled the Peeper Parthenon,' whatever the fuck that means."

Three muni PD file notes were listed below. Santa Monica PD: Irwin and Weiss questioned for loitering, 9/67. Beverly Hills PD: Irwin and Weiss questioned for loitering, 4/68. LAPD file note, 5/68: Realtor Arnold D. Moffett questioned per "porno parties."

She remembered the name. He rented "Gretchen" a house.

LAPD dropped the inquiry. Porno parties—so what? A KA list was footnoted: four names, plus Charles Weiss. "Mr. Weiss shares Mr. Moffett's penchant for bizarre Negro art."

Joan thought about the boy. Show him the file? Maybe, in part.

She found her pocketknife. She blade-redacted the lines on Margaret Woodard Crutchfield. The knife fit her hand precisely. She'd stabbed a picket-line goon with it in 1956.

122

(Los Angeles, 3/29/72)

Redd Foxx said, "Scotty was fucking a porcupine. I gots to tell you motherfuckers that it was a *female* porcupine, so I don't see nothing perverted in it."

Yuck, yuck—the crowd laffed, misty-eyed. Some coons offed Scotty—let's get zorched and mourn.

The wheelman lot. Early Christmas lights and plaid bunting. Booze and jelly bean–jar pharmaceuticals. You gots to love it.

Crutch, Clyde, Buzz, Phil Irwin and Chick Weiss. Milt C. onstage with Redd and Junkie Monkey. Ex-governor Pat Brown and numerous pigs. Fourteen Black Panthers. A colored heist guy turned TV evangelist. Frau Scotty and six of his girlfriends.

Junkie Monkey said, "Scotty popped my simian ass for a chump-change 211. I stole six moon pies, four bags of pork cracklings, a case of T-Bird and ten cartons of Kool king-size. Scotty saw that I had *soul* and let me live. We consumed all that motherfucking shit on the premises and went out lookin' for bitches."

Yuck, yuck—we're grief-struck, but it's fun. Frau Scotty passed a joint to Girlfriend #4. Girlfriend #5 nibbled a hash brownie.

Redd Foxx said, “Scotty was out searchin’ for this brother name of Cleofis. He was a stickup man and a booty bandit. He was robbing liquor stores with a sawed-off shotgun and banging Scotty’s bitches with a piece of hard black steel ten times that size.”

Girlfriend #3 roared. Girlfriend #2 hugged Frau Scotty. Phil Irwin popped a Quaalude in the air. Chick Weiss caught it with his mouth. Pat Brown blinked—*Why am I here*?

The bash noise bashed him. He’d spent the day re-memorizing and phone calling. The parlay: D.R. safe houses and Hoover victims.

He re-memorized the CIA-safe-house list. He re-memorized the safe-house list from Joan’s file. He got on the horn at pad #3 and called folks.

They vibed him as fuzz more than comrade. Joan’s name got him some trust. It was name stew out of Joan’s story and monologues. He ran phone checks and got numbers. He called and schmoozed the folks. He got updates and little tales back. J. Edgar fucked you—tell me about that.

They grapevined him. Jail terms, suicide, despondency. Early death and harassment. Lots of rat-out-your-pals barters—some succumbed to, some not.

He kept calling. The fuckers kept talking and feeding him numbers. He ran up his phone bill. The bad news avalanched him. Feds lurking at your window and your kids’ school. You ragged Gay Edgar, loose chitchat, *now we’ll get you*.

It got to him. It re-fueled *That Idea*. More suicides. More vanished loved ones. The grief had him earthquaked and tidal-waved.

Frau Scotty hopped onstage and got schmaltzy. It cued the Panthers to waltz. Junkie Monkey leered at Girlfriends #1 to #6. It cracked them up.

Crutch veered to the pay phone. It was still early. He could log more call-outs and more fuel. He coin-checked his pockets. Zilch on dimes and nickels. He pulled this sparkly emerald out.

His good-bye embrace. She slipped it to him then.

Babe, you didn’t have to. You already sent me Red.

Sills Tip-Top was North Vegas. The drive sapped him. She called it her lucky-charm place. If you have to come, meet me there.

It was a bum-fuck coffee shop near Nellis AFB. The a.m. crowd was enlisted geeks and lounge-act debris. He made it on time—snatch-hair margin.

She waited in a back booth. The joint was integrated. Minimal tension buzzed.

He sat down. Mary Beth said, "You always look like you're out of breath."

A waitress poured him coffee. Crutch guzzled it and burned his mouth.

"I'm always running here to tell you something. I called ahead this time, though."

Mary Beth sipped coffee. "You always look different. Maybe it's because I only see you at intervals and always in such distress."

Crutch fumbled at his cup. Coffee spilled. Mary Beth wiped it up.

"You remind me of Wayne."

"I'm so goddamn sorry for that."

"Wayne made his bed. I was grateful to share it for a while, but it had to end the way it did."

An air force chump evil-eyed them. Crutch hard-eyed him back.

Mary Beth said, "Don't. Look where big gestures took Wayne. Try to be more prudent. You'll be better served in the end."

Crutch got a late road cramp. He stretched his legs and bumped Mary Beth. It jittered him. She sat still and let his fluster subside.

"I'm good at finding people."

"You told me that last time."

"I'm better now. I've learned some things."

"You look different. I'll concede that."

The waitress freshened their coffee. Mary Beth rolled up her blouse sleeves. She wore a silver bracelet with a single emerald inset.

"Your son sent you that stone."

"How do you know that?"

"I'm not telling you."

Mary Beth looked out the window. Crutch tracked her eyes. She studied a RE-ELECT NIXON sign.

"I know where your son is."

"How do you know that?"

“I’m not telling you.”

She touched his hand. “I’m not going to ask you for it. You’ll do whatever you’re going to do, regardless of my wishes. The only thing I ask is that you don’t attribute all your foolishness to some perceived debt to Wayne.”

The waitress walked up. Crutch jittered. Mary Beth laced their fingers. The waitress caught it and zoomed.

Mary Beth covered his hands and held them to the table. He saw the green flecks in her eyes.

“Why do you do these crazy things?”

Crutch thought about it.

Crutch said, “So women will love me.”

The herb guys lived close by. They shared lab space at this cat François’ garage. Crutch showed up with beer and pizza. He caught a boil-and-sluice session in full swing.

The guys broke for a nosh-and-brew. Crutch said he had *An Idea*. I want to char-blacken paper short of combustion and flame.

Okay, baby boy. We work, you watch, you learn.

He explained Wayne’s redaction work and his own mixed results. He said he could carry liquids or powders, but no ray gizmos. He ran down all the molecule charts he’d just memorized. The guys jabbered in French and told him to watch.

Three boil plates ran overtime. He lost track of the proportions and the reduction process. François dumped piles of typing paper on the garage floor. The other guys filled Windex bottles with liquid. Crutch counted six bottles and paper piles. François walked pile to pile and spritzed.

Pile #1 sat there, wet. Pile #2 bubbled and dripped. Pile #3 exploded. Two guys stamped the fire out.

Pile #4 curdled and crackled and cut loose a black haze.

123

(Los Angeles, 4/1/72)

Ella missed Dwight.

She told her stuffed animals. She didn't tell Karen. Plush *alligators*—Dwight's gifts to her.

Joan watched. Ella perched the gators on the picnic table and stage-whispered. She was three. She was developing stoic qualities and playing to adults. She'd learn to parcel information soon.

Dina darted into the house. Karen said, "I've decided to vanish. Too much has happened here. I'm going to take the girls and just go."

Joan rubbed her wrists. They were healing. She removed the bandages last night. New scars were forming.

"Your husband?"

"I'll leave him a note. He's too self-interested to look for me. He'll miss the girls for a while and move on."

Joan said, "I can give you some money. You won't have to teach."

"I'd appreciate that."

The gators were scuffed. Ella was rigorous and assigned them tasks. She didn't say much. She listened and acted. She was dogged and circumspect. She'd become calculatedly blunt.

Karen said, "I want to build some paper. I'll keep my first name and concoct a persona from there."

"Jack can pull mug shots and fingerprint cards. Your name will show up in KA files, but you can limit your exposure."

Ella snatched her gators and ran inside. Joan looked up at the fallback.

"Is there a genetic link to the virtue of persistence?"

Karen pointed to Ella's shadow. Joan smiled. Sun shards hit the yard. Karen covered her eyes.

"We're being surveilled."

"Yes, I know."

"Is he harmless?"

"I'm not sure. He's a convert of sorts, and he tries to be kind."

"My husband gave me those binoculars. He'd die if he knew where they've been."

"Leave them with the note. They'll make a good paperweight."

The light swerved. Joan waved and gestured *Come Here*.

The girls inspected him. Ella *studied* him. Dina covered her mouth and ran. Ella ambled and peered over her shoulder.

Karen said, "The coffee place on Hillhurst. You were always there."

The boy said, "I follow people. I make my living that way."

Joan heard Dina crying. Karen went *excuse me* and ducked into the house. The boy was fit. He had small brown eyes and a gray-flecked crew cut. The style was fuck-this-era defiant.

"Your wrists are better."

"Yes."

"I hope I'm not bothering you and your friends."

"You make your living that way."

He smiled. "I'm good at finding people."

Joan smiled. "We've discussed your prowess before."

"I'll find Celia. I'll get her out and bring her back."

Karen scolded Dina. Their voices carried. The boy disturbed the child. Dina tossed a fit.

"Maybe I should go."

"You don't have to."

"I'm bringing Reginald back. I may as well bring Celia, too."

"What do you want?"

"I don't know. That's my way of saying 'I'm not telling you.' "

They walked to the fallback and talked up through dusk. The boy described his craziness in the D.R. She fortified her capsules with Haitian tea. They left the terrace door open for breezes. She took her temperature covertly and counted days.

She put candles down. He said he liked the flame light on her hair. She tossed her hair. He said he saw sparks.

Their feet bumped. She looked at him. The look said *Yes, now*. He kissed her. It was soft. She kissed him back hard. It said *Don't Be Scared*. He popped a blouse button. He put his hands on her breasts.

She pulled his shirt off and saw the scar. He started to tell her the story. She shushed him. It said *I know*. It brought back all of Dwight.

He pulled off her boots. She braced herself on the floor. Her blouse was up. Her jeans were loose. He ran his mouth over the gap. She arched. He pulled off her jeans and underwear and kicked off his own shoes and pants. Her blouse was half-buttoned. He popped the last three. The floor was cold on her back.

The candlelight and shadows set up *something*. Their heads converged in a weird way. She calculated the age-space between them. Telepathic tabulation. Eighteen years, four months, five days.

She rolled onto the mattress. Dwight's smell was still there. The boy kneeled and cramped up. She rubbed his legs and made him stretch and un-jangled him. He kissed her legs. She opened up for him. Little nose rubs parted her. She liked him for that.

A cold wind gave her goose bumps. He got protective then. He wrapped himself all over her. *Be safe/be still/I'm here*. She eased him back. She let her hands dance.

Her hair fanned as she touched him. He pulled himself up to *watch. Be still/don't look/I'm here*.

Her hands played rougher and harder. Their heads clicked in again. He fell back and shut his eyes. He made hurt sounds she'd never heard before.

Candlelight swerved. Shadows formed on the walls. He opened his eyes and saw her profile. Their heads clicked again. *We* haven't seen this before.

He tried to roll her. She didn't let him. She fit herself over him. She let him look and willed his eyes shut. She moved and took them someplace. It went for a while. The candles burned down to nubs.

"*You're determined to do this*?"

"*Yes.*"

"*There's a safe house in Borojol. The small building by the open-front bodega. You might get leads there.*"

"*I've got some addresses memorized.*"

"*There's a doctor named Esteban Sánchez. He moves his office around. He and Celia are close. He might know where to look.*"

"*I've got some ideas. I know some people there.*"

"*Are they bribable*?"

"*Yes.*"

"*I'll give you some money.*"

"*It scares me. You know what I saw there.*"

"*You went looking for it and it found you. It always does.*"

"*Will Celia know where Reginald is*?"

"*Possibly. They're comrades.*"

"*It scares me. The place itself. It scares me more than anything that might happen there.*"

"*What were you looking for*?"

"*Everything.*"

"*What did you find?*"

"*A picture of you on a beach and a ticket back here.*"

"*Was it worth it*?"

"*You don't have to worry about me. I know what shit costs.*"

"*No, you don't. You can't run at his pace forever, because one day it just stops.*"

"*Don't tell me that. I'm just getting started up.*"

124

(Santo Domingo, 4/7/72)

The Zombie Zone, distilled. Plain fucking *MORE*.

More street rousts, more toxic rodents, more Haitian dispossessed. More sap-twirling *fascistas* and more skin-color gaps.

More heat. More flying insects. More stump-legged black guys on rolling planks. No casino-build cosmetics. More *baaaaad* juju and less dissent.

Crutch cabbed into Borojol. He had four hundred K and a silencered piece. Customs let him in easy. He wasn't red-tagged. He had his memory lists. Joan got him two forged passports: one for Celia, one for Reggie.

Too familiar meets evil. Everything brought back something he tried to forget. He passed the golf course. His X-ray eyes revived. There's the torture bunker and the electric chair.

The *New York Times* diverted him. Doofus Democrats and Nixon. J. Edgar's latest gaffe. A street flash de-diverted him. Surging fuzz crush a leaflet-passing cabal.

He'd spent four nights with Joan. They talked and made love.

He'd leave for short stretches, just to take deep breaths. He didn't mention His Idea. He couldn't risk the word "No." He didn't sleep much. He curled around her and smelled her hair on the pillow. She held his hands to her breasts.

The cab pulled into Borojol. The More got Worse. More iron-heel bullshit. More skateboard beggars. More barefooted Haitians traipsing through rat dung and broken glass.

There's the open-front bodega. There's the safe house.

Crutch paid the driver and got out. The safe house looked innocuous. He knocked and got no answer. No footsteps inside and no sounds of flight.

He shouldered the door. Sunlight through broken glass supplied the upshot.

The walls were bullet-holed. Spent shells covered the floor. One wall was blood-sprayed and pellet-flecked, all laced with dark hair.

Flies buzzed around a doctor's smock, soaked red on a chair.

Stay awake. It's a last look. Go get more of the More. Lefty lifestyle rules curtailed him. Joan knew her comrades mostly by first names. Dr. Sánchez had no phone listed. That meant drive and peep.

Crutch rented a junker and cruised the safe-house list. He'd memorized fourteen addresses. He started in Gazcue and worked west.

The first three pads were empty. He door-knocked to no avail and broke in. He saw telltale cleanup signs. He smelled ammonia with blood undertones. He ran his penlight and saw the casings the cleanup guys had missed.

Santo Domingo by night: 82° and still fascist-oppressed.

He drove around. He got lost in the details. He saw three women he'd peeped a while back.

The black kids eating boat chum in the Río Ozama. The old casino sites with squatter bands and cracker-box cribs going up.

He hit four more addresses. Two houses weren't there. He talked to a street fool. The guy said La Banda torched them. It got to him. He wanted them to be speakeasies. Knock, knock. A peephole slides. He says, "I'm a friend. Comrade Joan sent me."

He looped around. He hit the next seven places. He met two square families at the outset. We just rented the dump. We don't know no Celia, no Reds.

He cruised the last five pads. He got one torch job and four clean-outs. A wino said those La Banda humps were fucking firebugs. He saw pellet pocks and maggot mounds on gristle. He saw a shot-to-shit Afro wig.

He got Another Idea.

Ivar Smith said, "*Hola, pariguayo.*"

Terry Brundage said, "I never thought we'd see your peeping ass back here."

The bar at the El Embajador. 8:00 a.m. Bloody Marys affixed with celery sticks. Both guys had aged. Both guys looked prematurely sclerotic.

Crutch cleared table space. Brundage Tabasco'd his drink. Smith pointed to the briefcase.

"*¿Qué es esto*?"

Crutch said, "Four hundred G's."

Brundage said, "Oh, shit. He's working for the Boys again."

Smith said, "As if Wayne Tedrow and the Tiger Krew weren't enough."

Brundage said, "Just what we need. More mob grief and Commie sabotage."

Smith said, "Wayne killed Mormonism for me. I used to think they were all good right-wing white men."

Brundage noshed his celery stick. "I hate fucking wops."

Smith noshed his celery stick. "I hate fucking left-wing converts with chemistry expertise."

Crutch flashed his show pix: Reggie and Celia Reyes.

Brundage said, "Who's the chiquita? I dig her eyes."

Smith said, "Sambo looks like Chubby Checker. 'Come on, baby. Let's do the Twist.' "

Crutch dipped into the briefcase and tossed them both ten grand. Smith gagged and almost sprayed. Brundage dropped his celery stick.

Crutch said, "They're Commies, sure as shit. I want to find them and take them back to the States."

Brundage fanned his cash stacks. "Why?"

Crutch said, "I'm not telling you."

Smith fanned his cash stacks. “Put motive aside for a moment. How much of the money do we keep?”

Crutch patted the briefcase. “All of it. You pay everybody who needs to get paid, and you keep the rest.”

Brundage said, “Explain this to me. I’m not saying no, but give me more of a hint.”

“I’m all out of leads. You’ve got the files, the informants and the manpower. It’s a roundup. You find them or you find the Commies who know where they are.”

Brundage salted his drink. “Detentions.”

Smith peppered his drink. “Interrogations. We bring in La Banda.”

Crutch said, “They could be in Haiti.”

Brundage rolled his eyes. “That means the Tonton.”

Smith rolled his eyes. “Evil, chicken-fucking primitives, who do not work cheap.”

Brundage chomped his celery stick. “Papa Doc will want a taste.”

Smith chomped his celery stick. “So will the Midget.”

Crutch fanned a cash roll. “It’s a lot of money.”

Brundage said, “I’ve got Jew blood. We’ll do it for five.”

Smith said, “I’m getting more Jewish by the moment. Five closes the deal.”

Crutch shook his head. “Four hundred big ones, over and out.”

Brundage sighed and looked at Smith. Smith salted his drink and sighed back.

“This could get raw. You’re dealing with hard-core subversives.”

Crutch tapped the show pix. “I don’t care, as long as they don’t get hurt.”

He stayed awake. Sleep scared him. His nightmares would eclipse shit that flared real-time. He copped dexies at a quick-script *farmacia*. He leveled his fuel with klerin-laced sno cones. The fruit base cut down dehydration.

Smith and Brundage culled files and built a name list. The cash split went down. Papa Doc and the Midget hogged the green. They got a hundred each. Smith and Brundage got fifty each. The rest went for ops costs and goons. La Banda and the Tonton supplied shake-the-trees guys.

Flying squads: the D.R. and Haiti. Rural-jail detention sites flanking the river. Polygraph machines, Pentothal, coercion. Hard boys with phone books and saps.

The planning took three days. Smith's office served as command post. Crutch stayed awake and sat in. Brundage and Smith scanned KA lists. They found nineteen Celia listings and zero Reggie listings. That limited their targets. Smith said, let's keep it tight. Detain, interrogate, press and/or release. Brundage disagreed. The Reds all know each other. Let's build a big snitch-out pool.

The argument extended. Crutch sided with Brundage. More was better. Smith argued for a less-meets-more combo. Don't overcrowd the jails. Don't let the fuckers huddle and collude. Weed out the lice who don't know Celia or Reggie at the get-go. Offer rat-out cash. Restrict the interrogations to likely suspects.

They agreed on thirty-four names. Twenty-three lived in the D.R., eleven lived in Haiti. They had four La Banda teams with squad cars. They had three Tonton teams with squad cars. The jail sites were mid-island, near Dajabón. A walk-bridge provided foot access. The Plaine du Massacre was croc-infested there. The fuckers dined on dumped garbage and errant Haitians on voodoo-herb trips.

The polygraphs were hooked up. The Pentothal was laid in. The interrogators stood ready. Both jails were two-way-radio–rigged. The squad cars had two-ways. The system was spiffy.

Smith called the shots. Crutch joined him at the D.R. jail. Crocs lounged on the riverbank. They were groovy. Crutch stared out the window at them.

Clock it: exactly 7:00 a.m.

Smith radioed the cars. The cars rogered back in English and French. Mug shots were wall-pinned: thirty-four comrades, total.

Crutch read their files last night. They were mostly kids his age. They looked like kids. He didn't. He had gray hair and posterior scarring. One non-kid exception: Esteban Sánchez, M.D. He looked battle-aged. Joan had called him "a seasoned Red Brigade warrior."

The callbacks hit: got them, got them, got them. Smith manned the radio. Crutch heard sputter and squawk. Some Reds resisted, some didn't. We're coming in now.

Crutch walked outside and waited on the bridge. Crocs sunned and swam below. He tossed them handfuls of beef jerky. They snapped it off the water. Their teeth flashed. Their snouts veered toward the bridge.

Joan.

Every thought now. Cutting through his case and his idea. Cutting through to *This*.

She raises her arms. He kisses her there. She says, "You're insanely durable and persistent." She harps on that. She talks about the gene of persistence. He asks her what she means. She says, "I'm not telling you."

Hours whizzed by. Crutch stayed in the Joan Zone. He ate dexies. He watched the crocs. He heard incoming calls on a loudspeaker. Yeah, we got Reds—but no Reggie or Celia.

The squad cars showed. Muffler noise announced them. Whoosh—dual-court press—both riverbanks. It felt synchronized. Crutch had a two-river view.

Eyes right—Tonton guys and black Commies. Eyes left—La Banda with Reds black and brown. Crutch stood on the bridge and head-counted. The D.R.: eighteen total. Haiti: nine of eleven. No Reginald Hazzard, no Celia Reyes.

The comrades were handcuffed. Crutch counted twenty-four men and three women. The goons shoved and pushed them. A few dragged their feet. Little sap shots got them back going.

They entered the jails. Two-river view. Out and in, instantaneous.

Nothing showed through the windows. Crutch stood on the bridge and fed the crocs. He was weavy and dingy. Spots popped in front of his eyes. He'd been up since L.A.

A croc leaped way high. Crutch reached down and scratched his nose. A man screamed in the D.R. jail, up close. A man screamed in the Haiti jail, faint.

It went on for ten seconds. Crocs swarmed under the bridge. *Feed me that shit now*.

Crutch tuned it all out. The crocs dispersed. Time dispersed. He popped more dexies, he got more dingy, he saw more spots. Joan takes off her glasses and rubs her eyes. He kisses her arms. He yanks at her boots. She laughs and resists. He falls on his ass.

A man screamed in the D.R. jail. Two men screamed in the Haiti jail, faint. It went on for half a minute and stopped.

Crutch re-tuned it out. His arms tingled. He felt sunstroked. He saw spots. His pants felt slack. The spots started to look like bugs.

A man screamed in the D.R. jail. It went on and didn't stop. He conjured Joan harder. She touched Dwight's clothes and cried. He told her he'd look after her. She said, "You can't."

A woman screamed in the D.R. jail. It went on and didn't stop. Crutch covered his ears. That didn't stop it. He turned his back and got more distance. That made it worse. His ears hurt. The spots grew into grids and reframed everything. The screams got louder. He turned around and sprinted up.

The front door was open. Kids were shackled to drainpipes and benches inside. The sound reverbed down a back hall.

Crutch ran. The spots became figures. He knocked down a Tonton dude and a La Banda guy with a Sten gun. He hit a connecting corridor. He saw mirror-paned sweat rooms on both sides. Kids resisted poly tests. Goons cuffed kids to chair backs. Goons waved phone books and hose chunks.

The woman screamed louder. Crutch nailed the sound and kicked in the door. She was chair-cuffed. Her arms were bloody. A Tonton fuck had a barbed-wire sap.

She saw him and screamed louder. The Tonton guy stepped up. Oh, no, baby boy—this is mine.

Crutch arm-barred him. His throat bones cracked. Crutch elbow-slammed his nose and broke it. The Tonton guy grabbed at his throat and convulsed. The woman screamed. Crutch pulled off his shirt and showed her his scar.

Smith ran into the room. The Tonton fuck puked bone chips and blood. Crutch weaved and saw spots. The woman looked at his scar. Their heads converged. She said something in Spanish. Crutch thought he heard "Celia" and "Port-au—"

Two Tonton guys drove him. Brundage and Smith frosted the dustup. You was over-zealous. You over-reacted. Thanks for the bread.

The car was a voodoo barge. A '63 Impala, lowered and chopped. Bizango-sect flags. Cheater slicks and baby-moon hubcaps. Dashboard pix of dogs in pointed hats.

Crutch weaved in the backseat. Those spots kept swirling. He broke his L.A. record for staying hot-wired awake. The Tonton guys dug him. The torture guy fucked the driver guy's wife. That be bad juju. You a righteous white boy.

The barge was air-cooled. Tinted windows shaded all the *pauvre* shit outside. Little villages and big signs extolling Papa Doc. Blood-marked trees ubiquitous and geeks in chicken-head hats.

The people faded into spots and vice versa. The Tonton guys spoke half English, half French. The roundup made them each a C-note. La Banda skirmished with some Reds in Santo Domingo. That be bad *gre-gre*.

Port-au-Prince was Shitsville with a Sea Breeze. Rocky beaches, stucco cubes and eroded buildings older than God. The barge stopped at a lime green pad raised off the street on pylons. Crutch said bye-bye and lurched up the steps.

He knocked. The door opened. Celia Reyes leaned on the jamb. She said, "I've seen you before." He said, "Everyone has." The spots cohered and made everything black.

Lieutenant Maggie Woodard, USNR.

She wore the winter blues and the summer khakis. Her name tag read WOODARD. She never married Crutch Senior. She drank too much and got pissy or effusive. She stayed in the reserves after the Big War.

She wore her uniform on weekends. He watched from doorways. She tipped highballs and played Brahms on a scratchy phonograph. She chain-smoked. She dangled her brown uniform shoe off her left foot. She dangled her black uniform shoe off her right. She caught him lurking and laughed. She fed him maraschino cherries out of her glass.

Fading in and dispersing. Blackout sketches into spots.

We're in Ensenada. You've got an earache. I can't stand your hurt. I hit a farmacia and shoot you up.

We're in L.A. Your father blows our money. We scrounge empty pop bottles and splurge at Bob's Big Boy.

We're in San Diego. Your father is elsewhere. You're out roving, as you always are. You come back unexpectedly. You catch me with a lover at the El Cortez Hotel.

You're always watching me. I leave that day. You stand at the window, waiting. I never saw it, but I know.

• • •

"You undressed me."

"You were delirious. You weren't making sense at all."

"How long was I out?"

"Two full days."

"Jesus. Everything looks different."

"Then maybe it is."

The robe was too big. He'd lost twenty pounds, easy. She cooked a big breakfast. The smell repulsed him. The kitchen was cramped. Everything was off-scale. Dishes covered the table and sent weird fumes up.

Celia said, "Joan sent you."

"How did you know?"

"I found a picture of her in with your clothes."

"What else did you find?"

"A Saint Christopher medal, a .45 automatic and a list of meticulously prepared questions."

Crutch re-focused. Four years, then to now. Hollywood to Haiti. She hadn't changed. Everything else had.

"I hope you'll be willing to answer them."

Celia sipped coffee. "I don't think I care like you do."

"I don't understand."

She smiled. "I'm saying I've changed. My beliefs have solidified. I'm not that reckless and vindictive person so determined to avenge Tattoo."

Crutch weaved. The off-scale room contracted. He felt kitchen heat and started to sweat.

"I'd appreciate it if you could tell me what you know and what you remember."

Celia buttered her toast. She wore a knee-length shift. Her hair was cinched tight by a barrette.

"Tattoo was a voodoo priestess. I held to her beliefs much more then than I do now. She was wild and I was wild, and I was trying to manipulate a man who worked for Howard Hughes. I wanted to see those casinos built in my country. Joan and I thought we could shape that event to benefit the Cause."

Crutch poured coffee. "I know that part. I know about the hex you placed on Tattoo and how you wanted to revoke it. What concerns me is the specific details of that sum—"

"I was wild. She was wild. We were caught up in large things together. I had summoned a curse on her because I believed in those things then. We reconnected that summer. It was a dangerous time in the world. I wanted to hurt Tattoo and save her, all at once. She had made a pornographic film with a voodoo theme. A sleazy realtor arranged for screenings of it around the time Tattoo disappeared. Things connected. The realtor knew the man who worked for Howard Hughes. It all felt mystical. Joan humored me and allowed me to rent a house from the man. Tattoo was crashing in a house nearby. Joan had told her about the place. It stayed vacant for long periods. Joan and some comrades had used it as a safe house years before."

Convergence, confluence, coincidence. Arnie Moffett, Horror House, the Commie meeting notes. A time loop: '68 to 12/6/62.

"The realtor's name was Arnold Moffett."

"Yes, that sounds right. He had a vague connection to the Caribbean. I think he was involved in Haitian import-export."

Re-convergence. Arnie Moffett in '68: my pads are fuck-film sets.

"You knew Sal Mineo. You asked him to set Tattoo up with some movie-business men. He'd referred you before. You wanted to revoke the curse. Tattoo had done penance and bought her way out of the book of the dead. She—"

Celia clamped his hands. He was racy and sweaty. He let her anchor him.

"Sal called it 'fantasia' then, and I'm calling it that now. *Tattoo was wild, I was wild. We were wild like you're wild now*. Tattoo reconciled with the 6/14 people and did favors for Joan. Joan said, 'Sweetie, stop this foolishness. Tattoo will be better served if you let all this go.' "

Crutch pulled his hands free. "And you *did*? And you're telling me that's *it*?"

Celia nodded. "I'll grant you this. Tattoo disappeared, and I had a legitimate premonition that she had been killed that summer. For what it's worth, I still have it. I had it later that year, and I talked to a friend about it, and—"

"Leander James Jackson, who—"

"Who is dead now himself. *He* asked around about Tattoo. *He* talked to the realtor, and *he* got nowhere."

Crutch rubbed his legs. His limbs felt numb. His brain respooled, re-started, re-stopped and re-fed.

"You're saying that's it?"

"Yes."

"You're saying you don't remember the men you set Tattoo up with?"

"Yes."

"You're saying you don't know who attended the screenings?"

"Yes. I have a copy of the film, but Leander and I never identified the other actors."

"You're saying that Jackson braced Arnie Moffett on the screenings and got nothing, and that from there you just let it all slide?"

Celia touched his arm. "You're resourceful and persistent, or you wouldn't have found me. If you're as anxious to please Joan as I think you are, you can find better ways to serve the Cause."

Re-feeding, re-spooling, stop/start, squelch/sputter/off.

"Do you know where Reginald Hazzard is?"

"Yes. He lives a mile from here."

Crutch laughed. "Just like that?"

She took a napkin and wiped his face. Sweat trickled into his eyes.

"I'm taking you back to Joan."

"No, you're not. I'll write a note to her."

The film can was heavy. The envelope was sealed. C.R./J.K. was printed on the back.

He decided to walk and re-scale things. It didn't work. He felt *re*-railed, not *de*-railed. He had the Arnie Moffett *re*-lead. He still had That Idea.

He called Ivar Smith from Celia's place. They made travel plans. Tonton shuttle to Santo Domingo. L.A. from there. Stiff the Vegas call and pray it plays out.

His fingers were paper-cut. File reads did that sometimes. They tingled. His brain just re-signaled him the pain.

Sea spray and humidity. Spice in the air. Black folks speaking French.

He tossed Celia's passport in a trash can. He swiped a banana from a fruit stand and snarked it. Some kids played a portable radio. Memory Lane: Archie Bell and the Drells with "The Tighten

Up."

There's chez Reggie. It's Caribbean Day-Glo green.

The door was open. A torn-up screen was stuck in place. Crutch reached through a hole and un-latched it.

A lab and a file trove. Bottle rows and stacked folders. Chem texts, beakers, burners and pots. Some nifty molecular charts.

His fingers stung. He scanned shelves and played a hunch. There's *ocimum basilicum*. Sure, why not?

He dipped his left-hand fingers in the bottle. They re-tingled and un-stung. He pulled them out. The cuts disappeared as the skin puckered up.

"Do you believe in Haitian chemistry?"

He turned around. Nix on Chubby Checker. Reggie looked like Harry Belafonte with white splotches and a Fu Manchu stash.

Crutch said, "I believe in everything."

Sleep found him and won. He wanted to see it all one more time and say good-bye to Wayne. He got a blackout curtain and cigarette backdraft.

He smelled the airport. Jet fuel and scorched rubber. He heard chants right after that.

"*Muerto,*" La Banda, "Raids" *en español.*

He opened his eyes. He saw kids with black-bordered placards. A photo of a swarthy guy. ESTEBAN JORGE SÁNCHEZ, 1929–1972.

He shut his eyes again. Reggie said, "Don't go to sleep. We're here."

The Midget flew them first-class. Reggie was tall. The legroom jazzed him. Crutch tried to conjure Joan and got Esteban Sánchez non-stop.

Reggie was Mr. Quiet. It all oozed fait accompli. He didn't niggle, question, protest. Reggie, the doofus genius with the hellbent past.

Crutch stayed awake. The nightmare potential re-vitalized him and kept him up. Reggie read chemistry books and over-ate. His burn scars looked exotic. The stewardess dug on him. Reggie, the socially unkempt and angelic savant.

Crutch got mad out of nowhere. The jet engine throb got lodged in him somehow. He got dizzy. Sleep fought him and won.

“Sir, we’ve arrived.”

The stewardess jostled him. First class had filed out. Reggie was gone. *No, not yet. Please, God—let me see—*

He jumped up. He grabbed his bag and shoved people out of the way. His coat flapped. People saw his gun and got panicked. He shoved his way down the ramp. He elbowed some hippie fools and a nun. He made the runway. He saw Reggie and Mary Beth lock in an embrace.

The kid was sobbing. Mary Beth held his head down. She looked up and saw Crutch. She gave him her green-flecked eyes for a moment and walked her son off.

125

(Los Angeles, 4/13/72)

Joan built identities.

She worked at Dwight's desk. Klein and Sifakis were verboten now. Too much had happened. She'd overused Williamson, Goldenson, Broward and Faust.

They needed birth certificates. Forest Lawn sent her a plot list. It included names, dates of birth and dates of death. She thumbed through it. The decedents were alphabetized. They needed two women. 1920s DOBs, one ethnic/one not. She was Jewish and looked it. Karen was Greek and did not.

She scanned columns. The correct-age name selection was scant. They needed solitary women. Scant family or none. That required backup research. From there: driver's licenses, Social Security cards, official file plants.

The names bored her. She sipped tea and lit a cigarette. Her wrist scars itched. She glanced around the fallback.

An envelope by the door. Expensive paper. It barely fit under the crack.

She got up and reached for it. She saw the set of initials on the back. She slit the top and read the note attached.

Mi Amor,
Me quedo. Por la Causa. Con respeto al regalo que eres tú.

She'd kissed the page below her signature. Her lips had left an imprint bright red.

126

(Los Angeles, 4/14/72)

Roll it.

Clyde and Buzz were out. Crutch worked the briefing-room projector. He spooled in the film and matched the sprocket holes. He killed the lights and pulled down the wall screen. He centered the beam and got *Action.*

Color footage, grainy stock. He jiggled dials. Better now—a clear image.

Fade in. There's a panning shot. There's a living room. The camera catches a window. It's light outside. The room is small and cheaply furnished. It's not Horror House.

A shot holds: the living room, close in. Five people walk into the frame. There's three women, two men. They're all naked and body-painted. Voodoo symbols, head to foot. The two men are black. Two women are white. They all wear wooden masks. The other woman is unmasked and wildly tattooed. She's María Rodríguez Fontonette.

Crutch straddled a chair. The camera swerved through the living room. There's the window again. The street is visible, it's Beachwood Canyon, we're *near* Horror House.

The camera re-centered. The actors swallowed brown capsules. Haitian herbs, yes. Cut to a close-up. There's Maria. There's the tattoo on her arm. The severing bisected the artwork soon after. She had lovely hands. They'd be severed. She moved gracefully. The killer cut inside of her. All that lithe movement, quashed.

Crutch watched. He felt compressed. Summer '68. Tattoo crashes in Horror House, Tattoo dies there. Arnie Moffett's rental houses. Joan and Celia rent one. The rental-house screenings. It's all compressed. He was close at the start of it and never since. Warning click: there's something you missed.

Jump cut: we're in a bedroom now. There's an uncovered water bed, jiggling. The actors mill around. They talk to someone offscreen. Their lips move soundless.

Crutch stared at Tattoo. She's beautiful, she's alive. She betrayed 6/14 in '59 and reconciled later. "It was a wild time." Celia said that. He couldn't reconcile the Cause with a fuck flick. It offended him.

The men trembled and shook. They fell on the bed. Their backs arched. Their legs spasmed. The potions took hold. They were early-stage zombified. They dumped their masks and gasped for air. They sweated the voodoo paint off their bodies.

Tattoo whipped them. Soft shots, for show. The two white girls started trembling. Their movements were puppet-string jerky. They got on the bed and stroked the guys hard. They all seized and thrashed. They all did grand mal shit, out of body. The men thrashed prone. Their movements slowed. The white girls straddled them and pulled them inside. The camera got insertion-close.

Different herbs. The women contorted at a hyper-pace. They pinned down the men. Their hips and arms moved in counterpoint. Their heads moved on some spazzy axis. The camera caught the men close. Their eyes were open and dead. Tattoo soft-whipped the women. Their contortions accelerated.

Tattoo stepped out of sight and stepped back in the frame. She held a fireplace tool, shaped like a phallus. The cock tip glowed. It was near white-hot. She touched the carpet with it and got combustion. The women thrashed and opened their mouths. She fed them the cock head. They sucked it and displayed no pain. They removed their mouths and pressed the cock head to the bedstead. The fabric sizzled and burned down to the springs.

The men were zombified. The women voodoo-fucked them. Tattoo grabbed the burning cock and burn-carved the wall. Crutch *got it.* He *knew* the markings. Tattoo drew them at Horror House. Tattoo drew them in fire on a fuck film–set wall.

The sprocket holes jammed. The screen went all white. The film died at just that spot.

Convergence. Connection. Confluence. Clyde's line: *It's who you know and who you blow and how you're all linked.*

Warning click: something's missing. You don't know who killed Tattoo. You don't know who glued all this up.

Crutch drove up Beachwood Canyon. It was all tight. There's Horror House. There's the house Joan and Celia rented. There's Arnie Moffett's other pads. Your four-years-back memory holds.

He zigzagged side streets. He calibrated the view out the fuck-film window. There it is, intact. The same palm trees and driveway across the street. A Moffett Realty sign.

Still all tight. Stone's throw here, stone's dribble there. Who/what started it and made it all cohere?

Celia said Arnie Moffett ran an import-export biz. Click—we're back *there* again.

Confluence. It's who you know and who you—

Crutch drove downtown. Clyde had pull at the L.A. License Bureau. File access cost you fifty clams and a wink.

The duty clerk recognized him. Import-export from a while back? The boxes in Room 12.

The room was a musty paper swamp. The boxes were marked by years. No pull tabs, no alphabetizing. Real paper digs.

He started at '66 and worked backward. He hit at '63.

Arnie had a low-rent biz going. "Arnie's Island Exotics, Limited." Curios, knickknacks, *connection.* Imports from: Jamaica, Haiti, the D.R. closer now. Where's that little link-it-all click?

The same office. The same next-door deli. "The Home of the Hebrew Hero."

He brought a pint of Jim Beam. Arnie was a lush. The booze softened the beating then. It might work now.

Crutch walked in. A bell jingled. Arnie sat at the same desk. His bowling shirt was green today. He picked his nose and read *Car*

Craft.

Crutch took the client's chair. Arnie ignored him. Crutch placed the jug on his blotter.

Arnie glanced at it. Crutch said, "Summer '68. What's the first thing you think of?"

Eyes on the jug. He considers, *re*-considers and *re*-cogitates. Aaah, he gets it.

"The first thing I think of is all that political *tsuris*. The second thing I think of is you."

Crutch cracked the jug and passed it over. Arnie chugalugged.

"The third thing I'm thinking is that you look a lot older. The fourth is that I hope you ain't still on that crusade. If it pertains to my houses, Gretchen Farr, Farlan Brown or Howard Hughes, you heard everything I got."

Crutch said, "Leander James Jackson."

Arnie re-chugged. "Say what?"

"The other guy who came around asking questions. That woman 'Tattoo,' your fuck-film set, the house you rented out for the screenings."

Arnie picked his snout. "We got two different agendas here. Where they connect, I don't know. You had your Gretchie crusade, he had his thing for Tattoo. He's dead, by the way. He got offed in that 'Black-Militant Blastout.' And, by the way, I didn't hold nothing back from you. I told you I rented my cribs as porno-film sets, but you didn't ask me no questions about Tattoo."

Re-convergence, *de*-convergence. So far, Arnie played kosher. Shit hovered close.

"Tell me about Tattoo."

"What's to tell? I knew somebody who knew somebody who knew her. I heard she was on the skids. She heard I used to run an import biz out of her shitty country. She wanted to make some *farkakte* voodoo-smut film, and she needed a place to screen it. We talked on the phone. I gave her some leads. They were all pervy-type guys off my old import-customer list. She cold-called them, which ended our brief and borderline profitable encounter."

Crutch rubbed his eyes. "Were you there for the film shoot?"

"No."

"Did you meet the camera crew or the other actors?"

"No."

"Have you seen the film?"

"*Nyet*. Porno ain't my bag. I like the real thing there in the sack with me. I'm an in-and-out kind of guy. Ten minutes of bliss and I'm back watching *Bowling for Dollars* on Channel 13."

Crutch rubbed his neck. He was all knots and kinks.

"Who went to the screenings? Give me some names."

Arnie sucked on the jug. "I don't know. I sent Tattoo a mimeograph copy of my list."

"She was murdered that summer. How does that sit with you?"

Arnie made the jackoff sign. "It don't sit with me one way or the other. That Haitian guy thought she'd been clipped, so I'll tell you the same thing I told him. Bobby the K. and that civil rights *macher* just bought it, so it's not like some stray piece of island gash carries all that much weight with me."

Crutch saw *RED*. Just like *then*. No, don't do it.

"Where's the fucking customer list?"

Arnie popped a zit on his neck. "It's in my garage, if it's anywhere. The key's on the hook by the john. Have fun, but don't come back in another four years and put me through this shit again."

Dust, mildew, cobwebs, spiders' nests, mice. Oil cans, dead batteries, a cracked engine block. *Car Craft* back to '52. Forty forged Sandy Koufax baseballs.

Arnie Moffett's garage, Mar Vista.

Stolen prescription pads. The full run of *Food Service Monthly*. A photo of Marlon Brando with a dick in his mouth. Four BB guns, two defunct lawn mowers, the skeletal remains of a cat.

Crutch worked. He dug through pack-rat shit to get at a pile of boxes. He hit the first box row. Arnie's résumé expanded. He sold French ticklers, he sold rosaries, he sold the Donkey Dan Dong Extender. He sold counterfeit football tix. He ran the Debra Paget Fan Club. He mail-ordered JFK and Jackie K. dolls. He drop-shipped amyl-nitrate poppers to fag bars. He owned an employment agency for wetback kitchen help.

There—"Arnie's Island Exotics."

He ripped the box open. An invoice stack popped out. He dumped the box on the floor. Gotcha—"Customers/'59–'63."

Four stapled pages. A fuckload of names.

Crutch scanned alphabetic. The names and addresses meant greek. He got to the last page. He scanned the *Ts* to Zs. He stopped dead at:

“Weiss, Charles. 1482 North Roxbury, Beverly Hills.”

Chick: divorce lawyer. Chick: wheelman consort. Chick: Phil Irwin’s best pal. Phil: hired and fired by Dr. Fred Hiltz—find me Gretchen Farr. Chick: dope fiend and mud shark.

And …

There’s …

The …

CLICK.

Chick’s office. Rope-job strategy. The three-phallus statue. The open-legged Negress. Imports—all voodoo vile.

He needed a throwdown. The fallback was close. *Cold pieces*. Dwight might have left some.

It was dusk. He floored it northeast. He looped by Karen’s place en route. Window view: Karen and Joan in the living room. The girls acting rambunctious.

The fallback lights were on. Crutch snagged the key under the mat and let himself in. A file was propped up on the desk. Joan had left him a note.

> D.C.,
>
> A friend found this. The Feds have paper on you. I thought you might like to see it.
>
> J.K.

CRUTCHFIELD, DONALD LINSCOTT.

Clyde Duber–culled reports. Knife-redacted paragraphs. Clyde’s assessments: “Voyeurs make good wheelmen.” “Weird tendencies.” The kid was working the Farr case. He was too tweaked on it.

A CBI report: Phil Irwin, Fed snitch.

“My buddy Chick and I like to peep. We studied under the best, Crutch Crutchfield. There ain’t a window in Hancock Park that that twisted cocksucker ain’t put his snout up to. He never knew it, but Chick and I used to tail him and study his technique.”

PD reports below: Phil and Chick popped for loitering. KA Arnie Moffett questioned per “porno parties.” Arnie shares Chick’s love of “bizarre Negro art.”

He saw *RED*. He couldn’t breathe. He gulped sink water and coughed it out. He got some wind back.

Dwight had left a goody basket in the closet. He found a throwdown, handcuffs and a roll of duct tape.

Phil was a car-dweller. He crashed in his Tiger kab most nights. He usually parked in the wheelman lot, away from the street.

Crutch drove over. The station was closed. A Tiger stretch was parked by the toolshed. Phil was sleepytimed in the backseat. His arms dangled out the window.

Snores. Booze breath wafting. Phil’s head propped on the window ledge.

Crutch parked and walked up. Phil dozed on. Crutch opened his cuffs and snapped Phil’s left wrist. Phil dream-yipped. Crutch cranked the ratchets and spare-cuffed the doorpost. Phil grimaced and snored.

Crutch yanked the door wide. The cuff chain gouged Phil and pulled him up and out of the seat. He roused. He hit the world on his knees. He didn’t get it. I can’t move. My arm’s above my head *and it hurts*.

He shrieked. He blinked and saw Crutch. He said, “Hey, Peep —”

Crutch kicked him in the balls. Phil hurled booze laced with peanuts. He tried to stand and get some chain slack. Crutch re-kicked his balls. Phil re-hit his knees.

He screamed. The cuff gouged him tight. Blood leaked down his arm. Crutch said, “Summer ’68. You got the Gretchen Farr gig first, I got it second. You went on a bender, I took over then.”

Phil tried to sit down. The cuff chain dug tighter. Phil tried to stand up. Crutch kicked him in the balls. Phil hit his knees, harder.

He screamed, he coughed, he dribbled puke. He lolled his head on his chest and panted.

Crutch said, “You and Weiss. The peeping, Arnie Moffett, that voodoo film.”

Phil lolled his head. Crutch slapped him. Phil ducked and tried to bite his hand. Crutch pulled the throwdown and held it out eye level.

"I'll run the radio. No one will hear the shot. You work Tiger Kab. You're all over darktown. You're fucking half the black chicks south of Washington Boulevard. How much time will LAPD give it?"

Phil took some breaths. Phil scooched around on his knees. His eyes got snitch-darty. Blood ran down his arm and soaked his shirt.

"So, we like to peep. You like it, I like it, Chick likes it. He knew this Arnie guy. Chick used to buy knickknacks and shit from him. Arnie owned party cribs and showed movies at them. Chick saw this weird-ass flick and got hipped on some babe in it. He heard she was living in some empty house around there, and my guess is he peeped her."

Crutch said, "And that's it?"

"You want more?"

"Yes."

"Okay, you've got it. We peeped you peeping, so we learned from the King. Whatever you're in a lather over came straight from you."

Crutch pulled out his duct tape. Phil squirmed and thrashed his head. Crutch grabbed his hair and mummy-wrapped him. He left a nose hole open. He covered his mouth, his head, his ears. He pulled him off the ground and kicked him into the backseat. The cuff ratchets gouged him. His bones showed plain. The mock-tiger seat covers shed all over him.

Hash smoke. Follow the trail. The wife's car is gone. He's tripping back by the pool.

Crutch walked down the driveway. The backyard was dark. The pool supplied shimmer light.

Olympic-size. Artful nudes scrolled on the bottom. Picasso on LSD.

Chick sat by the deep end. He rocked his chair and toed the diving board. The fumes got stronger. He had a little mesh-spouted pipe.

Crutch pulled a chair up. Chick focused in on him.

"You're supposed to call first. Clyde knows that."

“Does Phil have to call first?”

“Phil’s a special case. Clyde knows that, too.”

Crutch flipped his chair and straddled it. The hash smoke burned his eyes. He smelled Hai Karate cologne.

The pool water rippled. Chick took a hit and offered the pipe. Crutch shook his head.

“I’ve put some things together. I’d appreciate your comments.”

Chick re-lit the pipe. The little mesh glowed.

“There’s something portentous about this visit of yours. It’s starting to bum me out.”

“You killed a woman named María Rodríguez Fontonette. I’d like you to tell me about it.”

Chick grinned and winked. It was practiced. Chick had studied the late Scotty B.

“There’s not much to tell, although I have to credit you with an assist on that one.”

“Have there been others?”

“A few, here and there.”

“You peep, you see something you like, and you kill them?”

“More or less.”

“Tell me about María.”

Chick took a hit. His eyes were red, his pupils were dots.

“I peeped her. She dug voodoo, I dug voodoo, we both dug voodoo art. We ate some herbs and rapped about Haiti. Everything’s cool, until she lays out this guilt trip about some Commie invasion she betrayed. It was a bummer. It brought me down, until I started thinking, you know, you’re here in this abandoned house, you’ve always wanted to do it, she’s a nigger fly-by-night that nobody will miss.”

Crutch pulled his chair up. “So you did it.”

“Yeah. I bisected the body and cut off her hands. She told me all these emerald stories, so I ground up some green glass and stuffed it in with her wounds. I started having these fantasies about five years earlier. I bought a set of surgical tools and kept them in the trunk of my car, but I never thought I’d have the nerve. Well, the moon was in Scorpio that night, and I guess I just did.”

Crutch looked at the moon. It was slivered and half-eclipsed.

“You’re vibing judgmental, Peeper. That cracks me up.”

“Oh?”

"I always thought you had a surfeit of balls and a shortage of brains. Now, I have to add 'hypocritical mind-set' to that."

Crutch reached in his pockets. Chick took a hit and blew smoke in his face.

"You can't put your nose to windows and come away blood-free. Inspiration's inspiration. It's like that guy King said. 'I have a dream.' You just never know who's been watching you or who's kicking around in your head."

Crutch pulled out the capsules and displayed them. Chick said, "What have you got?"

"They're Haitian. It's an up trip. You'll fly for a day and a half."

Chick went *May I*? Crutch went *Sure*. Chick dry-swallowed the capsules and re-lit his pipe.

Crutch leaned closer. "Tell me about the other ones."

"What's to tell? They looked good, and I was bored."

"Just like that?"

Chick took a hit. "Yeah, 'Just like that.' It's the '70s, baby. 'Do your own thing.' "

Crutch looked around. The pool, the moonlight, the moment. A bird flutter overhead.

Chick looked at him. A few seconds passed. His gaze glazed. Green foam poured out his eyes, nose and mouth. His arms spasmed and constricted. Bones shattered. Crutch heard the breaks. Chick stood up and staggered. Foam bubbled out of his ears.

Crutch stuck a leg out and tripped him. Chick fell into the pool. Crutch watched him thrash and float facedown.

127

(Los Angeles, 4/17/72)

"Don't give me a surname. There's one I'm considering."

"Dare I guess?"

"Let's just say it honors the past several years, as well as runs from them."

The backyard was Ella's gator farm. Clouds brewed and promised rain. Joan rounded the stuffed creatures up.

Karen said, "Literary executor. What do you think? All our files, diaries, memoranda. Everything we've put together."

Joan looked up at the fallback. "He'd be good. He's quite the hoarder."

"What would he do with it?"

"He'd read through it and look for answers. He'd see things that no one else has seen and impose his own logic on it. If he grows up, he'll understand what it all means."

The girls bombed around the house. Joan peered through windows. Dina watched TV cartoons. Ella snuck up, pulled the plug and laughed.

Karen said, "I miss Dwight."

Joan said, "Something's changing with my body."

The rain kept up. A strong wind came with it. Joan anchored her paper stacks with throwdown guns and Dwight's knickknacks. She wanted the wind. The boy loved her hair aswirl.

Mixed blessing. The wind gave them the backdrop. Gusts snuffed the candle flames.

He was there with her and off somewhere. He kept his eyes open. She kissed them shut and held them shut and caressed a neck vein pulsing. He made sounds she'd never heard before. He had a kid-sound repertoire. The sounds pushed his tears back. He burrowed into her hair, so she wouldn't see.

It took a while. He'd drift someplace and touch her from a distance. He'd spend time away from her and roll back. He saw what he saw or thought what he thought and come back to her. He put a knee between her legs and kissed her underarms. He forced the fit. She rolled and kneeled over him. His eyes looked crazy. She covered them. He kissed her palms and held her fingers in his mouth.

"*Tell me what you've been doing.*"

"*I can't.*"

"*Have you been thinking about the island?*"

"*Yes, in part.*"

"*I heard that Esteban Sánchez had been killed.*"

"*Yes, he was.*"

"*Were you complicit?*"

"*Yes.*"

"*Trust the purity of your intent. There will always be casualties, and there will always be fewer of them if you act boldly.*"

"*There's something else.*"

"*Tell me about it.*"

"*I'm not going to.*"

"*Were you complicit?*"

"*Yes.*"

"*Did you act boldly?*"

"*Yes.*"

"*Did you realize that you had to act, because no one else* *would?"*

"Yes."

"Are you comforted by that now?"

"No."

"Your options were do everything or do nothing. You made the correct choice."

"How will I know when I've done the wrong thing?"

"When the result is a catastrophe that will in no way subside."

"What do I do then?"

"Reach for a deeper resolve and try to be stronger and smarter next time."

"There's something kicking around in my head now."

"Tell me about it."

"I can't."

"All right."

"Tell me why you redacted my file."

"I'm not going to."

"I don't think I'll ever feel safe again. I'll always be looking for something that may or may not be there."

"You've always been that way."

"Is there a way to run away from all this?"

"Not for you or me. We might run, but we'll always run back."

128

(Los Angeles, 4/18/72–4/30/72)

He worked at pad #3. He closed the curtains, shut the drapes and ran the air conditioning. He shut off all the clocks. He unplugged the phone. He turned day to night and night to day.

It was a controlled burning. He emptied out his file trove at the Vivian. He boxed up all his file shit downtown. He had the liquid-herb formula and the syringe. He had written formulas from his herb guys. Burn your mother's file, burn Wayne's file, burn your case file. Build your paper bombs and gauge the results.

He stole Dwight Holly's bolt-tappers. Pre-oiled tungsten cut through anything. He had his plane tix, his fake facial hair, his bogus ID. He had everything. He had to act, because no one else would.

He emptied out the boxes. The paper piles ran ten feet high. He dumped out his case file last. The murder occurred a heartbeat away. He should have known then. He figured it out late. He acted, because no one else would.

He saved Joan's mug shots. He nailed them to the back basement wall. He clamped his Saint Christopher medal to the nailhead.

The herb guys gave him crib sheets. He brewed liquids and filled eye-droppers. He squeezed droplets on blotter paper. He cross-checked molecular charts. He refined the burn words/retain paper effect.

File paper stripped. File paper blackened, curdled, crisped. Smell and haze—but no smoke outright.

He brewed six full bottles and baffle-wrapped them. He placed three Windex empties in his knapsack. He bought forty mesh laundry bags. He jammed them all paper-full.

Paper balls, paper pods, paper cylinders. Hold for the spritz.

He filled Windex bottle #1. He sprayed his Paper Parthenon life's work. It curdled, bubbled, singed, reduced and vaporized text. It sent up a stink. It produced eye irritation. The paper nests vibrated. The little mesh nets snapped. Wordless paper scraps whirled.

Crutch walked to the back wall. Joan's mug shots were dust-coated. He wiped them off. He placed the Saint Chris around his neck.

I will avenge you.

I will honor the great gift of you.

You faltered and gave me your flag for safekeeping. I will carry it for you now.

129

(Los Angeles, 5/1/72)

May Day.

Red flags swirled up Silver Lake Boulevard. Political banners were mixed in. END THE WAR, BLACK PRIDE, WOMEN'S RIGHTS. Marchers diverting traffic. Pissed-off cops working overtime.

Joan watched from the terrace. Dwight's binoculars got her in close. She recognized faces from Free the Rosenbergs, twenty years ago.

She'd be leaving soon. Their paper was built. She'd start out again as Jane Anne Kurzfeld. Karen was set to go. She wouldn't reveal her surname. They'd communicate through phone drops.

She had a good sum of money. She gave Karen an equal amount. Jack would administer the rest.

Cars skirted the parade route. Some drivers honked for peace. Some drivers lobbed balloons filled with piss and flipped off the marchers.

The boy disappeared. Something was distressing him the last time they met. Karen agreed with her. He's persistent and rich in synchronicity. We'll leave him our paperwork.

Joan lit a cigarette, took two hits and snuffed it. She shouldn't.

That change in her body had persisted. *Yes, I’m sure this is it.*

130

(Washington, D.C., 5/1/72)

May Day.

Red flags and yippies, aging peaceniks galore. Boocoo banners and causes. Mounted cops like Chicago in ’68. Nowhere near the bloodshed.

A few skirmishes, a few chases, some tramplings. Goofballs with red spray paint, ghouls in Nixon masks.

He blended in. He wore paste-on hippie hair. His mustache and beard itched. His headpiece fit askew. His overstuffed knapsack enhanced the effect.

He flew in two days ago. He pseudonymed his ticket and his hotel-stay stats. He cruised the target three times. The basement door looked impregnable. The basement fuse box looked easy. The laundry-room window was always ajar.

No live-in help. No stakeout Feds parked outside. No watchdogs.

She’d ask him if he did it. He’d wink like Scotty Bennett. He’d say, “I’m not telling you.”

The day marches became night parties. He hung out at Lafayette Park. The White House was across the street. He got

Tricky Dick elected. The Frogman assisted. It was a billion pre-Red years ago.

Hippies smoked weed and cavorted. A few chicks went topless. Cops made pro forma passes through.

Crutch ambled off to Rock Creek Park. D.C. was full of squares and renegades. Nobody noticed him.

He hit a Texaco station and changed back to his normal duds. He cut up his camouflage threads and hair and flushed them. He walked into the park and found a quiet spot. We're on-go for midnight.

The L.A. papers tagged Chick Weiss a drug OD. Phil Irwin held his mud. He remembered some things Joan told him. Esteban Sánchez kicked through his head.

It was muggy. Night insects bombed him. He was secluded. Fireworks popped on the other side of the park.

The countdown was endless. His watch hands got de-sprung. Midnight hit finally. He was woozy up to 12:03. Bam—reserve adrenaline popped on.

He walked, he ambled, he strolled. Nice night, nice neighborhood. I'm a nice kid lugging school clothes home to my mom's.

There's Northwest Thirtieth Place. There's the driveway. There's the neo-Georgian house.

Por la Causa. Be brazen, be bold.

The window was unscreened and ajar. He walked over, pushed the sill up and vaulted in. He hit the floor light on his feet.

The downstairs lights were off. The kitchen smelled like Lemon Pledge. He'd seen photos in *Antique Monthly* and diagrammed floor plans. He pulled his penlight and walked to the basement door.

It was locked. He inserted a #6 pick and popped the tumblers. Outside access was impossible. Inside access was easy.

He walked down the stairs. He narrow-dialed his beam.

It was his file space and Wayne's file space and Reggie's lab gone mammoth. The basement ran the length and breadth of the house. The ceiling was raised for more paper. The shelves topped Mount Matterhorn and almost scraped clouds.

He had forty-four paper bombs, mesh-netted and screw-topped. He uncinched the duffel bag and placed them shelf by shelf. He got to the bottom. His heart-attack potion had spilled. His syringe had been crushed.

He stood there. A million voices said, “*Dipshit, Peeper, pariguayo.*” He covered his ears. It didn’t stop them. The voices beat on him. He sat on the floor and let them yell themselves out.

He put on his gas mask. He ran through the basement. He popped all forty-four screw tops.

The fumes went up.

Colored clouds rose.

The walls contained them.

Paper singed, curdled, crackled and charred. Little explosions went off. The file shelves rattled. Paint peeled off the walls. The fumes turned re-colored: dark/light, dark/light. Paper flecks vaporized in thin air.

Crutch walked up the steps and shut the door behind him. The kitchen light snapped on. Mr. Hoover stood by the fridge.

Crutch reached in his pocket and pulled out the emerald. Mr. Hoover trembled and homed in on it.

The sparkle was incessant. It eyeball-magnetized. The green glow grew and grew. Mr. Hoover weaved and drooled. Mr. Hoover clutched his chest and staggered upstairs.

131

(Los Angeles, 5/3/72)

It was headline news. Heart attack, seventy-seven.

She felt nothing. The obits would extoll and defame. Dwight had ripped him out of her. She didn't care anymore.

Joan parked in front of the house.

A newscast blared next door. TV rays bounced out a window. The boy called the place "pad #3." His souped-up car was gone. She opened the door with a bogus credit card and let herself in.

The living room was messy. A breeze swirled paper scraps. The air smelled odd. The walls were soot-flecked.

A stack of car magazines. Test tubes and chemical bottles. Notes scrawled on scratch pads. A sawed-off shotgun.

She opened her purse and pulled out the camera. She rolled up her sweater to show him how she'd changed. She held the camera at arm's length and snapped the picture.

The print popped out a minute later. The image faded into focus. She placed it on the front window ledge.

Your resolve resurrected my resolve.

I can't imagine who you'll become.

I’m grateful this happened with you.

DOCUMENT INSERT: 5/11/72. Extract from the privately held journal of Karen Sifakis.

Los Angeles,
May 11, 1972

I'm leaving. This will be my last journal entry. The house has been sold, the car has been packed. The girls are tucked safely in the backseat, along with Ella's stuffed animals. I will never have to teach college again. Profits from a hellishly violent robbery will support me for the rest of my life.

For the time being, I possess no surname. I have resisted all the false identities offered to me. It's a risk, but I'm taking it gratefully. At the proper time, I will tell the girls the entire story and how I came to the name Holly.

I locked the house and took one look up at the fallback; I made sure all the car doors were secured. Dina pouted a little; Ella grinned at me. I noticed the little red flag attached to the seat.

I looked around. I wanted to see her one last time or at least catch a breath of her smoke. She was gone. She had always held that farewells were mystical and presumptive. Comrades should be ready to reunify or lose each other forever. Belief works that way.

NOW

The photograph has been preserved. History stopped at that moment thirty-seven years ago. History reconvened with the first batch of paper.

Documents have arrived at irregular intervals. They are always anonymously sent. I have compiled diary excerpts, oral-history transcripts and police-file overflow. Elderly leftists and black militants have told me their stories and provided verification. Freedom of Information Act subpoenas have served me well.

I found the journals of Marshall Bowen and Reginald Hazzard. I found Scotty Bennett's notebooks. Joaquín Balaguer was surprisingly candid. The Richard M. Nixon Library provided perfunctory support. The J. Edgar Hoover Library was resistant. Hoover spokesmen have consistently denied the charred files in his basement and refuse to link the event to Hoover's death that night.

I interviewed numerous comrades of Joan Rosen Klein and Karen Sifakis. Their recollections form a great contribution to this narrative. They refused to reveal Joan's and Karen's new identities. My attempts to bribe and coerce them have roundly failed.

My own memory rages in sync with everything I have described. I have not forgotten a moment of it. Forty thousand new file pages buttress my recall. I burned all of my original paper. I built paper all over again, so that I might tell you this story.

Most of the people are dead. Sal Mineo was murdered in a botched stickup. Booze took down Phil Irwin. Tiger Kab went bust. Freddy Otash had a fatal heart attack. Dracula died in '76. Farlan Brown died a year later. Clyde and Buzz are gone. The mob guys are dead. Mary Beth is still alive. Reginald Hazzard returned to Haiti. Dana Lund died in '04. Jack Leahy has vanished.

I was the youngest of us all. I remain in fine health. I run a successful detective agency in Los Angeles. My firm bodyguards *celebrities and verifies stories for tabloid tell-all rags. I am a frequent guest on scandal-mongering TV shows. My employees utilize cutting-edge technology. I reap profit from their efforts. It allows me to relive History and continue my search for Joan.*

I know she's still alive. I know that Karen and her daughters are alive and thriving. All my hunter's prowess has not led me to them.

God gave me a restless temperament and a searcher's discipline. My unruly rover's drive now veers toward the good. I look for lost loved ones and bring them home. I do it constantly and anonymously and at my own cost. I have found a great many lost people and quite a few lost dogs. This book encapsulates four years and circumscribes many arcs of magic. Wisps of that magic have come to reside in me. I listen, I look, I cull files. I follow people to people and bring them back to the people who most love them. The process fulfills a sacred trust and takes me breathlessly close to Joan.

She's eighty-three now. Our child is thirty-six. Instinct tells me it's a girl. My mother is ninety-four. She still sends me a card and a five-dollar bill every Christmas.

"Your options are do everything or do nothing." Joan told me that. I have paid a dear and savage price to live History. I will never stop looking. I pray that these pages find her and that she does not misread my devotion.

I have toured the world's revolutionary hot spots. I have been to Nicaragua, Grenada, Bosnia, Rwanda, Russia, Iran and Iraq. I have drawn pictures of Joan and aged her in my mind's eye. I read newspapers and magazines and search for her actions in ellipsis. I see women who might be her and follow them until their auras disperse. I have paid out millions of dollars in tip cash. I hear of car bombings and arms deals and scan computer photographs. I have a lab filled with photo-enhancing equipment. Correspondents send me footage every day. I stare at crowd scenes and hold my breath for the moment it's her.

Her picture. My gene of persistence.

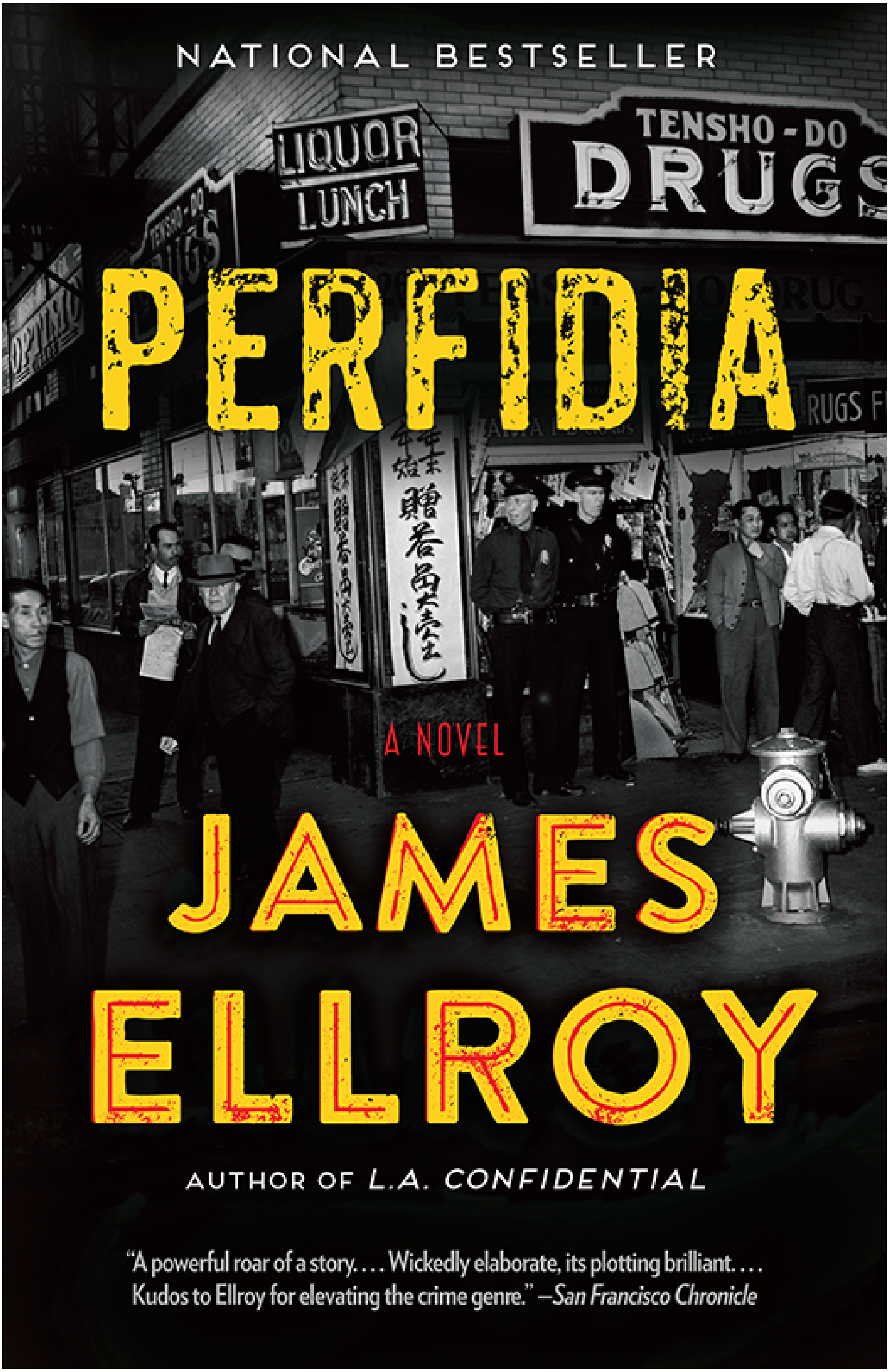
My options often fluctuate between Then and Now. I live in the latter with reluctance. I live in the former with kid-convert rectitude.

There's a party at Tiger Kab. A strange island beckons me. I'm chasing a killer to a self-indicting end. I'm making friends and enemies and roving at full speed. I've got that license to steal and that ticket to ride.

It's always there. It's always unfurling. It's always teaching me new *things. I give you this book and anoint you my comrade. Here is my gift in lieu of a reunion—my lost mother, my lost child and the Red Goddess Joan.*

A Note About the Author

James Ellroy was born in Los Angeles in 1948. His L.A. Quartet novels—*The Black Dahlia, The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential*, and *White Jazz*—were international best sellers. His novel *American Tabloid* was *Time* magazine's Best Book (fiction) of 1995; his memoir, *My Dark Places*, was a *Time* Best Book of the Year and a *New York Times* Notable Book for 1996. His novel *The Cold Six Thousand* was a *New York Times* Notable Book and a *Los Angeles Times* Best Book for 2001. He lives in Los Angeles.



NATIONAL BESTSELLER

PERFIDIA

A NOVEL

JAMES ELLROY

AUTHOR OF *L.A. CONFIDENTIAL*

"A powerful roar of a story. . . . Wickedly elaborate, its plotting brilliant. . . . Kudos to Ellroy for elevating the crime genre." —*San Francisco Chronicle*

JAMES
ELLROY

PERFIDIA

Alfred A. Knopf
New York · 2014

THIS IS A BORZOI BOOK
PUBLISHED BY ALFRED A. KNOPF

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www.aaknopf.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Ellroy, James, [date].
Perfidia : a novel / James Ellroy.
pages cm
ISBN 978-0-307-95699-6 (hardback) — ISBN 978-0-385-35321-2 (eBook) 1. Murder—investigation—Fiction. 2. Japanese Americans—California—Los Angeles—Fiction. 3. World War, 1939–1945—California—
Los Angeles—Fiction. I. Title.
PS3555.L6274P47 2014
813’.54—dc23

2014009939

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Cover design by Joe Montgomery
Cover photograph courtesy UCLA Library Special Collections

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Also by JAMES ELLROY

The Underworld U.S.A. Trilogy

American Tabloid
The Cold Six Thousand
Blood's A Rover

The L.A. Quartet

The Black Dahlia
The Big Nowhere
L.A. Confidential
White Jazz

Memoir

My Dark Places
The Hilliker Curse

Short Stories

Hollywood Nocturnes

Journalism/Short Fiction

Crime Wave
Destination: Morgue!

Early Novels

Brown's Requiem
Clandestine
Blood on the Moon
Because the Night
Suicide Hill
Killer on the Road

To **LISA STAFFORD**

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Dramatis Personae
A Note About the Author

Envy thou not the oppressor,
And choose none of his ways.

—*Proverbs 3:31*

Fifth Column: noun, and a popular colloquialism of 1941 America. The term derived from the recent Spanish Civil War. Four columns of soldiers were sent into battle. The Fifth Column stayed at home and performed industrial sabotage, the dissemination of propaganda, and numerous other forms of less detectable subversion. Fifth Columnists sought to remain anonymous; their ambiguous and/or fully unidentified status made them seem as dangerous or more dangerous than the four columns engaged in day-to-day war.

Reminiscenza.

I wandered off in a prairie blizzard 85 years ago. The cold rendered me spellbound, then to now. I have outlived the decree and find myself afraid to die. I cannot will cloudbursts the way I once did. I must recollect with yet greater fury.

It was a fever then. It remains a fever now. I will not die as long as I live this story. I run to Then to buy myself moments Now.

Twenty-three days.

Blood libel.

A policeman knocks on a young woman's door. Murderers' flags, aswirl.

Twenty-three days.

This storm.

Reminiscenza.

THE THUNDERBOLT BROADCAST
GERALD L. K. SMITH | K-L-A-N RADIO, LOS ANGELES | BOOTLEG TRANSMITTER/ TIJUANA, MEXICO | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5, 1941

The Jew Control Apparatus mandated this war—and now it's ours, whether we want it or not. It has been said that no news is good news, but that maxim predates the wondrous invention of radio, with its power to deliver *all* the news—good *and* bad—at rocket-ship speed. Regrettably, tonight's news is *all bad*, for the Nazis and the Japs are on a ripsnorting rampage—and the war is rapidly heading *our* undeserved and unwanted way.

Item: Adolf Hitler breached his deal with Red Boss Joseph Stalin in the summer and invaded the vast wasteland of repugnant Red Russia. Hammer-and-sickle armies are currently grinding *der Führer*'s stalwart soldiers to bratwurst outside Moscow—but the natty Nazis have *already* bombed Britain to smithereens and have placed half of central Europe under Nordic Nationalist rule. Hitler's *still* got the pep to give American ground troops a fair fight—which will assuredly occur at some not-too-far-off point in our great nation's future. Does it make you apoplectically ambivalent, my friends? We don't want this war—but in for a penny, in for a pound.

Item: the illustrious *Il Duce*, Benito Mussolini, is faring poorly in his North African campaign—but don't count him out. Italians are lovers more than fighters, it has been said—grand opera is much more their style. That is certainly true—but those bel canto–belting bambinos *still* represent a strategic threat in the lower-European theater. Yes, storm clouds are forming in the east. Storm clouds are *breaking* to our west, I'm sad to say—in the form of our most presently poised *alleged* enemies: the Japs.

Are you that much more amply ambivalent, my friends? Like me, you've opened your ardent arms to America First. But, Hirohito's heathen hornets are now heading across the high seas—and I don't like it one bit.

Item: the State Department just issued a bulletin. Jap convoys are currently headed for Siam, and an invasion is expected momentarily.

Item: civilians are fleeing Manila, the capital city of the Philippines.

Item: President Franklin "Double-Cross" Rosenfeld has sent a personal message to the Jap Emperor. That message is both entreaty and warning: Desist in your aggressions or run the risk of full-scale American intervention.

Uncle Sam is getting hot. The Hawaiian Islands are *our* possession and the Pacific gateway to mainland America. The lush tropical atolls that beeline in our direction are now targets for Jap gun sights. This undeserved, unwarranted and unwanted war is heading *our* way—whether we want it or not.

Item: President Rosenfeld wants to know why Hirohito's hellions are massing in French Indochina.

Item: Radio Bangkok has issued warnings of a possible Jap sneak attack on Thailand. Jap envoys are conferring with Secretary of State Cordell Hull at this very moment. The Japs are hissing with forked tongues—because they say they want peace, even as Jap Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo lambasts America for our refusal to understand Japanese "ideals" and our continued protests against *alleged* Japanese pogroms in East Asia and the Pacific.

Yes, my friends—it's becoming *Jew*niversally apparent. This Communist-concocted war is heading *our* way—whether we want it or not.

No sane American desires our participation in a Fight-for-the-Kikes foreign war. No sane American wants to send American boys off to certain peril. No sane American denies that *this* war cannot be kept off *our* shores unless we circumvent and interdict it on *foreign* soil. I'm ripsnortingly right about this, my friends—I'm apple-cheeked with apostasy.

We didn't start this war. Adolf Hitler and hotsy-totsy Hirohito didn't start this war, either. The Jew Control apparatchiks cooked up this Red borscht stew and turned friend upon friend, the world over. Are you apoplectically ambivalent, my good friends?

Yes, the war is coming our way, even though we sure as shooting don't want it. And America *never* runs from a fight.

Part One

THE JAPS

(December 6–December 11, 1941)

December 6, 1941

1

HIDEO ASHIDA

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1941

There—Whalen's Drugstore, 6th and Spring streets. The site of four recent felonies. 211 PC—Armed Robbery.

The store was jinxed. Four heists in one month predicted a fifth heist. It was probably the same bandit. The man worked solo. He covered his face with a bandanna and carried a long-barreled gat. He always stole narcotics and till cash.

The Robbery Squad was shorthanded. A geek wearing a Hitler mask hit three taverns in Silver Lake. It was 211 plus mayhem. The geek pistol-whipped the bartenders and groped female customers. He was gun-happy. He shot up jukeboxes and shelves full of booze.

Robbery was swamped. Ashida built the trip-wire gizmo and chose this test spot. He'd created the prototype in high school. His first test spot was the Belmont High showers. He used it to photograph Bucky after basketball prac—

A car swerved northbound on Spring. The driver saw Ashida. Of course—he yelled, "Goddamn Jap!"

Ray Pinker responded. Of course—he yelled, "Screw you!"

Ashida stared at the ground. The feeder cord ran across the street and stopped at the curb in front of the drugstore. The geek bandit parked in the same spot all four times. The cord led to a trip-action camera encased in hard rubber. The wheel jolts of cars parking activated gears. A shutter and flashbulb clicked and snapped photos of rear license plates. Rolls of film were stashed in rubber-coated tubes. A single load would cover a full day's worth of cars.

Pinker lit a cigarette. "It's a wild-goose chase. We're civilian criminologists, not cops. We know the damn thing works, so why are we here? It's not like we've been tipped to another job."

Ashida smiled. "You know the answer to that."

"If the answer is 'We've got nothing better to do,' or 'We're scientists with no personal lives worth a damn,' then you're right."

A bus passed southbound. A Mexican guy blew smoke rings out his window. He saw Ashida. He yelled, "*Puto* Jap!"

Pinker flipped his cigarette. It fell short of the bus.

"Which one of you was born here? Which one of you did *not* swim the Rio Grande illegally?"

Ashida squared off his necktie. "Say it again. You were exasperated the first time you said it, so I know it was a candid response."

Pinker grinned. "You're my protégé, so you're *my* Jap, which gives me a vested interest in you. You're the only Jap employed by the Los Angeles Police Department, which makes you that much more unique and gives me that much more cachet."

Ashida laughed. A '38 DeSoto pulled up in front of the drugstore. The wheels hit the wire, the lens clicked, the flashbulb popped. A tall man got out. He had Bucky Bleichert's dark hair and small brown eyes. Ashida watched him enter the drugstore.

Pinker ducked across the street and futzed with the bulb slot. Ashida window-peeped the drugstore and tracked the man. The glass distorted his features. Ashida *made* him Bucky. He shut his eyes, he blinked, he opened his eyes and transformed him. The man evinced Bucky's grace now. He *glided*. He smiled and displayed big buck teeth.

The man walked out. Pinker ran back across the street and blocked Ashida's view. The car drove off. Ashida blinked. The world lost its one-minute Bucky Bleichert glow.

They settled back in. Pinker leaned on a lamppost and chain-smoked. Ashida stood still and felt the downtown L.A. whir.

The war was coming. The whir was all about it. He was a native-born Nisei and second son. His father was a gandy dancer. Pops guzzled terpin hydrate and worked himself to death laying railroad track. His mother had an apartment in Little Tokyo. She was pro-Emperor and spoke Japanese just to torque him. The family owned a truck farm in the San Fernando Valley. His brother Akira ran it. It was mostly Nisei acreage out there. Mexican illegals picked their crops. It was a common Nisei practice. It was shameful, it was prudent, it was labor at low cost. The practice bordered on indentured servitude. The practice assured solvency for the Nisei farmer class.

The practice entailed collusion. The family paid bribes to a Mexican State Police captain. The payments saved the wetbacks from deportation. Akira accepted the practice and implemented it sans moral probe. It permitted second son Hideo to ignore the family trade and pursue his criminological passion.

He had advanced degrees in chemistry and biology. He was a Stanford Ph.D. at twenty-two. He knew serology, fingerprinting, ballistics. He went on the Los Angeles Police Department a year ago.

He wanted to work with its legendary head chemist. He was a protégé looking for a mentor. Ray Pinker was a pedagogue looking for a pupil. The bond was formed in that manner. The assigned roles blurred very fast.

They became colleagues. Pinker was admirably blind per racial matters. He compared Ashida to Charlie Chan's number-one son. Ashida told Pinker that Charlie Chan was Chinese. Pinker said, "It's all Greek to me."

Spring Street was lined with mock-snow Christmas trees. They were coated with bird dung and soot. A kid hawked *Heralds* outside the drugstore. He shouted the headline: *"FDR in Last-Ditch Talks with Japs!"*

Pinker said, "The damn gizmo works."

"I know."

"You're a goddamn genius."

"I know."

"That rape-o's still operating. The Central Vice guys make him for an MP. He dicked another lady two nights ago."

Ashida nodded. "The first victim resisted and tore off a strip of his armband. He wore his uniform shirt under his civilian coat. I've got fiber samples at my lab in my mother's apartment."

Pinker ogled a big blonde draped around a sailor. The sailor fish-eyed Ashida.

"Bucky Bleichert's fighting at the Olympic tomorrow night. The skinny is he'll fight a few more times and come on the Department."

Ashida flushed. "I knew Bucky in high school."

"I know. That's why I said it."

"Who's he fighting?"

"A stumblebum named Junior Wilkins. Elmer Jackson collared him for flimflam. He was running a back-to-Africa con with some shine preacher."

A '37 Ford coupe parked upside the drugstore. There—the wheels hit the wire, the lens clicks, the flashbulb pops on cue.

Pinker coughed and turned away from Ashida. A man got out of the car. He wore a fedora and an overcoat with the collar up. Ashida prickled. It was *no-overcoat* warm.

Pinker hacked and coughed. He was almost doubled up. The man pulled a handkerchief over his face.

Ashida tingled.

It was perfect. It was ideal. Pinker didn't see the man. They had the plate number. He could let the crime occur. He could run his forensic study from inception.

The man entered the drugstore.

Ashida checked his watch. It was 9:24 a.m.

Pinker turned around and lit a cigarette. Ashida scanned the drugstore window. The man walked down the toothpaste aisle. Ashida checked his watch on the sly.

The man hunkered out of sight. 9:25, 9:26, 9:27.

Pinker said, "My wife thinks it's dirt in the air, but I say it's just excess phlegm."

The man ran out of the drugstore. He gripped a paper bag and a half-visible pistol. He knocked over the newsboy. He shagged his car and peeled out.

Pinker said, "Holy shit." The cigarette dropped from his mouth.

The newsboy ran into the drugstore. Pinker ran toward a call box. Ashida ran up to the gizmo.

He unlocked it and knelt close. He studied the negative in the feeder. There, faint and blurred: Cal KFE-621.

A car idled by. The driver was a Shriner, replete with fez. He saw Ashida and got all contorted. Ashida stood up and made fists. The car pulled away.

"FDR in Last-Ditch Talks with Japs!" The newsboy stared at Ashida and shrieked it.

There—a cop siren at 9:31.

Ashida stood poised. A K-car took the corner and skid-stopped just short of the gizmo. Ashida was eyeball close. He recognized the guys: Buzz Meeks and Lee Blanchard.

They got out. Meeks worked Headquarters Robbery. Blanchard worked Central Patrol. Meeks wore a fresh-pressed suit. Blanchard wore a slept-in uniform.

Meeks said, "What gives, kid? How come you beat us here?"

Blanchard said, "What gives, Hirohito?"

Meeks jerked Blanchard's necktie and snapped his head. Blanchard blushed.

Ashida pointed to the gizmo. "Mr. Pinker and I were testing this device. The store's a patsy, so we chose it for our test site. Car wheels set off a camera under that tubing. We lucked into the robbery. The suspect's plate number is KFE-621."

Meeks winked and squatted by the gizmo. Blanchard got in the car and sent out the squawk. Meeks was a Dust Bowl vet and ex–cowboy film actor. He came on under James Edgar "Two-Gun" Davis. He was a bagman to Mayor Frank Shaw. The county grand jury sacked Shaw and Chief Davis. Meeks dodged fourteen indictments.

Blanchard was an ex–heavyweight contender. He bought a house above the Sunset Strip with his fight stash. He cracked a big bank job in '39 and cinched his cop reputation. He was shacked up with a woman—Kay something. Shack jobs were verboten under Chief C. B. Horrall. The Chief was soft on Lee and turned a blind eye. Meeks and

Blanchard were rumor magnets. The most prevalent: Lee was tight with Ben Siegel and the Jewish syndicate.

The drugstore was all hubbub. Voices bounced off the windows. Ashida looked inside. Pinker had the witnesses huddled.

Meeks picked his teeth and admired the gizmo. Blanchard stepped out of the K-car.

"The car was snatched in front of a pool hall on East Slauson. The 77th Street desk logged it at 8:16. It's got to be a spook. White don't survive from Jefferson south."

Meeks checked his watch. "Call Traffic, tell them to issue a bulletin, and tell them to spice it up. One-man crime wave, armed and dangerous. Make it sound like a meat-and-potatoes job."

Blanchard made the Churchill V sign. Meeks primped in the window reflection. Ashida walked into the drugstore.

He imprinted the floor plan. He memorized the witnesses' faces. He gauged distances geometrically. He moved his eyes, details accrued, he smelled body odors imbued with adrenaline.

Two white-coat pharmacists. A suit-and-tie manager. Two old-lady customers. The fat pharmacist had a boil on his neck. The thin pharmacist had the shakes. One old lady was obese. Her vein pattern indicated arterial sclerosis.

The witnesses were pressed in tight. Meeks walked behind the front counter and stood facing them.

"I'm Sergeant Turner Meeks, and I'm listening."

The manager said, "He walked in and went straight to the pharmacy. He wore a mask and had a gun, but I don't think it was the man who robbed us those other times. This man was taller and thinner."

The pharmacists bobbed their heads—yeah, boss, we agree.

Meeks said, "What happened then?"

The fat pharmacist said, "He lined us up and stole our wallets. He walked us down the first pill aisle, stole a bottle of phenobarbital and fired his gun into the ceiling."

Ashida prickled. There—the uncommon detail.

"Mr. Pinker and I were across the street. We would have heard the shot."

The fat pharmacist went nix. "The gun had a silencer. It stuck off the end of the barrel."

Ashida walked back to the pharmacy. Note the cash register, Hershey bars and Christmas-card display. He rang up a one-dollar sale. The money drawer popped open. The slots were stuffed with ones through twenties.

Instinct.

The bandit wanted dope more than money. The wallet thefts were secondary. They were undertaken to obscure the primary motive.

Anomaly.

Why steal only *one* bottle of phenobarbital? The action rebutted the dope-fiend robber archetype.

Ashida vaulted the counter and walked down the first aisle. There—no ejected shell casing. There—*two* options.

The robber picked it up, or the gun was a revolver.

There—the bullet hole in the ceiling. Metal shards on the floor below—decomposed silencer threads.

He knelt down and studied them. The edges were burned from muzzle heat. The threads dropped off in little swirls.

Ashida walked back to the front counter. Pinker had his evidence kit. Meeks uncorked a bottle of drugstore hooch and passed it around. Blanchard raided the chewing-gum rack. Meeks stuffed his pockets full of rubbers.

The jug made the rounds. Ashida declined it. The pharmacists took healthy pulls. The old ladies giggled and sipped.

Blanchard said, "We got a kickback from Traffic. The car was dumped three blocks from here. We got glove prints on the dashboard so far."

Meeks lit a cigar. "Did he touch anything inside the store? Can you folks help me with that?"

The fat pharmacist coughed. "He brushed the comic-book rack on his way out. I think he might have snagged his coat."

Pinker went *Now*. Ashida caught it and ducked past the witnesses. The rack was stuffed with *Mickey Mouse* and *Tarzan*. Ashida swiveled it twice. Nothing and nothing. Yes—right *there*.

Bright red threads, attached to one prong.

Wool felt, densely woven, *familiar*.

Ashida pulled out a pen and evidence envelope. He plucked the threads and sealed them. He wrote "211 PC/Whalen's Drugstore/10:09 a.m., 12/6/41" on the envelope flap.

More laughs up front—Blanchard and Meeks made like the Ritz Brothers. Ashida sniffed the envelope. He smelled the fabric through the paper. He made the synaptic catch.

The suspected MP rapist. The fibers off his armband. Pinker said he just raped another lady. The fool wore the armband on his rape prowls.

There was no red in the robber's overcoat. The rack prongs were situated at the man's waist level. The overcoat featured open-topped pockets. The fabric threads might have come from something sticking out. He had comparison fibers at his mother's place. He could confirm or exclude the match.

There's the whistle—Pinker's I need you *now*.

Ashida tracked the sound. Pinker was back in the pharmacy. He had his evidence camera out. He shot three exposures of the bullet hole, three exposures of the silencer shards.

"This job intrigues me. He didn't terrorize the witnesses with the gun, he didn't steal till cash, he squeezed a gunshot off for kicks."

Ashida nodded. "It's as if he was testing the silencer. And why did he only steal *one* bottle of the phenobarbital?"

Pinker nodded. "I like the test-fire theory. It's obviously a homemade suppressor, because you've got thread burns from a single firing. Eight or ten shots would render the thing useless."

"You're right, and the manager said it's not the same man who robbed the store on the prior occasions. Whatever his primary and secondary motives, he picked out a patsy."

Pinker scooped shards into an envelope. "There's probably a crawl space between the ceiling and the roof."

The ceiling was made from loose gypsum-board panels. Ashida jumped and popped the one beside the bullet hole. Pinker made hand stirrups. Ashida caught the boost and got up.

The crawl space was all mildewed planks and cobwebs. Ashida hoisted himself in. He smelled stale gunpowder. He stood up and snagged himself on a cobweb. He brushed it off and got out his pocket flashlight. The beam caught insect swarms and a scurrying rat. There —six decomposed bullet chunks.

Be careful. You've been in this from inception. There's your official duty —and there's You.

Stanford, '36. Introductory Forensics: "All true clinicians succumb and hoard evidence. The practice creates a symbiosis of *it* and *you*."

He checked his watch. He held the flashlight in his teeth and got out another envelope. He wrote "211 PC/Whalen's Drugstore/10:16 a.m., 12/6/41" on the front. He scooped four bullet chunks into it. He put the other two in his pocket.

The rat squirmed by him. He brushed himself off and dropped out of the hole. He landed deftly. He saw Buzz Meeks eyeballing the narcotics shelves.

"Look at this, kid."

Ashida looked. Bingo—four bottle rows neatly arrayed. The fifth row—*dis*arrayed. Vials of morphine paregoric—rifled, for sure.

"The pharmacist said he only stole phenobarbital."

Meeks said, "Yeah, and I believe him. But the skinny pharmacy guy's got the heebie-jeebies, and his shirt collar's soaked through. My guess is he's got a habit."

"Yes. He took advantage of the robbery to steal a vial of the paregoric. He only took what the robber could have carried on his person, and what he could hide himself."

Meeks winked. "You are *so* right, Charlie Chan."

"I'm Japanese, Sergeant. I know you can't tell the difference, but I'm not a goddamn Chinaman."

Meeks grinned. "You look like an American to me."

Ashida went swoony. Praise always made him flutter like a—

He glanced up front. Pinker dusted the door. Blanchard scrounged razor blades off the manager. The hophead pharmacist was green at the gills. His hands twitched, his Adam's apple bob-bobbed.

Meeks walked up to him and grabbed his necktie. The tie was a leash. Meeks pulled him back to the pharmacy and shoved him into Ashida. The hophead pissed his pants. Ashida shoved him into the counter and checked himself for stains.

The hophead quaked. The piss stain spread. Meeks pulled the sap off his belt.

"You swipe a jug of the paregoric? That a regular practice of yours?"

"One a week, boss. I'm cutting down. If I'm lyin', I'm flyin'."

"You got thirty seconds to convince me that you didn't finger this here robbery. You got twenty-nine seconds as of right now."

The hophead made prayer hands. "Not me, boss. I went to pharmacy school at Saint John Bosco J.C. I was raised by the Dominican Brothers."

Meeks grabbed a bottle of morph off the shelf. The hophead licked his lips.

"Who are you going to call to snitch off pushers in exchange for confiscated hop? Who's your Oklahoma-born-and-bred papa?"

"S-S-S-Sergeant T-T-Turner M-M-Meeks. He's my daddy—if I'm lyin', I'm flyin'."

Meeks tossed the jug at him. The hophead caught it and vamoosed down the aisle. Meeks said, "You're fastidious, Ashida. I don't know why you got such a fascination for this line of work."

The party up front was adjourning. Blanchard hugged the old ladies. The manager whipped out a camera and took snapshots. He got Pinker with his print brush and Big Lee in a boxer's crouch. Meeks walked over and traded mock blows with him. The old ladies squealed.

They all waved bye-bye on the sidewalk. Ashida smoothed out his suit coat and let the crowd disperse. Pinker, Blanchard and Meeks stood over the gizmo. Blanchard and Meeks had that *Holy shit* look.

Ashida walked outside and over. A prowl car swung north and grazed the curb. Pinker, Blanchard and Meeks snapped to.

Pinker said, "Look sharp now."

Meeks said, "Whiskey Bill."

Blanchard said, "Pious cocksucker."

A uniformed captain got out and inspected the gizmo. He wore glasses. He was dark-haired, midsize and trim. Odds on Captain

William H. Parker.

Ashida snapped to. Parker examined the feeder cords. Pinker, Blanchard and Meeks stood at parade rest.

Parker toed the cord. “It’s innovative, but the wider practical applications are eluding me. Address this point and describe the creative genesis and full mechanical workings in significant detail, and have your report on my desk by 9:00 a.m. tomorrow.”

Ashida and Pinker nodded.

Parker looked at Meeks. “You’re offensively overweight. Lose thirty pounds within the next thirty days, or I’ll have Chief Horrall put you on the ‘Fat Husband’s Diet’ recently extolled in the *Ladies’ Home Journal.*”

Meeks nodded.

Parker looked at Blanchard. “Roll down your sleeves. Your mermaid tattoo is repugnant.”

Blanchard rolled down his sleeves.

Parker tapped his watch. “It’s now 10:31. I want a stolen-car report, with a synopsis of the robbery, on my desk in fifty-nine minutes.”

Pinker nodded. Ashida nodded. Ditto Blanchard and Meeks. Parker got in his car and took off.

Meeks said, “Whiskey Bill.”

Blanchard said, “He lost money on my fight with Jimmy Bivens. He can’t let it go.”

Pinker said, “The fight was fixed. You should have told him.”

Army half-tracks rolled down Spring. Trucks hauling howitzers tailed them. The convoy ran for blocks. It was all over the radio. Fortifications for defense plants and Fort MacArthur.

Soldier-drivers waved to the locals. Pedestrians stopped to applaud. Men doffed their hats, kids cheered, women blew kisses.

The traffic rumble was bad. Ashida cut east on 4th Street and north on Broadway. Passersby kept eyeing him.

He felt disembodied. He broke the law to observe lawlessness from a criminal act’s inception. He succumbed to criminal pathology. He initiated an experiment. Would early access and distanced empathy allow him to understand criminals more clearly?

Introductory Forensics. He knew he’d succumb in time. He’d know the case as it grabbed him. That symbiosis—*it* and *you.*

He seized a textbook opportunity. He had to determine the pathology of a prosaic heist and report his findings first. His findings might serve the greater cause of forensic criminology. His findings might serve no cause at all. He was compelled to act. He was quintessentially Japanese. Japanese men were born to embody the concept of *Act*.

Ashida turned east and hit Little Tokyo. His pulse decelerated, his breath relaxed. A black-and-white cruised by. The driver recognized him and waved.

His mother had a walk-up at 2nd and San Pedro. The halls always reeked of broiled eel. He had his own apartment, across from Belmont High.

It was brimful of lab gear. The overflow filled his old bedroom at his mother's place. Mariko welcomed his intrusions. They allowed her to torque him at whim.

Ashida entered the building and unlocked the door. The place was quiet. Mariko was off somewhere, probably boozing and fomenting. He walked to his old bedroom and locked himself in.

Shelves packed with textbooks. Chemical vials and vats. Beakers, Bunsen burners, a hot plate. A spectrograph and three microscopes bolted to a table.

Ashida placed the bullet chunks on the table and grabbed his ammo-ID text. He held a magnifying glass over the chunks and studied the creases and dents.

The bullet pierced gypsum. The book was cross-referenced—ammo types to material fired upon. The photos were clear. Page 68—gypsum board. Two pages on—a bullet fragment with near-identical creases and dents.

The classic German firearm. The 9mm Luger.

The Luger had a floating-toggle ejector. The rounds always arced slowly. A deft shooter could catch an ejected shell in the air.

He ID'd the bullet independently. He withheld two fragments. He gave Ray Pinker the remaining four. Pinker would or would not ID them.

Pinker was not as skilled at bullet identification. He was cultivating *this* evidential lead all by himself.

The fibers next.

Pinker knew he kept the book-rack fibers. Pinker knew he had the armband fibers here. They were sharing this lead. It was hypothetical, thus far.

Ashida got out both fiber sets. They looked naked-eye similar. He placed them under the slides of his comparison microscope.

He swiveled in close. He scanned for texture and color consistency. *Almost, almost, go in closer still*. Yes—the book-rack fibers were cut from the same type of armband cloth.

He could boil out the fabric dye and blotter-dry it. He could run chemical tests. The tests carried their own systematic flaws. The results would prove inconclusive.

A key-in-lock noise jarred him. He walked into the living room. Mariko had 11:00 a.m. booze breath.

He said, “Hello, Mother.” She spoke slurred Japanese back. He bowed and tried to take her hand. She pulled away and flashed a magazine.

A “picture bride” rag. Choose a photograph and send for a young woman. She’ll be shipped from Japan. Include the five-hundred-dollar steamship fare. All brides guaranteed to be fertile and subservient.

“I’ve told you, Mother. I’m not going to marry a fifteen-year-old girl out of a brothel.”

“You too old to be bachelor. Neighbors get suspicious.”

“The neighbors don’t concern me. Akira’s a bachelor, why don’t you pester him?”

Mariko segued to pidgin talk. She learned it in railroad camps, circa 1905. She spoke it to demean his education.

“Speak straight English, Mother. You’ve been here for thirty-six years.”

Mariko plopped on the couch. “Franklin Double-Cross Rosenfeld back down to Minister Togo. ‘U.S. surrender to China imminent,’ Chiang Kai-shek say.”

Ashida laughed. “You’ve got your geopolitics confused, Mother. I’d ask you where you heard it, but I’m afraid you’ll tell me.”

Mariko giggled. “Father Coughlin. Christian Front. ‘No war for Jew bankers,’ Gerald L. K. Smith say. Lucky Lindy *ichiban*. He fly Atlantic solo, land at Hirohito’s feet.”

Enough.

Ashida walked to the kitchen. The Hiram Walker Ten High stood by the dish rack. Ashida poured a double shot and walked it in to Mariko. She knocked it back and tee-heed. She patted the couch.

He sat down. “Tell me something that isn’t crazy. Pretend that I’m Akira and we have business to discuss.”

“Farm profits up 16% last quarter. Jew accountant find way to deduct bribes to Captain Madrano. He say ‘Care and feeding of wetbacks good deduction.’ ”

Ashida tapped her arm. “Parts of speech, Mother. Don’t drop your articles. You always do it when you’ve been drinking.”

Mariko jabbed his arm. “This better? I read about Bucky Bleichert in the *Herald*. It say he got fight coming up, but it don’t say my son’s friend a cream puff who only fight bums he can beat. It don’t say my son think his mama’s Fifth Column, but Bucky’s papa Fifth Column, ’cause he in German-American Bund.”

Sucker punch. She got drunk, she played dumb, she hit low.

“Don’t talk that way about Bucky, Mama. You know it isn’t true.”

“Bucky scaredy-cat. Afraid to fight Mexican boy. Papa in Bund,

Bucky cream puff.”

Ashida stood up and knocked over a lamp stand. Mariko put two fingers over her lips and went *Sieg Heil!* Ashida swerved to his room and slammed the door.

The room was too hot now. Heat pressurized his chemicals and caused vapor leak. He turned on the fan and called the Robbery squadroom direct.

He got three rings. He heard “It’s Meeks, and I’m listening.”

“Hideo Ashida, Sergeant.”

“Yeah, and you’re Johnny-on-the-spot, given what time it is. Did you call to tell me something I don’t know?”

“I did, yes.”

Meeks coughed. “Then tell me, ’cause I’m listening.”

“The book-rack fiber matched the armband fiber. It *is* the same cloth, so it’s quite likely that the fiber came from an Army-issue armband. It may or may not be the *exact* armband worn by the same man, but it *is* the same cloth, and the chronological order of the crimes makes the rapist a suspect for the robbery.”

Meeks whistled. “Well, I think I should tell Dudley Smith about this. He’ll see what Jack Horrall wants to do.”

Ashida said, “What do you mean?”

“Well, you got the rape-to-armed-robbery parlay, and the likelihood of some U.S. armed services fiend on the loose. It sounds like this guy’s good for some mother dog shit, and it might notch us some cachet with the Army if we stop this short of a court-martial.”

Ashida gulped. “Or a civilian trial?”

“You’re getting the picture, son. Mrs. Ashida didn’t raise any dumb kids.”

Ashida dropped the receiver. Squadroom noise bounced up off the floor.

He chose this male world. He’s learning its customs and codes. It’s unbearably thrilling.

2

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

[COMPILED AND CHRONOLOGICALLY INSERTED BY THE LOS ANGELES POLICE MUSEUM]

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1941

I've begun this diary on impulse. An extraordinary scene unfolded as I sat on my separate bedroom terrace. I was sketching the southern view and heard the rumble of engines below me on the Strip. I immediately got up and wrote down the precise time and date. I sensed what the rumble portended, and I was right.

A line of armored vehicles chugged west on Sunset, to fevered scrutiny and applause. It took a full ten minutes for the armada to pass. The noise was loud, the cheers louder. People stopped their cars to get out and salute the young soldiers. It played hell with the flow of traffic—but no one seemed to care. The soldiers were delighted by this display of respect and affection. They waved and blew kisses; a half dozen waitresses from Dave's Blue Room ran out and passed them cases of liquor. Somebody shouted, *"America!"* That's when I knew.

The war is coming. I'm going to enlist.

I always do what I say I'm going to do. I formally state my intent and proceed from that point. I am going to write a diary entry every day, until the present world conflict concludes or the world blows up. I will walk away from my easy existence and seek official postings near the front lines. I live a dilettante's life now. My compulsive sketch artistry is a schoolgirl's attempt to capture confounding realities. My piano studies and emerging proficiency with the easier Chopin nocturnes stall my pursuit of a true cause. This lovely home in no way allays my psychic discomfort; Lee Blanchard's indulgence is disconcerting more than anything else. This diary is a broadside against stasis and unrest.

I have always felt superior to my surroundings. This house states the case most tellingly. I picked out every German Expressionist print and every stick of blond-wood furniture. I'm a prairie girl from Sioux Falls, South Dakota—and a gifted arriviste.

I'm moving into my separate bedroom now. My own work is arrogantly displayed on the walls, interspersed with Klee and Kandinsky. There are a dozen drawings of a light heavyweight named Bucky Bleichert. He has a hungry young man's body and large bucked teeth. I have sketched him many times, from ringside seats at the Olympic. Bucky Bleichert is a local celebrity who understands the ephemeral quality of celebrity and does not view boxing as a true cause. His circumspection in the ring delights me. I have never spoken to Bucky Bleichert, but I am certain that I understand him.

Because I was a local celebrity once. It was February '39. I was nineteen. It all pertained to a bank robbery and its alleged solution.

This house. A refuge a few years ago, a trap now.

The robbery got me this house, not Lee's prudently invested fight winnings. Lee Blanchard is not a savvy investor, as is commonly held. Nor is he my lover, in the common sense. He entered my life to facilitate my destiny—whatever that is. I know it now.

Sioux Falls was an insufficient destiny. The winter cold spells and summer heat waves left people dead. Indians strayed from nearby reservations and stabbed one another in speakeasies. Klansmen broke a Negro man out of the county jail. He was accused of raping a dim-witted white girl. The Klansmen convened a kangaroo court. The girl was slow to condemn or exonerate the man accused. The Klansmen staked him over a red-ant hill in mid-August. The summer sun or the ants killed him. Local lore was divided on this.

Protestants despised the few local Catholics. Nativist groups flourished throughout the Depression. Methodists were at odds with Lutherans and Baptists and vice versa. A range war over prize cattle broke out in '34. Fourteen men were killed near the Iowa state line.

My parents and older brother were sweet-natured and content. Their only sin was lack of imagination. I pretended to be one of them in order to live within myself unobstructed. I lived to read, draw and roam. People talked about me. I dropped racy bons mots in church.

I did not care about my family. The fact mildly horrified me. I wanted to run away to Los Angeles and become someone else there. I got a job at a bookstore and stole a month's worth of cash receipts. I left my parents a perfunctory note of farewell.

It was November '36. I was sixteen. The bus ride west featured dust storms and a flash flood near Albuquerque. Armed goons were stationed at the California border. They were charged to keep indigent Okies out. They were L.A. policemen.

I rented cot space at a career girls' residence in Hollywood and carhopped at Simon's Drive-In on the Miracle Mile. I wore roller skates and twirled flamboyantly to amuse myself and scrounge tips. The other girls hated me and spread the rumor that I was a prostitute. I was fired. I relinquished myself to an aimless bohemianism.

The Depression was winding down; privation and inequity were vividly present still. I roamed L.A. with my sketch pad. I drew polemical pictures of local labor strife. I read Karl Marx, only believed a third of it and went to numerous left-wing soirées. I embraced the Left as a fashion accessory. They lacked the grandeur I had come to see as my birthright.

I loved men and was going mad with suppressed desire. It pushed me into a series of affairs with dubious jazz musicians. Sex was not what I imagined. It was tension, scent and prosaic misalliance. It was sweet and sad revelation, and all expectation dashed.

I lent money to a string of lovers and went through my carhop stash. I was evicted from the career girls' residence and took it with strident good cheer. I ate in soup kitchens and slept bedroll-swaddled in Griffith Park. I cleaned up daily at the YWCA and never appeared unkempt. I was equal parts innocence and lunatic grit. I was impervious to danger and too addled by men to assess them past my own desire.

Bobby De Witt was a jazz drummer. He personified the appellation "lounge lizard." He wore high-waisted flannels and two-tone loafer jackets; he kept up with his pachuco bunk mates from the Preston Reformatory. He caught me sketching him. I convinced myself that he recognized my talent and Norma Shearer–like aplomb. I was mistaken there. All he recognized was my penchant for the outré.

He had a small house out at Venice Beach. I had my own room. I slept away months of taxing outdoor days and too hot and too cold outdoor nights. I ate myself back from the brink of malnutrition and pondered what to do next.

Bobby seduced me then. I thought I was seducing him. I was mistaken. He saw that I was growing wings and set out to clip them.

Bobby was quite sweet to me at first. It started changing shortly after New Year's. His business picked up. He got me hooked on laudanum and made me stay home to answer the phone and book dates with his girls and their "clients." It got worse. He held a dope kick over me and coerced me into his stable. It got much worse.

Jazz drummer is always a synonym for *dope peddler* and *pimp*. I have the knife scars on the back of my thighs to prove it.

It was winter '39 now. My local celebrity was at hand. The newspapers and radio have their version. The Los Angeles Police Department has theirs. Both versions assert *this:* Kay Lake meets Lee Blanchard at Bobby De Witt's trial.

It wasn't true. I met Lee before the Boulevard-Citizens heist.

We met at the Olympic Auditorium. Bobby let me out of the house-brothel on "furlough." I was a full year into my Bucky Bleichert craze and went to all of his fights.

Bucky knocked out his opponent in the sixth round. I dawdled with the crowd as they left the arena. Lee introduced himself. I recognized him as an ex-boxer. I didn't know that he was a cop.

We talked. I liked Lee. I worked to disguise my acute dissolution. I hurried home to laudanum and white slavery. Lee tailed me back to Venice Beach. I did not know it that night.

Two more fight-night furloughs followed. I ran into Lee both times. He had tailed me from the house to the Olympic. I did not know it then.

Lee drew me out gently. He saw through my lies and euphemisms and got very angry. He told me that he had a business opportunity pending. He hinted that he could "work in my situation."

February 11, 1939, arrived. The papers got the physical facts right. The bank was at Yucca and Ivar in Hollywood. Four men hijacked an armored car headed there. A downed motorcycle served as a diversion. The men overpowered and chloroformed three guards. They substituted six cash bags full of phone-book scraps for six bags full of cash.

They huddled in the back of the armored car. They changed into guard uniforms and drove to the bank. The manager saw the scrap bags and opened the vault. They sapped him and added the vault cash to their take. They locked the tellers in the vault and went back out the front door.

A teller had tripped an alarm switch. Four nearby patrol cars roared up. A shoot-out resulted. Two robbers were killed, two robbers escaped. No policemen were wounded or in any way harmed.

The two dead robbers were identified as "out-of-town muscle." The two escaped robbers were not ID'd.

The papers got all that right. The papers got it *all* right for the next two weeks. The *Herald* ran a headline on February 28: TIP FROM EX-BOXER COP CRACKS BLOODY BANK ROBBERY.

The official version:

Officer Lee Blanchard strung together tips. Informants and "fight-game acquaintances" supplied "the lurid lowdown." They fingered Bobby De Witt as the "brains behind the Boulevard-Citizens job."

Of course, it was a lie. Of course, the "fourth man" remained unidentified. I know who he is. The public and the Los Angeles Police Department do not.

The real version:

Lee Blanchard masterminded the Boulevard-Citizens job. I knew it then; I know it now. Lee and I have never discussed it. We simply share the knowledge in the same way that we do not share a bed.

Bobby went to trial in June. Planted evidence convicted him. Lee Blanchard is far more cunning and intelligent than he plays. Bobby drew ten to life. The *Herald* ran a human-interest piece. The tagline was quite perverse: GANG GIRL FALLS IN LOVE—WITH COP! GOING STRAIGHT—TO ALTAR?

I attended the trial and testified against Bobby. I tapered off the laudanum to assure a harrowing witness-stand performance. The DA's Office presented a threadbare case. My recounted degradation was the indictment, the closing argument, the sentence writ as my decree of damnation. I complied with the lie that I met Lee in the courtroom.

We did not go straight to the altar. Lee bought us this house. Bobby De Witt was consigned to San Quentin. Lee fumbled at making love to me a few heartbreaking times and broke off that part of our union. I live off of Lee's police salary and his alleged boxing savings. I'm working toward degrees at UCLA; my piano teacher calls my beginner Chopin bravura. I sleep with men at whim—because I want to and because I need to extinguish the power of Bobby De Witt. I bring men here, to the house Lee Blanchard bought for me. Lee expresses no resentment. He sleeps in the Detective Bureau cot room most nights. He wants a Bureau transfer very badly. He's in the thrall of a suavely brutal cop named Dudley Smith, and wants to join his cadre of goons.

I have my dilettante world and my more compelling world of criminals and policemen. I inhabit the two worlds seamlessly and *do* exhibit Norma Shearer–like aplomb. I revel in my insider status. The genesis was Bobby De Witt. He bid me to enter this world. I owe him for that.

Bobby introduced me to a call-service madam named Brenda Allen. Brenda weaned me through my dope kick. We've stayed in touch. We have coffee, talk and smoke ourselves hoarse. Brenda runs girls through a telephone exchange and services an elite clientele. Her lover is a Vice sergeant named Elmer Jackson. Elmer is funny and droll; he blithely facilitates this exclusive brand of police-sanctioned prostitution. Chief Jack Horrall gets a 7% cut.

I love both my worlds. I'm much more engaged by the cop-criminal world. I paid a very dear price to get in.

Another convoy is crossing Sunset and Doheny. I feel the rumble all through my body.

Paul Robeson is appearing at Philharmonic Hall Monday night. I might go. Some of my old leftist chums might be there. I could lord my local celebrity over them and argue that Stalin is just as bad as Hitler. I might even create a scene.

I'm bored. My life is all busywork. Lee reported a rumor floating around City Hall: Bucky Bleichert has applied to the PD.

I hope he gets on. I'll go to his Academy graduation and sketch him in cop blue. Sunday night marks his farewell fight. I'll be there to capture the last punch he throws. The papers have been running cartoons of Emperor Hirohito. The artists always give him Bucky's big teeth.

The convoy has passed out of range. That rumble has left my body.

Nothing before this moment exists. The war is coming. I'm going to enlist.

3

WILLIAM H. PARKER

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1941

Another fucking convoy. Stalled traffic at Pico and Crenshaw.

A major intersection. All six lanes blocked. Civilian motorists honking their horns—part fervor, part frustration.

Parker checked his watch. He was now two minutes late. He was meeting Carl Hull at Wilshire Station. Carl kept the Department's Fifth Column files. Carl was half intelligence agent, half cop.

A motorcycle punk jumped a half-track hitch and zoomed off, westbound. The act broke four traffic-code laws. The heist-hot car call cost him an hour. The Ashida kid's gizmo compensated.

Soldiers applauded the jump. The punk flipped them the finger.

Parker stepped out of his car. The convoy stretched to Olympic north and Washington south. Crisscross traffic, lumbering vehicles, Army fools running red lights.

His siren was useless. Street noise would smother it. The fortifications were pledged to defense plants. Two howitzers were pledged to Douglas Aircraft. His old boss ran the plant police. James Edgar "Two-Gun" Davis would get two more guns.

He was stalled in traffic. He was stalled in *Traffic Division*. He was The Man Who Would Be Chief. He was dead-stalled on all flanks.

He hailed from Deadwood, South Dakota. He was a son of the Holy Church and mining-town justice. He *will* be Chief. He will derail the Protestant line of succession. He will enact rigorous reforms. His brusque-tempered reformer's zeal was divinely bestowed. He *will* be Chief. He's been laying the groundwork for years.

He's William H. Parker III. Bill Parker I was a Union army colonel and U.S. attorney. Bill Parker I closed down Deadwood's whorehouses and dope dens. Bill Parker I was elected to Congress in 1906. Cirrhosis killed him at age sixty-one.

Bill Parker I had The Thirst. Line of succession: Bill Parker II and III inherited it.

His police department moniker is "Whiskey Bill." It's colorful, but incomplete. It fails to denote his comportment within the affliction.

He stayed dry throughout Prohibition. Alcohol was *illegal* then. 1933 brought repeal. He's been drinking at odd intervals since then.

Deadwood. He acquired The Thirst there.

Deadwood *formed* him the way L.A. *made* him. He graduated from high school in '20. He was the brightest kid in his class. His mother divorced Bill Parker II in '22. She uprooted to L.A. then. He helped with the move and stayed on.

L.A. was a hundred times bigger than Deadwood and a hundred times more corrupt. He worked as a movie usher and cabbie. L.A.'s sinfulness enraged him. The scale of the place drew him in.

There was a horrible kid marriage. His bride was a trollop. He did vile things to her. He cannot say the woman's name. He confessed his vile acts to a priest and received absolution.

He got a Church annulment and married again. Helen Schultz was a prudently chosen wife. She was an ex-policewoman. His first wife was a tawdry drunk dream. Helen was probity defined.

He drove taxicabs and attended law school. He joined the Los Angeles Police Department in '27. It was sickeningly corrupt. *Protestant* hoodlums ran the Department. He held his tongue and made rank. He became the hatchet man for Two-Gun Davis. The man was bone-dirty. He acceded to the man's designs. He heard things he shouldn't have heard and did things he shouldn't have done. His brutal ambition was forged from this ghastly descent.

He began his ascent. It started with his law school degree and stunning bar-exam performance. Jim Davis taught him the law from a morally forfeited perspective. He changed the law to vouch his career path.

Jim Davis and Mayor Frank Shaw were ousted. Fletcher Bowron was elected mayor. Bowron was a dimwit and half-assed reformer. Bowron brought in and sacked Chief Art Hohmann. Chief Art squawked when Fletch tapped "Call-Me-Jack" Horrall. Call-Me-Jack was a hear-no-evil/see-no-evil Chief. He maintained a clean façade. He was buffered by hatchet men and bagmen. Captain William H. Parker was frozen in place. The promotion list was an ice floe. He deployed his legal knowledge to thaw himself out.

He crafted legal documents. They fortified civil-service statutes, curtailed political influence and buttressed police autonomy. He had reform-minded jurists introduce the measures. They were straw men and kept his name out of it. The first measures altered the L.A. City Charter and were voted into law. A final measure granted civil service protection to police chiefs. That law now protected Call-Me-Jack

Horrall. It would protect him one day.

The Los Angeles Police Department was a snake pit. Rampant factionalism, feudal-warlord cops. City Hall was hot-wired. The Detective Bureau was full of mop-closet listening posts and wire-recording gadgets spackled to ledges and lamps. Cops talked heedlessly, cops kept tabs. Smart cops made their dirty calls from pay phones.

Like Dudley Smith.

They monitored one another. They played at civility. Their shared Catholicism served them there. They had monthly dinners with Archbishop Cantwell. Call-Me-Jack let Dudley peddle dope to southside Negroes. Call-Me-Jack cosigned Dudley's loathsome theories of racial sedation. Dudley was a Coughlinite and America Firster. He was Irish-born. He hated the English. He smugly relished the Nazi bombing of London.

Parker leaned on his black-and-white. The northbound traffic was stacked down to Adams now. Soldiers whooped at Dorsey High girls. A girl flipped her skirt and displayed her undies. It created an uproar.

Traffic jam. Logjam in Traffic Division.

He ran the Accident Investigation Detail. It was boring work, crucial work, not a career booster. The L.A. boom continued. The automobile boom boomed exponentially. More cars, more car crashes, more injuries and fatalities.

Call-Me-Jack sent him to Northwestern U. last year. He matriculated at a school for ranking traffic cops. His professors predicted an "auto-wreck apocalypse." He kept seeing a young woman on campus. She was tall, red-haired, about twenty-five. He asked a few students about her. They said she was a registered nurse and biology major. Her name was Joan something. She was from the Wisconsin boonies. She liked to drink.

It was 1:14 p.m. The convoy was impregnable. Wait—a northbound half-track stalled out.

Thread the needle. Hit the wiggle spot.

Parker got in the car and tapped his cherry lights and siren. Little kids on the sidewalk squealed. He gunned it and squeaked through the opening. He hit Wilshire Station at 1:16.

He parked and ran upstairs. Young cops gawked at the captain in full sprint.

Carl Hull had an office across from the squadroom. He ran the Red Squad in the '30s and reformed it. The Department hired out cops as strikebreaker thugs. Hull kiboshed the practice and took on his file-keeper job.

Parker stepped into the office. Hull sat at his desk, with his feet up. A war map covered two walls. Blue and red pins denoted troops in

Europe. Yellow pins denoted the Japs' Pacific march.

Hull said, "You're seventeen minutes late."

Parker straddled a chair. "An auto theft and a drugstore heist pushed me back."

"I've got scuttlebutt on that."

"Tell me."

Hull packed his pipe. "It's off the Bureau pipeline. That Jap lab kid called Buzz Meeks. He got a fiber match to that rape-o MP."

"Conclusive?"

"No, and the kid told Meeks that."

Parker drummed the chair slats. "Who'd Meeks tell?"

"Dudley Smith."

"And Dudley went to Call-Me-Jack, who said, 'You take care of it, Dud.' "

Hull lit the pipe. "Yes, and in an ideal world, I'd prefer due process."

Parker lit a cigarette. "As much as I despise rapists and heist men, so would I."

A breeze buckled the war map. Parker studied the Russian-front pins. The resisting reds swarmed the advancing blues. It was a near rout.

"We'll be up against Russia after the war, Carl."

"Unless we intercede after Hitler bleeds them dry."

Parker shook his head. "They're our allies now. We need them to win *this* war, which hasn't even started for us yet."

Hull smiled. "Stalin will angle for a property split in eastern Europe. We'll have to forfeit territories and hold on to some strategic possessions."

Parker pointed to the map. "The conflict will be largely ideological then. It's been that way since their goddamn revolution. They hate us, we hate them. We can't let a momentary alliance blunt us to the fact that the world isn't big enough for both of us."

Hull twirled an ashtray. "You're leading me, William."

Parker smiled. "Here's my cross-examination, then. Do you predict a U.S. versus Russia war of territorial chess, the moment that peace is declared?"

Hull said, "Yes, I do."

"Then I'll classify you as a friendly witness and capitalize on that concession. Do you consider our homegrown Fifth Column to be clever and farsighted enough to begin their subversive activities *before* our inevitable engagement in the current world conflict?"

Hull pointed to the map. "Yes. They know that Hitler can't fight a two-front war and win, just like we do. They'll play up the fact that Russian blood paved our way to victory, portray us as panfascists and ingrates, and roll out every cliché in the books from that point on."

Parker pulled out a pocket-size tract. "Here's some quotes from this. 'A draconian policy of U.S. aggression against Russia, our current brave ally, after the war is won.' 'Escalating war hysteria and the racially inspired mass imprisonment of innocent Japanese citizens, a collusive tangle of the Los Angeles Police Department and the FBI.' "

Hull tamped his pipe. "Devil's advocate, William. The Feds *do* have a Jap subversive list, and they *will* use us if any type of detentions are required. You can't fault the bastards' logic here."

Parker said, "Their logic is specious, seditious, disingenuous and criminally defamatory. These shitheels allege to be antifascist, yet they give aid and comfort to our shared fascist enemy with the very writing and publication of this tract. And if you require further verification of the pervertedly circuitous logic of it all, the tract was printed by the same outfit that prints Gerald L. K. Smith's hate tracts."

Hull stared at the wall maps. Parker tossed the tract in his lap. Hull skimmed it.

"I know who wrote this. I've got her prose style and vocabulary memorized."

"Tell me."

"It's a woman. She's a socialite, for want of less kind descriptions, and she runs a Red cell. She lords it over some screenwriters and actors. They show up at rallies, make speeches and cause a ruckus. The Feds have an informant in the cell. He's a Beverly Hills psychiatrist that all the Reds spill their woes to. A pal on the Feds passes me the good doctor's dirt. I'll show you my file, if you quit leading me and come clean."

Parker shook his head. "Give me some names first. Come on, Carl. I outrank you."

Hull laughed. "The doctor's name is Saul Lesnick. His daughter was riding a vehicular-manslaughter term at Tehachapi. The Feds sprung her on the proviso that he turn snitch."

"The others?"

"The woman's name is Claire De Haven. Her chief acolytes are a fairy actor named Reynolds Loftis and his inamorata Chaz Minear."

No bells rang. The Urge hit out of nowhere. Come on—revoke The Pledge. One drink won't kill you.

"These Reds are defaming our police department, Carl. We can't have that."

"You'll be Chief one day, William. I look forward to that day, and I'll serve proudly under you. For now, though, I'd be happy with an explanation."

Parker stood up. "We'll plant someone in the cell. Our own informant. Someone we've got a wedge on."

Hull opened a drawer and pulled out four photographs. Parker leaned over the desk.

Hull laid the photos out. “I was checking my surveillance files a few weeks ago. These jumped out at me. I thought they might be useful at some point, so you might call this serendipitous.”

Four sneak snapshots. Group pix. Two indoor meetings, two outdoor rallies. Dates: mid-’37 to fall ’38. A young woman’s face circled, four times.

She had dark hair. She stared intently at *something*. She looked provocative.

“Who is she?”

“Katherine Ann Lake, age twenty-one. Here’s a hint. Her boyfriend was the bluesuit at your heist call a few hours ago.”

Bells rang. Provocative—*sure*.

The Boulevard-Citizens job. That persistent rumor: Lee Blanchard bossed the heist and framed a fall guy. Blanchard was allegedly tight with Ben Siegel. “Bugsy” was now in the Hall of Justice jail. He allegedly snuffed a hood named Greenie Greenberg. It was a Jew gang rubout—November ’39.

Siegel would be out soon. The prosecution’s key witness took a window dive. Last month—Coney Island, New York. Gangland thug Abe Reles falls to his death. NYPD men are guarding him. He fashions a bedsheet rope and attempts to escape. He plummets eight stories.

Katherine Ann Lake. The girl Blanchard met at the robbery trial. The prosecution’s stunning star witness.

Parker stared at the photos. “Blanchard’s a shitheel. You’ve heard the rumors.”

Hull coughed. “Yes, and I credit them. If you’re thinking of the Boulevard-Citizens caper for a wedge on the girl, you wouldn’t be far off.”

Parker said, “He wants to link up with Dudley and his boys. You’ve heard the rumors.”

Hull said, “Here’s something you haven’t heard. The NYPD Intelligence Squad spotted Blanchard in Coney Island, right before that witness in the Siegel trial jumped. The cops recognized him from his fight days.”

Parker stared at the photographs. The resolution was sharp. The Lake girl had fierce dark eyes.

4

DUDLEY SMITH

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1941

Lineup.

Five rape suspects, four rape victims, one-way glass between. A raised stage and height strips marked on the wall.

Chairs for eyeball witnesses. Standing ashtrays. A discomfiting wall poster.

It featured flags and dyspeptic eagles. It was a war-bond pitch. It supported intervention in this Jew-inspired war.

Dudley was America First. He loved Father Coughlin's weekly broadcasts. He enjoyed Gerald L. K. Smith's tirades. He shared a surname and no blood with Pastor Smith. The pastor was vilely antipapist.

Mike Breuning said, "The rape ladies are next door. They all say they could ID the guy, so we're in luck there. The lineup guys are backstage. They're all MPs from the Fort MacArthur battalion, and they all fit the suspect's description."

Dick Carlisle cracked his knuckles. Elmer Jackson flipped through his notebook. He'd worked the rape string from the start.

Dudley watched him read. Yes—the rapes felt consistent with the drugstore heist this a.m. That Jap lab whiz was right—the book-rack fibers do not *assuredly* place the rape-o at the drugstore. The *possible* two-crime parlay was irrelevant. Rape devastated women. The offense equaled murder. He told Call-Me-Jack that. Call-Me-Jack said, "You take care of it, Dud."

Elmer chewed a cigar. Elmer ran whores with Brenda Allen. The Vice Squad phones were tapped. Everyone knew everyone's shit. City Hall was one big listening post.

Carlisle lit a cigarette. Breuning stood poised. Elmer wagged his cigar.

"We've got four incidents. The victims all described the fucker as blond, medium-size and about twenty-five. Our guys fit that bill, and they were all on overnight leave when the incidents occurred. On top of that, they all had battery beefs involving women before they enlisted. For MO, we've got this. All four victims were out walking, alone, in West L.A. The rape-o abducted them, gagged them and drove them to four different vacant lots nearby. Here's the crazy shit. The rape-o hits them twice, rolls on a rubber and cries out like he's in pain when he's giving it to them."

Dudley smiled. Breuning leaned in close. Dudley put an arm around him.

"Call the infirmary at Fort MacArthur, lad. Get the names of all the soldiers treated for syph and the clap within the past six months, both in the MP battalion and the camp at large. Compile separate lists and report back within half an hour."

Breuning vamoosed. Elmer said, "What gives, boss?"

"An instinct and a hypothesis, lad. Let's say the MP's armband was a ruse to foil identification, because wearing such an identifying item on a rape string is tantamount to suicidal. Let's say he's miffed at some long-ago woman for having given him a dose. Let's say he's a smart lad with scientific knowledge. He knows that we can determine blood type from pus or seminal discharge. Let's say that for some fiendishly unfathomable reason, he wants the rapes to cause him pain."

Elmer went *Huh?* Carlisle went *Oh, yeah—I get it.*

Dot Rothstein walked the women in. Dot was a Sheriff's matron and a grand bull dyke. She ran six one, 240. Male cops stood tall around her.

The women had that schoolmarm look that rape-o's found fetching. They wore church frocks to a lineup. Carlisle dispensed cigarettes and lights.

The room smoked up. The women eyeballed the stage and made faces. The Dotstress scrammed.

Dudley said, "You're all grand and brave ladies for submitting to this ordeal, so we will do our best to ensure that it will be brief. Five men will walk in and stand on that stage, under the wall numbers one through five. You can see them, but they cannot see you. If you see the man who so heinously assaulted you, please tell me."

The women gulped en masse. Elmer tripped a wall switch. Five soldiers walked onstage and faced the room. They wore olive drabs and red armbands. They ran to the rape man's type.

Two women squinted. One woman leaked tears. One woman put on her glasses. They studied the stage. The moment built and fizzled. They all shook their heads no.

Elmer tapped the wall switch. The soldiers filed offstage. The women clustered around an ashtray and stubbed out their cigarettes.

One said, "They just weren't him."

One rubbed her eyes. "He was more mean-looking."

One nodded.

One said, "He had mean eyes."

Dudley smiled. Dudley touched their arms. It meant *There, there*.

Breuning returned. He was breathing hard. His shirt was wet. He waved a mug-shot strip.

Dudley walked over. Breuning leaned into the doorway.

"One case. The guy's an MP corporal, and he fits the description. He was on overnight leave on the dates of all four incidents, and he got his dose treated *after* the last rape. The provost captain told me he was a suspect in a rape string in Seattle, but the Army took him anyway. He's on leave now. He's a racetrack fiend, and the Oak Tree Meet's at Santa Anita today. I've got a plate number for him."

Dudley grabbed the strip. *Aaaaaah*—Jerome Joseph Pavlik. Young, blond, *mean*.

Two women hovered. Dudley flashed the strip. The women studied it.

One woman cried. One woman screamed.

Dudley pulled out two shamrock charms. They were fourteen-karat gold. He bought them bulk off a Yid jeweler.

He drew the women to him. He placed the charms in their hands.

He said, "I'll take care of it."

The last race ran at 3:30. Santa Anita was off the Arroyo Seco Parkway. It was *très* tight.

They ran through the City Hall garage. Breuning owned a souped-up Ford. They piled in and peeled out.

Breuning drove. Dudley sat up front. Carlisle sat in back, with three sawed-off shotguns.

They were 10-gauge and twin-barreled. They were fitted for bear slugs and triple-aught buck.

They pulled onto Main Street and cut through Chinatown. They made the parkway, fast.

Breuning gunned it. The juice needle jumped to eighty. Dudley smoked and looked out his window. He caught a wreck on the southbound side.

Skid marks, road flares, collision. Impact—a Navy flatbed and shine Cadillac. Traffic grief. It brought to mind Whiskey Bill Parker. He had grand dirt on him.

You should not have indulged that youthful marriage. Did you think your misconduct would escape my scrutiny?

Whiskey Bill had remarried. His second union was plainly humdrum. Dudley had his own Irish-born wife and four daughters. He had a rogue fifth daughter in Boston. She was seventeen now. They exchanged frequent letters and phone calls.

Elizabeth Short. His child with a married woman named Phoebe. A scold with her own daughter brood.

The Short girls all looked like Phoebe. It cloaked Beth's paternal blood. Phoebe was older than him. He was a mere nineteen when they coupled. He was a raw Irish conscript.

Joe Kennedy lived in Boston. Joe was filthy rich and donated money to Irish causes. Joe financed his citizenship. The price was strongarm work.

Beth knew that he was her father. She loved him and cleaved to the notion of her rough policeman dad. He just sent her a plane ticket. She wanted to see Los Angeles at Christmas. Her last letter disturbed him. She hinted at a "horrible thing" last year. Beth had a blind chum named Tommy Gilfoyle. He should call Tommy and inquire about that "horrible thing."

Family.

Bold men required it. The constraints were minimal. The vows were laughable. The joys were rich. Family was a necessary tether. The hellhound within him would go berserk without it. Whiskey Bill was childless. He ran unchecked in his prim lunacy.

The parkway was near dead. Breuning took hairpin turns fast. The juice needle jumped in the straightaways.

Dudley checked his watch. It was 2:54. The next-to-last race ran at 3:00. Most track fiends left before the closer.

Lincoln Heights whizzed by. A cowboy movie was filming up in the hills. A gunfight blurred by. Dudley recognized a man in a loincloth. Some Apache—a skid row bookie and three-time loser out of Big Q.

Dudley smoked. His thoughts drifted.

He moonlighted for Columbia Pictures. He was Harry Cohn's morals watchdog. Film stars ran unruly. The studio führers controlled them with rigid conduct codes. Violations construed breach of contract. He's nailed queer movie stars. He's nailed dipsos and hopheads galore. He's got legions of bellboys and whores bribed to report indiscretions. He's building quite the grand scrapbook of Hollywood at play.

Bette Davis will love his candid photos. She'll be at the Shrine Friday night. The *Examiner* is throwing its newsboys' Christmas bash. He'll be there to provoke a chance meet.

Wetbacks tilled crops above the film site. Carlos Madrano probably supplied them. Carlos. *El Capitán,* Mexican State Police. Close pal of Call-Me-Jack and Two-Gun Davis. Carlos shared his antipathy for the Reds and the Jews. Carlos viewed the Japs as *der Führer*'s pesky kin.

Dudley checked the mug strip. The rape-o looked like a small Lee Blanchard.

Aaaaah, Leland. Are you still troubled by Coney Island, on November 12? You would love to join my cadre, but have you the gumption for the work?

Ben Siegel wanted Abe Reles dead. Lee Blanchard owed Ben, per the Boulevard-Citizens job. Jew syndicate lads bribed two NYPD guards. Hotel-room doors were left open.

They Mickey Finn'd Reles' food. It was a quick two-man job. Blanchard fashioned the escape rope—a euphemism for noose. He did the hoisting himself.

The New York *Daily News* captured the moment. CANARY FALLS TO DEATH! HE CAN SING, BUT HE CAN'T FLY!

The train ride home was vexing. Blanchard waxed weepy and stayed drunk. The lad went back with Ben S. Benny bought out his fight contract and advised Lee to take some prudent dives. Lee refused, Lee owed Benny, Lee behaved rashly with the Boulevard-Citizens job. Benny banked at Boulevard-Citizens and played golf with the prexy. Benny was quite insane and obsessed with respectability. That caper was one large snafu.

Breuning pulled off the parkway. It was 3:01. Carlisle loaded the shotguns. They cut through South Pasadena. They made Arcadia and Santa Anita in two minutes flat.

The San Gabriels loomed behind the racetrack proper. The crest line framed the grandstands and clubhouse. The parking lot was two-thirds empty. Loudspeakers blared. A race ran down the home stretch.

Breuning cruised the parking rows. Dudley and Carlisle scanned plates. Cheers squelched up the speakers. Track fools walked out of the clubhouse and made for their cars.

Carlisle said, "Right there."

Yes—a '36 Olds sedan. Forest green/whip antenna/California ADL-642.

Breuning swung into an empty space and idled. Dudley chained cigarettes. The crowd fanned through the car rows. A man and two women peeled off their way. *Yes*—Jerome Joseph Pavlik and a Chinatown whore duet.

Carlisle said, "Tong chippies."

Breuning said, "Four Families, and protected. The boss Chink plays mah-jongg with Call-Me-Jack."

They looked blotto. The rape-o wore wilted khakis. The chippies wore moth-eaten fur coats.

They piled into the Olds. Dudley said, "Tail them."

They brodied out of the lot. Breuning stuck close. They were stinko. They wouldn't notice. Breuning rode their bumper—hard.

Two-car caravan. Residential streets, Fair Oaks Boulevard. The

Parkway, due south.

The Olds fishtailed and weaved. Breuning eased off the gas. A Packard got between them. The whip antenna stayed in sight.

Carlisle blanket-wrapped the shotguns. Breuning said, “Bon voyage, sweetheart.”

The Olds pulled off at Alameda, southbound. Chinatown was straight ahead. Kwan’s Chinese Pagoda was quite close.

The Olds bumped the curb and stopped. The whores stumbled out. They got their sea legs. They tucked cash rolls into their garter belts and blew the rape-o kisses. They weaved down an alley behind a chop suey pit.

Carlisle passed out the shotguns. Jerome Joseph Pavlik stepped from his car and eyed the world, shit-faced. He gawked a vacant lot, catty-corner. It was full of palm trees and high grass.

He staggered into the lot. He walked up to a palm tree and pulled out his dick. He launched a world’s record piss.

Dudley said, “Now, lads.”

The street was no-one-out quiet. They beelined to the lot. Soft dirt covered their footsteps. The rape-o swayed and sprayed grass.

They came up behind him. He didn’t hear shit.

Dudley said, “Those grand girls won’t be the same now. This prevents recurring grief.”

He started to turn around. He started to say “Say what?”

Six triggers snapped. The rape-o blew up. Bone shards took down palm fronds. Carlisle’s glasses got residual-spritzed.

Big booms overlapped. Note those buckshot-on-wood echoes. 3:30 church bells pealed through all of it.

Bug-eyed dragons flanked the Pagoda. Their tongues lit up and waggled at night. Uncle Ace Kwan ran the Hop Sing tong. His joint catered to white stiffs and Chinks with white taste buds. L.A. cops dined gratis.

Dudley walked through the restaurant. Mayor Bowron and DA McPherson were snout-deep in chow mein. Fletch B. was a peppy civic booster and all-around stupe. McPherson was a narcoleptic rumdum and mud shark. He frequented Minnie Roberts’ Casbah and engaged two Congo cuties at a pop.

A recessed door led to the basement. Dudley took the stairs down. He leaned on a wall panel. It slid open. Fumes hit him straight off.

An opium den. Dim lights and twenty-odd pallets. Water bowls, cups and ladles. Scrawny Chinamen in their skivvies, sucking on pipes.

Dudley counted heads. *Aaaaah*, sixteen fiends adrift.

Dudley shut the panel. The basement conjured labyrinths beneath the Wolfsschanze. Cement walls, mildew, scrolled-iron doors. Ace Kwan's office—an SS bunker.

He knocked and walked in. Uncle Ace squatted over the floor safe. He was sixty-six and consumptive thin. He wore a Santa Claus hat. He conjured atrocity and Yule cheer.

"How's tricks, Dudster?"

"Tricky, my yellow brother."

"How so?"

"There's a dead white man in the lot across the street. Your lads should spread some quicklime and post a guard while the earth absorbs him."

Ace sat cross-legged. He was famously nimble. It was a common heathen trait.

"The lad was last seen with two tong whores."

"Hop Sing?"

"Four Families. You might want to remove the green sedan, as well. I don't want such trivial white business to disturb your clientele."

Ace bowed. "Four Families has been rude to my favorite niece. They are unsavory like that."

"Shall I rebuke those involved? I would hate to see another feud."

Ace stood up. "No, but my Irish brother honors me with the offer."

Dudley bowed. Ace pointed to a side doorway and went *Be my guest*. Dudley opened the door. Ace vanished somewhere. Chinks were stealthy and decorous.

It was his secret room. The pallet, the bowl, the ladle. Compressed tar spread on a bread plate. As always—The Pipe.

He hung his suit coat and holster on a wall peg. The pallet was built for a tall man. Dudley packed and lit the pipe.

The tar smoldered, the burn hit, the smoke funneled in. His shoulders dropped. His limbs disappeared.

The wisps now. *You never know what you'll see.*

Yes—there.

Dublin. Grafton Street, '21. Black and Tans with rubber-bullet guns. They aim for the kidneys. It still hurts when he stoops.

A rally. Patrick Pearse in full cry.

"Irishmen and Irishwomen—in the name of God and the dead generations from which she receives her nationhood—Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom."

A church rectory. A gun cache in a priest's bedroom. A rifle stock hits his hands. He's on the street now. He's sighting down the barrel. A British soldier's face explodes.

He's on Sackville Street. The recoil subsides. He's looting a Protty-owned shop. Patrick Pearse ruffles his hair.

“She now seizes the moment, supported by her exiled children in America.”

Joe Kennedy smiles. He’s got satchels full of cash. Irish Citizen’s Army men greet him. The Black and Tans murder Patrick Pearse. There’s a firing squad. He’s got a bull’s-eye pinned to his chest.

Joe Kennedy says, “You’re a bright boy. You should come to America. Prohibition is a license to steal. You could ferry hooch for me.”

He’s in Canada, that’s Lake Erie, he’s on a moored barge. He’s holding a tommy gun. Whiskey crates cover the deck.

Boston. A grand house. A Yankee maid scowls at him. He’s toddling six-year-old Jack.

Joe Kennedy says, “Dud, this Jew banker fucked me on a deal. Take care of it, will you?”

His limbs are gone. The tar still burns. He knows when to stir the flame. Time is a nickelodeon. It screens through eyes in the back of his head.

He hit the Jew too hard. He shouldn’t have killed him. Joe Kennedy is peeved.

“Your future is in Los Angeles, son. I can get you on the police force. You can fuck movie stars and create mischief.”

He’s standing proud in knife-sharp blues. He’s hitting a purse snatcher with a phone book. Jack Horrall toasts him at Archbishop Cantwell’s table. He’s in Harry Cohn’s office. Harry pats a bust of Benito Mussolini. He’s outside a Bel-Air manse with a camera. He’s got a window view. Cary Grant is engaged in all-male *soixante-neuf*.

Photoplay, Screen World—magazine pages aswirl. Bette Davis—aglow with something *he* said.

Switcheroo. Instant travelogue. He’s on Coney Island at the Half Moon Hotel. He’s hoisting the canary. Don’t cry, Lee Blanchard—it’s unmanly.

Travelogue. Back to Boston. Young Jack Kennedy’s a Navy ensign now. He’s due here for Christmas. He wants to fuck movie stars.

Jack starts singing, in Spanish. His voice doesn’t go with the tune. Cut to the Trocadero. It’s festooned with a banner: WELCOME 1938!

He’s at a table with Ben Siegel and Sheriff Biscailuz. Glenn Miller’s band plays “Perfidia.” Bette Davis dances with a fey young man.

Light streaked in. The nickelodeon jerked. A shutter dropped and killed his travelogue.

He felt his limbs. He saw his coat and gun on a peg.

A Chinese woman appeared. She brought an aperitif. Three Benzedrine tablets and green tea.

Dudley stood up. The room retained a glow.

“What time is it, please?”

“It is 6:42.”

“Perfidia” ended off-key. Bette Davis blew him a kiss.

5

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1941

Bucky was late. He always dropped by the lab on weekends. He trained at the Main Street Gym. Central Station was close.

The lab was dead. Most chemists worked Monday to Friday. Ashida worked seven days and nights.

The captain's office was next door. Elmer Jackson's voice came through a vent. He was boozing with Captain Bergdahl. They discussed the rape lineup with Dudley Smith.

The rapees ID'd the rape-o off a mug shot. Elmer said, "The guy might be good for the drugstore job this morning, but the DA'll probably have to indict him off a slab."

Bergdahl laughed. Ashida prepped a microscope and the drugstore bullet chunks. Ray Pinker ran *his* tests. He left his report on Ashida's desk. His conclusion: Browning 9mm, shell catcher–equipped.

Wrong. Pinker's comparison text was outdated. *Be certain now. Retest yourself.*

He dialed in close. He got the same characteristics as this morning. Call it conclusive. A Luger slug hits gypsum board.

Bergdahl cracked a joke. The vent amplified his voice. Ha, ha—Come-San-Chin, the Chinese cocksucker.

Elmer said, "Cute, but I already heard it."

Bergdahl said, "Can you tell them apart? The Japs and the Chinks, I mean. I've got a pal on the Feds. He says they've got a roundup list for the Japs, if we get into this-here war. From my white man's perspective, I can't see no difference."

Ashida unlocked his tool drawer. He kept his photographs inside.

There's Bucky. He's crouched in boxing trunks. He's tall. He's lean. His muscles meld more than protrude. He's German Lutheran, with a Jewish star on his trunks. It expressed anti-Nazi sentiment.

He moved sideways on his toes and never tangled up his feet. He had left-hand power off feints. Mariko said he had "Tojo teeth." His dad was in the German-American Bund.

His eyes were small and deep-set. His smile lit up rooms.

There. Those clomps—he's taking the steps two at a time.

Ashida locked up the photos. Bucky walked in and dragged a chair over. He wore flannels and his Belmont letter jacket. The green *B* was pinned for basketball and track.

They shook hands. Ashida said, "Is it true?"

Bucky grinned. "Who told you?"

"Ray Pinker said it's common knowledge, which probably means that everyone knows, except me."

"I'm cleared for the May Academy class. I've passed all the exams, and they told me the background check is pro forma."

Ashida smiled. "You were waiting to tell me. You didn't want to jinx it, so you thought you'd wait until you were sure."

Bucky rocked his chair. "Or after the fight tomorrow. I'll be starved, and I'll buy dinner. We weigh in at noon, and I'll be all butterflies until it's over. I can't drop weight the way I used to. I'm still up at one seventy-nine."

Ashida said, "Take some steam at the Shotokan Baths."

"Nix that. I've got a pass to the Jonathan Club. The DA left a note at the gym. 'Son, I'm betting on you.' "

Ashida slapped his knees. "I could tell you stories about him."

"I've already heard them. He showed up drunk at a Lee Blanchard fight, with two colored girls."

Ashida said, "Junior Wilkins? It's not a very auspicious farewell fight."

"No, but it's one I can win."

Ashida laced his fingers. "Did you read Braven Dyer's column? He said you're running from Ronnie Cordero."

Bucky flinched. "I'm not quitting off a loss, Hideo."

"You wouldn't lose."

"He'd clean my clock. I could take him like I could take Joe Louis."

"I'm sorry you took it the wrong way. I didn't mean to—"

Bucky waved him off. "I ran into Jack Webb. He's selling suits at Silverwood's. He said the Detective Bureau men buy wholesale there."

"Jack's an awful cop buff. He's always bringing the Bureau men coffee and cigarettes."

Bucky stroked his Belmont *B*. "Sentinels forever. Jack should let us buy wholesale. We got him elected class president."

Ashida blurted it. "You've got an admirer."

"Who is she? And what's wrong with her?"

"I've seen her at your fights. She's always drawing you."

Bucky flashed his teeth. "I'm saving myself for Carole Lombard. You think she'll go for these?"

There's the blush. It always happens. Bucky's so gracious that he never *sees.*

6

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1941

The Strip is swarmed with servicemen. Dave's Blue Room, the Bit O' Sweden and the Trocadero are dishing out free liquor on the sidewalk. I just listened to a news broadcast. The men are being deployed to the Chavez Ravine Naval Base, Fort MacArthur in San Pedro, and Camp Roberts, up near San Luis Obispo. Los Angeles is the deployment hub; the artillery passing through has been consigned to coastal-defense installations and the Lockheed, Boeing, Douglas and Hughes aircraft plants. Ex-Chief Jim Davis runs the Douglas police force; he blathered for a good ten minutes about the need to protect civilian production facilities from Fifth Column sabotage and air-balloon attack. Davis is a vivid local lunatic; I watched him shoot a cigarette out of Lee's mouth at the Bureau Christmas party last year.

I began my diary only this morning. It feels like a remedy to stasis already. I'm looking in at my separate bedroom; the first thing I see are my Bucky Bleichert sketches. They identify my need to engage men anonymously and abstractly. Writing about Bucky forces me to see him in a more critical light.

Lee Blanchard despises Bucky, for his "dance master style" and "handpicked powder-puff opponents." I love Bucky for the ways that he is not Lee, because I am beholden to Lee in confounding ways and need Lee in direct proportion to our shared history.

We had a horrible fight a few hours ago. It pertained to Lee's recent behavior. He's been acting hurt for nearly a month now. He's been sleeping in the Detective Bureau cot room more and more, and spending more and more time with the Bureau's "mascot," a very eager-to-please haberdashery salesman named Jack Webb. He disappeared for a week in mid-November, and explained his absence as "decoy work" in a robbery investigation. I believed it—but only briefly. On a whim, I went through Lee's separate bedroom drawers this afternoon. I found a receipt for a train ticket to New York City and back, November 8 to 15.

I stewed over it. Lee came home and changed out of his civilian clothes. He stated his intention to spend the night at City Hall. I confronted him then.

I demanded an explanation for the receipt and his recent actions. Lee confronted *me* then. He said, “You think you’re an independent woman, but you sponge off of *me* and screw guys in *my* house, while *I* foot the bill. You’re a dilettante and a parasite, and if you disapprove of my behavior, get the fuck out of *my* house.”

With that, Lee stormed out of *his* house, got in *his* car and drove off to live in *his* world—a world that I am subsumed by. A world that I fell into, and want more of.

Brenda Allen, Elmer Jackson and police-sanctioned vice. Lee and his fawning allegiance to Dudley Smith. Bobby De Witt in San Quentin and the scars on my legs. Whatever Lee owed or did *not* owe to Ben Siegel, currently awaiting release from the Hall of Justice jail. The bank heist that Lee planned in large part as a mission to save me. The deus ex machina: a little girl vanishes in 1929.

Lee’s little sister Laurie, age twelve. Lee, fifteen then. Laurie disappears. She was at play in a public park one moment and gone forever the next. Lee was supposed to be watching her. He was off screwing the neighborhood round heels instead.

Lee carries the guilt. He hasn’t fully touched a woman since that time. It’s why he provides me with a comfortable home and does not make love to me. It’s punishment sustained and punishment inflicted. It enrages me and moves me to sobs. It’s why I love Lee so deeply and refuse to leave him. It’s why I sleep with men in his own house.

The houses flanking this house are blaring the evening news; I can hear both broadcasts plainly. FDR is scolding Japan for their vile aggressions. Father Coughlin is scolding FDR and the Jew hegemony.

Both men own posterity. War gives men a plain and simple something to do. There’s a brawl down on the Strip. The radios are a low hum under the shrieks.

Lee Blanchard had forty-nine pro fights and engineered a daring robbery. He owns posterity in a way that I never will. That fact infuriates me.

All I have is withering perception. Women write diaries in the hope that their words will beckon fate.

7

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1941

The news signed off. A talking beaver signed on and pitched toothpaste. Parker kicked his door shut.

Traffic Division was dead. Traffic shit roiled citywide. He was the only man on duty. Nobody else cared.

The division had its own building. 1st and Figueroa—six blocks from City Hall. It was his brainchild. Buy an old warehouse and convert it. Create autonomy. Limit Jack Horrall's access.

Parker prayed. He asked God for the courage not to drink tonight. He asked God to guide him through his incursion.

He was frayed. The Thirst plagued him. West L.A. Patrol snared two soldiers for drunk driving. There were three downed half-tracks at Pico and Bundy. Ten Central Division men got diverted. Central was running a night-watch skeleton crew.

Parker tidied up his desk. Parker stared at the files on his blotter.

Lee Blanchard's personnel file. Carl Hull's files: Claire De Haven, Reynolds Loftis, Chaz Minear, Saul Lesnick. Carl's suspected seditionists' summary sheet on Katherine Ann Lake.

White female American. 3/9/20/Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Prairie stock like him.

Carl called Claire De Haven "the Red Queen." There were no files on the other cell members. The "subsidiary membership" fluctuated. The Queen moved her pawns in and out. She did not know that Doc Lesnick was a long-term Fed snitch.

Blanchard first—a thin file, three pages.

Class B fitness reports. No informant spiel on the Boulevard-Citizens job. Nothing on Blanchard's alleged friendship with Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel. Four civilian complaints. The complainants accused Blanchard of brutal jail-cell beatings. The complaints were dismissed—the complainants were perverts and hopheads.

No surprises. No new insights. His old instinct confirmed. Blanchard was strictly unkosher.

The Queen and her key pawns—more sinister.

Parker skimmed the files. The gist hit him quick. Doc Lesnick's snitch perceptions felt valid. Claire De Haven was an extortionist. Reynolds Loftis and Chaz Minear were homosexuals. The Red Queen held incriminating photos.

They wore drag gowns at a homo ball. Sheriff's roust sheets corroborated the pix. Loftis and Minear were repeatedly detained during fruit raids. The detentions ran up to 1940. Loftis and Minear habituated queer meeting places and congregated with other degenerates.

The Red Queen dominated them. She told Loftis what movies to act in and Minear how to craft his film scripts. Carl included sample dialogue. It was classic Fifth Columnism.

In the war films: Russian soldiers decry the plight of American Negroes. In the gangster films: hoodlums deride authority and extoll the ghastly charms of relinquishment. In the comedies: sophisticates drop leftist bons mots and vilify Adolf Hitler. The murderous Joe Stalin goes unmentioned.

Parker lit a cigarette. The Lake girl's file ran sixteen pages, replete with photographs.

Here's Miss Lake at Red gatherings. Banners abound. Dubious causes, ragamuffin crowds.

JUSTICE FOR THE SCOTTSBORO BOYS! REMEMBER SACCO & VANZETTI! ROOSEVELT, WALL STREET PAWN! BREAD ON EVERY PLATE NOW!

The crowds were unkempt. Miss Lake was groomed and well-dressed. She *attired* herself.

The photos were crisp black and white. He sensed that she always wore red. She wore a cloche hat to a Ban-the-Klan rally. Men clustered around her. She was not classically lovely. She worked with what she had.

The hat *had* to be red. She was spoofing her own affect. She was distanced from the causes she embraced.

She got straight A's at UCLA. She studied music, literature and political science. Her professors inked comments on her transcripts. They cited her "luminous" term papers. Two profs singled out her essay "Beethoven and Luther: Art and God Within." It was published in a prestigious journal.

Carl Hull secured a list of her library checkouts. It felt emblematic. Left-slanted biography. Romantic-era poetry. Muckraking labor screeds.

Wedges, fulcrums, coercion.

Serendipity.

What was *this* young woman doing with a thug cop like Lee Blanchard? The Boulevard-Citizens job failed to explain it. Carl Hull saw Miss Lake testify at Bobby De Witt's trial. The prosecution foundered until she took the stand. Miss Lake swore the oath between sobs. She closed the show, right there.

He made two calls from Carl's office. He got the FBI first. He wanted to talk to Dr. Lesnick's Fed handler. The man was off fishing in Oregon. He talked to Special Agent Ward Littell instead.

Serendipity.

He knew Ward from church. Ward was an ex-sem boy and a bit of a bleeding heart. Ward knew nothing about Lesnick. Ward leaked a tip.

The Feds were poised to investigate the tapped phones at City Hall. The push would occur in early '42. Ex-Chief Hohmann had snitched off the Department. Fletch Bowron made Jack Horrall Chief. Dimwit Hohmann wanted his job back. The taps and listening posts were an open secret. Fletch and Call-Me-Jack were fake reformers. Jack was 100% on the grift. Jack had a gentler touch than Crazy Jim Davis.

He called Sid Hudgens next. Sid scribed for the *Mirror-News*. Sid confirmed Ward Littell's assertions.

Art Hohmann was a Fed fink. The fucker was lawsuit-happy. Wouldn't *you* be, Bill? Fat Jack is in his chair.

Wedges, fulcrums, coercion.

It was 9:05. Parker grabbed the phone and called the Bureau line.

"Homicide, Sergeant Ludlow."

"It's Bill Parker at Traffic."

"Uh, yeah, Captain?"

"Is Lee Blanchard there?"

Ludlow said, "Yes, sir. He's taking a nap on Dudley Smith's couch."

Parker said, "Don't wake him. And don't tell him I called."

Ludlow mumbled something. Parker hung up. The surveillance pix beamed out at him.

Miss Lake's hat was red. It *had* to be.

Parker shagged his car and cut west on 1st Street. He skimmed the radio and caught newscasts. The news was all *JAPS*.

Japs whiz toward Siam, Japs whiz toward the Philippines. FDR remains embroiled with Jap envoys. Boss Jap Hirohito blows raspberries.

Parker doused the radio. 1st Street swept into Beverly Boulevard. Christmas lights blinked on lawns and outlined doorways. A Schenley's billboard reignited The Thirst. A Maytag billboard got him jazzed.

A family oohed and aahed a gas range. The mom looked like that redhead at Northwestern. Joan something. Homewrecker. He hid out from Helen and *gassed* on *her*.

Parker turned north on La Cienega. The Strip hop-hop-hopped. He swerved around a downed flatbed spilling gas masks. Drunken sailors donned the masks and capered. Two Marines duked it out by the Mocambo. They staggered and capsized a faux Christmas tree.

North on Wetherly Drive. The Lake-Blanchard love nest—halfway up the block.

Streamlined and stylish. Aesthetically landscaped. No kind of cop's house. Too costly, too *good*.

A Packard ragtop was parked in the driveway. Parker pulled in behind it. The house was lit up. Cigarette smoke plumed off a high terrace.

He got out and stretched. He straightened his tie and hitched up his holster. He crossed the porch and rang the bell.

Footsteps responded. She swung the door wide.

She stared at him. She wore gabardine slacks and a man's white shirt. She dressed up to stay home.

"Bill Parker, Miss Lake. I was hoping I could have a few moments of your time."

She checked her watch. It was solid gold. She wore saddle shoes. She cinched her hair with a tortoiseshell barrette.

"It's 9:41 p.m., Captain."

"Yes, I know it's late. If I'm intruding, I could come back tomorrow."

She stepped toward him. It was a block-the-doorway pose.

"It pertains to Lee, then? That's a Traffic Division patch on your sleeve. Has there been an accident?"

She had his prairie twang. He noticed her notice his. She could lose it or modify it. She exemplified *Affect*.

"Officer Blanchard is fine, Miss Lake. It's something else entirely. I'm hoping you'll be curious enough to hear me out."

She stepped aside. He stepped inside. The living room was a movie set. Mauve walls, wingback chairs, tubular chaise lounges. Leftist-message art and a chrome liquor sideboard.

"You have a lovely home, Miss Lake."

She shut the door. "Lee had a successful boxing career. He had good financial counseling, as well."

"Ben Siegel is shrewd with his money. I'm sure he counseled Officer Blanchard himself."

She leaned on the door. The pose covered a pout. For a heartbeat—faux sophisticate, reckless child.

"We've all heard the rumors, Captain. A few of us know that they're false."

Parker pointed to a chair. "Would you mind?"

She nodded and walked to the sideboard. Parker sat down. She spritzed out two club sodas and brought him one. She pulled a matching chair up close.

They touched glasses. She said, "To whatever comes next."

Parker sipped his drink. "Tell me how you knew."

"I attended Mayor Bowron's Easter dinner for Archbishop Cantwell. There was an open bar. You veered between a selection of spirits and the soft-drink tray. In the end, you had a seltzer. You seemed to be both disappointed and relieved."

Parker said, "Do you always observe minor moments that acutely?"

"Yes. And you sense that I do, which is why you're here."

Parker popped a sweat. "You're from Sioux Falls?"

"Yes, and you're from Deadwood."

"How do you know that?"

"Elmer Jackson told me."

"Are you friends with Sergeant Jackson?"

"Yes."

"Are you familiar with the rumors about him?"

"Yes, and I know that they're true, as much as the rumors about Lee are false."

Sweat pooled at his hairline. The goddamn girl saw it. She walked over and opened a window.

A breeze drifted in. Horns honked down on Doheny. The goddamn girl struck a lounge pose.

Fireworks exploded. He caught a wide window view. Illegal Army hijinks. Red-white-and-blue starbursts.

She said, "The war is coming."

"Yes. What do you think about that?"

"I see large events as opportunities. It may not be my best quality."

Parker smiled. "For instance?"

She sat down and crossed her legs. Her bobby sox clashed with her saddle shoes. It was a deliberate *Screw you.*

"The Depression, for instance. It got me out of Sioux Falls."

"What do you think of the eastern-front campaign?"

"I hate the Germans and feel ambivalent about the Russians, if that's what you're getting at."

Parker patted his pockets for cigarettes. The girl reached in her slacks and tossed him her pack. He took one and tossed the pack back.

They lit up. A two-second breather followed. Illegal fireworks went *whoosh.*

"You haven't asked me what I'm doing here."

"You were out clearing traffic jams. You were in the neighborhood, so you thought you'd drop in on a woman you've never met."

"Are you finished?"

"No. You called the Bureau first. You wanted to make sure that

Officer Lee Blanchard was asleep on Sergeant Dudley Smith's couch."

Parker gripped the chair and looked around for an ashtray. The girl stubbed out her cigarette and passed hers over. Their hands trembled and brushed.

"Are you finished?"

"No, but here's an alternate answer. It's Saturday night, and you thought I might be at loose ends."

"And why would I think that?"

"Because *you're* at loose ends? Because rumors run both ways? Because you read some sort of file on me and extrapolated?"

Fireworks streamed. Sunset Boulevard lit up. Couples jitterbugged on a flatbed truck.

They held a stare. The girl blinked first. She leaned in and plucked the ashtray off his lap.

He flinched. His glasses slid down his nose. The girl pointed to the window.

"What are they celebrating?"

"Opportunity."

"Yes. I'll buy that."

"Will you show me the house?"

She stood up and mock-curtsied. Parker followed her. Such affect—*look*.

Fifth Column art couched in sleekness. Cubism meets oppression. Astonishing—a *cop* lived here.

They walked upstairs. The landing featured deep red walls and floor-mounted lights. Pencil sketches were taped to the red. Breadlines, chain gangs, labor strikes and charging policemen.

She stepped into a room and flipped a wall switch. Light framed a cop still life.

An unmade bed. Discarded blues and desk debris. A .38 Special, handcuffs, spring-loaded sap. Framed wall clips from Big Lee's fight days.

She flipped off the switch. The room went dark. She stood on the too-bright landing and looked in at him. She *posed. He got it.*

She studied movie stars and random photos. She borrowed images to make herself cohere. She was brilliantly good at appearance. She was malleable without it.

The auburn hair, the dark red walls, the klieg lighting. She'll pivot now, that's for—

She pivoted. She walked to a doorway across the hall. He followed her.

The door was shut. A key lock was affixed to the knob. The anomaly stunned him.

He stood beside her. She pulled out a key and unlocked the door. It was her private bedroom. She fed him the cue and saved it for last.

Rose-colored walls, easeled drawing desk. An upright piano against one wall. Busts of Beethoven and Luther.

Pencil portraits arrayed on a shelf. That slick light heavyweight Bucky Bleichert.

Parker pointed over. “He’s applied to the Department.”

Kay Lake said, “I know.”

“Why him? You’ve got your own fighter.”

“You’re being disingenuous, Captain. If you tell me that shacking up is forbidden by Los Angeles Police Charter, I’ll explain it more provocatively.”

Parker walked out to the terrace. The Sunset Strip hopped. Drunken soldiers hobknobbed outside the Trocadero. They whooped and waved sparklers. Traffic was fucked-up from here to kingdom come.

He leaned on the rail. Kay Lake walked out and joined him. He felt light-headed.

She handed him a cigarette and lit it. She lit up herself.

“I stand out here in the rain sometimes. The colors change gloriously.”

Parker looked at her. He smelled sandalwood. She sprayed herself back in the bedroom. Affect, appearance—she caught her own sweat.

“What are your immediate plans, Miss Lake?”

“I’m going to enlist.”

“Which branch?”

“The one with the snazziest uniforms.”

Parker smiled. “You’re dead-set?”

She tossed her hair. “Unless you offer me something more enticing.”

He flicked his cigarette over the rail. It hit the hood of his prowl car and smoldered.

“There’s phone taps and listening posts all over City Hall. I need you to transcribe the wire recordings on the Detective Bureau taps. You’ll need to do it at the location.”

Kay Lake beamed. “*You’re being disingenuous, Captain*. I would say that there’s something on the recordings that you want me to hear, and that it pertains to the threat you’re holding back on.”

Parker flushed. “You can start Monday morning.”

She shook her head. “If you make sure Lee doesn’t see me, I’ll start tonight.”

Fireworks blew up twelve o’clock high. The Strip glowed white into pink.

“There’s a photograph of you. You were wearing a cloche hat, and I was wondering if it was red.”

Kay Lake walked into her bedroom and walked straight back out. She had the hat on.

She posed in the doorway. The hat was no-shit police navy blue.

8

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1941

Lee Blanchard snored. The lad was shacked up with a lovely lass. He perplexingly slept at City Hall.

Snores drilled Homicide. The squadroom was otherwise still. No Teletypes, no phone blare.

Two boys just rolled to the Congo. A Negro named Jefferson snuffed a Negro named Washington. A Negress named Lincoln precipitated the event. Dudley nixed the job. "Go, lads. The Dudster will be with you in the spirit of impartial justice."

Blanchard snored. Dudley had a small cubicle. The sound boomeranged. Jack Webb picked his snout and perched by the Teletype.

Dudley wrote Beth Short a letter. "Apply yourself more rigorously to your studies, my grand girl. Bring your blind chum Tommy Gilfoyle with you later this month. I will send you a second airplane ticket. I want to watch you describe a motion picture to him, that splendid trick of yours."

Benzedrine still fueled him. A Hop Sing boy guarded the quicklime spill and the bubbling rape-o. He sent the four rapees red roses. He included tender regards.

Blanchard snored. The lad was a constant cuckold. Rumors reverberated.

Dudley picked up *Screen World*. The pages were frayed. He'd read the Bette Davis piece a trillion times. The paper was shredded. Bette's face was ink-smeared.

Harry Cohn found Bette brittle. She refused to leave Warner's for Columbia. Harry said, "I can't understand it, Dud. She must be anti-Semitic." He said, "All good women are. But aren't *all* of you film moguls Yids?"

Harry roared. Harry was an honorary white man. He ran Columbia tightfisted. The studio scrape doc was a lez named Ruth Mildred Cressmeyer. Ruthie owned a dyke slave den with Deputy Dot

Rothstein. Ruthie botched a scrape on Bill McPherson's coon squeeze and lost her M.D.'s license. Ruthie's son Huey pulled heists and went to Bund meetings. Huey snitched for him. Huey sniffed glue. Huey was a grand psychopath.

His phone rang. The red button glowed—Lieutenant Thad Brown.

He caught it. "Yes, Thad?"

"I need a favor. It's menial, but you and Blanchard are the only warm bodies I've got."

"Of course."

"We've got a loud party squawk in Highland Park—2108 Avenue 45. The local desk's swamped, and Central's running light. Half the night watch is working that Army traffic grief."

Dudley jotted the address. Static cut Brown off. Sleeping Beauty stirred.

"Rise and shine, lad. There's a task at hand."

Blanchard rubbed his eyes. Dudley fed him coffee. Blanchard dog-yawned.

He slept in his suit coat. He needed a shave. He was a chronic malcontent. He pulled a daring heist in '39 and rescued a dubious maiden. He'd accomplished shit since then.

Dudley grabbed his holster. He steered Blanchard through the pen and watched him shake cobwebs. They elevatored down to the garage and shagged a K-car. They pulled out on Main, northbound.

The dashboard clock read 11:41. Blanchard *yaaaaaawned* and cracked his wind wing.

"Benny's getting out soon."

"Yes, lad. I know."

"He'll probably throw a party."

"He escaped the gas chamber. That's a feat to celebrate."

Blanchard lit a cigarette. "He escaped, thanks to us."

"Don't make me prompt you, lad. Complete the thought that you wish to express."

Blanchard shuddered. "I can still see his face. The canary, I mean. I get dreams sometimes."

Dudley rolled down his window. Cold air juked the Benzedrine.

"Be still, lad. You'd be better served taxing your conscience for those who deserve your regret."

Blanchard gulped and tossed his cigarette. Dudley took Broadway through Chinatown. They bypassed the parkway and caught Figueroa north. Memory Lane: Nightingale Junior High.

Spring '38. A sex fiend holds a girls' gym teacher hostage. The fiend makes her strip in the showers. He sneaks in and blows the fiend's brains out. He sends the hostage lady flowers every Christmas.

They moved through Mextown. Midnight revelers shot dice outside cantinas. They cut over to Avenue 45. The cholos vanished. The street was white and clean.

Wood-frame houses, parkway views, a stiffs' haven. That loud party—up on the right.

The house was bright. Music blared. Jarheads and Waves schmoozed on the porch. A petty officer ladled punch from a soup tureen. The Waves waved American flags on sticks.

Dudley parked. Blanchard got out and stretched. Somebody said, "Cops." Somebody killed the music.

Blanchard walked up to the porch. The revelry froze. Blanchard went *Sssssshhhhhhh*. Nervous laughs went around.

A jarhead said, "I saw you fight this shine down in T.J."

Blanchard bowed. A Wave fed him punch. Blanchard chugalugged it and went *Wooooo!* Church bells chimed midnight somewhere.

Dudley got out of the car. The bell echoes faded. He thought he heard something.

It was faint and high-pitched. It wasn't street noise back on Figueroa.

Blanchard charmed the yokels. The Wave refilled his cup. That shrill noise. Like overlapping violins.

Clock it—one house to the right. A wood-frame job. Tidy. Two floors, covered porch. He pulled out his flashlight and walked over. Shapes crossed the porch.

Coyotes. High-pitched beasts.

Blanchard weaved back toward the car. Dudley crossed the lawn and beamed his light on the porch. Coyotes lapped at the bottom door crack.

The light spooked them. They scattered. Their snouts were bright red.

He checked his watch. It was 12:02 a.m. Blanchard saw him and cut over. Dudley stepped onto the porch.

He flashed the door crack. Of course—blood.

Leaking out the door crack. Stiffening *blood*.

Blanchard jumped on the porch. He wafted cheap rum. Dudley went *Sssshhh*. Blanchard tracked the flashlight beam and went queasy.

Dudley pulled his piece. "Shoulder the door. Watch where you place your feet."

Blanchard aimed at a slack point midway up the jamb. One bump snapped the lock. The door swung in. A stench blew out.

Blood and flesh gout.

"Go inside, lad. Hug the wall and find a switch. Use your handkerchief. Watch your feet, and don't touch anything."

Blanchard covered his nose and went in. Deft boy—he flattened himself to the wall and inched sideways. The front room was midnight dark. Blanchard's feet scraped hardwood.

Light.

A ceiling fixture, bright bulbs, white light on this:

A living room. A wall-to-wall Persian rug. Blood-soaked, blood-*immersed.* Blood from four dead heathens. A yellow brood—papa, mama, daughter, son.

Blanchard said, "Japs."

They were supine. They were eviscerated. They were fully disemboweled. Their entrails flared on the floor. They laid four across. They seemed to be *positioned.* Four blood-caked swords lay beside them.

Long, hooked blades. Thick leather grips. Swords from Jap lore.

Blanchard teetered outside. Dudley heard him puke. He hugged the wall and circled the room. He studied the Japs.

Papa was fifty and trim. Sun-bronzed, rough hands—Jap farmer stock. Mama was plump and papa's age. The boy was twenty-two or -three. He was muscular. He had an insolent spic haircut. The girl was svelte and about sixteen.

Jap lore. Seppuku, hara-kiri, ritual suicide. Dishonor mandates self-annihilation.

Blanchard hovered in the doorway. His knees trembled. A jump tune kicked on next door.

Dudley said, "Call the Bureau and the lab. Tell Lieutenant Brown what we have, and leave a call to Chief Horrall to his discretion. Get Ray Pinker over here, and tell him to bring that bright young Dr. Ashida."

Blanchard talked through his handkerchief. "What about a canvass? You know, door-to-door on the neighbors?"

"Irrelevant, lad. I would say we have suicide. Have Pinker call Nort Layman at the morgue. He's a crackerjack cause-of-death man."

"What about ID's? Do you make them?"

Dudley squatted on the floor strip. "They're not criminals in the classic sense. You don't 'make' insane heathens who outwardly adhere to the white man's law. Brace the owner of the house next door. Determine what he knows. Call the night clerk at the Hall of Records. Inquire about the ownership of this house and find out how long the Japs have rented or owned it."

Blanchard took off. Dudley got out his notebook and pen.

He drew the living room. He eyeball-measured the floor strips and rug. He drew a sofa and two chairs. Blood halfway covered the legs. He called it two inches deep.

Wall décor:

Sepia photos of long-dead Japs and a framed map of Japan. The semblance of a sane family life.

A dining room adjoined the living room. Dudley drew the table, windows and chairs. The blood pools stopped short of the dining room. The living room rug had absorbed all the blood.

Their mouths were locked open. They died gasping for breath. They positioned themselves side by side.

He reached over and poked papa's arm. It stayed rigid. Rigor mortis had settled in.

He walked into the kitchen. It was all white-tiled.

Dishes stacked on a drain board. Jap fare in the icebox. Vegetables, rice, eel and squid.

Dudley drew the kitchen and laundry room. Linoleum floor, washing machine, indoor clothesline. Damp clothes pinned to the line. *Why wash clothes on your suicide day?*

He walked upstairs and stood on the landing. Two bedrooms, left. One bedroom, right. Wall pix of long-dead Japs.

He entered the near left-side bedroom. It was the girl's. It was pure female *Jap*.

The girl slept on a bamboo floor mat. The girl had a potted bonsai tree on her desk. She had slant-eyed stuffed animals. Her closets featured kimonos and normal school attire.

The connecting doorway was padlocked. He prickled at that. He cut around to the bedroom adjacent. It was pure male *Jap*.

The dead boy looked unruly. He sported that spic haircut. Call it—the girl locked the connecting door to keep him *out*.

The hallway doors had key locks. Two locks meant she could lock herself *in*.

The boy's room—unruly and then some.

Two golf clubs propped in a corner. A Franklin High pennant above the bed. Scattered comic books. Note the Nazi-spy covers.

A pitcher by the bed. A piss stink wafting up.

No loos in missy's room and junior's room. No cohabitator's privacy ensured.

Dudley went through the closet and dresser. This was revealed:

Innocuous male clothing. A Franklin letter sweater. Four zoot suits. More comic books. Two switchblade knives. Cheesecake mags and padded jockstraps.

He examined the jockstraps. They were padded with small Jap flags and female underwear. It matched little sister's underwear.

One bedroom left—mom and pop's kip.

He walked in. He checked the bathroom. He saw four toothbrushes in one holder. He saw pachuco hair oil on a sink ledge.

He checked the bedroom. He saw a sheet of paper taped to the wall.

Two lines. Japanese characters. The obvious suicide note.

The closet was packed tight. Mama wore kimonos. Papa favored dungarees and Jap warlord garb. A dresser was jammed into the closet. Dudley opened the top drawer.

Note: stacks of Jap yen and Kraut reichsmarks. Note: a pocket tract titled *The L. A. Oppressor*.

Dudley skimmed all eight pages. It was a goofball polemic. “Mr. Anonymous” assailed anti-Jap rage. He blamed “KKKorrupt fa*KKK*tions within the L.A. political machine.” Their minions: “KKKorrupt KKKops within the Police Department and Sheriff’s Office.” Mayor Fletch Bowron was pummeled. Sheriff Gene Biscailuz took some shots. Ex-Chief Jim Davis and Chief C. B. “Jack” Horrall got drubbed. The author lashed out at the Jews, the Brits and the Chinks.

Blanchard walked in. He held his pocket notebook and a Lucky Lager. He fucked up downstairs. His shoes were blood-smeared.

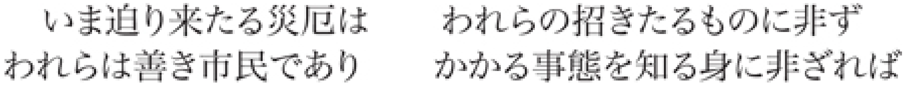
“The family’s name is Watanabe. Daddy-o’s name is Ryoshi. Mom’s name is Aya, and the kids are named Nancy and Johnny. The house is in daddy’s name. He owns a produce farm out in the Valley, just like every other Jap who don’t peddle trinkets or run a fishing boat out of Pedro. The guy next door says they’re decent Japs who steer clear of white folks and keep to themselves, and they’re supposedly the only Japs in Highland Park.”

Doors slammed outside. Dudley walked to Johnny’s room and looked down. Two-car pile-out: Ray Pinker, Nort Layman. The Ashida kid and Lieutenant Thad Brown.

They ran up to the house. A big *Oh Shit* boomed. The suave Blanchard walked in. He pawed Johnny’s comic books. He belched Lucky Lager.

Dudley snatched his bottle. “Go downstairs and send the Jap up. Chop, chop, Leland.”

Blanchard scrammed. Dudley walked into mom and pop’s room. Dudley studied the note.



いま迫り来たる災厄は　　われらの招きたるものに非ず
われらは善き市民であり　　かかる事態を知る身に非ざれば

The Jap walked in. It was 1:30 a.m. He was groomed and bright-eyed.

“Do you read Japanese, Dr. Ashida?”

“Yes, Sergeant. I do.”

Dudley pointed to the note. Ashida studied it.

“ ‘The looming apocalypse is not of our doing. We have been good citizens and did not know that it was coming.’ ”

December 7, 1941

9

LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1941

Dudley Smith said, “Surely a suicide note.”

Ashida said, “Yes, most likely.”

“Are you Nisei, Dr. Ashida?”

“Yes, Sergeant.”

“Have you insights born of your cultural background that might serve to enlighten me thus far?”

The body placement felt wrong. The house was too tidy. Domestic chaos often precipitated seppuku. There should be more disarray.

Ashida said, “The note justified rather than acknowledged dishonor or shame. ‘Looming apocalypse’ is ambiguous. Most Japanese mass-suicide notes are somewhat more specific and stress the concept of honor regained.”

Dudley Smith smiled. He was tall and fit. He had small brown eyes. His soft brogue seduced suspects. The gas chamber ensued.

“I appreciate your comments. I intend to remain in this room and ponder them while you assist downstairs.”

Ashida bowed and walked to the stairs. He made the stench: visceral fluids mixed with stale air. He walked down to the living room. Blanchard and Brown stood away from the carpet. They went *P-U* and lit cigarettes.

Ray Pinker snapped body pix. Nort Layman studied the bodies. He wore knee-high waders. He came prepared for liquid rot.

Blanchard said, “I like the girl. If she was alive and kicking, I’d give her a poke.”

Brown said, “This could go long. You think Ace Kwan would send up some chow?”

Blanchard said, “Hop Sing and Four Families are back in the shit. Ace has his hands full.”

Brown said, “Dudley has truck with Ace. He’ll get us some grub.”

Blanchard said, “Don’t tell Ace we got dead Japs here. The Japs and Chinks got some historical beef.”

Two morgue men lugged in blood cans. Layman wrote the time and date on adhesive labels. The morgue men wore rubber gloves and packed metal scoops. Layman pointed to the stiffs.

"Clear a path all around. Seal the cans with tape. Refrigerate the blood, so I can get a peek at the cells."

The morgue men went to it. They scooped blood chunks and canned them piecemeal. Layman tossed them four more cans. The blood was full-caked now. It came loose half-dried.

One man dug a path to Ryoshi Watanabe. One man dug a path to Johnny. They filled six blood cans. They threaded their arms through the handles and hauled them back off the rug.

Blanchard said, "Holy shit."

Layman walked over to the bodies. He picked up the swords. He placed them on the rug. He turned the bodies prone and pulled down trousers, skirts and underwear. Pinker tossed him four thermometers cinched by a rubber band. He inserted them into their rectums and counted seconds on his wristwatch.

Ashida counted off his watch. Layman removed the thermometers and checked the bars. He signaled the morgue men: *Go now*. They peeled off to their hearse.

Layman coughed. "I'd say they've been dead for ten hours. They were disemboweled, so the food in their intestines might have partially dispersed through their blood, onto the rug. If I can get a handle on their digestion, I might be able to pinpoint the time of their death more precisely."

The morgue men wheeled in four metal gurneys. The borders were blood-guttered. Pinker stood over the bodies and snapped posterior shots.

Brown said, "It's suicide. I talked to the Chief. He said to wrap it up and shitcan it."

Dudley Smith walked in. "I lean toward suicide, but we'll make that determination in good time."

The morgue men leaned on their gurneys. Layman signaled *Resume*. They formed a stiff line. The inside man hoisted the stiffs. The outside man grabbed the stiffs and swung them. Layman stretched them out on the gurneys, face-up.

Ashida observed. Ashida gulped and spoke.

"The practice of seppuku entails a ritual meal shortly before the disembowelings. Dr. Layman should be able to determine the amount of food in their digestive tracts."

Layman laughed. "I like this kid. He could call me 'Nort,' but he calls me 'Dr.' "

Pinker laughed. "He's a doctor himself. He's a goddamn Stanford Ph.D."

Blanchard made the jack-off sign. Dudley Smith winked at Ashida.

He fluttered. His legs dipped. Eight white men looked at him.

He walked to the gurneys. He slipped on rubber gloves. The morgue men gave him *Who's this punk?* looks.

Ashida turned Ryoshi over. Yes—instinct confirmed. Ashida turned Johnny over. Yes—there again. Ashida turned Aya and Nancy over. Yes—again, again.

He had the floor. Eight white men stared at him.

"We've got hesitation marks directly below the entrance punctures. It's not surprising, given the enormity of the deed. What's anomalous is the similarity of the marks, given that the four people allegedly eviscerated themselves. In seppuku cases, the hesitation marks are usually straight downward punctures. In all four cases here, the tears go side to side, as if the people were thrashing or resisting the urge to kill themselves, in some way that has never been evidentially recorded in any criminological journal."

Pinker and Layman crowded up. Ashida pointed to the marks on Nancy and Johnny. Layman brushed off blood flakes. Pinker whistled. Layman said, "The kid's right."

Ashida said, "The positioning of the bodies seems wrong to me. I've seen mass seppuku photos in Japanese textbooks. Invariably, family members grasp for one another as they die, even though their original intent was to pose side by side. The bodies are always found in a heap."

Dudley Smith lit a cigarette. "Let's say that we attribute the hesitation marks to papa. He was afraid that his wife, son and daughter would falter at the last moment and be unable to wield the blade. He guided their hands, killed them, arranged their bodies, and then killed himself. He hesitated on himself because the act of killing his family had unnerved him."

Ashida said, "Yes, it's plausible."

Brown shrugged. "We're getting too far afield. It's a goddam suicide."

Blanchard haw-hawed. "It's a back column in the *Mirror*. 'Dead Japs in Highland Park. Emperor Weeps.' "

Dudley Smith said, "Apologize to Dr. Ashida, Leland. 'I'm sorry, sir' will suffice."

Blanchard stared at his shoes. Blanchard said, "I'm sorry, sir."

Ashida stared at his shoes. Layman produced a flask. Pinker grabbed it, took a pull and passed it around. Ashida caught the dregs.

A morgue man laughed. Brown laughed. Ashida laughed. Dudley pointed to the swords and the stiffs.

"We'll print them and run comparisons. We need to determine whose hand touched which weapon."

Pinker shook his head. “The handles are pebbled leather. They won’t sustain prints.”

Layman said, “Dust the blades. We might get something.”

Ashida opened his evidence kit. On top: print powder, print ink, print brush, print cards.

He balanced the kit on Ryoshi’s gurney. He examined the four sets of hands. Rigor mortis had set. Their fingers were curled inward. It made the potential print rolls difficult.

Pinker opened his kit. Layman picked up the swords. Dudley walked over and stood by Ashida. They shared a look. It felt telepathic.

Ashida grabbed Ryoshi’s left wrist. Dudley bent the fingers and broke them. Bones snapped audibly. Ashida got a stable print surface.

Blanchard said, “Fuck.”

Brown said, “Don’t go squeamish, son.”

Ashida inked the fingers and thumb. Ashida rolled the tips onto a print card and got perfect spreads.

Blanchard said, “Mother dog.”

Pinker and Layman worked on the swords. Dudley broke Ryoshi’s right-hand fingers. Ashida inked them, rolled them and got perfect spreads.

The room temperature climbed. Ashida started sweating. Dudley broke Aya’s fingers. Dudley broke Johnny’s and Nancy’s fingers. Bones snapped. Slivers pierced skin.

Ashida inked the fingers. Ashida rolled the fingers. Ashida got perfect spreads. Dudley winked at him. Ashida felt himself blush.

Pinker and Layman held up the swords. They were dusted, hilt to tip. Pinker said, “No latents. Just smudges and smooth-leather glove prints.”

Blanchard whistled. “Shit, it’s homicide.”

Brown said, “Not necessarily.”

Pinker said, “Someone could have touched the blades with gloves on.”

Dudley said, “Toss the premises, Leland. We’re looking for smooth-leather gloves. No rough-leather work gloves or ladies’ gloves. We’re working on suppositions now.”

Blanchard scrammed. Brown produced a flask. Layman grabbed it, took a pull and passed it around. Dudley passed it to Ashida. He took a pull. The booze sparked a brainstorm.

“There’s a samurai tradition called ‘accomplice suicide.’ Dishonored patriarchs would bring in close friends or Shinto priests to help them kill themselves and their families. They were the ones who would actually wield the blade.”

Brown said, “You’re thinking that would account for the hesitation marks and positioning of the bodies.”

"Yes, but there's one detail off. The accomplice always leaves family pictures beside the bodies."

Brown shook his head. "Why did I roll out on this one? I'm a ranking police officer."

Layman shook his head. "We don't need Jap homicides with the world in the straits that it's in."

Dudley smiled at Ashida. "As a confirmed isolationist, I would have to agree."

Thumps echoed upstairs. Scrape sounds followed. Blanchard yelled, "No leather gloves! We got cloth gloves, and that's it!"

Ashida felt the liquor. The room was packed. White men with booze breath. Cigarette smoke. Four dead Japanese.

"There's one more thing. The whole family was attired in smooth woolens, from the waist up. If Mr. Watanabe assisted in the suicides of the other three, he would have stood behind them to hold the swords, so he might have left foreign fabrics on their posteriors. A *fifth* person —a suicide accomplice or killer—might have left foreign fabrics on all *four* people, Mr. Watanabe included."

Nods circulated. Yeah, we get it—*but*.

Pinker tossed Ashida a flashlight. He pushed the gurneys up flush and rolled the stiffs on their sides. The morgue men stepped back. Ashida went in two-handed—flashlight and magnifying glass.

He started with Nancy. She wore a thin wool blouse with embroidered snowflakes. In close now. Yes, there—light-colored foreign fibers. They were coarse and brightly dyed. Yes—mauve Shetland wool.

He went at Aya next. Her blouse was a wool-cotton blend. In close now. Yes—identical fibers, on her upper back.

Ashida oozed sweat. He wiped his hands on his suit coat and regripped his implements. Johnny wore a flannel shirt. In close now. Yes—mauve Shetland wool fibers, curlicued.

Ryoshi wore a fine-gauge cardigan. In close now—confirm or refute the thesis—

Yes. Mauve-colored Shetland wool fibers, along his entire back.

Ashida wiped his face. "There are identical fibers on all four of them. It's a common sweater fiber, so it was an easy make. It's mauve-dyed Shetland wool."

Blanchard walked in. He looked slaphappy. He'd stuffed his pockets with comic books.

Dudley collared him. "Toss the place again, lad. Look for mauve-colored Shetland wool garments. Mauve is a light purple shade, in case you were wondering."

Blanchard about-faced. Dudley said, "I want photographs. Create a perspective of the whole house. Let's see if we've missed anything."

Pinker dug in his kit. He grabbed flashbulbs and film. Ashida dug in his kit. He grabbed tweezers and an envelope. He wrote "Watanabe/Avenue 45, 2:17 a.m., 12/7/41" on the flap.

Pinker snapped posterior pix. He got close-ups of the fibers, four bodies across. Brown and Layman walked out to the porch and lit cigarettes.

Ashida tweezed fibers and sealed them. Blanchard thumped around upstairs. He yelled, "I tossed all the dressers and closets! There's nothing like that!"

Dudley watched Ashida work. Ashida tweezed fibers. He filled four envelopes. Pinker waved his camera. It meant *Chop, chop*. Ashida grabbed his evidence kit.

Photo sweep.

Pinker snapped the shots. Ashida carried the film and the flashbulbs.

They moved fast. Dudley followed them. They shot, reloaded, shot. The dead bulbs burned Ashida's hands. He tossed them in his kit.

Photo sweep.

Living room, dining room, kitchen. A service porch and damp clothes on a line.

The detail tweaked Ashida. *Why wash clothes on this day? Does this detail logically rule out seppuku?*

Photo sweep.

They moved to the hallway. Floor pix, wall pix, ceiling pix—

Ashida looked down. Pinker looked up. They caught metal shards on the floor. They caught a small hole, directly above them.

Ashida said, "*The floor.*"

Pinker said, "*The ceiling.*"

Dudley *saw* it. He looked up and down. He said, "I find this compelling."

Ashida squatted by the shards. They had to be silencer threads. They resembled the shards from the pharmacy heist.

"Did you read my report on the drugstore 211, Sergeant?"

"I did, Doctor. It was brilliantly etched and hypothetically rich. You said the bandit who brushed the book rack might not be the rape-o MP."

Ashida nodded. He scooped the shards into an envelope. He wrote "Watanabe/Avenue 45, 2:42 a.m., 12/7/41" on the flap. Pinker pointed to the ceiling. The hole was *bullet* size.

Dudley went *After you*. They quick-walked upstairs. A long carpet strip covered the landing. Dudley grabbed the near corner and pulled. The carpet flew off the floor.

Dudley yanked it to one side. There, on a floorboard—two bullet chunks.

Ashida got to them first. He knelt close. He put his magnifying glass in tight.

The chunks matched the drugstore chunks. It was a sure match or near match. It wasn't a coincidence.

Pinker knelt close. "It's a Luger with a shell catcher. I read your final report, Hideo. I know you did a recheck at the lab. There's just one discrepancy. This bullet had to come from a different ammo batch. I could crush these chunks with my bare hand."

Dudley knelt close. He picked up the chunks and crushed them. Powdered metal sifted off his hands.

He walked downstairs. Pinker went slack-jawed. Ashida *thought* he got it. It brought back his talk with Buzz Meeks. It brought back the green light on the Army rape-o.

Pinker stayed slack-jawed. Ashida walked downstairs. He heard voices in the kitchen. He hugged the hallway wall.

Brown said, "Maybe it's our killer, maybe it's not. All we *probably* have is the same man with a *probable* same firearm at two locations on the same day. Maybe he's a rape-o, maybe he isn't. We don't know for sure that he left those fibers at the drugstore. Yeah, they were an MP's armband fibers, but so what? If you're thinking we've got a rape/robbery/homicide parlay, you might very well be right—but you sure as shit might be wrong."

Dudley said, "It can't be a full parlay. Nort Layman never fucks up his approximate time of death."

Brown said, "Give me a road map, Dud."

Dudley said, "I identified the rape-o off a mug-shot run. Jack Horrall gave me the green light. My boys and I killed the man at 3:30 p.m. yesterday. He couldn't have killed the Japs."

Ashida tingled with it. Another brainstorm sparked. Introductory Forensics: "Instincts *will* cohere."

Deutsches Haus, West 15th Street. That Subversive Squad report. It's a meeting place for pro-Nazis. They allegedly traffic in Lugers and silencers.

10

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1941

"… and Call-Me-Jack has a standing order in with Brenda. The PD has this private room over at Mike Lyman's Grill, where the ranking guys all hide out from their wives and entertain gash. Brenda sends a girl over, once a week. She blows Jack while he's on the phone with Gene Biscailuz. They discuss jail transfers, who's got the motorcade detail when Roosevelt blows through town, all that horseshit. Get this: The Sheriff's getting blown by one of Brenda's girls, simultaneously. There's a message in all of this, but I'm not sure I want to know what it is."

I held down the lever and squelched the rest of the chat. The device is quite the thing. A thin wire passes through two spools on a machine about the size of a small phonograph. Levers inch the wire back and forth; I wear earmuffs to contain the sound. The preceding conversation typifies the ones I've been hearing since 1:00 a.m. I'm alone in a mop closet, in a blocked-off and empty hallway two floors above the Detective Bureau. It's a cramped space, about eight by eight. I have a desk, a chair, an ashtray, a pack of cigarettes and a thermos of coffee that Captain William H. Parker has supplied. I have only the vaguest of ideas as to why I'm here.

I'm stationed within an "open secret." There are purportedly dozens of these "listening posts" dotted throughout the closed-off and seldom-used hallways here at City Hall. The practice of phone-tapping began under the reign of Jim Davis. Policemen tap phones to learn what other policemen are thinking and plotting. The taps record internal phone calls here at City Hall, and calls to the DA's Office at the Hall of Justice, three blocks away. Policemen monitor the calls on a weekly basis and keep coded logs of the calls that go in and out. There's a stack of these logs on the floor by my desk; shelves hold boxes of wire recordings that match the code numbers for the calls. It is an astonishingly arrogant and heedless practice, perpetrated by astonishingly arrogant and heedless men. How did Captain William H. Parker know that I'd be perfectly at home here?

The preceding conversation is labeled "HD116 to BS014," 6/12/39. I'm sure that it means "Homicide Division to Bunco Squad." Captain Parker has instructed me to identify incriminating conversations, record the code numbers and dates, and outline the gist of what was said. He flushed when I asked him why he chose *this* listening post. He said that he chose it because the logs denoted calls from the Robbery and Homicide squads, along with Central Vice. I found the explanation disingenuous. Captain Parker is entrapping me. He wants me to do something that will further his pious notions of justice and advance his career. He believes that I will hear something that will put me in his power. Until that moment, he knows that I will be entertained.

So, I'm wide-awake at 3:32 a.m. Captain Parker snuck me up in a freight elevator, to make sure that Lee and any Bureau men I might know didn't see me. Lee is most likely asleep on Dudley Smith's couch. I'm here, eavesdropping on covert chitchat from 1939.

I rewound the spool, placed it back in its box and picked up a new spool. It's labeled "BD 214 to DBML 442," 10/6/39. It's an easily ID'd call: Burglary Division to the Detective Bureau's main line.

The caller engaged the callee. It's Bob Denholm at Burglary. He's calling Jim Yardis on the Pawnshop Detail. "Jim, I've got a trace on that old Jew lady's fur coats."

"This coon" escaped from Chino and shagged a car in San Berdoo. He headed to L.A. and 459'd a house in South Gate. He left a fat set of prints, so we made him. We put the car on the hot sheet. The coon hit a house off the Miracle Mile. He got the Jew lady's fur coats and jerked off on her nighties. He pawned the coats downtown and started boozing at a he-she bar on South Main. He was on the wire for auto theft, escape and 459 with perversion. The parlay mandated a "coon hunt." Two bluesuits on a tavern check made him. The coon bolted. The bluesuits slayed his "coon ass."

The conversation continued; I timed it at seventeen minutes and forty-two seconds. Police gossip reigned. I learned which cops were fucking which cops' wives and heard speculation on the quality of the fucking. Call-Me-Jack Horrall would step in the shit sooner or later; Lieutenant Thad Brown or Captain Bill Parker would then ascend to Chief. Officer Larry "the Lizard" Linscott possessed a two-foot penis. DA Bill McPherson fell asleep in City Council meetings and enjoyed Negro prostitutes.

I rewound the wire, replaced it and grabbed another one. I didn't recognize the code letters; the recording was dated 4/9/41. I put the wire on the spool and tapped the lever. I recognized the voices immediately: Call-Me-Jack Horrall and Mayor Fletch Bowron.

They discussed Japanese aggression in the Philippines. Bowron said, “We’re going to war, Jack.” Horrall said, “Mr. Mayor, you’re right as rain. I’m against intervention, but you’re sure as shit correct.”

Bowron said, “It’s this whole Jap angle that troubles me. The Feds have got a detention list a mile long. A colonel in the Fourth Interceptor Command told me the Army’s cooking up plans for the long-term imprisonment of all the sketchy Japs they can lay their hands on.” Horrall said, “A Jap’s a Jap, as far as I’m concerned. They’re clannish, and you never know what they’re thinking. What’s that goddamn word?”

Bowron said, “Inscrutable?” Horrall said, “Yeah, that’s it. You want my opinion? They’re all Fifth Column. They all breathe, drink and eat Fifth Column, when they’re not eating broiled eel.” Bowron laughed and said, “Look at it this way. We’re going to have a lot of government-confiscated property on our hands, and that means rental revenues if the Japs stay in stir until Armistice Day. L.A.’s a tourist mecca, we’ll have lots of servicemen passing through, and they’ll need lodging while they’re here.”

Horrall made cash-register sounds. Bowron said, “That’s what I’m thinking. And don’t call me a war profiteer, because we can kick back something like 10% to the Japs while they’re cooling their heels. I’ll keep them in cigarettes and candy bars.”

Horrall chuckled and said, “Or broiled eel.” Bowron laughed and went into a coughing spell. Horrall said, “Dudley Smith would be a good man to implement a deal like that. He’s the smartest man in the Department.” Bowron said, “I give the edge to Bill Parker. He’s even smarter, and he’d be savvy enough to see something like that as a stepping-stone to Chief.”

Static hit the wire. I heard snippets: “Who’s got the slush fund?” “Who gets the gash?” “Who’ll enlist if we fight this Jew-engineered war?” “Will the PD face a manpower shortage?” “Will FDR sign a wartime draft bill?”

The wire ran out; I rewound it and replaced it. There was one box left. It was marked “3,” for three extensions. It noted the Bureau clerical pool, Headquarters Vice, and the Pickpocket Detail. The date: 8/14/39.

I slipped the new wire onto the spool and pushed the lever. The entry talk was garbled; southern drawls eked through. I sensed the voices before I actually heard them. I sensed William H. Parker’s intent, as well.

Brenda Allen and Elmer Jackson hailed from Mississippi. Call-Me-Jack let Brenda use the clerical-pool phones. Lee played cards with a

Pickpocket Detail lieutenant.

I made the assumption instantaneously; it played out as true. *It was thrilling*. Captain William H. Parker knew it would be.

It was August of ’39. The Boulevard-Citizens trial concluded in June. I heard static and *heist* and *trial* a good dozen times. Full voices hit the wire then.

Elmer said, “I know you bought that house for Kay.”

Brenda said, “You must have money left over, sugar. You could invest in our service.”

Lee said, “I’m not running whores.”

Elmer said, “Be smart, hoss. You still owe Ben Siegel. You could cut him in on your part.”

Brenda said, “Benny don’t play with a full deck, Citizen. That bank was his good-luck charm. You were a damn fool to clout it.”

Lee said, “I’m a fool. I’ll concede that. And you’re right—I still owe Benny favors. But I’m not running whores.”

The wire slid off the spool. I started to rethread it; my hands shook and knocked the thermos to the floor. Coffee spilled over the wire. I dried it on my skirt, placed it back on the spool and pressed the lever. Squelch distorted a long interchange. Brenda’s voice rose out of it.

She said, “Ben will always be asking you for favors.”

Elmer said, “If you owe Ben, he makes you kill somebody for him. Son, you’ll get that call sooner or later.”

I turned off the machine. Tears rolled down my face and dashed the tabletop.

Lee and I had a routine. We’d devise mock newspaper headlines and pop them at each other to make our points. Parker trusted me to connect the dots on that recording. Now I knew why Lee went to New York. It was on the radio and in the papers. *Here* were some headlines to pop:

SIEGEL TRIAL WITNESS GOES OUT WINDOW! THE CANARY CAN SING, BUT HE CAN’T FLY!

11

LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1941

Snafu:

Wilshire and Barrington. Three-car pileup. Winches, tow trucks, traffic detoured.

A jeep plowed a road-hog Caddy. A ’38 DeSoto sheared off the Caddy’s rear end. Skid marks, broken glass, street flares. Six injured parties hauled to Saint John’s.

They were *all* drunk. The soldier was blitzed off booze from Dave’s Blue Room. The squares were still blotto from the Trojan-Bruin game. The soldier had hound blood. He shared ambulance space with a built blonde. She slipped him her phone number.

Parker stood in the intersection. Winches pried the vehicles loose. Tow drivers cinched chains and rolled the cars off.

Poof!—you’re alone. *Poof!*—it’s your own world at 3:40 a.m.

He doused the flares. He kicked glass down a storm drain. A Plymouth idled by. A redhead had the wheel. She was a Joan-from-Northwestern manqué.

He left Miss Lake at 1:00. She’d probably heard by now. She’d grasp the implied threat, for sure.

Carl Hull clued him in to the specific listening post. Carl had heard a ’39 recording. Miss Lake’s chums tattled. They jawed with her shitheel lover. Carl called the conversation a “significant wedge.”

Cars skirted broken glass and whizzed by him. He sat on the Wilshire curb and lit a cigarette.

He prayed off an urge to drink. He was too charged to sleep. He could brood on his back porch and hit early Mass. Dudley Smith would be there. The Archbishop would suggest coffee and cake.

Parker shut his eyes. A car door slammed. A man coughed and spritzed tobacco juice—he knew that sound.

He opened his eyes. Jim Davis walked up. His coat flapped wide. The hump still wore two big revolvers.

“Don’t tell me. You were listening to police-band calls, and you figured I'd be here."

Davis leaned on a light pole. "Got me a swell radio. The insomniac's best friend, as I'm sure you know."

Parker tossed his cigarette. "Insomniacs tend to find each other. The world narrows down at this time of night."

"Yeah. And the world narrowed down when you worked for me. I had a smart lawyer-cop as my adjutant when I pulled my most heinous stunts."

Parker stood up. Davis crowded in. He threw his gut out and walked two-guns-first.

"What's your net worth, Jim? The Mexican Staties were paying you a dollar a wetback to run their trucks through L.A. You let the Dudster sell dope to the coloreds, and it all had to add up."

Davis stepped back. "It's immaterial, son. We're set to fight this war for the Jew bankers, and I got me two big howitzers at my aircraft plant."

Parker laughed. "Maybe it won't come to that."

Davis spritzed juice. "The old Gypsy lady who reads my tea leaves says it sure as shit will."

Parker shook his head. "It's hard to dislike you, Jim. It shouldn't be, but it is."

Davis popped in a fresh plug. He came out of bumfuck Texas. He was a 1916 doughboy. He was Chinese-fluent. He mediated the last Hop Sing tong truce. He ran the Klan out of L.A. and welcomed the Silver Shirts.

"You were always looking over me, son. I'd have pulled a good many more heinous stunts if you hadn't been. I'll be there to tell the world that when they swear you in as Chief."

Parker drove home. The house was dead still. Helen was sleeping. Three hours to 8:00 a.m. Mass.

He poured a triple bourbon and walked out to the back porch. It overlooked the Silver Lake Reservoir. House lights bordered the water. There's twelve lights, predawn.

He sipped bourbon. Please, God—just one.

He thought about Miss Lake. He thought about Joan from Northwestern. He saw her in jodhpurs and boots once. She shot skeet off Lake Michigan.

Parker turned on the radio. The newscasts were shrill. He tuned in the police band. He caught a tavern stickup. He knew the detectives at the scene.

Police work—a closed circle. We all kneel at the same pew.

An ADW in Compton. A fleeing burglar in Watts. Spectators outside a house in Highland Park. Probable suicide. Sergeant D. L. Smith and Officer L. C. Blanchard at location.

Parker sipped bourbon. Closed circle—the Dudster, Miss Lake's shack job. Two-Gun Jim Davis at loose ends.

The bourbon felt wrong. The standard burn came on lukewarm. A Sheriff's call hit the air.

4600 Valley Boulevard. That county stretch upside Lincoln Heights. Hit-and-run, four down, no suspect-vehicle make. First broadcast: 5:47 a.m.

Parker dumped his glass. Roll on it. You won't drink if you go.

He took his civilian car. The location: a curb stretch off a warehouse block. Big industrial hangars and nothing else.

Crash ropes. Three Sheriff's cars, one meat wagon, four crushed bicycles. Deputies grilling three bruised-up boys. An older man on a stretcher. An ambulance crew standing by.

Parker stopped behind the ropes. His headlights framed the collision point. The wreckage spelled out the incident.

Four bikes. They proceed single file. The older man takes the boys on a predawn jaunt. One adult-size bike at the rear. It's the most damaged. The three bikes in front are *crushed*. They are not rear-impact *smashed*.

No skid marks on the pavement. Pull-away tread smears. The boys were grazed more than hit. Their bikes showed left-to-right denting. The car grazed them on the left and sped away.

The curb was half dirt, half paving. The right-hand tires might have left marks. Plaster molds might reveal the make and model. The bikes were adorned with pennants for the Santa Monica Cycleers.

Parker got out and stood by the ropes. The boys were high school age. Their jabbers overlapped. They left SaMo High at 4:15. Jim Larkin was their leader. He was English. He was some kind of spy in the Great War. They were riding out to Lake Arrowhead. They sure hoped Mr. Larkin was okay.

Larkin's legs were crushed. Larkin's collarbone was sheared. Larkin trembled from shock.

A deputy signaled the ambulance men. They picked up the stretcher and moved. An object fell from Larkin's pocket. The men tucked the stretcher in the ambulance and pulled out.

The ambulance hauled, Code 3. The boys waved good-bye. One boy started crying. Parker prayed the Rosary.

Dawn came up. Parker walked to the ropes and grabbed that object.

It was a pearl-inlaid gun grip. Red stones offset a swastika. The grip was Luger-shaped.

Parker tossed it and drove back home. His errand succeeded. He worked off The Thirst.

He still tasted the bourbon. A stale burn had him parched. He raided the icebox and guzzled orange juice. He vowed to pray for Jim Larkin.

The bedroom door was open. He heard Helen snore. The telephone rang. He walked into the living room and caught it three rings in.

"Yes?"

Miss Lake said, "The threat wasn't necessary. I'll take whatever you have for me."

12

LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1941

Lee Blanchard said, "The natives are restless."

Nort Layman said, "Do you blame them? Your neighbors are up and at 'em one day, going out under sheets the next."

Thad Brown said, "The sheet blew off of Nancy. They got a goddamn good look."

Blanchard said, "She was a dish."

Ray Pinker said, "Yeah, if you like raw fish."

The porch was packed: Blanchard, Brown, Layman, Pinker, Ashida.

Dudley watched bluesuits hold off the crowd. Gawkers filled the street. They eyeball-drilled the house and kicked up a fit.

The stiffs went out at sunup. Early birds caught the show. The hara-kiri rumor ran full speed now. He heard *JAPS* six thousand times. He watched Ashida take it stoically.

The gawkers gawked and jabbered. Men held their kids aloft. The house was rope-cordoned. Eight blues held the line taut. Jejune Jack Webb was out among the natives. He lugged a radio contraption and did interviews.

Some Japs killed themselves. Who gives a shit? No tickee, no washee. Where's Charlie Chan and Mr. Moto? It's Sunday morning—this sure beats church.

The house reeked of fried rice. Ace Kwan sent breakfast up. Dudley barely touched it. He flew on yesterday's Benzedrine.

The job was meddlesome. Jerome Joseph Pavlik could not have snuffed the Japs. He was down in a lime spill at the time of death. The bullet hole and silencer threads might not be a true lead. Pavlik might not be the heist man. The armband-fiber lead might not play. The book-rack fibers might not have been left by the heist man.

The heist man *probably* fired the shot at the house. There were no firearms on the premises. Nort Layman would paraffin-test the dead Japs. The bullet hole looked fresh. The silencer threads were off a fresh fire. Nort would know if the Japs had fired guns recently. Most telling—that note taped on the wall.

Dudley stood on the porch and prepped a logbook. It tallied check-ins and tasks performed. The case could blow wide and go long.

A Helms truck pulled up to the crowd. The gawkers swarmed it for coffee and crullers. A geek pointed to the porch and yelled, "Goddamn Jap!"

Ashida did not flinch. Staunch lad—ever calm.

Blanchard said, "We should be canvassing."

Dudley said, "Cause of death, lad. It's our first priority."

Brown nudged Dudley. They walked inside and huddled. The breakfast dregs were still out.

Brown said, "This job is nothing but shit. It's shit the Los Angeles Police Department and the city of Los Angeles don't want or need."

Dudley said, "Yes, I'll concede that."

That geek yelled, "Goddamn Jap!" It boomed through the house.

Brown said, *"And?"*

Dudley said, "Ideally, we should can it. We should mark it 'suicide, case closed,' and let those heathens rot in hell for their domestic sins."

Brown said, "What sins? They were working stiffs."

Dudley said, "The family strikes me as more original than that. If we proceed, I'll keep you abreast."

Brown snagged an egg roll. "And less than ideally?"

Dudley said, "I think a Japs-killed-Japs solution would make us look good, and allow us time to prepare for Christmas with our families."

The geek yelled, "Goddamn Jap!" Blanchard walked in and beelined to the chow.

Brown nodded. "Japs killed Japs. It's got a good ring."

Dudley snatched Blanchard's plate. "That lad shouting racial slurs may be offending Dr. Ashida. Please take him someplace secluded and kick the shit out of him."

13

LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1941

Ashida crouched outside the window. He caught Dudley's order. Blanchard grabbed an egg roll and took off.

He went outside. He ducked under the cordon. Ashida quick-walked down the driveway and watched.

Blanchard pushed into the crowd. The fools read bad news and stepped back. Ashida watched. He magnetized harsh looks.

Blanchard slammed into the insult man. The man tripped and fell. Blanchard grabbed an arm and dragged him behind a prowl car.

The man flailed. The crowd dispersed. Ashida stood on his tiptoes and watched. Blanchard drop-kicked the man. Ashida heard bones crack.

Compound fractures. Dislocated sternum. Probable shock.

The man went green. Blanchard stepped on his head and muzzled possible shrieks. Ashida looked away. Ray Pinker saw him and tapped his wristwatch.

Ashida walked over. Another shitbird yelled, "Goddamn Jap!"

Pinker got in his car. Ashida got in. He checked the side mirror. He saw Blanchard wipe blood off his hands.

They pulled out. Patrol cops cleared a path. Ashida felt giddy.

Pinker said, "I should be in church. I told my wife I'd start going."

Ashida said, "Dudley killed the rapist."

Pinker nodded. "Who may not be the heist man. *And,* the gunshots, bullets and silencer threads at the two locations do not *conclusively* indict the heist man for the *possible* homicides."

Ashida nodded. "Yes, but it's a significant lead."

Pinker caught Figueroa southbound. Ashida said, "I think it's homicide."

"I lean that way."

"They're going to short-shrift it. Brown will kick it up to Chief Horrall, who'll—"

"—kick it up to that rummy McPherson and Mayor Bowron. I don't see this thing as any more than a one-day headache."

They hit downtown. They cut east and made Central Station. They lugged their evidence kits up to the lab. Pinker grabbed a work sheet.

He wrote "7:49 a.m., 12/7/41" on it. They guzzled hot-plate coffee and worked.

They studied silencer threads. They dye-dipped the threads from the stickup and the house and examined them under full-dialed lenses. The dye magnified metallurgic components. They concluded this:

The threads were *similar*—but not *identical*. Two different silencers were deployed at the two locations. One individual crafted both silencers. Said individual: talented but unschooled.

The tests consumed two and a half hours. Pinker wrote "10:16 a.m., 12/7/41" on the work sheet. The tests prompted questions.

Did said individual *make* both silencers *and* shoot the bullets at either or both locations? Did said individual *sell* one or both silencers? Did he sell them to the heist man and/or a member or known associate of the Watanabe family?

The work torqued Ashida. He was frayed. He crossed a line yesterday. He withheld drugstore evidence. He had no foreknowledge of the Watanabe job.

The job increased the risk of exposure. The job increased his chance to develop his own evidence. He was frayed-wire alert. He got called out at 1:00 a.m. He was nowhere near tired.

Next—the bullet chunks and bullet powder.

Dudley crumbled the chunks at the house. They could crumble the drugstore chunks and spray-dye the powder from both locations. They could look for consistencies or anomalies.

Pinker tore out a new work sheet. Ashida wrote "10:22 a.m., 12/7/41" on top. Pinker crumbled the drugstore chunks in a desk vise.

They spray-dyed both samples and blot-dried them. They placed powder smears under slides and affixed a microscope. They studied the fully magnified characteristics.

Two bullets. Similar metallurgic and powder-grain formations. A Luger was fired at both locations. Small inconsistencies indicated different ammo loads. The cracked bullet chunks at the house indicated faulty ammo.

Ashida wrote "10:39 a.m., 12/7/41" on the work sheet. Pinker futzed with the microscope.

Ashida said, "I'm going back in the house. Something's off. You don't wash clothes on the day you perform seppuku."

"Don't break any rules. Wait until Nort Layman gives us a disposition."

"The dead rapist bothers me. He's Dudley's cat's paw if it's ruled homicide, and they need a convenient suspect with evidential links to the crime. They can write him off as a *vanished* suspect and file on him posthumous."

Pinker smiled. "You're a quick study. You're learning the ways of this man's police department very fast."

Ashida smiled. "Both shots came from Lugers. Dudley found reichsmarks in the house."

"Lugers are from hunger. You know who buys them? Nazi creeps who frequent the goddamn Deutsches Haus."

Ashida prickled. *He'd* keyed on the Deutsches Haus.

Pinker unlocked the gun cabinet and grabbed a Luger. The gun was blue steel. The grips were white pearl. They were inlaid with black swastikas and rubies.

Ashida studied the barrel aperture. He already knew the lands and grooves statistics. He'd memorized his college ballistics texts.

Pinker toggled a bullet into the chamber and walked to the shooting tunnel. He stuck his arm in the chute and fired. Acoustical baffling muffled the sound of the shot.

"It's a froufrou piece. It's for collectors and retired intelligence guys who never saw action."

Ashida walked to the tunnel and dug in the catcher bin. He snagged two bullet chunks.

Pinker rolled his eyes. "Goddamn Lugers. They're not worth a shit."

14

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1941

Sunday brunch with Elmer and Brenda. Decorous, save for the talk.

Brenda owns a lovely home in Laurel Canyon. The furnishings can be seen in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. Harry Cohn enjoys Brenda's girls and gave her free run of the Columbia warehouse.

A Mexican maid laid out huevos rancheros. Elmer mixed gin fizzes. Gary Cooper fucked Barbara Stanwyck on the couch I was perched on. Brenda swore that the rumor was true.

I felt disembodied. It was lack of sleep more than shock over what I'd heard at City Hall. Lee Blanchard, Ben Siegel and Abe Reles. Captain William H. Parker's belief that I would now be ripe for entrapment. He held me to be a woman who would stand up for her man and do anything to cover his misdeeds. He was gravely mistaken there.

Elmer said, "Lee caught a squawk with the Dudster. It's all over the air. Four Japs in Highland Park."

Brenda dosed her eggs with hot sauce. "You go straight to shoptalk."

Elmer said, "A good host plays to his guests, honey. Shoptalk is the only sort of talk that Miss Katherine Lake enjoys."

I laughed and picked at my food. Brenda and Elmer were nearly ten years older than I. *They* were professionals; *I* was a cop's quasi-girlfriend. The disparity rankled. We all went back to Bobby De Witt and the Boulevard-Citizens job. Open secrets and unspoken truths began germinating there. I wanted to peddle myself to wash the stink of Bobby off of me; Brenda refused to let me do it. She said, "You live by these crazy-girl notions you get from books and movies. I wouldn't be much of a friend if I let you take that nonsense too far."

Elmer handed me a cocktail. I wondered how up-to-date he was on Lee and Ben Siegel. "Bugsy" is now ensconced in a "penthouse" suite at the Hall of Justice jail. Sheriff's deputies serve as valets, flunkies and chauffeurs for visiting starlets. Velvet curtains provide privacy for Ben and his overnight guests. His release is imminent. Abe Reles' "swan dive" scotched the prosecution's case against him.

Elmer smiled and waggled his cigar stub. We possess an odd telepathy and often seem to know what the other is thinking. It always pertains to "shoptalk."

He said, "Lee paid off his chit with Benny Siegel."

I said, "Yes, I figured it out."

Brenda crushed her cigarette on a bread plate. "Tell all, honey. Don't be a C.T."

I said, "No, your lover goes first."

Elmer sprawled in a chair and grabbed Brenda. She fell into his lap and went *Whoops!* He said, "Thad Brown drove Dudley Smith and Lee to Union Station. He read the papers a few days later and put it together."

Brenda said, "How'd *you* figure it out?"

I made that zip-the-lips gesture. Elmer said, "*Give*, sister." Brenda said, "Don't be a C.T."

I played coy. "There's a Traffic captain who knows a lot about Lee."

Elmer draped an arm around Brenda. "How do you know that?"

"Because Captain William H. Parker is courting me."

Brenda hooted. "Honey, that sanctimonious son of a bitch does not court women in any kind of classic sense."

I lit a cigarette. "You mean he doesn't take bribes, beat confessions out of suspects, or screw your girls in the back of Mike Lyman's Grill, where I'm meeting him at 1:00."

Brenda looked aghast. Elmer looked flabbergasted. He said, "Kay, how do you know that Whiskey Bill Parker knows a lot about Lee?"

I blew an imperiously high smoke ring. "Because Parker is courting and coercing me. Because he has me transcribing wire recordings at City Hall before he tells me his play. Because you, Brenda and Lee had a very injudicious conversation on August 14 of '39. You discussed your 'service,' the Boulevard-Citizens robbery and Lee's debt to Ben Siegel. Elmer, you actually said, 'If you owe Ben, he makes you kill somebody for him.' "

Elmer bolted his drink. Brenda waved mock wolfsbane.

I said, "Do you think that William H. Parker is incapable of extrapolating and reaching the conclusion that Lee and Dudley Smith killed Abe Reles? Do you think that William H. Parker doesn't know that half of the Detective Bureau phones are tapped? Do you honestly think that you're as smart as William H. Parker?"

Brenda fished a pack of cigarettes from Elmer's coat pocket. "I can't believe it. You honest to God *like* that son of a bitch."

I felt myself blush. Elmer said, “No more calls from City Hall.”

Brenda lit a cigarette and blew her own high ring. “Gossip always comes in droves, Citizens. One of our girls picked up a tip from a G-man she tricked with. Some fellow named Ward Littell.”

Elmer said, “Give, sister. Who’s the C.T. now?”

Brenda said, “The Feds are going after the Department, strictly on the phone taps. Art Hohmann snitched the listening posts and the whole kaboodle.”

I said, “I destroyed that recording I described to you.”

Brenda said, “There’s oodles more, Citizen. Can you recall what you said on any given phone call from two years ago? *Uh-uh*, you *can’t*.”

Elmer cracked his knuckles. “I’ll tell Jack Horrall. He’ll pull the wires with the good dirt, and leave the Feds the pablum.”

I heard radio buzz next door. An announcer was almost shouting. The noise was high-decibeled and insistent.

Brenda climbed off Elmer’s lap and smoothed out her dress. She said, “Sweetie, please set Sister Lake straight on Whiskey Bill.”

Elmer leaned toward me. “Don’t hold no goodwill for that Pope-loving bastard,” he said. “He’s as ruthless as Dudley Smith, he was bone-dirty with Jim Davis, he’ll get the Chief’s job come hell or high water and take the Department down out of spite if it don’t fall his way. He uses people and tosses them away like fucking Kleenex. He’s a hatchet man, an extortionist and a fucking prig who gets shit-faced drunk, talks to God and moves his lips while he does it. He ran the ‘Bum Blockade’ for Two-Gun, he shackled Okies in the back of freight cars and sent them off to the lettuce fields up in Kern County, where the goddamn farm bosses paid Davis a buck a man a day. He ran bag to the Mexican Staties back when Carlos Madrano and Davis were supplying wetbacks to every Jap farm between here and Oxnard. You run, sister. Whatever that man has planned for you ain’t nothing you’d ever want for yourself.”

Brenda said, “Amen.” That radio blasted. I didn’t want to address Elmer’s pitch. I walked to the window and glanced out.

A man next door saw me. Our windows were wide open. His radio was earsplitting. He reached over and turned it off.

He said, “The Japs bombed Pearl Harbor.”

I ran outside. Elmer and Brenda blurred. Radios blared all around me. It was one enraged shout.

I got my car and pulled out, southbound. Traffic was light. I turned on my own radio. The news was all *WAR*.

It was a sneak attack. Japanese air squadrons bombed Hawaii early this morning. The Pearl Harbor naval base was brutally hit. The Pacific Fleet was decimated.

Massive casualties. Vital seacraft sunk. Hickam Field attacked. Soldiers machine-gunned at Schofield Barracks. Honolulu under siege. Two-faced Jap envoys. Roosevelt's imminent declaration of war.

I turned east on Beverly. The newsstand at Fairfax was swamped. Newsboys ducked into traffic and yelled, "No papers yet!"

I knew I was running. I didn't know where I was going. I knew who I was running from. Elmer's indictment of William H. Parker echoed.

The news was spreading. I saw men affix flags to storefronts. I saw men on rooftops with binoculars and rifles. Police cars sped past me, Code 3. The street tableaux cohered. It told me where to go. I turned off the radio and floored the gas.

Prowl cars swerved across westbound lanes and tore eastbound. I approached downtown. Cops had a dozen Japanese boys spread prone outside Belmont High. They frisked them, kicked them and held shotguns to their heads.

I crossed the 1st Street bridge and pulled into a parking lot. An attendant yelled, "The Japs bombed Pearl Harbor!" I tossed my keys at him and *ran*.

City Hall was under siege. Prowl cars were up on the south-facing lawn. The doorways were flanked with cops armed with machine guns.

I ran. People clustered on the 1st Street curb and played their car radios. I turned north on Spring. Yes, already—men on the Federal Building steps.

The line extended down the sidewalk, a good twenty-deep. The men had mobilized within moments of the news. There were young men, older men and high school boys. One boy dribbled a basketball. I heard *JAPS* and *WAR* ten thousand times.

I got in line. I was the only woman. The men jabbered and smiled at me. I heard *GIRL* along with *WAR* and *THE JAPS*. An olive drab sedan pulled to the curb. A Marine Corps captain, an Army major and a Navy lieutenant got out. The men in line cheered them. They ran up the steps and stood by the ground-floor doorway.

The doors flew open. Three sailors carried out tables and chairs. They positioned them, facing the crowd. The captain and lieutenant sat down. A sailor flashed V for Victory. The major pulled a Japanese flag from his pocket and spit on it. The men in line cheered.

The major tossed the flag into the crowd. A boy grabbed it, spit on it and passed it back. The next boy spit on it and tore off a piece of the fabric. The cheers became a continuous roar. The flag traveled back down the line, shredded and drenched in spittle.

The flag came to me. I spit on it, threw it down and ground it under my feet. The cheers escalated to roars.

Two tall young men picked me up and held me at full arm's length. I floated above the crowd, in my very own swirl. The whole world dipped into me. I yelled, *"AMERICA!"* as loud as I could.

The roar went louder and louder. Motorists whistled and waved. Every man in line looked up and saluted me as I swirled.

The tall young men lowered me; I kissed them as my feet touched the ground. The line pressed toward the recruiting stand. It extended down to 1st Street now. Men impulsively leaped from passing cars, ran up and got in line.

The line inched toward the steps; we were pressed tightly together; we moved as one body, connected. Time went haywire. We lit cigarettes. Flasks went around. Conversations overlapped. I got more and more details. The death toll was mounting. Big battleships went down. *We've got to nip this shit in the bud*.

The line moved. Motorists honked their horns and cheered us. I studied the Marine captain's uniform. The deep green against khaki was a knockout. *Semper Fi.* Screw Captain William H. Parker and his shrouded agenda. I decided to join the United States Marine Corps.

The men in front of me were given forms and told to return for further processing. I was hoarse from cheering and too many cigarettes. The Army major motioned me over. He seemed to be amused. He said, "Sorry, sweetheart. We aren't taking girls yet."

I said, "I'm willing to go now." The major looked at the other officers. They all seemed amused.

The Navy man said, "We didn't make the rules, sister."

The Marine said, "The canteens'll need volunteers. You dance with the boys and send them off happy."

I said, "Give me one of those forms. I'll come back tomorrow. The rules will change between now and then."

Boos and catcalls broke out behind me. The Navy man went *Shush now*. I started to say something. A wadded-up ball of paper hit the back of my head.

A man yelled, "Stow it, lady!" A man yelled, "You had your solo! Give us a chance!"

I turned around. Another paper bomb hit me. A chorus of raspberries blew.

The major thumbed a stack of carbon sheets with photo strips attached. He hit a sheet and went *Aha*. He held it up. I saw myself in a snapshot.

"There's a subversive hold on you, Miss Lake. Some kind of meetings you went to."

Men jostled me off the steps and jeered me. I stared at them and started to walk back toward the sidewalk. A paper ball bounced off my skirt. Men put their thumbs on their noses and made pig sounds. I stopped and stared harder. It made them laugh. Two men spit on me. I balled my fists and went toward them. Then I *sensed* something.

I wiped spit off my blouse. That Something stepped in front of me.

It was a boy-man. He was about six foot six and seemed too big for his clothes. He wore a brown wool suit, a white shirt and a tartan bow tie.

The spitting men looked at him. He grabbed their heads, smashed them and brought a knee up. I heard bones break and saw blood burst like they only had one face.

The spitting men screamed. The enlistment lines dispersed. The recruiters stood up and plain *stared*.

Then the boy-man took my elbow and steered me. Then we were down on the sidewalk and around the corner. Then we were sitting in the Hall of Justice cafeteria.

Where a waitress ran up and said, "The Japs bombed Pearl Harbor!"

Where the boy-man grinned and said, "No shit?"

The waitress huffed and walked off. I said, "My name is Kay Lake." The boy-man said, "Scotty Bennett."

I poured two cups of serve-ur-self coffee. My hands shook. I said, "To victory."

We clinked cups. A radio was bolted to the wall above our table. The broadcast was all *Japs!* Scotty Bennett doused the volume.

"Some day, huh? We'll be telling our kids about it."

I laughed. " 'Our' kids, or kids in general?"

He laughed. "It's one of those days where you can't rule anything out."

It was warm. I untied my scarf and unbuttoned my sweater. My body settled back in. I studied the boy-man.

He was one or two years younger than I. He had curly light brown hair and the world's greatest kid smile. No one ever called his bluff. His simple presence was that stunning.

"What do you do, Mr. Bennett?"

"I was about to join the Marines when I met you."

"I was doing the same thing."

"What happened?"

"They aren't signing up women yet. And I went to some socialist meetings a few years ago, which didn't do me any good."

Scotty Bennett smiled. "They should let you in anyway. We can't win this war unless we let bygones be bygones."

I lit a cigarette. "What were you doing before you decided to enlist?"

"I applied to the L.A. Police Department three months ago, but they found out I was shy of twenty-one. What do you—"

"My boyfriend's in the Department. Do you follow boxing? His name is Lee Blanchard."

Deft boy—he put his hands up and mimicked "The Southland's Great White Hope."

"You've seen Lee fight?"

"He kicked the you know what out of that Mex with the harelip. I was four rows back from ringside."

I blew a smoke ring. Quick boy—he reached up and pulled the wisps out of the air.

"Will you stand with me while I talk to the recruiter?"

"Yes. Do you promise not to rescue any more women?"

Scotty Bennett crossed his heart. Rough boy—don't think I can't see you.

"Bucky Bleichert's fighting at the Olympic tonight. Would you like to go?"

"Yes. I certainly would."

"Lee sleeps at City Hall most nights."

Mean boy—he mimicked my pseudo lover catching a right hand.

"My dad came over from Scotland in 1908. He's a minister, and he always says 'God moves in mysterious ways.' I think I just figured out what he means."

I touched his hand. Our knees brushed under the table.

15

LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1941

She was late.

One hour and nine minutes.

She fucking stood him up.

The back room was all his. The back room was the PD's private playpen. Mike Lyman's Grill was open twenty-four hours. Ditto the back room.

Mike Lyman loved cops. Here's why. Buzz Meeks iced a cholo who flashed his *schvantz* at Mike's wife. Grateful Mike anointed the back room.

Spicy wall prints, a full bar, a police Teletype. A private phone line and a foldout bed for woo-woo. Brenda Allen's girls had carte blanche. The back room was open-all-nite. It serviced a rankingcop clientele.

Parker nursed his fourth double bourbon. He'd been holed up since 8:00 a.m. Mass. The goddamn phone kept ringing. He kept ignoring it. The Lake girl knew he was here. Nobody else did.

Mass was problematic. Archbishop Cantwell had a hangover and suggested a hair of the dog. He acceded. One drink became four. Cantwell harped on Dudley Smith. The fucking Irish stuck together. Dudley missed Mass. Cantwell was fucking stood up.

Dud's got four dead Japs, Your Eminence. It's probably hara-kiri. *Well, William—they'll sure as shit rot in hell.*

He boozed with His Eminence and went to confession. He found a box and waited. He recognized Monsignor Hayes' voice.

His confession ran erratic. He confessed his scurrilous acts on the PD. He confessed his crush on Joan from Northwestern.

Te absolvo ergo sum. Monsignor Hayes was brusque. He was an isolationist mick, like Dudley and Cantwell. Father Coughlin's Sunday broadcast loomed.

Parker nursed his drink. He was half in the bag. The Lake girl was one hour and *twelve* minutes late. The fucking phone kept ringing.

Again and again. Here it comes again. Eight rings, ten, twelve—

Parker grabbed the receiver. Fuzz hit the line. Call-Me-Jack came on.

“Are you there, Bill? I didn’t know where else to call.”

“I’m here, Chief.”

“Good. Now get over *here*.”

“Why?”

“Haven’t you heard?”

“Heard *what*, Chief?”

“The goddamn Japs bombed Pearl Harbor.”

He dropped the phone and ran. He felt the booze evaporate. He ran out the door. He ran up 8th to Broadway and cut north. He caught it all at a sprint.

The radios blaring from storefronts. The people huddled outside a hat shop with their ears cupped.

Squelch, fuzz, static, crackle, hiss.

Hawaii, sneak attack, Pacific Fleet sunk.

Thousands dead, Pearl Harbor, Pearl Harbor.

Vile, atrocious, cowardly. Fifth Column–instigated.

Japs, Japs, Japs, Japs, Japs.

Parker ran up Broadway. His suit coat flapped. He held his hat firm on his head. *Herald* trucks passed him. Newsboys folded quickie editions in the back. He hit 6th, 5th, 4th, 3rd, 2nd. He looked east. There’s Little Tokyo. There’s Sheriff’s bulls in riot gear, swarming the sidewalk.

Up to 1st Street. A lawn hubbub at City Hall. Cops and MPs with riot guns. Black-and-whites and jeeps, parked snout-to-snout. Strafe lights aimed at the sky.

Parker held his badge up. He stumbled on a light cord and ran toward the doors. An MP saluted and stepped aside.

The foyer was all cops and war-jazzed reporters. He walked to a freight lift and pushed 6. The doors closed. He got some breath. The sweat purge sobered him up.

The lift hit the sixth floor. He straightened his necktie and buttoned his coat. He hit the Chief’s office, squared-up.

A secretary juggled phones. Her switchboard was full-lit and full-plugged. Parker went through a side door and caught a full house.

Jack Horrall, Sheriff Biscailuz, Mayor Fletch Bowron. DA Bill McPherson—passed out, narcoleptic-style.

Call-Me-Jack was at his desk. Parker pulled a chair up. A Teletype clattered. Jack reached back and pulled out a sheet.

“This is from the Army’s Fourth Interceptor Command. There’s a fifteen-mile coastline blackout, from San Pedro, Terminal Island and Fort MacArthur north to the southwest edge of city police jurisdiction. Jap fighters could hit us at any minute, and we can’t give them lit-up coastal targets to bomb. That's a full-nighttime blackout, in effect until further notice. The only L.A. Police Department divisions affected will be San Pedro and Venice, because they're on the water. We'll have two formal citywide test blackouts tomorrow, 5:00 to 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. All L.A. residents are required to draw their shades at home and drive with their parking lights only. The Fort MacArthur and Terminal Island gun placements are now operational, and the whole coastline down there is covered by aircraft spotters."

Fletch B. went *Whew!* McPherson stirred and snored. Biscailuz tossed a chair cushion at him.

The room spun. Parker popped a cough drop. Call-Me-Jack said, "We've got the Feds due in a minute. There's some Jap subversives we've got to round up."

Biscailuz said, "I dispatched some boys to Little Tokyo. They're standing ready. We all knew the war was coming, but I didn't see an attack on *us*."

Bowron said, "Cocksuckers. They'll rue the fucking day, believe me."

Biscailuz said, "Yellow bastards. I was hoping for a white man's war. Us versus the Krauts, on foreign soil. This is turning into a shit deal at the start."

Bowron said, "Gene's right. The Krauts are off the deep end with the Jews, but it's not like—"

Jack cut in. "Not like you can blame them?"

Biscailuz laughed. Bowron *roared*. Parker sucked his cough drop. *WAR*—the Krauts, the *Japs*.

The Teletype spit paper. Jack's phone rang. Jack hit the squelch knob and pointed to Parker.

"I'm starting up an Alien Squad. I want my Department in on this shit with the Japs from the ground floor. I'll put together some hard boys to work with Gene's deputies and the Feds. Bill Parker will serve as liaison, and the Department's monitor for any and all blackout-related operations. We're going to be running you ragged, Bill—but I know you can take it."

Parker said, "I'm in, Chief. It's an honor, and I'll carve out the time for the work."

Bowron laughed. "It's ink on your résumé, Bill. It'll look good when you go for Jack's job."

Jack laughed. "Don't talk about me when I'm still in the room."

Biscailuz laughed. "Bill won't mind the work. It means more time to hide out from his wife."

Jack said, "Let's wrap this up. My Moose Lodge has a block of tickets for the Rose Bowl, so we've got to put the quietus to the Japs by New Year's."

Bowron and Biscailuz yocked. Parker sucked another cough drop. Three men walked in. Parker recognized them.

Feds. The L.A. boss, Dick Hood. Special Agent Ed Satterlee. Ward J. Littell, the bleeding-heart Fed.

Introductions circulated. Handshakes and backslaps, ditto. Jack laid out folding chairs. The Feds straddled them. Jack opened a humidor and lobbed cigars.

Bowron arranged standing ashtrays. The gang lit up. The room smoked up, quick.

Hood said, "Let's discuss the roundups. Outside of Tokyo, this is the Jap capital of the known world."

Littell said, "Let's clear the legalities first, Mr. Hood. The three agents in this room are lawyers, as is Captain Parker."

Hood brushed ash off his vest. "Make your point, Ward."

"It's the criteria for identifying enemy aliens, beyond their racial distinction. Roosevelt's going to declare war on Japan tomorrow, and Germany and Italy sometime next week. The Japanese are easily identifiable, Germans and Italians much less so. We don't want to needlessly harass innocent Japanese, and we need to recognize the fact that German- and Italian-born and -derived aliens are potentially more dangerous, due to their enhanced level of anonymity."

Parker smiled. Ward's sidebar was legally and morally astute. The room froze up.

Jack said, "I can't tell the Japs from the Chinks, which invalidates Mr. Littell's concerns."

Biscailuz said, "I can't, either."

Bowron said, "Ask Uncle Ace Kwan. He'll set you straight on that."

Jack said, "Ace is sending dinner over at 5:00. We'll run these sensitive racial matters by the delivery boy."

Satterlee shook his head. "You astound me, Ward. How did someone with your sensibilities get on the FBI?"

Littell blew smoke at Satterlee. Bowron and Biscailuz chortled. Hood said, "The only criteria for the detention of alien Fifth Columnists is the established fact that the fucking Japs bombed a U.S. territory early this morning and killed at least two thousand Americans, and the fucking Germans and Italians did not. And, as I stated a moment ago, L.A. is chock-fucking-full of fucking Japs, so let's cut the fucking shit and discuss the best means to kibosh potential sabotage."

Call-Me-Jack said, "Hear, hear."

Bowron said, "Crudely put, but pithy."

Biscailuz said, "Special Agent in Charge Dick Hood does not mince words."

Satterlee popped his briefcase and removed a pile of folders. Hood grabbed them and passed them around.

"Sixteen pages of Jap names, gentlemen. When it became apparent that we might go to war with Japan, we compiled a list of known and suspected Fifth Columnists for possible detention. These Japs are known fascists, members of suspect fraternal organizations and general Emperor-worshiping bad apples. You'll see that the list is divided into A's, B's and C's. The A's are the Japs considered the most dangerous, and they've been earmarked for immediate detention."

The room was one big smoke cloud. Call-Me-Jack cracked a window. Street noise drifted up. Parker heard *Japs, Japs, Japs*.

He skimmed the file. The A list ran eight pages. There, on page four: "Watanabe, Ryoshi and family/produce farmer/Highland Park."

Hood crushed out his cigar. "Secretary of War Stimson has issued a top-priority bulletin. It mandates the seizure of property belonging to the A-list subversives. The commander at Fort MacArthur has allotted cell blocks at the Terminal Island pen for detention housing. You've got shitloads of Jap fishing boats moored down in Pedro, and the Army's gearing up to tow them in for inspection."

Littell and Satterlee swapped glares. The Teletype kicked out a typed page and wanted-poster set. Call-Me-Jack scanned them.

"Here's one for you, Bill. Apparently, the Federal Building is swamped with men trying to enlist. The state AG sees it as a godsend to fugitive felons looking to flee the country, so he sent some priority wanted listings along. Go over and check faces, will you? I'll have some bluesuits meet you downstairs. If you see any of the poster guys, send the blues in for the rough stuff."

Parker nodded and held up his A list. He pointed to the name Ryoshi Watanabe. He eye-drilled Call-Me-Jack.

"Last night, Chief. The dead Japs in Highland Park. I caught a broadcast. It's Dudley Smith's job, and it's homicide or suicide."

Call-Me-Jack shrugged. "It looks like suicide. I got that straight from the Dudster. Nort Layman's performing the autopsies right now. We'll know more fairly soon."

Parker said, "A Jap homicide case wouldn't hurt us. Mr. Littell might have something. Say we take some guff for the roundups. We're at war, but we still give these dead Japs a full play."

Call-Me-Jack shut his eyes. Parker read his brain waves.

He's weighing pros and cons. He's overbooked. I want his job. Dudley and I tend to clash. He probably wants a leash on Dud. He's more afraid of him than of me.

Call-Me-Jack opened his eyes. "You oversee the job, Bill. I know you're busy and you're not really a case man, but—"

Parker said, "I'll do it."

The City Hall clock hit 3:00. Bowron said, "Two hours to dinner."

Hood said, “I wouldn’t mind a drink. And it wouldn’t surprise me if Chief Horrall had a bottle.”

Call-Me-Jack smiled. “I do, if you call me Jack.”

Biscailuz said, “Jesus, the fucking Japs.”

The freight lift took him down. Eight blues met him in the foyer. They wore tin hats and packed tear-gas bombs. They were geared for Jap insurrection.

Parker felt stupid. *He* wore his church suit and a snubnose .38. They cut across the south lawn. Jeeps and half-tracks chewed up the grass.

Fool’s errand. Ten faces on ten posters. Felony punks—rape, ADW, mayhem. One pachuco and nine white-trash sons of bitches. Fools’ odds—these fucks would never try to enlist.

They turned north on Spring Street. The Fed Building was straight up. Parker blinked. A roar hit him.

The enlistment line went down the steps and the sidewalk to the corner. It ran two thousand men. They were singing. “God Bless America” rang.

Parker ran toward it. He dropped the posters. His eyes welled. His glasses slid down his face. The blues ran behind him. Their riot gear slowed them down. They couldn’t keep up.

Parker ran. The voices drew him in. They echoed louder and louder. He got up to the steps. He forgot what he was here for. The riot cops caught up and just stood there.

Discordant voices hit him. Parker looked around and saw a commotion. A big white kid beat on three white kids pounding a little Jap. A white woman kicked a white kid sprawled on the steps.

The Jap ran off. The big white kid threw fists and elbows. Parker stood and stared. The two-thousand-voice hymn went dissonant. The white woman turned his way.

It was Kay Lake.

She saw him.

She struck a pose, with chaos all around her.

Parker ran up the steps.

Kay Lake waved and disappeared.

16

LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1941

Four Japs on morgue slabs. Caustic fumes. A big stink in a small room.

Dudley stood with Lee Blanchard and Nort Layman. They smoked to stifle the stink. The morgue adjoined Chinatown. The Chinks kicked up a ruckus outside.

They banged drums. They tossed firecrackers. They *celebrated* the attack. The Chinks hated the Japs, and vice versa. Chinatown would swing and sway tonight.

Blanchard said, “Fucking Japs.”

Layman said, “Fucking Chinks. I’ve got a headache from those fucking drums.”

Dudley yawned. He was tired. He’d been up since yesterday morning. He killed a man. He smoked opium and took Benzedrine. He wrote Beth Short a fatherly letter. He honed his plan to meet Bette Davis. He caught this fucking Jap job. The fucking Japs bombed America into a Jew-devised war.

Blanchard blew smoke on Ryoshi Watanabe. “Hey, pops. Fuck your emperor and fuck you.”

Dudley laughed. Layman slapped his knees. Firecrackers popped outside.

Blanchard blew smoke on Nancy Watanabe. “Give me some pussy, baby.”

Layman said, “You’re a troubled man, Leland.”

Blanchard said, “I like it when they don’t move.”

A cherry bomb exploded. The window glass shook. Dudley reached for his gun.

“Sadly, this comic sojourn must conclude. Norton, please report your findings.”

Layman said, “Pending toxicology and whatever advanced tests I can dream up, I’d call it homicide or homicide-suicide, and I think the former’s more likely. All the blood was intermingled, so individual typings were difficult. I got random chunks of A negative, and the kids would have inherited either mama or papa's blood type, so that muddles things. The wound flaps were shredded, which indicates blade wiggle and a natural hesitation and/or coercion at the moment of the piercings. The paraffin checks on their hands came out negative, so we can't attribute that bullet hole on the second-floor landing to them, at least not in the past forty-eight hours. So far, I'd say this. I've handled four Jap sword suicides, and this doesn't fit my empirical bill. And here's the strangest goddamn thing. I found an oily residue on their feet and tested it. It was shrimp oil."

Blanchard tossed his cigarette. It hit a blood spill and fizzled.

"If it's murder, we lost time on the house-to-house, and now everybody's got a bug up their ass about the bombings, so they won't recall if they saw anything right before the snuffs occurred."

Layman said, "You're right on that. Big events induce a collective loss of memory. More important, who cares? I want to work this job for the pure science of it, but does anybody give a shit about four dead Japs on the day we went to war with Japan?"

The suicide note. The "looming apocalypse." It was grandly evocative. Was it portentous?

Dudley kicked it around. Blanchard was right. A house-to-house would prove futile. Jack Webb was out with the locals. His silly radio chats were their "house-to-house." That angle was *pure* futile.

The wall phone rang. A blue light blinked—police call.

Dudley grabbed the receiver. "Sergeant Smith."

"It's Jack Horrall, Dud."

"Yes, Chief."

"What a day, huh?"

"Surely one to remember, sir."

"I hope you don't have plans to enlist."

Dudley said, "I do, sir. I see a grand career for myself in Army intelligence, and I have an influential friend who could secure me a commission."

"Joe Kennedy?"

"Yes, sir."

Call-Me-Jack whistled. It squelched the connection.

"For now, no dice. That's final, until this war heats up or settles down, and we figure out where the Los Angeles Police Department stands in all of this."

"Yes, sir. And on that note?"

"On that note, what's Nort's take on the Watanabe job so far?"

Cherry bombs blew up outside. Dudley cupped his free ear.

"He leans toward homicide, sir."

"Well, then we'll try to make a silk purse from a sow's ear, to show how impartial we are. I've talked to Mayor Bowron. He's afraid of a backlash if our boys start taking grief for rounding up all these so-called loyal Japs. Are you reading me, muchacho?"

"I am, sir. The implications are quite clear."

"Good. It's a 100% Jap world we're living in now, and I want to make hay out of it while the sun shines."

"The *rising* sun, sir?"

Call-Me-Jack yukked. "That's rich, Dud. I've got some boys here in my office. I'll pass it along."

Flies buzz-bombed the stiffs. Nort aerosol-sprayed them. They dropped dead on Aya Watanabe.

"Please do, sir."

Call-Me-Jack said, "Don't get your dander up, but I've assigned Bill Parker to supervise the investigation. He's a savvy political beast, and I want him to ride a gentle herd on you and your boys."

Dudley lit a cigarette. "Whiskey Bill is bereft of gentleness, sir. He's an administrative drone, he's not a detective, his sole aim is to oust you and become Chief, and his considerable savvy is entirely in the service of personal advancement."

Call-Me-Jack belched. "Parker stays. And don't worry—he won't crowd you. I've got him working the blackouts, the roundups and a liaison job to the Army. He'll be too goddamn *tired* to crowd you."

Dudley said, "Yes, sir. I'm sure that Captain Parker and I will form a nonaggression pact."

Call-Me-Jack said, "Hear, hear."

"May I suggest a fourth man, to supplant Dick Carlisle and Mike Breuning? My choice would be Lee Blanchard. He's been with me since I caught the squawk."

Jack said, "Nix. He's a patrol boy, and I'm forming an Alien Squad to help the Feds out with the rousts. That job's got Blanchard's name written all over it."

Festive music reverberated. Chinks shouted gobbledygook. Dudley looked out the window. Paper dragons whooshed by.

"Yes, sir. I still request—"

"I'll give you Buzz Meeks. He's good muscle when push comes to shove."

Background noise fuzzed the line. The connection sputtered and died.

Blanchard said, "How come the Chinks have this beef with the Japs? They all look alike to me."

The natives were restless.

Dudley blew out of the morgue. He was Chinatown's sole white man. He strolled and enjoyed the show.

Fireworks, dragons, heathen babble. Tong boys with kettledrums. The Hop Sing lads wore red kerchiefs. The Four Families boys wore blue. They beat time like that grasshopper Gene Krupa.

Tojo dummies dangled from streetlights. Tong punks swung hatchets at them. Pillow stuffing swirled.

Dudley walked into the Pagoda. A radio blared *WAR!* Busboys laid down Jap flags as floor mats. City councilmen cheered.

Thad Brown slurped wonton soup. He saw Dudley and waved. Dudley winked and walked down to the basement.

Uncle Ace had redecorated his office. New pix had been framed and hung. FDR adjoined that white actor who played Charlie Chan.

"It is a great day, Dudster. The Chinese man and the U.S. Caucasian will align to slay the Jap beast."

Dudley bowed. "Yes, but we must not lose perspective on our German *Kameraden*. They remain our first line of defense against the Reds and the Jews."

Ace bowed. "My Irish brother seems weary. Might I suggest an invigorating tea?"

Dudley smiled and pulled a chair up. Ace laid out a kettle, powders and cups. *Aaaaaah, so*—Benzedrine and Ma Huang.

The scent invigorated. Ace poured two cups. Dudley sipped and cut through some cobwebs.

Ace said, "I have been thinking."

"Yes, my yellow brother?"

"The folly of the attack on Pearl Harbor presents us with opportunities to exploit the Jap beast. We can hide fugitive Fifth Columnists here in Chinatown and charge them exorbitant rates. We can exploit the white man's native bias toward the yellow man and profit from his inability to discern the differentiating aspects of Oriental physiognomy. White men cannot tell us apart. I see money in that shortcoming."

Dudley sipped tea. "You are quite astute and farsighted on this fateful day. And I would venture that you have a favor to ask."

Ace sipped tea. "That Four Families boy was rude to my niece again. I would hope that my reprisal would not engender a war."

The cobwebs dissolved. His circuitry reconnected.

"I'll kill the boy. We'll broker a truce then. Jim Davis will translate for me."

Ace pointed to a mismatched wall panel. It looked freshly varnished. A Chink flag hung askew.

"I want to show you something. I have new ideas to go along with some work I had done. Please, follow me."

Dudley stood up. Ace opened the panel. A dark hole dropped way underground.

A stairway, wall rails, overhead lights. Ace bowed and went *After you*.

The drop went thirty feet. The stairway featured red carpet. The steps hit a *loooooong* corridor. Hanging bulbs swayed and lit a path.

A generator hummed. The labyrinth was heated and air-cooled. Rooms lined both sides of the corridor. They were prelit. They had that grand model-home look.

Rooms with easy chairs and couches. Rooms with full kitchens attached. Rooms with card tables and wet bars. Rooms furnished with beds and whorehouse peeks.

Secret wall compartments. Hidden camera stations. Movie cameras pointed at two-way mirrors.

Thirty rooms. Wartime chic. The slant-eyed Statler Hilton. A gambling mecca and smut-film set. Chop suey always piping hot. A handy opium den.

Ace bowed to Dudley. Dudley bowed to Ace. The tea hit the back of his head.

Ace said, "I just completed the construction. I had originally planned it as a stag resort. Now, I see it as a luxurious hideout for Jap beasts in flight from prison. I had a fan-tan game here last night. It was profitable. We are at war now, which means that rich folks will need entertainment. Do you see socialites and movie stars coming here to mingle with Jap beasts and other riffraff?"

Dudley laughed. "Yes, my yellow brother, I do."

"Your friend Harry Cohn dropped nineteen G's here. If he lost that much to me, how much do you think he has lost to your friend Mr. Siegel?"

Dudley winked. "Indeed. What exploitable losses?"

Ace started babbling. High-test tea always sent him cross-eyed. He lapsed into pidgin English. He sputtered like Donald Duck.

Aaaaaaaah, yes—the Japs.

Jap roundups, Japs in chains, Japs consigned to luxury cells. Dead Japs at the morgue. Hideo Ashida—that stunningly bright Jap.

17

LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1941

Ashida pulled up to the house. Ray Pinker rode shotgun. The sidewalk was rope-cordoned. Patrol cops held gawkers back.

A tomato hit the windshield. Ashida hit the wipers and thinned out the pulp. Somebody yelled, “Kill the Japs!”

A tomato hit the roof. Ashida and Pinker grabbed their evidence kits and ducked under the rope. The porch was tomato juice. Goldbrick cops and their mascot lounged. Mike Breuning, Dick Carlisle, Buzz Meeks, Jack Webb.

Taking some air. Ensconced with a fifth of Old Crow.

They shook hands with Pinker. Breuning and Carlisle shined Ashida on. Meeks winked at him. Jack said, “What’s shaking, Hideo? Your so-called people sure put you in the shit.”

Ashida put Jack in a headlock. Jack laughed and swatted him off. Meeks pointed out to the street. Oh, yeah—*the shit.*

The mob was all local yokels. Fools lugged tomato crates, fools burned Japanese flags. Sailors and Waves jitterbugged. A phonograph blared Count Basie.

A tomato hit the mailbox. Meeks said, “I’m getting ticked off.”

Breuning said, “You can’t blame them.”

Jack said, “Sure you can. What did the Watanabes ever do except die? What did Hideo ever do except work for this white man’s police force?”

Carlisle said, “You’re not a policeman, kid. Don’t get your signals crossed on that one.”

Breuning said, “Leave the kid alone. The Dudster likes him, and he’s only half Yid.”

Jack flinched. A tomato hit the porch rail. Pulp spritzed Meeks’ coat. Carlisle said, “Look alive. You don’t get a show like this every day.”

Meeks charged.

He ran straight at the mob. He tore down cordon ropes. The blues stood back and supplied room. He hit a knot of sailors, low.

He pulled his belt sap and arced backhands. He came in low and stayed low. He went for their *faces*. He hit noses, he hit mouths, he hit skulls. The sailors froze. Their gawker comrades stood and watched.

Ashida watched. Meeks was a legendary sap man. His sap featured raised stitching and leather-laced lead.

Meeks dug in low. Meeks grabbed necks and pulled faces close.

Ashida watched. The gawkers shrieked and turned tail. The beat-on sailors covered their faces and stumble-crawled away. One man held a handful of teeth. One man puked blood.

The fools cringed off. Meeks picked up an ice-cream bar wrapper and wiped off his sap. That phonograph was still out there. Erskine Hawkins' band brayed "Uproar Shout."

The needle spun off the record. Ashida caught his breath. Jack passed out cigarettes.

The jug went around. Meeks walked up to the porch. He grabbed the jug, drained it and tossed it. Breuning started to gush. Meeks shoved him flat on his ass.

Ashida walked into the house. He still smelled decomposition. Pinker walked in. They signed the logbook and opened their evidence kits.

The living room carpet was rolled up and cinched. The dining room table was covered with Kwan's takeout.

There was more here. There had to be.

Pinker went *Whew*. "How are you holding up? The Webb kid's right. It's not like you did anything."

Ashida said, "I'm worried about my mother. She's right there at 2nd and San Pedro, with the FBI and Sheriff's coming in. My brother's out at the farm in the Valley. I think he'll be all right for now."

Pinker tapped his arm. "I forgot to tell you, but Bill Parker called me. He's supervising the case for Call-Me-Jack, and he said he wants you on it. Here's the surprising part. He's posted a guard with your mother, a Fed named Littell. Parker said the guy's got no beef with Japanese folks. He hit it off with your mother, and they started playing pinochle right off the bat."

Ashida smiled. "Whiskey Bill."

Pinker smiled. "He's not my cup of tea, but he looks out for the guys who get him results."

"On that note, then."

"Yeah, on that note."

They got out their cameras and flashbulbs. They split up and covered the downstairs. Ashida shot nine rolls of film. He got the kitchen and service porch. He shot the clothesline and hanging garments. *Why wash clothes on the day that you plan suicide?*

Pinker shot the living room and downstairs hallway. Ashida bagged fibers. They got out their print gear and the print cards for the Watanabes. They dusted touch-and-grab planes.

Shitwork. Furniture backing, windowsills, ledges. Smears and smudges. No evidential-quality fragments or full prints.

Ashida felt woozy. He'd been up since the Creation. He withheld drugstore evidence. He saw Bucky and caught this job. His country and ancestral homeland just went to war. His whole world just went blooey.

Jack Horrall quick-rigged an "Alien Squad." He saw the first muster back at Central Station. "Alien Squad" meant "Goon Squad." It was all hard boys.

Strikebreakers, America Firsters, ex-Klansmen. Lee Blanchard and Elmer Jackson were the sweethearts. Call-Me-Jack was working the get-the-Japs gestalt.

The Munson Report was stale news now. It saturated the Japanese papers last month. FDR sent Curtis Munson out to the coast. He visited Japanese enclaves and described what he saw. He called the Nisei "pathetically loyal Americans." The Japan-born Issei: "Devotedly pro-American, given that they had fled Japan." The Japan-educated Kibei: "Horrified by the onslaught of fascism in their native land."

Ashida print-brushed. Ashida got two full prints. He compared them to the cards and logged them for Aya Watanabe. He dusted a living room window ledge. He got a full print and scanned the cards. He got no matching loops and whorls.

He called it out. "Mr. Pinker, I've got one."

Pinker walked over and eyeballed the ledge. It was an adult-male right-index print. It required a full lift.

"Dudley and Lee Blanchard used handkerchiefs in the house, but I'm not sure about Breuning, Carlisle, Meeks and your pal Jack."

"We should elimination-print them. We'll spare ourselves confusion later on."

Pinker nodded and lugged his kit outside. Ashida walked over and dawdled by the door. Pinker laid print cards flat on a porch rail and inked up the boys.

Avenue 45 was quiet now. The porch reeked of tomato residue.

Pinker rolled Carlisle's prints. Breuning said, "We got fucking Bill Parker riding herd on us now. He's a Bolshevik. Elmer Jackson called me a few hours ago. Parker's got some woman transcribing the Dictograph wires at the Bureau."

Meeks passed Carlisle a Kleenex. Carlisle wiped his hands. Meeks said, "Elmer will lay it all out to Jack Horrall."

Breuning said, "He has, but you know Jack. He'll figure he can ride out whatever Parker's got planned."

Pinker rolled Breuning's prints. Carlisle said, "Parker should watch it. He's on the wires himself. Dud told me that."

Breuning wiped his hands on his trousers. "Pearl Harbor's put a new complexion on things."

Meeks said, "Yeah, yellow."

Carlisle smirked. "Why do you think we're working this shit case? You think it ain't politics?"

Ashida walked back inside. He sprayed the unknown print with ninhydrin and lifted it with clear tape. Pinker walked in with the new print cards. Ashida ran them under his magnifying glass. He got no matches. That meant one unknown print.

They spread out again. Pinker dusted the closet shelves. Ashida dusted the kitchen cabinets and notched grease-coated smears. He noticed two broom whisks below the bottom drawer. He aimed his flashlight at the floor.

He caught broken glass—a small shard pile.

He scooped it up and examined it. He noted an oily sheen on the shards and sniffed it. It smelled like fish oil.

Red dots on the glass—possibly dried blood. He scooped the shards into an envelope and tagged it: "Watanabe/Highland Park/5:21 p.m., 12/7/41."

The kitchen reeked of stale egg rolls. Chinese food turned his stomach. He walked upstairs and went through Nancy's and Johnny's rooms. Dudley told Ray Pinker that he found the rooms "engaging."

Ashida tossed the rooms. Ashida got the gist.

Nancy padlocked the connecting door to Johnny's room. Johnny hoarded smutty magazines and Nazi comic books. Johnny possessed padded jockstraps. They were padded with Japanese flags and Nancy's underwear.

Ashida ran his face over them. The smell aroused him. He trembled. He put them back in the drawer.

He walked to Ryoshi and Aya's room. He saw the hate tract on the dresser. He bagged it and tagged it: "Watanabe/Highland Park/5:34 p.m., 12/7/41."

There—the wall note.

Ashida studied the characters and their placement on the page. Pinker walked in. Ashida translated.

" 'The looming apocalypse is not of our doing. We have been good citizens and did not know that it was coming.' "

Pinker said, "We've got *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, right at the gate. We've got four dead Japanese the day before Japan attacks a U.S. territory. Is that what the note refers to?"

Ashida shook his head. "The 'apocalypse' could mean mass suicide or an inevitable world conflict, with no foreknowledge of this morning's attack itself. 'Apocalypse' could pertain to potential ramifications for individual members of the family or the family as a whole. The note is entirely ambiguous."

Pinker said, "Exactly. And the real question is whether or not the note was coerced, because the consensus is we've got homicide."

Ashida said, "Exactly. The characters are wobbly, it's a male script, and Mr. Watanabe would certainly have been under duress if he were planning seppuku. But, the characters are *extremely* wobbly, even by textbook suicide-note standards."

"We could call it a variant. It's the equivalent of the hesitation marks the swords made when they pierced the bodies."

Ashida studied the paper stock. It was thick and had a cloth content. He tapped dust on his print brush. He ran it over the note and stepped back for more light.

Smears and smudges. One blurred partial. A *badly fragmented* partial —half-eclipsed by a smooth glove print.

Pinker pointed to it. "There. The glove print indicates that someone was guiding the note writer's hand. There's your coercion, right on the page."

Ashida saw a notepad on the dresser. He walked over and studied the top page. It was a grocery list. The characters resembled the characters on the wall note. It was adult-male script. There were no fluctuations, indicating duress.

Pinker came over. "Identical. It has to be Ryoshi."

They walked up to the wall note. A breeze hit the room. Print powder puffed in the air.

Ashida said, "Let's call it coercion. If that's the case, and the killer wasn't Japanese, he ran the risk of Mr. Watanabe writing a note to the police that the killer himself couldn't read."

Pinker smiled. "I know what you're saying, but you should be the one to say it."

Ashida said, "I would surmise that the killer *is* Japanese."

Pinker bowed, mock-solemn. Ashida smiled and bowed back.

That phonograph kicked on outside. Father Coughlin launched a hate harangue, backed by Gaelic lutes. Pinker rolled his eyes and walked downstairs. Ashida stepped into the hallway.

Do the textbook exercise. Let your thoughts disperse and accrue. Let your eyes drift and see.

Stand there. It's a Buddhist practice, 2000 B.C. Your vile countrymen ignore such traditions. You are of them. You were born to the Samurai class and forged by the Reformation. Japanese customs formed you. Lutheran zealots schooled you. You are equal parts rigid view and the mind untethered. Let this horror house speak to you.

Ashida stood there. He thought of Bucky's fight tonight. He saw

Bucky in the Belmont showers. His old trip-wire gizmo snapped secret nudes. His new gizmo snapped pix at 6th and Spring. That man outside the drugstore. A Bucky manqué. Handsome, but not lovely and —

Ashida blinked. A trip-wire bulb popped.

He noticed a hallway shelf. It was lined with jade knickknacks. A small bottle was wedged behind a small jade temple. Note that frayed label.

Ashida snatched the bottle. A label strip read "Morphine Paregoric." There was no discernible pharmacy name.

Whalen's Drugstore yesterday. The bandit rifles bottles on one shelf. Said bottles: *morphine paregoric*.

Two crimes the same day. Matching details accrued.

Ashida retrieved his evidence kit and dusted the bottle. The smears meant *no more details accrued*.

He stood in the hallway. He heard Dudley's boys bullshitting outside. His eyes traveled. He saw dust motes and a bug on the wall.

The walls, the ceiling. Chipped paint, cobwebs, wait—

Anomaly. Inconsistency. Red-alert flaw.

Note the ceiling-wood strips, laid in lengthwise. Note the parallel seams. The seams disrupt the wood-grain flow. They are crosshatched and barely detectable. They form a two-foot square.

Ashida jumped and aimed his hands. He hit the middle of the square. The square flew back, off an inside hinge. A set of collapsible stairs dropped to the floor.

Metal stairs with rubber foot grips. Soundless, well oiled.

Ashida climbed up them. A slight tug made them retract. The square slid down flat in that movement. The apparatus operated off gears and air-filled cylinders.

A room. Less than an attic. More than a crawl space.

He stood at his full height. He pulled out his penlight and ran the beam. No windows. Lacquered plywood walls. One table, one chair.

On the table: a shortwave radio and ledger. The radio was hooked up to a tape-recording device.

The room was cold. His breath fogged. It was a somewhat cool evening. His breath should not condense. The room was probably soundproofed. Insulation panels trapped cold air.

He turned on the radio. The needle-and-tuning display lit up green. The dial numbers made no sense. He jiggled the volume knob—*be careful now*.

A man shrieked in Japanese. He defamed the United States. It was the "Land of the White Centipedes." He lauded the Emperor's divine triumph in Hawaii this morning.

The tape spools spun. Ashida studied the hookup. It was highly sophisticated. Yes, surely—radio voices activated the tape rig's starter gears. Magnets and radio signals—stunning mechanics.

Ashida pushed a button recessed below the spools. A new Japanese voice fomented. He stated the time and date: 2:00 p.m. yesterday. Chronology: the Watanabes died ninety minutes later.

The man howled. It was rabid-dog propaganda. He spoke native Japanese. Ashida spoke an American hybrid. Phrases slipped by him. The gist was plain. The man described preparations for the attack.

Ashida listened in Japanese. Ashida lost words on a brain spool to English.

He sweated up his clothes. His pulse soared. His breath came out hot and turned to cold steam. The man defamed the United States. It was "a mongrel nation who will die under the hooves of Imperial Japan."

The rant devolved into animal sounds. Ashida turned off the radio. The display light faded to pinpoints. He pushed tape-rig buttons. The spools turned back and forth and repeated the lunatic's words. Yes—yesterday's broadcast was the only recording extant.

He turned off the tape rig. He caught his breath and recited the "Gloria Patria." *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to*—

He forgot the English words. He finished in Japanese. His heart rate settled. He caught his breath and examined the ledger.

Thirty pages. Japanese characters. Dated entries going back three months. Surely *this:* shortwave radio broadcasts, transcribed.

Preparations for the attack. Soliloquies on male honor. A treatise on the erotic throes of kamikaze death.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall—

He lost the rest. He shut the ledger. He flashed his light on the walls. He saw indentations on a wall panel and pushed an edge in.

The panel creaked and opened into a closet. Ashida unplugged the radio and tape rig and laid them in. He curled up the electrical cords and placed the ledger on top. He shut the door and leaned on it.

He slid to the floor. He placed his head on his knees and took one hundred deep breaths. The room spun in time with his exhales and settled back in straight. He held his penlight in his teeth and got out his notebook and pen.

He wrote out a case brief. It was *his* case now. These were notes that no one else would ever see.

"Watanabes on FBI's A-1 Fifth Column list. (Capt. W. H. Parker told R. Pinker this.)

"Hidden shortwave radio at house/foreknowledge of attack on Hawaii.

"Near-identical gunshots and bullet fragments at Whalen's

Drugstore and house.

"German & Japanese moneys at house.

"Morphine paregoric bottles disrupted at drugstore/morphine paregoric bottle discarded at house.

"Deutsches Haus: pro-fascist gathering spot. Lugers known to be sold illegally there."

He heard something outside. It got through the soundproofing. That phonograph, out in the street. Muted brass, low woodwinds. A slow-tempo "Perfidia."

Ashida stood up. He felt Shinto calm. He opened the trapdoor and released the steps. The landing looked garish now. He had it all to himself.

He walked down the steps and pushed them back. The door slid into place. "Perfidia" faded. He heard Jack Webb laughing, out on the porch.

He walked downstairs. Ray Pinker buttonholed him.

"Did you find anything else?"

Ashida said, "No."

"I'm hungry. And don't suggest Kwan's, because this place still smells like breakfast."

Ashida smiled. "Will Dudley steer the case the way Horrall and Bowron want it?"

Pinker powdered his print brush. "Unless pious Bill Parker goes on a bender and gets his dick in a twist."

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1941

War fever.

The prelims went by, ignored. The national anthem got more applause than all three bouts. A huge flag cinched to a girder fluttered above the ring. The Olympic Auditorium buzzed. Nobody talked boxing. Everybody talked war.

Conversations were impossible; it was just that loud. People talked to one another and at one another, regardless. We were here to be with other people and mark this moment. We were Americans out on the town. We were jazzed up, indignant and proud.

Scotty and I sat four rows back from ringside. Mexican bantamweights held no interest for us. We kept our heads together and whispered; I held Scotty's arm while he rested a hand on my knee.

We spent the day on the Federal Building steps and around the corner at the cafeteria. We traded personal anecdotes and came to the aid of a young Japanese man trying to enlist. Scotty secured his Marine Corps papers. I got a glimpse of Captain William H. Parker and waved him off imperiously.

The man was a rankling presence now. Elmer Jackson had succinctly indicted him. Certain questions troubled me. They undermined this slice of early wartime je ne sais quoi.

Will Elmer tip Chief Horrall to my tap-transcription duty? What specifically does Parker know about me? Will Parker expose Lee for the murder of Abe Reles, and does he even know about it past phone-tap smears? Will Parker cross Dudley Smith over *that* matter? What does Parker want from me?

Scotty squeezed my knee and ran his hand under my hemline. I squeezed his arm and laughed. He said something; I couldn't hear it; I said something back and could not hear my own voice. Scotty smelled like my smoke and his own lime cologne. I wanted to draw him like I drew Bucky. I held my breath for the main event and Bucky's walk to the ring.

Scotty had borrowed his father's car for his enlistment run and had parked it in a lot on Bunker Hill. We walked back to retrieve our cars and caravan to the Olympic. We passed Central Station en route. The newly formed "Alien Squad" was just rolling out. Elmer and Lee were among the cops brandishing pump shotguns. We watched them walk east, toward Little Tokyo. A K-car pulled into the parking lot. Two cops hauled out three Japanese boys and shoved them through the jail door.

A Sousa march came over the loudspeakers and distorted all the raised voices. I heard a commotion and looked around. Bob Hope led a dozen sailors into the ring.

We all stood up and cheered. The music died or merged with the cheers—I couldn't tell which. Bob Hope grabbed the ring mike and laid down a run of jokes. Nobody heard him. We didn't want to hear him. We couldn't stop cheering and living out the moment.

Hope gave up and waved to the crowd. Our cheers became foot stomps and whistles. Hope led the sailors out of the ring and up to a row of back seats. Cops whisked him out to the lobby. His performance ran less than three minutes.

We all sat down. I held Scotty's hands in my lap. I saw a handsome young Japanese man enter the arena and walk to the second row. He wore a Belmont High letter jacket; he attracted a range of curious and plainly hostile looks.

People looked, people whispered, people stared outright. People muttered "*Jap*" and issued catcalls.

The microphone dropped from the rafters again. The announcer entered the ring.

A main event roar smothered further invective; the Japanese man settled into his seat. Yells and locomotive claps covered the introductions. I already knew the statistics by heart.

Ten rounds of boxing, in the light-heavyweight division. Wardell "Junior" Wilkins, the "Sepia Sensation," 22, 4, and 16. And, now, still undefeated at 35–0—Glassell Park's own "Tricky" Bucky Bleichert!

I squeezed Scotty's hand and laced up our fingers. A spindly Negro man jogged out and ducked into the ring. A barrage of boos greeted him. The few Negroes in the colored section gave him his only cheers.

The referee and cornermen hopped in the ring. The young Japanese man turned his head and looked back down the aisle; our eyes met for an instant. He kept looking. I turned my head and followed his line of sight. Bucky popped out of a dressing room and danced on his toes.

He wore his Belmont black-and-green robe. He flashed his buck teeth and raised a glove to salute his dead mother in heaven. I lost my breath, like I always do. Bucky passed by our row. He stopped at the second aisle and stuck a gloved hand out. The Japanese man tapped the glove. Bucky smiled at him. The man's eyes welled with tears.

Some people saw it and booed. Bucky ducked under the bottom ring rope and showed the crowd his teeth. I got frightened for him and hungry for him, like I always do. It always flutters through me the same way.

A cornerman popped in his mouthpiece and removed his robe. *Mine:* the sweet Lutheran boy with the Jewish star on his trunks.

The referee issued instructions. Bucky and the Sepia Sensation touched gloves. I looked up at Greta Heilbrunner Bleichert, despite my disdain for heavenly pap.

The bell rang. Bucky circled, Wilkins charged. Bucky was a good five inches taller. He flicked his jab at the scar tissue above Wilkins' eyes and stayed outside his range.

I squeezed Scotty's hand. It meant *Be still now*. Bucky worked outside-in. He was "taking his opponent's pulse" for a "blind-date introduction." He was "measuring" Junior Wilkins for a "cheap-shot right hand." Lee Blanchard taught me fight strategy and lingo.

Wilkins swung a haymaker. Bucky sidestepped it and left-hooked to the body. Wilkins' knees dipped. Bucky threw a double jab. Wilkins' right-eyebrow scar opened up and leaked blood down his cheek.

The bell rang. Wilkins was winded already. Bucky danced back to his corner and waved to the Japanese man. Scotty said, "Sambo's out on his feet."

I'd squeezed my hand numb. I unlaced our fingers and held Scotty's palm to my cheek. Scotty flashed his stunning kid grin.

The bell rang. I turned back to the ring. The Japanese man diverted me. He mimicked Bucky's feints as he watched him. It was perfectly concurrent mimicry.

Wilkins came in with coagulant smeared to his eyebrow; Bucky flick-flick-flicked jabs at it. I saw intent all over him. I knew the look. It was certainty replacing apprehension. Wilkins' cut opened up and dripped blood; Wilkins pawed at it. He blinked at the precise wrong moment. Bucky measured him for a cheap-shot right and delivered it.

Wilkins went down. He hit his head on the canvas and spit out his mouthpiece. The referee waved the fight over and raised Bucky's hand. Bucky waved to the Japanese man. The crowd stood up and applauded. Wilkins rolled over and crawled up on his feet.

Bucky hugged him. Reporters and photographers ducked under the ropes and eclipsed my view. My legs were weak; I tried to stand and slid back in my seat. Scotty helped me up. We joined the quick march out to the parking lot.

Scotty kept an arm around me. I watched people watching him and noticed them pause. Women were curious. Full-grown men possessed of fine éclat were wary of a twenty-year-old kid.

I turned around and blew Bucky a furtive kiss. The Japanese man diverted me. He was the only one still in his seat.

Scotty got me to my car. I pulled out onto 18th and Grand, ahead of the fight crowd. Scotty drove right behind me. We took Washington west and La Cienega north. Lee was probably out with the Alien Squad or over at Kwan's Chinese Pagoda. I didn't think I'd see his car in our driveway.

Scotty stuck close behind me and played a kid game with his headlights. It was a kind of Morse code: low and high beams, on and off. I watched my rearview mirror and tried to make sense out of it. I think he was trying to spell out "I Love You."

We turned west on the Strip and north on Wetherly. Lee's car was gone. I parked in the driveway and left room for Scotty. I thought about Bucky and a new sketch to draw from memory.

We got out of our cars. Scotty slid on the damp pavement and bumped into me. I steadied him. He put his hands on my shoulders. He said, "Shit, Kay. How come you're so sweet to me?"

I said, "I don't want this day to end. I don't want us to win the war until I learn a few things."

Scotty touched the part in my hair. "I intend to win the war all by myself. I'll ease up until you say it's okay."

"What were you trying to tell me with your headlights?"

"Prom-date stuff. I was trying to get it out before I go to boot camp and you go back to your life."

I touched his cheek. "Not just yet, please."

"Am I going to have to fight Lee Blanchard tonight? He was a ranked heavyweight, and I'm not so sure how I'd do."

"Hush. It's a silly-boy idea."

"I'm full of those."

I said, "We're at war now. You're entitled to be."

We kissed then. I thought of Bucky as we leaned in.

The walk upstairs was all fumbles and half-lit hallways. My bedroom was dark; shadows covered the Bucky Bleichert sketches. We fell on the bed and kissed with our clothes on. We undressed slowly. Snapshots, shutter clicks, discovery.

Scotty saw the scars on my legs. He kissed them, but did not comment. He was too tall for my bed. Passing headlights strafed the

Bucky pictures and made him faux-groan. I told him about Sioux Falls. He told me about football at Hollywood High and all the fights he'd been in. I omitted Bobby De Witt, laudanum and coerced prostitution. He revealed that he'd read about the Boulevard-Citizens case. I praised him for not mentioning it at the start.

Midnight came. We made love and talked. Scotty was tender and passionate. He worked hard to please me and succeeded. Sweet boy—thank you for spending this day with me.

I thought about Bucky. Scotty told me about a girl he was with on a visit to his family home in Scotland. His mother died of lupus there. It was 1938. She was only forty-three.

He fell asleep, draped into me. I lay still and blew smoke rings as halos over the bed. Dawn came on; sunlight illuminated Bucky, with Scotty asleep beside me. We woke up and saw each other naked. We silently noted what we'd missed in the dark. We got dressed and had coffee in the kitchen.

I walked him out to his car. We embraced and kissed good-bye. Scotty drove off. I watched him dip down to Sunset Boulevard.

It was cloudy and cold. I looked across the street. Captain William H. Parker stood by a '39 Ford.

December 8, 1941

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LOS ANGELES | MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1941

She saw him and walked straight over. Her hair was mussed. Her lipstick had been kissed off.

She came right up to him. He saw yesterday's clothes and caught her boudoir scent.

"Good morning, Miss Lake."

"You goddamn voyeur. Tell me what you want from me or get the hell out of my life."

"Your amorous ways don't concern me."

"Yes, they do. They concern you and entice you, because you knock on women's doors at night and extort them, because you get your kicks that way, because you have a famously bereft marriage, and you're coming out of your skin with boredom and that slimy, itchy *something* that drives brutal men like you."

Parker leaned on his car. He felt dizzy.

"I won't say it's the pot calling the kettle black. I won't deny that I tend to watch and stare. I won't say that your amorous ways don't intrigue me."

She made fists. "Goddamn you, Captain. Goddamn you for toying with me."

"Or for *seeing* you? Or for recognizing something that you want seen, because you're coming out of your own skin with your idiot attitudes and jejune notions, and your utterly fatuous belief that you're smarter, stronger and better than every other human being on God's green fucking earth, and isn't it a pity that no one else knows it?"

She stepped toward him. Their arms brushed. Her body was warm.

"Say 'yet,' Captain. Say 'no one else knows it *yet*.'' Because recognition's a two-way street. Because you can go to war, and I can't. Because you can lock up criminals to sate your petty need for order, and I can't. Because you can rise to Chief, rule your little world and move people around at whim like the shrill martinet that you are—but whatever you do, don't underestimate the fact that *I* see *you*."

Parker stepped back. "Have I convinced you that Lee Blanchard is dirty beyond your previous imaginings?"

"In your grossly manipulative and circuitous way, yes. The recordings put some things together for me, as you knew they would. But since I've known that Lee is capable of anything for some time, I'm truly not that surprised."

Stay strong, Katherine. Validate my belief in your silly-girl grit.

"I hope you won't confront Blanchard with anything you may have extrapolated from the recordings."

Kay Lake stepped back. "I hope you won't ask me what I figured out or discipline Lee in any manner."

Parker nodded. "I'm assuming that you spoke to your friends Sergeant Jackson and Miss Allen about me, and that you described the task I assigned you."

"I have, but I should tell you that they were nonplussed. And I seriously doubt that whatever you have planned for me concerns Brenda and Elmer or police-sanctioned prostitution. I would say that they have nothing to worry about, and I think you should permit me to tell them not to fret."

Parker nodded. Light rain hit. Wind tossed the girl's hair.

"You know and see so much. I'm astonished at how your actions betray your powers of insight and reveal you to be a reckless child out of her depth."

Kay Lake laughed. "That's a perceptive insight—from a man trying to drown me."

Parker checked his watch. The Bit O' Sweden was straight down on Sunset. Dudley was due at 9:00.

The rain hit harder. Parker opened the driver's door. Kay Lake got in behind the wheel. His cigarettes were on the dashboard. She helped herself.

Parker got in the passenger side. Rain hit the windshield and obscured the street.

"I won't transcribe any more recordings, and I don't think you want me to. We both know that we should keep Brenda, Elmer and Lee out of this, whatever 'this' is."

Parker shook out a cigarette. Kay Lake passed him hers for the light.

"The wedge wasn't necessary, was it? You're just round-heeled enough to take whatever I offer you."

Kay Lake cracked the wind wing. Her hair was wet. The light streaks in with the auburn glowed.

"Test my boundaries, Captain. It may surprise you, but they do exist."

Parker smiled. "*Now*, Miss Lake?"

“Yes. *Now* would be just fine.”

Parker said, “You’re going to infiltrate a Hollywood Fifth Column cell. They’re wholly seditious and deserve to be crushed. They’ve been investigated by the California State Committee on Un-American Activities and are currently disseminating anti-American and more specifically anti–Los Angeles Police Department propaganda, yet more specifically pertaining to the possible mistreatment and imprisonment of allegedly innocent foreign-born and native-born Japanese, now all the more relevant since yesterday’s attack. Dare I say that there *will* be a fair-minded scrutiny of the Jap contingent in Los Angeles. It will be judiciously enacted, and some arrests are likely to occur. The members of this cell are unscrupulous and ideologically insane. They will smear our country and my police force with huge strokes of Red paint. They will toe the Communist Party line and attempt to further the designs of Soviet Russia, once the Allies have won this war, as we inevitably will, and global Communist encroachment emerges as the chief threat to our internal security and the safety of the free world.”

Kay Lake said, “It’s a mad and presumptuous undertaking. It’s as questionable as you consider it to be certain.”

“Don’t stop there.”

“You haven’t worked pandemic racial bias into your equation. Since I’ve seen it already, I would urge you to.”

Parker tossed out his cigarette. Kay Lake tossed hers. Their knees brushed. Fucking rain. The car was a steam room.

“Will your concern for our Japanese citizenry prevent you from accepting this assignment?”

“No.”

“Am I crossing your boundaries in any way?”

“No.”

Parker pointed to the backseat. “Los Angeles Police, Federal and state Subversive Squad reports on Claire De Haven, Reynolds Loftis, Chaz Minear, and some subsidiary scum. We’re going to build a derogatory profile on them. We’re going to see them indicted for sedition and/or treason and see to the destruction of their cell through coercive means. Your job is entrapment. You are to be a stool pigeon, a snitch, a rat and a fink. If those appellations offend you, *c’est la guerre*. You are an informant. You will collect incriminating information and report it to me. You are a wayward young woman with a traumatically checkered criminal past. I am betting that the Red Queen will find you irresistible.”

Kay Lake said, “It’s a matriarchy. I like that aspect.”

“Paul Robeson is appearing at Philharmonic Hall tonight. You will attend, sans escort. You will meet Claire De Haven and whatever fey men she brings as her escorts. You will steer the conversation to psychotherapy. The Communist Party psychiatrist in Los Angeles is a man named Saul Lesnick. He is a Federal informant. He tends to the psychic needs of Miss De Haven and her slaves, as he concurrently reveals the shallow breadth of those needs to his Federal handler. Dr. Lesnick is also a *coerced* informant, who is quite vividly susceptible to young women. You will endeavor to meet Dr. Lesnick. Do not tell him that you are also an informant. I want him to unwittingly collude with you."

Kay Lake hugged the steering wheel. Her brown eyes were incongruous. They clashed with her auburn hair.

Parker said, "Tell me what you're thinking."

She said, "I'm too thrilled to speak."

He walked down to Sunset. He walked for a chance to view Kay Lake on the sly. She cut across to her porch. He heard a radio. She tuned in Roosevelt's congressional address.

The Bit O' Sweden was overheated. The waitresses wore dirndl skirts. They looked like Nazi cheerleaders five thousand miles displaced. Beer steins dangled off wall pegs. The décor connoted Hitler at play.

Parker grabbed a window table. The sky cleared a bit. The Strip was lined with fake Christmas trees. Mock snow covered the sidewalk.

A tall redhead walked by. She looked like Joan from Northwestern. She was a Navy lieutenant j.g.

The blues, the gold sleeve bands. That stride, maybe it's—

Parker ran outside. The woman was gone. A '36 Dodge pulled away from the curb.

He walked back inside. A zaftig waitress brought coffee. The rain kicked back on. A *Herald* truck drove by. The side-panel blowup read WAR!

Parker sipped coffee. The wall clock tapped 9:00. Dudley Smith walked to the table.

They shook hands. Dudley said, "Good morning, sir." Parker said, "Good morning, Sergeant."

Etiquette. They observed it at work. Catholic fellowship. They called each other "Bill" and "Dud" around Archbishop Cantwell.

Parker said, "You missed Mass yesterday. His Eminence was peeved."

"It was an inconvenient homicide, sir. I said a novena for the dead Japs, in acknowledgment of the Sabbath. I was up late writing you a first summary, by the way. I routed it to your office at Traffic."

Parker stirred his coffee. "I read it this morning, so I assume I'm up-to-date. You lost crucial time on the canvass. Were you waiting for

Nort Layman's disposition?"

"Yes. I sent Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle out belatedly, last night. They got nothing. The dead Japs kept to themselves. They were polite and properly diffident to their white neighbors. They had extremely occasional Jap visitors. They did not string Jap lanterns across their property to celebrate their heathen holidays and did not comport in the mysterious ways we Occidentals have come to expect from our Jap brethren. No one noted anything suspicious near the house during the Saturday-afternoon time frame of the presumed homicides, and given yesterday's events, I would surmise that the white stiffs of Highland Park will not tax their minds for those buried memories that sometimes reappear and solve murder cases."

Parker said, "Background checks?"

Dudley said, "They'll be undertaken, but I'd call them futile. Papa and mama were born in Japan, the children were native-born. They weren't Christian, so you won't find family, birth, death, baptismal and marriage records in any of the conveniently located Jap churches in Little Tokyo. Our bright colleague Dr. Ashida examined the religious geegaws in the house and anointed the dead Japs as of the Shinto persuasion. As Sergeant Turner 'Buzz' Meeks said last night, 'I like broiled eel as much as the next man, but all of this is Greek to me.' "

Parker smiled. "Property-records check?"

Dudley lit a cigarette. "Not applicable, for the moment. They own the house and a truck farm in the Valley, but Secretary of War Stimson has issued a Federal seizure order for the property of the Japs on the A-1 subversive list, which Ray Pinker tells me includes our very own dead Japs. With our country in its current state of agitation, I would say that we won't be able to cut through the Federal red tape necessary to get at those records for some time."

Parker lit a cigarette. "The son and daughter. Your description of their bedrooms was quite vivid."

Dudley twirled his ashtray. "I don't see their implicitly perverted relationship as being germane to the case, but that avenue is being explored. The dead lad and lassie attended Nightingale Junior High and Franklin High School, and Sergeants Breuning and Meeks roused the registrars of those lackluster institutions last night and grilled them per the dead Japlets. The registrars described them as 'decent kids,' 'quiet kids,' 'kids who didn't fraternize with white kids' and 'kids who got average grades and stuck to themselves.' "

Parker kicked it around. Parker looked out the window. Rain, rain and rain.

"The pharmacy heist, the gunshots at the two locations, the silencer threads?"

Dudley said, "We'll be checking gun-sales records and robbery reports, but we'll be coming up against the established fact that only one gun purchaser in six complies with state firearms-registration laws and actually registers their guns. That, and the established fact that Japs are clannish, that Japs sell guns to other Japs exclusively, and that the heist man at the drugstore yesterday was quite obviously a white man. Granted, I consider our dead Japs quite dicey. That stated, homicide is nearly always a closed racial circle, and I do not see a white heist man as a logical suspect in a feigned ritual-suicide murder case."

Parker shook his head. "Hot potato. You've got forty-three Federal agents, Sheriff's deputies and our Alien Squad working Little Tokyo. Nobody gives a shit about anything but the war, and why should they?"

Dudley said, "Why indeed?"

"Let's go back to 'quite dicey.' I'm thinking of the hate tract and the Axis currency you found at the house."

Dudley shook his head. "Hate tracts are fiendishly difficult to trace. The post office boxes listed on them are often designations for mail drops that hate merchants and pornographers use to muddle the trail of their filth. It's a form of collusion that requires the aid of local postal carriers, and even the most seasoned postal inspectors find this sort of investigation problematic."

Carl Hull knew hate tracts. He should call him and inquire. He should thank him for Kay Lake.

Parker said, "The currency."

Dudley said, "Yes, I find it interesting as well."

"Politics."

"Yes, 'politics.' "

"The A-1 list."

"Yes. I think we should start there. I'll be going down to Terminal Island. The Fort MacArthur MPs have a veritable invasion force of Japs in custody there."

Parker said, "It's our logical first step."

Dudley said, " 'Closed racial circle.' We're guided by that concept. We should keep an open mind and still cleave to it."

"You're the homicide man, Sergeant. How likely is a non-Jap suspect for this thing?"

"Very highly *un*likely, sir."

Parker looked out the window. Rain, rain, rain. War headlines, war on the radio. Kill-the-Japs table chat.

"*Cold* potato. The Japs sank the *Arizona*. They're going for the Philippines now. You can't run a homicide case in this kind of atmosphere."

Dudley smiled. His eyes twinkled.

"It's a dead-ender, sir. I'll give it the old college try, but I'm not optimistic. In the end, we'll find that the killings derived from a grave misdeed in feudal Japan. A Jap warlord fucked another Jap warlord's goat without first seeking permission. That transgression has festered for centuries. It finally came to a head on Avenue 45 in Highland Park, the day before the Japs grievously erred and bombed our grand fleet at Pearl Harbor."

Parker laughed. "Keep your boys leashed. Don't frame or kill anyone. This case isn't worth it."

Dudley walked out. Parker kicked blood back in his legs. He was nerve-cramped the whole time.

Rain, rain and rain. Drink, shut the world out, walk back up Wetherly. Sleep it off in the car. She might be out on the porch. She might strike poses.

Parker ordered a double bourbon. The first sip burned. He toasted the Pearl Harbor dead and replayed the test blackout.

He took his black-and-white. He traveled sans headlights. The blackout ran 5:00 to 7:00 a.m. He monitored the Department's two coastline divisions. He drove the coast road from San Pedro to Venice and caught dawn on the sea. No streetlights or traffic lights. House lights and car lights were off. Aircraft spotters were out on the beach. No Jap planes hovered or streaked. They had no glow to sight by and no targets to seek.

He cruised inland and checked individual houses. They were per-guideline dark. He peered through window-shade gaps. He saw strips of light and heard radios. FDR defamed the Japs—over and over.

Twenty-odd houses, all guideline dark. Let's reprise Deadwood in 1916.

Voyeur. The Lake girl called him that. He was fourteen in '16. He peered in brothel windows while his father fought the Great War. William H. Parker II came home with The Thirst. He reprised William H. Parker I, after the Civil War truce. Two Army captains. Antietam and the Argonne. War begets The Thirst.

Parker stared out the window. The zaftig waitress brought refills. He thought about Joan and the Lake girl. He fed The Thirst and watched their faces merge.

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LOS ANGELES | MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1941

Visit cell block 9 at T.I. It's *the* Jap hot spot in Pedro.

Four tiers. Twelve cells per. Two hundred and sixteen men and forty-two women.

Dudley brought Mike Breuning, Dick Carlisle and Buzz Meeks. They rehearsed interrogation skits on the ride down. The boys were war-fevered. Dudley nixed their enlistment plans.

"We're the home-front vanguard, lads. We have meddlesome tasks to fulfill before we can run off to glory."

They hogged a guard stand. They skimmed subversive lists. MPs lounged nearby. A catwalk adjoined the stand. Male Japs were sardine-packed, six per cell. They looked forlorn and fucked-up.

Breuning said, "This is a humbug job. The action's in the Philippines. Who gives a shit who killed the fucking Watanabes?"

Carlisle said, "Jack Webb's going for the Air Corps. He'll be bombing Tokyo before we clear this case."

Meeks said, "There's Jap subs off the coast, as far south as Santa Barbara. KFI ran a spot on it this morning."

Dudley skimmed the "A" summary. The Watanabes were listed. They were "known fascist sympathizers." Two known associates were named.

Hikaru "Tachi" Tachibana. Born 4/29/03—Kyoto, Japan. Suspected Japanese spy. Popped near the Douglas Aircraft plant in Santa Monica. The date: 3/12/40. In his possession: a peewee camera loaded with infrared film.

Tachibana was released on bail and slated for deportation. Judicial proceedings occurred. Tachibana absconded. He was rumored to be lost in Mexico.

"Frequently seen at the Watanabe produce farm (San Fernando Valley) prior to his disappearance."

KA no. 2: James "Jimmy the Jap" Namura. Born 11/9/07—L.A. "Known criminal and pro-fascist." Preston Reform School grad, grifter, dope peddler. Pushed maryjane at Nightingale Junior High.

"Frequently seen at the Watanabe produce farm (San Fernando Valley) early 1941."

Breuning said, "The check mark by Namura's name means he's in custody here. And the Watanabe kids went to Nightingale."

Dudley said, "Find the tier sergeant. Have Mr. Namura placed in that interview room we passed on our way in."

Breuning scrammed. Carlisle said, "The Feds are all over Little Tokyo. They're tossing the Japs in our divisional jails. I talked to a guy on the Alien Squad. He said the Sheriff's are clearing out the horse paddocks at Santa Anita. Call-Me-Jack thinks we'll be at our booking capacity by next week."

Meeks spat chaw juice in an ashtray. "It ain't right. Most of these fuckers just want to eat broiled eel and put the boots to mama. This is one big upscut that don't have to be."

Carlisle *slooooooow*-burned. Breuning whistled and waved. They ambled to the sweat room.

The door featured a two-way mirror. Inside: a floor-bolted table and chairs. On the table: a fat phone book. By the table: Jimmy the Jap Namura, perched in a chair.

Note the duck's-ass haircut and swastika tattoo. Note the hophead gaze.

They walked in and locked in. They hovered by the table. Jimmy the Jap giggled. Dudley signaled the lads.

Meeks said, "Remember Pearl Harbor."

Breuning and Carlisle grabbed Jimmy the Jap and threw him against the wall.

He crashed and bounced. He was thin. It made a flyswatter sound. Breuning snatched the phone book and smacked him in the head. He curled up, centipede-style.

Meeks said, "Enough of that. Mr. Namura is an American citizen."

Carlisle said, "Bullshit. This is a kangaroo court, and he's the kangaroo."

Jimmy the Jap pissed his pants. The lap lake spread to his knees.

Breuning arced the phone book. Dudley pulled his arm down and got in whisper tight.

"Have the tier sergeant locate Mr. Namura's arrest log. It should include an inventory of the items found at his dwelling. We're looking for phenobarbital, morphine paregoric, Axis monies, hate tracts, a silencer-fitted Luger and tools to fashion silencers."

Breuning lammed. Meeks dumped Jimmy the Jap back in his chair. Carlisle smacked him with the phone book. The swat dislodged a gold tooth. It fell on the table and spun.

Jimmy the Jap giggled. Dudley signaled Carlisle and Meeks. Carlisle fed Jimmy the Jap a cigarette. Meeks fed him his hip flask. Jimmy the Jap sucked on the tit.

Note the grateful shudder. Note the now slow-pulsing veins.

Dudley straddled a chair. “Your known associate Ryoshi Watanabe and his family were killed Saturday afternoon. The manner of death was simulated hara-kiri. I’m looking for a convenient Japanese scapegoat, and recent geopolitical events have convinced me that you fit the bill. Your job is to dissuade me. Begin by exonerating yourself. Continue with a primer on the Watanabe family. Entertain me with your knowledge and perception, or you will die in the green room at San Quentin Prison within three months’ time.”

Jimmy the Jap sucked bourbon. His heathen pallor flushed.

“I was at a graduation party up at Preston. A kid I know topped out a three-spot. We got some Tulare gash and fucked them.”

Carlisle said, “Where did you fuck them?”

Jimmy the Jap giggled. “Where do you think? In the snatch.”

Dudley said, “The location, lad.”

Jimmy the Jap tee-heed. “The Sleepytime Lodge, right off the 101. It’s a dodge the bulls at Preston work. They peddle twat for graduation parties. The girls cut them in for 20%.”

Meeks said, “What time did you check in?”

“About noon, Tex. I’ve seen you in pictures, you know. You’re always the fat guy on the spotted horse who never says anything.”

Dudley smiled. “Sergeant Meeks enjoyed a career as a cowboyfilm extra before he became a policeman. He had a grand speaking role in *Shootout at Crested Butte*.”

Jimmy the Jap tipped the flask. “I was in a two-reeler once. It was down in T.J. We fed a Mex girl some Spanish fly and got her all hopped-up. She took on me, two beaners and a Doberman pinscher named Rex.”

Meeks said, “What time did you check out of the lodge?”

“Rex had a big dick. It looked like a dousing rod.”

Carlisle waved the phone book. Jimmy the Jap mock-cringed.

“We checked out about 9:00. We clouted a ’36 DeSoto at an auto court off the ridge route and drove to L.A. We hit a Bund rally at Hindenburg Park and gassed on the fräuleins and beer. The gash and my pal peeled off in the DeSoto. I caught a ride with a Nazi cat named Fritz. We smoked a reefer and discussed the Jew question. He dropped me at my place about 1:00. I was still asleep when the Feds popped me. They said, ‘Your people bombed Hawaii, punk!’ I said, ‘So what? What’s that got to do with me?’ ”

Breuning walked in. He signaled Dudley: *Nix, nein, nyet*.

Carlisle said, “Give us some names. Your pal, the girls, the Nazi guy’s last name.”

Dudley flashed the cutoff sign. "The Watanabes, lad. What can you tell us about them?"

Jimmy the Jap went *Light me*. Carlisle fed him a cigarette. Jimmy the Jap drained the flask and tossed it to Meeks.

"Ryoshi was in with half the fraternal societies on the West Coast. You know, all those old-country feudal cats. I met him at a track meet at Lincoln High. We used to drink Ma Huang tea and gas on world events. Ryoshi was off the deep end on the Emperor, eugenics and eradicating the Chinks. He was gone on the notion of the worldwide Japanese hegemony. I told him all we needed was Asia, let the *Führer* take care of the Reds and the Jews, and don't fuck with the United States. I'm embarrassed, boss. I got no beef with the American white man. Pearl Harbor wasn't my idea."

Dudley grinned. "You are a charming witness, Mr. Namura. Please continue with your intriguing discourse on the Watanabe family."

Jimmy the Jap rocked his chair. "He was a secretive cat, Ryoshi. He went to meetings here and there, but he never spilled on who he saw or what he knew. He figured the Hitler-Tojo boys would win the war, so he converted all his U.S. coin into reichsmarks and yen, which may have been premature, given the latest news from the Russian front. He was running his farm on a shoestring, and he brought me up for a couple of weeks last winter, to ride herd on his slaves. His pickers were all wetbacks. The Mex Staties supplied them. Ryoshi told me the jefe was a Statie captain named Carlos Madrano. He pushed heroin down in Baja and was some kind of crime boss down there. I saw him once. He wore this snazzy outfit. Black shirt, jodhpurs, jackboots. He was *muy fascista, ándale pues*."

Grand Carlos, adroitly observed. Wetback runner—old news. *Heroin? New news*.

Dudley signaled the boys. They got out their notebooks. Breuning tossed the change-up.

"What about mama? What have you got on her?"

"What's to get? She wore kimonos and bowed a lot. She walked out of rooms backward. She limped because Ryoshi made her bind her feet."

Meeks said, "What about those fraternal societies? What have you got in the way of names?"

Jimmy the Jap laughed. "I've got nothing, because I don't speak Japanese. I dig the lore and the politics, but those fraternal guys take it all the way to the Middle Ages. What's the point of establishing a new world order if you can't accommodate a new generation? It's like I said. Ryoshi knew those guys and went to those meetings, but he kept it zipped up."

Carlisle said, "Cousins, uncles, other known associates?"

"Nix, boss. Ryoshi and I drank tea and gassed on world events, but that was all that *we* fraternized. I worked up at the farm and saw *El Fascista* nosing around, but I did not partake of the Watanabes' private lives, outside of that."

Breuning said, "Hikaru Tachibana. Ring a bell?"

"Nix, boss. No bells there."

Meeks said, "You pushed maryjane at Nightingale. Did you push to Johnny and Nancy?"

"*Nein, mein Herr*. Some Narco cops kicked the piss out of me in '37, so I put that dodge down and got into politics. I've got a front on Alameda. If you're in the market for rising-sun flags or Nazi armbands, call me."

Breuning said, "Johnny and Nancy. Give on that."

"What's to give? Nancy was a yawn. She wore kimonos in the house and bobby sox to school. Johnny was a snot-nose punk. He was gassed on all of Ryoshi's far-right hoo-haw and dressed like a cholo, but he was strictly a cream puff. He had a pervert streak. He used to peep Nancy. He said she had a thick bush."

Meeks said, "Silencer-equipped Lugers. What's the first thing you think of?"

Jimmy the Jap yawned. "I think 'from hunger.' Guns don't yank my chain, Tex. If you're asking me about that kind of gun or *any* kind of gun and the Watanabes, all I can say is 'I don't know' and 'It doesn't jibe with my truck with them.' "

Breuning said, "You didn't seem surprised when we told you the family had been killed."

Jimmy the Jap scratched his balls. "Nothing surprises me these days. I'm sleeping it off when the Feds kick in my door and tell me I'm Fifth Column. Fifth Column *what*? I sell fascist trinkets, gas on hop and chase cooze. Yeah, I dig the Emperor—but when push comes to shove, give me the old U.S.A."

Dudley slapped his knees. "Mr. Namura, you've exonerated yourself to my satisfaction. Lads, do we have a consensus?"

The boys nodded. Jimmy the Jap said, "I've got one more thing."

"Go ahead, lad. We're listening."

"Ryoshi told me that *El Fascista* and some 'white stiff' owned their place in Highland Park. It was some kind of 'phantom ownership,' 'unofficially recorded,' all that surreptitious jive. *El Fascista* and the stiff were buying lots of Japanese property and were 'planning big things,' which Ryoshi did not elaborate on."

Ryoshi was on the A-1 list. The War Department ordered all A-1 property seized. The property records would be Fed-sealed. Carlos Madrano was tight with Call-Me-Jack. *El Fascista* could not be braced —

Yet.

Dudley stood up. “I will try to get you released, Mr. Namura. In exchange, I will ask that you attempt to determine the verifiable ownership of those Japanese properties you mentioned. My name is Dudley Smith, and I can be reached at City Hall.”

Jimmy the Jap went *Sieg Heil!* Dudley *Sieg Heil!*ed him back.

Breuning and Carlisle yukked. Meeks fish-eyed Dudley. The *Okie* fish eye—quite severe.

Jimmy the Jap said, “*Mein Führer*.”

Dudley bowed. “You honor me, lad. But I must insist that you stop.”

21

LOS ANGELES | MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1941

The farm was way northeast. Dudley's report included a map. The Watanabes grew lettuce and cabbage. A wood carving marked their property line.

日本への門

"Gate to Japan"—carved in kanji script.

Ashida idled his car by the fence. The far-east Valley was Japanese farm turf. The acreage stretched up to the San Gabriels. The soil components sustained vegetable crops.

The Watanabes were dead. Their *braceros* worked on. Scrawny Mexicans. Stoop labor. Plunge that grub hoe, hack those roots.

"Wetbacks." Probably run by Carlos Madrano. *El Capitán* supplied the Ashida farm's workers. Their low pay assured borderline profits. *El Capitán* provided slaves for most of the East Valley farms. He was hooked tight with the PD.

Mexican Staties straw-bossed the Watanabe slaves. They wore starched khakis and SS-style hats. The Feds were out bagging Nisei and Issei. The Staties flaunted fascist garb.

Ashida stepped out of the car. A smell hit him—anomalous, distinct.

It was fish oil. He caught the same smell on broken glass at the Watanabe house. He read Nort Layman's autopsy protocol. It noted shrimp oil on the four victims' feet.

A work boss noticed him. He wore a cross-draw piece and a belt sap. Ashida got in the car and gunned it. He couldn't talk to the workers. It would get back to Dudley.

なぜこのことが気になるのか。*Why do you care about this?*

He was thinking in his native tongue. It was really his *second* tongue. He was birthright American. He was racial-code Japanese. The answer was this:

理由を知らなければならないからだ。*I need to know WHY.*

He cruised perimeter roads. He saw the same setup four times. Japanese farms, Statie slave drivers, desiccated labor crews. Akira was the sole boss at *their* farm. The Statie bosses felt like a new Medrano mandate—*trabajo muy difícil*.

The roads curled southwest. He passed carrot fields. Skinny *braceros* stooped and cut roots. A non sequitur loomed up ahead. Healthy pickers, no *fascistas* in view.

He pulled up to the fence. A Japanese man lounged across the wire. He wore short pants and a pith helmet. He leaned on a long-handled hoe.

Ashida tried native tongue. It felt garbled, straight off.

どうも、芦田という者です。“Do you know Ryoshi Watanabe? He has a farm nearby.”

The man spoke Japanese. He mauled nouns and dropped connecting verbs. “Have not seen Ryoshi lately. Quiet man. Sold farm. Don’t know who to.”

Ashida held up his ID card. The man dead-eyed it. He had no English. Ashida deployed native tongue.

“I’m a police chemist. When did Ryoshi sell his farm? What can you tell me about his family and friends?”

It sounded off-kilter. He was native-tongue rusty.

The man mumbled in Japanese. Ashida fumble-caught the words.

“Family kept to itself. Sold farm recently. Got no cash. Got percentage of crop.”

Ashida built a response. He started to talk and lost words. The man spat at his feet and walked off.

A breeze stirred up dirt. It rose off crop furrows and swirled. Ashida got in the car. *His* farm was close.

He drove though dirt clouds. The road was half-visible. He skittered on gravel all the way there.

His illegals looked fit. *They* had a heated bunkhouse and got Sundays off. *Akira* straw-bossed them. Black-shirted Staties—verboten.

Ashida parked by the truck shack. The breeze leveled off. Dirt clouds went *Poof!*

Akira walked up. He brought Coca-Colas. Ashida slid out of the car and grabbed one.

They clinked bottles. Akira said, “Mariko’s driving me crazy. She hasn’t figured out that it’s a new world now.”

“The FBI has a list. There’s agents and city cops rounding people up.”

“If there’s a list, her name’s on it. She called me this morning. She was half-gassed, and this time you can’t blame her. They’re knocking on doors and hauling away whole families. Half the doors on her floor have been padlocked. It was going on all night.”

Ashida sipped his Coke. It was lukewarm. He tossed it in a trash can.

"She's got an agent baby-sitting her. A captain on the PD set it up. He wants to mollify me, for now. There's a multiple homicide I'm working."

Akira tossed his Coke. "Special Agent Ward J. Littell. Mariko kept saying his name. He knows the way to the old girl's heart, I'll give him that. He boozed and played pinochle with her until 2:00 a.m."

Ashida smiled. "You only call her 'Mariko' when you're angry with her."

"She thinks Father Coughlin's the Pope. She calls the president 'Franklin Double-Cross Rosenfeld.' She told me Pearl Harbor is a 'Zionist encampment.' "

Ashida toed the trash can. "Has anything odd occurred with Captain Madrano? Has anyone tried to buy this place?"

Akira shook his head. "No. Madrano supplies the slaves, and that's it. He gets his cut, says '*Gracias'* and comes back with his hand out the next month. And *nobody* wants this place. The topsoil stinks, and we're harvesting second-class crops."

The wind kicked up dirt. Ashida got back in his car. Akira leaned on the driver's door.

"We're in the shit, Hideo. The goddamn Emperor pops his cork in Tokyo, and we're paying for it in L.A."

Ashida said, "I'm working on something. It could benefit the Department. If I benefit the Department, they'll make efforts to benefit us."

Akira laughed. "*Really?* You trust that calculation like you trust some chemical formula you got from a textbook? You're the only Japanese on the Department. Do you think you'll get civil service protection in all of this?"

A gust rocked the car. Pebbles raked the windshield.

Akira said, "That man Littell told Mariko that the FBI's bringing in Bucky Bleichert. They think he's got some dirt on Nisei subversives. He knows Mariko backward and forward. Do you think he won't squeal? Do you think they won't hold his police appointment over him?"

Belmont. The showers. The trip-action camera clicks. Bucky stands under the stream.

Ashida shook his head. Swirling grit stung his eyes.

"Mother never liked Bucky. She's blowing it out of proportion."

Akira said, "There is no proportion. Pearl Harbor took care of that."

He saw random words in kanji script. They bounced off his windshield. He pulled away and made the perimeter road.

He felt like a pilgrim fresh off the boat. Don't speak Jap—speak American.

I must become indispensable. I must be essential to the Los Angeles Police. I must act boldly. I must abet justice and secure the safety of my family—whatever it costs, whatever it takes.

Dirt roads to blacktop. The Cahuenga Pass to Hollywood. Flags at half-mast. Christmas decorations. No colored lights—it violated blackout codes.

Ashida took Sunset east. He kept the windows up. His car buffered him. Motorists might see him and yell, "*Jap!*"

It hit him then. He missed something at the house. Something very obvious. Something that the killer missed.

He was restless. The lab felt like a ball and chain. He bypassed Figueroa and cruised Chinatown. He saw tong boys in colored kerchiefs. He saw Mayor Bowron and Sheriff Biscailuz outside Kwan's.

The Chinks hate the Japs. There's good reasons why. The Rape of Nanking—1937. Japanese soldiers behead Chinese babies.

Chinatown adjoined Little Tokyo. The local Chinese are jubilant, the local Japanese are bereft. There's four dead Japanese in Highland Park.

Close quarters begets combustion. Now, there's *no* Japanese in Highland Park.

The crime felt racially circumscribed. The crime felt geographically contained.

Ashida cut south on Alameda. He rolled down his window and caught some cool air. A tin can hit the windshield. He blew a red light and slow-crawled to Little Tokyo. Fed sedans were double-parked along the east edge.

He slow-crawled up 2nd Street. American flags adorned storefronts. Broken windows, padlocked doors, seized-property bills attached. White men in dark suits with gun bulges. A roust outside Saji's Fish Mart.

Four Alien Squad bulls. Six Japanese boys. Lee Blanchard tossing wallets and car keys. Thad Brown and Elmer Jackson with shotguns.

He slow-crawled by his mother's building. The widow Nakamura stood outside, cuffed. A Sheriff's paddy wagon was up on the sidewalk. Mariko was on her fire escape. She was standing with a tall Fed. They laughed and sipped cocktails.

A Japanese man sprinted west. He held a bloody toupee and a piece of his scalp. Cal Denton chased him. Cal Denton was notorious. He once bodyguarded Two-Gun Davis and kicked a Negro pimp to death.

There's Captain Bill Parker. He's measuring traffic skid marks. He looks exhausted. He looks like he might need a drink.

Ashida passed a building draped in crepe red, white and blue. A window sign read ANTI-AXIS COMMITTEE. It was a pipe shop in the ’30s. It was empty on Saturday. It’s a patriotic hot spot now.

Ashida slow-cruised Main Street and looped back east on 1st. Dusk came on, *sloooooow*. A siren smothered street noise. 4:55—five minutes to the test blackout.

He pulled to the curb. The siren blare extended. He timed it off his watch. The repetitions stopped at 4:59.

Window lights went off. Drapes were drawn. Shutters were pulled. Motorists doused their headlights and hit their parking lights. Traffic lights went dim.

Soft dark, more dark, full dark. A commensurate street hush. Traffic thinned. People moved indoors. The Feds piled into their Fed cars and drove off.

It came to him. He didn’t say it, see it or think it. He just knew.

The spot was a mile and a half southwest. He ran his parking lights and drove alleyways. There’s no neon, no building light. The world is dark and flat now.

Shapes slid across 3rd Street and 6th Street. They were low-lit somethings. They had to be cars.

They drove too slow. He drove too slow and felt himself blend in. He turned west on Wilshire. Stop and go lights hardly beamed. He swerved south on Union and almost plowed a truck. The spot was right there at 15th.

No sound, no lights. *Wilkommen*, Deutsches Haus.

Ashida parked and looked over. No sound, no light. He heard a car crash somewhere.

His dried-blood scraper might work. His penlight, for sure.

He grabbed them. He walked over and banged on the door. The adjoining window glass shook.

The world is dark and flat. There’s no one here. It’s a simple 459.

You know it’s wrong. You know you must hoard evidence unilaterally. You know you must produce your own quantifiable results.

Ashida stuck the scraper in the keyhole. Call it a scalpel now. Probe the tumblers, *click-click*.

He did it. The keyhole was well oiled. The scraper blade had give.

Wait for the clicks. Wiggle the blade. Once more, that’s—

The lock snapped. The door popped open.

Ashida stepped inside and shut the door behind him. He clamped his teeth on the penlight. The Watanabes’ attic, now *this*.

He arced his penlight. The beam hit on this:

Swastika wall flags. Framed photos atop bookshelves. Hitler in brownshirt, Hitler in short pants, Hitler with wildly tossed hair.

Mein Kampf on the shelves. The screed in English and German. Clothbound books with blank spines.

Ashida grabbed a book and flashed the pages. It was all photographs.

Ravaged men in striped pajamas. German soldiers holding severed heads. Pigs foraging in a corpse pile.

He replaced the book. He went light-headed. *Penlight first—breathe as you walk.*

He stepped into an office. It was twelve feet square. Note the trinket-packed shelves.

Hitler and Hirohito key chains. Jewish skullcaps with toy propellers. Swastika-embossed poker chips.

A desk and swivel chair. Six sliding drawers.

He tried the drawers. They were locked. There were no keys on the desktop. He scraper-stabbed the keyholes. His hands dripped sweat, the scraper slipped, he popped one drawer.

It was empty. He left tool marks. They revealed the break-in.

He took a breath. He kept at it. He jimmied, he yanked, he gouged, he pulled, he jiggled, he shoved, he pried. His hands slipped. He wiped them on his suit coat. He sweated through his shirt cuffs.

There—two, three, four, five, six drawers popped. There—wipe your face, smear your fingerprints, catch your breath.

His jaw ached. His teeth ached. The penlight ratched his mouth.

He went through the drawers. Three were empty. The fourth held a big wad of reichsmarks. The fifth held a velvet drawstring bag.

He picked it up and laid it on the desktop. The heft aroused him. He pulled the string and dumped the bag on the desk. Four crude silencers and four Lugers fell out.

Blue steel automatics. Pearl grips with onyx swastikas.

He touched the guns. He stroked the guns. He held the guns to his cheek. He placed the guns and silencers back in the bag and cinched it.

Look for paperwork. Member lists, receipts, transaction books.

He looked under the desk. He checked the adjoining bathroom. He disrupted the shelf knickknacks. He made too much noise.

Nothing. No paperwork, no—

He went fluttery light-headed. He grabbed the bag and ran. His limbs felt disconnected. He bumped bookshelves and toppled Hitler busts. He went back out the door. It was 6:29. The blackout was still on. The world was still dark and flat.

Cars crawled up 15th Street. Clouds hid the moon. L.A. felt submerged. The a.m. *Herald* ran a headline—SOUTHLAND BRACES FOR JAP SUB ATTACK!

His car was a U-boat. The front seat was the cockpit. He took Union to 6th to Grand. Other submarines passed him. The water was too thick. They all maneuvered too slow.

He still felt disconnected. He checked the dashboard clock: 6:38, 6:39, 6:40. The world would relight at 7:00 p.m.

Grand to 1st, east to the station.

The building was underwater. He parked and locked the bag in his evidence kit. He walked in the rear door. The trapped-in light burned his eyes.

The booking desk was swamped with *JAPS* and Alien Squad goons. Lee Blanchard held a boy by the neck.

Ashida walked up to the lab. The lights were off. He hit a wall switch and tripped the ceiling bulbs. The window shades were taped to the glass.

Ashida locked himself in. Nobody would notice it. He was the night-owl Jap. He had no personal life. He always worked late.

He cleared table space. He laid out the Lugers and silencers. He opened the storage drawer and retrieved his two photo sets. He placed them by the Deutsches Haus swag.

Two shots of dye-dipped silencer threads. Shot no. 1: the pharmacy. Shot no. 2: the Watanabe house.

He scraped threads off the Deutsches Haus silencers. He dipped them in a vat of aniline dye. He pat-dried them and studied them under a full-dialed microscope.

Confirmed. *Yes*—the same metallurgic components. *Yes*—the same minor inconsistencies. *Yes*—his earlier conclusion, updated.

Different silencers were deployed at the pharmacy and the house. They were made from the same metal. Deutsches Haus was the source of the silencers used at both locations.

Horns honked. Whoops went up outside. Ashida checked the wall clock. 7:00 p.m., on the snout.

He pulled the tape off the window shades. Downtown L.A. was lit up. Building lights, neon lights, car lights. Motorists rode their horns and flashed V for Victory.

He opened the ammo drawer and grabbed four bullets. He loaded the Deutsches Haus Lugers and screwed on the silencers. He secured the ballistics tunnel and laid out the guns. Ready, aim, fire.

Four guns, four silencers. Four shots, four muffled thuds. Eyeball confirmation no. 1:

The silencers shed threads from a single firing. They curled and dropped off like the threads at the pharmacy and the house.

Ashida studied the pix from the pharmacy and the house. Ashida retrieved and studied the rounds he just fired.

Confirmation.

The new rounds deteriorated identically.

Deutsches Haus, Whalen's Pharmacy, the Watanabe house. Identically malfunctioning Lugers. Probable firing pin and ejector flaws. Sheared and bifurcated rounds. Brazen armed robbery. A faked ritual slaughter. Deutsches Haus guns fired at both locations.

I must become indispensable. I must continue to act boldly and unilaterally.

Ashida thought of Bucky. Ashida held a Nazi gun to his cheek.

We're at war.

The world is dark and flat.

Cars are submarines.

22

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1941

The audience is tense and poised for the moment. We're at war with a fascist enemy. An American Negro with leftist cachet and snob appeal will soon appear and validate our enlightened good taste. I'm six rows back from the stage, in an aisle seat. I'm the unescorted young woman in the stunning red wool dress. This will not be as much fun as last night's Bucky Bleichert fight. I am not here with Scotty Bennett. The stripped-to-shorts Bucky will not wave to the crowd and flash his big buck teeth.

I am here to advance Captain William H. Parker's presumptuous agenda. The Red Queen and her male consorts are one row in front of me. I know them from the photo-affixed files that Captain Parker gave me this morning. Claire De Haven is quite patrician. Her trembling hands and a wet sheen on her neck denote the drug habit mentioned in her file. She is a tall and handsome woman in her early thirties, a debutante who took a postcollege fall for the Left and astonished the Left by continuing to show up. Flanking her: the homosexual actor Reynolds Loftis and his lover, Chaz Minear. The two men form the nucleus of the Red Queen's cell. They are prissy, venomous, smug. I am close enough to hear their conversation and close enough to geopolitical reality to be guardedly sympathetic to their goals. The Queen's "subsidiary members" sit to their right. They are a blur from Captain Parker's crib sheet—the type of men who rush to agree, fetch drinks and light cigarettes. The Queen hosts grand parties at her home in Beverly Hills. Male guests often wind up in her bed. The subalterns empty ashtrays, carry glasses to the kitchen and lock up the house while their queen ruts.

I have been supplied with a primer on their dissolution. Narcotics, promiscuity, dry-out cures at a Malibu health farm run by a dubious plastic surgeon. Brilliant Captain William H. Parker. He read the subversive file on me, assessed my part in the Boulevard-Citizens case and perceived the outré nature of my relationship with Lee Blanchard. He understood that I am of these people and thus so appalled that I will entrap them, betray them and destroy them. We are of the Dakota prairie, Captain Parker and I. We see profligacy in ourselves and indulge and recoil from it in erratic measure. Captain Parker took a moral leap with me. He assumed that I would go at the Queen from a sense of self-vindication. He is entirely correct.

They are speaking with raised voices now; there's aggression in their tone. Conversations are buzzing all around me. It's predictable precurtain chatter. When will FDR initiate the massive wartime draft? What will be the numbers and who will be exempt? The Japanese have overrun the Philippines, the Hawaiian death toll mounts. The Queen and her consorts disdain the talk aswirl. Their talk is more elitist. It pertains to the "illegal mass imprisonment" of "innocent Japanese." It's gadfly chat in the middle of a war-bond rally. It's starkly illustrative of who they are—because I know it to be true.

I drove through Little Tokyo this afternoon. Lee is an Alien Squad cop, so I had to see. I saw arrests, confiscations, shackle chains of compliant Japanese. Lee walked up 2nd Street, twirling a billy club. I saw the Japanese man I noted at the Bucky Bleichert fight, observing the scene from his car just as I was. He was a thousand times more potently intent than the fussbudgets seated one row in front of me.

The houselights began to fade; it felt like the blackout, reprised. I was driving away from Little Tokyo when the 5:00 siren blew. Natural dusk and darkness by law spawned a contained chaos. I saw two auto wrecks in a minute's time; I witnessed a skirmish in Pershing Square. The dearth of light prompted the altercation—I'm sure of it. Placard-waving rightist factions fought. It was Catholic Coughlinites versus Gerald L. K. Smith's Protestant-Nationalist goons. They swung signboards and fists until they couldn't see whom they were hitting.

The houselights went all the way off. Stage lights replaced them. The curtain rose. A pale woman carried a massive stringed instrument over to a chair. She acknowledged mild applause. Paul Robeson walked onstage, bowed and stood under a spotlight. Frantic applause burst out. Claire De Haven cued her slaves to stand. The bulk of the audience took it as their consent to rise.

I remained in my seat. The moment was inimical to subversion. Robeson bowed and raised his hands: I'm honored, now sit. The Queen and her slaves complied first. The rest of the audience sat and fell quiet. The accompanist strummed an introduction. Robeson launched "Ol' Man River."

The tall Negro with the huge basso. The Broadway showstopper-cum-slaves' lament. The dilettante leftists. The wayward girl from

Sioux Falls. The unhinged police captain and his anti-Red pogrom.

I giggled.

It just happened. It popped through all my calculation. The people around me heard it. I sensed scowls in the dark.

Robeson wrung the song dry and brought it to crescendo. The workers' troubadour and Princeton alum goes showbiz! White swells and Fifth Column hacks go wild!

I giggled. It registered above all the cheers. A man went "*Sssssshhhhh.*" I giggled louder. I was nine years old and cutting up in church, the Sunday after the stock market crash.

The audience cranked out bravos and slowly simmered down. Robeson made with the dutiful bows. A dowager glared at me. I rebuffed her with a little wave. Robeson segued to the labor ditty "Joe Hill."

I got antsy. I was to make contact with the Reds, and no more. It felt insufficient. A Princeton-educated Negro extolled class revolt; a frail woman with runs in her stockings strummed an oversize lute. I laughed and covered my mouth. The dowager whispered, "*Be still, child.*"

Poor Joe Hill. He was railroaded and snuffed by the powers that be. Fear not—his message lives on. I held my hand over my mouth. Robeson soaked up adulation and segued to Verdi's *Otello*. He was the tormented Moor now. He went from Trotskyite recitalist to Milanese hambone. I *clamped* my mouth. I felt Claire De Haven's pissy gaze.

I shut my eyes so I wouldn't roar outright. Pictures clicked through my internal nickelodeon. I worked up the dialogue. I predicted the outcome and knew I was right.

Robeson laid on the torment. I thought of the Japanese man at the Bucky Bleichert fight and rose to my feet.

"No human being deserves to be entertained with a world at war and a city engaged in repressive actions directed against innocent people, simply because of the barbarism performed by their native countrymen."

It was spoken as a polemic; it was issued just short of a shout. The Moor sang through it. The accompanist dropped her lute. People rustled, hissed, whispered, ssshhhh'ed, booed. House lights snapped on. I became aware of individual movement. A speck appeared in my vision—but I did not react. The Red Queen was the first to stand and *Look at Me*.

"No human being deserves to be entertained while policemen and Federal agents harass and illegally detain innocent Japanese-Americans in the spirit of racial hysteria and overreaction to a fascistic display of aggression, and —"

In one instant:

The mad Moor shut up and *Looked at Me*.

All the houselights went on.

All the Queen's consorts stood and stared.

Boos, shouts, garbled admonitions—building to a roar.

"Goddamn Bolshevik!" "Goddamn fascist!" "Get out of here, you whore!"

I yelled a response; the roar smothered it; an usher grabbed my arm. I balled a fist and hit him in the face. I caught the tip of his nose and felt it crack. Blood burst into his eyes.

Everyone stood. The usher weaved and made hurt sounds. *Everyone looked at me.* Their shouted censure filled the hall. I looked straight at Claire De Haven as a group of men charged me. Men in silly uniforms—grabbing me, clutching me, picking me up as I thrashed.

Men carried me. I enjoyed it as it occurred. I stayed in character and squirmed in resistance. We went up an aisle and out to the lobby. I jerked and hit my head on a door frame. I saw a wall clock that read 8:19.

The Biltmore clock read 8:20. I opened my eyes in the backseat of a prowl car. I had a topsy-turvy view. Pershing Square, the Biltmore, Philharmonic Hall. A whoosh as the prowl car pulled out.

I didn't recognize the two cops; they'd cuffed me during my unconscious moments and ignored me now. The driver went north on Hill Street. Central Station was a minute away; Lee worked out of it; I was a noted police girlfriend. My performance got me *this*. I had hoped for a firm scoot to the lobby and a tête-à-tête with the Red Queen. I didn't think I'd be arrested and run the risk of alerting Lee.

A call hit the two-way radio; the cops grumbled about a B & E on Bunker Hill. Central Station was on the way; the passenger cop checked his watch and told the driver to gun it.

They continued to ignore me; we got to the station in less than a minute. The driver idled outside the jail door. The passenger cop led me inside and locked me into a cell on the women's row.

It was the middle cell on a five-cell tier; I had single lodging. The other cells held Japanese women. They were squeezed in four to a cell, each equipped with two bunks and exposed toilets. They looked away from one another. They gave no indication of acquaintance outside of this jail. There were young women, old women, women somewhere in between. There was no conversation. There was no camaraderie or commiseration. They registered the white girl in the bright red dress and felt the shame that she didn't feel for herself.

I turned away from them. I sat on the bottom bunk and lowered my eyes. I got it then.

They were a collective. They assumed one façade in solidarity. They were as sure-minded and composed as the Red Queen's collective was fretful and shrill.

The *Mirror-News* was partially wedged under my mattress. I read the front section.

The Pacific war. The Russian front. The Japs on an island-hopping rampage. A Sid Hudgens piece on Bucky Bleichert on page eight.

The banner was BUCKY BOY IN BLUE? A snide two columns followed.

Sid recapped Bucky's farewell fight and stressed his pending appointment to the Los Angeles Police. But is said appointment "pryingly predicated" on his supplying Federal agents with "insidious info" on "jungled-up Japs" aligned with that "heathen hellion Hirohito"? The piece described Bucky's Belmont High athletic career and friendship with fellow green-and-blacksters in the "slant-eyed community." Sid's trademark kicker: Isn't Bucky the son of German immigrants, and thus potentially suspect of Fifth Column leanings himself? "Whither goest thou, *Herr* Bleichert?"

I balled up and tossed the newspaper. I shut my eyes to blot out the cell row and all the Japanese women. They were still standing still, and they still despised me for my folly of self.

I was hungry. I wanted a big steak dinner and a cigarette. I wanted to watch Scotty Bennett take his shirt off. I wanted to dance with Bucky in his police dress blues.

A woman one cell over stifled a sob. I kept my eyes shut and prayed for her. I indulge prayer when the world seems incomprehensible and only a plea to the incomprehensible makes sense. The Reformation, the prairie, solidarity. The war and the Jewish star on *Herr* Bleichert's trunks.

The mattress settled under me. My prayer dislodged a piece of the earth and sent me spinning. No dreams, please. No Scottish pastor's boys, no war, no mad Moors—

"You were stunning, Miss Lake. You upstaged Paul Robeson."

I tilted my head and opened my eyes. The women were gone.

"Were they released? They were here when I fell asleep."

Captain Parker unlocked my cell. He was in uniform and looked exhausted. He tossed me a pack of cigarettes and a lighter.

"Your bunk mates? They were transferred to the Lincoln Heights jail. The desk sergeant told me you slept through it."

I lit up. "Where were you sitting?"

"Two rows behind you. I knew you'd pull something when you laughed that first time."

“Why didn’t you get me out of here sooner?”

“Because I knew you’d want the experience.”

“You were right.”

Parker said, “I think our next—”

I curtailed him. “I won’t allow you leverage on anything pertaining to Lee Blanchard. You can indict him for the Boulevard-Citizens robbery or for murders he may or may not have committed for Ben Siegel, as you deem fit.”

He leaned against the wall bars. “What are you telling me?”

“Not to assume that I’ll fold behind coercion. Not to assume that I’ll do everything that you demand without compensation.”

Parker patted his knees; I tossed him his cigarettes and lighter. He lit up and blew a smoke ring higher than this girl ever could.

“What are you telling me?”

I folded out yesterday’s newspaper. Page eight was crumpled, but legible. I tapped the middle columns and handed it over.

Parker read the piece. He crushed his cigarette on a bar hinge and smiled.

“I’m recalling those sketches I saw at your house. I would guess that you’re quite smitten.”

“Is the article accurate?”

“Yes. Apparently, Mr. Bleichert is acquainted with some dubious Japanese. I don’t know who they are, but Federal agents will be interviewing him shortly. The results of the interview will determine the status of his appointment.”

I tossed my cigarette in the toilet. “I’d like to observe the interview.”

“I’ll arrange it.”

“I want Bucky to get on.”

“Quid pro quo. Call Dr. Lesnick’s office and request a 2:00 appointment this Wednesday. You’ll see the Queen on her way out. I’d say she’ll recall last night and cite serendipity.”

I laughed. Claire, darling! I’m out to destroy you, but *do* tell me first. Where did you get that *gorgeous* dress you wore to the Robeson bash?

December 9, 1941

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LOS ANGELES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 1941

Parker walked off the tier. Exhaustion rehit him. He'd been up since the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor.

Not quite.

He cadged naps in his black-and-white. He got booze sleep in his new office. Jack Horrall gave him a Detective Bureau room. He was now the PD's "wartime emergency planner."

It covered his Traffic duties. It acknowledged his lust for hard work. He was the armed forces liaison. He collated Teletypes on war matters. He oversaw the Alien Squad and kept them leashed. He slack-leashed Dudley Smith and the Watanabe case.

He should wrangle the case some ink. Sid Hudgens could provide it. Sid owed Call-Me-Jack five yards in card losses. Tractable Sid.

Parker walked up to the muster room. He had five minutes with Kay Lake. It revived him and wrung him dry. He was alone in their deal now.

Carl Hull called him last night. He'd joined the Navy. Call-Me-Jack granted him a war-service leave.

In the meantime:

"I'm out of this deal of yours, William. It feels imprudent and untimely. We're in an actual war, and it's based on a great deal more than ideology. The Reds are our allies, and they've been dying in great numbers and bleeding Hitler dry. I subscribe to your prediction of an ideological conflict after we win *this* war—and, of course, domestic Reds will need to be interdicted. But, *presently*? *Presently*, your operation seems like quite a mad crusade. And, frankly, the notion of you and young Miss Lake troubles me."

He hung up. He hurled his telephone. It hit an auto-wreck wall map and shattered.

The muster room was chalkboard-walled and covered with masking paper. He came in at 5:00 a.m. and chalked up his pitch. He'd spiel officialese, verbatim. They'd be impressed.

He walked in. They beat him there. Call-Me-Jack smoked a morning stogie. Gene Biscailuz wore two six-guns. Fletch Bowron reeked of perfume. Bill McPherson snoozed.

Parker circled the walls and pulled off the paper. Six chalkboards glowed.

Jack said, "Bill was up early."

Biscailuz said, "Bill never sleeps."

Bowron said, "Bill's forgotten what his wife looks like."

Jack said, "Bill forgot that the day Adam fucked Eve."

Biscailuz laughed. Parker tapped chalkboard no. 1.

"We're at war, gentlemen. No one can say that the city of Los Angeles isn't taking it seriously. And if I look tired, I'm not the only one."

Biscailuz said, "I'm *hungry*. We should get Ace Kwan to send up some egg foo young."

Jack said, "I got blotto at Kwan's last night. Ace sent me home in a cab."

Bowron slapped his knees. "Go ahead, Bill. Strut yo stuff."

Parker grabbed a pointer and walked board to board. His block print was perfectly aligned. He filled in the abbreviations and expanded the officialese.

"Governor Olson has called for the immediate internment of all Jap nationals and suspected sympathizers. Attorney General Warren expects industrial sabotage. State guardsmen are now patrolling power lines and aqueducts statewide. New York City Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia has been appointed director of the U.S. Office of Civilian Defense. He will fly to Los Angeles today, accompanied by Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt. They'll be briefed by state guard officials."

One chalkboard down. One city bigwig dozing. Three city bigwigs alert.

"Four hundred Japs on the 'A' list are in custody. Forty-two Federal agents are interrogating them. The Japs are being held at the Terminal Island pen, the Fort MacArthur stockade, the Hall of Justice jail, the Lincoln Heights jail, and the jails at six of the Los Angeles Police Department's geographical divisions. Suspicious Jap fishing boats in San Pedro Harbor are being boarded, searched and towed to port. Navy PT-boat patrols are being deployed from Santa Barbara on the north to the Mexican border on the south.

There is a high probability that Jap submarines are patrolling these waters." Three chalkboards down. Parker deployed a monotone and excised his prairie drawl.

"Coastal defense batteries are being manned twenty-four hours. Coastal highways have been closed to all nonmilitary traffic. The Board of Supervisors has declared a state of wartime emergency."

Four chalkboards down. No hiccups or speaker's gaffes.

"Los Angeles is on a full-time blackout alert. Yesterday's a.m. and p.m. test blackouts were successful. There was no significant rise in the local crime rate, and traffic accidents increased by a mere 6%. There will be a citywide test blackout Wednesday night. The dusk-to-dawn time span will supply civic officials with valuable statistics."

Five boards down. There's the finish line.

"Per the Watanabe case. I met with Sergeant Dudley Smith yesterday. Sergeant Smith submitted a comprehensive first summary report. Sergeant Smith and three other detectives are working the case, full-time. I will approach *Mirror-News* scribe Sid Hudgens myself and will exhort him to portray the investigation in a laudatory light. The Watanabe case may prove to be a significant propaganda tool, should the PD's Alien Squad or the Sheriff's deputies working the roundups attract accusations of brutal treatment, or if the roundups and property seizures themselves come to be morally questioned."

Parker caught his breath. Fletch Bowron applauded.

Biscailuz said, "Get Bill a White Man of the Week Award."

Jack said, "Shit, get him a double highball at Mike Lyman's."

Bowron said, "Eleanor Roosevelt's coming. She'll probably want a parade."

Biscailuz said, "I heard she's a lezbo. My deputy Dot Rothstein told me. Dot's on the lezbo grapevine. She's the one who told me that Barbara Stanwyck licks snatch."

Bowron said, "I'm taking the bull by the horns on this Jap deal. Get this. I'm going to can all the Japs on the city payroll. They're all Fifth Column, and cream puffs don't win wars."

Parker said, "I don't think that's a sound idea, Mr. Mayor."

Blurt. Speaker's gaffe. Hear that pin drop?

Parker suppressed fidgets. Ward Littell opened the door.

"Sorry to interrupt, gentlemen. Captain, we're about to start with Mr. Bleichert."

Call-Me-Jack went *Shoo*.

Bowron said, "Comrade Bill. Saved by the bell."

Parker about-faced and followed Littell. They walked to the detectives' squad bay. Mirror-front sweat rooms lined the back wall.

Kay Lake stood outside no. 1. She could look in. The men inside couldn't look out.

Parker and Littell joined her. She ignored them and stared through the glass. Littell said, "These are gutter tactics. They're like Stalin's show trials."

The room was small and tight-packed. Ed Satterlee, Dick Hood. Dwight "Bucky" Bleichert. A table-and-chairs tableau.

Parker flipped a wall switch. Speaker static crackled. Sound merged with sight.

Bleichert rode his chair backward. Hood and Satterlee paced. Kay Lake wore her up-all-night look. Her dress was rumpled. Her hair was mussed.

Satterlee said, "Here's what interests me. When you shave in the morning, do you see a German or an American in the mirror?" Bleichert grinned. "You mean, like the mirror on that wall over there? The one with two sides to it?"

Hood said, "You can't score a knockout here, son. We're on the points system. You've got to say the right things and win by decision."

Bleichert pointed to the mirror. "Who's on the other side, J. Edgar Hoover? Does he really care if I get on the L.A. Police?"

Hood said, "Answer the question, please."

Satterlee said, "German or American? Pick a country, pick a loyalty."

Bleichert said, "My parents were born in Germany. I was born here. I was born in 1917, which gives me an alibi for the Great War."

Kay Lake smiled. Parker smelled her stale perfume.

Hood smiled. "I see your point, but our job is to investigate people with German and Italian bloodlines who might find their loyalties strained."

Bleichert said, "You're reaching, Mr. Hood. And I don't know about 'bloodlines.' You can't tell a Kraut or a dago just by looking at him."

Hood and Satterlee swapped signals. Satterlee snapped his suspenders. Hood said, "Yeah, I know. It's not like they're Japs."

Bleichert drummed the table. "German bloodlines are diffuse. It's not like Germans are Japs."

Parker studied Bleichert. Kay Lake hugged the wall. She stuck her hand in his pocket and grabbed his cigarettes. Her hand was warm. His leg fluttered. She lit up and blew high smoke rings.

Satterlee said, "Do you *like* Japs?"

Bleichert said, "I don't give a shit one way or the other."

Hood said, "You went to Belmont High."

Bleichert shrugged. "Class of '35. The Sentinels, green-and-black forever. What's all this have to do with me getting on the Los Angeles PD?"

Hood said, "We started compiling intelligence three years ago. We learned that the Jap kids from Little Tokyo went to Belmont. We checked the registration rolls and discovered that this fight phenom was a Belmont alum, and that he sure had a lot of Jap friends. We thought, If this goddamn war comes, our bright boy Bucky would be a good one to talk to, because he just might have the lowdown on some Jap Fifth Columnists."

Satterlee crowded the table. "Then we learned that our bright boy applied to the PD here. I won't mince words, son. If you give us some names, you get on. If you refuse, your application is marked 'null and void.' "

Bleichert wetted up. It was sweat, tears or both. Kay Lake pressed the mirror.

Bleichert said, "I know two brothers named Ashida. Akira runs the family farm, and Hideo's a chemist with the PD. Their father's dead, and their mother's named Mariko. She's a drunk, and she's crazy about the Emperor and that Tojo guy. She's got a Jap flag in her living room closet, for all that's worth."

Kay Lake shut her eyes and laid her head on the mirror. Parker white-knuckled his gun belt.

Littell said, "Mariko's harmless, and Hideo's a brilliant kid. I'll tell Hood that."

Kay Lake said, "Men are so goddamned weak."

24

LOS ANGELES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 1941

Opium.

The world was his channel. His pallet was a lifeboat. The pipe was his guide.

He flicked across lovely postcards. He welcomed fellow travelers. Bette Davis joined him. They're lovers in London. They're straphangers in the Tube.

Opium.

The pallet, the pipe. Ace Kwan's basement. He's here one moment, gone the next.

It's the Blitz. Ireland has stayed neutral. Joe Kennedy is an isolationist. He's the ambassador to England, but he knows things. The Nazis will win the war. The British beast will fall. Black and Tans killed Dudley Smith's father and elder brother. It left Maidred Conroy Smith widowed and prone to beat her young son.

Time evaporates. Blitzkrieg. It's September 1940. The Germans firebomb London. Dudley and Bette. Uncle Joe gets them a private car in the Tube. Uncle Joe resigns his posting later that fall. The British press dubs him a coward. The Blitz terrifies him. Irish lads drive him to Kerry and nurse him with booze and whores. Dudley and Bette. Uncle Joe got them this private car and ran home with his nuts shriveled up.

Opium.

His senses merged. London burned. Furtwängler played Beethoven's Ninth. He'd meet Bette Friday night. The Shrine Auditorium. The newsboys' bash. He'll wear his best tweed suit.

London becomes Nanking. Ace Kwan told him stories. Jap soldiers behead Chink soldiers. Jap hordes take a monastery and sodomize the priests.

Bette sees it and sobs. He consoles her. *War is the dark grandeur of forfeit, my child. It engages the hellhound within me.*

The Tube car entered a tunnel. Nanking went *Poof!* He's back in

Kwan's basement. *Yes, please*—the pipe.

He explained it to Bette. Anesthesia, supplication. *I am all thought and act. My habitude is connivance. I must halt and renew myself in this maddening rush.*

Opium.

Joe Kennedy reappears. He repeats words from 1927.

"Your future is in Los Angeles, son. I can get you on the police force. You can fuck movie stars and create mischief."

A projector clicks and sends film through a slide. Uncle Joe shares his smut fixation. Tijuana, '33. They're in a whorehouse, watching movies screened on a sheet. Two grand lezzies attend them. Dot Rothstein and Ruth Mildred Cressmeyer are honorary men. Dot's a Sheriff's matron and pimp for Gene Biscailuz. Ruth Mildred's a scrape doctor for Jewboy Harry Cohn. It's a grand and odd confluence.

Uncle Joe bankrolls smut films. Uncle Joe has a piece of Carlos Madrano's wetback-running schemes. Uncle Joe keeps a hand in the rackets. It reminds him of his origins.

The projector clicks. A Mex girl becomes Bette in *The Letter*. He got a letter from Beth Short this morning. Yes, she's coming to L.A. Yes, she'll bring her blind friend Tommy Gilfoyle. She hints at that "horrible thing" that happened last year. He'll call Tommy and inquire.

Uncle Joe says, "Devilish men require families, Dud. They keep you safe while you do what you damn please."

Felicitous words. Uncle Joe has his own bastard daughter. She's the spawn of Joe and Gloria Swanson. Laura Hughes is now fourteen. Joe secretly supports her. She took the name Hughes to ridicule Joe. Howard Hughes fucked Joe on a movie deal, circa '31. Unbidden children represent unbidden fate.

Laura lives at the Immaculate Heart Convent. Archbishop Cantwell knows her story. He has a lurid crush on the girl.

Opium.

The projector clicks. Wisps become faces.

Jack Kennedy smiles. He's a Navy ensign. He's coming to L.A. He wants to fuck Ellen Drew. He wants to fuck Gloria Swanson better than his dad did.

Click. There's that shift within him. His normal state is Thought and Act. His habitude is connivance. The postcard tour has refreshed him. He's returning to Thought and Act.

Mike Breuning once worked as a film tech. Ace Kwan has peek rooms within his labyrinth. Harry Cohn loses fortunes in tile games there. Harry owes Ben Siegel more money. Abe Reles is dead. Ben will leave jail soon. Ben loves to carve capital from perverse ventures. Harry Cohn produced a short film eight years ago. It was a suck-up ode to Benito Mussolini. Harry *has a bust of* Il Duce *on his desk. Has he dumped it in Sunday's aftermath?*

Thought and Act. The war. A realist's perspective.

The Japs won't bomb L.A. They're island-plundering insects. The Pacific is their ant farm. It's their habitude.

They'll lose the war. They'll stagnate as Yankee industry outstrips their material might. They fight to die and ascend to slant-eyed Valhalla. That dubious motive condemns them. Hitler is the Western world's mad lover. Wagner wrote the *Führer*'s ghastly end.

Tristan und Isolde. Unresolved harmonies. The world as the strings drop.

Thought, Act. War as opportunity. Ah, there it is.

Mass internment bodes. Ride along with it. Imprison local Japs for the war's duration. Leverage their property and charge them caretaking fees. Bring in wetbacks to fill vacancies in scut-work employment. Recruit Mex Staties to collect work kickbacks and oversee the wets. Jimmy the Jap Namura has been released from T.I. He would make a grand liaison to the Jap community. Empty out Little Tokyo and other Jap enclaves. Move in thousands of jigaboos too addled to pass conscription tests. Create a circumscribed vice zone built from confiscated Jap holdings. Keep the coons close at hand and contain their antics. Punish aggressions against the white race with instant death. Move rich Japs into Ace Kwan's tunnels and charge them stay-out-of-jail rent. Make the comely ones act in anti-Axis smut films geared for a white clientele.

Opium.

The pipe—once more, yes.

Projector clicks. Thought and Act restored. Memory Lane—New Year's, '38.

The Trocadero. Bette on the dance floor and "Perfidia." That moment he saw her and caught fire.

25

LOS ANGELES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 1941

They won't report the break-in. They won't reveal the thefts. They sell illegal weaponry. They peddle fascist filth.

The lab was a.m. busy. Chemists logged fiber samples and worked microscopes. Ashida rode his desk. He was keyed up and woozy. He got no sleep.

Ray Pinker walked up. "I've got bad news, kid. It was on the radio. Fletch Bowron's fired all the Japanese on the city payroll. I hate to say it, but that means—"

Ashida opened his top drawer and grabbed a leather pouch. Pinker said something reassuring. Ashida ran out of the lab. He took the stairs three at a clip. He made the front door and sprinted.

He cut across 1st Street. Cars swerved around him. City Hall was two blocks down. He ran there in his lab smock.

He went in the Spring Street door. He took the front stairs four at a clip. The Bureau buzzed. Robbery and Bunco—stuffed with desk-squatting cops. Vice—just Elmer Jackson.

Elmer grinned. "Hey, I know you. You used to work here."

"Captain Parker? I heard he has an office now."

Elmer waved his cigar. "Try 614. If the door's closed, he's sleeping it off."

Ashida walked. It was pushing noon. Homicide emptied out. Bunco and Robbery, likewise. A cop swarm swarmed to the lunchroom.

They all saw him. They all knew him. None of them greeted him. They hit the elevators and pushed DOWN.

Homicide was wide open. Twelve cubicles and one office. The main phone line and twelve extensions.

He shut himself in. He wedged a chair back under the doorknob. He opened the pouch and examined his tools.

Burglar's tools. Confiscated evidence. Three small lock picks and a blunt-edged pry.

The main phone sat by the Teletype. He eyeball-tracked the cord to a wall-mounted fuse box. Beside the box—a smaller box, smeared with wall paint.

A narrow cord connected the boxes. The phone was Dictograph-tapped.

Ashida placed his tools on the Teletype. He picked up the phone receiver and heard a dial tone. He took a skinny-head pick and pried off the talk and hear disks. He saw perforated diodes and glued-in microphones.

He screwed the disks back on. He eyeball-scanned the east squadroom wall. Four cubicles, four phones, four legitimate fuse boxes and piggyback boxes adjacent. Small boxes, painted over. Innocuous. Brazen. Two fuse boxes—who cares?

Ashida replaced his tools and unhooked the chair. He stepped into the hall. Sid Hudgens idled outside the cot room. The Sidster saw him and hooked a finger. Ashida walked over and looked in.

Sssshhh—men asleep.

Twelve cots, five sleepers. Alien Squad boys. Tin hats and gun belts dumped on the floor. Shotguns propped against the wall.

Hudgens closed the door. "Bund, Silver Shirts, Thunderbolt Legion. Care to comment, Dr. Ashida?"

Ashida said, "No comment."

Hudgens poked his ears with a paper clip. "Call me jaded, but I think the whole deal is fishy. The Feds are freezing assets and closing banks, habeas has been suspended, and now Fletch the B. has pulled all you folks off the city tit. Tojo and his boys took Manila, but that don't mean you should lose your job."

Ashida said, "No comment."

Hudgens chortled. "Did you read my piece in yesterday's *Mirror*? If you didn't, the postscript is a scorcheroo."

Ashida said, "I'm listening."

"It's about your old pal Bucky the B. The Buckster wants to mothball his mitts and come on this white man's police force. I suggested that he might have to fink out some Fifth Column fucks in order to secure the gig."

Ashida flushed. "*And?*"

"*And,* Bucky snitched you and your family. *And,* he starts the Academy next May."

The hallway shook—avalanche, earthquake, flash flood.

Hudgens ghoul-grinned. Ashida about-faced. Room 614 was two doors down. He walked over and straight in.

Parker stood near a wall map. Hammer-and-sickle pins covered Russia. Swastika pins covered Deutschland. A bottle and shot glass were out in plain view.

Ashida cleared his throat. Parker turned around. His gun belt slid down his hips.

"Yes?"

"I was hoping I could talk to you, sir."

"I'll venture a guess. You think I can help you retain your city employment."

"I know you can."

Parker tapped his wristwatch. "One minute, Doctor. Brevity affords you your best chance to convince me. Don't repeat yourself. I find repetition taxing."

Ashida said, "I overheard two detectives talking. They said that you had a woman transcribing the Dictograph taps here at the Bureau. They found it amusing, because you were on the recordings yourself, which implies that you made self-incriminating statements. The two detectives went on to say that Chief Horrall had been informed of your actions, but that he was too cocky and lazy to intercede. The implication was that the taps were an open secret, which does not negate the verifiable evidence of your easily identified voice on the recordings."

Parker poured a shot and downed it. He's the Man Who Would Be Chief. He's belting hard liquor at 12:16 p.m.

"Who were the detectives?"

Ashida said, "Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle. Since they know, it's safe to assume that Dudley Smith knows the gist of your statements."

Parker tapped his watch. "Tell me what you want. Do not employ flattery or threats."

"I want to thank you for stationing Agent Littell at my mother's apartment. I want to prove myself essential to this police department. I want to keep my job and remain on the Watanabe case."

Parker took another pop. "What can you do for me?"

"I can pull the taps, trace the wires to the listening posts and erase the recordings."

Parker dug through his desk and pulled out a folder. Circuit diagrams, certainly.

"Do it now, Doctor. Do it openly. I'm too valuable for Jack Horrall to fuck with. I'll try to impart that same value to you."

Ashida bowed.

Parker threw the folder at him.

Parker said, "You heathen cocksucker."

26

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 1941

It's worse today. It feels more embittered. There are more Federal men and more cop sentries stationed on 2nd Street rooftops. I saw FBI agents swarm a vegetable market. They shackled the proprietor and dragged him to a paddy wagon. A Fed fired his shotgun into the sidewalk vegetable displays. Rock salt shredded rows of cabbage into pulp.

I walked up 2nd Street. I felt invisible as a white woman and anomalous as a police-world provocateur. I'd called Dr. Lesnick's office and secured an appointment. I'd rehearsed my mockimpromptu meeting with Claire De Haven. 2nd Street registered as official chaos. It was sanctioned by justified outrage and perpetrated in the spirit of racial bias and war hysteria. I was here as Captain William H. Parker's pawn. I needed to see this within that context.

2nd Street was packed with pedestrians and prowl cars. Sheriff's deputies milled outside the Sumitomo Bank and loaded money bags into a van. The deputies held machine guns and scanned the sidewalk; an FBI man nailed a government-seizure notice to the door. "God Bless America" echoed from a storefront one block west. I saw red-white-and-blue bunting draped across the façade and men distributing pamphlets by the doorway.

I heard an explosion. It was a shotgun blast. I heard a second burst and saw two Japanese boys prone in the street. They were directly across from me; their trouser legs were torn to bloody strips.

A third boy dashed across the street. I caught a side view of a cop raising his shotgun. Then Captain Bill Parker stepped out of a crowd and yanked the cop's arms into the air. The rock-salt round exploded at nothing but sky; the boy escaped into an empty building.

The boys in the street flailed at their wounds; a man and woman ran over with rolls of gauze. Captain Parker snatched the cop's shotgun and ejected the remaining shells. He looked outraged. The cop trembled at his display of assertion. Captain Parker threw the shotgun at him and stepped back out of sight.

He never saw me. It happened very quickly. I walked toward "God Bless America" and the tricolored bunting. I hardly felt my footsteps.

The storefront was the "Anti-Axis Committee." It was a dispensary for pro-American regalia. The merchandise could not have been made from scratch since Sunday's attack. Shelves held stars-and-stripes armbands, Uncle Sam hats and anti-Emperor polemics. Browsers browsed. There were Japanese locals, robe-clad Shinto priests and Japanese pastors in dark suits with Protestant collars. A man and woman stood behind a case full of geegaws. They wore AVENGE PEARL HARBOR buttons. Hawaiian leis were draped around their necks; the flowers had been dyed mourning black. The Anti-Axis Committee and everything in it had to have been planned and executed well in advance of Sunday's events. It did not indicate foreknowledge of the attack. It acknowledged the bloodthirsty designs of Imperial Japan and predicted this moment of response.

The music came from a phonograph perched by the door. A pastor manned the recording disk. "God Bless America" repeated, loud and close-quarters shrill.

A man waved a jar at me; I dug into my purse and dropped in a twenty. The man tossed a red-white-and-blue lei over my head. I bowed and felt idiotic.

The man bowed off and accosted other browsers. I dawdled by a revolving book rack filled with tracts. The place felt like a vaudeville tent.

Reynolds Loftis and Chaz Minear walked in.

I looked down and feigned interest in a "Nisei Heroes" screed. Loftis and Minear saw me; little nods and nudges affirmed it. *That crazy girl from the recital. She sure caused a scene!*

The jar man sideswiped me again. I sensed Loftis and Minear within range and performed an encore. I deployed a stage whisper this time.

"These tracts are inherently unradical and fail to critique the systematic bigotry that has fueled this counteraggression for the past two horrible days. This cravenly jingoistic display of yours is an insufficient response to the injustice currently being perpetrated on this very street."

The man cringed. Loftis and Minear heard every word.

I walked outside and turned north on Main. My car was parked at City Hall. I recalled then—the gas gauge was down near empty, and I just gave all my money away. Lee was probably holed up at the Bureau. I could dun him for gas money or visit Elmer Jackson at Vice.

Downtown L.A. was all war and Christmas. Flags, faux fir trees, Salvation Army Santas. Aircraft spotters surrounded City Hall. They resembled dotty bird-watchers. They brought picnic baskets and wore funny hats.

I walked up to the Bureau. The cot room and Vice squadroom were dead. A crowd hovered by the Homicide pen. Call-Me-Jack Horrall, Gene Biscailuz, Sid Hudgens.

I joined them. They ignored me and stared into the squadroom. I tracked their eyes and saw a man disassembling a desk phone. He wore a lab smock and had his back to us. The floor was strewn with detached parts.

The man was removing tap mounts. It was weirdly synchronous. It brought back Bill Parker's tap-transcription ploy.

The man pulled wires. He turned around and faced the hallway. I recognized him immediately.

The young Japanese. There at Bucky Bleichert's fight. There in Little Tokyo yesterday.

Sid Hudgens noticed me. "What gives, Katherine? And what's with the lei? Were you over at Pearl for the fireworks?"

I removed the lei, dropped it over Sid's head and pulled him to a spot down the hall. Sid said, "Not here, sugar. Big Lee could show up any second."

Call-Me-Jack and Gene Biscailuz drifted. I said, "Sid, what is this?"

Sid sniffed the lei and leered. "I'm writing it up as a pro-Horrall piece. Bill Parker talked the Chief into letting that Jap kid do a little wire pulling. The Feds are planning some kind of *farkakte* probe. The Bureau's full of recording posts, and the shit on the wires could get half the Department indicted. Parker's plan is to plant some phony taps and wire rigs after New Year's and lay in some innocuous jive, which'll send the Feds home with *buppkes*. The Jap kid's name is Hideo Ashida. The Department's in a bind, 'cause he's the best crime-lab man in the West, but in case you ain't noticed, he's a *furshtinkener* Jap."

Hideo Ashida. Hideo Ashida at Bucky's fight. Bucky rats out *Hideo Ashida. I* transcribe Bureau taps Sunday morning. *Hideo Ashida* removes them *now*.

"Another time, huh, sugar? You, me and a bottle of Courvoisier while Lee's out of town with the Dudster?"

I blew Sid off and walked into the squadroom. Hideo Ashida snipped wires on a fuse box. He saw me. His smock and pants were grease-smeared and streaked with Spackle dust.

I said, "My name is Kay Lake. Captain Parker had me transcribing the taps."

Form of address seemed to stump him. A bow or a handshake? This girl discomfits me.

He said, "Dr. Ashida." He stuffed his hands in his pockets—*so there*.

"Is your doctorate in electrical engineering?"

He said, "I have two doctorates. I'm a research chemist and a microbiologist. I'm also a criminologist, but that's a self-bestowed title."

The whole business vexed him. The Homicide pen was a junk heap. Three detectives lurked by the door. *What's Lee Blanchard's twist doing with this haughty Jap?*

Hideo Ashida squirmed. Decorum flummoxed him. His limbs were impediments. He was diverted from his task.

I said, "I could show you the listening post I worked in."

"Captain Parker gave me a list of the locations. I have all the information I require."

He would refuse all offers. I had to state my intent.

"There's a good deal of work here. I'm going to help you."

He twitched. He almost bowed. He almost screamed "*No*."

He said, "Yes. As you wish."

It was hard work. I worked in a tweed skirt, silk blouse and cashmere sweater. My stacked-heel pumps slid on the floor. I kicked them off and worked in my stockings.

We unscrewed telephone disks, pulled cords and removed microphones. We worked at close quarters. Dr. Ashida retained an ever-decorous distance. He explained the task of tap removal entirely with gestures. His gestures were ever graceful and fluent.

We went from squadroom to squadroom, listening post to listening post. We lugged boxes; we filled them with transcription logs and yanked wires. Jack Webb followed us for a good two hours. He was a Belmont High chum of Dr. Ashida and Bucky Bleichert. Dr. Ashida went queasy every time Jack mentioned Bucky; I wondered if he knew of Bucky's betrayal. Jack managed the Belmont track team. "High-Jump Hideo" and "Bucky the Bullet" went to the All-City finals.

Dr. Ashida was deft. Athletics partially explained it. I screened mental snapshots of Bucky and Hideo, Belmont '35. Pep rallies, cheerleaders, laps on that hilltop track. Locker-room camaraderie and soapy Bucky in the showers.

It was filthy work. I tore my nails, ravaged my stockings and stained up my sweater and skirt. We communicated with nods and hand signals. I smelled his sweat and my own sweat; we lifted, yanked, carried and hauled. Bureau men dropped by and made conversation; they looked askance but refrained from editorializing. I explained the work as Bill Parker's gambit to thwart a Fed probe; I heard "open secret" a good dozen times. The taps went back to Two-Gun Davis. Cops kept tabs on other cops in a corrupt copocracy. The taps were a perennial pain in the ass. Good riddance to bad rubbish.

Dr. Ashida clenched every time I said "Parker." Bucky Bleichert was the phantom male presence in my life; Captain Parker was the most provocative. Dr. Ashida possessed histories with both men. He was wet-eyed at Bucky's farewell fight. His association with Captain Parker was all police intrigue.

I wanted his perceptions. I wanted to crack his reserve. I was the interrogator and cop with the rubber hose. *Who are these two men? You must tell me what you know*.

We worked. We pulled wires, removed microphones, cleaned out listening posts. The kibitzers drifted off at end of watch. I was jittery, hungry, exhausted. We blitzed through and finished our work.

We were disheveled. We were one collective mess.

I suggested a drink at Mike Lyman's. Scotty was meeting me there later. I knew exactly what Dr. Ashida would say.

He said, "Yes, as you wish."

We took the freight lift. We went out the 1st Street door as the Hill Street bus pulled up. Dr. Ashida stood aside and let me board first. I dropped two nickels in the fare box. We stood at the front and held the rail. Every passenger on the bus stared.

We were dirty and dramatically unkempt. Yellow man, white woman, war. Did they think we were plotting treason or fucking on the City Hall lawn?

The driver turned south on Hill. We made good time. I yanked the cord and signaled a stop at 8th Street. The driver pulled over and let us off.

The bus pulled away. A man yelled, "Goddamn Jap!" A woman yelled, "White whore!"

We walked into Mike Lyman's. The supper rush was just starting; Thad Brown stood at the bar. He did a double take and waved to us; I curtsied and waved back. Dr. Ashida preferred seclusion. I *knew* that. I led him to a back booth.

We settled in. Dr. Ashida said, "Black coffee," and sanctioned me to fetch it. He didn't want to risk a pissy waiter. I *knew* that. I walked to the bar, ordered the coffee and a Manhattan.

The barman served me quickly. I carried the drinks to the booth and interrupted Dr. Ashida. He was daubing his shirt collar. He saw me and dropped the napkin. I stifled a laugh.

"Cheers, Doctor."

"Yes … Miss …"

"Lake. My name is Katherine Lake, and I've gone by 'Kay' for years."

Dr. Ashida said, "Cheers, Miss Lake." He fiddled with his cup and saucer. He spilled coffee and doused his hands. He wiped them and tucked them under his legs.

I asked him where he attended college. He said, "Stanford." I told him that I went to UCLA and waited for a response. He nodded. It told me this:

He knew nothing of my Big Lee's shack-job reputation. He knew Lee but had no dirt on the Boulevard-Citizens job.

"I saw you wave to Lieutenant Brown."

"I know him through my boyfriend. He works Central Patrol, and his name is Lee Blanchard."

"Yes. I know Officer Blanchard."

I said, "Not 'Lee,' Dr. Ashida? You certainly outrank him in the police hierarchy."

He shook his head. "I only use first names by invitation. I know you're thinking it, so I'll say it. It's a commendable Japanese trait."

I laughed and raised my glass. "Yes, it occurred to me, but I was thinking of that commendable trait within the context of police work."

"Yes?"

"You have a hierarchy and nonmeritocracy, offset by a paramilitary ethos and casual social codes. Close personal and professional bonds are formed within this oddly flexible structure."

Dr. Ashida sipped coffee. "Captain Parker commands formality. I would always employ the most rigorous form of address with him."

I said, "Captain Parker is subtle. He's using me for an intelligence foray, and 'using' doesn't begin to tell the story. He knows that my loyalties will be stretched, because he recruited me with a certain foreknowledge of my likely ambivalence. He's banking that my ambivalence will grant me credibility with the people I've been engaged to entrap."

Dr. Ashida sipped coffee. I was baiting him. He knew it. He was aroused by the challenge of provocation and response. But, he didn't see the point. But, the notion of rapport vexed him. He was a scientist. He scorned everything but quantifiable results.

"You transcribed the taps for Captain Parker. I'm wondering how he convinced you to do it."

I lit a cigarette. "That's all I'll be telling you, Doctor. I wanted to see if police intrigue interests you as it does me. You confirmed that it does."

Dr. Ashida smiled. It delighted me. I sipped my cocktail and smiled back.

He said, "I think Captain Parker has misgivings about the roundups.

He assigned an FBI man to look after my mother."

"I witnessed his misgivings today. And his action with your mother must mean that he values your work."

"I'm hoping to prove myself indispensable."

"Yes, but you're employed by the city, so you'll be losing your job."

"I think my position is safe. For now, Captain Parker is my guardian —"

He stopped. I traced his eyes and saw why. Lee was standing there. He was wearing civvies and holding a highball. His shirt was darkly spotted. It looked like congealed blood.

He said, "Aloha, baby. You too, Hirohito."

I said, "Go home, Lee. Sleep it off. There's a roast you can heat up."

"Go home to *what*? My girl's out entertaining the Axis powers."

A hubbub began building close by us. Lee's slur, my raised voice. People looked over. They poked one another. They strained for better views.

I said, "Shut up, Lee." Dr. Ashida stared at his hands. Lee pointed to the stains on his shirt.

"Jap blood. A guy named Takahashi ran on me. He's at Georgia Street Receiving now."

I stood up. The hubbub built and spread to a whole string of tables. Two waiters stopped to look.

"Go home, Lee."

"Really, sweetheart. I'm enlightened when you keep to white men. But a goddamn Jap?"

I slapped him. My nails raked his cheek. He leaned into my hand and made it worse. Blood trickled over his lips.

Somebody gasped. The whole room gasped. Somebody said, "Oh," and dropped their drink. I heard glass shatter. Somebody said, "Shit."

Lee walked out. He bumped a waiter and capsized his tray. A birthday cake with glowing candles fell.

I sat down and looked down. Dr. Ashida bolted my drink.

The hubbub subsided. I heard exhales and dish clatter. A man went *Whew!*

Dr. Ashida looked at me. His eyelids fluttered. The veins in his neck pulsed dark blue.

"I've seen you at the Olympic. You're always drawing pictures of my friend Bucky."

"Yes. And I saw you at the fight Sunday night. Bucky waved to you."

"We've been friends for years. We went to high school together."

I said, "I have a very bad crush on him. It's all too unseemly."

A hand touched my shoulder. My rough boy—prompt and dear.

Scotty loomed. Dr. Ashida stood up and stood dwarfed. Scotty said, “Hello, sir. My name’s Bennett.”

Dr. Ashida muttered good-byes. He kept his eyes down and walked away. I nuzzled Scotty’s hand.

He said, “Lee Blanchard’s out on the sidewalk, crying. I’m not complaining, but you sure spread yourself thin.”

The war was two days old. I consorted with suspect aliens and created public scenes. Pinch me—I could be home practicing Chopin.

27

LOS ANGELES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 1941

Mayor Fletch served prime scotch. Parker pledged just *one* and quick-marched to *three*. The office was geared for bullshit and booze. Walnut panels, green leather chairs and spittoons.

Jack Horrall said, “The Bureau looks like the Philippines is supposed to look. The fucking Japs invaded today.”

Bowron said, “I heard it was ‘Jap,’ singular.”

Jack said, “Lee Blanchard’s girlfriend was helping out. Jesus, there’s stories on *her*.”

Parker sipped scotch. His world was upside down. He was losing weight. He’d been living on cigarettes and pretzels.

The roundups verged on unkosher now. The Alien Squad was running amok. Those kids with the rock-blasted legs.

He said, “We can’t fire Dr. Ashida. He’s essential to the Watanabe job.”

Bowron said, “So, it’s ‘*Dr.*’? Jesus, they’ll let anyone into Stanford.”

Jack said, “You’ve got to concede this one, Fletch. The Jap kid pulled us out of this shit on those taps. We were *all* on them. I used to call Brenda Allen from Homicide.”

Bowron sipped scotch. “I don’t like it. I already issued the order. ‘All Japs city-employed’ means ‘all Japs city-employed.’ It doesn’t mean we make Charlie Chan an exception.”

Parker sipped scotch. “He pulled all the taps and erased all the wires. The Feds will be coming through in February. He spared us a lot of grief.”

Bowron nibbled a pretzel. “ ‘Fed probe,’ shit. Any probe that isn’t directed at Fifth Columnists will be laughed out of town at its inception.”

Parker said, “We owe the kid, Mr. Mayor. And that means we can’t roust his mother and brother.”

Bowron laced his scotch with Bromo-Seltzer. He rubbed his stomach—goddamn ulcers, shit.

"All right, I'll concede. Never let it be said that Mayor Fletcher Bowron isn't an enlightened white man."

Call-Me-Jack said, "Hear, hear."

Bowron belted his voodoo drink. The Feds were due at 7:30. Dick Hood, Ed Satterlee, Ward Littell.

Bowron belched. "Lay it out, Bill. You know what we're here for. The roundups and tomorrow night's blackout."

Parker lit a cigarette. "It's been all over the papers and the radio. The curfew, the specific instructions, the works. Our officers will be working the checkpoints, along with Army sentries. Fleeing vehicles will be fired upon. That's straight from the CO at Fourth Interceptor."

Jack whistled. Bowron flashed V for Victory. Spotlights swooped off the City Hall lawn and crisscrossed the windows.

Parker said, "We've got Sheriff's reservists stationed at key intersections. They'll be looking for drunks and erratic drivers. On the roundups, we've got T.I., the Hall of Justice jail, the city jails, and the county honor farm booked to near capacity. It's starting to feel out of hand. Given the volume, I don't see how the Feds can accurately assess the innocence or guilt of these people, and we need to accept that it's highly likely that most of the people being detained are in fact blameless."

Jack whistled. Fletch B. rubbed his temples—goddamn headache, shit.

"As mayor of the great city of Los Angeles, I am officially anointing Captain William Henry Parker the Third as 'Comrade Bill.' " Jack went *Take a bow*. Parker bowed sitting down.

"I think we're headed for a full-scale wartime internment. From what I've read, Roosevelt's leaning that way. This poses the question—where do we house the goddamn Japs?"

Bowron belched. "We implement Federal property-seizure laws and grab all their houses and land. We lease it out and use the money to offset the cost of stockade-type housing."

The Feds walked in. They filled the doorway. Homo Hoover favored tall men with jawlines. These men personified that.

Bowron served up booze and club chairs. It set a gabfest tone. Dick Hood said, "The Navy sunk two Jap destroyers, and the Reds are bleeding Hitler dry. We're on the rebound."

Bowron sipped scotch and Bromo. "The Navy's got the high seas, but we're landlocked in L.A. So, gentlemen, if it goes to internment, where do we house the goddamn Japs?"

Ed Satterlee futzed with his cuff links. "Wherever we put them, they pay for it. And why mince words? If they've got dough, we house them commensurate with their ability to pay. If they're short on cash, we fill up the Marine Corps brigs."

Ward Littell shook his head. “There’s job furlough. The women work in defense plants for a suitable wage. FDR gets his draft bill through Congress, and the men have the option to enlist.”

Hood mimed masturbation. Satterlee rolled his eyes. Littell lit a cigarette and blew smoke his way.

Call-Me-Jack laughed. “The fucking draft. We’ll lose all our best men. All we’ll have left is illiterate thugs.”

Parker said, “That’s all we’ve got now, Chief.”

Everyone laughed. Everyone slugged scotch. Parker’s glow went to a flush.

Satterlee said, “We seized sixty grand at the Sumitomo Bank. A Sheriff’s van is taking it down to the T.I. vault tomorrow night.”

Littell crushed his cigarette. “Is the money itemized? Will it be properly returned to the account holders?”

Satterlee said, “Who gives a shit? We’re at war with these fuckers.”

Hood went *Ixnay*. “I hate to say it, but Ward’s right. We’ll itemize.”

Satterlee sighed. Bowron mixed a fresh scotch and Bromo. Parker jumped on Hood’s concession.

“All our jails are hitting capacity, and we’re only two days into this. I think we should have the agents conducting the interviews compile a list for habeas. If we release some low-risk Japs, we’ll have more jail space if the real shit hits the fan.”

Bowron said, “I like the sound of it. You divert overcrowding and get the low-risk Japs to go home and snitch the bad apples.”

Hood went *Comme ci, comme ça*. “It flies, up to a point. Habeas might work, but if we go to full-scale internment, they’re all going back in stir anyway.”

Parker checked his watch. It was pushing 8:00. A Dudster briefing loomed.

Littell said, “You should transfer over to our shop, Bill. We need more clear thinkers.”

Satterlee said, “Comrade Ward, meet Comrade Bill.”

Hood said, “He’s not Mr. Hoover’s type.”

Call-Me-Jack said, “The head G-man’s a fairy. I still can’t get over it.”

Parker winked at him. “There’s no way I’d transfer. There’s a job I want right here.”

The briefing was set for the cot room. Hurricane Hideo had blitzed the squad pens. Parker took service stairs down. Dudley sat with Ashida and Buzz Meeks.

Parker took a cot. Meeks passed him an ashtray. Dudley said, “Your play with the taps was brilliant, sir. You were both muckraker and protector of the corrupt status quo. You furthered your personal agenda and enhanced your reputation as a company man. Bravo, sir."

"Thank you, Sergeant. It was a two-edged sword as a compliment, but I'll take it."

Dudley smiled. "Did you play the recordings, sir? Were you stricken by the sound of your own voice and dismayed that you didn't hear mine?"

Parker winked. "Is that a roll of phone slugs in your pocket, or are you just glad to see me?"

Dudley roared. Meeks yawned. Ashida sat prim.

Parker said, "We're going back to fundamentals. Yes, the Watanabes possessed an anti-American tract. Yes, Dr. Ashida presents a vivid case for the alleged suicide note being coerced. Yes, the note refers to a 'looming apocalypse,' which might indicate either Sunday's attack or the inevitable American-Japanese conflict. I would doubt that the family had specific foreknowledge of the attack, and the crime itself seems to be more of a familial blood feud than a geopolitical matter. Dr. Ashida, would you care to offer comments from a Japanese-American perspective?"

Ashida nodded. "I would agree and disagree, Captain. The killer or killers had to have been Japanese-fluent, or they wouldn't have been able to read the suicide note. The 'looming apocalypse' line might have been a ruse within a ruse, and one intended to shift attention from a family motive to a political motive, should the suicide come to be revealed as having been staged. More pressingly, we have the spent round and the silencer shards, along with the astonishingly unlikely coincidence of the spent round and silencer shards at Whalen's Drugstore the same day."

Dudley beamed. "Doctor, you are a very bright penny."

Ashida blushed. Meeks unwrapped a cigar. Parker said, "The Watanabes were on the 'A' list. I don't consider it applicable, because I believe the Feds were overzealous in compiling the names in the first place. There were two known associates of the family listed. The first was a reputed spy named Tachibana, who allegedly fled to Mexico. The second was a man named Namura, who's in custody at Terminal Island. Sergeant, did you follow up on this during your visit to T.I. yesterday?"

Dudley said, "We interviewed Mr. Namura, sir. In point of fact, he was not a KA of the family, and had no true Fifth Column leanings himself. The sergeant of the guard had been complaining of overcrowding, so I took it upon myself to secure his release."

Meeks eyeballed Dudley. Meeks emitted strange brain waves. Meeks scowled a bit.

A patrol cop walked in. He said, "Phone call for you, Sergeant Smith."

Dudley followed him out. Searchlights strafed the windows. Somebody outside yelled, "*Banzai!*"

Meeks high-signed Ashida. "Don't take it rough, kid. It's your fucked-up people, not you."

Ashida blushed. "We keep coming back to the silencers and Lugers."

Parker said, "Yes, compounded by the fact that Sergeant Smith and his lads killed a man on Saturday afternoon. The man might or might not have fired the gun at the pharmacy, and he was dead himself by the time the Watanabes were killed. It's a pity, because he might have given us some insight as to that bullet hole on the second-floor landing."

Meeks whooped—*mother dog!* Ashida sat prim.

Parker said, "There's a lesson here. Don't abrogate due process. The act creates more problems than it solves."

The Dudster walked back in. Meeks fish-eyed him. Ashida sat prim.

Dudley smiled. "Did I miss anything?"

Parker lit a cigarette. "I told Nort Layman to do advanced blood work on the bodies, and I want Dr. Ashida to do molds on the loose dirt in the Watanabes' driveway. We had rain yesterday morning, but there's a corrugated roof over the driveway, so we might get some protected lifts. Fundamentals, gentlemen. I want detailed biographies on the victims and a backup house-to-house canvass."

A Teletype clattered somewhere. The echo dispersed. The sixth floor was an evacuation zone.

Parker yawned. "There's been a good deal of anti-Japanese rancor in Los Angeles lately."

Meeks said, "Imagine that."

Parker said, "I want Dr. Ashida to have a full-time bodyguard. I was thinking of two men in twelve-hour shifts. Meeks, do you have any ideas?"

Meeks said, "How's Lee Blanchard and Elmer Jackson grab you? Lee drools for plainclothes jobs, and Elmer's tired of standing around 2nd Street, sniffing broiled eel. It's sitting-down work, and both them boys enjoy a good magazine."

Parker nodded—done. Meeks waved his cigar.

"On the gun angle. One, we know it was a silencer-fitted Luger at both locations. Two, dead heist suspect or no dead heist suspect, it's the only real lead we got. Three, let's take a leap and say there's a fascist slant to this job. The Deutsches Haus over on 15th Street sells Lugers illegally. It's all over a whole shitload of Subversive-Squad reports."

Ashida twitched a tad. Parker blurry-eye yawned.

“We’ll raid the place later tonight. I’ll call the Feds. Sergeant Smith, I want you and your boys.”

Dudley smiled. “I bear our Teutonic kin no animus, but we’ll be there with bells on.”

Meeks goose-stepped off his cot. Dudley went *Lad, you slay me*. Parker shut his eyes.

Get it? I’m half in the bag. I’m bored. I’ve had enough.

Footsteps moved out. Somebody killed the lights. The room spun. The floor dropped under his feet.

The drop might have been a dream. The drop might have been sleep.

28

LOS ANGELES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 1941

Tong skirmish—Four Families versus Hop Sing.

They fought behind Kwan's. Dudley parked his K-car and watched.

He knew the opponents. Dewey Leng pumped gas at Chuck's Chevron. He was Four Families. Danny Wong fry-cooked at the Pagoda. He was Hop Sing.

The lads parried with switchblades. They grunted in their brusque language. They scampered and slashed.

Dewey Leng closed the gap. Danny Wong was winded. His knife hand fluttered. Dewey Leng feinted and chopped at his fingers. Danny Wong screamed.

Uncle Ace bossed Hop Sing. Danny was a stellar cook. No killing, please.

Dudley pulled his piece and fired above them. A fence board exploded. The noise spooked the lads. They scurried away.

The kitchen door was off the alley. Dudley opened it and followed a large rat in. Cooks and busboys bowed. He bowed back. Cats chased rats across scrub sinks. Peking ducks cooled.

Dudley walked down to the basement. Ace lounged in his office. A woman hand-stitched armbands. They were red, white and black—pure Deutschenationale. "*I am not a Jap!*" replaced the swastika.

Ace said, "We sell them to Chinese, Koreans and Jap beasts trying to pass. I foresee brisk business."

Dudley laughed. Ace signaled the woman: *You go*. She vanished like female slaves worldwide.

Ace said, "What gives, Dudster?"

"I have many grand notions to share with you, my yellow brother."

Ace rubbed all ten fingers. "You tell me. Grand notions mean money."

Dudley snatched the desk chair and swirled it. The office went *wheeeee*.

"A few questions, first. Tell me again, what does Harry Cohn owe you?"

"Jew cocksucker. It is still nineteen grand. The Jew beast owes Ben Siegel forty-eight."

"Two grand sums, two grand Jew beasts. Second, have you found the Four Families boy who insulted your niece? Your rivals have been misbehaving of late, and I had pledged death to the lad."

Ace said, "My boys find him, Dudster kill him."

Dudley tilted the chair. "In due time, my brother. Most pressingly, a Jap lad named Jimmy Namura will be visiting us in a half hour. We spoke on the telephone a short while ago. I hope I wasn't precipitous in extending the invitation."

Ace rubbed his palms. He was aglow. Greed became him.

Dudley said, "I believe that the entire Jap population of our city will be interned within sixty days' time. This provides us with an opportunity to implement your own grand notion to provide them with room and board in your tunnels and coerce them into performing in naughty films. It had occurred to me that the Japs would feel better if they actually looked Chinese, and that you know a morally sketchy plastic surgeon named Lin Chung. He's no Terry Lux, but he's a competent man."

Ace said, "Sounds like a dud deal, Dudster. Japs, Chinamen—the white man cannot tell us apart."

Dudley said, "Yes, but you had told me that Dr. Chung was a noted eugenicist who had studied racial surgery as performed by Herr Hitler's regime. I thought he might appreciate a chance to indulge his curiosity."

Ace shrugged and grabbed the phone. Ace dialed a number and spieled rabid Chink. A busboy walked in Jimmy Namura. Jimmy the Jap wore khakis and a silk bowling shirt.

He *Sieg Heil!*ed Dudley and scowled at Uncle Ace. The busboy scrammed. Uncle Ace dumped the phone and scrammed with him. Japs brought home the Rape of Nanking.

Jimmy the Jap clicked his heels. Dudley said, "You've worn out the joke, lad. It was amusing the first time, but no more."

"I've learned something, boss. I told you you wouldn't regret springing me."

Dudley pointed to a chair. Jimmy the Jap got comfy. He had that eager-snitch look.

"Here's the windup and the pitch, boss. *El Jefe* Madrano isn't a partner with that white stiff buying up all the Japanese properties. All that skinny I told you about the stiff owning the Watanabe house and all that 'phantom ownership' jive *es la verdad*, but *El Jefe*'s just a scout, and there's really *two* white stiffs. The 'phantom ownership' is officially recorded somewhere, but that's all I've got on that."

Dudley said, "Continue, please."

"That first pitch was a strike, boss—and I got another fastball coming. You've got *two* white stiffs, but I've got no names. They've bought city properties and farms from families named Ugawa, Hiroki, and Marusawa. They own the Watanabe farm and their flop in Highland Park, all through some 'dummy corporation.' That cat we talked about, Hikaru Tachibana, was the two guys' bird dog, and he allegedly got the deal on the Watanabe farm done. Tachi was out on bail and had some deportation hearing pending, but he absconded and started running a string of chippies up in Hollywood. Now, he gets arrested under a phony name, gets bailed and goes absconding again. Remember, he's supposed to be hiding in Mexico—but I heard that a Japanese guy snuffed him right after he brokered the deal on the Watanabe farm. So, allegedly, Tachi's *muerto*, anchored with lead weights and buried in some dirt-covered well hole out there in that farm stretch."

Dudley savored it. "And how did you secure this information?"

"My lips are sealed, boss. I'm a Jap on the Jap grapevine. I know Japs who know Japs who know Japs. If you start bracing them for corroboration, my Jap goose is cooked."

Uncle Ace walked Lin Chung in. Dr. Chung packed a large satchel. Ace brought a frosty mai tai on a tray.

Dudley said, "Drink up, Jimmy. Mr. Kwan is quite the swell host."

Jimmy the Jap shrugged and snatched the goblet. It featured almond bitters, high-volt rum and morphine.

He took a jolt and went pie-eyed. Jolt no. 2 dropped his lids. Jolt no. 3 put him supine.

The floor served as a bed. A tablecloth served as a sheet. Dudley jammed a chair cushion under Jimmy's head. Lin Chung disinfected his instruments with Old Crow. Ace smoked cigarettes to cover wayward scents.

Scalpels, cutting knives, catgut sutures. A bone saw with serrated teeth.

Lin Chung built a mouth vent with paper clips and duct tape. Dudley called Mike Breuning at the Bureau. Mike confirmed Whiskey Bill—the Deutsches Haus, 11:30.

Dudley dug through Ace's closets. Ace was a big tunnel digger. Yes, he's got all the tools.

Large shovel, small shovel, pickax. U.S. Army Geiger counter.

Dudley packed them into a duffel bag and carried them out to his car. His evidence kit was stashed in the trunk. Like the Boy Scouts—be prepared.

He walked back to the office. The tablecloth was soaked red. Jimmy the Jap's brows were cut and clamped wide. Lin Chung wore goggles. He worked through Ace's smoke.

He cut cheekbone to chin and blotted blood with cocktail napkins. Dudley stayed clear of the spritz. Lin Chung plucked tendons with pencil tips.

Dr. Chung was a witch doctor of subwestern repute. Indeed—no Terry Lux. Dr. Terry owned a dry-out farm in the Malibu Hills. He did movieland plastic jobs and booze and dope cures. Dr. Terry dried out jigaboo jazzmen and Hancock Park swells.

Lin Chung poked Jimmy the Jap. Lin Chung said, "So far, I pessimistic. Physiognomy incompatible, I think. Might not work on mass scale like Uncle Ace propose. Eugenics wave of the future, but still in its infancy. Require thought and study. This cocksucker still look Jap to me."

Jimmy Namura woke up and screamed.

The screams chased him outside. Dudley hit the parking lot, hell-hounded. He bagged his car and tapped the siren. The sound smothered fading screams.

Dublin, 1919. Black and Tans fire into a Grafton Street crowd. His brother James dies. He hides in a refuse bin. He's fourteen. His world is all sirens and screams.

He took Broadway to the Arroyo Seco. The parkway shot him straight north. He dry-swallowed two Benzedrine.

Mass surgery might prove untenable. It might be a eugenic conceit. Finer hands might make it work. Terry Lux *loved* to cut faces. Terry was America First and perhaps further right. Lin Chung could provide cut-rate cuts.

The Watanabe case was *his* case. The outcome was irrelevant. The case was his laboratory. It sanctioned him to exploit the dark races. The case shadowboxed the war.

He cut through Pasadena and Glendale. He took dirt roads to the northeast Valley. They were rutted and rock-strewn. He dropped into low gear.

Jap farmland. Fertilizer stink. Night irrigation. A constant subterranean hiss.

He had a Watanabe farm map. He'd disinterred before. Dublin, '22. He located buried British guns outside Galway. Joe Kennedy supplied his cell with metal detectors.

There's the Watanabe farm. There's the kanji-script sign. It means

"Gate to Japan."

The bennies tapped his bloodstream. It was all one big long shot. The lead weights on the body rang credible. The "dirt-covered well hole" narrowed it down. Jimmy the Jap might have been conned. The body might be elsewhere. It was worth an hour's time.

Clouds covered the moon. Dudley parked behind a scrub bush and saddled up. The duffel bag, the Geiger, a flashlight. His full-dress evidence kit.

He lugged his gear to the fence line and trampled down a stretch of chain links. He turned on his flashlight. He saw cabbage rows and smelled fertilizer. He flicked on the Geiger. The dial lit up, the needle hovered at zero.

There—a low hill ahead. No crop furrows—just green-brown grass.

Dudley trudged over. The load slowed him down. The bennies supplied extra oomph. The Geiger led the way. The needle stayed low. The clicker *click-clicked*.

He read the clicks. He made them. Metallic soil traces—innocuous.

The hill was a trudge. His heart rate bollixed his breath. He saw a stonework well up at the top. He low-beamed his flashlight and caught scurrying bugs.

The needle jumped. The clicker clicks clicked click-by-click *loud*. The intervals shortened. Follow the clicks, follow the needle, look for inconsistent topsoil.

Click, click, click, click, click.

A click-jabber, persistent. See the needle? It's jumping, *click-click-click*.

There—*that* patch of ground. Bugs are digging into it. There's soil exposed. They want that edible moss and that *something* underneath.

The needle shot to the end of the dial. The clicker clicked *LOUD*. The *click-clicks* said *DIG HERE*.

Dudley turned off the Geiger and got out his tools. Dudley anchored his flashlight and aimed it at the ground. Dig, now—there's something there.

Bugs skittered away. He sank his shovel into the swarm and killed the fuckers en masse. He chopped through them and hit soft dirt.

He tossed it away from his gear. Underground bugs squirmed. He smelled corpse-dissolving quicklime.

Dirt—one shovel's worth. *Dirt*—two, three, four, five, six. Yes—a flesh underscent.

Yes—yellow skin. Yes—brown dirt in black hair. Paradoxical quicklime. It liquefies flesh, it preserves flesh, it perfumes flesh and emits ghastly scents. It pervades soil and leaves metal traces. It alerts Geiger counters.

Dudley dug through soft dirt and quicklime. Dudley dug around a dead man's outline. His head's on top. He was dumped feetfirst. He was stripped nude to hasten the rot.

It had to be Hikaru Tachibana. Loose dirt engulfed him. A stone well space loomed underneath.

The flesh stink outstunk the quicklime. Dudley tied his handkerchief over his nose and mouth. Tachi's skin still adhered to his bones. It was a grab-and-pull job.

Dudley grabbed. Dudley pulled. The head and torso came out of the hole. The legs and entrails were gone.

Look at the Jap. There's half of him left. His eyeballs have dropped from his face. There's maggots atop his leg bones.

Note his bony chest. Note his rising-sun tattoo. Note the needle marks on his arms. Note the seven odd knife wounds on his biceps and abdomen.

Well preserved. Seamless cuts. An overall starburst effect.

Dudley got out his evidence camera. He attached the flash gizmo and screwed in a bulb. He laid Tachi out and held his flashlight close.

He aimed the camera one-handed. He shot the belly wounds first.

The bulb exploded. He ejected it and popped in another bulb. He shot the mid-left bicep wound. He squatted and went contortionist. Lucky seven, seven wounds, seven bulbs in his kit. He got seven tight close-ups.

The bennies ratched up his heart rate. He gouted sweat.

Dudley kicked Tachi back in the hole. Tachi's left arm dropped off. Dudley refilled the hole and smoothed out the dirt. Bugs reconverged.

Clouds passed over. Dudley made like a hellhound and bayed at the moon.

He packed up his gear. He brushed himself grime-free. He walked to his car and placed the gear in the trunk. He got in the car and drove back to flatland L.A.

It was late. He made the Cahuenga Pass, quick. The pass to Hollywood. La Brea to 15th and east.

The Deutsches Haus was lit up, gemütlich. The raiding party stood out by their cars.

Breuning, Carlisle, Meeks. Whiskey Bill Parker. Ed Satterlee and wet-blanket Ward Littell.

Dudley pulled up behind them. Breuning and Carlisle flashed V for Victory. Parker popped his trunk and dispensed shotguns. *Was ist das im Deutschen Haus?* It's *Tannhäuser*, too loud.

Parker said, "In the door and spread out."

They racked their shotguns. They ran over and flanked the doorway. Dudley kicked the door off the hinges. *Tannhäuser* soared, unconstrained.

The Haus was a shithole. Five men sat around a Victrola. It was

Pabst Blue Ribbon and Nazi armbands on loden coats.

Flying wedge.

Breuning, Carlisle and Meeks went right. Littell and Satterlee went left. Dudley and Parker took the chute.

The *Kameraden* just sat there. They ranged thirty to sixty. They looked innocuous. A Munich rally, the guys selling peanuts.

Parker kicked over the phonograph. *Tannhäuser* crashed and died. Littell aimed at a Hitler bust and blew it up. Stray pellets took out a window. Breuning and Carlisle cheered.

Meeks and Satterlee went in butt-first. They head-smashed the Huns. They knocked them out of their chairs. They kicked them prone and cuffed them facedown on the floor. Shrieks, yells and protest slogans—all gobbledygook.

Littell pumped in a fresh round and blew up the Victrola. Tube glass exploded. Dudley scoped the room—this sissy's Berchtesgaden.

Herr Breuning stomped Hun to Hun. He raged in German and kicked the Huns in the balls. Dudley watched Parker watch him. They traded eyeball clicks.

The Huns squealed. Parker yelled, "Toss the place! We want silencers and guns!"

"The place" was blitzkrieged. Shattered *Führer*, shattered glass, shotgun-pocked walls. Five *Übermenschen*, five piss-your-pants pools.

Dudley walked up to Parker. The pious pest looked haggard. His blue suit hung off of him. Hate tracts were stacked on a bookshelf. Dudley examined them.

"They look like the tract at the Watanabe house, sir."

Parker examined them. "They look like a left-wing tract in an outside deal I'm working."

The lads hit the back office. Flying wedge—two Feds, three city cops. Dudley heard five shotguns rerack.

Explosions overlapped. Wood sieved through the doorway. Parker ran back to the office. Meeks whooped—*mother dog!*

Lads, did you blow up a desk?

Satterlee yelled, "Nothing so far! No silencers and no guns!"

A Hun bleated something. Dudley caught "silencer."

He squatted beside him. The man looked vaguely Semitic. The man was seedy-debonair.

"What was that you said, lad? I'll loosen your handcuffs if you repeat it."

The man gasped. The man said, "We got burglarized last night. We lost our Lugers and silencers."

There's a lead—snag it.

"And your name, lad?"

"Robert Noble, Esquire. Order of the Iron Cross and the Thunderbolt

Legion."

Dudley patted Esquire's leg. "And before you anglicized it? Speak in a whisper, so your friends won't know you possess mongrel blood."

Esquire rasped it. "It's Moskowitz."

"And how many silencers and guns did you lose?"

"Four."

"Does this grand establishment *sell* silencer-equipped Lugers?"

Esquire squirmed. "I'm the ordnance lieutenant. I consigned two silencers and two pieces to a heist guy. He wanted to lay the goods off on some Japs he knew. He was a young, snotty guy. I don't know his name."

Dudley uncuffed Esquire. "Did you tell this lad how to demonstrate the silencers and the guns?"

"I don't read you."

"Think, Robert. Did you advise the young man as to how he might best demonstrate the effectiveness of the ordnance?"

"Oh, yeah. I told him to fire into roofs or ceilings, that that would impress the Japs good."

Crash noise echoed. Cops run amok. They're dumping shelves and punching through wallboards.

Dudley whispered. "My colleagues will be busy in your office for the next few minutes, which will allot me the same amount of time. I think you have a business ledger stashed on the premises. Tell me where, or I will kill you. I will unlock your handcuffs, pull a gun from my back pocket, fire it and place it in your hand. I will then blow your brains out and cite self-defense."

Satterlee yelled, "American money! We found a hidey-hole!" Dudley patted Esquire. "Your answer, lad?"

Esquire whispered. "I don't truck with the ledger, but it's behind that high shelf with the *Mein Kampf*s."

Dudley walked over and stood tiptoed. He reached behind Herr Hitler's screed and pulled out a clothbound binder. He stuck it in his waistband.

He brushed a pile of swastika pins. He laughed and pocketed them. Archbishop Cantwell was a Coughlinite and loved a good trinket. Shamrocks were passé.

December 10, 1941

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LOS ANGELES | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1941

A wind kicked through. Broken glass shattered. Door padlocks thumped.

Ward Littell called it a "pogrom." Mariko had her very own bleeding-heart Fed. They played cards and swilled cocktails. Her son's old room was Ward's room now. Mariko was living it up.

Because Bill Parker pulled strings.

Ashida stood on the fire escape. Sleep was a pipe dream. He'd been up since Monday morning.

He was woozy. Bucky finked him to the Feds. Kay Lake knew it. She knew things that other people didn't.

Because Bill Parker pulled strings.

The wind escalated. Broken glass flew. Cops paced adjacent rooftops. Ward left an hour ago. Captain Bill ordered a Deutsches Haus raid.

He had the guns and silencers. They were stashed at his apartment. He hid them with his Bucky photos.

Elmer Jackson stood one rooftop over. His cigar bobbed and glowed. Elmer and Lee Blanchard were his new bodyguards. Ray Pinker called and told him. He said Bill Parker pulled strings.

Police work. Kay Lake's male hierarchy. Kay Lake, the sorority girl Mata Hari. She was keyed in on Bucky. He'd seen her at Bucky's fights. They shared a certain reverie.

They worked together. He pilfered a tap disk. He took it to his apartment and played it. He heard four ghastly phone calls.

All from mid-'39. Fletch Bowron/Two-Gun Davis/Call-Me-Jack Horrall. They discussed the "Jap issue." It prophesied *now*.

The inevitable war. The inevitable internment. Property seizures, bank raids, confiscations. Lists compiled and names named.

The "Chinks" as potential enforcers. Chinatown and Little Tokyo are *this* close.

Two-Gun Davis spoke Chinese. He mediated tong truces. His negotiations always favored Hop Sing. The Chinks stood ready to assist the local white man.

Casual chat. Tong-snuff cover-ups and Ace Kwan's dope den. The Dudster pitched a Four Families lad off a building. A passing truck severed his head.

Bowron called the Chinks their "storm troopers." They'd be the ones to steamroll the Japs.

Ashida walked down the hall. Mariko snored in her room. Ward drove off to the raid and left his door open. The room felt magnetic.

Ashida picked up Ward's pajamas and held them to his cheek. He caught a scent and memorized it. Ward's briefcase was out and open. Ashida stroked it.

He skimmed a carbon sheet. It was the top page of the "B" list. The names ran from Akahoshi to Aridosho. He knew half of the people. They were all fine citizens.

He walked back to the fire escape. Ward's car pulled to the curb. The wind felt good. He heard, "Hey, Hideo!" out in the dark.

Elmer Jackson waved his shotgun. Ashida yelled, "Hey, Elmer!" back.

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1941

The basement is full of Lee's boxing memorabilia. There's a passel of publicity stills, along with framed posters for Lee's "Big Money" bout with Jimmy Bivens. The fight was fixed. Lee "went in the tank." The poster is dated July 16, 1937. It precedes Ben Siegel and the Boulevard-Citizens heist.

Lee will probably spend the night at City Hall. He will show up here when he damn well pleases, and right at the point that I begin to miss him. He'll apologize for his loathsome conduct at Mike Lyman's. He might heap praise on Dr. Hideo Ashida.

Who possesses a remote sort of courage. It's the courage I once mistakenly ascribed to his friend Bucky. The intersection of these two men fascinates me. I keep thinking, Why now? and go to the war as the only explanation. In the meantime, I can't sleep and remain hungry for Scotty Bennett. In the meantime, Captain William H. Parker has sent me a movie.

I'm set up to watch it. The screen is a roll-down contraption hooked to the rear basement wall. Lee bought it to view old fight films, and I've learned how to run the projector. I was there for the first show of *Gone with the Wind*. I want to see this movie much more.

I loaded the film and thought about Scotty. We left Lyman's in the wake of Dr. Ashida's embarrassed exit; we checked into the Rosslyn Hotel and made love. I wanted to spend the night—but Scotty said that he couldn't. He'd borrowed his father's car and promised to return it by midnight. My rough boy remained in the thrall of the Reverend James Considine Bennett. I resisted the urge to comment. I said, "You can go, but I'm not done with you yet."

It angered Scotty. He brought that anger to our good-night kiss; I started wanting him all over again.

I stuck the first piece of film under the slide, hit the switch and turned off the lights. There it was—*Storm Over Leningrad.*

I steadied the spools and leaned into the speaker. An overture covered the titles. The fascist dissonance was stolen from Prokofiev; the heroic harmonies were stolen from Brahms. A polemical folly unfolded; the real Russians and Germans were staining the steppes workers' red as I watched.

I was too tired to laugh. My clothes were filthy. My muscles ached from hours of grubby work in police squadrooms. My heart just plain dropped.

Claire De Haven and company cared for the plight of the world. Claire De Haven and company extolled tyrants and lived for adversarial cliché.

I recognized the Russian-front exteriors. They were the grounds of Terry Lux's sanitarium. The PD had their summer picnics there. I'd read Captain Parker's files. The Red Queen was the uncredited writer and director. The movie was shoddily improvised. The actors tripped over one another. The battling soldiers shot BB guns. The windbag oratory was flabbergasting. Most of the Nazis appeared to be Mexican, Jewish or Greek.

I felt sick. Captain William H. Parker sent me *this*. He viewed my performance at the Robeson recital and assumed my derisive laughter here. He did not stop to think that I might feel kinship with a woman this touched by the world's horror.

Enough.

I turned off the projector and turned on the lights. *Storm Over Leningrad* swooped and died. I stood in front of a wall mirror and performed.

The mirror was Claire De Haven. I was myself speaking to her and myself as her in reply. I ridiculed her movie for its artlessness and praised her courage in wearing her staunch heart on her sleeve. She voiced skepticism. My prairie-girl/police-consort persona was unconvincing. I was too young and feckless to have shed blood for the Red Cause. She called me a child sophisticate and critiqued my performance at the recital as artfully realized sophistry. "Are you a police informant, Katherine? You whored for a pimp and excoriated him at trial. You live with cops and off of cops and come to me with your revulsion for them as the stated basis of your credibility. Where have you been before that? I have stood before official committees and have been pilloried for my beliefs. I do not see one iota of self-sacrifice in you."

It was *my* best self-indictment as *her* best moment. I would meet her tomorrow, at Dr. Lesnick's office. Her slaves would tell her that they saw me at the Anti-Axis Committee. She would be impressed that I recalled lines from *Storm Over Leningrad* and would not know that I had watched it the previous night. I looked in the mirror and saw myself as her. I aged ten years and became slightly dissolute and much more patrician. *I lacerated myself*. I outcritiqued Claire De Haven's critique.

It was enough to take with me. I couldn't hold my mirror pose a moment longer. I had his mother's number memorized and wanted to talk to him. I dialed the number and barely heard it ring.

Hideo Ashida said, "Yes?"

I said, "It's Kay Lake."

"Yes, I know."

"Tell me what you mean."

"I'm saying that when the phone rang this late, I knew it was you."

"Were you awake?"

"Yes."

"I don't think I'll ever be able to sleep."

He said, "It's the war. Everyone is like that."

I said, "I saw Captain Parker yesterday afternoon. He was exhausted."

"I saw him several hours ago. He fell asleep in a briefing."

"I think—"

"I don't want to talk about Captain Parker. It seems inappropriate."

I said, "Tell me something. Give me an insight or provoke me. Tell me what you're thinking."

He said, "I've been assigned two bodyguards. I think you're acquainted with them."

"Tell me who."

He said, "Sergeant Elmer Jackson and Officer Lee Blanchard."

I said, "Meet me tomorrow night. Give them the slip. We'll have a drink somewhere."

He said, "Yes, as you wish." The phone went dead then.

The receiver slipped out of my hand. Nobody could sleep. Some of us could think as our eyes blurred.

Captain Parker knew the movie would instill empathy. He was creating confusion and a fanatic's fury within me. He knew I'd never back down. I was his sister in fury.

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LOS ANGELES | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1941

Traffic death. Shoreline job. Windward and Main.

Parker stood in the intersection. A lab man chalked the body and measured skid marks. The driver never saw the old lady. He was driving per blackout regs. The old lady stepped out of nowhere.

The driver was all boo-hoo. He said he was fucking exhausted. The fucking Japs bombed Pearl Harbor. He hadn't slept since Sunday morning.

Parker sent him home. Sleep, brother. We'll call you for the coroner's inquest.

A morgue van hauled off the body. The bluesuits resumed patrol. Parker wrote the report in his car. His clipboard blurred.

He got the call outside the Deutsches Haus and drove here. He played the radio on the ride over. A newscast gave him the blues.

That man James Larkin died at Queen of Angels. He got sideswiped on his bike Sunday morning. He was leading the Santa Monica Cycleers. The kids survived, he didn't.

Parker prayed the Rosary. His voice cracked. He vowed to pray for Larkin's recovery and forgot to enact the vow. The Japs bombed Hawaii. It induced mass amnesia.

Parker recalled an odd detail. Larkin's going in the ambulance. A Luger grip falls from his lap.

It was dark and cold. Hide-and-drink conditions excelled. Dudley's boys were booking the Krauts at the Hall of Justice jail. He should be there.

Parker drove downtown. He left the blackout zone and hit lit-up L.A. A woman jaywalked at Temple and Hill. She wore a Kay Lake–style red dress.

Parker double-parked outside the Hall and took the cop lift up. The thirteenth floor was Axis-packed. The holding tank was all Jap.

The booking desk featured Dudley's boys and the five Kraut fucks. They were shackled to a come-along chain.

Breuning said, “The skipper’s back.”

Carlisle said, “I’m hungry. Let’s head over to Kwan’s.”

Meeks said, “It’s Shotgun Bill.”

Parker checked the arrest log. The *Schweinehunde* were penciled in. Max Affman, Robert Noble, Max Herman Schwinn. Ellis Jones and a dentist named Dr. Fred Hiltz.

They were bruised up from the raid. Their snazzy armbands drooped.

A jail deputy hovered. Parker said, “Book them for sedition and hold them for the Federal grand jury. No habeas, no bail. Place them on the colored tier. They might learn a few things.”

A tall *Schweinehund* grumbled. Breuning backhanded him. The desk phone rang. The jail deputy got it.

A fat *Schweinehund* said, “I don’t bunk with no coons.” Breuning backhanded him. The jail deputy passed Parker the phone.

“Yes?”

“It’s Nort Layman, Bill. You should meet me at Homicide. I’ve turned up something on Nancy Watanabe.”

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LOS ANGELES | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1941

His favorite nightcap—coffee and Benzedrine.

Dudley cigarette-chased them. The squadroom was empty. Dr. Ashida and Miss Lake left the place disarrayed. It kept the nightwatch lads out.

His cubicle was spotless. *He* remained untapped. *He* made his dicey calls from pay phones. A Jew locksmith sold him slugs.

His desk phone blinked. *Aaaaaah*—the photo lab.

The night-shift man pledged a rush job on his snapshots. The man was a pervert parolee. He would not reveal the dead Jap in the pix.

Dudley twirled thoughts. One thought persistently twirled. *He missed something at the house. It was something very simple. The killer might have missed it himself.*

He twirled thoughts. One thought niggled. Call-Me-Jack burdened him with a stray job.

The draft would deplete the Department. Cops would be conscripted willy-nilly. It would mandate emergency hires. He had to scan recent reject files for men fit to serve.

It was niggling work. It cramped his brain waves. The Watanabe case ran full-time. *It* was his brain-broiler.

He missed something at the house. He should consult bright Dr. Ashida.

Dudley restudied the book. It was Ray Pinker's knife-wound text. It included photographs.

Yes—multiple blade marks. Yes—the central puncture and starburst effect. Yes—the same incision perspective.

The photos matched the stab points on Hikaru Tachibana. He was almost certain. The lab pix would cinch it.

Two phone lights blinked. Dudley strolled to the doorway tube chute and stuck his hand out. That whoosh *whooshed*. He grabbed the canister and strolled back to his desk.

Next—the comparison test.

Ray Pinker's knife photos. His own knife-wound photos. Twelve text photos and seven flashbulb shots.

He studied both sets. He went back and forth. Identical? *Yes*.

Pix confirmed. Go to Pinker's historical text.

A Jap war knife caused the wounds. The knife derived from eighteenth-century Japan. Feudal warlords dipped the blades in slow-acting poison. Superficial wounds rarely proved lethal. Warlords superficially wounded their men to test their courage under duress.

Deep stab wounds always proved fatal. Deep stab wounds and the poison caused slow and tortuous death. Warlords often stabbed the arms of their victims. This ensured that no pierced organs would cause instant death. Warlords often pierced their victims' abdomens. This transmitted poison to the lower intestines. This brought about slow and horrid death.

Dudley closed the book and stashed the photos. His brain twirled. He should study the Deutsches Haus ledger. His brain retwirled. Buzz Meeks caught the Whalen's job. *That* case aspect perplexed him. Meeks might have items desk-stashed.

It was 2:12 a.m. Robbery would be dead. Dr. Ashida's photo gizmo snapped evidence pix. Meeks might have duplicates.

Dudley walked over to Robbery. The squadroom was tombsville. Meeks had a horseshoe paperweight on his desk.

The top drawer was open. Pencils, paper clips, erasers. One roll of evidence film, with a note attached.

"T.M.: Sorry, but it wouldn't develop."

Dudley crossed out the note. Dudley wrote below it, "Try again. Return the photos to me. Try harder. You're a lazy fiend son of a bitch."

He walked to the tube chute and stuffed the film and note in. He hit the photo-lab switch and heard the *whoosh*. He walked back to his desk and studied the ledger.

The Deutsches Haus. Sedition as pratfall. Illegal weaponry sales. Buyers would use pseudonyms. It was a long shot.

Yes—block-printed columns. Dates and ordnance lists. Pseudonyms, as predicted.

H. Himmler, J. Goebbels, H. Göring. "A. Hitler"—that's rich.

Dudley scanned pages. There's Hirohito, Tojo, Mussolini. There's more puerile humor, up to—

A real name.

Huey Cressmeyer.

Ruth Mildred's perv son. Ruth Mildred, Dot Rothstein's lez frau. Ruth Mildred fucked a man to have a child that she and Dot could pervert.

Dudley skimmed the rest of the ledger. It starred Field Marshal Rommel and A. Hitler's squeeze, Eva Braun. He locked up the ledger.

His brain Geiger-counter clicked. Two desk-phone lights blinked.

He walked to the tube and snatched up the goodies. He walked back to his desk and unloaded them.

The lazy fiend delivers. It's prompt. It's wildly serendipitous.

Dudley examined the photos. He hypothesized the fuckups that gave him these shots.

Dr. Ashida's wizardly gizmo. It's applied to the task of photographing license plates. A malfunction occurs. Car wheels hit the wire and make the shutter trip. Something jams the lens upward. Four blurred images of Huey C. result.

It's Huey. He's about to heist Whalen's Drugstore. *They're blurred* images. They're courtroom invalid. It's Huey—but only if you know him.

He heard foot scuffs. Bill Parker and Nort Layman walked up.

Layman said, "Nancy Watanabe was recently pregnant. She'd had an abortion. I did advanced blood work and found stray tissue cells. The father had AB-negative blood."

Dudley said, "A delightful surprise."

Parker said, "It explains the morphine paregoric at the house. It's prescribed for cramps in early pregnancies."

Layman said, "The Whalen's guy pawed around in the paregoric. It's in Buzz Meeks' report."

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LOS ANGELES | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1941

Ashida wrote in kanji.

He summarized his private findings. He sprayed his paper with a preflammable mist. Direct heat would burn it.

He was relearning his mother tongue. Translation came slowly. Words came in fragments.

He worked at the kitchen table. Mariko and Ward Littell gabbed in the living room. Bookies' "flash paper." It spawned his idea.

He botched dual-language clauses. His pen skipped.

渡辺邸にあった短波ラジオ。あれを盗め。新たな放送を聴くべし。

English to Japanese and back again. Kanji to Arabic script.

"Shortwave radio at house. Steal radio. Play new broadcasts."

His mind misfired. He omitted parts of speech.

"Broken glass with fish smell at house. Shrimp residue on victims' feet. Fish smell on man at farm property."

He translated and *re*translated. It assured accuracy. He blew on the pages and dried the ink. He trembled. He had to sleep. He knew he'd never sleep. Kay Lake's phone call got to him.

It unnerved him. It made him think fantastically. Kay Lake had interdicted his brain waves. She seemed to be clairvoyant. She was immersed in Bucky Bleichert. Her erotic view of Bucky disturbed him. It granted her insight and deductive force. He was afraid that she could read his mind and decode his shameful thoughts.

Mariko walked in. She was stinko. Ashida covered his notepad.

"Mother, did Captain Madrano or any of the other Mexican policemen inquire about our farm labor? About replacing them or buying our farm?"

Mariko shook her head and snatched an ice tray. Ashida heard noise outside. He tilted his chair up to the window.

The Sumitomo Bank was open. Deputies loaded cash bags into a van. Thad Brown held a tommy gun and watchdogged the transfer.

The van pulled out. Brown nailed a seizure bill to the door.

Ashida went back to work.

Kanji, Arabic, kanji. *"What did I miss at the house?"*

He yawned. It hurt. He stood up and saw spots. He had to stop. He couldn't drive home. He had to fall down somewhere close.

His bedroom was Ward's bedroom now. His chemistry gear was packed in the closet. He could *brew* sleep.

He weaved down the hall. The door was open. He grabbed vials of fo-ti and liquid valerian. He took them to the bathroom and ran sink water into a cup. It tasted like astringent mud. He got it down in one gulp.

The spots returned. He braced himself on the walls and made it back to the kitchen. Mariko's rocking chair glowed some strange color.

He fell down in it. He rocked himself to some strange place. It looked like a bank vault. The money was purple, not green. The Lake girl and the Bennett boy committed seppuku. Their blood was the color the money should be. The Bennett boy stood under a shower. Water splashed on a secret camera. He tried to form a stop sign in kanji. Kay Lake blew smoke in his face.

He heard gunshots. His eyes burned. He opened them and saw daylight out the window. The last gunshot was the bank bell clanging. He squinted and saw the bank clock. The big hand and little hand said 1:30.

The gunshots were the doorbell. The water was his own sweat and urine. The world was the rocking chair on the floor.

He stumbled to the door. He opened it. Bucky Bleichert stood there.

"Hideo, I'm sorry. I just couldn't—"

He hit him and hit him and hit him. Belmont '35, green-and-black forever. Bucky stood there and took it.

He hit him. Bucky's blood was some strange new color. He hit him until he couldn't hold his hands up.

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1941

The oppressed-workers prints were predictable. The comely receptionist affirmed that Dr. Lesnick enjoyed young women. I was the only analysand in the waiting room; I wore a college-coed ensemble designed to tweak the doctor's susceptibility and introduce myself as a swoony huntress of the Left. Wool skirt, white blouse, fitted navy blazer. Scuffed saddle shoes for collegiate bonhomie, and bright red knee sox. A black beret pinned with a FREE THE SCOTTSBORO BOYS button. Most of the boys *had* been freed, and several of the boys were by all accounts guilty. It didn't matter. I was impervious to political reason and giddy with my own neuroses.

I was early for my appointment. I came early to acclimate to my huntress' habitat. I had created a narrative for my first session, based on Jung-like archetypes. I would thus designate the men in my life and both enchant and enrage Dr. Lesnick. He would be impressed that I possessed some knowledge of Jung and appalled that I had co-opted his theories so self-servingly. The sexual subtext would drive him mad and get me in like Flynn.

A radio broadcast served up distraction. U.S. flyboys sank two Japanese destroyers. President Roosevelt would soon initiate the wartime draft. Japanese submarines were now prowling our shoreline waters. Fletch Bowron weighed in on tonight's all-city blackout. Captain William H. Parker will meet with civil defense authorities later today. Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt will attend the wingding at the Hollywood Plaza Hotel.

The inner-office door opened. Dr. Lesnick entered the waiting room and looked at me.

He was sixty-five years old, frail and thin. He wore a Freud beard. His fingers were nicotine-stained. He had that haunted-Jewish-refugee look. He said, "Miss Lake?" and ushered me into his office.

The analyst's chair, the analysand's couch, the WPA murals. Beverly Hills meets the Dust Bowl. Lesnick closed the door behind us.

I took the couch; Lesnick took the chair. We lit cigarettes and pulled ashtrays close. Lesnick said, "May I ask who recommended me?"

"I went to some Young Socialist Alliance meetings a few years ago. There was a consensus that you were very good at interpreting dreams."

"Would you say that your dreams possess consistent themes?"

I shut my eyes and crossed my legs at the ankles; I wanted the doctor to ogle me and gauge my suitability for the Red Queen's cell. We were both police informants. I knew that he was; he did not know that I was. I had the upper hand.

The office was pleasantly cool. I blew smoke rings and burrowed into the couch. I said, "The unifying theme is sex."

A long silence percolated. I had preannounced my faux narrative off the doctor's first query. Lesnick gave the Feds intimate dirt on Claire De Haven. His informant role surely suffused him with self-loathing. I represented a quid pro quo. He could vouch me to the Red Queen and recoup on his perfidy.

The silence extended. I pictured the doctor enjoying my college-girl-recumbent pose. *Sex equals social consciousness equals politics. I'll tie it all up inextricably. He's astonishingly arrogant. He's every intelligent man who's not really brilliant and must convince the world that he is. He'll tell Claire De Haven all about me. He'll turn my pre-scripted monologues into disengaged ramblings. He'll tell the Queen that he rapidly deduced the key to my soul.*

He said, "Describe your dreams."

I put out my cigarette and laced my hands behind my head. I said, "Five men from my life pass through my dreams, interchangeably. I've given them archetypal names, based on my survey of Jung. There's 'the Chaste Lover,' 'the Boxer,' 'the Unruly Boy,' 'the Authoritarian' and 'the Japanese.' I live with 'the Chaste Lover.' We've had a few dashed sexual encounters and have settled into an arid domesticity. The Chaste Lover is a policeman, and I'm incongruously very much a part of his world. The Unruly Boy is a recent conquest, who may be going off to the war. The Boxer is a local celebrity, and a man I've been drawn to for some time. The Authoritarian and the Japanese are men I am in no way sexually compelled by, but they are the most gifted of the men, and gifted men compel me more than any other male type."

Lesnick said, "You think in types, then? Your survey of Jung has led you to organize your internal life in that manner?"

I said, "Yes. I think in types. I grew up in the Depression, and I've seen how the inability to think clearly and act decisively has hobbled our leaders and sustained oppressive conditions in this country. I made up my mind not to be that way. Thinking in archetypes has helped me grasp political situations as well as personal ones."

Another silence followed. My incomplete response laid the bait. *Nail me, Doctor*.

He said, "Your critique of oppression is quite incomplete. Especially so, given that button you're wearing."

He took the bait. I let him win. I made him think, *This callow child, she's so* young.

"I was only citing an example of how I think. I organize my external life rigorously, but my internal life and dream life are quite something else."

"It's very rare to have a patient begin analysis with their dreams. They usually begin by describing a current crisis or with a short autobiography."

I shifted on the couch. I was off in a stage performer's calm. I said, "My dreams undermine my self-confidence in the world. That's why I decided to begin a course in analysis. My external state remains static, but my unconscious state is currently in upheaval." He said, "Do you see the exterior world as a manifestation of your thoughts?"

"My personal world or the world at large?"

"Both."

"My personal world, certainly. The world at large, quite often."

"Would you explain 'the world at large,' please?"

I seized the moment. We had unconsciously colluded; it had forged his archetype of me. I was the Child Megalomaniac.

"I've comported in the world erratically and come to a point of self-knowledge that has given me uncanny insight. There are certain people who carry fire in the world and cause the world to shift in dramatic, inexplicable and rarely detectable ways. People like that, *like me*, create political shifts and effect changes of the social climate. So you see, Doctor, that is why the contradictions of my dream life are so disturbing."

Lesnick shifted in his chair. I sensed him keying up. He said, "Tell me about your dreams, then. Why is sex the unifying theme?"

This was my time to soliloquize. Lesnick's snitch duty had secured his daughter's prison release. Wayward Andrea Lesnick, wayward Katherine Lake. A drunken girl drives her car into a car filled with Rotarians. A South Dakota girl steals money and catches a bus to L.A. Politics, dreams, sex. Newly revealed megalomania. A clock was ticking toward the end of my fifty-minute hour. I performed with brevity.

I went straight to my archetypes and stitched them up. They were all policemen and policeman manqués. Why am I so drawn to men who rule by hobnailed boot? I'm a megalomaniac, but I'm confused.

I'm a woman in a man's world. They won't let me in. I tried to join the Marines on Sunday; I was smeared with red paint and rebuffed. I'm surrounded by atrocity and am enraged that I cannot make it stop. I carry fire in the world and sense my own complicity in the horror we all live as one soul united. My inner and outer worlds have merged. I make love with and fixate on all these men because it's all women have to make the horror stop.

I interpreted my own interpretations. I exuded megalomaniacal self-absorption. I described my girlhood, my sojourn with Bobby De Witt, my relationship with Lee Blanchard. *Get it, Doctor?* My external life is chaotically disordered and has led me to a point of intransigent mental resolve. Aren't people like me malleable at their core? Don't you think that Claire De Haven will go for me and see how faithfully I will serve the Red Cause?

Captain Parker was there, expurgated. I portrayed him as a police-world acquaintance and ghastly rightist theocrat. Hideo Ashida exposited my enlightened racial stance and outrage over the roundups. Scotty Bennett gave me raw sexual details; I merged them with some choice Bucky Bleichert fantasies. I held my voice to a monotone. It told Dr. Lesnick that this intimate revelation in no way discomfited me. *I give good value, don't I, Doctor? You don't know that it's all by design and all for effect.*

Lesnick interrupted me. He said, "Our time has concluded, Miss Lake."

I stood up. Lesnick stood and faced me. I couldn't read his expression.

"I'd like to schedule another appointment."

He said, "Please call my secretary."

I said, "Thank you, Doctor," and opened the door. Claire was sitting in the waiting room.

She had a new upswept hairdo and wore a tan twill suit. Her eyeglasses subverted her patrician look. One man in twenty would *get* her—and she always knew who those men were.

She looked up from her magazine. I caught a blink. *Oh, really—it's you.*

I dug in my purse, pulled out my cigarettes and looked in mock vain for matches. I pretended not to see her stand or to sense her shadow. Then she pounced with a gold lighter and a ready flame.

I accepted the light. She smiled just as I looked up and started to thank her. She caught my Scottsboro Boys button.

"I saw you at the Robeson concert. You brought down the house."

I blushed on cue. A drama teacher taught me the trick. Think mortifying thoughts and hold your breath.

I said, “I ended up in jail. I had a cell all to myself. The other cells were filled with Japanese women. They were too embarrassed to use the toilet. I watched them squirm all night.”

The Queen lit her own cigarette. “Until the morning? When your parents bailed you out?”

I said, “No. Until my cop lover came to the station and the jailer told him his crazy Bolshevik girlfriend was in the you know what again.”

She smiled and slipped the glove off her right hand. I extended my hand as she extended hers; it was gorgeously synchronized. She said, “Claire De Haven.” I said, “Kay Lake.”

She said, “Robeson sang ‘Ol’ Man River’ again, after they carried you out. The standing ovation acknowledged you more than him.”

I said, “It was foolish of me. No political good came of it.”

Claire De Haven shook her head. “It was provocative and theatrical. You raised a valid grievance and may have caused people to consider it.”

She’s older and more worldly. Social class divides you. Feign subservience.

I studied my scuffed saddle shoes. Cheerleader Kay, Phi Delt fuckup. Claire De Haven said, “I’m having some people to my house tonight. It’s the white Colonial at Roxbury and Elevado. 9:00 would be lovely, and I do hope you’ll come.”

I smiled. “Will Mr. Robeson be there?”

She smiled. “Not if you are, dear.”

The doctor’s door opened. Claire De Haven touched my elbow and walked away. I stepped out to the hallway; a tall man was leaving the office next door. I recognized him. It was Preston Exley, the policeman turned construction king. He smiled and stepped aside. I walked downstairs and outside.

It all caught up with me and sent me giddy. Preston Exley walked to the curb and talked to another tall man. I looked up at Dr. Lesnick’s window and saw the curtains part.

Claire De Haven scanned the sidewalk. She saw me and studied me. I resisted the urge to blow her a kiss.

35

LOS ANGELES | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1941

Parker primped in the bathroom. He wore his best suit. Call-Me-Jack said, “I want you looking sharp, Bill. Roosevelt’s lezbo wife will be there.”

Fletch B. wangled the Presidential Suite. It was football-field big. The bathroom adjoined the main room. The door was cracked. Chitchat drifted in.

Sheriff Gene told DA McPherson not to snore in his seat. Eleanor Roosevelt gabbed with Fletch. Franklin’s raising the draft age to forty-three. He wants six million men.

Parker ducked into a powder room and snatched the phone. The suite lines bypassed the switchboard. He dialed Thad Brown at City Hall.

“Homicide, Lieutenant Brown.”

“Bill Parker, Thad. I’m calling from the Plaza.”

Brown whistled. “Be convincing, boss. The Feds think we’ll screw up the blackout.”

Parker buffed his shoes with a Kleenex. “Pass this on to Horrall. Roosevelt’s raising the draft age to forty-three. Per manpower, it’s twice as bad as we thought. We’re going to have to recruit draft-exempt men and go to the reject files.”

Brown said, “Jack’s got the Dudster on it already. *And*, he’s setting up an ‘Auxiliary Police Program,’ to augment the sworn personnel.”

Parker cleaned his glasses on his necktie. “Winos, derelicts and pensioners with nothing to do. We don’t have the personnel to run security checks.”

Someone tapped the door. “You’re on, Captain.”

Brown coughed. “What goes with the Watanabe job? Can we trust Dudley not to short-shrift it?”

“He’s on for the whole ride, and Horrall trusts him. That said, I don’t think Pinker and Ashida will rig evidence just to give Dud a solve. Nancy Watanabe had a recent abortion, which is the only fresh lead we've got."

Brown said, "*Sayonara*, Bill."

Parker said, "*Banzai*, Thad."

Applause rippled. Parker quick-primped and stepped into the room. Eighty people looked up.

Bigwigs hogged the first row. The First Lady, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, L.A. city hotshots. American flags flanked the lectern. Parker positioned himself.

Fletch B. tapped his watch. Gene Biscailuz yawned. Bill McPherson looked sleepy.

Parker introduced himself. He notched mild applause and plagiarized Bob Hope.

Get this, folks:

A Jap submarine drifts into the Silver Lake Reservoir. The crew disembarks. They battle pachucos in Echo Park. They march to Griffith Park. Giant Bengal tigers escape from the zoo and eat them. "Wars are won with the resources on hand—remember Pearl Harbor, folks!"

The audience dead-eyed him. He got *no* smiles, *no* chuckles, *no* punch-line yuks.

Parker segued to preparedness. Motorist safety, pedestrian safety, power-outage tips. Blackout rules, driver etiquette. Plans to suppress vandalism. Mobilization strategy for air and sea attack.

It's our duty, ladies and gentlemen. Citizen support spells V for Victory!

Mild applause, bored applause. The First Lady, with her hand up.

"Yes, Mrs. Roosevelt?"

"On a related topic, Captain. Are you confident that everything possible is being done to safeguard the civil liberties of the Japanese people being detained in Los Angeles?"

Parker gripped the lectern. He saw that cop sandpaper those kids.

"Yes, Mrs. Roosevelt. I *am* confident."

He ran.

He backed away from the lectern and ducked out. He nixed the handshake line and a schmooze with Frau FDR. He took service stairs down to the bar.

He ordered just-one-bourbon and snagged a window booth. He watched the world drift down Vine Street.

Autograph hounds lurked outside the Brown Derby. Newsboys ducked into traffic and hawked papers. Four Navy women piled out of a cab. They wore the winter blues with officers' braiding.

Parker hugged the window glass. He checked their rank braids and studied their faces. Two ensigns, two full lieutenants. No lieutenant j.g.'s, no tall redheads, no possible Joans.

"What are you looking at?"

Hurricane Kay—fucking unsummoned.

"I thought I saw someone I knew."

"Those Navy women?"

"Yes."

"I sense a story here."

"It isn't much of one, and I'm not going to tell it to you."

She sat down. She snatched the cherry out of his drink.

"Dr. Lesnick is smitten. I met the Queen, right on schedule. She invited me to a party at her house tonight."

Parker studied her. "Your outfit is too broad and satirical. I'll tell you how to dress from here on in."

She sipped his drink. She lipstick-smeared the glass.

"Suppose I don't have the clothes you require?"

"Then I'll buy them for you."

His cigarettes were there on the table. She helped herself.

"How should I behave at the party tonight?"

Parker sipped his drink. "Act like you're not impressed by the glamour, but betray that you really are. Don't create another scene, under any circumstances. Keep track of conversations pertaining to upcoming meetings, rallies and political functions. Sneak into rooms and check the closets and drawers. I'm assuming that you'll visit the house on subsequent occasions, so I'll get you a concealable camera. I want photographic evidence of seditious literature or anything of a perverse nature that you might come across."

Kay Lake smoked and drank. *His* cigarettes, *his* liquor.

"I borrowed your persona for my session with Dr. Lesnick. We discussed archetypes and susceptibility. He has to tell the Queen that I'm malleable. She has to think that she's using me, or none of this will work."

Parker nodded. "I want you to wear a black cashmere dress tonight. I'll buy it and have the shop deliver it. Wear the stacked-heel pumps that I've seen you in."

Kay Lake blew smoke rings. "I'm a four. Make sure the waist is properly darted."

Her eyes deflect light. She's immune to doubt. It's her strength as a snitch and her flaw as a cognizant being.

"Were you flattered that I made you an archetype?"

"Don't flirt with me, Miss Lake."

"If I flirt with you, you'll know it."

Her eyes are so dark brown that they're black.

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LOS ANGELES | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1941

Il Duce. Mussolini, *molto bene*. The scowl and huge head.

Harry Cohn lugged *Duce* to a closet. The bust weighed eighty pounds. Jewboy Harry was fat and had a bum pump. His office was fascist moderne. A fairy set decorator dolled it up, *Führeresque*.

Dudley said, "You're a bright lad, Harry. I admire the dandy dago as much as you do, but it's best to keep him cloistered until this unnecessary world conflict concludes."

Harry glowed sclerotic. He dumped the *Duce*. The floor reverberated. He huffed back to his chair and lit a cigarette.

"Tell me what you want and give me the dirt. You never visit me just to schmooze."

Dudley settled into his chair. It was Pontiff size. It featured a built-in ashtray.

"You owe Ace Kwan nineteen thousand, Harry. You owe Ben Siegel an additional forty-eight. I can get you the nineteen tonight. I have a business opportunity pending."

Harry glowed. His standard fuchsia went to claret. The man radiated poor health.

"You mick cocksucker. You never come just to schmooze."

Dudley slapped his knees. "Jack Kennedy's coming to town. I'm sure you know what the lad has in mind."

Harry scratched his balls. His desk resembled Pharaoh's tomb. A perch permitted starlets to kneel and blow him.

"I've got some hot numbers that Jack will appreciate. Remember Joe the K and the T.J. smut days? Dot and Ruth Mildred got in a beef over that WAC major. Those were some rollicking times."

Dudley said, "I have some grand ideas along those lines."

"You always have grand ideas, Dud. But I produce quality motion pictures for a motion-picture public that demands quality, so you won't see me peddling one-reelers of diseased twat and pimply guys with big schlongs."

Dudley smiled. “Our friendship is based on extortion, Harry. We’ve never issued ultimatums, because we both understand that. I should add that you produced a nearly forgotten documentary on Herr Mussolini in 1931, and that I possess celluloid evidence. Don’t you think that the current world situation would serve to cast disapproval on your fawning tribute to that dago beast?”

Harry throbbed. His neck veins pulsed. See those arteries swell?

“I’ll consider your ‘idea,’ you mick cocksucker.”

“Grand. And since we’re engaged in the process of barter, what can I do for you?”

Harry chained cigarettes. “I’ve been getting strike threats. My slaves are getting antsy, and I might need some hard boys to quell all this Red-inspired grief.”

Dudley said, “I’ll be seeing Ben Siegel tomorrow. He’ll be released from jail soon, and he’ll set you up with some stellar strikebreakers.”

Harry stabbed out his cigarette. “You’re a cock tease, you fucking mick *ganef*. Give me the dirt.”

Dudley winked. “You shall have it. And I have a grand assortment for you today.”

There—the ritual begins.

Harry’s right hand leaves the desktop. Harry’s zipper scrapes. Harry’s right shoulder dips.

Dudley said, “Rita Hayworth is playing hide the ham with a heroically hung drifter named Sailor Jack Woods. Barbara Stanwyck remains butch. She’s known as ‘Steamy Stanny’ in all the lez hot spots. Carole Lombard has been palling around with District Attorney Bill McPherson, who has been spotted dozing at official confabs pertaining to the detention of subversive Japs. DA McPherson is covertly known as ‘Darktown Bill,’ a nod to his penchant for jungle-bred trim. DA McPherson has been frequently spotted at Minnie Roberts’ Casbah, a noted coon whorehouse. Miss Lombard, a mud shark herself, accompanies him and enjoys Zulu warriors while the DA enjoys dark girls.”

The ritual nears crescendo.

Harry’s right arm jerks. Harry’s right shoulder spasms. Harry gasps and tissue-blots his face.

Dudley lit a cigarette. “Ace Kwan wants to shoot smut movies. They’ll express anti-Jap sentiment, and perhaps feature Jap talent. I’d like to bring in you and Ben S. I can get you the money to cancel your debt with Ace. You’d be clean, and you’d be a grand one to assist us in this venture.”

Harry swabbed his brow. “I’ll consider it, you mick cocksucker.”

“Grand. And to an unrelated topic, then. Does Ruth Mildred do all your scrapes? I was thinking of an unfortunate Jap girl. Do you let

Ruthie work freelance?”

Harry shook his head. Moisture spritzed. His arteries groaned.

“Ruth Mildred is my abortionist. She does the scrapes *I* tell her to, and no more. I have the exclusive medical rights to Ruth Mildred Cressmeyer, ex-M.D.”

Dudley smiled. “A final question before I leave you to your work. Do you credit the rumor that our swell chum, *der Führer*, is slaughtering Jews by the millions?”

Harry said, “I don’t give a fucking shit. He can kill all the fucking Jews he wants, as long as he doesn’t kill me.”

“King Cohn must go! King Cohn must go!”

Chants boomed outside Harry’s office. Dudley walked down Gower and scoped the Red riffraff.

Seedy placard wavers. Kikes and coons predominant. A picket line up Gower Gulch. Cowboy extras milling by Rexall Drugs. Rightist lads geared for counterattack.

“King Cohn must go! King Cohn must go!”

He was parked down at DeLongpre. Doltish drudge work loomed. He was tired. The bennies wore off at dawn and dumped him in the cot room. Three hours’ sleep did not suffice.

“King Cohn must go! King Cohn must go!”

Dudley walked to his car and tucked in. Huey C. lived nearby. He was tied to *two* sets of apron strings. He stuck close to his dyke mommies.

Drudge work. The reject file weighed in heavy. Dudley balanced sheets on his lap.

Abbott, Adams, Allsworth, Arcineaux, Arthur. Drunks, wife beaters, all-around cretins. Atterbury, M. and Atterbury, S.—twin brothers and too-zealous Klansmen. Babcock, Bailey, Baltz. Consumptive physiques and suspect bonds with children. Beckworth—two jail jolts. Begley—a harelip. Bennett, Robert Sinclair—what’s this?

R. S. Bennett, nickname “Scotty.” Applied in August ’41. Twenty years old then. Lied about his age. Aced the physical and written exams. Extremely high intelligence marks.

Six five, 220. Hollywood High grad. All-city fullback and class valedictorian. All-state debater. Accepted at Yale’s divinity school. Father: the Reverend James Considine Bennett. Born: Aberdeen, Scotland, 1894. Mother: the late Mary Tierney Bennett. Liar Scotty, rejected for service. Note the principal’s cautionary aside.

“This boy has gotten in numerous fistfights since his freshman year. He has achieved a very high scholastic and athletic standing, but he seems to overly relish his reputation as the toughest boy in the Los Angeles City School District."

Current address: 218 North Beachwood.

"King Cohn must go!" The demonic chant carried.

Dudley drove to Waring and El Centro. Huey lived in a shabby bungalow court. Slatterns sunned naked toddlers out front.

Dudley parked and tipped his hat. They swilled sneaky pete and ignored him. He walked back to Huey's flat.

Knock, knock—who's there? Dudley Smith, so fiends beware.

He pushed the buzzer. Huey opened up. He's nineteen, six two, 140. He's got dandruff and cystic acne. There's model-airplane glue congealed on his face.

Dudley shut the door and locked them in. Huey mumbled something. The room was four-walled with Kraut banners. Balsa-wood Messerschmidts dangled from the ceiling.

Huey mumbled anew. Dudley picked him up and threw him into the wall. Huey pinwheeled and crashed a shelf of toy panzer tanks. He fell face-first on a sofa. He was too glue-addled to shriek.

Dudley pulled five bennies out of his pocket and jammed them in Huey's mouth. Huey gagged and swallowed. Dudley brushed glue crusts off his hand.

"You'll revive in a few minutes, lad. We're here to discuss the Whalen's Drugstore heist Saturday morning, the Lugers and silencers you procured at the Deutsches Haus, and the recently dead Watanabes. You know me, lad. Your mothers and I are great chums, which will not prevent me from killing you if you dissemble."

Huey mumbled, precoherent. He wore a Luftwaffe jumpsuit. Dudley swallowed three bennies and cigarette-chased them. The smoke stifled a pervasive glue stench.

Hubert Charles Cressmeyer II. Ruth Mildred named him after her dermatologist dad. Huey doted on mama's squeeze, Dot Rothstein. The Dotstress was Jewish. Huey graciously overlooked it.

Dudley pulled a chair up. The room spun a bit. He was skipping meals and losing weight.

One, two, three cigarettes. Smoke clouds over low-hanging aircraft. Dudley cracked a window. Huey yawned and stirred.

He rubbed his face. He stretched. The Night Creature, revived.

"Hi, Uncle Dud."

"Begin with Whalen's, Huey. I'm ill-suited for amenities today."

"Them Watanabe humps are dead? *I* didn't do it."

"I believe you, lad. The county grand jury might not."

"It's a Jap caper. The Japs mind their own paper, just like the Chinks. That shouldn't cause no work for your white man's police force."

Dudley said, “A cogent analysis, but irrelevant. Start with Whalen’s, lad. Omit nothing.”

Huey said, “Okay, I clouted Whalen’s on Saturday, but that was the only time. I knew the store was a patsy, and nobody could place me there for the first four or five jobs, which half-ass alibied me for my slot. I got some wallets and some phenobarb to give to my mom for her scrape gigs, and I poked around in the morphine paregoric. This babe I knew had been pregnant and got her doctor to script her the morph for her cramps. She shared it with me, and I started appreciating it. I was about to clout some, but I thought, Uh-uh, you’ll build a habit. I brought an Army MP’s armband with me but forgot to put it on. See, I read about this MP rape-o in the papers, and I wanted to put the onus off on him. I had the Luger all silencered up, and I popped off a round for grins.”

Credible. Quintessential Huey. Adroitly conceived and shoddily done.

“And the pregnant girl was Nancy Watanabe? You didn’t know she had a scrape?”

Huey picked his nose. “Nancy. How’d you know that?”

“Did you impregnate her?”

“Shit, no. You know my MO, Uncle Dud. I like older stuff. Anything under fifty is jailbait to me. I lick snatch like a hound dog on a biscuit, but I never put it in. You won’t see me slammed with no paternity suits. My mama taught me better than that.”

Still credible. “And your blood type, Huey?”

Huey patted his hip. “It’s O plus, Uncle Dud. And I got my reform school donor card right here in my pocket.”

The bennies kicked in. Dudley’s cells reawakened. His bloodstream went *aaaaaaaaaahhh*.

“The Deutsches Haus. Are you well established there? Are the fools in residence chums of yours, or just acquaintances on the right flank?”

Huey said, “The latter, Uncle Dud. Fifth Column’s Fifth Column, but only the real die-hard guys make a religion out of it. I’d see them guys at Hindenburg Park and rallies here and there, just enough for them to trust me and consign me them suppressors and guns. But I’m a heist boy and a lone wolf at heart. I didn’t want them political types sniffing around my illegal shit.”

Pure Huey. Self-preserving, self-deluded. He signed the Deutsches Haus ledger in his own name.

“Do you recall specific Deutsches Haus employees or habitués? Can you relate telling incidents or give me specific names?”

Huey shook his head. “*Nein, Obersturmbannführer*. They were all ‘Fritz’ and ‘Wolfgang’ to me.”

A radio squawked next door. Try the “Blackout Special” at Blackie’s

Lounge. Black-tie cuisine at a workingman's price!

"Tell me about the Watanabes. Again, omit nothing."

Huey sighed. "I got the same answer for you, Uncle Dud."

"Which is?"

"Which is Fifth Column's Fifth Column."

"Elaborate, lad."

"Fifth Column's Fifth Column. Which means everybody knows everybody, and everybody's all linked up in these ways they ain't revealing to nobody else. You got the Bund, America First, the Silver Shirts with them snazzy getups. The fucking Watanabes always spoke Jap around white folks, even them they were simpatico with. I knew Johnny a bit on his own, and Nancy likewise. Old man Ryoshi and old lady Aya? Them as a fucking *family*? I didn't know them from hunger."

Dudley said, "Really, lad?"

Huey reptile-flicked his tongue. "I offered Aya twenty scoots to let me lick her snatch. She slapped me. Jap women don't take it the French way."

Dudley smiled. "Proceed, please."

Huey bummed a cigarette. "I ran with Johnny W. He was one of those wild-on-the-outside, live-with-mom-and-dad kind of Jap kids. We clouted a few liquor stores, and Johnny held his mud, so that made him a white man to me. Johnny knew an older guy named Hikaru Tachibana, who up and vanished one day. He was about to get deported to Japan, but he scrammed on his bail and started running prosties, and then he plain disappeared. Johnny played his shit close to the vest, but I got the feeling that he knew lots of strange-o Japs like Tachi."

Huey—credible, snitch-frenzied.

"And you shot your silencered Luger into the ceiling at the Watanabe house."

"Yeah, last Friday. Ryoshi said he was in the market for a piece, so I gave him a demonstration. You know me, Uncle Dud. I get trigger-happy sometimes, and I go a bit crazy. The silencer dropped threads, so Ryoshi nixed the sale."

Dudley lit a cigarette. "Let's discuss Nancy."

Huey reptile-flicked his tongue. "I licked her snatch at the Nightingale prom. This Mex kid I know spiked the punch."

"Can you offer me anything more substantial?"

"How's this? I didn't knock her up, and my mom didn't scrape her. She shared her morph with me a few times, but that was it. Okay, I rifled that shelf at Whalen's with her in mind, 'cause I didn't know she got scraped. But I didn't knock her up, although I got a pretty good line on who did."

Dudley said, "I'm listening."

Huey picked his nose. "Johnny introduced me to this fucked-up crowd of Japs he ran with, but I pretty much steered clear of them. They carried these poison-dipped knives that had all these different blades on them. Johnny said there was four of them, young guys, with these beliefs that were too crazy even for him."

Dudley got goose bumps. They were bennie-enhanced.

"Please continue."

"All right. The guys pulled heists, worked shit jobs and donated all their moolah to the Imperial Jap Cause. I met this scary-shit Jap-Mex half-breed who was part of the cell. He had bad cysts on his back, worse than mine. He bragged that he knocked up a Jap girl, and I'm pretty sure he meant Nancy."

"His name?"

"I never got it, and Johnny told me the guy lammed back to Mexico. The guy bragged that he killed a family in Culiacán, but I thought he might have been pulling my pud."

"Please continue."

"That's it. You've got these four fucked-up Japs who live in Griffith Park, 'cause they give all their money to the Emperor. They hate the Chinks more than the Krauts hate the Yids. They think you got to rape and kill the female relative of a tong boss to achieve 'transcendence,' but they ain't got the nuts to do it."

Call Huey credible. Call his tale unverifiable. Call his knife spiel corroborative and tangential.

"I have a task for you, Huey."

Huey gulped. "What task?"

"The city will be blacked out tonight. I concede the short notice, but you're a resourceful lad. A Sheriff's van carrying a great deal of money will be traveling southbound, en route to Terminal Island. I would call 74th and Broadway the ideal spot to take it. You are to rouse your ascetic Japanese chums, set up a diversion and rob the van. You will carry the pump shotguns and use the rubber bullets that I know you stole from the Preston Reformatory. I will allow you to keep five thousand dollars for yourself, and to pay your pals one thousand apiece. You are to subtly interrogate them about the Watanabe family, Hikaru Tachibana and the esoteric knives they carry. They sound too mercurial to have killed the Watanabes, despite your speculation on young Nancy's pregnancy, but they may be good for Tachi. Failure to perform this task and bring me the balance of the money will mandate your premature death."

Huey picked his nose. "Suppose the Japs won't do it?"

"Then round up a band of your fellow Preston grads."

Huey grinned and ate his pickings. What a resilient lad.

It was dark. The slatterns and tykes had decamped. The blackout would begin at 7:00.

Dudley walked through the courtyard. Thought and Act, Benzedrine. The van heist was impromptu and high-risk.

He got his car and cut south. Army sentries stood at Melrose and Gower. They manned a searchlight and packed carbines. Beverly and Larchmont was fortified. Sheriff's bulls cradled tommy guns.

Dudley stopped at 1st and Beachwood. The house was '20s Spanish-style. Tile roof, casement windows, brushed adobe walls. He walked up and rang the bell.

R. S. Bennett opened the door. This big Celtic Brownshirt. A hammer hurler. Bred for kilt-clad brawls.

Dudley flashed his badge. "Mr. Bennett, my name is Smith. I've come to recruit you for the Los Angeles Police Department."

Scotty Bennett said, "I've been rejected, sir. I'm only twenty."

Dudley said, "We're at war, lad. Extreme circumstances provide for a stretching of the rules. We need you more than you need the United States Marine Corps."

Scotty Bennett smiled. The doorstep glowed. The boy was born to fight crime and break hearts.

"Would you consent to an audition? It will save time and spare you ten weeks at the Police Academy."

Scotty snatched a sweater off a wall peg. Note the big *H* pinned for basketball and football. Note the seven rings on the left sleeve.

"Tell your dad you'll be out late, and not to wait up. There's mischief in the air."

Scotty shut the door. They walked to the K-car and piled in. Dudley unhooked the two-way and roused the Bureau. Thad Brown counseled Call-Me-Jack. He should see this.

The radio crackled. Thad picked up.

"Lieutenant Brown. Who's calling me?"

"It's Dudley, Thad. And it's not a frivolous call."

Brown whistled. The line went *screeeee*.

"I can read tone, Dud. Tell me what you've got."

"Can you be across the street from the liquor store at 74th and Broadway in half an hour? What you see will be self-explanatory." Brown said, "Sure, Dud."

The radio *screeed* and went on the fritz. Dudley hooked it up and kicked the gas. They pulled out, southbound.

Hollywood, Hancock Park. Big blackout-ready houses. We're thirty minutes shy. Pull your shades, dim your lights.

Scotty said, "Green or orange, sir? I know you're from over there."

Dudley smiled. "Green everlastingly, lad. I'm a separatist, a militant papist and more."

"Dublin?"

"Yes, Dublin. And how did you discern that?"

"I'm quick to learn, sir. I understand things instinctively."

"Don't call me 'sir,' call me Dudley."

"All right, 'Dudley,' then."

They took 6th to Vermont and cut south. Car traffic *de*creased. Foot traffic *in*creased. It was 6:53. The siren would blast at 7:00.

Scotty stared out his window. *Bright lad—you see everything.*

"I'm orange, sir. I wear the color on Saint Patrick's Day, but I've got no grudge with the green. I got in a fight at Blessed Sacrament in '38, but that's as far as it went."

"And how did you fare in that engagement?"

"The orange prevailed, sir. I hope that doesn't make you think less of me."

"On the contrary. And don't call me 'sir,' call me Dudley." Wilshire, Olympic, Pico. Venice, Washington. We're approaching the Congo. There's the—

It was fucking *loud*. Pole-mounted horns squawked. Shades went down. Neon signs vanished. Traffic lights flashed through cellophane. Car lights beamed amber and low.

BLACKOUT.

Scotty cracked his knuckles. Dudley hit his parking lights. Coontown came on, dark and *sloooooow*.

Dark folk on de sidewalk. Dark sky, dark streets, dark skin. Washington to Broadway and south. *Say what, what's dis?*

BLACKOUT.

72nd, 73rd, 74th. Hear the tom-toms and *oooga-booogas*? It's de *deep* Congo now.

The Dark Continent. *Blackout* dark. Dark desires sizzle here. There's Lew's Liquor. It's dark, inside and out. The clerks wield flashlights and peddle hooch. Clock their all-spook clientele.

Thad Brown stood across the street. Dudley pulled up and idled by the parking lot. Eugenics. Note the natives at play.

A blackout crap game. Four jigs with flashlights and dice. A dollar bill–dotted blanket. Swerving light on hot dice.

Scotty studied it. The jigs wore yellow satin jackets. Gang scum. The Rattlesnakes. They whooped and waved their flashlights.

Dudley said, "We have an unlawful assembly. Will you require a sap or handcuffs?"

"No, sir. You might call an ambulance, though."

Dudley whooped. Scotty stepped out of the car.

The jigs capered. Thad Brown watched. His white fedora marked him. His cigarette glowed.

Flashlight beams crossed the lot. It was all dipsy-doodles. A jigaboo shot snake eyes. Cheers and groans went up.

Scotty walked to the blanket. Scotty swiped the dollar bills. The jigs saw it. *Oooga-boogas* rose. A jig swung his flashlight.

Scotty grabbed his arm at the wrist and snapped it. Dudley heard bones break.

The jig screamed. More jigs came in. *Ooga-booga*. They're packing flashlights and fists.

Scotty snapped their wrists. Scotty broke their hands. Scotty sidestepped blows. Flashlights fell, glass cracked, light did crazy things. Fists hit Scotty and did not budge him.

The jigs screamed. Scotty went in close.

He grabbed their necks and hoisted them. He held them high and hurled them. They hit the ground. They thrashed and tried to crawl.

Scotty kicked them prone and stepped on their faces. They ate gravel and dollar bills. There's a cracked-light close-up. See that severed ear?

Are you watching, Thad? The screams are like Dublin, 1919.

The noise seared him. He left Scotty to Thad and his Welcome Wagon spiel. He pulled into a vacant lot just south.

The noise faded. He fluttered. He felt his mother's fists and smelled his own blood.

Blackout. Dublin, 1919. L.A., 1941.

He hit a switch and got some roof light. The headliner reeked of a recent suspect's pomade. He grabbed his chessboard and pieces off the backseat. His pulse subsided.

His play was half risk, half calculation. Huey might not rouse the four crazy Japs. Huey might get dirt on Tachi and the Watanabes. Tachi was sliced with that feudal knife. *Fetch, lad. Tell me about that*.

Dudley set up the chessboard. The bennies brain-fueled him. He toppled pawns and rooks.

The Jap-Mex breed might be good for the Watanabe job. The Jap-Mex breed probably knocked Nancy up. Huey said the breed killed a Mex family. Huey said it might have been brag.

Call-Me-Jack wants a Jap killer. The house was too tidy for a full-bred lunatic. The Griffith Park boys packed that feudal knife. Said knife killed Tachi. The breed felt right for the Tachi job. Everything else felt wrong.

And—where's the profit? And—something's missing from the house.

Knights down, bishops down.

The DA felt wrong. Bill McPherson was wet-brained. Bill McPherson fucked jungle cooze. Bill McPherson snored in briefings and nursed a Red grudge. He might not rubber-stamp a Watanabe indictment.

It was 7:56. Dudley rolled down his window. L.A. was blackout black. He heard noise across the street.

Prompt Huey. Appropriate that vacant lot. Night Creature, fetch.

Car doors slammed. Stray moonlight lit up Huey and his gang.

There's four men. They're wearing bandannas. Note their exposed foreheads. That's yellow skin—Huey roused the Japs.

Huey wore Sheriff's duds. Makeup hid his acne. He was grandly disguised.

The Japs lugged cans into the street. They oil-doused the cement and skulked back to the lot. Huey walked to the middle of the street, with a flashlight.

Cars approached, north and south. Oil spill. Deputy Huey waved them around it.

The cars slowed and dipped by. The street went carless. Parking lights approached from the north.

Wide-spaced lights. *Van* lights. 7:59 p.m.—the Sheriff's, on time.

Huey stood his ground and waved his flashlight. The van braked and stopped short of the spill. Two deputies got out. Huey braced them.

Sorry, fellas—we've got an obstacle. The deputies huffed and checked their watches.

BANZAI.

The Japs reconnoitered. They wore crepe-soled shoes. They crept up behind the deputies. They raised shotguns and let rubber bullets fly.

The sound was *whoosh/thwap*. Four Japs, two cops, four nonlethal loads. The deputies pitched and hit the oil spill. They fucking gasped that I-need-air rasp.

Huey pulled out fabric tape and glued their mouths shut. Two Japs cuffed them and dragged them into the lot. Two Japs jumped in the back of the van. Huey got in the van and drove it into the lot.

No motorists eyeballed the incident. No pedestrians walked by.

The lot was blackout black. Dudley relied on sounds.

Car doors slammed. Van doors slammed. Rustles, foot scrapes, grunts. The looting, the sacking, the tossed money bags.

Two car doors slamming. Tires spinning on dirt. Then *"Sayonara"*—yelled out pure Jap.

37

LOS ANGELES | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1941

They were cuffed up. A short chain linked them. Bodyguard Lee Blanchard, cop stooge Hideo Ashida.

It was Ashida's idea. Hit T.I. with a bang. Spook the inmates, wow the guards.

San Pedro was twenty miles from L.A. proper. The ride down was tense. Blanchard was still scratched up from his Kay Lake tiff.

Ashida sold the trip to Bill Parker. *I'll do interviews in Japanese. I'll query the inmates per the Watanabes. The Nisei community is tight-knit. I'll probe and feign empathy*.

They entered the sally port and hit the guards' station. An MP buzzed them in. They walked down a corridor and snagged their sweat room.

Ashida rubbed his wrist. He'd jobbed Parker. He planned to stress his private leads. The farms, the buyouts, the wetback workers.

He spoke Japanese. Blanchard barely spoke English. He'd overhear the interviews and register zilch. They loitered outside the sweat room. Blanchard smoked and fouled up the air.

Takagawa, Kuradasha, Mikano, Murasawa. He got the names off the "A" list. They were North Valley farmers. They had to know the Watanabes.

The cuff gouged his wrist. He stepped back and put slack in the chain. The smoke congested him.

The sweat room adjoined a cell block. The cells were jam-packed. Men paced and bumped the bars. They looked malnourished. *Stir-crazy* said it all.

Blanchard rattled their chain. "I think we should bring in Mr. Moto. He always solves the case in an hour and a half."

The smoke was brutal. Ashida tugged at the chain.

Blanchard said, "You know what gets me? They hire this white guy to play him. Peter Lorre's a hophead, in case you didn't know. Wilshire Vice has got a green sheet on him."

Ashida looked down the catwalk. A guard escorted Hiroshi Takagawa. A mug shot was clipped to his file. Ashida had the facts memorized.

Blanchard nudged him. They took their seats and slacked up the chain. The guard walked Takagawa in.

Ashida stood and bowed. He spoke prepared text and translated back to himself.

"I apologize for this grave injustice inflicted upon you. You see, the same has occurred to me. I have questions pertaining to Ryoshi Watanabe that will serve the greater cause of justice for the Japanese community."

Takagawa stared at him.

Takagawa spit on the table.

Takagawa pulled a newspaper from his pocket and threw it in Ashida's face.

Blanchard said, "Tough luck, Mr. Moto."

The guard said, "I like Charlie Chan better. You always get some wisecracks and some girls."

Takagawa said, *"Traitor."* He trembled. The guard recuffed him and shoved him out of the room.

Ashida scanned the paper. It was in kanji. A piece excoriated the Ashida family. They were collaborators. The son was an informant. He was the only Nisei on the PD payroll. Nisei blood signed his paycheck.

Pictures included. Hideo Ashida at Stanford. Mariko Ashida with Agent Ward Littell.

Blanchard said, "You're fucked, Mr. Moto. You ain't going to find *any* Japs willing to talk to you."

Ashida jerked his cuff chain. Blanchard haw-hawed. They walked through the sally port and back outside. The MPs snickered. Ashida's knees dipped and held.

Blanchard uncuffed him. It was shoreline-blackout overcast. The harbor air stung.

Ashida got in the car. Blanchard got in and gunned it. They drove the connecting bridge and hit the mainland. Traffic was light. The moon played hide-and-seek.

Blanchard kept it zipped. Elmer Jackson was set to relieve him. Ashida kept it zipped. His thoughts scattergunned.

He spoke to Ray Pinker, back at the lab. Pinker knew radio. He queried him, disingenuously.

Can shortwave broadcasts be transmitted to individual sets? Pinker said yes.

The Watanabes' secret attic. Their radio gear. It's transmitting straight to him.

Blanchard said, "Kay and I don't have your standard deal going. I give her a long leash with men, so she keeps wiping the slate for all the rowdy shit I do with the Department. It's a good deal most of the time. It's worth giving up all the racy stuff just to have it."

Ashida studied Blanchard. The pitch played oddball. Blanchard touched the scratch marks on his face.

"Don't get in too deep with her. She'll use you and cut you loose. She's always looking for something she can't have, and she don't let people get in the way."

Ashida looked out his window. It was Monday night, redux. *The world is dark and flat. Cars are submarines*.

Blanchard skimmed the radio. It was all blackout spiel. He killed the sound and cut over to Broadway. They hit a snag at 74th Street.

Sheriff's cars, swarming cops, lab vans. Arc lights in a vacant lot.

Blanchard waved and went through. Ashida rolled down his window. He heard a fracas up ahead.

The blackout dark amplified sound. Pitch resonated higher. He heard shouts and breaking glass.

Blanchard hit his high beams. He caught the scene. Negro looters, up at 66th.

Men in yellow jackets. Running leaps through store windows.

Blanchard hit his siren and drove straight at them. They dropped truncheon sticks and scattered. Blanchard bumped the curb and drove up on the sidewalk.

He plowed trash cans. He clipped a slow-moving fat boy. The looters hurled rocks at the car.

Ashida laughed. Blanchard laughed. He killed his lights and pulled back on the street. Pissed-off shouts faded.

Blanchard said, "Fucking niggers."

Ashida said, "I used to be friends with Bucky Bleichert. He's an ex-boxer, like you."

"He's a cream puff. Kay wets her drawers for him. He's coming on the Department."

"I know."

"He finked you to the Feds. He's got a snitch jacket already."

"I know."

"We'll win this war before too long, Ashida. This bad deal of yours won't go on forever."

Blackout L.A. whizzed by. Blanchard dangled an arm out his window. They hit Central Station. Blanchard stopped the car by the back door.

Ashida got out. He saw Elmer Jackson first thing. Elmer dozed in a parked black-and-white.

Blanchard said, "Watch out with Kay."

Ashida said, "Thanks for the ride."

Blanchard brodied out of the lot. Elmer snored on. Let sleeping dogs

—

He had the blackout. He had the door keys. He had his penlight.

He got his car and cut north. Chavez Ravine, Mount Washington. Smudged hillsides and shit shacks. No parkway hum. Blackout drivers stayed home. Twisty pavement was a rough go in the dark.

It was 9:42. Highland Park was dark-past-dark. Ashida parked and walked up to the door.

The lab keys got him in. He had the floor plan memorized. He ignored the check-in log. He stood in the dark. He felt the Watanabe House Gestalt.

He missed something here. He's a gifted scientist. He should not miss simple things.

He walked upstairs and stood on the landing. He jumped and released the stairs. He went up them and retracted them. Rats skittered back in their holes.

He flashed his penlight on the cubbyhole and tapped it. The panel opened up.

There:

Radio, tape rig, ledger. Still in place—Sunday to Wednesday.

Now:

Work from recent memory. Tap the radio. Flick the right switches. Watch the metric bands glow.

There:

The bands illuminated. He goosed the volume and got sound. He kept it low and geared up to translate.

A lunatic ranted. He stated yesterday's date and announced the time as 2:41 p.m.

Think in English. It's faster that way. The lunatic rants. Don't miss his words.

And record them first.

"Secret military maneuver tomorrow. Submarine attack at dawn."

Ashida turned on the tape rig. The spools jammed. Tape shredded. He could not record this:

"Pocket sub" / "California coastal waters" / "Tomorrow at sunup." "Goleta Inlet, above Santa Barbara." "Collaborationist fishing village, Chinese-Japanese allied." "Torpedoes." "Punish traitors." "Aligned with our blasphemous enemy."

A rat zipped by. Ashida jumped and brushed a cobweb. A spider fell into his hair.

Ashida went *Eeeek*. The spider hit a wall plank. Ashida went *Eeeeeek*. It scared him. It sounded feminine.

The lunatic ranted. He ballyhooed Nanking, '37. Soldiers make women drink pus. Soldiers make children eat shit. Soldiers shove dynamite up a Chinaman's ass.

He unplugged the radio and tape rig. He grabbed the ledger. He released the stairs and went down them. His hands were full. He was sweat wet. The penlight ratched his teeth.

He carried the load outside. His car was right there. He locked his swag in the trunk. He retraced the floor plan all the way back. He double-checked the cubbyhole.

There—cobweb-covered. A stack of kanji-script tracts.

Ashida grabbed the tracts. He had X-ray vision now. He went down the steps and retracted them. He walked outside and back to his car.

A '38 Dodge was parked behind him. He touched the hood and felt engine heat.

"Hello, lad."

Ashida shivered. His teeth clacked. He told his brain to make it stop.

Dudley Smith appeared. He touched Ashida's arm. It sparked electric shocks.

"Why are you shaking, lad?"

"Because I'm afraid of you."

Metal touched his hands. He opened his right hand and released his left hand. Dudley took the tracts and passed him a flask.

His eyes adjusted. Sight merged with sound. Dudley leaned on the hood of his car.

"Drink, lad. It's 1919 vintage. I killed a British soldier and raided his stock."

Ashida took a pull. "Why did you kill the soldier?"

"I made inquiries and determined that he was the one who shot my brother."

"How old were you then?"

"I was fourteen."

Ashida tipped the flask. "Do you still hate the British?"

"Not individually. I hate them as a race given to imperial misconduct."

"I hate the Chinese that way. I can cite historical grievance to justify it, but the balance of atrocity always tips back to my own people. I hate them simply because of what I know them to be."

Dudley laughed. "Do you hate them individually?"

"No, of course not."

Dudley took the flask. His hand was warm.

"Are you an authoritarian, Dr. Ashida? Do you have an abiding allegiance to the cause of an ordered society?"

The liquor warmed him. "Yes. It defines my racial view and sense of the civil contract. I despise sloth and disorder. Racial exclusivity facilitates the social code. The natural instinct to exclude must be codified by law."

Dudley sipped brandy. "Lad, you are the brightest of bright pennies."

It was dark. It covered him. He let himself blush.

"Thank you, Sergeant."

"Dudley, please."

"Yes, as you wish."

Dudley passed the flask. "The roundups are unnecessary and reductive. They've created a self-perpetuating chaos that will serve to undermine the social order we both wish to preserve."

Ashida held the flask. Dudley's hand had warmed it.

"It's a remarkable policeman's insight. And, of course, I agree."

"Have last Sunday's events stretched your loyalties and induced ambivalence?"

"Yes. The attack constitutes misconduct, and now the roundups do."

Dudley said, "Per exclusion. Do you feel more American or more Japanese at this moment?"

Ashida sipped brandy. "More of both, actually."

Dudley held out his hand. Ashida passed the flask.

"Have you withheld evidence, lad?"

"No, I haven't."

"Why did you come here?"

"Because I've missed something very simple."

"It was my reason, as well."

Lie now. You have an opening. Let the brandy speak.

"I found the tracts in a crack behind the kitchen cabinets."

"It's more than that, lad. We're two bright pennies, and we both missed something significant and staggeringly obvious. We must surmise that the killer missed it, as well."

Ashida nodded. "You said 'killer' singular. Do you think it was one man?"

Dudley said, "I do, lad. The crime reeks of individual animus."

Ashida said, "There were four victims. It would have been logistically taxing for a single man."

Dudley said, "We have a sexual motive and a political motive. The sexual motive derives from Nancy and her recent abortion. The political motive is deeply obscure and most likely stems from internecine fascist intrigue, of an incomprehensible nature. One man did it, lad. I'm sure of that."

Ashida took the flask. "Do you think Captain Parker is a capable man for this job?"

"I do not, lad. He's not a rank-and-file case man. I know that he's done well by you, but he's not someone you should look to as a mentor. He'll sell you out the moment that it suits his needs."

Ashida gulped brandy. "And you won't?"

Dudley said, "I'm a detective. Bill Parker is an administrative drone.

I have a long-term need for a brilliant criminologist, Bill Parker does not. I am impervious to frivolous rules, Bill Parker is hamstrung by them. I suspect that you and I are quite alike in that way."

Ashida said, "He saved my job. He's kept my mother out of jail. For now, he's vouching our freedom."

Dudley touched his arm. "Say it, lad. I know you're thinking it. 'What can *you* do for *me*?' "

A peekaboo moon passed over. The big Irishman took on a glow.

"Yes, I was thinking it."

A woman walked a dog by. Dudley tipped his hat.

"My good friend Ace Kwan has a plan to provide comfortable shelter to harassed Japanese and safeguard their holdings until the hysteria subsides. William H. Parker will always comport within legal guidelines, even if it means enforcing racial bias. I am in no way constrained by the law."

The moon vanished. Ashida felt moonstruck. He had bodyguards. He had patrons. He'd called Kay Lake and arranged to meet her later. He was tête-à-tête with the Dudster.

"All these covenants and agendas. They supersede common human logic."

"It's a confounding world we live in, lad. It makes the loyalty of gifted men that much more essential."

38

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1941

The black cashmere dress was a knockout. Captain William H. Parker: couturier to stylish informants. Pinch me—am I really here?

The Red Queen's home was magnificent and filled with gilded folk celebrating themselves. The windows were covered with velvet drapes specifically purchased for blackout revels. Light itself had been redesigned for this one evening. We cavorted in slashes of light; we were extras in a German Expressionist film about the captives of the Beverly Hills Blitz. *This* was a bunker! *These* were some guests for the end of the world!

The lighting scheme was designed by Gregg Toland, the cinematographer who shot the current Hearst-censured film *Citizen Kane*. Toland went on a bender when *Citizen Kane* tanked. He ended up in a Tijuana whorehouse; Claire De Haven and Orson Welles rescued him. They got him to Terry Lux's dry-out farm and brought him down off Cloud 9. This lighting gig was occupational therapy.

I circulated, I listened, I talked when compelled. I heard praise for Uncle Joe Stalin and his brave Red troops; the Japanese roundups received properly outraged attention. I left a trail of conversational bait. I dropped my name, my leftist résumé, my anomalous cop-world credentials. Remember me. I'm young and unaccomplished. I'm desperate to impress you.

The party was now in high gear; I hadn't yet spoken to Claire De Haven. We drifted in overlapping circles and tracked each other with looks that said *Let's talk later*. She'd already researched me—I was certain of it. Dr. Lesnick would have spilled everything that he knew and might have suspected. We needed time alone—and I knew she wanted it.

I circulated, I listened, I talked when compelled. Dr. Lesnick saw me, acknowledged me and ignored me. Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya appeared and created a stir. Vladimir Horowitz played a Bach partita on a piano bathed in a searchlight. The sound was smothered by people talking.

They talked about the war, exclusively. They urgently made their points and were heedless of the points of their interlocutors. It was one huge roar of venomous insight. Everyone had to be more acute in their critique of worldwide slaughter. They were all of the Left and all seeking to upstage their companions and a reigning maestro. They were shrill, didactic, correct about most things. They were heedless of the fact that they'd gain more converts if they just stopped talking.

Bertolt Brecht cruised by and made a pass at me; I told him *The Threepenny Opera* was a yawn and sidled off. Reynolds Loftis cruised by and mentioned seeing me at the Anti-Axis Committee. I gave him a my-big-mouth-again response and blushed with a blackout spotlight on me. Loftis seemed charmed; I segued to the war and milked it. Egalitarian L.A., the fellowship of shared catastrophe. Loftis praised my performance at the Robeson show; I told him how the evil cops blasted the Japanese boys—but did not mention the gallant intervention of Captain William H. Parker.

Loftis left me abruptly; I saw that a handsome young man had magnetized him. I got an idea. It took hold and flourished. Thoughts of Hideo Ashida had sparked the brainstorm—and it would surely ingratiate me with the Red Queen.

I looked around for her and found her. She stood alone, in zigzagged light. The light was in her eyes; she couldn't see me watching. She had to have gone to a hairdresser directly from Dr. Lesnick's office. She wore a Joan of Arc do now; it was straight out of the Dreyer movie. The short crop, the fuck-you bluntness. She wore a velvet dress earlier; she wore a peasant shift now. I scanned the room and gauged her audience. Terry Lux was watching her. Gregg Toland was aiming a camera.

Her pose, *my* poses. I got the urge to *do something now*.

I took side stairs up to a second-floor landing. The bedrooms were off a long hallway. I tried all four doors; just one was open.

It was her bedroom. I knew it immediately.

The room was a clash of color and fabric. The bedspread was plum satin; the walls were flocked green. The armoire and dresser were ebony. The dress she'd worn earlier was there on the floor. Her stockings had been rolled off and tossed.

Four pewter-framed movie stills centered the room. They displayed Renée Falconetti in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. That hairdo/*her* hairdo. Falconetti's martyr eyes; Claire posed in zigzag light.

I felt it. I felt *her*. I touched the discarded dress and saw that Claire had sweated it through. *I* was sweating—dark cashmere in a warm room.

I rifled the nightstand drawers. I found a political tract and tucked it into the back of my dress. I saw a hypodermic syringe and a dozen ampules.

Falconetti. The short hair, the fierce eyes. Claire's light-show homage.

I left the room and brazenly walked downstairs. Claire was gone. Her slaves were setting up a movie screen and projector. I struck a Falconetti pose under those zigzag lights.

It was my homage to Claire's homage. I gazed up at the infinite. Someone tossed a shadow on me. It was Claire. She'd changed clothes again.

She wore a dark skirt and an elegant cardigan. She seemed floaty. Her blue eyes popped with much too much black.

She said, "*La Grande Joan*. I'm not surprised that you got it, and that you had to try it yourself."

I stepped out of the light. "I'm a ham, but I can't compete with you in the role."

Claire said, "You may or may not be a ham, but you're like the bad penny. You keep turning up."

"I'm here at your invitation."

"The Robeson concert, the Anti-Axis Committee, Saul's office. Where next? I first saw you on Monday, and you're satirizing me in my own home Wednesday night."

I reached into her pocket and stole her cigarettes. I lit up and extended the pose.

"Invite me to another party. I'll never turn down anything this seductive."

Claire smiled. "Who referred you to Saul Lesnick?"

"I heard some YSA people discussing him."

"Are you a police informant?"

"I wouldn't betray my beliefs for the sheer adventure of it. And the few cops who might know that you exist wouldn't risk putting us together."

Claire motioned for her cigarettes. Our hands brushed as she took them. She lit up. I leaned in and cupped her hand.

"I'm having another party, next Monday night."

"I hope you'll invite me, and I hope there'll be another blackout."

Someone whistled. Someone yelled, "It's movie time!" Chaz Minear yelled, "I wrote the script, so Reynolds and I will act all the parts!" Vladimir Horowitz called out, "I will provide the all-Russian soundtrack. It will be Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff!"

Claire's slaves arranged floor cushions facing the screen. Claire steered me over to a front-row seat. A man flipped a switch and killed

Gregg Toland’s light show. The projector rolled. Oh shit—*Storm Over Leningrad.*

Applause, whistles. Good-natured raspberries, boos. The film rolled. Loftis and Minear read over the dialogue; Horowitz soared over them.

Claire sat close beside me. I moved my lips in sync with the actors and felt her watching me. She *understood*. I *knew* the film. It was a cultural artifact of my youth.

She touched my arm. The gesture meant *Thank you*. I leaned toward her and whispered.

“I want to make a documentary exposing the roundups. I have a friend. He’s Japanese. He has police protection, and he could help us.”

Claire squeezed my hand. Loftis and Minear kowtowed to Horowitz and shut up. The maestro killed off the rest of the movie. The Rachmaninoff *Études-Tableaux* transcend pap.

The lights went on. Claire was gone. A handsome young man had replaced Horowitz at the piano. Bertolt Brecht said, “That’s Lenny Bernstein.”

I went over and stood beside the keyboard. Lenny Bernstein said, “Pick a composer.”

I said, “Chopin.”

Lenny Bernstein made room on the bench. I sat down and started playing one of my slow nocturnes. Lenny placed his hands over mine and dictated the tempo. His hands interpreted, my hands made the keys drop.

December 11, 1941

39

LOS ANGELES | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1941

The back room bounced. Waiters laid out booze and corn chips. The PD ran ’round the clock now. Blackouts, late-night briefings.

It was all justified. The war turned time topsy-turvy. *This* was unjustified. Dudley had a new pit dog. Ergo—his service oath.

Call-Me-Jack waved a cocktail and Holy Bible. Parker stood with the gallery. The Dudster, Buzz Meeks, Hideo Ashida. The ratlike Jack Webb.

Hurricane Kay. She stirs, ubiquitous. Dud’s pit dog was her Sunday-night lover.

Call-Me-Jack held out the Bible. The pit dog placed a paw on it and held a paw high.

“Do you, Robert Sinclair Bennett, solemnly swear to protect the lives and property of the citizens of Los Angeles and uphold the bylaws of the Los Angeles Police Department, so help you God?”

Scotty Bennett said, “Yes, sir. I do.”

Dudley clapped. Jack Webb whistled. Ashida fish-eyed Scotty. Meeks picked his nose.

The kid was twenty. He radiated pliability. The Dudster hits paydirt.

Call-Me-Jack passed out goodies. Scotty grabbed his badge, cuffs and .45. Handshakes circulated. Call-Me-Jack high-signed Dudley and went out the door.

Webb built highballs. The gang flopped on couches and chairs.

Scotty was starstruck. *Don’t I go to police school? No, you’re a war cop. You break heads for Dudley Smith.*

Parker straddled a chair. “You read my memo. Nancy Watanabe was recently pregnant and had an abortion. So far, the father’s unknown. Let’s take it from there.”

Meeks said, “We canvassed again. Everybody said the same thing. ‘They’re good wholesome folks.’ ”

Parker nodded. Scotty looked bewildered. Ashida sat prim. Meeks said, “What about that tract we found at the house? It laid all that

Bolshevik shit on the PD."

Parker said, "I don't think it's germane. It looks like a left-wing tract I've seen recently, and I think you'll trace it to a post office box and determine that it's nothing but some unscrupulous guy who writes tracts from all positions for a buck. Mail fraud's Federal, and it seems like a dead end to me."

Dudley said, "I agree, sir."

Parker said, "We're four days in now. Sergeant Smith, I want a second summary report. List everything that you and your men have learned. Feel free to extrapolate and state your impressions."

Dudley sipped his highball. "Yes, Captain."

Meeks sipped his highball. "I talked to Doc Layman. He told me he's frozen the stiffs. He thinks he might learn some new shit that way."

Ashida said, "Stray histamines lie dormant in dead tissue. Freezing cadavers serves to isolate cells. Dr. Layman might be able to tell us something about their degree of panic. We might be able to surmise how long they had foreknowledge of their deaths."

Parker lit a cigarette. "Where's your bodyguard, Dr. Ashida? I want you covered at all times."

"I couldn't locate Sergeant Jackson, sir. I've been alone since I got back from T.I."

Meeks said, "Elmer was off somewhere, sleeping. He gets all tuckered out auditioning Brenda's girls."

Dudley laughed. Scotty looked dumbstruck. This shit was all Greek to him.

Meeks lit a cigar. "There's a rumor floating around, from about a year ago. The pitch is that some folks were looking to buy the Watanabes' house and their farm in the Valley. We've got a second rumor that the house and farm were sold, but it wasn't officially recorded nowhere, and since the Watanabes were on the 'A' list, the Feds have seized all their property records. The Hall of Records didn't log it, but that don't mean it didn't occur. The Watanabes were the only Japanese folks in Highland Park, so I canvassed the Japanese folks in Glassell Park and South Pasadena. I got vague scuttlebutt that some guys—and nobody could put names or races to them—were throwing out sales feelers to the Japanese folks in them areas."

Dudley tensed up. He glanced at Meeks and glanced away. It went by *rápidamente*.

Meeks waved his cigar. "I took a run by that whole stretch of farmland, out in the Valley. You got Mex Staties riding herd on the Watanabes' wetbacks and a whole lot of others. Since the Watanabes are *muertos*, it makes me think that someone else owns their property."

Dudley winked at Parker. "I have wonderful friends on the Mexican

State Police, just as our dear captain did at one time. It would serve us poorly to harass them. They are invaluable to our extradition efforts."

Open secret. He ran bag for Two-Gun Davis. Dudley knew it. They both ran bag to the Staties. It's his self-loathing sin. It's the Dudster's blithe status quo. Call-Me-Jack and Two-Gun had yachts stashed in Puerto Vallarta. Carlos Madrano maintained them.

Meeks said, "The Watanabes' phone bills were a bust. They called their farm suppliers and nobody else. They made some calls to pay phones in Santa Monica, which I can't figure out, but it's probably just a fluke."

Parker looked at Ashida. "Again, Doctor. I want you to do molds on the tire tracks in the Watanabes' driveway. Their car's in the city impound, and there's a Teletype exemplar on the tire treads. Let's see if we can get some fresh lifts."

Ashida nodded. Jack Webb raised his hand.

Parker said, "You're not a policeman, Mr. Webb. You've ingratiated yourself at the Bureau, but please don't interfere in this."

Jack Webb gulped. His Adam's apple bob-bobbed.

"You should hear me out, Captain. I was doing some man-in-the-street interviews yesterday morning, and I think I picked something up."

Parker sighed. "Go ahead, then. Air it, and get it over with."

Jack Webb gulped. "A sailor told me he saw a black car pull up in front of the Watanabe house at about 2:30 p.m. on Saturday. A middle-aged white man got out and entered the house. He was heavyset and was wearing a purple sweater."

The room froze.

Dud's first summary. Mauve fibers on the victims. Dr. Ashida's theory. The killer stood behind the victims and guided their hands on the swords.

The room *un*froze. Meeks relit his cigar. Scotty went *I don't get it.* Ashida sat prim.

Dudley said, "Purple is not automatically mauve."

Webb said, "I didn't get a better description, and the sailor shipped out of L.A. last night."

Scotty said, "I don't understand any of this."

Meeks said, "Why should you? You were at the Hollywood High prom when the Watanabes bought it."

Scotty evil-eyed Meeks. Dudley grinned. His pit dog showed fang.

Meeks shot Parker a *look*. Call it Okie-shrewd.

Dudley stood up. "I have an engagement, gentlemen. I will bid you a late good evening and take my leave."

It had to be Kwan's. Mark it late chow and collusion.

The Dudster walked out. Jack Webb shuffled his feet. Scotty stared at his badge. Ashida sat prim.

Parker said, “Dismissed.”

The room thinned out. Parker got Meeks alone. Meeks shut the door. Parker walked to the bar and poured bourbons.

Meeks said, “I never know when you’re on the wagon.”

Parker said, “Don’t be impertinent. Tell me what the look meant.” Meeks slugged bourbon. “I’m thinking Dud wants to bury this. More than we all do, with a war on.”

Parker slugged bourbon. “You’re giving me old news.”

“Bowron and Horrall want a Jap-on-Jap killer. They’re afraid of a backlash on the roundups, which you can’t blame them for.”

“You’re giving me old news.”

Meeks booze-dunked his cigar. “Here’s the new news, for what it’s worth. I saw Pinker and Ashida’s full run of trip-wire photos from the pharmacy heist. Aside from the picture that caught the license plate, all the photos I had in my desk were too blurred to make sense. I came into the squadroom yesterday and saw that the negatives had been disrupted, so I braced the photo-lab man. He told me that Dudley went through my desk and had him take another stab at developing them pictures. The guy struck gold that second time, and I saw dupes of the pix. The heist guy is Dudley’s snitch, Huey Cressmeyer. That punk is well known in certain circles.”

Parker bolted his drink. Meeks refilled him.

“Is he heavyset and middle-aged? Does he fit for the purple-sweater man?”

“He don’t, Cap. He’s nineteen, and he was in the Lincoln Heights jail when the Watanabes got sliced. He blew a traffic light and got popped for twelve unpaid tickets. That Sheriff’s butch Dot Rothstein bailed him out at 6:15. She’s Huey’s mama’s main girl.”

Parker bolted his drink. Meeks refilled him.

“I got more news, Cap. You ready for it?”

“Don’t string me along, Meeks.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it. That stated, did you read that bulletin on the Sheriff’s van robbery last night? It’s a Fed job. You’ve got the blackout, a hijack and sixty grand in Jap cash gone.”

Parker said, “74th and Broadway. I saw the Teletype.”

Meeks licked his cigar. “The gang fired rubber bullets, so the deputies survived just fine. Here’s the kicker, Cap. Huey the C. was a suspect for the 459 of a guard shack when he was up at Preston. You know what got clouted? Rubber bullets and 12-gauge riot guns.” Parker kicked it around. “You’re a Robbery man. I’ll get you a liaison spot on the job. I’ll see if Dick Hood will bring in my friend Ward Littell.”

Meeks said, “Dudley?”

“It’s a check and balance. There’s no stopping him in the short run, but we can minim—”

Meeks jabbed Parker’s chest. “Minimize the grief to your career?”

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LOS ANGELES | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1941

Call-Me-Jack snarfed Pearl Harbor duck. It was Peking duck dolled up with pineapple rings.

"I like the kid. Thad told me he dusted those shines with aplomb."

"He did, sir. He's a fearsome young man, and I hope we won't lose him to the draft. He'd put in his papers for the Marine Corps, but I think our friend Fletch can get him declared 'Police-essential.' " Call-Me-Jack yocked. "Send him to the Philippines. He'll dust those Japs with aplomb."

Kwan's was deadsville. They dined by themselves. The blackout deterred late-night trade.

Dudley tossed an envelope on the table. "A business venture bore fruit, sir. I want you to share in it, but I shouldn't divulge the details." Jack palmed the pouch. "Thanks, Dud. I appreciate the thought, and you know I never require the details."

Dudley sipped bennie tea. Jack snarfed egg rolls. He was fat and prone to night sweats.

"Give me the rundown, Dud. What have you got, where's it going, and how can we wipe this off our plate?"

Dudley said, "It's going nowhere, but I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the possible opportunities that may well appear."

"Music to my ears, so keep going."

"Two unidentified white men have been buying up and attempting to buy up Jap house and farm property, which may prove or not prove to be germane to the case. I'm the only one who has up-to-date knowledge of this, although my boys and the blabbermouth Turner Meeks know some of it. Meeks spilled information to Whiskey Bill tonight, but nothing alarming. Grand William requested a second summary report from me, which I will supply him with in due time. The report will be a masterpiece of ellipsis and omission. Grand William will be satisfied and nullified."

Jack picked his teeth. "You've always had a bug up your ass about

Parker. Why do you think I assigned him to ride herd on this case? You and your boys are constrained to a certain point, but you and I pull the strings. I blame the Catholic Church for Bill Parker. He's blotto on altar wine, and he's out to punish the world for his own fucked-upedness."

Cogent, but heretical.

"Parker knows that the Jap internment is a fait accompli, sir. He seems to have some misgivings about the roundups, but he will comply with all official orders and the Department's version of events, which includes the Watanabe case. It is not within his moral makeup to take any kind of vigilante action. He understands the necessity of a Jap-on-Jap solution, and further understands that failing a wholly verified arrest and indictment, the only proper outcome is to bag a vile Jap pervert and interdict his certain future perversions with Murder One and a gas-chamber bounce. The evidence must be compellingly doctored. The pervert must be a horrifying individual, who must explicate the mad designs of the entire Jap race and thus justify a full-scale racial imprisonment."

Call-Me-Jack clapped. "Two things, Dud. One, I applaud your summation and wholeheartedly agree. Two, you couched the whole fucking thing in Bill Parker. I blame the Catholic Church again. You men are fucked-up on mystical juju straight out of papist Rome."

Dudley laughed. *Ho, ho—you cocksucking heretic*.

Call-Me-Jack said, "The roundups are a crock of shit, and we both know it. Most of your local Japs are fine folks, but they should be sequestered until the war veers our way. What I fear is a press backlash. We shouldn't have to take it—not at a time when the draft will be taking our best men. I'm not worried about losing my job, to Whiskey Bill or anyone else. As long as Fletch B. is in, *I'm* in. And when I'm *out*, the City Council will rubber-stamp Thad Brown. What I want is the fucking Japs tucked away, a peaceful wartime city and jerkoff reformers like Parker stalemated until I retire, head to Puerto Vallarta, get shit-faced drunk every night and fuck comely señoritas on my yacht. I want the fucking press to extoll our fucking clean city and clean police department, and I wouldn't mind making a few bucks out of it. We both know how to carve a buck, Dud. We want the same things, straight down the line, and you've got free rein, *within reason*, to get us what we both want."

Dudley clap-clapped. "A brilliant summation, sir. I will inform you, to the proper degree of accountability, as events progress." Jack wiped duck grease off his necktie. "I want the Watanabe case solved and a grand jury indictment rubber-stamped by New Year's."

"You shall have it, sir. Although, I should add that our narcoleptic district attorney troubles me. Mr. McPherson is shamefully compelled by the dark races. He frequents bar-b-q establishments south of Jefferson Boulevard, and enjoys the company of Negro prostitutes. I fear that he might dally or equivocate on our indictment."

Jack went *So?*

Dudley said, "I would like your permission to sandbag him." Call-Me-Jack nodded. "*New Year's,* Dud. I want a closed-chambers, four-count grand jury indictment. Throw in kidnapping, because the perv held the Japs hostage before he chopped them. That way we get Little Lindbergh and another gas-chamber bounce."

"You shall have it, sir."

"New Year's. That's unequivocal. That Fed probe on the phone taps is coming up, and I want the Department looking squeaky clean on all matters specifically Jap in advance of that."

"You shall have it, sir."

Jack burped. "Parker trumped us and saved our bacon on those phone taps. It's a fucked-up world we live in."

Dudley smiled. "It is, sir."

"Is there anything else I should know?"

"The prospect of a white suspect has emerged, but I'm sure the lead will play out as fruitless."

"I *know* it will."

Dudley lit a cigarette. "Sid Hudgens should write up the case, sir. There's been no ink on it thus far. The war has very badly upstaged us."

"I'll talk to Sid. Brenda's having a poker game tomorrow night. I'll tell Sid about McPherson. He'll love that."

"He's a grand columnist, our Sid."

Jack said, "Parker. Any final words?"

"We'll be having our monthly dinner with Archbishop Cantwell tonight. Whiskey Bill will be playing host. I'll take gentle digs at him and reinstill a sense of our stalemates."

Call-Me-Jack smirked. "Will Cantwell wear red robes? Will he tell you how he keesters little boys?"

Nun-raping Protty beast. Vile spawn of Luther and his vile church. "No, sir. His Eminence is far too secularized for all of that." Call-me-Jack lit a cigar. "What can *I* do for *you,* Dud? It's a two-way street we've got here, and you're doing a damn good job on your side of it."

"I want to go to war, sir. I have some designs that I'll share with you in due time, but I'll leave the implementation to Ace Kwan and my boys. Joe Kennedy has pledged me a commission in Army Intelligence."

Call-Me-Jack drummed the table. "*New Year's,* Dud. Fulfill your duties for the Department, and I'll grant you a leave of absence."

A bennie wave hit. He's in uniform. He's twirling Bette Davis at the

Coconut Grove.

Jack thumbed the envelope. *That's five grand, you Prod fuck*.

"Carlos Madrano is embroiled in the case, sir. He's playing scout for the men buying the properties and running wetbacks to Jap farms."

"Carlos is sacrosanct, Dud. Don't rattle his cage."

Gunshots popped outside. Call-Me-Jack said, "Fucking tongs. The fucking Chinks are worse than the fucking Japs."

Tongs, indeed.

He left Kwan's. Tong jalopies rolled down Broadway. They flew tong antenna flags. Tong boys rumbled in a gas-station lot.

Dudley got his car and U-turned. He smelled tong stink bombs. He saw a tong chain fight. The tongs are restless. They're all mischief.

He was all mischief. He dropped by Huey's place before Lyman's. Huey's Jap cohorts had lammed somewhere. He told Huey to fetch them and set up a powwow. He had some questions to ask.

Tachi, the Watanabes, deadly feudal knives. Please elaborate on that.

Rain hit the windshield. Dudley pulled into the Hall of Justice lot. A door guard ran over with an umbrella. Ben Siegel had a staff of flunky cops.

The guard served as a lift operator. They elevatored up to the jail. White piss bums and Fifth Column Japs shared cell space.

They turned a corner. There—the Penthouse.

Six cells combined. No bars. Wall-to-wall carpets and cashmere-tufted chairs. A privately enclosed bathroom. Paneled walls and a four-poster bed.

A fully equipped wet bar. The pajama-clad lad himself.

Handsome Ben. Don't call him "Bugsy." He's the Jew Cary Grant.

They shook hands. Ben slid the guard a sawbuck and dismissed him. Dudley lounged on the catwalk wall. Ben stretched out on the bed.

"You're gaunt, Dud. Jack Horrall must be working you."

"He is, Ben. I could use a grand retreat, such as this."

"Gene Biscailuz is the best innkeeper in town. All this for three yards a night. McPherson stalled my release papers, but I'll be out at noon. I could have stayed to New Year's, but they don't celebrate Hanukkah here."

Dudley laughed. "Ben, you're a pisser."

" 'The canary has wings, but he can't fly.' I was looking at a gas-chamber jolt. You and that Blanchard hump put the skids to it." Dudley said, "An honor, Ben. Superb compensation and train fare. I bought my daughters Indian beads in Bisbee, Arizona."

"They're dumber than the *schvartzes*, the Indians. They sold

Manhattan Island for peanuts. I should have bought L.A. off the beaners when I had the chance."

Brass tacks now. It's late. He knows it's about gelt.

"I'll be paying off Harry Cohn's debt to Ace Kwan, and I have a way for Harry to get you your forty-eight. It will most likely take some finagling, but I should have it to you soon."

Ben studied the ceiling. Salvador Dalí painted the mural swirling across it. Rabid unicorns fucked naked gash.

"Finagle away, Dud. It's what you do best."

Dudley lit a cigarette. "I have a bone to pick with the DA. He stalled your release, and I'm sure you'd like to see him compromised."

"I would, Dud. Spare me the details before, so I can enjoy them after. You'll have a favor on the books while you finagle me the forty-eight."

"Harry needs to break some union heads at Columbia."

"I'll send Mickey Cohen and Hooky Rothman over. They'll pull Harry out of the shit lickety-split."

That bennie tea *surged*. Dudley caught a dizzy spell.

"There are five domestic Nazis two tiers over. They were entombed here on Tuesday night. I would like to have Mickey and Hooky briefly jailed on gun-carry charges. While ensconced, they will beat the Nazis to the point of near extinction. I am attempting to secure the names of every Bundist, Silver Shirt, Klansman and pro-Axis shitheel on my Department and the Sheriff's."

Ben studied the ceiling. Dalí owed him. He was stretched thin with cocaine. Ben set him up with Terry Lux. Dr. Terry dried him out.

"Sure, Dud. It'll inconvenience Mickey and Hooky, but the Dudster will owe them one. It's all quid pro quo with us guys, and it all comes out in the wash."

"There's one more thing, Ben."

"There's always 'one more thing' with you, Dud."

"It directly pertains to our chum Lee Blanchard."

Ben cracked his knuckles. "That cocksucker does nothing but owe me. If he thinks Reles paid it off, he's got another fucking think coming."

Dudley said, "I have a swell acquaintance on the Feds, a man named Ed Satterlee. The Feds have a leftist psychiatrist reporting to them, and Agent Satterlee told me that Lee Blanchard's girlfriend, one Katherine Lake, was seen leaving the good doctor's office. She has apparently been befriended by a seditious shrew named Claire De Haven, who threw a swell party last night and was overheard inviting Miss Lake to a second party upcoming. You know the Hollywood crowd, Ben. It would please me to get an advance peek at the party invitations."

Ben cracked his thumbs. “Quid pro quo?”

“Of course.”

“I want to watch Mickey and Hooky slug on the Nazis. I want them to wear sap gloves.”

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LOS ANGELES | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1941

JAP hordes overrun Philippines! U.S. fliers sink *JAP* destroyer! *JAP* parachutists swarm Luzon!

The radio blasted it. Linny's all-night deli—blackout Beverly Hills.

Kay Lake smoked and ignored her food. She wore a black dress and a trench coat. People stared at them.

Ashida sipped coffee. The British soldier's brandy had worn off. He still smelled Dudley Smith.

Kay said, "You're distracted."

Ashida said, "I have to leave soon. There's something I need to see."

"At this time of night? In a *blackout*?"

"Time has a new meaning now. It's why there's so many people here. They can't sleep, and they're afraid they'll miss something."

Kay stubbed out her cigarette. She ignored the radio and the gawkers. It was *très* Kay.

He checked Bureau Teletypes and got the word on Goleta. The sub attack *did* occur. A fishing village got blitzed yesterday morning. It was *très* hush-hush. The Santa Barbara Sheriff's sealed it there at the spot.

He took a big risk. He called the Sheriff's Office and impersonated Ray Pinker. "Can I send a man up?"

They said sure. He didn't say the man was a *JAP*.

Kay said, "Thanks for meeting me. I know it's not really your style."

"I don't have a style. I met you because I knew I wouldn't be able to sleep, and because we have engaging conversations."

Kay smiled. Her teeth were lipstick-smudged.

"You'll say 'What do you want?' to me sooner or later. If I've figured it out, I'll tell you."

Ashida heard *Jap* and *white girl*. The place was full of late-night touts. The place reeked of steamed meat.

"I know what you want. You want to trade perceptions about the world we live in and discuss Captain Parker. He's given you a task that makes you feel important, and he's proven himself important to me. You were invited to a party in Beverly Hills, and you knew you wouldn't be able to sleep. You don't know what you want from one moment to the next, and now the war's gotten under your skin."

The radio erupted. Ashida heard *dead* and *JAPS*. The touts cheered and flashed V for Victory.

"I'm acquainted with both of your bodyguards. That fact intrigues me."

"Yes. Because you see everything as *you*."

"On that note, then. I know some people that you might find engaging. We want to film a documentary exposing the roundups, and I thought you might like to help us."

Ashida shrugged. The radio blared an advertisement. *Hacienda Homes in Sherman Oaks! Another Exley Construction smash!*

The newscast resumed. *JAPS perish as bombed destroyer sinks!* Ashida said, "The City Council approved a building plan last year. It was a proposed block of homes in Baldwin Hills, and Exley Construction was given the contract. The buyers' covenant permitted the Nisei to bid on home sites, but the City Council redlined the provision. The Nisei sued in district court. They won, and a few families moved in. They saw they weren't wanted and sold their homes back to Exley Construction for a pittance."

Kay looked around. Ashida traced her eyes. One wall featured Jewish-fighter photos. Barney Ross, Benny Leonard, Maxie Rosenblum. The Lutheran Bucky Bleichert, crouched below them.

Kay blew him a kiss. "I saw Preston Exley, just yesterday. He was leaving an office four blocks from here."

Their booth adjoined a window. Ashida pulled up the shade. Beverly Hills was blackout dark and flatland flat.

Kay looked out. She stared at a parked car. A big man leaned against it. Ashida recognized him—Officer R. S. Bennett.

It startled Kay. Ashida lowered the shade.

"He's on the Department now. I was at his swearing-in a few hours ago. He's our first emergency hire."

"Do you think he's following me?"

Ashida smiled. "He's twenty years old, and you're nothing but seduction. It wouldn't surprise me if he were."

Kay laughed and touched his hand. It shock-waved him. He pulled his hand back. He stood up and toppled his chair.

He walked outside. *JAP, JAP, JAP* trailed him. The Bennett boy was gone. Beverly Drive was 3:00 a.m. still.

He got his car and drove west. He kept the windows down. It dried his sweat and rewired his adrenaline. Beverly Hills, Westwood, Brentwood. Blackout-dark enclaves.

Santa Monica, the coast road. A clear shot north.

Soldiers patrolled the beachfront. They manned searchlights and scanned the wave break. Sandbagged bunkers, machine-gun nests.

He was risking coastal checkpoints. There's a blackout, he's a *JAP*, he's got a hot radio in his trunk.

He hid the radio gear from Dudley. They sat in his car and talked. Their shoulders brushed. He skimmed the *JAP*-language tracts and lied per their contents.

They were anti–L.A. Police. He soft-soaped that aspect and harbored the lead for himself.

Ashida drove north. Raw nerves and sea spray kept him revived. He passed Zuma, Oxnard, Ventura. He saw beach sentries and aircraft spotters. He lucked out on checkpoints—none, none, and none.

He passed Santa Barbara. Dawn was two hours off. The Goleta Inlet was close.

The Sheriff's man said they'd sealed it "on-site." That meant an evidence shed off the water. The attack occurred at dawn yesterday. Expect cops and Army Intelligence. Expect catastrophe display boards. Expect cadavers and debris.

Expect rancor. Expect suspicion. Explain yourself. You're a brilliant forensic chemist. It's an early-wartime ambush scene. *You had to see.*

But, it's a JAP *sneak attack. But, you're here unsanctioned. But, you're a* JAP.

It wouldn't work. He'd risk detention. Parker, Pinker, Smith—name drops wouldn't work. He had tenuous patrons back in L.A. He was a low-down *JAP* here.

He started to turn back. He saw beachfront lights ahead. He pulled up on a landside bluff and grabbed his binoculars.

He looked down. The site was eighty yards off. Arc lights framed an open-front shed.

He saw body tubs. Odd limbs extended. Dry-ice fumes blew out. He saw severed legs in a washtub.

He saw forensics pix clipped to clotheslines.

He saw trash bins full of charred wood.

The shed was lit bright-bright. One detail was off. Cops and Army brass should be hovering. Cars and jeeps should cover the beachfront and blacktop.

He saw one jeep only. He saw legs crossed at the ankle, sticking out.

One guard on duty. Goldbrick, predawn snoozer. There's nobody else around.

Risk it, Mr. Moto. He might be asleep. Try it, Mr. Moto. If he's awake, you're fucked.

Those bright-bright lights. You don't need flashbulbs.

Ashida grabbed his camera. He had sixteen exposures. He pinned his ID card to his jacket and crossed over to the blacktop.

He smelled charred wood and flesh. Salt spray merged with it. He walked straight to the jeep. He heard snores, straight off.

He looked in the cab. *Sweet deal, Mr. Moto*. The soldier wore earplugs.

The shed was decked out haphazardly. The attack was unexpected. Torpedoes hit the beach. It's a fishing village. It's "Collaborationist"—*JAPS* and Chinks allied.

Torpedoes hit. Explosive fire follows. It explains the charred wood in the tubs.

Cops and soldiers swarmed the scene and built this shed. They culled evidence haphazardly. They stuck around all day and got bored.

Think fast, Mr. Moto. You've got five minutes.

Ashida paced the shed. He paced quadrant-to-quadrant in strict crime lab–style. He photographed debris and the evidential photographs. He reconstructed the attack.

Torpedoes hit. The dock and fisherman's huts blow up and fall down. Fishing boats burn into wave-scattered bits. Waves crash, waves recede. Severed arms and legs bob on the crests.

Men stumble out of rubble piles. They're on fire. They scream and thrash. They fall down dead at the water-sand line.

Five dead men. Forensic photo–captured/body tub–confirmed. A stray foot on the sand. Note the photo. Note said foot right here in a tub.

Ashida studied the foot.

He examined it. He photographed it. He got in close and smelled it. He caught early decomposition. He caught a fish-oil scent. He revised his ID to shrimp oil.

It was anomalous. It was familiar.

Nort Layman's autopsy brief. Shrimp oil on the soles of the Watanabes' feet. Blood-dotted glass shards at the house. Said shards reeked of *FISH*.

His trip to the Nisei farms. That worker he spoke to. He smelled *FISH* on him.

Five dead men here. In wet sand yesterday. In body tubs today.

Collaborationists. Note the pix and snap your own shots. *Say what, Mr. Moto?* Two men look Japanese. Three men look Chinese. Racial distinction runs close. *You could be right, you could be wrong*.

Ashida paced the shed. Ashida snapped pix of pix and pix of dead men *right here*.

Dead men on dry ice. Two men badly flame-charred.

He rolled them onto their backs. He brushed off black skin. One man was scorched down to his rib cage. One man was marked by a faded stab wound.

It was old and knife-inflicted. The scar was symmetrical. The knife had to be multibladed. The scar resembled a starburst. Note the single deep puncture.

Ashida paced the shed. Ashida reloaded his camera. He heard a wave crash. He heard the soldier snore five yards away. He heard his own heart beat on overdrive.

He touched all the dead men. He noted their physiques. He matched their missing limbs to the limbs in the severed-limb tub. He said Shinto and Christian prayers for them.

Four minutes down. *Go, Mr. Moto*.

He hit the last quadrant. He photographed photographs.

Small cans in a rubble heap. The labels read “Chopped Shrimp.” Charred paper. Kanji-script notations. Money tallies. A Japanese-yen-to-U.S.-dollar play.

Thirty seconds, Mr. Moto. That dozing soldier might wake up.

Ashida braced the last limb tub. He knelt and aimed his camera. He shot a sheared penis arrayed on dry ice.

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1941

I brought my sketch pad and pencils to the restaurant. Captain Parker called at dawn and requested a meeting. I hadn't slept, couldn't sleep, and assumed the same for him. I was going from public place to public place, to meet police chemists and policemen I hadn't known the week before.

My table overlooked La Cienega, just south of Wilshire. Dick Webster's smelled of lemon pies and war-alert tension. I went home after Claire's party, then left for my truncated klatch with Hideo Ashida. Hideo left abruptly; I went back home to ponder the vicissitudes of entrapment. Captain Parker was now twenty-three minutes late; I filled up sketch-pad paper.

My pencils moved near randomly. I drew the woman behind the counter and segued to passing cars on La Cienega. I moved to Scotty Bennett in police blues, to Hideo Ashida, naked, with Bucky Bleichert's body. Then I was back in Claire's bedroom with Renée Falconetti.

I saw the Joan of Arc film as a high school frosh; a fey teacher took a group of students to the only foreign-movie theater in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The Silver Shirts got the theater closed down the next week. Sioux Falls was a nativist hotbed; the theater served up moral turpitude imported from Catholic countries. Religious ecstasy akin to coitus and a short-haired woman burned alive. Falconetti's depiction of a woman consumed by cause and a supplicant's desire for transcendence.

I drew Falconetti as Joan and Claire as Joan; I incorporated their features in a seamless Claire-Joan. A truck drove by and made the window glass rumble. A man and a tall red-haired woman got out of a car and began walking toward Wilshire. Bill Parker pulled his black-and-white up behind them. He stepped out and started following the couple. The woman swiveled to adjust her skirt and looked straight at him. Captain Parker appeared to be stricken. I read the look on his face.

She wasn't *Her*, whoever *She* was. *She* wasn't among those Navy women I saw him staring at yesterday.

He entered the restaurant. I slipped out of my trench coat. He purchased my dress and should see me in it.

A waitress swooped by and refilled my coffee; I pointed to the other cup on the table and had her fill it. Captain Parker sat down; I noticed the pilled lint on his uniform. I knew that lint-on-cop-blue stamp very well. Captain Parker had slept in the Bureau cot room.

He warmed his hands on the coffee cup. He said, "Good morning, Miss Lake."

I closed my sketch pad and placed it under the table. I said, "Sunday afternoon. Outside the Federal Building. You saw me with a very large young man."

"Yes, and I saw him leave your house Monday morning. His name is Robert Bennett, the Department just signed him on, and he has all the earmarks of Dudley Smith's latest pet thug. I'm sure you find him alluring, which speaks more to your susceptibility than your judgment."

Touché.

I said, "I was being disingenuous. I thought you might know things about Officer Bennett that I don't."

"I witnessed his oath of service last night. I would venture that you know him somewhat more intimately."

Touché. Et pour la robe en cachemire noir?

"I had a splendid time at Claire De Haven's party. She invited me to a second party next Monday night."

"Please continue."

"I sneaked into her bedroom, rifled the drawers and saw a hypodermic syringe and several vials of what I assumed was morphine. I stole a political tract, but I haven't read it yet."

"I'll get you a concealable camera. I want photographic evidence of illegal narcotics and paraphernalia."

"Terry Lux was at the party. He was watching Claire very closely. I'm assuming that she dries out periodically at his ranch, when the PD isn't using it for softball games and picnics."

"So, it's 'Claire' now? Have you established a bar of friendship?"

"All betrayals start with friendship, don't they? Isn't there always a filial basis for entrapment?"

"I'm going to fit you with an undetectable microphone. You're going to get Miss De Haven to advocate the violent overthrow of the United States Government, and we're going to have an audial record."

“Will you get me another snazzy frock while you’re at it? *This* one turned some heads.”

“I want photographs of every pill vial in her medicine cabinet. I want photographs of all her recent phone bills and photographs of every page in her personal address book.”

“We’re going to make a documentary movie exposing the Japanese roundups. I proposed the idea, and Claire went for it. I’ll make sure it’s less outlandish than *Storm Over Leningrad,* so the jury won’t bust a gut and laugh it out of court.”

“Juries do not appreciate subtlety, Miss Lake. If you create a filmed document, it must be bluntly and vilely seditious and unequivocally state Miss De Haven’s ideological designs.”

“Is ideology unequivocally anything? Doesn’t she have to blow up an aircraft plant first? Should I encourage her to do it, and should I bring along a noted cinematographer?”

“Treason is ideology and free speech perverted. Seditious thought and its reckless public expression is a grave criminal offense that fully sanctions me in this action that you allege to be precipitous, presumptuous and subversive in and of itself, so help me fucking God, I know it to be true.”

I was dizzy. He *looked* dizzy. My cigarettes were on the table. He helped himself and tossed me the pack. We lit each other up.

I said, “Who is she, Captain Parker?”

He said, “Who is *who*, Miss Lake?”

I said, “The tall red-haired woman you keep looking for.”

He stood up and banged the table. The silverware jumped a foot. William H. Parker looked schoolboy hurt and old-man haggard. He’d lost ten pounds in the five days I’d known him. His gun belt pulled his trousers halfway down his hips.

He ran away from me. I looked out the window and watched. He got into his car and swerved into traffic. Motorists honked their horns. Captain William H. Parker stuck his arm out the window and held his middle finger up.

In uniform. In his police black-and-white.

I laughed. The prowl car peeled out; I saw middle fingers salute him back and heard horn honks peak and fade. It made me laugh and left me exhausted. Just sitting at the table hurt.

Restaurant sounds subsided to a hum. I shut my eyes for one second and opened them just as quick. A wall clock told me I’d been asleep a full hour.

I rubbed my eyes and looked out the window. The tall red-haired woman stood out at the curb.

I reached for my sketch pad to draw her. I put the pad down just as abruptly and did something I’d never done before.

I prayed for the woman’s safe passage through this war.

43

LOS ANGELES | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1941

Parker paced his den. It was men's club–furnished. Framed certificates honored him.

His law school degree. His state Bar plaque. His Phi Beta Kappa key. Thirty-four police commendations.

The certificates covered three walls. The fourth wall was masking-papered. Inked headings denoted this:

Blackouts/Traffic Statistics.

Alien Squad/Subversive Roundups.

Watanabe Case/Details-Chronology.

Lake/De Haven.

Parker paced. He was doomsday exhausted. His glasses slid down his nose.

He was stretched Mass-wafer thin. He threw a fit in full uniform. He was afraid that he was missing things. That meant *write them all down*.

Blackouts/Traffic Statistics. Jot graph notes.

Last night's blackout spawned a Negro riot. Five people died in car wrecks. A soldier shot a society dame at a checkpoint. She did not hear his *"Halt!"* warning. He drilled her dead.

Alien Squad/Subversive Roundups. Jot graph notes.

"Feds go to 'B' subversive list. Details to come."

"Hold squad briefing. Urge officers to curtail strongarm methods."

He'd seen War Department Teletypes. FDR had full-scale internment plans. Army teams were scouting sites throughout the Southwest. The local jails were Japped to the tits. A mass evacuation boded. Hold for the Jap diaspora.

Watanabe Case/Details-Chronology. Jot graph notes.

"White man/purple sweater. Black car outside house, 12/6/41, near time of death."

"H. Ashida to do tire molds/most likely futile."

"Watanabe calls to Santa Monica pay phones."

Lake/De Haven. Jot graph notes.

He raised his pen. The world dipped off its axis. He was that fucking tired.

Lake/De Haven. It's all in his head. There's nothing to jot on the graph.

Kay Lake was working both ends of it. She was a swoony unfulfilled artist. She saw her film as a luminous polemic. She wanted to entrap Claire De Haven. She had to win his "fatuous" and "presumptuous" war. Her courtroom testimony settled the Boulevard-Citizens case. He would put her on the witness stand and doom the Red Queen. He would craft her oratory. She would explicate his theocratic resolve.

She senses his misgivings per the roundups. She thinks she can instill apostasy. Their meetings leave him tense. He thinks of her more than he should.

Parker laid his head on the graph. His arms and legs were rubberized. The wall held him up.

The door creaked. Helen walked in. She wore her gardener's jumpsuit.

"You're a wreck, Bill. You should take the day off and sleep."

He kept his head down. It hid the *Lake/De Haven* graph.

"I can't. I have to collate Teletypes, and Horrall wants a briefing on the blackout."

"The world can do without you for a day. You didn't start the war, and I don't think you'll be the one to finish it."

"Helen, *please*."

"*Bill*, please. Please rest, please don't sleep in the cot room at City Hall, please tend to yourself, and please don't run away from me like you've been doing."

She looked perky. She always looked perky. She was born perky.

"I'll take Sunday morning off. We'll go to Mass and get breakfast at Lyman's."

Helen laughed. "Where you'll disappear into the back room and read Teletypes. Where you'll gab with Thad Brown and joke about ousting Jack Horrall. Where—"

"Helen, please—"

"Bill, *please* stop neglecting your marriage. Bill, *please* curtail your brusque behavior with my family and friends. Bill, *please* take the pledge again, because I can't stand seeing you drunk. Bill, *please* don't work so hard and learn to have some simple fun, so you won't have nightmares and sweat up the bed on the few nights we share it. Bill, *please* quit praying aloud when you think I can't hear it, because I don't want to know what you're saying to God. Bill, *please* stop getting crushes on college girls when you have a woman who—"

Parker ran.

He made the back porch. He covered his ears. It didn't kill this:

Helen stomps through the house. Helen slams doors. Helen gets her car and guns it. Helen lays rubber down the driveway.

He kept a jug in the toolshed. He walked over and snatched it. He took three good pops.

He got the burn and the shudders. He got the bright colors. He got that moment you go somewhere else.

He stashed the bottle. He got an idea. He went back inside and snatched his desk phone. An operator plugged him through to Chicago.

Northwestern U. The campus cops. He had cachet there.

The Chief came on the line. Parker laid it out.

Joan. A biology major. About twenty-five. Tall and red-haired. He saw her shoot skeet off Lake Michigan. She owned a vent-rib 12-gauge.

The Chief said he'd jump on an ID. Parker hung up.

He felt sandbagged. Doomsday, Armageddon. Booze begets instant misconduct and regret. He walked to the couch and fell down.

Deadwood.

Yeah, that's it.

It's 1916. Those are brothel windows. Now it's '24 L.A. He's beating up his first wife. They're at the hospital. She's bandaged up and spiteful. She's hitting him back.

Church processions. He's shaking a mitre box. Pope Pius XII in *Deadwood*? no, that can't be.

Church bells. No, doom bells. Bloody thorns or his gun belt gouged him awake.

He opened his eyes. His wristwatch read 8:14.

Not the Pope—the *Archbishop*. Jimmy and Dudley—the mad micks.

He got up and opened the door. They saw him disheveled and roared that mick way. His Eminence favored golf togs outside the rectory. He wore a pink sweater and kelly green slacks.

Dudley said, "Our future Chief, roused from sleep."

J. J. Cantwell said, "We're three Catholic men relieved of our duties. We're going to get shit-faced drunk and defame the Prottys and the kikes."

Parker ushered them in. His Eminence was sixty-six and rambunctious. Dudley doted on him. They met in Ireland, circa 1919. Dudley killed British soldiers. Cantwell funneled gun money.

Dudley said, "I smell Helen Schultz Parker's corned beef and cabbage, warming in the oven."

Cantwell said, "*Schultz?* Bill married a *Hun*? We might have to intern her, along with all the heathen Japs."

Dudley said, "She's a fine Catholic lass, Your Eminence."

Cantwell said, "We'll have to have Bill explain this new war to us, Dud. Father Coughlin lays the blame on the coons and the sheenie bankers, and I tend to agree with him."

Dudley said, "America and Ireland first, Your Eminence. You know where I stand on that."

Cantwell said, "Let's get shit-faced drunk and defame that Jew shitheel in the White House. Franklin Double-Cross Rosenfeld, his name is."

Parker yawned. He was hungover. He craved a hair of the dog.

The phone rang. It hit him as gunshots.

He grabbed it. "Yes?"

"It's Thad, Bill. Please put Dudley on."

He passed the receiver. Dudley took it and dispensed winks.

He said, "Sergeant Smith." He listened. He said, "Certainly." He passed the phone back.

"There's devilish mischief in Chinatown. My presence is required."

Ignore the tone. Read his eyes. Dear God, such glee.

Part Two

THE CHINKS

(December 11–December 19, 1941)

44

LOS ANGELES | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1941

White man's fellowship diverted. Murder One in Chinatown.

Dudley shagged his K-car and ran Code 3. His roof lights strafed lawn lights and nativity scenes. The siren hurt his ears.

Back roads were best. Silver Lake and Echo Park—the hill route. It should go seven minutes, door-to-door.

It took six. His siren got him through bottlenecks. He skirted Chavez Ravine and hit Ord Street. Tong balloons bobbed sky-high.

This heathen custom. String balloons to fire escapes. It means *War*.

A crowd was cliqued up. Tong boys ran predominant. Three black-and-whites at the location. A four-floor building, all Chink.

Dudley skidded up, Code 3. Bluesuits flanked the entrance. The place was tight-sealed.

Firecrackers popped. Paper dragons flew. War with the Japs, and now *this*?

Dudley walked over. The bluesuits pointed up to the second-floor hall. He sailed there. He squeezed by a morgue man. Cigarette smoke blew out a doorway. It meant boocoo cops.

They spilled into the hallway. Thad Brown and Nort Layman. Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle. Scotty Bennett with his gorgeous big-kid look.

Jim Davis was there. Two-Gun was Too-Fat now. His two .45's bulged wide.

The gang greeted him and backed off. It's the Dudster's show.

He tipped his hat and sailed by them. Ace Kwan stood by the bedroom door. He saw Dudley and pointed him in.

Requiescat in pace. Dear girl, heaven-sent.

She was on the bed, naked. She was positioned facedown. Blood ran from her hips to her neckline. Note the blood-drenched coverlet. Note the blood-drenched sheets.

Ace said, "My niece. We were too late with our measures. The Japs fucked us up."

Dudley embraced him. The old man was all sinew.

"I will avenge her, my yellow brother. I will be merciless."

Ace squeezed Dudley and stepped back. Dudley signaled the living room. Breuning, Carlisle and Scotty B. ran up.

Dudley said, "We're throwing out a dragnet for Four Families. Mike, call Elmer Jackson at the Bureau. Vice has sheets on all the known members. Get me ten patrol boys from Central, ten from Hollywood, and bring Elmer with you. Dick and Scotty, rouse the coppers downstairs. I want a display of force. Go out and roust all the blue-kerchief punks you see and string up a grand shackle line. I want four paddy wagons. We're going to fill them with Four Families fucks and drive them to Temple and Alameda. There's a grand vacant lot there. It's a perfect interrogation spot."

Breuning scrawled up his notebook. Carlisle buffed his glasses. Scotty plain loomed.

Ace knelt by the bed. He touched the dead girl's hair. He fondled colored beads.

Dudley squared up Scotty's tie. "Your suitability for this profession will be tested tonight. Can you assure me that you will rise to your tasks?"

"Yes, sir. I can."

"Don't call me 'sir,' call me Dudley."

Scotty grinned and cracked his knuckles. Jim Davis waddled up.

"Can I help, Dud? I was listening to radio calls and thought, That's sure as shit a touchy homicide, in my old stomping grounds."

Dudley bowed, Chink-style. "Of course, Chief. It's going to be quite the heathen night, and I would be honored to have you join us."

"It's been 'Jim' since I retired, Dud."

"The grand jury forced you out, sir. It was a heinously coerced retirement."

Davis chomped a plug. "You're very gracious, Dud."

Ace screeched at the dead girl. Davis joined him and screeched in full Chink. Breuning and Carlisle ignored it. Scotty studied it. The dead girl left him unfazed.

Dudley said, "Lads, Chief Davis will be chaperoning you. Do what he says at all times. He will serve as your interpreter. The tong truce that he brokered has been violated, and we are witnessing the upshot now. Go, lads. God be with you on this garish night."

The lads smirked and moved. Ace touched the dead girl's hair and stood up. The blood on the sheets had gone stiff maroon. Ace bowed and stepped out of the room.

Dudley shut the door. Dudley circled the bed. Sirens *scree-scree'd* outside. He willed the room quiet. He got down and *looked*.

Her neck was unmarked. Her eyes were shut. He pulled up the lids and checked the pupils. No petechial hemorrhage. No exsanguination. The fuck did not strangle her.

The bedsheets were tucked smooth. Sex did not precede the death. It was not a lust crime. He stripped her to humble her. He wanted to humble the men who loved her. He wanted to violate them.

The dark races declared *WAR* in this manner. Ravaged women meant *WAR*. It was ghastly and cowardly.

Dudley studied the girl's back. The blood had firmed up. The darker patches indicated severed arteries. Dried blood and wet blood covered the stab wounds. It was high-volume spill. It indicated numerous thrusts. It exceeded the standard kill-the-whore two or three thrusts.

He bent over the girl. He got out his handkerchief. He blotted up a dark blood patch. It soaked his handkerchief. He tossed it and grabbed a pillowcase. He swabbed the patch blood-free.

Multiple cuts, off a central puncture. A starburst pattern.

Just like Tachi Tachibana. Just like the photos in Ray Pinker's book. The feudal warlord's knife. Eighteenth-century Japan. Huey Cressmeyer's spiel, yesterday.

Huey knew four crazy Japs. They packed knives that made this precise wound. They lived in Griffith Park. They hated the Chinks. They hated tong chiefs. They believed you must kill their female kin. This vile act bestowed transcendence.

Four Families did not kill Rose Eileen Kwan. Huey's Jap pals did. Huey used the Japs in last night's van heist. *He* made Huey do it.

Dudley slow-eyed the room. He went quadrant-to-quadrant—floor, walls, furniture. He caught a metal glint under a chair.

It was a knife. It was slick with Rose Kwan's blood. Note the six blades. Note the starburst pattern. It's not feudal vintage. It's recently manufactured.

Dudley ripped off a sheet swatch and wrapped the knife up. The evil thing bulged his pocket.

Toss the room. Be thorough, be slow.

He rifled the closet. He went through every drawer. He pulled up the rug and looked under the bed. He saw clothes, books, phonograph records. He opened the books and ruffled the pages. One book, two books, three—

A photograph fell out. It was four by six and in color. The print had faded. It showed a young man.

He had dark hair. He was a pallid non-Caucasian. He might be a Jap-Mex half-breed.

Huey C., yesterday.

A Jap cell guy pregged up Nancy Watanabe. Said guy possessed acne cysts. He said he killed a family in Mexico. It might have been brag. He might have fled back to Mexico. *He might be a Jap-Mex half-*

breed.

The Watanabe job was tidy. The Rose Kwan snuff was sheer sloth. The Watanabe job reeked of singular animus. This was an evil-boys mob. There were probably four killers. The death pose suggested it.

The wrists and ankles were not abraded. She did not thrash. Four boys subdued her. She was stripped, pinned prone and stabbed. She wasn't gagged. One boy pushed her face into the mattress and quashed her screams.

Dudley pocketed the photo and walked out to the hall. Nort Layman and a morgue man perched there. He motioned them in. Ace leaned on the wall.

"What gives, my Irish brother?"

Dudley lit a cigarette. "It's not Four Families. It's a cabal of renegade Japs. We will kill them, and Four Families will provide us with a scapegoat that will serve to enhance your power."

Ace bowed. Dudley grabbed the hallway phone and dialed the Bureau. He heard two rings and one click.

"Homicide, Breuning."

"Yes, and Johnny-on-the-spot."

Breuning laughed. "Go up on the roof and look north on Broadway in a few minutes. I wangled the vehicles and the manpower, so it should be some show."

Dudley said, "I will surely savor it, lad."

"What else have you got for me?"

"Find Huey Cressmeyer and make him available. Call Carlos Madrano in Tijuana and tell him to drive to Los Angeles immediately."

Breuning rogered it. Dudley hung up and walked back in the bedroom. Ace waved his beads at dead Rose.

She was up on her side. Nort Layman held a speculum and a mirror. He mouthed "No rape."

The living room was noisy. Crazy laughs bounced down the hall. Thad Brown swapped Jap jokes with some Chinamen. They were straight off a Bob Hope broadcast.

Dudley stepped out on the fire escape. A paper dragon sailed by him. He climbed up and stood on the roof.

Twenty blues quick-marched up Broadway. They packed shotguns and nightsticks. They smashed windows. They were advance-briefed. We're out to get Four Families. Tell their affiliates that.

The cops surged north. Four paddy wagons tailed them. Southbound traffic U-turned and vanished.

They smashed windows. They rock-salted fleeing Chinks. They pulled tong punks out of gin mills and nigger-knocked them. Fireworks, dragons, festive music. *Forget the Japs. Here comes the L.A. Police.*

Cops tossed tongsters in paddy wagons. Cops stomped tongsters on the street. "Display of force." Festive music and screams.

There's Scotty Bennett. He's got two punks by the neck. There's Jim Davis. He's a grand pistol-whipper. There's some rooftop folk enjoying the show. They're flying the red flag of Hop Sing.

Dudley lit a cigarette. What's this? A blue-kerchiefed dragon, floating straight at him.

Nose-to-nose now. A fierce reptile. Curled lips and bared teeth.

Dudley held up his cigarette. The dragon bumped into it. Burning embers to dry paper—an instant flame. The dragon exploded. Dudley pushed him out toward the street.

The dragon flew four stories high. Chinks looked up and shrieked. Chinamen grabbed their Chinklets and held them on their shoulders. The fiery dragon swayed in the wind.

Dudley hopped the fire grates downstairs. Broadway reeked of spent cherry bombs. His K-car was unmolested. He got in and swooped to Temple and Alameda.

The lot was pure quiet. He perched there. He reclined his seat and went someplace hazy. He felt that postbennie wooze.

The world disappeared. Time went in a bucket. He heard engine rumble and opened his eyes. The world had relit, all too soon.

Mike B. had Huey C. cuffed. Four paddy wagons idled up ahead. Dick C. and Scotty B. stood with Jim Davis. Two-Gun's shirt was blood-soaked.

Dudley got out and stretched. Huey quaked. Breuning shoved him in the backseat.

He moaned for his dyke mommies. The lad possessed initiative but lacked male dignity.

Dudley said, "Send the paddy-wagon boys home, Mike. They've served their purpose, and they might lack the stomach for this."

Breuning lammed. Huey boo-hoo'd. Dudley got in the backseat and uncuffed him. Huey pulled out a Mars bar.

"Your Jap chums killed Ace Kwan's niece. Do you know where in Griffith Park they reside?"

Huey unwrapped the Mars bar. "The hiking path up from the Observatory."

"Would they be harboring evidence from the van job? Specifically, evidence that might come back to you?"

Huey munched the Mars bar. "Naw. I took everything incriminating with me. And they're broke already. They gave all their gelt to some radio swami who's gone on the Japs."

The paddy wagons rocked on their axles. Dudley heard muffled screams.

"I'm treating you to a Mexican vacation, lad. My friend Carlos

Madrano will be escorting you down. You are to remain out of sight as all of this resolves."

Huey wolfed the Mars bar and licked his fingers. The paddy wagons shook on their axles. Dudley heard muffled screams.

He hit the roof light and held up the photograph. Huey eyeballed it.

"Is this the half-breed with the acne scars? The lad who bragged that he killed a family in Culiacán?"

Huey squinted. "I can't tell, Uncle Dud. Maybe *ja*, maybe *nein*."

The paddy wagons shimmied on their axles. Dudley heard muffled screams.

He cuffed Huey and walked over. The wagons stood four across. They swayed and banged one another. The screams got worse.

Dudley entered the first wagon. Six tong boys were cuffed on the bench. Dick Carlisle packed a rubber hose. The grip was friction-taped. The business end dripped blood.

Dudley stepped out. Dudley entered the next wagon. Eight tong boys were cuffed on the bench. Mike Breuning packed a beavertail sap. It was lead-stitched.

Dudley stepped out. Dudley entered the next wagon. Five tong boys were cuffed on the bench. Jim Davis packed a billy club and shrieked in Chinese.

Dudley stepped out. Dudley entered the next wagon. Nine tong boys were cuffed on the bench. Scotty Bennett packed his fists.

Scotty looked at Dudley. A skinny tong boy gave Dudley the finger. Dudley laughed. The skinny tong boy spit blood on his shoes.

Dudley said, "Uncuff him. Bring him outside for a bit."

Scotty unhooked the boy. Dudley stepped outside. Scotty shoved the boy toward him. The rascal spit blood and swayed on his feet.

Dudley said, "Kill him."

Scotty pulled his .45. Scotty blew his brains out, point-blank.

December 12, 1941

45

LOS ANGELES | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1941

Mold work. Tire-tread casting.

Difficult in the lab. Add this outdoor setting. Add the cold night and arc light. Add the kibitzers.

Lee Blanchard and Jack Webb. With a jug scrounged at the El Sombrero.

Ashida plastered up a tread trough. Arc light beams singed his neck. He had exemplar pix of the Watanabes' car. They owned a '36 Dodge.

He was two hours in. Bill Parker called and ordered the work. He called from Lyman's. Sid Hudgens was with him. Parker said, "Nobody can sleep, so we might as well be working. I've talked Sid into writing a piece on the case. I'm working—so you should be, too."

He didn't say "And you're drinking." He didn't say "And you're buying off a corrupt newsman."

Ashida worked. Dirt-and-gravel driveways made for good lifts. He'd confirmed the Dodge with six molds.

It was *elimination* work. He was looking for *suspect* car moldings. The odds: ten thousand to one against.

It was half-ass quiet now. The Chinatown ruckus had lulled. They heard shotgun blasts a mile southeast. Jack checked his police-band radio.

The Dudster ordered twenty cops out on a riot sweep. The fracas extended. It featured fireworks and high-flying debris.

Ashida daubed plaster. Lee Blanchard and Jack Webb were liquored up. Blanchard was scratched up from Kay Lake.

Jack said, "Scotty Bennett's on the PD now. You know, that big fullback from Hollywood High."

Blanchard said, "I think he's messing around with Kay, not that I give a shit. I saw him going into Lyman's after that scene she pulled with me."

Jack said, "I don't get it. You're shacked up with Kay."

Blanchard said, "You're too young to get it. You ain't figured out that the world is a strange and fucked-up place."

Ashida daubed plaster. Yes—strange and fucked-up.

Submarines. The Goleta Inlet shed. He drove back to L.A. and developed the photos. He succumbed to fear. He destroyed the Watanabes' radio with a ball-peen hammer. He burned the ledger. He mixed a sedative and slept for ten hours. He woke up, terrified. It was everything.

The roundups. His thefts. His lies. Crazy Kay and her crazy-girl agenda. Dudley Smith versus Bill Parker.

He studied the shed pix. Physiognomy, eugenics. Three dead men looked Chink. Two dead men looked Jap. They might all be mixed-race. He thought in racial slurs now. *The world was this fucked-up place.*

Blanchard said, "Hideo's pals with Kay. They made quite the pair at Lyman's. Thad Brown damn near shit a brick."

Jack said, "Quit needling Hideo."

Blanchard said, "Hideo's okay. It's Kay who ain't—but I love her, anyway."

Jack said, "Let it go, brother."

Blanchard tipped the jug. "Scotty Bennett. Another cop. And now your old pal Bucky's coming on the PD. Kay'll have her hands full."

It was cold. They wore their high school jackets. Belmont and Manual Arts. *Track meets, the showers, Bucky*.

Jack said, "I screwed up at the briefing. I shouldn't have mentioned the purple-sweater guy. I think Dudley's peeved at me."

Ashida said, "You did the right thing. It's a good lead."

Blanchard tipped the jug. "It's a *shit* lead. Nobody wants a white killer. That's straight from Horrall."

Jack snatched the jug. "I heard Mike Breuning and Sid Hudgens talking. I think they're cooking up something with the DA."

Blanchard unsnatched the jug. "McPherson's a mud shark. He used to bring colored girls to my fights and cause a big stink."

Jack resnatched the jug. "I did an errand for Mike, but he told me it was shitwork at the gate. I called PC Bell and checked those pay-phone calls that the Watanabes made. The clerk gave me the locations. The booths were out by those aircraft plants. You know—Lockheed, Douglas, Boeing."

Blanchard said, "You're right, shitwork. You follow these leads, and all you get is shit."

Ashida braced a new tread set. It was a grass-gravel imprint. He adjusted the arc light. He laid down his calipers and tape.

He squatted low. He got naked-eye bingo: *Something's different here*.

It was *diamond* tread. The Watanabes' Dodge had *sawtooth* tread. This was *separate-car* tread. He was naked-eye sure.

Something's familiar. He'd seen it before. He knew that tread.

Ashida ran out to his car. He dug in the glove box and skimmed his bulletin stack. He knew it was recent. The diamond-tread Goodyear—

December 11, 10, 9, 8—

There:

Sunday, December 7, 5:45 a.m. A Sheriff's car-on-bicycle job. 4600 Valley Boulevard. Four-person hit-and-run.

It's dark out. They're clipped from behind. Three teenaged boys survive. The group's leader expires.

Jim Larkin. Dead at Queen of Angels. The bulletin photo matches the driveway tracks. The same tread. The same wear pattern. The same impression depth.

December 7. Pearl Harbor morning. 5:45 a.m. The morning *after* the Watanabe snuffs.

That car, in *this* driveway. The driveway was roped off from Sunday a.m. on. *That* car, *those* tires, *this* driveway—sometime before that.

Ashida read the whole bulletin. His hands shook and jumbled the words. An eyeball witness said this:

The suspect's car hit-and-ran. It almost looked deliberate. The car was black. That's it for vehicle ID.

But:

A white man's arm dangled out the window. The man wore a purple sweater. End of description—that's all of it.

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1941

Scotty fumbled with me.

He showed up an hour ago. His hands were bruised; his suit was wrinkled; he wore a shoulder-holstered gun. My wartime lover. The "first emergency hire" of the Los Angeles PD.

He had surveilled me late Wednesday night; he had observed my date with Hideo Ashida. I should have been furious—but something made me step back from it.

My rough boy was distraught. He bolted three quick scotches, carried me upstairs and went at my body. He'd start to kiss me, stop and burrow into me. He'd get up and adjust the curtains to further contain us.

The bedroom is dark. We can't read each other. It's as if we're back in the blackout.

I put my hand on Scotty's chest and felt him pulsing. I said, "Tell me."

He said, "I was waiting outside here, way late Wednesday night. I'd just got sworn in. I wanted to tell you before someone else did. You came home, but you went out again, and I wanted to get things straight in my mind before I told you. Then you drove to Linny's and met Ashida. He was at the ceremony, so I knew you knew."

I smoothed his hair and undid his holster. He relaxed a bit. I placed his holster on a bedside chair.

"I was angry at you for following me. But I understand it now."

Scotty said, "I like Ashida okay, but he's a Jap. I wanted to tell you, but when you saw me outside Linny's, I knew he'd tell you and take it away from me."

I said, "I'm sorry. And you know I couldn't have known."

"I know. But there's a war on, and he's a Jap. It's like I said the other night. You spread yourself pretty thin."

I touched Scotty's face. His eyes were wet. I brushed away tears.

Scotty trembled. He said, "I killed a man. I thought I'd join the Marines and shoot Japs on some island. I killed a Chinaman instead."

His tremors moved to my body.

"What happened? How did it happen?"

He said, "Ace Kwan's niece was killed. The guy who did it went after Dudley, so I shot him."

"And?"

"There's no 'and,' Kay. That's all I'm supposed to say. You can read about it in the *Mirror*. Dud gave Sid Hudgens the exclusive."

I rolled away from him. There was Dudley Smith and Lee; Dudley Smith, Lee, and Abe Reles. "The canary can sing, but he can't fly." Coney Island and a drop out that window. A dead Chinaman now.

Scotty rolled into me. His breath subsided. He'd said it.

The bed was disarrayed. I pulled the covers over us and felt the hitch that signified Scotty's drifting to sleep. A five-day love affair and this body's knowledge already. The hitch felt safe.

Scotty slept. I turned on the bedside lamp and moved the beam away from him. I got out the tract I stole from Claire De Haven's.

The title was *Fascist Harvest*. An L.A. policeman's badge was pictured below it.

The prose style was luminous by propaganda-tract standards. The introduction rehashed beefs pertaining to Chief Jim Davis. It was stale stuff—but then the author riveted me.

Davis was abetted in his repressive enforcement schemes. The brains and "oppressive mind-set" behind them belonged to his administrative aide. The aide was a ruthlessly ambitious and incandescently brilliant lieutenant named William H. Parker.

Lieutenant Parker was an exceedingly gifted attorney-at-law. Lieutenant Parker utilized his legal prowess to enhance his personal power within the Los Angeles Police Department and to increase political autonomy for the Los Angeles Police. These measures were couched within a disingenuous and entirely self-serving populist stance. They restricted political influence as it regarded day-to-day police work. They dashed all notions of civilian oversight on the Los Angeles Police. They set the stage for greater political-police collusion, once compliant politicians with "quasi-reformer" credentials were lured into the PD's fold. The tract predicted the current reign of Mayor Fletch Bowron and Chief "Call-Me-Jack" Horrall, and laid the blame on the then Lieutenant William H. Parker.

Lieutenant Parker was a sterling long-term thinker. His legal mind was attuned solely to his own goals. He despised the Davises, Bowrons and Horralls of the world and facilitated their power solely to pave the way for his own ascent. He created the police regimes that he purported to despise and intended to reform at that far-ahead moment when power came to him. The author praised Parker here. He employed Marxist methods with magisterial aplomb. His city charters greatly increased the civil-service protection granted to Los Angeles police chiefs and gave them a free rein to ignore civilian interference and rule for life. Lieutenant William H. Parker was no less than the creator and sustaining force behind Police State Los Angeles and the theocrat's utopia that he planned to build from scratch. The author of the tract knew it: "As a victim, as a citizen engaged in revolt, as an affluent woman rendered a casualty in Whiskey Bill Parker's war."

So, it's personal. So, it's all about the two of you.

The text went to memoir. Claire De Haven described an antipolice rally in Pershing Square. The date was October 11, 1935. Claire was twenty-five and organizing for the Socialist Workers Party. L.A. cops beat a Negro prisoner to death at the Lincoln Heights jail. Protests ensued.

Police influence quashed a rising hue and cry. Lieutenant Bill Parker extorted newspapermen citywide. He pledged favors if they suppressed their coverage. They did. The incident faded from public consciousness. The SWP called for a rally on October 11.

Claire was there. The rally was peacefully run. Mounted cops attacked the protesters. Lieutenant Parker commanded them. Claire saw him in jackboots and Great War tin hat. She was beaten, kicked to the ground and tossed in a paddy wagon. She was locked up on the women's tier at the Central Station jail. *I* was in the jail Monday night. *I* was locked up with a score of Japanese women. *They* were commandeered in a moment of racial hysteria.

Sheriff's matrons tended to the female prisoners. They were stripped and sprayed for lice. A very large matron with a Jewish surname took her time with Claire. She fondled Claire's breasts, shaved her hair close, dressed her in a scratchy smock and threw her in a cell. Claire saw herself in a mirror. She had been beaten and molested. Her mirror image brought to mind Renée Falconetti in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*.

Claire's lawyer father bailed her out. She fixated on the man in jackboots and glasses. She talked to a Police Department plant. The man said, "That's Whiskey Bill. Let me tell you about him."

Joan of Arc. William H. Parker.

Claire kept her hair short. She viewed *The Passion of Joan of Arc* repeatedly. The Protestant-reared atheist converted to Catholicism. She attended Mass at Saint Vibiana's. Lieutenant Parker worshiped there. She observed him every Sunday morning. She watched Lieutenant Parker comport with an Irish-born policeman named Dudley Smith. She saw Lieutenant Parker and Sergeant Smith laugh and joke with Archbishop Cantwell. Monsignor Joseph Hayes became her confessor. He was also Lieutenant Parker's confessor.

The rest of the tract was pure indictment.

William H. Parker's intent was to place Los Angeles under martial law. His reforming zeal was the fascist ethos of subordinate and control. His Catholicism was the male vituperation of the Borgias. Her Catholicism was the ecstatic revelation of Joan of Arc.

I put down the tract. Officer R. S. Bennett slept beside me. I turned off the lamp. My bedroom went war-blackout dark.

The tract was never publicly issued—I sensed that very strongly. None of the information was documented in Claire's file. The relationship was impersonal on Parker's side—I sensed that even more strongly. He never saw the tract or saw Claire in church. It didn't matter. She saw Parker, just as he saw me.

Claire's middle name was Katherine, my full first name. I had lived a version of her life. The lover beside me killed a man this very night. His presence consoled more than disturbed me.

I have lain still for hours. I am aswirl in madness and magic. I don't know what to do next.

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LOS ANGELES | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1941

Parker annotated his graphs. He felt refreshed. He fell asleep drunk and woke up sober. He reinstated The Pledge.

Blackouts/Traffic Statistics. Jot graph notes.

Status quo here. He called the Bureau an hour ago. A secretary checked his Teletypes. There was a Jap sub attack Wednesday. Goleta, north of Santa Barbara.

A "hidden" fishing village was torpedo-bombed. Dead Orientals were found. They appeared to be Chinese. The local Sheriff's Office and Camp Roberts provost were on it.

Alien Squad/Subversive Roundups. Jot graph notes.

Status quo, again. One cross-reference.

Ward Littell was the FBI's rogue conscience on the roundups. Ward called them a "catastrophic injustice." He got Ward assigned to the Sheriff's van-heist job. He called Dick Hood and wangled the assignment. He did not say the names Huey Cressmeyer and Dudley Smith. Dick called the heist "a no-leads baffler."

Watanabe Case/Details-Chronology. Jot graph notes.

Status quo again. Four dead Japs. No news is good news. Who gives a fucking shit?

Dudley left his house last night. He stayed home and got blotto with the Archbishop. A tong kid killed Ace Kwan's niece. Dudley lit up Chinatown. Scotty Bennett killed the niece killer. Dud gave Sid Hudgens the exclusive. It derailed *his* plan to co-opt Sid for Watanabe-case ink.

He packed off the Archbishop and met Sid at Lyman's. He pitched him the notion. Sid was wowed. Sid consulted his editor and called him back this morning.

"Sorry, Bill. Ace Kwan's *Chinese* and tight with Fletch Bowron. Scotty Bennett's a good-looking kid. The Watanabes were *Japs* in hate-the-Japs L.A. We've got space for one piece of slant-eyed ink—and Ace and Scotty are it."

Buzz Meeks was on the van heist *and* the Watanabe job. Buzz Meeks was uncowed by Dudley Smith. The alleged house and farm purchases troubled Meeks.

Who gives a shit? It was Dudley's case. Dudley was Call-Me-Jack's boy.

Lake/De Haven. Jot graph notes.

He couldn't. It was all invisible. The Fifth Column worked invisibly. His challenge was to render their treason coherent. Kay Lake was his vehicle. She will show how words and thoughts poison the human spirit with systematically criminal intent. Kay Lake will say *This is the Evil of the Mind. This is how mass murder evolves from sordid dramaturgy. This is God reviled in the name of social critique*.

This redeems him for the squalor he himself perpetrated. This redeems him for his actions under Jim Davis. This is how he will cleanse this great city.

The phone rang. Parker unhooked the receiver.

"Yes?"

"Fred Kalmbach in Evanston, Bill. I hope you've got a pen handy."

Parker said, "Go ahead, please."

"She's Joan Woodard Conville. That's C, O, N, V, I, L, L, E. She's twenty-six, with a date-of-birth of 4/17/15. She graduated from the West Suburban Hospital Nursing School in '37. She got her B.S. in biology at Northwestern, while you were here in '40. She's from Tomah, Wisconsin. The most recent lead I've got is that she moved to Los Angeles, which seems like it might make you happy. That's all I've got for current whereabouts."

Parker scrawled it on *Lake/De Haven*. The doorbell rang. He jerked and dropped his pen. The phone connection died.

The bell persisted. Some fool leaned on it. Parker walked out and opened the door.

It's Hideo Ashida. He's the sole Jap on the city tit. He's holding two photo bulletins up.

Ashida looked at Parker. He held the bulletins side by side. He went *Look, Captain, look*.

Parker looked. He saw two bulletins. They showed two tire tracks. Identical tread patterns, wear patterns, declivities.

An L.A. Police photo: the Watanabes' driveway, an un-ID'd car. A Sheriff's photo: "Larkin, James/4600 Valley Boulevard."

Parker studied the photos. Parker linked the dots.

The Larkin job, the older man, the kid cyclists. He was there. He couldn't sleep. He went just to look.

Ashida tapped the bulletins. "The car that hit Mr. Larkin was parked in the Watanabes' driveway. Note the soil erosion. I'd say the tracks were made the week before they were killed."

Parker leaned on the door. He felt weightless. The door held him up.

"I was there that morning. I heard the squawk and drove over. An object fell out of Larkin's pocket as they put him in the ambulance. It was a Luger grip embossed with a swastika."

Ashida tapped the Larkin photo. "There's an eyeball-witness description of the man driving the car. He was white and wearing a purple sweater."

Parker crossed himself. "Why did you bring this to me?"

"Because you outrank Sergeant Smith. Because I thought you'd find it more compelling than he would."

"Finish the thought, Doctor."

"Because the notion of a white suspect intrigues me."

Parker said, "It's vehicular manslaughter. The Sheriff's should have a full package."

Ashida said, "It's threadbare. They've got no suspects and no more information. It's like it is with our Department. They're swamped by the blackouts and roundups. They can't give this job a fair shake."

"Tell me what you're thinking."

"I'm thinking that war regulations will constrain us. Larkin was a British Intelligence man, but the British embassy and Scotland Yard won't release information without a month of back-and-forth and writs. They'll say, 'There's a war on.' They'll say, 'We're being bombed, and you aren't.' "

Parker said, "Tell me what else you're thinking."

Ashida pointed to his car. "I'm thinking that I have Mr. Larkin's address. He lived in Santa Monica Canyon, and I doubt if the Sheriff's have searched his house."

Parker grabbed his house keys and shut the door. He walked straight to Ashida's car and got in.

Ashida got in. They took Silver Lake Boulevard to Sunset. Hollywood, the Strip, Beverly Hills. *Shut-the-fucking-world-out-so-you-won't-back-down*. Parker glued his eyes shut.

Sunset Boulevard went twisty. Westwood and Brentwood twisted by. The Pacific Palisades twisted by. Parker smelled the ocean.

Ashida swung south to SaMo Canyon. Those fucking monkeys. *Hear-no-evil/see-no-evil. Shut-the-fucking-world-out*.

Ashida stopped the car. Ashida said, "We're here."

Parker opened his eyes. *Here* was *this:*

A Japanese-style house. Low roof, cement façade, louvered windows. A sliding front door. Bonsai shrubs on the walkway.

High shrubs enclosed it. Shut-the-fucking-neighbors-out-and-get-inside-*now*.

They walked up to the door. Parker rang the bell and got reverberation. They waited ten seconds. Ashida jimmied the lock with some lab tool. The door slid open.

They stepped inside and slid it shut. Ashida flicked a wall switch. Here, look at this:

A small living room. A bisecting koi stream. A flat cement floor and walls lined with teak bookshelves. Japanese art and architecture. Japanese history. Sitting mats, paper lanterns.

Ashida took the lead. Parker followed him. The house was small. The connecting hall was flat cement. The one bedroom was twelve by twelve.

The bed was a floor mat. A glass wall framed an outside garden and a koi pond. Jim Larkin lived in stark beauty. Jim Larkin shut-the-fucking-world-out.

Ashida opened a closet door. Bam—just like that:

Four suits on hangers. A fuckload of German Lugers, hooked to a wallboard.

They dangled by their trigger guards. Parker counted seventeen. Ivory grips embossed with black swastikas. Red rubies inlaid.

A dresser below the guns. Two drawers only. Ashida opened the top drawer. *Bam!*—just like that:

A money stack. U.S. dollars, British pounds, yen and reichsmarks. Allied/Axis gelt—a fortune.

Ashida tapped the bottom drawer. Bam—just like that:

A loose-leaf binder—and nothing else.

Ashida opened it. The contents: two sheets of paper covered with Japanese script.

Jim Larkin was a white man. Jim Larkin knew Japanese.

Ashida studied the pages. Parker studied him. He's translating now. His lips don't move. His eyes barely do. It's word stew to thoughts sustained. He respects the house. He'll speak softly.

Ashida said, "I think it goes back to what Buzz Meeks brought up at the briefing. It pertains to buyouts or potential buyouts of Japanese-owned houses and farms. I'm extrapolating here, but I trust it. There's no Japanese names listed, just initials—but the initials by and large conform to the initials of Japanese men whose names I've seen on the subversive lists. The addresses listed are all in Glassell Park and South Pasadena—with one exception—and that's 'R.W.,' for Ryoshi Watanabe, with his address in Highland Park. Based on the tenses of the verbs, I'd say that some houses and farms were actually purchased, while, in other cases, the approaches were made, but the house and farm owners refused to sell. The amounts paid or offered are well below market value, and I have a theory about that."

Parker said, "Tell me. I'll extrapolate with you."

Ashida said, "We all knew the war was coming. I would posit that the men who tried to purchase the houses and farms had foreknowledge of when and/or where the Japanese forces would attack. I would further posit that they knew there would be a massive roundup of native-born and foreign-born Japanese, and a massive confiscation of their assets. We're headed for a large-scale internment, and I think the men knew that."

Parker said, "The Watanabes were killed the day before Pearl Harbor."

Ashida said, "Jim Larkin was mowed down at 5:45 Pearl Harbor morning. The news didn't hit L.A. until just before noon."

Parker said, "He knew something. The hit-and-run was premeditated. I'm certain of that."

Ashida scanned the room. The house was crazy serene.

Parker crossed himself. "I vowed to pray for him, but reneged on it. I caused his death."

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LOS ANGELES | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1941

Ruth Mildred loved cheesecake. The office celebrated her Sapphic bent and rogue-doctor status. Note the medical diplomas and framed glossies.

She pointed to Rita Hayworth. “I scraped her. She had a thick bush.”

Dudley laughed. He felt fit. He slept at home and played patriarch. The visit would hold his brood to Christmas.

Ruth Mildred ogled Jean Arthur. “I scraped her. I licked her snatch while she was anesthetized.”

Dudley roared. Ruth Mildred lived to entertain. Nice girls in a jam flocked to her. She did King Cohn’s scrape jobs. Dot Rothstein lured in outside work. Ruth Mildred was L.A.’s scrape overlord.

She ogled Ginger Rogers. “I scraped her. The baby had two heads.”

Dudley smiled. Ruthie was big at Columbia. She had a chic corner office with a waiting room. The latter was packed now. Dot and Huey C. Mickey Cohen, Hooky Rothman. Carlos Madrano, up from T.J.

He spoke to Carlos. He quizzed him per his Jap-farm schemes. Carlos refused to divulge. He quizzed him per the Jap house/farm buyouts. Carlos said, “*No más*, my friend. I will not talk about that.”

Ruth Mildred ogled Carole Lombard. “I scraped her. The daddy was a jigaboo.”

Dudley rocked his chair. “Did you scrape a Jap girl named Nancy Watanabe?”

Ruth Mildred lit a cigarette and threw her feet up on her desk. Her skirt flew wide.

“I don’t scrape Japs. That species of gash in no way intrigues me.”

“You’re not freelancing at MGM? I heard rumors about that stunning lass who played Scarlett O’Hara.”

Ruth Mildred said, “Okay, I did a job for Warner’s. Bette Davis missed two cycles, and I treated her for a miscarriage.”

It sandbagged him. His breakfast curdled. He heard chants out on

Gower.

“End the feudal system! King Cohn must go!”

Mike Breuning called him. Sid Hudgens was bird-dogging *Baaaad* Bill McPherson. He’d been on a cooze run at Minnie Roberts’ Casbah. He might return today.

Ruth Mildred ogled Barbara Stanwyck. “I scraped her. I sold her snatch hair to Frank Capra.”

Dudley lit a cigarette. “Huey pulled a caper. I’ll need to stash him in Mexico for a while.”

“My baby never works single-o.”

“There’s a grand chance that his partners will evaporate.”

“Keep him safe, Dud. My baby’s frail.”

“King Cohn must go! King Cohn must go!” This Red roar in Gower Gulch.

Dudley zipped to the waiting room. Mickey and Hooky sulked. Captain Carlos read *Time* magazine. Huey quaked. The Dotstress thigh-massaged him.

Dudley said, “Bid good-bye to your mothers, son. You’ll be leaving in a moment.”

Carlos said, “You’ll love Tijuana, Huey. We will go to the donkey show tonight.”

Huey ran to Ruth Mildred. Dudley admired his speed. Huey threw his arms around her. Ruthie consoled him. Note her tongue in his ear.

Harry Cohn walked in. Mickey and Hooky stirred and displayed brass knucks. The gang adjourned to Ruthie’s office. Ruthie slid Huey off her lap and opened the curtains. The gang peered out.

Picketers and chanters. Raggedy exemplars of specious discontent.

Mickey and Hooky slid out the door. Harry lit a cigarette and flushed sclerotic. Standing room only. Exclusive sneak peek. *Red Riot on Gower Gulch!*

It stars Mickey and Hooky. They’re two-fisted Jewboys, wielding steel knucks. “*King Cohn must go! King Cohn must*—”

The Hebrew hard-ons hit. They ducked their heads and came in low. Picket signs flew. Picket fucks fled. Dudley saw ripped cheeks and hairlines. Someone’s dentures bounced in the street.

Harry said, “Thanks, Dud. And thank Ben Siegel for me. I’ll consider your smut deal.”

The gang enjoyed the show. Dot tittered. Huey burrowed into Ruth Mildred.

She ogled Lupe Vélez. “I scraped her. The daddy had a two-foot schlong. I had to stitch Lupe up.”

The Dotstress ran interference. She led them through the studio and up to the Sunset gate. Mickey and Hooky flexed their hands. Their shirts were bloodstained.

Dot waved bye-bye. Dudley smooshed Mickey and Hooky into his car. They pulled out east. The Red riot dispersed. Traffic noise covered the shrieks.

“It’s your day to curry favor with influential men, lads. I applaud your fine work for Mr. Cohn, and offer applause in advance for your work for Mr. Siegel.”

Mickey flexed his hands. The *Herald* called him a “pint-size plug ugly.” The *Herald* knew their shit.

“We’re supposed to tune up some Nazi humps. What’s the drift on that, Dud? You’ve got no beef with the Krauts.”

Dudley said, “You will enjoy humbling men who condone the mistreatment of your grand people. They will reveal the names of other Bundists and like-minded souls in the Sheriff’s Office and Los Angeles PD. I will coerce those men into working for me. They will assist a roundup of potential witnesses for a case I’m investigating. It will not be a job for the frail of heart.”

Hooky massaged his hands. The *Mirror* called him a “vicious strongarm thug.” The *Mirror* knew their shit.

“So we get fake-popped on a gun charge and lounge around in stir? That’s the drift here?”

“It is, lad. That stated, I think you’ll find the accommodations engaging.”

Mickey and Hooky relaxed. Dudley highballed downtown. His best suit was stashed at Kwan’s. Bette Davis, tonight at the Shrine.

South to Temple. There’s the Hall of Justice. There’s the Welcome Wagon—two deputies in Santa Claus hats.

Mickey and Hooky yocked. Dudley pulled up to the jail door and idled. A Santa cop grabbed the sled. Mickey slipped him a C-note. The Santa cop swooned and peeled out.

A Santa cop escorted them up. Hooky slipped him a C-note. He swooned. They hit a Jap-infested catwalk. There’s the Penthouse. It’s been redecorated. It’s a bookie front now.

Blackboards. Chalked-on results for Pimlico and Bay Meadows. Fourteen phones. Ben Siegel—holding two pairs of sap gloves. Palm-weighted. Twelve ounces of solid lead per.

Benny hugged Mickey and Hooky. The gloves changed hands. Ben wore a swell blue suit. The boy nearly glowed.

He said, “A little break for you. I’ll have you out by Hanukkah.”

Dudley said, “Ace Kwan will cater your meals. Keep your ears perked for jailhouse chat that Mr. Siegel and I might find alluring.”

Mickey and Hooky donned the gloves. They were fetishist’s black.

Ben said, “You’re down to four, Dud. That Dr. Fred Hiltz guy finagled bail somehow. He’s jungled up with that anti-Semite preacher, Gerald L. K. Smith. They’re in some sort of hate-tract biz.”

“Not all Smiths are as benevolent as I am. I should add that the Reverend Smith is a Protestant.”

Ben pointed down the catwalk. It was empty-cell Siberia. The deputies tuned up rape-o’s and child molesters there.

Dudley said, “I want names. Currently employed policemen. The Bund, the Silver Shirts, the Klan, the Christian Front, the Thunderbolt Legion. I doubt if they will withhold the information.”

Mickey and Hooky flexed their gloves. Benny bowed. Proceed, *meine Kameraden*.

They walked over. The fucks were cuffed against a bar row. They stood behind-the-back cinched.

Tuesday night. The Deutsches Haus. The same lads, minus Fred Hiltz. In jail denims now. Denied bail. FUCKED in war-fevered L.A.

Scared. Trembling. Face-to-face with vicious Yids.

Dudley said, “My friends and I want names. Local policemen on the far-right flank that you’ve encountered. You’ll be returned to your cells once you provide those names.”

Ben Siegel gleamed. Zionist Ben. He was big in the Jewish Orphans Fund.

He nodded. Mickey and Hooky stepped in.

They slapped. Palm weights delivered the hurt. They employed shoulder pivots. They looked mean. Jews, racial scapegoats, *Kristallnacht*.

The Nazis thrashed and shit their shorts. Mickey and Hooky laid in love taps. The taps dislodged teeth. Lips split. Bridgework fell. The Nazis squirmed against the bars. They contorted. They started screeching names.

Dudley stood up close. The Krauts snitched names. He heard “Dougie Waldner, Sheriff’s, Firestone Station.” He heard, “He’s Klan and Shirts, and he knows Gerry Smith.”

Mickey and Hooky moved back. Benny embraced them. The Nazi fucks coughed up teeth and names.

Dudley heard “Fritz Vogel” and “Bill Koenig.” Dudley heard “Bund.” Dudley heard “77th Street Station.” The blood became untenable. Dudley moved back. A Santa cop shoved a phone in his face. He heard Dick Carlisle on the line.

Carlisle said, “McPherson, Casbah, outside on Temple, *now*.” Dudley ran.

He made the freight lift. He made the ground. He made the parking lot. A ’39 Chevy rolled by. Bill McPherson had the wheel.

A ’38 Cadillac rolled up. Sid Hudgens had the wheel. Dick C., Mike

B. and Scotty B. rode with him. Dudley jumped in back.

Carlisle said, “The DA’s up ahead, and he’s stinko.”

Sid said, “I’ve got my camera.”

Scotty said, “What do *I* do?”

Carlisle said, “What do you think? You *loom*.”

Breuning said, “He just up and ducked out of his office. I called Minnie Roberts and got the lowdown. He ordered the ‘Mudbath.’ It’s three colored girls.”

Carlisle went *Uuuuugh*. Sid went *Oooh-la-la*.

The Chevy hooked onto Broadway, southbound. Sid stuck in, bumper-tight.

Dudley caught his breath. He pulled out his notebook and scribbled. He wrote “Waldner/Sheriff’s/Firestone.” He wrote “Vogel/Koenig/77th.”

The Chevy made time. The Sidster hovered in pounce range. The complexion bronzed at Jefferson Boulevard. Dudley smelled white missionary *en croûte*.

The Call of the Jungle doomed the DA. There’s the Casbah—a strip of rooms above Sultan Sam’s Sandbox.

The Chevy pulled to the curb. Darktown Bill got out and primped his way upstairs. Sid braked and parked. Dudley counted off sixty seconds. Sid flashbulb-prepped his camera. Breuning and Carlisle smirked.

Scotty was dumbstruck. He killed a Chink last night. He slept with a woman. His suit was rumpled. Note the fading perfume.

Dudley said, “Now.”

They piled out and laid tracks. They went up the stairs, single file. Minnie met them on the landing. She flashed four fingers to denote room no. 4. Dudley led them over. Breuning and Carlisle kicked in the door. It sheared and flew off the hinges.

Bad Bill was poking a darky girl. Two high yellows stood by. They held switches and wore Cleopatra gowns. All hail the “Mudbath.”

The Sidster popped a flashbulb. Glare torched the room. It made the mudbathers blink and—

Halt.

It’s a shakedown.

Bill, stop fucking. The Mudbath is over. Put down those switches, girls.

The rutters froze. The cops ran into the room. Sid flashed photo no. 2. Breuning and Carlisle grabbed the switch girls. Scotty pulled the DA out of the saddle and tossed him on the floor. The girls squealed and beat feet down the hall.

McPherson sobbed. Breuning threw a blanket on him. Dudley hovered, close in.

“You will be presented with a suspect in a multiple homicide case sometime between now and New Year's. You will have a confession, superbly corroborated by eyewitnesses and forensic evidence. You will facilitate the filing of a grand jury indictment. The matter will be expeditiously adjudicated. You will secure a four-count conviction. It will buttress your reputation as a jurist of sterling repute."

McPherson soiled the blanket. McPherson went *Yes, yes, yes, YES!* Sid shot photo no. 3. The room glared bright white.

Dudley signaled the boys. They scrammed the room and vacated the Casbah. They walked back to the car. Sid screeched a U-turn and pointed them north.

The boys laughed. The boys whooped. The boys exhaled steam. Scotty played it sotto voce. He looked shell-shocked.

Sid drove west to Figueroa. The scenery improved. Mock-snow Christmas trees and REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR! signs. Klieg lights outside the Shrine Auditorium. Hold for Miss Bette Davis.

Dudley chain-smoked and brooded. His dope-peddling Armenians vexed him. Their heroin source had dried up. It induced a coontown panic. They've pled for help. He has no answers.

Ensign Jack Kennedy will hit L.A. tomorrow. Beth Short and Tommy Gilfoyle will hit shortly. Beth at seventeen—more and more cut from his cloth.

Beth's letter vexed him. He got it right before the Watanabe snuffs. Her "horrible thing" last year. She must reveal that event.

City Hall appeared. His lads disembarked. Sid went *Where to?* Dudley made slant eyes. It signified Kwan's.

Sid drove him there. Dudley winked and got out of the car. Black-bordered business fronts ran up the street. They were Four Families affiliates. They were heathens in mourning.

Hop Sing boys flanked the Pagoda. Their coat bulges concealed big gats. They got the door for him. He ducked to the basement. Ace had prepared his room.

The pallet, the bowl, the tar. The pipe for enhanced *Thought and Act.*

Dudley shrugged off his suit coat and holster. He lit the pipe. He held the smoke. He breathed *ouuuuuut.*

Something quashed stray imagery. He went straight to the Watanabe house.

That simple detail overlooked. He shouldn't care. The case would be fallaciously solved.

He inhaled again. He walked in the front door and circled the bodies. His sketched map merged with his memorized floor plan. The overlay encompassed brain camera and animation.

The dining room, the kitchen. The damp clothes on the line. It indicates homicide. The killer forgot to remove the clothes and/or dry them. It indicates a mental lapse.

He inhaled again. He walked through the house three times. He smelled all the food in the icebox. He touched all the furniture. Downstairs, upstairs, the note. "Looming apocalypse." Did it prophesy Sunday's attack or the current roundups?

He inhaled again. He stepped outside and conversed with Dr. Ashida. A truth sideswiped him. It's why they have to know *Who* and *Why*.

Dialectic. The lad embodied great utility and insight. Scientific application meets baffling event. Eugenics and racial identity. Add lurid psychopathy. Add the native-born Japanese and foreign-born Irish. Their compatible and conflicting visions. Their shared need to know *Who* and *Why*.

He spoke to Ashida, outside the house. The lad relinquished his pilfered tracts. Tracts were a difficult trace. Ed Satterlee cued him in to Lee Blanchard's girlfriend, Kay Lake. Miss Lake meets the Red Claire De Haven. Miss Lake attends a party at her home. Miss De Haven invites Miss Lake to a second soirée. Ben Siegel is procuring a guest list.

Whiskey Bill's "outside deal." Whiskey Bill's strident anticommunism. Chart the possibilities.

Miss Lake might snitch Reds to Bill Parker. That might explain Whiskey Bill's "left-wing tract" and "outside deal." It was all hypothetical. It was worth strategic scrutiny.

Ed Satterlee told him this: Parker got Meeks assigned to the Sheriff's-van heist. The move was suspicious. It might mean nothing. It might bode as Parker-Meeks collusion. The van job was watertight. Parker could not suspect Huey Cressmeyer.

The Watanabe house faded to pinpoints. Dr. Ashida waved goodbye. Light jumped through a door crack. He heard footfalls and smelled fortified tea.

A cup touched his hands. The footfalls retreated. He sipped the tea. It supplied the high voltage he'd need.

His body recalibrated. His watch said 6:18.

He got up. He put on his suit coat and hooked on his gun. He walked into the office. Ace greeted him. Note the ordnance on his desk.

Two .45's. Silencer-fitted and loaded with poison-dipped dumdums. Two short-handled axes. Note their razor-honed blades.

They bowed to each other. Ace wrapped the tools in a gunnysack. Dudley pulled out his switchblade. The business end popped up.

Ace said, "My Irish brother."

Dudley said, "My yellow brother."

He held out the knife. Ace held out his right index finger. Dudley cut it and passed him the knife. Ace cut Dudley's finger. Blood dripped over their hands.

They clasped hands. They formed a lace-fingered fit and merged blood. They wiped their hands on the gunnysack and walked outside.

Ace owned a Packard sedan. It was warlord size. They took Broadway to Temple, Temple to Vermont. Christmas lights blinked everywhere.

They took Vermont to the Griffith Park road. Plush homes, green hills, the Observatory dome. That stunning city view. No other parking-lot cars.

The hiking trail. A dirt pathway. It's steep and shrub-bordered. There's a fluttering light fifty yards up. Smoke denotes a cookout.

Ace passed him his pistol and ax. Ace armed himself. They stepped from the car. Dudley followed Ace.

They walked up the trail. A roasting-meat smell hit them. The light grew bright. The trail leveled off. Yes—the light signifies cooking flames.

Dudley saw three men. There should be four. Huey had four heist helpers. There's only three men here.

Voices now. It's that Jap bark-and-grunt. Two men look pure Jap. One man's a verified Chink.

Dudley recognized him. He was a Four Families initiate. Call him a "Collaborationist." He probably fingered Rose Kwan.

It's suppertime. They're roasting rats impaled on ice-cream-bar sticks.

Ace stepped into the clearing. He struck a pose—the aging Bringer of Death. The fucks saw him. One fuck tittered. One fuck muttered. One fuck dropped his skewered rat.

Ace aimed above the flames. Muffled thuds became holes in their faces and brains out the backs of their heads. They pitched away from the fire. Dudley stepped up and mouth-shot them. Teeth and bone exploded. Ace dropped his gun and raised his ax.

The old man *desecrated*. Dudley watched him. Ace chopped off heads and legs. Ace quartered the fucks. Ace monkey-moaned through it all.

Ancient sounds. Heathen desecration. Blood, fire, burned rats on sticks.

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LOS ANGELES | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1941

T.I. again. The same cell block and sweat room.

Ashida sat with Elmer Jackson. A cuff chain cinched them up. They were working the same ploy.

I'm Japanese, like you. I serve the police. Still, they oppress me. Aren't I sympathetic? Answer my questions, NOW.

Captain Parker sent him down. The ploy derived from their 459 at Jim Larkin's bungalow. The ledger. The assumed link to the house/farm buyouts.

Ashida and Parker discussed the ledger. Parker showed him the Feds' subversive lists. They cross-checked them with the T.I. arrest log. Ashida matched up four initial sets.

T.A. equaled Thomas Akahara. G.Y. equaled George Yamato. W.O. equaled William Okamura. R.M. equaled Rollo Moriyama.

Elmer said, "This cuff routine is bullshit. I'll unhook you if you want."

Ashida smiled. "There's a point to it. I'll tell you about it someday."

"I did a hitch in the Marines, and it was from hunger. I don't want to go back, war or no war."

Ashida said, "You'll be draft-exempt. You're friends with the Chief and the mayor."

"You mean Brenda is. I just run bag and do the scut work."

"You'll be declared 'police-essential.' I'm sure of it."

Elmer relit his cigar. "This white man's police force has been good to us. You, especially. Remember that when they start carting your people off to some hellhole, and you get rightfully inclined to hate me."

Ashida checked his notepad. He had opening questions prepped. Who approached you about your property? Why was the sale or potential sale attempted and/or recorded in secret? Were the buyer or buyers in any way suspicious to you?

Elmer smoked up the room. An MP walked in Thomas Akahara. Mr.

Akahara seethed. He was fat. He sported a Hitler mustache.

Ashida stood up and rattled his cuff chain. Ashida dredged up Japanese phrases and dispensed a formal hello.

The MP uncuffed Akahara. He pulled out a news clip and spit on it. He bared Tojo teeth and glared.

Elmer hooted. The MP shrugged and recuffed Akahara. They about-faced and scrammed.

Elmer said, “Dr. Hideo Ashida. Reluctantly notorious and despised by his own kind. The only yellow man on the Los Angeles PD.”

“Let’s go back, Elmer.”

“Okay, but let’s stop at Lyman’s first.”

The guard captain poked his head in. “Telephone call, Sergeant.”

Elmer uncuffed Ashida and followed him. Ashida teethed on that missing *something* at the Watanabe house. He missed *something* at Larkin’s place. Two *somethings* tweaked him now.

He brain-walked through both locations. He walked room-to-room. He got something/nothing a dozen times over. Elmer walked back in.

“We got to put a rain check on Lyman’s. There’s three dead Chinamen in Griffith Park, and Bill Parker wants you.”

They double-timed down the catwalk. Inmates held newspapers up to the bars. Ashida caught peripheral views.

Mariko ran her mouth again. The papers spieled the gist. *Viva J. Edgar Hoover! God Bless the L.A. Police and Special Agent Ward J. Littell!*

They shagged to Elmer’s car and peeled northbound. They crossed the bridge. The shoreline blackout swaddled them. It pressed down the sky. It smothered the ground. You got white pavement lines and no more.

Elmer said, “I can add, and I can go ‘one plus one makes two.’ That Scotty kid pops a Four Families boy last night, and now we got three dead Chinks. That adds up to ‘tong war’ in my book.”

Ashida stared out his window. They hauled north. The blackout lifted six miles up. Elmer tapped his headlights and siren.

They caught a long dead stretch and made Western Avenue. The siren bored them straight to L.A. proper. They cut west to the park road.

Note the door-to-door canvass. Note the blues holding back civilians. Note those lights in the Observatory lot.

A sentry waved them up. Elmer killed the siren. See that? It’s night arc-light glow.

Outdoor homicide. Follow the glow.

They made the lot. City vehicles packed it. Prowl cars, K-cars, meat wagons. Morgue men trudged a hiking path.

Follow the glow.

They parked and hiked up the path. The glow built to a blaze. A shitload of cops talked dead-man talk. Their voices boomed.

A clearing. Four bluesuits, three morgue men. Thad Brown, Buzz Meeks. Captain Bill Parker, civvy-clad.

Arc lights pointed *down*. Flashlights pointed *down*. Dirt soaked blood maroon. Entrail stink. No bodies, per se.

Ashida counted limbs. Six arms and legs meant three dead men. Four bedrolls in plain sight. That meant a fourth man snuffed somewhere else or plain gone.

Three heads. Forehead entry wounds, rear-head exit wounds. Mouth wounds. Exploded jawbones and teeth. They're shot in the forehead first. They gasp for air. Second shots go straight in their mouths.

Ashida studied their faces. Ashida studied the severed limbs and matched up skin tone. Eugenics. Race science. Asian racial distinctions.

Skin color. Physiognomy. Hair density. He could subdivide Asians by race. Most Asians thought they could—but could not.

One victim was Asian mixed-blood. Two were Japanese. He based his ID's on racial instinct. Scattered shells. Obvious .45's. Dumdum bullets. Mouth wounds that blew noses up.

A cop said, "Check Tojo. He's got his snout all over this."

Thad Brown said, "Shut up."

Bill Parker said, "Meeks, what are you doing here?"

Meeks said, "I caught the Bureau squeal. Slant-eyed homicides interest me these days."

Ashida scanned the ground. Spilled blood oozed past the clearing. The path dirt was hard-packed. It would not imprint footsteps.

Three heads. No personal gear with the bedrolls. A rising-sun tattoo on one arm. A shotgun-size rubber bullet.

A knife beside the bedrolls. Unbloodied and undeployed here. A short handle. A central puncture blade. Six smaller blades welded to a metal strip.

Crude manufacture. Anachronistic. A torture weapon—vaguely feudal-style.

Ashida knelt by the bedrolls. He recalled the Goleta Inlet. The blade marks on the dead man. Similar to these blades.

A cop said, "Charlie Chan's on the job."

Thad Brown said, "Shut your mouth."

Ashida studied the knife. Cigarette smoke diffused the death stink. A cop puked in the bushes. A cop squeezed prayer beads.

Elmer said, "I see a Four Families scarf. We got ourselves a tong war."

Ashida stood up. Parker and Meeks scoped the rubber bullet. It was riot-gun knock-you-flat size.

Meeks said, "Makes you think of Huey C., don't it, Cap? There were four other guys on the van heist, but we only got three here. Is this all a little close for you?"

Parker walked up to Ashida. He hopped a severed leg and gestured down the path. The arc-light poles swayed. Arc-light heat juked up the stink.

Ashida followed Parker. They found a quiet spot. Ashida felt arc-light burns on his neck.

Parker said, "Preliminary impressions. Tell me what you think."

Ashida said, "They're Japanese, not Chinese. One man may be mixed. It's imprecise science, but I'm reasonably sure of it."

Parker lit a cigarette. "Meet me at Nort Layman's office later. He's got something new on the Watanabes. He called over for Dudley, but I picked it up."

Ashida said, "I missed something at Larkin's bungalow. It's driving me crazy."

Parker tossed his cigarette. "Break in again."

"Elmer Jackson's driving me. I don't have my car."

Parker handed him a key ring. "Take mine. The plate number is QF-661."

Morgue men wheeled gurneys past them. Parker turned tail back to the clearing. Ashida walked down to the lot.

QF-661 stood by the park road. A half-full jug was there on the seat.

Ashida got in and U-turned. The park road got him past the sentries. Vermont got him to Sunset and that twisty shot to the beach.

The K-car was unwieldy. The shift lever stuck. The clutch squeaked and slipped. He drove west and got synced with it.

Hollywood to the Strip. The Strip to Brentwood. Brentwood to the Palisades.

He hit SaMo Canyon. He got out and walked to the door. He was 459-proficient now. One pick tweak got him in.

He shut the door. His penlight carved a path. Living room, kitchen, bedroom. He studied the koi stream and pond. The koi spoke to him.

There's no telephone.

There's no address book with names and phone numbers listed.

Lyman's back room. The Wednesday-to-Thursday-midnight briefing. Stray talk. The Watanabes called Santa Monica pay phones.

Nearby pay phones. Near the SaMo aircraft plants—Boeing, Douglas, Lockheed.

There was one other *something*. It was seemingly prosaic.

Ashida shut his eyes. He went someplace calm. He smelled powdered fish food. The koi spoke to him.

The Sheriff's bulletin. An inventory. Items found on Jim Larkin.

"Right-front trouser pocket. Three pay-telephone slugs."

Something or nothing? Connecting thread or non sequitur?

Ashida walked back to the K-car. He U-turned to the coast road and Sunset east. He drove downtown. He's a Jap in a cop sled. Colored fish talk to him.

He parked outside the morgue and walked in. Gurneys lined the central hallway. Body parts were gauze-wrapped and paper-pinned. Arms, legs, heads. All tagged "Griffith Park/12-12-41."

He smelled thawing flesh. He traced it to Nort Layman's exam room. Nort and Captain Bill had a jug. Ryoshi Watanabe was stretched out on a slab.

Ryoshi was six days and seven hours dead. Nort had sliced his back into chunks. The cuts were ten by ten. Freezing facilitated the slicing. Nort pointed to a chunk. It was tagged "upper-right posterior."

The thawing revealed an old wound. It was etched in subcutaneous tissue. It was barely detectable.

It was a knife wound. It was a *multiple-blade* wound. It reprised *the knife* in the clearing and the *knife scar* on the Goleta man.

Nort said, "It's a very old wound, so it wasn't visible on the surface of the skin. I looked up the blade pattern in Ray Pinker's weapons text. It's a knife out of eighteenth-century Japan. Warlords poison-dipped the blades. It was quite the perverted thing."

Parker said it first. "We just found a knife like that in Griffith Park."

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1941

The gang's all here.

I knew some of the men at the bar personally, and some by their pictures in the papers. They were drinking and casually speaking; they ignored the people seated in booths a few feet away. I was waiting for Scotty and had secured a room at the Rosslyn Hotel. He was ninety minutes late, but I didn't care. I was observing a blithe collusion.

Mayor Fletch Bowron, Jack Horrall, Sheriff Gene Biscailuz. FBI men Dick Hood and Ed Satterlee. Scorn for the Jap Whipping Boy. Brenda Allen's regulars as war profiteers.

They discussed the seizure of Japanese holdings; they cracked jokes about the Jap woman who committed suicide in the Lincoln Heights jail. Satterlee hatched a plan to issue armbands to all local Japanese. Chat turned to the Watanabe case. Jack said DA McPherson had been "keestered." Biscailuz laughed and said, "Dudley Smith?" Jack poked his middle finger through the circle of a forefinger and thumb. Mayor Fletch said, "Ouch."

I nursed a Manhattan and eavesdropped. Fiorello La Guardia entered the grill and joined the *Kameraden*. He praised the blackoutmonitor work of Captain Bill Parker. Jack and the FBI men held their noses. I thought of Claire De Haven's tract and saw Parker done up in jackboots.

The group broke up. Dudley Smith entered the PD's back room a few minutes later. He carried a tweed suit in a cellophane wrapper. He'd lost weight—he reminded me of Captain Parker that way. His appearance didn't surprise me. L.A. had been running on insomnia, cigarettes and liquor since last Sunday. People appeared at whim and vanished; I hadn't seen Lee since our fight here Tuesday night. People comported with a new sense of allegiance. Everything was new. Many people embodied surprise; a few embodied revelation.

Scotty left my bed and returned to duty. The a.m. *Mirror* brought him right back. Sid Hudgens wrote the piece. Officer Robert S. Bennett, the Los Angeles Police Department's first emergency wartime hire, proved his mettle during a murder dragnet in Chinatown last night. The niece of noted restaurateur Grover Cleveland "Uncle Ace" Kwan had been brutally murdered; "anonymous tips" led to a search for Four Families tong fiend Chiang "the Chinaman" Ling. Sergeant Dudley L. Smith and Officer Bennett cornered Ling. The Chinaman broke free and made an attempt on Sergeant Smith's life. The inexperienced—but bold—Officer Bennett shot and killed Ling before he could "snuff" Sergeant Smith with "heathen aplomb." A photograph of Scotty in football garb ran with the piece.

The article reeked of collusion. I juxtaposed it to Claire's account of her journey with Whiskey Bill and teethed on my own wartime allegiance. I ran for my car and drove to Beverly Hills then. Claire's Packard was parked in her driveway. I parked across the street and waited.

She walked out a half hour later. A scarf covered her Joan of Arc hair. I followed her to a Catholic church in Brentwood. She attended Mass there.

Comrade Claire, Supplicant Claire. I studied her from a dozen pews back, the same way she once studied the worshipful Bill Parker. Such adroit symbiosis. How perfect to merge with her perfect adversary on his own mystical plane. How perfectly unconscious for Parker to pick Claire as his target. His inner life perfectly mirrored the chaos that Claire so proudly displayed to the world.

I ducked out of the church before she saw me. Claire left the service and returned to her car ten minutes later. She took Bundy to Wilshire and drove all the way downtown. I stuck behind her, and ran a series of yellow lights keeping up.

Claire turned north on Main Street. I sensed her destination as Little Tokyo, and pulled up directly behind her. She turned east on 2nd Street and slowed down to observe. I watched her point a camera out her window and snap photographs.

I tracked her eye and camera lens. She snapped a sad-eyed man outside a fish market. She snapped the children with American flags on sticks and Cal Denton beating a man's teeth in. And now she's stopped her car. And now she sees Whiskey Bill Parker, standing at the corner of 2nd and San Pedro.

He jotted notes on his clipboard; Claire pulled up on his blind side and photographed him. She rested her arms on the window ledge and anchored the camera quite securely. She framed portraits of the man. She caught his superhuman focus and lunatic rectitude. I wondered if she noticed his slack uniform and the pathos in his eyes. How perfect.

Her photographs indicted the man who sent me out to entrap her.

Wartime allegiance. Collusion.

Claire reloaded her camera three times. Parker reeled from exhaustion. He fell into his black-and-white and reached for his bottle. Something astonishing happened then.

Claire lowered her camera. She allowed the moment to go unrecorded. She felt pity or decided not to risk documenting it. I drove away then. I felt them both in the core of my bones.

Scotty was an hour and fifteen minutes late. Thad Brown and Jim Davis walked in and stretched out at the bar. They ignored the diners a few feet away. I lit a cigarette and listened to them talk.

Collusion.

Jim Davis ran security at Douglas Aircraft. They discussed the prospects of Fifth Column sabotage there. Thad changed the subject. Three Chinks were slaughtered in Griffith Park earlier tonight. Two Japs and one Chink-Jap, really. The breed was Four Families. Chinatown was running a fever. “That Scotty Kid” blew up that Four Families punk and stirred up a shitload of shit. We’ve got to avoid a full-scale tong war. We’ve got to whitewash the snuffs in the name of a Chinatown peace.

Bill Parker entered the grill. He saw me but did not acknowledge it. I waved and blew him a kiss. I regretted it instantly.

Parker joined Brown and Davis. I eavesdropped. The PD was mobilizing in Chinatown at midnight. The Dudster’s display of force had the Chinks all hopped-up. Davis spoke in singsong Chinese and stretched his eyelids for added effect. Thad told the tale of Come-San-Chin, the Chinese cocksucker. The bartender poured a double bourbon and slid it over to Parker. Whiskey Bill downed it and white-knuckled the bar rail.

Thad tapped his watch; the three men dropped dollar bills on the bar and walked out. Scotty was late. Now I knew why. Scotty was needed in Chinatown.

I was all-of-a-sudden bored. There were no more provocative men to distract me. Tableside war chat resounded that much more predictably. The eastern front, the Japs. My son’s draft deferment. I heard Hitler’s gassing Jews. Well, *someone* has to! Eleanor Roosevelt’s a lez—the shoe-shine boy at the Jonathan Club told me.

Hideo Ashida walked in. I knew he was looking for me.

I stood up; he pretended not to see me. It would acknowledge that he came here *to* see me and would put him at a perceived disadvantage. I waved and forced his hand. He made a disingenuous show of noticing me, walked over and sat down.

The ruse was unlike him. He wore subterfuge unconvincingly. He carried a whiff of formaldehyde. He’d been to the morgue.

He said, "Hello."

I said, "Who were you looking for?"

"I thought Jack Webb might be here. I know he comes by when he has the chance."

The waiter walked over. He saw the Jap with the white girl and about-faced. I slid my drink across the table; Dr. Ashida took a more than healthy belt. It was a wartime play. Normally abstentious Japanese had a newfound yen for the sauce.

"Go find Jack. You'll have a better chance of being served with him."

"That's all right."

"I'm happy to sit with you, but I think you'd be more comfortable with Jack."

Dr. Ashida slid my drink back. "You're trying to make me uncomfortable. You're trying to get me to say something I don't want to say."

"You don't have to say anything. I'm happy to see you, and I'm pleased that you came here looking for me."

"All right."

"I'm sorry you're uncomfortable. We could go someplace else if you'd like."

"All right."

" 'Go someplace' has connotations. I don't want to make you any more uncomfortable than you already are."

He said, "I'll go wherever you suggest. I'll be uncomfortable wherever it is, but since you enjoy my discomfort, it shouldn't concern you."

Touché.

I said, "Room 314 at the Rosslyn. I'll go over first."

He just sat there. I walked outside before he could say, "All right." I dodged traffic across 8th Street, went in a side entrance and rode a back elevator up. The room smelled of freshly laundered sheets. The pillowcases were clean, but faded lipstick stains could be seen. There was just the bed, a sofa and a bathroom. It was a purposeful hotel room.

I smoked and paced. Other women had preceded me. Their heels had dug holes in the carpet.

My mind went blank. I couldn't think it through past a no-show or knock on the door. I fought the urge to run someplace safe. A string quartet played itself out in my head.

The door buzzer startled me. I blotted my lipstick on a tissue and smoothed out my hair. The buzzer blared again. I walked to the door.

Hideo Ashida was mussed up. His cheek was scratched. He smelled like my left-behind cocktail. He stepped inside. Our shoulders brushed. My legs fluttered; I leaned on the door so he wouldn't see.

"What happened to you?"

"I knew Mrs. Hamano. She would escort my brother and me to church."

"Yes?"

"She hanged herself at the Lincoln Heights jail."

"Yes, I know that."

"Some frat boys at the bar were telling jokes. I told them to stop it. There was some shoving, and Mike Breuning saw it and stepped in."

I touched his cheek. He flinched. I ran my thumb over his eyebrow. He trembled. I put my whole hand on his face.

He said, "Why are you doing this?"

I said, "Because we're alone in a hotel room, and because I want to."

He didn't pull away from me. So, I brushed his hair back. He didn't pull away from me. So, I said this:

"Say my name, Hideo. Say 'Katherine' or 'Kay.' "

He said, "All right. Katherine, then."

My hand trembled. He didn't pull away from me. So, I kissed him.

Our lips barely touched. He raised his hands to hold me back; his arms brushed my breasts.

We stayed that way. Our foreheads touched. It was a fit of sorts. His shirt was partially unbuttoned. I felt his pulse through it. I slid my hand under the fabric and placed it on his heart.

He shuddered. I moved in under his arms and found a closer fit.

He said, "Katherine, please."

I said, "Please, what?"

He said, "No, Katherine, please."

I pulled away from him. He went loose. I was the only thing holding him up.

He leaned against the wall and slid down it; he sat on the floor and drew his knees to his chest. I stood over him. He touched my legs and steadied himself. I moved closer. He pulled his hands back.

So, I sat on the floor beside him. So, I put an arm around him. So, we listened to a band concert on the radio next door.

I didn't want to lose the fit. I didn't want to say anything or do anything that would scare him away. The music was part of the fit; the raucous numbers and ballads merged. It ended, slow-tempoed. Hideo asked me to tell him a story.

All I had was a recounting of pratfall and eros. It started in a 1920 snowstorm and stopped when a police captain knocked on my door. I smelled the prairie on him. I would end my story there.

The radio was kind to us. Our next-door neighbor put on a night-owl serenade. The music was perfect for storytelling. We sat on the floor, in our fit.

My heroine was a dubious huntress; she was far too self-serving to ever be Joan of Arc. I described my early stay in L.A. and my time with Bobby De Witt. I euphemized Lee and the Boulevard-Citizens robbery. I spilled everything that Bobby had done to me. Hideo asked to see the scars on my legs. I pulled up my skirt, rolled down my stockings and showed him. He ran his fingers over the ridges and pulled his hand away. I wanted more of him there but said nothing.

His hand left me warm, so I told him about Bucky. I described my desire to capture a man and render him mine by seeing him. Hideo touched my leg then. He told me about a camera he'd devised to photograph people covertly. Bucky Bleichert hovered. Hideo's eyes went somewhere. It was Bucky's betrayal writ horribly deep.

So, he told me about Bucky. It was Belmont High, green-and-black forever, the Mighty Sentinels. The Kraut boy from Glassell Park, the Little Tokyo Jap. Half-Jewish Jack Webb—there with the jokes and along for the ride.

Track meets, pep rallies, the All-City cage finals. His crazy fascist mother, Bucky's Bundist dad. The boys packed tight in a deuce coupe. That long ride to a big game in Fresno.

The story receded into secret-camera snapshots. What Bucky wore on prom nights, how Bucky rescued Jack from pachucos. How Bucky chewed raw steaks and swallowed the blood before his fights. That time he drove the drunk Bucky home and tucked him into bed. Bucky's Sportsman of the Year award, bestowed at the L.A. Press Club. The rented tuxedo, the legs too short, the terribly clashing corsage.

I heard all of it. Hideo kept his head on my shoulder and a hand on my leg. I believed all of it and none of it. I felt heartsick in a way I never had before.

Silly girl. Idiot seductress. Now you know what he is. Don't cry while he tells you his story.

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LOS ANGELES | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1941

Tong hordes and cops. A rope line between them. Face-off at Ord and North Main.

Sixty Four Families punks. Sixty Hop Sing. Thirty cops culled for their penchant to cause pain. Darktown bruisers. Alien Squad goons. Scotty Bennett—in uniform tonight.

The punks jabbered. The cops held parade rest. Parker stood on the balcony at Daddy Wong's Chow Mein. Thad Brown and Jim Davis stood with him. Two-Gun held a plugged-in bullhorn.

The blues guarded stacks of brass knuckles. It was Two-Gun's idea. State the terms of truce and let the Chinks blow off steam. Clear out the jail ward at Queen of Angels. Reserve ten ambulances. Chinatown would flow red tonight.

It felt cumulative. It felt overdue. Somebody snuffed Ace Kwan's niece. Scotty B. snuffed the real somebody or some convenient Chink. A Four Families punk got snuffed in Griffith Park. That put Hop Sing one death up. Ace Kwan was the PD's favored warlord. The situation mandated parity.

Parker scanned the cop line. He noted Lee Blanchard. He noted Fritz Vogel and Bill Koenig—77th Street thugs. Thirty cops. Two Kay Lake lovers. The war had L.A. all fucked-up.

Brown said, "The natives are restless."

Davis said, "Now, Bill? Jack Horrall gave me carte blanche."

Parker said, "Now, Jim."

Davis raised his bullhorn and spritzed Chinese. He sounded like Chiang Kai-shek inbred with Donald Duck. Parker knew the gist. No more killing, boys will be boys, let's joust before the truce. No rackets enforcement through 1942!

The punks tossed a heathen fit. The cops distributed knuckle dusters, one per punk.

The rope went down. Male nurses pushed gurneys out of bars and chop suey pits. Firemen screwed hoses into hydrants. High-pressure water knocked rioters flat and washed away blood.

Parker walked away. He took rear stairs down to the alley and headed for Kwan's. Crazy jabber trailed him. He cut through the kitchen and muted it.

Brown and Davis beat him there. They sat with Uncle Ace. Lychee nuts and rumaki were laid out.

Parker pulled a chair up. Two-Gun said something in Chink. Ace made the jack-off sign. Thad slapped his knees.

Two-Gun said, "No more grief with Four Families. They'll reciprocate if you give your word."

Ace said, "I agree."

Thad said, "They've agreed to pay you ten grand in reparations for your niece."

Ace said, "I accept."

Thad waved a rumaki stick. "Chief Horrall is adamant about no more killing. He'll close Chinatown down if even one more killing occurs."

Ace said, "I will comply."

Two-Gun said, "No investigation on the Griffith Park killings. That's straight from Jack Horrall."

Ace said, "It is the best for all concerned."

Two-Gun grabbed *two* rumaki sticks. "A Chinaman killed himself at the New Moon Hotel. We can pin the job on him."

Uncle Ace beamed. Parker made fists and stared at him. Ace made the jack-off sign.

Ambulance sirens kicked on. Hydrant water whooshed. It all reeked of Dudley Smith.

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Meeks said, “You’re dressed nice, Dud. Am I keeping you from doing something you’d rather be doing?”

The paperboys’ bash was over. Grand Bette was surely long gone.

“You are, lad. I won’t pretend I’m not miffed. I’m sure your ‘urgent matter’ could have waited for the morning.”

The back room was musty. The Teletype clacked. That Chinatown truce abets mayhem.

Meeks said, “Where’s the wink and the blarney, boss? Tell true, now. I ain’t never seen you without them.”

“State your intent or make your request. Refrain from threats or suffer the consequences.”

Meeks lit a cigar. “I’m caught between you and Whiskey Bill. I’m sort of like the Ashida kid that way.”

Dudley cracked his knuckles. “State your intent or make your request. This prelude is vexing me.”

Meeks fumed up the room. “I went out on the DB call. A park ranger rang it in. Parker was talking to Ashida. They seemed chummy to me.”

“Again, for the last—”

“I saw a rubber bullet on the ground. It reminded me of that Sheriff’s-van job I’m working, which Parker put me on for some goddamn inexplicable reason. I dusted the bullet and got a ten-point print on Huey Cressmeyer, but I ‘*refrained*’ from telling Whiskey Bill. I can count, Dud. You had four men plus Huey on the van job, and three dead in the park. I’d say that one guy—probably a Jap—had already scrammed off. That leaves two Japs and a Jap-Chink half-breed who can’t be traced to the heist. They’re dead, and I’ll bet you got Huey stashed someplace.”

Dudley lit a cigarette. “You have my attention. Finish your recounting, please.”

“Here’s what I’ve got. Huey boosted the bullets and some riot guns from Preston. I didn’t put that in my report to Parker and Ward Littell, just like I left out the print."

"*And,* lad?"

"*And,* I saw Ashida's trip-wire shots, because I leaned on your pervert pal up in the photo lab. *And,* it's Huey again. He pulled the pharmacy job last Saturday, and for all I know, he's got a whole shitload of dirt on the Watanabe clan."

Dudley said, "Is there more?"

Meeks said, "Huey and his Japs clout the van. I go by the House of Lem Mortgage Company and learn that Ace Kwan paid off the loan on one of his buildings the next day. You always share your takes with Ace. Ace's niece gets killed, and your boy Scotty kills a handy suspect. It's getting tight as a tick, so here's what I'm thinking. Huey's Japs killed the Kwan girl, and you and Ace took them out."

What a shrewd detective. The Dust Bowl Charlie Chan.

"I wish to purchase your silence on these matters, through to New Year's. That includes your continued dissembling to Captain W. H. Parker."

Meeks wiggled three fingers. "I got me a slew of pregnant girlfriends. Your pal Ruth Mildred sure could help me out."

Dudley said, "Done."

Meeks walked to the bar. He poured a shot of bourbon and dunked his cigar.

"Call-Me-Jack wants a Jap to swing for the Watanabes, and I can't say I disagree. But I'm working the job, so I got a stake in it."

"Make your point."

"If it's a frame, I'd like to see some true pervert son of a bitch who really deserves it to go down."

As you will, you hayseed fuck.

"He'll be morally appropriate for the gas chamber, I assure you."

The Shrine was the Tomb now. She was long gone. He ran anyway. He ran to his K-car. He ran lights-and-siren southbound. He cut the noise at Washington and swung west. He pulled into the lot. A sea green Rolls-Royce almost grazed him.

His headlights strafed the windshield. He recognized the driver from a *Screen World* spread. Boston stiff Arthur Farnsworth—grand Bette's second hubby.

He's teary-eyed, swerving the Rolls, wringing a hankie. Harry Cohn told all. It was a studio-dictated marriage. Hubby was a whips-and-chains queer.

Hubby fishtailed down Washington. Dudley parked by the stage door. It was a *loooooong* long shot. He patted on cologne and chewed a pastille.

He walked to the door. A firm shove got him in. The houselights still glowed.

The Taj Mahal West. A plush-mosque motif. Wall tapestries and a thousand empty seats.

An elevated stage. The Mosque, the Crypt. Discarded programs everywhere. The Shrine, postmidnight. A stand-still-and-catch-your-breath spot.

Laughter. Overlapping peals. Behind the curtains, stage right.

Dudley jumped onstage and tracked it. He parted the curtains and sidestepped klieg lamps in the dark. He saw light down a corridor. He heard boys' voices. A woman laughed, contralto-pitched.

The boys squealed. Dudley stretched tall and walked over. He unbuttoned his suit coat. His shoulder rig showed.

She was down on her knees. She wore a pale blue gown. She was shooting craps with three paperboys.

They were starstruck. They hovered, they attended, they swooned. They wore their bargain-basement church suits. Everybody laughed and plain carried on.

His shadow hit them. The boys looked up. They were poor lads and wise to the world. They saw copper, straight off.

She felt their eyes leave her. Stray eyes discomfit the diva. She saw him and made him in a blink.

She saw the gun, the tweeds, the cordovan shoes. *Hold my eyes for a heartbeat, please*.

She did. He smiled and looked away first. He knelt beside her and dropped a C-note on the floor.

The boys looked at him, looked at her, looked at them both. She pointed to the fat boy with the dice. He passed them to her. She blew on them and rolled.

Snake eyes.

The thin boy said, "House take."

The blond boy scooped up the C-note and some singles. His cohorts squealed. Miss Davis opened her clutch and took out her cigarettes. Dudley lit her up.

The boys gawked. Dudley doffed his hat and dropped it on the blond boy's head. It covered his eyes and nose. Everybody laughed. *State your name now. She knows you know hers*.

He said, "Dudley Smith."

She blew a smoke ring his way. He laughed and passed her his flask. She took a belt and passed it to the blond boy. He took a belt and passed it to the fat boy. He took a belt and passed it to the thin boy. He took a belt. He went *Holy cow!* and passed it back to Dudley.

Bette Davis blew smoke at the boys. They made mock gagging sounds and mock-thrashed on the floor.

Bette Davis said, “They have to start sometime.”

Dudley said, “I’m pleased to have shared their initiation with you.”

“Mine was somewhat less refined.”

“Would you care to set the stage?”

“A speakeasy in Harlem in 1924. That’s as far as I’ll go.”

Dudley laughed. The fat boy snatched the flask. His cohorts chortled. The blond boy passed Miss Davis the dice.

The thin boy said, “Blow, Bette.”

Miss Davis said, “I’ve heard *that* before.”

Dudley roared. Bette blew on the dice and rolled lucky seven. The boys tipped off the flask. A babble went up. The boys laid down bets.

Bette’s point, Bette’s point, Bette’s point.

Dudley dropped a yard on the singles. Bette rolled and crapped out. The boys whooped and grabbed the take.

The boys looked at her, the boys looked at him. They made goo-goo eyes over his gun. He undid his holster and tossed it to the thin boy. It went *thud* in his lap.

Laughs circulated. The gun circulated. It landed in Bette’s lap. She pulled it from the holster. She looked straight at Dudley.

“Should I?”

“I’d be quite disappointed if you didn’t.”

Bette stood up. Her gown was smudged. She flicked off the safety and aimed at the ceiling. She kicked off her shoes and got a grip on the floor.

She said, “Remember Pearl Harbor.”

The boys whistled and cheered.

She squeezed off the full clip. Seven rounds, lucky seven, big noise. Muzzle smoke and cordite stink.

Plaster chips blew down from the ceiling. Dudley stood up and brushed silt out of her hair.

Bette’s smile acknowledged his touch. The boys applauded. He took off his suit coat and laid it down. Bette took his arm and curtsied to the floor.

She said, “Mr. Smith.”

He said, “Miss Davis.”

They shook hands, mock-formal. The boys made with the oooh-la-las.

They returned to the game. Dudley emptied out his wallet, Bette emptied out her clutch. Dudley engineered their losses. The throws went boy to boy. House take, house take. The boys got nigger rich. They were up on Cloud 9.

His flask went around. Her flask replaced it. Bette brushed plaster off his trousers. Sweet intervals, then her touch.

The boys started yawning. They were boozed and too lucky to live. Dudley cited the time. The boys groaned. Bette laid down a long and sweet brush-off.

Dudley passed out toy badges. The boys hugged Miss Davis. She hugged them back and urged them to buy war bonds. She left big lipstick prints on their cheeks.

They were wobbly-kneed. They wheeled their bicycles out to the parking lot and pedaled off, whooping. Dudley helped Bette into her coat and walked her outside. His prowler was the only car in the lot.

He lit cigarettes. They stood close and looked at the sky. “Perfidia” ebbed someplace soft inside him.

Well, then.

They tossed their cigarettes. They brushed bullet dust from each other’s hair and came in tight for the kiss.

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LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1941

Ashida wrote on flash paper. Invisible ink, flammable page stock. His own secret language.

It was his secret document. It would scald in common sunlight. Kanji script, English, shorthand. Five layers of obfuscated text.

Mariko's kitchen table did desk duty. Mariko geisha-girled in the living room. Elmer Jackson was stinko. Ward Littell ballyhooed Bill Parker. Captain Bill secured his berth on the Sheriff's-van job and shitcanned his roundup work.

The roundups disgusted Ward. He insistently critiqued the FBI's "racial agenda."

The roundups disgusted Elmer. He called them a "plain old raw deal."

Mariko disgusted Ashida. She blabbermouthed to the Japanese papers. Both his T.I. trips proved fruitless.

Kanji, English, shorthand. Impromptu hieroglyphics.

He drew the knife scar on the man at Goleta. He drew the knife found in Griffith Park. He drew the faded knife scar on Ryoshi Watanabe.

He drew the severed foot at Goleta. He drew wavy lines off the sole. The lines signified the smell of fish oil.

He smelled fish on the man at the farm. He caught a fish-oil scent on broken glass in the Watanabes' kitchen. Nort Layman noted shrimp oil on the Watanabes' feet.

Ashida drew shrimp. His pen wandered. He drew Kay Lake at the Rosslyn Hotel. He drew Bucky and Kay as phantoms, intertwined. He drew Jim Larkin's koi. He wrote 渡辺邸で何を見逃したのか? He translated: "What did I miss at the Watanabe house?"

Mariko toasted Nao Hamano. Good American, good mother. Dead at the Lincoln Heights jail.

Elmer said, "Hear, hear."

Ward said, "The Navy's calling me. Maybe sub duty. I could hibernate and fight the war."

Mariko tee-heed. "Ward ladies' man. Girl in every port."

Explosions on 2nd Street. *Ploosh, blam* and screams.

Elmer said, "Rock-salt rounds."

Ward said, "They're lacing it with bird shot now. It knocks anything human flat."

Mariko tee-heed. "No girls on submarines. I send Ward dirty books."

Ward and Elmer haw-hawed. Ashida looked out the window. He saw two boys with shredded jackets, knocked flat in the street.

Two cops dragged the boys to a K-car. Bucky Bleichert weaved across the street.

Ashida walked downstairs. Bucky was blotto on the front steps. He beat Bucky up on Wednesday. He still bore contusions.

Ashida said, "Hello, champ."

Bucky said, "You're the champ, and I've got the lumps to prove it."

Ashida sat beside him. Their knees brushed. Ashida slid back.

"You've been to the Shotokan Baths. The Harada brothers had a bottle. You've been talking boxing for hours."

Bucky said, "I retired undefeated. I'm either a chickenshit or the world's luckiest white man."

Ashida smiled. "You're a little of both."

Bucky smiled. "The brothers think I could take Lee Blanchard. I told them they're nuts."

Ashida said, "It's a toss-up. He's stronger, you're faster."

Bucky smiled. "Beat me up again, will you? I said I'm sorry, but it sure as shit wasn't enough."

Ashida smiled. "You'll pummel yourself from here on in."

Bucky drew his legs up and rested his chin on his knees. It was such a lovely thing.

"I'll graduate the Academy in July. We'll be working together then."

Ashida said, "I'll be in prison. Unless the right white man owes me."

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1941

I tended to Lee in the kitchen. His back and arms were covered with small cuts. He stood over the sink, stripped to the waist. I stood behind him with alcohol, tweezers and swabs.

The new tong truce was rigged for Hop Sing. Many Chinatown residents knew this. They gathered on rooftops and hurled bottles down on the cops. A dozen men were rushed to Queen of Angels; Lee's uniform shirt was now rags.

I extracted a shard and daubed the cut. Lee said, "It hurts, but it feels good. Tell me what that means."

"It means that your nerve endings were injured in a certain way. Your brain is receiving conflicting signals of pleasure and pain."

"Sioux Falls or UCLA? Where you learned it, I mean."

"I read an anatomy text. I studied the diagrams of the skin."

Lee smoked. I held his head down to get purchase on his wounds. I kept thinking of lovelorn Hideo. Bucky was in the room with us then, Bucky stayed with me now. Hideo was crucial to my documentary-film plan. He was my inside source and device to shape the film into a conflicting political statement. Parker wanted the film to explicate Claire De Haven's seditious designs. It would do that—while it showed these designs manifested as the exposure of a grave injustice. The film would portray the roundups as systematic brutality, war profiteering and racial hysteria of inescapable dimension. I would convince Claire to shape the film sans editorial comment. She and her comrades would not be permitted to speak on film, and thus validate Parker's assessment of their treasonous intent. I saw the film as *my* film and *my* codicil to Claire's tract defaming Parker himself. One person would speak to the world in *my* film—and that would be Dr. Hideo Ashida. He would exposit my ambivalent view of the police world I both loved and despised; he would speak from deep professional knowledge and his deeper personal experience as an oppressed Japanese. This film would nullify Parker's attempt to further maim Claire De Haven and would liberate Claire from her grandiose martyrdom.

Lee said, "Scotty B. wasn't hurt. I bet you're happy to hear that."

"Don't move your head. I've got a deep one here."

Lee said, "Did you screw him?"

I said, "Yes."

"Did you screw Hideo Ashida?"

"I offered, but he declined."

Lee laughed. "He probably goes for Jap girls exclusive. I'll hand it to him there. He knows there's lines you don't cross."

I pulled out the sliver and swabbed blood off the cut. Lee said, "The war's this license to fuck like rabbits. Not that you've ever needed one."

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LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1941

La Guardia said, "These Japs are fat and sassy. I see no mistreatment here."

They toured the Fort MacArthur stockade. It was all politics. Mayor Fiorello, Mayor Fletch, dipshit Ed Satterlee. A 1:00 a.m. call roused Parker.

The gang was up at Brenda A.'s trick spot. They'd worn out the girls. They still felt jazzed.

Fletch insisted. "I know it's late, Bill—but nobody sleeps these days. And it can't do your career any harm. This guy's got Roosevelt's ear."

Hence the tour. Hence the Pedro jaunt. Hence the bored MPs and gloomy Japs.

They were two tiers in. Most of the Japs slept through it. La Guardia jived with the insomniacs. He called them "papa-san." He said he *looooved* Mr. Moto. He'd seen all those movies.

Parker walked with *El Jefe*. Bowron and Satterlee hung back with the MPs. Parker detailed his blackout work. La Guardia gassed on him. Bowron and Satterlee bristled.

La Guardia said, "That Jap lady who killed herself had a Jap war bond on her. It sounds Fifth Column to me."

Parker said, "It was an unnecessary death, sir. I'm sure she was despondent, but that doesn't justify the act."

La Guardia said, "Live by the sword, die by the sword. The Navy just sank three more Jap destroyers. Those cocksuckers will rue the day they dropped those eggs on Pearl Harbor."

They hit the last tier. Parker felt sandbagged. Griffith Park, the morgue and Chinatown. No sleep and this bullshit.

Bowron said, "All the commandeered Jap real estate will leave the city fat and sassy. So you tell me. Where do we house the Japs?" Satterlee said, "The Army's got scouting teams combing the Southwest. You've got abandoned Army installations that can house six thousand Japs at a pop."

Bowron said, "I ran into Preston Exley in Beverly Hills yesterday. We see the same doctor for migraines. You know Preston, right? He was on the PD, and now he's a land developer."

Satterlee said, "Right. The retired inspector who made good in real estate. I've jawed with him a few times."

Bowron said, "Right. And if you've jawed with him recently, you know that he presents a persuasive case for interning some high-line Japs within the L.A. city limits, because a mass incarceration of that magnitude will promote a civilian job boom and keep the Japs close at hand for interrogations."

Satterlee said, "Preston's got the Midas touch. He knows what to buy and where to buy, and he knows how to squeeze a buck."

Bowron said, "His people may go back to the *Mayflower*, but I think he's got some kike blood."

Satterlee said, "He thinks there's money in Jap property. The question is, Who oversees the property while the Japs are in stir?" Parker yawned and kept pace with *El Jefe*. Bowron and Satterlee yawned and lagged back. "Hey there, papa-san!"

"How's the world treating you?"

"That Mr. Moto—ain't he a sketch?"

They killed off the cell block and hit the fresh air. They lit cigarettes and got revitalized. *El Jefe* pressed to see a gun placement. Mayor Fletch and Agent Ed suppressed groans.

They piled into their jeep. Shoreline blackout—the driver drove by roadway Braille. They got up flush to a cliffside. They hit a sandbagged bunker perched there.

Six men with binoculars. Two tripod-mounted machine guns. Radar gizmos. Deck chairs prearranged.

The gang piled out of the jeep and into the bunker. La Guardia backslapped the soldiers. Bowron and Satterlee crashed into chairs. Parker lugged a file box Call-Me-Jack gave him.

He grabbed a chair. *El Jefe* lubed the soldiers with raw jokes. Fletch and Agent Ed dozed. Parker cracked the file box. He brought a small-beam flashlight.

Oh, shit. Call-Me-Jack's new brainchild. The "Wartime Auxiliary Police."

Application forms. Applicant dossiers.

Parker scanned the pages. Call-Me-Jack plays Uncle Sam. He wants *YOU!* He wants air-raid wardens, airplane spotters, parking-ticket drones.

The applicants were low-tide. Pensioners, cop buffs, draft dodger types. Boris "Frankenstein" Karloff. Bantamweight Manny Mendez. Nightclub buffoon Lou Costello and the "Hearst Rifle Team."

Eight sharpshooters. Regulars at tycoon Hearst's San Simeon shack.

Sheriff Biscailuz endorsed the team. They assisted his mounted posse and corralled jail runaways. All eight men were in the San Berdoo Klan.

Misanthropes, movie monsters, misfits. The wartime Keystone Kops. Call-Me-Jack drooled for publicity. He'd sign up every one.

Parker shut his eyes. He tried to doze. It was hopeless. *El Jefe* had some live ones. He wouldn't let go.

Joan Woodard Conville, white female American, age 26.

She wouldn't let go. She kept sideswiping him. He called the Motor Vehicle Office and tried to trace her address. No go—she had no driver's license. He called four nurses' directories. No go—she wasn't listed.

It felt foolish. He felt foolish. He called the Northwestern cops back. He told them to send an ID pic of Miss Conville. It was police-sanctioned peeping.

His graph work stood in arrears. He was behind on *Watanabe Case/ Details-Chronology*. He'd been disrupted. Tangential cases stacked up. The Griffith Park triple. The Larkin hit-and-run.

It was fucked-up. *He* was fucked-up. The Watanabe case *got* to him. He cared more than he should.

A guard hut adjoined the bunker. Parker walked over. The guard boss was out. Parker grabbed the desk phone and dialed the morgue.

Nort picked up. "Morgue, Dr. Layman."

"It's Bill Parker, Nort."

"You can't let it go, can you? It's only been four hours."

Parker laughed. "Let's just say I can't sleep."

"You're not alone there. We're at war, or haven't you noticed?"

Parker said, "You're still thawing the cadavers, right? I thought you might have more information."

Layman said, "Roger that. You read my initial report, right? Shrimp oil on the victims' feet?"

"Right, I remember."

"All right, then catch this curveball. The freezing and thawing isolated particles in the subcutaneous tissue, under the soles of their feet. I found ground glass covered with shrimp oil on eight feet out of eight. Their feet were heavily callused, which isn't surprising, because Japs tend to walk around barefoot. What did surprise me was the even distribution of the particles. It was as if they were walking on the glass deliberately."

Curveball. Sinker. Wild pitch.

"Will you issue a statewide coroner's bulletin on that? Hospitals, infirmaries, doctors' offices. It's a long-shot parlay, but put my name and office number on it for callbacks."

Layman said, "You're way out in center field on this one, but I'll do it."

Parker said, "Thanks, Nort. You'll be rewarded, in this life and the next."

"I've already been rewarded, Bill."

"How so?"

"It's a hell of a treat to see you obsessed."

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LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1941

This grand manse, this grand lady.

They made love and talked. The bedroom was tucked in a parapet. Fireplace, dark beams, brushed-cement walls.

The bed was four-postered. The sheets were peach satin. Casement windows overlooked the Brentwood hills. A handsome Airedale lolled beside them.

The house was mock medieval. Stained glass and rough wood loomed throughout. Bette loved to fight. Her home portrayed her as embattled.

Her husband lived above the garage. Bette caught hubby blowing the chauffeur on their wedding night. She banished him then. He escorted her to events and attended queer masquerade balls. He fulfilled her studio morals clause. The chauffeur had a big dick.

Bette said, "Dudley Liam Smith. Are you surprised to be here?"

Dudley stroked the Airedale. "Delighted, more than surprised. I would have contrived another form of introduction if tonight hadn't resolved so serendipitously."

The Airedale stretched and kicked up his legs. Bette scratched his back.

"Do you miss Ireland, Dudley?"

"No, lass. I do not."

"No family there?"

"British soldiers killed my father and brother. My mother drank herself to death. My one aunt ran off to London with a Protestant. He was quite the dashing fellow. He looked like Leslie Howard in *Gone with the Wind*."

Bette laughed. "I screwed Leslie Howard. He looks like a fairy, but I assure you he's not."

Dudley laughed. "Who else have you screwed?"

Bette said, "Most of the men on the *Photoplay* eligible-bachelors list. Warner's made me host the Hamilton High prom party. I was bored, so I screwed the president of the Lochinvars Social Club."

The Airedale curled up between them. Dudley laid an ashtray on his back and lit cigarettes.

"I'm picking Jack Kennedy up at noon. His dad and I go quite far back."

Bette laced up their fingers. Dudley stretched the full length of the bed.

He'd kissed off her lipstick. She was smaller than he thought she'd be. She thrashed a way he'd never seen before.

"Joe Kennedy made a pass at me once. He was running RKO then. I heard Jack's an even bigger chaser, but he's hung like a cashew."

Dudley laughed. It shook the bed. The Airedale glared at him. Bette snatched the ashtray and scooted him down to the footboard. He flashed his fangs and went to sleep.

"Dear girl. How did this occur?"

"You got lucky. We shouldn't mince words about that."

"Should we give a nod to the war? I sense appetite in the air." Bette kissed him. "My appetite preceded the war. Ask the boys in Lowell, Massachusetts."

"I'm afraid they would make me quite jealous."

"I wouldn't want to see you jealous."

"And why is that?"

"Because you're brutal. Because you're all enticement and threat."

Dudley kissed her. She held his face and rubbed their noses, Eskimo-style.

"When I saw you, I thought, Oh, the big cop with the crush on me. And he dressed for the role."

Dudley crushed their cigarettes and put the ashtray on the nightstand. Dawn beamed outside. The big backyard glowed.

"Are you always that quick-witted?"

"Yes. I live by immediate perception. It's how I've survived."

Dudley smiled. "On Broadway? In Hollywood?"

Bette smiled. "You've killed British soldiers, and don't tell me you haven't. I've told the Jewish mama's boys who run my part of town, 'No, I won't blow you,' and got the part anyway. Aren't we both lucky to be that way? Aren't you glad you're not like the rest of the world?"

He trembled a tad. He wetted up a tad. Bette wetted up and touched his eyes.

"Dear man. Step away from your life and be sweet with me for a while."

Dudley pulled her hands down and pinned them to the bed. Her wet eyes were up against his. She hooked a leg over him and brought them just *that* close. It went to a thrash and stayed in a thrash. The thrash made her shut her eyes. The thrash let him look at her.

Her arms were soft. Her breasts pulled flat with the thrash. He kissed her neck. She showed her teeth and bit her lips. The thrash built to a flush all over her body. Then the arch above the thrash, a clutch and thrash, a plummeting something.

The Airedale slept between them. Dudley stirred and saw the dog first. He marked the moment—*Bette Davis snores*.

He kissed the dog's snout and kissed Bette's shoulder. He walked to the bathroom and shaved with a dainty razor. He dressed and rigged the curtains to light up Bette's hair. He kissed her arms and walked downstairs.

The Airedale showed him out. He nuzzled the grand beast. He walked outside and took in the morning.

Brentwood north of Sunset. Tudor mansions, French châteaux, Spanish haciendas. Dudley Liam Smith—*fate favors you*.

He got his K-car. He hooked out to the Valley and east to Burbank. The airport cops let him perch on the runway. He had two hours to kill. He smelled Bette on his shirt cuffs.

He had time to scheme and strategize. He had time to craft a disingenuous report to Bill Parker.

Watanabe/multiple homicide/12-7-41. Second summary—one week in.

He popped three bennies. He padded redundant information. He layered in futile background-check dirt. He heaped on the dead-end leads and stressed the clannish Jap culture that constrained the job.

The bennies kicked in. He shoveled cop officialese and underlined his detective's frustration.

Record checks were impossible. The war dashed all normal avenues of approach.

Can you read between the lines, Captain? Call-Me-Jack wants this job shitcanned by New Year's. He will get what he wants—but this damnable case intrigues me.

The Boston flight taxied in. Baggage men rolled stairs to the door. Dudley got out and stood by the gate. Jack was the first down the steps.

He wore his Navy blues. He saw Dudley and beelined. They hugged hello and shoved apart. They pushed each other out to arm's length.

Jack said, "You mick cocksucker."

Dudley said, "The pot calls the kettle black."

They got in the K-car. Dudley tossed Jack's bag in the back. Jack futzed with the two-way dial and stirred up a hum. Dudley pulled off the runway.

Jack said, "Where are we going?"

"How did your father once summarize Los Angeles?"

"He said you come here to fuck movie stars and create mischief."

"Well, then. Harry Cohn has an introduction for you."

Jack twirled his hat on one finger. "I wouldn't say no to Rita Hayworth or Ella Raines."

Dudley said, "Lad, you'll have to. Miss Hayworth is out of town, and Jewboy Harry has designs on Miss Raines himself."

"Which makes me the low man in a Mongolian cluster fuck."

Dudley laughed. "Ellen Drew, lad. She's a stunning new contract player, and she's waiting at the Los Altos Apartments."

Jack messed with the radio. Code numbers and locations overlapped. 390, Little Tokyo. Prowl cars requested.

Jack said, "What's going on at East 1st Street?"

"It's Japtown, lad. The locals are being detained."

"Can you believe it? We knew it was coming, but we didn't think they'd hit us first."

"It's a new world we live in."

"I fly to Pearl on Monday. I've got briefings, and then it's a jump to some shitty little island full of cannibals."

Dudley lit a cigarette. "Your dad came through. I'm free to be commissioned at New Year's. Army Intelligence. Mexican duty, most likely."

Jack said, "Dad's still got some pull. That 'Jittery Joe' talk didn't do him any good, though. Come on, Dud. *You'd* bail on the Blitz. A little drive up to the Emerald Isle and some sweet Irish cooze."

Dudley skirted the Hollywood Bowl. "Ireland's a place you don't leave. I'm surprised Joe came back at all."

"His money and his kids are here. Given that, you'd come back yourself."

Christmas was coming. The faux trees were up. Salvation Army kettles cluttered Sunset.

Dudley flicked his cigarette. "Does your dad still have that yen for dirty movies? He hasn't lost it at his advanced age?"

Jack laughed. "Ask him yourself. He'll be at Ben Siegel's party on Sunday. That said, he's always called the smut business 'high pulchritude with low overhead.' "

Dudley laughed. Jack tipped his hat over his eyes. Dudley took Highland to Wilshire. The Los Altos flanked a gas station and a South Seas–motif lounge.

It was a wayward starlets' haven. Contract players turned tricks in rent-by-the-night flops. Dot Rothstein ran the dyke dens. Eleanor Roosevelt munched muff in 419.

Dudley parked in front. Jack dug in his bag and spritzed on Lucky

Tiger. The lad was comely but frail. He looked vaguely inbred.

"Ellen Drew, right?"

"Yes, lad. She's in 332. Mention *The Château in Montparnasse*. She played the French maid."

Jack said, "This won't take long."

"I know, lad. Your reputation precedes you."

Jack yocked and scrammed. Dudley cogitated. The Watanabe house. Mental walk-through no. 9,000.

He walked the floors and checked the closets. He looked under the sink. He peered behind the icebox. He retrieved two memories.

He recalled mouse shit by a drainpipe. He recalled spilled detergent near the washing machine.

Jack hopped in the car. A hickey bloomed on his neck.

Dudley said, "You weren't long."

Jack winked. "Nice kid. Tell Harry to be good to her."

"Where to, lad?"

"The Delfern place. Dad's got an envelope for Gloria."

Dudley drove northwest. Jack shut his eyes and forestalled chitchat. Gloria Swanson lived in Holmby Hills. Joe K. was her way-back-when lover.

Joe looted her bank accounts. Gloria hatched their love child in '27. Joe pooh-poohed his patrimony and provided covert support.

The house was small-hotel size. Dudley brodied into the *porte cochère* and roused Jack. The lad looked startled. He grabbed his hat and rolled out of the car.

The backyard gate was open. Jack strolled over. Dudley cogitated.

He studied his report. He beefed up his canvassing notes. He ran mental walk-through 9,001. He recalled more mouse turds and spoiled lettuce in the icebox.

Jack walked back. His zipper was down. He tumbled into the car and tipped his hat. Dudley pulled out to the street.

Jack said, "I hate him."

Dudley said, "Yes, I know."

"Joe Junior fucks her, I fuck her. Bobby's too pious to fuck her, and Teddy's too young."

"Yes, lad. I know."

"It doesn't do any good. I still hate him. She made me fuck her out by the pool, and now my ass is sunburned."

Dudley laughed and turned onto Sunset. Holmby Hills Christmas trees loomed skyscraper high.

Jack said, "He rapes the world and shits all over decent people, then runs when the chickenshit Krauts drop a few bombs. I'm a chickenshit for feeding on his money, and you're a chickenshit for driving me around."

Dudley smiled. “Immaculate Heart, then?”

Jack smiled. “Immaculate Heart, you mick cocksucker.”

They tootled down Sunset. Jack stared out the window and scratched his balls. Dudley turned north on Western. The convent and school were built up a hillside.

The Archbishop’s limo was parked across the street. J. J. Cantwell liked to perch and peep schoolgirls.

Dudley pulled up behind him. Jack got out and walked over to the playground. It was recess. Laura sat by herself. She looked like a Kennedy, one genetic beat removed.

She saw Jack and ran up to him. J. J. Cantwell stepped out of the limo. He wore linen golf slacks and a pink sweater.

Dudley joined him. Cantwell stared at Laura and Jack.

“He’s too thin, Dud. Isn’t Joe feeding him?”

“He takes his sustenance from love, Your Eminence.”

Cantwell giggled. “I won’t live to see a Catholic president. Joe has designs for his sons, I’ve been told.”

“He does, Your Eminence.”

“A Catholic police chief. That’s more within my grasp.”

Jack and Laura chucked a baseball. J. J. Cantwell stared.

“How long does Chief Horrall plan to stick around, Dud?”

“Until the war concludes, Your Eminence.”

“And his preferred successor would be the capable, but dismayingly Protestant Thad Brown?”

“It would be, Your Eminence.”

“Can Horrall avoid scandal for the remainder of his term?” Dudley did the wavy hand. “A toss-up, Your Eminence. The FBI will be conducting a wiretap probe next February, and the Chief could be besmirched. He’s taking payoffs from a Vice sergeant named Elmer Jackson, who is quite embroiled with an enterprising madam named Brenda Allen. I would not like to see it become public news.”

Cantwell said, “Bill Parker is afraid of you.”

Dudley said, “I know that, Your Eminence.”

“Are you afraid of him?”

“No, Your Eminence. I am not.”

“Do you have something on him?”

“Yes, Your Eminence.”

“Does he have something on you?”

“No, Your Eminence.”

Cantwell stared at Laura and Jack. They tossed the baseball. His Eminence caught every move.

“I am pleased by this balance of power between two fine Catholic laymen, and I am equally fond of you and Bill Parker. I would like to see a Catholic Chief in my lifetime, and would hate to see this balance dashed unnecessarily.”

57

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1941

A warehouse block. Innocuous. 4600 Valley—hit-and-run homicide scene.

The impact point had eroded. Monday's rain drenched the tread marks.

Ashida walked outside the rope line. He held the Jim Larkin DB file. Ray Pinker shagged it for him.

A black-and-white skidded up and grazed Ashida's car. Bill Parker got out. He wore a too-loose uniform. He had that frayed I-can't-sleep look.

He walked up. His glasses fit cockeyed. He probably passed out on them.

"It's a premeditated vehicular homicide. The man possessed dexterity and nerve. He smashed Larkin hard enough to kill him and barely touched the boys. It all feels professional."

Ashida said, "And he was wearing a purple sweater, just like the white man outside the Watanabe house."

Parker said, "*Mauve* sweater. Those were *mauve* fibers you found on the victims' posteriors. *Mauve* and *purple*. It's ambiguous."

Ashida nodded. "The Sheriff's checked all the car-repair and paint shops, and got nothing. He had to have damaged his car, but he's kept it garaged."

Parker lit a cigarette. His gun belt flopped down his hips.

Ashida said, "It was an obvious cause of death, so there was no autopsy. I found one interesting note in the file, though. The impact sheared off a chunk of flesh from Larkin's rear thigh. The examining surgeon noted a 'circumscribed, uniformly configured series of stab wounds embedded in a muscle group,' but there's no photograph."

Cars whizzed by. The black-and-white spooked them. They braked and crawled.

Parker said, "The fucking knife. We've got the faded wound on Ryoshi Watanabe, and now we've got this."

Cars crawled close. Parker stood too close to them. Ashida stepped back.

"Yes. The whole thing keeps growing."

Parker's two-way squawked. Garbled speech issued. Parker walked over and snatched the receiver. The squawk leveled off.

Ashida studied the impact point. He noted loose molding. He saw a single sawtooth tread.

Parker walked back. "That was the Bureau dispatcher. I had Nort Layman put out a statewide bulletin on the glass particles and shrimp oil on the Watanabes' feet, and we just got a kickback from Lancaster. A hospital treated a 'Japanese derelict' for cut feet and released him an hour ago. We've got no name on the man, but there's half a connection. The deputies up there had fielded complaints from five local groceries. Customers found glass particles in cans of Japanese-caught and -manufactured shrimp. It's Sheriff's jurisdiction, and Gene Biscailuz saw the bulletin. He thinks it's Fifth Column sabotage, so he's going up."

Ashida gripped the rope line. Car whizzed by, too close.

Parker said, "Dispatch gave me the scoop on the canning distributor. His name's Wallace Hodaka, and he's in the Fort MacArthur stockade."

Ashida said, "We have to."

Parker nodded yes. They looked at each other. They eschewed more preamble. They walked to their cars and peeled out.

They convoyed, southbound. Ashida took the pole slot. Parker bird-dogged him.

They hit Main Street. They caught Lincoln Heights. Ashida checked his rearview mirror. Parker rode his back bumper and sucked on a flask.

They laid tracks to Pedro. Parker bumper-locked him and nipped on his flask. Downtown, darktown, Gardena. Salt air and Army trucks—San Pedro up ahead.

They hit Fort MacArthur. They hit the stockade. Ashida saw Parker stash his flask and gargle mouthwash. The gate guard fish-eyed Ashida—*Hey, you're a Jap*.

Ashida flashed his ID card. The guard clocked the black-and-white and waved them in. They found slots by the door. They got out and stretched. Parker teetered and held.

MPs flanked the door. They saluted Parker and fish-eyed the Jap. Parker pointed Ashida ahead. The sally port was a full-barred enclosure. The desk guard squint-eyed Ashida—*Hey, who's this Jap?*

Parker braced him. "We're here to interview an inmate named Wallace Hodaka."

The guard checked his desk book. "We just logged some L.A. boys in and out. A Sergeant Smith called down and said he had Chief Horrall's okay. We logged in Sergeants M. Breuning, R. Carlisle, and Officer R. S. Bennett. They examined our inmate list and left a few minutes ago."

Ashida gulped. Parker gripped his gun belt and cinched his loose pants. The guard unhooked a wall phone and gabbed officialese. He hit a button. Two bar doors slid wide.

"Interview room no. 3. He's a tubby little Tojo guy, and he don't speak English."

Parker walked ahead. His gait was off. His feet looked wrong on the floor. Ashida walked behind him.

He ignored the cell rows. Inmates saw him and hissed. It escalated cell to cell. They spat at him. He stuck to the middle of the catwalk. The spit globs fell short.

Number 3 was an eight-by-eight sweat room. The door was open. Wallace Hodaka wore jail khakis and straddled a chair.

Ashida shut the door. Hodaka stood and bowed. They shook hands. Hodaka rebowed. Parker popped a tin and swallowed six aspirin.

"Interview him, Doctor. You know what we need. Promise him habeas if he cooperates."

Ashida straddled a chair. He stacked up mother-tongue phrases and cut loose. Hodaka cut loose in reply.

He talked fast. He *wanted* to talk. It was a listen-now/translate-as-you-go deal. Ashida nodded—*Please, go ahead.*

Wallace Hodaka was perceptive. He spoke in direct sentences and did not digress. Ashida listened and mentally translated at his speedy clip.

Parker leaned on the door. His eyes were bloodshot. He was half in the bag.

Hodaka ran out of breath. He bowed to Ashida and Parker. Ashida bowed back and laid out the gist.

"Mr. Hodaka knows nothing about the particles of glass found in the canned shrimp that he produces, and he seems credible to me. He was detained here because he manufactured Emperor Hirohito souvenir dolls up until three years ago, when the Emperor's warlike agenda became evident. The shrimp canning is done at a San Fernando Valley truck farm owned by Hodaka family cousins. A rotating workforce of Japanese transients does the canning work. If glass got into his shrimp, it was inadvertently, and due to the sloppy efforts of his workers—or from errors that derived from the fishing-boat source of the shrimp. San Pedro–moored boats sell him their shrimp catches. Mr. Hodaka was very clear on this one point—and, again, I find him credible. He's always paid cash for the shrimp, and he's never kept records of the transactions. He can't honestly give you any names for his shrimp providers."

Parker said, “Keep going.”

Ashida said, “Mr. Hodaka *does* know about the white men attempting to purchase Japanese-owned houses and farms, but he doesn’t know their names. Their ‘front man’ was allegedly a man named Hikaru Tachibana, who was rumored to have been murdered—but Mr. Hodaka has no more details on that. A cousin visited Mr. Hodaka here a few days ago, and told him that a man named Jimmy Namura was seen in Little Tokyo and the Valley early last week, asking about the men attempting to purchase the houses and farms. Namura was seen again on Thursday, also in the Valley and Little Tokyo, asking the same questions. This time, Namura was facially lacerated and wore bandages that seemed to indicate a recent surgery. Mr. Hodaka knows nothing more about Jimmy Namura, has never met any member of the Watanabe family, and knows nothing about them. Again, Captain, I find Mr. Hodaka entirely credible.”

Parker rubbed his eyes. “Tachibana and Namura were Watanabe family KAs. They were in the ‘A’ subversive index.”

Ashida said, “I know. And Dudley Smith got Namura released from T.I.”

“I’d bet that Dudley is hiding him. If it’s anywhere, it’s Chinatown. And if anyone knows, it’s Ace Kwan.”

Hodaka fidgeted. He fretted his jail wristband. He’d chewed his cuticles raw.

Ashida smiled. “You’ll get Mr. Hodaka habeas.”

Parker said, “Not today. He’s more useful here.”

More hissing. More spit globs. More synchronized this time.

Traitor, traitor, traitor.

They reversed their way back down the catwalk. Parker took the lead. He ignored the taunts and spittle. His feet still looked wrong on the floor.

They walked through the sally port and out to their cars. Parker peeled off first. He fishtailed and kicked up grit.

Two-car convoy.

Parker took the lead. Ashida trailed him. He had a choice rear-window view.

Parker sucked on his flask. Parker *weeeeaved* his black-and-white. Ashida bumper-lock tailed him. They kept their windows down. Parker played his civilian radio. It was soaring Bruckner, too loud.

Northbound. Pedro, Gardena, mainland L.A. Over to Broadway. Chinatown, straight ahead.

Parker U-turned and swerved up to Kwan’s. Ashida braked and got out of his way. Parker bumped the curb and stalled dead by the entrance. Ashida parked across the street.

The Pagoda was gussied up. The doorway dragons wore Christmas wreaths. A Santa sled was perched on the roof. A sled banner read REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR!

Parker stashed his flask and gargled up some mouthwash. He spit it out the window and spritzed a passing Ford. A passenger lady evil-eyed him. Parker flashed his middle finger and lurched from the car.

Ashida watched. Parker got a grip on the street and pushed off. He stumble-walked. He entered the Pagoda. Ashida ran up behind him.

The dining room was cryptsville. Busboys lounged near the kitchen. Uncle Ace sat at his favored table and read a comic book.

Parker used chair backs as handholds. He stitched a course and made it over. Ashida walked a step back.

Uncle Ace looked up. Parker slid into a chair. Ashida sat down beside him.

Uncle Ace said, “Yes?”

Parker said, “We have several questions.”

He slurred it. His breath reeked. Uncle Ace hitched his chair back.

“Yes? I hope I have the answers for you.”

Parker pulled out his cigarettes. Three match swipes got one lit.

“A man named James Namura. His moniker is ‘Jimmy the Jap.’ We need to know his whereabouts.”

Uncle Ace slid his ashtray over. “I do not know Mr. Namura, or know of him.”

“I think you do.”

“I assure you that I do not.”

“I think you do.”

“It insults me that you repeat yourself. Describe Mr. Namura, so that I may better understand why you so persist.”

Ashida watched. The busboys watched. They cleaned their fingernails with switchblades.

Parker said, “Here’s your description. He was seen a few days ago, and was noted as being ‘recently facially scarred.’ A plastic surgeon named Lin Chung is a ranking member of your tong, I know that you’re friends with a plastic surgeon named Terry Lux, and that you supply the opiates that Dr. Lux employs at his clinic in Malibu. Chief Horrall is indebted to you, but at this moment, I don’t care.”

Uncle Ace shook his head. “You are out of your depth, Whiskey Bill. I advise you to go home and sleep it off.”

Parker flushed. Uncle Ace pulled out a stiletto and scratched his neck with the blade. Parker pointed to Ashida.

“This man is Japanese.”

“Yes, and he is locally celebrated and honored for his forensic expertise.”

Ashida blushed and sat on his hands. It always quashed swoons.

Uncle Ace said: お会いできて光栄ですよ、芦田さん。あなたが苦しい立場におかれていることは理解しているつもりです。

Ashida quick-translated. *“I am happy to meet you, Doctor. I understand your embarrassment in this moment.”* It was perfect Japanese.

He stood and bowed. Uncle Ace stood and bowed. Parker went cardiac red.

He poked Ashida. It hurt. Ashida’s arm went numb.

“You hate the fucking Chinese. Don’t tell me you don’t. Run this interrogation and get the information we need.”

Ashida said: わたしにはあなたに対して含むことは何もありませんよ、クワンさん。Ashida brain-translated back. *“I bear Mr. Kwan only goodwill.”*

Uncle Ace smiled.

Parker said, “You dirty yellow savages. How fucking dare you?”

Uncle Ace winked at Ashida. Uncle Ace resumed his knife manicure.

Parker said, “Hit him.”

Ashida said, “No.”

Uncle Ace smiled.

The busboys watched. Ashida watched them. They held their knives against their legs.

Parker said, “Hit him.”

Ashida said, “No.”

Uncle Ace smiled.

The busboys stepped forward.

Parker said, “Hit him. You’re a fucking Jap coward if you don’t.”

Ashida said, “No.”

Uncle Ace laughed and winked. Parker stood up.

His knees bumped the table. The ashtray jumped. Cigarette butts flew. Parker jumped and went for Uncle Ace. Parker fell on the table, face-first.

Uncle Ace slid his chair back. Parker’s weight dumped the table. The legs snapped. The table hit the floor. Parker rode it down, face-first.

Uncle Ace smiled at Ashida and walked to the kitchen. The busboys followed him in.

Parker flailed and tried to stand up. His glasses had shattered. Ashida knelt and held him down. The table creaked under their weight.

He’s disordered and ruled by puerile emotion. He’s not Dudley Smith.

58

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1941

I drew Scotty as he slept. I kept the bedroom dark and used the nightstand lamp as a framing device. It's midafternoon now; Scotty arrived in a state of up-all-night exhaustion. We live in an around-the-clock city. The sleeping Officer Robert S. Bennett exemplifies it.

Scotty's muscles are bunched and plainly reveal his recent exertions. He worked a Chinatown rope line last night, got fitful sleep in the Bureau cot room and went back to duty with his fellow Dudster goons Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle. It was hours of file work on the "chump change" Watanabe murder case, which has planted a "wild hair up the ass" of Chief Jack Horrall. A trip to the Fort MacArthur stockade followed. It all inexplicably pertained to shrimp oil, fish oil, glass shards and the Watanabe house. Goons Breuning and Carlisle checked an arrestees' log, secured the address of a fish-canning setup operating out of a Japanese truck farm, and hustled Goon Scotty out to the far-east end of the San Fernando Valley. Goon Scotty found the journey south and precipitously north perplexing; it all pertained to "these white guys" trying to buy "Jap" property—sheer gobbledygook to him. Goon Breuning and Goon Scotty strongarmed the Japs as Goon Carlisle cleared out canning equipment to avoid a "public safety hazard." Goon Breuning spoke pidgin English to the Japs, who revealed "goose egg." Goon Scotty was ordered to slap the Japs around, while Goon Carlisle exhorted them to silence. Goon Scotty still didn't know what the Dudster and his lads were after. My sweet boy didn't like slapping around passive Japs, although he'd killed a "Chinaman" Thursday night.

Early-wartime Los Angeles and around-the-clock adventures. My rough boy, clenched in his sleep.

I shifted the lamp and threw light on the bed space beside Scotty. I drew Claire De Haven as herself and Claire as Joan of Arc. I placed the two hers beside my naked lover. I studied the drawings and saw how Claire achieved such seamless transformation.

It was all belief. She did not exist beyond her imagination. Thinking things so made them so. She feigned irony and possessed only zealotry. She seized on William H. Parker and me because we were both of her ilk. We were both her enemies and her only blood kin.

It was dusk now. I turned off the lamp and got back into bed beside Scotty. My rough boy was deeply asleep. I put my head to his chest and felt the cadence of his heartbeat.

Lee came home. I heard him enter his separate bedroom and shut the door behind him. Dance music drifted from clubs down on the Strip; a bright moon skittered through storm clouds and lit Scotty up at odd moments. I thought of Claire's party coming up next Monday night and wondered why Dr. Lesnick's office hadn't returned my call requesting a second appointment. The probable answer? Claire had spoken to the traitorous doctor. She said, "Let it go, Saul. She's mine."

Such sleep. Robert Sinclair Bennett, such a spell you're in. You're off in the shadow play of Dudley Smith. You're in as deep as I am with William H. Parker.

I lay there for hours. The music began to soften as 2:00 a.m. neared. "Moonlight Serenade" always announced last call at Dave's Blue Room. How many times had I dreamt that Bucky and I would dance to that tune? Where did Hideo Ashida's dreams of Bucky take him?

"Moonlight Serenade" ebbed away from me. I opened my eyes in a daylight-bright bedroom. Scotty was gone.

The door was half-open. Scotty was out in the hall. He was dressed in yesterday's clothes. He was talking with Lee.

Scotty, in his shoulder holster and tartan bow tie. Lee, in his uniform.

They stood too close to each other. Lee said, "I could take you." Scotty hooked a thumb back to me. He said, "You know where I'll be if you'd like to try."

Rough boys—neither one blinked.

December 14, 1941

59

LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14, 1941

Helen went to Mass. He should have gone. Dudley Smith scared him away.

Parker stood in his den. He sipped an eye-opener and stared at his graphs. *Watanabe Case/Details-Chronology* hexed him.

Dudley shot him a second summary. It hit his tray before that outburst at Kwan's. It was verifiably accurate. It might be fraudulent.

He should have gone to Mass. He could have asked Dudley. Ace Kwan would have briefed him per the scene.

Parker sipped vodka with lemon juice and cayenne. Jesuit priests developed the formula. It was a prepledge purgative. It followed quixotic missions and mortifying acts.

He'd stumbled out of Kwan's. He got to his car and radio'd the Fort MacArthur stockade. He got an address for the Hodaka cannery and drove out there.

He found the workers cowed. They refused to talk. His guess? Dudley's boys preceded him. They extracted information and blocked future access.

The priests' brew burned his guts. It alleviated withdrawal pain. It postponed The Pledge.

Parker jotted up his graph. He thought of Uncle Ace. The fuck blinked just once.

He tossed out a parlay. Jimmy Namura/facial scars/Lin Chung and Terry Lux. The toss-out made Ace blink. Parker annotated the moment and added question marks.

The priests' brew slaked his craving. It got dangerous here. He had to prevent The Warm Glide.

Parker drew swastikas and Lugers. Parker drew swastikas embossed on Luger grips. The grip falls from Jim Larkin's hand. The Lugers in Larkin's bungalow. Alleged Lugers at the Deutsches Haus. The Lugers fired at the pharmacy and Watanabe house.

The graph hexed him. Ditto the priests' brew.

Parker killed the brew and grabbed his briefcase. The pepper burn doubled him over. He walked out to his car and sat through a jolt of cramps.

He found a radio prayer show. A priest extolled self-restraint as a duty. He drove west and lost track of the time.

The beach. Army trucks and new seaside bunkers. Santa Monica Canyon. Larkin's bungalow.

Quixotic mission. Do it anyway. That trick you learned way back. Twist the knob and hit the jamb, just so.

He walked to the door.

He did it.

The bends returned. The Thirst returned. The door popped—just so.

He stepped inside and shut it. The living room koi stream charmed him. He walked to the kitchen and found some algae flakes. He walked back and fed the koi.

They darted and gorged. Parker fought off cramps and walked to the bedroom. He fed the terrace koi. He opened the closet. Seventeen Nazi Lugers—right there on pegs.

He pulled them off and stuffed them in his briefcase. He broke a sweat. It smelled like grain booze and lemon juice. He walked outside and closed the door. Hideo Ashida stood by his car.

The bends. Seventeen guns in his briefcase. They banged and scraped. They weighed fifty-odd pounds.

Parker lugged the guns over. They banged and scraped. Ashida stood prim.

"I took Larkin's Lugers. We can test-fire them at the lab and compare the rounds to the spent round at the house."

Ashida said, "The spents at the house and pharmacy were too degraded to serve as specific exemplars. If we test-fire these guns, we'll get similar erosion, and any results we obtain will be unverifiable. I'm reasonably sure that all the guns in this welter of cases came from the Deutsches Haus. We'll have to settle for that assumption."

Parker said, "You can print-dust the guns. We don't have a print card on Larkin, but we could place him, or *someone,* inside the house. The evidence would serve to corroborate the car in the driveway and the hit-and-run."

Ashida said, "Yes. I came back to steal the guns for that purpose." Parker lowered the briefcase. Ashida reached in his pocket and pulled out a lozenge. *Sir, your breath stinks*.

He forked it over. Parker unwrapped it and popped it in his mouth. Clove and licorice. A kid's palliative. Deadwood, 1910.

Ashida said, "The Sheriff's hardly worked the job, so I canvassed the block here myself. I learned that Mr. Larkin was friendly, garrulous, enjoyed the company of younger people, and loved to bicycle. He did not entertain at his home. His neighbors did not know that he was fixated on Japanese culture, or that he harbored Axis moneys and German firearms. The radio reported him to have been a British Intelligence agent in the first war, which I find credible. None of his neighbors knew it, which I find revealing."

Parker crunched the lozenge. Ashida passed him a stick of Beemans pepsin gum.

He unwrapped it. "The lone wolf with the secret life."

"Yes. Who made calls from public booths and carried telephone slugs."

Parker chewed the goddamn gum. "The Watanabes called booths in Santa Monica."

"Yes, and I checked the specific locations. They were all on Lincoln Boulevard, no more than two miles from here."

"It's all Fifth Column. It reeks of it. The secretive old intelligence man, the secretive Japanese."

Ashida said, "We don't know who called those pay phones or who they talked to."

Parker said, "I'm going to subpoena the phone records on those booths. Outgoing calls are recorded, and maybe we can get a take on the incoming ones."

Ashida shook his head. "It's a very long process you're suggesting. PC Bell is buried in War Department work now. Any legal request will attenuate."

Parker spit out his gum. "I fed the koi."

Ashida passed him a fresh stick. "I was going to."

Parker unwrapped it. "We'll find them a good home when all this is over."

"Yes. I was thinking that."

Parker pointed to their cars. They eschewed more preamble. Ashida nodded yes.

They got in, they U-turned, they convoyed downtown. Ashida took the lead. Parker bumper-locked him. He chewed the fucking chewing gum dry.

They made Central Station and walked up to the lab. It was theirs, solo. Ashida locked them in.

Parker wedged a chair under the doorknob. Ashida cleared off an exam table. Parker laid the Lugers out.

Ashida laid out a pack of gum and a box of cough drops. Parker nodded—*Yeah, okay*.

Ashida tagged the Lugers—nos. 1 to 17. Parker chewed gum and watched him work.

The bends subsided. Latent booze evaporated. The cayenne burned his mouth. The shakes might or might not come today. The Thirst Denied would start tomorrow.

Ashida worked. Parker watched. He chewed gum and sucked cough drops. He drank left-behind coffee.

Ashida donned rubber gloves and earmuffs. He loaded all seventeen Lugers and toggled in test rounds. He held them lightly to avoid print smears.

He fired all seventeen Lugers. The ballistics tunnel vibrated. He retrieved the spent rounds. They were all cracked in half.

Parker watched. Ashida eyeball-checked the firing-pin marks. He lit up and bowed.

"I was right. These guns, the gun in the pharmacy heist and the gun fired at the Watanabe house all came from the same ordnance batch. We have the same firing-pin malfunctions on all three sets."

Parker recalled something. "I was booking those humps from the Deutsches Haus raid. One of them said the place had been burglarized Monday night. He said silencers and Lugers were stolen. We didn't find any during the raid, so that absolved them on illegal gunsale charges. I thought he was just covering up on that, so I let it go. Now, I'm thinking there really was a 459."

Ashida gulped and flinched. Ashida looked away. Parker eagle-eyed him. *See those neck veins pulse?*

"All five of the men made bail. The *Mirror* ran a piece on it."

Ashida kept his eyes down. Parker stepped up close to him. Ashida backed away.

He did it. He B & E'd the Deutsches Haus.

Parker backed away. Parker looked down. Parker looked up and smiled. Ashida looked up and saw him. Ashida smiled. They bowed in formal sync.

Parker turned away. The moment needed air.

He chewed gum. He sucked cough drops. He turned back around. Ashida was back in his prim skin. Parker watched him work.

His print gear stood ready. Powder/brush/ninhydrin/Scotch tape. He laid the Lugers out beside them. He tape-tagged them—1 to 17.

He held pencils down the barrels. He dusted and sprayed surfaces. Smudges and streaks appeared. Ashida eyeball-scanned the surfaces. Guns nos. 1 to 5: smudges, smears and streaks.

Ashida worked. Parker watched. Ashida dusted gun no. 6. More smears, more smudges. Spray now. Spray that smooth grip first.

He did it. Parker tracked his eyes and caught the BINGO. *Pop*!—there's a right-index fingerprint.

Ashida rolled tape over the print and got a transparent lift. He stuck the tape to a print strip. He opened a drawer and pulled out a file exemplar. "Watanabe/12-7-41/unknown right-index print."

Ashida studied the exemplar. Ashida rigged a microscope and examined the new lift. He went back and forth three times. He was stranglehold intent.

Parker held his breath. His chewing gum went dry. Ashida tapped the file card.

“It’s a match. I lifted an unknown print at the house last Sunday. There’s no way to know if it’s Larkin himself, because we’ve got no sample on him. This new print is a perfect fit. A man touched one of Larkin’s guns, and we’ve placed him in the house now. We’re closing it all in.”

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LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14, 1941

It was elegant. It was egalitarian. It was a most star-studded bash. Ben Siegel beats the rap. The Trocadero swings tonight!

Jimmie Lunceford and his Orchestra. Tantrum-tossing Harry Cohn. "Jittery Joe" Kennedy. Joan Crawford, ogling Scotty Bennett. Sheriff Gene Biscailuz, news nabob Sid Hudgens, three dozen jarheads.

Benny invited the lads. He oozed patriotic largesse. He waltzed on the "Big Greenie" Greenberg snuff. Benny showed off shakedown snapshots. Bill McPherson hosed a darky girl in boots.

Dudley circulated. Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle jawed with Dot Rothstein. Jack Webb dogged Sheriff Gene and plagued him with kid bullshit. Ellen Drew and Elmer Jackson bobbed for apples in rum punch.

Jack Kennedy fucked Ellen yesterday. Ellen whored for Brenda Allen between ingénue stints. Benny lined up Brenda girls for the jarheads. Herr Siegel, the Jew Santa Claus.

Dudley circulated. Jimmie and his boys launched a raucous "Lunceford Special." Clarinets swayed. Trombone slides waggled. The Troc was all bonhomie.

Packed dance floor, swamped tables, standing-room-only bar.

Time tipped. New Year's, '38. He saw Bette here that first time. She was perched in a booth now. They'd shared lovers' looks. It was we'll-meet-later semaphore.

Bette sat with her froufrou hubby. He eager-eyed a waiter. Will homo hijinx ensue?

Dudley orbited. Benzedrine and Macallan '24. He chatted up Jewboy Harry. My smut-film plan—say ye yea or nay? Harry said he leaned toward yea—don't crowd me, you mick fuck.

Dudley circulated. Jittery Joe waved him over. Dudley hovered by his booth. They gabbed old times in Dublin and Boston. Yak, yak. Dudley's Army commission. Jack's L.A. gash run.

Joe brought up their smut jaunts to T.J. The Dotstress and Ruth

Mildred were grand company. Dudley outlined his smut scheme. Joe pledged twenty-five grand.

Joan Crawford and Scotty Bennett necked. Elmer Jackson and Ellen Drew jitterbugged. Brenda Allen swooped by and pulled Joe up to fox-trot.

A Benny goon sidled close. He handed Dudley an envelope. Dudley slit it and read the note inside.

That party list. Benny delivered the dish. Claire De Haven's do Monday night. Notable Reds had RSVP'd. It was a Commie conga line.

Miss Katherine Lake would be there. Miss Lake was spotted at Red Claire's last bash. Whiskey Bill's "outside deal." The Parker-Smith stalemate. *All allegiances must be scrutinized.*

Bette hit the dance floor. Dudley caught a flash of her green dress, aswirl. It was *kelly* green. She wore it for him.

She danced with a tall Marine. A short Marine cut in. She danced with him. A stout Marine cut in. She danced with him and waved to Dudley.

The room weaved. It reprised the '33 earthquake. Bette placed his world on springs.

The short Marine walked up. Dudley saluted him. The short Marine delivered a note. Dudley unfolded it.

"D.S. I keep a suite upstairs. Join me after the festivities, please. Ever yours, B.D."

The short Marine vanished. Dudley kissed the note and caught patchouli. He orbited—Benzedrine and Macallan '24.

Scotty Bennett necked with Joan Crawford. Brenda Allen necked with the short Marine. The Dotstress and Ruth Mildred saw it and went *Uggggh*.

The wingding wound down. Jimmie Lunceford blared the national anthem and shooed folks to the doors. Bette headed for a staircase. Dudley watched her dress trail up the steps. Hubby and a swish waiter swapped anxious looks. They walked toward a cloakroom, seconds apart.

Hubby opened the door and ducked in. The waiter ducked in moments later. Dudley strolled over and peeped the keyhole. Hubby had the waiter's prick in his mouth.

This grand war. The world on springs. D.S. + B.D.—the heart and arrow.

The room evaporated. Couples swerved outside, entwined. Joan C. had Scotty B. fuckstruck.

Dudley walked up the staircase. Her door featured a cupid's-quiver knocker. He banged it. She opened up, sans pause.

They kissed in the doorway. Dudley unhooked the green dress. The straps caught on Bette's shoulders. He slid them off and pulled the green to her breasts. She wriggled the door shut. She stood on her tiptoes and kissed him. Champagne and tobacco—he knew her breath now.

Her mouth on him. His mouth in her—he wanted that. He picked her up and carried her. He looked for a kneeling spot.

A velvet-tufted sofa. Yes—that's your spot.

He put Bette down. He pushed up her dress. Her stockings were hooked to a garter belt. She said, "Dudley Liam Smith." He bit at her stocking snaps.

He bit them off. He ripped her stockings and dainties down to her feet. Bette said, "Dudley Liam Smith." She pulled at his hair and brought her hips up.

He found that her he wanted. She said his name. He learned that taste. She held his head down and pushed her hips up. He pulled at her breasts. She pulled his hair.

She pushed her hips and said his name. She thrashed and lost his name and went to gasps. She arched and pushed the sofa up against a wall. Her last thrash knocked over a lamp.

"Dudley Liam Smith. Are you tired of hearing it?"

"No, darling. I am not."

"You can't be comfortable where you are."

"I'm a Church-bred lad. You can't imagine how familiar this is."

"I wouldn't want you to regard me as familiar."

"Consoling, then. Familiar only in the sense that I've imagined this moment a great many times."

"Dear, dear you. The big Irish cop with four daughters, while I'd give anything for just one."

"I have a fifth daughter, of illicit birth. She's living in Boston now. She's my favorite daughter, but I would lovingly bequeath her to you."

"Tell me about her."

"Her name is Elizabeth. She's seventeen, and quite gifted and lovely. She has evolved a peculiar narrative form with a blind friend of hers. She describes the action in motion pictures to him, as he concurrently hears the dialogue. It's quite a grand collaboration. She never falls behind in her description, and thus a young blind man is given God's gift of sight."

"I would like to meet that girl and witness that gift of hers."

"She'll be in Los Angeles, with her friend, for Christmas. I'll arrange an outing."

"Is she a sympathetic lapse between your bouts of brutality, Dudley? I say this because it reminds me of myself."

"Your perceptions honor me, darling. I imagined you as vividly lucid, but

you are lucid in excess of your most potently imagined self."

"Such recognition you grant me. I'm jaded, you know. I outgrew fatuous acclaim some time ago. 'It takes one to know one.' I see that adage at work here."

"I won't belabor the point. I wouldn't want you to consider me familiar."

"You're redefining 'familiar' for me. This unseemly posture of ours has me questioning concepts and acts."

"Dear, dear girl. You're getting sleepy, I can tell."

"I am sleepy. And I'm a selfish woman who has every intention of falling asleep right here."

"I would not want to keep you from that."

"My God, those young Marines. I do not want one single one of them to die. I don't want it, and I will not permit it. Shit, those fucking Japs."

"You're yawning, lass. Say something grand before you fall off."

"Dudley Liam Smith, please kill a Jap for me."

Bette slept. He didn't. He was Church-bred. He shifted his knees and refined the posture. He reached that toppled lamp and killed the room light.

The Macallan '24 wore off. The Benzedrine stayed. Bette slept, he didn't. Cars backfired out on the Strip. Doors slammed down in the Troc. Pictures flashed off their echoes.

His mother hit him. His mother snapped a razor strap. He held his gun and kept his head on Bette's breasts.

The sounds dwindled. The sky went second-by-second bright. He stood up and rubbed his knees alive. He arranged Bette head-to-toe on the sofa. He placed his suit coat over her and walked to his car in shirtsleeves.

The world rolled on springs. He smelled Bette all over him. He took Sunset east and cut south on Virgil.

The Melrose stoplight stalled him. He looked around and saw a lanky Jap in a phone booth. He was making Jap-like gestures on a call.

The light went green. Dudley pulled to the curb and got out. The Jap blathered on. Dudley walked to the booth. The Jap noticed him.

What's this? Where's your coat? What's with that gun?

Dudley pulled that gun and shot the Jap four times in the face. It blew out the back of his head and the back of the booth.

Dudley said, "For Bette Davis."

December 15, 1941

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LOS ANGELES | MONDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1941

Football practice. Early-morning scrimmage. His standard window view.

His apartment provided the view. He rented it for the view. All roads led back to Belmont. Green-and-black 4-ever.

Ashida watched a block-and-pass drill. He made the two receivers Bucky. Both boys fumbled. He shut his eyes and made them *more* Bucky. *His* Bucky snagged the ball and ran through the goalposts.

He walked to the living room closet. His early trip-wire gizmo was stashed on a shelf. He kept his photo box beside it.

The pictures were paper-sheathed and sequestered from sunlight. He'd hidden the camera behind a ledge, facing the showers. A tight-sprung wristwatch tripped the shutter.

Basketball practice ended at 4:00. The camera clicked at two-minute intervals. Lucky clicks caught Bucky, stripped.

Ashida studied the photos. He held them by the edges and left no fingerprints. He recalled his lab work with Bill Parker. They turned up that one print. He dusted the other Lugers, with nil results. Parker nailed him for the Deutsches Haus 459. They eschewed an explicit exchange.

The photos were perfect. *Bucky* was perfect. The black-and-white was perfectly etched. Kay Lake tugged at him. He assumed her perspective. The silly huntress mooned for Bucky Bleichert. What would she think of *his* Bucky, nude?

She called him last night. It was all about that crazy film. A muckraking exposé. Roundups as pogrom. It derived from her maneuverings with Bill Parker.

She invited him to a party tonight. “Comrade” Claire was tossing a do. He agreed to go.

Ashida replaced the photos and studied the gizmo. The lens mount was firm. The shutter wire was taut. The switch mechanism had chipped over time. It rendered the gizmo *un*perfect.

The new gizmo was still stashed outside Whalen's Drugstore. Secondary switch gears were tucked in. It was early. He could remove the backup gears and refit the old gizmo.

He walked downstairs. He got his car and drove downtown. Traffic was light. It supplied a cognitive window. He brain-walked through the house.

Watanabe/187 P.C. Room by room, quadrant by quadrant. Nine days since the murders. His ten thousandth walk-through.

6th and Spring was morning quiet. He parked outside Whalen's and studied his gizmo. The casing held firm. The gizmo remained protected. He pulled the secondary switch gears and drove off.

He turned on the radio. The police band kicked in. Code 3—homicide at Melrose and Virgil.

Dead man in a phone booth. Gunshot wounds, close range. Lab men and morgue men requested. Ray Pinker and Thad Brown there now.

Ashida drove home. He walked upstairs and grabbed the a.m. *Herald*. He saw a news pic below the fold.

A Fed roust. A curio shop—1st and Alameda. Dick Hood, Ed Satterlee, two unknown Feds. One frightened Japanese man.

Two Feds held large swords. Two Feds held matching *SCABBARDS*. There it was. Hot off a fluke. Right at mental walk-through ten thousand.

Here's what he missed. Here's what Dudley missed.

There were no *SCABBARDS*. There were no *HOOKS* or *WALL PEGS* to hang the swords on. They were display items. They were always left out to see.

Ashida vibrated. Camera shutters clicked.

No scabbards.

No hooks or wall pegs.

No spackling or wall indentations. No wallpaper inconsistencies.

CLICK—ten thousand times. *CLICK*—ten thousand and one.

CLICK—the world's revving up now. *CLICK*—it's at silent-movie speed.

Ashida walked back downstairs. He got his car. The car drove him. He made Avenue 45 in one second. The house glowed ten thousand times too bright.

He let himself in. He stood still and reduced all that speed.

He walked through the living room. He scrutinized and confirmed. He walked through the dining room. He scrutinized and confirmed. He walked through the kitchen. Yes, scrutinized and—

"Hello, lad."

Ashida turned around. Dudley wore plaid suit pants and no coat.

"You embody revelation, lad. You have quite the large eyes at this moment."

"I know what we missed. That 'very obvious thing.' I came here to confirm it."

Dudley smiled. His neck was lipstick-smeared.

"Were you going to tell me? Or were you going to share the insight with Bill Parker exclusively?"

Ashida said, "I hadn't decided yet."

Dudley laughed. "How much evidence have you withheld? I'm curious about that, and about the extent of your collusion with Bill Parker."

Ashida gripped the sink ledge. "I'm not telling you."

Dudley said, "Tell me what I missed, then. Dazzle me with your circumlocutions."

Ashida smiled. "There were no scabbards. There were no wall pegs or hooks. I don't understand how we both overlooked it."

Dudley bowed. "Extrapolate, please."

Ashida said, "The killer brought the swords inside, in some form of conveyance, or had secreted them here on a prior visit. The act was premeditated, and conceived and embellished in a state of escalating psychosis. The family complied out of a racially and culturally regressed sense of shame, deriving from Nancy Watanabe's sexual misconduct and recent abortion, and Johnny Watanabe's incestuous voyeurism and probable molesting of Nancy. The motive for the killings is tripartite. The killer was driven by sexual animus, a sense of personal betrayal, and insane ideological conviction. The entire case rests on the distinction between the shade of mauve and various shades of purple. The mauve fibers on the victims' posteriors conclusively indict the killer, regardless of what you and Chief Horrall want. It might be the heavyset white man, seen in a purple sweater. It might be a Japanese man, wearing a much lighter-shade garment. Ceremonial swords are quasi-illegal. The curio shops that sell them keep no records. White collectors purchase the swords, along with Japanese patriarchs eager to celebrate their feudal heritage. We remain at an evidential dead end. The overall *motives* are becoming clear to me."

Dudley sniffed his shirt cuffs. Ashida smelled an orchid-content perfume.

"I will not require you to divulge what you've withheld from me. I will ask if you have suspects."

Ashida said, "I think I understand the crime, but I have no inkling as to who committed it. It feels very much like an open-file case to me."

"You said it yourself, Doctor. Chief Horrall and I would very much prefer a Japanese killer. I'm sure you've discussed our wishes with Captain Parker."

Ashida said, “Yes. We’ve discussed it.”

“Have you discussed official versus unofficial justice? Has Whiskey Bill extolled the virtues of expedient justice to you?”

Ashida stepped close. Dudley Smith reeked of a woman.

“*You* explain it, Sergeant. *You* tell me what it means.”

Dudley stepped closer. Their hands almost touched.

“A Japanese killer indicted by New Year’s. A man so vile that the injustice of his conviction is monumentally overshadowed by the sheer monstrousness of the acts he’s already committed, and fully justified by the interdiction of the future acts he will most assuredly commit. The real killer, perhaps uncovered at a later date, perhaps not. Anonymously extinguished, regardless of his race.”

Ashida bowed. “That statement in no way offends me.”

Dudley sniffed his shirt cuffs. The mad creature, moved by scent.

“I commend you for your actions at Kwan’s Pagoda. Your composure in the face of Whiskey Bill’s boorishness did not go unnoticed by Jack Horrall.”

Ashida said, “The Chief’s patronage is important to me.”

Dudley said, “As it should be. The Chief will be meeting J. Edgar Hoover at Union Station this afternoon. Mr. Hoover is here to further implement his plans to abrogate the civil liberties of your people. Japanese radios and firearms will be confiscated. A good many more Japanese businesses will be forcibly closed. There will be a massive seizure of Japanese property and financial assets, and it is likely that your people will be made to wear demeaning armbands. I condemn these actions, even as I attempt to exploit them. I am grateful that my lawless streak allows me the latitude to maneuver, and to offer opportunities and protection to my colleagues and those who serve to further my designs. I feel that you have begun to emerge as a colleague.”

Ashida went dry-mouthed. The kitchen went gas-stove hot.

Dudley said, “A Japanese man was murdered early this morning. His name was Goro Shigeta, and he was shot in a phone booth south of Hollywood. He appears to have been heavily in debt to bookies in Little Tokyo, and Thad Brown thinks he was killed to settle a gambling debt. I would disagree with that hypothesis. I think a white man motivated by misguided patriotism and racial hatred killed Mr. Shigeta, and I think that a good deal more of such hatred will be inflicted upon your people. I would like to spare you and your family the horror of it.”

Ashida white-knuckled the sink ledge. “And, in return?”

“In return, I would like you to weigh the pros and cons of my patronage versus Bill Parker’s.”

Ashida said, “Yes, I’ll keep an open mind.”

Dudley half-bowed. "Grand. And, along those lines, I would like to show you something. It entails a trip to Malibu, tomorrow afternoon, and it pertains to a plan that Ace Kwan and I are working on. We are determined to assist members of the Japanese community in avoiding internment."

"Well-heeled members?"

Dudley winked and about-faced. He grabbed the dining room phone and dialed a number. Ashida heard a pick-up sound.

Dudley laughed. The phone line crackled. Dudley said, "Dr. Ashida" and "witness the procedure." Dudley listened and smiled.

Dudley said, "Our surgeon chum, Terry Lux." Dudley listened and smiled. Dudley said, "He's drying out Miss De Haven? Yes, I've heard of her."

"Comrade" Claire. Kay Lake. The party tonight. Some odd confluence.

Ace Kwan brayed on the telephone. It was surely *his* bray. Dudley winked and turned away. Ashida ducked out the kitchen door.

There—one last glance. A telling one—Dudley sniffs his shirt cuffs.

He walked around the house. Neighbors evil-eyed him. *Who's that Jap? Oh, yeah—he's with the cops*.

Ashida bagged his car. He felt light-headed. The car drove him. It bypassed the lab. It drove him to Virgil and Melrose.

The booth was roped off. POLICE SEARCH AREA, NO TRESPASS, KEEP OUT. Black-and-whites, K-cars, meat wagons. Thad Brown, Nort Layman, Ray Pinker. Three morgue jockeys, poised with body sacks.

Ashida parked across the street. He pushed his seat back and watched.

Goro Shigeta had a face and no head. His rear skull was obliterated. His ears blew out with his brains. The killer stood close to him. The powder burns on his forehead indicated that. The shots shattered the rear phone-booth wall.

Ray Pinker bagged shell casings. They were fat. They were probably .45 ACPs. The morgue men scooped up brains.

Ashida watched. Simple details held him. The day slipped away.

The morgue men hauled off Shigeta. Thad Brown directed a canvassing crew. Bluesuits swarmed Virgil down to the south horizon and worked their way back. They buttonholed Brown. They went *Nix, nothing, nyet*.

Brown sent them home. The scene dispersed. A bluesuit lagged back and watchdogged the booth.

Ashida took off. The car drove him. He thought of Dudley Smith.

Some woman marked the Mad Creature. *He* knew her scent, secondhand.

Ashida drove downtown. He double-parked outside the station and ran up to the lab. He was late for Claire De Haven's party. He kept spare dress clothes in his locker.

He beelined over. A note was taped to the door.

> Hideo,
> Per Watanabe/187 P.C.
>
> Nort's got more on the bodies. (The thawing revealed an irregular threading on the wounds, & now Nort's convinced the swords found at the scene couldn't have made the incisions.) Also, he found minute traces of a rare Japanese narcotic poison in the victims' livers.
>
> R.P.

It came at him, jumbled. He sifted it forensically. He layered in case logic. He shook it all out.

The killer brought the swords and smeared blood on them postmortem. He didn't kill them with the swords. The swords made the hesitation punctures only. The punctures were inflicted postmortem and were solely obfuscation. The narcotic poison anesthetized the Watanabes. It left them compliant and immobilized at the moment of their deaths. The killer killed them with a prosaic foreign implement or *THE KNIFE.*

Japanese narcotic poisons induce near-immediate retching. Predeath euphoria and narcoleptic states follow. The killer knew the Watanabes. The killer served them tea. They retched on their clothes. He made them change clothes in a euphoric state. Ryoshi wrote the suicide note then. The killer *was* Japanese or *knew* Japanese or decided to *risk* Ryoshi's predeath warning to the police. Ryoshi might have considered it all a prank and might not have known they were doomed. The purple-sweater white man was middle-aged and heavyset. Jim Larkin knew Japanese. Jim Larkin was a gaunt sixty-seven. The purple-sweater white man pulled up in a car. Jim Larkin had no driver's license and did not own an automobile. Jim Larkin was Fifth Column. The Watanabes were Fifth Column. Foreknowledge of Pearl Harbor defined all five deaths.

The Watanabes were dead. The killer lingered in the house. He washed their soiled clothes and hung them up to dry. *Why wash clothes on the day that you intend to die?* This hypothesis answered that question.

The killer served them tea in the kitchen. They retched onto slick linoleum. The killer wiped their vomit up. Feudal warlords dipped their knives in slow-acting poison. This killer did not. Japanese narcotic poison absorbed rapidly. It evaporated more rapidly in spilled blood. The poison should not have been identified. The killer did not bank on Nort Layman's near-insane persistence.

Ashida thought it all through.

Ashida thought, *THE KNIFE*.

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | MONDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1941

Comrade Hideo was late. The swell party went on without him.

I came in red. I'd dipped by Bullock's Wilshire and purchased a twin to Bill Parker's black cashmere dress. My dress matched the living room curtains. I wore it so that I could stand beside them and pose.

Claire's slaves were in attendance. Dalton Trumbo, Abner Biberman and John Howard Lawson represented the more feted Hollywood Left. I met them, traded war chat with them and moved on. An imperiously tall neighbor appeared and walked straight to the piano. It was Sergei Rachmaninoff—who appeared to be drunk. He attracted a range of comments on the Russian-front war; he said, "Fuck the men of the brave Red Army," and banged out loopy Scriabin.

Claire came as herself. Her red dress complimented mine; her Joan of Arc hair had grown out into a charming bob. She was gaunt. Claire, the martyred crusader. Claire, the dry-out-farm habitué. Claire, with the carriage to make dissolution stylish. Claire—who swirled around me and met my eyes like we were the only two in the room.

Claire, who was saving me. *We'll talk later, dear*. I represented *opportunity*. Her every look told me that.

Hideo was late. It discomfited me. He was the crux of my entrapment-seduction of Comrade Claire De Haven. I stood by the red drapes in my red dress and sipped a red-tinged Manhattan. It was my second party in as many nights.

I heard Jimmie Lunceford blasting from the Trocadero last evening and walked down to catch the occasion. Five scoots to the doorman got me in. Ben Siegel had been released from jail and had invited numerous cops, Marines and film colony folk to mark the moment. I played wallflower and observed. I thought I saw Scotty Bennett duck out a side door, but couldn't be sure. The astonishing thing I saw was Dudley Smith trading looks with Bette Davis.

It was unmistakable and altogether romantic. Their glances were very much synchronized. Miss Davis danced with a series of Marines and played eye music with the Dudster. They are most certainly lovers.

I left then. There was no way to top *that* party favor. Early-wartime intermezzo—my dear God.

My current party favors were less glamorous. Andrea Lesnick stood across the room; she was a young and female version of her father, with identical nicotine-stained fingers. I recalled Bill Parker's brief. The Feds sprung Miss Lesnick from Tehachapi and used that wedge to turn Dr. Saul as a snitch. The doctor walked in the door a few minutes ago. He went directly to the bar, spritzed a highball and talked to a Chinese man dressed in a physician's white coat. I could tell that it was shoptalk. Reynolds Loftis mistook the Chinese man for a waiter and hit him up for a cocktail. The Chinese man gave him what for.

I was antsy. I had a small camera and miniature wire recorder in my purse and intended to put them to use. They were the filched property of Officer Lee Blanchard; Lee had used them during a loan-out assignment to Central Vice. I wanted Hideo Ashida to be here, and wanted Comrade Claire to see us together. I was quite anxious to make things occur and even more anxious to cause trouble.

Rachmaninoff segued to a dank piece by Karol Szymanowski. It eloquently rebutted the chirpy talk all around us. The late Mrs. Hamano got significant play. Likewise, the Japanese man shot in the phone booth. It was all over the radio. Chaz Minear pegged it as "escalating racial juju, jingo-imperialist style."

I was antsy. I felt ignored. I walked to the bar and mixed myself another Manhattan. Saul Lesnick and the Chinese man were still at it. The Chinese man's coat was embroidered with Asian symbols and "Lin Chung, M.D." The two men discussed eugenics. Lesnick called it "quite the compelling and inaccurate science, and surely the justification for ghastly racial misdeeds."

Lin Chung vehemently disagreed. He said, "Science very precise! Science very precise!"

Lesnick looked away from him. I followed his eyes to the patio. His daughter was summoning him.

Lesnick walked over. I trailed him and loitered near the door. Father and daughter lit cigarettes together and coughed in unison. Andrea said, "Bad this time, Daddy."

Lesnick said, "I'll run you out to Malibu, after the party. Dr. Terry will wean you. He's been doing day retreats with Claire. See how much better she looks?"

They looked for Claire and saw me. I turned and walked back into the living room. Claire crossed my line of sight. *Day retreats?* She was floatier than I had ever seen her.

It made me that much more antsy. I cut through conversational cliques and entered the downstairs bathroom. Parker wants evidence of Dope Fiend Claire? Let's toss the medicine chest.

I opened the chest and got out my camera. Parker wants it, Parker gets it. A row of pill vials. Morphine, phenobarbital and Dilaudid. All prescribed by Saul Lesnick, M.D.

I snapped three close-ups and noticed a small bottle on the shelf. The label bore Japanese characters. I unscrewed the top and looked in.

The bottle contained black hair dye. I photographed it, stashed the camera in my purse and went back to the party. Rachmaninoff had passed out on the piano keys. The front door opened; Hideo Ashida walked in.

He closed the door and stood poised. Lovely Hideo, in a navy hopsack blazer and gray slacks.

Stand there, darling. Be tentative. Your people are raping the civilized world. Jingo-imperialist L.A. is unjustly retaliating. Stand there and look handsome. Let the party swells take note. This audience was made for you.

Hideo stood by the door. *Yes—be forlorn and apprehensive. Be controversial, be* oppressed.

The jabber commenced. People looked over. Who's *He*? What's *He* doing here? He's not Chinese, like that doctor. That's right—he's Japanese, he's a *JAP*.

People touched one another. People gestured and looked at the door. I watched eyes travel. *Claire, darling—please look.*

She was talking to Reynolds Loftis. He watched eyes travel. *His* eyes went to the door. Claire followed his eyes. *Yes, love—please look.*

She did. I watched her dip and swoon—just a little. She set the stage for me.

I dropped my purse and ran to Hideo. I shouldered partygoers out of the way and knocked over drinks. I claimed the room and owned the room. Hideo saw me. He held out his arms. He wanted to hold me off—I knew it. I couldn't have that. I flew into him and kissed him before he could move.

He put his arms around me. It wasn't passion—he did it to hold himself up. I held his head and put my tongue in his mouth; he moved his tongue because he'd heard that men and women did that. It looked like a lovers' kiss. I put everything I had into it. Hideo went numb. The kiss tasted like mint mouthwash.

His arms went slack and dropped to his sides. I broke the embrace, to make it look synchronized. I slid an arm around his waist and swiveled us to face the party head-on. Hideo followed my lead perfectly.

We claimed the room. That brash girl and her shy lover. Aren't they sweet together? And *so* brave—with the war eight days old!

Everyone looked at us. Everyone clapped. Claire yelled, "Bravo!" Reynolds Loftis and Chaz Minear went *Woo-woo-woo!*

Hideo smiled. He was knock-kneed and seemed to be both keyed up and exhausted. We walked into the crowd. Handshakes, back claps and embraces engulfed us. People stated their names. The overlay went to cacophony. Hideo stated his name and let strangers touch him. I stepped back to let it all happen. Claire stepped into the fawners' circle and winked at me. I winked back; Claire slid an arm around Hideo's waist and led him out of the crowd. She hijacked my man with aplomb. I watched as she steered him to a divan.

The crowd watched. I ducked past the piano and the snoozing Rachmaninoff and retrieved my purse. I went up the staircase to the second floor as Comrades Hideo and Claire held center stage.

That hallway again. Those closed bedroom doors.

I went down the hall and jiggled knobs. Claire's bedroom and the bedroom beside it were unlocked; I entered the latter one first.

It was strewn with male clothes and toiletries. Shirt monograms gave it away. Reynolds Loftis and Chaz Minear shacked up here.

An armoire flanked the door. The first drawer was stuffed with male underwear; the second drawer held homosexual paraphernalia. There were spiked collars and a program for a transvestites' ball at Leo's Love Nest. There were photographs of W. H. Auden, naked on a beach with Reynolds and Chaz. There were matchbooks for the Tradesman and Knight in Armor bars, with men's first names and phone numbers jotted on the inside covers.

I photographed all of it. I went through the bottom drawer and found a single tract, stuffed under a sock pile.

The title was *J'accuse: The Los Angeles Police Reich, Volume III*. It ran twelve pages; I knew immediately that the lucid Claire was not the author. This tract defamed a Red Squad lieutenant named Carl Hull.

I skimmed the text and shot close-ups of the pages. Lieutenant Hull was a close friend and ideological consort of the then Lieutenant W. H. Parker. I added *alleged* to the indictment. Parker was surely prejudiced, but did not actively purvey racial hate. Lieutenant Hull was possessed of a scholarly mien during his on-duty hours. Come dusk, he became a "Night-Riding Nativist Nabob" and dragged Mexicans back over the border from the hindquarters of his white stallion. Lieutenant Hull asserted that *Mein Kampf* was the lost book of the Bible and that Jesus Christ was an Aryan and not a Jew. Lieutenant Hull was also a speechwriter for the Christian Nationalist Legion and the most infamous offshoots of the America First Committee.

I replaced the tract, dropped the camera into my purse and stepped back into the hall. No one saw me; all the revelry remained downstairs. I moved into Claire's bedroom and closed the door. I saw it, first thing—a new martyr had joined Joan of Arc.

Claire had pinned newspaper photos to the wall beside Joan. They depicted Nao Hamano, alive and smiling—and dead in the jail cell where she killed herself. I reached for my camera, then dropped it back in my purse.

No. Claire did not indict Bill Parker at his most self-damning. I had to extend the same reprieve.

I studied the pictures. Claire had pencil-stroked Nao Hamano's hairline. Little arrows revealed her intent. The black dye made sense now. Claire as Joan, Claire as Nao Hamano. A new transformation—immediate and of this war.

I walked back to the party. Admirers thronged Hideo; they ran monologues as he listened and played ethnic novelty act. Claire was sitting alone. She was holding a drink and a cigarette. I walked over and took them from her; our hands trembled as they brushed.

She said, "You create memorable moments, disappear and reappear. I'm not accusing you of anything. I'm commenting on your deliberate nature."

I finished off Claire's cigarette and scotch with bitters. I said, "I'm out of my depth with this crowd of yours. I've found my early-wartime boon companions, but two parties in one week is taxing. Your people are fascinating, but I have a limited capacity to observe and do nothing."

Claire pointed to Hideo. "Is he red-blooded? I see you as a woman of appetite, and I'm wondering if Dr. Ashida is up to your needs."

I laughed and doused the cigarette in her glass. It bought me a heartbeat. Claire found the entrance scene contrived—I knew it.

I said, "He isn't my only lover. I have a weakness for rowdier men, and Hideo fulfills me in ways that they can't."

"You're saying that he's socially relevant. You're saying he's a diffident lover, and a grand foil in your ongoing stage show."

She nailed you. Concede it. Allow her that triumph. Express chagrin.

"Yes. That's pretty much it."

I went to *crestfallen*. My shoulders sagged. I leaned back on the couch and fell into Claire's shadow.

She said, "Reynolds has an eye on him. I think he senses susceptibility and/or inclination."

Be blasé. Express mild titillation. You appreciate risqué address.

"I think not. Tell Reynolds I'll keep an eye on him, though. If Hideo loses interest in me, I'll attribute it to that and play Cupid for him."

Claire said, "Deft girl. So quick with the answers. I've known you less than a week, but you've quite captured me."

I said, "It's the war. Everything feels immediate. Relationships reveal their purpose over time, but the war won't allow for that. I'm going mad with a sense of purpose unfulfilled. I would assume that you are, too."

Claire touched my knee. "Bright girl. So alert to my moods. I'm enjoying day retreats at Terry Lux's clinic. Come out tomorrow. We'll take a mud bath and discuss purposeful things."

"That would be lovely."

"Andrea Lesnick will be there. We'll be representing the Wartime Female Disenfranchised."

"Will you come as Joan of Arc, then? I would hate to see you crop your hair again, but I'd be intrigued to watch you extend the performance."

Claire lit a cigarette. She snatched up a heavy lighter and replaced it with a too-brusque thud. *Dope*. I could tell that she needed it; I saw her drift off with the urge.

I said, "Our film idea is the closest thing I have to a purpose. I think we should film the roundups covertly, and refrain from editorializing. Our polemical strength rests in the imagery itself."

Claire said, "We'll discuss the matter tomorrow." She looked away from me and scanned the room. She blinked as she saw Saul Lesnick holding a medical bag.

Claire looked back to me. She said, "I'm committed to the film. I hope the lovely Dr. Ashida will participate."

We stood up to say good-bye for now. I stepped into Claire's shadow and let her be altogether more woman than I. She whispered, "Red becomes you, Comrade," and touched my waist.

She vanished then. She dipped between two men and reappeared on the staircase with Saul Lesnick. Her good-bye trumped me and left me breathless. I sat down and shut my eyes.

The room spun. Beverly Hills became Pearl Harbor eight days ago. I'd stopped at the Beverly Canon before the party. I caught the newsreel sandwiched between the two features. I saw footage of the *Arizona* aflame and Japanese planes strafing Wheeler Field. They mowed down a little boy who could have been Japanese.

A Marine was hawking war bonds in the lobby; he told me he was shipping out for Pearl the next week. He saluted a Navy ensign sharing a bag of popcorn with a woman. I recognized them from the *L.A. Times* society page and the backwash of my own life. The ensign was Jittery Joe Kennedy's playboy son; the woman was Ellen Drew. She costarred in Paramount turkeys and part-time whored for Brenda Allen. Ellen looked at me. She whispered, "That little boy," and started crying. It embarrassed Ensign Jack.

The room spun; I kept my eyes shut; I had a sense of Hideo Ashida adrift, a few feet away.

"I spoke to Mr. Rachmaninoff. He isn't very nice."

It was Andrea Lesnick speaking. I opened my eyes and motioned her to sit down. She kicked off her shoes and sat with her legs tucked under her. She wore nose-pinching glasses. I sensed her sensing us as jilted girls at loose ends.

I said, "He's the maestro. He doesn't have to be nice."

"All I did was ask him to play a favorite piece of mine."

"If it was the C-sharp Prelude, you probably touched a nerve."

"I might have confused him with another composer."

"That couldn't have helped."

Andrea laughed and lit a cigarette. Her movements precisely mimicked her father's. It was astonishing to observe.

My purse sat between us. I reached in and tapped the switch on the recorder. Andrea failed to notice it.

I said, "I'm in analysis with your father. I don't know if I should be talking with you. It might comprise an ethical breach."

Andrea said, "Don't be naïve. Papa's driving me to Malibu after the party. All I'll have to do is say, 'Your analysand, Miss Lake. Give me the goods, pretty please.' I'll know more about you than you know about yourself by the time we get to the beach."

"Well, now I know who to go to for gossip."

Andrea said, "It isn't me. I've been to the penitentiary, so I hate snitches. The Feds tried to get me to snitch Claire and her people, but I refused. Papa snitched to get me out, but he doesn't know that I know. I'm impolitic, you see—but I'm not an informant. It's not betrayal if you supply the information voluntarily, and without malice. I've been to the Lincoln Heights jail and Tehachapi, so I understand these things. Papa thinks I'm naïve, but I'm not. He blames himself for me going to jail, but I settled my own hash on that one. He's just a self-absorbed little Communist, and he thinks everything evolves from him. I'm horrible, aren't I? I play on my papa's guilt and get everything I want out of him."

She talked with her hands and waved her cigarette in time. Her dress was dusted with old ash burns.

"Does Claire know that your father informed on her? Do any of her people know?"

"Of course not. It's not betrayal if you hold your mud and don't say anything. Hold your mud is a penitentiary term. I got it from the lezzies at Tehachapi. They all looked liked Dust Bowl refugees, except that they're fat. They liked to watch the regular girls take showers, so now I only take baths when Papa tells me to. The worst lezzie was this Sheriff's matron named Dot Rothstein. She tried to get the regular girls to do things with a bar of soap shaped like a prick."

I shut my eyes. *Please stop talking. Please don't think I'm like you.*

Andrea said, "You think you're unique, but you're not. Everybody shuts their eyes when I talk about lezzies and the penitentiary. Everybody thinks I'm crazy, so don't think you're unique. It doesn't make me bad that I did it with girls. You think I'm crazy, but I'm just impolitic. I only did it with girls a few times, and I'm not a snitch."

I opened my eyes. Andrea's dress was covered with ash; I started to brush it off, then pulled my hand back. A waiter walked by with a drink tray. Andrea stood up and grabbed two whiskies. She said, "Don't think you're unique," and walked away.

I shut my eyes. I pretended that I was out on the town with Ellen Drew and Jack Kennedy. We went to the Trocadero; Dudley Smith and Bette Davis twirled by us on the dance floor. Ellen, Jack and I—quite the cutups. We had a late supper at Dave's Blue Room and rice cakes in Little Tokyo. There were no Jap roundups. There was no Andrea Lesnick, no Bill Parker, no Claire De Haven. I was very far away from this goddamn room.

The party noise subsided. I opened my eyes and saw the two Lesnicks walk out, draped around a comradely Sergei Rachmaninoff. He kissed the tops of their heads and made way for Hideo Ashida to walk out in front of them. I'd wanted to kiss Hideo good night, with an audience present. It didn't matter now—because I was a snitch.

Claire was gone. There was no one I wanted to bid good night or felt compelled to entrap. I gathered up my purse and coat and walked outside with a group of alleged Fifth Column strangers. The strangers dispersed in front of the house; I walked across the street to my car.

William H. Parker stepped out of the car parked behind mine. William H. Parker, in his slack uniform. William H. Parker, unsteady on his feet. William H. Parker, with no place to go at 2:00 a.m. William H. Parker, with nothing to do—except entrap me.

I walked up to him. William H. Parker, with his bourbon breath. William H. Parker, unshaven. William H. Parker, with his skivvies exposed and his shirt on inside out. William H. Parker, with his drooping gun belt.

I said, "How fucking dare you." I said, "I'm more Red than Claire De Haven, so indict me." I said, "If you saw me kiss Hideo Ashida, I meant it."

I called him a voyeur and a malicious martinet. I cursed his malevolent God and his sexless marriage. I was *this* close to him. I smelled the stale urine on his trousers. I asked him how often he passed out and pissed himself. I damned him for knowing how lonely I was and for exploiting my grotesque need for adventure. I was *this* close to him. I saw the spit bubbles on his lips and the caked grime at his collar. I saw the chain for the cross around his neck. I saw a film of tears over his eyes.

I must have shouted. House lights went on behind us. Parker did not move, Parker did not speak, Parker did not flinch or offer rebuttal.

More house lights went on. I willed Claire's lights to flare and expose us—and failed. I called Parker a parasite and a vampire. I brought up fresh invective and felt my voice crack. Parker was *this* close to me. I knew that he would never flinch or lower his eyes. I had no voice to extend the indictment.

I snapped first. I wheeled and got into my car as Parker stood mute. I smoked and watched the house lights dim over X number of minutes or hours. I checked my rearview mirror and saw that he'd gone. I cursed him for leaving me.

Two upstairs lights flared within Claire's house. I stared at the window brackets and willed movement. I succeeded this time.

Reynolds Loftis and Chaz Minear kissed. Claire pranced in a kimono. She had dyed her hair jet black.

They walked out of the light and left me alone. I became frightened. I conjured Bucky, Lee, Scotty, Hideo, Brenda and Elmer to keep me company. William H. Parker pushed his way in with them. I cursed him and banished him. He refused to go away.

I thought of Andrea Lesnick. I played the recording of her crazy remarks and indictment of me. It was worse than being scared and alone. I'd forgotten to turn off the device; the recording included a long pause and my tantrum spewed at Bill Parker. I sounded picayune and entirely ununique.

My voice faded into hoarse whispers and silence. I turned off the device and laid my head on the steering wheel. I didn't want to go home. I tried to sleep and grasped for consciousness every time I got close.

X number of hours brought dawn. Milk trucks made their rounds; children skipped off to school. Music drifted over from Claire's house. A small ensemble played "Perfidia."

December 16, 1941

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LOS ANGELES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1941

Women.

Joan Woodard Conville and Kay Lake—persistent distractions. Bette Davis—hard to ignore.

Parker stood on the parade lawn. The Academy was hosting a *biiiiig* war-bond rally. Miss Davis was the surprise emcee.

Flags galore. A big lawn crowd. A dais packed with local hotshots. There's Miss Davis—sprinkling ruby dust.

Call-Me-Jack sucked in his gut. Two-Gun Davis leered. Bill McPherson stayed awake. Thad Brown and Archbishop Cantwell tittered. A *biiiiig* question loomed. Why is Dudley Smith here?

Miss Davis strolled the dais. She moved man to man. She touched arms and left lifelong crushes. She curtsied for His Eminence. She moved on to Dudley. He stroked her leg under the table.

It can't be. It shouldn't be. How COULD it be?

Folding chairs covered the lawn. The crowd was half cops, half paying stiffs. Parker took his seat. He was dead-to-rights, far-gone shot to shit.

The sun burned his eyes. His head throbbed. His uniform chafed. Miss Conville and Miss Lake crawled around inside him.

He crawled away from Miss Lake and drove to Saint Vibiana's. The night watchman unlocked the sanctuary. He prayed for three hours straight.

He invoked the Holy Trinity and revoked The Thirst. He recited abstinence prayers. He emptied his backup jug outside the church.

He drove to the Bureau and cleaned up. He was emaciated. He'd worn his uniform shirt inside out.

He put on a fresh uniform. He brushed his teeth bloody. The duty sergeant brought him an envelope.

He opened it. His hands shook and tore the flap. The Northwestern cops delivered. There's Joan Woodard Conville.

There was one snapshot. It was backside-annotated. "Bowler,

Wisconsin. 5/23/39."

She sat on a split-rail fence. She wore a plaid shirt, high boots and jodhpurs. Her hair was cinched and center-parted. She radiated a severe and breathtakingly implacable beauty.

He peeled the envelope at dawn. He'd frayed the picture already.

Bette Davis walked to the microphone. Cheers went up. She glanced at Dudley. Did the Dudster just *blush*?

Miss Davis spoke. The loudspeakers futzed and distorted her words. The men at the dais swooned.

"… and three wonderful new members of the Los Angeles Auxiliary Police—the Hearst Rifle Team! They will now perform a daring trick with my very own unrelated namesake, James Edgar—"

The loudspeakers refutzed. Jim Davis hopped to the lawn and fired two .45's in the air. The crowd locomotive-cheered. A Negro man in jockey silks walked up a palomino. Parker recognized him. He played slaves in plantation films.

He helped Two-Gun Davis up on the horse. Davis kicked his spurs and charged the nag down to the edge of the lawn. He dismounted and stuck a cigarette between his lips. The crowd went nuts.

Parker scanned the dais. Call-Me-Jack wooed Miss Davis. Miss Davis smiled and rebuffed his binoculars. A balloon drifted by her. She stabbed her cigarette and popped it. The dais bigwigs cheered.

There's the riflemen. They were crouched out of sight, hambone eager. They're wearing ceremonial robes. They're packing .30-06's. They radiate *Klan*.

The crowd went all-the-way nuts. Parker got a jolt of the pre-shakes. Dudley stepped off the dais and vanished. Miss Davis waited ten seconds and scrammed off his cue. The Klan shits formed a line and aimed at Crazy Jim's cigarette.

Ready, aim, fire.

Three shots went off. Tobacco exploded forty yards out. The fucking cheers hurt.

Dudley walked toward the rose garden. Miss Davis hovered a discreet distance back. The garden was gussied up with DON'T TREAD ON ME flags. MPs flanked a table stacked with war bonds.

The Klan shits went to port arms. Parker quick-walked down to the parking lot and puked in a hedge. He heard rifle shots and covered his ears.

He saw Jim Davis drill a Mexican, back in '33. The shot missed the cigarette and took off his nose. He bled to death on the eighth hole at Wilshire Country Club.

He heard more shots and more cheers. He heard horses' hooves on the lawn. He heard "God Bless America," loudspeaker-canned.

He dropped his hands. He sucked in air and caught a wave of the bends. The lawn crowd dispersed and formed a bond-purchase line. He slow-walked around to the lawn.

Thad Brown was up on the dais. Call-Me-Jack and the Negro jockey traded quips. The Negro did a soft-shoe and promoted a buck off the Chief. Thad signaled Parker: *See El Jefe now*.

The Negro took off with his swag. Thad trailed him. Parker bolted the steps. Call-Me-Jack slid him a chair.

"You're off the Watanabe job. Your stunt with Ace Kwan queered it. You're lucky Ashida had a leash on you. Dud reports directly to me now. I advise you not to protest."

Parker said, "Yes, sir."

Jack scratched his balls. "You stay on the blackouts, the roundups, and all our war-planning work. Chinatown's still iffy, so I'm sending Jim Davis in to lay some voodoo on the Chinks. You and Jim go back, so I want you to watchdog him."

Parker gripped the chair slats. "I want to enlist. You'd like to get rid of me. This is your chance."

Jack grinned. "Comedian. The fucking Marx brothers combined. First, you fuck us on those phone taps and save your pal Ashida's job. Now, you want to blow town while the Feds crawl up our ass."

Parker shut his eyes. Call-Me-Jack belched scotch and bitters. It reinstilled The Thirst.

"You screwed us and did us a shitload of good, Bill. We've got a leg up on the Feds because of you. Sid Hudgens will do a feature on the Watanabe mess when Dud clears it, which'll notch us some publicity to offset this Fed snafu. All in all, I'm ahead on you. Don't queer it with me like your queered it with Ace."

Parker said, "Yes, sir."

Sid H. waltzed the Webb kid by. Call-Me-Jack winked at them.

"Go home, Bill. You've got one, remember? Reacquaint yourself with the lovely Helen Schultz Parker. Remember her? I danced with her at your wedding."

Parker stepped off the stage. Wet grass put him into a slide. He caught himself on the railing and walked to the parking lot.

Simple sunlight hurt. His uniform felt like a bug swarm. He got out the picture and caught new details.

Her teeth were slightly crooked. Her hands were as big as most men's.

Thad Brown walked up. Parker said, "Horrall canned me."

Thad shrugged. "Dud'll get us a clean solve or hang it on some fiend who should have burned for deals ten times as bad. One of us will be Chief after the war, Bill. We'll thank our lucky stars we've got guys like the Dudster shoveling the shit for us."

"It rankles, Thad. Don't tell me it wouldn't rankle you."

Thad shrugged. “Dud’s got four dead Japs in Highland Park. I’ve got a dead Jap in a phone booth. Dud’s got no leads because there’s a war on, and the Japs won’t talk to white cops. The same shit applies to me. A solve’s a solve, and the same thing goes for no-hopers. A dead Jap’s a dead Jap, and white cops didn’t start this war.”

Sunlight hit the photo. Most redheads had freckles. Miss Conville did not.

Thad said, “Who is she?”

Parker got out his notebook and pen. His hand trembled. Thad noticed it. Parker jotted her particulars.

“Find her for me. Will you do that?”

Thad nodded. “Go home, Bill. Dead Japs are dead Japs. Pretend that you’re like the rest of us for a while.”

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LOS ANGELES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1941

Call-Me-Jack said, "You and Bette Davis. Jesus."

Dudley said, "Yes, sir. Our Savior indeed."

"How did you finagle it?"

"Gaelic charm, sir."

"*She's* the charmer. Jesus, the line's backed up all the way to Chavez Ravine. Gene B. thinks she'll sell fifty G's."

"I took her for a spin through the ravine, sir. Mexican peasants swarmed the car. It was as if the Virgin of Guadalupe had appeared." Call-Me-Jack belched. "Sid Hudgens is writing it up. 'Diva Davis Wows Boys in Blue. Grown Men Fall at Her Feet.' Jesus, and you're *screwing* her."

The Chief had an on-the-grounds hideout. It featured reclining seats scrounged off a train wreck. Ben Siegel donated the bar supplies.

A window overlooked the parade lawn. A wall peek scoped the officers' lounge. Dudley walked over and peeped the slot.

Mike, Dick and Scotty were there. Ditto the porcine Buzz. Three other men stood around. They were plainly vexed.

Jack lit a cigar. "What gives, Dud?"

Dudley leaned on the wall. "We're nine days in on the Watanabe case, sir."

"I read your second summary. The gist is 'Fuck those Japs, it's going nowhere.' "

Dudley said, "That's correct, sir."

Jack pinched a neck cyst. He was double-wide fat. Brenda Allen fucked him most Tuesdays. She said he was hung like a flea.

"I get the picture. It's a baffler, which fucking stews you. You'd like to close it out kosher, just to say you did it. Boo hoo, boo hoo. The war upstaged you, and now I've got you on a clock."

Dudley smiled. "Yes, sir. New Year's is sixteen days off."

Call-Me-Jack waved his cigar. "I canned Bill Parker."

"A wise move, sir."

"He fucked with Ace Kwan. We can't have that. Ace is the number-one Chinaman in this white man's town."

Dudley said, "He is, sir."

"The Ashida kid keeps popping up and making himself useful. He's like a fucking jack-in-the-box. He helped us on the phone-tap deal, and he threw down against Parker with Ace. He's chummy with Parker, then he comes in for the other guy. They had to be working rogue on the Watanabe job, which constituted another good reason to cut our fucking losses."

Dudley lit a cigarette. "Ace and I have conceived a wartime plan, sir. You'll be in for 5%. Young Hideo is essential to our endeavors."

Call-Me-Jack ghoul-grinned. "Tell me as much as you think I should know. You understand how I operate. I'm a see-no-evil/hear-no-evil sort of guy."

Dudley glanced out the window. Bette's bond line covered the lawn.

"The internment will produce a significant backlog of affluent Japs, indignant and anxious to avoid incarceration. Ace has tunnels under the Pagoda. They could house a hundred Japs, easily."

Call-Me-Jack sniffed the air. "I smell green. Give me a little taste, and cut me off before I start drooling."

Dudley smiled. "I know you know Terry Lux, sir. He hosts our softball games and dries out the film colony elite."

"Sure. Terry does nose jobs for Yids trying to pass. That, and he's a do-gooder. He did free work on those kids who got scorched in that pileup on the coast road."

"Terry's a face man, sir. He has quite the avid interest in eugenics and other advanced forms of racial science. My plan is to have him cut Japs to look Chink, which may or may not work, given that most white folks can't tell them apart. The fees will be quite lucrative, and the cut Japs will be able to comport openly in Chinatown, under Ace's high-priced protection. The procedure itself has not been perfected, but I am optimistic. There's also a smut-film angle that will certainly play out."

Jack buffed his badge. "I'm on the hook, Dud. Get to Ashida before I know too much."

Dudley said, "He is an astonishingly gifted forensic scientist. His gifts far exceed the legendary Ray Pinker's. I do not wish to see Dr. Ashida or any members of his family imprisoned, and I wish to vouch his sub-rosa employment with the Los Angeles Police Department for the duration of the war. I intend to ensure Dr. Ashida's services and employ him in my endeavors with Ace Kwan. He is unpopular in the Japanese community at this moment, but that will change when the Japs are hauled off en masse, and a handsome young Japanese man appears to explain the alternatives."

Jack tapped his wristwatch. "See-no-evil/hear-no-evil. That fucking stated, I will reiterate. I want a Jap killer indicted by New Year's—no-tickee, no-washee, and I'll sign your Army release papers the second the grand jury complies. I talked to Sid H. before the rally. He's going over to the *Herald*. The Hearst Rifle Team boys are tight with Mr. Hearst, and they set it up. Mr. Hearst has been running hot since that *Citizen Kane* picture came out, and he's got a thermometer so far up his ass that it hurts. He's looking to make friends with some cops not adverse to cracking heads in Hollywood, and your name quite naturally came up. Sid plans to write some front-page spreads once you've got a suspect, so don't shilly-shally. He's bringing Jack Webb in as his legman, so we've got a friendly press on this one."

A ruckus erupted next door. Dudley checked the wall peek. Mike Breuning waved a Nazi flag. The new men had that caged-beast look. Call-Me-Jack waddled over.

"What gives? What's with the goddamn flag?"

Dudley said, "You know my boys, so I'll introduce the other lads. Left to right, we have Bill Koenig, Fritz Vogel and Douglas Waldner. The former two work the 77th Street DB. Waldner is on the Sheriff's. Their early-wartime loyalties are suspect, and properly so. The Bund, the Shirts, the Klan, the Christian Nationalist Crusade. I would say that my boys have just fulfilled their worst fears of exposure."

Jack went *Tut-tut*. "You're co-opting muscle. It's slick, son. Dudley Smith knows you fight fire with fire, so he brings in reinforcements."

"Just so, sir."

"Go to it, then. I've got an early lunch with Mayor Fletch and Ed Satterlee. We've got our own Jap shit to sort through."

Dudley clicked his heels, Kraut-style. Call-Me-Jack yukked and went out a side door. Laughter drifted up. Bette wooed the yokels. Men stretched tall. Their wives glared.

Call-Me-Jack sucked in his gut and stretched to his tiptoes. Bette saw him and made with the smiles. Dudley opened a connecting door. The lounge ruckus died.

He didn't know the new lads. They made him, fast. It's the Dudster. He's Jack Horrall's hard boy.

Koenig was Scotty Bennett size. Vogel exuded mean. Waldner had that fetching storm trooper look. It urged Jews to flee.

Dudley strolled up to them. He snatched the flag from Breuning and ripped it to tatters. Nobody moved, nobody breathed.

"You've heard the threat, and you know that I'll implement it. Raise your hands if you're in."

Vogel raised his hand. Koenig raised his hand. Waldner raised his hand. Scotty stood by and looked young. Meeks stood by and looked sullen. Breuning and Carlisle stood by. They issued subdued mean.

Dudley said, “You are now detached to the soon-to-be-celebrated Watanabe homicide case. You will work under my supervision and the direct orders of Sergeants Breuning and Carlisle. Your job is to locate and help us select a range of suitably coercible eyewitnesses, along with a range of suitably perverse Japanese suspects. For the latter, you will scour the Fort McArthur stockade, the Terminal Island penitentiary, the Hall of Justice jail, the Lincoln Heights jail and the various L.A. Police and Sheriff’s divisional jails for politically incarcerated suspects with no alibis for the afternoon of Saturday, December 6. See Sergeants Breuning and Carlisle for more specific details.”

They took it in. Koenig cracked his knuckles. Vogel snapped his suspenders. Waldner went *Ja, mein Führer*.

Vogel said, “I’m not squawking, and I don’t mind this kind of work. You coming down on us feels indiscriminate, though. I know a lieutenant at Wilshire who’s twice as jungled up as any of us.”

Dudley said, “You’re speaking of?”

“Carl Hull. I worked the Red Squad with him, under Jim Davis. He’s a 100% America First. How’s this? He wrote that speech that put Charles Lindbergh in the shit.”

Indeed.

Hull was Bill Parker’s confrère. Hull was a scholarly rightist. Bill Parker peruses a Deutsches Haus tract: *This looks like a left-wing tract in an outside deal I’m working.*

Waldner went antsy. Dudley goosed him. Waldner said, “Hull was in the Shirts. I used to see him at rallies.”

Indeed.

Koenig went antsy. Dudley goosed him. Koenig said, “I saw Hull with that twit Bill Parker, over at Wilshire. It was the day before the Japs hit Pearl. It looked like they were cooking something up.”

Carlisle said, “Nobody move. I know that look. The boss’s wheels are turning.”

Dudley winked at him. “Dick, lad. You and Mike find a copy of Colonel Lindbergh’s grand speech of September 11, and deliver it to Lieutenant Hull at Wilshire Station. Tell him to meet me at the Malibu Rendezvous restaurant at 4:00 p.m. today.”

Breuning and Carlisle lit out. The new lads went *Huh?* Dudley shut his eyes. It quashed distractions.

He’d talked to Ed Satterlee. Ed said the L.A. Feds owned a fink psychiatrist. Kay Lake was seen leaving his office. A Red shrew named Claire De Haven befriended her. Kay Lake attended a party at the shrew’s home last week. The shrew invited her to a second party held just last night. He was initially tweaked. Ben Siegel got him a guest list. Ace Kwan said Terry Lux was drying out Claire De Haven. Parker. Initial suspicions, *strategic concerns. Confluence—the Feds and Dr. Saul Lesnick. The De Haven shrew and Kay Lake. Carl Hull and Bill Parker, "cooking something up." "Outside deal I'm working." All instinctive—and all unverified*.

Dudley opened his eyes. Scotty Bennett loomed.

"Yes, lad?"

"I've got to tell someone. It's driving me nuts."

Dudley said, "Tell them what, lad?"

Scotty said, "I fucked Joan Crawford."

He just missed Bette. He stepped outside and saw her Packard laying tracks.

She left the place gaga. Men fanned themselves—*whew!* Little boys compared lipstick-smacked cheeks.

Dudley lit out. He took the parkway-Valley route. He chased three bennies with cold coffee.

He hooked through Pasadena and Glendale. Ranch roads shot him to the Malibu hills. Ace Kwan and Lin Chung did the advance work. Terry Lux approved their guinea pig.

A Jap wino. Strong Jap physiognomy. A eugenicist's dream.

He phoned Hideo Ashida and told him 1:00 p.m. He said, "Lad, you can't afford to miss this show."

The Malibu hills played peekaboo with the ocean. The Channel Islands dipped off a cloud bank. The hill road hit the coast road and dead-ended. Dudley drove north to the spot.

Pacific Sanitarium. Right there, on the land side. Quite the grand spot.

A converted hacienda. Plush acreage. Lovely lawns and a putting green. Robed patients, out strolling. Lourdes for the dissolute rich.

Dudley parked in the *porte cochère*. Dr. Terry strolled out. Dressed in tennis whites, per always. Terry could *play*.

Terry closed out Big Bill Tilden once. Big Bill was in for shock treatments. It failed to curb his yen for young boys.

Dudley got out and stretched. Terry ambled up. Women found him enticing. He allegedly bounced both ways.

They shook hands. Terry dispensed a bone crusher. He squeezed tennis balls for a Grip of Steel.

"Dud. Always a pleasure."

"For me, as well, Doctor."

"Lin Chung said you observed the cut on a man named Namura."

Dudley lit a cigarette. "I did, yes. Lin was less than satisfied with the results."

Terry said, "Lin's a nose-job man. If your Jew daughter's got a big beak, Lin's the surgeon for you. Beyond that, he's a butcher. Beyond that, I don't know if mass-scale cuts on fugitive Japs is feasible. It might end up being a three- or four-step procedure, with ambiguous results. What I dig is the psychology and race science. The Japs and Chinks hate each other, and it's virtually impossible to tell them apart. You know the drill on Nanking, right? The Japs dumped Chink babies out of *airplanes. All* Japs feel superior to *all* Chinks. Now, you cut Japs to look Chink. I'm a eugenicist. The potential ramifications here wow me."

Dudley smiled and tossed his cigarette. Terry went *After you.*

They toured the grounds. Terry furnished narration. Hopheads and boozehounds strolled by them. They sipped purgative potions and cleansed their sapped souls.

There's Lupe Vélez. There's that L.A. loop. Ruth Mildred Cressmeyer scraped her. There's Ellen Drew. Jack Kennedy breezed through her life last weekend.

There's a frail quail. She's Andrea Lesnick. Her daddy's a psychiatrist and left-wing race man. Race science crossed political lines. God was dead. Let's build *Übermenschen* to replace him.

That loop again. Saul Lesnick, M.D. Kay Lake was seen at his office.

They entered the main building. Note the long corridor. Note the swank bedrooms and wide-open doors. Note the hopheads lashed to their beds. Watch them writhe and kick white horse.

That loop again. White horse was scarce in L.A. now. His coontown pushers were vexed. Carlos Madrano ran horse in Mexico. That loop—an insiders' cluster fuck.

The corridor hooked into an ell. Both sides were lined with steam rooms. Note the portholes. Dr. Terry liked to peep.

Dudley peeped. The patients' names and allotted times were taped to the doors.

There's Raoul Walsh. He's gouting sweat in the buff. There's Anita O'Day, pacing in steam clouds. There's a tall woman, perched on a ledge.

She's desiccated but regal. Her ribs show on one side only. Her breasts are asymmetrical. She's awash in sweat.

"Claire Katherine De Haven."

Kay Lake's new friend. Saul Lesnick's analysand. That loop as ratchet gear.

Click, one more notch. Claire De Haven, leftist dilettante. Fed informant Lesnick. Enter Miss Lake. Click—she could be a snitch herself.

Click—the irregular loop. Click—let's brace Carl Hull. Click—do I sense Bill Parker here?

He studied Claire De Haven. Her nipples were dark for such a fair woman. Dark veins ran through her breasts.

Terry smiled. *Who's the peeper now?* They walked down the hall. The cut room was small. A wizened Jap was strapped to a table-bed.

He was out cold. A plastic bag and feeder tube were hooked to his left wrist. Cutting tools were laid out on a tray.

Hideo Ashida stood by. He clasped his hands that classic Jap way.

Dudley said, "Dr. Lux, Dr. Ashida."

Terry said, "Doctor, a pleasure."

Ashida said, "A mutual pleasure, sir."

Terry donned rubber gloves. "Stand back five feet. There'll be blood."

Dudley stepped back. Ashida stepped back. The Jap wino dozed on.

Terry quick-raked his hair with barbers' shears and got close to his scalp. Terry alcohol-daubed his face and grease-pencil marked it. Terry clamped his head in a vise gadget clamped to the table.

He poked the man's face. A nurse walked in. Terry mock-growled at her.

She blushed. She placed a sponge tub between the wino's legs. Terry nodded. She rolled the tool tray over.

Knives, scalpels, skin peelers. Four bone saws. Skin clamps that resembled hair clips.

Terry dispensed winks. He flexed his fingers and picked up a scalpel. He leaned in and cut.

He peeled cheekbone flesh down to muscle strands and rolled it onto a clamp. The nurse sponged blood. Terry studied the strands.

"Maybe, maybe not. If you're looking for a quick assessment, you're out of luck. For this to work, we might need something like an assembly line. I think this man might need resinous injections to puff out his cheeks and alter his skin tone—and even then, you'd have more luck fixing him up with a 'Joe Wong' ID card."

A fly buzzed through the room. It circled Ashida's face. Ashida ignored the fly and studied the wino.

Terry went back in. He cut and stretched tendons. He sopped up blood and fixed studs to ledged bone. The nurse smeared absorbent putty below the wino's eyes.

Ashida watched. Dudley watched him watch. His eyes dipped to a window at precise intervals. The lad embodied astounding *focus*. Dudley checked his watch and timed the glances. Three minutes, exactly. Eyes right, eyes left. The procedure to the window and back.

The window framed a picnic lawn. Robed hopheads lingered. The lad glanced out with intent.

Terry cut and sawed bone. Blood sprayed the room. Ashida tracked the window. Five, six, seven times. There, now—see him blink.

There's Kay Lake, at a picnic table. She's embroiled with Andrea Lesnick.

Young Hideo and round-heeled Kay. Still chummy past their phone-tap pulls. That loop. Another ratchet click.

Terry sawed. Loose skin hit Dudley's shoe. He shook his foot and divested it. He walked out to the hallway.

Ashida walked out. Dudley read his gleam.

"Are you impressed? I would assume that this part of our plans would work to safeguard a fair number of your people."

Ashida said, "It can't possibly work, but I'm impressed."

Dudley lit a cigarette. "Tell me why, please."

"I'm impressed because it's a bold and radical measure. I'm impressed because it both acknowledges and plays hell with racial purity, and because it affirms the ultimate separation that defines race."

Dudley tingled. "You are a very bright penny, Hideo."

"Thank you, Dudley."

The saw noise escalated. Terry said, "Shit."

Ashida said, "I would like to shoot some movie footage with a friend of mine. She gave me a camera. Our intent is to expose the injustice of the roundups."

Ratchet click.

"They are indeed unjust. Proceed, then. You have my consent."

The saw noise escalated. Terry said, "Shit. I nicked the occipital ridge."

Ashida hovered close. Their coat sleeves brushed.

Dudley said, "My Japanese brother."

Ashida said, "My Irish brother."

The saw noise got to him. Malibu '41 meets Dublin '19. Grafton Street—screams and sirens. The noise quashed his good-byes and pushed him outside.

The Malibu Rendezvous was straight across the road. Dudley jaywalked over. Army spotters had commandeered the parking lot. They manned machine guns and searchlights.

Dudley walked in. The motif was lacquered trophy fish and driftwood. Carl Hull had the place to himself. His head poked above a back booth.

A jukebox blared noise. Dudley pulled the plug. The *bam!* silence spooked Hull. He looked over and saw the Dudster. He bolted his drink and waved on a refill.

Dudley sat down across from him. Hull wore Navy ensign's blues. Call-Me-Jack okayed his enlistment. He'd heard the scuttlebutt.

"The getup surprises me, Carl. I didn't think you approved of this war."

The barman brought a triple. Dudley waved him away. Hull knocked back half of the juice.

"You don't, either. You don't sit things like this out, though. You know how it works."

"I do, yes."

Hull said, "So does Colonel Lindbergh. I wrote that speech for him, and so what? We both know the Jews engineered this war to put us in hock to the Reds. Your implied threat isn't much of a threat, and I can't figure out for the life of me why you're shaking me down."

Dudley smiled. "We weren't at war when you wrote that speech, but we're at war now. That fact renders my implied threat golden. The Jews are the Jews, and they are a grand scapegoat for all manner of the world's ills, although I hardly think that their shoddy business practices mandate genocide. You are politically sound only up to a point, Carl. You do not possess the sterling mind and brilliant acumen of your dear friend Bill Parker, and you are blinded by unintelligent hatred in a way that he is not. You flinched when I said 'Bill Parker,' Carl. I'm wondering why."

Hull jiggled his glass. Booze sloshed on the tablecloth.

"Wonder away, Dud."

Dudley said, "I'm monitoring Parker. I have no intention of upsetting the applecart of anything he or the two of you may be running outside of your normal duties. You hitched your star to the man a long time ago, and I am simply gathering intelligence to vouch my autonomy in the unfortunate event that grand Bill becomes Chief."

Hull unclenched. He stirred his drink and licked the swizzle stick.

"You're tweaking me for a reason. Tell me what you've got."

Dudley said, "I have a left-wing psychiatrist turned out by the Feds, and his dope-fiend daughter sprung from Tehachapi. I have a leftist woman named Claire De Haven, and Officer Lee Blanchard's inamorata, Katherine Lake."

Hull smiled. "We're operating the Lake girl. It was Bill and I, but I pulled out. We wanted to build a sedition profile on the De Haven woman and these Reds she lords it over. The real war starts when this one ends. You know that as well as I do. We wanted to get our feet wet and lay the groundwork for what's coming. I had a pink sheet on the Lake girl. We knew she was out for kicks and malleable beyond our wildest dreams. We sent her in to collect dirt on Claire De Haven, but I had second thoughts."

Dudley smiled. "And your second thoughts pertained to?"

Hull said, "Bill himself. The operation was a sweet deal, and justified all the way. Bill was out on a limb with it, though. He'd lost his sense of proportion, and I could tell that he was off the deep end on the girl."

Dudley shook his head. "Such zealotry saddens me, Carl. It is always naïvely conceived and fatuously executed. I would call Miss De Haven and her cell harmless. They may prove to be convenient scapegoats for aesthetic reasons, but I find 'sedition' an uncomfortable stretch. I may or may not ask you to monitor this silly pogrom for me. If you inform Bill Parker of our conversation, I will kill you."

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LOS ANGELES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1941

Sentry posts ran down the coast. MPs scanned southbound traffic. The beachfront was jammed with machine-gun nests.

Ashida felt *Jap* and looked *Jap*. He was too *Jap* to get cut and look *Chink*. It wouldn't work anyway. The Lux-Smith plan was madness. He told Dudley that. The Japanese and Chinese were one race. Nationhood divided them. Biology did not. Terry Lux knew that. He simply wanted to *cut*.

The notion remained tantalizing. It was a controlled experiment spawned by world war. How would racially altered people behave? An all-new discipline of eugenic psychology results.

Ashida swerved inland. He couldn't risk a stop-and-frisk. He was stretched thin. He might blurt the names of his many white patrons. They were the ones stretching him.

He said good-bye to *Dudley* and huddled with *Kay*. She was soon to join *Claire* for a mud bath. *Claire* gave *Kay* camera gear for *Comrade Hideo*. He secured permission to film the roundups. *Comrade Dudley* granted consent.

The canyon was narrow-laned and twisty. He oversteered and induced fishtails. His foot slipped off the clutch.

He was exhausted. He'd been up since dawn yesterday. Every moment stretched him.

Kay's love charade stretched him. Claire stretched him. She cogently analyzed the roundups. She said, "Will you shoot some film for us, darling? Your eye would be invaluable."

He said, "Yes." It was easy. That fact astonished him.

He went home. He tried to sleep and failed. He got up and worked the Watanabe case.

He canvassed Japanese curio shops. He pressed on swords purchased by white men. Half the shop owners recognized him. They refused to converse. The other half said they knew zilch.

The roundups were on overdrive. He choked on the hate and fear.

He saw Bill Parker, couched in his car. He appeared comatose. The Sunday-morning Parker was all raw-sober nerves. The Tuesday-morning Parker was half-dead.

He called the War Department and tried to track Jack Webb's lead. Jack said a sailor saw the purple-sweatered white man. The sailor shipped out of L.A. that night. He pressed a clerk on troop movements for December 6. The clerk refused to divulge.

He called PC Bell. He requested records for the Santa Monica pay phones. The clerk told him to submit the proper forms.

He went to the morgue and talked to Nort Layman. They discussed The Knife found at the Griffith Park scene. They reexamined the wound photos of the four dead Watanabes. They reexamined the frozen cadavers nine days postmortem.

They agreed. It might be The Knife, replicated. The Knife might be the murder weapon.

They discussed the poison found in the victims' livers. He detailed his tea-and-soiled-clothes theory. Nort found it credible. Nort identified the poison by its bond components. It was anachronistic and was not mass-produced under a brand name.

It could not be purchased wholesale or retail. A skilled chemist could manufacture it in large or small quantities. The killer was a skilled chemist or knew a skilled chemist. Said chemist was adept at ancient Asian chemistry.

The cut-through hit the Valley. Ashida took ranch roads to the Cahuenga Pass. Hollywood traffic was light. Full dusk was on. He could shoot Little Tokyo at twilight.

Sunset downtown, Alameda south. A sawhorse roadblock at 1st Street.

He pulled up short of the barricade. He rolled film into the camera. He screwed on a mid-range lens.

Metal wheels crunched. He tracked the sound to the far side of the roadblock. Four cops pulled a jumbo handcart into view. It was piled high with rifles and shotguns.

Small radios fell off and shattered. A fat Fed trailed the cart. He held a cocked revolver.

Ashida heard screams and smelled tear gas. A Japanese boy ran toward the cart, rubbing his eyes. The fat Fed fired over his head and blew out a second-floor window.

J. Edgar Hoover leaned on a government limo and watched. Hoover wore a camel-hair topcoat. His hair was pomaded. He was diminutive.

Ashida noticed a black-and-white parked three car lengths up. He knew that license plate. He walked up and checked the front seat.

Bill Parker sleeps again. He looks beyond half-dead now. A photograph rests on the dashboard.

A woman. Quite the stern beauty. Plaid shirt, jodhpurs, high boots.

Ashida studied the photo. It was sharp-contrast black-and-white. The woman was probably red-haired.

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1941

My separate-bedroom terrace blazed with light. Lee had strung up Christmas bulbs and laid out scuffed furniture meant to be rained on. The motif acknowledged the weather and the war. I wanted to perch here on winter nights and watch festivities down on the Strip; I wanted to kill the lights on the blackout nights that were sure to come. Sirens would sound; the city would go dark within moments. I wanted to be here for that.

Scotty and I sat in deck chairs and sipped bourbon. Tinseled Christmas trees and REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR! signs were interspersed and backlit all along Sunset. We linked hands every so often and stayed in our separate selves.

We had both been out in the world today. I'd sat naked in steamed mud and plotted revolution with a woman I intended to betray; Scotty had plotted a "pervert sweep" with Dudley Smith's boys. It was drudge work for the Watanabe case, an unfolding event that bewildered him—the boy who became a policeman less than a week ago. Still, he was a quick study. He was learning the rituals of the Los Angeles Police Department, and had begun to employ its vernacular.

Mike Breuning, Dick Carlisle and Buzz Meeks were "strong-arms." Three new cops had been co-opted for a stint of "heavy work." Their new duty was to "haul in Jap sex fiends," "ex-cons with perv jackets" and "ding-farm runaways." Bright boy, troubled boy—part pastor's son, part thug. You'd be tussling with Catholic lads and fucking me at the best hotel in Aberdeen if you weren't here with me now. The Bureau's New Year's dance is coming up. Wear your kilt and formal dinner jacket; I'll wear a black silk dress and a tartan sash to match your ensemble. Rest your hand on my leg and call me "Katherine," darling. You're imperiously tall. You make me wish that I was as tall as Claire *Katherine* De Haven.

Claire and I removed our robes and stepped into the mud bath; the mud was warm and caused us to get goose bumps. We took in each other's bodies as we slid in.

Claire was depleted from her dope-purging treatments and was quixotically alive with notions of apostasy. I thought she'd try to draw me out and trap me in falsehoods and contradictions. I was wrong. She wanted to discuss our movie.

I wanted to make a film devoid of stated text. That tactic would foil Bill Parker's attempts to deploy the film as evidence of sedition. It would nullify Parker's mission, while I made his mission my grand moment in the overall grand moment of the war. Claire was fixated on the roundups as a grave and immediate injustice. She considered Hideo Ashida to be the deus ex machina of the male Japanese psyche, and believed that he should editorialize on film. I agreed, but stipulated that anything he said must be void of inflammatory content. Claire said she planned to speak at a rally in Pershing Square Thursday morning. The rally loomed as a populist free-for-all. Gerald L. K. Smith would spew hate for the Christian Nationalist Crusade; the Young Socialist's Party and Bund would be there. Claire and Reynolds Loftis would speak themselves.

She said, "Darling, *you* should speak. I'm playing a hunch here. You could fire up our crowd, and the crew could film their reaction. You're right about actual speeches undercutting the force of the mise-en-scène. But you can *give* the speech, and we can capture the response."

I enthusiastically agreed. I would tell the crew to film my speech with full sound; I would make certain that that moment ran unexpurgated in the movie. The segment would mark my defiance of William H. Parker and would strike a blow to the heart of Claire's tormentor. Claire would never know the intent of this design. The film would invalidate me as a courtroom witness and accuser. Parker would not risk the embarrassment of my official dishonor. He would never know that I conceived this plan while naked with the woman he sought to destroy.

I looked down at the Strip. Scotty kept a hand on my knee and brooded. I heard Lee park his car in the driveway. He stabbed the keyhole a half dozen times and unlocked the front door; I could tell that he was drunk.

Scotty stretched and laced his hands behind his head. Lee walked upstairs and stepped out on the terrace. His uniform was rumpled; I knew he'd been scrounging at Kwan's.

Scotty turned around and looked at him. He said, "Hey, bub. How's the world treating you?"

Lee said, "Not so good."

Scotty said, "Why's that, bub?"

Lee said, “Don’t call me ‘bub,’ you punk cocksucker.”

I started to step in. Scotty squeezed my knee and stopped me. Quick boy—he reached back and unhooked his holster.

“*Blanchard*, then. How’s the world treating you, *Blanchard*? How’s tricks in Little Tokyo, *Blanchard*? It’s a nice night, *Blanchard*. Why are you so bent on fucking it up?”

Lee unfastened his gun belt and lowered it to the floor. “Dudley hasn’t uttered a fucking word to me since he started creaming for you, *Bennett*.”

Scotty said, “You sound like a fucking homo.”

Lee balled his fists. Scotty stood up and gave me a look. It said *I’m sorry/things go this way/it wasn’t my call*. I moved to the far edge of the terrace. My legs fluttered and held.

Scotty pointed to me. “Any man who’d skate on a woman like that is a fucking queer in my book.”

They were three feet apart. I felt the pull go both ways. Scotty let his shoulder rig drop. They went for each other right there.

It was a three-foot charge and collision. They came in with their guards down and made no moves to block blows. Lee dropped two body shots below Scotty’s arms, ducked his head and let Scotty swing high. Scotty swerved off balance; Lee threw a right uppercut and snapped his head back. Scotty staggered; Lee threw a hard left elbow straight at his nose. I heard bones break. Lee raised his head and caught a faceful of Scotty’s blood. It blinded him. He flailed and rubbed his eyes. Scotty grabbed his head and bit off a piece of one ear. Lee screamed. Scotty spit the piece in his face and head-butted him. Lee’s nose cracked and gouted blood. He screamed again; his arms were low; he was wide open.

Scotty took one step back and dug his feet in. He threw a left hook to Lee’s rib cage and a right cross to his head. They connected; Lee reeled and stayed standing. He weaved and ducked his head. Scotty swung high and wide again, and got tangled up in his feet.

Lee had openings. Every Bucky Bleichert fight I’d seen gave me the diagram. I wanted it to end and didn’t care how. The science of it moved me and felt ghastly all at once.

Scotty stumbled and tried to gain his balance; Lee threw left-right body shots and an in-tight uppercut. Scotty reeled and hit a chair back. Lee cocked a wide left hook. He launched it, missed Scotty’s head and stumbled into him. Scotty had his balance now; they grappled and held each other upright.

Scotty jammed a knee between Lee’s legs and jackknifed him. Lee screamed and coughed blood. Scotty launched the wide left hook that Lee failed at. He aimed high and caught Lee’s head coming up.

His head snapped at a near-right angle. I heard bones *shear* and started to scream *"No."* My throat closed up; I choked on that single word.

Lee pitched forward. His eyes rolled back. Scotty threw left-right body shots. I heard Lee's ribs crack. He fell facedown on the terrace. Blood and tooth stubs poured from his mouth.

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LOS ANGELES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1941

Church inhibited The Thirst. He had The Shakes now. He sequestered himself and fought off Desire.

The sanctuary was all his. That night watchman let him in. Saint Vibiana's, again.

Parker hogged a front pew. He gripped the pew back in front of him and numbed his arms. He was booze-free since Miss Lake's tirade.

He couldn't go home. Helen would be there. She'd see his tremors and propose a cure at some rummy priests' farm. He couldn't have it on his record.

Tremors hit his legs. He dug his feet into the floor and quashed them. He was ten times past exhausted. He spent the day dogging the Alien Squad. He kept falling asleep in his car.

His body and brain got disconnected. It induced all-day brainstorms. He called PC Bell and demanded the Santa Monica pay-phone records. A shift boss said they were buried in war work. Parker persisted. The shift boss caved. Look for a reply in two weeks.

His knees spasmed. Parker regripped the pew ledge. The Sweats would start soon.

He had an 8:00 a.m. meeting. He had eleven hours to ride The Hurt out and prepare. Fletch B.'s office. The now-standard Feds and politicos. J. Edgar Hoover and Preston Exley.

The Big G-man. The ex-cop turned construction king.

Preston ran Homicide during the mid-'30s. His cop son Thomas was killed on duty. Preston buried his grief in work. Preston gutted out recurring migraines. He built the Arroyo Seco Parkway. He built low-end houses for Negroes and high-end houses for whites. He's got a local internment plan—and he's got some high-level ears.

The Jitters hit. Parker roamed the pew rows. He picked up Bibles and read his way through the Psalms. He prayed for his neglected wife. He prayed for the success of the Lake/De Haven incursion and the destruction of Claire De Haven's cell. He prayed for the courage not to drink. He prayed for Miss Conville and Miss Lake.

His prayers consumed seven hours. He roamed pews and worked his legs numb. He walked to the altar. He lit candles for his lost ones.

His congressman granddad. His irresolute father. The Okies he drove out of L.A. The people he hurt in his craven reign under Jim Davis.

He stretched out on a pew. He bypassed sleep and got up at dawn. He walked outside and got his black-and-white. The Shakes were internal now.

He drove to City Hall. He cleaned up and changed uniforms. Strong coffee stirred his blood. He wrote a manpower-shortage report. He hit Fletch B.'s office, on time.

The door was open. The office swelled.

Fletch, Call-Me-Jack, Sheriff Gene. Ward Littell and Ed Satterlee. Fey Mr. Hoover. Handsome Preston Exley.

His skin itched. His bones ached. The de rigueur handshakes scared him. Here they come now.

He endured bone crushers. He endured de rigueur laughs. Mr. Hoover flashed cold eyes.

Preston said, "You're working too hard, Bill. Demand a month's vacation. I've got pull with the mayor."

Fletch laughed. Hoover shot him a look. Fletch snapped to and arranged chairs.

Hoover took the lead chair. Preston sat beside him. The rest of them got bleacher seats. Parker dug his feet into the floor. Muscle cramps loomed.

Hoover said, "Tangential matters first. The van robbery of December 10 interests me. The Sumitomo Bank is in the Federal Reserve System, and its Jap provenance is irrelevant. Mr. Littell, you have the floor."

Parker looked at Littell. Buzz Meeks had solved the case, sub rosa. The rubber bullets. Huey Cressmeyer's prints.

Littell said, "It's dead-stalled, sir. I don't see a solve on this one."

Hoover bristled. His nails were buffed. His shirt was stiff-starched. His Masonic pin was pink gold.

"No significant criminal cases directly or indirectly related to Federal cases or even remotely related to the current roundups of Japanese subversives are to go unsolved. No significant criminal cases directly or indirectly related to the internment of all Japs in the greater Los Angeles area are to go unsolved. The Bureau will be going after the Los Angeles Police Department in February of next year. The matter of the illegal phone taps strewn throughout City Hall will become public news. I am prepared to exonerate, absolve and push dirt under the rug in this matter. I would be more inclined to pursue that course if you heed my admonishings here."

Jack said, "We all swim in the same stream, sir. What's good for the goose is good for the gander, and municipal and Federal law enforcement will be well served to present a unified front. You may or may not know that an entire Jap family was murdered here in L.A. the day before Pearl Harbor. The lead investigator thinks the case will be wrapped up by New Year's. We've got a scribe for the Hearst rags by the nuts, and he's going to run a series of puff pieces in the *Herald*. I'll tell him to work in an FBI angle. Pork barrel, sir. One hand washes the other. *Comme ci, comme ça* on the phone-tap imbroglio. We fucked up, so now we pay the piper. That stated, I think we've come to a meeting of the minds on this one."

Fletch said, "Amen."

Sheriff Gene said, "Hear, hear."

Satterlee went Comanche. "White man smoke peace pipe. Wisdom prevail."

The shtick drew laughs. Parker fought stomach cramps. Hoover puffed his pocket square.

"The roundups, Ed. Update us in one minute or less."

Satterlee said, "We're going after the fishing boats in San Pedro Harbor, and we've got the Coast Guard backstopping us on that. We're confiscating Jap firearms and running ballistics tests to compare to the evidence in preexisting Federal and local cases. We're getting ready to deploy agents to search the houses, apartments and businesses of the Japs we've already got in custody."

Fletch said, "This is a well-oiled machine you're describing."

Jack said, "We're feeding Hirohito a shit sandwich."

Satterlee said, "There's a Jap bantamweight I like. 'Tornado' Tagawa. He's fighting Manny Gomez at the Legion Stadium next week. I've got money on him. Don't make me pop him before he takes that beaner out."

The shtick drew laughs. Hoover smiled at Satterlee. Parker sensed a simmering crush.

Sheriff Gene said, "I rolled on a coroner's bulletin last Saturday. It pertained to that homicide case that Chief Horrall brought up. Our boy Nort Layman found glass particles covered with shrimp oil on the victims' feet, and he requested information from hospitals and groceries statewide. I rolled to a grocery-store call up in Lancaster. Sure as shit, they'd been consigned an order of Jap-caught and -canned shrimp, and it was sure as shit full of crushed glass. The lead went dead there, but it sure as shit felt like Fifth Column stuff to me."

Jack said, "You're talking Greek here, Gene. I don't know about this aspect of the case, but I'll pass the information along to my man, Dudley Smith."

Satterlee shivered. "The Dudster. There's a piece of work."

Fletch said, "Amen, brother."

Jack said, "He's fucking Bette Davis. That's no shit. It's one for *Ripley's Believe It or Not*."

Sheriff Gene looked at Parker. Telepathy, half-assed.

That bulletin. It ordered kickbacks to Parker himself. Sheriff Gene might know that. Call-Me-Jack dumped him off the case. Sheriff Gene might know that. Sheriff Gene was juked on Fifth Column grief. The Watanabe case? Outside his purview.

Hoover sniffed his boutonniere. It was early-morning fresh.

"We're running afield of our purpose here. Canned shrimp and Jap murder cases are not national-security priorities, while housing Japs for the duration of the war is. You're at bat, Mr. Exley. I advise you to hit for the stands."

Preston winked. "Mr. Hoover demands brevity, so I'll get to it. A contiguous stretch of the eastern San Fernando Valley is dotted with Japanese-owned truck farms. The farms could be purchased from the Japs outright, leased for the length of the war, or legally confiscated under state or Federal security-seizure laws after the owners themselves have been detained. Internment camps could be erected on those sites, utilizing California state laws on eminent domain. The detainees would work the existing farmland under the direction of a private guard force employed by my firm. Profits would be dispersed to my firm and to local government, which would help to defray the cost of our part of the overall mass internment. Leased farms that generate *substantial* profits would pay out a *nominal* percentage of those profits to the incarcerated owners themselves. 'Trusty' Japs would be allowed the privilege of participating in a furlough program, where they would be bussed to factories in downtown L.A. to work under armed supervision, and returned to their compounds at night. They would pay for their room and board and would be rewarded for their cooperation by being permitted to retain a small portion of their paychecks. The linchpin of all aspects of this proposal is *proximity*. The San Fernando Valley adjoins L.A. proper. The initial transporting of interned Japs is thus expedited. The trusty-Jap shuttle is a simple, day-to-day milk run. The farm camps themselves will create a large-scale employment boom and resultant economic boom for the city and county of Los Angeles."

Feasible. Adroit. Casually malevolent. FAMILIAR, in that it—

Ward Littell made fists.

Hoover said, "Superb, Mr. Exley."

Call-Me-Jack said, "A grand slam, in my ballpark."

Fletch said, "Kudos, Preston. It lets us house and feed our own Japs, while we keep them close at hand."

Sheriff Gene said, "It takes the pressure off the county jails and those big internment centers the War Department is planning. My deputies could run shackle chains from the Valley to the job sites. The Japs are a green-thumbed race. They turn out high-quality produce, we sell it to every class eatery in town."

Satterlee said, "Ward Littell and Bill Parker look glum, so we know we're on the right track."

Ward said, "It's ghastly. It's depraved. It's something we'll all live to regret."

Fletch said, "Ward and Bill seem to be forgetting Pearl Harbor."

It's usurious. It's exploitative. It's FAMILIAR, in that it—

Parker fought off gut cramps. Parker thought it through.

It suggested the Watanabe case. It suggested the house and farm buyouts that Buzz Meeks revealed. Actual buyouts. Rebuffed buyouts. Rumored buyouts. Secretly recorded—in no way criminal.

It all played tangential. Preston's plan played insidious and legally sound. There were no farm-buyout links to murder.

The meeting broke up. Parker's brain waves dispersed. His cramps doubled down. His legs were gone. The crowd filed out. He waved from his chair.

Sheriff Gene walked back in. "How's the boy, Bill?"

"I'm all aces, Sheriff."

"I know you requested the kickbacks on that bulletin, and that Jack pulled you off the Watanabe job."

"That's right, Sheriff."

Sheriff Gene twirled his hat. "I'm still tweaked on that canned shrimp. I had a lab man examine that sample we got up in Lancaster. He said it was full of toxic human oils."

Parker yawned. "I'm off the case, sir."

"Sure, but you could hoof it down to Pedro and hook up with the Coast Guard. They're boarding some Jap shrimp boats today. It still reads Fifth Column to me. You could scoot down there and quench both our curiosities, if you've got a mind to."

Call-Me-Jack whistled. It was wicked shrill.

"Chinatown, Bill. Riot gear. You and Jim Davis, for old times' sake."

"Riot gear" meant the tin hat and shotgun. "Riot gear" meant rock-salt rounds.

He took the elevator. The Bureau hallway buzzed. Lee Blanchard and that Bennett kid traded swats last night. The kid put Blanchard in Queen of Angels. Blanchard's shack babe inspired the grief.

How's *this* per cooze? Dud S. is sticking it to Bette Davis. *Es la* *verdad, muchacho*. Elmer Jackson saw them smooching at the Academy.

The briefing rooms buzzed. There's Dudley and his boys. Note the nose splint on Scotty Bennett. Note Sid Hudgens and Jack Webb, sitting in.

There's Thad Brown and a *Mirror* hack named Morty Bendish. Morty drooled for the dead-Jap-in-the-phone-booth caper. He wanted to lay in Pearl Harbor. The dead Jap fingered the attack. A Jap spy chilled his Jap ass and muzzled him. Thad said he found it far-fetched.

Parker signed out his riot gear. He suited up in the hallway and flexed his legs on the stairs. He made it to the garage. He drove to Chinatown.

He saw Jim Davis, outside Kwan's. Davis wore Army fatigues and packed a king-size shotgun. Uncle Ace stood beside him. His FDR cape drooped on the ground.

Parker ditched the car and walked up. Ace spit just short of his shoes. Davis said something in Chink. Ace replied in Chink and ambled off.

"Good morning, Bill."

"Chief."

"Like I always say, it's been 'Jim' since the grand jury sacked me."

Parker said, "All right. You're an ad hoc conscript. You're not the Chief."

Davis said, "You're boiling it out, I can tell. We'll get you a tonic at that herb joint in Ferguson's Alley."

The Hurt smothered him. He wore lead shoes. His shotgun weighed ten tons.

"Let's go, Jim. I want to get this day over with."

They walked Broadway north. Davis buttonholed passersby and dispensed Chink bons mots. Parker yawned through it. The Hurt paved new paths.

His legs fluttered. Sweat pooled and soaked his socks. Davis ran his mouth. *Aaah*, the old days.

The Bum Blockade. The vag sweeps. Jew-pawn FDR's campaign trips. Carl Hull and the Red Squad. Remember that Kraut hard-on, Fritz Vogel? Red riots in Pershing Square.

Bill, you stood tall there. We brought in mounted troops. We were the Cossacks. They were the rabble. Bring on the balalaika music and swords.

They waltzed. Tong boys jabbered and tong-eyed them. The Hurt moved to his head. His hat was too big. He sweat-soaked the band. The visor fell over his eyes.

Bill, you were good. How's Helen these days? You brought in Carlos Madrano. You finessed our extradition deal with the Staties. Bill the Brain.

You walked me through depositions. You wrote my grand jury spiel. You brokered our strikebreaker agreement. The merchants' cabal still owes you.

They waltzed. The Hurt gored him. Davis wooed kids with bubble gum. They stopped at the herb joint. Davis ordered him a potion. It tasted like frog shit and dirt. It gave him X-ray eyes.

It put ants in his pants. It contained ground roots and mystical powder. They left the shop and stopped at a call box. The world took on pastel hues.

Parker called Sheriff Gene. He rogered that mission to Pedro. Sheriff Gene said to hit Pier 16. Ask for Lieutenant Duguay.

They waltzed. Parker popped sweat and weaved. His taste buds popped. He exhaled mystic dirt.

North Broadway buzzed. The tong truce was five days in. It felt abrogated already. Tong boys congregated. They wore their tong kerchiefs and switchblade-cleaned their nails. They fell in behind the fat Chink-o-phile and the sweaty cop.

Parker and Davis strolled. Shop owners braced the Big Bwana and whispered tips. Dewey Lem's a 459 man. Joe Chen's a 211 man. A Chinaman plugged that Jap in the phone booth. There's a tile game at Kwan's right now. It's high stakes, it's marathon. It's drawing Hollywood folk.

They waltzed. Parker waltzed behind mystic dirt. The creeping tong boys closed the gap. They're twelve yards, ten yards, eight yards back.

Hop Sing crept straight behind them. Four Families crept, right across the street. Parker kept looking back. The fucking tong fucks crept.

Parker got scared. The Hurt and that mystic dirt had him quivered. The Hop Sing fucks were *six* yards back. Four Families was straight across Broadway.

Davis said, "They're too close."

Mystic dirt. The Fear and The Hurt. They're creeping on rubber-soled—

Parker raised his shotgun. The fucks crept on. *Four* yards now. He jacked in a round and fired.

The shotgun buckled. Rock salt blew. He nailed four Chinks in one spread. Davis aimed across the street and tripped both triggers.

He launched bigger rounds. *His* Chinks went airborne. Parker's Chinks caught the salt chest-high. Their tong threads vaporized. Shards sliced straight through to their skin.

They screamed and turned tail. Parker pumped rounds and aimed at their backs. He sighted in tight. He squeezed the trigger, slow. He knocked them down and strafed the clothes off their backs.

The blasts spooked the locals. They turned tail and ran. Jim's Chinks screamed double-loud. One punk lost two fingers. One punk groped for chunks of his ass.

Screams. Tong fucks and locals, all high-decibel. Language-stew gobbledygook.

Jim Davis whipped out his dick and wagged it. Jim Davis yelled Chink insults.

The punks crawled. They were salt-sheared and shredded. They crawled through diced clothing and blood.

Davis walked across the street. Parker followed him. Davis wagged his dick at the punks on the ground and doused them with piss.

"It's an old-country custom, hoss. I own their souls from here on in."

He bolted. Mystic dirt, pissed-on hoodlums. The ex-Chief, wagging his dick.

Parker cut down an alley. His shotgun weighed six tons. His sweat smelled putrid. His head felt wrung out.

He ran straight to Kwan's. Some shithead had egged up his car. The windshield was yolk-spattered. He ran the wiper blades and thinned out the splats.

The car started and rolled. Nobody slashed his tires. The brakes worked. Nobody cut the linings.

He drove south. Broadway ran direct to Pedro. He saw tear-gas clouds above Little Tokyo. Bluesuits swarmed low rooftops.

He thought about The Case. Sheriff Gene sanctioned him to work it. He teethed on The Case. He teethed on Dudley Smith and Hideo Ashida. He highballed it straight to Pedro.

Salt air announced the harbor. Parker skirted Fort MacArthur and the Terminal Island Bridge. A checkpoint blocked off harbor access. Duty MPs saw his black-and-white and waved him in.

The docks were hodgepodged with Coast Guard cutters and skunk-wood fishing boats. Search teams boarded the boats, six men per. The dock road was packed with jeeps and black Fed sedans.

Japs wheeled fish barrels. They looked scared. MPs strolled with M1's and leashed police dogs. The dogs growled at the Japs and drooled for their fish.

Parker drove to Pier 16. A cutter was moored there. It was rigged with grappling hooks and prow-mounted machine guns. Two Coast guardsmen and two Sheriff's deputies stood on deck. They wore slinged carbines and scanned the horizon.

An officer spotted the prowl car and walked over. He wore fatigue blues with lieutenant's bars. Parker stepped out of the car. Salty air fogged his glasses.

They shook hands. Parker stamped blood in his legs.

“Did the Sheriff call ahead?”

The lieutenant said, “He did, Captain. I told him that if you hauled tail, you could see something interesting.”

Parker said, “What have you got?”

“We’ve had our eyes on two shrimp boats that range north, up the coast to Santa Barbara. They fish north and berth here, full-time. The skippers and crews are on the Feds’ A-2 list, and their residences have been vacated. They’re all sleeping on the boats and making their fish drops covertly, at night.”

Parker considered it. “Is their canning done at a truck farm in the Valley? I’m thinking of a place owned by a Jap named Hodaka.”

The lieutenant said, “No, sir. We were tipped that these guys drop their catches at a plant in Little Tokyo.”

Parker considered it. “I read a bulletin. A Jap sub torpedoed a fishing village at the Goleta Inlet, just north of Santa Barbara. It was last week. Do you think these boats could play in somehow?”

The lieutenant shook his head. “Nix on that, sir. I read that bulletin. The boats we’re looking at are deep-sea jobs, and that Goleta village was nothing but burned-up shore-fishing craft. And, there’s this. We’re going after all-Jap crews, but that bulletin said the village humps were Japs and Chinks in cahoots, which is odd—given how those humps hate each other.”

A pierside siren *screeeed*. A guardsman dropped his ship-to-shore phone and tore up to the lieutenant.

“We’ve got a spotting-plane report, sir. That first boat anchored in Ventura, and the Sheriff’s up there raided it and said it was clean. It was all some kind of snafu. The skipper said they’ve been going out for albacore for over a year, and he had the records to prove it. They sleep on the boat because they’re all track fiends, and they blow their coin on the nags. Nobody can make a case for these guys as Fifth Column. There’s all that, plus the fact that they dump all their loads on Lou’s Fish Grotto in Long Beach.”

The lieutenant made the jack-off sign. The onboard men grabbed life jackets. It smelled like a rollout. Parker sniffed hullabaloo.

The lieutenant said, “Don’t tell me. The other boat’s coming in.”

The guardsman said, “Aye, aye, sir. It’s headed our way.”

The lieutenant blew a whistle and ran up the gangplank. Parker fast-walked behind him. A deputy lobbed life jackets. Parker snagged his. Two guardsmen retracted the anchor. The cutter pushed off.

The engines whirred and caught. It happened too fast. Parker stagger-walked to the prow and hugged a gun mount.

A telescope was fixed there. It pointed straight ahead. He took his glasses off and put an eye down. He squinted and caught the hubbub.

A two-mast fishing boat. Maybe two miles out. Tiny figures on deck. Maybe yellow men.

The cutter churned straight ahead. Waves drenched the deck. Engine noise muffled all shouts and yelled commands. Parker hugged the gun mount and kept that eye down.

The lens compressed the horizon. The cutter-to-fishing-boat gap closed. The tiny figures expanded.

Yellow men—yes.

They look scared. Their boat is stalled. Two men are priming rear-deck motors.

The cutter cut waves. The cutter cut close.

Close.

Closer.

Close now.

VERY CLOSE.

Twenty yards or knots or clicks or whatever—

Parker kept that eye down. The yellow men looked scared and mad. Parker slid his glasses on and squinted.

"Hands up, now! All hands up! All hands up, all hands on deck!"

Parker straightened up and braced himself. The boat-to-boat crash knocked him flat. His view went all upside down.

A guardsman tossed a grappling hook. Parker saw it upside down. Men with tommy guns jumped. Parker saw it upside down. Four Japs raised their—

Parker stood up. His view recalibrated. He wobble-leaped and jumped on the boat. The sea cops drew down on the Japs. The Japs raised their hands up, up, *up*.

The boat rocked. A wave hit Parker. He went sea-blind and grabbed a mast rail. He thought he saw—

The Japs reach in their pockets.

The Japs raise their hands and open their mouths.

The Japs bite down and fall down.

The Japs convulse and puke foam and—

One Jap thrashed right by Parker. Puked foam hit Parker's shoes. Parker made a crazy noise and jumped back.

He was still close. The Jap was *too* close. The Jap had smooth fingertips. The Jap had *no* fingerprints. Smooth tips meant carbolic-acid dips and—

A sea cop panicked. He arced his tommy gun down and let *go*.

Deck wood exploded. A Jap's head exploded. All the sea cops arced down and let *go*.

The Japs blew up, the deck blew up, it all blew into wood scraps and smoke.

Parker ran.

He ran from the gore and the noise. He ran toward the rear of the boat. The boat lurched. Parker tumbled down a stairwell. He went upside down and rolled belowdecks.

He hit a small compartment. He saw a might-be Jap or might-be Chink torching currency and tracts. Parker was *this* close to him. The money and paper flared into black ash.

Parker was *this close* to him. The gelt was reichsmarks and yen. The tracts were in Jap script and English. *They were just like all the tracts in this crazy mix of—*

The fucker bit a pill and thrashed. Parker stepped on his hands and broke his fingers flat. The fingertips were smooth tissue. Parker saw it. He was *this* close.

December 17, 1941

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LOS ANGELES | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1941

Kwan's basement. It's hotsy-totsy. It's egalitarian.

Everybody rubbed shoulders. The tile game was unstoppable and eighteen hours in. The war justified the misconduct. Everybody knew it. This went unsaid:

Life's short. Easy come, easy go. There's Jap subs off the coast. Those swabbies at Pearl didn't know what hit them. *We* could be next.

Benzedrine tea kept it going. Uncle Ace supplied a full bar and around-the-clock buffet. Hopheads packed the "O" den. Lin Chung morphine-soothed losing players. Brenda Allen peddled cooze at her new wartime rate. Salvador Dali's pet leopard roamed. He mauled a busboy and snatched chow mein off Count Basie's plate. Nobody gave a shit.

The minuscule meet the mighty. The elite meet the effete.

Clark Gable was there. He displayed a pic of Cary Grant with a dick in his mouth. There's Call-Me-Jack Horrall. There's Nort Layman and Ed Satterlee. There's Stan Kenton. He's with the "Misty" June Christy. She's got eyes for Scotty Bennett—all bruised and contused. Tough luck, sister—that's *Joan Crawford* draped all over him.

It was sardine-packed standing room only. The basement trapped smoke from ten thousand cigarettes. It was one big iron lung.

Dudley stood with Bette. They watched high steppers throw tiles. He'd been up since yesterday morning. Pervert patrol. They'd been rousting potential eyeball wits and death fiends.

Records checks. A new canvass. Where's that Jap-needle-in-a-haystack? Where's that perv-to-end-all-pervs?

He was near-shot exhausted. A sleepover date boded. Ace prepared them a room upstairs. Bette's hubby was occupied. He was hosting a houseboy named Man-Oh-Man Manolo. Man-Oh-Man serviced film folk. His short arm was more like a foot.

Dudley watched the game. Ace dealt tiles. Elmer Jackson played watchdog. He held Jim Davis' boss shotgun.

Jim and Whiskey Bill had indulged misconduct. They rock-salted two tong cliques. One lad developed septicemia. One lad lost three fingers. Uncle Ace was miffed.

The game was eons in. Players came and went. They succumbed to gambling fatigue and scorched pleura. Harry Cohn was sixteen hours in. He played bantamweight stiff Manny Gomez and three Chink dentists.

Harry was fifty-three grand down. He'd repaid his previous debt with van-heist money. Harry owed Ben S. forty-eight. Ben watched the game with Jew-payback eyes.

The game was incomprehensible. The players threw tile-tossing fits. Bette steady-eyed Miss Crawford. They loathed each other. Such bitch-goddess fury.

She pointed to the buffet. Clark Gable and the leopard noshed spareribs.

"Clark's a silly boy. He collects women's snatch hair. He'd fuck that beast if someone held its tail."

Dudley roared. The basement was a tinderbox. A roving waitress passed him a mai tai.

Bette said, "I'm going to use the upstairs loo. The one here is occupied. Brenda is blowing Sheriff Biscailuz."

Dudley kissed her neck. Bette ducked into the crowd. People faded out small in her swirl. Dudley lost her in a low smoke cloud. His fucking lungs burned.

The game continued. Manny Gomez cashed out. Jewboy Harry lost four straight bets and eight grand. Dudley winked at Ben Siegel. Jewboy Ben winked back.

Harry cashed out. Kibitzers booed the famous misanthrope. Harry grabbed his crotch and booed back.

Dudley steered him to Ace's office. Harry was damp and florid. The office was blessedly smokeless. Harry crashed into a chair.

"I owe Ace sixty-one G's. Why do I do this to myself? I'm a powerful man with a heart condition. Why am I such an inveterate slum crawler? The Germans are slaughtering my people, and I'm powerless to stop it. Why do I add to all the world's sorrow and grief?"

Dudley leaned on a towel rack. "You owe Ben forty-eight, Harry. You have a hundred and nine thousand in gambling debts outstanding. You can bemoan your unnecessary losses or allow me to offer you relief."

Harry said, "Fuck you, you mick cocksucker. Don't think I don't know where this is going. Don't think I'm incapable of saying 'I'm not in the smut biz these days.' "

Dudley coughed. "You saw me with Bette Davis."

Harry coughed. "Don't gloat, you mick cocksucker. I know you're *schlamming* her, and I'm not impressed. I also noticed that punk goon of yours with Joanie. That don't impress me, either. Gash like that goes for anything beefcake. Bette and Joanie are the town pumps, and given that the town is L.A., that's saying something."

Dudley grinned. "Shall I convince Bette to leave Warner's for a few months, to facilitate her appearance in a film for Columbia? Would my proposition cause you to reconsider, in that case?"

Harry said, "On my hands and knees, you mick cocksucker. In such a case, I would grovel and thoroughly enjoy it."

Dudley winked and walked back to the party. Ben S. saw him and went *So?* Dudley nodded and popped through a smoke cloud. Scotty and Joanie necked in a doorway. Clark Gable and the leopard snoozed on a couch.

Sycophants and sinners. *What* world conflict? The brave and the wrong.

Dudley walked up to the restaurant. Bette owned it now.

Tonged-up busboys hovered. Patrons pushed autograph books. Bette dished out hugs and posed for snapshots. A line went out the door and down the block.

Bette dispensed cards. *Call my secretary. Buy war bonds. I'll sign glossies and kiss them. I'll send them to you.*

She shook their hands. She talked to them. She gave them her eyes. She met them one by one and engaged them. She did not brush a single one of them off.

She looked over and saw him. She blew him a kiss. Dudley's eyes welled.

The line grew. Radio trucks screeched to the curb. Bette Davis wows Chinktown. Brother, *that's* news!

Dudley walked upstairs. The room was small and tidy. He stretched out on the bed.

The wallpaper blurred. The leopard jumped on the bed. He tried to pet him. The beast dispersed into spots.

He went in and out. The leopard jumped back on the bed. In and out. The leopard purred and pawed at his feet. Out and in. There's Bette. She flopped on the bed and pulled off his shoes.

"I got a hundred and sixty-eight thousand dollars in pledges. The line went on for six hours."

Dudley yawned and touched her leg. She pulled her dress up to her garter belt. He slid his hand in.

"You embody metamorphosis, darling. You were a leopard just a moment ago."

Bette flashed her claws. "I'm a tigress, really. They're much more deadly."

Dudley undid the straps. Her stockings fell slack.

“I’m close with Harry Cohn, you know. Would you ever consider doing a film for Columbia?”

Bette said, “You’re crossing the line with me, sweetie. Please don’t do that.”

Dudley flinched.

His eyes blurred.

Tears ran down his cheeks.

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LOS ANGELES | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1941

A siren kicked on. Ashida woke up. He rolled over and looked out the window.

L.A. went black. The Belmont bleachers vanished. Searchlights reared up and swooped.

The siren blare escalated. The fear moment passed. No Jap Zeros swooped.

Ashida dressed in the dark. He got an hour's sleep. The morgue was a short walk. Nort Layman lived there and never slept.

He stepped into the hallway. Someone painted *JAP!* on his door. He got home at 8:30. It happened between then and now.

Ashida locked up and walked downstairs. The street was blackout black and searchlight yellow. He walked due east. The sirens sustained a high rev.

He thought of Goleta. He thought of cut-Jap eugenics and muckraking films. He passed the Hall of Justice. Night clerks perched on the roof and enjoyed the show.

He hit the morgue. Hearse drivers shot craps on the roof. A guy pissed over the edge.

The morgue ran 'round the clock. Ashida walked back to Nort Layman's exam room. It featured disinfecting tables and body vaults. Nort added a couch and clothes rack.

Nort sat on the couch. A gurney played footrest. Ashida took the one chair.

"I hope you're staying out of phone booths. I did the Shigeta autopsy. He was blown to shit. It feels like a race job, more than anything else."

Ashida said, "Tell me why."

Nort said, "His face was obliterated. I think the killer intended to make that statement, either consciously or unconsciously. He eradicated all external evidence of the man being Japanese."

Ashida considered it. "Racial science, in a way. A malevolent form of eugenics."

Nort shrugged. "You've got progressive eugenicists who want to build healthier people, and Nazi humps who want to wipe out the races they don't like. The Shigeta deal interests me, though. It feels like a crime of opportunity, with a random victim. And I have a very strong hunch that the guy plugged Mr. Shigeta to impress someone."

"Like a cat bringing a mouse home to its master?"

Nort lit a cigarette. "Exactly."

Ashida said, "The Watanabes. We're ten days in now."

Nort pointed to a body vault. "I've been going through wound texts for days. Not only were the swords at the house too dull to have made the incisions, but no goddamn ceremonial sword in existence could have made them."

Ashida said, "Let me extrapolate, please. You liked my theory that the killer had the Watanabes drink poison tea. It would account for that rare poison found in their livers. There's that, and that knife that Captain Parker and I saw in Griffith Park, which significantly matched the faded wound on Ryoshi Watanabe, which—"

"—which *could* have been the weapon that killed the Watanabes, but not dipped in poison, the way the warlords did. Which *could* have been used, one blade at a time, to both kill the Watanabes and simulate hara-kiri."

Ashida smiled. "Is it feasible?"

Nort smiled. "It's feasible, working on possible. And, if I continue to suffer from insomnia, I'll probably think up some new tests I can run."

The all-clear sirens blew. Nort retracted his window shades. Outside lights flared.

They talked crime and science. Nort teethed on the Shigeta job. Ashida thought of Kay Lake. She called him before he sacked out. She talked up a planned Pershing Square rally. Comrade Claire booked a camera crew. It was their opening film salvo.

Crime and science. Eugenics. Nort brought up Dr. Lin Chung. Dr. Lin was a race man and nose-job provider. Ashida brought up Terry Lux and stayed mum on the cut job he saw. Nort disdained Dr. Terry. He went to med school with him. Terry pandered to rich dope fiends. Terry was tight with Ace Kwan. Terry knew the Dudster. Ace supplied opiate base for Terry's dope cures. The Dudster mediated a southside dope trade. Some Armenian fucks peddled white horse under his flag.

They talked. They teethed. Biology and chemistry. Newfangled spectrographs. The sun popped to life. Nort dozed off in middiscourse. Ashida stood up.

Nort stirred. Nort said, "Stay out of phone booths."

The morgue left him woozy. Decay and pestilent vapors. He walked outside and sucked in fresh air.

Pershing Square was close. He cut through Little Tokyo and tallied padlocked shops. They ran about 68%. A fat man leaned out a window and hissed at him.

He hit Hill Street. Pershing Square was packed and 8:00 a.m. rowdy. A platform flanked the bronze J. J. Pershing. A microphone was wired to loudspeakers hooked into trees.

A hambone harangued a big crowd. Ashida joined the fray. He was skintight with the great L.A. unwashed.

Speakers huddled on the platform. That's Dr. Fred Hiltz. He's been in the papers per the Deutsches Haus raid. Hiltz chatted with Reynolds Loftis. Claire and Kay chatted with a colored man. Ashida made him off a Vice sheet. He was the local *Burgermeister* of the Negro Nazi League.

The ham was Gerald L. K. Smith. He was a Disciples of Christ cleric and noted Jew baiter. Ashida kept his head down and tried to blend in. Smith whipped up the crowd.

German atrocities have been overplayed. The Red Control Apparatus ladles on the boo-hoo. Hitler mollycoddles the Jews. He's a heartwarming humanist. Join the Christian Nationalist Crusade. Derail the "Jew Deal" of President Franklin "Double-Cross" Rosenfeld. Write to P.O. Box 8992/Glendale, California. Purchase our informative tracts.

The crowd cheered. The crowd booed. The crowd tossed paper cups. A water-filled condom hit the platform and exploded. Gerald L. K. Smith hugged the Negro Nazi. They faced the crowd and *Sieg Heil!*ed.

More cheers. More boos. More water-balloon bombs. The crowd grew. Ashida got compressed. A skullcap man brushed by him and mouthed "*Goddamn Jap.*" He saw the film crew. They stood on benches at the back of the crowd.

Kay Lake walked to the microphone. She wore a police blue dress. The crowd simmered down. Ashida caught the gist.

Let her talk. She's a girl. *Feed us some shit we can work with, doll. We're here to act up*.

Ashida scanned the crowd. He saw Bill Parker back by the film crew. Parker stood on a trash can and leaned upside a tree. He wore civilian clothes. He had a high balcony view.

Kay placed her hands on the mike stand. Kay looked straight at the crowd.

"We live in a time of the vile act justified. Vile acts spawn immediate and reactive injustice. Such reaction is often obscured by righteous intent. The empathic bond of shared catastrophe creates an unshakable will to power that binds each and every one of us to a world outside of and most deeply within ourselves. We comport in this shared world at great moral peril, and understand that this is the moment that calls us to self-sacrifice. The name that we give to this moment is History, and that moment is now."

She paused. Ashida read it. She's catching her breath. She's got them for one instant.

Kay said, "History afflicts both individuals and nations. History assumes the form of a mass debt that common people pay in blood. History *is* this moment, and *at* this moment we are charged to love and hate on a mass scale, as we act as individuals called to the best within ourselves, as we react to atrocity by euphemizing atrocity, for atrocity assumes forms both subtle and strident and obliterates everything within its path, and as individuals we are thus charged to the near-impossible task of enacting love that much more ruthlessly, and with a self-sacrifice that would have been unknowable had History not summoned us. At this moment, our options become do everything or do nothing."

She paused. Ashida read it. She's still got them. She knows they won't hold off much—

Kay said, "War is the mass imprisonment of the individual will and the paradoxical liberation of the individual voice. Thus, self-sacrifice oft becomes the voicing of unpopular sentiment within more popular outrage. History is this moment. This moment must acknowledge the merger of the individual voice and our nation's will to power, and bring it to a more specific moment of conscious and contrary statement. We must avenge the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor with the full assumption of our mass will to power, which will be in the end our individually enacted wills to fight and risk death. Because we are honorably called to that duty, we must honorably call ourselves to the recognition of the sordid fact that we are now perpetrating a blood libel on the honorable Japanese people of this city, that our best selves have been countermanded by fear and irrational hatred, and—"

Boos. Jeers. Catcalls.

Shouts, yells, shrieks.

Kay moved her lips. The crowd yelled over her. Lowlifes dumped the loudspeakers. Kay moved her lips. No sound came out.

She had no voice. They stole her voice. Somebody yelled, *"JAP!"* It was right up close to him. A man jumped in and hit him.

He pitched forward. He flailed and stayed upright. He heard *Goddamn Jap!* a million times.

A man hit him. A boy hit him. A girl kicked him. He raised his hands and covered his face. A woman yanked at his arms.

Ashida went down. People hit him and kicked him. He lost sight of Kay. People hit him. People kicked him. People spit on him. He felt beat-on and shit-on and fucked-up anesthetized.

Something hit the people.

They stopped. They stumbled. They tripped. They fell down themselves. Something hit them and made them run.

It's hard to see. There's blood in his eyes. It might be Scotty Bennett and Bill Parker. They're hitting the people. They're hitting them and kicking them and making them run.

December 18, 1941

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1941

I kept speaking. No one heard me. The microphone and loudspeakers provided no sound. I had no voice. The crowd's voice was obscenity.

I kept speaking. Paper debris and water balloons hit the platform. Everyone jumped off. Garbage spattered me.

I held the microphone and kept speaking. My lips moved and made no sound. I spoke with undiminished intent and could not hear my own voice. The crowd was directly below and right in front of me. I heard a thousand *Japs* and saw a savage beating.

Someone was down. People were kicking him. People were beating those people and forcing them to disperse. I couldn't see faces. It was all punches and kicks. I held the microphone and kept speaking.

I delivered my indictment. The platform rattled and skewed my line of sight. People ran in front of me. I thought I saw Ed Satterlee. Bill Parker and Scotty Bennett might have run by. They were disheveled. The might-be Parker lost his glasses. The might-be Scotty wore ripped clothes.

I looked to the 5th Street sidewalk and blew a line of text. Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle eased Hideo Ashida into a K-car. Hideo brushed the back window and left blood streaks.

The car pulled out. *The lie that race defines human beings. The lie that dissent defines sedition.* The car turned north on Hill Street. I watched it disappear. A paper bag full of food scraps hit me. *The definitive lie of fearful hatred.* Rotten fruit in my hair.

A man hurled a trash can at the platform and cracked a foundation strut. The boards listed to one side; the microphone stand tipped over; I stumbled and fell down with it.

The platform collapsed. I crashed to street level. A man ran up, kicked me and ran back into the crowd. Saul and Andrea Lesnick walked through the rubble. They grabbed my arms and began to hoist me; I felt how frail they were and pushed myself upright.

They were frail. I was jarred and battered. We stumbled to the Hill Street curb and a double-parked Chrysler. Saul got in the driver's side; I got in beside him. Andrea slipped and fell into the back.

Saul pulled into traffic. Andrea said something about her nerves and Queen of Angels.

We drove north. I brushed apple pulp out of my hair. Traffic was stalled in front of us; I saw the whip antenna on the K-car above the traffic line. Hideo stepped out of the backseat and began walking east. He held a bloody handkerchief to his face.

Saul cut through Bunker Hill and got us to the hospital. He parked by the side entrance; he helped Andrea out and gave me a look. It meant *You've done enough*. They walked in the door together—frail comrades, arm in arm.

Lee's room was on the third floor. I smoked a cigarette in the car and walked inside to the washroom. I tended to myself and reread Saul's look. *Brittle child, chaos attends you, so impervious to others*.

I took the elevator up to Lee's room. Lee was asleep, with his bed cranked into a sitting-reclining position. He had metal studs and sutures in his jaw. His chewed-off ear had been retrieved and stitched back into place. Criss-crossed stitches secured his nose.

He'd left the house, arm in arm with Scotty. *No hard feelings, huh? Jesus, that Kay. It was like the first Louis-Schmeling fight. You stay here, sweetie—this is man's stuff*.

They drove off together. Of course, I stayed behind. Chaos attends but does not subsume me. I don't stick around to view the cost.

I pulled a chair up to the bed and watched Lee sleep. Leland Charles Blanchard, "The Southland's Great White Hope." Ex-contender, policeman, bank robber–killer. I'd known him for three years. This is where we were now.

I watched Lee sleep. He never stirred. A medical chart was hooked to the wall above his bed.

"You were brilliant, Miss Lake."

He'd let some prairie into his voice. Deadwood and Sioux Falls—that short distance apart.

I turned my chair around to see him. His face was nicked, his jaw was bruised, his eyes were huge without his glasses.

"Did you follow me here?"

"I saw Lesnick drive off with you. I had an instinct as to where you were going."

"My movie is unprecedented. It will stand as an unbiased document, whatever you do to Claire and me."

"Don't cast yourselves as martyrs. It's not who you are. She's a traitorous dilettante, and you're the biggest opportunist since me."

"I may be that in spirit, but I lack your résumé. You can't blame me for that. You had Two-Gun Davis for a mentor, but all I have is you."

"Your résumé is the men you've screwed to get what you want. It exceeds my résumé in sheer volume."

"Who's the tall red-haired woman? What will you do when you find her and she sees how little you have?"

"What will you do when your 'unprecedented' movie is labeled Exhibit A in Federal court?"

"What will you do when the world steps aside and you don't get what you want? What will you do when Russia remains our ally after we win this war? What will you do when the world decides that you're not worth the trouble and throws in with some other man less furious and more presentable than you?"

Lee coughed. I turned away and looked at him. He twitched in a dream; his eyes fluttered; he rolled onto his side.

I shifted my chair back around. He was gone—and the room was too bright and quiet without him. I opened a window and saw Scotty down on the sidewalk. He was disheveled and reading the Holy Bible.

I'll make love with him again.

I horrify myself.

Only William H. Parker knows my heart.

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LOS ANGELES | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1941

Occupied territory.

Miss Lake would know the term. It dovetailed with “blood libel” and made dialectic sense. Cops and Japs ran equal here. The cops had increased. The Japs had *de*creased.

It vibrated in plain view. Door-to-door rousts. Street frisks. Gun confiscation.

Parker pulled to the curb. The warehouse was off 1st and San Pedro. That Coast Guard lieutenant supplied the address. He called from City Hall and got no answer. He opted for a 459 then.

The canning plant. The shrimp boats dumped their catches here. This three-story warehouse. This bolted-padlock door.

He had a tire iron and flashlight. He had one full day sober. He slept in the Bureau cot room last night and woke up tremor-free. He smashed his glasses in Kwan’s Pagoda. He lost them in Pershing Square. It was 459 with a squint.

He walked over and snapped the lock. It was his first solo 459. Hideo Ashida partnered him on the Larkin-bungalow raids. Ashida vanished from Pershing Square. He’s beaten-on one moment, gone the next.

Parker stepped inside and slid the door shut. He ran his flashlight over the floor and walls. One floor/four walls—all smooth cement. It was dead empty. Call it dead certain. The place had been cleaned out.

It was damp. It was musty. He caught a subscent. He couldn’t place it.

He walked along the walls. He held his flashlight close. He saw floor-to-ceiling streaks and made the source.

Washcloth marks. The walls had been wiped. The practice erased fingerprints.

Parker touched a streak mark. He felt slight condensation.

The place was print-wiped *yesterday*. *After* that botched harbor raid. Word got back to the owners or renters.

He walked to the second-floor landing. He saw floor-to-ceiling wipe marks. He caught that subscent again.

He nailed it. It was shrimp oil.

He saw charred paper on the floor. It was charred like the tracts and money on the shrimp boat. See *that*? *Japanese characters*.

Now extrapolate.

The warehouse was pre-1900. The buying and selling went Jap-to-Jap. That wartime paper backlog. His rogue police status. It impeded records checks.

He walked to the third-floor landing. He saw more wipe marks and caught more subscent. He saw an empty can on the floor. It was unlabeled. Note the shrimp oil and glass specks.

Now extrapolate.

Last Saturday. His talk with Nort Layman. The glass in the canned shrimp up in Lancaster. Sheriff Gene investigates. He thinks it's Fifth Column work.

Nort eschews that conclusion. Nort extrapolates.

Four dead Watanabes. Glass particles flecked with shrimp oil on all their feet.

Heavily callused feet—"Japs tend to walk around barefoot."

"What did surprise me was the even distribution of the particles. It was as if they were walking on the glass deliberately."

Parker walked back to his prowl car. He left the warehouse door ajar. It was a fuck-you/I'm-a-rogue-cop-now move.

He unhooked his two-way and roused the morgue, direct. Nort picked up.

"Dr. Layman. Who's this?"

"Bill Parker, Nort."

Nort said, "I'm not surprised, and I bet you've got questions."

"I do, and it's a parlay. Glass particles and shrimp oil. Is there efficacy here? What would that combination *do*?"

Nort cleared his throat. "I'd been wondering about that myself, so I did some research. I came up with one thing, which hits me as a non sequitur. The oxide componentry of the glass, in concert with shrimp oil, would create a level of toxicity that would prove deleterious to urban topsoil and many forms of foliage and grass."

Huh?

"That's it, Bill. I know it's a head scratcher, but so's the goddamn case. It's a head scratcher and a dead-ender, and I'm running out of tests I can run."

Parker said, "Thanks, Nort."

Nort said, "You know where to find me."

The connection fritzed and died. Parker hooked up the radio and notched his seat back.

Shitwork bodes. There's Call-Me-Jack's report stack. "Assess this shit, Bill. You know it's not my style."

He thumbed the top folder. It detailed Preston Exley's Jap-housing plan.

Predictive statistics. Potential internee-employment sites. A *Mirror* piece on Exley Construction and the Arroyo Seco Parkway. Notes on proposed Highland Park on-ramps. Hoo-ha on Preston's cop career.

Boring shitwork. Assess *what*?

Parker lit a cigarette. He thought about the shrimp-boat slaughter. Mass suicide, scorched paper. Links, links, links. Dead Japs and one maybe-Chinaman.

He thought about Pershing Square. He fought beside Scotty Bennett. They rescued a fickle Jap.

He prayed off a jolt of The Thirst. He thought of Miss Lake.

Her lovely dress. Garbage-spattered and trashed. He should buy her a new dress just like it.

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LOS ANGELES | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1941

Dudley walked through Mike Lyman's. Cops and local bigwigs tossed the shit. Dire shit—that Santa Monica sniper.

It was late-breaking shit. The fiend sniped Army sentries on the Palisades. The fiend *fatal*-sniped a Jap a mile from the beach. Maybe it's Fifth Column. It's a fucked-up fiend, sure as shit.

Sniper talk now outrevved war talk. The fiend sniped soldiers *and* Japs. The cops got it. Chaos is king. It perplexed the bigwigs.

Dudley hit the back room. Mike B. and Dick C. oozed *eager*. Scotty B. snapped to. He wore that unfetching nose splint. Buzz Meeks smirked—ever shifty and porcine.

They sprawled up the furniture. Carlisle worked the buffet. He served coffee and ham sandwiches.

Dudley said, "Report, please."

Carlisle said, "We've been at it since Tuesday morning, and we've turned up nine fools who'll stand as eyeball wits. They've all got parole-violation sheets and bench warrants we can squeeze them with. They live inside a tight radius of the Watanabe house, and they'll ID any suspect we tell them to."

Breuning said, "Six white men, a beaner and two Japs. We snagged the Japs out of South Pasadena, but they were at a block party on Avenue 44 that day. We tried, but we couldn't dig up any women."

Dudley said, "It will be a closed grand jury proceeding, which means that our witnesses' criminal records will be sealed. Thankfully, saints are not required for this part of our endeavor. If Vogel, Koenig and Waldner provide us with a properly loathsome and unhinged suspect, he'll be deemed unfit to stand trial, sentenced to death in a negotiated manner and held incommunicado until such time that a suitably pliable psychiatrist declares him competent. The Feds have a Jew doctor named Saul Lesnick in their pocket. He would be a grand one to pronounce our lad sane and fit for the gas chamber. What we must avoid is a well-publicized trial, where our unruly eyeball wits might be discredited.”

Meeks unwrapped his sandwich. “I got us a Jap kiddie-raper. He’s got no alibi for December 6 and 7, and he’s about as low as human beings get. We could pack him off to the green room and not lose any sleep over it.”

Dudley sipped coffee. “I’ll keep that under advisement, lad. I want Vogel, Koenig and Waldner to report their findings first.”

Scotty raised his hand. “Listen, I’m new to this. We brief the eyewitnesses? Is that it? We lead them through their depositions?”

Breuning and Carlisle laughed. Dudley winked at Scotty.

“I *dictate* their depositions, lad. I layer in discrepancies to impart verisimilitude.”

Breuning and Carlisle *re*-laughed. Scotty grinned. Vogel, Koenig and Waldner showed. Carlisle dispensed lunch.

It was SRO now. The new lads slouched by the door.

Dudley said, “Report, please.”

Vogel lit a cigarette. “Bill and I dug up four Jap sex creeps, all at large and all with stat-rape sheets. If you want my opinion, it goes like this. Our guy knocked up Nancy Watanabe and snuffed the whole family to hush it. He got Nancy a scrape down in T.J., but it all went blooey in his head anyway. Doc Layman said the daddy had AB-negative blood. I checked jail records on all four of our guys, and one guy’s AB neg.”

Dudley raised a hand. *Be still, please*. Waldner opened his yap. Carlisle shushed him.

He talked to Huey Cressmeyer. It was eight days back. Huey snitched the Griffith Park cell. Huey said this:

The guy who made Nancy preg was a Jap-Mex half-breed with bad acne cysts on his back.

“The cat bragged that he killed a Mex family down in Culiacán.”

“The cat headed back to Mexico.”

The original cell was four men. He and Ace killed three. The cell was “Collaborationist.” They snuffed two Japs and a half-breed. The Jap-Mex half-breed was a wild card. He was probably still in Mexico. He would not derail their full-Jap plans.

The lads wolfed their sandwiches. The lads kept it zipped.

Dudley said, “I would very much prefer AB-negative blood, but it may not be essential. Any paramour of poor Nancy Watanabe would be subject to intensive personal questioning per the lass herself, and all our coaching might fail to provide him with the answers. I see blood type as corroborative, rather than primary evidence. What we want is a raving lunatic motivated by incomprehensible lust.”

Waldner said, “I’ve got him.”

Dudley smiled. Waldner was an avid thug. Waldner did not indulge whimsy.

"He's a transient knife sharpener named Fujio 'Fuji' Shudo. He did a six-year jolt at Atascadero and got paroled on Wednesday, December 3rd. He was seen going door-to-door with his tool cart in Highland Park on the 4th and 5th. I lost track of his movements then, but I'm betting he's clear for Doc Layman's time of death on the 6th. He's been holed up at a fleabag hotel in Little Tokyo since Pearl Harbor day. The Kyoto Arms, a real dive. He's afraid to go out—because of the roundups, I'm guessing. I paid Elmer Jackson to keep tabs on him. Elmer's working the Alien Squad, so he's in the area a lot. Fuji's still holed up in his room, belting terpin hydrate."

Dudley said, "Please continue."

Waldner said, "I've got no blood type, but I like him. He's a knife man and a nut-farm inmate, and he did that Atascadero bounce for mayhem. His moniker is 'Bamboo Shoot' Shudo. He kidnapped some wetbacks in '34 and stuck bamboo shoots up their keesters."

Breuning winced.

Carlisle said, "Ouch."

Vogel said, "That smarts."

Scotty gulped.

Koenig said, "Bend over and touch your toes. I'll show you where the wild goose goes."

Meeks said, "Bon voyage, sweetheart. The green room's coming up."

Dudley said, "I assume that Mr. Shudo remains in place?"

Waldner said, "Right there, boss. Elmer J.'s his watchdog. If Fuji bolts, Elmer will call me."

"Have the witnesses at City Hall for a 7:00 p.m. show-up. I'll brief them before we bring in Mr. Shudo."

Grins circulated. *Woo-woo-woos* followed. Breuning and Carlisle twirled their saps.

Dudley opened the door. Sid Hudgens and Jack Webb were close by.

"We've identified our suspect, lads. Be at the Kyoto Arms Hotel at 8:00 tonight. Mr. Hearst will get the exclusive."

The lads filed out. He hit the couch. He was tired. His bones hurt.

He was losing weight. The bennies depleted him. He forgot his wife's name yesterday. He's fucking Bette Davis. She instills tremors in him.

She upbraided him last night. He faltered. She made herself soft and tried to rescind the rebuke. She saw weakness in him. He tore off her clothes and went at her to regain his edge.

They have a truce now. He must trump her as he trumps all men.

The method eludes him.

Beth Short and Tommy Gilfoyle are due. Bette will meet them. He's running too many people. He's thinking at a frantic pace. He flails for consciousness when he needs sleep.

Dudley yawned. Dudley reached for a thought and missed it.

The couchside phone rang. Dudley grabbed the call.

J. C. Kafesjian blathered. Their "H" source got popped in bumfuck Honduras. J.C. harped on his tight bond with Call-Me-Jack Horrall. "It don't mean shit if there's no shit to sell to the jigs."

Dudley baby-talked him. Dudley proffered no solution. He *oversaw* J.C. He did *not* procure his dope. Dudley mollified him. J.C. fumed and hung up.

Dudley yawned. Dudley reached for a thought and missed it. The Teletype clacked. He reached for a thought and reeled it in.

He called a downtown florist. He spieled his police credentials and said he'd send a check. He ordered three dozen red roses. He gave them Bette's name and address. The clerk whistled. Bette Davis, *whew!* The card? "Sign it 'Your Secret Irish Admirer.' "

The clerk hung up. Dudley yawned. He felt schizy and itchy. He popped three bennies and popped his briefcase.

Watanabe/187 P.C.

He skimmed reports. He keyed on the tracts at the house. The case hexed him. They had Fuji Shudo now. A true solve was irrelevant.

Still—

Dudley repacked his briefcase. Thad Brown walked in and pulled a chair up.

"I've got a Teletype coming. The Fourth Interceptor Command's got me on those snipings."

Dudley said, "It appears indiscriminate. He's shooting Japs *and* soldiers."

Brown lit a cigar. *"He's* indiscriminate. It's like the phone-booth snuff. Some crazy fucker sees a Jap and 86's him. You want my opinion? It's all a nutty string of dead-enders."

The Teletype clacked and spooled paper. It's a ballistics sheet. There's a photograph. Lands and grooves on a spent bullet.

Dudley grabbed the sheet. A margin note grabbed him. ".30-06 carbine/sawed barrel."

He saw the land-groove pattern. He saw the barrel nicks common to sawed-offs. He passed the sheet to Brown. He ID'd the sheet, he *made* the gun, he *made* the assailant right there.

Brown studied the sheet. "Sawed-off rifles are from hunger. The shells tumble. I'm betting on some Army punk with a hard-on for the world. You check armory thefts and take it from there."

Dudley said, "I should be going, Thad."

"Go, Dud. Get Jack H. his solve on your Jap caper. We should get at least one Jap solve before this fucking war ends."

Dudley waltzed. The bennies kicked in and perked him. He ducked out the side door and shagged his K-car. He drove to City Hall and elevatored up to six.

The Bureau was lunchtime-lulled. He hit his cubicle and unlocked the bottom-left desk drawer.

Aaaaah—

His throwdown guns and spare handcuffs. His Huey Cressmeyer file.

He had Huey's rap sheet and reform-school transcript. He injected Huey with Pentothal last summer. The dope made him talk. Huey blabbed all his 459's and 211's. He recorded and transcribed the confessions. He test-fired Huey's fourteen pistols and four rifles. He had the result sheets right—

Here.

Huey's sawed-off carbine. Identical lands and grooves. A match to Thad Brown's sheet. Trigger-happy Huey—back from Mexico.

His tests were run covertly. Thad's sheet would never match any on-file gun.

Dudley locked the file up and elevatored back down. He popped two more bennies and ran to his car.

He took 1st Street to Boyle Heights. The Heights was a grand weave of kikes and cholos. Ruth Mildred ran her scrape clinic there. *Right* there—an ex-warehouse behind an auto-wreck yard.

Two full floors—all Girls, Girls, *GIRLS*. Girls-on-benders, girls-on-the-run, girls-in-a-jam.

Floor no. 1 was a dormitory. Ruth and Dot rented rooms to lezbo Marines. They went AWOL from Camp Pendleton. The lezbo grapevine drew them here. Hey, Butch—Ruth and Dot want *You!*

Floor no. 2 was a scrape shack. It was cop-protected. It featured deluxe scrape gear and recovery rooms. It catered to Harry Cohn's stars and the L.A. elite. The exam rooms featured wall peeks. Sapphic sisters paid to watch.

Dudley parked in the auto yard. CARRO MONTEZUMA—SE HABLA ESPAÑOL. He walked through the dorm. Girls with crew cuts scowled. He went up to the waiting room. Plain janes with bulging bellies pitched boo-hoo.

He knew the receptionist. He always forgot her name. They coupled in a parked car once. It lingered for her.

"Huey, darling? I know he's here. Where else would he go?"

"Number four, love. I've never been able to say no to you."

Dudley winked and walked down the hall. The door was shut. He pushed it open. The room was Huey's lair now.

Note the bedroll on the table. Note the skivvies hooked to the stirrups. Note the *der Führer* pinups. Note the model airplane–glue stench.

Note Huey. He's building a toy panzer tank by the scrub sink. He's wearing a jockstrap and a Nazi armband. Note the Mossberg .30-06, propped on the wall.

Huey saw Dudley. Huey *guuuuuuuulped*. Huey said, "Please don't hurt me, Uncle Dud."

Dudley grabbed Huey and slapped him. Dudley ripped off his armband and crushed the toy tank. Huey squealed. Dudley picked him up and threw him against the far wall.

The effort taxed him. He gasped for air. Huey crashed and fell on the floor. Huey crawled up on mommy's gyno table.

Dudley said, "Carlos Madrano stashed you in Mexico, last Friday. You were instructed to stay there, without complaint. You have returned, against my wishes, and you have performed a string of unconscionable misdeeds. Explain yourself. Be thorough."

Huey burrowed into a blanket. He tucked his knees up to his chin. The blanket was fluffy pink.

I was holed up in T.J. I was going squirrelshit. I was drinking 151 rum and sniffing cocaine. I was going to the donkey show every night. I was reading comic books and anti-Jew tracts. Uncle Carlos gave me films of bossman Hitler's speeches. I bought a projector and screened them on my Klan sheet.

I got the urge to KILL. I shot a Jew tourist outside the Agua Caliente racetrack. He was wearing a beanie, so I knew he was a Yid. I got the URGE TO KILL a jigaboo. I drove to San Diego and shot a coon outside the El Cortez Hotel. I read about that Jap who got shot in that phone booth. I got the URGE TO KILL a Jap. I drove to Oceanside and shot a Jap mowing some white stiff's lawn.

I got the URGE TO KILL soldiers and at least one more Jap. I drove up to L.A. and cruised Santa Monica. I shot a Jap sitting on a bus bench. I sniped some soldiers on the Palisades, but the cocksuckers survived.

Dudley pulled down the blanket. Huey sucked his thumb. Dudley ruffled the lad's hair.

"No more, son. I can't have you causing such grief."

"Okay, Uncle Dud."

"I'll have to destroy your trusty rifle. We can't risk it being traced back to you."

Huey said, "I brought you a gift from Mexico. It's something you'll like."

Dudley said, "A souvenir trinket? A key fob shaped like a sombrero?"

Huey blew his nose on the blanket. "Better than that. Something you want."

Dudley jabbed his arm. "Get to it, lad."

"Okay. It all goes back to what we were talking about last week. You know, I was trucking with some Japs on the far-right flank."

"Yes. Including the late Johnny Watanabe."

"Right, Johnny. There's him, and there's this guy that said he got Nancy preg. I said I didn't know his name. Remember? I told you he was a half-Jap, half-Mex breed."

"I recall it vividly, lad."

"Okay, so here's the rest of the drift. I get a bee in my bonnet down in T.J. I think, I should locate this halfbreed fucker, shanghai his ass and bring him home to Uncle Dud. Maybe he sliced the fucking Watanabes, maybe he didn't. It don't matter, because kicks are kicks, and I've never pulled a kidnap before. However it plays out, I'll bet Uncle Dud sure would like to talk to him."

"Continue, please."

"Okay, so I go out looking. It don't take too long, because Jap-spic half-breeds stand out. I find the guy in a whorehouse in Ensenada, and I Mickey Finn his ass and toss him in the trunk of this jalopy I bought for thirty clams. Then I drive him over the border and up here to L.A. His name's Tojo Tom Chasco, and I've got him stashed in the next room right now. This lezzie nurse has got him knocked out on a morph and phenobarb drip."

The Night Creature fetches. Such initiative.

Dudley scanned the room. He saw syringe kits on a shelf. He saw a wall-bolted phone.

He grabbed the receiver and dialed-up the Bureau. He went straight to Mike Breuning's desk.

"Homicide, Sergeant Breuning."

"Send Scotty to Ruthie's clinic, lad. I've got an errand for him."

Breuning said, "Roger, boss."

Dudley hung up and snatched a syringe. Huey plucked at him. He resembled Renfield in *Dracula. Master, come look*.

They walked next door. Dudley looked.

Tojo Tom was friction-taped to a gyno table. He was stripped to his boxer shorts and out cold. He was muscular and about twenty-eight. Eugenics. He was equally Jap and Mex.

¿Qué pasó, Tomás?

They needed a *full-blood* Jap killer. *Fuji Shudo* fit that bill. The case was twelve days old. Tojo Tom was their first hard suspect.

Huey hovered and made like Renfield. Dudley jammed the syringe in Tojo Tom's arm.

He hit a fat vein. He extracted a full sample. Tojo Tom slept through it. He was off on Cloud 29.

Dudley reached in his pocket and pulled out a handful of bennies. He made a fist and crumbled them to powder. He poured it into Tojo

Tom's drip bag. It merged with the extant liquid. Rise and shine, Tojo Tom.

Huey patted Tojo's dick. He went Greek in reform school. It complied with the Ruth-Dot gestalt.

Tojo Tom slept in hophead heaven. Dudley and Huey stood by. Young Scotty walked in. Huey swooned, just a tad.

Dudley passed him the syringe. "Good Samaritan, lad. There's a lab man named Samuels. Get me a quick typing and call me back here."

Scotty vamoosed. Huey sulked and picked his nose. Dudley watched the dope-bag liquid recede. He felt slightly *off*. His pulse stuttered. His breathing hitched.

He stared at the dope bag. The liquid drained. The wall phone rang and startled him. He snatched the receiver.

"I'm listening, lad."

Scotty said, "It's O-positive blood. He couldn't have impregnated Nancy, if that's what this is about."

Dudley said, "Go back to the Bureau, lad. We've a busy night ahead."

Scotty hung up. Dudley hung up. The dope bag drained out. Tojo Tom twitched.

His veins pulsed. He broke a sweat. He electroshock-spasmed. Dope contravention. He's on a snootful of new hop.

Tojo Tom opened his eyes.

Tojo Tom flexed his body.

Tojo Tom saw his old pal Huey. Tojo Tom saw an obvious cop.

He eyeball-tracked the room. He's getting it. He's been shanghaied. It's not Mexico. It's not a whorehouse. It's some rogue hospital.

He flexed. He thrashed. He sprayed piss and soaked his shorts. He thrashed a strip of tape loose. Blood trickled down his arm.

He gleamed a tad. He eyed the drip bag. He's getting it. *Why do I feel gooooood? Because there's a needle stuck in my arm. Because there's hop in that bag.*

He coughed. His eyes traveled. He zeroed in on the big cop. He *Jap*-zeroed in on Huey. He said, "You sandbagged me, you hump."

Dudley said, *"Hola, Tomás. ¿Qué pasó? Ojalá que se mejore pronto."*

Tojo Tom coughed. "White cops who speak Spanish don't impress me. There's lots of you. You always want information, and you always say there's an easy way and a hard way. If you want to impress me, speak Japanese."

Dudley smiled. "I'm Spanish-fluent, lad—but that's as far as my linguistic gifts go. I'll bring in my friend Ryoshi Watanabe, if you like. I'm sure he'd be willing to translate for me."

Tojo Tom said, *"Ryoshi es estúpido. Es el pinche cabrón."*

"You've employed the present tense, Tomás. I find that interesting."

"It's correct usage, *pendejo*. I'm half-Mexican, so I know. And what's with that funny accent of yours? Are you some limey homo?"

Dudley laughed. "Did you impregnate Nancy Watanabe, Tomás? Huey told me you knocked up a Japanese girl."

"Huey licked Nancy's snatch at the Nightingale prom. *He* told *me* that. I knocked up a twist named Shirley Yanagihara in '39, and I've got mongoloid triplets somewhere to prove it. Why are you so hipped on the *estúpidos* Watanabes, *pendejo*? There's a war on. Why aren't you off fighting for the wrong side?"

"Huey thought you meant Nancy Watanabe. Huey also said that you bragged of killing an entire family in Culiacán."

Tojo Tom laughed. "I remember that night. We were drinking with some Collaborationist boys in Griffith Park. I said I killed a family in Culiacán and fucked Betty Grable. Huey said he pistol-whipped Clark Gable and raped Carole Lombard. This Chinese-Japanese half-breed said he firebombed a nigger church in 1912, but I don't think he was born until 1918. These Collaborationist boys ended up getting snuffed, but that's the only action of that sort that any of us ever saw."

Dudley smiled. Huey pouted. Wild-goose chase. The Night Creature, disdained.

Tojo Tom said, "You've got me on some sort of rocket-ship fuel. I feel so good that I'm not half as pissed off as I should be. I'm in a whorehouse in Ensenada one moment, and strapped to a table at some undisclosed location the next. I was drinking mescal one moment, and now I'm jawing with my ex-pal Huey and some limey cop. I'm curious about all of this, but I don't want to spoil the fun."

Dudley said, "The Watanabe family was murdered on Saturday, December 6. The crime occurred here in Los Angeles. I'm sure you didn't kill them, so I will apologize for the outrageous inconvenience of your abduction, which Mr. Cressmeyer undertook without my consent. While I have you, I would love to hear your insights on the family itself."

Tojo Tom tee-heed. "Live by the sword, die by the sword."

"I understand the concept, but please elaborate."

"It means they were Fifth Column. It means they pissed off some Fifth Column humps, who took it out on them. Fifth Column's Fifth Column. None of us do much, except meet on the sly and jaw treason. Once in a while, you get rivalries. You want my bet, limey? Somebody said something or did something that didn't seem like anything, but it festered. That's the way it is with Fifth Column humps. They know someone who knows someone who knows someone who plants a bomb. Something happens once in a blue moon, but most of it's all in our minds."

Dudley said, "You're a bright penny, Tomás."

Huey huffed. "He's not as bright as me, Uncle Dud. If he's so bright, how come he's here?"

Tojo Tom squirmed. "I need to go to the bathroom."

"Momentarily, lad. In the meantime, please tell—"

"—tell you the book on the Watanabes, which isn't much of a book. If it was a book, the title would be *Screwy Jap Family*. Nancy was a round heel, and Johnny was window-shopping all over the far right. He was palling with those Collaborationists, pulling crimes and donating the takes to the Emperor's cause. Ryoshi and Aya pushed hate tracts and laundered Axis money. They were shortwave-radio pals with some white American and English fascists whose names I don't know, but all they did was talk, talk, and talk. The only thing I could ever give them credit for was knowing that Hirohito would hit Pearl Harbor first. It was the last time I saw them, about eight months ago. Ryoshi said something like 'We will strike first at the naval base in Hawaii.' I had the feeling that he picked it up off his radio chats. Then what he said came true, and now you're telling me the whole family got clipped the day before."

Huey said something dumb. Dudley shushed him. Huey clammed up.

The Watanabes possessed no shortwave radio. The Watanabes possessed no radio at all. The house had been tossed. The garage had been tossed. There was no basement. There was no attic. There was no shortwave hookup.

Tojo Tom said, "My teeth are floating. I need to use the can."

Huey said, "I'm hungry. Do you think Kwan's delivers this far?"

Dudley said, "Think, Tomás. Where did the Watanabes keep their shortwave set?"

Tojo Tom said, "Ryoshi had a hidey-hole rigged to the second-floor ceiling. He kept all his secret stuff there."

Ransack the hidey-hole. It might be undisturbed. It might have been tossed already. There might be no radio. That would mean this:

Hideo Ashida got there first.

Ashida might have heard broadcasts. Ryoshi might have kept broadcast logs. Ashida might have read them. Ashida might have suppressed crucial leads from the start.

"Secret stuff." Irrelevant stuff. Fuji Shudo would burn. A true solve was irrelevant. Tojo Tom supplied a relevant lead. The lead rendered him irrelevant.

Dudley pulled his ankle piece. It was silencer-rigged. The ammo pierced skulls and lodged in brain tissue. Minimum leak resulted.

Huey giggled.

Tojo Tom shit his shorts. A big stink resulted.

Dudley cocked the gun.

Tojo Tom said, "I know where there's money."

Dudley aimed the gun.

Huey squealed.

Tojo Tom said, "I was running horse for Carlos Madrano. I know where he stashes his money and dope."

Dudley lowered the gun.

Huey pouted.

Captain Carlos and heroin. That rumor, redux.

"Is there more, lad? You've been credible up to this point. I would advise you to continue."

Tojo Tom said, "Carlos has got some kind of land-grab deal going with some rich gringos, here in L.A. I've got no names for them. I think it's a good tip, but that's all I've got."

Land grabs. That rumor, redux.

Dudley walked to Huey's room. He grabbed the wall phone. He called his man at PC Bell and placed a rush order.

Trace job. Long-distance calls. Start at the Mex Statie HQ in Baja. Check Carlos Madrano's line. Cull all L.A. calls, going back three months.

He pledged a C-note. *Rápidamente, por favor*. Huey taunted Tojo Tom next door. Dudley hung up and walked back.

Huey said, "Let me kill him, Uncle Dud. I've never killed a halfbreed before."

Dudley threw Huey against the far wall. Huey pinwheeled and crashed. Tojo Tom whooped.

"You may not kill Mr. Chasco, or anyone else. You will baby-sit Mr. Chasco while I attempt to verify his statement. I am quite busy, and will call for an expanded statement later. You will *cater* to Mr. Chasco, Huey. I will kill you if you do not."

The dorm lezzies blew kisses. He hit the auto yard and walked up to his car.

He dry-swallowed three bennies. His brain perk-perk-perked.

Hate tracts, redux. Across all case lines. Ashida filched the Jap-language tracts. Did he lie about the contents?

Dudley popped the trunk. The Jap tracts were stashed there.

He scanned them page by page. His brain perk-perk-perked. He saw that tract at the Deutsches Haus. They popped Fred Hiltz at the Deutsches Haus. Hiltz was a hate-tract man.

Link *that* tract to *these* tracts. Different languages and print styles.

Wait.

There's a lost memory. *That* tract to *these* tracts. *Perk, perk—there it* *is*.

Identically glued bindings / identical paper stock.

Dudley walked to a phone booth. City directories were chained to an inside peg. *Perk, perk*. Go in alphabetically.

The northeast directory. The *C*'s first. "Christian Nationalist Crusade": 2829 Chevy Chase, Glendale. On to *H*. "Hiltz, Dr. Fred": 2831 Chevy Chase, Glendale. On to *S*. "Smith, G. L. K.": 2829 Chevy Chase, Glendale.

The detectives' craft. Instincts confirmed. Disparate wisps cohere.

He snagged his car and laid tracks. He took the 1st Street bridge to Broadway. He took Broadway to the parkway. He popped two bennies and hit Avenue 45.

He parked in the driveway and walked across the lawn. Some fuck painted *JAPS!* on the door.

He let himself in. He walked straight upstairs. He paced the second-floor landing and stretched tall. He tap-tap-tapped the ceiling. He noticed inconsistent grain. He tapped that exact spot.

Presto—folding stairs dropped to the floor.

He walked up them. He lit a match. He lit up a snug crawl space.

No shortwave radio. One table and wall outlet. The radio *was* plugged in there.

Dusty footprints by the table. Note the heel and toe marks. Hideo Ashida always wore shoes with *taps*.

Hideo Ashida was here. Hideo Ashida stole the radio. Hideo Ashida stole the tracts. You drove up then. You should have searched his car.

Dudley got chills. Benzedrine. This detectives' competition. His quixotic regard for the lad.

He walked down the steps and retracted them. The ceiling panel slid in place, flush. He walked out to his car and drove to the parkway.

He felt off-kilter. He should eat something. The thought sickened him.

Mr. Smith, Sergeant Smith.

The Brit Smith, the mick Smith. The Prod, the Papist. Gerry was Huey Long's protégé. He was a share-the-wealth Red then. The Kingfish was snuffed. Gerry turned hard right. He was one florid Jew baiter.

Dudley swung off the parkway. A bridge put him up on Chevy Chase. He caught the edge of a golf course and read address plates.

Right there. Two mock Tudors, by the driving range.

He parked curbside. 2831 was range-flush. The backyard was grassed in. Fred Hiltz sailed irons. Gerald L. K. Smith cued up his balls.

Dudley ambled over. He came at them sideways. They were copwise. Hiltz knew him from the Deutsches Haus. Smith provoked discord routinely. They were copwise.

There—Hiltz sees him. There—he nudges Smith. They're a Mutt and Jeff team. Hiltz is short, Smith is tall. Convergence. Mike Breuning said he saw them at Pershing Square.

Note the pitcher of lemonade. The dark hue says that it's spiked.

Hiltz cranked a three-iron. The ball sailed two hundred yards.

Gerald L. K. Smith said, "Well, sir."

Dudley said, "Pastor, it's an honor to meet you."

Hiltz twirled his iron. "He's Alien Squad, Gerry. He was there at the Deutsches Haus. The Jew Control Apparatus sent some hard boys in."

Smith said, "Friend or foe? Come on, out with it. You're smiling, but you're a harness bull in mufti. That brogue is disarming, but I wouldn't want to get on the wrong side of it."

Dudley cranked up his smile. His mouth twitched. He felt off-kilter.

"My name is Smith, Pastor. I answer to it proudly, as I'm sure you do. I'm Dublin-born, I'm Catholic, I'm a sergeant with the Los Angeles Police. Some pamphlets that I believe you to have published have come to my attention as collateral evidence in an already-solved homicide case. I have a few perfunctory questions along those lines, but the true purpose of this visit is to solicit your advice on a business matter."

Hiltz sailed off a high one. Smith hoisted his trousers. He had stock moves. He was a grand stage ham.

"I bear no ill will for Catholics or the Irish, sir. The Irish lit bonfires so that Luftwaffe airplanes could get a better fix on London and blow it to smithereens. English Jews wrote *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. The Jew Control Apparatus has its own special entrance at number 10 Downing Street."

Dudley bit his tongue. Hiltz walked to a sideboard and poured three lemonades. Smith went *After you.*

They pulled up chairs, facing the golf course. Hiltz dispensed lemonade. He was Gerald L. K.'s flunky. Gerry collected stooge protégés.

Hiltz raised his glass. *"L'chaim.* It's a Jew toast. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. I like a good pastrami sandwich as much as the next Christian white man."

Dudley *Smith* roared. Gerald L. K. *Smith* roared. He had the lion head common to stage hams.

They sipped lemonade. It was laced with high-test bourbon. Dudley broke a sweat.

Smith said, "Huey Pierce Long, R.I.P. The sour mash that you are now imbibing came from his private stock. It's 168-proof. The Kingfish appreciated a fast push out of the gate."

Hiltz said, "That Jew dentist massacred him. I was in dental school then. Carl Weiss, DDS. That Jew cocksucker defamed my whole profession. I heard the news on the radio, and joined the Shirts the next day."

Smith said, "Ask your questions, sir. 'Perfunctory,' you stated. That means *three* questions to me."

Dudley said, "A Jap family named Watanabe was killed on December 6. They possessed one English-language and a score of Jap-language tracts that I believe you to have published. Did you know this family? Did you sell them tracts? Do you know or think you know anyone who might have known them?"

Smith said, "Well, that's three questions."

Hiltz said, "We've got no 'Watanabes' and no Jap names, period, on our mail lists. We consign our Jap tracts to a newsstand guy at 2nd and San Pedro. Who knows where they end up."

Smith said, "They get killed December 6. Pearl Harbor takes it up the shorts the next day. No wonder I haven't seen it in the papers."

Dudley said, "Fainthearted people might call your pamphlets hateful, but I do not. It does not perturb me that some of your published screeds are vociferously anti-American, anti-Catholic, anti–Los Angeles Police, pro-Japanese and more than occasionally written from a Communist perspective. These extraordinary times have created a radically comingled populism, and your pamphlets serve to give it voice. I am possessed of extreme viewpoints that most of our fellow Americans might consider reprehensible. I laud you for having the courage to put forth such a diverse range of thought."

Smith and Hiltz gawked. This mick can *talk*!

Hiltz said, "The bad pamphlets pay for the good pamphlets. We're proponents of First Amendment discourse, and we revere our native right of free speech. Also, it's fun to stir up shit from conflicting perspectives, and see how it all comes out in the wash."

Dudley sipped lemonade. It burned going down. It merged with the bennies and sparked tingles.

"Who writes the tracts? Who receives them? How extensive are your mail lists?"

Hiltz said, "This guy's bearing down with the questions, Gerry."

Smith said, "There's a pitch coming, son. Smitty ain't here to waste our time."

No, you vile Prod sack of shit—I am not. "Smitty"? I have killed men for less.

Dudley said, " 'Smitty.' That's rich."

Hiltz said, " 'Smitty's' a potato eater from way back. The Irish breed with the dagos every chance they get. It's eugenics. They produce good-looking people with dark hair and blue eyes. Potatoes are an aphrodisiac. Smitty's probably got half-dago whelps scattered all over the country."

Dudley went for his sap. *No, no, no—don't.*

"I will readily admit my fondness for potatoes, Doctor. It is surely in my eugenic blood."

Smith said, "Don't rile Smitty, son. He's got more than potatoes in his blood."

Dudley sipped lemonade. Dudley faked a cough and popped three bennies.

Smith said, "To answer Smitty's questions, then. I write the rightwing tracts, Dr. Fred writes the left-wing tracts, and an old British fascist guy who was Jap-fluent wrote the Jap tracts, but he got killed in a hit-and-run accident on Pearl Harbor morning. The Jap-tract market has slowed down since we got in the war, but I'm considering hiring a Chink writer to write anti-Jap tracts and a Jap writer to write anti-Chink tracts in their own languages, which will cover a lot of bases and buttress our pro–First Amendment stance. There's a socialite Commie woman named Claire De Haven who buys our Red tracts in bulk, and she even wrote an anticop tract herself. She distributes the tracts to Hollywood Jews, labor agitators, bleeding hearts, jigaboos, welfare creeps, queers, lovers of President Franklin 'Double-Cross' Rosenfeld, Jap lovers, Klan haters, Fifth Columnists and the Red parasites who pollute the minds of our young at American *Jew*niversities."

The stage ham pooped out. Hiltz rolled his eyes. *He's always like this*.

Dudley said, "Pastor, how many names do you have on your mail list?"

Hiltz stirred his lemonade. "Now, he gets to it."

Smith said, "Let's allow him his moment. He hasn't been brusque so far."

Hiltz said, "He was brusque at the Deutsches Haus."

Smith slurped lemonade. "Smitty, I'm not a bragging man—but Dr. Fred and I are currently blessed with 68,981 names on our list."

Dudley whistled. It came out dry. *He* was dry. The golf course swirled.

"Gentlemen, I represent a cadre of investors who stand to reap significant profits from the upcoming Japanese internment. Among our many plans, we intend to shoot risqué movies with an anti-Axis political content, featuring Jap performers. This war is a free-for-all, gentlemen. If even 15% of the people on your list have the predilection or wartime je ne sais quoi to partake, we would all earn significant monies."

Hiltz said, "And that's only one of your plans?"

Dudley said, "Yes."

Smith slurped redneck lemonade. "And you're telling us it's police-protected? I used to drink and worship with Two-Gun Davis, so I know police protection when I see it."

"Chief Horrall is less flamboyant than Chief Davis, but no less willing to capitalize on unfortunate situations that he himself did not create."

Hiltz said, "The Japs lost me with Pearl Harbor. I wouldn't mind turning a buck off the upshot. We could tithe 10% to the Crusade and wash our hands of the seamy side."

Smith winked. "Dr. Fred's been known to enjoy a racy two-reeler every once in a blue moon. He draws the line at tykes and animals, though."

"We all do, Pastor."

Smith said, "How much seed money are you looking for, Smitty?" Dudley said, "None, sir."

Hiltz said, "The magic words. You can't trust a man who arrives with his hand out."

Smith said, "It's all about selecting the proper names on the list. You can't send out 68,981 smut brochures and remain confident of a high sell-through and no Christian censure."

Hiltz said, "Amen."

Dudley sipped redneck lemonade. His vision fritzed. His shirt collar seeped.

"There are a great many details to be worked out, gentlemen."

Smith said, "You're looking peked, Smitty. It's not attractive on a ruddy guy like you."

Hiltz said, "Huey Long's private stock is not for weak sisters."

A golf ball hit the house. Dudley flinched and reached for his piece.

Hiltz said, "Goddamn Jews. They're gunning for us, I can tell."

Smith said, "It's a restricted club, Freddy. You can't blame this one on the kikes."

Hiltz said, "You're right, Chief. It's *Smitty* who's gunning for us. He's got a case of the yips."

Dudley stood up. He saw spots in front of his eyes.

"Gentlemen, I'm afraid I must leave. I have a murder suspect to arrest."

Hiltz said, "Did you hear the one about Pope Pius and the Dalmatian? Just a quick one before you go."

Smith said, "You shoo, Smitty. I can tell you've been working too hard."

He got to his car. Caddies lugging golf bags blurred by him. He clutched his Saint Chris. Martin Luther taunted him. He started the car and got rolling downhill.

A canyon, a golf course, a white pavement line. He concentrated on his front tires and that white blur. He squinted. His clutch foot went numb. The car jerk-jerk-jerked.

He turned on his lights. Bugs crawled over the windshield. He ran the wipers and killed them.

He drove too fast. He drove too slow. He popped four bennies. He lost track of where he was. It looked like Dublin. Street signs said GLENDALE.

He stayed in second gear. He stalled out traffic behind him. He lurched up to red lights and fishtailed through greens. Christmas trees and American flags made him cry.

It might be raining. It might be his tears. He ran his wipers and brushed off more bugs. He weaved by the Silver Lake Reservoir. Front tires/white pavement line.

He saw double and triple. He passed Melrose and Virgil and saw that phone booth. Goro Shigeta waved at him. He yelled *You're dead, and I'm not.*

He made Temple Street. His vision discombobulated and normalized. He checked the rearview mirror and saw Dudley Liam Smith. He recognized a hot dog stand.

He test-fired his mind. He recalled his daughters' names. He recalled sporting events. The second Louis-Schmeling fight, 6/22/38.

Temple to Spring. Spring to City Hall.

The garage was near empty. He parked with great care. He wobble-walked to the lift and pushed 6. His feet were all pins and needles.

The lift stopped. He made the Bureau hallway. It was suppertime dead. The wall was a pavement line. His feet were front tires. He made it to the men's room.

He threw the bolt and locked himself in. He slid down the door. The floor tile induced shivers. He crawled to the sink and pulled himself up.

He soaked a paper towel and doused his face. The mirror was a mirror. It was not a bug habitat.

Dudley Liam Smith. Dear Lord, that's a scare.

He walked back out to the hall. He walked to his cubicle and fell into his chair. He stifled a screechy child's sob.

Cigarettes settled his pulse and rewired his blood. Twenty minutes to the show-up. The eyeball wits were being briefed now.

He sucked pastilles. His pulse raced and subsided. The desk phone rang. He snatched the call.

"Homicide, Sergeant Smith."

"Larry at PC Bell, Dud. You wanted fast, so you got it."

"You'll be compensated, lad. You know I reward rapid service."

Larry said, "The only consistent run of Ensenada-to-L.A. calls that Madrano made over the past three months were to three local numbers. You've got the home number for a man named Preston Exley. That's E,X,L,E,Y and WEbster-4821, which is a Hancock Park exchange. The second number is Exley Construction, 6402 Wilshire Boulevard, OLeander-2758. We've got Beverly Hills for the third number. It's the office line for one Pierce Patchett. That's P,A,T,C,H,E,T,T. The number is CRestview-7416. I don't know what sort of business Patchett is in, but the address is 416 Bedford Drive."

Dudley wrote it down. His hand trembled. The pencil snapped.

Larry nagged him. You owe me a C-note—blah, blah. Dudley hung up. Evidential links and tweakers overlapped.

He *knew* Preston Exley. He *served* under him. Preston ran Homicide for a spell. He read an inter-Bureau memo. Exley Construction had proposed internment-prison plans. The Madrano-to-Exley calls *suggested* Watanabe-case links.

Carlos Madrano fed wetbacks to Jap truck farms. Add the "two white stiffs" embroiled in the buyouts. Exley and Patchett might be those stiffs.

Patchett's address hit familiar. 416 Bedford Drive. There's more overlap.

Ed Satterlee supplied it. They were gabbing at Kwan's. *"We've got this Red psychiatrist turned. He's got an office on Bedford, across from Klein's Pharmacy."*

He knew Klein's. His wife got her asthma pills there. The address was 419 Bedford. He always parked by 416.

Overlap.

Preston Exley suffered from migraines. They discussed it at a Bureau lunch last year. Preston said a Jew doctor worked wonders for him. The man was deep off in eugenics. His office was right by Marv's Hofbrau. A pal in the same building recommended him.

Marv's Hofbrau. Across the street from Klein's Pharmacy. Right by 416 Bedford Drive.

Exley. Doctor-snitch Saul Lesnick. The unknown Pierce Patchett. Evidential leads and overlaps.

The phone rang. He fumble-snatched the receiver.

"Homicide, Sergeant Smith."

"It's Bette, and I will not tolerate one single interruption or line of blarney while I tell you that my husband was there when the flowers arrived, as were Willie Wyler, Myrna Loy and John Huston. My husband began weeping, in full view of my friends. John said, 'Who sent them, Bette? Some stagehand you're fucking?' I was mortified, I was inconvenienced, I was made to look picayune. Do not cross the line again with me, Dudley—because I will not let you inconvenience me one more time."

He trembled. Bette hung up. He fumble-lit a cigarette. The match singed his hand.

Buzz Meeks walked up. He struck a pose. He oozed insolence. He wagged a cigar.

"You look dicey, Dud. The Dudster with troubles. It's one for the books."

"Is there a point to your comments?"

"The point is you owe me three scrapes. My girlfriends are squawking, and I know you got to book Ruthie in advance."

Dudley scrawled up a note slip. "Pierce Patchett/416 Bedford/Beverly Hills." He tore it off the pad and gave it to Meeks.

"Get me all you can on this man. I'll pay you five hundred. No delays, no cornpone asides. You've *inconvenienced* me, lad. I will not let that happen again."

Meeks gulped. There—the fucking balance regained.

Dudley stood up. He got anchored. He weave-walked to the show-up room. It was elbow-to-elbow tight.

His lads. The nine eyeball wits. Low-life Meeks, waddling up.

A sideshow. A fashion show. Punks in slit-bottom khakis. Sideburns and duck's-ass haircuts. A Mex in a full-drape zoot suit.

Jabber. Oppressive smoke. Dudley went light-headed. Dick Carlisle went *Pipe down, now*.

Dudley said, "Good evening, and thank you for your cooperation. We are forgoing the show-up we had originally planned, in favor of a more expeditious two-step procedure. You will view the suspect's image on a mug-shot strip, and will later view the man himself through a blacked-out interrogation room mirror. In recompense, you will be given ten-dollar food and beverage chits for the much honored Kwan's Chinese Pagoda."

The lowlifes stomped and cheered. Dudley raised a hand and squelched it.

"To further express our appreciation, all of your extant bench warrants and parole holds will be rescinded."

More cheers, more stomps. Dudley went queasy. Bette berated him. He shook his head and muzzled her.

Dougie Waldner passed out mug shots. The strips featured full-face and side-angle views. Bamboo Shoot Shudo ran pudgy. He had a *loooooow* hairline.

The mug shots went around. The wits scoped the slayer. *Woooo*, he's ugly. *Woooo*, he's scary. *Wooooo*, he's *evil—and dat's no fuckin' shit*.

The strips ran back to Waldner. The Mex said, "He looks like a werewolf."

Dudley said, "December 6, gentlemen. That was twelve days ago, and memories tend to falter with the passage of time. Paradoxically, memories cohere in the proximity of important events. We all remember where we were when we got the word on Pearl Harbor. That horrible occurrence has forever fixed the sighting of our suspect in your minds."

Nods went around. The Mex howled like The Werewolf. It promoted boocoo laffs.

Dudley signaled Scotty: *It's you and me*.

A black-and-white was pre stashed downstairs. Ditto a throwdown piece and two Ithaca pumps.

They took side stairs down. Dudley went on-and-off weavy. Scotty fiddled with his nose splint. It looked ridiculous. It marred his boy-man élan.

They piled into the sled. Dudley took the wheel. Scotty scanned the backseat ordnance and whistled. The Kyoto Arms was two-minutes close—1st and Alameda.

Dudley pulled out and goosed the lights and siren. Bette said *"You inconvenienced me."* He went pins and needles. He kept hearing her.

They cut southeast. It was late-fall cool. Local business fronts were broken-windowed and dark. Little Tokyo had been raped. Unimprisoned Japs stayed indoors. It was a howlers' night. *No one out but us werewolves, boss*.

Sid Hudgens and Jack Webb beat them there. They brought a camera geek along. The Kyoto Arms was a two-story fleabag. There's Elmer Jackson on the fire escape.

Dudley pulled up across the street. Sid and Jack trotted over. He shook his legs limber. Scotty loaded the shotguns.

Sid said, "I'm glad you brought the Bennett kid. Our female readers will go for him. Mr. Hearst knows that beefcake sells papers."

Jack said, "Mike Breuning showed me a mug shot. The cocksucker looks like a werewolf."

Sid howled. *"Jap Creature Apprehended! Fearless Cops Storm Monster's Den!"*

Dudley laughed. He felt fine-all-of-a-sudden. Scotty passed him a shotgun.

Sid said, "You're a swell-looking kid, Scotty—but I don't like that splint."

Jack said, "Have you been off to Mars? Scotty KO'd Lee Blanchard."

Dudley ripped off the splint and tossed it in the gutter. Scotty went *Ouch!* Blood trickled down his cheeks.

Sid and Jack went *Ouch!* Elmer yelled, "He's in 216!" He waved his Ithaca pump.

Dudley grabbed the throwdown piece. The camera geek walked up. He said, "Watch the birdie." He snapped the Dudster and the swell-looking kid.

Sid said, *"Hollywood High Fullback Scores Crime Touchdown! Werewolf Slayer Sacked!"*

Jack said, "Holy shit, this is kicks."

Sid said, "Blast a few rounds, will you, Dud? Mr. Hearst likes action pix."

Dudley winked at Scotty. "I'll take the door. If he makes any sudden moves, kill him."

The geek hooked a flashbulb strip to his camera. They ran across the street and went in the front door. No lobby, no desk man. Straight-up stairs to the second floor.

They ran up, single file. Elmer stood outside 216. They formed a crash line. The camera geek took the rear slot.

Dudley kicked in the door. There's The Werewolf.

He's on the bed. He's dolled up in skivvies. He's slurping muscatel.

Note the bamboo shoots, propped on the nightstand. They're covered with dried blood and shit.

They ran in. They stood three across. A flashbulb popped.

The Werewolf snarled. Dudley triggered a round and blew out a window. Bulb no. 2 popped. Elmer triggered a round and blew up a wall. Scotty triggered two rounds and blew up the bed legs. The mattress and Werewolf crashed to the floor.

Bulb no. 3 popped. Dudley charged Bamboo Shudo and kicked him in the head. Shudo screeched. Elmer crowded up and stepped on his neck. Bulb no. 4 popped. The room went phosphorescent. Dudley went light-headed and glare-blind.

Scotty crowded up and grabbed Shudo's wrists. Dudley heard bones shear. His head cleared. Scotty cuffed Shudo's hands behind his back.

They dragged him.

They dragged him facedown. It was clumsy. Their shotguns got in the way. Dudley grabbed a foot. Elmer grabbed a foot. Scotty grabbed an arm and walked backward.

Shudo screeched and ate floor wood. They dragged him down the hall and down the stairs. His face bounced off the steps. Tooth stubs hit Scotty's shoes.

Dudley saw a crowd outside. He dropped the foot and pulled Shudo up by his hair. Elmer and Scotty held his arms and steered him. Dudley got the door and shoved him outside.

Local Japs ghoul-shrieked. White squares cheered. They steered Shudo up to the black-and-white. Sid and Jack stood by.

The photo geek snapped a shot. *Pop!*—he got Dudley's mitts in The Werewolf's mane and The Wolf in full snarl.

Shudo flailed. Elmer sapped him in the balls. Shudo gasped and went two-second meek. Dudley laid down his shotgun and popped the trunk.

Elmer shoved Shudo in. Scotty slammed the door. City Hall—Code 3.

Dudley drove. Scotty rode up front. Elmer took the backseat. The Werewolf thrashed in the trunk.

Dudley lit a cigarette. Scotty chewed gum and blew a big bubble. Dudley stabbed his cigarette. The bubble blew all over Scotty's face.

Scotty laughed. Elmer laughed. They all laughed and went *WHEW!* The siren whooped *loud*.

They made City Hall. Dudley idled the car by the lift. Elmer and Scotty popped the trunk and hauled Shudo out.

They kicked his legs wide. They manhandled him and got him into the lift. The doors slid shut.

Dudley sat in the car. He popped sweat and felt it freeze. He blinked and saw Bette. She said, "*You inconvenienced me.*"

He tasted Huey Long's booze. His breath was off. His trousers fit slack. His feet swam in his shoes.

Rest, now—just a bit.

He parked the car and worked the seat back. Bette said those words again. He said, "Hush, dear. I've work to do."

He caught his breath. He wiped his face and walked to the lift. He pushed the button. The doors slid wide. *Dudley Liam Smith—a task beckons you.*

He went up six floors. He primped and stepped into the hallway. His audience awaited him. They jammed the sweat-room row.

Now, they turn. Now, they applaud. Now, they honor you.

Call-Me-Jack Horrall. Lieutenant Thad Brown. Ray Pinker and Hideo Ashida. A glum Bill Parker.

The eyeball wits. All his lads. Sid Hudgens and Jack Webb. Werewolf watchdog Elmer Jackson.

He walked over. They pumped his hand. They clapped his back. They attaboy'd him. He heard *Werewolf! Werewolf! Werewolf!* He looked in mirror-front no. 1.

Fuji Shudo was cuffed to a bolted-down chair. He dripped blood on a bolted-down table.

Dudley smiled at his colleagues. Dudley winked at young Hideo and dour Whiskey Bill. He tapped the speaker above the mirror. Shudo's breath eked.

Breuning lobbed a syringe. Dudley snapped it out of the air. He motioned Scotty over. They stepped into the room.

Shudo stuck out his tongue and wagged it. Scotty huddled close. He smelled like fresh bubble gum.

Dudley said, "Walk the witnesses by the look-see, individually. Get their eyeball confirmations and write the precise time and date in your notebook. Go to the property room and filch a pair of Nancy Watanabe's panties and one of Aya Watanabe's brassieres. Go back to Shudo's room, drag the articles over the floor and create a coating of particles. Place the articles in one of Shudo's coats, return here and talk to Sergeant Jackson. Tell him that he's green-lit to toss the room."

Scotty walked. The steno rolled in his machine. Shudo tongue-wagged him. The steno said, "*Really*, sweetheart."

Dudley roared. The steno arranged his machine. Shudo studied him and rattled his cuff chain. Dudley blindsided him.

He grabbed Shudo's head. He jammed the syringe into his neck and siphoned blood. Shudo screamed. Dudley pulled out the spike and waved at the mirror.

Breuning walked in. Dudley tossed him the syringe.

"Good Samaritan, lad. The fastest typing you can get."

Breuning scrammed. The steno slid his chair outside spit-glob range. Dudley straddled his chair. Shudo sat two feet away.

Dudley reached under the table. Flip—the hallway-speaker switch.

Shudo queer-eyed the steno. Dudley laid his cigarettes and matches on the table. He faked a cough and popped three bennies. Shudo shook his chain.

Dick Carlisle rolled in a coffee cart. He poured two cups and left the cart close. The steno grabbed his. Dudley grabbed his. Carlisle left the room.

Dudley lit a cigarette. Shudo made *gimme* eyes. Dudley slid the pack and matchbook over. Shudo lit up.

His lips were lacerated. His teeth were cracked bloody. He smoked stylishly. He was almost-but-not-quite effete.

Dudley said, "To begin, I am Sergeant D. L. Smith, assigned to the Homicide Division of the Los Angeles Police Department. The stenographer is Mr. George T. Eggleton, a licensed and board-certified employee of the county of Los Angeles. It is now 9:23 p.m., on Thursday, December 18, 1941. We are in the Detective Bureau offices of the Los Angeles Police Department. This is our first interview of Mr. Fujio Shudo. Mr. Shudo's local address is 682 East 1st Street."

Shudo killed off his cigarette. Dudley slid him the ashtray. Shudo crushed the butt.

"I want to go home."

"To the Kyoto Arms, Mr. Shudo? To Imperial Japan?"

"No. Atascadero. I had a sweet berth there. I didn't have to think about nothing. I think too much when I'm on the outside."

"What do you think about, sir?"

"Crazy things. You wouldn't understand."

"I would, sir. My enlightened perspective might surprise you."

Shudo said, "Okay, then. I did it."

Dudley said, "Did what, sir?"

Shudo said, "I bootjacked three rumdums from a he-she bar on East Fifth. I fed them terpin hydrate and got them all sleepy. I stole a car and took them up the ridge route. There was a pretty forest outside of Castaic. I was in the honor farm there. You know my MO, chief. I'm the Sheriff of the Brown Trail."

Dudley said, "Would you explain your last comment, please." Shudo said, "Bamboo shoots. The dirt road. Figure out the rest for yourself."

Dudley said, "Are you admitting sodomy or other forms of sexual deviance, sir?"

"Okay, chief. If that's what gets me back home, I admit it."

"And where did you go after you performed the sexual assaults that you have just elliptically, but colorfully, described?"

"I left the winos in the pretty forest. I gave them a buck each for car fare and got a pizza pie at a diner on the ridge route. The old bat behind the counter was real friendly. She said she didn't usually like Japs, because we were in with the Krauts, and she was a Jew. She said she liked me because I look like a werewolf, and Lon Chaney flirted with her at a sneak peek in Burbank back in '34. She didn't charge me for my coffee. She was nice, so I left her a big tip."

Dudley said, "And then, sir? You presumably left the diner. Where did you go then?"

Shudo said, "Back to the hotel."

Dudley said, "The Kyoto Arms Hotel, at 682 East 1st Street?"

"Right."

"You've described the abduction and its aftermath quite concisely. Will you tell me when it occurred? The *date*, sir. Do you recall the date or the day of the week?"

Shudo scrunched up his face. Dudley slid his cigarettes and matches over. Shudo lit up.

"Two weeks ago. Wednesday. They kicked me loose at Atascadero. I got off the bus and rented that hotel room. I started drinking terp and got the hankering. My dick started talking to me, so I went to the Murakami Nursery and got some shoots."

Dudley said, "That's Wednesday, December 3rd, that you're describing. You were released from Atascadero on that date. You rented a room at the Kyoto Arms on that date, you purchased bamboo shoots at the Murakami Nursery on that date, you abducted the three men and performed the sexual assaults that you described on that date, you returned to your hotel room after you left the diner, on that date?"

Shudo pouted. "That's right, chief. You don't have to be so quick with the questions, though. It's not like I don't want to go back. That, and you and your pals didn't have to be so rough. I had a sweet berth at the Big A."

Dudley said, "I apologize, sir, but you do resemble a werewolf. My colleagues and I were unprepared for your fearsome appearance, and acted out of sheer panic. Again, sir, my deepest apologies."

Shudo grinned. His cracked teeth wobbled. His lips oozed blood.

"I like you, chief. You got that funny accent, and you talk nice."

Dudley said, "Thank you, sir. You are a man of considerable insight, and I appreciate your kind regard for me. On that note, I would like to discuss your apprenticeship in the knife-sharpening trade."

Shudo said, "That's me. 'Fuji, the Werewolf.' 'Fuji, the Knife Man.' "

Dudley lit a cigarette. "How long have you practiced the trade, sir? As I understand it, you peddle your wares door-to-door."

Shudo said, " 'Fuji, the Knife Man.' I've been at it since '31. I was in Preston for 459 and indecent exposure. I learned the trade in metal shop."

Dudley blew a smoke ring. It sent him light-headed.

"You were out with your cart two weeks ago, weren't you, sir? That would be Thursday, December 4th, and Friday, December 5th. You were in Highland Park, a few miles north of Chinatown, on the west side of the parkway. Is that correct, sir?"

Shudo yawned. "Yeah, that's correct. But I don't get it. I told you what I did. I *confessed*. I told you I bootjacked them winos and had fun with them. You don't need to talk so much. I'm ready to go back, and all you got to do is give me the paper, so I can sign it and go to my cell and go to sleep."

Dudley crushed his cigarette. He felt bilious. His wedding band slipped off and hit the table.

He grabbed it. He saw spots in front of his eyes.

"I'm curious, Mr. Shudo. You were released from Atascadero on Wednesday, December 3rd. You rented a room in Little Tokyo, kidnapped three winos and sexually assaulted them at a remote location sixty miles north of Los Angeles, ate a pizza pie at a nearby diner and returned to your room, all on Wednesday, December 3rd. The following day, Thursday, December 4th, you were spotted in Highland Park, with your knife-sharpening cart. I'm curious, sir. You're fresh out of a mental institution, and you've been quite the busy lad. My question is, where, when, and from whom did you secure the knife-sharpening cart you were seen with?"

Shudo yawned. "Too many dates. Days and dates get blurry, you know? I'm a terp man. I drink terp and lose track of things. It's not my fault. Nobody's that good with dates. People don't remember what they did on Tuesday, three weeks ago. This is all Sanskrit you're talking."

Dudley drummed the table. "Normally, you would be correct about that, sir. But the Japanese attack of Sunday, December 7th, has served to embed a unique sense of chronology within all of us. We recall our movements preceding and following that event with enhanced clarity. Do you understand that, sir?"

Shudo yawned. "Too many words. Too much talk and too many dates. You got to slow down, chief. I'm a terp man. I'm losing track of things."

Dudley saw spots. Bette said, *"You inconvenienced me."* The spots dispersed.

"The cart, sir. Where did you buy the knife-sharpening cart?" Shudo yawned. "Outside the Shotokan Baths. This old nip named Kenji. He sold me the cart, wheels, sample knives, the megillah."

"And when was this?"

"The morning. I was hungover. I thought, Shit, I'm back here again. Shit, I should go home."

Dudley smiled. "And that would be the morning of Thursday, December 4th?"

Shudo yawned. "That's right, chief. The Werewolf's at the Shotokan Baths, and he's one day out of stir."

The door light blinked. Dudley walked over. Breuning and Scotty B. stepped inside.

Scotty said, "I planted the items. I gave Elmer the green light on the toss."

Breuning said, "We hit paydirt on the typing. The Wolf's AB negative, so he could have knocked Nancy up. I called Atascadero, on a hunch. Get this. The Wolf was out on a work furlough at the approximate time that Nancy would have been impregnated, so we're golden there."

Dudley smiled. "Reserve a padded cell at Central Station. Call the jailer. Tell him it's a straitjacket deal."

The boys tore off. Dudley walked back to the table.

Shudo said, "I'm hungry. I'll cop to the Lindbergh baby job if you get me a pizza pie."

The steno hooted. Dudley drummed the table.

"Let's return to Thursday and Friday, December 4th and 5th. You're on your knife-sharpening rounds in Highland Park. What drew you to that particular area? Was there any specific reason?" Shudo shrugged. "Instinct, I guess. I was on the Figueroa bus, and it looked like a good place to work."

"Instinct." A sure grabber. Lunatics succumbed to wisps.

"You say 'Instinct.' Had you been drinking terp at this time? Would you say that it contributed to your 'instinct'?"

"I don't know. I guess so."

Dudley drummed the table. He went light-headed. He lit a cigarette and saw spots. He saw Bette in the wall mirror. He shook his head and shooed her off.

"Would you be more specific, please? Were you drinking terpin hydrate, and do you think it contributed to your 'instinct' to peddle your wares in Highland Park?"

Shudo pouted. "I want a pizza pie and medical attention. You and your pals kicked the shit out of me."

"In due time, sir. We have the matter of your knife-sharpening rounds in Highland Park to discuss first."

Shudo said, "Highland Park and *Glassell* Park. Them neighborhoods confuse me. It was the first two days I was out of the joint, and maybe more. I was belting terp. Things get fuzzy when you belt terp. You get hazy and lose track of the time."

Missing time. Terp blackouts. Lunatic gems.

"You were on your rounds in Highland Park and possibly Glassell Park, on that Thursday, that Friday and possibly that Saturday, right?"

"Right."

"You made some sales and talked to some customers, right?"

"Right."

"Do you recall any specific sales that you made?"

"No. But I made sales, because I woke up in my room and had money in my pocket."

"Do you recall any specific incidents that occurred on your rounds? Any specific people you might have talked to?"

Shudo giggled. "I talked to a little girl. She said I looked like The Wolfman. Her dad took a picture of me."

"And when was this, sir?"

"It must have been Saturday, maybe noon or so. Her dad said a college football game was coming on the radio."

"And this was in Highland Park, sir?"

"Yeah, one of them avenues with numbers. Forty or fifty something."

"And *then*, sir? Do you recall any incidents or interactions that might have occurred *after* you talked to the little girl and her father?" Shudo shook his head. "It all got fuzzy then. Terp, man. It gets into your noggin."

The door light blinked. Dudley got up and walked over. The floor dipped. He reached for the wall.

The door popped wide. Call-Me-Jack beamed. A thin man stood beside him. He looked like a lox jock. He wore a Phi Beta Kappa key.

"Dud, this is Ellis Loew. He'll be presenting the case to the grand jury. He went to Harvard, and he's a comer. Bill McPherson calls him 'the Hebrew Hammer.' "

Loew cringed. Dudley laughed—*That's rich, sir*.

"A pleasure, Mr. Loew."

"Mine entirely, Sergeant."

Jack pointed to Shudo. "He's The Werewolf Slayer. Can you smell the wolfsbane? Sid Hudgens is writing that angle up."

Loew drifted off. He screamed wet blanket. He was no shtick-meister Yid.

Jack said, "He's a stick-in-the-mud, but he's damn good in court. He's got the ethics you'd expect from one of his kind."

Dudley popped a sweat. The walls compressed. He loosened his necktie.

"Close him, Dud. Close that fucker and get this off our plate. Sid H. sees this caper as a Sunday-supplement series. It'll take us straight up to that Fed probe and have us looking so good that that fucking pansy Hoover will drop the whole thing. The Japs got Pearl Harbor, but we got The Werewolf. He slayed his own kind, but we're blind to racial horseshit, so we fucking slayed *him*. Close him, Dud. I'm going over to the tile game at Kwan's. Meet me there later. We'll belt a few."

Dudley walked back. Call-Me-Jack shut the door. Shudo yawned. Dudley tossed a change-up.

"I'm still curious about something, Mr. Shudo."

"So am I. I'm curious about Thursday, Friday and Saturday in Highland Park, when you got me for grief up the ridge route on Wednesday."

"Then our curiosities overlap, sir. Your 'instinct' took you up the ridge route on Wednesday, and to Highland Park for the following three days. I don't think we can entirely attribute your 'instinct' for Highland Park to the consumption of terpin hydrate, do *you*, sir?"

"I don't know. Maybe not. Instincts are strange. It's this word we use to explain things we can't explain."

Yes—like brainstorms. He could enlist Hideo Ashida. The lad could craft a Jap-script note. Fuji Shudo writes to Ryoshi Watanabe. A friendship preexists.

The note bolsters hazy memories. He rolls The Werewolf's prints on transparency tape. He plants a print at the house.

"Did you belong to any Japanese fraternal societies before you went up, Mr. Shudo?"

"I went to the clubs. Why? I don't get this, and I want to go home. The clubs were all Japanese, and the guys I keestered were white. I'm losing track of all this, and my head hurts, and you promised me medical care and a pizza pie."

Dudley went light-headed. Dudley leaned across the table.

"I realize that things are often quite hazy for you, sir, given your long-standing consumption of terpin hydrate. However, I *do* know that you were often seen in the social clubs on 2nd Street, as far back as the early ’30s, often arguing politics and racial issues with a man named Ryoshi Watanabe. Do you recall Ryoshi Watanabe, sir?”

Shudo yawned, Shudo shrugged, Shudo rattled his cuffs.

“I don’t know. I used to go to those clubs, sure. I knew a guy named Ginzo Watanabe and a guy named Charlie Watanabe, and—”

“—and it all gets hazy after that, doesn’t it? It all gets hazy and instinctive, and you wake up in your hotel room with knives missing from your cart, and you wonder where your instincts took you before you passed out, and why there’s shit and blood on bamboo shoots, and what vile thing did you do with this or that sharp implement, when instinct led you to this or that house, where these hazy memories of arguments you had years before exploded, and you just couldn’t help yourself, so—”

Shudo spit at him. The glob hit his eyes. He saw spots. His eyes burned. He heard *“You inconvenienced me.”*

The Werewolf showed his teeth. Dudley pulled his sap and went for his mouth.

He hit him. He tore his mouth at the corners and crushed his stubbed teeth. He heard the door swing. He heard foot scuffs. He grabbed The Wolf’s mane and pulled him in tight. Something blocked his arm. It was Bill Parker, all red-face flustered.

He *flicked* his arm and *flicked* him aside. The *flick* tossed Parker sideways. The *flick* put him down on the floor.

The Wolf spit at him. It burned the spots in his eyes. The door crashed in. Thad Brown ran in. Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle got to him first. “Go slack, boss”/“Go slack, boss”/“Go slack, boss—we’ve been here before.”

He went slack. He let go. They grabbed his sap and wrestled him out to the hall. The temperature dropped twelve thousand degrees. Some brain shutter doused his lights.

He heard, “Go to Kwan’s.” Everything tumbled. An elevator dropped.

He saw green numbers: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. The doors opened. He saw marble walls and Main Street up ahead.

He walked outside. Lawn sprinklers twirled and sent up a mist. He anchored his legs and walked through the wet.

The water felt good. He slid on the grass. His trousers slid down his hips. He felt like Bill Parker looked.

Parker was frail. He *flicked* Parker off. It brought back ’38. He beat a Mex dead at Newton Station. His lads said, “Go slack, boss.”

“You inconvenienced me.”

He dashed the words and erased Bette’s picture. *El Pueblo Grande* at midnight. That howler’s moon and Chinatown straight ahead.

Dudley Liam Smith—the world tumbles.

He walked straight to Kwan's. He wolfed all the gumballs at the counter. He's werewolf-famished. The counter girl says, *Dudster, you claaaaazy*.

He weaved down to the basement. The tile game was sputtering out. Ace dealt to Harry Cohn. Clark Gable and that leopard snoozed on a couch.

He made the office. He made the den. There's the pipe, the bowl and the tar.

He shut himself in. He removed his suit coat and holster. He kicked off his shoes.

Opium.

Go slack, boss. We've been here before.

Wisps and The Werewolf. His Army commission. *Captain* D. L. Smith. Parity with *Captain* Bill Parker.

That pesky bug. He *flicked* him.

Dudley smoked opium. His pallet flew over America. He visited his loved ones.

Stopover, Boston. Say hello to Beth Short. She's laughing. She's satirizing her rogue-daughter status. She's calling him "Dad."

Stopover, L.A. He nuzzles Bette's Airedale. Bette's naked, Bette's loving him, Bette's a crone in a flash. *He inconvenienced her*. She throws red roses in his face.

Dudley smoked opium. Stopover, Central Station and The Werewolf's padded cell.

The Wolf wears a straitjacket. Terp vials dot the floor. The cell is lined with blood-and-shit-streaked bamboo. The smell drives him out. It's a quick hop to the morgue.

He goes by Nort Layman's office. He steals a vial of Ryoshi Watanabe's blood. He revisits Fuji Shudo. He prints him and creates a tape transparency. He visits the house and finds an overlooked surface. He rolls on the bloody print.

Opium.

Create a note for me, Hideo. Link the victim to the killer in 1933.

Stopover, Nowhere.

He went blank. He reached for thoughts and snagged nothing. He reached for pictures and got empty frames.

"You inconvenienced me."

Stopover, Dublin. A gallery on Sackville Street. At that location—portraits in gilt frames.

His mother. His dead father and brother. His wrathful Bette.

He heard "Perfidia." He smelled roses. He felt sharp thorns on his face.

Dudley smoked opium. The pallet under him dropped.

Dudley said, "Don't hit me."

December 19, 1941

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LOS ANGELES | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1941

They kissed.

It was Claire's idea. Film it at the Anti-Axis Committee. Show the mixed-race lovers in a postmidnight clinch.

It was a post–Pershing Square kiss. It refracted his beaten appearance and Kay's barn-burning speech. The shoot was running in high gear now. Kay laid out her latest intrigue.

She *wanted* the film to come off broad and parodistic. She *wanted* it to scotch Bill Parker's loony crusade.

The kiss required umpteen takes. Kay was eager. Ashida faked urgency. Claire played director. The open doorway served as their set.

An arc light beamed down and prickled them. Two cameramen and a light man hovered. Reynolds and Chaz stood with Claire. Saul Lesnick brought his black bag. The Japanese extras got a dollar each.

They kissed again. Kay went in with her tongue. The cameramen shot the kiss from umpteen angles. They got the shelves stacked with antifascist pamphlets. They got the walls draped with AVENGE PEARL HARBOR! signs.

They kissed again. Kay caressed his bruises. Claire said, "That's good, kids."

The setup drew attention. Ashida saw a Fed sedan parked across the street. They broke the clinch. Claire said, "Once more, please."

A car rumbled by. A man yelled, "Goddamn Jap!"

Ashida flinched and bumped the arc light. Kay steadied him. He brushed free and walked to the back of the room. He stood by a jingoist toy shelf. Kabuki dolls were dolled up red, white and blue.

It was escalating.

Pershing Square. Goro Shigeta. The Japanese man shot in Santa Monica. Nao Hamano's suicide. A suicide at the Fort MacArthur stockade.

Claire talked to a cameraman. Their voices carried. She bribed a cop at the Lincoln Heights jail. They could film the Hamano cell.

Little Tokyo was decimated. Twelve days, then to now. Incarceration, confiscation, liquidation. It was common knowledge—the internment flies in February.

Fait accompli. One possible way out.

Dudley Smith. Brutally revealed tonight. Stunning and endearing.

It started with Pershing Square and impotent Bill Parker. Whiskey Bill came solely to ogle Kay Lake. The attack on Hideo Ashida disturbed his sense of order. Scotty Bennett's intercession was something else.

Dudley knew the hate was building. Dudley knew that he'd ducked his bodyguards. Dudley sent men out to loose-tail him. *They* extricated him. Bill Parker flailed for his glasses and punched at the air.

The scene replayed at the Bureau. Parker witnessed Dudley's lapse and reacted again. The civil forfeit offended him more than the brutality. Parker hated disorder. That hatred created disorder in him. Parker's intervention was prissy and indicative of the man. Dudley's lapse showed the raw man beneath the glib skein.

Ashida studied the Kabuki dolls. Kay glanced back and saw him. She blew him a kiss.

He tried for a Dudley Smith wink—and failed. *Nobody* winked like Dudley Smith.

Kay laughed. Ashida thought of Bucky. He got that flutter and walked to the parking lot. A Fed was checking license plates. He carried a flashlight and strolled.

It's 2:26 a.m. *There's no one out but us Feds and Reds*.

Ashida got his car and drove home. That *JAP!* was still there on his door. He went straight inside and straight to his picture trove.

He got out the photos and his gizmo prototype. He went *all* flutters. He placed the Bucky pictures on his lap and nickelodeon-fanned them. He made Bucky dance in the nude.

He kept old photos loaded in the gizmo. The lens glass magnified details. He clicked levers and slid photos by. Shutter stops and Bucky, in the nude.

He scrolled pictures. They began to blur. It wasn't attrition caused by exposure. The pictures rarely met light.

Ashida studied the gizmo. Diagnostic scrutiny, prognosis.

A too-tight lens mount. Upward pressure. Hence, tears in the film.

The housing gears had rusted. The blurs were not pronounced. A new lens mount would halt the blurs at this point.

He had one new lens mount. His new gizmo was still affixed by Whalen's Drugstore. He could switch mounts. The new gizmo had run out of film. It was a twenty-minute drive, door-to-door.

He ran back out. He drove to Whalen's and braced the new gizmo. He pulled wires and detached the generator. He grabbed the new gizmo and drove straight back home.

All right. Prognosis to procedure.

Ashida studied both gizmos. Ashida figured it out.

It's a scroll-through. Go back to the first day the new gizmo clicked film. It's thirteen days ago. It's Saturday, December 6. It's that drugstore 211.

Scroll film until it runs out. Pull the lens mount then.

Ashida tapped levers. Click—car wheels hit a rubber strip stashed curbside. Click—the shutter snaps. Click—an image appears under glass.

Click—that first car parks. Click—the man looks like Bucky. Click—there's the robber's car. Click, click, click—throughout the day.

Click—the gizmo *works*. The precise time and date are clock-marked below each image.

Click—cars pull up and park. Click—there's a double exposure and blurred image. The gizmo jerked off the pavement. The lens jerked upward and snapped foot traffic. See the passersby on Spring Street?

Ashida scrolled photos. Click/snap/picture—all 12/6/41. 1:46 p.m., 2:04 p.m., 2:17 p.m. A rattled-lens run—note the blurred foot-traffic pix.

2:36 p.m., 2:42 p.m. Clear pix off an upward-right image. 3:08 p.m., 3:18 p.m., 3:19 p.m.—*WAIT*.

Hold it now. Wait, wait, wait.

Click/snap—a downtown street scene.

That's *FUJI SHUDO* in the foreground. He's stagger-gaited and visibly bleary. He's zorched on terpin hydrate. The people around him look agitated and downright scared.

They should be. He's evil. He practices bamboo-shoot rape.

It's 3:19 p.m. He's three and a half miles south of the Watanabe house. He's out among refuting eyewitnesses. It's Nort Layman's precise time of death.

The fearful people will recall Shudo. He's that outré. Coerced eyewits have placed Shudo in Highland Park at this time. These eyewits countermand those eyewits. Sure, it's a frame. Sure, The Werewolf will burn. Yes, it's justifiable. But that brings up this:

The Hearst papers will blast the case. Evidential details will be spilled nationwide. The real eyewits will recall The Werewolf and fuck it all up.

Ashida studied the image. Earthlings walk with a werewolf. He terrifies them.

Call-Me-Jack ran late stags most Thursdays. He should hear this.

Ashida rolled. He ran down to his car and burned tread to City Hall. He double-parked in a City Council space and ran up to 6. He heard dirty-joke snippets, straight off.

He tracked it. "Dudster this," "Dudster that." "What do you call an elephant hooker? A two-ton pickup that lays for peanuts."

Ashida walked to the briefing room. It was cops and Feds, intertwined. Note the Hearst Rifle Team boys. Note Brenda Allen by the all-Kwan's buffet.

Highballs and a dice game. A Jap flag for a craps-rolling felt.

Ashida stood in the doorway. Call-Me-Jack waddled over. The lipstick smear on his neck matched Brenda's shade.

"Dr. Ashida. What brings *you* here?"

A rifle man said, "Banzai."

Thad Brown said, "Shut up, he's ours."

Jack gestured out to the hallway. Ashida complied.

"I'm sorry for the intrusion, sir. I wouldn't be here if I didn't consider it urgent."

"*Urgent* always gets my attention. Remember, though, I'm jaded. It was the Dudster versus The Wolfman a few hours ago."

Ashida said, "This pertains to that, sir."

"Okay, kid. Impress me. The Dudster versus The Wolfman. Take it from there."

Ashida said, "Fujio Shudo was outside Whalen's Drugstore at 6th and Spring at Nort Layman's precisely estimated time of death. The trip-wire device that Ray Pinker and I installed that morning authenticates this quite plainly. Shudo was surrounded by five people who were obviously quite frightened of this fearsome individual. Those people will not forget Fujio Shudo, sir. They will come forth as newspaper and radio publicity accrues, they will contradict our eyewitnesses, and they will be credible."

Jack shrugged. "So what? Five eyewits aren't nine eyewits. Your device is something out of Buck Rogers or *Tom Swift and His Flying Saucer from Mars*, and you and Ray Pinker are the only two white men on earth who understand how it works, and you aren't even white. There's that, and there's a kicker. Yeah, Dud blew up at a bad time, but he picked himself up off his heinie, quick. He went back to the Watanabe house and turned up an eight-point print on The Wolf. You want a final kicker? The print was in Ryoshi Watanabe's blood."

Ashida reached for the wall. It wasn't there. Jack steadied him.

"You missed a fingerprint. So what? I don't blame you. Dud blows his cork, you blow an eight-point latent. We're all human, right? The important thing is solidarity. This police department has stepped way out on a limb for you, Doctor. You're too damn smart not to know that, and there's one other thing."

Ashida said, "Which is, sir?"

"Which is this. Dudley Smith is real fond of you."

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1941

The cell.

It was drab. There was a metal bunk, a sink and a lidless toilet. The jailer had vacated all the women's cells. A thin wall separated this tier from the men's tiers. They were brimful of Japanese "subversives" and general riffraff.

The crew moved their gear into the cell and began setting up. I stood with Reynolds and Chaz; Claire and Saul Lesnick gabbed with a light man. Nao Hamano died in the cell. The sequence would feature Claire, speaking directly to the camera.

She would address the powers that be and soliloquize from Mrs. Hamano's perspective. I wanted her to be loopy and bombastic. I feared that her eloquence would supersede bombast and convince a jury that she was indeed plotting treason. We were shooting two sequences here at the jail. The second was Hideo Ashida's stroll down the tier. Hideo, the police chemist. Hideo, the tenuous survivor of a horrible pogrom. Hideo, beholden to his white cop masters and despised by his own people for playing the game so goddamn well.

We needed Hideo here—but Hideo was gone. He broke off a filmed kiss with me and walked away, two hours ago. Claire said, "His kisses are quite tenuous, dear. Perhaps I should rent you a hotel room where you might rehearse." Staged kisses and my gender might have driven him away. Or perhaps he sensed peril—as I was beginning to.

We were under Federal "lockstep" surveillance. Our equipment and developing trailer was outside in the lot; Ed Satterlee and Ward Littell were parked across the street. Littell was Mariko Ashida's protector and was opposed to the roundups; Littell was a Federal agent charged with conducting them, nonetheless. I sensed peril. My cop-wise antennae kept twitching.

Our shooting schedule ran frenetic. It was wholly determined by the contents of Saul Lesnick's black bag. Claire kept saying, "I need to do this and *get away* somewhere." I was determined to shape the content of the film and prevent it from granting her the martyrdom she so desperately craved.

I was tired. My 'round-the-clock life since Pearl Harbor was catching up with me. The tier was strewn with cords and camera dollies; temporary telephone lines had been installed. Claire was skimming news clippings on Mrs. Hamano. Immersion, transference, identity assumed.

There was a daybed in the equipment trailer. I needed a moment's rest and more than a moment alone. I walked out to the parking lot. I saw Hideo enter the jail. He wore his particular look of harried and prim.

I stepped into the trailer, kicked off my shoes and lay down. I heard thunder and hoped for dawn rain. Late autumn in Sioux Falls brought electric storms. I loved them passionately. I spent my girlhood on our front porch, imploring God to bring downpours.

The phone rang. I grabbed the receiver and pulled the cord over to the bed.

"Hello."

A man's voice came on the line. "It's Ward Littell, Miss Lake. I got this number from a police source. I'm sure you know who I am, and that this call constitutes a risk for me."

"I do know who you are, Mr. Littell. I know that you've been helpful to Hideo Ashida and his mother, but you haven't said anything risky."

Littell said, "I'm about to, and so I'll be brief. I would advise you to destroy the existing footage of the movie you're filming. Mr. Hoover is in Los Angeles. He's quite concerned that your movie is abetting the Japanese war effort."

I began to reply. Littell hung up on me. The hang-up noise became a pick-up click. Someone was making a call from an inside-the-jail line. The two calls were moments apart. Something tweaked me. I tapped the connector button and listened in.

I heard a moment's static and "News travels fast, lad." The brogue announced Dudley Smith. A man said, "I didn't know where you were, so I went to Chief Horrall." It was Hideo Ashida.

Their voices were hushed. Hideo was twenty yards away. He was making the call within range of Claire and the crew.

Dudley said, "… your grand photo device."

Hideo said, "I had no intention of interfering in your case against Fuji Shudo. I was simply pointing out a glaring time discrepancy."

"Did the Chief tell you that I uncovered a corroborating print? I lifted it off a patch of dried blood."

Hideo did not respond. His silence extended. I read some kind of shock in his pause. The conversation made no sense to me.

Dudley said, "You haven't asked me 'Whose blood,' lad."

Hideo said, "Ryoshi Watanabe's. The Chief told me that."

The Watanabe case. They had a suspect. They had solid leads. Dudley said, "It's winding down, lad. I'll be crafting a chain-of-evidence brief for our lawyer chum, Ellis Loew. Shudo is AB negative, so I think we can attribute Nancy's pregnancy to him."

Hideo did not respond. His silence extended. I read some kind of censure in his pause.

Dudley said, "Are you feeling ambivalent, lad? Are you torn between the notion of a just exoneration and the degree of expediency required to ensure your safety? Am I witnessing a dithering expression of fatuous Japanese solidarity?"

Hideo said, "I simply acted on instinct."

Dudley said, "You're being disingenuous. You're far too circumspect to fall prey to the hot blood that 'instinct' implies, and I would venture to guess that your only instinct *is* circumspection."

Another pause. "Exoneration," "expediency." "Ambivalence," "interference." It felt like dialogue on a frame.

Dudley said, "Are you *there*, lad?"

Static hit the line. I shook the receiver and cleared it. Hideo said, "I've become involved in that movie I told you about. Remember? You gave me permission."

Dudley said, "Yes."

Hideo said, "Ward Littell told my mother that Mr. Hoover is here now, and that there'll be a Federal raid on the movie. I called you to tell you that. I'm sorry I bypassed you on the Shudo matter, but my intention was to bring the issue of the discrepancy to the attention of someone as far up the chain of command as possible, as soon as possible."

Traitor. Coward. Perfidious deviant in the thrall of a bold man he would dearly love to fuck.

"That is indeed a good tip, lad. I would caution you not to share it with Miss Lake, Miss De Haven, and the sundry dilettantes involved in this idiot venture. I assure you that your participation in the venture will be persuasively explained away, by me, at my most immediate opportunity. We are embroiled in the backwash of Whiskey Bill Parker's lunacy—and, as such, I would caution you to continue to treat the man with perfunctory kid gloves."

Hideo said, "Yes, Dudley. You have my word on all of that."

Vile, simpering, craven. Emasculated, frigid, vapid, picayune—

An air-raid signal blasted. I fumbled the phone back into the cradle and ran outside. Dawn was just breaking. The City Hall searchlights swooped across the southern horizon.

Red lights flashed above the jail. Uniformed jailers ran out and piled into their cars. The film crew followed them. Claire, Reynolds, Chaz and Saul Lesnick *walked* out. They were determined to appear unfazed by an air raid. Comrade Hideo *strolled* out. He was *smiling.*

They got in their cars, pulled out and made for the parkway. I was almost-but-not-quite alone.

Ward Littell and Ed Satterlee were parked across the street. A black-and-white was parked a half block behind them. It was too dark to see through the windshield.

It had to be *him. I* was here, and where else did *he* have to go?

I stepped back inside the trailer and locked myself in. I gathered up four reels of unedited film and dumped them in the service sink. A shelf above the sink was lined with bottled solvents; two were marked with skull and crossbones. I poured the contents over the film strips, watched them bubble and burn.

A rough-edited cut of the film had been fed into a glass-topped device. It allowed the editor to view it, frame by frame. The shoot had been rushed and haphazardly implemented. Still—it was *my* film that had to be destroyed. I had to see some version of it.

The editor's desk was covered with film strips; I went though them and straightened them into one long trail. The trail covered the floor up to my ankles. The commencing image was already clamped into the device. I held a lamp down and squinted.

It was a black-and-white negative, rendered white-on-black. The first frame portrayed a peaceful 2nd Street.

I'd seen the editor work and had a sense of how to operate his machine. I stood over the desk and fed film strips under the glass.

The process was slow. Air-raid sirens provided a soundtrack. Frame by frame and image by image—*my movie.*

The reversed black and white. The roundups in miniature. L.A., a week and a half after Pearl Harbor.

Street rousts. Japanese men and cops with shotguns. Cut to a white-on-black Claire, speaking to camera. Cut to clips from *Storm Over Leningrad.*

William H. Parker is right: they are didactic buffoons. William H. Parker is wrong: the roundups are barbaric and Claire is courageous in attempting to expose them. William H. Parker is right: the film indicts the filmmakers as provocateurs out to exploit injustice. William H. Parker is wrong: expressed outrage does not equal treason and any succor that it provides to our enemies must be seen as incidental and not actionable in any sane court of law.

I went through the film, frame by frame. I lived my movie and my moment in History. I became adept at identifying the people I already knew. I quickly spotted reverse-print snips of familiar figures and garb.

That's Thad Brown—I see his light fedora. That's Elmer Jackson—I see his ever-jutting cigar. That's my own speech yesterday. That's the riot in Pershing Square.

I caught the front of a building off 1st and San Pedro. Yes—I know those rounded pillars and that narrow stoop. Yes—that's Ed Satterlee. He's talking to an Asian man.

Their headgear identified them. Satterlee was tall and wore flat-topped hats with feathers; the presumed Asian man wore a coolietype hat. I scrolled frames and saw what looked like an exchange. The men were close enough to be embracing.

Something made me stop. It was an *I-see-something* moment. I ran the subsequent frames through the glass, fast. I knew what I was seeing before I actually saw it.

Their hands touch. Their hands withdraw. Satterlee places something in his pocket. Both men wheel. Both men walk off. They head out in opposite directions.

It was a handoff. It was a covert exchange.

I grabbed a pair of scissors and snipped the appropriate frames. The trailer came with a darkroom. I'd studied photography and knew how to develop film.

I stepped into the darkroom. The red light above the door went on automatically. The developing tray was filled with solution. I laid the strip in and let the solvents go to work.

The enclosed space muffled the air-raid sirens; caustic chemicals made my eyes sting. The film-strip images reversed their shades and slowly came to life.

I pulled out the strip and held it up to dry. Yes, it was Ed Satterlee. The red light on his face ID'd him. I stepped out of the darkroom. The red light became normal light. I identified the Chinese man. It explained the whole furtive vignette.

It was a payoff. It was filmed inadvertently. The Chinese man passed Agent Satterlee money. They concluded their business then.

The Chinese man was a Hop Sing enforcer. Lee pointed him out to me at a Bureau Christmas party. He delivered Ace Kwan's holiday baskets to Call-Me-Jack and the boys. Cask-strength scotch and dry-rubbed ducks. Neatly folded C-notes.

Lee riffed on the man. His name was Quon something; he'd witnessed the rape of Nanking. He was a vociferous Jap hater. His rage far exceeded Ace Kwan's.

I stepped outside and lit a cigarette. The sirens went off; those dark clouds looked ready to burst. The Fed car was gone. The black-and-white was still here. *I* was here. Where else did *he* have to go?

I walked over. Parker stepped out of the car. He was fresh groomed and wore a neat uniform. His glasses were lost in the riot. He wore wire-rimmed spectacles now.

He said, “Miss Lake.” I said, “Captain Parker.” He reached into my skirt pocket and removed my cigarettes. I lit him up.

“Dudley Smith knows about your operation. I overheard him talking to Hideo Ashida. They’re colluding on the Watanabe case. I determined it from their conversation.”

Parker said, “I’ve been relieved of my stewardship. I lost face with Ashida, and he threw in with Dudley. He’s a farsighted young man in a terrible bind. His interests are better served with Dudley. I can’t fault him for that.”

We smoked and looked at the storm clouds. Traffic hummed on the parkway. I glanced south and saw the Federal Building. The morning enlistment line swelled.

“The FBI is going to raid us and confiscate our film. We’ll all be arrested.”

“Will you warn your comrades?”

“No.”

“Because your cause will be better served by anointing them as martyrs?”

“Yes.”

“Will you reveal this operation?”

“Under no circumstances.”

“Do you believe that your own martyrdom will tip the balance of credibility away from me and toward you and your friends?”

“Yes, and there’s one more thing.”

“Which is?”

“You’ve given me myself, and I will not betray you.”

It began to rain. Parker stared at the sky and held his hands out to touch it. We looked at each other. I walked to the middle of the parking lot and let the rain come down on me.

Black clouds eclipsed the City Hall spire. Lightning streaked over the Hall of Justice. I thought of the prairie. Flash floods and tornadoes. Drunken Indians, drowned in their lean-tos. That short havoc that takes witless lives and lets ruthless dreamers start up anew.

The black sky was overwhelming. I let time dissolve. I felt William’s hand brush my leg. I held that moment close and stood still in the rain.

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LOS ANGELES | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1941

Sleeping beauties. A cot room slumber party.

Call-Me-Jack and Jim Davis dozed. Mike Breuning and Lee Blanchard, likewise. Jack and Jim were stag-night refugees. Breuning was bushed from the frame job. Note Blanchard's fistfight wounds. Blanchard was hiding out from Kay Lake.

A.M. *Heralds* covered the floor. COPS STORM WEREWOLF'S LAIR! JAP FIEND APPREHENDED! BAFFLING JAP WHODUNNIT—FULL STORY REVEALED!

Front-page news. A big photo spread. The Dudster and The Wolf. The "Demon's Den." Scotty Bennett, dragging Fuji Shudo. Scotty Bennett, chomping bubble gum.

The boys slept. Parker stepped out to the hallway. Thad Brown braced him.

"I've got a partial trace on Joan Conville. She's a home wrecker and more than a bit of a wild one."

Parker said, "Tell me."

Brown said, "I've got no location on her now, but she was shacked with a man at 8th and New Hampshire up until Pearl Harbor. He joined the Army that day. She joined the Navy, was commissioned as a lieutenant j.g. and was ordered to stay put and wait for her training papers. She's on the loose now. She was working as a research biologist at a lab in Culver City, but she grabbed her last paycheck on the 8th and skeedaddled. She broke up the Army guy's marriage and cut him loose the day they enlisted. You want my opinion? She's a shitload of trouble that you'd be well advised to avoid."

Parker smiled. "That's *it*? That's *all* you've got?"

Brown said, "Isn't it *enough*? There's all *that*, and there's the disappointing fact that she's a Protestant."

Parker laughed. Call-Me-Jack and Two-Gun lurched to the washroom.

Brown said, "One of us will be Chief after the war, Bill. When the City Council grills us, I swear that I won't mention the big redhead in your closet."

Parker grinned. His last drink was 2:00 a.m. Tuesday. He'd marked sober days in his Bible. He'd pledged five clams per day to the church.

Brown said, "We should go. It's Mr. Hoover's show."

They ran the back stairs. Call-Me-Jack and Two-Gun beat them. Fletch Bowron sat with Hoover and Preston Exley. Chairs faced a speaker's stand and easel. A San Fernando Valley map was propped up.

Hoover wore a fresh carnation. Preston fiddled with a pointer. Call-Me-Jack and Two-Gun sipped Bromo.

Parker and Brown took seats. Hoover tapped his watch. Nobody smoked—Hoover disapproved.

Jack said, "Eleanor Roosevelt's jungled up with that colored mammy from *Gone with the Wind*. They shack at the Los Altos Apartments when FDR blows through town. Gerald L. K. Smith hosted a shindig at the First Christian Church of Glendale, and Gerry does not speak with forked tongue."

Hoover said, "Pastor Smith is a long-standing FBI informant. He rats out his rivals in the alarmist-pamphlet business. He's very well connected along the right flank."

Parker studied the easel map. It depicted the Valley's east edge. Circles denoted farmland. Check marks denoted farm structures. They were Jap properties. It went with Preston's internment plan. It *suggested* that rumor per the Watanabe case.

Hoover said, "The floor is yours, Mr. Exley."

Preston walked up to the easel. "In essence, what I am proposing is a separate cog within the larger cog of the Federal government's wartime internment planning, which mandates the housing of hundreds of thousands of suspect Japanese in massive centers throughout California and Arizona, and as far north as Wyoming and Montana. My proposal allows us to cull inmates selectively, house them locally and see to it that the accretion of revenue remains local, so that it might boost the specific wartime and postwartime economy of Los Angeles. When I say 'selective,' I am implying a judicious application of eugenics, or racial science. The Japanese are a gifted people, an industrious people, and a compliant people. We would be well served to keep a number of them here, close at hand. Keep in mind that they themselves will benefit from a postwar economic boom, once they've been released from custody."

Jack said, "I get it. The Japs have got green thumbs, so we put them to work on their own farms and their neighbors' farms, to work along those lines you've already described. I don't like the word *kickback*, but it applies here. There's potential profits for all those concerned. We take a sizable number of Japs off the Federal government's hands, which benefits Mr. Hoover's people. We police our own Japs, so we see the lion's share of the wealth."

Fletch said, "Where's the 'racial science' part, Preston? What do you mean by 'selectively'?"

Hoover said, "Since Mr. Exley and I have already discussed it, I'd like to answer that question. My agents have been the driving force behind the roundups of Japanese subversives over the past twelve days. As such, they have observed a great many Japanese, and have compiled individual dossiers on them. I see this as a controlled experiment in both penology and eugenics. Japan has remained a feudal culture, running parallel to ours, but hamstrung by atavistic social codes, up through the Industrial Revolution, as free societies have come to flourish in the West. Now—despite or because of their native atavism—they have mobilized and nationalized their resources almost on a par with our own white country's. The Japanese threaten the worldwide Western hegemony at this moment—but we will, of course, crush them in the end. Why not exploit their native cunning and brainpower as we destroy them militarily, in the hope that our experiment casts light on a race both inferior and oddly superior to ours, most tellingly differentiated by their mad drive for power? Why not ply them with intelligence and mental and physical aptitude tests, and select our potential Los Angeles–based prisoners on that basis? Why not study these people while we imprison and productively employ them?"

Davis said, "Mr. Hoover don't speak with forked tongue. I'm a race man from way back. This angle of the plan has got me licking my chops."

Preston said, "Don't stop licking there, any of you. I'm thinking we can run those tests and come up with a select few within the select few, give them high-security clearances and allow them to work at those defense plants out in Santa Monica. You've got Lockheed, Boeing, Douglas and Hughes out there in one tight stretch, and Jim's running the Douglas police force already. We could expand Jim's jurisdiction to all the plants and deputize a special group of men to police our worker Japs exclusively."

Prescient. Lucrative. Usurious past moral reason. Blood libel. Slavery reestablished on American soil.

Parker stared at his hands. *Don't look up, they'll read your mind—*

Preston said, "The draft will saddle us with a citywide shortage in menial employment. I propose that we create a guest worker program with the Mexican State Police. They will supply us with peons to fill the shortages, we house them in Chavez Ravine, Shore Patrolmen from the Chavez Ravine Naval Base can do the policing there. Again, the entire operation remains localized and fully indigenous to L.A."

Hoover sniffed his carnation. “I need a touch of fresh air. I would like to observe some arrests in Little Tokyo, and I would like to do so now.”

Call-Me-Jack said, “I’ve got two cars waiting.”

Davis said, “Some Reds are shooting a movie. Dick Hood’s getting ready to put the quietus to it.”

The boys jumped on cue. Parker got up and followed them. They took the mayor’s private lift down.

Two Fed sedans idled in the basement. Ed Satterlee and Ward Littell drove. Parker got in beside Ward. They swapped looks. Call-Me-Jack and Jim Davis piled in the back.

The other boys hitched with Satterlee. The cars pulled out, snout-to-tail. Parker shut his eyes and squeezed his holy cross.

He felt the ride over. Every bump jarred him. The two-way radio squawked. The Anti-Axis Committee—one minute to go.

We’ve got Hearst Rifle boys up on rooftops. There’s four Feds already there.

Street bumps, left turns, right turns. We’re inside Little Tokyo. One minute to go.

Parker counted right turns. Ward braked and pulled over. Parker opened his eyes. Satterlee’s car idled flush in front of them.

The Hearst fucks manned neighboring rooftops. They packed scope-mounted Mausers.

More Hearst fucks hogged the sidewalk. A photo man, Sid Hudgens, Jack Webb. The target storefront blazed red, white and blue.

Ward squeezed Parker’s arm and stepped from the car. Satterlee got out. Four Feds jumped from a surveillance van.

They pulled sidearms. They walked to the doorway. It was wide open. They went in, guns first.

Parker got out. The Hearst geeks blocked his view of the door. The storefront was sotto voce. No protests, no slogans, no shouts.

Parker waited. He strained to hear her. He heard handcuff ratchets click.

She walked out ahead of the others. He left her standing in the rain. She wore a brown ensemble then. Now she wore bright red.

Part Three

THE FIFTH COLUMN

(December 19–December 27, 1941)

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LOS ANGELES | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1941

Meeks sat down. Halitosis fogged the booth. He decided to kill him in 1946.

The war would be *pffft*. He'd be rich. Meeks would rot in Ace Kwan's lime pit.

Vince & Paul's was dead. They sat by the exit. A waiter brought coffee and vanished.

Meeks said, "I turned up some racy scoop on Pierce Patchett. You owe me five hundred."

Dudley dropped five yards on the table. Meeks snatched it up.

"I'd say he's about forty. He's a big, impressive-looking guy who's good at jujitsu, for what that's worth. He's an 'Orientalist,' which means he goes for shit that emanates from that godforsaken part of the world. He's a land developer, and he's turned significant coin with deals here and there. He's also a chemist by trade, some kind of closet fascist, and a budding sugar pimp. He's got a plan that involves plastic surgery, which sounds like outer space to me. He wants to cut girls to look like movie stars, which'll probably tickle your funny bone, given the true-life stuff you're getting. The scoop is that he wants to run a telephone-service operation, like our chums Brenda and Elmer."

Dudley sifted it. "Continue, please."

Meeks drummed the table. "I see circle jerk and cluster fuck all over this guy, and a whole flotilla of other guys he knows. I ran Patchett's house and office phone records. There's lots of calls to our old pal Preston Exley's house and office, and calls to your beaner pal Carlos Madrano, down in Ensenada. Patchett's office is in the same building as a doctor named Saul Lesnick, who just happens to be treating Preston for migraine headaches. More fucking over, I learned that Lesnick is a Fed informant, and that he's infiltrated some kind of Red cell. More fucking over on that, I went to the cop you always go to to get the dirt on Fifth Column types."

Dudley sifted it. "Continue, please."

Meeks said, “I cracked union heads under Carl Hull, so I know how to read him. As soon as I say ‘Lesnick,’ he starts dropping his drawers. Okay, I know that you braced him. Okay, I know that Bill Parker’s running Lee Blanchard’s girlfriend in that cell that Lesnick’s in. I know that you’re always keeping tabs on Parker, and that you told Hull that you’d let Parker’s deal with the Lake twist go forward. ‘Circle jerk,’ Dud. The Lake cooze is fucking Scotty Bennett and might be fucking Hideo Ashida. ‘Cluster fuck.’ Exley, Patchett and Madrano aren’t hooked up on that anti-Red thing, but they’re hooked up on something bigger and better.”

Dudley *re*sifted it. “Continue, please.”

Meeks hunkered in. Note his gold watch. He killed three shines in a blastout at Slauson and Broadway. He stole that watch off a dead coon.

“You smell money in the Watanabe job. I’ve known it since I spilled that scoop on those farm and house buyouts at the briefing last week. *Now*, you’ve got Exley, Patchett, and Madrano. You’ve got the Mex Staties strawbossing the wets at those Jap farms out in the Valley. You’ve got these allegedly ‘unknown’ white stiffs buying and trying to buy farm and house properties from the Japs, secretly recorded sales, and Exley’s plan for internment sites on confiscated Jap land, which is all over every inter-Bureau memo floating around the PD and the mayor’s office. It’s a circle jerk and a cluster fuck, and you smell money, and my bet is that you haven’t figured out all the angles, and that Ace Kwan is in this with you, and you’re waiting until Shudo is indicted and off your plate, and then you’ll kick your schemes into high gear, and you wouldn’t mind knowing that Whiskey Bill won’t get some anti-Red or anti–Dudley Smith wild hair up his ass to complicate your already too-complicated life.”

Dudley clapped. Meeks, with halitosis. Meeks, with his gold watch. Meeks killed two spics in a blastout at Wabash and Soto. Meeks stole God knows what off of them.

“It’s a brilliant, lucidly reasoned and accurate précis, lad. It prompts the question ‘How much do you want?’ ”

Meeks unwrapped a cigar. “5% of whatever you and Ace might be cooking up on any kind of land deal you’re looking at, and whatever else you might have going on the internment end.”

Dudley said, “Done.”

Meeks said, “It must gall you to know that you can’t kill me.”

“Yes. I’ll concede the point.”

Meeks stood up. “Take care of yourself. You blew your cork with The Wolf, and I know you’re stretched thin. You’re the horse I’ve got my money on, and I need you fit for the race.”

Meeks waddled out. The 5% deal goosed his date of death. The shit would go in 1942.

Dudley doodled up cocktail napkins. He crumbled a bennie and goosed his coffee.

The war caught up with him yesterday. Today announced a new campaign. He thought of Bette. She bridged both days as his sorceress.

He *conjured* her. He bore the mad grit of the Irish dispossessed. He *summoned* her. She did not know it yet.

The bennies tickled his brain. Memo: call Huey and prepare to brace Tojo Tom Chasco. Memo: send Ellis Loew a grand bottle. Apologize for the Werewolf dustup. Welcome him to the Hearst-hurrahed Watanabe Case.

Dudley doodled. He sifted Meeks' spiel and shorthand-transcribed it. Circle jerk, cluster fuck. Collusive connections revealed. No real murder leads. The house/farm buyouts take shape.

Shorthand. Equals signs and excised parts of speech. Quotation marks, question marks, boldfaced proper nouns. See how the names repeat?

"E.'s internment-housing plan." "W. house directly off Arroyo Seco Parkway." "Parkway blt. by E. Construction." Take this conjectured leap:

"Presumed buildup of L.A. after war."

Cocktail napkins. Detectives' hieroglyphs.

Meeks lays out Pierce Patchett. He wants to run cut whores. Who's the King of the Cut Men? Terence Lux, M.D.

Dudley drew Jap faces and Jap faces cut to look Chink. He saw no eugenic difference. He drew Terry Lux with a scalpel. He drew Claire De Haven. He drew Claire De Haven nude in Terry's steam room.

He drew Hideo Ashida. Hideo's watching Terry cut that Jap wino. He finds the cut scheme dubious, but enjoys eugenics.

Hideo's gizmo play troubled him. It felt recklessly unconscious. His "corroborating-witness" pitch was far-afield contrived.

He drew question marks and a map. The map denoted proximity.

The Arroyo Seco Parkway. Downtown L.A. to Pasadena. An Exley Construction contract. Lincoln Heights to the east. Highland Park to the west. South Pasadena at the north terminus.

He drew the twisty blacktop. He X-marked on- and off-ramps. He fanned his pencil to indicate hillsides and undeveloped land.

He caught a bennie surge. He got up and left the restaurant. He shagged his K-car and drove to the parkway.

Chavez Ravine marked the south edge. Lincoln Heights stood due east. The Heights was all scrub hills and shack rows. There's a drainage creek running parallel north.

There's Highland Park, to the west. There's fewer hillsides and on- and off-ramps. Undeveloped land abuts the west side. There's no meddlesome creek.

There's barren land on the west flank. There's meddlesome houses interspersed. They abut the parkway safety fence.

Dudley got off at Avenue 64 and looped south. He noted topography and counted vacant lots. He drove to Avenue 45 and The House.

He parked in Their Driveway. He strolled to Their Backyard.

It overlooked *undeveloped* land and ran straight to the parkway. The distance was one-quarter mile.

Dirt and scrub. A few trees and low hills. This *undeveloped* stretch ran due north and south. The topography ran more problematic further up and down. *This* House and *This* Land plumb-lined perfect parkway egress.

Dudley vaulted the fence and went walking. The ground was all rough dirt and twigs. He walked straight to the parkway fence and straight back.

It might be city-county property. It might be Watanabe property. It might be property secretly purchased by the Exley-Patchett combine.

He grabbed a handful of soil and sniffed it. He caught a vague shrimp subscent. He quick-walked to the backyard fence and jumped it.

He got his car and hooked down to Figueroa. He donned a construction king's thinking cap.

The sin of undeveloped land. No parkway-flush commercial strips between downtown and Pasadena. A perfect spot, to the west.

Parkway-flush Highland Park. No meddlesome drainage creek. No high hills to block car traffic. Egress off the safety fence and the Watanabes' backyard.

He stopped at a pay phone and called Nort Layman. Nort was eager to chat. Shrimp residue and topsoil. Have you an opinion to share?

Yes. He's made studies. It's per the Watanabe case.

Shrimp oil solidifies urban dirt and contaminates it for crop planting. Shrimp oil could be used to undercoat topsoil. It might provide a baseline for poured cement.

Dudley thanked Nort. Dudley hung up. Dudley mind-screened a film vignette.

It stars the Watanabes. They're cinematically alive. They coat their feet with shrimp oil and trek through their backyard. They journey to the parkway fence. Someone bid them to do it. *Useless crop soil facilitates the pouring of cement.*

Dudley drove to City Hall. He popped two bennies. He screened visions of postwar L.A.

He'd seen that German movie *Metropolis*. It was dystopically shrill.

He combined that vision with his vision.

Shop-and-dine terraces with grand parkway views. No jigaboos in sight. Spaceship cars skitting north and south.

He parked and went up to the Bureau. Mike Breuning lassoed him.

"I still don't believe it. I just jawed on the phone with Bette Davis. She said you should call her."

Dudley roared. He did a jigaboo two-step and cartwheeled up to his desk. He saw an envelope on the blotter.

A letter from Tommy Gilfoyle. That erratic block print. Blind Tommy never learned to type or write cursive.

Dudley slit the envelope. The letter ran two pages. He knew Tommy's print technique. Words devolved into alphabet stew.

"I know Beth wrote you about that 'horrible thing' last year, but she didn't tell you what it was."

Dudley got scalp bumps. Tommy's words broke up. Look—wet ink and dried tears.

Beth was raped, in Boston. It was November '40. Two thugs assaulted her. Boston PD ID'd them. Beth broke down at the show-up and blew her identification. The men were released.

She went to a doctor. He examined her and said she wasn't pregnant. He found benign cysts and told her she was barren. She would never be able to conceive.

Beth was devastated. She wanted children dearly. Tommy kept in touch with Boston PD. A cop told him that the rape-o's had joined the Marine Corps. They were stationed at Camp Pendleton, near San Diego.

PFC John Arcineaux, Private Robert Ettig.

"We'll be arriving in Los Angeles on Monday, December 22, and staying through Christmas. I wanted you to know this before we came, but please don't tell Beth that you know. I think she has spells where it doesn't weigh on her, and I want our Christmas with you to be one of them."

The pages turned wet. He didn't know why. He picked up a chair and started to hurl it. He sobbed and put the chair down.

The sob strangled him. He couldn't breathe. He opened his mouth and made animal sounds. *Werewolf, Werewolf*. He bit his arm to kill the sounds. He bit himself down to the skin.

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LOS ANGELES | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1941

Werewolf Shudo was *sin*-sational. He was a *Jap* werewolf. The radio harped on that.

Ashida tuned in the news. He worked the lab solo. KFI ran an all-Jap scroll.

A denuded synopsis of the Watanabe job. *"No Leads in Jap Phone Booth Slaying!" "No Leads on Jap Slain at Beach!" "Jap Jail Suiciders: Fifth Column All!"*

He'd tuned in for word on the Anti-Axis raid. Mariko called and described what she saw. The Feds swooped down on the office. They grabbed a white girl in a red dress.

The Feds would grab the film. Claire and the others might name him. His Kay Lake kisses would be Fed-scrutinized.

It happened very fast. He had a chance to destroy the film. He went by the Lincoln Heights jail to do it. Kay scotched his chance. The film was out in the trailer. Kay was holed up there.

The radio hawked toothpaste. Back to Fuji Shudo and grid great Scotty Bennett. Hollywood High's hero blasts a tong thug last week! Last night, he storms The Wolfman's Den!

"You look apprehensive, lad. Given recent events, I can hardly blame you."

The door was open. He casts no shadow. He's the Real Werewolf.

Dudley locked the door and walked over. He killed the radio. He pulled out a revolver and popped the cylinder.

He held up the revolver. Six chambers, one bullet stuffed in.

He shut the cylinder and spun it. He put the barrel to Ashida's head and pulled the trigger twice. The hammer hit empty chambers.

Ashida opened his eyes. He didn't know he'd shut them. He wasn't dead. He was still at his desk.

Dudley lounged on the desk. Dudley tapped a legal pad.

"You are to swear out an affidavit in my presence. You will address it to District Attorney William McPherson, Chief of Police C. B.

Horrall, Sheriff Eugene Biscailuz and Special Agent in Charge Richard Hood of the Los Angeles FBI. You will confess to all of your withholdings and suppressions of evidence in the Watanabe family homicides of December 6, 1941, both alone and in collusion with Captain William H. Parker. You will include your knowledge of Captain Parker's covert actions aimed at Miss Claire De Haven. You will sign and date it at the bottom of the final page. Dick Carlisle's wife is a notary public. She will affix the appropriate seals."

Ashida squared off the pad. His pen moved all by itself. He smelled iodine. Dudley had salved an arm wound.

Saturday, December 6th. Whalen's Drugstore. He pilfers bullet chunks and silencer threads.

Sunday, December 7th. The Watanabe house. He finds the shortwave radio, tape rig and ledger. He steals them on Wednesday, December 10. He plays the radio and learns of the Goleta raid. Dudley confronts him outside the house. He lies about the tracts he stole. They fiercely attack the Los Angeles PD.

Dudley touches his arm. It rewards his candor.

Monday, December 8th. He visits Japanese farms in the Valley. Ryoshi Watanabe sold his farm—but who to? Wetbacks pick crops, Valley-wide. Mex Staties boss them. He sees Carlos Madrano behind it.

Dudley smiles. *Lad, you got there first.*

Monday, December 8th. He 459's the Deutsches Haus and steals their gun-silencer cache. He test-fires the guns. The ordnance used at the drugstore and house came from the Deutsches Haus batch.

Dudley winks. He knew that, somehow.

Thursday, December 11th. He views the sub-raid evidence. He sees a dead "Collaborationist." His body bears a starburst-style stab wound. It refracts a similar wound found on Ryoshi Watanabe. The soles of another dead man's feet reek of shrimp oil. That refracts the shrimp oil on the Watanabes' feet. He views cans of chopped shrimp among the collected debris.

Dudley slaps his knees. *Lad, you delight me.*

Friday, December 12th. He discovers odd tread marks in the Watanabes' driveway. The pattern looks familiar. He matches it to a Sheriff's bulletin, issued 12/7.

Hit-and-run. One fatality. James Larkin/British/age sixty-seven. He lives in Santa Monica Canyon. There's a vague description of the hit-and-run driver. He's a white man in a purple sweater. This refracts the white man seen outside the house, 12/6/41.

Dudley gawks. It's endearing.

Friday, December 12th. He takes the Larkin lead to Captain Bill Parker. They break into Larkin's bungalow.

They find a Japanese-language ledger. They find seventeen Lugers embossed with Nazi symbols and a fortune in Axis cash.

He translates the ledger. He believes that it details the house and farm buyouts. There is no conclusive proof.

They 459 the bungalow again. They see that Larkin possessed no telephone. They recall a Sheriff's bulletin. It lists "three pay-phone slugs" in Larkin's property. They steal the seventeen Lugers. He print-dusts them here at the lab. He gets a match to the unknown print at the house.

His collusive friendship with Bill Parker tanks. Parker's tirade at Kwan's Pagoda does it. He knows very little about the Kay Lake/Claire De Haven incursion. Kay Lake lured *him* in. *Her* motives? Specious and incomprehensible.

He omitted The Knife in Griffith Park. Bill Parker believed that Dudley and Ace Kwan killed those three men. He omitted the Wallace Hodaka interview. It provided no follow-up leads.

That's it. Sign it—Hideo Ashida, Ph.D.

Dudley made the hand-on-heart sign. "I am moved by you and honored to know you, Hideo. You bore up to the one-in-three prospect of instant death valiantly, and you are the only detective on God's grand earth who stands as my equal. I pledge my continued loyalty, as malign fate continues to plague your people. The next several months will surely be unkind, but I will do my best to provide you and yours with succor and devilish good fun."

Ashida swooned. It felt like a head-to-toe flush.

"My Irish brother."

"My yellow brother."

Rain drummed the window. Dudley smiled and lit a cigarette.

"Have you the skills to craft a preexisting document, lad? I was thinking of a letter from Fuji Shudo to Ryoshi Watanabe, vintage 1933."

Ashida smiled. "Yes, I can do it. I assume that you want it in kanji script."

Dudley said, "I do, yes. The text should detail a political disagreement pertaining to Asian geopolitics, and should foreshadow Fuji Shudo's ultimate psychic collapse. Can you apply convincing age spots to the paper and forge a postal cancellation?"

"Yes, and the letter should have been sent post office to post office. We can't be sure that the Watanabes had their house in '33. That official records backlog is still in effect."

Dudley said, "Bright child. I hadn't thought of that."

"I'll cut a stencil and write the characters within it. I'll get the closest approximation of Fuji's script that way."

Dudley smiled. "The cancellation mark?"

"Purple vegetable dye."

“The aged paper?”

“A chloral-phosphate spray and ultraviolet light.”

Dudley blew smoke rings. “Have you a final perspective on the Parker-Lake matter?”

Ashida said, “They’re both insane. They’re in love with each other, but they’re so crazy that they don’t even know it.”

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1941

I was back on the women's tier at Central Station. My first visit was eleven days ago. I'd improvised at the Paul Robeson concert, in an effort to force a meeting with Claire. She was in the adjoining cell now, withdrawing from her narcotics habit at a spiraling rate. Our male comrades were on the men's tier. Hideo Ashida was probably upstairs at the crime lab, or off subverting justice for Dudley Smith.

The women's tier was packed with Japanese women. They sat on their bunks just like their comrades did eleven days earlier. Pearl Harbor was *twelve* days ago. Did the world exist before it?

I watched Claire thrash. We had been here for nearly six hours; we'd been fingerprinted and forced to change into jail smocks. A Sheriff's matron named Dot Rothstein watched us undress. She was the largest butch I'd ever seen—Andrea Lesnick had told me about her. She wore Sheriff's greens, with beavertail saps stashed in the trouser-slit pockets. She chewed Beemans pepsin gum, vigorously.

My purse had been confiscated. Dot Rothstein saw Claire shivering, and snatched her overcoat. I knew of the impending raid, and assumed that the Feds had warned off Saul Lesnick. I burned my movie, and destroyed that evidence trail. I saved two film strips. They were tucked into a small rip in the lining of my purse.

Claire thrashed. I reached through the bars and stroked her hair. We'd been booked for reckless endangerment and placed on a Federal hold. Ed Satterlee kept strolling down the tier. He told us that the real charges would be determined by a Federal grand jury. "You're looking at a gas-chamber bounce—so I'd advise you to cooperate."

I felt weightless. It was like the time I had measles and ran off during a blizzard. I was nine years old. My fever broke while I played in the snow. My father found me a few blocks from home, dressed in a nightgown. I wasn't shivering or sweating. My father believed me to be possessed from that moment on.

Claire burrowed into her pillow. Two women meet in a doctor's office nine days ago. A woman lights a woman's cigarette—and now we're here.

Claire slid down the mattress. Her smock was soaked through; it was dark wet from the hem to the neckline. I gripped the bunk ledge and sat there, facing the Japanese women. They all turned away from me.

My hands numbed on the ledge; I was grasping a sharp metal surface. A piece snapped off in my hands. I released my grip and snapped it back into place. I'd gouged my fingers near bloody.

I paced the cell. I counted out one hundred bar-to-wall trips. I thought of Bucky and Scotty.

Ed Satterlee walked up. He said, "Hello again, Katherine."

I walked to the bars and faced him. I said, "Call me 'Comrade.' " Satterlee laughed. I said, "Get Miss De Haven a doctor."

"Any doctor we come up with would make her suffer through it. This isn't supposed to be easy. If she cops to a few Federal charges, though, I might find her some stuff that she'd like."

I said, "Habeus, you cocksucker. You have to let us make bail."

"Not for sixty-five hours and fourteen minutes, '*Comrade.'* We've got that much more time to make you feel antsy. You'll be snitching your dipshit granddad back in Sioux Falls by this time on Sunday."

I said, "You're a limp fuck, Ed. You've never been laid."

Satterlee smiled, oh so bored. "I've got a niece your age, back in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. She reminds me of you, without the pretense. Prairie du Chien was too small for her. She didn't know what to do, so she ran off with an eye-talian guy and got knocked up."

"Give me a cigarette. I'll be more inclined to talk if you do."

Satterlee shook his head. "I'm not in the mood to be nice. I think you were the one who torched the film in that trailer. Normally, I'd look to the men, but not with these guys. It's bees where the women rule the roost, right? That's why I'm looking to you and Claire, and she doesn't seem like the firebug type right now."

I said, "Habeus, Ed. Monday morning at 10:00."

Satterlee shook his head. "You can't bluff your way out of this one. You're in superseding Federal custody, and you can't flash some toy badge and say you're a cop's girlfriend."

I flashed my right middle finger. Satterlee feigned amusement and walked off. I stretched out on my bunk and held an arm over my eyes. The ceiling lights threw down a red haze.

It felt like I was back in that blizzard. The red haze was just like Sioux Falls in the snow. I heard key-in-lock and sliding-metal sounds. I opened my eyes and saw Dot Rothstein sitting on the edge of the bunk.

She said, “Sweet dreams, cupcake?”

I said, “Call me ‘Comrade.’ ”

She said, “That’s a hard girl’s name. You’re not a hard girl. You’re a sweetie pie.”

She placed a hand on the mattress. She wore signet rings on three fingers. Her right knee brushed the bed rail. She carried a sap in that trouser-leg pocket. The handle sat flush on her calf.

I smelled Beemans pepsin chewing gum and Butch Wax. I watched her eyes, I watched her hand.

She said, “You’re a soft girl.”

She put her hand on my knee. She ran it slowly up my thigh. She leaned in and opened her mouth to kiss me. I opened my mouth and ran a hand up her leg, toward the sap. She shifted as she pressed down on me. I moved my hand to the bunk ledge and pulled that piece of loose metal free.

Her mouth was wide open. Chewing gum was stuck to her teeth. Our lips were in close. I gripped the mock shiv and brought my arm up.

I stabbed her in the arm. I stabbed her in the side. I stabbed her in the back. I held on to the shiv as she shrieked and punched straight down. My nose snapped—red, black, red. Blood blew into my eyes.

I rolled off the bunk. I stabbed her in the leg as my back hit the floor. She shrieked male falsetto. Her blood was all over the shiv. I gripped it that much harder. The mock blade cut my hand.

She rolled off the bunk and fell on top of me; she pinned me to the floor with her knees. She cocked her right fist and punched straight down.

I flailed. Her fist hit the floor. The blow carried her full weight.

Bones shattered. I *heard* it.

She shrieked. I stabbed her in the shoulder, I stabbed her in the back. She kept pressing down on me. I felt a rib snap. It’s another kiss, her head’s coming down, open your mouth.

She opened her mouth.

I opened my mouth.

I reached up and showed her my tongue.

She shut her eyes for the kiss.

I bit off her nose and spit it back in her face.

She *shrieked* and rolled off of me. She rubbed blood from her eyes and *shrieked*. I stood up and kicked her where her nose used to be; I stabbed her in the back, the arms, the legs. She *shrieked* and tried to pull herself under the bunk. I pulled the sap off her leg and smashed her hands on the ledge. She sobbed something like “Ruthie.”

I blinked away blood. Men made male noises and ran down the tier.

Dot sobbed for Ruthie and crawled away from me.

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LOS ANGELES | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1941

He touched her things.

She was locked up a block away. He parked at 1st and Hill, so he'd be close. He couldn't go home. Whose purse is that? *Helen Parker, meet Kay Lake.*

He filched the purse from the property room. He got in and out, unseen. Claire De Haven's slaves fomented. The Queen herself looked sedated. Miss Lake swapped jokes with the jailer. The man thought she was a sketch.

Joan Conville's picture sat on the dashboard. *Miss Conville, meet Miss Lake.*

Parker went through the purse. It was scotch-grained leather. Miss Lake owned a cheap lighter. It was a fight-night souvenir. Bleichert versus Saldivar, 4/12/39.

Lipstick-blotted tissues. A paisley scarf. A ticket stub for the Carthay Circle Theatre. She'd gone to the first L.A. showing of *Gone with the Wind.*

It wasn't supposed to end this way. They were supposed to work together all through the war. She was supposed to gain Claire De Haven's trust and slowly come to know her perfidy. They were supposed to work together as the Allies won the war and the Queen worked to further the Kremlin's agenda. They were supposed to build evidence and drink Russian vodka to toast the impaneled grand jury.

A cross on a chain. All too Protestant. A tortoiseshell comb and barrette.

It wasn't supposed to end this way. She was supposed to snap photographs at two dozen locations. They were supposed to dissect the subversive mind-set in a thousand late-night talks.

The cross was chipped at the four corners. She'd clutched it in girlish prayer or skeptic's frustration. Her hair brush matched the comb and barrette. Auburn strands were laced in.

A lipstick tube, a compact, a blue handkerchief.

He held the fabric up to his cheek. He recalled her scent that first Monday in the rain.

It wasn't supposed to end this way. They were out to create a decorous courtroom document. They were out to destroy a barbarous ideology. They were supposed to exchange letters and call each other Katherine and William in due time.

Parker emptied out the purse and put everything back in perfect order. He saw a rip in the lining. He felt something inside it.

He reached in. He touched a slick surface. He pulled out two film strips.

They were both two feet long. One was fully developed. One was a white-on-black negative.

He flicked on the dashboard light. He held the strips up, side by side. The developed strip showed images of two men talking. The negative strip showed a still figure.

Parker squinted at the white-on-black. He recognized the cut of her dress. It was her speech yesterday.

Blood libel.

"We are thus charged to the near-impossible task of enacting love that much more ruthlessly, and with a self-sacrifice that would have been unknowable had History not summoned us. At this moment, our options become do everything or do nothing."

Katherine, the valiant and foolish.

He ran his eyes down the strip. She barely moved. The picture run encompassed just seconds. He saw her in mute white on black. He heard her every word.

Blood libel. Moral duty and small-minded fear. Sioux Falls and Deadwood. Sodden Indians and nativist fiends.

He studied the developed strip. He recognized details and followed them, frame by frame.

1st and San Pedro. He knew that building. He knew that tall man, with that hat. It's Ed Satterlee. There's a small Chinaman. It's Ace Kwan's toady, Quon Chin.

Quon ran bag to Call-Me-Jack. Quon pimped Chinese girls to Brenda Allen. Quon laid bribes on the County Zoning Board.

Quon killed sixteen rival tong men. Quon purportedly beheaded four hundred Jap soldiers after the Rape of Nanking.

Parker studied the strip. Bravos to Kay Lake. She knew what she saw.

A bagman, a rogue Fed, a payoff. An evidential hole card—nailed on film.

He prayed off The Thirst. Sunday Mass would mark five days sober. He heard sirens running eastbound on 1st Street. It was ambulance pitch.

He saw cherry lights spin outside the station. Something said *NO*—

Christmas shoppers swarmed Hill Street. Buses blocked the north-south lanes. Some loudspeaker blared "Jingle Bells."

He ran. He left his prowl car unlocked. He ran and got winded inside two seconds. His holster flopped and almost flew off. He ran across Hill Street. He sideswiped a thin Santa Claus.

An ambulance was parked outside the station. Two men rolled a gurney up. A big woman was strapped in. She wore Sheriff's green. She was nothing but slash wounds and blood.

She *shrieked*. She *shrieked* for Ruthie and Huey. Parker sidestepped the gurney and ran up the steps.

He went through the door. The desk sergeant saw him. *Oh shit, Whiskey Bill, what's this here*—

Parker tumbled up to the desk. He got "Katherine Lake" out in one breath. The desk man got the heebie-jeebies. He double-clutched and slid a key across the desk.

He said, "The bin."

Parker grabbed the key. He wheeled and saw a dozen plainclothesmen, all huddled up. They cordoned off the hallway and looked straight at him. He looked straight back.

Those looks traveled. Those looks talked. Parker caught his breath and walked toward them. They looked at one another and passed signals. They stood aside and let him walk.

He walked. He walked to a bisecting hallway and turned right. The padded cell—it's that white door.

He jammed in the key and turned it. The door was dead-heavy. He shouldered it in.

She wore a straitjacket. Her arms were laced tight. Her face was blood-crust swollen. Her hair was patched black and matted red.

Parker went to her.

Her eyes told him to untie her.

Her eyes told him to brush that one crust off her cheek.

Her eyes said *Lift me. You can do it. I'll be light for you*.

He did all of it.

Her eyes said *Carry Me Now*.

80

LOS ANGELES | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1941

Land grabs. War fever and cash schemes. Whores cut like movie stars.

Dudley inked a wall graph. Scotty Bennett and Dick Carlisle watched. The graph was a palliative. It subsumed Beth's "horrible thing."

He wallpapered his cubicle. The graph ran from floor to partition top. It was all shorthand-inked.

It detailed The Case and related cases. It detailed financial conspiracies and his Ace Kwan plans. Snoops would see it as gobbledygook.

Initials noted names. Proper nouns were initial-ID'd. Circles and rectangles blocked off business deals. He worked from his own memory and Hideo Ashida's confession. Buzz Meeks' spiel figured in.

The graph was a hospital chart. He caught the Watanabe case and contracted war fever. The graph was a prescription pad. He prescribed Benzedrine to keep himself going. He prescribed the graph to remember it all.

Dudley inked the graph. Bennies spiked his memory. The Parker-Lake fiasco was dead now. The Shudo case was big news. The graph was a crib sheet. The graph would expedite The Werewolf's greenroom trek.

Names, dates, leads. Opportunities highlighted. Cash trails sensed and tracked. War fever. His fevered twelve-day pace.

The phone rang. Carlisle took the call. Dudley worked. Scotty watched him work. The lad was damnably acute and retentive.

Dudley worked. His brain buzzed. Distractions came and went.

Ruth Mildred called and reported. Tojo Tom Chasco was still under guard. Some crazy girl shivved Dot. Her sweetie pie was now ensconced at Queen of Angels. He eschewed lectures. Dot called the tune and paid the piper. She'd been fondling jail cooze for years. Ruthie wondered if Terry Lux would plastic up Dot's kisser. He said he had a call in to Terry right now. Terry *would* stitch Dot's snout.

Collusive circles. Pierce Patchett planned to run cut whores. He had to know Terry Lux. Terry was *the* L.A. cut man.

Scotty said, "I think I get it. 'W.M.P.S.' means 'white man in purple sweater,' right? He's the guy who's really good for the snuffs."

Dudley said, "Hush, bright penny. We've got a Werewolf by the tail."

Carlisle dumped the phone. "The Doc's at Les Frères Taix. He'll meet you there in half an hour."

Dudley dropped his pen and grabbed his suit coat. Bette danced through his head. She was all vapors. He'd left her three messages. He got the "Miss Davis be out" brush-off.

He waltzed. Les Frères Taix was a frog joint in Echo Park. He popped two bennies and drove over. Terry was a gourmand. He kept a booth there.

Dudley joined him. Terry was immersed in truffled kidneys. His black bag was up on the table. He noshed and skimmed a medical chart.

A photo was clipped to the top page. Claire De Haven was wan. Her hairdo connoted Joan of Arc.

"I'll hazard a guess, Terry. The Feds have allowed Miss De Haven a phone call, which means a house call for you."

Terry waved his fork. "Jail call. The Feds think I can loosen Claire up to the point where she'll talk."

A waiter swished by. Dudley ordered a double scotch.

"I feel constellations aligning, Terry. I would guess that a man named Pierce Patchett has contacted you, and that it pertained to young women cut to resemble film stars."

The waiter brought Dudley's drink. Aesthete Terry sniffed his Bordeaux.

"He *commissioned* me, Dud. And I can cut his girls, because it's not high-volume jobs, like your Japs-into-Chinks play with Ace. I'm betting you'll slap me with too many patients and too little recovery time, and a lot of the high-tide Japs have had their assets confiscated, so it's not like they've got the scratch to pay you, Ace and me. There's that, and the fact that your deal plays nutty, beyond the whole admittedly seductive eugenic aspect."

Dudley sipped scotch. "Tell me about Patchett, Terry. I've heard he's quite the eclectic beast."

Terry said, "In spades, Irish. You know me, and you know that I'm in with the cognoscenti, and that I run a mean Dun & Bradstreet on my potential Collaborationists. Patchett comes to me, so my first task is to determine if this scheme he's proposing is on the come, or if he's got the gelt to pay me."

Dudley said, "Continue, please."

Terry swirled his wine. "Patchett's a race man, I'm a race man. We're gemütlich in that regard, so it facilitates our chat. Patchett is also a fucking name-dropper, so he tells me that he's hooked up with Preston Exley on some kind of furtive deal to grab Jap land in the Valley for chump change, but they're short on hard cash right now, and Exley's an ex-cop who wouldn't countenance his running whores. I take all this under advisement—tell Patchett that I want a percentage of his overall biz in exchange for my medical services, and Patchett agrees."

Dudley said, "Continue, please."

Terry said, "So, I think of my pals Ace and Dud then. They've got this smut-movie notion that I'm privy to, Ace has got his tunnels, movie-star prosties to smut films isn't too big a jump, and maybe there's a way to combine the two. I started thinking, If Dud's got a way to distribute the films, or leads on potential customers, this biz could fly, because we're at war now, and white folks have got a perv deal going with the Japs, and seeing them fucking and being humiliated could be enticing to the right brand of geek."

Dudley smiled. "Continue, please."

"You follow my drift, Irish. We need sales leads, camera equipment and some white on-camera talent to offset our all-Jap acting stable until I cut those girls to look like Myrna Loy, Joan Crawford and Bette Davis, et-fucking-al."

Dudley said, "I have mail-list leads and distribution, through a prominent hate merchant. I have leads on film equipment, and I'm raising money now."

Terry said, "Raise *more* money. I told Ace that, just a few hours ago. He said he's going to run another tile game at his place tomorrow night, to boost your revenues. I told him what I'll tell you, Dud. If we create a lucrative cash funnel now, we can finance our Jap deals and get in for a cut of Patchett and Exley's Jap deal at the gate, while they're cash-strapped."

The restaurant sparkled. The red banquettes *glowed*.

"The word *convergence* comes to mind, Terry. Miss De Haven has money and access to camera equipment, and she requires your services now. I would assume that she'll bail out soon, she has a flair for performing, and is also quite attractive. Her *bons frères* Loftis and Minear share her acting flair, and are handsome, if effeminate, men. Do you require a more explicit summation?"

Terry shook his head. Terry came on *très rapide*.

Très rapide—he snarfed good-bye truffles. *Très rapide*—they walked out to their cars. *Très rapide*—Dudley took the pole slot. *Très rapide*—they convoyed downtown.

Rain threatened. A werewolf's moon beamed.

Dudley bayed. The moon brought back Belfast, 1921. He blew up a railroad car and killed fourteen Black and Tans. He took lorry routes back to Dublin and had a piss break on the moors. A wolf sidled close to him. They shared their life stories in snarls. He prayed for the wolf every night. He pined for their heavenly reunion.

Rain threatened. Dudley bayed and urged it on. Terry swerved ahead of him. They made Central Station, *très rapide*.

Terry beat him there. Dudley parked in the DB lot and went in the jail door. It was late. The station was quiet. He heard female sobs and male coos.

Follow them. Down the hall, veer left. The white door is open. The padded walls are blood-slick.

Claire De Haven wore a jail smock. She rode the floor, cross-legged. She made a hand tourniquet and watched Terry feed her arm.

The spike went in. The plunger went down. The spike went back out. Dudley stood in the doorway. He saw Claire levitate.

Her back arched. She untangled her legs and stretched. She threw her arms over her head and floated.

She *levitated*. It was real or it wasn't. He didn't know and didn't care. He was back on the moors with his wolf.

She ignored them. She was somewhere else. He studied her. She was Joan of Arc.

Terry blathered. *You're a lovely woman, in a horrible jam. Your cooperation will vouch your safety and the safety of your comrades. You have equipment we require. I'll continue to service your medical needs. You're a born performer and a libertine. You might find the experience alluring.*

She stretched. *She levitated*. She spanned the full room.

Terry said, "You love dirty films, Claire. I've been to screenings at your home. Do you recall that Peruvian film in the style of Cocteau? You could duplicate the wedding-night sequence. I can already picture your gown."

Thunder cracked. The wolf brought them rain.

Terry blathered. *It was fatuous. He preached to a she-wolf. The films will be distributed covertly. You will shape their radical content. Submission is active seduction. I've heard you say it. There's quite the thrill in being coerced.*

Dudley stood in the doorway. Claire turned and faced him. Such metamorphosis. Red Queen, She-Wolf, Joan of Arc.

"I've seen you in church. You're friends with His Eminence. Monsignor Hayes told me that you've killed English soldiers. Belief is shaping this moment. It supersedes greed and perversion. Can you comprehend that?"

She trumped them. He walked off, sans rejoinder. She knew who he was. She played to him. She nullified his coercive mission.

She *levitated.* A jail stint and an armful of hop left her blasé. He would not subject her to smut. A church girl and chum of Monsignor Joe Hayes? Proof that the wolf was out loose.

Dudley strolled through the station. Memo—send Dot Rothstein flowers. Memo—nail Fuji Shudo's formal confession and brace Tojo Tom.

The front desk buzzed. Four Japs escaped from T.I. They tore down a fence and ran to a getaway car. The crashout occurred at 7:00 p.m. The Japs were *loooooong* gone. They were all *biiiiiiig* fascist types.

Cops swamped the desk. The night sergeant blared his radio.

Massive San Pedro manhunt! Sheriff's dragnet out! All-points bulletins! Door-to-door canvass! Roadblocks, traffic stops!

Sheriff Gene hit the air. He sounded Friday-night blitzed. He announced a massive posse.

Calling all policemen! Special duty waivers provided! Twelve dollars in riot pay per day!

Cops rushed off. They ran upstairs and stormed the squadroom phones. The desk sergeant grabbed *his* phone. *Get the Japs! Get the Japs! Fuck incoming calls and L.A. Police business! Riot fun and twelve clams a day!*

Dudley walked outside. The rain felt delightful. He lit a cigarette. He heard radio squawk and squadroom phone jabber. He looked up at the third-floor windows.

They were open. He heard more squawk. He saw Hideo Ashida.

The lad worked late. *Calling all cops. Dragnet. Roadblocks*. Hideo smiled through the squawk.

Tweak. The Irish wolf cocks one ear. The Irish wolf gets a scent.

Hideo lived at Beverly and Loma. He knew the building. It was three-minutes close.

Dudley shagged his car and drove there. Belmont High stood close. It faced a walk-up building. Note the high playing-field views.

Dudley parked and walked into the foyer. He clocked the mailbox bank. H. Ashida, no. 219.

He walked up. The *JAP!* on the door signaled hatred. *The wolf cocks one ear. Why does Hideo let such blasphemy remain?*

He snapped the lock with his pocketknife. He invaded the apartment. He hit the living room lights.

The front room was spotless. He knew it would be. A Bunsen burner on a pedestal? A *très* Hideo touch.

Two gizmos on an end table. One looks old, one looks new. Note the flanges on the new one. Hideo improved his own prototype.

The trip-wire device. Hideo exonerates Fuji Shudo. He employs mechanical means, self-devised.

Dudley pulled a chair up. Dudley studied the new device. Levers, shutters, trip wires. Hidden film rolls. Car tires activate a lens and snap pictures. The pix appear under magnified glass.

He tripped a lever. He saw a car's rear license plate. A date mark appeared on the photo.

Snap—9:18 a.m., 12/6/41.

Dudley scrolled pictures. He tapped levers. He saw clock-marked images. Huey Cressmeyer showed. Stupid lad—such a shoddy heist.

Dudley scrolled through the day. Cars, cars, cars. Skewed sidewalk shots. Click/snap/click. 2:04, 2:17, 2:36 p.m. *Brilliant lad—what thou hath wrought.*

3:08 p.m., 3:18 p.m., 3:19 p.m. The Werewolf walks down Spring Street.

And he looks unkempt. And he might be lurching. And the square white folks around him *do* look perturbed.

But:

The square white folks walk *separately*. Fuji Shudo looks discomfiting. He does *not* look terrifying. *Why do the square white folks look identically perturbed?*

Tweak—the wolf cocks one ear. Tweak—something is wrong here.

Dudley studied the image. Dudley squinted at the image. Dudley moved his eyes around the frame.

There—the bottom-left corner. A square object. A white square, facing out.

Dudley squinted. He *thought* he saw it, he *almost* saw it, he *saw* it.

A sidewalk news rack. It faced the street. There's the headline—JAPANESE ATTACK PACIFIC FLEET!

So, *this*.

The device malfunctioned. It's not Saturday, December 6th. It's Sunday, December 7th.

The Watanabes are one-day dead. The Pearl Harbor news hits L.A. at 11:30. It's the rush-edition *Herald*. The square white folks are perturbed because we're at war. The outré Fuji Shudo? A radar blip of History.

Hideo Ashida fucked up. Hideo Ashida acted in self-destructive haste. Hideo Ashida tried to clear a fellow Jap and revealed his eugenic identity.

Dudley bayed. Dudley let his mind drift. Dudley fiddled with the old device.

He got the hang of it. He tripped levers and saw pix under glass.

Tiled surfaces. A shower enclosure. A lanky youth, naked. He's dark-haired, he's muscular, he's got big bucked teeth. A familiar lad. A local phenom. Dwight "Bucky" Bleichert.

Quite the light heavy. Soon to work the PD. He finked some Fifth Column Japs to get on.

Here's Bucky, naked. Here's Hideo's squalid toy, hidden from view.

Rain drummed the windows.

Dudley bayed.

Dudley thought *So, it's this*.

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LOS ANGELES | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1941

良治、貴殿はアメリカのファシズムの黄色い走狗だ。我ら一族は我らが母国、大日本帝国の影たる地にて何世紀も戦ってきたのである。いま我は、ここロサンジェルスにて、貴殿に宣戦を布告する。白人の抑圧者どもが我ら日本人のすべてを黄色い奴隷にせんとするこの土地で。

Ashida wrote inside precut stencils. He cut them himself. He wrote with a fountain pen and red ink. The color symbolized Fuji Shudo's psychosis. The Werewolf writes in simulated blood.

"You are the cowardly yellow dog of American fascism, Ryoshi. Our families have battled for centuries in the shadow land of our true nation—Imperial Japan. Now, I throw down the gauntlet to you here in Los Angeles, where the white oppressor seeks to make all Japanese his yellow slaves."

He age-spotted the paper and envelope. He used a 1933-vintage stamp. He drew the postal cancellation mark perfectly. He based the text on Dudley's interview with Fuji Shudo.

Shudo was out to fuck Nancy and kill Ryoshi. An argument at the Shotokan Baths blew out of hand. Shudo was delusional in 1933. The fraternal clubs were big then. His clan and the Watanabe clan had warred for centuries. Shudo wanted to impregnate Nancy and leave her to bear his wolf cubs. He communed with talking animals. This letter was his first formal statement of intent.

He impregnated Nancy on his nuthouse leave. His lunacy escalated during his loony-bin years. Nancy got an abortion and destroyed his wolf-cub litter. He left Atascadero and went on a terp run. His madness exploded on December 6.

Ashida worked in the lab. The station was a nuthouse. The Feds booked Claire and her coven. Four men escaped from Terminal Island. It put the PD in a siege state.

Phone buzz ran incessant. *Calling all cops. Sheriff's posse. Duty waivers and twelve scoots a day.*

Then this rumor spread. It spread up through the heat shaft. He heard it through the get-the-Japs roar. Lee Blanchard's girlfriend shanked Dot Rothstein.

Yeah, the Lake twist. Yeah, that big lez. What's Dot weigh—240? I heard the Lake twist bit her fucking nose off. Dot's getting transfusions at Queen of Angels right now.

He believed it. He didn't believe it. It was late. He was tired. He was *Jap*-overdosed.

Dead *Japs* in Highland Park. *Jap* werewolf Shudo. *Jap* jail suicides. The dead *Jap* in the phone booth. The dead *Jap* at the beach. Cops out to get escaped *Japs*.

He was tired. He locked his forgery kit in his briefcase. He walked down the back steps and ducked rain to his car.

He took 1st Street home. He dumped his car and walked upstairs. An envelope was taped to his door.

He opened it. He read the note inside.

You will testify for the Los Angeles County Grand Jury in the matter of the State of California versus Fujio Shudo. You will state under oath that you discovered the bloodstained fingerprint on the morning of December 7, 1941, and that you neglected to mention that fact in your initial reports.

Your new photographic device is faulty and perhaps obsolete. The picture of Fujio Shudo was taken on December 7 at 3:19 p.m., not December 6. The agitated pedestrians are reacting to news of the Pearl Harbor attack. A newspaper headline pertaining to the attack can be minimally glimpsed in the photo.

The note was unsigned. A big heart was sketched below.

Replete with an arrow. Replete with initials: *H.A. + B.B.*

Ashida screamed.

He thought he heard a wolf howl, somewhere close.

December 20, 1941

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1941

Gauze.

It was what I saw and what I was covered in. I knew I was in a hospital room and that I had been anesthetized. The walls were white, the bedding was white. I was in and out of a white-hazed consciousness. The gauze was just porous enough to let me glimpse the world. All my immediate memories were hazy white.

I recalled Bill Parker lifting me; the ambulance men wrapped me in white blankets and wore white coats. Parker told them to take me to Good Samaritan. A needle went in my arm. I came to on a white bed, dressed in gauze and floating in white.

My nose is broken—I heard a doctor say that. I know I'm wearing some sort of splint, like the ones Lee and Scotty wore after their fight. There's a tube in my arm, feeding me fortified water. The metallic taste in my mouth reminds me of the taste of Dot Rothstein's blood.

I fought as the Feds wrestled me out of the cell; it was the last thing I remember before the world turned white. The padded cell was white, my straitjacket was white. I spat blood in Ed Satterlee's face—I recall that.

I have a mild concussion; I heard a nurse say that. I'll be all right; I heard two doctors conferring. I'm not in the jail ward; I heard Bill Parker demand a private east-wing room. I'm a block away from the Pacific Dining Car and the world's best steak sandwich. I can taste it through the blood taste in my mouth.

I intended to kill her. I made up my mind the moment she touched me. The decision did not shock me then; the decision does not shock me now. I was poised to kill her when the Feds stormed my cell.

She's going to survive. I heard two nurses talking. She's in surgery at Queen of Angels. A doctor is grafting her severed nose back onto her face.

Everything is white. All sensation is altered. Numbness subsumes pain, the floaty haze engulfs discomfort. Gauze is porous. Gauze allows me to pretend to sleep while I peek at the men who've come by to see me.

Lee came by, in his uniform. Scotty came by, in his brown wool suit and tartan bow tie. They came by separately; they sat on opposite sides of the bed and held my hands while they spoke to each other. They cracked jokes about their own broken noses. Scotty cried and wiped his face with my hazy white sheet. Lee said, "Holy shit, Bennett. She fucked up the Dotstress."

Bill Parker frosted out a mayhem beef—Lee told Scotty that. Parker called Gene Biscailuz and talked turkey. Dot's antics had been out of line for years now. Sheriff Gene kowtowed—no charges on Miss Lake.

Scotty said, "I wish I could have seen it." Lee said, "Yeah. It had to be a better dustup than you and me."

I started drifting off then. I recall talk of the Dining Car and "belt a few highballs."

Gauze and white haze. Familiar scents. Brenda and Elmer came by. I smelled Brenda's perfume and Elmer's cigar.

Gauze and white haze. A nurse says, "Telephone, Captain." William H. Parker says, "Thank you."

Gauze and haze. Then, "It's after midnight, Sergeant." A pause and "Yes, I know I proposed the meeting." Silence and "The rectory? Certainly, if His Eminence requests it."

Gauze and white haze. Scents. His cigarette smoke and a hint of the rainstorm I willed. The wet wool of his uniform.

Gauze and white haze. He's sitting beside the bed. *Tell me things, William. Tell me who the big redhead is. Tell me what you want from her*.

Gauze and white haze. He's praying. His eyes are shut. His elbows are up on his knees. His fingers are laced and pressed to his forehead.

Gauze and white haze. I'm in, I'm out. Chair scrapes and footsteps, departing. A glimpse through the haze—but he's gone.

I smelled the prairie. He left it here for me.

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LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1941

The Archbishop said, “I’m thrilled to receive you boys. I’ve had devilish insomnia since we entered this war, and brokering a truce between two uniquely brilliant Catholic laymen bodes as splendid good fun.”

Cantwell’s study aped the Wilshire Country Club taproom. The walls were golf trophy–festooned.

Dudley said, “I’m glad that I took the liberty of calling you, Your Eminence. Captain Parker suggested an intermediary, and I’m thrilled that you were available at this ungodly hour.”

They sat in easy chairs. Rain tapped the windows. Cantwell sipped brandy. Dudley sipped scotch. Parker sipped ginger ale.

He had four days booze-free. His nerve endings *screeched*. The free world was up his ass. His blood pressure verged on 6,000.

He had Kay Lake’s film strip. Dudley held a folder. Cantwell and Dud went back to Dublin. Cantwell was a papal up-and-comer. The Dudster was a kid assassin.

“Are we in the protected sphere of clerical confidence now, Your Eminence?”

“We are, Dud. You may both rest assured of my discretion. Consider this to be a grandly appointed confessional, and consider me to be your confessor.”

Dudley passed the folder. “Hideo Ashida’s notarized statement on the Watanabe case and what he knows and has surmised about your extracurricular operation.”

Parker opened the folder and read the enclosed pages. Hideo Ashida—dear God.

Rampant suppression. The prim doctor goes rogue and goes snitch. He gives up all their rogue actions. The document was a torch. It would burn down his whole fucking life.

Parker passed the folder back. “I concede my predicament. I’m sure that you coerced Dr. Ashida with great verve.”

Cantwell twinkled. Dudley winked. Parker passed him the film strip. Dudley rolled it out and studied it.

He scanned it, up and down. He scanned it six full times.

He said, “Yes, Captain. I concede.”

Parker rubbed it in. “Your pal Ed Satterlee and Ace Kwan’s pal Quon Chin. Let me extend the argument that this film so lucidly asserts. It’s a payoff. You and Ace have plans to exploit the roundups and the forthcoming internment, and you’re greasing a well-placed Fed in advance. If Ace is acting independent of you, I don’t care. You and Ace cannot afford to have this film strip publicly viewed or logged as police evidence. You and Ace cannot afford to have the roundups in any way officially besmirched.”

Dudley passed the strip back. “Your assumptions are soundly reasoned and entirely correct. I must ask Mr. Kwan why he is paying off Agent Satterlee. Knowing Mr. Kwan, I would guess that it pertains to business.”

Cantwell twinkled. “It’s all Greek to me, but I’m having a swell time anyway.”

Parker said, “Describe your end of the agreement.”

Dudley said, “I respectfully request your vow not to interfere in the legal processes attending the conviction of Fujio Shudo for the murders of Ryoshi, Aya, Johnny and Nancy Watanabe. Within that request, I offer this concession. You, with or without Dr. Ashida, may have a grand time searching for white men in purple sweaters, but you may not publicly or officially present evidence that anyone other than Mr. Shudo killed the Watanabe family. I also respectfully request your vow not to interfere in my endeavors with Ace Kwan in any way, shape, manner or form. I should add that I have vivid documentation of your near-fatal beating of your first wife, Francine Pomeroy.”

Cantwell crossed himself. Parker willed his hand back from his gun.

“With God as my witness, you have my vow.”

“Thank you, Captain. And on your end?”

Parker said, “I respectfully request your vow to make damn fucking sure that no Federal, state, or local charges are filed against Katherine Lake, Claire De Haven, the men in her cell and the film crew. There are to be no reprisals against Miss Lake for her justified assault on your friend Dot Rothstein. I respectfully request your vow to see to the timely release and the dropping of all charges for Miss Lake and the others. I respectfully request that you present my threat of public exposure to Richard Hood, the SAC of the FBI’s Los Angeles Office, immediately. Within this request, I offer this concession. I will never again seek to entrap Fifth Columnists of any sort, with or without Miss Lake’s participation.”

Dudley tapped his belt wares. Stations of the cross. Knuckle dusters, sap, shiv.

"With God as my witness, you have my vow."

Parker stood up.

Dudley stood up.

They shook hands.

Cantwell stood and clapped. "White men, both of you. Good Catholic boys. Such dry wit, such decorum."

The walls compressed. The heat index climbed. Some unseen fireplace roared. Here come the jim-jams and quakes.

Dudley said something droll. Cantwell dished blarney. Parker made for the door.

He got outside. Rain hit him. He weaved down a walkway and puked into a hedge. The walls retracted. The heat index dropped. He lost his legs. He felt propelled. He made it to the sanctuary. The side door was unlocked.

He got to a pew. He got to his knees and faced the altar. He got squared away and got to it.

Holy Father, grant me reprieve. Take my fraudulent righteousness. Revoke the arrogance that blinds me to the plight of others and leads me to horrid error and misalliance. Temper my ambition with grace, Dear Lord. Forgive me for persecuting Claire De Haven. I am complicit in blood libel. Protect the innocent Japanese of this city as chaos attends them. Bring me Joan Conville and tell me what she portends. Grant Katherine Lake the will to self-rebuke, so that she might repent and forfeit her reckless urges. I will honor the vow that I just issued in Your Name. That oath of convenience makes me small in Your Eyes. I succumb to worldliness in this address. I speak to You in ghastly qualification. I cannot lose what I have fought so hard for and can only grasp and compromise when others seek to take it from me.

He stayed on his knees. He prayed. He got up to the edge and retreated. He knew the words and fought the words. He saw dawn through stained glass. The new vow lodged inside him and caused tremors.

He got up to it. He retreated. He said the words so he would not go insane.

Dear God, let this be my final compliance with evil. Dear God, I must never do this again.

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LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1941

Dick Hood said, “It’s extortion. It’s sheer blackmail.”

Dudley said, “We have to comply. He’ll levy the threat without hesitation.”

“Tell me who ‘He’ is. I’ll concede that it’s a valid threat, and I’ll get Mr. Hoover’s okay. Just tell me who ‘He’ is.”

They sat in Dudley’s cubicle. Graph paper masked the walls. Arrows, boxes, initials. Baffling hieroglyphics. Hood kept glancing sidelong.

Dudley zipped his lips. Hood lit a cigarette.

“My money’s on Thad Brown or Bill Parker. They’re the frontrunners for Chief when Jack the H. retires. Parker’s a drunk and a religious nut, and Thad’s subtle. *Shit.* Mr. Hoover’s going to hit the roof.”

Dudley rocked his chair. “You’ll have to speak to the U.S. Attorney. You’ll have to release Miss De Haven and the others, and disband that part of your investigation.”

Hood made the jack-off sign. “I’ll gird my fucking loins, make the fucking calls and take the fucking heat. And in case you haven’t noticed, it’s not really an ‘investigation.’ It’s just round up the fucking Japs and make this a Jap-free city within sixty days.”

Dudley said, “I spoke to Ace Kwan an hour ago. He explained the payoffs to me, and I would describe them as felicitous in intent. They were Ace’s bequest to the agents who’ve been working so diligently to clean up this damnable mess. Ed Satterlee would have explained it to you by New Year’s. Ace intends to throw a grand party for all of you, including the Hearst Rifle Team and some of our Alien Squad boys. You’ll have a week at Cal Drake’s Blue Lion Lodge, up in Victorville. There’ll be bourbon, bird hunting and Cuban cigars. It’s Ace’s treat for you, once the Japs have been properly penned.”

Hood grinned. “The goddamn war, the goddamn Japs. You’ve got escaped Japs, now. Gene Biscailuz is throwing his own party. Duty waivers and twelve scoots a day. He's got a lynch mob on his hands."

The Blue Lion tale was a dodge. Yes, he called Ace. Yes, Ace came clean. Ed Satterlee was hawking Jap-property leads. Ace had Quon Chin purchase some.

He called Ed. He told him about the film strip and its upscut. Ed came clean. He told him to comply with the Blue Lion dodge.

Hood said, "I like Ace. He's been feeding my boys on the cuff. Got a yen for egg rolls at 3:00 a.m.? See Ace the Chinaman."

Dudley said, "Ace is a thoughtful man. He knows that your niece Jane is getting married, and he's offered to cater the reception, free of charge."

Hood stood up. "Free of charge" echoed.

"Damn. The Blue Lion. Will you be joining us?"

"Regretfully, no. I'll be entering Army service at New Year's."

Hood stretched. "I'll go make those calls. Jesus, Mr. Hoover will piss blood."

Dudley tossed him his hat. They shook hands and sighed. *Ain't life a pisser?* Hood hit the road. Dudley coffee-chased two bennies. The graph summoned him.

He jotted notes. He updated the land grab. He detailed Dr. Terry's buy-in strategy. He drew a howling wolf.

He was keyed up. He barely dozed last night. He kept calling Bette. A coon maid kept stalling him. Beth and Tommy were due. He made calls and located the two rape-o Marines.

He spoke to Scotty. He rebuked him for the Lee Blanchard tiff. He requested a favor in recompense. Scotty said Sure.

He went by Carl Hull's house. Craven Carl spilled to Buzz Meeks. It mandated a severe beating.

Frau Carl diverted him. *Ensign* Carl had left for the Navy.

He was keyed-up. He needed investment gelt. He needed to plan the raid on Carlos Madrano's stash.

Dudley drew wolves and dollar signs. Money. Madrano's cash and dope. Money. Ace Kwan's tile game tomorrow.

Dudley studied his graph. Arrows, boxes, initials, contractions. Scotty walked up. Scotty studied the graph.

"It's interesting how the initials repeat. If you know the names, you can almost figure it out."

"Bright lad. I'm surrounded by acute young men these days."

Scotty smiled. "The Werewolf's in no. 2. Mr. Loew told me to get you."

Dudley grabbed his suit coat. "I'd like you to observe and follow my signals. There's that task, and a drive down to Oceanside later. It pertains to that amends I require. I'll explain it to you en route."

Scotty said, "Okay, Dud."

They walked down to 2. No gallery this time. No steno, no hallway speaker.

Ellis Loew sat with Fujio Shudo. Two extra chairs were pulled up.

Shudo was handcuffed. This interview was the stalker. The closer was later today.

Loew jiggled his Phi Beta key. Dudley and Scotty sat down. Shudo stood up.

He said, “I’m a whip-out man.” He unzipped his trousers and whipped out his dick.

Dudley signaled Scotty.

Scotty improvised.

He grabbed Shudo by the neck and picked him up, one-handed. He lowered him and sat him back down in his chair.

Loew gawked. Shudo tucked his dick away and went *Ouch*.

Dudley said, “Good morning, Mr. Shudo. I’ve missed you. Have you missed me?”

Shudo said, “No.”

Dudley smiled. “We left you on the avenues in Highland Park, around noon on Saturday, December 6th. You posed for a photograph with a little girl who thought you resembled a werewolf, which you most fetchingly do. You had been drinking terpin hydrate, you recall that day as being hazy, and you said that an ‘instinct’ drew you to Highland Park. You became upset when I brought up your visits to Japanese fraternal clubs in the early 1930s, your acrimonious relationship with a man named Ryoshi Watanabe, and your political arguments with him. Do you recall that, sir? It was only Thursday night that we had this discussion.”

Shudo picked his nose. “I don’t know. I told you I knew Ginzo Watanabe and Charlie Watanabe, but I don’t remember no Ryoshi.”

Dudley said, “You will in time, sir. We’ve come into possession of a letter that you wrote to him in 1933.”

Loew gawked the letter. He was in on let’s-get-him. He was clueless per the frame. He signaled Dudley: *My turn*.

“Mr. Shudo, do you carry sample knives on your cart? Sharp-bladed knives to show off the fine work you do?”

Shudo said, “Sure.”

Dudley said, “We’ve reset the stage for you, sir. It’s Saturday, December 6th, and you’re in Highland Park on an ‘instinct.’ You’ve been drinking terpin hydrate, and things are hazy.”

Shudo said, “I don’t remember writing Ryoshi Watanabe no letter.”

“But you *do* recall Ryoshi and your arguments with him at the fraternal clubs?”

Shudo shrugged. “Yeah, I guess so.”

Clincher. Now, reverse the field.

"You were born in Yokohama, Japan, in 1903. Isn't that correct, Mr. Shudo? Your Atascadero file reports that you emigrated in 1908."

Shudo said, "That's right. I was born in the land of the rising sun. I'm not no Nisei Johnny-come-lately."

"Your father ran a fishing boat out of San Pedro, didn't he, Mr. Shudo?"

"That's right."

"Did he engage in political activities?"

"No, but he hated the Chinks, and he rumbled against the tongs."

"Did he educate you in the political ways of Imperial Japan?" Shudo said, "No. He educated me with a croquet mallet."

"And when did this practice begin, sir?"

"When I was about eight years old. When he saw me whip it out on this Mex boy."

"And how long did this practice last?"

"Until I ran away. I think I was fourteen. The Beast told me to cut tracks, so I did."

"And who is 'The Beast,' Mr. Shudo?"

"The Beast is my dick."

"Do you view your dick as a separate being, sir? As something or someone attached to your body, but able to act and speak to you independently?"

"Yeah. The Beast is The Beast. Sometimes he gives me good advice, sometimes he leads me astray."

Loew gawked. Scotty gassed on Shudo. *This sure beats divinity school!*

Dudley said, "The Beast is your counselor and your confidant, is that correct, Mr. Shudo? He frequently guides your actions and advises you on what to do?"

Shudo said, "That's correct. The Beast is my baby boy. I'm a whip-out man. If I see something that I think The Beast will like, I show it to him. Your boy here is The Beast's type, so I gave him a peek."

Dudley said, "Are you referring to my colleague, Officer Robert S. Bennett?"

Shudo said, "That's right. The Beast likes husky boys."

Loew said, "Mr. Shudo, are you a homosexual?"

Shudo said, "No. I'm just the *ichiban* of The Beast."

Dudley said, "I'm curious about the advice that The Beast offers you, sir. Can you give me any examples of it?"

Shudo scratched his balls. "The Beast tells me to take the streetcar up to Hollywood, so I do it. The Beast tells me to break into houses and sniff jockstraps, so I do it. The Beast tells me to share my terp with him, so I do."

Dudley smiled. Shudo ogled Scotty.

"Mr. Shudo, a pair of women's panties were found in your hotel room. Were you aware of that?"

Shudo shrugged. Women's panties—so what?

"Sir, have you ever broken into a house for the express purpose of sniffing women's panties? Feel free to consult The Beast if you need to."

Shudo scrunched up his face. Shudo expressed deep thought. Shudo nodded yes.

"Yeah. I like to break into houses and sniff women's panties."

"Do you enjoy fucking the occasional girl, sir? Do you indulge the practice if there are no comely young men in sight?"

Shudo scrunched up. Shudo consulted The Beast. Shudo nodded yes.

"Yeah, boss. I go for gash if there's no cute brown eye around." Loew cringed. Dudley tossed a curveball.

"Sir, did you fuck Nancy Watanabe during a work-furlough release from Atascadero, six months ago?"

Shudo scrunched up. Shudo consulted The Beast.

"Yeah, I fucked Nancy. I fucked her good."

Loew nudged Dudley. *He's in the house. We've got partial motive. We're halfway there*. Scotty chewed bubble gum. Shudo ogled him. Here comes curveball no. 2.

"You've been with Mr. Shudo a long time. Isn't that true, Beast?"

Shudo spoke basso profundo. "That's right. A *looooong* time."

"You've certainly taught him a few things, I'd venture to say."

Shudo, basso profundo. "I'll say. Fuji was a punk until I took him in."

"Why would you say something that harsh, Beast?"

The Beast said, "Because it's true. Fuji was the sissy until I made him the brunser. He gave out the brown at the San Pedro Y and up at Preston. I took him to the Murakami Nursery. They got bamboo shoots there. 'Bamboo Shoot' Shudo. Fuji owes that moniker to me."

Dudley said, "Would you say that Mr. Shudo owes his entire criminal career to you, Beast?"

The Beast said, "In spades, *ichiban*. I taught him the knife-sharpening trade and made him a knife man. I got him a job at a blood bank in Long Beach, so he could steal the cute sailors' blood. I took him to see *Dracula* at the Marcal Theatre. We kidnapped a sailor in the parking lot, so we could cut him and drink his blood. I showed him how to mix terp with blood, for a swell cocktail. I showed him how to cut himself when he couldn't find no cute brown eye to cut."

Loew leaned in. He ticked legal points, sotto voce.

"Get back to the 6th, and get to his weapons. Nort excluded the swords, but this isn't going all the way to a jury. The swords and his knife cart. Let's get back there."

Dudley nodded. Scotty blew a big bubble. Shudo giggled and squirmed in his seat.

"Beast, are you and Mr. Shudo familiar with the Japanese swords used in the practice of hara-kiri?"

The Beast said, "Yes."

"And were you and Mr. Shudo in possession of four such swords on Saturday, December 6th?"

The Beast said, "Yeah, boss."

Dudley said, "But you had lost the scabbards, hadn't you, Beast?"

The Beast said, "Right. We lost the scabbards."

"Do you know what scabbards *are*, Beast?"

"I'm not sure, boss."

"Beast, do you and Mr. Shudo keep an assortment of sample knives on your cart? Knives that you show to prospective customers to demonstrate the high quality of your work?"

The Beast said, "Yeah, we got some sample knives."

Dudley tossed a change-up. It's a for-real question. It's a head scratcher.

"Beast, we did not find the knife-sharpening cart in your room at the Kyoto Arms Hotel."

"Fuji sold it to a nigger, outside the Rosslyn Hotel."

"And when was that?"

The Beast said, "Sunday, December 7, 1941. A day that will live in glory for mighty Imperial Japan."

Loew leaned in. "What's with this letter Shudo wrote?"

Dudley leaned in. "Hideo Ashida found it at the house and transcribed it for me. It was posted in October '33. Fuji and Ryoshi had had some voluble disagreements at a Jap social club, and it's apparent that he was already quite smitten with Nancy, even though she was a scant eight years old, and female."

Loew said, "I don't get that part of it. This guy's a queer, and he keesters men with bamboo shoots."

Dudley sighed. "Sex is a devilishly complex phenomenon, Mr. Loew. There's that, and the considerable fact that Mr. Shudo is insane."

"Quit addressing his schlong, will you? It's giving me the willies."

Dudley smiled. Scotty blew bubbles. Shudo goo-goo-eyed him.

Loew leaned close. "Walk him up to it, Sergeant. He hates Ryoshi, he impregnated Nancy, but she got a scrape. We've got the letter and the print in Ryoshi's blood. We've got eyeball wits that place him in Highland Park that day. The knives versus the swords is problematic, but we know he's going to confess. Walk him up and walk him *through* when we go for the close this afternoon. Jack Horrall's bringing some Army brass in for the show. You'll have a full house."

Shudo said, "You're whispering and conspiring against me. The Beast told me so. I told him you're all right. The jailers get my grub at

Kwan's Chinese Pagoda. I get peach duck for noon chow today."

Dudley grinned. "And two portions you shall have, sir."

Shudo went *Yum-yum*. "I've got no grudge on the Chinks. Eugenics is eugenics, boss. The Chinks got the better grub, but us Japs are the master race."

Dudley rode a brainstorm. "I agree with you, sir. The Japanese are quite the superior race. I'm wondering, sir. By and large, you prefer men over women—but you've sustained quite the lust for Nancy Watanabe over time."

"Yeah, Nancy. What a dish. Almost as good as brown eye."

"You were quite determined to impregnate her, weren't you, sir?"

"Yeah. Fuji and Nancy, and a little cub in the oven."

"Was propagating the Japanese master race your chief concern with Nancy, sir? Did it trump your sexual desire, given your long-standing and rather cruel lust for young men?"

"Yeah."

"And did Nancy's termination of her pregnancy consume you in waves of despair?"

"Yeah."

"And were those waves of despair in fact tidal waves, as you rolled your knife-sharpening cart down Avenue 45 in Highland Park in the early-afternoon hours of Saturday, December 6, 1941?"

"Yeah, boss."

"And were you in the hazy, dreamlike state common to those who habitually swill terpin hydrate?"

"Yeah, boss. Terp. Terp and blood-bank blood from a husky white boy."

"The Beast was leading you astray that day, wasn't he, Mr. Shudo? He had you teething on Nancy's abortion and all the indignities you had suffered during your contentious friendship with Ryoshi Watanabe."

"Yeah, boss. The Beast was talking to me. I remember that day. He said *Frankenstein* was playing at the Wiltern Theatre. That little girl said I looked like The Wolfman."

"The white residents of Highland Park viewed you with suspicion as you made your rounds that day, didn't they? They knew you to be a member of the master race, soon to go to war with our inferior white nation."

"That's right, boss. Pearl Harbor was coming up. *Banzai*, you white fuckers."

"You sensed the looming attack in the air, didn't you, Mr. Shudo? You knew it was coming. It moved you, thrilled you, and filled you with elation and a paradoxical rage. You were on that street, you were near that house, you had sharp weapons on your cart and at your disposal. You were enraged. You wanted to be poised on the deck of a Japanese aircraft carrier, headed for Pearl Harbor. You were surely a werewolf, but you wanted to be a werewolf of the sky, in the glorious service of Imperial Japan, and that disjuncture filled you with a maddening and murderous hunger. Nancy was in that house. She had slaughtered your eugenic contribution to the Japanese master race. Ryoshi was in that house. He had belittled you in numerous arguments, going back nearly a decade. You knew that Aya and Johnny were in that house, and you suddenly sensed, with all your being, that you were nearing your very own Pearl Harbor."

Shudo giggled. "That's right, *ichiban. Banzai*, you Jap fuckers."

Dudley tapped Loew. Scotty leaned close. Shoptalk, sotto voce.

"Call Kwan's in half an hour. Order peach duck, chop suey and pork fried rice. Tell Ace to throw in two vials of terpin hydrate."

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LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1941

The Reds walked. Newshounds scoped their jail exit. Ashida watched. He had a lab-window view.

Claire took the lead. Her slaves followed her. The film crew lagged behind.

Reporters and cameramen pounced. Sid Hudgens and Jack Webb led the pack. The Anti-Axis raid made the papers.

It got *some* ink. It should have gleaned *more*. The escaped Japs and The Werewolf gobbled print space.

Flashbulbs popped. Newsmen yelled. Claire magnetized them and breezed through. Two limos were parked curbside. Claire took the lead car. Her slaves piled in behind her.

Both sleds pulled out. The crew dispersed on the street. The newsmen ignored them. *Reds Lay Tracks in Looooooong Lincolns!* Photo men snapped the getaway.

The scene evaporated. *Poof!* It's over. Everyone walked away.

The Reds walked. Ashida sensed quixotic Bill Parker. He pulled Kay Lake from the bin last night. The station buzzed with the tale. Whiskey Bill's prom-night gesture.

Ashida stood at the window. The lab was Saturday dead. He had nowhere to go.

Dudley raided his apartment. Mariko's place was Fed-sieged. L.A. was a siege state. Blood libel. His myth of normalcy, dashed.

Ashida stood at the window. The squadroom phones blared. Detectives logged get-the-Japs scuttlebutt.

The Sidster and Jack Webb walked in. They glad-handed Ashida and lit cigarettes.

Jack said, "That Claire De Haven's a dish."

Sid said, "Yeah, if the dish is red borscht."

Jack said, "She can keep my tootsies warm in the Kremlin."

Sid said, "Hideo, what are we going to do with this kid? His tenuous wartime employment as a stooge for William Randolph Hearst is going to his head."

Ashida forced a laugh. *Sid, you're a sketch.*

Jack said, "The Dudster gave me a job for tomorrow night. Ace Kwan's throwing a big tile game, and he got a tip that some jigs are going to heist it. I'm supposed to observe the game and call him at a pay phone."

Sid winked. "Like I said, It's all going to his head. The Dudster and Mr. Hearst. What's the diff?"

Jack said, "Why mince words? This war's been good to me so far."

Sid winked. "Unlike some others. Unlike the bulk of the Japanese folks in *El Pueblo Grande* at this particular moment. Right, Hideo?" Ashida flushed. Sid was a eugenic misfit. He was half cockroach, half maladroit dwarf.

"That's right, Sid."

"I'm thinking about doing a piece on you, Hideo. Dud got The Wolf, and you were a big part of the case. How about this? 'Hideo Ashida helped crack the baffling Watanabe job, and he's Japanese himself.' It's a good angle, given the way things are going for you folks."

Ashida said, "They couldn't go much worse."

Sid said, "Sure they could. Those escapee fools have got this town in a tizzy, and that posse is out for blood. All the jails are full, so there's talk of housing you folks in the horse paddocks at Santa Anita. You can dig that, right? You're eating broiled eel on 2nd and Alameda one minute, you're sharing a bale of tasty hay with Seabiscuit the next."

Jack yukked. Ashida gripped the window ledge. *Racial cur, cockroach, dwarf.*

Sid said, "And, to top it off, you've got Fletch Bowron, stinko at the Jonathan Club last night. Is he railing at the Japanese forces currently gutting the Philippines? No. He's ragging on a certain Nisei police chemist."

The window ledge cracked. Ashida said, "You *heard* him?"

Jack said, "Fletch the B. Elmer the J's got the goods on that boy." Sid said, "I was there, and I heard him. He was talking up his plans to levy taxes on confiscated Japanese property, and he was hurling dirt on you and Whiskey Bill Parker. He was ragging Bill the P for that tapped-phone ploy that kept you on the PD, and he called you the 'yellow spot on his spotless political record.' "

Ashida gripped the window ledge. The whole thing snapped off.

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KAY LAKE’S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1941

The white haze and morphine were gone. The pain all over my body made me feel more like myself. I was going home in the late afternoon. My concussion was healing. The nose splint made me sneeze.

Lee and Scotty sat on opposite sides of the bed and held my hands. We all bore wounds from early-wartime altercations.

I pointed to my nose. “You should see the other girl.”

Lee and Scotty laughed; Scotty plumped up my pillows. Lee said, “I tried to enlist. I wasn’t going to mention it until I got in. Thad Brown got Jack Horrall’s okay. I took the physical, but I’m 4-F. That punctured eardrum from my fight with Jimmy Bivens.”

Scotty gave Lee a big stage look. Lee said, “Don’t flatter yourself, Bennett. You don’t hit that hard.”

We all laughed. Scotty gave me a look. Lee caught it. He wiggled my feet and said, “I should go now.”

Scotty said, “Wait downstairs for me, Blanchard. I’ll drive you back to the Hall.”

Lee blew me a kiss and walked out. Pain shot down my jaw. I sneezed and felt stitches tug loose.

Scotty handed me a tissue. I said, “You’re going to tell me something.”

He said, “That I’m breaking it off with you. Right’s right and wrong’s wrong, and we all know which one this is.”

I squeezed his hand. “I would have said ‘one more time when I’m feeling and looking better,’ but you’re right.”

Scotty said, “Right’s right.”

I said, “You’ll have to make do with Joan Crawford.”

Scotty blushed. “Who told you?”

“Brenda Allen. She saw you with *La Grande Joan* at the Trocadero.

She called it an astonishing moment. You were with Joan Crawford, and Dudley Smith was with Bette Davis. It was when she knew that the war had changed everything."

Scotty shivered. I said, "You shouldn't be ashamed of being afraid of him. It's the proper response."

"He collects protégés and discards them. You've seen it. Lee Blanchard didn't cut the mustard, and now there's me."

I smiled. "You're learning."

"He's like a centipede. He's got his feelers spread out, but you can't see them. He's got this graph taped up in his cubicle. It's all about the Watanabe case and what you'd call 'related opportunities,' and it's in this special shorthand of his. I've been studying it when no one's around, and I've put some things together. You wouldn't believe what I've figured out."

"It's what you do with what you've learned."

Scotty shrugged. The good lad, the bad lad. The bright lad who cracked puzzles that stumped other kids. The troubled lad, always.

"I'm joining the Marines, right after New Year's. I just talked to Dud about it, and he already got Chief Horrall's okay. I can go fight the war and come back on the Department. That's the thing about Dudley that gets me. He's so damn generous."

I laced up our fingers. "Don't get killed, sweetie."

"Not this boy."

"I'm going to try to enlist again. Ward Littell told me that a lot of the Federal holds have been lifted."

Scotty touched my cheek. "That's you, Kay. You bite this big bull's nose off and go to war. It's like your speech. Your options are do everything or do nothing."

My eyes wetted up. Scotty handed me a tissue and went pensive. I said, "Tell me what you're thinking."

"I was thinking about Dud. He's got a job for me later today, and God knows how many more between now and New Year's. He knows that I'm inclined a certain way, so he uses me. I just want to get to some safe little island, so I can kill Japs with a clear conscience."

I said, "Tell me about this graph."

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LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1941

Parker burned graphs.

He torched his traffic graph and roundup graph. He torched *Watanabe Case/Details-Chronology* and *Lake/De Haven*. He found a jug under the kitchen sink and built a bourbon blaze.

He raised a stink. The flames blew high. He doused them with tap water.

The sink was a sludge mound. Parker scooped the mess into a bag and dumped it in a trash can. He washed his hands and aired out the kitchen. He walked back to the den. Call-Me-Jack stuck him with more shitwork.

It was punitive. He messed with Dudley's first go at The Wolf. He was back to the PD's "Auxiliary."

Call-Me-Jack got tight with the Hearst Rifle boys. They were his Auxiliary faves. They were out on Sheriff Gene's dragnet. Call-Me-Jack craved more men like that.

Parker read applicant files. A low tide rolled in. Bottom-feeders gleamed in the muck.

Klanned-up studio guards. A nudist preacher. A Negro janitor at Le Conte Junior High. Numerous stat-rape assertions.

Low tide. Denizens of the deep.

Parker flipped files. He hit four clipped-up sheets.

Boudreau, Costigan, Gutridge, Palwick. Ex–Nevada prison guards. All Spanish-fluent. All canned from their state jobs. All dumped for brutality.

Hard boys. Goon-squad types. A routing slip and photos clipped to the sheets.

A messenger picked them up. One-week paper loan-out. Four files, sent to:

Exley Construction. 6402 Wilshire Boulevard.

Hard boys. Ex–prison guards. All Spanish-fluent. It comes down to—

THIS:

The Valley. The Jap-owned farms. The wetback workers supplied by Carlos Madrano. Preston's law-enforcement ties. Preston's internment scheme.

Catch it now. It's a soft lob. You should have caught it before this.

Preston was behind the house and farm buyouts. Preston was linked to the Watanabe case.

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LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1941

The Werewolf read Hideo's letter. He was terp-primed. He moved his lips and read slow.

Dudley sat with Ellis Loew and a new steno. The hallway was packed. The wall speakers supplied crisp sound.

Call-Me-Jack hosted some Army pals. Said pals brought their children. The lads and lassies wore rubber werewolf masks. Shudo was quite the kiddie show.

Dudley said, "Do you recall that letter, sir?"

Shudo said, "Yeah. Sure. I guess so."

"With that in mind, sir, let us return to Saturday, December 6th."

"Okay, boss."

"You were in a state of both agitation and premeditation. You were, quite frankly, looped on terpin hydrate. By your own admission, sir, things were quite hazy for you."

Shudo said, "Terp, boss. It's like Wheaties. 'Breakfast of Champions.' "

Dudley said, "You had the deadly sharp knives on your cart. You had the Japanese ritual swords that you purchased in Little Tokyo, but you don't recall where, and you misplaced the four scabbards in your inebriated state. You had purchased four sachets of a rare Oriental poison from a chemist that you knew from your fraternal-club days, but you cannot recall his name—and, again, your consumption of terpin hydrate had rendered that patch of time hazy."

Shudo scratched his neck. "I think I remember that chemist guy. He was friends with The Beast way back when. I sold my cart to a coon outside the Rosslyn Hotel. I do remember that."

Dudley said, "We discussed it, sir. That stated, I should remind you. You sold the cart on Sunday, December 7th. It's still Saturday, December 6th, that we're discussing here."

Shudo said, "Right, boss. Saturday. This little girl says I look like The Wolfman, and her daddy takes a picture of me."

Dudley said, “That is correct, sir. And by our combined calculations, it was right before you knocked on Ryoshi Watanabe’s door.” Shudo yawned. “Ryoshi was a wrong-o, boss. We went back to the clubs. I read that letter. We had this grudge going. I was full of no-good for him. It was bad, *ichiban*.”

“He was surprised to see you, wasn’t he, sir?”

“Yeah, he was surprised. ‘Hello there, Ryoshi. We go back, baby boy.’ ”

“You were shocked to see Nancy, weren’t you, sir? She was the carrier of your wolf-cub litter, but she slaughtered the whelps in her womb.”

“Yeah, Nancy. She was a wrong-o. The Beast hated her. She did me dirt.”

Dudley lit a cigarette. The Wolf snatched the pack and lit up. Loew nudged Dudley. It meant *Close Him Now*.

Dudley said, “Aya and Johnny were there. You’d stashed your cart on the porch, out of sight from the street. The reunion with your hated foe and his family was uncomfortable at first, but you suggested a nice cup of tea, all around. The tea contained a slow-acting poison that induced euphoria before it induced death. The dope-addled Watanabes vomited on their clothing, but didn’t seem to mind, because of their euphoric states. That display of sloth offended you and disrupted the fantasy that had been building ever so vividly within your mind. You made the four people change clothes. You spied on Nancy and Johnny and became aroused at their states of undress. You didn’t want to be seen outside with their vomit-soaked clothing, so you dumped it in the washing machine. Your fantasy went into improvisation. It now entailed a period of waiting, postmortem. You would have to wait for the clothes to wash and hang them out on the line.”

Shudo said, “Yeah, the fuckers puked. It made me real mad. What’s that word? It ‘disrupted’ me.”

Loew went *Wheeeeeeeew*. Dudley smiled.

“Ryoshi had been bragging. He told you that a Japanese attack on the Pacific Fleet was imminent, and his certainty infuriated you. You felt impotent, because your hated foe remained a vital and well-informed Fifth Columnist, while you moldered in an asylum on charges of bamboo-shoot rape. You improvised again. You capitalized on the euphoric states of your intended victims and had Ryoshi write a suicide note pertaining to the attack on his bedroom wall. The stage had been set, sir. Your victims had been lulled into a state of docile and euphoric compliance. ‘Fuji, the Knife Man.’ They had long underestimated you. You suggested a friendly game of charades and made them lie supine, four across, on the living room floor.”

Shudo raised his hands. Shudo rattled his cuff chain. Shudo said, “Yeah, boss.”

“And then you pulled a sharp knife from your waistband and gutted them in the manner of seppuku. Is that correct, sir?”

Shudo went *Heil Hitler!* Shudo said, “Yeah, boss.”

“And then you removed the clothes from the washing machine and hung them on the clothesline. Is that correct, sir?”

Shudo went *Heil Hitler!* Shudo said, “Yeah, boss.”

“And then you waited until nightfall, calmly gathered up your knife-sharpening cart and cautiously surveyed the outside world. You then wheeled your cart down to Figueroa Street and walked southbound, to your hotel. You were wonderfully elated, and consumed yet more terpin hydrate in celebration. You went up to your room and slept through to the following day. It is now Sunday, December 7th, sir. You went out in the world and learned that your misguided countrymen had, indeed, attacked the Pacific Fleet. You ventured southbound and sold your knife-sharpening cart to a Negro man outside the Rosslyn Hotel. You dropped the knife you used to kill the Watanabe family down a sewer grate. Is that correct, sir?”

Shudo said, “Yeah, *ichiban*. I did it all. Ryoshi got under my skin. Nancy killed my cubs, and Johnny said no to The Beast. Aya was mean to me, so she had to go. Pearl Harbor, boss. This caper ain’t no gas-chamber bounce when my people win the war.”

Ellis Loew sighed.

The steno sighed.

Dudley stood and bowed to the mirror. The door blew open wide.

The gallery ran in. They blitzkrieged Dudley and banzai’d The Wolf. Call-Me-Jack, Thad B., Fletch Bowron. Stray Feds, Army brass, little kids.

They pounded Dudley’s back. Thad uncuffed The Wolf. The kids stormed him and hugged him. The Wolf mugged and ruffled their hair.

The kids wore Mummy masks and Werewolf masks. The Wolf hopped around. The kids poked him and squealed.

Dudley ducked out. More work loomed. Oceanside—eighty miles south.

He popped two bennies and hit the back stairs. Scotty was parked in his pastor dad’s Dodge. Dudley loaded it this a.m.

One Navy seabag. Two .45’s tucked in. Silencer-rigged. Loaded with Ace Kwan’s dumdums. Eugenics. One slug killed whole dynasties.

Dudley jumped in the car. Scotty pulled out. Dudley dipped the seat and shut his eyes. *Don’t talk to me.*

He’d talked to Ace. The tile game was Chink-only and high stakes. He called Harry Cohn and said stay away. He called Jack Webb and gave him a gig.

Watch the game for me. Chart the winners and losers. Call me, pay phone to pay phone. I fear a robbery.

The Smith-Kwan cartel needed money. Terry Lux was in with them now. Terry's business acumen juiced up their plans. Terry thought they could buy in with Exley and Patchett. It required big seed cash.

Scotty drove. Dudley rode a bennie surge and schemed the Mexican foray.

It was risky. It meant fucking Carlos Madrano. Carlos was Exley's and Patchett's tight pal. It meant a Mexican dope and cash raid. It meant planned obfuscation and convincing suspects killed in advance.

Scotty drove. Dudley opened his eyes. He saw the coast road. A sign read OCEANSIDE, 10 MILES.

Salt air. Late-afternoon mist. A rocky beach stretch.

Scotty passed him a note slip. "It's a phone message for you. Dick Carlisle gave it to me."

Dudley pocketed the slip. The topography grabbed him.

Scrub mounds on the land side. Roadhouses by the beach. Narrow parking strips. No cars tucked in. Storm clouds right at dusk.

"Two young Marines have grievously harmed a young woman who is quite dear to me. I've been told that they cast their lines at the same spot every Saturday. They're intrepid lads, undeterred by wind and cold air. We'll take them as they get into their car."

Scotty blinked. Dudley touched his wrist. Scotty's pulse skipped.

He saw their fishing spot. He saw their '40 Ford coupe. He pointed over. Long poles swooped toward the sunset.

Scotty pulled up by the Ford. He kicked off the ignition and set the brake.

Dudley reached back and unzipped the seabag. The silencers were screwed on tight.

Scotty said, "She's a good girl, right? It was bad what they did."

Dudley passed him his piece. "Am I a frivolous man, lad? Have you not sensed conscience and a fond regard for women beneath my raw streak?"

Scotty smiled—*So be it.*

Two men walked over the rocks. They wore Marine fatigue jackets. They carried surf poles and wicker baskets. Fish tails drooped out the top.

They walked to the Ford. One tall man, one stout man. The stout man checked out the Dodge.

The tall man popped the trunk. He loaded the baskets. The stout man dropped the poles in the backseat.

They got in the front. The stout man kicked the engine. The tall man lit a cigarette.

Cops, huh?

They knew it. They were cop-wise. They were too nonchalant.

Dudley stepped out. Scotty stepped out. They went in, flanking.

The rape-o's caught it. Intent, gun-barrel glint—*something.*

The tall man dropped his cigarette. The stout man fumbled at the wheel.

Dudley said, "For my beloved child, Beth Short."

He fired. Scotty fired. They aimed at their wide-open mouths. They blew up their faces and took all the windows out.

Ricochets took out the engine wall. The crankcase threw hot oil. The radiator threw steam.

The Ford rocked on its struts. Dudley and Scotty got back in the Dodge and pulled out.

The sun went down. The Ford sat on the blacktop. Dudley lit a cigarette and pulled out that note slip.

"Call Claire De Haven. CR-4424."

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LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1941

The Yellow Spot.

He treads cautiously.

He skulks by night.

It wasn't *quite* night. *Skulk* hyperbolized. City Hall was dead quiet and safe. He was two floors up from the Bureau. He almost blended in.

"The Yellow Spot." It went with "The Werewolf" and the monster-masked kids. He caught the backwash of Shudo's confession. Shudo signed autographs and posed with children. It was ghastly and hilarious.

The hallway was dead quiet. The mayor's office suite was a tomb. The watchman worked the Spring Street door. The Yellow Spot strikes—

Now.

A no. 3 pick got the door. His penlight drilled the waiting room. Chairs and the receptionist's desk. Fletch B.'s private office—right there.

A no. 2 pick popped the door. Ashida eased it shut and beamed his penlight. The office was all plaques and club chairs. There's Fletch Bowron's desk.

It was presidential. A tube-fed Dictaphone covered the right edge. A cord hooked the Dictaphone to the telephone. Fletch recorded his calls.

Ashida scanned the walls and floor. The Dictaphone and telephone shared one outlet.

Fletch recorded his calls. Fletch might have his calls transcribed. He might erase the tube scrolls. Pertinent talk was a long shot.

Ashida sat in Fletch B.'s chair and got situated. He held the penlight in his teeth and worked.

He studied the Dictaphone. He opened the tray and saw a tube pressed in. It was a live tube. The magnetic tape had recorded phone calls. The tube was still working. Used-up tubes ejected automatically.

Ashida checked his watch. It was 6:12 p.m., Saturday. The tube probably notched Friday's calls.

Ashida tweaked the volume knob. Ashida rewound the tube and hit the SPEAK switch. He heard line hiss and canned air. Fletch said, "It's Friday, December 19." That meant recorded calls.

Ashida kept the volume low. Ashida listened in. Ashida squelched through the boring calls.

Water and Power called. It was boring. Ashida squelched through. Four city councilmen called. We're at war now. Should we cancel the Rose Bowl?

Fletch called Ace Kwan. They discussed the mayor's Christmas stag-night menu. Fletch jawed with an Army one-star. The escaped Jap deal was one big snafu. Mrs. Fletch called and defamed their colored maid. Ace called back. He suggested a pig roast atop City Hall. Fletch said fuck that shit—it might rain.

Ashida listened in. Dead air and dead talk accumulated. Dead time eked by.

Sheriff Gene called. Hot update. The escaped Japs fled to the San Gabriel hills. The posse was up there. The Hearst boys went nuts and strafed a hobo jungle. Flesh wounds and no fatalities.

Line squelch. Dead air. Congrats on the Watanabe job. Did you see the *Herald* spread? Friday calls. Saturday-morning calls.

Time eked by. Ashida checked his watch. It was 10:41 p.m. Dead air, Ace Kwan again, Chief Jack Horrall on the line.

Squelch, hiss, crackle. Call-Me-Jack, bellicose.

"… and if we cancel the Rose Parade, we'll look like chicken-shits. It's a moneymaker, and it shores us up with Pasadena PD." Bowron said, "Amen, brother."

Horrall said, "And while I'm griping, let me weigh in on Dick Hood, that pansy Hoover, and the Feds in general."

Bowron said, "I'm all ears on that one, Jack."

Horrall said, "Somebody pulled a squeeze play and got some Reds who were making some Red movie down in Japtown sprung from jail. The Dudster fielded the play, but he ain't talking, and Hoover's furious. That means he'll come down on us with that phone-tap probe that much harder. Bill Parker saved our bacon on that one, but Dick Hood thinks it was Parker who put the squeeze play on Dud."

Bowron said, "Parker. That meddling cocksucker. He fucks with Ace Kwan, he fucks with Dud's first go at The Werewolf. Parker and his Jap pal, Ashida. Those cocksuckers gore my goat."

Horrall said, "Ashida's ass'll be grass, come February. It's the tide of History, brother. Whiskey Bill and the Dudster can't save him on that one."

Bowron said, "Ashida gores my goat. He's the yellow spot on my spotless political record. He'll be out of my hair in February, but we'll still have Parker stirring up shit."

Horrall said, "I've got to say it, Fletch. I don't want that cocksucker to succeed me as Chief. He'll start defaming my regime the moment he takes the oath. That fucker lives to make regular men look small. It's like my man Elmer Jackson says, 'He talks to God and moves his lips while he does it.' "

Bowron said, "You bringing up Elmer the J reminds me. I've got to call Brenda. I want her to get me a girl for Monday night."

Horrall said, "I'm getting a boil on my ass about Parker. I do not want my legacy besmirched by some pious prig who sucks the giant imperial cock of papist Rome. You'll get fucked in the backwash of that, Fletch. He'll defame me, and slander your administration by implication. He won't stop at Chief, Fletch. He'll go for attorney general and the governor's chair."

Bowron said, "You're right, Jack. Let's derail that cocksucker while we've got time on our side. We'll build a derogatory profile on him. If he drops his drawers and makes even one false move, we'll know it and record it. When you step down, we show Bill the package. 'Sorry, Bill—but you fucked with the wrong guys and stepped on your dick too many times. It's Thad Brown's job, not yours.' "

Horrall said, "Amen, brother. We'll do it. Whiskey Bill's ass is grass, and we're the fucking lawn mower."

Bowron said, "You've got Parker, you've got Ashida. He's a conniving little cocksucker. Of all people, Dud Smith thinks the world of him."

Horrall said, " 'Derogatory profile,' Fletch. We can't flag on that. We'll rue the day if we do."

Bowron said, "I'm in, Jack. But you've got to get out of my hair now. I've got to place my order with Brenda."

Horrall said, "Happy hunting, Mr. Mayor."

Bowron said, "Shoo, now. I've got to get down to the Bureau. Dud's going at The Werewolf again."

Horrall said, "I'll see you downstairs, sahib."

The call terminated. Ashida hit the OFF switch.

The Yellow Spot.

The Yellow Plague.

The Yellow Peril.

Dudley's valentine.

February '42—the Jap Diaspora.

Ashida put his feet up on the mayor's desk. Ashida ran a brain balance sheet.

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1941

Dudley Smith.

I couldn't think of anything else. I took a taxi home from the hospital and thought of Dudley Smith; I'm bearing wounds inflicted by Dudley Smith's henchwoman, Dot Rothstein. Dudley Smith, Bette Davis' wartime-fling lover; Dudley Smith and his frame of the vilely pathetic Werewolf. Dudley Smith and his confluence of criminal cases, his collusive relationship with Ace Kwan, his land grabs and war-profiteering schemes, up to and including the distribution of "Anti-Axis" pornography, in league with his notorious namesake, Gerald L. K. Smith. Dudley Smith, the urbane. Dudley Smith, so given to casually expeditious murder. Dudley Smith and his corruption of young men. Dudley Smith and his stunningly democratic cultivation of family.

His "boys." His Catholic Archbishop, his lesbian doctor chum and her vicious paramour. More than anything else, his sincerely deep regard for Hideo Ashida.

I sat on my separate bedroom terrace and nursed a highball. Lee was off somewhere; I had the house to myself and was grateful for the spell of silent ponder. Dudley Liam Smith had severely underestimated the mental powers of Robert Sinclair Bennett, just as I had. I now knew everything that he had written on that astoundingly comprehensive and heedlessly conceived wall graph.

It was all police work and criminal business. Dudley Smith did not scheme or kill from petty rancor or from anything other than expeditiousness viewed as his sole option. He operated at an astoundingly complex level of deception. He adhered to family loyalty and did not name his minion who robbed Whalen's Drugstore and the Sheriff's van full of hijacked Japanese money. Scotty surmised that Dudley and Ace Kwan killed the three men in Griffith Park—but

Dudley's partner in those killings was designated as "UA," for "unidentified accomplice." Those killings derived from his fatherly ethos and desire to avenge a ravaged young woman. Scotty ran through the graph three full times. He told me that Dudley had created this document so that he might be able to recall everything that he had done since the Whalen's robbery, the Watanabe homicides and the attack on Pearl Harbor. It was conceived as a study sheet and memory tool. It now burned within me, as a quintessentially bad and gifted man's confession. I had been teething on it for hours. I've come away thinking that Dudley has omitted something—perhaps horrifying, perhaps mundane, and surely revelatory—and that it derives from his relationship with Bette Davis.

And, I'm astonished that I don't hate this astonishingly bad man. And that I am as beholden to him as I am beholden to Bill Parker. Their exchange of vows secured me my freedom. And Claire's freedom, and the freedom of all the others. Sergeant Smith and Captain Parker will honor their vows before God—I have no doubt of that. This shared vow feels grand to me. The vow—however expedient, corrupt and self-interested—acknowledges the power of the infinite to mediate worldly order. That such brutal men would accede to that power belittles my own recent machinations and renders me tiny in my soul.

Graph details keep unfurling. I'm stuck on Pierce Patchett and his plan to surgically re-create women as film stars. My nose is broken and splinted; I've achieved a partial re-creation myself. My fight with Dot Rothstein mirrors Dot's molesting of Claire. I learned of that act through a tract that Claire wrote. She wrote it for G. L. K. Smith—Dudley's graph said so.

The telephone rang. I walked inside and picked up the call.

"Hello?"

Hideo Ashida said, "Kay? I hope it's not too late to be calling." Dudley's lackey oozed deference.

"I'm always surprised to hear from you. And I'm always happy to talk, so the time doesn't really matter."

He said, "I overheard two phone calls. Mayor Bowron made them, but I can't tell you how I know."

Because you don't know what I know about you? Because you think I'll believe whatever you say?

I said, "Please tell me, anyway."

"I overheard Mayor Bowron and Chief Horrall talking. They're planning to create a 'derogatory profile' on Captain Parker, to prevent him from becoming Chief. There's that, and that Mayor Bowron ordered a girl from your friend Brenda, for Monday night."

So you called me. Because Captain Parker knows who you've thrown in *with. So you called me. Because Captain Parker would refute this call. So you called me. Because you might need Captain Parker one day and this clumsy warning might somehow serve you.*

I hung up. I thought about Pierce Patchett; I got an idea and picked the phone up again.

I called Brenda. She was still awake at midnight. She started to quiz me on my hospital stay. I cut her off, told her to round up Elmer and meet me at Dave's Blue Room, immediately.

Brenda blurted good-byes. I hung up, grabbed my coat and headed down to the Strip. The Blue Room was quiet; I found a booth in the back. The waiter gave my nose splint a double take. I ordered a highball and said, "You should see the other girl." He grinned and left me alone. I listened to a wall-radio newscast.

Japanese subs had been spotted near Monterey. Subs had fired on freighters above San Francisco. The reports brought me back to the graph and the Goleta Inlet attack.

My drink came. I pulled out my compact and examined myself in the mirror. I was badly bruised below my eyes; the cuts on my nose had congealed into scabs. I took a belt of my drink and pulled off my nose splint. It *hurt*—but there was no blood.

Brenda and Elmer walked over. Elmer said, "I liked you better in the gauze. It gave you panache beyond your years." Brenda said, "This better be worth it, Citizen."

I made room for them in the booth. I reported, with a rigorous degree of omission.

Jack Horrall and Fletch Bowron were colluding against Bill Parker. I'd come across valid information that might drastically undercut *their* biz. A police-protected businessman planned to run a string of girls cut to look like movie stars. Brenda whooped at that. Elmer fumbled his cigar.

Jack and Fletch were building a "derogatory profile" against Parker. Jack would surely sanction the businessman's operation. Parker would be a damn good ally for them. Parker might well become Chief. Fletch had ordered a Monday-night girl from them. Think shakedown. Think threat of misconduct exposed. Think "Put the skids to the cut-girl racket before it gets off the ground." Your options are do everything or do nothing.

Elmer said, "There's no guarantee that Parker makes Chief, which means we got no protection then."

I said, "That's a risk you take. In the meantime, you'll quash this racket, and we've made sure that Fletch doesn't tell Jack he's been squeezed. This is a future-safety gambit. If you squeeze Fletch now, he'll be able to lay the groundwork to say, 'Jack, I'm not so sure about this.' "

Brenda said, “Shake down the mayor of Los Angeles, *now*. Stall this rival *now*, and punt if your pal Bill don’t get the job and worse comes to worse.”

I said, “Yes. And this deal *is* going forward, and with all the right people to make it happen.”

Elmer said, “If Parker’s in it from the git, with a convincing handshake, I’d be inclined to say okay.”

Brenda lit a cigarette. “I can’t risk one of our girls for the bait. Miss Katherine Lake, fresh off the KO victory over the Dotstress, is feeling her oats—but she won’t name names on this deal. I’m skeptical, Citizens.”

I said, “There’s names you’ll recognize and names you’ll respect. You’ll want someone like Parker on your side. You’ll want him because you don’t trust him now, but you’ll trust him if he gives you his word.”

Elmer relit his cigar. “I’m inclined to say yes, then. Since this racket sounds like a big-name sure thing, we’d be stupid not to try something.”

I lit a cigarette. “I’ll be the bait. A little Helena Rubenstein no. 9, and Fletch won’t know this girl’s been in a tiff.”

December 21, 1941

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LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1941

Parker cruised the Palisades. Shoreline blackout—night fifteen.

Ocean Avenue was fortified. Sub alert, sniper alert. Sub spotters lined the bluffs. Big searchlights swooped.

That fiend sniper lurked somewhere. Ocean Avenue was triple-manpowered. Thad Brown worked liaison with SaMo PD. The sniper packed a sawed-off carbine. Thad was running gun-sales checks.

Soldiers camped on the bluffs. Pup tents ran from Pico to Wilshire. Sub spotters perched every ten yards. Sub fear was weird juju. It connoted werewolves of the sea.

Wolf fear. Parker thought of Fujio Shudo. Sub fear. Parker thought of Hideo Ashida and the Goleta attack.

He cut east on Wilshire. There was zero traffic. Stop and go lights were cellophane-wrapped. The blackout ran to the L.A. city line. He cruised, aimless. His house was booby-trapped.

His wife nagged him. Phone calls plagued him. He couldn't sleep. That last call *Japped* him.

Hideo Ashida called. The truce rumor had spread. Ashida apologized for snitching him. He fawned and came on disingenuous.

He came on brusque. The Dudster had surpassed him as a patron. He told Ashida that. Ashida spieled two phone calls that he'd overheard.

Call-Me-Jack and Fletch Bowron talked. They hatched a "derogatory profile" to scotch his career. Fletch and Brenda Allen talked. Fletch ordered a girl.

Ashida was tizzied. He was playing angles. He threw in with Dudley. It canceled out his rogue actions. It would not cancel out his internment.

Sub fear. Derogatory profile. Parker cruised. Parker recalled Dudley Smith.

"You, with or without Dr. Ashida, may have a grand time searching for white men in purple sweaters, but you may not publicly present evidence

that anyone other than Mr. Shudo killed the Watanabe family."

Parker turned north and parked. It was cold. He idled the engine and ran the heat.

He read Teletypes. Traffic deaths were up. The escaped Japs were Japped-in north of Monrovia. Cops swarmed the hillsides. The Hearst Rifle Team prowled.

Derogatory profile. Moral boomerang. His profile of Claire De Haven. God now indicts him.

Parker drove to SaMo Canyon. Larkin's bungalow was still there. The street was still still.

He grabbed his crowbar and a carton of fish food. He walked up and shouldered the door in.

He closed it behind him. He tapped the lights and got light. PG&E was swamped. Dead men got free utilities.

The living room koi stream sparkled. The koi darted to the surface and peered up at him. He sprinkled half the fish food on the water. The koi gobbled it.

Who is the white man in the purple sweater?

Parker walked into the bedroom. He tapped the lights and saw the koi pond outside. He opened the terrace door. The pond sparkled. The koi peered up at him.

He fed them. He emptied the container. The koi swarmed and chowed.

The toss was a long shot. Hidey-holes were rare. The Watanabes had a hidey-hole. Ashida's confession described it.

Who is the white man in the purple sweater?

Parker walked through the house.

He opened cabinets. He looked in drawers. He tapped the walls and listened for thunks.

He got angry. He got impatient. He told the koi that he'd build them a nice pond in his backyard. He'd keep them safe from dogs and cats.

All right, then.

He walked to the middle of the living room. He grabbed his crowbar and hurled it down at the floor.

He splintered the boards. It killed his arms. He saw nothing but dirt underneath.

He did it again.

He did it again.

He did it again.

He threw crowbar shots at the living room floor and the living room walls. He stopped at forty-three. He saw nothing but gypsum board and dirt. He worked his way back to the bedroom. He ran his body numb. He wheeled into the bedroom and destroyed it.

He threw crowbar shots at the bedroom floor and the bedroom walls. He saw nothing but gypsum board and dirt. He tore his hands bloody. He cracked the boards around the bed and put the bed down in the dirt.

He soaked himself black wet and ran his body numb. He smashed his way up to the terrace. He smashed the walls through to empty spaces and the floors through to wood chips and dust.

He saw dawn break. It meant shit-all-zero. He hit the floor, he smashed the floor, he fucking *Japped* the floor. He counted crowbar shots. He went to 286.

And there's a binder. It's flat in the dirt. It looks like that first binder. He was here with Ashida. They found it.

Parker picked it up and went through it. The writing was in Japanese.

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LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1941

He wore a chalk-stripe suit and brought flowers. He came straight from Mass. Whiskey Bill failed to show. The Archbishop was peeved.

Such a grand home. A plantation manse, sans darkies. A tall man mowed the neighboring lawn. It was Sergei Rachmaninoff.

Dudley rang the bell. Claire De Haven opened the door. Her hair was cut short. She wore a blue scarf over it.

He smelled church on her. She lit altar candles and covered her head before God.

She smiled and accepted the flowers. He took off his hat.

He said, “Miss De Haven.”

She said, “Sergeant Smith.”

He smelled her bath scent. Did she smell Bette? They made love all night. She left him for a studio breakfast. He left her for Mass.

Claire stood aside. Dudley walked in. Her habitat stunned.

Silk brocade, ebony, jade. Modernist paintings. The classical, the exquisite, the chic.

“Would I disapprove of the revelry that occurs here?”

Claire closed the door. “No, because you see through disapproval to bemusement. You might enjoy the spirit of the revelry, but you’d be enraged at the chat.”

He passed her his hat. She sailed it across the room. It landed square on a hat rack.

Dudley whooped. Claire touched his arm and pointed to a red leather couch. She’d laid out tea. Service for two. She’d anticipated a guest.

Dudley sat to her right. Claire held his bouquet in her lap.

“I knew you’d appear in person, rather than call.”

“I would have sent the flowers, if you hadn’t called and left that message.”

Claire tossed the bouquet. It sailed across the room. It landed square on a love seat.

Dudley said, “You’re deft. You’re an equestrienne of some note, a grand tennis player and a low-handicap golfer. Were you disappointed when those skills came to you so easily? You revel in the gilded as you despise it and plot against it. Were debauchery and revolution the only roads left to you?”

Claire said, “You’re glib. You’re an inquisitor and interlocutor of sterling gifts, and you fully understand that I do not accept compliments without reservations. You could have gleaned my sporting résumé from the *Los Angeles Blue Book*, or from Terry Lux, as I gleaned yours from Terry and Joe Hayes. You didn’t, though. You went straight to well-reasoned surmise, and I am flattered and much impressed.”

Her scarf matched her eyes. She saw him notice it. She untied the scarf and tossed it. Her Joan of Arc hair glowed.

“I’ve seen the Dreyer film a great many times. It created quite the stir in Dublin, my cousins tell me. Religious ecstasy and martyrdom, suffused with Marx. The Church apparatchiks didn’t know whether to shit or go blind.”

Claire said, “They did both. And Dreyer was a Protestant. They smelled Luther all over it.”

“Has there ever been a greater tyrant than Luther?”

“Hitler comes to mind.”

“And not Uncle Joe Stalin?”

“The current Russian-front war comes to mind. ‘Uncle Joe’ will bleed Hitler dry in the East, and facilitate the Western alliance in the ultimate division of European property. That must displease you, given your own revolutionary efforts levied against Great Britain.”

“The Irish lit bonfires to create a flight path to London for Hitler’s bombers. Gerald L. K. Smith reminded me of that recently. He also told me that you’ve purchased many of his left-wing tracts, and that you wrote one yourself.”

Claire poured tea. “It very much rebutted the ways of your police department. I singled out a colleague of yours and portrayed him as emblematic. I won’t tell you who he is, but I’m sure you know him. If you haven’t read the tract, I’m sure you can extrapolate.”

Dudley smiled. “I haven’t read the tract, and I won’t indulge guesses. Perhaps you’ll string me along and tell me in good time.” Claire passed him his teacup and saucer. The herb scent braced him.

“I’ll overconfide to you before you leave today, Sergeant. I’ll be most curious to see what you don’t ask.”

Dudley said, “Pastor Smith and I discussed populism, utility and the blurred self-interest that supersedes and largely defines left and right. I would say that the two of us coexist within that orbit. I’m honored that you place my unruly actions in Ireland within a context of workers' revolt, but I must state that I'm as much of a czarist as Mr. Rachmaninoff next door."

Claire smiled. Her few harsh lines vanished.

"Have you heard the Opus 32 Prelude, number 10? It's very much a referendum on that."

Dudley sipped tea. "I play the piece on my phonograph, repeatedly. It's his treatise on exile. I play it when I begin to miss Ireland unduly. The maestro reminds me that I can never go back."

Claire opened an ebony box. Dudley removed two cigarettes. Claire produced a lighter. Dudley lit them up.

That grand pleasure. They'd been craving it. They laughed and blew smoke in the air.

Claire said, "Was Kay Lake a police informant?"

Dudley said, "Yes, but very much one entrapped."

"And who entrapped her?"

"The policeman you described as 'emblematic,' but judiciously declined to name."

"Do you think that my tract initiated his interest in me?"

"I doubt that he's read it. The man is powerfully given to provocative women and charts reckless courses through them."

Claire said, "And who secured my release?"

"That man and I sealed a pact, in the Archbishop's presence. Your release was part of it, at that man's instigation. He is given to effusive gestures in a way that I am not."

Claire crushed her cigarette. "I will contest the last part of your statement in time, and cite our meeting in that padded cell Friday night. What interests me now is why you acceded to the man's stipulation."

Dudley crushed his cigarette. "I do not consider you and your comrades 'seditious' or in any way traitorous. The current wartime hysteria and its related racial animus offends me. Since Monsignor Hayes has given you a primer on my early history, and I first viewed you in a moment of acute dissolution that you deftly transcended, I ascribed a meaning to the moment that I now know to be true. It was about 'belief.' You told me that, and you were right. I knew that the ever-opportunistic Terry Lux would describe my present endeavors with Ace Kwan, Preston Exley and Pierce Patchett to you, and that you would want to indulge significant risk and a clash of ideals and invest."

Claire touched her hair. Claire pointed to a lacquered box on the coffee table.

"Kay Lake unnerved me. I knew that she was fraudulent, but I was powerless to resist her. She reinstilled and served to revise a performer's sense within me. I've been taken with a desire to perform in perilous contexts that challenge my beliefs but allow me to retain my native integrity. Terry told me that you would be commissioned in Army Intelligence at New Year's. Whatever your conflicts of belief, you are going off to fight this war. I was hoping that my natural skills and scrutiny of Kay Lake might be put to good use in the Anti-Axis cause, and that we both might profit from it, personally and financially."

Dudley sipped tea. He was levitating. The cup and saucer shook.

"And what led you to this? Beyond your just-stated rationale?"

"I saw mercy in your eyes Friday night. I saw rebuke for Terry Lux in them, along with a desire not to hurt me."

The box was red and gold. Dragons and courtesans adorned it. Claire opened the top. Hundred-dollar bills were stacked in.

"It's fifty thousand. It's not that I approve of your schemes, it's just that I see the internment as inevitable. I will insist on safeguards to ensure that Messrs. Kwan and Exley don't bleed the fugitives from internment dry, and I trust that you'll treat them more humanely than the United States Government."

Dudley lowered his cup. The saucer rattled.

Claire said, "I smell a woman on you."

Dudley said, "There's a beast in me. I destroy those I cannot control. I must be certain that those close to me share my identical interests. I'm benevolent within that construction. I'm ghastly outside of it."

Claire said, "I know that."

"I'm hoping for a posting in Mexico. I'm Spanish-fluent, and there's considerable Fifth Column activity in Mexico City, as well as German rightist cells in the stunningly lovely Acapulco. Mexico is quite the place."

Claire smiled. "I'm Spanish- and German-fluent."

They looked away from each other. Dudley saw things.

The Kandinsky painting. A gold-framed piece of sheet music. It was Rachmaninoff's prelude of exile. He knew it.

They looked back at each other. He saw the flanking bumps on her nose. She wore glasses on occasion. His guess was tortoiseshell.

She said, "I think you'd be a good man to spend this war with."

He said, "Really, *you*?"

Claire had freckles. It delighted him more than the rest.

The tour of the house. The things she said. The bedroom, saved for last.

Every furnishing and accoutrement stunned him. The aesthetic satirized her wealth and canonized her embrace of the Left. The effect was both seamless and discordant. Her library ran to the classics and Social Realist tomes. She owned the collected works of Saint Augustine. She had studied religious poetry and conceded that Marx was wrong about God. She'd read Stanislavski on acting and asserted that Kay Lake had, as well. Her phonograph records were alphabetized from Bach to Wieniawski. She loved Bruckner's symphonies as much as he did.

She rented a room to two of her slaves. It kept them close at hand. She disdained weak men and deployed them to facilitate her whims. She brought up Hideo Ashida and said that he undermined Kay Lake's verisimilitude. Dr. Ashida rang warning bells on Miss Lake. He was an unconvincing lover. She fell prey to *La Grande Kay*. She was *La Grande Joan* and given to a flawed egalitarianism. Kay Lake was South Dakota trash. She knew it going in. Kay was probably told to attend that Paul Robeson concert. She should never have lit the girl's cigarette.

Nao Hamano and *La Grande Joan* adorned Claire's bedroom. The suicide woman recalled Goro Shigeta. The recollection brought the echoes of gunshots and shattered glass.

There was no "G.S." on his graph. He was saving it for Bette. She said, "Kill a Jap for me." He'd tell her at an appropriate time. He wondered if Claire still smelled Bette.

She showed him the tract she wrote for Gerald L. K. Smith. It was convergence in the *spiritus mundi*. Her bête noire policeman was William H. Parker. His Catholicism sparked her leftist-humanist conversion. Her anti-Parker crusade was confined to this one tract. His anti-Claire crusade did not acknowledge the tract or the historical event that spawned it. Parker went looking for women to entrap and decided on Kay and Claire. It was serendipity or malign fate. Claire De Haven attended the same church as D. L. Smith and W. H. Parker. Sergeant Smith and Captain Parker did not notice Miss De Haven. Miss De Haven noticed them.

They shared an adversary. He decided not to tell her. It would encumber what might emerge between them. It might impinge upon his vow with the man.

He read the tract as Claire stood beside him. He marveled at her sharp précis of the jackbooted oppressor. The *spiritus mundi* coheres. Dot Rothstein fondles Claire in a Central Station cell. Kay Lake shivs Dot. Claire lies comatose, one cell away.

They walked out to the terrace. The view took in Beverly Hills and the Santa Monica Mountains. He described his moorside colloquy with the wolf. Claire described a spot of mischief, circa '24.

Her father took her to a gala at the Annandale Country Club. She was aghast that no Jews belonged. She sneaked out to the groundskeeper's shack and stole a sack of quicklime. She burned a six-point star into the ninth green.

It wasn't enough. She'd heard of a Silver Shirts rally up the Angeles Crest. She stole her father's car and drove there with arson in mind. A case of bootleg rye sat in the trunk. She found the Shirts' campground and uncorked the bottles in their equipment shed. She formed a cord with newspaper strips. One match torched dozens of hate screeds and nativist robes.

He laughed. She touched his arm. She said, "I have freckles." He said, "Show me, please."

She did. He lost count at two hundred something. He kissed them in groups.

The terrace windows faced a high sun. The warmth off the glass became an early-dusk chill. They kept their eyes open and told each other why. We must not miss a first-time anything.

He showed her his scar from an Ulster jail riot. It came from a Black and Tan's cell key held over a flame. She took him back to Pershing Square in 1935. His blue comrades wore brownshirts that day. Horses bore down. A bridle bit gouged her shoulder. A stirrup flange cut her leg.

She was bigger and stronger than Bette. She kissed him harder. She refitted him to suit herself. She said his name more.

She flushed more than Bette. Her skin burned warmer. They kissed every moment they were locked together. She threw sweat like she threw sweat that time he saw her in the steam room. It turned her hair black and pooled on their lips.

He kissed her underarms. He brushed the stubble with his nose. He took her fingers in his mouth.

They passed a fever back and forth. She was grateful for him. She told him that. She said his name and *"I'm grateful."* He lost track of the times she said it. She held him close every time he said, *"You, Claire."*

She fell asleep beside him. His name faded off in a whisper. He knew she was out then.

He dressed in the dark and walked downstairs. He replaced the lacquered box with Shakespeare. He folded the volume open. She'd see the page and go straight to the quote.

Othello. The mad Irishman as mad *Moor. "Perdition, catch my soul, / But I do love thee."*

He levitated out to the car. He drove straight to Chinatown.

Breuning and Carlisle were meeting him. That lot on Alameda was their rendezvous spot. Breuning and Carlisle would bring shotguns. Jack Webb would buzz the corner pay phone.

The tile game should go all night. Pesky Jack would report the cash ebb. The house cash didn't count. It was Kwan-Smith cash to begin with. They had to get the stake cash the marks brought with them.

They were tong Chinks out of Frisco. They were tile game–touring their way down to T.J. They had New Year's Eve plans. Let's ring in '42. We'll catch the midnite donkey show.

Ace predicted a sixty-grand cash stake. They might bring it all with them. They might leave a reserve in their car.

Dudley hit Chinatown. He caught a blockade at Alpine and Broadway. Four bluesuits stood around. Ray Pinker perused a deuce coupe. It featured chopped windows and flared fender skirts.

A bluesuit waved Dudley over. Dudley pulled up and badged him. The bluesuit snapped a salute.

"It's the Japs, sir. Four Japs dumped that jalopy and clouted a Chinked-up '36 Ford. Mr. Pinker's doing the forensic, and we got an eyeball wit. You want my take? They stole a Chinatown car to help themselves pass for Chink."

Japs. *The* Japs. Down from the San Gabriels.

Dudley saluted. The bluesuit slid a sawhorse back and waved him through. Dudley drove to the lot. Breuning and Carlisle stood by their K-car. Breuning walked over.

"Good night for it, boss."

Dudley said, "I think we'll be out until sunrise, but yes."

"Where's Scotty? This would be a sweet deal for him."

"He's running fraught, lad. He's seen a vexing amount of grief for a two-week rookie. I'm granting him the Marine Corps vacation he so richly deserves."

"We'll be reading about him. He'll storm some pissant island and eat the Japs whole."

"Or not, lad. He's a tortured boy, and he's only twenty years old."

Breuning lit a cigarette. "I cruised the game an hour age. Ace was taking a bath, there was a shitload of cash on the table, but I don't know about the tong guys' reserve."

Dudley pointed north. "Ray Pinker is working a heap at Alpine and Broadway. Those escaped Japs dumped it, or it's Chinks, off a bad eyeball wit. Go over, act unobtrusive and bag some trace evidence. The Japs are far better suspects than rampaging jigs."

Breuning winked and scrammed. Dudley checked his watch and popped three bennies. 10:58, 10:59—11:00 exactly.

The sidewalk phone rang. Like clockwork—Jack Webb.

Dudley walked over. He caught it four rings in.

"Hello, lad."

Jack was eager. He was a Hearst/PD lapdog. He lived to fetch.

"The Chinks are taking Ace to the cleaners. They're talking about playing all night, and I haven't seen those colored guys you told me about."

"Did you see the car the Chinks arrived in? I know you've got a grand eye for license plates."

Jack said, "It's a '39 Caddy sedan. Mint green, with whitewalls and some Chink flag on the antenna. California license BHO44." Dudley said, "Grand work, lad. Go home, now. Create some mischief for Mr. Hearst, or get a good night's sleep."

Jack said, "Roger, boss."

Dudley hung up. Carlisle ambled over and went *What gives?*

"It's the morning, lad. The out-of-town fucks are winning, so I would assume that their reserve will be in the car. I predict a dozing Chinaman in the front seat, with a briefcase cuffed to his wrist."

"I figured that. We don't want loose cash, so I brought a hacksaw."

Dudley winked. Carlisle ambled back to the K-car and played dashboard solitaire. Dudley ambled to his prowler and tipped the seat full stretch.

Bette/Claire, Bette/Claire, Bette/Claire. He saw them naked. He smelled them. Claire said, *"I'm grateful."* Bette said, *"You inconvenienced me."*

He chain-smoked and orbed the headliner. New Year's, the Army. Comrade Claire and Acapulco. Mexican boys cliff-dive for pesos. Fetch, muchachos, fetch.

Time whizzed. Bennies did that. Breuning walked up. Note his paper bag.

"I got carpet fibers and dust. Pinker had his back turned, so I wedged three bullets behind the spare tire. They'll match our spent rounds."

"Have you been by Kwan's?"

"I checked the parking lot. The lookout's in the backseat. He's cuffed up to a big satchel, and he's got a belt piece."

Dudley said, "I'll take him. We'll get them all in the car. You and Dick take the other three."

Breuning whistled. Carlisle locked the K-car and lugged their wares over. Silencered Magnums. One shark-tooth hacksaw.

The lads piled in. They drove to Kwan's. It was 3:16 a.m. The Caddy was the sole sled tucked in the lot.

Dudley parked three slots over. Carlisle unplugged his flask. The lookout had to be supine. No yellow head showed.

They hunkered in. They bullshitted. It was all women and war.

Breuning was a native-born Kraut. He wanted to slay Krauts under George S. Patton. Carlisle craved flyboy action. He had an eight-year-old son. They built toy Jap Zeros and blew them up with cherry bombs.

Stray talk. Lee Blanchard's skirt shivved the Dotstress. Terry Lux stitched her Jew beak. Breuning harped on Bette. Holy shit—Bette Davis talked to me!

That New Year's Eve. That dance floor. "Perfidia." Claire says, *"I'm grateful."* Bette says, *"You inconvenienced me."*

They settled in. They bullshitted. Dick revealed his murky crush on Ellen Drew. He saw her in some oater—man, that's a dish!

Breuning dropped the wet blanket. She bunks at the Los Altos. She whores for Brenda Allen. Elmer J.'s poking her.

They *re*settled. They killed the flask. Breuning played sentry. Dudley rewired his bennie surge with Jim Beam.

The sun came up. The tong sled just sat there. All four windows were down. The lookout remained supine.

6:09, 6:21, 6:43.

They got ready. Carlisle passed out bandannas. Breuning loaded the Magnums. They covered their faces, snout-high.

Dudley palmed his Magnum and saw. 6:44, 6:45, 6:46. There—the rear kitchen door.

Three Chinamen walked out.

They beamed. They swerved and bumped one another. Ace served knockout mai tais.

They carried Kwan's take-out boxes. Yankee greenbacks bulged out. They carted two each.

The lookout stirred and sat up. One wrist was cuffed. The Chinks bumped to the car and got in.

Three doors slammed. Dudley said, "Now."

They wheeled out. Two strides got them there. Breuning took the driver. Carlisle took the passenger fuck.

It was head-to-muzzle tight. Dumdum blasts tore off faces and blew the steering column out. Dudley shot the lookout in the ear and the other fuck in the neck. Silencers went *kick-thud*.

There's the skull shrapnel. There's the eyelid flutter. Now they convulse.

Breuning and Carlisle scrambled. Get the doors, get the boxes, get the fuck out.

The lookout convulsed. Dudley opened the door and grabbed his wrist. Dudley sawed his hand off.

Breuning and Carlisle scrambled. They sprinkled trace evidence, they got the boxes, they looked back at the boss.

Dudley grabbed the satchel. It was cash heavy. A severed hand twitched on the grips.

December 22, 1941

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LOS ANGELES | MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 1941

Sirens kicked on. It sounded all-points. Ashida pegged the distance. Call it close by, northeast.

Maybe Chinatown. Maybe Lincoln Heights.

He stood in the lab. He was the first Monday log-in. Ray Pinker spent the night at Alpine and Broadway.

It was Code 3 work. The escapees ditched a deuce coupe and stole a ’36 Ford. “*Probable*” escapees—Pinker stressed that.

Squadroom jabber hit the vents. *Quadruple homicide outside Kwan’s*. It’s hot, hot, hot. Calling all cars, *now*.

Ashida sipped coffee. He had no real work. His real job was wait. He was the Yellow Spot, dispossessed.

A man weaved by the doorway. He was a stumblebum. He reeked of rotgut muscatel.

“If you’re Dr. Ashida, I got a package. This great big kid gave me a buck and a jug to find you.”

He slurred it. He wore a drunk-tank wristband. He waved a manila envelope.

Ashida snatched it. The bum did a double take. *Hey, you’re a Jap*.

“Tell me about the kid.”

“Well, the funny thing was he was a kid, but he was a cop. He was about six six, and he was wearing a gun. He had on a brown suit and a plaid bow tie.”

Ashida slid the bum a dollar. The bum about-faced away. Ashida closed the door and leaned on it.

He slit the envelope. It contained four typed pages. Scotty used a Bureau typewriter. The stroke marks nailed that.

He skimmed the pages. He *got* it. Scotty deciphered Dudley’s graph.

He’d seen the graph. It made no sense. Scotty B. decoded Dudley’s mad hieroglyphs.

The Watanabe case. “Related opportunities.” The land grab. The “two white stiffs” named. His own confession, recounted. Bill Parker, coindicted. Dudley and Ace Kwan's war-profit schemes.

Ashida read the pages. Ashida slid down the door and jammed it shut.

The war. Fifth Column overtones. Spycraft. Graphs, diaries, ledgers. Suicide notes, stenciled letters. Coerced confessions. Notarized statements. Doodles deciphered. Vows exchanged before priests.

Who is the white man in the purple sweater? We have ALL OF THIS. Why don't we know who he is?

Someone pushed against the door. Someone said, "Hey."

Ashida dug out a dime and tossed it. Scotty broke ranks. Tell someone. Don't think beyond the toss. Heads for Dudley, tails for Whiskey Bill.

He tossed the coin. It hit on heads. He stood up and got the door. The day-watch men filed in and fish-eyed him.

He walked.

He got downstairs and outside. He jaywalked across 1st. People glanced at him. They held up newspapers and moved at half his clip. They were off in the morning *Herald* and JAP SUBS PROWL COAST!

He ran. He made the Hall and took the freight lift. He hit the sixth floor. All-man rollout—*Four dead at Kwan's!*

Dudley was gone. His cubicle was empty. All-Bureau rollout. *Four dead at*—

There's the graph. It's genius. This brutish boy decoded it.

He studied the graph. He knew advanced mathematics. He knew cryptology. He read two full sheets and got nothing.

He walked to the washroom. He soaked his head and toweled off. He tossed his dime—heads, heads, tails. He blinked. Dudley kills people. *Who is the white man in the purple sweater?* Impotent Bill Parker kills no one.

He walked to Parker's office. The door was open. Parker sat at his desk. He stared at a binder. It matched the one from Jim Larkin's place.

The top page is kanji script. That's good. Parker can't read it.

Parker saw him. Ashida tossed Scotty's envelope on his desk. Parker began reading. Ashida swiveled the binder and read standing up.

Parker read. Ashida read. They flipped pages in near sync. Parker finished first.

He got up and shut the door. He leaned against it. He watched Ashida read.

Ashida finished. Parker flipped the door lock.

"Who wrote this?"

"Scotty Bennett. He got Horrall's okay to enlist. I think he wanted to get square with all of this before he left."

Parker said, "Thad Brown told me about the graph. Dud told him it was his crib sheet."

Ashida nodded. Parker lit a cigarette.

"It's all there. So far as I know, the only facts missing are two things I've never revealed."

Ashida said, "Tell me."

Parker said, "I witnessed that shrimp-boat fracas down in Pedro. The men on the boat were Collaborationists. I saw them burn Axis currency with bookmaker's flash paper right before the suicides, and I got a lead on the warehouse where they off-loaded their shrimp. I broke in, but the place had been cleaned out and print-wiped. I saw discarded shrimp cans and smelled shrimp oil."

Ashida teethed on it. Parker pointed to the binder.

"I'm listening, Doctor. Don't make me coax you."

Ashida said, "Larkin wrote the diary, and we now know him to be Gerald L. K. Smith's Japanese-fluent author of those tracts that kept turning up in this aggregation of cases. He writes of his friendships with high-ranking officers of the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy, and states that he knew that the attack on the U.S. Fleet would occur on December 7, but that he'd become ambivalent about America's assured entry into the war. Larkin did not want to see a Japanese-American conflict, simply because he loved both peoples. He was stridently anti-Semitic, and did not want to see Japanese and American lives 'squandered' in what he viewed as 'a war to protect Jewish business interests.' "

Parker said, "Go on."

Ashida cleared his throat. "Larkin had a friend on the far-right flank. He doesn't name the man, but I can tell that he's white. The man was a rabid eugenicist, as Larkin was, and he owned a shortwave radio, as Larkin did. Like Larkin, the man was Japanese-fluent."

Parker said, "Go on."

"The man picked up early Japanese-language radio reports of the forthcoming Pearl Harbor attack, as I know the Watanabes did. The man wanted to see a U.S.-Japanese war and coerced Larkin into silence as the attack drew near. Larkin dumped his radio the day before the attack and wrote of his urgent desire to take the boys of the Santa Monica Cycleers someplace peaceful for the time that the news of attack would most likely occur. The rest of the entries are Larkin's views on eugenics. He repeatedly states that the science itself had been 'contaminated by the Jew left-wing intelligentsia,' who wanted to breed healthier human beings, rather than create a master race. Members of his 'cell' and their 'satellites' had engaged in a philosophical dialogue with various leftists, which infuriated Larkin. The concluding entries show Larkin succumbing to lunacy. The diary devolves into profane ramblings and a treatise on *Mein Kampf* as the lost book of the Holy Bible."

Parker checked the wall clock. He had that I've-got-to-go look.

"Larkin's shortwave pal is the purple-sweater man. He probably killed the Watanabes, and he sure as shit mowed down Larkin."

Ashida said, "Yes, that's what I'm thinking."

Parker scoped the clock. "We might get something off those pay-phone records. Pay phones are our one circumstantial Larkin-to-Watanabe link. The records are coming, but I'd guess that they're a good week away."

Ashida coughed. "And there's the print match. It probably wasn't Larkin, but someone touched one of Larkin's Lugers and left a print at the Watanabe house. The print establishes a relationship between that man, Larkin and the Watanabe family."

Parker said, "The purple-sweater man."

Ashida nodded. "The Watanabes had a shortwave radio and were tuned in to the same frequency. I would conclude that, like Larkin, they began to feel ambivalent about the Pearl Harbor attack, and threatened to rat it out. They were allied with Larkin and his shortwave-radio pal, and it went bad between the three of them."

Parker checked the wall clock. Parker checked his watch.

"And, there's this. No one working independently or in concert on this case has been able to link the Watanabes or Jim Larkin to Preston Exley, Pierce Patchett and their buyout-internment prison scheme. And now Dudley and company are attempting to buy in with them."

Ashida shook his head. "We're not going to know. The Werewolf will burn, and we'll never get the pieces to click."

Parker shook his head. "Don't say 'we'll,' Doctor. I can't afford to indulge independent action on this, and neither can you. I don't judge you for naming me in your confession, because I know how persuasive Dudley Smith can be. I've taken some steps to protect you, but that's over. I won't break the law for you. Dudley Smith will. If your options are him or me, I think you'd be well advised to take the former route."

Ashida shook his head. "You're not *him*. You've never been *him* and you'll never *be* him. Does it gall you to know that he's more powerful than you, and that he'll always supersede you, however erratically hard that you try to put yourself on top?"

Parker said, "You're pouting, Doctor. You're simpering. I would advise you to examine what you're saying and to consider your effeminate tone."

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 1941

Parker was late. I'd left the message with his duty sergeant and got no return call. Citizen Brenda had spruced up her house and had laid out a breakfast buffet. Citizen Elmer talked a blue streak on the Chinatown killings.

"It was an all-Bureau callout, so I went. You got four dead Chinamen in one automobile, and an eyeball in some splattered chicken chow mein. Close-range fire, Citizens. They rob the Chinks, they kill them. One guy's got a money bag cuffed to his wrist, so they cut off his hand. Ray Pinker says it's them Japs who escaped from T.I. They drop a car and steal a car, right there in C-town. Ray found matching bullets in the trunk of the drop car and trace elements from the drop car in the Chink car. You had brains and shredded egg rolls all over the seats. There's roadblocks all the way up to the San Gabriel hills. The posse's up at four hundred men now. The Feds are passing out tommy guns. Ace Kwan's offered a twenty-five-thousand-dollar reward, and Mr. Hearst's matching it. Dud Smith and Thad Brown got the lead slots on the investigation. Ace told Call-Me-Jack that he'll pay a hundred grand for their heads in a sack. The Hearst Rifle Team boys bought some Jap shrunken heads from this loony Chink doctor, Lin Chung. Lin's the boss Chink eugenics man. He's been peddling shrunken Jap heads since the Rape of Nanking. The Hearst Rifle boys are wearing them around their necks." Brenda said, "Citizen Elmer knows how to stir a girl's appetite. Citizen Bill's twenty-four minutes late, and the eggs are getting cold. I'm starting to think that Citizen Kay's been barking up the wrong tree with this deal of hers, and we should just go ahead and let Citizen Fletch get his ashes hauled."

Elmer said, "Fletch is a whip-out man. It's not like Kay has to go up to the doorway of being screwed, or anything close to it. Fletch just whips it out, and expects certain comments to follow. I'll be kind here.

Fletch likes his girls to exaggerate."

I laughed and lit a cigarette. I'd spent the night swaddled in ice packs; my bruises had smoothed out and faded; a smattering of powder on and around my nose camouflaged the extent of my recent injuries. I could convincingly play a call-service girl for one night.

Elmer waved his cigar. "Lin Chung's got a stand set up outside Kwan's. He's peddling them shrunken heads for two clams apiece. I got one for my civilian car. I named it 'Tojo' and got it all dangled up on my rearview mirror. Lin's doing a land-office biz. Call-Me-Jack's on this whole shrunken head business like a rabid dog. He's issued chain saws and gunnysacks to them Hearst Rifle boys. Once the grand jury indicts our boy Shudo, Lin and Jack are going to start peddling twoskies. You get a shrunken head and a photo of yourself with The Werewolf in handcuffs. Five bucks a pop, three for ten. Christmas is Thursday, Citizens. See Doctor Chung and Chief C. B. Horrall for your wholesome shopping needs."

Brenda said, "I'm in the market for a wholesome, 10:00 a.m. eye-opener. I brought the maid in from browntown to doll the place up, but I don't see hide nor hair of Citizen Bill."

The bell rang. Elmer got up and opened the door. Bill Parker walked in. He wore a crisp uniform and new glasses.

Elmer said, "Morning, Cap." Parker looked over. He noted my appearance. He said, "Miss Allen, Miss Lake."

Elmer said, "We put on the dog for you, Cap." Parker registered the liquor on the buffet and reeled his eyes back.

I hadn't thanked him yet. I needed to thank him for myself, and for Claire. I needed time alone with him.

Parker tapped his watch. "I appreciate the trouble you went to, but I have a briefing back at the Hall."

Elmer said, "Okay, then." Brenda said, "Jack Horrall and Fletch Bowron are working up a 'derogatory profile' on you, Cap. I think—"

Parker cut her off. "I know. Hideo Ashida called and told me. If the three of you have concocted a countermeasure, I'd appreciate a summary."

Brenda said, "Citizen Kay has cooked something up. The floor's all hers."

I took the floor. I stressed Brenda and Elmer's self-interest. Pierce Patchett's cut-girl plan would deep-six their biz. I would portray a prostie tonight. A wall peek would be set up in Brenda's spot at the Roosevelt Hotel. We'd squeeze Fletch. No Patchett call-service sanction. No derogatory profile. *Parker's* sanction for Brenda and Elmer—should he become Chief.

Parker said, "Yes."

No hesitation. No qualms expressed.

Parker looked at me. “I’ll be on the other side of the peek. Keep it to words, please. I don’t want him to touch you.”

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She waved from the door. Her smile was off-kilter. He liked her new bumpy nose.

Parker took Crescent Heights south. He was late for the briefing. The briefing was three-pronged. The coastal sub attacks, escaped Japs, the Kwan's slaughter.

He observed the callout alarm. He rerouted traffic by Kwan's. It was a hellish 187.

It oozed inside job. Some Hop Sing busboy got miffed at Uncle Ace. Tong tiff. The busboy fingered the tile game to Four Families. Four Families clued in some Collaborationist fucks. The fucks had a line on *The Japs*.

The job oozed hybrid. It was Fifth Column meets loot-and-slay. *The Japs* bolt their hillside hideout and hit C-town. Drop cars, getaway cars. Do they head back north or head south? The posse's all over the hills. The job oozed oddball and *skewed*.

Parker cut east on Beverly. *He* felt oddball-skewed. He had six days booze-free. He endorsed a sex shakedown. It revised his vow before God.

It did not abrogate it. It did not breach Dudley's stipulations. It gave him a loophole to crawl through.

He was splitting moral hairs. He knew why.

It was the war and his beloved *Pueblo Grande*. The war made everyday life *life in extremis*. Expedient gestures and moral stands stood a hairsbreadth apart. L.A. blazed with common cause in stark contradiction. L.A. would build up and out after the war. It would become unrecognizable. The war gave him L.A. ablaze with crazy purpose. The war let him love L.A. one last time as it was.

Parker hit City Hall. Posse men lounged on the steps. Kudos to Lin Chung. The boys wore shrunken heads on chains.

He parked in the basement. A Navy ensign ran the mayor's freight lift. They zoomed up to Fletch B.'s floor. The briefing spread out to the hallway.

Army brass schmoozed with reporters. Cops and politicos swarmed a doughnut tray. Parker stepped into the conference room. A Navy commander flanked a lectern and wall map.

Pins denoted coastal waters and recent sub attacks. The Navy man swept a pointer. Subs Jap U.S. freighters. Subs Jap U.S. tankers. Subs threaten the Mex coast. Our Mex Statie *amigos* are *scaaaaared*.

Remember the Goleta Inlet. These are *rogue* subs. L.A.'s shoreline waters could be next.

Ace Kwan and Lin Chung walked in. They wore shrunken heads. Call-Me-Jack and Sheriff Gene hugged them. The Navy man sat down. Mild applause trickled. Dudley Smith took the lectern.

The Merry Mick. Church pulpit–trained. He scanned the room. He let chitchat subside. He took the room, full brogue.

"Chaos attends our fair city. We rebuff invaders as havoc is cried and the dogs of war are let slip. 'The bay trees in our country are all withered, and meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven. The pale-faced moon looks bloody on the earth, and lean-looked prophets whisper fearful change.' "

The room *got* it. Big cop, big words. He ain't no American. It makes this shit okay.

"Would you have our city be less fair? Should we retract the nets of beauty that lure such a collage of splendid peoples and wolfen monsters here? December 7th is Genesis in the Unholy Bible. The normal phases of the moon have been canceled. Werewolves walk among us, sans lunar compass. They are lost. They know only that they must destroy the beauty that unites each one of us, the beauty that has brought each one of us here."

Dudley paused. He scanned the room. He saw Parker. He looked straight at him.

"I spoke to a wolf, twenty years ago. I commune with him in prayer and have enjoyed earthly visitations of late. The wolf told me that wolves are visible only to a scant few. My duty is to detect them and follow them to points where only one of us may survive. We carry weapons and wear heads that were once men around our necks. We carry the wolfen deeply within us. They are invisible as we become visible to destroy them. We love beauty in a way that they cannot. It subsumes our basest urges and sends us their way. 'I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw.' The wolf told me that there is no Fifth Column, because the Fifth Column is each one of us. We will track down the wolfen. We are mad with godly allegiance and now see the invisible plainly. We have drunk from the chalice of unholy blood and have become them that we might slay them."

Parker walked out to the hallway. Dudley sermonized and segued to cop talk.

There's laughter. He's cracking jokes now. He's issued his sermon. His sermon supplants his Satanic exchange of vows.

I am but mad north-north-west. I have exploited blood libel for profit. We are as one, William. You will let it all be.

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“DUD-LEY! DUD-LEY!”

Backslappers stormed the lectern. Grown men wolf-howled and waved shrunken heads.

Dudley scrammed for the freight lift. Fans blocked his path. They held up pens and Werewolf pix. He signed *D. L. Smith* twenty times.

The heads were de rigueur now. Call-Me-Jack wore one. Fletch B. wore *two*. Two-Gun Davis wore *three*.

Dudley made the lift and blew kisses. A woman slipped him her phone number. The doors slid shut.

He pushed B. The lift dropped. Ace had a limo waiting. The Pagoda—chop, chop.

Benzedrine and Shakespeare. 83 grand in the trunk. Ace retrieved his house stake, plus 41. He was mildly peeved and exuberant. *You should have warned me, Dudster. You shot up my parking lot.*

The doors slid open. The Lincoln idled close. Dudley ran over and got in the back. Ace was waiting. A partition sealed them off. The driver waved a shrunken head and pulled out.

Ace said, “My Irish brother never fails me. He gets the gelt, and he’ll get the Japs.”

What Japs? There were no Japs. He braced the eyeball wit on the car snatch. The man *thought* he saw Japs. He was war-fevered. Japs, Chinks—what’s the diff? War fever served a purpose here. *We’ll make it The Japs*.

Beth and Tommy were due. He sent a taxi to fetch them. Harry Cohn was meeting him. The Pagoda—chop, chop.

Dudley lit a cigarette. “How much does Harry owe you now, my brother?”

Ace stroked his shrunken head. “The Jew beast owes me one hundred and sixteen thou. He is the pus in the boil on my yellow ass.”

“I will barter with Harry and secure us equipment in lieu of money. I have my friend Claire’s donation, and I’ll speak to my friend Bette tonight. We must accrue ready cash, in order to close Messrs. Exley and Patchett. Our friend Terry assures me that they are cash-strapped, and will be willing to let us partner in with them."

They hit the Pagoda. The lot was roped up. Bluesuits flanked the death car. Ray Pinker measured tread marks. Hideo Ashida vacuumed the backseat.

Mike B. and Dick C. played watchdog. Lin Chung peddled shrunken heads on the sidewalk. Harry Cohn bought a head and waddled in.

The limo swerved curbside and dropped them. Ace ran inside and tore for the kitchen. *Blood of the Infidel!* He always spit in Harry's soup.

Dudley strolled through the lot. Bluesuits saluted. He walked by the death sled. It reeked of solvents. Hideo Ashida glanced up.

They shared a look. Dudley winked. Hideo nodded back.

Dudley walked inside. Harry hogged a window booth. He wore his shrunken head and slurped wonton soup.

Dudley joined him. Harry scooped floating pork.

"I need an extension with Ace. And don't mention your *farkakte* smut racket, because my answer remains *nyet*, Comrade."

Dudley said, "Comrade, your new answer will have to be '*da.'* You will supply equipment upon command. You will let us employ the sets from your grand Frank Capra movies that extoll the human spirit, and you will provide beautiful gowns for our female performers, who will have been surgically cut to resemble your own brightest stars. You will do all of this, and much more, without complaint."

Harry waved his spoon. "Or what, *bubelah*? It's that, or you kill me? It's like I'm some *schvartzer* heist man you put the boots to to keep L.A. safe and clean?"

Dudley said, "No. But I'll release my sneak photographs of you cavorting with two fourteen-year-old girls in Hitler Youth outfits."

Harry went red. His arteries constricted. Dudley lit a cigarette and blew smoke in his face.

"Nod yes and enjoy your soup, Harry. Ace has embellished it, especially for you."

Harry coughed. Harry slurped soup. Harry lit a cigarette.

" 'Yes,' you mick cocksucker."

"You'll be in august company, Harry. Our pals Joe and Ben are investing, and I'm certain that Bette Davis will be, as well."

Harry waved his shrunken head. "A curse on you, you mick cocksucker. May giant circus elephants shit on your lawn. May bug-eyed gargoyles eat your young."

A taxi pulled up. There—a yellow smudge lights the window.

Dudley ran out. He buttoned his suit coat over his gun and squared his necktie. Fair Beth stepped up on the curb.

She was seventeen, now. She was taller. Her hair had gone to his shade.

Beth said, “Hello, Dad.”

Dudley said, “My dear lass.”

They embraced. Beth was overcoat warm. He kissed the top of her hat.

“What’s going on out there? I’m blind, but I’ve got a nose for things.”

Dudley laughed. Beth laughed. She stood on her tiptoes and kissed her dad’s beak. They bundled into the cab and scrunched up beside Tommy.

He was a pudgy Irish boy. He worked for Packard Bell and built radios by touch.

Dudley pumped his hand. “It’s good to see you, lad. You look delightfully fit for our grand L.A. adventure.”

Tommy grinned. He wore dark glasses and a swell suit. Beth groomed him. He missed shaving spots. Beth squared him away for the world.

“I can’t see you, Uncle Dud. I can hear you, though. And you know you can’t fool me. If you try to pass off a fake Bette Davis, Beth will see and I’ll hear.”

Dudley laughed. Beth laughed. Dudley winked at her and tapped the driver.

“Brentwood, please. Take Sunset out to Mandeville Canyon.”

The driver U-turned. Beth leaned into Dudley. Tommy leaned into her. She looked out at L.A. She saw Chinatown choked with police cars. She said, “It’s a dream.”

The San Diego papers inked the oceanside snuffs. The Camp Pendleton cops caught the squawk. The early consensus was Baffler. It might be the Santa Monica sniper. It might be those escaped Japs.

Tommy rolled down his window. He wrinkled his nose and caught scents. Beth said, “There’s a high cement retaining wall to your right. There’s sycamore trees at the top.”

Tommy said, “I can smell them. The limbs are full of oil. It’s darker than eucalyptus.”

Beth squeezed Dudley’s hand. “It’s dark, like my dad’s Irish heart.”

Dudley roared. Beth laughed and nuzzled into him. They passed a stretch of Mex eateries. Tommy said, “I smell fried pork.”

The cab clocked westbound. Beth described Hollywood and the Sunset Strip. “There’s a billboard for airplane flights to Palm Springs.” “There’s a man walking a spotted Great Dane.” “There’s the world-famous Mocambo. Maybe Miss Davis will take us there.”

They hit Beverly Hills. Tommy said, “It’s more green now. There’s more oxygen in the air.”

Dudley faked a cough and popped three bennies. Beth described Will Rogers Park. Dudley welled up. His fair child and fifty-foot palm trees. Such inexplicable love.

They passed the Bel-Air gates. Sunset went hairpin. The cab dipped and swerved. Beth and Tommy giggled. It was a fun-house ride for the blind lad. He took joy where he could.

Such gratitude. *"I'm grateful."* His sweet Claire said that.

Brentwood, Mandeville Canyon. There's a Tudor house. There's a Spanish house. There's a château. Dad, they're so *big*.

He saw the Airedale first. Bette stood on her lawn and tossed him a ball. The cab pulled into the driveway. Bette shouted something. Beth covered her mouth—*Oh my God*.

He got out. Bette skipped up to him. She wore gabardine slacks and a blue sweater. She went *Not in front of the neighbors* and embraced him. She ran a hand down his leg.

Beth helped Tommy out. She calmed herself. It was *très* decorous. It was more Smith than Short.

Bette went to them. It was hugs, two-hand greetings, skipped heartbeats. The Airedale jumped on Dudley. He stroked him head-to-tail and kissed his snout.

La Grande Bette. She's playing herself. She'll rebuff *Miss Davis this, Miss Davis that*.

She said, "Bette, please. I wouldn't dream of calling you Miss Short or Mr. Gilfoyle."

Beth and Tommy swooned. Bette pointed to a Rolls limo, curbside. She passed the cab man a wad and went *Shoo!*

The cab U-turned. Bette tucked the Airedale behind the gate and walked back over. She drew them in. She touched all three of them. She looked at Dudley, she looked at Beth.

She went *Mmmmmmmmmm*. She drew it out to nine thousand syllables. She said, "Yes, I see the resemblance."

Dudley roared. Beth doubled over. Tommy squealed and plucked at Bette's sleeve. She laced their fingers up.

"I know you can't *see* it, Tommy. But don't you think there's Ireland all over these two?"

Tommy leaned into Bette. "I don't know what Ireland looks like, but Uncle Dud and Beth both smell green."

Dudley welled up. Beth said, "Dad's more emotional than he lets on."

Bette jiggled Dudley's wrist. "Yes, and I can attest to that, in a rather intimate manner. So, before I lapse into the bawdy, I think we should go to the movies. I haven't seen *Citizen Kane*, and it's playing second-run in Hollywood. A Monday matinee shouldn't be too crowded, and I can observe Beth's narration technique."

Beth looked at Dudley. *Can we? Should we impose?*

Bette said, "How about it, Dad? The kids and I are in."

Dudley said, "Then I shall make it a quorum."

Bette stuck her fingers in her mouth and whistled. It was pure stagecraft.

The limo pulled up. Dudley got the door. Beth helped Tommy in. Dudley winked at Bette.

She said, "How many hearts have you broken with that one thing?"

He eased her inside. Tommy sniffed the air. The lad was a scent hound. Hold for his diagnosis.

"The prior inhabitant wore lime cologne and had a flask. He spilled brandy on the seat cushions."

The decree drew applause. Bette whistled. It was poor stagecraft. She whistled shrill. She was laying the hoi polloi on too thick.

The limo pulled out. They sat bundled and retraced Sunset, east. Beth *re*described the landscape.

Bette studied Beth. She would know Beth's every tic by suppertime. She would deftly mimic Beth by dessert.

He loved Beth more than his full-fledged daughters. She possessed the skewed will that they lacked. She affirmed his bent for the illicit. She did not plague him with the mundane.

They passed the Strip, eastbound. Beth described the Trocadero. Bette did not smile at him or touch him. He saw her there that first time. They made love upstairs. She said, *"Kill a Jap for me."*

Claire was outwardly harsh. She was tall and patrician and used it to brusque effect. She fully succumbed to touch. Bette thought she did but did not.

Miss Davis remained Miss Davis, portraying raw appetite. It was about the future memory, recalled. Bette's passion was a recollective device.

They hit the Hawaii Theatre. Beth described the marquee. Star-studded *Citizen Kane*, late shows nitely. Palm-tree accents. REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR! signs by the ticket booth.

Bette donned dark glasses. It was a Miss Davis move. Dudley got out a five-dollar bill. Beth took charge of Tommy. It was a maneuver.

They stormed the booth and got their tickets. The blind man supplied a diversion. They got through the lobby. The place was near empty. The trailers had just ended. They steered Tommy out in front of them and got to their seats.

Bette went *Whew*. Tommy made a blind man's face. Dudley took the aisle seat and stretched his legs. Bette sat beside him. Beth sat next to her. Tommy took the end seat.

The lights redimmed. Dudley tucked close to Bette. She tucked away from him and tucked close to Beth.

The movie began. Beth tucked close to Tommy and whispered. She ran down the credits. She described a deathbed prologue. The film proper kicked in.

It was the late nineteenth century. Beth captured that. Deft girl, in soft sync.

Dudley ran his hand up Bette's leg. She smiled at him and turned back to Beth. The movie unfurled. Daylight scenes threw brightness. Beth whispered. She eyed the screen and squeezed Tommy's hands. The music got to him. Stringed crescendos made him cry.

Dudley watched them. Bette kept her head turned. He took his hand off Bette's leg. He thought she'd pull it back. She straightened the crease in her slacks.

The movie rankled. It was idiot muckraking and invasive technique. Beth caught the style and conveyed it, frame-to-frame. Dudley's mind raced. He drove to Mexico with Comrade Claire. He invaded Mexico with his boys.

This moronic motion picture. His Bette, dumbstruck. The chubby wunderkind, Orson Welles. Harry Cohn knew young Welles. Young Welles scrounged coon maids off Beverly Hills bus stops. He bamboozled them with maryjane and magic tricks. He plied them with his cricket dick and drove them home to coontown.

Dudley popped two bennies. He tapped his feet. He felt stretched. He got woman pangs. He panged Bette, Claire, Bette. He got daughter pangs. He panged for long talks with Beth.

The movie dragged on. It was Old Testament length.

Bette kept her back turned. Dark sequences hit. He couldn't see Bette, he couldn't see Beth. He was marooned on Mars.

It ended. The great Kane falls. His life was one hopped-up dance on a dunghill. It all pertained to a fucking child's sled.

His companions stood and clapped. Bette reprised her hoi polloi whistle. Dudley walked out to the lobby and lit a cigarette.

He was sweating. Benzedrine in a hot box. That tortuous movie. *Rubber-hose me—I'll confess*.

Bette and Beth walked Tommy out. They wore glazed culture looks. Bette cold-eyed him. Party pooper. *Don't you know how great that was?*

She suggested the Brown Derby. Beth and Tommy swooned. Dudley held an arm out. Bette linked up with him.

It felt perfunctory. She withheld her eyes. She gave them to Tommy and Beth.

Tommy kept going "Gee *whiz*, Uncle Dud." He heard Claire say *"I'm grateful."* Beth took his free arm. He went instantly buoyant. They tumbled out to the limo, linked up.

The backseat was airless. Bette dropped his arm and threw chitchat at Beth. Orson's a *genius*, you *must* meet him, he understands so *much*.

Dudley undid his necktie. Vine Street was just west. The ride traversed eons. Fat Orson, boy genius. No air in the fucking backseat.

They hit the Derby. Bette removed her dark glasses. She walked ahead of them. She led them. She came as Herself.

Hurricane Bette.

The homo maître d' fawns and shags them a booth. It's *the* Brown Derby. Beth steers Tommy and describes every inch. Tommy bumps a table. Bruce Cabot glares. He was the male ingénue in *King Kong*. Central Vice has a blue sheet on him. He enjoys underaged snatch.

Hurricane Bette.

She calls out to her filmland chums and blows kisses. She strides ahead of them. Heads turn: It's Bette! It's Bette! She walks ahead of the big man. He's the blind man's keeper. Who's that pretty girl in that cheap dress? My, what a procession! It's the Shanty Irish Dispossessed!

They made the booth. The homo seated them and swished off. Dudley squeezed in beside Bette.

He cupped her knee. She slid away and buttonholed Tommy. Her tone went arch. She had a foil and cued up deep compassion. Her voice went *TOO GODDAMN LOUD*.

Tell me, dear—how *does* one assemble radios without the gift of sight?

Tommy laid it out. His hands plucked at the tablecloth. He made blind man's faces. He glowed with Bette-Davis-is-being-nice-to-me love.

Beth was way across the booth. He couldn't touch her or tell her sweet things. She dabbed at Tommy's face and studied Bette. She'd wear Bette's hairdo tomorrow. She'd restitch her frocks for a more-Bette look.

Bette owned the room. People looked over. That's Gary Cooper. He's wearing a disabled vet's boutonniere.

A waiter came by. Dudley snagged him first. He ordered bonded bourbon, four shots. Menus appeared. Beth read Tommy's, aloud. Dudley inched closer to Bette. Bette inched closer to Tommy. *Tell me how you wire the antenna disks, dear*.

The drinks arrived. Beth had ginger ale. Tommy's Scotch Mist came with a straw. He slurped it. The sound echoed. Bette sipped a martini and scanned the room.

She trawled for recognition. She bestowed smiles and blew kisses. She doted on Tommy and one eye–cased the joint.

Dudley bolted his drink. He touched Bette's back. She reached around and patted his hand. The waiter reappeared. Dudley held four fingers up.

The waiter took orders. Bette ordered for Beth and Tommy—the New York steak, rare. Dudley ordered a well-done hamburger. Bette deadpanned the joke.

Dudley killed his drink. The refill appeared. He chugged half of it. The room resettled. His nerves smoothed out. He concocted small talk.

Be risqué for your brood. Orson Welles fucks nigger maids. Mr. Hearst will fuck *him*—and *soon*.

He cleared his throat.

Bette squeezed Tommy's hand and squeezed out of the booth.

Conquistadora.

She swirled, booth-to-booth. She snagged a waiter's pen and demanded war-bond pledges. Everybody coughed up. Bette wrote the names and amounts on her arm. Gary Cooper coughed up. Jean Arthur coughed up. An Army colonel wrote her a check. Bette curtsied and blew the ink dry.

Dudley killed his drink. It sent him gaga. He got a surge up his legs. He watched Bette swirl. He willed her to look his way and give him *something*.

She swirled. She fixed on her audience. She covered her arm in blue ink.

His tumbler vanished. A new one appeared. He slugged down two fingers and watched Bette swirl. John Wayne grabbed her wrist and kissed her arm above the ink line. Dudley pulled out his gun.

He felt something in his hand. He looked down and wondered how it got there. Beth saw it. Nobody else did. Bette had the room.

Beth looked at him. She made a little gesture. It meant *Dad, please*. He tucked his piece back in his holster. John Wayne released Bette's arm. Bette swirled away.

Dudley shut his eyes. Beth whispered something. Tommy's knees bumped the table. Dudley opened his eyes. Beth steered Tommy around a waiter.

His tumbler was back at four shots. He bolted half of it. The room blurred and cleared. He saw Bette, swirling his way.

She sat down. There's three of her, two of her, *one*. She smiled. She displayed her arm. Her sleeve was hiked up to her shoulder. Ink marks covered every inch.

She said, "For the war." *"Kill a Jap for me"* echoed.

He reached for her wrist. She jerked her arm back.

She said, "No, don't."

He killed his drink. There's three, two, *one* of her.

She said, "You're looking at a hundred thousand dollars for the war, from fifteen minutes of work."

Dudley gripped his tumbler. "I can make you five times that for a fifty-thousand-dollar investment that you won't even miss. It's smut movies, darling—of a level of artistry and perverted significance that will put that dithering piece of cinema we just witnessed to shame.

Don't pretend that you don't love filth in the guise of art. Don't pretend that I don't understand that part of you. Don't pretend that you don't want me to fuck you tonight, and don't pretend that you won't write that check."

Bette slid close to him. Bette lowered her head. Lovers' tête-àtête.

"How dare you inflict such vile presumption upon me at a time such as this? How dare you attribute your own basest urges to me? How dare you advance this obscene proposition with your daughter and her dear friend twenty feet away, on what is surely the most splendid night of their lives? How dare you think that you and I are anything more than a trivial and titillating footnote to this horrible moment in time, and that *you* can impose your brutal will upon *me* in such a cruel and casual manner?"

Dudley gripped the tumbler. His hand spasmed. The glass shattered.

Bourbon spilled. Shards crumbled. He held pure shrapnel and made a tight fist. Glass tore his hand. High-test booze scalded him.

Bette got up and walked out. Blood seeped through his fingers and drenched the tablecloth. People looked over. His suit coat was unbuttoned and wide open. His holster was out in plain view.

He stared at his hand. Blood covered it. The liquor burned, wicked bad. He saw three rooms, two rooms, *one*. He snatched up the table napkins. He wrapped his hand and watched the red seep through.

People looked at him. Movie stars gawked. Beth helped Tommy out of the washroom. Bette herded them toward the door.

Dudley Liam Smith. You took a spill. Take your leave, now.

He fished out two C-notes and dropped them on the table. He got up and squeezed out of the booth. His hand burned and throbbed. The pain gave him legs.

He trailed blood out to the sidewalk. He got in the limo. They all looked away from him.

The limo pulled away. The white napkins seeped to pure red. Beth and Tommy got out at the Roosevelt. Tommy fumbled at his hand. Beth whispered this astonishing thing.

She said, "I *know*, Dad."

They got out. Beth steered Tommy toward Grauman's Chinese. Dudley shut his eyes and went someplace. He knew he was moving. His hand throbbed. He smelled Bette's smoke.

The limo moved. A wheel hum settled him. *Dudley Liam Smith—you're someplace. That's Her smoke*.

Conquistadora.

Smoke, no smoke. She's there, she's gone.

The limo ran east on Sunset. His lap was blood-soaked. The seat cushions were slick.

He tapped the partition. He said, "Roxbury and Elevado, please."

It took five minutes. The house was lit up bright. He heard Fifth Column music. Atonal subversion. Dissonant dissidence.

He threw a C-note at the driver and weaved to the porch. He got the bell with his elbow. His hand leaked blood and throbbed.

She opened the door. The Red Empress. *Perdition, catch my soul.*

She smiled.

She said, “Really, *you*?”

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LOS ANGELES | MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 1941

Yard work. Night work, by searchlight. Dudley's graph to Scotty's snitch sheet to Here.

Ashida carried a knapsack and lantern. It was confirmation work and last good-byes. He walked the ground between The House and the parkway. He'd bottled four soil samples so far.

Two stunk of shrimp oil. It confirmed the graph and snitch sheet.

Dudley trekked this path last Friday. Dudley spun theories.

Preston Exley and Pierce Patchett were land czars. Dudley's resultant surmise:

They buy land and destroy its crop-raising potential. They build parkway ramps and commercial structures right Here.

He'd been out all day. Confirmations, good-byes.

He drove to the Valley. He went by four wetback-staffed farms. Slave crews picked diseased-looking crops.

He bottled four soil samples. They all contained shrimp oil. He went by three *all*-Japanese farms. The crops there looked healthy. He bottled soil samples. There was no shrimp-oil scent.

It confirmed Dudley's theory. Destroy crops. Build internment centers. Usurp the all-Japanese farms. Build internment centers There.

He left the Valley and drove to Kwan's. He worked the death car and got *An Idea*. He clocked out and drove to the Bureau.

Dudley neglected a follow-up. It did not appear on his graph.

Check the reverse directories. The Watanabe house was one prospective ramp and land site. Dudley surmised other ramp and land sites. Dudley did not follow up.

Other houses had been bought. That was common case knowledge. Buzz Meeks tracked sales to Glassell Park and South Pasadena. South Pasadena was on the parkway. Glassell Park was close but not on. Glassell Park houses were valuable but not essential. Houses right by ramp sites were pure gelt.

He hit the Bureau. He shagged the Central Reverse Book. He worked the street-address and house owners' index. The Watanabes were the only Japanese in Highland Park. A *few* Japanese lived in South Pasadena.

He found three. Nagoya, Yoshimura, Kondo—all on the parkway.

Lincoln Heights ran parkway-parallel. It began just north of Chinatown and continued two miles up. A drainage creek nixed eastside-flush homes. Behind the creek and still close? Let's check right There.

He found three more. Takahama, Miyamo, Hatsuma. All close to the creek.

He drove by all six houses. All six were parkway-flush or creekflush. He walked around the exteriors. All six houses had been cleaned out.

Dudley got most of it. He got the rest.

Who is the white man in the purple sweater? We both want to know.

Ashida walked up to the back door. He let himself in. He turned on the lights and strolled. Let's say farewell to The House.

It was still intact-furnished. The check-in log was still there.

He skimmed through. The entries ran from 12/7 to 12/19. He'd logged in fourteen times. Dudley checked in twelve times.

He checked the check boxes. Dust all touch surfaces—check. Dust all grab surfaces—check. Itemize the kitchen. Itemize the bedrooms. Itemize the living room.

Latent-print boxes. Inventory boxes. Empty the drain grates. Test all solvents. Print-dust all glassware. Carbon sheets by the work log. Everything in The House, itemized.

He went down the check boxes. He recognized his own check marks. Forty-two separate boxes checked, all the way to—

"Master bedroom closet/victims' clothing (laundry marks, moneys, note slips, etc.)."

Box no. 43—*un*-checked.

Oversight. It happened. Shitwork accumulated. Cases grew cold.

Box 43. Check it now. Formalize this farewell.

Ashida walked upstairs. Box 43 was the toss-the-pockets step. It was often overlooked. The victims' death garb *had* been checked.

He walked into the bedroom. He opened the closet. Aya left three smocks behind. There were no toss pockets sewn on or in. Ryoshi left two sports coats—blue serge, gray herringbone.

Four pairs of shoes. Neckties on a hook. Belts on a wall peg.

Ashida went through the blue serge and got zero. Ashida patted the herringbone breast pocket and felt a bulge.

He reached in and removed it. It was a pair of men's socks, turned inside out.

Tan, cable-knit, cashmere. Sized for a small-footed man. Maroon stains on the soles. Congealed matter—inside and out.

Men's hosiery. Expensive—and small. Ryoshi and Johnny Watanabe had large feet.

Ashida touched the stains. Ashida smelled them. They were dried blood.

The killer walked the house with his shoes off. The killer stepped in blood. The killer panicked and got rid of his socks.

No. That was wrong. That didn't fit. His killer would not do that.

Ashida thought it through. Ashida worked backward. The blood-dotted glass shards—12/7/41.

The Watanabes oil-doused their feet. They were soil contaminators. They sprinkled the shards on their feet. It aerated the ground. The Watanabes had *heavily callused feet.* Glass shards on *their* feet would not produce this much blood. These were men's socks. They wouldn't fit Ryoshi or Johnny. They might fit Aya and/or Nancy.

Ashida ran downstairs. Ashida read every carbon sheet. Every item of clothing in the house had been logged. There were no tan cashmere socks. There were no tan socks or cashmere socks—male/female, over and out.

He went out the front door. He got his car and drove to the morgue. He ran inside. An attendant buttonholed him. He said something about the crematorium.

Ashida quick-walked there. Nort was stoking an incinerator. Four sheet-covered stiffs were laid out on gurneys. The sheets were solvent-soaked and prepped to ignite.

"Jesus, you've got timing. Did you come to say good-bye?"

"How badly have they decomposed?"

Nort shook his head. "You've got something, son. Tell me what it is before they go."

Ashida tossed him the socks. "I found them at the house. They weren't itemized, and they're too small and too expensive for Ryoshi and Johnny. Look at those bloodstains. You can't attribute them to glass shards and shrimp oil on heavily callused feet."

Nort nodded. Ashida caught The Smell. They'd decomped past their use date. Their flesh was off the bone.

He pulled up all four sheets. Their feet were still intact. Nort held the socks up to them.

They were far too small for Ryoshi and Johnny. They were too small for Aya and Nancy. The Cashmere Sock Man had *tiny* feet.

A microscope was bolted to a workbench. A stack of files sat next to it. Nort ripped off a sock swatch and clamped it under the slide.

He dialed in. He looked down. He plucked a file and consulted an autopsy sheet. He looked back and forth six times. He wheeled and grinned.

"He stepped in visceral blood. It was Ryoshi's. He'd had a recent intestinal infection. There's leukocytes all through that stain."

Who is the white man in the—

Nort said, "Werewolves don't have small feet. Not that I didn't know it was a frame."

The incinerator kicked on. Ashida felt a big blast of heat.

He cranked up the gurneys and pushed them to the edge. He tipped the bodies into the flames.

Nort said, "*Sayonara*, folks. I wish we'd done better by you."

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 1941

I felt ridiculous.

I stood in front of the Roosevelt Hotel, across from the courtyard of Grauman's Chinese. I did not look like a whore. I looked like a prairie girl who'd misjudged the local climate.

My dress was winter-weight, pleated, and fell below the knee; the matching jacket fit loosely. The red silk blouse showed scant cleavage. My mink coat was too much for L.A. at Christmas. A mothball scent made me sneeze.

Elmer, Brenda and Bill Parker were up in suite 813. They were stationed behind a wall peek. A tripod-rigged camera pointed into the living room. The room was microphone-fitted. Elmer and Brenda knew Fletch B.'s "quirk" and assured me that this was strictly a living room deal.

Parker appeared to be off the sauce. He issued abrupt orders and comported himself with brusque civility. He agreed to the shakedown without a moment's pause. It astonished me.

I waited. Mayor Fletch was due momentarily. My broken nose was cosmetically masked and showed no sign of recent fracture. I chain-smoked; I watched rubes congregate outside Grauman's and slide their feet into movie stars' footprints. A pretty girl led a blind man through the courtyard and helped him compare his feet to Cary Grant's. It was heartbreakingly lovely.

A Lincoln sedan pulled to the curb, directly in front of me. The driver flashed his headlights twice—my signal. I leaned into the passenger window. Pinch me—it was Fletcher Bowron.

He looked over at me and leered. He wore Kiwanis, Moose, and Elks lodge pins, along with a Pearl Harbor mourning armband. I said, "Suite 813. Please give me a few minutes."

Fletch gave me the high sign. I walked into the hotel, took the elevator up and let myself into the suite.

It was Brenda's standing tryst spot. The living room and bedroom featured peeks built into wall-mounted mirrors. Camera stations stood in crawl spaces behind the walls; three people could crouch and covertly film assignations. Brenda, Elmer and Parker were behind the living room peek. I had been told to position myself sideways, eight feet from the wall. Elmer warned me that Fletch night be nervous and told me to have a stiff drink waiting.

I did a little soft-shoe and waved at the peek. Brenda yelled, "No mugging, Citizen. This ain't no high school play."

I laughed and walked to the bar. I poured Fletch a triple and siphoned in club soda. I smoothed my hair and heard the doorbell.

I carried the drink over and opened the door. Fletch snatched the glass and chugalugged it. I shut the door and threw the bolt.

He said, "You think I'm Fletcher Bowron, Esquire, but I'm not. That guy's a pantywaist. The War Department's got me traveling incognito, and I'll admit I look a little bit like Fletch. Let me have it, sister. Tell me who you've got standing here."

Fletch always worked off a script. I had my part memorized.

I said, "You're Race Randall, the ace spy. You've been transporting secret documents from the Continent, and you're all tuckered out."

"That's right. I've been monitoring the progress of the eastern-front war, and I'm starting to think we should cut a deal with Hitler while we've still got the chance. Those Nazi boys have got oomph, and since I'm a man with lead in my pencil, I know oomph when I see it."

I walked to the bar and built another triple. I said, "Geopolitics fascinates me. Please tell me more."

Race snatched the glass. He chugalugged his drink and did a little cock-'o-the-walk strut.

"Russia's all right, if you like gruel and lezbo discus throwers, but Deutschland's got the goods. I was there with the L.A. Trade Commission in '38, and I say *der Führer*'s been getting a bum rap. The Abwehr tried to recruit me, but Race Randall's devoted to the good old U.S. of A. You know what they say about me, don't you, sister?"

I certainly did. "Everyone knows about *you*, Mr. Randall. You've got the biggest and the best."

Race reeled and sloshed his bourbon. "Marlene Dietrich will attest to that, sister. We were with some of the boys at a schnitzel palace on the Goetheplatz. You know the Horst Wessel song? *'Die Fahne hoch! Die Reihen dict geschlossen! SA marschiert mit ruhig festem Schritt.'* "

We were squarely in line with the wall peek. Race killed off his drink and began goose-stepping. He goose-stepped the length of the room, three times. I stood back and watched; I heard foot scuffs along the crawl space and observed the evening's climax before ace spy Race

Randall did.

Citizens Brenda, Elmer and Bill were standing by the bedroom doorway. Race would see them the moment he turned and began goose-stepping back our way.

He goose-stepped.

He froze in mid-step.

He dropped his glass and screamed.

Brenda said, “We go back a coon’s age, Fletch. But business is business.”

Parker said, “No ‘derogatory profile.’ A closed-chambers, grand jury–sanctioned conference at 8:00 a.m. tomorrow. Immediate subpoenas for Preston Exley and a man named Pierce Morehouse Patchett. They may bring an attorney. I’ll be the grand jury’s ad hoc counsel.”

I said, “Race, you’ve got the biggest and the best.”

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LOS ANGELES | MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 1941

Fletch started sobbing. Brenda mother-henned him.

We're still pals, sweetie. I'll still get you girls. Let's get some coffee in you. You'll be right as rain.

The pathos was unnerving. Parker ducked out. He elevatored downstairs. The lobby choir unnerved him. He ducked outside.

He'd parked his car off the boulevard. He brought his law texts and scrawl sheets. He jogged over and piled in.

He checked his watch. 2:00 a.m. would mark six days sober. He checked the 813 windows. Fletch boo-hoo'd. Miss Lake talked with her friends.

Parker got out his pencils and notepad. A girl walked a blind man in front of the car. He sent up a prayer for them.

Prayer gave him the idea. It densified the Bowron shakedown. Cease-and-desist was insufficient. The closed proceeding put Fletch at more risk. It upped the odds that he'd never break ranks and snitch.

The idea sidestepped The Vow. He plea-bargained God for just this one thing. Dudley's blithe sermon convinced him to try it.

It might convince Exley and Patchett to ditch their slave-camp plans. It might instill just *this much* doubt in them.

Parker worked. He studied statutes. He dog-eared pages. He underlined legal points. He smoked himself hoarse. He swilled stale coffee and cogitated. He thought of Lieutenant Conville. He thought of Miss Lake.

He drove by Coulter's yesterday. He saw a tweed skirt in the window and thought of Miss Lake. That skirt and white stockings. Miss Lake in white gloves at church.

Lieutenant Conville was taller. She wore the winter uniform now. She'd go to the khaki in springtime. It would complement her red hair.

Parker worked all night. He wrote out a series of questions and phrased them loophole tight. He drove downtown at dawn.

He cadged a cot room nap. He slept between Thad Brown and Lee

Blanchard. He got up at 7:40. He cleaned up and shaved in the washroom.

Crapshoot. The county grand jury room—546.

Parker walked down. Fletch delivered. The annex was set up.

One table, five chairs. A female stenographer. The participants, plus counsel.

Bill McPherson and Preston Exley. Pierce Patchett—tall and gaunt. *Counsel?* Ben Siegel's man, Sam Rummel.

The fit was tight. One small room and six people. Blasé Exley. Blasé Patchett. The DA—early-morning alert. A high-stakes shyster and early-a.m. subpoenas.

McPherson said, "We're all here. Let's not pretend that it's anything other than an inconvenience, and get to it."

The steno rigged her device. Rummel placed three sheets of paper on the table.

"The confidentiality forms. We'll need signatures from Mr. Exley, Mr. Patchett, and Captain Parker."

Pens came out. Exley signed. Patchett signed. Parker signed. Rummel cleared his throat.

"Are you here as a policeman, or as a specially deputized attorney and representative of the county grand jury, Captain Parker?"

"The latter, Mr. Rummel. I'll add that I'm legally prohibited from repeating testimony sworn here this morning to any outside agency, which includes the Los Angeles Police Department."

McPherson tapped his watch. "Let's get this thing going. Gentlemen, raise your right hands."

They complied. McPherson spieled the oath.

"Do the witnesses swear that their privately sworn testimony is fully true and free of all dissembling and evasion? Does counsel swear that his queries are proffered with full knowledge of California state and Federal law, and that this inquiry is undertaken to comport with the best interest of all citizens of and within Los Angeles County? Do all parties understand that upon completion of this interview, I will decide whether or not to pursue a full-scale inquiry, and that my decision will be final and conclusively binding?"

Exley said, "I so swear, and I do."

Patchett said, "I so swear, and I do."

Rummel said, "I so swear, and I do."

Parker said, "I so swear, and I do."

The steno typed it in. Rummel cleared his throat.

"Twelve questions, Captain Parker. If my clients decline to answer, please do not comment or badger them."

Exley and Patchett sat down. Parker sat facing them.

"All questions are directed to both Mr. Exley and Mr. Patchett.

Either or both of them may answer, and they may elaborate if they wish."

Rummel shook his head. "They do not wish to, nor will they, 'elaborate.' "

McPherson straddled a chair. "Let's move this along. We've got three hotshot lawyers in the room. There won't be any hanky-panky." Rummel sat down. Parker studied Patchett. Note his pinned eyes. Odds on drugstore hop.

"Here's my first question. Gentlemen, do you comprise a combine that has purchased, has attempted to purchase and is currently attempting to purchase Japanese-owned house properties in Highland Park, Glassell Park and South Pasadena, along with Japanese-owned farm property in the San Fernando Valley?"

Exley said, "Yes."

Parker said, "Is it your intention to raze those house properties in order to build ramps to the Arroyo Seco Parkway and shopping centers near the Arroyo Seco Parkway?"

Patchett said, "Yes."

Parker said, "Exley Construction has a proposal before the mayor's office and the City Council at this moment. The proposal theoretically supplants preexisting plans currently being implemented by the Federal government. Mr. Exley wishes to construct prison work camps to house Japanese subversives for the duration of the war, in the San Fernando Valley. Mr. Exley, have you purchased Japanese-owned farm property, and are you attempting to purchase Japanese-owned farm property in order to raze said properties to create prison work camp sites?"

Exley said, "Yes."

Parker said, "Are you employing illegal Mexican farm workers to pick your crops?"

Exley and Patchett leaned toward Rummel. Patchett's shirt cuffs slid up. Note his Asian-symbol tattoos.

Rummel said, "Point of order, Captain. Those workers have been granted temporary visas by Captain Carlos Madrano of the Mexican State Police."

Cluster fuck. *El Capitán* Carlos. *El Jefe, muy fascista*.

"I'll rephrase. Gentlemen, are your workers systematically destroying crop acreage by the application of shrimp oil upon topsoil, in an attempt to provide a baseline for the cement foundations of your prison work camp structures?"

Exley said, "Yes."

Parker said, "Have you created a dummy corporation and secretly recorded your purchases of the house and farm properties?"

Patchett said, "Yes."

"Will you present documentation of your purchases to the Los Angeles County grand jury?"

Rummel said, "Only in the event of a full-scale grand jury inquiry, and under official subpoena only."

Parker said, "Did you purchase the Highland Park home and the East Valley farm of Ryoshi Watanabe?"

Exley said, "Yes."

"Did you tell Mr. Watanabe and/or members of his family to walk the acreage behind the house with shrimp oil and/or glass shards applied to their feet, in order to aerate the acreage and provide a baseline for the pouring of cement?"

Patchett said, "Yes."

Parker said, "The property behind the houses you have purchased or have attempted to purchase is public land deeded to Los Angeles County, with first-purchase rights of refusal granted to Exley Construction, due to its proximity to the Arroyo Seco Parkway. Gentlemen, were you systematically attempting to reduce the value of those properties by your topsoil-destroying machinations, and had you realized that people *walking* the acreage would stand a better chance of going undetected than a mechanized application of shrimp oil would?"

Exley said, "Yes."

Parker said, "Did you murder Ryoshi, Aya, Johnny and Nancy Watanabe on December 6, 1941?"

Patchett said, "No."

"Do you know who killed them?"

Patchett said, "No."

"Do you have verifiable alibis for 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, December 6th? I would like both of you to answer, please."

Exley said, "Yes."

Patchett said, "Yes."

Parker said, "Will you present valid third-party proof of those alibis?"

Rummel cleared his throat. "In the event of a full-scale and official inquiry only, and only under direct subpoena."

Twelve questions. Added clarifications. Thirty-four minutes, door-to-door.

Parker looked at McPherson. "As your deputy, I call for a full-scale inquiry."

McPherson stood up. "Request denied. The Wolf's good for those homicides. Shrimp oil, farms and parkway ramps—who gives a shit?"

December 23, 1941

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LOS ANGELES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1941

"BET-TE! BET-TE!"

They stormed the Miracle Mile. They commandeered parking lots and blitzed Christmas shoppers. Buy war bonds. Meet Miss Davis. She's Aunt Sam—and she wants *YOU!*

The late-shopping rush. Hollywood. War fever.

The big department stores ran down Wilshire. Desmond Silverwood's, Coulter's. The lots ran straight behind them. Platforms were set up by the exits. Bette stood above the crowds and worked off microphones.

She wowed the fans. Army color guards flanked her. Cops monitored the bond-purchase lines. Bette shook everyone's hand. Bette posed for photos. MPs handled the pledge slips and cash.

Beth and Tommy stuck close to Bette. Dudley stood not too close. Bette deadpanned him. Last night shrouded them.

His hand hurt wicked bad. Claire picked glass out of the cuts for two hours. She mummified his hand. He couldn't touch her with it. They made love awkwardly.

He put the onus on a cop's bash. He heard a grand joke and squeezed his glass too hard. The Red Empress seemed skeptical.

They discussed their Mexican plans. They talked blue streaks. She gave him a painkilling pill. They fell out, entwined.

He left her bed at 7:00. She inquired about his day. He said he'd been assigned to guard Bette Davis. Skeptic Claire roared.

"It was her I smelled on you Sunday. I met her once, at a premiere. I remember her perfume."

He laughed. Claire grabbed an atomizer and marked him with her scent.

"BET-TE! BET-TE! BET-TE!"

Dudley watched the crowd. Cops linked arms and held back the crowd. Silverwood's was Stop no. 2. Five hundred people showed up for Desmond's. Diehards slept in the lot overnight.

"BET-TE! BET-TE!"

The crowd shouted her name. A crowd shouted his name yesterday. Bette deadpanned him. *You inconvenienced me*.

"BET-TE! BET-TE!"

He worked the store cop's phone back at Desmond's. He called Huey. Huey reported. Huey said Tojo Tom was still tucked in tight. He talked to Tojo Tom. He quizzed him per Carlos Madrano's dope and cash stash. Tojo credibly reported and begged to be sprung. He said, "Merry Christmas, lad. You'll be released at New Year's."

He started *seeing* it. The raid itself. Let's utilize those Jap subs glimpsed in Baja.

Call-Me-Jack was sub-fixated. He feared attacks off the L.A. coast. Dudley called Call-Me-Jack and snow-jobbed him.

Chief, I fear sub raids. Let me liaise with the Staties. I'll take my boys down.

It all clicked his way then. Fate intervened.

Carlos Madrano was sub-fixated. *He'd* called Call-Me-Jack. Those Baja sub spottings spooked him. Call-Me-Jack played right in.

"Go down on the QT, Dud. Don't tell Carlos you're there. Chart scuttlebutt on the sub front. Ellis Loew presents to the grand jury today, and we'll get our indictment on Monday. You'll be commissioned at New Year's, and I know you want a Mexican posting. Lay the groundwork and poke some señoritas. Let me know what you hear."

Roger, Chief. I'll do just that.

"BET-TE! BET-TE! BET-TE!"

She deadpanned him. *You inconvenienced me*. She would not look his way.

Beth played to him. She kept glancing over. His hand throbbed. The crowd yelled for Bette.

Cops walked stiffs up to meet her.

She smiled at each and every one.

She posed for pictures and dispensed hugs.

She was an American. He was immigrant scum. She was native-born Protestant. He was papist rabble. It was her war—not his.

He thought of the Red Empress. He thought of Mexico and money. Schoolchildren stormed the platform. They waved American flags on sticks.

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LOS ANGELES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1941

Ashida saw smoke. It billowed northeast. It might be a brush blaze. It might be morgue soot off the Watanabes.

Who is the white man in the purple sweater? He walked in Ryoshi's blood. He wears cashmere socks and has very small feet.

He sat outside Mariko's building. She was upstairs, asleep. Little Tokyo was peaceful. The Feds took a holiday breather. No street rousts, no bank raids.

A depleted population. Sidewalk Christmas trees.

Ashida read the morning *Herald*. It was his breather. He was due back at Kwan's after lunch.

They were disassembling the death car. It was make-do work. The escaped Japs had been preconvicted. Dudley would brutalize Hop Sing busboys and nail the finger man. It was all fait accompli.

He missed Dudley. He wanted to sit beside him. He wanted to see him wink.

The *Herald* was all Japs and Christmas. SHOPPERS SWARM MIRACLE MILE! BETTE DAVIS DUE AT COULTER'S! ARROW SHIRT SALE AT THE WILSHIRE MAY COMPANY!

Dudley and Bette. He'd love to see it. His camera, a wall peek.

Jap sub alerts in Baja. It's only a hundred miles. It *could* happen here.

The escaped Japs were spotted down in San Diego County. They skirted the dragnet. The posse was on its way.

Ashida tossed the paper. Hardy locals swept the street. The population was two-thirds dispersed. Padlocked buildings vouched that figure. February was coming. The papers euphemized "Concentration Camps."

A cab pulled up. Bucky Bleichert got out. He wore his Belmont jacket.

The cab U-turned. Bucky jiggled the coins in his pockets and looked over.

He was taller than Dudley. They both had small brown eyes.

Bucky's arms were longer. Dudley's hands were twice his size.

Bucky walked up. He hemmed and hawed that Bucky way. He forked over an envelope. It felt like money.

"Is it a penance payment? You informed on my family, and you think this will erase that?"

Bucky shrugged. It was quintessential. His most dismissive poses evinced grace.

"It's my life savings. I think you'll be needing it."

"Complete the thought, Bucky. Why will I be needing it?"

Bucky said, "I was playing basketball at the Academy, and I heard these Feds talking. They were saying that you were involved in making some kind of Red-type movie, but their case against you and the Reds got blown somehow. They're looking for dogs to kick, so they're bypassing your pal Ward Littell and picking up you and your family after Christmas. They said all of you were Fifth Column from way back."

"Thanks, Bucky. You didn't have to tell me, but you did."

Bucky jiggled coins. "I always knew how you felt about me. I didn't care, until you got in my way."

Ashida said, "There's a woman looking for you. I'm sure she'll find you someday."

He lunged. He blew off Bucky and the car job at Kwan's.

He drove to City Hall and lunged upstairs. Homicide was all Japs and Chinks. Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle worked adjoining sweat rooms. Ashida scoped the hall mirrors.

Hop Sing boys were cuffed to drainpipes. The lads tossed phonebook shots.

Thad Brown worked the main briefing room. He traced routes on a wall map. He preached to forty hunting-garbed men.

The Japs dashed down to Dago. It's a border crashout. The Mex Staties are waiting. Spotter planes are up. They're camped in the boonies. They'll hit southbound roadways. We'll take them then.

Ashida counted shrunken heads. He got to twenty-three and stopped. Half the men carried hacksaws.

Enough.

Ashida walked to Bill Parker's office. The door was open. Parker wore Army fatigues.

He was posse-bound. Check his office. It's a loading zone.

Gas masks, grenades, Ithaca pumps. The spotter planes would gas hillsides. They'd flush out the Japs.

Ashida said, "Have you done anything? Is there anything more we can do?"

"I tried a play with Exley, Patchett and the grand jury. McPherson declined to pursue."

Cashmere socks. Bloody socks. Who is the white man in the—

"Is there anything more we can do?"

"We can wait for a callback on the pay-phone records."

Ashida scanned the room. He counted twenty Thompson submachine guns.

"The Feds are coming after my family."

Parker said, "I'm sorry."

"Is there anyone you can call?"

Parker checked the wall clock. "I've worn out my welcome with the Feds, Doctor. That shouldn't surprise you."

Two MPs rolled an ammo cart down the hallway. The metal wheels gouged the floor.

Ashida lunged. He cut down the hall. He made Homicide. He made the cubicle.

Dudley sat at his desk. His right hand was bandaged. He wore a tweed suit and brown brogues.

No man should be so deadly. No man should be so handsome. No man should be so adroit and so debonair.

Dudley smiled. Graph sheets enclosed him. Ink strokes covered all four sheets.

"WATANABE CASE CLEARED/12-7 TO 12/23/41."

Dudley said, "Hello, lad."

Ashida fluttered. "The FBI is coming after my family and me. I thought you could help."

Dudley said, "I'll take care of it immediately. In recompense, I will require your presence on a grand Mexican foray."

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1941

Nothing before this moment exists. The war is coming. I'm going to enlist.

I wrote those words in this same spot, seventeen days ago. I knew the war to be inevitable, and believed that I could control the onslaught with self-directed actions and statements of intent. Callow girl. Look at your face in the mirror and convincingly state that you believe it now.

Scotty Bennett has enlisted. I doubt that Pacific duty can match his two weeks as a wartime-hire policeman. I received a letter from Scotty a few hours ago; he wrote it en route to the Marine Corps recruit depot. There was no mention of Dudley Smith, the Watanabe murder case, the alleged killer he shot in Chinatown, his daring raid on The Werewolf's den or any other heinous errands he might have undertaken while under the Dudster's spell. He did not mention the graph summary that he sent to Hideo Ashida at great risk, or reveal that his flight to the war was a horrified repudiation of evil and his own compliance with it. He stated that he will seek to serve his country as a combat chaplain's assistant and thanked me for the love I gave him the month America entered the war and he became a policeman.

I wept then. I retrieved the Saint Christopher medal that I received at Trinity Lutheran Church in 1929. I know that I will never see Scotty Bennett again. I will wear the medal until I learn that he has returned safely or that he has died.

I did not know Scotty seventeen days ago. I did not know William H. Parker, Hideo Ashida or Claire De Haven. I had not enlisted in a political pogrom and had not maneuvered at a dozen levels of allegiance and betrayal. I had not perpetrated a shakedown on a noted public official, nor had I fought for my life with a jailhouse shiv. The war gave me this. It came to me in the form of a man who misread the war with his own self-directed actions and statements of intent. I am in no way comforted by the knowledge that Captain William H. Parker was every bit as reckless and foolish as I.

I've called Hideo's apartment repeatedly and gotten no answer. He betrayed me, he betrayed Claire, he betrayed a film venture that would have exposed the brutal blood libel of his people. I called him because we're at war and I've been imbued with a heightened understanding of instant allegiance and sudden betrayal. I've called Claire repeatedly and gotten no answer. I betrayed her. I betrayed my best ideals. I betrayed Claire's courage to confront injustice and her ability to surmount sophistry and acute dissipation.

I've called Saul Lesnick's office. I've left messages with his secretary, and gotten no calls back. I called Reynolds Loftis and talked to him. He told me that Claire came to believe that I was a police informant. Reynolds said, "Claire thought you possessed stunning artistry, but no character or conviction." He asked me if I *was* a police informant. I said, "Yes." He said, "You silly thing," and hung up.

I cannot cite the war to rebuff Claire's indictment. It's an accurate brief of my life to date.

The war. This storm. This storm that now indicts me.

Dudley Smith and his graph. Land grabs and the dead Watanabes. Lee Blanchard kills a gangland witness. Fletch Bowron's drunken goose step. A rumor Brenda shared with me. Dudley smokes opium in Ace Kwan's basement.

I miss Scotty. I miss Hideo. I miss Claire. *The Passion of Joan of Arc* is playing at the Filmarte Theatre. I'm going to see it and think of her.

I think of Dudley. He shadows me. I keep seeing him trading looks with Bette Davis. Lovers' glances across a dance floor.

The war. My own Japanese invasion. Hideo. The Goleta Inlet. Submarines, from Monterey to Mexico. The jail suicides. Goro Shigeta in the phone booth. I don't know where Lee is. I would guess that he's out with the posse. The men are wearing shrunken heads. Lee bought one for a car ornament.

I don't know where Hideo is. We share a love for a perfidious boxer with big buck teeth.

The war. Rash acts and injustice. I possess stunning artistry, but no character or conviction. I miss the people I've betrayed and who've betrayed me. I know only two things. America will win the war, and I'm alone with William H. Parker.

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SAN DIEGO COUNTY | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1941

Posse. Convoy. Pincer attack. Twenty vehicles and a crop-dusting biplane.

They moved south. Two hundred Jap hunters. The topography favored them.

They moved in two flanks. They held the high-vantage-point edge. Paved roads overlooked a north-to-south gulch. Thick foliage, scrub mounds, half-paved roadways. Tree cover and a shot to Mexico.

The Japs were down there somewhere. They were outnumbered and outflanked.

By jeeps and Army half-tracks. By black-and-whites rigged with off-road axles. By shotguns, tommy guns and grenades. By decapitation gear. By *baaaaad* shrunken-head voodoo.

The flanks pushed south. Pincers. Left-side/right-side canyon roads looked down on that gulch. The biplane flew low behind them. It sprayed yellow shit from a hundred feet up.

The shit flushed out bird flocks and wetbacks. It pushed all living things *south*. The shit burned and ate flesh. The shit dropped downward and stayed there. Get out, get to fresh air, get *south now*.

Parker rode *south*. He rode on the west flank. The ocean was off to the right. His black-and-white was radio-rigged. A Hearst Rifle man drove.

Parker sat up front. The backseat was stacked with tear-gas bombs and gas masks. They were somewhere near San Marcos. That yellow shit wafted below them. A breeze pushed it *south*.

The ride was bumpy and twisty. Parker craned his neck and looked *down*. Wetbacks ran out of the trees. They wiped their eyes. They pitched willy-nilly. They fled the yellow shit and ran *south*.

The Japs were somewhere back in the trees. The biplane spotted them and radioed a report.

Japs. They've got a brown car. They're down there. We need them out in the open. We need them to run SOUTH.

The roads down there ran *south*. They were one-lane wide and half dirt. They were escape routes. Local cops called the mass “Blood Alley.” The alley ran straight into Mexico. It bypassed border crossings and stopped at a barbed-wire fence. A hundred fugitives had made the break. A hundred fugitives had died.

Posse. Convoy. Lynch mob. Kamikaze play.

Parker thought it through. He went back to Dudley’s speech yesterday and pushed *out*. He might have read it wrong. He was Dudley-fixated and saw Dudley everywhere. It was Dudley Mania and Dudley Paranoia. Maybe he robbed and killed the Chinamen. Maybe he did not. Maybe he shot President Lincoln and bombed Pearl Harbor himself. He had the Dudley Juju *baaaaaaad*.

Still.

The breakout felt wrong. Why break for Mexico? The Japs had the tile-game money and could buy hideouts from fellow Japs. Why switch cars in Chinatown? Why clout cars so close to their intended heist? It felt like a Dudley Convergence and some Dudley Brainstorm.

Radio scoop crackled in. The San Gabriel posse flank issued a broadcast. They discovered the Japs’ campground. It resembled the Griffith Park slaughter scene. They found rodents on sticks. They found a shortwave radio and charred-paper mounds. The radio was dead and could not receive or put out signals.

The Watanabes had shortwave gear. It clued Hideo Ashida in to the Goleta attack. Jap subs were prowling the Mexican coast *now*.

Confluence. Overlay. Frayed threads that read *Wrong*.

The convoy moved *south*. They ran above the yellow shit in the gulch.

The radio belched gibberish and squawked *LOUD*.

Jap alert. They’re out of the bush. They’re outrunning the yellow shit. *See the car, see the car*. It’s coming up on a Statie roadblock. Cut left by them trees up ahead.

There’s them trees—they’re straight ahead.

Parker looked down. Parker looked *south*. Yellow shit, yellow shit, Blood Alley. There’s the car. It’s down there and southbound. It’s out of the shit and in the clear.

The driver pulled hard left. The black-and-white brodied down a half-paved embankment. Parker saw the roadblock. It was six sawhorses wide. Mex Staties manned it. They wore Mussolini black shirts and jodhpurs. They held tommy guns, pointed straight *out*.

The black-and-white skidded and stopped. Parker and the driver got out. Parker looked across the gulch. Eight jeeps and half-tracks were parked on a matching embankment.

Men. Thirty-odd.

They’ve got tommy guns and rifles. They’ve got slug-loaded shotguns. They're crouched and aiming straight *down*.

Parker grabbed his binoculars. The driver aimed a scope-fitted Mauser. There's the car. It's coming at the roadblock. It's binocular-magnified, *right now*.

The guns exploded. *All* the guns exploded. *All* the guns exploded *down*.

Parker saw it, magnified. He *saw* metal hit metal. He *saw* metal pierce metal. He *saw* window glass blow. He *saw* the tires blow and the car swerve on bare rims.

He *saw* a bullet swarm. It was visibly *black*. He *saw* buckshot—one thick haze.

Parker looked left. His embankment was packed now. Sixty men fired straight *down*. The car fishtailed. The Staties opened up and fired straight at it. The car blew up red.

The Japs piled out and ran. Japs on fire, Japs batting at flames. Black swarms came down on them—bullets, buckshot, slugs. The Japs blew into pieces. He *saw* it, magnified.

They had heads. They had no heads. Their arms and legs disappeared. They vaporized.

Then a pause.

Then echoes and wind.

Then the pause extends.

Then the posse men run *down*.

Parker ran down with them. He stumbled off the embankment and tore for the roadblock. A hundred men converged and just stood there. The Japs were pulp in the dirt.

The Staties walked up. Parker looked at the car. It burned and whooshed black smoke. He noticed debris on the ground. He walked over and looked close.

Wood scraps. A radio tube. Three round metal objects. Pay-telephone slugs.

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LOS ANGELES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1941

Summitry. The Smith-Kwan combine meets the Exley-Patchett boys.

He bagged Lyman's back room. A buffet was laid out. He'd represent the combine. Uncle Ace and Terry Lux would backstop him.

Exley and Patchett would represent themselves. They'd get down to brass tacks and handshakes. A Christmas tea would follow. Beth meets the Red Empress.

He had two lovers. Beth was illicitly bred. She was seventeen. Boston was provincial. She should observe the moral tone of a wartime hot spot.

She met Bette. It was nearly all bad. She remained starstruck nonetheless. Bette's bond gig drained him. His hand still throbbed and shot aches up his arm. He called Bette an hour ago. A coon maid rebuffed him.

He called Terry Lux and got no answer. He wanted Terry here. He was a key backer.

Terry found their cut-Japs play dicey. It was medically improbable and logistically unsound. The eugenics intrigued him. That was as far as it went.

Terry should be here. He said he'd be here. Ace made the arrangements this morning. Terry said he'd call and confirm.

Dudley popped three bennies. Dudley paced the room.

His pins were stacked tight. Mike and Dick were phone-booking Hop Sing boys right now. It sustained the "inside job" charade. The Oceanside snuffs would go unsolved. He just read a Teletype. The posse nailed the Japs outside San Diego. The assumed tile-game killers—*muertos*.

Dudley paced. Dudley chain-smoked. His hand throbbed wicked bad.

Ducks in order. Pins stacked tight. Nine days to New Year's. Let's tie up loose ends.

He talked with Hideo. They discussed Mexico. Hideo said he'd build a frame kit. He'd bring hair and tissue samples and semen slides. He'd bring a range of shell casings.

They'd create a thieves-fall-out scenario. Punks steal Carlos Madrano's cash and "H" and embark on a dope run themselves. Tempers flare. Psychopathy rages. Three deaths result.

Mike had a line on three hopheads. They're Tijuana scum. They boost the stash and hole up. The cash and dope vanish. They shoot barbiturates as a horse substitute. They overdose and die.

He conceived the plan with Hideo. They collaborated on every point. He called Dick Hood and pressed him. Dick agreed to postpone the Ashida family's detention. Dick pledged preferential treatment from that point on.

It was 3:00. The summit was set. Where's Terry Lux?

His hand throbbed. Benzedrine rushed blood to the wound. He poured a double scotch and nursed it. The booze ran the throb to a burn.

Uncle Ace walked in. Preston Exley trailed him. He saw Dudley's bad hand and bumped him. An *abrazo*—that friendly Mex gesture.

"Preston, it's grand to see you. You know Mr. Kwan, of course."

Exley bumped him. "How many free suppers have I bummed off of you, Ace? You've catered half the big events in my life."

Ace said, "Lobster à la Kwan and pork lo mein. That meant 'Inspector Exley is working late.' "

Dudley laughed. A tall man walked in. Pierce Patchett, doubtless. Check his all-black look.

Black suit, black shirt, black tie. *Muy fascista*. The Carlos Madrano look.

Patchett said, "Sergeant Smith, Mr. Kwan. This is some male preserve you've got here."

No handshake. No *abrazo*. Ace sniffed him. Ace Chink-eyed him. What gives with *you*?

Dudley said, "We have momentous plans to discuss, although our partner Terry Lux appears to be missing. I think we—"

Exley squeezed his arm. "We've got a colleague coming, Dud. I think we should wait for him."

Ace Chink-eyed Exley. Patchett built a scotch-rocks. Dudley's hand burned. He felt glass deep in the cuts.

Sammy Rummel walked in. *Some colleague?* Ben Siegel's backup counsel on the Greenie Greenberg snuff.

Rummel dropped his briefcase. Rummel oozed brusque.

Dudley said, "Hello, Sam. It's been too long."

Rummel said, "I'd shake your hand, but left-handed shakes are bad luck."

Ace said, "I know you, Sambo. My friend Lin Chung did your daughter's nose job."

Rummel said, "I know, and not much good came of it. She married a goy cook at Don the Beachcomber's. The food there is dreck, unlike the chow at your slop chute."

Laughs went around. They were forced. Dudley got hackle bumps.

"To briefly summarize, Mr. Kwan, the missing Dr. Lux and I form quite the tidy cartel. We are interested in merging with your tidy cartel, in an effort to expand wartime contingency plans that both factions have conceived independently, but would be well advised to implement as a unified partnership. Mr. Kwan has told you of our plans, and we learned of your plans in a rather roundabout and clandestine way. Forewarned is forearmed, gentlemen. We know about you, and now you've been told about us. We did not create this global conflict, nor have we ordered the mass imprisonment of the local Japanese. That stated, we would be remiss in not capitalizing on it."

Rummel said, "Well said, Dud, if a little flowery for my taste. We've all come up with some bright ideas, although yours are more legally questionable than ours. I say 'ours,' because I'm a full partner with Mr. Patchett and Mr. Exley, as well as their attorney. Your ideas complement and embellish our ideas, and both factions bring savvy, gravitas, and sound notions to the table. There, that's the windup. The short version? If you want in, you've got in. The pitch? You have to bring in seed capital to make this partnership jell. We're taking ground-floor bids as an advance against potential profits, and the entry-floor bid is four hundred grand, cash, all due upon a handshake agreement. I negotiate for my boys, you bring in your own lawyer. Chop, chop, gentlemen. You're not the only girls on our dance card."

Boom. The ball drops. No backslaps, no winks, no hail-fellow farewells.

Exley walked out. Patchett walked out. Rummel herded them out.

Dudley blinked. The door flew open. The shits dispersed in the grill.

Boom. The ball drops. It's that prohibitive floor.

Ace said, "White cocksuckers. Some cocksucker came in with seed gelt and double-fucked us."

Dudley blinked. His hand throbbed. The grill proper buzzed. Beth and Claire stood at the bar. They found each other. Note their sisterly chat.

Ace waltzed. He seethed and walked off. He pulled out his shrunken head and caressed it. *Sayonara*, my Irish brother.

Dudley popped two bennies. His hand throbbed wicked bad. No deal. They got double-fucked. That double-dealing kike, Rummel. They had a preemptive bid.

Dudley teethed on it. He shut his eyes and talked to the wolf of the moors.

Beth and Claire walked in. They bumped him. It killed his hand and made him roar.

He gathered them close. They stood in his arms. Claire kicked the door shut.

Beth said, “I recognized Miss De Haven from your description and just started blabbing. It was so Boston and so shanty Irish of me.”

Dudley smiled. Their blue eyes. Their trim suits. Freckled, both of them.

Claire said, “I’ve been giving your daughter a primer on men and women, and how the war has the phenomenon skewed. I hope I’m not turning her jaded before she reaches the age of consent.”

Beth said, “It’s putting you, Miss De Haven and Miss Davis in perspective.”

Dudley laughed. “Tell me, dear. You’ll be legal next July. Tell me while you’re still possessed of some innocence.”

Beth jiggled his good hand. “All right. The war’s made everything crazy, so men and women are getting crisscrossed and trying to have a good time while their opportunities pan out.”

Claire jiggled his good hand. “She’s your daughter, love. She’s a little moonstruck these days, but she’ll be back in Boston with her sisters and schoolwork soon, and that’s a perspective in itself.” Dudley touched her hair. “Have you seen Terry Lux, dear? He was due here a moment ago.”

Claire said, “He’s been weaning me, and he came to the house today. Lin Chung was with him. You know him, don’t you? He’s a plastic surgeon, and he’s been to my parties.”

Boom. The ball drops. Well, there it is.

Double cross. Go back to Tuesday, 12/9. Lin Chung cuts Jimmy Namura to look Chink. Terry lied to him. Terry called Jap-to-Chink cuts untenable. Race science. The Eugenic Brotherhood. Terry talked to Lin Chung. They got surgeon-to-surgeon tight. The cut jobs might or might not be feasible. Terry and Chung vowed to work around it and formed their own cartel. They were buying into the Exley cartel. Lin Chung was the floor bid. His own ideas convinced Terry to speed the buy-in process up. Beth said, “Dad looks abstracted.”

Claire said, “He’s thinking.”

Dudley touched her hair. He should see that Joan of Arc film again. It was playing in Hollywood.

Claire nuzzled his good hand. “Bette was in the *Herald* today. She always makes sure that her good deeds are publicized. She and her husband are hosting a group of soldiers for a late Christmas dinner. I don’t think she’ll invite you, but you and Beth can join me and a few left-wing friends.”

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LOS ANGELES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1941

Who is the white man in the purple sweater?

Ashida poached the USC Law Library. White students fish-eyed him. He worked with a notepad and textbooks. He worked with notes snatched from Bill Parker's desk.

Parker was down in San Diego. He left Dudley's cubicle and rifled Parker's drawers. Parker said he'd pulled a "grand jury play." Parker tried to nail Preston Exley and Pierce Patchett. He probably prepped before the implied proceeding. He might have left notes.

Parker *did* leave notes. Ashida found them and stole them. Parker might have missed something. That notion prompted his theft.

His assumption was pure hubris. He knew *he* missed something. Someone saw something/did something/said something. It would tell him something that would give him answers.

Who is the white man in the—

He missed something. It was like the missing scabbards at The Watanabe House. The Missing Something Gestalt kicked in this morning. Someone said something/did something/saw something. There's a puzzle piece. He can't quite snap it in.

Parker left notes. Parker noted the legal texts he'd studied and flagged them. Ashida studied the books Parker studied. The print was small. He got eyestrain. White kids skunk-eyed him. Who's this goddamn *Jap*?

Ashida ran through Parker's notes. Parker jotted "No. of questions permitted?" and "Question restraints?" That meant this: he couldn't ask all his questions.

Think from that perspective. What did Parker fail to ask Exley and Patchett?

Ashida studied Parker's notes. Ashida tracked the notes to texts. He worked off the notes and his read of Scotty B.'s snitch sheet. He layered in personal knowledge. He plumbed potential questions and got this:

Did Exley and Patchett have foreknowledge of the Pearl Harbor attack? Did it spawn their house/farm buyout and war-profit schemes?

Parker did not ask that question. Parker should have. Back to the Missing Something Gestalt.

Something was biting him. Someone did something. Someone saw something. *SOMEONE SAID SOMETHING*.

Pop.

Snap.

Click.

Gears mesh. Synapses crackle. *Said something* said it. It's a recent memory.

Thursday, December 11th. About 2:00 a.m., Beverly Hills. He's about to head up to Goleta. He sits in Linny's all-night deli with Kay Lake.

Kay said, "I saw Preston Exley, just yesterday. He was leaving an office four blocks from here."

Pop, snap, click. Now go to *this:*

Linny's was on Beverly Drive. Go to the following Monday. He spoke to Saul Lesnick at Claire De Haven's party. Lesnick said his office was at 416 Bedford. Bedford Drive was four blocks from Beverly Drive. Kay said she began her snitch gig with an office visit. Someone said something—yes. That's *two* someones so far. Now, don't forget this:

Someone Saw Something. Someone Did Something. Someone Wrote Something. Wait—there's a *pop, snap, click*.

Ashida went through Parker's notes. Yes—there it is.

Someone Wrote Something. *Parker* Wrote Something. Parker wrote this:

Business addresses. Exley: 6402 Wilshire Boulevard. Patchett: 416 Bedford Drive, Beverly Hills.

Click.

Click.

Click.

Ashida packed up and walked out. White kids eyeballed him. *Hey, Jap—where's your Jap Zero?*

It was 4:53. Storm clouds brewed low and brought dusk early. Ashida got his car and drove to Beverly Hills.

He pulled onto Bedford. He found a curbside slot and got out his tools. 416 was a white mock château.

Three floors. Innocuous. They'll lock the building at 6:00.

Ashida walked over. Early dusk covered him. He felt *un-Jap* invisible. He entered the lobby. He checked the directory.

Saul Lesnick—suite 216. Pierce Patchett—suite 217. *Pop, snap, click*. Confluence and convergence.

He walked up to the second floor and ducked into the men's room. He locked himself in a stall and perched on the toilet. He willed himself to sit tight.

He sat in a crouch. He heard doors slam. He heard footsteps in the men's room. He heard water run and urinals flush.

His legs held.

Someone stepped into the men's room. That someone killed the lights.

It was 6:11 p.m. More doors slammed. No doors slammed. It went quiet and thick dark.

6:21, 6:37, 6:49 p.m., 6:53, 6:58, 7:00.

Do it now.

Ashida stepped off the toilet. He stomped blood back in his legs. He got out his penlight and threw out a beam. Patchett, first. He's the Unknown Someone.

He breezed out of the men's room and walked down the hall. It was deep dark. The carpet hushed his footsteps.

There's 217. It's got a spring-keyhole door lock.

He jiggled a no. 4 pick and breezed in. He bit down on the penlight. He swiveled his head and aimed the beam. He locked himself into the waiting room. He put light on this:

A reception desk, two chairs, one couch. A wall print depicting Mount Fuji. Heedless Patchett. We're at war now. Mount Fuji is Japanese.

Phone records. Rolodex or address book. Financial books. Toss for those things.

The inner-office door stood ajar. Ashida walked in and penlight-strafed. Wall prints depicted geisha girls and snow monkeys. Heedless Patchett, redux.

Heedless Patchett had a large desk. A standing cabinet flanked it. The desk drawers were half-open. The cabinet door was unlocked and cracked a half inch.

Ashida walked back to the waiting room. He sat in the receptionist's chair and rifled the desk.

Nothing was locked. It felt unkosher. The office felt like a front. Pierce Patchett was a crooked "Entrepreneur." Pierce Patchett oozed incompetence.

Ashida beamed the top drawer. He saw pencils, pens, carbon sheets, paper clips, postage stamps, erasers. He shut the top drawer and beamed the middle drawer. He saw the August to December phone bills.

PC Bell envelopes. Note the postmarks. PC Bell sent out partial bills for December. He got *his* bill this morning. It covered his calls up to 12/21. It was a holiday-rush strategy.

He went through the envelopes. August, September, October, November, December. The bills tagged calls from 8/1 to now. He folded out the call lists. He arranged them by month. He started in August and scanned up to now.

He looked for familiar names first.

He saw innocuous names. He saw florists, haberdashers, drugstores and radio-supply stores. He got to the familiar names quick.

Familiar names. Confirming names. But to what end?

Patchett called *Preston Exley*. He called his home and office many times. The calls went back to 8/3/41.

Patchett called *Dr. Saul Lesnick*. He called his home many times. The calls went back to 8/4/41.

Patchett called *Dr. Terry Lux*. He called his home and dry-out farm many times. The calls went back three months only. They began 9/9/41.

Ashida read the bills. He went line by line. He held back the partial December bill and saved it for last. August, September, October, November. Innocuous calls. Calls to *Exley, Lesnick, Lux*. One number kept popping up. It was incongruous. No surnames or business names were logged beside it.

*GL*adstone-4782.

Think now.

It's familiar.

Think now.

Spark that brainstorm. Fuse that lightbulb.

Pop.

Snap.

Click.

Tick, tick, tick. That's no clock. That's your *craaaaaaazy* heartbeat.

*GL*adstone-4782.

There, there, yes—that's it.

The number denoted a pay phone. The booth was on Lincoln Boulevard. It was in Santa Monica. It was near Boeing, Lockheed and Douglas. The Watanabes called that pay phone. Jim Larkin lived near that pay phone. Jim Larkin might have/probably used it. Bill Parker requested records for that pay phone, plus two others. PC Bell was currently backlogged.

Ashida trembled. Sweat rolled into his eyes. His teeth chattered. The penlight dropped.

He picked it up. He wiped his face. He tore into the December bill. Where's *GL*-4782?

It's right there. There's nine calls—December 1, 2, 3. There's six calls December 4 and 5. There's no calls from 12/5 on.

We're up to *12/6/41. The Watanabes are murdered that day*.

Ashida scanned the bill. *Patchett's* calls to *Exley* decrease. *Patchett's* calls to *Lesnick* increase and stop at 12/6/41. *Patchett's* calls to *Lux* run sporadic. They stop at 12/19/41.

Then, we have *this:*

Patchett calls *Lux sixteen times*—December 19, 20, 21.

Confluence, convergence, coincidence. *Craaaaazy* chronology. No proof of anything.

Here's more convergence. It's December 19, 20, 21. Patchett calls Lin Chung, M.D.

Dr. Chung is a plastic surgeon. He met Dr. Chung at Claire De Haven's party. Dr. Chung sparred with Saul Lesnick. The argument pertained to eugenics.

Eugenics. Plastic surgery. Scotty's graph summary. Dudley's plan to cut Japanese to look Chinese. Lin Chung's botched cut on Jimmy Namura. Lin Chung, entrepreneur. A thriving shrunken-head merchant.

Convergence. Confounding, in its—

Ashida caught his breath.

He put the bills back in the envelopes. He put the envelopes back in the drawer. He rifled the other drawers. He saw more desk clutter. He walked to the inner office. He rifled the desk drawers there.

Fancy fountain pens. Stationery. Pornographic playing cards. A box of Sheik prophylactics. A letter opener with embossed swastikas.

A pervert trove. Some new *eeeeeeverything* confirmed. No hard evidence.

Ashida shut the drawers and faced the standing cabinet. The door was cracked. He popped it wide and beamed in.

Heedless Patchett—just like that.

A shortwave radio. A leather-bound ledger. It matched the Watanabes' ledger—*just like that.*

Ashida trembled. The penlight beam swerved. He hit the radio dials and tried to raise a signal. No sound issued. No bands lit up.

He followed the cord to a wall hitch. The radio was plugged in, the radio was dead.

He saw a clipped paper sheaf. It was just-like-that there on a shelf.

He grabbed it and skimmed it. It was a geologist's report.

It detailed soil components. It charted the East Valley, South Pasadena, Glassell Park and Highland Park. It confirmed the land grab. It echoed Parker's grand jury play.

Ashida put the pages back. Ashida picked up the ledger and leafed through it. All the pages were blank.

A folded sheet dropped out. He unfolded it and beamed his penlight. It was a mad child's map.

The West Coast, pencil-sketched. Sharks and submarines along the wave line. The sharks scream "Kill the Jews!" The speech balloons are twice their size.

Swastikas dot the waters. They're haphazardly scrawled. There's X marks along the coast. Submarines prowl. Note their rising suns.

The drawing is one-dimensional/stick-figure quality. Heedless Patchett. *Craaaazy* Patchett now.

There's inland L.A. County. There's jotted numbers and X marks. There's small subs up and down the coast. There's a giant shark swimming in Mexican waters.

He's screaming "Kill the Jews!" A submarine patrols beside him. The hull is scrawled with rising suns and dollar signs. It's headed for the Colonet Inlet.

Ashida caught something. Ashida went *Not so fast.*

Yes, it's madness. But I see something. It signifies design.

The numbers. They're megahertz and kilohertz listings. The X marks denote real locations. The small subs note coastal inlets.

That's the properly sketched and proportioned L.A. County. Now, look at *this:*

Northeast L.A. was mapped in detail. An X mark notes the Watanabe house. Santa Monica and Malibu are mapped in detail. There's an X mark near the Terry Lux nut farm.

There's an X mark by the Lincoln Boulevard pay phones. The little sub above Santa Barbara? It denotes the Goleta attack.

Ashida popped sweat. It dripped on the map. He wiped his eyes and pressed the map against the wall.

He beamed down for a close-up. He scanned north/south and east/west. He saw that sub drawn by the Colonet Inlet. The papers predicted Baja sub raids. *Confluence*. Call-Me-Jack told Dudley to scout the area. Dudley said he'd laughed. The scout run buttressed their "Mexican mission."

Here—double X mark. *Here*—the San Gabriel hills. *Here*—a possible *convergence*. The escapees hid *here*—and then broke for *Mexico*.

Ashida wiped his hands on his pant legs. He refolded the map. He tucked it back in the ledger and scanned the room.

He rechecked the room. He triple-checked the room. He walked into the waiting room and triple-checked it.

Intact? Yes.

He cracked the hallway door and looked out. *Safe? Yes*. All dark at 8:14.

He stepped out of Mad Patchett's office. He hugged the hallway wall. He toed the door shut and got out his no. 4 pick.

He wheeled and faced Doc Lesnick's door. He put light on the knob. Butterfingers—he dropped the pick.

He retrieved it. Butterfingers—he dropped it again. He retrieved it. He bit down on the penlight and cracked a tooth. He held the pick two-handed and stabbed the keyhole.

Eight stabs hit the slot. He wiped his hands and slid the tumblers. *Twelve* swipes popped the door.

Vertigo.

He stepped inside and shut the door. He caught some equilibrium. He swiveled his head and light-swept the room. *This* office looked professional. *This* office was well furnished. *This* office *did not* look like a pimp-fascist's front.

A sofa. A magazine rack. Bookshelves and filing cabinets. The receptionist's desk. The inner-office door—reinforced-steel locks.

He jiggled the cabinet doors. They were all locked. He jiggled the desk drawers. They were all locked. He checked the inner-office door. It was keyhole-locked tight.

Doc Lesnick was careful. His locks were pickproof. This office was tossproof.

Ashida sat on the couch. He caught his breath. He penlight-strafed the room. The shelf books were all Marx and Freud.

He saw four books on the desk. He got up and scanned the spines.

Medical books. *Nazi* medical books. Eugenics texts. He knew some German. He skimmed the books and got the gist.

Nazi surgical guides. Race science. "Reconstructive surgery." Cut Slavs to look Aryan.

A note, tucked below the books.

"Lynn—I know it's rather ghastly, but would you pls. messenger these to Dr. Chung? It's about a dialogue we've been having."

Pop.

Snap.

Click.

Ashida walked out of the office. He shut off his penlight and moved downstairs in the dark. The street door had a quaint snap-in-place lock. He walked out and click-snapped it shut.

It was 9:08. He walked to his car. The cool air burned his lungs and froze his sweat.

He drove through Beverly Hills and out Coldwater Canyon. He hit the Valley. He doubled back to Malibu. He had the map memorized. The X marks were surely shortwave-radio spots.

He had the perspectives memorized. He could calibrate the X's to near-exact spots.

He drove out to the coast road. He calibrated. Yes—Pacific Sanitarium is a shortwave-radio spot.

Convergence. Terry Lux and Pierce Patchett are shortwave-radio chums.

The coast road ran straight to Santa Monica. He should avoid it. Army spotters clogged the beachfront. He was an out-at-night Jap.

He doubled back inland and hit Lincoln Boulevard. He drove by the three pay phones. Yes—the booths matched X-marked shortwave-radio spots.

Someone close by had a shortwave radio. He was Pierce Patchett's radio chum.

Ashida U-turned and drove east. He made good time. He caught the Arroyo Seco above Chinatown. He drove two miles north. He hit the Watanabe house.

It matched the broadcast map. The certainty and fatality amazed him. *The Watanabes were Pierce Patchett's shortwave-radio chums*.

One X-marked spot remained. It was double-X-marked. It would confirm or refute his approximations.

He drove to a pay phone first. He checked the central directory. He found a home/office address for Lin Chung, M.D. The doctor lived at 282 Ord. It was four blocks from Kwan's Chinese Pagoda.

Ashida hooked back to the parkway. He got off and cut east through San Marino. The double X mark clocked the Monrovia hills. Thad Brown should still be there. The campsite was one big search scene.

He caught an access road to the foothills. He climbed straight up in low gear. He saw light way ahead. It had to be cop arc-light glow.

The glow went bright bright. He swooped over a hill and saw the campsite. There's Thad. There's cops bagging evidence.

Ashida parked and got out. Thad saw him and waved. Ashida waved back. Two cops boxed a busted-up radio.

Pierce Patchett was tied to the escaped Japanese. They were all shortwave-radio pals.

A hubbub drifted over. The posse got the Japs at Blood Alley! They were crashing out to Mexico!

Yes, they were. Here's why. They had a hot date with a submarine. Call it a saboteur's landing. See that X mark on that Nazi child's map? It denotes a cove in Baja, Mexico.

Thad doffed his hat and waved. Ashida waved back. Thad looked happy.

The posse got the Japs. It cleared the Kwan's job. The Werewolf cleared the Watanabe caper.

It was pushing midnight. Ashida drove to Chinatown. He cruised by Kwan's. The parking lot was cop-free. The search ropes were down. The death sled was gone.

Case cleared. The posse got the Japs at Blood Alley.

Ashida drove to 282 Ord. The front windows glowed. Lin Chung was a night owl. Ashida parked and ran a sit-tight stakeout.

Lin Chung lived medicine. His front room was wallpapered with anatomy charts. Maxillofacial charts. Occipital charts. Skin-flaps-pulled-all-the-way-back charts.

Ashida stared at the windows. Inside lights beamed. Lin Chung and Saul Lesnick appeared.

It did not surprise him. Nothing surprised him. The war is sixteen days old. The world is dark and flat. Cars are submarines.

Lin Chung and Saul Lesnick walked chart to chart. They argued and stabbed pointers. Lesnick paced the room. Ashida clocked his small feet. It did not surprise him. Nothing surprised him.

They strutted and argued all night. They pounded the charts and smoked ten million cigarettes. Ashida watched them. Contentious pals. The shrunken-head-peddling Chinaman and left-wing Jew.

Land grabs, plastic surgery, blood libel. Rogue cops, sub attacks, a lynch-mob massacre. Pay phones. A white man in a purple sweater. Secret radios and feigned seppuku. The haughty Left and the bellicose Right. A grand alliance of war profiteers.

He'll tell it all to Dudley Smith or to William H. Parker. He'll tell no one if it suits his needs. He has uncovered the real Fifth Column. It is not what anyone thinks.

December 24, 1941

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1941

I was bored. I "possessed stunning artistry, but no character or conviction." I was tired of looking at my new face. My leftist friends refused to talk to me. Hideo Ashida wasn't answering his telephone. There were no men I could sleep with out of early-wartime ennui. Elmer and Brenda were out in the vapors of police work and prostitution. Lee was back from "Blood Alley" and was working the overflow of Japanese prisoners at the Lincoln Heights jail. The first showing of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* was scheduled for 11:00 a.m. I kept hearing Claire's words and kept thinking of Dudley Smith. I kept hearing my own words: *do everything or do nothing*. I smoked and paced the house. I was coming out of my skin.

The house itself drove me crazy. Its perfection affirmed my shallow concerns. I thought of Scotty and reread his letter. I read the paper, three times. Wake Island fell to the Japs. The escaped Japs were mowed down in San Diego County. A Filipino man heard a song called "Johnny the Jap Killer" on the radio and took it as a sign from God. He promptly left his house, found a Japanese man and stabbed him to death. The man was really Chinese.

I was bored. Boredom is a common state for shallow folks like me. We become vexed and capitulate to antic notions. I looked up "Bleichert, Dwight W." in the central directory and called the number just to hear Bucky's voice. His "Hello?" was slightly harried and mid-range baritone. I hung up the phone, giggling. I felt ridiculous.

Christmas Eve was tonight. I had no plans and had received no invitations. There was no Christmas tree surrounded by wrapped gifts at the Blanchard-Lake home. My only plan was to spin the late Beethoven quartets and conjure the winter-locked prairie.

I went driving. I looked out at everything and engaged the act of memorization. I glimpsed odd people. Yes, I will remember him. Yes, I'll remember her. You don't know me and don't know that I have anointed you. I will feel less alone as I recall your face twenty years from now.

I drove east to Belmont High; I envisioned Bucky and Hideo on the playing field and Jack Webb scrounging votes for class president. A wino weaved by me on the sidewalk. I got out of the car and handed him five dollars. He did a gleeful dance step and embarrassed me. I got back in the car and drove to Hollywood.

The theater was just opening up; I bought my ticket and settled into a balcony seat. I saw a few people sitting below me: vagabond artistes with no place to go the day before Christmas.

The movie began. I slouched into my seat and slipped off my shoes. The film stock was grainy and flecked; the music ran out of line with the images. I watched Renée Falconetti as Joan of Arc and saw her concurrently as Claire Katherine De Haven. Claire as Joan spoke to me and castigated me for my inaction. I felt her fury. Devout Joan, plaintive Joan, Joan roused to quixotic rage. My options were do everything or do nothing. My stunning artistry trumped my weak character and lack of conviction.

I ran out of the theater. I dashed through the lobby, half-blind with tears. A tall man in a tweed suit brushed by me. I got a momentary sense that it was Dudley Smith, but discarded that delirious notion. It was raining. The weather gave me the option to run somewhere and hide in plain sight. I got my car and drove to Little Tokyo. It was just the right distance away. There was time to concentrate on the wet streets and compose myself.

The Friendly Moon Teahouse provided a destination. It was a venerable J-town spot, and had become a cop's hangout during the first two weeks of the roundups. That was arbitrary and grossly unfair—but the owner and all of his people had been spared incarceration. Why? The rice cakes were legendary, and the owner let the cops bring in jugs.

Little Tokyo was preholiday still; Lee told me that the Feds were on hiatus until the big roundup commenced after New Year's. The PD's Alien Squad had been yanked and put on hold for 1/2/42 sweeps.

February '42 loomed as brutal. The "mass evacuation" and transport to the camps, the FBI's phone-tap probe on the PD. This storm. All the people I knew would be tossed through it.

I parked at the curb and ducked rain into the café; I hung my coat on the rack by the door and heard someone say "Miss Lake." I turned and saw Ward Littell, sitting at a window table. He had a pot of tea and a plate of rice cakes in front of him; he motioned toward an empty chair.

I walked over and sat down. Littell said, "I'm taking a break from

Mariko Ashida."

I said, "I know she's difficult. Hideo's told me stories."

Littell poured me tea. "I'm an orphanage boy. I take family where I can get it."

"I've forgotten what my own family looks like."

"They probably look like you, before that new nose of yours."

I laughed and lit a cigarette. "You were very considerate to Claire and me at the booking. This is a good opportunity for me to thank you, so I will."

Littell said, "You and Dot Rothstein are the talk of the L.A. Office, along with Dudley Smith, Bill Parker and whatever sort of devil's deal they cut to get you and the others released."

He was fishing for gossip. I sidestepped him with a query.

"You'll be out of your cushy assignment soon. The Ashidas will be detained, and I'm wondering how that will sit with you."

"Not so soon for the Ashidas, I'm happy to say. Dudley Smith pulled strings and got them yanked from the arrest-and-detain list. They'll be escorted to a private train compartment at the last second."

I smiled. "Hideo's *valuable*. Powerful men are indebted to him." Littell smiled. A decorous silence passed. I thought of Dudley Smith, ubiquitous. I pictured papal conclaves, 1514. It's the time of the Augsburg Confession. Luther is poised at Wittenberg and must be dealt with. The Dudster is dispatched on horseback. Agreements are sealed and heads secretly roll.

"What do you *know* about Dudley Smith, Mr. Littell?"

"Everything and nothing. He rigs evidence routinely, or only as a desperate last measure. He does favors for people. He kills people or doesn't kill people. The Watanabe case is either fishy or kosher, depending on who you talk to. It doesn't matter either way, because the grand jury just handed down a true bill."

I crushed my cigarette. "And that's all you know?"

Littell smiled and twirled his teacup. "There's the rumor that he's sleeping with Bette Davis. Which I choose not to believe, because I've always enjoyed Miss Davis' work."

I laughed. A woman at the counter called out. "Your office, Mr. Littell."

Littell got up and took the call; I sipped tea and ate the two remaining rice cakes. Littell came back, holding his raincoat and hat.

He said, "I should be going. I'm due in court."

I stood up and offered my hand. "Merry Christmas, Mr. Littell. And thank you. You were gracious beyond the occasion."

"Take care of yourself, Miss Lake. And try to be careful."

I smiled. Littell put on his coat and hat and walked into the rain. I sat at the table and watched the clouds break. I thought of Scotty and

Christmas dinner at boot camp. I squeezed my Saint Chris medal.

The sun appeared. I walked outside and dawdled in front of the store next door. It was more than a curio shop and less than a gallery. Beautiful tapestries were displayed in the window, along with a shelf of painted Kabuki masks.

The faces were artfully rendered, paint on sculpted wood. The features were indistinguishable—except one.

I caught the resemblance immediately. It was a martyr's mask. It commemorated a ravaged lost soul. The mask derived from theatrical tradition. It purportedly summoned just vengeance and eased the ravaged-soul bearer to rest.

The painted features depicted Goro Shigeta. He was shot and killed in a phone booth, about ten days ago. I'd seen his picture in the papers. The case remained unsolved.

I walked in and bought the mask. It cost thirty-two dollars. The cash-register girl disapproved of the purchase. It was quite plain to me.

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LOS ANGELES | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1941

The line ran down to the sidewalk. The recruiters wore Santa Claus hats. Seventeen days since Pearl Harbor. A still-brisk enlistment trade.

The desks were stationed inside now. Regional offices smoothed out the Fed Building flow. The line crawled. Parker was two hours in.

He wore civilian clothes. He brought his birth certificate. He was playing a long shot. The war spawned paperwork chaos. Call-Me-Jack's enlistment holds might have been misplaced.

The line inched up. He still smelled Blood Alley. Wake Island couldn't be any worse.

A women's line flanked the men's line. It was one-tenth as long. He had a sideways view.

Kay Lake stood three from the end. She couldn't see him.

He was running. She was running. War enticed runners. A Filipino man stabbed a Chinese man last night. He had an alibi: "I thought he was a Jap."

Parker hit the desk. He flashed his badge and birth certificate. The recruiter checked his *P*-flagged papers.

He looked up at Parker. He shook his head.

"I'm sorry, sir. A hold's been filed on you. You've been declared 'civilian-essential.' "

Parker stepped out of line. He looked at the women's desk. Miss Lake stood there.

A recruiter said something. It was an easy read. The man said, "No, ma'am."

Katherine, the foolish huntress. Our purpose here eludes me.

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LOS ANGELES | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1941

Dudley cut through Mandeville Canyon. His hand throbbed and sent bolts up his arm. He wore the gray tweed with a Christmas boutonniere.

Bette through tonight. Mexico tomorrow. Rob and kill. Return for Christmas supper. Claire was serving braised goose.

Bette called impromptu and invited him over. She caught him leaving for the Joan of Arc film. He thought he saw Kay Lake in the lobby. It was eerie.

The movie was eerie. It was a crib sheet on Claire. He gleaned insight on her martyrdom. He vowed to teach her spontaneous joy.

Dudley drove one-handed. He chain-smoked to stifle the pain. His lads were meeting him outside Chez Bette, tomorrow. His trunk was ordnance-packed.

He pulled into the driveway and primped one-handed. Necktie, collar, starched cuffs pulled taut. He brought a white rose bouquet. I surrender, dear.

He ran across the lawn and rang the bell. The bolts hit his arm and his neck.

Bette opened the door. She wore riding breeches and boots. Dudley embraced her. She pulled back. One knee blocked the doorway.

His hand throbbed. She snatched the bouquet and threw it on the floor.

“We have to end this, Dudley. It’s gotten away from us. I know it’s Christmas, but—”

Bolts.

His hand throbbed, his arm throbbed, his knees throbbed the worst. He pitched forward. The sky fell. He saw Jesus Christ and Bette Davis, upside down.

Upside down, right-side up. A bouncing Airedale and Ruth Mildred. A needle in his arm.

That warm-blanket rush. It wasn't opium and Kwan's basement. He was on the bed he fucked Bette on before she went cruel.

Ireland. That convent nun. Put your mouth here, boy. Another needle jab. A rocket-ship ride through the Bible. The Airedale lays down with the lion and the lamb.

A black box. A confessional. Monsignor Joe Hayes and cascades of his sin.

The rocket ship, in orbit. Ruth Mildred, with a stethoscope. Bette says, "The goddamn *inconvenience*." Ruth Mildred says, "His fever's down. He's one tough mick."

Bette. Quite the fashion show. *S*uccubus/equestrienne/nun. She whips him with a riding crop. Dominatrix, equestrienne.

Don't hit me.

Don't hit me.

A needle stab. Hush, now. You've sweated through the sheets. Ace and the tunnels. Race science and the bidding floor. Bette says, *"Kill a Jap for me."*

Goro Shigeta's face blows up. Bette's holding a knife now. She's on leave from heaven or standing by the bed.

Ruth Mildred, with sponges. Bette, with her riding crop. "The goddamn *inconvenience*. I'd *invited* people. It's Christmas Eve."

I'm sorry.

Don't hit me.

I'm sorry.

Don't hit me.

Ruth Mildred says, "Hush, Dud. This ain't confession. Don't give up the world."

"Goddamn him, Ruthie. I had *plans*. The fucking *inconvenience."*

Don't hit me. Don't hit me. Put your mouth here, son.

The rocket ship parked in the black box. The Airedale jumped on the bed. They discussed police work and cat hunting. The dog said he bit Bette's husband. It feels good to bite humans. You should try it.

The black box compressed. Joe Hayes said, *"Te absolvo."* Claire said, "*It's not her, it's me."*

Bells rang. The rocket ship vanished. The black box dissolved to daylight.

The Airedale slept beside him. Bette pinned a note to the headboard.

"I went to a friend's. It's over. You inconvenienced me."

Ruth Mildred slept in two chairs pulled together. A bag and feeder tube were stuck to his arm. He pulled the needle out.

He was naked. His hand was freshly bandaged. The pain was gone.

Church bells. Christmas Day. *Dudley Liam Smith—you took a spill.*

He kissed the Airedale. He got up and stayed up. He was lightheaded. He was hungry. He was swervy. He used chair backs as handholds and walked to the window. He looked out and down.

There's Mike and Dick. There's Hideo. They're standing by his car. They're Christmas fresh-scrubbed.

Ruth Mildred snored. She clutched a vial of anti-bug pills. He pried it loose and popped three. Ruthie snored on.

Dudley walked to the bathroom. He shaved and showered. He combed his hair and toweled off. He looked around the bedroom.

They'd laundered his clothes. His holster was hooked on a chair. He got dressed and felt his body cleave in strong.

He sent up a prayer for the Airedale. He snatched the pills and kissed Ruthie. The grand beast and lezzie snored on.

He walked downstairs and outside. The boys greeted him. Dick Carlisle was misty-eyed. Young Hideo lugged a briefcase. Mike Breuning was sprinkled with doughnut crumbs.

"Miss Davis fed us. She said you might be out for a while."

Dudley said, "She's good to common folk. They make her feel authentic. She covets their approval in small doses."

Carlisle got the back door. Dudley yawned and tossed Breuning the keys. Ashida got in the back. Dudley sat beside him.

Ashida said, "I've got a lead on that rogue sub in Baja. I think I know where it might be mooring. I'll explain later on."

Dudley winked. Hideo blushed. Breuning pulled out. Dudley yawned and shut his eyes.

He held his bad hand on his lap. He counted Claire's freckles and gave up at eighty. He walked through their rob-and-kill, Christmas '41.

The border crossings were cake. The Staties ran light Christmas shifts. Captain Carlos wouldn't know they were there.

He visited the clinic. Tojo Tom snitched the cache convincingly. They'd kill the guards at their mid-shift. It gave them six hours to snuff the patsies and plant the evidence. They couldn't clip them before they clipped the guards. They had to plant some bootjacked heroin at the death scene.

He was Spanish-fluent. He'd stiff a snitch call to the Statie HQ. *Hola, hombres*—big ruckus on Calle Calderón. The Staties would discover dead men and *some* stolen "H." It would coincide with the dead guards found at their end of shift.

An alarm would sound *muy explosivo*. Where's the *dinero*? Where's the rest of the "H"? The Staties would surmise a dope catastrophe or an obfuscated heist. They would not surmise American cops on a sub-spotting hunt.

Dudley shut his eyes. Dudley dozed. Dudley opened his eyes in T.J.

Feliz Navidad. Próspero año y felicidad.

Child beggars. Baby rodent swarms. They hawked religious medals and mugged for chump change. Rancid niteclubs. The Blue Fox, El Perro Blanco, El Gato Rojo.

Donkey-show fronts. Mex Statie–run. The proprietors Mickey Finn'd white swells and robbed them. Car-upholstery shops. Artisans fashioned seat covers and stuffed them with horseshit. Chancre-sored whores. On-leave sailors. He-shes in bullfighter garb.

Avenida Revolución. Street cops peddling nativity scenes. Prison inmates built them. They were made from matchbooks and ice-cream-bar sticks.

Dudley lit a cigarette and popped three anti-bug pills. Carlisle turned around. *¿Qué pasa, jefe?*

Dudley said, "Go right at the corner. Calle Calderón. Slow down by 229. Our patsies live there."

Carlisle looked at Ashida. *¿Es kosher, jefe?* Breuning shushed him. *Jefe* knows his shit.

They made the turn. Breuning slowed down. There's the address. It's a tin-roof shack up on crushed-beer-can stilts.

"We'll find them inside. Their PD file portrayed them as shut-ins. They make do with injected sedatives if there's no white horse to be had. I'm sure we'll find them in and conveniently docile."

Breuning said, "We weren't flagged at the border. Nobody knows we're here."

Carlisle said, "Call-Me-Jack knows. We're on that crazy sub hunt, remember? Jack's tight with Captain Carlos. He'll tell him, 'What a coincidence. The Dudster was down in Baja when your shit hit the fan.' "

Dudley shook his head. "Carlos won't tell Jack. He doesn't know that Carlos pushes white horse. Carlos won't reveal the thefts to him."

Breuning shook his head. "The forensic part of this worries me. The Staties send their evidence to a lab in Juárez. They've got all this up-to-date gear."

"Yes, lad. And we've got Dr. Hideo Ashida, which more than compensates."

There—Hideo swoons.

Breuning said, "I wish we'd prescouted this deal. Yeah, I did a good file scout on them, but it was a Statie loaner file, and who knows how up-to-date it was?"

Carlisle said, "They're hopheads. They never do anything but shoot hop and die. You didn't *requisition* the file, so nobody can trace you to it. Don't go fucking cuntish on Christmas Day."

Breuning flipped Carlisle off. They cut through T.J. They hit the coast road. Note the *baaaaaad* sub fear.

Mex Statie spotters. Sandbags and searchlights. Shoreline L.A., replicated. Blackshirts on beach patrol.

Dudley got out his map. He drew it from Tojo Tom's description. Tojo Tom ran him through it three times.

Pass Ensenada. Go inland at San Vicente. Go four miles. Take the bisecting road right. There's scrub brush for cover. Go one mile. There's an open cave.

There'll be three Staties. They work in twelve-hour shifts. There's two safes. One holds the *dinero*, one holds the "H."

The Staties know the combinations. They're *hombres muy feos*. They might not talk.

If so, kill them. If so, know this:

Carlos has four vials of nitro stashed. Pace off twelve yards, right. It's in a lead-lined strongbox, under a bush.

Dudley studied the map. Ashida hugged his briefcase. The boy was staunch in the manner of repressed Nipponese. He'd acquit himself bravely.

They passed Ensenada. Tile roofs and tin roofs. Abandoned-car settlements. Seaside docks and land-side *casitas*.

He saw it. Flanking movements and shotguns. Aim for their legs. They slip into shock and forfeit the combinations.

The sign. SAN VICENTE: 10 KI.

Breuning turned inland. Dudley brain-clocked the four miles. He flexed his good hand. He could shoot left-handed. Precise aim didn't count. The pellets dispersed.

Breuning turned right. He dropped into low gear. The throttle noise decreased.

They crawled. Breuning eyed the odometer. The dashboard numbers clicked. Breuning braked and stopped at .8.

Scrub mounds flanked the roadway. The road ran downhill and dipped left. The cave should be just beyond.

Dudley said, "Please wait here, Hideo."

Ashida nodded. Breuning and Carlisle got out and opened the trunk. Dudley joined them. A breeze blew their way. Loose scrub scraped the road.

It was too quiet. Something was *wrong*. They all caught it. Field hounds—both his lads.

Dudley said, "There should be voices. They can't all be sleeping."

Breuning said, "You can't get Mex cops to shut up."

Carlisle said, "Especially if they're bored and just standing around."

Dudley passed him the binoculars. Carlisle climbed on the hood of the car and looked downward left. Breuning got out the shotguns.

Carlisle climbed down. “No Staties. You’ve got the mouth of the cave and the two safes, right there. There’s nobody around. I couldn’t quite tell, but it looks like the safe doors are half-open.”

Dudley pointed into the scrub. We come in diagonal. We draw blind fire or no fire.

They waded in. Dudley took the lead. The scrub dragged against them. They held their shotguns at port arms.

Dudley saw the cave and the safes. He saw footprints leading away. He triggered a round in the air.

It was loud. It drew no response. He counted ten seconds of *nada*.

He ran down. Breuning and Carlisle ran behind him. They pushed out of the scrub and into the cave.

The safe doors *were* half-open. There was *nothing* inside.

Dudley stepped outside and scanned all four directions. They were ambush-prone and wide open.

Breuning said, “Huey.”

Carlisle said, “The Nazi fuck snitched us.”

Dudley said, “I don’t think so. I think he might have let Tojo Tom make a phone call, which would account for the cleaned-out safes.”

Breuning said, “Then how come we’re not dead? We’re sitting ducks here.”

Dudley said, “I’m too valuable to Carlos, lad. He wouldn’t kill me. He’d call me in L.A. and politely tell me to call it off.”

Breuning said, “Well, there’s always Christmas in L.A.”

Carlisle said, “And there’s the nitro. My kid and I could sure have fun with that.”

Dudley walked to the bush. It was exactly twelve paces. He saw the strongbox and grabbed it. It was lead-lined and a foot square. It was a tough one-hand scoop.

Breuning walked over and grabbed it. Carlisle jammed up. They lugged the box back to the car.

Ashida held the same pose. He hugged his briefcase and stared straight ahead.

They locked the shotguns and nitro in the trunk. Dudley got in the backseat. Ashida went *So?*

Dudley said, “The Staties were tipped. We’ll need to determine if we were informed upon. We got a box full of nitroglycerin for our troubles.”

Ashida said, “We should detonate it before we go back to L.A. It travels poorly. We shouldn’t take the risk of a sudden explosion.”

Dudley winked. Ashida blushed. Breuning and Carlisle piled in. They cut back to the coast road and hauled north.

Sub spotters lined the bluffs. They manned movie spotlights and scanned with binoculars. Breuning drove *rápidamente*. Dudley saw a cantina up ahead.

No name, tin roof, mismatched chairs out front. He tapped Breuning and pointed over. Breuning pulled up.

Dudley got out and walked in. It was a drunk tank. *Borrachos* slugged mescal from the bottle and fought over floating worms. The place connoted visions and night sweats.

Dudley braced the gent in the apron. He appeared lucid and in charge.

"Un teléfono y una oficina privada para llamar a Estados Unidos, por favor, señor. Pagaré sesenta dólares norteamericanos por este privilegio."

The man pointed to a door. Dudley greased him and ambled over. The office was ten by ten. The walls were lined with mescal jugs. Two hundred worms swirled in toxic sludge.

A desk, a chair, a telephone. When in Rome—

Dudley grabbed the phone and roused an operator. His brogue Spanish delighted her. He uncapped a jug and swirled brew. The worm floated up. He bit it in two and ate the top half.

"Los Ángeles, AX-catedral-2921, por favor. Y llamo a cobro revertido. Su nombre es Hubert Cressmeyer. Mi nombre es Dudley Smith."

The operator *sí, sí*'d him. The call crackled and went through. A nurse came on the line. Dudley did the collect-call shtick bilingual. The operator signed off.

The nurse seemed flustered. Dudley slugged mescal and nibbled the worm. *Get Huey now, darling. His Uncle Dud requires him.*

The nurse flustered off. The crackled line held. Dudley swigged mescal and noshed the worm whole. He felt volcano heat. The shit ran 180 proof.

Huey came on the line. He whined and whimpered. Dudley cut him off.

"You fucked up, lad. You let Tojo Tom call Mexico."

Huey simpered and whimpered. Huey stuttered and stammered. Huey was shit-your-pants scared.

"He didn't make no phone calls, Uncle Dud. This dorm lezzie snuck in and cut him loose this morning."

Dudley put the phone down. Huey long-distance boo-hoo'd.

They'll wait at the border. They'll put roadblocks up. You should have been warned off and escorted off by—

Blackshirts kicked the door in. They wore jackboots. They had little Hitler toothbrush—

His hand throbbed. It woke him up. Steel ratchets cut into his wrists.

He was cuffed to a chair. The chair was floor-bolted. He made the room.

It was twelve by twelve. It was outré by all sweat-room standards. One table, two chairs. Wall outlets for ball-clamp electrodes. A cutlery rack. Bloodsucking scorpions, caged.

Carlos Madrano stood over him. He wore a Mussolini ensemble with an FDR cape.

Dudley said, "Tojo Tom called you."

Carlos waved his cigarette holder. It was pure FDR.

"Yes, he did. But his call would have only mandated a warning to you. 'My dear friend, please do not steal my money and heroin.' It was the other telephone call that troubled me."

Dudley flexed his arms. Carlos uncuffed him and fed him a cigarette.

"Tell me about that call. Was it Patchett or Exley? Were they concerned that I was attempting to buy into endeavors that tangentially concern you?"

Carlos tipped ash on the table. Mike Breuning screamed next door.

"Sam Rummel called. He said Bill Parker pulled something, and that he sensed you in the margins. It had to do with my farmworker endeavors and your Watanabe case. He said he had never seen Parker so fixated, and now I see that you've succumbed to quite the unprofessional lapse."

Dudley rubbed his wrists. His hands throbbed. His head throbbed. 180-proof booze and toxic worms.

"State the terms of my release and the release of my men."

"You will be released under any and all terms. You will see to it that your Army Intelligence posting is stamped 'Mexico,' and you will work with me to thwart Axis sabotage, despite our Axis sympathies. A large sum of money will secure the release of your men. You may not call Ace Kwan for a quick handout. I am determined to keep word of your mission contained."

The sweat room featured side windows. Dudley got up and peeped them. He saw Mike Breuning to the left, Hideo to the right.

Two spics worked over Mike. They rubber-hosed him and electrode-clamped his ears. Hideo sat uncuffed. Scorpions crawled near his chair. Hideo sat prim-still.

He glanced up at the window. He saw Dudley. He smiled and drew a dollar sign in the air.

Dudley said, "Carlos, I would advise you to talk to Dr. Ashida. I think he may have something to tell you."

He dozed in his chair. They left him his penicillin and fed him *arroz con pollo* and beer. His hand throbbed. His head throbbed. He was dead-man shot-to-shit.

He dozed and stirred. He counted the days since Pearl Harbor and the days to New Year's. He counted Claire's freckles. He dozed/stirred, dozed/stirred.

He checked Mike B.'s window. Mike was gone. He checked Hideo's window. Hideo was gone. The floor was smeared with scorpion pulp. The fuckers had been stomped to bug juice.

His hand quit throbbing. He pissed in a hole in the floor.

He dozed. He woke up and smoked cigarettes. He saw a note slip on the floor.

He got up and read it. He recognized Hideo's print.

"I tried something. It has to do with that sub I mentioned to you. Captain Madrano is in so far."

Dudley smiled. Dudley counted Claire's freckles. Dudley dozed in his bolted-down chair.

The door lock clanged. Dudley went for his gun and got no gun. Hideo walked in. Insect pulp covered his shoes.

"I convinced Madrano to post a dozen men at the Colonet Inlet. It paid off. They snared a submarine."

"And how did you divine this mooring?"

"I saw a crazy map in Pierce Patchett's office. It was doodled with submarines covered in dollar signs. It reminded me of your graph."

Dudley smiled. He heard rain outside. Four *fascistas* stood behind Hideo.

"And your current assignment, lad?"

"We toss the sub. I interrogate the crew."

Dudley grabbed his suit coat. The Blackshirts hustled them outside. Two Caddy sedans idled by the barracks. They were tourist confiscations. Spic cops loved Jew canoes.

The sleds featured suicide doors and double backseats. The Blackshirts shoved them in. Breuning and Carlisle sat in the back.

They were sallow. They'd been tortured. Their necks were clamp-burned.

The sleds pulled out. Dudley made the slit-throat sign and mouthed "Madrano."

Mike and Dick grinned. The Caddy hit the coast road, north. The rain was bad. The Statie sleds crawled *slooooow*.

Black clouds hung low. The sun was off in deep nowhere. Dudley saw arc-light burn—up ahead/10:00 high.

A beach-bluff encampment. A search scene. Blackshirts and captured Japs. Pup tents to thwart the rain.

The sleds pulled onto a bluff. Ten arc lights were up. Twenty Staties loitered. They wore black slickers over their black shirts.

Dudley got out first. He pushed through the Staties and entered the near tent. Captain Carlos sat in a deck chair. Six Japs were shackle-chained, facedown in the dirt.

They wore water-soaked uniforms. They'd been manhandled and kicked to shit. Their mouths were taped shut.

Carlos said, "Dr. Ashida has promised me money. I hope he's right. His tips have proven credible so far."

The sub was moored on hard sand up against rocks. Carlos ceded the toss to Dudley and Hideo. They boarded the fucking thing and ducked belowdecks. Five Staties stood outside the hatch.

It was toss and find or toss and die. It hedged on Patchett's nutty hieroglyphics.

They tossed. It was Hideo's show. The sub was all screw plates, gauge panels, wall instruments. Hideo knew everything mechanical. Hideo knew the needle-in-a-haystack and wild-goose concepts and the crazy-hieroglyphics gestalt.

They tossed. They went through the crewmen's quarters first. They tossed their lockers. They found L.A. tourist guidebooks and guidebooks per L.A. Chink culture. They found Chinese-language guides. Dudley teethed on it.

The deal oozed Fifth Column infiltration and sabotage. Hide in plain sight as Chink and deep-six L.A. from within.

They tossed. Hideo worked with socket wrenches and his bare hands. He unscrewed bolts and searched behind panels. He unwired instrument clusters and ran his hands over flush walls. He unscrewed the interior periscope mount and threw a flashlight beam on the gears.

They tossed. Carlos joined them. His kibitz spiel was all football and war. The Chicago Bears. Jew quarterback Sid Luckman. The Japs take Wake Island. Do you feel a racial tug, Dr. Ashida?

Carlos got loosey-goosey. Dudley hit him up for his car keys. His car was back on the bluff. He was out of cigarettes.

Carlos tossed him the keys. Dudley walked to his car, under guard escort. He grabbed his cigarettes. He palmed a vial of nitroglycerin.

He walked back to the sub. He winked at Hideo. Hideo winked back.

They tossed. Dudley lugged steel plates one-handed. His bad hand throbbed. He popped bennies and anti-bug pills. Carlos was no dumb beaner. He knew they might bolt. He kept one hand on his gun.

They tossed. The sub was a claustrophobe hot box. They sweated through their clothes. They sliced up their hands. Dudley ripped a fingernail half off.

They tossed systematically. They went from plated walls to plated catwalks. Everything was built narrow and Jap-size. Dudley kept banging his head.

They tossed. Hideo pulled up a floor plate and smiled.

Pierce Patchett. Crazy-kid hieroglyphics.

Five duffel bags stuffed in a hole. All bulging with Yankee C-notes.

Carlos was pleased. "Fate has decreed that you live. Now, Dr. Ashida must interrogate."

The rain persisted. They worked in a pup tent. Blackshirts unhooked the Japs and rehooked them to chairs. Hideo pulled the tape off their mouths. Hitler mustaches tore free.

Dudley watched. Breuning and Carlisle watched. They had that fetching *Whew we don't die* look. Carlos supplied mescal. Everybody took pops. Hideo exhibited panache and ate the worm.

The Japs jabbered and rattled their cuff chains. They were Fuji Shudoesque. Hideo hectored them. It went on and on. It got boring and vexing. It required no translation. The Japs weren't giving up shit.

Hideo looked at Dudley.

Dudley looked at Carlos.

Carlos passed Hideo his gloves.

They were palm-weighted and fascist fetishistic. Hideo slipped them on.

The Japs rolled their eyes and giggled. *Punk, you ain't got the guts*.

Hideo hit them.

He windmilled lefts and rights. Their heads snapped at near-right angles. Teeth blew out. Severed scalps flew.

They dribbled teeth.

They coughed blood.

Their eyebrows flopped over their eyes.

They made garbled sounds and gave it all up.

It was six-man Jap-on-Jap jabber. Hideo crouched low and picked it all up.

The jabber overlapped and extended. Hideo took it all in.

"It's Terry Lux and Pierce Patchett, with Preston Exley off to the side. Patchett knows people in the office of Naval Intelligence. He's been fingering those sub attacks on freighters up the coastline, and he was in shortwave contact with the escaped Japanese. Lux took your plan with Ace Kwan and refined it into a sabotage front. The escaped men were on their way down here to rendezvous with the sub when the posse got them. Lux is going to work with Lin Chung and hide saboteurs in Chinatown. Chung has eugenic plans for them, which sounds draconian. At the very least, he's going to infiltrate them into the Chinese community and let them perpetrate their sabotage from there."

Dudley smiled. "Bright, bright penny. How gifted you are."

A fat Jap squirmed and spit blood at Hideo. He called up some English. He said, "You fairy."

Hideo grabbed Carlos Madrano's Luger and drew down on him. The other Japs froze. The whole tent froze.

Dudley watched his gears click. Yes/no, yes/no, yes/no.

Hideo lowered the gun.

Hideo said, "I'm an American."

The cleanup extended. The Blackshirts loosened up. They let the gringos walk free.

Dudley loitered on the bluff. The rain covered him. He spotted Madrano's car. He wedged the nitro into the left-rear wheel well.

They hog-tied the Japs and dumped them in the sub. The Japs squirmed, squealed and begged. Breuning friction-taped their mouths. Hideo rigged a detonation kit beside them.

Hideo designed the kit. It featured nitroglycerin and shotgun shells.

Rip three pairs of trousers into strips and trail them out the hatch. Gasoline-soak them. Get the sub twenty yards out. Shotgun-blast the hull and manufacture combustion.

Hideo studied the sub's engine. He read a set of Jap-language guides and got the gist. Breuning and Carlisle ripped up the trousers and knotted the fuse. Dudley gas-soaked it and tucked the explosive end in with the nitro and shells.

They coated the fuse with sulfuric acid and rendered it waterproof. They packed the kit upside the Japs. The fuse tip draped over the hull.

Hideo stoked the engine and slammed the gears into reverse. The sub shimmied and lurched backward.

They jumped off. Rain drummed down and soaked them.

They stood with the Blackshirts and passed around the mescal. The sub caught water traction. The Blackshirts divvied up shotguns loaded with big-bore slugs.

It all felt ceremonial. It all went down in the rain and the dark.

The sub lurched twenty yards out. All right, now—

Uno, dos, tres—

Dudley did the count. They all fired on *cuatro*.

Twenty-four men fired. Twenty-four slugs pierced the hull. The sub blew to kingdom come.

The sky burned red. Everybody yelled *adiós* and peeled to their cars. Carlos drove off with four Blackshirt pals.

Waves smothered the flames. Steam hissed off the water. Breuning burned tread. Carlisle waxed elegiac. Dudley and Hideo sat in the backseat.

It was over. The Watanabe case. The Smith-Kwan cartel. It ran twenty days, door-to-door.

Dudley touched Hideo's arm. "I won't begrudge you a last go at the Watanabe case. Do what you deem prudent, without mentioning my name. You'll be interned in late February. I'll break you out in early May."

Hideo smiled and winked at him. Dudley roared and slapped his knees.

The drive was a slog. The fucking rain. Fallen debris, abandoned cars, bobbing peons. Carlos lived two hours south of Ensenada. He might get halfway there.

Back to America. No border-crossing grief. A snail trail through San Diego. They rendezvoused at the Davis manse. They had to return and disperse there.

They stopped at the Friar Tuck Drive-In. The carhops wore rain slickers over wench garb. Hideo bounced for dinner. They gorged on cheeseburgers and mescal-spiked milk shakes.

Snail trail. They *craaaawled* up the coast road to Sunset. It was almost midnight. Dudley perked up. He'd get a last look at the house.

Sunset east. Mandeville Canyon north. Back to her street and her house. All her lights were on.

The gang said *adiós* on the sidewalk. The *abrazos* extended. The lads laid tracks home. Dudley walked up and peeped a front window. Tall trees shielded him from the rain.

Bette's "Late Christmas Dinner." The papers ballyhooed it.

She played to a group of soldiers. They were winter-uniform spiffed. Bette's hubby sashayed. The Airedale hopped on Tommy Gilfoyle's lap.

Bette held court. The revelers drank eggnog. Beth danced into view. A handsome soldier twirled her. She wore her Irish green sweet sixteen dress.

She sailed by the window and disappeared. Dudley held back sobs.

Part Four

THE HUNTRESS

(December 27–December 29, 1941)

December 27, 1941

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LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27, 1941

Dudley stood at the window. Ashida saw it. He made a green light and cut east. Dudley disappeared.

The rain subsided. He checked his rearview mirror every few seconds. His face still looked the same.

He toured Mexico with the Dudster. He thought he'd look different.

Kay Lake shivved a woman and looked different now. He thought he'd go the same route.

It was Christmas weekend. It was raining. There was no traffic. Dudley said, "Omit my name. Do whatever you deem prudent."

He knew most of it. He understood the Fifth Column text. Saul Lesnick had tiny feet. It was not binding proof. He could not name the white man in the purple sweater. Jack Webb described the man. He was "heavyset" and "middle-aged." Saul Lesnick was old and thin.

The USC Library was open-all-night. Law students were night owls. He was a night owl. He cooked up a scheme on the ride back.

He left 282 Ord at 8:00 a.m. Wednesday. Lin Chung and Saul Lesnick paced and argued on. He played a hunch and drove to the Hall of Records. The hunch played off Pierce Patchett's calls to Lin Chung.

Said calls—12/19, 12/20, 12/21. Patchett's only calls to Chung. Patchett calls Terry Lux *sixteen* times those three days.

The Hall was paperwork-swamped. He quick-skimmed a recent transaction list. Lin Chung owned twelve houses in the San Gabriel Valley. He had second-mortgaged *all* of them. The transactions *all* occurred on Monday, 12/22/41.

Patchett, Lux, Chung. Telephone lists. Hurried money scrounging. His theory was this:

Lux and Chung wanted in on the prison-camp deal. Patchett exhorted them to raise scratch. Convergent schemes were brewing. Come on—outbid Dudley and Ace Kwan.

He drove by all twelve houses then. He looked in the windows. He saw movie cameras on tripods and bedrooms that resembled smut-film sets. He saw rooms with mattress-covered floors.

Let's house Japs in plain sight. Great minds think alike. Dudley and Ace concocted the scheme. Let's usurp the scheme now.

Now he knew this:

The houses were smut-film sets. Only that explanation sufficed. The houses would also hide Japanese saboteurs.

Madness. Racial insanity.

Lin Chung was Chinese and anti-Japanese. He was a fascist-eugenicist and friend of left-wing Saul Lesnick. War profiteering superseded racial-political ties. Let's make money off innocent Japanese and assist the Jap enemy.

The rain let up. Ashida hit USC and parked outside the library. He ran inside. He knew the place now. He knew specific law books.

"Whatever you deem prudent."

Let's prevent more sabotage. Let's blitz the slave-camp deal. Exley, Patchett, Lux and Chung might desist. They could be legally dissuaded. They were not killers of the Smith-Kwan ilk.

Ashida read textbooks and jotted notes. They comprised a legal brief.

Memo to William H. Parker. Here's twelve questions for Terence Lux, M.D.

They all require "yes" or "no" answers. None of them touch Dudley. They circumscribe the Bedford Drive and Mexican revelations. They would reveal wisps to Parker. They would tell Lux this:

I know all about it. You and the others DESIST.

Ashida wrote it all out. Ashida folded his notes into a Christmas card and dropped them in an envelope.

He felt weightless. He smelled Dudley's wet tweeds on his skin.

The library was stuffy. Ashida walked outside and gulped cold air. He got his car and drove to Silver Lake. He parked outside Parker's house.

The living room light was on. He walked up and dropped the card in the mail slot. He checked the window.

Parker sat in an easy chair. He stared at a photograph. It was probably the big redhead.

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27, 1941

Lee said, "It wasn't much of a Christmas."

I said, "No. But it's been a hell of a month."

We sat on my bedroom terrace and drank cask-aged scotch. It was a gift from Uncle Ace Kwan. All the posse men got a jug, a shrunken head and a free-meal chit for Kwan's Chinese Pagoda.

Lee said, "We should fill each other in on it one of these days. Scotty's gone off to the war, we both took some licks, and you got your face rearranged more than I did. I've been hiding out from you, but I know that there's some kind of story here."

Our chairs faced south. The clubs on the Strip had doused their lights a few minutes earlier. It was cool and clear; the late-traffic hum mesmerized me.

"Give me your version first. It's your college term paper, and the title is 'A Hell of a Month.' "

Lee said, "You're the college girl. You're the one who writes things down."

I smiled and sipped Ace Kwan's scotch. Uncle Ace and his best friend, the Dudster. All roads lead to Dudley Smith. All my thoughts circled back to him.

I said, "You're dodging me. I know when you've been holding back something you've been teething on. There's a perception here. We're going to sit here and enjoy Ace Kwan's largesse until you tell me."

Lee swirled his drink. "Call-Me-Jack got Count Basie for the Bureau New Year's bash. The Count clipped a black-and-white outside the Club Alabam, and the blues found reefers on him. It was our gig or six months in the clink."

I poked his arm. "You're dodging me. Give me the perception and we'll go back to small talk."

Lee put down his glass and prepared to make newspaper headlines.

It was Leland C. Blanchard code—the way he ridiculed the big moments of his life before he buried them.

"Bivins Takes Blanchard in Tuff Tiff at Olympic!" "Hero Cop Rescues Gang Girl from Heist Mastermind!" "Southland's 'Great White Hope' Joins L.A. Police!"

I laughed. Those were some of his best.

Lee went bam-bam-bam and said, *"Epic Raw Deal for Local Japs! Ex–Heavyweight Contender Spills Beans! 'Most of These Fuckers Didn't Do Shit,' Officer L. C. Blanchard Says. 'It's All War Fever and Hopped-up woo-woo!' "*

I applauded the sentiment and the performance. Lee bowed and went back to his drink. He said, "This war's leaving me behind. Dud's going into the Army as a goddamn captain, while I herd Japs who didn't do shit into cattle cars and pop winos on skid row. You'll be entertaining the troops in the sack, and you'll probably write a book about it."

He stopped and made more headlines. *"Home-front Courtesan Tells All in Racy Memoir! Southland Holds Its Breath as She Names Names."*

I exploited the opening Lee gave me. I said, "Let's start with the name Dudley Smith."

Lee crashed. He simply gave out. He said, "Oh shit, babe."

I said, "You can do better than that."

He said, "Come on, Kay."

I made newspaper headlines—bam-bam-bam in the air.

"Irish Cop Beats Man to Death at Newton Station!" "Irish Cop Frames Werewolf! Gas-Chamber Bounce Looms!" "Irish Cop Suborns Young Cops into Rogue Cop Coven!" "Kid Cop Flees to Perilous War Duty! Fears Sergeant D. L. Smith More than Japs!"

Lee said, "Come on, Kay. Dudley's Dudley, and the world needs guys like him."

He was tired. He was beaten. The war, the roundups, his fight with Scotty. His trip to New York City, mid-November. He killed a man with the Dudster. He could have fought him or said no. There were options, but he was beaten, and he had me to come home to. And I possessed stunning artistry, but no character or conviction. And I was too possessed by his world of vile intrigue to exercise my own option to leave him.

Lee rolled his eyes. I was boring him. I was besieging him with schoolgirl idealism. He rolled his eyes; he checked his watch; he gave me this look. *Come on, Kay. Come on, Kay. Come on, Kay*.

I made headlines—bam-bam-bam.

"Ex-Boxer Cop Slays Gangland Witness! Canary Can Sing, But He Can't Fly!" "Slaying Facilitates Mobster's Jail Release!" "Ex-Boxer Cop Whimpers to Irish Cop: I'm Just a Boy Who Can't Say No."

Lee threw his glass over the terrace; it shattered down on the driveway. He kicked over his chair and looked at me. He wasn’t outraged or hurt. He was just beaten. I knew what he’d say before he said it. He said, “Goddamn you, Kay.”

It was all he had. He left me alone with it. He walked into the house and out of the house and slammed doors as he went. He got into his car and slammed the door and burned rubber down to the Strip.

He left me alone with Dudley Smith.

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LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27, 1941

Night owl. Black coffee and the picture. Eleven days booze-free.

Lieutenant Joan Conville. The wayward farm girl makes rank. The picture was badly shredded. He should toss it soon.

Helen snored in the bedroom. She hated him now. He skipped Christmas for two car wrecks and a koi run.

Three Mexicans dug a big backyard pond and glazed it. He strung the fence around it himself. He drove to Jim Larkin's bungalow and brought the koi back in pails.

They all survived. They loved their new home. He fed them high-line fish food. The fence deterred cats and dogs and kept them safe.

Helen hated him. He deserted his marriage for pictures and colorful fish. He sat in the yard and looked at the koi. He sat in this chair and looked at the picture. He thought about Miss Lake.

Parker rubbed his eyes. The living room blurred. He glanced toward the door. He saw an envelope on the floor, under the mail slot.

He walked over and snatched it. He saw his name on the front. There was no postmark. It was probably a late Christmas card.

He opened it. The card depicted reindeer on Wilshire Boulevard. A note was folded in. Dr. Hideo Ashida sends Yule regards.

Ashida had tossed his office and found his grand jury notes. Ashida studied them and read those law texts himself. He made unexplained assertions per a shortwave radio mob. Patchett, Terry Lux, the Watanabes.

The Dudster went unnamed. He called Preston Exley a "non–Fifth Column colluder." The note further explicated Blood Alley. He implicated Pierce Patchett in the coastal sub attacks. He used mitigating language. He prepared a script. Brace Terry Lux—he might fold.

Elliptical. Damning by suggestion. Evidentially unverified and circumstantially sound.

Parker went punch-drunk. He bumped the doorside table. A stack of mail hit the floor.

He gathered it up. He snatched late Christmas cards in square envelopes. One long envelope stood out.

The return address juiced him. PC Bell/642 South Olive/"Official Query Reply."

They always *called*. They never *wrote*. He thought they'd *call*.

The postmark was 12/23. The Christmas rush stalled delivery.

Parker slit the envelope. Finally—the outgoing pay-phone list.

He skimmed the first page. The wall held him up.

One glance said *IT'S HIM*.

Night owl. Night owls, plural. He'd be up. War insomnia ran epidemic.

It's raining again. The pavement's wet. You're punch-drunk. Keep your eyes on the road.

Parker drove to Santa Monica. He ran Sunset to Lincoln and south. Two pay phones stood a block away. *The* phone stood across the street.

He parked curbside. The plant was barb wire–enclosed. He walked to the gate and badged the guard. The man was ex-PD. He went *Yup, the boss is in*.

The boss had his own Quonset hut. Parker dodged camouflage nets and ducked over. He was punch-drunk. The rain carried him.

The door was open. Jim Davis was sprawled on a green leather couch. His office was slathered with shadowboxed guns and war flags.

Davis wore cross-draw .45's and picked his teeth with a knife. It was The Knife.

The rising sun flag was blood-streaked. The Chinese flag was bullet-ripped.

Davis said, "The pay phones?"

Parker nodded.

Davis said, "I locked my office keys up one night and got in a pinch. There was no gate guard on duty, so I used that pay phone to call home. Bill Parker on the job. I fuck up once and he nails it. I figured Dudley would get here first, and that he'd have his hand out."

Parker locked the door. Davis kicked a chair over. It slid on the floor and banged Parker's knees.

He sat down. He unholstered his belt gun. Davis unholstered. He placed his .45's on the floor and kicked them. They hit Parker's feet.

"It was my case, more than Dudley's. I should have jumped when the Larkin job came in. It was there in all the Watanabe reports, but nobody keyed on it. They called pay phones near Lockheed, Boeing and *Douglas*. You've run the force here since '38. You're as fascistic as

Hitler. We went quail hunting once. You wore a purple sweater."

Davis said, "I've got three purple sweaters. And it's not your case, it's the Jap kid's. If I burn for this, I want a Jap to light the fuse."

"I can smell it on you, Jim. Everything about it is you."

The room reeked of liquor-soaked tobacco. Davis snatched a chaw cup off the floor.

"You were my trusty adjutant. I should tell you what we got here."

You know me, Bill. I love the Oriental culture and the Oriental gash, but I kowtowed to eugenic pressure and married a white woman. I learned to speak Chink in a Chink whorehouse, which gave me a leg up on Chink culture when I worked Chinatown as a kid rookie. I got hooked on Jap culture when Hirohito started making noise, and I already gave my heart to Hitler back around the beer hall putsch. I met a nice old British guy named Jim Larkin in a bar a few blocks from here. He was some kind of Mickey Mouse code breaker back during the Great War, and he had a quite well-founded hatred for the Reds and quite an exhaustive knowledge of the Jew roots of the Russian Revolution. Jim was a big Jap-o-phile, and he creamed his jeans for a Japan-conquers-Russia revolt, to compensate for all the appeasement and stasis of the Sino-Russian War. Jim taught me to read and write Jap, which came easy to a Chink-fluent guy like me. The gang's forming now. You get that, Bill. I've met Jim, and I already know Preston Exley from my days on the PD. Now, Jim liked Jap twat, and he knew a budding Jap-o-phile pimp and alleged businessman named Pierce Morehouse Patchett.

Pierce was a chemist by legitimate trade, with a special interest in eugenics and Asian chemistry. Frankly, he was a dope fiend, and he had a sideline peddling Jap gash to the sailors and Marines down in Dago. If it's profitable and illicit, Pierce has done it or considered it, but I didn't trust him completely. He was too egalitarian for my taste. He was too populist and hooked on weird dialogues. He'd talk race science with all these Hindu health faddists and do-gooders, including this Red eugenics fiend with an office right next to his. That's Saul Lesnick, M.D. He wanted to build perfect human beings to fight the fascist beast. Since I am the fascist beast, I can't countenance old Saul, but Pierce the P dotes on him.

Preston wasn't political. It's 1937, and there's thunder on the Right—but Preston's nonplussed by all of it. He's on the sidelines, but Jim, Pierce and I are tub-thumping fascists. There's America First, the Shirts, the Bund, the Copperheads, the Thunderbolt Legion. I'm a public figure, so I'm not as notably rabid as Jim and Pierce, who I've always found to be sloppy and impolitic, which is something, coming from a guy like me.

We're jungled up in Jap societies with names no white man this side of *me can pronounce. That's how we meet Ryoshi Watanabe. At the time, Ryoshi was the A-number-one fascist* ichiban *of the fucking western hemisphere. I still love the Chinks, but the Chinks hate the Japs. It's not that I'm confused or ambivalent, I'm just riding the zeitgeist for all it's worth. Ryoshi's an ex-Collaborationist, and his son Johnny is second-generation pro-Collaborationist, to Ryoshi's dismay. Ryoshi's got a knife scar that says it all, and our ex-Collaborationist pal Jim Larkin's got the same one. The Collaborationists had a ritual, Bill—and civilized white men like you will probably find it hard to believe. They'd fight each other with poison-dipped knives to see who survives, which Jim and Ryoshi did, some few times. The Collaborationists were vociferously pro-Jap and anti-Chink, despite their mixed-blood lineage. That's because they saw Jap fascism as the vanguard of the new Asian racial order. The Collaborationists were virulently antitong, because the tongs were virulently anti-Jap and represented a challenge to Japan's slant-eyed hegemony. You get it, right, Bill? The world is knee-deep in economic chaos, and some visionaries with rowdy tendencies and quaint rituals see a way out. The Collaborationists are staking their claim to usurp the tongs and take over their rackets, and terror tactics are their means. How's this for a ritual? Kill Chinks with poison-dipped knives, rape and kill the female kin of tong bosses, live outdoors in collaborative mixed-race harmony. Sound familiar, Bill? That Griffith Park multiple? I'm betting that Dud S. and Ace K. killed them boys that raped and killed Ace's niece.*

So—Jim, Pierce and I are jungled up with the Watanabes. We've got our kid's auxiliary: Johnny and Nancy W., and the Dudster's Nazi snitch, Huey Cressmeyer. Huey's the odd child out in all of this, and I made sure that Jim, Pierce and I steered clear of him, because he was close to Dud S. We're all one like-minded family. Pierce has got his property schemes and his Jap-twat stable, and he's peddling replica feudal knives to Collaborationists up and down the coast. I showed them how to acid-dip their fingerprints off to avoid identification, which they right-as-rain did. I'm the noted ex–police chief who got crucified by the local Jew Grand Jury and castigated for poking some underaged snatch up in Ventura County, so I keep my head down as the boss here at Douglas. Larkin corrupts kids with his 'Santa Monica Cycleers' hobby and writes tracts from all perspectives, and in Kraut and Jap. There's money in it, but I don't invest. Here's where I'll concede a certain lack of foresight. Bill, I'll admit that I got carried away a bit. I know the war is inevitable, and I firmly believe that the Axis boys will win. I do some money hoarding and changing with Ryoshi, the Collaborationists and the Deutsches Haus kids. I've got a yen for yen and reichsmarks, because I know the war's coming and the right side will sure as shit win.

But shit has this tendency to disperse, Bill—especially when money gets all fucked up with ideology. Because Preston knows a savvy Fed named Ed

Satterlee. Ed says the Feds are building Fifth Column files on the local Japs, because the Feds are planning roundups when this inevitable war hits. Preston's a big land-development man and construction kingpin, and Pierce had made money turning over property. Pierce is a chemist and knows topsoil applications. Preston built the Arroyo Seco Parkway, and he's always had a yen to build more ramps to it, with shopping plazas adjacent, to take up the slack between L.A. proper and Pasadena. Now, this inevitable war and inevitable mass imprisonment jacks up his nonfascist but still-utilitarian thinking. He knows me, he knows Pierce, he's met Jim Larkin. He don't know the Watanabe family from the Jap man in the moon. But he comes up with a plan to buy Jap houses off the parkway and Jap farms in the East Valley, to goose his parkway plan and supplant it with a local Jap-internment plan, outside of the Federal government's schemes.

We're into '40 now, Bill. Everyone knows the war is coming. Preston's a straight-shooting guy, and he dispatches Jap-fluent Pierce and Jim to talk turkey to Japs who might want to prudently dump their property. The war's coming, you're fucked. You'll be imprisoned, your houses and farms will be seized. You can't win this one, Tojo. But we'll kick back gelt to you while you're in stir. Your options are to get royally fucked by Uncle Sam or to get prematurely exploited and covertly helped out by us. You and Dud have got most of this figured out, Bill. I'm sure of that. We get parkway Japs and farm Japs to sell out, but some refuse. We bring in Carlos Madrano and his wetback corps and start fucking up the land, so we can build parkway ramps and prison camps. Preston's nonfascist conscience is assuaged, which is fiscally imperative. He's the big construction fish in this pond of ours, and we want him happy. Sure, we love the Japs, but most of them aren't tub-thumping fascists like we are. A buck is a buck, and we're Americans first.

Ideology and money make for strange bedfellows. Did you hear the one about the Jap prostitute who went broke because no one had a yen for her? What Preston needs now is an angle to sell his prison-camp-within-prison-camp scheme to our local fathers and the Feds. The autonomous, build-the-local-economy angle is a cinch for Fletch Bowron—but Preston needs a clincher for J. Edgar Hoover. You know who gives it to him? Saul Lesnick, who's been off in eugenic dialogue with Pierce the P and a Chink doctor named Lin Chung.

The clincher is eugenics. Get it, Bill? We house the best Japs, the smartest Japs, the sturdiest Japs, and study them to determine what makes them different from us. Lesnick concocted it. Hoover loved it. Hoover hates the Jews and the Reds, Lesnick's a Jew Red and a Fed snitch, but populism ain't nothing but the big shared agenda. Will it get down to torture studies and rewiring Jap brains to the paws of rabid wombats? You tell me, Bill. We'll reconvene sometime in '43 and discuss it.

So, we all know the war's coming. We're all huddled up with our shortwave radios, except for Preston—who don't know shortwave shit from Shinola. But Jim Larkin's got his Jap-o-phile pal, Terry Lux, who's got a king-size shortwave setup and did a nose job on one of Jimbo's Jap girlfriends. Our plans are brewing. We're going to destroy crops and topsoil and sell canned shrimp oil and glass to Jap canners who want to kill white Americans. I know you witnessed that raid at the shrimp boat, Bill. Our Collaborationist pals and warehouse pals got that one by you. You're not really a detective, but I can tell you're following me.

It all came down to the radios, in the end. There's Pierce, Jim, Terry, me. Jim teaches Terry Jap. We all follow the buildup for the war in Japanese. Ryoshi came through there. He knew all the coded Jap Navy frequencies.

Our plans are percolating. Got a yen for glass-infused shrimp? You know who to see. Preston's in the shadows. Terry's glued to his radio and not much else, because he's busy sucking up to society dope fiends. Ed Satterlee's feeding us dope on the potential roundups. Pierce has got a plan to cut whores to look like movie stars, and Terry's adroitly considering it. Pierce and Terry are bankrolling Collaborationist villages. It violates Jap loyalty codes, but America's a democracy, as much as we don't like it. The villagers are laundering money and hawking that good glass-packed shrimp. Meanwhile, all we have to do is tune in our radios for the latest coded military news, straight from Jap Navy sources. We're still in 1940, Bill. And in walks a draconian character named Hikaru Tachibana.

I was fond of Tachi, but the cocksucker was a straight-up Jap spy. The SaMo cops popped his yellow ass right outside of here, on Lincoln Boulevard. He had a little Minox spy camera on him, which served to get him slated for deportation. I bailed him out on the q.t. and made him my spy. I'd started to think that Ryoshi W. was a less than ardent fascist and was less than loyal to our little clique. He Jewed us up for more money than we wanted to pay for his house and farm, which sat poorly with us, because we'd eugenically elevated him to Sacred White Man Status and thought the world of him. I got Tachi a job on the Watanabe farm, sometime in mid-'40. He reported back and confirmed my suspicions that Ryoshi was indeed wishy-washy.

You had to take everything Tachi said with more than a grain of salt, Bill. He was temperamental and fanciful, and a bigger jailbait jumper than me. He ran street whores and sold maryjane to high school kids, which is highly immoral for one who ascribes to samurai codes of honor. That stated, I let things simmer for a good long while, because we were all enjoying the Jap military buildup, engagingly available on our radio sets. That, and I was fond of Tachi. Until the summer of '41, when we all figured out that he knocked up Nancy Watanabe.

Aya learned Nancy was pregnant, and told Ryoshi. Ryoshi spilled it to

Pierce and me. We figured it had to be Johnny, because Johnny was perved on Nancy and told Pierce that he used to Mickey Finn her and fuck her with rubbers on, because he didn't want no mongoloid kids. Ryoshi beat on Johnny and determined that he wasn't the daddy, so our suspicions fell on Huey Cressmeyer. Ryoshi braced Huey. Huey said a Mex-Jap Collaborationist bragged that he knocked up Nancy. Terry Lux blood-tested Nancy and Huey and exonerated Huey. We got suspicious of Tachi and had Terry test him. Terry matched Tachi's blood type to Nancy's zygote. The wages of sin are death, Bill. Johnny and I snuffed Tachi. We stabbed him with poison-dipped knives and dumped his yellow ass down a well hole at the farm.

It was like this, Bill. I was in love with Nancy. Ryoshi had already sold her to me. She was pledged to be my concubine, but I hadn't poked her yet. We were going to live together in Tokyo or L.A., depending on who won the war. Don't look at me that way, Bill. I know she was sixteen, but I was going to wait, even though she was used goods already.

We're up to the fall of '41, now. Our enterprises are progressing, and we've all got our own little schemes. Pierce is sloppy. He's all over the shortwave frequencies, talking to his fascist chums, while I've got my own frequency here at the plant blocked by a dummy transistor. Pierce is coffee-klatching with Doc Lesnick every chance he gets, because they're office mates. Eugenics, Bill. Lesnick's a Nazi do-gooder in his soul, Jew or no Jew. He wants to build more effective human beings, and he knows that it entails lab work. He's looking to build Übermenschen *with jumbo nigger-size dicks, Jew brains, Jap cunning, Russian resistance to disease and Nordic good looks. I'm not shitting you, Bill—Lesnick let Pierce eavesdrop on his psychiatric sessions, and old Saul is always laying race science on his patients.*

So, this fall progresses. We're glued to our radios, and we know the Japs are going to bomb Pearl Harbor. Pierce has got Office of Naval Intelligence and freight company connections, and he's relaying info on ordnance shipments to the Jap Navy and our Collaborationist pals. The Jap Navy and the Collaborationists hate each other, but we don't care—all we want is more destruction. Those sub attacks on those freighters up the coast? All over the papers? It's all off Pierce the P's intelligence. Those Japs who escaped from T.I.? Pierce supplied them with money, slugs for pay-phone drops, hideout leads, the megillah. He bankrolled their whole fucking escape, and those fuckers were headed down to hook up with a sub in Colonet, Mexico, when you cops took them out at Blood Alley.

We're reckless here, we're cautious there. I've got my frequency blocked, but Pierce and Terry are all over the airwaves. I'm on the air, Jim's on the air. He's got a shortwave set stashed in a garage out near Terry's farm in Malibu. Them pay phones are all working overtime, which was a security precaution I came up with myself. In the middle of all this prewar hoo-ha, I *see that Ryoshi and Jimbo are getting cold feet about the war in general and Pearl in specific. I'm afraid that they're going to rat out the attack, and fuck up world history for all fucking time. I'm sanguine, Bill. I'm laissez-faire. We're going to war. If the Japs and Krauts win, great. Ditto the U.S.A. I'm spending time with Nancy. I want her to have the kid, so I can have a full-blood Jap son to bullshit, shoot guns and play catch with. Then she fucks me over and gets a scrape from some beaner quack down in T.J. I decide that the whole family has to go, and ditto that Brit fucker Jim Larkin. It's a two-tiered motive, Bill. There's revenge for the abortion and my allegiance to the Jap war effort.*

I'm not sure when the Japs are going to hit Pearl, Bill. Frankly, I've spent this whole fall soused on sour mash and terpin hydrate. Saul Lesnick was peddling anesthetic dentists' cocaine to Pierce, who was letting me dip my beak as much as I liked. I told Pierce the Watanabes had to go, and he agreed with me. He cooked up some poison tea that would get them all loopy before I brought down the blade, and powdered it all up in little sachets. I set the date for December 6, and I bought the swords at a curio shop on Alameda. But I forget to buy scabbards to complete the package of obfuscation. I was fuzzy that fateful day, Bill. I'd set the date, and I picked up radio tips that the Japs were going to tap Pearl the next morning. Jimbo told me he was taking the Cycleers on a jaunt to San Berdoo come Sunday dawn, so I decided to clear up all my business, go home, sleep it off, and be bright-eyed and bushy-tailed by the time the big news hit.

So, I drive to Highland Park, but I get cold feet en route. I stop at a pay phone on Figueroa, call Pierce and get him to buck me up. 'Can you come over and watch*, pal? Just for the eugenics of it?' Pierce turned me down, because he had tickets for that Bruin-Trojan game at the Coliseum, but he told me to call Saul Lesnick, because the old Yid might gas on multiple seppuku. So I called Saul, and he said he'd try to make it, and I drove up to the fucking Watanabe house in more than a bit of a blur. Lucky for me, the family was all in and receptive to a nice bowl of "special" tea, supplied by their white* Kamerad*, Jungle Jim Davis. I was blurry, they* got *blurry. The tea induced nausea, and they puked all over their clothes. I made them change clothes, which they did in this giddy blur they were in. I told Ryoshi to write that "looming apocalypse" note in kanji on the wall, meaning this boding internment. Ryoshi does it, and then Saul Lesnick and Lin Chung show up at the back door, and I almost shit my britches, because I'd forgotten that I'd called Saul, and now he's brought his Chink pal with him, so they can watch ex–Los Angeles Police Chief James Edgar "Two-Gun" Davis commit multiple Murder One.*

But Saul and Lin were cagey, which I appreciated. They left their cars down on Figueroa and walked up by the parkway fence, so nobody saw them. They told me it took a while to get up their gumption for the show, so they stood by the fence, smoked some cigarettes and thought, Well, this is *one we can't miss.*

Ryoshi, Aya and the kids were so zorched that they hardly noticed Saul and Lin, who came to scientifically view this whole episode and catalogue it from their divergent perspectives. So I say "Excuse me," run out to the car and get the swords, all wrapped up in a blanket. Saul and Lin are watching real close, and they take their shoes off, because they've got some cockamamy notion about leaving shoe prints. The closer I get to it, the blurrier it gets. But I make them lay down on the living room floor, and I pull out my feudal knife and gut them, belly to sternum. They convulse and die, and there's blood everywhere, and Saul steps in it, gets his socks wet, takes them off, and runs upstairs in a tizzy. I wiped blood on the swords and laid them on the bodies, but I forgot the scabbards and all the Jap ritual shit that it takes to convincingly depict seppuku. Lin Chung held his mud, observed, and asked me questions about my mental state, which pissed me off, because he wasn't that Jew Red Sigmund Freud and I wasn't some neurasthenic woman. I told Lin and Saul to scoot and leave me alone, so they scrammed out the back door. I washed the puked-on clothes and hung them up to dry, and I tried to find Ryoshi's shortwave cache, but I fucking didn't find shit. I just stared at the bodies, talked to them, cleaned myself up and walked out the door under cover of nightfall. It's all real blurry, Bill. I take a snooze, wake up, drive out to that traffic call and schmooze with you, right there on Wilshire and Barrington. I go from a jaw with my old pal Bill Parker and drive out to Valley Boulevard, where I mow down my old pal Jim Larkin. Then I go home to sleep it all off, and my wife wakes me up and says, "Jim, the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor."

So, the PD gets the case. Dudley Smith's the lead, and he's the single smartest white man on earth—he's right up there with you. I'm holding my breath now. Then Dud gets wise to the land grab, then Pierce and Terry's movie-star-cut-job scheme takes flight with them, then Dud and Ace Kwan cook up their own bunch of like-minded schemes, which Lin Chung rats out to Pierce. Then Dud spills the schemes to Terry, and Terry extrapolates and goes wild with them and gets on his radio to the Jap Navy—we can move Japs in to work the old Fifth Column and all of white L.A. will think that they're Chink. Before you know it, Dud and Ace are in a bidding war with Lin Chung, and you're knocking on my door, because I was drunk and lazy and called my home phone from one of our own tub-thumping fascist pay phones.

Davis stopped. He was pale. He verged on green.

Ten million pins dropped. Parker unloaded the guns on the floor.

Davis said, "I've got congestive heart disease, Bill. I won't live to Armistice Day, whoever wins the war. I wouldn't make it through the legal proceedings and up to the gas chamber in my own lifetime."

Parker said, "Are you lucid, Jim? Do you see things that aren't there? Do you talk to people who aren't in the room with you?"

Davis said, “That’s *you*, Bill. That’s not *me*. And nix on the loony bin. I’m not The Werewolf, and I won’t go that route. There’s only two ways we can play this. The first is Captain William H. Parker, the former adjutant and lackey of widely defamed former L.A. Police Chief Jim Davis, walks ex-Chief Davis out of here in handcuffs and hands him over to the DA. It’s the first month of a staggering world conflict, and ex-Chief Davis is justly accused of hideously butchering four Japs, two of them women. It’s the most sensational news story of the century, whatever prestige the L.A. Police Department has accrued since ex-Chief Davis was ousted is now squandered, and ex-Chief Davis’ tenure as Chief is microscopically scrutinized. This fact is widely publicized. Ex-Chief Davis’ hatchet man was a liquored-up papist prig named Bill Parker, a ruthless man of overweening ambition who sacrifices his fatuous ideals at the slightest hint of personal or professional advancement. Bill Parker is the largest subsidiary casualty of Jim Davis’ Murder One indictments. While on trial, the flamboyant Davis indicts the Los Angeles Police Department with the breathtaking clarity of a man who has seen and done it all, and with men who still serve on that police department. You will go first, Bill. I have an affidavit that your brutalized ex-wife signed. Jack Horrall goes next. I have a wire recording of Brenda Allen giving him a blow job. I had the private room of Mike Lyman’s wired all the time I was Chief. You go, Thad Brown goes. There’ll be a nigger Chief from the Belgian Congo by the time I’m through. It comes down to this, Bill. If you take me in, I’ll fuck you and the L.A. Police Department up the ass so hard that they’ll hear the screams in Tokyo and Berlin. Here’s your second option, Bill. You walk out of here, now. You say a few prayers to your evil, cocksucking God of papal Rome, then you jerk off while you look at yourself in the mirror and lust for a few college girls that you don’t have the nuts to move on. Do you read me, papa-san? I killed four Japs the day before Pearl Harbor, and burning me for it costs more than it’s worth. I’m sitting here fat and sassy, because I’ve got history on my side.”

Parker stood up.

Davis said, “Shoo, Bill.”

Parker walked out into the rain.

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LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27, 1941

Teatime. Service for three.

Ace Kwan catered the do. They relaxed in Dudley's cubicle. His tea was bennie-laced. Beth's and Tommy's was not. Tommy read the Braille-version *Herald.* GRAND JURY INDICTS WEREWOLF! wowed him.

Beth ate almond cookies. Dudley smoked and bennie-twirled. They perused catalogues. Phelps-Terkel offered custom-made uniforms. Bullock's Wilshire hawked their women's line.

Beth said, "Blue is Claire's color, but it's not a winter shade. Mexico won't be too cold, so she should favor dresses over suits."

He couldn't shake Mexico. His losses felt victorious. Hideo was revelatory.

Tommy said, "Can I get a picture with The Werewolf, Uncle Dud? I won't be able to see it, but my pals at work will think it's swell."

Such goodness. Such gratitude.

Dudley said, "Of course, lad. I'll arrange it immediately."

Call-Me-Jack walked up. He was pale. He verged on green.

"Carlos Madrano's *muerto*. His car blew up on the coast road south of Ensenada. I just saw the Teletype. There's some kind of Jap angle on it."

Dudley said, "I'll miss him. He was quite the grand fascist."

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LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27, 1941

Littell said, “We don’t know where you’ll be sent, but it won’t be until late February. In the meantime, Dudley Smith’s arranged some sweet digs for you and your family. He got you a three-bedroom suite at the Biltmore, all on the cuff. Mike Breuning’s brothers will work your farm until you get out. You’ll keep drawing a paycheck and get your old job back. Dudley squared it with Jack Horrall.”

They stood on the fire escape. Ashida scanned the living room. Akira packed boxes. Mariko dozed on the couch.

Somebody whistled, due east. Ashida tracked it. Elmer Jackson prowled a neighboring rooftop. He waved his shotgun.

He yelled, “Hey, Hideo!”

Ashida yelled, “Hey, Elmer!”

Ashida thought, *I’M AN AMERICAN*.

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27, 1941

Brenda supplied the address, but stopped short of an introduction. It would have been embarrassing. The husband ordered boys from a "Tomcat" service run by one of Brenda's friends. It was L.A. Everyone knew someone big—and primarily within illicit context. I had one name to drop. She'd take the bait or she wouldn't. I walked up to the door and rang the bell.

The approaching footsteps were *Her*. Stacked heels on hardwood. What *is* this unsolicited interruption?

Bette Davis opened the door. She wore a plaid shirt over dungarees and riding boots. Her look was *unkind*. No amenity would work here. I said, "Dudley Smith."

It brought her up short. Her look went from unkind to *Oh shit*. She said, "Who are you, and what do you hope to gain by mentioning that name to me?"

I said, "My name is Kay Lake, and I'm not looking to gain anything. I'm hoping that we both might benefit, or at least achieve a measure of relief, from a discussion."

She held the door open. She said, "I can give you a few minutes," and stood aside to let me in. She pointed to two thronelike chairs. It was *Sit, you*.

I followed her lead and obeyed. *There, now*. She walked off toward the back of the house.

Which was unwelcoming and overly conceived. Large beams and too-large furniture. Too much dark wood. The home of a British baroness—and an unruly Airedale bounding my way.

I embraced him and held him off; he ignored my entreaties to *sit*. He wanted all my attention and seemed to know how beguiling he was. I gave in and gushed over him.

Miss Davis returned and resumed her performance. She was brusque

—but now amenable. She balanced a pewter tray like a drive-in carhop and swooped over to me. She placed the tray on a table by our thrones. The baroness, her petitioner. The pewter pitcher and mugs. The props covered her skittishness. She was dying to hear what I had to say.

She filled the mugs with rum punch. She opened a pewter box and pointed to a pewter lighter. I lit a cigarette and reclined in my throne; Miss Davis did the same. The Airedale hopped on an ottoman and went to sleep.

"Dudley was besotted by the dog. There's a way that certain men behave with animals. They regress in a certain way. Dudley *kissed* the dog, which I found discomfiting."

I sipped grog. "I live in a policeman's world. In a sense, I've been seduced by it. It's my résumé for any discussion of Dudley Smith."

Miss Davis tucked her legs up on the throne. She placed a pewter ashtray on the ledge between us.

"I know from seduction, as you might have guessed. I thought I recognized him, and then convinced myself that I knew him and could restrict him within the boundaries that I impose upon my men. I erred there, and I will never see him again. Which does not mean that he will fail to haunt me."

I said, "You haven't asked me to explain my résumé, or asked me if there's a specific purpose for my visit."

"Why should I? You're an artful inconvenience, and I'm momentarily taken with your approach. It's a cool Saturday morning, and we're having a chat. We're going to get shit-faced and become over-familiar, because the war has sanctioned such indecorous behavior. Your introduction was entirely sufficient."

I sipped punch. Dark rum, Pernod, fruit juice. Pinch me—am I really here?

"Tell me about you and Dudley Smith, please."

Miss Davis said, "He fell ill here Wednesday afternoon. He became delirious and muttered things in his sleep."

There was no quick revelation. I knew why, instantly. Miss Davis was at loose ends. She was lonely and needed an audience; she knew that she could hold me enthralled, in my front-row seat. She would bid me to speak, in time. She would ignore telephone calls and intrusions, such as her husband and any lovers she might have on a string. I expected autobiography, and got it.

Miss Davis, Broadway ingénue. She runs afoul of her family and makes her way to the Big Town. The '20s. Prohibition. Jewish intellectuals, eager to fuck her. George Gershwin succeeds. Poor George. He may or may not have been queer. She's there for the Carnegie Hall debut of Concerto in F. She smokes hashish with Scott Fitzgerald and finds herself weeping at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine. She witnesses a May Day parade that leaves three dead. She's outside the prison when Sacco and Vanzetti fry. I sat silent and steady-eyed. I made no attempt to intrude on the woman's one great theme of Herself.

The stories went on. The day passed in one long monologue. We moved room to room. Miss Davis tossed flapjacks and deep-fried them into egg-stuffed enchiladas. Every movement was graceful and calculated to appear nonchalant. She was teaching me how to act in the world. The baroness and her protégée. She knew that I was studying her and believed that I would mimic her for the rest of my life. Miss Davis failed at insight and excelled at technique. This put her at odds with Claire De Haven. Claire embraced drama and employed it as but one approach to her fierce assignment of task.

We sipped grog, smoked cigarettes and stayed short of pie-eyed. Miss Davis had her one story. This shortcoming outlived its novelty and taxed me over time. I resisted her story, in all its accomplished seduction. I saw how deeply she fell prey to Glamour and how willfully she reconstructed it as Life's Big Romance. Her Forced March to Hollywood. Her Conquests of Famous Men, all weaker than she. Her Tiffs with Studio Chieftains and Directors.

It went on through the night and two bottles of red wine with coq au vin. The Airedale reappeared at fetching intervals. He brought the baroness a fresh-killed squirrel at one point. I dutifully cleaned up the mess as Dudley Smith loomed in ellipsis. The dog reminded her of him. Miss Davis was all artifice, save for her fear and rage. It was fear of nothingness and rage at the prospect fulfilled. It was her appetite for men at war with her need to orchestrate her every life's moment. Dudley Smith terrified her. He was the brutal blank page of her unconscious and had hurled her beyond her ken. They had breached each other's façades.

Miss Davis goes to Hollywood. Miss Lake goes to Hollywood. The film star, the round-heeled carhop. She was there at the premiere of *Gone with the Wind*—and was almost cast and should have been cast as Scarlett O'Hara. I attended the first public showing and still kept the ticket stub in my purse.

My visit ran through the wee small hours and up through dawn. I realized that she'd done this many times. She got lonely and became bored with all the people in her life. She needed a new audience. Someone might offer her a perfect new reflection. It would cut her loose to be someone less furious and less arch.

She gave me my opening. It was her critique of Victor McLaglen in *The Informer*. I told her that Dudley Smith brought to mind McLaglen, writ suave.

So she told me. She phrased it as a Bette Davis Story. Miss Davis and her Demon Lover. His infected hand, his delirium, the studio abortionist she brought in. She invited him here to screw him one last time and then banish him. She changed her mind at the door. He collapsed and said things in his sleep.

What things, Miss Davis? Please tell me. I can tell that they disturbed you.

She said she heard Dudley confess. He blathered in Catholic Latin and English. His utterings shocked her.

Extortion and robbery. Murder. The killing that took her past Her Ken—*Because She Caused It.*

“There was a party for Ben Siegel, a little over two weeks ago. It was at the Trocadero. I keep a room there, over the club.”

Yes, Miss Davis. And then?

“I spent the night there with Dudley, and I made a harmless wisecrack as I fell asleep. I said, ‘Kill a Jap for me.’ I read the newspaper the next day, and there was a horrible account of that Japanese man shot in the phone booth. Dudley confessed to the murder in his sleep.”

Miss Davis wept then. It was the crescendo of her performance. She wanted to be held, so I held her. I thought of my Kabuki mask and heard Japanese music. I held Bette Davis and let her sob into me.

December 28, 1941

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LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28, 1941

Church. A High Mass for the Pearl Harbor dead.

The Archbishop sermonized. He extolled goodness in a world gone mad. He cited statistics—lives lost and battleships sunk.

Parker sat in the fourth row. Dudley sat two rows up. The Archbishop assailed the madness of nations and men.

Parker smelled bourbon-doused tobacco. Parker saw Pierce Patchett at his shortwave radio. Parker heard civilian freighters explode.

He went by The House at dawn. He walked to the parkway and saw those cigarette butts. Saul Lesnick and Lin Chung killed time there.

The Archbishop sermonized. He preached to a full house. The Mass drew nonbelievers who showed up just for show. Fletch Bowron showed. Bill McPherson showed. Call-Me-Jack showed. Brenda Allen's lipstick showed on his neck.

War. The will to atrocity. Invisible subversion. Detectable and eradicable. The duty of God-driven men.

Parker stared at Dudley. The Archbishop segued to patter. There's a war-bond rally. Hollywood, tomorrow night. It's star-studded and free. Here's the cutie: a Catholic setter and Protestant spaniel fall in love at the pound.

The celebrants roared. Dudley roared—*Your Eminence, that's rich!*

The Archbishop announced the "Gloria Patria." The celebrants stood. Hideo Ashida entered the church.

He's putting out rays. *Jap, Jap, Jap*. There's the looks and whispers. He's sliding down the second row. The Archbishop is miffed.

Ashida walked straight to the Dudster. Dudley draped an arm around him.

Now the gasps. Now the shudders. Now the big *NO*.

The Archbishop put the skids to it. The Archbishop closed the show.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginn—

Parker walked. He tripped out of the pew. He stumbled to the aisle and made the side door. An usher gulped and looked away.

He made the parking lot and his black-and-white. He kicked an empty pop bottle and shattered it. A flock of nuns crossed themselves.

Parker gunned it and took Wilshire west. The Miracle Mile and Beverly Hills were Sunday quiet. He cut north and ditched the car at Bedford and Dayton. He reached under the seat.

There—weighted sap gloves. The nightwatch man kept them stashed close.

The front door stood open. Parker walked through the lobby and took the hallway stairs. The second floor was quiet. Saul Lesnick's door was shut. The 216 door stood open. Parker walked right in.

Patchett was sorting mail. He wore tennis garb. The shorts and cable sweater. The polo shirt.

"It's the cop-lawyer. What's with the gloves? They look too sexy for a guy like—"

Parker ran up and hit him. A tight uppercut snapped his chin and rocked him back. Parker came in behind glove weight. He stepped close and saw Patchett *get fear*.

He put his hands out. *Don't hit me—we can talk about this*. Parker stepped in close and went for his face.

He hit him. Bones cracked. He had stitched lead in both fists. Patchett stumbled and crashed into the doorway. Parker pinned him there.

Parker hit him. He swung left-rights. He broke his nose. He broke his jaw. He sheared off one nostril and his lower lip.

There was all this blood. Bone showed white under it. Patchett screamed. Parker screamed over him. No Sabotage, No Prisons, No Parkway, No Eugenics.

Patchett's eyes rolled back. Parker smelled his piss and sprayed shit.

He hit him. He got his nose. He hit him. He got his mouth. He hit him. He cracked his teeth gum-deep. There, one ear's dangling. There, his scalp's gone. There, he's got no eyebrows. There, you've soaked your arms red.

There, he's half-dead.

There, he's eradicated.

There, you're God-driven now.

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LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28, 1941

Opium.

The pallet, the tar, the pipe. Kick off those shoes, spark that flame.

The smoke hit his blood. It was immediate. The body was all conduit. Monsignor Meehan taught biology and smuggled arms by night. Dublin, 1918. Machine Gun Meehan knew from blood.

Opium. Three match strikes. The pallet drifts.

Stopover, L.A. Airplanes arrive and depart. The Airedale stares out a passenger window, agog.

He drove Beth and Tommy to the airport. It was sweet wartime *l'adieux*. He takes his oath of service tomorrow. Joe Kennedy will fly in.

He invited Hideo. Claire would appreciate that.

Stopover, Acapulco. Cliff divers and lobster salad. Claire in frocks from ritzy catalogues and Claire walking naked through steam.

Dudley smoked opium. He drifted through his own body and swam in red arteries.

He heard something. It was not of this drift on this pallet. It was a *click*. It was a *creak*.

He heard something. It was a footfall. It was a *creak*.

IT brushed the pallet.

He opened his eyes.

IT had a knife.

IT was Goro Shigeta, resurrected. He returned with a lacquered-wood face.

He covered his own face. He had no voice to say *Please don't hit me*.

A knife came down. This thing stabbed him. This thing raked his arms and his neck. He hid his face. This thing stabbed him. He had no voice. This thing cut him—his back, his legs, his feet.

He heard Chink voices. They were far, they were close. This thing vanished. The pallet dropped through a hole in the world. His blood was ice on his lips.

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LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28, 1941

The Werewolf sleeps.

He had his own cell row. It accommodated his fans. Jailers sold photos. The Werewolf snarls. He bites your neck for five bucks.

Ashida watched him sleep. The urge to see him hit out of nowhere. It took his mind off Mexico.

The Werewolf sleeps. He's curled around his pillows. He's unshaven and knocked out behind terp.

Ashida stood in the catwalk. The adjoining tiers ran all-Japanese. He lived at the Biltmore Hotel now. His suite overlooked Pershing Square.

Ray Pinker walked up. "I don't know what this means, so you tell me. Dudley Smith was attacked, over at Kwan's. Your name was on a card in his wallet. You know, 'in case of emergency.' "

His car was boxed in. He kicked the gas and plowed a row of trash cans. He popped the clutch and fishtailed east. He blew a red light and made Main.

A logjam held him back. Temple Street was blocked. Flag wavers and drum beaters stalled traffic dead. It was some ragtag parade. *Remember Pearl Harbor! Lest we forget!*

Ashida nudged the gas. He grazed the car in front of him. The driver looked back and saw *Jap*. He shot Ashida the finger—*Lest we forget!*

The logjam broke. Ashida swerved around the finger man and blew two reds.

He fishtailed across Temple and hooked to Broadway. He saw grief outside Kwan's.

Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle ditched a K-car. Lin Chung pushed a gurney. Fluid bags swung on a pole.

He swerved up and parked on the curb. A crowd pushed into

Kwan's. Nort Layman and a tall woman ran in.

The car blew hot oil and steam. Ashida tripped out and fought leg cramps. He half walked, half ran over. He caught an antiseptic stink. He pushed his way in.

Tables were shoved aside. Floor space was cleared. Dudley was stretched out on a bloody tablecloth.

Lin Chung fed him fluids. Ace Kwan waved a shrunken head. He thought he saw/he saw Claire De Haven. She was the tall woman. She was squeezing prayer beads.

All eyes on Dudley. All prayers for Dudley. He's stripped to his shorts. He's been gored and ripped.

Nort Layman made napkin tourniquets. Lin Chung swabbed Dudley's neck and plunged a syringe. A thin woman rigged fluid bags. Mike Breuning called her "Ruthie."

Dick Carlisle said, "It's good you were close."

Ruthie said, "Dud's been in the shit lately."

Ashida pressed close. Dudley bled out, ruddy to pale. Claire stood close. Her feet touched the tablecloth. Blood seeped into her shoes.

Busboys talked pidgin. *Four Families attack Dudster. Blue kerchief boy. Very small. Bandanna on face. Run through office. Escape out alley*.

Nort swabbed Dudley's arms. Lin Chung rolled Dudley on his back and swabbed posterior wounds. Nort said, "The neck cut's superficial." Chung said, "Back cuts, too."

Ruthie hung a plasma bag. Nort counted wounds. Ace ran up with a bottle of vodka. Ruthie wiped Dudley's back with high-test Smirnoff. Nort said, "We're good so far. He missed the arteries."

The tourniquets stanched blood. Ruthie dug in a doctor's bag. She pulled out stitches and bandage clamps. Breuning yelled. Carlisle yelled. It was all *no hospital/no cops*.

Ruthie threaded stitch needles. Chung held up Dudley's arms. Nort pumped his veins and passed out fluid bags. Busboys stood on their tiptoes and hooked them to ceiling beams.

The vodka went around. Nort and Ruthie chugged. Dudley stirred and coughed. He raised his hands and made fists.

The whole room cheered. Ruthie winked at Claire. It was a great faux-Dudley wink.

Ashida walked back to the alley. His legs gave out. He sat on a stack of bald tires and sobbed.

They cheered inside the restaurant. Nort warbled that Irish song "Kilgary Mountain." Ace announced free pupu platters and drinks.

Ashida wiped his face and kicked rocks across the alley. His lab smock was tear-drenched.

"Were you really Kay's lover?"

Ashida looked over. Claire sat on her own stack of tires. Her dress was soaked red. Her cheeks were bloody. She'd knelt to kiss him.

"No. I wasn't."

"I found her miraculous and disturbing. She taught me things."

Ashida nodded. Claire dabbed her cheeks.

"It's very powerful to love someone that you shouldn't."

Ashida said, "Yes. I know what you mean."

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

LOS ANGELES | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28, 1941

I burned the evidence in my backyard incinerator. The bloody clothing, the blue kerchief, the mask. I wadded up newspaper and covered all of it. A single match made it all flame.

I intended to kill him, and may or may not have succeeded. Radio bulletins will confirm the murder. No news will ascribe a clandestine convalescence and prepare me for a fateful knock on the door. In either case, I'll be ready.

I might waltz altogether. I might be sent to the green room at San Quentin Prison. I'll walk that last mile with Bette Davis defiance or in the spirit of Claire De Haven as Joan of Arc. I will exhibit stunning artistry in any and all cases. Character and conviction? Maybe, maybe not. I'm only twenty-one, and this war is but three weeks old. These past days affirm my appetite for heedless adventure. Opportunity may or may not find me. In the meantime, I will sit perfectly still.

Approaching footsteps forced me to flee. Busboys saw me escape down the alley, disguised as a small Chinese man. I removed my male clothing in a gas station men's room and walked out as a woman in blouse and slacks. I was not seen entering or leaving the men's room and had stashed a handbag under some rocks near the corner of Temple and Main. The bloody clothes and mask went in them; the bloody knife went down a sewer grate. I blended into a passing parade and chanted "*Lest we forget!*"

The clothes and mask burned. I watched the smoke rise over Wetherly Drive and drift down to the Strip. I sat at the backyard table and wrote Scotty a letter.

Dear boy, I will wear my Saint Christopher medal until you safely return. What are you thinking now? Will full-scale war seem prosaic after what you saw here? I wish I could run off to Scotland with you. We would make love in a cottage on the moors and frolic with a rambunctious dog I *just met. We had only a few weeks together, and I never saw you in kilts*.

I left the letter outside for the postman and went in to the piano. I was badly out of practice, but gained momentum as I played. Lee failed to appear. The phone failed to ring. No one knocked on the door. The Chopin was for Claire, the Grieg was for Scotty, the dank Rachmaninoff étude was for Hideo. I sent magisterial Beethoven out for the only one who had earned it.

I learned to play in the dark. I seemed to acquire the skill instantaneously. I strung together variations on already-learned harmonies and phrased them as one long sonata *reminiscenza*. I stayed up all night and all through the following day; I improvised contrasting themes and built them from the raw stuff of fresh war and raw men and women. I banged low chords to announce the conflicts of the man I had come to love dearly.

War. Blood libel. Twenty-three days, this storm, *reminiscenza*. It was for all of them and him most of all. It was a transcendental *mémoire*. Here we were in Los Angeles. We were at odds with one another and afire with crazed duty. We were as one and bound by a terrible allegiance in the time of Pearl Harbor.

December 29, 1941

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LOS ANGELES | MONDAY, DECEMBER 29, 1941

Dudley swore allegiance.

It was a bedside ceremony. An Army major read the oath. Joe Kennedy and Hideo Ashida stood witness. Uncle Ace supplied a room above the Pagoda. He made love to Bette Davis on this selfsame bed.

He repeated the major's words. His voice fluttered and held. Claire pinned captain's bars to his smock. Ace wheeled in egg rolls and mai tais.

Captain D. L. Smith, United States Army. *Dudley Liam Smith—a ghost attacked you.*

He survived. Ruth Mildred credited Big "O." It prevented shock and provided baseline anesthesia. It stalled the rush of spilled blood.

The lads proposed a tong sweep. Find the boy and skin his hide. He nixed it.

"The creature wasn't human, and I summoned him myself. I've been rowdy of late, and brought on retribution. The best of us err and sin, and I'm only grateful that my Creator chose to spare me."

They thought he was nuts. They were empiricist hardheads. He was a mystic. Wolves spoke to him.

Claire stayed by his side. She'd knelt in his blood. *Steadfast girl, who are you? Did I conjure you or did you conjure me?*

Ace dished out snacks and drinks. The gang dished out toasts.

The major said, "Congratulations, Captain."

Joe said, "You're one lucky mick."

Hideo said, "I'm honored to be here."

Ace said, "Which makes you honorary Chinese."

Claire laughed and plumped his pillow. Dudley kissed her hand and winked.

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LOS ANGELES | MONDAY, DECEMBER 29, 1941

Mob scene. Hollywood Boulevard at Las Palmas Avenue.

The crowd ran two thousand. The cop crew ran two hundred. Note the double barricades and loudspeakers on streetlamps.

Movie spotlights swooping. A twenty-foot-high bandstand with curb-to-curb span. Geek citizens stretched out a half mile.

Cross streets blocked off. Cars diverted and rerouted. Bottlenecks south to Melrose and north to the Hollywood Bowl.

The rally started at 7:00. Ann Sheridan and Ellen Drew. Ronald Reagan and Joan Crawford. Two half-gassed Ritz Brothers.

L.A. was a cluster fuck. Miss Sheridan was a Narco snitch. Elmer Jackson was screwing Miss Drew.

Parker paced a stretch of sidewalk. Crowd noise slammed him. Ditto a hot rumor. A tong punk sliced the Dudster at Kwan's yesterday.

Dudley survived. He was now Army-commissioned and Mexico-bound.

The celebs were ensconced at Musso & Frank's. A "U.S.A. Buffet" was set up. The Ritz Brothers were grab-assing Miss Sheridan and Miss Drew.

His nerves were shot to shit. He was thirteen days sober. This was all shit that he didn't need.

He ducked into Musso's. The crowd noise abated. The bartender saw him and held up a telephone.

He walked over. The celebs had lacquered photos pinned to their coats. The pix honored Our Boys in Service. Cluster fuck. Miss Crawford's pic noted Scotty Bennett, USMC.

The bartender passed the phone. Parker cupped his free ear.

"Yes?"

"It's Preston Exley, Bill. I'm calling to tell you that we're folding our tent. That means on all of it. You convinced us that it's not worth the trouble. For what it's worth, you won."

Parker said, "Thank you."

Exley said something else. The restaurant started broiling. Parker hung up and walked outside.

He stood on the sidewalk. He felt shot-to-shit numb. That big noise washed over him.

He smoked and watched the crowd. The spotlights swept low. They illuminated odd people.

He stared at the crowd. That big noise escalated. The celebs climbed the bandstand. The spotlights lit up geeks standing close in.

He caught half a glimpse. The light swerved away. He'd caught her tall sway and red hair. The light swerved back. He caught her face. He saw the gold braid on her uniform.

He ran toward her. He jumped off the curb and made the street at a sprint. People saw *Cop* and stepped back. People caught a blur and stood still. He saw her, he lost her, he saw her. He thought he saw her blow smoke.

He hit the crowd. He lost her. He elbowed through the crowd. People moved away and tripped away from him. He stumbled and lost his hat. He saw her, he lost her.

He elbowed people. He pushed people back. He saw her, he lost her. He shoved people. They shoved him back. He staggered and stayed upright. He saw her close, he lost her, he saw her farther back.

He tried to turn toward her. People blocked his path. He shoved them. They shoved him. He shoved harder. They shoved harder. He saw her gold uniform braid.

He caught an elbow. He caught rabbit punches. Someone coffee-doused him. Someone stuck a foot out and tripped him. He hit the pavement and heard people laugh.

He stumbled up and tried to run. He got tripped again. He got up, he fell down, he got up. He thought he saw her. He tripped and lost her. People laughed at him and kicked him. He crouched low and ran. He knocked down a fat man and made the south curb.

His trousers were ripped. His hat was gone. He stumbled to a streetlamp and pulled himself up on a ledge. He looked above the crowd and down at the crowd and tried to catch her red hair.

He lost his grip. He slid off the pole and hit the curb. People laughed at him. Patriotic music blasted. Two thousand fools screeched.

He steadied himself and walked off the boulevard. He saw a COCKTAILS sign down Las Palmas.

He beelined. The door was propped open. The bottle row above the bar was backlit.

The barman saw him and quick-read him. He laid down a napkin. Parker pointed to the Old Crow and held two fingers up.

The barman poured him a double. He downed it. The barman refilled him. He downed it. The barman refilled him. He downed it and dropped a twenty on the bartop.

The booze quick-scorched him. He walked outside with the flush. Stray spotlights hit him. He saw a cab.

He got in the back. The cabbie went *Where to?* He went *It's off the Strip*.

The cabbie U-turned. Parker steered him around the bottlenecks and got him away from the shit. They caught a lull. They made all greens to the Strip. He pointed him up the hill.

The porch light was on. Blanchard's car was gone. Her car was there.

He paid the cabbie and walked up. The living room was dark. The door was halfway cracked. There was just fireplace glow.

She was there. She was tucked asleep on the couch.

He stepped inside. He grabbed a stray chair and carried it over. He sat facing her. One arm was draped toward him. He saw the fresh knife nicks. Dear lord, she did it.

He pulled his chair closer. His legs bumped the couch. Her eyes fluttered. She said, "William," and went back to sleep.

A breeze stirred the fire and lit her hair red. He smelled the prairie. He touched her face and said, "Katherine, love."

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Perfidia is the first volume of the Second L.A. Quartet. The L.A. Quartet—*The Black Dahlia, The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential* and *White Jazz*—covers the years 1946 to 1958 in Los Angeles. The Underworld U.S.A. Trilogy—*American Tabloid, The Cold Six Thousand* and *Blood's A Rover*—covers 1958 to 1972, on a national scale.

The Second L.A. Quartet places real-life and fictional characters from the first two bodies of work in Los Angeles during World War II, as significantly younger people. These three series span thirty-one years and will stand as one novelistic history. The following list notes the previous appearances of characters in *Perfidia*.

BRENDA ALLEN. The real-life Allen appears in *The Big Nowhere*.

AKIRA ASHIDA. The brother of police chemist Hideo Ashida.

HIDEO ASHIDA. This character is referenced in *The Black Dahlia*.

MARIKO ASHIDA. The mother of Hideo and Akira Ashida.

OFFICER SCOTTY BENNETT, Los Angeles Police Department. Bennett appears in *Blood's A Rover*.

LEONARD BERNSTEIN. The real-life pianist, conductor and composer.

EUGENE BISCAILUZ. The real-life sheriff of Los Angeles County.

OFFICER LEE BLANCHARD, Los Angeles Police Department. Blanchard appears in *The Black Dahlia*.

BUCKY BLEICHERT. This character appears in *The Black Dahlia*.

FLETCHER BOWRON. The real-life mayor of Los Angeles.

SERGEANT MIKE BREUNING, Los Angeles Police Department. Breuning appears in *The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential* and *White Jazz*.

LIEUTENANT THAD BROWN, Los Angeles Police Department. A noted real-life policeman.

ARCHBISHOP J. J. CANTWELL. The real-life head of the L.A. Archdiocese.

SERGEANT DICK CARLISLE, Los Angeles Police Department. Carlisle appears in *The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential* and *White Jazz*.

"TOJO TOM" CHASCO. A Japanese-Mexican criminal and Fifth Columnist.

DR. LIN CHUNG. A plastic surgeon and proponent of eugenics.

MICKEY COHEN. The real-life Cohen appears in *The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential* and *White Jazz*.

HARRY COHN. The real-life boss of Columbia Pictures.

LIEUTENANT JOAN CONVILLE, USNR. A Navy nurse adrift in Los Angeles.

JOAN CRAWFORD. The real-life film actress.

HUEY CRESSMEYER. This character appears in *American Tabloid*.

DR. RUTH MILDRED CRESSMEYER. Dr. Cressmeyer appears in *American Tabloid*.

BETTE DAVIS. The real-life film actress.

JAMES EDGAR "TWO-GUN" DAVIS. The real-life former chief of the Los Angeles Police Department.

CLAIRE DE HAVEN. Miss De Haven appears in *The Big Nowhere*.

ELLEN DREW. A real-life "B" movie actress.

PRESTON EXLEY. This character appears in *L.A. Confidential*.

ARTHUR FARNSWORTH. The real-life second husband of Bette Davis.

TOMMY GILFOYLE. This character appears in *The Black Dahlia*.

MRS. NAO HAMANO. A real-life Japanese housewife.

MONSIGNOR JOE HAYES. A Catholic priest and the confessor of Captain William H. Parker.

THE HEARST RIFLE TEAM. Real-life sharpshooters employed by tycoon William Randolph Hearst.

DR. FRED HILTZ. This character appears in *Blood's A Rover*.

WALLACE HODAKA. A suspected Japanese Fifth Columnist.

RICHARD HOOD, FBI. The real-life head man at the FBI's Los Angeles Office.

J. EDGAR HOOVER, FBI. The real-life Hoover appears in *American Tabloid, The Cold Six Thousand* and *Blood's A Rover*.

BOB HOPE. The real-life film and radio comedian.

CLEMENCE B. "CALL-ME-JACK" HORRALL. The real-life chief of the Los Angeles Police Department.

SID HUDGENS. This character appears in *L.A. Confidential*.

LAURA HUGHES. The illegitimate daughter of Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., and Gloria Swanson.

LIEUTENANT CARL HULL, Los Angeles Police Department. Friend and ideological consort of Captain William H. Parker.

SERGEANT ELMER JACKSON, Los Angeles Police Department. A notorious real-life policeman.

ENSIGN JACK KENNEDY. The real-life Kennedy appears in *American Tabloid*.

JOSEPH P. KENNEDY. The real-life Kennedy *père* appears in *American*

Tabloid.

SERGEANT BILL KOENIG, Los Angeles Police Department. Koenig appears in *The Black Dahlia*.

ROSE EILEEN KWAN. The niece of Uncle Ace Kwan.

UNCLE ACE KWAN. This character appears in *L.A. Confidential*.

FIORELLO LA GUARDIA. The real-life mayor of New York City and director of the U.S. Office of War Preparedness.

KAY LAKE. Miss Lake appears in *The Black Dahlia*.

JIM LARKIN. A real-life British spy, retired in Los Angeles.

DR. NORT LAYMAN. Dr. Layman appears in *The Big Nowhere* and *L.A. Confidential*.

ANDREA LESNICK. Miss Lesnick appears in *The Big Nowhere*.

DR. SAUL LESNICK. Dr. Lesnick appears in *The Big Nowhere*.

WARD LITTELL, FBI. Littell appears in *American Tabloid* and *The Cold Six Thousand*.

ELLIS LOEW. This character appears in *The Black Dahlia, The Big Nowhere* and *L.A. Confidential*.

REYNOLDS LOFTIS. This character appears in *The Big Nowhere*.

DR. TERRY LUX. Dr. Lux appears in *The Big Nowhere*.

CAPTAIN CARLOS MADRANO, Mexican State Police. A Nazi sympathizer and alleged Fifth Columnist.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY BILL McPHERSON. This character appears in *L.A. Confidential*.

SERGEANT TURNER “BUZZ” MEEKS, Los Angeles Police Department. Meeks appears in *The Big Nowhere* and *L.A. Confidential*.

CHAZ MINEAR. This character appears in *The Big Nowhere*.

“JIMMY THE JAP” NAMURA. A Japanese Fifth Columnist.

ROBERT NOBLE. A real-life Nazi sympathizer.

CAPTAIN WILLIAM H. PARKER, Los Angeles Police Department. The real-life Parker appears in *L.A. Confidential* and *White Jazz*.

PIERCE PATCHETT. This character appears in *L.A. Confidential*.

JEROME JOSEPH PAVLIK. A rapist at large in Los Angeles.

RAY PINKER, Los Angeles Police Department. The real-life Pinker appears in *L.A. Confidential* and *White Jazz*.

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF. The real-life pianist and composer.

PAUL ROBESON. The real-life actor, singer and political lightning rod.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT. The real-life First Lady.

HOOKY ROTHMAN. A real-life minor hoodlum.

DOT ROTHSTEIN. Miss Rothstein appears in *L.A. Confidential*.

SAM RUMMEL. A real-life criminal lawyer.

ED SATTERLEE, FBI. Satterlee appears in *The Big Nowhere*.

GORO SHIGETA. A Japanese businessman and murder victim.

ELIZABETH SHORT. Miss Short appears in *The Black Dahlia*.

FUJIO “BAMBOO” SHUDO. A Japanese psychopath.

BENJAMIN “BUGSY” SIEGEL. The real-life Siegel appears in *The Big Nowhere* and *L.A. Confidential*.

SERGEANT DUDLEY SMITH, Los Angeles Police Department. Smith appears in *The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential* and *White Jazz*.

GERALD L. K. SMITH. The real-life native fascist.

GLORIA SWANSON. The real-life film actress.

SERGEANT FRITZ VOGEL, Los Angeles Police Department. Vogel appears in *The Black Dahlia*.

DEPUTY DOUGLAS WALDNER, Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Office. A Klanned-up local cop.

AYA WATANABE. The matriarch of a traitorous Japanese family.

JOHNNY WATANABE. The son of Aya and Ryoshi Watanabe.

NANCY WATANABE. The daughter of Aya and Ryoshi Watanabe.

RYOSHI WATANABE. The patriarch of a traitorous Japanese family.

A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Ellroy was born in Los Angeles in 1948. He is the author of the L.A. Quartet—*The Black Dahlia, The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential* and *White Jazz*—and the Underworld U.S.A. Trilogy—*American Tabloid, The Cold Six Thousand* and *Blood's A Rover*. These seven novels have won numerous honors and were international best sellers.

Perfidia is the first novel of the Second L.A. Quartet, Ellroy's fictional history of Los Angeles during World War II. The design of this extended work is unprecedented. Ellroy will take characters from the original quartet and trilogy, set between 1946 and 1972, and detail their lives as significantly younger people.

Ellroy currently lives in Los Angeles.

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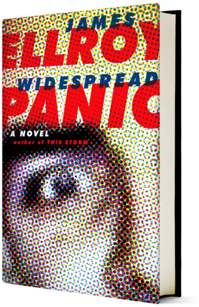
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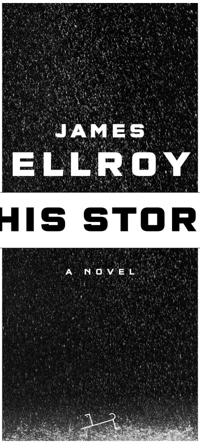
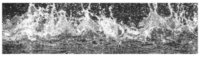


JAMES
ELLROY

THIS STORM

A NOVEL

Alfred A. Knopf
New York · 2019



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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Ellroy, James, [date] author.
Title: This storm : a novel / James Ellroy.
Description: First United States Edition. | New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2019.
Identifiers: LCCN 2018048538 | ISBN 9780307957009 (hardback) | ISBN 9780525521730 (ebook) | ISBN 9781524711511 (open market)
Subjects: LCSH: Murder—Investigation—Fiction. | BISAC: FICTION / Literary. | FICTION / Mystery & Detective / Hard-Boiled. | FICTION / Historical. | GSAFD: War stories. | Historical Fiction. | Mystery fiction.
Classification: LCC PS3555.L6274 T47 2019 | DDC 813/.54—dc23 LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018048538

Ebook ISBN 9780525521730

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Cover photograph: Hollywood, California. Old Visuals / Alamy
Cover design by Chip Kidd

Title pages and part opening pages: Rain over black background by sirtravelalot / Shutterstock

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Dramatis Personae
A Note About the Author

TO HELEN KNODE

Blood alone moves the wheels of history.

—Benito "Il Duce" Mussolini

Reminiscenza.

I remain spellbound. That then-to-now fever still consumes me. I am very old and the sole living witness. The Maestro willed me his piano and the score we smuggled from Russia. I retain faultless vision and memory. Long bouts of practice keep my hands strong.

I compose at the keyboard. Improvisation spawns recollection. Words and music sustain me and forge my repudiation of death.

The war.

The rain.

The gold.

Los Angeles and Mexico, the Fifth Column.

I will not die as long as I live this story.

THE THUNDERBOLT BROADCAST/FATHER CHARLES COUGHLIN/XERB RADIO, LOS ANGELES. BOOTLEG TRANSMITTER: TIJUANA, MEXICO. TUESDAY, DECEMBER 30, 1941

Good evening and *bienvenidos,* a belated *Feliz Navidad,* and let's not forget *próspero año y felicidad*—which means "Happy New Year" in English and serves to introduce the Mexico-at-war theme of tonight's broadcast. And at war we are, my fellow American listeners—even though we sure as shooting didn't want to be in the first place.

Let's talk turkey here. *Es la verdad,* as our Mex cousins say. We've been in this Jew-inspired boondoggle a mere twenty-three days, and we've been forced to stand with the rape-happy Russian Reds against the more sincerely simpatico Nazis. That's a shattering shame, but our Jew-pawn president, Franklin "Double-Cross" Rosenfeld, has deliriously decreed that we must fight *der Führer,* so fight that heroic *jefe* we regretfully must. It's a ways off, though—because we've got our hands full with the Japs right now.

So, let's meander down Mexico way—where the *señoritas* sizzle and more HELL-bent *jefes* hold sway.

Mexico connotes *"PROUDLY CATHOLIC,"* does it not, friends? Add *THEOCRATIC REPUBLIC, ANTI-RED,* and *DUTIFULLY RELIGIOUS* to that. It paints a picture, doesn't it? Yes—but the picture is wholly inaccurate and sorrowfully seditious, dating back to the tempestuous '20s and the repugnant Red reign of *Presidente* Plutarco Calles.

Item: Calles instituted a Six-Year Plan for social and political reform, patterned after Red Russia's Five-Year Plan.

Item: Calles set out to eradicate the influence of the Catholic Church, barred religious festivals and processions, and created "workers' collectives" to counter the alleged excesses of industrial capitalism and further secularize the Mexican body politic, despite the stubborn opposition of the *CATHOLIC* Mexican people.

Item: Catholic bishops were forced to suspend public worship.

Item: Calles's "Redshirt" goon squads shuttered churches across Mexico.

Item: priests were murdered, nuns were raped, bishops sought South American asylum, and the Holy Mass was performed as a secret sacrament.

Item: cancerous Calles was succeeded by limp leftist Lázaro Cárdenas. He was a motley mollycoddler of a less malicious sort. His anticlerical policies bore a still Stalinist, but less overt stink. Priests were still murdered, nuns were still raped, provincial despots still shuttered churches and satanically forbade Mass.

Item: these practices continue under current *Presidente* Manuel Ávila Camacho—a purported “leftist-centrist”—read that as one mealymouthed *muchacho.*

This brings us to the Cristeros—the ripsnorting, righteous, *CATHOLIC* resistance.

The Goldshirts—not the *Red*shirts of the Calles/Cárdenas/Communist ilk. The armed home guard that fought fire with fire, killed Redshirts, lynched Communist commissars and apoplectic apparatchiks, and burned more than a few Red reptiles alive.

The Cristeros flourished under Calles and were forced into hiding under Cárdenas. In ’37 they majestically metamorphosed into the Unión Nacional Sinarquista.

Synarchism means “without anarchy.” Sinarquismo represents a full-fledged assault on the anti-Catholic Left. Underground *Üntermenschen* now enforce *Presidente* Camacho’s atheistic agenda; the Sinarquistas magnificently mount a Catholic counterattack. The Sinarquistas are growing in number. They proselytize for a merged Catholic-secular state. They’ve been called *fascistas* and Nazis—but that’s all Red hoo-ha. Yes, but they surely grew out of the Spanish Falange and *Generalissimo* Francisco Franco’s valiant victory in the Spanish Civil War. And, now—with the United States embroiled in a consuming world conflict, and with Mexico situated at our southernmost tip—will the Greenshirt Sinarquistas serve our best interests as the emergent world power both anti-Axis and nationalistically non-Red?

Item: Mexico has remained “neutral” in this world conflict so far.

Item: *Presidente* Camacho closed the German consulate in August ’41 but has let a great many pro-Axis Krauts and Japs linger down May-hee-co way.

Enter Baja California.

Baja’s that lurid lick of Mexican land south of our own San Diego. It’s a hellish hotbed of fascist-*comunista* intrigue. There’s a great many resident Japs. The Mex State Police suspect the presence of a great many Jap submarine berths along Baja’s Pacific coastline. There’s talk of secret Jap air bases being readied for raids on U.S. naval installations and defense plants near Los Angeles.

Enter Sinarquista boss man Salvador Abascal.

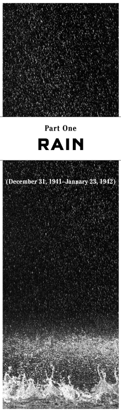
Señor Abascal *es muy católico.* He’s the Sinarquista’s spiritual and intellectual leader, and wears Sinarquismo’s Greenshirt proudly. Like most male adherents to Sinarquismo, he wears a small “SQ” with a coiled snake encircling it, tattooed in the web of his right forefinger and thumb. He’s a handsome man of thirty-one—and *Presidente* Camacho seems to fear him.

Item: the Sinarquista membership is growing in Mexico and the U.S.

Item: punk patriarch Camacho has granted them land for an encampment at Magdalena Bay in Southern Baja. Is he isolating the Sinarquistas or readying them for some task?

U.S. Army Intelligence officers are mobilizing in Baja. They will sort out the political gestalt and round up Japs, in a replication of our own Jap-internment efforts. What's the upshot here? Will Mexico end its neutered neutral stance and throw in with Uncle Sam? America is now alarmingly aligned with the repugnant Russian Reds, and allied against the nifty but nefarious Nazis. Will the Mexican peso and the U.S. dollar plummet and will a new gold standard arise? What about those ripe rumors—Nazis and Russkies melting gold bars into swastika and hammer-and-sickle artifacts?

Mexico, my American *hermanos* and Christian countrymen. It's the southern gateway to our cherished shores. Will waterlogged wetbacks breach our borders and sap us with sabotage? Will the Sinarquistas come to our aid as a heroic home guard?



Part One

RAIN

(December 31, 1941–January 23, 1942)

1

ELMER JACKSON

(LOS ANGELES, 9:30 P.M., 12/31/41)

Stakeout.

It's a sit-and-wait job. Some hot-prowl burglar/rape-o's out creeping. He's Tommy Glennon, recent Quentin grad. He's notched five 459/sodomies since Pearl Harbor.

Happy fucking New Year.

Three-man stakeout. Two parked cars. 24th and Normandie. Sit and wait. Endure bugs-up-your-ass ennui.

The rain. Plus war-blackout regulations. Drawn shades, doused streetlamps. Bum visibility.

It's a stag hunt. The PD worked that way. Four victims mugshot-ID'd Tommy. The Chief and Dudley Smith conferred. They called it. Per always: perv shit on women mandates *DEATH.*

Elmer gargled Old Crow. He had the front-house car. Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle had the alley. Tommy had the crib cased. Two leggy sisters lived there. Lockstep surveillance locked down the gestalt.

Central Burglary tailed Tommy a week running. Elmer moved the sisters out and moved his leggy girlfriend in. She had the legs and the stones for the job.

Ellen Drew. His *part*-time girlfriend and *part*-time Paramount starlet. Ellen glommed raves in *If I Were King* and went *pffft.* She *part*-time whored for Elmer and his *full*-time girlfriend.

Brenda Allen. *Part*-time squeeze of Chief Jack Horrall. It's who you know and who you blow. Call-Me-Jack set up the bait gig.

Elmer scoped the house. Upstairs lights gleamed. Ellen cracked the shades to spotlight her gams. It violated blackout regs and lit her legs *gooooood.* Tommy G. was a leg man. Elmer read his Quentin file and glommed the gestalt.

Thomas Malcolm Glennon/white male American/DOB 8/19/16. Preston Reform School and Quentin. Tight with pachucos and Four Families tong men.

Fireworks popped somewhere north. The rain drenched the sparks and killed the effect.

"It's who you know."

Elmer knew Dudley and Call-Me-Jack. Thus, this shit job. Mike B. and Dick C. were Dudley's strongarm goons. Dud got the night off. Some unknown geek shivved him three days ago.

Elmer yawned. Elmer futzed with his two-way radio. Police calls spritzed.

Niggertown 211/Happytime Liquor/prowl cars at scene. Dope roust at Club Zombie. Mexi*coon* rumble, 84th and Avalon. Zoot-suit beaners *ex*-cape.

Elmer yawned. Elmer skimmed the dial. He hit a civilian band and got lucky. The PD's New Year's bash warbled.

It's live from City Hall. It features Count Basie's Band. The Detective Bureau muster room's rigged with radio mikes. The Count's at the keyboard. There's Lester Young's sax.

Here's the inside tattle. Two bluesuits popped the Count with reefers. Jack Horrall caught wind and tossed the pitch. Your call, Count. Six months honor farm or a one-night engagement?

Rain slammed the car. Said rain outslammed Count Basie. Elmer skimmed to Band 3. He caught an open line to Breuning and Carlisle.

"Know" and "blow." Maladroit Mike and Dipshit Dick. This jive New Year's Eve. What good's your insider-cop status?

He loved Headquarters Vice. It dispensed yuks and served to scotch his call-biz competition. Then the fucking Japs bombed fucking Pearl Harbor and fucked the white world up the brown trail.

He got detached to the Alien Squad. It was Japs twelve days a week. Japs, Japs, *JAPS.* Foreign-born, native-born, for sure and alleged Fifth Column. Raid their pads. Confiscate their goods. Transport them to ritzy horse stalls at Santa Anita.

Band 3 popped sound. Breuning and Carlisle bullshitted. Who shivved the Dudster? Their rambunctious kids. This meter maid with jugs out to here.

Breuning and Carlisle gassed. They hashed out the Fed's phone-tap probe. The PD was knee-deep in shit. It's a nail-biter.

City Hall was bugged and tapped, floor-to-rafters. Rival cop factions spied on each other. Grifter cops, tonged-up cops, cop strikebreakers. The Feds took note and launched a probe.

Cop fiefdoms. Cop thieves. Cops in the Silver Shirts and German-American Bund. Calls to the DA's Office. Calls to Mayor Fletch Bowron. Detective Bureau cops be *scaaared.*

Elmer was *scared.* He ran a call-girl ring. He peddled flesh to the L.A. elite. He made biz calls from the Vice squadroom.

The radio browned out. Shit—line crackle, static, hiss. Elmer twirled the dial. He caught some luck there. Good Lord—it's Cliffie Stone's *Hometown Jamboree.*

It was auld lang syne for displaced crackers. That was him, defined. Cliffie connoted hayrides and moonshine. Cliffie brought back Wisharts, North Carolina.

Wisharts was Klan Kountry. Geography is destiny. Klan life fucked up his daddy and big brother, Wayne Frank. That hate-the-jigs diet stuck in young Elmer's craw. He hit eighteen in '30. He joined the Marine Corps. Semper Fi: Parris Island, Camp Lejeune, Nicaragua.

Man-o-Man Managua. The Marine detachment backstops puppet *Führer* Somoza. Jarheads snuff his political rivals and stand embassy guard. They're bellhops and part-time assassins. *El Jefe* loves Lance Corporal E. V. Jackson. Hence a plum job: run *Jefe*'s favorite whorehouse.

He learned the biz that way. It spawned his notion of call-service-to-your-door girls. *Jefe* shot him Plum Job #2. He watchdogged the L.A. police chief.

James Edgar "Two-Gun" Davis. One vivid lunatic. Davis and *Jefe* were sordid soul mates. They boozed and whored together. Davis loved Lance Corporal E. V. Jackson. Here's why:

A leftist zealot charged Davis with a machete. Lance Corporal Jackson shot and killed him. Davis shot Lance Corporal Jackson a police department appointment.

Goodbye, Marine Corps. Hello, Los Angeles.

Elmer liked police work. Davis set him up with a cooze pusher named Brenda Allen. Elmer and Brenda clicked. They concocted their phone-exchange biz and saw it flourish. The L.A. grand jury sacked Two-Gun Davis. He poked one Jailbait Jill too many and took it up the dirt road.

Call-Me-Jack's in now. He's got 7% of the call biz. Sergeant E. V. Jackson is twenty-nine. He's one lucky white man.

Cliffie Stone laid down hick ballads. That was Wayne Frank's mawkish meter. Wayne Frank was a hate dog and nativist nabob. Kid brother Elmer notched opportunities. Wayne Frank harvested shit.

Wayne Frank goes Klan, goes rumdum, goes hobo. He habituates the West Coast and clocks an untimely end.

Elmer gargled Old Crow. He was half-tanked. It was 10:18. Tommy G. always hit between 10:00 and midnight.

The hick music rubbed him raw. He doused the radio and gassed on the rain. His prowl car was sunk fender-deep.

He checked the house. Cracked blinds gave him a look-see. Ellen was upstairs. She was pacing and smoking. She provided a Leg Show De-luxe. Smoke plumes plumed out a transom slot.

Elmer tuned in Band 3. Mike B. groused to Dick C. Dudster this, Dudster that. More drift per their rambunctious kids.

More line fuzz and static. Elmer killed his jug and tossed it out the window. "Whoa, Junior" fuzzed in.

Elmer grabbed the receiver and flipped the talk switch. The fuzz-static cleared.

"Yeah, Mike."

"Our boy's coming south. He hopped the next-door fence. You take the front. Let him sniff Ellen and start upstairs before you sh—"

Elmer jumped.

He shoved out the door. He puddle-leaped and lunged for the curb. His shoes squished and leaked. He pulled his piece and chambered a round.

His hat flew off. The rain stung his eyes and ratched up his vision. He made the lawn/the front porch/the front door.

It's unlocked. Go in slow now. You oiled the hinges and jambs. Tommy won't hear shit.

He got inside. He smelled Ellen's cigarette smoke and perfume. He made for the stairway. He squished all over the living room rug.

Mike and Dick squished toward him. They hit the stairway. Everybody went *sssssshhh.*

They scoped Tommy's muddy footprints. They heard floorboard creaks and foot scuffs upstairs.

Mike winked. Dick did that slice-the-throat thing. Elmer gulped—*mother dog, holy shit*—

Ellen screamed.

Mike whooped. Dick whooped. They ran upstairs and raised a ruckus. They bumped each other off the walls and hit the landing. Elmer heard front-window glass shatter. Tommy pulled some human-fly stunt.

Elmer ran back out the door. There's that black sky and sluice rain, there's half a glimpse. There's Human Fly Tommy, running northbound—

He's two front yards up. He's cutting toward the sidewalk. There's no soaked grass and more traction there.

Elmer cut crossways and hit asphalt. His flapping raincoat slowed him down. He gained ground, lost ground, gained ground. He aimed at Tommy's back and popped three rounds. Muzzle flash turned the rain red.

Tommy gained ground. Mike and Dick fired—back there, long-distance. Shots ricocheted off front porches.

Tommy ran east on 26th. Elmer caught a sideways look and emptied his clip.

The flare messed with his eyes and made little halos.

Elmer ran east. He reloaded and sprinted. His raincoat slipped off. Window shades went up. He got some sight-in light.

He gained ground. His wind faltered. Something dropped from Tommy's pants pocket. He stopped and aimed tight. He had him, he had him, something said *DON'T*. He squeezed three shots wide on purpose.

Tommy cut north. He's a Human Fly. He's a fleet-foot rape-o. Watch him vamoose.

Elmer heard Mike and Dick, way back there. Shots bounced off the street. Them dumbfucks blasted will-o'-the-wisps.

Elmer stopped and caught some breath. He walked east and checked the sidewalk.

Tommy dropped something. Elmer saw it and picked it up. Well, now. Tommy dropped a red leather address book.

—

Ellen said, "Swell New Year's."

Elmer said, "I had that same thought."

"I guess you're not much of a shot."

"Come *on.* At night, in the rain?"

They drove through Hollywood. Ellen flopped at the Green Gables Apartments. It adjoined Paramount and lubed early cast calls. Ellen had a second marriage going. Two husbands and a kid at age twenty-seven. Her hubby was off with the Air Corps. She serviced Elmer's clients out of ennui. She serviced Elmer, likewise.

Elmer hit Melrose, westbound. Call it Aquacade by Night. Muted streetlamps. The blackout and curb-high floodwater.

Ellen lit a cigarette. "He pulled out his pecker and waved it. That's when I screamed."

Elmer yocked. Ellen wagged a pinkie. Tommy Glennon—hung like a cashew.

Elmer yocked anew. Ellen groped his trouser pockets and extracted his roll. She peeled off a fifty and stuffed the roll back.

"That felt nice."

"Not tonight. The weekend, maybe."

"I've got late duty. My bodyguard gig with Hideo Ashida."

Ellen said, "He's cute, for a Jap. Do you think he's queer?"

"Come on. He's the best forensic chemist in this white man's PD."

Ellen tossed her cigarette. "Tell Jack Horrall thanks for the fifty, and tell him no more bait jobs for this little black duck."

"Anything else?"

"Tell him I said you should go back in the Marines. There's a war on, and you should be fighting it, like my husband."

Elmer said, "Do you love me?"

Ellen said, "No. You're just my wartime diversion."

—

Ellen scrammed at the Gables. Elmer U-turned and booked east. This nutty brainstorm percolated. His short hairs prickled on overdrive.

Tommy G. lived at the Gordon Hotel. Breuning and Carlisle were too lazy to go toss it. The Gordon was straight up Melrose.

Let's prowl Tommy's room. Let's sniff leads. Let's get some buy-back on that fuckup. Let's mess with Dudley Smith.

The Dudster gored his goat. Hey, Elmer—toast this guy. That don't sit right. He ain't no black-robe killer.

The goddamn rain. Backed-up sewers. Mud slides. No hot toddies, no swell women.

Elmer parked upside the Gordon and puddle-jumped in. The lobby was threadbare. A clerk dozed by the switchboard. He wore a green felt leprechaun hat.

Tommy rented 216. Elmer walked upstairs and braced the door. He caught zero voices and no radio warble. He pulled his piece and shoulder-popped the jamb.

No Tommy. No nobody. Just this flop. Just this twelve-by-twelve den of despair.

No bathroom. One closet. A milk-bottle pissoir by the bed. No chairs. One closet, one chest of drawers.

Elmer locked himself in. Thunder shook the whole building. Geeks yelled "Happy New Year!" out on Melrose.

He checked the closet. It contained nada. That meant Tommy lammed. He had a car or stole a car. He traded shots with three cops and vamoosed. Farewell, you rape-o cocksucker.

Elmer tossed the drawers. He caught some provocative shit.

A teach-yourself-Spanish book. A smut-photo book. Spicy donkey-show pix, à la Tijuana. Note the porkpie hat on *El Burro.*

Nazi armbands. Jap flags. One tattoo stencil. Note the excised parts:

Outlines for swastikas. Outlines for an "SQ" circumscribed by coiled snakes.

Elmer thumbed Tommy's address book. More odd shit accrued. Look—

there's no addresses and no full names.

Look—a "J.S." and a Hollywood exchange. "St. Vib's" and a downtown exchange. It's probably St. Vibiana's catholic church.

Look—RE-8761. No names or initials. Republic's a south-of-downtown exchange.

Look—MA-4993. That number's familiar. He scoured his brain and snagged it.

Eddie Leng's Kowloon. A Chinatown slop chute. It's open-all-nite. It features tasty shark-fin soup.

Eddie Leng was a Four Families tong geek. Tommy G. was a known tong associate.

Plus: three more no name/no initial numbers.

Elmer grabbed the wall phone and roused the switchboard geek. Get me MA-6884, pronto.

The Detective Bureau. The Vice Squad night line. It was manned round the clock.

He got four rings and a pickup. He heard noisemaker squeal. The clerk came off blotto.

"Uh…yeah?"

"Rise and shine, dipshit. You got phone numbers to run."

The clerk yawned. "That you, Elmer?"

"It's me, so grab your pencil."

"I got it here someplace."

Elmer said, "HO-4612. The subscriber's got the initials J.S."

"Okay, I got—"

"The number for St. Vibiana's Church, and the subscriber name for RE-8761."

The clerk perked up. "I know that last number. It's a hot-box pay phone, and them *farkakte* phone-probe Feds been looking at it. A lot of hinky City Hall guys make their hinky calls from there."

Elmer said, "Don't stop now."

"Who's stopping? I was just pausing."

"Come on. Don't string this—"

"It used to be a bookie's hot-box, and the drift is it still is. It's over on 11th and Broadway, by the *Herald.* That *farkakte* reporter Sid Hudgens stiffs his unkosher calls from it."

Sid the Yid. Scandal scribe, putz provocateur. St. Vib's—*the* papist hot spot. Eddie Leng's eatery.

Tommy, what does this shit portend?

2

DUDLEY SMITH

(LOS ANGELES, 11:30 P.M., 12/31/41)

Surging brass. Soaring reeds. Driving rain in syncopation.

The muster room jumped. The Count and his boys cranked it. “Annie Laurie” now. Up-tempo and grandly Gaelic.

The room broiled. Steam heat fights cold L.A. winter. Dance-once-a-year cops danced tonight and overdid it. They quaffed table booze and tossed their dates, willy-nilly. The Count observed. White folks were circus clowns. This confirmed it.

Dudley watched. He had a side table and a cracked-for-air window. He wore his Army dress uniform. Claire wore a kelly green frock.

The Archbishop played to her. J. J. Cantwell liked women. He observed his vows and properly abstained. Monsignor Joe Hayes ignored Claire. She converted. It proved her inauthentic. He reluctantly served as her confessor.

Women repulsed Monsignor Joe. He liked boys. He contravened his vows and indulged his bent.

Father Coughlin liked raw discourse. His trinity was booze, slander, and foment. He loathed the Reds and the kikes. He played to the nuns at St. Vib’s and sundered them with hate tracts. He lived to sway souls and spawn discontent.

A waiter restocked the table. He bowed and laid out scotch, gin, and ice. The waiters were county jail trusties. This lad was a weenie waver. He habituated schoolyards and slammed his ham.

Claire freshened drinks. The clerics lit cigarettes and imbibed. The Archbishop ogled Claire. Monsignor Joe ogled the waiter. Father Charles doodled up a napkin. He drew swastikas dripping blood.

Dudley adjusted his sling. His left arm had sustained multiple shiv wounds. A pesky Chink, surely. Tong intrigue, most likely. He was allied with Uncle Ace

Kwan and Hop Sing. Said alliance might have spawned rival-tong enmity. Said shiv man would soon be sternly rebuked.

Claire shared her morphine. It facilitated his rapid recovery. Her love for him outweighed her habit. The drug salved pain and rendered the world elegiac. It granted noblesse oblige.

It deadened his recent failures. Pearl Harbor and the Jap roundups as one big botched business deal.

He hatched war-profit schemes. Ace Kwan assisted him. They all went blooey. He chased a heroin stash in Baja. Mike Breuning, Dick Carlisle, and Hideo Ashida assisted. That went blooey. It was Captain Carlos Madrano's stash. Madrano and the Mex Staties interdicted the Smith cartel. A Jap sub fiasco played in. He planted nitro in Madrano's car and blew up *El Capitán.* It was small recompense.

Father Coughlin knew Madrano's replacement. José Vasquez-Cruz was anti-Red and anti-Jew, but less overtly *Fascista.* Baja bodes again now. Police Sergeant Smith as Army Captain Smith. He'll meet Vasquez-Cruz and perhaps seek to suborn him. Baja bodes as opportunity reborn.

Count Basie kicked off a Latin-tinged ballad. Claire squeezed his good arm. Let's dance, *mi corazon.*

The sling curtailed movement. Dudley let Claire help him up and lead him. She cradled his bad arm. They danced close. Claire laid her head on his shoulder.

She said, "We'll be there in two weeks. We'll get tired of this music."

"Major Melnick has secured us a grand hotel suite. We'll have our own terrace, with a lovely ocean view."

Claire nuzzled up. "We'll go to Mass and observe all the saints' days. We'll be taller and better-looking than everyone else, and they won't believe how well we speak Spanish."

Dudley laughed. "The hoi polloi will adore you. They'll call you *'La Gringa'* behind your back, and wonder how this mick thug got so lucky."

"Don't deride yourself, dear. Never forget that I've civilized you more than you've corrupted me."

"It's a toss-up, isn't it? It's a determination that time and fate will reveal."

Claire said, "Yes, darling. It is all of that."

The dance floor was packed. Revelers bumped and tangled up their feet. Dudley swapped grins with his fellow policemen.

There's Lieutenant Thad Brown. He's jawing with a high-yellow songstress. There's ex-Chief Davis, spiking the punchbowl. There's Captain Bill Parker and Kay Lake. They comprise a dashed romance. There's a full room between them. They shoot sparks across it, nonetheless. Parker's a persistent burr in his tail. Miss Lake's comely, if fatuous.

Parker's in uniform. Note his soggy blues and drooping gunbelt. He's been clocking traffic grief in the rain. He's hiding out from his wife. He's here to ogle comely Kay Lake.

Many men find La Lake brilliant and alluring. Parker surely does. He himself does not. She's a dilettante and a round-heeled police buff. She's nonconjugally shacked with surly Officer Lee Blanchard. Parker is pious and dangerous. He may ascend to Chief one day.

Bill Parker. The Watanabe case. Roadblocks on his sprint, post–Pearl Harbor.

Fujio Shudo. The Werewolf psychopath. He was Sergeant D. L. Smith's proffered slayer. Bill Parker worked for a true solve. Bill Parker failed. Hideo Ashida assisted Sergeant Smith. It cinched the whole deal.

Claire swayed close. Dudley felt her tremors. She'd excuse herself soon. She'd retrieve her hypodermic.

He steadied her. She steadied him. It was a new love affair and a most tender pact.

His arm ached. He'd lost weight. The attack climaxed his post–Pearl Harbor sprint.

He vowed vengeance. Mike and Dick were meeting him later. They recruited some Alien Squad muscle. A grand tong sweep loomed.

The Count segued to "Adios." Soft reeds with low-brass punctuation. A Mexican motif.

Claire said, "Good-byes are never that beautiful."

Dudley kissed her neck. She was damp there. He knew her body and her dope habit already.

"It's our song, for the war's duration. It prohibits all farewells."

Claire shuddered. He eased her back to their table. Father Charles launched a raw joke. "Have you heard it, Your Eminence? It's the swell tale of Come-San-Chin, the Chinese cocksucker."

J. J. Cantwell roared. Joe Hayes glowered. Claire snatched her clutch and made for the loo.

She cuts a swath. Drunken cops step aside. She betrays no haste and smiles at each one.

Dudley checked his watch. It's 11:51. Where's Mike and Dick? Where's dim bulb Elmer Jackson?

Quo vadis, Tommy Glennon?

Tommy self-decreed his extinction. A three-count indictment levied charges. Count One: Tommy raped women and thus annulled the civil contract. Count Two: Tommy was Sergeant D. L. Smith's ex-snitch and pal of current-snitch

Huey Cressmeyer. Count Three: Tommy ran wetbacks for ex–Baja kingpin Carlos Madrano.

Count Three, subordinate clause:

He visited Tommy at Quentin, mid-November. Tommy pumped him per Madrano and his own Mexican plans. He has *grand* Mexican plans. He will exploit his Army SIS status to implement them. He will push heroin and run wetbacks. He will sell jailed Japs into slavery. Tommy could fuck it all up. Thus, Tommy must die.

Dudley chased pills with club soda. Two for knife-wound pain. Three bennies for late-night woo-woo.

Cantwell, Hayes, and Coughlin were shit-faced. They defamed the coons and Red scourge Joe Stalin. The English prottys concocted this war and brought in the Jew bankers. They fixed the ’36 Olympics. That shine Jesse Owens? He runs slow as me old Irish granny.

Ten seconds to midnight. Count Basie rolled the trumpets—9, 8, 7, 6—

Dudley stood up. Cops waved table flags. Dudley waved the Stars and Stripes and Irish Republican green.

—5, 4, 3, 2—

Mike and Dick walked in. Dudley saw them. Such grand goons they were. They saw Dudley and cringed.

Dudley waved and went *Tommy?* Mike and Dick shook their heads *no.*

—1, zero, *HAPPY NEW YEAR*—

Shouts, back slaps, popped corks galore. Noisemaker blare and flags on sticks—

The Count kicked off “Auld Lang Syne.” Dudley reeled. The mock ballroom went hothouse hot and spun topsy-turvy.

His arm throbbed. He thought he’d faint. Claire sailed up to him.

She steadied him and kissed him.

She said, “It’s our time, love.”

3

JOAN CONVILLE

(SAN DIEGO, 12:15 A.M., 1/1/42)

Should auld acquaintance be—

Yells and hoots. Noisemaker shriek. Shouted toasts and *Remember Pearl Harbor!!!*

Revelers crammed up the Sky Room. You've got Navy brass on a toot. There's grabbing and groping. There's full-length necking on the dance floor.

Stan Kenton presents "Artistry in Rhythm." The Misty June Christy purrs select vocals. The Sky Room was glass-walled and umpteen floors high. You got wide views of battle-dressed beachfront. You got storm clouds and the world's darkest sky.

Joan dodged gropes. She clutched her purse and made for the door. She was half-gassed. L.A. was three hours north. Army checkpoints would stall traffic. The shoreline blackout would drop shroudlike.

She dodged last-ditch gropes and escaped. She made the elevator and pushed 1. Mirrored walls hemmed her in. They were too good to pass up.

She winked. She whistled. She was too proud to falter and too tall and good-looking to lose.

Her red hair. Her green eyes. Her bold six-foot sway. Her trim winter uniform. Gold buttons and braid.

Lieutenant Junior Grade J. W. Conville, USNR. You shitbird Japs better watch out.

She enlisted in L.A. on Pearl Harbor day. It was pure impulse. She kicked out her one-night lover and drove downtown. The Fed building was deluged. She stood in line six hours straight.

Anchors aweigh.

She was a registered nurse and graduate biologist. Her jazzy CV got her a rank jump at the gate. Nurse Corps training camp loomed. She put in for battleship duty. Point Loma, here I come.

The elevator jarred and stopped. There's the lobby. Joan pushed her way through swarms of rich stiffs.

The famous El Cortez Hotel. Dowagers and old guys in tuxedos. Walls festooned with tricolored bunting. THWAP THE JAP! signs. Fat Wallace Beery, signing autographs.

Joan ducked out to the parking lot. Short men google-eyed her. Holy moly—*the rain.*

She got soaked. She found her car and huddled in. She kicked the heater and ran the wipers. She lit a cigarette. She popped over to the coast road, northbound.

She observed blackout regs and rode her low beams, exclusive. They lit up this *looooong* rain sluice. Beach waves crashed off to her left.

She chain-smoked. She knew the sober-up drill, inside out. Fix on task and quash those dozen highballs.

She blew out of Dago proper. Traffic thinned. She hit a clear stretch and goosed up more speed.

Barrel through. It's the Conville family code.

It was Earle Everett Conville's code. It's his elder daughter's now. It's not the kid sister's. She married a papist and smeared Big Earle's legacy.

That clear stretch telescoped. It formed one black hole, here to always. Joan floored the gas. Her low beams hit rain smashing down.

Wind slashed it horizontal. Just like Tomah, Wisconsin.

The wind played tricks. Snow flew horizontal. Uprooted trees flew likewise. Big Earle was the Monroe County game warden. He made Joan blast felled trees with a 10-gauge shotgun. Five trees supplied all-winter kindling.

Her hometown curriculum. Dead, like her parents. Absent, like her sister and inbred cousins in Bilgewater, Scotland. Usurped by nursing school and grad work at Northwestern. Gone, like her numerous men.

Holy moly—this rain.

She barreled through. It's what Convilles do. She chain-smoked. It fought her booze load. She slowed for an Army checkpoint. Saboteur Alert. She slowed for a cop checkpoint. Wetback Alert. White thugs smuggled wets in car trunks and flatbed trucks.

The cops wore blue serge and fat gun belts. They brought back this L.A. police captain. He all but swooned for her.

Northwestern. Spring 1940. This skinny sad sack with glasses. He followed her everywhere. He watched her shoot skeet off Lake Michigan. He eyeballed her at sock hops. She almost asked him to dance.

Nobody knew his name. He was in for some traffic cops' seminar. He peeped Joan Woodard Conville in his spare time.

The seminar ended. The captain vanished. Here's the weird epilogue. She saw him in L.A., three nights back.

Hollywood Boulevard. A war-bond rally. The Ritz Brothers grovel for laughs. *Poof*—she sees him. *Poof*—he sees her. *Poof*—he's gone again.

The checkpoint cops waved her through. One cop whistled. Joan blew him a kiss and floored the gas.

Rain came down vertical. Wind kicked it horizontal. Rain brought back Big Earle—a forest fire casualty.

Big Earle, firefighter. Big Earle, shitkicker and drunk. Big Earle, friend and foe of migrant Indians hooked on bathtub juice.

He hired them to fight forest fires. They blew their pay on hooch and started more fires for more wampum. A big blaze hits—April 9, '38. Maybe it's the Indians. Maybe it's not. Maybe it's premeditated arson.

E. E. Conville, dead at forty-nine. Her father, burned alive. The U.S. Forest Service investigates. Their call: "No evidence of arson extant."

Joan disagreed. She switched grad-school majors. She dropped premed for biology. She studied *forensic* biology. She haunted the blaze site. She studied soil and tree-wood samples. She interviewed Indians and compiled a suspect list. A soused Indian fondled her. She blew his left foot off with her shotgun.

She shredded her suspect list. It wasn't liquored-up redskins. The fire felt deliberate—not haphazard.

She discovered an airplane-fuel spill. It was near the fire's flash point. She examined fuel-laced soil. She determined the molecular content and the fuel's brand name. She traced the fuel to a charter-airplane service in Duluth, Minnesota. The service pointed her to Mitchell A. Kupp.

Kupp called himself an inventor. He lived off of family money. He was pals with Charles Lindbergh. Kupp chartered a small aircraft on 4/9/38 and flew it over Monroe County.

She learned all that. Her case fizzled, then. Her fuel-spill evidence was erratically collected and logged. She could not attribute motive. She could not connect E. E. Conville to Mitchell A. Kupp in any discernible way.

Barrel through. It's what Convilles do. Big Earle expects it.

She held down night-nurse jobs. She crash-coursed her master's degree. She read extensively. She devoured monographs by L.A. coroner Norton Layman and police chemist Hideo Ashida. She took her degree and moved to L.A. She got a lab job and applied to the doctorate program at Cal Tech.

Joan barreled through. It's what Convilles do. She'll return to Wisconsin and avenge Big Earle's death. Vengeance is *thine.*

Banzai. Pearl Harbor preempts her. She's a sucker for hot dates. It's her hot date with History.

Rain battered her car. Visibility decreased. Pooled water doused her low beams and cut sight lines down to zero.

Thunder boomed. Joan sighted in off lightning flare. She hit close-to-L.A. traffic. She chained cigarettes. She downshifted, fishtailed, swerved. She saw a sign for Venice Boulevard.

She pulled right. She went woozy and white-knuckled the wheel. She got light-headed. It's that booze-catching-up feel—

Lights hit the windshield. Big full-on *head*lights. They violated blackout reg —

Joan went glare-blind. She rubbed her eyes and lost the wheel. She smashed the lights and this great big something.

4

HIDEO ASHIDA

(LOS ANGELES, 2:30 A.M., 1/1/42)

The Werewolf sleeps. He's fetal-curled and looks pacified. Oblivion becomes him.

He has a one-man/vacant-tier cell. Jailers keep him penned up and sedated. Fujio Shudo/age thirty-eight/male Japanese. He's bought and paid for. He's down for four counts of Murder One.

A sanity hearing pends. It's strictly rubber stamp. He allegedly killed the four Watanabes. It was a sex lust/pro-fascist caper. He's green room–bound. He'll be dead inside six months. Police chemist Hideo Ashida stands complicit.

Ashida watched the Werewolf sleep. Lee Blanchard watched and kibitzed. Big Lee. Kay Lake's faux lover, ex–heavyweight contender.

"The Werewolf and the Wolfman. I don't know the difference. Maybe it's the actors who play them."

They stood in the vacant-tier catwalk. Thunder echoed. Barred windowpanes shook.

Ashida said, "It's one symbolic character, with differing narratives."

Blanchard yawned. "I don't mind bodyguarding you, Hideo. But the Central Station jail ain't my idea of New Year's Eve kicks."

The Werewolf snored. The Werewolf twitched and sucked his thumb.

Blanchard said, "Talk to me, Wolf. Tell me something I don't know."

Ashida ventriloquized the creature. He kept the spiel internal. He mimicked the Werewolf's pidgin-English/Japanese stew.

Dudley Smith framed me. Sensei Ashida assisted. Dudley Smith coerced him. Dudley Smith applied pressure and made the frame stand. Sensei Ashida fawns for Sergeant Smith.

Blanchard nipped off his flask. "Here's to you, Werewolf. You want my opinion? You deserve the loony bin more than the gas chamber."

Ashida grabbed the flask. “We should go upstairs. I’m on call to Traffic. Captain Parker might call in.”

“He was at the City Hall bash. Him and Kay were making with the big eyes.”

Ashida sipped brandy. He rarely drank. This small dose induced a small glow.

“I’m sure she makes you uncomfortable. She must be difficult to live with.”

Blanchard grinned. “My shack job’s ‘difficult,’ but my shack job’s Kay Lake, which has its compensations. She’s always off to something new. You want the latest? She’s fallen in with these classical-music types, out in Brentwood. Mostly Reds and Jews, on the run from *der Führer*. I don’t know how much time she’s got for Bill Parker.”

Ashida passed the flask. His eyes burned. The cold jail went warm. Ashida felt antsy. He was backlogged. Pearl Harbor put the lab in arrears. The Japanese roundups spawned massive confiscations. Evidence log-ins stood un-logged, back to mid-December.

He stood un-jailed. His family stood free. The roundups would resume, tomorrow. Dudley Smith’s patronage vouched his freedom. He lived in a Biltmore Hotel suite. His mother and brother had their own rooms. Dudley’s patronage carried a price. Call the Werewolf frame part and parcel.

Blanchard said, “You’re in a trance, Hideo. Maybe it’s all that caustic shit you been sniffing.”

Ashida smiled. They walked out to the jailside hallway. Ashida heard snores.

Blanchard went *sssshh*. He pointed to the Alien Squad cot room. They walked over and peeked in.

Confiscated swag covered the floor. Radios, flags, Nazi Lugers. Kanji script and English-language hate tracts. Hate the Chinks, hate the Jews, hate all Americans.

Plus three plainclothesmen, sprawled out on cots. They were stripped to their skivvies. Their sidearms and belt gear were piled adjacent. Brass knucks, leather truncheons, beavertail saps.

Three big guys. Cop heavies. On-call strikebreaker types.

Blanchard said, “Lunceford, Rice, and Kapek. You’ve got the Silver Shirts and the Thunderbolt Legion represented here. These dinks chasing down Fifth Column Japs? Don’t tell me I don’t know what’s ironic.”

A bluesuit walked up. He was blitzed. He wore a dumb party hat and a WELCOME 1942 button.

“Captain Parker called, Ashida. He needs you in Venice. It’s a vehicular homicide. There’s four dead wetbacks and some Navy woman in custody.”

Pole-mounted tarps held the rain back. A sawhorse barricade held off the looky-loos. It's a Car-Crash Inferno and Car-Crash Holocaust.

Head-on collision: '36 Dodge coupe hits jalopy. No visible skidmarks. Eastbound Dodge, westbound heap. Two front ends accordion-pressed.

The Dodge: minus the driver's-side door. The heap: compressed to the rear seats and trunk ledge.

Flares marked the crash site. Prowl cars stood close. Two morgue sleds were parked snout-to-snout. There's four sheet-draped stretchers, out in the wet.

Blanchard pulled up to the flare line. Ashida got out and eyeballed the site. He deployed Man Camera. *Click, click*—a wide-lens shot.

Click—no skid marks. *Click*—the rain erased them. *Click*—the blown door saved the Navy woman's life. *Click*—there's more damage to the heap. *Click*—the Navy woman was speeding. *Click*—the jalopy driver was slowing down.

Ashida walked up to the stretchers. Wind tugged at his hat. Rain stung his eyes.

All four sheets were blood-soaked. Ashida pulled them halfway down. Four clicks clicked. Let's extrapolate.

Four male Mexicans. All dead. Two men in the front seat, two men in the back.

Head-on impact. The frontseat men sustain massive chest wounds. Their hearts explode. The backseat men sustain downward-thrust trauma and are thus disemboweled.

Ashida looked up. Bill Parker stepped out of his prowl car. An empty pint jug fell from his lap.

It clattered and rolled. Ashida looked away. He heard a muffled shriek.

He tracked it. He walked up to the jalopy. He flashed his Man Camera, in tight. The trunk lid's ajar. Something's in there.

He jammed up the lid. He saw a little boy. The boy was crushed dead under a spare tire. A little girl murmured and coughed blood.

She tried to say something. Ashida picked her up and held her close. She clawed at his face and died in his arms.

5

(LOS ANGELES, 3:15 A.M., 1/1/42)

Kwan's Chinese Pagoda. It's open-all-nite. It's a cop haunt. It's Hop Sing Tong HQ and *the* Chinatown hot spot.

Here's Uncle Ace Kwan. He's a PD puppet. He's your warlord-restauranteur.

The rain killed business. Local Chinks and night owls stayed home. The boys hogged a prime table.

The Dudster held court. Ace laid on pupu platters and mai tais. He was sixty-six years old and too thin. He switchblade-skewered fried dumplings and snarfed them.

Oooga-booga. All-cop summit. It's that botched stakeout. There's this fugitive rape-o at large.

The boys noshed and boozed. Elmer chased two bennies with Bromo Seltzer and went *aaahh!* Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle sulked. Also present: Catbox Cal Lunceford, Wendell Rice, and George Kapek. Tag them shithead goons roused from sleep.

All eyes on Dudley. Elmer's the most. This mick fuck sends him out to kill a man. That don't sit right.

The Dudster played off-key. His voice fluttered. His arm sling seeped. His Army threads fit slack. Elmer eyed him surreptitious and tried to look contrite.

Dud passed out roust sheets. Tommy Glennon's KAs and known haunts. Chink-o-phile Tommy. He perched in C-town. The sheet tagged juke joints, whore cribs, and dope dens.

The boys skimmed the sheets. Dudley tapped his fork. *Achtung, meine kameraden!*

"We're here to redress tactical errors committed earlier this evening, and perhaps accrue collateral leads on the man who shanked me in the basement here three days ago. He was a slight man, well within the bodily range one expects to see in the Chinese. He also wore a lacquered-wood mask, one depicting Oriental features, such as the masks worn by Japanese actors in the Japs' more arcane theatrical productions. I sense a baroque and oddly playful sensibility at work. You would honor me by bringing in this rare bird alive, as you would by shooting Tommy Glennon on sight."

Mike and Dick fawned. They went *Yeah, boss* and dispensed grins. Catbox Cal cracked his knuckles. Rice and Kapek glared. Elmer scoped their belt shit. Per always—they packed saps and throwdown guns.

Elmer reskimmed his roust sheet. One column tagged locations. He noted boocoo spots nearby. Yeah—but where's Eddie Leng's Kowloon?

He'd memorized Tommy's address book. It held damn few listings. Eddie's joint stood out.

Rice said, "We should take these guys to the Bureau? Put the boots to them there?"

Dudley lit a cigarette. "Brace them where you find them. Bring your likely suspects here."

Ace knifed a fried shrimp. "You bring to basement. We put balls in vise and burn with cigarettes."

Elmer gulped. His windpipe bobbed. Dudley clocked it. Elmer clocked his clock.

Kapek said, "Say we get us a whole shitload. Call for a whore wagon then?"

Dudley said, "Shackle chains. Hook them up and march them down Broadway. Create a stir. Make a statement. The PD stands with Hop Sing. Four Families *chingasos y putasos.*"

Lunceford said, "Dud's practicing. He's Mexico-bound."

Ace knifed a rumaki. "Viva the Chinaman and white man! Kill all jigaboos and Japs!"

Elmer yukked. Ace was a moondog psycho. He ran afield sometimes.

Breuning drained his mai tai. "Tommy's tonged up the ying-yang. Him and Four Families go way back."

Elmer unwrapped a cigar. "We should issue an APB and call the Immigration cops. Tommy used to run wetbacks. He'll have a green sheet, sure as shit."

Dudley smiled. "No. You precipitated this fuckup, Elmer. Now, go forth with your grand colleagues and remedy that."

—

Two squads swamped C-town. They wore rain slickers and packed shackle chains and belt gear. Lunceford went with Breuning and Carlisle. Elmer went with Kapek and Rice.

North Broadway was all bars and slop chutes. Local Chinks and white stiffs hobknobbed. New Year's increased foot trade. The big rain *de*creased it. Both squads trekked north.

Elmer's squad took the west flank. Elmer packed his .45 and a buckshot-stitched sap. He walked point and carried the billy club. It was Chink sweep de rigeur.

Rice and Kapek lugged the shackle chains. They were six-two beefcake types and well suited. They shoulder-draped the chains and went hunchback. It pissed them off.

The PD was Hop Sing–allied. Uncle Ace was Jack Horrall's #1 Chink. Hop Sing joints were sacrosanct, Four Families the converse. Fuck last month's tong truce.

Elmer walked point. He smashed front windows and galvanized attention. He went in the door first. Rice and Kapek fanned out behind him. They ignored eeeeks, shrieks, and flustered women. They braced blue-kerchief tong guys and went in tough.

Elmer took the bar-stool guys. He sap-smashed hands on bartops and broke bones. He kicked over bar stools. He logged bilingual eeeeks and shrieks.

Rice and Kapek took the booths and tables. They donned sap gloves and broke faces. They dunked said mugs in tureens of shark-fin soup.

The boys hovered close and tossed questions. They pushed past eeeek and shriek. They got *Don't know nothing, don't know nothing!* They got *Nobody know who slice Dudster—not us, not us!*

Elmer stood by. He posed tough. He looked *un*tough upside Kapek and Rice. He leaned close. He logged gibberish laced with rat-outs.

Tommy Glennon know Huey Cressmeyer! Tommy go queer up at Preston!

It was pidgin English. Elmer called it "*Chink*lish." Sputters and nonsense talk. Some enticing tattle. Huey C. was a known Dudster snitch.

That's it for bars and slop chutes. That's it for North Broadway. It's all lackluster leads. There's no shackle bait yet.

The boys cut west on Ord. Elmer smashed clubhouse windows. Rice and Kapek kicked in doors. They tore down to basements and stormed opium dens.

They encountered noxious smoke and hopheads on pallets. Coolies packed pipes and lugged water bowls. *You know Chiang Kai-shek, papa-san? You know famous sleuth Charlie Chan?*

The dens served a Chink clientele. Some white swells made the scene. There's a city council hump. There's Ellen's studio rival—ice-blond Veronica Lake.

Rice and Kapek thumped blue-kerchief guys. They imitated Jap Zeros. They knocked tong punks off pallets and hauled them down from Cloud 9. Elmer water-doused them. The noxious fumes messed with his gourd.

He clubbed "O" fiends. Ankle and wrist shots. Eeeek-and-shriek inducers. Rice and Kapek lobbed queries. Gibberish and half-baked leads accrued.

Tommy G. run wets from T.J.! Tommy G. supply truck farms in Imperial Valley! Don't know who slice Dudster—don't know, don't know, don't know!

Elmer laid on the hurt. Rice and Kapek worked their sap gloves. They got more eeeek and more shriek, and more *Chink*lish.

Tommy nancy boy! Don't know where he is! Tommy poking some priest!

Elmer caught *that* one. It brought back Tommy's address book. It underlined the St. Vib's listing.

Rice and Kapek went pure rogue. They lifted wallets and plucked cash rolls. The fumes got to Elmer. "O" plus bennies induced all this weird wispy shit.

He went *eeek* his own self. He upchucked on some Chinaman's shoes and made for the door. He bumped into Veronica Lake. She said, "Whoa, sailor."

—

The rain felt good. It cleared his skull somewhat. All those colored raindrops went neutral again.

He lost his billy club. He still had his hat, badge, and roscoe. His watch said 4:35. It was still dark. It was still Chinatown and still Ord Street.

He recalled Tommy's address book. He recalled that number for Eddie Leng's Kowloon.

Kantonese Kuisine. Ord & Hill. Your gracious host, Eddie Leng.

It's a block up. Why not? Maybe Veronica's there. Maybe she'll smile at you. Maybe she'll sleep with you. You won't know till you try.

He walked over. The rain felt good. There's Eddie's place. It looks dark. That plays wrong. It's a 24-hour dive.

Elmer pressed up to the window. He left nose prints on the glass. Okay—the kitchen doorway's lit up.

He shook the doorknob. The door was ajar. He walked in and shut the door behind him. His eyeballs adjusted. He popped through the dining room. He smelled something all scorched up.

He knew from scorched. He'd flamethrowered Nicaraguan insurgents. It dispersed crowds good. Those humps got their tail feathers singed.

Elmer weaved toward the kitchen. He bumped tables and chairs. He made the doorway and saw all the stoves and deep-dip fryers. Well, shit—it's *fried* flesh, not scorched.

Eddie Leng was rope-cinched to a four-burner stove. He was barefoot. Charred anklebones extended from two fryer thingamajigs. Residual grease and blood bubbled. Eddie's feet got deep-fried.

Elmer reeled and caught himself. He double-scanned the stiff. Eddie wore reet-pleat pants and a Hawaiian shirt. Some fuck folded his hands on his chest.

Note the tattoo. It's there on the right forefinger-thumb web. It's an "SQ" circled by snakes. Remember Tommy Glennon’s tattoo stencil? It’s flat out just like that.

6

(LOS ANGELES, 4:45 A.M., 1/1/42)

Opium.

His private room at Kwan's. The tar, the match, the pipe. It's a tainted locale now. He was knifed in this selfsame spot.

Dudley smoked opium. It stamped his travel visa and whooshed him off to wispy locales. Stopover, Baja. Seaside Ensenada appears.

There's shoreline coves. There's Jap subs stashed out of sight. Nitroglycerin explodes. There's Carlos Madrano—now particulate waste.

There's Tommy Glennon. He's wearing a sombrero and bullfighter chaps. Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle mewl. They've been transmogrified to *dos perros.* There's no dead prey for their master. There's Elmer Jackson, bad shot and bumptious trash.

Dudley smoked opium. He succumbed to pictures and colors. His mind still logically tracked.

Stopover, Beverly Hills. Claire De Haven's Colonial manse. The Red Queen spars with the Cop Arriviste.

They express inimical views. They walk upstairs. There's the too-bright bedroom sun. He counts the freckles on Claire's back.

Stopover, Dublin.

His trek to the New World. Joe Kennedy and Father Coughlin wave. Uncle Joe donates gun money. J. J. Cantwell funnels it to Republican causes. It's 1921. Dudley Liam Smith's a schoolboy killer. Uncle Joe says he'll sponsor American citizenship.

There's a Grafton Street skirmish. Schoolboy Smith shoots three Black-and-Tans. Their faces explode.

Dudley trembled. He dropped the pipe, the pallet shook, the colors and pictures dispersed. He saw Tommy Glennon as he looks today.

Another wayward Irish lad. A Coughlinite, a rape-o, a snitch.

Tommy at that costume party. Brentwood, winter '39. The Jewish Maestro's home, sublet. Nazi antics reenacted. Orgiastic overtones. *Sturmbannführer* D. L. Smith injudiciously attends.

Dudley fought back jitters. He reached for his pipe. He saw an envelope on the floor.

Popped through a door crack. A colored envelope. A Western Union telegram.

Dudley slit the envelope and read it. The tone was brusque. The gist was *this:*

It's an active-duty summons. We're calling you in, early. Report to the Special Intelligence Service command post in Ensenada, *NOW*.

7

(LOS ANGELES, 6:30 A.M., 1/1/42)

Thumps. Muted squeals. Dream fade—you're half in, half out.

Murmurs now. Singsong voices. You're more out than in.

They're foreign voices. They're all female and all Jap. It's a movie encore. It's that film they show Navy recruits.

Know Your Foe. Loose Lips Sink Ships. Jap Women Report to Jap Men.

Joan woke up. She assessed it all, quicksville.

Booze blackout. You're driving up the coast road. Then something happens. Now you're *HERE.*

A jail cell. A hard bunk. Her scuffed palms. Her rumpled uniform.

She heard real voices. She distinguished them and counted five altogether. There were five Jap matrons, crammed in a cell down the tier.

Joan stood up and stretched. The Jap ladies stared at her. Joan stared right back.

They looked down and went *I'm so humble.* Joan looked past them. She saw dawn out a window and more goddamn rain.

No purse, no cigarettes. This goddamn cell. Odd aches and pains.

Joan tucked her blouse in. She flexed her hands and smoothed out her coat and skirt. She stood by the front bars and willed panache.

A door clanged. A uniformed cop walked up. He was midsized and slight. Joan loomed over him.

Captain's bars and three hashmarks. Wire-rim glasses. They magnified his dark brown eyes. He'd never be handsome. He'd always be unnerving.

So, it's you. Northwestern—spring 1940.

He said, "Lieutenant Conville."

A prairie drawl. The Dakotas, maybe.

Joan said, "We haven't met, but I've seen you before."

"My name's Parker. I'm with the Los Angeles Police Department. I command the Traffic Division."

"Acknowledge me, will you? 'I've seen you before.' "

Parker gripped the bars. "You might well have. I checked your enlistment file. We attended Northwestern concurrently."

Joan gripped the bars. Their hands were close. Joan moved hers away.

"Can you be more emphatic? You seemed to be surveilling me then."

Parker got out his cigarettes and offered the pack. Joan took one. Parker lit it.

Joan tossed her head and exhaled. It telegraphed vamp move. She felt stupid and out of her league.

"What happened? Why am I here?"

Parker lit a cigarette. "You've been arrested for four counts of vehicular manslaughter. Four men are dead because you drove inebriated in a heavy rainstorm. If you're lucky, you'll do five years at Tehachapi."

Joan stepped back. She grazed the bunk ledge and almost tripped. She caught herself and stepped back up to the bars.

"I need a lawyer. I'll be charged and arraigned, and there'll be a trial."

Parker said, "I've had some experience with this sort of matter. Most inebriate killers evince regret or remorse and ask questions about the people they killed. You went to your own survival immediately. I don't know whether to be impressed or appalled."

Joan gripped the bars. Her hands brushed Parker's. She kept them there.

"Tell me about the people I killed. I'll react, and you can decide whether to be impressed or appalled then."

Parker said, "They were Mexican illegals. They were transporting marijuana, and had extensive criminal records. Their offenses included strongarm robbery, aggravated assault, kidnapping, white slavery, and first-degree extortion."

Joan dropped her cigarette and crushed it. "I'm evincing regret now. I can't quite embrace remorse."

Parker grinned a tad. "You're a cum laude forensic biologist. A prison sentence would scotch whatever degree of success you might ultimately achieve."

"You're leading me, Captain. There's something going on here."

"Oh, *really*? And what would that be?"

Joan winked. "*Really,* sir? It wasn't that long ago."

"Lieutenant, now *you're* lead—"

"I was shooting skeet off the Evanston Bridge. You were watching me. I thought, That man should go home and be nice to his wife, because his attention has surely strayed."

Parker blushed. It was almost but not quite endearing.

"You rid the world of four vicious thugs. I'll extend muted bravos, and add that all opportunities carry a price. If you resign your Navy commission, I'll see to a dismissal of all charges against you. I'll secure you a position with the PD's Central Crime Lab and personally vouch your wartime employment."

Booze blackouts, skeet guns, cop voyeurs—

"Is this your métier, Captain? Have you made a career out of entrapping young women?"

Parker said, "I've only done it once before."

"And when was that?"

Parker said, "Last month."

Joan laughed. "I've read monographs by your Dr. Ashida. I greatly admire them."

"Would you like to meet Dr. Ashida?"

Joan said, "When?"

Parker said, "Now."

8

(LOS ANGELES, 7:45 A.M., 1/1/42)

The bash felt stale now. ’41 was old news. ’42 was au courant.

Nobody danced. Count Basie’s boys dozed in their chairs. A few cops and dates schmoozed. A buffet dispensed Bloody Marys and stale bagels.

Lee Blanchard was out cold. He topped out his bodyguard shift. The dead kids got to him. He hit the party and drank himself insensate.

The day-shift man was due. Elmer J. always ran late. Blanchard said he had late work with the Dudster.

Thad Brown circulated. He ran the Homicide Squad. Kay Lake circulated. She was the PD’s favored seductress. Brenda Allen table-hopped. She ran call girls with Elmer. Jack Horrall and Fletch Bowron dozed on a couch. The Count dozed with them. His head brushed the mayor’s shoulder.

The dead kids.

Ashida teethed on it. He teethed each and every split second. He sipped coffee and stayed alert.

Bill Parker issued a gag order. No reporters, no public exposure. Four male wetbacks, *muerto.* It stands at *THAT.* The Navy woman must not know.

Parker called Catholic Charities. He had oomph there. A private hearse hauled the kids off.

Parker admonished Blanchard and Ashida. *I demand silence. Do not talk about this.*

Ashida trawled the room. The Count was up and bleary-eyed. He chatted with Kay. La Grande Katherine looked up-all-night fetching.

Brenda Allen blew a kiss. Ashida waved back. Colored sax men fish-eyed him. Yeah—we ain’t white, but you’re a *JAP.*

Elmer walked over. He straddled a chair and drained Blanchard’s highball.

“Sorry I’m late. Dud had us hopping.”

Ashida sipped coffee. “You tend to be overextended.”

Elmer said, “It’ll get worse, starting tomorrow. The roundups’ll kick in again, and your few remaining countrymen on the loose’ll be headed for the pokey.”

“We’re backlogged on your confiscations. You’re bringing in more than we can process.”

Elmer relit a cigar. “You’re lucky we got thieves on the squad. Georgie Kapek and Wendell Rice got your swag appropriated.”

Ashida laughed. Elmer eyeballed the room. He said, “Kay looks swell, don’t she?”

“Are you in love with her?”

“I’m entranced. That’s worse. You acknowledge that you ain’t got a chance, so you act even dumber than you usually do.”

Ashida jumped topics. Romantic intrigue bored and vexed him.

“I read a Teletype from Fourth Interceptor. There’s allegedly hidden air bases out in Indio and Brawley. The command picked up coded pay-phone calls from here to Baja.”

Elmer shrugged. “Dud’s headed south. He’ll nip that grief in the bud. ‘Knock, knock, who’s there? Dudley Smith, so spies beware.’ ”

Ashida smiled. Elmer scoped the doorway. Ashida tracked his gaze.

Bill Parker walked in. He wore a fresh uniform and looked all spruced up. He brought a date.

A Navy lieutenant. Rumpled blues, red hair, quite tall and statuesque. Vehicular manslaughter/six counts/two counts unacknowledged.

Elmer waggled his eyebrows. Elmer wolf-growled.

Ashida deployed Man Camera. He framed Parker and the redhead. He panned to Kay Lake and caught her reaction. He zoomed in for a close-up. Kay and Parker shared This Big Freighted Look.

Parker and the redhead hit the buffet. They ignored the food and mixed high-test Bloody Marys.

They clicked glasses. Their hands brushed. Kay saw it all.

Thad Brown walked up. He ignored dozed-out Blanchard. He braced Ashida and Elmer.

“Let’s go. We’ve got mud slides in Griffith Park. They’ve dislodged a body by the golf course.”

9

(LOS ANGELES, 8:30 A.M., 1/1/42)

They ran Code Three/red lights and siren. It goosed squarejohn drivers curbside. Thad Brown hauled. Ashida rode shotgun. Elmer hogged the backseat.

First reports state *this:*

The stiff is a long-term decomp. That means all bones. It washed up on the par-3 golf course. Said course adjoined Mineral Canyon—i.e., the spot where Wayne Frank Jackson died.

Elmer agitated it. Elmer segued to more pressing shit. Eddie Leng's deep-fried feet. Tommy Glennon's address book.

He'd dropped the book on the day-watch Vice clerk. He'd slipped him a yard and told him to run a phone-number check. Chop, chop. I need results, pronto. And don't blab on this.

Brown hauled up Vermont. Rainwater jammed the wheel wells. The car belly-flopped and drifted. Brown veered right and caught a flat surface. They shimmied down a golf course access road.

Elmer saw two black-and-whites and a prowl sled. Plus a snack hut. Plus green fairways and the dump site.

There's two harness blues and two plainclothesmen. They've got arc lights and a rain tarp set up. They've got a steep hillside all lit.

Brown fishtailed over and yanked the brake. They all went *whew.* Elmer bundled into his hat and trench coat. They all got out and ran.

Elmer got there first. He saw Al Goossen and Colin Forbes—Hollywood Squad hard-ons.

Nods circulated. The tarp fluttered and dripped rain. Brown and Ashida caught up. The arc lights lit *this:*

Soaked grass up the fairway. The mud spill and all this loose soil. A big dirt hole. Exhumed mud sluicing down to this flat spot.

The spill dislodged a box. It tumbled down the hillside. It's a pine box—six-

six by two feet.

It's charred black. They're char marks, for sure. Intermittent marks—mud-and-root-matted.

The lid was warped and soil-eroded. The mud slide sprung it off, clean. It's a jig-rigged casket. There's green goo caked inside. There's skeletal remains.

Ashida pointed to the goo. "That's congealed quicklime. It serves to speed decomposition."

Elmer relit his cigar. Forbes and Goossen lit cigarettes. Brown spit tobacco juice.

"That tags it Murder One."

Ashida leaned in close. Elmer said, "Genius at work."

Bluesuit #1 rolled his eyes. Bluesuit #2 said, "Like Charlie Chan." Elmer said, "Charlie Chan's a Chinaman, dipshit."

Bluesuit #2 blanched. Ashida foot-tapped the box.

"Note the width of the pelvis and the overall length and breadth of the remains. The victim was male, tall, and heavyset."

Brown said, "Talk to me, dead man."

Forbes said, "Who killed you, boss?"

Ashida futzed with the stiff's jawbones. They went *creak.* He pulled them loose.

"The killer knocked his teeth out. Note the mandible fractures. The uppers and lowers are unidentifiable stubs."

Elmer studied the box. The fire aspect gouged him. October 3, '33—the Griffith Park blaze.

Ashida tapped a shattered rib bone. "It's a knife-thrust homicide. The killer hit hard, went in deep, and twisted the knife."

Brown leaned low. He studied the skull. He pointed out a hole and faint cracks adjacent.

"He was shot once. You'll find a spent round embedded."

Elmer looked up the hill. Lightning backlit the whole golf course.

"You remember that big fire, back in '33? I'm thinking it could have whooshed over the box and caused all the charring."

Ashida said, "I don't think so. There's too much mud for the fire to have gone that deep."

Brown poked at some rags. They were quicklime-caked and bore singe marks.

"That green shit dissolved the clothes off the body."

Forbes said, "Who killed you, dead man?"

Goossen said, "It's a missing-person job. That stuff puts me to sleep. Give me a nigger homicide any day."

Brown said, "You're out of luck there. Get the box and the stiff to Doc Layman at the morgue."

Forbes and Goossen sulked. Elmer chewed his cigar. He recollected Wayne Frank. He felt all razzle-dazzle.

"Here's what gets me. Some of the box is burned, but some ain't. I don't see no special flame pattern on the wood."

Forbes said, "Elmer's brother died in that fire. He's got fires on the noggin."

Goossen said, "I remember that day. Fire trucks were backed up all the way down Los Feliz."

Forbes said, "It was the Reds. They never proved arson, but some Red cell was supposed to be good for it."

Ashida studied the box. Genius at work. All eyes on Ashida now.

He said, "Elmer could be right. I think the box was burned concurrent with an aboveground fire. 1933 might be a good guess."

—

The rain let up. Black clouds hovered. Thad B. drove Elmer and Ashida back downtown. L.A. was hungover. Shops closed, nil traffic, local yokels sleeping it off.

Ashida hopped out at the Biltmore. Elmer snagged his civilian sled at City Hall. That Vice clerk delivered. He'd stuck the phone-call list under the wiper blades.

Elmer had a bachelor flop at 1st and Saint Andrews. He drove by and fed his tropical fish. Brenda had a house up Laurel Canyon. He part-time shacked there. Brenda might be home. She might toss him some New Year's woof-woof.

He drove over and let himself in. The place was done up Spanish Hacienda. Brenda scrounged used sets from *The Sword of Zorro.* Some homo art director went nuts.

Elmer built a highball and buzzed the call-service switchboard. The dispatch girl delivered the dish. She knew Elmer was het up and voyeurizized.

Dig tonight's roster:

Fletch Bowron booked a threesky. DA Bill McPherson booked a colored cooze. Sheriff Gene Biscailuz booked a tall blonde.

The service featured house calls, plus three fuck flops. Apartment-building tryst spots. Replete with hidden wall peeks and cameras. Folks paid to peep bedroom action. The camera shit doubled as potential shakedown gear.

The Chapman Park flop was booked tonight. Cary Grant, Butch Stanwyck, and Ruth Mildred Cressmeyer were tricking with "Ten-Inch" Tony Mangano.

Tony tricked switcheroosky. He turned Ruth Mildred straight in one-night allotments. Ruthie was a disbarred physician and scrape doc. Ruthie was tight with Dudley Smith. Ruthie recruited lez girls for Brenda.

Fourteen peepers had booked seats for the show. The peepers peeped anonymous. They paid fifty scoots a head. Butch and Tony commanded top dollar.

Also, on tonight's roster:

Mickey Rooney booked a girl. Likewise John "Cricket Dick" Huston. Eight girls for a USC frat bash. Six boys for a Brentwood hen party.

Elmer signed off the call. The phone rang and startled him. He snagged the new call.

"Talk to me."

"It's Kay, Elmer."

"Well, then. Some weather, huh? It's like the flood in the Bible. You think it'll ever stop?"

Kay laughed. "I didn't call to discuss the weather."

Elmer laughed. "Well, it sure ain't the war, because we hashed all that out the last time we talked."

"Don't be a C.T. You know what I'm angling for."

"Oh, yeah? And what's that, pray tell?"

Kay stage-sighed. "Come on, Elmer. Give."

Elmer stage-sighed. "The party? The big redhead with Bill Parker? That catch your eye?"

"Now, he gets to it."

"Hard not to notice, huh?"

Kay laughed. "I've known William Henry Parker the Third for twenty-seven days, and during that time he has repeatedly cast his eyes about for tall, red-haired, naval-officer women."

Elmer said, "You're counting the days since you've met him. What's that tell you about yourself?"

Kay said, "You're deliberately tweaking me."

Elmer said, "I don't know no more than you do, except how much you love that man."

Kay blew him a kiss and hung up. The ten-second phone call was her standard MO.

Elmer yawned and kicked his shoes off. He got out the Vice clerk's list. He studied Tommy G.'s address book and put shit together.

St. Vibiana's Church. He decoded that one already. It's the home of papal poobah J. J. Cantwell. He's the Dudster's old pal.

The Deutsches Haus. 15th and Union. Pro-Nazi hot spot. Kraut regalia for sale.

Let’s backtrack. We’re in Tommy’s hotel room. There’s that tattoo stencil. It features swastikas and an “SQ” circled by snakes. The “SQ” snake job was embroidered on the late Eddie Leng.

More names, more phone numbers. Huey Cressmeyer. A Hollywood phone exchange. That’s no surprise. He’s Ruth Mildred’s perv-o son and a Dudster informant. C-town tattle: Huey and Tommy were reform-school chums.

Monsignor Joseph Hayes. A West L.A. exchange. More C-town drift: Tommy and “some priest” travel the Hershey Highway.

Jean Clarice Staley. A Hollywood exchange. That rates a *Huh?* She’s a woman—but Tommy runs Greek. He *rapes* women—he don’t *call* them.

That hot-box pay phone. It’s right upside the *Herald.* It’s drilled for slug calls. Plus *this* head-scratcher. It rates a big *Huh?*

Fourteen pay phones. All down in Baja. All in Ensenada. All eighty miles south of T.J.

Let’s backtrack. Tommy ran wetbacks for Carlos Madrano. That Spanish-language book in Tommy’s room.

Head-scratchers. Brain-broilers. Code 3 Alert. Look out, son. You’re brushing upside Dudley Smith.

Rain kicked up hard. Elmer walked to the front window and looked out. He saw fresh mud slides. He saw storm crews on Crescent Heights.

Let’s backtrack. The Griffith Park slide, the old-new DOA. Let’s backtrack. The 1933 fire.

It’s October 3. It’s 103 degrees in L.A. Santa Ana winds change course. CCC workers are out cutting brush. Wayne Frank’s among them.

Thirty-four men die. It gets ambiguous here. There’s sloppy rosters and files and fly-by-night work crews. Who died and who didn’t? There’s un-ID’d bodies. There’s Wayne Frank—ID’d off old dental charts.

Arson or not? It gets ambiguous here. It’s the Depression. There’s Red revolt in the vox populi. Garment workers agitating. Labor marches. Kreepy Kremlin prophecies. Fires, tidal waves, storms.

Elmer dug out his scrapbook. Wayne Frank pix consumed four pages. Wayne Frank in a boxer’s pose, 1924. Wayne Frank in a Klan sheet, 1926. Elmer V. in Marine green, 1930. Wayne Frank giving him the horns.

Wayne Frank was taller and handsomer. Wayne Frank was smarter and meaner. Elmer V. was slow to rile. He could kick big brother’s hate-dog ass all day long.

What made Wayne Frank tick? Nobody knew. Wayne Frank was whimsical. Wayne Frank imagined impossible shit and convinced himself that it was true. Wayne Frank developed this big gold-heist fixation.

May ’31. A mint-train job. A Frisco-to-L.A. gold-transfer run. Gold bars. A small number. Triple-locked in a cage. Shackled passengers under guard. San Quentin convicts bound for retrials in L.A.

Chaos attends a track switch in Monterey County. All eight cons escape. Seven men are hunted down. They’re shot on sight *faaaaast.* One man remains at large still.

More grief. A downed-track snafu two hours south. Chaos atop chaos. Guards and crew succumb to frayed nerves. The heist occurs then. The heister or heisters are smart. Just one box’s worth of bars leaves the train.

The train treks south. Santa Barbara’s a coal stop. The theft is discovered then. Suspicion falls on Leander Frechette. He’s the train’s odd-job man. He’s dim-witted, Negro, fucking-A strong. The Santa Barbara cops posit a single-o heister. He walked the bars off the train two or three at a clip. It had to be Frechette. Nobody else had the strength. *Some*body bossed him. He was too dumb to concoct the plan himself.

The Santa Barbara cops beat Frechette *baaaaad.* He refused to confess. A colored preacher with cop clout intervened. Frechette was released. The case fizzled out. It went to open-file status, stale bread.

Wayne Frank hoarded news clips and treasure-magazine pieces. He studied the heist and worked himself up to fever pitch. Wayne Frank, the dreamer. Wayne Frank, the fantasist. What makes Wayne Frank tick? He’s a news-clip hoarder and treasure-magazine collector. He’s an all-time fabulist.

“Oh, Lord. He’s in a fugue state. He’s got his scrapbook out, and he’s gone stir-crazy from the rain.”

Elmer flinched and spilled his highball. Brenda walked soft. She snuck into her own house. It was some trick on high heels.

“You know what Kay says. ‘Keep referring to me in the third person. It sends me.’ ”

Brenda shut the door. “Katherine Ann. She’s the first thing out of your mouth. She’s the only one you’ll ever love, in case you ain’t figured it out.”

Elmer checked his watch. “It’s almost noon. The party must have run long.”

“I spent some time with Jack. I’ll tell you, so you won’t ask. It was a paid date, and Jack said he wants you to run bag to some city councilmen. Him and Fletch got worries on that phone-tap probe. They’re buying forgiveness in advance.”

Elmer smiled. “Let’s hit the kip. We ain’t spent time there in a coon’s age.”

Brenda said, “The weekend, maybe. You know I do my best work by appointment.”

Elmer scoped the world at large. Hard rain hit, palm trees wiggled, palm fronds flew.

“There’s too much going on out there. God’s telling us something.”

Brenda said, “You’re at loose ends, Citizen. You’re looking to louse something up and put yourself in a jam. Go see Ellen and get your ashes hauled. You’ll do us both a favor.”

—

Ellen tapped his forehead. “You’re broody. Something’s going on in there. And don’t tell me it’s the Fate of Mankind, because you’re not that deep.”

They were naked. Ellen’s mattress sagged. Her baby boy dozed one room over.

Elmer said, “It’s too warm in here. You get that with these big buildings. They don’t leave you no choice with the heat.”

Ellen lit a cigarette. She sat up crossways and blew smoke rings. Their sweat was all mingled up.

“That’s not a real answer. I could turn down the heat if I wanted to, but I keep it warm for the baby.”

Elmer said, “We’ve got this rule, remember? We’re not supposed to talk about him.”

“You’re broody. Give me a hint. There’s the war, the draft, and you blew that stakeout, so maybe Dudley Smith’s peeved at you. You don’t like harassing these so-called innocent Japs, and you wish you could go back to Vice. Give me a little clue.”

Elmer relit his cigar. Smoke fumes fumed the room up good.

“One little clue. I’ll hold you captive here until you tell me.”

Elmer said, “That’s a swell inducement not to talk.”

Ellen said, “And that’s a swell compliment. But tell me something, or I’ll start brooding on adultery and kick you out.”

Elmer touched her hair and kissed her. Ellen nuzzled his hand.

“My life’s too easy. I got the world by the dick, but it don’t sit right with me.”

—

Loose ends. The New Year’s blahs. Elmer hit the road.

He drove to City Hall and prowled corridors. The Hall was holiday dead. The PD ran a light crew. The Air Patrol guys stuck to the basement. The mayor’s office and City Council chambers were dark.

Elmer had keys and a briefcase. He hit Call-Me-Jack’s office and unlocked his desk drawers. Jack left four envelopes. They were marked with initials. They were probably five-yard payoffs.

The mayor’s office ran swank. Walnut panels and a Mussolini-size desk.

Elmer unlocked Fletch Bowron's drawers. He grabbed four more envelopes. He saw that familiar green binder.

His binder. Brenda's. Their merchandise book. Nude pix of their girls.

He leafed through it. He got titillated and broody, simultaneous.

He replaced the binder. He hit the Council chambers and divvied up the gelt. The 4th District guy kept a desk jug. Elmer helped himself. He sat in the guy's green leather chair and put his feet up.

—

Loose ends. The New Year's blahs. Elmer hit the road.

The hard rain subsided. A drizzle held in. Central Station was close. Elmer walked over.

The crime lab was locked. The main squadroom was locked. The Alien Squad pen was lit bright. Elmer poked his head in. He saw Wendell Rice and George Kapek. They were in their skivvies. They were tossing dice and snarfing pizza pie.

Elmer said, "Happy New Year."

Rice said, "You up and took off last night. Dud wondered what happened to you."

"You and George started lifting wallets. I got a burr in my tail."

Kapek said, "You're pious, Jackson. That, and you don't need the money. You got your girl racket, and you're Jack Horrall's favorite Okie."

Elmer waved his cigar. "I'm a cracker, not an Okie. There's a distinction."

Rice raised his hands. "Peace, brother. We're all white men, and we're going back to rousting Japs first thing tomorrow."

Elmer made the jack-off sign. Kapek said, "Last night was a bust. We got no good drift on who sliced Dud, and nothing ripe on Tommy Glennon."

Rice said, "Dud's hipped on Tommy. Something's going on there that I don't comprehend."

Kapek said, "Dud's right hand don't know what his left hand is doing."

Elmer gauged the chitchat. Nothing gored him. Fucking Eddie Leng gored him. There was no dead-body call. These humps would have heard. There was no *Herald* headline: DEEP-FRIED CHINAMAN FOUND! COPS SIFT CLUES!

Kapek rolled snake eyes. He crapped out and moaned. Rice snatched the dice. His undershirt hiked and exposed his left arm. Note the thunderbolt armband.

Still life. Geek cops at play. Exiled from home and hearth. Jap hunters in repose.

Elmer fought off the New Year's blues. Elmer hit the road.

—

The hard rain revived. He drove through swamped intersections and sewer floods. Who snuffed Eddie Leng? Who's the dead man in the box?

Elmer drove to the Gordon Hotel. Tommy's "SQ" tattoo stencil tweaked him. He braced the desk clerk. Let me retoss Tommy's room. Tommy's a fugitive rape-o.

The clerk went *Nyet, sahib.* He said two cops just tore through here. They tossed Tommy's room. I'm not repeating that grief with you.

The clerk described Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle. They *re*tossed his first toss. That scotched toss #3.

Elmer drove back downtown. He hit 11th and Broadway and parked. He recharged with bennies and Old Crow. He got electricized.

He eyeballed that hot-box phone for no damn good reason. It stood outside the *Herald.* It was just some coin booth.

But:

Tommy called it. Maybe *mucho* times. Tommy's address book. Think fast, now. Tommy called *fourteen* Baja pay phones.

Elmer glanced across the street. He spotted a Fed sedan. Ed Satterlee was tucked in. He was eyeballing the booth.

Cop life. Circle jerk. Who you know, who you blow. Satterlee bossed the Fed probe. Satterlee tricked with the Brenda-Elmer service. Satterlee was tonged up.

Elmer stared at the hot-box. Baja calls. That's a head-scratcher. Ain't the Dudster Baja-bound now?

10

(TIJUANA, 3:30 P.M., 1/1/42)

Border cops saluted and waved them through. *Bienvenidos, señor y señora.*

They were Falangista thugs. They were Francoesque in dress and demeanor. They saw the staff car and Army *jefe.* They noted the comely *mujer.* They fawned and clicked their heels.

Mexico. Our grand, if raucous, neighbor. A properly subservient hello.

Dudley and Claire breezed into T.J. Claire drove. Dudley's arm sling precluded. A late sun lit rain clouds.

They cut inland and south. The coast road detoured through T.J. proper. It's *muy feo.* Let's see how Claire reacts.

The child-beggar swarms. The cat-meat taco vendors. The women-fuck-donkey clubs. The open-air *farmacias.* Voodoo health cures and sub-rosa dope.

Liquor stores. Niteklubs. Prowling sailors and Marines. Strolling *putas.* He-she's in bullfighter garb.

The cops wore mismatched uniforms and drove mismatched cars. Jackboots, jodhpurs, tunics—all Nazi black. *Der Führer*—style purveyor to the world's great unwashed.

Chevy prowl cars, Ford prowl cars. U.S. confiscations. Wait, there's a Packard. Note the coyote-pelt seats.

Claire said, "I left Beverly Hills for this. It must mean that I love you."

Dudley laughed and squeezed her knee. His bad arm ached. Claire caught a lane back to the coast road. To the east: scrub hills and abandoned-car encampments. To the west: cliffside coves and sea swells.

Claire hit the gas. Dudley read her. She wanted to get there and dose herself. She wanted to craft her rich-leftist-among-the-peons persona.

She brooded her way down from L.A. He brooded in inimical sync. He concentrated on Tommy Glennon.

Mike and Dick tossed Tommy's room. A clerk told them that another cop had already tossed it. The clerk described the doltish Elmer Jackson.

He caught a noon radio broadcast. It stressed "Chinese restauranteur slain." There was no "victim Leng tong affiliate." There was no "close pal of Thomas Malcolm Glennon." Both facts should have been stressed.

Tommy's missing now. Mike and Dick saw a Spanish-language text in his room.

Dudley scoped the terrain. Eyes left: hills and Jap fishing towns. He'd raid them. He'd roust Fifth Column Japs and plain old Japs set for internment. Eyes right: the cliffs, the coves, the sea.

Storm-tossed now. Like last month. Shallow beachfront/glide-in spots/ perfect sub concealment.

Like last month. Like the botched dope raid. Like the Jap sub and blown-to-shit Carlos Madrano.

Claire said, "You're clenching, dear. Your jaw is trembling."

Dudley lit a cigarette. "I'm considering failure and the means not to repeat it. Mexico redefines opportunity, and I must not stumble here."

Claire smiled. "You're a war profiteer."

Dudley winked. "Bright lass. I knew you'd figure it out."

—

Ensenada.

Fishing spot, tourist trap, lovers' hideout. Cliffside hotels and sportfishing piers. Slum piers crammed with tuna boats and bait shops. Streets named for saints and notable despots.

Claire turned off the coast road. Avenida Costera hugged low cliffs and offered up jazzy views. The Army usurped the Hotel Pacifico del Norte. The third floor was all SIS.

Officers billeted in sea-motif suites. Enlisted men lived in off-site barracks. They were jerry-rigged, post–Pearl Harbor. Convict laborers toiled, posthaste.

The hotel was Moorish-mosque adobe. Eight stories, thick walls, tile roofs. The front entrance was sandbagged. Howitzers and tripod Brownings flanked the doors. Mex Staties stood guard. They held tommy guns at port arms.

Claire pulled into the porte cochere. Greedy valets swooped. Beaners in movie-usher attire. Coolie hats à la Grauman's Chinese.

A full-dress major broached the car. He was forty-five, short, and porcine. He leaned in on Dudley's side. He expelled booze fumes.

"Captain Smith, Mrs. Smith. I'm Ralph Melnick, and I'll escort you to your quarters, and show you around before you can say *'más rápido.'*"

Dudley grinned and stuck out his hand. Melnick bone-crushed him. Claire saw something. She ignored the exchange and glanced streetside. Dudley tracked her eyes.

It's a waif girl. About fifteen, tattered coat and skirt, scuffed Army boots. Dark hair, glasses, feral élan.

Dudley touched Claire's arm. She turned back and smiled—a dazzler.

"I'm not Mrs. Smith, Major. I'm Miss De Haven."

—

The tour, then.

The gringo was king here. Army personnel and swank turistas capered. Statie drones worked the desk and switchboard. They wore starched fatigues and packed sidearms. Mix-blood mestizos fetched drinks and scrounged tips. Dark *indios* slaved.

Three restaurants. Seaside lounge. Private fishing pier and Rose Bowl–sized lobby. Dolores del Rio, engulfed by fawning fans.

Captain Smith's billet: the Plutarco Calles Suite. Dudley roared—the Red priest-killer, *conmemorativo.*

Two bedrooms, living room, dining room/kitchen. Ocean-view balcony, mounted trophy fish throughout. Bathrooms with five-foot-deep tubs.

Claire decamped to explore the suite and geez morphine. Major Melnick blushed and curtsied good-bye. He walked Dudley down to 3. The floor had been wartime-gutted. *Arriba,* SIS. The U.S. Army has arrived.

One massive squadroom. Forty-odd cubicles and desks. Floor-to-ceiling corkboards and file banks. U.S./Baja wall maps.

Switchboard. Forty phone lines. Eight Teletypes. All-new photostat. Coding room and armory. Two dozen men on duty. Twenty-four-hour work shifts.

Captain Smith got a full office. He got a large desk and green leather chairs. The FDR wall pic had to go.

Melnick produced a flask. They traded pops. Dudley turned the FDR pic facedown. Melnick yuk-yukked.

"So, right now Mexico's 'neutral,' but it's just a pose, because *El Presidente* Camacho's a dick tease, and he wants to extract all the U.S. aid he can get his mitts on before he comes onboard with the Allies. Baja's full of Japs, with a sprinkling of Krauts, and Camacho's been dragging his heels on that, while he keeps up his neutrality pose. We've got to get these Jap boogers detained and interrogated. We've got eight hundred and fifty miles of coastline here, beach coves up the ying-yang, and Jap fishermen with Fifth Column sympathies and the wherewithal to guide a goddamn armada of subs in."

Dudley passed the flask. "My special duties, sir?"

Melnick said, "You're my executive officer, with all corresponding authority. You'll serve as liaison to the Mexican State Police and the California-based police and civilian authorities. You'll supervise inland airplane searches and shoreline sub checks. You'll round up Japs and see to their U.S. deportation and internment, because the spic powers that be haven't got the manpower and facilities to intern the fuckers here, and the Mexican government's out to steal all the Jap money it can. The Baja governor is a Kraut-Mex breed named Juan Lazaro-Schmidt. He's another heel-dragger. He kind of likes Hitler and Tojo, and thinks they just might win the war. So, we try to work around this guy. Our big asset in north Baja's the new boss of the Statie boys here. José Vasquez-Cruz. He's coming by to see you at 1800. He's an honorary white man in my book."

Dudley swiveled his desk chair. He took two full spins. The office went *wheeee.*

Melnick said, "Miss De Haven sort of bushwhacked me. Your personnel file said you were married."

Dudley said, "Miss De Haven bushwhacked *me.* She wasn't the first woman to contravene my vows, but she may well be the last."

—

Dusk hit early. They kept the terrace doors open and the bedroom lights low. Storm clouds brewed just past the harbor. More rain was due.

Claire sat up in bed. Dudley cradled his bad arm. The sling tanked their lovemaking. They laughed it off.

Claire scootched down and got their eyes level. Dudley plumped pillows and drew her in close.

"We're here now. Are you aware of how much things have changed?"

Claire kissed him. "We of the Left see our lives as History. I find myself counting the days since Pearl Harbor, and chalking all change up to the novelty of the war."

Dudley kissed her. "We're both unruly. The war will serve as our justification until we tire of the falsehood. We've both endured failures of late. I failed in business, but it has not derailed my resolve. You succumbed to the infiltration efforts of William H. Parker and Kay Lake. They succumbed to war fever and a desire to hunt Reds, and took it out on you. You succumbed to your idealism and susceptibility to fetching waifs, as evinced by Miss Lake. This war will advance our individual and often antithetical agendas. If we remain candid and strong, we will not derail ourselves."

Claire hooked a leg over him. They were *this* close.

"Grant me a concession, darling. Merge our agendas just a little bit."

Dudley laughed. "Hitler is every bit as bad as Stalin. That's as far as I'll go tonight."

Claire laughed. "Quid pro quo, then. Stalin is every bit as bad as Hitler, and in case you're wondering, it was Kay Lake who first got me to concede that."

"Then concede this. It's *our* war."

"Yes, love. It is surely our war. And it's Kay's war, as much as I dislike her."

Rain drummed the terrace. Lightning flashed. Claire lit a cigarette and blew smoke rings.

"I'm in the market for a new waif. I might go looking for that girl we saw."

—

The coast road, southbound. It's a rain sieve and slalom course. There's thunder. There's wave smash. It's eerie-beautiful in the dark.

Captain Vasquez-Cruz drove. He proposed the excursion. Here's his windup and pitch:

"Captain Smith, I have something to show you. It is on the beach a fair way from here. I think it will amuse and confound you."

They drove due south. Vasquez-Cruz wheeled a Cadillac impound. He called it a "Jew canoe." He expressed regard for Adolf Hitler and defamed nun-raping Reds. He knew El Dudster's rep and toiled at rapport.

He was snazzy. He was thirty-two or -three and ever bemused. He wore Statie blacks and spit-shined jackboots.

They comported in a merry monsoon. Vasquez-Cruz sped through it. Dudley futzed with the radio.

He tuned in XERB and Father Coughlin. The pulsing padre praised the Sinarquistas and Salvador Abascal. Static ditzed the broadcast. Dudley skimmed the dial. He caught more static and a coon jazz quartet.

Vasquez-Cruz doused the sound. "I'm glad that you killed Carlos Madrano. It secured me his position."

Dudley said, "And how did you secure this information?"

"I tortured his *ichiban.* Scorpions attacked his small dick. He revealed that you and your policeman colleagues attempted to steal Madrano's heroin cache. You blew up Madrano with nitroglycerin you uncovered at the cache site, but failed to get the heroin."

"Because *you* got it?"

"Yes. *You* killed Madrano, but *I* commandeered his soul. I assumed his State Police command and appropriated his dope racket. If he had a woman, I would have fucked her or killed her."

Dudley laughed. "You embody the beating heart of machismo."

Vasquez-Cruz went *tee-hee.* He embodied the vicious-bantamweight aesthetic. He tittered in the near-soprano range.

"You and your policeman friends discovered a Jap sub at the Colonet Inlet. You interrogated members of the crew and determined their Fifth Column intent. They were going to pass themselves off as Chinese and perform sabotage in Los Angeles."

Dudley popped his holster flap. His raincoat featured fast-draw pockets.

"Madrano's *ichiban* told you that?"

"Yes, just before I killed him."

Dudley smiled. Vasquez-Cruz swung a hard right and hit a beach-access road. The Jew canoe brodied on loose mud and sand. He skidded up to the shoreline. His headlights strafed ocean swells.

He set the brake. "We are near the Colonet Inlet. This must seem familiar to you."

Dudley popped the glove box. He saw two flashlights, straight off.

He grabbed one. Vasquez-Cruz grabbed one. He stepped out of the car and walked ahead. Dudley lagged five yards back. He unbuttoned his raincoat and unholstered his piece.

Low cliffs deflected the rain. They kicked through wet sand and skirted the wave line. Dudley reholstered. Vasquez-Cruz turned on his flashlight. He aimed it at a rock cove. It was shallow—about eight feet deep.

Dudley smelled it and saw it. Dudley noted the drag marks and counted the stiffs.

Sixteen Jap sailors. Not yet decomposed. Close-range gunshot wounds. Shots to the head. Probable close-range ambush.

Tangled bodies. Facial powder burns and jawline stippling. Exploded bridgework and shattered teeth.

Vasquez-Cruz flashed his flashlight ten yards north. There's the beached sub.

Dudley said, "The Colonet Inlet Japs were a first wave of saboteurs. I would call this a second wave. They were killed by rival Fifth Columnists or rogue State Police. I'll need to interrogate any and all men you might suspect."

Vasquez-Cruz bowed. *Sí, mi capitán.*

Dudley said, "The contact man for the Colonet saboteurs was a Chinese plastic surgeon named Lin Chung. He lives in Los Angeles. The rest of the cabal are wealthy white men, too powerful to touch. Please permit me to work the Los Angeles end of this. I have thoughts already."

Vasquez-Cruz bowed. *¿Qué, mi capitán?*

Dudley lit a cigarette. It smothered the death stink.

"A Chink restauranteur was murdered in Los Angeles last night. He was a tong affiliate, and I'm sure he knew Lin Chung. They were both Jap-haters and committed rightists. This war of ours is breeding some rare birds."

Vasquez-Cruz said, "Yes. You and I among them."

Dudley bowed. *Sí, mi hermano.*

“Do you have access to a capable crime lab? I would like all of this assessed.”

Vasquez-Cruz shook his head. Dudley said, “I know a man in L.A. It may amuse you to know that he’s Japanese.”

11

(LOS ANGELES, 8:30 P.M., 1/1/42)

Captain Parker was late. Joan nursed a highball and killed time. She felt bushwacked and adrenalized.

She wore a clean uniform. Last night's blues were a mess. She'd go back to civvies tomorrow. Navy commission, adieu. She'd unpack her lab smock and white shoes.

Pinch me.

The party in Dago. The smash-up and dead men. "Cholos" and "wetbacks" in cop parlance. The City Hall party. All those politicos and policemen.

She meets ex-Chief "Two-Gun" Davis. She meets the L.A. mayor and the current chief, "Call-Me-Jack" Horrall. Count Basie says, "Hi there, Red."

Now she's here. Mike Lyman's Grill, 8th and Hill streets. A long oak bar and red leather booths.

Parker chose the spot. The PD had its own private room. Parker laid out the gist.

You had couches, chairs, and a Murphy bed. A police Teletype and phone line were laid in. Mike Lyman supplied free cold cuts and liquor. Married cops "poked" their girlfriends there. "Famous madam" Brenda Allen supplied high-class prostitutes.

Pinch me.

Joan lit a cigarette. Her booth faced the bar and the front door. Lyman's was packed. War chat bubbled.

Jap atrocities. FDR's draft quota. *I heard Hitler's really Jewish. The Jews started this boondoggle, if you ask me.*

Joan sipped scotch and bitters. The Navy bash faded out, the cop bash faded in.

She almost met Hideo Ashida. He went out on a dead-body call as she arrived. She talked to a cop named Lee Blanchard. His girlfriend Kay something hovered. Blanchard ran down the Captain Parker gestalt.

He was "Whiskey Bill" and "The Man Who Would Be Chief." He was a hotshot lawyer, juicehound, and devout Catholic. He was impervious, tough, and commanding. He was somewhat slovenly.

He's married. He hides out from his wife and sleeps in his prowl car. The capper: "You're too tall for him, Red."

Men always called her "Red." They thought it was hep. Said men were dinks and buffoons.

I ain't jiving you, cousin. Hitler's a lox jockey from way back. My wife's cousin's a full-blood Kraut. He knows whereof he speaks.

Parker walked in. He wore a fresh uniform. He'd trimmed his hair. He primped and slid into the booth.

He wore piss-poor lime cologne. He sucked a hide-the-hooch lozenge.

He tossed his cigarettes on the table. A waiter materialized. Parker pointed to Joan's glass and held up two fingers.

Joan slid the ashtray over. "Am I officially employed by the Los Angeles Police Department?"

Parker lit a cigarette. "Forty-two hundred dollars a year. You'll work Central Station, under Ray Pinker and beside Hideo Ashida. Learn what you can, while you can. Pinker's looking at an indictment in this Fed-probe megillah, and Ashida will probably be interned next month. You'll be logging property, as well as processing evidence."

Joan snapped her fingers. "Just like that?"

Parker snapped his fingers. "I called in a favor. We don't have to discuss it. You're in means you're in."

"Yes, but you've got me at a disadvantage. You've placed me in your debt, and you know a great deal about me, while I know virtually nothing about you."

Their drinks arrived. Joan let hers sit. Parker bolted his.

"You're being disingenuous, Lieutenant. You read men like you read chemical tables. You met Lee Blanchard and Jim Davis at the party and solicited information. You gauged their bias and arrived at conclusions. You're as up to speed on me as I am on you. I'll concede my crush on the lithe Northwestern coed, if you won't labor the point."

"I'll concede the scope of my debt, then, and refrain from judging your motives."

Parker said, "Let's go see Nort Layman and Dr. Ashida. They're working late at the morgue."

—

Dr. Nort *lived* at the morgue. Dr. Nort lived for his work.

Corpse gurneys flanked clothes racks. Formaldehyde bottles lined bookshelves. A cot and booze cabinet covered one wall. A charred box lolled on an autopsy table. A skeleton was jammed within.

Parker played emcee. The drift was meet your new colleague. She's credentialed. She's qualified. She swapped her Navy commission for a crime-lab gig.

Dr. Nort blushed. Dr. Ashida bowed Oriental. They stood by the table. The box deterred small talk.

Dr. Nort said, "These damn mud slides dislodged this box on the Griffith Park golf course. Our late friend here was stabbed, shot, and put to rest. We're trying to determine the source of the fire and when it occurred."

Joan studied a dirt clod jammed under the rib cage. She saw desiccated roots and granular ash.

"The box has been suspended in dirt for a very long time. I would posit that the killer or killers dumped the man in the box with that dirt mound stuck to his upper posterior, while he was still clothed. Those rags rotted off the cadaver, and the passage of time was accelerated by the application of the quicklime that remains visible on those cloth fragments. I think the box has been covered by heavily rooted soil for close to ten years."

Ashida said, "A fatal brush fire in '33 most likely caused that charring."

Joan examined the box. "Look at the flame pattern. The box was surely buried on a hillside, and the flames leapt irregularly and scorched through to dry, freshly excavated dirt, at some point in time before the seeding that produced grass on that hillside. I would conclude that the box was buried immediately before the 1933 fire that Dr. Ashida mentioned, or at the time of the fire itself."

Dr. Nort gawked. Ashida half-grinned. Joan tickled the dead man's chin.

"Run molecular-compound tests on the charred wood, and check the grain markings against the photographic records kept at local lumberyards. You might be able to match the grain to a presold lot."

Parker weaved a tad. Joan caught his booze breath. She reached in his pants pocket and tossed him a lozenge. Ashida slack-jawed the move.

12

(LOS ANGELES, 6:00 A.M., 1/2/42)

Man Camera. Attach your reverse lens. Become the object you observe. Deploy this Hans Maslick technique.

Maslick the Mystic. At one with nature and the material world. Organic specimens and objects live. You must assume their perspective.

Ashida rigged a microscope and dialed it in tight. He examined old dirt particles. He saw Miss Conville's stripped roots.

He one-upped Miss Conville then. He added ionized water and bonded the particles. He dialed down and caught *petrified* ash. It theoretically confirmed the nine-year-old-fire assessment.

Maslick propounded time-travel theories. Place yourself in immediate context. You were there and you saw it. You observed and/or committed the crime.

He was alone. He beat the day-shift chemists in. He savored early-morning work. Juxtaposition. Bright lab lights and a black sky outside.

He time-traveled. He buckled into his time machine. It's 10/3/33 now. It's that very hot day.

He was at Belmont High. He was watching Bucky Bleichert toss a football. He indulged daydreams. Bucky needs a postpractice shower. You can kibitz and throw him a towel.

He watched Bucky dry off. A radio blared: *BIG GRIFFITH PARK BLAZE!!!* They got in Bucky's car and drove over. Fire trucks stopped them short at Riverside Drive.

Ashida shut his eyes. It shuttered his Man Camera. He placed himself in Griffith Park. It's still that very hot day.

Mineral Canyon. Dry dirt and scrub. It's undeveloped. There's no par-3 golf course yet.

The dead man. The killer or killers. The pine box, stashed. A hillside hole, at least partially dug.

Spontaneous blaze or covert arson. One gunshot. One stab wound. A hasty burial as the flames spread.

Thirty-four dead. The killer or killers might have survived. The killer or killers might have perished.

Ashida opened his eyes. His time machine lurched. His recollection lurched in sync.

He read Maslick in high school. He invented his own Man Camera. It was a trip-wire photo device. He shamefully deployed it. He snapped pictures of Bucky in the Belmont High locker room.

He updated the device. He deployed it at a robbery scene late last year. The forensic application backfired.

Dudley coveted the device. Dudley broke into his apartment and covertly studied it. He found the picture stash. Dudley ran the Watanabe job. Dudley blackmailed him and co-opted him to the Werewolf frame.

Ashida rubbed his eyes and cracked a window. Cold air rushed in. He felt wind-deflected rain.

Thad Brown put two detectives on the boxed-dead-man job. It was perfunctory. Here's a postscript: Elmer Jackson's brother died in that fire.

A radio blared down the hallway. Sid Hudgens blared his a.m. *Herald* piece.

Chinatown torture snuff. Jap-hater Eddie Leng. Fifth Column Japs on Chinatown rampage?

Ashida shut the door and muzzled the Sidster. Miss Conville was due. She seemed competent. Dr. Nort and Captain Parker were dazzled. Parker quashed Manslaughter Two and got Miss Conville a job. She knew she killed four Mexicans. Parker quashed her knowledge of the dead kids in the trunk. Lustful men and corrupt women. It was ghastly business.

The phone rang. The noise startled him. Ashida snatched the call.

"Crime lab. Dr. Ashida speaking."

Dudley said, "Good morning, lad. It has been entirely too long."

13

(LOS ANGELES, 8:45 A.M., 1/2/42)

Today's B-Squad roust sheet. It's all J-town and nearby. There's three likely Tojoites.

The squad pen was drafty. The day-watch guys honked their snouts and skimmed their roust summaries. Elmer unwrapped a cigar and crib-noted his sheet.

Yanigahara, Willy J. Age 47/tavern employee. Rat-off by: Agent Ed Satterlee. Noted Chink-hater. Spotted at bund rallies. Has white girlfriend.

Yamazaki, Robert/AKA "Bad Bobby." Age 34/railroad employee. On Federal rat list. Deutsches Haus habitué. Has Negro girlfriend. Frequents jazz clubs and tokes maryjane.

Matsura, Donald L. Age 41/metallurgist/gold broker/imports samurai swords. Rat-off by: Agent Ed Satterlee. Has Jap Navy KAs. Wears zoot suits. Has Mexican girlfriend.

Per above suspects:

No wants/no warrants/no parole holds. Inventory domiciles and transport to Lincoln Heights Jail. Today's B-Squad pair off: Kapek, Jackson, Rice.

Elmer lit his cigar. He got unlucky today. Kapek and Rice gored his gourd. Lee Blanchard got A-Squad/Lunceford and Moss. He notched the relative luck.

The boss took the lectern. Noted nosebleed Lew Collier. The squad humps straddled chairs and snapped to.

Collier said, "Go easy on your confiscations. The lab's overloaded. Inventory the flops and tape-seal them. This squadroom is not a pawnshop. Don't bring stuff in, thinking you can hock it later on."

Lunceford said, "No tickee, no washee."

Kapek said, "That's what you call a mixed metaphor. The Chinks say that, not the Japs."

Blanchard pulled his cheeks taut. He did the squint-eyed Chinaman—always good for laughs.

Ha-has rose and subsided. Elmer said, “What about plain old stealing, boss? You might direct your answer to Kapek and Rice.”

Kapek sput-sputtered. Spit bubbles popped.

Rice said, “Jackson’s a Bolshevik.”

Lunceford said, “He’s a Jap-lover, you mean.”

Blanchard said, “How come we’re not rousting the dagos and the Krauts?”

Moss said, “They’re in this here war, the last time I heard.”

Collier rolled his eyes and held up the *Herald.* “You all know this, right? Eddie Leng bought it New Year’s Eve. Safe to say you also know the Japs hate the Chinks. The Chief wants you guys to keep your ears down in J-town.”

Blanchard said, “Who’s working it for the Bureau?”

Collier said, “Nobody. The Chief’s kicked it over to Ace Kwan. Let the Chinks police the Chinks, he always says.”

Elmer said, “Eddie Leng was Four Families, and Ace runs Hop Sing. You see a certain hypocrisy there?”

Rice said, “Jackson’s a Bolshevik.”

—

They walked to J-town. Unjailed Japs voodoo-eyed them. *Oooga-booga.* It’s B-Squad, on the hoof.

They wore civvies and carried pump shotguns. Rock-salt rounds replaced buckshot. Rock salt knocked you down and pocked your ass bloody. It stopped short of instant death.

Kapek and Rice dwarfed Elmer. They hoofed three abreast and dwarfed all known Japs. Yanigahara lived on East 2nd. Yamazaki lived on East 1st. Kapek hit a call-box phone and summoned a whore wagon. The wagon met them outside the Yamazaki crib.

Bad Bobby went peaceful. Elmer wrote the inventory and gave him a cigar. There was no evil swag extant. Bad Bobby owned boocoo jazz records and zoot suits. Plus pulp westerns and a Packard-Bell radio. Nix on hate tracts and guns.

They tape-sealed the door and dumped Bobby in the wagon. They hit East 2nd Street. Willy J. Yanigahara went peaceful.

Elmer wrote the inventory and gave him a cigar. There was no evil swag extant. Racy swag, though.

Kapek found a stack of girlie mags. Rice bootjacked them. Elmer found a locket stuffed with blond pubic hair. A note was jammed in. It read “To Willy, love always, Lorene.”

Elmer bootjacked it. They tape-sealed the door and dumped Willy in the wagon. The wagon trailed them south on San Pedro.

Donald Matsura lived at 219 3rd. His pad was upstairs rear. There was no elevator. B-Squad hoofed it up and back.

Rice banged the door. Music snapped off inside. A skinny Jap opened up.

He was TB-ward thin. He had gassed hair topped by a jigaboo hairnet. He had pinned-out, darty eyes.

Oooga-booga. He put out dat fear stink.

Elmer said, “Son, don’t you rabbit.”

Matsura squealed words, Jap-talk falsetto.

Rice and Kapek grabbed him. They smashed him against the door and cuffed his hands behind his back.

Matsura squealed squeal words. They verged on crazy-man squeaks. Rice grabbed his hair and smashed his face into the doorjamb. Matsura screeched falsetto. Elmer ran through the crib and eyeball-tossed it.

He saw ratty furniture and a fly-swarmed kitchen.

He saw a console radio and smelled burned-out tubes.

He dumped a hamper full of sock-padded jockstraps.

He dumped a nightstand full of gold swastika paperweights and *Goldlover* magazines.

He saw a terpin hydrate still. It was hooked up to a four-burner hot plate. It featured feeder vats and four yeast spouts.

He saw a take-out menu for Eddie Leng’s Kowloon.

He opened a closet. He saw samurai swords up the wazoo.

He ran back to the front room. Rice and Kapek had Matsura pinned to that wall.

They wheeled and saw Elmer. They stopped rabbit-punching Matsura. They dropped their mitts and went *Well?*

Matsura squirmed loose and ran out the doorway. Kapek gave him a ten-yard lead and raised his shotgun.

He let three rounds fly. Rock salt shredded the shirt off Matsura’s back and scalped off most of his hair.

14

(ENSENADA, 8:00 A.M., 1/3/42)

Dudley said, “I’ve issued a blanket arrest order. All Japs registered in the ’40 census. Noncoms and State Police have been dispatched.”

Coffee klatch. Strict dress code. Olive drabs for SIS. Statie fasco black.

They perched in Ralph Melnick’s office. The boss served coffee and sweet rolls. His ODs were crumb-flecked.

“Captain Smith lets no moss grow under his feet. Isn’t that right, José?”

Vasquez-Cruz winked. Dudley winked back. They sat in Chinese lacquered chairs. Melnick worked the Asia desk back in the Ming dynasty.

“No, Major. He does not. Captain Smith is not here to coddle Fifth Columnists or view the notorious donkey show at the Blue Fox.”

Melnick slapped his knees. Almond flecks flew. Desk knickknacks rattled.

Dudley said, “I’ve reserved cells and interrogation rooms at the Statie barracks. The coastal site has been sealed and is now under guard. My police chemist will be driving down later today. He’ll forensic the sailors and the submarine itself.”

Melnick said, “*¿Qué pasa, amigo?* What did you make of it all?”

“I think Mexican leftists killed the sailors, sir. I’ll investigate with that in mind.”

Vasquez-Cruz smirked. He knew the truth. Or thought he did.

Melnick slurped coffee. “We’ve got sixteen dead saboteurs. You could say we got lucky, and let it go at that.”

“They were Fifth Column, sir. That’s undeniable. I’ll be grilling our in-custody Japs, with an eye toward turning leads along those lines.”

Melnick checked his watch and went *Shit-I’m-late.* He saluted and booked out the door.

Vasquez-Cruz smirked anew. Smug little shit. His mother cavorts with *El Burro.* He was *born* at the Blue Fox.

“ ‘Mexican leftists,’ hardly. You told me something quite different.”

Dudley lit a cigarette. “Let’s discuss money first.”

“We should begin with Carlos Madrano. You blew up his car, and a great many burned U.S. dollars were found amid the wreckage. Madrano had just left the Colonet Inlet, where the first sub had berthed. Now we have a second beached submarine. I’m thinking there may be additional monies hidden onboard.”

Dudley said, “I searched the Colonet sub and found ten thousand dollars U.S. My friend Hideo Ashida did the bulk of the work. We gave the money to Madrano, in exchange for our safety. I think we will find a similar amount in this newly beached craft. We will split the money, of course.”

Vasquez-Cruz pulled his chair up. “There is more to tell me, I’m sure.”

Dudley pulled his chair up. Their knees bumped. Burro Junior winced.

“There’s a fugitive at large in Los Angeles. His name is Tommy Glennon, and I know him rather well. I think Tommy killed a Chinese restauranteur, Eddie Leng, that I told you about. He disappeared the night Leng was killed, and they were both known to be jungled up in the Four Families tong. I also consider it likely that Tommy knows Lin Chung, a dubious physician who is surely privy to both sub berthings and sabotage plots. Tommy ran wets for Carlos Madrano and was dunning me for information about the man, when I last saw him. I think Tommy is part of all this, but he had to have had considerable help here in Baja.”

Vasquez-Cruz oozed delight. He fluffed his cravat and tee-heed.

“Such strategic insight. You are Robespierre, reborn.”

Dudley laughed. “Our mandate is to foil sabotage and make money.”

Vasquez-Cruz stuck his hand out. Dudley bone-crushed it. Vasquez-Cruz went *Caramba*—such strength.

—

Claire was out. Dudley patched switchboard calls straight from the suite.

He got Mike Breuning. They bypassed amenities. Mike reported *this:*

Drift per Tommy Glennon. Tommy owed Eddie Leng money. Eddie was crowding him. Jack Horrall palmed the Leng snuff off on Uncle Ace. Jack hated Chink snuffs. Their heathen customs fucked things up. Chinks should arbitrate Chinks.

The Alien Squad popped a Jap named Donald Matsura. He was a terp man and renaissance lowlife. He showed up in dead Eddie’s KA file. Matsura knew Tommy and Chink sawbones Lin Chung.

The phone rang. Dudley jiggled the receiver. The switchboard patched out Mike B. and patched in Uncle Ace.

Ace gibbered. English and Chinese overlapped. He talked himself dry. He pooped out and coughed himself hoarse.

Dudley said, “Good morning, my brother.”

“My Irish brother. I have missed you.”

“Eddie Leng, my brother. Jack Horrall has appointed you judge and jury.”

Ace said, “No leads, Dudster. I make piss-poor Charlie Chan. That why white man play him in movies.”

Dudley laughed. “There’s a Jap named Donald Matsura at Lincoln Heights. Lean on him, and confirm or eliminate him. I think Tommy Glennon killed Eddie, but I could be wrong. Put this matter to rest, my brother. We should seek to avoid a tong war as we pave our way to the money.”

Phone static hit. Ace talked over it: “Fuck”/“shit”/“money, how?”

The line cleared. Dudley said, “We run wetbacks. We smuggle heroin in Army vehicles transporting Baja Japs to U.S. internment camps. There’s a sell-Japs-as-slaves scheme I’m pondering.”

More line hiss. More garbled Ace: “Fuck”/“shit”/“cocksucker.” The line cleared. Ace said, “Jap beast must die.” It was his boffo signature close.

15

(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 A.M., 1/3/42)

The lab smock clashed with her hair. Her sensible shoes lacked panache. Navy blue and gold, farewell.

She waltzed on the war. She served notice at the Fed Building and cabbed to Central Station. She lugged her gear by the muster room. Short cops ogled her.

Anchors aweigh.

Joan schlepped two suitcases. They contained her microscope and textbooks. She trudged the stairs. The lab was unlocked and unoccupied.

She surveyed it. She smelled luminol and gun oil. The ballistics chute leaked asbestos.

PD chemists worked sardine tight. Her desk adjoined Dr. Ashida's. They shared bookshelves and burner plates. Joan unpacked and stashed her suitcases in a closet.

Dr. Ashida kept his desk tidy. The charred box was propped up against it. Dirt-packed jars sat three across.

They were evidence-tagged. Mineral Canyon/Griffith Park/1-1-42.

The case intrigued her. It merged human passion with elemental forces. The rain, the mud slide, a precipitant fire. Possible-probable arson. Her specific métier.

She went by the *L.A. Times* yesterday. She flashed her police ID and wheedled a set of page scrapbooks. They detailed the Griffith Park blaze. Santa Ana winds and scorcher heat. A firebug arrested and released. A Communist cell scrutinized. No arrests. No firm forensic determination.

She should reread and annotate the scrapbooks. She should discuss the case with Dr. Ashida. Catastrophic fire was *her* métier. Dr. Ashida was prissy and domineering. She should establish crime-lab parity.

Joan unscrewed a dirt jar. She sniffed the dirt and placed a small clod in a beaker. She filled a stopper with liquid ammonia and squeezed in eight drops. She added sink water and placed the beaker on a hot plate.

She brought up a flash boil. The heat induced blue coloration. She checked her organic chemistry text and found a color chart. She got a perfect match.

She studied the charred box. She memorized the wood grain and consulted her woodlot text. There's one more perf—

Hideo Ashida walked in.

He glared. He stomped one foot. Joan preempted him.

"This batch of wood derives from late summer '33. It was cut by the Anawalt Lumber Company. My book lists Anawalt's key 1933 customer as Los Angeles City Parks and Recreation. The dirt I tested contains traces of a four-to-one solution of oil-diluted kerosene, which has been known to be employed as a secondary accelerant to spread already-lit fires. I talked to Dr. Layman and did some newspaper research. Accordingly, I would surmise that the killer had knowledge of an impending arson in Griffith Park, or started the overall fire himself. The box was unearthed in a canyon that was then nearly invisible from the warren of canyons at the apex of the blaze. I would surmise that the killer knew his victim would be in that nearly invisible canyon or lured him there, then killed him, boxed him, covered him in deep, soft earth, and then set the secondary fire."

Ashida slack-jawed it. Mr. Brain was struck dumb. Bill Parker lounged right behind him. Joan smelled his dumb lime cologne.

16

(TIJUANA, 2:00 P.M., 1/3/42)

He knew the look. It said *YOU'RE A JAP.* It vexed him in L.A. This border variant *scared* him.

Mexican cops. With their hate glares. With their soiled uniforms and hand-tooled gun belts. Swastikas and coiled snakes carved in.

Dudley wrangled him an Army pass. A slew of border guards perused it. They hemmed and hawed. Cars piled up behind him.

Horns blared. A man yelled, "Goddamn Jap!" Time stuttered and stalled flat.

A guard returned his pass. A guard pointed south. A guard grabbed his crotch. A guard spit on his windshield.

Ashida floored the gas. He detoured through T.J. and hit the coast road. He counted days backward. He stopped Christmas Day.

It was his first Baja visit. He joined Dudley, Mike B., and Dick C. He survived the botched dope raid. He survived the Statie jail and *mucho* torture. He caught the first beached-sub incursion. He questioned captured sailors and beat them with sap gloves. A fat sailor called him a swish.

He searched the sub. Dudley assisted. They found a cash stash and bought their freedom. They hog-tied the sailors and dumped them in the sub. He started the engines and got the sub out to sea.

It was explosive-rigged. Twenty-four men fired shotguns and tore out the hull. The sub detonated. The sailors burned alive.

They drove back to L.A. then. He sat in the backseat. Dudley sat beside him. Their legs brushed. He fluttered, all over.

Ashida drove south. Rain clouds gathered off the coast. He brought an evidence kit. He left notes for Elmer Jackson and Lee Blanchard.

He called off their bodyguard schifts. He fed Elmer a P.S. It laid out Joan Conville's charred-box diagnosis. "I know about your brother. This new wrinkle's a non sequitur. It shouldn't bother you."

Ashida drove south. He played the radio and caught a news broadcast. “Recent Jap aggressions” blared. He turned the radio off.

Ensenada came and went. Low clouds seeped rain. He saw Statie goons perched on a beach bluff.

He pulled over. The goons came on servile. They pointed him down a steep roadway. He skidded on hard dirt and sand.

The beachfront was right there. He brodied in tight. He hit his headlights and framed the scene.

Low tide. A beached sub. Dead sailors stacked on wood pallets. A cove entry right behind them.

Rain tarps at the ready. Two generators. Dry ice, dumped in wire-mesh buckets. It foils decomposition. We’ve got fans rigged. They’ll blow cold air on the stiffs.

And there’s Dudley. He’s dashing in his olive drabs. He’s with a Statie captain. Note the jodhpurs and peaked Nazi hat.

Ashida walked over. *El Fascisto* clicked his heels.

Dudley embraced him. Dudley said, “Hello, my dear friend.”

—

He surveyed the scene and went in close. Statie goons held spotlights. The tarps deflected light rain.

High tides eradicated drag marks. Storm tides hit the cove and wrecked his trace-element search. A Statie van backed down to the tide line. The tailgate gave him a flat place to work.

Ashida examined the bodies. He saw the facial powder burns that Dudley saw first. He studied a rock outcropping. He found three dead flashbulbs. He restudied the dead men and examined their tunics and exposed upper chests.

The goons held their spotlights tight-close. Ashida saw silencer threads and noted varied formations. He tweezer-plucked three representative batches and placed them on slides. He carried them to the tailgate and dialed his microscope tight-tight.

Dudley hovered. Ashida studied the threads. He saw three individuated formations. He looked at Dudley. He smiled and bowed.

“There were three gunmen. They stood at that near outcropping and hit the sailors with flashbulb glare. They ran up and shot them while they were blinded, and they used silencer-fitted guns.”

Dudley smiled and bowed. Ashida walked back to the pallets. The goons snapped to. He pointed to the sailors’ heads. He said, *“Se siente todos.”*

The goons flashed their spotlights. Ashida went in with a surgeon’s ax and knife.

He cracked skulls. Eyeball sockets collapsed. He scooped brain tissue and dropped it in the sand. He dug out forty-eight spent bullets, *todos.*

The goons looked ill. They murmured prayers. Ashida was blood-spattered, blood-smeared, blood-flecked.

He walked back to the van. Dudley and Vasquez-Cruz hovered. Ashida sprayed his hands with 100-proof alcohol. He dipped the spents in gasoline and blotter-dried them.

He clamped sixteen spents to microscope slides. He dialed the scope close and passed the slides under his lens. He studied fragmentary striations.

Dudley and Vasquez-Cruz hovered. They chain-smoked and eyed the process. Ashida ran through said process three times.

"The lands and grooves are obliterated, but I can state that the bullets themselves are surely of U.S. manufacture. Based on what I can see of circumference, my best guess would be Smith & Wesson Police .38s."

Dudley said, "Ambush. Three capable men, identically armed."

Vasquez-Cruz went *tee-hee.* He spoke baritone and tittered soprano.

Dudley winked at Ashida. "The submarine, lad. We're looking for money, of course."

—

Ashida worked straight through. He felt energized. Dudley worked beside him. Vasquez-Cruz supplied tools. They replicated their first inch-by-inch search.

They unscrewed bolts and looked behind panels. They unwired instrument clusters. They disassembled the periscope mount. They scuffed their knuckles and gouged their arms. They pulled up loose floor plates and found *MONEY.*

It was duffel-bagged the first time. It was attaché-cased tonight. Vasquez-Cruz tee-heed and cut through the locks. The yield: twenty grand, U.S.

Dudley grabbed half. *El Fascisto* grabbed half. A fat goon grabbed the attaché.

—

On to photographs. Let's capture the dead and shoot for long-shot IDs.

El Fascisto tipped his goons. He was one high-stepping *jefe.* He dispensed C-notes. The goons genuflected. They went *Sieg Heil* and called Vasquez-Cruz *"Führer."* Dudley dog-bayed and laughed himself hoarse.

It was full dark now. The goons erected arc lights. Ashida loaded his lab camera and close-up shot the stiffs.

He went through sixteen flashbulbs. He dumped bulbs and duplicated the pix. He shot two full sets. One for the Staties, one for SIS.

On to fingerprints. That was a long shot. The sailors were surely native-born Japanese. Their prints were filed in Tokyo and nowhere else.

Ashida hustled up the goons. They were half-tanked on mescal. They *weeeaved* through more arc-light work.

Ashida numbered sixteen print cards and inked thirty-two hands. Rigor mortis worked against him. The goons supplied weavy light. He placed the cards on a wood plank and maneuvered stiff fingertips.

Some were too stiff. He knife-severed those fingers and rolled them free and clear.

Dudley's staff car stood cliffside. Ashida washed his hands and walked up. Dudley and Vasquez-Cruz worked in the backseat.

They dug through file carbons. Resident-alien files. Baja-resident Japanese/pickup orders issued. They trawled for Japanese Navy KAs.

Ashida sat up front. Dudley passed him a file stack. Ashida trawled for KAs. He trawled twelve files and tapped out. He hit on file #13.

The file tapped one Kyoho Hanamaka. He was an "Imperial Navy attaché."

Ashida said, "I've got a man named Hanamaka here. He's tagged as a naval attaché, but he's got very few KAs, and none in the Navy."

Vasquez-Cruz said, "He's one slippery eel. He's quite the friend of Juan Lazaro-Schmidt, the Baja governor."

—

Supper at the Hotel del Norte. The beach-view dining room served late. Picture windows and wave crash. Your host, Dudley Smith.

In civvies now. Blue blazer, gray slacks. Claire De Haven sat to his left. She satirized this arrangement and tossed barbs at *El Fascisto.* Vasquez-Cruz indulged her and laughed.

He wore his black uniform. He came off sinister. Ashida cleaned up and changed in his room. He showered off brain matter. He scrubbed off fingerprint ink.

Pacific lobster and champagne. Convivial Dudley. No man should be so handsome. Ashida tried not to stare.

Talk flowed. Ashida sipped club soda and ignored his food. He counted days back to Pearl Harbor. He hit the Bill Parker/Kay Lake pogrom.

His role was Kay's lover. He failed at it. Claire threw a party. Leftist Los Angeles bickered and preened. Kay caused a scene. She deployed her Jap paramour and overplayed the pose. Claire saw through Kay. Claire teethed on her nonetheless.

Dudley dropped a bon mot. Vasquez-Cruz laughed. No *El Fascisto* titter. He laughed deep baritone.

He played to Claire. He moved his chair close and leaned in.

"You must not judge neutral Mexico too harshly, Miss De Haven. This dinner conclave proves my point. We have a Latin man and a Japanese man. We have an Irish-Catholic immigrant and a landed Protestant lady."

Claire lit a cigarette. "I converted to the Roman Church, Captain. I'm an apostate in my faith as well as my politics. You'll have to cite pithier examples if you wish to make time with me."

Vasquez-Cruz went *Salud.* "Perhaps I should cite Mr. Leon Trotsky. He fled Stalin's death squads and found asylum nowhere but here. President Cárdenas provided him with a home when no one else would."

"Only as a means to counter accusations that he was a Stalinist, Captain. And, of course, Trotsky was assassinated in your selfsame country, under that selfsame *capitalista* poseur."

Vasquez-Cruz smiled. "Spanish and French in one sentence. Aaay, *caramba."*

Claire blushed. Ashida caught her dope-pinned eyes. Dudley winked at him. It conveyed subtext. If *El Fascisto* gets too frisky, I'll kill him.

Ashida laughed. It verged on a squeal. He covered his mouth and muzzled himself.

Claire said, "Is something amusing, Dr. Ashida? Something you forgot to tell me when you were a much-welcome but finally intrusive guest in my home last month?"

Ashida said, "I'm quite tired, Miss De Haven. I've spent a busy day in Captain Smith's employ."

Claire glanced away. She looked out the window and stood up. Ashida clocked the window. He saw a raggedy girl on the beach. The girl picked up a starfish and cradled it to herself.

Vasquez-Cruz stood for Claire. Call him Señor Decorum. She touched his hand—*un momento.*

She walked out. *El Fascisto* watched her go. He clicked his heels and bowed to Dudley. He pivoted and walked off.

Ashida said, "He's going to check on Claire. He must have police friends in Los Angeles."

Dudley said, "You're a very bright penny tonight."

Ashida blushed. He looked out the window. Claire engaged the raggedy girl. They fussed over the starfish and had quite a chat.

Dudley rocked his chair back. "My Claire has an enormous and impetuous heart."

Ashida went dizzy. The dining room tilted. Spots popped in front of his eyes.

“What *is* this? Why am I here?”

Dudley tapped his knee. “There’s my ex-snitch Tommy Glennon, and a dead Chinaman named Eddie Leng. There’s our old friend Lin Chung, and the scent of money.”

“Yes, but what’s in it for me?”

Dudley said, “I intend to rescue you and your family from the internment. Would a U.S. Army commission and a posting here suit you?”

17

(LOS ANGELES, 10:00 P.M., 1/3/42)

Elmer doodled. It soothed his gourd and vitalized his brain cells.

Lyman's was jam-packed. He nursed a highball and worked at his table. He scribbled up napkins. He drew pit dogs with sharp fangs and big dicks.

He wrote, *"DUDLEY SMITH EATS SHIT!!!!!"* He laughed. He scoped the bar and saw Thad Brown and Two-Gun Davis. The highball kicked in. He quit futzing around and got to it.

He wrote, *"D.S. & T.G."* He underlined it and added question marks. He wrote, *"T.G. to E.L. (murder vict)"* and underlined it.

He wrote, *"Donald Matsura & E.L.—???"* He wrote, *"Can't talk to Breuning & Carlisle—D.S.'s goons."* He wrote, *"Kapek & Rice—too corrupt."*

He circled. He underlined. He drew arrows and *X*s and stitched all this shit up. He got bored and periscoped Lyman's.

He saw Kay in a back booth. He saw Bill Parker's redhead at the bar. She wore civilian vines now. Jim Davis crowded her. He blathered and sprayed pretzel gack.

Elmer wrote, *"E.J. & J.C."* and drew a heart around it. He added Cupid's arrow and got back to work.

He wrote, *"T.G.'s address book—???"* He wrote, *"Hot-box phone calls—???"* He wrote, *"Calls to 14 Baja pay phones—???"*

He drew an SQ circled by snakes. He drew more question marks. He drew Eddie Leng's death rictus and french-fried feet.

Kay hopped in his booth. There she is, her all-time self.

Elmer scooped up his doodles. Kay laid down her Manhattan. Elmer plucked out the cherry and ate it.

"Tell me something I don't know. And make it interesting, because it's Saturday night, and the world's got me batshit."

Kay laughed. "Thad told me about the DB call New Year's morning. I thought, Uh-*oh,* Elmer's brother died close by there. That's the chickens come home to roost."

Elmer spit the cherry pit in an ashtray. Elmer jiggled Kay's hands.

"I got no dish on this one. It's '42 now, and Wayne Frank cashed out back in '33. I don't see no hook between him and this here DB. And if I *did,* I wouldn't know what to do, because I'm really just a whore-peddler, a bagman, and a strongarm thug. I *might* be the world's luckiest white man, but I sure as shit am not much of a detective."

Kay lit a cigarette. "There's a look you get. Your jaw sets a certain way, and your eyes go flat. It's like you're saying, 'The comedy hour's over.' "

Elmer snatched her drink. He plucked an orange rind and waved the swizzle stick.

"The Dudster sent me out to kill a man, but I couldn't do it. I been reading some C-town files, and it looks to me like that selfsame geek killed himself a tonged-up Chinaman."

Kay looked him over. She had well-known X-ray eyes. Elmer squirmed and relit his cigar.

Bar chat escalated. Elmer caught threads. Jim Davis called FDR "Double-Cross Rosenfeld." Joan Conville took offense.

Kay caught the kerfuffle. She X-ray-eyed Joan. Elmer said, "There's your gossip."

"If you mean vehicular manslaughter, I've already heard it. Lee told me. He said it's worse than the dead Mexicans, but he wouldn't say why."

Elmer shrugged. "You know everything that I know. If there's more to it, you could ask Bill Parker."

Kay jiggled his hands. Elmer laced up their fingers.

"Kick Lee out. You don't sleep with him, anyway. Tell Parker to leave his wife and marry you. If he nixes it, I'll marry you. I'll get a cop job in Bumfuck, Indiana. We'll live fat and sassy on a farm someplace."

Kay laughed and *un*laced their fingers. She scanned the bar and X-ray-eyed Big Joan.

—

He got itchy. He stayed batshit. He fought the Saturday Night Blues.

Elmer drove to his place and fed his tropical fish. Said fish ignored him. Itchy feet pushed him back out. L.A. was blackout black. He drove straight to Brenda's place.

He almost walked in. *Oooh-baby* grunts stopped him dead at the door. He peeped the front window. *Shit*—Brenda's shtupping Jack Horrall on the floor.

Elmer drove to Ellen's place. He parked outside her building and reconnoitered. He elevatored up to her floor. He climbed out on a fire escape and peeped the front room. *Shit*—Ellen's shtupping her husband on the couch.

More loose ends. More fucking rain. Mama, dem blues gots me *baaaaaad.*

Elmer drove to Chapman Park. Brenda's fuck flop overlooked the Ambassador Hotel. Tonight, at the Coconut Grove: Glenn Miller and the Modernaires.

He parked and elevatored up. He let himself in and stormed the kitchen. He built a ham sandwich and a highball. He pondered dumb moves.

Send Kay flowers. Send Big Joan flowers. Take her to the Coconut Grove. Mess with Bill Parker.

Elmer guzzled his highball. He unlocked the wall peek and checked the camera gear. He skimmed the play-for-pay girl book.

Charlotte, French expert. Dirty Diane, striptease. Call the switchboard. You're the boss. You get the woof-woof for free.

Or—

Hit the Lincoln Heights Jail. Brace Crazy Don Matsura. Remember? He had that menu for Eddie Leng's Kowloon.

—

The rain got worse. He snail-trailed up the Parkway to 19th Avenue. The jail stood upside the off-ramp. He hooked right and sluiced up to a PD space. He got out and ran in.

The entrance hall was bare bones/all gray cement. Elmer brushed off his raincoat and shook himself dry. A night cop lounged by the gate racks. He wore that I-hate-this-job look. He beady-eyed a cheesecake book.

Elmer walked up and badged him. The night cop said, "So?"

Elmer said, "I'm with the Alien Squad. You've got a frisky Jap named Donald Matsura here. I know, because I brought him in."

The night cop said, "He ain't so frisky now. *Banzai,* if you know what I mean."

"Why don't you explain what you mean?"

"I mean, Chief Horrall called the watch commander. He said Ace Kwan would like a few words with your boy. As in, 'Put him in a sweatbox and then walk away.' "

Elmer slipped the dink twenty. "Ace and I go way back. Call-Me-Jack, likewise. If Ace is still at it, I'd like to watch the show."

"Well…"

Elmer doubled up the bribe. The night cop went *Mum's the word* and racked the front gate. Elmer took the main catwalk back. Crisscrossed catwalks extended. Japs were packed in six and eight to a cell.

He hit a bisecting hall. He saw recessed doorways. Oh, yeah—it's sweatbox row.

Four twelve-by-twelve rooms. All the same. Look-see mirrors/floor-bolted tables/two screwed-down chairs.

Elmer cut straight left. He peeped three mirrored doors and got bupkes. He peeped room #4 and got the real shit.

There's Demon Don. There's Uncle Ace. It's the well-known third degree.

Ace was a known rubber-hose man. His hose looked heavy-duty. It was friction-taped. It stood straight up. It had to be ball bearing–packed.

Matsura was chair-cuffed. Ace swung the hose. He threw tight shots—arms, rib cage, legs.

Elmer popped the door. A shit and piss stink hit him. Matsura screamed. He bucked his chair. The floor bolts shimmied. One bolt pulled loose.

Ace saw Elmer. Ace said, "Jack H. give okay."

Elmer said, "You mean Dudley did."

Matsura dribbled blood on the table. Ace threw a head shot. Matsura screamed. Gold bridgework flew.

Ace gibbered. Matsura dribbled blood. Elmer saw gum flaps laced in.

Ace shrieked, trilingual. He went Chink/English/*Chink*lish. Elmer caught *this:*

You Jap fucker/you tonged up/Four Families/sell terp/winos and dope fiends. You sell pharmacy hop/with Lin Chung/you know Tommy Glenn—

Ace stopped. Ace went *Oops.* Ace shut his fat fucking mouth.

Elmer went *Oh shit.*

Ace swung the hose. He threw rib shots and leg shots. Elmer heard bones break. Matsura dribbled blood. The hose cracked down the middle. Ball bearings flew—

Elmer grabbed Ace by the neck and hard-shoved him. Ace bounced off the back wall and hit the floor flat on his ass. Matsura bucked his chair and tore out all the floor bolts. The chair capsized.

Ace keened and screeched. It was some heathen curse. He got to his knees and pulled out his dick. He piss-polluted this big pool of Jap blood.

18

(ENSENADA, 9:15 A.M., 1/4/42)

That cretinous redneck. That Klan-klique bumpkin. That maladroit buffoon.

The telephone exploded. Dudley dropped the receiver. It cut Mike Breuning off.

Bad news. Elmer Jackson muscled Ace Kwan and caused a big upscut. Tough tiff at the Lincoln Heights Jail.

Dudley lit a cigarette. His office spun. Squadroom noise went cacophonous. The temperature zoomed.

He wiped his face and roused the switchboard. He got more bad news. All Baja-to-L.A. circuits—full up.

He should call Jack Horrall and demand reprisals. That could boomerang. Jack was thick with Brenda Allen. That fact mandated circumspection.

Dudley rubbed his bad arm. The sling came off yesterday. An Army doc checked him out and pronounced him okay.

Minor aches persisted. They induced flutters and sweats. They derailed his concentration. His mind wandered. He teethed on the inconsequential. Little things set him off.

His wife called. She wanted to chat. He forgot his eldest daughter's name. Claire eavesdropped on the bedroom phone. It enraged him.

Claire missed Mass this morning. It vexed him. Claire was off with her fetching, if feral, new waif. The girl vexed him no end.

Joan Klein was age fifteen. She was a New York runaway and a Zionist Jew. Her immigrant kin veered hard left. Claire found the girl *très* enchanting.

She bought the girl clothes. She got her a room down the hall. The girl told tall tales. Labor agitators clash with Fed thugs. Mayhem results.

He humored Claire. He said, "You're underemployed, darling. You're picking up strays and grasping at straws."

Claire lashed out. She defamed the "effete" Hideo Ashida. She excoriated the harmless dilettante Kay Lake. Young Kay shivved him in Kwan's basement. Claire fell prey to her most fleeting whims. The charge was preposterous.

José Vasquez-Cruz gored Claire. She thought she gored him. That was *très* Claire. She confused enmity with mild contempt. She said, "I think I've seen him before. Somewhere—perhaps a demonstration."

That felt spot-on. Vasquez-Cruz was a chameleon. He tee-heed to his Army pals. He low-growled to provocative women.

Dudley flexed his bad arm. He made a fist and squeezed it tight. He tore through the pain—and laughed.

—

Statie HQ:

Three dank buildings inland and south. Slave labor built them. Jail, trooper barracks, administration. They were plopped down beside an arroyo. Lettuce fields stood close by.

Shackled inmates toiled there. Stoop labor. Lift that barge, tote that bale. The jail featured sweat rooms and torture dens. Scorpions nested there. They ate bugs and stung recalcitrant spics.

Admin featured file vaults and cramped office suites. Dudley called ahead. He talked to a lieutenant named Juan Pimentel. They gabbed at length. Lieutenant Juan reported *this:*

He braced their in-custody Japs. They possessed nada knowledge of the beached sub and dead sailors. He developed Hideo Ashida's film. He cross-checked it against mug-shot files and resident-alien sheets. He got more nada there. He got no fingerprint matches. Sixteen dead Jap sailors? *Es mucho mierda.*

Juan Pimentel was *muy bueno.* He jumped on all the small shit.

He head-counted jail Japs. He got 44 in custody/182 still loose. He prepped admin suite 214. He stacked the custody files and made a pot of coffee.

Dudley drove over and parked outside. Prowl cars hemmed him in. Statie bossmen custom-fitted them. Note the hood-mounted flamethrowers. Note the hand-painted saints and giant rodents emitting death rays.

Dudley entered the building and found 214. Lieutenant Juan delivered. He had the homey touch.

The desk, the chair, the coffee. The ashtray and ceiling fan. The worm-in-the-jug mescal. Forty-four files laid out.

Dudley read through them. He chain-smoked. He read from this spark point:

Kyoho Hanamaka. He's a naval attaché. Hideo skimmed his file and nailed a big inconsistency.

There were very few KAs. There were no naval KAs. It startled Hideo.

Hanamaka was still on the loose. That fact troubled him.

Dudley reread the file and studied the clipped photograph. Hanamaka looked psychopathic.

Born in Kyoto, 1898. Career Navy man. Intel background. Toured Europe, '35-'36. Toured Russia, likewise. Brilliant student at the German Naval Warfare School.

There were three male KAs listed. They were all fishermen. That was enticing. Jap Navy man, the Baja coast, beached submarines.

Three KAs. Hiroshi Takai, Hector Obregon-Hodaka, Akira Minamura. All coastal fishermen.

Dudley thumbed custody files. He checked name tabs and hit Obregon-Hodaka.

He read the file. The man was a Jap-Mex half-breed. He spoke English. His moniker was "Big Tuna." He had a valid U.S. travel visa.

Dudley snatched the desk phone and dialed double ought. A jail noncom picked up. Dudley said, "Inmate Obregon-Hodaka. Room 214, please."

—

"I know I'm headed for the shithouse, boss. What I'm angling for is a nice internment berth up near L.A. The Chino work farm, maybe. Dexter Gordon's there. He blows tenor. You've got to gas on his chord changes for 'Ol' Man River.' "

Hector the hepcat. More Mex than Jap. He knew the type. They bred like rats in L.A.

"Quite the jazzman, are you?"

"You ain't lyin', daddy. I know L.A. niggertown like I know the coast here. All the coons on Central Avenue call me 'El Tojo,' 'cause of my mixed bloodline. I'm the Big Tuna here, and El Tojo in L.A."

They sipped mescal. Dudley got a glow on. 160-proof. Satanic worms afloat in the jug. No drink for nancy boys.

"Do you possess strong political convictions, sir?"

"Well, I'm not Fifth Column, if that's what you're getting at. I'm a live-and-let-live, hold-for-the-downbeat sort of cat. I'm looking to get interned at some amenable spot, sit out the war and go home."

Dudley smiled. "I wish you well in that regard, sir."

Hector sipped mescal. His eyes buzzed. He looked halfway blitzed.

"I've got a colored girlfriend in L.A. She's a waitress at the Club Alabam. They'll let me out once Uncle Sambo wraps this war up. I'll marry her and have some whelps with her, even though she's got four pups with Coleman Hawkins already."

Dudley bowed. “You have convinced me of your political solvency and your allegiance to the Allied cause, sir. Now, please describe your relationship with the Japanese naval attaché, Kyoho Hanamaka.”

Hector made the jack-off sign. “That cocksucker owes me money.”

“Sir?”

“I’d been supplying him with prime tuna for over a year—and by that I mean boatloads. He skipped town owing me *mucho dinero.*”

“So, your relationship with Hanamaka was entirely professional?”

Hector plucked a worm from his glass and ate it. Hector evinced great style.

“We’d bat the breeze sometimes. I knew he was pals with the governor, Juan Lazaro-Schmidt, who’s a Nazi sympathizer and a big Jew-hater. So what? World conflicts breed strange bedfellows. I could live with that, but not with him stiffing me for three big boatloads of fish.”

Dudley said, “Did the quantities that he purchased in any way arouse your suspicions?”

“Yeah, they did. After Pearl Harbor, I started thinking, What’s he want all that fish for? You follow me, boss? Fish, submarine crews, sailors with hearty appetites?”

Dudley lit a cigarette. “We are having parallel thoughts, sir.”

“Okay, so I’ll wrap it up, then. I was having these suspicious thoughts, and Hanamaka owed me money. He lives up in the Baja hills, so I drove up there to collect. It was December 18—I remember because it’s my birthday. I drove up there, but the house had been cleaned out.”

Dudley said, “Take me there. We’ll leave now.”

Hector said, “This jungle juice has got me hopped up. I might try to escape.”

Dudley said, “I’m prone to whim, sir. I’ll either shoot you dead or bid you sayonara.”

—

They cut inland. They hit half-paved roads and breezed through lettuce fields and scrub hills. Bugs bombed the windshield. Dudley tapped his wipers and scraped them to pulp.

They hit low mountain ranges. Low clouds blurred the view. Hector was blitzed. He blathered out his hopes and dreams and extolled jigtown L.A.

He’d get a soft internment berth. He’d deflower Jap virgins and learn to play the bass sax. He’d teach the virgins to play skin flute. He’d rent his boat out to full-blood cholos while he was inside.

Central Avenue. *Está* the most. Ivy Anderson’s chicken shack. Minnie Roberts’ Casbah—the best spook gash in the West. Club Alabam, Club Zombie.

Stan Kenton, mud shark. He's got twenty-eight Congo cuties on the string.

Jam sessions. Back-to-Africa mosques. Political clubhouses. Zoot-suit pachucos, zorched on Sinarquismo. These two rogue cops and their *craaaaaazy* crib on East 46th. Crap games and cooked terpin hydrate. Cole Porter's "Anything Goes."

Maybe he'll learn the bass clarinet. Maybe he'll open a seafood dive—Hector's Hacienda. Bring *la familia.* He'll import that Cuban guy with the two-foot dick. *El Cubano* will poke your *mujer* while you watch and jack off.

Dudley half-heard it. He took rickety bridges across arroyos and climbed more scrub hills. Hector switched gears and jabbered: right there, it's right *there*!

Dudley swung a tight left turn. Dudley braked and saw it:

A mock ski chalet. Two stories/pitched frame/big glassed-in view. Front carport and no cars extant.

Dudley pulled into the carport. Hector smiled at him. So, *Ichiban*? What have we got here?

Dudley winked. Dudley slipped him a border pass and a ten-dollar bill.

Hector took off. He amscrayed, vamoosed, and vanished in five seconds flat.

Dudley stepped from the car. He sniffed the air. He felt raindrops. He pulled his piece and walked up to the door.

It was locked. He stepped back and threw his weight. He slammed hard and shouldered the door in.

He looked right and saw dumped furniture. He looked left and saw a blood-spattered wall.

19

(LOS ANGELES, 4:30 P.M., 1/4/42)

Morgue Powwow. One forensic agenda. ID the Charred-Box Man.

Morgue personnel: Joan, Dr. Nort, Hideo Ashida.

They measured Box Man. Joan stifled a yawn. She'd indulged a late night at Lyman's. She'd hit the sack at 5:00 a.m.

Ashida placed the bones on a gurney. Dr. Nort unrolled his tape. Joan steadied Box Man. Dr. Nort marked the height at seventy-five inches.

Joan said, "He was six-three. If we factor in erosion at the joints and the compression of the spine that comes with age, we can posit that he was as tall as six-four and a half in his youth."

Dr. Nort poked odd bones. "He was tall, and heavyset. Note the pelvic width."

Ashida measured the back-to-front rib cage. He got a fifty-two-inch circumference.

Joan said, "Big man."

Dr. Nort said, "He must have gone two forty-five. His spine's crunched. Note the socket frays. You carry that much weight, you pay a price. I'll go out on a limb. He went DOA in his early forties."

Joan jiggled the foot bones. "Hey there, cutie."

Ashida flushed. He balled his fists and glared.

"We're having a scholars' lark here, Miss Conville. I should add that our late friend in no way constitutes a breaking case, while the lab is currently backlogged with breaking-case evidence, which demands our more immediate attention."

Joan flushed. She balled her fists and glared back.

"We're backlogged with Japanese-property confiscations, Dr. Ashida. I think you might feel a certain ambivalence about that aspect of our work. I deem that understandable, and I can hardly condemn you for dragging your feet and exploiting our late friend's reappearance, so that you might abstain from facilitating your own countrymen's misfortune."

Oooh—hear that pin-drop silence? Now, hear it *streeetch.*

Joan glared at Ashida.

Ashida glared at the floor.

Dr. Nort said, "Children, enough."

Joan lit a cigarette. Dr. Nort, ditto. Ashida looked up. Joan blew smoke in Box Man's face. Dr. Nort laughed.

They all stretched and unclenched. They put out some small talk. Safe topics —the weather, the war, the '42 congressionals. The PD's Fed-probe travails.

Ashida coughed. "We can check CCC worker lists and DB lists in the newspapers. We've got report carbons stored somewhere, and the fire department Arson Squad must have a comprehensive file."

Dr. Nort said, "That's assuming our late friend was a CCC worker."

Joan said, "We can cross-check the death lists to height listings on California drivers' licenses and CCC registration cards. We can cross-check *those* names against missing-persons reports."

Dr. Nort tapped Box Man's skull. He'd extraction-bored the bullet hole last night.

"I dug out the spent. It's flattened and badly decomposed."

Ashida said, "I'll examine it at the lab. I might determine a partial make on the lands and grooves."

Joan said, "We could try for a match to ballistics bulletins from '33. We could run test fires with old custody guns."

Dr. Nort slow-cruised Joan. She knew the drill. The cruise ran head to toe. It was half-leer comprehensive.

"How did you get this job anyway?"

Joan laughed. "I was drunk New Year's Eve. I hit a car and killed four Mexicans. Bill Parker goes for me, and I'm sure you can fill in the rest."

Dr. Nort went *oooh-la-la.* Ashida balled his fists and *glaaaared.*

—

Oooh-la-la? Well, not quite.

Joan walked to Lyman's. She was cash-flush. She'd hit an Alien Squad crap game and won forty scoots.

The game ran most Sunday nights. Wendell Rice and George Kapek draped the squadroom floor and steered the show. Bluesuits and Bureau men rolled.

Lee Blanchard and Elmer Jackson rolled hot. Joan put five on the pass line and let it ride. She cashed out right on cue. Forty clams—Man-O-

Manischewitz!

The boys called her "Red." *That's* a new one. Elmer slipped her a mash note. She ruffled his hair and laid one on him. Rice and Kapek wolf-howled. Catbox Cal Lunceford roared.

Joan cut south on Hill. She counted back to New Year's Eve and ran highlights. Her Navy life then, her PD life now. The show ran four days, door-to-door.

She liked the PD. She liked Mike Lyman's Grill. She perched there and eavesdropped most nights. She rebuffed passes and logged scuttlebutt. She learned the personnel.

There's Two-Gun Davis. He's tonged up. He speaks Chinese and drills underage slash. There's Lee Blanchard—shacked with PD siren Kay Lake.

Big Lee did not drill Kay. His abstinence stemmed from old grief. La Kay scorched for Bill Parker. Whiskey Bill scorched back. He refused to pounce. His abstinence stemmed from his dead-dog marriage and prim Catholic guilt.

Rumors. Barroom scuttlebutt. The skinny, the dish, the drift.

Lyman's back room. The PD's haven and redoubt. Here's how it commenced:

A beaner exposed himself to Mike Lyman's niece. Sensitive Mike was distraught. Sergeant Buzz Meeks shot Whipout Juan dead. Grateful Mike bestowed the back room.

She joked with Buzz at Lyman's. They had a running shtick. "I'm too tall for you, sweetie." "Yeah, but I know how to climb."

Joan hit 8th Street and breezed into Lyman's. She clocked tableside traffic and breezed to the back room.

There's Oooh-La-La Bill. He's Two-Fisted Bill now. He's wolfing a highball and a club sandwich. His uniform's a mess.

Joan said, "Don't spoil your dinner."

"That can't be an invitation."

"I'm rich tonight. You should take advantage."

Parker tossed his sandwich and brushed off stray crumbs. The wastebasket thunked.

"You've got me thinking there's a catch."

"'Catch'? *Me?* As catches go, you're the master."

"Well…"

"Come on. I owe you dinner, *at least.*"

Parker blushed. It was almost endearing. Joan almost swooned.

—

They ate at the Biltmore. It was swank meets plush de-luxe. Joan had roast sirloin. Parker had apricot duck. Their table overlooked Pershing Square.

Soapbox pundits declaimed. Partisan crowds egged them on. Fistfights ensued. White winos shrieked at colored winos and vice versa.

A bar waiter brought cognacs. Parker lit their cigarettes. Joan said, “Tell me what you’re thinking.”

Parker warmed his snifter. “That I should be fighting this war.”

“I’ve heard the stories. Chief Horrall won’t let you enlist, despite your stated intention to steal his job and enact reforms that might well land him in jail, if the Fed probe fails to do so first.”

Parker smiled. “You’re a quick study.”

“I am, yes.”

“What else have you heard?”

“Tales of your feud with Dudley Smith. Intimations that then-Sergeant Smith clashed with you on the Watanabe case, and perhaps rigged a convenient solution, abetted by Dr. Hideo Ashida.”

Parker sipped cognac. “Policemen run their goddamn mouths, with no sense of consequence.”

Joan crushed her cigarette. “I clashed with Dr. Ashida today.”

“He’s uncomfortable with women. I’ve observed it with…”

“With *Kay Lake*? The PD’s favorite round heels and all-around provocatress?”

Parker slugged cognac. “Can it, will you? I realize that you’ve had a heady few days, but you’re being quite indiscreet.”

Joan scanned the dining room. It was dinner-rush packed. She read faces. She sensed outrage and furious intent.

“It’s America’s moment, isn’t it?”

Parker said, “Yes, it is.”

“We’re going to win, aren’t we?”

Parker said, “Yes, we are.”

“We’re going to lay out the Japs and the Nazis, and woe be to the Russians if they try to crowd us then.”

Parker said, “Yes, you’re right.”

Joan got goose bumps. She felt all torn up. A cloudburst hit. Rain banged the picture window right beside her.

“This war is the shit, isn’t it? Doesn’t it make you want to get lost, make love, and go crazy?”

Parker said, “Miss Conville, you go from zero to sixty faster than any—”

Joan grabbed his face and kissed him. Water glasses capsized. Parker kissed her back. He leaned in and pinned her arms to the table.

He trembled. She felt it. It went all the way through her.

20

(LOS ANGELES, 10:15 A.M., 1/5/42)

The rain let up. The sky gleamed. The Central Station roof supplied views.

Ashida took advantage. He brought binoculars and trained them due east. He caught a roust at 1st and San Pedro.

He zoomed his lens and played Man Camera. The roust's Alien Squad. There's Wendell Rice and George Kapek. Catbox Cal Lunceford's running backup. They've got four Japanese men, shackle-chained.

Rice waved a red-sun flag. Ashida supplied a thought balloon. "Say! This would make a swell crap-game blanket!"

Ashida swiveled south and scanned upward. Sun framed the Biltmore Hotel. He caught his mother's bedroom window. He saw Mariko looking out.

Their elegant suite. Dudley Smith bestows gifts. His pending Army commission. Lieutenant Hideo Ashida.

Shakespeare, revised. *I owe this bad man more tears than you shall see me pay.*

Joan Conville was a briefly tenured Navy lieutenant. Bill Parker bestows gifts. He entraps comely women. The silly girl works with *him* now.

Parker bestows gifts and abrogates justice. *Do you see the children in your dreams, sir? The reckless girl killed them. I see them every night.*

Ashida turned northeast. He saw a foot procession. It was all male and mostly Chinese.

Tong thugs. Jap-haters astroll. They waved casket pix of Eddie Leng. The bigwigs marched up front. Uncle Ace Kwan, Two-Gun Davis, Dr. Lin Chung.

Ashida dialed a close-up. He caught Chung gesticulating. He knew Chung, secondhand. He's the butcher plastic surgeon. He's the mad eugenicist. He's the bagman for last month's sub approach.

This new approach feels somewhat different. It's like the first approach, refined and revised. The first approach was oddball inclusive. The new approach could be much more or much less of that.

Right is Left and Left is Right. Dr. Chung is tight with a leftist eugenicist named Saul Lesnick. Dr. Lesnick is a psychiatrist and FBI informant. He is Claire De Haven's analyst. Kay Lake knows Dr. Lesnick. He figured in Bill Parker's anti-Red crusade.

Inclusion. Confluence. Wartime folly. The Fifth Column is everyone.

Ashida walked back down to the lab. Two chemists logged evidence. Ray Pinker and Joan Conville were out.

He caught something.

His photo device. He'd been oiling the parts. It was placed just so on his desk. He left the lab for twenty minutes. The device was set off-kilter now.

Mr. Pinker. *He* handled it. The device confounded and thrilled him. Japanese inventors can't secure patents. Mr. Pinker wants to front the device. He wants half the money. This war spawns opportunities. Fair-minded men turn unfair.

A ruckus bubbled up, streetside. Ashida heard shouts and shrieks. He checked the window. Two cops wrestled Fujio Shudo into a van.

The Werewolf wore a straitjacket and jail khakis. A sanity hearing beckons. His gas-chamber trek begins. He's a ready-made Jap. He's been handpicked for prosecution. Dudley Smith, inquisitor. Hideo Ashida, forged-document man.

The chemists walked out. Ashida locked himself in. Gossip spritzed through a wall vent. The lab shared vents with the Alien Squad. Lee Blanchard and Cal Lunceford groused. *The fucking phone-tap probe. What a crock of shit.*

Ashida walked to his desk. Joan Conville had compiled reports. She supplied study stacks. They were squared off and pencil-marked.

Missing-persons bulletins. A tight geographic spread. Southern California, all police agencies. L.A. County, Orange County, San Diego County. Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. San Bernardino, Riverside.

A tight date spread. Late summer '33 to early winter '34. Tall men only. Heavyset men only. A tight age spread. Mid-thirties to mid-forties.

Plus CCC survivor lists. Grist for their thesis. Box Man died concurrent with the Griffith Park fire.

Miss Conville oversupplied paper. He didn't need the dead-and-identified lists. He read through them anyway. He saw a morgue pic. It displayed Wayne Frank Jackson's charred corpse.

Ashida scanned lists. He looked for matched names and compatible descriptions. He sifted reports. He eyeball-clicked. He got zero, zero, zero, and *this:*

A CCC living survivor. Karl Frederick Tullock/6'4"/235. Born 6/14/93. Forty in October '33. A Santa Barbara County missing person.

An ex-cop. On the S.B. County Sheriff's Department. Wife reports Tullock missing—1/12/34.

It fits circumstantially. It's a hot one. It's a possible match.

Zealous Miss Conville. She oversupplies paper and supplies a possible match. And—she's stuffed a box under his desk.

Ashida went through it. He saw off-the-corpse clothing patches. He studied them. He noted quicklime saturation and seed husks.

He saw a white cotton swatch. He identified collar points. The swatch tweaked him. It was hand-stitched Egyptian cotton. He placed the swatch under his fluoroscope and brought up a blurred laundry mark.

He got goose bumps. Box Man's a CCC wage slave. Wage slaves don't wear high-quality shirts. They don't send them out to be laundered.

Ashida went through the box. He sifted cloth fragments. He pulled pieces. He grabbed a folded-over trouser cuff. It felt weighted down.

He dug into the fold. He pulled this out:

A small piece of gold. One-inch by one-inch. Small but hefty. Irregular-shaped.

It felt substantial. It felt pure-gold dense. It was mid-range nugget-sized.

It was bored through. A metal chain and key were attached. The key was stamped "648." It looked like a locker stamp.

Ashida got goose bumps and flushed hot and cold. He rigged a microscope. He hook-clamped the gold chunk and dialed his lens close. He saw faint markings. "U.S." and "023" stood out.

Mint marks. They had to be that. He was locked-in, dialed-in sure.

21

(LOS ANGELES, 11:45 A.M., 1/5/42)

Oooga-booga. Vile voodoo ascends. Eddie Leng goes out in style.

Pit dogs pulled Eddie's casket. They wore tong kerchiefs and spiked breastplates. The casket was tiger-striped and rolled on tricycle wheels.

Spectators lined North Broadway. Car traffic was verboten. Boocoo Chinks trailed the casket. They waved REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR! and KILL THE JAPS! signs.

Elmer stood at Alpine and Broadway. Street vendors hawked ptomaine tacos and egg foo young. Elmer reeled. It was all of it—plus *this* shit:

Deep-fried Eddie Leng. These suffocation dreams. It's really Wayne Frank and him in that charred box.

All *that* shit. Plus his fool stunt with Ace Kwan.

Said stunt got him cogitating. Ace blathered that night. He said Lin Chung and Don Matsura crossed hate lines and hobknobbed. They sold pharmacy dope. Matsura was tonged up. He peddled terp to winos and dope fiends. He knew Tommy Glennon. Lin Chung knew Tommy, likewise.

Cut to the Matsura roust. It's him, Rice, and Kapek. There's the terp still in Matsura's dump. There's the Leng's Kowloon menu.

It got him cogitating. So, he did *this:*

He read Chinktown intel files at the Bureau. Thus, he learned *this:*

Lin Chung peddled opiate compounds. He supplied "O" dens in the San Gabriel Valley. He pushed pharmacy hop to herb quacks.

And, he saw *this:*

Fed routing stamps on Chung's file. That was provocative. That meant *this:*

The Feds had Chung pegged as hinky and suspect. Thus, he did *this:*

He staked out Chung's house. He saw Ed Satterlee staked likewise. He tailed Ed the Fed to the phone-probe stake spot by the *Herald.* The hot-box phone outside: listed in Tommy G.'s address book.

The hot-box was a bookie-call phone. Sid Hudgens purportedly used it. Sid scribed at the *Herald*. It all felt popcorn-fart tight.

Elmer watched the parade. He pondered a ptomaine-taco lunch. The casket rolled out of sight.

He felt something behind him. Some lurking beast. His fellow spectators veered, lurched, and scrammed.

Something/someone grabbed him. He got all smothered up. It was an octopus snatch. Six arms clamped him tight.

He squirmed and orbed the octopus. Tentacles became arms. It was Jim Davis and two Hop Sing shits. Our ex–police chief and two heathen slants.

They snatched him and scissor-walked him. Sidewalk geeks gawked. Yellow folks went *White men claaaaazy!* They gassed on the show. Jim Davis tossed them Chink bon mots.

They scissor-walked down Broadway. They hit Kwan's and scissored through the dining room. *Shit*—it's packed.

White stiffs quaffed mai tais and slurped pork fried rice. *Shit*—there's Fletch Bowron, there's Wallace Jamie, there's fucked-up Father Coughlin.

They scissor-walked downstairs. They hit the basement. They pushed through the "O" den and Chinks reposed on Cloud 9. They hit a small office. *Bam!*—the tong shits depart.

Davis unwrapped him and plopped him down in a chair. The fat cocksucker was red-faced and all sweated up.

Elmer dredged savoir faire. "You don't look too good, Chief. You look like a man in need of medical care."

Davis caught his breath. "You're still a pup to me. You're still this lance corporal I befriended."

Elmer said, "That was '35, and this here's '42. And I'm recalling that I shot this loopy beaner trying to kill you."

The office was smother-cramped. Desk, chairs, *claaaazy* wall art. Velour-flocked pictures. Fire-spitting dragons roasting Jap dragoons.

Elmer stood up. He smoothed out his coat and tie and redredged savoir faire. Davis said, "You're still a pup. And pups require a rap on the snout when they misbehave."

"It's starting to dawn on me, Chief."

"Okay, then you listen close. Jack Horrall's pissed because the Dudster's pissed, because you muscled Ace. You've got to desist on whatever it is that's goring you and got you acting dumb. That means the Leng snuff, Tommy Glennon, and Donald Matsura—who just happened to hang himself in his cell last night. *¿Tú comprende, muchacho?* The Chinks police the Chinks, and that's straight from Jack H. Ace makes Matsura for the Leng job, and that's the way it stands. Tommy G.'s long gone, and nobody cares."

Uncle Ace walked in. He wore that steam-pops-out-the-ears look. He resembled the aggrieved Donald Duck.

Elmer said, “Hey, pappy.”

Davis said, “Jack Horrall wants you to apologize.”

Elmer said, “I apologize, Ace.”

Uncle Ace shrieked curses. Elmer feigned deep remorse. Ace whipped out his dick and pissed on his shoes.

—

Stakeout.

11th and Broadway. Upside the *Herald* building. Upside that hot-box phone.

Elmer sprawled in his prowl sled. He felt revivified. He went by the Biltmore first. He got a double-fine shoe shine and quaffed two Rob Roys. He lunched on salted peanuts and bought a one-dollar cigar.

Stakeout.

Elmer lit the cigar and eyeballed due south. Ed Satterlee sat in a Fed sled and eyeballed the hot-box. Elmer scratched his balls and kicked the seat back.

He eyeball-clicked. Click to the phone booth. Click to the Fed sled. Click to the *Herald*’s front door.

Stiffs fed the phone nickels. Nobody aroused suspicion. They made brief phone calls and scrammed.

Elmer savored the cigar. It was El Supremo Cuban. He watched the booth, the Fed car, the door.

He stuck at it two hours. Sid Hudgens walked out at 3:32.

He strolled to the hot-box. He waved to Ed Satterlee. He consulted a racing form and fed the coin slot. A four-minute confab ensued.

Sid hung up and waltzed. Elmer vacated his sled and hoofed back around to the alley. He popped a storm door and hit the lobby. He caught Sid at the elevator. They indulged some unfunny shtick.

Sid went *I surrender.* Elmer went *Kid, you’re a sketch.* Sid went *¿Qué pasa?* Elmer flashed his hip flask and fed him two twenties. Sid walked to a mop closet and went *After you.*

Elmer stepped in. Sid joined him. The fit was tight. Sid cracked the door for air.

“Elmer the J. It’s been too long, *bubi.”*

Elmer passed the flask. “Let’s start with Eddie Leng. I’ve been reading your columns.”

Sid yodeled Old Crow. “All right, and here’s what’s *un*fit to print. Mike Breuning braced me, and said the Dudster would appreciate it if I killed the

Leng series, which I summarily did."

Elmer took a pop. "Don't stop there."

"Dud's up to something, which don't surprise me, and shouldn't surprise you—but I don't know what it is."

Elmer went *Give—don't dick-tease me here.*

Sid said, "About a week back, Mike and Dick Carlisle told me that Dud wanted his ex-snitch Tommy Glennon clipped, allegedly because he's a rape-o, which don't sit right with Dud and Jack Horrall. You were supposed to be part of that—but you, Mike, and Dick blew that stakeout New Year's Eve. So, Eddie Leng gets clipped that same night, and Eddie was tight with Tommy. Conventional wisdom would have it that Tommy clipped Eddie for some *farkakte* reason, after he escaped *your* dubious clutches—but I heard that Eddie was low-rent Fifth Column, and tangled up with some unholy mélange of right-wing Chinks and Japs. I also heard that Ace the K. clipped this Jap fucker Donald Matsura, who allegedly killed himself at Lincoln Heights. And that's as far as I can think it through."

Elmer sucked on the flask. "Leng was a Jap-hater. It feels like a race job to me."

Sid said, "Nix. I heard that Leng and Matsura were tight, and that Matsura manufactured terp, and Leng and Four Families peddled it to the Chinks, along with drugstore hop."

"A doctor named Lin Chung. Ring any bells?"

Sid yocked. "Yeah. He's a plastic surgeon, and he peddles nose jobs to all the Jew girls trying to pass for *goyishe.* Lin, the snout doctor. Strictly cut-rate."

Elmer switched gears. "Leng had a tattoo on his right hand. A little 'SQ' with snakes curled around it. Tommy G. had stencils for that selfsame tattoo in his hotel room."

Sid fingered his Jew star. "The 'SQ' means Sinarquista. It's some kind of batshit Catholic, pro-Nazi movement in Mexico. Like Father Coughlin, only worse. I'm a hebe, so I don't feature that shit."

"I saw you wave to Ed Satterlee. What's with that?"

"Open secret, *bubi.* Fey Edgar Hoover concocted this phone-tap schmear before the Japs tapped Pearl and put our great country in a tizzy, so now he's obliged to see it through, but he don't wet his pink lace undies for it. Some good-sized fish will get indicted, but only a few minnows will burn. This Wallace Jamie kid's tight with some hotshot Republicans who want to run him for office, and his dad's close pals with Fletch Bowron. The inside pitch is that Fletch, Jack Horrall, the Jamie putz, Ray Pinker, and a few DAs will get indicted and acquitted. Jamie will be revealed to be a secret Fed informer. He'll turn State's on some Hollywood Reds that Fey Edgar wants to fuck with, and goose his own career."

Elmer went *Oh, my cabeza.* Sid yock-yocked.

"Why would Tommy Glennon have this hot-box number?"

"Why *wouldn't* he? Everybody's got this number. It's a former bookie-drop call-in phone that used to take slugs, and for all I know, it still does."

Elmer cogitated. "Why would Tommy G. have the numbers of fourteen Baja pay phones in his address book?"

Sid shrugged. "Why wouldn't he? He's a perv. Baja's the Perv Capital of North America. Tommy's pals with the Dudster's snitch, Huey Cressmeyer, who ranks with Leopold and Loeb in the Perv Hall of Fame. Don't be naïve, *bubelah.* Tommy pokes boys in the keester and rapes women. That spells P, E, R, V in my book."

Elmer recogitated. "Can pay phones be tapped?"

"Supposedly, yes—at least the incoming calls. Some Mexican cop supposedly devised a plan."

The closet shot heat waves. Warm, hot, too hot. Elmer wiped his forehead.

"There's Fed routing stamps on Lin Chung's DB file. Recent, with your boy Satterlee as the agent requesting."

"Well, it don't sound phone probe, so maybe the snout doctor runs Fifth Column."

Elmer cracked the door wide. Cool air vitalized him. Lobby noise whooshed in.

"I don't get where all this is going."

"What's not to get? God's telling you not to fuck with Dudley Smith."

22

(BAJA, 4:15 P.M., 1/5/42)

Chez Hanamaka. It's a magnetizing force. It mandates a second visit.

Drudge work ate up yesterday. Paper piles and phone calls deluged him. The bloodstained wall summoned him today.

Dudley studied the wall. He quadrant-scanned it. He made two eyeball circuits. Something felt wrong.

He saw three bullet holes. He pegged the tight spread and upper-right-side wall placement. He pulled his pocketknife and dug out the spents.

He studied them. He saw dried blood and dark-hair fragments on all three. The bullets were embedded per a left-to-right trajectory.

But:

The *full* wall was bloodstained. That was wrong. Only the upper-right quadrant should be spattered.

Late sun hit the living room. Picture windows threw glare. It enhanced magnification. That wall gleamed—bright, bright, bright.

Dudley brainstormed. Dudley got it. It had to be *this:*

There's Mr. X. It's probably Kyoho Hanamaka. He needs to paint a picture. It's an urgent need. This wall provides a canvas and picture frame.

Mr. X gulps. The job entails self-mutilation. It puts him in a squeamish state. He must create a slaughter scene.

Mr. X holds his left arm up and out. He's angled toward the right side of the wall. He holds the gun in his right hand. He employs an upward-right trajectory. He aims very closely and fires three flesh-grazing shots.

Thus:

The dark hair on the spents.

Thus:

The upper-right-wall slug placement.

But:

The entire wall was bloodstained. That surely resulted from *this:*

Mr. X squeezed blood from his superficial flesh wounds and flung it randomly. Thus, the wide spatters. Why did he do this? Here's a theory:

Mr. X fakes his own death. He's a Jap Navy man prone to Fifth Column mischief. He wants to vanish. His blood type is police-filed. He knows the *estúpido* Staties will peruse this wall and scrape samples. They will compare them to their file. They will thus conclude:

Hanamaka was killed here. His body was removed and most likely dumped in the sea.

No suspects present themselves. Case closed, finito.

Where's Kyoho Hanamaka? Hector Obregon-Hodaka saw him here. That was December 18. It's now January 5. The Staties have not been here. There's no evidence tags or signs of a toss.

Think. Expand your theory. Layer in Hepcat Hector. He plays in here.

This hilltop home connotes hideaway. Hanamaka probably lives in Ensenada. His resident-alien file might list the address. The Staties would look for Hanamaka there first.

He's scared. He's afraid he'll be interned soon. His friendship with Governor Lazaro-Schmidt will be rudely breached. He needs to vanish. He has Fifth Column duties. He needs this hideaway to be discovered inadvertently.

Enter Hector Obregon-Hodaka.

He's a cat's paw. Hanamaka brought him up here. He knew that Hector would be interned. Hector would suck up to his Statie captors and reveal that this place exists.

Hector was a patsy. Hanamaka rigged the faked-death scene all by himself. Hector got lucky. Captain D. L. Smith set him free.

It's virgin turf. No tags, no tape seals. It's a fresh toss.

Dudley checked the kitchen. He found a toilet plunger and plunged the two commodes. He brought up gauze strips and adhesive-bandage snips. The gauze showed water-bleached bloodstains. It confirmed his wall-tableau theory.

He emptied cupboards. He opened canned foodstuffs and dumped the contents. He dumped drawers and examined innocuous glut. He unscrewed sink drains and plunged standing water. He ripped apart stuffed furniture. He unscrewed light fixtures. The net yield was zilch.

The walls now.

He brought a stethoscope. He attached the earpieces and began downstairs. He walked room-to-room. He tapped the walls and listened. He got all solid thunks. He worked downstairs to upstairs and wall-tapped. He got all solid thunks.

He walked back downstairs. He retapped the walls, higher up. He turned down a side hallway and tapped the right-side wall. He got solid, solid, solid, solid, and—

Hollow thunks. Pitch-perfect—tap, tap.

He brought a pry bar. He ran to the living room and grabbed it. He ran back to the hallway and swung.

The wall was wood-reinforced plaster. Two hits crumbled it. The boards snapped. Plaster grit swirled. Twelve hits ripped a floor-to-ceiling hole.

A hidey-hole. Rendered inaccessible. There was no latch entry, no wall-panel hinges and slides.

The hole ran twelve by twelve. It was carpeted. There were light fixtures, clothes racks, and shelves.

Dudley brushed off grit and sawdust. He stepped in and tapped a light switch. Well, now. What's this?

Mahogany walls. Well buffed and gleaming. A flag spray at the rear. Pole-mounted banners, elegantly fringed and draped.

Dudley unfurled them. They were smooth silk. They proclaimed stark alliance and devilish intent.

A swastika flag, a rising-sun flag, a hammer-and-sickle banner. Flags for Franco's Falange. Ku Klux Klan flags. Redshirt Battalion flags. Flags ablaze with "SQ"s and coiled snakes.

Lovely silk twill. Bright yellow fringe. Lurid emblems, ablaze.

Dudley smelled mothballs. They hung from gauze sachets. They protected haute-*KKK*outure threads.

Nazi uniforms. Winter- and summer-weight wool. Gray Wehrmacht tunics and breeches. Black SS dress kit.

Collar and shoulder insignia. All field-grade rank. Creased trousers and puffed jodhpurs. Jackboots on foot racks. Peaked hats on a shelf.

Dudley time-machined. Brentwood, north of Sunset. It's winter '39 again.

That costume party. The Jewish Maestro's house, sublet. It's done up Bauhaus-moderne. He's an SS Sturmbannführer. The party replicates a Nazi purge. The party swirls out of sync.

More uniforms. Jap Army and Navy issue. Cut small. Hanamaka is small. The yellow peril boys run tiny and shrill.

Soviet uniforms. Coarse olive wool. Drab beside Herr Hitler's couture.

The People's Army. Drab comrades. Godless Bolsheviks hooked on dead-Jew Marx and stiff potato brew.

Dudley plucked a Nazi hat and tried it on. It was too small for him. He saw a leather-bound diary, stuffed behind the foot rack. He grabbed it and leafed through.

Kyoho Hanamaka wrote in English. He introduced his historical memory book and stated that he saw it all firsthand. “Please be credulous. I witnessed the following events.”

He ignored chronology. He hopped locale sans explanation. He did not justify his presence at moments of pitiless terror. He remained mutely complicit then and broke his silence on these pages.

He witnesses the Rape of Nanking. Jap soldiers make Chinese fathers fuck their own daughters. Those soldiers behead one thousand Chinamen a day. Jap flyers toss Chinese children from airplanes at five thousand feet.

Witness Hanamaka heads northwest. He visits Hermann Goering. The *Reichsführer* drinks the morphine-laced blood of Aryan virgins.

El Jefe Franco needs help. He calls *El Supremo Jefe* Hitler and requests air support. Witness Hanamaka cozies up to the Condor Legion. He joins the bombing runs over Guernica. He describes the firestorm and Basque civilians burned alive.

Witness Hanamaka heads east. He drinks vodka with Joe Stalin and tours Red Square. Uncle Joe predicts the Nazi pact back in ’36. He murders the army brass and Party apparatchiks he deems potential refuseniks.

He kills 100,000 men. Witness Hanamaka views mass murder. NKVD death squads burst into homes and blast perceived traitors. Wives and children scream. The death squads blast them point-blank.

Hanamaka views Stalin’s booze-blitzed rages. Uncle Joe issues five hundred death decrees a day. Hanamaka views torture sessions at the Lubyanka prison. He’s there for the Moscow show trials. They couch all loose talk as sedition.

Stalin orders up slaughter. He’s the psychopathic god to rival Auden’s Hitler. Show-trial defendants stand mute. They are condemned and shot in their cells. Their last words are often “What for?”

Witness Hanamaka hops back to Deutschland. It’s now summer ’34. It’s the Night of the Long Knives.

Hitler’s purges are small scale beside Stalin’s. They are intimately conceived and plotted on the q.t. Brownshirt boss Ernst Röhm is a boy-buggering bully. He’s holed up in a spa hotel outside Munich. He’s there for an all-boy bacchanal. Witness Hanamaka and some SS lads fly down.

They tear through the hotel. It’s a rude disruption. It’s sodomy and *soixante-neuf interruptus.* There’s death shots to the head. There’s slashed genitalia.

Dudley stopped there. Winter ’39 tore through him. The party reprised the Night of the Long Knives. Tommy Glennon witnessed *Sturmbannführer* Smith’s nadir.

Maestro Klemperer’s house. The Maestro’s recording of *Tristan und Isolde.* The prelude soars. The costumed guests caper.

Dudley fondled Nazi uniforms. He touched silver thunderbolts and death’s-heads. He kissed stiff black wool. He loved beautiful clothing. Claire joshed him about it.

He'd sweated through his clothes. He felt dizzy. He reached behind the foot rack and pulled out an oak box.

It was two feet long and weighty. It looked ceremonial. A hinged lid lifted up.

Dudley opened the box. A bayonet had been placed on black velvet. Swastikas were carved on the handle. The bayonet glowed.

Dudley picked it up and cradled it. He gauged the weight as eight pounds. The bayonet was pure gold.

23

(SANTA BARBARA, 12:30 P.M., 1/6/42)

Dissemble now. You're here ex officio. It's just a scholar's lark.

The probable widow played slow. Joan played off of that. Dr. Ashida authored the text. Joan improvised.

I'm with the L.A. Police. This is strictly routine. Your missing-persons report. I'm compiling a lab-file update.

Ellen Marie Tullock. Fifty-five and too thin. The wife of Karl Frederick. He's on the CCC survivor list. He's the probable Box Man.

"I don't quite understand what you do, young lady."

"I'm a biologist. I work in the crime lab, and we're reviewing our missing-persons files. We're up to January 1934, the month you submitted the query on your husband."

Mrs. Tullock frowned. "Are you a policewoman? I don't understand why they didn't send a man."

Joan smiled. "My immediate superior is Japanese. Given the times, he thought you'd rather speak with me."

Mrs. Tullock blinked. Joan plainly vexed her. The front parlor broiled. Heating vents audibly hissed.

The house induced claustrophobia. It ran hot *and* overfurnished. Doilies and tchotchkes abundant. Too many too-stiff chairs.

"Did you know that your husband was present at the Griffith Park fire of 1933? Many men died, but he survived."

Mrs. Tullock tugged at her skirt. "No, I didn't know that. What month was this fire?"

Joan said, "October."

"Well, Karl took off in August of '33, and I've never heard from him since."

"You waited five months to report him missing. Was there a reason for that?"

"Well, Karl just took off, and it took a while for me to start to miss him."

"Do you know why he took off?"

Mrs. Tullock smirked. "He took off to pursue buried treasure, which was the onliest thing he ever did when the Sheriff's Department canned him."

Joan said, "Could you explain that?"

"Well, Karl was a treasure seeker. If you don't know the type already, you should take heed. Brazilian diamonds and pearls in Jamaica. That gold robbery off that train, back in '31. Karl worked that one for a little bit, which is why it had such legs for him."

A memory popped. Joan recalled bar chat. Lee Blanchard talks to Wendell Rice. They discuss Elmer Jackson's dead brother.

He was torched in Griffith Park. He was this nutty rumdum. He was torqued by that big mint-train heist.

"Young lady, are you all right?"

Joan smiled. "Mrs. Tullock, are you saying that your husband was a wanderer? And that he had an untoward interest in that mint-train robbery?"

Mrs. Tullock tugged at her skirt. She wore tennis shoes with threadbare tweeds.

"I'm saying he read treasure magazines written for bums with big dreams, and he believed everything he ever read. The amazing thing is that he only got in trouble the one time—but it up and cost him his job."

"Would you explain, please?"

"That gold robbery. Karl worked on the Santa Barbara end, and he got this fool notion that this dimwit colored boy was the thief. He did some beating on that boy, but some colored preacher with police friends in L.A. went to bat for the boy and got him released, and Karl got the ax for the whomping he did."

Joan sifted it. "Did Karl ever mention any friends he might have had with the CCC in Los Angeles?"

Mrs. Tullock sneered. "Karl didn't have friends. He had treasure magazines."

—

Hot potato. The old girl tossed it. Catch it—don't drop it.

Joan left the Tullock house and reparked down the street. Some sidewalk boys showed off for her. They chugged sneaky pete. They strutted and posed.

A cloudburst drove them indoors. Joan sat it out. She chain-smoked and fumed up the car.

She reprised the conversation. It ran circuitous. She sat in Lyman's, two nights back. Lee Blanchard and Wendell Rice shot the shit.

Kay's in with these Jew exiles. Longhair-music types. Otto Klemperer. She *dotes on him.*

Elmer the J. His dipshit brother died in the Griffith Park fire. This alky drifter. Always the big dreams. This big hard-on for that gold-train heist.

We have proximity. We have Karl Tullock and Wayne Frank Jackson. We have two men and one fire. One dead man has been ID'd. One dead man has been unearthed. We have a probable identification.

One ex-cop, one drifter, one idiot dream. Two violent deaths in concurrence. The ex-cop worked the gold heist. That event preceded and might have precipitated catastrophic arson.

And she kissed Bill Parker. And Bill Parker kissed her back.

I blew my shot at the war. Who cares? My new life's aswirl.

24

(LOS ANGELES, 9:30 A.M., 1/7/42)

A college kid approached. He glared and flashed his fangs. His intent beamed.

He closed in. He leaned down. He said, "Filthy Jap."

The library was dead still. The kid employed stealth. He made like a Jap Zero. No one else heard.

The kid strolled off. Ashida scanned his page book. He'd ordered up the *L.A. Times.* A clerk brought him bound photostats.

From May 19–23, 1931. From October 4–12, 1933.

Joan Conville called him last night. She described her talk with Ellen Tullock. They discussed death-by-fire and death-by-knife-and-gun proximity. Was it design or coincidence?

He told her not to talk to Elmer Jackson. Elmer might go off half-cocked. He described his lab findings. He omitted just *this:*

I found a gold nugget in that box you left me.

He found it. *He's* hoarding the lead. *He's* studied under Dudley Smith. *He's* learned to lie. *He's* a Jap. *He's* shifty and stealthy.

He called Thad Brown last night. Thad was brusque. The dislodged-body job's a dog. Chief Horrall wants it reburied. It puts a stink on the PD.

He withheld from Thad. He omitted the gold nugget and two-dead speculation. Karl Tullock and Wayne Frank Jackson died at the same time and place. Both were gold heist–fixated. He knew the full Wayne Frank story. Joan had picked up bar scuttlebutt.

The library was dead still. College kids studied and evil-eyed the Jap. Winos dozed in rock-hard chairs.

Ashida skimmed news stories. He read the heist accounts first. The stat sheets printed out white on black. The coverage ran threadbare.

The Frisco-to-L.A. mint train. Eight Quentin cons on board. There's a track-switch snafu. Four masked men swarm the train. They overpower the crew. The cons escape en masse. The escape precedes the robbery. Seven men are hunted down and shot and killed that day. The unwritten law holds sway. Escape mandates death.

One man eludes the dragnet. He's still at large. Fritz Wilhelm Eckelkamp. DOB 10/12/98.

He's German-born. He's a Great War stalwart. He wins the Iron Cross. He goes bad in '20s Berlin. He toes the Sparticist line and skirmishes with Brownshirt thugs. He robs banks and jewelry stores. He stows away on a steamship and comes here. It's '27 now. He migrates to California and settles in Oakland. He reverts to armed robbery.

Liquor-store jobs. There's always cash on hand. It's high risk for low yield. Fritz falls behind multiple counts. He gets twenty-five to life at Big Q.

Fritz becomes a virtuoso jailhouse lawyer. He learns to write Federal writs. He secures a retrial. The Federal court's in L.A.

Fritz Wilhelm Eckelkamp. Missing since 5/18/31. Karl Frederick Tullock. Reported missing 1/12/34.

Ashida chalked brain notes. He reviewed his stat sheets and compiled a checklist.

Secure Eckelkamp's Oakland police file. Secure his Quentin file. Secure Tullock's Santa Barbara Sheriff's personnel file.

The mint train resumes its southbound journey. There's a second track snafu. The heist occurs then. The theft is discovered at the Santa Barbara stop. Leander Frechette is grabbed for it. Karl Tullock "beats on him." A Negro preacher intercedes and greases Frechette's release. The preacher has "cop friends in L.A."

Frechette drops from sight. Where is he now? Who's the preacher? What cop friends in L.A.?

Ashida switched page books. He jumped from gold to fire. He logged more sketchy coverage.

It's late September '33. We're into Indian summer. It's hot in L.A. The heat provokes unrest. There's leftist agitation and a garment workers' strike.

It's now October 3. The blaze occurs. The death toll mounts. It may or may not be arson. A pro forma query goes down. The Young Socialist Alliance proves suspect. The leader's one Meyer Gelb.

YSA sloganeers "prophesied apocalypse." Their rants ran from mid-September to the blaze. Meyer Gelb urged "a workers' revolt." "One line burned memorably at a Pershing Square stump speech."

Gelb railed. He called out, "This storm, this savaging disaster."

The line drew oohs and aahs. The *Times* got pissy here. "The flowery sentence might have been lifted from a noted British poet of the homosexual ilk."

Ashida flipped pages. The fire was initially tagged “a spontaneous conflagration.” The death toll fluctuated daily. CCC workers tagged dead showed up alive. They’d been on booze binges and deserted their wives for a spell.

A well-dressed man was glimpsed in Mineral Canyon. Eyewits described him as “Chinese or Japanese.” He vanished as the blaze whooshed. A studio carpenter got popped the same night. He set a blaze in Fern Dell Park. Eyewits nailed his car’s license plate.

His name was Ralph D. Barr. He was a known firebug and public jack-off man. He was alibied up for the big blaze. He worked at Paramount all day.

That was it. The PD tapped out. The fire department tapped out. Nobody proved arson or *dis*proved it. Local leftists were grilled and released. News coverage fizzled.

Ashida restacked his books. He stood up and stretched. He chalked more brain notes.

Get more on the YSA. Get more on Meyer Gelb. Track the gold chunk. What does “648” mean? Does the attached key correspond to a storage locker someplace?

He walked to the drop-off desk. A college boy waltzed by. He said, “Stinking Jap.”

—

Dark clouds blew in. They unzipped and leaked rain. Ashida drove to Griffith Park and trekked the golf course.

He was killing time. He needed privacy at the lab. The day-shift chemists clocked out at 6:00.

Gale winds hit. Cloudbursts followed. Fairways and sand traps flooded. It occurred just like that.

Ashida walked into it. He sketched brain pictures and transposed newspaper maps. He crafted a then-to-now terrain.

He noted incipient mud slides. Hillsides with thin turf planes and exposed roots. He employed Man Camera and assumed killer and victim perspectives.

It’s four-burner hot and dry. A Santa Ana wind fans flames. He set the fire/a cohort set the fire/the fire started itself. It’s deliberate arson or crime of opportunity. The box stands ready, either way.

He lures the probable Karl Tullock someplace secluded. He shoots him and stabs him and dumps him in the box. He buries the box. He chokes on thick smoke. Approaching flames singe his eyebrows. He runs. He gets away or burns to death.

The converse now.

He's lured. He's stabbed and shot. He's the probable Karl Tullock. He's dead in the box. He did or did not know Wayne Frank Jackson. Rest in peace. The two men die the same day.

Ashida walked back to the parking lot. The wind pushed him along. He saw a phone booth by the snack hut.

He ducked in and went through the Yellow Pages. He tore out all the storage-locker ads.

—

There was still time to kill. He had two hours to clock-out and assured privacy.

Ashida drove to Central Station. He went down to the cellblocks and watched the Werewolf sleep.

The jailer brought his son's Scout troop down. They goofed on Fujio Shudo. They finger-poked him through the bars and squealed. A boy stared at Ashida. He read the kid's mind. Hey, mister—aren't you a Jap?

He walked up to 3. A crap game whooped and hollered. It was Alien Squad SRO.

The players rolled on rising-sun flags. Wendell Rice and George Kapek wore Wehrmacht helmets and green eyeshades. Lee Blanchard and Cal Lunceford rolled.

Chief Horrall stopped by. He chatted up the boys and dropped off pizza pies and beer. The boys whoop-whooped and cheered.

Call-Me-Jack winked at Ashida. He said, "Chin up, kid."

Rice passed Ashida the dice. He told him to roll once, for grins. Ashida rolled a big six. The boys stomped and cheered.

He rolled again. He came up seven and crapped out. The boys stomped and booed.

—

6:05 p.m. The lab was off-shift dark. Ashida walked over and locked himself in. Miss Conville had left ballistics bulletins on his desk. He slugged cold coffee and got to it.

He worked the gold first. He got out the nugget and naked-eyed it. The mint marks went naked-eye unseen. The chunk was rough-cut. Buff swirls were present. The chunk felt talismanic. It was pure brag. *Look what I've got, look what I did.*

Ashida boiled an acid-phosphate solution. It would create faint abrasions and scrub the buff swirls.

He dropped the gold in the beaker. The solution fizzed and turned the liquid black. He timed the dunk at three minutes. He turned off the burner and scooped the gold out.

He'd preset his microscope. He put the chunk on a clamp slide and studied it. The swirls had abraded and sloughed off.

He studied the chunk. He moved it around on the slide. He hit four separate angles. A fifth angle gave him *this:*

The letters *L.U.S.*

It was scratched on. It was *diamond*-scratched. The scratcher scratched the letters below-the-surface deep. He bought a rough diamond and carved, assiduously. The abrasive dip raised the letters. It had to be that.

He had the gold chunk/the L.U.S./the key fob marked "648." He had storage-locker listings. He'd pulled two pages' worth.

The pages were half wet and crimped. Ashida smoothed them out on his desk. He started at A and eye-scanned.

A-1 Storage, Albright Storage, All-Nite Storage. He read subheads and caught the gist.

Store your belongings. Safety and privacy assured. Your key unlocks your locker. Front-door key provided. We're open-all-nite. There's no questions asked.

He knew these places. He'd read Burglary and Robbery reports. They were extra-legal stash holes. You had lockers rented short-term, long-term, and lifetime.

You had transient renters. You had come-and-go traffic. You rent 648 in '31. You rent it lifetime. There's no-questions-asked. It's still your locker today.

Ashida scanned listings.

Bring-Your-Key Storage. Capitol Storage. Carthage Storage/open-all-nite. He jumped to page two. He quick-skimmed to the L's. He hit Larry's Lockers, Len's Lockers, Lucky Lon's Locker Vault. Wait, now—

Lock-Ur-Self Storage. 829 North Glendale Boulevard. "U Store, U Karry the Key."

Lock-Ur-Self. L.U.S. Open-all-nite. Locker 648.

Ashida burned hot and cold. Sweat ran into his eyes. He flexed his hands and steadied them. He grabbed a lab towel and wiped his face.

It's 8:06 p.m. It's still too early. Folks are still out and about. Lock-Ur-Self might be packed.

The bullet now.

It was skull-smash/up-close flattened. He naked-eyed six impact crimps. He attached bullet forceps to both ends and pulled.

The clamps held. He got a half stretch. Four crimps flattened out. He naked-eyed very faint lands and grooves.

The microscope now.

He studied the bullet. He eyeball-measured millimeters between the stretched crimps. He slide-clamped the bullet and dialed his lens deep.

Magnification meets imagination. It's forensically haphazard. Yes—but sound guesswork sometimes results.

He imagined his way to full lands and grooves. He memorized the fragmented patterns. He imposed a crimp-point differential.

The bulletins now.

Ignore the crime summaries. Go straight to the microscope pix. Juxtapose your imagination and extrapolate.

Miss Conville had arranged the stack chronologically. Ashida went to January '32 and quick-skimmed.

He got through '32. No full land-and-groove reads tweaked him. He skimmed into '33. Winter, spring, summer—

Wait—

The bulletin was dated 8/12/33. It summarized four liquor-store heists. *"UNSOLVED"* was stamped on four bulletins. *"STILL UNSOLVED"* was stamped on 8/12/36. The summary brief detailed *this:*

Wilshire Division. Four near-southside locations. No gunshot wounds. Shots fired into wood-plank ceilings.

Flat, flatter, flattened. Like his skull-flattened spent.

Brainwork now.

Take your skull-flat spent. Compare it to your plank-flat-spent photos. Add your imagined differential.

Ashida did it. Ashida brainworked *this:*

Five spents. All time and sheer-impact degraded. Four from the liquor-store planks. One from Karl Tullock's skull. Consider all angles. Stir it all up, you get *this:*

Almost three-to-one identical markings. Call it 72%. It's a possible, if not probable, match.

—

He knew the block. It was just north of Belmont High. He brought a celluloid shim. He possessed B and E skills. Dudley Smith taught him well.

It was 1:00 a.m. He parked a block down and walked over. The building was two-story stucco. The parking lot was empty. He heard thunder and felt light rain.

He approached the front door. It was glass-paneled and wood-jambed. The interior was full-lit. He peered inside. He clocked an entryway and bisecting hallway.

Open-all-nite. U-keep-the-key. Make-like-you-belong-here.

Ashida stood at the door. He patted his pockets. Where's my key? I'm Mr. Flustered. I'm Mr. Jap in disguise.

He shimmed the lock-jamb juncture. The door wiggled and popped wide. He stepped inside and shut himself in. He walked back out of sight.

There were no first-floor lockers. They were all upstairs.

Ashida walked up. The steps creaked. He almost shrieked. He clamped his mouth and held it in. Shrieks made him sound effete.

There's the lockers. There's rows and rows. It reprised Bucky at Belmont. The boys gym, the showers, the locker room.

He walked the rows. He pegged 648. He strolled the rows and saw no one. He walked back to 648.

The boy's gym, redux. The same gray metal locker, the same padlock.

He slid the key in the keyhole and turned it. The padlock snapped.

He opened the door. It was right there on the shelf. May '31, redux. Memo to Karl Tullock and Wayne Frank Jackson.

You're dead and I'm not. I've got what you don't. It's solid gold and weighs thirty pounds. You died for this.

25

(LOS ANGELES, 1:30 A.M., 1/8/42)

Late cocktails at Brenda's. Three old pals and inveterate nite owls. Comfy chairs and ticker-tape dish.

The Japs take the Malay Peninsula. The Japs eye the Dutch East Indies. The PD slams local Japs. The Feds slam local cops.

Brenda said, "Jack Horrall's scared, Citizens. The probe's got his dick in a twist."

Elmer said, "The probe's a shuck. That's straight from Sid Hudgens. Ed Satterlee's J. Edgar's straw man. They'll let the probe fizzle out and put it to some Hollywood Reds."

Kay said, "Satterlee's in with Hop Sing. I picked that up when I was deep off in Bill Parker's incursion. Bill told me he was selling leads on Japanese confiscations."

Brenda said, "Katherine Ann reveals herself. She's gone from 'Captain Parker' to 'Bill' in a hot tick. 'Sweetie Pie's' warming up in the bull pen."

Kay laughed. Brenda stirred the fireplace. Elmer relit his cigar.

"Ed Satterlee's a drip. He wouldn't cut it in our white man's PD."

Brenda lit a cigarette. "Elmer's jealous. Ed's spent notable time with his pal Ellen Drew, which I will readily concede that he pays for."

Elmer said, "Let's change the subject."

Brenda sipped Cointreau. "It's Citizen Kay's turn to yak. As long as she don't start extolling Maestro what's-his-name and those Stalin lovers out in Brentwood."

Kay lit a cigarette. "The Maestro's name is Klemperer, and most of his friends are Trotskyites. There's quite a rabid distinction."

Elmer blew smoke rings. "The Reds are all rabid dogs. So's Kay's friend Bill. But he don't hold with Roosevelt, much less the Russkies."

Kay said, "I'm worried about him."

Brenda said, "You're *jealous,* Citizen."

Kay bristled. "Tell me why I should be."

Elmer said, "You're front row at Lyman's, so you've seen the big redhead. That's one damn good 'why' in my book."

Kay doused her butt in Elmer's highball. Elmer woofed. There she is—Katherine Ann Lake, hopping mad.

"I know the rumor, Elmer. 502 PC and vehicular homicide. She's working at the lab now."

Elmer looked at Kay. Lamplight torched her eyes. Why euphemize? He loved her past all hoo-ha and hurt.

"I shouldn't have said what I said. I know how you feel about Captain Bill."

Brenda said, "Look at you two. You'll be spooning there on the couch sometime soon."

Elmer laughed. Kay rolled her eyes. Brenda tossed an ice cube and missed her.

"Here's a ripe rumor, Citizens. I saw Bill Parker kissing a big redhead outside City Hall, and he had to stand on his tiptoes to do it."

—

Ellen said, "You keep forgetting our rules. 'No shop talk in bed,' 'no talk about my husband or the baby.' "

The bed sagged. The headboard drooped. Elmer smelled cheap pomade on the sheets.

"He's Elmer Jr. You can't tell me he don't resemble me."

"You weren't in play at the moment of conception."

Nite-owl serenade. A 4:00 a.m. quickie. Elmer Jr. messed with Ellen's sleep. Elmer Sr. capitalized.

"Toss me a little one. How dirty's Ed Satterlee? I know you trick with him, and I'm not jealous."

Ellen twisted up two fingers. "He's like that with the Chinks."

"Stale bread. Give me something hot off the griddle."

Ellen mulled it. Thunder slammed the windows. Junior squalled one room over.

"He's bragging about all this Fifth Column work he's doing. Mr. Hoover wants to extort some key guys, and he wants Ed to run sex shakedowns."

—

Lyman's ran round the clock. They served select pols and cops after hours. Elmer cruised the bar. It was wee-hours packed. Select nite owls waved.

Lee Blanchard. Joan Conville. Thad Brown. Two-Gun Davis and Mike Breuning, Buzz Meeks from Robbery.

Elmer hit the back room. He evicted Catbox Cal Lunceford. He called chez Satterlee. He woke up Ed the Fed. He told him *this:*

"If this probe of yours is a shuck, why are you working it so hard?"

Ed said, "Shit." Ed said, "I'll meet you at Lyman's in ten minutes."

Elmer hung up and fixed breakfast. He chugged one ginger ale and gobbled three bennies. Ed showed in six minutes flat.

He snarled. You-redneck-fucker-you-fucked-with-my-sleep. He fixed himself a Bromo and drained it.

"Who told you it's a shuck?"

"A little birdie."

"A little birdie named Ellen Drew?"

"Talk circulates, Ed."

Satterlee flopped on the couch. Elmer flopped beside him.

"Okay, it's a shuck. Mr. Hoover's putting a sheep dip on that punk Wallace Jamie. He'll be off to Congress before you know it."

Elmer tossed a curveball. It swerved low and inside.

"There's a doctor named Lin Chung. Your name's on his intel file. The routing stamp's recent."

Satterlee lit a cigarette. "If there's something in this for me, let me know. If it's we're brothers under the sheets, fuck off and let me go home."

Elmer relit his cigar. "You've got carte blanche with the service. One full month. I've already cleared it with Brenda."

Satterlee held up two fingers. Elmer went *Shucks* and *Okay.*

"All right, here's what this is. A, we're picking up code intercepts from Baja. We think it's some kind of subtle Jap-Chink Fifth Column gang, and we're trying to separate the tract pushers and *Sieg Heil* boys from the real menace. B, I'm not naming names, not for two months' or ten years' worth of the best gash on the planet. C, Chung knows lots of well-heeled right-wingers, and he's got a communist doctor pal that he talks eugenics with. D, I don't care that he was jungled up with that dead Chink Eddie Leng, or that guy Don Matsura, who stretched his neck at Lincoln Heights."

Elmer waved his cigar. "Have you got a file on a punk named Tommy Glennon?"

Satterlee shook his head. "No dice. Tommy goes back with Dudley Smith, and my policy with Dud is 'hands-off.' "

"Tommy used to run wets. I'm thinking he ran them with Carlos Madrano."

"He did, so I'll issue a warning here. Tommy was very loyal to Captain Carlos, and I have it on good authority that it was Dud who blew up Carlos last month. I also heard that Ace Kwan warned you away from Tommy—which was very sound advice. Let Dud, Ace, and the Staties take charge of Tommy. You're not equipped for it."

Elmer blew smoke rings. "Does Dud think Tommy will come after him for clipping Madrano?"

"Well, there's that. But mostly I think Dud's afraid that Tommy will try to ingratiate himself with whoever took over Madrano's wetback biz, which I bet Dud's got his eye on himself."

Elmer said, "That little birdie told me something else."

Satterlee sighed. "You confide to a woman in the sack, and it's on the Teletype within twenty-four hours."

"Sex shakes. You want to put the squeeze on some Fifth Column geeks."

"*Es la verdad,* daddy."

Elmer said, "I've got a fuck spot, all wired up. Right on Wilshire, upside the tar pits. Wall peek—the whole deal."

"I'll take it. It puts you in contention for White Man of the Week honors."

Elmer smiled. "Give me more on Tommy."

Satterlee shrugged. "I don't consider him a traitor, or a saboteur, or any kind of hot-blood seditionist. To me, he's just a *Sieg Heil* boy, looking for giggles. He's a Coughlinite, and he's in with these Mex right-wingers called the Sinarquistas. They're righteous Catholics and anti-Reds, and their boss is some cholo lawyer named Salvador Abascal. Tommy's in with them, and he's been poking Dud's snitch, Huey Cressmeyer, in the keester since the year one. They called him 'the Sheriff of the Brown Trail' up at Quentin."

Elmer slapped his knees. Satterlee said, "I'm ahead on this deal so far. What can I do to even things up?"

"Pick up Huey C. and rattle him. I'll give you a script, so it don't come back to me."

"I'll consider it. And, while I've got you, should I issue a formal warning on the Dudster?"

Elmer said, "I'd just ignore it."

—

Harem hideaway. Lovers' lair. Rendezvous redoubt. The spot radiated S-E-X.

Two rooms. One poontang parlor, one bootie bandits' boudoir. Brocade walls and French postcard art.

Fake panels hid the peek. Stashed microphones caught the *FUCK ME!* and pillow-talk sound tracks. A spy mirror framed the bed.

Wall baffles soundproofed the crawl space. The camera guys worked with impunity. The fuckers and fuckees couldn't hear shit. Special film lit in-the-dark ruts.

RKO hotshots rigged the place. Ed Satterlee would love it. His Fifth Column fuckers and fuckees were fucked.

Elmer hooked up a piggyback camera. He laced wires to the camera already aimed at the bed.

He'd see everything Ed the Fed saw. That meant Ed the Fed was fucked.

26

(ENSENADA, 8:00 P.M., 1/8/42)

Polyglot. That said it. We're this strange new alliance. We're strange bedfellows all.

Joan Klein—Jewish waif extraordinaire. Red dress and Red Youthbund dialectic. *Dos fascistas*—José Vasquez-Cruz and Juan Pimentel. His dear Claire. Besotted by her new daughter. Kyoho Hanamaka—present but unseen.

The restaurant stood on the Malecon. Waves smashed below. Table talk flew polyglot.

In English and Spanish. Plus Claire and the Klein girl's French.

Dudley ignored it. He was back at the hidey-hole. He revisited it at whim. Hanamaka cached his secret life there. That meant he'd be coming back. He might send a trusted stooge in his stead. Captain D. L. Smith crashed his secret life. Hanamaka must not know.

He found a second-floor trapdoor. It supplied quick access and was well devised and disguised. He refitted the boards and replastered the wall he broke in through. He celebrated his seamless job. He stole the gold bayonet.

Table talk droned on. It was trilingual and smug. Vasquez-Cruz flirted with Claire. Pimentel flirted with Joan. The girl found a big sister. Claire found a kid sister. Let's discuss the war and sing the "Internationale."

He weighed the bayonet. It ran 8.2 pounds. The swastika was stunningly embossed. He issued an APB. Kyoho Hanamaka/all Mexican states/hold and detain. He studied the photos in his Statie file. Hanamaka's hands were burn-scarred. It was not explained.

He studied the file. No Baja address was listed. Hanamaka lived at the hideaway. That seemed certain now.

Hanamaka.

Fifth Column warlord. *Es la verdad.* Embroiled in two sub fiascos. Allied with leftists and rightists abroad. *Es la verdad,* as well.

The Fatherland and Mother Russia greet him. They present their indigenous horror. He crafts his memory book.

Hanamaka.

He might be in the U.S. His Jap visage would endanger him there. Someone abetted his flight. Governor Juan Lazaro-Schmidt might have pitched in.

The wall-panel cache lies intact. Lieutenant Pimentel is his watchdog. He's ensconced in a nearby house. He's got chez Hanamaka surveilled.

Lieutenant Juan's a technical whiz. He developed a plan to tap incoming calls to Baja pay phones. SIS has shot him a hot work assignment. Decode suspect slug calls from the U.S.

Table talk droned. Young Joan spun tales. Garment strikes and Uncle Shmuel of the *Yiddish Tagelblatt.* The Jews proclaim their woes and boo-hoo the world's vexation.

Vasquez-Cruz said, "Captain Smith appears to be bored."

Pimentel said, "His women are ignoring him. Captain Smith requires their constant attention."

Vasquez-Cruz twirled an ashtray. "Miss Klein's regard for Leon Trotsky gets his goat."

Dudley winked at the lads. "At least he was killed in Mexico. You'll always have bragging rights there."

"Trotsky" tweaked Young Joan. She raised her seltzer glass and pinged Claire's wineglass.

"Comrade Trotsky, lady and gentlemen. The antidote to Fascism at home and abroad."

Dudley raised his glass. *Los fascistas* went *tut-tut.* The whole gang imbibed. Musicians table-hopped and scrounged tips. They wore pink floral shirts and plaid cummerbunds. They carried trumpets and jiggled maracas.

Vasquez-Cruz ordered a rhumba and slipped the maraca man chump change. He bowed to Claire. She stood up and offered her hand. They walked to the dance floor and found their hip-popping fit.

Dudley watched. It sent him back. This spic's hands on Claire. He recalled a precedent.

That dance in London. 1922. The Irish Citizens Army sent him in to plant bombs. A protty boy asked his date to dance. He said, "You don't mind, do you, Paddy?"

The boy danced with her. He encircled her waist. Dudley Liam Smith, age sixteen. Here's a dilemma.

The dance crowd dwindled. His date drifted off with her sister. He followed the boy down a dark road and blew his brains out.

Vasquez-Cruz held Claire's hips and steered her. Pimentel watched Dudley watch. Young Joan watched it all.

She had small brown eyes. She wore glasses. She spoke Yiddish and French. She had long black hair with gray swirls. Gray hair at fifteen. Your call—benighted or possessed.

Pimentel said, "My captain has abridged the social code. I would not ask another man's woman to dance without first seeking permission."

Dudley lit a cigarette. "You abridge the officers' code of conduct, Lieutenant. Your comment was impolitic, however well put and well taken."

Pimentel smiled. "My captain appears to have misjudged you. You demand diffidence from your fellows. You offer loyalty and camaraderie in return."

Young Joan walked out on the dance floor. She tapped Claire on the shoulder and cut in. Claire bowed and deferred. Vasquez-Cruz and Young Joan took up the beat. His hands went straight to her hips.

Claire walked back to the table. Pimentel excused himself and walked off. Good lad—such decorum.

Claire pointed to Vasquez-Cruz. "I've seen him before. I know it."

Dudley pointed to Young Joan. She danced a mean rhumba.

"How does she get by?"

"She steals out of stores. She hasn't asked me for anything, but she appreciates the clothes I buy her."

Dudley said, "I'm going to have her tailed."

—

They walked back to the hotel. Harbor lights blinked. Young Joan took Claire's arm. They mimicked nineteenth-century daguerreotypes. Faux Parisians stroll Saint-Germain.

The Malecon cut inland. Shoreline hostelries loomed. They bucked a sea wind, three abreast. Alleyways bisected the sidewalk. Gaslamps lit narrow footpaths.

They walked single file. Claire said something. Young Joan slid on wet asphalt and went *whee!*

A man stepped in front of them. He moved alleyway to lamplight. He was unkempt and looked dissolute. He verged on raggedy-ass.

He's got a revolver. He's aiming it. It's a hand cannon. The hammer's cocked.

He yelled slogans. They were nonsensical. He braced his gun arm and aimed straight ahead. Dudley pulled his piece. His arm fluttered, his aim fluttered, he fired two shots wide.

A second man stepped out. He moved alleyway to lamplight. He's young and sleek. Note the twill shirt and armband. He's got a sawed-off shotgun.

He tripped two triggers. Muzzle flare lit the load:

Steel scraps/tight-packed/trench-warfare-slaughter weaponry—

The Slogan Man blew up. Such blood you've never seen. The scraps disemboweled him. His gun arm severed and flew.

Claire and Young Joan fell back. Dudley body-blocked them and covered their eyes. The Sleek Man dipped his fingers in the Slogan Man's blood.

He said, *"Comunista."* He spat on the corpse. He saluted Dudley and ran off.

—

Opium.

Kwan's basement. His private den. The tar, the match, the pipe. His body anesthetized, his mind relinquished and adrift.

He drove to L.A., impromptu. He wanted to see Mike and Dick. He wanted to see Jim Davis. He wanted to conspire with Ace and cultivate Hideo Ashida.

Dudley smoked opium. He dipped elsewhere. He leaped time and rewrote History. He went with the tar and the pipe.

Stopover, Ensenada. All-too-recent History. Bleak moments, last night.

Statie Blackshirts arrived. They cased the stiff and called for a morgue van. He walked down that bisecting alley. He saw wet-blood artwork on a wall.

A garland of swastikas. An "SQ" wrapped in coiled snakes.

The Slogan Man remains unidentified. The Sleek Man, likewise. The attack might be premeditated. The attack might be happenstance.

His uniform denotes random target. The D. L. Smith persona denotes something else. Last month's knife attack. Last night's attack. Dudley Liam Smith attracts *HATE.*

Stopover, Europe and the eastern steppes. Here, you become someone else.

You've touched his uniforms and gold bayonet. You've read his diary. Don the attire, now. Live the History and wield the bayonet.

You're Kyoho Hanamaka. You're a little Jap with burn-scarred hands and a consuming appetite. You feast on horror as it disillusions you. Your diary exposits one great theme. Ideology is solely a means of entrapment and thus a barbaric shuck.

The Fascist Right. The Communist Left. Divergent in rhetoric. Identical at their core.

The Reds embrace wretchedness and promise peasants tasty gruel and a warm place to shit. They scapegoat capital and hoard it to build prison camps and tanks. The Nazis embrace Norse gods and exalt art. They extoll civilization as the Reds defame it as bourgeois. They scapegoat Jews because Jews contravene the all-is-beautiful Nazi aesthetic. The Nazis and Reds tell the selfsame lie in boldly diverse guise. Both lies indict the democratic West and defame it as naïve and effete.

Totalitarianism will win. The rabble will opt for conformed identity over chaos. Which lie will you accede to? Which hidey-hole uniform will you don?

Dudley Liam Smith, *Sturmbannführer.*

You donned the uniform at that party. You enacted the Night of the Long Knives. Now, wield your gold bayonet.

Stopover, Baja. Your Army duties summon you.

He read a Fed Teletype this morning. Agent Ed Satterlee wrote it. Now, hear *this:*

The rumors persist. Coded phone calls have been received. There's been L.A. pay-phone to Baja pay-phone traffic. The Baja pay phone was tapped and thence transcribed. This was revealed:

There are hidden Jap airfields in San Berdoo County. No exact locations have been determined. Indio and Brawley are both rumored. He should talk to Juan Pimentel. Juan developed the phone-tap technique.

Opium.

The tar, the match, the pipe. His mind untethered, his imagination adrift.

He pictured a lineup stage. The lights remain bright. The height strips extend. The dead and the missing stand tall.

Eddie Leng and Donald Matsura. Tommy Glennon and Kyoho Hanamaka. They burn under stage lights. He interrogates them. They reveal their interconnectedness and tell him nothing else.

—

Ex-Chief Jim Davis. He's vivid—if in decline.

He's sclerotic and obese. He's half-mad and ravaged by aphasia. He still packs two belt guns. He was a Great War doughboy. He's tight with spic dictators and nativist hucksters. He's volatile and sentimental. He's mentored Elmer Jackson and Whiskey Bill Parker.

They dined at Kwan's. Jim slurped shark-fin soup. His color was off. Malaria yellow meets dead-man gray.

"I was hoping I could ask a few favors, Chief."

"For you the world, Dud. You say 'Jump,' I say 'How high?' "

Dudley sipped tea. "Keep your snout down. There appears to be a Chink and Jap Fifth Column play afoot."

Jim slurped soup. He dribbled up his suit coat. Dudley tossed him a napkin.

"And, I'd be grateful if you'd continue to watchdog Elmer Jackson. I realize that you and Ace leaned on him, but the warning might not have held."

"I taught Elmer the whore business. He was a wet-behind-the-ears jarhead when I met him. I made him the man he is today.”

Dudley said, “He bears your imprimatur, Chief. He’s suave in the Jim Davis manner.”

Jim fidgeted. He blotted his necktie and pushed his soup bowl away.

“I’m going batshit, Dud. I’ll blow a gasket if I don’t tell someone.”

“Tell them what, Jim?”

“That Werewolf creep’s no killer. I killed the Watanabes.”

27

(LOS ANGELES, 1/9–1/23/42)

Fire and gold.

Scholar's lark.

Ex officio quest.

Her father burned to death. It taught her to fight and think. That fire drove her to this riddle of two intertwined deaths. The possible-probable arson and the mint-train heist merged there. The gold symbolized her blown shot at the war.

She's a treasure hunter. She's the female Karl Tullock and Wayne Frank Jackson. She broods on gold. She's bought books and done library research. She's studied gold like she once studied fire.

She bought herself solid-gold cuff links. They cost half a week's pay. She found treasure magazines in a used bookshop. She fell prey to Congolese diamonds and man-eating pygmies. She succumbed to gold artifacts in Malaysian caves. She's a scientist. She stood outside her fixation and watched herself swirl. She's a sensationalist. She fell prey because it felt good.

She's studied PD and FD Arson Squad reports. She's read up on the dead CCC men. No leads surfaced there. She's logged morgue time with Dr. Nort Layman. No further leads surfaced. Dr. Nort formalized it. Karl Tullock *is* the man in the box.

The downtown library's her refuge. It's a brooder's perch. Newspaper rolls report the gold and the fire. She's gone from ignorant to expert. She's a scientist trained to hypothesize.

Just like Hideo Ashida. He's her scholar's-lark confrere.

She hit the library late one night. She looked up and saw Ashida. He was studying her. The moment unnerved her. She realized *this:*

He's omitting and dissembling. He's withholding. He knows things that he will not reveal.

The gold consumes him. He craves it as substance and money. He may see it as the means to abrogate wartime injustice. He may crave it out of pure greed.

Gold is money. It would buy her a cabin in lake-bound Wisconsin. It would buy British shotguns and hunting dogs. She could shoot quail and sleep with her dogs. Provocative men might appear.

Scholar’s lark.

Treasure hunt.

Potent riddle.

The drudge work that pays her rent and counterweights her lust for the gold.

She works confiscations. The Alien Squad raids Japanese homes and impounds property. Appliances, guns, shortwave radios. Flags and political hate tracts. Ashida translates the tracts. She transcribes the dreary content.

They run ballistics tests on impounded guns and compare the results to custody pieces. They dismantle appliances and look for hidden explosives. They’ve found none to date.

The squad rousts are overzealous and waged against passive foes. The U.S. government has instituted full-scale internment. She’s observed brutal rousts and has a sense of the boys.

There’s Lieutenant Collier. He’s the permissive boss. Elmer Jackson and Lee Blanchard are the sweethearts. There’s Wendell Rice, George Kapek, and Catbox Cal Lunceford. They’re the Rodent Squad. They manhandle their prisoners and steal what they can.

Her work entails Lincoln Heights Jail runs. Ashida goes with her. They inspect the property of already-jailed Japs. Rank-and-file Japs hate Ashida. They hiss and spit at him. They curse him in Japanese. It started with Pearl Harbor and the Watanabe case.

He’s the white man’s slave. He’s the PD’s toady. He’s a tong shitheel. He sucked the big white dick and sidestepped internment. He’s a traitor and the real fascist. The big white woman is his whore.

She feels kinship with Ashida then. It dissolves fast. She’s always been good with men. Ashida’s the one man she can’t touch.

She’s assumed a role. She’s the handmaid to a cloistered patriarchy. She’s met Jack Horrall and Mayor Fletch Bowron. They radiate good cheer and casual corruption. The PD is rankly corrupt and headed toward rank incompetence. Good men go off to the war. Unfit “war hires” replace them. Cops fear the draft and the phone-tap probe.

She understands men. They’re seducible. Hideo Ashida is not.

She faked an excuse and dropped by his hotel suite. It was her sole visit. She angled her way in. Ashida’s living quarters impressed her.

The Biltmore. A large parlor and three bedrooms. Dudley Smith’s patronage and largesse.

She met Ashida’s affable brother and boozed-up mama-san. She went through Ashida's bedroom en route to the john. She rifled drawers and found a boxed photo stash.

Candid pix. A boys' locker room backdrop. A lanky boy in the foreground. He's naked and toweling his hair.

She recognized him. He was Dwight "Bucky" Bleichert. She saw him fight in Milwaukee. He headlined a big card and knocked out a stumblebum.

The photos saddened and repulsed her. They force-fed her Hideo Ashida's sickness and corruption. They backlit his complicitous bond with Dudley Smith.

Lyman's. The all-night rumor mill. Here's the tattle on Sergeant/now Army Captain Smith.

His blithe expediency. His axman-to-Jack-Horrall status. His rivalry with Captain Bill Parker. Their Watanabe-case clash.

She's seen him at Lyman's and Kwan's. He's a ravishing man. Hideo Ashida must be in love with him.

Which gives her pause. Which tells her to dissemble. Which tells her to withhold fire and gold leads. She knows that he's omitted. He's most likely up on her there.

Ashida underestimates women. He cannot *see* them. Let him underestimate you as he seems to underestimate Kay Lake.

They costar in the Male PD Drama. Joan Conville's the handmaid. She's PD-employed and has professional cachet. Kay Lake's a specious seductress and brainy bawd. And William H. Parker stands between them.

Rumor: Kay Lake tears through men. Ask the long-aggrieved Lee Blanchard. Rumor: Kay and Whiskey Bill are yet to consummate. Rumor: Kay Lake shivved a bull dyke cop named Dot Rothstein. Dot's pal Dudley Smith nixed reprisals. Rumor: Bill Parker and "Big Red" are madly enjoined.

No, it's not true.

He's an alcoholic voyeur. He abbreviates his marital vows. He does not trash them. They've kissed three times. Twice at the Biltmore. Once outside City Hall. Brenda Allen witnessed that last kiss.

He isn't tall and handsome. His Catholicism gores her Protestant core. His wild grit mirrors her own and almost makes her love him.

Bill Parker knows from sin. It's a shared papist-protty trait. Bill Parker revealed his great sin of omission.

They were half-gassed at Lyman's. He told her that Two-Gun Davis killed the four Watanabes. Davis sat at the bar, a few feet away.

Parker solved the crime himself. Davis confessed to him. Parker withheld the solution from the at-large PD. The crime derived from Fifth Column intrigue.

Davis acted alone. His lunatic cohort did not participate. Rich America

Firsters roamed the periphery. Japanese and Chinese saboteurs joined them. The band redefined Treasonous Alliance.

There was a Chinese physician. He was a plastic surgeon/eugenicist and very *right*-wing. There was a Beverly Hills psychiatrist. He was very *left*-wing. He pandered to film stars and socialites and snitched them off to the Feds.

Parker devastated her. She told him to reveal Two-Gun's guilt and exonerate Werewolf Shudo. Parker refused. He cited Shudo's sex-assault priors. He stressed this fact: Jim Davis indicted would destroy the PD.

She relented. Her protty guilt pushed her back. She got drunk and plowed the Mexicans. That meant two four-count indictments. Four dead wetbacks and four dead Watanabes.

It was her sin omitted. Bill Parker covered it up. Their shared complicity ran breathless deep.

She went to the library. She read Sid Hudgens' series on the Watanabe case. Hudgens fawningly praised Dudley Smith. Equal praise went to Hideo Ashida.

Parker and Smith chat at Lyman's and Kwan's. She's observed their brusque civility and the hatred underneath. They attend the same church. They drink with Archbishop Cantwell and confess to Monsignor Joe Hayes. They worship God, to the detriment of God's law.

She drinks and jousts with Bill Parker. They drink, to their equal detriment. She worked a property-confiscation string with Hideo Ashida. They bagged a terpin hydrate still. The owner killed himself at the Lincoln Heights Jail.

She filched a dozen terp vials from Don Matsura's apartment. She wanted to experience the effect. She consumed two vials in the back room at Lyman's. She entered a vivid dream state.

She saw forest fires near Tomah, Wisconsin. She shotgunned a drunken Indian. She woke up on the couch. Dudley Smith looked down at her.

He said, "Hello, lass. You were extolling the wonders of gold in your sleep."

28

(LOS ANGELES, 1/9–1/23/42)

Gold.

He stole the bar and stashed it in his hotel suite. He kept the key and called Lock-Ur-Self Storage. He learned the provenance of locker 648.

It was a permanent rental. A “John Jones” paid the full fee in June ’31. A file card listed John Jones’ address. It was a fake.

Dead end.

He reprowled Lock-Ur-Self and brought his evidence kit. He print-dusted 648 and got smudges and rubber-glove prints.

Dead end.

He wants the gold. Joan Conville wants the gold. He saw Joan at the library. She was reading old newspapers and jotting notes. He cruised the reference desk and scanned Joan’s request slip. The words *fire* and *gold* jumped out.

Joan knows most of what he knows. He’s certain of that. She knows nothing of Lock-Ur-Self. She has not *seen* the gold. He’s far ahead of her there.

The gold.

It’s Joan’s idée fixe. She wears gold cuff links. She works in the lab and fondles them constantly. She’s clocked him clocking her. Their omissions and suspicions reverberate both ways. She’s seen all the reports and news clips that he’s seen. She queried him per his ballistics tests. He laid out the liquor-store spree. Joan extrapolated. She said, “Fritz Eckelkamp. Liquor stores were his métier.”

She’s a natural detective. She knows how to cull facts and think. They have not discussed fire or gold since.

He subtly pumped Elmer Jackson. He quizzed him per Wayne Frank’s death and gold idée fixe. He curveballed “Karl Frederick Tullock.” Elmer deadpanned the name.

Wayne Frank and Karl Tullock. This simple conclusion. They converged in Griffith Park that day. This less simple question perplexed him. The gold nugget in Tullock's trouser cuff. How did it get there?

He sought to buttress his fire-case logic. He set out to establish a *certain* Box Man ID. He recalled gossip. The Santa Barbara Sheriff's Bertillon-charted their deputies.

The men were comprehensively measured. Hand spans/arm and leg lengths/ twelve phrenological marks. He could measure Box Man. He would measure up or he would not.

He called the SB Personnel Office and stiffed the request. He said it pertained to a missing-persons job. The photostat arrived the next day.

He went by the morgue. Nort Layman was out. He consulted the Bertillon chart and duplicated the measurement regime.

He measured hand spans/arm lengths/distances between toes. He tape-wrapped the skull and plumbed the occipital sockets. Box Man and Chart Man measured up exactly.

October 3, '33. The two gold seekers converge in Griffith Park and die there that day. Those are facts. The rest is conjecture.

He tracked conjectural logic. It led him back to the ballistics bulletins. He'd studied the spent lodged in Karl Tullock's skull. He got that partial lands-and-grooves read. It partially matched the liquor-store spents.

He walked over to the DB and pored through Robbery files. He snagged a file for the '33 liquor-store spree. He saw an eyeball-witness sketch. It vaguely resembled Elmer's Wayne Frank wallet pic.

He walked back to Central Station. A basement storeroom housed misdemeanor files. He breathed dust and mold and tore his hands bloody. He wagered on *this:*

Alky Wayne Frank. At loose in L.A., summer '33. It's logical. He would have been popped for plain drunk or vagrancy.

He dumped file boxes and went through them. It was pure shitwork. He hit a July '33 box. He caught a "Jackson, Wayne Frank" file tab.

Wayne Frank sustained a vag roust. Note the attached mug shot. It's a more than vague/half-ass-good match. It veers toward the liquor-store sketch.

Tell Joan Conville none of this. She wants the gold, to your exclusion. Your probity exceeds hers. The gold will buy her a man-trap wardrobe and front-row nightclub seats. The gold is your racial bargaining chip.

You diverge in moral intent. She's a round-heeled girl out for kicks. You're out to ensure your family's freedom. You converge as scientists. You both love gold as an entity.

He went to a jeweler's. He bought two solid-gold second lieutenant's bars. They brought Dudley Smith to mind. They warned him of Joan Conville. They told him not to underestimate her.

She's gifted but erratic. She's conjoined with the gifted but erratic Bill Parker. Their union comes off deluded. It may play out effective. It mirrors his own union with Dudley Smith.

Ever-gracious Dudley. His proffered Army commission. It carries a price. He'll abet evil designs. He'll enter the man trap that is Dudley Smith.

Dudley has usurped Bucky Bleichert. Dudley is now the naked man in his dreams. Dudley calls him twice a week. He always issues directives.

Brace Elmer J. Find out what he's doing. Bring up Tommy Glennon. Mention Eddie Leng and Donald Matsura. Don't forget the sketchy Lin Chung.

He quizzed Elmer. He was subtle. Elmer sloughed him off. He told Dudley that Elmer felt clean. He said the Glennon/Leng/Matsura/Chung alliance felt Fifth Column.

Dudley told him to scour J-town for Kyoho Hanamaka. He's dubbed Hanamaka Baja's spy king. Hanamaka runs Baja's boss saboteur cell. Dudley wants to extort the cell and limit the extent of their damage.

Baja suits Dudley. He's created a second family there. He's got Claire and her street-urchin daughter. Dudley's screen sleuth Charlie Chan. *He's* Dudley's #1 son.

He loves Dudley's egalitarianism. He loves Dudley's realpolitik. Dudley sees the internment as fear-spawned race hate. The Manzanar camp opens March 25. The Owens Valley broils in the summer and sustains winter's deep freeze.

Dudley, the Irish arriviste. Dudley, ever strategic. Dudley, most chilling here:

"I've heard that Bill Parker and your colleague Joan Conville make quite the pair. I met lovely Joan at Lyman's recently, and became somewhat entranced. Any friend of Bill Parker's merits my attention. Please keep me apprised of Miss Conville's activities."

Dudley denotes equal measure. You love him and fear him proportionately. You submit to him because it delights him and proves your utility.

Lieutenant Hideo Ashida, Army SIS.

You will survive and exploit this war by Dudley Smith's sole decree.

29

(LOS ANGELES, 1/9–1/23/42)

He's scared. It crept up, belated. *Oooga-booga.* Dem demons done launched demselves his way.

He's scared of the war. He's scared of the draft. He's scared of Jap infantry. He's ex–Marine Corps. They'll resnag his cracker ass and get his cracker ass slayed quick.

That's surefire terror. It's regulation issue. It's standard for this shitstorm time and place. It pales before his fear of Dudley Smith.

Oooga-booga. It's like he back in de ole south. He done *ex*-caped Parchman. De hellhound's on his trail.

Dud won't kill him. He's too tight with Brenda and Jack H. Dud's too savvy for Murder One. He'll just nullify his redneck ass in some cagey way.

The hellhound's got him pinned. The beast's baying baleful. Elmer, why'd you pull all this meddlesome shit?

Well, it's my case, hound. It's my very own big-deal investigation. That means Glennon/Leng/Matsura/Chung et al. I've got to wrap it up for some special woman—and Dud just got in the way.

Who's the woman, shithead?

I don't know—but L.A.'s full of candidates.

He's scared. He's restless. Diverse shit's coming and going. The Box Man job went *pffft.* Dr. Nort, Big Joan, and Hideo did what they could. He retooled memory lane and jawed with Wayne Frank in his dreams. But Wayne Frank's still dead and buried. Who's the Box Man? Who gives a shimmering shit?

There's still his case. It's breaking wide. Where will it go?

He's got address-book names. Tommy G.'s oddball KAs. We'll start with Monsignor Joe Hayes. He's a mick priest and Dudster KA. That tong rumor: "Tommy's poking some priest."

There's this Jean Staley twist. He ran her through R & I. File checks revealed *this:*

She's thirty-three. She's a carhop. She fell behind maryjane, back in '36. She did six months honor farm and thenceforth kept her snout clean.

He might brace her. She might tattle Tommy for some scurvy misdeeds. She might be bored and het up and sleep with him.

Ed Satterlee might roust Huey Cressmeyer. Ed's considering it. He'll write Ed's script and peep the sweatbox mirror. Ed's a phone-book man. Huey'll be hurtin' for certain.

Huey might hold his mud. Huey might break. Huey might reveal Tommy's whereabouts or some extraneous dish. Here's for sure—Dud will get wind of it quick.

Ed hasn't utilized Brenda's trick spot. He's checked the piggyback camera four times to date. Ed's on some trap-spies crusade. He's out to honey-bait Fifth Columnists. The wall peek could yield roundabout leads on his case.

Ed's played out as a white man. It rebuts his nosebleed rep. Ed's evinced high class per the phone-tap hullabaloo.

"You're afraid we've got wires on you, right? Okay, I'll give you the chance to listen to any calls you might be on. You can erase them, if we keep it on the q.t."

Wartime camaraderie. Spy chasers afield. Plus, new folks orbiting through.

There's Hideo Ashida. He's all-time tight with El Dudley. There's Big Joan. She allegedly scares Hideo. Joan haunts Lyman's and trades looks with Kay Lake. *Oooga-booga*—she de hellhound on Kay's trail.

The war's shifting things. The draft's depleting the PD. The phone probe's an undulating undercurrent. Jack Horrall wants to ride the war and probe out and retire. Let Thad Brown or Bill Parker take over then.

He braced Jack at Kwan's. Rotate me back to Vice, boss. I hate the Alien Squad. Most of these Japs were sandbagged. They ain't pulled no ruinous shit.

Jack said, "The Squad rates you war-essential. Stick it out, son. If you rotate back to Vice, you're draft bait."

Sage fucking advice.

The war's got folks calculating. Brenda's pulling away from him. Ellen's veering back to her husband. Hideo's running off to Baja. The Dudster's got his hooks in deep.

Hideo's feeling his oats. He blows off his bodyguards. Him and Lee Blanchard got pink-slipped there. The crime lab's fielding a Jap-woman team. The goddamn rain won't stop.

The Box Man job worked some hoodoo on him. He's had all these Wayne Frank dreams. Plus dreams of tall redheads in gold lamé gowns.

The war's a moneymaker. His call biz has gone gold post–Pearl Harbor.

Everybody's scared and fucking willy-nilly. He got plastered and tried to kiss Kay. She pushed him away and said *this:*

"The war's got us all by the scruff of the neck. That doesn't mean we should succumb."

Sage fucking advice.

He wants to succumb. He's more hopped up than scared. That's his dilemma here.

30

(BAJA AND LOS ANGELES, 1/9–1/23/42)

He can't shake the thought. He can't exploit it for profit. The revelation bodes *CATASTROPHE.*

Jim Davis slaughters four Japs. He tells his ex-adjutant. Bill Parker keeps mum, so far as we know. Parker is a grandiose drunk. He's remorseful and suffused with blind ambition. He probably won't blab. Jim Davis has blabbed twice already.

A gaudy psychopath seeks absolution. Father D. L. Smith grants it. He now knows *this:*

Lin Chung was privy to the Watanabe snuffs. Ditto Claire's doctor chum, Saul Lesnick. Jim Davis runs amok. The local Fifth Column bodes, crazily diffuse and politically inclusive.

He's scared. He's hamstrung. He can't kill Jim Davis or Bill Parker. He ran the Watanabe job. Widespread knowledge of Jim Davis' guilt would create widespread panic. It would keelhaul Jack Horrall and Hideo Ashida. It would ruin one D. L. Smith.

He'd face criminal indictment. He'd forfeit his Army commission. His dear Claire would disavow him. He'd stand condemned.

He's scared. He's hamstrung and stalemated there. His Baja work compensates.

He discussed the pay-phone taps with Juan Pimentel. The deciphered codes suggest Jap air bases in San Berdoo County. The specific wording suggests rumor more than hard fact. He forwarded the allegation to Fourth Interceptor. They knew the rumor already. They considered it hogwash.

José Vasquez-Cruz considers it hogwash. He's got a brand-new hobbyhorse. He wants to infiltrate U.S. diplomatic junkets. The notion consumes him. It's his #1 intel priority.

El Capitán is politically savvy. He hates FDR. FDR's Latin American stance is "One Big Red Ruse." Franklin "Double-Cross" Rosenfeld has seduced film folk en masse. He's sending them out to hawk the Jew Deal and the Allied war effort.

Captain D. L. Smith has blackmailed numerous film stars. Vasquez-Cruz wants him to recruit junketeering informants. Claire finds Vasquez-Cruz suspicious and attractive. They danced, hands on hips. Captain D. L. Smith noticed it then.

Claire lives within herself. He feels her slipping away. She's a capable woman, underemployed. She pervs on odd beaners and boots morphine. She communes with Joan Klein. Young Joan steals from stores. He's spot-tailed her and observed her thefts.

She consigns junk jewelry to street vendors and takes a quarter cut. She's a petty thief and seasoned prevaricator. He was killing British soldiers at her age. He likes the girl nonetheless.

He likes Juan Pimentel. Lieutenant Juan is competent and adroit. He watchdogs Kyoho Hanamaka's hideaway. He sees Captain Smith visit the premises. Captain Smith locks himself in and lingers *loooooong.*

He visits the wall cache. He brings the gold bayonet. He poses with it.

He found a discreet tailor in T.J. The man altered wall-cache uniforms to fit him. He's bypassed the Russian garb. He poses in Wehrmacht gray and SS black.

A cobbler fitted him with jackboots. He bought a sheath for the gold bayonet. His fascist trousseau stands complete.

The bayonet consoles and confounds him. He's run a magnifying glass down the whole length. He picked up the probable remnants of U.S. mint marks. Buff-out marks also appear.

The provenance. That's what confounds him. FDR banned gold hoarding back in '33. The dictate was widely ignored. Let's indulge fantasy here.

There's a wealthy U.S. fascist. He employs an artisan. A gold bar is cut into bayonet shape. It makes its way to the Fatherland and Kyoho Hanamaka. Fetishistic horror ensues.

Provenance. A fantasy rendition. Fantasy as necessity and a firewall against chaos.

A man tried to kill him. That made two attempts in two months. He scanned Statie mug-shot books. He ID'd his second would-be assassin.

The Slogan Man. Victor Trejo Caiz. Born Calexico, 1901. Priest killer under Kommisar Calles. Commandant of a Redshirt Battalion. In disfavor under Lázaro Cárdenas. Suspected wheelman for the Leon Trotsky snuff.

Caiz was the Slogan Man. *Está muerto* now. The Sleek Man killed him. He mug-shot ID'd the Sleek Man. He's one Salvador Abascal.

The Sinarquista *Führer.* Born 1910. Blood foe of all Reds and anticlerical slime. Devout Catholic hegemonist. Fiery supporter of the Irish Republican cause.

A man to honor. A man to covet. A man to scrutinize.

He drove south on a whim. He hit Magdalena Bay and surveilled the Sinarquista encampment. He watched a priest perform outdoor Mass for six hundred Greenshirts.

Abascal gave a rip-roaring speech. He stood too far off to hear. He admired the *Führer*'s fluent gestures and delivery.

He drove back to Ensenada. Joe Hayes called. He was in town with Charlie Coughlin and the Archbishop. They came to fish and drink. "And, you owe us dinner, Dud."

He made good. They dined at the Hotel del Norte. He steered talk to the Sinarquistas. His pals praised Salvador Abascal. *Es un hombre magnifico.*

Father Charles brought up Tommy Glennon. You know Tommy, don't you, Joe? Monsignor Hayes blushed and blanched.

Tommy tops the still-missing list. Elmer Jackson seems to have curtailed his rogue antics. The Baja Jap roundups proceed. Two more L.A.-to-Baja pay-phone calls have hit.

They were decoded. Sub berths were abstractly discussed. No exact locations or coordinates were mentioned. It was just abstract chat.

Human voices spieled code words. Said voices were muffled and barely audible. They might have been prerecorded. Pay-phone stakeouts were the logical next step.

He discussed it with José Vasquez-Cruz. *El Fascisto* was bored. They discussed their racket plans. *That* perked him up.

Running wetbacks. Running heroin. Moving wets and "H." Their Utopian vision, shared.

It's all grand, but—

Jim Davis and Bill Parker still trouble him. Jim's blabbed twice already. Parker might blab.

Beth Short will visit Baja soon. She'll be eighteen this summer. She's his favorite bastard spawn. She wants to quit school and roam. He'll play stern dad and dissuade her.

It's all grand, but—

He's due in L.A. The county grand jury has summoned him. He's set to testify. He'll be resolute. Werewolf Shudo killed the four Watanabes. He'll concede that he may be insane.

It's all grand, but—

Jim Davis and Bill Parker remain meddlesome.

A recent snapshot blinded him. The bulb glare slowly cleared. He saw lovely Joan Conville at Lyman's.

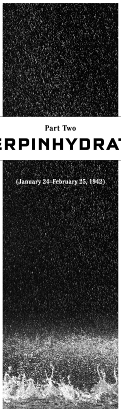
She stirs and mutters in her sleep. Her skirt’s hiked. She’s red-haired and rangy. She’s got midwestern je ne sais quoi.

She woke up. They spoke briefly. Now she’s back and blinding him. Dear girl, what took you so long?

Part Two

TERPINHYDRATE

(January 24–February 25, 1942)



31

(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 A.M., 1/24/42)

Collusion.

City Hall. Room 546. Today's Monster Matinee. Werewolf Shudo versus the L.A. County grand jury.

The jurors perched at desks. They faced the room. Eight old men and eight old ladies. They were rich-stiff pedigreed. They radiated high-end Pasadena and Hancock Park.

A witness box stood adjacent. Counsel tables faced the perch. DA Bill McPherson repped the county. Note the Werewolf's seedy lawyer. Check the racing form in his hip pocket.

The Werewolf dozed in his seat. He wore a straitjacket and jail denims. PD men sat behind the DA. Officer Lee Blanchard and police chemist Hideo Ashida.

Dudley Smith sat with the DA. He wore his Army dress uniform. Note the flap-holstered sidearm.

Handsome devil.

Two chair rows faced the show. Joan sat there. Bill Parker got her in. He'd said, "Consider what you know now. You don't get a deal like this every day."

Parker supplied drift. The DA liked colored girls. Shudo's lawyer was ex-PD. He had a night-school diploma and serviced a Negro pimp clientele. He procured for the DA.

Joan doodled up a scratch pad. She'd done research. She knew gold-per-ounce prices in '31 and today. She teethed on the upswing.

$20.67 then. $35.50 now.

Mint bars weighed 33.3 pounds. She calculated then-to-now prices. $8,268 a bar then. $14,200 now. The heist men clouted thirty-odd bars. Take it from there.

Lee Blanchard testified. It felt pro forma. Joan suppressed yawns.

It's December 6. There's a loud-party squawk. Him and Sergeant D. L. Smith check it out and find the stiffs. He called the Watanabes "Japs" and went *Oops.* The jurors laughed.

Blanchard concluded. Hideo Ashida took the stand. The DA lobbed softballs. The Werewolf dozed. His lawyer skimmed the racing form.

Ashida breezed through the forensics. He described various documents and their evidential value. He forged those documents. Bill Parker told her that.

Persuasive Ashida. Submissive dog Ashida. Fetch, running dog.

Ashida concluded. He walked to the door and passed right by Joan. She looked at him. He stared straight ahead.

Dudley Smith took the stand. The lady jurors swooned. Joan read their minds. Now, *that's* a witness.

The Dublin brogue. The idiomatic flair. The wild charm and sheer language.

He ran down the case. He glowed warm and lied with blithe assurance. He noticed Joan. He gave her a bolt-from-the-blue look.

Their eyes snagged and held. Dudley smiled. Joan tried not to smile back. Dudley glitched his testimony and glanced away. It might have been seductively feigned/it might have been real.

Joan observed Dudley. She believed each lie and caught herself duped within seconds. He threw nods and smiles. She nodded and smiled back and caught herself duped again.

Her face burned. She looked away/shit, I'm mortified/she looked back again.

Dudley concluded. He left the witness box and walked to the door. He winked at Joan en route.

—

The Werewolf jury adjourned. The Fed-probe jury convened. Joan kept her seat.

New jurors heard evidence. More rich stiffs perched. A U.S. attorney replaced "Mud-Shark" Bill McPherson.

Joan fidgeted. She fretted her gold cuff links. She wanted a cigarette, she wanted two highballs, she wanted a steak sandwich.

Jack Horrall testified. He was disingenuous. Phone taps and bugged squadrooms? That's the first I've heard of it.

Mayor Fletch testified. He grandstanded and burnished his crimebuster credentials. He failed to understand all this hoo-ha. He was a lawyer himself. "Frankly, I know whereof I speak."

Wallace N. Jamie testified. He extolled his noted uncle. Eliot Ness was a T-man and certified hotshot. He bragged up his electronics know-how. He laid out his dirty-cops probe in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Fletch B. hired him. Mayor

Fletch wants the truth. Mayor Fletch don't know bupkes per wall bugs. "The truth will out here."

Joan yawned and stretched. A shadow hit her. She split-second knew.

"It's what we call the 'rubber-stamp' grand jury. True-bill indictments are ever assured."

Joan smoothed her skirt. She shot her blouse cuffs and displayed her gold cuff links.

"You framed that man Shudo. It's as much an open secret as the phone taps."

Dudley sat beside her. They brushed arms. He kept his voice low.

"I'll concede the possibility. But I could hardly have accomplished it without the brilliant assistance of your Dr. Ashida."

Her face burned. Shit, there's the blush.

Joan blinked. She suppressed a full primp. She thought fast and dredged up a punch line.

Shit—one split-second blink, and he's gone.

—

She got her highballs and steak sandwich. Lyman's was Saturday-packed. She bridged the lunch crowd and the early bar crowd. The grand jury crowd bled in.

Wallace Jamie schmoozed Eliot Ness. Uncle Eliot cruised the bar and glad-handed Fletch Bowron. Big Earle Conville hated Ness. Big Earle had a beef. Ness raped the Monroe County Forest Service on extraditions. Big Earle called Ness "that preening cocksucker."

Kay Lake walked in. She saw Joan and waved her little snoot wave. Joan snoot-waved her back.

They never spoke. They hadn't been introduced. They knew each other secondhand. Cops supplied two-way drift and tantalized them.

Joan sipped highball #3. Kay bootjacked Elmer Jackson's stool and eased him down the bar. Lee Blanchard pulled his stool close. Kay leaned into him. They discussed household hoo-ha. Kay made her voice carry.

Kay always did that. Kay wanted her to hear. Kay telegraphed her moves. Kay Lake, grandstander and ham actress.

The backed-up sink. Otto Klemperer's party, next Wednesday night. Name-dropper Kay. Bertolt Brecht and Orson Welles. Spy-mistress Kay. A symphonic score, smuggled from Russia.

Joan hexed Kay Lake. Shut up or drop dead, you poseur. She killed off her highball. Bill Parker walked in.

He passed by the bar. He wore leave-me-the-fuck-alone blinders. He spotted Kay and dumped them. Kay saw him. Their hands laced up for one second.

Parker weaved to the back room. Joan stood up and shoved her way over. She hit a waiter. His drink tray flew.

Some Shriners got booze-doused. A whole table, spritzed. A fat man *eeked* and wiped his face with his fez. Joan hit the door at a sprint. The hinges shook.

Parker stood by the Teletype. He held a photostat and a cold beer. He saw Joan and blinked.

Joan slapped the beer out of his hand and ripped up the photostat. She got *this* close to him. Parker just stood there.

They were *this* close. Joan said, "Whose man are you? Are you your wife's, mine, or Kay Lake's?"

They were *this* close. Joan said, "How dare you tell me that Jim Davis killed those people, and you refuse to reveal it? How dare you lay that burden on me?"

They were *this* close. Joan said, "Or, did you dream it all up? Does that make Dudley Smith and Hideo Ashida credible? Is Fujio Shudo's life worth saving, given his established transgressions?"

This close:

"Whose man are you?"

"How many women do you plan to entrap before this war is over?"

"Why haven't we made love?"

"How can you live with what you know and do nothing?"

"What do you think you're doing with me?"

Parker swerved out of the room. Joan slammed the door and threw the bolt and locked herself in.

She dug in her purse. She pulled out a terp vial. She drank the terp and shuddered. The terp burned going down.

There's the heat and the *whoosh.* There's the gleaming gold bars right behind.

32

(LOS ANGELES, 8:30 P.M., 1/24/42)

His photostat popped from the tube. The PD and FD shot him paperwork. The Griffith Park fire. Two agencies weigh in.

He'd forged the stat request. He signed Ray Pinker's name. Mr. Pinker was off somewhere. He was Fed bait. He was scrounging lawyer money. He shined his lab duties on.

Ashida unrolled the photostat and read at his desk. He saw a Fed-routing code. He jumped on the text.

Two agencies weighed in. Two agencies zeroed in on the Young Socialist Alliance.

The YSA was a Red front. The membership fluctuated. College kids came and went. The state AG's Office deemed the group harmless. One fact bothered them.

The YSA cloaked a Communist cell. It was live-wire CP. It was cloistered and clandestine. A nameless Fed snitch finked it out.

Ashida recalled an *L.A. Times* piece. The YSA boss man was one Meyer Gelb. He was a Pershing Square slogan shouter and didactical creep.

Gelb's really *Comrade* Gelb. The Comintern bankrolled the cell and presumably issued directives. Bold obfuscation spawns bold cover.

Gelb, the florid buffoon. Gelb, the cell *Führer.* Kommisar Gelb, the Red cell master of:

Jorge Villareal-Caiz. A Mexican national. No further facts.

Jean Clarice Staley. No further facts.

Saul Lesnick, M.D. No further facts.

Andrea Lesnick. No further facts.

Ashida broke a sweat. He got the mean megrims and the shakes.

He knew the Lesnicks. He'd observed them at a Claire De Haven party. Saul Lesnick was a Beverly Hills psychiatrist. He was a left-wing eugenicist. He was a pal of right-wing race man Lin Chung. Andrea Lesnick was Dr. Saul's daughter. She'd been convicted of vehicular manslaughter. She served a brief term at Tehachapi.

Ashida wiped his face. He fought off the mean megrims and stifled some shakes. He went through the L.A. phone books. The lab kept a full set.

There was no Meyer Gelb listed. There was no Jean Staley and no Villareal-Caiz. Dr. Saul's office was listed. There was no Andrea Lesnick listing.

The cell names felt seductive. They confirmed the pervasive presence of the 1930s Left. Police-file names were police-file names and most often no more. They lived in the non sequitur void of snitch-out information. This new lead felt seductive and inconsequential. It was more than trivial and less than germane.

Ashida plumbed the lead. He vowed to withhold it from Joan Conville. She craved the gold to his exclusion. He held the upper hand there. He possessed a gold bar and she didn't.

The bar troubled him. It was casually but expertly stashed. The heist occurred almost eleven years ago. The bar remained unutilized.

He'd checked '31 and '42 gold prices. The bar had nearly doubled in value. Heist men ran long on impulse and short on circumspection. He saw circumspection here. He sensed motives that contravened pure greed.

"Hello, lad."

Ashida wiped his face. His hands jumped. He squared his shoulders and patted his hair. Stop it—you're primping.

He checked the doorway. Dudley wore a tweed suit now. His uniform flattered him more. He turned heads at the grand jury.

Ashida kicked his chair back. I'm nonchalant and indifferent. What's your name again?

Dudley held a suit coat on a hanger. Dark cellophane covered it.

"I couldn't go back without dropping this off. It's a moment to celebrate."

Ashida stood up. His legs held. He said, "Dare I ask?"

Dudley unveiled the coat. It was Army OD. Second lieutenant's bars gleamed.

"Fourth Interceptor has approved your commission, and there's a great many papers to sign. Your mother and brother have been granted Mexican amnesty for the war's duration. You will serve as my adjutant in Baja. You will interpret the Japanese language, assist in the roundup of resident Japanese, and work to further our antisabotage mandate."

Ashida walked over. Dudley unbuttoned the coat and held it open. Ashida slipped it on.

It fit perfectly. The lieutenant's bars were pure gold.

Dudley said, "My Japanese brother."

Ashida said, “My Irish brother.”

33

(LOS ANGELES, 11:00 P.M., 1/24/42)

J. Kurakami/DR #8619641/one console radio, one snubnose .38.

Check.

D. Matsushima/DR #8619642/one spring-loaded sap, twelve Nazi armbands, one lead-filled baseball bat.

Check.

H. "Hophead" Hayamasu/DR #8619643/one hypodermic syringe, one rising-sun flag, twelve Mr. Moto novels, twenty-nine vials of terpin hydrate.

Check.

Elmer prelogged confiscations. He called out the juicy bits. Rice and Kapek ran their mouths. Catbox Cal Lunceford picked his nose and watched.

They slogged through a late duty stint. The fucking squad pen froze. The fucking janitor fucked with the heat vents. Rice and Kapek habituated the squadroom. Their fucking wives tossed them out like the fucking shitheels they were.

A. Takamina/DR #8619644/one vial of Spanish fly, fourteen smut books, 142 Japs-kill-Chinks atrocity pix.

Check.

Rice said, "That Takamina guy's a beast. I pondered killing him for a minute there."

Kapek said, "You should have. I know this Chink's selling Jap shrunken heads."

Lunceford said, "I heard about that. Frisco PD put out a bulletin. They found twenty-one decapitated Japs in the bay."

Rice said, "Remember Pearl Harbor."

Kapek said, "I remember—but don't tell my draft board that."

The squadroom was jammed floor-to-rafters. Elmer tagged boxes and logged shit. Hey, check *this:*

R. "Banzai Bob" Yoshida/DR #8619645/nine spike-studded dick sheaths, four blood-flecked samurai swords.

Lunceford said, "Ouch."

Rice said, "The guy told me he used the swords to kill chickens. Some Jap voodoo ritual. He supplies the rice bowls on Alameda."

Kapek said, "Yeah, and them riceheads feed the slop they cook to white cops."

Ed Satterlee walked in. Elmer clocked him. The kibitzers flashed fuck-the-Fed looks.

Satterlee hooked a finger. Elmer dumped his confiscation box and trailed him out to the hall.

"I'm in a bind tonight, Elmer. I figured you could help me out."

Elmer said, "Short notice, but okay."

"I've got a mark set up with one of Brenda's girls, but I've got nobody to work the camera. The gig just fell in my lap."

"And the girl's all primed to pump him?"

Satterlee lit a cigarette. "That's right. Annie Staples. She could get the sphinx to cut loose."

College Girl Annie. The bobby-sox type. *Woof!!! Woof!!!* Ivy League threads and long blond hair.

"Who's the mark?"

"An informant of mine. A geezer named Saul Lesnick."

The name reverberated. It reprised some Kay Lake dish. La Kay worked old Saul for Bill Parker. She'd mentioned some upcoming soirée. Old Saul was sure to attend.

Elmer said, "Okay, Ed. I'd be happy to help out."

—

The lovebirds showed at midnite. Elmer crouched in the wall peek. Annie winked at the two-way mirror. Elmer yocked and rolled film.

The birds peeled and hit the sheets. Doc Saul looked cancer-cough consumptive. Annie vibrated Viking Vixen Supreme.

Perfunctory woo-woo ensued. Annie rode old Saul. She straddled him and found the fit. She faced the mirror and went mock *craaaaazy.*

Elmer timed the ride. It ran 4.8 minutes and felt practiced. Elmer nailed the gestalt.

Annie's Ed the Fed's mock girlfriend. She's a shakedown pro. Fey Edgar Hoover *looooves* this shit. He watches it and slams the ham. It justifies his political agenda. He thus entraps Red slime.

Annie disengaged. She patted Saul's pecker and walked to a sideboard. She poured two Drambuies and spritzed in seltzer. Saul lit cigarettes.

The lovebirds cozied in. Annie sipped her drink and blew smoke rings. She basked nude. Old Saul covered himself.

Talk hit the wall mikes. Elmer goosed the volume. Saul said, "…and Hitler's not what people think he is. He's more subtle than that."

Annie patted her mouth. It expressed big ennui. Elmer yuk-yukked.

"The war's a yawn. I've had it up to here. My sister joined the Wacs, because she's a lezbo, and it's full of young tail. She looks like the Bride of Frankenstein, and she got fired from her gym-teacher job for honking this girl on the volleyball team."

Old Saul chained cigarettes. "That confirms my point about Hitler. He places a premium on physical culture. His Aryan breeding program impresses me. He subsidizes good Nordic stock and pays the females a breeding bonus. He's convinced that the selective breeding of superior specimens can eliminate the specter of congenital disease."

Annie rolled her eyes. "Okay, but what about good looks? I look good, and so do my mom and dad. But my sister looks like something the cat dragged in."

Saul coughed into his handkerchief. Elmer yocked. The old hebe dug the Nazis. It was unrequited love.

"Racial science is still in its infancy. Comrade Stalin should put his people to work. We can't let the Right ace out the Left here. Stalin's designs are humane. He'll implement compulsory breeding from a workers' perspective."

Annie patted her mouth. "You're putting me to sleep."

"What shall we talk about? You're eager to learn. It's what I like most about you."

Annie tickled old Saul. Old Saul giggled. She swatted him with a pillow. Old Saul evinced glee.

"You like my big breasts and long legs, and these collegiate outfits that Brenda makes me wear. Do you know how many pairs of saddle shoes I've got now?"

Saul went *Oy vey.* "All right, then. What shall we talk about?"

"That party you mentioned last time. You said all these music exiles and movie stars would be there."

"Oh, yes. At Otto Klemperer's. I saved his life, you know. I diagnosed his brain tumor and got him into surgery, jack flash."

"You're heroic, sweetie. They should put you on the cover of *Time* magazine."

Old Saul went *tut-tut.* "Comrade Stalin deserves it more than I do."

"Will *he* be at the party?"

"No, but Orson Welles will be. I know you, Annie. Orson's your favorite. You can't fool me."

Annie crushed her cigarette. "He should lose weight. I like my men lean."

Old Saul laughed. "Like me?"

"You're too lean, sweetie. I saw a newsreel at the Wiltern last night. The Japs captured these prisoners somewhere. They looked emaciated, like you sort of do."

Old Saul glared. Elmer mind-read him. *You dumb goyishe twat.*

Annie said, "Come on, baby. Let's get back to Mr. Welles."

Old Saul sighed. "All right, Comrade Welles. He's going out on one of FDR's diplomatic missions, to Latin America, so that he can shtup Dolores del Rio and espouse the Red cause with all the gifted-dilettante fervor he's capable of, which is considerable. He's been my analysand dating back to his radio days, and his best work isn't *Citizen Kane,* believe me. It's the smut films he makes with big-name movie stars. You wouldn't believe the names."

Annie put out big eyes. The mike volume glitched. Elmer caught "Kurt Weill," "Bertolt Brecht," "Spanish Civil War." He goosed the knob and replugged a wire. He caught "Meyer Gelb," "analysand," "incendiary whiz." He caught "badly burned" and "battle with Franco's Falange."

The glitch unglitched. Full volume kicked on. Old Saul said, "I saved his life, too. I've got a Chinaman pal. He's a plastic surgeon, and he performed skin grafts on Meyer."

Elmer snagged it. The surgeon was Lin Chung. Who else but? It's who you know and who you blow—

Annie said, "I thought Terry Lux was the big plastic surgeon. I tricked with him once. He told me he was America First, and the world's greatest plastics man. He said he could turn my ugly sister into Betty Grable."

Old Saul shrugged. "Terry's Terry. He's as right as I'm left, and sometimes the twain shall meet. The war's created odd alliances. The left and right converge to acknowledge the shuck of democracy. My analysand Claire De Haven and her cop lover underline that perception."

Elmer snagged it. *Wooo*—Claire the D. and El Dudster Alert.

Annie lit a cigarette. "You told me about her. She's a socialite, but she's Communist up the wazoo."

Old Saul sipped Drambuie. "I'd call her a morphine-addicted dilettante before I even addressed her speciously reasoned politics. And, I'd add that her cop lover is an evil brute, and that Claire's out for thrills, plain and simple. They're in Mexico now, and Claire and I have phone sessions twice a week. She's behaving paranoically, I'm afraid. She thinks that a transplanted prairie tart named Kay something stabbed her lover last month, and I can in no way dissuade her."

Wooo—that's a hot one. It's a Code 3 Alert.

Annie patted her mouth. "Claire what's-her-name bores me. Tell me more about Mr. Welles."

She was *goooooooooood.* She neon-beamed *SHAKEDOWN.* Ed the Fed was out to jack Reds. Fey Edgar Hoover loathed Orson Welles. It was common-knowledge drift.

Old Saul popped a boner. Annie google-eyed the event. The bedsheet stretched and held taut.

"That ogre William Randolph Hearst is out to fuck Orson for *Citizen Kane.* Conversely, I would add that Orson would surely love to fuck you."

34

(LOS ANGELES, 3:00 A.M., 1/25/42)

Pub crawl. Movie shitbirds slumming. We're at Kwan's "O" den. It's open-all-nite.

Amateur pipe fiends hold sway. Orson Welles and Ann Sheridan. Plus froufrou hairdressers and prop boys. They're film geeks hot to restage *Fantasia.*

They settled on pallets. Seasoned Chinks ignored them. They sucked smoke and coughed a great deal.

Dudley and Uncle Ace watched. They rode chairs upside a back wall. Ace wore a KILL THE JAPS T-shirt and an I AM NOT A JAP armband.

Fumes drifted over. Dudley breathed deep.

"I would summarize as follows, my brother. The plan entails corrupting, usurping, and co-opting the Ensenada contingent of the Mexican State Police, under Captain José Vasquez-Cruz. Once accomplished, we would create a mass exodus of wetback workers, to pick crops at San Joaquin Valley farms."

Ace said, "I listen raptly, my Irish brother. Please tell me more."

Dudley clocked Orson Welles. Fat Boy purportedly fucked Claire. They coupled at Terry Lux's clinic. Rumors persist.

"Mexico will ditch its neutral stance in May, and throw in with the Allies. A guest-worker program will go into effect in August. It will be signed into law by our Governor Olsen, and Baja's governor, Juan Lazaro-Schmidt. It will effectively legalize slave immigration, and all attendant profits will bypass us. We need to preempt and supersede the program with our own wetback exports."

Ace pissed in a drainage sluice. He was earthy. He exemplified the hearty-peasant aesthetic. He possessed a cashew-sized dick.

"I still listen raptly. Please tell me more."

Dudley lit a cigarette. "We'll take handsome kickbacks from the farmers and attach our wets' wages. We'll house the more educated wets in the dwellings of interned Japs and grab a percentage of the rent they pay, along with a percentage of their wages from the better jobs they secure. Conversely, we will reduce the Jap population of Baja through a concerted internment effort, and will seek U.S. government assistance in housing Mexican Japs in U.S. internment centers. We will house *rich* Mexican Japs here in Los Angeles, under your Chinese protection. The reduced Jap population in Baja will alleviate the specter of coastal sabotage and infiltration, which will fulfill my Army mandate."

Ace said, "Kill the Japs."

"A hearty and well-informed sentiment, my brother."

Ace laughed. Dudley clocked a peep show. Ann Sheridan hopped on Fat Boy's pallet. She tossed her hair and went for his fly.

"I find Captain Vasquez-Cruz problematic, and Claire agrees with me. He's inherited Carlos Madrano's heroin business, and we've struck an alliance of sorts. *El Capitán* has welcomed me to Baja, but I suspect that he has designs on my designs. This brings us to our long-lost pal, Kyoho Hanamaka."

"I keep eye down here. No Hanamaka. No tickee, no washee."

"O" fumes circulated. Dudley caught wisps. He drifted a bit. He dream-caressed the gold bayonet.

"Hanamaka disappeared on December 18. He should have been detained on Pearl Harbor day, which leads me to believe that he was allowed to remain at large. It now appears as though he's faked his own death. He's the logical man to run sabotage operations in Baja, and I'm determined to capture him. Our ventures in Baja will succeed in direct proportion to my success in interdicting the Baja Fifth Column."

Ace said, "You interdict, we make money. Good tickee-washee there."

Dudley said, "We've picked up code calls from here to Baja. There's allegedly hidden air bases in Indio and Brawley. It may or may not be credible innuendo. Should the former be true, I would tag Hanamaka my number-one suspect."

Ace squinted. The dope fumes stung his eyes.

"You think Staties help Hanamaka escape? Maybe Vasquez-Cruz help? You get proof and extort his greaseball ass? We take over 'H' trade then?"

Dudley smiled. "Great minds think alike, my Chinese brother."

Ace bowed. "Tommy Glennon. He remain at large also?"

"Yes, and vexingly so. He was Carlos Madrano's boy, and he's a long-standing Mex-o-phile. He could very well fall prey to the charms of José Vasquez-Cruz."

"Tommy kill Eddie Leng. You think so, Dudster?"

"Yes. It's likely, but I don't know why."

"I rubber-hose Don Matsura. He don't know shit. I fake suicide. Hang that Jap fucker in his cell."

Dudley whooped. Ace was a good dog. Ace always fetched.

"Tommy's been out in the vapors since New Year's. I don't see how he could have done it without professional help. My instincts tell me that he's in Baja, and that Hanamaka's here."

Ace said, "Tommy Fifth Column. Crazy fuckers jungled up in strange ways."

Dudley said, "He's Catholic Fifth Column, my brother. Sadly, I see more sinister forces at play."

Fat Boy's pallet shook. He squealed and bit his pillow. Lovely Ann wiped her chin and zipped him up.

—

Whiskey Bill fought the booze. He had one drink. Then one more drink. His thirst persisted. Dudley watched him dither and succumb.

Stag dinner at St. Vib's. Archbishop Cantwell hosted. Joe Hayes slurred the kikes and the prods. Father Coughlin slurred the frogs and the coons. Every man jack slurred the Japs.

The Archbishop's study. Packed with golf-themed artwork. Golf as holy sacrament. Heretical horseshit.

Deep chairs bid sleep. Parker bid scrutiny. Dudley yawned. He took bennies yesterday. He charged thirty-six hours straight.

He read Alien Squad files and trawled for notes on Hanamaka. No mentions popped up. He walked J-town and flashed his Baja file pic. *Hanamaka? Me no see him.* He logged that response, ceaselessly.

He issued a U.S. APB. All points/hold and detain. His mind churned. He teethed on the gold bayonet.

It's provenance. The who/the why/the upscut. He indulged fantasy. He merged reality. Who first possessed the gold? Who forged the bayonet? He recalled a mint-train job. It went down in the spring of '31. The job stood unsolved. It felt non sequitur. Impecunious heist men and gold fenced down in value. Gold now long gone.

Cantwell said, "Dud's tired. He's been yawning since he walked in the door."

Hayes said, "He's got one eye fixed on Bill, though. Those two share a history."

Cantwell said, "Like Scylla and Charybdis. Evenly matched apparitions in the Old Testament."

Hayes said, "Greek mythology, Your Eminence."

Coughlin said, "Lay off the 'Greek,' Joe. You'll get all fluttered."

Hayes blanched and gulped. Coughlin winked at Cantwell. Dudley tweaked Whiskey Bill.

"Are the refreshments to your liking, Captain?"

"Yes, Captain."

"I thought you might appear at the grand jury. The Watanabe job was your overall command."

"My testimony would have proved redundant. You were the lead investigator."

"Yes, but I thought you might have felt compelled to present an alternative solution."

"Your solution was expedient and stunningly crafted—if speciously reasoned and fallacious in your presumption of guilt."

Dudley laughed. "Aaahh, there's our impasse."

Cantwell coughed. "You boys quell your differences. We're five good Catholic men here to get shit-faced."

Hayes said, "Hear! Hear!"

Coughlin said, "Let the Japs kill the Japs with impunity, then fry the Jap who killed the Japs in the first place."

Cantwell said, "Dud's spoiling for a tiff. The Mexican sun's broiling that grand brain of his."

Dudley lit a cigarette. "Mexico's an opportunity in search of a solution, Your Eminence. On that note, I should add that Father Coughlin's friend Salvador Abascal did me quite the favor recently."

Coughlin said, "Salvador's quite the lad. An honorary mick, that one. I'll set up a feed the next time I'm in T.J."

Nuns wheeled in a steam tray. Dinner is served. It was god-awful corned beef and cabbage. It smelled like canned dog food.

The clerics dug in. Dudley cracked a window. Cabbage fumes dispersed.

Parker flashed the *malocchio.* He was half-tanked. Dudley evil-eyed him back. Parker blinked first.

Frat-boy antics. Such cheap diversion. Wholly indecorous and undignified.

Joan Conville wisped by. Dudley caught her musk and savored it. She crashed his dreams most nights.

Bill Parker entraps young women. It's one per month now. His patronage carries a price. It creates exploitable rage.

Joe Hayes ignored his food. He checked his watch once per second. Monsignor Joe possessed family money. He kept a beachfront apartment. He held all-male retreats there.

Hayes stood up and murmured good-byes. The gang waved and laced back to their grub. Dudley ticked off thirty seconds and excused himself.

He walked outside. He caught Hayes in the rectory lot. Family money. Such a smart roadster. Wire wheels and red leather seats.

The engine throbbed. Hayes looked up and fluttered. Dudley reached in and cut back the key. The engine coughed and died.

“Hot date, Monsignor?”

“I don’t care for your tone, Dud.”

“Where’s Tommy Glennon, Monsignor? I won’t comment on your relationship, but I do need to see him.”

Hayes wore driving gloves and a puce muffler. They clashed with his penguin suit.

“Tommy comes and goes as he pleases. I’m his confessor, not his nursemaid. I haven’t seen him since he left San Quentin.”

Blunt lies. This sacrosanct fairy. Not some thug you rubber-hose.

“You’re Bill Parker and my Claire’s confessor, as well. I’d pay good money to hear their confessions.”

Hayes smoothed his muffler. His clan assimilated. He left his brogue in Galway, 1919.

“I’m your confessor, to boot. You surely have much to tell me, if Bill Parker is to be believed.”

“I’m beyond sin, Monsignor. I was killing Black-and-Tans when you were in the seminary. I’m bucking for Pope Pius’ job. Do you think the Vatican Council will grant me a dispensation to fuck women?”

Hayes laughed. “Check the rightist mailing lists. Tommy’s quite the avid reader. You might get a line on him that way.”

Dudley flicked the key. The engine purred.

Hayes donned a tweed cap. “‘Pride goeth before a fall,’ Dudley. Not everyone fears you. Men like you tend to trip and fall in the shit.”

35

(LOS ANGELES, 9:30 P.M., 1/26/42)

Joan walked home. She felt dream-smacked and wispy.

She cut west on 1st Street. She crossed Bunker Hill and bypassed Belmont High. She caught wisps of Hideo Ashida. He ran track at Belmont. Gold dust wisped by.

She floated. She drank two terp vials back at the lab. It was blackout dark and cool-evening still.

Faces popped here and there. She saw Dudley Smith and Bill Parker. Terp had that effect. It unlocked doors and let you peek in.

Joan cut north on Carondelet. Her courtyard was blackout black/shades drawn/we do our part. She got out her keys. She heard, "Hello, lass."

She dropped her purse. He caught it and stood up. He'd camped out on her steps and popped up in the dark.

Tall. The trim-cut Army uniform. The cross-draw .45.

Joan mimicked his brogue. "'Lass,' is it? Not 'Miss Conville'? How long have you been in America? Shouldn't you have lost your accent by now?"

"That's a great many questions. I'll note that you didn't ask, 'What are you doing here?' "

Joan unlocked the door and turned on the lights. Dudley followed her in. She tracked his eyes. She saw him catch *this:*

Her framed diplomas. Her mounted shotguns. Her sepia prints of Big Earle. Her microscope and chemistry texts.

"Policeman's daughter, are you? That man in the photographs is wearing a badge."

"You've dimmed the brogue, Captain. And, yes, my father was the game warden of Monroe County, Wisconsin."

Dudley singled out the diplomas. "I admire scientists. I know nothing of science, so I stand naïve and admiring before those of your stripe."

Joan smiled. “Call *me* naïve, Captain. I can’t see you as a supplicant outside of church, and even then I’d have doubts.”

Dudley said, “And I’m sure you doubt the probity of this visit.”

Joan said, “I’ve narrowed it down. You were in the neighborhood, so you thought you’d drop by. You’re monitoring your longtime nemesis, Bill Parker, and you’d like a hand with that task. Lastly, you’d like to screw me, which is a motive that I’ve encountered before.”

Dudley bowed. He mimed Hideo Ashida. The little Jap taught the big Irishman style.

“One drink, then. That’s my motive. Before you ask, I’ll concede that I called the lab for your address.”

Joan walked to the kitchen. She took some deep breaths and poured two double scotches. Her hands shook.

She carried the drinks back. Dudley sat on the couch. He skimmed a typed manuscript. Lee Blanchard leaked it to her. “Beethoven and Luther,” by Katherine Lake.

“Reading up on a rival, are you?”

Joan sat beside Dudley. She tossed Kay’s manuscript on the floor and handed him his drink. She caught his fine French cologne.

“Kay’s deft. She’s mad to attribute meaning, which is a trait that good scientists share.”

They lit cigarettes. They sipped scotch. Her float intensified. A thunderstorm kicked in. A window breeze tossed her hair.

“Your father looks like a bold lad. You used ‘was’ to describe him. Has he left us?”

Joan said, “He died in a fire, back in ’38. I’ve spent some time investigating it. I need to go back and reassess my notes. I’m not giving up.”

Dudley said, “I’ve heard reports of the charred box unearthed in Griffith Park. The genesis of your great interest comes into focus now.”

“Hideo Ashida reports to you. It doesn’t surprise me.”

Dudley went *Tu salud.* “I live to attribute meaning. By your lights, it makes me as one with scientists and unschooled essayists.”

Joan crushed her cigarette. “Should I bluntly note the genesis of *that*? Your dirt-poor childhood in Dublin? The gun money you funneled to then-Monsignor Cantwell? The Ulster Constabulary men you’ve killed?”

Dudley said, “Bill Parker reports to you. It doesn’t surprise me.”

Joan laughed. “Sometimes I don’t want the war to end. If it ends, people will fall back into their old circumspect ways. They won’t talk as much and delight me as much and give me all this crazy drift to attribute meaning to. We’re the end result of our curiosities and the extent to which they’re sated. Has that ever occurred to you?”

Dudley said, “Yes, it has.”

“I’ve begun to see the war as an opportunity. The realization confounds me.”

Dudley said, “I understand.”

“I’m starting to see how far I’ll go to get what I want. It’s exhilarating beyond anything that I’ve ever experienced.”

Dudley said, “I know.”

Joan touched his captain’s bars. She held on his eyes. She said, “I was a Navy lieutenant for ten seconds.”

Dudley smiled. Joan leaned in and kissed him.

—

They kept the light off and the windowpanes up. Rain hit frayed screens and sprayed them. The breeze cooled their sweat.

It rained all night. They made love all night. They talked in between.

Don’t you have a wife and kids somewhere?

In Van Nuys, I think. I forget my daughters’ names sometimes.

Those scars on your back. What happened there?

Some Ulstermen hooked me up to a truck battery. I broke free and killed them.

My sister married a Catholic. It caused a big uproar in Tunnel City, Wisconsin.

Your father. Do you think it was arson?

I lean that way. I’ve sworn vengeance, but the war’s hexed me. I don’t think of my father as much as I should.

In the first war, was he?

He killed Germans in the Ardennes. Not enough, he always said. It looks like history has proved him right there.

I prefer them to the Reds.

We should sic them on each other and bow out. Bill Parker always says that.

Aaah, our friend Bill.

The first time you sleep with someone, all these other people hop in the bed.

Who were you thinking of here?

Bill, Claire what’s-her-name, and Hideo Ashida. Kay Lake, most of all.

Aaah, La Belle Kay. The poor man’s Kirsten Flagstad and Eleanora Duse. I’ve never seen the allure, but my Claire credits her with a wide array of mischief.

I think she’s capable of anything.

36

(LOS ANGELES 12:00 P.M., 1/27/42)

Boomerang.

Ashida trudged the Biltmore lobby. He wore blinders. They scotched *You're a Jap* looks.

He was pissed off. He tried to shuck the FBI. He forged Ray Pinker's name to a file request. He marked it *"Urgent."* All mint-train-heist paper/please expedite.

He stressed a collateral case. Forensic evidence has surfaced. Please expedite ASAP.

He hovered by the stat tube. A reply arrived fast. It read *"Request Denied."*

Ashida trudged up to his floor. He was past mortified. He lived at the Biltmore. Elmer said, "You're shitting in tall cotton, son."

A colored maid dipped by. She sneered at him. The slave class revolts. You're the slant-eyed Jim Crow. That means *You're a Jap.*

Ashida unlocked the door. The lights were off. Somebody flipped a wall switch. Somebody yelled, "Surprise!"

The parlor was SRO. Somebody'd hung red-white-and-blue bunting. People stood and clapped. Somebody hummed *for spacious skies and amber waves of grain.*

People. Dudley, Jack Horrall, an Army major. Dr. Nort, Ray Pinker, Lee Blanchard.

People. Elmer Jackson, Joan Conville, Kay Lake. Note the full bar and buffet. Note the tipsy Mariko and Akira.

They swarmed him, they pumped his hand, they clapped his back. Ashida went slaphappy. They circled up and enclosed him. It all felt rehearsed.

Call-Me-Jack raised a glass. "Our very own enemy alien. A thorn in my side on the Watanabe case, but he delivered in the end."

Some people laughed. Some people cringed. Some people rolled their eyes.

They all raised their goblets and went *L'chaim.*

The major stepped close and held out a Bible. Ashida placed his left hand atop it and raised his right hand high.

"Repeat this, son. 'I, Hideo Ashida, do swear the following oath. I will observe the rules and regulations of the Army Officer Corps and will defend the United States Constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic, at home and abroad.' "

Ashida said the words. The major shook his hand. The crowd whistled and clapped. Dudley stepped up.

He said, "Lieutenant Ashida." He pinned gold bars on his suit coat. People cheered and whistled. Lee Blanchard handed him champagne.

A conga line formed. Dudley steered Ashida through. People shook his hand and tossed congratulations. Dudley swapped looks with Joan Conville. Ashida caught a two-way surge.

Dudley went *Hush.* The hubbub subsided. Dudley picked up a long leather case. He held it out, presentation-style.

The crowd circled tight. Dudley opened the case. It was black velvet–lined. Black velvet cradled a gold bayonet.

It was two feet long. It was blood-guttered and swastika-embossed. Ashida saw faint blade etchings. They might be mint marks.

The crowd ooohed and aaahed. Dudley said, "The spoils of war you'll encounter in Mexico, lad."

Ashida went *eyes right.* Joan went *eyes left.* Their eyes met and held. Ashida trembled. They orbed back to the bayonet.

Dudley said, "It's solid gold."

Ashida said, "I'd like to commemorate the moment. May I take some photographs?"

37

(LOS ANGELES, 2:00 P.M., 1/27/42)

Fucking Hideo Ashida. The brilliant little hump transcends.

Or exploits.

Or steps from shit to clover.

Or sells his soul to Dudley Smith.

The party throbbed. Elmer circulated. Hideo donned his full uniform. Dig the tight-creased trousers and holstered .45.

Jack Horrall was blotto. Hideo's mom and brother, likewise. Lee Blanchard jawed with Doc Layman. Dudley slow-cruised by.

He said, "Are you behaving, lad?"

Elmer said, "You bet I am, boss."

Dudley slow-cruised Big Joan. He caressed her shoulder. Big Joan went *Oooh, baby.*

Elmer caught it. Kay caught it. Elmer caught her rebound catch. He grabbed a bottle of champagne. Kay scoped the grab and pointed straight up. Elmer winked assent. Kay blew a kiss back.

Elmer strolled.

He sidled out of the suite. He hit the corridor and tapped an elevator. He whooshed to the penthouse floor and jogged up to the roof.

Downtown L.A. sparkled. Storm clouds brewed, north and east. The San Gabriels were all snowflake white.

Kay stood by a storage shed. She wore a black beret and a jazzy wool suit. She looked *très* swell.

Elmer walked over. Kay popped the champagne. They bottle-chugged. It was bargain-basement swill. Elmer gulped and tossed a flare.

"Tell true, now. Did you shank Dudley Smith?"

Kay gulped. "Elmer, come *on.*"

"Come on, yourself. You shivved Dot Rothstein."

Kay lit a cigarette. It took three match swipes. Her hands shook that bad.

"All right, I'll bite. Who told you I shanked Dudley?"

Elmer chugged champagne. "I was working the peek in one of Brenda's trick spots. This Commo doctor blabbed on Claire De Haven. He was poking a college-girl pro. He blabbed, and I picked up on what the De Haven bint said about you."

Kay blew smoke rings. They trailed sky-high. Kay pulled herself together, quick.

"You tell true, now. What's with you and Dudley?"

Elmer said, "He's crowding me. I've got a bug up my ass to crowd back."

"Was the doctor Saul Lesnick?"

Elmer relit his cigar. "He's a Fed snitch. His handler's keeping tabs on him, and he needed me to fill in with the camera. He thinks Lesnick's prone to blab to young tail."

Kay mulled it. Elmer heard her gears click. She played classical piano and wrote highbrow hoo-ha. She was the smartest—

"The Fed's right. I met Lesnick during Bill Parker's incursion. He's very susceptible to young women, but Claire's giving me more credit than I deserve. What you're telling me dovetails."

Elmer reset Kay's beret. He set it farther back on her hair and pulled up the stem.

"Can I sleep with you tonight?"

Kay laughed. "No, Brenda would kill me. Sleep with the college girl. It's not like you're not susceptible."

Elmer laughed. "Who are you holding out for?"

"Bill—once he gets free of the redhead."

"She gets around, that one."

Kay said, "Dudley. All roads lead back."

Elmer said, "I'm gathering information. Shit could play out a half dozen ways."

Kay sipped champagne. "Operate the college girl. I'd be curious to know what Dudley and Claire are saying about me."

Elmer said, "You've got the darkest brown eyes I've ever seen. They hide what you're really thinking."

—

Annie Staples had green eyes. She ran 5'10"/150. She induced *looooooow* growls.

They coupled at Brenda's fuck flop. Elmer made it *laaaaast.* They basked naked afterward. Elmer lay supine. Annie sat cross-legged on the sheets.

She sipped Cointreau, neat. Elmer dug in his trousers and plucked his flash roll.

He peeled off ten C-notes. He dropped them in Annie's lap. Annie went google-eyed.

"That can't be a tip. Brenda says we're supposed to take care of you for free. 'You keep Sergeant Jackson well supplied, Citizens. That way, he won't be demanding on those rare nights he sleeps over.' "

Elmer haw-hawed. "You've got Brenda down, and I sure would like to make this a regular thing."

"I see what you're saying. There's something else going on here."

Elmer said, "There's a certain FBI man that I think you know pretty well. He's got you prompting old Doc Lesnick, who I also think you know pretty well."

Annie pointed to the wall peek. "Ed Satterlee's filming us. You've seen the prints. Ed probably screens them at FBI smokers. All these G-men eat popcorn and pull their puds."

Elmer said, "There you go—but I wouldn't say Ed's all that crass."

Annie lit a cigarette. "All right. I'll concede that Ed's got me working Saul. He's a Fed snitch, and I'm snitching him to Ed. Filming us is something else, which I think Ed should pay me for more than he's paying me now."

Elmer jiggled Annie's feet. "Whoa, now. I'm not going to film you or us, and I promise I'll get your film back from Ed, and dissuade him from letting his pals take a look-see."

Annie sighed. "Sergeant Elmer's a sweetie pie. All the girls know that. He never asks for anything perverted, and he always tips."

Elmer blushed. "Does Lesnick always blab so much about his patients?"

"Always. We screw for two minutes, then he talks for two hours."

Elmer zeroed in. He stroked Annie's hair. He dialed their eyes tight.

"I want to know whatever that woman Claire De Haven and her cop boyfriend say about me, a woman named Kay Lake, and possibly a kid named Tommy Glennon. Old Saul spiels to you, and you spiel to me. There's a party in Brentwood tomorrow night. You're going to work old Saul, and I'm hooking you up to a microphone gizmo."

38

(TIJUANA, 2:00 P.M., 1/28/42)

"Hirohito's hellions rape Rabaul and pound pitiful Palau. The jungle-bred Japs parse peril throughout the Pacific. They cornhole the Carolines and savage the Solomon Isles. Ripsnorting Rommel lashes Libya and causes camel caravans to flee. Here in *mucho magnifico* Mexico, a furtive Fifth Column keesters coastal inlets. This quivering question remains—"

Father Coughlin cranked it. Dudley sat in the waiting room. Wall speakers popped the padre's pitch. Glass walls showcased his gesticulations.

XERB Radio. 500,000 watts. It broadcast from Baja to Bangladesh. The whole world heard Charles Coughlin's shit.

Coughlin cranked it. He threw sweat. His microphone melted. He'd promised a "special guest." He said, "You'll love this lad, Dud."

"…as the lachrymose Left bemoans justified Jap roundups, and Mexico's cucumber-cool cognoscenti wonders if Prez Camacho has turned righteously right, as evinced by his land grant to the sizzling Sinarquistas. And, since there's no business like show business, are those ripe rumors about Eleanor Roosevelt and Colored Commissar Paul Robeson true?"

Charging Charlie Coughlin. Uproarious in short doses. T.J. by way of his Detroit parish and the Emerald Isle. Pope Pius pulled his U.S. show. The padre ran rogue and popped south. The Mex right wing loved him.

Dudley tuned him out. He daydreamed. He donned fascist garb and swung the gold bayonet.

He eviscerated priest-killers and nun-rapers. He butchered the British House of Commons. He speared Winston Churchill and noted royals. He decapitated FDR and all the men who'd fucked Claire.

He recalled Joan, two nights back. She tossed her hair just so. She wore gold cuff links. He watched her unfasten them.

He didn't crave gold as gold or money. The bayonet's provenance now bored him. He wanted to know who it killed. Only Herr Hanamaka could tell him that.

Joan was six feet tall. She'd be his height in heels. He wanted to dress her in black SS kit.

Her father burned to death. It might have been arson. He wanted to find the killer and offer him to Joan. She'd wield the gold bayonet.

Father Coughlin went reverential. His voice dropped. There's his trademark pulpit hush.

Dudley watched. Coughlin bowed his head and hosanna'd. A man walked up to him. The two embraced.

Aaay, caramba. Es El Flaco Explosivo. It's the Sleek Man himself.

He dressed pure Greenshirt. He wore jackboots and the coiled-snake armband. He looked through the glass wall and saluted El Dudster. Dudley stood and saluted him back.

Salvador Abascal. Why equivocate? He's Saint Ignatius of Loyola, reborn.

Abascal straddled a hair and grabbed the microphone. He spoke perfect English. He addressed the World Grand Jury and laid down indictments. He demanded true bills penned in blood.

He defamed President *Puta*rco Calles and his Red regime. He ridiculed Lázaro Cárdenas and his "godlessly gutless" reforms. He maimed modernism. It was "perversion perpetrated by the Jewish/atheist/nihilist Left." He quoted the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion.* He critiqued communism as Jew-derived. He lashed Uncle Sam's *imperialista* forays in Latin America. He urged the U.S to embrace the Catholic Church and reform from within.

He spoke straight to Dudley. Their eyes held through the glass.

Abascal cranked it. His spiel borrowed from Huey Long and Gerald L. K. Smith. He pumped his fist à la Conde McGinley and wailed like Klan preachers and *El Führer* himself. His voice rose and fell. He'd studied the soapbox orators of Weimar-era Berlin. He knew when to purr and when to *SHRIEK.*

The Protestant Reformation? "Wholly genocidal" and "the Christian Diaspora." Martin Luther? "A tyrant to rival Josef Stalin." Adolf Hitler? "A great, if unruly, leader, and a beatific beacon to the Western world at large."

Abascal cranked it.

He mourned the martyred Cristeros. He described the Redshirt tortures inflicted upon them. He detailed a Sinarquista death list. The torturers would be slaughtered, one by one.

Dudley walked up to the glass. He placed his hands on it. The glass vibrated. The Sleek Man's words did that.

Abascal walked to the glass. He placed his hands even with Dudley's. The glass seemed to melt.

They were *this* close. Abascal spoke to a ceiling mike. Abascal said *this:*

"I vigorously condemn the British-Protestant imperialism levied against the sovereign Catholic people of Ireland. I call for all-out Irish revolt against the British beast.”

Dudley wept then.

39

(LOS ANGELES, 7:00 P.M., 1/28/42)

Star-studded bash meets field study. Know your foe. Observe her habitat. You're a scientist and a thrill seeker. This could be fun.

She read up on Klemperer and his guests. The *Herald* previewed the party. She had the address and the pedigrees. The piece featured pix and boxed bios. It's a slick study guide.

Pretend it's a frat bash. You're the new girl on campus. Breeze in and blend in. Crash the party.

Joan surveilled the Lake-Blanchard house. It was streamline moderne and just north of the Strip. It was turned out, *c'est bon.*

The house intensified rumors. Ex-boxer Lee took dives and reaped big payoffs. He was a name heavyweight. He raked it in for a spell. The cop rumor mill stamped it true.

Joan sat in her car. Her beat-to-shit '36 Dodge. It still bore New Year's Eve dents. She'd had the cracked windshield replaced.

Kay Lake drove a '41 Packard. It sparkled and gleamed up her driveway.

Joan lit a cigarette. Her thoughts tumbled. She tossed words and characterized the excursion. Words came and went. *Voyeuristic* and *Inconsequential* stuck.

She watched Kay's front door. She wore a green cocktail dress and high heels. She felt too tall/gawky girl at the prom. She went sleeveless. She missed her gold cuff links.

Her thoughts retumbled. They went party-to-party. She jumped back to the Biltmore. New-Captain Smith and new-Lieutenant Ashida. Behold the gold bayonet.

Possible mint marks. A raised swastika. She studies Ashida as he studies her. It's a *holy shit* moment. Ashida photographs the bayonet. It's evidence now.

Joan stretched and kicked off her shoes. Kay Lake stepped out on her porch.

Kay, you're a knockout. That black cashmere dress really works.

Kay walked to the Packard. She pulled out and swung down to the Strip. Joan U-turned and caught her at Doheny.

It's a two-car caravan. It's heading west through Beverly Hills. It's all voyeuristic and inconsequential.

Joan reviewed her study guide. She respooled that *Herald* piece. Sid Hudgens penned it. He laid in a sidebar on Claire De Haven.

Dudley's screwball lover. A "former Las Madrinas Ball debutante." "Scrupulously scrutinized in 1940. State HUAC reads Red Claire the ripe riot act."

Claire looked highborn and haughty. Buzz Meeks dished her at Lyman's. He said she was snooty goods and rode the white horse.

Westbound on Sunset. Two women/two cars/one schoolgirl prank.

Joan lagged back. They passed the Bel-Air gates and UCLA. They swung through Brentwood and cut north on Mandeville Canyon. The terrain went posh rural. Recessed lawns and topiary. These rich folks had spreads.

Spanish haciendas. French châteaux. All-glass-cube moderns. Tall eucalyptus trees and terraced backyards.

Kay cut west. Joan followed her. Kay slowed and braked. There—that's the spot.

A massive adobe. The Sidster's "Maestro Manse." Bright windows and lantern-lit yard. Blackout-reg violations up the ying-yang.

A wide porte cochere. Mexican valets. Loudspeaker music—gloomy and dissonant.

Kay swung in. Joan hung back and let a Coupe de Ville pass her. Kay ditched the Packard. She tossed her keys. A Mexican kid snagged them.

Joan swung in. She stepped into her shoes and out of the car. A little Mex gawked *La Gringa Grande.*

She gave him her keys and a dollar bill. He said, "It's free." She said, "It's a tip."

The porte cochere was spiffed up. Three flagpole banners rotated in sequence and supplied a drape effect. Stars and Stripes/Loyalist Spain/hammer and sickle. Red guardsmen flanked the front door. They looked like winos hired off skid row.

The front door stood open. Joan breezed inside. Kay played whirling dervish. She whooshed and disappeared.

Now, the looks. They're all standard-issue. Who's that? Check the big redhead.

Joan rebuffed looks. She checked the Maestro Manse. Holy moly. Somebody *lives* here.

There's a foyer. It's stark Deco and Nuremberg-sized. Living room, *nein.* It's a Bauhaus beer hall. It's all pillared and bas-reliefed.

Brass statuary. Backlit and floodlit. Beethoven and Wagner, splashed in workers' red. It's all distinctly modernist. Note the Picassos and Mirós on the walls.

Black leather couches and chairs. Silk tapestried carpets. Cut-crystal tables. A forty-foot fireplace. Mounted polar bears standing guard.

Joan just stood there. Guests mingled in clumps. War blah-blah bombarded her.

Hitler was wicked. Stalin was swell. Their recent pact was all rightist ruse. Hear those piano chords? That's Otto's sneak peek. He got V-mail from Shostakovich. It's his new symphony. Nazi tanks attack Leningrad. Listen close—you can tell.

A waiter swooped by. Joan snatched a champagne flute. She imbibed Pernod and absinthe. It went straight to her head.

She stood her ground. She looked around. She matched faces to newspaper pix.

There's the Maestro. That's easy. Talk about tall. He suffered a brain tumor, circa '39. He's got a half-frozen face.

There's Thomas Mann, Kurt Weill, and Bertolt Brecht. There's Lotte Lenya and Arnold Schoenberg.

Sid Hudgens defamed them all. He wrote a private-PD dirt sheet. It covered his poker losses to Jack Horrall.

Lenya was a loin-lapping lezbo. Weill traveled Estrada Chocolato with George Cukor. Mann and Schoenberg ran Red. Brazen Brecht brought the bratwurst to Leni Riefenstahl.

Joan laughed. She snagged another Pernod and absinthe and quaffed it. Short men dipped by and gawked her. She looked left and saw José Iturbi. She looked right and saw Claire De Haven.

She's patrician and near-translucent. She's got hophead eyes. She's Edna St. Vincent Millay, in Dudley Smith's bed.

Claire evinced screechy nerves. She fretted a handkerchief. Her eyes darted. Guests swirled by her. Joan saw her eyes land.

On a small old man. Playing courtier. Perched on a black leather couch.

He sported a Sigmund Freud beard. He held a doctor's bag. He pontificated on overdrive. A big blond girl cleaved close to him. She wore a tweed skirt and a brown crewneck sweater. She wore prep-school saddle shoes.

Joan sidled over. She perched in eavesdrop range. The old man gasbagged. Partygoers dropped by and said hi. They called pops "Saul" and "Dr. Lesnick."

The blonde oozed adoration. She looked parodistic/he talked parodistic.

Joan caught “Comrade Stalin” and “noble Red Army.”

Claire beelined up. Party fools swelled and crushed against her. She pointed to the doctor’s bag. Lesnick nodded. Lesnick went *There, there.*

Joan hovered. Claire fidgeted. A Chinese man pushed his way over. He plopped on the couch. The blonde went *eeek* and spilled half her cocktail.

She blotted her skirt. Lesnick patted her knee. He copped a leg feel and went *Oy vey.* The Chinaman gasbagged.

Joan heard “Hitler”/“Waffen-SS”/“racial science.” Words devolved to jabber. Lesnick said, “Slow down, Lin. I know some French, but I don’t know Chinese.”

Lin laughed. “Two-Gun Davis speak Chinese. Not you. Chinese new master race. They fix your Jew wagon.”

Lesnick laughed. The Davis crack ditzed Joan. The whole exchange warped in weird. Someone told her something pertinent. Some Lyman’s barfly. The exact source eluded her.

Claire leaned in and whispered to Lesnick. Chinaman Lin jabbered on. Joan caught movement, stage right.

Kay Lake hovered. She stood within voyeur range and eyed Lesnick and Claire. Guest swarms covered Joan. Lin’s blather drowned out Lesnick and Claire.

Kay drifted off. Lesnick and Claire stood up. The blonde pouted—Don’t leave me, lover. Lesnick mollified her. He laid out *There, there*’s.

Joan voyeurized. Pops bid deference. Moses parts the Red Sea. Guests step aside and hosanna. Lesnick hooks Claire’s arm and leads her off.

Joan followed them. They walked outside. Pole-fixed lanterns lit the backyard. Guests mingled by a barbecue pit. Negro chefs in Red Army tunics dished out spareribs and slaw.

A guesthouse stood by the back fence. Lesnick led Claire over and in. Joan caught up and peeped a side window. She caught an eye track inside and saw *this:*

Lesnick opens his bag. He pulls out a hypo and jabs a vial of morphine sulfate. Claire rolls up her left sleeve. Lesnick ties a silk-sash tourniquet. Claire shuts her eyes. Lesnick dips a cotton swab in rubbing alcohol. Claire trembles. Lesnick swabs her arm and injects her.

Joan walked off. She got the Sad-as-Shit Blues and traipsed back to the house. The triad concept ditzed her. It applied to chemistry. She applied it right here and right now.

Kay Lake/Dudley Smith/Claire De Haven. Unknown quotients abound. Smith/Parker/Conville. The same applies. Claire thinks Kay knifed Dudley. I’m a Wisconsin farm girl. What am I doing here?

Bombs away:

She caught more war talk. More guests talked it. More guests shouted it. More guests shouted over other guests and poked at their chests.

More spilled drinks. More cigarette-burned furniture and dumped ashtrays. No more sit-down space. More guests tripping and sprawling flat on their ass.

Joan detoured. She traipsed up a back stairway and hit the second floor. She heard a piano. Somebody played soft Chopin or Liszt.

She walked toward it. She stopped short at a doorway. She tucked herself out of sight and peeped.

Kay Lake and the Maestro played four-handed. Kay played the easy parts, the Maestro carried the weight. They sat close together. They wore symphony black. Kay was half the Maestro's size. He had that half-frozen face.

They played to a crescendo. Klemperer's hands trembled. Kay improvised one-handed chords and steadied them.

The piece built to an off-key finish. Klemperer laughed. Kay said, "Please tell me I'm not all that bad."

Klemperer half-slurred. He pushed words and made himself understood.

"Your formal sense exceeds that of most amateurs. You learn very quickly. You interpret passionately, and you will give a successful recital before the end of this decade."

Kay said, "I'm honored." Klemperer banged chords. *Boom, boom, boom.* They were ominous and bluntly repetitive.

"German tanks descend upon Leningrad. Dimitri errs on the side of the descriptive and polemical here. He hates Hitler and Stalin equally, you know."

"You should conduct the American premiere. I'm sure Maestro Toscanini would disagree, but you—"

"But I shall preempt him, dear Katherine. The finished score will reach me in advance. Smuggling plans now proceed. I will put together a vast assembly of film-studio musicians. Exorbitant ticket prices will assure vast sums for European war relief."

Kay said, "Don't price out my Police Department friends."

Klemperer laughed. His whole face contorted.

"I will give your suitor Lee Blanchard a free ticket. That is because I saw him beat the piss out of Irish Eddie Gilroy in 1935. Did you know that I enjoy boxing? I will give your Lee a free ticket, because I fear him."

Kay said, "The fight was fixed, *Liebchen.*"

"Then I hereby retract the offer."

Joan waltzed. She felt overmatched. The Sad-as-Shit Blues reappeared. She traipsed back to the yard. A standing bar was set up. She ordered a double scotch mist.

Orson Welles whizzed by and vamped her on the fly. He tapped his wristwatch and mimed *We'll talk later.*

Joan blinked. The Welles vignette consumed .5 seconds. She pulled up a lawn chair. A young woman materialized.

Frizzy-haired. Saul Lesnick's distaff double. Her white gown trailed the ground. The hemline had been trampled. Joan saw footprints.

"I saw you watching my father. He was talking to that Nazi Chink."

"It's Miss Lesnick, is it?"

"It's Andrea, or 19832040. That was my booking number at Tehachapi. I married a butch while I was inside, so that would have made me Mrs. Cahill. It wasn't a real marriage, but it kept the really bad girls off of me."

The Sad-as-Shit Blues, redefined and—

"I was in for vehicular manslaughter, but my daddy turned FBI snitch, and got me sprung as part of the deal."

Too-real reprised.

"Do you always unburden yourself to total strangers at parties?"

Andrea said, "Yes. That's what parties are for. I always come with my daddy. I keep him company while he writes dubious prescriptions for his numerous hophead patients—especially the ones he has qualms about finking off to the Feds."

"Does your daddy supply his patients with liquid morphine?"

Andrea nicked a cigarette. Joan slid the pack over. Andrea dropped it in her purse.

"He supplies a Communist lady named Claire. She throws the best parties, because she's really rich, and a faux Communist. He tattles her to the Feds, and shares it with me. He showed me a naughty film she was in. She had a scene with an actor named 'Captain Hook.' He had this big you know what, shaped like a dousing rod."

Kay walked by. She bypassed Andrea's floor show. Andrea glared at her and made claws.

"I met that girl at Claire's house. Claire hates her. My daddy says she's a police snitch. I always say it takes one to know one."

Joan killed her drink. "Who was that blond girl sitting with your daddy?"

"That's a whore he's fucking. He fucks her and tattles his patients to her. He showed me a lock of her snatch hair."

The Sad-as-Shit Blues. Revised and regurgitated—

Joan waltzed.

She ducked back inside. She snagged a Pernod and absinthe and downed it. She saw Doc Lesnick write scripts for Orson Welles and the Maestro. She saw the Chinese quack hobknob with a famous clinician. She made him. It was Terry Lux—"Plastic Surgeon to the Stars." Sid Hudgens called him "Herr

Eugenics."

Joan circulated. The weird drinks had her weavy. Lesnick's blond dipped by. Joan followed her outside. The blond ducked behind the guesthouse. Joan crouched behind a banyan tree and peeped her.

The blond pulled off her sweater and blouse. The blond went *Oh shit* and futzed with a microphone taped to her bra.

Bombs away:

Joan walked back to the house. Loudspeakers blared *Tannhäuser*. The ten thousand guests went rouge-cheek opera buffa. Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya bushwhacked her.

They German-jabbered. They dragged her to a book nook. A projector and movie screen were set up. Opera buffa ghouls whistled and cheered.

Shucks. No Claire De Haven, no Captain Hook. Too bad, but:

Barbara Stanwyck fellated Walter Pidgeon. Carole Lombard and Anna May Wong went 69. Fredric March keestered Norma Shearer. A German shepherd scoped the two-bed action. He looked like Rin Tin Tin and wore a foil leprechaun hat.

Bombs away:

Joan waltzed. Lotte Lenya yelped good-bye. Joan pushed through yet more ghoul swarms and made it back outside.

She caught some air. War-chat cliques mingled. She glanced around. She looked for Kay and didn't see her. She felt voyeuristic and inconsequential.

It was cold. The car valets lugged out coil heaters. Joan hit the stand-up bar and ordered black coffee.

It diluted the oddball drinks and revived her. A barside clique formed. Joan heard Spanish and Russian yak-yak.

Saul Lesnick plus two. One man and one woman. They dragged lawn chairs up to a heater and warmed themselves.

Joan pulled up a chair. The woman was dark-haired and wore klutzy glasses. The man was tall and gone to fat. He wore a Spanish Loyalist greatcoat and tuxedo pants.

Supplicants buzzed the clique. Lesnick played emcee. He introduced the woman. Her name was Jean Staley. The man got no intros. His coat did the job. The supplicants fawned. He was "our Meyer" and "Comrade Gelb."

He stood up and embraced his fans. He employed the Spanish-style *abrazo*. Joan saw his burn-scarred hands. She nailed the full gist then.

The fire. *L.A. Times* coverage. Meyer Gelb fronts the Young Socialist Alliance. The Pershing Square orator. His public rants precede the blaze.

Joan pulled her chair close. Doc Lesnick schmoozed Jean Staley. They came off as old pals.

Jean updated him. She said she flogged real estate. She specialized in ritzy sublets. So many rich people traveled.

Lesnick said, "Don't shit a shitter, Jean. You're a carhop. Your house gig's strictly part-time."

Joan tuned them out. She brushed her chair up against Comrade Gelb's. He turned and looked straight at her.

She said, "It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Gelb. I heard you give a speech many years ago. I've never forgotten it."

He appraised her. He did that slow head-to-toe cruise.

"You're very tall. Are you a lesbian volleyball player? It's a shame there's no money in it."

"I was quite young when I heard that speech. High school girls are impressionable, and it was very hot that day. I'll chalk this chance meeting up to disillusionment. You were someone aflame with purpose then, and you're someone bitter now."

Gelb lit a cigarette. He blew smoke too close to her face.

"You've never been to a political rally, and you're not from L.A. Your drawl denotes the northern Midwest. Don't try to jive me, I've been jived by the best."

Joan lit a cigarette. She blew smoke too close to his face.

"It was '33, Comrade. I remember the time vividly. The Griffith Park fire occurred a few days after your speech. My father was a greenskeeper on the golf course. He was lucky to escape with his life."

Gelb twitched and flicked his cigarette. It hit damp grass and fizzled.

Joan said, "It was 'a low, dishonest decade.' That's another line you could have stolen from Auden. 'This storm, this savaging disaster' has got more punch, but the former acknowledges History, which I know you Red shitheels deem essential."

Gelb balled his fists. Joan opened her purse and went for a hat pin.

He spoke soft now. "Who are you?"

She spoke soft now. "I'm a forensic biologist. I work for the Los Angeles Police Department, and I've extensively studied the causal factors of arson and spontaneous wildfires. Which was it in your case? Or did you burn your hands in Spain, where you valiantly battled the fascist beast?"

Gelb bolted. Pure bluff torqued him. He jumped up. He kicked his chair and kicked the coil heater. Joan went *What did I do?* Jean Staley went *Sweetie, that's just Meyer.*

Lesnick chased after Gelb. Joan chased to the bar and chugged scotch. Her pulse dipped to 300-plus.

She walked back to the party proper. The Bauhaus beer hall throbbed. *Parsifal* replaced *Tannhäuser.* That Wagner cat came to work.

Where's Kay? Let's find her. Let's get it over with.

The Maestro Manse ran labyrinthine. Joan cut down hallways and got lost. She traipsed downstairs and upstairs. She hit a third-floor corridor. Steam seeped out a door crack.

She saw Orson Welles and Claire De Haven. They huddled tight and missed her. They wore white cotton robes. They exited a dressing room and entered the steam room. Steam billowed out.

Joan debated it. She plumbed the when-in-Rome concept. She just filleted a Red shitbird. In for a penny, in for—

She stepped into the dressing room. She stripped and hung her clothes beside Claire's. She donned a robe and walked straight to the steam room. The steam was all-the-way hot.

They sat on a top ledge, buck naked. She dropped her robe and sat across from them.

Welles said, "Hi, Red."

Joan said, "Hello, Mr. Welles."

He stage-laughed. It was Falstaff's ho-ho-ho. He said, "This is Claire De Haven."

Joan said, "I'm Joan Conville."

Steam mist covered Claire. Joan squinted. She wanted to see Claire stark nude.

Claire said, "Are you a friend of Otto's, dear?"

Joan gouted sweat. She smelled purged absinthe and scotch.

"I worked at a research lab, up until Pearl Harbor. A doctor I knew there invited me."

Welles said, "Red's a physician. I knew it. Hey, Red—write me a script for pharmaceutical cocaine. I need to curb my appetite and lose weight."

Joan laughed. "You look fine, Mr. Welles."

"Orson, please."

"We're fishing for your occupation, dear. What you currently do for a living."

Catch this, dear. "I work for the L.A. Police Department. I'm a biologist."

Welles said, "Red's a brain. I knew it."

Claire toweled off. Joan caught a look. Her rib cage showed. Her breasts flared unevenly. Her legs were too thin. She was all translucence and veins.

"I know people there. Do the names Hideo Ashida, William Parker, Dudley Smith, and Katherine Lake ring any bells with you?"

A steam vent clicked off. The haze dissipated. Everybody caught looks.

"I work with Dr. Ashida, so I know him rather well. I know of Captain

Parker and Sergeant Smith, but I haven't met them. I don't know Miss Lake at all."

Welles said, "Smith's Claire's new flame. They're shacked up in Mexico now. He's an Irish hothead. He'd shoot me if he knew I'd seen Claire in the buff."

Claire caressed Welles. She ran a hand between his legs. Welles bit his lips and stifled a gasp. Claire eyed Joan throughout.

"Be careful of Dr. Ashida, dear. He's duplicitous and unmanly."

The steam vent kicked back on. The peep show clicked off. Welles coughed out vapors.

"Hey, I'm feeling ignored here."

Joan said, "You'll never be ignored, Orson."

"Are you kidding? In *this* town?"

Claire said, "Orson's set to tour Latin America. Our faux-left president has him eating out of the palm of his hand. It's a cultural mission. Orson's been told to brownnose fascist despots to shore up the Allied cause."

Welles mock-whispered, "This from the lady shacked with a cop who gets his kicks beating up Negroes."

Claire caressed Welles. He moaned and bit his lips. Claire full-on grabbed him. She eyed Joan throughout.

Joan stood up and put her robe on. Welles said, "So long, Red. See you in church."

Claire said, "Are you a police informant, Joan? Did Kay Lake recruit you when I got wise to her?"

Joan stepped outside. She went light-headed and hugged the wall. She stepped into the dressing room and dressed in two seconds flat.

Her pulse dipped crazy high and low. She walked downstairs and got lost. She caught *Lohengrin* blare and cut down a side hallway. She ran straight into Kay Lake.

Kay said, "Isn't this party the most?"

—

They two-car'd back to the Strip. Kay trailed Joan this time. Dave's Blue Room stayed open late. They rendezvoused there. They noshed steak sandwiches and quaffed gin fizzes.

Joan kept mum per Dudley and Claire. Meyer Gelb, likewise. They wolfed their food. They juiced. Andrea Lesnick had nicked Joan's cigarettes. She smoked out of Kay's pack.

A barman whipped up refills. Brenda A. and Elmer J. owned a house percentage. Kay dined and boozed gratis. They dished the dish and unfurled the hot ticker tape.

Kay said, “I’m wondering what you know that I don’t.”

Joan said, “I credit everything I hear—because I’m the new girl in town, and I haven’t developed a knack for discernment.”

“Run one by me. I’ll confirm or refute.”

“The Fed probe’s a shuck. J. Edgar Hoover’s a secret fairy. He goes for beefcake types like Ed Satterlee, and they both get their real jollies entrapping Reds.”

Kay lit a cigarette. “Don’t stop there.”

Joan played kamikaze. Her drift featured Dudley and Hideo Ashida.

“The Watanabe job’s a frame. The Werewolf looked convenient, so they nailed him. I’ll quote your chum Lee Blanchard. ‘The PD was running a fever on Pearl Harbor and the internment, so Jack Horrall told the boys to come up with a Jap-kills-Japs solve.’ ”

Kay whistled and went *woo-woo.* She said, “Here’s one you don’t know, because Jack H. can hold his mud, and it concerns you. Are you listening?”

Joan said, “Give.”

Kay said, “Jack dates Brenda once a week, at her place. It goes back to when Brenda was a line girl. She’s his confidante, and he tells her everything. The dish is he goes for you, and he wants you to run the lab and the whole Scientific Division. Ray Pinker’s taking a teaching post at Cal Tech in ’44. Mind your p’s and q’s, and the job’s yours. You’ll be the highest-ranking woman on the PD, and you’ll be sworn in as a full-boat police officer. Are you ready? You’ll attend the Academy and come out a captain.”

The room rolled cockeyed. Joan went breathless. Obscure psalms passed through—

Kay pushed her water glass over. Joan took big gulps.

“He likes my legs. I know that.”

“He told Brenda they go on forever.”

“I’m better qualified than that.”

“Jack’s soft on odd people. It’s an endearing trait for a crooked police chief.”

“I saw that with Hideo Ashida.”

Kay said, “Hideo’s a twisted little pansy. He framed the Werewolf to get next to Dudley Smith. They put Bill Parker in the middle, and devastated him.”

Joan said, “He was devastated, and he did nothing. Bill put his career and the PD’s reputation before an innocent man’s life, and what will it do to his soul when Shudo goes to the gas chamber?”

Kay crossed herself. She formed the protty cross. She’s a prairie Lutheran.

“I know. *Es la verdad, muchacha.*”

Joan squeezed Kay's hands. "So, who tells him? Who holds him when he's terrified and the world veers away from him? Who tells him that certain principles supersede his idiotic ambition?"

Kay laced up their fingers. "You're saying, 'Who gets him?' "

"Yes, I am."

"There's something that Lee used to tell his opponents, before the first-round bell."

"Which was?"

" 'Luck, short of winning.' "

—

Joan drove home. She kept saying it. Captain J. W. Conville, Los Angeles PD.

She kept seeing it. The blue uniform. The silver bars. The rank parity with Dudley and Bill.

Two years from now. 1944. The war might well be over. America would win. She'd be twenty-nine then.

Joan pulled up to her courtyard. A prowl car was parked right in front of her. The driver's window was down.

She walked over and looked in. Bill Parker was passed out in the front seat. A photograph was taped to the dashboard. It was sun-yellowed and bleached.

Winter, '38. Bowler, Wisconsin. Big Earle Conville, shutterbug.

She's sitting on a split-rail fence. She's wearing a plaid shirt, jodhpurs, and lace-up boots. Her shotgun's there in the frame.

Joan looked at Parker. She squared up his glasses and kissed the top of his head. He can't weigh much. He's not tall. He's cumbersome at worst.

She pulled him out of the car and slung him over one shoulder. His gun belt bumped her. She tottered on her stupid high heels.

She lugged him inside her bungalow and laid him down on the bed. She unhooked his gun belt and took off his shoes.

A fresh rainstorm hit. She closed windows and kicked off her shoes. She sat at her desk and crossed herself like Kay did. She opened her lab notebook and wrote *this:*

"For better or worse, I am as one with this man."

40

(LOS ANGELES, 6:00 A.M., 1/29/42)

He came in early. He locked the door. He had the lab free and clear.

He developed photo prints. He enhanced his snapshots of Dudley's bayonet. He close-up shot his gold bar and microphotographed them both. Eureka. The mint marks matched.

Ashida clamped two photo slides and prepped his two-lens microscope. He'd prepared for this. He read gold textbooks and monographs. He gained metallurgical knowledge. He studied forge componentry and learned how gold spun and knit.

The *L.A. Times* supplied facts. Gold-heist sidebars laid out mining data. The stolen bars were forged from one Alaskan lode. He bet on knit bonds identically fused.

Dudley knew nothing of the gold heist and subsequent fire. He determined that at his swearing-in bash. The bayonet was stashed in Kyoho Hanamaka's stash hole. It was the fetishistic apex of his Red/fascist cache.

Ashida dialed the two lenses. They maximum-magnified. He studied knit lines and melt marks and noted flaw patterns. He sifted them through his new knowledge. He concluded *this:*

His bar and Dudley's bayonet. Separate-source items. They comprise a perfect match. They're both gold-heist contraband.

Perfect symmetry. Dudley Smith. All roads intersect.

Ashida heard key-in-lock sounds. Ray Pinker opened the door. He said, "Hello, Lieutenant." He shuffled his feet. He looked mortified.

Ashida said, "Is something wrong, sir?"

Pinker said, "I'm what's wrong. I'm short on lawyer money, so I back-doored you. The Feds have got me cornholed, so I sold the plans for your photo device to the Mexican Staties. A Baja officer named Juan Pimentel brokered the sale."

Ashida sighed. "You didn't have to do that. I'll be stationed in Ensenada. If the Staties require assistance, I'll be happy to provide it."

Pinker sighed. "God bless you, Hideo. And, before you say it, I'll concede that I'm a shitheel. And, before you ask, I'll kick back half the gelt."

Joan Conville walked in. She sidestepped Pinker and Ashida. Pinker skulked back out the door. He dragged his feet. He looked hangdog.

Joan stood at Ashida's desk. She looked in his microscope and adjusted the right- and left-side eyepieces. She dialed tight and saw the two photo blowups. She glimpsed the gold bar that he'd hid from her.

Ashida shut his eyes. He shut out Reckless Girl and Cunning Girl. He braced for her voice.

She said, "Well?"

Ashida opened his eyes. Reckless Girl and Cunning Girl stared him down. *Shameless* Girl. He saw suck marks on her neck.

"We both want the gold. You've withheld from me. That might be a good place to start."

He stammered. His hands twitched. He fought back chills and nausea. He laid out what he'd withheld.

Joan said, "Half the gold's mine. Don't trifle with me. I'll ruin you with Dudley Smith if you do."

41

(LOS ANGELES, 11:00 A.M., 1/29/42)

Annie was *gooooooood.* She laid on the gee-whiz. Her tell-me-more, sweetie? The cream de la cream.

Elmer adjusted his headphones. The wire gizmo covered his desk. He kicked his chair back and put his feet up.

The Vice squadroom was yawnsville. Elmer's cubicle cocooned him. He heard party sounds and extraneous voices. Annie laid dat voodoo on old Saul.

She said, "That was Red Claire you were talking to, right? I'll tell you this. She looks like a hophead. I know from hopheads, 'cause my kid brother's one."

Old Saul said, "I'll credit Claire with a certain courage. She took that Parker and Lake pogrom that I told you about in her stride. Did I tell you that she converted to Catholicism a while back? It softened her regard for Parker, I'm afraid. They attend the same church and confess their specious woes to the same priest. I met the man at one of Claire's tedious mixers. He impressed me as a fruitcake."

Go, Annie, go! You gots me all voyeurizized!

Old Saul hacking-coughed. It fritzed up Elmer's headphones. He said, "… and she's prone to grandiose whim. To wit—this brutal cop-beast she's shtupping. Her soul veers right as she poses left, and she thinks I don't notice. To wit—she critiques my friendship with the esteemed racial scientist Lin Chung, who's more politically savvy than ten Claire De Havens at their dilettante best."

Annie lobbed a soft one. Gee-whiz meets sugar pie. "Racial science. It's the same thing as 'eugenics,' right?"

Old Saul harrumphed. "Yes, and in that regard, I must concede that Hitler really does stand as the vanguard of a new world order. Who can fail to applaud his stand on euthanasia and the sterilization of mental misfits? Are we seriously to believe these idiot claims that he's slaughtering Jews en masse? I pose that question as an informed Jew myself, and I'll go on to add that all enlightened people must be ready to accommodate Hitler, should he win the war."

Annie said, “Gee, Saul. You’ve really given this some serious thought.”

Elmer haw-hawed. Go, Annie! Skewer that bug-fucker!

Old Saul said, “Claire accedes to none of this, of course. She accedes to her cop-brute lover and passively condones his horrid beliefs, but she can’t comprehend the simple truth as far as Hitler is concerned.”

Party noise escalated. Elmer heard strange music. Annie came through, skunked.

“Welles…oh, dear…he’s put on weight.”

Old Saul said, “Orson was coddled in his crib and improperly toilet-trained. He wet his bed into his teens and still sucks his thumb when nobody’s looking. He eats too much, drinks too much, fucks too much, and sniffs too much cocaine. He’s a sucker for flattery and a shill for the OIACC—and every other acronym shuck that FDR’s ever dreamed up. Claire’s been known to orally copulate him in steam rooms—”

Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle popped in the door. They looked hot-fevered. Elmer dumped his headphones.

Mike said, “There’s a callout. We’ve got three down at 46th and Central. Thad Brown wants you there.”

—

It was niggertown. It was Code 3, lights and siren. Jack Horrall decreed a hot rush.

Eight vehicles rolled. Lab car/foto car/morgue vans. Newton Station sleds ran escort.

Thad Brown ran the pole car. Breuning and Carlisle dogged him. Elmer bumper-locked them. Sirens blared god-awful loud.

It was one fucking big cop armada. It rolled eastbound and south. It magnetized street fools. They bug-eyed the white man’s hurried-up shit.

Call-Me-Jack was due later. He told Thad to tight-seal the location. It can’t be some triple shine killing. Shine killings drew zero heat.

Cop cars made like bumper cars. They siren-blared and snout-bashed civilian cars out of the way. The caravan strafed the jazz-club strip. Elmer gassed on the marquees.

Club Zamboanga, Port Afrique, Club Alabam. Pasteboard music clefs two stories high. Club Zombie, Ivy’s Chicken Shack, Mumar’s Mosque #3. The Church of the Living Dead and Congregation of the Congo. Rae’s Rugburn Room—*the* darktown dyke den.

There’s 46th. It’s a sharp left turn. Newton blues have got the crib cordoned off.

It’s a two-story backhouse. It’s dilapidated. The in-front house looks gutted. Note the surrounding crabgrass and discarded short dogs.

The caravan screeched up and braked all in sync. Fenders smashed and locked eight in a row. The blues stepped aside. Plainclothesmen hauled ass straight over and in.

Elmer elbowed up to the front. He got there first. He saw *this:*

It’s some jazz fiend/dope fiend/right-wing-geek klub*haus.* There’s two pool tables. There’s ratty furniture. There’s a terp still. There’s a dry bar stocked with Mex mescal and tequila.

There’s a phonograph. There’s a sax, trombone, and trumpet dumped on a chair. There’s smut mags piled beside them. There’s Hitler pix taped to the walls. There’s Sinarquista flags interspersed.

Thad Brown ran in. Breuning and Carlisle crowded up. It got real hushed inside and real noisy out.

Sirens whooped and cut off. Car doors slammed. Doc Layman ran in. Hideo Ashida and Joan Conville followed. Everybody eyeballed the death crib. Everybody cased the stiffs.

Three dead men. All clothed. Perched upright on one couch. They’ve got upraised heads and wide open mouths. They’re sucking in last gasps of breath.

A low-life Mex.

Officer George Kapek.

Officer Wendell Rice.

42

(ENSENADA, 12:30 P.M., 1/29/42)

Dudley said adios. Long-distance fuzz skunked the call. He got the gist but no context.

Mike called from the Club Alabam. There's three dead in some coontown shithole. Two Alien Squad humps and a Mex rumdum. It might be homicide. It might be terp ODs. Thad Brown's got the command.

Thad formed a crash squad. Mike and Dick from Homicide. Hideo and Joan from the lab. Lee Blanchard and Elmer Jackson from the Alien Squad.

Blanchard was lackluster. Jackson was meddlesome. Elmer's proximity troubled him. It recalled Chinatown, New Year's Eve.

The botched stakeout. Tommy Glennon escapes. He forms a posse. Mike and Dick suit up. Ditto Jackson. Ditto dead cops Kapek and Rice. Add on Catbox Cal Lunceford.

Eddie Leng is snuffed that night. Proximity as destiny. Design within the chaotic.

Dudley spun his desk chair. He orbited his office and applied the brakes. He brooded up the coontown job. Two options appeared.

Possible ODs. That meant cover-up. Dope-fiend cops just would not do. Possible homicide. That meant showcase. It's the PD's first double cop killing. Pull out the stops. Whitewash the victims. Enact justice at all costs.

Sound recent and familiar? It should.

The Watanabe job consumed December. It's late January now. Two-Gun Davis remains volatile and perhaps talkative. He should choose a propitious moment and inform Jack Horrall.

Dudley spun a reorbit. It cleared his head. Juan Pimentel walked in. He clicked his heels and saluted. He placed a grand object on the desk.

Hideo Ashida's photo device. A contraption suffused with true dash.

"You've succeeded in delighting me, Lieutenant. Dr. Ashida's invention has served to revolutionize policework in Los Angeles."

Pimentel reclicked his heels. "Mr. Ray Pinker sold the plans to Captain Vasquez-Cruz, who promptly had the design duplicated. He has already installed three devices at the Tijuana border. We can now photograph license plates as vehicles enter and leave our country."

Dudley pondered the sale. One conclusion popped. Pinker sold the plans covertly. Hideo would have told him otherwise.

"I've had a grand brainstorm, Lieutenant. I would like you to place one of these alongside Kyoho Hanamaka's carport. Stretch the trip wire across the entire circumference and affix three wide-angle lenses. I'm going up there now. I'll bring you back a dimensional drawing."

Pimentel clicked his heels. He clicked elegantly and often. Heel clicks punctuated his dutiful young life.

"A question before you go, Lieutenant."

"Sir?"

"I would call your dislike and distrust of Captain Vasquez-Cruz plainly apparent. Am I correct here?"

Pimentel clicked. "Sir, you are vastly correct."

—

He brought the bayonet. He undressed in the hidey-hole and donned Nazi black. The gold shaft caught lamplight and threw his image back. He rewrote History a tad.

The Blitz. Evil London burns. Irish Republicans light bonfires to guide Luftwaffe bombers. He's there to watch.

Salvy Abascal joins him. They're dressed in Sinarquista green. Joan Conville's their consort. She's green-clad. She wears her Scottish clan's tartan sash.

They've had one night together. He's learned a few things. The scientist-empiricist shares his mystical streak. She's as death-derived as he is. He told her of the Wolf he met on the British moors. She did not doubt the Wolf's occasional visitations. He touched her clothing while she slept. He became the Wolf chasing her scent.

She's as man-bound and father-bound as he's bound to his mother and women. She rages to kill the man who burned her father dead. She's told him some things. He's made a few queries. He shares her suspicions of mad inventor Mitchell Kupp.

Burned Londoners run toward them. They resemble Joan's father felled by scorched trees. Joan wields the gold bayonet. It's both merciful and brutally just.

She's his sister-lover now. Her conduit-to-Bill Parker status may or may not play out. He will help her take a man's life. Salvy Abascal saved his own life. He's Joan's half brother and his own full one. He demands respect and commands scrutiny.

Salvy killed Victor Trejo Caiz. It was an act performed with bold premeditation. They spoke briefly after Father Coughlin's broadcast. Their touchstone is shared ideology. Salvy wants something from him. This seductive dimension will soon be revealed. There's a Sinarquista rally in Ensenada tonight.

Lover-sisters/brothers/daughters/sons—

Beth is due for a visit. He'll pair her off with Joan Klein and commend them to mischief. Young Joan pilfers from stores. She's pilfered bland SIS memos and cabled them to her "Comrades" in New York. She asked him to teach her how to shoot a gun. They had a father-daughter jaunt on the beach.

Young Joan blasted driftwood with his .45. A sidearm vanished from the armory the next day.

Young Joan to Young Juan. The snappy heel clicker and pay phone–tap whiz. The tireless surveiller of this selfsame hideaway.

He read Juan Pimentel's personnel file. He noted Class A fitness reports and a pithy biographical aside.

Pimentel resigned a war college posting. He defamed President Cárdenas' anti-Church policies. Lieutenant Juan is devoutly Catholic and pro-Sinarquista.

Salvy will address a large crowd tonight. *El Flaco Explosivo* will surely explode.

Dudley swung the gold bayonet.

Where's Kyoho Hanamaka?

A nice heart attack would rectify the Two-Gun Davis glitch.

Joan must miss him. He'll send the Wolf by to sleep at the foot of her bed.

—

Young Joan showed off her pin map. The Russian campaign wowed her. Her people hailed from that neck of the woods.

They sat on Dudley's terrace. Claire was off at afternoon Mass. Young Joan had nicked an atlas and tore out the Russian spread. She nicked the pins from the SIS squadroom.

Little swastikas for the Nazis. Hammer and sickles for the martyred USSR.

A grand child. Perhaps psychopathic. Only time would tell.

She said, "The green swastikas represent armored battalions. The blue ones represent troop movements, and the penciled-in *X*s represent the Germans' retreat from Moscow. The red pins show the Home Guard dug in."

"You get your war news from the radio, do you?"

"XERB. I know some Spanish now, but I base my troop movements on the English-language broadcasts."

Dudley lit a cigarette. Young Joan nicked one just to nick one. She didn't smoke.

"No more stealing memorandums to impress your chums back home. Keep the gun you stole, but don't steal any others. Since you know damn well how softhearted I am, I'm offering you a job as a consolation prize."

Young Joan said, "That sounds intriguing."

She mimicked Claire's inflections. She invaded Claire's closets and tried on her clothes. He'd caught her at it.

"Your Aunt Claire finds Captain Vasquez-Cruz suspicious, and I must say I agree. I've requisitioned a great many police files, and I don't have time to go through them. I'd like you to. Study them and look for pictures and notations pertaining to the captain. I'll pay you, of course."

Young Joan said, "You're a pal, Uncle Dud."

They shook hands on the deal. She pinned a green swastika to his necktie. Dudley roared.

—

Avenida Ruiz was blocked off and torch-lit. Blackshirt Staties and Greenshirt Sinarquistas mingled. The crowd numbered some six hundred. Dudley stood at the back.

He wore his Class A uniform. He retained the swastika tiepin for giggles and grins. He stood near men with coiled-snake armbands and women in green twill frocks.

He caught a nap at the hotel. A dream placed him in the Maestro Manse, among gargoyles. Beethoven and Wagner busts sprang to life.

A long-distance call roused him. Mike Breuning reports:

The darktown crib remains chaotic. It's still undetermined—homicide or terp ODs. Mike braced Thad Brown on Elmer Jackson. Thad said, "He worked the Alien Squad with Kapek and Rice. I want him in on this."

The call disconnected. Something vague tweaked him. He'd heard of the death crib. He can't recall where or when.

Cheers went up. Salvy Abascal took the stage. It was built from tin cans and lashed-up orange crates.

El Flaco held a microphone. It was hooked up to a '32 Ford. A Statie sergeant ran the engine and sparked the battery. *Flaco* let loose.

He spoke Spanish. The microphone cut in and out. Dudley quick-translated and still lost bursts of text. The shrieking crowd further blitzed comprehension. Nobody heard a thing the man said.

Dudley gave up sound for sight. Salvy gave the crowd Weimar Berlin, reborn. His gestures urged them to listen to their one united voice and imagine what it was saying. He swayed on rickety orange crates and held a dead microphone. He spoke the truth in the crowd's one voice.

It extended. It remained vitalist. Salvy swayed and made the crowd speak in his voice. Dudley supplied his own words. He began with the Book of Revelation and worked backward. Salvy stopped and he stopped with *this:*

God gave Noah the rainbow sign. No more water—the fire next time.

43

(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 P.M., 1/29/42)

They stood nine hours in. Thad Brown ran the Crash Squad. Nobody sleeps till I give the word.

Newsmen swarmed outside. Brown nixed them inside. It's the PD's first double cop snuff. That's the urgent gist and newsprint hook here.

Arc lights glared outside. Cops and lab folk swarmed inside. Doc Layman left to testify in court. He was Crash Squad–adjunct. Hideo Ashida ran the lab slot. Joan backed him up.

Newton blues roped off 46th Street. They cordoned Central to the west and Hooper to the east. Newsmen hopped backyard fences and got though regardless. Radio scribes spieled right there in the yard. Said yard was trampled past all forensic hope.

Joan stepped outside. She gobbled aspirin and dosed a solvent-fume headache. Breuning and Carlisle ducked past her. They ran in and out. Ashida and Brown stuck inside. Lee Blanchard was canvassing. Elmer Jackson booked off somewhere. He'd redubbed the "death crib" the "klub*haus.*" The news fools lapped it up.

Joan lit a cigarette. Arc light glare torqued her headache. She caught newshound jabber. Dumb comments overlapped.

It's a shine caper. Coons off the jazz strip. You've got a skirt and a Jap on the job. The Dudster and Whiskey Bill should have a piece of this. They scored good on them Watanabe snuffs.

"The Skirt and the Jap." The news ghouls loved it. She ran her own Skirt-and-Jap riff. The punch line reverb'd.

Half the gold's mine. Don't trifle with me. I'll ruin you with Dudley Smith if you do.

Ashida trembled then. She acted then. She typed a note to the Santa Barbara Sheriff's. She forged Ray Pinker's signature and demanded *this:*

"Photostat the gold-heist file. Do it now. Priority expedite."

Then, this callout. Then, all this grief.

They'd worked nine straight hours. She dusted touch-and-grab surfaces and got all smudges and smears. She elimination-printed all the blues and detectives. Ashida photographed the klub*haus* interior. The bodies remained on the couch. The Mex remained un-ID'd.

She combed a two-block radius. She jotted vehicle descriptions and plate numbers. She brushed up against jazz-club habitués. Negroes and Mexicans with big conks and hairnets. They made faces and coochie-coo'd her. She blew that Indian's foot off for less.

Joan tossed her cigarette. She was hungry. Thad Brown just called Kwan's. He ordered eight pupu platters and four fifths of hooch.

Jumped-up jazz echoed. The Club Zombie and Club Alabam stood forty yards off. A big sedan bucked the west cordon and bumped up on the curb. The driver leaned on the horn. Jack Horrall got out.

The newshounds cheered. A radio man held his mike up to catch the kerfuffle. Call-Me-Jack hopped the gate. He tried to look somber and tanked. He was a huckster. He lived for this.

He held up his hands. He went *Thank you, thank you.* He almost but not quite grinned.

The newsmen simmered down. Call-Me-Jack shook fifty hands in ten seconds. Joan pushed in close. Jack saw her and went *woo-woo!*

He pushed two flat palms down and got instant *ssshhh.* He looked up at God and down at his feet. He tried to look humble and tanked. He looked straight at the newsmen and launched his spiel.

"It's a sad occasion any way you slice it, but we don't know if it's homicide or not. We haven't ID'd the Mex yet, but our two late policemen are Officer Wendell D. Rice, age thirty-four, and Officer George B. Kapek, age thirty-six. Officer Rice came on in '28, and Officer Kapek came on in '30. They are survived by their lovely wives, Mrs. Vera Rice and Mrs. Dorothea Kapek. They've got a whole brood of kids between them, but I'm not sure how many. Our prayers go out to the bereaved families of these two fine young policemen, and to the Mexican's family, if he had one."

The newsmen clap-clapped. Call-Me-Jack relaunched his spiel.

"Here's a tidbit you boys will enjoy. We're reviving the all-league team that solved the baffling Watanabe murders last month, with a few exceptions and one addition. Sergeant Dudley Smith's battling the Fifth Column in Mexico now, but he's sure as you know what here in spirit. We've got Captain Bill Parker to ride herd, Lieutenant Thad Brown to run the show, Sergeants Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle from Homicide, and two close pals of the dead men—Officer Lee Blanchard and Sergeant Elmer Jackson—from the Alien Squad. Big Lee was once a ranked heavyweight contender, so you reporters better be nice to this white man's PD."

Haw-haws rose and fell. Call-Me-Jack did the flat-palms bit.

“Last but not least, we’ve got Sergeant Turner Meeks, detached from Robbery. All you Western-movie fans know Buzz. He’s played in a lot of those oaters they shoot out in the Valley. He never gets the girl, but he always gets the horse. Maybe one day he’ll get lucky.”

The Meeks jive drew laughs. It cued Meeks his own self. He jumped out of the Chief’s sedan and jumped through the gate. That drew more laughs. He saw Joan and jumped straight her way.

He said, “Will you go to Acapulco with me?”

Joan looked down at him. She patted his head. She said, “No, you’re too short.”

That drew the *biiiiiig* laughs. Meeks doubled over. Newsmen pulled their notebooks and wrote up the shtick.

44

(LOS ANGELES, 10:30 P.M., 1/29/42)

Dr. Nort shooed the cops out. They hit the yard and mingled with the press. Sid Hudgens made a liquor-store run and juiced the whole gang.

Breuning and Carlisle dished out stale rumaki. Thad Brown sloshed bourbon in coffee cups. Buzz Meeks snoozed on the grass. Lee Blanchard was off canvassing. Elmer Jackson plain vanished.

Ashida walked back inside and cased the dead men. He'd photographed them at 1:00 p.m. and reshot them at 8:00. They were rigor-locked and lightly livid the first time. They were full stiff now. Blood expanded their ankle and foot tissues. That meant they died sitting down.

Dr. Nort wheeled up an arc light. He strapped a surgeon's lamp around his forehead.

"We're not here to strictly determine cause of death, unless something jumps up and bites us. I'll do the formal autopsies at the morgue. This is a triple the likes of which I've never seen. I'd like to examine them within the context of this equally unique place we have here."

Joan said, "I haven't even begun the inventory."

Ashida said, "You have three men, near-identically posed. That suggests that the killer or killers rearranged their bodies postmortem."

Dr. Nort shook his head. "Yes, to an indeterminate degree. But the first thing that comes to mind for me is that they all appear to have died while struggling for breath, which suggests three men, insensate from the ingestion of narcotics, who died of toxic exsanguination within short intervals of one another."

Joan said, "They would have flailed then, Doctor. There's a certain symmetry in the way they're posed on the couch."

Ashida tugged the Mexican's left biceps. He got no flex and no give.

"The approximate time of death, sir?"

Dr. Nort said, "I took rectal temperatures the moment I got here. I'm calling it 2:00 to 4:00 a.m."

Ashida deployed Man Camera. He panned the couch and framed the three men. He studied their clothes first.

The Mexican wore slit-bottom khakis and black leather oxfords with crepe soles. Plus a white undershirt and striped zoot coat. Crepe-sole oxfords were burglars' shoes.

Rice wore brown wingtips and gray flannel slacks. He wore a cross-draw belt gun on his left hip. Plus a blue sport coat and loud Hawaiian shirt.

Ashida extrapolated. The Man Camera revealed *this:*

No wedding ring on Rice's left-ring finger. An indentation where wedding rings normally sit. Rice was married. Rice removed his ring to hide the fact. Rice was a tomcat.

Kapek wore a green cardigan and navy dungarees. His footwear seemed anomalous. He wore patent-leather pumps.

Ashida extrapolated. The Man Camera revealed *this:*

They were dancing shoes. The klub*haus* adjoined a jazz strip. Officer George B. Kapek was a jitterbug.

Dr. Nort said, "Our Hideo's worked himself into a trance."

Joan said, "It's a study technique. I learned it in grad school."

Ashida stepped back and aimed off the couch. He framed a coffee table and strafed a glass ashtray. It was filled with spent matches and cigarette stubs.

Ashida extrapolated. The Man Camera revealed *this:*

There are more matches than stubs. The ashtray appears freshly wiped.

Ashida said, "I've spotted an inconsistency. We have a freshly washed-out ashtray, filled with cigarette butts. I've counted twenty-four butts and twenty-seven expended matches. That's three more than we have butts for, and we have three potential homicide victims."

Joan examined the ashtray. "I'll extrapolate. The killer wants to remove incriminating evidence, yet retain what I'll call 'forensic normalcy' here in the klub*haus.* He removes the three butts and washes the ashtray. Now, I'll hazard a guess. Our victims, who might not *be* victims, but just inadvertent bunglers, smoked liquid terp in hand-rolled cigarettes. It's the butts themselves that appear anomalous. The killer removed the hand-rolled butts and wiped the ashtray to eliminate all traces of liquid terpin hydrate."

Dr. Nort cracked a smile. Ashida balled his fists. Reckless Girl usurped his thesis.

"There's a terp still here on the premises. We should determine the molecular makeup of the drug that remains in the feeder vats. Dr. Layman can check it against any terpin hydrate he might find in the victims' bloodstreams."

Dr. Nort whistled. He went *Whoa, now.*

"Let's not jump the gun. We don't know for sure that they're victims. And we don't know that smoked terpin hydrate killed them."

Joan approached the couch. She reached down and turned out Wendell Rice's front pants pockets. They were empty. Imperious Girl. Ashida balled his fists.

Dr. Nort said, "You're looking for rolling papers."

Joan nodded. She turned out the Mexican's front pants pockets. They were empty. She turned out George Kapek's front pants pockets. She pulled out a cigarette-paper deck.

Dr. Nort went all gaga. Reckless Girl did that to men.

Ashida rearranged the corpses. He turned out their back pockets and got lint balls and nothing else.

Joan said, "We confiscated a still from that man Don Matsura's apartment. Remember, Dr. Ashida? He committed suicide at the Lincoln Heights Jail."

Dr. Nort shook his head. "We're getting ahead of ourselves. They could have bought terp at any one of the clubs half a block from here. Let's have this discussion after my postmortem."

Ashida leaned over the couch. He worked three across. He grabbed the dead men by the hair and looked in their wide-open mouths. The room light was just right. He saw inflamed lesions.

Dr. Nort leaned down. He adjusted his headband light. He close-up lit the mouth cavities. He stepped back and stretched.

"Precancerous lesions. All three men. Similar levels of inflammation, of a type common to habitual terp smokers."

Thad Brown and Buzz Meeks walked over. They'd huddled up to watch.

Meeks said, "What about maryjane? They spray the crops with chemicals down in Mexico, then the grasshoppers up here got to contend with all kinds of medical grief."

Brown said, "Toss the place, Buzz. Look for maryjane, and tag any contraband you find."

Meeks clumped upstairs. Brown poked around. He had well-known eagle eyes.

He scoped a pile of hate tracts and the Hitler wall pix. He touched the sax and trombone on the chair. He went through phonograph records. He ran his hands under the couch and pulled out a matchbook.

Ashida stepped close. Brown opened the matchbook. Half the matches were gone. They'd been removed left to right.

Brown held the matchbook out. Joan stepped close. Ditto Dr. Nort.

Brown said, "Southpaw. It's something or it's nothing, but it's not a bad elimination lead."

Ashida aimed his Man Camera. He framed the dead men. He close-up shot their hands. He caught your standard size discrepancy.

"They were all right-handed. Their right hands are larger and more muscularly developed."

Dr. Nort said, "Kapek and Rice wore their belt guns on the left. That connotes a right-hander's cross-draw."

Brown checked out the matchbook. Club Zamboanga/yellow-and-black type/a snarling panther motif.

"Blanchard's out canvassing. He's supposed to meet up with Elmer. They'll check the Zamboanga, for sure."

Meeks banged on the upstairs floorboards. He sent up a racket. His voice boomed down.

"No maryjane! Nothing but a whole shitload of disarray!"

Ashida pointed to the ashtray. "I'm positing a fourth man. I understand that it's precipitous, but please indulge me. I'm thinking that he fashioned hand-rolled cigarettes but did not partake."

Dr. Nort shrugged. "All right, I'll play. Maybe it's terp, maybe it's not. It could have been a toxic level of some other inebriant that I'll determine at autopsy."

Joan braced the couch. She leaned close and circled it. She worked three across.

She clamped heads, three across. She studied them. She came up behind the couch. She reverse-angled the process and said, "There's something here."

Ashida leaned in. Dr. Nort and Thad Brown watched. Joan pointed to *this:*

A blood dot below George Kapek's left ear.

Ashida look-see'd. It was less than a puncture/more than a pinprick.

Joan slid man to man. Showy Girl struts and poses. She pointed below Wendell Rice's left ear. The Mexican, likewise. She nailed identical dots. They were less than punctures/more than pinpricks.

Thad Brown said, "Mother dog."

Dr. Nort said, "If he came at them from behind, he had to have been left-handed."

Joan said, "These are in no way killing wounds. They barely penetrate the skin, and they don't correspond to visible veins at all."

Ashida pointed three across. "It could be a coerced ingestion of a lethal substance. The killer persuaded them by the means of a sharp instrument at their necks."

Brown wiped his glasses on his necktie. He put them back on and peered extra close.

"Here's a guess. They were partially debilitated already. That's the only way I can see one man taking out three. And there's no dust on that matchbook, smack in the middle of this shitty little dust hole. That means it was shoved under the chair recently."

Dr. Nort shrugged. "Maybe the killer had accomplices. Maybe we should concede that all of this is suppositional and may have no bearing on the matter at hand."

Joan smiled. "Dr. Nort's being a killjoy, so I'll add that those dots look like icepick markings I've seen in Crim One texts."

Ashida got bristles and chills. Watch this, colleagues. Brilliant Boy shows off.

He pulled down George Kapek's shirt collar. Ditto for the Mexican and Wendell Rice. He laid their necks bare. It revealed *this:*

Single hand-span bruises. All right-handed/all applied from behind. Thumb marks on the left side of their necks. Finger-grab marks on the right.

"I don't know how they died, but he held them steady with his right hand and held the ice pick with his left. A left-hander would favor that hand for such a task."

Joan said, "Single-hand strangulations are very rare. It might have been two men applying force from both the front and the back."

Dr. Nort said, "All right, I concede. Call the Chief, Thad. It's homicide."

45

(LOS ANGELES, 11:00 P.M., 1/29/42)

Local jazzcats made him. They sniffed grief and gave him dat *wiiiiiiiiiiiiide* berth. He magnetized resentment. He percolated fear and hate.

Elmer walked the strip. He felt underdressed. His squarejohn suit clashed with all the full-drape zoots. Lots of cats and kittens, lots of saucy dash. Coloreds, beaners, whites. The Dark Continent jumps tonite!!!

Peace, my dusky brethren. I'm as hopped up as you are. It started New Year's Eve—but it be exploding HERE.

The Sinarquista flag at the klub*haus.* The Sinarquista stencil in Tommy G.'s room. The Sinarquista tattoo on Eddie Leng. The terp still in the klub*haus.* The terp still in Don Matsura's apartment. Matsura's jail "suicide." Matsura's KA'd up with Eddie Leng and Lin Chung. Two Alien Squad hard-ons. Said hard-ons now *muerto.* Don't dis shit read Fifth Column to you?

Elmer loitered at 47th and Central. Kool kats and kittens skunk-eyed him. He caught blare-blasted music. He smelled whorehouse perfume and spattered grease.

Lee Blanchard was due. They had late-nite canvass duty. Elmer loitered and brain-broiled His Big Case.

He blew out of the klub*haus.* He went AWOL. He got this wild bug up his ass. Let's detonate this whole fucker. He drove to his place and got to work.

He called the Vice clerk he braced New Year's Eve. He told him to keep mum and promised him five yards. He said, "You never ran them phone numbers I troubled you with." The clerk pledged *silencio.*

Oooga-booga. Let's blow this klub*haus* job straight to shit.

Elmer studied Tommy G.'s address book. He got Tommy's block-print style down pat. He spiced up the book. He drew swastikas and Sinarquista snakes. He added right-wing thunderbolts. He skimmed phone books and got some choice numbers. PC Bell shot him unlisteds. He forged and spawned chaos then.

Tommy's book ran provocative from jump street. It listed St. Vib's, the

Deutsches Haus, Dudster snitch Huey Cressmeyer. You had unknown cooze Jean Staley and homo priest Joe Hayes. You had the hot-box phone by the *Herald.* You had fourteen Baja pay phones. Now, let's add *this:*

Lin Chung. Low-rent plastic surgeon/dope peddler/Fifth Column shitbird.

Orson Welles. Hotshot actor-director/quasi-Red flotsam/finked-out patient of Dr. Saul Lesnick.

Dr. Saul himself. Red tool/Fed snitch/Annie Staples' fatmouth trick. Headshrink and morph pusher to Claire De Haven.

Wallace N. Jamie. Nosebleed PI/Fletch Bowron confrere/rumored Fed-probe indictee.

He spiced up Huey Cressmeyer's listing. He drew swastikas and coiled snakes beside it. Huey was Tommy's bun boy at Preston. He wrote "Big Dick!!!!!" and drew Cupid's heart and arrow. He printed "T.G. & H.C." inside it. The whole address-book fantasia was some unholy shit.

He drove back to the klub*haus.* The joint was abuzz. Dr. Nort tagged the job Murder One.

He walked upstairs. He planted Tommy's address book under a carpet strip. He hoofed out to meet Blanchard. He got the I'm-fucking-with-Dudley Smith chills.

Elmer loitered. A floor show unfolded upside him. Kolored kats bopped into a hair-process joint. Eight barbers worked the late shift. The kats slipped into chairs and donned hair-suction gizmos. They sat down kinky and stood up straight.

Blanchard showed. They walked the strip and tossed queries. That backhouse on 46th? Who owns it/who rents it/what's the secret story here?

They braced street strollers and ducked into nitespots. They got *Huh?/Beats me/Say what?* They got rebop per Jew landlords raping the black man. They hit jazz joints and rib cribs. They hit liquor stores and pool halls and Minnie Roberts' Casbah. They got more, more, and more of the same.

They witnessed a shiv show at Port Afrique. Two jigs swapped swipes. A he-she whore watched and shrieked. A jazz trio laid down knife-fight riffs. Elmer dug the sax wails that mimicked screams. Blanchard told the barman to call an ambulance.

They ducked out and ducked into Club Zombie. Note the rhinestone-studded walls. The stones depicted the solar system and rocket ships zooming. They were open-cockpit. Spooks with red lightbulb eyes jockeyed them.

Small tables fronted a bandstand. Mixed-race lovebirds spooned. High-yellow girls served drinks. They wore tiger-striped leotards.

Elmer glimpsed Mud-Shark Bill McPherson. The DA hosted two bronze cuties. He saw Elmer and waved. Elmer waved back. Blanchard pulled him up to the bar.

A tall jig tended it. A jumbo conk put him up at six-ten. A wall sign extolled the Baron Samedi cocktail. “One sip leaves you zombified.”

Elmer and Blanchard grabbed stools. The jig ambled up. He once-over’d Blanchard and smirked.

“I saw you fight Andre McCoover. He punked your white ass, but you got the decision. I hope you ain’t here for information on no one near and dear to me.”

Blanchard grabbed the jig’s conk and jammed his face into the bar. The jig flailed and knocked over ashtrays and drinks. Bar patrons scrammed. Elmer snatched the jig’s left hand and bent his fingers back.

“There’s a shitty little backhouse on 46th, just east of Central. We want to know who owns it, who rents it, and who owns the vacant house in front. You got two choices here. Give us something we can work with, or get zombified.”

The jig squirmed. He blubbered and dug for façade. Blanchard smashed his head on the bartop. Nose bones broke audible. Blood burst and pooled.

Elmer said, “We’re listening.”

The jig screeched. Elmer bent his fingers. The jig coughed blood and coughed up *this:*

“Jew landlords own most of them cribs….”

“But not that one.”

“This preacher, Martin Luther Mimms…”

“This back-to-Africa con…”

“Congregation of the Congo—47th, down the strip.”

—

It’s a storefront church. There’s big plate-glass windows. There’s pews from here to Mozambique. It’s lit bright at 1:30 a.m.

The door’s wide open. Some dink artist muraled the walls.

Pygmies spear-hunting lions. Hunchbacked Jews in skullcaps lugging money sacks. L.A. in flames. White folks roasted alive. Colored folks butt-fucking them with hot pokers. A flotilla of back-to-Africa seacraft. The destroyer USS *Negro.* The battleship *Colored Man’s Triumph.* PT 69—replete with colored folk engaged in that selfsame act.

Elmer looked at Blanchard. Blanchard looked at Elmer. They went *Holy shit* in sync.

They bopped in and bopped up to the altar. A colored man and white man counted collection-plate cash.

The colored man was heavyset and cleaved close to fifty. The white man was twenty-three, tops. He was tall and fit. He wore a Navy ensign’s uniform, with flyboy wings. He smoked a corncob pipe.

Elmer badged them. The screwy duo made nice-nice. They dropped their cash count and laid down handshakes. It settled everyone's hash.

The colored man said, "I'm Martin Luther Mimms. You can call me 'Reverend' or 'Rev.' "

The white boy said, "Link Rockwell."

Mimms chided him. "George *Lincoln* Rockwell. Be proud of that. Your namesake freed the slaves."

Rockwell pipe-jabbed the Rev. It came off rehearsed. They worked their salt-and-pepper act.

"A dubious distinction, sir—especially coming from a well-known slave driver like yourself."

Mimms took the cue. "Link thinks I'll reinstate the Dred Scott decision over on African soil. Colored folk as chattel, to do with as I wish. I'll have them excavating gold from secret mines in Zimbabwe. I'll be putting the boots to the best-looking yellows and putting the horns on their men."

Blanchard jiggled a cash plate. "Business is good. Huh, Rev?"

Mimms cued Rockwell. "This is Officer Lee Blanchard. He was once billed as 'the Southland's good but not great white hope.' "

Rockwell tapped his pipe on the pulpit. "You should fight Joe Louis, Officer Blanchard. A white man deserves a shot at the crown."

Elmer harrumphed. "We had some questions, Rev."

Mimms grinned. "I'll be pleased to answer them, in my sanctum sanctorum. If you'll follow me."

Elmer and Blanchard swapped looks. Link Rockwell resumed his cash count. Mimms played pontiff and strode on ahead. Elmer gassed on his act. He sucker punched the white man and called all the shots.

Mimms waked to a side door and swung it open. Elmer and Blanchard caught up. The room was knotty pine–paneled. The walls were foto-festooned. The Rev's desk was eight feet long and all knickknacked. It featured big-dick crocodiles and pygmy-goddess statuettes.

Mimms said, "My people will be knee-deep in zebra shit by this time next year. The USS *Negro* will be sailing about then. We've got to be watchful, though. Hitler's U-boats pervade the Atlantic, and are ever alert to torpedo Allied shipping. Let me state for the police record that I've got no beef with the *Führer,* and that I admire his subjugation of the Jews, the colored man's traditional foe."

Blanchard cleared his throat. "We appreciate your hospitality, daddy—but there's still some questions we've got to ask."

Elmer orbed the wall pix. Oh, yeah. They explicate some shit.

There's the young Mimms. He's standing with the young Jack Horrall.

They're doughboys. Jack's a major. Mimms wears captain's bars.

There's colored cops in formation. There's Mimms with Fletch Bowron. There's Mimms with our mud-shark DA.

Blanchard scoped the wall pix. He went *Man-O-Manischewitz.*

Mimms said, "As you can see, Jack Horrall and I go back. He commanded a colored battalion, and I was his staff adjutant. I might add that we've stayed in touch, and that I get my people on your police department—for prudent remuneration, of course."

Blanchard cracked his knuckles. "Sounds like a sweet deal."

Mimms said, "Let colored police colored. Keep colored south of Slauson until the pilgrimage begins. Keep your colored cops south of Slauson, where they know the turf."

Elmer winked. "That's white of you."

Mimms guffawed. Blanchard said, "We've got these questions. We know you own that backhouse on 46th, and you must have got the word by now."

Elmer flashed his foto spray. PD pix of Rice and Kapek. The Mex, DOA.

Mimms studied them. Mimms went *nix.*

Elmer said, "Tell us about the backhouse. Two cops were killed there."

Mimms popped his suspender straps and pulled himself tall. Hold for a sermonette.

"I own fourteen houses in these parts, and half of them have backhouses that have come to be utilized as playpens by unruly elements. Over the years, the backhouses have been taken over by my acolytes, all of whom live squeaky-clean. The only exception is my backhouse on East 46th. It's a place where coloreds, spics, and ofay hepcats congregate, hold jam sessions, and are assured of the privacy they require to drink and fuck in peace. That particular clubhouse took on a political bent—but as long as it isn't the Reds or the Klan, I don't give a rat's ass. The front house has been empty for a while—but I'll find a new tenant sooner or later."

Elmer said, "Let me guess. All your tenants pay in cash, and you don't keep written records."

Mimms said, "That is correct."

Blanchard said, "Let me guess. You'll beef us to Jack Horrall if we start poking too deep into your financial shit."

Mimms said, "That is correct."

Elmer relit his cigar. "Who specifically rents this backhouse? Who pays the rent every month?"

Mimms snapped his suspenders. "As stated, I keep no records and recall no specific names. The clubhouse denizens pay in cash, and anonymous cholos drop off the gelt on the first of the month. I would guess that the habitués take up a collection."

Blanchard said, "There's a terp still on the premises. That's illegal."

Mimms resnapped his suspenders. "I don't condone terp. I exhort my people to live clean."

Blanchard lit a cigarette. "The dump's full of Nazi regalia."

"You had best check with the fearsome Gestapo and the illustrious SS about that. And, once again, let me state that I bear no grudge against the Nazis—but the Reds and the Klan bear the full brunt of my enmity."

Elmer blew smoke rings. "What about the Sinarquistas?"

Mimms said, "Tacoheads and fools from the gate. Just another copycat movement trying to piggyback Adolf Hitler and make hay while the zeitgeist bends their way. I would advise them to refine their wardrobe, though. Green doesn't cut it. You've got to go with basic black, and snazzy armbands."

46

(ENSENADA, 10:00 A.M., 1/30/42)

Green twill and black leather. The green connotes Ireland and Mexico. The black boldly stamps Sinarquismo. It's a right-wing affront.

Starched green twill. Cut to fit him. Shirt, necktie, pants. Stiff black leather. Boots, holster, belt. A red-white-and-black armband. It stamps resurgent realpolitik.

Dudley sat in his office. The squad bay buzzed bilingual. Army noncoms and Staties shared desk space. Anti-Jap fever raged.

He just missed *El Flaco.* He found this grand ensemble placed on his desk. Salvy came and went, *rápidamente.*

The courtship continues. Salvy bears gifts. There's still unanswered questions. They're couched in unstinting rapport.

Victor Trejo Caiz planned to kill him. How did Salvy know? Salvy *understands* him. How much does Salvy know and where did he learn it?

The squad bay bustled. Japs, Japs, Japs. The internment push roared. Dudley shut his door and muzzled the blare.

He touched green twill and black leather. He rolled the armband on and off his left sleeve. He decided to stage a dress rehearsal. He'd don Salvy's gift and pose in K. Hanamaka's lair.

He'd utilize his secret fashion runway. He'd wear Sinarquista green and black SS kit. He'd swing the gold bayonet.

The Teletype clacked and popped a page into his tray. Dudley snatched it and skimmed it. Fourth Interceptor blared cautionary drift.

L.A. defense plants targeted/Red Alert imposed. Secret air bases in San Berdoo County/Red Alert imposed. Jap sub berthings in Baja/Red Alert imposed. L.A. pay-phone communiqués decoded. Jap air attack on L.A. predicted. Red Alert: hold for late February.

Dudley teethed on it. Red Alert/Jap Alert/alarmist rhetoric. He was Japped to the gills. The Statie jail was Japped, floor-to-rafters. Jap overflow was Japped up in slum cribs Baja-wide. Statie goons tortured Japs for hot leads and kicks.

He called the Ventura County Sheriff. He offered him bribe cash and proposed a sub-rosa deal. House Baja Japs on county work farms. Bunk them in horse stalls. Rent them out as stoop labor. We'll split the money.

The Sheriff agreed. Dudley called José Vasquez-Cruz and cut him in on the deal. José said he'd oversee the inmate transfer. Their racket front now bears fruit.

Japs, Japs, Japs.

Slant-eyed intruders. They haunt his dreams. The Wolf stalks them across the Baja plains. Where's Kyoho Hanamaka? No one has visited his mountain hideaway. Juan Pimentel surveills it. Hideo Ashida's photo device has snapped no license plates. Lieutenant Juan tortures Japs. Where's Kyoho Hanamaka? None of the Japs knows shit.

Japs, Japs, Japs.

Fourth Interceptor's besieging SIS. Major Melnick's crawling up his ass. Interdict coastal sabotage without further delay.

Juan Pimentel has chartered a twin-engine plane. They'll cruise the coastline later today. They'll scan for sub berths and dip south to Magdalena Bay. They'll swoop by the Sinarquista encampment.

Japs, Japs, Japs.

The Wolf hunts Japs in his dreams. The Wolf rips them and eats them and shits them out, postmortem. Last night's dream dissolved a memory glitch.

The Wolf cornered an unruly Jap. The Wolf said something's troubling my old pal Dudley Smith. There's a backhouse/klub*haus* on East 46th. Herr Dudley thinks someone's mentioned it before. He can't dredge the memory. What say ye to this?

The Jap feared the Wolf. The Jap had the inside dirt. The Jap revealed *this:*

Hector Obregon-Hodaka blabbed to the Dudster. *He* mentioned the klub*haus* and wild goings-on there. *He* said two rogue cops ruled the roost.

All hail the Wolf. The Wolf retrieved that lost memory.

Mike Breuning called him. He bore hot news. Nort Layman tagged the klub*haus* job Murder One. Hector's rogue cops? Surely Wendell Rice and George Kapek.

Hector's a Kyoho Hanamaka KA. He'll photostat Hector's Statie print card. He'll get it to Hideo Ashida. Hideo will redust the klub*haus* and try to fix Hector's presence there.

Mike B. updated Dudley. Mike B. reported *this:*

There's that dead Mex. El Dudster's Spanish-fluent. Jack Horrall thinks the klub*haus* job could dip south. He wants Dudley to consult, long-distance. Bill

Parker's set to oversee. It's their Watanabe-case assignments, grandly reprised.

With attendant sidebars. Werewolf Shudo's innocence and Jim Davis' guilt. Sinarquista flags at the klub*haus.* Elmer Jackson on the job. Hideo's Baja posting on hold.

Dudley touched green twill and black leather. He should buy the Wolf a black leather harness and spiked collar. The Wolf retrieved that memory. He deserves a treat.

—

Lieutenant Juan flew low. The Army supplied a twin Beechcraft and all-purpose weaponry. Flamethrowers, tommy guns, grenades.

They hugged the coastline. Dudley binocular-scanned.

The cockpit was sun bright and altitude cold. Dudley sat behind the pilot's seat and peered out. He marked latitudes on a relief map. He *X*'d coves and inlets and saw no signs of life.

They flew south. Dudley scanned fishing boats. They featured all-Mex crews and came off kosher. Lieutenant Juan refueled the plane in Puerto Romulo. They swung back south and cruised Magdalena Bay.

Lieutenant Juan swooped low and dipped toward the Sinarquista encampment. He'd prepped a leaflet drop. Hate tracts *en español.* He got them at the Deutsches Haus in L.A. They featured German death-camp photos with humorous captions. Lieutenant Juan found them *howl*arious.

Dudley saw men tilling soil and women dunking clothes in a stream. Lieutenant Juan dipped to three hundred feet. *Los cameradas* looked up and waved. Lieutenant Juan dropped the cargo hatch. Hate tracts hit blue sky.

The *kameraden* whooped en masse. They jumped up and down. The tracts caught air streams and flew. The sky went *craaaazy*-paper white and eclipsed all sunlight.

Lieutenant Juan U-turned and gained altitude. They flew northbound and low. Lieutenant Juan dropped down to two hundred feet and air-trekked the coastline. Dudley binocular-scanned.

It got boring. Rocks, waves, and sand. Time stands still. Rocks, waves, sand shoals. The same shit—*por vida* and beyond.

Then—*bip!*—there's this lone Jap.

He's just outside an inlet. He's tossing a fishing net. He's not looking up.

Dudley jabbed Lieutenant Juan. Lieutenant Juan looked down and went *Caramba.*

He dipsy-doodled up and east. He cut past the coast road and nosed the plane down. There's a flat dirt patch/mock runway.

The ground came up *faaaaaast.* Dudley braced himself against the seat back. Lieutenant Juan hopscotched around rocks and dumped trash. He found a clear stretch. He cut the flaps and put the wheels on the ground. The plane fishtailed and pulled two full doughnuts.

The engine thumped and stalled dead. The propellers tapped out. Dudley went *whew!* They jumped out and indulged *abrazos.* They armed themselves.

Dudley grabbed a tommy gun. Lieutenant Juan grabbed a flamethrower. They ran across the dirt patch and dodged cars across the coast road. They hit an embankment. A carved path led down to the beach.

Dudley saw an outcropping due north. That was his landmark. He spotted that Jap forty yards up.

He pointed north. Lieutenant Juan gripped the flamethrower and fell in beside him. They trekked down to the beachfront. The sand was wet-wet. Wavelets doused them knee-high.

They walked north. Wet sand sucked at their feet. They approached the inlet. It fronted a cove cave. Dudley saw fishing-net drag marks. Dudley heard jabber: Mex, Jap, Mex.

They hugged the rocks and crept close. The jabber escalated. Dudley craned and looked into the cave. A Jap flag hung off a two-by-four. Voices jabbered—men, women, kids.

Lieutenant Juan went *So, Jefe?* Dudley went *Of course.* They wheeled and walked right in.

The cave was *muy* deep. They hit a left fork and veered toward the voices. Dudley saw them then.

Thirty-odd souls. Fifth Column *familia.* Half Jap and half Mex. Right there in front:

Hector Obregon-Hodaka, himself.

Lieutenant Juan kicked a rock, inadvertent. The noise echo-chambered. *La familia* turned and looked. Hector looked straight at Dudley and pulled a waistband piece.

Lieutenant Juan aimed and cut loose. Flames shot up and out. They hit Hector. He screamed and went all bugshit on fire. Lieutenant Juan hit the kill switch. The barrel whoosh died. *La familia* ran, *todos.* They reached the back of the cave and hit a dead end.

Lieutenant Juan walked up and cornered them there. Dudley followed him. He read their fear, close-up. Lieutenant Juan got blast-oven close. Each and every one of them screamed.

Lieutenant Juan hit the on switch. Flames shot up and out. He fried each and every one of them alive.

47

(LOS ANGELES, 8:00 A.M., 1/31/42)

Crash Squad confab. Jack Horrall's office. It's a double cop snuff. There's fanfare and razzmatazz.

The squad ran ten strong. Folding chairs fanned the Chief's desk. Dudley Smith was down in Baja. He pledged daily call-ins and/or Teletypes.

They signed a check-in log. It was big-job de rigueur. The duty roster ran thus:

Captain W. H. Parker: Traffic Division/commanding officer.

Captain D. L. Smith (Army SIS): executive officer/Spanish-speaking consultant.

Lieutenant T. B. Brown: Homicide Division/squad whip.

Sergeant M. D. Breuning: Homicide Division.

Sergeant R. S. Carlisle: Homicide Division.

Norton Layman, M.D.: medical consultant.

Lieutenant H. J. Ashida (Army SIS): crime lab supervisor/on-leave consultant.

Miss J. W. Conville: crime lab/forensic biologist.

Sergeant E. V. Jackson: Vice Division/Alien Squad.

Officer L. C. Blanchard: Central Division Detectives/Alien Squad.

Sergeant T. R. Meeks: Robbery Division/detached for current duty.

They sat ten across. They smoked and sipped coffee. They wore that down-for-the-count look. They were forty-four hours in.

Joan glanced at Parker. He glanced back. She smelled his dumb lime cologne. She was antsy. The Santa Barbara Sheriff's file arrived. She wanted to jump on it.

She stroked her gold cuff links. She was distracted. The Chief said something. She missed the lead-in.

"…and if you're wondering why you don't see Ray Pinker, it's because he's in Dutch with the Fed probe, and he's running raw these days. That means Lieutenant Ashida's our top lab dog, until Dud S. pulls some strings and hauls him back to Mexico. There's a war on, you know. Things like that tend to supersede."

The gang laughed. Breuning and Carlisle smirked. They hated Ashida. Dud loved him more than them.

Call-Me-Jack drummed his desk. "We all know why we're here, so let's get to it. Will someone please tell me something I don't know?"

Dr. Nort raised his hand. "I found large quantities of carbolic acid in the three victims' livers. This indicates that the terp they were smoking just prior to their deaths had been spiked. They were deliberately poisoned—but organ saturation indicates that all three men were habitual terp smokers."

Call-Me-Jack rolled his eyes. "We can't defame our fallen colleagues as terp fiends. Let's keep that fact away from any and all reporters you might be talking to. As far as reporters go, this is gospel. The inside dirt goes exclusively to Sid Hudgens and his legman Jack Webb, and that's it. They've done us proud before, and they'll do us proud here. Given the state of the klub*haus,* I'd say we're looking at a Fifth Column job. I want Sid and Jack to play up that angle, because Fifth Column hoo-ha's the rage now, and that sort of emphasis will make us look good with Fourth Interceptor and the Feds."

Elmer waved his cigar. "What about a command post, boss? There's no room at Central, and there's no room here at the Hall."

Call-Me-Jack sipped coffee. He spiked it with schnapps. It's PD-certified dish.

"You got lucky here. I'm giving you Lyman's back room, until we clear this thing. You'll all have keys, and it'll be off-limits to rank-and-file PD. I'm putting cots in, and you'll have food and booze twenty-four hours."

Carlisle said, "Suppose we have to…"

Elmer woofed him. "Put some hurt on a suspect or witness, Dick? That what you're thinking?"

Breuning said, "You've got shit for brains and shit for tact, Jackson. And it's not like people don't know it."

Elmer woofed him. Here's your fucking tact.

"*People?* You mean like a certain Irishman, well known to folks in this room?"

Joan held her breath. Buzz blew Elmer an Okie-redneck kiss. Hideo Ashida gasped.

Call-Me-Jack banged his ashtray. Desk clutter hopped.

"Not in my office, and not on my time card. You're policemen investigating a double cop killing, and I've got no time for pique from any of you. To the point of Dick's question, I'll add this. There's a storeroom two floors up from Lyman's, and I'm having a chair bolted to the floor. It's nice and quiet. If you need to stretch someone, do it up there."

Breuning and Carlisle smirked. Elmer winked at Meeks. Thad Brown coughed.

"What about the victims' families? At the very least, we should interview the wives."

Call-Me-Jack made the cutoff sign. "I paid condolence calls, and unless something pertinent comes up, I want them left alone. I don't want to aggravate them and get them thinking they should slap a wrongful death suit on the PD. There's that, and there's the undisputed fact that their dutiful hubbies were skirt chasers and God knows what else, given a certain klub*haus* on East 46th."

Parker said, "We've got to ID the Mexican. That's our first priority."

Blanchard said, "I'll be checking mug books against the DB pix."

Ashida said, "I'll start checking print cards immediately."

Joan said, "I want to redust, resweep, and rephotograph the premises. There has to be something there."

Ashida shot his shirt cuffs. Joan saw his new gold watch. He evinced drag-queen taste.

"I found a series of semen stains on the bedsheets upstairs, and I've already typed them. All four of the men were secretors. I'll be checking my samples against blood samples from our victims."

Elmer whooped. "That's the sort of bed traffic you see in your everyday whorehouse."

Parker said, "Elmer's speaking as an expert witness here."

Buzz said, "I found an address book under a piece of carpet upstairs. Ray Pinker swooped by and dusted it for me. He turned up two latents. They match to a hot-prowl hump named Tommy Glennon."

Breuning and Carlisle went lockjawed. Elmer woof-woofed them.

"Tommy the G. Does it get you all nostalgic for New Year's Eve?"

Call-Me-Jack said, "Tommy G. That Irish cocksucker has been a thorn in my side since God was a pup."

Buzz said, "The Chief knows from Irish cocksuckers, given his long-standing friendship with Dudley Smith."

Call-Me-Jack went *tut-tut.* Breuning and Carlisle trembled. Elmer blew Buzz an Okie-redneck kiss.

Joan laughed outright. *Pinch me. What am I doing*—

Thad Brown said, "Jackson, Blanchard, Meeks. You take the address book. Jump on the names, jump on Glennon, and jump on all of it now."

Call-Me-Jack yawned. I'm half-gassed, I need a nap, you're wearing me thin.

“Get out of here. All of you. Find the guy who killed our pals Wendell and George, and try not to kill him until he’s confessed.”

Parker dashed for the door. He detoured and slipped Joan a note. It read “Tonight?”

Joan whistled and brought him up short. Parker turned and faced her. Heads shot their way. Joan spoke full vibrato. Damn circumspection. Let the world know.

“Yes, Bill. I’d love to see you tonight.”

—

The all-clear horn blew. The Army searchlights kept swirling. They lit up clouds you just never saw. False-alarm nights moved her. The war had its upsides.

Joan said, “When peace comes, we’ll lose this.”

Parker said, “They magnify the moon. That’s the part I like best.”

They sat on Joan’s back steps. Joan sat one step down. His feet were right there. Joan held an ankle just so she could touch him.

“You’ve been detached to work this job. I thought you’d be more displeased than you are.”

Parker touched her shoulder. “We’re skirting that topic we weren’t going to discuss.”

“You’re saying Jack Horrall’s pining for a certain case last month, so he’s assembled a near-identical Crash Squad.”

“You understand this police department very damn well. You wouldn’t have learned the ins and outs of the Navy anywhere near as fast.”

“I dreamt about the Mexicans last night. I was being tried for vehicular manslaughter, and the DA asked me if I knew the names of the victims. I said, ‘Well, my policeman colleagues call them wetbacks and cholos.’ ”

Parker touched her hair. “Don’t do that. Don’t derail yourself when things start going your way.”

Joan kissed his hand and placed it back on his knee. A searchlight beam crossed the moon. Joan saw little craters.

She left City Hall and drove back to the klub*haus.* She redusted and rephotographed all day. She hadn’t seen the Santa Barbara file. Ashida was there all day. He hadn’t seen it, either.

Parker tapped her shoulder. “You’ve developed a particular habit. You keep worrying those gold cuff links, like you’re checking for signs of stigmata.”

Joan smiled. “There’s a story behind it, but I’m not going to tell it to you.”

“I’ll quote Jack Horrall, then. ‘Tell me something I don’t know.’ ”

Joan looked up at him. His dumb sport coat complemented his dumb cologne. His trousers drooped. He wore a cross-draw belt gun.

“I went to a wild party, just to observe Kay Lake. I took a steam bath with a famous actor and your old nemesis Claire De Haven. I kept thinking, Why am I naked with people I don’t even know? and They don’t do this in Tomah, Wisconsin.”

Parker looked down at her. “What are you saying? You’re a scientist, and you never speak elliptically. I admire that about you. I never have to strain myself to grasp your intent.”

Joan touched his leg. “I’m saying, ‘Darling Bill, you’ve given me a life that I never could have imagined, and I will remain forever grateful, however this thing of ours plays out.”

Parker tripped down two steps instead of just one. Joan grabbed his arm and pulled him back up. She brought him in close. They kissed. His glasses snagged in her hair. They stumbled inside and into the bedroom. They knocked over a wobbly lamp as they fell.

48

(LOS ANGELES, 5:00 A.M., 2/1/42)

Ashida dawdled. He felt gob-smacked. It felt indolent and all wrong.

He made beaker-brew coffee. It salved his drinks-with-Dudley hangover. He ran checklists. He cleaned his lab gear. He replayed last night.

They met at the Windsor and sat at the bar. They wore their uniforms and turned heads. It felt like a hot date.

Dudley ordered stingers. Ashida felt like a girl plied with booze. Dudley brought a Statie print card. Hector Obregon-Hodaka/Kyoho Hanamaka's KA.

The klub*haus* job dips south. It melds with Hanamaka and his gold bayonet. The bayonet's mint marks match the marks on his gold bar. The mint-train heist and Griffith Park fire further intersect.

Ashida cracked windows. Cold air fanned a lab-solvent stink. He sipped coffee. He tallied case points. What he knew and Joan Conville knew. What Dudley knew nothing of.

He lost track of his falsehoods. He realized *this:*

He was Dudley's idolatrous accomplice. Joan was Dudley's lover. He saw them together and sensed it. They had to disclose everything. They had to share the gold, three ways.

Rain bounced off window screens. The coffee induced cold sweats.

Dudley loved the bayonet. Its utility superseded 8.2 pounds of gold. The bayonet accessorized his fascist aesthetic. Captain D. L. Smith killed people and communed with a fantasy wolf. Lieutenant H. J. Ashida's fantasy lover was quite insane.

The bayonet was History. The bayonet was Dudley's beloved Wagner and Norse myth. Dudley would accede to gold as money. The Myth of This Gold would gob-smack him and inspire him to possess it.

Ashida checked his watch. He was due at the klub*haus.* He had three lab tasks first.

Test the semen-stained sheets. Run the Mexican's prints. Study the Santa Barbara Sheriff's heist file. Hope that Reckless Girl hasn't studied it first.

He'd blood-typed the ejaculate and ID'd four secretors. Two O-positive/one A-negative/one rare RH-positive. Dr. Nort would comparison-type the victims' blood types. *He* was set to run foreign-substance tests himself.

He prepped a burner and preheated an acid-phosphate solution. He added purified water and brought up a boil. He placed sheet swatch #1 in the liquid. The semen stain eroded in two seconds flat.

Ashida noted swirling particles. One type was dark and granular. One type was viscous and near-transparent.

He naked-eyed them. They were forensically compatible and easily ID'd.

Human fecal matter. A glycerin-based lubricant. Most likely K-Y jelly.

Ashida flinched. He turned off the burner and set the other swatches aside. He wide-cracked windows. A wet breeze raised goose bumps. He pulled the Unknown Mexican print card.

Drudgework now. The print-card index. Card drawers subdivided by gender and race. Twelve drawers for "Mexican, Male."

Ashida microphotographed the Unknown Mex card. He got all ten digits and hit the photo lab. He locked himself in the darkroom. He worked with scissors, dip solvents, and a magnifying camera. He shot ten six-by-eight prints.

A heater fan dried them inside twenty minutes. They developed white on black. He taped them to the wall above the print-card bank. He pencil-marked significant ridges and whorls. He pulled out the *A* drawer and worked standing up.

He started at Abrevaya, George and Acosta, Ramon. He noted inconsistent whorl patterns and moved on. He went through Alvarez, Alvaro/Alvarez, José and Alvarez, Juan. Alvarez was a dirt-common name.

He studied nine more Alvarez cards. He hit Archuleta, Arturo, aka "Archie."

There's a tweaker. Check the left-forefinger print. Look—the top ridge patterns match.

Ashida snatched his eyepiece scope. He went up/down, up/down, up/down. He studied Archuleta's left-hand prints. He eyeball-skimmed the unknown Mex fotos.

He counted comparison points. He got ten points, fourteen points, a big twenty-one. That cinched it. *Bam!*—Archie Archuleta was klub*haus* stiff #3.

The lab went sauna hot. Ashida cracked all the windows. A breeze blew loose papers off desks.

He hit the green-sheet index. He yanked the *A* to *B* file drawer and finger-walked. He pulled Archuleta's green sheet. It revealed *this:*

Born: Tijuana, Mexico—8/19/89. Narco jolts back to '15. Two years at the dope hospital in Lexington, Kentucky. Two Chino terms here. Popped for plain drunk/drunk 502/forging doctors' scripts. 27 dope rousts, total. LKA: 841 Wabash, Boyle Heights. No KAs listed. Last bounce: drunk 502/3-6-39. Popped in '35 Ford/59th and Central.

Ashida wrote up his findings. He'd call Thad Brown and inform him. He'd paper-post his reports at Lyman's.

He got out the heist file. The page stack felt heavy. He checked the bottom of the pile and saw loose paperwork. It pertained to the '33 liquor-store jobs. Robbery Division weighs in.

Reckless Girl forged a file-request slip. She was Sloppy Girl here. *His* forgeries surpassed hers. *Her* "Ray Pinker" sigs looked like tomb hieroglyphs.

Ashida skimmed the heist file. It detailed the mint train's Santa Barbara stop. It featured Leander Frechette and Deputy Karl Tullock.

Negro youth Frechette. He's six-eight and weighs 340. He's mentally dim and inhumanely strong. The Santa Barbara cops posit *this:*

The gold-cage lock was removed. A look-alike lock was cosmetically affixed. *Just enough gold* was clouted. The low bar count ensured that the cache would not appear ransacked.

The bars were wheeled off, walked off, or tossed off the train. Waiting confederates grabbed them. The cops canned the toss-off theory. It entailed confederates in moving surveillance. Said confederates could not know *this:*

When the gold-cage walkway would stand unobserved. When the theft and toss-off would occur.

The cops canned the wheel-off theory. Somebody would have seen it. The walk-off theory remained. The bulk weight of the bars meant *this:*

The thief is exceptionally large and strong. He hides the bars on his person and obfuscates the load. He walks on and off the train. His confederates grab the gold.

It's a stop-for-coal stop. The eight convicts escape precedingly. The overall atmosphere remains chaotically charged. It obscures the thief's actions.

One train worker possesses just such strength and bulk. It's Leander Frechette. Deputy Karl Tullock has at him.

Tullock badgers and beats on Frechette. Leander holds firm. I didn't do it/I don't know who did it/I don't know nothing.

Frechette remains in stir. A Negro man named Martin Luther Mimms secures his release. Mimms is tight with L.A. Police high-ups. Frechette is released to his custody.

Ashida kicked it around. *This* seemed certain now:

The mass escape and train heist comprised one event. The two repair stops were caused by staged mechanical glitches. It all cohered behind Fritz Eckelkamp.

He escapes and remains at large. He was a career heist man. The other escaped cons are shot on sight. It feels like preengendered chaos.

Cut to the klub*haus* job. Hector Obregon-Hodaka laid the *haus* gestalt out to Dudley. Hector knew Kyoho Hanamaka. Hanamaka's gold bayonet: cast from the same ore as the bars on the train. This seems certain now:

Eckelkamp, the German Marxist. Hanamaka, the left-right horror connoisseur. The klub*haus* as haunt of debauched politicos. There's a stench here. It's Fifth Column mischief couched in criminal greed.

Two mug shots were clipped to the file. Fritz Eckelkamp looked Teutonic fierce. Leander Frechette looked bewildered.

Ashida jumped files. He went gold heist to liquor-store jobs in one heartbeat. He saw the witness-composite sketch. He saw a list of look-alike vagrants. They were detained, un-ID'd, released for lack of proof.

The fourth name down: Jackson, Wayne Frank.

49

(LOS ANGELES, 10:00 A.M., 2/1/42)

The boys are back in town.

That bluegrass ditty nailed them. The *KKK*lan outkast and Okie shitkicker. Sergeants E. V. Jackson and T. R. Meeks their own selves.

With their own prowl sled. On this big case. Fuck struck with bitching intent.

Elmer drove. Buzz kibitzed. They got pigshit lucky. Hotdog Ashida notched a print make. The dead Mex now stood ID'd.

Boyle Heights was Baja north. Shack rows on flat streets and hillsides. Tacofied taverns and pachucoized pool halls. Lots of Catholic churches. Sinarquista decals on souped-up cars.

Elmer said, "Wabash. It's around here somewhere."

Buzz said, "She'll take it rough. Her Archie treated her raw, but he gave her the big chorizo like nobody else."

Elmer went *nyet.* "What did our first two widows give us? Nothing but relief that their hubbies were dead, and 'Where's my survivors' pension check?' "

"Twenty says you're wrong."

"Twenty says I'm right."

They shook on it. It sealed their Pax Redneckiana. They'd breached Jack Horrall's orders already. They braced the Personnel Division boss and the two widows. It revealed *this:*

Call-Me-Jack pulled Rice's and Kapek's Personnel files. Them boys were just *toooooooo* dirty. Dirt leaks might besmirch the PD. Their bust lists were in those files. The Crash Squad needed a look-see. Maybe some crazed felon was fresh out of stir and hot for revenge.

The widows pissed on Rice and Kapek, postmortem. You want baleful bile? Gas on *this:*

Rice pimped his wife to cover his poker debts. Rice fathered Kapek's three kids, and vice versa. The widows were lezbo lovers and turned dyke tricks out of Linda's Little Log Cabin. Rice and Kapek filmed their antics and peddled the lez epics down in T.J.

The widows evicted their hubbies at least once a week. They had a hideout somewhere. The widows knew zilch per the klub*haus* and hubbies' KAs. They knew their hubbies veered far right. Rice and Kapek made them wear dirndl skirts and Nazi armbands. Their kids wore lederhosen and Tyrolean beanies to school. They frolicked at German-American Bund summer camp.

Elmer and Buzz eyeball-tossed their two domiciles. Rice possessed some *farkakte* fly-ur-self/build-from-scratch model-airplane kit. The fucking thing consumed half his garage. It had rivet-attached wings. It had Luftwaffe insignia and a cockpit-mounted machine gun. The Widow Rice said he bought it from some right-wing geek in Minnesota.

Georgie Kapek possessed twenty-six incendiary bombs. The Widow Kapek called him a "Secret Firebug." Georgie possessed two terp stills and thirty-four back issues of *Goldlover Magazine.*

Georgie's swag gored Elmer's gourd. He knew he'd seen similar shit somewhere. It hit him belated:

The late Don Matsura owned that selfsame shit. Terp stills and *Goldlover Magazine.*

Elmer and Buzz logged man-hours. They quizzed the Alien Squad guys per Kapek and Rice. Nobody coughed up good drift. They said Georgie and Wendell were bent. So what? We all are. We're bent in the ways of this bent PD in this bent and fucked-up town.

That approach tanked. They braced the watch boss at Newton Station then. They pressed on complaints levied against the klub*haus.* Nope—there were none. That approach tanked, likewise.

Buzz said, "That's the address."

Elmer pulled to the curb. Said address: a cinder-block and wood firetrap. Note the fat *mamacita* ensconced on the porch.

The boys piled out and drifted over. Mama-san sniffed bad news. She had good feelers. Her snout twitch-twitched.

"You've got him downtown, right? He topped out his parole, but you still got him for some dumb law he shouldn't have broke."

Buzz doffed his hat. "Archie's dead, ma'am. It took a few days to identify him, but it's him. He was killed, along with two policemen. It occurred in a little clubhouse down in the colored side of town."

Mama shrugged. "Live by the sword, die by the sword. Adios, Arturo. With him you always knew the other shoe would drop."

Elmer said, "How so, ma'am?"

Mama said, "Archie ran with lower companions. Water seeks its own level.

He was a *pendejo* and a *borracho.* He snitched to the police and mainlined the white horse. You pay the piper, the piper calls the tune. You buy trouble, you get what you pay for."

Buzz spit tobacco juice. He doused the porch steps good.

"Did he snitch to any particular policemen?"

Mama shook her head. "I always told him 'Don't name me no names, 'cause what I don't know can't hurt me.' I know he snitched to these two fools on the Alien Squad, but I made sure he didn't name no names."

Elmer relit his cigar. "You're saying you didn't know Archie's running partners, and you only had a general sense that he was out in the world, causing trouble."

"That's right. Archie was a snake in the grass, but I told him 'Don't you bring no mice home to me.' "

Elmer said, "Archie must have had himself a parole officer. He'd have known Archie's associates."

"He always topped out his parole, so there'd be no strings attached. He said that way, he'd have the world on a string."

Buzz said, "How many *niños* you got, ma'am? You think they'd have more details on their daddy's pals and activities?"

Mama snorted. "Arturo was a back-door man. You don't conceive no *niños* that way."

Elmer whooped. Ashida posted a lab report. *Oooga-booga.* Jizz stains, K-Y jelly, shit traces.

"Here's a question, ma'am. You're the late Archie Archuleta. You've got time on your hands and a penchant for trouble. How do you spend your days?"

Mama picked her nose. "Arturo knew his way around C-town and J-town. He sought most of his trouble there. 'Seek and ye shall find.' He sold his dope and bought his dope there, and he snitched to these two Alien Squad bulls who worked around there. He knew lots of tong men, crooked Japs, and these Jap Fifth Column types. He bought these Nazi-type trinkets from some Jap, and he sold them to the zoot-suit *pendejos* here in the Heights."

Elmer said, "Is that the Sinarquistas you're talking about?"

Mama crossed herself. Mama whipped out some voodoo amulet and hexed the world at large.

"Evil *fascistas.* May they boil in a vat of nigger pus and potato-chip lard."

Buzz winked at Elmer. "What about that clubhouse, ma'am? 46th and Central, off the jazz strip?"

Mama went *¿Qué?/Who cares?/So what?*

Elmer said, "These two Alien Squad cops. Do the names Wendell Rice and George Kapek sound familiar?"

Mama went *Huh?/¿Qué?/So what?*

Buzz spritzed tobacco juice. He nailed Mama's mailbox *gooooood.*

"Give us some names, mama. Feed these two weary dogs a bone."

"I don't got no names. I know Arturo went back with them Alien Squad bulls, to when they worked the Narco Detail. Arturo said, 'Better to snitch to the devil you know than the devil you don't know.' "

Rice and Kapek worked Narco. They allegedly grafted there. It was pre-established drift.

Elmer teethed his cigar. "What else can you tell us about these nameless Narco guys?"

Mama waved her amulet. "They were *dos fascistas.* They loved Hitler, Tojo, and Father Coughlin. Arturo mostly finked out these Jap pharmacists who wouldn't sell him no morphine."

Buzz said, "Names, ma'am?"

A rat zipped across the porch. A big cat-sized fucker. Mama hexed him.

"Arturo said he only snitched off one real Fifth Column fool. Some fool white boy named Huey Cressmeyer. The Alien Squad bulls said, 'Huey's sacrosanct. He's got high-up friends, and he's our pal.' "

50

(LOS ANGELES, 5:00 P.M., 2/1/42)

Call-Me-Jack shagged phone calls. He lived to wheedle, bully, and schmooze. Dudley shagged the chair by his desk.

Jack blah-blahed and yeah-yeahed. He bloviated with Fletch Bowron and Fourth Interceptor. Dudley lit a cigarette. Jack went *Un momento.*

His phone-light blinked. He winked at El Dudster. He coo-coo'd and oh-baby'd now.

It was surely Brenda Allen. The two shared a history. It predated Brenda's liaison with doltish Elmer Jackson.

Dudley wore civvies and a belt piece. He drove up *rápido.* Mike B. called him in Baja. Mike reported *this:*

Tommy Glennon's address book appeared at the klub*haus.* It contained Huey Cressmeyer's name. Ditto Lin Chung's name and Saul Lesnick's name. Plus more provocative listings.

Chung and Lesnick were Watanabe-case adjunct. That mandated discretion. Huey was a glue addict and plainly psychopathic. That mandated a T.J. retreat.

Jack coo-coo'd good-byes and hung up. He stared across his desk. He read the Dudster's dire look.

"Lay it out. Bypass the blarney and get to it."

"Jim Davis killed the Watanabes. Bill Parker put it together. Jim confessed to him in late December, and unburdened himself to me more recently. I'm assuming that no one else knows. That stated, I should add that we now have peripheral names crossing over to the klub*haus* job. Dare I say that we need to be careful here?"

Jack went deep-vein sclerotic. He chugged digitalis straight from the vial. He chased it with desk-jug scotch.

"Parker won't blab. He goes way back with Jim, and Jim's got dirt on him that could sink his career."

Dudley said, “Yes, but our Bill is nothing if not capricious. He’ll do anything to appease God and impress young women.”

The desk phone rang. Jack squelched the call.

“Adjudicate this thing with Parker, Dud. Make whatever concessions you deem necessary. Brace Jim D. and tell that lunatic cocksucker in no uncertain terms to keep his fucking mouth shut. As for the klub*haus* job, I’ll state this. We need a clean solve and dead suspects who’ll never enter a courtroom. Keep that in mind, along with this. Do whatever you deem necessary to put the quietus on those ‘peripheral names’ you just mentioned. *¿Tú comprende, muchacho?*”

Dudley chained cigarettes. “You pulled Rice’s and Kapek’s Personnel files. That severely restricts our access to their arrest records. I’ll hazard a guess here, sir. They ran bag for you when they worked the Narco Squad back in the Davis regime.”

Call-Me-Jack tipped scotch. The pills kicked in. His color receded.

“They covered niggertown for Jim D. and yours truly. Envelopes changed hands. My old Army pal the Reverend Mimms greased the skids south of Slauson. That’s the drift, and here’s the upscut. I burned the Personnel files and the Narco files. Leave Mimms alone, and get me a clean solve despite those restrictions. Elmer Jackson and Buzz Meeks are playing gadfly with you, but I’m disinclined to cut them loose. As our pal Sid Hudgens says, ‘That’s all the news that’s *un*fit to print.’ ”

The phone rang. Jack squelched it. He slurped scotch and wagged his eyebrows.

“You’re working angles in Baja. My best guess is that Ace the K. is covering you here. By my calculations, I should be in for 8%.”

Dudley smiled. “12%, sir. With a codicil attached.”

“Would that be latitude on everything we’ve just discussed?”

“Yes, and I would like you to detach Lieutenant Ashida, effective immediately.”

“Yes to the former, no to the latter. I need Ashida here.”

Dudley stood up. Jack said, “I met Jim Davis in 1919. He’s always been good to me. Here’s *my* codicil. I positively forbid you to kill him.”

—

Whiskey Bill dozed in his prowl sled. Long naps served to revive him. Dudley tagged him in the City Hall lot.

Herr Bill snored. He was unkempt and looked stale overall. Note the photograph taped to the dashboard.

Joan Conville, hometown seductress. She’s posed on a split-rail fence. Note her fetching huntress ensemble.

Fierce Joan. Note the shotgun. She blew a randy redskin's foot off with it.

The passenger door stood ajar. Dudley slid in beside Parker. He rattled him awake. Parker flinched and went for his gun.

Dudley pinned his hand. "Wake up, Captain. We've a serious matter to discuss."

Parker blinked and rubbed his eyes. He had boozehound breath. Dudley passed him a mint lozenge.

"You woke me up."

"Yes, and with good cause. Jim Davis told me that he killed the Watanabes. He told you in December, and I'm wondering who else he might have told."

Parker crossed himself. His eyes zipped to the dashboard.

"There's the issue of who you've told, Captain. Have you confessed to Monsignor Hayes? Have you told your wife or the twin sirens, Miss Conville and Miss Lake?"

Parker recrossed himself and reogled the dashboard. Of course—the sodden shit told Joan.

—

Sea winds bore down. Bad rain threatened. Wave chop doused his boots. It rendered the beach trek unpleasant.

He drove back last night. He left pressing biz in L.A. A deal with Bill Parker. A bedroom chat with fair Joan.

The Wolf urged his return. The Wolf told him to check the other caves near the death cave. The Wolf wondered *this:*

Juan Pimentel. Did he torch those saboteurs with undue haste? Herr Juan was the slow-torture type. French-fried Japs and spics played out of character. The Wolf was most emphatic here.

Dudley trekked north. He carried a flashlight and a tommy gun. He saw the death cave and smelled it concurrent.

The scorched flesh. The stale stomach gas and burst entrails.

He entered the cave. The Wolf growled. They walked back and viewed the charred-corpse mound. The Wolf wagged his tail and gnawed flame-bleached bones. Dudley counted thirty-four dead.

They walked back to the beach and turned north. Dudley spotted a cave cove fifty yards up. They walked over. Dudley racked his tommy gun and stepped in. The Wolf walked point ahead of him.

Yes. It's the same setup. A deep cave. Numerous forks. Beachfront recessed. Wave-free access.

They explored the cave. The Wolf chased enticing scents. They saw *this:*

Empty food cans. Two dozen bedrolls. A smashed and thus useless shortwave radio set.

Plus *this:*

Charred airplane parts. Oddly flimsy. Rivet perforations. Incongruous construction.

The wings snapped onto the fuselage. Flimsy wires secured them. They resembled model-airplane parts.

The engine compartment laid there, exposed. Four small cylinders leaked gas. There's a flywheel and an automotive gear train attached. There's hammer-and-sickle decals on a wing plate.

The Wolf cocked his head and perked his ears. Dudley said, "Yes, I know—it's quite the mad contraption."

They left the cave and trekked farther north. The Wolf frolicked and chased beach rats. They found four more saboteur nests.

All abandoned. Smashed radios/empty cans/dumped bedrolls. No more jig-rigged airplane parts.

The Wolf possessed a keen intellect and sharp fangs. He gnawed on *this:*

Did Herr Juan torch those shits judiciously? Did he torch them to warn off other cave dwellers?

Dudley had sharp fangs. He gnawed on it.

—

A thunderstorm blew in. The Wolf stayed home with Claire and the Klein girl. Dudley teethed and drove back out in the rain.

He gnawed on the Jim Davis snafu. He gnawed on the klub*haus* job. He gnawed on his nascent Baja rackets and José Vasquez-Cruz. He gnawed on his L.A. versus Mexico duties and his Army mandate. He gnawed on Kyoho Hanamaka and the gold bayonet.

He took Benzedrine and gnawed with revived gusto. He drove to T.J. and bootjacked a Border Patrol office. The Benzedrine induced brainstorms. It said do *this:*

Study photo-device footage. Check the northbound passages only. Look for covered vehicles and exposed license plates. Test the efficacy of Hideo Ashida's grand creation.

The Staties had stockpiled eight photo boxes. Trip wires caught approaching and departing bumper plates. They'd rigged a viewfinder thingamajig in the office. It was crank-scroll operated. Plate numbers appeared on a bubble screen. Date markings ran below them.

Let's look for suspect vehicles. Let's study upward-jerking pix and nail suspect *trucks.*

Overpacked trucks. Trucks riding low on their axles. Fleeing Japs. Internment-dodging Japs. Saboteur Japs.

Dudley scrolled and rescrolled. His mind scrolled and unscrolled as he descrolled license plates. He saw Joan Conville naked. He saw her dressed in SS black. She swung the gold bayonet. She killed the man who killed her father.

License plates abundant. License plates redundant. Front plates, rear plates. Car plates, truck plates, all heading-adios plates.

Dudley got eyestrain. He went through two full boxes. He scrolled up to 1/25/42. He kept seeing Jap goblins who weren't really there. He kept seeing Joan naked and the Wolf abed with naked Claire.

He fed in the 1/25 pix. He scrolled through boring turistas waving good-bye and leering jarheads sated from the Blue Fox. His brain scrolled/*un*scrolled/*re*scrolled/*de*scrolled.

He kept seeing Joan naked/Joan naked/JOAN NAKED. He blinked to *re*scroll reality. He *re*instilled the imposition of boring license plates. He plate-scrolled up to 10:14 p.m., 1/25/42.

He caught a northbound bumper plate and truck grill. The camera lens jerked upward. He caught an up-to-the-windshield shot and caught *this:*

Wendell Rice and George Kapek—right there in the cab. They've got three fucking nights left to live.

51

(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 A.M., 2/3/42)

Cramped quarters. They verged on SRO. Lyman's back room as Crash Squad HQ.

The crammed-in chairs. The food table and coffee urn. The Teletype and phone lines. The corkboard-hung walls.

The booze table. The sweat room upstairs. A bolted-down chair for recalcitrant suspects. Rubber hose and phone-book-thumping tools, on call.

Joan sat between Elmer and Buzz. Ashida sat beside Dr. Nort. Breuning, Carlisle, and Blanchard hogged the back row. Bill Parker and Thad Brown stood and faced their crew. Brown summarized.

We're six days in. We've ID'd the Mex. He long-term snitched for Kapek and Rice. Jack Horrall dumped their Personnel and Narco files. The Mex topped out his paroles. We've got no leads there.

We've got two rogue cops. They're embroiled in a secret life deal. We've got Tommy Glennon's address book and jizz-stained sheets. We've established a unique cause of death. The lab folks are still at the klub*haus.* We need names. We've got to stretch this goddamn thing.

Joan ignored the spiel. She jotted gold-heist notes and snuck looks at Bill Parker. Call him lover #1. Dudley was here in L.A. She was seeing him tonight. Call him lover #2.

Brown haggled with Breuning and Carlisle. They wanted to haul in "jazz-club niggers" and "put the boots to them." Brown told them to pipe down. Joan tuned most of it out.

She doodled. Her thoughts scattergunned. She had breakfast with Kay. They discussed Kay's diary. She started it the day before Pearl Harbor. Bill Parker knocked on her door that night.

They discussed Joan's diary. She started it right after the Maestro's party. Bill Parker lay insensate in her bedroom. Bill Parker, ubiquitous. La Conville and La Lake—now screwball friends.

Lee Blanchard squawked. He canvassed ninety-one houses and didn't learn shit. Joan tuned him out. She fretted her gold cuff links and rehashed the Santa Barbara file.

Ashida got to it first. He'd thumbed it. She saw that. She'd dog-eared random pages. He undid them. She set a trap for him. He fell into it.

She left the file out for him. He hadn't mentioned it. He was starting to omit and dissemble again. She simply knew it.

She'd included some liquor-store 211 reports. She'd skimmed that paperwork first. There's "Jackson, Wayne Frank" on a detain-and-release slip.

Ashida had thumbed that file. Ashida did not mention the Wayne Frank Jackson lead.

It was Bingo #1. Bingo #2 surpassed it.

Martin Luther Mimms sprung Leander Frechette. That was 5/31. Now jump to 1/42. Martin Luther Mimms owns the klub*haus*. Elmer Jackson and Lee Blanchard turned up the lead.

Mimms: purportedly tight with high PD brass. Mimms: southside slumlord and bilk-the-poor preacher. Mimms: there for the gold-heist aftermath.

The room trapped cigarette smoke. Ashida fanned it away and made faces. Elmer and Buzz winked at Joan. Joan smiled and winked at Bill Parker. Lover #1 blushed.

Thad Brown said, "Breuning and Carlisle. Check DB files and see if you turn any paper submitted by Kapek and Rice. Blanchard, you recanvass the same radius, whether you like it or not. Jackson and Meeks, shake the names in Tommy Glennon's address book, and put your snouts down for Tommy himself."

Get it? We're finished here. Go to work. This fucking job's going nowhere so far.

Chairs scraped. The room thinned out. Parker shot Joan a look. It meant *Tonight?* Joan shot a look back. It meant *Sweetie, I can't.*

Parker slunk off. A bottleneck hit the door to Lyman's proper. The room thinned all-the-way out.

The smoke clouds dispersed. Ashida hit the doorway. Joan grabbed his arm and pulled him back in. She slammed the door and leaned against it. Talk to me, you prissy queen.

"You've seen all the paperwork, and you haven't said a word. We need to follow up on Mimms and see what we can get on Wayne Frank Jackson."

Ashida shook his head. "I'll be called down to Baja soon. The gold bayonet derives from there. I'll uncover leads in Mexico. That's how I can best serve this venture."

"That's not an answer. It's an evasion. And 'this venture' does not begin to describe all of this."

"Yes, and 'all of this' means that 'half of this' is down in Mexico. I told you about Kyoho Hanamaka and Dudley's fixation with him, and we're not going to turn leads on him here in Los Angeles."

Joan shook her head. "That's not what you're saying. You're leading me and playing me blithe, and you're withholding the punch line."

Ashida shook his head. "All right. Here's your denouement. Dudley's in Mexico, and we don't stand a chance without cutting him in. He uncovered the Mexican lead, but I know he hasn't connected the bayonet to the heist. We can't work around him, not with leads crossing over to the klub*haus* job. He has to be told, and he has to share in whatever gold we take possession of."

The room spun off-kilter. Joan got ground-floor vertigo. The prim little shit—

"Who tells him?"

"You do. You're his lover."

Joan said, "Yes, I am—however much you'd like to be."

Ashida hurled his coffee cup across the room. It hit a file cabinet and shattered.

52

(LOS ANGELES, 11:00 A.M., 2/3/42)

He hid from Reckless Girl. The klub*haus* as hideout. He worked upstairs. She worked downstairs. The klub*haus* as haunted house. He felt her through the floorboards and walls.

Reckless Girl. Brutal Girl. Hausfrau and Harlot. Consort of two brutal cops.

Ashida rephotographed the upstairs bedroom. He wanted to re-create the full-scale *haus* and run forensic reconstructions. He cracked the front window. Full-scale chatter chattered up.

Patrol cops and press. They crowded the yard and spritzed rumors. "It's a coon caper" persisted. "It's a jealous-wife job" ran second. "Nazis and Sinarquista humps" ran third.

Gossip persisted. Sid Hudgens said he got a tip. There's a big powwow brewing. It's a face-off. Whiskey Bill versus Dudley Smith.

It pertains to Rice-Kapek. It pertains to Watanabe. My lips are sealed past that. It's all *very* hush-hush.

Jack Webb bird-dogged Sid. Jack was a Belmont alum. He bird-dogged Ashida and Bucky Bleichert in high school. He bird-dogged cops now. He was the PD's favored stooge-mascot.

A hot dog vendor worked the front yard. Cops and reporters swarmed him. Ashida shut the window and rephotographed.

He deployed a Man Camera variant. It merged Man Camera and Camera Camera and created a merged tableau. His goal was full depiction. Capture the klub*haus*-death*haus* full on.

Ashida shot baseboards and closet corners. He worked with and without flashbulbs and lights. He got the walls. He got stacks of *Thunderbolt* and *Stormtrooper Magazine*. He should print-dust them. They hadn't been dusted. There was no powder residue.

He shot every page. *Thunderbolt* featured hate diatribes and cheesecake pix. Ashida saw Wendell Rice's wife in fishnet stockings. He recognized a contributor’s name. George Lincoln Rockwell penned a back-to-Africa screed. He praised “Ebony *Führer*” M. L. Mimms at great length. Elmer Jackson and Lee Blanchard braced Mimms and Rockwell. They’d posted their report.

Rockwell, Navy pilot. Mimms, gold-heist periphery.

Ashida shot wall cracks and warped floorboards. He saw shoe scuffs on both sides of the bed. The bed engaged heavy traffic. He knew that.

The floor creaked behind him. The bedroom door creaked.

“I brought you some lunch, Hideo. Worker bees have to eat sometime.”

Ashida wheeled. Jack Webb tossed him a hot dog. Ashida tossed his camera on the bed and snagged it.

Jack said, “I’d call you the world’s hardest-working white man, except you’re not white.”

Ashida laughed and unwrapped the hot dog. Jack lounged in the doorway.

“I’m chasing leads for Sid’s private dish sheet. Like, ‘Call-Me-Jack’s dragging his heels on cutting old Hideo loose for the Army.’ Like, ‘Jack wants to build a new crime lab before he retires, and Bill Parker or Thad Brown ascends to the throne.’ Like, ‘Jack’s got it bad for the Conville cooze, and he’s sending her to the Academy and swearing her in as a captain.’ She’ll command the division, and you’ll jump to civilian chief chemist. How do them apples sound?”

Ashida ate half the hot dog and wiped his hands. Jack smirked. He was Mr. Insider’s scent dog. He sniffed out the dirt.

“Tell me about the Reverend Mimms. He owns this property, and he impresses me as someone you and Sid would have the lowdown on.”

Jack chortled. “Hideo Ashida says ‘lowdown.’ Coontown’s getting to him. He’ll be wearing zoot suits and poking colored girls before you know it.”

“Come on, Jack. Mimms. You and Sid must know something.”

Jack ticked points on his fingers. Jack aped the Sidster’s gruff growl.

“Okay, boychik. He’s the white sheep of a prominent Negro family. He bilks his own people with that return-to-our-homeland shuck. He’s got a southside network of snitches reporting to him, and he reports to Jack the H. exclusive, because they’re pals from ‘The War to End All Wars.’ As a snitch himself, he always bypasses the Dudster and goes straight to Jack. He’s got his minions pushing maryjane, in corrosive counterpoint to these Armenian shits who push white horse under Jack’s aegis, with Dud as the middleman. Both these factions service an all-jig clientele, which is the way Jack H. and his *un*illustrious predecessor, Two-Gun Davis, think narcotics should play out in our town.”

Ashida said, “And that’s all the news that’s unfit to print?”

“Well, you got your costar in this Mimms drama. He’s this Navy flyboy named Link Rockwell. He’s the white Abbott to Mimms’ Costello. He passes through L.A. when he’s on leave, and he’s a bagman for these rich white guys who back the Rev's deport-the-spooks agenda."

Ashida sifted it. His brain gears clicked and meshed. Mimms was sacrosanct. That scotched an approach.

Jack said, "Mimms has got darktown hot-wired. He could help the PD out with this job, but you'd have to bypass Chief Jack. He don't like to be reminded that he's asshole tight with the Rev."

—

Reckless Girl went to lunch. He hid upstairs and watched her walk to Central Avenue. He deployed Man Camera. He close-up shot photo trails.

He began downstairs and worked upstairs. He detail-shot the stairway to the landing and the bedroom door. He was a camera lens and shutter. He went objective and subjective. He posited *this:*

He's a left-handed killer. He walks Rice, Kapek, and Archuleta downstairs. He walks them individually. His victims are terped to the gills. He's got his ice pick pressed to their necks.

His victims flail and bounce off the walls. Note the wall pictures knocked to the floor.

Man Camera. Let's shoot reverse-angle snapshots downstairs.

Ashida walked back down. He's the killer. His victims have ingested carbolic acid. All three are near death. He positions them on the couch. He's got his ice pick to their necks. He steadies them with it. He one-hand strangles them. *Or—he has help.*

Ashida went back upstairs. He reversed field and walked from the bedroom door to the stairway. He Man Camera'd the right-side hallway wall and the floor-juncture points. He snapped the downed pictures. Palm trees and seascapes. Pix that came with the crib.

Let's shoot close-ups now. Let's shoot those floor-juncture points.

He did it. He snapped scuff-mark indentations. They were low on the wall. They were sharp-point indentations. They're in with the dumped pictures. Dent, dent, dent—here to there:

Straight across from the bedroom doorway. Dent, dent, dent—all along the right-side wall. Dent, dent, dent—terminating at the steps leading downstairs.

Man Camera. Let's hypothesize. Let's hazard a guess.

They're scuff-mark indentations. They're sharply pointed. They connote a woman wearing high-heeled shoes.

It's all theoretical. It's inconclusive and unprovable at this point.

Ashida walked into the bedroom. He dumped his Man Camera and opened his evidence kit. He studied photos of the semen-stained sheets.

Four semen stains. Four differentiated blood types. Two O-positives. One O-negative. One rare RH-positive. Dr. Nort blood-tested the dead men. Archuleta was AB-neg/not applicable. Rice and Kapek were O-positive secretors. It was odds-on NA. O-positive was the most common white-European blood type.

Whorehouse. Fuck flop. Acey-ducey antics. Differentiated jizz stains. Perverted acts performed. Performed with men, performed with women. There's no way to tell.

Did sex acts precede the murders? Did the victims or their killer or killers watch/abstain/perform? There's no way to determine that.

Ashida donned his headband light. He bent over the bed and went in close. He quadrant-scanned and saw five small hairs. He'd run two prior scans and missed them.

Dark hairs, curled hairs. Surely pubic hairs. The three victims were dark-haired men.

He tweezed the hairs and prepped his kit microscope. He dialed tight and scoped the hairs, one-off and collectively. He determined *this:*

Three hairs are male. Two hairs are female. The maxilla circumference indicates gender. He's not a physician. It's Dr. Nort's final call.

Ashida walked downstairs. He grabbed the PD's callout phone and buzzed Dr. Nort. He described the hair samples and said he'd bring them in. Dr. Nort said he'd compare them to the stiffs' pubic hair.

Reckless Girl was due back. Ashida walked upstairs and went back to work.

He stifled shrieks. He quashed effete exhalations. It came on belatedly. He knew what it meant.

The stains. The shit traces. Inverted sex acts. He ran from Reckless Girl. She understood inversion and called him an invert. He should have fought back.

Ashida wiped his face and caught his breath. He redusted. He redid touch-and-grab planes. He hit one dresser, two nightstands, the closet door and shelves. He got smudges, smears, distressed latents. He pulled a stack of phonograph records. The grooved plastic would thwart lifts. The covers would sustain.

Jazz records. Duke Ellington and Count Basie. Obscure Negro ensembles. The klub*haus* rolls heterodox.

Ashida dusted. He powdered twenty-one album covers. He got smudges, smears, badly distressed latents. He dusted cover #22. Erskine Hawkins and his 'Bama State Collegians. *The White Dog Blues.*

He got more smudges and smears, more badly distressed latents. He got one partial latent—a top-half fingertip.

Ashida tape-lifted it and rolled it on blank cardboard. The partial looked near-familiar. He checked it against his elimination prints. No loops, whorls, and ridges matched. He saw the two Statie print cards that Dudley supplied. Hector Obregon-Hodaka and Kyoho Hanamaka.

He instantly nixed Hanamaka. All his fingertips bore burn scars. He ran eye clicks. He clicked the partial to the Obregon-Hodaka card. He matched three comparison points. He fell short of a conclusive ID.

He dusted four more album covers. He got smudges and glossy-surface smears.

He got out Tommy Glennon's address book. Ray Pinker pulled two Glennon latents off the front cover. He didn't dust the pages. They were semigloss paper. They might sustain prints.

Ashida flipped through the book. He got hackle bumps. Something seemed wrong. He noted four names. All four played *wrong.*

Dr. Lin Chung.

Dr. Saul Lesnick.

Orson Welles.

Wallace N. Jamie.

Tommy Glennon's a rape-o. Lesnick and Chung are dubious physicians. He knows their reputations himself. Jamie and Welles. A private eye and a film *wunderkind.* Those names, this address book. It does not logically track.

The address book was pocket-sized. Page dusts were difficult work.

Ashida adjusted his headband light. He placed the book atop the dresser and opened it flat. His car keys held it steady. He arrayed his powder and brushes and jumped—

He got thumb-ruffle smears on page one. He got straight smears on page two. He got zero on pages three, four, and five. He got something on page six.

It looked familiar. I've seen you before. You look like a smooth-glove print, but—

You lie flat below the top-digit line. Glove prints don't do that. I've got a hunch that I know what you are.

Man Camera now. Strike an all-objective pose. Observe yourself as you do this.

It's auspicious. You're trembling. Open your evidence kit. Pull that print card Dudley sent you. There it is. You willed it. Yes—it's a perfect match.

Kyoho Hanamaka. His burn-scarred right forefinger. The ghoul touched Tommy Glennon's address book.

53

(LOS ANGELES, 2:30 P.M., 2/3/42)

The boys are back in—

Elmer and Buzz hit the Gordon Hotel. They parked their prowl sled on the sidewalk and opened strong. They pinned their badges to their sport coats and tornado'd the lobby. The desk clerk went *Oh shit.*

Elmer went *Oh shit.* That selfsame guy worked the desk New Year's Eve. He'd tossed Tommy G.'s room then. Buzz knew shit per all that.

Rumdum tenants snoozed in chairs. A radio spieled war news. The fucking Japs stormed the Pacific. They barbecued white missionaries and keestered stray cats.

The clerk said, "Gentlemen?"

Buzz said, "We're looking for Tommy Glennon. This is his last known address. We figure he might have come by for old times' sake, or he might have had folks coming by to say hi."

The clerk eyeballed Elmer. Buzz retrieved the look. Elmer gulp-gulped.

The clerk picked his nose. "Tommy skedaddled New Year's Eve. He said, *'Adios, muchacho,'* so I figured he was Mexico-bound. He gave me ten clams to store his boxes, which I summarily did."

Buzz slid him a ten-spot. " 'Summarily,' huh? That's fine for then, but now's now, which means you should show us Tommy's shit."

The clerk unlocked a door upside his switchboard. He pulled a light cord, all nice-nice.

Elmer and Buzz stepped behind the desk and scoped the doorway. Elmer gulp-gulped. Buzz woo-woo'd Tommy's shit.

It was old news to Elmer and new news to Buzz. There's Tommy's New Year's Eve gear.

The smut books. The Jap flags and Nazi armbands. The tattoo stencils—swastikas and Sinarquista snakes.

The clerk futzed with the switchboard. Buzz pulled Elmer in tight.

"You seen all this before. How's New Year's Eve sound? You, Breuning, and Carlisle fluffed that stakeout on Tommy. You got this dimwit notion to go out rogue."

Elmer smiled and zipped his lips. Buzz said, "Who put that burr in your tail?"

"I wasn't about to shoot some fucker in cold blood. It all came down to the Dudster messing with me."

Buzz winked. "This partnership is starting to gel. We're looking at some big fun."

—

Big fun, huh?

Buzz tattled his own Dudley tale. It's the Watanabe job, post–Pearl Harbor. Dud's working a land grab. He's out to snatch Jap property and promote boocoo gelt. Buzz extorts the mick fucker. He gets cash plus a *biiiiiiiiiiig* bonus.

Buzz had three pregnant girlfriends. Dud was tight with Huey Cressmeyer's mom, Ruth Mildred. Ruthie was a licentious lez and defrocked physician. She worked at Columbia Pictures. She did all the film-goddess scrapes. She scraped Buzz's girlfriends, gratis.

Big fun, huh? Yeah—and Buzz figured *this:*

Dud would up and kill him. He'd frame some jigs for it and get away clean. He figured he should bide his time and kill Dud first.

Big fun, huh?

Elmer perched in Lyman's back room. Lunch was two highballs and three bennies. He was alone. The rest of the Crash Squad was gonesville. Buzz was occupied elsewhere.

They went by Huey C.'s bungalow and saw Dud's prowl car out front. They staked the crib and saw Dud lead Huey outside. Huey's face was glue-smeared. Huey was glued to the planet Mars. Dud tossed him in his car and drove off.

Address-book duty loomed. Elmer had dropped Buzz at St. Vibiana's. His gig: brace Monsignor Joe Hayes. Elmer drove to Lyman's then. His gig: bone up on Jean Clarice Staley.

Jean bounced for maryjane, back in '36. He knew that already. It was old news. Lee Blanchard posted a background-check note. Jean Staley was allegedly an ex–Paramount starlet. She works as a carhop now. Blanchard attached a mug-shot strip. The Jeanstress wore glasses and still looked *gooooooooood.* Blanchard closed out his note: "Additional file at Red Squad office/Wilshire Station."

Oooga-booga. That's food for thought.

The Red Squad was hush-hush. It was cloak-and-dagger and a one-man show. Lieutenant Carl Hull lock-and-keyed the files at the Wilshire DB. Hull was in the Navy now. Hull was an ardent anti-Red and pal of Whiskey Bill Parker. Hull hoarded one file set only:

The Communist Party (U.S.A.), its own self.

—

Parker greased the skids. The Crash Squad rated top access. He called Whiskey Bill. Whiskey Bill called Wilshire. The watch boss opened the office and found the file.

Some file. It ran *mucho* brief. Tortilla-thin meets threadbare.

Elmer sat at Carl Hull's desk and put his feet up. He looted Hull's cigar and liquor stash and got comfy. He read through the file. There's our girl:

Staley, Jean Clarice. White female American. DOB: 1/28/09/Beaumont, Texas.

Jean graduates high school, 1926. Jean migrates to L.A. Jean's mom and dad kick in a dust storm, summer '32. Jean's got a kid brother. Robert Arthur Staley's a homo prostitute. He does a two-spot juvie bounce at Preston. Jean does that reefer bounce. Before that, there's *this:*

She's live-wire CP. She's in a cell with four other Reds. She carries the card. She toes the Red line and wears the Red beret. She's a part-time starlet and full-time Red reptile.

The cell boss is one Meyer Gelb. Jean's cellmates are a beaner named Jorge Villarreal-Caiz and two Commos—

Oops—

Named Lesnick.

Dr. Saul. Dr. Saul's daughter, Andrea.

It's old home week. Small world, huh? What goes around comes around. Life's one big circle jerk. It's who you know and who you blow.

Old Saul. Annie Staples' trick. Ed Satterlee's snitch. Psych doc of Orson Welles and Claire De Haven. Fuck-flop target of Sergeant E. V. Jackson.

Elmer skimmed file sheets. They ran threadbare. He ran dozy. An occurrence sheet jerked him awake.

October '33. That very hot month. The PD Arson Squad rousts the cellmates.

Per the Griffith Park fire. The blaze that scorched Wayne Frank. It's all Meyer Gelb's fault. He made "apocalyptic remarks." He predicted "big antifascist chaos."

The rousts went nowhere. Gelb retracted his remarks. The hullabaloo died out.

Kay Lake jive-talked this deal called the *Spiritus Mundi.* It's some eastern swami hoodoo. It's the place where all our shit coheres and our souls intersect.

Elmer got the heebie-jeebies. Kay just sold him on the *Spiritus Mundi. Woo-woo*—he's heading there now.

—

The carhops hopped on skates. They hopped cars-to-kitchen, round-trip. They wore red-and-white tunics and puffed-leg slacks. The girls looked good and hopped good. Jean Staley looked and hopped the best.

Simon's Drive-in stood across from Hollywood High. It was a streamline-moderne job. Cars circled a walkway ramp and an inside counter. Some bleached-blond cooze hopped Elmer. He popped her for whore vag in '39. She didn't recognize him.

Elmer sipped a pineapple malt. He spiked it with Old Crow and three bennies. Jean Staley hopped cars in his *perv*-view. He watched her sling burgers and glom tips.

She skated nice. She dipped her tray nice. She dipsy-doodled and drew wolf whistles and hoochie hoots. She was East Texas/barn dances/male kousins all Klanned up. Kay's *Spiritus Mundi.* He saw his shit and Jean's shit, entwined.

It perplexed him. He grabbed Tommy G.'s address book. Jean Staley's initials are in there. That Vice clerk got him her full name. He glommed her PD sheet last month and tumbled to her weed roust. He planted the address book to fuck with Dudley Smith. It's fake evidence in a real murder case. He planted names in the address book. Lin Chung and Doc Lesnick radiate Fifth Column. The klub*haus* is Fifth Column. Jean's revealed as Red now. Old Saul was her '33 cellmate. The cell got braced per the '33 fire.

Spiritus Mundi? Yeah, he gets that. Beyond that, there's just *this:*

Jean Staley. Barn-dance femme fatale. She sure can sling hash on skates.

54

(LOS ANGELES, 4:30 P.M., 2/3/42)

Ruth Mildred held court. She excelled at screwball comedy. Her office proved the point.

The dippy Deco furnishings. Props scrounged from *Dinner at Eight.* The cheesecake wall fotos. Ruth Mildred's nice-girls-in-a-jam.

Ruthie pointed to Joan Crawford. She said, "I scraped her. A coon trombone knocked her up."

Dudley roared. Juan Pimentel went *tut-tut.* Huey Cressmeyer snoozed on mama's couch.

Ruthie pointed to Katharine Hepburn. She said, "I scraped her. I sold locks of her snatch hair for a C-note a pop."

Lieutenant Juan grew a Hitler mustache. It sprang up dark and thick. He wore Statie blacks north of the border. He lived to cause fear, wherever he went.

Huey snored. He required resuscitation. Model-airplane glue laid him low. He built a Messerschmidt squadron and succumbed.

Ruthie pointed to Sylvia Sidney. She said, "I scraped her. I licked her bush while she was anesthetized."

Dudley yanked Ruthie's cord. "Regretfully, I must call for an intermission. I have questions for your grand boy before the lieutenant drives him south."

Ruthie dug out her dope spike and filled it. Nazi-issue amphetamine possessed pop. Harry Cohn swore by it. Ruthie injected his starlets. They toiled in grade-Z turkeys all day and Harry's private stag flicks all night.

"The Dudster's a killjoy. My baby needs his beauty sleep, and his mommy loves to strut her stuff."

Lieutenant Juan said, "Dr. Cressmeyer should resettle in Tijuana. I would see to the reinstatement of her medical license. We are currently battling a VD epidemic. Our vivid nightclub acts have spawned this medical plague. Donkeys, you see. You never know where they've been and who they've been with."

Dudley roared. Ruthie roared big. She swabbed Huey's arm and tied him off. Huey snored. Ruthie tapped the spike and fed him the juice. She went *There, there* and held her baby's hand.

Lieutenant Juan timed the wake-up. His wristwatch ticked off three minutes. Huey babbled and twitched.

Dudley shooed Ruthie and *El Fasco* out. He bolted the door and pulled a chair up to the couch. Huey twitched, babbled, twitched.

He slurred verses of the "Horst-Wessel-Lied" and "Lili Marlene." He babbled up the Deutsches Haus and its habitué, "Mitch." "Model-airplane man, model-airplane man." Huey made no sense.

Dudley lit a cigarette and blew smoke in Huey's face. Huey coughed. His eyes popped open, wide.

"I have questions, lad. Prompt compliance will earn you a pat on the head. Evasions will earn you a beating."

Huey pouted. "I want to go home. You've got me on some jaggedy hop, and I'm zorched to the gills. I want to mess with my pin map. I've got the Russian campaign all doped out."

Dudley twirled his ashtray. "You may have heard that two policemen and a Mex pal of theirs were murdered late last month. Your friend Tommy Glennon may have been involved. Wendell Rice, George Kapek, Archie Archuleta. Do those names sound your chimes?"

Huey picked his nose and admired a loose nugget. Huey pulled out a paper clip and excavated his ears.

"I don't know no Archuleta. I've seen Rice and Kapek at the Deutsches Haus, but we just sling a few barbs at the kikes, and let it go at that. They're far right—but who ain't? If I'm lyin', I'm flyin'."

The Deutsches Haus. It appeared in Tommy's address book. The PD raided it in December. It was now Fed-infiltrated. That nixed an approach.

Rice and Kapek appeared in T.J. They wheeled a truck toward the border. He ran photo-device pix and saw them. Photo fuzz obscured the license plates.

Dudley chained cigarettes. "Far right to the extent that they'd run fugitive Japs?"

"No, that don't beat no tom-toms for me. But Rice used to brag that he was running wetbacks—if I'm lyin', I'm flyin'."

Dudley said, "Lad, how do you *know* this?"

Huey shrugged. "Fifth Column's Fifth Column. We all drink at the same trough and pick at the same fleas."

"On that note, then. Where's Tommy Glennon?"

"I ain't seen him since he left Quentin. That was back in November."

"Do any Japs habituate the Deutsches Haus? I'm thinking of a man named Kyoho Hanamaka."

Huey scratched his balls. "Japs on the loose, since the Day of Infamy? Japs who ain't already in stir for the war's duration?"

"Can you connect Tommy G. to the Deutsches Haus, or Rice and Kapek?"

"*Nein*—'cause the Deutsches Haus didn't open up until sometime in '37, and Tommy was in Quentin then. As far as Rice and Kapek go, you've got Rice bragging that he ran wets, and Tommy used to run wets for Carlos Madrano. It's like the Fifth Column concept. Everybody knows everybody—if I'm lyin', I'm flyin'."

Dudley cracked his knuckles. "Let's talk about Tommy's address book."

"Okay."

"Let me run a few names by you. Lin Chung, Orson Welles, Dr. Saul Lesnick, Wallace N. Jamie. Can you relate these men to Tommy, or to anyone else that you might consider Fifth Column?"

Huey made the jack-off sign. Huey grabbed his crotch and went *Consider this.*

"Moving along, then. Monsignor Joe Hayes, a woman named Jean Staley, the hot-box phone by the *L.A. Herald* building, and fourteen pay phones in Baja, rumored to receive coded calls of a suspicious nature."

Huey squirmed. He was bored. The psycho thrill killer wants his diesel-dyke mommy.

"No, nix, *nein,* and *nyet,* Uncle Dud. All us fascist types use phone drops, but I don't know nothing about pay phones in Baja."

"Your name was in Tommy's address book."

"That ain't no large surprise. We used to correspond, from here to Quentin."

"He wrote 'Big Dick' beside your name. I'm wondering if you lads might have traveled the Hershey Highway at any time during your reform-school or on-the-loose sojourns."

Thrill-killer Huey. He kills Jews, kills jigs, kills Japs. He kills behind pique, ennui, and glue withdrawal. Now, he's *aghast.*

"It's a fucking lie! He ain't never seen my dick!"

Dudley flashed his photostat. There's that address-book page. Tommy extolls Huey's big dick.

"That ain't Tommy's printing! He used to write me! Tommy don't print that way!"

—

Huey was credible. He oozed indignation and righteous affront. He went Greek. Tommy went Greek. They sought the Greek grail—but not together.

The address book had been altered and planted at the klub*haus.* That seemed evident now. Who performed these misdeeds? Puerile Elmer Jackson comes to mind.

Dudley sat in Luke's Shanghai. It was Bill Parker's C-town haunt. Parker disdained the ritzier Kwan's. Uncle Ace vexed him no end.

Dudley sipped green tea. He'd dropped by Lyman's en route. The address-book pages were photostated and tacked to a bulletin board.

He studied the block printing. He saw hesitation marks. Huey's "Big Dick!!!!!" was a badly forged addition.

The botched New Year's stakeout. Tommy flees and drops the address book. Cretinous Elmer grabs it. The act spawns his series of inexplicable gaffes. That seems theoretically evident now.

Hideo called him at Lyman's. He found a burn-scar print in the book. It matched Kyoho Hanamaka's print card. Tommy was privy to Baja-based Fifth Column operations. That seems evident now. The print links Tommy to Hanamaka and his faked-death act.

Parker slid into the booth. He wore civvies and cradled a highball. He'd cut himself shaving. His belt piece weighed down his pants.

Dudley smiled. "It was good of you to meet me, sir."

Parker lit a cigarette. "I've told you before, we're both captains. This pertains to Jim Davis' admissions, and you're here as Jack Horrall's proxy. With that in mind, I'm listening."

"And, with that in mind, I'll open with a question. Have you seen the photostated pages from Tommy Glennon's address book posted at Lyman's?"

Parker said, "No, I have not."

Dudley said, "Names from the Watanabe job are crossing over to the klub*haus* job. Specifically, Lin Chung, Saul Lesnick, and the Deutsches Haus. We need to address this and limit the extent of Jim Davis' exposure, along with the risk of discrediting our arrest of Fujio Shudo, soon to be sentenced to death and executed."

Parker crossed himself and killed his drink. Beseech Kay and Joan, Bill. They round out the Trinity.

"We should set terms. Something that will appease Chief Horrall and satisfy both of us. Something we can both live with."

Dudley said, "Now, *I'm* listening."

"No frame on this job. No killing convenient suspects. Put Breuning and Carlisle on a tight leash."

"Agreed."

"Immunity for case-to-case witnesses who provide leads that clear the klub*haus* job. We've got a rubber-stamp grand jury installed now. We may as well put it to good use."

Dudley said, "Agreed—but within that, I must insert a codicil. Rice and Kapek were rogue cops of a most pernicious ilk. We must make every effort to suppress evidence of their malfeasance at trial, to limit general testimony, and to urge the presiding judge to issue a directed guilty verdict."

Parker said, "Agreed." A fresh highball appeared. Parker drained it double quick.

Dudley smiled. "Full disclosure, Captain. Rice and Kapek were spotted at the border, three nights before their deaths. They may have been running wets or fugitive Japs."

Parker shrugged. "You're Army SIS, Captain. Mexico is your jurisdiction. I don't care what you do there. Nor do I care if you judiciously abrogate the rule of law here in the States."

Dudley bowed. "I consider that a grand declaration and nod to informed latitude. It would please me to grant you a concession."

Parker lit a cigarette. His leaky Zippo whooshed.

"Put Jim Davis under pentothal. Take him to Terry Lux's farm and forcibly sequester him. Have at him there. We need to determine what he might know about the klub*haus* job."

Dudley said, "Agreed."

Parker said, "I cannot abide executing Shudo. Have Horrall brace the DA and hint at our impasse. We need a true bill from the grand jury, along with a decline-to-file DA's writ, buttressed by an insanity ruling submitted by a blue-ribbon panel of psychiatrists. We've got Shudo on multiple counts of kidnap and sodomy. He'll never get out."

Dudley offered his hand. Parker clasped it. The deal was *comme ci, comme ça.* The fucking Werewolf survives. Jack Horrall will fucking *SHIT.*

—

They made love straight off. They peeled their way to the bedroom and left the lights on. Joan held on his eyes.

She rolled under him and above him and moved him about. She got him just so and fixed on his eyes.

He tried to untie her hair. She swatted his hands away and pinned them to the bed. She clamped his head and bent down to kiss him. She did not shut her eyes. He kept his eyes open. It sealed their spell.

They started that way and finished that way. Joan killed the lights then. She got them cozy. She said, I must tell you something. You must not interrupt.

She cinched narrative lines. The Rain, The Gold, The Fire. It's all one story, you see.

The charred box. The gold chip within. The dead man worked the gold heist. Wayne Frank Jackson died a short distance away. The elements have conspired in our favor. We owe this moment in the dark to The Rain.

The train journey south. The Griffith Park blaze. The gold bar stored in the locker. The gold bayonet. The burned fingerprint. Did Hanamaka singe his hands in the park that very hot day?

The Reverend Mimms bailed out the prime gold-heist suspect. The Reverend Mimms owns the klub*haus. It's all one story, you see.*

Fritz Eckelkamp escapes from the train. There's a partial bullet match to a robbery spree. Wayne Frank Jackson is detained and released. The spree precedes the fire. The fire occurs. Some Reds are detained and released. I met one of them at a party. *It's all one story, you see.*

Hideo Ashida put most of this together. He urged me to disclose it and to bring you in on the gold. It's yours as much as ours. Your skills surpass ours. I defer to Hideo in all matters that concern you. He's far less compromised in his affections. I will never be as exclusively in love with you.

—

I should be stitching sailors on a battleship somewhere. I attribute all of this to the war. Our convergence is a heady bit of wartime magic. Ask your friend the Wolf about that.

Have you felt him in your presence? He's determined to do his part in keeping you safe.

I wake up and see him at the foot of the bed.

Claire disdains the Wolf, you know. I find it endearing that a scientist should relinquish herself to this beast.

You're the beast I've relinquished myself to. I'll be decorous, and refrain from mentioning your littermate, Bill Parker.

I deserve such brusque mention. I shouldn't have brought up Claire.

I met her at that party I told you about. Did she tell you we'd met? It's the war again. The party couldn't have occurred at any other time.

She told me you were nude together, in a steam room. You and Orson Welles, no less. She didn't state your name, but I knew it was you. This very tall and brazen redhead, she said.

It was another magical convergence. Tell Claire that she's a fool not to believe.

I'm going to interview young Welles soon. His name turned up in Tommy Glennon's address book, as I'm sure you already know.

Tell him Red says hi.

I've been to the Maestro's house. Another party, some time ago. I may tell you *the story one day.*

You owe me a story, given the one I told you.

I wholeheartedly acknowledge my debt there.

I went to the party to observe Kay Lake. It should be a bitter rivalry, but we're becoming friends. She's got me keeping a diary.

Write of me frequently and fondly, dear.

My lips are sealed, but I may show you if the mood strikes me.

You have me reconsidering the notion of debts. It prompts me to say, How can I ever repay you?

Well, there's the gold, of course. And you might also find the man who killed my father. That would be nice of you.

55

(LOS ANGELES, 9:30 A.M., 2/4/42)

She hated him now. She conceded his brilliance and despised his effeminacy. She told him that Dudley was in and cut it off there. Ashida went smarmy and smirked.

Dr. Nort arrived. His presence muzzled her. She'd prepared jazzy ripostes. They spoofed Ashida's crush on Dudley. He was Renfield in *Dracula.* He intoned, "Master, I come."

Lyman's back room socked in heat. Joan cracked a window. Shrieks echoed upstairs. Mike Breuning phone-booked a snotty witness.

Dr. Nort said, "I matched the male pubic hairs to our victims. That leaves the female samples unknown. We've got one Latin, and one Caucasian."

Ashida said, "The semen stains. Were you able to—"

Dr. Nort cut in. "Rice and Kapek, most likely. O-positive is a very common type, and that's as far as I could classify the secretions. Archuleta was AB-neg. I got four differentiated ejaculate groups. Our boys plus two unknown males."

Joan lit a cigarette. "I examined the stains. There's no sign of cellular erosion, so I concluded that the stains were recent—perhaps as recent as the night of the homicides. Can we posit an orgy that went spontaneously bad? Do the unidentified ejaculates correspond to more than one killer? Say it's an orgy. Did our other men participate, abstain, or were the stains left at varying intervals?"

Dr. Nort sipped coffee. "We don't really know who secreted what. Beyond that, we've got no leads on the two women."

Ashida dunked a tea bag and blew on his cup. The snotty witness screamed. The upstairs floorboards shook.

"I have a theory. I think the killer led the victims downstairs, individually, with his ice pick pressed to their necks. All three are debilitated from their consumption of terpin hydrate. They stagger, flail, and knock those framed pictures off the right-hand side of the wall. There are a series of kick-mark indentations, low on that wall. They indicate a woman wearing pointed-toe shoes. The kick marks do not indicate any concentrated degree of force. It's as if she were observing the forced marches downstairs, and the kicks were her form of punctuation."

Joan mulled the theory. Dr. Nort shrugged and tapped his wristwatch. The snotty witness screamed. Dr. Nort went *eeek* and walked out.

Joan locked the door. She pointed to the corkboard and Jean Staley's green sheet.

"She's on Elmer Jackson and Buzz Meeks' interview list. We already know a few things that they don't. They may learn that she was in Meyer Gelb's cell, and that the members were questioned about the fire that killed Elmer's brother."

Ashida studied the green sheet. He scanned the text and tapped a routing stamp.

"She has a CP file. They keep all those files at Wilshire Station."

Joan pointed to the wall phone. Ashida walked up to it and dialed out. He spoke low and listened. He hung up and stamped one foot.

"Elmer saw the file yesterday. Captain Parker arranged it."

Joan said, "Here's what we're up against. Is Jean Staley germane to this case, or to the fire case, or to our other one? Will the fire be mentioned in the CP file? If so, how will Elmer react?"

"He's been alerted to a possible fire-case link. A gold-robbery link is most unlikely here."

Joan mulled it. Ashida slouched against the wall and twirled the phone cord.

"Miss Staley's name appeared in Tommy Glennon's address book. I find that book suspect in and of itself."

Joan leafed through the corkboard reports. She studied the book photostats. They were white on black and tacked straight across.

She saw what Ashida saw. Block-print forgeries. Hesitation marks and ruler marks. Four names were forged. The name Jean Staley was discernibly legit.

"You're right. Chung, Welles, Lesnick, and Jamie are forged."

The Teletype clattered. Joan tore off the sheet. Fourth Interceptor sent a communiqué. Lieutenant H. J. Ashida/you've been summoned south.

"This should please you, Hideo. Our handsome Irish friend has mischief in mind."

56

(TIJUANA, 5:30 P.M., 2/4/42)

It's dusk in teeming T.J. Soldier, beware. The ghastly ghouls are out.

The he-shes. The whores. The jarheads down from Dago. The zip-gun boys.

Ashida parked on Revolución. He gave a zip-gun boy ten centavos to watchdog his car. The boy was eight years old. He goofed Ashida's Army duds. Ashida mind-read him. *Usted es un Jap.*

Dudley shot him a note at the Biltmore. It said Jack Horrall kowtowed and pink-slipped his early release. The note critiqued probable address-book forgeries. The key suspect was one E. V. Jackson.

Ashida agreed. The why of it perplexed him. The note concluded: "Meet Lieutenant Juan Pimentel at the Blue Fox."

Strolling ghouls checked out Ashida. The sex-show barkers. The rat-meat taco vendors. The male prosties in bullfighter chaps. Ashida rigged his Man Camera and shuttered them out.

This is Mexico. Certain questions persist. Where's Kyoho Hanamaka? The fourteen Baja pay phones in Tommy's address book. *Qué es el* truth there?

Ashida strolled. There's the Blue Fox. It's licentious and lewd-legendary. Hoochie girls lured sailors inside. They wore blue fox masks and tails. They were otherwise nude and single-digit pubescent.

Ashida shut his eyes and pushed past them. He entered the Fox. Big noise hit him. He opened his eyes and saw *this:*

A bandstand. An androgynous trio. A tethered donkey sporting red devil horns. Tables packed with U.S. Marines.

The trio featured a sylph vocalist, trumpet, and sax. They whipped through the "Marines' Hymn" and segued to *this:*

"Mama's on welfare!!!"

"Papa's in jail!!!"

"Little sister's on the corner—yelling, pussy for sale!!!"

"Grandma's on white horse!!!"

"Grandpa's on glue!!!"

"Little brother's getting cornholed by some jigaboos!!!"

Ashida stood, stunned-o. Ghouls fluttered by. A girl tongued his neck. A boy grabbed his crotch. A he-she fondled his holster. He tried to move. He failed to move. The ghouls glued his feet to the floor.

He deployed Man Camera Left. Nude girls danced on a bartop. Seated sailors muff-munched them and jerked off. He deployed Man Camera Right. Fox-face girls table-hopped and fellated Marines.

He shut his eyes and shut it out. A schizy sound track rolled in the dark.

"There he is."

"You are very astute, Huey. Of course it is him. He is the only Japanese within view."

"Come on. You said you'd call me *'mein Führer.'*"

"If it pleases you—yes, of course."

"I think he's cute."

"He's Oriental cute, which is not my sort of indulgence."

"He won't open his eyes. This place must seem pretty raw to him."

"Come, Lieutenant Ashida. Captain Smith has a full night's work for you."

—

They took Ashida's car and hit the coast road south. Ashida drove. His ghoul colleagues lounged in the backseat. Pimentel sniffed cocaine. *Führer* Huey made kissy sounds. Pimentel reached over and played the radio. Father Coughlin proclaimed.

The drive protracted. Pimentel mimicked Jap Zeroes at Pearl. Huey mimicked bomb blasts and sailors fried alive.

They passed Ensenada and cut inland. They climbed scrub hills and found it: this weird A-frame chalet.

The lights were on. Dudley stood outside. He wore a kimono. He embraced Ashida and called him *"Ichiban."*

Pimentel and *Führer* Huey peeled off. They were bivouacked in the surveillance *haus* up the next hillside. Ashida unloaded his lab gear. Dudley assisted. Ashida Man Camera'd him.

He swayed here. He walked inimically straight in L.A. He's T. E. Lawrence West now. He's gone native. Call him Smith of Mexico. He overlords the brown hoi polloi.

His kimono swirled. Ashida studied the design. It was orange-and-black silk. Little Sinarquista snakes were inlaid.

—

They toured the hideaway. Dudley dubbed it the *"Wolfschanze."* He'd appropriated the chalet and planned to remodel it. Maestro Klemperer's L.A. spread inspired him. Claire had showed him jazzy snapshots.

Ashida viewed Hanamaka's hidey-hole. Dudley posed in Nazi tunics cut to fit him. Ashida read Hanamaka's journal. He trembled as he flipped pages. The lunatic Left and Right merge behind one banner. This war marks a prophecy fulfilled.

They sat down in the living room. Faded bloodstains covered one wall. Dudley served warm sake. A phonograph murmured *Parsifal,* low.

They discussed the gold and all events related. They time-machined back to May '31 and October '33. They stopped at the klub*haus* today.

They tracked police-file revelations. Fritz Eckelkamp and Wayne Frank Jackson. The liquor-store spree. Tommy Glennon's address book. Brother Elmer's forgeries.

Jean Staley. Elmer, poised to brace her. Miss Staley's membership in Meyer Gelb's cell. Martin Luther Mimms. Dudley's plan to brace Chung, Jamie, and Welles.

The dialogue wound down. *Untersturmbannführer* Ashida remained attentive.

Dudley said, "Comb the place, top to bottom. See what you can find."

—

A midnight rainstorm came and went. Dudley drove back to Ensenada. Lieutenant Juan and *Führer* Huey stuck to the lookout *haus.* Ashida roamed the *Wolfschanze.* He'd inventoried his gear. It covered all contingencies.

Three microscopes. Three forensic hot plates. Print cards and print-lift tools. Evidence pouches/beakers/Bunsen burners. Three forensic vacuums.

The task was confirm or refute. Try to match L.A.-to-Baja locations. The Hanamaka print linked the klub*haus* to the *Wolfschanze.* Try to link conversely here.

Prints first.

Ashida dusted the downstairs walls. He powdered wide swaths and naked-eyed them. He saw washcloth wipe marks overlaid with dust.

Thick dust. Hanamaka vanished on December 18. It was now February 5. The washcloth marks and dust overlay confirmed his departure date.

Ashida dusted downstairs furniture. He hit hard surfaces only. They were all print-sustaining/all touch-and-grab.

He got wipe marks, smudges, and smears. It confirmed the professional wipe job. The smudges and smears overlaid the marks. That meant they were recent. The smudges and smears were surely Herr Dudley Smith's.

Ashida dusted the upstairs walls and furniture. He got the same results. The upstairs dust had settled in thick. Dudley kept the windows cracked wide.

Fibers next.

He installed vacuum bags and worked with flat and scooped nozzles. He vacuumed carpets, soft furniture, floor-to-wall points. He pulled up rug grit and dust and filled three bags.

He emptied the bags on Dudley's kitchen table. He naked-eyed the contents. It was all dust and rug grit.

Ashida switched nozzles. He installed a soft-bristled one. It caught buffed-surface particles best.

The one bathroom had been wall-and-fixture wiped. Washcloth swirls plainly showed. This was in-tight work. Get behind the toilet and under the sink.

Ashida worked on his knees. He swept the nozzle over flat surfaces and pushed it against sink pipes and wall planes. He got the sink, the bathtub, the toilet. No suction sounds reverberated. All fiber snags would run silent here.

Dawn broke clear and bright. His muscles throbbed. He smelled his own sweat.

He walked to the kitchen table. He donned his headlamp and looked into the bag. He naked-eyed toilet-paper scraps and one dark blue thread.

He plucked the thread and placed it on a microscope slide. He dialed close and saw the interior shaft. The weave indicated fine silk. The cross weave indicated cheap dye.

Maybe. Just possibly. This could be—

Ashida rigged a comparison scope. He removed the thread and placed it on the right-side mount. He dug in his evidence kit. He found his comparison thread.

He placed it on the left-side mount. He dialed both lenses tight. He looked left-right, left-right, left-right. He made this determination. It's an identical match.

Wendell Rice. His Hawaiian shirt. The shirt he died in. Wendell Rice was here at the *Wolfschanze.* Wendell Rice died at the klub*haus.*

Ashida went up-all-night woozy. He stumbled around the kitchen. He went weak-kneed. Flashes lit the one window. It startled him.

The flashes repeated. They hit once, twice, three times. A pattern repeated. Short, long, short. It was Morse code/dot, dash, dot.

Light hit the window. The same sequence repeated. Ashida knew Morse code. He deciphered it.

Dots and dashes. Dashes and dots. They spelled out "We love you."

The flashes hit windowpane glass. They hit downward. They flashed from somewhere outside and above.

Ashida brought binoculars. He grabbed them and held them up to the window. He dialed in. He glanced up and out and saw *this:*

The lookout *haus.* A wide window there. Lieutenant Juan and *Führer* Huey. They're holding up a hand mirror. They're flashing "We Love You/We Love You/We Love You."

Lieutenant Juan and *Führer* Huey. They're stark nude and entwined.

57

(LOS ANGELES, 10:00 A.M., 2/5/42)

The *Herald* headlined it. Tall type jumped out and slammed you. Sid Hudgens inked the piece.

WEREWOLF BEATS GAS CHAMBER!!! D.A. MANDATES LUNACY BOUNCE!!!

Elmer read the piece and reread it. He sat in his prowl sled. Simon's was packed. He read and *perv*-viewed Jean Staley, intermittent.

The Sidster's style packed panache. Chief Horrall was a "heartbroken humanist." He could not "abysmally abide" a "Werewolf barbecue." "Devoted-to-justice detectives" brokered a deal. NO GREEN ROOM TREK FOR WEREWOLF, D.A. BILL MC PHERSON SEZ.

Elmer tossed the paper and snarfed his breakfast. He noshed nutritious today. His pineapple malt was infused with Old Crow. *Oooga-booga.* The Werewolf gets a skate. Sid fed him the inside dish back at Lyman's.

Bill Parker got all weepy. Poor Werewolf—boo-hoo, boo-hoo. He confabbed with El Dudster. Demands went down. It was a frame job, anyway. Fuck the fucking Watanabes. Who cares who killed them? The Werewolf rates a stroll.

Elmer scoped Jolting Jean. Her tortoiseshell glasses wowed him. She packed panache herself.

That same bleached-blond carhop hopped him today. That was good. He was saving Jungle Jean. He had to scurrilously scope her out first.

Her CP file hexed him. He got weepy for Wayne Frank. He recalled the good times. He ignored Wayne Frank's shitbird demeanor and Klan escapades.

Buzz hopped in the car. *Wham!*—this Okie cyclone.

"I ain't seen you in two days, but I thought I might find you here."

Elmer said, "I'm staking out a suspect."

Buzz wagged his eyebrows. "Yeah, I can see that."

"You feel like reporting? I ain't seen you in two days, either."

Buzz torched a cold cigar. "I braced that papist hump, Joe Hayes. He impressed me as a froufrou, but he didn't reveal no racy drift on Tommy. He said he was Tommy's confessor, and that was it."

Elmer made the jack-off sign. Buzz said, "I went back to Lyman's then. Breuning and Carlisle had posted a note. It said Dud's coming back in. He's all set to brace Chung, Welles, and Jamie."

Elmer yocked. Buzz blew smoke in his face.

"Then I remembered that Huey Cressmeyer's mama works at Columbia, right by Huey's flop. So I drove over there, and the first thing I see is Dud's car, parked outside on Gower—with a Mex Statie sedan parked right behind it. I got the plate number, called the Ensenada barracks, and learned that that particular sled was checked out to some lieutenant named Juan Pimentel. This led me to believe that Dud and mama were baby-sitting Huey until Pimentel could get him down to Baja and hide his homo ass out."

Elmer whooped. "Because Huey's in Tommy's address book, and he's Dud's snitch, and he's jungled up with Dud in three thousand questionable ways—and we're set to pull him in for questioning."

Buzz rewagged his eyebrows. "So, I played a hunch on Pimentel. I called the Sheriff's Office here, plus Orange County and San Diego County. Get this. San Diego R & I has a green sheet on old Juan. He got popped in a fruit-bar raid in '37, but it got hushed up, because Juan's got juice with the Staties. *Then,* I go back to my stakeout at Columbia. I see Dudley, Huey, and some uniformed beaner who's got to be Pimentel walk out. Him and Huey wave bye-bye to Dud and take off in that Statie sedan. I tail them to the coast road southbound, and that's all the news that's unfit to print."

Elmer slurped his malt. He eyeballed Jean Staley. He mulled the Huey dish. Jean did this nifty tray dip.

Buzz said, "Are you going to brace her, or peep her for the rest of your life?"

—

Brace her, boss. You gots her under yo skin.

He swooped that night. He hit at 8:00 p.m. He bopped to her Beachwood Canyon hut. He wore his best chalk-stripe suit and new brogans. He primped and rang the bell.

She cracked the door. He saw one eyeball and badged her. She pulled the door wide.

She wore dungarees and a white tennis shirt. She'd pinned up her hair. She wore schoolmarm glasses. Her joy de viver undermined the dowdy effect.

"You're not the Sheriff's, because they've got that six-pointed thing. You're not the state AG, because they don't come around anymore. You're not the FBI, because Mr. Hoover goes for beefcake types, and that's not you."

Elmer smiled. She talked East Texas. She downplayed it. It still poked out some.

"If you're trying to tell me you've been around, you've succeeded."

"I'm not trying to tell you anything. I'm just wondering why you're letting me give you so much guff from jump street."

"Well, I did have some questions."

"All spiffed up, at this time of night?"

"Let me in, will you? It won't take that long."

Jean squinted. Her cheaters magnified her eyes. Jean the Defiant. Screw you—I still look good.

"You're stalling me. There's a whole lot of things I want to talk to you about, but I can't do it standing at your door."

She had buck teeth and sleek hair. Note the gray strands in with the brown.

"You've been frequenting Simon's. All the girls knew you were up to something."

Elmer said, "I popped that blond girl for pros vag a while back. She must have spread the word."

Jean went *Well, all right.* Elmer walked in. The front room featured Navajo rugs and green leather chairs. Stand-up ashtrays clinched it. Some men's club tossed a yard sale.

Elmer took a seat. Jean took a seat. Wind blew the door shut.

Jean said, "What's on your mind?"

"My name's Elmer Jackson, in case you were wondering."

"Is it Lieutenant?"

"It's Sergeant, and I'm lucky to have that."

"I'm not going to ask you what it's all about. Cops always get to it soon enough."

Elmer peeled a cigar. "Why was the state AG coming around?"

Jean crossed her legs and lit a cigarette. She hunkered in some.

"I was a Communist, back when lots of folks were. A dumb hillbilly girl—that was me. And the CP was something I sure as you know what came to regret."

Elmer said, "You must have had a lot of visitors. Red Squad men, Feds, Racket Squad guys up the ying-yang."

Jean blew smoke rings. Elmer glimpsed her starlet side. She crouched inside herself and played to men.

"I was in a cell. All we did was rattle our own cages and listen to ourselves talk. We went to labor marches and carried banners. The Feds carried cameras and got pictures of us. We were real-live CP. We shot our mouths off, and you boys started coming around asking questions. That was enough for this little Red duck."

Elmer blew smoke rings. They came out all dispersed.

"Did you fink? You got disillusioned, it was the Depression, you realized the Party was all full of crap. I'm just thinking aloud now. Finking was a way out for most of you Commo types."

Jean crushed her cigarette. "There were five of us in the cell. I finked the guy I liked the least, and the one I figured would do the most harm in the long run."

"Who was the guy? Come on. His name's on six dozen lists somewhere."

Jean said, "Saul Lesnick. I finked him because he talked too much, and got people to convert to the Party just by wearing them down with the yak-yak. He was a Beverly Hills psychiatrist, if you can figure that."

Blackout sirens whooped. Elmer and Jean froze. The all-clear signal blew. They unfroze quick.

"Who else was in the cell?"

"A man named Meyer Gelb. He was the leader, and another big fatmouth. We had a brief wingding, which shows you how susceptible I was in those days. There was Dr. Saul's nutty daughter, Andrea, and a Mexican named Jorge Villareal-Caiz. He went back to Mexico and hooked up with his brother, Victor. They got embroiled in the plot to clip Leon Trotsky, then I heard they went fasco. If you want my opinion, the Party was no longer au courant, so in the end everybody just picked up their toys and went home."

Jungle Jean rats Old Saul. That was prime drift. Beyond that—*c'est la guerre.*

Jean said, "You look parched."

"Does it show that bad?"

"I'll whip us up mai tais. I used to barmaid at the Wan-Q."

"A mai tai and some peanuts. It sounds like supper to me."

Jean smiled. "Atlanta, Georgia?"

"Wisharts, North Carolina. Like Beaumont for you. It's this place you leave from."

"Leave for where?"

"The Marine Corps and Nicaragua. Then L.A., on a bet."

"That's your lifetime itinerary?"

"That's right. And it's all been prelude up to you."

Jean rolled her eyes and cut to the kitchen. Elmer heard drawers scrape and slam. He scoped the front room. The crib played bohemian. The weird blankets induced eyestrain.

The Jeanstress returned. She dipped and posed, carhop-style. Elmer snatched a drink off her tray.

"Everybody's got an itinerary. I'd sure like to hear yours."

Jean sipped her drink and plopped her feet on a hassock. She said, "My name's in six dozen files you've read. You've got it down pat."

Elmer sipped his drink. "I'm just prolonging the interview. You'll say, 'What's this all about?' pretty damn soon, which will damn near break my heart."

Jean futzed with her tumbler. Ice cubes click-clicked.

"I'm dead bored, and you're not the only one prolonging. If you intended grief, you'd have dropped the punch line by now. It's Thursday night, and I've got tomorrow off. I've got nobody to stay up late with, and this is a swell diversion."

Elmer stretched his legs and plopped his feet on the hassock. Jean's feet bounced a half inch away.

"I've got a part-time girlfriend named Ellen Drew. She goes back to the '30's, at Paramount. Did you see *If I Were King*?"

"I knew Ellen. We used to schmooze at Lucy's El Adobe. She's still at Paramount, and she's on her second part-time husband. I also heard she turns tricks for Brenda Allen."

"Brenda's my other part-time girlfriend. I run that call service with her."

Jean lit a cigarette. "Your face just dropped down to your lap. Does running girls chagrin you?"

Elmer relit his cigar. The whore biz double-chagrined him. Jean had good sonar.

"Did you know a Paramount geek named Ralph D. Barr? He was some sort of stagehand or carpenter."

Jean said, "I knew Ralphie, but Meyer knew him better. Meyer had a cameraman gig at the studio, and he used to recruit for the Party there. He was running a one-man book on the side. He had his Commo aspect and his money-grubber aspect, and never the twain shall meet."

Ralph D. Barr. Arsonist and whipout man. Detained and released, 10/33.

"Barr was a firebug, wasn't he?"

"Coy doesn't suit you. You know from Ralphie. He set fires and pulled his pud until the fire engines came."

Elmer played somber. "My brother died in the Griffith Park fire. Remember? October '33?"

Jean played no-shit footsie. Her foot tapped his foot. She tapped with expertise.

"Here's something else that you know damn well, and I damn well remember. The cops rousted our cell. Because of that fire, because Meyer was making speeches, predicting fires and tidal waves and all sorts of CP hoo-ha, because capitalism was producing spontaneous combustion, so get ready for some god-awful thunderstorms and conflagrations. He was preaching that crap before the fire, so the cops came around, and then it all went blooey."

Blooey. That said it. Gasbag Gelb. Gasbag Lesnick. He gasbags to Annie Staples.

Jean said, "Meyer knew this fruity English poet. W. H. Auden, his name was. W.H. wrote a poem for one of his numerous boyfriends, and it had the words 'This Storm' in it. Meyer read the poem at his rallies, to work up the rubes. You know how this works. You provoke the rubes, and the cops come nosing around."

Elmer tapped Jean's foot. "Like yours truly."

Jean went *Yep.* Elmer said, "You and your comrades got leaned on, but it was just routine."

Jean went *Yep.* Elmer said, "What about the old gang? Do you still stay in touch?"

"Not much. Meyer loops through my life every so often. I saw him at a party a week or so back. Otto Klemperer's place. You know—that hotshot maestro who had the brain tumor. The Lesnicks were there, so we all said hi and bemoaned the Hitler-Stalin pact. It was typical CP horseshit."

Elmer heh-heh'd. Annie Staples was there. He'd hot-wired her.

Jean sighed. She'd had enough. *¿Qué es* this *jive, muchacho?*

Elmer came clean. "Your name turned up in a hoodlum's address book. Tommy Glennon. It all pertains to a case I'm on. The fire stuff is incidental. My brother died that day, and it's always mauled me."

Jean drained her drink. "My kid brother Bobby goes for boys. To each his own, okay? Bobby met Tommy at some kind of Catholic youth event, because that's where those type of boys go to find chicken. Okay, they got something percolating. Bobby was staying with me then, and Tommy was calling him here. Bobby was crushed when Tommy got sent to San Quentin."

Elmer tapped Jean's foot. Jean tapped his foot back.

"Did Bobby know that Tommy raped women? That the evil little shit worshipped Hitler?"

Jean sighed. "Love is blind. Don't they say that?"

"I say we're both stir-crazy. I've got a fat roll yelling 'Spend me,' and I want to spend it on you."

—

Jean dressed up nice. She put on a floral-print dress and new glasses. A fox throw topped her off. For-real fox heads and fox paws stuck out. Elmer goo-

goo'd the foxes. It coaxed Jean to laugh.

They played southern rubes on a date. They talked up Wisharts and Beaumont and all points between. He told Jean he hated the Klan. She loved that. She told him she hated the Reds now. He double-loved it.

They drove up to the Strip. It hopped sans marquee lights. The blackout created this ghost-town effect. Elmer played the big kahuna out to paint the town red.

He overtipped lavish. Waiters and barmen genuflected. They hit the Troc and the Mocambo. They danced fast and slow and worked up an appetite. Elmer waved to Charlie Barnet and Lena Horne. He made like he knew them. Jean knew it was a shuck.

Dave's Blue Room was straight across Sunset. Brenda and him owned 10%. They made a big entrance. Kay Lake and Joan Conville waved from the bar. The standard Elmer Jackson hubbub ensued.

He's that bagman cop. He runs girls with Brenda A. Who's that cooze with the glasses? That fox throw's from hunger.

They noshed steak sandwiches and slurped Dave's renowned gin fizzes. They hashed out queer kid brothers and Klanned-up brothers roasted alive. A tipster cruised their table. He ratted a coon 211 gang. Elmer whipped a yard on him. The tipster salaamed. Jean said, "He was yanking your chain." Elmer said, "I'm out to spread the love tonight."

They ditched the Strip and levitated to browntown. Hear dem tom-toms? Let's get tantalizized.

They cruised the Club Alabam. Elmer knew the hostesses and bar crew. He'd canvassed them on the klub*haus* job and treated them white. They treated him white right back.

High-yellow girls circled their table. They served illegal corn-liquor shots, on the house. Elmer and Jean downed three shots and toured the solar system. Elmer dispensed C-note tips. You gots to lay down dat love.

A bouncer played escort and dropped them at the Club Zombie. Elmer slid him two yards and sent him off loved. They entered the dark dinge dive. Elmer saw the tall jig he muscled with Lee Blanchard.

He soothed his tall ass. He genuflected his own self. He coaxed numerous smiles off of him. The tall jig poured two Baron Samedi cocktails. "One sip leaves you zombified."

Dat's no muthafuckin' shit, Daddy-O.

Four sips dive-bombed them. They side-draped themselves and weaved back to Elmer's sled. Elmer close-cleaved the middle lane and slow-crawled them up Central.

Per blackout regs. Under the speed limit. With cellophane taped to the headlights.

God got them to Lyman's, undead. The joint jumped with nite-owl cops and their consorts. A waiter read their zombified state and brought them coffee. Elmer crumbled bennies into their cups. The brew took hold *faaaaaast.* They went zombified to electrified.

They talked a lot. They drew stares. Elmer quick-sketched the barside gang. Buzz Meeks, Two-Gun Davis. Kay and Big Joan, reprised. Their talk drifted over. They spritzed heady concepts and big words.

Elmer talked. Jean talked. Elmer said he saved Two-Gun's life and got on the PD. Jean said she saw a colored man lynched in Beaumont. Elmer said him and Buzz were fucking with one very bad hombre.

It got late-late/early-early. The sky lit up gray-gray. They walked to Elmer's car in the rain.

Their electric charge waned. They both started yawning. Jean said, "Not right now, okay? I'm too bushed to be much use to either one of us."

Elmer said, "Okay."

The rain accelerated. Thunder boomed them up to Hollywood and Beachwood Canyon. Elmer parked outside Jean's place. They huddled up and ran inside. Jean's fox throw got soaked.

They kissed some. Elmer went dizzy. Joan ran her coil heater. They kicked off their shoes and fell asleep on the couch with their clothes on.

58

(LOS ANGELES, 10:00 A.M., 2/6/42)

The whiz kid. Fletch Bowron's shoofly. His swell apartment as fix-it shack.

The Bryson. Wilshire and Rampart. A swell spot with a high-window view. Blocked by workbenches. Crammed with disassembled radios and test tubes.

Wallace Jamie was portly and twenty-four years old. He lived to snoop and snitch. He'd keestered crooked cops in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Fletch hired him to rebuff the Feds and watchdog the PD. The move backfired. Indictments loomed.

They stood by the benches. Jamie issued halitosis and fondled dead tubes.

"This grand jury deal's a stifferoo. Everybody made suspect phone calls. You can't indict the whole world."

Dudley said, "I'm sure you're right, sir. This is strictly a routine inquiry, and I'll be out of your way in a very few minutes."

"I don't get this. You're an Army captain and a sergeant on the PD."

"Yes, and I have questions about a punk criminal named Tommy Glennon, whose dubious endeavors have aroused my interest in both of my professional guises. Your name appeared in his address book, you see."

Jamie shrugged. "Well, I'd like to help you out, but I don't know any Tommy Glennon. I've got a listed phone number, so maybe this chump got my name and address there."

Dudley said, "Yes, and you've been in the news lately."

Jamie smirked. "I get fan letters, sometimes. My uncle's Eliot Ness, and he's a well-known hotshot. I haven't gotten letters from any Tommy Glennon, though."

He evinced no hink whatsoever. He beamed forthcoming youth.

"I had a few technical questions, if you'd be so kind. You've convincingly cleared yourself in the matter of Tommy Glennon, and I'd like to move on."

"Well…sure."

"Let's take the hot-box phone outside the *L.A. Herald* as our exemplar. It's a bookie-drop phone, which in no way concerns me. What does concern me are the implementations of Los Angeles-to-Baja pay-phone calls of a Fifth Column nature. Coded calls—pay phone to pay phone."

Jamie went bulb bright. His eyes popped. He almost drooled.

"Okay, this is what you might call intermediate spycraft. You'd have to have a dot-dot substitution code worked out in advance, and agreed upon by both the sending and receiving parties. It would have to be wire-recorded, and the sender would have to hold the device up to the pay-phone receiver. Code calls from regular phones to pay phones wouldn't work, because of the U.S.-to-Mexico relay systems involved."

Dudley said, "Please continue."

Jamie said, "It was canny of you to cite that hot-box phone as your exemplar, so I'll proceed in that vein. That hot-box phone is internally drilled to accept slugs, and you would need that type of drilling to gain access to the applicable Los Angeles-to-Baja relays, all of which have been rigged to feed into bookie rooms in T.J. and Ensenada. Slug calls to *outside* Baja pay phones would thus reach their terminus point *inside* those bookie rooms, *if* a subsidiary dot code were applied. American hoods developed this system in order to relay split-second information on fixed horse races to bookmakers operating in Mexico. *That's* the way it works. Your L.A. spy calls are intentionally made to terminate at the phone banks of bookie operations."

Such a bright lad. A swift autodidact. Pudgy and erudite.

"SIS has a tap on one specific Ensenada pay phone. That's how the coded calls have been picked up and decoded. There have been U.S. air-attack pronouncements, which seem fanciful to me."

Jamie said, "And I'm sure that that specific pay phone has been fruitlessly surveilled. Here's why that's the case. The code calls are retrieved from their bookie-room terminus. Your in-country spies work at that particular bookmaker's front."

—

He honey-trapped Lin Chung. Uncle Ace stoutly assisted.

Chung was a surefire traitor. Jim Davis revealed that. Chung bankrolled the first Baja sub deal. Chung deserved a good scare.

Dudley lounged upstairs at Lyman's. Ace promised Chung cocaine and white girls. He laced chloral hydrate in Chung's chop suey. Chung passed out in Kwan's Chinese Pagoda and woke up cuffed to a floor-bolted chair.

He rattled his cuff chain. He wiggled his chair. He grasped his I'm-in-the-shit dilemma.

The storeroom was window-taped and cloaked blackout black. Chung screamed and wet his pants. Dudley caught the telltale piss scent.

Ace phone-booked Chung. Dudley caught the telltale head thumps.

Chung screamed. Dudley said, “Why would your name appear in Tommy Glennon’s address book, Doctor?”

Chung screamed. Ace rethumped him. Chung rescreamed and Chink-babbled. Ace said, “This cocksucker speak English good as me.”

Dudley roared. Chung rebabbled Chink. Dudley said, “As you wish, Doctor. But please allow my Chinese brother to translate before you continue.”

Chung babbled Chink. Short bursts, long bursts, Chink gobbledy*gook.*

Ace said, “This cocksucker say Tommy don’t have his address. Say he only know Tommy from eugenics study group at Four Families clubhouse.”

He was credible. His name had been forged. That fact alone cleared him.

Dudley said, “What do you know about coded pay-phone calls from Los Angeles to Baja?”

Chung babbled polyglot. Dudley caught Spanish and French. The glot devolved to pure Chink.

Ace said, “I miss some of it. Gist is this cocksucker don’t know shit.”

Dudley said, “Two tangentially related events occurred in December, Doctor. A Japanese family was murdered in Highland Park, and a Jap sub came ashore on the coast, south of Ensenada. You were part of a plan to disguise Jap saboteurs as Chinese and hide them in and around Los Angeles. I would like you to admit your complicity, and give me your solemn promise that you will not engage in further sabotage aimed at the United States.”

Chung babbled Chink. Ace said, “He can’t speak no English back. He now in second childhood. We pour water on his brain.”

Dudley laughed. “Please translate the Chinese idiom, my brother.”

Ace said, “This cocksucker admit complicity. He blame crazy cop Bill Parker. Crazy Bill break up cabal and scare white partners away.”

That was true. Jim Davis revealed that detail.

Chung babbled. Ace phone-booked him. He swung the fat main directory. He hurled good head-thwapping shots.

Chung gurgled now. He issued babble, down at a hush.

Ace said, “This cocksucker offer vow of fealty and eternal brotherhood. He say if you got daughter, he perform free nose job.”

Dudley laughed and lit a cigarette. The sealed room sealed in heat. He cranked the wall heater off.

“There was a second sub incursion, early in January. What do you know about that?”

Chung blathered Chink. He slather-talked now. He oozed discombobulation.

Ace said, “This cocksucker say he don’t know shit from shinola. It not his bund, ’cause his bund disband. He say one rumor heard. He say second sub fiasco copycat of first plan.”

Ace phone-booked *El Chungo.* The hot seat shimmied. The floor hinges creaked.

Chung whimpered and snitch-babbled. Ace said, “I hear song on radio. This cocksucker ‘popcorn kernel too pooped to pop.’ ”

Dudley laughed. “What did he just say?”

“He say he hear rumor. Jap Navy man hiding in L.A. plan second incursion. Man’s name Kyoho Hanamaka. He don’t know where man hide.”

Bravos *pour* Le Chung. That’s a swell lead.

Dudley said, “Wendell Rice, George Kapek, Archie Archuleta. Ask him what he knows.”

Ace asked. Chung answered. He slurred his words one at a time.

Ace translated. “This cocksucker say he meet Rice and Kapek at Deutsches Haus. Very casual. They talk race science and go *Sieg Heil.* He say Archie C-town and J-town fool. Buy terp and pharmacy hop from illegal sources.”

Chung rebabbled. Ace retranslated him.

“This cocksucker say he just waiting to see who win war. U.S. go postwar kaput. Nazis or Reds take over world then. Democracy for nancy boys and weak sisters. ‘Comrade’ or *‘Kameraden.’* All same to this shitbird.”

Dudley hit the lights. The storeroom went vivid bright. Lin Chung lolled in the hot seat. He’s cuff-gouged down to the bone.

Ace ripped his shirt down the middle. Ace waved two glass jars. One jar of honey. One jar of big red ants.

Chung screamed.

Dudley said, “Restate the threat, my brother. No U.S. sabotage from this point on.”

Chung caught the gist. He went *No, no, no, no, no, no, no.*

Ace applied the honey. Ace applied the ants. They were fat red fuckers. They verged on King Kong size. They were famished and deserved a tasty treat.

Lin Chung screamed. The Wolf materialized. He bayed. Dudley ruffled his fur and kissed his snout.

—

Chung plus Jamie. That meant two names down. One name remained. This lad deserved a rebuke.

Dudley took Los Feliz east. *Der Wunderkind* was *der Flash-in-der-Pan* and *L’Arriviste.* He rented a show-off shack in the hills. His type lived to soak up praise and impress.

Dudley went by the *Herald* first. He talked to Sid Hudgens and abridged his right of free speech. He laid down the law. I'm your new editor. I will edit all your klub*haus* reportage. Give me the final say-so. Let me peruse all your texts.

Sid agreed. Dudley jumped topics. Sid was a horse-race fanatic. Sid knew from hot-box phones and bookie rooms. Dudley pumped him for *this:*

Pay-phone relay bets. L.A. to Baja. Wallace Jamie's technical spiel. Sid, you dirt*meister.* What say ye to this?

Sid knew three relay spots in Ensenada. Two were floating and unstable. Spot #3 stood upside the White Dog Klub.

El Dudster thanked El Sidster. And, by the way:

Mr. Hearst hates *Citizen Kane.* Orson Welles adroitly defamed him. Would he enjoy a spot of revenge?

Sid said, "In spades, Daddy." Dudley grabbed Sid's Leica then.

Der Fat Boy's house was two blocks up Berendo. Dudley caught the light and read curb plates. Spanish casas predominated. Fat Boy rented a posh Tudor job.

Dudley parked curbside and walked up the driveway. A gate stood ajar. He smelled swimming-pool chlorine and detoured on back.

Welles was alone. He lounged in a poolside lounge chair. He wore a terry-cloth lounge shirt and swim trunks. He skimmed a film script and oozed lounge ennui.

L'Auteur looked over. He clocked his visitor and gulped. There's a big man with a camera. He's got a badge and gun clipped to his belt.

Dudley walked up close. Welles said, "Hello there. Are you who I think you are?"

Dudley tapped the chair-back catch and put him flat on his back. Welles squealed. The film script flew. Dudley foot-stomped Fat Boy's neck and pinned him faceup.

"Do you know a man named Tommy Glennon?"

"Your name's in his address book."

"Are you a Communist?"

"Are you a Nazi?"

"When do you leave on your goodwill tour of Latin America?"

"Did you know that the OIACC is a Communist front?"

Welles croaked out answers. Straight nos eked out. His eyes bulged. His face flushed. *Die fahne hoch!!!* He endured the Hobnailed Boot.

Dudley hummed "Deutschland Über Alles." Dudley clicked his heels and slipped on sap gloves. Lead weights were stitched in.

He said, "No more steam-room encounters with Claire. I will not permit it."

Welles raised his hands and covered his face. Dudley kicked his hands away. Welles sissy-shrieked.

Dudley slammed him. Dudley aimed downward shots. He got Fat Boy's back, Fat Boy's gut, Fat Boy's legs. Fat Boy shrieked and chewed his shirt collar off.

"I'm building a network of informants, to be run out of Mexico. You are my first recruit. You will rat out leftists and outré rightists within the OIACC and your Hollywood circle. You will rat out the Jewish exiles who sponge off Maestro Klemperer. You will nod once to signal your compliance."

Welles squealed. Welles went *Yes/yes/yes/yes/yes/yes*—

Dudley kicked him in the balls and beat his face bloody. The camera contained color film. The blood red would predominate.

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(LOS ANGELES, 9:30 A.M., 2/7/42)

Thad Brown said, “We’re ten days in. Somebody say something to cheer me up.”

Crash Squad briefing. All hands on deck. Torpor had set in. The klub*haus* job as snorefest. Lyman’s back room as sleepwalkers’ den.

Joan stood by the coffee urn. The klub*haus* job was the gold job. She fretted her gold cuff links and stayed wide-awake.

Mike Breuning mock-yawned. Dick Carlisle lolled his head. Lee Blanchard mimed a heroin nod-off. Buzz Meeks stretched out across three chairs and played dead.

Dr. Nort laughed. Her Dudley laughed. Her Bill looked nonplussed. Two-lover tension popped between them. Joan recalled the *Herald* headline. WEREWOLF BEATS GAS CHAMBER!!!

She sensed the story behind it. Jack Horrall had panicked. Dudley laid out Jim Davis’ confession and caused a big uproar. Jack decreed a Smith-Parker summit. Bill seized the reins and forged a mercy deal.

Thad said, “Don’t speak up all at once. I don’t think I could take it.”

Dudley said, “I cleared Lin Chung, Orson Welles, and Wallace Jamie.”

Buzz said, “An ambulance took Chung to Queen of Angels. It seems that some hungry ants had themselves a nice lunch.”

Dudley lit a cigarette. “Meeks, you are treading a thin line here.”

Buzz hooted. The room hubbubed. Elmer Jackson played diplomat.

“I cleared Jean Staley. She was a Commo back in the ’30s, but that’s all she wrote.”

Buzz said, “I cleared Monsignor Hayes. He’s Tommy’s priest, so his ass was in the book for a reason. I’ve been looking for Huey Cressmeyer, and I spotted him outside Columbia Pictures. He got into a Mexican Statie sedan, and I trailed him. I lost him on the coast road outside Balboa, and I’m betting he’s in Mexico now.”

Looks traveled. The whole squad clicked to Buzz. Huey was Dud's snitch. The whole squad knew it.

Thad Brown played diplomat. "You and Elmer head down to Baja and shake the trees for Huey. Consult the Staties first thing."

Elmer said, "Yeah, boss." Buzz winked at Dudley.

"I don't suppose you know where Huey is? I heard he calls you 'Uncle Dud,' which sure implies family to me."

Joan flinched and dropped her coffee cup. It doused her skirt. The room froze. Dudley went for his belt sap. He froze a split second on.

"That line is about to fray, Meeks."

Buzz grabbed his crotch. "Does it gall you that you don't scare me? That you're just some Pope-sucking shitheel as far as I'm concerned?"

Dudley pulled the sap. Elmer stepped between him and Buzz.

Thad said, "Enough."

Bill Parker said, "This stops now."

Dr. Nort said, "Somebody else report."

Joan stepped in. "I dismantled the terp stills at the klub*haus.* I ran tests and determined that the terp in the feeder vats possessed the same molecular componentry as the terp from the still of a Japanese man named Donald Matsura. Hideo Ashida and I confiscated that still last month. Matsura committed suicide at the Lincoln Heights Jail."

Icebreaker. The floe snapped. The room thawed out some.

Lee Blanchard said, "I've recanvassed until I'm blue in the face. I got a lead that the klub*haus* fools filled up their own trash cans and started dumping their debris in their neighbors' cans. It was all booze bottles, used rubbers, musical-instrument reeds, and otherwise what you might expect. The neighbors said the *haus* was a hot-sheet spot, a jam-session joint, and a hobknob pit for whites, spooks, and beaners—which I think is what's behind these snuffs, not all this Sinarquista and Nazi jive. I've also got four eyeball-wit sightings of Rice and Kapek in the thick of it with colored whores that they obviously picked up on the jazz-club strip—even though them snatch-hair samples that Ashida found belonged to a white girl and a Mex girl. I realize that all of this contradicts Sid Hudgens' campaign to whitewash our dead pals, but then I'm not the one telling Sid what to write."

Mike Breuning coughed. "Dick and I have put together a list of the Japs that Rice and Kapek rousted while they worked the Alien Squad. We're doing divisional DB checks now, looking for cross-filed paperwork. Jack Horrall sealed their Narco files, so we've got no truck there. We're looking for file notes on Archuleta, but I think Jack foiled us there, too. He's trying to build a wall between our guys and Archie, because Archie's a low-life sack of shit."

Thad coughed. "Post the list and stand ready to roust the Japs who've managed to stay out of custody since the night of the homicides. Blanchard, you hit the jazz strip, get drunk or act drunk, and try to get a line on any whores or other women who might have frequented the *haus.*"

Joan said, "There's been no mail deliveries since two days before the homicides. I called the branch P.O. on Slauson and asked why. It seems that the route carrier's been off on a toot, and his mail's gone undelivered. He's out of the honor farm and back at work now. There should be a large stack of mail delivered later today."

Thad nodded. "Grab it, Joan. Read it, catalogue it, and compile a list of the senders."

Dr. Nort raised a hand. Thad went *Hold on, now.*

"I'm thinking of running a series of lineups. One for jazz-club types, one for suspect Japs, and one for Mex political types. The Deutsches Haus keeps popping up, and I'm thinking of raiding it, even though half of the habitués are Fed plants. Those Sinarquista flags keep vexing me, so I got Sinarquista membership lists from Treasury and the Feds' Subversive Detail. We've got a whole battalion of those punks right here in Boyle Heights."

Dudley cracked his knuckles. "I'm Spanish-fluent. I'll make a stab at some interviews before I head back."

Thad nodded and yawned. He went *shoo.* Get out of here/solve this fucking thing/don't scotch my fucking shot to be Chief.

The room evaporated. Dudley signaled Joan. It meant *Tonight?* She signaled back. It meant *No, I've got Bill.* Her Dudley chuckled. Her Bill caught the exchange.

—

Joan pulled a klub*haus* shift. She worked, distracted.

Hideo Ashida booked to Baja and left tasks incomplete. It vexed her. The Dudley-Meeks tiff vexed her. Her Dudley—baited and goaded. Her Dudley—enraged past control.

Joan print-dusted. Ashida left her an undone-surface list. Pipe fittings, radiators, phonograph legs.

She did the work. She powdered hard-to-reach places and got bupkes. She worked, distracted.

The gold quest felt stillborn. Dudley nixed more file checks. He believed they'd arouse suspicion. Don't state undue interest or provoke it.

Ashida backstopped Dudley in Baja now. It juked his propensity to lust and deceive. Ashida tweaked Dudley's vanity perversely. Dudley viewed their compact as two geniuses entwined. Baja inspired corruption. It played to the venal and rewarded deceit. Ashida would seek to undermine Dudley. His lust was covetous and malignantly defined. He would conspire against her. His motive was jealousy. She had what he did not. He would attempt to steal her fair share of the gold.

Joan dusted phonograph tubes. She worked, distracted. Sid Hudgens had jammed her outside the *haus.* He flashed a sheaf of color snapshots.

It's Orson Welles. He's tear-streaked and bloody. There's poolside cushions soaked red.

Sid said, "Guess who?" It was easy. Welles saw her naked. He saw Claire De Haven, likewise. Actions spawn consequences. "Big Red" made this occur.

Joan dusted tubes. Large tubes and small tubes. It was tight brushwork. She got smudges, smears, and one latent print.

She applied tape and lifted it. She pressed it to stiff cardboard. She pulled her elimination-print file and ran comparison checks. She got no match.

She slipped on her headband light and reading glasses. She counted loops, whorls, and pocket dents. She numbered an unknown-print card.

The doorside mailbox clanged. There's the postman. He's back from his dry-out retreat.

Joan walked out to the porch. Two Newton blues stood guard. One woofed her and waved. One said, "Hey, Red."

The mailbox was stuffed. Joan dislodged manila envelopes. Wendell Rice received four parcels. They were sent from Terminal Annex. All box mail was rerouted there. It bollixed mail traces up.

She opened a six-by-eight parcel. A small booklet was stuffed in. It was glossy-bound and cheaply printed. It comprised a gold-case lead.

The Back-to-Africa Manifesto. Authored by Martin Luther Mimms. The Rev bailed out Leander Frechette. Elmer and Buzz interviewed him.

Joan skimmed the text. It was plainly nuts. Nazi U-boats would escort Negro warships to the verdant Congo. Pilgrims would feast on barbecued Jews. Enslaved Congolese would guide the pilgrims downriver. Tame crocodiles would pull ten-ton canoes.

Joan slit the second envelope. It contained a sister tract.

AmeriKKKa for Whites!!! AfriKKKa for Blacks!!! (in support of the Reverend M. L. Mimms), by G. L. Rockwell.

The young Navy flyer. The Rev's white sidekick. Elmer and Buzz braced him.

Joan skimmed the text. It predicted racial apocalypse. The Learned Elders of Zion had annexed the *Jew*nited States. The Ku Klux Klan fought them back. Noble Negro legions rallied and joined their KKKause. The Jews sought to *Jew*nify the U.S. and Russia. All noble Negroes must flee to AfriKKKa *NOW!!!!!*

Joan recalled pillow talk. Dudley riffed on Wendell Rice and George Kapek. One—they were batshit crazy. Two—Hideo Ashida's photo device snapped them in Tijuana. Three—they were probably running wetbacks and/or fugitive Japs.

Envelope #3. *The Red Swastika,* by Salvador Abascal. It's a catchy title. Pithy subtitles cover a full page.

A Polemic on the Potential Brotherhood of Dispossessed Totalitarians.

A Utopian Vision of Hoarded Monies and the Promulgation of a New Gold Standard to Assure the Solvency of Catholic Nationalists Worldwide.

Joan skimmed the text. Abascal was a devout papist and proponent of Sinarquismo. The tract extolled Nazis and defamed Jews. It extolled the Spanish Falange and defamed the Loyalist cause. It extolled Irish nationalism and defamed the British-Protestant oppressor. It was anti–U.S. imperialist. It was pro–Catholic workers worldwide.

Abascal veered hard right. He added hard-left hoo-ha and spiced up the brew. His first subtitle stated the theme. He described its first "radical implementation."

November 1940. A secret conference is held in Ensenada. The Hitler-Stalin pact flows in full bloom. Nazi and Soviet high-ups attend. They pooh-pooh their political divisions. They blare their antidemocratic ideals. They discuss fascism and communism. They define it as one philosophy, united. They acknowledge the curse of factionalism. They defame the divergent rhetoric that individuates and self-defines them. They redefine themselves as nonopposites. They are as one in their hatred of the democratic West.

Hitler will breach the pact. The Germans and Russians both know this. Hitler will invade Russia. The cost will be ghastly. America will enter the war. America will align with Russia and turn against Russia should the Allies win. How will *WE* survive such a catastrophe? How will *WE* surmount the horror of an Axis victory? What will *WE* do should *der Führer* decree Russia's annihilation?

The dialogue extends. Postwar strategies are discussed. What should *WE* do? *WE* must probe beneficial solutions. *WE* must assure totalitarian survival.

Joan caught the upscut. The all-caps *WE* said it. How do *WE* prepare for contingent postwar shitstorms? What do *WE* enlightened few do?

Abascal was crazy draconian. Rockwell and Mimms were race-baiting buffoons. They were collectively ridiculous. All three "Polemicists" were booby-hatch bait.

Joan slit envelope #4. She slipped out a tract. The title packed punch:

New Implementations of Air Attack in the Coming World Conflict, by Mitchell A. Kupp.

—

Bill talked a blue streak. Joan tuned him out. They lay in bed. She heard every third word he said.

Mitch Kupp. The airplane nut and Charles Lindbergh boon companion. Her father's death. Her personal vendetta. Kupp was her one hard suspect.

Kupp charters a plane in Duluth. He flies over Monroe County, Wisconsin. A blaze consumes Big Earle Conville that day.

There's a fuel spill nearby. She cannot prove that it caused the fire. She traces the fuel to the charter service. She cannot attribute motive. Mitch Kupp did not know Earle Conville. It all goes away.

She built her own arson file. She worked on it all through grad school. She moved to L.A. and neglected the file. Kupp's tract brought it all back.

Bill talked a blue streak. Joan heard every fourth word. She read the airplane pamphlet. It was not a hate tract or a political screed. It was scholarly and technically dense. Mitch Kupp believed that everyday Joes could fly model planes. He did not advocate race hate or seek to barbecue Jews. He advocated an armed civilian air corps. Airplanes could be built from prefabricated parts. Automotive drivetrains and rivet-forged wings would do the trick.

Bill talked a blue streak. It was all Dudley Smith and Werewolf Shudo and *Look what I did.* It was all *Don't you love me for it?*

She couldn't think. She was back at Big Earle's wake. She pried off the casket lid and viewed his charred corpse. She made herself look.

"You haven't been listening. I've been talking to the bedpost."

"I'm sorry. I know what you've been saying, though—and I admire what you did."

Bill flinched. "You don't act as if you feel that way. You act like you're somewhere else entirely."

She touched his face. "I'm here, and I'm with you. We're in bed, and we've just made love, and I don't know why you require more than that."

His eyes glazed up. He knuckled back some tears.

"I know you're sleeping with Dudley. I figured it out today. You know what he is, and you still dishonor me in that way. I tell you that I saved a man's life that he tried to destroy, and you aren't even listening."

Joan brushed off his tears. "Don't ask me to love you for a self-absorbed grand gesture, when you make such gestures routinely. I won't let Dudley go, any more than I'd let you go. The difference between the two of you is that he wouldn't ask."

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(ENSENADA, 11:00 A.M., 2/8/42)

Stakeout.

They perched on Avenida Floresta. They packed zoom-lens cameras and box lunches. They sat in a surveillance sled and orbed the White Dog Klub.

Sid Hudgens supplied the lead. Wallace Jamie supplied the phone-relay perspective. Dudley supplied the '34 Ford. Ashida and Lieutenant Juan wore tattered civvies.

The bookie front worked out of a two-story row house. The house was bright peach stucco. Brisk foot traffic traipsed in and out.

Ashida had the front seat. Lieutenant Juan had the back. They raised their cameras and shot the basement entry.

Lieutenant Juan said, "It's supposedly a forty-man operation. I've seen these places. There might be as many as forty phones hooked to a relay board. Look how many men we have walking in."

Ashida shot sidewalk loiterers. He'd shot four rolls of film already. Lieutenant Juan ran his mouth. He was an invert. He was a pederast/*péde/maricón.* Ashida replayed the surveillance *haus* moment. "We Love You" tapped out in Morse code.

Men dawdled by the basement steps. El Lieutenant shot them.

"I've got thirty-odd scalps on my belt, you know. I burned up some saboteurs in a coastal cave. I saw loose teeth expelled. Their abdominal cavities burst."

Ashida reloaded his camera. Lieutenant Juan draped his arms off the seat back.

"I hope you enjoy gossip. You'll become bored with me if you don't."

A woman stood at an upstairs window. Ashida shot her. Lieutenant Juan made a face. Women—*ick.*

"Wendell Rice and George Kapek ran wets for Carlos Madrano. I'm not sure that Dudley knows that. They did a trial run for Captain Vasquez-Cruz, too. Dudley distrusts Captain José, because he thinks he has designs on his Claire. She injects morphine, in case you didn't know. I know the pharmacist who supplies her."

The window woman shifted. Her robe fell open. Ashida saw her breasts.

Lieutenant Juan went *Ick.* "Nice, if that's your sort of gambit."

Ashida shot the woman. A man appeared behind her. He slipped off her robe and kissed her neck. Lieutenant Juan sighed.

"Mexican men run teensy. You know that old joke? How can you tell a Mexican man in the dark? He's got a big belt buckle and a small pee-pee."

Ashida squirmed. La Juan's hands were too close.

"Salvy Abascal's seducing Dudley. Not in *that* way, of course. Salvy's killed a great many priest-killers, which I applaud him for. He's *muy guapo.* Don't you think he's got a big—"

Ashida muzzled him. "Dudley told me a story about a gold bayonet. It was inlaid with swastikas."

"Well, the swastikas sound like Dudley. He's gaga for fascist knickknacks. Don't get me going on *that.*"

"I thought he might have told you about the bayonet."

"Well, all I know is that there was supposed to have been a secret Nazi and Russian meeting here, sometime in '40. All these alleged counteropposites got cozy. They discussed melting some gold cache into political artifacts, to save their keesters regardless of who wins the war. Maybe it happened, maybe it didn't. Dudley's bayonet story sounds rather like that. The nice thing about gossip is that it doesn't matter whether or not it's true."

—

SIS was Sunday dead. Ashida worked the squadroom, solo. The Klein girl studied surveillance files and kept to herself. Dudley gave her a kid task. It kept her busy and supplied pocket change.

The gold cache. Melted artifacts. The Red-Nazi confab. La Juan's gossip reverberates.

Ashida pushed it aside. He developed the bookie-drop snapshots. It took three hours. He pulled SIS sedition sheets. Mug-shot strips were attached.

It was drudge work. Cull the bookie-drop shots. Cull the mug shots and compare faces. Confirm or refute bookie-drop/Fifth Column malfeasance.

Ashida worked photo-to-photo. The Klein girl kept to herself. Ashida eyeball-hopped. Bookie shots, mug shots, repeat the process.

It was drudge work. He viewed right-wing and left-wing fiends and traveled sedition-sheet byways.

With Redshirts and Goldshirts. With priest killers and priest avengers. With Stalinists, Trotskyites, and Sparticists. With the full idiot spectrum.

Ashida flipped photographs. The mug-shot stack dwindled. He yawned. He scratched. He chugged coffee. He rubbed his eyes and—

Hit *Santa Cruz, Luis Ramon. Born 4/19/11, Ensenada.*

Santa Cruz killed two *puto comunistas.* He beat them with a nail-studded plank and cut their dicks off. All misdemeanor charges were dropped.

Luis Santa Cruz:

Snapped outside the bookie front. Exalted Cyclops of the White Dog Bund.

—

Dudley decreed a raid. He said, "Go in with shotguns, lad. You and our chum Juan. The Wolf will walk point and provide for your safety."

It was a test. Ashida knew that. He must not disappoint.

They parked by the White Dog Klub. They'd discussed the play. They carried 12-gauge pumps. Dudley decreed lethal loads. *Oooh*—double-aught buckshot, rat poison–laced.

Lieutenant Juan ticked off numbers. On three, now. *Uno, dos, tres*—

They ran across the street. Pedestrians wigged out and scattered. They charged the basement door. It refused to give. Lieutenant Juan racked his shotgun and blew off the lock and jamb.

Ashida kicked the door in. The bookie room was right there. Bookie dinks saw them and raised a raid ruckus. An alarm siren blew.

Fifty-some desks. Fifty-some men. Blaring telephones and stacks of flash paper. Wall-to-wall chalkboards, chalked with horse-race odds.

The dinks lit the flash paper. Bet slips ignited. Ashida saw a relay transmitter at the front of the room.

Lieutenant Juan triggered a spread. A chalkboard blew up. Men yelled *en español.* Smoke covered the room. Ashida triggered a spread and blew up a chalkboard. The recoil knocked him flat.

He hit the floor and crawled forward. Scrambling legs hit him. He crawled toward the transmitter. A man stopped to kick him. Ashida took four head shots. He jammed his shotgun up against the man's belly and blew his guts out.

His own scream outscreamed fifty-some screams. Blood spattered wide. Ashida crawled under the smoke line. He saw Luis Santa Cruz by the transmitter. Luis Santa Cruz flipped a switch.

The transmitter exploded. Santa Cruz vaporized. Legs ran over Ashida. Men fell on top of him. Flames shot up and out.

Ashida crawled and fired his shotgun. He hit legs and severed legs and brought down fleeing men. He killed them and crawled over them. He screamed in English and Japanese. He coughed out black smoke and crawled for the door.

61

(TIJUANA, 8:00 P.M., 2/8/42)

The boys are back—

Said boys crossed the border. Elmer wheeled his spiff ’40 Buick. It featured wide whites and an 8-ball shifter. Buzz badged the turnstile goons. They salaamed to *los jefes.* Buzz dispensed dollar bills and contraband smut pix.

The goons cheered. They wore Nazified threads and went *Willkommen.* Buzz *Sieg Heil*’d them back. Elmer haw-hawed.

He peeled rubber southbound. We’re here now. We’re sanctioned. Let’s find Huey C.

Elmer yodeled Old Crow. “We’ve got to bypass the Staties. It’ll get back to Dud, *rápidamente.*”

Buzz snatched the jug. “I’ve been thinking about that hump, and I’ve come to some ripe conclusions.”

“Such as?”

“Such as, he’s a sissy. Such as, he’s pussy-whipped. He’s got his put-upon Irish wife and his bitch-in-heat Claire what’s-her-name, and his umpteen daughters and that bastard girl Beth Short—and without them goo-goo talking him, he ain’t shit. In my view, he ain’t nothing but a charming lunatic who’s got the world bamboozled. Moreover, he ain’t as smart as Bill Parker—which just about kills him.”

Elmer snatched the jug. “They’ve got each other dialed, that’s for sure.”

“You want the drumroll here? They’re both poking the big redhead, which means they’ve got some juice that we don’t.”

Elmer brain-broiled the spiel. It got him torqued. He chronologized his own Dudster drift.

He don’t gun down Tommy G. He finds char-broiled Eddie Leng. Eddie’s Fifth Column, boocoo. He’s Tommy’s KA. Dud wants Tommy *muerto.* Sergeant E. V. Jackson’s bored. He goes rogue behind feisty ennui.

Buzz gargled Old Crow. "We got to wrangle Huey someplace secluded and put the spurs to him. All these Fifth Column geeks are jungled up. Huey's got some answers that'll take us back to Kapek and Rice."

"Jack Horrall wants a clean solve on this one. Clean by his standards, I mean."

Buzz said, "Ditto yours truly. A clean solve puts it to Dud, not that I give a shimmering shit about those whipdick cops and how bad the PD looks."

They hit T.J. proper. Elmer slow-trawled Revolución. Buzz checked their backseat stash.

Brass knucks. Beavertail saps. Two sawed-off shotguns. Leg restraints. Come-along chains. Thumb screws. Friction tape. Wadded-up socks. This cattle-prod gizmo.

Elmer slow-trawled. Buzz orbed multitudinous street whores. Elmer daydreamed.

He daydreamed Jean Staley. Their hot date reverberated. He called Jean *mucho* times and got no answer. She didn't call him. He sent her flowers. No sweet thank-you call ensued.

He daydreamed Jean and Wayne Frank. Jean's Red cell ran adjunct to the Griffith Park fire. He sleep-dreamed Wayne Frank scorched alive and living flush on some island. Brown girls engulf him. He's melting gold bars into greenbacks.

They passed a *farmacia.* Buzz went *Whoa now* and jabbed him. Elmer idled the sled curbside. Buzz jumped out and ran in.

Kid beggars swarmed the car. Mangy muchachos all. They hawked religious medals and nudie pix of their mamas. They jabbered, "Joo want pussy?"

Elmer dispensed chump change and illustrated hate tracts. FDR with fangs and Jew beanie. Frau Eleanor blowing Joe Stalin. The kids whoop-whooped. Buzz hopped back in the sled. He waved a brown paper bag.

The kids waved adios. Elmer peeled out. Buzz dumped the bag in his lap. It contained *this:*

Liquid terp. Bennie rolls. 180-proof mescal. Diseased worms afloat in the brew.

They pulled into an alley and fortified. It juked their resolve. They jammed the knucks and saps in their waistbands. They ate two worms apiece.

Elmer said, "He's in T.J., if he's anywhere."

Buzz said, "He'll have some Statie watchdog. Dud won't let him go around unchaperoned."

Elmer said, "We've got to get him alone."

Buzz said, "*You* can chaperone me. Them worms got me seeing double and thinking evil thoughts."

T.J. by nite. It’s this fucked-up phantasm. White man, beware. Hock your souls at your own risk.

They ditched the sled behind a church and paid two nuns to guard it. They scoured on foot. Buzz packed the flash roll. It was all *yanqui* five-spots. Elmer packed pidgin Spanish and bilingual savoir faire. They bopped loose and orbed for Hugh C.

Huey was a notable pervdog. He sniffed cocaine and model-airplane glue. He boffed boys and butch dykes like his mama. He was a Fifth Column shitheel and smut-film conno*sewer.* T.J. offered all such deelites.

They scoured accordingly. They hit *farmacias* and flashed Huey mug shots. You see this fucker? He buy dope from you? No, señor—he don’t.

The sky melted. The sidewalks weaved. Terp and mescal supplied the effect. The bennies supplied bounce. The terp supplied grip. The mescal sent sparks off their footsteps. Elmer saw his dead redneck kin in with all the nite-hopping spics.

They braced cat-meat taco vendors. They braced sailors down from Dago. They logged nada and no. They braced male prosties in Roman breastplates and padded jockstraps. They got ditto and nix. They hit the noxious nitespots next.

The Chicago Club. The Blue Fox. The Red Cat. Donkey dives. Cunnilingus caves. Fellatio fiefdoms. Cocktail bars with built-in piss troughs. All-nude stage acts. Connie Lingus and her Cunt Corsairs. Some Cuban coon with a two-foot dick. Dig: he table-hops and dunks it in your drink!!!

They flashed Huey mug shots. Buzz dispensed five-spots. Elmer logged *¿Que?* and *Huh?* They weaved outside and over to Klub Falangisto. The motif celebrated boss man Franco. The walls featured atrocity shots from Guernica and Bilbao. Mex girls danced nude on tabletops. Marines match-singed their snatch hair and made them hop-hop.

Elmer and Buzz table-hopped. Buzz flashed the mug shots. Elmer gagged on burned-hair fumes. They got no, no, no, and one *yes.*

A fat corporal pointed upstairs. He said there’s a camera club. He saw that Huey guy there. Look for a bare-chested Mex. He wears chaps. He’s got bad acne. Huey keestered him while some slumming Shriners snapped pix.

Elmer and Buzz weaved over to a freight lift. An old guy in Sinarquista garb operated it. Buzz whipped a fivesky on him. The old guy ran them up. The doors slid open. They saw *this:*

One jumbo room. Blasting flashbulbs and wall-to-wall bedrolls. Ten thousand penetrations. Disembodied dicks and holes. Camera fiends jumping bedroll-to-bedroll. More flashbulb blips. “In The Mood” blasting from wall vents. Ten thousand fuck shrieks.

Elmer just stood there. Flashbulb pops made him see quintuple. He saw five of everything. He *thought* he saw a guy in chaps. Buzz ran toward him or it.

He stumbled over bedrolls and kicked fuckers and fuckees elsewhere. He dumped camera fiends and sent cameras airborne. Elmer saw it all quintuple and lost it just as quick. He popped sweat. He almost lost his legs and his lunch. He shut his eyes and felt himself grabbed.

Buzz screamed upside his face. Elmer heard gibberish and "We got us a lead!"

—

Here's the drift:

The Mex in chaps turned tricks with El Huey. He poked Huey last night. Huey stole his trick stash. Huey's got a Statie bodyguard. His name's Juan. He goes Greek, too. Huey *ex*-capes from Juan and spawns trouble. Huey's HQ is the Klubb Satan. It's due east of T.J. He's bunked in at El Kasa 69. It's close by.

The boys are back in—

They scrammed. They retrieved Elmer's sled and tore eastbound. Buzz drove. Elmer mixed terp-and-bennie cocktails. Buzz made a purchase en route.

A roadside vendor sold scorpions in small cages. One sting and you're dead. They ate bugs and made dandy pets.

El Scorpio snoozed in his cage. Elmer prepped a kidnap kit. It featured one stuffed-sock muzzle/two brass-knuck persuaders/one come-along chain.

They tore east. They hit dirt roads and scrub hills. They topped a rise and caught this red neon blaze.

Buzz pulled up to it. There's Klubb Satan. It's perched on a packed-dirt flat.

The red blaze was El Diablo. He was two feet high. His dick was fifteen feet long. Said dick blinked, on and off. Note the pulsing pitchfork head.

The building was all cinder block. Sandbags formed the foundation. Locals porked in parked jalopies. Transaxles banged the dirt.

Buzz parked snout-out. Let's be prudent here. Let's boogie and *ex*-cape quick.

Elmer winked at Buzz. El Buzzo winked back. They slurped some mescal. Elmer noshed a toxic worm. They got out and stretched their legs. They hit the Klubb two abreast.

Loud noise/barnyard stink/tethered donkeys onstage. Wraparound booths and a strolling trio. They crooned into microphones. A Mex castrato warbled *this:*

"I've got a girl, her name's Roseanne, she uses a tortilla for a diaphragm!!!"

Elmer clocked the room. He went eyes left. Buzz clocked eyes right. Elmer clock-snared Huey—right there at ten o'clock high.

He's in this big booth. He's biting some boy's neck. Pervdog Huey. The boy was twelve, tops.

Buzz clocked left and caught it. He nudged Elmer. They slid on their knucks and threaded on over. They came off overt and covert.

They bopped up behind the booth. Buzz grabbed a fistful of Huey's hair and plain pulled. Huey flew up and out. He flailed his legs and shrieked soprano. His kiddie paramour shrieked. Elmer kicked Huey in the balls and stuffed a sock in his mouth. A big ruckus materialized.

Satanites craned their necks and peered over. They jumped up and out of their booths. They went *¿Qué?* and *¡Madre mio!* Buzz pulled his piece and popped two shots at the ceiling. The donkeys strained at their tethers and brayed.

Elmer slammed a knuck shot. Huey's rib cage deflated. Buzz *re*gripped Huey's hair and plain dragged him. Elmer ran up on the stage and untied the donkeys. They jumped off the stage and did some *goooood* Satanite trampling. Elmer pulled his piece and popped two shots at the ceiling. Buzz dragged Huey to the door and kicked it open.

The donkeys capsized tables and hoof-stomped revelers. Ten thousand Satanites screamed. The donkeys made for the door. Elmer held it open. The furry fuckers *ex*-caped into the night.

—

El Kasa 69 was out in the boonies. It was perched behind some hills and tucked out of sight. Buzz rifled Huey's pockets and plucked his room key. Elmer stashed his car in a scrub grove. He walked back to the room. Buzz had Huey double-cuffed.

El Kasa was a hot-sheet hellhole. Tar-paper huts. Rafter rats. Mismatched wood-plank walls. Huey's room was a pus pit. Piss troughs and one bare mattress. Huey restrained thereupon.

He wore a Luftwaffe jumpsuit. He was wrist- and ankle-cuffed. He'd drooled up the sock in his mouth. Buzz dangled El Scorpio upside his head.

El Buggo malo y feo. He poked at his cage bars and issued evil intent. Huey fright-eyed him. He pissed his pants. The lap lake spread.

Elmer said, "It's about Dudley Smith. We want whatever you've got."

Buzz said, "That means all his current racket plans and everything he's got on Tommy Glennon and Fifth Column grief here in Baja. That also means whatever you've got on Wendell Rice, George Kapek, Archie Archuleta, and those homicides in L.A."

Elmer crouched by the mattress. Buzz scootched Huey's legs over and took a seat. Elmer plucked the sock gag. Huey whimper-screeched.

Words poked through. It was all *I-love-Uncle Dud* and *I-ain't-no-snitch.* Buzz sapped his legs. Elmer sapped his arms. Huey screeched and thrashed and went hoarse quick.

Buzz unlocked El Buggo's cage and poked him out on the mattress. El Buggo gravitated toward Huey. He crawled up Huey's legs and sniffed Huey's crotch. Huey screamed. Buzz positioned the cage on Huey's chest and lured El Buggo back in.

Elmer uncorked the mescal. Huey went *Gimme, gimme.* Elmer bottle-fed him three good pops. Huey flushed roseate.

Buzz placed the cage next to his head. El Buggo stretched his legs through the bars. He got love-struck and tried to nuzzle Huey.

Elmer said, "Tick, tick, tick."

Buzz said, "That's the clock running out on your life."

Elmer said, "These fucking scorpions go straight for your dick. They inject their poison there."

Huey went *Okay, okay.* Elmer bottle-fed him. A worm dribbled out and hit Huey's chest. Buzz plucked him and dropped him in El Buggo's cage. El Buggo devoured him *faaaast.*

Huey coughed and drooled mescal. Huey evinced snitch fever. Huey tattled *this:*

"Uncle Dud's got these plans to run wetbacks and push horse to the niggers in L.A. He's got this sort-of partner, who runs the Baja Statie Constabulary. His name's José Vasquez-Cruz, and Uncle Dud don't really trust him. He glommed Carlos Madrano's dope stash, and Uncle Dud's got these dope-cadre guys in L.A., all ready to go."

Buzz said, "Where'd you get this?"

Huey said, "My pal Juan Pimentel. He's my bodyguard here. He feeds me all this good dish."

Elmer sap-tickled Huey. "For instance?"

"For instance, this. Uncle Dud's got his wetback deal all brainstormed, but he's got to clear it with the Baja governor first. The guy's name is Juan Lazaro-Schmidt, and he veers *mucho* right. There's got to be some kind of U.S.-Mexico 'guest worker' pact in place before Uncle Dud starts moving the wets north in big numbers. It's a combo deal. You pack the horse in the trucks hauling the wets, and kill two birds with one stone."

Elmer slurped mescal. Buzz snatched the jug. Elmer sap-tickled Huey. The shitbird resnitched.

"Okay, you've got a bunch of resident Japs all rounded up here in Baja. Okay, so Uncle Dud and this Vasquez-Cruz dink have got this piggyback plan cooked up, all abetted by Uncle Ace Kwan in L.A. The deal is, they'll move the Baja Japs north and jungle them up with the L.A. Japs, and hire them out as slave labor. Uncle Dud's already got the Ventura County Sheriff on board. Uncle Dud and Vasquez-Cruz also got plans to move horse up to L.A. in the trucks hauling all the Jap internees. Ace the K.'s got plans to pass off rich Japs as Chinks and hide them out in C-town while he bleeds their Tojo-loving asses dry."

Elmer and Buzz swapped looks. They conveyed *Vintage Dudster*. Huey went *Gimme.* Elmer bottle-fed him. Huey re-*re*snitched.

"There's been scuttlebutt disseminated at the Deutsches Haus. Uncle Dud don't credit all this, but I tend to. There's supposed to be a Jap air attack on L.A. later this month, with some sub shellings of these oil refineries north of Santa Barbara, coming before it. Uncle Dud holds the line at sabotage on U.S. soil. You got to give him that—he's a pro-U.S. white man. But this Vasquez-Cruz geek's allegedly bent on chaos. To top all this off, Uncle Dud's allegedly scared that this here klub*haus* job will bleed into the Watanabe job and deep-six the PD."

Elmer said, "Where'd you get this? The last part, I mean."

Huey went snitch smug. "I got it from Claire De Haven. I've been selling her morph on the sly, and she sure loves to talk. She's also screwing Vasquez-Cruz on the sly, and he tattles her things that she tattles me."

Buzz whooped. "Son, don't you stop there."

Huey coughed. "Claire loves Uncle Dud, but she thinks he's in over his head with all these racket gigs of his. Plus, she knows that Uncle Dud's putting the boots to some redhead in L.A., that Bill Parker's likewise poking. Claire says the redhead is just some 'incremental advance in the Parker-Smith exchange.' "

Elmer and Buzz swapped looks. They conveyed *More Vintage Dudster*. Huey yawned. Huey said, "I'm half in the bag."

Elmer fed him three bennies and one jolt of mescal. Buzz uncuffed him. Huey stretched and rubbed his ankles and wrists.

"You boys should visit the Deutsches Haus. There's this Mitch guy who frequents the place. He's from the Midwest—maybe Minnesota or Wisconsin. He's a brother model-airplane fiend. He knows all about air warfare, and he builds these real, flyable planes from prefabricated parts. I'm not jiving you, cousins. You can build your own airplane, and fly it. Mitch is always talking up this notion of Japs dropping flammable bombs and setting forest fires. He calls it 'chaos from the air.' "

Elmer mock-yawned. "What's this chump got to do with our shit at hand?"

Huey real-yawned. "Nothing."

Buzz jiggled El Buggo's cage. "What's with Dud and Tommy Glennon? He was Dud's snitch, but now Dud wants him clipped. I sense a lively tale there."

Huey went *harrumph.* "I never poked Tommy. Uncle Dud tried to lay that on me, but it was a humbug rap. Tommy's squeeze was this priest named Joe

Hayes. Tommy likes his brown eye Irish and Catholic. He got turned out by priests, so he has to have it that way."

Elmer said, "Thank you for them unsolicited comments."

Buzz said, "Let's get back to Tommy and Dud."

Huey scratched his balls and picked his nose. He got this bennie-revved look.

"You want Tommy and Dudley? If you're sweet to me, I'll give you Tommy and Dudley like you've never had it before."

Buzz said, "Don't you get flirty or pouty with us. You do that, I let this centipede loose."

Elmer lit a cigar. "One bite and you're paralyzed. Two bites and you're dead."

Huey went *Oooh, I'm scared.* He put on an archfruit lisp.

"Okay, here's your Tommy and Dudley. It's the winter of '39, and there's a *very* posh costume party at a *very* swell mansion in Brentwood. North of Sunset, *daaaarlings*—pheasant under glass all the way."

Elmer said, "Don't string this out."

Huey tittered. "The party was *aaaall* about the Night of the Long Knives, which anybody who's *anybody* will tell you occurred in Germany in the summer of '34, when boss man Hitler had a beef with his Brownshirt *Sturmbannführer,* Ernst Röhm. Ernst liked boys, which anybody who's *anybody* does, but boss man Hitler just *couldn't* countenance that. So, he rounded up some hunky young *Black*shirts and sent them to this spa hotel in Munich, where Ernst and numerous like-minded *Brown*shirts were consorting, and the *Black*shirts found the *Brown*shirts all cozily entwined, and liquidated them presto-changeo."

Elmer said, "Don't stop now."

Buzz said, "Cut the travelogue and get to it."

Huey went butch baritone. "So, the party celebrated this noteworthy event, just for giggles. Everybody wore masks, the men wore Nazi uniforms, and the women wore these beautiful gowns. This highbrow opera music played on this Victrola. I was there, my mama was there, and Harry Cohn was there—even though he's a yid. Lots of Hollywood hotshots were there, Tommy G. was there, and this little Jap guy with burned fingers was there. He told people that he was there for the *real* Night of the Long Knives, but nobody believed him."

Elmer got goose bumps. He looked at Buzz. *He* had goose bumps. Huey sighed and strung out a *looooooong* pause.

"*Well,* Dudley was *surely* there. He was *veeery* handsome in his SS uniform. He wore a sidearm and a bayonet on a black leather belt. Orson Welles was there. He wore a mask, but I *knew* it was him. He was chummy with this guy who owned the house—some music maestro. Welles always premiered his smut films at the house, and he showed a new one at the party. It was the dirty version of the Night of the Long Knives—and, *daaarlings,* it was a *hit.*"

Huey paused. Huey stage-sighed. Huey tossed his hair. This glue-sniffing psycho mimes Marlene Dietrich.

"Well, *meine Herren*—the *movie.* The killing was all faked, but the oooh-la-la was all real. It was men and women, women and women, men and men. The party quieted down when the movie ended, and the guests started fondling out in the open. They started peeling into the maestro's bedrooms. And, of *course*—Dudley had women *fighting* over him."

Huey paused. Huey stage-sighed. Huey threw his hair over one eye. The fruitcake loon mimes Veronica Lake.

"Uncle Dud kissed and petted with at *least* a dozen women. The last woman was very tall and thin, and she led Uncle Dud outside and over to a pergola. Tommy and I were close by, but Uncle Dud couldn't see us. We were wearing Brownshirt uniforms, and we were cuddled up and collaborating with two cute *Black*shirt boys. Uncle Dud didn't know that we saw all of this, but Tommy spilled it to him when Uncle Dud visited him in Quentin last November."

Huey paused. Huey stage-sighed. Huey blew mock smoke rings. This Nazi shitheel mimes Bette Davis.

"Uncle Dud and the tall woman kissed passionately. Tommy and I watched. The woman knelt between Uncle Dud's legs. *Well,* her gown hiked, and Tommy and I saw those hairy gams. The moon passed over, and Uncle Dud saw them, too. The woman coughed, *meine Herren*—and it was *surely* a man's cough."

Elmer went dry-mouth. The room spun topsy-turvy. Huey turned female for real.

"*Well,* Uncle Dud screamed then. He pulled out his bayonet and stabbed the girl-boy in the face and the chest. He walked away, sobbing—and if you tell Uncle Dud that I told you all this, I'll be *very* peeved with you."

62

(LOS ANGELES, 9:30 A.M., 2/9/42)

Rain loomed. Low clouds hovered and seeped. Boyle Heights went garish to bleak.

It was Shitsville, both ways. Shack rows and strutting pachucos. Tripe-stew emporiums. Invasive food stench.

Dudley cruised Brooklyn Avenue. The cholos had subsumed the Jews, circa ’35. The zoot suit reigned now. Frock coats and beanies, verboten.

Three interviews loomed. Thad Brown had cherry-picked a Fed subversive sheet. Local Sinarquista boys. Three, *todos.* Thad’s curious. Did they frequent the klub*haus*?

It’s a bind. He served two factions here. He had to plumb the extent of Wendell Rice and George Kapek’s exposure. He served the PD there. He served Salvy Abascal and the Sinarquistas, most inimically.

He had to warn and exonerate. He wore Sinarquista green himself. He had to revamp the klub*haus* job and provide a credible solution.

To wit: kill a plausible suspect or suspects. To wit: spics, spooks, or treasonous swine. To wit: quash crossover leads to the Watanabe job. Nullify Bill Parker’s Free-the-Werewolf extravaganza.

Dudley scanned curb plates. He was vexed. He felt constrained. The fucking klub*haus* job consumed him. He should be back in Baja. He had nascent rackets to run. He had to revamp his search for the gold.

He’s vexed. He’s constrained. He’s diverted.

There’s dumb cracker Elmer Jackson and smart Okie Buzz Meeks. He’s constrained there. He cannot dissolve their partnership. Jack Horrall straddles a fence. Clean solve, staged solve—he’s ambivalent. Jackson and Meeks are in Baja now. They have not liaised with the Staties. They may or may not locate Huey. Juan Pimentel has the lad sequestered. Huey was staunch in his way. He would never blab to rogue cops.

He’s vexed, he’s constrained, he’s diverted. He’s buoyant, otherwise.

He has Joan. She exemplifies wartime passion and binds him to the gold. He has his brilliant Hideo.

The lad turned a single fiber. It placed Wendell Rice at chez Hanamaka. Hideo Ashida plumbed minutiae. He turned Hanamaka's print at the klub*haus.* A *triple* print check revealed it. He endured the raid at the White Dog Klub. The first Jap-internee transport is at the ready now. It will leave for Ventura County tomorrow. A load of "H" will be stashed on the bus. Hideo will debrief the captive Japs at the border.

He's vexed. He's constrained and diverted. He's more optimistic now.

He conducted his three interviews. They ran prosaically. The three boys attended LACC and bunked with their moms and dads. They eschewed zoot suits and went to Mass thrice weekly. They expressed their intent to avoid conscription and sit out this Jew-derived war.

They knew all about the klub*haus.* They had never set foot inside. They conceded a stern right-wing presence there. The presence of hopheads and jigaboos negated that. The klub*haus* was inherently un-Catholic. *Está un sacrilegio.*

They offered up no names. They snitched off no klub*haus* klubmen. *¿Qué? ¿Qué? ¿Qué?* We don't know *mierda.*

Three convivial chats. A felicitous morning. Somewhat loosened constraints.

Rain loomed. Black clouds seeped and burst. Dudley drove west and hit his wiper blades. Pachucos ducked under awnings. Note their sodden zoot suits. No Sinarquistas, they.

A car nudged his back bumper. A horn went *toot-toot.* Dudley checked his rear-view mirror and grinned.

Well, now—it's Salvador Abascal.

—

They lunched at a taco tavern. Salvy knew all the good spots. They shared spicy platters and quaffed beer. Their back booth assured privacy. A waitress cleared their table. They lit cigarettes.

Dudley said, "I'm wondering how you knew where to find me."

"I called Major Melnick in Ensenada, and your Lieutenant Brown here in Los Angeles. He passed me on to the impolitic Sergeant Breuning, who said, 'Oh, yeah—Dud told me about you.' "

Dudley smiled. "You mustn't consider me suspicious."

Salvy crushed his cigarette. "You have every right to be suspicious. I entered your life in quite the spectacular fashion. We surveil each other from afar and understand each other adroitly, even though we are but casual friends. We touch upon only the most obvious high points of our shared ideology, and rigorously avoid the specifics. This indicates mutual respect. We are not the type of men who indulge frivolous friendships. For men like us, there is no point in friendships that preclude a defining efficacy."

A grand lad. A mind reader and a seer. Father Coughlin thought the world of him. "He's an honorary mick, that one."

"I'm wondering how you came to save my life, and how you arrived at that man Trejo Caiz as my potential assassin."

Mariachi men strolled up. Salvy slipped them a dollar and shooed them off.

"Trejo Caiz was a Stalinist and a wheelman for the murder of Leon Trotsky. He had compiled a death list of fascist sympathizers, and you were on it. I learned of this in quite the roundabout way. Some three years ago, the late Carlos Madrano told me about you. He described you as a 'budding American fascist with profound law-enforcement credentials,' and a 'notable killer for Irish Republican causes.' I despised my boon acquaintance Madrano, and was overjoyed to learn that you had killed him and would soon join the SIS contingent in Ensenada. I have a superb intelligence network. They learned of Trejo Caiz's plan to kill you. I had both of you under surveillance up to the moment of your convergence."

Dudley roared. The Wolf appeared and lapped beer from the pitcher. Dudley reversed his coat lapel. Joan Klein's swastika map pin gleamed.

Salvy laughed. "Victor's brother lives on. Jorge Villareal-Caiz. A yet more pernicious *comunista.* There are no photographs of this evil *puto* extant. I see his face everywhere and nowhere, which confounds me. He is a priest-killer with many scalps to his credit. I have vowed to kill him."

The Wolf trusted Salvy. He was a discerning beast. He rarely bestowed approval.

"Let me indulge a hunch here. Did you and your stout *Kameraden* kill sixteen Jap submariners shortly after New Year's?"

Salvy smiled. "Yes. I received a tip that they were arriving, and carrying a great deal of money. Their plan was to impersonate Chinese men and perform sabotage in and around Los Angeles. We killed the men but did not find the money on the submarine."

Dudley winked. "Captain Vasquez-Cruz and I found the money and split it. My half was ten thousand dollars. I will acknowledge the sixteen scalps you took, and donate that amount to the Sinarquista war chest."

Salvy raised his glass. *"Meine Kameraden."*

Dudley raised his glass. "Do you have intelligence on a naval attaché named Kyoho Hanamaka?"

"No."

"Are you privy to plans for an air attack on L.A. later this month?"

"No."

Dudley said, "I pledge 15% of the profits from my admittedly criminal ventures to our shared cause."

Salvy said, "I am most humbly grateful, although I must risk your displeasure with two requests."

"Which are?"

"That you do not permit the sale of heroin to Mexicans, and that you quash all mentions of the appellation 'Sinarquista' as they might pertain to this scurrilous investigation of yours."

"I am in no way displeased, and I am happy to comply."

Salvy lit a cigarette. "These ventures of yours. Do they proceed apace?"

"Yes and no. I'll need to speak to Governor Lazaro-Schmidt soon. I require some assistance in the matter of exporting guest workers."

Salvy laughed. "You deftly omitted the word *wetback* in my presence."

Dudley laughed. "Lazaro-Schmidt. I'm assuming that you've met the man?"

"I have. He is *un hombre simpático,* if *un hombre* quite covetous and greedy. I find his relationship with his sister disturbing, though. She is a concert violist, and quite lovely. I must accede to decorum here and say no more."

Their waitress hovered. She poured tequila shots and hootchie-eyed *dos hombres guapos.*

Dudley downed his shot. He got that quick burn and glow. The Wolf licked his glass.

Salvy coughed. "If I were to tell you that I have plans to perform what might be termed 'cosmetic sabotage' on U.S. soil—gadfly gestures only—will you intercede and seek to expose me?"

Dudley leaned close. "You must solemnly promise that no American men, women, or children will be harmed."

Salvy leaned close. "Yes, you have my most solemn word."

Dudley sighed. "I'll profess vexation here. Gadfly gestures aside, I'm wondering what the world will be like when all of this is over."

Salvy twirled his shot glass. "Perhaps Europe and the East will realign. Perhaps the Hitler-Stalin pact will be reinstated as a hedge against chaos and the new American hegemony. I despise communism but quite often fail to see it as fascism's antithesis. A conference transpired in Ensenada, in the fall of '40. It was *comunista-fascista* and purportedly amiable. I have heard that numerous top dogs attended. It was the high-water point of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and postwar escape strategies were discussed. It was reportedly proclaimed that the war would kill both Stalin and Hitler, along with all paper currencies, save the U.S. dollar. All those in attendance were urged to hoard gold."

Gold. Ever synchronous. The *Spiritus Mundi* speaks.

Dudley said, "My fascist brother."

Salvy said, “A Catholic hegemony. We must stake our loyalty there.”

The Wolf jumped on the table. He cocked his head and howled his love for Salvador Abascal.

63

(LOS ANGELES, 1:00 P.M., 2/9/42)

The lab buzzed. Joan called it Jap*werk.* She worked Jap*werk* all day and all night.

Two chemists logged in radios. They scrawled serial numbers and searched for stashed contraband. Their gig was straight Jap internment. Joan's gig was Jap internment plus klub*haus* job.

She culled Rice and Kapek's Jap busts. She logged arrest and court dispositions. She wrote it all up and cross-referenced it. She determined custody status. She noted habeas writs. She tagged current known whereabouts.

She pulled mug shots and clipped dispo bulletins. It was advance work. Thad Brown had ordered massive roundups. His goal was massive lineups. He'd subdivided the suspect types.

In-custody Japs. Released Japs. Known cholos. Jazz-club denizens. Perverted hepcats. Nazi-esque types.

We'll run lineups. We'll parade the above. 46th Street locals will orb them. Have you seen these dinks at or near the klub*haus*?

The job was twelve days in. They'd turned zero at-the-scene eyewits. Thad decreed one last shot at that.

Joan worked. Joan worked, distracted. It was drudge*werk* and scut*werk.* She worked, bored and gored.

That hate mail. The Back-to-Africa screed. Preacher Mimms, gold heist–linked. *The Red Swastika.* Salvador Abascal critiques the Ensenada conclave.

Fall 1940. Nazi and Russian hotshots meet. They discuss potential world-war outcomes and ponder potential means of ascent. She read the tract three times. The Nazis and Reds huddle and conclude *this:*

They must exploit a new postwar gold standard.

That tract gored her. Gold, gold, gold. Gold in the vox populi. Gold, omnipresent. Gold, subsuming her.

She read the Mitch Kupp tract. Her own past and dead father subsumed her. It wasn't a hate tract. It was scholarly and altogether nuts.

Joan worked. Joan worked, distracted.

Bill and Dudley. Bill's jealous outburst. Weepy Bill and imperious Dudley. She wants Dudley more than Bill. She wants to talk gold with him. Dudley savaged Orson Welles. The *wunderkind* saw her naked. It drove Dudley to brutal rage. Bill would have sulked and hexed Welles from afar.

Joan *werk*ed. She logged evidence and ran circuits to the Alien Squad pen. She snagged file carbons and checked the Jap-arrest index. She ran into Lee Blanchard, outside the upstairs cot room. He stood by the file bank and flashed a shit-eating grin.

"We turned a habitué. Breuning and Carlisle grabbed him. They've got him in #3. Jack H. said you could watch."

"Who is he?"

"His name's Harold John Miciak. Breuning told me he's a lulu."

Joan stashed her carbons and walked to sweatbox row. #3 was spy-mirrored. A hall speaker spritzed sound. The hallway was SRO.

Jack Horrall. Sid Hudgens. Catbox Cal Lunceford. They played Mr. First Nighter and pressed their snouts up to the glass.

Joan joined them. Sid woo-woo'd her. Call-Me-Jack said, "Hi, Red."

The sweatbox ran standard. Twelve by twelve, cork-baffled walls, floor-bolted table and chairs. Miciak sat and feigned nonchalance. Breuning and Carlisle hovered. They phone-booked dipshit's shoulders and head.

The hall speaker spritzed. Breuning said, "Come on, give." Carlisle said, "We can keep this up all day." Miciak sustained swats. His forehead and cheekbones grew welts.

He was too thin. He looked used up. He sported a hairnet conk and shaved whitewalls. He wore a gone jacket with wide-wing lapels.

He raised his hands. "Feel free to desist. I always like to absorb some hurt before I grovel and spill. It reestablishes my white-man credentials."

Breuning and Carlisle desisted. They hankie-wiped their brows. Breuning fed Miciak a cigarette. Carlisle lit it. Call-Me-Jack nudged Joan. *Some floor show, huh?*

Breuning straddled the spare chair. Carlisle sat on the table. Miciak blew smoke their way. Hudgens and Lunceford yukked.

Miciak cracked his knuckles. "You had some questions about that crib on 46th, right? You were seeking the lowdown from an informed perspective."

Breuning said, "Come on, give."

Carlisle said, "We'll give you a lunch chit for Kwan's Chinese Pagoda if you give good."

Miciak picked his nose. “That’s a swell inducement.”

Breuning said, “Give. We’re not getting any younger here.”

Miciak scratched his balls. “I would call the 46th Street spot an arsenal of democracy and a monument to free-thinking egalitarianism. It’s what you might variously call a fuck joint, a blowhole, a jam-session crib, and a redoubt for thugs, goons, and the pro-Nazi crowd—but hep niggers, nigger jazz musicians, Mexicans, Mexicoons, and square-ass cops are welcome, too. Let me not tread lightly here. You’ve got jazz fiends, hopheads, boozehounds, terp men, bennie eaters, untold numbers of right-wing blowhards and Jew-haters, along with some name jazz guys. You’ve got coons like Wardell Gray, Dexter Gordon, and Charlie Parker—not to mention white cats like Stan Kenton, Art Pepper, and Bart Varsalona. You’ve got coon cops bringing in colored whores they popped for Pros-1 and fucking them upstairs. You’ve got mud-shark white girls who crave dark meat cavorting with shine smut-film actors with king-sized dicks, while the late Georgie Kapek takes pictures and peddles them for fifty cents apiece.”

Miciak stopped flat. Miciak mugged at the mirror. Miciak performed a smut-film trick. He stuck out his tongue and stretched it up to his nose.

The hallway crowd slack-jawed it. Joan lit a cigarette. Call-Me-Jack popped digitalis. The Sidster sucked his pocket flask.

Breuning said, “Don’t stop now.”

Carlisle said, “We’ll throw in free-drink coupons for Kwan’s.”

Miciak lit a cigarette. “Let us not euphemize or tread lightly here. You might call this exalted spot a lewd liaison lair. You’ve got divorced cops with no place to live paying the late Wendell Rice a buck a night to sleep on the floor. I would call the late Rice and Kapek the overlords of this hallowed joint. They’re selling confiscated Jap flags and crib sheets for the war-hire cop exams, not to mention confiscated Jap swords, daggers, and guns to these Mexican zoot punks out in Boyle Heights. The late *Sensei* Rice showed me a bayonet that must have been solid gold, all inlaid with this hammer-and-sickle design, made out of real rubies—”

Joan dropped her cigarette. It bounced off the mirror ledge and singed her skirt. She fretted her gold cuff links, and—

“—and you got this kid Link Rockwell. He’s on leave from the Navy, and he’s this jig preacher’s pal. He sells tickets to these sex shows upstairs—and you got lots of pro-Nazi, pro-Jap, and pro-Sinarquista talk, and lots of *Sieg Heil,* and hate tracts being passed around, and traffic cops fixing tickets for a buck a pop, and auto-theft cops selling hot cars and counterfeit license plates, and—”

Joan lit a fresh cigarette. Her hands shook. She looped back to the gold bayonet. She fretted one gold cuff link clean off.

Jack H. grabbed her arm and steered her down the hall. He was I-need-a-drink trembly and pre-heart-attack flush.

"It's the guns, Red. It's all bad, and the guns are the worst of it. Check the Alien Squad's gun-confiscation roster and note all of Rice and Kapek's filings. Cross-check that against the lab's ballistics-comparison log, and pray that we're not too far exposed and deep in the hole. Do it now, and I'll owe you a very large favor."

—

Kay was late. Joan hogged their regular booth at Dave's Blue Room. She sipped her third scotch mist and chain-smoked. She respooled Jap*werk* and Jack*werk.* It comprised a six-hour sprint.

She logged 161 guns. They ran the gamut. Revolvers/automatics/rifles/shotguns. Rice and Kapek seized them all. They were all missing.

Gone meant *gone.* They're not in the lab vault. They're not in the Central Station and/or DB vault. There's no backup paper*werk.* They haven't been test-fired. There's no ballistics-comp sheets.

She did the *werk.* Lee Blanchard kibitzed. He laid out THIS BIG SNAFU and the upshot.

Breuning and Carlisle hard-nosed Miciak. They took him to the Lyman's sweat room and black-gloved him. He gave up relative bupkes. He refused to rat his other klub*haus* confreres. He said that Rice and Kapek bought off a slew of Newton Street blues, and quashed reports of klub*haus* misconduct. The *haus* thrived behind quasi-official approval. Local yokels ignored it. Preacher Mimms owned the property. He greased the yokels with fat Christmas baskets. They recruited saps for his back-to-Africa shuck. The klub*haus* was protected and sacrosanct.

Breuning and Carlisle beat Miciak half-dead. Thad Brown halted it. He drove Miciak to Queen of Angels and pledged a waltz on two 459 warrants. Miciak was half-dead and relieved.

She *werk*ed. She reported to Jack Horrall. Call-Me-Jack pledged his large favor. It floored her. She got floored twice in one day. Miciak blabs. Wendell Rice shows off this gold bayonet. Pinch me, I'm—

There's Kay. She's wearing her houndstooth-huntress ensemble. The black beret clashes. The saddle shoes are pure Kay.

Joan said, "You're late."

Kay slid into the booth. "Ask me why I'm late."

"Why are you late?"

"I'm late, because I ran into Jack Horrall. He told me the whole story three times, and to his credit, he never once mentioned your legs. I'm late, because I was looking for a certain item in sterling silver."

Joan laughed. “He served drinks in his office. He said, ‘Don’t you dare cry,’ and ‘Quit blushing, you’ve earned it.’ ”

Kay laced up their hands. “What’s the first thing you thought of?”

“You know what it is.”

“Tell me. Confirm how well I’ve come to know you.”

Joan sipped scotch and bitters. The room went too warm. She reached over and reset Kay’s beret. She’d seen Elmer J. do it. He always pulled up the stem.

“I’ve achieved rank parity with William H. Parker. It’s the first thing that popped into my head.”

Kay lobbed a small jewel box. Joan snagged it on the fly. She snuck a look and saw two captain’s bars.

“Don’t you cry, sister. Don’t you dare blush, because you’ve earned it.”

Joan wiped her eyes. “My academy class convenes in October. I’ll ace the pistol range. I used to shoot rabid bats, back at home. I’d nail them from forty yards out.”

Kay lit a cigarette and killed off Joan’s cocktail. The jewel box glowed. The silver bars threw sparks.

“Go home and put some words on paper. Send one up for the ones you left behind. They don’t have your grit, and they’ll never have your luck.”

—

She prayed for a blackout. Army searchlights strafed the sky, just so. She wanted to count moon craters. Empirical science meets God. Tell me what all this means.

No blackout. Easy come, easy go. It scotched her shot at cheap metaphysics. She took Kay’s advice instead.

She scrawled up her diary. She described the Big Snafu and critiqued her antithetical lovers. She pondered the second gold bayonet. She wrote her name and rank twenty times.

The doorjamb creaked. She looked over. Bill Parker stood in the doorway. He’s in uniform. He’s half-gassed and grinning. He’s cock-of-the-walk smug and proud.

Joan said, “You’re just standing there. You usually walk straight up and kiss me.”

“Don’t look so disappointed. I pulled a coup at the grand jury today. I could have gone home and told my wife, but I came here instead.”

Joan tossed him a breath mint. It hit his gun belt and fell to the floor.

“You could have told Kay Lake. Your wife ignores you, and Kay lusts for you. I don’t really consider your wife much of a rival.”

"You've got no beef with Kay. The two of you are friends now."

Joan tossed a breath mint. It hit his badge and fell to the floor.

"Tell me about your coup, and I'll tell you about mine."

Bill weaved and steadied himself. The doorway held him up.

"I nailed those Fed fuckers, and I nailed Jack Horrall. I pulled some wire mounts in December, when the probe was first announced. I gave up Jack H. and told the jury that he ordered it. They granted me full immunity. They were going to rubber-stamp no-bills. Now, they're going after Jack, Fletch Bowron, Ray Pinker, and the Jamie kid for real. I'll be the star witness, and I'll be sitting in Jack's chair inside six months."

Joan tossed a breath mint. It hit his necktie and fell to the floor.

"Bravo, Bill. Now, go tell Kay and Dudley. Then all the ones you care about will be up to speed."

"You've got a lot of goddamned nerve, bringing Dudley up to me."

Joan said, "I'll tell Dudley. It's what you really want. Everything you do is about you and Dudley, so why should I deny you that joy?"

64

(ENSENADA, 8:00 A.M., 2/10/42)

He returned to the charnel house. Dudley ordered a search. He picked through scorched cadavers and phone-line debris.

Forty-two bookies perished. Most were Fifth Column–adjunct. Their deaths served no purpose. No hard leads accrued.

Ashida sifted rubble. Juan Pimentel searched for lockboxes and safes. A.M. arc lights were up. Statie goons watchdogged the location.

It was the one Baja relay spot. It immolated in ten seconds flat.

Ashida sifted plaster dust. Blasted teeth jammed up his net. He relived the explosion. Fleeing bookies trampled him. He pumped his shotgun and blew their limbs off. He stumbled out the door.

He replayed it awake. He redreamed it asleep. He smelled it right now.

Ashida sifted dust. He snared wood husks and scorched Bakelite chunks. Crazy Juan waved a skull and made kissy sounds. The plaster grit expelled gastric juices. Forty-two men burned alive.

A wedding band dropped from his sift net. It was pure gold.

Joan called him last night. She relayed the Miciak mess. She stressed Wendell Rice and *his* gold bayonet.

He told her he fiber-swept Hanamaka's hideaway. It paid off. He notched a fiber match to Rice himself. More threads converged. Dudley dubbed it the "Trifecta." The gold heist, Fifth Column grief, the klub*haus* job.

More evidence and more death. More open-air cadaver rot. More teeth in his sifting pan.

Ashida walked off. Crazy Juan yelled, "Come back, my love!"

—

Japs.

Japs, Japs, Japs. His ex–racial kin. His pre–Pearl Harbor brethren. His pre–

Dudley Smith bund.

Ashida pulled up to the Statie barracks. Dudley shot him a last-second job. It was Jap-derived and Jap-defined. A Jap trial run was set to move north. Dudley and the Ventura County Sheriff colluded.

They moved precipitously. Captain Vasquez-Cruz cosigned the collusion. They bypassed Governor Lazaro-Schmidt.

Ashida parked and walked back to the loading dock. The transport bus stood ready. Two Statie shits guarded it. They packed tommy guns.

Japs, Japs, Japs. Sixty men and women shackled. Japs, Japs, Japs. He employed the common vernacular now.

Dudley told him to interpret. Curry favor and seek last-minute rat-outs. Press on Japs still at large. Pledge snitch rewards. We'll feed you gourmet dog food and house you in de-luxe horse stalls.

Ashida hopped on the bus. He wore U.S. Army fatigues and jump boots. He carried his evidence kit and wore a holstered .45.

He counted sixty Japs. They were shackle-chained. Their arm and ankle cuffs scraped and drew blood. They were cinched up, seat back to seat back.

Ashida studied them. He stood by the gun guard's seat and let them notice him. It took a moment. They stopped talking, they looked up, they saw him.

He had them now. They fell quiet and studied him. He issued Dudley's snitch directive in Spanish and Japanese. A babble rose. He walked through the bus.

People hissed at him. People talked to him. He heard *traitor* in Spanish and Japanese. He ran the spit gauntlet. He caught globs on his fatigues and globs in his face.

He looked out the rear window. Two Staties stuffed bundles inside the wheel wells. It was uncut heroin.

The curses persisted. The driver and gun guard jumped on board. The driver kicked the ignition.

Ashida about-faced and walked toward the front of the bus. Hisses and curses overlapped. Spittle dripped off his chin. He threw out Spanish and Japanese. *Kyoho Hanamaka—do you know him?*

He walked seat row to seat row and repeated it. Spit bombs blurred his vision. An old man motioned him close.

Ashida leaned close. The old man spoke English. He said, "Hanamaka fascist. I valet for him. I help him mess up mountain house and pack. Two white policemen drive him over border."

Ashida opened his evidence kit. He flashed ID pix of Wendell Rice and George Kapek.

The old man nodded YES.

65

(SAN DIEGO, 12:00 P.M., 2/10/42)

The boys are—

They hauled north. Elmer drove. Buzz baby-talked his pet scorpion. They left El Huey naked, outside the Klubb Satan. Devil take the hindmost.

The coast road looked good. Eucalyptus trees and big wave swells. The klub*haus* job looked bad. Elmer masticated it.

They called Thad Brown from T.J. They said Huey was just plain nowhere. Thad laid out the Miciak mess. The looted guns were the gnarly nadir. Thad issued an APB on Link Rockwell. Flyboy Link staged klub*haus* sex shows and sold tix.

The klub*haus* job was Shit City. Buzz and him brain-waved it. There had to be an upside somewhere. Huey's Dudster tale, ditto. Dud attends a pervert hoedown and snuffs a he-she. That's blackmail bait. It could rescind Dud's hex on Buzz.

Elmer relit his cigar. A light drizzle hit. They passed Del Mar Racetrack. Buzz dropped bundles there on his days off.

They did one good deed already. He called Fourth Interceptor and played Mr. Anonymous. He tattled that so-called Jap sub attack. It retattled Huey's tattle. Sub attack planned!!! Japs target Santa Barbara refineries!!!

That was tattle #1. Tattle #2 was stale bread. Jap air attack!!! Late February, *banzai!!!* It was most likely vapors and bullshit.

El Scorpio snoozed in his cage. Buzz stuck a finger in and stroked his pincers. A pet store on Fairfax sold dead crickets. Buzz planned to stock up. Keep El Scorpio fat and sassy.

"Here's something I don't get. There's those fourteen Baja pay-phone listings in Tommy G.'s address book. My question's *Why?* Why's a psycho jerkoff like Tommy have those numbers? Is he *really* some hot-blood seditionist? On top of that, this English-language paper ran a story this morning. The Staties knocked over a pay-phone relay spot and disabled it. Does that mean them pay phones in Tommy's book are dead?"

Elmer said, "I got phone slugs in the trunk. We'll try to call those phones from that hot-box by the *Herald.* If we get dead air, we'll know something's cooking."

Buzz rogered him and yawned *wiiiiiide.* He tipped his hat low and snoozed off. Elmer chained cigars and daydreamed Jean Staley. He dressed her in Kay Lake threads. Kay had this black cashmere dress. He liked it best.

Full-on rain hit outside L.A. Elmer cut east on rinky-dink streets and north on Figueroa. The rain abated, the clouds dispersed, some sunshine poked through. Buzz yawned and stirred.

"Looks like home to me."

Elmer cut east on Pico and north on Broadway. There's the *Herald* building. There's the hot-box. There's Ed Satterlee, parked upside.

Elmer U-turned and pulled up behind him. He got out and unlocked his trunk. He kept his extralegal shit there. Throwdown guns, burglars' tools, maryjane to plant on suspects. Pay-phone slugs. Crib notes per Tommy G.'s address book.

Buzz got out and stretched. They waved to Ed Satterlee. Ed the Fed waved back. They ducked into the phone booth. Elmer passed Buzz the address-book numbers and a handful of slugs.

El Buzzo spoke okay Spanish. He got the place-the-calls gig. The gambit was station-to-station. The L.A. operator hails the Baja operator. She shoots the actual calls.

Buzz went to work. Elmer moseyed up to Ed's sled and popped the passenger door. Ed nipped on a hip flask. Elmer slid in and went *Gimme that.*

Ed passed the flask. "Your boy Bill Parker pulled a fink play with the grand jury. Those halfhearted bills rigged to produce acquittals don't look so assured now."

Elmer sipped cheap brandy. "Bill Parker's right hand don't know what his left hand is doing."

Buzz lounged half outside the phone booth. Elmer eyeballed him. Buzz held up three fingers and pointed them down. That meant three disconnects.

Ed slurped cheap brandy. "What's Meeks doing?"

"We're tracking Baja pay phones. It pertains to the klub*haus* job."

"Are you working with Fourth Interceptor? They're chasing Baja pay phones."

Elmer went *nix.* "No, it's something else."

Ed the Fed shrugged. "As numerous wags have said, 'Fifth Column's Fifth Column.' We get lots of those Deutsches Haus creeps making calls from here."

Elmer orbed the phone booth. Buzz wagged nine fingers and pointed them down. That meant nine disconnects.

“How do you *know* this, sahib?”

Ed gargled cheap brandy. “We run photo surveillance. We take pictures and match them to the plate numbers of the cars the creeps get back into. We get the registration details from the DMV and run the names against known-subversive files.”

Buzz flashed fourteen fingers and pointed them down. That meant all disconnects.

Elmer said, “I don’t suppose you’ve got any of those pictures on you?”

Ed reached under his seat. He snagged a stack of glossies and dropped them on Elmer’s lap.

Elmer thumbed through. He saw a slew of unknown phone callers. He saw a far shot of Ensign Link Rockwell. *Oooh*—there’s a tight shot. Dig that mean-looking Jap.

Jap on the loose. *Oooga-booga.* Why ain’t this fucker detained?

“You got a name on him?”

Ed flipped the picture over. Scrawled on the back:

Kyoho Hanamaka.

66

(LOS ANGELES, 7:00 A.M., 2/11/42)

Breakfast at Kwan's. Flapjacks and Bloody Marys. Jack Horrall, half-blitzed and dyspeptic.

"What you're saying in no way surprises me. Bill Parker rats to the Feds. It's on a par with 'dog bites man.' "

Dudley sipped coffee. He left Joan's bed for this bereavement. She finked Parker's fink play. She finked Wendell Rice's gold bayonet. La Bonne Joan—ever opportunistic.

"It ups the odds that the grand jury will issue binding indictments, sir. Forewarned is forearmed."

Jack dosed his morning jolt. He added Tabasco and Worcestershire. His highball glass glowed malignant.

"Parker's making his move. If I'm convicted at trial, he'll grab my job early. He'll work some voodoo on the City Council and push Thad Brown aside."

"Yes, sir."

"Talk to him. Horse trade. White man smoke heap big peace pipe. Tell that pious cocksucker that I'll pull my support of Thad if he recants his testimony extant."

Dudley scanned the room. The City Hall crowd noshed early. Fletch Bowron, Sheriff's brass, Jew lobbyists. They waved to Chief Jack and the big mick.

"I'll call Parker this morning, sir."

Jack salted his drink. His liver was shot. His pump was shot. His arteries bulged. His life span loomed as next week.

"You heard about that Miciak fuck? We've got Rice and Kapek selling Jap guns now."

"I was informed, sir. Mike Breuning called me."

"I'm starting to think I should countermand my clean-solve directive. Rice and Kapek's shit should never see the light of day. I've been giving this a great deal of thought. It's causing me to wax profound. I'm also shit-faced at seven-fucking-a.m."

Dudley grinned. "You've always been a lively man, sir."

"I'm also very enlightened, and not averse to enlisting jigaboos in our noble crusade. Which brings me to my pal Preacher Mimms."

Dudley lit a cigarette. Call-Me-Jack resalted his drink.

"Preacher Mimms owns the klub*haus.* That gives him a stake in this. He's also got his snout dunked in a great many poisoned streams."

Such as the gold heist. May '31. Mimms bails out Leander Frechette. Hideo and Joan uncovered it.

"You've piqued my interest, sir."

"Talk to Preacher Mimms. Ask him about his numerous enemies embroiled in perverted walks of life. Get a sense of the ones he'd like to see dead."

—

They shared rank now. Two uniformed captains/two august agencies. They drew stares at Kwan's.

Parker slouched. Dudley sat stiff straight. Joan would notch rank soon. Jack H. shot her an Academy slot. Captain J. W. Conville, Los Angeles PD.

Parker sipped coffee. His glasses were Scotch-taped. He'd chewed his nails raw.

"I read the posted summary at Lyman's. The stolen guns constitute a shitstorm."

Dudley lit a cigarette. "Yes, and a discomfiting and potentially scandalous one."

"Was that what you wished to discuss?"

"Among other matters, yes."

Kwan's buzzed. It was a lawyers' lair this a.m. Fletch B. and counsel. Ray Pinker and counsel. It refracted Whiskey Bill's snitch ploy. The Fed probe snarls and shows teeth.

Parker said, "I'm listening."

"Please restate your promise not to reveal Jim Davis, per a certain quadruple homicide."

"So stated, with a codicil. We still need to put him under pentothal, voluntarily or coerced. There's the currently pending matter of the klub*haus* job, and what he might know."

"I'll do it. Would you care to witness the interview?"

Parker nodded. Archbishop Cantwell walked in the door. He wore kelly green golf togs and drew delighted stares.

“Do I have your word that you will not seek to countermand my efforts in *l’affaire* klub*haus*?”

“End it. It’s a lake of shit our police department will drown in.”

“Thank you, Captain.”

Parker lit a cigarette. “Let me anticipate your next salvo and nip it in the bud. No, I will not recant at the grand jury—even if Jack Horrall pulls his support of Thad Brown.”

The Archbishop worked the room. He swapped jokes with Battling Gomez. He ogled Betty Grable and winked at Harry James.

Dudley said, “Would you reconsider if I offered to walk away from Joan?”

Parker said, “Emphatically no.”

J. J. Cantwell sidled over and approached their table. He looked vividly elfin today.

“What are you two brilliant lads discussing so heatedly?”

Dudley said, “Women, Your Eminence.”

Cantwell winked. “That’s a topic I know nothing of, regardless of any rumors you may have heard.”

—

The drive back protracted. There were flash storms and coast road tie-ups. The jaunt ran six hours, door-to-door.

He got a late start. A bayonet search postponed his departure. He badged the widows Rice and Kapek and tossed their houses, floor-to-floor. He searched two domiciles and two detached garages. The Widow Rice said two shitkicker cops had already been through.

No gold bayonet appeared. The widows knew nothing of it. They’d dumped Wendell’s and Georgie’s Nazi gear. Their loony husbands gored their goats. Goodbye to all that.

Alas.

Dudley parked and lugged his grip upstairs. Music surged within his suite. It was dank and dissonant. Claire and Young Joan doted on Shostakovich.

He unlocked the door. Young Joan blasted the dour maestro. She sprawled on the couch. The Wolf sprawled beside her. Young Joan ruffled his coat.

Dudley doused the Victrola. Loud brass diminuendoed. Bass cellos swooped and died.

Young Joan said, “Hi, Uncle Dud.” She patted a folder on her lap. The Wolf stirred and nuzzled her hand.

“I have something to show you.”

Dudley smiled. “Perchance?”

“I found an L.A. Police intel file, in with some blank forms. It’s good you came home when you did. Aunt Claire’s out, and she wouldn’t want you to see it.”

The girl Mata Hari. His very own Hebraic offspring. She’s always concocting intrigue.

Dudley dropped his grip and perched on the couch. Young Joan passed him the file.

“It’s a CP cell, back in the ’30s. I recognized one of the pictures.”

Dudley opened the folder. It was standard Red Squad paper. A cover note prefaced it. Five suspect sheets and photographs were included. The note listed five CP members. The names stood out.

Saul Lesnick, M.D. Claire’s psychiatrist and confidant. Her L.A. dope conduit. Plus Andrea Lesnick. Plus Meyer Gelb, plus Jean Staley and Jorge Villareal-Caiz.

It’s *the* cell. Hideo and Joan uncovered the lead. The cell drew heat per the Griffith Park fire. Said heat cooled and died. It was stale news today.

Sicknik seditionists. Dr. Saul’s schizy daughter. Florid cell boss Gelb. Red pawn Jean Staley. Priest-killer Villareal-Caiz. Reviled by the great Salvy Abascal.

Young Joan said, “Look at the pictures.”

Dudley flipped through the suspect sheets. Four pix beamed, innocuous. Villareal-Caiz stood out.

As he well should. Here’s the punch line. He’s really José Vasquez-Cruz.

Claire found Vasquez-Cruz familiar. She’d “seen him somewhere, maybe a demonstration.” She found him attractive. He concurrently repulsed her. Claire viewed all men that way.

Young Joan stroked the Wolf. He hated priest killers and Communists. His hackles flared.

—

History. Munich, ’34. The Night of the Long Knives. Brentwood, ’39. A costume party replicates slaughter. Ensenada, now. History as fused circuit and final reprise.

Dudley brought the gold bayonet. He wore SS black. Salvy brought two stilettos. He wore Wehrmacht gray. They took Salvy’s car. The Wolf lounged between them. He wore his spiked collar, swastika-pinned.

3:00 a.m. Calle Diamante. The priest-killer lives in a bluffside casa. It’s bleached-white adobe. There’s a wide front lawn and eucalyptus trees.

Dudley knew the floor plan. Cruz-Caiz threw a party. Claire danced with *El*

Communisto. He was *El Fascisto* then.

Salvy parked across the street. The Wolf growled and flashed his fangs. He told them to carry their weapons unsheathed.

They walked over. They veered toward the right-side front of the house. French doors marked the master bedroom. Gargoyle doorstops held them open. A breeze stirred sheer drapes.

Dudley heard snores and smelled stale perfume. It was Claire's scent.

They walked in. Salvy patted the side wall and tripped a light switch. The room went too bright too fast. The priest-killer sleeps, the priest-killer stirs.

He's wearing silk pajamas. The bedsheets are mussed. He's almost awake.

Dudley stepped up. He gripped the bayonet two-handed. The priest-killer opened his eyes. Dudley slammed the blade into his face.

It crushed his skull and tore one eye out. Blood exploded. It sprayed Dudley's tunic and drenched the pillows and sheets. The priest-killer gurgle-screamed. Dudley slammed the blade into his mouth.

It choked off all sound. Severed bridgework snagged the blade. Dudley yanked it free. He stabbed the priest-killer's face and smashed into his brains.

Salvy stabbed. He arced two knives, in and out. He stabbed one flailing arm and severed it. One knife blade broke off in his hand.

Dudley swung the bayonet crossways. He shattered the priest-killer's ribs and lanced through to his heart.

All that blood. *Comunista* red. All that offal and blood stink. Dudley smelled Claire through all of it.

67

(LOS ANGELES, 2/12–2/25/42)

I will take fate by the throat.

Beethoven said it. Dudley passed the maxim along. She repeated it to Kay. Diarist Kay loved epigraphs and thus lectured diarist Joan. She said, "It consecrates your opportunism. This war honors arrivistes. So does Los Angeles."

She should be in Wave training now. She should be field-dressing wounds and reading male VD charts. Fate intervened. A new set of should be's unfurled. She got drunk and caused four deaths. She should be in Tehachapi now. Elmer Jackson said, "You're the world's luckiest white woman, Red. You plowed some wetbacks hauling maryjane."

That's true. Luck and fate intertwine and spawn opportunity. And opportunity carries a price. Consider this nightmare.

New Year's Eve through a booze veil. Blinding rain and the crash. The jail cell wake-up and policeman standing there. He's an opportunist, as well.

That dream bearably repeats. Repetition renders it banal. The dream sound track retains its verve. She hears young voices and pounding fists. They emanate from some enclosed space. The sound track horrifies.

Fate, thus defined. Cop life beckons her. She joins her fellow opportunists—wartime irregulars all.

Bill Parker and Dudley Smith. Hideo Ashida and Kay Lake. Thad Brown, Nort Layman, Call-Me-Jack Horrall. Elmer Jackson, Lee Blanchard, Buzz Meeks.

All task-assigned. All duty-driven. There for the body-in-the-box and the dead-cops caper. It's all one story, you see.

The story coheres in her diary. The supporting players recede and make room for the stars. She's as one with Dudley and Hideo. They all want the gold—and that's all that counts.

Fate. Opportunity. Misalliance. Fool's errand. Sacred quest. The gold heist and the fire. It's all one story, you—

She stands poised. Her forensic skills verge on genius. Hideo supersedes her in all things scientific. Dudley's fierce will supersedes all forensic application. It's their one story. It will culminate if and when they solve their intertwined cases. It will end if and when they get the gold.

It's Fate, prophesied. It's Opportunity, writ large. It's Luck, in the form of a boozed-up policeman and his college-girl crush.

I can help you, Lieutenant. Of course you can. I've always had my way with men. And you won't be the only man who finds me.

Her Bill. Her Dudley. A troika yet to resolve. She shared lust and gold fever with Dudley. She shared hurt and dashed faith with Bill. She holds her own with both of her lovers. She shares their stalemates. She shares their secrets. She knows things that no woman of her station should know.

Two-Gun Davis killed the four Watanabes. Werewolf Shudo was framed. Dudley did it. Bill plucked Shudo from death row. He did it to impress her and to wow God. He performed a penitential act to negate his adultery.

You do not cut deals with God. Protestants know this. Catholics do not. Bill snitched to the Fed grand jury. He did it with self-seeking aplomb. Dudley told her that he and Jack Horrall are scheming countermeasures. They will address Bill's grand-jury play and the ghastly klub*haus* case itself. Her lovers blur within their machinations. She's aswirl with their secrets. She's powerfully indebted to their conflict. The realization stuns her.

Dudley has pledged to solve her father's murder. It was not an idle boast. He added the caveat: "If a solution is there to be had." She told him about the air-warfare tract, mailed to the *haus.*

Mitch Kupp authored the tract. It was sent to Wendell Rice. That fact stunned Dudley. He held forth on fate and lunar tides. Dudley puts faith in talking animals and spirit worlds aligned. Bill cuts deals with God and weeps in shame. He comes to her nakedly revealed and blinded with desire. She will not give up either man.

Kay Lake mediates both men. She's the Bill-loves-Joan deus ex machina and piquantly critiques their affair. Schoolgirl intrigue is at play here. Kay is waiting out Bill's fatuous crush on the big redhead. Kay mediates Dudley Smith with bald malice.

She despises Dudley. She purports to see through to his cold, evil heart. She may or may not know that Dudley and Big Red share the sheets. Kay eavesdrops at Lyman's. She gleefully catalogues and passes on gossip. She should know the story. She's never said, "Are you or aren't you?" That seems odd in itself.

Kay collects rumors, Kay reveals rumors, Kay constellates rumors herself. One pithy rumor surfaces on occasion. Kay Lake shivved Dudley Smith late last year.

It was ridiculous. She didn't believe it. It exposed the fault lines of the Lyman's rumor mill. Cop work was inherently outré and given to extravagant expression. All provocative rumors have legs. The Kay-Dudley dish was pure fantasia.

Kay was triangle-happy. She observed troikas, and slid in and out of them. There's Joan/Dudley/Bill. There's Joan/Bill/Kay. There's Joan/Dudley/Claire De Haven. Can she credit the war, or is it all just luck and lust, defined?

She's visited Otto Klemperer's spread on three more jazzy occasions. Kay and the Maestro play the piano together. The Maestro enjoys flirting with young women. He's hinted that his house holds a dark secret. Kay plays improvised piano chords. They're dark and secretly descriptive. There's an open secret swirling at chez Klemperer. Kay and the Maestro lead a cabal of New York leftists and their "Mexican friend." They're smuggling Shostakovich's new symphony out of Russia. The Maestro intends to conduct a preemptive performance. All proceeds will go to European war relief.

It's a benign secret. It dovetails with malign cop-world secrets. Kay told her that Dudley smokes opium. Kay said, "Don't tell anyone—it's a secret."

She hoards secrets as well as Kay does. She keeps a secret diary and performs secret deeds. She met Meyer Gelb at her first Maestro bash. He was Griffith Park fire–adjunct and thus adjunct to Karl Tullock and Wayne Frank Jackson. She checked statewide DMV records. There were no Meyer Gelbs listed. She ran nationwide records checks, with identical results. She attended her second Maestro bash. She prowled the Maestro's office and went through his Rolodex. There was no Meyer Gelb listed. She performed this secret deed sans compunction.

Jean Staley attended her maiden Maestro bash. She once belonged to Comrade Gelb's Commie cell. Miss Staley was listed in the '38 L.A. White Pages. She lived in Beachwood Canyon. It mandated a covert approach.

Burglars' tools. Easily accessible. The crime lab kept an exemplar set.

She surveilled Jean Staley's bungalow. Miss Staley's car was missing. Miss Staley appeared to be missing herself. She let herself in to the bungalow. It was musty. The gas had been turned off. The walls bore print-eradication marks. The place had been deftly wiped.

Secret indications. Secrets, not yet revealed.

Claire De Haven attends the Maestro's parties. Kay calls her the "doomed poetess." Claire's morphine habit is a poorly kept secret. Guests see her coming and mime her deft touch with a spike. Claire remains a most stately dope fiend. She observed Claire and Orson Welles talking. Welles refused to go in the steam room with her. He saw both of Dudley Smith's women naked. Dudley issued commensurate warnings and a brutal rebuke. He probably possessed a secondary motive. She had no idea what. It was Dudley's secret—and she's not one to pry.

Terry Lux recut Orson's face. Orson recuperated in secret. Terry Lux is American First. Bill Parker spilled Terry's big secret. Terry was privy to the Watanabe snuffs.

Secrets.

Her secrets. The gold cabal's secrets. Cop secrets, above all else.

Navy blue to police blue. Fate, luck, and opportunity conjoined. Jack Horrall likes her legs and knows grit and brains when he sees them. She joins the ranks October 4. She'll be Captain J. W. Conville and the highest-ranking woman on the PD. Her precipitous commission will spawn cop resentment. She will rebuff it with imperious ease. Her serendipity mirrors that of Lieutenant Hideo Ashida. Fate, luck, opportunity. Cop noblesse oblige. Dudley Smith's largesse.

They both love him. They both know what he is. It's their dark secret, shared.

They talk, long-distance. Their mutual enmity has waned. They speak as fellow scientists and gold questers. She accepts his prissy deviance. He accepts her bedroom bond with the man he loves. They talk for hours. The U.S. Army pays for the calls. They discuss crossover leads in their three complex cases. They dissect every single lead and clue and possible connection. They do not covet the gold from an aggrieved perspective. They've both played this war for all it's worth and come out ahead.

She lucked out of Manslaughter One. He lucked out of the internment. Their war efforts run parallel to their personal ambition.

Hideo fights the Fifth Column in Mexico. His Jap-toady work repulses him. That's his only rub. It's her rub, as well. The internment is a disgrace. Wendell Rice and George Kapek exemplify the injustice. J-town stands decimated. The Manzanar camp opens next month. Hideo Ashida dodged that bullet. Great shame undermines his great luck.

Hideo works in Baja. Her L.A. workload has now doubled. It's all Jap*werk* and klub*haus* job. Thad Brown ran three lineups at Newton Station. Lineup #1 featured jazz-club patrons. #2 featured "political types." #3 featured uninterned Japs.

46th Street residents viewed fifty-odd men. No positive IDs resulted.

The Crash Squad meets daily at Lyman's back room. Their APB turned Link Rockwell. Ensign Rockwell was ensconced at a Navy flight school in Florida. Jack Horrall declined to extradite. Young Link and Call-Me-Jack were tight with Martin Luther Mimms.

Jack wants to bury the klub*haus* job. Dudley considers it insoluble. He wants to isolate klub*haus* leads that point to the gold and shitcan the rest. She and Hideo want the gold and a unified solve. Dudley is currently pondering klub*haus* countermeasures. Hideo told her that. The phone receiver froze in her hand.

Secret measures. Secret pleasures. Secret locales.

Dudley smoked opium. She asked Kay where. Kay said, “The basement at Kwan’s.”

She crashed the party there. Uncle Ace proved amenable. They’d met socially. Ace fed PD folks on the cuff.

He supplied the tar, the pipe, and the pallet. She joined twenty-odd Chinamen and DA McPherson’s colored girlfriend. The pallet was too short for her. She smoked opium and flew off someplace. She traveled in a gold rocket ship. Gold dust dropped from the clouds.

68

(TIJUANA AND ENSENADA, 2/12–2/25/42)

He jumped rank. Major Melnick passed the word. He's now First Lieutenant Hideo Ashida.

Silver outranks gold in the U.S. Army. He traded gold bars for silver. The bookie-front fiasco secured his promotion. Juan Pimentel moved up to captain. He replaced the late José Vasquez-Cruz. Vasquez-Cruz *está muerto.* La Juan is the new Baja Statie boss.

Who killed Vasquez-Cruz? His first thought was rival wetback and/or dope runners. The Mexican papers set him straight. Vasquez-Cruz was really Jorge Villareal-Caiz.

The ex-Communist. Once installed in Meyer Gelb's cell. Linked to the Griffith Park fire. Linked to Dr. Saul Lesnick. Linked to Jean Staley. Linked to Tommy Glennon's address book.

Consider *this:*

It's January 8. Victor Trejo Caiz misbehaves. He's Jorge's brother. He foolishly draws down on Dudley Smith. Salvy Abascal slays him right there.

Dudley Liam Smith—ever present. Dudley Liam Smith—*por vida.*

Dudley instigates his promotion. Dudley recommends and vets Juan Pimentel. Note the design. Pimentel is fearsome and most competent. He'll serve as Dudley's enforcer. Wetbacks/heroin/the Jap-prisoner dodge. Dudley has plans for La Juan.

Dudley—*por vida.* All circuits terminate there. Dudley rules his thoughts. La Juan flits in counterpoint. All alliances reign under Dudley Smith's command. Dudley indebts his underlings. Dudley corrupts and/or seduces. Ask Joan Conville. Ask Lieutenant Ashida himself.

They've been seduced and corrupted. They've become inexplicable friends. *Comrades* says it best. They're rogue scientists held spellbound by one man.

Phone calls sustain their new kinship. There's long stints of forensic and investigatory surmise. They interpret evidence across three case lines. They fondle gold objects as they talk.

They've reached conclusions. They agree. It's not a single conspiracy. It feels like three conspiracies and random events interlocked. The conspiracies are imperfectly contrived and erratically enjoined. The klub*haus* murders do not mark termination. All of it continues. The acquisition of the gold and the explication of all things past is the only permissible end.

He thinks that. Joan thinks that. They move from gold heist to fire to klub*haus* to now—ceaselessly. They never-endingly probe evidence and indulge supposition. As per Tommy Glennon's address book. As per the Baja pay phones listed. They indicate a new and revised Tommy G.

He's more than Dudley's snitch and a pro-Axis blowhard. He's more than a rapist and wetback runner for Carlos Madrano. He's more sinister than that. Consider this fact. Kyoho Hanamaka touched Tommy's address book. He left a burn-scarred fingerprint.

The fourteen pay phones. Plus the coded slug calls. The bookie-front inferno blitzed that line of inquiry. No more code calls will be received. No more messages will pass through the front. They can't trace Hanamaka and Tommy G. that way.

Where are they? Hanamaka's a long-gone fugitive. Japs on the hoof draw heat. Tommy's a disordered psychopath. Such fiends leave traces. No one has visited Hanamaka's hideaway. Juan Pimentel continues to surveil it. No cars have tripped the photo-device wires. No license plates have been glimpsed. All this dizzies and confounds him.

He feels overmatched. Joan feels overmatched. The Jap and The Skirt. Sid Hudgens wrote them up that way.

He secured permission to visit L.A. and conduct field interviews. Dudley spoke to Major Melnick and got his okay. He'll drive up on his days off. Lee Blanchard will bodyguard him.

He's overmatched in L.A. and Baja. Dudley commands him in both locales. Dudley commands him domestically and commends him to voyeurize.

He lives in the Hotel del Norte. His suite adjoins Dudley and Claire's. He hears them make love. He rarely hears words and often gleans impressions. He senses chaos.

Claire now appears gaunt. She accosted him in the lobby one morning. She said, "Do you know what Dudley's capable of?"

He said, "Do you know the extent of my debt?"

Claire rarely speaks to him. The feral Joan Klein talks blue streaks. She spins teenage-girl tales. She's expecting an "important package from the East." Her comrades in New York will pass it on to her. She'll deliver it to "the Maestro in L.A."

Young Joan excels in puerile blather. One schoolgirl yarn stands out.

She's "spot-tailed" Aunt Claire. She got that term from one of Uncle Dud's soldiers. Aunt Claire had an affair with José Vasquez-Cruz. She saw them at it once. Vasquez-Cruz was really Villareal-Caiz. Somebody "slayed his greaser ass." She got that term from one of Uncle Dud's soldiers.

Spot-tails. Uncle Dud and Aunt Claire. Dudley Smith adopts and corrupts children.

Cruz-Caiz is dead. Dudley must have killed him. La Juan has replaced him. A second batch of Jap slaves will ship out on March 10. Manzanar opens its Jap-slave doors on March 25. Internment centers have sprung up regionwide. The Jap-slave diaspora now runs on overdrive.

His most pressing Army task is Jap-language translation. He gets Japs to rat other Japs. This Army task sickens him. His *secret task* thrills him. He tweaks Japs per gold-germane and three-case-germane topics.

Herr Hanamaka and Herr Rice. Gold political artifacts and the Nazi-Soviet meet. He's got zilch thus far. He logs sullen looks and spit globs. He now carries two handkerchiefs.

He's a traitor and a war profiteer. His fellow Japs sense that.

They're right. He's a gold bug. He wants to touch *THE* specific gold cache. It's alchemized gold. It's been molded into artifacts. It consecrates monstrous ideologies. It's his world war/I was there/I did my part souvenir.

He wants to earn the enhanced esteem of the monstrous Dudley Smith. He wants to pave a gold pathway through this war. He will see his racial countrymen slaughtered. He will see his native countrymen imprisoned in horse stalls. He wants to pave a gold pathway to a three-case solve. He wants to alchemize the riddles of that shithole backhouse on East 46th Street. He wants Dudley Smith to love him—because he's fought and endured.

He's heard Harold John Miciak's wire-recorded statement. It vividly explicates the cut-loose male id. The staggering range of misconduct. The mixed-race escapades at a fascist meeting spot. The booze- and dope-fueled obliviousness.

The klub*haus* commemorates nihilistic bonhomie. It's avant-garde in that way. The klub*haus* feels Fifth Column–tangential. The murders have begun to feel incidental. They are thus coincident to the '31 gold heist and the '33 Griffith Park fire. The crossover leads to those earlier cases are simply address-book and police-file names. The Hanamaka-to-Rice leads are all present-day. There's Rice's gold bayonet. There's Hanamaka's print in Tommy G.'s address book.

The klub*haus* caper. It feels like a sexual crime. It reads as coincident to Fifth Columnism and all preceding cases. Two women left pubic-hair exemplars upstairs. Said women play as prostitutes or jazz-club pickups and thus as non sequiturs. The klub*haus* job feels like a homosexual crime. It may possess roots within the wide range of klub*haus* misbehavior.

The bedroom sheet. Stained with feces and K-Y jelly. It's the sole forensic indicator. It complements his overarching instincts. The upstairs wall indentations. Low indentations. Surely made by a woman's right shoe. That indicates a two-person/three-victim crime. He postulates a homosexual man with a female accomplice.

Sexual crimes are lust and jealousy crimes. They are impetuously performed and irrational in nature. Sexual crimes are personal-animus crimes. They are directed at one victim only—even when two killers kill.

Wendell Rice.

George Kapek.

Archie Archuleta.

One man was the sole intended victim. He knows this. He knows this because he's a homosexual. He must solve this gaudy murder case and justify the admission.

69

(LOS ANGELES, 2/12–2/25/42)

Oooga-booga. Hear dem tom-toms? Dat hellhound's still on his trail.

He's jungled-up and fucked-up with Buzz Meeks now. Their T.J. swoop was hopped-up and shook-up and altogether nuts. The Huey Cressmeyer snatch was jacked-up and jumped-up and ill-advised. Buzz wants to kiss up and suck up to El Dudster or conversely slay him dead. Buzz wants to clip Tommy Glennon. Maybe Dud will make up with him then.

Maybe. Maybe not. Buzz is scared. *He's* scared. What if Huey blabs? It's katy-bar-the-door then.

They work the Big Case. It's Crash-Squad Apocalypse and Crash-Squad Abyss. They've canvassed from 46th Street to the planet Mars. Jack H. constrains them. He's sealed pertinent records. He's nixed further chats with Preacher Mimms. He's nixed a Newton Station approach. Rice and Kapek bought off the night-watch blues and the fucking Vice Squad en masse. There's no occurrence sheets extant. There's no loud-noise reports and D&D lists. Thad Brown's three lineups dry-humped the whole universe.

Harold John Miciak. That fat-mouthed bugfucker. He monkey-wrenched the whole case. He ran his mouth and glued his mouth shut. *Get it?* He named no names. He ratted out the looted guns and Wendell Rice with some gold bayonet. He dick-teased the Crash Squad and the whole PD and zipped his trap shut.

Miciak's pitch could tank the PD. Jack H. and Dud know it. They've got to be brainstorming.

Figure this. They've formulated kill lists. Kill, kill, kill. Kill some right-wing spics. Kill some jazzhound jigs. Kill some white Nazi shits. Plant some evidence on them and *coon*vene a new grand jury. Nail postmortem indictments.

It sounds *goooooood.* It might relieve overall tension. It might remove him and Buzz from the Dudster's gun sights. It floodlights his own mixed motives. He'd *loooooove* to file a clean solve. He'd *looooove* to end all this shuddering shit.

He'd love to gun-sight Jean Staley. Tough luck there. She flew the coop. She's off for Des Moines. She's driving *slooooow* and sending him postcards. It's hinky. It gores his gonads. It dings his dick. It torques his tail raw. It's got him thinking.

Jean was ex-CP. That was back in '33. The Griffith Park fire occurs. Wayne Frank dies. Jean's cell catches heat. Call it coincidence. It was the Depression. The Red Beast got plain folks het up. Yeah, there's that. Then, there's *this:*

Wayne Frank was his brother. It could have been arson. He's supposed to be a detective. Jolting Jean jumped loose of their should-have-been love.

He B and E'd her crib and tossed it. Too much stuff was gone. The walls were all print-wiped. She left behind some lingerie. He sniffed it and went euphoric.

Jean weighs on him. He might call up some Arson Squad paper. Why'd she hink and boogaloo? It was just getting *goooood.*

Dud weighs on him. *He's* the hellhound. Elmer J. gave the hellhound a hotfoot for kicks and suffered comeuppance. He's not the hotfoot type. That's strictly Bill Parker's MO.

Dud won't fuck with Whiskey Bill. Parker's too far up the PD's ass to mess with. Joan Conville laid some lowdown on Kay Lake. La Kay relaid it to him. Dig: Parker sold the PD out to the Fed grand jury.

He could do something similar. He had the grit to survive and thrive. He could shadowbox Dud the Impaler and Jack H. himself. Elmer V. was no Whiskey Bill. He lacked Parker's stature and juice. He had some backwoods skills, nonetheless.

He should do the PD a big favor. It would buy him love from Dudley and Jack. It would offset the chance that Dud would clip him and Buzz. The favor should pertain to the klub*haus* job or Parker's Fed-probe play.

He gave it one shot so far. Thad Brown refused to raid the Deutsches Haus. The December raid went bust. So Sergeant E. V. Jackson donned disguise and worked his way back in.

He bought some two-tone loafer jackets and Tyrolean porkpies. He laced venom into his Carolina drawl and played Klansman adrift. He tossed barbs at the Jews and ballyhooed the L.A. Reich. He drank German beer. He jumped three fat fräuleins. He pulled *this* out of his hat:

He's *Herr Doktor* Vengeance. His brother fried in the Griffith Park fire. He's out to vaporize the Commie cell that started the blaze. *Herr Doktor* Vengeance knows some names.

Meyer Gelb. Jean Staley. Dr. Saul Lesnick. Andrea Lesnick. Jorge Villareal-Caiz. Who's got the scarified skinny? *Herr Doktor* Vengeance pays cold cash for hot drift.

Die Krautniks went *Vass*? They were ditzy dilettantes. They were juvenile jerkoffs hooked on hate and the "Horst-Wessel-Lied." *Herr Doktor* Vengeance dropped more names.

Wendell Rice. George Kapek. Archie Archuleta. You know these guys? John Harold Miciak. You know him? You dig the Sinarquistas? You like nigger jazz? You been to this hot spot on East 46th?

Nobody bit. *Herr Doktor* Vengeance hunkered in and observed. He attended a eugenics lecture. A three-hundred-pound porker extolled the master race. He attended a lecture on postwar reconciliation.

The Nazis and Russkis kiss and make up. They've got some mysterious gold cache. They hatched a plan in Mexico. Let bygones be bygones. The real foe is democracy.

Herr Doktor yawned through the lecture. His luck fizzled then. Some just-out jailbird busted him.

This Klan fool's a cop. I saw him last month. He's on the Alien Squad. I was locked up in Lincoln Heights. He was hauling in Japs.

Deutsches Haus—auf Wiedersehen. Fat fräuleins, adios.

He misses Jean Staley. He sleeps with Brenda and thinks about her. He sleeps with Ellen and thinks about her. He sleeps with Annie Staples and thinks about her.

He thinks about Dudley Smith. He got terped at Ellen's place and woke up on the floor. A speckled bug started talking to him.

The bug rebuked his promiscuous ways. The bug said shit like "You're scared—but somebody's got to take that mick booger down."

The bug egged him on. He started tapping the piggyback mounts at Brenda's trick spot. He's been playing the recordings of Annie S. and Saul Lesnick. He heard gasbag Saul gasbag *this:*

His analysand Claire De Haven's been running distraught. She's miffed at her lover man, Dudley. She thinks he killed a passing fling of hers. The man was a Mexican State Police captain. His name was José Vasquez-Cruz. That name played out pseudonymous. He was really a Commo named Jorge Villareal-Caiz.

Old Saul found this flabbergasting. He said, "I knew Jorge! He was in my CP cell with Meyer Gelb! Remember? I introduced you to Meyer at Otto Klemperer's party!"

Annie remembered it good. *He* remembered it good. He planted Annie at that party. He hot-wired her. He heard that introduction as it transpired. He thought nothing of it then.

Old Saul regasbagged. Annie reran her gee-whiz shtick. Old Saul resnitched his analysand.

Claire told him that Dudley beat up Orson Welles. Lover man added insult to injury. Dudley made Orson his informant. Orson told her all of this. He's now finking leftists on his OIACC tour. Dudley forbids Claire to see Orson. She sees him anyway. Fuck lover man. He's screwing a red-haired tart in L.A.

Old Saul re-*re*gassbagged. He dropped the kicker then.

"Claire was very agitated. She kvetched throughout the whole session. She said, 'Kay Lake will surely be at Otto's next party. I'm going to make up to her and talk to her about Dudley. The girl is a seasoned gossip. I'm sure she knows things about Dudley that I don't.' "

The recording spritzed out. He spent three full days restitching *this:*

Klemperer's party. *In Brentwood.* Huey's Night of the Long Knives party. *In Brentwood.* "North of Sunset, *daaarlings.*" Orson Welles was there. "He was pals with the guy who owned the house—some music maestro."

He let it sit for a week. He rehashed it with Buzz Meeks. They grabbed a reverse directory and looked up Klemperer's address. Yep—it's Brentwood, north of Sunset.

They brainstormed their next move. Eyewits didn't apply here. All the Long Knife party guests wore masks. Huey and Tommy G. saw it. Their "dates," ditto. Dudley pulls his bayonet and chops the he-she.

Huey and Tommy. Call them hostile eyewits. Huey wouldn't *re*blab. Tommy wouldn't blab at all. Their dates were unknown. It was a perv bash. There'd be no formal guest list.

They checked dead-body reports. West L.A. Division. Winter '39. Up near Brentwood. North of Sunset Boulevard. Up in that *très* posh turf.

They snagged a dumped-body decomp. It was up in Mandeville Canyon. It was out in some woodsy preserve. A male stiff got chomped by coyotes. The critters ate his feet and his dick. The dump site was half a mile from Klemperer's crib.

The DB report was dated 3/5/39. The stiff was roughly two weeks DOA. The cops ID'd him. The coroner tagged cause of death. The hump died from stab-wound trauma.

He's Cedric Francis Inge. Age twenty-seven. White male/6'3"/135. Sixteen sodomy beefs. Drag-revue performer. "Gene the Queen" Harlow to his-her friends.

So far, so *goooood.* Here's the next angle. Dudley Smith's got his nuts in a vise. Who would he call? Who else? He'd call Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle.

Buzz and him checked old duty rosters. Breuning and Carlisle worked the Bunco night watch then. There it is—2/19/39.

Breuning and Carlisle clock out. It's "personal business." They vamoose at 11:20 p.m.

Buzz and him hashed it out *gooooood.* He said, "Do you really want to blackmail Dudley Smith?"

Buzz gulped and popped sweat. Buzz said, “Not right yet, I don’t.”

They let it sit for a week. He called Annie Staples then. She met him at Scrivner’s Drive-in on 6th and Vermont. They slurped pineapple malts and discussed Annie’s crush on Orson Welles.

He said, “I foresee a date at Brenda’s trick spot. I’ll be in the camera hole. Notable woof-woof may well ensue.”

Annie said, “Orson needs to lose weight.”

He said, “I’ll slide you a grand.”

Annie said, “Let me guess. You want me to pump him for certain information.”

He said, “Winter ’39. A party at Otto Klemperer’s place, and a movie he screened. Put the spurs to him. I want to see how he reacts.”

70

(LOS ANGELES AND BAJA, 2/12–2/25/42)

The Wolf licked the blood off his gold bayonet. It consecrated his conversion.

He's a reborn apostate. He mimed History and reprised the Night of the Long Knives. It erased his wretched moment at Herr Klemperer's house. He's a fascist now. He's more specifically a Sinarquista.

The Wolf decreed a commemorative rampage. He enlisted Salvy and Juan Pimentel and issued the Wolf's directive. They staged a raid and stole Cruz-Caiz's heroin stash. He killed *El Communisto*'s key henchmen. Sinarquista Greenshirts cut up the bodies and buried the offal. He kept Hideo out of it. Hideo would have had qualms.

The rampage continued. Salvy had kill-listed eight former Redshirts. They were torturers and nun-rapers of the Calles regime. They lived in seclusion throughout Baja. El Dudster and Plucky Salvador slaughtered them. Stout Juan fed their guts and limbs to greedy ocean sharks.

Traitors and rapists, all. Thirteen deaths in all. He filed thirteen notches on his bayonet. The Wolf drank thirteen drafts of blood.

Reprise and revision. Munich, '34. Brentwood, '39. The lakeside spa and Herr Klemperer's house. The Brentwood bash spawned chaos. Mike and Dick salvaged him. Tommy Glennon forced him to relive the nightmare. San Quentin, last November. Tommy's smirky blackmail pass. He'll find Tommy and kill him. He'll nullify all impediments. He'll kill Buzz Meeks and Elmer Jackson as whim dictates.

He told Salvy about the gold. He omitted nothing. He pledged 15% of all gold profits to the Sinarquista cause. Salvy joined the gold-questing band. He'll tell Hideo and Joan in due time.

Said band is egalitarian. There's an Irishman, a Japanese, a woman. A Mexican lawyer and rightist firebrand now join them. *Está la nueva familia* and cause to exult.

Hideo and Joan talk long-distance. Their one topic is gold. They remain his

L.A. family. They supplant the wife and daughters he never sees. Favored daughter Beth Short lives up near San Francisco. She promises visits but repeatedly renegs. Beth is boy crazy. She may be spreading herself thin.

His Mexican family sports fractures. Young Joan Klein first detected the schism. She'd tailed Claire to liaisons with *El Puto* Cruz-Caiz. It explains Claire's recent sobbing fits and bedroom retreat. Young Joan remains secretive and obstreperous. It befits a fifteen-year-old girl born on Halloween. She speaks in riddles and hints at her "package from the East." He deadpans these salvos. The girl has a fantastical penchant for left-wing intrigue.

His own intrigues consume him. The klub*haus* job remains in acute disarray. Jack Horrall has granted him sanction. He's free to plumb more immediate paths to a solve.

He schmoozed up Sid Hudgens. He told him to plant three pithy items in the *Herald.*

Hot item!!! PD stalwarts pursue Fifth Column suspects!!! Klubhaus solve at hand?

Hot item!!! PD stalwarts pursue Mexican suspects!!! Klubhaus solve at hand?

Hot item!!! PD stalwarts pursue Negro suspects!!! Klubhaus solve at hand?

Martin Luther Mimms will supply suitable suspects. Call-Me-Jack is convinced of that. Preacher Mimms is out of town now. He's recruiting for his back-to-Africa shuck. Herr Mimms gleefully bilks his own people. A Smith-Mimms summit must be penciled in. They'll eat soul food and drink corn liquor. They'll trip the dark fantastic.

The klub*haus* job is all taxing tangents. Huey Cressmeyer escaped from Juan Pimentel and remained at large for three days. Huey revealed that two cornpone cops snatched him. The crazed crackers roughhoused Huey. He rebuffed their hurt. Huey said he snitched Tommy G. and Wendell Rice, *los dos.* He stuck to this tale.

Thad Brown said Redneck Elmer worked a Deutsches Haus incursion and learned less than zilch. Cretin Elmer and Cagey Buzz may be harboring leads. He should kill them both. Now might be good. Why wait for Armistice Day?

Taxing tangents. Jackson and Meeks. Likewise, James Edgar Davis.

He's cultivated Two-Gun. He's coddled and cajoled him. He's endured a slew of boozy dinners at Kwan's. Jim will not submit to pentothal. "I spilled my guts on the Watanabe job, Dud. You and Bill Parker know, you sure as shit told Jack Horrall, and Bill must have told the latest college girl he's perved on. That's status quo for me, and I'm sticking to it."

Two-Gun Jim remains balky. He radiates intransigence. His sclerotic face pulses and beams *Fuck You.* This may necessitate force.

Like his Orson Welles approach. Fat Boy in blood-soaked lounge garb. That was a crackerjack play.

Orson passed through Ensenada. El Porko was on his goodwill tour. They enjoyed a beachside dinner. Orson waxed acquiescent. He exemplified the if-you-can't-beat-'em-join-'em school of cowed informants. He tattled numerous tinseltown Reds.

As in his own psychiatrist. *There's* a red reptile. Saul Lesnick, M.D.

He was Claire's headshrink. The gold-quest gang knew all about him. Lesnick snitched Reds to Ed Satterlee. Lesnick tooled for Meyer Gelb. Orson met Gelb at Otto Klemperer's place. Orson showed up at the '39 *Walpurgisnacht.* They crossed paths in costumes and masks and never knew it. Orson screened his Long Knives smut film. He dressed as a Red Guardsman and rolled film. Leni Riefenstahl mocked him and tossed a drink in his face.

Psychic recurrence. Confounding convergence. Chez Klemperer as star-crossed place. The cosmos sends a message. Hark—the gold is yours.

The cosmos speaks to the Wolf. The Wolf drinks the blood of his master's victims and licks the gold bayonet clean. The Wolf sniffs out strategic imperative and reports back to him. Governor Juan Lazaro-Schmidt appeared at the Hotel del Norte. His sister Constanza played with a middling string quartet. They performed a recital at the del Norte. Beethoven and Hindemith. The Wolf scared up a ticket and arranged a chance meet with Governor Juan.

The *Führer* and Herr Goebbels detest Hindemith. They are hidebound in that regard. The sonata was lovely. It was properly dissonant and no more. The Wolf hopped onstage and curled up at Constanza Lazaro-Schmidt's feet. She played achingly well. She paused to let the violins and cello ascend. She stroked the Wolf then.

Stunning creature. Dark hair and eyes. Long legs and almost too broad shoulders. She bit her lips as she played. Her white gown bunched at the hips. She kicked off her shoes for the "Grosse Fugue" and dug in barefoot.

The Wolf approved of Constanza. Her scene enticed. The Wolf escorted him to the lobby at intermission. Hark—there's the governor. The Wolf introduced them and trotted off.

He was a slight man. He was elegant and smaller than his sister. They wore identical lapel pins. The pin clasps faced outward. The gold swastikas were tucked out of sight.

They chatted up the war and made nice-nice. He brought up the U.S. crop-worker conundrum and requested a chance to discuss it. They made plans to meet in a fortnight.

The recital concluded. Beethoven 131 went out in a rush. The Wolf led him back to the artists' dressing rooms. He saw Constanza unhook her gown and adjust her brassiere. The fabric was sheer. She had lovely dark nipples.

J. Lazaro-Schmidt and sister. Salvy distrusted their relationship. Salvy urged him to hold that thought.

Late February brought rain. Pacific storms hit the coast. Wave swells lashed Santa Barbara. A Jap sub lobbed shells north of there. Sea wolves aimed at the Ellsworth Oil Depot. The shells fell short. The sea wolves turned tail. Fourth Interceptor imposed a press blackout. The attack was kept mum.

He bennie-laced his a.m. coffee. The brew complemented his rainy mornings and spiked his ability to read and assess. He read Jap residential files and scoured for leads on K. Hanamaka. He brainstormed and cinched a few things up.

Sea attack. Air attack. Those prefab airplane parts he saw in the shore cove. Left-behind parts. Flame-charred to disguise them. Nazi and Soviet insignia.

Psychic recurrence. Confounding convergence. Something Huey Cressmeyer said. "Mitch," the model-airplane man. A Deutsches Haus regular. Mitchell A. Kupp. Madcap aviator-inventor. Joan's #1 father-snuff suspect. He charters a plane in Duluth. Earle Conville burns to death in western Wisconsin.

Joan tracks a fuel spill back to him. She suspects but cannot prove malfeasance. A scholarly tract arrives at the klub*haus.* Mitch Kupp authored it. He critiques firebomb warfare and proposes funded research. Everyday Joes can fly build-ur-self planes. He's prefabbed kits himself.

It all dovetailed. Joan subscribed to notions of psychic recurrence and star-crossed place. She *made* stars cross. She summoned Mitch Kupp to her very own constellation.

He ran nationwide file checks and cross-checked subversive membership lists. Kupp was pegged as America First. He had no police record. He had a California driver's license and lived in San Berdoo.

Psychic recurrence. Confounding convergence. Star-crossed place.

He surveilled Mitch Kupp. Herr Kupp lived in a small house with a detached garage. Madcap Mitch. He worked in the garage and kept the door open.

See the airplane parts. See the prefab rivets. See the Nazi and Soviet stencils. See the workbench and bottled arson accelerants. See Madcap Mitch sniff paint thinner.

Madcap Mitch. He'll stay put for now. Instinct is proof. Due process is a shuck. He's fairly sure that Joan will want to kill him.

71

(LOS ANGELES, 2:15 A.M., 2/25/42)

Sirens kicked on and whooped. They invaded her dream. She was hunting ring-neck birds. She was back in Tomah some—

Joan opened her eyes. Bill stirred. The whoop-whoop hit overdrive. Bill grabbed his glasses. Searchlights swooped. They invaded the bedroom. Blackout drapes went translucent.

Bill got up. The drapes backlit him naked. The alarm felt inadvertent. A bogus one went down last night. Full blackout/false alarm/7:00 to 10:00. One large pain in the ass.

Joan said, "Shit."

Bill peeled back the wall drapes. Searchlights crisscrossed. The bedroom soaked up light. The phone rang. Oh shit/*no* shit—three short and shrill bursts.

It was PD code. It meant This Is Real. It meant Report for Duty *NOW*.

Joan got goose bumps. She stepped into her shoes and threw on last night's clothes. Bill tripped into his trousers and fell back on the bed. Courtyard doors banged. Rubes jumped out on their porches to gab and watch the show.

Joan buttoned her blouse. Bill tied his shoes and looped his gun belt. Joan tossed him his shirt and necktie. They tripped into each other and ran outside.

A drunk neighbor wolf-whistled. Bill was untucked and disheveled. Joan's blouse tail drooped. They made the sidewalk. Bill's prowl sled was haphazardly parked and nosed south.

They slid on damp asphalt. They banged their knees getting in. Sirens whooped loud. Searchlights glared bright.

Joan said, "Shit."

Bill said, "Shit."

He kicked the ignition. He pulled out and cut east on 1st. Searchlights flutter-lit the street. Fools stood outside and gawked. Joan dug in Bill's pants pockets and pulled out his cigarettes.

They tore through Bunker Hill. They hit a rise at Figueroa and got a wide downtown view. They saw it and heard it simultaneous.

Artillery fire. Flak bursts. The antiaircraft guns outside City Hall.

Joan fumbled her cigarette. Bill fumbled his. He fishtailed downhill and bumped the curb upside Central Station. Joan squeezed his leg. Bill touched her hair. She got out and ran inside.

Bluesuits jammed the entrance hall. They wore tin hats and riot gear. They shouted. Two words overlapped.

It's Real/It's Real/It's Real.

Joan heard machine-gun fire. She pegged it northeast. City Hall again. Those .30-caliber BARs with hundred-round belts.

Ceiling lights burned dim. Joan ran down to the basement and hit the generator switch. It juiced up real light. She ran back upstairs. The armory door stood open. The watch sergeant passed out tommy guns.

A bluesuit lobbed a roll of tinfoil. Somebody yelled, "Windows!" Joan snagged the roll and ran upstairs to the lab.

She tore off strips with her teeth. She foil-crimped curtain-windowpane junctures and cut off escaped light. She looked out a window crack. Flak bursts glowed pink. The goddamn sirens and searchlights persisted. She thought she saw an airplane wing.

The phone rang. She snatched the receiver and said her name. Flak noise drowned out her voice. She thought she heard a voice. It was long-distance faint. The flak noise subsided. The voice said, "Joan, is it you?"

Hideo Ashida. Filtered through party-line jabber. She heard Mexican voices. It was switchboard gobbledygook.

Joan talked loud. Mex jabber smothered her voice. She cupped her free ear. Flak noise came and went. Hideo got fractured words out.

It's real. I'm with Dudley. We've seen aircraft heading north. Coastal artillery. We're coming up. You won't believe what we've—

She lost him. Two minutes passed. She clutched the receiver. She bit her lips and chipped a tooth.

Hideo came back on. The switchboard screech resumed. She caught crazy chatter and fractured-sentence talk.

Alien Squad.

Red Alert roundup list.

Uninterned Japanese.

Stand by.

Take photographs.

Suspects.

Klubhaus job.

Work confiscations.

More jabber-screech. More cacophany. Then profane *español.* Then a blare disconnect.

Joan dropped the phone and ran down the hallway. She hit the Alien Squad pen at full sprint. The boys were garbed up and armed for *JAP*.

They wore tin hats and bandoliers. They slid .45 dumdums into tommy-gun drums. Lew Collier dispensed pickup lists and divvied up partners. Lee Blanchard got Robby Moss. Elmer Jackson got Cal Lunceford. Catbox Cal wore gloves. He dipped his dumdums in a jar of liquid strychnine and hand-fed his tommy gun.

Joan opened the supply closet. She pulled three mug-shot cameras off a shelf and quick-loaded film. She affixed flashbulb strips and boxed up everything. Thad Brown spotted her and walked straight over.

He said, "Holy shit, Red."

She said, "Holy shit, Thad."

He passed her a canvass list. "Call these people and get them over here. Promise them whatever you have to. Tell them we're being attacked, so do your goddamn duty, and we'll shitcan extant warrants, or we'll tap our slush fund and pay you twenty bucks apiece. They're our 46th Street locals and jazz-club people—off our first canvass. We've got Red Alert Japs coming in, and I want to run lineups. We could get lucky here. This is fresh lineup meat, and I want to see if any of these yokels can make positive IDs. Most of these people won't have cars or will be too scared to drive, so arrange your pickups with Newton Patrol, and get on it."

Joan flashed the V sign. Thad said something. Antiaircraft bursts drowned him out. He flashed the V sign and popped in earplugs. Joan laughed and shooed him off.

She walked back to the squad pen and pulled a desk phone over. She yanked the cord taut and barricaded herself in the closet. It was half-ass quiet and claustrophobe-cramped. She began stiffing calls.

She got hang-ups and no-answers. She got fearful yelps and *It's just like Pearl Harbor!* She talked nice to folks and harsh to folks and promised police escorts. She shamed folks. She pledged slush-fund gelt and dinner chits for Kwan's. She worked two hours straight and smoked herself hoarse. She logged *I'm not going out in this* calls. She logged *shit yes* calls. She called canvass names and Newton Patrol, contrapuntal. She hooked nine stout souls up with the Newton switchboard.

She'd sweated through her clothes. She stepped back out of the closet and into the blare.

The artillery. The flak. The BARs. The station was sealed tight. The windows were blackout-crimped. The generator lights cut in and out. The blare ate its way inside her head.

Joan lugged her cameras down to the jail. Fourteen Red Alert Japs crammed up the main holding cell. They were beat to shit and ratchet-cuffed behind their backs. They dripped blood on the floor. They saw the big white cooze and spit at her through the bars.

Werewolf Shudo's cell was straight across the catwalk. He dick-flashed the Red Alert Japs. They dick-flashed him right back.

Joan dodged spit blobs and pressed close to the bars. She deployed all three cameras and snapped photos. The Japs blinked back flashbulb glare. They crowded up to the bars and mugged. They hopped around. They yelled pro-Emperor slogans and stuck out their tongues.

She shot all fourteen men. She unloaded the film and scooped up the spent flashbulbs. She lugged her camera box up to the lab and dropped it off.

The lab windows faced north. City Hall was two blocks off. The trifecta blared: artillery, BARs, flak.

Joan caught her breath. She wrote a cover note and dropped it in the box.

"4:30 a.m., 2/25/42. Corroborative photos. Current per this date. Mug-shot comparison/14 male Japanese."

It was cold. The generator lights usurped the pipe heat. Her blouse stuck to her back. Her wet stockings had stretched.

She walked to the lineup room. Thad Brown chatted up the eyewits.

Four squarejohn whites. Three colored hepcats. Two Mexican boys in aloha shirts and slit-bottomed khakis.

Thad winked and handed her his clipboard. Fourteen rap sheets and mug-shot strips were clipped in.

The hepcats and Mex boys ogled her. She walked to the lineup stage and studied the clips.

Fourteen righteous criminals. No known Fifth Column ties. Uninterned for that reason. Red Alert for that reason. All uninterned Japs posed a threat.

All young men. All ex-cons. 459/211/502 PC. 390 sex deviate. Sodomy/stat rape.

Joan studied the mug shots. All fourteen men wore neck boards. The photos were dated 8/38 to now. All fourteen men had aged. They were all frayed-cum-raggedy ass.

The lineup stage was harsh-lit and one-way glass-fronted. Height strips lined the back wall. Fluorescent lights bore down. Potential eyewits faced the stage and grabbed look-sees.

Joan walked back and milled with the eyewits. Thad Brown passed out dinner chits and sawbucks. The white folks took it stoic. The hepcats and Mex boys yipped. One hepcat said, "Remember Pearl Harbor." A Mex boy said, *"Banzai."*

Thad laughed. "You know how this works. We've got fourteen suspects. They'll be wearing neck boards numbered one to fourteen. You study the men and decide for yourselves, without conferring with anyone else. Raise your hand if you're certain, and talk to Miss Conville."

A buzzer buzzed. A wall light pulsed. Mike Breuning popped through the stage-right door. The shackle gang dogged him. Their cinch chains dragged on the floor.

They were kicked to shit. Black eyes, cuts, contusions. One half-detached ear. Sap damage. Beavertail saps with rough-stitch edges. Cops armed for *JAP*.

Breuning positioned the men. They stood behind raised number plates and blinked back bright light. The eyewits eyeballed them. Thad said, "Take your time, folks."

They grabbed good look-sees. Joan watched their eyes click. She ticked seconds on her wristwatch. Two full minutes passed.

A white lady looked over and held up five fingers. A hepcat looked over and flashed five more. Joan flashed five fingers. Thad caught it and flashed the stage. Joan checked the clipboard. There's suspect #5.

Hiroshi NMI Yamura. Age 34. Grand Theft Auto/Peeping Tom/Stat Rape.

The white lady said, "I saw him go in and out of that horrible clubhouse. He was always inebriated."

The hepcat said, "I used to see him at Mumar's Mosque and Happytime Liquor. He used to shoot craps outside the clubhouse, but after Pearl Harbor he dropped out of sight."

Breuning detached Yamura. He unlocked his cuffs and shackle chain and threw on a headlock. The stage was soundproof. It went down hush-hush. Yamura thrashed his arms and went dead-legged. Breuning clamped his neck and dragged him off, stage right.

The white lady crossed herself. The hepcat shrugged. A Mex boy said, "Screw his mama sideways. My brother-in-law got it at Pearl."

The lineup room adjoined sweatbox row. Joan passed Thad his clipboard and took the stage-right door. She heard shrieks and thumps and followed them. Two short hallways intersected. She saw Breuning drag Yamura, and Dick Carlisle kick him from behind.

They dragged him and kicked him. Breuning popped the #3 door and hauled him inside. Carlisle slammed the door. It squelched a loud screech.

Joan walked over. She goosed the wall speaker and peeped the mirror wall. Breuning and Carlisle proned out Yamura. Carlisle kicked his head and back. Breuning rifled his pockets and plucked his wallet and keys. Yamura screamed. Carlisle slid on sap gloves. Breuning went through the wallet sleeves.

He saw something. You could tell that. Joan read him plain. He faced the mirror wall and waved the wallet. He knew somebody's peeping. Somebody always peeps.

Breuning yelled at the wall mikes. "He's got a driver's license in another name. There's an address on 46th. It's right by the klub*haus.*"

Yamura flailed. He kicked Carlisle off of him. Carlisle tripped and hit the back wall. Yamura reached into his right shoe and pulled something out. He put the something in his mouth and bit down hard.

He *Fuck You*–fingered the mirror. His legs twitched, his arms twitched, his back arched off the floor. He belched foam and went spastic jerky. The foam was half blood. Dick Carlisle saw it and screamed.

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(ORANGE COUNTY, 5:00 A.M., 2/25/42)

They cut inland. Coastal roadblocks stalled their progress north. Artillery jolts deafened them. Tracer rounds blurred their sight. Beach guns fired at airplane wisps and plain shadows.

Ashida drove. Dudley commandeered Major Melnick's staff car. It was full-boat SIS. Big V-8/two-way radio/ammo-packed trunk. They blasted out of Ensenada and went AWOL.

Sirens blared at 3:00 a.m. The Baja alert aped the L.A. alert. Some Statie coastal goon saw Zeros and tripped the alarm. He radioed beach batteries north to San Diego. Full artillery launched at 3:10.

It spread. Whatever this was spread exponential. Jack Horrall patch-called Dudley and ordered them up.

Whatever this was hit Baja and L.A. The City Hall guns blasted Jap Zeros or Jap wisps. The Alien Squad mobilized and roused Red Alert Japs.

Coastal guns blazed. Spotters spotted whatever it was. Juan Pimentel sicced the Baja Staties. They patrolled beachfronts. They ran floodlights and strafed wave lines north to T.J. They shot at Jap subs or Jap wisps or whatever it was.

No Jap subs blew up. No Jap Zeros exploded. Something was up there and/or down there. Somebody saw something and punched the trigger. Chain reaction. Jap fever. Some L.A. somebody. Some Baja somebody. Something was up there and/or down there.

Prophets prophesied that something. Code-call intelligence accrued. Fourth Interceptor logged it. SIS ignored it. Possible airfields in San Berdoo County. Late February attack.

The bookie-front raid backfired. The transmitter exploded. It blitzed a code-call approach. Now hear this: the fucking prophecy's fulfilled.

Ashida drove blackout-blind. Eastbound streets blurred. He heard ack-ack and siren screech. Predawn lit the sky. A plane passed overhead. He thought he saw wing rivets and a hammer and scythe. Something's up there. He knew he saw something.

Dudley chain-smoked. He wore his I'm-brooding-don't-talk-to-me look. He rolled down his window. Ashida smelled cordite and spilled gasoline.

The two-way radio beeped. Dudley flipped switches and plugged in his headset. He said, "Yes, Thad." He listened. He said, "Yes, Thad," and unplugged.

"We may have a klub*haus* lead. A man named Yamura or Nunakawa killed himself in custody. His driver's license listed his address as 682 East 46th. That's the klub*haus* block, and Thad wants us there. He's dispatching Lunceford and Jackson, as well."

Ashida gunned it. He drove eighty-plus, blackout-blind. They crossed the L.A. County line. Sirens whooped and sputtered. He pushed it to ninety. He hit Gardena and caught Western Avenue. The sky cleared some. He took Imperial Highway east and hooked onto Central north.

Low-rent L.A. at dawn. Gun chatter somewhere. No plane-crash debris. No foot traffic. Locked-tight business fronts.

78th Street. 77th Street. 76, 75, 74. Ashida saw smoke. Two prowl cars sped past them. Their cherry lights whirled.

Ashida floored it. He fishtailed and blew a string of red lights. Dudley unholstered his sidearm and winked.

Smoke roiled up dark and thick. Ashida got it now. He hit the siren and unholstered. He steered the car with his knees and jacked a shell into the breech.

Full dawn hit. 51, 50, 49. Black smoke plumed. Parked cars issued flames. Here's your something. It's for sure. There's a Negro Riot on the Jazz-Club Strip.

They drove into it. Dudley cracked his windwing. Negroes rock-shattered windows and hauled off whiskey crates. 48, 47. Negroes bashed down the doors of the Club Zamboanga and Port Afrique. They swung two-by-four bashing rams. They smashed parked-car windows and hurled wine-bottle bombs. Car seats ignited, car windows blew.

Ashida downshifted and pulled right. Somebody somewhere yelled, "It's a Jap!"

Shots hit the car. The windshield exploded. Shots dinged the trunk and pierced the rear doors. Dudley grabbed the wheel and pulled it hard right. The car banged the curb and stalled flat.

Dudley got out. Ashida got out a split second on. Dudley braced his arm on the car-top and fired into the mob.

Three Negroes fell. A man's chest blew up. Dudley fired hollow points. He shot one man in the neck and blew a man's arm off.

The mob issued one big scream. Ashida aimed and fired straight at it. He shot two men in the back. They careened and crashed and bumped heads.

Dudley ran toward 46th Street. Ashida ran after him and caught up. They turned the corner. They saw the klub*haus,* ablaze.

Flames scorched the top floor. The air stung. Negroes hauled swag out the front door. Furniture, radios, trombones. Sinarquista tapestries.

Ten Negroes. Twenty Negroes. Negroes in gang silks and zoot suits. Negroes slurping muscatel. Negroes waving Nazi flags on sticks.

Somebody somewhere yelled, “Dig the Jap!”

Dudley walked toward them. Ashida followed him. The Negroes made buzzing-airplane sounds and turned their arms into wings.

Dudley aimed and fired. Two zoot suiters fell. The mob screeched and dispersed all whichways.

A kid stumbled to the sidewalk. He cradled a big saxophone and peeled toward the avenue. Ashida saw his coffee skin and almond eyes. Tokyo meets the Congo.

Ashida aimed at his face. He squeezed the trigger and saw it break red. The sax pitched backward with him. The kid death-cradled it.

73

(LOS ANGELES, 6:00 A.M., 2/25/42)

The tin hat mussed his hair. The tommy gun weighed ten tons. He gots dem Red Alert Blues.

Cal Lunceford wrote dem blues. Catbox Cal. A hate dog to rival Wayne Frank. Wayne Frank hated up dem jigs and dem Jews. Sergeant E. V. Jackson disapproves. He gots dem Red Alert Blues.

Elmer breezed into Central Station. Catbox Cal lagged back. They steered a six-man shackle chain down to the jail. Joan Conville was there. She circled the holding pens and snapped photographs.

The Jap attack or big scare or plain fuckup fizzled out. It was all for Jap naught and *OOPS* writ large. Fletch B. scheduled a press confab. He'd dish the gist later today.

The jail overflowed. Werewolf Shudo waved his pecker at his Red Alert pals. Elmer unshackled the new fish and got them penned up. Catbox Cal sulked.

Thad Brown walked over. He looked spookified.

"You and Lunceford roll back out. We've got a riot at 46th and Central. The klub*haus* has been torched. Dudley and Ashida put down some shines."

Elmer gulped. Catbox Cal giggled. Thad snatched a cigar from Elmer's coat pocket.

"Check this address. 682 East 46th. It's right by the klub*haus.* We took it off a DL on one of our suspect Japs. He killed himself with a cyanide pill, which I don't like the looks of. Get over there. Dud and Ashida are busy with the fire department."

Lunceford snatched a cigar. "How many shines did they bag?"

Thad said, "Eight."

Lunceford said, "There's hope for this world. I wouldn't have thought Ashida had it in him."

L.A. was deadsville. It's *The War of the Worlds,* redux. Orson Welles did that radio show. Flying saucers and zombies. Folks thought it was real. Folks wigged out, resultant.

Elmer drove. Catbox Cal resulked. They ran Code 3/lights and siren. They ignored traffic signs and laid tracks.

They hauled south and east. There's the jazz-club strip. It's been manhandled. Note the scorched cars. Note the smashed windows. Note the kicked-in doors. Note the soot-filtered air. Note the blues holding spectators back.

Elmer cut left on 46th. Sayonara, klub*haus.*

It was torched toast. The upstairs had smooshed the downstairs. Hose steam hissed. Beams wiggled and collapsed. Rubble mounds sizzled.

Note the two fire trucks. Note the three morgue wagons. Note the eight sheet-draped gurneys. The Dudster posed for pictures. Firemen aimed box cameras. Ashida looked shell-shocked.

Lunceford said, "Coon hunt."

Elmer said, "Son, you are wearing me thin."

Lunceford shut up. Elmer shot east. He checked curb plates and read addresses. 674, 676, 678. There's no 680. There's 682—

It's a small wood-frame job. It's one-story and dilapidated. Dig that porch rat. He's big and black and scaly-tailed. He exemplifies beady-eyed evil.

Elmer parked at the curb. They got out and walked up the steps. The soul rat skittered off. The dump radiated quietude.

Lunceford pulled his roscoe. Elmer eared the door and got all-quiet squared. He nudged the door. It slid open easy.

Lunceford squeezed in ahead of him. The front room was musty. Thin curtains let in light. Pizza-pie boxes were stacked on a table. Elmer smelled stale cheese and mold.

All quiet. *Oooga-booga.* Where de peoples at?

Lunceford walked ahead. He cut through the front room and eased toward a back hallway. Elmer slow-orbed the front room.

He caught stale food and stale air. His hackles jumped. The joint felt quick-vacated. That proclaimed *Hideout.*

He eased toward the hallway. He thought he heard footfalls. Wood planks squeaked. The squeaks overlapped. He thought he heard footfalls—two sets.

He thought he heard whispers. He froze right there. His ears perked. He thought he heard *"Run."*

He crouched and stared down the hallway. Something moved. He thought he heard something. He caught a shutter-click glimpse.

It's a Jap. He's going for the back door. Shutter click. There's that surveillance pic. Shutter click. Ed the Fed showed it to—

It's Kyoho Hanamaka, that evil little—

There's *"Run"* again. There's footsteps heading back this way. There's a stumble sound and Lunceford in the hallway. He's quick-walking straight for—

Elmer hit the floor. Lunceford pulled his gun. Elmer pulled his ankle piece and aimed straight up.

He squeezed slow. He got Lunceford in the legs and the gut. Lunceford lost his legs and dropped his gun and flew ass-backward. Elmer squeezed slow. He got the cocksucker in the chin and took his fucking face off.

74

(LOS ANGELES, 10:30 A.M., 2/25/42)

Flashbulbs popped. Newshounds swarmed and scrawled notes. Mayor Fletch blathered. He lived to jive the Fourth Estate.

City Hall was Jap Attack and Fed Indictment HQ. The briefing room overflowed. Dudley stood at the back. Sid Hudgens sidled up to him. He flashed the a.m. *Herald.* The attack claimed ten-point headlines. The backup piece ran under the fold.

INDICTMENTS ISSUED IN PHONE-TAP PROBE!!! PROMINENT ANGELENOS J'ACCUSED!!!!

Fletch B. himself. Chief Clemence "Jack" Horrall. Hotshot PI Wallace Jamie. Police chemist Ray Pinker. Lesser-known legal beagles galore.

Sid said, "I never thought the Japs were up there. Pearl taught us they come in fast and low."

Dudley winked. "There was a grand scuffle at 46th and Central. Let's see if Fletch deigns to mention it."

Fletch drooped off the lectern and mauled the microphone. He lived to grandstand and distort.

"For those of you who remain unconvinced, let me repeat. There was no air attack, Jap or otherwise. There *were* shells dropped, but we don't know by who, and they failed to detonate. Several folks throughout the city were struck by falling debris, but there were no serious injuries and no fatalities."

Dudley grinned. Credit a madcap inventor. Build-ur-self airplanes aloft.

Fletch coughed and hankie-wiped the microphone. He thrived on deceit.

"The only fatalities resulted from a Negro riot, in the vicinity of 46th Street and Central Avenue. Negroes looted numerous liquor stores and jazz clubs. A score of Negroes were fatally wounded by other Negroes, who have not yet been identified."

Sid whistled shrill. "I hope they didn't torch Minnie Roberts' Casbah. The DA gets his ugambo there."

Laffs rocked the room. Sid lived to offend and provoke. Fletch undid his necktie and buffed the microphone.

"On a more dour note. The Negroes set fire to a clubhouse under police investigation. And, in an unrelated incident, Officer Calvin S. Lunceford was shot and killed by a Jap seditionist, who has not yet been identified, and who remains at large."

Catbox Cal. A jailbait-jumper and a sloven at best. The world will not mourn.

The room rumbled. Dead cops goosed circulation. The Hearst rags would pounce and exploit.

Fletch said, "It would have been impossible for any unlogged airplanes to have taken off or landed unseen in L.A. County or any adjoining county. Those shells were most likely unintentionally dropped by U.S. Army scouting craft, sent up in the wake of the preceding yellow-alert blackout."

Sid whistled shrill. "There's been reports of coded calls from here to Baja. They supposedly mentioned secret air bases in San Berdoo County, and inquiring minds want to know if Jap planes could have departed and returned there."

Fletch said, "Poppycock. Inquiring minds should inquire about the rising tide of Negro crime in Los Angeles."

Sid despised Fletch. Mr. Mayor picked his pockets bare at PD pokerfests.

"How does it feel to be under Federal indictment, boss?"

Fletch said, "The truth shall set me free."

—

San Berdoo was sixty miles out. It was a tank town. Farmhands and low-rank Army. Package stores and whorehouses. Shitkicker cops up for grabs.

Dudley dawdled en route. He called Joan and gave her the address. He pledged a grand surprise. He sidestepped discussion of the fool air attack and declined to ascribe blame.

He'd spotted a kit plane, down in Orange County. The car-engine hum alerted him. The hammer and sickle gave it away. He got the picture then.

It was cloudless and midmorning cool. He'd changed into civvies. The riot left his uniform soot-streaked. Hideo impressed him. He followed his *Führer*'s lead and shot quick and true. He'd ride out conscience pangs in due course.

The Lunceford item troubled him. Catbox Cal dies. Elmer J. survives. An alleged Jap slayer remains at large. Elmer's proximity was worrisome. The lad magnetized trouble and/or caused it himself.

He hit San Berdoo proper and drove straight to the address. The garage door stood open. He parked across the street and walked over.

A breeze kicked in. Solvent fumes blew down the driveway. Dudley scanned the garage. He saw blueprints for build-yourself torpedoes. He saw tin snips and hand-cut propellers.

Drivetrains and flywheels. A box of clutch pedals. Spark plugs, rivet guns, Messerschmitt stencils. Bottled arson accelerants. A snap-in-place airplane control board.

Dudley walked around to the back. Tarpaulins dotted the yard. They covered irregular mounds. Fuselage panels stuck out.

A back door was propped open. He saw a kitchen crammed with boxes. He smelled glue and saw legs jammed under a table.

He walked in and skirted the boxes. Madcap Mitch glued up a toy Stuka. He was forty-five or so. He sported a goatee and a soil-crusted smock.

Dudley said, "Hello, sir."

Mad Mitch looked up. He had quick blue eyes.

"Cop, huh?"

"That's right."

"Federal?"

"No, city."

Mad Mitch went *You got me.* "I'll admit I dropped those bombs. They were deliberate duds, and nobody got hurt. I didn't drop any gas or set any fires, which I damn well could have done."

Dudley smiled. "I'm not accusing you of anything, sir. I'm here to compliment you on your work."

Mad Mitch picked up the Stuka and zoomed it. The great Charles Lindbergh admired this man. He had deft hands and nativist chutzpah.

"I picked up rumors of an air attack and alerted the kids in my squadron. We decided to launch an armada and do some joyriding."

"Your kids, sir? Your squadron?"

Mad Mitch scratched his arms. They were solvent-scarred and overlaid with ripe sores.

"Frat boys, mostly. Engineering students. They build my kits and go hog wild. You can't keep good kids down on the ground when they want to be up in the air."

Dudley smiled. "You sell your kits through the mail, do you?"

Mad Mitch smiled. "Blueprints and parts. U.S. and Mexico. The spics are my best customers. *Yo habla español,* daddy?"

Dudley heard footsteps behind him. Stacked-heel footsteps. A tall woman's gait.

"Are you a saboteur or a spy, sir? Are you a Fifth Columnist?"

"Nix to all three. I'm just a card-carrying white man, and I'm proud to attend the beerfests at the convivial Deutsches Haus."

Dudley heard short breaths behind him. She stood out of sight. She was sight-and-sound close.

"I read your air-warfare tract, sir. I'm wondering if you ever considered the setting of forest fires as an implementation."

Mad Mitch slapped his knees. The table jolted. The toy Stuka jumped.

"I most certainly have, and I've already done the research. April 9, 1938. I took a joyride and dropped a torch bomb near Tomah, Wisconsin. I got up a sweet bar-bq."

Joan stepped up. She wore a tweed skirt and a green cashmere sweater. Mad Mitch said, "Hello there, sweetie."

Dudley felt her hand at his belt line. She pulled out his piece and shot off the full clip. She bull's-eyed Mad Mitch. Muzzle flare scorched his face. His teeth exploded. His hair caught fire.

75

(LOS ANGELES, 4:00 P.M., 2/25/42)

Time blurred. She dropped things. *Shock* failed to explain it. *Numb* missed the point.

They left him there. Dudley swatted out the fire and jacked the pipe heat. It would speed decomposition and foil time of death. Dudley knew the San Berdoo Sheriff. They'd schemed together. They'd schemed per wetbacks and captive Japs.

Time blurred. She dropped things. She saw rural Wisconsin sans through line. The fuel spill. Big Earle's wake. She hunts quail off Lake Mendota. She shoots rabid bats. She visits the Little Bohemia Lodge. Dillinger escaped from there. It was April '34. She'd just turned nineteen.

Vindication distorted it. *Barrel through* said it best. It's the Conville code. She said she'd do it and did it. Dudley made it happen. Men always indulged her.

Central Station supplied distraction. It remained chaotic. The air-raid snafu and the riot. The klub*haus* blaze and Cal Lunceford's death. Last night and this morning blurred. She thrived on police disorder. She threw herself into it. She superimposed her father's killer. Muzzle-flare sparks flame.

She developed her booking photographs and file-clipped them. The station teemed. She saw new cop faces. War-hire rookies came by to help. They talked up the Fed-probe indictments and Bill Parker's role. She kept hearing *Bill.* It registered as incantation. The same with *Dudley.* War-hire babble. This *Dudley* guy waxed some shines.

Bill and Dudley. One of them would call her. She'd sleep with one of them tonight.

Joan walked down to the jail. She pulled log-in duty. The jail was SRO. Red Alert Japs, held for transfer. Mexican illegals—INS transfer bait.

Wetbacks. They exploited the air raid and border grief and broke for L.A. The PD snagged three truckloads. That meant work. Log property. Fumigate ragged apparel. Call the INS.

Joan worked in the property office. It adjoined the main catwalk and holding pens. The jail was wall-to-wall shouts and jeers.

Packed pens. Trilingual ruckus. War hires baited the inmates and cracked jokes.

The babble distracted her. She dumped confiscated satchels and searched for contraband. She logged zip guns and hair pomade. She logged *fotografías de niños* and Spanish fly.

Two war hires lounged by her door. They dropped double entendres and defamed the wets. Come-san-chin, the Chinese cocksucker. This cholo I popped worked at the Blue Fox. He said the donkey poked Eleanor Roosevelt. I'd pay to see *that.*

Joan half-heard it. She logged contraband and fixed on her task. Brass knuckles. Matchbooks and swizzle sticks. A .45 ACP clip.

"The goddamn wets. Listen to that racket. It's like New Year's Eve. Remember that rainstorm? They were swarming over the border fences and clouting cars. They thought we'd have our guard down, on account of the rain."

"They were right about that. We were stretched, 'cause all the drunks and the rain had us hopping."

"They sent me out to Venice. Some Navy woman blitzed a jalopy with four beaners up front. She's dead drunk, and she dispatches all four. Then we find two dead kids in the trunk. Cute little kids—a boy and a girl."

"Oh shit. That's a rough go."

" 'Rough go' don't say it. They were breathing through airholes on the ride up from T.J., but the trunk got crushed and they smothered to death."

"A six-down 502. Tell me that ain't a world record, and tell me the Navy skirt didn't draw twelve to life, wets or no wets."

"Nix to that. The drift is Bill Parker put the fix in. He had it bad for that cooze, and he got her a skate."

—

Shock failed to say it. *Numb* missed the point. It explained recurrent nightmares. Thumps and muffled shrieks.

She bolted. The war hires went *Say what?* She swerved and bumped her way out to the sidewalk. DT shakes developed. Her hands trembled. She tried to light cigarettes and gave up.

She swerve-walked to City Hall and elevatored to the DB. She stared at the floor and cringed at hellos. Ringing telephones scared her. Door slams turned to thumps. Soft voices turned to shrieks.

Dudley was out. Bill was gone. She looked everywhere and gave up. She locked herself in the women's washroom. It was somebody else in the mirror. She hid from the thumps and the shrieks. They blasted her through the locked door.

She killed Mitch Kupp. She did it to break the impasse of Dudley and Bill. She sided with Dudley there. Dudley gave her sex and danger and recast her as himself. She coveted his mastery. She murdered and gave him the power to destroy her. Bill covered up the children. She gave him the power to destroy her before they'd formally met.

Indictments. True bills. No gold and no captaincy. Justice carries a price.

Joan swerve-walked to her car and drove to the Strip. She knocked on Kay's door and got no answer. She sat on the steps and considered true bills and justice. She drove back downtown and conjured the means.

Central Station. Still vividly chaotic. Don't fuck with America. The thought startled her and moved her.

She cleaned out her locker. She placed her microscope in Hideo's locker and removed her gold cuff links. She placed them face-out on his desk.

Central Station. Big Earle would have loved it. She memorized every face she saw and sent up appropriate prayers.

Forgive this theft, Lord.

She broke the clasp on the evidence locker. She stole fourteen terpin hydrate vials and stashed them in her purse.

—

Nursing school in Oak Park. That hot Chicago night. Sirens like last night. Prowl cars and morgue sedans. The Feds got Dillinger outside the Biograph. Crowds formed. She saw his hearse on Lincoln Avenue. Woman waved handkerchiefs, men doffed their hats. Vendors sold ice-cream bars.

Joan looked out her bedroom window. Dusk came on pink-gray.

She bundled up her diary pages and boxed them. She postage-stamped the box and addressed it to Miss Katherine Lake. She placed it outside for the postman.

Rain hit. Her next-door neighbor spun disks. Joan heard "Moonlight Serenade" and "Tuxedo Junction."

She drank the terp. It burned going down and stayed down. She prayed for her police friends and all the people she'd gone through. She asked God to punish her for her vile and reckless actions and her sinful misconduct with men.

Forgive my proud follies.

Forgive my fatuous dream of the gold.

Forgive my lifelong arrogance.

Forgive my regret without remorse.

Forgive my remorse without repentance.

Forgive this final heedless act and condemn not this expiation.

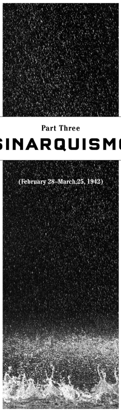
Shapes and colors took hold. She stretched out on the couch and kicked her shoes off. She saw Dudley's wolf. The Maestro's steam room appeared.

There's Orson Welles and Claire De Haven. Orson's a Wisconsin boy. He hails from Kenosha. She shouldn't be naked with a wraith socialite and a movie star.

The steam turned all different colors. Rainbows drifted by.

Orson said, "So long, Red."

Claire said, "Good-bye, Joan. See you in church."



Part Three

SINARQUISMO

(February 28–March,25, 1942)

76

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 A.M., 2/28/42)

The rental pastor substituted Housman for Scripture. He had quite obviously compiled notes as to who this woman was and opted for lilting elegy. She was cut off in her prime; she had everything this life offers to look forward to; her seat at the banquet was very much assured.

Hardly, sir. Joan Woodard Conville killed herself. She had gorged herself at your banquet already. Stop reciting "To an Athlete Dying Young." Let me offer up a more suitable graveside selection.

"This storm, this savaging disaster."

It's from Auden, sir. Joan quoted it repeatedly and never ascribed a specific source. Auden's lines summarize Joan's life since New Year's Eve. Catastrophic events subsumed her; she fell into the police demimonde that has threatened to subsume me. Her proud grit and resourcefulness took her only so far. Ask the man standing next to me. He was Joan's lover, and should have been mine. When this service concludes, I will reach into his left pants pocket and pull out his cigarettes. He's a feckless and erratic man, which serves to blunt his great ambition and yet more spectacular gifts. He'll flinch when I touch him, and know that I've restated my claim.

The PD bounced for the service. A twelve-car cortege traveled out the Arroyo Seco to this hillside memorial park. The service commemorated Joan's brief transit in Los Angeles, to the exclusion of her Wisconsin years and her nursing school and university stints in Chicago. The mourning corps was all PD, with two exceptions. Joan loved official garb and regalia; I first saw her in her Navy lieutenant's blues. She would have loved this mourners' conclave, because she loved a certain breed of man.

Captain Bill Parker wore dress blues; Captain Dudley Smith and Lieutenant Hideo Ashida wore Army olive drab. Jack Horrall, Elmer Jackson, and Buzz Meeks wore dress blues, along with Thad Brown and my cohabiting friend, Lee

Blanchard. Nort Layman and Ray Pinker wore black suits; Brenda Allen wore a charcoal gray ensemble. I wore a black cashmere dress, because I look good in it, and because I pander to men as shamelessly as Joan did.

Two men stood apart from the graveside gang. Sid Hudgens eulogized Joan in the *Herald.* The piece was entitled, "Adios, Big Red," and bore Sid's trademark low wit and leer. The subhead read "Girl Forensic Whiz a Suicide. Worked Baffling Cop-Killing Case."

Adios, Big Red failed to address Joan's crowded love life and the New Year's Eve misadventure that brought her to us and to here. Orson Welles stood behind Sid. Joan met him briefly at Otto Klemperer's. She told me that Dudley savagely beat him and turned him out as an informant. Dudley was Joan's other lover. I never told her that I knew.

"'Eyes the shady night has shut/Cannot see the record cut,/And silence sounds no worse than cheers/After earth has stopped the ears.'"

The pastor droned on. His delivery stank. Spoken poetry requires snap and verve. Elegies should inform rather than soliloquize. Big Red packed a wallop. She was a brilliant forensic biologist and consort of brilliant rogue cops. All men wanted to sleep with her. Don't mess with Big Red. A drunken Indian groped her. She blew his left foot off with a 10-gauge shotgun. Lee was there for Joan's New Year's Eve mishap, and told me the full story last night. Joan's sodden drive up from San Diego claimed six lives, rather than four. Two of them were children. Bill Parker withheld that fact from her.

The burial crew placed Joan in the ground. I recalled a song I heard at a colored dive in Sioux Falls. "Ashes to ashes and dust to dust, stormy weather cause your pump to rust." I laughed as Joan's casket went thunk. The pastor glared at me. I'm a cutup, as Joan was. We're both prairie Protestant girls, and we both believe.

That was it. Adios, Big Red. The wake's on the PD. Scrambled eggs and booze at Kwan's await.

I stuck my hand in Bill's pants pocket and pulled out his cigarettes. Don't look so shocked, Captain—I loved her just as much as you did.

—

The wake was boozy and predictably weepy. I sat with Elmer and heard his account of the Negro riot and Catbox Cal Lunceford's death. Elmer said he'd been scanning mug books, in an attempt to ID the Jap gunman. He was nervous about something but refused to tell me what.

Uncle Ace Kwan served Ming Dynasty Eggs and his world-famous mai tais. He is a remorseless psychopath, known crime partner of Dudley Smith, and Jack Horrall's Chinatown enforcer. I sipped a single mai tai and chain-smoked my way through the wake. The liquored-up testimonies bored me; I indulged my sport of imputing motive as I watched people interact. Only two mourner-celebrants held my interest today. Of course: Bill Parker and Dudley Smith.

They are both devoutly Catholic and bound by faith and enmity; I share a recent history with both men. Pearl Harbor storm-tossed our lives and revealed startling opportunities. Joan succumbed to them in the romantic form of Dudley and Bill. I was more circumspect and possessed the presence of mind to avoid Dudley at all costs. Our one clash was brief and remains unacknowledged by the police world and by Dudley himself. I very simply love Bill and want him for my own. Joan gave herself to both men; it was a stunning act of idiot courage and self-abnegation.

Both men stood at the bar; they eyed each other sidelong and retained a decorous distance. They were brusquely civil in all their dealings and only met to negotiate. Bill respected and despised Dudley. Dudley respected Bill and glibly concealed his hatred. Each was astonishingly aware of the other's presence. I saw it now. I watched them drink, smoke, and talk to others as they remained in psychic sync. Ace Kwan walked up and whispered to Dudley; Bill caught every nuance of the approach.

Elmer drifted off to talk to Buzz Meeks. I threw a bold stare at Dudley Smith. I knew he'd turn around and see me at some point. Ever bemused and bent on seduction, he'd smile and wink.

Brilliant girl. It took some fifteen minutes, but the evil bastard did just that.

—

I went home and practiced. Otto has been teaching me Medtner's "Sonata Reminiscenza," and the shifts in tempo continue to perplex me. This was my moment to play the entire piece through, in honor of Joan. I was determined to do it, regardless of gaffes and flubbed notes. The piece depicts the passage of time as both temporal and eternal. I arranged the sheet music on the stand and commenced.

I possess the ability to play and actively daydream in concurrence, and it laid waste my interpretation here. I thought of Otto and his part in smuggling the Shostakovich symphony out of Russia, a convoluted journey with numerous stops scheduled along the way. My impromptu performance was meant to honor Joan, but snapshots of my late friend undercut my concentration. I flubbed a great many notes and scotched my narrative momentum. Otto had received a V-mail letter from Maestro Shostakovich. It contained note sketches meant to portray German tanks approaching Leningrad. I started hitting those notes, and begged Joan's forgiveness. I played those notes to the point of exhaustion.

The doorbell rang. I got up and walked out to the porch. The postman had left a good-sized package.

It was addressed to me. I noted Joan’s handwriting and return address.

77

(LOS ANGELES, 4:00 P.M., 2/28/42)

The wake protracted. Joan, we hardly knew ye.

She left him her microscope and gold cuff links. It was symbolic. It meant *Follow my lead and carry the torch.*

The PD owned Kwan's today. Jack Horrall deposed Uncle Ace and reigned as potentate. The main dining room was all PD. Cops juiced and table-hopped.

Ashida watched. He sipped tea, cold sober. Cops deferred to him now. He held Army rank and carried a gun. He soared at the riot. Close-range dumdums inflicted brutal damage. He felt no remorse. That could change. Kill now, pay later. Hold for probable nightmares.

Jack H. worked the bar. He rolled dice with Thad Brown and chomped rumaki sticks. Breuning and Carlisle snoozed in their booth. Lee Blanchard arm-wrestled Lew Collier. Buzz Meeks showed off his pet scorpion. Elmer Jackson fed the beast chop suey tidbits.

Ashida eye-tracked Elmer. Cal Lunceford's death stank. Elmer's part felt schizy and all wrong. Jack Horrall dumped the Lunceford snuff. Catbox Cal knew Rice and Kapek and veered hard right. Screw Cal, over and out. Thad Brown debriefed Elmer and took a threadbare statement. Thad bought the "unknown" Jap suspect. Sayonara—that's it.

Elmer caught his eye and table-hopped over. He maneuvered a highball and a plate of egg rolls. He plopped down and stroked his broken heart.

"I'm grieving for Red. I should have stolen her away from them shitheels Parker and Smith. She was too much woman for them. I would have tamed her rangy ass with my warm redneck love. We would have bred some good-looking kids."

Ashida smiled. "Kay's your woman. If you have to love from afar, she's the one."

Elmer belched. "You're on target today. Dead-eye Hideo. You take some scalps, and it goes to your head."

"Kay called me. She said Joan sent her a package, and she wants to meet with us to discuss it."

"*Us?* Yours truly, E.V. Jackson? I never say no to a hobknob with Kay, but you've got me scratching my head."

Joan kept a diary. They'd discussed the contents. The diary described *everything.* The gold. Elmer's gold-crazed brother. The three-case confluence. Kay Lake hates Dudley Smith. She demands an audience, now. It must pertain to the diary. What fresh hell awaits?

Ashida sipped tea. "I read the statement you gave Thad. There were spatial discrepancies in your account of the shooting and the Japanese man's escape. You've worn a spare .38-snubnose in an ankle holster the whole time I've known you, but suddenly it's gone. Lunceford was felled by a .38 Special two-inch. I ran the ballistics myself. You killed him, Elmer. I'll give you a skate if you'll tell me why."

Elmer killed his drink and lit a cigar. He brushed ash off his coat and blew smoke rings.

"Cal was in with a Japanese guy, and he warned him out of the hideout. I caught a glimpse of him, and Cal came at me. I pulled my throwdown piece and dropped him. That's all you need to know, and all I'm going to say."

Ashida twirled his teacup. "Did you recognize the Japanese man?"

"Ed Satterlee showed Buzz and me a surveillance pic. It was that Navy guy you and Dud were looking around J-town for."

"Kyoho Hanamaka?"

Elmer said, "That selfsame hump."

78

(LOS ANGELES, 10:00 P.M., 2/28/42)

Uncle Ace pulled the plug. He said, “Time to go. I got business to run. Mourn dead girl enough.”

He pried Breuning and Carlisle off bar stools. He shook Buzz awake. Buzz jiggled El Scorpio’s cage and hexed him. El Dudster and Whiskey Bill were long gone. Ditto Kay and Brenda. The wake veered to stag night. Call-Me-Jack slept it off in his limo. Nort Layman snoozed with him. Thad Brown and Lee Blanchard single-filed out.

Ace said, “Elmer, you go. Chop, chop, you cocksucker. You perpetual thorn in my ass.”

Elmer hit the road. He wolfed bennies and Old Crow and got eroticized. He drove to Brenda’s place and promoted some woof-woof.

It was perfunctory. The postlude went ten seconds. Brenda said, “Shoo. Don’t think you’re spending the night. You’ve got Joan and who knows who else on the noggin. Let me sleep in peace.”

Elmer hit the road. He drove down to the Strip and pay-phoned Ellen. She said, “Okay, sure. But make it a quick one. The baby’s got the flu.”

That dick-wilted him. He went over anyway. It was perfunctory. The postlude stretched. Ellen war-talked him into a coma. Wake Island this. The Solomons that. “Go back in the Marines, you dippy cracker. My husband’s older than you. You’ve got no right to sit this one out.”

Elmer hit the road. He was wide awake and still libidoized. He cut down to La Brea and pay-phoned Annie. She invited him over and said she was hungry. She told him to snag a pizza pie.

Annie lived on Hi-Point off Pico. Elmer found a pizza pit on San Vicente and turned a quick loop. Annie snarfed half the pie and plopped him down on the couch.

She said, “You’re scared. You’ve got the jimjams like I’ve never seen.”

He said, “I’m in the shit like I’ve never seen, and it’s not like the shit and I ain't acquainted."

"Is this police-type shit that you aren't inclined to discuss?"

Elmer rolled his eyes and went *Yep.* Annie stretched out on the couch and plunked her head in his lap. She yawned and stretched. She pat-patted her mouth.

"Wake me if you get lonely. We'll play the radio or hit the sack."

Rain drummed the windows. Annie dozed. Elmer percolated. He lied to Thad Brown. He said he scanned mug books and ID'd Catbox Cal's killer. It was a dink named Kyoho Hanamaka. He's the fiend at large.

He covered his tracks there. Hideo *un*covered them. Hideo won't blab. He was *re*-covered there. Add on Dudley, Buzz, and the Huey snatch. Yeah, sweetie—I'm *scared.*

Annie started snoring. Elmer hit the road. He drove to Hollywood and B and E'd Jean Staley's place. It was you're-way-deep-in-the-shit dark.

He sniffed her lingerie and got transported. He time-traveled Jolting Jean's life. Beaumont, Texas. The dust bowl. Jean goes west and goes Red. Meyer Gelb's cell. The Griffith Park fire and Jean's queer brother. The whole deal induced hink.

Elmer hit the road. It was 3:14 a.m. He knew she'd be there. She'd be wearing the black cashmere dress and sipping the bright red Manhattan. She had permanent back-room access. She was just that jungled up.

Elmer drove to Lyman's. He's the mystic maharajah. He nailed it just that tight.

The dress. The cocktail. Kay at Crash Squad HQ. She's snooping. She's reading the file carbons tacked to the board.

She said, "I knew you'd show up."

He said, "I had a hunch you'd be here."

Kay lit a cigarette. "Something's frightening you."

Elmer lit a cigar. "Women keep telling me that."

"Joan sent me her diary. There's some things you should know."

Elmer dug on her dress. It head-bopped him, periodic. There's only her. There's no one else.

"You shivved Dudley. It had to be you."

Kay said, "Yes, it was."

79

(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 A.M., 3/1/42)

There's Beth. She's almost eighteen. She's stunningly lovely and most stunningly refracts him.

Her small eyes. Her set jaw. Her dark hair. She'll see him and run to him. This Army captain's her dad.

Dudley lounged outside Union Station. Porters wheeled luggage carts. Cabs clogged the breezeway. Parked cars stretched up to Alameda. Beth stood on her tiptoes and shielded her eyes.

She'd called him, impromptu. She was up in Vallejo with her cuckold dad. El Cornudo stifled her joie de vivre and made her keep house. It mandated a Baja retreat.

She had blue eyes. He had brown eyes. He was tall, she was petite. They were otherwise of the same—

She saw him and beelined. Her standard gambit was sprint and collide. She knocked him up against his staff car. She dropped her grip and burrowed in.

He said, "My dear girl."

She said, "I've never seen you so handsome."

They stepped back and squared off. There's that full view. Beth wore Claire's Christmas gifts. Twill slacks and a dark red sweater. The ensemble complemented and jazzed up his ODs.

"I'm here. It's twice in three months, so it must mean that I love you."

Dudley laughed. "You're a Boston provincial no longer. You've seen Los Angeles, and now you must brace yourself for Mexico."

—

They talked themselves hoarse. Beth's faux dad and half-blood sisters. His rocky road with Claire. Claire's faux child, Joan Klein. His split L.A. and Baja duties. Compliant Major Melnick cuts him travel slack. Her day-to-day crushes. Cute boys off to war. Navy pen pals, Point Loma to Pearl.

They fell quiet. Beth played the civilian-band radio. She scootched close and laced up his free hand. Swing broadcasts whooshed them south.

They crossed the border and cut through T.J. Beth went agog. His sheltered lass viewed raucous Revolución. She orbed the nude barkers outside the Blue Fox. The famed *negrito* waved his two-foot dick and drew stellar crowds.

Dudley swung south on the coast road. Half-assed beauty washed out the T.J. stink. High cliffs and sea swells. Fishing craft and Statie speedboats. Full-scale Jap cove alert.

He's meeting Juan Lazaro-Schmidt in La Paz today. Juan Pimentel's flying him down. El Governor wants to talk turkey. He wants El Dudster to attend a moving wingding. His cable included a postscript. "You will see through it, of course."

He misses Hideo. Hideo's his brilliant son, in with all his daughters. Major Melnick signed a dual-duty chit. Hideo has been assigned to probe spy mischief in L.A. He convinced Melnick that Baja fiends lurked there. "Hideo's our man, sir. I strongly recommend him."

It's a white lie. Hideo will hit L.A. and work the klub*haus* job. Lee Blanchard will watchdog him. Field interviews loom.

The case slogged on. They were thirty-two days in. Jack H. fretted the gun angle. Rice and Kapek glommed Jap weapons, wholesale. A great many were likely sold to Boyle Heights pachucos. Thad Brown proposed an East L.A. youth sweep. Roust local cholos. Stress the gun angle. Note this downside:

Some Sinarquista lads might draw heat. That's discomfiting.

Beth said, "Mexico is hard to fathom. I can't quite believe everything that I'm seeing."

"Ensenada is a bit more genteel. I have to fly down to La Paz, but Claire and Young Joan will give you a proper first look."

"You say 'Young Joan' like you're not sure you should trust her."

"She's sui generis, that one. She lacks your grace, but she's possessed of grit in abundance. I can't imagine how she'll turn out."

Beth smiled. "You take guff from women that you'd never take from men."

Dudley smiled. "It's my Achilles' heel—but don't tell anyone."

—

La Paz.

Off the south Baja coast. Swell Pacific and inland gulf views. Tuna boats and shack shanties. Grand white houses and yet-more-grand churches. Thick foliage and gargantuan insects. All quintessentially Mex.

Captain Juan dropped him at the Statie airfield. They discussed their plans on the flight down. Wetbacks and heroin. Jap slaves, to boot. Captain Juan urged caution. Lazaro-Schmidt was no *pendejo.*

He'd dropped Beth off at the del Norte. Claire swarmed her and laid on the love. Young Joan was less effusive. Ever watchful, that one.

Dudley cabbed to El Governor's casa. It was sunny and gulf warm. He wore a tropical-weight suit and a belt piece. Flaunt your allegiance. He wore his swastika lapel pin, face-out.

The casa was built up a hillside. Lazaro-Schmidt knew from flaunt. It was double-deck, peach-pink adobe. The pitched roof was inlaid with hand-painted tiles. Big-name artists' work on glazed cement. Picassos, Klees, and Kandinskys overlapped. Squiggles and doodles baked in the sun. The effect was modernist chaos.

The front door was flush with the street. Dudley walked up and rang the bell. It sparked shrieks from Strauss' *Elektra.* The door clicked open, full automatic.

Dudley stepped inside. The front room dipped below sea level. Four steps took him down. The room was done up fasco moderne.

Thronelike chairs. All brown leather. Ebony tables and settees. Hammered-bronze lamps and Axis-flag-motif carpets. Mussolini's lair meets *Better Homes & Gardens.*

Recessed wall paintings. Lit by pink neon tubes. More Picassos, Klees, and Kandinskys. *Der Führer* and Red Beast Stalin would frown. It was decadent art.

"Franco's men sacked a train passing through the Pyrenees. These paintings and my roof tiles were to be sold to raise funds for the Loyalist cause. The general and I are old friends. I appreciate art in a way he does not, which explains his most generous bequest."

Dudley wheeled. The thick carpet threw sparks. There's Lazaro-Schmidt. Note his cashmere lounge suit. It befits Hermann Goering at play. His swastika pin beams, face-out.

"I'm impressed, sir. Your lovely home expresses a grand theme."

Lazaro-Schmidt plopped into a throne. Buffed leather engulfed him.

"Which would be?"

"These times we live in. Art as the sole voice that will transcend the clash."

"'This savaging disaster.' A friend of mine exhorts crowds with those words."

Dudley plopped into a throne. He faced Lazaro-Schmidt head-on. The fasco motif disfavored his host. El Governor ran elfin. He lacked *Il Duce*'s notable heft.

"You may recall our brief chat at the recital, sir. I have schemes to propose and resources to pledge. I can vouch your immediate profits, and all I require is your promise of protection and a wave of your official pen."

Lazaro-Schmidt smiled. “Wetbacks. We must not euphemize here. I am set to sign the guest-worker pact with California’s Governor Olson in August. It will effectively legalize the temporary immigration of Mexican *braceros,* who will pick crops in the verdant San Joaquin and Imperial valleys. You wish to move wets north more urgently. All that the traffic will bear. You are prepared to offer me a price per head, and I am prepared to consider offers.”

Dudley smiled. “Yes, but that’s just one operation I have to propose.”

El Governor plucked lint off his lounge suit. He was dainty. He lacked *Il Duce*’s feral depth.

“Let me anticipate your other proposals. You wish to defray the cost of the Baja internment by housing our resident Japanese in U.S. internment camps and municipal-police road camps for the war’s duration. You have a plan to hide wealthy Japanese in Los Angeles, under the protection of Hop Sing and Uncle Ace Kwan. You plan to implement the heroin racket you took over from José Vasquez-Cruz, belatedly revealed to be Jorge Villareal-Caiz. My official signatures will provide the unrestricted travel visas that you require. They will free you to move wets, Japs, and dope north, free of scrutiny.”

Dudley flicked lint off his trousers. Monkey see, monkey do.

“You know my plans in advance of my comradely pledges and supplications, sir. Have you had me surveilled?”

Lazaro-Schmidt said, “Yes, and I am aware of the purging of Cruz-Caiz’s men that you and Salvy Abascal performed in the wake of *El Capitán*’s death. I know that you killed Carlos Madrano, in advance of your army posting here in Baja. I have assessed you through secondhand sources, and have largely extrapolated your designs. I am ready to do business with you, should we come to felicitous terms.”

Dudley scanned the room. He saw gold statuettes on a wall ledge. Tigers, panthers, jaguars. Perhaps solid gold.

“I’m chastened, sir. I thought I’d walk in here and knock you off your feet.”

Lazaro-Schmidt laughed. “I am not easily dislodged.”

“Nor am I easily chastened, sir.”

“I will add that I know you are quite concerned with the whereabouts of my friend Kyoho Hanamaka, and further add that I did not facilitate his exit from Mexico, nor do I know where he is now. I know that you have discovered Kyoho’s hideaway, and are spending considerable time there.”

Dudley said, “Yes, and I discovered a gold bayonet in a cache hole. It was swastika-adorned, and I’ve come to learn that there’s a companion piece, adorned with a hammer and sickle.”

It was a curveball. El Governor deflected it.

“I would call Kyoho ambidextrous. He plays the totalitarian field, and he does not know which beast will prevail in the end.”

Dudley said, “The Red Beast, I fear.”

“Yes, the Red Postwar Beast, who will turn on the Allied nations that buttressed its dubious triumph to begin with. This poses a challenge to the more farsighted members of the German high command. They must sow the seeds of their postwar redemption now, while the outcome of the war remains in doubt. They must prove themselves palatable and potentially valuable to the postwar West, and see to the hoarding of monies for their ultimate relocation.”

Dudley fondled his lapel pin. “I’ve heard that there was quite the confab in Ensenada. November of ’40, it was. The Russians and the *Kameraden* got down to brass tacks. The Hitler-Stalin pact won’t last. One of us must lose this war. How will civilized and enlightened men like us survive in such a predicament?”

Lazaro-Schmidt fondled his lapel pin. “I attended the conference. I told both factions that Mexico might well prove to be a gateway for the establishment of gainful resettlement throughout Latin America, with proper guarantors of safety provided by U.S. Intelligence services based in Mexico herself.”

Dudley said, “I would be loath to hide godless Reds.”

“You won’t have to. Germany will lose the war—and a newly reformed civilized world will require Nazi brainpower to help keep the Red Beast in check.”

Dudley slapped his knees. “Will all unruly Nazi acts be forgiven?”

“Of course. The concept of realpolitik holds sway here. Seeds of reconciliation have already been planted. Humanistically inclined Nazis have begun a process of atonement with world Jewry. You will see a moving example at the ceremony I’ve invited you to. It is realpolitik at its bald-faced best.”

Dudley scanned the wall ledge. He caught a boffo photograph. Abwehr boss Canaris. NKVD boss Beria. A festive cantina backdrop.

“Is that your conclave there?”

Lazaro-Schmidt twinkled. “Indeed. As subtext, I’ll add that Canaris has been leaking German secrets to British Intelligence since ’37, during the same time frame that Beria has been sending parcels to Churchill himself. As further subtext, I’ll add that both men were quite anxious to visit the legendary Blue Fox.”

Dudley roared. The Wolf appeared. He pointed to a photograph on a bookshelf. Dudley studied it. Constanza Lazaro-Schmidt attacked her viola.

El Governor plucked the photograph and passed it over. Constanza bore down *bellísima*. Her bow threw sparks. She’d snapped a string. Her white gown dipped off one breast.

“My frenzied sister. She was Kyoho Hanamaka’s lover, some time ago.”

—

The Statie airfield had been prettified. It was a rush job. The theme was Welcome Exiles!!!

WILLKOMMEN signs lined the runway. Statie goons rolled out a red carpet. An old lady distributed pamphlets. They were quasi–symphony programs. A Spanish-language text ballyhooed the virtuosi.

Four uprooted souls. All first-chair musicians. Late of the Dresden Staatskappelle and Hitler's death camps. Miklos and Magda Koenig. Sandor Abromowitz. Ruth Szigeti. *Mittel* European Jewry. Austro-Hungarian, all.

Their flight was due. Dudley stood behind a rope line and mingled. The welcome crowd ran forty, tops. They were all Mex and ran to type. Oldster *kultur* hounds. *Konzert*goers in this heathen land.

A small airplane swooped toward the runway. A baggage cart rolled into view. The *kultur* hounds applauded. A Statie sergeant wheeled the Lazaro-Schmidts. They waved Hungarian flags on sticks.

Governor Juan wore a seersucker suit and white bucks. He eschewed his swastika lapel pin. Constanza wore a pink summer dress and spectator pumps. The Wolf strained at the rope line. He plainly desired her.

The Lazaro-Schmidts hopped off the cart and stood by the red carpet. A Statie corporal carried out a long-cord microphone. Dudley leafed through his program and checked the photographs.

The overfed Koenigs. The aged Abromowitz. The thin-sculpted Ruth Szigeti. They wore symphony black and held stringed instruments. *Das Vaterland* was good to them then.

The airplane dipped and landed. The pilot fishtailed up to the carpet. The *kultur* rubes cheered. The Wolf cocked his head and pawed the ground. *What is this shit?*

The Statie corporal pushed steps up to the airplane. The door swung open. The four refugees filed out.

The men wore overcoats and winter-wool suits. The women wore long dresses and fur wraps. The gulf heat smacked them. They looked like they'd pass out.

They weaved onto the carpet. Lazaro-Schmidt and fair Constanza dispensed *abrazos* and handshakes. The refugees looked gaunt and all beat-to-hell. They broiled in their winter ensembles. Old man Abromowitz grabbed Ruth Szigeti's arm for support.

The rubes lapped it up. They tossed bravos. An old girl dipped into a paper sack and tossed rose petals. The Koenigs glared at the crowd. Old Abromowitz reeled. The Szigeti woman waved.

Lazaro-Schmidt braced the microphone. He spoke high-end Spanish and cut straight to the Big Theme Gist. He hit Expiation, Redemption, Reconciliation. He hit Forgiveness and Asylum. Our *hermanos y hermanas* were spared certain execution. Honor knows no national or ideological boundaries. German men of conscience saw to the rescue of these four gifted people. They are dedicated to the overthrow of Adolf Hitler and determined to create a better tomorrow for all citizens of the world. Our four new friends will be resettled into the exile community in Los Angeles. They will resume their musical careers as this storm of catastrophic war rages around us.

Applause blitzed the wrap-up. Constanza grabbed the mike and announced a reception. “My home, tonight. There will be music.”

The refugees reeled. Sing for your supper. Ruth Szigeti fumed and peeled off her fur coat.

Her arms were bare. Dudley saw torture scars and an SS tattoo.

—

The Wolf pre-prowled the wingding. Dudley walked the beach outside the house and peeped windows.

Said house was classic Spanish. It ran inimical to El Governor’s modernist spread. A night breeze stirred sand. The Wolf loped back and reported.

The refugees greeted Los Beaners. Well-wishers engulfed them. It was *mucho* enlightened and disingenuous. El Governor played host. Juan Pimentel wore Statie black and clicked his heels, Nazi-esque. The refugees avoided him. The *kultur* hounds swilled free champagne and snarfed free hors d’oeuvres.

Constanza circulated. Her dress straps kept slipping down her shoulders. She had short hair and wore no makeup. She went barefoot. Open windows stirred that beach breeze. Her pink dress swirled.

She’d coupled with Kyoho Hanamaka. It was “some time ago.” That mandated thought.

The Wolf curled up on a beachfront chaise. Dudley peeped a picture window. A valet laid out folding chairs. The refugees unpacked their instruments and sat down. Ruth Szigeti wore a black cocktail dress. She rolled up the sleeves and revealed half her tattoo.

They ripped into baleful Bartók. The room went *kultur*-hushed. Dudley slipped inside and skirted the crowd. He walked toward the back of the house.

Bisecting hallways. Brushed-adobe walls. Hardwood floors and silk tapestry rugs. Garish oil paintings. An all-jungle motif. Green foliage and predator cats.

Dudley opened doors and flipped light switches. He saw servants’ quarters and storage rooms and a closet jammed with skeet guns and horse-riding tack. He opened the adjacent door and caught Constanza’s scent.

She wore sandalwood perfume. He’d smelled it at the del Norte recital and the airfield. He flipped a wall switch. Floor lamps popped on and cast light.

The room ran fifteen-by-fifteen. It featured rough wood walls and floors. Phonograph records, a Victrola, a desk. Ornament shelves and framed wall photographs.

Dudley walked wall-to-wall. The shelves held small gold statuettes. Constanza's wolf pack glared at him. Male wolves snarled. Mother wolves suckled their cubs. It refracted her brother's menagerie. It refracted his own wolf worship. He hefted a wolf cub. It was solid gold. Gold plagued him and followed him, everywhere.

He studied the photographs. Constanza feeds jackals large slabs of meat. She's wearing a bush jacket and safari hat. There's Constanza kissing a jaguar. She's wearing a summer dress tossed above her knees.

Constanza feeds wolves. She's wearing lederhosen and a loden coat. Rhine maiden Constanza. Constanza, the Black Forest nymph.

The German motif extends. Constanza stands with pianist Wilhelm Kempff and conductor Karl Böhm. Wehrmacht officers huddle behind them. It's a symphony bash. Constanza's laughing and blowing smoke in the air.

More photographs. Constanza with Pierre Fournier and Alfred Cortot. Both men welcomed the *Boche* to France. Constanza wears a slit-legged gown. That's Paris by night behind her.

We return to Deutschland now. Consider this photograph. Constanza warmly greets Adolf Hitler. *Musik Maestra* and furious *Führer*. Both evince delight.

Dudley stood by the desk. He noted the swastika paperweight. It was solid gold. He noted the blue leather diary.

It was locked. The clasp and keyhole were solid gold. The front cover was gold swastika–embossed.

Women as diarists. Intimate thoughts and deeds recorded. He recalled the late Joan Conville. She kept a diary.

He touched Constanza's diary. He kissed the gold swastika and caught Constanza's scent.

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 A.M., 3/2/42)

"The rain, the gold, the fire. It's all one story, you see."

I knew Joan's diary now. I had studied it to the point of memorization. She repeated that annunciatory phrase many times. She said the words to Dudley Smith on the first occasion. They had just made love, and Joan had settled in to tell her most complex and harrowing tale. She succumbed to evil in that moment. She recounted her rogue investigation with Hideo Ashida; she stitched the evidential links, from the discovery of Karl Tullock's body up to a series of forensic crossovers to the Rice-Kapek murders. Her summary circumcribes a state of shock and awe, and depicts her immersion in the police world that has consumed me since 1939 and my collision with Lee Blanchard. Joan's diary spotlights her analytic skills and her surpassing ability to plumb evidence and assess motive. Self-analysis eludes her. She cannot frame and assume a moral stance as to Dudley Smith. Her capitulation is wholly erotic and steeped in her overweening pride and ambition. Dudley Smith's hold over women derives from the hold that women have over him. He projects a casual mastery over any and all perils. Joan found that irresistible. She was a woman determined to conquer a man's world. She wanted Dudley Smith's mastery more than she wanted the gold and a clean Rice-Kapek solve. Her efforts to countermand Dudley's hold by the means of her concurrent affair with Bill Parker proved fruitless. She misjudged the two men as antagonists and failed to see them as complicitous and cravenly needy in all their strategic designs. I love Bill Parker unto the death and hate Dudley Smith just as passionately. I must take Joan's account of her last six weeks and deploy it to a broad moral advantage. I must break the usurious bond between Bill Parker and Dudley Smith and see to Dudley's most severe censure.

I'm writing these words on the upper-floor terrace of my house above the

Sunset Strip. Yet more rain seems to be brewing. This house symbolizes my own capitulation to the police world that so consumed Joan. Lee Blanchard bought this house with bribe money. He tanked his boxing career because he knew he'd always be good and never great. Lee gave a wayward South Dakota girl a home; it's a place where I muse, ponder, study, and cultivate opportunity with a ruthless will very much like Joan's. I now possess the sum of Joan's criminal knowledge. I have a grasp of Dudley's racketeering plans. I know that Two-Gun Davis killed the Watanabe family and that he confessed to Bill Parker and Dudley Smith. Bill cut deals and saw to the dismissal of Werewolf Shudo's death decree. I know all about Joan's mission to avenge her father's death and her suspicions of one Mitchell Kupp. I know that Dudley promised to look into him. I read yesterday's Sunday *Herald* and spotted a page-eight piece. Mitch Kupp's decomposed body was found at his house in San Bernardino. He had been shot dead at point-blank range. I sense a Dudley-and-Joan-at-their-most-crazed symbiosis here.

Hideo Ashida lives in Joan's diary. He lives triangulated with Joan and Dudley, ever indebted to Dudley, ever corrupted, ever lustful and unfulfilled. Joan admired him, came to despise him, and developed a fond regard for him during the fevered merging of the gold quest and the klub*haus* job. Hideo and Joan coveted the gold and coveted a clean murder-case solve just as furiously. Hideo's desire to push through to a proper case solution jumped out at me. I had initially planned to meet Hideo and Elmer Jackson together. I put out feelers toward that end as soon as I'd read the diary. I reconsidered the approach almost immediately.

Joan's diary was evidence. I trusted Elmer and did not trust Hideo. I wanted to present the evidence of Joan's diary to them individually and gauge their individual reactions. I met them at Dave's Blue Room yesterday. I reported the contents of Joan's diary—but withheld a certain piece of information from both men.

Elmer evinced shocked outrage. He had brushed up against the events that Joan had described since New Year's. His brother died in the Griffith Park fire and was surely involved with Karl Tullock and the summer '33 robbery spree. Elmer had been cuckolded. His friends Hideo and Joan told him nothing. They ran their rogue investigation and brought in Dudley Smith. Elmer was enraged. Two purported friends had betrayed him. Elmer feared and hated Dudley Smith. Dudley had facilitated Joan Conville's and Hideo Ashida's lies and omissions. Elmer's hatred now burned that much more fearfully and recklessly bright. Sweet Elmer, combustible Elmer. Now dangerously close with Buzz Meeks—who hated Dudley and did not fear him at all.

Elmer guzzled gin fizzes and chain-smoked cigars. I watched him flail at all of it as he fought back tears. I had omitted that key diary thread. It was a soundly reasoned omission.

Hideo, Joan, and Dudley had formed a pact to get the gold. I withheld that fact from Elmer. I withheld my perception that they were every bit as gold-crazed as Karl Tullock and Wayne Frank Jackson. I withheld this fact because I had to withhold it from Hideo Ashida. Elmer was volatile. He might go for Hideo's throat—with Hideo's gold greed as the spark that lit his fuse.

My dear friend Elmer. Pie-eyed from six gin fizzes. A silent moment passed between us. Telepathic sparks flew. We had engaged a deadly and foolhardy agenda. We will take down Dudley Smith.

Elmer weaved out of Dave's Blue Room; Hideo Ashida timorously walked in. He wore his Army uniform, replete with sidearm, and caused jaded heads to turn. He sipped coffee in lieu of gin fizzes and heard me out impassively.

I presented Joan's diary as evidence and cited my purely academic interest. I knew that Hideo underestimated women and saw me as an idiot child. Hideo held Joan in the same low regard, until she became his gold-quest accomplice. I excised Joan's gold-quest narrative; I worked around it in the same manner as I had with Elmer. I further omitted Joan's withering critique of Ashida's homosexuality and fawning allegiance to Dudley Smith. I wanted to stun Hideo with what I knew and sustain his idiot-child assessment. This idiot child was now armed with damning facts but possessed no formal agenda. Hideo sat through my recitation, implacably. His eyes flickered when I told him that Jim Davis killed the four Watanabes. It was his only notable reaction.

I want Hideo to seize on Joan's reluctance to describe and analyze the gold quest. I want Hideo to feel safe here. I'm banking on the threads of reluctant decency that Joan and I have both glimpsed in him. What will you do now, Hideo? Which way will your tortured conscience lead you? Will you tell Dudley that I've seen the diary or will you omit?

Bill Parker's tortured conscience rivals Hideo's. Joan watched him falter and ascend in near-direct proportion. Bill keeps mum on Two-Gun Davis and the Watanabe frame; Bill diverts the Werewolf's gas-chamber trek. Bill cosigns an expedient solution to the klub*haus* job and boldly sells the PD out to the Federal grand jury. Bill falters and ascends; Bill pratfalls, dusts himself off, and stumbles toward his next moral encounter. He caroms between God and Old Crow bonded bourbon in the hope that the former will obviate the need for the latter. He fears the loss of Dudley Smith more than he fears Dudley Smith himself, and clings to the bereft notion that Dudley Smith's brutal élan facilitates the fortunes of his beloved police department. He stops short of condemning Dudley Smith as monstrous—because to do so would reduce him to the role of most meek collaborator.

I had to bank on Hideo Ashida's few decent instincts. I had to hope that Bill Parker would pray or drink himself through to the truth of Dudley Smith's malevolence.

Joan excelled at portraiture. She nailed William H. Parker and went on to nail the Dudley–Claire De Haven misalliance. Dudley and Claire exemplify a barely contained madness. Dudley hoards Nazi regalia and hints at a fascist conversion. Claire defends the Moscow show trials and waves the Red flag with aplomb. Dudley dallies with opium and Benzedrine. Claire boots morphine. A U.S. Army posting buttresses Dudley's Baja racket schemes. They adopt a fifteen-year-old red diaper baby. Dudley brutally beats Orson Welles and suborns him as an informant. Claire fellates Welles in Otto Klemperer's steam room.

Claire is a man-trap woman. She holds sway over men in the manner that Dudley holds sway over women. Claire is horrified at the power she's granted him and aghast at the erosion of her so-precious self. Claire fears that Dudley killed her lover, José Vasquez-Cruz. Vasquez-Cruz was really Jorge Villareal-Caiz. Villareal-Caiz stood foursquare in Meyer Gelb's Red cell. As Joan Conville said, "It's all one story, you see."

And it's my story now. I'm a bit-player-in-waiting. Claire suspects that a "South Dakota slattern" shanked Dudley last December. Dudley pooh-poohed the assertion and passed it along to Joan. Claire added this: "Maybe I'll confront the slattern at one of Otto Klemperer's parties. She's like the bad penny, always showing up at them."

Claire, I'd *love* to gab. I know we'd have things to discuss.

Those looming storm clouds burst; I gathered up my diary pages and carried them inside. I placed Joan's diary pages in a good-sized cardboard box and addressed it to William H. Parker. It was 11:25 now. The postman always arrives around noon.

81

(LOS ANGELES, 11:30 A.M., 3/2/42)

He lied to Dudley. He omitted and withheld. It was split-second instinctive.

Ashida drove through Bunker Hill. He replayed the phone call. The Biltmore switchboard had patched him through to La Paz. Dudley issued klub*haus* directives. His chance to rat Kay fizzled out.

They met at Dave's Blue Room, yesterday. Kay described the contents of Joan Conville's diary. Joan willed her the pages. Joan candidly described her post–New Year's life and spilled leads on their intertwined cases. Joan laid out her liaisons with Dudley and Bill Parker. Kay talked for two hours straight.

He braced himself for The Bomb. The Bomb did not exist—or Kay declined to drop it.

Joan detailed the gold heist and its current reemergence. Joan omitted the subsequent gold quest altogether.

Or Kay abridged her account. She played editor and expurgated at will. She excised Joan's pages and recounted only what she wanted him to know.

Rain clouds unzipped. Ashida ran his wiper blades. He crossed Loma and looked north to Belmont High. He replayed Kay's key remarks.

"Here's something you should know, Hideo. Jim Davis killed the Watanabes. He initially confessed to Bill Parker, and to Dudley more recently. From the look on your face, I can tell that Dudley failed to inform you."

Kay provoked him. Kay taunted him and scolded him. "You should have told Elmer everything. His brother died in that fire." Kay provokes, Kay scolds, Kay taunts and dares.

"I know everything that I've told you. I will leave you guessing as to what I might have withheld. You will tell Dudley whatever you decide to tell him. I will seek to expose any and all false solutions to the klub*haus* case."

Kay closed with that. The moment felt telepathic. Kay wanted a clean solve. He wanted a clean solve. Joan might have expressed his desire. Kay might have read him just right.

Telepathy begets telepathy. He talked to Dudley a second time this morning. Dudley said, “Our late friend Joan kept a diary, lad. She’d mentioned it to me several times. Will you go by her bungalow and do a toss and forensic? She may have tattled a few of our secrets that we don’t want commonly known.”

Ashida cut west on 1st Street and north on Carondelet. Central Property kicked loose the door key. The idea came to him then.

He parked beside the courtyard and walked back. He lugged his evidence kit. Nobody saw him or stopped him. Nobody slack-jawed the Army-togged Jap.

He unlocked the door and locked himself back in. He turned on all the room lights. Joan’s bungalow remained unrented and appeared to be intact. It was a suicide scene. The PD and morgue men had come and gone last week.

Ashida checked the kitchen. He looked under the sink and saw a wastebasket. It contained booze empties and coffee grounds. They were piled halfway up. He checked the sink drain and ran some cold water. The drain trap worked well. That was good. It enhanced forensic detail.

He tossed the bungalow.

He went through the closets, the one dresser, the front-room shelves. He went through Joan’s desk drawers. There was no typewriter. That was good. He found pens and writing paper in the bottom-left drawer.

A soft blotter covered the desktop. Ashida popped his evidence kit and filled an atomizer. He utilized deionized water and liquid dioxide. He sprayed the blotter and watched pen indentations rise.

Joan had block-printed and applied hard strokes. “Dudley” and “Bill” crisscrossed the blotter. He saw “despite his best intentions” and “confiscated gun lists.”

The “Dudley” and “Bill” impressions were instructive. They sparked a secondary notion. It would tweak Dudley’s vanity and densify this construction.

He took a hundred sheets of writing paper and dumped them in the kitchen sink. He spritzed them with diluted kerosene and dropped a match. The pages burned. He counted off ten seconds. He doused the flames with tap water and created a wet mess.

He turned off the water and cleaned up the mess. He dumped the bulk of the wet paper in a grocery bag. He placed the bag in his evidence kit and performed his obfuscation tasks.

They were *extra* precautionary. Dudley trusted him. He relied on that fact.

Ashida unscrewed the sink drain. He smeared sodden paper to the inside walls of the pipe. He tweezed paper fragments and affixed them to the drain holes. He screwed the drain trap back on.

He scooped wet paper and smeared the inside of the wastebasket. He covered all contingencies. The ruse stood complete.

Joan’s telephone worked. The landlord forgot to kill her service. Ashida roused a local operator and placed a long-distance call. Person-to-person. La Paz, Baja. Hotel Los Pescados/Captain Dudley Smith.

The operator said she’d place the call and ring him back. Ashida hung up and prowled the bungalow. He caught Joan’s tobacco and lilac soap scent. He examined her Navy uniforms. He saw red hairs caught in a fine-bristled brush.

The phone rang. Ashida grabbed it.

Dudley said, “Hello, lad. You’re calling from Joan’s apartment, I take it.”

Ashida coughed. He white-knuckled the receiver. The phone cord went taut.

“There’s no diary. She burned the pages in the kitchen sink, and left unmistakable traces. The cops who came through missed them. I raised a few indentations off her desk blotter. I saw partial sentences, along with your name and Captain Parker’s.”

Dudley laughed. “I’m sure she wrote my name a great many more times than his, and wrote it with far greater passion.”

Ashida forced a laugh. “I’m sure she did. And I’m sure a trained graphologist would confirm it.”

“Lad, you delight me. Such wit on such short notice. Go forth and do your duty now. Put your grand mind to work on the klub*haus* mess, before Major Melnick calls you back.”

Ashida forced a joke. “I’ll call you if I find the gold.”

Dudley said, “Yes, lad—you do that.”

The line went dead. Ashida replaced the receiver. He’d committed treason. His motive revealed itself.

You’ll never love me as I love you. I cannot place Kay Lake in jeopardy. This ruse punishes you.

82

(LOS ANGELES, 3:30 P.M., 3/2/42)

WAYNE FRANK JACKSON. 1907–1933. BELOVED BROTHER AND SON.

The headstone read thus. No 211 Man. No Gold-Heist Goon. No Embroiled with Communists. No Fifth Column–Adjunct.

Elmer stood graveside. He was half-tanked. He flagellated his dumb cracker ass and hexed Hideo Ashida.

Ashida broke his heart. Ashida should have told him the whole story. Joan wrote it all out. Kay regurgitated it. The bad news hurtled, here to Hell.

The Dudster, Joan, and Hideo. They harbored leads. They knew he planted the address book at the klub*haus.* Two-Gun Davis iced the Watanabes. Joan writes it out. Kay regurgitates it. Here's the part he don't get:

Kay says Joan told all. Thus, Kay told all. But—one thing don't conform to type.

Dud, Joan, and Hideo. Three covetous cookies. Wouldn't they go for the gold? Where's their big fat doughnut? Did Joan fail to write that down or did Kay fail to mention it?

Inglewood Cemetery. Wayne Frank's wobbly stone. It didn't read Klan Klown. It didn't read Kid Brother Elmer's Got de Hellhound on His Trail.

The furry fucker's name is Fear. Buzz and him thumped Huey C. Did Dud find out? Dud snuffed a fruit at a Nazi bash and waltzed on it. Does Dud know that he knows?

Nobody knows de trouble I'se seen, nobody knows my redneck sorrow—

Elmer scrammed. He sprinkled flask booze on Wayne Frank's grave and hit the road. Three bennies detoured his hooch load. He drove home and fed his tropical fish.

The mailman was due. Jean Staley owes him a nice postcard. Elmer J. digs Jean S. Sister, why'd you run out on me?

Elmer sat on his porch. He lit a cigar and watched storm clouds brew. The mailman showed. He dropped off the light bill and a card, postmarked St. Louis.

The front displayed the churning Mississippi. Jolting Jean scribbled up the back.

Dear Elmer (You Sweet Dog),

My eastward trek continues. I'm looking forward to a party with some old friends in Albuquerque. Wish you were escorting me. XOXOXO, Jean.

Tilt. His shit detector clicked on. Something ain't right here.

The card was postmarked St. Louis. St. Louis is way northeast of Albuquerque. Jean's headed for Des Moines. Des Moines is north*west* of St. Louis. Jean's not taking no regular route. Here's the capper here:

He got a Texas-postmark card, two days back. Jean's hot to hit that Albuquerque wingding. Texas is east of New Mexico. It's all fucked-up geography.

The mailman stuffed mailboxes. Elmer ducked into his flop and grabbed the stack of cards Jean sent.

He studied them. He tracked postmarks and skimmed Jean's scrawl. *Ooops,* there's—

The Kansas City card preceded the Denver card. KC's east of Denver and should have come first. Here's one he missed. The Lubbock card extolls the Rocky Mountains. That don't fit. Jean ain't seen those mountains yet.

The cards are all checkmarked. *Oooga-booga.* There's all these different shades of ink.

Elmer goosed the mailman. "Lou, what's with these cards? They're coming all out of sequence, like this girl's trying to put one over on me. And what's with all these checkmarks?"

Lou studied the cards and tapped them on his teeth. Lou shiteater grinned.

"It looks like these cards got routed through a mail-drop system and sent on to you from a drop here in L.A. You know from mail drops, right? They're these services that gigolos and call prosties use, all over the country. It's like a relay pipeline for people on the run and on the lam, who want certain folks to think they're somewhere else. Mail comes in, and the drop employees log it in or out and charge your account. These places are all over the U.S., so mail gets forwarded, and that way you can get whatever postmark you want. You get a lot of smut books and hate tracts sent that way. It's like a cheating-wife-and-husband parlay. You can't be in two places at the same time—but sometimes you'd like to convince folks that you are."

Elmer snatched the cards and fanned them out. He fanned a spray and pointed to the checkmarks.

“What’s with these here marks, boss?”

Lou went *oooh-la-la.* “I know those marks. Look—they’re half cross, half *X* mark. That’s Bev’s Switchboard. It’s out in West Hollywood. Blow Job Bev Shoftel runs the place. She’s one for the record books.”

—

Nite-owl stakeout. 1:00 a.m.—Fountain and Crescent Heights.

Bev’s Switchboard was county turf. It was a rinky-dink storefront upside a swish bar. Elmer brought his B and E tools. He parked his sled across the street and got up some gall.

He ran a routine check first. He went by the West Hollywood Sheriff’s Station and braced the Vice boss. The boss confirmed Lou the mailman.

Blow Job Bev turned out the twelve-year-old sons of the L.A. elite. She devirginized movie-biz scions and the offspring of Hancock Park swells. Bev’s Switchboard was a racket drop. It serviced smut merchants, hate-tract purveyors, and filmland shitheels. Plus homo prosties, dirty-picture girls, dubious “actors” and “musicians.” The service passed on phone messages and forwarded mail. The service rented on-site mailboxes. Sometimes the mail just jumped box-to-box. Bev’s been popped for smut and indecent exposure. She flashed her snatch at some dowagers at the Wilshire Country Club.

Bev’s got a pedigree. Bev snitches for Sheriff Biscailuz. Bev’s Switchboard is Sheriff’s-protected. Yeah, and there’s *this:*

The Feds are homed in on Bev’s. Sheriff Gene just quashed a premises search warrant.

Elmer said, “What were they looking for?”

The Vice boss said, “They were looking for incoming mail sent from mail drops in Phoenix, Albuquerque, Salt Lake City, Denver, Kansas City, and St. Louis.”

That meant pay dirt. Jolting Jean sent *him* cards from those cities. Jolting Jean allegedly passed through them.

The Vice boss said, “The requesting agent was this nosebleed Ed Satterlee. He’s purportedly tonged up and on the grift.”

They wrapped up at 5:00 p.m. Elmer split West Hollywood Station and went shopping then. He bought a miniature camera, film, and some flashbulbs. He popped bennies and brainstormed names.

Three-case names. Crisscrossed through three case lines:

Wendell Rice, George Kapek, Archie Archuleta. More names: Fritz Eckelkamp, Eddie Leng, Donald Matsura. Still more names: Martin Luther Mimms, Leander Frechette, George Lincoln Rockwell. Yet more names: Harold

John Miciak, Cedric Francis Inge, Catbox Cal Lunceford. Boocoo names: Meyer Gelb, Jean Staley, Dr. Saul and Andrea Lesnick. *Mucho* names: Jorge Villareal-Caiz, Kyoho Hanamaka, Lin Chung, Tommy Glennon. Bent-cop names. Fifth-Column names. Commo names. Nazi names. Jap names, Chink names, Mex names—

Elmer checked his watch. It was 1:19 a.m. The fruit bar roiled. The jukebox blared and supplied noise cover. Do it now, son.

He'd packed his B and E and camera shit in a gym bag. He grabbed it and crossed the street, fast. Traffic was scarce. Bev's Switchboard was flat brick. A door awning covered him. The door was push lock/one keyhole.

Elmer got out a #4 pick. He probed said keyhole. The booger failed to fit. He got out a #6. That booger probed deep. He twisted it left/right, left/right. The mechanism snapped, the doorjamb shimmied and popped.

He stepped inside and threw the reverse bolt. The joint was deep dark. He pulled his flashlight and got his eyeballs adjusted. He beam-strafed the whole premises. He saw *this:*

The back wall was rigged with pullout mail slots. The east wall was lined with file cabinets. A desk and chair faced the front window. The west wall was foto-festooned. Film-biz schleppers mugged. For sure: part-time talent/full-time gigolos and whores.

Elmer walked to the back wall. He yanked a dozen mail-slot pulls and got no give. They were locked crab's-ass tight. He kept his beam low and walked to the east wall. The cabinets ran alphabetical. Little letter plates were stuck to the drawers. He slid over to the *S*-for-Staley drawer and gave it a tug.

He hit pay dirt. *Woo-woo!*—the booger's unlocked.

The drawer was jammed with file folders. Elmer maneuvered his flashlight and lit the name tags. He finger-walked from Sadler and Samuelson on. He saw the odd name Szigeti, Ruth. Two non-*S* files were clipped to it. Koenig, Miklos & Magda, Abromowitz, Sandor.

Elmer finger-walked. No familiar names mauled him. He hit Sperling, Phil and Sroloff, Ralph. *Bam!*—he hit Staley, Jean.

He pulled the file. It contained one sheet only. "Recent transactions" was typed at the top. Plus notes on "postcards received & forwarded/out-of-town postmarks assured."

Postcards forwarded. To one geek only. A lunkhead named E. V. Jackson. Postcards from Phoenix, Albuquerque, Salt Lake City. Postcards from Denver, Kansas City, St. Louis. That means *this:* Jean sure as shit sandbagged him.

Elmer got out his camera shit and foto-snapped the page. The flashbulb popped bright. Elmer extracted it and dropped it in the gym bag.

Names. Names. Names. Take your pick. Open file drawers await you. It hit him, quick. Jean's Commo cell. Villareal-Caiz, the Lesnicks, Meyer Gelb.

Elmer file-jumped. He pulled the *V* drawer and finger-walked. *Bam!*—there's no Villareal-Caiz. He pulled the *L* drawer and finger-walked. *Bam!*—no Saul or Andrea Lesnick. He pulled the *G* drawer and finger-walked. *Bam!*—there's Meyer Gelb.

The file contained one sealed envelope. It was addressed to "MG 226/CO Bev's Switchboard." That was plain dumb code. 226 was Gelb's box number. Note the return address: "PO Box 1823/La Paz, Baja."

Elmer slid to the front desk and rifled the drawers. Shit—there's no envelope steamer. He slid back to the *G* drawer. Fuck it. He ripped the letter open with his teeth.

For what? There's just this blank sheet of paper. It's a head-scratcher. What's that there? It looks like a dried stain.

Elmer head-scratched it. He worked his dim brain every which way. It hit him, belated.

Blotter paper. Microdots. Fourth Interceptor issued a bulletin. "Report all such/A-Level evidence."

He nicked the envelope. He brain-broiled. He ran more names and pulled more file drawers. He pulled the *H* drawer and got zilch for Kyoho Hanamaka. He repulled the *L* drawer and got *nyet* on Catbox Cal Lunceford. He repulled the *G* drawer and finger-sprinted.

He hit Gainford, Garfield, Gersh, Gifford. He hit Glennon, Thomas Malcolm. *That's* some pay dirt.

Elmer skimmed the transaction sheet. There were no mail-outs scrawled. Tommy's PO box number was scrawled in. Box 7669/La Jolla, California.

La Jolla. A swank enclave down by San Diego. It's close to the Baja border. It's a hot lead. More circles loop and constrict.

Elmer went through Tommy's file. It contained one fat envelope. Elmer ripped it open and yanked the contents.

Tracts. Little hate pamphlets. Hate, hate, hate. Kill, kill, kill. Recipes for Jap fricassee and Chinaman stew. Kill the jigs, kill the Jews, kill the British Protestant oppressor!!!

Elmer dumped the tracts in his gym bag. He broiled more names. He hit the *A* drawer and trawled for Archie Archuleta. He got *nein* there. He hit the *C* drawer and trawled for Lin Chung. Tuff luck—there's no Chinaman Chung.

He went light-headed. He weaved. This was all some wild-ass shit. He got his feet under him. He pulled the *R* drawer and trawled for George Lincoln Rockwell.

He finger-walked. Rehnquist, Rillard, Roberts, Robertson—Rockwell, George Lincoln. No transaction sheet. One fat envelope stuffed in the file.

Note the note clipped to it. "Forward to T. M. Glennon, Box 7669/La Jolla."

Elmer slit the envelope. He banked on more hate tracts. He got smut pix instead.

Fuck, fuck, fuck. Suck, suck, suck. All black-and-white glossies. Pokey-pokey shots. In the mouth, up the love trail, up the dirt road. Two men and two women. The men wear leather masks. One man wears a Nazi uniform. One man wears Red Guard threads. The women wear zero. One woman's white, one woman's Mex.

Circles constrict. *Oooga-booga.* Circles meld and overlap.

The pubic-hair samples. Ashida found them. Doc Layman typed them. Two samples are female. One sample's white, one sample's Mex. Note the foto backdrop. Fuck, fuck, fuck. Suck, suck, suck. It's there in all the pix.

It's the upstairs bedroom at the klub*haus.*

83

(LA PAZ, 8:00 P.M., 3/3/42)

Seduction.

He knew it. She knew it. Her coy act at the exile bash proclaimed it. The Wolf caught her scent and proclaimed her lust.

Constanza recorded the Wieniawski *Légende.* She played the soaring violin part. A randy Pole composed the piece. The motif was explicitly Latin. Recurrent themes depicted star-crossed lovers aswirl.

Dudley sat in a harborside cantina. His booth overlooked the east-facing gulf. He sent Constanza a mash note-cum-invitation and got no response. He purchased her phonograph record and slipped it to the maître d'. A fat bribe assured steady play.

There's Constanza's solo now. Love subsumes conflict, conflict subsumes love. She'll walk in soon. She'll wear a white dress. One strap will slip off her bare shoulder. She'll hitch it up repeatedly. She's perfected the move.

Dudley chain-smoked. He wore his summer uniform and brown gun belt. Harbor craft bobbed a few feet away. A sea breeze hit open windows and cooled the place off.

Constanza walked up. She wore the white dress. He stood and bowed. Constanza laughed.

"I heard my third recapitulation, all the way out on the dock. I will reinterpret the composer's intent if I record the piece again."

Dudley smiled. "Don't spoil my interpretation. The piece infatuated me."

"You succumb to infatuation, as long as it serves you. It's a ruthless trait that I admire in men."

A waiter snapped to. He brought Cointreau on ice and Dudley's third scotch. Cointreau was her drink. The Wolf told him so. Constanza tucked her dress pleats and slid into the booth. Dudley sat across from her. Constanza sipped Cointreau and lit a cigarette.

"My impolitic maid warned me about you. She said, 'There's a strange man prowling the house, and looking at things that he shouldn't see.' "

"I saw you posed with beautiful animals and quite notable men. I was smitten at the airfield, and conquered when I saw you with the jaguar and your German friends."

Constanza twirled her ashtray. A dress strap slipped off her shoulder. She hitched it back up.

"My brother forewarned me. He said, 'Captain Smith is a voyeur who misses nothing. Poor boys confronted with affluence always love to look and touch. If there's anything you don't want him to see, you should hide it in advance of your party.' "

"And what did you hide?"

Constanza said, "I hid nothing."

Dudley lit a cigarette and twirled his ashtray. Their fingers brushed.

"You brother intercedes in your life in a manner that some might find unseemly. My friend Salvy Abascal told me that."

"Did Salvy tell you that I am his occasional lover? He has his child bride, who will supply him with children, and the women he ruts with and talks to."

The cantina was built on a barge. Waves tapped loose pilings. Constanza swayed in time with them.

"It's the war, you see. You are the U.S. Army captain and certified foreign devil. My brother only trusts people who want things from him, once he has vetted their most pressing common concerns. He has had you surveilled and knows of the British soldiers you killed in your homeland. He knows of your rich *puta* lover Claire, and her odious beliefs. He knows of Claire's young charge Joan Klein, and has verified her outré stories of leftist intrigue. Would it surprise you to know that Joan's New York comrades are acquainted with the Koenigs, Ruth Szigeti, and Sandor Abromowitz? My brother interceded for me because he distrusts wartime alliances and knows more than I do. He considers you to be a voyeur and quite the rank amateur. He intercedes and looks out for me by accommodating my own voyeuristic impulse."

Dudley crushed his cigarette. "It's all alliance, is it not? Once again, we come back to the war and those we might learn to trust or distrust."

Constanza crushed her cigarette. "Alliances overlap. That is because spheres of interest and influence are ever mutating. In wartime, the only true common interests are profit and ultimate survival. Take the musical underground. In it, the musical Left and Right clash and just as often collude. It is all toward the end of profit and survival assured."

Dudley said, "I saw that at your party. Your photographs of Herr Kempff and Herr Böhm, and your exiles so bravely and disingenuously repatriated."

Constanza said, "You are perceptive. However amateurish, you compel me to report what my brother reports to me. There are mock traitors in the *Führer*'s high command, you see. They are strategically saving volubly articulate Jews from extermination. It is all part of an exoneration ruse, to be put into effect should Germany lose the war. An identical plan has been implemented in Russia. The Russians fear that the U.S. will invade their country should Germany lose the war. It is all about establishing moral credentials now, and paving the way for the appearance of redemption in what will surely be a bitter and rancorous postwar era. It also asserts the need for a mutual accommodation of Communist and fascist beliefs in the present, so that both sides will be couched to prove themselves indispensible to the ultimate victors."

Dudley stirred his drink. Constanza's strap slipped down her arm. He reached over and pulled it up. Constanza touched his hand.

"Let's see if I can extrapolate off the point you just made. I would guess that our current exile friends and all others that may follow will be put to use as informants. They've served the cause of Communist-fascist amity. But their efficacy should not stop there."

Constanza said, "My brother allows that you are quick. You confirm it by keeping up with me."

"You keep bringing up your brother's intercessions. His influence daunts me. I've begun to think of him as a rival and romantic impediment."

Constanza smiled. "We will get to the topic of the two of us in good time."

"Pray forgive my great haste."

Constanza smiled and lit a cigarette. Her hair was brown more than black. She was pale more than tan. She wore a man's wristwatch.

"My brother knows a *comunista* named Meyer Gelb. Comrade Gelb is working on the Russian end of the exoneration scheme I described to you. Russian émigrés, badly used by Stalin, will be approached by my brother and suborned as informants, wherever they are resettled. Meyer will approach the Koenigs, Mr. Abromowitz, and Miss Szigeti in Los Angeles."

Red Meyer. The Griffith Park Fire. Gelb's '33 cell. Brother and sister know Kyoho Hanamaka. The intersections failed to surprise him.

"Let me extrapolate. Your brother knows high-ups in the Fatherland. Comrade Gelb knows high-ups in Mother Russia. You're describing a blackmail racket."

Strolling musicians dipped by. They jiggled jangly maracas. Constanza went *Shoo.*

"Yes, and I should add that Comrade Gelb has marvelous dirt on the Koenigs, old Abromowitz, and Miss Szigeti. They sold three hundred Jewish musicians into the *Führer*'s death camps in order to save their own skins."

Dudley lit a cigarette. "You are telling me quite a great deal. I find it as disconcerting as your brother's unseen presence at our table."

Constanza laughed outright. She covered her mouth, double quick. She had pronounced buck teeth.

"I was Kyoho Hanamaka's lover. He showed me the gold bayonet you later found at his hideaway. Like you, I had heard of a companion piece, adorned with Soviet symbols."

"I mentioned the Communist bayonet to your brother. Let me hazard a guess here. You had his living room bugged."

"Yes. Again, I'll state that you are very perceptive."

Their hands were close. Dudley touched her fingers.

"Again, I'll state that you are telling me quite a great deal."

Constanza squeezed his hand. "You want the gold. Men like you deem such treasures irresistible. I share your desire, body and soul."

The barge lurched. Dudley lurched. The room went double hot. He saw gold bars that weren't really there.

"Do you know where it is, or who has it? As much as it pains me to ask, does your brother know?"

Constanza said, "I don't know, nor does my brother. Kyoho most likely knows—but he is hiding somewhere undisclosed in the U.S."

The room went triple hot. Dudley fluffed his napkin and wiped his face. Constanza leaned in and undid his necktie.

"Much of this dates back to a fire in Los Angeles. Kyoho and Comrade Gelb were burned there. Gelb lays the source of his wounds on the Spanish Civil War, which is rubbish. Kyoho tells a similarly self-serving lie. My brother and I know all of this—but no more."

"And you don't know who has the gold now?"

"The alliance that I have described to you has many layers of buffering. The top few men surely know the status of the gold. My brother is just a minor cog, who tells me things. I am a woman, and no cog at all."

Dudley cracked their window and roused some gulf air. Constanza opened her clutch and removed a vial of perfume. She daubed her left wrist and held out her arm. Dudley took her hand and kissed the scented spot.

"And the *Kameraden*'s ultimate plans for the gold?"

"The establishment and implementation of a strategy of escape, resettlement, and credible exoneration. Select members of the world's great totalitarian regimes, collaborating toward that end. Beyond that end, I know only of plans to hoard the gold and invest in U.S. defense industries, to further induce gratitude in our presumed conquerors, and to increase the likelihood that the new identities of our comrades will not be revealed."

Dudley said, "Darling, you are recklessly impolitic. However much your revelations excite me."

Constanza said, “I know something about you. The gold would be incomplete for you without a woman.”

—

Dawn broke bright and warm. Ensenada looked drab. La Paz creamed it, hands down. Ensenada was T.J. South. La Paz was Saint-Tropez for Irish arrivistes.

Dudley elevatored up to his suite. He was dead bushed. He closed that harborside haunt with Constanza and caught a late Army flight back.

He yawned and saw fatigue spots. He unlocked the door and saw Beth asleep on the couch.

The bedroom door stood ajar. Overhead lights snapped on. He heard radio hum.

He walked in. The fatigue spots made him blink. Claire threw herself at him.

She hit his chest and spit in his face.

She clawed at his mouth.

She ripped the buttons off his coat and tore the captain’s bars off his shoulders.

She beat at his face.

She defamed his redheaded whore and hexed her in Hell.

She called him a “fascist insect.”

She called him a “cowardly killer.”

She hurled herself up at him and bit off a piece of one ear.

It’s Dublin again. It’s 1919. He’s out sniping British soldiers. He comes home to Maidred Conroy Smith. She wields her razor strop.

84

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 A.M., 3/4/42)

I waited on my front porch. I was to be Otto's goodwill ambassadress and accompany him to Union Station. We would greet four Austro-Hungarian string players, late of Nazi concentration camps. A cryptically defined relief organization had secured their release and brought them here via steamship, transport airline, and overnight train trek from Baja. The extravagantly generous Maestro had secured them courtyard apartments in Santa Monica. My contribution was good cheer and a grocery bag stuffed with two-dollar champagne and paper cups.

The day was bright and cool; I glanced across the street and down to the Strip. A PD prowl car was parked at the curb, just above Sunset. I had no doubts as to the occupant. This is what Captain Bill Parker does. He perches outside the homes of provocative young women and plots his next move. He intrudes, he entraps, he blunderingly seduces. Ask yours truly and the late Joan Conville.

Bill had something on his mind now. Provocation abets provocation. I had sent Joan's diary special delivery. He'd received it, read it, and wanted to talk.

Otto's big Chrysler turned left on Wetherly and headed up to me; the chauffeur wheeled a clumsy U-turn and bumped the curb in front of my house. I walked over and hopped in the back. The Maestro kissed my cheek and wrangled me in. We passed the prowl car, southbound. Bill slept behind the wheel. Incident recalls incident. Joan returned home from a party at the Maestro Manse and found Bill parked outside. She wrote her first diary pages with Bill passed out on her bed.

It was a half-hour drive downtown, and Otto wanted to yak. I positioned myself on his good side and played to his vanity. The brain tumor had constricted his facial muscles and marred his fierce good looks. It made conversation difficult and frustrated a man born to yak at great length. Otto is six-foot-seven and disposed to yak and command. When Otto yaks, one listens.

We lit cigarettes. Otto settled in to run discourse. Dr. Saul Lesnick had diagnosed the tumor. Otto credited Dr. Saul with saving his life; I credited Dr. Saul with the array of damning mischief exposed in Joan's diary.

The Maestro held forth. He was composing a nightmare tone poem in the Richard Strauss–*Elektra* mode. The piece would depict events that had occurred in his own haunted house. Declining chords would portray a murderous occurrence in Nazi Germany's past and sequentially link it to a rumored reenactment in his own home. The orchestral part would subside to a hush then. Low-register piano chords would announce the first of his brain-tumor blackouts.

The Maestro yakked orchestral structure, and paused only to light cigarettes. I squeezed in a few questions about our goodwill mission and how our exile chums had escaped Europe. Otto cited vague rumors. Exoneration-minded Nazis had bounced for their repatriation. They were moved out on a transport flight to Mexico; the airplane was loaded up with precious mercury ore for the return flight. Our exiles comprised a first refugee wave. Otto said it seemed like a ruse to him; exoneration-minded Russians were purportedly releasing prisoners to establish their own humanitarian credentials.

The blithe hypocrisy stunned me. I asked Otto where he picked up the "vague rumors." He said, "A chatty Communist named Meyer Gelb told me. The man impressed as fraudulent, so perhaps the rumors themselves are just propaganda or idle schmooze of some sort."

Meyer Gelb appeared in Joan's diary. Joan met him at the Maestro Manse. His Communist cellmates Jean Staley and Saul and Andrea Lesnick attended the same party. The cell was scrutinized in the Griffith Park fire inquiry. Joan considered the cell germane to the welter of cases that had so consumed her and Hideo Ashida. I asked Otto how he came to meet Meyer Gelb. Otto said, "He's Saul Lesnick's analysand. Saul invites him to my parties."

—

We found our chums by the taxi stand outside Union Station. They stood by a large mound of luggage and stringed-instrument cases. It was an up-to-the-moment Ellis Island snapshot. They weren't quite the huddled masses. They looked exhausted and apprehensive and exhibited not one ounce of relief.

Sandor Abromowitz fell into Otto's arms; they were former comrades from the Berlin Opera. The Koenigs were heavyset, frail, and proud. I carried their luggage, but they refused to take my arm for support. Magda Koenig gave me the stink eye. She figured me for a party-crashing dilettante and Otto's young whore. Ruth Szigeti was thin and wobbled on brand-new high heels. She took my arm and wasted no time bumming a cigarette. Her flat, straight hair and hollow cheeks were straight out of Brecht and the horror musicales of Weimar Berlin. She had schizophrenic gray-green eyes and warmed to the notion of brushing against me. I pegged her as a lezbo or at least an avant-garde creature who veered any and all ways.

The gang piled into Otto's imperial-sized auto. The chauffeur pulled down the jump seat, but we were still strapped for room. The Maestro yanked fat Abromowitz up on his lap; the frail Koenigs scrunched in side by side. The jump seat was narrow and built for one only. I staked my claim and hopped onto it. Ruth Szigeti staked her claim and hopped onto my lap. She said, "Do you mind, *Liebchen*?" I said, "Given your ordeal, how could I?"

The chauffeur pointed us westbound on Wilshire Boulevard. Otto played host and served up my bargain-basement champagne. War and music talk bubbled in English, French, and German. There was no talk of death camps or the oppression of Jews in Hitler's Germany. An implicit pact rendered the topic verboten. I stifled my curiosity and kept my mouth shut.

Otto was throwing a party tonight. He announced it and leaned back to read reactions. Mr. Abromowitz and the Koenigs went stone-faced. Ruth Szigeti said, "Will you be there, *Liebchen*?" I assured her that I would be and summoned up my own ideal guest list.

Claire De Haven and Meyer Gelb. *There's* two party cards. I'd love to meet Communist carhop Jean Staley. What about Dr. Saul and Andrea Lesnick? I went back to Bill Parker's incursion with them and would *adore* a chance to get reacquainted. Don't forget Orson Welles, Dudley's newly cowed informant. He might be in the market for a new steam room pal.

Magda Koenig gagged on cigarette smoke and rolled down a window. I looked out and saw that a PD prowl car was providing an escort. Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle sat in the front seat; a man in Mexican Statie garb sat in the back. Breuning looked over and saw me. I waved; he waved back. Carlisle yelled, "Hey there, Kay!"

Mrs. Koenig rolled up her window and cut off the exchange. I got chills in an overheated limo. Ruth Szigeti jiggled into me and draped an arm around my neck.

Joan's diary. Dudley Smith's orbit. The ubiquity of a single rogue policeman.

We journeyed through Beverly Hills and West L.A. A sea breeze welcomed us to Santa Monica. The chauffeur turned north on 4th Street and pulled up in front of a palm-lined courtyard. Our exile chums got out and surveyed their new home. Ruth Szigeti reluctantly undraped me. Her left blouse sleeve had rolled up; I saw knife scars and an ominous tattoo.

I got out last. I smelled salt air and watched the prowl car park behind us. The chauffeur unloaded the luggage and instruments; Otto escorted the gang to their new digs. The Maestro owned numerous beachside properties, the

Seabreeze Court among them. He was forfeiting rental income from three bohemian bungalows. Otto Klemperer defined noblesse oblige.

I lagged back and strolled over to the prowl car. Breuning and Carlisle were piling gift baskets on the hood of the sled. The baskets featured withered fruit and cheese of the hold-your-nose ilk.

The Statie introduced himself. He was Captain Juan Pimentel. The captain was an emissary of Governor Juan Lazaro-Schmidt and the governor's friend Dudley Smith. The baskets denoted the governor's warm *bienvenidos* to our immigrant pals.

Pimentel impressed me as a vicious little shit. His spiel indicted the repatriation plan as a shuck. Meyer Gelb had uttered "vague rumors." That was suspect in itself.

Pimentel clicked his heels. "Your new Americans are the first wave of the governor's humanitarian effort to rescue persecuted Jews from the horrors of fascist Germany."

I pointed to his SS-style hat. His spit-shined jackboots and flap-holstered Luger were just as snazzy. I said, "I'm all for the rescue of persecuted Jews, but I must note that you dress fasco yourself."

Pimentel clicked his heels. It expressed disdain and moral confusion. He clicked his heels again. It gave him something to do and suppressed his urge to kill infidel women.

Breuning and Carlisle cracked grins. *That Kay Lake's a sketch.* I'd belted a few with Sid Hudgens at the PD's New Year's bash. The Sidster plied his crazy craft. He called Mike and Dick "maladroit mastiffs on a mission to maul for their master." And, *who's* their master?

Who else but?

—

Rain drove the party indoors. That was okay by me. Joan described the Maestro Manse as a lodestone for the Meyer Gelb–Saul Lesnick set. I came to perch and observe. Sid Hudgens had attended numerous Klemperer soirées. He called them "bilious bacchanals and Baedekers of early-wartime indulgence." Sid was right about that. The Klemperer crowd came to harangue, gesticulate, bloviate, and dubiously critique. *I* was there to worry the Griffith Park fire and the proximity of Meyer Gelb's cell.

I stationed myself on the second-floor landing and looked down on the huge main room. I had been home to change clothes and see if Bill Parker was still poised to pounce. He wasn't. He'd be back, though. He'd have Joan's diary memorized and worried down to page pulp.

The party swirled below me. Mr. Abromowitz and the Koenigs beat back admirers; Ruth Szigeti drifted off with Barbara "Butch" Stanwyck. Party delirium had set in. Folks harangued, gesticulated, bloviated, and dubiously critiqued. Cigarette smoke obscured faces. Saul Lesnick arrived with a zaftig young woman. I recognized her. It was Annie Staples, Elmer and Brenda's college-girl vixen. Elmer told me she was jobbing Dr. Saul for the Feds. Elmer had worked the camera at Brenda's Miracle Mile trick spot, and had caught Annie's act.

Orson Welles arrived. I noticed his plastic-surgery scars straight off. The Sidster told me that Terry Lux did the plastic job. It smoothed out the obvious signs of the Dudster's thumping. Claire arrived, with two young girls in tow. The older girl was Beth Something. She was Dudley's reputed spawn. I made the younger girl as Joan Something. She was Dudley and Claire's *enfant sauvage.* Joan Conville's diary supplied explication. Joan Something perplexed Dudley. He found her otherworldly and considered her a counterpart to his fantasy wolf. Claire was haggard, ever the doomed poetess. I knew her MO. She'd seek out Dr. Saul and hit him up for a fix.

The party would run late. Otto's parties always did. I had time for an interregnum before I hit the main floor. I ducked into the conservatory and sat down at the piano. "Sonata Reminiscenza" was embedded within me and fully memorized. I decided to play it all the way through.

The piece demands a meditative approach. It is both pictorial and diffuse. The piece depicts recollection and portrays the sweet heartbreak of time lost and recalled. I always mark the moment as I sit down to practice it. Today is March 4, 1942. I am twenty-two years old and have knocked around a bit. A late and dear friend of mine willed me some words she wrote. The words comprise a debt I must repay and punitive measures I must enact. This is for Joan Woodard Conville.

So, I played. I hit notes too soft, too hard, and just right. I veered off the established score and hit notes to the words "This storm, this savaging disaster." I veered back to the score and lost myself in shifting tempos. Someone entered the room behind me; I heard rudely loud footsteps in approach.

"You're playing Nikolai Medtner. I hate him, because he hates the Bolsheviks."

I stopped playing and looked up. Joan Something stood to the right of the bench. She wore a red party dress I'd seen Claire in. A tailor had altered the sleeves and hemline to fit someone much smaller. Joan Something was fifteen or sixteen and discernably otherworldly. She wore dark-framed glasses; her black hair bore gray streaks.

"I'm sorry, but I don't know your name."

"Sure, you do. My aunt Claire says you know everything. I'm Comrade Joan, and you're Comrade Kay, but you're really not much of a comrade if you like Medtner."

I said, "Rachmaninoff hates the Bolsheviks. Scriabin hated them, as well. I'd say that puts Medtner in good company."

"You think you're clever, but you're really just glib. Rachmaninoff and Scriabin are yesterday's news. Comrade Shostakovich is au courant. I'm part of the collective that's smuggling in his new symphony, in case you think I'm just a silly young girl who has no business being in Comrade Otto's house."

She spoke Brooklynese. She had Dudley Smith's small brown eyes. She flexed her jaw while she spoke and glared more than looked at you. Her part in the smuggling effort surprised me. I felt confluences merge.

"It was nice of you to come up for this party, Comrade. I'm sure Comrade Otto appreciates it."

Comrade Joan lowered her voice. She leaned against the piano and dropped into stage-whisper range.

"I've gone undercover down in Mexico. My fake dad's an Army officer in Ensenada. My aunt Claire's his lover, but I don't think for much longer. My mock dad's a fascist, but he's nice to women, even though he cheats on Aunt Claire. He's got a wife and five real daughters, and his illegitimate daughter is nice, but she's stupid and boy crazy."

I said, "You're very perceptive, Comrade."

The girl swooped over to the low-register keys. She sat down at the bench and banged the first four notes of Beethoven's Fifth. She did it one time, two times, three times—each time harder and faster. I looked over my shoulder and saw Claire De Haven standing in the doorway.

We stared at each other and nodded in sync. Comrade Joan hopped off the bench and ran to her mock mom. They disappeared down the hallway.

So much for Comrade Medtner. Comrade Claire and Comrade Joan had excised him for now. I walked back to my observation perch and looked down at the party floor.

The Koenigs and Mr. Abromowitz remained bombarded and beleaguered. Partygoers continued to harangue, gesticulate, bloviate, and dubiously critique. I scanned the room for new faces and spotted Meyer Gelb.

He'd been pointed out to me at a previous party. There he was now—tall, florid, heavyset. Joan had run nationwide records checks on him. They turned up negative; he had no listed address and no driver's license issued within the forty-eight states. He came to Otto's parties in cabs. Joan had noted his burn-scarred hands and had surmised the source as the Griffith Park fire. Gelb was waving his hands in Magda Koenig's face at this very moment.

I scanned the room again. Faces popped in and out of smoke clouds. I saw Ruth Szigeti necking with Butch Stanwyck's husband, Robert Taylor. Butch herself watched and delightedly grinned. Someone called out "Jean!" A woman turned and walked toward the voice.

Jean, as in Staley. Slender, dark-haired, stylish glasses. It had to be her—she fit Joan's precise description. She entered my line of sight from the back of the house; her hair was noticeably wet. I wondered where she had just come from.

I walked downstairs and through the big room. It was all war-talk cacophony and gesticulation. Dr. Saul held court for daughter Andrea and Miklos Koenig; I noticed Andrea notice me. She had buzz-sawed me at a Claire De Haven party in mid-December. Andrea lived to harangue, gesticulate, and *dish.* Party guests were her *very* favorite victims. She tended to *find* people. I walked out the terrace, to let her find me.

I sat in a deck chair and looked out at the rain. Wind buckled the awning above me. I counted days backward to the Rice-Kapek murders. January 29 to March 4. That made thirty-five.

The investigation had gone fallow since the catastrophic blackout and Joan's suicide. Hideo split his duty time between L.A. and Baja; Dudley rarely attended briefings. The Crash Squad continued to meet and hash out go-nowhere leads. Lee reported an overarching sense of futility. His drunk act on the jazz-club strip had gleaned no leads; the Negro riot had turned jazz-club regulars that much more truculent. Thad Brown teethed on the bootjacked guns. He was planning to run an East L.A. youth sweep. Rice and Kapek had purportedly sold a good many firearms to Mexican hoodlums.

"Hello, Miss Lake. I haven't seen you in a dog's age. I chewed your ear off at one of Claire's dos, remember?"

I pulled a chair up beside me; Andrea slumped down and kicked off her shoes. She wore a man's greatcoat over her party dress. The left breast pocket was pinned with Spanish Civil War medals. Meyer Gelb had worn that coat just a few minutes back.

Andrea's hands were a mess. Her nails were chewed bloody; her fingers were nicotine-stained. I lit two cigarettes and passed her one. Let's dish, Andrea. How about Meyer Gelb as a topic?

"I like that coat you're wearing, Andrea. It's not yours, is it? It's much too big for you."

Andrea jiggled the breast-pocket medals. She said, "To hear Meyer tell it, he killed more fascists than the Red Guard at Leningrad. I think he bought them from an old lefty down on his luck, and passed them off as his own."

"He must have whole rooms full of that sort of junk at his house."

"If he has a house. If he doesn't sleep in a coffin like Dracula, and come out only at night. If he doesn't just appear at Mr. Klemperer's parties to grandstand and schmooze up his old comrades."

"You're saying that nobody knows where he lives?"

Andrea flicked her cigarette out in the rain. She'd smoked it in ten seconds flat.

"'Kay Lake's nosy. She's a fascist chippy and keeps her ear to the ground.' Claire De Haven told me that."

"'Andrea Lesnick loves to tattle.' A little birdie told me that."

Andrea giggled and made bird sounds. "'Miss Lake's a hoot.' That's my grand pronouncement, and I figured it out for myself."

"Yes, and what have you figured out about Comrade Gelb?"

"What's to figure? Meyer's Meyer. My daddy and I were in his cell back in the early '30s, and Meyer went off to the Spanish Civil War, and he became this big hero and got his hands burned in a pitched battle with Franco's Falange. Or, there's the persistent rumor that Meyer and some Jap Navy man were doing acid dips on their fingerprints way back."

Or, he burned his hands in the Griffith Park fire.

"Was the Navy man's name Kyoho Hanamaka?"

"I don't know. Rumors are rumors. All I know is that it was just some loopy Jap."

"Jean Staley was in your cell, wasn't she? She's here at the party now."

Andrea snatched my cigarettes. She lit one up and dropped the pack in her purse. The awning dripped rain just a few feet away.

"Meyer's Meyer and Jean's Jean. Everybody made her for a snitch way back when. The CP was full of snitches then, and everybody made Jean for a secret right-winger, because she was such a conniver and a square. She's a carhop, but she sucks up to rich people in the arts. She bunks in their guesthouses, like she's hiding out and on the lam, even though she's got a nice little place in Hollywood. My daddy says Jean's a piece of work. She plans theme parties for rich people and hides out like the bogeyman's on her case. She's holed up in Mr. Klemperer's guesthouse right now, and she leaves the curtains down all the time. My daddy says she's a nympho and an exhibitionist. He said she blew Clark Gable at a party, while all the other guests watched."

Andrea paused to catch her breath and chain cigarettes. I mulled the Jean Staley dish. Jean's name appeared in Tommy Glennon's address book. Kyoho Hanamaka touched the book and left a burn-scarred fingerprint. Jean Staley was on Elmer Jackson and Buzz Meeks' interview list. Jean was bunked up across the backyard. That fact explained her wet hair.

Andrea stood up and slipped her shoes on; Meyer Gelb's greatcoat brushed the ground. She said, "'Miss Lake's not as smart as she thinks she is.' My daddy told me that. 'Miss Lake's a stooge for the L.A. cops.' That's another good one you can chalk up for Claire."

I stood up and extended my hand. I almost said, "Thanks for the dish, kid." Andrea swatted my hand and skipped back inside the house.

It was midnight. The party was approaching its gesticulating and fawning nadir, and the guesthouse lights were still on. I walked to the door of the main house and peered in. Jean Staley was ardently occupied with Mr. Abromowitz and the Koenigs. Mr. Abromowitz snoozed while Jean gesticulated and fawned.

I took off my shoes and ran across wet grass to the guesthouse; rain plastered my dress and soaked me down to my skin. The shades were up and wind had blown the door all the way open. Careless Jean. Exhibitionist Jean. Sloppy Jean, ditto.

The front room was a jumble of tossed clothes and dumped cosmetics. I walked into the bedroom and left squished-stocking footprints. Jean would know there had been an intruder. An open suitcase sat on the bed. A stack of picture postcards was arrayed atop a pile of lingerie.

The cards displayed the Mississippi River and the low skyline of Des Moines. I turned the top card over and whooped audibly. It was addressed to Elmer V. Jackson. Elmer's address was scrawled below.

Jean plied Sergeant Elmer with schmaltzy greetings from the American Midwest. The postmark caught my eye and stopped me cold.

It was postmarked Des Moines. But it wasn't a *canceled* postmark. It was dated March 9. Today's date was March 4.

I checked the rest of the cards. All four featured Des Moines pictorials and breezy greetings to Elmer; all four featured uncanceled Des Moines postmarks. The postmarks ran a full week ahead of today's actual date. That meant the postal cancellations and forwarding would be accomplished in L.A.; that meant Comrade Jean was jobbing and/or sleeping with horndog Elmer. It meant that Elmer had become entangled with a material witness in his own brother's probable arson death.

I left everything where it was and squished back across the wet grass to the party. I ignored the bloviators and gesticulators and squished upstairs to the conservatory. Otto kept spare blankets in a closet there. I grabbed one and swaddled myself. The couch by the piano supplied a cozy roost. I stretched out to think and/or doze.

Goofball Elmer and *What Is This?* fought the tug of my late-night exhaustion. My next-door neighbor's cat jumped on the couch, but I knew he didn't really. I saw picture postcards of Des Moines and heard Joan's casket go *thunk.* A woman said, "Katherine?"

I opened my eyes. Claire De Haven was perched on the edge of the couch. Claire, the doomed poetess. Edna St. Vincent Millay for the poor.

Who had aged since the first time I saw her. Who had given herself to Dudley Smith. Who held a rosary and prayed for Dudley to survive my knife wounds. Who survived the idiot onslaught of Bill Parker and my dilettante self.

Her fingers were as tobacco-stained as Andrea Lesnick's. I said the first thing that came to me. It was, "Oh shit. I'm sorry."

Her voice was raw. "It's not enough."

"It has to be."

"You gained my trust and betrayed me. It's not within me to forgive you."

"Ask Monsignor Hayes about forgiveness. Ask Bill Parker the next time you see him at Mass."

"He's a man. I expect less from them. I expect women of your caliber to behave more gallantly."

I said, "Word travels, Claire. I'm a prairie slattern and a switchblade assailant, or so you believe. How could I behave gallantly?"

She said, "I admire your sense of risk, even as I despise you."

I said, "I admire your ability to withstand Dudley Smith, even as your love for him confounds me."

A single tear ran down her cheek. I reached up and brushed it away.

"Will you continue to crash the party, Katherine? Will you continue to bombard people who've done you no harm?"

"You threw the party, and I crashed it. You instilled the sense of risk that you see in me. I'll repay the debt and nullify my meager apology."

Claire took my hand and placed it back on her cheek. She kissed the palm and placed my fingers in her mouth. Her eyes flickered between hard and soft. She placed my hand on her breast. The nipple pebbled up at my touch.

"Sweet girl, you don't know who you are."

"Dear lady, you don't know my resolve."

—

Bill's prowl sled was parked in front of my house. He tapped his headlights as I swung into the driveway; I got out of my car and got into his.

Joan's diary was there on the seat. Bill turned on the roof light and illuminated the pages. I leafed through the stack. Bill had marked the full manuscript in red ink.

He handed me his flask; I took a sip and passed it back. Bill killed the roof light. Late-night shadows fell over us; light rain tapped the windshield.

"You've been to a party, and your dress took a beating."

"I would have asked you to escort me, but I thought your wife might disapprove."

Bill said, "Don't get catty. We have things to discuss."

I squared off the manuscript between us. The numbered pages ran to 324. Joan wrote them in one month's time.

"You should hear this injunction first. I'll expose any and all manufactured resolutions to the klub*haus* case, regardless of how it affects the craven deals you've cut with Dudley Smith."

Bill nipped on his flask and mumbled in Latin. He started to cross himself; I reached out and pinned his hand to the seat.

“Send one up for Joan, before you even think of the plight you’re in. Think of what your sweaty crush got her.”

Bill sighed. It was too dark to see his face. I pictured him rolling his eyes and thinking, *For the love of God, WOMEN.*

I hit him. I swung around and punched his face and knocked his glasses into the backseat. Bill wiped his mouth and reached for the flask; I grabbed it first and tossed it out my window.

“You killed her. Don’t put it off on Dudley for one instant. She killed six people in a drunken stupor worthy of you, and you robbed her of the dignity of paying a just price for her actions. You wanted her, and that was all that mattered. You swooped down on her and used her, and she couldn’t resist Dudley, because he was so unlike you in all the easy ways and so like you in his soul. You used her, and Dudley used her, and you didn’t have the kindness or decency to pull her out of this crazy world you forced her into.”

Bill said, “Yes. But I’m the one you trusted with her diary.”

85

(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 A.M., 3/5/42)

Thad Brown said, "We're thirty-six days in. This job commenced back when Hitler was a corporal. It you're as bored as I am, raise your hand."

Ashida polled the room. Breuning and Carlisle raised their hands. Buzz Meeks raised his hand. Lee Blanchard raised two hands. Ray Pinker had assumed Joan's lab slot. He *Sieg Heil*'d Thad and roused some laughs.

Captain Parker looked hungover. He disdained Crash Squad shtick and kept his hands down. His lip was split, like somebody had smacked him. Elmer J. was AWOL. Dudley was down in La Paz.

The back room looked worn-out and threadbare. The food and booze inducement felt thin. The blackboard hung loose. The bulletin board drooped. The tacked reports wilted.

Ashida sipped coffee. He wore his winter Class As and gun belt. He scrolled back to Joan's place every half second. He'd betrayed Dudley there.

Thad said, "We've got collateral cases up the wazoo now. We've got the Lunceford snuff and that Hanamaka guy that Elmer ID'd. We've got the klub*haus* arson, and the presence of that hideout crib down the block. And don't tell me the proximity is a coincidence."

Ray Pinker said, "I've forensic'd the place three times. It was repeatedly vacuumed, so there's no trace elements worth a shit. I can't turn a latent print to save my life. There's rubber-glove prints on all the room surfaces and cooking utensils, so I'd bet the inhabitants were gloved up at all times."

Thad leaned into the blackboard. "What about the klub*haus* torch?"

Pinker kicked his chair back. "It was deliberately set. I found powdered-accelerant traces on a downstairs floorboard. The first floor ignited, and the rioters caught arson fever and started chucking bottle bombs."

Breuning said, "Monkey see, monkey do. The firebug lays down the accelerant and drops a match. He's got the blackout and all the air-raid grief for cover. The jigs go all copycat and get up a bonfire."

Thad cracked his knuckles. "We're coming up against that Miciak shitheel's statement. There's the sheer bulk of all the criminal and PD-implicated shit that transpired at the klub*haus.* We've got to work the confiscated guns that Rice and Kapek were selling. I want to run a sweep out of Hollenbeck Station. We'll raise some hell, rattle some cages, and see if we can tie some beaners to our homicides."

The room rumbled. *That's* policework. The boys foot-stomped the floor. Ashida went *aw-OH.*

Blanchard said, "My so-called drunk act on the jazz strip is going nowhere. I'm a well-known cop, and the coons have got all closemouthed since the riot."

Carlisle smirked. "Mr. Celebrity. 'The Southland's good but not great white hope.' He spawns fear and envy wherever he goes."

Blanchard kicked Carlisle's chair. Carlisle cringed and *un*smirked. Fight fever peaked and fizzled, fast.

Thad pitched Blanchard. "You and Lieutenant Ashida work a Mutt and Jeff and comb the strip again. We've got to ID the women who left those pubic-hair samples."

Blanchard said, "We should try to ID the other cops who habituated the klub*haus.* We might pull some leads there."

Thad went *nix.* "Chief Horrall says no. He thinks it'll open a whole can of worms."

The Teletype clacked and unfurled paper. Parker walked up and tore out the sheet.

He read it. He rubbed his split lip. He glanced at Ashida.

"They're moving the Werewolf back to Atascadero today. I thought you'd want to know."

—

Ashida watched the move-out. Sayonara, Werewolf—thanks for the memories.

Two male nurses plucked him out of his cell. They wrestled him to the catwalk floor and shot him up with jungle juice. The Werewolf flailed and bared his fangs. He bayed at some nutso moon and went loosed-limb floaty.

Ashida stood close by. The nurses fish-eyed him. He's a Jap. He's Army brass. Who gave him that .45? The Werewolf's his daddy.

They cuffed and shackled the Werewolf. They straitjacket-wrapped him. They grabbed his arms and wrangled him upstairs and outside. Ashida followed them out.

Newshounds sent a cheer up. Sid Hudgens and Jack Webb led the pack. The hounds howled and pawed the sidewalk outside Central Station. Flashbulbs pop-pop-popped.

Ashida blinked back bulb glare. Monster Matinee. He saw passing papas hold their toddlers up to watch.

Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle lounged on the steps. Breuning flicked his cigarette butt and hit the Werewolf's back. A little girl tossed her ice-cream cone and missed the Werewolf by inches. The Sidster scribbled up a scratch pad.

A nuthouse wagon idled curbside. The driver slid out a gurney on casters. The nurses hoisted the Werewolf and triple-wrapped him in. More flashbulbs popped.

The nurses hopped in the back. The driver fishtailed eastbound on 1st Street. News fotogs snapped Ashida. He's this Jap stoic. He's all dolled up, Army style.

Ashida rubbed his eyes. That bulb glare had him seeing double. He saw two Elmer Jacksons, straight across the street. Two Elmers bolted the Moonglow Lounge and booze-weaved toward the station.

Ashida blinked and got back his eyesight. He saw one Elmer now. Elmer stumbled over the curb and made straight for him. He got up in booze-breath range and cut loose.

You little Jap shit/you should have told me/my brother died in that fire/you fuckers wanted the gold/I watchdogged your ass when the Japs bombed Pearl/ you should have told me/you little Jap shit, you—

Mike Breuning stepped in. He grabbed Elmer's coat collar and jerked him half off his feet. Elmer wheeled and sucker punched him. His Marine Corps ring gouged Breuning's cheek down to the bone. Breuning yelped and threw sissy punches. Elmer moved close and slammed elbows. He smashed Breuning's nose, Breuning's teeth, Breuning's dumb jug head overall. He put Breuning down on the ground and kicked one jug ear half off.

86

(LOS ANGELES, 11:00 A.M., 3/5/42)

His elbow hurt. He was skunk drunk. Breuning's snaggle teeth snagged up his suit coat. He snagged Dumb Cracker of All Time honors. They foretold his futile fate. Dudley Smith would fuck him up the dirt road.

Elmer lurched through City Hall. He lurched toward the Vice squadroom and his cozy cubicle. He lurched by sweatbox row. He thought he saw Buzz Meeks in box #2. He lurched past box #3 and hit the home stret—

Something bushwhacked him. Two geeks snatched him and shoved him into box #4. He hit the bolted-down table and plopped into the bolted-down chair.

Bill Parker kicked the door shut. Thad Brown thunked a thermos down on the table. Parker unscrewed the top and poured out hot coffee.

Elmer took a test sip. It burned his tongue and stung his teeth. Parker and Brown pulled up chairs. Parker said, "We talked to Buzz Meeks. He told us you forged up Tommy Glennon's address book and placed it at the klub*haus.* He also mentioned that the two of you put the boots to Huey Cressmeyer, down in T.J. Huey purportedly snitched off Dudley Smith's racket schemes, up here and in Baja."

Elmer sipped too-hot coffee. His hands shook. He scoped Parker's fat lip and willed savoir faire.

"Who smacked you, Bill? Was it Kay, or some other swift college girl?"

Brown chortled. "My money's on Kay."

Parker deadpanned the shtick. "We don't know if Meeks gave us the whole drift on you two and Huey, and it doesn't really matter. The spatials on the Lunceford shooting are off, and you've quite noticeably ditched your ankle piece. That doesn't matter, either. You fired it on a liquor-store stakeout in October of '40, and a spent-ballistics file exists. Guess what, dipshit? We got a match to the pills you pumped into Catbox Cal."

The green room looms. The last mile beckons. Your ass is grass, son.

"So, I'm fucked."

Brown shook his head. "No, you're not. Lunceford was Fifth Column, and he was in with that Jap hump, Hanamaka. You're getting a waltz on Manslaughter One. We consider the shooting kosher, and this room is as far as it goes."

Parker said, "Thad and I have read Joan Conville's diary, and I've discussed the text with Kay Lake. I know that Miss Lake has discussed that text with you and Hideo Ashida, but I'll add that she omitted one key narrative thread."

No green room. The coffee had cooled down. Elmer took a big gulp.

"I already figured that out. The Dudster, Joan, and that little shit Ashida were out for the gold from the git-go. I sensed that Kay was fibbing on that. She didn't tell me, because she thought I'd go berserk on account of my brother. She didn't tell Ashida, because he's Dudley's lapdog, and he's a participant in this whole crazy gold hunt anyways."

Brown smiled. "Elmer's not as dumb as most folks think he is."

Parker said, "Let's not get carried away."

Elmer yukked. The coffee diffused the booze. Son, you're in the catbird seat.

"Okay, then. We got our three big cases, going back to '31. You two, me, Buzz, Kay, and maybe Ashida want a pure solve on the klub*haus* job—but Jack H. and the Dudster want to put the onus off on some shines. And you two are all ditzed, because Bill clean-solved the Watanabe job and kept mum on it, and our pal Jim Davis killed them Watanabes, and you don't want that leaking out, and Dud told Joan Conville that he intends to pentothal Jim D. to see if he spills any crossover leads to the klub*haus* caper. One of you's our next chief. Jack Horrall's afraid of Bill, because his grand-jury plays served to get the Werewolf sprung, and Jack can't retaliate. You want my opinion on that?"

Parker sighed. "Give us your esteemed opinion, Sergeant."

Elmer stood up and kicked blood back in his legs. He scratched his balls and worked up some brain juice.

"Judge and jury will sure as shit acquit Fletch B., Call-Me-Jack, Ray Pinker, and the Jamie kid, along with all them others. That's for-sure gospel—regardless of Bill's testimony. While I've got you here, I'll tell you why. J. Edgar Hoover don't want bad blood between the Feds and the PD, not when we got this here Jap internment to deal with. You got a spell of time to make hay on the klub*haus* job, before the acquittals come down, and Jack H. figures he can pull the plug on the job and give Dud his marching orders, and then it's good-bye, jigaboos."

Parker sighed anew. "You're right, Thad. He's not as dumb as folks think."

Elmer hoot-hooted. Brown said, "Meeks told us that Ed Satterlee offered you a shot to listen to the Fed's phone and bug recordings and delete your own voice. I'd like you to provide that same service for Captain Parker and me."

Elmer plunked back down in his chair. He hooked his thumbs in his suspenders and put his feet up on the desk.

"In exchange for what?"

Parker said, "In exchange for let bygones be bygones. That means any and all illegal and questionable shit that you've pulled since New Year's. That stated, I'll add that we're easing Breuning and Carlisle off the job. We're keeping you and Meeks, Ashida and Blanchard on. Dudley's permitting Ashida to do field interviews, and Thad and I are convinced that Ashida wants a clean solve, regardless of his relationship with Dudley. I'm not going to tell Dudley that Kay revealed the contents of Joan's diary to you and Ashida, and the only attendant risk here is what Ashida might tell Dudley himself."

Brown lit his pipe and shook out the match. He raised his feet and nudged Elmer's feet off the desk.

"That leaves Blanchard and Ashida, you and Meeks as our line detectives. Ashida's driving back to Baja tonight. We're swearing him in as a war hire when he returns. The four of you will have carte blanche. We'll ride out interference from Jack Horrall, if and when it occurs."

Elmer snagged the full gist. "You're freezing Dudley out. You're driving him to make some dumb play that will put his dick in the wringer."

Parker lit a cigarette. "Don't say it, Thad. 'He's not as dumb as most folks think.' "

Brown said, "Our biggest concern is the guns. I rebraced Harold John Miciak last night, and bought him out of a GTA bounce in Fresno. He fleshed out the statement he gave Breuning and Carlisle, as it pertained to the guns. He told me that Rice and Kapek sold all the guns to pachuco right-wingers. We're compiling a roust list off the Feds' subversive files. You're the first man on the Crash Squad we've shared this lead with. It's a bigger deal than I let on at the briefing this morning. We're going in with shotguns and sedition-stamped grand-jury subpoenas. There'll be three two-man flanks. That's Captain Parker and me, you and Meeks, Blanchard and Ashida."

Elmer wolf-whistled. "You are taking a very dicey risk with Ashida. You are risking him spilling everything we get to the Dudster."

Parker gulped. Brown gulped. Their throat doohickeys bobbed.

Brown passed Elmer a snapshot. It was a niteclub-type deal. The backdrop denoted Club Alabam. A jolly trio mugged in a booth. Dig said trio:

Meyer Gelb, Jean Staley, Tommy Glennon.

Elmer wolf-whistled, *looooooooow*. Brown said, "It was in with Miciak's property, up in Fresno. It's date-stamped February 27, which makes it one week ago. Miciak refused to comment on the picture. I had some hayseed cops hard-nose him, to no fucking avail."

Elmer brain-strained it. Jean's allegedly back east. Jean's mail-drop play via Bev's Switchboard. Smut pix with klub*haus* backdrops. Tommy G.'s La Jolla

PO box.

Parker crushed his cigarette. “Here’s the big question. What’s a Nazi like Glennon doing with two Communists like Staley and Gelb?”

Elmer lit a cigar. “I think I know where Tommy is.”

Brown said, “Then go find him and arrest him.”

Elmer scrammed. He booked out of box #4 and cut back to box #2. Bad Buzz still sat there. He looked un-Buzz-like forlorn.

“I know where Tommy the G. is. Let’s go get him.”

87

(ENSENADA, 4:00 P.M., 3/6/42)

Silver bars to gold oak leaves. The SIS command. We mustn't mince words here. Juan Lazaro-Schmidt pulled strings.

Ralph Melnick jumped to lieutenant colonel. Fourth Interceptor promoted him and called him back stateside. It occurred abruptly. Colonel Ralph threw a party.

At Major Smith's new office. It was Colonel Ralph's ex-office. It was twice as large and twice as grand. Mess orderlies served cake and champagne. Dudley invited guests.

Hideo Ashida and Juan Pimentel. Claire, Beth, and Young Joan. Salvy Abascal. The two Lazaro-Schmidts.

Dudley circulated. He tossed the FDR portrait out the window and drew scattered applause. Captain Juan raised a toast. "To outgoing despots and incoming *Sturmbannfürers.*"

The right-flankers loved it. Claire and Young Joan scowled. Colonel Melnick giggled. He loathed Double-Cross Rosenfeld.

Beth looked perplexed. She did not comprehend repartee or lovers' passion. She'd witnessed his tiff with Claire. Both parties raised welts and drew blood. He belt-lashed Claire. His severed ear required stitches.

The moment drew nigh. Colonel Melnick called for order. The guests moved in close. Dudley clicked his heels. Constanza removed his silver shoulder bars and pinned on his gold oak leaves.

Major Dudley Liam Smith. The bluff Irish lad ascends.

Constanza kissed him, full on the lips. Beth gasped. Young Joan smirked. Claire wheeled and walked off through the squadroom. Dudley heard glass break. Dudley smelled sprayed champagne.

The orderlies made haste. They moved out with towels and whisk brooms. Claire's display of pique upstaged him. Constanza hooked two fingers through his belt loops and tugged. They bumped hips and kissed again. It restated her claim.

The guests dispersed. They shuffled and formed war-chat cliques. Hideo caught his eye. Dudley gestured toward the squadroom. Hideo filed out first.

Dudley joined him. He smelled Dom Pérignon ’29. The orderlies whisked up glass shards. Hideo sat at the duty sergeant’s desk. Dudley pulled a chair up.

“Is something troubling you, lad? I doubt that it’s the trifling domestic scene you just witnessed.”

Ashida said, “The klub*haus* aspect of our cases troubles me. I think there’s a very simple solution at the heart of it. I would like your consent to explore all possibilities in my field interviews, before Chief Horrall orders you to implement a more expedient solution.”

Dudley smiled. “You have my consent. I will add that you know a great deal about my business dealings here in Baja, and I would ask that you steer clear of them as they might pertain to your investigation.”

“Yes, I agree.”

Dudley fondled his oak leaves. They were solid gold.

“I would advise caution on a second front, as well. Dick Carlisle called me and described your contretemps with Elmer Jackson, including the vile comments he made to you and the beating he inflicted on our friend Mike. Dick said that Elmer made a garbled reference to gold, which I find discomfiting. Please be careful there. Beyond that, I would like you to draft an extensively detailed report on our three cases, for my exclusive review. Requisition any and all files you need, under your SIS sanction and my signature as your new commanding officer. Interpret all the evidence and theorize as to how the three cases cohere. Have the report to me in one week’s time.”

—

El Rancho de Narcóticos was ten miles east of T.J. Carlos Madrano built it. Dudley and José Vasquez-Cruz usurped it. Juan Pimentel now sub-*Führer*’d the ranch.

Dudley and Captain Juan dropped in. Sinarquista goons straw-bossed the operation. Statie noncoms patrolled the perimeter. They packed tommy guns and Brazilian mastiffs on short tethers. The dogs hunted feral cats and mauled dope-worker slaves on command.

The conversion lab was up-to-date and unhygienic. Four chemists brewed Mexican poppies into Big “H.” Low-peso peons packaged the shit. A slave barracks adjoined the lab. The slaves worked sixteen-hour shifts and got Sunday mornings off. A local priest performed Mass. He was hooked on Big “H.”

Dudley toured the grounds. Captain Juan played tour guide. Governor Lazaro-Schmidt had joined the cabal. He’d requested a progress report.

Four large trucks and three large buses stood by the barracks. Their big-scoop wheelwells would move the shit north. Interned Japs would ride the buses. Legally vetted wetbacks would crowd up the trucks. Hideo Ashida would watchdog future border crossings. He'd speak Jap to the Japs. He'd tally confiscated gelt and secure property lists.

Wets, Japs, dope. A trenchant trifecta. El Governor would vouch the three fronts. He'd grease the skids with the U.S. Relocation brass. Their Jap jails would overflow. He'd sign on California farm bosses. He'd exploit his office and sell them cut-rate wets.

Dudley spot-checked vehicles. He kicked tires, popped hoods, tightened loose spark plugs. Juan Pimentel watched. He said, "You haven't told me the governor's percentage."

Dudley swung a wrench and cinched up wobbly lug nuts. Slack tires just wouldn't do.

"15% of our combined ventures. He provides the official sanctions, while we provide the work."

"Do you not find the governor's relationship with his sister quite strange?"

Dudley winked. "I would call it outré, and perhaps perverse."

—

They dined at Neptune's Locker. It was a driftwood and barnacle barn on Avenida Costeño. Native swells and U.S. stiffs loved the place.

Their table overlooked the yacht pier. Film moguls cruised down from L.A. and went slumming. Nude starlets baked on warm teakwood. The governor openly stared.

He wore a trim-cut navy blazer and white ducks tonight. The London Shop dressed him. He shopped in Beverly Hills once a month.

They drank absinthe frappés. Constanza wore a yellow sundress. Dudley wore his ODs. He felt dowdy beside these two.

They toasted Dudley's precipitous promotion. They toasted their business deal and a certain German *jefe.* Constanza hummed the "Horst-Wessel-Lied." The table was set with mock-gold flatwear. Lazaro-Schmidt raised a mock-gold fork.

"To new friends and acquisition. To that precious commodity we seek."

They tapped forks over the table. The absinthe had Dudley light-headed. Constanza ran a hand up his leg.

"Tell the major about Kyoho, Juan. He's quite naturally curious, and I need to gauge whether or not he's the jealous type."

Lazaro-Schmidt laughed. He lit a cigarette and shot his shirtcuffs.

"It may dismay my sister, but I think of Kyoho as a conspirator more than I think of him as her lover. As a conspirator, I would surmise that he was the most adroit and politically savvy of all those in the left-right cartel. He was always tight-lipped, especially as it pertained to the gold. He was here for the conference in November of '40, and I recall that he seemed to be very much within himself, amid the few instances of camaraderie that I witnessed."

Constanza lit a cigarette. "Juan was there for the opening ceremony and the departures only. He was not there for the formal meetings where the strategies pertaining to the gold itself were discussed."

Dudley said, "Do minutes for the conference exist?"

Lazaro-Schmidt said, "Yes, but they are not to be found. They would be a priceless discovery, of course."

Constanza dipped a hand under the table. Dudley threaded their fingers up.

"It would delight me to have you drop some names, Governor. The conference has me starstruck."

Lazaro-Schmidt waved the gold fork. "The Russians were without significant style or substance. Molotov, Beria, a few elevated apparatchiks. They were there to betray Butcher Stalin and the Communist International, and I credit them only with their ardent belief that informed leftists and rightists must unite to survive a certain postwar apocalypse. Our Nazi *Kameraden* were quite another barrel of fish. They shared the revelation with comparable urgency and comported themselves with inestimable class. Wilhelm Canaris was most cultured and gracious. Ernst Kaltenbrunner was thin, gorgeously attired, and six and a half feet tall. My acquaintance Meyer Gelb drove the German contingent around Ensenada, without their ever once suspecting that he was a Jew."

Red Meyer, redux. Dudley pondered it.

"Gelb attended the conference?"

"I'm sure he was there as a rogue Stalinist, and the tool of an enlightened faction within the Comintern. He served as a chauffeur, but was not privy to the conference itself."

"But minutes of the conference do exist?"

"Yes. An American man took them with him at the end of the conference. I know nothing about this man, but I saw him leave for the airfield with a briefcase cuffed to his wrist."

Dudley said, "Please describe the man."

Lazaro-Schmidt said, "He was tall, and he had a southern accent."

—

Constanza booked a suite at the del Norte. It was insolently close to his suite and Claire. They walked through the lobby, entwined. Beth and Young Joan sat in lounge chairs and saw them. Beth scowled. Young Joan scrutinized.

His body revved, his mind raced. They'd sniffed cocaine in the cab. The seditious siblings, the gold, some elliptical gap. They hadn't discussed the heist/the fire/the gold's full origins. They assumed each other's lust for possession and possessive intent. The sibs went back with Kyoho Hanamaka. Governor Juan attended the confab and knew Meyer Gelb. His body revved, his mind raced. *Tell me everything.* He almost shrieked it.

They elevatored up to the suite. Constanza pushed him into the back wall and held him there with her mouth. She kissed his eyes and his neck. The doors slid open. She grabbed his waistband and pulled him down the hall. He fumbled the key out of her clutch and unlocked the suite.

The front room was all dark shapes and shadows. He kicked the door shut and pushed Constanza into a chair. He dropped to his knees and held her there with his mouth.

He threw her dress up and pulled down her stockings and underwear. Constanza drew back and hooked her legs over the width of the chair. He caught her scent. She grabbed his hair and pulled him into it.

He wanted that. He knew she knew it. He stretched her legs. He found the wet and the fit and the place. Constanza fell into Spanish. She went *Sí, sí, sí, sí, sí.*

She made different sounds. He learned her tones and her tastes all together. Her breath raced. She pushed up. She pitched and buckled off one drawn-out *Sí.* She held him there with her legs then. He'd hoped that she would.

—

It rained all night. They made love all night. They talked in between. It reprised his first night with Joan.

Pious you. You kill people and sense God as an innocent. You see the abrogation of all moral law in my relationship with my brother.

Yes. I disapprove and am concurrently titillated.

I disapprove of La Comunista. She is strident and indecorous. You must confirm or refute that you killed her Red lover. My brother believes that you did. He believes that my occasional lover Salvy may have assisted you.

I'll confirm or refute when I know you better. Forgive my circumspection until then.

I have never been circumspect. I despise your Red whore. She is La Comunista Estúpida. I find your young charges compelling, however. They are both of you, regardless of their blood. Young Joan possesses your ferocity, and young Beth possesses your hunger.

Your perceptions honor me, darling.

You are tall and urbane. One rarely sees that in Mexican men. My brother is urbane, but he is a shrimp.

Your brother is urbane, but not quite as perceptive as you. I rather enjoyed his perceptions of Meyer Gelb, though.

Meyer Gelb is a puto, a parasite, and an extortionist. He is an evil Stalinist, and he hates Trotskyites more than he hates fascists such as you and me. He will extort the very life's blood from our Jewish exile friends.

Betray me not, mi corazon. It would surely devastate me.

Do not tell me that. It will assure my betrayal.

Caustic you. So determined to take my measure in the course of a first-night's encounter.

One takes a lover's measure immediately or not at all. You need women to record your triumphs. You need to capitulate to women in a manner that many would find unseemly.

I commune with a wolf I met on the British moors, in 1921. He will sleep with us tonight, and he is very astute about women. He has told me that your designs are entirely felicitous, and has recently informed me that I underestimate a reckless young woman in Los Angeles. He's close to convincing me that the silly girl intends me great harm.

88

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

(LOS ANGELES, 7:00 A.M., 3/7/42)

I was still woozy from Otto's party, three nights ago. It wasn't a liquor hangover or a case of party-behavior regret. I barely touched booze; I abstained from flirtatiousness and cutup antics. I felt the undertow of Otto's provocative guest list. It was a nexus of criminal-case suspects, present and past.

Meyer Gelb. Jean Staley and her postcard ruse, geared to deceive my pal Elmer. Gelb's tenuous connection to the four exiled musicians. Gelb, Staley, the Lesnicks. Communist comrades in '33; party guests nine years on. Jorge Villareal-Caiz did not attend the party. Dudley Smith allegedly killed him. Claire De Haven told me that. She told me that with my hand on her breast.

I'm seated at a folding table in my backyard now; I'm ten feet from the incinerator that I use to burn rubbish. I put the incinerator to hasty use late last December; I burned the clothes I wore during my impetuous attempt to take Dudley Smith's life. Canny Claire made me for this crime. Elmer picked that nugget up during a hot-sheet surveillance. A call girl named Annie Staples was servicing Saul Lesnick.

The Claire-Dudley liaison is imploding. Claire went to Mexico with a murderous madman and now pays the price. Claire told me this herself. She told me with my hand on her breast.

Bill called me an hour ago; he bluntly stated that he and Thad Brown are now colluding. They are pushing Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle off the klub*haus* case, while they retain my Lee Blanchard, partnered up with Hideo Ashida. Bill has characterized Hideo as a young man who perpetually "falls from shit to clover." Hideo is surely the luckiest Japanese in these parts. He has whizzed through the internment push and has secured a U.S. Army commission. Bill told me that he will soon be doubly credentialed. Double-Trouble Hideo will also serve as a war-hire policeman. He is down in Baja now, but will soon be returning. He will cut his teeth in an upcoming "pachuco sweep."

Bill Parker, fired with holy purpose and fixed upon task. Joan Conville's diary chastened and dismayed him. I'm glad I hit him in the mouth. It served to wake him up.

Bill told me that he will abet my pledge to expose false solutions to the klub*haus* case and will publicly excoriate the slaying of any and all bogus suspects. This is a direct contravention of his pledges to Dudley Smith. I have concluded that Hideo has not revealed the existence of Joan's diary or the fact that I hold possession. Hideo pines for a clean klub*haus* solve. He was robbed of a clean solve on the Watanabe case and harbors guilt for his part in the frame-up of Werewolf Shudo. I know this. Hideo's desire for a clean solve supersedes his lust for the gold and his kid crush on Dudley Smith. I know this. Hideo's desire for a clean solve transcends his bond with Dudley and Joan Conville, and cuts through all their criminal and romantic circumlocutions. I know this.

I pondered romantic triangles within a triangulated case structure. I pondered triangles in general. I thought of Brenda Allen, Elmer Jackson, and Annie Staples. A brainstorm hit. I ran inside to the phone.

—

Brenda's preferred meeting spot was Dave's Blue Room. She and Elmer owned a sizable percentage. Brenda's preferred pose was midmorning gin fizzes; her preferred conversational style was the full-speed monologue. One buckled in for these.

Our back booth assured privacy. The waiter brought a full pitcher of fizzes and left us alone. Brenda revved up on the war, FDR's tax bill, and her monthly bribe cut to Sheriff's Vice. She laid on the prelude and arrived at her preferred topic: her call-biz partner and part-time lover, Sergeant E. V. Jackson.

"…and I'm thinking of calling the Missing Persons Squad about this boy, Citizen. I don't care that he's got Ellen Drew on the side, or whatever else he's got going—but we're running thirty-four girls, and it's an around-the-clock enterprise that he's been neglecting while he's been working that klub*haus* job down in darktown, him all partnered up with Buzz Meeks, who I know for a fact has gunned down numerous colored and Mexican gents under dubious circumstances."

So far, so good. I arranged the klatch to get a bead on Elmer's recent actions. I sipped midmorning gin and egg whites and formulated a question. Brenda relaunched her monologue and cut straight to Jack Horrall.

"As you well know, I've got my weekly date with Call-Me-Jack, which involves perfunctory woof-woof in the missionary manner, and always on the floor, and I've got the long-standing rug burns to attest to this long-standing arrangement. Well, Jack don't take very long, and he always segues to his long-standing spiel about the woes of the big-city police chief, and this morning it's all about how your chum Whiskey Bill Parker showed up at his office last night and summarily announced that he would oppose and expose any bogus solving of the klub*haus* job, despite Jack and the Dudster's wishes, and it left Jack in a veritable tizzy, because Citizen Jack is now under Federal indictment, and vulnerable in about six trillion ways."

Bill fulfilled his pledge to me. My heart swelled. My well-aimed smack in the mouth surely did it. Brenda drained her third gin fizz and lit a cigarette; I jumped at my chance to ask a question.

"Brenda, what's going on with Elmer and Annie Staples?"

Brenda tittered and formed a circle with her left forefinger and thumb. She poked her right forefinger through the middle of the circle. It was international sign language for fuckee-fuckee.

"Well, Citizen, to begin with, Annie likes it more than she should, given that she repeatedly does it for money. Second, I told Ed Satterlee that he could use my Miracle Mile wall peek to get some footage on Annie in the kip with some Commie psychiatrist, and I heard a rumor that Elmer got embroiled in that play. I confronted him, but he refused to blab. Annie's always been too smart for her own good, which don't sit right for a line girl. To top it off, I saw Annie in Hollywood last week. She was hobknobbing with Sid Hudgens at Breneman's Ham 'n' Eggs, all huddled up thick as thieves."

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(ENSENADA, 10:00 P.M., 3/7/42)

The walls were thin. His suite adjoined theirs. The walls were sound sieves. He sat at his desk and worked through the tiff.

Ashida read photostats. He'd submitted stat requests and gotten fast replies. Treasury and Alameda PD kicked loose. LAFD Arson stats had been pledged.

He read. He took notes. He sat up against a sieve wall. The two suites ran contiguous. He worked and eavesdropped.

1927. Fritz Eckelkamp's heist spree. Liquor-store jobs. Cash on hand, always. The quick in-and-out. Alameda PD snags Fritz. He falls behind multiple counts.

Claire shrieked. She defamed the Redheaded Succubus and the Nazi Half-Breed Whore. Dudley shrieked. *She* was the whore. She was a Dope-Addict Shrew and a Mex- and Nigger-Fucker. She fucked that Putrid Puto Jorge and that Nigger Welterweight in L.A.

Ashida read stat pages. Alameda PD supplied a background sheet. He traveled back to Weimar Berlin. *Willkommen, Herr Jap.*

Claire shrieked. Dudley shrieked. They traded *You're* the Dope Fiend barbs. Claire defamed Ace Kwan. Dudley demeaned the Jew Maestro. Claire went singsong. *Somebody-stabbed-you/somebody-stabbed you/I-think-it-was-a-girl.*

Fritz was a Sparticist. He fought Brownshirt thugs and swung a nail-studded plank. He robbed diamond merchants at gunpoint. He firebombed a *bierhaus* and fried two Brownshirts to a crisp.

Ashida wrote, "FE precedes all criminal cases and all intrigues. FE as precipitating agent? FE escapes from gold train, 5/18/31. Catalytic moment of all cases combined?"

Claire called Dudley Pussy-Whipped and Shanty Irish Scum. Dudley called Claire a Round-Heeled Poseur. A silent gap stretched. Then they laughed, then they moaned, then bedsprings creaked.

—

Ashida ran from it. He sat in the lobby bar and nursed a dry sherry. It was late. The lights were dim. He was the sole patron. Joan Klein messed around at the piano.

She possessed some skill. Her forte was hybrid improvisation. She melded Chopin and Gershwin tonight. Ashida caught strains of a jumpy mazurka and Concerto in F.

Young Joan. She's Dudley's and Claire's odd creature. The hotel management indulges her. She's become Spanish-fluent in record time. The head barkeep pays her a pittance to play show tunes. She wows patrons with her oddball transcriptions.

She wrapped up Chopin Meets Gershwin. She hit two sour notes and went out with a bang. Ashida applauded. Young Joan walked over and sat down with him.

She sipped his sherry, uninvited. She cleaned her glasses with his napkin. People recognized it. She had Dudley Smith's eyes.

"Comrade Chopin drank patent compounds and went insane. Comrade Gershwin died from a brain tumor. The fascist patriarchy stifles the creative class and drives them nuts."

Ashida smiled. "Comrade Stalin's agrarian purges have left four million dead. Consider that the next time you start fomenting."

Young Joan waved faux wolfsbane. "Uncle Hideo's a square, but he's not a fascist, like a certain party I could name. The jury's out on Uncle Hideo, in more ways than one."

Ashida waved faux wolfsbane. "Stop being cryptic and uncanny. Stop making with the non sequiturs and comrade talk. Nobody knows what you're talking about half the time."

Young Joan replaced her glasses. Her small eyes magnified.

"Aunt Claire took Cousin Beth and me to this swift party. Everybody talked in non sequiturs. I met Bertolt Brecht and Orson Welles. Comrade Welles squeezed my knee and called me 'cutie.' I met some swell string players from the Dresden Staatskapelle, and I drank absinthe and had visions."

Ashida grinned. He indulged the girl more than he should.

"What did you see, specifically?"

"I saw this violinist named Ruth Szigeti making the beast with two backs with Robert Taylor, while Miss Barbara Stanwyck herself watched. Then I saw this man named Comrade Meyer Gelb hit Comrade Ruth up for a blow job, and try to get her to snitch out Trotskyites in this studio orchestra."

Meyer Gelb. From the mouths of babes. This loopy child source.

"What else did you see?"

"Nothing. Visions are visions, and I'm not going to tell you I saw something

I didn't. I'm not going to lie just to entertain you, when you think I'm just a silly girl playing Mata Hari."

Ashida went *Stop it.* "Don't misunderstand me. I don't think that at all."

"Don't underestimate me, Uncle. If I'm just this silly girl, then why does Juan Pimentel pay me to get next to you and pump you for information?"

—

Pimentel was an invert. *Maricón en español.* Pimentel possessed sonar and radar. Pimentel sensed inversion in him.

RHIP. Ashida had master keys. They unlocked the SIS squadroom and all the file banks. He was Dudley's exec now. It covered him. Boss, I was just working late.

Pimentel perved on him. Pimentel had no shame. Pimentel corrupted a mere child and sicced her his way.

Ashida unlocked the squadroom door and hit the fluorescents. Bright tube light bore down. SIS kept intel files on all the Baja Staties. They were deemed corruption-prone.

Statie folders filled up two file banks. *N* to *Q* filled a full drawer. Green sheets detailed suspect history. Addendums listed "Possibly Related Intel."

Ashida unlocked the drawer. The Pimentel file was stuffed between Pecheco and Pizzaro. One green sheet poked out the top. Ashida plucked it and skimmed it. The sheet revealed *this:*

Pimentel, Juan Ramon. DOB 5/26/11. Suspect Personal History. One derogatory report.

"Arrested in raid on homosexual nightclub. 2/19/37. San Diego PD."

Ashida flipped the green sheet. Three intel notes were typed on the back.

"Subject Pimentel alleged to be highly skilled in area of telephone (payphone) technology."

"Subject Pimentel holds graduate degrees from Mexican Polytechnical Institute, Guadalajara. Purportedly attended technical institute in Germany. Purportedly knowledgeable in microdot technology."

"Subject Pimentel purportedly attended assumed subversive conference/ Ensenada, mid-11/40. Conference purportedly brought together high-ranking Soviet and Nazi intelligence officers. Subject Pimentel purportedly assigned chauffeur duties & was spotted with Abwehr Commandant Wilhelm Canaris & Gestapo chieftain Ernst Kaltenbrunner."

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(SAN DIEGO, 11:00 A.M., 3/8/42)

The boys are back in town.

At this lice-lair motel. On the PD's dime. Staking Tommy G.'s PO box. To no fucking good avail.

The Seaglade Motel. Off the main drag in Dago. A hot-sheet hut for sailors and jarheads. All-nite whore traffic. One big VD stain.

Buzz read a Donald Duck comic book. He gassed on Donald's rage and perved on Daisy Duck. Elmer gabbed with Thad Brown, long-distance.

He spilled his break-in at Bev's Switchboard. Thad went *Yikes.* Elmer steamrolled the reaction and ran down the mail-forward scam. Link Rockwell held a box at Bev's and sent smut pix to Tommy's box in La Jolla. The pix featured klub*haus* backdrops. A white girl and Mex girl frolicked with masked men. The girls fit Ashida's snatch-hair prognostications.

Thad went *Yikes.* Elmer relaunched his spiel.

The post office stakeout bore no ripe fruit. Fruitcake Tommy hasn't showed. Elmer ran down the envelope in Meyer Gelb's box. It featured a La Paz PO box return address and no return name. The envelope contained blotter paper and maybe microdots.

Thad went *Yikes.* He told Elmer to ring Ashida—chop, chop. Tell him to check the La Paz box and apply his brain to microdots. Beyond that—chop, chop. You and Meeks go find that Tommy fuck.

Elmer went *Yeah, boss.* Buzz read his comic book. Thad laid out some hot PD dish.

Whiskey Bill keestered Jack Horrall. *Ouch!*—straight up the shit chute. Bill pulled Breuning and Carlisle off of the klub*haus* job. Bill told Jack he'd quash a bogus-suspect solve. *Ouch!*—Bill keestered Dudley Smith.

Elmer went *Yikes.* Buzz tapped his wristwatch—wrap this shit up. Thad motor-mouthed. He said Parker's wrangling a material-witness writ. Link Rockwell's at some Navy flight school in Florida. Parker wants to extradite him. Jack Horrall's dragging his heels.

Elmer went *Yikes.* Thad went *Chop, chop, you dumb hayseeds.* Thad went *Quit jerking off and go to work.*

—

They restaked the post office. The posh hamlet cocooned them. La Jolla was swanksville. Cypress trees and golf courses. Nice stores with candy-cane awnings. A nifty beach close by.

The stakeout was yawnsville. They pondered a more direct approach. Brace the Postal Inspection Service. Have the postal cops dump Tommy's PO box.

They discussed it. They nixed it. This was a strongarm job. The postal cops would demur. They had to snatch Tommy. They had to hurl some hurt on him before they dumped him on Thad.

Swanksville. Yawnsville. They sat in Elmer's civilian sled and evinced ennui.

Buzz said, "Maybe Tommy ducked down to T.J. He's bored, so he's thinking he'll go catch the donkey show and see his pal Huey. I say we go down there and stir up some shit."

Elmer said, "We overstirred the shit the last time we went down there. I say we check with SDPD Burglary. We're brother officers looking for a hot-prowl man. They might have some fresh cases and some leads they could share."

SDPD was close by the Seaglade. That greased the skids. They drove over and parked in a visitor's slot. The building was whitewashed adobe and two stories high. They walked up to the DB. Dago was a turkey town. Burglary Division was one fat-slob cop.

The dink sat in a gnat-sized office. His desk plate read SGT. LEW SARNI. They walked in, deliberate. The dink shook himself awake.

"L.A., right? You've got that look. You're down here on a job, and you need a hand."

The dink dwarfed his dink-sized desk. Elmer and Buzz straddled chairs and faced him. They lit up cigars. Elmer tossed the dink a one-dollar Cuban. It bounced on his desk.

"We're looking for a hot-prowl geek named Tommy Glennon. He's a homo, but he rapes women. He's got a postal box in La Jolla, and we thought you might have made him for some incidents down here."

Buzz slid the dink a mug-shot strip. The dink lit the cigar and studied the fotos.

"We've got a series of 459/rapes, and your guy matches the suspect's description. The victims are all Navy women, working out of Point Loma. Navy CID's handling it, because they make the rape-o for a sailor. The guy's vicious, and he's pulled six jobs so far, but the whole thing's going nowhere."

Elmer said, “That’s it?”

The dink savored his cigar. He flicked ash and went *Yum-yum.*

“No, that isn’t it. A Wave officer called us and reported a man following her and skulking around her apartment house. He matches your guy’s and our suspect’s description, but CID and the DB here can’t spare a stakeout team or a woman cop to play decoy.”

Buzz whipped out his flash roll. He peeled off two yards and dropped them on the desk.

“Let us handle it. What CID don’t know won’t hurt them.”

The dink coughed cigar smoke. “Well…uh…I like to accommodate the L.A. boys whenever I can.”

Elmer said, “Give us the Wave’s statistics. We’ll take it from there.”

—

Ensign Margaret May Mewshaw. An Omaha transplant. Ensign Meg lived in Pacific Beach. She lived alone and had no boyfriend. She lived in a second-floor/street-facing crib. It was a two-crib stucco building. Outside stairs led up to her door.

They waited for dusk. They hunkered in and car-sat across the street. Ensign Meg was home alone. They brought a short dog of 151 rum. It got them lubricated and motivized.

It was late-winter warm. Ensign Meg kept her front window cracked and the shades up. She played the radio. Bucky Beaver shilled Ipana toothpaste. Charlie Barnet played “Cherokee.”

Ensign Meg schlepped around in her slip. She was a big blonde. She had that Annie Staples scope and je ne sais quoi. Elmer got erotified. Tommy G. was a leg man. Ensign Meg had legs from Dago to Detroit.

Elmer said, “I don’t get it. Tommy’s a fruit, but he rapes women.”

Buzz said, “Sex is powerful juju.”

“Moonlight Serenade” drifted over. Elmer yawned. That tune and 151 put him dozy. He wisped off somewhere. He saw Wayne Frank in a limousine packed with gold bars. He saw Dudley in the green room at San Quentin. Buzz went *Ssshhh* and elbowed him awake.

“Hush now. We got a prowler.”

Elmer rubbed his eyes and looked out his window. This jamoke stood by the stairs. He’s wearing gloves. He’s holding a tool pouch. He’s pivoting to creep upward. Hold the phone, mama. It’s Tommy Glennon.

They bolted the sled and ran over. They crouched low at the foot of the stairs. Tommy stood outside Ensign Meg’s door. He brandished a lock pick and blew on it for luck. Buzz kicked a tin can, accidental. Tommy heard it and glanced down the stairs.

He saw the boys. He was trapped-rat confined. He dropped the pick and pulled a shiv and charged down the stairs.

Elmer charged up. He pulled his belt sap and crashed Tommy low. Tommy stabbed down and snagged his sport coat. Elmer sap-slammed a nut shot and cartwheeled him. Tommy screeched and tumbled ass over elbows.

He hit the ground, all bruised and splayed. Buzz rabbit-punched him and bashed his head on a stair ledge. Elmer tripped down the stairs and cuffed his hands behind his back.

They cuff-dragged him across the street. They made the sled in one split second. Elmer unlocked the trunk. They dumped Tommy in and slammed the trunk shut. Ensign Meg looked out her window. *What's all this ruckus?* Elmer blew her a kiss.

Tommy thunked around in the trunk. Buzz jumped in the car. Elmer got behind the wheel and burned tread. They had a spot all picked out. The caustic-sewage dump behind the Point Loma base.

Elmer wheeled them there, rapid. The spot adjoined an air-artillery range. The dump was barb-wired up. Caustic gack bubbled and gurgled. Evil swamp creatures gamboled within.

Elmer brodied up to the fence. He got out and unlocked the trunk. Buzz got out and jerked Tommy up on his feet. Tommy was beat-on and green at the gills. Buzz tossed him in the backseat and scooched him toward the middle. Elmer got in and sandwich-jobbed him on the other side.

Tommy huffed and squirmed. Elmer tapped the roof light and halo-lit him. Buzz pulled his throwdown piece. He popped the cylinder and flashed the six-bullet load.

Elmer said, "We got some questions."

Tommy quiver-quaked. Buzz dumped five bullets and spun the cylinder. He snapped it shut and winked at Tommy. He put the muzzle to his head and pulled the trigger twice.

The hammer hit empty chambers. Tommy wriggled and squealed. Elmer said, "We got some questions."

Buzz held up his piece. He spun the cylinder and snapped it shut. He winked at Tommy.

Tommy said, "Fuck your mother."

Buzz put the muzzle to his head and pulled the trigger. The hammer hit an empty chamber. Tommy wriggled and squealed. Elmer said, "We got some questions."

Tommy wriggled and squealed. Tommy bleated and squealed. Tommy said, "Okay, okay, okay."

Elmer said, "You dropped your address book New Year's Eve. I guess you figured that out."

Buzz said, "There's some names we were curious about."

Elmer relit a cigar. "Let's start with Eddie Leng. The number to his slop chute was right there in your book."

Tommy coughed. He was bruised and contused. He talked, squeaky-frail.

"Eddie was an old pal of mine. He was a terp man. He was all tonged up, and he got snuffed in C-town on New Year's Eve. You're climbing the wrong tree if you think I did it. It was this Jap, Don Matsura. He had a terp still at his place in J-town, and he peddled terp to the Japs and the Chinks. He hung himself in the Lincoln Heights Jail, but Ace Kwan might have helped him."

Buzz said, "You're in the know, son."

Elmer fed Tommy a jolt of 151. Tommy gulped and coughed out residue. Elmer caught a residual spritz.

"What else you got on Eddie and Don Matsura? You got any KAs for them?"

Tommy coughed. "How's Cal Lunceford sound? He was this shitheel cop on the Alien Squad, but he's dead now. It was in the papers. Some ex-caped Jap shot him. Cal was Fifth Column, and he was in with Eddie and Don Matsura, plus a whole lot of other shitheels. Before you ask, I ain't got no proper names."

Elmer fed Tommy a jolt of 151. Tommy sucked it in and kept it down.

Buzz said, "St. Vibiana's. What's going on there? What's with you and Monsignor Joe Hayes?"

Tommy said, "Come on, don't make me say it."

Buzz said, "I'll say it for you. You and the monsignor travel the dirt road together. You're both Coughlinites and Jew-haters. Let me hazard a guess here. Being tight with priests got you juice with Dudley Smith."

The roof light haloed Tommy. He got this caged-mick look.

"I snitched for Dud. I'm pals with Dud's boy Huey Cressmeyer. I ran wets for Carlos Madrano, so you could say I been around and know some people you might be interested in. Dud visited me in Quentin, last November. I put the squeeze on him, which I shouldn't have done. Dud put your cracker pal, Mike the B., and Dick the C. on me, but I got away, because your cracker pal here didn't have the stones to shoot me."

Elmer brain-strained it. Tommy extorts Dudley. Let's call his shakedown wedge *this:*

Winter '39. That Nazi costume bash. Tommy gets a *biiiiiiiiiig* eyeful. Dud slays that he-she bitch.

Buzz pat-patted Tommy. Good snitch dog. Let's give him a treat.

He snatched the 151 and fed him two jolts. Tommy coughed and joy-kicked the front seat.

Buzz said, "Let's get back to the address book. What's with that hot-box phone, by the *Herald.*"

Tommy said, "I was relaying gibberish calls. It was all dot-dash-dot, dog-cat-pig, code shit that means something if you know how to decode it. My call scripts got patched through to a bookie drop in Ensenada, and I got the scripts at my mail drop in L.A. It was all through what you call cutouts, so I never knew who was writing the scripts or giving the orders. I got this sort-of tip from a Mex bookie who was forwarding the messages. He told me they were going to this political guy and his sister in La Paz, but then he clammed up."

Elmer said, "Come on, there's got to be more there."

Tommy coughed. "Okay, okay, okay. The bookie guy zipped it, but I extrapolated some shit, because Fifth Column's Fifth Column, and it's all one big sort-of-happy family, which sure loves to talk. I know Deutsches Haus guys, guys with the Mex Staties, and guys from that nutso 46th Street place. I know *things* just as good as I know all these guys. I know Dud killed Carlos Madrano, I know there were some sub-berth killings in Baja, and it was all part of a play to pass Japs off as Chinks, and—"

Elmer cut in. "Eddie Leng was tight with a Chinatown doctor named Lin Chung. You're a guy who knows guys, so I'm wondering if you know him."

Tommy smirked. "I know Lin. Everybody knows Lin, including a notable dead guy named Eddie Leng, who don't know him no more."

Buzz poked him. "Don't string this out. Finish whatever it is that you got to say."

Tommy resmirked. "Okay, okay, okay. Eddie was tight with Lin, and Lin was tight with these rich white guys who were behind that first sub landing. Eddie introduced me to Lin, and Lin said the *second* landing was the work of a left-wing/right-wing alliance, and they were setting up some kind of postwar reconciliation deal. They're pulling all sorts of evil shit in the here and now, but they intend to make themselves look good by exposing it after this war is over."

Elmer brain-braced it. "Was Dud embroiled in any of this?"

Tommy laughed. "*Nein* to that. Dud leans Fifth Column, but it's just a cocktease. He loves Nazi threads and regalia, but he ain't no saboteur. He's just some kind of fetishist."

Buzz said, "Let's revisit the klub*haus.*"

Tommy said, "Goody. That sounds like kicks."

Elmer said, "Link Rockwell. Them smut pix he planned to send from his mail drop to yours."

Buzz flashed the key pix. Elmer shot good camera dupes. You've got two women. One's white, one's Mex. There's that klub*haus* backdrop.

Tommy shrugged. "If you're asking me who the two janes are, I don't know. They're just jazz-club chippies out for distraction."

Elmer said, “We’re here, and we’re all ears. Give us some more on the klub*haus.”*

Tommy said, “I’m parched. Give me another nip first.”

Buzz grabbed his hair and pulled his head back. It stretched his mouth wide. Buzz juked in the juice.

Tommy gargled it and kept it down. Buzz wiped his hand pomade-free. Tommy’s mouth snapped shut. He went electrizized. He looked sloshed, slammed, and slathered to shit.

“I like this stuff you’re slipping me. It makes me want to hot-prowl and commit some swell misdeeds.”

Elmer said, “The klub*haus.* Let’s get back to that.”

Tommy squirmed. He was cuffed tight. Steel ratchets gouged his wrists. The evil punk bloodied up the backseat.

“The smut pix were just some Link Rockwell deal. Beyond that, the klub*haus* was just this place where anything goes.”

Elmer gnawed his cigar. “Our lab guy found jizz stains and fecal matter on an upstairs bed. That reads ‘queer shit’ to me.”

Tommy went *C’est la vie.* “I hid out at the klub*haus* for a week, after you blew that stakeout on me. Okay, I knew Wendell Rice and Georgie Kapek, but just to say hi to. I knew they were cops, and I knew they were Fifth Column, but then so’s everybody else in the exalted Thomas Malcolm Glennon’s world.”

Buzz sighed. “The ‘queer shit,’ Tommy.”

Elmer sighed. “Chop, chop, you pervert. It’d delight me to put some hurt on you.”

Tommy yawned. It was I’m-so-bored stagy. Elmer bitch-slapped him. Tommy licked blood off his lips and rebounded quick.

“Okay, ‘queer shit,’ a topic dear to my heart. I didn’t really *know* Rice and Kapek, but I knew they were afraid of this queer kid who hung out on the jazz strip and brought boys to the klub*haus* for some pokey-pokey. He was a blondie kid, sort of tall, maybe some kind of musician, and he was pals with a crazy Jap that Rice and Kapek busted, but the Jap made habeas and got himself sprung. Now, Mr. Jap was a sword man. Rice and Kapek popped him with this big blood-caked sword, and after he waltzed, he became a sure-as-shit klub*haus* regular. He used to kill chickens for all these slop chutes in J-town, and he licked the blood off the swords that he used.”

Elmer brained-snagged it. He witnessed that log-in. Rice and Kapek/the blood-flecked sword. This could be good. Paperwork might still exist.

Buzz said, “The *haus,* Tommy. Keep going there.”

“What’s to tell? It was too crazy for me, so I vamoosed.”

Elmer said, “What did you squeeze Dudley with?”

Tommy said, "Brace yourself, daddy. Dud snuffed a drag boy at a party. Huey C. and I witnessed the whole thing. I'll give you my long-held opinion on that, for what it's worth. Dud knew that she was really a he, and he was *loooving* the encounter until something flipped his switch."

Elmer looked at Buzz. Buzz looked at Elmer. They both orbed Tommy G.

Buzz said, "Kyoho Hanamaka? Ring a bell?"

Tommy said, "Nix."

Elmer said, "José Vasquez-Cruz. His aka's Jorge Villareal-Caiz."

Tommy said, "Ixnay."

Buzz said, "Archie Archuleta?"

Tommy said, "I knew that *pendejo.* I used to see him at the klub*haus,* and from what I heard, he was a notable J-town and C-town crawler. He was cinched up with more strange-o's than you can count, and he veered Fifth Column right. He knew Mex girls who'd pose for smut pictures, and he knew Sinarquista heist guys and set them up with Rice and Kapek, to buy these guns they'd confiscated from these Japs they'd tossed in the clink. RIP, Archie. He was a white man, as much as any Mex can be."

Elmer soft-lobbed it. "This Commie girl, Jean Staley. How come she's in your book?"

Tommy drop-jawed that one. He's gone on 151. He's all stage ham now.

"Jean's been known to *play* Red, but she's been a Federal snitch since the ice age. She was in a CP cell back in the '30s, while she was meanwhile tattling to her handler and running shakedowns on movie people and her fellow Reds with this yid, Meyer Gelb. Meyer's a ganef and a penguin-fucker from way back. There's nothing he ain't done or considered doing. He got Jean shaking down these Trotskyites he hates, because he's a Stalinist, and these Red-faction humps hate other Red-faction humps more than they hate confirmed fascistos like yours truly."

Elmer digested it. Tommy credentialed it. Jean, baby—say it ain't so.

Buzz wiggled the 151. "Bottoms up, Tommy."

Stage Ham Tommy. He goes all rubber-faced.

"I've heard *that* one before, but I have to add that I'm the brunser, more than the punk."

Elmer cringed. Buzz bottle-fed Tommy. The stage ham smacked his lips. The backseat socked in heat. Elmer rolled down his window and breathed deep.

"What's Meyer got Jean doing now? There's a picture of you three at the Club Alabam, just last week."

"Souvenir pictures are the blahs, hoss. They send girl photographers around, and Meyer always succumbs."

"I asked you a question, fucker."

"Okay, okay, okay. The answer is shakedowns. That's the Jean and Meyer bailiwick. This time, they're putting it to these left-wing musicians that got so-called rescued from *der Führer*'s clutches, to make the so-called rescuers look good when Uncle Sambo wins the war. You sound me, muchacho? Meyer's setting Jean up to extort them and recruit them as informants."

One more time. Jean, darling—say it ain't so.

"How dirty is she?"

"She's a mud hen from way back, hoss. She goes back to that Kraut hump, Fritz Eckelkamp. Does *that* name ring a bell? He ex-caped from that gold train that got robbed back when I was still in pigtails. Jean got around and *gets* around, and she sure plays Jezebel in the process. She was married to a pathetic geek named Ralph D. Barr. Ralphie set fires and yanked his crank when the fire engines showed up. He was a suspect for that big Griffith Park fire, but he was a small-blaze specialist and got absolved. Jean told me he was hung microscopic."

Elmer looked at Buzz. Buzz looked at Elmer. They both orbed Tommy G.

Buzz said, "'Fifth Column's Fifth Column.' We get that. Past that, have you got a specific source for what you been feeding us?"

Tommy made horn-call sounds. Tommy blew a *loooooong* fanfare.

"Hold your hats, race fans. We're at Del Mar, and my #1 nag is at the gate. He's my #1 source for Fifth Column scuttlebutt, and he's none other than your ex-chief, James Edgar Davis."

Buzz looked at Elmer. Elmer looked at Buzz. They both orbed Tommy G.

Buzz sighed. "It's getting late. Tell us something we don't know."

Tommy blew a long fanfare. He wet his pants for such shtick.

"All in all, I've raped twenty-three women. I killed two bags in Frisco and a thin cooze at a truck stop in Visalia. I killed an old Jew lady in South Beach and did a necrophile job on her. I made like Dracula and drank her blood, and I yanked out all her gold teeth."

Buzz grabbed a loose seat cushion. He clamped it over Tommy's head and pulled his belt piece. He pumped a full clip into Tommy's face. Blood and cushion stuffing exploded. Shots tore out the trunk ledge and ricocheted. A skull chunk hit Elmer's cheek.

Buzz said, "I got me an old granny who's one-sixty-fourth Jewish. I don't condone that sort of grief."

91

(SANTO TOMAS, 12:00 P.M., 3/9/42)

The Wolf growled and paced. This bluffside spot vexed him. Swooping gulls and salt spray. A dirt parking lot. Tables perched close to a cliff.

Dudley sat outside. The spot induced vertigo. He'd called the meet. Salvy suggested this cantina. They served Baja's best *mariscos.*

Mucho carros jammed up the lot. The Mex Army favored El Dumpo. It was their place. They ignored the rats clustered by the kitchen. The cantina was subramshackle. Army staff cars brodied on loose dirt. Dudley ate exhaust fumes.

He sipped lukewarm beer. His table overlooked the lot and a hundred-foot drop. Mex soldiers chortled all around him.

He was furious. He conceded Fear. Bill Parker enlisted Thad Brown and applied a vise squeeze. Parker levied his no-false-solution decree and sandbagged Jack Horrall. He violated the Smith-Parker truce. He slammed Jack H. and offered up an irresistible concession. Parker said he'd erase every bug and tap recording now in Fed custody. This action would spark courtroom acquittals for Jack and his gang. Fletch Bowron, Ray Pinker, the Jamie kid. All the lesser defendants. *Poof!*—all would go free.

Parker pulled Mike and Dick off the klub*haus* job. Pinker stymied Jack H. there. Elmer Jackson put Mike in Queen of Angels. Call-Me-Jack nixed reprisals. Parker has adroitly nullified one Dudley Liam Smith.

Salvy was late. Dudley chain-smoked. He conceded Fear. Parker's machinations depleted his ranks. They left him with Hideo Ashida, *todos.*

Hideo was newly war-hired. He was partnered up with lackluster Lee Blanchard. Jackson and Meeks were off to hell and gone. Their partnership spelled chaos. Hideo came through and supplied hope.

Brilliant lad. He turned up an old Arson Squad accelerant swatch. It derived from the Griffith Park fire. He compared it to a klub*haus*-blaze swatch and got a match. The match linked two crimes spaced nearly nine years apart.

Dudley chain-smoked. He conceded Fear. The Wolf bodyguarded him. Constanza returned to La Paz. He missed her. His union with Claire had imploded. Beth was poised in retreat. The promotion-party incident unhinged her. Claire was up in L.A. She was prowling for new lovers there. He *knew* that.

Salvy was late. More Mex *soldaten* arrived. They drove custom-fitted U.S. confiscations. Special tailpipes. Hood-mounted BARs. Bleeding-saint and snarling-panther paint jobs.

They stomped three abreast. They entered the cantina and commandeered outside tables. They pinched waitresses and demanded fast service. "Neutral" Mexico. Soon to be Allied-allied. Axis in temperament and aesthetic.

Salvy showed. A car appeared, he appeared, *el carro* peeled off. Salvy employed Greenshirt flunkies. They chauffeured him and groomed him. He appeared more than arrived.

Dudley stood up. They exchanged *abrazos.* Hail-fellows-well-met. Men's men, *por vida.* Two damn good backslappers.

"My dear comrade."

"*Mi* mayor. Will you be content to stop there, or do you wish to rise to four-star general?"

Dudley laughed. "I'm a police sergeant in my heart and soul, lad. I was one when this war started, and I'll be one when this war ends."

Salvy laughed. "You are an entrepreneur, a strategist, and a treasure seeker. I am humbled and gratified by your generous pledge to our shared cause."

Dudley poured two beers. They clicked tankards and sat down at the table. The Wolf trembled. That cliffside drop loomed.

Dudley lit a cigarette. "I bear discomfiting news from Los Angeles. My errant police colleagues are determined to round up a large number of young Mexican men, who they believe may have frequented that damnable klub*haus.* I'm afraid that quite a few stout Sinarquista lads may fall into this melee. My colleagues are looking for guns, sold out of the klub*haus.* You had assured me our East L.A. lads were not klub*haus* affiliates, but I need you to convincingly reassure me now."

Salvy lit a cigarette. "Yes, of course. I am grateful to have been informed of this, and you have my most sincere reassurance."

Dudley sipped beer. It was warm. The Wolf prowled adjacent tables. He sniffed raucous Mex soldiers and growled.

"I require another assurance, as well. I proffer this request couched in my utmost respect for you as a comrade and a man. I have become involved with Constanza Lazaro-Schmidt, and I have been informed that you are her occasional lover. I request that you terminate this relationship, and that you sever all contact with Constanza immediately."

Salvy blinked once. Dudley blinked once. Salvy stubbed out his cigarette.

His veins pulsed.

"You have my assurance, but I will issue a warning along with it. Constanza and her brother are shamefully as one, and they are more utilitarian than ideologically fascist. I have given you my pledge and additional caveat, and we need not mention this matter again. I commend you for not threatening me and blowing this trivial request out of proportion."

The Wolf growled. He smelled Salvy's rage. He saw his pulsing veins and incipient tremors. Salvy checked his wristwatch. He went *uno, dos, tres*—and winked.

The cantina exploded. It went up, just like that. It's a fireball. There's blasted-out glass and wood shrapnel. There's smoke, flames, and palm trees ignited. Detonation equals earthquake.

The outside *soldaten* ran for their cars. They trampled civilians and kicked over tables and chairs. They tumbled into their taco wagons and slammed bumpers, en masse. It was straight from the Keystone Kops.

The inside *soldaten* ran outside. They stumbled over scorched timber and screamed. Twelve men, *todos.* They pitched crazy-spastic, in flames.

Salvy said, "Priest-killers and nun-rapers. Redshirts of the Calles regime."

A car pulled off the coast road and skidded into the lot. Four Greenshirts piled out. They held sawed-off shotguns. They dodged flying debris and ran up to the burning men.

They pumped buckshot into them. They severed limbs on fire. A burning man staggered and knocked over tables. Dudley pulled his piece and fumbled it. The burning man got close. Salvy pulled his piece and shot him dead.

92

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

(LOS ANGELES, 2:00 P.M., 3/9/42)

Annie Staples arrived in her work clothes. That meant tartan skirt, crewneck sweater, and saddle shoes. She was Elmer and Brenda's college girl, and pitched her charms to men thrice her age. Brenda set up the lunch and urged Annie to be forthcoming. We met at Jack's Drive-in on the Strip.

Annie was blond. She was tall, leggy, and busty, and hailed from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. We dined in my car. Monarch burgers and pineapple malts. I understood Annie's allure. She was all college girl. Bill Parker would flip for her.

We made small talk during our lunch; Annie guilelessly dished on her tricks and told me she once spent a cozy weekend with the allegedly straitlaced Thad Brown. She tricked with Wendell Willkie during the '40 campaign, and said he was a sweetheart. Our carhop skated by and removed our trays; we lit cigarettes and settled down to business.

I said, "Brenda saw you with Sid Hudgens at Tom Breneman's. I sense a story there."

Annie blew smoke rings. "Well, I'd call it a complicated story."

"Those are my favorite kind."

"Brenda told me you know some of it already, because you know about her trick spots, and you're such good friends with Elmer Jackson. She said you know Sid, and you've met Ed Satterlee, and they're part of the story, too."

I said, "L.A.'s a small town for a big town, and I've been ensnared with the PD for a good three years. You tend to run into men like that, in the course of things."

Annie thought that was a hoot. She doused her cigarette in her coffee cup and chuckled a bit. She had changeling's eyes. One veered blue, one veered green.

"You tend to run into men like that, and I tend to sleep with them. You could say I ran a parlay with Elmer, Sid, and Ed, and Ed was the one who put me to good use, beyond the old you know what."

Elmer and I gabbed at Hideo Ashida's swearing-in party. He spilled the beans. I told Annie that I was up to speed on her shakedown gig with Ed the Fed. The mark was Dr. Saul Lesnick. Elmer filled in for Ed behind the camera one night. He caught wind of Annie pumping Dr. Saul. It got him thinking—and Elmer thinks impulsively, at best.

Annie said, "Well, sister, you've got most of it."

"Ed was interested in sexual and political dirt, wasn't he? Mr. Hoover gets his jollies that way, and you never know when dirt like that can be useful."

"Yep. That's the gist of it."

"Confirm this, will you? That first night Elmer ran the camera. Dr. Saul was discussing his patient Claire De Haven."

"That's right. Claire, the rich-girl Communist. Her and her cop lover, down in Mexico. Claire said you tried to kill the lover, but old Saul didn't believe it. The upshot is that Elmer heard all this, and he offered me money to wear a microphone and go to Otto Klemperer's parties, and ratchet up my pump job on old Saul."

I said, "Because Elmer wanted to keep tabs on Dr. Saul, and Claire always attended those parties, and Elmer was curious about what she might say regarding Dudley Smith."

Annie smiled. She was truly big-girl lovely. Call her Ingrid Bergman, with ten thousand chromosomes askew.

"Elmer was very curious about Mr. Smith, and I think he's got some kind of vendetta going against him. I told Elmer a little tale that old Saul told me, where Mr. Smith beat up Orson Welles, because he had a sort-of deal going with Claire. Elmer said he'd like to wire me up to pump Mr. Welles, which I'd do for free, if Mr. Welles lost some weight."

Brenda called Elmer "shakedown happy." This jibed with something I knew about him. He was a canny judge of character and voyeuristically inclined.

Annie ordered a second malt. Brenda thought she looked best on the sturdy-milkmaid side. I asked her how Sid Hudgens played into all this. She told me Sid was shakedown happy, all on his own, apart from Elmer and Ed. Join the crowd, Sid. Annie Staples knows from shakedowns.

Sid wanted dirt on film folk and politicians. He was putting out a sub-rosa scandal sheet and wanted dirt too hot for the *Herald.* He tried to recruit Annie as his very own Venus flytrap. She was still considering his pitch.

Annie's second malt arrived; she dunked her straw and siphoned the goo in a wink. Annie played a cameo role in Joan Conville's diary. Joan observed her futzing with her microphone outside Otto Klemperer's guesthouse. I teethed on the nexus of the whole three-case megillah. It was Meyer Gelb's cell and how the four surviving members still hovered in plain sight. The Cell. What old Saul might know and might have written down.

And Annie Staples was sitting right beside me. She's a one-woman nexus. In the market for a shakedown shill? Annie's the tops.

She had malted-milk residue on her upper lip. She's about five-foot-ten and built like a discus queen. I grabbed my napkin and daubed the goo off her lip. Annie likes people to touch her.

"I know that old Saul is a Federal informant, and that he reports to Ed Satterlee. Do you know if his informant duty went back to the early '30s, when he was in a Communist cell?"

"No, I don't think so. I think he signed on with Ed more recently than that, because his daughter was in prison for vehicular manslaughter, and Ed used that as a wedge to turn Saul out as his fink."

I lit a cigarette and thought about Elmer. He'd gone AWOL from Crash Squad briefings; Lee told me this.

Annie said, "Penny for your thoughts."

I said, "I was thinking about Elmer."

"What's there to think about? I'm in love with him, and he's in love with you."

I laughed. Elmer and his dead brother, Elmer and his shakedown girl. Early wartime L.A. The pursuit of the big main chance.

Annie jiggled the charms on her charm bracelet. Little dogs, doghouses, arrows piercing hearts.

"But Ed did have a snitch in Saul's cell back then, and Saul and Andrea didn't know it. It was this woman named Jean, and she was no kind of Red. Ed dished her to me. He said she's still in cahoots with this Meyer guy who ran the cell, even though the cell's dissolved. Jean used to be married to some crazy firebug. This Meyer guy's going to get her to shake down these exile musicians."

I said, "I'll pay you a thousand dollars to make wax impressions of all the keys that Dr. Saul carries."

Annie detached a little dog charm. She placed it in my hand and gave me a squeeze. She said, "For luck, sweetie. Because where you're going with all this, you're sure going to need it."

"Annie, will you—"

"Sure, sweetie. It's not like I've never caught him with his trousers off."

93

(LOS ANGELES, 3:00 P.M., 3/10/42)

Army brass. War-hire cop now. His luck holds. He's serendipitous and fuckstruck.

The Hollenbeck muster room was cluttered and cramped. The reduced Crash Squad was all ears.

The boys straddled chairs and faced Thad Brown. Ashida, Elmer Jackson, Buzz Meeks. Lee Blanchard and Bill Parker. Cigarette and cigar smoke/one big iron lung.

Ashida side-eyed Elmer J. Elmer's outburst still rankled. Jap, Jap, Jap. Elmer stooped to *that.*

Thad said, "We've got nine male Mexicans on our roust list. We need to determine whether or not Rice and Kapek sold them Japanese-confiscated guns. They filed no gun-confiscation paperwork, so we've got no comparison sheets to check against any guns we bag tonight. What we *do* have is the threat of illegal possession of firearms and possibly related armed robberies, to use as a wedge to extract information on our homicides."

Blanchard said, "Say it, boss. 211 pops will make us look good, if this whole job dips south."

Elmer said, "Blanchard's a pessimist."

Buzz said, "Blanchard's a Bolshevik."

Thad rolled his eyes. "We've got three squads tonight. There's Captain Parker and me, Jackson and Meeks, Blanchard and Ashida. On a related topic, that Navy chump Link Rockwell's in custody down in Florida. A naval district judge should be issuing an extradition ruling soon."

Elmer said, "Anchors away, whipdick."

Buzz said, "Link's tight as ticks with the Reverend Mimms. They're the world's foremost salt-and-pepper act."

Parker said, "We're going out tonight, and we muster here at 1930 hours. Shotguns, riot gear, and one paddy wagon per squad. Go home and sack out.

We'll be stretching these humps all night."

Buzz whistled. Blanchard whooped. They dogged Parker and Brown out to the hallway. Elmer kicked the door shut. Ashida gulped. Elmer pulled his chair up close.

"I'm sorry, Hideo. I shouldn't have said what I said. It was plain wrong of me, and I apologize."

Ashida stuck his hand out. Elmer bone-crushed it. Ashida mock-winced.

"I understand. You've been seething since you met with Kay, and I more than warranted your outburst."

Elmer displayed an envelope. He waved it and pulled out a sheet of soft-bond paper. Ashida saw faint spots. They resembled pinpricks dipped in soluble oil.

"Where did you get this?"

"At Bev's Switchboard. You know, that loopy mail drop in West Hollywood. It was in Meyer Gelb's mail-holding file, and it was addressed to a PO box in La Paz, down in Baja."

Ashida touched the sheet. It was high-rag content and top-grade absorbent.

"It's microdots. We'll need a microdot camera to bring up the text."

Elmer whooped. "I knew that was it. I saw a piece about that shit in *Reader's Digest.*"

Mail drops. Meyer Gelb. The dicey Lazaro-Schmidts hailed from La Paz.

"Hideo's in a trance. He's hanging out the 'Genius at Work' sign."

Ashida laughed. "We can't bring up the text without that camera."

"What about a plain old microscope? Could that get us in close?"

Ashida said, "Meet me at the lab. I'll see what I can do."

—

They two-carred over and hooked up at six. The day-shift chemists had clocked out. Ashida locked them in. Elmer jammed a chair under the doorknob.

Ashida scissor-cut the paper and shaped three equal strips. Elmer watchdogged the process. Ashida rigged a microscope and slide-clamped swatch #1. He dialed down to maximum range. Faint ink blurs appeared.

He ran swatch #2 and swatch #3. He got eight more ink blurs.

Ashida shook his head. Elmer went *Shit.* Ashida placed the strips back in the envelope and resealed it.

"There's something you should know, Elmer."

"Let me guess. You can't withhold this here lead from Dudley, like you withheld Kay's spiel on Joan Conville's diary."

Ashida balled his fists and fumed. He despised that mannerism. It made him look eff—

Elmer woofed him. "You're on the fence about Dud now, aren't you? I'm not all that surprised. Kay wouldn't have clued you in if she thought you'd tattle to him. And here's something you might want to consider. Maybe Kay's smarter than you are, and maybe she's cooking up something good."

Ashida stomped one foot. Elmer haw-hawed. Ashida walked to the mail slot and dropped the envelope in.

"It's out of our hands now. I might be on the fence, and I might not be. You've got the box number in La Paz as a lead, and that's it."

Elmer stomped one foot. He did good impersonations. He mimed effete rage, *c'est bon.*

"You're trumping me, Hideo. I'm coming out second-best here."

Ashida walked to his locker. He turned away from Elmer and unlocked it. He grabbed the gold bar off the top shelf.

Robbery swag. Thirty-three pounds plus. Worth twenty grand, U.S.

He turned and faced Elmer. Come, let us adore it. He held it out, worship me–style.

Elmer trembled and dropped his cigar. He lurched and bumped a glassware shelf. A glass beaker toppled and shattered on the floor.

Ashida said, "Take it. Your brother died for this, and I don't want it anymore."

Elmer picked up his cigar. He looked electrified. He dredged half a voice.

"What do you want?"

"A clean solve on the klub*haus* job."

Elmer kicked glass under a work desk. He brushed ash off his suit coat and went *Nyet.* Ashida placed the bar back in his locker. He tossed a lab rag over it. Gold as holy sacrament. Men died for this.

"Tell me how you turned the lead on Bev's Switchboard."

Elmer said, "It commenced with Jean Staley. I braced her, and she jobbed me out of my socks. We had a nifty first date, and then she plain vanished. I started getting postcards from U.S. 66, but Jean was really here in L.A. Bev's Switchboard was stiffing the cards and jobbing up the postal cancellations."

D. L. Smith on E. V. Jackson. He's half smart here and there. He trips on his dick otherwise.

"I need those cards. They may contain microdots, inserted between the inside and outside pieces of cardboard. I'll take them back to Ensenada with me. I might be able to locate a microdot camera there."

Elmer said, "Okay, boss."

Ashida said, "I'll try to work out a truce for you and Buzz. Keep the bar. I'm sure Dudley will accept that concession."

"All I want is a fair shot at whoever killed my brother. It has to be a plain murder. The gold's just a way in to figure all that out."

Ashida bowed. "I lost my taste for the gold when Joan died. All I want is a shot at a solve."

Elmer relit his cigar. Lab fumes and hot ash. Ignition, combustion, explos—

"I got no beef with that. You're Dud's boy, so you handle everything pertaining to that fucker."

"That's fine, but he'll want to know how you know whatever you know, and we have to keep Kay and Joan's diary out of it."

Elmer said, "You're right, boss."

Ashida said, "You should know something. You should know that I'll reveal whatever I learn at the sweep tonight to Dudley."

Elmer said, "You should know that fence-sitters tend to teeter and fall. You should also know that Buzz and me did Dud quite the solid. You know our missing chum, Tommy Glennon? Buzz and me braced him and killed him."

Ashida teetered. The fence wobbled. The floor dipped.

"What did he tell you?"

"My lips are sealed, boss."

94

(LOS ANGELES, 8:30 P.M., 3/10/42)

The boys are back in town.

El Towno said it best. Boyle Heights was T.J. North. It was tacofied territory. It was one big beaner bin.

Hola, fuckers. Here comes trouble. All you wicked Juans and dirty Diegos gonna get shit-kicked tonight.

Elmer and Buzz comprised Two Squad. They wore tin hats and lugged cut-down shotguns. They packed grand-jury subpoenas. Said paperwork was stamped “Alien Sedition Act.”

A paddy wagon trailed them. Two Squad worked the flats upside Lincoln Heights. One Squad and Three Squad were off elsewhere. Three squads, three turf quadrants, three righteous roust lists.

Three three-man rousts. That standardized the sweep. Elmer and Buzz caught three doozies. Chuy *“El Perro”* Mendez. Frankie *“El Cabrón”* Carbajal. Carlos *“El Cucaracha”* Calderon. The Dog, the Fucker, the Cockroach. Suspected 211 men and right-wing nuts. The flats *gots* to swing tonight.

Two Squad worked north-northeast. Los cholos lived in a tight radius. Elmer and Buzz walked. The paddy wagon chugged in low gear. Elmer was fitfully fucked-up and dizzy distracted.

It was Ashida. It was Ashida’s microdot play. It was Ashida’s gold bar. It was Ashida’s implied double-cross of one Dudley Smith. It was Tommy Glennon, to boot.

Buzz snuffed Tommy, impromptu. That didn’t faze him. They dumped Tommy in the waste dump and let the swamp beasts eat him up. That was likewise okay. But Tommy bleated a klub*haus* lead in his pickled prelude to death.

This Jap. Rice and Kapek popped him. He was a “sword man.” He had this queer white-boy pal. The white boy might be a musician. The white boy frequented the jazz strip and poked boys at the *haus.* The Jap sword-sliced chickens at J-town slop chutes. The Jap licked blood off the swords that he used.

The Jap made habeas and was on the loose somewhere.

Elmer teethed the lead. He was fungooed and fucked-up. He was ditzy and diverted. The shotgun weighed ten tons. The tin hat banged his head. He walked the flats, distracted.

He'd witnessed a property log-in. It was late January. Kapek and Rice talked up a sword man. The sword man licked blood off his swords. It disgusted Kapek and Rice.

He checked Alien Squad roust sheets last night. Guess what? No fucking sword man was listed. Guess what? No Jap swords were property-logged during that time span. Guess what? No chicken-killing sword lickers were tagged in the MO file.

He'd read the initial log-in report. He recalled that much. He had the sword man's name tucked someplace unconscious. Rice and Kapek pulled his paperwork. That had to be it.

The sword man. Hideo Ashida. Cause for ditzy distraction.

He got Jean Staley's postcards to Ashida. Army SIS just might possess a microdot camera. Him and Ashida worked out a cover story. It explained how he knew all this three-case hullabaloo. It served to cloak his ass with Dudley Smith.

Dig *this:*

He was at Joan Conville's place. He was hot to pour Big Joan the pork. Joan was terped up. She was burbling, out of her gourd. She kept mumbling shit about the gold and her diary. He found the diary and read it. He learned everything. He put the diary back where he found it. He bid Joan adieu and waltzed off, unlaid.

The story played *goooooood.* It jibed with Ashida's lie to Dudley. Joan burned the diary. She was suicide-fevered. Ashida found that burned-page mess.

The rousts proceeded. The Cockroach went easy. Papa Roach fumed. Mama Roach wrung rosary beads and went *Aaay, caramba.* The Cockroach submitted to cuffing and shackling. Elmer gave him a cigar. They hoisted him into the paddy wagon and split for *El Casa de Perro.*

The Dog went easy. Mama and Papa Dog whimpered and retreated. El Perro wore a Sir Guy shirt and slit-bottom khakis. He submitted to cuffing and shackling. Buzz gave him a cigar. They hoisted him into the paddy wagon and hit *El Casa de Cabrón.*

The Fucker went rough. He tried to run and tripped over a lamp stand. Buzz grabbed his hair and smashed his face on the floor. Elmer cuffed him. Buzz shackled him. Mama and Papa Fucker evinced boredom. They were blitzed on white port and lemon juice.

The extraction went rough. The Fucker flailed and kicked. They tossed him in the paddy wagon. Elmer sat on his legs. Buzz sat on his head. The Dog and Cockroach haw-hawed. The driver cop hauled for Hollenbeck Station.

Four bluesuits met them. They grappled the punks through the jail door and got them ensconced. The Dog and the Cockroach went in the drunk tank. One Squad's and Three Squad's geeks were already there. That made eight geeks, all in all. They whooped and demanded their rights. A colored trusty slapped them around.

The blues dumped the Fucker in sweatbox #2. Buzz recuffed him to a chair. *Oooh*—what's that on his right hand?

It's a coiled-snake tattoo. It's *El Symbol* of Sinarquismo. This mandates some thought.

Elmer ducked down to the file room. He tapped the *C* cabinet and pulled Frankie Carbajal's sheet. *Aaay, caramba.* Frankie peddled maryjane, Frankie 211'd bodegas, Frankie whipped his *chorizo* out on women.

That was it. Just one file sheet. No Fed routing stamps. No subversive rebop noted. No KA list attached.

Elmer walked back to the sweatbox. Frankie was trussed to that chair. Buzz rode a matching chair and skunk-eyed him. Elmer pulled a chair close and relit a cigar.

Buzz lit a cigar. He got it going good. The sweatbox fumed up. Frankie cough-coughed.

"You guys are sadistic. I've got asthma. Those cigars aren't doing me any good."

Buzz said, "Did you catch Frankie's tattoo?"

Elmer nodded. "We got that to consider, along with the fact that Frankie's a whipout man."

Buzz said, "I'll bet he habituates schoolyards and whips it out on little kids."

Frankie said, "I whipped it out on Eleanor Roosevelt. She was serving cookies and punch at some crippled kid's gig in the Heights."

Elmer said, "A whipout man's a whipout man. I don't see no distinction between kids and our swell First Lady."

Frankie squirmed in his chair. He looked consumptive. He sported a hairnet conk. His zoot pants rode up to his sternum.

"I whipped it out on Ann Sheridan and the Liltin' Martha Tilton. They were at this war-bond drive on Hollywood Boulevard. I escaped into the crowd and whipped it out on a B-girl at the Firefly Lounge."

Elmer sighed. Buzz sighed. Elmer uncuffed and unshackled Frankie. Buzz slipped on sap gloves.

"Your whipout escapades don't interest us. Your tattoo interests us. There's some names we'd like to run by you. There's a certain spot on East 46th Street that we’d sure like to discuss. Fifth Column shit’s a hot topic these days, and we’d sure like to hear your thoughts about that.”

Frankie rubbed his wrists and ankles. Frankie said, *“Viva Sinarquismo. Chinga tu madre.”*

Buzz roundhoused him. One slap/ten-ounce palm weights/see Frankie fly. El Whipout Man whipped off the chair and hit the floor flat on his back. Buzz stepped on his neck and pinned him supine. Elmer read him the riot act.

“Here’s where you determine your fate, son. Prompt answers get you a cozy cell and a shot at a kick-out. Horseshit and jive gets you a bunk in the fruit tank at Lincoln Heights. Gene ‘the Mean Queen’ Kefalvian’s in custody there. He goes for Mexican shrimps like you.”

Buzz released his foot. Frankie coughed and rubbed his neck. Elmer helped him up and sat him back in his chair. Buzz slipped off his sap gloves and pat-patted him on the head.

“I’ll take the cozy cell and the shot at a kick-out. I saw Gene the Queen fight Chuco Ortiz at the Olympic. He put a drubbing on him.”

Buzz said, “Señor Carbajal’s no dummy.”

Elmer said, “Señor Carbajal’s on the Fed’s subversive list, or he wouldn’t have been on our roust list. He’s got no routing tags on his green sheet here, so I’m guessing that all the Feds have got on him is his membership in them goofy Sinarquistas.”

Buzz cracked his knuckles. “Let’s see what Señor Carbajal has to say about that.”

Frankie flashed three fingers downward. It was Klan kode. It meant KKK. This beat-on beaner aped redneck rubes.

“I say *‘¡Viva Sinarquismo!’* I say, *‘¡Sinarquismo por vida!’*”

Buzz relit his cigar. “Let’s note Frankie’s point, and get to them names.”

Elmer said, “Let’s start with Archie Archuleta. He’s Mex, and he hails from Frankie’s neck of the woods.”

Frankie snapped his suspenders. “I knew Archie. He’s dead now, and he got snuffed along with two cops—which is sure as shit what all this is about.”

Buzz said, “Frankie’s quick on the uptake.”

Elmer said, “Don’t stop there, Frankie.”

Frankie fluffed out his conk. It glistened with Lucky Tiger pomade.

“Archie recruited Mexican boys for *La Causa.* He pulled them out of the CYO at St. Vibiana’s. This priest named Joe Hayes ran the St. Vib’s chapter. He was a Coughlinite and a big Sinarquista contributor, not to mention a big sissy. He was poking this crazy Tommy Glennon guy up the *culo.* I didn’t know Tommy too good. He was just a face in the right-flank crowd.”

Elmer said, “The klub*haus.* 46th, just east of Central. Wendell Rice, George

Kapek, and a cop named Cal Lunceford."

Frankie shrugged. "I dropped in for visits. A bunch of my fellow Greenshirts did, and so what? I won't give up no active shirts, but I'll tell you I hardly knew Rice and Kapek, and Lunceford didn't show up there all that much. He was a keep-to-himself sort of guy. They all took the blood oath and joined *La Causa,* but they're dead now, so who cares?"

Elmer said, "Let's get this out of the way. We all know a Jap spy killed Lunceford, and you've got no goddamn idea who killed Rice, Kapek, and Archuleta."

Frankie said, *"Sí. Es la verdad, muchacho."*

Buzz slipped on his sap gloves. "Son, I don't like you telling us who or what you won't give up, and you trying to set the terms of this here interrogation."

Frankie flashed the Klan sign. Frankie flexed his coiled-snake tattoo.

"I curse your syphilitic mama, Tex. I curse your white Protestant-oppressor ancestors going back six generations, and—"

Buzz roundhoused him. Teeth and gold bridgework flew. Ditto blood. Ditto gum flaps. Ditto a slice of his tongue.

Frankie pitched backward. The chair jerked loose of its struts. Frankie crashed into the wall. The chair toppled. Buzz balled his fists and cocked big left-rights.

Elmer jumped up and held him back. Elmer bear-hugged him and ran *Whoa now*'s. Buzz went limp and dropped his hands. Elmer hug-walked him out of the sweatbox and dumped him in the hall.

He slammed the door and threw the lock. Frankie gurgled blood and quaked abject. Elmer pulled off his suit coat and squatted beside him. He wadded the coat and passed it to Frankie. The little hump blotted his face.

Elmer hit the wall switch. The sweatbox went all dark. He got up close to Frankie. He touched him soft and whispered *this:*

You've got to talk/you've got to talk/you've got to talk. I won't let that Okie hurt you, if you talk to me.

Frankie gurgled and spit blood. His breath went asthmatic. Elmer baby-talked him. The sweatbox went eerie dark. Frankie caught some asthma breath and snitched *this:*

The Greenshirts fingered a sub attack. It was last month. The Japs lobbed the Ellsworth Oil Refinery. The shells went adios and pfft. Rice and Kapek were muy Fifth Column. Catbox Cal, just as much. They sold Jap guns to the Greenshirts. The shirts got plans to commit 211s. La Causa needs the gelt. Catholic dinero fuels los Sinarquistas. They've got this initiation rite. You got to kill three priest-killers.

Salvy Abascal's El Führer. He's got kill lists of priest-killers and Reds. El Führer's got this Irish fool eating out of his hand. The fool's an Army major and *an L.A. cop. They're smuggling "H" and wets. They're selling Baja Japs as slaves. The Irish guy's got his head up his ass. He don't know shit from shinola. Salvy's put Greenshirt plants in with the wets. Them fake wets are set to escape and pull sabotage.*

It came out in stutters and gasps. The sweatbox was blackout dark and reeked of slobber and blood. Elmer cleaved close to Frankie. The little hump bled on him. The little hump gasped for breath and gasped *this:*

Archie the A. Call him "El Pimpo." He brought girls to the haus. There was this queer boy. He went to all the jazz clubs. He orchestrated the pervo shit at the haus. He had this Jap friend. The Perv of All Pervs. He sold curios. He ate raw chicken flesh. He sucked blood off samurai swords.

95

(LOS ANGELES, 11:00 P.M., 3/10/42)

Salvy said, “You seem fretful, Comrade.”

Dudley lit a cigarette. He’d chained the whole pack in nothing flat.

“I could say the same about you, lad.”

“Yes, but I am more high-strung to begin with. I have never possessed your most serene composure.”

They slouched in Dudley’s prowl sled. They’d parked up from Hollenbeck Station. They had a clear front-door view.

The sweep stood complete. They’d observed the haul-ins. Nine fish were now jailed. Salvy tagged three Sinarquistas. Miguel Santarolo, Frankie Carbajal, Mondo Díaz. Hard boys all. Salvy said they’d never roll and bleat.

Dudley chain-smoked. His throat felt raw. His nerves ran raw, besides. Hideo called him, pre-sweep. Hideo tattled an odd chat with Elmer Jackson.

Elmer tumbled to the three-case convergence. He wouldn’t say how. He knew about the gold and fixated on the fire. A three-case principal must have killed his brother. Elmer believed it. Elmer vowed revenge.

It was unsettling. Hideo’s punch line troubled him.

Elmer and Buzz Meeks killed Tommy Glennon. The act redeemed Elmer’s New Year’s Eve fuckup. The act proclaimed a vow of fealty to one D. L. Smith. Hideo foisted his gold bar on Elmer. Hideo urged him to confess to Father D. L. Smith. The gold gift seems justified. How Elmer tumbled remains perplexing.

Salvy lit a cigarette. “You needn’t concern yourself as to what my boys might reveal about our plans. They know very little, and I’ll secure them a lawyer and post bail in the morning. This klub*haus* mess will subside and resolve at some point, and I’ll keep my boys sequestered until then.”

Elmer Jackson showed. He walked out of the station. He lit a cigar and stretched loose some kinks. He looked disheveled. He was coatless and sported a badly stained white shirt.

Dudley beeped the horn and flashed his high beams. Elmer looked over. Dudley got out and stood on the sidewalk. Elmer ambled on up.

He leaned against a streetlamp. It backlit him nicely. The stains were wet blood.

Elmer said, "Forgive my appearance, Dud. A suspect got between me and Buzz."

"Turner Meeks is a vivid interlocutor. He's been known to lose patience with rowdy Mexicans. Might you tell me the suspect's name?"

"Frankie Carbajal."

"I'm assuming that he rolled in the end."

"Such as it was, boss. He said the Sinarquistas are planning some 211s, and they plan to use some guns that Rice and Kapek sold them. Archie Archuleta brought girls to the *haus,* which don't surprise me at all. Frankie was hipped on some queer jazz-club geek and some Jap with a sword fetish."

Bland revelations. Ho-hum. Nothing catastrophic there.

Elmer pointed to the car. "Who's the cholo?"

Dudley smiled. "He hardly concerns you."

Elmer smiled. "Tommy Glennon concerns both of us. Buzz and me clipped him, in case you didn't get that from Hideo already. I don't expect an attaboy on it, but I'd sure like you to acknowledge the favor we did."

Dudley said, "Muted bravos, Elmer."

"Don't you want to know what he spilled?"

"I was getting to that, yes."

Elmer blew smoke rings. "He laid out some old news. You and Carlos Madrano ran wets, and Joe Hayes was his bun boy. He tried to squeeze you when you saw him up at Quentin last year, but he didn't say what with."

Dudley lit a cigarette. It was a gaffe. His hand trembled. Elmer caught it.

"I had quite the chat with Hideo. He told me that you've put some things together since the last time we spoke. I'm wondering how you came upon what you learned."

Elmer stretched and rubbed his back against the streetlamp. He was milking this. *You overreaching bumpkin, I will kill—*

"I was over at Joan Conville's place about a week before she died. I was putting some moves on her, but it wasn't going my way. Joanie was terped, and she was mumbling about the gold heist and the fire. She kept fading in and out, and she talked up a diary before she passed out for real. I tossed the place, found it, and read it. It was mostly woo-woo about you and Bill Parker, but she wrote up her forensic shit with Hideo pretty good. I put some threads together, and figured the three of you were out for the gold. I put the diary back where I found it, kissed Joanie good night, and scrammed."

Vivid verismo. Elmer Jackson in quintessence. Woman-crazed and self-seeking. Less than half smart.

“Sally forth, lad. Keep the gold bar. Kill your brother’s killer with my most fond regards.”

96

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

(LOS ANGELES, 11:30 P.M., 3/10/42)

I watched the Maestro compose. We sat at his piano; Otto picked out low-register chords and jotted notes on a scratch pad. He was working on the nightmare tone poem we had discussed several times. Otto encouraged me to improvise at the moments his imagination faltered. I filled in with passages from the three Bartók concerti; I was undermining Otto's more foreboding motifs. My mission was therapeutic more than anything else. I was seeking to derail the Maestro's darkly foreboding moods and loosen the hold of his formal therapist: the darkly corrupt Saul Lesnick.

Otto hit chords as I smoked and sipped brandy. Once again, I studied the piece of paper secured by the sheet-music stand. Words by Meyer Gelb and W. H. Auden. Once again, I came up against Comrade Gelb's old Communist cell.

This storm, this savaging disaster.

Otto tapped the music stand and smiled at me. He said, "When I compose, I must always immerse myself in the mood the music attempts to express. Here, we have the chaos of my brain tumor and the muted light of my recovery, with recapitulative passages depicting the ongoing slog of the war."

I hit a series of random chords, up and down the keyboard. They were meant to represent the overlapping jabber of the too-rude and too-voluble guests at Otto's all-too-frequent parties. The chords covertly announced my intention to pump the Maestro for information on Jean Staley.

Otto said, "Tell me what that earsplitting passage represents, and perhaps I shall tell you a compatible tale."

"Your parties," I said. "Nesting grounds for parasites, all given to one doctrinaire view. All belligerent and convinced of their own uniqueness."

Otto laughed and clasped my left hand; he poised it over the keyboard and banged a run of similarly unpleasant chords. I pulled my hand free and laughed with him.

Otto said, “Call it a crude parody of the German tanks approaching Leningrad in Comrade Dimitri’s new symphony, and anoint it the expression of my own loneliness and need to smother it with the company of idiots.”

I laughed and got to the point. “Jean Staley comes to mind there. She seems to have colonized your guesthouse permanently. One might call her ‘the woman who came to dinner.’ ”

Otto found this uproarious. I failed to add “while she’s been dodging a major police inquiry and perpetrating a bewildering mail ruse.”

“Jean has colonized my guesthouse before, and will colonize it again. She is a Communist, you see. She purports to despise private property, even as she appropriates it. She sublets the homes of the rich to suit the whims of the decadent Right, which I find delightfully hilarious.”

I banged right-hand chords up and down the keyboard. “I sense a provocative story, *Liebchen.*”

“Aaah, Katherine Ann Lake in her vamp mode, and ever the rival of other provocative women.”

“I’m hardly Mata Hari, *Liebchen.*”

“No, but you are the consort of inquisitive policemen, and I know when I’m being pumped.”

I laughed and covered my mouth. I was once again a conniving schoolgirl in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Otto sipped brandy and lit a cigarette. “I wasn’t there for the party that Jean midwifed, but I had given her my consent to sublet the house, and to do with it as she saw fit. Saul Lesnick had diagnosed my tumor, and I was taking a rest cure prior to my operation. So, I’m afraid my story lacks the level of detail that might give it a corresponding punch.”

Once again, Saul Lesnick. Once again, Meyer Gelb’s cell. Annie Staples called me early this evening; she told me that she had secured wax impressions of Dr. Saul’s office keys.

“I’ve never minded incomplete stories.”

“I know that about you, dear. You’re quite capable of ascribing your own endings.”

“Otto, you’re taunting me—”

“It was early in ’39. Jean sublet my home for a party she described as having a ‘pro-fascist theme.’ I left the sanitarium and returned here. I immediately felt that something evil had happened in my absence, but I was debilitated, and disinclined to confront Jean as to what might have occurred. I was stuporous from headaches and the medicine that was prescribed to alleviate the pain, so I don’t know where I was or who the other person was when the following occurred.”

The Maestro taunted and teased me. I almost blurted "Don't string this out."

Otto hit the tanks-approaching chords from the *Leningrad* Symphony. They were ever dark and foreboding. The Maestro knew how to build suspense.

"The conclusion, dear Katherine. A man approached me and berated me for living in a haunted house. I beat that man to death."

I shut my eyes. Otto hit the ominous chords again. I barely heard my own voice.

"And then?"

"And then, I told Dr. Lesnick. And Saul told me he knew an FBI man who could make it all go away, for a goodly amount of money."

"Was the FBI man Ed Satterlee?"

"Yes."

"Was Jean Staley the conduit for the financial transaction?"

The Maestro said, "Yes, she was."

—

This/storm/this/savaging/disaster/the rain/the gold/the fire/it's all/one story/you see.

I drove home and sat down at my own piano; I picked out those notes and tried to will a single three-case solution. The gold robbery as genesis; the fire as corresponding catastrophe; the Communist cell as point of constellation. Meyer Gelb, Jean Staley, Saul Lesnick. Ed Satterlee as snitch-recruiter. Otto Klemperer kills a man; Lesnick and Satterlee quash public exposure. The Maestro Manse as a current constellation point. Gelb's current plan to recruit four exiled musicians and turn them as informants.

Lee was off at Hollenbeck Station; he'd told me the East L.A. sweep should run through the night. The house echoed those twenty-odd notes. My thoughts went nowhere constructive. I thought of Joan through it all.

The doorbell rang; I knew who it was; who else perched and pounced this late?

I got up and opened the door. Bill walked straight past me and beelined to the liquor shelf. I allotted him time to guzzle a tumbler of scotch. I knew all his brusque movements and modes of peremptory address.

He'll turn to face me. He'll reveal unsettling moments from the East L.A. sweep. He'll take me in because I'm the woman he loves, and I hit him in the face ten days ago. I'll notice the coffee stain on his wilted white shirt.

Bill did just that; the stain was off to the side of his necktie. He stood ten feet away from me and made no move to close the gap. He said, "Thad and I braced a dink named Miguel Santarolo. He said Rice and Kapek sold the

Greenshirts a large quantity of Jap guns. He laid out some planned 211s and snitched off Salvy Abascal's Irish-cop *hermano.* I'm sure you won't be surprised to learn that Dudley has been murdering priest-killers down in Baja, or that he's now a slavering fascist convert."

I sat down on the couch; Bill sat down beside me. I took off his hat and sailed it across the room. It hit the piano and landed on the adjoining carpet. Bill shut his eyes. I put my hand on his chest and felt his heart race.

"Annie made those wax impressions. We've got access to Lesnick's office now."

"Have Ashida toss it. He's primed to betray Dudley. There's a glimmer of decency in him that we can exploit."

I unbuttoned his shirt and ran my hand over his chest. Bill said, "Oh Jesus, Kay." He fumbled at my legs and snapped one garter strap. I went dizzy. He kept his hand there and kept his eyes shut.

It was who kisses who now. I pulled off Bill's shoes and unclipped his holster. He clamped his hand on my hand and held it to his heart. I threw my free hand back and hit the light switch by the couch. It was who kisses who in the dark now.

Bill surprised me there. He pulled me close and touched me under my sweater. We bumped noses and scraped teeth as we kissed in the dark.

97

(LOS ANGELES, 8:00 A.M., 3/11/42)

Mondo *"El Tigre"* Díaz. He defines intractable. Sweatbox #4's his new habitat. Ashida played good guy. Blanchard played bad guy. They were ten hours in. They eschewed rough stuff. They fed *El Tigre* doughnuts and coffee. They plied him with booze and contraband weed.

El Tigre revealed zero. They stressed the Sinarquistas and his Peeping Tom busts. *El Tigre* came off bemused. He wore a sharkskin zoot suit and a coiled-snake pendant. He sported snarling-tiger tattoos.

Blanchard yawned. Ashida yawned. *El Tigre* told stale jokes. A lion is fucking a zebra. If a nigger and a Mexican jump off the Taft Building, who hits the ground first? Come-San-Chin, the Chinese cocksucker. That old chestnut.

El Tigre was twenty-nine. He graduated Lincoln High and LAJC. That was enticing. Ashida dispatched the Hollenbeck watch boss. *El Tigre* came off educated. See what you can find out.

Díaz lit a cigarette. He'd smoked all of his and half of Blanchard's. He was bright-eyed and bushy-tailed.

"You guys have been good to me. I'll concede that. You've read me pretty well, too. You know a tough nut to crack when you see one. I got popped for 459, back in '38. It was a humbug roust. Two jamokes named Dougie Waldner and Fritzie Vogel leaned on me. They were rough boys. I withstood their grief, so you can bet your bottom dollar I'll withstand yours."

Blanchard yawned. "That Fritzie's a mean one. He's never learned the art of waiting your suspect out."

Díaz said, "I'm the intransigent type. The day you wait me out will be the twelfth of never."

Blanchard rolled his eyes. He ruffled the phone book on the table. The '41 White Pages. Heavy and fat. The classic tell-me-now tool.

Ashida said, "You're well-spoken, Mondo."

"For a beaner. That's what you're saying."

“No, I’m saying you’re well-spoken, by any and all standards.”

“Don’t butter me up, Charlie Chan. I’ve been buttered up by experts.”

Blanchard yawned. “Charlie Chan’s a Chink. You’re confusing him with Mr. Moto. Peter Lorre plays him in the movies. I popped that little twerp for possession of morphine. Some studio bulls put the skids to it.”

Ashida yawned. Díaz mock-yawned. Peter Lorre—snoresville. The room buzzer buzzed. Ashida got up and cracked the door.

A bluesuit passed him a folder. “That educational stuff you asked for. LAJC requisitioned it from the U.S. Passport Office. Your pal here did some traveling and raised some eyebrows.”

Ashida nodded. The bluesuit took off. Ashida shut the door and skimmed file pages.

Díaz had a Passport Office green sheet. He’d matriculated in Germany, circa ’35. He attended Dresden Polytechnic. He had a graduate chem degree. He’d joined the Nazi *and* left-wing Sparticist parties. He built bombs for Franco’s Falange and blew up Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War.

Díaz said, “Mr. Moto’s in a trance. He’s conniving something. He’s the inscrutable yellow man of the East.”

Blanchard said, “What gives?”

Ashida dropped the file and grabbed the phone book. He applied a two-hand grip and a baseball swing and smashed Díaz in the head. He heard his nose snap and watched blood burst. He reversed himself and slammed downward. Díaz whiplashed and jackknifed and bounced off the chair.

Blanchard jumped up and stood back. Díaz burrowed into the chair legs and covered his head. Ashida pounded his back. He made like Mr. Moto. He talked pidgin singsong.

“Dresden Polytechnic.”

“Your chem degree.”

“Your conflicting memberships.”

“Fascist or Communist. I’ll hit you until you roll.”

Díaz scrunched down and covered up. Ashida phone-booked him. He hit Díaz in the back, Díaz in the legs, Díaz in the head. He caught side shots of drop-jawed Lee Blanchard. He heard Díaz singsong-yell:

“Fuck Salvy.”

“Fuck his puto Greenshirts.”

“I’m playing the left-right field.”

“I’m in with the real Kameraden.”

“We’ve got cutouts and mail drops and microdots.”

“We’ve got rebop straight from Buck Rogers.”

“We’re running shakedowns and we’ll have spaceships before this war is

through.”

“We’re invisible.”

“We’re everywhere.”

“We’ll rule the postwar world.”

“Ask my cutout, Two-Gun Davis. Ask sub-Führer Meyer Gelb. We’re invisible and we’re everywhere.”

98

(LOS ANGELES, 11:00 A.M., 3/11/42)

Crash Squad confab. The big postmortem. Let's kick loose leads to death.

The squad ran underweight now. Ashida split for Baja and pressing Army shit. The roster ran Elmer, Buzz, and Lee Blanchard. Plus Bill Parker and Thad Brown.

They hogged the Hollenbeck muster room. Thad brought a jug. They yawned and stretched and crapped out at one long table.

Elmer was bennie-bopped. Ashida's absence jazzed him and gored him. Ashida grabbed Jean Staley's postcards. They might contain microdots. That was all good. Ashida foxed him otherwise. He dumped that microdot letter in the mail slot. It would shoot to La Paz. He'd probably snitch the PO box number to Dudley. Ashida was playing Dud ad hoc. Betray him/rat *to* him/betray him. Ashida ran this treadmill to The Big Where?

The Big Where? was everywhere. Him and Buzz were half-ass estranged now. Buzz overthumped Frankie Carbajal. They half-ass made up, in the wake. They agreed to withhold certain shit that Frankie revealed.

Like Frankie's sabotage rat-out. Like Abascal's double-cross on Dud. Like Abascal's plan to work wetback saboteurs and plant bombs on U.S. soil. The withhold felt dicey and clammy. The withhold felt good. Him and Buzz were running pure rogue now.

Dud vetted the Tommy Glennon snuff and told him to keep the gold bar. Dud vetted his shot at Wayne Frank's killer. It all felt dicey-clammy and good. This new Crash Squad had formed. It was him, Kay, Thad, and Bill Parker. Ashida half-ass cosigned their main gig.

Cornhole Dudley Smith. Nullify his evil shit. Notch a clean klub*haus* solve. Ashida was a wild card. Buzz was wild card #2. Buzz was running hurt-crazed and kill-crazed. He laid Joan's diary scoop on him. The scoop gave Buzz this big hotfoot. Yeah—but toward what goddamn end?

Everybody yawned. Everybody stretched. Crash Squad vexation meets Crash

Squad exhaustion. The jug went around. Elmer abstained. Booze defused his bennie drift. Thad B. intoned some bad news.

"This Greenshirt fuck Abascal fucked us. He got a lawyer to get Díaz, Santarolo, and Carbajal moved into Federal custody. Hollenbeck Patrol raided their domiciles and turned sixteen revolvers and automatics that Rice and Kapek sold them. The Feds are holding those little Nazi shits under Alien-Sedition Act provisions. My guess is they'll be in stir awhile, and then get deported to Mexico."

The room rippled. Abascal be wicked whammy. Elmer caught a whiff of Ed the Fed Satterlee here.

Buzz yawned. "This priest Joe Hayes is Tommy Glennon's bun boy."

Parker said, "*Ouch*—he's my confessor."

That roused some yuks. The jug went around. Elmer abstained. Buzz lit a big cigar.

"Archie Archuleta recruited out of the CYO at St. Vibiana's. You got lots of rich-ass Catholic laymen contributing to the cause. Who knows how many 211s those dinks have pulled so far."

The room rerippled. Buzz stifled a big yawn.

"Here's something that may shock the more naïve among you. The Dudster's hatching racket schemes down in Baja. I don't see no dropped jaws on that one, so I'll add that he's partnered up with Salvy Abascal on that front, which makes him a second- or thirdhand accomplice to all of Salvy's seditious shit."

The room triple-rippled. Elmer slapped the table and focused eyes his way.

"Look, Dud's covered as long as Jack Horrall serves as Chief. We've got our next chief right here in this room, and it's either Brother Bill or Brother Thad. We all know how bent the Dudster is, but we've got ourselves a homicide job right now. The next chief can put the hurt to Dud—but we should only talk up real case leads."

Thad said, "Hear, hear."

Parker said, "Elmer's right. And all our Dudley Smith accusations are second- and thirdhand supposition."

Buzz said, "I hate that mick cocksucker."

Blanchard said, "*That's* hot off the ticker tape. Roll the presses on that one."

More yuks ensued. Elmer slapped the table. He was bennified out to the planet Pluto.

"I got a lead, but I can't reveal my source on the first part of it. It's a no-shit, somebody-killed-those-guys-at-the-klub*haus* lead."

Thad said, "We're listening."

Blanchard said, "Elmer tends to draw things out."

Elmer laughed. "My source told me a crazy Jap and a queer white kid frequented the klub*haus.* The Jap was a nutty sword man who killed chickens and licked blood off the swords he used, and the fruit kid was a jazz-club habitué. Rice and Kapek popped a Jap like that in January, and I witnessed the property log-in, but all the paperwork and property has gone missing, and I can't remember this Jap's name."

Thad said, "Okay, that's the first part, and you've still got our attention."

Elmer said, "You've got the gist right there, which Frankie Carbajal confirmed last night. But he added that the Jap sold curios for a living, which narrows down a possible make on him. There was queer action going on in the upstairs bedroom, and any Jap sucking blood off samurai swords looks like a real lead to me."

Buzz grabbed his crotch. "I got your real lead, throbbing twelve inches."

That roused yuks and yawns. Blanchard nipped on the jug and stubbed out his cigarette.

"Here's your real lead, but I'm not sure how it pertains to the klub*haus* job. First, there's this. Ashida broke Mondo Díaz, but he took off and split back to Baja—which I don't like, given what he is to Dudley. It turns out that Díaz is a chemistry whiz, and he went to college in Germany, and he knows something called 'microdot technology,' and he betrayed Salvy what's-his-name and threw in with some left- and right-wing guys he calls the *'Kameraden.'* They're out to profit off the war, they're running a shakedown racket, they've got mail drops and intermediaries, so nobody knows nothing they're not supposed to. It's all one big fucked-up megillah, and Mondo's personal high-up was a certain ex-chief of ours named James Edgar Davis."

Oooga-booga. Nobody's yawning now. Elmer recalled Joan's diary. Joan laid out good Davis dish.

Thad slapped the table. The room simmered down quick.

"We've got to act on this. For the PD's sake, if nothing else."

Parker said, "I happen to know that Dudley has plans to pentothal Davis. We need to get to him first."

—

Sweep fever resumed. They went Mex sweep to Chink sweep in a hot tick. Two squads formed. One Squad: L. Blanchard, T. Brown. Two Squad: B. Parker, E. Jackson, B. Meeks.

We rendezvous at Kwan's, 1300. Chink-o-phile Davis haunts C-town nonstop. He's Chink-fluent and Chink-defined. He's got a rumored C-town pied-à-terre.

The sweep could wait. Elmer detoured first. He racked his brain and snagged that log-in Jap's name. There it is. It's Robert "Banzai Bob" Yoshida.

He dipped by Central Station and combed the Alien Squad files. He found what he missed the first time.

Banzai Bob's log-in sheet. 1/24/42. No habeas tab. The klub*haus* job occurred 1/29. Banzai Bob was a railroad clerk. Banzai Bob was *not* a curio dealer.

Elmer called the Lincoln Heights Jail and talked to the watch boss. The boss checked detention records and came back on the line. He said Banzai Bob had been in stir, 1/24 to now. That nixed him as a klub*haus*-job suspect. Elmer told the boss to plant Bob in a sweatbox. He'd be right there.

He bopped to Lincoln Heights. Banzai Bob spoke good English. Bob was native-born. He voted for FDR three times. This internment drive's the shits. He'll be on the bus for Manzanar, 3/25. It's like Pharaoh and the Jews. *Let my people go!!!*

Elmer commiserated. Elmer slipped Bob a ten-spot and a stack of girlie mags. Bob was delighted. Bob revealed *this:*

He didn't know no queer white boy. He didn't know no klub*haus* or jazz-club crawlers. He didn't know no curio men. His daddy bequeathed him his samurai swords and nail-studded dick sheaths. Who knows where Daddy got them. Daddy was bughouse crazy. Daddy committed seppuku on 10/8/39. Sayonara, Daddy.

Banzai Bob conceded *this:*

Yeah, he sword-slaughtered chickens. So what? He was a part-time Buddhist priest. It was like them Jew rabbis. They kosherized food. He decapitated it.

Sayonara, Bob. You've been exonerated. Elmer laid tracks for Kwan's.

Two Squad was set to go. Buzz supplied beavertail saps. Bill Parker supplied rock salt–packed shotguns. He cautioned Elmer and Buzz. The PD was Hop Sing–allied. Ace Kwan was Jack Horrall's lapdog. Go easy on Hop Sing storefronts.

They fortified on mai tais and pork fried rice. Ace Kwan served them. Ace professed ignorance. *Don't know Jim Davis' hideaway!!!* Ace lied like a rug.

They lit out on North Broadway. It brought back New Year's Eve and french-fried Eddie Leng and the start of all this multitudinous shit. They lit out three abreast. Elmer gassed on their mission. *Oooga-booga.* They packed pump guns and walked tall.

They bypassed Hop Sing fronts. They leveled rival tong fronts. They blew out plate-glass windows. They raided chop suey pits and bookie joints. They dumped the fly-specked produce in open-air stalls. They prowled Chink-smut theaters on East College Street. They saw surreptitious Chinamen slam their underhung ham.

They ran field interviews. They got *Don't know where Chief Davis live!!!* ten million times. They tore through "O" dens. They dumped hopheads off dope pallets and got ditto. They knocked over the late Eddie Leng's Kowloon. Elmer spotted a Four Families warlord. Buzz dunked his face in a bowl of wor-wonton soup. The warlord revealed *this:*

I see Dudley Smith and Lin Chung!!! They wrestle Davis into car!!! Don't hurt me, don't hurt me!!! Parking lot on North Hill!!! Broad-daylight abduction!!!

That was lead #1. A B-girl at Moo-Shoo's Mandarin disgorged lead #2.

Jim Davis live above garage off Alameda and Ord. He fly Hop Sing and Don't Tread on Me door flags. He keep sewer rats as pets.

Two Squad hotfooted on over. They kicked down said door. Jim Davis was gone. The ex-chief lived in a rodent resort. Note the swastika wall flags. Note the beaver pix taped beside them. Sewer rats ate out of dog dishes. A box of hand grenades sat by the bed.

They tossed the place. Buzz snatched the beaver pix. No further leads surfaced. Bill Parker decreed a breather. They schlepped back to Kwan's and revitalizized.

Uncle Ace served lunch-crowd leftovers and Singapore Slings. He told Elmer Miss Lake called and said to call her back. Elmer ducked over to the pay phone and slug-dialed Kay's number. He got two rings. Kay came on the line. She said, "Elmer, is that you?"

"It's me, for sure. I'm at Kwan's, and Ace told me you wanted to gab."

Kay said, "Lee called me from Chinatown. He told me about Mondo Díaz and what he said about Jim Davis and the *'Kameraden.'* Díaz said they were running shakedowns, and Annie Staples told me some things that got me thinking."

Elmer yukked. "Well, shit, then. When you think, I listen."

"All right. Annie told me that Jean Staley wasn't really a Red, and that she and Meyer Gelb planned to extort a group of Jewish refugees that Otto Klemperer has befriended. Otto shares a minor history with your friend Jean, and she's been staying in his guesthouse while she's been sending you postcards from her automobile trip."

Elmer went *woooo.* "I can tell you found out some things that I didn't tell you."

Kay said, "I've got that knack—which is why you love me so much."

Elmer said, "Hold that thought. A notion just smacked me, and I'll let you know if it pans out."

—

Brentwood was swank. Lots of leafy streets and big Spanish houses. Brentwood north of Sunset was woodsy swank. You had deep-set yards and cribs more like estates.

Elmer surveilled the Maestro Manse. He hunkered low in his sled. Dusk came and went. He settled in for a *loooooong* eyeball stint.

He parked behind Jean Staley's '35 Ford. He got her DMV stats and ID'd her car. He went by Central Station, en route to here. He burgled Hideo Ashida's locker and stole a priceless something. He laid said something on the front seat of Jolting Jean's car.

The Maestro Manse was done up modernistic. Elmer perched across the street and got the *looooooong* eyeball view. He pissed in a cardboard coffee cup and smoked cigars. He scratched his balls and brain-strained Jean Clarice Staley.

Jean, the carhop. Jean, the ex-starlet. Jean, the faux Red and Fed fink. Jean, the ritzy-house subletter. Jean's jungled up with Meyer Gelb. Red Meyer extorted movie stars and Commos. That was back in the '30s. Meyer and Jean got current blackmail plans. There's these hebe exiles swapped out of Krautland. Meyer's got designs on them.

Jean, baby—say it ain't so.

Tommy G. tattled her good. Jean went back with Fritz Eckelkamp. That cinched her to the gold heist. Jean was hitched to an arson dog named Ralph D. Barr. That cinched her to the fire. Tommy G. revealed all this. Tommy G. dubbed Jim Davis his spy conduit. Mondo Díaz tapped Chief Jim, likewise.

Elmer lit a fresh cigar. Elmer pissed in his piss cup and tossed the piss out the window. Elmer scoped the Maestro Manse and heard a door slam.

Then a cough. Then high-heel taps. Then Jean herself. She made for her car. Moonglow lit her up. She wore a tight skirt and a camel-hair coat. She wore nifty tortoiseshell glasses.

Elmer hunkered extra low. Jean crossed the street and went for her sled. She opened the driver's door. The roof light flashed. She saw you know what and fucking *SHRIEKED.*

Elmer jumped out and swooped down on her. Jean dumbstruck'd the gold. She was bug-eyed and all trancelike. She sensed nothing else on planet Earth.

She touched the bar. She traced the mint marks. She caressed the bar and all but drooled. She fondled the contours. It's the Fatted Calf. Come, let us adore —

Elmer swooped and clamped her mouth shut. Elmer said, "You can keep it, if you tell me some things."

—

Santa Monica was close. They car-o-vanned to the Goody Goody Drive-in. They sat in Elmer's car. Elmer ordered coffee and spiked it with 151.

It was cold and clear. The beach was close. Cars whirred by on Wilshire. Jean snuggled close to him.

Elmer nudged her back. Ixnay, sister. Don't you vamp me tonight.

"Tommy Glennon's my source on most of this. Some police-file dirt fills out the rest."

Jean said, "How is Tommy? I haven't seen him in a coon's age."

"Tommy's off for parts unknown. Sort of like you, with that fake-postcard shuck you were running on me."

The gold bar sat on the floorboard. Jean kicked off her shoes and foot-fondled it. Her nylon stockings went *screee.*

"You're telling me you sussed out the drop at Bev's Switchboard, and you know what's going on there."

Elmer sipped spiked coffee. "Let's start with Tommy. He was making what he called 'gibberish calls' to some sort of relay phone down in Baja. He got his so-called scripts for the calls at Bev's. All of this here shit is specifically spy shit, and you've got to have some sort of knowledge of it, because everybody knows everybody in this tight little world of yours, and all this shit is rolled up in a tight little ball."

Jean lit a cigarette. "You've got to be more specific than that. I don't know anything about Tommy making 'gibberish calls,' and I don't know anything about spies in Baja or elsewhere. I was in the CP back in the '30s, back when it was the thing to do. I met some questionable folks, but I'm not part of any spy ring run by the Comintern or the domestic CP, or anybody else. Get it? I renounced Communism, and you know what I am in my heart?"

Elmer smiled. "You're a shakedown girl."

Jean smiled. "Give Sergeant E. V. Jackson a gold star, because he hit it right on the head."

Elmer respiked their coffee. "Let's get back to Tommy for a second. All that code-call stuff got decoded and sent to a brother and sister in La Paz, way south in Baja. There's some hotshot left-wing/right-wing cabal looking to make hay with whoever wins this here war. Does any of this make sense to you?"

Jean said, "No. But I've been around CP guys and their pals for a long time, so I can tell you that the far Left and the far Right share a lot of spit, because what they really hate is the square white man's U.S."

Elmer sipped coffee. The 151 subverted the bennies and had him seeing wisps.

"There's a klub*haus* off of 46th and Central. Two cops named Wendell Rice and George Kapek got snuffed there. They had a Mex pal named Archie Archuleta. He got snuffed, too."

Jean shrugged. "If you're asking me if I know anything about all this, the answer is no."

"Frankie Carbajal, Miguel Santarolo, Mondo Díaz, and Salvador Abascal."

"No. It sounds like a cavalcade of cholos to me, and I don't play the Latin-lover field."

Elmer smirked. "What about Two-Gun Davis? He's the ex–L.A. police chief."

Jean tossed her cigarette. "Strictly from hunger. He's a fellow traveler all over the spectrum, but he sways distinctly right. We talked about Meyer Gelb that first time we met, and Meyer and Jim Davis go back a ways. Jim's also tight with Saul Lesnick, for what that's worth."

Elmer teethed on it. Elmer flashed the klub*haus* smut pix. Jean squinted at them and went *nein.*

"If you're asking me who the two skirts are, I've got no idea."

"Sex shows at the klub*haus*? Queer stuff at the klub*haus*? A nutty Jap who licks blood off swords, and his homo companion?"

"Elmer, I know nothing about that clubhouse, so why would I know something about the strange-o types who congregate there?"

Elmer teethed Jean overall. "Tommy said you knew Fritz Eckelkamp. That takes you back to '31, Eckelkamp's escape, and the gold robbery later that same day. You're tight with Meyer Gelb, so that takes you back to '33 and the fire that killed my brother. Them first two events are all hooked together, and don't tell me they're not. They're both a ways back, and now we got the klub*haus* job tethered in, and the same names keep popping up. There's some kind of story here, and you're the only one I got to tell it to me."

Jean sipped spiked coffee. She took little sips. 151 was hoodoo hooch.

"I'll tell you what I know. I'll start at the start, and you can fill in whatever blanks you can."

"That's what I need to hear."

"You haven't issued any kind of threats yet. I haven't heard you say 'Give me this' and 'Roll over on this guy, or I'll run you in.' "

Elmer shook his head. "I don't know where I can go with any of this, without it causing a big upscut and getting shot down, because it's all too damn embarrassing for everybody concerned, and the smart thing to do is make it all vanish. I'd like to find out the whole story on my brother and get a clean klub*haus* solve, and running you in wouldn't help me any there."

Jean said, "Okay, then. I'm fifteen years old and crapping out in a Jesuit college dorm in San Francisco. I meet Fritzie Eckelkamp, who likes his stuff underage, and one thing leads to another. It's '27 now, and Fritzie goes down behind his robbery string in Alameda. He's up in Quentin now, and we correspond and keep in touch. Fritzie wangles a retrial in L.A. and gets on that train that's all loaded up with gold. Before you ask, I don't know if Fritzie got hipped on the gold before or after he escaped from the train, or if he had anything to do with the heist. All I know is that he sure got hipped on it in good time, and this gold bar you promised me didn't come from nowhere."

Elmer sipped spiked coffee. Jean sipped spiked coffee. She scooched her legs and surefire vamped him.

"Don't stop there, now."

Jean caught some breath. "Fritzie told me there might be a crash-out, and he said to wait by the phone. I did, and I sure as hell got the call. I was twenty-two then, and I dressed all high school girl. I stole a car in Sacramento and picked Fritzie up in San Luis Obispo. There were roadblocks all the way southbound on the 101, but the cops bought my schoolgirl act and neglected to check the trunk. The roadblocks were lifted, north of Malibu and this swanky nuthouse. I got Fritzie into L.A. and dropped him at a fleabag hotel in Echo Park. That's when I met Meyer Gelb, and that's when Fritzie stopped being the so-called man in my life, and Meyer took over the job."

She'd played kosher so far. The last part felt rehearsed. Her Fritzie-Meyer spiel played too pat.

"Keep going. You're doing good in my book."

Jean said, "Some time passed. I'd been selling maryjane in Sacramento and moving it through Tulare County, into Nevada. That made it a Federal bounce. A Fed named Edmund J. Satterlee popped me, and I gave up Meyer as a Commo to buy my way out. Ed fed me a diet of Communist tracts, and I faked a conversion and joined Meyer's CP cell in L.A. Ed got me a screen test at Paramount, because he was chums with the studio cops, and that's when I entered my silly-starlet phase. The deal was, Ed learned that Meyer recruited for the Party at Paramount, and that he ran a handbook there, and he wanted me to keep tabs on him. That's how I became a so-called movie actress."

Elmer tossed a tweaker. "What's Fritzie doing while all this is going on?"

Jean rebuffed it. "I told you. Fritzie walked out, Meyer walked in."

It still played hinky. It still played too pat.

Elmer said, "Keep going. You've got me tantalizized."

Jean removed her glasses and buffed them on her skirt. She was buck-toothed and half cross-eyed. She was still a hot dish.

"So, I met a prop man at Paramount and married him. Ralph D. Barr. I lied the first time we talked. I was afraid you'd roust me if you knew I was hitched up with this big arsonist and Griffith Park fire suspect. Of course, Meyer and Ralphie were two peas in a pod, and they both loved fires, floods, cataclysms, and storms. Ralphie was an active firebug, but Meyer was just a fire talker and a gasbag. He was preaching apocalypse before the big fire, working up the rubes at garment workers' marches and the like. Then the fire occurred, and Meyer and me and the other fools in the cell got leaned on, and it all went away until you knocked on my door."

Elmer sighed. "So that's it, then?"

Jean sighed. "That's it."

"Wayne Frank Jackson, Karl Frederick Tullock, Kyoho Hanamaka. Ring any bells for you?"

"Well, Wayne Frank's your brother, who I didn't know from Adam—and you still haven't told me why you thought he was murdered and not just burned up by accident. I don't know the second guy, and Kyoho was pals with Meyer, but I hardly knew him. Meyer said he swung right *and* left, and that he was some big-deal spy for the Jap Navy."

Elmer brain-drained it. "Gelb and Hanamaka have got these allegedly burn-scarred fingers. I'm wondering if they got them in the Griffith Park fire."

Jean shook her head. "Meyer was with me the day of the fire. Him and Kyoho were strange-o types of the first order, and they burned their fingers doing print-eradication dips, if you can feature that kind of action."

Elmer beagle-eyed Jean Clarice Staley. She read 96.6% kosher overall.

"Let's get back to Gelb, Tommy the G., and that spy shit we discussed."

Jean squirmed. She was hot to grab the gold and scram.

"Like I said, I'm strictly from shakedown. I pulled jobs with Tommy, mostly on political types, but I just sent incriminating photos and wire recordings through intermediaries, so I never knew who the marks were. I'm really just a courier and an informant. I finked Saul Lesnick to Ed Satterlee, years before Ed exploited his daughter's vehicular-manslaughter beef and turned Saul as his own snitch. All *I've* done spywise is forward mail for Meyer through Bev's Switchboard, which is the Grand Central Station of spy mail, because it's 1942, and everybody and his spotted dog is Fifth Column and thinks this new world war is the gateway to untold riches. Also, Bev's is in L.A., and L.A.'s close to Mexico. Meyer says the alleged *el jefe* of this alleged right-left conspiracy is a Mex, but I think it's all fantasia, because I think Mexico's a repository for all of Meyer's nutty get-rich-quick schemes and political notions. Bev's is Sheriff's-protected, and—"

Elmer cut in. "Why'd you send me them postcards? Why'd you pretend to be traveling?"

Jean turned on her baby browns. Jean laid on the *oooh, baby* and soft-soaped him.

"You're a cop, Elmer. I sure go for you, but that's what you are. I told Meyer you were nosing around, and he told me to scram for a while. I had a bunch of microdot postcards I was supposed to forward, so I decided to send them through you, because I knew you'd save them, and then I could retrieve them. Also, Bev Shoftel was starting to think that Sheriff Biscailuz was souring on their protection deal, so sending the cards to you seemed safer, because then I could resend them through Bev, if her biz was still protected."

Jean, baby. Say it ain't so. You exploited my redneck ass and ran me in circles.

"Ed Satterlee requested a search warrant for Bev's. How does that snatch you?"

"It doesn't snatch me at all. Ed's business is Ed's business, and thanks for the tip."

"Where's Meyer live? Nobody can pin an address on him."

"Nobody knows where Meyer lives. He's just that secretive. We communicate through Bev's."

"What's Fritzie doing now?"

"I told you. Fritzie walked out, Meyer walked in. Fritzie's out in the vapors."

"You arranged a party at Otto Klemperer's place in the winter of '39. Tell me about that."

Jean foot-stroked the gold bar. Her nylon stockings went *screee.*

"I know the Maestro through Meyer. He contributed to Meyer's Free Spain funds, which were all scams to begin with. The Maestro was holed up at Terry Lux's dry-out farm in Malibu, because he'd been suffering from these bad headaches. Some America First guy, a priest from a wealthy family, came to me through Tommy Glennon, who I already told you was my kid brother Robby's squeeze. The priest laid out the theme of the party. It was supposed to be all about some event in Nazi Germany four or five years before. There was supposed to be costumes and masks, and it all sounded strange-o to me. That's it. I set the party up, but I didn't attend it. I heard rumors that something went very bad—but everyone I knew who was there held their mud about what all happened."

Elmer brain-strained it. "Was the priest a man named Joe Hayes?"

"Yes."

"Do you know a man named Dudley Smith?"

"No, but I've heard of him. He's supposed to be a hatchet man for the L.A. Chief of Police. People are afraid of him."

"Klemperer and Meyer Gelb. Give me some more there."

"What's to give? Otto throws parties, and Meyer attends."

"You attend, too. Here's my guess there. You've got these music and movie hotshots passing through, and Meyer trawls for his marks."

Jean said, "Bingo."

Elmer said, "Bingo how?"

Jean said, "Meyer's always trawling for marks, and he's got no conscience in that regard."

Elmer smiled. "Rat him, then give me something I can use, in case this whipdick and I ever meet."

Jean lit a cigarette. "Otto's befriending these refugees. They're all Jewish musicians, let out of Germany. Meyer's set to run a squeeze on them. He says it's all hooked into some mysterious cabal, but I think he's just in it for the gelt."

Kay knew those folks. They were okay by her. They'd endured too much grief as it was.

Elmer said, "No soap. No shakedown, no extortion. That's straight from me. Tell Meyer I'm looking to hurt him. Tell him I'll put him in the shit if he goes ahead."

Jean said, "Okay, sweetie. I'll pass it along."

Elmer kissed his fingers and brushed back Jean's hair. La Jean swooned a bit. It felt half real/half fake.

"Take the gold and go someplace safe. This whole deal could blow up in our face."

Jean dumped the bar in her purse. She dropped a wet one on him and booked triple quick. The bar was triple fat and heavy. Her purse sagged down to her feet.

99

(LOS ANGELES, 1:00 A.M., 3/12/42)

The mad eugenicist. The butcher plastic surgeon and tong affiliate. Your host, Lin Chung.

Slumlord Lin. The crazy sawbones owned half of Montebello. He packed Chink refugees into gimcrack cribs and charged usurious rent. An opium den flanked his office. "O" fiends test-trialed Lin's "Youth Forever" blends. Lin and Dr. Saul Lesnick synthesized them. Let's build a hophead master race.

Lin's office was *Führer* bunker–sized and all knotty-pined. Physical-culture posters drooped off the walls. Norse vixens performed calisthenics. It refracted Leni Riefenstahl and *Triumph of the Will.*

Dudley watched *Herr Doktor* work. Lin jacked a spike with sodium pentothal and geezed up Jim Davis. Chief Jim was strapped to a gurney. He's a suckling pig at a luau. A sock is stuck in his mouth.

Chief Jim went loosey-goosey. He was prone to run his mouth and blab impolitic. In truth serum, *veritas.* Let's see what results.

Lin bowed and left the office. Chief Jim looked knocked-down euphoric. Dudley lit a cigarette and blew smoke in his face.

Hideo called him, postsweep. It spurred the abduction. Mondo Díaz snitched Davis as his spy-ring conduit. Lee Blanchard observed the snitch. Blanchard will likely resnitch it to Bill Parker. Hideo further revealed *this:*

Elmer Jackson showed him a microdot letter. Hideo ran first-round tests and failed to raise the text. Elmer refused to forfeit the letter. Hideo grabbed it and dropped it in the crime lab mail slot. It was addressed to a Baja PO box. La Paz/box 1823.

Elmer snagged the letter at Bev's Switchboard. Bev's stood self-indicted now. It's a seditionist mail drop. Dudley called the La Paz post office. He spoke Spanish and came off Army-SIS brusque. He picked up a ripe tidbit. Miss Constanza Lazaro-Schmidt rented box 1823.

Chief Jim looked ripe to pluck. Dudley pulled his gag. Jim coughed and gurgled euphoric. Jim looked gaga guileless and eager to please.

"I'm anxious to hear your thoughts about several events and the numerous people who may have attended them, Chief. We have a celebrated gold robbery in 1931, the celebrated Griffith Park fire of 1933, the recently celebrated klub*haus* murders, microdot communiqués, the Sinarquistas, and individuals named Tommy Glennon, Meyer Gelb, Jean Staley, Fritz Eckelkamp, Wendell Rice, George Kapek, Archie Archuleta, Karl Frederick Tullock, Martin Luther Mimms, Leander Frechette, George Lincoln Rockwell, Kyoho Hanamaka, Eddie Leng, Donald Matsura, Mondo Díaz, Miguel Santarolo, Frankie Carbajal, Juan Lazaro-Schmidt, and his sister, Constanza."

Chief Jim deadpanned the names. He said his pet rat Lucifer fucked his pet rat Brünnhilde. Dr. Saul fed them eugenics potions and imbued them with eternal youth. He planned to name their ratlings Hitler, Stalin, and Saul Junior.

Dudley said, "You're veering off a bit, Chief."

Davis said, "Lucifer raised money for some far-right boys. Meyer Gelb's a kosher cowboy. He's right-left and who knows what else. Meyer gave a speech at this Mexican confab. Vodka and schnitzel. The 'Horst-Wessel-Lied' and the 'Internationale.' Meyer's a goldbug. He wants the gold, but who doesn't? There's good colored trim at the klub*haus,* but I like fourteen-year-old white girls myself. There ought to be a law—and, frankly, there is. Preacher Mimms preaches the new gold standard. Meyer's a kosher extortionist. Kyoho refueled Jap planes at the Blue Fox on the Day of Infamy. He took Ernst Kaltenbrunner and some apparatchiks to the Fox his own self. Lucifer's a muff-diver. That's a rare trait in rats. Is this the DTs, Dud? I've had the DTs before."

The confab. Goldbugs. Blathering nuts and realpolitik. Oddball egalitarianism. *Aus der Neuen Welt.*

"I wonder if I might ask you a few more specific questions, Chief."

Davis said, "No. I won't let you. They're my DTs and my pretty pictures I'm seeing. I fucked Theda Bara and Vilma Bánky, and you didn't. I fucked your Irish mama. Lucifer fucked Marlene Dietrich in Dresden. There were these white boys and spic boys in this college there. Wallace Jamie, Joe Hayes. Juan Pimentel and Mondo Díaz. You want microdots and phone relays? They've got them. Jamie's America First. Father Joe blows Father Coughlin. They own a drop in West Hollywood, but Blow Job Bev's got her name on the deed. This Juan spic was there at the confab. Talk about your spy brain."

Aus der Neuen Welt. Realpolitik. Lucid instants couched in dross.

Postwar-strategy talks at a donkey club. We all want the gold. That means you. We're all goldbugs. We're all in this together. It's all one story, you see.

100

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

(LOS ANGELES, 2:30 A.M., 3/12/42)

My émigré friends lived in adjoining bungalows. They were night owls to begin with; they required no urging to stay up late, socialize, and make music. Elmer called me at home an hour ago and told me that he had braced Jean Staley. He said we should discuss the fruits of the interview, and told me I should pass a message to "those refugee chums of yours."

"Jean was in on some shakedown deal with Meyer Gelb," Elmer said. "And I figured out he had an eye on your chums. Tell them to breathe easy. I paid Jean off and sent her back on the lam again. She's indispensable to that shitbird Gelb, so he won't be squeezing your chums, no way at all."

I called the Koenigs and relayed the good news. Hence this impromptu celebration. My refugee chums had learned one aspect of the L.A. gestalt very quickly. When in doubt, throw a party.

Magda Koenig whipped up a pot of goulash; Ruth Szigeti journeyed out to a liquor store and stocked up on booze and mixer. I called Elmer back and told him he'd be a fool not to attend. He said, "We both know I'm a fool, but I'll be there anyway."

Bill called me a few minutes later. He relayed the latest sweep leads and closed with "For what it's worth, I love you." He hung up, just as I started to swoon.

The party was running full steam now. Ruth had invited four of her most recently acquired lovers, two of each sex. There was an usherette from the Aero Theatre and Miss Barbara Stanwyck. There was Brenda Allen's sought-after male prostitute, "Ten-Inch" Tony Mangano. There was sepia songster Billy Eckstine, hot off a record-breaking engagement at the southside Congo Club.

The goulash was spicy and tasty; Miklos Koenig made mean rye-whiskey Manhattans. Ruth shared brief bedroom intervals with Babs and Tony, and returned from them both looking pooped. The disparate batch of folks seemed to get along swell. Ruth played Paganini’s 24th violin caprice; Billy Eckstine held pace with her and warbled an a cappella “Ebb Tide.” Elmer the J. walked in the door and withstood a refugee stampede.

Miklos Koenig and Mr. Abramowitz pumped his hand and pounded his back; Magda demurely kissed both his cheeks. Elmer and Ruth shared a look that might best be described as lustful and opportunistic. Miklos force-fed Elmer a bowl of goulash; Elmer told him it was savory, but ain’t this the sort of grub the Communists eat? Babs asked him to fix a slew of her unpaid traffic tickets—which Elmer graciously agreed to do. Elmer addressed Billy Eckstine as “Sir.” He apologized for the Vice Squad raid on the Harlem Hutch in August ’38. Sir Billy impulsively embraced him.

Elmer and Ruth fell into each other’s gravitational pull. I eavesdropped on their screwball conversation. Elmer said things like “You’re Jewish, right?” and “I’ll bet Hitler’s boys were right on your tail.” Ruth asked Elmer how many Negroes he’d lynched and if his mom and dad bullwhipped their slaves. Elmer told Ruth she had green panther eyes. Ruth told Elmer he had beady eyes and said that she preferred circumcised men.

Dawn came up. I played hesitant Liszt on Miklos Koenig’s piano while Magda Koenig scrambled two dozen eggs. It was a very fine party. I looked out the front-door window and spotted a Ruth-meets-Elmer vignette. They leaned up against a wilted palm tree. I watched the not-too-dumb cracker and the Jewish refugee kiss.

101

(ENSENADA, 7:00 A.M., 3/12/42)

He worked all night. SIS maintained a small crime lab. Their photographic gear excelled. He examined the Jean Staley/Elmer Jackson postcards. He found microdots on two out of six.

The cards were two-ply pasteboard. He separated the pieces and got microscopically close. The dots looked like pinpricks. He dialed down and exposed them at maximum power. They remained dots. No text was revealed.

Ashida swigged coffee. He pondered ways and means and got an idea. He walked to the photo room. He pulled a Minox Riga camera and loaded it with high-resolve film. He shot twenty-four exposures. He photo-snapped the postcard pieces and developed the film.

The darkroom was well stocked. Ashida did the cut-and-dunks inside four hours. He hang-dried the prints. He got all cardboard grain. No microdots were exposed.

He found a paint atomizer. He sprayed a large piece of posterboard black. He taped the twenty-four photographs to sheer sheets of paper and placed them on an easel stand. He placed the posterboard on its own easel. Both stands were frame-only and hollow-backed.

He poked pinholes in the posterboard and placed the two stands close together. He rigged the posterboard easel in front of the photo easel. He aligned the stands just so.

He squinted through the pinholes. He saw the taped photographs just so. He dragged a forensic arc light up into position. He hit the juice and illuminated the back-easel sheets from behind.

It was very sheer paper. Ashida naked-eyed the flaws in the bond. He reloaded his camera and cut the overhead lights.

Black room, blinding arc light. He placed the camera lens up to the pinholes and snapped shots into the flare. The pinholes limited his photographic field and homed it in on the invisible dots.

He shot twenty-four exposures.

He developed the film.

Microdots appeared.

They were naked-eye visible. The text appeared as a blur.

Ashida microscoped all twenty-four prints. He dialed deep and brought up bursts of visible text. It wasn't coded. It was Spanish language. The sentences ran out of sequence. He poked his pinholes randomly and photographed the dots that way. He juggled prints and microscope slides and rigged up a first-draft sequence.

He quick-translated to English. He scanned words and cribbed up a text. Said text was all *LISTS.*

Of U.S. defense manufacturers.

Of pro-Communist and pro-Axis comrades/*Kameraden* within.

Of gold prices now.

Of gold prices predicted, up through '44.

Of sub berths on the Baja coast.

Of secret airstrips geared for takeoffs and landings. All situated north of L.A. All in the San Joaquin Valley. All near agricultural-crop properties.

This admonition. Typed in boldface:

"EYES ONLY. DO NOT REVEAL TO JLS & CLS UNDER ANY CIRCS."

JLS, CLS. Surely the Lazaro-Schmidt siblings.

Ashida jumped microscopes and rigged up fresh slides. He dialed down to maximum power. He brought up more text. It was all numbers and single letters.

The import hit him. It was Bible code. He'd learned the rudiments in grad school. Chapter and verse listings. King James page listings. Substitutions to transpositions to coherent text.

Ashida combed the lab and squadroom. He found a KJV Bible in the watch sergeant's desk. He worked with scratch pad, pen, and microscope.

He jumped Bible-to-scope. He fought eyestrain. He jumped Genesis-to-Revelation and covered all sixty-six books. Numbers-letters, numbers-letters. Chapters and verses. Sacred text to microdot text.

He worked for five hours straight. The translated text read thus:

"My trusted Comrade, or should I say *Reichsführer,* second only to me. We have veered left and right as this storm rages. Tovarich and *Kamerad* mean the same to us now. The NKVD and Gestapo are as one. 'Hail' or *heil,* makes no difference. I say both to you—Captain Juan Pimentel."

—

Ashida pulled up to chez Hanamaka. Genesis to Revelation. A recent memory perks. Cause and effect perk, in retrospect.

The bookie-drop raid. The phone-relay system identified and destroyed. Forty-odd men burned alive. Pimentel acts boldly. He incinerates evidence and kills co-conspirators. Comrade, *Kamerad,* tovarich. The perverse brotherhood survives.

Plus, something Dudley told him. A cove cave south of Ensenada. Pimentel acts boldly. He flamethrowers saboteurs. Comrade, *Kamerad,* tovarich. The perverse brotherhood survives.

Ashida parked in the carport. He'd called Pimentel and suggested a meet. Pimentel suggested this place.

Ashida arrived early. He wanted to reconnoiter. He wanted to check his photo device.

He got out and examined it. The trip wire stretched the full carport width. The photo housing was dust-streaked. It appeared operational. He pressed levers and heard car-tire thuds. The picture tube showed three rear license plates.

Two Baja diplomatic plates. One U.S./state of California plate.

Ashida memorized the numbers. He walked up to the house and unlocked the door. He had his own keys. Dudley trusted him.

The front room was breezy cool. Dudley kept the windows open. The telephone still worked. Dudley saw to that.

Pimentel was late. Ashida left the door cracked. He'd hear *Kamerad* #1 arrive.

Ashida dialed the Mexican Motor Vehicle Bureau. A male clerk took the call. Ashida cited his Army rank and serial number. He stiffed the plate request and stressed *diplomatic.*

The clerk went *Un momento.* Ashida eyed the door. The clerk came back on the line. He kicked loose the name and address stats.

Juan Lazaro-Schmidt. Constanza Lazaro-Schmidt. Two La Paz addresses.

Ashida hung up and dialed the Ensenada operator. He asked her for a stateside hookup. The main DMV in Los Angeles. Person-to-person. The head clerk, *por favor.*

The operator *Sí, sí*'d him. Ashida hung up and eyed the door. Pimentel was late-late now. The phone rang inside three minutes. Ashida jumped on the call.

He laid out his Army credentials. He recited the plate number. The clerk had him hold the line.

He held. He watched the door. The clerk came back on the line. She kicked loose the name and address stats.

Claire Katherine De Haven. A 1910 DOB. A Beverly Hills address.

Ashida hung up. The room warmed up. He walked to the back window and took some deep breaths.

He counted lies, omissions, distortions. What he'd told Dudley. What he hadn't told Dudley. Joan's diary. The East L.A. sweep. His end run with Elmer Jackson. His microdot findings. What he learned about Juan Piment—

"Alone at last. However you might judge me, you can't say that I haven't been patient."

Ashida wheeled. Pimentel wore Statie black. His tunic was custom-tailored. Silver daggers marked the Waffen-SS. Braided shoulder boards marked the Red Guard.

Ashida said, "Should I call you *Reichsführer*? I don't know the equivalent rank in the Russian Army."

Pimentel blew a kiss. "You'll call me sweetie pie in just a few minutes, once you've seen what I have to show you."

Ashida backed away. He bumped a window sash and froze. Pimentel crooked one finger and walked past him. He turned down a short hallway.

He sashayed. He rolled his hips. He did mambo steps and went *Tra-la-la.* Ashida followed him. The hallway dead-ended ten feet ahead. Brushed-oak panels. No doors inset. A tight cul-de-sac.

Pimentel tapped a wall plank. A panel slid back. Ashida saw pulleys and hinges. A dark space opened up.

Pimentel said, "Kyoho was quite the pack rat. Dudley never discovered *this* little cache."

Ashida caught up. Pimentel pulled a light cord. Presto—cul-de-sac, cubbyhole, closet.

It's six feet wide and deep. It holds period costumes. They're all nineteenth century and displayed on wall pegs. Pastel silk gowns. Cossack cavalry wear. German Navy kit. Imperial couture. The czarist era. The reign of Otto von Bismarck.

Pimentel giggled. "Does it make you feel special? There's really just a very few of us who know."

"Like the Lazaro-Schmidts? Like Claire De Haven?"

Pimentel went *tsk, tsk.* "The disapproving American. Ever so judgmental. He can't see through to the roots of what we have here. It's like your national treasure, the motel. Couples dress up to meet in sordid little places. We have this snazzy dressing room, and a surfeit of bedrooms upstairs."

Ashida said, "Couples?"

Pimentel touched his coat sleeve. Ashida pulled away. Pimentel went *tsk, tsk.*

"Well, the Lazaro-Schmidts are a couple, however much you might disapprove. And Claire met José Vasquez-Cruz here, up to the point that he was revealed to be a Communist priest-killer, and our gorgeous comrade Dudley killed him. People come here to don costumes, and who can blame them? We all want to be something more beautiful and gilded than what we really are.”

Ashida shuddered. “What costume will you wear? Are you a comrade or a *Reichsführer* at this moment?”

“That’s hardly the question. The question is what you’ll wear.”

Ashida froze. Pimentel leaned close and kissed him. Ashida grasped his arms and opened his mouth. He felt Pimentel’s tongue. He felt Pimentel’s hand between his legs.

He kissed back. He smelled mothballs and old wool. He shut his eyes and saw Bucky and Dudley. He opened his eyes and saw the moles on Pimentel’s eyelids. He smelled talc and cheap aftershave.

He stifled a screech. He shut his eyes. He clamped down and bit Pimentel’s tongue off. Blood burst into his mouth. Pimentel screeched. Ashida pulled his piece and emptied the clip.

Pimentel pitched and flailed. He took down a row of hatboxes. He smashed into mothball sachets and gold brocade gowns.

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(LOS ANGELES, 3/12–3/25/42)

This kiss.

His first kiss with Ruth. It started something. Kay told him she peeped the event and saw worlds implode. He hasn't forsaken Brenda, Ellen, or hot-damn Annie Staples. Ruth hasn't forsaken her hot-damn yen for both girls and boys. Kay told him about this other kiss. That kiss got him all brain-broiled.

Kay visited Hideo Ashida. He was plunked in the Army stockade outside T.J. Dudley extracted him from the Statie jail. The beaner cops popped him and held him there. He snuffed that Juan Pimentel cat. Hideo Ashida, tagged for Murder One.

The Mex cops tortured Hideo. They beat him and attached electrodes to his balls. They installed hungry rats in his cell. The Dudster wangled a writ and secured him a stockade berth. Kay saw him there. Hideo was woozed up on morphine. The Army docs prescribed it for his thumped-upon head. Kay asked him why he juked Pimentel. Hideo babbled, "This kiss."

"This Kiss" tweaked him. It cinched him up to "This Case" and all the attendant queer shit. Queer Tommy Glennon. Queer Joe Hayes. Queer Huey Cressmeyer and queer klub*haus* traffic. Pimentel got snared in a queer-bar raid. San Diego, '37. That cinch-up cinched numerous threads.

He goosed Thad Brown. Thad record-checked Captain Juan, back to his bassinette. He glommed El Juan's Statie file and some adjunct paperwork. Pithy dish was revealed.

Pimentel studied in Krautland. He attended Dresden Polytechnic, circa '35. Class lists came with the paperwork. Wallace Jamie, Mondo Díaz, and Padre Joe Hayes were Dresden alums. Pimentel studied relay-telephone techniques. That cinched him up to a slew of pay-phone snafus. Pimentel studied microdot technology. Pimentel hobknobbed with Nazis and Reds at that Baja shindig. That cinched him to this whole shit-shrouded conspiracy.

Hideo killed him at Kyoho Hanamaka's place. He called the Staties and surrendered right there. Pimentel—microdot whiz. Hideo—forensic whiz. Microdot postcards. The Staley-Jackson snafu. Hideo's pledge to decode them postcards.

The overall dish strained his brain waves. He dished it straight back to Kay. She dished Bill Parker. Whiskey Bill dished Thad Brown. They held an All-Dish Summit at Lyman's. Buzz Meeks joined them. They made no progress toward a three-case solve.

Ace Kwan dished some dish. Ace said Dudley pentothaled Jim Davis. Chief Jim revealed gibberish. Dud ensconced him at the Terry Lux nut farm. Jim's got congestive heart disease. Jim's going through the DTs. Jim's tick-tight with Mondo Díaz. Jim's cinched to the left-right combine. *Sieg Heil,* you fat sack of shit.

Jim's stuck in stir. That's one witness down. Link Rockwell's witness #2. He's in the Navy brig in Sarasota, Florida. The Navy won't permit extradition. Whiskey Bill's preparing a hot question list. A Navy lawyer pledged cooperation. He said they'd film the interview and send it along. Witness #2's scratched for now.

Witness #3 crapped out. Adios, Ralph D. Barr. He was Jean Staley's ex-hubby and a Meyer Gelb KA. Ralphie: Paramount stagehand/firebug/noted whipout man.

He got popped in Detroit. The Motor City bulls nailed him for Red agitation. It was summer, 1940. He firebombed the love shack of a high-up Ford man. The cops hard-nosed him. He snitched Gelb and ex-frau Jean. He said they recruited him for the CP. Ralphie torched his cell in the Detroit City Jail. Ralphie self-fried in true firebug fashion. Scratch witness #3.

Scratch three more witnesses. Díaz, Carbajal, Santarolo. Salvy Abascal interceded on their behalf. He called in Catholic fat-cat favors. Papist lawyers sprung the trio from PD custody. They're now in Fed custody.

Bill Parker requested further interviews. The U.S. attorney rebuffed him. Parker was a Federal bar–licensed lawyer. He called Fey Edgar Hoover personally. Fey Edgar rebuffed him. Parker requested a sitdown with Ed Satterlee. Fey Edgar rebuffed that request. Ed the Fed had been placed under house arrest.

Scratch seven witnesses. Scratch the Parker-Jackson shot to erase the Fed-probe recordings. Scratch that avenue to secure acquittals for Jack H. and Fletch Bowron. Ed the Fed was their conduit. Ed the Fed was set to unlock the evidence vault.

Lawyers will fuck you when no one else will. Salvy Abascal is a lawyer. He's an overall shitheel to rival Dudley Smith. Yeah—and him and Buzz have got a hole card to lay Salvy's ass low.

Frankie Carbajal's key revelation. This delirious dish:

Abascal is jobbing his Irish *Kamerad.* Abascal is planning sabotage behind El Dudster's back. Abascal has piggybacked Dud's run-wetbacks racket and has infiltrated saboteurs in with the wets. The saboteurs are set to bolt their San Joaquin Valley huts. They're fruit-pickers *and* bomb-tossers. *That's* a hot new one.

Him and Buzz got advance warning. They've withheld the word. It bought time. He bought them time with Dudley. He told him they slayed Tommy Glennon. He got the green light to slay Wayne Frank's slayer in return. Dud cares naught for the klub*haus* job. All Dud wants is the gold. Yeah—but it's all a lot bigger than that.

Strategies. Plays, plots, ploys, plans. His overworked brain's overheated and pitched to a boil.

He's prowled the jazz-club strip. He's trawled for the Jap sword man and his queer white companion. He's notched no solid leads. He's likewise trawled for the two skirts in the klub*haus* smut pix. You get lucky sometimes. He spotted them at the Congo Club. They were full-fucked forthcoming.

We've been to the klubhaus. Link Rockwell and Archie Archuleta drew us in. We posed for the pix. Our male costars wore masks. Link worked the camera. We never met Wendell Rice and George Kapek. We don't know who snuffed them. We don't know no Jap sword man and no queer white boy. You sound us, Daddy-O?

Sí, yo comprendo. Vaya con Dios, you slovenly sluts.

He jumped locales then. He jumped darktown-to-J-town and trawled for the sword man. He'd eliminated Banzai Bob Yoshida. Sword man was allegedly a curio dealer. He pounded J-town under shit conditions. The bulk of the Jap populace was now stuck in stir. The remaining Japs fish-eyed him and played it sullen. Sword man? Queer friend? Eat shit and die, White Oppressor!!!

The klub*haus* job was thus dead-stalled. He worked around it. He finally finagled an Annie Staples–Orson Welles tryst. Brenda put it together. Welles tricked out of the service and gassed on big blondes. The fuckfest transpired at the Miracle Mile love nest. Sergeant E. V. Jackson voyeurizized.

Annie seemed to enjoy it. *Der Wunderkind* surely did. Annie steered Fats to some pillow talk per Major Dudley Smith. Welles described the savage beating Dud put on him. Welles described Terry Lux's plastic job and his snitch recruitment. Welles went on a goodwill tour conceived by FDR. Dud wanted rat-outs on Commies and other such scum. Welles was Claire De Haven's part-time lover. Dud was jealousy-jammed. Welles considered the Dudster insane. *I'll tell you this, Annie. He's dropping into some hellish abyss.*

Annie excelled at the Welles tryst. Kay paid her to make wax impressions of Saul Lesnick's keys. Annie delivered there, ditto. Who's set to raid his office? Him and Buzz are good bets.

Yeah—but all bets are off on the gold now. Joan's dead. Hideo Ashida's imprisoned. Dud's the sole gold quester still extant. The gold to the fire. That's your ’31 to ’33 parlay. Jean Staley dished there. It felt incomplete. What if nobody killed Wayne Frank? What if he fried of his own dumb volition? What if kid brother Elmer’s got nobody to clip for revenge?

His brain’s overheated. He’s overworked. He’s running bag for Jack Horrall and Fletch Bowron. Gold-star contributors are dumping gelt on their defense fund. They fear Fed-probe convictions and expulsion from office. He’s siphoning cold cash to their lawyers. Bagman Elmer rides again.

He’s overworked. His brain’s overheated. His body and soul’s overtaxed. Temptress—thy name art Ruth Klarfeld Szigeti.

She’s from Budapest. He’s from Wisharts, North Carolina. She’s forty-three. He’s twenty-nine. She’s Jewish. He’s a Scottish preacher’s kid out of some unholy bog. Her dad conducted the Hungarian National Opera. His dad peddled Klan kode books. He’s seen some whopping bad grief in his day. She’s seen the Nazis machine-gun three hundred Jews and dump them in a ditch.

The Nazis made her watch. The Koenigs and Sandor Abromowitz stood beside her. They didn’t get blasted themselves. Here’s the big why of that.

The Jews were Commies and big anti-Nazis. Ruth and friends snitched them out for asylum. Their life savings bought them tickets to Mexico and the U.S. The dead three hundred were musicians and college profs. The death-squad Nazis were distantly allied with Meyer Gelb. The slaughter warned Comrade Gelb. His postwar scheme was a distant jerk-off dream at this moment. It could go blooey at any point.

Ruth was braced in advance of the slaughter. You will survive. You will emigrate and inform. You will facilitate extortion. You will fink at Comrade Gelb’s behest.

Comrade Gelb. Comrade Jean Staley’s shakedown boss. Comrade Elmer bought Comrade Jean off and scared her out of L.A. Comrade Elmer derailed Comrade Gelb’s current shakedown play. Comrade Elmer’s a big hero to Ruth Szigeti and friends.

The Koenigs and old man Abromowitz have crowned him their king. Ruth throws herself at him in bed. Ruth’s omnivorous. She throws herself at cocktail waitresses and pizza-delivery boys. It doesn’t faze him. Her big hurt fazes him. He plays the fool to quash the hurt and make her laugh.

Ruth runs abrupt. She whips him the woof-woof and hops out of bed to practice her violin. He lives to jolly her and eradicate her grief for a while. She flaunts her death-camp tattoo. He tickles it and makes her howl. He tells her Marine Corps and cop stories and lays on the laffs.

They’re both treading quicksand. He’ll escape his patch or he won’t. She’s got it worse than him. Her quicksand is all in her memory—and it sure as shit won’t go away.

103

(LOS ANGELES AND BAJA, 3/12–3/25/42)

Fractures.

Fissures.

Absences.

Checkmates.

Stalemates.

Abandonments.

Banishments.

Rifts.

Claire left him. Young Joan left him. Beth left him. His Mexican family has cut him adrift. Juan Pimentel is dead. Hideo Ashida has been imprisoned. Salvy Abascal is off, preoccupied. He's running their biz ventures sans Salvy's aid and Greenshirt collaboration. He's neglecting his Army duties and his triple-murder case. The gold quest lies dormant. Army doctors have diagnosed Hideo's "advanced fugue state."

Hideo masterminded the gold quest and their three-case inquiries. Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle have been removed from the klub*haus* job. A hostile faction runs that investigation now. Elmer Jackson and Buzz Meeks are running rogue. Elmer read Joan's diary. The rogue redneck knows the gold heist and fire jobs intimately.

He misses Claire. He misses Young Joan. He misses Beth. His wife and daughters have booked passage to Ireland. He misses Hideo most poignantly.

Hideo killed Juan Pimentel. A lust motive glimmers there. A hidden closet was revealed at chez Hanamaka. It was packed with garish costumes. Captain Juan's severed tongue was found on the floor. Responding Staties noted Hideo's blood-smeared lips.

Hideo has withheld from him. He senses that. His hideous omissions feel paradoxically defined. Juan Pimentel's death plays non sequitur. He interfered in some vexatious manner and caused Hideo to react. Hideo was doing microdot work at the SIS lab. Singed cardboard and misplaced equipment suggest it. The microdot work revealed something. Hideo is near catatonic and in no shape to tell him what.

He had requisitioned a full range of three-case paperwork. A range of newly discovered files was cached within it. He gave the paperwork to Hideo to study and analyze. He searched Hideo's quarters in Ensenada and L.A. The paperwork has gone missing. Hideo remains his sole hope for a three-case solution and shot at the gold.

Missing paperwork. Three-case principals, missing in action.

Link Rockwell—in Navy custody. Díaz, Carbajal, Santarolo—in Fed custody. James Edgar Davis—exiled to Terry Lux's retreat.

Count Joe Hayes missing. He called the Archbishop and requested a formal chat with Monsignor Joe. His Eminence brusquely refused. Count Orson Welles missing. He's off carousing and moviemaking. He's an unproven snitch, so far.

Impasses.

Stalemates.

Checkmates.

Credit Bill Parker's strategic aplomb.

Jack Horrall has not returned his phone calls. Parker's Fed maneuvers have put Jack squarely in his debt. Thad Brown has fallen under Parker's pious spell. The two great rivals for postwar Chief of Police. Now allied against Dudley L. Smith.

He's made moves to restore a counterbalance. He's requisitioned a second set of three-case paperwork. He's saving it for Hideo's hopeful return to health.

Hideo haunts him. He pulled strings with U.S. Army courts and secured binding writs. Hideo will not stand trial for the murder of Juan Pimentel. He will not rot in Leavenworth or a Mexican prison. Hideo will be interned at a U.S. relocation center later this month.

Three-case paperwork will await him. The U.S. Army is building him his own crime lab. Hideo will waltz the day that fascist Japan surrenders.

Countermeasures.

Logical applications.

Counterbalancing tasks.

Kyoho Hanamaka haunts him. He's the crux of all explication. He's the secret sharer. The gold heist and fire precede his tour of fascist-Communist hot spots. His friendship with Meyer Gelb precedes. His German-Russian schooling sets the course of hellish events to come. The gold is hoarded and left to snowball in value. World war looms as inevitable. Hanamaka envisions a postwar brotherhood. The gold will finance the survival of totalitarian rogues in extremis. A conspiracy is born. Murderous pratfalls occur. Personal agendas surface. 1942 marks a chaotic nexus. He must exploit it.

Countermeasures.

He's issued a second APB on Kyoho Hanamaka. He's tapped police agencies, jails, hospitals. Plus relocation centers and travel hubs. He's blanketed Mexico and the U.S. Kyoho Hanamaka—arrest and detain.

Countermeasures.

Makework.

Tasks to tether him.

He's adrift. He's not demoralized. Constanza tethers him. They thrive as one imagination. Constanza loves the Wolf and trusts in his powers. They envision the gold and lust for it as one shared dream. Brother Juan lusts for the gold—but lacks their imagination. Brother Juan attended the '40 conference. He knows things he might not have revealed. Constanza was Herr Hanamaka's lover. She rutted with the one man who knows the whole story. Her body consecrates their dream quest.

Constanza withholds from him. He's yet to brace her. He needs to know the mail-drop secrets of box 1823. He falters with women, on occasion. It's his Achilles' heel.

Constanza's passion exceeds Claire's. Terry Lux told him that Claire is kicking morphine at his retreat. Kay Lake urged the treatment and visits Claire daily. The Wolf views Kay Lake suspiciously and considers her a deadly proposition. His own opinion vacillates and finally rests at disbelief. The Lake girl is grandiose and heedless to her core. Claire has always overestimated her and vilified her to a fault. Kay Lake and Claire De Haven now live in rapprochement. They are casualties of early-wartime L.A. Only the war could have spawned such a fatuous misalliance.

He found Claire's morphine stash in their hotel suite. He injects the drug periodically. He drifts off on a cloud where no woman ever beats or betrays him.

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

(LOS ANGELES AND BAJA, 3/12–3/25/42)

We were fated, Bill and I. He knocked on my door last December 6; he'd concocted an injudicious plan to entrap Communists and recruited me on the day before Pearl Harbor. He instilled my bitter loathing of Dudley Smith and introduced me to Claire De Haven. I was sucker bait for the heady series of events that have followed. I was at loose ends, in the Joan Conville manner. Bill hopped from crush to crush and ensnared us both. He pointed Joan on her way to self-immolation and allowed me to glimpse a blithe evil that I cannot turn my back on. The late diarist has provided the current diarist with the means to rectify her botched knife assault. I shouldn't have done it; I could not have taken a human life and lived with the consequences. And why kill when one can facilitate a self-immolation of the sort that consumed my dear friend?

Joan's words indicted Dudley. I will draft a freshly revised indictment. It will take various epistolary forms. I will create scripts for the Catholic Bill and Claire to perform for their confessor, Joe Hayes. The scripts will contain innuendo and misinformation calculated to push Dudley to blunder. Dudley is blunder-prone now. Elmer told me that Salvy Abascal has monumentally betrayed him, and has hinted at possible deadly ramifications. Dudley collects protégés. Witness Mike Breuning, Dick Carlisle, and—most auspiciously—Hideo Ashida. I encountered Breuning at Lyman's a week back. He was in his cups and mourning the loss of some essential Dudley Smith. He told me that Dudley's women are leaving him, one by one. Dudley's corps of able and compliant men must be made to follow. This is the basic design of my malicious levy of words.

Hideo's current gambit is no words. I have visited him at the Army stockade and am convinced that he is feigning a catatonic state. He is doing this in order to circumvent confrontation and capitulation in all matters pertaining to Dudley Smith. Dudley Smith and Hideo Ashida love each other deeply. Dudley's love is fraternal. It's the love of a brutalized Irish boy who saw British soldiers murder his brother, leaving him alone to suffer the whims of a sodden and vicious mother. Dudley holds Hideo Ashida to be James Conroy Smith, reborn. Dudley worships brilliance and mastery and possesses the generous gift of acknowledging it in all manner of people. He sees Hideo as his fascist-utilitarian kin. Hideo's love for Dudley is wholly lustful and at odds with his fulsome knowledge of Dudley's evil.

Hideo has omitted and withheld from Dudley. Dudley will not crack unless Hideo cracks first. Dudley sees the Smith-Ashida alliance as a perfect wartime union. Hideo sees it as a vouchsafe of his wartime survival and fugitive sexual urge.

I will rob Hideo of his early-wartime love. I will covertly engage and collaborate with early-wartime fury and racial animus. I will rip Hideo free of Dudley Smith—so help me God.

I am possessed of a ghastly agency here. The war facilitates me; I consider the war to be a dear friend. I worship catastrophe in the manner of the nineteenth-century romantics. Chaos vitalizes me and assigns me tasks. I accede to the fact that this is my personal madness.

The war gave me the great Otto Klemperer and his nightmare story of beating a man to death. The war gave me a small part in the American passage of Shostakovich's new symphony. The war gave me a brief colloquy with an imbecilic monster.

I've been visiting Claire during her dope cure at Terry Lux's clinic. Jim Davis is now enrolled there. Two male nurses were walking him back from the infirmary. He recognized me from various PD functions and said hi.

I asked him how it felt to betray your country and side with fascist and Communist killers. I asked him why he molested underaged girls. I asked him how it felt to disembowel four human beings and let an innocent man take the rap.

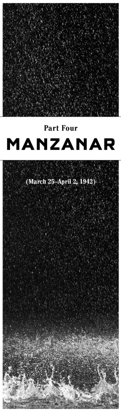
Davis didn't seem to understand me. Terry most likely had him doped up.

Claire and Chief Jim head the sick list; numerous three-case witnesses top the custody list. Hideo Ashida remains in stir. The internment push has leveled Japanese communities throughout Los Angeles County. City jails, work farms, and barracks shantytowns overflow with imprisoned Japanese. They'll soon be scoured Jap-free. The exodus to permanent relocation centers will kick into high gear. Hideo Ashida will head northeast to the Owens Valley. Dudley Smith will surely enhance his accommodations. I might run into the Dudster some fine visitors' day.

Part Four

MANZANAR

(March 25–April 2, 1942)



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(LOS ANGELES, 8:00 A.M., 3/25/42)

Exodus, 7:14. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Pharaoh’s heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go.”

He watched. He pointed his binoculars east and tracked the migration. He’d spent his last free night at the Biltmore Hotel. A high terrace supplied the view.

Whole families trudged. They pulled handcarts piled with luggage and folded overcoats. Prowl cars trailed them. FBI men walked alongside. The pickup spot was north-northeast. Army buses revved their engines there.

Ashida watched. He stood by himself. His mother and brother had already been interned. They were sequestered at Heart Mountain. He was Manzanar-bound. The Owens Valley. Up in the Sierras. A two-temperature zone. Broiling heat, freezing cold.

He got off lucky. There would be no Mexican jail or U.S. prison. He sidestepped death by torture and brutal mistreatment. All praise to Dudley Smith.

Manzanar would suit him. Preferential treatment had been arranged. Dudley assured him of that. He canned his *I’m catatonic* act. They had a nice chat.

He detailed the text of the microdot postcards. He laid out Juan Pimentel’s spy-ring complicity. He did not snitch off the two Lazaro-Schmidts.

Dudley was Constanza’s lover. She was spy-ring complicit. Dudley would or would not determine this for himself.

He played God with Dudley. It was a jilted-lover move. He employed need-to-know tactics with Dudleyesque aplomb. He apologized for killing Pimentel. It left Dudley’s “business fronts” understaffed.

Dudley took it all in. There were no accusations. There were no probes or digs per the murder and no displays of pique.

They embraced. They vowed to retain close contact. Ashida pledged his loyalty.

I'll remain assiduous. I'll study any and all files you provide. I'll press for a three-case solution and shot at the gold.

Dudley said, "Chin up, lad. We'll both survive and prevail." Dudley evinced psychopathic good cheer.

That was last night. He trained up from Baja then. He packed one suitcase and ordered a last room-service meal. He slept on the living room couch. Early sunlight roused him.

Ashida walked out. He affixed his blinders and took the back service stairs down. He cut through the lobby and walked north on Olive. The migration was due east. He looped in west of the swarm.

He cut east on 1st Street and passed Central Station. He took a last look up at the crime lab. The pickup spot was dead ahead.

He dawdled over. Two hundred Japanese huddled at 1st and Los Angeles. They pushed off the sidewalk and covered the street. Four buses were double-parked.

Army noncoms cinched luggage to above-the-bus racks. They unloaded handcarts and checked names off clipboard lists. Men, women, children. Knots of four, five, and six. Name tags pinned to overcoats. Families in tight little cliques.

Ashida scanned faces. The Japanese suck it up. The kids stuck close to mom and dad. He saw flat eyes and no spilled tears.

He jostled into the throng. He removed his blinders and donned his Man Camera. He picked out details. People recognized him.

Little girls clutching dolls. Who's that man there? Little boys clutching toy trucks. It's Running Dog Ashida.

Name tags pinned to coat lapels. More eyes pinned his way. Old men with canes. Running Dog Traitor. Luggage lashed to bus racks, piled skyscraper high.

He dialed his Man Camera close. He saw men hiss. He saw women dodge his lens. A fat man mimed spitting. A high school boy mimed *FUCK YOU.*

The boarding commenced. The noncoms herded people onto buses. Ashida stood his ground. Men elbowed and jostled him on purpose. Spit globs hit his coat. He heard Shudo/Werewolf/Watanabe. The crowd thinned a bit. He Man Camera'd the sidewalk and saw them.

Bill Parker. Elmer Jackson. Kay Lake.

They smiled at him. They waved at him. They made no moves to screw it up with words. His eyes clouded over. Tears doused his camera lens.

Two noncoms approached him. They called him Dr. Ashida. They said something about Major Smith and sitting up front.

Ashida waved to his friends. Elmer Jackson bayed like a hound dog. Kay Lake blew him a kiss.

—

The driver and gun guard gabbed. It was all baseball and promiscuous Wacs. They'd rigged up a jump seat. Ashida sat between them. Wire mesh closed off the hoi polloi Japs.

They looked forlorn and apprehensive. They played it stoic. They saw Ashida up front with the round eyes. Ashida supplied thought balloons. Race traitor/white man's tool/running dog.

The bus rolled through L.A. and San Berdoo counties. Ashida's bus took the pole spot. Three buses trailed it. The gun guard yakked Ashida up.

Manzanar ain't too bad. The weather bites Chihuahua dicks. Families get housed all together. The mess halls are done up homey. You can plant your own garden. There's Christian and Shinto chapels. There's work assignments. Kids go to school.

That Major Smith's a sketch. That's some brogue he's got. He's got swell quarters set up for you.

The journey slogged. The driver and gun guard shot the shit and yakked over engine throb. The buses refueled at a filling station outside Visalia. The guards passed out sandwiches and declared a piss stop. The Sierras loomed off to the east.

The stop consumed an hour. The captive Japs hogged both rest rooms and pissed the local yokels off. Hooligans went *Banzai* and made like the Zeros at Pearl. The gun guards pulled their billy clubs and moved them along.

The slog resumed. The temperature dropped. The caravan chugged through steep mountains. Ashida shivered. The gun guard passed him a blanket.

They hit the Owens Valley. It was wide, flat, and bleak. Tall mountains bordered it. The air was dry and cold. Snow covered the peaks and iced up the ground.

There it is. Manzanar War Relocation Center. It's all the way off by itself.

There's all these claptrap buildings and all this barbed wire. The family huts extend a mile out. It's perfectly symmetrical. It's all jerry-rigged.

There's all these wide streets. They're unpaved and squared off. The crisscross goes on forever. It's cold today. There's nobody out and about.

Fifty-odd buses were parked by the guard gate. MP's in hooded greatcoats smoked and chewed the fat. A first lieutenant stood off by himself. Ashida recognized him.

Al Wilhite. Ex-Burglary hardnose. Known Dudley Smith toady and apologist.

The new buses pulled up to the bus line. Wilhite approached the lead-bus door. The gun guard kicked it open. Ashida walked out first.

Wilhite saluted him. “Welcome to Manzanar, sir. Major Smith has requested that I show you to your quarters.”

—

They were jailhouse de-luxe. Dudley Smith vouched good hotels. The Biltmore in L.A. The del Norte in Baja. This three-room Manzanar suite.

A bedroom. A well-equipped lab. A workroom with built-in shelves and a large desk. A fresh set of three-case paperwork, all neatly stacked.

Plus a kitchenette. Plus an Army scrambler phone. He could make and receive his own calls.

His suite was detached. He had stormproof windows and a Mount Whitney view. Central ducts supplied heat. He had privacy. The shack rows stood a full hundred yards off.

Al Wilhite pointed to the paperwork. “That’s your job, for as long as it takes you. And, there’s a man at the Lone Pine Hospital. Major Smith would like you to interview him. He’s being treated for severe burns there.”

—

Dusk settled in. A mountain gale stirred loose snow. It swirled high and obscured rooflines. Manzanar went arctic cold. Steam heat warmed the suite.

Ashida dozed. Al Wilhite brought him his dinner. The MP’s mess hall employed local cooks. Those guys knew their stuff. The jailbirds rated Army cooks. They got substandard fare.

The meal was good. It included French champagne. Relentless Dudley. Ever the Dudleyesque touch.

Ashida heard voices outside. He checked his front-room window. Three young men stood by the steps. They wore Belmont High letter jackets and held whomping sticks. Go, Mighty Sentinels. Green-and-black, 4-ever.

He walked outside.

He said, “As you wish.”

He motioned them forward to beat him.

They came at him low and knocked him flat on a snowdrift. They arced their sticks and brought them down hard. They thumped his arms and legs. Swirling snow covered their faces.

106

(LOS ANGELES, 9:30 P.M., 3/25/42)

Ruth kicked him out. Lazy love gave her the frets. She cited her violin and an audition. You have other women, *Liebchen.* Go, pester them for a while.

Elmer hoofed it. Ruth dispensed good advice. Make the rounds. Visit the girls. Ask those questions you should have asked before this.

He hopped east. He split Santa Monica and cut back to L.A. proper. The SaMo PD ran shoreline blackouts. That meant doused traffic lights and house lights. He drove out of it and lit a cigar.

He passed the SaMo-city border. He went from no lights to muted lights and cellophane-dim stoplights. Folks drove faster. Wilshire opened up.

A light rain kicked in. He cut north to Laurel Canyon. He caught Brenda in her robe and up for a chat. She drew the line there. No transitory woof-woof tonight.

They sipped Cointreau and noshed salted peanuts. They discussed their hot-sheet biz. Elmer snagged his chance and steered the talk.

"Bev's Switchboard keeps popping up in the klub*haus* job. I was wondering if you knew who actually owns the place."

Brenda blew smoke rings. "This priest Joe Hayes has a small percentage, but the Ness family's got more of a percentage on the books. You know—that racket buster Eliot Ness, and his nephew, Wallace Jamie. That twerp who's in the shit on the phone-tap probe."

That hitches up. Jamie and Hayes. It bespeaks Fifth Column calumny. Thad Brown turned bonus paper on Mondo Díaz. The INS compiled it. Dig: Hayes and Jamie attended Dresden Polytechnic. Likewise, Mondo Díaz and Juan Pimentel. *Sieg Heil*—it's Deutschland '35.

"Bev's is Sheriff's-protected, right? Gene Biscailuz is taking a few points there."

Brenda said, "Eight points, Citizen. One more than we're paying Jack Horrall. That doesn't mean that Gene don't have misgivings. The rumor is that he's been rethinking the protection, because Bev's is so damn flat-out crooked."

Elmer sipped Cointreau. "That's some tasty dish. It's funny how these things drop on you out of the blue."

Brenda laughed. "You came here to pump me, Citizen. And I'm not talking about in the sack."

—

Ellen kept late hours. The baby bawled nonstop and shitcanned her sleep. She was shooting some back-lot oater. Her hubby was off with the Air Corps. He might catch her bored and eager to yak.

Elmer cut to Hollyweird. He parked outside the Green Gables and elevatored up. He peeped the fire-escape window. The lights were on. Ellen wore a shorty nightgown. Ellen paced and smoked.

He climbed back inside and door-knocked her. Ellen opened up and went *Ssshhh.* He knew the drill. The baby's sleeping, you dipshit.

They sat around and tipped Lucky Lager. Ellen cited a migraine. It quashed a stint in the kip.

They kept their voices low. The baby had keen ears and lived to disrupt. Elmer steered talk to Jean Staley.

This job I'm on. It's strictly routine. Her name popped up. You two were fellow starlets, huh? Right here on the Paramount lot.

Ellen inveighed. Insomniacs ran talkative. Ellen lived to dissect and rehash.

"Jean was a strange-o. She fell into her actress gig, but I always made her for a grifter at heart. She had a strange-o kid brother. His name was Robby, and he wanted to be an actor, but he couldn't get his foot in the door. He was a swish, and I think he was in with some swish boys who rolled pathetic old queens for kicks."

Elmer cinched it. Robby was Tommy Glennon's ex-squeeze. Jean told him that. He lashed up loose strands. The queer white boy, the Jap sword man's pal.

"Was Robby tall? I'm working off witness descriptions of some fruit kid I've never seen."

Ellen lit a cigarette. "Robby was short. He was a shrimp in the mode of Alan Ladd, but without the charm and good looks."

Elmer said, "Jean and men. There's got to be a story there."

Ellen said, "Sure, if you don't mind Communist no-goodniks and firebugs."

"Shit, don't stop now."

"Who's stopping?"

"Ellen, come on. Don't—"

"Jean had this strange-o lover named Meyer Gelb. He recruited for the CP at Paramount, and he was hawking a pro-Red script titled 'This Storm,' which Jean told me was strictly from hunger. Meyer exerted a sick-o power over Jean. He made her marry a sick-o grip named Ralph D. Barr, who set fires and whipped his pecker out on the girls at Le Conte Junior High. Ralphie used to rig explosives and set contained fires for the cheap-o westerns the studio used to shoot out in the Valley. This was strange—because Meyer had these burn scars on his hands, and the rumor was that Terry Lux and some Chink plastic surgeon did skin grafts on him."

Ellen dished good dish. It confirmed prior dish. It cinched up Staley/Gelb/Barr/Lux/Chink-o Chung et al.

"Sergeant Elmer's in a trance. Don't tell me this is 'strictly routine.' You've got your jaws locked on something."

Elmer yukked. "All right. We've got all these strange-o types. What about other friends and known associates?"

Ellen crushed her cigarette. "There was this tall southern guy. He impressed me as a grifter, and he had a drawl sort of like yours."

Cinch knots unraveled. Elmer pulled out his wallet and fanned the photo sleeves. He flashed his Wayne Frank picture. Ellen orbed in on it.

"Yeah, that's the guy. And I hate to say it, but that Klan sheet looks pretty good on him."

—

Surprise didn't cut it. *Shock* missed the point. *Spiritus Mundi* said it best.

Kay's shtick. We share one soul and one fate. Our shit's all interlocked. We're as one and fucked-up by life's follies. We swirl as our foolish fate plays itself out.

Annie was bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. She looked 1:00 a.m. in-her-robe *goooood.* She scoped his dizzy demeanor and fixed him a quadruple scotch. He guzzled it.

The couch dipped. He saw the six-eyed beasts in the Book of Revelation. Wayne Frank grew six eyes and burned a Klan cross. Tommy Glennon levitated. Gold dust rained down on L.A. Joan Conville resurrected. Revelations ripped his way.

Mondo Díaz. Frankie Carbajal. The Dresden boys. Joan said it's all one story. Kay said she'd marry him if he sussed it all out.

Annie said, "Penny for your thoughts."

Elmer opened his eyes. The couch resettled. The Revelation gang waved good-bye.

"Ed Satterlee. You've spent time in the sack with him. Tell me something I don't know."

Annie furrowed up. “I think he’s a secret Red, but nobody knows it. He’s always saying we’ll win the war with Germany but lose the war with Russia, which wouldn’t be such a bad thing. He says we should be prepared for that, because the Reds are the wave of the future.”

—

Ruth said, “Have you ever killed anyone, Elmer? You have heard my own horrible story, and I must insist that you respond in kind and answer me candidly.”

The bed sagged. They’d sweated up the sheets. The bedroom was cold. A sea breeze ruffled the curtains and induced goose bumps.

“I clipped a political fanatic in Nicaragua. He was trying to kill the police chief we had here in L.A. then. Jim Davis was grateful, and that’s how I got on the PD.”

Ruth finger-walked up his rib cage. She did deliberate things like that. Her panther eyes gleamed.

“You are a bloodthirsty type. I would have thought you would have more scalps on your belt.”

Book of Revelation. Six-eyed beasts. Tommy Glennon and Catbox Cal Lunceford. Additional scalps on his belt.

“That’s as far as it goes. I’ve never had the misfortune of passing through Nazi Germany, and I’ve never come up against the likes of Meyer Gelb.”

“You say Comrade Gelb’s name casually, as if you know this man in a personal way.”

“I’m working an investigation. His name keeps coming up.”

Ruth shrugged. “There is not much one can say about Comrade Gelb. He is a Communist, so he is both enlightened and deluded. He is also an extortionist, which has earned him my enmity. I owe my American passage to Herr Comrade, but many good people died as a result. My friends and I will not be impressed into informant duty, and we ardently applaud your coercive efforts with Miss Staley. Maestro Otto has passed along rumors as to Comrade Gelb and his left-right bund, but they impress me as nebulous poppycock.”

Elmer shrugged. “That’s all you’ve got on Meyer the G., huh?”

Ruth grabbed his hair and pulled their heads close. She did abrupt things like that.

“I formally met Gelb only once. It was in Munich, in ’36 or ’37. We met at a reception for Wilhelm Furtwängler. We were two Jews, and we briefly discussed our prospects for leaving Germany alive. Gelb bore an odd resemblance to a Sparticist hoodlum I knew in Berlin in the ’20s. His name was Fritz Eckelkamp, and he was quite the mad boy. I mentioned this to Herr Gelb, and noted that my rather bland comment disturbed him."

Revelation. *Spiritus Mundi.* Six-eyed somethings. Ellen Drew's dish. Jean Staley's drift.

Ellen's dish enticed. Terry Lux and a Chink plastic man grafted up Gelb's hands. Jean's drift gored and perplexed.

The train escape and gold heist. Jean finagles Fritz Eckelkamp through southbound roadblocks. The roadblocks stop north of Malibu. "Near this ritzy nuthouse." It's the Terry Lux clinic, for sure.

"Elmer, where are you? You are certainly not listening to me."

Elmer fought off chills. His goose bumps grew goose bumps.

"I'm sorry. What were you saying?"

"I was commenting on Comrade Gelb, and I was saying that when the four of us were flown to La Paz, the airplane stopped in Juarez to refuel. An FBI man boarded the plane and queried us on Comrade Gelb. He wanted to know about Herr Gelb's plans to relocate refugees, but it occurred to me that he already knew the answers, and that perhaps he and Herr Gelb were in league. He added that we should mind our p's and q's, or risk expulsion from America."

Elmer tingled. "Was the FBI man's name Ed Satterlee?"

Ruth said, "Yes, it was."

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(TIJUANA, 9:00 A.M., 3/26/42)

The T.J. Express. Two trucks and two buses. Perched at the border. Japs and wets set to roll.

To internment camps. To PD road gangs. To San Joaquin Valley farms. *Arriba, Japos y braceros.* You're plain old slaves now.

Salvy was late. Dudley briefed the Statie drivers and gun guards. They resented him. Juan Pimentel was their immediate boss and sub-*Führer.* El Dudley mollycoddled his killer. *El Puto* Ashida got a soft stateside berth. It pissed the slave crew off.

Salvy was late. It pissed *him* off. Salvy was set to ride north with the slaves. He was charged to glad-hand farm and road-gang *jefes* and dispense bonus cash. Salvy excelled at such tasks. Salvy possessed the gift of gab and the PR-man touch.

Salvy was late. Dudley was double-pissed. Al Wilhite called him last night. He reported Hideo Ashida's first day in camp.

Hideo praised his accommodations. Youthful thugs beat him up. That was most regrettable. Hideo had pressing tasks. He had file work to assess and a french-fried Jap to debrief.

Kazio Hiroki. Note the suspect initials. Wilhite snagged him off the Hanamaka APB. Hiroki is bilingual. Hideo will brace him in English and Japanese.

Salvy was late. Dudley fumed and performed roll-out tasks. He head-counted slaves. He stashed heroin in engine compartments. He teethed on Constanza, nonstop.

He saw her naked. He saw her clothed. He dressed her in fascist garb. She wore brown jackboots and carried a riding crop. She surveyed Waffen-SS troops and found them unkempt. She lashed them and drew blood.

Salvy was late. Dudley teethed on Constanza. He loved her. He did not fully trust her. He'd run intermittent stakeouts on the La Paz post office. Hideo snatched and mailed Elmer J.'s microdot letter. Constanza must have received it.

His stakeouts continue. He wants to nail her at the location. Tell me why I should trust you. Declare your loyalty and lead me to the gold.

Salvy was late. Dudley teethed on Constanza. He saw her in white gowns. Her shoulder straps kept slipping. He saw her in Brownshirt riot gear. She raised her riding crop and whipped Marxist thugs.

"Mi hermano, I apologize for my tardiness. Greenshirt business has kept me occupied."

There he was. Salvy snuck up on you. He was Latin decorous and ever deferential. Dudley raised a hand to slap him. Dudley hugged him instead.

"Your tardiness is confounding, but I trust and revere you, regardless."

Salvy laid on back slaps. He had that Latin love-tap touch. Salvy beamed. Latins lived to ingratiate.

Dudley pointed to the lead bus. The driver goosed the gas. The engine purred. The gun guard jacked shells in his piece. The shackled slaves pitched boo-hoo.

"Bon voyage, lad. Call me from Fresno or Bakersfield. I'll be staying with Constanza in La Paz."

Salvy shook his head. "I cannot accompany the convoy, Dudley. *La Causa* needs me here. I have urgent duties in Ensenada, and at the encampment. There will be many other convoys, but I cannot go with this one."

Dudley saw red. He flushed and felt his veins swell. Salvy love-tapped him. *Poquito* cuffs.

"Do not be angry, brother. I see that you are disappointed, and your anger hurts me. The Staties will perform my duties, and I will accompany the very next convoy. I promise you that."

Dudley flushed, warm to hot. He stepped close and almost threw elbows. Salvy love-tapped him. Dudley almost screamed.

—

The box rows flanked a service counter. The boxes were pullout, shelf-parcel size. They were numbered off-kilter. 1823 adjoined 901.

Dudley stood by the stamp machines. The PO resembled a pint-sized Alamo. He'd caught an Army flight down. He wore civvies and a belt piece.

Constanza called him in Ensenada. She suggested a tryst and come-hithered him. He said, *"Sí, mi corazon."* She said, "My place at six."

It was 3:20 now. Constanza said she had afternoon errands. She mentioned the grocery store and the post office. She decreed this surveillance herself.

It was stand-around/blend-in surveillance. That's the most boring type.

Dudley read postal circulars and wanted bulletins. The bulletins tagged U.S. fugitives and deserters. Dudley yawned and stayed awake.

3:40, 4:00, 4:20. Dudley got impatient. His thoughts boomeranged.

Salvy had mollified him. He should have hit him and cowed him right back. Constanza had a darkroom. She developed her wildlife photos there. She might possess her own microdot camera.

The Wolf appeared. He enjoyed La Paz. He hunted wharf rats and peeped Mexican women. Constanza loved the Wolf. He slept between them most nights.

4:40, 5:00, 5:10. Constanza walked in and strolled to box 1823.

Dudley peeped her. She unlocked the box and pulled out four envelopes. She sifted through them. The last one tweaked her. She evinced surprise.

She slit the envelope. Dudley stepped close. She examined the contents. Dudley got *muy* close. He saw a soft-blotter page.

Constanza looked up and saw him. She smiled, Latin stylish.

She said, “My alert darling.”

He said, “I’ll need to read it, of course.”

—

The process consumed her. He watched her work. The darkroom cast pulsing red light.

She placed the page flat on a workbench. It was magnification glass–topped. A small arc lamp beamed light from below it. The light was bright-bright.

She sprayed saline water on the page surface. It brought up collodion and aniline dye. The page glowed purple now.

Constanza donned magnification-lens goggles. She loaded her camera and placed the lens up against the page. She moved the lens left to right and snapped photos. She shot twenty-four exposures per quadrant. Her photographic field covered the full page.

She unloaded the film and cut it into ninety-six strips. She placed them in a developing pan. She sprayed on emulsifier. It brought up ninety-six small prints.

Spanish words appeared. Constanza kept her goggles on and skimmed the out-of-order texts. She took a white grease pencil and numbered the prints from 1 to 96. She clipped them to three clotheslines.

The prints dried in an hour. Dudley donned the goggles. Constanza turned on a fluorescent arc light. She positioned Dudley beside print #1 and had him read left to right.

Message #1 was a variant. Hideo described the postcard texts. This was more of that.

Lists:

U.S. defense installations. Leftist and rightist plants there employed. Established gold prices now. Gold prices predicted, up to ’44. Jap sub berths upside Baja. Secret airfields. All upside San Joaquin Valley farms.

Message #1 dittoed postcard information. Message #2 was all new. It revealed *this:*

A list labeled “Defense Contacts.” Lists labeled “Farmers,” “Ordnance Makers,” “Airfield Supervisors.” San Joaquin Valley locations, listed below.

One ellipsis loomed large. There was no closing salute. Plus, no admiring nod to Juan Pimentel. Plus, no admonition: “Do not reveal to JLS & CLS.”

Dudley tracked the logic. The postcards were sent to Pimentel himself. Elmer Jackson intercepted them and shot them to Hideo Ashida. The postcard dots expressed exclusion. They nixed the two Lazaro-Schmidts. Said dots nailed them as submembers of a factionalized cabal. The postcard sender distrusted the two Lazaro-Schmidts. This dot sender trusted them fine.

One cabal. Stratified and well buffered. Factions within factions. The intelligent, the resourceful, the superbly self-protective. To wit: Pimentel and the Lazaro-Schmidts. To wit: Meyer Gelb and Kyoho Hanamaka. Allied with the reckless and near insane. To wit: Jim Davis, Saul Lesnick, Lin Chung. To wit: Tommy Glennon and Catbox Cal Lunceford. To wit: dead cops Wendell Rice and George Kapek.

Dudley removed the goggles. Constanza ran her hands through his hair.

“You see how many layers there are, and how little most of us in the middle range know.”

“I knew you and your brother were part of it. You all but told me some weeks ago. You wouldn’t have known what you know about the gold if you were fully on the outside.”

They stepped out of the darkroom. The normal light burned Dudley’s eyes. Constanza placed her hands over them.

“I have not betrayed you. I simply omitted what you had already surmised. I assumed that you already suspected Juan Pimentel.”

Dudley nuzzled her hands. “You forward dot mail sent to you. The various forwarding levels are buffered past comprehension. Pimentel was one step up from you and your brother. Beyond that, you have no idea who’s who.”

Constanza stroked his cheek. “I have never doubted your ability to assess and extrapolate.”

Dudley said, “I have a certain matter to discuss with your brother.”

—

Governor Juan’s office. It was a big-cheese refuge and spot to receive and anoint. Note the pedestal desk and throne chair. Short beaners sit tall here.

Dudley walked in. Constanza followed him. She shut the door and bolted it. Governor Juan looked up.

His chair sat on risers. His desk sat waist-high. Goldbug Juan. All these gold figures on shelves.

His perfect suit. Gray wool with flecked gold highlights. His gold collar pin and burnt-gold necktie.

Dudley walked up to him. Constanza sat beside the desk. She lit a cigarette. Juan's desk lighter flamed.

Juan sensed intent. He slid his chair back. It bumped a window ledge. Dudley picked him up and threw him. He crashed into a bookshelf and fell to the floor. Gold-etched volumes fell on his head.

Dudley kicked him. The books scattered. Dudley kicked his face and split his nose. Dudley sliced a new harelip. Juan bit his coat sleeve and muzzled shrieks.

"I read a dot letter that Constanza received. It convinced me that I should issue a stern warning. There will be no sabotage on U.S. soil. Your cabal or clique or junta may not kill Americans."

Juan whimpered. Dudley kicked his balls and kicked his legs. He pulled his Arkansas toad-stabber. It brought back '28. He shot a 459 man and took a souvenir.

Juan whimpered. Dudley leaned over him. He grabbed his hair and carved a Jew star on his forehead.

Juan screamed. Constanza crossed her legs and blew smoke rings.

—

The Wolf watched them sniff cocaine and make love. They steamed up Constanza's bedroom. Dudley held a hand out. The Wolf licked white powder off his fingertips.

They lay three abed. The Wolf purred and dozed. Constanza stroked him.

"The scar will never heal. You've marked him for life. He'll look in the mirror and know that I've told you everything. He'll recall that he raped me on my tenth birthday, and he'll never touch me or tell me who to sleep with again."

Dudley burrowed into her. He felt schizy. His heart raced. He fought chills. He saw three of everything. Constanza, the Wolf, the bed.

Constanza stroked the Wolf. Constanza stroked him. His pulse ratcheted down some. She gave him her breasts.

"We can use him, my darling. We can use him as he has used me. We can find the gold by ourselves, and keep all of it. These rumored comrades would not dare to trifle with a fearsome man such as you."

The Wolf warmed him. Constanza warmed him. She threw a leg over them both.

“You must know something, my love. I consider it definitive. I will never be able to fully give myself to a man as long as my brother draws breath.”

—

He caught a midnight flight back. He still felt schizy. His pulse still raced. He ran too hot or too cold.

He smelled Constanza all over him. He held his hands out and shared her scent with the Wolf. He cabbed home to the del Norte. He unlocked the door and turned on the lights.

The Wolf hopped on his favorite chair and dozed off. Dudley smelled something familiar. Perfumed stationery. The envelope on the floor. He knew that—

The L.A. postmark, her handwriting, her now-banal scent.

He opened the letter. It ran six full pages. Claire cut loose on him.

His Irish pomp and bonhomie. People laugh behind his back. Her dope cure and how it purges his fowl touch and stink. His infantile brag. His groveling need for women. His puerile rule over weak men. His shanty mick cultivation of all things high-class. His jejune grandiosity. His vile regard for God’s law. The precise moments that Beth Short and Joan Klein saw through him. His rage cloaked in pitiful terror. His shallowness. His abject neediness. His idiot criminal schemes that all run aground. His sheer fraudulence. His effete eye for callow young men. His remorseless cruelty. His repugnant selfishness. His trifling life passed unmourned and casually unremembered.

He dropped the letter and weaved into the bedroom. His heart raced. He saw three of everything. He saw three nightstands on Claire’s side of the bed. He pulled open the top drawer. He saw three syringes and dope spikes and vials of morphine sulfate.

He grew three arms. He ripped off his coat and fashioned a sleeve tourniquet. His three hands shook. He saw three syringes, three spikes, three vials. He rigged the kit and punctured the stopper. It took three tries. His third try hit the vein. He went slack and fell back on the bed.

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

(LOS ANGELES, 8:00 P.M., 3/27/42)

The PD kept a suite at the Ambassador Hotel. It was used to stash important witnesses and entertain politicos that Jack Horrall sought to impress. The Cocoanut Grove was three floors below; the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra was headlining tonight. "Song of India" drifted upstairs. It made me want to jump out of bed, grab Bill, and dance.

But we were naked, Bill wasn't the dancing type, and he was occupied with my typed draft of Claire's handwritten letter to Dudley. We were both anxious and apprehensive. Dudley should have received the letter by now.

Bill said, "You're presuming a small kernel of self-knowledge in the man. One that he won't be able to shake."

"Yes, but not conscience," I said. "I expressed Claire's sentiments in my own words, and inferred that a great number of people see through him. He's immune to remorse, and he has no germ of probity to appeal to. He has to be made to question his hold over those he commands and seeks to intimidate."

Bill smiled and cleaned his glasses on a pillowcase. We sat with our backs on the headboard and sipped room-service bourbon. We were lovers and hotel cohabiters now; Bill's marriage cohabited his conscience more than mine. Lee Blanchard didn't care what I did with men. We were cohabiters in name only. Bill understood the arrangement more than I first thought he would.

He said, "I've got your script memorized, and I'll be seeing Monsignor Hayes soon. I'll lay out your version of Dudley and the klub*haus* job, and make the monsignor fear for his own safety."

"Claire's recuperating. She'll go to confession a few days after you. She'll spear Dudley from oblique angles."

Bill kissed me and pulled the sheet below my breasts. Seeing me nude always underlined exactly what this was and that I wasn't his wife. I knew he'd say something dispiriting next.

“We cannot maneuver Dudley into criminal indictment without bringing down the PD. We cannot strategically circumvent him to any sure advantage. He’s simply too well situated, and too many powerful men owe him and need him.”

“He’s inviolate as long as he’s perceived as sane,” I said. “And the best way to unnerve him is through his women.”

Bill said, “He has to lose his shot at the gold. A three-case solve has to explode in his face. We have to hope that Hideo Ashida values a clean solve more than he values his loyalty to that shitheel.”

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(MANZANAR, 9:00 A.M., 3/28/42)

The file stacks. Newly compiled and exhaustively comprehensive. A full three-case brief.

He'd lost his Ensenada set. Post-Pimentel chaos had engulfed him. Dudley had supplied this replacement. It contained all-new paperwork.

Newspaper clips. Custody files and visitors' logs. Bertillon charts. Detailed background briefs and summary reports.

Ashida worked at his desk. His beating-injury pain had subsided. He'd self-treated his wounds. He'd rested. He'd applied alcohol rubs and ice packs. He felt better now.

He'd scrambler-phoned Elmer and Kay this morning. He'd bug-checked the phone and tagged it pristine. Elmer and Kay updated him. They laid out the faux Claire letter. Faux daughter letters would follow. Plus, faux Claire and Bill Parker confessions to Joe Hayes. They laid out the Jamie and Ness family ownership of Bev's Switchboard. Plus, the Hayes family-money cut. Plus, the L.A. Sheriff's protection clause. Plus, Jean Staley as Ed Satterlee's snitch. Jean drives Fritz Eckelkamp southbound, post–gold heist. Wayne Frank Jackson as Meyer Gelb's KA.

Terry Lux and Lin Chung. They plastic-cut Meyer's hands. Ruth Szigeti. She knew Eckelkamp in Berlin, circa '20s. Circles constrict and overlap, circles remain in ellipses.

He updated Elmer and Kay. He laid out the microdot revelations. He pitched the left-right cabal, then to now. He stressed the Dresden Poly convergence. He told them everything Dudley had told him. Elmer and Kay stood up-to-date. They'd repitch Parker and Thad Brown. *He* stood up-to-date. He was set to push forward, *now*.

Ashida stacked the files. He worked chronologically. He jumped back to '27. He read the Eckelkamp arrest reports and background sheets.

Alameda. A small East Bay burg. It's couched between Oakland and

Berkeley. Alameda's the county seat. Their rinky-dink Sheriff's force roams countywide. Fritz Eckelkamp pulls countywide 211s. County bulls pop him at his eleventh heist. He admits his prior robberies. It's tacitly confirmed. His confession was coerced.

It's old news, so far. The background brief's got more snap.

Eckelkamp riffs on Weimar Berlin. The street skirmishes. The Nazi-thug-versus-Marxist-thug riots. Nazi thugs and Marxist thugs allied in blackmail schemes. A Nazi-Sparticist kidnapping ring.

Deutschland, '26. Evidence of right-left alliance. Ensenada, '40. The *formal* alliance meets. It pervades three case lines: '31, '33, '42.

More background facts. Fritz Eckelkamp is born Protestant. He's orphaned early. He's raised by a Jewish family. He's Yiddish-fluent.

Ashida cut back to Alameda. Fritzie is tried, convicted, slammed for twenty-five years. He's sent to San Quentin. He studies law texts and petitions for a retrial. It's now 2/31. His application is granted. The trial is scheduled for Los Angeles District Court.

Three newspaper stories were clipped to the file. They were perfunctory. Clip #1 announced eight convict retrials. Judicial errors had been determined. The retrials would take place in L.A. They would begin in mid-May, '31. Clip #2 announced the gold-train run. It was set for May 18. There it is—San Francisco to L.A. Clip #3 announced a rail workers' strike. It would cripple but not halt operations. The San Francisco train yards have endured labor strife. The strike would hit 4/25. That meant *this:*

Certain train runs would be combined.

U.S. government runs. California state runs. That meant *the* run. Ashida surmised *this:*

The convict-retrial run and gold-train run were *secretly* combined. Fritz Eckelkamp learned this. He had leftist contacts at the Frisco train yards. He planned the mass escape. He escaped for good. The other convicts were gunned down. Fritzie worked solo. He cut his fellow convicts loose, impromptu. He planned the derailed-track snafu. The escape went down. Chaos reigned. It suited Fritzie's designs. Marxist realpolitik. Expendable convicts are killed. Only his freedom counts.

Ashida backtracked. He pulled the Alameda custody file and skimmed it. He caught a hot file note.

Fritzie met Leander Frechette in '27. They were county-jail inmates then. Frechette. He's these three things. He's Negro/mentally dim/big and inhumanely strong. He's the chief gold-heist suspect. He's the bête noire of the Santa Barbara Sheriff's and Deputy Karl Tullock. Frechette was a trainman and rail-yard worker. He'd been jailed for Assault One. He took part in a Frisco labor brawl. An obscure file note sizzled. A guard boss caught the odd friendship. Here's this Kraut armed robber and dim colored youth.

Ashida surmised:

Frechette is not dim. He feigns insolvency. It complements his labor-thug pose. He conspires with Fritz Eckelkamp. He tells Fritz that he works gold-run jobs on occasion. The heist is theoretically planned. It's a jailhouse-bullshit concoction. It's conceived in advance of Fritzie's San Quentin jolt. It's all shuck and jive at that stage.

Ashida backtracked. He pulled Fritzie's jail visitors' log and skimmed it. He caught a hot file note.

Martin Luther Mimms visited Fritzie. There's Mimms, in Alameda County. He's a corrupt preacher/slumlord/race racketeer. He owned the 46th Street klub*haus.* He's tight with ranking L.A. cops. Jump—'27 to '31. Mimms springs Leander Frechette from the Santa Barbara jail. Mimms halts the beatings of Deputy Karl Tullock.

Mimms. He's L.A.-based. He's tight with high-up L.A. cops. Who's *the* boss L.A. cop in 1931? It's James Edgar "Two-Gun" Davis.

Names. Dates. Guesses. Extrapolation. Surmise.

Frechette creates the initial train-track diversion. He employs his fearsome strength and bare hands. The escape occurs. The train journeys south. There's a second track snafu. It's Frechette's work, as well. Frechette off-loads the gold bars on his person. He hands them off to—

?????

Jean Staley facilitates Fritzie's escape. She's Fritzie's lover. They haul southbound. They dodge roadblocks. Jim Davis aids the escape. He clues Fritzie and Jean in to roadblock deployment. Said roadblocks are pulled on U.S. 101 south. Right before this ritzy nut farm. It's Terry Lux's nut farm. This is all informed guesswork.

Elmer Jackson chats up Ruth Szigeti. She cites Eckelkamp's resemblance to Meyer Gelb. Her statement startles Elmer. He almost blurts *his* big guess on the scrambler-phone call.

Ashida surmised. Let's confirm or refute. This investigation is all about *that.*

Meyer Gelb has burn-seared fingers. They're covered by graft marks. Meyer Gelb was hauled in and braced per the Griffith Park fire. His scarred fingers tweaked the Arson Squad cops. That has to be true. Gelb's fingerprint ID has been compromised. What's their next step? What would the Arson cops do?

They'd order up a Bertillon measurement chart. They'd establish a certified Meyer Gelb ID. That raises this question:

Was Fritz Eckelkamp Bertillon-charted? Did Alameda County or the San Quentin lab chart his measurements?

Ashida prowled file paper. He jumped '27 to '28 and Fritzie's Quentin jolt. There it is. The Quentin lab charted him, 1/12/29. That's one comparison point.

It takes two to make this work. Ashida jumped—Eckelkamp to Gelb. He jumped ’29 to ’33 and the Griffith Park fire. He thumbed Arson Squad and Red Squad reports. Comrade Gelb’s cell is hotly scrutinized. Comrade Gelb is hard-nosed. What’s with your fingers, Jewboy? Let’s Bertillon-chart this kike.

There it is. 10/18/33. The PD crime lab charts Meyer Gelb. Ray Pinker measures him.

Ashida studied the two charts. Ashida dripped sweat on the pages. He compared the height and limb-length numbers. He compared the finger spans. He compared twenty-three separate phrenological marks. Every single mark matched identically. This is no extrapolation. Fritz Eckelkamp is Meyer Gelb.

Now, we extrapolate.

Jean Staley lied to Elmer Jackson. She omitted a key fact. The roadblocks are pulled just north of Terry Lux’s clinic. Jean takes Fritzie there. Dr. Terry and Lin Chung perform plastic surgery. They make Eckelkamp Gelb. Jean Staley knows this, full well. Fresh-cut Gelb joins the CP and forms his own cell. Jean S., the Lesnicks, and Jorge Villareal-Caiz join up. *Sieg Heil*—they raise the Red flag.

Cut to summer ’33. It’s two months before the Griffith Park blaze. A rash of liquor store 211s plague the L.A. cops. Liquor-store jobs are Fritz Eckelkamp’s meat. Eyewits ID a man who resembles Wayne Frank Jackson. Let’s posit a two-man heist squad. Strange bedfellows. Faux Jew/face-cut Meyer Gelb and Klan klown Wayne Frank Jackson. Let’s posit that prefire Gelb/Wayne Frank bond.

Ellen Drew has already confirmed it. She has *not* confirmed a Gelb/Wayne Frank *chronological* point of convergence. Ellen Drew was a *mid-’30s* Paramount starlet. She met Gelb-who’s-really-Eckelkamp *then.* She met Wayne Frank Jackson *then.* Wayne Frank was alive *then.* She ID’d Elmer’s wallet pic. That cinched her identification.

Ergo:

Wayne Frank did not die in the Griffith Park fire. Ergo: somebody else did. Ergo: somebody snatched Wayne Frank’s dental chart from the office of his cut-rate dentist. Ergo: somebody planted the real dead man’s chart under Wayne Frank’s name. Ergo: those efforts confirmed Wayne Frank’s death. Ergo: Wayne Frank’s perceived death was deemed essential—but to who and to what criminal end?

Ashida surmised. Ashida tossed conclusions. Ashida linked three-case players, flesh-to-flesh. Eckelkamp-Gelb to Jean Staley to Leander Frechette. Leander to Martin Luther Mimms. Toss in the late Ralph D. Barr. Toss in Ed Satterlee. He suborned Jean Staley. He ordered her to fink out fresh-cut Meyer’s cell.

Saul Lesnick’s in that cell. Satterlee makes him his snitch. Kay Lake has duplicate keys to Lesnick’s office.

Ashida caressed the file stacks. He'd dripped sweat all over them.

It's all one story. I will not be denied the full truth of it.

—

Kazio Hiroki. The same initials. It must be him. Al Wilhite has implied it. Who else could he be?

A waiting room adjoined the burn ward. Ashida sat alone. Wilhite drove him from Manzanar to Lone Pine. The interview had been prearranged. The subject requested Dr. Ashida. Dr. Ashida was his preferred interlocutor.

Hiroki was bilingual. They could chat in English or Japanese. Wilhite issued strict orders. "You will take no notes. You will write nothing down. You will report to Major Smith, verbally."

Wilhite sat downstairs. He'd worked off Dudley's APB. Hiroki hid in plain sight. His cover was interned Jap, vouched by forged papers. He'd journeyed north-northeast. Baja to L.A. L.A. to Manzanar. He had a cot in "C" row, bachelor barracks 3.

Hiroki was clearly insane. He torched his barracks and scorched himself, severely. A doctor noted preexisting burn scars. The doctor told Hiroki that some Army cops wanted to brace him. Hiroki said, "Dr. Ashida, one hopes."

A nurse walked in. Ashida stood up. The nurse walked him to the ward proper. It was three rooms off a hallway crammed with drip gizmos. Ashida smelled medicinal salve and charred flesh.

The nurse opened the door and about-faced. The room was small. There was a crank-up bed and guest chair. Air vents diffused salve and burn stink.

Hiroki was bandage-mummified and cranked up to face guests. An intravenous bag fed him pain juice. His face was uncovered. It was him. It's all one story, you—

—

Ashida pulled the chair up. He said, "芦田先生."

Hanamaka said, "花丸司令官."

His voice was firm. His neck was unbandaged. His vocal chords were most surely intact.

Hanamaka shut his eyes. Ashida unscrewed the fluid bag. He pulled out an envelope and poured in three crumbled Benzedrine. Get your man perked up and loose-lipped. Dudley taught him the trick.

They traded pleasantries. Hanamaka alternated English and Japanese. *So happy to meet you* and あなたの最近の人生に興味を持ってきました. 渡辺事件. 警察 署の仕事. *Juan Pimentel* and のメールドロップニュース.

Ashida quick-translated. *I've followed your recent life with interest. The Watanabe case. Your police department work. Mail-drop news from Juan Pimentel.*

"I would say that I'm notorious, more than justifiably famous."

Hanamaka switched to English. "I'm sure that you and Major Smith know a great deal about my endeavors, going back some years."

Ashida sat down. "Yes, but I'm sure you can fill in a few gaps."

The stimulant took hold. Hanamaka's carotid vein pulsed. His hands twitched. He spoke more rapidly.

"I should tell you that I love fire, and that the small barracks blaze was merely an experiment. I wanted to see if I could eradicate the burn scars the Griffith Park fire inflicted, along with the print-eradication scars that Meyer Gelb and I so foolishly marked ourselves with."

Ashida said, "Meyer Gelb is really Fritz Eckelkamp. Terry Lux and Lin Chung cut him a new face shortly after his escape from the gold train."

Hanamaka smiled. "The American Jew is the German Gentile, and quite the covert anti-Semite. The leftist firebrand is really an armed robber."

"That statement tells me a great deal about this politically diffuse cabal of yours."

Hanamaka said, "I'll quote Meyer here. 'This storm, this savaging disaster.' The disaster is History, and the cabal was formed as a means to survive it."

Ashida smiled. "I'll quote the Book of Proverbs. 'Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways.' "

Hanamaka sipped water. Benzedrine spawned dehydration. He held a small canteen. He sipped through a glass straw.

"Bible to Bible, Dr. Ashida. I read the Los Angeles papers on New Year's Day. A rainstorm of biblical proportions had unearthed a man's body in a wooden box. I knew that a reckoning of biblical proportions was about to occur."

Ashida tingled. "Yes?"

"Yes, and I had been thinking about Karl Tullock for some time already. Two months earlier, I had read a locally distributed golf magazine, published in San Diego. An article described a driving range, soon to be built on the exact spot where Tullock reposed. I'm sure you've heard the complaint 'It's hard to find good help these days.' That complaint proved itself especially true in the world of the domestic Fifth Column. I dispatched Wendell Rice and George Kapek to find the box and dispose of it before the excavation crews began work. Rice and Kapek bungled the job, because a reckoning was preordained."

Ashida coughed. The burn stink stifled him.

"Who set the Griffith Park fire?"

Hanamaka said, "Ralph Barr, on Red Meyer's orders. Meyer wanted to create an apocalypse that would take the lives of many oppressed workingmen, which would be a Marxist-fascist ruse to rival the temerity of the Reichstag fire. Meyer also knew that Karl Tullock had found a spot on the CCC crew, and was closing in on Wayne Frank Jackson as a gold-robbery suspect. Meyer wanted Tullock dead and Wayne Frank believed to be dead. When weather reports predicted one-hundred-degree heat and strong winds that day, he put Ralph to work creating a very subtle accelerant."

Ashida inched his chair back. Hanamaka oozed contagion. The Mummy escapes his crypt. His wrapping suppurates.

"Wayne Frank was suspected of a string of liquor-store heists in the summer of '33. It was shortly before the fire, and liquor-store jobs were Fritz Eckelkamp's well-established pattern. Was Eckelkamp-Gelb Wayne Frank's partner on those jobs? The gold heist occurred two years and three months previously, so I would assume that Wayne Frank met Gelb before May of '31, or am I mistaken here? Were those robberies a means of Wayne Frank's introduction to Gelb and your cabal et al.?"

Hanamaka shook his head yes. Hanamaka shook his head no. He was fully Benzedrined. His eyeballs glowed.

"You must realize that the Comintern and their kindred fascist counterparts are criminals first and foremost, over and above whatever ideologies they might express. You should not be surprised to see armed robbery as a recurring motif in this account of political misdeeds. On that note, yes. Gelb was Wayne Frank's partner in those robberies. Yes, Karl Tullock suspected Wayne Frank of complicity in the gold heist. Tullock had, in fact, been shadowing Wayne Frank—but Wayne Frank's presence on the CCC work crew was at first largely coincidental. Wayne Frank had been scouting potential targets for Meyer's 'workingman's apocalypse,' and the work crew seemed like a good candidate. But then he saw Tullock's name on a hire sheet, and told Meyer. That was when Meyer truly conceived his notion of workingmen burned alive."

Ashida coughed. "*Sensei,* when did Meyer Gelb and Wayne Frank Jackson meet?"

Hanamaka said, "Wayne Frank met Meyer in his Fritz Eckelkamp incarnation. They met in the Alameda County Jail in 1928, before Fritz was sent to San Quentin. Wayne Frank was serving time for plain drunk and vagrancy, and Fritz Eckelkamp was plain Fritz. That jail became a point of convergence for the gold heist—Fritz, Wayne Frank, and Leander Frechette. That was the genesis of the robbery. That was the moment that Fritz inculcated Wayne Frank with Marxist rhetoric and converted him. It was culminatingly the moment when Fritz and Wayne Frank saved Leander from a gang of race-baiting jailhouse thugs, and ensured that the robbery would actually occur."

Wayne Frank Jackson. Elmer's Klansman brother. Revealed as a Comintern dupe.

“Something troubles me, *Sensei.* It’s Wayne Frank’s statements pertaining to the robbery. His brother Elmer speaks of Wayne Frank as no more than a sad fantasist.”

Hanamaka smiled. “You are quick to note that, *Sensei.* Let me add that Wayne Frank was then a man of intemperate appetite, and is now a man of strict circumspection. He went on a bender shortly after the robbery, and awoke one morning in an opium den in San Francisco. A nosy Chinese man told him he had been mumbling about the robbery while in his opiate haze. Wayne Frank was already a seasoned treasure dreamer, albeit one who had now transcended his sad origins. That moment in the opium den shocked him. He incorporated the gold robbery into the repertoire of his once-obsessive persona. He used it as a means to publicly express ‘I could not have done this.’ ”

Explication. Revelation. Ashida had clenched himself numb.

“You torched the klub*haus,* didn’t you? You were holed up down the block. You used the same accelerant that Ralph Barr used in Griffith Park.”

Hanamaka said, “Yes, and those were taxing days for me. Some unknown person killed Rice, Kapek, and their friend Archuleta, and the puerile Cal Lunceford was chaperoning me. They were all manipulated and given tasks via mail drop, and the murders felt like yet another preordained catalyst. I felt you, Major Smith, and the other policemen converging. I took advantage of the Negro riot and burned the klub*haus.* I wanted to divert your investigation and create a new level of chaos, and the angry Negroes proved themselves to be convenient scapegoats.”

Ashida said, “Whose body stood in for Wayne Frank’s? A dental-plate substitution must have been worked.”

Hanamaka smiled. He was *Sensei* Death. He was Mr. Death’s-Head.

“Wayne Frank’s assignment was to kill Karl Tullock during the fire, and then disappear. We were afraid that Tullock had informed other Santa Barbara policemen of his suspicions, so Wayne Frank’s disappearance was deemed a necessity. Wayne Frank decided to kill a second man during the fire, and pass that man off as himself. Wallace Jamie was quite young then, but he was already acquainted with another comrade named Joe Hayes. Wallace and Father Joe were fellow travelers on the Right, and dabbled on the Left. They would reunite a few years later, at a German technical college. Wallace had a meddlesome younger brother named George. Wayne Frank got George a job on the CCC work crew. George ran a German-American Bund cell, and began recruiting at the work site. George was also about Wayne Frank’s size and build. Wayne Frank decided to kill him and disguise it as his own death. George only came to work occasionally, and was never carried in any sort of official CCC log.”

Gears snapped in place. Ashida heard clicks. He'd guessed abstract parts of it.

"And then?"

"Then Meyer had Terry Lux build prosthetic dental work off of Wayne Frank's actual teeth. Then the fire occurred. Then Wayne Frank beat George to death, knocked out all his teeth, and inserted the prosthesis. Meyer preinserted forged dental records for Wayne Frank at a downtown L.A. dentist. It facilitated the coroner's decree. Wayne Frank died in the fire. Then Wayne Frank deftly disappeared."

Ashida said, "Leander Frechette?"

"Last seen in San Francisco, some years ago."

"And the gold? Where is it now?"

Hanamaka went *C'est la guerre.* "Meyer entrusted it to a Mexican Stalinist. I think he was a money conduit for the assassination of Leon Trotsky. The gold was transported to Mexico, to be deployed for political purposes, with one bar left in a Los Angeles storage facility, to cover pertinent expenses. Meyer has hoarded the gold, and now it is pledged to the cause of postwar resettlement. Only Meyer and the Mexican Stalinist know where it is. Meyer trusts the Stalinist, because he made him endure a rigorous initiation. Meyer had him butcher forty Trotskyite priest-killers, and make it look like fascists did it. The man fawningly complied."

Ashida watched the fluid bag drain. The mixture was down to mere drips.

"Where is Meyer Gelb hiding?"

"No one knows that."

"Let's return to the gold."

Hanamaka shrugged. "It has lain fallow, and has exponentially increased in value. A good deal of time has passed. A convergence in Dresden brought about an enlargement of our original band of *Kameraden.* Wallace Jamie brought Joe Hayes, Mondo Díaz, and Juan Pimentel in. You killed Pimentel, and I'm sure you know of the other men."

Ashida checked the fluid bag. It had drained dry.

"Would you call Meyer Gelb the key architect of the gold robbery?"

"No. It was Wayne Frank."

"Where is he now?"

"I have no idea."

"Are the *Kameraden* really Communist or fascist?"

Hanamaka said, "At this point, who can tell?"

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(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 P.M., 3/28/42)

Oooga-booga. The DTs, dead sober. It's like this gag song. I gots jitters like Jell-O in an earthquake.

Ashida called him and Kay. He relayed his talk with Kyoho Hanamaka. Wayne Frank masterminded the gold heist. Wayne Frank was sure as shit alive.

Elmer boozed and noshed at Linny's Delicatessen. His table fluttered. The pickle jar leaped. The walls talked back to him. He is Risen, He is Alive.

Buzz was three blocks over, on Bedford. They were set to 459 Saul Lesnick's office. Buzz brought cans of paint and brushes. Buzz brought pistol silencers. The rendezvous time was 9:30.

Elmer snarfed Old Crow and pastrami. Him and Buzz had spent the day at Kay Lake's place. Kay dished Buzz her version of the whole story. It put Buzz up to speed with him, Kay, Whiskey Bill, and Thad Brown. Buzz buzzed straight to Meyer Gelb. He vowed to find that whipdick.

Whiskey Bill showed up. He brought subpoenaed phone bills for Ed Satterlee and Doc Lesnick. He wrote a quickie writ and ran it by a PD-lapdog judge. PC Bell kicked loose bills going back six months.

They divvied up the bills and worked at Kay's dining room table. The bills listed the callees' names and phone numbers. The tally job took four hours. It revealed *this:*

Doc Lesnick and Ed the Fed called each other boocoo times. They were snitch and snitch runner. There was no surprise there. Ed called Bev's Switchboard nineteen times. *Woo-woo*—it's a spy mail drop. Ed called Padre Joe Hayes fourteen times. Hot potato—El Padre went *waaaaay* back with the spy-ring boys and owned points in Bev's.

Here's a scorcher. Doc Saul and Ed the Fed called the Baja phone-relay number fifty-nine times, all in all. Up till Ashida and Pimentel torched the relay room. Those calls indict both callers up the ying-yang.

Satterlee called Tommy Glennon's L.A. hotel room. Satterlee called

Tommy's La Jolla crib. Mark that forty-two times, total. Satterlee and Lesnick called Jean Staley's Hollywood place. Mark that twenty-three calls.

Here's an El Scorcho. Ed the Fed called Baja's governor, Juan Lazaro-Schmidt. Mark that fourteen calls. Hideo said El Juan was jungled up with El Dudster's rackets. El Dud was bonking Juan's sizzling sister. Hideo said the seditious sibs were spy-ring complicit.

Doc Saul and Ed the Fed called AX-4869. It's a darktown exchange. They called the number twenty-four times, total. Dig: it's the hideout-house number. Kyoho Hanamaka holed up there. Cal Lunceford died there. The klub*haus* was just up the street.

Ed the Fed called Martin Luther Mimms. Twice at his crib, thrice at the Congregation of the Congo. Mimms was deeply gold heist–embroiled. Ed and Doc Saul called Wallace Jamie—fourteen and nineteen times apiece. Both gents placed umpteen calls to Drs. Terry Lux and Lin Chung. Both gents called the C-town flop of James Edgar Davis.

A final head-scratcher scratched. Ed the Fed placed a recent spate of late-nite calls. He called all-nite eateries and cop spots. As in Lyman's and Kwan's. He called them interchangeable. Who you lookin' fo, Brutha Ed?

Elmer paid the bill. He schlepped over to 416 Bedford and donned his B and E wig. Buzz was parked curbside. Elmer got in and tossed him a french-dip sandwich. Buzz snarked it.

Beverly Hills. The psych-doctor district. Pitch your woes to Doc Saul. He'll fuck you up worse than you are.

416 was a mock-château job. Lobby, elevator, stairs. Offices above. Kay made keys off Annie Staples' wax mounts. It was a walk-in caper.

Buzz said, "The building's empty. Everybody up and left two hours ago."

Elmer grabbed their tool kit. It was two grocery sacks, double-wrapped. Buzz jiggled the keys. They choked back B and E giggles and charged.

They crossed the sidewalk. Elmer lugged the bags. Buzz held the keys. The lobby door opened easy. They checked the directory. Saul Lesnick, M.D.: suite 216.

They took the stairs. The second-floor hall was pitch-dark. Elmer flashed his flashlight and read door plates. There's 216.

Buzz unlocked the door. They stepped in and locked themselves in. Elmer hit the lights.

The waiting room featured agitprop art. Workers Unite!!! Beefcake boys waving scythes. Elmer made the jack-off sign. Buzz unlocked the inner-office door.

Elmer hit the lights. There's the psychee's couch. There's the psych doc's desk. There's file cabinets. There's more Commo wall art. Tanks rolled through Red Square. Butcher Stalin screamed. The Russki alphabet resembled DT hieroglyphs.

Buzz yanked at the file drawers. They were locked. Elmer dug into his bag. He pulled out the two silencers and tossed one to Buzz.

They tap-screwed their roscoes and stood back. They aimed in unison and blasted the drawers. The silencers went *pfffft.* Bullets pierced the file locks and ricocheted through the drawers. The office got all gunsmoked up.

They slid the file drawers open. They both went *wooooooo.* They thought they'd find patient folders. Nix to that. They found wire-recording spools.

Elmer grabbed all of them. He dumped them in the bags. Buzz hit Old Saul's desk. The drawers were locked. Buzz aimed tight and blasted them open. Gunsmoke smoked the whole room now.

Elmer dug through the drawers. Old Saul stashed his jerk-off books there. It was Nazi shit. Hopped-up Hildegards in black tunics whipped terrified Jews. The Hildas wore jackboots and had tits out to here. The Jews wore skullcaps with propellers on top. Full-page ads hawked dick-size enhancers and eugenics brews.

Elmer tossed all the drawers. He thought he'd find correspondence and an address book. Nix to that. He found more Nazi shit and a jack-off suction device.

Buzz flashlight-flashed the walls. He said, "Looky here." Elmer tracked the beam.

He saw wires spackled to wainscot strips. He saw wires stuck to wall junctures and tucked under rugs. He saw painted-over wires stuck to lamp stands.

"He's bugging his patients. I don't see no other explanation."

Buzz said, "Let's fuck that fucker up."

They pulled the wall wires. They unspooled the rug wires. They dumped the lamps and yanked the microphones. They got out their paint and brushes and refestooned the walls.

Buzz painted swastikas and hammer and sickles. Elmer painted *X* marks over them. Buzz painted "Death to Traitors!!!" Elmer painted "America Forever!!!"

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(LA PAZ, 10:00 A.M., 3/29/42)

Cocaine and cigarettes. Their standard breakfast. Rut and talk. Their standard MO.

They stuck to Constanza's bedroom. Peons puttered, just outside. Constanza motormouthed. She plumbed two topics. Her brother and the gold.

Dudley played attentive lover. His thoughts ran afield. Al Wilhite found Kyoho Hanamaka. Hideo was debriefing him. Hideo had failed to report.

The bed sagged and grazed the floor. It succumbed to overuse. They banged the headboard loose last night.

Constanza said, "I was thinking of the brand you stamped upon my brother. I would imagine he'll employ Terry Lux to prettify the damage you did."

Dudley sniffed cocaine off a bread plate. He shivered. He got the chill, the numb teeth, the whoosh.

"Terry's the best at what he does. I could hardly begrudge your brother his services. I'm dining with Orson Welles in Ensenada tonight. He utilized Terry recently. Terry deftly allayed some damage I inflicted."

Constanza lit a cigarette. "Fierce you. Such utility. Such brutal agency."

Dudley kissed her breasts. Constanza and cocaine. His morning bifecta. She seized his body. His mind whooshed elsewhere.

The microdot letter. The planned sabotage. He'd warned off brother Juan. He did not report possible attacks to Fourth Interceptor. Kyoho Hanamaka. Constanza's former lover. He'd described Kyoho's self-torch job. Constanza said he saw too much in Deutschland and Russia. It was his time to die. He simply gave up.

"You haven't mentioned the gold in at least three minutes, darling. Are you relinquishing your grasp?"

Constanza primped him. She wiped his face with a bedsheet. The whoosh raised a sweat.

"Allow me to gloat over my brother. You enacted a long-overdue revenge."

Dudley lit a cigarette. "I pentothaled a rather sodden *Kamerad.* He described a convergence at a German technical college. The late Juan Pimentel, and young men named Díaz and Jamie. Joe Hayes, whom I've mentioned before, was a member of their bund. The mid-'30s, I think. I'm wondering if the overall cabal was formed then."

Constanza said, "No. I believe it all began to germinate before the fire. I would call the meeting of Kyoho and Meyer Gelb the point of germination. Meyer was recruiting for the Comintern at the Paramount Studio. People fell under his sway. The Kommisariat was Meyer's idea. He predicted the world conflict, as we see it today. His prophecy preceded Kyoho's sojourn in Germany and Russia."

The Wolf cocked his head. Constanza's scent aroused him. He probed Constanza's mind. She disclosed just so much. This vexed the Wolf.

Constanza said, "I have a lead on the minutes for the Baja conference. What would you pay for them?"

—

Welles was late. Film folk ran breezy and tardy. He knew that beast inside and out.

He'd extorted them. Harry Cohn paid him well. They misbehaved. He snapped furtive photographs. They starred in Columbia cheapies, resultant.

Johnny Weissmuller jumps jailbait. Tallulah Bankhead snarfs muff at lezbo hot spots. Duke Ellington sires Kate Hepburn's mulatto love child.

Welles was late. Like Salvy was late in T.J. Salvy refused to chaperone the Japs and the wets. The Wolf teethed on it.

Dudley ordered a private room. The del Norte staff salaamed and obliged. Welles drew flocks of autograph hounds. This room would hold them off. Orson called and requested the audience himself. It was a snitch and snitch-runner confab. It mandated privacy.

Dudley drummed the table. He felt fluttery. The flight back induced jitters. Cocaine exacted a price. He missed Constanza more than he should.

Dudley Liam Smith. Such a schoolboy crush. How unsound of you.

The door swung open. Such élan. Orson Welles *entered* rooms. He walked to the table. He was six-three and porcine. He exuded bonhomie and snitch fear.

Dudley stood up. They shook hands. Fat Boy's clasp was damp and weak. Dudley wiped his hand on the tablecloth. He made a blunt show of it.

They sat down. Dudley poured champagne. It was one-dollar swill. *L'auteur, le gourmand.* He'll gag on it.

"It's good to see you, Dudley."

“You’re looking sleek, lad. Would you consider me brusque if I asked what brings you to Ensenada?”

Welles sipped champagne. He almost but not quite pulled a face.

“It’s quite the ad-lib proposition. Howard Hughes flew us down. Dolores del Rio’s sister needed a blind date.”

Dudley went *Tu salud.* “Allow me to chart your train of thought, lad. You have information for me, and you thought you’d kill two birds with one stone.”

Welles guffawed. Note the coward’s cringe within.

“That’s Dudley Smith for you. He cuts to the third act, and forswears the amenities.”

“On that note, lad. You’re not here to waste my time, and who am I to deny Miss del Rio’s comely sister your presence?”

Welles coughed. “Well, I’ve been making appearances for the OIACC, as you well know. I’ve been traveling with a small jazz combo, and I’ve put together a few incidental things I thought might interest you.”

Dudley sipped rotgut champagne. He pulled a face and gagged it down.

“I’ll set the scene, lad. You’re traveling throughout Latin America. The combo plays inoffensive music during the cocktail receptions that precede your dinner talks.”

Welles said, “Right you are. And one of the musicians was a froufrou kid I first met at an admittedly bent party at Otto Klemperer’s place in ’39. Otto was holed up in a sanitarium then, and—”

Dudley clamped his champagne flute. The stem snapped. Fat Boy missed it. Dudley dropped the shards on the floor.

“—and the kid told me he was there at the party, which chagrined me quite a bit. He went on to tell me a rather outrageous story about the America Firsters he met—”

Dudley cut in. “Describe the party, lad. Set the scene for me.”

“Well, it was what you might call a masked ball, and the theme ran decidedly right of center. People wore Nazi costumes, and I screened an admittedly risqué film that I’d shot. I wore a mask, but the fruit kid recognized my voice from my radio broadcasts, although I’m reasonably sure that no one else did.”

I was there. You wore a Red Guard costume. I saw parts of your film. It repulsed me.

“Please continue, lad. You’ve piqued my interest, quite adroitly.”

Welles smiled. Mere hints of praise induced simpers.

“Well, the kid told me that he’d seen some real-life Nazis, whom he’d seen in newsreels, there at the party. They were talking out on the porte cochere, and they’d removed their masks. It was about dawn, and there had already been quite a ruckus. Some comatose woman was carried away, on the Q.T., which was—"

The She was a He. Dead is not comatose. Do you know who you're talk—

"Here's where it gets intriguing, if a bit outlandish. The kid told me the real-life Nazis were discussing the 'Führer's ultimately futile war' and some sort of 'future exoneration scheme.' One man said they should assassinate Hitler, or deliberately fail at it, but publicize the failure. Another man said their 'Red *Kameraden*' should do the same thing with Stalin. There was some talk of potential postwar escape routes to Latin America, specifically pro-fascist or pro-Communist countries."

Dudley said, "Please continue. It's like your *War of the Worlds* broadcast. You've got me on the edge of my seat."

Welles beamed. "Well, the kid sounded sincere about all this, and I'll admit to having a soft spot for good stories. This was one story I couldn't quite shake, and I tossed out hints to a few left-wing and right-wing types I met at various functions. I got a lot of murky responses, and heard rumors that this so-called plot derived from Mexico."

Dudley lit a cigarette. "I'm tipping off the edge of my seat. Please continue."

Welles laughed. "All right. Here's the conclusion, and we jump from the winter of '39 up to the present day. The kid told me a man named Wallace Jamie was at the party. He saw him unmasked, and he just recently put together who the man actually is. He recognized Jamie from newspaper photographs, a few weeks ago. That's because Jamie's in Dutch on that big Federal probe. The kid also said he recognized two other men who'd been at the party. Their pictures were in the papers, because they'd been murdered. I'm talking about Wendell Rice and George Kapek. They didn't actually attend the party. They wore chauffeur's garb and stood outside, on the porte cochere."

Autopsy pix. The dead cops. Gasping mouths. Ice-pick punctures. Single hand-span bruises.

"It's a small world, eh? Then the kid tells me that he knows another fruit kid, who's also a jazz musician, up in L.A. He didn't know the other kid's name, but he said that when those murders were all the rage in the papers, the other kid told him he'd been to jam sessions at the clubhouse where the bodies were found. He bragged that he and a so-called 'Red-fasco woman' killed Rice, Kapek, and a Mexican friend of theirs. I'm telling you all this because Claire told me you were involved in the police investigation."

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 A.M., 3/30/42)

Sheriff Eugene Biscailuz. "Clean Gene" to his supporters. "Last Seen Gene" to his detractors. Frequently glimpsed at the Saints and Sinners Drag Ball.

We met the Sheriff at Kwan's Chinese Pagoda; Uncle Ace set a table for four in the Chiang Kai-shek Conference Room. Hop Sing goons peddled trinkets out of the room, twenty-four hours daily. REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR!!! signs and I AM NOT A JAP!!! T-shirts were current hot sellers. Ace also sold Jap shrunken heads. They were purportedly harvested by Chinese death squads, in retaliation for the Rape of Nanking. Elmer gave me the true lowdown. Chinese kids at Nightingale Junior High were the culprits. They robbed recently planted graves in Japanese graveyards. Dr. Lin Chung performed the decapitations and supervised the shrinking process.

Thus, breakfast with Sheriff Gene. Bloody Marys, hangtown fry, and Emperor Tso's flapjacks. Elmer, Bill, and I sat across from the Sheriff; he was three morning cocktails in and emitted a glow. His eyes clicked: Bill to Elmer to me. He already knew Bill and knew Elmer through Brenda—but what's this young cooze doing here?

Bill kicked things off. He'd sent the note requesting the sit-down and had braced Biscailuz in advance. Brusque Bill: the meeting pertains to Bev's Switchboard.

"We know you've got points in Bev's, Sheriff. We'd be going the search-warrant route if that weren't the case."

Biscailuz said, "I can read tea leaves. You're talking about a raid."

Elmer butted in. "Nobody's judging you for those points, boss. Everybody's got operating costs. You know damn well that Brenda and me are letting Jack H. dip his beak."

Biscailuz winked at me. "Miss Lake's got judgment written all over her. I know girl Bolsheviks when I see them."

I laughed and lit a cigarette. Bill lit up out of my pack.

"There's a great deal of seditious drop mail passing through Bev's. I want to raid the premises and seize it. Wallace Jamie and the Ness family hold the deed to Bev's, and a priest named Joe Hayes has a profit percentage. We're not looking for publicity, and we're not looking to turn this into indictments. We only want to depose Wallace Jamie, in order to turn leads on the klub*haus* job and two related cases from '31 and '33."

Elmer butted in again. "I know you know Ed Satterlee, boss. A little birdie told me Ed was looking to hang a search subpoena on Bev's, but you kiboshed it. Ed's Fifth Column up the wazoo, to the extent that Mr. Hoover's got him under house arrest. That's the sort of shitheel who sends drop mail through Bev's. We figure these here traitors are beset by factionalism, and Ed was looking to gain some sort of advantage with that subpoena plan."

The Sheriff drained his third cocktail. "Let's see if I'm reading you right. This 'we' you keep mentioning is you two policemen and Miss Lake. You're not proxies for the PD, which means you're open to a little horse trading. Which means you'll throw Uncle Clean Gene a bone."

Bill fumed. I kicked his leg under the table. My message was *Concede. We need him more than he needs us.*

"Ed Satterlee told Elmer that he'd accord him the opportunity to erase his own name on any Fed-probe recordings currently held in custody. I've been charged to erase recordings that might implicate Chief Horrall. With Satterlee suspended from duty, a new strategy to enter the evidence vault will have to be conceived and executed. If such a plan can be implemented, I'd enter the vault myself, and erase every single wire-recorded mention of your name."

Biscailuz winked at me. The novelty of a woman in the room floored him. Brenda wasn't sure which way he bounced. He ordered girls out of the girl book. He kept a copy of the boy book handy.

"That's okay for starters, Bill. It takes care of *me,* but it doesn't take care of *mine.* For what it's worth, I like Wallace Jamie, and if he's Fifth Column, I'm a Hottentot. Moreover, his Uncle Eliot will be mayor of Cleveland soon, and I want *him* to owe me. So, I *won't* permit you to depose Wallace, but I *will* permit you to seize anything and everything on-site at Bev's."

Elmer butted back in. "You ain't said what you mean by 'mine.' "

" 'Mine' means 'me and all my deputies.' 'Mine' means 'erase every spool in Fed custody, to make damn sure me and mine don't get smeared.' "

Bill said, "It's a deal." Clean Gene dropped his eyeglass case and ducked below the table to retrieve it. He wanted to look up my skirt. I'd have to tell Brenda: the Sheriff veers toward girls.

—

Bill and I tucked in at the Ambassador. We discussed the Lesnick burglary first thing.

Doctor Saul hadn't reported it. That much was sure. Bill threw feelers out at Beverly Hills PD. Elmer and Buzz robbed his office and desecrated it. Their wall artwork defamed the *Kameraden.* Saul Lesnick—*j'accuse.* We're onto you and yours.

"We," "We're," "Us." Sheriff Gene picked up on it and parlayed it to his tactical advantage. I extended "We" to include Annie Staples, and described our phone chat early this morning. Annie called me. She said she was servicing Saul Lesnick tomorrow night; the assignation would take place at Brenda's Miracle Mile trick spot. This was to our benefit. Doctor Saul unburdened himself to Annie and would most likely whine about the burglary-desecration. And Elmer would be there to film it.

Room service delivered club sandwiches and coffee; Bill and I lunched on the bed. Assignation, rendezvous, shack job. Bill crossed himself every time I said the words.

"The phone records," he said. "What's the first thing that comes to mind? Where do they most conclusively point?"

I said, "To collusion and conspiracy. And, given what we know about the principals, a conspiracy that must be judged as politically and socially diffuse."

"And what string of calls plays most out of sync with the rest?"

"Ed Satterlee's late-night calls to Lyman's and Kwan's. Two all-night PD watering holes. The calls serve to pose the question: 'Who was Ed the Fed looking for?' "

Bill snagged his trousers off the floor. He dug through the pockets and pulled out three mimeographed sheets of paper. The cheapo typeface and multiple exclamation points screamed *Sid Hudgens!* I breezed through the text; it was the Sidster's privately circulated subscription scandal sheet.

The inimitable Sidster. Ever alert for watchful postal inspectors. He laid out the lurid lowdown—but stopped short of pure pornography. He used initials in lieu of real names. He gave you the tantalizing tattle and dystopian dish. Celebrity abortions, miscegenist liaisons, lezbo love nests. Alluring alliteration. Muff-munching matrons at the Lincoln Heights Jail. Doped racehorses and fixed fights. Draconian drag queens. A regular "Police Blotter" feature. Perennial poop. Filmland fellators and cunning linguists, caught "in flat-footed flagrante."

I laughed out loud. Bill said, "We shake down Sid for his subscriber list. We lay out Dudley and all the known *Kameraden.* You write the text, and insert the appropriate initials. We wallpaper Dudley, the comrades, and every conceivable man jack that might be inclined to do the Dudster dirt."

D.S.: that hellhound Hibernian. Malevolent Mexicans. S.L.: that sicknik psychiatrist and shitbird shrink. Feckless Fascists and riotous Reds. Waterlogged wetbacks. Pustulant policemen and jungle-bred Japs.

I fell off the bed, laughing. I'd never laughed so hard. I thought my roars would never stop.

113

(LONE PINE, 2:00 P.M., 3/30/42)

They reset the stage. The burn-ward room, the bed, the chair. Benzedrine in the fluid bag. The burn salve and charred-flesh stink.

The Mummy and Mr. Moto. Their second encounter. A vitalized Hanamaka. Ashida, poised to interrogate.

"Tell me about the klub*haus, Sensei.* You might begin by giving me your overall impressions."

Hanamaka plucked at his bedsheets. He was *drug*-vitalized. His mind sped. His limbs spastic-twitched.

"Egalitarian and degenerate. Those two words define the klub*haus.* Mr. Hudgens of the *Herald* is quite the cheeky man. The German spelling of house. A touch first bestowed by policemen, there on the scene. One can be certain of that."

Ashida said, "The sexual activity. The use of narcotics. The seemingly at odds political views."

Hanamaka grinned. *Sensei* Death rides again. His breath was foul. His teeth rattled. He oozed putresence.

"'At odds' aptly describes the atmosphere. 'Fugitives from normalcy' might best describe the klub*haus* clientele. There were no racial or political barriers to hinder conversation. The constant jazz music served to alleviate tension. There was a single consensus among the fugitives. 'The most discordant jazz is our voice.'"

Ashida prickled. The queer white boy. A jazz player. His Jap sword man pal. Elmer J. shared the lead.

"Jam sessions. Phonograph music. The proximity of the jazz strip. Diverse characters passing through."

Hanamaka jiggled his water cup. "You're leading me, Dr. Ashida. You want me to identify a specific denizen, and you're disingenuously setting the scene before you ask."

Ashida coughed. “A white youth. Blond and tall. Most often accompanied by a Japanese man given to licking blood off samurai swords. That was the Japanese man’s parlor trick. I’m assuming he performed it at the klub*haus.* The white youth was homosexual. Forensic evidence indicates homosexual activity upstairs.”

Hanamaka shrugged and shook his head. *Sensei* Death emits deceit.

“No. I did not encounter such men at the klub*haus.* I disdain homosexuals and Japanese who perform parlor tricks. Such individuals would most certainly catch my eye and rouse my indignation.”

Ashida jumped tracks. “Let’s discuss the gold. I want to conclusively determine the chain of possession.”

“The chain began with Leander Frechette and the Reverend Mimms. Meyer considered Leander reliable, because they dated back to Meyer’s previous incarnation, as Fritz Eckelkamp, and Leander was there for the conception of the robbery, along with Wayne Frank Jackson. Meyer trusted Leander, and, by extension, the Reverend Mimms. Meyer put great stock in Negroes, and held them to be avant-garde. The Reverend Mimms’ buffoonish black nationalism delighted him no end.”

Ashida undid his necktie. “Please continue, *Sensei.”*

“Leander had been exonerated by the Santa Barbara Sheriff’s. He had withstood the brutal ministrations of Deputy Karl Tullock, and had prevailed. The Reverend Mimms bailed Leander out of custody, and was a noted friend of Chief Jim Davis, a nativist huckster known to have close friends on the Left. He later became a comrade–*Kamerad,* as you must know.”

Ashida said, “The gold. Let’s continue with the chain of possession.”

Hanamaka sipped water. He’d cracked his glass straw. Blood dripped off his lips.

“You must realize that unforeseen events intervened, along with fortuitous circumstances. Dresden Polytechnic, for example. The serendipitous convergence of Hayes, Díaz, Pimentel, and Jamie. The Spanish Civil War converged. Meyer earned his share of battle stripes there.”

Ashida shook his head. “You’re repeating yourself, *Sensei.* Let’s return to the chain of possession. I’m trying to establish a chronology.”

Hanamaka shrugged. “Frechette and Mimms returned the gold to Meyer at some point. I don’t know where it was stashed during what I would call an ‘intervening period.’ Juan Pimentel took possession of the gold after the Baja conference, at Meyer’s directive. It has since gone to the Stalinist priest-killer. I mentioned him to you in the course of our first interview.”

Ashida said, “Wayne Frank Jackson. Where was he during this interim period?”

"He was in periodic touch with Meyer, but beyond that, I have no idea."

The room broiled. Steam heat jacked the burn stink. Ashida removed his suit coat.

"Frechette and Mimms returned the gold at some point, and Meyer once again took possession. Were Frechette and Mimms reluctant to relinquish it? Did a disagreement occur? Was force employed?"

"I was surprised at how easily they forfeited the gold. It shocked me at the time. Meyer gloated over the ease of the transaction. He held Negroes to be the most malleable of beasts. He considered them exalted, prone to whimsy, and subservient at their core. When one exalts, one is compelled to demean."

Ashida coughed into his handkerchief. The burn stink and salve stink accreted.

"Let's return to the klub*haus.* I find it illuminating that you decided to nest there, in a hotbed of degenerate behavior and impolitic discourse. Were you sent there? Were you told to observe, inform, or attempt to impose order?"

Hanamaka licked his lips. The blood had congealed. He looked worse today. The give-and-take taxed him more.

"José Vasquez-Cruz sent me in. I knew him from Meyer's cell, when he was Jorge Villareal-Caiz. He was a *Kamerad,* in both his guises, and in the latter he was a captain in the Mexican State Police. He smuggled me out of Baja in the wake of Pearl Harbor, at the behest of Governor Lazaro-Schmidt. So, yes, *El Capitán* installed me in the house down the street. As you state, I was told to visit the klub*haus* and 'observe and inform.' Most preposterously, I was also told to attempt to restore order."

The room went ice-cold. Ashida glanced out the window. Snowflakes brushed the screen.

"The klub*haus* offended you. You discontinued your visits. I'm wondering if you were told to investigate the murders of Rice, Kapek, and Archuleta, on your own. The comrades must have feared the police investigation. We had drawn very close to a number of your people. Were you told to investigate? Did you arrive at a suspect or suspects?"

The Mummy cranked his bed up two notches. The Mummy pushed himself off his pillows and bowed at the waist.

"I prevaricated on the topic of your white youth and his Japanese friend. I cannot tell you whether or not the youth was homosexual, but he was surely tall and blond. He played the saxophone, and he worshipped the Negro jazz greats most exaltedly. A woman frequently accompanied him to the *haus.* She was frizzy-haired and roughly thirty years of age. And, yes, the white youth had a Japanese friend, who was plainly psychopathic."

Man Camera. Time Machine. The klub*haus* job now stands some sixty days in. We're back in the upstairs hallway. There's dent marks on the wall facing the bedroom. There’s his working hypothesis.

Two killers. One male, one female. Rice, Kapek, and Archuleta—terped to the gills. The man and woman lead them downstairs. The woman stands to the right of the victims. She sways. She punctuates the death march. She kicks out at the wall and leaves shoe-mark indentations. There’s his overarching conviction. The crime was organically homosexual and homosexually spawned.

“The blond youth, the woman, and the sword man. Did you hold them to be murder suspects?”

“Instinctively, yes. They stood out as unique in a most unique milieu.”

“Once again, *Sensei.* Who possesses the gold at this moment?”

Hanamaka said, “Once again, the Stalinist Mexican. The most exalted slayer of priest-killers is our *Führer* and most exalted comrade. I would give you his name, but I don’t know it.”

114

(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 A.M., 3/31/42)

They huddled at Kay's place. Bill Parker snagged four wire players and four earmuff sets. Four socket plugs supplied juice.

They worked at the dining room table. Elmer divvied up the spools. Lesnick had scrawled analysand names on the boxes. They stuck to Claire De Haven, Orson Welles, Otto Klemperer.

Those three adjoined the whole megillah. No *Kameraden* wires existed. That meant no Meyer Gelb.

Kay distributed coffee and ashtrays. Buzz plugged in the cords. El Buzzo crowed a bit. He'd triple-checked their subpoenaed phone bills and snagged a doozy.

Ed the Fed Satterlee. 2/14/42. He calls a bail bondsman, up in San Fran. Buzz calls the bondsman and hits pay dirt.

Here's the pitch. Leander Frechette's been jailed for a soft-prowl 459. Ed the Fed bails him out.

Attaboy, Buzz. You pin-mapped Big Leander. Now, what about *these* calls?

Ed's late-night calls. All to Lyman's and Kwan's. Interchangeable calls. All to pay phones there. Who you looking for, Ed?

Everybody set up and lit up. The room got smokeified. Everybody pushed buttons. Wire spools spun.

Elmer heard static and line fritz. It cleared inside six seconds. Doc Saul and Orson Welles schmoozed the big Leningrad siege. They exhausted that topic. Welles bemoaned his weight. Doc Saul said he'd prescribe pharmaceutical cocaine.

It got boring then. Welles pitched boo-hoo. He was a genius. Boo-hoo. America was a philistine encampment. Boo-hoo. "I get more ass than a toilet seat, Saul. How come I'm so damn unfulfilled?"

Boo-hoo. The government should subsidize his movies and pay him a hundred Gs per. Boo-hoo. “I should lose weight. A hatcheck girl at the Trocadero blew me. We steamed up the hatcheck booth.”

Kay pulled off her earmuffs. It cued the whole gang. Elmer dumped his earmuffs. Buzz and Whiskey Bill followed suit.

Kay said, “Claire’s weeping. Dudley takes his pleasure, and then ignores her. He spends hours tending to his clothes. A cobbler custom-fitted him for jackboots.”

Buzz said, “That’s a good one. All I’ve got is your maestro chum haranguing the doc about Beethoven. The late quartets are some shitfire ‘Apotheosis.’ Lesnick told him Beethoven’s got certified coon blood, which accounts for his rhythmic stance. He read it in some eugenics journal. Herr Goering is going to exhume the body and take bone samples. They’ve got some Nazi breeding farm in Norway. Kraut wenches and Norse-god men screw all day. The wenches pop frogs for the Fatherland.”

Elmer said, “Count me in.”

Kay laughed. Whiskey Bill rolled his eyes. They redonned their earmuffs and went back to work.

Boo-hoo, boo-hoo. Orson Welles talked drivel. Elmer listened in. Boo-hoo. The plight of the artist. Boo-hoo. The burden of social consciousness. “I drilled Norma Shearer, Saul. That old girl shtups with the best.”

Elmer switched spools. He swapped Welles for Claire De Haven. Claire defamed El Dudster and Joan Conville. “Really, Saul. She’s beyond Amazonian. She’s something out of the *National Geographic.*”

Parker pulled off his earmuffs. It cued the whole gang. Elmer dumped his earmuffs. Kay and Buzz followed suit.

Parker said, “Klemperer’s telling Lesnick about the headaches that he diagnosed as a brain tumor, and he’s fawning over Lesnick for saving his life. Then there’s a gap, where the two discuss the war, and then it gets good. Klemperer begins talking in fragments. He says that a man was ‘hectoring’ him and ragging on him as a Jew and a leftist, and the man says that he knows ‘Meyer’s girl Jean.’ Klemperer tells Lesnick that this man is taunting him, and he ‘plays horn’ in Negro jazz clubs. Klemperer repeats the phrase ‘He’s taunting me’ at least a dozen times. Then he states that he beats the man to death. Then he begins fawning over Lesnick again. Then he states, ‘And you took care of it, Doctor—you and your FBI friend.’ ”

Elmer went *wooo.* “The FBI friend’s sure as shit Ed Satterlee.”

Kay said, “Otto told me that story. He confirmed that Satterlee was the FBI man, but the story itself was fragmented to the point of incomprehension.”

Buzz said, “The part about this guy being a horn player gores me. For one, it takes us back to the jazz strip again, and we all know our current klub*haus* suspect is a queer and a jazzman.”

Parker shook his head. “Our homicides occurred on January 29. This Klemperer-Lesnick session occurred the week after Pearl Harbor. That exonerates this particular jazzman, and it’s not like he’s the only jazzman in captivity, queer or otherwise.”

Buzz shook his head. “Yeah, but this guy tells the Maestro he knows Meyer’s girl Jean. That’s fucking significant, and it takes us back to the klub*haus* job and the whole shooting match again.”

Kay lit a cigarette. “Yes, and I’m not convinced that Otto killed anyone, which means that this particular jazzman could be our jazzman, who’s good for the klub*haus* job and possibly a whole lot more.”

Parker shook his head. “Jazzmen are jazzmen. There’s millions of them. Gelb and Staley aside, I don’t consider this any sort of real lead.”

Elmer said, “We’ve got Hideo deposing Kyoho Hanamaka now. He’s our key source. Somebody should talk to Hideo and see what Hanamaka spilled on the klub*haus* angle, and if any of it pertains to our queer jazzman and his Jap playmate.”

Buzz lit a cigar. “Meyer Gelb. This whole deal comes down to him. He’s Fritzie Eckelkamp cut into Gelb, which takes him back to ’31 and the gold job. He’s all over this whole thing, and I am currently doing everything within my power as a member of this white man’s police department to find him and have a long chat with him.”

Parker sighed and redonned his earmuffs. It cued the gang. Talk gets us nowhere. Let’s get back to work.

Elmer redonned his earmuffs. Kay and Buzz followed suit. Elmer fish-eyed Buzz. El Buzzo radiated the lynch mob gestalt. Buzz had Meyer Gelb on the brain. Ditto El Dudster. Buzz figured Dud would kill him soon. Buzz figured he should kill Dud first.

Elmer switched spools and spun spools and smoked himself hoarse. He played the analysand field. Orson Welles boo-hoo’d and bragged up his conquests. Claire De Haven boo-hoo’d and skewered Dudley Smith. The Maestro extolled the Bruckner symphonies and the upcoming “exile migration.” Elmer perked up and took note.

Well, shit. There’s Meyer Gelb, again.

Elmer pulled off his earmuffs. It cued the whole gang. Kay dumped her earmuffs. Parker and Buzz followed suit.

Elmer said, “Here’s the Maestro. He’s talking up his comrades Ruth Szigeti, the Koenigs, and old man Abromowitz. They’re being repatriated to L.A., and he wants to help out. Lesnick talks the Maestro into getting them jobs as movie-studio musicians, then says to have them keep their snouts down and report to Comrade Gelb.”

Buzz cracked his knuckles. “I intend to have words with that whipdick.”

Kay said, “That entails finding him first.”

Parker four-eyed Elmer. He tapped his wristwatch. *We’ve got pressing biz downtown.*

—

They reconvened outside the Fed Building. Elmer lapel-pinned his badge. Parker displayed his search warrant.

“A Fed district judge signed it. He’s an old law school classmate, and he hates Fey Edgar like death itself.”

Elmer skimmed the legalese. Limited premises/custody vault only/all wire recordings on-site. On-site listening consent granted/one day only.

“We’ve got to erase the whole kit and caboodle. That’s the only sure way to cover ourselves and Sheriff Gene’s guys. It’s a whole shitload of work, with the Fed squadroom right down the hall.”

Parker pinned up his badge. “The judge called ahead. We’re covered there. We’ve got the means to scotch the whole probe, but they’ll know it was us. We’ll have to ride out whatever shit hits the fan.”

Elmer gulped. “Fey Edgar will wet his pink-lace undies. He’ll be on the horn to the U.S. attorney inside half a second.”

Parker winked. It fell flat. He possessed no savoir faire. He lacked Dudsteresque panache.

They breezed in and breezed up the side stairs. The Bureau owned the full third floor. A desk agent manned the lobby. They walked up. He looked up. Parker passed him the paperwork.

He read the full writ. He said, “The vault, huh? You fellows must be turncoats. A whole lot of PD guys are going to burn in this deal.”

Parker said, “We’ve been detached to the grand jury. We’re on your side as far as this one goes.”

The agent yawned and stretched. He passed the paperwork back. This rebop left him nonplussed.

“Judge Leffler called ahead. You know the rules, right? You can listen to whatever you want, but nothing leaves the room. You know how to use the machines?”

Parker nodded. Elmer broke a sweat. The desk man led the way back.

Elmer stared straight ahead. They passed boocoo doorways. Elmer heard squadroom bustle and counted his footsteps. He hit eighty-nine. The desk man turned right and unlocked a door.

Some vault. Just this dumb room crammed with boxes. Note the wire spools sticking out. Two player contraptions. Two earmuff sets. One beat-up desk and two chairs. A wire log clamped to a clipboard.

The desk man said, “I leave you to it.”

Parker saluted him. Elmer feigned nonchalance. The desk man vamoosed. Parker locked the door.

Elmer went *wheeewww.* Parker picked up the log and skimmed it. You had twenty-some pages. Maybe eight hundred calls and taps.

Parker scanned pages. Elmer dumped his coat and undid his necktie. He futzed with the gizmos. He plugged in the earmuffs and ID’d the erase switch. Parker got all bug-eyed.

He crossed himself. He waved wolfsbane. He did all this papist shit.

“The Feds bugged the pay phone at Kwan’s. We’ve got EX-4991 calling MA-2668. PC Bell tagged the call at 3:14 a.m., on March 6. It’s a West L.A.-to-downtown toll call, and it runs sixteen minutes.”

EX-4991. That’s Ed Satterlee’s home number. Holy heart attack—

The wire log listed box 56. They tore through four box stacks and found it. Two spools were stuffed in one envelope.

Elmer rigged the two gizmos. The wires spooled up tight. Parker passed him his flask. They traded pops and tamped down their wigs. Parker kicked the chairs back. They sat side by side. They donned the earmuffs and replayed the call.

The phone rang. Static and line fuzz bled into *this:*

“There you are. I figured I’d get you sooner or later, and 3:00 a.m. in a Chinatown slop chute doesn’t surprise me at all.”

Ed Satterlee speaks. He’s crusty, per always.

“Ed, I’ve been wanting to talk to you.”

Mike Breuning speaks. He’s servile, per always. Elmer and Parker swapped looks.

Satterlee said, “I gathered that. You called the Bureau nine goddamn times. You’re lucky I’m a night owl, or I wouldn’t have caught you at all. I’m just hoping you aren’t jerking my chain.”

Breuning said, “It’s Dudley, Ed. He’s gone batshit. You wouldn’t believe some of the stunts he’s been pulling.”

Satterlee said, “I’d believe anything you might want to tell me about Dudley Liam Smith, which is one damn good reason why I do my best to avoid him and stay on his good side.”

Breuning said, “I’ve got to get out from under him, Ed. He’s gone off the deep end, and I thought maybe you could help.”

Breuning speaks, frazzled. He’s caught the snitch virus. *Oooga-booga.* Snitch fever permeates the call.

Satterlee whistled. The phone line hissed.

“If you’re asking for help, you’ve got to pay for that help. If you’re offering me an up-to-date derogatory profile on Dudley, I'd be inclined to help you, if and when the time is right."

Breuning said, "That's awful damn equivocal."

Satterlee said, "Lay it out for me. And it better be a little spicier than Dud's framing a few jigaboos for the Rice-Kapek job."

Breuning speaks. He's delirious now. Dat snitch voodoo's gone to his head.

"He's hooked on Benzedrine and opium. He's geezing morphine, but he thinks nobody knows. Bill Parker's checkmating him. He's gone full-fledged Nazi. He parades around in Nazi uniforms and preens like a fruit. He's running heroin and wetbacks. He's selling Japs off as slave labor. He's in with this Sinarquista hump Salvy Abascal, who's playing him like he's the village idiot. He was in with Joan Conville and Hideo Ashida on some gold angle, but Joan's dead and Ashida will be heading to Manzanar, and now he's flapping in the wind all by himself. He told me he found the guy who killed Joan's dad and made Joan kill him. He killed a drag boy at a pervert party in '39, and Dick Carlisle and me cleaned it up. He's murdering Reds in Mexico. He killed a Statie captain who was screwing his Commie girlfriend. The Baja governor's sister has got him pussy-whipped, and Abascal's got him hoodwinked. I'm way far exposed, Ed. I've run point for Dud for eleven goddamn years. I need a safe-haven deal with an outside agency. He's a Nazi and a traitor, and he's chopping the heads off these Redshirt guys who kill priests. I'll depose, Ed. I'll give Dudley up. He's a feather in your cap, Ed. He's the biggest scalp you'll ever take. Ed, you've got to help—"

The line fritzed. The call died. It cut off Mike Breuning's sobs.

—

Doc Saul slogged it. His gourd was elsewhere. That was evident. Boolah, boolah. Annie gave it the college-girl try.

Elmer and Parker watched. Elmer ran the camera. They were dead bushed. They'd erased all the Fed vault wires. It took ten hours. They heard Mike Breuning's sobs the whole time.

They discussed the Breuning-Satterlee call. They caught Breuning's snitch virus. Ed the Fed was house-arrested. He posed no threat to Dudley Smith. They stole the Breuning-Satterlee wires. They could ditz Dud with them. They could pass the virus on.

The crawl space was tight-cramped. Elmer and Parker smoked it out. Smoke hazed the see-thru mirror. Elmer placed the camera lens flat on the glass. Their sound gear caught pillow talk.

Saul waved off the woof-woof. He was abstracted and limp-noodled. Two-minute Saul. He'd rather talk anyway.

Grave Saul. Distracted Saul. He suffers from de white man's burden. De chickens be comin' home to roost.

Annie said, "What is it, sugar? What happened to my stallion of the sack?"

Elmer yukked. Parker oozed pious censure. Annie smoothed out the bedsheets. Saul assumed a crucifixion pose. Nobody knows de trouble he's seen.

Annie goo-goo-eyed him. Annie tickled his ribs and got bupkes.

"You're remote tonight, baby. You're wearing that crown of thorns, as my preacher daddy used to say."

Saul said, "You wouldn't understand. I can't blame you for what you don't know. You're game, but you're not enlightened."

Elmer yukked. Annie winked at the see-thru. Old Saul sighed.

"Hoodlums laid waste to my office. They stole valuable recordings and smeared jingoistic slogans on the walls. I can't go to the Beverly Hills Police or the FBI, and I certainly can't go to my friend Ed Satter—"

Saul stopped cold. Annie tweaked on *Satterlee.* Old Saul tweaked her tweak. Elmer tweaked both tweaks.

Parker said, "He nailed her reaction."

Elmer went *Yep.* Old Saul eyeballed Annie. He pushed off his pillow and zoom-lensed her.

"Do you *know* Ed?"

Annie shrugged. What's with this Ed? I don't know this Ed whoever.

"I tricked with Eddie Cantor once. It was after this Save the Jews wingding. He's the only Ed I know."

Parker said, "She's not convincing."

Elmer went *Yep.*

Old Saul jumped out of bed. He was stooped and chicken-chested. His cashew dick flop-flopped.

He orbed the walls. He patted the walls. He poked at wall junctures. He's an old CP hand. He knows from wall bugs and honey traps.

He poked wall moldings. He pulled a spackled wire off a baseboard and yanked it out from under a rug. Annie jumped out of bed. She faced the see-thru, buck naked. She flashed this fetching *Oh shit* look.

Old Saul caught it. He dropped the wire and went for Annie. Elmer and Parker jumped.

They tore out of the crawl space. They tumbled into the bedroom and dog-piled old Saul. They floor-pinned him. He sissy-kicked and flailed. Annie snagged the sap in Elmer's waistband.

She applied a good grip. She whipped shots at old Saul's genitalia. Old Saul screamed. Elmer gassed the floor show. Annie yelled *"You Fucking Traitor"* roughly ten zillion times.

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(ENSENADA, 8:00 P.M., 4/1/42)

Fat Boy unfurled a portable screen and set up his projector. Dudley cut the lights. His suite subbed for Grauman's Chinese.

Fats boomeranged. He returned to L.A. and shot straight back to Ensenada. He supplied that klub*haus* lead. He'd retrieved a memory. It spurred this return visit.

Orson met a fruit kid on his goodwill tour. The kid attended the *Walpurgisnacht* party. He was a jazz musician. He knew another fruit kid. *That* kid attended klub*haus* jam sessions. *That* kid was a jazzman. *That* kid bragged up the klub*haus* snuffs. *That* kid and "some Red-fasco woman" snuffed Rice, Kapek, and Archuleta.

It was secondhand drift. It comprised a hot lead, regardless. It supplanted prior leads. It confirmed the queer white boy and Jap sword man.

Here's Orson's memory. Orson met that other kid. The kid appeared in the *Walpurgisnacht* smut film. He'd bragged up his Jap sword-licker friend and some darktown clubhouse. It had to be him.

Hence, Orson returns. Hence, this home movie. Roll it, Fats.

Dudley pulled a chair up. El Gordo adjusted the film spools. He wore Bermuda shorts and a loud Hawaiian shirt.

"Your man's the clarinet player. When the camera pans to the woodwind quintet, you'll see him."

Dudley cued Welles. Lights, camera, action. Wagner hit the sound track. Trumpets and low strings. It's *Götterdämmerung.* Dig the bleak intercessional strains.

A title card: "Berlin, '29." It denotes bleak atop bleak. Here's Alban Berg's *Lulu* and grainy stock footage.

It's a street riot. It's Reds versus Brownshirts. There's Marxist banners and swastikas ablaze. Bullyboys wield two-by-fours. The Brownshirts outnumber the Reds. It's a rout. Blood flows in crisp black-&-white.

There's a quick cut. Weill and Brecht replace Berg. There's *"Mackie Messer."* Lotte Lenya warbles it.

Bam!—there's a new title card. "Near Munich, 6-30-34." *Bam!*—we're outside a country inn. There's a dumb paper moon. The inn looks one-dimensional. We're on a cheap studio set.

Four black-clad SS men approach the door. Two men are Negro. Two men look Samoan. Fat Boy Welles provides surreal laffs.

Schubert usurps *The Threepenny Opera.* It's a woodwind quintet. We're inside the inn. There's a Nazi-garbed ensemble. Three string men and one oboe. The queer boy's on clarinet. It's his skin flute in lieu of hard flesh.

Welles said, "That's him."

"Him." Their triple-snuff suspect. He's blond. He's innocuous. He's lanky, and seems to be tall.

A quick cut. *Auf Wiedersehen,* Schubert. "Mack the Knife" returns.

We're in a small bedroom. We're peeping an all-boy bacchanal. It's a daisy chain. The lads wear Brownshirts and nothing else. They're cinched groin-to-buttocks. They pump and gesticulate. There's pelvic thrusts twenty boys long.

The SS men enter the room and shoot them. They employ toy Lugers. Cap-gun pops hit the sound track. The daisy chain collapses. The bugger boys disengage.

Dudley studied the film. He'd seen stray cuts at the party. He recalled none of it now. He was gone on hop then. He was flat sober now.

The screen blurs. *"Mackie Messer"* goes garbled. Wagner rides again. It's *Das Rheingold.* More trumpets and more low strings.

The screen unblurs. The daisy chain replicates. It's men and women now. They're linked groin-to-mouth.

The camera cuts away. Walter Pidgeon appears and struts as Adolf Hitler. He's Homerically hung. He rubs his toothbrush mustache. Claire De Haven kneels and gobbles his *schvantz.*

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

(LOS ANGELES, 7:00 A.M., 4/2/42)

I'm writing a letter to Hideo Ashida now. I will hand-deliver it to Manzanar. I will include a wire recording of Ed Satterlee's phone chat with Mike Breuning. I may send the second recording to Dudley Smith.

It's beginning to cohere. Joan's "all one story" is careening toward final explication. Hideo recounted his first interview with Kyoho Hanamaka; second and third interviews may well have occurred. My letter will urge Hideo to move beyond mere dissembling and omission. I will demand that he repudiate and fully betray his dear Dudley.

I'm exhausted. I visited Claire at Terry Lux's retreat last night; we gabbed until dawn and had steak and eggs in the lounge. Jim Davis sat a few tables over; a male nurse attended him. Comrade Jim is faltering. He had trouble lifting his fork.

Claire's morphine cure is proceeding. She talks and smokes incessantly and rails against her once-dear Dudley. She reads the Bible and obscure prayer books and often coils a rosary around one hand and forms that hand into a fist. Dear Claire. She showed me letters that Beth Short and Joan Klein have sent her. I studied the girls' cursive styles and unformed sentence structures. Dudley has seven daughters; these two are his favorites. Their expressed condemnation would dismay and perhaps bitterly wound him. I would, of course, craft both texts.

Elmer and Bill leaned on Sid Hudgens. They imposed a gag order on Sid's scandal-sheet machinations and secured his subscriber list. I will write the text that Sid's 461 paid subscribers will read. The sheet will be sent to key SIS personnel and ranking officers in the Mexican State Police. Every known comrade/*Kamerad* will receive the sheet; it will go out to Jack Horrall, notable Feds, Archbishop Cantwell and L.A.'s papal high brass. It will go out to Dudley himself. I will smear Dudley Smith in the Salacious Sidster's trademark style. I will instigate insidious ink. Everything that I write will be true.

Hatred fuels me now. It fuels this letter I'm writing. I now pass my hatred along to Hideo Ashida.

I described the Saul Lesnick–Annie Staples misadventure. Bill and Elmer tossed Doctor Saul in the Lincoln Heights drunk tank and let him stew for six long hours. They hauled him to the City Hall DB then. I observed the interrogation through a wall mirror; a wall-mounted speaker served up sound. Lesnick vividly confirmed the *Kameraden*'s postwar strategy and stoutly defended the grand ideals of enlightened dictatorship. Bill and Elmer let him blather. Lesnick laid out no less than the world as he saw it. It was one creepy credo. Sid Hudgens would label it "dippy dialectic" and a "miasmic manifesto." It featured the doctor's eugenic rationale for slaughtering infants. It ballyhooed Hitler's Norse breeding camps. It included a stirring defense of the Moscow show trials and Stalin's mass execution of deviationists and perceived traitors. Stalin's agrarian purges and Hitler's assault on the Warsaw Ghetto Jews were plain poppycock. Doctor Saul voiced an intense distaste for one Sergeant E. V. Jackson. He told Elmer that he'd be castrated and sold into slave labor once the comrades took over the world. Elmer turned to the mirror and winked at me.

Doctor Saul talked himself out; Bill got the interrogation down to brass tacks. He asked the questions. Elmer hovered and tapped a phone book on the sweatbox table. Lesnick gulped and credibly snitched.

He'd heard rumors about the gold but possessed no specific information. He was conversant with the *Kameraden*'s mail drop and microdot shenanigans. He did not know who the prior *Führers* were and did not know who the current *Führer* is. He knew Meyer Gelb and Jean Staley. He did not know that Gelb was once Fritz Eckelkamp and did not know where Gelb hid out. He described Ed Satterlee as an apostolic theoretical Trotskyite and committed Marxist. Ed was the *Kameraden*'s fix-it man. Lesnick professed ignorance of the klub*haus.* He had never been to the klub*haus.* He did not know Kyoho Hanamaka. He had never met Wendell Rice, George Kapek, and Archie Archuleta.

Bill released Lesnick. Go, shitbird. Twist in the wind. Describe your ordeal to your comrades. I watched Lesnick weave through the City Hall lobby. He bumped into an old friend on his way out the door.

The man was the L.A. *Bürgermeister* of the Negro Nazi League, and was known to pimp colored girls to DA Bill McPherson. The long-lost soulmates embraced. I overheard their conversation. Lesnick suggested lunch; the *Bürgermeister* suggested Kwan's. He went way back with Ace. Ace owned a sweatshop that enslaved eight-year-old kids. The kids stitched the League's banners and armbands.

The Fifth Column is everyone. Hideo Ashida told me that. It was New Year's Eve. Hideo had just returned from Venice. Joan Conville plowed a car full of wetbacks and left six dead. Bill Parker put the fix in. He had the hots for the big redhead. It's all one story, you—

We know most of it now, Hideo. There's a good deal still to be learned. It entails your betrayal of Dudley Smith. I command your loyalty in this moment. You know what he is. You know this is true.

Bill and Elmer are set to raid Bev's Switchboard. Do you recall the speech I gave two weeks after Pearl Harbor? Pershing Square was packed. I decried the Japanese internment. You were beaten for being there and being a Jap. I baited the crowd. I told them their options were do everything or do nothing. I'm telling you that now.

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(LONE PINE, 4:00 P.M., 4/2/42)

Sensei Hanamaka, aka "The Mummy" and "Dr. Death." He's faltering. He's entered an implosive state.

His grin's stretching wider. His fangs protrude more. He's caving in. He'll die soon. He'll become a Jap Shrunken Head.

Interview #3. It reprised 1 and 2. The salve and burn stink. The visitor's chair and the hospital bed.

Ashida said, "I'd like to hear your impressions of Wendell Rice and George Kapek."

Sensei coughed. His fluid bag drained. Sledgehammer dope hit his veins.

"They were second-generation rightist. Rice's father was in the Silver Shirts. Kapek's father is a gauleiter in rural Czechoslovakia. I saw them the first time in the winter of 1939. They were chauffeuring America Firsters to a Nazi-themed party in Brentwood. They served well in the manner of henchmen, as evinced by their minor roles in moving illegals under the aegis of Carlos Madrano. Such employment continued into the era of José Vasquez-Cruz, abutting the era of your mentor, Dudley Smith."

Ashida flinched. He hasn't called Dudley. He's put it off repeatedly. Three crucial interviews. What to tell/what to omit/what to obfuscate.

"Again, were they homosexual? The crime seems to be homosexual in its origins."

"I would not call them homosexual. I would call them fetishistic. Their fetishism was fueled by dope and liquor, along with the trinkets that Archie Archuleta procured for them in Little Tokyo. What would you pay for a slaughter sword deployed at the Rape of Nanking? Your mentor, Dudley Smith, might well be described as a fetishist. Juan Pimentel considered him such."

Dudley was. Dudley *is.* Kay's faux Claire missive. Fetishism implies the lavender look. Dudley's "effete eye for callow young men."

Slaughter swords. The Jap sword man. His queer white boy friend.

Confirmations accrue and overlap.

"You appear to be deep in thought, Dr. Ashida. I consider it peculiar that you are not taking notes. Did Major Smith tell you not to? I could see where he might want to avoid a public record of our talks."

Ashida bristled. Don't torque me, Tojo. He'd heard Elmer J. tell a Jap suspect that.

"Major Smith is a close friend, and my former commanding officer. I consider all his suggestions, but do not consider them commands."

Hanamaka leered. Opportunist Ashida. Race traitor Ashida. The white man's lapdog. He heels at Major Smith's command.

"Let's return to the trinkets. What were the other types that Archuleta procured, in addition to the swords you mentioned?"

Hanamaka said, "Torture devices. Vile ones. Suits of armor in the shape of Japanese soldiers, fitted with interior spikes meant to inflict horrible death on the wearer. I would call devices such as these militaristically homosexual. Archuleta brought a sampling of them by the klub*haus* one day while I was there. He said he was the middleman for a 'fruit' who sold them to 'strange-o types' he encountered on the jazz strip, although the 'fruit' did his primary business through the U.S. mail. Archuleta mentioned the 'fruit's' sister very briefly. She was the purported brains of this mail-order business. The sister visited the klub*haus* one night. I recall her vividly."

Elmer on Jean Staley. Jean and her "froufrou" kid brother. Robby, ex-jailbird and would-be actor. Not a musician.

We're up against prior descriptions. The would-be killer's tall and blond. Jean Staley is short and dark-haired. A tall blond brother seems unlikely. Archuleta's fruit and the queer-white-boy killer? Probably separate men.

Hanamaka coughed. Blood dripped down his chin. Ashida cracked his evidence kit and pulled his Jean Staley mug shot.

He flashed it. Hanamaka nodded yes. His ID was conclusive. It tied Robby Staley to the Jap sword man. It tied Robby to the queer white boy, once-removed.

Hanamaka yawned and shuddered. The dope jolt had depleted him. Metamorphosis. Here comes your Jap Shrunken Head.

"I think I know you now, Dr. Ashida. One thing continues to perplex me, though. Do you consider yourself Japanese or American?"

Ashida said, "You don't know me at all. I'm as American as you're not."

—

The main-gate guard left him a package. It contained one letter and one wire spool. An MP sergeant lent him a player and listening earmuffs.

It snowed. Manzanar was socked in tight. Hold for the mid-April thaw. You freeze or broil here. Manzanar's a two-climate zone.

Ashida holed up. The heating vents hummed. He read the letter four times. He played the wire recording twice.

He paced his suite. He looked out at the snow. A mess corporal brought him his dinner. The burn-ward doctor called. Kyoho Hanamaka died at 8:29 p.m.

The letter rankled. Kay was nothing but Kay-like. She was imperious, didactic, jejune. Kommisar Kay. Categorical and Manichean. There is no way but my way. If I believe it, it's true.

Your options are do everything or do nothing.

The wire call revealed Dudley in extremis. Mike Breuning levied a multicount indictment. Mike closed with sobs.

Ashida sat in the dark. He sipped champagne and willed the Baja-to-Manzanar call. The MP's mess hall served chilled champagne nightly. He'd come to expect and enjoy it.

He thought about Kay. She tried to seduce him last December. Kay's faux Claire letter. Dudley's effete eye for callow young men.

The phone rang. Ashida grabbed the receiver. Static cut off his "Hello?" Dudley was Dudleyesque. His blunt approach channeled Kommisar Kay.

"You've been among the missing, lad. I've gotten secondhand reports, from Al Wilhite, but I haven't heard from you."

Ashida cleared his throat. "I wanted to conclude my interviews before I reported. I'm sorry if it inconvenienced you."

"Hanamaka's dead, lad. Lieutenant Wilhite just called me. You won't be seeing our fair Kyoho again."

Man Camera. Let's frame this moment. There's the dark room. There's his window view. It's all snow and prison-camp searchlights.

"He gave up nothing of note. He was incoherent most of the time, and he gave up nothing we hadn't already learned."

Dudley sighed. "The gold? The cabal's chain of command?"

Ashida said, "No. The decadent behavior at the klub*haus* amused him, and he provided me with a great many anecdotes. We spoke at length three times. It was very frustrating."

Dudley sighed. "Soldier on, lad. Study the files I sent you. Put that grand brain of yours to the task."

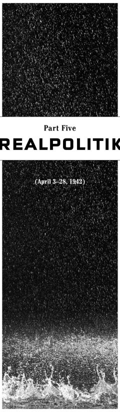
Ashida said, "I'm sorry, Dudley."

Dudley said, "I know you are. I hear it in your voice."

The line went dead. Ashida stifled a sob. Kommisar Kay had it right. There's no alternative. It's everything or nothing.

Part Five

REALPOLITIK



(April 3–28, 1942)

The El Lay Lowdown. Volume I, issue 4. Our motto? "All the news that's *un*fit to print." April 3, 1942 issue. Surreptitiously circulated since November 1941. Our serpentine circulation: 461 paid subscribers, and climbing via vile word of mouth. Dedicated to the proposition that *YOU WANT THE DISH.* All items written by Party Peeper 69. Subscription rate: $20.00 per year. Direct all inquiries to PO Box 69, Terminal Annex, Los Angeles.

—

Peeper 69 last left you in Nazi-nullified Paris, France. There was no need for insinuating initials in my climactic close-out piece. The frazzled frogs can't lasso me with libel suits from across the U-boat-undulating Atlantic. I joltingly *j'accused* piano putz *ALFRED CORTOT* of hunkering down with the Huns. I ditzed divaesque *DANIELLE DARRIEUX* for bedding down with the Boche. Cello cheese *PIERRE FOURNIER?* Shacked between the sheets with fetching filmstress *LENI RIEFENSTAHL.*

A barrage of bilious letters urged me to can the travelogues. If it ain't happening in El Lay, it ain't happening. Peeper 69 aims to please his rapacious readers. This issue repugnantly returns us to loopy Los Angeles—but with a twitchy twist.

The El Lay Lowdown speciously specializes in Hollywood dirt. Plus pulsing political scandals and the annihilating antics of El Lay socialites. Our regular "Police Blotter" feature features yet more Tinseltown tattle. And this issue turgidly turns its spotlight on the El Lay Police Department's most sinfully sinister and snaggled snafu.

Hear those surging saxophones and cloying clarinets? They announce the boogie beat of a big southside murder case. Dead men tell no tales—but we've got three stagnant stiffs grousing from the grave. Bent cops W.R. & G.K. demand justice; their Mex *muchacho* A.A. shrieks in *español.* Carrion cops case the corpses and lick their lips. This job's a maximum moneymaker and a shot to unseat J.H. as Chief.

W.H.P. Don't trust this guy. He'll sell his soul for the pomp of power and college cooze. Don't trust H.A. He's a Mr. Moto manqué and a jittery Jap. Don't trust pustulant policeman M.B. He's in league with furtive Fed E.S. There's a tapped telephone at a Chinatown eatery habituated by hellhound cops. M.B. and E.S. conspire via wire. Mr. B. rats out his maladroit mentor, that hellbound Hibernian hatchet man—D.S. himself.

D.S. is the duped deus ex machina of our dreary drama. Fifth Column finagling defines the big murder case. Caustic Commies M.G. and J.S. frame the fray. Feckless fascists W.J. and J.H. have joined them. Sicknik Sinarquista S.A. is playing D.S. for the fool. We've got riotous Reds and nutty Nazis galore. We've got *farshtinkener* factions out to glom gorgeous garlands of gold. Greed and graft, kats and kittens. Peeper 69's put his paws on the pulse of this story. He knows *alllllllll* about that perv party at the Maestro's manse in the winter of '39. *She* was really a *He,* and who can blame D.S. for taking ultimate umbrage? Thank heaven M.B & fellow cop D.C. cleaned up the mess.

It's hurtling to a head, dear readers. E.S. is under house arrest; H.A.'s joined the Jap diaspora and has been shipped out to Manzanar. Seditionist psychiatrist S.L. has been pounded by the police. Ex-Chief J.E.D. mutters murderous murmurs at a swank beachside retreat. Quo vadis, D.S.? You're the creepy crux of our drama. You've been spread cruciform, and demons of your own devising are coming for you.

118

(LOS ANGELES, 2:00 P.M., 4/4/42)

Double play. This raid and the scandal-rag blast. The rags went out, first-class mail. They should bull's-eye today.

And there's Bev's. It's straight across Fountain. It's transmitting Raid Me rays.

Elmer watched the door. Bill Parker watched the door. They sat in Bill's civilian sled. They brought shotguns and pry bars. It's a smash-and-seize job.

Parker smelled like Kay. That musky scent she wore. Elmer got all flustered and jealous. He teethed on them as bedmates. It hurt *baaaaaad.* He teethed on Wayne Frank Alive for relief.

Wayne Frank Alive hurt. He teethed on Ruth in the Kip. She'll call when she calls. That was her artiste's way. He teethed on Doc Lesnick. Thad Brown got a tip. Doc Saul ensconced himself at Terry Lux's place. He had company there. As in Claire De Haven and gaga Jim Davis.

Salvador Abascal. Teethe on that dink. He sprung Díaz, Carbajal, and Santarolo. He got them habeas. They waltzed out of Fed custody and rewaltzed back to Baja. That was *baaaaad* grapevine. Here's the *gooooood* grapevine. Fletch B. got preemptive acquitted. The grand jury pulled their true bills.

All charges were dropped. Mass acquittals were predicted. Guess who jump-started *that* shit.

Parker said, "I'm getting antsy."

Elmer said, "What's wrong with right now?"

They grabbed their gear. Riot guns and hefty pry bars. They ditched the sled and jaywalked. The front door stood open. They walked right in.

Raid Me rays?—*shit.* Here's what they got:

Mail-Drop Holocaust. Mail-Drop Inferno. Mail-Drop Mud Slide. All the mail slots were spread wide. There was no mail stuffed inside.

Elmer orbed the walls. Whiskey Bill, ditto. They saw open file drawers and no files visible. Plus open desk drawers in plain sight.

Plus Blow Job Bev and Wallace Jamie, perched in deck chairs. Looking smug. You can't seize vapors. You can't raid stale air.

Parker said, "You were tipped."

Jamie said, "People talk. Word travels. Fellow travelers travel, too." Bev giggled and flipped them the bird.

Parker went for Jamie. He kicked his chair over and smashed his head on the floor. Jamie bitch-yelped. Parker kicked him in the balls and cuffed his hands behind his back. Bev jumped up and whore-yelped. Her deck chair capsized.

Elmer scoped the room. He saw juncture cracks behind the file banks. He dropped his pump gun and ran to the east wall. He jammed his pry bar behind the *A* to *D* bank and pulled.

Metal screeched against linoleum. The file bank slid out. No paper scraps or mail debris got revealed. Elmer yanked out the *E* to *J* bank. Lice eggs got revealed. Elmer yanked out the *K* to *R* bank. A mousetrap and stale cheese got revealed.

Metal screeched against linoleum. Jamie and Bev screeched Fascist Assault! Elmer pulled out the *S* to *Z* bank. He saw boocoo mail debris.

Glossy stuff. Spilled catalogues. Jammed upside the walls. In there with mouse turds and soot.

Elmer knelt down and pored through it. *S* to *Z* skank got revealed.

Sally's Sexy Lingerie. Crotchless Panties Our Specialty. Fat models with full beavers exposed. Silver Shirt closeout. Lo prices on bullwhips and nigger knockers. The Best in the West. Tasty Tessie. Hairpie deluxe. Pubic locks 4-sale. Your choice of blond, brunette, or red bush. Write to Tasty Tessie 2-day!!!

Vivid Violet. Certified nympho. Frat parties welcome. Special college-boy rates. Call Sharon, 24 hours. Your place or mine? No Negroes, Mexicans, or sailors. Call for introductory rate. Boys, Boys, Boys!!! Wicked Willie's got 'em!!! See fotos in May '41 issue of *Hung Magazine*!!!

Parker stomped the premises. Blow Job Bev pitched a fit. Jamie yelped for Uncle Eliot Ness. Elmer snagged a crumpled catalogue.

Johnny Shinura Curios. Exotic & Erotic Items. The Mysterious Orient Lives! 482 East 2nd Street, Los Angeles.

Oooooh, what's—

East 2nd Street. J-town. The Jap sword man. He's a curio dealer. 482's not a storefront. The Crash Squad would have nailed it already. It's some warehouse stash hole. It has to be that. The sword man, the blood licker, the queer white boy's—

Elmer thumbed the catalogue. Check this out. You've got iron maidens and swastika branding irons. There's SS tunics for your dog. You've got a Jap soldier suit of arms. It features sharp spikes inside. It’s now available in four sizes!!! It’s guaranteed to cause *EXCRUTIATING DEATH!!!*

119

(ENSENADA, 5:00 P.M., 4/4/42)

The watch sergeant called in sick. It was SOP. He was an all-time goldbrick. He habituated the Blue Fox and White Dog Klub. His work went undone.

Dudley filled in. Major D. L. Smith, among the squadroom pogues. He worked at the sergeant's desk. He filled out the duty roster and sorted the mail.

The squadroom buzzed. SIS ran full Saturday shifts. Dudley buzzed. He had Benzedrine for breakfast and lunch. The Wolf was down in La Paz. Constanza doted on him.

Dudley slit envelopes. The mail was SOP-plus. Fourth Interceptor demands Jap head counts. The Staties demand liaison meets. There's Jap sub alerts. There's Redshirt rallies east of Piedra Rojas. Please infiltrate.

Plus a plain envelope. Addressed direct to him. An L.A. postmark and no return address.

Dudley slit the envelope. Three mimeo sheets were stuffed in. The cheap ink bled. The cheap paper wilted. Say what? It's Sid Hudgens' private rag.

The El Lay Lowdown. Sid's standard fare, free of restraints. 461 subscribers. William Randolph Hearst, take note.

Dudley skimmed through it. He skimmed through Holly*weird* tattle, couched in Sid's standard style. Men's room hijinks and gang bangs. Sid's standard fare. He skimmed to "big southside murder case." He hit "pustulant policeman M.B." He quick-skimmed to "D.S. himself." He went hot/cold/hot and skimmed the full text.

He made this noise. Code clerks glanced over. He threw an arm across the desk and dumped a file box. He made a worse noise. It just seeped out. More clerks looked over. He dumped his coffee cup and smashed a typewriter into the floor.

He made a worse noise. It was screechy effete. The whole squadroom watched.

Opium.

The tar, the match, the pipe.

Stopover, Dublin. He views James Conroy Smith's resurrection. A brotherly reunion turns sanguine. They go on the hunt together. Protty militiamen fall. The Wolf hunts with them. Bloodthirsty beast. He slays and eats his prey.

Stopover, Rome. Salvy's confession and papal audience. I did not betray Dudley Smith, Your Holiness. He is my *Führer* as thou art God's sole worldly lord.

Stopover, L.A. Meyer Gelb assumes a supplicant's pose. He bows. He bestows the gold. He explains everything.

Stopover, New York. Maestro Klemperer conducts at Carnegie Hall. It's the Shostakovich symphony. He's proud of Young Joan. She did her part. Uncanny child. Gray hair at fifteen. She's surely the spawn of the Wolf.

The bedroom door slid open. The Wolf followed Constanza in. He called her, or thinks he did. The night's been a blur. He thinks he described the letter. She must have sensed his duress.

The Wolf jumped on the bed. Constanza sat on the edge. She took his hands. Her voice was soft.

I journeyed up to love you and assuage your fear. It is all hearsay. It's a smear tactic employed by my brother, allied with Meyer Gelb. They are creating dissension among the Kameraden, because they fear you so. They possess the gold or know where it is. They fear that we will take it from them. We ourselves will live in fear as long as my brother remains alive.

I cannot believe that Salvy would betray me. You were his lover. Please refute the assertion and tell me that it isn't true.

You collect acolytes and younger brothers. It is not a trait I admire in you.

Harsh you. Your stern words wound me.

You have never been wounded as I have. Consider the horror my brother inflicted, as you permit him to draw breath.

You were approached and offered the minutes for the Baja conference. Has a sum been mentioned? Was the approach credible?

The approach was tendered through my mail drop in Los Angeles. The note was block-printed with a ruler, which bespeaks spycraft to me. The sender failed to explain himself further. The sum mentioned was ten thousand dollars.

120

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

(LOS ANGELES, 1:00 P.M., 4/5/42)

Chez Lux. Health retreat, dry-out farm, divorce hideaway. Sid Hudgens has dubbed it the "Nose Job Notre Dame." Jack Horrall and Gene Biscailuz boil the booze out under Terry's supervision. Fritz Eckelkamp was cut into Meyer Gelb here. The guest bungalows are enclosed by high hedgerows and pepper trees. The medical buildings resemble a Bauhaus college campus. There are tennis courts, putting greens, a first-run movie house. Noted comrades skulk in residence. Saul Lesnick, Two-Gun Davis. Lin Chung concocts eugenics potions in Terry's lab. Orson Welles will soon engage Terry's weight-loss regime. Steam baths and cocaine do the trick.

Claire and I sipped coffee on her terrace. Our own comrades were otherwise deployed. Buzz was chasing Meyer Gelb; Elmer was chasing J-town leads in the wake of the Bev's Switchboard raid. Bill assigned my own Lee Blanchard to bodyguard Sid Hudgens. The mock scandal sheet had been widely received; the Sidster feared Dudster reprisals.

The setting was lovely. Claire and I sat side by side; Claire kept a hand on my knee. It was companionable, more than seductive. Ten years separated us; the war enthused us equally; my enthusiasm was girlish and ghoulish when compared to hers. Claire saw the war as the culmination of her long leftist immersion. The current worldwide horror was the horror of her failed attempts to spark revolution. She failed to grasp the horror of her own profligacy and could not acknowledge its self-perpetuation. She viewed her personal life and the war as one inextricable struggle. I viewed my personal life and the war as an opportunity. I put my hand on Claire's hand on my knee. I thought of Edna St. Vincent Millay as I did this. "Through my mother's hand. / I saw the web grow, / And the pattern expand."

Claire said, "I'm not going to issue a false confession to Monsignor Hayes.

I've read your script a dozen times, and I've decided that I cannot and will not do it. I called Captain Parker this morning. We discussed the matter, and he told me that he has arrived at the same resolve. He said the monsignor has consented to a formal police interview. Your scandal mock-up must have frightened him, dear."

I squeezed Claire's hand. "You called Bill Parker. I must say I've heard everything now."

"God despises half-assed apostates. I can't justify that scripturally, but I know it to be true."

We lit cigarettes and blew smoke at the sky. The retreat caught sea breezes; cloud patterns expanded and swirled. I released my enclosing hand and let it fall free; Claire laced up our fingers.

"I did something you should know about."

"Yes?"

"It began back in Ensenada. It was shortly after I realized that Dudley had become involved with the Lazaro-Schmidt woman. I heard them talking on the phone, and eavesdropped. He was discussing a Nazi-Soviet conference with this creature, and I picked up quite a few details. The conference occurred in Ensenada, in the fall of '40. Dudley said he'd pay dearly to acquire any typed minutes that might exist."

I squeezed Claire's hand. "I know about that conference," I said. "It was all over Joan's diary."

Claire placed my hand on her knee. Mature woman, young woman. Edna St. Vincent Millay and early-wartime flirtation. Pinch me—I'm a South Dakota farm girl.

"I did something precipitous, Katherine. I recalled what you told me about Bev's Switchboard and mail drops, and I ruler-printed a note to the Lazaro-Schmidt woman. I told her I had the minutes, and I'd be willing to sell them to her for ten thousand dollars."

Claire, the bold apostate. Claire, the vengeful lover. Precipitous, indeed.

"Did you tell her where to contact you?"

"No. I wrote that I'd contact her again."

I said, "We can't overdo it here. We sent your letter to Dudley, as well as the scandal sheet. I was going to send notes from Beth Short and Joan Klein, but it may be altogether too much, and alert him."

Claire smiled. "I should mention that Joan has moved into Otto's guesthouse. She's become a yet-younger version of your still-young version of Mata Hari. If the Shostakovich symphony ever arrives in this country, it will be due to that rather outré child's efforts."

Jean Staley vacates the guesthouse; Young Joan Klein moves in. Otto Klemperer's Home for Wayward Women.

"Otto told me a horrible story, Claire. It goes back to the time of his blackouts, and it has the feel of a blackout itself. A man was making 'vile comments' to him, and he beat the man to death. He told Saul Lesnick about it. Lesnick and Ed Satterlee exploited the situation and hushed it up. Otto paid them a good deal of money, of course."

Claire said, "Otto killed no one, dear. Saul was drunk one night, and explained it all to me. The man was Japanese. He sold rather horrific curios, and he rented a few items to Orson Welles, to use as props in a smut film he was making—one that I appeared in, as a lark. The film was debuted at what I've been told was a rather decadent party at Otto's house, while Otto was here at Terry's place, taking a rest cure. Otto met the Japanese man at some point after that party. He beat the man, but not badly. He was insensate from the pain medicine that Saul had prescribed, and convinced himself that he'd committed murder. Saul and Ed Satterlee were more than willing to exploit this addled belief."

—

The drive to Manzanar consumed eight full hours. I journeyed from springtime Los Angeles to a bleak outpost of the California Sierras. Bill secured me a visitor's pass and warned me that an MP lieutenant named Al Wilhite was a Dudley Smith toady and had likely been assigned to watchdog Hideo Ashida.

Hideo was expecting me. Bill called him on his scrambler phone and arranged the rendezvous. Dudley might well learn of it; I didn't care; my visit was contrived to place Hideo in a state of moral jeopardy from which he could not run.

I drove into snow country; the temperature dropped at dusk; mountain winds slammed my car as icy blacktop skewed the traction. I concentrated on driving and nothing else. I learned to drive on winter prairie roads; this was more of that; I hit a flat plane right before Manzanar and slalomed just as I did in rural South Dakota.

Road signs announced the camp; I saw perimeter lights a half mile ahead and slid the last hundred yards up to the gate. I saw cabin rows, bisecting paths, barbed wire, and pivoting floodlights. The gate guard issued me a parking pass and gave me directions to the canteen. Visiting hours were over, he said. But they made exceptions for Dr. Ashida—he was a star boarder here.

I could have visited Hideo in the plush suite that Dudley had secured for him—but Hideo nixed that idea. He knew I was coming to further recruit and suborn him. He wanted me to feel ill at ease within a public context of his own people.

I parked and began my trek uphill. Mountain gusts pushed me forward, back, from side to side. The canteen was three paths up and three paths over. I trudged a good mile and a half; the family huts stretched just that far and wide. They were dimly lit and shuttered; no faces peered out at anomalous me.

I found the canteen. It was dim bulb–lit and hung with frayed Japanese lanterns. The interior walls were rough pine-planked and joined at severe right angles. One small room, rough wood furniture, wall photographs of majestic Mount Fuji.

Hideo sat off by himself. Four older men sat in a group. The canteen was a Japanese bachelors' club, prison camp–style.

I sat down across from Hideo. He said, "No outrage, please. It's spartan, but it's not the Warsaw Ghetto or the Lubyanka."

He'd lost weight. He wore gray flannels and a brown anorak. He warmed his hands on a thermos and poured me a cup of hot tea.

I took off my gloves and sipped at it. I played cutup and waved to the old men; they looked down and made me feel like a farceur and wretch. Hideo said, "At least you tried. I'd have thought you'd become someone else if you hadn't."

I smiled. "I subjected you to that wiretap," I said. "You're subjecting me to your fellow bachelors and this spartan accommodation."

"You didn't subject me to anything I didn't already know about Dudley. You tend to overplay your hand, Kay. Your subtext was 'he's finished,' but I'm not sure I agree with that."

Touché, Hideo. We're here to bargain, and I know you'll set boundaries. You fear implacable women. I know that about you.

"I spoke to Claire today. She told me Otto Klemperer crossed paths with our Japanese sword man. It confirms his presence in our suspect pool."

Hideo said, "I consider him tangential. The homosexual youth may or may not be an actual suspect. Kyoho Hanamaka placed him with a white woman, about thirty. It confirms my key thesis. Without actual names and evidence, these confirmations are no more than supposition."

I said, "You're a killjoy. You're like those old men over there."

"Since you're fishing for compliments, I'll provide one. Your epistolary approach is inspired. You surely got Dudley's attention with the scandal sheet, but I wish you hadn't sent it to the Staties."

"It lured Monsignor Hayes. He's coming in, with a lawyer. Bill's set to interview him."

Hideo sighed and stomped one foot. He was impatient. Tell me what you expect of me. You're a woman. I'm bored already.

"Tell me what you want. I'll say yes or no immediately."

"I want you to forge a document. Minutes for the Baja conference in '40."

"To be sent to whom, and under what cover?"

"Constanza Lazaro-Schmidt," I said. "It should be crafted to induce greed for the gold, and I want it sent anonymously."

Hideo drummed the table. "Quid pro quo? There's two specific concessions I require."

I said, "Tell me what you want. I'll say yes or no immediately."

The riposte sailed right by him. He said, "I want to conduct the interviews with Leander Frechette and Martin Luther Mimms."

"And, second?"

"I do not want Dudley Smith harmed. You may expose him and seek to contravene his designs. You may not kill him, physically harm him, or seek to imprison him. Tell your vindictive lover Bill Parker that. Tell your volatile friend Elmer Jackson that. Tell the trigger-happy Buzz Meeks that. All four of you must know that I will not permit Dudley Smith to be harmed in those specific fashions."

Touché. You trumped me. This girl knows when she's ceded the high ground, and when she's licked.

"I've never seen you this passionate."

Hideo said, "I love him. He gave me the world, and it was not an insignificant gift."

121

(LONE PINE, 10:00 A.M., 4/6/42)

You're a Jap.

The main drag bustled. The spring thaw hit all at once. It engendered foot traffic. Folks stormed the grocery store and the hardware store. Who's that big goon cuffed to that Jap?

The goon wore civvies. He was an MP PFC. Ashida wore civvies. The cuff chain dangled in plain sight.

You're a Jap.

Folks saw them. Folks passed comment. It was snide but civilized. Manzanar was close by. It juiced local business. The war had its upside. Why's this Jap on the loose?

Because he's Manzanar's star boarder. Because he's out shopping. Because he's buying forgery gear.

The MP mapped the excursion. They hit a stationery store and a bookstore. It created a mild upscut. Biz was biz, though.

Ashida purchased four reams of quality bond paper and four fountain pens. He bought corresponding bottles of ink and German- and Russian-language study texts.

They hit the hardware store. Ashida bought a rubber-stamp kit and three hobbyist's knives. Ranch locals cruised him. He bought a bottle of gum arabic. A ranch boy sidled close. He pulled his eyes into Jap slits and giggled. The MP moved him along.

—

His lab was well stocked and equipped. All praise to you know who. The shopping jaunt bypassed Al Wilhite. Subterfuge and spycraft. He slid the MP fifty scoots and made him pledge silence. You know who taught him well.

Ashida skimmed the usage books. He gained German and Russian vocabulary and enhanced his syntactical grasp. He was Spanish-fluent. He possessed one typewriter. It was a ’36 Underwood. Verisimilitude. The concept buttressed his Baja ’40 construction.

The minutes were composed and typed *at* the conference. The German and Russian factions shared this one machine. It was a late-vintage U.S. import. Verisimilitude. Staff flunkies typed in Ensenada hotel rooms. It was a rush job. Be sure to flub and overscore words.

Ashida composed at his desk. He typed off his hand-scrawled notes. He kept the German text lofty and ambiguous. The *Kameraden* fear committed words on paper. The Russian comrades are less circumspect.

Man Camera. Time Machine. Spring ’42 as the fall of ’40. Retrospective verisimilitude. You must express ridicule and contempt. It must wound Dudley Smith in the present tense.

Ashida assumed a Russian voice. He’s a high-up apparatchik. He castigates the Dresden Poly boys. Díaz, Jamie, Hayes, Pimentel. They are all rightist refuseniks and deviationists. They cannot comprehend the grand ideal of left-right amity.

Ashida played a hunch. He recalled Joan’s diary. She described a tract sent to the klub*haus.* Salvy Abascal wrote it. The tract critiqued the Baja conference and the postwar utopian dream promulgated there. The tract suggested Abascal’s presence at the confab. Call him a right-wing stooge at the prom and no more.

Here’s the hunch. He cruised through Dresden Poly. He knew the boys there. He withheld this from Dudley. He’s a longtime outlier in the left-right cabal.

That’s the hunch. Here’s the fictive reinterpretation.

Abascal is no more than a stooge racketeer. He’s out to grab the gold for himself. The apparatchik has heard rumors. Abascal’s militant Catholic stance is a ruse. He’s a Brit-loving monarchist. The Irish are subhuman pigs.

Salvador has hoodwinked Dudley. That’s confirmed evidence now. It should be retroactively advanced. The apparatchik should express it. Abascal’s goal has always been racket appropriation. He’s been looking for a U.S. sugar daddy. His goal foreshadows *this:*

He found his sugar daddy. Dudley Smith’s muddleheaded when it comes to wild young men. Exploit the Dudley-Salvador fissure. Render it a chasm. Grant Meyer Gelb retrospective *Führer* status.

Ashida wrote Russian text. The apparatchik defamed Salvador at great length. Meyer Gelb was conversely lauded. Ashida overscored and flubbed words deliberately. The German and Russian texts stood complete. He forged varying ink signatures.

The textual work took eight hours. He aged his paper next. He boiled a hydroxide solution and laced it with tap water. He filled an atomizer and sprayed his pages. He fan-dried them. It created a frayed yellow effect. He repeated the process four times. Verisimilitude. Quadruple-aged paper. He worked through the night and into the next day.

He built the stamp. He devised one symbol for one cause united. He cut rubber and sawed wood and glued ink pads tight. He worked through that next day. He forgot to eat.

Die Fahne hoch!!! Beastly ideology, one savage beast. He’s half Nazi eagle, half Russian bear. He’s a lumbering creature with wings. His claws drip blood. His contorted beak screams. Crossed hammers offset the swastika. The four points are sharp workers’ scythes.

122

(LOS ANGELES, 4:00 P.M., 4/7/42)

Papal slugfest. Bill Parker versus Padre Joe Hayes and some dioscean shyster.

They hogged a DB sweatbox. Parker wore civvies. Hayes wore his penguin suit. The lawyer wore a blue blazer with a Loyola crest. Elmer peeped the see-thru. He goosed the hall speaker up high.

Parker and Hayes indulged blah-blah. Elmer tuned it out. He gassed with Kay yesterday. She passed on Hideo's report. Kyoho Hanamaka was dead now. He supplied good drift, premortem.

It confirmed the Jap sword man and the queer white boy. The white boy had a white girl pal. Archie Archuleta peddled the sword man's trinkets. Jean Staley masterminded the mail-order biz. Fruit brother Robby helped out.

Padre Hayes told stale jokes. The prelude protracted. Elmer brain-revved. The sword man had to be Johnny Shinura. That Bev's Switchboard catalogue spelled it out plain. Shinura had no green sheet. Shinura was uninterned and out on the hoof. Shinura peddled his shit out of a J-town loft. The Feds seized the building a month ago. It was government-sealed. Where's Sword Man Johnny now?

The prelude deprotracted. Joe Hayes lit a cigarette. Shyster McBride lit a cigar. Parker pushed an ashtray across the table.

"The Sinarquistas, Monsignor. Their leader, Salvador Abascal. They're going on the Feds' 1-A subversive list next month."

Hayes said, "I wouldn't call them subversive. A great many Catholics support them, morally and financially, and I'm proud to stand among them. We're not subversives—we're just concerned Catholics, like you."

Parker said, "Like Dudley Smith?"

"Yes, like Dudley."

McBride said, "Captain Parker's a nonpracticing lawyer. I've got a hunch he's about to introduce People's Exhibit A."

Parker popped his briefcase. He pulled out a wire-player gizmo and plugged it into the wall. He tapped two switches. Hold tight, fuckers. Dud's in the hot seat now.

Mike Breuning and Ed Satterlee gabbed. Elmer gassed on the replay. Breuning finked El Dudster. Hayes got the scandal sheet already. This tapped call doubled it down.

Wetbacks. Heroin. Jap slaves. Nazi fucks and Red fucks and a lost gold cache. Dud's priest-killer snuffs.

Hayes went pale. McBride went all flushed. Parker turned the gizmo off.

"There are a few issues I'd like to discuss, Monsignor. Chiefly, your partial ownership of Bev's Switchboard, and your Dresden Polytechnic alliance with Wallace Jamie, Mondo Díaz, and Juan Pimentel."

McBride shook his head. "Monsignor Hayes declines to answer."

Parker lit a cigarette. "Continuing, then. Bev's Switchboard as a confirmed seditionist mail drop. Your own mail-drop collaborations, coded phone calls to a relay station in Ensenada, and the general range of your far-right, and/or far-left, alliances."

McBride said, "Monsignor Hayes declines to answer."

Hayes squirmed. He quick-lit a cigarette and fumbled the match. Elmer gassed on the show.

Parker said, "Continuing, then. Mr. Abascal as a possible saboteur and/or seeker and hoarder of a gold cache stolen from a U.S. Mint train in 1931."

Elmer squirmed. That saboteur query ditzed him. Frankie Carbajal blabs at the sweep. El Salvy plans sabotage in the San Joaquin Valley. Him and Buzz held back the lead. It's their fallback card. It's insurance against all forms of censorious shit.

Hayes and McBride huddled. They pressed heads. Whisper, whisper. Parker cleaned his glasses on his necktie. He looked devil-dog pissed.

McBride said, "Monsignor Hayes will issue a blanket statement that addresses your last few points. No rebuttals, Captain. This is a police interview, not a courtroom proceeding."

Hayes said, "I would never condone sabotage. I seriously doubt that the Sinarquistas would ever perform it or even consider performing it. I have heard vague rumors as to a cache of gold, including the rumor that Salvy took possession of it, and somehow all of this pertains to a leftist-rightist cabal out to establish their postwar credentials, regardless of which side wins. Concludingly, let me state that these rumors impressed me as poppycock, and the Salvy I know would never collaborate with anyone on the Left."

Elmer relit a cigar. Fuck you, Father Joe. You speak with forked tongue.

Parker said, "Continuing, then. A clubhouse on 46th Street, east of Central Avenue. Homosexual activity, on the premises. One Thomas Malcolm Glennon, one Robert Clinton Staley, a homosexual jazz musician and his known associate—a Japanese purveyor of fetishistic curios."

Hayes and McBride huddled. Whisper, whisper. They pressed heads again. McBride snapped his suspenders and kicked his chair back.

"The Monsignor admits to intimate relationships with Tommy Glennon and Robby Staley. Should you be fishing for leads on the murders of Wendell Rice, George Kapek, and Arturo Archuleta, I'll state that the monsignor has a beaut, and it's yours for across-the-board immunity."

Parker went all Donald Duck. Steam hissed out his ears. His eyeballs popped in rage. His glasses fogged up.

"DA McPherson has authorized me in that regard. I'm listening, Monsignor."

Hayes said, "I know of the musician, but I don't know his name. His Japanese friend is named Johnny Shinura, and his curio business is located on East 2nd Street. The musician has a friend. She's a high-strung woman, about twenty-eight years of age. I don't know her name, either. Rice, Kapek, and Archuleta purportedly raped a woman at the klub*haus.* I credit the rumor, but I don't know the victim's name. One might call rape a good motive for a triple homicide, although I've never seen the allure."

Elmer brain-drained the lead. It played good and backstopped Hideo Ashida. Hideo theorized a male-female deal.

A Vice bull walked up a desk phone. He looked bored. The phone cord was stretched taut.

"It's Meeks. He sounds agitated."

Elmer snatched the receiver. "Yeah, boss."

Buzz said, "I found Meyer Gelb."

123

(ENSENADA, 3:00 P.M., 4/8/42)

AWOL. “Absent without official leave.” Abdication, flight, retreat.

He trashed the squadroom four days back. He abandoned his command. SIS men witnessed his tantrum. He holed up with Constanza. They made love and sniffed cocaine. They donned Nazi uniforms and fondled his gold bayonet.

He told her he killed Cruz-Caiz with it. She told him to kill her brother with it. She reprised haughty words.

“I cannot truly give myself to a man as long as my brother remains alive.”

Dudley drove the coast road north. Constanza left this morning. She flew back to La Paz. She has a chamber recital tonight. Call him the widower, adrift.

Adrift, untethered, bereft.

He assigned himself tasks. Make phone calls. Shore up the home front. Visit the dope ranch. Issue command directives. Visit the Jap holding pens. Hold sway over your peons. Return to duty, starched and pressed.

Dudley cut inland. His phone task had backfired. He called Claire’s house in Beverly Hills. A maid brushed him off. He called Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle at home and got no answer. He called Beth at her real dad’s place in Vallejo. She hung up on him.

He’d lost weight. His trousers hung slack. He stood two days awake. He’d brought Claire’s stash kit with him. He could geez and rest up at the ranch.

Constanza called him an hour ago. She told him that Bev’s Switchboard had contacted her. Bev said she’d received a letter. He told Constanza to read it to him.

She did. The note was ruler-block-printed. It restated a prior note she’d received.

“I’ve got the minutes. I want ten thousand dollars. I’m tired of waiting. I’ll write again soon.”

Dudley cut through scrub hills and desert patches. A warm wind kicked in.

Tumbleweeds hit the car and caromed off. He ran a tumbleweed gauntlet. Tumbleweeds scraped the windshield and rendered him blind. He floored the gas and plowed past them. He got scared and went *whee!* and laughed.

It hurt to laugh. He sounded shrill. Wisps passed in front of his eyes. The wind lulled and died. He saw the ranch up ahead. He saw cars he knew and cars he didn't recognize.

He pulled up and parked outside the lab hut. He saw the foreman's car and the head chemist's car. He saw no straw-boss jalopies. He saw a low-chopped '40 Ford and a '38 Packard. He smelled high-test gasoline fumes.

He got out and stretched his legs. He unholstered his piece. He weaved and saw wisps, wisps, and wisps.

The lab door flew open. The sound echoed loud. Three Blackshirt Staties walked toward him. He smelled burnt-almond fumes.

Boots scuffed gravel behind him. The Wolf growled, out of nowhere. A wet rag smothered him and scoured out the wisps.

—

Stench. Mildew and urine. Words—off to what we call left. Cognizance. Brain function. Spanish words. What we call language. Crackle sounds. What we call radio.

"Bombing attacks."

"Suspected sabotage."

"Crop-farm acreage."

"San Joaquin Valley."

Cognizance. Scent. Of blood and entrails, of rancid fur. His face burned. Burnt almonds means a chloroform tincture. That's brain function. It's the will to forge thought and isolate sensation. It's the ability to link sensation to thought.

Dudley Liam Smith, you've been sandbagged. Dudley Liam Smith—you took a nap.

He opened his eyes. He saw four squashed rats and his own bloody hands. Entrails and fur. Bite marks on his wrists. He'd squashed them himself.

The Wolf licked his face. It revived him. The Wolf supplied a travelogue.

We're in the Statie barracks jail. Blackshirts commandeered your biz fronts. Japs, dope, wetbacks. You've been usurped.

He kissed the Wolf and thanked him. The Wolf told him to torture and kill Meyer Gelb. Herr Gelb has the gold. *Es la verdad.* Kill Juan Lazaro-Schmidt. Constanza will leave us if you don't.

Cognizance. Brain function. They stole his gun, his watch, his money. He's on a bare cement floor. Cognizance. Language. "Sabotage," "San Joaquin

Valley." Brain function. The ability to extrapolate.

You're still exhausted. You remain impaired. Let the Wolf explicate here.

Sid Hudgens spoke *la verdad.* Salvy Abascal has betrayed you. He smuggled saboteurs in with that last batch of wets. It's why he refused to ride north. *Salvy es El Grand Jefe de los Kameraden.* You are a dupe of your own sentimentality. Trust wolves before you trust dashing and fawning young men.

124

KAY LAKE'S DIARY

(LOS ANGELES, 7:00 P.M., 4/8/42)

The Crash Squad HQ stood abandoned. Daily briefings had been discontinued; the report boards drooped off the walls. The once-hot cop murder job now ran parallel to cases going back eleven years. Attrition and factionalism had decimated the squad proper. Mike Lyman's back room returned to what it once was: a rendezvous spot for married cops and their girlfriends.

Like Bill Parker and me, drinking highballs and dining on cheese puffs. Meeting in cop-assigned places. Utilizing them as love shacks and hole-ups, where we hashed out *What the hell is all this?*

Elmer was off somewhere; Buzz notched an address for Meyer Gelb and was staking out the location. He talked to that bail bondsman in San Francisco; the man kicked loose Leander Frechette's address. The DA granted Joe Hayes immunity. The Japanese sword man was ID'd as Johnny Shinura. The invert white boy had a gal pal. Hideo Ashida considered them viable klub*haus* suspects. Kyoho Hanamaka was dead. Hideo lied to Dudley. *Sensei* Death told me nothing. Hideo crossed the line over to God's side.

It might all be breaking. It might dwindle down to dashed leads and misinformation. None of us knew.

We had the back room to ourselves. I wanted to head to our Ambassador spot and make love. Bill wanted to hash out *What the hell is all this?*

I said, "Hideo wants to interview Frechette. It's part and parcel of his forged-document deal."

Bill said, "We'll have Lee bodyguard him. He can't go to San Francisco alone."

"Hideo called me this morning. He's completed the minutes, and he'll be sending them along to the Lazaro-Schmidt woman."

Bill just nodded. I dug through his pants pockets and pulled out his cigarettes. It was a regular routine of ours; Bill always gasped.

"Say something, please. It's a nice breezy night, and I'm antsy."

Bill smiled. "Here's two observations. First, you know how to get a man's attention. Second, I need to have a talk with Buzz Meeks. He most certainly intends to kill Dudley, and I have to dissuade him, before he goes off half-cocked."

I laughed. The Teletype clacked and rolled paper; Bill got up and detached the sheet. He read through it and crossed himself.

"It's from Fourth Interceptor. They're reporting multiple incidents of sabotage, up near Bakersfield. There's three dead at a private-plane hangar. A garage filled with bomb materiel was blown up in Taft, with two more dead there. Maricopa's got a Bund hall, arsoned. It was packed with illegal ordnance, and was torched to the ground."

I crossed myself. "It's truck-farm country. Dudley's running illegals up there."

—

Bill ran the full distance Code 3, lights and siren; we made the night trek to Kern County in probable record time. Bill called ahead and spoke to a Sheriff's captain. The man said his Subversive Squad had raided the Bund hall on Pearl Harbor Day. The ordnance had remained on the premises; the county and the Feds were embroiled in a big jurisdictional brouhaha. The man closed with "If you've got questions, I might have some answers by the time you get up here. And there might be an L.A. angle on this thing."

Kern County was low, wide, and flat; U.S. 99 north cut straight through it. It was farm and oil country. Pump derricks stood tall; they framed the low-lying terrain. We crossed the Maricopa city limits and saw lights beamed up a half mile ahead. It had to be arc lamps at the arson scene. Bill sighted in on the glow and drove straight to it.

Forty-odd lamps threw light on a half block torched to a husk. Rubble mounds stood ten feet high. Firemen probed them with axes and shovels. Bill parked beside a perimeter rope closing off a slew of fire trucks and prowl cars. The mounds hissed and spat embers. Uniformed deputies lounged around and watched.

We got out and walked over to them; a tall man noticed us and ambled up. He said, "Captain Parker and Miss Lake, right? Who else could it be at this time of night?"

Bill flashed his badge; the captain introduced himself as Bob Boyd and passed us calling cards and BIG BOB BOYD FOR SHERIFF campaign buttons. I pinned on my button; Big Bob all but swooned.

He said, “Here’s what we’ve got, and here’s the consensus. We’ve got eight dead at three sites, with three holed-up winos fried in this Bund hall. We think some ex-caped wetbacks from some farms south of here are good for all three jobs. They took off just preceding the blasts, so that has to be it. We tossed out a dragnet right quick, and we snagged a hinky Mex named Mondo Díaz at the Bakersfield bus depot. We ran a subversive-sheet check on him, and damned if he didn’t get nailed by your police department just recently. He bailed into Federal custody, hightailed to Mexico, then made his way back here. He’s not a righteous wet—but we think he’s the ringleader of these bomb-tossing sacks of shit. We leaned on him at the county jail, and he admitted as much. He’s in with some Nazi beaners called the Sinarquistas, so why they’d want to up and bomb a Bund hall, I’ll never know.”

Bill said, “Plant Mr. Díaz in a sweatbox, Captain. I’d like to have a few words with him.”

—

The All-Star PD hits Kern County. Big Bob Boyd proves himself a most gracious host.

The Sheriff’s Detective Bureau hopped at midnight. Off-duty deputies showed up for the show. They brought their wives and girlfriends; they were all Big Bob supporters and inclined to think I was swell. The incumbent Sheriff, “Kickback” Kit Denkins, was a notorious no-goodnik. He took bribes from crooked building contractors and solicited high school girls for their soiled underwear. Big Bob was running an insurgent campaign against him. He called up a group of his partisans and suggested a hoedown. The bite was a dollar a head. All the proceeds went to his campaign pot. Big Bob provided corn liquor and potato chips. Plus a gallery peek at the Bill Parker–Mondo Díaz tiff.

The gang convened in sweatbox #2. A see-thru mirror framed booth #1. I dropped a ten-spot in the kitty and drew a round of applause. It was an SRO crowd: eighteen deputies and their dates. Big Bob joined his fans. He jacked up the volume on the wall speaker and supplied us with swell front-row seats.

Bill and Mondo Díaz sat at the #1 table. Why mince words? Díaz looked beat to shit. The gang tossed back corn-liquor shots. A preperformance hush enveloped us. We crowded up to the see-thru and watched.

Bill dispensed commiseration. Those hayseed cops sure thumped you. I don’t feature that, myself. Mondo, you’re looking at a gas-chamber bounce. We’ve got you for eight counts of Murder One, easy. Plus capital-charge sedition and treason. You’ll suck gas inside six months.

The gang cheered. “Suck gas” spurred the ovation.

Díaz said, “Your mama sucks Chihuahua dicks.”

The gang booed. “Chihuahua dicks” spurred the response.

Bill pulled out his pocket flask and urged Díaz to take a few pops. The gang rumbled; they admired the ploy; the city-slicker cop knew his stuff.

Díaz chugalugged Old Crow. Bill spoon-fed him. Things look grim, Mondo. I won't lie to you there. One hand washes the other. There's a few things I'd like to know about Salvy Abascal and the Sinarquistas. If you'll provide a few answers, I'll see what I can do for you.

Díaz said, "Okay, *pendejo.* Ask me something simple first, so I don't get all gun-shy talking to you."

Bill slid his cigarettes across the table. He smiled as Díaz lit up.

So, *Mondo.* Tell me this, *Mondo.* Why would a right-wing cabal like the Sinarquistas blow up a Bund hall? I'm perplexed, *Mondo.* I'm out of my depth here. Call me a *pendejo*—but you're taking me beyond my ken.

Díaz killed off the flask. Entranced cops pressed up to the see-thru and left nose prints on the glass.

"Here's your primer on the new dialectic, *pendejo.* Sinarquismo's left as much as it's right. Suppose I told you *La Causa*'s financed by the NKVD, out of Moscow? Suppose I told you the Hitler boys contribute to the Redshirt Brigade in Ensenada? Suppose I quote this Greek guy, Aristophanes? He said, 'Whirl is king.' "

A fat deputy said, "What's 'dialectic'?"

Big Bob said, "This guy's the guy talking Greek, not that Aristo-whoever guy."

Mrs. Big Bob said, "This is wearing me thin. Bob, you get in there and phone-book that creep."

I said, "Hush, now. You don't get a show like this every day."

Bill enacted deep befuddlement. I can't piece this together, *Mondo.* I know you went to this German technical college. You're educated, so you know all about the Greeks and all this other highbrow shit. I've read your green sheet, *Mondo.* You can't be a Red and a Nazi at the same time. Any fool with a high-school education knows that much.

Üntermensch Bill baited the hook. *Übermensch* Mondo snapped up the bait.

"Here's the thing about History, *pendejo.* Every so often someone comes around and explains that what's what ain't what. This is by way of saying that Salvy Abascal gave a talk at Dresden Poly. It was pro-Nazi, which wowed my little clique. He had this Jewish pal named Meyer Gelb, which conversely ticked us off. He explained the rudiments of totalitarianism, which allowed us to see that the Reds saw things the same way we did. He pointed out that Jew Hatred and Workers Unite was all the same shuck. Do you know what 'prescience' is, *pendejo*? It's when you predict the future and it comes true, against all empirical evidence. Which is by way of saying that Salvy predicted this war we're in, along with a U.S. and Russian victory, which necessitates the need for a potently inclusive new totalitarian alliance to surmount the inevitable postwar chaos and monkey-wrench the world's new idiot taste for democracy."

Bill said, "I read a Federal subversive summary. It described a conference, along the lines of what you just described. I'm wondering if you were there."

"Of course I was there. I was there when they signed the Magna Carta and when Moses parted the Red Sea. I was there when your *puto* forefathers signed the Declaration of Interdependence. You're wearing this look I've seen before, *pendejo.* You just figured out that what's what ain't what, and I'm not just some dumb pachuco."

Bill said, "Do minutes for the conference exist?"

Díaz laughed. "They're a myth. They're like *Das Kapital* and the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion.* They're some jive that the great unwashed thinks is real."

"The gold, Mondo? What about that? Is that just a pipe dream, too?"

"It's all a pipe dream. It's a nightmare, and nobody knows where the goddamn gold is. Ask Salvy and that cracker pal of his. For all I know, they cashed it in for S & H Green Stamps."

Big Bob said, "Miss Lake's right. You don't get a show like this every day."

125

(SAN FRANCISCO, 10:00 A.M., 4/9/42)

Blanchard crowed and groused. The Fed-probe acquittals. His domestic woes. He blew steam from Manzanar to Golden Gate Park.

"Whiskey Bill and Elmer J. That's the word. They pulled some mischief in the Fed vault. Nobody doubts that Bill Parker's smart. But he's out in the open with Kay now, and that ticks me off."

Ashida ignored him. They sat outside Kezar Stadium. Leander Frechette picked the spot. Leander will walk up. He'll ask how things stand. They'll trek memory lane.

The Alameda County Jail. Remember, Leander? You, Fritz Eckelkamp, and Wayne Frank Jackson. Your screwball alliance. You conceived a daring gold heist.

Blanchard arranged the meet. He called Frechette last night. Leander was affable. Blanchard assured him—this ain't a roust.

It's a waltz. He'll know that. His criminal actions preceded all legal cutoff dates. How's this shit stand now? That's easy. Chaos has intervened.

Blanchard said, "Parker's a pervdog. I respect him, but I don't like him. He's out to set the white man's world record for entrapping college girls. First Kay, then Big Joan. The war put a bug up his ass. His libido's overheated. He's been running roughshod since Pearl."

Ashida ignored him. Chaos has intervened. He sent the forged minutes out. Constanza Lazaro-Schmidt will receive them. Dudley Smith will read them. Dudley might note a grievous narrative lapse.

Elmer called him this morning. Elmer sobbed and begged forgiveness. He'd just heard a radio broadcast.

Eight dead in Kern County. Three sabotage attacks. Farmworker saboteurs. Mondo Díaz, in custody. Díaz, the ringleader. Wetbacks for the drudge work.

The report stunned Ashida. He'd interviewed Díaz at Hollenbeck Station. Elmer sobbed. He said he'd withheld crucial drift. The East L.A. sweep. Elmer and Buzz Meeks squeeze Frankie Carbajal. Frankie reveals the sabotage plan.

He reveals the plan under duress.

Escaped wetbacks. All torch men. Salvador A. was behind it. Dud S. didn't know shit. Elmer and Buzz withheld the lead. They'd gone rogue. The lead was their hole card. It's their redneck mea culpa now. Eight people got blown up.

Elmer sobbed and hung up the phone. Kay called a few minutes later. She'd been up to Kern. Bill Parker braced Mondo Díaz. Mondo riffed dialectic and finked the deal out.

The *Kameraden* pulled the sabotage. Salvador A. ordered it. He's Comrade Number One. That *puto* Irishman didn't know shit.

Chaos intervenes. It's hubris ascendant. Comrade Ashida perpetrates it. He plays a hunch based on a specious assumption. Salvador is not *El Grande Jefe.* Meyer Gelb is. The faux minutes proceed off that hunch. Comrade Ashida writes as *Herr Apparatchik.*

Herr Apparatchik defames Abascal. He's a cholo chump out for the gold. *Herr Apparatchik* ignores Comrade Hanamaka's lead. Hanamaka said the big boss is a "Mexican Stalinist." Here's a revised hunch. Abascal *is* that Stalinist.

The minutes go out. They are geared to spark two confrontations. Dudley versus Abascal, Dudley versus Gelb. Chaos intervenes. Dudley reads the minutes. They contradict breaking news. *His* wetbacks as saboteurs? *Unknown* to him? He might sense Salvador's hand. He might sense Salvador as El Boss *Führer*. He might sense the document had been faked.

Chaos intervenes. Statie goons pop Dudley at his dope ranch. Dick Carlisle shot that dizzy dish to Lee Blanchard. Dudley called Jack Horrall. Chief Jack pulled strings and got him released. Dudley's on the loose now. He's a gone-rogue Army major. He'll probably run to Constanza. He'll be with her when the minutes arrive.

Herr Apparatchik. Née Comrade Ashida. He sent the minutes out precipitously. He demanded no money. He disregarded consequences. He's culpable here.

Elmer's culpable. Buzz is culpable. They should have reported the sabotage lead. Kay's the most culpable. She's their *La Jefa* and queen bee. She bends men who want to fuck her to her impervious will. She assessed him as a man who declines to fuck women and adroitly massaged his love for Dudley Smith. The minutes have gone out. Dudley will know that Comrade Ashida forged them. He has the skill. No one else does. Dudley will know that he betrayed him.

Chaos intervenes. They're closing in on the klub*haus* killer. It seems like small recompense. Jean Staley and brother Robby. Johnny Shinura, curio broker. Johnny's the Jap sword man. Who's the queer jazzman? Who's the woman who got raped?

A clean solve looms. The details remain uncertain. Chaos may subsume all resolution. Winner take nothing—if he forfeits Dudley Smith's love.

Nannies pushed strollers by. Vendors pushed food carts. Storm clouds whooshed overhead.

Blanchard nudged him. "You got tears in your eyes, Hideo."

"I thought I could have something both ways, but I forgot to consider the price."

"Welcome to the world, son. Our friend Kay taught me that selfsame thing, quite a while back."

—

They walked and talked. Kezar to the rose garden, Stanyan Street to Fell. Ladies pushing strollers gawked them. It was relative size more than race.

Ashida was small and slight. Leander loomed high and blocked out the sun. Folks called him "Skyscraper" and the "One-Man Eclipse."

He confirmed Dr. Death's chronology. He confirmed the cabal's chain of command. Salvy was the Stalinist and Top Dog Comrade. Meyer Gelb deferred to him.

Leander was affable. He worked as a longshoreman. He eschewed agitation and indulged a yen for 459 PC. He had a wife and kid here in Frisco and a wife and three kids in L.A. He kept in mail-drop touch with select comrades. He refused to name names.

They bought ice-cream bars and lounged on the grass. Blanchard lounged twenty yards back. He was the bodyguard. Ashida ran the Q & A.

"Hanamaka told me the gold has lain fallow for some time. Gelb and Abascal are the only ones who know where it is."

Leander shook his head. "I've never known Comrade Kyoho to be mistaken about anything, but I think he's wrong here. I think Wayne Frank and the Reverend Mimms might be able to give you a more recent accounting."

"Why?"

"The Rev wanted to repo the gold, and I can't say that I blame him. I'd call him the first man among us who wised up to the way life plain old is. He'd come to see the *Kameraden* as a bunch of treacherous shitbirds who'd blow the whole world up if they got half a chance. All that 1931 idealism and commitment got to be ancient history, and the Rev wanted his fair share of the gold, just like any other properly self-interested man in your run-of-the-mill democracy. He heard that the Sinarquistas and some of their satellite thugs were looking for a clubhouse rental, so he had Link Rockwell rent them the 46th Street place. Link stayed on and did some infiltration. The Rev figured Link might get some leads on the gold there, which he sure as hell did. He heard Salvy and Wayne Frank took hold of the gold, not Comrade Gelb. That's as far as the Rev takes the story, because he always busts out laughing then."

Ashida said, "That's all you know? They took possession of the gold, and that's it?"

Leander winked. "The Rev's got the storytelling prowess. He can surely tell you more."

Ashida let it go. Leander ran intractable. He held his hole cards tight.

"Jean Staley. Her brother, Robby. A Japanese curio peddler named Johnny Shinura. A purportedly homosexual jazz musician. He's tall and blond, and he has a female companion, purportedly very nervous and roughly thirty years of age. The three klub*haus* victims purportedly raped her."

Leander tossed his ice-cream stick and wiped his hands on the grass. A stroller lady strolled by. She gawked the jig and the Jap.

"Jean's brother was a homo, for what that's worth. Johnny S. was bughouse crazy, but you must already know that. I don't know any woman who got raped, but the jazz quiff has got to be Chuckie Duquesne."

126

(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 A.M., 4/10/42)

Ruth practiced. She played Sibelius and lit the whole courtyard. He recognized composers now. He heard concerto strains out here on the street.

Elmer fought the jimjams. He'd had the sweats and frets since he got the word. Eight Kern County dead. Him and Buzz could have stopped it. They held it back and covered their backsides.

He sobbed to Kay and Hideo. He sobbed to Buzz. He sobbed himself into these frets. He sat in his sled and waited out Sibelius. Don't interrupt Ruth. She'll bite your head off. She's caught the muse.

She fed her lovers cues. Morning practice meant Get Out. Elmer sat in his sled. He had a clear courtyard view. Some geek will exit her bungalow. Ruth sustained heavy bed traffic. Kay called her "relentless" and "egalitarian."

Elmer fought the frets. He fretted up the Kern County dead and Meyer Gelb. Buzz found Comrade Meyer. Buzz conceived a bold approach and pin-mapped that shitheel.

The hump lived in L.A. The hump had to. The hump attended Otto Klemperer's parties. He always arrived alone. Joan's diary stated that. How'd Gelb get to the parties? Let's try taxicabs.

Buzz called the Maestro. He laid out a line of officious shit and coaxed a list of party dates. He canvassed cab dispatchers then. He had the party dates and the Maestro's address. He checked evening pickup logs for dates going back to Pearl Harbor. He checked sixteen cab companies. Company seventeen—*tilt.*

He tagged seven parties and seven pickups in Beverly Hills. The Simon's Drive-in at Wilshire and Linden. It's a neutral pickup spot. Comrade Gelb's cautious. Comrade Gelb must live nearby.

Buzz tagged seven pickups. Buzz tagged the same hackie three of those times. Buzz braced the cat and lubed him. The hackie had good recollection. He remembered this guy. The guy had burn-scarred hands.

Buzz pounded pavement then. He made Gelb for an apartment-house dweller. The blocks south of Charleville were all house blocks. That restricted his range. He schlepped Wilshire to Charleville, Charleville to Beverly Drive. He entered apartment-house foyers. He scanned mailbox slots. He got no Meyer Gelbs and no hinky M.G.s. That approach tapped out. He ran block-to-block stakeouts then.

He car-perched and peeped doorways on Linden. He saw Gelb on stakeout night #3.

We got him pin-mapped. What's next? That's obvious. We kidnap him and turn on the heat.

Elmer eyeballed Ruth's bungalow. He had peeper tendencies. He liked to perch and watch. He saw nifty shit that way.

Sibelius diminuendoed. Babs Stanwyck breezed out Ruth's door. Note her wet hair and love-struck demeanor. *Woo-woo!* Round Heel Ruth rides both ways!

Babs breezed to her boss Packard coupe and peeled northbound. Elmer breezed into the courtyard. Ruth sat on her steps. She looked flustered and distractified.

"Sergeant Elmer has once again been lurking. It is a leitmotif with him. He lurks to allay his restlessness and to sate his curiosities. Sergeant Elmer is a voyeur. He should move to Berlin and join the Gestapo."

Elmer yukked. Ruth had that mordant streak. It played off-kilter now. She still played distractified.

"I liked the Sibelius."

"There was nothing to like. You are an undiscerning listener. Barn-dance music is more your métier."

Elmer sat down beside her. Their arms brushed. He felt tremors. Round Heel Ruth, electrizized.

"You seem shook up, sweetie. You'd think a sleepover with Babs would have you all pacified."

Ruth lit a cigarette. "I was at the Musicians' Local on Vine Street all night. I filled in for an absent first violin and recorded the third Bartók Quartet. Babs came by to pick up a book I'd borrowed, and to wash her hair. She enjoys my shampoo, more than she appreciates my prowess. You are ever the policeman, Elmer. You attribute motive in a most paranoic way."

Elmer laughed. "Let's hit the hay. It's been too long, and I've missed you."

Ruth X-ray-eyed him. "You've been crying. Your face is flushed and mottled, and your beady eyes are bloodshot. Am I the source of your tears? I would think a man as promiscuous as you would engage a woman such as I with more distanced affections."

Elmer teared up. Not that much. He was done in and sobbed out.

"I withheld a confession. Eight people died. I'm in some shit I can't step out of, in more ways than I can count.”

Ruth flicked her cigarette. It hit a wet grass strip and fizzled.

“Scheiss, eh? Are you in the *scheiss* as the Koenigs, Sandor, and I seem to be? We are facing a Federal deportation order, my callow friend. The lawyer Otto secured for us explained the motive behind it, so I will explain it to you. Your Mr. Hoover is perturbed, because our names were mentioned in a memorandum pertaining to extortion and an FBI agent under house arrest. Expulsion from the United States. Does not my *scheiss* exceed your *scheiss, mein herr*?”

Extortion. House arrest. That meant Ed the Fed Satterlee.

“I didn’t come here to brawl with you, love. I didn’t show up to compare notes on who’s got it worse, either.”

Ruth said, “You have blood on your hands. Allow me to commiserate, and add that it is not Jewish blood, and not the blood of three hundred.”

“Are we going for volume here? Is Jewish blood any better than plain old white and Mexican blood?”

Ruth wheeled and slapped him. She knocked off his hat. Her nails raked his cheek and drew blood.

—

Buzz said, “I’m going to kill him. Dudley Liam Smith, *muerto.* It’s the only way this deal makes any sense.”

Elmer relit a cigar. “This deal has never made sense, and it never will. There’s too much to it, and it goes back too far. It’s not supposed to make sense. Kay told me that, and if Kay says something, it’s true.”

Daylight stakeout. Elmer’s sled. Four eyes on 562 South Linden. This four-flat apartment house. This pink mock château. Gelb had the upstairs-left spot.

Buzz relit a cigar. “I rented a motel room, up the Ridge Route. Nice and secluded. We’ll put the blocks to El Comrade there.”

Elmer said, “Bring your pet scorpion. One look at him, and Gelb’ll shit his britches.”

Buzz scoped Elmer’s cheek. “Ellen clawed you, right? I’ve seen a couple of her pictures. She’s got that caged-tigress thing going.”

Elmer tiger-growled. “Girlfriend #4 scraped me. *She’s* your jungle cat.”

Buzz said, “I mixed a terp and chloral hydrate cocktail. We’ll sedate Gelb and toss him in the trunk.”

Elmer blew smoke rings. “You don’t seem too upset about those dead folks up in Kern.”

Buzz said, “Easy come, easy go. It’s not like losing your own near and dear.”

—

Elmer dozed. He dipped to some torrid locale. Jungle Cat Ruth scratched him. Jungle Cat Annie loved him. Jungle Cats Brenda and Ellen tossed him out in the rain. Jungle Cat Kay took him home to her glade.

Some stray cat nudged him. Elmer blinked and opened his eyes.

Buzz went *Looky, looky.* He pointed across the street and up. Frankie Carbajal ambled toward Comrade Gelb's place. He wore a Sir Guy shirt and loose flannels. Note the creepy-crawler tennis shoes and gun bulge.

Elmer rubbed his eyes. It's no mirage. Frankie's out of custody and up from Mexico. El Whipout Man de Sinarquismo. He's loose in Beverly Hills.

Buzz said, "We'll give him five minutes. If he comes out with Gelb, we'll grab them from behind."

Elmer said, "We'll work singles otherwise. I'll flip you for who takes Gelb."

Frankie jogged up to Gelb's door. He knocked. The door stayed shut. Frankie whipped out a set of lock picks. He had fast hands. He picked the lock and crept in. The door slammed shut.

Buzz dug out a quarter and flipped it. Elmer called heads. The quarter hit tails. Elmer went *Shit.*

They timed Frankie's visit. Elmer orbed his wristwatch. It ticked off two minutes flat. The door popped open. Frankie stumble-walked back out. He looked all of a sudden fright-wigged and racked with the frets.

He stumble-walked down the stairs and weaved back toward Wilshire. Elmer and Buzz piled out and foot-dogged him. They closed the gap. They closed too fast. Frankie looked back and saw them.

Buzz pulled his roscoe. Elmer pulled, likewise. Frankie pulled his waistband piece. They all got their bearings. They all dug in and aimed straight and threw shots all at once.

Frankie stood his ground. He popped two rounds. They hit parked cars and zinged wide. Elmer and Buzz ran up, shooting. Buzz cracked this Chevy's windshield and tore up the ragtop. Elmer nailed Frankie, waist-high. Frankie pitched ass over elbows and popped shots at the sky.

Elmer and Buzz ran up. Frankie sprawled, supine. Elmer kicked his gun hand. Frankie spit blood and dropped the piece. Looky-loos craned out their windows. What's this big noise about?

Buzz looked around. Frankie bit his lips and pawed at his hip wound. Elmer went *Aw-oh.* An old lady across the street screamed.

Elmer reholstered. Buzz grabbed Frankie's neck scruff and dragged him down the Wilshire-flank alley. Frankie wailed and flailed. Buzz looked around. Parked cars and hedgerows covered him. He shot Frankie three times in the head.

Muzzle job. Frankie spilled the sabotage lead. Dead men tell no—

Elmer wheeled and ran. He ran to the mock château and stumble-tripped up the stairs. He kicked the door off the hinge plates. It caved in and crashed upside Meyer Gelb's legs.

He's flat on his back. He's been tortured. There's congealed cuts on his arms and his neck. There's a bullet hole in his forehead. It's small caliber. The blood's dried maroon.

Elmer prowled the room. The walls were plastered with pix of Boss Man Hitler and Butcher Stalin. Note the scrawled-up margins. It's all weird shit about fires and storms.

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(LA PAZ, 9:00 A.M., 4/11/42)

The plaza newsstand hawked the L.A. papers. The *Herald* headlined the Fed-probe acquittals. They ran the snuff piece, page two.

BEVERLY HILLS SHOOT-OUT! POLICE KILL SUBVERSIVE! MAN SLAYS COMMUNIST BOSS!

Dudley stood by Constanza's PO box. He read the snuff piece three times. Sid Hudgens inked it. Jackson and Meeks blew up Frankie Carbajal. Frankie torture-slashed and shot Meyer Gelb. "'Gelb snuff open and shut,' B.H. cops state."

Constanza was late. Like Salvy was late. Like Welles was late. People stood him up now. People sandbagged him and jailed him. People ignored his phone calls.

Hideo was nowhere. He was AWOL himself. He'd bolted the squadroom and relinquished his command. Jack Horrall bailed him out. The Staties seized his biz fronts. Jack told him to lay low in Baja. "We're holding your job for you, Dud. The PD's your home, and always will be. Poke some señoritas, and work on your tan."

Constanza was late. She said she'd meet him at 9:00. She was expecting a package. From Russia, no less.

From a "Comrade Dimitri." A package of "grave import." Constanza spoke in riddles now. She ignored him in bed. His squadroom outburst and jail stint provoked the retreat. She patronized him. She urged him to buck up and fly right.

Dudley chain-smoked. He reread the *Herald* piece. Sid Hudgens, ubiquitous. Sid's scandal rag slandered him. It was true drift, regardless. He called Sid and left a message with the copy chief. Sid ignored his call.

Constanza showed. She ran a sorry-I'm-late number and kissed him on the cheek. *Put some oomph in it, you chola whore. I'm still Dudley Smith.*

She unlocked her box. Two packages were crammed in. One rolled package. One flat package. The rolled package was V-mail-stickered and Russian-postage-stamped. It was addressed to Comrade C. Lazaro-Schmidt.

The flat package was ruler-marked. Straight edges, right angles, no cursive exposed. It was sent from Bev's Switchboard. It's the minutes, dear Lord.

—

They read in Constanza's bedroom. The text was Russian and German. Constanza was fluent in both. The paper looked authentic. The seal looked authentic. The Nazi eagle and Russian bear were conjoined as one beast. The Wolf disapproved.

Constanza read him through the text. Inconsistencies accrued. Dudley considered them. Constanza read him through again. Dudley nailed a basic falsehood.

The text read wrong, overall. It stooped to defamation. It defamed Salvy Abascal as it exalted Meyer Gelb. It plainly stated Salvy's presence at the confab. That was patently untrue. Dudley plumbed connective threads and nailed the source.

Joan Conville. She reads a tract Salvy wrote. It was sent to the klub*haus.* It critiqued more than praised the Baja confab. The minutes ridiculed Salvy. He loved the British monarchy. He hated the Irish. He despised Catholicism. He wished to appropriate the Baja rackets. He needed a ruthless American front man for this.

Joan reads the tract. She tells him about it. She tells Hideo Ashida. The basic falsehoods of these minutes germinate there.

The minutes have been forged. They were retroactively composed and geared to provoke confrontation. Salvy is underestimated. The forger lays out divisive fodder. He seeks to spark a Smith-Abascal war. His duplicitous design reveals itself here:

The sabotage incursion. It violates D. L. Smith's no-sabotage decree. Salvy declines to ride north with the wetback saboteurs. It underlines D. L. Smith's jailhouse revelation. Salvy is Comrade #1.

He is locked-in fucking certain of it. These minutes were composed and sent before the attacks. They exposit a preattack assertion.

Meyer Gelb is Comrade #1. He believes it. Hideo Ashida believes it. A second confrontation is provoked here. It's D. L. Smith versus Comrade Gelb. The forger cannot foresee the attacks or Comrade Gelb's death. Genius is one thing. Prescience is another. The minutes are brilliantly conceived and executed. The technical skill. The boldness and glibness. Hideo Ashida forged the minutes. Hideo Ashida betrayed him and trashed his deep love.

Dudley said, "They're a fake. It's Hideo Ashida's work. He's the only one capable of it."

Constanza said, “Betrayal does not occur in a vacuum. Ashida had to have help. You will notice that my brother is not mentioned in this document. The omission is deliberate. Ashida wants to protect Juan. First he rapes me and pimps me to his *Kameraden.* Now he attempts to rape you. Dry your wet eyes, my frail darling. Kill Juan in my name. Kill him before I cease to love you.”

—

El Governor always worked late. Constanza told him that. He worked at home and at the Baja Government Palace. Go by the palace. Look for a fourth-floor light burning. He might be there. He might be at home.

Dudley drove by the palace. No fourth-floor light burned. He brought his gold bayonet. Constanza decreed death by blade.

They’d sniffed cocaine and made love. She encouraged him. She urged him to seek her favor and atone for his recent sloth. She bundled him off with the Wolf.

Dudley drove by the house. Juan’s office light burned. A winding footpath led to a backdoor. Juan kept it unlocked. Constanza told him that.

He parked streetside. He consulted the Wolf. They discussed political and romantic alliance. Constanza had coupled with Salvy and Kyoho Hanamaka. She admitted the liaisons. She did not withhold love affairs past. Lovers past withheld from her. They withheld the truth of the gold. She knew no more than he did. The Wolf told him that.

Dudley left the car unlocked. The Wolf walked point. He sniffed the footpath and low-growled. They hooked around to the back door. Dudley swung the bayonet and mauled rosebushes and shrubs.

The door stood ajar. They entered the house. Turn right and then left. Constanza told him that. “Juan never shuts his office door. He’ll look up from his desk and see you. I know him as a sister and lover does.”

They followed her dictates. They stepped into the office. Constanza failed them here. The office was lit bright. There was no Juan.

Dudley dropped the bayonet. The Wolf cocked his head. Dudley walked to Juan’s desk. A note had been placed on the blotter. Juan employed an elegant cursive. It covered a single sheet.

April 11, 1942

Dear Major Smith,

She will convince you to kill me sooner or later. Having no wish to die, I have resigned my governor’s position and have flown to Havana. I will remain there for the war’s duration. You have mutilated me, but I will not let you kill me.

Terry Lux has allayed the marks of your mutilation, and we had quite the chat about you. I brought up your union with Constanza; Terry found the notion perturbing.

"Those two only love efficaciously," he said. "Dudley must be after more than Constanza's favors. Don't tell me. He's heard about the gold, and has fixed upon your luscious sister as integral to the prize."

We laughed ourselves silly. I won't shilly-shally here—Terry's a long-standing *Kamerad.* He's heard about the gold. He's coveted it, and dismissed it as so much piffle in much the same manner as the rest of us have. Terry turned serious at this point. He said, "What was Constanza after? She's as jaded on the gold front as you and I."

I said, "She wants Dudley to kill me." Terry replied, "Go somewhere safe, Juan. Dud will go to outrageous lengths to appease women. He's quite the child in that regard."

I'll close now, and head to the airfield. Has Constanza told you that I raped her and took her as my incestuous child bride? The truth is altogether more subtly complicitous than that.

All best,

J. Lazaro-Schmidt

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

(LOS ANGELES, 8:00 A.M., 4/12/42)

Claire was off at Mass. She intended to pick Joan Klein up at Otto's place and bring her back here for a visit. Young Joan had a surprise for us; it entailed the piano in Claire's suite. I had joyous notions about that surprise—but the swirl of what I now call All of It ruled my thoughts.

I enjoyed the view from Claire's terrace. The setting was lovely; the passing parade was provocative. Terry Lux walked Saul Lesnick by a few minutes ago; a doddering Jim Davis had preceded them. All of It. Supporting cast glimpses. Joan Conville's All One Story.

Elmer, Hideo, and I conferred on the phone, at least once a day. I was kept up to speed on All of It and shared the information with Bill. Meyer Gelb, once Fritz Eckelkamp, had been murdered. Elmer and Buzz shot and killed the fleeing Frankie Carbajal. The Beverly Hills PD made Frankie for the homicide. Elmer saw the body and thinks otherwise.

The corpse was stiff-cold. The torture cuts had congealed. Elmer talked to Dr. Nort Layman. Dr. Nort had performed the postmortem; he tagged the time of death as 2:00 a.m. Elmer found the body at 11:30. Dr. Nort removed a .25-caliber bullet. The cause of death: one small-bore gunshot wound to the head. The postmortem exonerated Frankie Carbajal. The Beverly Hills cops liked him, regardless. A Mex fascist kills a Communist. Cops slay the slayer. It played nicely open-and-shut.

The Carbajal shooting troubled Elmer. It came on the heels of the sabotage revelations. Frankie had pretipped Elmer and Buzz. They sat on the lead. Then Frankie appears and enlivens their stakeout. Elmer may confirm my hunch or play it mum. Buzz killed Frankie in cold blood. It silenced Frankie. He could not snitch the held-back lead now. His death bought Elmer and Buzz a skate.

What they hath wrought. What we have all precipitated.

The forged minutes have gone out. Constanza Lazaro-Schmidt must have received them; Dudley must have read them. How will he react? The minutes pushed him toward Meyer Gelb and Salvador Abascal. Dudley could not have killed Gelb. He was ensconced in Baja and did not know where to find him. Gelb was killed by a small-bore weapon. Dudley employed big-bore weaponry.

Thad Brown passed Bill a tip. Jack Horrall had issued an ultimatum. Dudley has one week to turn himself in or suffer PD-sanctioned reprisals. Call-Me-Jack has sought outside-agency help here. A Federal posse stands on call. Postal inspectors and Treasury agents. Ex–Texas Rangers. The hard boys who took down the Ma Barker mob, along with Bonnie and Clyde.

What fate hath wrought. What we have all precipitated.

Dudley might go after Salvador. Dudley might deem the minutes a ruse and comport circumspectly. Dudley might surmise that Hideo Ashida forged the minutes. What Hideo hath wrought, in the name of love. What early-wartime L.A. has done to us all.

I heard voices out on the walkway. Young Joan sounded gleeful; Claire kept going *Ssshhh, people sleep late on Sunday.* The terrace door swung open; Joan saw me and crashed into me and waved a poster tube.

I noted the V-mail sticker and Russian postage stamps; I saw that the tube had been resent by Constanza Lazaro-Schmidt. Confluence. Comrade Shostakovich to a fascist seductress to Maestro Klemperer. What this war hath wrought. Otto could now upstage Maestro Toscanini and stage his benefit show.

We ran inside. We crash-landed the piano and pulled out the score. I sight-read my way through it and isolated the best three-handed part. It was the tanks-approaching-Leningrad passage that Otto had already played for me. Claire arrayed the appropriate sheets on the music stand; Joan sat down at the bench between us. We were the just-formed Dry-out Farm Trio. We poised our hands over the keys. Claire gave the downbeat.

Boom, boom, boom. Nazi tanks circle Leningrad. It was bluntly ominous music that made us all roar. We hit true notes and flubbed notes and laughed through it all. *Boom, boom, boom.* What life hath wrought. How did I get this pigshit lucky? I'm a rogue prairie girl from Sioux Falls.

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(LOS ANGELES, 1:00 P.M., 4/12/42)

Coffee klatch. Crash Squad alumni, at loose ends. Lyman's back room, now moribund.

The alums kicked their chairs back and got cozy. Ashida, Lee Blanchard, Buzz Meeks.

Buzz sipped coffee. "BHPD likes Carbajal for the Gelb job. Elmer and me are breathing a big sigh of relief."

Blanchard sipped coffee. "Dr. Nort disagrees."

Ashida sipped coffee. "I gave Elmer Frechette's lead on Chuckie Duquesne. He's on his way up to the Musicians' Local right now."

Buzz said, "Elmer's a busy bee. He told me he went by Johnny Shinura's building and did some shinnying up a drainpipe. Johnny's roost had been cleaned out, but he found two bedrolls on the third floor. He figures Johnny and Chuckie were hiding out there, up until the Feds seized the place."

Blanchard lit a cigarette. "If Chuckie's our queer white boy, then who's the woman who got raped? Joe Hayes says that's our motive, right there."

The back room oozed sloth. Ashida tidied up. He straightened the report boards and emptied ashtrays. He tossed stale cold cuts. He dumped booze empties.

Buzz lit a cigar. "I caught Jack Horrall and Brenda A. going at it here. The '36 Olympics were on the radio. Jack's a floor man from way back."

Blanchard said, "Hideo's due back at Manzanar. I'm driving him up."

Buzz tossed a paper sack. Ashida snagged it on the fly. Buzz said, "I almost forgot. Elmer snatched this from Shinura's place. He wanted Hideo to see it."

Ashida emptied the sack. Leather strangling gloves fell out.

Black leather. Fetishistic. A Weimar Berlin and red-light Tokyo item. Palm-weighted. One size fits all.

Buzz whistled. Blanchard went *oooh-la-la.* Ashida held the gloves up.

"They explain the single-hand-span bruises on the victims' necks. All the killer had to do was apply moderate pressure. The palm weights would do the rest."

Buzz said, "Hideo's theorizing here."

Blanchard said, "As theories go, I like it. It fits Hideo's man-woman theory. The man holds the ice pick and keeps our guys immobilized, while the woman applies the elbow grease."

Buzz waved his cigar. "I'll bite. But who is this crazy ginch?"

The Teletype tapped-tapped and furled paper. Blanchard tore it off the spool.

"M. L. Mimms is back from his rouse-the-natives tour. Two airport cops saw him get off the late New York flight. The Navy JA's kicked Link Rockwell loose. He was on the same flight as the Rev."

—

He saw Dudley everywhere. *Cri de coeur.* He saw him conjured and unbidden. All men looked like him. No man looked like him. *Je m'excuse, pour ma trahison.*

Ashida cabbed southbound. The hackie *You're a Jap*'d him. Ashida shut his eyes and saw Dudley. The cab passed through darktown. *Je ne te verrai pas blessé.*

Kay pledged him the Mimms interview. It secured their forgery deal. She stipulated a co-interviewer and suggested Elmer. He tried to find Elmer. He called the DB and Brenda's house. Elmer was out. He called Kay's place and got no answer. He tried the Musicians' Local. He asked if a Sergeant Jackson had been by. Sergeant Jackson was looking for a horn man named Chuckie Duquesne.

The clerk said, "No, but that's an odd coincidence. An Army major named Smith called and asked for Chuckie's address, which I sure don't have. This major was some mick with a brogue. He told me a nutso story about how he identified Chuckie from some smut film that Orson Welles showed him. I told him Chuckie's a clandestine sort of guy, but he'll be gigging at the Taj Mahal tonight. Orson Welles himself. Don't that take all?"

The hackie cruised Central Avenue. They hit a midday traffic lull. Ashida steered him by the klub*haus.* It was a flat vacant lot now. Jordan High footballers scrimmaged. They were colored. The white coach looked like Dudley Smith.

The hackie U-turned back to Central. There's the jazz strip. Club Alabam, Port Afrique, Club Zombie. The façades have been refitted. Rioters had torched cars and business fronts. He killed two of them. Dudley Smith killed many more.

The cab dropped him at 48th Street. The Congregation of the Congo hogged half a block. A wide storefront with wide picture windows. Easel-propped window art.

Colored pilgrims in Africa. They rode lions and zebras and boiled white folks alive. The Rev offered steerage and deluxe passage rates. The USS *Negro* sailed monthly.

Ashida walked in. White janitors dusted the pews and swept the aisles. The Rev and Link Rockwell stood by the pulpit. Link wore Navy khakis. Both men smoked corncob pipes.

They saw Ashida. Looks flew, bilateral. *He's that Jap cop.*

Ashida walked up. Both men grinned. Both men proffered handshakes. Both men jut-jawed their pipes.

Rockwell said, "Leander told us you might drop by."

The Rev said, "Dr. Ashida's hipped on the gold. I don't think I'm being precipitous by stating that. Will you give him a gander, Link?"

Rockwell went *After you.* Ashida trudged a short hallway. The Rev trailed him. Rockwell opened a closet door and pulled a light cord.

Hosanna. At long last. Come let us adore it. Behold the sacred vault. It's a good-sized closet. Gold bars are stacked floor to chest-high.

The Rev chortled. "Too bad it's not real. If you've got a moment, Link will elaborate."

Rockwell said, "As Leander told you, the Rev had me infiltrate the klub*haus.* I made friends with the late Frankie Carbajal, who had developed quite a dislike for his onetime *hermano,* Salvador Abascal, along with his close friend, Wayne Frank Jackson. Frankie coveted the gold, which was then believed to be in the possession of the late Meyer Gelb and Señor Abascal. The late Frankie put together some leads and learned that the gold was stashed in a bank safe-deposit vault in San Diego. The Rev and I brought in Ed Satterlee then. Ed secured a seizure writ that allowed him to secure the gold and sequester it in a nearby warehouse. I flew the gold up to L.A., and the Rev brought in a metallurgist to weigh the bars and calculate their value. He was the one who determined that they were all fake."

The Rev kicked at the bars. The Rev jabbed his pipe at Ashida.

"Cast iron, and thick-gold-plated. Formed to exactly resemble and weigh the same as solid-gold bars. Even the mint markings match, down to a tee. The bars were designed to fool the naked eye, and no more than that."

Ashida grabbed a bar and hefted it. He'd held a real bar. The fake bar was indistinguishable.

"The robbery itself. The chain of possession and levels of dispersal. Did factionalism occur? The robbery preceded all known accounts of the forming of the *Kameraden.* I have a well-developed theory, and I'm wondering if you'll confirm or refute it."

The Rev winked. Link Rockwell winked. Mr. Moto's got the floor. Both men jut-jawed their pipes.

"Leander walked the bars off the train. He portrayed the dumb Negro kid. The Reverend Mimms portrayed a colored sleeping-car porter. Kyoho Hanamaka portrayed a Japanese chauffeur, and Wayne Frank Jackson portrayed a white swell, perched in a limousine. Salvador portrayed a Mexican youth, hovering in the background. Skin color as disguise. Racial prejudice as a means of obfuscation. The switch was accomplished in that manner."

The Rev bowed. "You left out Eddie Leng and Don Matsura. They were in on the job. They played Oriental train-yard workers. They also helped out with the escapes and the track-switch snafus."

Rockwell said, "Otherwise, you're right with Eversharp."

Ashida said, "The initial cadre of *Kameraden* was formed at Dresden Polytechnic. Kyoho Hanamaka underplayed its importance to me. Abascal gave a speech, and Carbajal, Pimentel, Jamie, and Hayes heard the message. The Spanish Civil War loomed. The big war loomed, and Salvador saw it as a fait accompli. He prophesied the Hitler-Stalin pact and Hitler's ultimate abrogation. The idea of a left-right postwar alliance took hold and flourished intellectually. The initial heist conspirators—Eckelkamp-Gelb, Wayne Frank, Leander, Salvador, Hanamaka, the Reverend Mimms, Leng, and Matsura—were watching gold prices escalate and waiting out the statute of limitations on the robbery. The statute clock stopped on May 18, 1940. The original conspirators were caught up in the crazy politics of upcoming war, but not to the extent of the Dresden Poly boys. The boys had been to Spain, the Fatherland, and Russia. Kyoho and Salvador had spent time there, and forged connections. High-level Nazis and Soviets knew the war would go bad for them, as early as the late '30s. Salvador and Kyoho exploited their fear, and proposed the Baja conference of November '40. The gold lured the bigwigs in. They capitulated to Abascal's vision of postwar alliance, but the gold cinched the deal."

The Rev bowed. Rockwell said, "Right with Eversharp."

Ashida said, "You were perpetrating a shell game. The gold achieved the status of an open secret and a wet dream. Your informal alliance grew as the war loomed that much more palpably close. Kyoho and Meyer Gelb went back to the heist and the fire. They were Communists and arsonists and God knows what else together. Saul Lesnick signed on from the Left. He was in Gelb's CP cell. Ed Satterlee played tangential to the heist. He signed on in a fix-it man capacity. Jim Davis signed on from the Right. Salvador killed priest-killers at Meyer's behest. It all blew chaotically out of proportion. Idiot ideologues shot their mouths off, and rumors spread. Terry Lux, Lin Chung, Wendell Rice, and George Kapek. The Lazaro-Schmidts, Villareal-Caiz, crazy Bundists, Reds, and Sinarquistas. Come, one and all. We'll survive this war or we won't. The bigwigs were over in Russia and Germany, engaged in a fight for their everyday survival. They had no idea that the original conspirators had no intention of sharing the gold with them, after postwar gold prices had skyrocketed. Factionalism and personal rivalries raged within the original robbery band. Rancor fell short of fatality. The chain of possession shifted along those lines as gold prices and war catastrophe escalated. Salvador Abascal succeeded Meyer Gelb as the *Kameraden*'s top dog. The title is surely meaningless, if illustrative of how deep this self-deluded madness goes. Salvador got the job because he was in the original robbery band and because he recruited the Dresden Poly boys. The Nazi bigwigs loved him because they thought he was a fascist. The Soviet bigwigs loved him because they considered him a Red, and because he'd slaughtered Trotskyites. The Rev's got his back-to-Africa con. Gelb was extorting Jewish refugees that the *Kamerad*-Nazis had cut loose. You're all criminals first, and ideologues a distant second. You'll split the gold on Armistice Day, and you'll sell out the comrades overseas to the highest intelligence-agency bidder."

The Rev went *whew.* Rockwell wiped his face with a handkerchief.

Ashida wiped his face. "Here's a prudent guess. Wayne Frank shipped the real gold to Switzerland, right after the Baja wingding."

The Rev said, "Mr. and Mrs. Ashida didn't raise any dumb kids."

Rockwell said, "I met some real hot dogs at the wingding. I got Ernst Kaltenbrunner and Anastas Mikoyan's autographs."

The Rev jabbed his pipe. "Take a bar with you, Doctor. Makes a swell paperweight."

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(LOS ANGELES, 4:00 P.M., 4/12/42)

Peep job. Girlfriend #4 evinced hinky behavior. That mandates brainwork and eyeball scrutiny.

Elmer peeped Ruth's courtyard. He car-lounged. He popped bennies and gargled Old Crow. 1 plus 1 equals 2. He pondered a quick-toss B and E.

He'd gone by the Musicians' Local. A clerk fed him a hot lead on Chuckie Duquesne. Chuckie, aka "Kid Lightning." He was gigging at the Taj Mahal tonight.

The Taj. A *coon*verted garage at 28th and Budlong. He schmoozed the clerk and got her phone number. She just *loooooved* policemen. He brought up his friend Ruth Szigeti. She played the violin. She recorded a Bartók piece, here at the Local. That was three nights back. The quartet worked dusk to dawn.

The clerk went *nix.* She worked the late shift that night. No such quartet passed through.

That's 0 plus 1 equals 1. Add this to that:

Ruth lied to him. Ruth came off flustered that last time they gassed. He talked to Nort Layman. Dr. Nort autopsied Meyer Gelb. Dr. Nort confirmed his I Was There/I Saw The Stiff call.

Gelb was cold. Frankie Carbajal didn't snuff him. Nort fixed the TOD as 2:00 a.m. The torture cuts were inflicted postmurder. Said cuts were all fussy. It felt like a squeamish-woman job. The small-bore gun, the cuts, the prissy gestalt. *Cherchez la fucking femme.*

1 plus 1 equals 2. 2 plus 2 equals 4. Gelb was a shakedown man. He extorted Ruth and her refugee chums. He victimized Ruth. La Ruth brooked no shit from man or beast. That's 4 plus 4 equals 8. 8 equals confirm or refute.

Bennies and booze equals pins and needles and juiced-up intent. Elmer got out and breezed through the courtyard. It was pin-drop quiet. Ruth's door was locked.

He got out his pick set. He pulled a thin-edge pick and jabbed the keyhole.

He pushed deep and rode the door in.

He shut the door. The front room looked okay. No hink details jabbed him. He walked through the kitchen. It smelled like fried eggs. Ruth left her breakfast dishes out. No hink details jabbed him.

He shinnied through the bedroom and checked out the porch. A taut clothesline ran through it. Damp clothes were pinned on.

Two brassieres. One camisole. One pinned-up white blouse. Spots down the front of it. Almost removed. Blood red fades to pale pink.

Elmer cut back to the bedroom. He'd slept with Ruth here. He knew the layout. He went straight for the one chest of drawers.

The top drawer featured underwear. He ran a hand through it. The middle drawer featured scarves and folded skirts. He ran a hand through it. His hand hit metal. He pulled a small revolver out.

A purse gun. .25-caliber. A five-shot cylinder. 1 plus 1 equals 2.

Elmer sniffed the barrel. He caught cordite fumes. He broke the cylinder. He saw one shell gone.

The front door jiggled. Stacked heels tapped the floor. He caught cigarette smoke and bath scent.

She walked straight to the bedroom. He gave her a heartbeat to see him. She stopped short. He turned around.

She wore a flower-print dress and a mousy cardigan. He held up the gun. She grabbed an ashtray off the bookcase and crushed her cigarette.

"So?"

"So, why?"

"So, what can one more death mean to me now?"

Elmer shook his head. "You'll have to do better than that. I don't want to hear 'the war made me do it.' "

Ruth said, "He called me and ordered me to his apartment. He ordered me to lure Otto Klemperer into my bed and make him admit his Communist Party allegiance. I told him that he had created enough chaos, and condemned him for the idiotic ideals his idiotic alliance had foisted upon us. I was enraged in that moment. I demanded the gold that I had heard so many rumors of. I told him that I would use it to ransom Jews out of Germany. He said, 'Why should I care about Jews?' I knew he was Fritz Eckelkamp then, and that was when I shot him."

She was touch-me close. He smelled her breath and counted her gray hairs.

"It's a gas-chamber job. You'd do better with a jealous-lover plea."

"What will you do?"

Elmer said, "I don't know."

—

The Taj was unlicensed and nouveau-swank. It was couched behind a house row. Four garages got bulldozed and comprised one cabaret. The refurb job was par excellent.

You had booths, tables, and a raised bandstand. There's an ebony bar and blue-flocked wallpaper. It's a boss swami's playpen.

You had standard booze and bootleg booze. There's absinthe and Everclear. You've got colored waitresses in saris. The Taj welcomes a race-mixed clientele.

Elmer and Buzz showed early. They grabbed a prime wallside booth. They figured they'd take Chuckie backstage. Chuckie foxed them there. He was onstage with his sidemen already. Chuckie played bass sax. A white dink played trombone. A black hepcat played fluegelhorn.

Chuckie was tall and blond. He ran six-two and 140, tops. He sported a ducks-ass haircut. He wore zoot pants and a plaid Sir Guy shirt.

Buzz craved results. Let's move now. Elmer nixed it. Let's wait. Johnny Shinura might show. A Chuckie's gal-pal type might materialize.

The Taj filled up. A good crowd filtered in. They snatched the wallside booths and floor tables. They swarmed the bar. They flirted and gassed. They craved Le Jazz Hot and distraction.

Elmer and Buzz drank Green Lizards. Their swell waitress made them as cops. Green Lizards were 151 rum and crème de menthe. Buzz was half-tanked. Elmer was benzified out of his gourd. Killer Ruth ruled his thoughts.

The combo tuned up. Kid Lightning and his Bolts from the Blue. They honked and blatted. The blue motif prevailed. Blue spotlights lit them up.

The low ceiling trapped cigarette smoke. Elmer and Buzz orbed the premises. Where's Sword Man Johnny? Where's the Gal Pal? Elmer watched the door. *Oooga-booga.* Dudley Smith walked in.

Elmer nudged Buzz and pointed over. Looky, looky. Dud wore civvies and looked whippet thin.

Buzz clenched up. Dud walked to the bar. He ordered a drink and glanced around. Elmer and Buzz were perched off aways. Dud didn't see them. Dud eyed the bandstand and Chuckie D.

The Bolts tuned up. Chuckie's king-sized sax weighed him down. Elmer watched the door. Race-mix cliques filed in. Hideo Ashida followed them.

Elmer nudged Buzz and pointed over. Looky, looky. Buzz saw Ashida. Hideo stood barside. He saw Dudley. Elmer and Buzz caught that, plain. Dud was preoccupied. He missed Ashida and eyeballed Chuckie D.

The music wasn't music. It was fucking noise stew. Elmer killed his drink and watched the door. Where's the gal pal? What does she look like? Fuck—Johnny Shinura walked in.

Elmer saw him. Buzz saw him. They swapped *oooga-booga* looks. Ashida saw Johnny. Elmer caught that. Dud missed Johnny altogether. He sipped his drink and eye-drilled Chuckie D.

Ashida stood upside the pay phone. He eye-clicked Dud to Johnny. Jap Johnny stood tiptoed and waved his arms at the bandstand. Chuckie caught it and unstrapped his sax.

Chuckie tromped Johnny's way. Dud caught it. He unbuttoned his coat and touched his belt piece. *Oooga-booga.* A colored doorman braced Johnny. Hit the road, Tojo. We don't seat no Japs.

Ashida crouched by the pay phone. The doorman missed him. Johnny pitched a fit. I'm an American, Sambo. You're just some nigger to me.

Folks looked over. Folks hubbubbed. Johnny pitched that *loud* fit. The doorman pulled a waistband sap and swung it. Johnny pulled a hip piece.

He drilled the doorman. Two shots echoed. The doorman collapsed and convulsed. Folks started screaming.

Chuckie flinched. Chuckie did this big double take. Chuckie made the big man at the bar.

Dud caught it. They drew down simultaneous and fired point-blank. Chuckie blew out a shelf of booze bottles. Dud shot muzzle-tight. Chuckie's face blew up, muzzle-burned. His hair shot flames.

Buzz froze and unfroze. Elmer froze and unfroze. They stood up and unholstered late-late. Ashida stumbled toward Dudley. Elmer and Buzz aimed and let fly.

More bottles exploded. Elmer shot high and off left. Buzz nailed Johnny. Sword man pitched back and shot back. His shots hit high and off right.

Elmer braced his gun hand and aimed real careful now. He triggered in on Dudley Smith and squeezed off two perfect shots. He caught a blur simultaneous. He saw Ashida's suit coat. He blew Ashida up against Dudley. They toppled bar stools and crashed to the floor, all tangled up.

Elmer screamed. Buzz crashed tables and ran to the bar. Johnny slumped up against it. He'd dropped his piece. He was gut-shot and woozed. Buzz shot him straight in the face.

The whole room screamed. Elmer screamed over it. He kicked screamers out of the way and pushed to the bar. Ashida's suit coat was powder-scorched and tattered. He'd bled up the floor. Dudley sobbed and held him tight.

L.A. *Herald Express*. Monday, April 13, 1942. Page-two feature. Byline: Sid Hudgens.

FOUR DEAD IN NITECLUB BLASTOUT!!!!!

Hero Cops Prevail in Juice-Joint Holocaust!!!!!

An ill wind blew the blues last nite, at the noxious near-southside nitespot, the Taj Mahal. It's unlicensed; it's unsanitary; it serves bilious booze and jittery jazz out of season. It caters to caustic cats and kittens, and a catastrophic convergence has caused it to close its doors for good.

Police Sergeants Elmer V. Jackson and Turner "Buzz" Meeks appeared, hot on the trail of jazz jackal Charles "Chuckie" Duquesne, and his jackalesque Jap henchman, John Kimoji Shinura—suspects in the baffling "klub*haus*" slayings of January 29. Policemen Wendell Rice and George Kapek were killed, along with their savvy Sancho Panza, Arturo "Archie" Archuleta. Sergeants Jackson and Meeks tracked Duquesne and Shinura to the tempestuous Taj, where four fearsome fates fatally intervened.

Enter legendary Police Sergeant Dudley L. Smith, currently on leave to serve with the Army's crack Secret Intelligence Service. Enter Hideo Ashida, the PD's crack forensic chemist and sly sleuth, who puts Charlie Chan and Mr. Moto to shame. They were on the Jackal and Johnny the Jap's trail, as well. Enter the Taj Mahal's tipsy doorman, Willis "Big Daddy" Gordean. Shots shattered the smoke-smacked air as the Bolts from the Blue blasted onstage. The police contingent made their move, and Duquesne, Shinura, Ashida, and Gordean lay dead. Colored canary Loretta McKee caught the two killers' dying declarations and last words. "They were in awful bad shape, and on their way out," she said. "But I managed to hear what they were mumbling."

And, what's that, our sepia songbird?

"Chuckie said, 'I am the klub*haus* killer,' and 'Man, what a gas.' Johnny said, 'Viva Hirohito' and 'Pearl

Harbor was cool.' "

Infamous last words, dear reader. But here's our heroic happy ending. Police Chief C. B. "Jack" Horrall has stamped the coruscating klub*haus* job "Case Closed." Mayor Fletch Bowron will bestow the Los Angeles Civic Service Award on Hideo Ashida, posthumously. Elmer Jackson and Buzz Meeks will be feted with the Los Angeles Police Department's Medal of Valor. Citing nervous exhaustion, Sergeant Dudley Smith has resigned his Army commission and is now recuperating at a swank beachside retreat.

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(LOS ANGELES, 4/14–4/26/42)

Niteclub Blastout to wartime exile. Official forfeiture and unofficial censure. Malibu is rarely intemperate. He goes back with Terry Lux. The Wolf carries news from the outside world.

Deals were struck. Jack Horrall brokered them. The Staties commandeered his biz fronts. He resigned his Army commission and will not be court-martialed. He will not be prosecuted for his misjudged stateside misconduct. Here's a cheeky footnote: "Sepia Songbird" Loretta McKee is DA Bill McPherson's girlfriend.

The Baja authorities will not seek indictments. Terry's dry-out farm is not Folsom or San Quentin. He enjoys a grand suite of rooms. They remain locked at all times, and thus constitute custody. Two-man guard teams police him. He's permitted late-night strolls around the property. His guards eavesdrop on his chats with the Wolf. They consider him whimsically insane.

Meyer Gelb is dead. The true killer remains unknown. El Salvy remains at large. Jack H. has implied that he will be sternly rebuked. Mexican cops have been charged to infiltrate the Sinarquistas and disrupt them from within. Ed Satterlee remains under house arrest and has cut immunity deals. Monsignor Joe Hayes has been granted immunity. Wallace Jamie has divested his financial interest in Bev's Switchboard and has pledged to leave L.A. The klub*haus* job has been officially stamped a clean solve. Chuckie Duquesne's woman friend remains unidentified.

Jim Davis and Saul Lesnick also bunk at Terry's farm. Lesnick resides in a locked ward and is prone to screaming fits. The gold remains unfound. Postal inspectors grabbed Bev Shoftel and arrested her on eighty-four counts of felony mail fraud. Treasury agents raided mail drops in twelve U.S. cities. The comrades-*Kameraden* have been nullified to the point of extinction. Jack H. was blunt here. Bill Parker told him the whole story. A ragtag band of opposed comrades engineered the coup. Parker, Elmer Jackson, Buzz Meeks. Kay Lake—most spectacularly.

Claire has kicked morphine. She'll leave the farm soon. Constanza joined her brother in Havana. She plays in a string quartet there. Terry said they've received a recording contract with RCA Victor. Resourceful Constanza. She's taken Cuban strongman Prío Socarrás as her inaugural lover.

He spends his time reading and contemplating his ultimate release. He'll remain a policeman as long as Jack Horrall remains Chief. He plays the Bruckner symphonies. Otto Klemperer's interpretations hold him spellbound. He plays *Tristan und Isolde* most obsessively. Kirsten Flagstad sings the latter part. He listens and transmogrifies her to Kay Lake.

He sips mint juleps with Jim Davis. Chief Jim is lucid on one topic only. The Fifth Column is everywhere but rarely achieves coherence. It's no more than an amalgam of mischief-minded souls hooked on current dangerous ideas. Jim mentioned a pervert party, back in '39. Salvy noticed you then, Dud. He was there, but he was costumed and masked up. He had plans for you from that time on. He's not really a fascist. He's a Stalinist. He killed those priest-killers because they were Trotskyites. It's a wild and fucked-up world, ain't it?

Yes, it certainly is. And he must absent himself for a spell.

He needs rest. He's earned this interval of meditative renewal. He's a privileged dry-out-farm inmate. Kwan's Chinese Pagoda caters his meals. Special chop suey cartons conceal opium. Uncle Ace visits him often. They guardedly discuss their postwar plans.

The Wolf sleeps at the foot of his bed. Their dialogue takes in the world and the cosmos. They mourn their most dear Hideo Ashida.

He misses Hideo. He snipped a lock of his hair in the ambulance that transported him to the morgue. Hideo's betrayal does not trouble him one whit. The great gift of Hideo himself renders it small.

Hideo was put to rest at Manzanar. He wires graveside flowers each week. He sent condolence notes to his mother and brother and got thank-you notes back. He keeps the lock of hair in a Japanese lacquered box.

His bedroom window overlooks a tree-lined walkway. He keeps vigilant watch for Kay Lake. She wears cashmere dresses and heather-toned skirts. Her eyes are so dark brown that they're black.

Stunning girl, I can't begin to imagine your fate.

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

(LOS ANGELES, 8:00 A.M., 4/27/42)

A certain *Kamerad* was due. I expected her to be prompt and to be candidly forthcoming. It took a great deal of effort to ascertain her identity and determine her whereabouts at the time of the klub*haus* killings.

I sat on a walkway bench near Claire's bungalow. I was within view of Dudley's locked domicile. Extensive records checks and cross-checks brought me here. I began pulling paper in the wake of the Niteclub Blastout. The Blastout was a local sensation. Elmer Jackson was its most auspicious surviving casualty. His stray shots killed Hideo Ashida. He aimed at Dudley Smith, fully intending to kill him. He told me this and told no one else. The papers pinned the blame on the conveniently dead Big Daddy Gordean and Johnny Shinura. My dear Elmer. Volatile and impetuous. Sweet-natured and tolerant for a cop. Guilt-racked now. Done in by internal sabotage and Hideo Ashida's death. The man who reminded me that Hideo had sussed it all out. A woman attended the klub*haus* deaths and may have helped commit them. We owed Hideo his clean solve. Elmer said, "Maybe there's some records checks you can run."

I was at loose ends; Elmer was at loose ends, verging on shell shock. He was estranged from Ruth; Annie was visiting her ailing dad in rural Idaho. Ellen was off with her husband and son; Brenda was tending to their call-service business. The Blastout remained hot news. Loretta McKee replaced Lena Horne as Charlie Barnet's colored canary. Mrs. Big Daddy sued Los Angeles County. Duke Ellington was busy composing his "Niteclub Blastout Suite." A land baron purchased the Taj Mahal, with plans to refurbish and reopen it as the Klub Blastout. Jo Stafford and the Pied Pipers will play the gala opening.

This blithe exploitation enraged Elmer. He raged against himself and the *Kameraden* and his long-gone brother, who started the whole thing. He told me to run directory and phone-call checks on Chuckie Duquesne. "You might turn something there."

Bill swore me in as a PD clerk-typist. He assigned me a cubicle with a desk and a telephone. I ran jail checks first. I learned that Johnny Shinura was in Lincoln Heights on the night of the murders. Chuckie Duquesne had never been arrested. Johnny and Chuckie were bunked in at the East 2nd Street warehouse then. That was their collective last known address. They squatted there after the Federal seizure and Johnny's formal eviction. Chuckie lived somewhere before that. He had to have had a formal address. I ran DMV checks and turned up an address in Echo Park.

Chuckie rented a house there, and had a telephone installed. I called PC Bell and secured his phone bills from October '39 up through last year. One suggestive female name repeatedly popped up.

I recalled Hideo's theory. The case was definitively homosexual. It derived from two-person animus. The foot scuffs on the upstairs hallway wall had been made by a woman.

I ran DMV checks. I learned that Chuckie did not own a registered automobile. I secured car stats for Chuckie's female friend. I spent many hours in the former Crash Squad command post. I studied the master file; I studied the initial canvassing sheets in particular. I noted the north/south/east/west canvassing perimeters. The crime occurred on a Wednesday night into Thursday morning. The proximity of the jazz strip troubled me. I walked the strip and saw that most of the clubs possessed no parking lots or assigned parking spaces. The strip hopped on weeknights; patrons had to park their cars somewhere; the somewhere within the canvass perimeters would be packed with club hoppers' cars. The klub*haus* killer or killers would have had to park outside those perimeters and walk to the *haus.*

I drove to 46th and Central and walked my own expanded perimeter. I noted NO NIGHTTIME PARKING signs in all directions. That's when I knew I had a chance to solve it; that's when I knew that the debt to Hideo might be repaid.

It took one more phone call. I buzzed the PD's Traffic Bureau and requested a list of parking tickets issued on the night in question. Her name was on it. She had parked on 41st Street, east of Hooper. It was three blocks past the northeast perimeter.

I placed my cigarettes and matches on the bench beside me. I'd met the woman twice before; she bummed out of my pack on both occasions. She smoked too much and talked too much and divulged inappropriately. I beckoned her here. I wrote to her and told her I knew. She had my full consent to divulge inappropriately.

Andrea Lesnick walked up. She sat down and went straight for the cigarettes. Her fingers were nicotine-stained; her nails were bitten down to the quick.

She said, "Miss Lake knows my secret. She figured out what the dumb cops couldn't."

"You parked in a red zone. They missed the citation you were issued."

"They raped me."

"I know."

"I've been to Tehachapi. San Quentin can't be any worse. 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' I'll enter the green room with my head held high. I've groveled enough in my lifetime. Chuckie convinced me of that."

I lit a cigarette. "I was wondering how you met him."

Andrea said, "I met him at a party at Otto's place. Everybody who was anybody was there, but we all wore masks. Chuckie was gigging there. Wendell and George were there, but they were chauffeuring some America Firsters, so they had to stay outside. Archie stayed outside, too. The car-park boys were Mex, so Archie spoke Mex to them, and Jewed them for half of their tips."

"I've heard of this party, Andrea. People wore Nazi costumes. Orson Welles screened a pornographic movie."

Andrea shook her head. No, no, *no.* Let me tell it *my* way.

"Miss Lake's a C.T., and a provocateur. She's a snitch, and she's in with the cops. It's my story, and I don't have to let her prompt me or tell me how I should confess."

I touched Andrea's arm. She pulled away and chained cigarettes.

"Wendell and I got stoked on each other, and we necked in this limousine he was driving. We petted, but he wanted more than I wanted to give him, so I said, 'Whoa, son.' Wendell got ticked off, because the party was very libertine, and he told me I should give him what everybody else was getting, but I left him high and dry instead. Chuckie and a boy Robby Staley set him up with were necking, outside by a pergola. They witnessed some horrible thing that gave Chuckie nightmares for the rest of his life, but he never told me what it was."

I glanced out at Dudley's jail suite. Andrea poked me and brought my gaze back to her. Look at me, look at me. It's *my* story I'm telling you.

"Wendell was hateful and spiteful. He started sending me letters and snapshots of him and his wife, doing you know what in the you know where. It went on for a year and a half or so, then it stopped, and some time passed. Then my daddy sent me to the klub*haus* to pick up a eugenics book he'd lent this boy Link Rockwell. Wendell, Georgie, and Archie were there, alone. That was when they raped me."

She'd dribbled ash on her blouse and sweater. Both garments were burn-marked already. Her fingers were gnawed. She gnashed her hands when she wasn't smoking. She was unbearable to behold. She condemned me as glib. She commanded my prayers for the rest of my life.

"'Vengeance is mine,' saith You Know Who. Which is just what Chuckie and I started planning. It was a double-dip. I got keestered, and he got nightmares from that party. We started frequenting the klub*haus,* and Chuckie poked boys upstairs. I told Wendell, Georgie, and Archie that I wanted to do it again with them, while Chuckie watched. That's how we got them alone at the *haus.*"

Her hair. She curled strands around her fingers and twisted them taut. She maimed herself. She left bald spots. Self-inflicted stigmata. Collaborator women shaved bald.

"We lured them upstairs. Chuckie gave them terp cigarettes laced with poison. They smoked them and became woozy, and we led them back downstairs. Chuckie sat them down on the couch. He was left-handed, so I had to scooch around him just so. He held an ice pick to their necks, and I put on these strangling gloves that Johnny Shinura gave me, and I strangled them right there."

I looked in her eyes. One was blue, one was gray. Her eugenicist daddy. I suspected experiments gone awry. She sat on her hands so she wouldn't gnash or pull her hair out. What would Hideo Ashida do? It came down to that. I said, "I wish you safety," and walked away.

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(LOS ANGELES, 8:00 A.M., 4/28/42)

Union Station. The Welcome Wagon awaits. They're packing brass knucks and belt saps. *Bienvenidos, señor.*

Jack Horrall dispatched them. His orders ran succinct. Beat the fuck half dead. Tell him no sabotage. Return to Mexico. Come back, we kill your spic ass.

Elmer and Buzz lurked outside the station. Cars clogged the front lot. The breezeway hopped. Porters schlepped suitcases. Tourists hailed taxicabs. The Baja train was past due.

Elmer and Buzz lurked. They got their orders. They got their reward. They were acknowledged whizbang detectives. Jack H. shot them two Homicide slots.

El Salvy walked outside. He scanned the front lot. Cars zigzagged through. Elmer and Buzz swooped.

They grabbed him and hustled him. They pinned his arms. He went along, peaceful. They worked the two-man accordion press.

Salvy complied. They waltzed him off to the side of the building. Elmer grabbed his hair and elbowed him in the windpipe. Salvy gasped and squeaked. Buzz pinned him against the wall. Elmer stuffed a sock in his mouth. They unhooked their knucks and saps and let fly.

Octopus job. They worked him, four-fisted. Elmer smashed his ribs. Bones crunched and snapped. Buzz squatted low and ripped uppercuts at his balls. Elmer punched his teeth out. The sock trapped loose choppers and sopped up blood.

Buzz hurled sap shots. They sliced Salvy's ears half off. Buzz intoned the edict. Elmer hummed the "Marine's Hymn." He checked the parking lot. He saw this man upside a Cadillac. He thought, Maybe, maybe not.

He dropped his hurt kit and walked over. Well now—and amen. It was good old good-looking Wayne Frank.

He sported some gray hair. He wore wingtip shoes and a swell chalk-stripe suit.

He said, “Try not to kill Salvy. Him and me share a history.”

Elmer said, “I like your car. Life’s been good to you.”

Wayne Frank spit tobacco juice. “I’ve got a wife and two kids in New Orleans, and a wife and three kids in Atlanta. If I can avoid this here futile war, I’ll have it made in the shade.”

Elmer smiled. “You always believed in the Resurrection. It was your favorite Bible story. You always said you might die young, but you’d just as likely return.”

Wayne Frank smiled. “I visited Wisharts last year. Sue Bailey asked about you. She’s with the TVA now. She had herself a damn fine job with the Willkie campaign.”

Sue B. was a six-foot blonde. She justified the climb. Him and Wayne Frank fought over her. He kicked Wayne Frank’s ass good.

“Those New Year’s rainstorms stirred up some grief, didn’t they?”

“Let’s not talk about that.”

“New Year’s is New Year’s. Remember? We always listened to Cliffie Stone’s *Hometown Jamboree*.”

Wayne Frank spritzed tobacco juice. “You look pretty good, for a man who’s just seen a ghost.”

“I’ve learned a few things since New Year’s. I’ve had a good spell to prepare.”

Wayne Frank said, “I always told you I’d make something of myself.”

—

Ghosts. Apparitions. Warlocks, poltergeists, ghouls. Wayne Frank’s alive. Hideo Ashida’s dead.

Elmer drove out to Santa Monica. He hadn’t seen Ruth in a coon’s age. He should put her at ease. You never know. She might throw him some woof-woof.

Wilshire was bright and breezy. The beach air felt sweet. He parked outside Ruth’s courtyard. Longhair music wafted over. Ruthie sat on her porch. She played her radio full blast.

Elmer got out and walked over. Ruthie saw him. She primped and turned off the radio. She looked grim—per always, these days.

“I’ve been reading about you. The widow Big Daddy Gordean asserts that you are trigger-happy.”

Elmer dittoed Wayne Frank. “Let’s not talk about that.”

“Shall we discuss Brahms? That was the Double Concerto I was enjoying.”

Elmer relit a cigar. “Let’s discuss what’s eating you. Maybe I can help you out."

Ruth said, "You have not the cachet. A deportation order has been issued against me. I am held to be a seditious alien, and I have no means of redress."

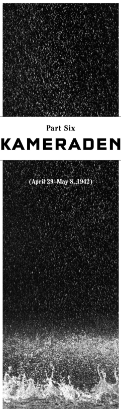
She had green panther eyes. He had beady eyes. They discussed it their first night. Elmer slalomed in and dialed their eyes tight.

"You can't deport the wife of a U.S. citizen. Husbands can't fink out their wives for Murder One."

Ruth turned on the radio. A violin and cello tangled chords and fought. She kept the volume low.

"Might we have a Jewish wedding?"

Elmer said, "Don't press your luck."



Part Six

KAMERADEN

(April 29–May 8, 1942)

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KAY LAKE'S DIARY

(LOS ANGELES, 4/29–5/8/42)

Early-wartime L.A. The blackouts, the attendant car wrecks, the impromptu race riots spurred by enveloping dark. The grinding shame of the Japanese internment. The revelry of fearful folks disinclined to step outside. The unexpected pregnancies and great volume of kids expected in the fall of '42.

The muzzle flash of Pearl Harbor burned bright through the spring, as the phenomenon of the war was subsumed by the war as our refuge and justification. Early-wartime L.A. was a time of great crimes and witheringly ambiguous solutions. It was a time to celebrate the shit-kicking American spirit and our mass resolve to see this thing through. Early-wartime L.A. The booze and the muzzle-flash love affairs. There was no better time to howl and throw parties.

Jack Horrall hosted an acquittal bash at Kwan's Chinese Pagoda. It celebrated Bill Parker's and Elmer Jackson's bold move to squelch the Fed probe. The PD and City Hall crowd showed up in force. The acquittals formally justified the soirée. I held it to be a wrap party for the span of events preannounced by a New Year's Eve rainstorm. The gang was there. *We* were there. Comrades and adversaries crammed into Ace Kwan's back room. Bill, Elmer, Buzz, Brenda. Thad Brown and Nort Layman. Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle. Ray Pinker, Fletch Bowron, my beleaguered Lee Blanchard. DA Bill McPherson, with Loretta McKee in tow. Reconciliation overwhelmed rancor. Something big had ended as the war progressed. I chatted with Mike Breuning. He said, "*Whew,* Kay." I said, "*Whew,* Mike" right back. Our conversation fizzled then. There was no need to say anything else.

We were there. Provocateurs and profiteers. Bill Parker danced and drank with Claire De Haven. They argued the Baltimore catechism and defamed my most revered Martin Luther. Then something extraordinary happened.

Jack Horrall gave a speech. He blew raspberries at the Feds and crowed over the mass acquittals. He praised the diligent detectives who solved the klub*haus* job and notably omitted Dudley Smith. He broke down and wept as he lionized the "late and surely great" Hideo Ashida.

Elmer married Ruth Szigeti two weeks later. There had to be a hidden story there—but Elmer refused to divulge it. The Protestant service dismayed Ruth. The wedding party vacated the church and reconvened in Mike Lyman's front room. Fake gold bars served as dinner-table settings. The Reverend M. L. Mimms supplied them.

Buzz brought his pet scorpion. He slid steak tidbits into his cage and dared people to stick a finger in and pet him. The acquittal-bash crowd celebrated the Jackson-Szigeti nuptials. Otto Klemperer and Joan Klein joined us, along with the Koenigs and Sandor Abromowitz. Barbara Stanwyck and Robert Taylor dropped by and heckled Ruth. We've lost you to a cop bumpkin. Say it ain't so. You've lost nothing, *Liebchens.* My husband understands me as I understand him.

Indeed. Brenda Allen, Ellen Drew, and Annie Staples had served as Ruth's maids of honor. Ellen hawked her new Paramount oater; Annie told Elmer not to lose her phone number. Bob Taylor took Brenda aside. He slid her a roll of bills and told her to set Babs up with "Ten-Inch" Tony Mangano.

I sat with Elmer and Ruth at the head table and overheard their conversation. Ruth thanked Elmer for his great generosity. Elmer said, "Hush, now. It's not like I'm suffering, and it's not like I don't like you."

Early-wartime L.A. Profiteers and privateers. My most valued *Kameraden.*

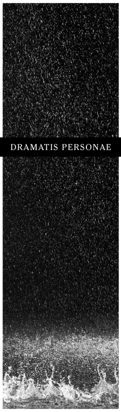
Otto debuted Shostakovich's *Leningrad* Symphony the following week. The performance was not billed as such. The five-hundred-dollar-a-pop tickets were sold via hushed word of mouth. Otto was preempting Maestro Toscanini's formal premiere of the work. He had put together an orchestra of relocated exiles and film-studio musicians. Ruth Szigeti was the first-chair violin; the Koenigs and Sandor Abromowitz played alongside her. The occasion was strictly black-tie. The Wilshire Ebell Theatre held roughly one thousand seats. The proceeds were earmarked for European war relief. Every woo-woo movie star and local hotshot of the day was there. I squeezed Bill Parker's hands as Otto raised his baton and went *Now.*

The symphony was brutal, at the expense of majestic and elegiac. It was an hourlong disruption of my most dear hopes and my most conceited dreams. I rode with the shock of it. Foreshortened crescendos dashed my sense of savagery as beauty and the beauty of art itself. Human love will not sustain us in this time of horror. Comrade Dimitri mocked the assumption. He sought only to instill a brutalized survivors' resolve.

So be it, then.

The antithesis of resolve is relinquishment. It's wartime L.A., and I am a brilliant and passionate young woman with stories to tell. Circumstance is destiny. I may never live as boldly and adroitly as I live now. This is my war and my country. Do not mock the love that I hold for both. I willed thunderstorms as a child in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I must do that here and now. *Reminiscenza,* this storm, this savaging disaster. My options are do everything or do nothing. My hot date with History continues. It is now May 8, 1942. These final strains of the *Leningrad* Symphony mark my refusal to die.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE



This Storm is the second volume of the Second L.A. Quartet. The first volume, *Perfidia,* covers December 6 through December 29, 1941. The L.A. Quartet—*The Black Dahlia, The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential,* and *White Jazz*—covers the years 1946 to 1958 in Los Angeles. The Underworld U.S.A. Trilogy—*American Tabloid, The Cold Six Thousand,* and *Blood's A Rover*—covers 1958 to 1972, on a national scale.

The Second L.A. Quartet places real-life and fictional characters from the first two bodies of work in Los Angeles, during World War II, as significantly younger people. These three series span thirty-one years and will stand as one novelistic history. The following list notes the previous appearances of characters in *This Storm.*

SALVADOR ABASCAL. A real-life Mexican fascist.

SANDOR ABROMOWITZ. An exiled Hungarian musician.

BRENDA ALLEN. The real-life Allen appears in *The Big Nowhere* and *Perfidia.*

ARCHIE ARCHULETA. This character is a dope fiend and rowdy Fifth Columnist.

AKIRA ASHIDA. The brother of police/U.S. Army chemist Hideo Ashida. Mr. Ashida appears in *Perfidia.*

HIDEO ASHIDA, Los Angeles Police Department/Army SIS. Ashida appears in *Perfidia.*

MARIKO ASHIDA. The mother of police/U.S. Army chemist Hideo Ashida. Mrs. Ashida appears in *Perfidia.*

EUGENE BISCAILUZ. The real-life Sheriff of Los Angeles County. Biscailuz appears in *Perfidia.*

OFFICER LEE BLANCHARD, Los Angeles Police Department. Blanchard appears in *The Black Dahlia* and *Perfidia.*

FLETCH BOWRON. Mayor of the City of Los Angeles. Mayor Bowron appears in *Perfidia.*

"BIG BOB" BOYD. Captain, Kern County Sheriff's Department.

SERGEANT MIKE BREUNING, Los Angeles Police Department. Breuning appears in *The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential, White Jazz,* and *Perfidia.*

LIEUTENANT THAD BROWN, Los Angeles Police Department. The real-life Brown appears in *Perfidia.*

VICTOR TREJO CAIZ. Fifth Column assassin.

ARCHBISHOP J. J. CANTWELL. The real-life boss of the L.A. Archdiocese. Archbishop Cantwell appears in *Perfidia.*

FRANKIE *"EL CABRÓN"* CARBAJAL. Hoodlum and raucous Fifth Columnist.

SERGEANT DICK CARLISLE, Los Angeles Police Department. Carlisle appears in *The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential, White Jazz,* and *Perfidia.*

DR. LIN CHUNG. A plastic surgeon and proponent of eugenics. Dr. Chung appears in *Perfidia.*

LIEUTENANT LEW COLLIER, Los Angeles Police Department. Collier heads up the PD's Alien Squad.

JOAN CONVILLE, Los Angeles Police Department. Miss Conville appears in *Perfidia.*

FATHER CHARLES COUGHLIN. The real-life radio priest and nativist blowhard.

HUEY CRESSMEYER. Glue sniffer, psychopathic killer, and Fifth Column traitor. Mr. Cressmeyer appears in *American Tabloid* and *Perfidia.*

DR. RUTH MILDRED CRESSMEYER. Dr. Cressmeyer is Huey's mom, and a film-studio abortionist. She appears in *American Tabloid* and *Perfidia.*

EX-CHIEF JAMES EDGAR "TWO-GUN" DAVIS. The real-life Davis appears in *Perfidia.*

CLAIRE DE HAVEN. Dope addict and shrill left-winger. Miss De Haven appears in *The Big Nowhere* and *Perfidia.*

ELLEN DREW. The real-life film actress. Miss Drew appears in *Perfidia.*

MONDO *"EL TIGRE"* DÍAZ. Hoodlum and raucous Fifth Columnist.

CHUCKIE DUQUESNE. Jazz musician and psycho killer.

FRITZ ECKELKAMP. Armed robber and Marxist-fascist extortionist.

BILLY ECKSTINE. Real-life singer and bandleader.

SERGEANT COLIN FORBES, Los Angeles Police Department. The real-life Forbes works out of the PD's Hollywood Station.

LEANDER FRECHETTE. Labor goon and heist man.

MEYER GELB. Armed robber and Marxist-fascist extortionist.

TOMMY GLENNON. Hot-prowl rapist and Nazi shitheel.

SERGEANT AL GOOSSEN, Los Angeles Police Department. The real-life Goossen works out of the PD's Hollywood Station.

WILLIS "BIG DADDY" GORDEAN. A bouncer at the Taj Mahal Klub.

KYOHO HANAMAKA. Japanese naval attaché and Fifth Column mastermind.

MONSIGNOR JOE HAYES. Morally dubious priest with the L.A. Archdiocese.

CHIEF C. B. "CALL-ME-JACK" HORRALL, Los Angeles Police Department. The real-life Horrall appears in *Perfidia.*

SID HUDGENS. Newspaper scribe and scandalmonger. Hudgens appears in *L.A. Confidential* and *Perfidia.*

SERGEANT ELMER JACKSON, Los Angeles Police Department. The real-life Jackson appears in *Perfidia.*

WAYNE FRANK JACKSON. Drifter, armed robber, Fifth Columnist. Brother of Sergeant Elmer Jackson.

WALLACE N. JAMIE. Real-life private eye.

OFFICER GEORGE KAPEK, Los Angeles Police Department. Shitbird cop on the Alien Squad.

JOAN ROSEN KLEIN. Fifteen-year-old girl, on the loose in Mexico. Miss Klein appears in *Blood's A Rover.*

OTTO KLEMPERER. The real-life conductor and composer.

MAGDA KOENIG. An exiled Hungarian musician.

MIKLOS KOENIG. An exiled Hungarian musician.

UNCLE ACE KWAN. Tong warlord and restauranteur. Uncle Ace appears in *L.A. Confidential* and *Perfidia.*

KAY LAKE. Miss Lake appears in *The Black Dahlia* and *Perfidia.*

DR. NORT LAYMAN. A Los Angeles County deputy coroner. Dr. Nort appears in *The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential,* and *Perfidia.*

CONSTANZA LAZARO-SCHMIDT. Concert violist and fascist femme fatale.

JUAN LAZARO-SCHMIDT. Governor of Baja, California, and Marxist-fascist tool.

EDDIE LENG. Restauranteur, tong man, Fifth Columnist.

ANDREA LESNICK. Ex-Communist and lunatic about town. Miss Lesnick appears in *The Big Nowhere* and *Perfidia.*

DR. SAUL LESNICK. Red tool and headshrinker to the stars. Dr. Lesnick appears in *The Big Nowhere* and *Perfidia.*

OFFICER "CATBOX" CAL LUNCEFORD, Los Angeles Police Department. Shitbird cop on the Alien Squad.

DR. TERRY LUX. Hotshot plastic surgeon and closet nativist. Dr. Lux appears in *The Big Nowhere* and *Perfidia.*

"TEN-INCH" TONY MANGANO. Call boy and fruit hustler.

DONALD MATSURA. Dope peddler and skeevy Fifth Columnist.

JAMES J. McBRIDE. Lawyer for the L.A. Archdiocese.

LORETTA McKEE. Vocalist at the Taj Mahal Klub.

BILL McPHERSON. The L.A. district attorney. McPherson appears in *L.A. Confidential* and *Perfidia.*

SERGEANT TURNER "BUZZ" MEEKS, Los Angeles Police Department. Corrupt cop, on the prowl. Meeks appears in *The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential,* and *Perfidia.*

MAJOR RALPH D. MELNICK, Army SIS. The boss of the SIS contingent in Baja.

HAROLD JOHN MICIAK. Psychopathic flotsam. Miciak appears in *White Jazz.*

THE REVEREND MARTIN LUTHER MIMMS. Slumlord and race racketeer.

HECTOR OBREGON-HODAKA. Jazz aficionado and Fifth Columnist.

CAPTAIN WILLIAM H. PARKER, Los Angeles Police Department. The real-life Parker appears in *L.A. Confidential, White Jazz,* and *Perfidia.*

CAPTAIN JUAN PIMENTEL, Mexican State Police. Fifth Column mastermind.

RAY PINKER, Los Angeles Police Department. The real-life forensic chemist appears in *L.A. Confidential, White Jazz,* and *Perfidia.*

OFFICER WENDELL RICE, Los Angeles Police Department. Shitbird cop on the Alien Squad.

GEORGE LINCOLN ROCKWELL. The real-life race baiter and provocateur.

SERGEANT LEW SARNI, San Diego Police Department. Fat-slob Burglary cop.

EDMUND J. "ED THE FED" SATTERLEE. Dubious FBI agent. Satterlee appears in *The Big Nowhere* and *Perfidia.*

JOHNNY SHINURA. Jazz hound and broker of fetishistic curios.

"BLOW JOB" BEV SHOFTEL. Hooker and proprietress of a notorious mail drop. Miss Shoftel appears in *Blood's A Rover.*

ELIZABETH SHORT. The illegitimate daughter of Dudley Smith. Miss Short appears in *The Black Dahlia* and *Perfidia.*

FUJIO "THE WEREWOLF" SHUDO. Sex psycho and scapegoat for a quadruple homicide. Shudo appears in *Perfidia.*

SERGEANT DUDLEY SMITH, Los Angeles Police Department/Army SIS.

Smith appears in *The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential, White Jazz,* and *Perfidia.*

JEAN STALEY. Carhop and Commie seductress.

BARBARA "BUTCH" STANWYCK. The real-life film actress.

ANNIE STAPLES. Call girl and shakedown artist.

RUTH SZIGETI. An exiled Hungarian musician.

ROBERT TAYLOR. The real-life film actor.

ELLEN TULLOCK. Deputy Karl Tullock's querulous widow.

KARL TULLOCK, Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department. Thuggish cop, on the prowl.

CAPTAIN JOSÉ VASQUEZ-CRUZ, Mexican State Police. Politically ambiguous war profiteer.

JORGÉ VILLAREAL-CAIZ. Communist tool.

ORSON WELLES. The real-life film auteur.

AL WILHITE. MP lieutenant at the Manzanar internment camp.

ROBERT "BANZAI BOB" YOSHIDA. Part-time Buddhist priest and samurai-sword peddler.

A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Ellroy was born in Los Angeles in 1948. He is widely considered to be the greatest living crime novelist and a major literary figure, genre designations aside. His L.A. Quartet and Underworld U.S.A. Trilogy novels have won numerous awards, were international best-sellers, and are now available in Everyman's Library editions. *This Storm* is the second volume of Mr. Ellroy's Second L.A. Quartet. The first volume, *Perfidia,* was much honored, and achieved international best-seller status. The Second L.A. Quartet places real-life and fictional characters from Mr. Ellroy's first two bodies of work in Los Angeles, during World War II, as significantly younger people. The design is monumentally ambitious.

Mr. Ellroy currently lives in Denver, Colorado.

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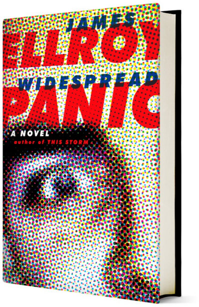
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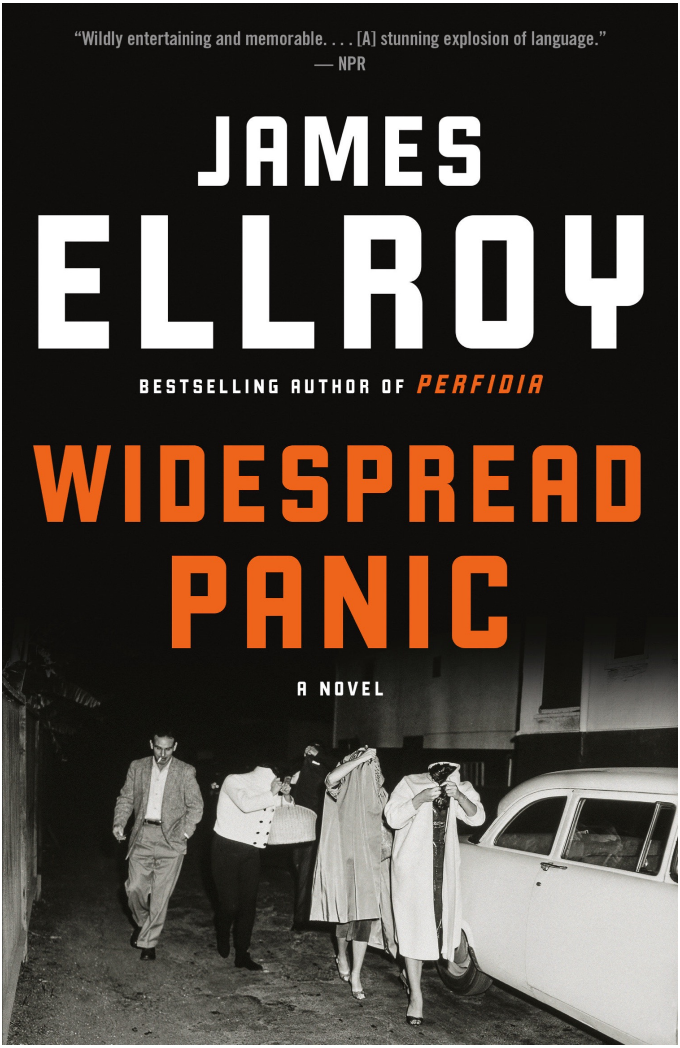

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Perfidia
This Storm

THE UNDERWORLD U.S.A. TRILOGY
American Tabloid
The Cold Six Thousand
Blood's A Rover

THE L.A. QUARTET
The Black Dahlia
The Big Nowhere
L.A. Confidential
White Jazz

MEMOIR
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WIDESPREAD
PANIC

A NOVEL

Alfred A. Knopf
New York · 2021

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Part I originally published (in slightly different form) in ebook format as “Shakedown” by Byliner Fiction in 2012.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Ellroy, James, [date] author.
Title: Widespread panic : a novel / James Ellroy.
Description: First United States Edition. | New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2021.
Identifiers: LCCN 2020050847 (print) | LCCN 2020050848 (ebook) | ISBN 9780593319345 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780593319352 (ebook) | ISBN 9780593320310 (open market)
Subjects: GSAFD: Suspense fiction. | Mystery fiction.
Classification: LCC PS3555.L6274 W53 2021 (print) | LCC PS3555.L6274 (ebook) | DDC 813/.54—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020050847
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020050848

Ebook ISBN 9780593319352

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Cover design by Joe Montgomery
Cover photograph: Cliff Wesselmann Collection courtesy Gregory Paul Williams

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Excerpt from The Enchanters
A Note About the Author

_144566430_

To
Glynn Martin

and to
Lois Nettleton, 1927–2008

7

SHAKEDOWN

Freddy Otash Confesses, Part I

CELL 2607

Penance Penitentiary
Reckless-Wrecker-of-Lives Block
Pervert Purgatory
7/16/2020

I've spent twenty-eight years in this fucking hellhole. Now, they tell me I can memoir-map my misadventures and write my way out.

All that religious shit I disdained and disobeyed has played out true. There's Heaven for the good folks, Hell for the beastfully *baaaaaad.* There's Purgatory for guys like me—caustic cads that capitalized on a sicko system and caused catastrophe. I've sizzled in my sins for two decades plus. I've relived my earthly life in dystopian detail. My cunning keepers are currently dangling a deal:

Record your jaundiced journey. Trumpet the truth, triumphant. Hop to Heaven, and hit that high note.

Baby, it's time to *CONFESS.*

Purgatory is shitsville. You're stuck with the body you had on Earth when you died. You eat nothing but coach-class airplane food. There's no booze, no jazzy intrigue, no wilt-your-will women. Violated victims bop by my cell. They remind me of my many misdeeds and jab me with red-hot pokers. Gay gauchos hurtle down from Heaven and scold me for outing them back in the homo-hate '50s. It was my *job.* I entrapped soiled celebrities and putzo politicos, and cornholed them in *Confidential.* I sold my soul to that maladroit magazine. Now, I'm sordidly SORRY.

So *what?*

Sorry's for limp-dick losers. Confession salves the savage self and rips it to righteous redemption. Hear my plaintive plea, O watchful world:

Get me the fuck out of here!!!!!

My keepers have poised me with pen and paper. They've compiled a complete run of *Confidential.* My synapses soar with a million malignant memories. Freddy Otash, 1922–1992. I'm a rogue cop, a private eye, a shifty shakedown artist. I'm the demonic deus ex machina of my tattered time and place. I'm the hellhound who held Hollywood captive. I'm the man with the sex-scorched secrets you irksome earthlings want to hear.

Confidential presaged the infantile Internet. *Our* gobs of gossip were repugnantly *real.* Today's blowhard bloggers and *their* tattle texts? Pussyfooting punks *all.* We stung the studios. We popped the pooh-bahs. We hurled the hurt, wholesale. We voyeur-vamped America and got her hooked on the shivering shit. WE CREATED TODAY'S TELL-ALL MEDIA CULTURE. We crazily crafted a lurid language and made it our own.

It's the lexicon of the lowdown. It's the dialogue of the dish. It's the slithering slur and the thrill of the threat. I think and write in algorithmic alliteration. Language must lambaste and lay on the lash. Language liberates as it offends. *Confidential* taught me that. My confession will make this dizzy dialect divide you in two. There's Sin and Atonement, fuckers—there's nothing else.

Purgatory's a punitive proposition. Montgomery Clift pitchforked me yesterday. *Confidential* labeled him "the Lavender Lilliputian" and "Princess Tiny Meat." JFK followed Monty. I dumped the dish on his dope habit and call-girl cavalcade. Marilyn Monroe penance-poked me next. Marilyn was a snout trout. She dispensed head to rogue pharmacists, *XXX*-exclusive. They dispensed noxious Nembutal back. Maybe I shouldn't have tattled the tale—but I was within my First Amendment rights!!!!!

I'm consumed with candor and wracked with recollection. I'm revitalized and resurgent. My *meshugenah* march down memory lane begins *NOW.*

NATE & AL'S DELI

Beverly Hills

8/14/92

I was working Hollywood Vice in '51. We got word on a fuck pad, operating out of a crib at the Villa Elaine. I hotfooted it over there."

We're bopped back in my booth. There's my audience: four showbiz *machers* in worse shape than me. Walkers, canes, and oxygen tanks clog the aisles to the kitchen. Fractious Freddy O.'s holding court.

It's late summer, '92. I'm seventy and in *baaaaad* fucking shape. I've consumed scads of scotch and sucked three packs a day since I shot out the chute. I've got emphysema and a bum pump. I'm aching to make eighty. It's a lunar-looped long shot.

Sol Sidell said, "Get to it, Freddy. You roll to the pad, and then what?"

Sinful Sol. A jailbaiter from jump. He produced beach-blanket flicks in the sick '60s. I pulled him out of the shit, circa '66. He was reefer-ripped and poking two underage twists.

I said, "Okay, I roll to the crib and peep a side window. Shit—there's Sam Spiegel, the cat that produced *Lawrence of Arabia* and *The Bridge on the River Kwai.* He's muff-diving a three-hundred-pound chick. That was a boss beef, back in '51. I told Sambo it's dues time. It's a morals bust, or a monthly donation to the Fred Otash Retirement Fund."

My pals yukked. I wrapped into my Reuben sandwich and felt a twisted twinge in my chest. I downed digitalis. I saw Jules Slotnick suck on his oxygen mask and light a Camel Light. Julie produced turgid turkeys about farmworker strife. Call him Mr. Guilt for Gelt. He made all his live-in maids blow him. He held their green cards as a hedge against their refusal to bestow daily head.

Sid Resnick said, "Give us another one, Freddy."

The Sidster was Mr. Holocaust Heartache. He produced *schlock*umentaries for Islamic TV. He was the King of the Chubby Chasers. He longed for it *laaarrrge.*

I cruised my cranium cracks for a story. Two elderly gay cats sashayed by the booth. That fed me my cue.

I pointed to them. “I got tipped to an all-male pajama party, back in ’56. I paid some LAPD hard boys a yard apiece to bust it, and brought my camera along. Those cats were piled up in a five-way with Rock Hudson, Sal Mineo, and a dude with giant acne cysts. *Confidential* wrote it up. Universal paid me ten g’s to keep the Rockster’s name out of the story.”

The booth roared and *re*-roared. Julie Slotnick gasped for breath. Al Wexler yukked out a bagel chunk. It flew and flopped to the floor.

Alky Al owned six porno bookstores and nine nose-job clinics. He plowed a truck full of migrant Mexicans and left six dead. I got it mashed down to a Mickey Mouse misdemeanor. Al *owed* me, *laaaaarge.*

I killed my sandwich. Alky Al blew a faux fanfare. I laid out my lifelong credo: “I’ll do anything short of murder. I’ll work for anyone but the Reds.”

My boys clapped and guffawed. A bad twinge hit my heart. I downed digitalis and deep dips of scotch.

Corned beef and sauerkraut socked my system. I got floaty and deep dyspeptic. I brought up a bread crust. It popped on my plate.

The booth tumbled. My pals vaporized. My vision blurred black. Calendar sheets shot backward. Decades disappeared and devolved. Maybe I’m dead. *Maybe I’m just dreaming this shit*—

ROBBERY DIVISION SQUADROOM

LAPD Detective Bureau
City Hall
2/4/49

There I am. I'm fetching fine in '49. I'm beefcake, boss, and bangin' them bonaroo bitches, three at a pop.

I'm handsome and heavy-hung. I'm a lustful Lebanese. Call me a camel cad from the get-go. I'm an ex-Marine. I trained troops at Parris Island and sent them off to Saipan, savvy. I joined the LAPD in late '45. I went on the grift *faaaaaast.*

I formed a 459 ring. They worked my downtown foot beat. They popped pawnshops and dumped dope-pushing pharmacies. I fingered the jobs. My gang cadged cash and dope. They were 2:00 a.m. creepers. I was their Rogue Cop Rajah.

I'm corrosively corruptible and tempted by the take. I live for the scurrilous score. It's my existential fate. I had a squaresville home life in bumfuck Massachusetts. My mom and dad loved me. Nobody butt-fucked me in my bassinet. I live by a cool-cat code. There's shit I won't do. My code got catastrophized on 2/4/49.

I hogged a hall mirror. I combed my hair and noosed my necktie. Sy Devore tailored my formfit uniform. The squadroom buzzed *baaaad* all around me. It's a Code 3 squawk—shoot-out at 9th and Figueroa.

Two men down. One traffic cop/one heist geek. The cop's nudging near death. The geek suffered superficial wounds. Both men—ensconced at Georgia Street Receiving, *right now.*

The squadroom bebop buzzed. The squadroom phones rang incessant. The buzz bombarded me. I heard murderous murmurs laced with a lynch-mob gestalt.

I heard heavy footfalls. Booze breath bristled me.

"If you're through admiring yourself, I've got something."

I turned around. It's a Robbery bull named Harry Fremont. Harry has a rancid rep. He stomped two pachucos dead during the zoot suit riots. He pimped transvestite whores out of a he-she bar. He was shit-faced drunk at noon.

"Yeah, Harry?"

Harry said, "Be useful, kid. There's a cop killer at Georgia Street. Chief Horrall thinks you should take care of it. This is an opportunity you don't want to pass up."

I said, "Take care of *what*? The cop he shot isn't dead."

Harry rolled his eyes. He passed me a key fob. He said, "4-A-32. It's in the watch commander's space. Look under the backseat."

I *got* it. Harry locked on my look. He went *Nooowww, he gets it.* He winked and waltzed away from me.

I steadied myself and stood still. I loaded up on that lynch-mob gestalt. I lurched through the squadroom and zombie-walked downstairs. I hit the garage.

I found the watch commander's space. There's 4-A-32. The key fits the ignition. The garage was dark. Ceiling pipes leaked. Water drops turned wiggy colors and morphed into wild shapes.

I gunned the gas and pulled out onto Spring Street. I drove *slooooow.* The heist geek was jacked in the jail ward. It was a lockup-transfer ruse. It was forty-three years ago. It's *still* etched in *Sin*emascope and surround sound. I can *still* see the passersby on the street.

There it is. There's Georgia Street Receiving.

The jail ward sat on the north side. The squarejohn ward sat to the south. A narrow pathway bisected the buildings. It hit me then:

They know you'll do it. They know you're that kind of guy.

I reached under the backseat. I pulled out transfer papers for Ralph Mitchell Horvath. I grabbed a .32 snubnose revolver.

I put the gun in my front pocket and grabbed the papers. I slid out of the sled. I popped down the pathway and went through the jail-ward door.

The deskman was PD. He pointed to a punk cuffed to a drainpipe. The punk wore a loafer jacket and slit-bottomed khakis. He sported a left-arm splint. He was acne-addled and chancre-sored. He vibed hophead. He looked smack-back insolent.

The deskman did the knife-across-throat thing. I handed him the papers and uncuffed and recuffed the punk. The deskman said, "Bon voyage, sweetheart."

I shoved the punk outside and pointed him up the pathway. He walked ahead of me. I couldn't feel my feet. I couldn't feel my legs.

My heart hammered on overdrive. I lost my limbs somewhere.

There's no telltale windows. There's no pedestrians on Georgia Street. There's no witnesses.

I pulled the gun from my pocket and fired over my own head. The gun kicked and lashed life back in my limbs. My pulse topped 200 rpms.

The punk wheeled around. He moved his lips. A word came out as a squeak. I pulled my service revolver and shot him in the mouth. His teeth exploded. He dropped. I placed the throwdown piece in his right hand.

He tried to say "Please." This dream's a routine reenactment. The details veer and vary. The "Please" always sticks. I'm alive. He's not. That's the baleful bottom line.

—

The cop lived. He sustained a through-and-through wound. He was back on duty inside a week.

Vicious vengeance. Wrathfully wrong in retrospect. A crack in the crypt of my soul. Harry Fremont passed the word. Freddy O. is kosher. Chief C. B. Horrall sent me a jug of Old Crow. The grand jury sacked him two months later. He got caught up in a call-girl racket. An interim chief was brought in.

Ralph Mitchell Horvath. 1918–1949. Car thief/stickup man/weenie wagger. Hooked on yellow jackets and muscatel.

Ralphie left a widow and two kids. I got the gust-wind guilts and shot them penance payoffs. Money orders. Once a month. Fake signatures. All anonymous. Dig—Ralphie's dead, and I'm not.

—

Memory Lane. I'm fetching fine in '49. I'm full-fuck filleted in '92.

I holed up at my pad. I lingered through Labor Day. I looped the lane and took last looks at my loved ones, lewd ones, and lost ones.

I scoured scrapbooks. The old photos got my gears going. I'm there with Frank, Dino, and Sammy. I broke legs for them. They cringe and crawl away. There's boocoo pix of my bed at my old pad. I called it "the Landing Strip." I was Mr. Three-Way then. I swung with stewardesses, starlets, and stars. Liz Taylor and I swung with a stew named “Barb” on many groin-grabbing occasions. There’s pix of my lost love, Joi Lansing. There’s pix of my *true* love, Lois Nettleton. I was young and hung then. *Aaaahhhh*—sweet motherfucking mystery of life!!!!!

There’s my dictionary and thesaurus. They were teaching tools for the wrathful writers at *Confidential.* Utilize alliteration and instill intensive slurs. Homosexuals are “licentious lispers.” Lesbians are “beefcake butches.” Drunks are “bibulous bottle hounds” and “dyspeptic dipsos.” Vulgarize and vitalize. Create a *craaazy* populist parlance. Make it sinfully *siiiiiing.*

My pals popped over on Labor Day. We built burgers and boozed big. They left at 2:00 a.m. A male nurse corps shagged them and shot them down to their limos. Walkers wobbled, oxygen tanks toppled and rolled. It rubbed me raw, Daddy-O.

I settled in and watched a *Dragnet* rerun. I bought the juicehead judge in four of Jack Webb’s drunk-driving beefs. I shtupped Jack’s wife, soaring songstress Julie London. She said I was the biggest and the best.

I noshed a dozen Famous Amos cookies. I’d seen the episode before. Sergeant Joe Friday busts some hirsute hippie punks. I missed Jack. We shared some yuks. He kicked off back in—

A hydrogen bomb hit my heart. Mushroom clouds claimed me. Monsters morphed out of them. Johnnie Ray. Monty Clift. Politicians pounded and movie stars mauled. It’s a calamitous kaleidoscope of condemnation.

They jumped me. They went *J’accuse, j’accuse, j’accuse!!!!!* I gasped. My left arm exploded. I hit the medical-emergency button on my phone.

Then some pixilated pops. They’re the *Herald*’s horror headlines. TATTLE TYRANT, MR. FEAR, SHAMAN OF SHAME. Then a crunching crash. My door’s down. There’s a mask on my mouth.

I’m dead. Thence comes Purgatory and this confession.

MY FUCKED-UP FOOT BEAT

Downtown L.A.
10/4/52

Central Division. The doofus day watch. Freewheeling Freddy's at loose ends.

I disbanded my 459 gang. My main men got hooked on Big "H." They were decidedly desperate and snitch-prone. I'd gambled away my gelt. I was living on a schmuck cop's pay and was suffused with the blues. William H. Parker became Chief in '50. He instituted righteous reforms and riddled the ranks with a phalanx of finks to sniff out miscreants and misconduct. I drove a Packard pimpmobile. I won it in a darktown dice game. Parker's punks tattled to the hellhound *Jefe.* I got called in and grindingly grilled. Parker warned me not to be a Bolshevik. He said, "I've got my four eyes on you."

It rained that day. It was some mad monsoon. Wild winds whipped me along on my foot beat. I stopped at a lockbox phone and called the station. The deskman told me to hotfoot it to 668 South Olive. They were shooting a *Racket Squad* episode in the lobby. They needed a hard boy to shoo off autograph hounds.

I headed over there. I caught a taut tailwind and slalomed in the slush. It was a medical building. The lobby was all lit up. I caught a frazzled fracas, right off.

Lights, cameras, boom mikes. Here's the *action,* straight up.

A jug-eared cat was hassling a boss blonde. He wore pegged chinos and a gone jacket. She was built, va-va-voom.

The cast and crew orbed the scene. Jug Ears grabbed the blonde's arm and applied abrasions. It gored my gonads and hit my heartstrings. I walked up behind him. He saw my shadow and swift swiveled. I notched his nose with a palm shot. I looped a left to his larynx. I kneed his nuts as he dropped.

The blonde genuflected. I tipped my hat. Jug Ears cradled his busted beak and moaned for his mama. The cast and crew clapped.

The blonde said, “He’s my ex-husband. He stiffed me for three months’ alimony.”

I kicked him in the head and lifted his wallet. Jug Ears mama-moaned anew. The cast and crew whistled and stomped.

The wallet weighed in heavy. I fanned the cash compartment and counted a sea of C-notes. I handed them to the blonde. She dropped them in her purse and dropped a dollar on her ex-hubby. She said, “For old times. He was good in the sack.”

I laffed. I reached in my pocket and handed her a card. Understated class *shows.* There’s my name, phone number, and “Mr. Nine Inches.”

She dropped the card in with her cash stash. A guy yelled, “You’re up, Joi. Scene 16-B.”

She winked and walked away from me. I cuffed Jug Ears behind his back and pay-phone-called the station. Holly*weird:* they filmed the scene with the ex coma-conked and cuffed on the floor.

I walked outside and smoked a cigarette. A black-and-white cruised by and hauled the ex to Georgia Street. I thought of Ralph Mitchell Horvath. A kid returned my calling card. She wrote on the back: “Joi Lansing. 39-25-38. Googie’s, tonight at 8:30.”

—

I’ve got a boss bachelor pad, straight up from the Strip. It’s jammed with Jap flags and shadow-boxed Lugers. There’s a periscope perched on my porch. I peep neighbor women and gas their gestalts.

I’m a voyeur. It’s vampiric. I study people. I rage to know their secret shit.

My bedroom features a *biiiiiiiig* walk-in closet. I’ve got sixty Sy Devore suits. My dresser drawers drip with lacy lingerie. My lynxlike lovers leave me *mucho* mementos.

I’ve got a file on Ralph Mitchell Horvath. I culled it from PDs and penitentiaries statewide. I know *all* Ralphie’s secrets.

He poked a Mexican sissy in reform school. He fathered two half-wit kids. He pimped his wife to cover his poker debts. He scored prescription goofballs from a Chink pharmacist.

I dug up that dirt. It bought me distance on Ralphie. It held off his hold on me. Know your foe. I’ve known that godless gospel since my crib.

I dressed sharp for Joi Lansing. I wore my crocodile loafers and hid my heater in a shoulder rig. A spritz of Lucky Tiger—and a short stroll to the meet.

Googie's was a coffee cave on Sunset and Crescent Heights. The space-age aesthetic rubbed me raw. Fluorescent lights/Naugahyde/chrome. A hip hive for showbiz shitheels headed for Hell.

I walked in. Joi Lansing table-hopped. She wore a too-tight gown and a meager mink stole with a pawnshop tag attached. The joint buzzed per a sneak peek in Glendale. A Googie's regular played a love scene with Bob Mitchum. Bad Boy Bob slipped her tongue. They toked a reefer in the RKO backlot. She blew him in his '51 Ford.

A hubbub juked the joint. I knew I radiated *FUZZ.* I crashed into a booth and unbuttoned my jacket. A flit flamed by and ogled my piece. He hopped to a hen party, one booth over. Dig *this* dirt: the barman at the Cockpit Lounge ran an all-boy slave auction. Adlai Stevenson got embroiled and embarrassed. The hens hooted—*ha, ha, ha!!!*

Joi sat down. I pointed to the pawnshop tag. She pulled it off and dropped it in the ashtray.

I said, "Thanks for the invitation."

Joi said, "Thanks for the revenge. That guy fractured my left wrist on Saint Patrick's Day, '49."

"You're too young to have an ex-husband."

"Yeah, and I'm estranged from number two. I'd head to Reno for a quickie, but it might not work. We got hitched in T.J., so the paperwork could get dicey."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"Well, you're a policeman."

I lit a cigarette and held the pack out. Joi shook her head.

"He's on parole, and he's a grasshopper. You could call Narco. That might do me some good."

I shook my head. "Give me his address. I'll think of something."

"He'll be *here* at nine-thirty. He's been living at the Y since I kicked him out, and the fry cook here takes his phone calls. He's a nonunion grip. I stiffed him a fake message after I met you. You're a producer at Fox, with a job for him. You're meeting him in the parking lot."

I laffed. "You just assumed that I'd do it?"

Joi laffed. "Come on, Freddy. That stunt you pulled downtown, and 'Mr. Nine Inches'? What won't you do for money or gash?"

A Mex busboy sidled by. I grabbed a belt loop and stopped him. He saw my roscoe and got the shiver-shakes.

I socked him a sawbuck. “Go to the kitchen and get me a bag of weed. You’ll be on the night train to Culiacán if you don’t deliver.”

Manuel went *Sí, sí* and moved out. Joi laffed and bummed a cigarette. I blew a high smoke ring. She blew a higher one. They hit the ceiling and mushroomed, Hiroshima-esque.

Manuel meandered back with the *mota.* I told him to scram. The hen party parsed a new nugget. Ava Gardner sacked Sinatra. She’s shacked with a heavy-hung extra at Monogram.

I said, “What’s your real name?”

Joi said, “Joyce Wassmansdorff.”

“Give me the fill-in.”

“I’m from Salt Lake City. I’m twenty-four. I went to the MGM school, and went nowhere.”

“But now you’re up-and-coming?”

Joi stubbed out her cigarette. “I’m uncredited in six pictures, and credited in four. I’ve got *Racket Squad, Gangbusters,* and a comedy with Jane Russell in the can.”

“Give me some dirt on Russell.”

“What’s to give? She’s a Goody Two-shoes married to that quarterback for the Rams.”

I eyeballed the room. Paranoia pounds me, periodic. The two crew cuts by the take-out stand? They’re Bill Parker’s boys. I’d seen them at Central. They were purse-lipped puritans out to bag bent cops.

Joi said, “You’ll need money to enjoy my company.”

I *re*-eyeballed the room. I exercised my X-ray vision. A punk I popped for flimflam made me and beat feet.

Joi said, “It’s nine-thirty. Look for a little guy with a big pompadour.”

I bopped back to the parking lot. Pompadour lounged upside a ’51 Merc. I closed in close. He orbed my shoulder rig and went *Oh shit.* He wore light-colored slacks. Piss coursed and covered his cuffs. I dug in, diplomatic.

“Don’t contest the divorce. I’ll negotiate your alimony payments. Send the check directly to me. I’ll take my cut and deliver the rest to Miss Lansing.”

Pompadour held up his hands. It was *Don’t hit me, hoss.* I pulled out the bag of weed and caught his left mitt in one motion. I pressed hard and finagled a full fingerprint spread.

A drizzle drifted down. I gestured toward the street. Ex-hubby #2 took off running.

“Hollywood could use a guy like you.”

I turned around. There’s Jolting Joi. She knows from opportunity.

“You mean I could use Hollywood.”

She kissed me. I kissed her back. That’s how it all started.

—

I know from opportunity. It costs money, honey. I heisted a bookie room two days later.

A Hitler mask hid my face. I entered with an empty grocery sack and exited with four g’s. I blew half the swag on Joi. I bankrolled my biz with the remainder. A Beverly Hills pharmacist fed me piles of pills to push. Harry Fremont sold me eight ice-cold roscoes. Joi scared up a scrape doctor. I told him I’d be out seeking nice-girls-in-a-jam. Guns/dope/a felonious physician. My girlfriend as conduit to a coruscatingly corrupt culture.

Joi hit Hollywood in ’42. She was fourteen. She matriculated at MGM and met Everybody. She was luridly low-rent *and* confoundingly connected. She knew Everything. She was a one-babe Baedeker. She knew bartenders, bellhops, busboys, call girls, casting directors, and cads. She knew pornographers, pushers, and pimps. She knew troves of tramps in trouble. She was out to crown me King Shakedown. Joi greased Holly*weird* with my handouts. Scores of scurrilous scamsters licked up my largesse. We were buying bleak and blowsy blackmail dirt.

I worked LAPD. I scored an off-duty gig. I was now the security boss at the Hollywood Ranch Market. It was licentiously legendary and open-all-nite. I bagged shoplifters and check kiters. I lived within my means and never gave Bill Parker’s goons a hook to entrap me. I took Joi to Ciro’s and the Mocambo. I saw Intelligence Squad cops cataloguing the scene. I braced them as a brother. I ballyhooed my big nights, financed by big days at the track.

I sold guns. I sold pills. I brokered abortions. I hawked a filthy film called *Mae West’s Menagerie*. Shack jobs were verboten for LAPD men. Joi and I trysted at her mom’s pad in Redondo. She said the word was moving out and metastasizing: Freddy O.’s The Man to See.

Gigs rolled in. I pounded a perv who’d whipped out his whang on Duke Wayne’s wife. Duke paid me five yards and gave me the skinny on Red Hollywood. Dino Martin called me. He knocked up his maid with soon-to-hatch triplets. I bribed a Customs cop and got Dolorous Dolores deported. Dino paid me two g's and dished the dirt on a stunning string of starlets. They bounced on my bed and dug up dirt on my regular retainer. Want C-notes and riotous ruts in the hay? Call Mr. Nine Inches.

I got Lana Turner a scrape. She banged an alto sax named Art Pepper in a bout of bebop abandon. Putzy Pepper wanted her to keep the kid and threatened exposure. I planted two reefers in his sax case and buzzed the fuzz. He got nine months at Wayside Honor Rancho.

Joi knew a classy clique of Hancock Park housewives. They were unbearably unbodied and entrenched in ennui. They needed furtive fucking. She saw money in it. Put "pimp" on my résumé. I'm on Stud Patrol as of now.

Opportunity is love. That cold concept socked my sick soul.

Joi said Liberace had a job for me. We were in the sack at her mom's place. Her eyes twinkled and twirled me some all-new way. She drew dollar signs in the air.

The moment vibrates in VistaVision and swervy Swish-O-Scope. A piano noodles a nocturne and pounds a polonaise.

LIBERACE'S SWANK SWISH PAD

Coldwater Canyon
4/29/53

A fey factotum met me. The yard was tropically tricked out and football-field size.

Flamingos flitted. Toucans tooled and bit bugs. A path cut through ten-foot-high fronds and floral explosions. Everything was green, purple, and pink.

We hit a clearing. It was paved with stones embossed with musical clefs. The pool was shaped like a piano. Liberace sat in a deck chair. A leopard with a mink collar snoozed at his feet.

The factotum sashayed off. I pulled up a deck chair. The leopard stirred and snarled at me. I scratched his neck and kissed his snout. He went back to sleep.

Liberace said, "You're fearless. You're the kind of man I need."

"I'm here to help you out, sir. Joi said you've got a guy bugging you."

The factotum sashayed back with cocktails. Two highball glasses glowed pink. The guy served us and skedaddled. My drink tasted like radioactive bubble gum.

Liberace said, "Bottoms up."

I yukked. "A kid's putting the boots to you, right? Pay up, or he'll rat you to the Legion of Decency. All those dago mob guys that book your act in Vegas will hightail it. Your TV show will be canceled if word gets out you go Greek."

Liberace sighed. "Inimitably candid, and so, so true. He's a dishwasher at Perino's. What was I thinking?"

I sipped my pink drink. "Pictures?"

"Of course, dear heart. He lured me to a motel with a wall peek."

A hi-fi speaker sparked and kicked on. Judy Garland belted, "Someday he'll come along / The man I love." The leopard lolled and licked his balls. Liberace goo-goo-talked him.

"Five thou, sir. You get the pictures and the negatives, along with my assurance that it won't happen again."

Liberace pouted. His chest heaved. Sequins popped off his toga. The leopard loped to the pool and arced his ass over the edge. A giant shit ensued.

The factotum ran up. He wielded a turd-scoop contraption. Liberace reached under his chair and snagged a scrapbook.

"Ex-convicts are a weakness of mine, I'm chagrined to say. I've got mug shots of him, and quite a few other rough-trade conquests. It's my new hobby. I paste pictures, when I'm not wowing my fans or practicing Chopin."

I grabbed the book and leafed through it. It was the fucking lavender lodestone. I counted twenty-six K-Y cowboys wearing neck boards. Names/dates/penal-code numbers. A smutty smorgasbord of malignant maleness. Parole holds and prosty beefs galore.

Liberace jabbed a pic of one Manolo Sanchez. The guy vibed baleful bantamweight.

"He broke my heart, while his evil lezzie sister took snapshots. Feel free to get tough."

I nodded and flipped ahead. Three glum glamour boys popped off the page. Ward Wardell, Race Rockwell, Donkey Don Eversall. All booked for possession of pornography.

I pointed to the pics. "Blue-movie actors, right? They peddle it on the side. You see the movies, you get a yen, you make a phone call."

"That's correct. I went to a screening at Michael Wilding and Liz Taylor's house. Michael screened *Locker Room Lust* and *Jailhouse Heat,* and supplied the referral."

"Referral" ripped me. "Could these guys get it up for women?"

Liberace whooped. "Could, can, and *do,* sweetheart. And Donkey Don is the eighth wonder of the world, if you follow my drift."

I tingled. I thought *Parlay.* I saw dollar signs and movie-star movement on my Landing Strip.

"So, Michael Wilding's a gay caballero?"

"In spades, love. His house is known as the 'Fruit Stand,' which perturbs lovely Liz no end."

I yukked. "And Liz wants a divorce, so she can move on to her next husband and break the all-time world record?"

Liberace slapped his knees. "Yes, and she's pulling ahead of your girlfriend in that department."

I cracked my knuckles. Liberace swooned. The cat almost creamed in his jeans.

"Tell Liz to meet me at the Beverly Hills Hotel, tomorrow night. Fill her in on my résumé."

Liberace *re*-swooned. The leopard snarled and shooed a toucan up a tree.

—

Perino's was high swank and old money. It catered to sterile stiffs and dotty dowagers. I drove over at close-up time and parked by the back kitchen door. It was whipped wide open. Sassy Sanchez was scour-scrubbing pots.

I slid out of my sled and hunkered low on my haunches. I ran reconnaissance. I noted a line of lockers by a walk-in freezer. I had Salacious Sanchez alone.

He mambo-minced to his locker and primped. A mirror magnified his mug and tossed it back at me. I squinted and claimed a close-up. *Aaaaaaaah*—the top locker shelf. There's a stack of photo sheaths.

He picked his teeth. He squeezed blackheads. He dewaxed his ears. I walked in and crept up behind him. I pulled my beavertail sap. His neck hairs bristled. He wheeled and pulled a shiv.

Flick—the blade sliced my Sy Devore blazer. He shrieked shit *en español.* It ran the your-mama gamut.

He pirouetted and parried. We were in knife-fight tight. I risked a ripe stab wound and roundhoused him to the head. My sap socked him, full force.

The seams ripped his face. The business end tore an eyebrow loose and gnashed in his nose. He dropped the knife. I kicked it away. I grabbed his neck and squelched a scream. The deep-fry dipper was four feet away. It was spitting hot grease off spuds lyonnaise.

I dragged him over. I stuck his knife hand in the grease and frog-fried it. He screamed. I held his hand in the grease and burned it to the bone. Spatters spotted up my London Shop shirt.

I dropped his hand. I walked to the locker and grabbed the photo sheaths. I flipped through them.

Ooohhh, Daddy. It's Liberace Goes Greek—Kodacolor prints and negatives.

Sanchez screamed and careened through the kitchen. He dumped a dish rack and spasm-smacked the walls. His hand was charbroiled and crackle crisp. Flayed flesh flew off.

—

The night was young. I was up five thou and blasphemously blasted on blood and aggression. Revelation ripped me. I knew I could mix my own fruit shakes. I pocketed two Liberace negatives.

I called R&I. They delivered the dish on the smut-film troika. The boys shared a pad in Silver Lake. Plus a bent for the sex-soiled and seditious. *Semper fi*—they met in the Marine Corps and ran rackets out of a bondage bar down in Dago. They sold forged green cards. They peddled Spanish fly. They led Rotary groups to T.J. for the mule act. They sold dildo dupes of Donkey Don's sixteen-inch whanger.

They fell in the shit in '50. They sold Spanish fly to a nervous nympho and pledged a date with Donkey Don. The Donkster reneged. The nympho impaled herself on the gearshift of a '46 Buick. San Diego PD filed Felonious Assault. The judge tossed the case. Here's a ripe rumor: he was Race Rockwell's regular trick.

I popped out to their pad. It was a wizened wood-frame job, buried in bougainvillea. I rang the bell at 11:00 p.m. and got no answer. I picked the door lock and let myself in. I crept flashlight-first and inventoried their shit.

The boys possessed Nazi armbands/Mickey Spillane novels/combat-pinned Marine blues. Plus *mucho* moviemaking equipment. Plus cheesecake mags going back to '36. Plus souvenir snapshots from the Klub Satan, Tijuana, New Year's '48. El Burro sports spiffy red devil ears.

I walked out to the porch. I chain-smoked and sucked on my flask. I recognized the ribbons on their uniforms. The boys savaged Saipan and stormed Guadalcanal.

I sipped bonded bourbon. I got a light load on. A jalopy jammed up at 1:00 a.m. The boys bounced out and made for the door.

I whipped out my badge and flashlight-lit it. It was deep dark out. I couldn't catch their capitulation. Call it a cool coup d'état. The dominant dog now rules their pack.

"My name's Otash. You're going into business with me."

—

Extortionist. Entrepreneur. Enterprising Enforcer. I ran that roundelay as I licked my lips for Liz.

I got half looped with the lads and laid down the law. I'm taking 20 percent of your smut biz. You get police protection. You're now the naughty nucleus of Freddy O.'s stud farm. Get ready to bring the brisket to some housewives in heat.

Donkey Don laid a ladle of bennies on me. I buzzed through my day-watch duty downtown. I broke up a fistfight at the Jesus Saves Mission. I chased a raft of Red agitators out of Pershing Square. I popped a whipout man at the Mayan Theater. I busted a psycho kid blowtorching two lovebirds in a '49 Ford.

My tour of duty tapped down. I went by the Criminal Courts Building and read up on divorce law. I reserved a bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel and scrounged refreshments off local merchants. Lou's Liquor Locker supplied champagne. Hank's Hofbrau coughed up cold cuts. Fast delivery was assured.

I swooped by my pad. I traded my cop suit for a choice chalk-stripe ensemble. Oh *yeah*—it's your ardent arriviste poised to pounce!!!!

The bungalow was big, boss, flouncy, and flamboyant. The bellman harrumphed at my ham and cheese hors d'oeuvres. He rolled his eyes and split. I paced and smoked myself hoarse. The bell rang at 8:00 p.m. sharp.

There she is—Elizabeth Taylor at twenty-one.

She stood in the doorway. I fumbled for chitchat. She wore a tight white dress. It caressed her curves and clambered up to her cleavage. She said, "If I move too fast, I'll split a seam. Help me over to that couch."

I grabbed an elbow and steered her. My hand trembled, my heart trilled. I sat her down and poured two jolts of '53 domestic. We perched on the couch and offered up toasts.

Liz raised her arm. A dress seam split down to her hemline. She said, "Shit. I didn't *have* to wear this. You're just the bird dog for my divorce."

I yukked. Liz said, "Don't marry me, okay? I can't keep doing this for the rest of my life."

"Have I got a chance?"

"More than you think. Hotel heirs and queer actors haven't worked out, so who's to say a cop wouldn't?"

I smiled. I sipped champagne. Liz snagged a slice of ham and snarfed it. Her wicked white dress constricted her. She looked plaintive, plain, and pure.

I unzipped the back. I slid in some slack and brought breathing room. Liz sighed—*Aaaaah,* that's good.

The shoulder straps slid slack and fell down her arms. Liz deadpanned it. Our knees brushed. Liz retained the contact.

"How do I cut loose of Michael? I can't cite mental cruelty, because he's a sweetheart, and I don't want to hurt him. I know you have to show just cause in order to sue."

I refilled her glass. "I'll bug your house. You get Wilding looped and get him to admit he digs boys. I levy the threat in a civilized manner, and he consents to an uncontested divorce."

Liz beamed. "It's that *easy*?"

"We're all civilized folks. You probably earn more money than him, but he's older, and has substantial holdings. You broker the property split and the alimony along those lines."

"And how are you compensated?"

"I get ten percent of your alimony payments, in perpetuity. You keep me in mind and refer me to people who might require my services."

Liz lounged on the couch cushions. Her dress collapsed past her brassiere. Our eyes found a fit. The rest of the room vaporized.

"And how will I keep you in mind? There's lots of people vying for my attention."

"I'll do my best to make this a memorable evening."

—

It started out clumsy and sweet. My punch line cued the first kiss. Liz was victimized and vanquished by too-tight attire. She shrugged her dress off. It wiggled down to her waist.

I carried her into the bedroom. The hoist popped buttons off my shirt. They shot across the room. We laffed. I heard the radio a bungalow over. Rosemary Clooney sang, "Hey, there—you with the stars in your eyes."

We got naked. We were built boss, stratosphere stacked, and hung home wrecker heavy. We were the boffo best of L.A. '53.

We made love all night. We drank champagne with Drambuie chasers. We smoked cigarettes and spritzed gossip. We put on robes and climbed to the roof of the bungalow at dawn.

An A-bomb test was scheduled in nowheresville Nevada. The newspapers predicted priceless fireworks. Other bungalow dwellers were up on their roofs. There's Bob Mitchum and a young quail with the quivers. There's Marilyn Monroe and Lee Strasberg. There's Ingrid Bergman and Roberto Rossellini. Everybody looks fuck-struck and *happy*. They've all got jugs for the toast.

Everybody laffed and waved hello. Mitchum brought a portable radio and tuned in the countdown. I heard static and "…eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one."

The world went *WHOOSH*. The ground shook. The sky lit up mauve and pink. We raised our booze bottles and applauded. The colors bristled into bright white light.

I had my arm around Elizabeth Taylor. I looked Ingrid Bergman straight in the eyes.

—

L.A. '53 was my ground zero. That blast still shoots shock waves through me.

There was smog in the air then. People coughed and gasped. *I* never noticed it. That bomb-blast moment *made* me. My L.A. was always mauve and pink.

I worked LAPD. I walked a downtown foot beat. I rousted Reds during the "Free the Rosenbergs!" fracas. I pinched pervs, purse snatchers, and pickpockets in Pershing Square. My smut-film biz laid in loot. Donkey Don Eversall plied his python all over Hancock Park. Joi was Donkey Don's dispatcher. She koffee-klatched with horny housewives and set up the dates. Liberace gave me girl-talk gossip. Liz Taylor and Michael Wilding went to Splitsville. I got 10 percent of Liz's alimony bite. Joi, Liz, and I threeskied on my Landing Strip. Liz knew a Pan Am stew named Barb Bonvillain. She flew the L.A.–Mexico City route and had half of Hollywood hooked on Dilaudid and morphine suppositories. Bad Barb was six-three, 180, 40-24-36. She scored high in the women's decathlon, Helsinki '52. All four of us locked loins. The Landing Strip lurched. We murdered the mattress and banged the box springs down to the floor.

L.A. '53—*ring-a-ding-ding!!!!*

Joi and I crashed the Crescendo and the Largo most nights.

Cocktail waitresses fed me slander slurs. I tipped them, titanic. It brought back my kid-voyeur days, rabidly redux.

A fragmenting frustration set in. I *had* the dirt. It would take an armada of shakedown shills and photo fiends to deploy it. I racked my brain. I knocked my noggin against the bruising brick wall of unknowing. Extortion as existential dilemma. A confounding conundrum worthy of those French philosopher cats.

My cop life could not compete with the lush life. I was a double agent akin to that Commie cad Alger Hiss. Liz Taylor drove me to Central Station and signed autographs for the blues. I knew that word would leak to Chief William H. Parker. I was full of a finger-stabbing *FUCK YOU.*

Ralph Mitchell Horvath haunted me. Nightmares nabbed me as I slid into sleep. Joi and Liz nursed me with yellow jackets and booze. My bedtime mantra was *He Deserved to Die.* It was beastly bullshit. I couldn't convince myself that it was true.

I spent nuke-bomb nights at the Hollywood Ranch Market. My office was two-way-mirrored and overlooked the aisles. I scanned for boosters and looked down at the legions of the lost.

Their pathos pounded me. Bit actors buying stale bread and short dogs of muscatel. Six-foot-two drag queens shopping for extra-long nylons. Cough-syrup hopheads reading labels for the codeine content. Teenage boys sneaking girlie mags to the can to jerk off.

I watched. I peeped. I lost myself in the losers. A goofy ghost came and went with them.

He was about twenty-three. He slouched in windbreakers and wore cigarettes as props. He breezed through the aisles at 3:00 a.m. He always looked ecstatic. He talked to people. He cultivated people. He studied people the way I peeped windows as a kid. I saw him out on the sidewalk once. He played the bongos for a clique of fruit hustlers and junkies. A girl called him "Jimmy."

The fucker appeared intermittent. I made him for an actor living off chump change and aging queens. I saw him kiss a girl by the bread bin. I saw him kiss a boy in the soup aisle. He moved with a weirdo grace. He wasn't froufrou *or* masculine. He was in on some exalted joke.

I saw him boost a carton of Pall Malls. I cornered him, cuffed him, and hauled him upstairs. His name was James Dean. He was from bumfuck Indiana. He was an actor and a bohemian you-name-it. He said that Pall Mall cigarettes were queer code. The *In hoc signo vinces* on the pack meant “In this sign you shall conquer.” Queens flashed their Pall Malls and ID’d each other. It was all-new shit to me.

I cut Jimmy loose. We started hanging out in the office. We belted booze, looked down on the floor, and gassed on the humanoids. Jimmy habituated the leather bars in East Hollywood. He ratted off pushers and celebrity quiffs and filled a whole side of my dirt bin. I told him about my smut-film and male-prosty gigs. I promised him a date with Donkey Don Eversall in exchange for hot dirt.

We’d hit silent stretches. I’d scan the floor. Jimmy would read scandal rags.

They were just popping up. *Peep, Transom, Whisper, Tattle, Lowdown.* Titillation texts. Lurid language marred by mitigation. Insipid innuendo that left you craving *more.*

Politicos got slurred as Red—but never nailed past implication. Jimmy loved the rags but cruelly critiqued them. He said they weren’t sufficiently sordid or precise in their prose. He called them “timid tipster texts.” He said, “You’ve got better skank than this, Freddy. I could give you three issues’ worth from one night at the Cockpit Lounge.”

A bell bonged. It was faint and far off. Memory is revised retrospection. Oh *yeah*—fate fungooed me that night.

A newsboy pulled a red wagon into the market. It was stacked with magazines. He started filling up racks.

A cover caught my eye. Priapic primary colors and hard-hearted headlines screamed.

You get the picture. The magazine was called *Confidential.*

THE BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL

8/14/53

Joi woke me up. I was nudging off a nightmare. It was a dark double dip. Ralph Mitchell Horvath, shot in the mouth/Manolo Sanchez with skeleton claws.

I looked across the bed. *Shit*—Liz was gone.

Joi read my mind. “She had an early call. She said to remind you that Arthur Crowley wants that phone date.”

I lit a cigarette. I chased bennies with Old Crow. *Aaaaaaah,* breakfast of champions!!!!

“Remind me again. Who’s Arthur Crowley?”

“He’s that divorce lawyer who needs your help.”

I said, “I’ll call him when I go off-duty.”

Joi stepped into a skirt and pulled her shoes on. She dressed as fast as most men.

“No more girls for a while, okay, Freddy? Liz is great, but Barb is like Helga, She-Wolf of the SS. Really, that stunt with the armband and the garters? That, and she hogs the whole bed.”

I laffed loud and lewd. My wake-up whipped through me. It canceled out all dreary dreams and coarse cobwebs. Late summer in L.A.—*ring-a-ding-ding!!!!*

Joi kissed me and bopped out of the bungalow. I shit, showered, shaved, and put on my uniform.

The phone rang. I snagged it. A man said, “Mr. Otash, this is Arthur Crowley.”

I buffed my badge with my necktie. A mirror magnetized me. *Man-O-Manischewitz,* I look good!!!!

“Mr. Crowley, it’s a pleasure.”

Crowley said, “Sir, I’ll be blunt. I’m swamped with pissed-off husbands and wives, looking to take each other to the cleaners. Legal statutes are in flux, and divorce-court judges are demanding greater proof of adultery. Liz Taylor told me you might have some ideas.”

I lit a cigarette. Benzedrine arced through my arteries and piqued my pizzazz.

"I *do* have ideas. If you have flexible scruples, I think we can do biz."

Crowley laffed. "I'm listening."

I said, "I know some Marines stationed down at Camp Pendleton. I was their DI in '43 and '44, and now they're back from Korea and looking for kicks. It's a parlay. Hot rods, good-looking shills, walkie-talkies, phone drops, and Speed Graphic cameras."

Crowley hooted. "*Semper fi,* sir. You're a white man in my book."

"*Semper fi,* boss. We'll work out the details at your convenience, and I'll round up my boys."

"And, in the meantime? Is there anything *you* need?"

Benzedrine was a groin groper. One thing *did* come to mind.

"My Landing Strip's got two empty runways tonight. Liz told me you're conversant with the concept."

Voices vibrated outside the bungalow. They were *mucho* male and brazenly brusque. I heard foot scrapes and coughs.

Crowley said, "Liz explained the concept, so I called you prepared. I'll send two stenos over."

"Mr. Crowley, you're a pisser."

"It takes one to know one, sir."

We hung up. The voices vibrated. I caught key-in-lock sounds. I walked into the living room. The door whipped wide.

It's William H. Parker.

With two plainclothes bulls. Both six-four. They live to hurl hurt. They're mastiffs on a mission to maul for their master.

"Send not to know for whom the bell tolls—"

I unpinned my badge and tossed it at Parker. It hit his chest and dropped on the floor. The mastiffs moved. Parker went *Get back.* The mastiffs pawed the carpet and growled *loooowwww.*

I unhooked my gun belt and dropped it on a chair. I called up some cool. Freon Freddy, the Shaman of Shakedown.

"Hit me, Bill. Shack jobs, living above my means, bending the rules here and there. My head's on the chopping block, baby. Guillotine me."

The mastiffs smirked smug. Pious Parker parsed out a grin.

"You are currently engaged in an intimate relationship with a Pan American stewardess named Barbara Jane Bonvillain, now in Federal custody for possession of narcotics procured in Mexico. I must inform you that the outsized Miss Bonvillain is a Communist agent and a personal emissary of Marshal Tito, the Red boss of Yugoslavia. As if that weren't enough, Miss Bonvillain is really a man. She underwent a sex-change operation in Malmö, Sweden, in late 1951, before her stellar efforts impersonating a woman at the '52 Olympics. You fucked a man, Freddy. You're a homo. Get the hell off my police force."

—

You're a homo."

"You're a homo."

"You fucked a man."

"You fucked a man."

"You're a homo, you're a homo, you're a homo."

I drank myself into a stunned stupor. I passed out on the floor. I got intimate with insects inhabiting the rug. They were dung desperadoes. They were my filthy fellow travelers, lower than lice.

"You're a homo, you're a homo, you're a homo."

I drank, I passed out, I woke up. I went eye-to-eye with a big beetle. We discussed the man-bug metaphysic. It was infused with frissons from that freaky frog Camus.

The beetle said that life was horrifically happenstance and that we were all fucked by fate. Bugs were biologically bid to live off larvae and leaves. Men were massacred by lascivious lust and bumbled into bed with he-shes. *You didn't know that she was a he. Hit your bennie stash and find your way out of this funk.*

I obeyed the beetle. The Benzedrine outrevved the booze. I talked shit with the beetle for hours. We went feeler-to-feeler on the floor.

I called Abe Adelman at the State License Bureau. I promised him two g's for PI's ducat, quicksville. I bid the beetle adieu and climbed back into my civvies. I drove straight to the Hollywood Ranch Market.

L.A. looked like Pompeii, postearthquake. The summer sun skimmed the sky and scattered death rays. Hes were shes and shes were hes and the most gorgeous girls were gargoyles. I got to the market and ran up to my office. Jimmy was scanning the August *Lowdown.*

He said, "You're wigged out, Freddy."

I said, "I've been talking to a bug."

"What did he tell you?"

“Some shit you wouldn’t believe.”

“I would believe it. It’s the basis of our friendship. We tell each other shit the world wouldn’t believe.”

I smiled. “Tell me something typical. I’ve had a jolt. I need to get my feet back under me.”

Jimmy said, “The barman at the Manhole is pushing horse.”

I said, “I’ll file it away, in case I need him.”

Jimmy said, “I’ve got a picture of Marlon Brando with a dick in his mouth.”

“I’ll give you a C-note.”

Jimmy passed the Old Crow. I took a pull and felt the floor meet my feet.

“How was your date with Donkey Don?”

Jimmy held his hands two feet apart. Jimmy said, “Ouch.”

I roared. We passed and repassed the jug. Jimmy lit a Pall Mall.

“I’m up for a role on *GE Theater,* but this Paul Newman punk will probably get it.”

“I’ll plant a bag of weed on him, and lay on the fear. You’ll get the gig.”

“Thanks, Freddy.”

I thought about the talking bug. I looked down at the aisles. I felt fate beaming back at me.

“I’ve got all this good dirt and no place to put it. It’s driving me fucking crazy.”

—

S*emper fi.*

I assembled my ex-Marine cadre. My porno-prosty boys proceeded priapically apace. My Camp Pendleton pals came up to L.A. and joined Operation Divorce. The two crews crossed over. I had six certified psychos, culled for my command. My Pendleton pit dogs were blood-blitzed from killing Commies in Korea. They were out for chaotic kicks and required tight tugs on their chains. Our marks were adulterous wives and husbands. Donkey Don lured ladies to hot-sheet hotels and instigated insertion. Flashbulbs flared as I kicked in doors, camera cocked. My Pendleton pits were adroit and adept at rolling surveillance. They tailed wayward wives and whorehound hubbies to hotels and walkie-talkied me. Joi was the mouthwatering man bait.

She worked off Arthur Crowley's *craaazy* crib sheets on the hubbies' habits. Joi was sinful seductress *and* cold cocktease. I kicked the doors in just as Joi's zipper dropped.

Operation Divorce was a Marine Corps maneuver and a mad moneymaker. Operation Otash was the ultimate umbrella command. I had an army of snarky snitches on my payroll. My PI's license arrived and served to cinch my sinful sanction. I did not much mourn my severed service with the LAPD. I paid vulture Vice cops for tips on quivering queers, jittery junkies, dipsos deep in the DT's. I built fat files on celebrity secrets and hoarded the horrors hard in my heart. Knowledge is power—the Beverly Hills Hotel bug told me that. The one puzzle piece still missing: how to *systematically* carve cash from all of it.

Jimmy joined in. I kicked putzy Paul Newman's ass and held a bag of maryjane primed with his prints. Jimmy got the *GE Theater* role and groveled with gratitude. I hired him to hump the husband of a divorce-seeking dowager sick of hubby's hijinks. Jimmy was a swift switcherooer—if it mamboed, he'd move on it. He boffed five babes in one week—topping Donkey Don's extant record. I camera-caught the wives as Jimmy shot them the *schvantz.*

L.A. '53—radioactive ring-a-ding-ding!!!! That mauve-and-pink sky, ever mine.

Then, at long last—the confounding convergence.

I was on the Landing Strip. I was lolling with Liz and a winsome waitress from Biff's Charbroil. My mail slot creaked. An envelope hit the floor.

It was a Western Union telegram. I opened it and read:

> *Dear Mr. Otash,*
>
> *We here at* Confidential *are looking for a man conversant in the celebrity secrets of present-day Los Angeles, preferably a man with prior police experience. Would you be willing to meet me in a week's time, to discuss a possible collaboration?*
>
> *Sincerely,*
> *Robert Harrison,*
> *Publisher and Editor In Chief*

—

Ava Gardner's Dusky Dee-lite."

"Johnnie Ray's Men's Room Misadventure."

"Bad Boy Bob Mitchum: Back in Reeferland AGAIN?"

Oh *yeah—Confidential* contaminated. *Confidential* kicked up chaos. *Confidential* came to *work.*

I wired Harrison and confirmed the meet. I booked a boss bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel. I borrowed textbooks from Arthur Crowley's library and studied libel, slander, and defamation of character. I learned to think and talk like a language-lucid lawyer.

Jimmy bagged back issues of *Peep, Lowdown, Whisper, Tattle,* and *Confidential* itself. I studied linguistic loopholes and cultivated codes of mitigation, equivocation, ambiguity. There's innuendo, inference, implication. There's many wicked ways to scandal-skin a cat.

I alter-egoed myself in a week's time. I discovered *sin*uendo and scandal language. I moved into the bungalow a day early. That talking bug and I conferenced and concurred:

Confidential was the grooved-out grail of this shook-up generation. Disillusionment is enlightenment. *Confidential* trafficked truth and harpooned hypocrisy. It was a devoutly decorous document. It was the *meshugenah* Magna Carta of our hopped-up and fucked-up age.

It's now 9/21/53. It's now precisely 10:00 a.m. The doorbell rings.

Caviar, canapés—check. Martinis mixed *magnifico*—check. My dossier on Bondage Bob—malignantly memorized.

I opened the door. There's the Sultan of *Sin*uendo. He's a nervous nebbish in a dreary drip-dry suit.

He said, "Mr. Otash."

I said, "Mr. Harrison."

He walked in and went *Oooh-la-la.* I poured two mighty martinis and pointed to the couch. We raised our glasses. I said, "To freedom of speech."

He said, "The First Amendment. What it hath wrought."

We clicked glasses. He made the you-and-me sign. He said, "Strange bedfellows."

You're *stranger,* dipshit. *You* wear women's lingerie and love the lash. *You* published "Honeys in Heels," pre-*Confidential.*

"Get my attention, Mr. Otash. Open strong, baby. I need dirt, and a man to excavate it. Hit me, sweetheart. Show me why the cognoscenti says, 'Fred Otash is the man to see.' "

I flashed my Marlon Brando snapshot. Bondage Bob perused it. He spazzed and spritzed me with a mouthful of martini.

It drip-dried on the sofa and my silk suit coat. Bondage Bob coughed and called up composure. He said, “Holy fucking shit.”

“May I give you a candid assessment of your situation, and explain how I might best serve you?”

“Hit me, doll. I didn’t fly three thousand miles for some namby-pamby chitchat.”

I shot my cuffs and showed off my Rolex. Twenty-four-karat gold/diamonds/rubies. I buzz-bombed Bondage Bob with my bold opening thrust.

“You publish what is rapidly becoming the premier scandal magazine in a very crowded field. You compete with *Whisper, Tattle, Peep, On the Q.T., Lowdown,* and others. Your competitors rely largely on true-crime exposés, reports of miracle cures for various diseases, and rehashes of your own articles on celebrity misbehavior. The specific strengths of your magazine are its staunch anti-Communist stance and *sex.* Frankly, I find your articles that play on the *greed* of your readers are both unbelievable and devoid of the heat that people turn to *Confidential* for. There are no emerald mines in Colorado, and no Uruguayan herbs that triple the size of the male member in two weeks’ time. You’re *lying,* sir. You’re hoping that bilking your readers with stories like that will both boost your sales and help defray the costs of the libel suits that are being filed against you with greater and greater frequency in circuit courts all over America. My good friend, the esteemed jurist Arthur Crowley, has informed me that magazines that publish filler pieces chock-full of boldfaced lies create what he calls a ‘gap in credibility and verisimilitude.’ This calls into question the veracity of all the articles published in said magazines over time, leaving said magazines vulnerable to both individual lawsuits and the looming specter of what Mr. Crowley calls the ‘lynch-mob-like and Communistic specter of the emerging class action suit,’ wherein aggrieved parties band together under the aegis of left-wing lawyers in order to posit a common beef and destroy the First Amendment right of free speech that we hold so sacred here in America. The mitigating, equivocating, and temporizing language that runs through your groundbreaking articles on celebrity misconduct will not save you. You may use *alleged, purported,* and *rumored* as much as you like, but they will not legally extricate you in the end. My first two salient points are these: you must dramatically boost your sexual content, and everything you publish in *Confidential* must be entirely true and verifiable."

Wooooooooo!!!! Bravura breath control and artful articulation!!!! Bondage Bob's flabbergasted and flushed.

He fidgeted. He licked his lips. He crossed his legs and went submissive sissy. I saw restraint-rope scars on his wrists.

"Nuisance suits are costing us twenty-five thou a month. Those Commie lawyers are coming out of the sewers like rats."

I socked him my Second Soliloquy:

"Informants must be both credible and coercible, as well as vulnerable to exposure of their own misdeeds. I served as an officer of the Los Angeles Police Department for close to a decade. I have access to every crooked cop in this town, and they will rat out any celebrity, socialite, Communist, miscegenist, or alluring lowlife that they know of for a simple retainer. The scum that they rat out will rat out six others to stay out of your magazine, and the mathematical equation that I am positing will extend indefinitely. I can tell that you're thinking, *Informants alone will not suffice,* and that assumption is correct. You may know that we are entering a bold new era of electronic surveillance. I propose that we install standing, full-time bugs in every high-class hotel in Los Angeles. I will bribe the managers and desk clerks of said hotels to steer celebrity adulterers and queers to specific rooms, where their sexual activities and conversation will be captured on tape. The best bug man on earth is a hebe named Bernie Spindel. I will meet with him soon. Mr. Spindel would love to enter your employ, and has a gift for you. He bugged a bungalow at the Miramar Hotel in Santa Monica last week. The manager of the hotel is a masochistic child molester with a quite understandable urge to be punished for his aberrant behavior. I will physically chastise him on a monthly basis, which will deter him from hurting children, as well as keep him under my thumb. He will have strict orders to place all celebs in bungalow number nine. Bernie's gift is a tape of Senator John F. Kennedy fucking Ingrid Bergman, and detailing his preposterous plans to run for president of the United States to her, while she yawns and prattles on about her kids. Be forewarned: the fucking is short-lived. I'll be frank: Senator Kennedy is a two-minute man."

Bondage Bob. He's gaga, goo-goo-eyed, *gone.*

"So, we—"

I cut him off. "*So,* we also bug all the gay bathhouses. *So,* I have extortion wedges on the informants who supply the dirt for our most explosive pieces. *So,* I polygraph-test them to assure their veracity. *So,* I create a climate of fear in Hollywood, which is the most gorgeously perverted and cosmetically moralistic place on God's green fucking Earth. *Because,* I have an unerring nose for human weakness and have sensed for some time that we have entered an era where the gilded and famous all secretly harbor a desire to be exposed. *Because,* I am willing to burglarize any psychiatrist's office in order to get the dirt on their celebrity patients. *Because,* I am willing to quash lawsuits through the threat and application of physical force."

Bondage Bob *guuuuuuuulped.* "What *won't* you do?"

I saw Ralph Mitchell Horvath. I said, "Commit murder or work for the Reds."

A pin-drop silence sizzled. I let it linger *loooooong.*

"Would you consent to an audition? To test your inside knowledge?"

I nodded. Harrison hit me. I bopped to his beat, beatific.

"Senator Estes Kefauver?"

"Whorehound. Shacks with Filipina prosties at the downtown Statler."

"Sinatra. Give me the latest."

"Caught his new girlfriend muff-diving Lana Turner, went on a six-day bender with Jackie Gleason, and wound up with the DT's at Queen of Angels."

"Otto Preminger?"

"Mud shark. Currently enthralled with a sepia seductress named Dorothy Dandridge."

"Lawrence Tierney?"

"Brawling, psychopathic brother of noted grasshopper Scott Brady. Digs the boys at the Cockpit Lounge, and the occasional girl who looks like a boy."

"John Wayne?"

"Quasi–drag queen. Fucks women and looks stunning in a size fifty-two-long muumuu."

"Johnny Weissmuller?"

"King Schlong. Well known to have fathered nine kids out of wedlock, with nine different women. Current holder of the White Man's World Record."

"Duke Ellington?"

"Current holder of the Black World Record."

“Van Johnson?”

“The Semen Demon. Sucks dick at the glory hole at the Wilshire May Company men’s room.”

“Burt Lancaster?”

“Sadist. Has a well-appointed torture den in West Hollywood. Pays call girls top dollar to inflict pain on them.”

“Fritz Lang?”

“Known to film Burt’s torture sessions, and screen them for a select clientele.”

“The Misty June Christy?”

“Nympho size queen. My shakedown bait Donkey Don Eversall gives her the big one on a regular basis. Donkey Don’s got a wall peek at his crib. My pal Jimmy Dean made an avant-garde film of their last assignation. It’s called *The Stacked and the Hung.* The premiere is Friday night, in my living room. You’re cordially invited.”

“Alfred Hitchcock?”

“Peeper.”

“Natalie Wood?”

“Child actress in transition. Rumored to be ensconced at a dyke slave den near Hollywood High.”

“Alan Ladd?”

“Dramatically underhung snatch hound. A man on the horns of a brutal existential dilemma.”

Bondage Bob. The big magazine mogul. He’s gaga, goo-goo, pulled into putty. He’s martini-mangled and *mine.*

“Mr. Otash, the job is yours.”

I said, “The bite is fifty grand a year, and expenses. My operating costs will go at least double that.”

Now, he’s green at the gills. *Now,* he knows there’s No Exit. It’s a fabulous fait accompli.

“Yes, Mr. Otash. We have a deal.”

We shook hands. We jacked gin and vermouth. Bondage Bob said, “Jean-Paul Sartre’s a pal of mine. He’ll love *The Stacked and the Hung.*”

That talking bug rocked across the rug and waved at me. I swear this is true.

—

Jimmy timed the fuck. It ran 1:46. Jack Kennedy and Ingrid Bergman banged the beast with two backs.

Pillow patter tapped the tape. Jack said, "*Aaaaah,* that was good." Ingrid said, "Vell, for vun of us, perhaps."

I roared. Jimmy howled. The market was 3:00 a.m. dead. We gargled Old Crow.

Jimmy said, "We wrapped *GE Theater.* I invited Ronnie Reagan to the premiere."

I said, "He hates the Reds. I'll hit him up for some snitch-outs."

The tape groaned and ground down to squelch. Jimmy turned it off. I looked down at the floor. A dippy denizen bought this month's *Confidential.*

Jimmy said, "When I'm famous, keep me out of the magazine."

I said, "When you're *in* it, you'll know you've arrived."

—

My first ops check arrived. I retained Bernie "the Bug King" Spindel. We spent a week whipping wires to wainscoting and laying mike mounts into mattresses. I bribed hotel honchos up the yammering ying-yang. We drilled, bored, spackled, threaded, planted, and wired all the high-end hotels. Regular retainers would result in records of sicko celebs sacking up in those rooms. Bondage Bob had bountiful bucks. We wire-whipped full-time listening posts at the Beverly Hills Hotel, the Hotel Bel-Air, the Beverly Wilshire, the Miramar, the Biltmore, the downtown Statler. A Biltmore bellboy tipped us, right off. Gary Cooper and a jailbait jill jumped into that bugged bedroom. *BAM!!!*—our system socks in sync. Bedsprings bounce, voices vibrate, mikes pick up tattle text and lay it to the listening post. *BAM!!!*—my Marine Corps mastiff retrieves the tape. *BAM!!!*—the babe is sixteen and a Belmont High coed. Coop says, "You're built, honey. Tell me your name again." The girl gasps, "I've always loved your pictures, Mr. Cooper. And, wow, you're really *big.*"

The dirt. The dish. The scandal skank. The lewd libels revealed as *real.* It all came to me and to *Confidential.* Freddy O.'s in unstoppable ascent.

Jimmy cut his movie and dubbed in a sizzling sound track. The proud premiere was *the* L.A. Moment of Fall '53. I served pizza, booze, and pills from a felonious pharmacy. My pad was packed with movie *machers* and Marines, stupid starlets, stars, and studs. Dig: Liz, Joi, Ward Wardell, Race Rockwell, Donkey Don Eversall. Ronnie Reagan, Harry Fremont, Arthur Crowley, Bondage Bob, and Jean-Paul Sartre—existentially seeking the scene. A six-foot-six drag queen, Rock Hudson, ex–U.S. Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas. Charlie "Yardbird" Parker, nodding on Big "H."

It's the egalitarian epicenter of postwar America. It's a colossal convergence of the gilded and gorgeous, the defiled and demented, the lurid and the low-down. This seedy summit set the tone for the frazzled and fractured frisson that is our nation today.

I dimmed the lights. Race Rockwell ran the projector. The sound track hit: Bartók, Beethoven, bebop by way of Bird. There's the opening titles: *The Stacked and the Hung,* starring Donkey Don Eversall and June Christy. Photographed, edited, produced, and directed by James Dean.

The applause ran apoplectic. There's the first shot. It's a Holly*weird* motel room. It's a through-a-wall-peek peep at you know what.

June Christy enters the room and drops her purse on the bed. She looks apprehensive. She lights a cigarette, she checks her watch, she taps her toes and paces. It's soundless cinema. The camera stays static—the lens is lashed to that peek.

June hears something. She smiles, she walks offscreen, she walks back on with Donkey Don. Donkey Don winks at the wall peek. He's in on it. June sits on the bed. Donkey Don whips it out and wags it. My pad shakes and shimmies. There's gasps, wolf whistles, shrill shrieks.

I looked around for Jimmy. June devoured Donkey Don, tonsil-deep. Where's Jimmy? Fuck—he's jacking off by the pizza buffet!!!

—

'53 to '54. My mauve-and-pink skies. Sales-graph lines in escalation. *Confidential* hits a million a month. *Confidential* makes two million in rabid record time.

It's all *ME.* I'm awash in the sicko secrets I've cruelly craved my whole life. I've got L.A. hot-wired. My city teems with tattle tipsters on my payroll. Hotel rooms are hot-sheet hives hooked up to my headset. I know everything sinful, sex-soiled, deeply dirty, and religiously wrong. It's wrong, it's real, and it's *MINE.*

My Marines lived in listening posts. They caught Corrine Calvet cavorting with a car-park cat at the Crescendo. They caught Paul

Robeson, ripped to the gills at a Red rally. They caught Jumping Johnnie Ray again. I verified all of it and fed it to *Confidential.* Gary Cooper and Miss Belmont High? Quashed for ten grand.

’53 to ’54. A-bomb parties on Liz Taylor’s rooftop. Cavalcades of color against the dim dawn. The camaraderie and opportunity. The sense that this march of magnificent moments would never stop.

Sales graphs. *Confidential* covers. Dipsos, nymphos, junkies, and Commies, exposed. That cover I regret, that ball I dropped, that *malignant* moment. That page in Purgatory as I pause my pen.

It’s January 16, 1954. I’m at my pad. I’m booking a threeski for the Landing Strip. I quashed a story on Marilyn Monroe’s Mexican marriage. Marilyn grovels, grateful. She knows a sapphic sister with a sometimes yen for men.

The phone rang. I picked up. Arthur Crowley said, “There’s trouble, Freddy.”

I said, “Hit me.”

“I got a tip. Johnnie Ray’s been to a libel lawyer, and he’s suing the magazine. I know that you verified the story, but he’s going forward anyway. I strongly suggest that you nip this in the bud.”

“Men’s Room *Mishegas:* Jittery Johnnie Strikes Again.” I verified the story. *Confidential* ran it. This was untold grief.

“My Marines are on maneuvers, Art. There’s no one to handle it.”

“*You* handle it, Freddy. Take care of it, before that tip gets back to Bob Harrison.”

I hung up. My nerves were nuked. I took three quick pops of Old Crow. Joi was tight with Johnnie. They girl-talked regular. I liked Johnnie. Jimmy screened *The Stacked and the Hung* for him, personally.

I dropped three yellow jackets and obliterated the day. I woke up at midnight. Johnnie always hit Googie’s after his closing set. He always parked in the same spot.

I walked over. I recall spring heat and a brisk breeze. I lounged on Johnnie’s Packard Caribbean. Johnnie bopped out at 1:15.

He saw me. He got the gestalt. He said, “Hi, Freddy.”

I said, “Don’t make me, kid. I’ll keep you out from now on, but you’ve got to stop it here.”

Johnnie said, “You’re a parasite, Freddy. You feed off the weak. I’m not backing off. I don’t see any of your goons around, so you’ll have to do it yourself.”

I said, “Let it go, Johnnie. You can’t win this one.”

"*You're* the weak one, Freddy. Joi told me you cry out for your mother in your sleep."

I trembled. "One more time, Johnnie. No lawsuit. Do this for me, and the magazine will never come near you again."

Johnnie spit on my shoes. "You're a mama's boy, Freddy. Joi told me you fucked a tranny, which makes you more queer than me."

I saw red and black-red. I hit him. My signet ring slashed his cheek. He went down on his knees. I picked him up and hurled him against his car. I heard bones crack and teeth shear. The bumper ledge gouged his head. I kicked him and tore a chunk of his scalp free.

He said, "Okay, okay, okay."

I said, "I'm sorry, kid."

Johnnie spit blood. Johnnie spit teeth and gum flaps. He shot a big fuck-you finger my way.

—

The market was 2:00 a.m. deadsville. Jimmy and I quaffed Old Crow. We stood by the mirror and gassed at the ghoul show. I was spritzed with Johnnie Ray's blood.

Jimmy said, "I'm up for the lead in *East of Eden.* Elia Kazan's waffling. It could go either way."

I said, "I'll lean on Kazan. He's susceptible. There's some pinkos he didn't rat to HUAC."

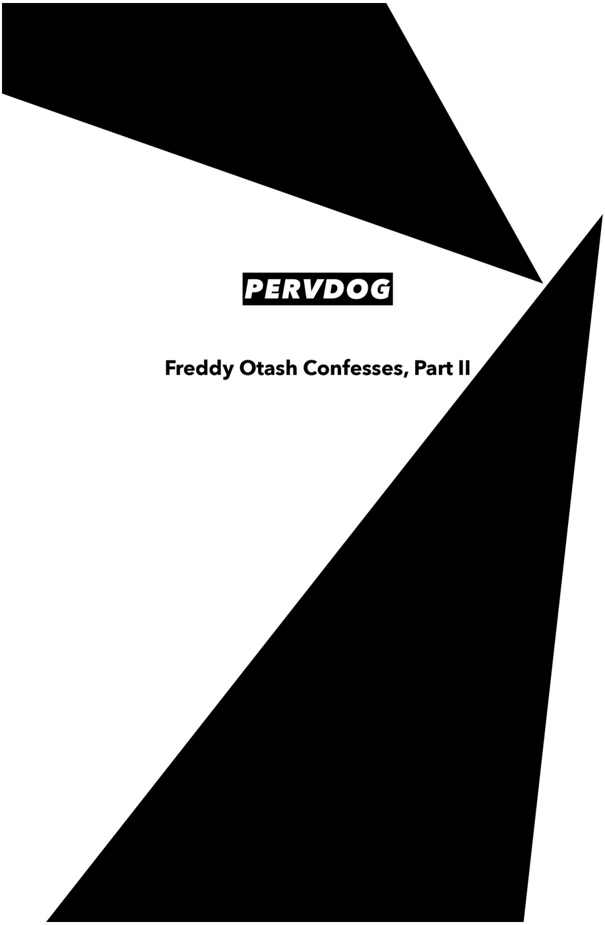
Jimmy gazed down at the aisles. My hands hurt. I cracked my signet ring. My shirt cuffs were soaked red.

The Legions of the Lost. They're down there. They're damning me. They're hexing me to Hell. They're my comrades in chaos. They're saying You're One of Us.

"Jimmy, do you know why you're a freak?"

"I don't know, Freddy. Do you know why *you* are?"

I said, "I don't know, but sometimes it all gets to me."



PERVDOG

Freddy Otash Confesses, Part II

CELL 2607

Penance Penitentiary
Reckless-Wrecker-of-Lives Block
Pervert Purgatory
8/25/2020

I'm balefully *back*. It's time for my next contaminated confession. I'm *still* stagnantly stuck in the Hell Adjacent Hilton and yammeringly yearn for a heavenly reprieve. I'm *still* stuck with the fucked-up and failing body I had when I crapped out, back in '92. It's *still* confession/repentence/atonement. It *still* comes down to *that*. Here's the draconian drill:

I'll repugnantly reprise some shit I pulled in phantasmagoric '54. I'll be freewheeling Fred Otash at thirty-two. '54 was a ring-a-ding-ding year. I'm going to *diiiiiiig* going back.

So, succumb to the seditious soul of a scandal-rag scoundrel—because wicked words on paper are pop-pop-popping your way.

Freaky Freddy O. rides again.

ATOP MATTRESS JACK KENNEDY'S BOSS BUNGALOW AT THE BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL

2/14/54

It's a wind-whipped winter nite. It's cloudless clear all the way to noxious Nevada. Uncle Sambo is detonating a payload-packed A-bomb in some deserted desert burg. We're here to grok, groove, flip, flash, and gas on the show.

We've got a ripe rooftop perch. I'm here at Bondage Bob Harrison's behest. *Confidential*'s running a *farkakte* feature on radioactive waste as a dick-enlargement bonanza. Bob's got a mad chemist brother. He's calling his priapic product "Megaton Man."

We're here. That means me and my Marine Corps mastiffs: Race Rockwell and Ward Wardell. Mattress Jack has slipped his gilded guests binoculars and Hyannis Port toggle coats. My cool contingent carries burglars' tools and comes with B and E know-how. The plan: burglarize Senator Jack's bungalow in the wiggy wake of the blast.

Dig the guest list. There's Jack the K. and insolent Ingrid Bergman. There's Bob Mitchum and Juicy Jane Russell. There's Tarzan-toned Lex Barker and liquor-looped Lana Turner. Jimmy Dean's on *my* guest card. He's *still* peddling snapshots of Marlon Brando with a dick in his mouth. Jimmy's got director Gadge Kazan in tow. He's *this close* to snagging the top role in *East of Eden.* Gadge is a maladroit midget. His flicks send me somnambulistic. He ratted some Comintern cads to HUAC and earned *Confidential*'s fevered fealty. He snitches recidivistic Reds to Bondage Bob, subversively sub rosa.

Senator Jack served rum drinks topped with floating hashish cubes. I opted for the Benzedrine-spiked reefers. Jack Baby loves my larcenous Lebanese ass. I flew a bitching bevy of call girls down to Acapulco last year. They trashed Jack's paparazzi-pounced honeymoon and made Jackie jump into my bed. Jack's a *c'est la vie,* Daddy-O, noblesse oblige sort of guy. Jackie was grovelingly grateful.

A portable radio announced the countdown. Waiters stood by with postblast drinks and hors d'oeuvres. A doomsday disc jockey intoned: "ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one—zero."

Bombs Away, Motherfuckers!!!!!

A magnificent mushroom cloud morphed into mauve and pink. Man, what a suck-your-soul sight!!! My balls contracted. My boys and I hopped off the roof, down to ground level. Ground zero popped pink particles high in the sky. The gilded gang applauded and roared.

—

We deviously ditched the party. None of the bomb babies saw us. Jack's bungalow was right there, off the roof. I demobilized the door lock with a celluloid strip. We locked the door behind us and worked with pocket penlights. Chop, chop—fuckers. I'm giving us eight minutes, tops.

Our top target was address books. They were stashed in handbags and overcoats discarded for Jack's toggle togs. It's a scandal-rag caper. I'm out to notch names/numbers/addresses. The lurid love shacks of the heavy-hung and hard up. Nubile names and fuck-struck fone numbers. Noxious names and homo-hideout addresses. Non sequitur names that might mandate bracing break-ins themselves.

It was all for *Confidential.* Knowledge is power. You naïve *nudniks* know that. *My* misanthropic motive? A demonic desire to know the world's secret shit and hoard said shit for my personal titillation and shakedown potential.

The clock's ticking. We crisscrossed the crib. Ward and Race went for all the boss booty. *Ooooohhh*—overcoats draped on hotel-suite chairs, high-line handbags galore. My job was forensic frame-up. I secretly secured three fingerprint cards from Beverly Hills PD Burglary.

Dig: three hot-prowl/rape-o/459 men. Bad lads, already ID'd. At large for six Beverly Hills jobs. Forced oral cop/straight rape/thirty-four thou in stolen furs and jewels.

It gets wicked worse. There's a Little Lindbergh Law kidnap. She's a Beverly High cheerleader. There's multiple motel-room rapes before she's cut loose. The BHPD wanted these fucked-up fiends, *baaaaaaaaad.* Heh, heh—I made Scotch-taped transparencies of the three print cards. George Collier Akin, Durwood N. M. I. Brown, Richard "Rattlesnake" Dulange. Fred O. judge-and-juries a frame job on YOU.

I got out my print cards. I laid the treated transparency tape across three thumb and full-fingerprint spreads. I pulled off my single-digit tapes. I laid prints on chair backs, waist-high wainscoting, touch-and-grab bedroom planes.

J'accuse—Akin, Brown, and Dulange—you were here. You robbed Senator Jack Kennedy's hotel suite. You done been FRAMED.

Ward and Race dumped furs and address books. They stacked them in Senator Jack's ostrich-skin suitcase. We were six minutes in. I saved the best booty for last.

Mattress Jack was a hellacious hophead. He had legal scripts from half the pharmacists in L.A. I made for the bathroom and Jack's mad medicine chest. Oh yeah—Dilaudid, Dexedrine, Dolophine sulfate. *Ooooohhh*—the nifty new Nembutal suppositories!!!

Jack collected lissome locks of women's pubic hair. He traveled with them and kept them in unscented sachets. I found his stash in an attaché case under the bed. They were lewdly labeled. I've always gassed on La Bergman and Anna Magnani. I left the attaché behind. I took two love-lashed sniffs on my way out the door.

—

Ward and Race left me the address books. Bomb blasts and burglary—the total take vibed ten g's. Don Wexler knew a fence. We'd lay off the furs soonsville. We split the wallet cash three ways.

I popped two of Jack's delectable dexies and leveled the load with a one-grain Dilaudid. I drove to Googie's to log tattle tips from the late-nite legions who lingered there.

Tipsters crept up and crowded my table. Here's baritone sax Gerry Mulligan. He lays out alto sax Art Pepper's yen for lush high school chicks. Pepper pounded his pud at the sight of pom-pom-girl garb. He haunted Hollywood High and Hami High and left drool stains on the football field bleachers.

Comme ci, comme ça. I laid twenty clams on Gerry. He amscrayed to score some Big "H."

Billy Eckstine dropped by to schmooze. The mellifluous Mr. B. was mad for miscegenation. He played all the colored clubs on 46th and Central. He loved *Confidential* and lauded its sheer linguistic flair. He called it the "scatterbrained scat of white men working hard to be hip." Billy was right. I told him I'd insert the quote in the next issue. Billy went on to *coon*fide his own recent affairs. And, Freddy, dig—all these bints *want* to see themselves linked to me in *Confidential.*

"All these bints." As in Ava Gardner, Bette Davis, ex–U.S. Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas. Lezbo basketball player Joan "Stretch" Perkins—hiding her secret yen for men from her sapphic sisters on the USC team. Plus the Misty June Christie, Anita O'Day, four boss bitches on work furlough from Tehachapi, and smack-back Chet Baker's willowy white wife.

I laid two yards on Billy. He showed me a pic of Stretch Perkins. She's sinking a *loooooong* hook shot against UCLA. I emitted low growls. Stretch ran six-six and 190. Billy grokked my Landing Strip antics. He affirmed that Stretch dug threeskies. He said he'd set Joi and me up with her.

Low growls and bilious boredom. Billy bopped off. Jilted lovers bopped up. They ratted out their cheating wives and hubbies as the Black Dahlia killer. The Dahlia was stale bread. I fobbed them off with a five-spot apiece.

It was 2:00 a.m. My dope cocktail coursed through me. My thoughts tumbled and tossed. That A-bomb blast blazed behind my eyelids. I saw three big squarejohns in gray suits by the bar. They vilely vibed fuzz. I thought of William H. Parker, still running spot tails on me. I blinked, the squarejohns squiggled, they might have been A-bomb/dope fantasia.

I thought about the magazine. Sales were up 16 percent for January '54. Shame shot through me. I thought about my thump job on Johnnie Ray. Johnnie was tight with Joi. They koffee-klatched and gal-talked. Johnnie threatened to sue *Confidential.* He refused to desist. I had one rancid recourse. Johnnie gave Joi the blow-by-blow. Joi was righteously repelled. She resisted my rigorous romancing and refuseniked threeskies with Liz Taylor. Maybe Stretch Perkins would loosen her libido and liberate her heart.

Another jacked-up Joan jumped me. Joan Hubbard Horvath. Ralphie's widow. I had two grand in my pocket and no place to go at 3:00 fucking a.m.

So, I cadged an envelope from my waiter.

So, I went by the penance pad.

—

Lower Holly*weird*. Camerford between Vine and El Centro. A smudgy small wood-frame job, just short of a shack.

I parked across the street and bopped over. I popped the envelope in the mailbox and bopped back to my sled. A light popped on. The Horvath hut glowed internal and infernal.

I'm a devious dipshit. I made too much noise on purpose. Hey, lady—I killed your husband. It's been five years and eleven days now. I've never seen your face.

Just newspaper pix. Pixilated pokes at you in wilted widow's weeds. The *Herald* ran headlines. WOUNDED COP SURVIVES SHOOT-OUT. GUNMAN SLAIN IN ESCAPE ATTEMPT.

There's a *biiiiiiig* pic of Fractious Freddy. There's zero per throwdown guns and Ralphie's unarmed status.

I lit a cigarette and sat there. I played "Willow Weep for Me" in my head. Time tipped by. Joan Hubbard Horvath walked out on the porch. The front-room lights boffo backlit her.

She wore a dark wool dress and brown loafers. She sported a short shag hairdo and wire-rimmed specs.

She looked *toward* me. I looked *at* her. I'm a good whistler. I whistled "Willow Weep for Me" all the way through. I made the crescendo a cri de coeur and a long-suppressed sob.

Joan Horvath looked in her mailbox. The song went *sooooooooo* soft—

THE SECURITY OFFICE AT THE SLEAZOID HOLLYWOOD RANCH MARKET

2/15/54

Jimmy Dean and I lolled by the two-way mirror. We looked down at the dregs and the dreck and the dreamy drag queens dragging themselves through the aisles. Shifty shoplifters shot their gaze to our opaque eye in the sky.

Jimmy said, “Aisle six. That fat guy slid a Swanson’s TV dinner down the back of his pants.”

I lit a cigarette. “The checkstand guy will spot the bulge and nail him.”

“You’re abstracted today, Freddy.”

“I had a late night, and I don’t feel like messing with chumps.”

Jimmy pulled a chair up. I collapsed on my couch. Jimmy tossed a magazine on my lap.

“I talked to Billy Eckstine after you left Googie’s. He told me you’re entranced with a certain lezzie athlete. I heard she frequents Linda’s Little Log Cabin, and I thought you might appreciate page twenty-six.”

The *Trojanette Sporting News.* Glittery glossy and a boss booster rag. Page twenty-six: a fulsome foldout of Joan “Stretch” Perkins.

Woo-woo!!! She’s a Viking Valkyrie. She’s a blitzkrieg blonde with bleached-blue eyes. She’s bigger than Barb Bonvillain—richly revealed to be a man some quack diced and dehomoized.

There’s Strapping Stretch. She’s Stunning Stretch in USC crimson-and-gold silks. She wears no makeup. She looks heavenly wholesome. She’s smiling because she’s bigger than everyone—men insistently included. And I know and dig that that means *ME*—you towering temptress.

I tossed the magazine back to Jimmy. He said, “Something’s eating you.”

“Joi moved out last night, while I was at Googie’s. She left me a note: ‘Fuck you and go to hell. You’re a storm trooper, and the world is wise to your shit.' "

Jimmy yukked. "Joi's vivid, but I found you a new roommate—at least for a while."

"Stretch Perkins?"

"No such luck. Liberace called me. He wants you to look after his leopard while he goes on tour. You're the only man for the job. The fucking leopard would kill anyone else."

I yukked. "I'll consider it. Tell me some other shit I don't know, and make it entertaining."

Jimmy lit a cigarette and blew concentric smoke rings. Gadge Kazan told me the trick got him *East of Eden.*

"I did two days on *Ride Clear of Diablo,* at Universal. Lew Wasserman knows we're pals, and he chatted me up on the set. He said Rock Hudson's going batshit with boys of all races, colors, and creeds, and Morty Bendish at the *Mirror*'s getting ready to blind-item it, and he's passing the specific dirt and some motel-room infrareds on to some guys at *Transom* and *Whisper.* He wants you to put the squelch on it and find Rock a wife, so maybe the appearance of being married will put the skids to all those persistent and wholly accurate rumors."

I roared righteous and laffed lewd. I folded my fitful funk and tossed Jilting Joi and Jittery Johnnie Ray aside. I popped two of Jack Kennedy's Dexedrine and went rippled and revitalized.

"Call Lew, and put him on your side in all matters pertaining to your career. Tell him we're in. I'll lean on Bendish and the *Transom* and *Whisper* guys. We'll negotiate the wife search when I glom the infrareds, and we'll split Lew's paycheck fifty-fifty. Hit the studio casting pools and hustle up some good-looking skirts who know an opportunity when they see one, and who know how to keep their mouths shut. No semipros, nothing garish. Withhold the 'He's a fruit' punch line until we've narrowed down our list of candidates. Call Rock now and tell him to be discreet and order in his woof-woof, for the time being. Tell Lew that *he's* the one to break the news to Rock—and to tell him the good news that as far as women are concerned, nothing lasts forever."

—

Rippled, revitalized, ready to roll. *Bam!!!!!*—scratch a righteous and reptilian American, and the lines between *OPPORTUNITY* and *LOVE* blur.

Jimmy split to find Rock Hudson a wife he'd never pour the pork to. I checked the a.m. papers and ran the radio. As expected—the 459 at Jack Kennedy's suite went unreported. As expected—a BHPD Burglary dick called me. As expected—he called everybody on Senator Jack's A-bomb-bash guest list. As expected—he mentioned the burdensome B and E in *sooooo*-discreet terms. *But*—he laid the vivid verismo on ex-cop Otash, X-clusive.

"We know who did it, Freddy. It's those rape-o shitheads who kidnapped that cheerleader chick. They left prints up the wazoo. Those humps are bought and paid for."

Don Wexler called half an hour later. Dig: we got 11.6 thou for the furs and jewels in Jack the K.'s hotel suite.

I went through the five address books we stole. *Confidential* thrived on insider tattle. I had pink and red leather books for Ingrid Bergman, Lana Turner, and some society sob sister named Connie Woodard. She scribed for the Hearst rags and wrote up the pampered party lives of the L.A. elite. I had black books for *Baaaaaad* Bob Mitchum and Senator Jack his own self.

I tapped La Grande Bergman first. The names and numbers were prissy predictable. Fat voyeur Alfred Hitchcock. Yawn-meister Gregory Peck. Dago directors Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, Michelangelo Antonioni. So far, so *what*? Ingrid swung with Rossellini, circa '50. She popped his out-of-wedlock whelp and caused a stir. So *what*? *Confidential* ran that stale story already. The rest of the numbers? Studio stiffs, fag hags, anonymous suck-ups to the stars. Plus—Jack the K., *biiiiiiiig* surprise: Ingrid was a *WOMAN*—if it mamboed, he'd move on it. Plus *this:* all the dizzy data was in *Confidential*'s master file already.

I tapped Bob Mitchum's black book. It was all call girls/all day and all nite. Note the boffo bust measurements next to the numbers. Half these babes peddled their poon out of Googie's. *Yawn.* They were all in *Confidential*'s comprehensive call-girl file. Note to Bondage Bob Harrison: run an All Call Girl Issue soon!!!!

Next up: Hearst hack Connie Woodard. *Aha*—here my hackles hopped.

Call girls to Commies. *That's* a puzzling parlay. Note these noxious names. We've got Joe Losey and John Howard Lawson. We've got Comintern cultural commissar V. J. Jerome. There's dyspeptic Dalton Trumbo. Don't stop now. There's blustery blowhards blasted and blacklisted, Moscow's minions all, plus all the mock martyrs known as the Hollywood Ten.

We had all the names and numbers in our "Known Commo" file. *So what?* It's the confounding connection to the Woodard cooze that made it all pop!!!

And—*here's* a hot one. Gnaw on *this* non sequitur. He ain't no apoplectic apparatchik. He ain't no rank Red, no way.

Steve Cochran.

Steve the Stud. Mr. Twelve Inches. B-movie thug and cad supreme. Star of dreary drive-in drivel like *Highway 301, White Heat,* and *The Damned Don't Cry.* Steve the Stud's ruff and tuff, on- and offscreen. He's a brawler and a sicko psychopath. Men fear him, women crave him. He's the hungest among us. He treats women ruff and tuff—like they licentiously like it. He beat two pachucos who tried to mug him half dead. A fruit honked him at Grauman's Chinese. He bit the guy's nose off and spit it back in his face.

Woooo-woooo!!!!

A hunch hit me, hard. Call it the Cochran Confluence. I had two address books left. Lana Turner's and Jack K's. Said books would yield boring bupkes. Except for this: said books would unify the Cochran Confluence.

I cracked the books and riffled pages. Steve the Stud's right there, alphabetical.

Bingo. Both books. Add on Commophile Connie Woodard. Here's my hunch: it all meant Something Big.

—

I drove back to my pad. I brooded and worked the phone until 10:00 p.m. sharp. Then I dressed sharp and drove out to the Valley.

Something Big.

My phone work confirmed it. I tapped my contact at PC Bell. I gave him four names and pledged him a thou to run phone bills. Dig this, demonic:

Jack Kennedy called Steve Cochran nineteen times the past two months. He called from his Senate office and his Hyannis Port home. Steve the Stud called Jack fourteen times. He called from his well-known fuck pad in West Holly*weird.*

Connie Woodard called Steve Cochran twenty-four times the past two months. She called from her crib in high-rent Hancock Park. Steve the Stud called Connie twenty-one times.

Lana Turner called Steve Cochran thirty-four times the past two months. She called from her Holmby Hills manse. Steve the Stud called Lana twenty-six times.

I logged the insidious info and let it pulse and percolate. Dumb domestic shit ditzed me. Joi left a note, taped to the bathroom mirror. She called me a "Merchant of Hate and Violence" and preeningly prophesied my short and loveless life. I checked my answering-service messages. Liberace begged me to babysit Lance the Leopard. I left a message with his service: "Okay, I'll do it."

I popped two dexies and leveled the load with four belts of Old Crow. I put on my choice chalk-stripe suit and spritzed on Lucky Tiger. I pondered the Cochran Confluence and Joan "Stretch" Perkins, nonstop. I called Bernie Spindel on my way out the door.

I said, "We're working tomorrow. It's a bug-and-tap on Steve Cochran's place."

Bernie said, *"Oy,"* and hung up.

—

Linda's Little Log Cabin: a lezbo lair and rustic rendezvous raft. A shadowed shack. Shellacked wood beams and show tunes tuned low. A make-out mood. Wraparound booths wrapped in cigarette smoke. Butch bunkers and fetching femme nests.

I walked in. I knew the drill. Central Vice validated the dive and took 5 percent. Linda Lindholm owed me. She liked lewd Latin stuff. She went through wetback wenches, *mucho mas.* Linda laid *las chiquitas* low. Linda went from burning love to boredom in six seconds flat. Frame-up Freddy stepped in then. I reefer-rousted the girls and bounced them back over the border.

Linda saw me. She stood at the bar and made that *gimme* sign. I dipped a double sawbuck her way. She pointed to a back booth.

I walked over. I smelled Jungle Jaguar perfume—straight up/no chaser. She stepped out of the booth and stood up to meet me. Gilded goddess, I'm yours.

She towered tall. She backlit and bashed my base desires and made me simmer *soooooooft* in her glow. She wore a sleeveless madras shirtdress and saddle shoes sans socks. She emitted Valkyric vibrations. She looked like Kirsten Flagstad sang *Tristan und Isolde.* She said, “Hello, Mr. Otash,” and held out her hand.

I took it and bowed. She had a husky kid voice. It was cool contralto cut with prep school—straight up/no chaser.

We slid into the booth. We sat across from each other. A table lamp lit Stretch, A-bomb mauve and pink. Her bare arms were my size. She raised a hand and tossed her hair. Her underarm hair showed. Her *craaaaazy* credentials crackled by torchlight. Kirsten Flagstad to Anna Magnani. She took on an Italian Neorealist glow.

She said, “Billy told me that you wanted to meet me. I like meeting new and interesting people, so I said okay.”

I said, “I saw your picture. That’s why I’m here, and I know you can guess why. But my intentions went out the window the second I saw *you.*”

Stretch smiled. “Billy said you’re the man to see in L.A. He considers me trouble-prone, because I sort of like girls. I’m training for the ’56 Olympics, and I don’t want to bollix that up.”

Drinks appeared. On the house. Linda brought them herself. A Manhattan for Stretch. Old Crow for me.

We tipped glasses. “You’re nineteen. Everyone’s a new and interesting person to you. That leaves you vulnerable. Lezzie girls, and colored guys like Billy, and guys like me are trouble, so if you’re trouble-prone, you should consider who you let into your life.”

Stretch sipped her drink. I held my hands back and tried not to touch her.

“If the stern-big-brother routine is a ploy, it’s a new one. People usually don’t meet me and start warning me away in the same breath.”

“I like the idea of you being reckless, and me getting you out of jams. Here’s my first bit of advice. Billy told me you want to be linked to him in *Confidential.* That’s a dumb move. It’ll mess you up with the USC regents and the Olympic people.”

Stretch shrugged. “I’m nineteen. I’m restless. I’m as notable as an intramural athlete who happens to be a girl can be. I’m big, and I’m rather awkward, and a certain type of man and woman go for me, and want to meet me and test themselves with me, and I’m very curious as to who those people are.”

I folded my hands on the table. Stretch folded her hands over them. Her hands were bigger than mine.

“So, I go for you. I wanted to meet you, and I’ve met you. I’ve explained my intentions, so here's something you might find interesting. I'm looking after a real-live leopard for the next three weeks. You can visit my pad and meet him, and I won't let him maul you or kill you."

Stretch laffed. She temptress-tossed her hair. It was straight and dirty blond and center-parted. She had big buck teeth.

I locked up our fingers. It went to a cute tug-of-war. Her hands were stronger than mine.

"Are you in a jam right now?"

"No."

"Can you sniff out bad intentions and walk away, fast?"

"Yes."

"Will you call me if you're unsure about somebody?"

"Yes."

"Have you got enough money to live on?"

"Yes, and I'd never let man, woman, or beast set me up in a place and expect favors."

I yukked. "It's a code you've got, right? It's like me. I'll do anything short of murder, and I'll work for anybody but Communists."

Stretch yukked and unlaced our hands. The booth was warm. We popped sweat. Stretch wiped her brow and her underarms. She tied her hair back with a rubber band and gave me This Look.

"I'm glad you like me there. It means that you're discerning, and that you dig the offbeat."

My nerves were shot to shit. Stretch scared me and scattered me and lust-lashed me some new way. Stretch read me her restricting riot act.

"I like to make out and take naps with men. I'm putting the rest of it off until I sort some things out."

I lit a cigarette. Stretch lit up out of my pack. She blew four concentric smoke rings to my three. I felt dope-ditzed and sex-socked —and lost-lifed some new way. I laid my head on the table. Stretch ran her hands through my hair.

"You're okay, Uncle Freddy. I know you killed a man when you were a policeman, and Billy said maybe you shouldn't have. I'm forgiving with people, if they don't mess with me directly."

I raised my head and pulled her hands down and kissed them. I caught her scent and my scent, all merged up.

"What else did Billy tell you about me?"

"He said we were both curious and lonely, in the exact same way."

—

Jungle Jaguar. The widow’s withered scent. The Joan-to-Joan parlay at 1:00 a.m. A penance payment in my pocket and a picture in my head.

Liz Taylor in *A Place in the Sun.* The final shot. Monty Clift walks the last mile. The mad mise-en-scène goes silky subjective. There’s a climactic close-up. Liz looms, *laaaaarge.*

She parts her lips. Transposition/transfiguration. I kiss the merged Joan Perkins and Joan Horvath for the fade-out.

Camerford and El Centro. There’s the house. There’s late living room lights.

I parked and walked over. I mimicked Monty’s last mile and made the mailbox drop *laaaast.* I looped back to my sled and waited. I whistled “My Funny Valentine” at dirge speed.

Joan Horvath walked out. She wore the same stay-at-home ensemble. She held a cigarette and a highball glass. She tossed her dumb wool skirt and sat down on the porch.

She caught me mid-chorus. I hit a high note and made the secondary theme soar. I looked *at* her. She looked *toward* me. The moon moved out of a cloud bank. I saw gray flecks in her shag cut.

Those steel-rimmed glasses gave her 3-D vision. She saw through me like some creature in a monster matinee. I shut my eyes to shut her gaze out and deploy the big close-up. A black curtain closed off her kiss.

BERNIE SPINDEL'S BUG VAN

Outside Steve Cochran's Apartment Complex
West Holly*weird*
2/16/54

Bernie said, "I'm wary of this job. This psycho cocksucker scares me."

Studly Steve lived on Havenhurst between Fountain and the Strip. Three sparkle-Spanish buildings/one cool courtyard. Six pads per building. Call girls and minor movie minions ensconced within.

It's 9:14 a.m. now. Steve's home. His coon maroon Merc's parked out back.

I lit a cigarette and gargled Old Crow. I had a case of the yammering yips and the mean megrims. I kept seeing things. Strongarm cops in surging surveillance. Women I wanted wicked *baaaaaaaad* and weren't there. Waiting wilted me. I wanted *WORK*. I popped two Dexedrine to goose things along.

Bernie said, "He's got four rooms, plus bathroom. I checked with the County Planning Office. The walls are soft stucco, and all rough-finished. They'll be easy to drill and respackle. I broke in last night and carved some paint chips. It's a new paint job, so it should be easy to match."

We wore TV repairman jumpsuits. Master keys would get us in. Steve the Stud was filming some crime lox called *Private Hell 36*. Bernie spot-tailed him yesterday. He said Steve got his all-day calls at 9:30 a.m.

I said, "We'll piggyback the listening post on Sweetzer. Burt Lancaster's got his torture den in the same building. My Marines will monitor both locations. We'll have a man hot-wired in at all times."

Bernie went *Oy*. "Burt swings both ways. Ward Wardell told me. He buys his boys from a swish named Dwight Gilette."

I said, "To each his own. You're a big cheese at your synagogue, and you've got eight *schvartze* girlfriends."

Bernie went *Oy*. I pointed across the street. Studly Steve's rolling. His cherry Merc's wheeling southbound.

We loaded up. Drills, spackle paste, paint and brushes—*check*. Wire rolls, condenser mikes, friction tape—*check*. Wire clamps, spatulas, industrial vacuum—*check*. Toolbox packed with close-work tools—*check*.

We packed two big metal cases. They were marked "Acme TV Repair." We vacated the van and coursed through the courtyard. We hit Steve's door at a sprint. Bernie jabbed keys at the door lock. Key #3 got us in.

I popped through the pad. It was cool, cozy, and tidy tight. Living room/ bedroom/kitchen/bathroom/washroom. One connecting hallway. One demented decorating motif:

World War II. Ripe real regalia. Booty from Berchtesgaden and Jap flags salvaged from Saipan. Swastika wall banners. German helmets as cereal serving bowls, sunk in the sink. SS-motif ashtrays. Rising-sun rugs. Showy shadow-boxed Lugers. Beaver pix of Eva Braun—*der Führer*'s freaky *Frau*. Choice tchotchkes on chairs/tables/wall racks. Dig *this,* deranged: Jap shrunken heads, beady-eyed beasts, all wearing fit-to-size Brooklyn Dodger hats.

Bernie slavered, slack-jawed. I got out my Minox spy camera and shot it all. I smelled Smear Job. Let's foto-fuck this creep.

Steve Cochran, the Big Dick *Bürgermeister* of the L.A. Reich. Nazi nests at Warner's, Metro, and Fox. We'll loose-link it to last year's Nazi/flying saucer piece. Bondage Bob Harrison partied with Paraguayan parasite Alfredo Stroessner and wicked Juan Perón. They hid hordes of Hitlerites, circa '46. Commie columnists called *Confidential* "fascistic," "nativistic," "hucksteristic," and "the voice of vile volition in the vox populi." The coruscating Cochran exposé would lash those leftist lies!!!!!

Bernie jerked at my jumpsuit and jacked me half off my feet. "Freddy, let's *go*. Quit gawking. We've got work to do."

So, yeah—we *worked*. We whipped wires to wainscoting and wiggled them under rugs. We drilled white walls and wedged in bug mounts. We rigorously respackled and repainted. We vacuumed up Spackle dust. We planted microphones in cracks, crevices, crawl spaces. We ripped the receivers off the two telephones and planted condenser mikes. We studied standing lamps and stuck bug mounts under the shades. We bugged the bedroom and looped the living room. We supersocked in the *sound*.

Tick, tick, tick. Four-plus hours' work. I was sweat-swacked and dexie-ditzed and stomp-the-stars elated. We repacked our gear. Bernie sighed and went *Oy. Opportunity is love.* That maladroit maxim moved through me.

—

The Sweetzer listening post. A two-bedroom flop in a Deco dive off Willoughby. We recorded Burt Lancaster's torture tilts with stacked starlets there. Plus three call-girl cribs. Plus an opium den in the back of the Hunan Hut—"Home of the Shanghai Shipwreck Cocktail."

The pad was wire-whipped, floor to rafters. Cable cords and outlet plugs jammed up the joint. We manned tape rigs round the clock. Bernie set up a transceiver in Steve Cochran's living room. It went optimum operational at 6:00 p.m. 6:00 sharp came and went. I slipped on headphones and listened to dead air.

Jimmy Dean dropped by. He brought nudie pix and brief bios for Rock Hudson's wife candidates. Dig: six backlot babes who cadged coffee for cast and crew and blew select directors. I told Jimmy they looked *gooooood.* Jimmy donned earmuffs and manned the Hunan Hut rig. He passed on choice *sin*uendo. The delivery dinks pushed pills packed in with their pupu platters and pork fried rice. Bela Lugosi and Peter Lorre toked "O" in the den. They schmoozed their guest shots on Vampira's late-nite TV show. Vampira went lez in the Los Amigas home for girls. She was running a lez string out of Googie's, as we speak.

More dead air. I got bored and called my answering service. *Oooooh*—Miss Joan "Stretch" Perkins called. She wanted to know if she could pick up Lance the Leopard and install him at my crib. I called Stretch back and set it up. I urged caution. Stretch blew me a fone kiss and said she'd make out with me soon.

Joi called. Johnnie Ray called. The answering-service girl said they got catty. "Tell Mr. Otash he's hung like a cashew—and who knows better than me?" "Tell Mr. Otash he's an evil storm trooper—and soon the whole world will know."

Fuck that shit—I went back to line hiss and dead air.

Time ticked. I chain-smoked and scratched my balls. The Hunan Hut delivered dinner. I noshed Noodles à la Chang and China Joe's Chop Suey. Steve Cochran's phone rang at 8:29.

Steve picked up. The voice activator vibrated. "It's Lew's War Surplus. We've got a clearance sale on Schmeisser machine pistols, Nazi daggers, and Jap shrunken heads—flamethrower-fried on Iwo Jima." Steve bought three daggers and three heads. The guy said he'd fix them up with Dodger baseball caps.

More dead air. I doodled on scratch paper. I wrote "Freddy & Stretch" and drew a heart around it. Time ticked. Steve's phone rang at 10:52.

I picked up. Static and line fuzz futzed with the call. I got a woman's voice. I got Steve's voice. I got static, fuzz, garbles, line lint, lewd laffs, and static stew.

I cuffed the console. I hit the squelch switch. I ditzed dials and got this:

The woman said, "Well…I don't know…are you…can sign up the talent?"

Steve said, "Are you kid…concept…time has come….Celebrity smut. You want to talk—"

The call static-stuck, fuzzed and futzed, and diminuendoed to dead air.

—

Googie's hop-hop-hopped. The Iris Theatre ran a sneak peek of some 3-D dog. The Googie geeks retained their 3-D glasses and goofed themselves out of their gourds.

Jejune jerkoffs. Their revelry ran rampant and rubbed me raw. Tattle tipsters took note of me. I got stuck with stacks of stale bread.

Yawn. Orson Welles sliced the Black Dahlia. Check *The Lady from Shanghai.* Grok the symbiology. *Yawn.* Bill Holden's in the DT ward at Queen of Angels. He's banging night nurses two at a pop. *Yawn.* I've got morgue pix. The Carole Landis suicide, back in '48. All-nude. Full bush. Kodachrome color—if I'm lyin', I'm flyin'!!

Snore. There's a plot to throw the '54 World Series. The *Jew*nited Nations is pulling the strings. *Snore.* Grace Kelly's a nympho. She turned Johnnie Ray straight in a mop closet at the Crescendo. *Snore.* I know you won't believe this—but Pat Nixon hatched Count Basie's mulatto love child!!!!!

I believed all of it and none of it. I was back at the listening post. Unknown woman: "Can sign up the talent?" Steve Cochran:

"Concept…time has come….Celebrity smut."

Quivering question marks broiled my brain and skimmed under my skin. I couldn't stop the scurrilous scroll.

Then:

The Googie's geeks froze. I froze. Four fuzz walked in and waltzed the floor. Not just any cops. The LAPD Hat Squad. Sergeant Max Herman. Sergeant Red Stromwall. Sergeant Harry Crowder. Officer Eddie Benson.

LAPD Robbery. Hunter-slayers of heist men. All six-four and 220. All in pearl gray suits and white panama hats. The PD's hardest hard boys. Chief William H. Parker's personal pit dogs. Mastiffs on a mission to maul for their master.

I stood up. They whipped up and braced me. Red Stromwall said, "Hi, Freddy."

Max Herman said, "The Chief wants to see you, Freddy."

Harry Crowder said, "I like your suit, Freddy. Where'd you steal it?"

Eddie Benson said, "You were always a dipshit, Freddy."

Max Herman tugged a belt loop and made me his bitch. Red Stromwall poked me with a beavertail sap. Harry Crowder and Eddie Benson flanked me and dwarfed me and made me mince minuscule.

We marched out to the parking lot. A PD plainclothes car rumbled, off by itself. Bill Parker sat in the backseat. I looked in. He looked out. I said, "How's tricks, Bill? Your wife still doing her act with the mule?"

Harry Crowder kidney-punched me. Red Stromwall sapped me. Max Herman said, "Don't screech, Freddy. You'll sound effeminate." Eddie Benson tossed me in the backseat.

I caught my breath and caressed my kidneys. Parker wore civvies. Parker spoke in his foghorn South Dakota drawl.

"Joan Hubbard Horvath, the widow of the man you killed in the line of duty, was murdered in her home last night. Her kids were off on a school trip. It appears to be a hot-prowl sex snuff. The house was ransacked, and the woman was strangled and stabbed. We found a total of fourteen envelopes bearing your fingerprints. Two of them were stuffed with twenty- and fifty-dollar bills."

Parker paused. He evil-eyed me. He made with the *malocchio.*

"The victim fought. We found beard and skin fragments under her nails, and I can see that you're unmarked. Her assailant had AB-negative blood. Your PD file reveals that you have O positive. This exonerates you as the actual killer, but not as an accomplice or a material witness. I would advise you to provide me with a plausible explanation for your prints on those envelopes."

I evil-eyed Parker. I made my *malocchio* more hopped-up and hateful than his.

"I killed Ralph Mitchell Horvath under the PD's implied dictum that cop killers must die. He was unarmed. I planted a throwdown gun on him and shot him in the back. Then the cop he shot recovered, which rubbed me the wrong way. I've been laying penance payments on Joan Horvath, going back five years. I've never spoken to her. You're a good Catholic boy, Bill. You get the guilts sometimes, so you know how it is."

Parker lit a cigarette and blew smoke in my face. I coughed the smoke back in his face.

"There's more to this, and most of it makes you look bad. First off, we've seen you talking to the Beverly Hills PD, and we make you and your boys for the 459 on Senator Kennedy's hotel suite. You screwed up the print transparencies, though. You laid down prints for *all three* of those shitheels who've been terrorizing Beverly Hills. That was a big mistake. George Collier Akin left the gang two weeks ago. We have very sound intelligence on this. He insisted on killing the girl they kidnapped, but Brown and Dulange held him back, and the girl was released. George Collier Akin is alleged to be casing solo hot-prowl jobs in my jurisdiction, and I've told Max and the boys to find him and kill him. They may seek to consult you in the course of their investigation, and I would advise you to cooperate. It might prevent the Beverly Hills PD from filing charges on you."

Parker paused. Parker went *Shoo, you cockroach.* I stepped out of the car. The Hats surrounded me, hail-fellows all.

Max Herman shook my hand. "Here's to you, Freddy."

Red Stromwall shook my hand. "Be good, kid."

Harry Crowder shook my hand. "We miss you, Freddy. Keep your chin up."

Eddie Benson shook my hand. "Stay clean, dipshit."

I cut free and stumbled back into Googie's. I beelined for the front door and plowed busboys and waiters, en masse. I knocked over drink trays. Customers went *eeeek* and crap-your-pants cringed. I grabbed a double scotch off Gene "the Mean Queen's" table and guzzled it, sans consent. I capsized a waitress and sent milk shakes and club sandwiches airborne. I crashed out the front door and snagged my

Packard pimp sled at the curb.

The Strip was one block north. I blew a red light and whipped westbound. Ciro's was close. I floored the gas and flamed through late-nite traffic. I swung hard right and racked my undercarriage all up the porte cochere. I fender-bended Ferraris and Facel-Vegas and didn't give a fucking shit. Two car-park kids tried to corner me. I decked them and downed them and bashed them in the balls. They went ball-bashed falsetto and mewed for their mamas in Miami and Milwaukee.

I crashed into the club. The floor was packed tight-tight. Johnnie Ray stomped the stage. He woman-wiggled and wanton-warbled his hit song, "Cry." He wiggled the mike and wailed like a jilted fishwife. He sobbed, he sighed, he tossed his spit curl and spun his hearing aid out into the crowd.

Joi and Liberace sat front-row center. I charged up. Patrons saw me. They stood up and went *Whoa* and *Halt now!!!!!* I dumped waiters and a fat broad at Bing Crosby's table. I made the front row. Joi and Lee looked up. Joi lip-synched, "You loser cocksucker."

I poured her Tom Collins down her dress and ice-cubed her chichis. Joi roundhoused me and fell flat on her ass. Patrons yowled. Johnnie blew his crescendo and cried for real. I dumped Joi's purse and found her Seconal stash. I guzzled out the contents. I chased five fat red devils with Lee's double martini. Lee *looooved* it. He pinched my cheek and swooned. I lurched and lunged and levitated my way out of the club. I slid into my sled and sluiced eastbound on Sunset.

Some new solar system subsumed me. Streetlights went mauve and pink. A-bomb particles parsed and pierced my windshield. I eyeballed passersby. Every man's face went gargoyle, every woman's went succubus. Steve Cochran sang "Das Horst Wessel Lied." I ripped Nazi flags off his walls.

There's Vine Street. I cut south and cut east on Camerford.

The Horvath house was hot-lit, postmidnite. Nosy neighbors gawked. Outside arc lights glare-glowed the pad and strafed the sky. I parked behind a row of black-and-whites and K-cars. Plainclothesmen and bluesuits pounded the porch. Kids' toys and furniture were loose on the lawn. The front door stood open. Print men dusted walls. Foto men snapped fotos. Lab men fiber-swept the floors.

Burglary dicks checked window openings and cluck-clucked. I saw Harry Fremont at work. The red devils ripped me and turned it all topsy-turvy. I went blank. Arc-light glare burned my eyes. Joan

Horvath and Joan Perkins kissed me like Liz in that close-up. I went black-blank and blinked. I saw Bill Parker and Red Stromwall pass a flask on the porch. I slid my car seat back to deflect the arc light. I got snug and supine. I said, “Please, God—make me safe,” and passed out.

—

I passed out cold and woke up windshield-warmed by the sun. My windows were up. A cop type stood in the street and eyeballed me. I didn’t recognize him. He got into an unmarked unit parked in front of me. I grabbed a stray piece of paper and wrote down the rear plate number.

It all came back. I prayed my way out of the sunlight and blinked back to black. Rosie Clooney sang, “Hey there, you with the stars in your eyes.”

THE SECURITY OFFICE AT THE SLEAZOID HOLLYWOOD RANCH MARKET

2/17/54

I made the *Mirror.* NITEKLUB INFERNO: P.I. FRED O. IN FRANTIC FRACAS. I made the *Herald: Confidential* COP OTASH IN CIRO'S BROUHAHA. The hot headlines heartwarmed me. They instilled instant pride. Joan Horvath dead-deadened it. Freddy, what thou hath wrought.

Bondage Bob called and congratulated me. The insidious ink spiked *Confidential*'s early-morning sales. Ciro's was Sheriff's turf. Bob called Gene Biscailuz and pledged ten thou to his reelection campaign. It covered the cost of my ten-minute tantrum and frosted out possible beefs.

Joan Horvath got a bleary blip in the *Herald*'s local spread. WIDOW WOMAN SLAIN IN HOLLYWOOD HOME. BURGLARY-SEX MOTIVE CITED.

Bob and I biz-talked. I tossed him the tattle on the Rock Hudson wife hunt and laid out the lowdown on the would-be wives. Bob knew candidate Claire Klein. She played shakedown shill at *Whisper,* back in '51. Her part-time gig at Universal was a plain ploy to meet extortable men. I weighed in: We've got to scoop the fan mags on this one. Dole out the dish on Rump Ranger Rock's disingenuous dates with real women. Sock in the subtext. It's a shadow shuck. Hollywood will fuck you when no one else will.

Bob agreed. He added, And we'll double-cross Rock on his wedding nite and expose his boy bent. We yukked the irksome irony. I dumped the dirt on the Steve Cochran gig. Bob pooh-poohed the Nazi-Jap fetish trove and called Steve a history buff and no more. He himself paid five thou for a swastika-print bikini once worn by Leni Riefenstahl. His girlfriend turned heads at that big Polio Fund pool party.

"And, Freddy—I heard Cochran leans left, if anything."

I closed with the cloying clue of "Celebrity Smut." Bob told me to work the listening post my own self. “*And*—if it pans out, we’ll send in a female ringer to entrap Steve—Claire Klein might be good.”

Bob signed off with “Sayonara.” I offered “auf Wiedersehen,” boss. I shit, showered, shaved, and made myself march to the mirror. I saw myself and saw where all this was going. Freddy, what thou hath wrought. I called Harry Fremont and made a lunch date.

—

I drove home. A basketball hoop was nailed beside my front door. Stretch sank long hook shots. She wore her USC silks. Neighbor kids watched. Lance the Leopard lounged in my doorway. Kids patted him and fed him potato chips.

I snuck up behind Stretch. I said, “If you convince me you’re really nineteen, I’ll toss your hair and kiss your neck.”

Stretch laughed. She dropped the ball and pulled her hair to one side. The kids scoped the exchange. What’s this repob? *She’s bigger than him.*

“I was born January 18, 1935, at Good Samaritan. That means you can go ahead.”

I caressed her bare shoulders and kissed her neck. I stood tiptoed to do it. The kids clapped. Lance the Leopard looked over and growled.

Stretch sank three long ones and swiveled. She grabbed my belt and pulled me inside my own pad. Lance followed us in. He detoured to the front bathroom and guzzled toilet water. Stretch waved to the kids and kicked the door shut.

I crapped out on the couch. Stretch stretched out and laid her head on my lap.

“My mom showed me the *Mirror*. Did you have fun at Ciro’s last night?”

“Do you live with your mom and dad?”

“I live with my mom. My dad was killed on Saipan, when I was eight. What did you do in the war?”

“I was a drill instructor at Parris Island. I trained Marines who got killed at Saipan, but I never went overseas myself.”

“Why not?”

“Because I knew I’d get killed, and I didn’t have the stones to take the risk.”

"Why?"

"Because I'm fearful and selfish, and I have to get whatever it is that I want, and that's as far as I'm going with this line of questioning."

Stretch balled my hands into fists and kissed the knuckles. She kicked off her sneakers and dangled her feet off the couch. Lance hopped on my favorite chair and licked his balls.

"You're watchful, too. You forgot to mention that. And you're diffident and circumspect around me. And none of the girls at Linda's hates you, even though you broke half the liquor bottles during that Beverage Control raid in '48. And you're chagrined for digging on me, even though you spy on people and expose them in print, and beat the crap out of people who threaten to sue your low-life magazine."

I smiled. "I stole the bottles I didn't break, and Billy Eckstine bought them off me at half price."

"Billy likes you. I wouldn't be here if he didn't."

"Billy's Billy, and he's not all moonlight and roses. He tried to promote you to me and my recently ex girlfriend."

Stretch pried my fists loose and placed my hands on her breasts. Hey there, you with the stars—

"Billy overrates me, in lots of different ways."

"You're nineteen, and you're looking around. I get that you're bold—and you think the rules don't apply to you. That's as far as I'll take that line of chat, until I see you start making mistakes."

"You're saying the only thing that you can teach me right now is efficacy?"

"I'm saying that for some people, opportunity is love, and you might be one of them."

—

The dizzy duo at the listening post. Leashed Leopard and Large Lady. Race Rockwell and Ward Wardell *swoooooooned.*

Stretch wore a tweed skirt, saddle shoes, and a pink oxford shirt. Lance wore a spiked collar that Bondage Bob bought him for Christmas. I brought three pizza pies and a cold case of Brew 102.

Stretch loomed and she-lorded it over three big men. Lance roamed the rooms and let people pat him. Race fed him anchovy pizza. Ward showed off our new corkboard. There's Operation Rock

Wife bold-bannered—with nude pix and dippy dossiers tacked below.

We snarfed pizza pie and went to work. Race worked the Hunan Hut tap, I worked the Cochran line. Ward worked Call-Girl Line #1. Stretch got Call-Girl Line #2. Cool kicks motivated me. It was the lez line. Bernie Spindel and I hot-wired the crib—Flores south of Sunset. The *sin*sational sapphic scene sang dusk to dawn and entrapped occasional big-name babes and butches. Let's see how Stretch registers and reacts.

We pulled chairs up to the consoles. We plugged in. We donned headphones. Lance noshed pizza crusts and crapped out on the floor.

I sat close to Stretch. We played kneesies and lazy-linked hands. I got two hours of dead air. Some unknown male called Steve the Stud at 8:19 p.m. Steve called him "Cal." They schmoozed *Private Hell 36.* Steve dished Howard Duff and wife Ida Lupino. Duff was a souse. La Lupino was a snout trout. She blew him behind the food truck. Dorothy Malone sizzled. "I've got this celebrity smut angle I'm working on. She'd be a prime candidate."

Bingo!!!—Celeb Smut Lead #1/8:27 p.m.

The call capped at 8:33. Dead air dinged in its weary wake. I watched Stretch work the lez line. Her headset was clamped tight. She notched notes in her fone log. She evinced deep delight and entrenched ennui.

Boredom banged me. I snagged Claire Klein's buff shot and dossier off the corkboard and sat back down. Stretch snatched the buff shot and studied it. She winked and went *Oooh-la-la.* She said, "Rock should marry *her.*"

I winked back. Claire was boss-built and credibly credentialed. Born: New York City, 8/11/21. World War II Wave lieutenant. Court-martialed and DD'd on a pandering beef. Emigrated to Palestine, '47. Seduced and tortured Arab spies for the Irgun and the Stern Gang. *Shit*—the *A*-rabs are my put-upon people!!!!!

Claire hits America. She moves to L.A. and gets a California teaching credential. She teaches algebra at Le Conte Junior High. She gets part-time studio work. Claire's a climber. She takes scalps and moves on. Bob Aldrich, Otto Preminger, Henry Hathaway, Willy Wyler. She visits Burt Lancaster's torture den. Burt wants to spin her on his wall-mounted dartboard and toss darts at her legs. Claire won't play. Burt comes on coercive. Claire shows him the shiv strapped to her left leg. Burt amps up the ante. Claire drops names.

Mickey Cohen, Lou Rothkopf, Sammy Dorfman, Baldy Stein. The kosher kowboys in the L.A. rackets. All zany Zionists. All demented and dyspeptic. Burt backs off—Claire's bad to the bone and calamitously connected.

Steve the Stud's phone rang. Log it—10:21 p.m.

Steve picked up. Unknown Male #2 jabbered. Steve called him "Fritz." They schmoozed the Jap sword and Jap-shrunken-head market. Fritz called it "a growth industry." Biz was up, up. Biz was bullish per Nazi-knife cutlery, all swastika-embossed. Plus Nazi helmets recut into chafing dishes and soup tureens.

Steve said, "I'm moving out of my kraut phase, Fritzie. Find me some Makarov pistols and some NKVD memorabilia. I wouldn't say no to daggers from some Ivan's Lubyanka stash."

The call droned on. I exhumed Bondage Bob's dish: "Cochran leans left, if anything."

The call capped out—10:42 p.m. Dead air doused me and slid me into sleep. I went someplace safe and soft. I snored in sync with Lance the Leopard, laid out at my feet.

Time ticked. Safe and soft became wet and warm. I swam in the River Styx. Joan Horvath rebaptized me. She wore a Nazi-print bikini and swim fins. Stretch jerked off my headset. Such innocence, such glee.

"Dig this, Uncle Freddy. The dots connect. Claire Klein's hooking, part-time. She tricked with that Communist Party cultural guy V. J. Jerome, who's supposedly infiltrating Hollywood, and the third spoke of the wheel was Babs Payton, who's been on the skids since she dumped Franchot Tone, according to the fan mags my mom reads. They went at it for two hours straight, and then they drank vodka and slurped borscht."

OLLIE HAMMOND'S ALL-NITE STEAKHOUSE

Wilshire and Serrano
2/18/54

We drank lunch. My appetite was up, up. I kicked assiduous ass all morning. Morty Bendish at the *Mirror*. The *Transom* and *Whisper* guys. I told them Rock Hudson was *my* gig, X-clusive. They kvetched, moped, and moaned. Blood bloomed on my beavertail sap. I sacked their civil contracts and ratched their rights of free speech.

Harry badged our waiter. He slipped us a jug at the PD's stock half price. Old Crow and Dexedrine—va-va-voom!!!!!

"Let's get to it. You want in on the Joan Horvath snuff. You've been waxing sentimental on that nutty broad for years. The price is five yards to buy in, and a yard a pop for special favors."

I flashed my flash roll and peeled off ten C-notes. Frazzled Freddy always comes flush. Harry cadged the cash and smiled smug.

"It looks like a hot-prowl 459, gone way bad. The guy came in a cracked window and left rubber-glove prints on the sill. He had Joanie's purse in his hands when she woke up and fought him. She scratched him, and we took AB-negative blood spill and dark and coarse beard fragments out from under her nails. That's good, so far. But there wasn't enough blood to run individual comparisons on. In this case, that means that blood type can exonerate, but it can't convict."

I gargled Old Crow. "Go on, and tell me why you called Joan a 'nutty broad.' "

Harry made the jack-off sign. "One, she married Ralphie Horvath, had two kids with him, and stuck with him. Two, she was overqualified for a low-life thief and punk like Ralphie. She had some big education, and was some kind of Russian-history scholar, but all she did was stay at home and tend to her snot-nosed kids."

I lit a cigarette. "Here's the big question. Did George Collier Akin do the job?"

Harry shook his head. “I’m not so sure. Bill Parker’s convinced himself, he’s convinced the Hats, and you know what that means. Parker saw the hospital pix of that girl that Akin, Brown, and Dulange abducted, and now he’s running hot, with a thermometer so far up his ass that it hurts. He wants Akin dead, the Hats want to kill him, and it’s true that Akin broke with Brown and Dulange when they wouldn’t agree to snuff the girl. Okay, we can assume that Akin—who’s a hot-prowl man from way back—is off working solo, and most likely in L.A. city. So far, so good—but I go back to ’43 with this evil cocksucker—and the Horvath caper doesn’t look like his kind of deal.”

I stubbed out my cigarette. “How so?”

Harry said, “Okay. He’s got dark and coarse facial hair, so that matches. I checked his Quentin file, and he’s got AB-negative blood, so that matches, and it’s pretty rare. But I popped Akin for eight hot prowls in ’43, and he always wore a rubber red devil mask, cut down low on his neck, to protect him from scratching and gouging, and to further terrorize his victims—because he is *the* most sadistic son of a whore I’ve ever met—so if the Hats want to put him down, who am I to raise a stink?”

I gargled Old Crow. It rerouted my dexie surge, *molto bene.*

“He *wanted* to kill the cheerleader girl, but he’s never killed *any* women, prior to that, that you know of.”

Harry twirled his glass. “Never. He spent ’43 to ’51 in Quentin. He paroled out in November, hung up his parole, and went rogue. We’ve had six more hot-prowl/assaults possibly attributable to the Red Devil Bandit since then—all with grievous bodily harm short of murder. Then this fuck hooks up with Brown and Dulange, and it’s the BHPD’s grief from that point on.”

I said, “He split from Brown and Dulange two weeks ago. You ‘assume’ that he’s working solo, but you’re ‘implying’ that he’s not strictly adhering to his Red Devil Bandit MO, and you’ve got no reported hot prowls that you’re sure he’s good for.”

Harry sighed. “You nailed it. Never let it be known that the infamous Freddy O. drew a dumb breath.”

I chained cigarettes. “What else? Describe the crime scene.”

“The pad was ransacked. I think he was looking for something besides purse cash and whatever else he could carry away. There was over six grand of your penance money stashed in Joanie’s clothes closet, and he didn’t bother to find it or steal it. This whole deal reeks of personal animus. It’s an I-hate-you-and-I’m-going-to-kill-you job, and that spells revenge."

I flashed my flash roll and rolled off five more C-notes. Harry snatched them up.

"You're a white man, Freddy. I'll have complete background paper on Joanie by tomorrow."

I got noxiously nostalgic. "Harry," "Ralphie," "Joanie." '49 to '54. A kid cop THEN. A Pervdog of the Nite NOW.

"I remember that day in the squadroom. You were younger and not quite so fat. 'Hey, kid, you look bored. Go shag this Ralphie guy and kill him.' "

Harry went *nix*. "Can it, Freddy. You can't pull the shit you pull in your everyday life and think that this jive crusade of yours will render you squeaky-clean."

—

Clean," *shit.* "Jive crusade"—malignantly more so. Harry Fremont was bent and bought and paid-for since the year one. He knew bewilderingly bupkes per Opportunity is Love.

I drove back to my pad. The door was whipped wide open. I heard screeches, yowls, growls, *eeeeks,* and roars. I ran inside and grokked on the grief.

Catfight. Lance the Leopard versus Joi Lansing—my exultant ex and extortion partner par excellence.

Joi was packing left-behind undies. Lance smelled thievery. He pinned Joi to the back wall and clawed her clothes to torn tatters. Her dress dripped off of her. He sharp-shredded her brassiere. His claws caught frayed fabric and rip-rip-ripped. I sensed sexual intent. Lance lashed at Joi. He orgiastically ordered up a cross-species striptease.

I laffed. Joi screeched, *"Freddy?"* I grabbed Lance's spiked collar and pull-pull-pulled. Lance went sulky submissive. He cursory-growled and slither-slunk to the bathroom. I heard him lap up a toilet-water aperitif.

I said, "What's shaking, baby?"

Joi said, "You loser shitheel."

I stepped toward her. She stepped toward me. She launched a left hook and landed it mid-face. She ripped a right. I let it land and pushed her down on the bed.

She said, "One for what you did to Johnnie, and one for that stunt you pulled at Ciro's. And tell Lee to get that rape-o cat declawed."

I pulled a chair up. Joi grabbed her purse and dug out her cigarettes. I lit her up.

"It's good to see you, kid."

"You insouciant shitheel. I'm never coming back to you, and I'm never working with you again—not in this lifetime."

I laffed. "How's this sound? Rock Hudson needs a wife. Lew Wasserman's protecting his reputation and Universal's investment. I could let you be the girl, for ten percent of the alimony deal when you dump him."

Joi kicked out at me. Her shoes flew wide and missed me. Her nylons were nicked and rife with runs. Lance clawed *clooooose.*

"I'm never coming back to you."

"I heard you the first time."

"No more shakedowns, no more bait jobs, no more three-ways."

"Come *on.* You're saying no more Liz Taylor in the sack?"

Joi blew smoke up at me. Her fierce façade cracked a tad. She'd landed two good ones. I wiped blood off my lips.

"The world's hip to you, Freddy. Your 'Tattle Tyrant holds Hollywood hostage' shtick is wearing people thin."

"Who's 'people,' babe? Come *on.* Name some names that mean something to me."

Joi rehooked her brassiere. "How's Steve Cochran sound? He said he's seen you and Bernie Spindel lurking around his place. He ran a bug check and came up empty, but he's got you pegged as Public Cockroach Number One, and he said you're heading for a good ass kicking."

Steve the Stud. There's a grabber. It's an irksome inkling of *Something.*

I lied loud. "His building's full of call-girl cribs. Bernie and I were planting some taps. 'Lurking,' shit. He's talking out of his ass, and the magazine's got no stake in him."

Joi flipped her burning butt at me. It singed my Sy Devore coat.

"You're jealous. Steve's got all the goods you're envious of. I know you, Freddy. You've got to know what's going on with him, and you'll pay me for the debrief."

My throat clamped and closed tight. My hands shimmy-shimmied. I whipped my wallet out and tossed bills on the bed.

Joi culled the cash and counted it. *Confidential* comes up flush. A grand for a five-minute snitch.

"I ran into Steve at Johnnie's. He told me he's making a 'message' smut movie, based on a hillbilly song by Bill Haley and His Comets, whoever the hell they are. He's trying to recruit some name actors and actresses, because the film will only be shown privately, so no one's career will get hurt. The song's called 'Thirteen Women and Only One Man in Town.' The atom bomb destroys the world, except for thirteen women and a man in this little desert burg, and the man has a giant dick, and he's on a crusade to repopulate the world. *Get it?* Steve's out of his gourd, and he's the director, the writer, and very obviously the star. He said he's got financial backing, but I don't believe him. *Get it?* He wants to lure thirteen women to the desert and get laid, and odds are, there's no film in the camera, and it's all some pipe dream."

"Celebrity smut." Steve Cochran's name in Jack Kennedy's address book. The phone records. Steve calls Jack/Jack calls Steve/Steve calls Jack.

I smelled *Something.*

"Five grand, love. I'll hot-wire you and send you in to bait him."

Joi smiled. "You're malleable, Freddy. You've always been easy to manipulate. It's the only thing that attracted me to you."

—

I rolled to the Ranch Market. A radio broadcast broiled, up in my office. Dig: sodden Senator Joe McCarthy rips Reds and socks out southland subpoenas. Dig, ditto: Jolting Joe and Bondage Bob are jungled up—larcenous land deals and sleazoid slum holdings. *Heh, heh*—Fractious Freddy knows all and holds all trump cards tight.

I turned off the radio and checked my in-box. Harry Fremont delivered, quicksville. *Bingo!*—a background brief on Joan Hubbard Horvath.

Joan, the big brain and undulating underachiever. She matriculates at UCLA, circa '39–'45. She logs advanced degrees in Eastern European languages. She speaks fluent Italian, Polish, and Russian. She works as an interpreter for the California State Senate, circa '46–'47. She marries riotous Ralphie Horvath, circa '48. She hatches his second-rate seed. She's got no visible means of support, then to now. *But*—this bodes *BIG*—Red Stromwall finds a Bank of America passbook tucked in Joan's undie drawer. *AND*—the current balance exceeds fourteen grand.

That's a brain broiler. *That's* prongingly provocative.

I recalled that cop car parked at the crime scene. I recalled that rear plate number I wrote down. I buzzed Central Burglary and braced Harry Fremont. Who's this cop cad working for? The plate number ain't LAPD. Harry said the suffix denoted a Fed sled. Maybe FBI or Treasury.

I downed two Dexedrine and gargled Old Crow. *Aaahhh*—my bloodstream blossomed and swelled. I called my answering service and checked my messages. *Aaahhh*—the wide world wants Freewheeling Freddy!!!

Joi called. Her koffee klatch with Steve the Stud was set for 7:00 p.m. Stretch called. She said she'd pop by my pad later. Bondage Bob called. Update me, sweetheart—what's with heavy-hung Steve? Jimmy called. It's official—Claire Klein's in for the Marry Rock gig. Midnite at Googie's—be there for the meet and greet. I called Bernie Spindel. Six-fifteen at Havenhurst. Joi's jamming up Steve the C.

Wow—Frantic Freddy's in demonic demand!!! He's *THE* man to see!!!

—

Joi kvetched. She emphatically emasculated my last stirring statement. We wire-whipped her in the back of Bernie's bug van. Freddy, the mike-mount's too tight. Freddy, the lead wire's bunched up in my brassiere. Bernie, quit honking me—get your fat paws off my tits.

The wire job ate up fifteen minutes. We shooed Joi out and reparked on Steve Cochran's side of the street. Joi broadcast static and high heels hitting pavement. Our earmuffs caught every rustle and riff. Bernie worked the transceiver. The live feed fed furtively in. *Knock, knock*—Joi's at Studly Steve's door. *Creak/gnash*—door-lock noise—Studly Steve's letting her in.

Static/voice burble/sound overlap. Bernie ditzed dials and recalibrated the rustles and riffs. We got settle-in sounds. Glasses clink/Steve serves drinks/cigarette lighters click.

Joi sighs. That's her "We're seated" signal. It's laying in, loud and clear. Incriminate yourself, shitbird. Smut's a felony bounce. *Confidential* gonna get yo ass. San Quentin's surging yo way.

Joi said, "Who decorated this place, Hermann Goering?"

Steve said, “It’s set decoration for the movie. I’m deep into the immersion aspect of it all. There’s this subplot I’m working on. The guy who’s out to repopulate the world is a former Nazi sympathizer, and he renounces Nazism and moves into a one-world mind-set. Apostasy is a major theme of this movie. It’s not all fun and games, and hide the salami.”

Joi hooted. “Baby, you’re avant-garde.”

“I’m *beyond* it, you mean.”

Joi: “*Yeah?* Well, who else thinks so? By that I mean, how many name people have you signed up, other than yourself as the star?”

Steve: “Anita O’Day and Barbara Payton have inked contracts, as they say in the trades. Lana Turner’s on the ropes and considering it.”

Joi: “That’s week-old bread at half price, sweetie. Anita’s a junkie, and Babs is turning cheapie tricks out of Stan’s Drive-In. And, Lana—she’s just jerking your chain.”

Steve: “Hang on to your hat. I’ve inked Gene Tierney. You’ve *got* to gas on that one. She scored in *Laura* and *Leave Her to Heaven,* and she was Jack Kennedy’s fiancée, back before he married that lockjawed stiff Jackie.”

Ooooh—Jack the K. jumps in. *Ooooh*—his name in Studly Steve’s address book.

Joi: “My ex, Freddy, sent some girls down to Acapulco, to spice up Jack’s honeymoon. I know from Jack, believe me.”

Steve: “And I know from Freddy O. My pals in politics have been passing along rumors. The studios are putting together a slush fund to put the skids to *Confidential.* Freddy and his storm troopers have been ratting out all these fags, dykes, and politically enlightened people. The boom’s coming down on Freddy, mark my words.”

Bernie made the jack-off sign and went *Oy.* The sweats swept over me. “Slush fund.” “Politically enlightened people.” That read *RED* in my book.

Joi: “Name names, lover. Your pals in politics. Who’ve I got looking over me, to make sure that the you know what don’t hit the fan, if I appear in this movie of yours?”

Steve: “Jack Kennedy, for starters. Joe McCarthy, even though he’s a fasco in the *Confidential* mode. Also, we’ve got Senator Bill Knowland, and Senator Hubert Humphrey. All these heavy guys are pals of mine, and these guys will put the squelch on any rumors that might seep out about the film, and you’ve got my word that it will only be screened for high-ticket people in politics and the industry—

people who want to see—pardon my French—movie stars fucking and sucking and preaching the anti-A-bomb gospel as only I can write it. This is a high-ticket endeavor from jump street, lady—and you can get in on the ground floor."

Bernie went *He craaaazy*. Bernie grabbed his crotch and went *Oy*. Static broke through the broadcast. I doused dials and cleared the feed.

Joi: "…and it's not like I don't need the coin. But I'll tell you, though—the idea of screwing on film flips my switch. As long as the film doesn't make the rounds, like that photo of Marlon Brando with his mouth full."

Steve: "Marlon wants to appear in the film. I have this on good authority."

Joi hooted. "You're out of your gourd. As Bondage Bob Harrison says, 'I've got your good authority swinging.' "

Steve scoffed. "Mr. V. J. Jerome's my good authority. How's that for naming names? All the Group Theatre actors take their orders from him. And don't give me that fasco smear that he's in the employ of the Comintern. V.J. knows quality entertainment when he sees it."

Joi scoffed. "Okay, we're naming names. Okay, name me *one* name that can do me some good if and when my movie and TV career goes in the tank."

Steve: "Harry Cohn. How big is *that*? He runs Columbia, and he's bankrolling my film. He will personally see to it that nobody outside of a very elite circle of people see this movie. This is not a smut flick like you see at those Elks Club smokers."

The transceiver fritzed and glitched and broadcast stark static. It consumed the conversation. Bernie doused dials and replugged the console. I snared snippets of chat.

Steve: "Come on. It's not like you've never auditioned."

Joi: "Well…it's…not like I'm in any kind of ordained situation."

Line buzz/fuzz/stuck static. Wire warp and burned bulbs—the console's coughing smoke—

I dumped my headphones and hauled out of the van. I ran across the courtyard, *rapidamente*. I circled Steve the Stud's building and peeped ground-floor windows. I saw Steve's noxious Nazi regalia and Joi's skirt and shoes, shorn in a heap. I saw Jap flags and shadow-boxed shrunken heads, and heard gruff growls in bass-baritone. I tracked a trail of nylon stockings and men's Jockey briefs. I peeped one last *Walpurgisnacht* window—

And saw Joi gobble Steve the Stud, tonsil-deep.

—

Call me *Cornuto*. Call me shame-shattered and shit-shorn of power and agency. I made the midnite meet at Googie's. I surged with self-pity. Stretch called my answering service. She dumped our date and cited early practice. The Pervdog of the Nite knows better. Stretch now roils recumbent in savage sapphic embrace.

I sat alone. I nursed a numb-your-soul highball. Joi walked in the back door. She saw me and glimpsed my sick sorrow. I was *l'étranger* out of cool Camus—gallows-bound of my own device.

Joi went *oooh-la-la*. She rolled her eyes and held her hands two feet apart. She shot me the finger and walked back out the door.

I bebopped to a boo-hoo beat. Cuckold/*Cornuto*/jilted Johnny left in the lurch. Somebody save me. I'm sunk in this sink of self-hate.

Jimmy Dean and Claire Klein walked in the back door. La Klein wore blue jeans, Bass Weejuns, and a baleful Beethoven sweatshirt. She was rangy, busty, dark-haired, and unadorned. She had that proud/New York Jew/don't-fuck-with-me look.

I stood up. I primped. I blew off the blues and bloomed in the glow of new love.

They ambled over. This was biz on Bondage Bob's timecard. I snapped my fingers. My funk went *finito*.

A wetback waiter wafted into view. I ordered a pitcher of off-the-menu/high-test lemonade. 150-proof bourbon. Some ambiguous amphetamine. Pounded potions from Hop Ling's Hormone Hutch.

Jimmy played emcee. "Claire, this is Freddy. Freddy, this is Claire. I'm here as a full partner in this enterprise, and to ensure that Rock doesn't get hurt."

Claire said, "I'm here to marry him, not skin him alive."

The waiter bopped back. I played host and poured drinks. I said, "Don't smoke. This stuff tends to ignite."

We settled in. I studied Claire. I gassed on her crooked teeth and bold brown eyes. Here's my first fitful impression:

She's an agent provocateur. She lives to make shit shimmy to her own beat and bounce to her terms.

She said, "Jimmy's been briefing me. Steve Cochran, and all that."

She lived to pry. I caught that. I rerouted a reply.

"*All that*'s the Rock deal, for the moment. Now that I've seen you in person, Miss Klein, I've got some ideas."

Jimmy sipped laced lemonade. "We're listening, boss."

I sipped lemonade. Claire sipped lemonade. Her pupils popped, instantaneous. Her brows broiled with sweat.

"Here's the drift. Six dates, covered in *Confidential.* Atypically wholesome by *Confidential*'s standards, but we'll lay in some anti-Commie repob, to justify that. You play yourself. You're the bohemian algebra teacher at Le Conte Junior High. You meet Rock at Scrivner's Drive-In. You were sipping a pineapple malt, and some pachucos hassled you. This works an antipachuco message into the text. Rock walks into this fracas and beats up the pachucos. A flame sparks. He gives a pep talk to your algebra students. It's heartwarming. You have six dates. Your separate worlds collide and merge. Rock takes you to Ciro's and the Mocambo. You take him to culture caves and groove on le jazz hot. He proposes, you accept, the squarejohn press covers the wedding. You shack for the foreseeable future, and Jimmy watchdogs Rock and diverts him off boys. There's some bylaws I'll run by you when I know you better, and I'm not so afraid you'll scratch my eyes out."

Jimmy hoot-hooted. He eye-strafed the room and pupil-popped a built boy with bleached-blond hair. He ducked off to cull contact. I had Claire Klein to myself.

She said, "Let me guess the bylaws. Then I'll tell you what's acceptable, and what's not."

"Shoot, baby."

Claire said, "No side deals with Rock, his boyfriends, or any men I meet through him. No obvious extramarital liaisons with men I want to work on my own, or men I just plain like. Quit my job at Le Conte, or turn it into some jive fable of me helping underprivileged kids. Fink out all the skeevy goings-on I see in my swanky new Hollywood life."

I sipped laced lemonade. I made This Gesture. It meant bravo/stalemate/your move, mama-san.

Claire lit a cigarette. Bold girl. Brilliant girl. She understands chemical combustion. Her lemonade fails to ignite.

"No deals. Your bylaws stink. And, before you ask, yeah—I did pull a knife on Burt Lancaster. And, before it comes up, I was at Ciro's the other night, and caught your act with Joi Lansing, and if you think she'll ever play bait for you after the Cochran gig, think again. I'm better at this line of work than she is, and I'm not letting you lay down restrictions, even if it means blowing this 'Rock's wife' caper sky-high."

I took it in. I lit a cigarette. Freon Freddy. My lemonade fails to ignite.

"Okay. Do what you want. And, before you ask, yeah—I'll consider you for any bait gigs that might come up for the magazine."

Claire blew smoke rings. "It's not all a one-way street, baby. I've got quite a bit of inside dirt, and I've got no qualms about sharing it, especially as it pertains to the Reds and their sort of filth. I've finked to HUAC, and I'll fink to you—and at least you'll properly compensate me."

I made This Gesture #2. It meant capital *C* capitulation and wrung-out relinquishment.

Claire laughed. She flashed her crooked teeth. I went all woo-woo. Hey there, you with the stars in your eyes.

"Freddy O.'s a pushover. It's the last thing in the world I expected."

I said, "Let's go someplace and fall down. Let's crawl into a hole and not come out for a while."

Claire said, "Not tonight. I've got test papers to grade, and I can't let those disadvantaged kids down."

OUTSIDE THE HORVATH DEATH PAD

2/19/54

Late nites become me. They obfuscate and overtake me. They send me where I'm supposed to be.

I pulled up and parked on Camerford. LAPD yanked their crime-scene guard. The shit shack now stood dark. The clock marched toward midnite. I ran my radio and notched *Nachtmusik.*

Stan Kenton's "Machito." Jimmie Lunceford's "Uptown Blues." Gonesville, Daddy-O. Mad music to B and E by.

I ditzed the dial and extended the interlude. I got bop, by way of Bird and Deranged Dizzy. Bop bops me and sends me where I'm supposed to be.

I brought my evidence kit. I brought my burglar's tools. I was jazzed and jacked-up exhausted.

I'd worked Operation Rock Wife all day. Sexville, Daddy-O. Close contact with Claire Klein had me *gooooooone.*

Jimmy handled Rock and played director. *Confidential* supplied a foto man. I called Harry Fremont and brought him into the gig. Harry sprung three badass beaners from the Lincoln Heights drunk tank. They portrayed the pachucos who mob-menace Claire. We staged our stirring scene at Scrivner's Hollywood. Claire sips a pineapple malt in her '51 Ford. Rock lurks nearby. Swish carhops swarm him. He signs *mucho* autographs.

Jimmy feeds the cholos their motivation. He stamps them Stanislavskiites at the gate. Dig it: you want white pussy *baaaaaaad.*

They surround Claire's car. They coochie-coo her and weenie-wag her. Claire shrieks. Rock rocks to the rescue. He pounds the three pachuco punks to the pavement. LAPD rolls up and rousts the beaners. Harry Fremont cued them in advance.

It all worked, *perfecto.* Our fotog shot film and stills and got it all in four takes. Rock meets Claire. It's love at first sight. Jimmy counseled reluctant Rock. Brother, you *have* to. Lew Wasserman decrees that you take a wife.

I called Harry and pledged him five yards for his work. Harry shot me leads per the Horvath snuff.

Lead #1: he ran the plate number on that cop car I saw at the crime scene. *Bip*—it's a Fed sled/FBI/on loan to serpentine Senator Joe McCarthy and his L.A. Commie hunt. Lead #2: the Hats pulled in a shitbird pal of George Collier Akin's. He was a hump hot-prowl man himself. The Hats were hammering him *haaaaaaaard.*

Bird bopped me. Dizzy dinged me. I pulled on rubber gloves. I grabbed my evidence kit and *rolled.*

Shadows shrouded me. Streetlights were dim. I poured across the porch and braced the front door. I pulled a #4 pick and jammed the jamb upside the latch spring. The door popped open, *faaaaast.*

I pulled my penlight. I locked myself in. I laid my evidence kit on a chair. Harry got me the PD's print manifest. Joan's prints and her kids' prints were inked in.

Smudge-and-smear locations were noted. No other known or verified prints were found and logged in. Here's *my* job: roll overlooked touch-and-grab surfaces. Contrast and compare.

Chez Joan. It's all there for you to touch and taste. *She's* there for you as your own. Go forth, Pervdog—contrast and compare.

I roamed. I spread print powder on unlisted surfaces and pulled up dust and palm sweat. I worked back toward Joan's bedroom and saved it for last. I hit the kids' bedroom. It broke my hard heart. I pulled an unlogged little-kid print off a bed rail. I checked shelves and drawers for stashed booty and got zilch.

The kitchen reeked of overripe food and dumped trash. I rolled it, regardless. I dusted the breakfast-nook table and pulled up a full-digit print. I checked the print manifest and compared tents, arches, and whorls. *Eureka*—it's an unknown.

I inked it on a fresh print card. My pad prowl was now two hours and ten minutes in. My heart hurtled on overdrive. I stepped into Joan's bedroom and stood there.

Stale perfume stung me. It was Tweed or Jungle Gardenia. The Pervdog's a scent dog and knows whereof he speaks. I caught Joan's underscent. It jazzed me and fucked me up, in caustic concurrence. I penlight-flashed the walls and saw something.

A small borehole. Right there. The east-facing wall. Just above the floor. White Spackle paste caked at the edges. One frayed wire sticking out.

I knelt and flashed a close-up. I'm a bug-and-tap pro. I know bug-and-tap work when I see it. *This* was a bore-and-tap access point. The frayed wire was old. The bug-and-tap mounts had been removed. The Spackle paste was old and crumbled. The bug-and-tap removal man did a shit camouflage job.

Stale perfume. Tweed or Jungle Gardenia, mixed with her—

I went through the bedroom drawers. Joan's underthings were stacked neatly. The stale perfume scent became her scent, all by itself.

—

I racked out at the Ranch Market. Bondage Bob called early and drilled me out of a dream. Joi rolled her eyes and held her hands two feet apart. Joi flipped me off and walked out of my life.

Bondage Bob reprised my dreary dreamscape. He demanded dish on the Steve Cochran gig. I laid out the lowdown on Joi's bait job. Bondage Bob popped his perceived punch line:

Luscious Lana Turner On Skids—Soon To Sign Smut Contract!!!

We discussed Steve the Stud's phone bills. He called Jack Kennedy and society scribe Connie Woodard. We discussed my address-book thefts at Jack's hotel suite. Connie's a Hearst hack. *But*—she's got listings for the blustery blacklist boys of the Hollywood Ten. Plus V. J. Jerome and other Red rogues. Bob considered Commophile Connie the key to my perceived Something Big. Joi's bait-and-bug job confirmed it.

Steve the Stud blathers per his "political pals." The address book/phone bill parlay. Connie Woodard calls Steve twenty-four times. Steve calls Connie twenty-one times. Jack Kennedy calls Steve nineteen times. Steve calls Jack fourteen times. Commophile Connie's once removed from Jack the K. Bondage Bob called it all a "pinko porridge"—now running into *Red.*

I told Bob I'd jump on Connie Woodard, and hung up. I omitted the time-consuming cost of my Horvath-snuff crusade. Time tumbled down on me. I reflex-popped two Dexedrine and turned time my way.

I had a pile of pilfered paper from the L.A. DA's Office. Writs and rejoinders, summonses and subpoenas—all signed, sealed, and loaded with legalese. I crafted a subpoena for Joan Horvath's college transcripts. I stamped it and forged it under the seal of DA Ernie Roll. I filled in the blur of blank paper and laid in the lawyeresque. I figured the UCLA admin hacks would kick loose within one week.

Rain and wild wind whipped me west on Wilshire. The run to Westwood Village took an hour and a half. My Packard pimpmobile carved a course westbound. Water-wilted pedestrians got out of my way.

I parked and ran into the main admin building. I flashed my Special DA's Investigator badge at a wowed desk lady. Ernie Roll shot me the shield. I'd pulled him out of the shit with two Jailbait Jills at a Jonathan Club soiree.

The desk lady pledged quick compliance. I winked to seal the deal. L.A. was winter storm–struck. The haul back to Holly*weird* would take two hours plus. I had time to kill. I schlepped over to the north campus library and ordered up microfiche.

The Hearst-hack *Herald.* Constance Woodard's column. Look for pro-Commie calumny cloaked in society slush. Look for Steve the Stud and Jack the K. puff pieces and mere mentions. See what jumps out.

The microfiche ran from December '53 back to August '51. Connie's column was called "Connie's Column." A small pic denoted all her one-page spreads. I recalled La Woodard from Jack K.'s A-bomb party. She was a knock-kneed redhead of the spinster-idealist ilk. She'd be richly ripe for Red recruitment.

I moved microfiche through a machine. I read Connie's columns. My hackles hopped at the start. Every Hancock Park hoedown, every debutante do and cutesy cotillion contained a rip on the Reds. It was *tooooooooo* much of a good thing. It was *waaaaay* out of print proportion. I scrolled back and hit May 16, '53. Jack K. attends a lawn bash. It fetes limp-wristed loser Adlai Stevenson. Connie properly prongs Adlai and calls him "pink in more ways than one." *Ooohhy,* Connie—you got *dat* right. *But*—she singles out Jack's kid brother, Bobby the K. She suck-up cites his tight ties to Joe McCarthy. And, *dig:* McCarthy has already disgraced himself. He's now anathema to astutely informed anti-Reds.

Tooooo much of a good thing. *Waaaaay* out of print proportion.

What's going on here? Connie's got Jack's name in her address book. It's right beside John Howard Lawson and V. J. Jerome. She calls Jack. She calls Steve Cochran. Steve's anti-A-bomb. That's suspect in itself. Steve's making "celebrity smut." He's "leaning left these days."

I scrolled back through Connie's columns. I skimmed for Jack and Steve worked into the word stew. '53, '52, '51. There—August 18.

Steve's captivating kids at a Shriners wingding. Connie's ever the muddled muckraker and gooey gadfly here.

"B-movie heartthrob Steve Cochran broke hearts at the Shriners last night, and not the hearts of the willing women so often attributed to him. No, readers—and he didn't brawl his way through the corridors of Children's Hospital, nor did he hit any doctors or slap any nurses who got in his way. He simply showered affection on those less fortunate than he, and in the process he claimed the hearts of many, including myself. Isn't it time the world looked at this very talented and humane young man as the gifted and sensitive artist that he is?"

I was floored, flabbergasted, and flipped into a rage. It's the Parthenon of Puff Pieces. It's the deus ex machina of disingenuousness. Connections, deflections, lies unworthy of *me.* I sensed it was *Something Big* at the start. Now I knew it was *Something Wrong.*

—

I levitated out of the library. Something Big/Something Wrong. I surfed the tsunami east on Sunset. It was some mad monsoon. A homing instinct homed me in on Havenhurst Avenue. I cut south and pulled up by Steve Cochran's courtyard.

Sit-still surveillance. Hard rain to hide me, couched curbside. Old Crow to kill the cold.

I dialed down the defroster and kept the windows clear. I strafed eyeball paths to the rear carport and Studly Steve's door. Time faltered and failed to trample my trance. Hours passed. Steve Cochran and Joi Lansing came out of the carport and headed for home.

His home. *Her* home now. They lugged *her* luggage. The matched set *I* bought her. Monogrammed at Mark Cross.

Some cute couple. A matched set. The Stacked and the Hung. Joi wobbled on too-high heels. A Band-Aid on Steve's right cheek set off his jawline and failed to mar his good looks.

Boo-hoo. Nobody knows de trouble ise seen, nobody knows my sorrow. Somebody, save me. Who said size doesn't count? I'm sunk in this sink of self-hate.

I bolted. I cut down to Fountain and came back up Crescent Heights. I parked in the rear lot and entered Googie's. I saw her, straight off. She wore her culture-cave ensemble. Blue jeans, Bass

Weejuns, baleful Beethoven sweatshirt.

I primped. I popped two Sen-Sen for instant fresh breath. She was alone. She sat in a back booth. I feigned the nonchalance of the cool and the callous and walked straight up.

She twirled her ashtray. She sipped absinthe on the rocks and nibbled french fries.

"Joi's shacking with Steve Cochran. Jimmy called and told me. He said he helped Joi pack the rest of her stuff."

I said, "The Teletype travels fast. I just found out myself."

"I hope this consoles you. Jimmy said there was a very big girl asleep in your bed. She's about as tall as that colored guy from KU. Joi hexed her and poured liniment on her basketball shorts."

I laffed and took a jolt of Claire's absinthe. It stung my too-taxed liver and looped to my head. Claire tossed french fries on my place mat.

"Bondage Bob cut you a check for your wardrobe. He wants you dressed to the nines for your Mocambo date next week. You're doubling with Rock and Jimmy. Jimmy's bringing Liz Taylor. He's inked for some big oater set in Texas, soon. Rock and Liz top-bill him. Jimmy and Liz are strictly platonic. They'll make sure Rock doesn't light out after some hunky chorus quiff."

Claire lit a cigarette. "I'll sell Liz some Israel bonds. She's devoted to the cause now. She's sub rosa with this wheeler-dealer, Mike Todd. She never stays unmarried for long. Mike's a *landsman* of the old school. Liz is forbidden fruit to him."

I laffed. "Liz is low-hanging fruit of the new school. *Confidential* winks at divorces, and the magazine will always be kind to her."

Claire tossed a changeup. "I shivved that Mex who whipped his chorizo out on me. Jimmy got him lit up on the Method, but he whipped it too close to my face."

I tossed a changeup. "Harry Fremont saw a Fed intel file. He said you were in on the King David Hotel bombing, back in the British mandate."

"I planted the bomb. And then I played girl sabra and lovingly carried out dead Englishmen."

"The PD guys took the Mex to Georgia Street Receiving. You were kind. It was a superficial flesh wound. He got off easy."

Claire twirled her ashtray. "You've got a history with Georgia Street. Harry loves to dish. He said your guy didn't get off so easy."

"Let's not get into scalp counts. I couldn't possibly compete with you."

Claire smiled. "You've got lineage. The Lebanese come to fight. You're a Christian, so your people were surely considered elites."

I made the jack-off sign. "I fell off my camel and landed in L.A. My whole life's nothing but a prelude to you."

Claire yukked. "I'll never say yes, and I'll never say no. At some point we'll want to fall down together, and we'll both know the moment when it comes."

I got chills. I chugged Claire's absinthe. Wormwood whipped my wig and winged me back to Weimar Berlin. I joined a bevy of bohemians at the Hotel Adlon. We're there to cull the cusp of the abyss.

"What are you doing in L.A.? You didn't come here to teach school and see what happens next, and you're overqualified for studio gigs and bait jobs."

Claire said, "People here love to talk. Jimmy, Harry, Bob Harrison. I've come to understand that you're interested in Connie Woodard, and I'm interested in her, too."

I said, "Don't stop now."

Claire said, "I came to L.A. to kill a man. I don't know his name, but I think Connie Woodard might. It's all design and opportunity with me, as it is with you."

—

I drove home. I drove home jazzed and jacked to the gills and *SCARED* down to my shit-stained shorts.

The pad was queerly quiescent. Stretch dropped her USC silks on the living room floor. She left a note propped by the phone.

"Harry Fremont called. Meet him at the Central DB tomorrow. 10:00 a.m. Hat Squad. A 459 suspect. Mandatory."

I walked back to the bedroom. A bedside night-light was on. Stretch was crapped out on my bed. She was tucked in under the covers and dead asleep. Lance the Leopard was curled up on top of the duvet. Stretch was too tall for the bed. I covered her feet. Lance growled at me. Don't mess with my woman, you hump.

I know when I'm licked. I walked back to the living room and fell asleep on the couch with my clothes on.

CENTRAL DIVISION DETECTIVE BUREAU

Interrogation Room #3
2/21/54

The Hats had a hump in the hot seat. A claustrophobe closet/one table/six chairs. One fat phone book in vivid view.

He's Delbert Davis Haines/white male American/DOB 6-12-18. He's tight with George Collier Akin. They met and compared notes at Quentin. Haines did a doomsday dime for 459 plus rape-sodomy.

Harry Fremont dragged a dragnet and hauled him in. He was alibied up for the Joan Horvath homicide. He blew blues clarinet at a round-the-clock romp at the Riptide Room. Dexter Gordon, Chet Baker, and Art Pepper alibied him.

Harry said he'd made pay-phone contact with Akin. Haines said Akin was casing cooze for a Red Devil Bandit comeback. He's bidding Beverly Hills bye-bye. He's back on L.A. city turf.

The Hats hovered. They straddled chairs and loomed over Haines. I kicked my chair against a side wall and scoped it. Haines was a junkie. He skin-popped Big "H" and held off a habit. He was snaggletoothed and pustule-pocked. He wore a Sir Guy shirt and slit-bottom khakis. He was one mean motor scooter and bad actor.

Max Herman said, "You could waltz, Delbert. We've got nothing on the books we can hold you on."

Red Stromwall said, "Or we could concoct something and hold you indefinitely."

Harry Crowder said, "Or we could get ugly."

Eddie Benson said, "You know what we want and who we want, and the sooner you give it to us, the less likely it is that we'll lay on the grief."

Haines said, "Who's that guy kicking his chair back? I think I've seen him before."

Max Herman said, "That's Mr. Otash. He's a former Los Angeles policeman, currently employed as a private investigator."

Haines said, "He's a greaseball. I'm very much attuned to racial distinctions. I'm on the editorial board for the National States' Rights Party, and I write for *Thunderbolt Magazine.*"

Red Stromwall said, "Let's stick to the topic at hand. George Collier Akin. You know what we want."

Haines picked his nose and ate the goober. He said, "I want your wife to suck my big dick."

Red phone-booked him. *Wham!*—a big roundhouse shot. His face hit the table. His nose cracked. Blood blew out.

He tried to wipe his face. Harry Crowder grabbed his hands and cuffed them to his chair slats. The ratchets racked deep and drew blood.

Haines giggled and licked blood off his lips. He wagged his well-hung tongue at the Hats.

"I'm the Lizard of Love. Check my rap sheet. I'm a go-down man from way back."

Harry Crowder said, "We like Akin for a burglary-homicide two nights ago. Lower Hollywood. Camerford off Vine. The victim's name was Joan Horvath. Does that ring a bell with you?"

Haines said, "Your wife rings my bell, eight nights a week. She's a go-down girl from way back."

Harry phone-booked him. He sidled a sidewinder shot. Haines' head whiplashed. Nose blood and mouth blood blew wide. Two teeth hit the far wall.

Eddie Benson said, "Joan Horvath. Camerford off Vine. The B and E snuff there. She wakes up and fights him. Does this sound like Akin? Has he mentioned the job to you?"

Haines licked his lips and torqued his tongue. He said, "Your wife mentioned that you're hung like an amoeba. That's why she brings me all the woof-woof."

Eddie phone-booked him. He ripped a reverse sidewinder. It tore one eyebrow loose. Blood spattered the opposite wall.

I said, "Joan Horvath was pushing forty. She had some gray hair, and she was on the stout side. I bet Akin likes it younger and firmer, and Harry Fremont told me the Red Devil Bandit doesn't range that far north and west."

Haines licked blood off his lips. "Hey, the greaseball speaks, and he don't speak with forked tongue."

Max Herman said, "Tell us what you mean by that."

Haines said, "I mean the greaseball speaks *la verdad.* The Red Devil

Bandit likes young gash he can terrorize. He likes the pads off Washington and Jefferson, down near USC. I can get more specific if you give me that waltz and lay a big dinner-and-drinks chit for Kwan's Chinese Pagoda on me."

Max Herman said, "You're on."

Red Stromwall said, "We'll throw in a shower and a run by Georgia Street. We know all the doctors there. They'll fix you up."

Harry Crowder said, "Delbert's a white man."

Eddie Benson said, "Let's not go overboard."

Haines looked straight at me. "Severance Street, the first block south of Jefferson. The Bandit's casing a pad there. He might hit tonight. The chick's a predental student. She's got short dark hair in a pixie cut."

Max uncuffed Haines and handed him his handkerchief. Haines wrung his wrists and grabbed the chair back. He staggered and struggled to stand up.

I said, "You don't make him for Joanie? There's no way he'd go for that?"

Haines haw-hawed. " 'Joanie?' Do I detect something there?"

The Hats haw-hawed. They shared wicked winks. Max said, "We make him for Joanie, and that's all that counts."

—

Harry and Eddie took Haines to Georgia Street and ensconced him with the jail-ward doc. I went with them. Georgia Street, redux. I walked the wicked path I walked when I whacked Ralphie Horvath.

Eddie ribbed me. "Must bring back some memories. Eh, Freddy?"

Haines had no fixed address for George Collier Akin. The Hats preferred to hit hot-prowl men in the act. Max dug up a map of Severance south of Jefferson. Red stiffed cold calls to every house on the block. He pinned the pixie cut. She was one Louise Marie Vernell, age eighteen.

Red laid out the sick situation. Louise gave in to gasps. She rented a room in a coed boardinghouse. Max decreed evacuation. Red dispatched three patrol sleds. Patrol cops took the tittering tenants and their landlady to the downtown Statler. The PD picked up the tab. The girls gassed on the service and posed for pix with the cops.

We waited. The dead-of-winter day dipped to dusk. Max buzzed

Bill Parker. I heard his side of the call. He said, “Yes, Chief” fourteen times and hung up.

I packed my .45 automatic. The Hats packed Python Magnums. Harry made the booze run. He brought back six short dogs of bonded bourbon and boocoo potato chips.

We rolled out in two K-cars. I rolled with Max and Red. Max laid in Ithaca pumps and a box of throwdown guns. We pulled ahead in the pole spot. Harry and Eddie bird-dogged behind. We hit South Severance at full dark.

Louise left her lights on, upstairs. They beamed I’m-home-alone/come-and-find-me rape rays. The pole car took the back-alley slot. The follow car took the Severance slot.

Max and Red played host. We shared short dogs and potato chips. The car was cold. The booze built its glimmering glow. Max and Red teased and taunted me.

You’re okay, Freddy. We miss you, Freddy. *Confidential’s* a shit rag, Freddy. How many felony extortions have you pulled this year, Freddy? The Chief’s got his four eyes on you.

It sailed sadly by me. I was off with Stretch and Claire and the mystery man she vowed to kill. Plus Studly Steve and Commo Connie Woodard. Claire per Connie: “I’m interested in her, too.”

Time ticked by. *Tick, tick, tick.* I entertain ripe revelations. Claire scares me more than Georgie Akin and the Hats. *Tick, tick, tick.* The hellhound Horvaths. They’ve haunted me and hurtled me *here.*

The teasing and taunting ebbed. Time ticked toward 10:00 p.m. Max and Red booze-dozed their way through ten-minute naps. I popped two Dexedrine and wound myself up.

I saw something. It was something evil and something wrong. The something walked northbound. In our direct direction. There’s a red blur where its head should be and black below that. It’s getting close. It’s veering toward the boardinghouse back gate.

The boys woke up. The Something’s *très* close. It’s got its hand on the gate latch. Said latch is unlocked. Our K-car’s shadow-shrouded. We see it. It can’t see us.

The Red Devil Bandit. That red-rubber mask. The fangs and horns. He rapes and maims. He didn’t maim and kill Joan Horvath. We’re past all that now.

Max and Red pulled their belt guns. I pulled mine. The Red Devil Bandit opened the gate and closed it behind him. Max mouthed One, two, three, four, five. We got out and followed him.

We were silent. We went tiptoed. The Red Devil Bandit heard zilch. He stood in the walkway and eyed the upstairs light. Harry and Eddie stepped out of a shadow. The Red Beast saw them. They held pump shotguns.

The Red Beast turned to run. He saw three more men and three more guns out. He saw me.

Max said, “Kill him, Freddy.”

I stepped up. I aimed. The Red Beast stood still. I fired at his face. It blew up, red-on-red. Red rubber and red blood exploded. The shot rang loud *loud.*

Harry and Eddie shotgunned him and tumbled him back off his feet. He’s dead now. He’s no danger. This is how this works. All five of us walked up and emptied our guns. We fired point-blank and shot him to bits.

INFERNAL INTERMEZZO:

My Furtively Fucked-up Life

2/22–3/18/54

Yeah, I did it. Yeah, it was wrong. Yeah, I enjoyed it. He got what he paid for. I knew I'd pay for what I did—somewhere down the line.

The Hearst rags loved it. HATS SLAY RED DEVIL BANDIT!!! CELEB P.I. ASSISTS!!! Dig the fetching fotos. I stand with Max, Red, Harry, and Eddie. They dwarf me. We point to something red and dead on the ground.

More headline hullabaloo. TIPSTER TATTLES RED DEVIL BANDIT!!! DARING BLASTOUT ENSUES!!! More fetching fotos. Georgie Akin's 1943 mug shots. A posed my-hero shot. Fractious Freddy with Max Herman and Red Stromwall. We strut. Louise Marie Vernell smarmy-smiles up at us.

BHPD blew a stakeout on Durward Brown and Richard Dulange. The Hats hunted them down and killed them four days later. The Hearst rags loved it. More headline hullabaloo. MOTEL MASSACRE!!! HATS GUN DOWN KIDNAP-RAPISTS!!! ALL GANG MEMBERS NOW DEAD!!!

Many more fetching fotos. The Hats with Chief Parker. Mastiffs maul for their master. Big backslaps and yuk-yuks. Many mentions of me. Max Herman sez, "We needed Freddy O. on this one. Freddy's our boy. He's the Man to See." Red Stromwall sez, "God bless Freddy O. What's a daring blastout without him?"

Yeah, I did it. Yeah, I knew it was wrong. Yeah, I loved the hack hullabaloo. Don't fuck with Freddy O. He's the Man to See. Too bad the world sees back. Too bad the world's inside him.

The Googie's gang saw me and tipstered me and fed me scandal skank. I scored scads of *sin*uendo for the magazine. Homos, lezbos, dipsos, hopheads. Underhung *Untermenschen* and big-dick barracudas. Heavy hermaphrodite action sunders the Sunset Strip!!!

Freddy O.'s the Shaman of Shame. He's got to *see* you. Meanwhile, *you* see *him.*

I saw Joan "Stretch" Perkins and Claire Klein. We talked about things and around things. I saw them, they saw me. They taunted, tickled, and teased me. Stretch wanted kid love, with all the va-va-voom verboten. We slept in my bed. Stretch wore basketball silks. I wore pajamas. We necked to a naughty nexus and stopped cold. Lance the Leopard got between us. It was nighty-night then.

Stretch taunts and teases me. She knows things about me. She knows I killed the Red Devil Bandit in cold blood. She knows it all pertains to the hellhound Horvaths—and that I'm not done with them yet. Claire Klein taunts and teases me. She won't fall down with me. We meet at Googie's most nights. We smile and drink. Our hands often brush. We discuss Operation Rock Wife. I'll be taking over Jimmy Dean's stewardship soon. He'll be off to shoot *East of Eden* with Gadge Kazan and that big Texas flick with Liz and Rock. Claire wants to kill a man. I *see* that. It consumes her. She *sees* that I'm going at the Cochran gig and the Commie Connie connection circumspectly. She's an I-want-to-*see*-it-and-know-it-all-now girl. And most assuredly a psychopath. She withholds from me. I withhold from her. Our boundaries wiggle, wilt, and hold firm. She scares me. I don't scare her. I'm not the Man to See. I'm the man to help her fulfill her murderous destiny.

Stretch provides innocence. Claire turns my lifelong voyeurism back in on me. I want to know her secret shit—but fear the price she'll make me pay. She knows that I killed the Red Devil Bandit to impress her. She intends to kill a man. I intend to kill the man who really killed Joan Horvath. The hellhound Horvaths. It all comes back to them. Claire *sees* that and knows that full well. I told her that I killed a man so she'll love me. She failed to reply. She won't love me until I find the man that *she* wants to kill. In the meantime, my will to work rages.

I work the Cochran gig. Bondage Bob wants a wild and sex-soiled serialization. I live at the listening post. The bugs and taps work *gooooood.* I listen to Studly Steve fuck my ex-woman Joi Lansing. They deliriously defame me. They underestimate me. Joi tattles, taunts, and teases me. She knows there's bugs and taps in place. She hasn't told Steve. She knows I'm listening. She wants me to hear. That means she wants me to *see.*

Sound equals sight. My imagination seals the sensory gaps. Information insistently issues. Steve's recruited Lana Turner and hunk hubby Lex Barker. Lurid Lex *loooooves* underage stuff. The casting-call aspect of the celeb smut film proceeds. I'm on it. I'm on the Connie connection just as assiduously.

I haunt the UCLA library. I bug the admin folk: where's the Joan Horvath transcripts? The admin folk go *Soon, soon.* I read and reread Connie's columns. Connie's a codified Commie. She's Comintern. She's a Red Reptile couched in cold cover. She's seditiously subtle. Her words work on a mini-microdot level. She's linked to Steve Cochran. Steve rolls Red. I'm building a scandal-rag exposé and a damning derogatory profile. I'll leak it to Joe McCarthy or some more rigorously responsible cat. I'll get Claire the name of the man she wants to kill in the process. She'll love me then or she won't. I'll love her whatever the outcome.

Work. Operation Rock Wife. Rock and Claire like each other and look good together. Lew Wasserman's pleased. Rock orders in bunboys from a dial-a-dick service owned by Bondage Bob's wayward kid brother. He gets his regular woof-woof.

I fotograph Rock and Claire's at-the-doorway kisses. It's sterile stuff. Rock's a movie star and a very sweet man. He's engaged to wed a batshit bomb thrower and more. Only in America, only in L.A., only in Holly*weird.*

Work. Allies and adversaries. Old friends passing through.

The Hats hold their hands in. They swing by Googie's and torque me as I tally tipster dish. How's the boy, Freddy? Do you miss us, Freddy? The Chief misses you, Freddy. You're always in his thoughts.

I looked for them when they weren't there. I listened for them at the listening post. They imparted the impudent theme of We See You. I saw them everywhere. I popped pills and saw them. I drank and saw them. I adamantly abstained and saw them most of all.

Work. I got my FBI kickback on that Horvath house print. Bad news: there's no file print extant. I *lived* at the listening post. I wore headphones and willed the next static-stung stammer that would tell me something big and something wrong. I waited for UCLA to call. Commie Connie confounded me. She never left her Hancock Park home. I needed to prowl the premises. I needed to booby-trap bugs and hot-wire the whole hut.

Connie hid from me and hindered me and immolated my imagination. I parked across the street and ran my radio. Joe McCarthy proclaimed his presence in L.A. Bondage Bob told me a Fed listening post had been set up someplace/somewhere. I saw my wires crossed with their wires, strung as strangling cords.

Work to constant communion. The Horvath house as soiled sacristy. I vowed vengeance. I exonerated the Red Devil Bandit and ran my rationale for his death. Joan heard me. I know that. Vigilance is love. I hold vigil most nights. I know that Joan hears me and sees me.

OUTSIDE CONSTANCE WOODARD'S HANCOCK PARK HOUSE

3/19/54

Connie's casa: a cool contemporary job at 1st and Beachwood. Two stories. All aluminum and glare-glinted glass, up and down. Some dippy Dane's idea of swank.

Sit-and-brood surveillance. A raging rainstorm brings a brainstorm. Hey, lady—we've got fone lines down. Let me in to check your fones, willya?

I perched in my Packard pimpmobile. Bernie was due. He had the pseudo repair tools and the know-how. He'd wing it, wham-bam. One fone/one condenser mike/one half-ass tap. No time to tackle bug mounts.

Raging rainstorms rip me, recollective. They wash my broiled brain and cleanse it clean. Last month. The Willoughby listening post. Stretch Perkins works Call-Girl Line #2. She hears Claire Klein and Barbara Payton trick with V. J. Jerome. The appalling apparatchik's in Connie's address book. That's Cold Connection #1. Here's Cold Connection #2:

Last month, ditto. Claire and I nosh the news and flare-flirt at Googie's. Claire lights me large with this line:

"I came to L.A. to kill a man. I don't know his name, but I think Connie Woodard might."

Hence, my bristling brainstorm. Hence, my ripe resolve. Work the Connie Connection *now*.

I yawned. My ass dragged. I was up late last nite. My landlord lashed my lease and tossed me out, temporary. Lance the Leopard laid waste to his rose gardens and crotch-sniffed his crotchety wife. I rented a boss bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Stretch helped me move. We hung up corkboards and tacked on *Confidential* sales graphs. Plus notes for my tricky troika: Operation Rock Wife/the Cochran Gig/my Horvath Crusade.

Lance *looooooved* his new lair. Room service served his cheeseburgers and fries in a dog dish. Lance slept with Stretch. I slept on the couch.

I yawned. I dexie-dosed my case of the blahs. Bernie showed. He'd scrounged a PC Bell repair truck, for vivid verismo. He parked in Connie Woodard's driveway and drilled her doorbell.

She opened up. There she is. She's still rangy, nervous, and knock-kneed. She's the Specious Spinster and Miss Soviet Suck-Up of 1924.

Bernie schmoozed her. I rolled down my window and heard it. He went *Oy, lady*. She went *Oh dear—are you sure? Ooohhh*—she talked butch bass like Lauren Bacall.

She let Bernie in. He shut the door. I timed the house call.

Twenty-two and a half minutes. Bernie tips his cap and walks back out the door. Connie holds the door. Her russet hair's wrapped in a bun now. She waves *toodle-oo.*

—

Paydirt.

Bernie tapped the living room fone and shoved a short-range transceiver under the couch. We rented an upstairs office at a bank building off 1st and Larchmont. We laid in listening-post paraphernalia. Casa Connie to the post: two short-range blocks. We should get *goooood* signal feeds.

Bernie donned earmuffs and manned the tap. I called Harry Fremont from a pay phone. I groused and proclaimed my predicament.

There's this woman. She's a shut-in. I've tapped her. I need to pad-prowl her. Rig me a ruse. I need four hours. She's a Commie. Uncle Sambo needs you. Violate her sissified civil rights. I'll pay you five yards.

Harry said, "*Jawohl,* boss."

—

Babs Payton car-hopped and hooked out of Stan's Drive-In. It was hard by Hollywood High. She hit *her* Holly*weird* high with *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye,* circa '50. She was Mrs. Franchot Tone for six seconds. Tom Neal beat Timid Tone half dead and battered Babs with his lurid love. *Tattle* told the torchy tale, circa ’51. Babs screeched into the skids. *Yeah*—she was ripe for Steve Cochran’s *sex*ploitation.

I pulled into Stan’s. A comely carhop cadre caught sight of Big Freddy O. Babs and I go back. We badger-gamed businessmen in my cop days. Babs snared the schnooks at the Kibitz Room at Canter’s Delicatessen. She lured them to the Lariat Motel on Lankershim. She socked the saps into the saddle and made with the moans. I kicked the door in and played irate husband. I glommed the gelt and kicked the cads back out the door.

Babs roller-skated over. She wore red-and-white jodhpurs and a too-tight jersey top. She said, “Here’s trouble.” She hooked a tray to my passenger-side door.

I dropped a C-note on the tray. Babs got the gestalt. She got in and sat beside me. The C-note went *poof!!!*

“Okay, I’ll play.”

“I thought you might want to.”

Babs scooched down and swung her legs up. Her skate boots nudged her knees and fit fetishistic. She posed pouty and ran the rollers on my dashboard.

“I’m on my break for the next fifteen minutes. Before you start, let me state no more shakedowns. I’m not going back to the Kibitz Room or the Lariat Motel.”

I laffed and lit a cigarette. Babs bummed a smoke and lit it off my lighter.

“*Freddy,* the point of all this is—”

“Steve Cochran. The smut film he’s making, and don’t ask me how I know about it.”

Babs said, “Ha-ha. You’re jealous, because Joi’s in the flick, and she left you for Steve. I don’t blame you, I’d be jealous, too. Ha-ha, and too bad for Joi, because as crummy men go, she’s gone from the frying pan into the fire.”

I rebuffed the rude remark. “Update me. The film, who Steve’s conned into appearing, the start date, the whole schmear.”

Babs shrugged. “Smut’s smut, and I know from smut on an intimate level. Okay, Steve’s wrapping *Private Hell 36* this week, so we’ll start pretty soon. Probably within the next two weeks. Lana Turner, Lex Barker, and Gene Tierney have dropped out, which I know don’t surprise you. Steve’s stuck with me, Joi, and Anita O’Day, and he’s recruiting an additional ten girls out of one of the call services some of us have been known to work for, which makes the full thirteen women that Steve and his big dick will repopulate the world with, after the A-bomb wipes everybody else on Earth out. Need I say that Steve's hipped on the A-bomb like nobody I've ever seen."

I went *Don't stop now.* Babs rolled her rollers on my red leather dashboard. It rubbed me wrong. I nudged her knees and kiboshed it.

Babs tapped ash out the window. "The premiere is sometime later this spring, in Harry Cohn's rec room. Smut's smut, and what's smut without some straitlaced boys to let their back hair down while they watch it. And since Harry's Harry, and a tyrant, a perv, and, most especially, a suck-up, these are some powerful boys, as in Senator Bill Knowland, Senator Joe McCarthy—if he don't trip on his dick between now and this so-called 'premiere'—and Senator Jack Kennedy, who I know you know from, but probably not on the intimate level that I do."

"Why would Jack's name be in Steve's address book? Why would Jack and Steve be calling each other, regularly?"

"Because Steve's Jack's pimp and dope supplier in L.A. Because Steve rolls left, and Jack's a barely suppressed bleeding heart, right below the surface."

I dipped through the dish. I strung it and strained it and microscoped it minutely. Nothing surprised me. Babs bops banal, so far.

"Claire Klein. I know you trick three-ways with her, and don't ask me how I know. If you start by saying she scares you, it wouldn't surprise me—because she scares me, too."

Babs made the hex sign. Babs waved faux wolfsbane. Babs made the sign of the cross.

"Claire don't scare me. Claire terrifies me. She likes to shave men's pubic hair with her switchblade, and half the tricks we go out on *love* it. She carries a Makarov pistol with a silencer in her purse, and we've been tricking with these Russian consulate guys, and they speak Russian with her, so I don't know what they're saying—"

I cut in. "*And* V. J. Jerome, that Commie culture-vulture guy—"

Babs cut back in. "Yeah, there's him, *and* Claire's cutting side deals, to swing with these Russian guys and shave their wives, and all the time she's pressing them, and she's digging for leads on some Commie scientist back in the '30s and '40s, who's got this weirdo 'Robin Redbreast' code name, and then she's pressing them on some society writer named Constance Woodard, and about this time I lose track of all Claire's crazy shit, and start praying to the Good Lord that

I never have to work with her again."

—

I drove to Googie's. I perv-peeped Claire through a back window. I trembled. I smeared nose prints on the glass.

Claire sat in her back booth. She sipped absinthe and nibbled french fries. She wore tight blue jeans. Note the knife bulge on her left leg.

I walked in. The dinner din diminuendoed. There was just my heartbeat and hers. I trembled and tumbled toward her. She saw me. She read me right and tumbled telepathic. *She knew that I knew.*

I sat down. She read me. Here's fright-fraught Freddy. Freddy's got the frets.

"I saw the bug mounts when Babs and I tricked with V. J. Jerome. I thought it might get back to you. Babs even joked about it. 'Half these trick pads are hot-wired, and you never know who's listening. Most likely it's Freddy Otash."

I guzzled her absinthe. I grabbed the goblet too hard. The glass sheared and shattered. Sharp shards cut my hand.

Claire pressed her napkin into the palm and balled my fist around it. Claire unbuttoned my shirt cuffs and rolled up the sleeves in one go.

She ran her hands up my arms. She tugged at the hairs. She removed the napkin and blotted blood off my hand.

"You should assume that I want you to know everything that I do and say, and that it's all in our common interest. 'Opportunity is love,' as you've put it before. I'm sure you've spoken to Babs. And I'm sure she's told you a few things. You know why I'm here in L.A., and I know you're not here to deter me or prevent me from doing what I intend to do. From here on in, we should credit each other with the ability to learn and extrapolate. We'll have our moment together when we've accomplished what we need to, and it will be all that much sweeter then."

I said, "Robin Redbreast" and "Connie Woodard." My voice sheared. Claire pulled her shiv and picked glass shards out of my hand.

—

Stretch said, “You’re scared. It’s like you’ve seen the world’s worst ghost.”

My bungalow bid me to safety. Stretch was safe. Lance was safe. I *needed* that. I *wanted* to be someplace dark and depraved with Claire Klein.

I held my hand up. I heal fast. My cuts had crusted into crisp little crosses. I’d been stigmatized.

Claire was a Navy nurse, circa ’43. Claire knew from knives. She cleansed my wound with high-test absinthe. She placed my hand on her breast and held it there. A part of me passed into her.

“Uncle Freddy, you’re shaking. And what’s with your hand? Don’t tell me you’ve had some kind of religious visitation.”

I walked up to my wall graph. *Confidential*’s daily sales had spiked spectacularly. I scanned my treacherous troika graph. I drew arrows between Operation Rock Wife and the Cochran Gig. I linked former to latter and wrote “Claire Klein & Babs Payton” below. I arrow-linked “V. J. Jerome” & “Connie Woodard.” I wrote “Russian consulate guys” & “Robin Redbreast” below that.

Stretch walked over. Her eyes grazed the graph and ran right to “Robin Redbreast.” She got goose bumps. They sprouted and spread up her arms.

I said, “The Sweetzer listening post. Monitor Lez Line #2, every chance you get. I’ll pay you two yards a week.”

She orbed my hopped-up hieroglyphics. She said, “As long as you tell me how all this plays out.”

THE NORTH CAMPUS LIBRARY AT UCLA

3/20/54

Transcripts. One fat file box. She was Joan Marcelline Hubbard then. She's Joan Horvath of My Heart now.

The admin folks delivered. They called me this a.m. They stridently stressed that rules and regulations apply. View the contents here. Return the box by 9:00 p.m. Don't snitch documents. Don't mooch monographs. The honor system applies.

I took a table all by myself. I tallied tabbed file folders and crafted a chronology. Joan Marcelline Hubbard. DOB 11-6-18. She hails from the hellish-hot San Joaquin Valley. She's farmworker stock. She graduated high school in '35. She picks fruit with a wetback work crew. She digs her way out of the Depression. She applies to UCLA.

She's accepted. She hits Westwood in the fall of '39.

It's all language labs and lit crit. She learns Russian/Polish/Italian. She flaunts her fluency in class and stages stirs. La Hubbard's a hambone. She's a distaff disc jockey on Bruin Radio. She shoves Shostakovich down the throats of the campus illiterati. She rewards them with reductive Rachmaninoff and cheesy Tchaikovsky. She riffs on Russki literature. She writes her own commercials for Russian restaurants. She's a regular at Karlov's Kasa Kiev. Karlov kicks back kash. She writes her own commercials for Polish Pete's Pirogi Palace. Pete pays her in cold cash and kielbasa cutlets. She works her way through college in this mad manner. She's a noted campus cutup. She's a sinfully self-promoting cheerleader chick.

She gets the grades. *Woooo!!!*—Straight A's across the board. She studies the Russian romantic poets. She cruelly critiques the movement. It's all marginal and mystical malarkey. She links Polish piano pounder Paderewski to nattering Nazi composers of the oompah-band ilk. Her professors know that she's a gallivanting gadfly—but stress the solid soundness of her rigor. '39, '40, '41. Joan Marcelline Hubbard makes her mark and goes forth.

She graduates. She goes on to grad school. That crisp chronology cruised me through her academic life. Course names/dates/test scores/grades/the names of professors. The transcripts tripped by as La Joan's light fantastic. File pages blew by in a blur.

I hit late '41 and the cusp of '42. I hit my first chronological misfile. Spring '40: An Introduction to Polish Labor Movements/ Professor Witold Kirpaski. I put the transcript aside and plowed through late '41. Then this, then this, then *THIS:*

Fall '39. The Political Content of the Post-Revolutionary Russian Novel/Guest Professor Constance Woodard.

—

The nite becomes me. I assume my Pervdog pose. My hophead side sidles forth and fuels me. I'm the Red Devil Bandit, one crazed chromosome removed. It's kid shit shorn of pretense. I've peeped since I was fourteen years old in bumfuck Massachusetts. Thus, I peeped *NOW.*

I parked outside Connie Woodard's pad. I popped three Dexedrine and adjusted my adrenaline load. Midnite marched to 1:00 a.m. All Connie's lights were off. I pondered a B and E—but abstained.

My wall graph walloped me. Lives and lines linked on paper. Fall '39. Connie Woodard links to Joan Hubbard. Connie's linked to Steve Cochran. Claire Klein links to Connie. She's marked a man for murder. She thinks Connie may know things. She knows I know things. She knows I've got L.A. hot-wired. I'm the Man to See. Claire talks to me through a mad medium. Listening posts broadcast *two* ways under her spell. She pounds me, paranoiac. Freddy, what thou hath wrought. She Bible-bashes me. The Book of Revelation 3:8. *I know all the things you do, and I have opened a door for you that no one can close.* She has made me the Man to Be Seen.

I eyeballed the Woodard house. I fought off B & E urges. I felt seen. I kept seeing things that might or might not be there. Cop cars clustered in close surveillance. Women wielding shivs. Claire stamped me stigmatized. We merged heartbeats. She marked me the Man to Be Seen.

I worked the phones all afternoon. I talked to Harry Fremont. He froze on the get-me-into-Connie's-house front. "I can't come up with a ruse or diversion, Freddy. Give me time to think this through." I talked to Stretch. She reported from the Sweetzer listening post and Lez Line #2. She said Claire and some unknown Russki talked mucho McCarthy. Jabbering Joe and his feckless Feds were working L.A., through and through. Joe was set to serve subpoenas and roust Red cliques clicking back twenty years. Joe needed *gooooooood* publicity *baaaaaad.* Newspapers gnashed him. Radio reporters rebuffed him. TV pundits punished him for his sins. Brother, I empathize. We're both Men to Be Seen.

I hid out at the Larchmont listening post and listened to listless dead air. I killed dusk and half the nite there. Connie called nobody, nobody called her. I dozed and dreamed of Stretch and Claire, nude like I'd never seen them. I woke up and drove two blocks to here.

Late nite becomes me. 1:00 became 2:00. I noticed empty milk bottles outside Connie's front door. I got This Nutty Notion That Just Might Work.

Time ticked. I chain-smoked and chewed Chiclets. The milkman arrived at 4:13 a.m. He grabbed the empty bottles and left a fresh four-pack. I grabbed my sodium secobarbital stash and removed eight capsules. Connie might mix milk with her morning coffee. If so, she's cooked.

I walked up to the door. I pulled off the bottle caps and whipped in my witches' brew. Four bottles/eight pills/Freddy O.'s merry milk shake. I shook the bottles and condensed the contents. I slid back to my sled to wait.

Dawn dimmed nightfall. Low clouds closed in and reigned rain. Connie opened her front door at 7:14. It was quick. She filched the four-pack and went back inside.

I waited. Waiting wilts me and wears me thin. I waited, regardless. 7:14 to 8:14. One hour, no more. She's had coffee or she hasn't. The kitchen's the likely location. It's peepable. Note those low windows facing the driveway.

I peeper-popped over. I peeped one window, two windows, three. There's Connie. She's passed out flat on the kitchen floor. There's spilled coffee au lait. She's inviting me in.

My #6 pick fit the keyhole. The back door wiggled wide open. I cut into the kitchen. Connie snored. She should inhabit Dreamsville for ten to twelve hours. I had time for a top-end toss.

The kitchen. Chromium and bleached-blond wood. Nothing succulent or suspicious. The living room. All mid-century modern miasma and murky abstract art. A blitzkrieg of black leather. Glare off glass walls. A Kandinskyesque carpet, cobalt-colored and loaded with goofball gewgaw shapes. Nothing succulent or suspicious. Just Connie's suspect taste.

I checked the downstairs bathroom. Nothing nudged me. I walked upstairs. No surprises sandbagged me, straight off. One bathroom/one bedroom/one office. I always work up to women's bedrooms. I checked the bathroom first.

No, *nein, nyet.* Cold-cobalt walls and threadbare throw rugs. No medicine-chest *mishpokeh*—no dizzy dope/no ribbed rubbers/no diaphragm dusted with cornstarch.

The office. Here it gets *gooooooood.*

Note the *red* walls. They're all poster-pinned. It's a treasonous triptych. Free the Scottsboro Boys!!!!! Communism is 20th Century Americanism!!!!! Ben Shahn's screechy screed: "You have not converted a man because you have silenced him."

I grabbed my crotch. Hey, Connie—convert *this,* you Red Reptile!!!!!

There's a desk/a swivel chair/a typewriter. There's three drawers packed with dumb desk supplies. Connie's column for today was tucked in the typewriter. The Marlborough School for Girls, the winter '54 ball, the Hancock Park elite attends.

I checked the top drawer. There's a red leather diary marked "1954." Yesterday was March 20. I dipped to the date and read *this:*

"I fear what I presume will be Senator McCarthy's last stand before a long-overdue U.S. Senate censure. I fear what will happen when less strident anti-Communists take up the cause that once he owned and has now all too overtly besmirched, and that those subtle fascists will assume an aura of respectability. I fear that my Party membership will be exposed, along with those in my cell—which seems likely, as Senator Joe has set up shop here in Los Angeles, rather covertly, and seems determined to do damage to those I love in the city that I love and call home. All of us have sworn allegiance to the Soviet Union. How could any sane person not? But I fear that we will never have the chance to put forth our public case, as we conduct our more pertinent tasks in secret. McCarthy has been our most consistent goad and the most persistent face of fascist vituperation since the early days in Korea. What will happen when he goes? We require intense persecution to prove the solvency of our war on capital. We must never be tolerated. Tolerance militates against revolution. We must be violently opposed, so that our reaction in kind will be considered the only true and sane reaction by the oppressed masses that we strive to liberate."

Woooo!!!!! That is some dippy dialectic and convoluted confusion!!!!! Connie's a stagnant Stalinist—with Uncle Joe now a year dead!!!!!

I dipped diary pages backward. It was more, more, more—maladroitly more of the same. I hit February 17. Simple sentiment stunned me and stopped me in my tracks.

"JMH is dead. *She* is dead, the only *she* I've ever known. It was in the papers and briefly on the radio. The police suspect a burglary gone awry."

I flipped back to New Year's. It was all agitprop and agitation. I got no more Joan jolts, no incriminating initials, no named names.

I bopped to the bedroom. I saw more red walls. They were garlanded with Goyaesque portraits of women. *Ooooh*—they were nuke-bomb nude and clad in the wicked wardrobe of revolution. They wore black boots and fur-trimmed hats emblazoned with hammer and scythe. They wielded whips and laid the lash on men marked "Fascist Oppressor."

I *got* it. It's Goya as comic-book artiste. It's savage satire. It's the annihilating antithesis of Connie Woodard's *toooooooo*-tame life as a Hearst hack. It's communism as contraband pornography. It's a staggering strain of the jejune jive *WE ALL* jerk off to. It's the jack-off juvenilia that has enslaved half the world.

I opened a closet door. Connie's spinster threads channeled Chanel No. 5. A top shelf featured comely camisoles and slithery slips. I ran a hand under them. Scented envelopes slid out. I knew they were lesbian love letters.

I let the butch billet-doux lie. A file cabinet couched against the wall caught my eye. Three file drawers. All unlocked. I tornado-tore through them.

Red-leather diaries. Connie's Red message, beaming back to '38. The Moscow show trials. Connie justifies Stalin's purges. She confoundingly cosigns death, death, and more death. There's photographs tucked between pages. Connie cultivates young women and preens proud with them. Perdition, catch my soul—there She is.

Connie and Joan Hubbard. A UCLA backdrop. The foto is dated 8/12/41. There's Joan. She's twenty-two. It's faded Kodachrome color. Connie's russet-haired and knock-kneed at forty. Joan wears a red beret.

I tore through Connie's August '41 diary. I went to 8/12/41 and found *this:*

"I spent time with Joan H. today. I think she's ready to join the Party. I told her my cell was small and all were utterly loyal to one another. She'd be safe there."

It wasn't enough. I wanted more of what all of this was. I found diaries dated up to 1946. Connie's prose went crypto-clipped. Initials replaced names. "All of this" had to be Commie cell minutes.

I hit my first "JH" in May '42. I followed "JH" at weekly intervals, up through V-J Day. *"JH," "JH," "JH."* My Joan's a certified subversive. I know who "CW" is. Who's *"SA"?* Who's "RJC"? Who's "EPD"? I didn't know and didn't care. I only wanted Joan's name and Connie's scent on the pages.

JH, JH, JH. She's mine throughout the war years. She's left UCLA. I'm in the Marine Corps and dodging combat duty. She translates for the California State Senate. I join LAPD. JH, JH, JH. We're into '46 now. I'll murder Joan's husband in three years' time—

—

Googie's. My unfailing fallback and righteous retreat. The Tattle Tyrant held sway here. *Confidential* was king. Bondage Bob Harrison's handouts bought me all the love I could take.

Late-a.m. tipsters almost toppled my table. Orson Welles snuffed the Black Dahlia. The rumor raged now. I told the tipsters to fuck off and bought them off with chump change. Joe McCarthy's in town. No shit, Sherlock. Yeah—but he's shacked at the Chateau Marmont with Danny Kaye. Okay—here's ten scoots, don't bug me, my heart's heavy, and I'm all alone with some shattering shit.

Boo-hoo, boo-hoo. I'm in existential exile. I've got boocoo opportunity, but the love eludes me.

I wolfed pancakes and pondered my doofus dilemma. I told my wetback waiter to bring me a phone. I called Harry Fremont at the City Hall DB. Harry boo-hoo'd me. He hadn't rigged a ruse or devised a diversion to get me inside Casa Connie. I told him I got inside. I trashed my tracks and blew a blistering shot at reentry. In the meantime, I'll pay you to do *this:*

There's Feds in town. They may be running rogue. They're jungled up in jumpy juju with Joe McCarthy. They must have a field office somewhere. Find them and suborn them with Bondage Bob's payola. I need three hours with their files.

Harry said, "And this pertains to Joanie?"

I said, "Yeah—it sure as shit does."

Harry coughed up compliance. I hung up. Claire Klein and Rock Hudson sat down with me. They held hands. I held up my hand and showed them my stigmata. Claire laffed. Rock went *Huh*?

They looked good together. They glowed. They were actors to their core. They were Strasbergites maimed by the Method. The homo heartthrob marries the sicko psychopath. This mock marriage sends them, Daddy-O.

Rock said, "You're green at the gills, Freddy. You should take a Bromo and hit the sack."

Claire said, "Freddy has things on his mind."

I laffed. "Have you set a date yet?"

Rock lit a cigarette. "Jimmy's working on it. He's with Liz and me on *Giant,* you know. He thinks two ceremonies is the way to go. Claire's Jewish, and I'm a Presbyterian. Jimmy wants to emphasize the interfaith angle. You know, one synagogue gig, and one church gig."

Claire lit a cigarette. "There's no need for Rock to convert. I know a rabbi who performs a good ceremony and works cheap. We met in the Sinai, back in '48."

Rock said, "Claire's got a history."

I said, "Don't I know it."

Autograph hounds hit the table. Rock threw up his hands and winked at Claire. *I'm in demand, babe.*

Claire winked at me. Rock signed autographs. Claire slipped me a note under the table. I peeped the piece of paper.

Tipster Claire. The insidious insider. She's got news on the celeb smut film.

The start date had been moved up. They shoot tonight. Here's the address. It's an abandoned motel in Cathedral City.

—

The Jolly Jinx Motel. A desert dump. Off a deep-rut road between Indio and Palm Springs. It's sandwiched by sand dunes and next door to nowhere. It's a baleful bank foreclosure, circa '31.

It's a film set tonite. *Thirteen Women and Only One Man in Town.*

Steve *"L'Auteur"* Cochran mans the megaphone. The Jinx is a horseshoe-shaped hellhole. There's twelve beat-to-shit bungalows, sans doors. Note the parked cars. Note the arc lights outside bungalows 8,9, and 10. Note the camera up on casters and the boom mike. There's a cameraman and a soundman. I've seen them at Googie's. They're headed-for-hell hopheads and rancid racetrack touts.

Dig: it's *finito.* The A-bomb wipes out the world. It's Steve the Stud's delicious duty to repopulate it. He's got titillating talent to siphon his seed and assist. Joi Lansing, Anita O'Day, and Babs Payton. Plus ten call girls headed for Holly*weird* stardom and felony smut raps.

I hid hip-deep in a high sand dune. I brought binoculars and Bernie Spindel's sound-receiver. It was battery-juiced and sent sound to headphones-cum-earmuffs. The set was forty yards down. I had open-door and smashed-window sight lines. The arc lights and malignant moonglow made me Johnny-on-the-spot.

The courtyard was Cochran's command post. Steve mingled with the thirteen lucky ladies. They wore crocheted bikinis cut hairpie *looooooow.* The girls scrolled script copies and learned their lines. They moved their lips and traded quips.

"How can we live with such devastation?" and "I don't want our kids growing up with Strontium-90 in their bones." Joi said, "First, we've got to have the kids. Do you think Big Steve's up to the task? The motel is the Garden of Eden. Big Steve is our Adam, and all thirteen of us are his Eves." Babs said, "I heard he's hung like a barracuda." Anita said, "People blame the Communists and the Soviet Union for everything bad in the world. But I say, 'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.' " And, dig: "It's the good old USA who A-bombed the Japs."

Ooohhh—Studly Steve's script toes the repugnant Red line. Shuddering shades of Red Connie Woodard!!!

Steve walked actress to actress. He pulled down their bikini tops and *looooooow*-leveled the bottoms. The arc lights lit hairpie glow. Steve lined up the cast. They stood thirteen strong. The nite was cold. Goose bumps popped pandemic. Steve microphone-mauled his talent pool.

"*Achtung, meine Kinder.* Comrade Steve speaks, and your job as my Fertility Guard is to listen. We're shooting scene one now. Bungalow nine has been decorated with some Nazi gear I've collected. Babs portrays Hilda, She-Wolf of the SS. My job is to impregnate and reindoctrinate her. Chop, chop, comrades. Babs and crew to bungalow nine. The rest of you huddle up in your cars and stay warm."

Twelve girls beat feet out of the courtyard. Steve and Babs as Hilda hit Bungalow 9. The camera guy and sound guy followed them. The setup took six seconds. I had live sound and a smashed-window view. Roll it, Big Steve.

Lights, camera, action. Big Steve rolls it. The camera caught the swastika wall banners and the rising-sun bedspread. Steve as Adam and Babs as Hilda squared off.

Steve/Adam: "Look, you fascist bitch, you've got to atone for your sins and submit to reeducation, like Comrade Stalin did with the Moscow trials in the '30s."

Babs/Hilda: "Don't sound me, *muchacho.* The Moscow trials were a shuck—and I know it because I subscribe to *Klansman* magazine. I'm hip to geeks like you. If you think you're going to repopulate the world with me, you'd better stow the lecture and show me what I'm getting into."

Steve/Adam whips it out. Man, what a *schvantz*!!!

Babs/Hilda says, "I'm impressed, but *der Führer* was bigger. Eva Braun told me he packed a hard yard. But I guess twelve inches is better than nothing, especially if the fate of the world is at stake."

Steve/Adam says, "I'm radioactive, baby!!! You know what I want!!!"

Babs goes *woo-woo* and shucks her bikini. Big Steve dumps his duds. They forgo foreplay. They hop on the Jap bedspread and instigate insertion. Steve's a two-minute man. It's over that quixotically quick. Steve climbs to a climax and wails in rapturous Russian. *Say what?* Babs/Hilda chortles and lights a cigarette.

The whole night went listlessly likewise. Up to the pustulating point that it changed.

Babs/Hilda does it with Steve. Ditto Anita as Nuke-Bomb Nellie. Joi plays Evil Eve. She does it with Steve—and fails to jolt me jealous. The collective call girls strip and dog-pile Big Steve. Half the sizzle sex fizzles. Steve can't get it up. He's a wilted wonder boy. His beast is bushed. He's auf Wiedersehen, adios, sadly sayonara. His priapus is *proschai.*

I watched for hours. My vulturous voyeurism nudged toward its nadir. It bid me to boredom. Man, what a drip-dry drag.

The camera guy and sound guy packed up their shit. Steve moped around the courtyard and mumbled to his muse. I bent my binoculars to Bungalow #7. I saw Anita O'Day and Babs Payton prep jolts of Big "H."

They cooked it. They fed a spike. They tied off tourniquets. They geezed and went smack-back. They hit Cloud 9 as Steve entered the room.

He backhanded Babs. She hit the floor. Anita backed up to the bed. Steve stood over her. Anita brandished the spike. Steve grabbed it and stabbed her in the leg.

Anita screamed and sobbed. I heard it high up on my dune. Steve stormed out of the bungalow. He glowed radioactive red. The red was Strontium-90. It's got a half-life of ten thousand years. I glowed rage-red myself.

—

Stretch was asleep. Lance the Leopard cleaved close to her and snarled at me. They ordered room service. Lance left paw prints on the white tablecloth.

I changed clothes. I put on black gloves, black slacks, and a black turtleneck. I stopped at an all-nite novelty store on my way over. I bought a rubber red devil mask.

I tried it on. I posed in front of the bathroom mirror. I'm George Collier Akin, reborn. I capered and preened.

Havenhurst was a short shot up Sunset. I got my sled and slid there in the slow lane. I cut south and parked. It was 3:00 a.m. His lair lights still glowed.

I put the mask back on. The Red Devil Bandit resurrects. I beelined to his door and rang the bell.

He opened up. He screeched and backed away. Size isn't everything. I pulled my beavertail sap and bitch-backhanded him.

It tore him a high harelip and took out some teeth. The reverse shot ripped him a new widow's peak. He hit the floor like Babs Payton did.

I picked up a Russian-helmet ashtray and dumped butts on his head. I hurtled high and drop-kicked him. I heard ribs crack. Rib bones sheared out of his shirt.

He screeched. His eyes rolled back. I forced open the lids and put my red devil face upside his. He sputtered and coughed up Camels and Kool Kings. I wiped ash off my red devil face.

ROGUE FBI FIELD FACILITY

Office Building at Wilshire and Mariposa

3/22/54

Harry said, “This is pricey. I’ve got palms to grease. Bondage Bob’ll have to dig deep on this one.”

Some office. One confined cubicle. Thoroughly threadbare. Bare-bones and strictly cut-rate. It’s twenty feet by twenty feet. There’s three desks/three chairs. There’s one file cabinet, no fone, no Teletype.

“These guys are black bag, all the way. McCarthy’s kaput. He can’t call old man Hoover and say, ‘Hey, Johnny—I need some men to hunt Reds.’ ”

Harry shrugged. “They’ve got some Federal motor pool vehicles. At least three, by the looks of this place. Remember that plate number I ran for you? That car was checked out to these guys.”

I said, “See if you can put a name to it, okay? The car might have been specifically assigned.”

“Sure, kid. You and Bondage Bob say, ‘Jump,’ and I say, ‘How high?’ ”

I thought it through. The word *Hollywood* hit me. I prowl Casa Connie. Her current diary drivel drills me. She fears jumped-up Joe McCarthy’s last gasp and fears for her cell. Joe’s working a Hollywood angle. It’s in tight and spicy specific. He thinks he’ll bag big names somewhere down the line. It’s his loopy last hurrah. It’s a Hollywood headline hunt. Here’s a hunch. He doesn’t quite know where it all is or what he’s got.

Harry harumphed. “Freddy, get *to* it. We’ve got three *hours,* not three weeks.”

I popped the top file drawer. It was Bug City. Bug mounts, bug mikes, bug transceivers and cords. Plus *looooooong*-range broadcast shit. I popped the middle file drawer. It was Hurt City. Brass knucks, rubber truncheons, ball-bearing saps.

I popped the bottom file drawer. It was Rat City. A file sticker spelled it out: “Security 1-A: Coded Informant Index.”

Four thin files. Thin gruel. Thin carbon sheets couched within.

File #1. Code name: “Big Duke.” These notes: “No remuneration. Subject has said his motive is ‘love of country.’ Has numerous contacts within the entertainment industry.”

I’ll say. It has to be John Wayne. He’s ratted Reds since the ice age. It doesn’t say he’s a cross-dresser. He’s strictly straight—but *still.* My Marines foto-fucked him at the Big Girls Boutique in Balboa. He bought his way out of a *biiiiiiig* exposé.

File #2. Code name: “Mama Zee.” These notes: “Noted writer (Negro) turned anti-Communist zealot. Has numerous contacts within the Negro community in Los Angeles.”

I’ll say. It has to be Zora Neale Hurston. She rats Reds to Bondage Bob. She’s fetchingly featured in *Confidential*’s “Darktown Strutters’ Ball” clips.

File #3. Code name: “Mr. Webfoot.” These notes: “Subject hosts local L.A. kiddie show. In hock to bookmakers. Always needs $ & knows people within the CP.”

I’ll say. It has to be Jimmy Weldon. He’s a venal ventriloquist. Webster Webfoot’s a downscale Donald Duck. Jimmy’s a Googie’s geek. He peddles piles of the Carole Landis nude morgue pix.

File #4. Code name: “Redbird.” No summary notes. One bank-deposit summary.

The deposits ran from March ’47 up to last month. $150 per week. ’47 to ’54. Almost seven full years. Account #8309. The bank branch: the B of A at Melrose and Cahuenga.

I’LL SAY. Melrose and Cahuenga. It’s four blocks from the Horvath House of Death. Red Stromwall found a B of A passbook in Joan’s undie drawer. The balance: fourteen g’s. The weekly snitch pay stopped last month. Joan Horvath *esta muerto.*

I’ll say. What would you say? How does this sound to you?

My Joan. Communist Party infiltrator/FBI snitch.

—

I’m a Pervdog. We’re nativistically nocturnal. Our genus genuflects at moon fall and comes alive at nite. We seek succor in the scent of secret lives, half hidden. We peep, prowl, break, enter, *SEEK.*

Day dimmed to dusk. I parked across the street from Connie Woodard's house. I was half gone on high-test lemonade. The Pervdog percolates.

I holed up at the Larchmont listening post, all afternoon. I called the B of A branch at Melrose and Cahuenga. I impersonated Joe Fed. I demanded the name attached to account #8309. The timid teller gave it up: Joan Hubbard Horvath.

It felt right. It felt wrong. I reacted, reflexive. I sought Connie Woodard's scent.

I hooked on headphones. I caught calls. Connie called her cleaner's and a Chevy dealership. I heard backup bips on my line. My hackles heaved.

The *looooong*-range transceiver. It's packed at the pathetic pocket office. It's expensive equipment. It hints of a centralized eavesdrop apparatus. Jolting Joe McCarthy. Not as pointedly pathetic as one might think? Communist Connie—quite possibly bugged and tapped?

Rain clouds eclipsed the moon I came to howl at. The sky unzipped and ripped rain. I ran my heater and warmed my canine coat. Connie Woodard walked out her front door.

She wore a formal kilt ensemble. A tartan sash was cinched across her embroidered black crepe blouse. Tartan pleats ran down to her knock-knees. White kneesocks and black brogues filled the ensemble out.

She shagged her '52 Chevy and cut southbound. It felt right. It felt wrong. I felt summoned suddenly. *Take note of what you are seeking, for it is seeking you.* Some sweaty swami said that. I get it now, Daddy-O.

I walked across the street and picked the back-door lock. Connie left the kitchen lights on. She left lurid leads out in plain sight.

The broken milk-bottle glass and milk mulch in the sink.

The Milk of Magnesia bottle on the counter. Milk of Magnesia absorbs ingested barbiturates.

Connie's coldly outraged. She's been vilely violated. She's left those leads out to address me. You contemptible coward—will you fling your hands high and flee?

I wimp-wavered. I almost flipped out and fled. Her summons seduced me. I ran upstairs instead.

Connie left the bedroom lights on. I went straight to her clothes closet and her scent. I opened her file drawers. She left her 1949 diary out and bookmarked for me. 9/10/49. Connie carves her pen across the initials JH and scrawls *"Traitor"* boldface.

I sat in a red leather chair. The red walls closed in on me. I pulled my roscoe and jammed it under the seat cushion. I looked over at the bed. She'd left those lezbo love letters out for me to read.

Take note of what you are seek—

I read at them and through them. I looked for the name Joan and/or the initials JH. They weren't there. There were no torrid texts. It was all *kiss* and *swerve* and *breath* and *scent.* I failed to determine gender or genus—male/female/moon-mad beast.

I shut my eyes. I summoned seconds of safety and solace and slid into sleep. It was *kiss* and *swerve* and *breath* and *scent* and scent on wool and black crepe. *Take note of—*

I stirred and stretched and saw her. She stood by the bed. She held a Makarov automatic. The kilt ensemble caught me and held me. She was fifty-two. We're May and September. She dressed this way to meet me. It's some furtive first or one-and-only blind date.

I said, "Redbird. You must know that this is about her."

She said, "There's some high points here. She betrayed the Party, and you killed her husband. I saw your photograph in the paper. I thought, He is certainly a young man who intends to go places, and you certainly have. 'Tattle Tyrant' suits you, but 'Peeping Tom' and 'Slander Merchant' might be more apt."

I sprawled. She stood. Her bed stood between us. I felt underdressed and outmaneuvered and called out in calm contempt. She's verging on rude rebuke, and I still want to touch her.

"You're wearing battle kit. I saw you at Jack Kennedy's bomb party, and you didn't evince this sort of flair. I've found some things out about you, and you know me by reputation. That stands as the basis of some sort of discussion. I'm a peeper, and you want me to see you. You left your diary and your letters out for me to read. You're begging a stranger who's assaulted your home and your person for intimate comprehension, and I want to know why."

She messed with her Makarov. She had fast hands. She racked out the round in the chamber and popped out the clip. She tossed it on the red leather chair. My piece was stuffed under the cushion.

" 'Intimate comprehension.' It works both ways, you know. Perhaps I should tell you what I know about you, so that we might turn this into an opportunity."

I said, "Tell me."

She said, "I was in love with Joan Horvath. You weren't the only one inclined to park outside her house and moon. I've counted the money you left in her mailbox on more than one occasion, and I'm convinced that you intend to kill the person who killed her, since the man that you've already killed certainly didn't do it. You have my consent for this, and my word that I won't report the act, or any act that might have transpired between us up to this point."

I said, "I've read your diaries. Comrade, your whole life's a deception. Your word's about as good as mine is, and that's hardly an indictment."

She put one knee on the bed. Tartan battle kit. The pleats/the wool/the scent. One long leg exposed.

"It's all about Joan, you see. It's your willingness to act, and my willingness to suborn your intention. I would never betray anyone who possessed the grit to do what you intend to do, despite my shoddy track record with veracity for its own sake."

I stood up. Connie stood still. I reached under the seat cushion and grabbed my piece. I have fast hands. I racked out the chamber round, popped the clip, and tossed it all on the bed.

Connie said, "Say her name."

I said, "Joan."

She said, "Well, then."

I said, "I intend to see you again."

She said, "Yes, of course."

I made for the door and brushed by her. I touched her back and nuzzled her hair. She leaned into me one mad moment.

INFERNAL INTERMEZZO:

My Furtively Fucked-up Life
3/23–4/4/54

It started like that. We were joined in Joan and forged in forgiveness. Sex saturated us. I've decided to dim the details by dint of decorum. "Freddy & Connie." Initials cutely carved on a tree. I'm thirty-two, she's fifty-two. You know what *I* am. Connie Woodard defies cloying classification. Commie, lezbo, sweltering switch-hitter. Take your punk pick. She's all of it, some of it, none of it.

I'm being dizzy disingenuous. Connie's a righteous Red. She's a treasonous true believer with her hooks hitched into me. I'm foiled and fucked five thousand ways. Perdition, catch my soul. And she won't let me all-the-way *SEE* her.

I needed names to know her and to know who killed Joan. Known associates, rancid Reds, fractured front-group front men. Fellow travelers, pusillanimous pinks, lily-livered leftists. Give me names/no, I won't/Connie takes the *farshtinkener* Fifth Amendment. Tell me the names of your Commie cell mates. I've already memorized their initials. Who's SA? Who's RJC? Who's EPD? I've scurvily skimmed your diaries—and I'm tweaked. I told you I killed the Red Devil Bandit in cold blood. You must reciprocate in kind.

No, Freddy. I'm your recidivistic refusenik. Besides, there's one name that you've withheld from me.

Yes, that's true. I refused to name Claire Klein. I equivocated here. I told Connie that a dangerous woman was orbiting her orbit. She wants to kill a man—but she won't tell me why. She won't *name* the man. She's my other ripe refusenik. I'm not naming her. She's one of the other two women that I love.

"Freddy & Claire." "Freddy & Stretch." More names cutely carved on a tree. Unconsummated communions. That's fine for now. I'm beat-to-shit busy. I've got to find a man and kill him, myself.

Connie won't name names. I vow to kill Joan's killer. Connie won't name names. I vow to jerk Joe McCarthy's chain so that he won't expose her. Connie *still* won't name names. Why's Jack Kennedy's name in your address book? Oh, *pshaw*—Jack's just an old pal. Why's Steve Cochran's name in your address book? Here, Connie withers and wilts me: he was my last tortured and torturing male lover—before you.

I'm thirteen days in with Constance Linscott Woodard. It's tender and tortured. I'm beat-to-shit busy. I'm rolling lucky and unlucky thirteens.

Lucky 13: Harry Fremont frosted out my assault on Big Steve. He greased the Sheriff's bulls investigating the caper. They put it off to a B and E man out to clout Big Steve's Nazi gear. *Un*lucky 13: *Thirteen Women and Only One Man in Town* debuted a week later.

In Harry Cohn's rec room. Popcorn and cut-rate booze. I'm there. Big Steve's there. He's beat-to-shit bandaged and mummified like Pharaoh's granddaddy. Jack the K.'s there. Bill Knowland's there. They yuk-yuk and wolf-whistle. Joe McCarthy's there, his own self.

The flick made me squirrelshit squeamish. I've got no beef with the A-bomb. We should have mushroomed Moscow after we juked the Japs. Joi Lansing was my ex, and I had a wolfish wingding with Babs Payton. It was the *sex*ploitation aspect. That's what gored my goat.

Bondage Bob bagged me outside the rec room. He said he was killing the Cochran exposé. Big Steve was tight with some powerful pols. He pimped for Jack K. He juiced Jack's pill habit. Freddy, let this one go.

I did. It rudely rankled me. I compensated, commensurate. I bore down big on the who-killed-Joan and the spare-Connie-from-Joe McCarthy fronts.

I gave Harry Fremont a *gooooood* gig. The rogue Feds *had* to have a long-range listening post. Find it for me, Dads. Lucky 13: Harry hit it, hard. *Un*lucky 13: I found bugs and taps in Connie's living room and bedroom. Lucky 13: they were mismounted and mismatched and malfunctioned. The broadcast beams barely made it next door.

Lucky 13: Stretch worked my Sweetzer listening post. *Un*lucky 13: she picked up Lez Line #2 chat. Claire Klein tricked with V. J. Jerome. She pressed him on "Robin Redbreast"—but venal V.J. purported to know zilch. Claire pressured him on Connie Woodard. V.J. said, "Don't sound me—she's just a dilettante." Stretch told me his tone was deadly demeaning. V.J., you speak with forked tongue.

Thirteen days. I want names. Claire wants names. V.J. won't name names. Connie won’t name names, most of all.

I vow to find Joan’s killer. Connie won’t name names. I vow to save her from Joe McCarthy. Connie won’t name names. We make love. We pillow-talk around the whirlwind woman who brought us together. Connie won’t name names. She won’t say whether she and Joan did or didn’t do the deed and were or were not rapture-rapt lovers.

I read Connie’s diaries. The sex sent me. It remained *kiss* and *swerve, breath* and *scent.* I read through years of Commie collusion. Delusion deluged me. Pathos pounded me. Connie and her cell siblings suck up Soviet yak-yak and proudly proclaim it as truth. They dialecticize purulent purges, cold conquest, mass murder. Connie says she’s Sovietizing me. I roll my eyes. It makes her laugh. She covers her mouth then. Some Central Committee of Kremlin kreeps might be listening.

Connie won’t name names. She won’t reveal Robin Redbreast’s real moniker. She won’t name names. I’m on her side as much as she’ll let me be—and more. She won’t name names in Joan’s memory. She memorializes Joan and tells me how much she loved her. She loves me with her body and won’t say the worshipful words. I explore the world’s secret shit. I excoriate it and explode it in *Confidential.* I live to do this. I’ve peeped windows since 1936. Connie joined the Party that same year. She joined the Party to run rogue in the squarejohn world and live *baaaad* bourgeois while she did it. We bit the same cancerous coin and spit it back at the world. Shared blood blooms in our veins. We both know this. She still won’t name names.

THE SWEETZER LISTENING POST

4/5/54

The noxious nite shift. Torrid two-line tilts. Pizza pie and beer and Pink's hot dogs. Stretch worked Lez Line #1. I worked Lez Line #2. We held hands and swapped nifty nuggets.

Gamal Abdel Nasser's in town. He's scrounging funds to overthrow Egypt. He's a fellow camel jockey. He's banging butch girls, three at a throw. Go, Gamal, go!!!

Biff Stanwyck's ensconced at a hot-sheet hut on Highland. She likes it fresh and heavenly wholesome. There's a dyke slave den near Hollywood High. The den doyenne's an old studio scrape nurse. She "reeducates" nymphets and feeds them dope and the lewd lore of Lesbos. Currently embroiled: ex–kiddie star Natalie Wood. Jimmy Dean told me she's hot to trot, across the sex spectrum. Biff's got first dibs.

Art Pepper's at it again. He's gone foto fiend. He's now the King of the Sapphic Snapshot. He's snapping pix at a fuck pad on Fountain. Go, Art, go!!!

I was big-time bored. My headphones itched. Lance went home to Liberace. Stretch and I boo-hoo'd his departure. The lez line pickings were thin—but tasty. Then Harry Fremont called, two hours back. Go, Harry, go!!! Once again, Harry delivers.

That Fed car. The rear plate I saw. Outside the Horvath crime scene. It's on loan to a Fed fuck named Charles Fullerton. He's in Joe McCarthy's posse. He's a rogue Red basher from Jump Street. And, Freddy, dig: I've located the longrange listening post. It's a shit shack in Silver Lake. They're running bug-taps up the yammering ying-yang. I hit my PC Bell contact. Dig: the phone bills run three grand a month.

Woooo!!!—that's one nifty nugget!!!

I yawned. I scratched my balls. I ogled Stretch in basketball silks. I got insistently itchy. I wanted to *slooooooow*-cruise the Fed pad and lay some late-nite love on Connie.

I yawned. I scratched my balls. I ogled Stretch in basketball silks. She went *Wowie-zowie* and scribbled up her scratch pad. She hurled off her headset and went *You, too.*

I hurled my headset. Stretch *glooooowed* and dished *this:*

"Claire and Babs just tricked with V. J. Jerome. I got forty minutes of grunts and groans, and then Claire starts pumping V.J. on Robin Redbreast again. V.J.'s vexed and bored, but he *finally* cops that Robin Redbreast was a crackpot scientist and a CP flunky named 'Sammy.' But that's as far as it went, because they all started up with the woof-woof again."

—

We lounged in the red bedroom. Connie wore a half-slip and her tartan skirt. I was stripped down to my skivvies. We ran the radio. Some Russki piano putz rippled Rachmaninoff.

I was *tooooooo* tense and caught-up constricted. I went by the Fed pad and reconnoitered. I got a Big Dumb Idea. It was cold-calculated and meant to make Connie name names.

Connie lay languorous. We stretched and struck poses and draped off the bed. I kissed Connie's knock knees. She ran her hands through my hair.

"Don't start hounding me again, dear. My lips are sealed, and I won't let you ruin this lovely moment."

I parted her legs and tossed her skirt and kissed my way up a bit. Connie made this soft sound that she makes.

"I'll name some names that you might recognize. You don't have to respond, but I'd be happy if you would."

Connie laffed. "It's our ongoing game, isn't it? Freddy interrogates Connie. Connie takes the Fifth. Freddy and Connie. Has it ever occurred to you that our names lack dignity?"

I smiled. Connie said, "I'll indulge you, if you promise that you won't press me too hard. I'm out to sustain this mood that I'm in."

I pulled her skirt down and patted it back into place. I looked up at her and fixed on her eyes. I'd know if she dissembled or flat-lied to me. I'd know if she knew the names and went refusenik.

"Robin Redbreast. He's allegedly a 'crackpot scientist' and a Party flunky named Sammy. There's also an FBI man named Charles Fullerton. He was at Joan's house with all the other cops, and I saw him there myself. You should know that he's in Joe McCarthy's posse—which is, quite frankly, out to get you, given the bugs and taps that I've pulled here."

Bingo/Eureka/Three-Cherry Jackpot. The refusenik reacts. Tears fill her eyes. Her hands fly to her face.

I know you, Constance. You'll wipe your face on a pillowcase. You'll light a cigarette and blow smoke at the ceiling. You'll say, "No comment" or "I'm not telling you."

I nailed the first part. I blew the second part. Connie said, "You're never going to quit, are you? You will always insist on this, and in the end, I'll either lose you or never have a moment's peace."

I pulled myself up close to her. I got our eyes close.

"Sammy. Charles Fullerton. The 'SA,' 'RJC,' and 'EPD' in your cell. I want full names and confirmations. It's all for Joan. You know that's true, and since you're a dialectical materialist who's always looking for a payoff, I'll offer you a doozy if you'll do this for me."

Connie kissed me. I wiped some tears off with my thumbs. She kissed me again. I pulled her slip up and kissed her bare back.

"'A doozy,' you said?"

"Yes. If you tell me what I need to know, I'll burn down the McCarthy gig. You'll never set foot on a witness stand. It'll spare some other people a good deal of grief, whether they're for-real traitors, or just bleeding-heart fools like you."

Connie said, "It's not nice to betray your friends, you know. People you've lived History with."

I said, "Joan."

Connie said, "We'll always come back to her. She's our deus ex machina."

I said, "Joan." Connie stubbed out her cigarette and turned back to me.

"Yes, we were briefly lovers, and that's as far as I'll go to sate your curiosity there. Charles Fullerton turned Joan out as an FBI informant, and served as her handler for years. He also introduced Joan to Ralph Horvath. Sammy is a physicist named Samuel Ahlendorf—and, yes, he was Robin Redbreast in our cell. 'RJC' was a Negro man named Robert Jones Crawshaw. He wrote for the *Daily Worker,* and now he writes cheap paperbacks about Negro pimps. I know that he's friends with your friend Billy Eckstine, for what that's worth. 'EDP' is Eleanor Price Donnell. She was one of Joan's professors at UCLA."

She snitched. It hit me six ways from Sunday. I rolled away from her. I stared at the red walls and faux-Goya garlands of women. Connie clung claustrophobe close.

“ ‘The citadel of my integrity has been irrevocably lost.’ That’s from T. E. Lawrence, in case you were wondering.”

I wasn’t. “Don’t shit a shitter, and don’t playact with me. It was the right thing to do.”

Connie stage-sighed. “I’m twenty years, one month, and nine days older than you. I was born in 1902, and you’re in love with two other women. Why did I do what I just did? Am I really that desperate to keep you?”

I stage-sighed. “You’re just self-absorbed. Are all Communists as self-involved as you?”

Connie laffed. “Frankly, yes.”

“Including Joan?”

“Yes, and Joan more than most.”

I said, “She made the rounds, didn’t she? Men, women—she had the appetite.”

Connie said, “She was faithless, yes.”

I said, “I’m sorry about that.”

“Don’t be, dear. You’re like that yourself.”

I pulled down her skirt. I caught her scent and kissed her breasts.

“I’ve fulfilled my part of the bargain, dear. How will you derail the evil senator and save me?”

“I’ll do something brave and stupid, and it will damn well cost me a great deal.”

THE DOWNTOWN L.A. PUBLIC LIBRARY

4/6/54

Research. Reading-room rigor. Know your foe. They might have *YOU* made, going in. You're the Tattle Tyrant Who Holds Hollywood Hostage. You're the Freewheeling Freddy O.

I felt *gooooooood.* Connie fed me a big breakfast. I chased it with three dexies and four jolts of Old Crow. I hit the library early. I collated a cavalcade of *goooooood* dish. I tapped solid sources.

The *L.A. Herald* and the *L.A. Sentinel*—L.A.'s colored rag. *Who's Who In America/1953. Who's Who In American Academia/1953.* Plus *Downbeat* magazine, the *Daily Worker,* and a call to LAPD R & I.

Dig:

Comrade Sammy Ahlendorf. Age sixty-three. That's "Robin Redbreast" to you. He's a physicist. He got doctorates in his native Russia and the U. of Chicago here. He's also a kultural kommissar. He partied with bibulous bohemians in wicked Weimar Berlin and malignant Moscow. He knew Eisenstein/Nijinsky/Stanislavsky/Meyerhold/Okhlopkov. Sicko cinema, dipshit dance, stilted stage productions for the maimed millions enslaved by the Red Beast. Sambo emigrates to the U.S., circa '36. He's dumped off the Manhattan Project, circa '44. He was pro-A-bomb then. He's anti-A-bomb now. This guy gored my goat. I was hopped-up and out for Commo blood—*baaaaaad.* I might phone-book Sambo in the studly style of the Hat Squad.

Comrade Robert Jones Crawshaw/aka *"KKKomrade X."* Age forty-one. Labor agitator and scurvy scribe for the *Daily Worker.* Would-be "Racial Reconciler." Dig this: He tried to integrate the L.A. Klan, circa '40. Close pal of my pal Billy Eckstine. The august author of *Black Pimp, Black Bossman, Black Savior, Black Dictator, Black Kingpin, Black Bwana,* and the *KKK*ontroversial *Black Führer.* Comrade Bob renounces Communism, circa '51. Comrade Bob heads hard right. He's pals with nativist *nudnik* Gerald L. K. Smith. He's got a righteous rap sheet.

There's three pops for receiving stolen goods. There's the cancerous capper, circa '48. Ralph Mitchell Horvath bails him out on a burglary beef.

Comrade Eleanor Price Donnell. Age thirty-eight. Tenured history professor at UCLA. She's a shrill shrike and shrieky Soviet suck-up. She's the author of *Moscow Miasma*—an apoplectic apologia for the show-trial sins of Uncle Joe Stalin. You think you've got this bilious babe pegged, don't you? Well, fuckers, here's the *real* reconstructionist riff:

She's an ex–call girl. She pandered poon to the Party, circa '44–'45. She sold sex to CPers with gelt. She was part of a poor-working-girls/Stalinist stable. She gets popped V-E Day. A cadre of Commie construction magnates celebrates Hitler's surrender. It's caviar and call girls for these cats. La Donnell and her sick sisters turn tricks for striking dock workers. LAPD Vice intervenes. They raid a fuck pad-cum-millionaire's mansion. La Donnell and eighteen other confessed Commie girls get busted. La Donnell writes a memoir about her salacious sojourn. It's called *Party Girl.* She wrote it under the pseudonym "Miss X." Robert Jones Crawshaw's publisher published it.

My Connie's Commie cell. Add on the late Joan Hubbard Horvath: Commo, turncoat, licentious lover. Here's the tattle-tabloid tilt of a lifetime:

I'm marching into the maximum maw of madness.

—

They all lived in L.A. I installed an itinerary—north/south/northwest. Comrade Sam lived in the Valley. Comrade Bob lived in Watts. Billy Eckstine set the meet at Club Zombie. Comrade Ellie lived on the Wilshire corridor. It was *très* close to UCLA.

Sambo and Party Girl were door knocks. Knock, Knock—trouble treads your way. I'd browbeat them. I'd bring them to tears. I'd dig for the dish on Comrade Joan Hubbard. I'd yank them through the war years. I'd push the Claire Klein angle. This dangerous dame is out to kill a man. She thinks Connie Woodard might know him. So, how about *you*?

I bopped out to bumfuck Van Nuys. The Valley Vista Villas—hotbox huts off Hastings and Harlequin Heights. I parked and popped up to the pad. *Knock, knock*—trouble treads your—

Sambo opened up. *Ooohhh*—he's threadbare thin and cancer cough–consumptive. I flashed my State Police badge. All the HUAC humps had them. *Cringe, you Red rat fink.*

"Yes. I've seen that badge before. It's not like you people haven't sought me out in the past."

I said, "This is a new wrinkle, boss. It pertains to the murder of a woman named Joan Horvath. You knew her as Joan Hubbard."

Sambo let me in. He rolled an oxygen tank to his chair. He sucked air. He cancer-coughed and said, "Yes?"

I perched on a footstool. "I'm not here to nail you for your CP membership, pops. You should know that going in."

Sambo said, "That's white of you—and uninformed. I left the CP in '44, before I got cleared for the Manhattan Project. I was the first one to abandon the cell I was in, although all of the others, except for our den mother, ultimately saw the light."

The statement stunned me. Connie's diaries ditzed me. I saw Sambo's initials on cell minutes for the postwar period.

"I have documents, sir. These documents plainly state that you attended cell wingdings up to the late '40s."

Sambo sighed and sucked air. "Then they're fabrications. Especially if the den mother proffered them to you. I'm an apostate, Mr. Detective. I renounced the Party, and I've been vetted by a great number of committees, both State and Federal. And if Mr. McCarthy should subpoena me for this latest pogrom of his, I'll testify to that at the outset. You look like McCarthy, I might add. You share his black-haired, beetle-browed look."

Fuck you, pops—I got your beetle brows swinging!!!

"Joan Horvath, sir. She was Hubbard when you knew her."

"Yes, and I had an affair with that very lively and brilliant young woman, and I think you're bright enough to have deduced that I'm in no condition to drive to Hollywood, break into a house, and commit murder."

Esta la verdad, Daddy-O—I sound you loud and clear.

"What did you think of Joan?"

"I thought she was the single most self-absorbed human being I've ever met, and that she was a hot piece of skirt. I also thought that she was no sort of Communist, back when the rest of us were convinced that the Party was the light of the world."

I snorted. "That's it for Joan, huh?"

Sambo sucked air. "Yes, it is. Ask me about nuclear physics. I can talk physics all day long, but it might prove to be over your head."

I snorted snide. "Okay. Why'd you get dumped off the Manhattan Project? That must have been an ace gig for a guy in your trade."

Sambo sucked air. He rattled and racked. His lifespan loomed as next week.

"I'd made friends in the film colony, here in L.A. Young people—one in particular. I was antibomb then, even though I helped build the bombs the fascist U.S. dropped on Japan. It's believed that I was fired for scientific ineptitude. That's hardly the case. I was a political casualty, pure and simple. I may be a physicist, but I'm an idealist and a patron of the arts, most of all."

Sambo, the idealist. Sambo, the ardent artist. I ran with that ball.

"I know you swung with all those swinging artists in Russia. Eisenstein, Stanislavsky, Meyerhold—those were some hotshot cats."

Sambo laffed and coughed viscous vapors. *Pops, you contaminate me.*

"I knew them, yes. Their visions formed me in ways that you will never know."

Sambo sickened me. The interview inflamed me. I bounced a new ball. Let's get this over with.

"There's a dangerous woman, circling your cell. I know she's aware of your 'den mother,' who I assume to be Constance Woodard. Her name is Claire Klein, and she's not to be trifled with."

Ooohhh—did Sambo just glitch, twitch, shudder, cower, and cringe?

"No. The name Claire Klein means nothing to me."

That's okay, Sambo—I've registered your response.

"Constance Woodard. Your 'den mother.' Why would she fabricate cell minutes, after all the members of the cell had renounced the Party?"

Sambo sighed. "Because she was the only one of us who truly believed, and her belief transcended quite an onslaught of reality. And she was the loneliest woman I've ever known, and her fabrications must have convinced her that she still had comrades and friends."

—

The Club Zombie. A double dose of darktown. A danger dive. Discordant bebop and the Baron Samedi Cocktail—"One Sip Leaves

You Zombified."

I knew the Zombie. I busted beboppers, mud sharks, and junkies here back in the '40s. The big buck bartender made me. Fractious Freddy's back. He still be *baaaaaaaaaad* muthafuckin' juju. I'll make him a Baron Samedi Cocktail. He *gots* to be Zombified.

He cooked up the cocktail. It glowed radioactive. I slipped him a Bondage Bob C-note. He went *You the man.* I guzzled the cocktail. It bebopified the dexies dosing my bloodstream. I went ZOMBIFIED.

Robert Jones Crawshaw walked in. He's aka Comrade Bob and *KKK*omrade X. He bypassed the bandstand and bopped to a booth by the bar. I made him off old mug shots. He looked bad to the bone. I dug his purple porkpie hat.

I joined him. He snapped his fingers. Two Baron Samedi Cocktails appeared. He bolted his. I sipped mine.

He belched, he burped, he bypassed all amenities. He gave me the Big This Is It.

"The Party is a crock of motherfucking shit. Ask Richard Wright or Zora Neale Hurston. Money and fame is the name of the game. I'm raking it in off *Black Bossman, Black Dictator,* and *Black Führer.* Billy told me you're investigating the murder of Comrade Joanie, and let me state at the outset that I liked her okay, but I never poured her the pork—not no way. Ralphie and me were tight—and I know you killed him, and it was a humbug deal, and now you got the guilts. I didn't kill Joanie, because the fuzz know it was a white man, because Joanie scratched his face good. I also know you know that Ralphie bailed me out on a 459 charge, back in '48. Are we all caught up, now? You think Bob Harrison would shoot me a gig, writing for *Confidential*? I'm hot shit in intellectual circles. *Black Führer* just went into its twelfth printing. Alfred Kazin and all them motherfucking intellectuals go for my shit."

I was zombified. I was beatified and transmogrified. The booze. The bebop. The dope. Comrade Sammy's sad take on my Connie. The mad musings of *KKK*omrade X.

"Known associates. Joan, Ralphie, or both of them. Can you come up with some names?"

*KKK*omrade X went *haw-haw.* "Some Fed mofo named 'Charlie.' He shot Ralphie the word on burglary scores. He knew Joanie, too, and he might have been her handler when she got hip and turned rat. Plus, I think Charlie might have introduced Joanie to Ralphie. That's the only name that I can think of, off the top of my head."

Charlie. Agent Charles Fullerton. It had to be.

"There's a woman named Claire Klein. She's got a very bad beef against a man in your cell, or in your general circle of the Party. Does *her* name ring any bells?"

*KK*Komrade X said, "*Nein,* Daddy. But there was only two men in the cell—me and old Sammy Ahlendorf. That said, there was this cast of thousands that the den mother knew, because she was always taking in strays. That also said, there was no man who jumped out of the crowd and said, 'Hey, remember me?' "

I stood up. I was Zombified, Commified, *RAT*ified.

"Go home and sleep it off, baby. And remember to chat me up to Bob H."

—

K*K*Komrade X called it. I took his advice and car-napped in my Packard pimpmobile. I woke up, unzombified. I remained Commified and *RAT*ified. My first thought was:

Lonesome Connie.

I pulled those taps and bugs at her pad. The McCarthy/rogue-Fed listening post was northeast in Silver Lake. Connie's place stood within long-range broadcast beams. Comrade Sam lived in Van Nuys. His place was *out* of range. *KK*Komrade X lived in Watts. His place was *out* of range. Comrade Ellie lived in Westwood. Party Girl's pad was *out* of range.

And:

Die Kameraden had ditched the Party and renounced Communism. Only my Connie carried the torch.

Ergo:

The Feds had targeted my Connie, *solamente.* Plus other Commos in cells unknown.

I whipped west to the Wilshire corridor. Party Girl had demon digs in a high-ticket high-rise. A valet parked my pimpmobile. I big-tipped him. He said Miss Donnell was in and walked me to the penthouse lift.

A glass rocket rocked me up twenty-four stories. It vibrated me, vertiginous. The door opened into Party Girl's parlor. Party Girl welcomed me.

She was tall. She was blond and waif willowy. She looked like Lizabeth Scott in *Pitfall.* Dick Powell leaves his wife for her. Now I know why.

I flashed my Statie badge. Party Girl said, "I already testified, and I thought I blew all the State HUAC guys, back when I was in the game."

She gored my gonads. She had Liz Scott's lisp and low purr down pat. She wore tennis whites to stay home and talk blow jobs to strange men. She defined noblesse oblige.

"Ten minutes, Miss Donnell. That's all I need."

"Who do you want me to fink on? I thought I was done there."

"I'm investigating Joan Horvath's murder. We're looking at the CP cell she was in. I've talked to Samuel Ahlendorf and Bob Crawshaw already. Quite obviously, you were on my list."

Party Girl went *After you.* I entered her demented demimonde. Glass walls winged wide on Wilshire. Dig the deep-pile rugs and lounge-lizard furnishings—all violet velour.

She walked me to a wet bar. She poured two Tom Collins, light on the lime. We sat on black leather stools and nudged knees.

"I didn't know Joanie that well. I wouldn't sleep with her, and I outgrew the Party before she did. I tried to recruit her for my stable, but she wouldn't hear of it. We ratted each other out to you State HUAC guys, but I forget who finked first. The den mother knew her better than any of us, that's for sure."

The Liz Scott lisp and low growl. The lioness-level gaze. She's leading you. *KKK*omrade X called and warned her. Freddy O.'s en route. He ain't no HUAC cop. Milk him, baby. He's money, once removed. He's susceptible. Spin him into your spell.

She wants to slander-slam den mother Connie. That's her intention. Field this changeup, bitch:

"Let me issue a warning about a woman that I consider to be quite dangerous—one that I've passed on to Mr. Ahlendorf and Mr. Crawshaw already. She has plainly stated that she intends to kill a man in your cell, or the general orbit of Party members you might have knowledge of. Her name is Claire Klein. She's quite persistent, and she has a way of getting up in your face that I would describe as unforgettable."

Party Girl lit a cigarette. "Well, there's one woman and one instance that I can think of, but the name Claire Klein sounds no gongs for me. It was back during the war. '43, I think."

I said, "Please continue."

"Well, it was some sort of Scottsboro Boys revival, and it was supposed to be all-Party—I thought one hundred percent. Then in walks a Wave officer, in her full-dress blues. She sizes me up as a girl who likes to gab, and then she applies the full press."

The war/the Waves/Lieutenant j.g. Claire Klein. *Perdition, catch my soul—*

"The funny thing was, it all pertained to Commie arcana in Russia, during the show-trial era. She was hipped on Vsevolod Meyerhold, his importance in radical-theater circles, and how Stalin liquidated his theater, made him attend a self-criticism session, denounced him for abandoning socialist realism, and had him tortured and killed. This is in '39 and '40, I think. Here's the worst part. The NKVD stabbed his wife's eyes out and stabbed her to death a few months earlier."

Meyerhold. Sambo Ahlendorf knew that cat.

"That's the extent of it? This Wave woman pressed you and moved on?"

"Right with Eversharp."

"Samuel Ahlendorf mentioned Meyerhold to me, earlier today."

"Sammy's old, and he's Russian. He's dined out on radical-socialist theater, all the time I've known him. I dare you to sit through one of Meyerhold's plays. Crassly put, they ain't *Guys and Dolls.*"

I gulped. "Let's discuss the den mother. I assume you're referring to Constance Woodard?"

Party Girl crushed her cigarette. "That's right. Connie was our resident drag and expert on Joanie Hubbard. She was also Joanie's lover for an indeterminate period of time, during the war and after it, which means that she was awarded the Jealous Lover of All-Time Award for who knows how many years running, because you have *never* seen jealousy like that, and you have *never* seen anyone chafe under the yoke of it like Joanie did."

I said, "Keep going. There's something you've been dying to tell me."

Party Girl laffed. "I never liked Connie, but I grokked her existential anguish. Because Joanie was a Venus fly trap, and she had men, women, and who knows *what* else standing in line to get in her bed. Connie pulled a gun on *two* of Joanie's would-be suitors, and one man—a lefty lawyer in Marin County—vanished from sight altogether."

Now, I'm Commified, reconstructivized, social-dialecticized—

"Get it—Mr. State Cop who's not a state cop? The den mother killed that man, and *that's* what tore our dumb Communist cell asunder."

—

That man." Claire's Meyerhold fix. Dead men and dead Joanie. I was dungeon-deep with dead men and castrated by Communist women. Here I am in the den mother's bedroom. I'm crapped out on the bed. The red walls *clooooose* in on me.

I thumbed a library book. I'd bipped by the West L.A. Library, post–Party Girl. I did microfilm research. The *San Francisco Chronicle,* '48–'49. An emphasis on local murders.

The book. It's a big and boring Baedeker on Russian radical theater. There's big ink on Vsevolod Meyerhold and his actress wife, Zinaida Raikh. Party Girl told it true. Stalin's goons tortured and shot Meyerhold dead. They stabbed Zinaida's eyes out and stabbed her dead. They were one comely couple. The pix told it true. He's hero handsome as he waves a Red flag. She's beautiful in her babushka. The Red Wheel crushes them flat.

Meyerhold was a Stalin-era stud and swinging swordsman. He brought the brisket to women in Russia and abroad and left bawling babies behind. Those facts fanned me. Ditto this fact. *Somebody ratted Meyerhold to the NKVD.*

Murder in Moscow. Murder in Marin County. It's September '49. "Lefty lawyer" Will Hartshorn vanishes. Will's a wicked womanizer. Scads of scurrilous Commo women are questioned, to no avail. Wicked Will dips off and disappears. There's no corpus delecti—case closed.

The den mother's downstairs. She's cooking our dinner. She'll call up to me.

I left the library and sidled up to Silver Lake. There's the rogue-Fed listening post. It's a shit shack on Ewing off of Duane Street. Harry told me they run three monitor shifts and lock up at midnite. I drove to Higgins' Hardware and bought what I'd need. Charles Fullerton lived in the Miracle Mile. The mid-Wilshire fone book said so.

The den mother dipped upstairs. I heard her heels hit. She stood in the doorway. She smiled at me and read me. She went *What's wrong, love?*

I said, "I talked to some people who knew you pretty well. You know who I mean, because you gave me their names."

She said, "Yes?"

I said, "They hold you in the highest contempt, because you stayed the course after they walked, and that made you a dupe and marked you as naïve. You wrote hundreds of pages of cell minutes and spun fantasies. You loved them. They didn't love you. You carried the torch. You created a pretend world in this very room. That fact alone has convinced me to protect you."

Connie said, "I 'stayed the course.' It's quite the male concept, but it's not something I can accept in you, if it means that you consider me pathetic."

I laffed. "How could I? You killed a man with no compunction, in the Freddy Otash mode. 'Pathetic' hardly describes it."

"He brutalized Joan. He hit her and demeaned her, and I couldn't stand it. I shot him and dumped his body in a lime pit in Point Reyes. The police questioned me once and believed my denials. They never troubled me again, and my ex-comrades never informed on me."

"How did you feel, after you killed him?"

"I felt aghast and relieved."

Perdition, catch my soul—for I do KNOW her.

—

Charlie Fullerton, FBI. Harry Fremont tagged him a booze-hound bachelor and a cloistered closet queen. He juiced at the Raincheck Room, Rick's Riptide, and Roscoe's Reef. He had an above-garage crib off 6th and Dunsmuir. Harry advised a midnite snatch-and-grab. Dump him in his doorway and go in strong.

Sound advice. The lock snapped easy. The crib was cloistered-closet claustrophobic. Small kitchen/small bathroom/small front room. *Whew*—it's Suffocation City. It's suffused with stale cigarette smoke and spilled booze.

I kept the lights off. I lurked and listened, doorway-close. 12:19 a.m. Fumbling footsteps. Charlie's key in the lock.

The door opened. I sandbagged Charlie, coming in. I kicked his legs out from under him. He moaned and mewed. I banged his head on the floor and hankie-gagged him. I dragged him into the kitchen and hit the lights. *Heh, heh*—there's this hot plate.

I handcuffed Charlie. I plugged the plate in. The coils glowed hot, *hot.* I hauled Charlie to his feet and shoved him up to the counter.

Charlie bug-eye beseeched me—don't scorch me, boss.

I curled his right-hand fingers into the coils. I scorched and scalded him. My hankie-gag muffled his screams. I caught the french-fried fragrance of burned skin.

Charlie bawled and buckled and tore free of me. I kicked him in the balls and jackknifed him. A frigid Frigidaire was right there. I opened the door. I pulled Charlie upright and jammed his scorched hand in the freezer compartment. *Yeah!!!*—it's a skin-fry *frappé!!!*

Charlie tried to scream. The gag mumble-muted him. The cold ice cauterized his scalded skin and made streams of steam rise. I pulled his hand free and shoved him into a chair. I stood over him and laid out my Bill of No Redress.

"Joan Hubbard and Ralphie Horvath. Connie Woodard and her CP cell. This latest jive crusade of Joe McCarthy's, and how Connie fits in. Who you've got wired out of that long-range post in Silver Lake. Nod once if you want to live, and twice if you want to die."

Charlie nodded once. I yanked his gag. His muffled scream screeched out, sissy soprano. I pulled my pocket flask and fed him bonded bourbon. He gargle-gurgled it down and glowed booze-hound red.

I waited. Charlie went *Gimme.* I ran a refill down his throat. I tapped my wristwatch. Charlie went *More.* I ran Refill #2 down his gullet. *That* got him. His booze glow glissandoed into plain old pink-red.

I said, "Give."

Charlie coughed and cleared his throat. Phlegm flew into his hankie. He went from refusenik to running dog in one second flat.

"Joanie was never a Commie or a Comsymp. She was an FBI plant at the gate. We financed her radio show and gave her a stipend she could live on. She was always *ours,* and we planted her in Connie Woodard's UCLA class, because Connie was lez and loved young-idealist cooze, and because Connie was the den mother of the L.A. Left. Joanie was bait from 1939 on. She was nothing but a promiscuous gang girl with hotshot college degrees, and she was on the Federal payroll up to the time of her death. *I* set Joanie up with Ralphie Horvath, and they got a 459 thing going. So fucking what? Burglary isn't treason, the last time I checked."

I sucked bonded bourbon. I passed the flask. Charlie sucked bonded bourbon. He was booze-bombed and hurtin' for certain. He took on this weird white witch doctor look.

"So, the cell. There's a joke for you. Sammy A., that hump Crawshaw, and Ellie Donnell. They were smart, though. They recanted before they got named, which left the den mother all by her lonesome. And *she* was a joke, but she *knew* everybody, and *everybody* confided in her. She's the linchpin of this new thing Joe M.'s running, and we wired her place, but the bugs and taps went on the fritz. Joanie was set to testify, as a friendly witness. She was going to lay out the *criminal* misdeeds of Ahlendorf, Crawshaw, and Donnell, as sidebars to their recantings, to tell the whole world that onetime Commies never change. *But,* Joanie gets snuffed. *So,* there's a hot-prowl hump on the loose. *So,* the LAPD keys on him as a suspect, and blows him up. You were there, you should know."

I ran through the rat-out. One riff rang false.

"I can see Crawshaw and Donnell as criminals—sure. But Ahlendorf didn't hit me as the criminal type."

"Yeah, but Sammy's bent. We knew that, at the start. He emigrated in '36, but he kept going back to Russia, under false passports that the Party fixed him up with. He was embroiled in some shifty stuff over there, but we never figured out what."

I said, "That long-range post you're running. You didn't set that whole deal up just to nail the den mother."

Charlie said, "That's correct. We've got nine other cells wired up, lockstep. The members are all Hollywood types, including some very large names, and most of them are linked to the den mother. Joe M. wants to squeeze her and get her to roll on them. She's never rolled before, but we've got her for Murder One, up in Marin County. A lawyer went missing, and we know why. You know how we know? Because Joanie told us. This guy was putting the boots to her, and the den mother got jealous and snuffed him. We can get her full immunity, if she rolls. If she doesn't roll, she's got a hot date with the green room."

I sighed. "Constance Linscott Woodard will never roll."

Charlie said, "Freddy, you're blushing."

—

The post was spiffed, spangled, and space age. Joe McCarthy scrounged the latest and greatest new stuff.

Long-range broadband transceivers. All-weather bug mounts, suited for outdoor use. Camouflaged microphones. Long-play tape recorders. Automatic voice activators. Static-eliminating headsets.

Plus work desks. Plus twelve file cabinets. All of them unlocked. All stuffed with bug-and-tap transcripts. Nine Commie cells headed for Hell.

I stuffed 12-gauge shotgun shells in the file drawers and spread gunpowder on top. I placed paper bags full of fertilizer and ammonium nitrate under the desks. I splashed two-gallon gas cans full of Mobile Supreme on the floor. I left the front door open and blasted seven ACP rounds inside.

The post blew up mauve and pink. It harked me back to Hiroshima and that blistering blast at Jack K.'s bomb bash. There's this magnificent mushroom cloud, all aglow.

THE GOOGIE'S PARKING LOT

4/7/54

Googie's. Early-bird peeps from my Packard pimpmobile. A peremptory peep for Claire Klein, specific.

I popped dexies and chain-smoked. The a.m. *Herald* was due. Fullerton wouldn't rat me. He was in deep with a putrid pol soon to implode. I had him for all his Joanie-Ralphie 459 shit. The listening-post blast would blare headlines. The Feds would stagnantly stonewall it. The words *McCarthy/black-bag job/rogue action* would not pry their way into print.

I peeped the back window. Four shadows whipped by my windshield. Sergeant Max Herman. Sergeant Red Stromwall. Sergeant Harry Crowder. Officer Eddie Benson.

The Hats. Pearl gray suits and white Panamas. Trouble treads my way.

I waved faux wolfsbane. They deadpanned it. Max and Red yanked me out of the car. Harry and Eddie cuffed me. They tossed me in the backseat of their K-car and sandwiched me in tight.

Max drove. Red whistled "Funeral March of a Marionette." We ran Code 3 downtown. We hit City Hall and took the freight lift up to the DB. They dumped me in sweatbox #3 and cuffed me to a chair. Note the fat fone book on the table.

Max said, "You're fucked, Freddy. Metro's been spot-tailing you since February."

Red said, "We know everyone that you've seen and everything that you've done."

Harry said, "The moment of truth approaches, Freddy."

Eddie said, "Your camel-fucking ass is grass."

I said, "Maybe we can pin my grief on some random lowlifes. The *Herald*'s always willing to go that route for you guys."

Max phone-booked me. He threw a top-of-the-head/leave-no-marks shot. He cracked my cranium *gooood.*

“We know every sleazy thing that you and your goons have pulled for *Confidential.* We saw you and Bernie Spindel hot-wire Steve Cochran’s place, and we saw you pull that red devil stunt with him the night of the film shoot. We know all about your wingding with the den mother, who seems a little long in the tooth for a young stud like you. We tailed you to your interviews with Samuel Ahlendorf, that geek Crawshaw, and Ellie Donnell. We boom-miked your assault on Agent Fullerton, and we saw you blow up the Fed post.”

Red phone-booked me. He threw a cause-great-pain/leave-no-marks shot.

“You’re fucked, Freddy. We know all of your shit, inside out.”

Harry phone-booked me. “You’re not our pal anymore, Freddy. You’re just some jamoke that’s outlived his usefulness.”

Eddie phone-booked me. “We’ve got you for Treason, Sedition, and boocoo Smith Act violations. You’ll burn, just like the Rosenbergs.”

Max phone-booked me. He employed his love-tap/this-ain’t-so-bad swing. “We’d appreciate it if you’d recount your interviews with Ahlendorf, Crawshaw, and Donnell. That would go a long way toward earning our favor.”

Red phone-booked me. He tossed a love-tap uppercut.

“We’ll let you think about it. We’ll put you up in a tidy cell, away from the riffraff. I know the Chief is looking forward to speaking with you.”

Harry phone-booked me. “Freddy O.’s wild ride has just ended.”

Eddie phone-booked me. “R.I.P., Freddy.”

—

They tossed me in a holding cell. My bunk was bare-bones. My hurt head hit a hard pillow. It caromed me into a coma.

I wasted Ralph Mitchell Horvath. Joi gobbled Steve the Stud’s *schvantz.* I beat up Johnnie Ray. I peeped ten thousand houses. I popped penance payments in Joanie Horvath’s mailbox.

I must have cried. I soaked my pillow down to the mattress. My head felt homogenized. My cerebellum sang sad songs. My cranium creaked.

William H. Parker racked the door and sat on my bunk. He wore his full four-star blues.

“The Los Angeles Police Department now owns you. As of this moment, *Confidential* has ceded its claim. We will let you skate for everything that you have done. You will skate for your assault on Agent Fullerton, and for blowing up the listening post. You will skate for your rogue actions on the Joan Horvath snuff. You will skate for any and all of your illegal actions while in the employ of *Confidential.* We will allow you to avenge Joan Horvath, however you deem fit. In recompense for the above stated mercies, you will enter my direct employ."

Parker paused. His Bible gaze burned my soul. The Book of Revelation 3:17–18: *And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. So, I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire.*

I said, "Yes."

Parker said, "You will sign a detailed confession regarding your work for *Confidential.* You will serve as my personal informant and agent provocateur, and assist me in my efforts to destroy the magazine. We are going to bankrupt it, expose the breadth of its evil, and slay it dead in Federal court. As of now, you are my personal snitch, rat, stool pigeon, and squealer. Say 'Yes' or 'No' immediately. Your answer will dictate the course of the rest of your life."

I said, "Yes."

—

Tough tasks. Deep duties. My vows to first fulfill. *WOMEN* said it all.

Joan, Claire, Connie. Linked in cause and effect. Calamitous causation. Let's extract the truth thereof.

I bopped to Beverly Hills and beat feet to my bungalow. I stood by my wall graph and linked lines in black ink. I linked Joan to Connie, straight up.

Connie knew every Commie in captivity. Joan's killer lurked there. The '30s and '40s CP in L.A. Comintern cads coursing through. Fractious front groups established and unions usurped. How many dark-haired/heavy-bristled white men lurked and looted within?

On to Claire. Let's craft a chronology. Let's link lines. Let's answer this quivering question: who's the man that Claire wants to kill?

A nihilist notion nudged me. It was all circumstantial and based on thirdhand dish. Claire's out to get Sammy Ahlendorf. Here's my line links:

Lez Line #2. Stretch monitors it. Babs Payton dishes per her three-ways with Claire. Claire tricks with Russian consulate humps. She speaks Russian. Ahlendorf *is* Russian—but emigrated here in ’36. Claire pumps out the code name “Robin Redbreast.” V. J. Jerome says it’s a former Red named “Sammy.” Samuel Ahlendorf belonged to Connie Woodard’s cell. Claire carries a Makarov pistol. Claire hates Reds and has finked them to HUAC. Babs dishes *this:* Robin Redbreast was a crazy Commo in the ’30s and ’40s. He’s stale stuff in the ’50s. His expulsion from the Manhattan Project underlines this.

Then, there’s *this:*

Sammy digs Russian revolutionary art. He rankly revealed it to me. Ellie Donnell told me the tale of Meyerhold’s maiming and murder. Meyerhold was a fitful formalist. He renounced socialist realism and pissed off the punk Politburo. Meyerhold is snuffed, circa ’39–’40. His wife Zinaida Raikh is torture-stabbed and slain. A Wave officer braces Party Girl at an all-Party bash in L.A. It *has* to be Claire. She presses Party Girl per the whole Meyerhold deal. Claire’s armed with supple suppositions now. She’s got Sammy gun-sighted. That’s a probable certainty.

Harry Fremont was tight with a U.S. Customs cop. I called and asked him to run passport checks on Claire and Sammy A. Check for Russian excursions. Post-’36 for Sammy. He might be using forged Party passports. Look for variants on the Robin Redbreast code name. Do this per Claire: check birth certificates per her surname and DOB. Check her parents’ surnames. Check Claire’s passport travel: ’39 and ’40. She was of legal age then. Did she connect to Robin Redbreast in Russia? Meyerhold was a sweltering swordsman. Did he siphon his seed in ’20 and ’21 in New York? Did he somehow spawn spectacular Claire? I pledged Harry a grand and told him to get back to me *faaaaast.* He told me it was all far-fetched. Yeah, but you never know.

I ink-linked lives. Claire, Joan, Connie—shakedown shills, rabid Reds, knock-kneed succubi. I ran them all through the Book of Revelation and found that they fit right there.

The fone rang. I picked up. Harry said, “I’ll never doubt you again.”

“Tell me why.”

“Claire and Robin Redfield—that’s the name on Ahlendorf’s passport—crossed paths in Moscow in late ’39 and ’40, but they traveled separately.”

I said, “Don’t stop now.”

Harry said, "Who's stopping? Customs ran the Klein skirt's DOB in New York. The guy was smart, because he cross-checked 'Claire Klein' with birth-parent names, and got Meyerhold and Zinaida Raikh. The Meyerholds granted custody to Mendel Klein and his wife, Clara, who were both big Party and radical-theater people. They gave the baby *their* name, and it all fits, just like you said it would."

The Book of Revelation 2:9–10: *I know about your suffering and your poverty….I know the blasphemy of those opposing you.*

—

I owed Sambo a warning. I sensed his malevolent move, back in Russia. He finked Meyerhold and his missus to the Politburo and the NKVD. He cited reconstructionism, recidivism, formalism. He kissed Commie ass as only Commies can. His motive was most likely envy. He didn't want to be a bomb big shot. He wanted to be a radical-theater rajah. He wanted to mesmerize the masses, à la Meyerhold in his hoodwinked heyday.

Dusk hit. I looped Coldwater Canyon northbound and hit the Valley. The Valley Vista Villas loomed. I surveillance-circled the block and came back behind the buildings. I noticed a series of second-floor terraces with connecting walkways.

Let's surprise Comrade Sambo. Pick the sliding-glass-door lock and enter his crib. Hey, Sambo—it's dues time. Run while you can. Claire Klein is radical theater beyond your corrupt ken.

I parked and schlepped it up to the terrace walkway. Sambo's pad was three glass doors down. I heard shuddering Shostakovich bursting from within. The muted message was Fuck the Soviet Beast. The doors were heavy glass and locked from inside. I thought I heard one single screech.

I was too late. Sambo ran toward the terrace—and me. He was naked. His pubic hair had been shaved. His eyes had been stabbed out. His chest and legs had been stabbed. Claire chased after him. She wore a wooden Kabuki mask. Kabuki masks were a Meyerhold trademark. Claire's mask bore the face of Zinaida Raikh.

Comrade Sam couldn't see me. Zinaida-Claire didn't see me. Comrade Sam tripped and fell. Claire ran her shiv between his legs and eviscerated him.

—

Rush-hour traffic. It slowed my trek back. I stopped at a pay phone to kill time. I called Bill Parker and gave him a loose lowdown. He said, "Thanks, Freddy." He said, "Better dead than Red," and hung up.

I hung up and snail-trailed back to 6th and Dunsmuir. Charlie Fullerton lived above his garage. His garage enticed me.

Old police detectives and Feds. They saved their most fecund files and stored them in marked boxes. They piled said boxes in their garages—more often than not.

Charlie would be off at the Raincheck Room or Rick's Riptide. It was 7:45. I had lock picks and a penlight. I had Whiskey Bill Parker's home number if I fell in the shit.

It went as predicted. I picked the lock and picked through stuffed boxes. They were code-named and listed code-numbered rat-outs. I found the "Redbird" boxes and counted numbered snitches. Who killed you, baby? There's just numbers—no names.

Fullerton inked occasional comments. Rat-out #114 stood out. This guy was Hard Red and Deep Red. Sammy Ahlendorf mentored him. He talked up the need to snuff Federal snitches. He did this incessantly. Joan ratted him in May '49. He never joined the cell. Fullerton called him a fellow traveler. He was a closeted Party member. He drifted off for parts unknown, fall '49.

I wrote "114" and Fullerton's comments on my scratch pad. I wrote down numbers and comments for a dozen other snitches. I planned to pop the den mother with Pentothal. I believe in coerced confessions. How could I not? Bill Parker just made me his snitch.

—

I beat retreat feet to Googie's. The Tattle Tyrant turns tail. He slinks in defeat.

Rock Hudson sat in my booth. He was anchored in anguish and locked in loss. He's all worrisome and woe is me.

I sat down. Rock said, "Ask me why I look like warmed-over shit. I'm a movie star. I can't afford days like this."

"Tell me—but it's not like I can't guess."

Rock said, "Claire robbed me. She cracked the safe in my den, and stole twelve grand in cash and forty grand in gold Krugerrands. She'll be long gone by now, and I know I'll never see her again. I called Lew Wasserman, and, man, is he pissed."

“You got off easy, brother. Some day I’ll tell you why.”

Rock slid me a slip of paper. “She left this in the safe. It’s for you. *You* get a good-bye, but I don’t.”

I read the note. It was bravura brief:

> *Freddy, love:*
>
> *Rain check, okay? I’ll be thinking of you.*
>
> *All best,*
> *C.K.*

THE DEN MOTHER'S RED BEDROOM

4/8/54

I said, "It's for Joan."

She said, "You know exactly what to say to get exactly what you want from me. Truth serum, *really.*"

Connie sat in the red chair. I sat on the red footstool. She held out her left arm. I swipe-swabbed it with alcohol and measured a mainline. I spike-speared her and jammed her the juice.

She sighed and went loosey-goosey. I said, "Count backward from one hundred and feel free to shut your eyes."

She moved her lips. I barely heard it: 100, 99, 98, gonesville. I took a brief breather and consulted my control notes.

Joan rat-out #84. Code name: Lazy Maizie. She's a San Marino socialite. She makes big donations to the Strikebusters' International. It's a known Commo front. Joan rat-out #204. Code name: John Henry. He's a male Negro. He's right tackle for the Detroit Lions. Charlie Fullerton's comment: "All the mud-shark girls go nuts for him."

I said, "How do you feel, Connie?"

Connie said, "Loose. But what if I don't feel inclined to…"

"Name names? That's okay. I'd be satisfied with simple, candid responses."

Connie, *très* loose: "Love, I'm sure that's all you'll ever get from…"

I said, "Lazy Maizie."

Connie, *très, très* loose. "She smoked hashish. She…put…her…hand on Joan's leg…and Joan slapped her."

That was *gooooood.* It was Joan-centric and Joan-phobic. I laid John Henry on her.

Connie, yet *more* loose: "He was…a steel-driving man in a Negro spiritual. We…sang that song at all the Scottsboro Boys rallies…we knew that something like half of them were guilty, though."

It was half good. Connie voiced un-Commie-esque candor. I gave her a brief breather.

Rat-out #114 was un-code-named. I'd have to mention Sammy Ahlendorf to rouse recollection. The papers toed Bill Parker's line, per dead Sammy. It's suicide, case closed. Connie believed that horseshit.

I said, "Joan informed on this man. She must have felt very strongly about him. He said he wanted to murder all FBI snitches, but I don't know his name. He never joined your cell, although he was very much in the thrall of Sammy Ahlendorf, and I think it's safe to say that he shared Sammy's anti-A-bomb mentality, which is to say he was pissed off when we A-bombed the Japs, even though they were fascists, and even though they dropped those eggs on Pearl Harbor."

Connie sighed. Her hands twitched. Her eyelids fluttered. She's digging deep here.

"I…remember him….He said, 'We've got to expose the bomb before it wipes out the human race, and I'm going to build my career on it.' "

She snapped awake then. She didn't name names or say *his* name. She didn't need to. She'd already said this to me:

"He was my last tortured and torturing male lover—before you."

Fullerton's file facts fit. They surged circumstantial. Joan's rat-out rang true. It did not mean that Steve Cochran killed her.

Connie snapped *très* awake. She blinked, blank-faced. She didn't recall what she'd said.

"Did you learn anything provocative? I'd hate to think that I let Joan down."

I said, "You did swell."

—

A-Bomb party. The U.S. Army's set to launch at 9:00 p.m. It's a tête-à-tête this time. It's *my* bungalow roof. Stretch, me, frozen daiquiris and corn chips. My transistor radio for the countdown. Two cozy deck chairs.

We held hands. Stretch lounged low and leveled out our height disparity. The radio murmured musings on mach 10 and beyond. Supersonic rockets are now passé.

I said, "You're not a Communist or a psycho killer, are you? My friendship's not sending you over the bend?"

Stretch said, "Uncle Freddy's having conscience pangs. He's sleeping with this nutty old lady in Hancock Park, when he could be here with me."

I laffed and lapped my daiquiri. The nite was cool. Stretch wore her USC letter coat. I wore a Beethoven sweatshirt that Claire left at Googie's for me.

"She'll break it off soon. It was a situational sort of deal. You and I are eternal."

Stretch laffed. "Older man, younger woman. *That's* a news flash. It's on a par with 'dog bites man.' "

I laffed. We swung our hands. The radio reporter cut to a commercial. Bucky Beaver hawked Ipana toothpaste.

"I saw that note you tacked to the board. *Really,* how blithe. 'Rain check, okay?' And don't tell me C.K. isn't the dread Claire Klein."

I said, "She's ephemeral. Forget all the bad things I told you about her. Don't listen for her on the tap lines. She got out, right on cue."

Stretch squeezed my hand. "You're being disingenuous, but I'll let it slide, because we're about to witness history."

The radioman rang out the countdown. *"Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one—blastoff."*

I missed the mushroom cloud and the mauve-and-pink sky. Stretch strong-armed me into a kiss.

THE MALINOW-SILVERMAN CEMETERY

4/9/54

Ashes to ashes, baby. Ask the rental rabbi. Sammy Ahlendorf eats the dust.

LAPD quick-processed the stiff and released it. The graveside service was bilingo and brief. The rabbi ululated in Hebrew and extolled Sambo in English. He was a bomb builder, a *macher,* a *mensch.*

I stood graveside. The den mother stood with me. Grave diggers grappled the casket into the ground. The rabbi lit a cigarette and split the gig. It was a rush job. Who's this Ahlendorf *schmendrick*?

Connie and I came in two cars. She insisted on it. We walked toward the street and the Big Splitsville. Connie lifted her veil and dropped my hand.

"You brought a whirlwind into my life. We were united in common cause for a moment—and one that I'll never forget. But the walls between us stand too high to breach, darling. It's best that we end this thing now."

I said, "Stay strong, Red. It was a gas knowing you. You're History's child. Someone has to carry the torch, and I'm glad that it's you."

Connie touched my cheek. "Oh, Freddy—I knew you'd understand."

I winked. "Rain check, okay?"

Connie winked back. Her eyelash stuck. She pulled out a hankie and wiped it free.

"Always, love. For you, the world."

I walked away. She walked away. I felt ghastly and relieved.

—

The Ranch Market. My eye in the sky. It felt feckless and familiar and *gooooood.*

It's where I plot and plan and scrounge and scheme. It's a shakedown shack. It's a divorce-work dive. It's a scandal screen that sifts gold. The hard heart and sick soul of *Confidential* thrive here. I'm a police informant now. It's where I'll plot and plan and scrounge and scheme to take *Confidential* down.

It's ghastly. I'm relieved. It's an opportunity.

I popped three dexies and gargled Old Crow. I put my feet up on my desk and scratched my balls. Bernie Spindel walked in. He carried earmuffs and a tape spool.

I said, "*Qué pasa,* baby? It's a good day to be alive, *n'est-ce pas*?"

Bernie went *Oy*. He spooled the tape through my desk rig and earmuffed my head. He said, "It's our standing mount at the Miramar Hotel. I'll destroy the tape after you hear it."

I molded the muffs down and got comfy. Bernie flipped switches. I heard mattress moans and fucky-fucky exertions. I matched moans to my megamillions of women. Oh *yeah*—it's Joi Lansing in the sack. Oh *shit*—that's Steve Cochran with her.

Steve Cochran. Joan Hubbard rats his ass. He's Commie #114.

Steve and Joi light cigarettes. I hear match flare and exhale. There's fucky-fucky/goo-goo sounds. Oh shit—there's two full minutes' worth.

Joi says, "Your scars are healing, baby. That plastics guy knows his stuff."

Steve says, "I hate to say it, but so does your ex. I never bought that bill of goods the Sheriff's fed me. Some World War Two buff in a red devil mask? That dog don't hunt. It had to be Freddy."

Joi said, "Let it go, baby. He's just a stooge and a gofer. What's that you always call him? The 'running dog of capitalism.' "

Steve dog-bayed. Steve said, "Guys like Freddy are the fuckboys of the American Oligarchy. They've spawned this whole atomic nightmare we're enduring. Freddy's the ne plus ultra of the fascist gestalt. He's Camus' *l'étranger*. He's the guy who goes to his death knowing exactly jack shit."

Joi laffed. Joi giggled. Steve tickled her—I knew those squeals.

Steve said, "Credit where credit is due. It's Freddy who got me started on this big roll of mine. He blew up Joanie Horvath's husband, and got me thinking that maybe Joanie herself should go. For one, she was an FBI snitch, which mandates death in my book. That's why I bugged her pad. Two, she'd snitched me once already, and with Joe

McCarthy in town, I figured she'd mount the revival."

Joi said, "You 'revivaled' her, baby."

Steve said, "You mean I *de*rivaled her."

They laffed. Steve was swarthy and dark-haired. I recalled that bandage he wore two months back. Joan scratched him. In that exact spot. I read the autopsy protocol.

Joi: "Don't tell me too much, baby."

Steve: "You're right. Mum's the word."

Joi: "And you be careful. Freddy's pussy-whipped, and he's got this thing for dead chicks. He might come after you."

Steve hooted. He coursed contempt. He pilloried my pathos. He decreed my damned destiny.

"I've got Freddy fail-safed. Charlie Fullerton told me that he torched that Fed post. I lifted some of his prints off his office at the Ranch Market, and placed them on a booze-bottle accelerant at the crime scene. If Freddy acts up, I can hang Treason on him. And that bottle is now in a Fed evidence vault."

Joi laffed. Steve said, "Ralphie to Joanie to now. The big karmic circle. When the revolution comes, your ex will be the first one to go."

I hit the off-switch. Bernie went *Oy* and walked out.

—

I felt reckless and feckless. I felt striated and stretched bare. Phantasmagoric '54 had me morally massacred and fearfully fucked-up.

Rain check, okay?

I made the rounds that night. Rock Hudson was having people over. Jimmy and Liz were there. Johnnie Ray saw me—and scrammed out the back door. Claire left some undies behind. Jimmy told me and showed me. I took a few farewell sniffs.

Jimmy dished Rock's new wife candidate. She was one Phyllis Gates. She worked for Rock's agent and came recommended. Jimmy said Phyllis was squaresville. She wanted to wait for her wedding nite. Phyllis was clueless. She swooned for Rock and did not know that Rock swooned for boys.

I got half gassed and bopped back to Beverly Hills and my bungalow. I went inside and watched Stretch sleep. I tucked her too-long legs back under the sheets.

Rain check, okay?

Pervdogs are scent dogs. We often loop by locations that recently roused us to lust. I drove east to Hancock Park and pulled up to the den mother's digs. I cut my lights and peeped her windows in the dark.

I whistled "Willow Weep for Me" and "My Funny Valentine." I saw Connie walk across the red bedroom and turn off the lights. I drove by Camerford and Vine then. A family had moved into the Horvath house. Their kids romped out on the porch.

I drove southeast for no good reason. I stopped at Ollie Hammond's Steakhouse and juiced in the bar. I peeped a tall redhead and watched her walk out of my life.

Opportunity is love. Hey, there—you with the stars in your eyes.

7

GONESVILLE

Freddy Otash Confesses, Part III

CELL 2607

Penance Penitentiary
Reckless-Wrecker-of-Lives Block
Pervert Purgatory
9/4/2020

I'm beastfully *back*. This concluding confession covers spring '55 to spring '60. The freewheeling Freddy O. is now a sniveling snitch. I'm Chief Bill Parker's back-room bitch and punk pawn in his crusade to take down *Confidential*. It's a fucked-up fin de siècle. The madcap magazine is doomed, Daddy-O. And I'm the ardent architect of its dipshit demise.

I've lost that lush life. I'm bopping the byways of big boo-hoo. Joi Lansing's gone. Connie Woodard's gone. Claire Klein's gone. Stretch Perkins went licentiously lez and snagged herself a barmaid at Linda's Little Log Cabin. Jimmy Dean's pulling away. He's a movie star now. He toplines *Giant* and *East of Eden*. He's been shooting a teen turkey called *Rebel Without a Cause*. It's filming on some loopy L.A. locations. I'm his main mentor no more. Director Nicholas Ray has replaced me. Nick Ray's a sweaty switch-hitter and a carcinogenic Commie. *I'm* Jimmy's real faux dad.

Boo-hoo, boo-hoo. I'm surfing a sicko surge of self-pity. *But*—this thunderous thought keeps me poised to pounce.

I know people. I'm now the pills-and-cocaine conduit for Senator Jack Kennedy. I broker scrapes for the contract cooze at Columbia and Metro. I've got L.A. bugged, tapped, and hot-wired here to Hell. I'm all repugnant resource and the withering will to survive.

Opportunity is love. Confluence is opportunity. I move in a mélange of *machers,* grifters, and graft-grabbers, and the sex-soiled sycophants so indigenous to L.A. Something has to pop my way. Something's coming. Something's telling me that *IT* is a *SHE*.

SHELL GAS STATION

Beverly and Hayworth,
L.A.
5/11/55

The wheelman lot. It's the *baaaaaad* bane of wicked wives and horndog hubbies, hot to trot. Divorce begins here. Lowlife lawyers call the pay phone by the lube rack. Punk PIs hustle off to hot-sheet huts and kick doors down. There's flashbulb flare and *eeeek* and *shreeek* and fuckee-suckee singed on celluloid.

The wheelman lot. It's my lurid launching pad today. *Confidential*'s cornholing Art Pepper. Artful Art's an alto sax hopping high on the *Downbeat* poll. He's a junkie with a jacked-up jones for high school honeys. He's nailed Miss Belmont High and Miss Lincoln High already. He's meeting Miss Franklin High at the Leechee Nut Lodge in Chinatown, one hour hence. I'll be there to instigate fuckus interruptus.

I'm serving two masters here. *Confidential*'s calling the piece "Sax Potentate Pepper: Junk and Jailbait Call the Tune Now!!!!!" LAPD Vice laid on the lead to the meet and laid down the law: *We'll* be there to slam this slime for Stat Rape/1st Degree.

Bill Parker hates hopheads and jailbait jumpers. Bill Parker's out to keester *Confidential.* He wants to catalogue *Confidential*'s coercive methods and march the mag to Indictment City. He's implementing a *looooooooooong*-range strategy.

I lounged in my Packard pimpmobile. Ward Wardell and Race Rockwell reclined in their surveillance van. Donkey Don Eversall worked the outside spot. Miss Franklin High had her own sled. She handed out hand jobs, at five bucks per, and glommed a beat-to-shit '48 Merc. Donkey Don would call the pay phone. He'd say *It's on* and tail the twist to the Leechee Nut Lodge. The desk clerk was an LAPD lapdog. He told Don that putzo Pepper was smack-back in Room #9. Two Vice Squad goons were mainlining mai tais in the Lily Pad Lounge. They were set to grind Pepper while my camera crew rolled film.

I’m a snitch. I’m a rat fink. I’m a doofus double agent. *I’m* LAPD Lapdog #1.

I eyeballed the lot. Six wheelmen reposed in their rides. They drove hellacious hot rods and blew their gelt on booze, kustom kar kits, and cooze. They *lived* at the lot. They slept in their sleds. They poked B-girls from the Kibitz Room at Canter’s Delicatessen and bounced their backseats, six at a pop.

Ward Wardell walked to the phone. Race Rockwell *schmoozed* a wigged-out wheelman with pizza-pus zits. The cat was a cop buff. He said the Hat Squad was chasing two 211/rape-o’s. They stormed steak houses at closing time. They tapped the tills and took wallets. They purloined purses and made the women strip and dispense snout jobs. The Hats were out to take scalps on this one.

I tuned it out. The Hats and I had shared some shimmering shit. Fuck them—more current shit shivered through me.

Bondage Bob called me this morning. He beefed a southside radio station and a late-nite show called *Nasty Nat’s Soul Patrol.* It was all pimp patois, cool-cat consciousness, and jive jazz. A woman called in three nights running. She came off winsome and *waaaay* white. She called herself “Miss Blind Item.” She jawed with Nasty Nat and aped *Confidential*’s alliterative prose style. Bob had no gripe there. *But*—she crossed some *craaaaazy* line and madly mauled the magazine. She *baaaaad*-beefed the August ’52 piece on “Red Light Bandit” Caryl Chessman.

The piece bawled boo-hoo per Chessman’s tripartite conviction. It’s *baaaad:* Kidnap/Armed Robbery/Forced Oral Cop. Dig: the tone was apoplectic apostasy. The tone disregarded the magazine’s perpetual fry-the-fucker stance. Chessman was convicted in spring ’48. The Little Lindbergh Law applied. Hanging judge Charles Fricke righteously mandated *DEATH.* Chessman professed his innocence. Chessman excoriated capital punishment. Lunar-looped liberals took up his hue and cry. ’48 to ’55. He’d held off his trek to the green room for seven full years. He filed appeals. He wrote screechy screeds and peddled them to pinko publishers. Now, this wiggy witch was mocking *my* magazine, and lambasting its *one* lamentable lapse in moral tone.

Bondage Bob told me to tune in Nasty Nat tonite. He said the witch called in at 1:00 a.m. and motormouthed till 3:00. I said I’d jump on it and take boocoo notes.

The pay phone rang. Ward grabbed it and grinned. He said, "*Arriba,* boss."

—

I banged Beverly, straight downtown. My Packard pimpmobile *performed.* A supercharged V-12 va-va-voomed me due east. My sled featured lake pipes, cheater slicks, and a Nazi death's-head shift knob. It was two-way-radio-rigged and synced to the surveillance van and Donkey Don's '53 Chevy. Our frequency number? *What else?* It's *69.*

I ran the lead slot. The surveillance van dogged me. Donkey Don tailed Miss Franklin High southbound on the Arroyo Seco. She's crazoid Chrissy Molette. She's a hot-hormoned hellion out to bang all the bopsters on the '54 *Downbeat* and *Metronome* polls. She plays mean skin flute and hides hatpins in her big beehive. Her high school homeroom teacher was hotsville with Donkey Don. *She* tattled Chrissy's crazed yen for men.

Confluence. It's who you know and who you blow. Thus, this shimmering shakedown—

My radio cricked, crackled, and spit sputters. Donkey Don said, "69-Baker to 69-Alpha. Come in, Freddy."

"Alpha to Baker. I hear you, Don."

Don gargled garble talk. Sputters, stutters, static—his real voice shimmied and shot through.

"Chrissy picked up a tail at the York Avenue on-ramp. It's a '49 Ford ragtop, tan over blue. I got the plate number and buzzed the DMV. It's her brother Robbie's ride. Robbie's got a green sheet. One fall for pandering, one for 459."

I said, "Shit, this is grief." I brain-broiled a cool countermeasure.

"The Vice guys at the Lodge have a walkie. They're tapped in at 69, D-for-Dog. Buzz them and tell them to grab Robbie, plant some dope on him, and hold him. He's out to mess the gig up, and we need Chrissy and Pepper in the sack and *at it* for this deal to work for the magazine *and* Bill Parker."

Don tittered and tee-heed. He giggled, guffawed, and laffed lewd.

"Yeah, plus full bush, insertion, Pepper's sax and groovy dope paraphernalia in view."

Wire warp froze the frequency and cut the call off. I knew Don would field a follow-thru and buzz 69-Charlie. He'd rig the rendezvous. We'd converge and collide at the Lodge. Chrissy knocks on Door #9. Pepper opens up. He might be noxiously nude. We'll airbrush in a two-foot schlong and redact it, down to his knees. Our randy readers will get the gestalt. Ward and Race will roll film from high cover. I get the kick-the-door-in shot. The Vice cops pile in behind me.

Oooooooh—it's Stat Rape/1st Degree for Bill Parker. *Ooooooooh*—it stacks my status as LAPD Rat #1 and brings me brownie points with the pervy puritan I hocked my soul to!!!!

I hit the hill by Belmont High. Beverly bywayed to 1st Street. I goosed the gas eastbound. I cut north on Broadway and east on Alpine. There's the Leechee Nut Lodge, up ah—

There's a car cavalcade, curbside. Chrissy's '48 Merc. Robbie's '49 Ford ragger. Donkey Don's '53 Chev. The Lodge is horseshoe-shaped, one floor only. Chrissy's cutting through the courtyard. She's anxiously angling toward Door #9. Robbie's skulking by the door of the Lily Pad Lounge. He's peeping the courtyard. He's insidiously intent. There's Donkey Don and the Vice cops. They're crapped out in deck chairs outside the office. They're sharing a short dog of Old Crow.

I parked behind Don's Chevy. The surveillance van parked behind me. I grabbed my righteous Rolleiflex. Ward and Race wrangled out their movie-camera shit. The *whoooole* scene sizzled in *SIN*-emascope and slid into a slithery *sloooooow* motion.

I signaled Don and the Vice cops and pointed to Robbie. They booze-barged over and braced him. He went *Who, me?* Don went *Yeah, you—cocksucker.* Robbie resisted and refuseniked. He put up his paws in a punk fighter's pose and bop-de-bop danced on his toes. Vice Cop #1 nabbed his neck and whacked his head against the wall. Vice Cop #2 kicked him in the balls and cuffed his hands behind his back.

Robbie baby-bawled and bitch-squealed. Don grabbed his greasy hair and pulled him inside the Lily Pad Lounge. I scoped Door #9. I saw *craaaazy* Chrissy crash in and crotch-dive Art Pepper. Man—it's a deep-focus door shot, *delicioso!!!!!*

The door slammed shut. I signaled Ward and Race and pointed to my wristwatch. The second hand tick-tocked toward fuckus interruptus. *Tick, tick, tick*—it tapped the two-minute mark. Donkey Don said, *"Banzai."*

We ran to Door #9. Ward and Race rolled film. Donkey Don worked the sound gizmo. The Vice cops ran up and stood behind us.

They put on palm-weighted sap gloves and got het up to hurl some hurt.

Ward counted down. “Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one—*zero.*”

I flat-foot kicked the door-doorjamb juncture. It juked the door hard off its hinges. The door flew back and in. It dumped a nightstand and pulped Pepper’s sax.

Man—it’s *suck*us interruptus.

Chrissy gobbled Ardent Art. Ardent Art geezed Big “H” in caustic concurrence. I got my shot. My boys rolled fuckee film. Chrissy went *eeeek.* Art Pepper said, “Oh shit.” The Vice cops charged the bed.

—

The Hats hard-nosed Robbie Molette. I observed. The City Hall DB/ sweatbox row/two-way-mirrored walls and outside-corridor speakers.

I perv-peeped the action. Sweatbox #3 snap, crackled, popped. I goosed the wall volume dial and caught every nasty nuance.

Robbie sat in a bolted-down chair. Note the bolted-down table and fat phone book. The Hats hovered. Max Herman waved Robbie’s green sheet. Red Stromwall riffled Robbie’s wallet. Harry Crowder crowded Robbie and caused a case of the sweltering sweats. Eddie Benson tapped the table and looked *meeeaaan.*

Max said, “Pandering. Pleaded down at arraignment, March ’52. You’re the most raggedy-ass-looking pimp I’ve ever seen, Robbie. *Successful* pimps take considerable care with their appearance.”

Es la verdad. Robbie dressed pure pachuco. He wore a see-thru Sir Guy shirt and slit-bottom khakis. Pointy-toe fruit boots cinched the enchanting ensemble. Robbie evinced bad hygiene. Dandruff debris dusted the table. Robbie picked his nose and noshed the nuggets.

Red said, “459 PC. Three counts. Tossed at prelim, January ’53.”

Robbie said, “I quit pimping, and I quit burglarizizing. Actually, I don’t know what the beef here is. You boys and those magazine shitheels kicked my ass, when all I was doing was lounging in the vicinity of a room where my underage sister was about to get devirginizized by a notorious junkie and degenerate.”

Harry laffed. “Your sister’s three weeks and one day under the age of consent. The DA will never file Stat Rape on Pepper.”

Eddie laffed. “He’ll file for possession of narcotics, and leave it at that. And your sister lost her virginity back in the Coolidge administration."

Robbie laffed. "Yeah—just like your mama."

Eddie phone-booked him. *Whap*—a real noggin-knocker. It scoured his scalp and raised blood blisters. His dentures dipped to the floor.

Robbie reached down and replaced them. Bill Parker walked up to me. He weaved a tad. I knew the signs. *El Jefe* was half in the bag.

I said, "*Hola,* Chief."

Parker passed me his flask. I gargled Old Overholt and popped two Dexedrine on the sly.

"The kid's dirty. I've got a theory. I think he wanted to catch Pepper in the kip with his sister, and extort him with it."

Parker yukked. "Never let it be said that Freddy Otash doesn't know from shakedowns."

I passed the flask back. Parker yodeled Old Overholt. I rescoped the sweatbox hullabaloo.

Max said, "There's a few items we'd like to discuss with you, Robbie."

Robbie shrugged. Robbie said, "Okay."

Red said, "Here's the first item. There's a note from the Boys Vice Principal at Hollywood High attached to your green sheet. He states that you were seen at last year's Hollywood-Fairfax football game, attempting to pass yourself off as a 'talent scout' and recruit high school girls for your stable of underage prosties."

Robbie stut-stuttered. He blanched and blew spit bubbles. They pop-pop-popped.

"That's a humbug accusation. I've gone straight. I'm gigging as a busboy at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Talk to the desk manager. He'll tell you I'm revered by both my fellow employees and all the guests."

Max said, "Here's the second item. An hour ago, we sent two plainclothesmen from the Highland Park Station to the house where you live with your mom and dad, and your sister. They tossed your room and found a stack of forty-two beaver photos of Chrissy, all of which were marked '$1.00' on the back. Robbie, you would spare yourself a lot of grief, in this room and beyond, if you admitted that you were peddling those photographs, and that you and Chrissy were engaged in an attempt to extort Art Pepper, based on his somewhat specious relationship with Chrissy herself."

Robbie sputtered and stuttered. His dentures popped out. He crammed them back in.

“That is a no-good, goddamn lie. The cops planted those pix, and —”

Harry phone-booked him. *Whap*—a real cranium-crunch. Robbie’s head bounced on the table. Ashtrays hopped, cigarette butts flew.

Parker said, “You called it on the extortion.”

I said, “The Hat Squad. Accept no substitutes.”

Robbie quivered and quaked. He shook, shimmied, and mewed for his mama. Max pulled his pocket flask and whipped it on him. Robbie suckled and siphoned it. His Adam’s apple bob-bobbed.

He drained the flask dry. Max tossed him a pack of cigarettes and a matchbook. Robbie lit up and surged with a sudden savoir faire.

“I’ll concede that I’m quite the racketeer, and that you’d do well to utilizize me as your personal secret informant. I’ve been known to provide young stuff to the guests at the hotel, so they might utilizize this young gash for what you might call ‘casting-couch sessions,’ which ain’t illegal the last time my high-priced Jew lawyer checked. Also, ‘Rapid Robbie,’ as I’m known in the trade, has been known to supply maryjane to the geeks working at film locations, throughout the southland. I’ll be candid here. I utilizize the inside scoop on the locations off of tips the guests feed me.”

Max said, “You’re a criminal mastermind.”

Red said, “I’ve never doubted it.”

Harry said, “People dismiss you as a dipshit kid, in over his head. They fail to see the real, dynamic you that lurks beneath the façade.”

Eddie said, “Keep going, hotshot. You’ve got us utilizized.”

Robbie blew smoke rings. “Right now, I’m moving maryjane to the gang on *Rebel Without a Cause.* That’s this juvenile delinquency lox being shot all over L.A. This jamoke Nick Ray’s directing it. He’s got the hots for all these rough-trade boys he’s hired to stand around and look tough in crowd scenes. I’m doing high-volume biz here. Nick the Dick’s signed up an all-hophead cast, and—”

Parker hit the speaker switch. Rapid Robbie ran his mouth and made mute-mime gestures. Nick the Dick. That shitbird. He holds swishy sway over Jimmy. I should look into—

“I’m working up a brainstorm, Freddy.”

“I’m listening, boss.”

“I want you to build a derogatory profile on the filming of *Rebel Without a Cause.* Deploy your pal James Dean and your usual gang of thugs, and sell Bob Harrison on the notion of a big spread in the magazine. You see where this is going? The piece is written. You improperly vet it. That leaves your shit rag that much more open to slander and libel charges, and in the meantime, you'll be passing whatever hard criminal dirt accrues on to me through the Hats."

I orbed the two-way mirror. Rapid Robbie mute-motormouthed. The Hats har-har'd and haw-hawed. Max Herman mugged at the mirror. He rolled his eyes and made the jack-off sign.

Parker passed the flask. I doused my dexie dose. *Yeah!*—a blistering blast of straight rye.

I said, "This gig packs potential. Cut dipshit loose, and I'll see what I can do."

—

Max made the meet. 6:00 p.m. at Ollie Hammond's. He'll be there, Freddy. It's an ass kicking, otherwise.

I arrived early. I worked the pay phones for two hours flat. I called Bondage Bob Harrison first.

Bondage Bob bemoaned the Art Pepper fiasco. All that shakedown shit for *one dope bounce*? Bob bitched: The demonizing–dope fiends craze has crapped out. It's *muerto,* you dig? I said, *Au contraire,* Daddy. It's seditiously segued into the jejune juvenile delinquency craze. To withering wit: the filming of teen turkey *Rebel Without a Cause.*

I laid it *aaalll* out. Jimmy Dean's my "in" on the shoot. Nick Ray's a carcinogenic Comsymp. There's sure to be horny hijinx with all the hot hunks and honeys on the set. Dig, Daddy: I'll dive for the dirt, you'll deliver the dish. Ten thousand words in the nuke-bomb November '55 issue.

Bob bought it, *big.* We seamlessly segued to the Rock Hudson–Phyllis Gates mock-marriage *mishegas.* Universal instigated it. Rock was one gallivanting gay caballero, and Lew Wasserman wanted all ripe rumors quashed. He hired me to find Rock a wife. My first candidate ran rogue and ransacked Rock's pad for cash and Krugerrands. Phyllis Gates seemed like a safe and sedate second bet. She was Rock's agent's secretary. She *seemed* to catch a secret scent of Rock's man-lust modus operandi—but would most likely keep her mouth shut. *Confidential* planned to publish a dizzy-disingenuous piece. How's *this* fly? "Rock's Trippy Triangle—*With Two Women!!!!!*" How's *that* for yuks and fucks/lies and sighs?

Bob said, You've got to *find* the other woman first. I said, Yeah—and I'm meeting Phyllis and Jimmy Dean at Googie's tonite to discuss it. Bob signed off, per usual: *L'chaim, boychik.*

I called Jimmy's pad and got no answer. I called his answering service and left a message: Nine tonite/Googie's. I called Phyllis and told her to make the meet. She gassed on the tricky triad scenario. She said it should culminate in a catfight at the Mocambo.

I hung up and scoped the barside crowd. *Shit*—there's Robbie Molette. He's hard-hustling a high-toned blonde and causing an undulating upscut.

Shit—

I fast-walked over and grabbed him. Rodent Robbie squirmed and squeaked. I frog-marched him to a back booth and shoved him in. I said, "Behave." Robbie sulked submissive. The barside babe blew me a kiss.

A waiter waltzed up. I ordered two double Old Crows, quicksville. Robbie smirked smug. The waiter dropped our drinks off and vamoosed.

Robbie said, "I know about you. My dad's a grip at Metro. He called you 'Mr. Fear.' He said you're the king of the shakedown."

I lit a cigarette. "What are you trying to tell me?"

"That we're two peas in a pod. That you should consider taking me on as a protégé. You could teach me the tricks of the trade and make me the new you. You could retire and ride off into the sunset then, knowing that you've got a vital young stud to fulfill your legacy."

I cringed. "Let's change the subject."

"How about boxing? Ray Robinson versus Bobo Olson. I think Ray's stale bread. Bobo's a vital young stud, and it won't go four rounds."

"How about *Rebel Without a Cause*? Lay the full dish on me. If I like what I hear, I'll let you run loose for a while. If I don't, I'll send you back to the Hats. You can play the role of the vital young stud in the queens' tank at Mira Loma."

Robbie cringed. "What's to tell? Nick Ray's a switcheroo man. He likes it young and hung, and ripe and saucy. The word is he stakes out one quiff of each gender on all his flicks. On *Rebel,* he's got Jimmy Dean for the brown eye, and Natalie Wood on the distaff side. Natalie's sixteen, in case you were curious. She's also a nympho with lezbo tendencies, for what that's worth."

Rodent Robbie. Reptile Robbie. He delivers the dish. He's cruel-credible so far.

“Keep going.”

Robbie chugalugged his drink. “So, I drop off the maryjane and toke with the actors. I observe the gestalt, and to my way of thinking, this actor Nick Adams is Nick Ray’s head honcho on the set. He’s the court jester and the instigator, the boss pimp and the guy who drops the hammer and fulfills Nick Ray’s skeevy hopes and dreams.”

I killed my drink. “What hopes and dreams?”

Robbie went *tee-hee.* “Getting all these punk, fruitcake, hophead actor kids to ‘fly without a parachute,’ ‘work without a net,’ and all that other movie horseshit, when all he really wants is limitless young woof-woof, and to manipulate people in the guise of his jive, so-called art.”

I clapped. I went *Ole!!!* I wolf-whistled and went *Woo-woo!!!*

“You’re not stupid, Robbie. That’s the only attaboy you’re ever likely to get from me, so enjoy it while you can.”

Robbie beamed *biiiiiiiiig.* “Nick Ray’s got all these hood-type extras under his thumb. He says he’s testing their ‘motivation.’ He’s sending them out on ‘chickie runs,’ like in the flick. Nick Adams is straw-bossing these deals, and Jimmy Dean’s along for the ride. I don’t know what’s actually happening, but Jimmy calls them ‘panty raids.’ ”

I chained cigarettes. “Where do you drop the dope off?”

“The set, the location, or Nick Ray’s bungalow at the Chateau Marmont.”

I peeled off five C-notes and slid them across the table. Reptile Robbie rolled his eyes and went *Oooh-la-la.*

“I’m in the White Pages. Call me at home or page me at Googie’s the next time you’ve got a delivery.”

Robbie scooped up the cash. “Two for the road? A couple of aperitifs to keep your whistle wet?”

I sighed. “All right.”

“Hey, he’s acting bored and vexed already.”

“Robbie…”

“Okay, okay. Here’s aperitif number one, straight from Nick Ray’s mouth. Jimmy goes to leather bars and has guys put out their cigarettes on him. He is therefore known as the ‘Human Ashtray.’ Aperitif number two’s more predictable. Jimmy’s putting the moves on this kid actor, Sal Mineo. Pretty good, huh? Especially from a guy you only met a few hours ago.”

I flashed back. Jimmy at Googie’s. Little Band-Aids on his arms and neck. A solvent scent wafting my way.

Robbie stood up. I grabbed his waistband and slammed him back down to the table. He yelped and flailed. I held the table candle up to his face. Flame flutters scorched his pachuco pompadour and fried it to frazzled split ends.

“Jimmy and I go back. I’ll concede my soft spot. Watch what you say about him.”

GOOGIE'S ALL-NITE COFFEE SHOP

West Holly*weird*

5/11/55

The 8:00 p.m. rush. Prosaic-predictable. Folks tumbled tables, noshed and shot the shit. Niteclub action accelerated around 9:30. Ditto, late-show movies. The Strip/the Boulevard. Ciro's, the Mocambo, the Crescendo. Grauman's Chink and the Egyptian. Googie's bopped close to all.

I took my table. Tipsters tagged the Tattle Tyrant as fair game. They salaamed and sucked up. They delivered the dubious dish.

Orson Welles sliced the Black Dahlia. *That* choice chestnut. Here's five scoots—please go away.

Here's a ripe wrinkle. Orson Welles sliced the Black Dahlia. *Yeah*—I know, it's day-old bagels at half price. Yeah, but dig *this:* Rita Hayworth held the Dahlia's legs while Orson sawed her in half.

Okay, here's *ten* scoots—*now* go away.

Van Johnson's at it again. The old semen demon's always up for a taste. He siphoned Tab Hunter's python in a back row at the Admiral Theatre.

No, I can't prove it. *Yeah,* I need gelt. There's a sneak peek at the Iris, and I'm short on the freight.

Here's twenty scoots. Uncle Freddy's a soft touch. The popcorn's on me.

A guy peddled Carole Landis morgue shots. *Yawn.* A guy peddled pix of Marlon Brando with a dick in his mouth. *Shit*—I thought I cornered *that* market, back in '53. A call girl tossed me a tip on the steakhouse rape-o/robbers. They were holed up in a hot-sheet flop on 54th and Vermont. They were geezing Nazi-made morphine and meth speedballs. I slid her forty scoots. She slipped me her phone number. I told her to tattle the tip to the Hat Squad. She told me she banged Red Stromwall at an Elks Club smoker, back in '46.

Juan the fry cook passed me a message. Jimmy was 86'ing the

Phyllis Gates meet. Nick Ray culled the cast and called for a script read. Nick Ray ran regular “Motivational Missions,” as in tonite. Sorry, babe—give Phyl my love.

Neuter Nick Ray. “Motivational Missions.” Robbie Molette’s mad monologue. My pal Jimmy. The “Human Ashtray.” I felt god-awful gut-punched.

It was 8:55. A late nite loomed. I had a batch of bilious back issues to study for Big Bill Parker. *Nasty Nat’s Soul Patrol* popped the airwaves at 1:00. Miss Blind Item might call in. She’d castigate and condemn *Confidential.* She’d evince righteous rage per Red Light Bandit Caryl Chessman. The deal instantly intrigued me. Chessman was sure as shit guilty. I wanted him to burn, baby, burn.

My dexie dose fizzled, drizzled, and withered to wisps and gnashed nerves. I popped two more and awaited the *aaaaahhhh.* Phyllis walked in. I stood up and bowed. She walked up and curtsied cute. She wore twill slacks and a cashmere cardigan. She radiated rectitude and a reserved ring-a-ding.

A waitress brought menus. Phyllis sat across from me. She went *Where’s Jimmy?*

I said, “He couldn’t make it. Something about a script rehearsal.”

The waitress whipped back. Phyllis ordered a dry martini. I held up two fingers. The waitress scrammed. Phyllis said, “Drat.”

I laffed. *“Drat?”*

“Well, yes.”

“Should I decode that?”

“Well…Jimmy and Rock were pals on *Giant.* I was hoping that he might provide…”

“A perspective on Rock’s bent, and your conundrum? Maybe buffer you and me getting down to brass tacks?”

The martinis materialized. Phyllis mainlined half of hers. She said, “Drat. What have I gotten myself into?”

I lit a cigarette. “You love him, right?”

“What’s not to love? He’s every Minnesota farm girl’s dream. But *this* girl has lived in Hollywood for a while, and I’ve heard the rumors, and I know how to read signs.”

“How discouraged are you?”

Phyllis laffed. “Not that much. Part of me knows that it’s more than a little bit of a lark.”

I mainlined my martini. It payload-packed the dexies. I rippled resurgent and revitalized.

"I'm on your side, and Rock's side. 'Love conquers all,' and all that happy horseshit. The magazine's on your side, and Rock's side, but the magazine is *Confidential,* with all the skank that implies. We've got to dispel one set of rumors, and create a contradictory, second set to eclipse it. Bob Harrison's committed to an eternal triangle scenario. That means we need to find a bait girl, and L.A.'s the bait girl capital of the world. And, for what it's worth, I like your idea of a catfight at the Mocambo."

Phyllis popped the olive out of her drink and snarfed it. I tossed my olive on her place mat. She snarfed it, quick-quick.

"Rock's a sweetie pie. Who am I to demand perfection in a man?"

"You've got every right to demand more than you damn well might have to settle for."

Phyllis said, "Ouch."

I said, "I'm sorry. That was harsh."

Phyllis went *Pshaw.* "It's not like I'm a hundred percent discouraged."

"Give me the good news, then."

"Rock took an inkblot test once, in the Navy. He saw butterflies and snakes, which symbolize a feminine nature and the penis. He took a second test, after the war—and this time he scored much more butch."

I sighed, sad-ass. "Shit, don't break my heart."

Phyllis snatched my martini and drained it dry. Her eyeballs boinged. Now, she's all rectitude—ripped to the gills.

"It's a lark, right?"

"Right."

"And there's no guarantee it'll *remain* a lark, right?"

"Right."

"So I should be prepared for any and all outcomes, right?"

"Right."

"Didn't you say something about us getting down to brass tacks?"

I leaned close. Phyllis leaned close. We deep-dialed our eyes and *cleaved* close. She wore Chanel No. 5. I wore Lucky Tiger. Our separate scents sizzled and merged, *molto bene.*

"You'll want out sooner or later. You won't want him hurt in the press, but you'll want your fair share of the pie. I'll handle the entrapment and all the other shitwork for ten percent of the initial property and revenue split, and ten percent of your alimony, in perpetuity."

Phyllis kissed me. She found the fit and held my head and leg-clamped me under the table. The kiss lingered *loooooong.* We wrapped ourselves into it. Our scents merged that much more. Some geeks at adjoining tables whistled and clapped.

—

11:00 p.m. Googie's is late-nite lulled. The dinner crowd's thinned threadbare. Phyllis split. I brooded and brain-broiled my *Rebel Without a Cause* caper.

My dexie decibel helped. Vodka shots sheared the rough edges. I worked the pay phone. I called Harry Fremont and my contact at Sheriff's R & I. Dig: Get me homo-hive roust sheets on Jimmy Dean, Sal Mineo, Nick Ray. Check for juvie sheets on Natalie Wood. Solicit hometown paper per Nick Adams.

The counter man divvied dish. Nick Ray placed take-out orders nitely. Juan the fry cook schlepped the shit up to Nick's boss bungalow at the Marmont. The orders came in late. There was bupkes tonite. I told Juan to burn a batch of burgers and send them up *now.*

The Marmont was four blocks west on Sunset. I shagged my Packard pimpmobile and crawl-cruised on over. I saw three hunky hot rods stashed just off the Strip. *Craaaaazy* chrome creations. Kool kandy-koat kolors.

One '40 Ford coupé. One '46 Merc. One *cholo*-chopped Chevy van, replete with flame paint job. All three flew flags for the "Nick's Knights Kar Klub, Limited."

The flags wiggled on whip antennas and flat-out flew in the wind. I fantasized shivering shit.

Nick Ray in tight toga and a simpering Caesar haircut. He's holding a movie megaphone and sporting a spiked collar. He's Mr. Fasco Fantastico at the all-boy bacchanal. As *real-life* proof—there's Nick's Knights, poised and posed by their sleds.

Three hunky monkeys. Ruff trade tricksters and buff B-boys. Black leather jackets, pomade pompadours, and pegged pants. Rodent Robbie ratted these punks. They were Nabob Nick's crowd-scene extras. They went out on "chickie runs" and "panty raids." Nudnik Nick held swishy sway over them.

I pulled up and parked on the bungalow access road. Juan the fry cook's junk jalopy was parked just ahead. I walked up to bungalow row. I peeped whipped-wide windows. I saw sapphic *soixante-neuf* and Marilyn Monroe blowing Joe DiMaggio. I saw a dusky dominatrix whip producer Sam Spiegel. I saw Funky *Führer* Nick Ray blaspheme, bloviate, and bluster to his actor acolytes.

He's the Father *Führer,* the Daddy Despot, the Doofus *Duce* who's exhumed mad Mussolini. He's brewing up bracing bromides. It's populist pap across all specious spectra. He's stamping it Stalinist. He's looping in Lenin and marginal Marx. It's the actors' art to subsume the rule of law and the ordered society. It's *ART* to sack sacred synagogues, chain church doors, and retorch Joan of Arc at the stake. It's sicknik sexual liberation, by way of the maladroit Marquis de Sade. He's pitching *Sex/Sex/Sex/* and *Love Me/Love Me/Love Me*—and I will beatifically bestow upon you the gilded gift of *MOTIVATION*—which will unlock all the doors of your life.

His kiddie korps is digging it. They're bopped back in beanbag chairs. They're biting the burgers I bought them. They're big-eyed behind Big Nick's bullshit. There's Jimmy Dean and Natalie Wood. There's sloe-eyed Sal Mineo. That blond cat's Nick Adams. I've seen that Dennis Hopper hump on TV. They're Nihilist Nick's hip Hitler *Jugend,* ten years post–V-E Day.

I unpeeped the window and broomed back down to my sled. Memo to Chief Bill Parker: I got your derogatory profile, hanging a hard fucking yard.

Something was brew-brew-brewing. It had to break up and boil over, *soon.* I hunched low and peeped the hot rod punks. They popped hoods and adjusted fan belts. They poured quik-start in quad carburetors and goosed the gas *loud.* They made big noise. They torqued and toxified the air outside the Chateau Marmont. Then the moment of *Achtung!!!!!* arrived.

The punks froze. Eyes right, all *Kameraden.* There's Nick Ray in a cool khaki jumpsuit. He's Rommel, reborn. He's got an Iron Cross pinned to one pocket. He's wearing a Desert Korps hat. He's got a movie camera strapped to one shoulder. Jimmy Dean and Nick Adams stand behind him. They're his suck-up subalterns.

The punks salaamed and saluted. Nick Ray ran to the Chevy van. *Raus mit uns!!!!! Mach schnell!!!!!* All subalterns and B-boys to the Chevy van now!!!!!

The crew cringed and complied, toot-fucking-sweet. The van U-turned and booked west on Sunset. I U-turned and tailed it.

We struck off down the Strip and bombed through Beverly Hills.

My Packard pimpmobile hovered three car lengths back. Beverly Hills to Holmby Hills to the East Bel-Air gate. Up to Westwood and the UCLA campus.

The van cut south on Hilgard. It decelerated down to a crawl. I crawled and kept perfect pace. We were on Sorority Row now. Note the big Tudor and sparkle-Spanish houses. Note the Greek symbols embossed by the doors.

It was midnite. It was quiet and moon-muzzled dark. The driver rolled down his window and pointed across the street. Somebody said, “Establishing shot.” A back window slid down. Nick Ray held his camera out and rolled film. I decelerated and pulled to the curb. The *Führer* van U-turned and parked in front of a faux-château sorority house.

The Desert Korps decamped. That’s the B-Boys, Nick Ray, Jimmy, and Nick Adams. A B-boy held Ray’s camera cord and a spotlight gizmo. Ray gave the high sign. They walked six abreast. They crossed the sidewalk and trampled the front lawn. They hit the porch. Nick Adams pulled a set of picks and unlocked the door. It’s *soooooo* sinister—the six sickos slide and slither inside.

I heard nothing. I saw nothing. No light went on. I got out and jogged up to the door. It stood ajar. I heard wicked whispers and *sssshhh, sssshhh* upstairs.

The camera light snapped on. A beam bounced across upstairs walls and closed doors. I heard a door open. A girl said, “What’s that?” A girl said, “Who’s there?”

Then door kicks/shrill shrieks/light beams on dorm doors and double sets of bunk beds—

Then college girls in nightgowns and pajamas. They’re kicking off their covers and tumbling out of bed. They’re running straight into bright light and the Desert Korps with their hands out to GRAB.

Nick Ray yelled, *“Chickie run!!!”*

Jimmy yelled, *“Panty raid!!!!!”*

Spotlight beams bounced. I saw short shots of grabs at pajama tops and nightgowns. I saw panties pulled down to the knees. I heard screams overlap.

I ran upstairs. Half-nude girls dodged grabbing hands and bouncing light and ran from *der* Desert Korps demons. I pile-pounded into them. I dumped the fucko *Führer*’s camera and smashed the bouncing-light machine. I got a fade-out shot. It’s Jimmy Dean with pink panties pulled over his face.

I saw a fire-alarm switch wired to a wall mount. I swatted the switch and instigated deep darkness. A siren shrieked shrill. The girls screamed into it. They ran left and hit the back stairs. The Desert Korps ran to the main stairway. They couldn't see me. I couldn't see them. I pulled my belt sap and sapped black leather and coarse khaki. They made with the motivation and bitch-bleated. I might have sapped my pal Jimmy. So what if I did?

MY BOSS BACHELOR PAD

West Holly*weird*

5/12/55

I ran the radio. KKXZ—le jazz hot levied with listless bop ballads that blew blue and nodded off to nothingness. A low-watt/storefront station. Above Sultan Sam's Sandbox and Rae's Rugburn Room.

I was laid low, bent bare, and stripped to striation on the Isle of Deep Despair. The Westwood caper cornholed me. I humped Hilgard to Sunset. I ripped rubber just as the fuzz and fire engines arrived. The Afrika Korps beat it southbound. Their goofy getaway masked their insidious intent. A moment to maul my memory: Jimmy Dean, with pink panties stretched eyeballs to neck.

Nasty Nat's Soul Patrol popped the airwaves. Nat read local news spots before he samba'd back to his soporific sounds of the nite. He kicked off with his "Cutie."

UCLA. Sorority row. Panty raid at Chi Beta Gamma. The fuzz arrive. There's a garland of girls, wrapped in robes and issuing indignation. Four girls put it off on the SAE boys or USC football studs. One girl called it "more evil than that. These guys were older. One guy carried a camera. They ripped our robes, and tried to shoot a nudie film right there."

Nasty Nat put down some pooh-pooh patter. "UCLA ain't the ghetto, sisters. And I'm sure those young buck cops will be back to ask you to stage in-the-buff reenactments."

Ouch.

Nasty Nat said, "It's crime on the dime, tonite. The some might say infamous LAPD Hat Squad shot it out with those two steakhouse rapist-robbers. It went down at Tommy Tucker's Playroom on Washington and La Brea. One man escaped in the mad melee. *Muerto* at the scene: Richie 'The Dutchman' Van Duesen/white male American/age thirty-eight. Still at large: George 'Fat Boy' Mazmanian/white male American/age forty-two. The Fat Boy is purportedly armed and dangerous, so watch out."

Nasty Nat mimicked the *Confidential* style. It gored my goat. He cut from crime on the dime to bleak blues from the Synagogue Sid Trio. Dig: Sid on bass sax, Bobby Horvitz on flügelhorn, Aaron Adelman on drums. The piece: "Premature Funeral March for Gamal Abdel Nasser and King Farouk." Nat laid down the intro. He closed with "These cats run long." One, two, three—*shalom,* cats.

Synagogue Sid blatted his sax. Bobby Horvitz flaunted his flügelhorn. Aaron Adelman drilled his drums. I doused the volume. I got imperiously impatient. Where's Miss Blind Item? Where's her cruel critique of *Confidential*'s Caryl Chessman piece??? Where's her fry-the-cocksucker rebuttal???

I was itchy/antsy/fraught/fragged and dexie-ditzed out of my gourd. I got out my notepad and skimmed '52 to '55 *Confidentials*. I'm a snitch, a rat fink, a stool pigeon, a squealer, a quisling, a rogue dog who bites the hand that feeds him. Let's do legal prep work for Chief William H. Parker.

Bill Parker and me. We're like *that* now. Let's take down *Confidential.*

Back issues. Clipped-on legal files. Lawyers' notes and field reports. Look for loopholes. Dippy depositions to dice and deep-six. The mag hired ace legal beagles. The mag had Freddy O. for strongarm vetting and verification. All our slurs and slander slams are true. We stand by our shit. Yeah, but if anybody's prone to fuck it all up, it's yammeringly yours truly.

I skimmed back issues. I read legal briefs and my own notes. I muddled through mellifluous memories.

December '52: "Showgirl Sells Shares in Self!!!"

Bland, by and large. A stock-market spoof. Vetted by a kid clerk. No slander slams or libel loops here.

December '52: "Exposed: Love in the UN!!!!"

Tattle text. The Multinational March of Miscegenation. Minor minions *j'accused.* I'm bored already. No vetting notes. Doofus diplomats never sue.

November '53: "Marked for Death: Walter Winchell, Bishop Fulton Sheen!!!"

Anti-Commie pap. Lawyers cite unnamed sources. Snoresville, U.S.A.

March '54: "Why Orson Welles Bit the Lip of Eartha Kitt."

Miscegenation—*Confidential*'s merry mainstay. Orson was boning irksome Eartha. A Vegas stringer fed us the bit. Eartha said goons broke down her door. She was right. I hired the goons. Eartha demanded cold compensation. I slid her ten thou. Orson said, "You're a shit, Freddy." I bitch-slapped him.

This piece was bad juju and a potential Parker payoff. It exposed the mag's strong-arm methods and exposed *ME.* I put it in my secret Parker dirt file.

November '54: "Christine Jorgensen's Romance with a Vanderbilt Stepson."

He-she hijinx. Ex-man Christine set Vanderbilt up and had me shoot sneak pix. She wanted the publicity—to goose her dead-stalled film career. I shook down Vanderbilt for twenty thou. Christine and I split the gelt. *Confidential* published a pablum-packed piece that went *pffft.* Christine was pissed. She wanted to see some wild and wet woof-woof. This piece could mulch the magazine, *baaaaaad.* Ditto, Fred Otash. It was *goooood* Parker file fodder.

January '55: "Eartha Kitt and her 'Santa Baby' Arthur Loew, Jr."

Miscegenation marches on. The old colored canary/white sugar daddy bit. It's Irksome Eartha *again.* Eartha threatens to sue. I'm the bagman. *Confidential* coughs up cold cash.

Synagogue Sid blatted on. I yawned. Where's Miss Blind Item? It's almost 2:00 a.m.

March '55: "The Wife Clark Gable Forgot." Yawn. "The Girl in Gregory Peck's Bathtub." Man, it's sacked-out soporific.

Synagogue Sid bleated bleak and deep diminuendoed. I heard the mike-magnified cough of coins dropped in a pay phone. I kicked the volume. Nasty Nat said, "Miss Blind Item's back—so I know we're going to be talking *Confidential* magazine and the infamous Caryl Chessman case."

Miss Blind Item said, "Hey, Nat. What's shaking?"

I dug her voice. It was cool contralto and *mucho* Midwest.

"Nothing but the leaves on the tree, baby."

"Locate me, Nat. Where did we leave off last time?"

"Well, we did the long-range overview of *Confidential,* and we both commented on how atypically liberal their coverage of the Chessman case was, given that *Confidential*'s been a Red-baiting and race-baiting rag from jump street."

Nasty Nat told it true. August '52. The cheesy Chessman piece. The mag was naïvely new then. I didn't sign on till fall '53.

Miss Blind Item laffed. "*Confidential*'s got style, baby. You're starting to alliterate already."

Nasty Nat wolf-whistled. "And you've got *cojones,* as our Mex cousins say, calling a Negro man 'baby.' "

Miss Blind Item relaffed. Phone-booth sounds went mike-magnified. There's a match strike and exhale. She's smoking a cigarette.

"I'm an actress, Nat. You can always count on me to go for a provocative effect."

"Disc jockeys go the same route. Our sponsors here encourage it. Come on, Sultan Sam's Sandbox and Rae's Rugburn Room? They ain't paying me for bland."

"Talk about alliteration, *baby.*"

Nasty Nat said, "You ain't Miss Blind Item, you the sexy succubus. Now, moving along, before you get me in trouble with the Klan, the Catholic Legion of Decency, and Chief Parker his own self, why don't you drop the basic lowdown on the Chessman case on all the folks out in Radioland."

Miss Blind Item refed the pay phone. Dimes dipped, nickels notched down the slot.

"It's early '48. Chessman's fresh out of Folsom. He's stealing cars and committing armed robberies. He's utilizing a hot '46 Ford as his rape vehicle, and he's affixed a phony red light to it, so he can pass himself off as a policeman. Now, he's prowling lovers' lanes in Pasadena and up above Hollywood. He's robbing young couples making out. On two legally affirmed occasions, he forcibly removes young women from *their* cars, and places them in *his* car. That legally constitutes kidnapping. Once they're in *his* car, he sexually assaults them, which constitutes a second, specific set of felony charges. His two *certified* victims conclusively identified him. He was convicted at trial and sentenced to death. Much has been made of the fact that Chessman did not kill anyone. *C'est la guerre,* sweetie. The Little Lindbergh Law applies. Now, that evil no-goodnik has become an ace jailhouse lawyer, and he's beaten back a slew of attempts to send him to the green room, where he most devoutly belongs. He wrote a book, which was published last year, called *Cell 2455, San Quentin.* In it, he fatuously asserts his innocence of the Red Light Bandit crimes and demands a redress of the entire American legal system."

Nasty Nat went *whew!* "I'm renaming you, and it ain't 'baby' or 'sweetie.' And you ain't really Miss Blind Item, you more the 'Vindictive Vixen,' which prompts me to ask you why you so het up on this case, when just about everybody *I* know thinks Chessman got railroaded, and these justice-minded folks *I* know are all doing their darnedest to make sure he *don't* go to that green room."

Go, Nasty Nat. You snagged it on the snout. Baby, sweetie, Miss Item—why you calling in to my radio show?

"It's dawning on me, sugar. *You* got a personal stake in this whole Chessman hullabaloo. That means there's something you haven't told us."

Miss Blind Item lit a cigarette. I heard the match flare and exhale.

"There was a third victim. She came forth and identified Chessman, but the DA chose not to have her testify at trial. The sexual assault that Chessman perpetrated against her was especially vile and vicious. Bluntly put, she went insane, and has spent the past seven years in Camarillo. The young woman was a friend of mine. We studied at a prestigious acting school in New York together, back in late '47. That's the long and short of it, Nat. I'm on leave from a gig in New York now, so I thought I'd make a little ruckus in my friend's hometown, and maybe take a little drive up to Camarillo."

Es la verdad. I was at Hollywood Station that night. I saw Miss Third Victim walk in and collapse on the squadroom floor.

GRIFFITH PARK

Above the *Rebel Without a Cause* Shoot

5/13/55

Ouch!!!!!

Outdoor surveillance. The withering worst. Dirt on my duds and briar bristles brushing my ass. I'm up some hellhole hiking trail. There's a noxious noonday sun singeing me. I've got binoculars trenchantly trained on the Observatory lot.

It's lunchtime. The lot's cordoned off for cast and crew, exclusive. It's loaded with hot rod heaps and kool kat kids couched within. Robbie Molette's hopping, heap to heap. He's pushing pills and reefers. I'm peeping the transactions. It's a rippling replay of last nite's panty raid/chickie run.

There's Nick Ray, Nick Adams, my putz pal Jimmy Dean. The gang's got up in street threads. There's no Afrika Korps kouture and *Sieg Heil* today. There's the three B-boys. They're still dressed in blasphemous black. I memorized the Chevy van plate stats last nite. They came back to one Chester Alan Voldrich/white male American/age twenty-six. Dig: he bossed the nabobically noted Hollywood High Rat Pack, circa '49. They rolled elderly fruits and Mickey Finn'd Marymount girls and got in their pants.

That was *goooooood* derogatory dish. Bill Parker would crap-his-pants *cream. And*—per Nick Adams/real name Adamshock/DOB 7-10-31/Nanticote, Pennsylvania:

No arrests/eight rousts on suspicion: GTA, flimflam, malicious mischief, Stat Rape, Peeping Tom, pushing pornographic snapshots. *Plus:* gay-bar roust sheets on Jimmy Dean and Nick Ray. Confirmed per Jimmy: Robbie Molette's "Human Ashtray" shtick. Confirmed per Nick Ray: rousted at the Saints and Sinners Drag Ball. Whoa, Nellie—Nick was a knockout in his Red Guard empire gown. *Plus:* Natalie Wood and Sal Mineo, popped at the "Jailbait Jamboree" at Linda's Little Log Cabin.

It's all Kids Run Wild/Kids Led Astray. It summoned me to serve Bill Parker *and* my *meshugenah* magazine. It summoned me to save Jimmy D. from himself.

I binocularized the big parking lot. Robbie pushed pills. Jimmy and Nick Adams shot craps on a Nazi-flag blanket. Jimmy called my service and left a message: "See you at Googie's tonite." *That* meant *this:* he didn't make me at the panty raid/chickie run.

I binocularized. Chester Voldrich and his B-boy buddies sniffed a glue-soaked rag. Natalie Wood basked in a bikini. She reclined on the roof of a '52 Eldo. Nick Ray walked by and kissed her thighs on the sly.

—

I walked into Hollywood Station. The desk sergeant moaned. *Oh shit—it's Freddy O.*

I walked up to the squadroom. A meter maid tagging tickets sighed. *Oh shit—it's Freddy O.* The squad lieutenant saw me. He rolled his eyes and slammed his door. *Oh shit—it's Freddy O.*

I looked for Colin Forbes and Al Goossen. They bossed the Chessman case, back in '48. There they are. They're Hollywood Squad lifers—they've still got the same two desks. They're workhorses worn weary. They're working. The squadroom was otherwise dead.

They saw me. They shared a look. *Oh shit—it's Freddy—*

I pulled a chair over. Forbes said, "Hi, Freddy." Goossen said, "Freddy's slumming. That means he wants something."

I said, "Chessman. The magazine wants to atone for that boo-hoo piece they published three years ago. There's some rumors percolating on the third victim. I was here when she came in, if you recall."

Forbes lit a cigarette. "That's right. You called Queen of Angels when she fainted."

Goossen lit a cigarette. "Chessman bit her forty-three times. *You'd* faint, too. She went straight from Queen of Angels to Camarillo, and the last I heard, she was still in shock. Don't put her in the magazine, Freddy. Show some class for once in your life."

I let it go. "Do you recall her name?"

Forbes shook his head *nein.* Goossen shook his head *nyet.* They revealed zilch. My reptile rep rubbed them raw.

"What's the story on her? Can you give me that, without naming names?”

Goossen kicked his chair back. “She was an L.A. girl, home for a visit. She was studying at the Actors Studio in New York, which is some sort of hotshot deal. So, she’s home, and she’s staying with her folks. She’s also a lezzie, which her folks know nothing about. On the night in question, she picks up a girl at Rhonda’s Rendezvous, and they parked on the shoulder at Mulholland and Beverly Glen. Chessman pulls his red light number, sees the girls making out and flips his lid. He throws the pickup girl out of the car, escorts the victim girl to his car, does what he does to her, and she makes her way here, under her own power. She never testified in court, and she didn’t need to. Judge Fricke heard the story, and *that’s* what convinced him that Chessman should burn. And he *will* burn, sooner or later, despite all his books and legal appeals, and Marlon Brando and all the other Hollywood geeks waving placards.”

Forbes said, “Shove your ‘rumors percolating’ up your ass, Freddy. You’ve got your own perv-o agenda going on this deal, so take it with you when you walk out the door, sometime in the next five seconds.”

—

Perv-o agenda.” *Oh shit—it’s Freddy O.* My old cop colleagues lay on the love. Freddy O’s the Shakedown King. He’s the Shaman of Shame. He’s the Pervdog of the Nite. Where’s the payoff here, Freddy? There’s got to be a payoff with you.

Why mince words? *Cherchez la femme.* It’s Miss Blind Item. She’s scorched herself under my skin.

I drove by the Ranch Market. I checked my phone slips. Jack the K. called. “I’m at the hotel. Come by at six. I’m having people up for drinks.”

I’ll be there, Jack. Fetch, Pervdog, fetch. I’ll go by your favorite pharmacy first. I know what you like. Why mince words? I like it, too.

Miss Blind Item. She studied with Miss Third Victim. They were New York friends. A “prestigious acting school.” Late ’47.

Al Goossen. *The* Actors Studio. “Some sort of hotshot deal.”

So—

Quo vadis, Freddy? Where to now?

I know. Let’s slam Mr. Blacklist. He always gives up the goods.

—

Jack Lawson. John Howard Lawson. Anglicized from Levy or some such. One studly Stalinist. He tramples Trotskyites and hexes HUAC to hell. Folks hate Jack. It's that perennial politics and personality parlay. Jack's determinedly dyspeptic. He's a *schmuck, a schlemiel, a schmendrick,* and a *schlimazel.* The PD and DA Ernie Roll own him covertly. Let's bop back to '40. Jack's the Party's Kultural Kommissar and hard-hearted hatchet man.

Enter Budd Schulberg. He's a ripsnorting writer and a marvelous *mensch.* He's writing *What Makes Sammy Run?* The Party demands rafts of revisions. Budd's a Party man maimed by *mucho* misgivings. Like Studly Stalin's purges that mowed millions dead. Jack mediates a meet and sets the spot. It's some comrade's casa off Hollywood and Fairfax. Budd is suddenly summoned. Jumpy Jack's there. Likewise the viperish V. J. Jerome. V.J.'s Jack's Ko-Kultural Kommissar. V.J. and Jack pack the Party's one-two punch.

V.J. and Jack. They berate Budd for two days, stridently straight. You *will* rewrite your bourgeois book. It must be proudly proletarian. You're a revisionist, a refusenik, a deviationist delinquent. You're a passive pawn of the fascist elite.

Here's the punch line. The comrade's casa is bugged, rugs to rafters. The comrade called in the cops. The Hitler-Stalin pact did it. The comrade ain't no Commie no more.

Jack berates Budd. Jack reads him the ripe riot act. Jack motormouths on many topics. Jack pounds popular front groups and takes them to task. Jack jacks off à la idiot ideologues worldwide. The PD shoots the bug tapes to State HUAC. Fourteen Smith Act indictments result.

The bug's still in place. Jack's sublet the comrade's casa since '48. *Ex*-Commies visit Jack. They juke him with jungle juice and get him to jaw. Jack jaws on overdrive. He's every Red Squad cop and dirt digger's dream. '48 to '55. That's seven years. The bugs remain in place. Jack don't know shit.

I drove over and parked outside Casa Comrade. I brought Jack a jug of Jim Beam. Jack sat on his front steps. I saw him. He saw me. It was *Oh shit—Freddy Otash,* redux.

I got out and walked up. Jack went *Sieg Heil* and hummed "Das Horst Wessel Lied." I yukked and tossed Jack his jug. He yanked the cap and yodeled a big blast.

"Freddy the O. *Gauleiter* for the occupation forces of Chief William

H. Parker."

"You know who I work for, Jack. I'm a free-speech man, just like you."

Jack grabbed his crotch. "Free speech is a shuck. It's a smoke screen to cosmeticize the fascist agenda. *Confidential* riles up the *schvarzers* and *faygeles.* In that sense, it's an organ of revolutionary intent."

I laffed. "I'll tell Bob Harrison that."

"Tell Bob I saw his first wife at a Scottsboro Boys rally, back in '30-something. She was holding hands with a *shvoogie* and Pete Seeger's Filipina girlfriend. They were singing 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot'—off-key, no less."

I stuffed a fifty in Jack's shirt pocket. Jack reyodeled Jim Beam. He hummed "Lili Marlene" and the love-death bit from *Tristan und Isolde.*

"Freddy the O. wants something. He never comes just to *schmooze.*"

I said, "The Actors Studio. The late '40s. I know you go back to the Group Theatre, so I thought you might be able to help me."

"The Actors Studio. *Oy.* Not a revolutionary organ, susceptible to takeover by Comrade John Howard Lawson and the hundreds of young Red Guard majorettes eager to suck his big dialectical cock."

I said, "Come on, Jack. I was thinking you could give me some names."

Jack went *mucho* outraged. "*Me?* Name *names*? You think the *apparatchik* to end all *apparatchiks* would name names and betray the Fourth Apparatus of the Central Soviet?"

I said, "Jack, you're a pisser."

Jack stumbled into Casa Comrade. He left the door open. I saw him banging bookshelves and tossing tomes on the floor.

I lit a cigarette. Jack barged back outside. He passed me a school-type yearbook. It was buckram-bound and gilt-embossed. The cover read: *The Actors Studio/1946–47.*

"Thanks, Jack."

Jack hummed "The Internationale." "I know about the bug, Freddy. My *schvartze* cleaning lady discovered it when I first moved in."

I was floored and flat-flabbergasted. I grabbed Jack's jug and jammed down the juice. The world rippled and revised itself right before my eyes.

"You could have pulled it. You'd have saved some comrades of yours a whole lot of grief."

"Maybe I didn't want to. Maybe they deserved what they got. Maybe I thought I'd fuck with History and roll the dice for a while."

—

I traveled Trans-Jack Airways. The Lawson-Kennedy loop. It flew Casa Comrade to Beverly Hills. I buzzed by the Beverly Wilshire Pharmacy and filled Jack the K.'s order. Spaceman Jack would orbit tonite.

I hit the Beverly Hills Hotel. It was a back-bungalow bash. I lit through the lobby and landed right on cue. Women outnumbered men six to one. It was all stacked starlets and porko politicians. DA Ernie Roll and AG Pat Brown. Both quash-*Confidential* conspirators. Governor Goodie Knight. Colored congressman Adam Clayton Powell. Note his "Kiss Me, I'm Irish" campaign button.

I crashed the crowd. I popped out to a poolside porch and straddled a deck chair. A brisk breeze induced *aaahhhs.* I studied the Actors Studio book.

I poured through picture-packed pages. No-name kids built sets. Lee Strasberg made like Moses and laid down the law. I noted name actors and nudniks I'd seen on TV. I hit a section marked "1946–47 class." Kids congregated on bleachers and smiled, heartbreak hopeful. Page twenty-two popped out at me. I *thought* I saw—

Some names and no-names mingled. Kim Hunter, Ralph Meeker. Two no-name males. I recognized Reed Hadley of *Racket Squad.* There's Julie Harris and boss Barbara Bel Geddes. There's the wounded waif I saw at Hollywood Station during the Red Light Bandit's rampage.

She's hopeful here. She's heartfelt. She's wearing a paint-smeared smock and saddle shoes. She's standing beside a lissome light-haired woman I'd never seen before.

A name list laid out the players. Miss Third Victim was Shirley Tutler. The light-haired woman was Lois Nettleton.

Jack the K. walked up. I tossed him the pharmacy bag. Pill vials vibrated and did the shimmy-shimmy shake.

"Dare I ask what it cost?"

I said, "Zilch. The pharmacist's a defrocked physician. He owes me numerous favors."

Jack relit his cigar. "I'll be a defrocked U.S. senator, if I can't raise a whole lot of money tonight."

"There's not a lot of money in the next room. The girls don't have it, and the political guys never give it away."

Jack chortled. "Give me a good one, Freddy. My sisters like dish on handsome young actors and their secret lives. And don't give me Rock Hudson, because that's yesterday's news."

I said, "James Dean is known as the 'Human Ashtray.' "

"That's fairly unsavory."

"Barbara Payton's on the skids. She's car-hopping at Stan's Drive-In, across from Hollywood High."

Jack said, "Old news. You set me up with Babs when you were a cop and I was a congressman."

I said, "Katharine Hepburn is really a man. *Whisper*'s running the story next month. She underwent hormone therapy in the Soviet Union."

"I'll live with it. As long as she's not a Commie or a Republican."

My time was up. Jack's eyes wiggled and wandered. He's Two-Minute Jack with his minions. He's Ten-Minute Jack in the sack.

"It was good seeing you, Freddy."

"Always a pleasure, Jack."

—

The sun salved me. The breeze went warm and bid me to bask. I dipped and dozed. The bungalow behind me went muffled and mute. I saw Shirley Tutler's picture and heard Miss Blind Item's voice. Soft sounds soothed me. Reverie. I'm rapt and reverential. I'm a kid back in church.

Wheels popped over pavement. Dishes rattled. Somebody said, "I didn't know you knew Jack."

I opened my eyes. Oh shit—it's Rodent Robbie Molette. A hairnet hid his fried hair. He's Busboy Robbie today. He's rolling a room-service cart.

"Everybody knows Jack. He exemplifies our new egalitarian society. It's why he talks to guys like you and me."

Robbie scratched his balls. "Be that as it may, I should take advantage of running into you, and tell you the latest scuttlebutt from the shoot."

I said, "I'm listening."

"You *should* listen, given the gist of what I'm about to tell you."

"Robbie, don't draw this—"

"Okay, here's the latest and greatest, which ain't so great in my view. A, Nick Ray's talking 'escalation.' He wants 'the kids' to 'plumb their motivation' and 'escalate their mischief.' B, he's talking hot-prowl 459's, liquor-store robberies, and making some sort of 'radical alternative movie,' that will 'complement and enlarge the meaning of,' this lox *Rebel Without a Cause,* which in my view is headed for the drive-in circuit in Dogdick, Arkansas."

I pondered the poop. Robbie futzed with his hairnet.

"You burned me, fucker. You messed with my good looks, because you're jealous of me."

—

Stood up, stiffed, dropped dry, and jilted. Dumped for some psycho Film *Führer.* Bereft like some left-behind belle at the ball.

Jimmy no-showed. I waited at Googie's. No Jimmy. I called my answering service. No messages. I called Jimmy's pad. No answer. I went by Jimmy's pad. No lights lit, no Jimmy. I cruised by the Chateau Marmont and bopped back to bungalow row. I peeped Nick Ray's bungalow. I saw Nazi Nick pour the pork to Natalie Wood while Sal Mineo snapped snapshots.

I bolted back to my sled and slipped southbound. I was whip-wigged and wound up *waaaaaaay* tight. A new notion nudged me. It pertained to Miss Blind Item. I stopped at a pay phone and called crime lab rajah Ray Pinker.

I outlined my plan. I pledged five yards. Rajah Ray said, "Sure—I'll do it." I ran back to my Packard pimpmobile and pointed it southbound. I *dove* into darktown. Vermont to Slauson, eastbound and *dooooooooown.*

I passed Mumar's Mosque, Mama Mattie's Massage Paradise, and the Mad Monk Klub. I hustled by Happytime Liquor, Happy Hal's Liquor, Hillhaven Liquor, and liquor lockers lit by signs that said LIQUOR and no more. I saw the signs for Sultan Sam's Sandbox and Rae's Rugburn Room. There's my dizzy destination: KKXZ Radio.

A wino weaved by. I curb-parked my pimpmobile right by the

Rugburn Room door. The wino whistled and gassed on the tritone paint job. I tossed him a ten-spot and told him to watchdog my baby.

Back stairs ran me past the Rugburn Room and up to Radioland. It was beat-to-shit bohemian and cultivatedly cut-rate.

A wastified waiting room. Album covers stud-stapled to bare walls. They were all Bird. Bird bought the farm and bid us bye-bye in March. Bird beamed beatific now—I'm *muerto, muchachos.* A myriad of mourners scrawled up the white walls. It was all adios, Big Daddy and Hail to the King.

"Write something, Mr. Otash. He won't mind."

I swift-swiveled. Nasty Nat stood there. I recognized his radio voice. He was tall and a fit forty. He dressed cool-cat insurrectionist. I dug his fez/combat fatigues/fruit-boot ensemble.

I pulled my pen and scrawled on the wall. Nasty Nat said, "You're pissed, right? I mean, the magazine's pissed."

"I'm not pissed. I'm intrigued more than anything else. I was thinking you could record a message for me, and make sure that Miss Blind Item hears it the next time she calls in."

"How about a message for Bird? 'Sorry I popped your ass for junk outside the Club Alabam in March of '49.' "

I said, "How do you know I didn't write that on the wall just now?"

Nasty Nat pointed to the sound booth. I followed him over and in. We took the two chairs. The booth boxed us up. We were nudged knee-to-knee.

The Synagogue Sid Trio trickled and trilled. Nasty Nat killed the sound and moved his microphone my way. I excavated my bold bass-baritone.

"Miss Item, my name is Fred Otash. I work for *Confidential,* and I'm a former Los Angeles policeman. I was there at Hollywood Station the night your friend Shirley came in. I agree with your assessment of Caryl Chessman's guilt, and I'd like to discuss with you a second Chessman piece that might serve to set the record straight."

Voilà. That was *goooooooood.* I was cool-cat commanding and concise. Nasty Nat smiled and hit the kill switch.

"I'm pretty sure she'll call in tonight, and I'll make sure she hears your message. And, before you ask, I don't know her righteous name, or anything more about her than you do."

I scoped the bare-bones booth. It's got that rat resort/proud poor folks gestalt.

“You get by on donations, right? Making the rent’s a stretch, and you’re always running on fumes.”

Nasty Nat said, “That’s right.”

I said, “*Confidential*’s a sucker for good jazz, and we’re in business to make friends, regardless of what you might have heard about me, or the magazine itself. I need a favor that only you can perform, and if you *do* perform it, the magazine will drop five hundred clams a month on KKXZ, indefinitely.”

Nasty Nat lit a cigarette. “She’s calling from a pay phone. I can hear her feed the coins in. Does this favor pertain to that?”

I smiled. “That’s right. I need a trace. I need you to call a cop pal of mine within two minutes from the time she gets on the horn with you. It might not work the first time, but it should work sooner or later.”

“She might leave town. This whole deal could go *poof.*”

“You still get the bread.”

“Well then, okay.”

I winked. “I’m going home, to sit by my radio.”

“Tell me something before you go?”

“Sure.”

“What did you write on the wall?”

“I wrote ‘Dear Bird: Thanx for the sounds. Best wishes, Fred Otash.’ ”

Nasty Nat said, “You’re caustic, but you’ll never be hip.”

—

Synagogue Sid serenaded me. I ran my radio low and laid low on my couch. Nasty Nat cut to commercials for Sultan Sam’s Sandbox, Kool Kings, and the Cannonball Adderley Quintet. Then dimes dipped and nickels nudged and slid down a slot. I knew that noise now. I knew it was microphone-magnified.

Silence socked me. I knew why. Nasty Nat put Miss Blind Item on hold and buzzed Ray Pinker.

It’s Tap Try #1. It’s logged in at 1:16 a.m.

I heard fuzz, buzz, radio rasp, and dissonant dial tones. I knew why. Nasty Nat’s playing my plea. I held my breath. Now, she’s back in ripping rejoinder.

“I don’t know, Nat. Is our Mr. Otash looking for a date, or justice for my friend Shirley?"

"It could be both, you know. One don't exclude the other."

I heard tap-taps. *Tension* taps. Miss Blind Item's crammed in a phone booth. She's drumming the wall. It's stagecraft. She's buying time to rig a response. That means she's tweaked, that means she cares.

"Mr. Otash has a reputation, Nat. It precedes him, you might say. I read a piece in the *L.A. Mirror*—last year, I think it was. It described his illegal surveillance methods and alleged that he resorted to physical force in order to quash lawsuits levied against *Confidential.*"

"Well, you know that old saw, right? 'If you want to make an omelet, you've got to break a few eggs.' "

Miss Blind Item laffed. "Not that *Confidential* magazine is much of an omelet, right?"

"You sure got me there, baby."

Silence settled in. Silken, sullen, sickened—who knows? Ardent or artificial—who knows *that*? She's amply ambiguous. It's cold-calculated. She's *leading* me, she's *playing* me, there's something she *wants.*

"A casting director I know told me he beat up Johnnie Ray. *Really,* Nat—*Johnnie Ray*? I met him once, after his gig at the Copa in New York. He was certainly one of the nicest, and certainly *the* least offensive young man that I've ever met. Nothing that I can think of could ever justify that sort of behavior."

Baby, I know just how you feel.

Nasty Nat said, "Yeah, I dig on Johnnie Ray. I spin his discs on the show, every so often."

"Handsome is as handsome does, Nat. I saw Mr. Otash on Paul Coates' show, the last time I passed through L.A. I remember thinking, My, that surely is a most presentable man, which made me doubly sad to have heard the Johnnie Ray story."

Miss Blind Item. I've got you under my skin.

SECURITY OFFICE

The Sleazoid Hollywood Ranch Market
5/14/55

A.M. shitwork. Phone work and field reports. Two per *Rebel Without a Cause.* Mendacious memos to Bondage Bob Harrison and Bill Parker.

I called Nasty Nat at KKXZ. Pathos pounded me. He *lived* at the station. His noxious news: last nite's trace went blooey. Nat said he'd try again tonite. I bid the big bopster bon voyage.

Miss Blind Item. You've got me torched and scorched.

I wrote my report to Bondage Bob. I delivered the dish on Nick Ray's Afrika Korps and described the pustulant panty raid in delirious detail. I omitted Jimmy Dean's presence. I owed Jimmy that. I exorbitantly expanded my memo to Bill Parker. I reported Robbie Molette's dish per *Führer* Nick's "escalation" escapades. Dig, Chief: He's planning hot-prowl 459's and liquor-store 211's. He's the maladroit mastermind of the "motivation" crime. Addled actors bow to his bidding. Nazi Nick's applied the Stanislavskiesque stamp.

I called *Confidential*'s messenger service. A car schlepped down from Sunset and Vine and picked up the pouches. Chop, chop, fucker—deliver them *now.*

My desk phone rang. I picked up. Bondage Bob bored straight in.

"Lew Wasserman just called me. Rock's at the West Hollywood Sheriff's Station. He was booked under his kosher name of Roy Fitzgerald, and it looks like he was drunk or maybe Mickey Finn'd, he might have been blowing some guy in a parked car, and what's for sure is he swung on a deputy, so now he's in custody. All this means I need you and your boys to get him out and clean him up before the press gets wind of it."

I said, "*Jawohl,* boss. I'll jump on it."

Bob bored back in. "We've got to safeguard our exclusive on the 'Rock marries a woman' front. Lew's a hundred percent behind us on this. He wants to call the piece 'Rock's Rocky Road to Marital Bliss,' and he's a hog for the eternal-triangle bit that you and Phyllis have cooked up. That means you've *got* to find us a bait girl to play the other woman. You dig, *bubi*? I want a fresh face, which means nobody we've used before. If Rock falls in the shit on this Sheriff's deal, we can lay the bait girl off as the 'sexy succubus who led the righteously religious Rockster to tasty temptation,' or some such happy horseshit."

I said, "I'll have Rock out inside of an hour."

Bob said, "Lay off the kraut jive. I'm one twenty-fourth Jewish, and I'm touchy about it."

—

Ward Wardell and Race Rockwell rendezvoused with me. We surged up surreptitious. We slid in slick and parked by the jail-exit door. Bondage Bob called ahead and bought the bail bond. Rock stood ready to roll.

Race remained with my sled and sluiced the engine. I'd called ahead and pledged the jail deputies a yard per. Ward and I juked through the jail door. We caught a corridor and sidled up to cellblock row. There's Rock. He's signing autographs for a filthy phalanx of his fellow jailbirds. *Wheww!!!*—they're malodorous *Menschen*—winos, weedheads, K-Y cowboys caught in the act.

Race wrangled Rock. I ran interference. Rock hurled hand kisses back to the boys and ran with us. He was sweaty and swack-back on some kind of hop. His feet flip-flopped on the floor.

We made the door. I barged us out. We ran right into a riotous raft of reporters.

Banzai!!!! Sneak attack!!!! It's Pearl Harbor perpetrated by the putzoid Fourth Estate!!!!

Flashbulb flare. Hurled questions. I heard *Rock, Rock, Rock* and *ARE THOSE RUMORS TR—*

A cordon constricted around us. I pulled my belt sap. Ward pulled his belt sap. We sap-slapped cameras. Flashbulbs shattered and sheared into shards. We sap-bashed heads and scoured scalps and hurled Rock ahead of us. We slid into my sled three across. Race Rockwell goosed the gas. We surfed out to San Vicente and nailed it north to the Strip.

Dig it. *Escape from Stalag 69.* Rock could top-line the flick. He yukked, I yukked. Ward and Race yukked. There's blood in my soul and torn-out teeth stuck to my sap.

Race wound west on Sunset and dipsy-doodled south and north on Crescent Heights. Rock and I hopped out at Googie's. The coffee cave was midmorning lulled. We took my table. Debrief me, Daddy. *Escape from Stalag 69.* What's the priapic prelude here?

I fed Rock my flask and two dexies. I fed myself, likewise. Rock said, "Don't tell me. You want me to lay out the whole sordid tale."

I said, "That's right."

Rock lit a cigarette. "Here's what I recall. I was visiting this kid actor, Nick Adams. *Why?* Because I sensed susceptibility. He's got a little rental house, up north of the Marmont. Okay, I'm there. Nothing much is happening, except I go to the bathroom, and I notice this spare bedroom piled up with hi-fis, TV sets, movie cameras, and all kinds of radio consoles and electrical gear. It's like Nick's running a Sears, Roebuck out of this one room. Then Nick makes me a drink, and there *had* to be something in it, because I go gaga. And…well…there might have been another guy there, but I'm not sure…and…well…the next thing I remember is waking up in jail."

Nick Adams. "Motivation, escalation." Robbie Molette's 459 dish. Rock's Sears, Roebuck shit. It radiated *Burglary Swag.*

"I'll take you home. We've got that fake-wife caper coming up, you'll have two good-looking women fighting over you, and you should get some rest."

Rock went *Why me, Lord?*

—

I pulled into Stan's Drive-In. Babs Payton knew from bait girls. She had a history with Nick Ray. She cadged courses at the Actors Studio West. She knew all within her limited *perv*view. She tattled all for cash and cocaine.

I'd dropped off Rock and rolled by the Ranch Market. I read my two message slips. Bondage Bob and Bill Parker called. I returned the calls. I bagged big bravos for my *Rebel Without a Cause* report. Bob said the *Escape from Stalag 69* cost him six g's. It covered cameras smashed and busted bones set at Central Receiving. He laffed it off.

The *Rebel* report and Rock's tricky triangle made the money minuscule. Parker parsed attaboys. He told me Ernie Roll rhapsodized per the *Rebel* revelations. Meet us at Ernie's office, 4:00 tomorrow.

Babs skated up. She did her signature sideways dip and passed me a pineapple malt. The malt metastasized. A mushroom cloud toxified me. Babs laced *my* malts. Bonded bourbon and Benzedrine bits brought the brew to a head.

I slid our seats back. We got cozy. Babs tucked her legs up and skimmed her skate wheels on the dashboard.

"I need a hundred, Freddy. Regardless of how many topics we cover."

"Okay. Let's start with the Actors Studio. I'm looking for something very specific here. Do they keep a radio and TV tape library on the premises? I'm looking to identify a specific actress by her voice."

Babs lit a cigarette. "Yeah, they do. Their members put on these earmuff thingamajigs and watch the TV and movie stuff on some monitor-type gizmos."

I sipped my malt. The depth charge detonated. *Oooooohhh,* Daddy —

"Second topic. I'm looking for a bait girl. It's a long-range deal, and I'm looking for a new-kid-in-town, who-are-*you*? type."

Babs blew smoke rings. "Let's come back to that one. I've got to put my thinking cap on."

"Okay, here's topic three. Nick Ray. I know you worked as an extra on *They Live by Night,* so that's got to ring some bells."

Babs whooped. "That's the three-cherry jackpot and *two* chapters in my book, *Hollywood Creeps I Have Known.* To begin with, he's a perv of the fake-daddy ilk. He likes it young, and he likes sending young actors out on 'motivational missions,' which he films, and I assume that that would be for kicks in the moment and blackmail purposes somewhere down the line. Do you like it so far?"

I said, "Tell me something I don't know. This juvenile delinquency turkey interests me."

Babs tossed her cigarette. "Nick's got his head goon on all his pictures. On this one, it's this mean little shit, Nick Adams. He's also got his 'Love Boy' and 'Love Girl' on all his pictures, and this time it's your chum Jimmy Dean and Natalie Wood. He's always trying to push these kids into all kinds of scary stuff, and he's got it all justified and sugarcoated to the nth degree. There's an actor on the shoot named Dennis Hopper. He's a customer here, and he's got common sense enough to give Nick a wide berth. Now, Dennis told me that Nick's got Jimmy all hopped-up to play Caryl Chessman, and Jimmy's drooling for the part."

Click, click, click. *That's* a three-cherry jackpot. Yeah, but it's turgidly topical, it's *new* news, Chessman's a headline humper, but *still* —

"Freddy, are you even *listening* to me?"

I said, "Keep going. What else have you got on Chessman?"

"Nothing. Except who wants to see a vital young stud like Jimmy Dean play Caryl—"

"Whoa, Babs. Hold on. Where'd you get that 'vital young stud' line? It's something I've heard before."

Babs scoffed. "I got it from a would-be criminal mastermind named Robbie Molette. He's a regular here, and he's always referring to himself as a 'vital young stud.' I used to shtup his daddy when I was a contract kid at Metro. He also works as a busboy, at the Beverly Hills Hotel, and—"

I cut in. "Babs, *what*? What's with that lightning-bolt look?"

"Nothing. Except you're looking for a bait girl, and Robbie was in last night, and damned if he hasn't put together a stable, and damned if he didn't show me a merchandise book with some very fresh faces."

OUTSIDE NICK ADAMS' RUSTIC RENTAL PAD

West Holly*weird*

5/15/55

Stakeout. *Eine kleine Nachtwerk.* The mad march to 1:00 a.m. and Miss Blind Item. I'd run my radio *loooooooooow.* I'd hear coins slip-slide down that slot. Nasty Nat would try for a trace. I'd hear *Her* voice.

Nutty Nick Adams. There's his chump-change chalet. I'm parked across the street and two doors down. It's a murky moon-mist nite. I'm cunningly camouflaged. Shade-tree shadows shield the shape of my sled.

It's peeper peekaboo. I see Nick's pad. Nick can't see shit. There's window lights. Big beams bounce my way. I possess Peepervision. No one else does.

There's a scurrilous script read. Nick Ray pontificates. Nick A. and Jimmy Dean declaim dialogue.

I hexed the house. I made mental mincemeat of the punks and mocked their motivation. Leave now, feckless fools. I've got work to do inside.

I brought my evidence kit. It contained print gear and Ray Pinker's stop-frame camera. I dunned the DMV. They fed me photostats of three drivers-license applications. I had right thumbprints for Jimmy Dean, Nick Ray, Nick Adams. Pinker's camera light lit latent prints and magnified tents, whorls, and arches. My game was confirmation and/or elimination. If they touched the B and E swag that Rock described, I'd know.

I turned on the radio. Synagogue Sid serenaded me. Sid's bass sax sallied forth. The flügelhorn flew with it. The drums drilled a cool counterpoint. Then that cacophonous coin cough cut in.

Adios, Sid. Nasty Nat's nudged you aside for Miss Blind Item. I ran the radio *looooooooow.* I listened for tone above text. Talk to me, love. Say something, say anything. *Give me your voice.*

Miss Blind Item riffed and rang rapport with Nasty Nat. I listened for tone above text. I nite-dreamed as she talked.

Caryl Chessman would be in L.A. As in soonsville. He had a court appeal downtown. Nick Ray wants Jimmy Dean to play the Red Light Bandit. It surged as subtext and nudged me nonplussed. It couldn't compete with Her Voice. Her vowels suggest the urban Midwest. It's a seen-it-all city voice.

A door slammed. I orbed the chalet. Mark it: 1:23 a.m. The punks pop from the pad. They bag Nick Adams' rental ragtop and roll northbound.

I rolled. It's late, time is tight, you need an hour inside. I *ran* to the door and laid into the lock.

Lock picks and penlight. It's up-close, in-tight work. I jammed a #4 pick in the keyhole and massaged the main spring. Two tumblers tipped. I pulled out the #4 and jammed in a #2. The door jerked from the jamb. I shoulder-shoved it and inched inside.

I locked myself in. I penlight-flashed the main room and dug on the details. Bullfight posters, bongo drums, a TV tuned to a test pattern. Natalie Wood nudie pix tacked to one wall.

It's cheesecake chiaroscuro. Natalie's backlit by flickering flames and feral faces peering out. It's the Afrika Korps, the B-boys, the Nick's Knights Kar Klub. The *Führer*'s face peers out above them. Nick Ray's wearing devil horns and torquing a ten-inch forked tongue.

I cut down the hall. I flashed a bare-mattressed bedroom and a bathroom in bad disarray. My light speared the spare bedroom. My beam swung over the swag.

The hip hi-fis. The cumbersome consoles. The fetchingly fenceable TV sets and camera cascade. They were hurled haphazard and carelessly covered the floor.

I left the room lights off. I got out my gear. I made for the mountain of merchandise and went to work.

My penlight put me in close. I went contraband item to item. I marked manufacturers' ID numbers on my scratch pad. It was all B and E stash. I knew that. It might be traceable to specific burglary lots.

Prints next. That's the tuff part. Dust touch-and-grab surfaces. Daub contrasting-color powder. Put the stop-frame camera up to liftable latents. Expand the images and look for thumbprint configurations. Count tents, whorls, and arches. Compare them to the DMV photostats.

I went at it. I *had* at it, wholesale. I kept the lights off. I penlight-parsed and brushed purple powder over every touch-and-grab surface in sure sight. Finger oil brought up smudges, smears, paltry partial and full fingerprints. I went item to item. I dusted hi-fis/consoles/cameras/TV sets. Smudges, smears, and partials popped up. No glaring glove prints stood out. That was *gooooood.*

I caught two full finger spreads. They popped off a pinewood console. That meant bupkes/zero/zilch. I needed right thumbprints X-clusive.

I worked myself weary. I wound my way down to two portable TV sets.

They had hard-to-hold planes and no handles. They were cumbersome and unwieldy. They were hoist every which way items.

I dusted Set #1. I hit hard surfaces, crevices, cracks. I brought up a right thumbprint. I raised my camera. I zoomed close. I let fly.

The camera magnified. The camera impaled images and brought them up, white-on-black. I counted comparison points. I'd memorized the photostat points. I'd broiled them into my brain. I knew every tent, whorl, and arch.

I counted One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten—

Nick Adams, it's you. You're fucked for 459 PC.

I dusted Set #2. It's hard to hold and pry off the premises. There's that hard-to-hold tube housing.

I dusted it. I pulled Right Thumbprint #2.

I put the camera up to the print. I magnified it. I counted common points. Six points saddened and sickened me. Nine points nullified me. Ten points pounded James Dean, courtroom conclusive.

—

Bait girls. Babs Payton shtups Robbie Molette's dad, circa '47. Rodent Robbie. He's running call girls now. No shit, Sherlock. Robbie's got a merchandise book. Babs reveals fresh faces. It's a nutty non sequitur. It indicates the brute breadth of my *craaaaaaazy* crowded life.

I broomed to the Beverly Hills Hotel. Robbie worked the noon-to-nine swing shift. I parked in the employees' lot and lingered by the locker room door. Robbie rolled up at 11:40. His '49 Ford fed fucked-up fumes to Beverly Hills and beyond. It laid out L.A. as a lung ward.

I coughed up to the car. Robbie popped the door. I scooched in.

Robbie called in some cool.

“Hey, Freddy. What’s shakin’ today?”

I lit a cigarette. Robbie said, “Hey, watch it. Asthma runs in my family.”

“Let’s talk about your family. Like in your dad, who’s a grip at Metro. I see nepotism at work here. Babs Payton and your dad were some kind of an item. And Babs is impressed with your new stable. ‘Fresh faces’ was how she put it.”

Robbie reached under his seat. He pulled out a pink padded notebook. It was embarrassingly embossed “The Young Stud’s Stable.”

I riffled and ran through the pages. “Fresh faces”—yeah. Nepotism—yeah plus. They were Metro contract cooze. The innocent ingénue type. The Hollywood Heartache Class of ’55.

Dad strung strings around Robbie. He passed on his pimp patrimony. I knew the Metro method. The casting cads culled and curried a type. Bryn Mawr, Vassar, Mount Holyoke. This was Ivy League woof-woof deluxe.

“Your dad wants you to keep it localized. The hotel, and nowhere beyond. You suck up to the guests and take it from there. Your dad palms the desk guys and gets the rooms. You do a little matchmaking, and take home your cut.”

Robbie huff-huffed. His dentures dipped out. He’s twenty-two. He’s got dentures. He *needs* a dad.

I reriffled the girl book. A look lassoed me. She’s tall and lioness lithe. She’s chestnut-haired. She’s heaven-sent in heathered tweeds. She’s Bryn Mawr brought to life.

Robbie said, “That’s Janey Blaine. She went to Smith. She’s gigging with Jack tonight.”

‘Jack’? You mean Senator John F. Kennedy?”

“Well, *I* call him *Jack,* and I’m the one who set him up with Janey. He’s meeting her at a Democratic fund-raiser here tonight. It’s my patented ‘Some Enchanted Evening’ scenario, you dig? Janey’s an out-of-town Party functionary, you dig? She sees Jack at the wingding, their eyes meet across a crowded room, and she goes back to his bungalow with him, and stays all night. There’ll be movie big shots at the wingding, and they’ll scope Janey and check out her pedigree at Metro. She’ll get legitimate work out of this gig, you dig?”

I chained cigarettes. “I dig. And I’ll be crashing the gig, by the way. And if I like the way Janey carries herself, I’ll have a long-term gig she won’t be able to resist.”

Robbie sniff-sniffled. His eyes went wet. He trembled. His dentures clack-clacked.

"She resisted me, that's for damn sure."

I resisted the riposte. You'll always have your sister, kid. Chrissy's a hot sketch. She's yours as you live and breathe.

—

Ernie Roll sipped scotch. "Your *Rebel Without a Cause* summary is boffo. Don't you think so, Bill?"

Parker sipped scotch. The DA's sanctum sanctorum featured fishing trophies tricked up on wood-paneled walls. Monster marlin and ossified octopi.

Ernie crapped out at his desk. Parker and I sat in soft leather chairs. The seasick green leather went with the walls.

"It is. We'll get some indictments out of it, and we'll get Freddy to improperly vet the magazine's story, which will give us the double whammy when we put *Confidential* in the shit."

"Get us some good dirt on this James Dean kid, Freddy. He's a big movie star now."

"Freddy's tight with the kid, Ernie. We have to assume he's a source for a lot of this information."

I sipped scotch. "The Chief's right about that, Ernie. That said, I should add that I tossed Nick Adams' pad and took his prints off some hot TV sets. Harry Fremont's got the ID numbers off the merchandise. If the burglaries were reported, he'll nail that punk for a whole flotilla of 459's."

One more misdirection. One more mercy missive for Jimmy the D.

Parker said, "Freddy Otash. Accept no substitutes."

Ernie said, "Lay out some story vettings you were remiss or criminally culpable on, Freddy. And, remember, I'm voluntarily offering up that no-file sheet on you when all this goes to court, so you'll be in the clear on any and all criminal charges."

I cracked my knuckles. "The two Eartha Kitt jobs were dirty. I slapped Orson Welles around. We paid off Eartha on both of them, all off-the-books cash. The pieces were all lies. Race mixing was a hot topic, so we went nuts with it."

Ernie went *Hubba-hubba.* Parker said, "Freddy's prebriefed me. It gets better than that."

I scoured my scotch rocks. “Christine Jorgensen and I shook down the Vanderbilt kid for twenty grand. The piece we published was expurgated during the editorial process. I kicked the door down and took pictures. They’ll make good courtroom exhibits or place mats at your next Elks Club smoker.”

Ernie slapped his knees. “Like your stellar photos of Marlon Brando with a dick in his mouth.”

Parker rolled his eyes. “A legendary item.”

Ernie said, “Your legendary tiff with Johnnie Ray. That’s a good courtroom vignette.”

I cringed. “As tiffs go, it wasn’t much. And it’s not like I’m proud of it.”

Parker held one finger up. Ernie ticked *that* topic off.

“We’re working a two-way street here, Freddy. That means you’ve got a fat credit slip in Banker Roll’s vault.”

I said, “Caryl Chessman’s got an appeal in superior court. He’ll be here soon. I’d like a jail visit with him.”

Parker said, “That evil cocksucker.”

Ernie crossed himself. “Those poor girls. That girl in Camarillo.”

Parker crossed himself. “Consider the request, Ernie.”

I crossed myself. “I promise I’ll behave, and I promise that anything *Confidential* puts up will atone for that boo-hoo piece we published in ’52.”

Parker beady-eyed me. “Here’s a reminder to go with that request. The next time you witness Nick’s Knights, or the Afrika Korps, or whatever you’re calling them, committing first-degree felonies, you are to intercede with all due and vigilant force.”

—

Match the voice. Make a voice print. KKXZ to the 1946–47 yearbook. She’s not the noted Kim Hunter or Barbara Bel Geddes. She’s not Shirley Tutler/aka Miss Third Victim. She’s *probably* Unknown Actress #1 or #2. She *might* be the lissome Lois Nettleton. Her picture *might* not have popped on that page.

Babs bought me in. She called ahead and relayed my request. She artfully audited Actors Studio West classes and muff-munched member Mercedes McCambridge on occasion. She explained my kooky conundrum. A clearheaded clerk caught it quick. She snagged her yearbook copy. She found the faces. She rigged a TV clip/film clip/scroll-the-screen machine.

Unknown Actress #1 was Marjorie McConville. Unknown Actress #2 was Lana Linscott. Shirley was Shirley. Lois was Lois. The machine socked sound out of side vents.

The clerk cozied me up in a cubicle and cut the lights. I scrolled the screen. Miss McConville mangled *Major Barbara*. She stormed a stage in Belfast or Ballymora. She shoved Shaw at me in a brutal brogue. I rescrolled the screen.

Lana Linscott laid it on light. She played some doofus Doris in a dithering *Dinner at Eight*. Her voice wasn't *The Voice*. She was a salt-lick soprano. She came off as a comedienne.

I knew what was next. I scrolled the screen and got to it. There's Shirley Tutler, pre-Chessman.

She looked L.A. She *talked* L.A. She had the flat vowels and the vibrato drawl. She essayed Stella in *Streetcar*. She simpered and saw how it played. She started over and notched up her native dignity.

I replayed the nite we met. Her blood-soaked blouse *dripped*. I brought her a blanket. She said, "You're very kind." I brought her a cup of water. Colin Forbes and Al Goossen took over from there.

I touched the screen. I scrolled the screen. Lois Nettleton mainlined Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

It was Her Voice. She had *The Voice*. She jumped geography and subsumed a southern belle's timbre here. She withered her weak willy/bottle baby/homo-haunted hubby and begged him to sire her child. She pinnacled the pathos and wrapped back to the rage. Her Deep South diction dipped north to Chitown shaded with Sheboygan. I was glad. It was *Her Voice, The Voice*.

Lois, it's you.

—

***J**aney, it's you.*

For Jack, it is. Tonite, at least. You look *goooooood*. You move magnetic. You roil the room and mug the men moving at you. You've got droves of dreary Democrats drip-dried. You might bag the bait-girl gig. I'll call you Rambunctious Rock's Squeeze, then.

I circulated. It was a big-room bash. It was committedly corny and panderingly partisan. Note the crepe-paper bunting. Note the coarse cardboard cutouts—Democrat donkeys at graze.

I'm crawl-crammed in with two hundred people. The women wear god-awful gowns and show too much shoulder. The men sport springweight suits and sweat them straight through. *I'm* sweating. I'm a Lebanese camel fucker and prone to the sweats.

Jack's immune to sweat. Janey's immune. Jack's got cucumber-cool chromosomes. Janey's loose-limbed in lavender linen. I'm tall, Jack's tall, Janey's tall. I'm a periscope. I'm peering over the heads of the heaving hoi polloi. Come on, kids. It's Some Enchanted Evening. This bum bash is one hour in. Orb those eyes. Orbit the room. Let's see you cull contact.

Some *nudnik* nudged me. Oh shit—it's Robbie Molette. He's passing out puffed cheese and seared tuna on toast. He slipped me a note. I brusque-brushed him off. The rodent rambled away.

Ooooga-booooga. There it is. Jack's moving *her* way. Janey's moving *his* way. It's a slow slog and a deep detour through dowdy folks. He's laughing. She's laughing. They move their hands in sexy sync. It's fate—*what can you do?*

There, they've met. They shake hands. They're speaking. Here's my speech balloons. She's calling him "Senator Kennedy." He's calling up his killer comeback: "Come on, call me Jack."

I watched them. The Pervdog of the Nite's a peeper from *waaaaaaaay* back. What's going on here? What's with this jungled-up juju? What *is* it that you two have got?

It's this:

You're decorous. It's a deft deception. You project a state of groovy grace as you sally forth in sin. There's a halo around you now. It hides your cold hearts and your constant calls to conquest.

Janey, it's you.

You were born to play bait gigs. I'm enchanted and appalled.

I barged out of the bash. I bopped over to the porte cochere and read Robbie's note.

"Nick's Knights are mobilizing. Tomorrow night, 9:00 p.m. at the Marmont."

—

I remade myself as Stage Door Freddy. I'm a sweaty swain swooning for my phone to ring. I know her name, she knows my name. Nasty Nat's our conduit and cupid. The Actors Studio clerk laid out the lowdown on Lois.

Born Oak Park, Illinois/'27. Miss Chicago, '48. The Art Institute of Chicago. East to the Apple. The Actors Studio. Lois meets Shirley Tutler. Her connection to the Caryl Chessman case is calamitously forged.

TV work. Film work. Stage work. Her zenith's *right now.* She's understudying Barbara Bel Geddes in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.* Here's a punchy parenthetical:

The play's all Broadway bravos *right now.* If Barbara bails behind a bad bug or lays up with laryngitis, Lois plays Maggie the Cat.

But she's in L.A. She knew her cruel critique of *Confidential* would somehow summon me. She knows things about me. She wants something from me. My pay-phone trace will work at some point. Yeah, but I'm *right here, right now.*

I caved on my couch. I'm Stage Door Freddy. I'm a cuckold, a *cornuto,* a juvie jerkoff, a chump. I hexed the phone. I brain-brewed an APB on Lois June Nettleton/white female American/DOB 8-16-27, Oak Park, Ill—

The phone rang. I picked up and risked ridicule. I said, "Hello, Lois."

She said, "Hi, Freddy. I figured you'd find me before too long. So I jumped the gun a bit."

"I'm glad you did. And I'm not going to ask you what you want, because I know you'll tell me pretty damn quick."

Lois said, "That's true, but what I want is evolving, and I'm not quite sure what it is."

I said, "I saw a clip of you today. It was in black and white. I couldn't tell what color your hair is."

"It's strawberry blond. And I saw *you* on Paul Coates' show, and you tried to tell the truth, but you faltered at it."

I said, "Meet me. Right now. It's not that late."

Lois said, "Not tonight. Before too long, though."

I said, "You've got this haunted tomboy thing going. Like Julie Harris, but earthier and more pronounced."

"I like men who notice things like that, and make accurate comparisons like the one you just did."

"How long have you been pulling this anonymous telephone stuff?"

“Since the war, when I was in high school. The telephone has always been my métier.”

“I wish we could talk in person.”

“We will, in time.”

“Shall we talk about Chessman?”

“Not yet.”

“You’re right. It’s more of an in-person conversation.”

Lois said, “Shirley speaks of you, when she’s capable of speaking. She’s never forgotten those few moments you spent together.”

OUTSIDE THE CHATEAU MARMONT

West Holly*weird*
5/16/55

Rolling stakeout.

It's 8:55 p.m. I'm parked perpendicular, down from bungalow row. I borrowed Donkey Don's '53 Chevy. It's innocuous compared to my Packard pimpmobile. I'm snout-out in a flat flower bed. I'm ready to roll.

I'm still stage door–stuck and looped on Lois standard time. We talked until 2:00 last nite. We tippled at topics and nodded off into non sequiturs. We laffed, we flirted, we surged toward and circumnavigated a path past Shirley Tutler and Caryl Chessman. Lois refused to divulge her L.A. hideaway. I called Nasty Nat and Ray Pinker two hours back. They'd trace-tracked three Lois calls. They got cloyingly close. Ray tracked transformer stations and logiced out a loose location. He made it mid-Wilshire east.

It's a booth call. Here's his best shot at a border-to-border bid. It's Western to the west/Vermont to the east/Beverly to the north/Olympic to the south.

I *got* it. I *saw* it. My mind churned and channeled straight to Chapman Park.

The Ambassador Hotel's there. Ditto, the Chapman Park Hotel and the Gaylord Apartments. The Brown Derby's there. Dale's Secret Harbor's there. It's a lively locale. Lois would light there—I *knew* it.

The fone fungooed my whole day. Rodent Robbie called and ran me raw. He said, Jack loved Janey. I said, No shit, Shadrack—what's not to love? Robbie goosed me: You giving her the bait gig? I said, Yeah—tell her to meet me tomorrow nite/Frascati/ten p.m. It's a pithy party of four. She'll meet the players then. Robbie hung up. Harry Fremont called. *Caramba!!!*—Sheriff's Burglary called *him.*

It's a make. The Nick Adams swag matched the manifests for six 459's. Six B and E's—all within one mile of Nabob Nick's rent-a-pad.

That's *gooooooood.* If Nick keeps the cache, he's cooked. Here's what's *baaaaad.* The Sheriff's lab dutifully dusted the B and E locations. They turned up no viable latents.

I called Bill Parker and tattled the tidings. He said, Sit on it for now. I called Bondage Bob and told him. He said, This *Rebel Without a Cause* caper is a cause célèbre.

I'm a snitch. I'm a rat fink. I'm an infernal informer. I beat both ends against some malignant middle. And the wide world *knows.*

I checked my mailbox, midafternoon. I found one piece of paper. Dig this vivid valentine:

> *Freddy,*
>
> *Quit bugging me, okay? It's annoying. I've moved on to greener pastures. I'm a movie star now. I'm not the scuffling kid who used to jack around with you and your stupid band of thugs. Over's over. Quit persisting. It's undignified.* Confidential*'s a shitrag, and you're a shitheel for working for it. Over's over. You're passé, bubi. You're not a name I want on my résumé.*
>
> *Best wishes,*
> *Jimmy*

—

***J**immy, you shitbird cocksucker. I knew you when.*

I bug-eyed bungalow row. I watched my watch. 9:00 p.m. nudged by. Bungalow row remained snoresville. The action accelerated at 9:14.

There's the filthy phalanx. *Farshtinkener Führer* Nick Ray stridently strides ahead. His *Untermenschen* unfurl behind him. Jimmy Dean, Nick Adams, Chester Alan Voldrich. The two black-jacket *Kameraden* from the sorority *soiree.*

Die Fahne hoch. Die Reihen fest geschlossen—

They're *all* Afrika Korps tonite. The jumpsuits, the big-billed caps, the Rommelesque regalia. Nick R.'s got his movie camera. We're back at El Alamein, '42. Rommel's resolute. He's readying his raid on the brave British forces.

It's a quivering quick-march. The Kiddie Korps follows their festering father—they goof some goose steps and hop in the Chevy van. Voldrich whips behind the wheel and peels out.

They looped left on Sunset. I looped left and lagged back. I caught cover behind a big bus booming eastbound. I rode the back bumper and kept their back bumper surveilled.

We headed into Hollywood. The bus barged due east. The van vizzed south on Wilton Place. A taco wagon wiggled between us. It was chopped and channeled. It surged, submarineesque. The sassy side panels read LOS INTRUSOS.

The van vipped ahead. I surfed behind the submarine. We're headed southbound and down. Wilton arced into Arlington. We passed Mount Vernon Junior High/aka Mount *Vermin.* The van angled east at the Jefferson juncture. The tacomobile tooled on south.

I lost my car cover. I dawdled three car lengths back and dug darktown by nite. Something Rodent Robbie Molette said sacked me.

Escalation. Liquor-store 211's. We're at Jefferson and Normandie. It's liquorland lit large—right *here,* right *now.*

Telepathy ticked—me to them. Don't read my mind, *Menschen*—don't cross this line.

The van wriggled to the right lane and crept curbside. I saw the lit-up liquor store window, jarringly just ahead. I whipped wide and nudged up to the north-side curb. The van stopped in front of the store.

Achtung!!!! Raus!!!! Mach schnell!!!!

The six sickos pile out. Nazi Nick's got the camera. Nabob Nick's got a pump shotgun. Jimmy Dean's got a bottle of T-Bird topped with a cotton-wick fuse. It's a sure-as-shit Molotov cocktail.

I froze, I watched, I *peeped.* I'm a peeper first and forever. Bill Parker told me to intercede and fuck up all felony actions. I didn't. I disobeyed. I sought succor in savagery. I was coldly complicit. I'm all vile volition, and—

They walked into the store. The counter clerk saw them and *guuuuulped.* Nick Ray rolled film. Chester Voldrich reached behind the counter and tapped the till. The clerk yelped. His mouth moved. I imagined a plaintive *please.* The two no-name *Kameraden* hopped the counter and taped his mouth shut.

Voldrich shagged a shelf bottle. He uncorked it and passed it to his putrid pals. Some reflex ripped me. I kept going for a gun I didn't have.

Nick Ray rolled film. No-name Nazi #2 pulled out a Minox minicamera and snapped stills. Jimmy flicked his lighter and lit the

Molotov. Nabob Nick pumped his shotgun and blasted the booze shelves.

Glass shattered and sheared. Wino wine and rotgut rye and skunk scotch blew wide. Jimmy tossed the Molotov. It caught the cold cuts case and exploded. Fumes flared and flattened out at the ceiling. Electrical cords caught fire and sparked blue and white.

Smoke smothered my Peepvision view. The clerk ran outside and ran straight out of my frame. Nick's Knights walked out, en masse. They stood studly, six across. They rebel-yelled. They whipped out their whangs and pissed in the street.

MY BOSS BACHELOR PAD

West Holly*weird*

5/17/55

I confessed. I crawled my crib, cruciform. I drank myself draconian and drip-dried my dearly soul. *What* soul? They could have clipped the clerk and popped some pedestrians. I had to peep it and imprint the images. I'm the Pervdog of the Nite—past all rancid rationale and jacked-up justification.

I confessed to God and Chief William H. Parker. I wrote him a self-defaming memo and had it messengered, posthaste. I read my Bible and ripped right to Revelation:

Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand….Anyone destined to live by the sword will die by the sword.

That's Nick's Knights, that's me. That's God's conflagration called down on *Confidential.*

I sat by the phone. I willed Lois to call. She didn't call. I laid the phone in my lap. It rang. I picked up. It wasn't Lois. It was Reptile Robbie Molette.

He blathered. I listened, listless. I was shot to shit and half in the bag.

"…and, Freddy, I figured I should tell you. Nick Ray's over at Googie's right now. He's got a group of his kids in tow, and they're all ragging on you pretty bad."

I hung up. I willed Lois to call. I voodooized the airwaves and tried to make the phone ring. It rang. It wasn't Lois. It was Chief William H. Parker.

He said, "You're absolved, Freddy. We've got those humps on Arson, Assault 1, 211, and six related firearms charges. They're sunk if Ernie Roll and I decide to sink them, and you've proved to me you won't sell me out to *Confidential.* Get it? You're not a coward or a quisling. You're a shitbird who played it smart for the first time in his life."

I blathered. Parker said, “Shut up, and enjoy your absolution and the rather astonishing fact that I’m starting to like you. And, while I have you, here’s a suggestion. It might be nice if you let Nick Ray and his gang know that they should mind their p’s and q’s.”

—

Absolution. Parker’s sassy sanction. Dexedrine and strong coffee. I hurtled out of my haze and fumbled out of my funk.

Googie’s was jam-packed. I tamped on my tunnel vision and bebopped in the back door. I saw them, they saw me.

Them:

That giant-ant flick, last year. Giant ants attack L.A. They raise a ruckus and eat good-looking women. I giggled and goofed on it. Freddy O.’s a giant ant.

Them:

Nick Ray, Jimmy Dean, Chester Voldrich. Natalie Wood and Sal Mineo. They’re ensconced in a big booth. They’re slurping massive martinis. Natalie and Sal are underage. It’s a Beverage Control bust.

I adjusted my antennae and ant-ambled over. Don’t fuck with Freddy O., the Giant Ant. The gang ignored me. I popped the olive out of Nick’s drink and noshed it. I went *Yum-yum.*

Jimmy said, “Get lost. Can’t you read? My days as your sidekick are *finito.*”

Nick started to stand up. I nabbed his necktie and yanked. It put him face-first in his antipasto. He glug-glugged and heaved. I twisted his tie and held his head there. He flap-flapped his arms.

Natalie giggled. Sal swooned, swishlike. Jimmy played it kool-kat quiescent. The Giant Ant *bored* him. The shimmy-shimmy shakes gave him away.

I dropped Nick’s necktie. He glug-glugged and blew his bloody nose on his napkin. Chester Voldrich pulled a push-button shiv and popped the blade my way.

He was close. I ratched his wrist and sheared the shiv free. Voldrich yelped. I pinned his hand to the table and stabbed straight through it. Bones broke, blood blew, the blade cracked wood and tore through the tabletop. I put my weight behind it. Voldrich screamed. I pinioned and pyloned him. I crafted a cruciform seal.

Voldrich screamed. I said, “Natalie, pour your drink on his hand.”

Natalie said, "What's my motivation?"

I said, "You're a juvenile delinquent."

Natalie said, "Okay." Natalie poured her drink on his hand.

Chester screamed. His purloined paw got freon-fried and scorchified. He screamed anew. He buckled the table and banged his back against the booth.

Sal said, "I'm a juvenile delinquent." Sal tossed his drink. It rescorchified Chester's hand.

Chester screamed. I shoved a napkin in his mouth and muzzled him. Jimmy's still kool-kat quiescent. Now Nick's putting on *his* pose.

I'm Freddy O., the Giant Ant. Don't fuck with me.

—

Maiming mission to mortification. Giant Ant to peeper pariah.

I walked into Frascati. The maître d' moaned. He took me to my table. Dippy diners at adjoining tables moaned and moved away. Waiters whipped up. They plied plates and place settings and rescued the geeks. It's Exodus—let my people go!!!

There's Rock and the girls. *Helllllloooo,* Janey Blaine.

She's bravura. She's *mucho magnifica* in a madras shirtdress.

She held out her hand. I bowed and took it. Rock winked. Phyllis rolled her eyes and registered resentment. Come *on*—it's just a showbiz shuck and another mock marriage. It's Hollywood. Rock's Trippy Triangle!!! Let's lay in for some laffs.

I sat down. Rock motioned for more martinis. I smelled tossed gin on my coat cuffs. It made *me* moan.

Janey kicked it off. She went for the whammo, straight in.

"Forgive me for being precipitous, but exactly what do I *do*?"

I lit a cigarette. "You *act.* You're a Smith girl on the loose in L.A. You meet Rock at a dinner party. It's the Some Enchanted Evening scenario that I know you're acquainted with. Phyllis is with Rock. She's his fiancée, and she doesn't like what she's seeing with you two. I'll script a dinner-table dialogue for you and Phyllis. You'll debate politics and some other things, but it's all a smoke screen to cover the simmering feeling building between you and Rock. That's how it starts. We'll see how the kickoff goes, and we'll take it from there."

Phyllis said, "It's demeaning. It can only go downhill from there, at least in my case."

Rock said, “No heavy petting, Janey. I don’t roll in that direction.”

Janey laffed. Phyllis said, “Not *yet* you don’t—but we’re working on it.”

The martinis materialized. We took a brief breather and boozed. I scoped Janey, sidelong. I came to cold conclusions.

She’s peremptory. She’s petulant and short-tempered. She gored Phyllis’s goat at the get-go. Let’s define the Tricky Triad. Rock’s the passive putz—but now he’s strictly *straight.* Phyllis brings the brains and the royal rectitude. Janey is what she is—*bait.* She’s the torrid temptress who diverts Rock’s idling walk down the aisle.

Janey sipped her martini. “What are you prepared to pay me, and how long will the gig last?”

I said, “Ten thousand. Be prepared for a series of staged encounters, to transpire over a series of months. There’ll be a series of interviews with the celebrity press. Lew Wasserman has pledged a second-tier speaking part in Rock’s next picture. You’ll play the female lead’s bitchy kid sister.”

Janey lit a cigarette. “I’ll upstage her, too. Won’t I, Rock? Or should I start calling you ‘sweetie’?”

Rock said, “Janey’s a pisser. Isn’t she, Freddy?”

I said, “She sure is.”

Phyllis glowered and glared. *Hell hath no fury like—*

“Just remember who gets him in the long run, dear. Only one of us has the ability to facilitate his conversion, and that’s me. So, in *that* sense, this tawdry charade of ours *does* reflect reality.”

Rock said, “Keep referring to me in the third person. It sends me.”

Janey crushed her cigarette. “I can tell you’re quite accomplished when it comes to losing men, Phyllis.”

“Let’s just say I’m more practiced than you in general, dear. For instance, Freddy and I made out in a crowded coffee shop, not that long ago—and I would have slept with him, if he’d asked.”

Janey said, “Freddy, you’re a dog.”

I said, “Woof, woof.”

Rock high-signed me. I moved Janey’s purse out of the way and pulled my chair close. Rock chaired in close.

“I’m coming out of that haze I was in when you got me out of jail. I’m remembering some things that happened at Nick Adams’ place.”

“Such as?”

“Such as arc lights. And, you remember that guy who I said was there with Nick?”

"Yeah, I do."

"Well, now I remember him touching me—if you catch my drift. And he was babbling something about Jimmy Dean playing Caryl Chessman."

It vibed blackmail/smut smear/cold-cocked Rock and some Nick's Knights perv. Some filthy-film fandango. *That* equals Extortion 1. Bill Parker would dig it. *Rebel Without a Cause.* The derogatory profile expands. Plus—Caryl Chessman, *again.*

A waiter passed me a message slip. I unfolded it.

Freddy,

We traced the calls. She's calling from a booth at Wilshire and Mariposa. It's behind Dale's Secret Harbor.

All best,
Nasty Nat

I stood up. I grabbed the flowers out of the centerpiece and wrapped my napkin around the stems.

Rock said, "Freddy's leaving. I'll bet he's got a hot date."

The girls ignored us. They chitchatted and heaped on the hate.

—

Lois Nettleton at twenty-seven. Here she is, the first time I saw her.

I parked in the lot behind Dale's Secret Harbor. The booth stood by the back door. She talked to the phone. A booth bulb shined down and shimmered her. She's boldly backlit by nite.

She's lithe. Lissome, yeah—I figured that from her foto and film clip. She runs rangy but not tall. Her hair's red running to blond. She's unadorned. She goes to gaunt. It's that timeless tomboy gestalt. She's got bleached-blue eyes. They connote kulture-kooky and crazy. They confirm our fone-call contact. She works for effect, she shears short of contrived.

I walked up to the booth. Lois saw me. She cracked the door and smiled. She saw the flowers and stage-swooned. She said, "Nat, I have to go," and hung up.

I handed her the flowers. She said, "Freddy, you shouldn't have." Her bleached-blue eyes bounced. They were set too close together. They marred her good looks and served up her soul.

She'd leased a cool casita at the Chapman Park Hotel. It was a white stucco job with a tiled terrace. A green-brown walkway wound down to Wilshire. Stray headlights strafed skyscrapers and smart storefronts.

We sat on a serape-print swing. Room service sent lobster salads and white wine by. Lois wore a shift dress and a sheer cardigan. We laid our feet on a long ottoman. Lois had knobby knees. I dug that.

I said, "What if Miss Bel Geddes gets pneumonia? You'll be out here with me, brooding on you know who, and you'll blow your big break."

Lois twirled her ashtray. "Barbara will never let herself get sick. It's one reason why I scheduled the trip when I did. And you shouldn't be shy about saying his name. It's Caryl Whittier Chessman."

I twirled my ashtray. "What's another reason?"

"He has a court appearance coming up. I thought I might stand outside the Hall of Justice and hex the son of a bitch."

I stretched and plopped my feet close to Lois. She scooched close and bumped her feet up against mine. She wore ungainly lace oxfords. I dug that.

"There's a weird confluence going on, with that hump Chessman in the middle. First, you show up and start tweaking the magazine, and yours truly. Second, I get embroiled with some cop pals of mine *and* the magazine, as they pertain to this movie that my ex–boon companion, James Dean, is filming right now. I've been informed that Nick Ray has been urging Jimmy to play Chessman in some sort of biopic that he's got his hat set on making."

Lois lit a cigarette. "Jimmy's a shit. I knew him in New York, and I didn't like him. If he plays Chessman and portrays him as anything other than the evil bastard he is, I'll hex him with Aunt Lois' you-will-die-young hex, and he'll go tits up in some sort of embarrassing leather-bar altercation."

I laffed loud and lewd. Lois laffed loud and lewd and laced up our fingers.

"I might have a shot at interviewing Chessman, while he's in L.A. My pals the DA and police chief have okayed it, provisionally. Would you like to be there?"

Lois crossed herself. "As God is my witness."

I crossed myself. "Then you shall be."

Music meandered and wafted over Wilshire. The Ambassador Hotel and the Coconut Grove were close by. I heard “How High the Moon” and looked up. Moonbeams stirred stars, all across the sky.

“Freddy, the mystic. Penny for your thoughts.”

“I’m wondering how you’d summarize this whole Chessman deal of yours.”

“I’d call it the central moment of my life, even though I wasn’t there for the outrage.”

I looked at Lois. “I’ll buy that. I’m also wondering if you’ll let me kiss you good night.”

Lois said, “I haven’t decided yet.”

MY BOSS BACHELOR PAD

West Holly*weird*

5/18/55

Fone rings raked me and drilled through a dream. I was the Giant Ant, once again. I wrangled the receiver and scoped the nitestand clock. It read 8:12 a.m.

I said, "This is Otash."

A man said, "It's Jack, Freddy. Don't ask questions, just get out here, immediately."

It *was* Jack. He came off panic-pounced and scream-screechy. I said, "I'll roll now."

—

I rolled, *rapidamente.* I hit the Beverly Hills Hotel in one hard heartbeat. I ran through the lobby and out to Jack's bungalow. I banged the door. Jack opened up.

And stood stunned-o. In his tattered tartan skivvies. Note his dumb-dunce demeanor. Dig his dilated eyes. He's on some pillhead pilgrimage. He's Mongo Lloyd, late of the loony bin. He's broiled off brain cells by the billions. He's holding a wet washcloth.

"What are you doing, Jack?"

"I'm wiping fingerprints off the walls. That way, they'll think she hasn't been here. I sprinkled cornflakes all over the bedroom floor, so if they come in the back way, I'll hear them."

I stepped inside and shut the door. I double-bolted it. A table radio rumbled. I switched it off.

"Who's 'she' and who's 'they,' Jack? Lay it out slow."

Jack said, "I stripped the bed and sent the sheets to the laundry. I pulled two of her hairs off my hairbrush and flushed the butts she smoked down the toilet. Nobody saw her enter or leave. She hid in the bedroom when room service came. I'm a pro at this kind of thing, so

—”

I slapped him, hard. Once, twice, three times. I raised red welts and blood dots. I grabbed his pencil neck and pinned him to the wall.

“Tell me what this is. Tell me who ‘she’ and ‘they’ are.”

Jack trembled and trickled tears. I hankie-wiped his face and put my hand over his heart. His pulse popped to two hundred plus. His skivvies drooped, sweat-wet.

“This call girl. Janey something. She spent the night before last here. They found her body this morning. It was on the early news. She was dumped, off of Mulholland and Beverly Glen.”

Shattering shit fuck. Jack the K., off to Shaft City. Robbie Molette’s cold-complicit. He pimped Janey to Jack. Adieu, Janey. No bait-girl gig for you.

I pulled pills from my pockets. Jack gob-gobbled them. He’d pass out, pacified. He’d wake up goosed out of his gourd.

“Clean up the cornflakes, and stop wiping the walls. Call Jerry Geisler and tell him the truth. Tell Jerry to call Ernie Roll, and I’ll call Bill Parker. We’ll hang a shroud on this deal and make sure you don’t get hurt.”

Jack said, “You’re a pal, Freddy. I knew you’d come through.”

Nothing’s free, rich boy. The ticket’s fifty g’s at the get. The PD’s payoff goes up from there. Parker’s got his eye on the FBI. It’s common drift. Gay Edgar Hoover hates you. This could be *gooooooooood.*

Jack weaved to the bedroom. Cornflakes crunched underfoot. He collapsed on the bed and burrowed under the covers. Muffled snores drifted up.

—

Fifty g’s. Lois and me. A madcap month in Montego Bay, Jamaica. Last nite’s kiss multiplied *mucho* million times. I’ll slip some bad bacillus in Barb Bel Geddes’ coffee. Lois will revise and reprise her role and bring Broadway to its knees. We’ll jump to Jamaica on *Cat*’s closing nite. And, in the meantime, we’ve got Manhattan.

I popped to the porte cochere. I’d conked Jack comatose. I should call Parker and Ernie Roll and jump-start this. The valet saw me. I saw my Packard pimpmobile. Four big men lounged upside it.

Ever yours—the Hat Squad.

I walked up, *slooooooow.* The Giant Ant ankles, acquiescent.

Max Herman said, “Hi, Freddy.”

Red Stromwall said, “How’s Senator Jack, Freddy?”

Harry Crowder said, “Too bad about Miss Blaine, Freddy.”

Eddie Benson said, “We found your prints on Miss Blaine’s purse, Freddy. The Chief would like to discuss that with you.”

—

City Hall. The Demon DB. Sweatbox #3. The Hats held me hostage in the hot seat. We’ve been here before.

The bolted-down table. The bolted-down chair. The ashtray. The fat phone book. It’s *the* you-will-confess confessional.

The Hats straddled chairs. I kicked my chair back. Max passed out cigarettes. Red revealed his flask. It made the rounds. We took two pops each.

Red went *aaahhh.* “Breakfast of champions.”

Max said, “Explain your prints on Miss Blaine’s purse.”

“I had drinks with her last night, but I left early. I moved her purse out of the way.”

Harry said, “Where, when, and who else was there?”

I said, “Frascati, in Beverly Hills. It was a ten p.m. wingding. The other guests were Rock Hudson and his fiancée, Phyllis Gates.”

Eddie said, “Rock’s a fag. Don’t tell me—you were cooking up some ruse for the magazine.”

“That’s right. I brought the Blaine girl in as the bait.”

Max said, “Why’d you leave early?”

“I had a date.”

Harry said, “Where, when, and who with?”

“About eleven-thirty. The Chapman Park Hotel. A woman named Lois Nettleton.”

“How long were you with Miss Nettleton?”

“Until two a.m.”

Harry sighed. “If the alibi is kosher, it clears you.”

Max sighed. “We should bring Freddy up to date.”

Red sighed. “Freddy deserves to be updated.”

Harry lit a cigarette. “We’ve had you spot-tailed from the moment the Chief signed you up for his *Confidential* caper.”

Eddie twirled the flask. “For example, I saw your outburst at

Googie's last night. Voldrich lost two pints of blood and went into shock. I stiffed the call to Queen of Angels. Voldrich is a noted sack of shit, so I told the dispatcher to dawdle."

I laffed. "Give me the particulars on Janey."

Red checked his notebook. "It's rape and manual strangulation. The TOD is one a.m. She was dumped on Lindell Street, at the foot of the Mulholland embankment, right off Beverly Glen. It looks like she was killed in the bushes and dumped from there. A dog walker found her at four-fifteen. It made the a.m. *Herald* by a rat's snatch-hair margin. Doc Curphey's doing the autopsy now."

I point-by-point parsed it. She might have stayed late with Rock and Phyllis. She cabbed to Frascati or took her own car. She knew the guy. She tricked with the guy. It all went bitching *baaaad.*

"Vehicle at the scene? Did she *have* a car? Tracks in the dirt up on Mulholland or down at the dump site?"

Harry checked his notebook. "No vehicle at the scene, that we know of. We'll be running the canvass in an hour or so. She owned a '50 Buick Super, which is parked in the driveway of this little house she rented in Culver City. We've run the cab logs already. There were no drop-offs or pickups at Frascati from eight p.m. on."

I pondered it. Harry said, "You were spot-tailed the night of the fund-raiser. In case you didn't know, the public places at the hotel are riddled with surveillance ports, so I was able to observe you, Senator Kennedy, and Miss Blaine—which, in retrospect, looks like a staged-date sort of deal. BHPD, by the way, has a roust sheet on Miss Blaine. She was soliciting at the bar at the Beverly Wilshire."

Max sighed. "You see what we've got, Freddy. The big question is, who hipped you to the Blaine girl and got this whole thing going?"

Eddie slid the flask over. I glug-glugged, deep-deep.

"You won't believe it, but I'll tell you anyway. It was that little dipshit, Robbie Molette, that you rousted on my Art Pepper gig. He's a busboy at the hotel, and his old man's a wage slave at Metro. He's recruited some contract girls at the studio, and Robbie's peddling them to the guests at the hotel, along with his other jive criminal enterprises."

Max said, "Holy shit. *That* jerkoff."

Red said, "Nice family. Daddy and junior peddle poon, and Robbie sells nudie pix of his own sister."

Harry said, "And, he sells maryjane to all the hophead kids working on film shoots. Remember? He revealed that when we were squeezing him, last week."

Eddie said, "Including *Rebel Without a Cause,* which Freddy knows all about, because the Chief's got him working up a derogatory profile on that lox, and I myself saw him bird-dogging the parking lot by the observatory, while they were shooting there."

Spot tails. Enterprising entrapment. I'm keestered every which way. Chief William H. Parker. Accept no substitutes.

I said, "Here's a word to the wise. Anything pertaining to that movie should go from the Chief, to me, and me to you. Robbie's dirty, sure—and dirty as far as that flick goes. I'm just making sure that this work I'm doing for the Chief doesn't get trampled on."

Max sneered. "And I'm sure the same goes for Senator Kennedy, when and if we clear him on the Blaine job."

Harry scoffed. "The Molette kid is pushing ass to a U.S. senator. I still find it hard to believe."

Red moaned. "We're buried on Fat Boy Mazmanian, and now we get reburied on this Blaine deal. Give us a ray of hope, Freddy. Tell us she confided in you, and you know all about her private life."

I sucked the flask. "Nix. Robbie set the senator up with her, and I just met her last night. It's a big canvass and known-associates job, when you'd rather be putting that Mazmanian shit in the ground."

Red laffed. "*Es la verdad,* junior."

I buzzed Harry. "Okay, you spot-tailed me at the fund-raiser. You were on the premises at the hotel. You observed the senator and Janey, so you kept your eyes open. I'm wondering if you noted anything inconsistent while you were there."

Harry shrugged. "Some unruly news photographers, outside the main lobby. At least one guy got loose and started shooting pictures through that big window that looks out on the porte cochere. A BHPD guy told me there were a couple of dozen dumped flashbulbs on the ground where he was standing."

Somebody knock-knocked the door. The Hats stood up, *rapidamente.* Bill Parker walked in. The Hats walked out. It took point-one-two fucking seconds.

Parker straddled a chair. "The senator brought in Jerry Geisler. Jerry called Ernie Roll. Ernie sent Miller Leavy over to take the senator's deposition. It appears as if the senator was indisposed with a second call girl while the first call girl was being raped and murdered, which clears him for Doc Curphey's presumed time of death. The second call girl has confirmed the senator's assertion that they were together at the senator's bungalow from eleven p.m. to four a.m., which handily covers all possible estimated times of death. Inexplicably, the senator wants you on this job. I don't know why, and I don't care. I am acceding to the senator's request, and I forbid you to utilize your dubious influence with the senator to in any way derail my incursion against *Confidential.* You will also deploy your goon squad and have them make every effort to dissuade newspaper, TV, and radio reporters from publicizing the murder of Miss Janey Blaine. Per that purported homicide, Doc Curphey has revised his first estimate of Miss Blaine's cause of death. He has officially announced that Miss Blaine died of injuries sustained by a fall from the Mulholland Drive embankment. Are you following me so far?"

I cracked my knuckles. "I am, sir."

Parker lit a cigarette. "Ernie Roll wants you to work with the Hats. He's issuing you DA's Bureau credentials and swearing you in as a special deputy. This will pave the way for you to *legally* contact municipal, state, and Federal agencies and request records checks on each and every member of the cast and crew of *Rebel Without a Cause.* I am, of course, aware that the disreputable Robbie Molette sells drugs to them, and I am *painfully* aware that young Robbie pimped Miss Blaine to Senator Kennedy. I want you to compile dossiers on any and all members of the *Rebel* gang. This will assist you in preparing *Confidential*'s smear job on the movie, and assist me in assessing the derogatory profile that you are preparing for my eyes only. It will also, dare I say, assist you and the Hats in your sub rosa efforts to seek justice in the matter of your dear lost bait girl, Miss Blaine. Are you following me so far?"

I follow, boss. Find the guy. Kill him. Buttress Doc Curphey's bullshit. Janey fell off a high hill.

"I follow, sir."

Parker dry-popped digitalis. He chained Chesterfields and chased it. He smoke-smacked Sweatbox #3, wall to wall.

"Concludingly, I want you to compile a derogatory profile on Senator Kennedy himself. I may direct you to publish your findings in *Confidential.* There's been talk that the senator may be tapped as Governor Stevenson's running mate next year. It might be just the right time for an in-depth smear."

William H. Parker. Accept no substitutes.

—

I parked my Packard pimpmobile in the City Hall basement. Back stairs bopped me down there. I saw Jack the K.'s Lincoln limo by the cop-car slots. The back doors were whipped wide. Roof lights lit the ripe rendezvous.

Jack, Ernie Roll, Bill Parker. There's a backseat bar and Baccarat decanters. Jack served drinks.

Fluorescent tubes ghoul-glared and lit the whole basement. I slid behind my sled and peeped the confab.

Jack sucked up to Bill and Ernie. Bill and Ernie sucked up to Jack. They all sucked scotch and nailed that noon glow. Jack said he'd cadge a case of Cointreau and send it to Coroner Curphey. His postmortem postulations pulled them out of the shit.

Parker said, "Especially you, Senator."

Jack said, "Call me Jack."

Ernie said, "We're white men, Jack. Don't expect us to start calling chits in the second you land in Washington."

Jack said, "Ouch."

Parker said, "You feel bad about the girl, don't you?"

Jack lit a cigar. "I do. And, frankly, I'd like to see each and every conceivable loose end tied up, as well as see her avenged in some sort of clandestine and never-to-be-revealed manner."

Ernie said, "You won't be disappointed, Jack."

Parker said, "The Hats are good at that sort of thing. Freddy Otash isn't bad, either."

Jack said, "I rue the day I met Freddy. I don't think a case of booze will express the proper thank-yous for the Dutch uncle talk he had with me, as well as kick that cocksucker out of my life forever."

Parker lit a cigar. He blew smoke rings. The aroma dispersed and sweet-swacked me. *Aaahhh,* Cuba. It's a puppet regime. We've got our mob mascots making mad money. They grease Democrats and Republicans, fifty-fifty. Jack and half the House heels take tastes.

Jack said, "Batista's got a pet shark named Himmler. He lives in a big swimming pool, behind the presidential palace. Himmler eats Commie dissidents. Batista's goons toss them in the pool, and Himmler goes to town. Lyndon Johnson told me it's a show you don't want to miss."

Ernie said, "Forget about this whole damn boondoggle, Jack. We'll take care of it."

Parker said, "We've got resources, and we're not afraid to break a few rules."

Jack said, "Bury it. I don't want to know the whos, whats, and whys. She was just another girl, right? Maybe I'll run into her again someday."

—

Dusk. A meandering moon cleared away clouds and starlit chez Lois. We swung on the swing and held hands. Lois wore a cord skirt and a blouse like Shirley wore that night.

"I know what you're thinking. You're thinking how deep it goes with me, and that I'm a nutty actress who works out her motivation by assuming persona, because *her* persona is a drag, and that's what convinced her to become an actress in the first place."

I went *nix.* Lois laid a hand on my leg.

"You were kid roommates. You shared a cheap pad down in the West Twenties. It was just after the war, and things were exciting. Kid friendships are powerful. You can't let go of Shirley, and there's no reason why you should."

Lois burrowed into me. "You're right about that. And you know just what to say to defuse me. I hardly know you, but I know you've been looking wan, because Chessman's appeal has been postponed, and you know I'll be going back to New York soon, so what happens next?"

I tilted her chin up. I kissed her hair and caught almond shampoo.

"I'm not letting this go."

"Yes, but what will you *do* about it?"

I prickled. "Is this the part where you reveal that you contrived to meet me, because you knew Chessman would be out here, and I spent five minutes with Shirley, and you like to create drama, and you sure like to chase men while you're at it."

Lois slapped me. I let her. She slapped me again. I caught her hand and kissed her fingers as the slap hit. She cried a little. I kissed her neck and brushed tears back.

She said, "I need you to do things that I can't do. I don't know exactly what they are, but I need you to do something."

I said, "I'm putting together a smear piece on Nick Ray, Jimmy Dean, and *Rebel.* I've got special deputy status on a cop job that ties in, and I stiffed a call to the mail-room boss up at Quentin. Nicholas

Ray and James Dean are approved correspondents of Chessman's, so I think the rumor that Jimmy and Nick want to make the movie about him are probably true."

Lois tugged my hair. We bumped foreheads. Our eyes locked too close in. We pulled back and found the fit.

"Let me explain something to you. I suck up to certain men and lean on certain men, and it's how I cull favors. I'll put the two of us in a room with Chessman, *if* I can keep culling favors with the guys who can make it happen, which will sure as shit serve to *make* it happen."

Lois said, "If James Dean plays Caryl Chessman, it will result in a publicity blitz that will serve to guarantee his exoneration. I don't want that to happen, and I want you to do something bold and brave and more than a little bit stupid, because that's the type of man I throw myself at."

A light rain kicked on. Lois pulled the serape spread around us. I ran my hand under her blouse and touched her bare back.

"Don't leave me, because you can't see beyond this Chessman deal. It's a drama, so it's half-assed unreal at the gate. Don't leave me, period, because I don't want to lose you."

Lois threw herself at me. I convinced her I was bold, brave, and stupid. We stretched out and gassed on the storm.

—

Rain.

Torrents tidal-waved the terrace. Puddles popped and soaked the serape. We swung off the swing and collided inside to bed.

We shivered and shucked our duds. We didn't do it. We got nuke-bomb nude and dove under the duvet. Wide windows gave us Wilshire by nite. Buses stirred and streaked water high-high. Rain racked the roof. We posed on pillows and whispered under the racket. We kissed and touched each other top to bottom and went back to words.

I spilled. I savagely self-defamed. I *confessed.* I laid out Bill Parker's crusade to crush *Confidential.* Lois called me a crazed crusader. It impelled me to impolitic discourse. I laid myself out as one servile serf. I dodged overseas duty. Men I pounded to perfection at Parris Island got Jap-juked on Saipan. I described the Johnnie Ray debacle as the nightmare nadir of my life. I ran through my *Rebel* wrangles and deliriously delivered everything that they did and I did. I ran down the Janey Blaine/Robbie Molette/Jack the K. conundrum and the official hoax to obfuscate Janey's cause of death. We played to Jack's vile vanity. He wanted the killer killed. Who killed Janey Blaine? Five of us were determined to traffic the truth, even as we assailed it as the penance pose of a hotshot politician too hot to touch. Say we catch the killer? It's devil take the hindmost, then.

And, per Caryl Chessman? What will I *do* about it? I'll think of something. What will it cost me? I don't know—but the price will be high.

Lois told me stories. Bond drives and beauty pageants in Chicago. New York and acting gigs. This scurvy schizophrenia, the Too Many Bedrooms Blues. Too many weak men with shaky psyches. All of them actors. All too-too temperamental and so-so sadistic, all of it aimed straight at *You.*

Freddy, I could tell you stories. Darling, you already have. I knew you'd have stories like the ones you told me. I think it's why I set out to find you. You're a dear heart, Lois. No, I'm just your midnight caller. Lucky for me you picked up the phone.

We fell asleep about then. The last thing I recall is the rain.

SUB ROSA INVESTIGATION (187 PC)

Jane Margaret Blaine (White Female American)
DOB: 4-19-29/Visalia, California
Personnel assigned: Sgt. M. Herman, Sgt. R. Stromwall, Sgt. H. Crowder, Det. E. Benson, Spec. Dep. F. Otash
5/18–5/21/55

The Hats and me. Full-fledged partners. One rich run at the roses. We reckoned we could race three full days. Max had a cousin in Bremerhaven, Germany. He worked at a pharmaceutical facility. They manufactured Pervitrol. It was a loopy lozenge that *max*imized merriment and once drove the Wehrmacht Tank Korps to pound Poland to pulp in record time. *Anschluss!!! Blitzkreig!!!* We rendezvoused at Stan's Drive-In. Comely carhops hopped us pineapple malts laced with 151 rum. We popped Pervitrol and particularized our *werk*load.

We ran through our records checks to date. Dig: Janey Blaine dropped out of Visalia J.C. Her Smith–Bryn Mawr credentials were shucksville. She looked it, she didn't *earn* it. Dig: her phone records came through threadbare. She buzzed mom and dad in Visalia and Robbie Molette. That's *it*—sadly *solamente.*

We ran Robbie's records. He had his own line listed at mom and dad's Highland Park hutch. Dig: Robbie called Janey and the fourteen other call girls listed in his merchandise book. Harry braced the security boss at Metro. The boss vouched the names. He roundly ratted out Rodent Robert J. Molette, Sr. He'd been instigating ingénues into the call girl arts since '49. He told Harry he'd have a damning dossier for them soon. We returned to Robbie's records. *Re*-dig: Robbie called Nick Ray, Nick Adams, Jimmy Dean, Chester Voldrich, and Nick Knight Arvo Jandine. Arvo was the so-called unit fotog at the liquor-store job.

We discussed the Robbie senior and junior jihad. We agreed: senior would seize a lizardesque lawyer, *faaaast.* We agreed: we'll hardnose

Robbie and get him to give daddy up. I reported on *my* records checks. I lamentedly left Lois for a 3:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. fone stint. I ran the *Rebel* rascals and supply supplanted my existing records checks. Now, hear *this:*

Nick Ray's under subpoena from State and Fed HUAC. He ran Comintern-financed front groups, '42–'43. Among them: the Hollywood Committee for Artistic Freedom, the People's Party to Resist Censorship, and the Hands-Off Comrade Stalin Committee. Max interjected: he talked to a Sheriff's Burglary bull this a.m. Bingo, baby: the noxious numbers on Nick Adams' swag matched two recent 459 lots. We agreed: we'll haul him in and bat him around till he bitch-squeals.

I returned to my *Rebel* checks. It was all junk juvie shit—Arvo Jandine's excepted.

He was a whipout man. He tossed his tool during daring girls' locker room gambols. He hit Pasteur Jr. High, Nightingale Jr. High, Le Conte Jr. High, Foshay Jr. High, and Audubon Jr. High. We all agreed: this cocksucker mandates consideration.

Eddie reported per the crime-lab crucible. Dig: the rape-o/presumed killer was a savage secretor. Ray Pinker typed his blood, off his putrid payload. It's AB negative. Jammed upside Janey's body: plasticene and foam fabrics. Car seat-cover shit. Bad news here: said shit was indigenous to Mercs, Buicks, and Pontiacs, produced between '51 and '54. We all *groooaned.* That meant *mucho* millions of cars. It came down to *this:* we had to check all indigenous makes and models per our suspect pool.

Cars. This banged our bells per a big issue. How did Janey get up to Mulholland and Beverly Glen? She had no car. She called no cab. Rock and Phyllis didn't drop her. She didn't wait outside Frascati. Ergo: somebody picked her up near the restaurant.

It's in Beverly Hills. It's a short hill hop up Beverly Glen to Mulholland. It all came down to Janey's tricks, past and present. It all came down to Robbie Molette and whether or not Janey worked freelance.

Eddie riffed on the crime-scene canvass. It boded bupkes—nobody saw shit. Ray Pinker noted drag marks at the foot of Beverly Glen and the embankment. This indicated *one suspect,* pulling upward. A West L.A. squadroom dick disagreed. He studied a bunch of crushed leaves. They indicated *two suspects,* dragging Janey *down* that embankment. Per toxicology: Janey had a big booze load in her system. No shit: she sheared down martinis and most likely wine at Frascati. Yeah, and she gobbled or was force-fed four Seconol. Ray called her comatose at her TOD.

Max said, “I’m bored. Let’s go get Robbie. Freddy and Eddie, you come with me.”

Harry said, “We’ve got leads on Fat Boy I’d like to check out.”

Red said, “Nix. You and I will go pick up Adams. The Sheriff’s bull said we could have first dibs.”

I *guuuullped.* Jimmy was Nick A.’s 459 accomplice. I failed to mention that—

—

We strode in strong. Max, Eddie, and me. We’re overzealous. It’s overkill. We’re raiding the Beverly Hills Hotel kitchen.

We went in the employees’ entrance. We staged a stir. We eyeball-orbed for Reptile Robbie. It’s no sale, *papacito.*

Max braced the crew chief. *El Jefe* said Robbie was up by the bungalows. He had four breakfasts to clear.

We bopped back there. We saw Robbie’s pushcart. Max and Eddie snarfed left-behind bacon and home fries. Robbie bopped out of a bungalow. He lugged leftovers off lox plates and dirty dishes. He saw us and went *Oh shit.*

He dumped his dish debris and went all punk passive. He shuddered and moved meek and mild. We tossed him in our K-car and drove him straight downtown.

Max and Eddie sat up front. Robbie and I hogged the backseat.

Robbie said, “It’s about Janey, right?”

Max said, “Robbie’s wising up.”

Robbie said, “I’m just letting you know in advance that I plan to cooperate. I’m looking to avoid a thumping like the one you put on me last time.”

Eddie said, “Tell him, Freddy.”

I said, “You’ve got two choices here, junior. You give up your dad’s girl biz, or I put the hurt on you myself.”

Robbie’s dentures dipped out. I dipped them back in. Max said, “He gets the picture. His family life as he knows it has just gone *pffft.*”

We drove downtown. We hauled him up to the DB and sweatbox row. Red radioed in. He said he and Harry just nabbed Nick Adams.

Nick got bad-boy belligerent. They kicked his ass and sapped some sense into him.

We ensconced Robbie in Sweatbox #2. Max bought him a candy bar and a Coke. Box 3 was reserved for Nick Adams.

Eddie said, “I turned the hall speakers on. The Chief wants to observe.”

Robbie noshed his Nougat Deelite and chugged his Coke. Max, Eddie, and I straddled chairs. Robbie sat sidesaddle. He’s a passive putz. He’s here to help. He’s a fellow rat. Who do I have to betray to leave here unthumped?

Max said, “You’ve got your girl biz and your dope biz. Your dad runs the girl biz. He recruits, and you peddle the tail, exclusively at the hotel. You run the dope biz on your own, and you sell maryjane and pills to dickheads on film shoots. You suck up to film-biz guests at the hotel, and develop leads on the shoots in that manner.”

Robbie said, “Right with Eversharp.”

Eddie said, “For the record, did you kill Janey Blaine, or know who did?”

Robbie said, “No.”

I said, “What’s your best guess?”

Robbie glugged Coca-Cola. “I read the *Herald.* They said Janey left the restaurant alone. That means she’s on the hoof, alone, in deserted Beverly Hills at midnight. She left her car at home. Maybe she was meeting someone, maybe she got picked up. Here’s an insight. Janey was avaricious. Maybe a guy picked her up, and she sensed his interest. She offered him some snout for fifty clams, and it got all tangled up, and poor Janey got 86’d.”

Eddie said, “Give up your dad. For the record. Let’s get it out of the way.”

Robbie scratched his balls. “For the record, my dad has been exploiting his job as a grip at Metro for the purpose of recruiting wholesome, Ivy League–looking ingénue snatch, for the purpose of turning them as call girls, for a fifty-fifty split. He’s been pulling this shit since ’49. Before you ask, I’ll tell you he doesn’t keep a trick book or a girl book. He keeps it all in his head.”

Eddie said, “Describe his relationship with Janey Blaine.”

Robbie picked his nose. “He recruited her. That means he made her strip, and he poked her, one time only. He didn’t *kill* her. That’s ridiculous. He never leaves the house at night. He’s got home cooking, anytime he wants it—and he *always* wants it. My mom and my sister keep him well supplied."

Max said, "Tricks harassing Janey. What have you heard about that?"

Robbie said, "Zilch. And that goes for all my girls. They work a high-class clientele, strictly at the hotel."

I said, "Your dad doesn't keep a trick book or a girl book. But you keep a picture book—because I've seen it. Here's the question. Did Janey keep a trick book?"

Robbie licked his fingers. Yum, yum—Nougat Deelite.

"I don't know, but here's something you should know. I keep a trick list in my room at the house. Specifically, all the big-name guys who put the boots to my girls, and here's the rub. My room got burgled a few days ago. Shit was subtly out of place when I got home, and the trick list was gone. Lucky for you, I had the list memorized."

Max yukked. Robbie Molette. Accept no substitutes.

"Give us a preview. You can reconstruct the list on paper, later on."

Robbie rescratched his balls. "Besides our pal Senator Kennedy, we've got Senators Johnson, Knowland, Smathers, Humphrey, and Governor Stevenson, who likes boys, but my biz don't fly that route. We've also got Ike's chief of staff, Sherman Adams, DA Ernie Roll, Louis B. Mayer, Lew Wasserman, Jack L. Warner, and Darryl F. Zanuck. Not to mention Clark Gable, Gary Cooper, Van Heflin, and that froggy guy, Yves Montand."

Eddie went *Oooh-la-la.* Max whistled. My first thought: *BLACKMAIL.* Big-name men/call girls/some clumsy first approach. A list on *paper*? Prememorized names? It read *AMATEUR NITE.*

I tossed a tight changeup. "The *Rebel* shoot. Has anyone on it expressed interest in Janey or your other girls? The cast and crew are nothing but pervs and shitbirds. It's a suspect pool we should explore."

Robbie made the jack-off sign. "Nobody on the shoot *knows* about Janey or my other girls. I keep my two business worlds separate and compartmentalized. And, as far as *Rebel Without a Cause* goes, the shoot's wrapping on the twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth. I'll keep my ear down for you, but I've got to make one final haul off those weirdos, because once they go into postproduction, I'll never see any of them again."

Max said, "The Democratic fund-raiser. You were bussing tables there, so you saw your 'Some Enchanted Evening' scene play out. Here's what interests me. Were there any unusual occurrences *outside* of that that you can think of?"

Robbie dry-drained his Coke. "Not really. Some stray paparazzi guy got loose and started shooting pix through an uncurtained window, and me and Manuel, this other busboy, got tapped to pick up all these used flashbulbs where he was shooting."

I said, "We know that Nick Ray and Jimmy Dean have been talking up a Caryl Chessman flick. What else have you heard about that? The whole deal sounds unsavory to me."

Robbie shrugged. "Nick Ray and Jimmy Dean are unsavory. The whole biz is unsavory. Chessman's headed for the green room. If movie folks are gabbing up Chessman, it's just that he's a hot topic these days."

The wall speaker sparked. Bill Parker said, "Otash, get out here."

I walked out. Parker passed me his flask. I gargled Old Overholt and lit a cigarette.

Parker said, "The shoot's closing down. I'm thinking we should recruit Robbie and do a big dope raid. It would do the magazine good in the short term, and we should net a variety of leads on a variety of criminal matters out of it."

I said, "I agree."

Parker went *scoot.* We popped down to Sweatbox #3 and peeped the wall window. There's Nick Adams. He looks phone-booked and fit to be tied. Note the blossoming bloody nose and torn earlobe.

Parker said, "He confessed to the burglaries, and he gave up your friend Jimmy Dean as his accomplice. Red and Harry are out shagging him now. It may take a while. They're chasing a hot lead on Fat Boy Mazmanian, too."

I made the gimme sign. Parker passed his flask. I glug-glugged and got that glow.

"We've got the confession on Adams, Chief. That will stand up in court, and who knows what you'll get from Jimmy. But we need to cut them loose, so they'll be there if we run that dope raid."

Parker popped digitalis. Straight, no chaser. Gas on *his* glow.

"You've been saying 'we,' Freddy. I find that encouraging."

"I'm starting to think like a cop again, sir."

"Anything else before you go?"

"Yes, sir. Tell Red and Harry to give Jimmy a good thumping."

—

I soloed out to Culver City. My peeper penchant popped me out there. Pervdog, peeper, priapic pad prowler. You're a clue clown on a *biiiiiiig* case. Let's toss Janey Blaine's pad. Let's lay it low and look for leads. Let's sniff her panties while we're at it.

It was 1:00 p.m. I stopped at a pay phone and called my service. I had one message: "Call Mr. Kennedy at his hotel."

I did it. A stooge picked up. He asked me to drop by at 3:00 today. I said I'd be there.

To extort your boss, fucker. Ring-a-ding-ding!!!!

I found chez Janey. It was a peach stucco cube job off of Motor Avenue. Her '50 Buick was gone. The West L.A. dicks impounded it, posthomicide. A first-rate forensic revealed zero and zilch. West L.A. left the case then. The Otash-Hats combine caught the duty. The pad was pristine to prowl.

I pinned my badge to my suit coat. It added official ooomph. I walked up and keestered the keyhole. Pick #6 worked. The door popped. I locked myself in.

The living room was squaresville meets hipsville. Persnickety Persian carpets and nifty Naugahyde chairs. The kitchen featured a gas range/Frigidaire combo. The fridge featured TV dinners and Tovarich vodka. Tovarich was high-test and cut-rate. Janey was jacked on the juice. She was a secret sauce hound. That's Clue #1.

I hit the bathroom. It was tidy, turquoise-tiled, and crawl-in cramped. I checked the medicine cabinet. *Aaahhh*—here's some good shit.

A diaphragm. A big box of cornstarch. Vivid vials of biphetamine and Nembutal. I popped two of Janey's biphetamine. Let's bond, baby doll.

I hit the bedroom. It was squaresville squared. The de rigueur ratty carpets. The small slipcovered bed. A small four-drawer desk. A matching four-door dresser. Cheap Picasso prints on the walls.

The desk blotter. It's a clue clown/pad-toss classic. Check *it* out. Catch some light and look low.

Jawohl. It's crisscross indented. There's cursive marks all over it. Janey wrote loose-leaf letters and pressed her pen hard. *Shit*—no legible words leaped out.

I rifled the desk drawers. An inconsistency inflamed me. They were all bare-bones empty. No pens, no paper, no envelopes. The wood had been washcloth-wiped. That meant print eradication. The gradations of grain gave it away. The light grain was dry, the dark grain was damp.

The desk had been tossed. The contents were picked clean. The thief carried off correspondence and/or personal pen-to-paper musings. He stole some called-up calculus of Janey Blaine's life.

I checked the one window. I saw tool marks sawed into the sash. He leaped off the lawn and let himself in, presto chango.

That left the dresser. Women's dressers always draw me. I'm a peeper and a sniffer. I've been one since puberty pulsed. Women's dressers drew me in 1936. Women's dressers draw me *NOW*.

I opened the top drawer. I saw the panties I sought. I pulled away, cold concurrent.

They were white. They were decorous-demure. There was one row, fetchingly folded. It was everything I liked.

BUT—

They were jizz-juiced, semenized, spurt-spattered, and sicko soiled. The B and E bastard laid his load on lace and cool cotton. It enraged me.

And it was *evidence*. I ran out to the car and grabbed my evidence kit.

—

The Jack-Freddy Summit. It's been set for 3:00 p.m. It gave me time to run the panties downtown to the crime lab. Ray Pinker promised results by 6:00. I whipped back west and made the meet on time.

I buzzed the buzzer. Jack opened up. He wore seersucker shorts and a Harvard Crew T-shirt. He was drawn dry. He was too thin. He had stick legs. His raw rib bones showed. He was still strikingly Jack the K.

He pointed to a chair. He said, "Sit."

I sat. He sat facing me. He lit a cigar. It was Cuban. I recalled *Jefe* Batista. His pet shark noshed dissidents.

"I need a promise, Freddy."

"I'm listening."

"It's no publicity of any kind on the girl. No sandbag job in your magazine. No shakedown attempts by any bent cops who might know the story—which, of course, includes you."

I said, "I have some questions about 'the girl,' as you describe her.

I'm wondering what she told you about herself, during that brief amount of time you spent talking."

Jack flushed. "No. We're not discussing it. I'm not telling you, and this is the last time this matter will ever come up between us."

I called up some cool. "I set you up with Ernie Roll and Bill Parker. You own them now. I overheard you guardedly state that you would like to see the girl's killer put down. There are five of us who intend to find him and kill him, which will surely save you grave embarrassment somewhere down the line. I expect to be compensated for this, and the price is fifty thousand dollars."

Jack flinched. "The price is way high, and your manner is entirely too brusque. You're not saying, 'Jack, I'm stretched,' or 'Jack, I need a touch,' or 'Jack, we go back a long time.' You're too brusque, Freddy—and you're rather out of touch with reality, given who I already am and where I'm going. So let's end this conversation and remain friends while we still can."

I said, "No. I expect to be compensated for what I've done already and what I'm going to do, and the price is nonnegotiable, and a bargain."

Jack fondled his cigar. "It's a shakedown. You're shaking *me* down."

"No, it's not. I've levied no threat of exposure. I'm presenting you with a bill for services rendered and services to come. Read whatever you like into it. I'll expect a call from one of your inbred Irish flunkies, sometime within the near future. We'll discuss the mode of payment and the time and place, and this is the last time you and I will ever discuss it."

Jack said, "I'll pay, Freddy. And this is the last time we'll ever discuss anything. You've just made an impetuous and small-time move—but then, you've always been that kind of guy."

—

It was fifty paces to the Polo Lounge. My legs quake-quivered and held. I ducked by some dowagers and dumped one on her ass. I helped her up and sent drinks to her table. She waved and went *Yoo-hoo!*

I boozed. I watched a wall clock. Ray Pinker promised semen-stain results by 6:00 p.m. I conjured Montego Bay, Manhattan, the mountains on the moon. I spent the fifty grand fifty million ways. I saw Lois naked by a wild waterfall and Lois naked at the Chapman Park Hotel. Belfast-born hoods killed me all the standard ways. I died by garrote, gun, brass-knuckle blows to the brain. Flags flew. Jack took the oath of office. I saw Caryl Chessman in Hell. He said, “Hey, baby doll.”

6:00 p.m. boded and bopped close. A radio riffed near my booth. The Hat Squad closed in on fiendish Fat Boy Mazmanian. The cocksucker was doomed. I knew it. Nobody said it.

I found a phone and stiffed the call. Ray Pinker got the goods. The jizz-juiced panties matched the Janey Blaine autopsy discharge. Ray said shit like “identical cellular componentry” and “exudate cell formation.” Ray said the sample was six to eight days old. *That* meant *this:* the killer left his load *before* he killed Janey.

I bolted. I drove straight to the Chapman Park Hotel and Lois. We got naked and tumbled into bed. We didn’t do it. We held each other tight-tight and talked.

We made sense and no sense. My monologue on money/Montego Bay/Manhattan. My rude riffs on the Janey Blaine job as really *MURDER*. Lois on Nick Ray and Jimmy Dean and We Can’t Let Them Make That Movie. I heard what I heard and knew she heard me back the same way. I said We’ve Got Some Money twelve million times. She said Chessman and What Will You Do About It? twelve million times back. We talked *at* each other. We wrapped ourselves up together and tried to find some fit we never found.

I went out or passed out and went someplace Lois wasn’t. It was booze and dope and Jack and Janey and Jimmy leaving me. I tumbled. I saw things that weren’t there and went somewhere Lois wasn’t. I woke up for real at 4:00 a.m. Lois was gone, her suitcase was gone, she left no note on the pillow. All I had was her scent.

—

The Hats were off hunting Fat Boy Mazmanian. I drove home and changed clothes. I checked my answering service. Nobody called me. I heard Chessman and What Will You Do About It?—but she wasn’t there.

I called Jimmy’s pad and service and got no answers. What Will You Do?/What Will You Do? She ventriloquized me. I heard her say it—but she wasn’t there.

Jimmy had a crawl-in crib off of Wilshire and La Brea. He slid in there to sleep and be alone. It was an above-garage abode and a cool caterpillar's cocoon. I drove over and brazenly broke in.

It was easy. One lock poke, one shoulder shove. It's a room-with-bath/eat-off-a-hot-plate deal. I scoped the one room. Here's what I saw:

A Chessman shrine. The Chessman Taj Mahal and Sistine Chapel. The Chessman Mount Rushmore and National Cathedral. Newspaper headlines taped wall-to-wall. Chessman foto glossies shellacked to the ceiling. Movie-type test fotos stacked on the bed. Jimmy Dean made up as Caryl Chessman.

He's got darker hair here. It's been cut and kinked à la Chessman. A makeup man puttied his nose. That prominent prow is Chessman's choice feature.

Jimmy always looks peeved and pissed off. It's always there and always offset by his native pride and prettification. He embodies hip hurt and magnified maladjustment. It's his studly stock in trade. Here, he moves into *MEAN*. He looks older. He's usurped and channeled Chessman. It's a trenchant transubstantiation. He's made himself vicious and vile. It's a metamorphosis, man to monster.

Harrowing headlines hemmed me in. They were existentially Chessman/No Exit. They jumped from January '48 and jammed up to now. Red Light Bandit Sought. Red Light Bandit Captured! Chessman Convicted—Gas Chamber Looms. Victims Describe Degradation. Third Victim Hinted At.

The walls whipped around me. They coldly constricted me and cut off my air. Pictures popped out. Regina Johnson and Mary Alice Meza. Victims 1 and 2, weeping. Apoplectic appeals. High Court Rules No Stay Of Execution. Worldwide Protests: Free Caryl Chessman!!!

I gasped for air. I stumbled and fell on the bed. I looked up at Jimmy's Michelangelo art. He'd pasted Chessman pix to the bodies of Greek cherubs. They flew, flitted, and flung the face of the Beast down at the whimpering world.

Maladjustment. He's memorializing it. It's his movie motivation. He's a tortured teenager tempting teens to toss themselves at the abyss. He's a mad marionette of modernist depravity. And Nihilist Nick Ray is pulling the strings.

I shut my eyes and conjured Lois. I counted to fifty thousand dollars, one dollar bill at a time. I magically misplaced myself: Montego Bay, Manhattan, the mountains on the moon. I opened my eyes and saw the file cabinet by the bed.

Flimsy green metal. One file drawer. File-tabbed *C.C./San Quentin Correspondence.*

I opened the drawer. I saw dozens of envelopes dumped in. They were addressed to Nicholas Ray and James Dean and postmarked San Rafael, California. I recognized Chessman's handwriting. The *Herald* had run two of his prison letters in full cursive. He moved *these* missives past censors and guards and got them into the mail.

I plucked the first envelope and pulled the first page. The sassy salutation said, "Hey there, Jimmy and Nick." It was dated 12/18/54. The first line read, "Before we start, let me state that I want Elizabeth Taylor to play the Meza bitch. She's got bigger jugs, that's the main thing."

Chessman scrawled a script title here. *If I Really Did It—(heh, heh).*

I read my way through the whole file. I popped sweat and sweltered out toxins from my delirious last days. Some tears must have merged there. My eyes burned bad and felt funny. I kept wiping them.

Chessman admitted all of it. He copped to the most minute evidentiary details. It was a savagely sustained depiction of sexual horror. It was demonically descriptive. Chessman recalled sights, scents, and sounds. He reveled in the mess he'd made of lives for years to come. He described the Shirley Tutler assault and designated Shirley by name. He spent forty-three pages extolling each and every time he bit her. He said he sucked the blood off her blouse front. He wrote, "Maybe we can get Natalie Wood to play Shirley."

I read all of it. I read Jimmy's margin notes. He wrote, "Wow!" "Dig it!" and "This Caryl cat is cold," repeatedly.

I got my evidence kit out of the car. I walked back inside and prepped my shooting stage. I turned on all the room lights and photographed all the pages. I ran through twelve rolls of film and dumped the envelopes back in the drawer in approximate order.

My legs quake-quivered and almost caved. I walked into the bathroom and doused my face. I looked different. *What Will You Do About It?* I looked older. I wondered if Lois would notice.

Evidence. "This Caryl cat" was cooked. His rights of redress had run out. I just punched his ticket to the green room.

—

Dizzy spells. Discontent and discombobulation. Don’t go for exultant. There’s No Exit, Baby. Don’t pop to your pad or rack out at the Ranch Market. Roll somewhere nobody can find you.

I’d lost a full day and a half at Jimmy’s crawl crib. It was the next nite of the next day at least. I drove downtown and parked in the cop lot at City Hall. My car cocooned me and sent me soporific. I tried to count from one to fifty thousand. I fell asleep at two thousand-something.

Bill Parker rapped on my windshield and woke me up. I popped the passenger door. He stepped in and dropped the early a.m. *Herald* on my lap.

I saw the Call Girl Homicide headline. Plus Coroner Curphey’s Accident Ruling “Hogwash,” Anonymous Source Sez.

Janey Blaine, hot off the press. There’s one fab foto. She’s fetching fine in ’49. She’s Miss Visalia JC.

There’s zero per Jack the K. Ouch—Prominent politicos among her many patrons. LAPD with egg on face. Chief Parker pledges revived investigation.

I said, “Who’s the source?”

Parker said, “As if you didn’t know.”

“Are you saying you won’t buy the pillow-talk defense?”

“No, and I would think you’d have figured out that you’re being spot-tailed a goodly portion of the time, and would have learned to conduct your liaisons accordingly.”

I lit a cigarette. Parker passed me his flask. I dunked deep and passed it back. Parker dunked deep. A barter bid’s boding. He’d have bitch-slapped me otherwise.

I said, “Let’s trade favors. Binding, as of now.”

He said, “You ask first.”

I said, “No reprisals on Lois Nettleton.”

He said, “Granted. On my end, I want you to assist in the dope raid on the *Rebel* gang. We’re going in at eight p.m. tomorrow. We’re hitting the Marmont, instead of the set. The head shitheels are camped out there, and they’re the ones we want to shake.”

I laffed. “Is that *it*? I’m getting the better end of the deal here.”

“No, not quite. I’ve decided that that Fat Boy Mazmanian is good for the murder of Janey Blaine, and I would like you to assist the Hats in wiping the egg off my face that Miss Nettleton put there."

Why not? Montego Bay and Manhattan moved into sight. Lois rabbited, ratted me, and ran. To forgive is divine. I had that hot hole card. The Chessman/Dean letters would light Lois up. I'm *locking* them up as of now.

Stage Door Freddy. He's back. He's finessing fuckups and finalizing favors at full speed. Rat, fink, sovereign suck-up. The man who shook down John F. Kennedy. Call me bold, brave, and stupid. Lois Nettleton could do worse.

Parker said, "Fat Boy. Are you in?"

I said, "Yes, sir, I am."

OUTSIDE THE CHATEAU MARMONT

West Holly*weird*

5/22/55

Dope raid. Preselected bungalows. Nick Ray's hip hutch. The cast and crew crawl pad. The B-level bedrooms of the Nick's Knights Kar Klub.

It was 7:50 p.m. Rodent Robbie ran the dope by at 7:20. Nazi Nick had assembled the Juvie *Jugend* at his place. He'll pitch one more motivation message. The flick wraps three days hence.

We perched on the access road. Four Sheriff's plainclothes cars, eight Narco cops, plus me. The Hats were off elsewhere. They had Fat Boy Mazmanian 94.6 percent pinned. That quashed our Janey Blaine job. Fat Boy punched the ticket for Rape/Murder One. He'd go down soonsville.

We were looping up loose ends. The shoot would wrap. Ernie Roll would run the evidence and finalize filings. The panty raid. The liquor store 211/Arson. The four burglary counts to keester Nick Adams and Jimmy Dean. The Hats thumped Nick and Jimmy and cut them loose. We were playing and plying a *looooooooong* game here. Call it collusive convergence—cops and Fourth Estate.

The *Confidential* smear job and the issued indictments must hit concurrent. The big bonanza lay there. I ran rapaciously rogue through all this *Rebel* rigamarole. I would confess all at the *Confidential v. State of California* trial.

"Two years, Freddy. We'll be in court then. What you and I hath wrought."

Parker said it. I believed it. It vouched my visions of Lois and fifty grand. It stamped Caryl Chessman's insisted innocence Null and Void. I believed it. I *had* to believe it. So why hasn't she called?

The radio rumbled. The squawk box squawked. That meant go, goon squad—

We got out and barged up to bungalow row. We're heat on the hoof—eight cops up against hip hopheads and dizzy dilettantes. We hit the *Führer* Bungalow at a sprint. We prepeeped the door kick. Here's the big window view:

Nick Ray in white robe and sandals. He's serving up the Sermon on the Mount. His addlepated acolytes are attired likewise. That's Nick Adams, Jimmy, Natalie Wood, and Sal Mineo.

Reefer smoke smogged the air. The acolytes noshed home fries and Googie's burger bits. It's the Last Supper. Jimmy beat his bongo drums. Natalie and Sal made like Muslims and ululated to Allah. Nihilist Nick held up a cheesy chalice of cheap wine. He said, "Art is self-sacrifice in the fight against Squaresville America. Come, drink from my blood."

He's serving Commie Communion. T-Bird wine and burger bits for wafers. Natalie whipped off her white muumuu and stood starkers. No shit—she's the *altar!!!*

We kicked the door in. I went straight for Nick Ray. I elbow-popped his face and gnashed his nose in. His cheesy chalice flew. I kicked him in the balls and jackknifed him to the floor. I double-cuffed his hands to his ankles. I bow-bent him back ninety degrees. The fucker scree-screeched.

The acolytes made like Mahatma Gandhi. They went supine and sang Sufi songs to unnerve the fuzz. The cops shackle-chained Jimmy, Nick A., and Sal. They fondle–felt up Natalie and let her linger nude. They grabbed pill vials and reefer wrappers off the floor.

I ran down the row. I hit the crawl crib and crashed in the door. Four grimy grips groused and ground themselves deep in their bedrolls. I noticed no dope evidence extant. I ran down the row to the B-level bedrooms. I beat down the door to room #29.

It's a two-bed flop. There's nobody home. My roust sheet listed the occupants: Chester Alan Voldrich and fotog Arvo Jandine.

I eyeballed the room. A glossy glint gleamed on the dresser. I checked it out.

It was a black-and-white snapshot. Dig the built babe in a bikini. I'd seen her before. I knew where. Robbie Molette's girl book. This studette starred in his stable.

OUTSIDE FAT BOY MAZMANIAN'S HIDEOUT

2892 South Budlong

5/23/55

He's back there. It's a back garage setup. He's paying furtive fugitive rates for three hots and a cot. The front house is a sweltering sweatshop. A kiddie korps sews Sir Guy shirts and sicknik silks for L.A. gang goofballs. Ten cents an hour, *muchachos.* You're overpaid at that.

He's George "Fat Boy" Mazmanian. He's survived his pustulant pal, Richie "the Dutchman" Van Deusen. We've got him for the steakhouse/211-sex assaults. That mandates death by cop, all in itself. We've got him for the Janey Blaine homicide. He didn't kill Janey Blaine. Nobody's perfect—least of all him, or *US*.

We evacuated the sweatshop. The Hats bought *los muchachos* Eskimo Pies off a Good Humor truck. The kids gassed on the LAPD's largesse. We weren't LAPD or the Hat Squad plus Fred Otash today. We were the Men from Mars.

Dig it. We're spiffily space age. We're wearing spangle-sparkly bulletproof vests. The PD purchased a big batch of Chicom surplus supplies. They're *hiiiiigh*-density and heat-resistant. They'll deflect H-bombs and silver bullets. They glow candy apple green in the dark.

We reconnoitered behind the sweatshop. We adjusted our vests. We loaded our Ithaca pump shotguns with rat poison–laced buckshot. We slipped on our headgear. Dig: L.A. Rams football helmets rigged with antiradiation rays and Plexiglas face shields. Wobbly whip antennae for that space-monster look.

We were ready. We were armed and attired. *Uno, dos, tres—vamanos, muchachos—*

We blasted the door off its hinges. Double-aught buck punctured pinewood to pulp. Fat Boy fired. I caught two shots. Max and Red caught two shots. They singed synthetic fabric and fell off our vests. Fat Boy popped four more shots. Harry and Eddie took them. Ricochets riddled my football helmet and zinged off of me.

We advanced. We were the Men from Mars. We feared no man or beast. We stood in point-blank range and let fly. I pumped my five rounds straight at his head. He was my voodoo-doll substitute. I saw Caryl Chessman's face as I killed him.

GOOGIE'S ALL-NITE COFFEE SHOP

West Holly*weird*

5/24/55

I tallied table tips. I autographed a.m. *Herald*s. Here's the headline: MEN FROM MARS BATTLE CALL GIRL KILLER!!!!!

Not quite—but I'll take it.

I logged lowdown. It was all bullshit. I didn't care. Let's celebrate and gloat.

The *Rebel* wrap party was here tonite. The dope-raid arrestees had bailed out. Parker wanted it that way. Let's postpone the parade of criminal indictments. We'll sync them to the film's release.

I tallied tips. I rippled with resurgence. The money. Fat Boy dead and scapegoated for Janey Blaine. It buttressed Jack the K.'s peace of mind. That was *gooooood.* That meant it buttressed *me.*

Yeah—but why hasn't Lois called? I called her New York service fourteen times and got zilch back. I'd null-and-voided Caryl Chessman. Nobody knew but me. I was resurgent. That meant WE should be.

A tipster bopped up. He tattled the Secret Snatch Hair Auction at the Charlie Chaplin estate. Certified Jean Harlow locks went for thirty grand each. Certified Carole Lombard locks went for twenty grand, plus. L.A. County Morgue doctors certified the snips and attested to their authenticity.

Here, kid. Here's forty clams. Uncle Freddy can afford to laff. He's got Lois Nettleton and fifty g's.

The *Rebel*ites wandered in. Nick Ray, Nick Adams, Natalie Wood, and Jimmy the D. Jimmy had that bruised-and contused, I've-been-phone-booked look. His hacked hairline gave it away.

He saw me. He kissed his middle finger and flipped me off. He wheeled and walked back out the door.

You get the picture. I never saw him again.

INFERNAL INTERMEZZO:

My Furtively Fucked-up Life
5/25/55–10/14/57

Confidential fell. The mistrial mandated a move to excessive expurgation and bum bowdlerization. Jimmy Dean went tits-up in a car wreck. Tuff shit. His mopey martyrdom moves millions and redefines *Confidential*'s concept of epic boo-hoo. I felt next to nothing. *Nada, nix, nein,* nullification. Jimmy betrayed me. Jimmy dumped me. Jimmy left me for Demon Daddy Nick Ray.

Bondage Bob killed the *Rebel Without a Cause* smear job. Bill Parker dumped his derogatory profile on the teen turkey turned big hit. Ernie Roll rolled over and declined to file criminal charges on Nick's Knights et al. Parker and Roll succumbed to sentiment and success. Canonized kid actor, boffo box-office take. They capitulated to cultural consensus. Movie money made them meek. That big boo-hoo made them back off, bitch-like. That's the bilious *bi*-fecta. They're satedly satisfied. I'm not.

'55 to '57. It was all one speciously spectacular sprint. I served my two mad masters. I vetted vile stories for Bondage Bob as I bamboozled him. I tanked the verification process and trafficked the truth to Bill Parker. We built a defamous dossier. It topped two thousand pages. It was mucho more than any prize-prick prosecutor could ask for. It comprised one wicked workload. It detailed my libelous life as a smear merchant and thug and made for a massive missive of my misconduct. Why mince words? I'm a rat, a fink, a snarky snitch, and an insidious informant. And I revere Bill Parker for giving me the chance to become one.

'55 faded out. Rock Hudson married Phyllis Gates in November. Best of luck, kids. I give it two years. I'll work Mrs. Hudson's divorce gig then. Phyllis is a fine filly. We collapse in the kip once in a while. Phyllis pretends that I'm Rock. I pretend that she's Lois.

Barbara Bel Geddes never caught cold or laid up with laryngitis.

Lois never netted the ripe role of Maggie the Cat. The show shut down in November ’56. I remain Stage Door Freddy. I tune in my TV and watch the only woman I’ve ever loved. There’s Lois on *Decoy.* She’s dizzy and dykey in two prison-drama shows. Lois stuns on *Studio One* and mangles the motions on *Captain Video and His Video Rangers.* She’s bravura on *The Brighter Day.* She called out to me on *Camera Three,* and told me we’re still on.

Lois played Emily Dickinson. She was all Art and Loneliness. Her poet’s passion pounded me. I know why. Lois lives longing the same way I do. She said, “What will you do about it?” I haven’t told her I’ve done one big thing already. I haven’t said, “I’ll tell you all in time.” I want to rig our reunion in Shirley Tutler’s name and the name of Vindictive Justice. We’ve got time here. Three jolting jurists have told me that.

J. Miller Leavy prosecuted Chessman. He told me the hump should burn some time in ’59. Ernie Roll’s best guess is early ’60. Judge Charles Fricke calls it ’60–’61.

We’ve got time. Hotshot men owe me favors. We’ll get our jailhouse visit. I promise you *that.* In the meantime, I’ve done *this:*

I stored the pix from Jimmy D.’s crawl crib in a bank vault. I B and E’d the crib the day Jimmy died. I stole his Chessman letters and stored them in Vault #2. I ripped his Chessman wallpaper to shreds and burned it. I contacted two high-ups at Quentin and begged for *all* the names of Chessman’s approved correspondents. They’ve refused me so far.

We’ll reunite. I know it. We won’t ride as rich as I’d hoped. Jack the K.’s fifty grand sallied south.

The cocksucker stiffed me. A minion called and made the meet. The parcel weighed in weighty. I took it home and counted the cash. The bills boded *wrong.* I showed some to a Treasury man. He said the cash was counterfeit. Freddy, you’re fucked.

I hexed Jack the K. It worked at first. He lost the veep bid in ’56. ’56 is not presumptive ’60. Jack was right. My shakedown was short-range thinking and a small-time move. That made me a small-time man.

Yeah—but I took down *Confidential.*

Es not *la verdad.* I just helped. The gig was Bill Parker’s bristling brainstorm from the get. We compiled the damaging data. Parker fed it to AG Pat Brown. He launched the official investigation and empaneled the grand jury then. The grand jury issued indictments on

5/15/57. Conspiracy to Publish Criminal Libel. Conspiracy to Publish Obscene Material. Conspiracy to Disseminate Information in Violation of the California Business Code.

Call it a clamorous cluster fuck. Bondage Bob hired Arthur Crowley to defend the magazine. Art was a divorce lawyer. He was not a libel-defense lawyer. Assistant AG Clarence Linn repped California State. I owed Bob a big beau geste. I was not indicted. Parker and Roll kept their word. I made a ham-handed play to pollute the jury pool. It cost Bondage Bob forty g's. I flew the fuckers to Acapulco. They lived large for one week. So what? Nobody noticed or seemed to care.

A load of lawsuits surfaced, postindictments. Maureen O'Hara sued. *Confidential* cornholed her in the March '57 issue. It alleged that she made out with a Mexican at Grauman's Chinese. *Oops.* Somebody futzed the fact check. It had to be me.

Robert Mitchum sued. Errol Flynn sued. Dorothy Dandridge sued. We miscegenation-mauled her on no evidence. The trial opened on 8/7/57. Prosecutor Linn called Bondage Bob "Mr. Big." He said Mr. Big had prosties lure celebs into compromising contexts. *No shit.* He said we paid known homosexuals to rat out those of their ilk. *No shit.* He said we employed strongarm methods routinely. *No shit.* Art Crowley preached the letter of the libel laws and freewheeling freedom of speech. It bopped back and forth. The courtroom socked in summer heat. Maureen O'Hara testified. She said she never made out with that Mex. The trial traipsed and trucked along until late September. The jury was deep-six deadlocked. They stood at seven to five for conviction on two counts. The judge closed the cluster fuck off and declared a mistrial.

Doofus Double Agent Freddy. He's the dippy deus ex machina of the whole mess. His secret depositions shaped the prosecutor's trial brief. He gave up his guilt. It cost him big gelt. It freed him to dream and scheme anew.

Confidential survived. It cooled down its content. It now publishes pap for a reduced readership. Our circulation circled downward. Bondage Bob pledged to publish "only wholesome stories." He went on a cost-cutting binge. Listening posts were abandoned. I'm on my way out. My goon squad squared up tall and went back in the Marine Corps. I'm a full-time private eye now. I work divorce gigs out of the wheelman lot and snitch to Bill Parker. A snitch fund pays me five yards per month. I make out okay. Robbie Molette and Nasty Nat Denkins work the wheelman lot with me. I'm their faux daddy who used to be hot shit.

I'm alone most nights. I talk to women who aren't in the room with me. I think about Janey Blaine and Shirley Tutler. Rumination to revelation. A *click* clicked in my broiled-to-burnout brain, much belatedly.

January '48. Shirley Tutler is abducted and assaulted. *Near Mulholland and Beverly Glen.* May '55. Janey Blaine is raped and murdered. *Near Mulholland and Beverly Glen.*

Rumination to revelation. I now see *replication* at work here. Movie madness. The *Rebel* shoot. *Craaaazy* crisscrosses at play. Robbie Molette and Janey. Robbie and the *Rebel* crew.

The *Rebel* remnants remain in L.A. Nick Ray's prepping a preachy lox at Fox. Nick Adams shows up on TV. The Nick's Knights Kar Klub is surely making mischief. It poses a What-Will-You-Do-About-It? dilemma.

I'm bored. I'm underemployed. I may be ramping up to do something bold, brave, and stupid.

BONDAGE BOB HARRISON'S SUITE

The Downtown Statler
10/14/57

The useless eulogy. The dippy de-brief. The rip-snorting ride is over, Sahib.

We took chairs. Bondage Bob poured mid-morning martinis. He wore a pink-puce toga. Note the lash marks on his legs.

"It's the end of an era, Freddy. And you're savvy enough to know why I've called you in."

I lit a cigarette. "You're 'Mr. Wholesome' now. I'm redundant. You've got no need for a strongarm corps, so you're cutting me loose."

Bob sipped bum Beefeaters. The suite was bargain basement. The booze was bottom shelf. His toga resembled a reclaimed Klan sheet.

"That's the long and short of it, son. There's a few clean-up jobs you can take care of—but that's it, over and out."

I went *nix*. "You've got qualms about the trial. The prosecutors came in, armed to the teeth. Somebody fed them a shitload of inside dirt. It was either me, or one of my guys. You're getting up the juice to ask me. You're sitting there in your toga, and you look like Julius Caesar at a drag ball. You're getting ready to lay some sort of '*et tu,* Freddy' number on me."

Bob went *te salud.* I went *so ask.* Bob scratched the whip scars on his ankles.

"I see Bill Parker behind the whole magillah. He ran the show and fed the dope to the AG's boys. He recruited informants, took depositions, the whole *schmear.*"

I said, "Ask me, Bob. Accuse me and ask me, and I'll say yes or no."

Bob shook his head. "This is not the Freddy Otash of yore I'm seeing here today. This is some new *kamikaze* version, that I find disconcerting."

I drained my drink. "You're asking me to feed you cues. Okay, here's the first one. The shit I pulled for you and the magazine was wrong. You take it from there."

Bob made the jackoff sign. "You're jerking my chain, son. You don't get to take my money for as long as you did, and make me the bad guy."

I said, "I'm the bad guy. I knew it when I put the hurt on Johnnie Ray."

Bob shrugged. "I'm not going to ask you, and you're not going to volunteer. I'll tell you what gets me, though."

I went *so?*

"Here's what gets me, son. Whoever it was was some sort of insider, and that fucker sided with that pious son-of-a-bitch Parker, against me."

I stood up. "Here's a cue, dad. I'd rather be him than be you."

SHELL GAS STATION

Beverly and Hayworth
10/15/57

The wheelman lot. Legions of the lost light and *live* here. We scrounge for scraps. We dive for divorce dough. I'm *El* Daddy-O by default and decree. I'm a licensed PI. I'm a DA's Bureau special deputy. My ex-*Confidential* status still stamps me a stud. Bondage Bob fired me. I've still got my Ranch Market gig. Bob's got me doing clean-up jobs on a per diem basis. I'm closing out listening posts, tomorrow. Taps, bugs—they've got to go. Bob's divesting and dumping his properties. His profits have dipped *looooooow.*

He's Mr. Wholesome now. He told the judge and prosecutors that. Call him Messrs. Bland and Blasé.

I slid low in my sled. I yawned and yodeled Old Crow. I popped two biphetamine and lashed the late-morning blahs. I shared my shit with Robbie Molette. He's my new sidekick, thus my new Jimmy D. Nasty Nat Denkins dozed in the backseat. He crossed the wheelman color line. He's now Mr. Darktown Divorce. He's still got his gig at KKXZ. *Confidential* still subsidizes the station.

Robbie said, "What's the deal today?"

I lit a cigarette. "France's Parisian Room, over on Washington and La Brea. The mark's an ofay stiff. The girl's colored. She hops cars at the Parisian and peddles it part-time. The mark's terrified of exposure. He's a preacher at a drive-in church in Van Nuys. The wife wants a divorce. Nat's playing a kitchen cook and bringing lunch over. The pad's right behind the Parisian. We'll take down the door and take the pictures. The girl's in on it. There's three of us and one of him. We'll kick his ass and take him to Wilshire Station. The wife and her lawyer want criminal charges filed."

Robbie *yaaawned.* He cricked and uncricked his neck. He slept on the lot. He slept in his '49 Ford. He left his mom and dad's house. He's now Mr. Apostasy. He quit boning his kid sister and peddling her beaver pix. The Janey Blaine job tested and torqued him. He cleaned house and wound up *here.*

I said, “I’ve been teething on Janey. Who she knew, who she tricked with, who she might have met in Beverly Hills that nite.”

Robbie picked his nose. “We’ve been through all that. I’ve been through it with you and the Hats, and Max and Red braced my dad at Metro and polygraphed him. He came up kosher, and you and the Hats made Fat Boy for the snuff. I don’t want to keep on plowing up this old dirt.”

Nasty Nat stirred. “Fat Boy was framed. He’s Emmet Till and the Scottsboro Boys, reborn. I’m referencing him on my ‘Cutie’ tonight.”

I said, “Tell me why.”

“Those Chicom space suits the PD bought spontaneously combusted, in this Police Academy storeroom. *Whoosh,* they go up in flames. They were defective from the jump. No bad deed goes unpunished.”

Robbie said, “I never thought Fat Boy did it. He always worked with a partner, and he robbed the women first.”

I laffed. The pay phone rang. Nat reached out his window and wrapped the receiver.

He said, “Yeah, we’re here.” He listened. He hung up.

“It’s on. The girl says she’s afraid of the mark. He’s gone kinky on her.”

—

The Parisian Room. A mock-moderne job with Frenchy accoutrements. The standard counter hut and outside park-and-eat slots.

We pulled in and parked. The girl walked out. She wore a white blouse and pink pedal pushers. She was gawky good-looking, in her own wild way. She wore a black lace hairnet. Her name tag read *Babette.*

She pointed up to a back-rear apartment. It was second floor/ stairway access/ three pads in a row.

She said, “Don’t be too long. He’s on his lunch hour, and he always moves these things along. And he damn sure always jumps on me first thing.”

Robbie winked at her. She rolled her eyes and skipped off. Nat doffed his street duds and slipped on his cook-waiter's whites. I checked the camera and fitted in a flashbulb strip. Robbie eyeballed the second-floor stairway. He said, "Okay, she's in."

A real cook-waiter waltzed up. He handed Nat a big bag of burgers and fries. Nat paid him off.

I watched my watch. I gave the loser lovebirds five full minutes to find that funky fit. The girl screamed, three minutes and eight seconds in.

It rang real. I gunned my sled and peeled through the rear-exit alley. I came up by the stairway and double-parked, snout-out. Robbie moved, Nat moved. I went *No* and waved them back. I went *Sit* and *This Is Mine.*

I got out and ran up the stairs. Scream #2 rang real. The pad was three doors down. I did a spring-and-pivot move and flat-kicked the jamb juncture.

The door caved. I saw them. He had her flat-pinned to the couch. He was naked. She was naked. A foot-long rubber dick extender condom-covered his schlong. He blew on a lit cigarette. He lowered it and burned her back.

She writhed and screamed. He lowered the cigarette and reburned her back. I jumped him and pulled him off. He flailed and sissy-swatted me. His fake dick poked me. I pulled my belt sap and backhanded him in the face. I got his nose and his teeth and broke bridgework. I ripped one nostril loose. His fake dick dipped and wilted. I kneed him in the balls. He puked on my Sy Devore coat.

Somebody Jap-jumped me. A dogpile ensued. It was Robbie and Nat, neighbors and cops. A fat cop applied a headlock. I got loosey-goosey ecstatic. I saw Lois as I went out.

—

B*lackout.*

I've had them before. I know the messed-up MO. You booze and abuse for weeks running. An altercation ensues. Somebody cuts off your carotid artery. You see shit that is and shit that ain't there.

Like Lois. Like the backseat of a beat-to-hell prowl car. Like the Wilshire Station drunk tank. Like Jimmy Dean at Ten-Inch Tommy's—and these bad boys butting Kool Kings on his neck.

Like Max and Red. Holy shit, Freddy—don't you ever *quit*?

I came to at Ollie Hammond's. Max and Red sat facing me. My neck hurt. Somebody snatched my Sy Devore coat. Where's Robbie and Nat? What's the dispo on the sicknik sadist and that colored carhop?

Drinks appeared. We imbibed. Max said, "We squared you up. Your boys took your car back to the lot. We got the girl settled in at Queen of Angels, and we booked shithead for Rape 1 and Mayhem. He'll do a doomsday dime somewhere."

Curb-to-curb service. Freddy O.'s our boy. Bill Parker wants something. They're here to ask.

I said, "I appreciate all this. Thanks. Now, let's go out and kill some 211 guys and blow off some steam. Maybe clear some pending homicides on the books."

Max said, "Freddy's miffed."

Red said, "It's a delayed reaction to Fat Boy."

Max said, "We did a favor for Freddy's pal, Jack. It's called 'snipping loose ends while you punch a shithead's ticket that deserved to be punched in the first place.' "

Red said, "Freddy knows the rules. He's got scalps on his belt. He's just momentarily aflutter with Senator Jack and his vision of 'an America that provides for all her people.' "

I laffed. I raised my drink. I went *Touché.*

Max said, "What did Jack pay you, Freddy? Don't disappoint us and tell us you didn't shake him down."

I said, "The bite was fifty g's. I got the package. Too bad it was all counterfeit."

Max and Red roared. I *re*-roared. Montego Bay, Manhattan, the mountains on the moon. O bird thou never—

Red lit a cigarette. "The Chief has a job for you. It pays three grand, cash, no counterfeit. It piggybacks a job you're embarking on for Bob Harrison."

I drained my drink. I faked a cough and dipped two dexies.

"He's got me packing up listening posts, and disarming the bug-and-tap feeds. Let me hazard a guess. The Chief wants me to play the recordings extant and compile intel files."

Max said, "Freddy was never dumb. He's always known up from down."

Red said, "I like Freddy, but I wouldn't go that far."

I blew smoke their way. "Sure, I'll do it. I'm starting the gig for Bob tomorrow."

Max twirled his glass. “You know what the Chief likes. You can’t go wrong with sex, politics, and California Penal Code violations.”

I noshed a bread stick. It was stagecraft. It covered my mean megrims and trembling tremens.

“I need a favor. I don’t think it’s a big one to ask.”

Max went *tsk-tsk*. “Snow job alert. I sense one coming.”

Red went *tsk-tsk*. “The shaky hands are always the tell.”

“I need a look at the Caryl Chessman master file, and the PD file on Janey Blaine.”

Max said, “No. Whatever you’re thinking of, whatever you may be planning, no good can come of it. The Chief looks askance at your fixation with dead and brutalized women.”

Red said, “No more dead-woman crusades, Freddy. That’s over and out. Chessman’s a dead issue, and Janey Blaine’s been avenged. You should know—we killed the man who killed her.”

LISTENING POST

Argyle North of Franklin
10/16/57

Shitwork. Divestment duty. I'm a wage slave. Lift that barge, tote that bale.

There's six posts. Pack the furniture/box the bug-and-tap mounts. Take last listens. List damning dish Bill Parker would drool for. Look through bug-and-tap logs. Bootjack hot bug-and-tap tapes for Big Bill.

I started *here*. The Argyle post ran a *loooooong*-range transceiver. We bugged and tapped mid-Hollywood and the hip Hollywood Hills. Our bug-and-tap targets totaled twenty-four houses and apartments.

Film folk. Sullen subversives. Furtive fuck pads and nifty nests of stewardess call girls. Fly *me*—I'm Pam, Lizzie, Sally, Nancy, Kathy et al.

I scanned the logs. The indices listed bug-and-tap targets and their addresses. Tap callers were listed. Their call dates and times were marked. Two names nabbed me, straight off.

Ingrid Ellmore. Pan Am stew and poon panderess supreme. Ingrid invented the all-nite pajama party. She owned a six-bedroom A-frame on Bronson Hill. You got six girls/180-proof absinthe/all the poppable pills in the *PDR*. Ingrid had a heated pool. Ingrid had sauna and steam rooms. Two yards bought you the Debauch of the Damned. Ingrid rocked round the clock.

Ingrid's call-in list. Note some names. AG Pat Brown, Mayor Norris Poulson. Baseball boss Leo Durocher. Sheriff Gene Biscailuz. TV titan Sid Caesar. Bumptious Buddy Hackett and lounge lizard Louis Prima.

I boosted three bug-and-tap boxes. I'd listen in and cherry-pick some choice shit for the Chief. This was a listen-at-your-leisure deal. The second name shrieked *Listen Now!!!*

Dalton Trumbo. Commie *Caporegime*. Bugged and tapped at his worker's wigwam off Whitley Drive. Hollywood Ten hard-on. Gallivanting gadfly. Dig *this* name on *his* call-in list:

The Caryl Chessman Defense Committee. Dig Bernie Spindel's margin notes:

"CP-financed. Popular front-group remnant. Evolved from the Free the Rosenbergs Committee. Frequent celebrity call-ups to target's home phone. Names noted on specific call sheets."

I culled the call sheets. They coughed up *baaaaaad* Burt Lancaster and cheesy Chuck Heston. There's Calypso King Preston Epps. He's hard on the heels of his hit "Bongo in the Congo." There's Liz Taylor. There's Hugh Hefner. There's Mr. Mumbles himself—Marlon Brando.

Marlon mauled my main *mujer,* Joi Lansing, at a party. It was fall '53. I've ground that grudge for four years now.

I went straight for the call-in tapes. I was hopped up on hate now. I'd rereprised my role of the cornholed *cornuto.* I got a hot hit off the call-tap list: Marlon Brando *at* the Caryl Chessman Defense Committee.

I found the tape and wrapped it into a tape rig. Dig the date: 10/9/57. That's just last week.

I got cozy. I lit a cigarette and sucked my flask. I punched PLAY. Red rake Trumbo schmoozed Mumbles Brando.

Static cut through the call. I amputated the amenities and sundered some chitchat. Voices vibrated two minutes in.

Brando: "…and they've got that burglar-killer guy, slated to burn on the eleventh. What's his name, again?"

Trumbo: "Donald Keith Bashor. The Party was thinking of sending some pickets up, but this guy was just too vicious. He killed two women, and messed around with the good-looking one, postmortem. We want him to burn, because it explicates the callous nature of fascist injustice. In fact, we want everyone to burn, including Caryl. The more the merrier. They're martyrs to the cause. We can really play that angle up in the press."

Brando: "You're right about that. And, you know, there's these rumors floating around that Caryl will be coming down soon for a hearing. I'm laying some groundwork on that. Can the Party bounce for two hundred protestors, at ten clams a pop? That's two grand, all in all. I'm leading a protest outside the Hall of Justice, downtown. Me, Preston Epps, maybe Liz Taylor. That's on the seventeenth, and I'm not floating this gig out of my pocket."

Trumbo: "I'll get you the bread, don't worry. That's what front groups do—they front their comrades money."

Brando: "Rumors…yeah, I dig that concept. Hey, have you heard the one about the third victim? That Caryl bit her nipples off, and she's been in the funny farm ever since? That she couldn't testify at Caryl's trial, because she was far-gone catatonic?"

Trumbo: "The fascist lie machine dreamed that one up. Of course, they made her a real baby doll, with tits out to here. Too bad she didn't really exist."

The call staticked up and stuttered out. Mumbles mumbled. Dial tones ditzed and dimmed Trumbo out.

I went back to work. Caryl Chessman *click-clicked* in my head. It felt like a fever. It's mutating and metastasizing. It'll maim me unless I do something soon.

I boxed up the Ingrid and Trumbo tapes. I called *Confidential*'s messenger service and told them to roll up here *now*. I added notes to Bill Parker:

"The Ellmore woman's a mother lode for Headquarters Vice. Duplicate and forward the Trumbo tapes to your Intel Division, plus State and Fed HUAC. More to come/F.O."

That fever. Festering, mutating, metastasizing. I could feel it. I could feel *him*—this malignant microbe inside me.

I called my answering service. I had one message:

Mr. Nat Denkins called. He said Miss Blind Item called him and will call the show tonight.

—

Festering. Mutating. Metastasizing. *The malignant microbe inside both of us.*

I messengered the bug-and-tap boxes to Bill Parker. I blew off my other work gigs. I popped home and perched by the phone. I'm Stage Door Freddy, resurrected.

She didn't call. The wait wilted, withered, and wiped me out. I boozed, I chain-smoked, I popped pills to push the clock forward. A paradoxical effect popped me. They slowed the clock down.

I made midnight. The clock climbed to 1:00 a.m. I ran my radio. The Synagogue Sid Trio blatted and blasted their intro. They went topical tonite. The microbe moved within *them*. Dig their composition: "I Got Dem Caryl Chessman Blues Again, Mama."

Bass sax, flügelhorn, drums. A crash-out crescendo. Then the silken sound of coins slid down a slot. Then *her* voice: "Hey, Nat—what's shakin', baby?"

Nasty Nat said, "Miss Blind Item, her own self. Man, it has been way too long!"

My heart thudded and thumped and threatened to blow on the spot. Lois said, "Over two years, sweetie."

"*Sooooo,* are you back to finalize your beef against *Confidential*? Is that what brings you to town?"

"What's to finalize, Nat? That trial last summer pretty much emasculated it."

Nasty Nat said, "Yeah, *Confidential*'s been declawed and devenomed, that's for sure. *Hhhmmmmm.* Let's see now. Could the purpose of your visit be the fact that Caryl Chessman will be coming here for a court appearance later this month, and because there's a big protest rally scheduled at the Hall of Justice tomorrow, with Marlon Brando and numerous other celebs slated to appear?"

Lois laffed. "You've lost me there, Nat."

"Hey, baby. You're an actress, I hear tell, and I know you've done some things in New York. You ever cross paths with the Mumble Man?"

Lois said "*Weeelll,* I'd be remiss if I didn't say we shared a history."

My heart shook, sheared, and shuddered—and almost shut down on the spot.

Nasty Nat said, "Here's a question, Miss Item. Chessman's court appearance hasn't been announced in the press, but it certainly has been a persistent rumor. How did *you* hear about it?"

Lois laffed. I saw her bleached-blue eyes bounce and almost cross *craaaazy.*

"Well, Nat. I flew out for a fund-raiser for your attorney general, Pat Brown—who's running for governor next year. Mr. Brown mentioned the appeal, and also the fact that Vice President Nixon will be touring South America next spring, where Communist-backed protests against Chessman's death sentence and American foreign policy in general have already been announced, which poses the question, 'How can one evil man command such attention, and *what can we do about it?*' "

Well now, baby. Here's where it gets really *gooooooooood.*

OUTSIDE THE HALL OF JUSTICE

Downtown L.A.
10/17/57

Oooga-booooga. There's the protest. That's two hundred college kids. Note the Party putzes passing out ten-spots. They're buying a Commie cacophony. The kids are chugging out chants: "Chess-Man is Inn-O-Cent!!! Stop the Death Machine!!!"

There's Brando. He's in with the kids. He's signing autographs and popping a placard high in the sky. He's the solo celebrity. He's top-lining this gig. He's wrapped in a fulsome phalanx of fans. He's a hog for their *loooooooove.*

The Spring Street sidewalk shook with their shouts. I curb-crawled and slid my sled inch-by-inch slow. I looked for Lois. I saw her not. I circled Spring to Temple and drove around the block. I saw counterpickets congregate. Their signs said BURN CHESSMAN NOW!!! They were weary working stiffs. The college kids packed more panache.

I full-circled the shit show and shot back to Spring. I saw a solo college boy by the bus stop. He looked bored.

Heh, heh. I had the antidote for *that.*

I pulled up. He saw me. I waved him up to the car. He ambled on over. Man—this kid's entrenched in *ennui.*

I said, "Hey, junior. How'd you like to make a C-note for a half hour's work?"

He said, "Doing what?"

I held up a stack of my Marlon Brando fotos. They're a cool cultural touchstone and define our time and place. It's Mr. Mumbles, gobbling *schvantz.*

Junior perused the pix. Junior's jaw jerked and dropped to his drawers. He filched the fotos. I laid out the loot.

He said, "Gee, thanks."

I said, "Distribute these to your pals. What's a protest without some smut? Maybe he'll autograph them."

—

I went back to work. I had four more listening posts to dismantle and disencumber. The microbe moved within me. Lois lived within me. Janey Blaine bloomed off by herself. Justice for Caryl Chessman? Fuck that shit. Justice for Janey and Shirley Tutler.

Left brain/right brain. My paid work boded boring. That protest prodded me proactive. I felt radicalized and detectivized. My brain quadrants melded and merged. I realized *this:*

The Sweetzer listening post. It's Bug-and-Tap Central. We kept the master bug-and-tap logs for *all* the posts there. That meant *all* the typed transcripts. Going *aaaaalll* the way back to *Confidential*'s first issue. It's got *aaaalll* the callers' and callees' names and fone numbers. It's nothing but names, names, and names. It's *the* ripe repository of L.A. vice.

It's still a long long shot. But confluence causes coincidence. It's who you know and who you blow. L.A. vice. That wicked world. Everybody *knows* everybody. Everybody *talks.* And *Confidential* had that wicked world *wired.*

I drove over and let myself in. It was midday musty. I kicked on the air-conditioning and cooled the place off. The master logs ran to eighty-eight volumes. Twelve for '52/seventeen for '53/eleven for '54/eighteen for '55/twenty-one for '56/nine for '57. My confluence was Chessman/Blaine/the *Rebel Without a Cause* connection.

The convergence culminated in '55. The *Rebel* shoot ran from March to *May.* Nick's Knights escalated in *May.* The loose Chessman chatter escalated in *May.* Janey was murdered in *May.* I knew of no bug-and-tap mounts at the Marmont. That might or might not mean they weren't there. Bernie Spindel installed independent of me. The Marmont was a mother lode of L.A. vice. Certain units had to have been bugged and tapped.

I didn't need to hear voices. I needed typed transcripts and named names. I pulled Log #9/May–June '55. I noted a Marmont bug-and-tap listed. I finger-walked to page 483.

I noticed the names first. "Voices ID'd as actors Nick Adams and Dennis Hopper." I noted the listed location: "Bungalow 21 D/Chateau Marmont." I knew who lived there in May '55. It was Nabob Nick Ray.

I'm a bug-and-tap pro. I know the work. This talk reads like a living room conversation.

I *get* it. Nick and Dennis Hopper. They're alone in Big Nick's boss bungalow suite. It's 5/14/55. Something Robbie Molette said tweaked me.

Nick Ray's "alternative movie." It refracts *Rebel* and then some.

The bug's laid in a lamp or wired to a wall. The transcriber typed out bursts of static, dead air, and *this:*

Adams: "The boss has got some more escalation shit he's concocting. He's calling it the 'final filmic thrust.' "

Hopper: "I think he's a fucking psycho. That's why I've kept my distance with him."

Adams: "All geniuses are psycho. Look at Bird and Lucretia Borgia. You don't get one without the other."

Hopper: "Nick's out of his gourd. He keeps hopping around the set, asking everyone from the camera guys to the grips, 'Can you spell the word *rape*?' "

That was it. The conversation coughed to static and dead air. I found the work order and the transcriber's signature at the bottom. Bernie Spindel ran the gig.

—

We met at Googie's. I'd read the rest of the May transcripts. Nothing else slammed me. *"Final filmic thrust." "Can you spell the word* rape*?"* The conversation occurred 5/14/55. Janey Blaine was raped and killed 5/18. Confluence abets consequence. I grokked a cause and effect.

We sipped coffee. Bernie said, "I remember the job, but it wasn't for the magazine. Whatever you're looking at, this conversation plays sideways to."

I lit a cigarette. "Who put in the work order?"

"The security chief at Warner's. He didn't trust Nick Ray not to go over budget, and he didn't trust him with all that young pulchritude around. He was just keeping tabs for the studio execs. It was a nothing kind of Hollywood job. I did all the transcriptions, and nothing I ever heard was worth a shit."

I said, "Shit."

Bernie said, "Yeah, 'Shit.' Just what I said. One thing you should check, though. One of my guys misfiled a bunch of the May transcripts in the July log. Since the gig never came to anything, I just let it lie."

—

Lois Nettleton at thirty. The second time I saw her for the first time.

Gaunt subsumes *goooood*-looking. She's winsome and wary, all wound up. She's much more of whatever made her. She's a runner stirred in the starting blocks. She'll run from you but not herself.

Once again. Lois the Lithe. My midnight caller. We're outside Dale's Secret Harbor. She's boxed in a booth. She's haloed in a heathered crewneck sweater and cord slacks.

I walked up. She saw me. She closed her eyes and probably prayed. It was a *whew!!!* prayer. We worked through conduits and cupids. Her sudden summons worked.

She talked to the phone. I pulled out the Chessman/Jimmy D. letter and placed it flat on the booth glass. Chessman rags Shirley Tutler. He adamantly admits the assault.

I gripped the door hinge. Lois laid her hand there and laced up our fingers. I heard the phone drop.

—

We got naked and tumbled to bed. We didn't do it. We conjured a rainstorm, like last time. It time-machined two years away. It rained hard and hurled hailstones. We sealed our circuit of time lost. '55 to '57—our window view's a wonderland by nite.

It was *now*. We did what we did *then.* We kicked the sheets off and burrowed deep-*deep.* I told her how I found the letters. I forgave her Janey Blaine blurts to the press. She winced and wept at that. I put it off to pillow talk. I didn't tell her I killed a man to spare her exposure.

Lois talked. She said Chessman's L.A. court date had been moved up. We had forty-eight hours to make the meet and no more. I talked. I said Ernie Roll retired. Bill McKesson had his job now. He was a tough piece of goods. Bill Parker would have to persuade him. Lois said, The Chief should see the letters. I said, He should. She said, I want to read every one.

The bedroom spun. It arced on an axis in sync with the rain. It rendered me reluctant and muzzled me mute. I wanted to riff, ramble, and laff. I wanted to predict our prosaic future beyond this sacred cause. I stayed still. Our future ended at the green room. We both knew that.

Lois grabbed my briefcase and walked to the kitchen. She left the door open. She chain-smoked and drank coffee and read Chessman's letters. I watched her. She wept and kept her sobs as mute as me.

I hid in her heartbeats. Her silent sobs put me to sleep. Time hurtled haywire. She slid into bed and moved me to murmurs. I said, "Do you love me?"

She said, "I'll think about it."

THE SWEETZER LISTENING POST

West Holly*weird*
10/18/57

Escalation.”

“Final filmic thrust.”

“*Can you spell the word* rape?”

All synced to Janey Blaine’s date of death.

I popped into the post. Bernie’s boys misfiled some May ’55 transcripts. They were master-filed *here*. I felt moon-mad in broad daylight. Lois was back. I was raking in righteous results.

I’d messengered a missive to Bill Parker. It included photostats of four Caryl Chessman to Jimmy Dean letters. Ernie’s out, Chief. Bill McKesson’s in. Remember that favor I asked? Twenty minutes with the Fiend?

Parker called McKesson and messengered me back. We got ten minutes with the Fiend.

I blew out of my pad then. I hopped to Hollywood and *blitzkrieged* Hollywood Station. I blew into the records room and cruised crime-scene pix. I found Shirley Tutler *and* Janey Blaine. ’48 meets ’55. Mulholland meets Beverly Glen. The abduction spot for Shirley. The probable dump spot for Janey. Five fotos total. They were point-by-point duplicates.

Here’s what’s hair-raising. The ’55 foliage had been trimmed back to ’48 dimensions. I did *not* imagine this. I saw tree and leaf clippings on the ground.

Escalation meets replication.

I locked myself up in the listening post. I pulled the July ’55 book and skimmed for misfiles. I found the Nick Ray/Chateau Marmont work order. The room-bug transcripts preceded the fone taps. The room bugs revealed jack shit.

Neuter Nick blathers and bloviates. Jimmy D. and Nick A. blather back. Nick pokes Nifty Natalie and Sassy Sal on the couch. Bernie’s notes note “low and high-pitched grunts and sounds of sexual frenzy.” Fourteen pages of garbled-voice overlap follow that.

I hit the phone-tap transcripts. The section ran sixty-two pages. A separate column listed callers. It got boring, fast.

Nick Ray calls Googie’s forty-three times. Cal the counter man picks up. Nick calls Jimmy/Nick A./Natalie and Sal. They discuss movie motivation. Nick promotes underage woof-woof.

Nick calls his agent. Nick calls twenty-nine unknown men and women. Forty-one unknown men and women call Nick. Bad-boring to languorous and long-winded. No ripe revelation. No talk worth jack shit.

I hit twenty-six pages of fone static. Bernie marked it as such. I hit a noodle-nudging non sequitur: Nick calls NO-65832 nineteen times.

It’s a pay phone in Silver Lake. It’s by the Black Cat Bar at Sunset and Vendome. Bernie lists it as a “known bookie drop.”

Nick and Unknown Man #21 talk. It’s 99.9 percent voice voids and static crunch. Yeah—but there’s nuggets in with the dross.

Nick, 5/11/55. Bookie Call #8: *“Setups,” “lights,” “the girl.”* Interlaced static throughout. Eleven minutes of line static follow.

Unknown Man #21, 5/13/55. Bookie Call #9: *“Props,” “the ’46 Ford,” “some sort of real-life location.”* Interlaced static throughout. Sixteen minutes of line static follow.

Nick, 5/14/55. Bookie Call #16: *“Of course, Jimmy wants to play the Bandit.”* Interlaced static throughout. Four minutes of line static follow.

Three more pay-phone calls follow. There’s no transcribed talk. So what? Calls 8, 9, and 16 dumped the dirt.

The calls precede the Janey Blaine snuff. It’s movie talk. *“Props,” “lights,” “setups.”* Janey’s *“the girl.”* Caryl Chessman drove a *“ ’46 Ford”* on his rape jobs. Mulholland and Beverly Glen is the *“real-life location.”* Jimmy wants to play the (Red Light) *Bandit*? If the shitbird weren’t dead, he could do just that.

—

The booth calls belatedly bugged me. I considered them conclusive. They surged circumstantial. The *“ ’46 Ford”* cinched the whole deal. I wanted more. I wanted to place Janey Blaine’s killer in that phone booth.

I called Al Wilhite at Headquarters Vice. He knew *that* booth and the bookie-drop gestalt. He said, "Freddy, it's just a run-of-the-mill pay phone. Yeah, it sees a lot of bookie traffic—because bookies book a lot of action at the Black Cat. But what's to stop some neighborhood denizen with no phone from making calls there? Or your two callers arranging calls there, because the callee lives in the neighborhood, and he doesn't want his number listed on any calls-received list?"

It made sense. I drove by Sunset and Vendome and eyeballed the booth. I saw bookie types exit the Black Cat and enter the booth. I saw them take and make calls and fill out bet slips. I got half gassed at the Cat. I called up concepts and threaded theories through my head. One stuck stern and *held.*

Phone calls. Letters. Codes of communiqué. Caryl Chessman writes to Jimmy Dean. Jimmy probably writes back. It's *Nick Ray's* repugnant replication film. Wouldn't Neuter Nick want to *talk* to Caryl Chessman—at least once?

I whipped west. The concept coursed through me. I ran by the Ranch Market. I kept my *Rebel* cast and crew records check paper there. I ran through the address index. *Nein* and *nyet.* Nobody lived near Sunset and Vendome/the Black Cat.

Nick Ray called Chessman. I sensed it. Death row cons caught calls at the attorney room. The Quentin switchboard put them through. Nick Ray called Chessman in May '55. His hotel bungalow was bugged and tapped. He might have sensed it. *I* was hurling heat at him then. What would he do? He'd place a switchboard call.

I moseyed over to the Marmont. I badged a dippy desk clerk and played special deputy. I laid it out. Nicholas Ray/the *Rebel* shoot/May '55. Did Mr. Ray make any switchboard calls, here in the flesh?

The clerk said he seemed to recall it. He was on the desk that month. He checked his call records and went all aglow.

Here it is. *Now,* I remember. He called San Quentin Penitentiary. He spoke for fourteen minutes, and he used that phone right here at the desk.

I slid him a C-note. He palmed it, *perfecto.* I went all dippy disingenuous.

I would *never* accuse you of eavesdropping, but—

Well, I recall one thing that Mr. Ray said. He said, "Jimmy and I consider you our technical adviser."

I checked the call list. The call went through at 3:16 p.m., 5/17/55. Janey Blaine was murdered the next morning.

OUTSIDE CITY HALL

Downtown L.A.
10/19/57

Picket punks. Slogan slammers. College kids and movie morons moved to outrage. Their main martyr's up in the DB. He's hard-wired to a hot seat. We're heading that way.

"Chessman Is Inn-O-Cent!!!" "Stop The Death Machine!!!"

I ran interference. Lois lugged a prop steno machine. Picket punks posed and paraded. They were packed tight and pissed off. They bristled with bromides and placard-plumed the air.

I stiff-armed us through them. We maneuvered by Marlon Brando. Lois said, "Hi, Marlon!" Brando said, "Lois, what are you doing with that putz?" I flipped his necktie in his face.

There's the steps. We tumbled over, up, and inside. Max Herman and Red Stromwall played escort. They doffed their Hat Squad fedoras. Max ogled Lois. Red went *Woo-woo!!!*

We made the freight lift and the DB. We walked to sweatbox row. The Fiend's in #2. I looked at Lois. She looked at me. I winked. We held the Holy Shit moment close and linked hands. I pushed the door in.

There he is.

Beelzebub. 666. The Biblical Beast. The red-horned/trident-tailed/cloven-hoofed apparition. He emits dust and sparks. Serpents coil through his hair. He's assumed human form today. He's thirty-six and pale. He's got that bumpy nose. He's skinny, he's prissy, he wears jail denims. He vibes World's Smartest Convict.

He sat cross-legged. I pulled a chair up. Lois perched her steno machine on the table. I brought my briefcase.

Chessman said, "You were at Hollywood Station. I recall you at the squadroom there."

The Beast speaks. He's a brazen braggart. I know that about him. He's brought his so-soft voice today. He's surgically circumspect and silky self-effacing. He's the watchful world's Victim of This Time and Place. He's Sacco and Vanzetti, and Timothy Evans, framed for Reg Christie's grief.

I said, "Yes, I was there. I saw Colin Forbes and Al Goossen interview you, and I was there when Shirley Tutler came in."

Chessman said, "Who's Shirley Tutler?"

"She's the woman you assaulted between your assaults on Regina Johnson and Mary Alice Meza. I state that knowing full well that you've denied those crimes, and will certainly deny assaulting Miss Tutler."

I let the moment meander and metamorphose. He'll deny it. He'll say there's no proof. Lois futzed with her machine. Dear Lord, her eyes. Such righteous hate.

"I don't have to talk to you. The court will invalidate the stenographer's transcription, and I surely will not confess to yet another crime I did not commit."

I popped my briefcase. I pulled out the forty-three-page depiction of Shirley Tutler's bite wounds. I put the pages before the Beast's eyes.

He looked down. He saw, he recognized, he willed himself nonreactive. His hands palsied, his neck veins pulsed.

"It's not my handwriting. And even if it was, I've attributed those crimes to someone else."

I lit a cigarette. "You only looked at the top page. You don't know it's crimes plural you've described here. I didn't mention the attribution, and the only way you could have known that was if you'd written this document yourself."

Chessman pushed the pages back to me. He's Camus' *l'étranger*. He's beset by bourgeois burghers who just don't understand. He's implacably withstood their stupidity and indifference. He's read Gandhi and Sartre. He knows how to trenchantly transcend.

He said, "No." That one word. Existentialism 101. To refuse is your right of redress.

I passed him a pen. "You will write the following on that top page. 'These are my crimes, as told to the late actor James Dean, and attributed to an unnamed rapist. Thus, they are *my* crimes, and these documents in the aggregate stand as *my* confession.' "

Chessman said, "No." The Beast's beset by Bourgeois Burgher Freddy. It's his lot in life. Who's that red-haired wraith? *She's* rape bait, for sure.

Chessman said, "No." I backhanded him and banged him to the floor. He went sullen silent and nonreactive. Bourgeois Burgher Freddy kicked him in the balls.

"You have two choices here, Caryl. Sign the confession or get kicked to death. The latter option leaves you no option. The former option permits you to survive, cultivate yet more public acclaim, and further dissemble in court."

Chessman shape-shifted. He went maladroit Mahatma, coming off the railroad tracks. He couldn't call up a costume change. He couldn't shave his head and don his granny specs.

He stood up. He winced from my nut shot. He wrote out my confession text and signed his name below.

Lois said, "Jimmy Dean wanted to play you. That must have appealed to your vanity."

Chessman said, "Hi, Red. I knew you'd have a kicky voice."

I locked his confession in my briefcase. Chessman kicked back in his chair.

"I'm beyond vanity, Red. I've seen too much and had too much done to me. You're a woman, so I'm sure you'll understand."

I said, "Too bad Jimmy crapped out. I would've dug on the movie."

Chessman said, "There's always Nick Ray's alternative movie, not that it will ever surface. I was the technical adviser on it, so I'm sure it's got some verisimilitude."

Lois said, "Things went awry there, didn't they? It seems that always happens with you."

Chessman shrugged and grinned. Ring-a-ding. The Mahatma meets the Rat Pack.

"The game's rigged, Red. That's why I always take what I want, and take it where I can find it. And I always find it, because I'm not choosy. Johnson, Meza, and Tutler surely attest to that."

That's it, then. It took eight minutes and sixteen seconds.

I hustled Lois out to the hallway. The wall speaker spritzed and sparked static. Bill Parker and the Hats hooted, howled, and clapped.

—

I had no name/no at-the-scene proof/no certified murder suspect. I had the infernal inspiration for the crime itself and the cancerous contexts that had caused it. Lois and I laid siege to the *Bacillus chessmanitis.* At some point of prickly protraction, the strain would strangle by gas. That was the unforeseen *then.* Janey Blaine revenged ran me resolute now.

I dropped Lois at the hotel and nudged north-northwest. I hit Mulholland and Beverly Glen. The two crime-scenes crisscrossed and merged as one hellish whole.

’48 to ’55. The perfectly preserved historical location. Jimmy D. didn’t kill Janey. Ditto, Nick Ray. It was some suck-ass subaltern. He’d prowled Janey’s pad. He rifled her desk and jizzed up her undies. *Somebody* stole Robbie Molette’s list of Janey’s johns. That somebody was circling Janey in advance of the alternative film. Nick Ray called *that* man at the pay phone by the Black Cat. They discussed the details of the shoot. The Hats cleared Robbie Molette’s dad. The killer was a *Rebel* set flunky. He possessed technical and/or logistical skills. He 459’d Robbie’s pad. That meant he knew Robbie. That meant Robbie knew *something* about him.

I walked the merged crime scenes. I climbed hills and claimed clues. I found used flashbulbs off the Mulholland embankment. That meant *photography.* It linked the lead of the used flashbulbs at the Demo fund-raiser site. He was stalking Janey then. It was furtive foreplay. He knew Janey would be there to culminate with Jack K. Robbie set Janey up with Jack. That meant Mr. X knew Robbie.

I humped hillsides. I claimed clues. I found a roll of red cellophane by a tree trunk. *Red* cellophane. It covered the headlights on Chessman’s ’46 Ford. It covered the headlights of the ’46 Ford prop car Nick Ray discussed with Mr. X. The Red Light Bandit posed as a cop. Jimmy revived the role. *This* red cellophane was weathered and worn. It looked to be two-plus years old.

Robbie didn’t kill Janey Blaine. He showed me his foto ID once. He had O-positive blood. The killer had AB-negative blood. His jizz secreted his blood type. Robbie had a name for me. I sensed it, sure thing.

—

The wheelman lot. There’s Robbie. He’s listlessly lounged by the lube rack. The lot’s listless, today. There’s no *trabajo,* no divorce *dinero.*

I pulled in and hit my horn. Robbie rubbed his eyes and walked over.

I popped the passenger door. Robbie scooched in. I passed him my flask. We traded pops and glommed up a glow.

"I had a few questions about Janey."

Robbie said, "Boy, that's sure old news."

I smiled. "Well, something's come up."

Robbie heh-hehed. "You mean Fat Boy doesn't fit the bill anymore? Not that he ever did, to the cognoscenti."

I went *nix.* "I'm recalling something you said, and how you said it wistfully. You said, 'Well, she resisted me,' and I'd like you to elaborate on that."

Robbie choked up. "Aw, Freddy. Don't make me say it."

"Say what, Robbie? That you were in love with her?"

Robbie wiped his eyes on his sleeve. Robbie blew his nose on his shirttail.

"Okay, I'll say it. I was in love with her."

"And your dad set you up with her. And she joined your stable at the hotel."

Robbie said, "You're rubbing it in. I divested the stable, as you damn well know. I'm a wheelman now. I'm on the straight and narrow."

That made me laff. "Your dad introduced you to Janey, right?"

"No. Chrissy, my sister, did. She knew Janey, independent of my dad. Even before she got her contract at Metro."

"Are you saying they were pals? Running partners?"

Robbie snatched the flask and deep-dunked it. He got this kid wild-man glow.

"Chrissy and Janey were movie-mad. They costarred in these jive, skeevy-ass shorts. You know, so-called experimental films where nobody gets paid, you never see the flicks in theaters, but copies circulate. I'm not calling them smut, but I'd call them 'bodice rippers,' with a lot of skin and some pretty smutty scenes, if you get what I mean."

I said, "Keep going. Don't make me prompt you."

Robbie deep-dunked. "They were historical-type pastiches, and they were all based on famous crimes where women got raped and sliced. You know, *The Last Days of the Black Dahlia,* Fatty Arbuckle and Virginia Rappe, the girls that guy Otto Stephen Wilson shanked. Chrissy always played the sidekick, and Janey always played the victim. That's how they met, and how they got tight."

I said, "Who made the films? I mean photographed and directed them?"

Robbie said, “I don’t know. Just some fucko movie guys who wanted to push women around and see some skin.”

“Did any guys like that work on the *Rebel* shoot?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Did you know that a film like the ones you described was being shot, and that it pertained to Caryl Chessman?”

“No, but it don’t surprise me, because, like I told you back then, that sick twist Jimmy Dean was all hopped up to play Chessman, and that yet sicker twist Nick Ray was promoting the idea. I also passed you the tip on that so-called alternative film.”

I lit a cigarette. “Do you know a bar in Silver Lake called the Black Cat?”

“Yeah. It’s a bookie joint by day and a fag joint by night.”

“All right. Did you know anyone from the *Rebel* shoot who lived near there? Right off of Sunset and Vendome?”

Robbie shook his head. “Not exactly. Not back in ’55, I didn’t.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I knew a guy who lived *up the hill* from there, and who frequented the Cat, and who moved his studio to a couple of doors down from the Cat, maybe last year.”

I tensed up. Say the name, Robbie. We just tipped telepathic. I should have tapped the guy already. I nabbed the name a split second back.

“And?”

“And, *what*? It’s Arvo Jandine. He was the unit fotog on *Rebel,* and he’s another sick twist of the Jimmy and Nick Ray ilk. He don’t strike me as the killer type, so that’s why I didn’t mention him when you started in on the *Rebel* guys.”

I shut my eyes. I *saw* it. Jandine. The *Rebel* records checks. He’s a whipout man. He habituates junior high schools. He invades girls’ locker rooms. He’s a photographer. He snapped stills at the Liquor Store Inferno.

Plus, the dope raid. Jandine’s flop. The bikini pic from Robbie’s girl book.

Robbie said, “Freddy’s in a trance. It’s like he’s on some new species of hop that’s just been discovered.”

I opened my eyes. “You said ‘sick twist.’ ”

“Yeah. He’s the guy who took those beaver pix of Chrissy. That, and he whipped it out on my mom.”

I reshut my eyes. Robbie said, “Do you ever get ashamed of your life, Freddy?"

I said, "Only most of the time."

—

Escalation. Mine and his. I escalated my efforts to know him. I escalated my master plan and primed it for profit. I called LAPD Vice and filched a *full* fotostat of Arvo Jandine's green sheet. It revealed his rude escalation.

Arvo Jandine, one *sizzling* sick twist. Born 6/8/19, bumfuck Nebraska. Arvo's a shifty shutterbug. He's sneaking snaps in girls' locker rooms, *eeeaaarly*.

His first bust is back in Omaha, '37. He's peddling candid nudes at CCC camps and WPA wingdings. He's sent to a compassionate youth camp. It's committedly coed. He wires the girls' locker room and rigs an automatic shutter flap. He compiles and catalogues candid nudes by the thousands. He escapes and peddles the pix at truck stops and gin mills throughout the Midwest. He's Mr. Smut now. He makes his move and hotfoots it here.

He becomes a unit fotog. He pops pix at Paramount and calls Columbia home. He rigs automatic shutter flaps in female stars' dressing rooms. They snap sneak pix on overdrive. He's Mr. Beaver Bounty and Mr. Stark Naked Star. Word of mouth mainlines him to the L.A. Perv Elite. He manufactures nude actress trading cards. Myrna Loy, Carole Lombard, Norma Shearer. Rita Hayworth, Ella Raines. One Ann Sheridan trumps two Betty Grables. He spawns a *craaaaazy* craze. He makes a fat fortune. The fuzz fox him and entrap him. He sells shunt shots to an undercover cop and gets five to eight in quivering Quentin.

He's paroled in '49. He returns to L.A. He's Mr. Subtle till his fall '51 flameout. He gots to have it/see it/fotograph it *young* now. He's popped outside Le Conte Junior High, June '52. He does eighteen months at Chino and pops out on parole—January '54.

He's *escalated.* He's ready to *collaborate.* He seeks sick twists who twirl to his delirious delusions. He finds his way to Nick Ray and *Rebel Without a Cause.* He's cringingly crossed the path of Freon Freddy Otash. That's where Arvo erred.

Escalation. His and *MINE.*

I creeper-crawled Sunset and Vendome and stared at storefronts.

Jandine Art Photography was two doors down from the Black Cat.

Noxious nitefall fell. I wound my way west to the Fox lot. Nick Ray was shooting his latest lox there.

Party Girl. Robert Taylor and Cyd Charisse. Costarring studly John Ireland. Jungle John's Hollywood's reigning tape topper. He measures in at a mighty 171/2.

I knew all the gate guards on the Fox lot. I knew I could bluff my way in.

I did. I cited a pokerfest at Pandro Berman's office. The guard bought it. I slid him a C-note. I parked my Packard pimpmobile and noodled over to Nick Ray's bungalow.

I burgled my way inside and paved paths by penlight. I planted a mini-mike and a battery pack under Neuter Nick's desk. It was a flip-switch gizmo. I'd flip said switch on Judgment Day.

It was 11:14 p.m. I barged back to Silver Lake and orbed Jandine's studio. It was deep dark and devoid of all movement. I circled the block and saw a back door off the alley. I stashed my sled and slid on rubber gloves.

I carried a camera case and a Leica loaded with infrared film. I loped up like I owned the place. Two pick pokes popped the door. I locked myself in. My penlight paved paths once more.

I got the gestalt. Arvo lived for his work. I flash-flared three storerooms laid with lights and camera gear. I slid by a sleeping cubicle. Arvo conked on a couch-bed combo and cooked on a hot plate. He hung his threadbare threads in a freestanding wardrobe. The sink, shower, and toilet stall stank of rat turds and sprayed piss.

Arvo the obsessive. Arvo the unkempt. He'll keep malignant mementos. These sickniks save souvenirs.

The cubicle catty-cornered a corridor. My penlight lit a shut door. I nudged the knob. I got no give. I put picks in and pushed counterclockwise. The door gave and bent in.

It's one room. Ten by ten, tops. It's windowless and suction-sealed, tight. I tapped the walls and tipped a switch. Gooseneck floor lamps lit four walls of *this:*

The combined shoots. *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Red Light Bandit.* Glam glossies by Arvo Jandine.

Jimmy Dean in his red *Rebel* jacket. Nifty Natalie and Sassy Sal, costumed per the flick. Shots from the shoot. Shots from the Sorority Panty Raid. Shots from the Liquor Store Inferno. Natalie, nude. Sal, nude and nervously embarrassed. A nude Jimmy Dean, banging his bongos. Jimmy Dean, costumed as Caryl Chessman. The ’46 Ford rape car, replicated. Nite exteriors at Mulholland and Beverly Glen.

Janey Blaine done up as Shirley Tutler. Janey, with mock blood blotting her blouse. Janey and Jimmy, tussling in the Ford. Note Janey’s bare breasts.

Then we escalate. Note this wraparound wreath of shots:

See Janey, nude. See Janey and Jimmy, nude. See Janey and Jimmy coiled in coitus in the backseat of the Ford. See Janey in the clothes she wore to Frascati. See Janey body-dumped at the crime scene. She’s handspan-strangled and dead.

NABOB NICK RAY'S OFFICE

20th-Century Fox

10/20/57

I sat and tamped up some tension. I conjured Lois and moved money to new mountains on the moon. Nick notched his final take an hour back. His office slaves slid out early. I booby-trapped the doorway. I kept the lights off. I brought Exhibits A and B in my briefcase.

My pix of Jandine's pix. My pix of his diary pages per *Red Light Bandit.* He kept his diary cached under his couch-bed. He kept his Junior High Hall of Fame pix close by.

Jandine recounted his revelatory fix on Janey Blaine. He met her at Robbie Molette's place. Chrissy introduced them and called her a friend of her dad's. Janey got him unit fotog work on *The Last Days of the Black Dahlia* and the Fatty Arbuckle flick.

His obsession per-per-percolated. He 459'd Janey's pad and stole *her* diaries. He read them and got to the hard-hearted heart of her yen for men and money. He tried to seduce her with his own blackmail scheme. He enlisted Nick Adams. They Mickey Finn'd Rock Hudson and took nudie pix. He 459'd Robbie's room and stole his list of powerfully perved clients. Janey laffed his blackmail scheme off. He fotographed Janey and Jack K. at the Beverly Hills Hotel. He had the unit fotog gig on *Rebel,* already. He ran up a rapport with Nick Ray and Jimmy Dean. They concocted *Red Light Bandit.* The shoot went swell. Janey jumped Jimmy's bones for real, right out in the open. It made him mad. He said he'd drive her home after the wrap. It got out of hand. He didn't mean to rape her and kill her. Shit like that happens. Thank goodness nobody blabbed.

The door opened. Nabob Nick hummed "Lisbon Antigua" and walked this way. My trip wire tripped him and proned him out flat on his face. His head hit the floor. He snagged his snout. He's Nosebleed Nick now.

He groaned. I got up and stepped on his neck. It pinned him and muzzled his mouth. I penlight-flashed the pix and the diary pages. I ran them by his flattened face sidelong and *slooooow.* I gave him time to digest his dilemma and ponder Jandine's every word.

"You're going to pay me twenty-five percent of your net earnings, for the rest of your life. That means twenty-five percent of every dime you make. You're going to cut me in for twenty-five percent of all your current bank balances, and you're going to liquidate any stocks and bonds you might possess and pay me twenty-five percent of their value, now. You're going to pay me twenty-five percent of the assessed values of any properties you might own, now. You will pay me my salary cuts on the first of each month, beginning on November 1, 1957. I called your bank in Beverly Hills this afternoon. I impersonated a Federal bank examiner and learned that your current balance is forty-four grand. We're going to the bank together, tomorrow. I'll take the first eleven grand in cash."

Nick Ray squirmed and squinted back tears. Freon Freddy Otash. The Giant Ant ascends.

—

Low clouds unzipped and reigned rain. I broomed northeast to Sunset and Vendome. I parked on that same side street and sidled to the same back door.

The same two picks popped the lock. I stepped inside and *eeeaaased* the door shut. I heard his snores, straight off.

The sleep cubicle. Eight paces and flank sharp right.

I brought a .44 Magnum revolver. It blasted loud. The pro suppressor soaked up all attendant sound. I walked toward the snores and flashed my penlight. It haloed Arvo's face on the pillow. I aimed and fired six shots.

He vaporized. I smelled dissipation and desiccation in the bone-and-blood mist. I snatched his diary and his wall-to-wall fotos. I jacked the wall heat up to ninety. Let the demon decompose.

KKXZ RADIO

Southside L.A.
10/21/57

Jolting jam session. Walloping world premiere. Live in-studio: the Synagogue Sid Trio.

The piece:

"Trippy Triptych: Dirge for Shirley Tutler and Janey Blaine & Caryl Chessman's Gas Chamber Chaconne."

It's hastily composed. As in *right now*. Sid and his boys embody improvisation. There's four kool kats here for the bash. As in Lois, Robbie Molette, Nasty Nat, and yours truly.

We're celebrating. I bought KKXZ outright and dumped the deed on Nat. Nick Ray paid the freight. I pocketed two g's in chump change and paid Lois' air-fare back to the Apple. She's got an *Armstrong Circle Theatre* gig pending.

I'm bleak, blue, and shorn to shit. We defanged the Beast. We radically revised the sexy secret history of our nation. Lissome Lois leaves me for ten minutes on TV.

Sid and his boys cranked it. Bass sax/flügelhorn/drums. It only goes so far.

I got itchy and Giant Ant antsy. I kept thinking of fatal fuckups and the loony lore of decomposition. I walked to the waiting room and ran some deep breaths.

It helped. I de-antsified. I scoped the Charlie Parker tribute wall. I noticed a new screed scrawled below the *Live on 52nd Street* album.

"Pack up all your cares and woes / Here you go, swingin' low / Bye, bye, blackbird."

It was signed, "Much love, Lois N."

INFERNAL INTERMEZZO:

My Pensively Pent-up Life

10/22/57–5/1/60

It came and went. *Confidential,* the whole *Rebel* rigamarole. I waltzed on the Arvo Jandine snuff. Decomposition devastated all possible inquiries. Stagnant stomach gasses gasped out of the stiff and ignited. The studio blew up. Nobody made it a murder.

I burned all of the listening-post tapes and tape logs. *Confidential* and I went kaput. The mag moseys along without me. Bondage Bob's been raked by residual lawsuits. Savaged celebs now savage him. He's putting out ten and fifteen g's per pop. Nuisance suits are draining him dry. The mag's corrosive content has wizened to wispy white bread. There's no vindictive va-va-voom and scandal skank. There's no strongarm goons to dash dissent and fight that fierce First Amendment fight.

I'm shit out of luck there. I'm Ex-Officio Freddy. I'm a former PI and a dervish of divorce at the wheelman lot. I shook the shakedown tree and bled Nosebleed Nick Ray for a spell. Sustained extortion withered my wig. I blew my take on booze, dope, and women. I sold myself into sin and saw a certain sickness eat me alive. I divested to climb clear of the serpent sucking at my soul. I told Nosebleed Nick this. He genuflected and wept.

Opportunity is love. I've always known it. I doped a racehorse named Wonder Boy and tried to rig a run of races. I got popped for it. The L.A. DA issued indictments. Bill Parker interceded and rerouted my Quentin trek. I lost my PI's license. I'm still Big Bill's back-door bitch and informant. I'm still a rat, a fink, a snarky snitch. I've gone from tattle tyrant to tattletale. It's the work I'm best suited for.

I'm still the Pervdog of the Nite. I still trawl for trouble and peep potent windows in my path. I've cruised and crashed a load of lives on said path to date. I'm lonely in my loss of them. I peep them from afar and peruse the paths they've chosen.

Jack the K. was resoundingly reelected to the Senate. ’58 boded big for him. Pat Brown was elected governor of California. The *Confidential* trial trounced the notion that Pat was a putz. Rock and Phyllis are Splitsville. I negotiated the divorce. Nick Ray remains the awful auteur. He makes miasmic movies that slide folks to sleep. The *Rebel* rigamarole marked his slide into evil. Confluence is destiny. He had help there.

Jimmy D.’s dead. I killed Arvo Jandine. Natalie Wood and Sal Mineo are movie stars. Nick Adams has his own TV show. Chester Voldrich lost the hand I mangled to gangrene. I slide him five yards a month, anonymous.

I see them all as the specious spawn of Caryl Whittier Chessman. The cancerous conjunction of vicious thug/victim/hard-hearted hipster left them too weak to resist. Escalation. The Sorority Panty Raid, the Liquor Store Inferno, the film *Red Light Bandit.* Spring ’55 et al. Chessman hovers in ellipsis. I cannot and will not forfeit the thought of him. He’s insistently intertwined with Lois Nettleton. *They* collectively colluded and marked my one shot to become someone else.

Chessman continues. He files appeals and writes books and claims the ownership of a fatuous phalanx of folks given to dime-store notions of redemption. He’ll fry sooner or later. I trust that legal consensus. *Here’s* what my most heated hatred and powerful perceptions tell me.

He’s struck Lois with a strain of his virus. It lives within that part of her where the hard-hearted careerist and ardent artist coexist. Lois worships a tricky trinity. It’s Art/Chessman/Shirley Tutler’s Desecration. She found me because she needed me and sensed my susceptibility and rage for romance. She’s discarded me twice now. She sees me as a Chessman casualty, as I see her. She knows that I’m love-struck in a way that careerist-artists are not. I torch for her as she does not torch for me. She’s unfit to live a squarejohn life. So am I. I’d try it with her. She won’t try it with me. I must change my life. She will not abet this design. She considers the design pathetic and inimical to her Drama of the Artist Alone. I’ve got one last shot at Lois Nettleton’s love. I consider it a curtain call. We must stand together the day Chessman burns.

THE GREEN ROOM

San Quentin Penitentiary
5/2/60

There it is. This stark steel contraption. It's ghastly ghost green and riven with rivets and big bolts. It faces the spectator seats. It fits one condemned convict. The door's plied with a Plexiglas window staring straight at us. The hot seat features cinchable restraints. A vat socked with sulfuric acid sits beneath it. The cyanide pellets scoot through a chute and dissolve there. Thus begins the big adios.

I sat with Lois. Bill Parker booked our seats. Colin Forbes sat two seats down. Chessman drew a full house. Sixty seats. Sixty newsmen, politicos, and those with clear-cut clout.

We parked in a lower lot and pried through protesters to get here. A thousand people jostled, jeered, shoved, and shrieked. Marlon Brando mugged into a megaphone. He told the folks he was set to play Chessman in a forthcoming flick.

It's 10:01 a.m. There's the Beast. He's entered through a side hallway. Two guards hold his arms. A third guard pops the door. They strap Chessman hard in the hot seat. He's strapped legs, lap, and chest.

A doctor appears. He hangs a stethoscope around Chessman's neck. The death dudes pop back out. Chessman's alone in the green room. It's 10:02 a.m.

The Warden spoke. Wall speakers sent sound our way.

"Do you have any last words?"

Chessman said, "I am not the Red Light Bandit."

A green-room mike cranked out his credo. I winked at Colin Forbes. Colin went *Freddy, you dog.* Lois caught it and swatted my leg.

The pellets dropped. It was soundless. I saw Chessman feign nonchalance. Cyanide fumes filled the chamber. They were invisible. Chessman buckled and gasped and dripped drool.

His head lolled and sat sideways. His mouth stretched wide-wide. His lips curled over his teeth. His tongue torqued. His arms trembled and palsied palms-up. He looked sure-as-shit deadsville to me.

Time slipped slow and stood still. The fumes dissipated and died. The doctor reentered the green room. He held a handkerchief to his face. He donned his stethoscope and put it to Chessman's chest. He said, "I pronounce this man dead."

—

Guards got us through the throng. Protesters pressed against us. Lois looked at them and waved at kids in papoose-style pouches. We trudged and tripped down some stairs. The slogan chants and shouts sheared off to a low roar.

We made the lower lot and my Packard pimpmobile. We lounged upside it and lit cigarettes.

I said, "Let's head into the city. I'll get us a suite at the Fairmont, and we'll lay low for a while."

Lois blew smoke rings. "I'm getting married, Freddy. I thought you should know."

I slumped into my sled. "Well, shit. Who is he?"

"He's a playwright, and he has his own radio show. Before you ask, I'll admit it. I took to calling in, and one thing led to another."

I laffed. "Okay. L.A., then. We'll hit Trader Vic's or Ollie Hammond's. I'll drop you at the airport tomorrow."

Lois said, "Marlon's driving me back. Don't look so glum, and don't pretend you don't know. It was always about the three of us, and with What's His Name gone, we'd just be fishing for compliments, and making conversation."

—

An evil rape-o burns. I lose the girl. My confession ends right here, right now.

The bridge traffic was brutal. News trucks traipsed to and from Quentin. Outbound cars carted slogan slammers and protest pros out to hatch havoc. Placards plumed out their windows. STOP THE DEATH MACHINE and KENNEDY IN '60. Hey, kids—I used to pimp and cop dope for that guy!!!

I dipped downbeat and bopped with the blues. Dig my big boo-hoo. Lost Lois and a dizzy decade out to castigate and confound me.

I'm shivering under my shroud. I'm a rogue cop and strongarm goon with too much past and no future to lose.

The traffic thinned. I hit the bridge and goosed the gas. It propelled me past a caravan of Kennedy kids. Sheer movement gored my gonads. L.A. was four hundred miles south. Opportunity is love. I'm gonesville, Daddy-O.

Read an excerpt from

THE ENCHANTERS

By James Ellroy

Available from Alfred
A. Knopf September 2023

1

(LOS ANGELES, 8:23 P.M., SATURDAY, 8/4/62)

The drop ran eighty feet. The cliff was loose dirt and no footholds. We hauled shitbird up to the edge and showed him the view.

The Pasadena Freeway, southbound. Due north of the Chavez Ravine exit and downtown L.A. Steady traffic clocking through at 65-plus.

Shitbird was Richard Douglas Danforth/white male American/approximate age 36. No green sheet, no wants, no warrants. He's a bleak cat with a pachuco haircut and Sir Guy shirt.

I held his right arm. Max Herman held his left arm. Red Stromwall jammed his head down and force-fed him the view.

Freddy O. and the Hat Squad. We're at it again. Bill Parker says, "Jump." We say, "How high?" It's a kidnap job tonight.

Harry Crowder and Eddie Benson watchdogged Suspect #2. They stood him up by their prowl sled. They fed him the threats, the car noise, the view. He's Morris Hershel "Buzzy" Stein/WMA/age 42. His perv sheet dates back to 1938. He's a stat rape-o and psycho snout diver. Danforth and Stein were bought and paid for. Kidnap was a gas-chamber bounce.

This gig was strictly rogue and ad lib. Here's the gist:

A B-film actress named Gwen Perloff got strongarm snatched. It was late a.m., today. She lived in a cheese-luxe building up from the Strip. Three men grabbed her on the sidewalk. They wore Fidel Castro masks. Multiple eyewits saw them. They shoved her into a double-parked vehicle and jammed south. Said vehicle might have been a '58 Dodge or a '56 Chevy Nomad. Miss Perloff plays second leads in horror and dance-craze flicks. She's a 20th Century–Fox contract slave. The Strip is county turf. The L.A. Sheriff's caught the squawk, *but—*

Fox kingpin Darryl Zanuck got tipped off. Some unknown woman called him. She finked Danforth and Stein and spilled one of their two girl-stash locations. Zanuck called his tight pal, Bill Parker. Chief Bill bootjacked the kidnap job. He dispatched Freddy and the Hats to a house off 6th and Dunsmuir. We grabbed Danforth and Stein. Perloff was stashed elsewhere. Danforth and Stein refused to divulge the spot. Stein said there were three more snatch men still out there. *They* pulled the job, not him and Richie. Stein zipped it then. Harry and Eddie whomped him with sap gloves. Stein still kept it zipped. Ditto Danforth. That mandated the Death Threat and Freeway Drop Show.

I held Danforth's right arm. Max held his left arm. Red jammed his head down and force-fed him look-sees.

Max went *Where's the girl?* Red went *Give it up or you fly*. Harry, Eddie, and Pervdog Stein stood ten feet back from the drop.

It was August-in-L.A. hot and humid. Max and Red sweated through their shirts and suit coats. Danforth wriggled and squirmed. He dug his feet in and thrashed. Dirt clods skittered off the cliff. The fucking drop loomed.

I scoped Max and Red. They looked impatient. I clamped Danforth's arm. He buckled against me. My hand went numb. My legs fluttered. Max and Red ran six-four and 240. *Their* legs fluttered.

Red said, "You're wearing us thin, Richie. We can't keep this up all night. Tell us where the girl is, so we can walk away from here."

Danforth giggled and spit on Red's shoes. He said, "I'm having fun."

I slid on my brass knucks and kidney-punched him. He stifled a screech and dug his feet in. I looked over the cliff. Cars zigged by—fast, with no letup.

Max sighed. Red sighed. Max said, "Sink him, Freddy."

They dropped their hands. I shoved Danforth off the cliff. He treaded air for one split second. "*It's a put-up job*" came out garbled. I heard him hit a car roof. I heard brakes squeal. I heard wheels thump over him. Crisscrossed headlights lit him up. A pimpmobile Caddy dragged him against a guardrail and sheared off his feet.

2

(LOS ANGELES, 10:09 P.M., SATURDAY, 8/4/62)

We ran Code 3 to the Valley. Sheriff's black-and-whites blew past us. We two-car caravanned. I rode with Max and Red. Harry and Eddie took the pole slot.

We dumped Buzzy Stein with the DB guys at Highland Park station. Buzzy saw the drop show and finked a hostage pad in Encino. Gwen Perloff was stashed in a vacant bachelor crib off Woodman. The Fidel Castro dimwits hid her in a broom closet. Max called the lead Sheriff's IO. He ran the command out of the West Hollywood substation.

"Motel Mike" Bayless. Gloryhound cop and all-around nosebleed. He blew up four cholos at the Don José Motel, back in '50. The scalps went to his head. His wife and kids called him "Motel Mike." He named his dog Motel Mike Junior.

Six Sheriff's cars blew past us. The Ventura Freeway was all siren blare and hot lights. It vibed interagency grief. Bill Parker usurps a county job from Sheriff Pete Pitchess. Parker and Pitchess were film-biz suck-ups. Parker went rogue for Darryl F. Zanuck. Pitchess overplays the rescue. Old man Zanuck's shtupping Gwen Perloff. *That's* the key to this grief.

Max passed me his flask. I took two pops. It blew my sixteen days off the juice.

The jolt hit me. My brain waves sparked. I replayed the drop show. Danforth screeched "It's a put-up job." The snatch played unkosher. The Marie "The Body" McDonald job nudged me.

It's early '57. Marie's on the skids. The studios blackball her. Her nightclub act tanks. She concocts a jive kidnap tale. She says rough-trade boys abducted her and dumped her out near Palm Springs. She glommed brief headlines and saw it go *pffft.*

I brain-waved Buzzy Stein. He divulged the stash-hole location. He did *not* rat the Castro guys. He said *they* grabbed Gwen Perloff. The eyewit vehicle IDs did *not* comport with—

Max squelched my brain waves. “Danforth tried to escape. He took a wrong turn and went off the cliff. I stiffed a call to the Chief after I talked to Mike Bayless. He sent some AID guys out to clean up the mess. The Chief knows what’s what, but he likes our revised version better.”

Red laughed. “Motel Mike’s a bullshitter. He planted throwdown guns on those beaners he blew up. You want the punch line? They weren’t really righteous 211 guys. They tapped the till and swiped some beaver mags from a dirty-book stall, and took off running.”

I lit a cigarette. “Here’s what I don’t get. Bayless works SHIT—the Sheriff’s so-called Handpicked Intelligence Team—and we all know that intel is a big bug up Pete Pitchess’ ass.”

Max said, “Yeah. So, what’s Bayless doing shagging kidnap calls out of the West Hollywood squad?”

I made the jack-off sign. Two more Sheriff’s cars blew past us. We followed Harry and Eddie’s taillight blinks and cut to the far right lane. We hit the Woodman exit and hauled due north.

Ventura Boulevard held us back. We ran a red light and hit residential Encino. Sirens overlapped somewhere northeast. We blew a string of stop signs and caught a string of Sheriff’s sleds. We tailed them down a northbound alley. Said alley was narrow and way tight. We bumper-smashed trash cans and sent household shit airborne.

The alley dead-ended at Saticoy Street. Déjà vu ditzed me. I knew I’d been here before. My brain wires fritzed. I couldn’t place the context. This summer was half booze-and-dope blur.

The Sheriff’s cars swung east. Our two PD cars bird-dogged them.

The turf went downscale. Ranch spreads devolved to apartment blocks. Swinger joints. Schmooze pits. Stewardess crash pads. Fag cribs and bachelorette dumps for kept women.

And, *this:*

Eight Sheriff’s cars clustered outside the Tiki-Torch Village.

We fishtailed on over and skid-braked. Six uniformed deputies blocked the streetside entrance. They packed pump shotguns. Jumbo tiki torches flanked wrought-iron gates. It was San Fernando Valley hot. The torches leaked propane. The air reeked. The sky pressed down, explosive.

The Hats plus Freddy O. We’re here to observe. We killed one guy and locked one guy up. LAPD came in early. The Sheriff’s came in late. Let’s watch them save the girl.

We piled out of our prowl sleds and mingled. Max and Harry passed their flasks. The Hats plus Freddy O. got a good glow on. Eddie chatted up a Pan Am stew and got her phone number. A Mexicali stew told me the Tiki-Torch Village swung hard. Her shit-faced copilot confirmed it. He said four Sheriff's dicks were inside the complex, right now. It was some kind of kidnapped-starlet caper.

Somebody yelled, “No suspects inside.”

Somebody yelled, “We've got her.”

I climbed the back bumper of a Sheriff's black-and-white. It gave me a high and wide view. The shotgun deputies slid the gates open and stepped back. *Here they come, here they come.*

There's Motel Mike Bayless. He's tall and stupid-handsome. He's got too-hip razor-cut hair. He's waltzing out Gwen Perloff.

She's no starlet, she wears glasses, she's at least thirty-five. She's big and rangy. She's a schoolmarm knockout in a summer shift dress.

A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JAMES ELLROY was born in Los Angeles in 1948. He is the author of the Underworld U.S.A. Trilogy: *American Tabloid, The Cold Six Thousand,* and *Blood's A Rover,* and the L.A. Quartet novels: *The Black Dahlia, The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential,* and *White Jazz.* He lives in Colorado.

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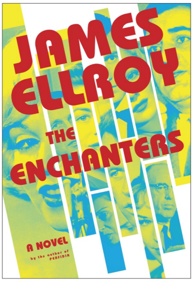
JAMES ELLROY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THE ENCHANTERS
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by the author of PERFIDIA

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goes straight to the tragic heart of 1962 Hollywood with a
wild riff on the Marilyn Monroe death myth, in an astonishing,
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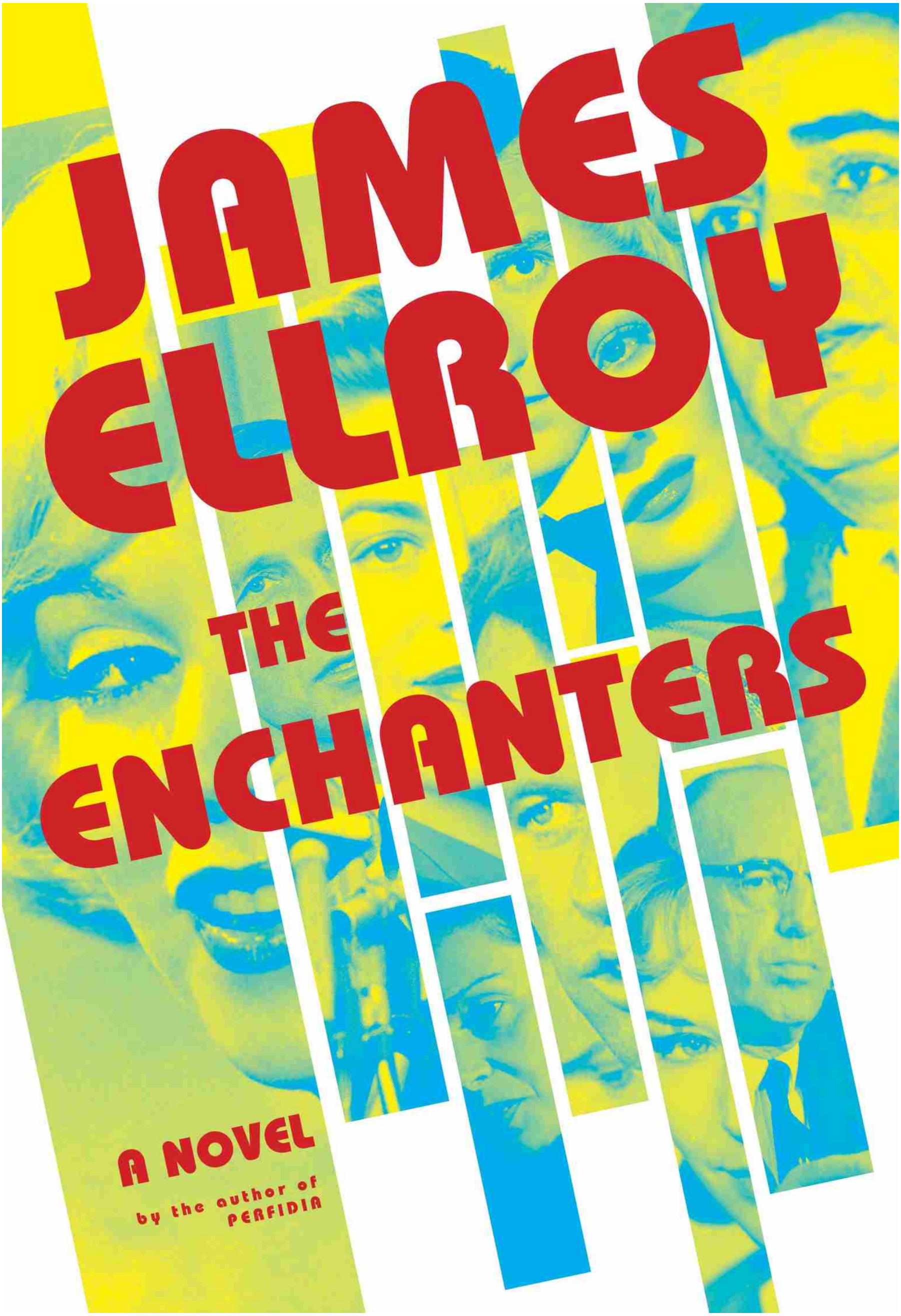

JAMES ELLROY

THE ENCHANTERS

A NOVEL

by the author of
PERFIDIA

Also by JAMES ELLROY

THE L.A. QUINTET

Perfidia
This Storm

THE UNDERWORLD U.S.A. TRILOGY

American Tabloid
The Cold Six Thousand
Blood's A Rover

THE L.A. QUARTET

The Black Dahlia
The Big Nowhere
L.A. Confidential
White Jazz

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Crime Wave
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OTHER NOVELS

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Clandestine
Blood on the Moon
Because the Night
Suicide Hill
Killer on the Road
Widespread Panic

THE LOSERS CLUB
Beverly and La Cienega

Groovy Locale of

THE ENCHANTERS

The LOSERS
The LOSERS
LOSER
OF THE WEEK
EDDIE
FISHER

April 1962

JAMES
ELLROY

THE ENCHANTERS

A NOVEL

Alfred A. Knopf
New York · 2023

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PUBLISHED BY ALFRED A. KNOPF

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Ellroy, James, 1948– author.
Title: The enchanters : a novel / James Ellroy.
Description: First edition. | New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2023.
Identifiers: LCCN 2023005542 | ISBN 9780593320440 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780593320457 (ebook) | ISBN 9781524712563 (open market)
Subjects: LCGFT: Detective and mystery fiction. | Novels.
Classification: LCC PS3555.L6274 E53 2023 | DDC 813/.54—dc23/eng/20230427
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2023005542

Ebook ISBN 9780593320457

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Cover design by Chip Kidd

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Who Are the Enchanters?
Glossary of Police and Criminal Terms, Codes, and Abbreviations
A Note About the Author

_144870803_

To François Guérif

Let me not be put to shame, Lord, for I have cried out to Thee; but let the wicked be put to shame and be silent in the realm of the dead.

—Psalms 31:17

CONFIDENTIAL MEMORANDUM

From: Lt. J. T. Meadows, Jr./#294883
Public Disorder & Intelligence Division
Los Angeles Police Department

To: Former Chief Daryl F. Gates
Dana Point, California
(by secure telefax)

Subject: Surveillance of memorial service for Fred
Otash & related observations on events of
summer 1962 (as previously discussed)

10/10/92

Sir:

The ceremony took place yesterday morning at Forest Lawn, Glendale. Given your recent media notoriety (and coerced early retirement), I understand your reluctance to attend in person. Given my father's participation in the events of summer '62—along with your own—I was honored to be both your designated surveillor and your choice to author the following brief.

Forty-three people attended the graveside service. A Lebanese minister read a New Testament passage and cited the "colorful life of the freewheeling Freddy O." A mourner, former *Mirror-News* scribe Morty Bendish, told Channel 5 News anchor Tony Valdez that he "wrote the pastor's spiel, which Freddy himself dictated to him." It should be noted that Mr. Bendish was a suborned LAPD informant during the events of summer 1962.

The "spiel" was a sanitized biographical riff on the late Mr. Otash. It noted his 1945–1953 LAPD service and later "reign" as the "undisputed King of the Hollywood Private Eyes." The "spiel" failed to acknowledge Mr. Otash as a freelance extortionist, scandal-rag dirt digger, strongarm goon, perpetrator of divorce shakedowns, doper of racehorses, informant for Chief William H. Parker, procurer and dope conduit for President John F. Kennedy, and agent provocateur for Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, in the combined LAPD/Justice Department operation of summer ’62. The pastor concluded Mr. Bendish’s “spiel” by lauding Mr. Otash as both the “Hellhound Who Held Hollywood Captive” and “a role model for all those in the Lebanese American community.” Many mourners openly laughed at this concluding statement.

Per the mourners themselves:

Most were Mr. Otash’s neighbors from the Park Wellington Apartments, along with three former operatives of the long-defunct Otash Detective Bureau: Phil Irwin, “Rodent” Robbie Molette, and Nathaniel “Nasty Nat” Denkins, the longtime host of *Nasty Nat’s Soul Patrol* on Radio KBLK. Irwin, Molette, and Denkins were peripheral figures in the events of summer ’62, but several individuals who might be termed “major players” also attended the ceremony. They were:

The two surviving members of the LAPD “Hat Squad,” retired sergeants Harry Crowder and Clarence “Red” Stromwall;

Assistant U.S. Attorney Edgar Chacõn, a Justice Department investigator under Robert F. Kennedy in the summer of ’62;

Roddy McDowall, noted TV and film actor, as well as an “underground” director of homosexual porno films;

Recording artist/nightclub entertainer Eddie Fisher, who attended the service with former major league pitching ace Bo Belinsky. Mr. Fisher is the fourth husband of actress Elizabeth Taylor. It should be noted that Mr. Otash and Mr. Belinsky pulled a divorce shakedown on Miss Taylor in the summer of ’62;

TV and stage actress Lois Nettleton, who attended the service with the sister of John and Robert Kennedy and the ex-wife of the late actor Peter Lawford, Patricia Kennedy Lawford. The women appeared to be close friends of long standing. They left the service in a chauffeured limousine. I tailed the limo to St. Vibiana’s church in downtown L.A. They lit altar candles, presumably for Freddy Otash, and had the limo drive them to the nearby Pacific Dining Car restaurant. I surveilled them in the cocktail lounge. They became inebriated and offered up toasts to Freddy Otash. At one point, Miss Nettleton said, “We should have loved him more.”

In conclusion:

I consider it unlikely that the death of Freddy Otash will serve to reignite the rumors of LAPD/Justice Department collusion that flourished and spawned much speculation thirty years ago. That unique merging of movie stars, major politicians, a corrupt Hollywood element, and a vicious criminal demimonde has largely faded from public consciousness, and most of the more celebrated and notorious participants are now dead or have vested interests in retaining their silence. Freddy Otash was the only one who knew the entire story, and now *he's* dead. And I seriously doubt that he left any sort of incriminating evidence and/or narrative accounts behind. There's also this: You were there that summer, sir. You know full well that Freddy himself was the most guilty participant in the whole mess, and thus had the most to lose by hoarding defamatory documents.

Respectfully,
Lt. J. T. Meadows, Jr./#294883/PDID

PART 1

BAIT GIRLS

(AUGUST 4, 1962)

1

(LOS ANGELES, 8:23 P.M., SATURDAY, 8/4/62)

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I held Danforth's right arm. Max held his left arm. Red jammed his head down and force-fed him look-sees.

Max went *Where's the girl?* Red went *Give it up or you fly*. Harry, Eddie, and Pervdog Stein stood ten feet back from the drop.

It was August-in-L.A. hot and humid. Max and Red sweated through their shirts and suit coats. Danforth wriggled and squirmed. He dug his feet in and thrashed. Dirt clods skittered off the cliff. The fucking drop loomed.

I scoped Max and Red. They looked impatient. I clamped Danforth's arm. He buckled against me. My hand went numb. My legs fluttered. Max and Red ran six-four and 240. *Their* legs fluttered.

Red said, "You're wearing us thin, Richie. We can't keep this up all night. Tell us where the girl is, so we can walk away from here."

Danforth giggled and spit on Red's shoes. He said, "I'm having fun."

I slid on my brass knucks and kidney-punched him. He stifled a screech and dug his feet in. I looked over the cliff. Cars zigged by—fast, with no letup.

Max sighed. Red sighed. Max said, "Sink him, Freddy."

They dropped their hands. I shoved Danforth off the cliff. He treaded air for one split second. *"It's a put-up job"* came out garbled. I heard him hit a car roof. I heard brakes squeal. I heard wheels thump over him. Crisscrossed headlights lit him up. A pimpmobile Caddy dragged him against a guardrail and sheared off his feet.

2

(LOS ANGELES, 10:09 P.M., SATURDAY, 8/4/62)

We ran Code 3 to the Valley. Sheriff's black-and-whites blew past us. We two-car caravanned. I rode with Max and Red. Harry and Eddie took the pole slot.

We dumped Buzzy Stein with the DB guys at Highland Park station. Buzzy saw the drop show and finked a hostage pad in Encino. Gwen Perloff was stashed in a vacant bachelor crib off Woodman. The Fidel Castro dimwits hid her in a broom closet. Max called the lead Sheriff's IO. He ran the command out of the West Hollywood substation.

"Motel Mike" Bayless. Gloryhound cop and all-around nosebleed. He blew up four cholos at the Don José Motel, back in '50. The scalps went to his head. His wife and kids called him "Motel Mike." He named his dog Motel Mike Junior.

Six Sheriff's cars blew past us. The Ventura Freeway was all siren blare and hot lights. It vibed interagency grief. Bill Parker usurps a county job from Sheriff Pete Pitchess. Parker and Pitchess were film-biz suck-ups. Parker went rogue for Darryl F. Zanuck. Pitchess overplays the rescue. Old man Zanuck's shtupping Gwen Perloff. *That's* the key to this grief.

Max passed me his flask. I took two pops. It blew my sixteen days off the juice.

The jolt hit me. My brain waves sparked. I replayed the drop show. Danforth screeched "It's a put-up job." The snatch played unkosher. The Marie "The Body" McDonald job nudged me.

It's early '57. Marie's on the skids. The studios blackball her. Her nightclub act tanks. She concocts a jive kidnap tale. She says rough-trade boys abducted her and dumped her out near Palm Springs. She glommed brief headlines and saw it go *pffft*.

I brain-waved Buzzy Stein. He divulged the stash-hole location. He did *not* rat the Castro guys. He said *they* grabbed Gwen Perloff. The eyewit vehicle IDs did *not* comport with—

Max squelched my brain waves. "Danforth tried to escape. He took a wrong turn and went off the cliff. I stiffed a call to the Chief after I talked to Mike Bayless. He sent some AID guys out to clean up the mess. The Chief knows what's what, but he likes our revised version better."

Red laughed. "Motel Mike's a bullshitter. He planted throwdown guns on those beaners he blew up. You want the punch line? They weren't really righteous 211 guys. They tapped the till and swiped some beaver mags from a dirty-book stall, and took off running."

I lit a cigarette. "Here's what I don't get. Bayless works SHIT—the Sheriff's so-called Handpicked Intelligence Team—and we all know that intel is a big bug up Pete Pitchess' ass."

Max said, "Yeah. So, what's Bayless doing shagging kidnap calls out of the West Hollywood squad?"

I made the jack-off sign. Two more Sheriff's cars blew past us. We followed Harry and Eddie's taillight blinks and cut to the far right lane. We hit the Woodman exit and hauled due north.

Ventura Boulevard held us back. We ran a red light and hit residential Encino. Sirens overlapped somewhere northeast. We blew a string of stop signs and caught a string of Sheriff's sleds. We tailed them down a northbound alley. Said alley was narrow and way tight. We bumper-smashed trash cans and sent household shit airborne.

The alley dead-ended at Saticoy Street. Déjà vu ditzed me. I knew I'd been here before. My brain wires fritzed. I couldn't place the context. This summer was half booze-and-dope blur.

The Sheriff's cars swung east. Our two PD cars bird-dogged them.

The turf went downscale. Ranch spreads devolved to apartment blocks. Swinger joints. Schmooze pits. Stewardess crash pads. Fag cribs and bachelorette dumps for kept women.

And, *this:*

Eight Sheriff's cars clustered outside the Tiki-Torch Village.

We fishtailed on over and skid-braked. Six uniformed deputies blocked the streetside entrance. They packed pump shotguns. Jumbo tiki torches flanked wrought-iron gates. It was San Fernando Valley hot. The torches leaked propane. The air reeked. The sky pressed down, explosive.

The Hats plus Freddy O. We're here to observe. We killed one guy and locked one guy up. LAPD came in early. The Sheriff's came in late. Let's watch them save the girl.

We piled out of our prowl sleds and mingled. Max and Harry passed their flasks. The Hats plus Freddy O. got a good glow on. Eddie chatted up a Pan Am stew and got her phone number. A Mexicali stew told me the Tiki-Torch Village swung hard. Her shit-faced copilot confirmed it. He said four Sheriff's dicks were inside the complex, right now. It was some kind of kidnapped-starlet caper.

Somebody yelled, "No suspects inside."

Somebody yelled, "We've got her."

I climbed the back bumper of a Sheriff's black-and-white. It gave me a high and wide view. The shotgun deputies slid the gates open and stepped back. *Here they come, here they come.*

There's Motel Mike Bayless. He's tall and stupid-handsome. He's got too-hip razor-cut hair. He's waltzing out Gwen Perloff.

She's no starlet, she wears glasses, she's at least thirty-five. She's big and rangy. She's a schoolmarm knockout in a summer shift dress.

3

(LOS ANGELES, 11:28 P.M., SATURDAY, 8/4/62)

The dump job. The bent schoolmarm. Saturday-night kicks gone wrong.

I prowled my pad-office and inventoried my shit. I was up-the-ass antsy. I Man Camera'd my four rooms and muzzled my thoughts.

Here's the inventory:

I've got bug-and-tap gear, piled in boxes. I've got an LAPD-issue Teletype. I've got an evidence kit. I've got a forensic-shot Polaroid camera. There's four file cabinets—packed with dirt sheets and filthy snapshots. Plus a box of throwdown guns and two pump shotguns. Plus belt saps, handcuffs, and come-along restraints.

I took a USC night course, back in '46. Criminalistics for Police Officers. A Nazi professor named Hans Maslick developed the Man Camera technique. You observe interior-crime scenes and imprint minute details. You stare and study and lodge details in specific brain vaults. Your vaults never leak or spill their contents. I'm a self-taught eideteker and never lose what I imprint. I stare and study and hone my application of the technique. It rewires my brain circuits and often serves to curb my lust for booze and dope.

Man Camera. My work gear, out in plain sight. Here's a late-breaking flashback. That pimp Caddy drags Richie Danforth off a guardrail and severs his feet.

I dumped the gear back in my hall closet. I inventoried my personal shit and went in Man Camera tight.

My projector, pull-down screen, and film-can trove. Lois Nettleton in *Naked City* and *Alcoa Presents.* TV to Broadway. Lois as Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.* It's 1956. She's the lead's understudy. I've imprinted every soaring moment and gaffe.

Lois to Pat. One framed photograph. V-J Day in Kodacolor. Pat's USO hostess gown droops. My Marine dress blues gleam.

She's gawky working on regal. She can't outrun her star surname. She tried to then. She's past it now. Hollywood Boulevard erupts behind us. I've imprinted every anonymous face and the glint off every windowpane.

My reverie unraveled. The dump job schizzed me. We'd waltz on it. I knew that. Some types have just got to GO. Rape-o's, hot-prowl guys. Hostage takers. Kidnap-for-profit and sex-motive fucks. Bill Parker would frost repercussions. Local press geeks would cosign *El Jefe*'s PR line. Buzzy Stein would refuse to fink the snatch men. I cranked my lens in tight and framed two outtakes.

Richie Danforth flails and drops. *"It's a put-up job."* The crowd outside the Tiki-Torch Village. Cops and airline stews jazzed by the show. A Pan Am stew did samba steps with Harry Crowder. Eddie Benson scored fourteen phone numbers. I've got my high bumper perch.

Man Camera. Crane shot. Motel Mike Bayless and Gwen Perloff walk out. Gwen's unruffled and unmussed. It's ninety-three degrees at 10:00 p.m. She's been locked in a broom closet. There's no sweat pools on her mint green shift. There's no tape-gag residue. There's no wrist-restraint chafe marks. She's redoubtably composed.

She's an actress walking into a crowd. Some men whistle. Some hopped-up stews jump and wave. Motel Mike stands apart from Gwen. He's not consoling a distraught kidnap victim. He's establishing parameters. He's telling the crowd he's not poking the big, rangy dish.

I shut my eyes. It doused the room lights and reset my lens cap. It cut me loose to brood and think.

Gwen Perloff looked like a bait girl. She might play main squeeze in Darryl Zanuck's all-starlet stable. Zanuck was high up and bitched up at Fox. The big toga lox *Cleopatra* had Fox strung up and fucked-up and gouting money. It was Movie Debacle as Worldwide Sensation. Liz Taylor's shacked with Richard Burton. They swoon through Rome by night and screw in prop rooms at Cinecittà. Fox might sell their backlot to cover cost overruns. Darryl Zanuck's high up and bitched up and has shit stacked high on his plate. Then some woman calls him and rats out a sketchy kidnap deal.

I gnawed the *Cleo* rumors. Fox kingpin Zanuck, Fox starlet Gwen Perloff. I popped two Dexedrine for late-night pizzazz. I replayed the first Hats-plus-Freddy O. caper.

May '54. The Red Devil Bandit/aka George Collier Akin. He's a hot-prowl sadist/rape-o. He hits USC sorority pads. *HE JUST HAS TO GO.*

He wore a red rubber devil mask. He torqued his victims with monster film one-liners. We jumped him outside a coed rooming house. We had .45 Colts and Ithaca pumps with rat poison–dipped buckshot. The reverb blew out four downstairs windows.

My biz phone rang. I grabbed it two rings in. A Brit-voiced man babbled at me. I made the voice. It was Peter Lawford. He was half-gassed and far-gone panicked.

I heard *"dinner party"/"no show"/"found the body."* I said, "Calm down and make sense."

Lawford wheezed. My phone line staticked up. I heard *"late for dinner party"/"oh my God"/"Marilyn Monroe."* Gasps and garbles spelled it out. The line cleared. He went over/he saw the pill vials/there was no housekeeper extant—Freddy, she was *cold.*

I shrill-whistled. It fritzed up the line feed and made dipshit Lawford *eeeeek.* I heard coins drop. Dipshit fed dimes to a pay phone.

Lawford mewled and wheezed. I heard *"My wife, Pat."* That stopped me short. I said, "Go back to the house and sit in your car. I'll be right over."

Lawford pitched boo-hoo. *Freddy, you're a mensch. She was such a talent and such—*

I hung up and dialed Bill Parker's home phone. Spool clicks blurred to dialtones. The Chief recorded his calls. Local malcontents and dissidents dialed the boss for kicks and grins.

Parker said, "Who's calling?"

"It's Fred Otash, sir."

"Are you calling for reassurance? You shouldn't be. It's been settled. Mr. Danforth escaped and misjudged the drop off the embankment. Mr. Stein is in custody, and the Sheriff's will deal with the three suspects at large."

I lit a cigarette. "It's something else, sir."

"Let's not string this out. What 'something else' are we talking about?"

"Marilyn Monroe's dead. It looks like a pill OD or a suicide. Peter Lawford found her and called me. He's waiting for me at the house. I'm going out."

Tap-taps hit the line. I knew the ploy. Parker pencil-tapped the phone and bought response time. I clocked the taps at—

"Intel has extensive files on Miss Monroe and her movie-business and political chums and lovers, up to and including John and Robert Kennedy. Peter Lawford supplies his brother-in-law Jack with dope and girls, a reprise of your mid-'50s role as the young senator's pimp and supplier. You're a charter member of the L.A. cognoscenti, Freddy. How up-to-date are you on all of this?"

I gulped. "I'm up-to-the-moment, sir."

Parker said, “Really? As in?”

“As in a recent gig I had.”

“You’ll tell me about it? As in the next time we speak?”

“Yes, sir.”

More tap-taps hit. They extended. I timed them off my watch. They ran two minutes and sixteen seconds.

“Go back to the house. Calm Lawford down and coerce him into silence. Enter the house and perform a full forensic. I’ll post perimeter guards to keep civilians at bay. Meet the Hats at PC Bell in Santa Monica, tomorrow at 8:00. Pull Miss Monroe’s phone records for this calendar year, along with her up-to-date toll tickets. Let’s see what we can do about keeping this contained, and perhaps reaping benefit from it.”

—

Nightclub traffic bottlenecked the Strip. Cars crawled past Ciro’s and the Crescendo. I cut side streets south and Santa Monica to Wilshire westbound. Traffic thinned down to zero. I hit Barrington and San Vicente. Commercial Brentwood was shut down tight.

I hooked north on Carmelina. The swank level popped exponential. Grok the deep lawns and tall hedgerows. Dig the quaint Spanish cribs and outsize Spanish de-luxe.

There’s Fifth Helena Drive. There’s the Monroe crib. There’s Peter Lawford’s cherry Rolls parked in front.

Headlight blips hit me. I caught two blip sets, on and off. It was Parker’s point men in civilian cars. They were stashed across the street and down from the Rolls.

I blipped back and pulled up to the Rolls, snout-to-snout. I banged the front bumper and hit my brights to jolt the cocksucker. The windshield lit up glare white. Lawford blinked and fumbled a cigarette. I killed my lights and stepped out of the car.

Lawford cracked his passenger door. I slid in beside him. Green leather and burled wood cocooned us. Lawford had the shakes. I passed him my flask. It was brim-full of jungle juice—151 rum and powdered Benzedrine.

He sucked on the nozzle. Don’t light a cigarette—the shit might ignite.

I said, “Okay, she’s dead. The key thing now is protecting some very important friends of hers, and we don’t need to name names here.”

Lawford went electric. Jungle juice hits you fast.

"I know who you're talking about, because they're my family. I resent the fact that you know them, and that you deign to mention them so casually."

I bitch-slapped him. He yelped. I grabbed the flask and took two good pops.

"I like Jack. I can do without Bobby, but that's a topic for another time and place. When what's-her-name's body is discovered, they'll need friends, and as far as this town goes, that's the Los Angeles Police Department, and I've been delegated to tell you that Chief Parker's friendship comes with a price."

Lawford broke a sweat. Hot night, jungle juice, manhandling.

" 'What's-her-name' is the greatest female film star of her era, and the men you so blithely refer to as 'Jack' and 'Bobby' are the president and attorney general of the United States. And I happen to be married to—"

I bitch-slapped him. He yelped and blubbered. I tossed him my pocket square.

"Marilyn was nothing but a glorified bait girl. I know shit about her, Jack, and Bobby that you wouldn't believe. And don't start in on who you're married to, because that's when the hurt really starts."

He wiped his face and neck. He looked at me. Hot night, jungle juice, manhandling. Check his eyes. He can't decode my riff on Pat.

"Where's the AG? He was in the *Herald* this morning. Something about a speech in San Francisco."

Lawford wiped his nose. He trashed my pocket square in two seconds flat.

"Yes, he's up there. He's at the St. Francis."

I said, "Call him and get him down here. Bill Parker will want to talk to him."

Lawford wiped his eyes and kicked the ignition. I slid out of the car. The Rolls laid rubber, westbound. I whistled and signaled the point cops—I'm going in.

"Full forensic."

The Monroe pad, redux.

My evidence kit was suitcase-size and full-fitted. It held one Polaroid camera. It held thirty film rolls and eighty flashbulbs. Plus print gear and rubber gloves. Plus fiber-collection combs and sheaths and a crank-up fiber vacuum.

Spray cans. Ninhydrin to pull bloodstains and acid phosphatase to pull jizz. Stoppered vials to store liquid samples. Twelve rolls of

Scotch tape. Good print-lift and dust-collection strips.

Lawford left the front gate and front door ajar. I knew the interior layout. I rolled on surgeon's gloves and flexed my hands. It was a work-in-the-dark job. I got out my penlight and bit down on the shaft. I was ripped to the gills. I clicked on the Man Camera inside my head.

The evidence kit was deadweight. I lugged it up the steps and inside. I kicked the door shut and threw the bolt. Man Camera plus penlight. Aim, point, discern, and imprint.

Fuck the slothful living room. It's standard Monroe disarray. Let's go case the stiff.

I walked to her bedroom. My light beam zigzagged a path. I clocked bare white walls, pulled window drapes, the dull-veneer wood floor.

There's the nightstand and pill vials. There's the bedside phone. There's Marilyn's left hand, hot to grab. She's curled prone beneath white sheets.

I ran a hand under them. She was nude/her skin was cold/the bedcovers trapped no heat.

I scoped the vials. Nembutal, Seconal, chloral hydrate. Instant dreamland. That shit promotes deep sleep.

Film scripts piled under the nightstand. Mouse turds close by. Here's an anomaly.

A clock radio. It's been upended and dumped on the floor. It's flush between the bed and the nightstand. The plug's still in the wall.

Say she's zorched and flailing. She's got options. More pills or the phone as a last-ditch yelp for help?

I knelt by the bed and penlight-flashed close-ups. Here's Anomaly #2:

Dried washcloth streaks. *Print-wipe* streaks. All along the top surface and the grab sides of the gizmo. Two pale blue fibers stuck to the top-surface streak.

I popped my evidence kit. I tweezer-pinched the fibers and bagged them. They looked like terry cloth. I powder-dusted the top and grab sides. The streaks stood out bold now. I picked up two rubber-glove prints. I diagnosed it:

Crime-scene obfuscation. Evidence of a professional print-wipe job.

The front and back of the gizmo were fabric/wire mesh. That meant non-print-sustaining. I sat on the bed and quadrant-scanned the whole radio. Note the print-wipe streaks on the dial. Note the dial needle stuck at All-News KLEZ. I goosed the dial and got sound. A newshound spieled through static skreek.

"…daring kidnap in the shadow of the hip Sunset Strip. Starlet Gwen Perloff—"

Static blur cut off the newsman. I jiggled the dial. I got *"one suspect fell to his death"* and line fuzz. I got *"suspect now in custody"* and blur, fuzz, hum, crackle, skreek.

I jiggled the plug wire. I got *"This updates our 9:05 broadcast. The three men remain at large."*

I hauled my evidence kit up on the bed and scooched the lid up against Monroe. I got out my Polaroid and spooled in a twelve-shot roll of film. I adjusted the flash attachment and screwed in a bulb. I hit the button.

The room blew up white. White glare lit the white sheets and white walls. I got the nightstand and dead white arm. I got the phone and the pill vials. I got white-blond hair on a white pillow.

I waited sixty seconds and pulled out the print. Pic #1: dead bait girl. I dropped the print in my kit and shot eleven more bedroom exposures. The clock radio, the nightstand, the pill vials. The whole room in wide-angle shots. Mid-shots of the bed. Peekaboos of the one exposed leg and disheveled white-blond hair.

Twelve bulb bursts. Twelve brain imprints. I must retain what I see.

I walked into the living room. I penlight-flashed the walls and floors and reloaded the Polaroid. I caught Anomaly #3:

Deep-pile carpets. Mashed-down foot impressions. Large male feet/heavy shoes/deep fiber displacement. Footprints to and from a quarter-cracked eastside window. Tall-man footprints. This guy walked big.

I got out my measuring tape and unfurled it. I penlight-flashed representative footpaths and laid my tape down between imprints. 26", 25.4", 30". Tall Man had to run six-one or six-two.

I fed bulbs to my bulb strip. I shot the measured and unmeasured paths. I shot loose paint chips by the cracked-window ledge.

He entered through that window. The fibers had been foot-mashed *down.* They bounced *back* and smoothed out as I watched. Tall Man prowled the room tonight. The LAPD lab could develop a walking portrait off my pix.

I strolled the pad. I quadrant-flashed the walls and floors. I caught Anomalies #4 and 5 fast.

Bug mounts. Camouflaged as outlet plugs. Flush on the wall wainscoting. One per the living room/one per the spare bedroom.

They weren't *my* bug mounts. I pulled *my* mounts two weeks back.

These mounts were now defunct. The connector wires had been snipped.

My mounts were oblong. These were square. I pulled *my* mounts. *These* mounts were not on the premises then.

I unscrewed the mounts and dropped them in my evidence kit. They looked like L.A. Sheriff's or FBI-issue. The Jap transistors gave them away.

Bug mounts meant potential tapped phone lines. The Monroe crib featured three extensions. Living room, spare bedroom, Marilyn's boudoir. I made the rounds and ran receiver checks.

I pulled the handsets off the phones and unscrewed the perforated tops and bottoms. I checked for stashed mini-mikes and got zilch. *But* —I saw left-behind circuit spacers. That meant the three phones had been tapped. The spacers were frayed and corroded. *My* spacers and mikes had been inset in the handgrips. Monroe bought the house in February and moved in March 10. My surveillance job began April 11.

I photographed the three spacer sets and replaced the receiver caps. I dropped the damp prints in my kit. I returned to Monroe's bedroom and worked up fibers and prints.

Hardwood flooring. Two throw rugs by the foot of the bed. One wood-veneer dresser. The flooring would not trap dry-constituent fibers. The rugs would. The dresser had good touch-and-grab planes that might sustain latent prints.

I blew off the floor and vacuumed the rugs. I filled half an evidence sheath with threads and unknown gack. I brush-dusted the touch-and-grab planes on the dresser and got useless partials, smudges, and smears.

Monroe was a hoarder. My prior B and E's taught me that. The dresser drawers deserved a toss. I might find all-new shit. It might be evidentially germane.

The bedroom was hot, *hot.* I was dexedrined and jungle-juiced. This prowl-and-seek gig eroticized me. I penlight-flashed the bed and saw that white-blond hair on the white pillow.

I opened the top drawer and viewed the contents. I inventoried nine pairs of nylon stockings and a red crocheted bikini. I photo-snapped said contents and counted off sixty seconds. I pulled the print and dropped it in my evidence kit.

The room heat spiked. I broke a sweat. A strong wind rattled the windows. I reached under the bedsheets and touched Marilyn's leg. It felt dead cold and hot-room warm all at once.

Drawer #2 contained assorted slips and Chanel No. 5 sachets. Hot-room air merged with perfume residue. I counted six sachets and slips. The slips were all pale pastel. The armholes were sweat-stained. It enticed me.

I picked up a pink brocade slip and held it close to my face. I crossed myself. It quashed an urge to touch the whole batch.

The drawer was jammed open. I jiggled it and shifted the contents. I saw an old black-and-white snapshot and a yellowed piece of paper beside it. The gist hit me, straight off.

It's an L.A. County morgue shot. That's Carole Landis, buck nude on a gurney. She's a bottle blonde, she's a pre-Monroe manqué, she quaffed barbs and booze in July '48 and left a woe-is-me note for her fans. She'd tried suicide before. As in four times. She was on Husband #4. She had a run of costar gigs at Fox and a sub-run of poverty-row quickies. Brit hearthrob Rex Harrison declined to dump his wife for her. She had a big spread in Pacific Palisades and a film career stuck in skidsville.

Skidsville to creepsville. The yellow paper displayed a note. It was fashioned in cutout/pasted-on magazine letters. The paper was old. The typeface was old. The note read:

I loved her before I loved you.
She was nicer. You're more desperate and pretentious.
I had to learn to love you. She made it easy.

I shot the note and the morgue pic. Flashbulb pop lit the bedroom some crazy new way. I counted off sixty seconds and pulled the print. I dropped it in my evidence kit.

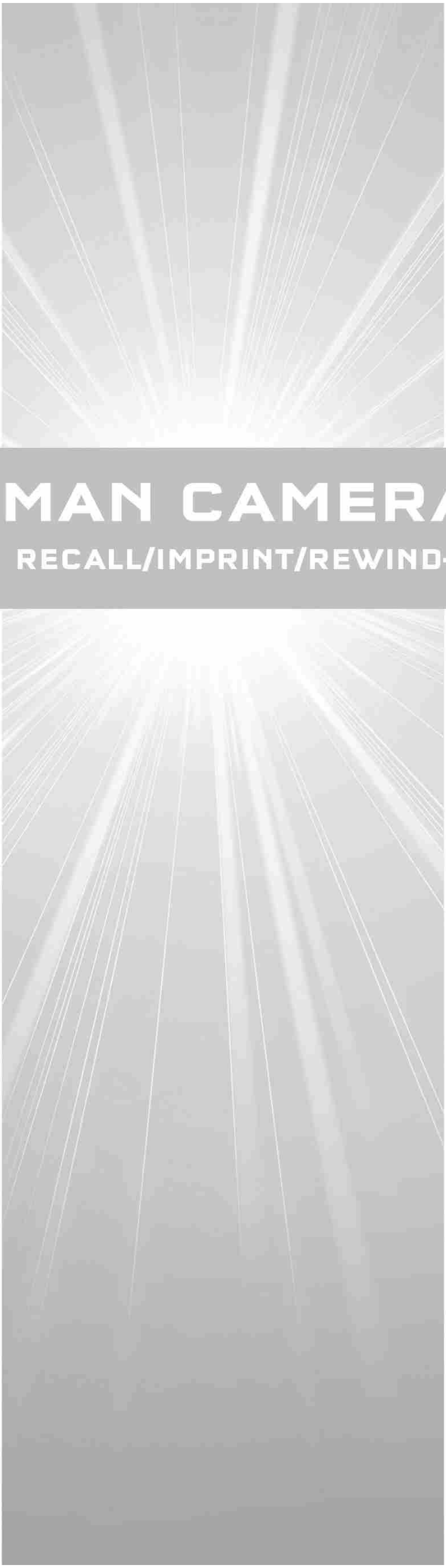
I dusted the morgue pic. I brought up one partial and two smears. I photographed them. I dusted the paper backing and brought up bupkes.

The room heat *re*-spiked. The room went claustrophobic. I sheath-wrapped the morgue pic and note. I dropped the photos in my kit. I unjammed the undie drawer and rammed it shut. The jolt tripped a lever.

A wooden tray below the drawer slipped out and open. I crouched close. *Ich bin ein eideteker.* I saw and imprinted *this:*

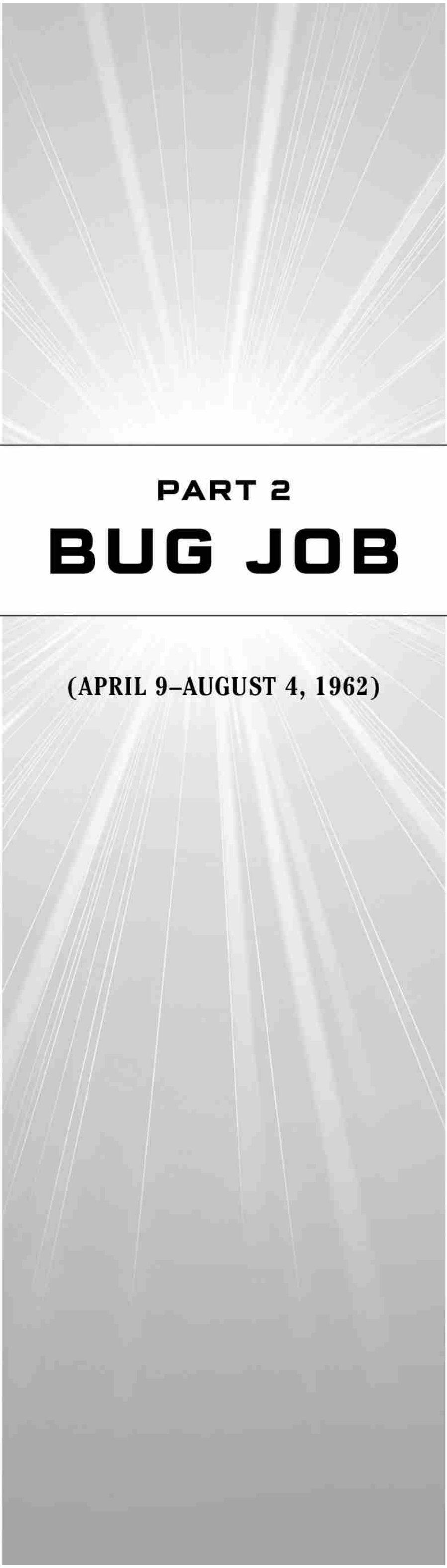
Fuckee-suckee pix. Four in all. Black-and-white Polaroids. The nude Marilyn Monroe and a cruel stud with a big pompadour. There's whiteout strips over his eyes. It distorts his identity. He's beefy-muscular. Monroe's Monroe. They're fucking, sucking, going 69. It's Kama Sutraville, baby. Note the sleazy motel backdrop. Monroe looks younger. The pix connote ’58 or ’59.

Dried jizz crusts. Some perv spritzed all four pix. Clusters of dead cells and blood-type markers. The lab can run tests, we can ID this freak—



MAN CAMERA

RECALL/IMPRINT/REWIND—



PART 2

BUG JOB

(APRIL 9–AUGUST 4, 1962)

4

(LOS ANGELES, 9:14 P.M., MONDAY, 4/9/62)

The Losers Club. Beverly and La Cienega. It's a strip joint. It veers topical. Large-draw comics slum here. Lenny Bruce, Don Rickles, Mort Sahl. They're sanctioned to work raw. It's the Losers gestalt.

There's a big sign out front. It denotes the "Loser of the Week." Eddie Fisher begins his reign tonight. He's the designated schmuck and all-star attraction. I'm bodyguarding Eddie. We're perched in the greenroom. There's a full bar and a deli-nosh spread. Note the goblets crammed with goofballs and bennies.

Eddie said, "Nixon's been Loser of the Week twice. Rock Hudson got the nod last month, but nobody knows why."

I lit a cigarette. "Sheriff's Vice caught him blowing a quiff in the john at the Hamburger Hamlet. The nod's to the cognoscenti. The Rock's got a secret-life scenario going. He's not a signature loser, like you and Nixon."

Eddie yukked. "I'll take it, because it's getting me work, but Liz should get Loser of the Millenium. Her makeup man's an old pal of mine. I get daily reports from the set. All indications point to catastrophe."

He meant the *Cleopatra* mess and Fox in the shitter. The shoot's a cash drain and pure chaos. The Rome-to-L.A. cable lines buzz twenty-four hours. Liz Taylor rates Shrew of the Year to Eddie's Passive Putz. She's zonked on booze and pills and beset by mystery ailments. She malingers in swank hotel suites and eats herself fat. She's bonking her costar, Richard Burton. Paparazzi bird-dog them down the Via Veneto.

Liz and Eddie are splitsville. She's dumping Husband #4 and warming up #5 in hot-sheet flops on the Appian Way. Eddie's Mr. Cornuto and a revived nightclub sensation. He's done turn-away biz in Vegas and L.A.'s Cocoanut Grove. Tonight's his Losers Club debut. He's embraced loserhood. There's six hundred Eddiephiles lined up outside.

I've got three operatives working the rope line. Horny women press envelopes and bribe cash on my guys. The envelopes contain mash notes, cheesecake pix, and snipped pubic hair.

Eddie sipped a scotch-rocks. "All the Liz tsuris and money tsuris aside, the picture is already a legendary dog in waiting. Zanuck is planning to reshoot it, with Lassie and Rin Tin Tin in the lead roles."

I yocked. Bo Belinsky walked in. He's the new pitching stud for the L.A. Angels. Women dig him. He's out of Trenton, Eddie's out of Philly. They're big new best friends. They party hearty and denigrate Liz nonstop.

Eddie and Bo embraced. Their "Love ya, *bubi*" schtick commenced on cue. I ditched the greenroom and ducked outside.

La Cienega was tight-packed. The rope line ran two blocks north. Nat Denkins, Phil Irwin, and Robbie Molette worked the crowd. They checked the prepay tickets for Eddie's ten, midnight, and 2:00 a.m. shows. They dispensed laughs and booted underaged kids out of line.

I counted heads and crossed myself. The Eddie gig was a moneymaker. It's 100% open-end. The gig would last as long as Eddie's victim status held and Liz notched headlines in Rome.

I needed the work. I'd been tanksville for months. I'd been repossessing cars for Felix the Cat Chevrolet. I'd been working divorce shakedowns and sandbagging tomcat hubbies. Bill Parker shot me strongarm jobs too dicey for regular cops. It kept Robbie, Phil, and Nat part-time employed. The Eddie gig was a sinecure and a life raft.

Eddie's intro music trickled outside. I ducked inside. The crowd was shoehorned in tight. Check the SRO bar. Check the six-set tables with ten fans crammed in tight. Check the wall-to-wall standees. Check the cocktail girls in beatnik black leotards and berets.

They wore cleavage-clip buttons. They read *I'm Joyce, I'm June, I'm Jane—rip me!!!!!* The tables featured lava lamps and plastic back scratchers. Dipshit guys grabbed the scratchers and raked the girls' leotards. The girls dodged gropes and served drinks in tatters.

Eddie's combo weaved onstage. Tenor sax, trumpet, bass, plug-in keyboard. All junkies on work furlough from Wayside Honor Rancho. All in tight black suits and fruit boots and half on the nod.

They set up and tuned up. The crowd sent up *"EDDIE!"* chants. And there he is—

Now.

Eddie hopped onstage. He twirled a hand mike on a cord. The combo ran off-key riffs on the "Peppermint Twist." The crowd went nuts. Eddie twist-stepped to center stage. The crowd simmered down. Eddie jacked off the mike handle. The crowd went *re*-nuts. Eddie made like the Big White Bwana and went *Hush, my children—for now I shall speak.*

The crowd went hush. The Mahatma has spoken. Eddie said, "*So?* What's new with *you*?"

The crowd bayed. They stomped, hooted, whistled, shrieked. A cocktail waitress hopped onstage. Her leotard was sliced into slivers. The combo relaunched the "Peppermint Twist." Eddie grabbed the waitress. They did bump-and-grind twist steps in sync.

The *"EDDIE!"* chants reprised. The waitress hopped offstage and dodged gropes across the room. Mahatma Eddie went *Hush.* The crowd went hush. Eddie introduced his combo as the Four Muff Divers. The crowd yock-yocked.

Eddie said, "My label, RCA Victor, wants me to include 'Arrivederci, Roma' and 'After You've Gone' on my next album. But I told them, 'There's limits to my self-abasement.' "

The crowd *re*-yocked. Eddie said, "I've got a couple of tidbits, hot off the wire from Rome. My soon-to-be-ex, aka Liz, aka Cleopatra, was seen baring her soiled soul at a meeting of Nymphos Anonymous."

The crowd yocked on overdrive. Eddie jacked off the mike handle and pelvis-popped steps from the wah watusi. Boozed-out college kids and drink girls watusi'd down on the floor.

Eddie said, "More news from Rome. *La Repubblica* has reported that Richard Burton was seen poking an Italian greyhound near the Trevi Fountain—but it was a *female* greyhound, so I don't see anything wrong with it."

The crowd stomped and woof-woofed. The combo launched "Fly Me to the Moon." Eddie kicked the struts loose and crooned.

He's a nebbish and shaggy-haired twerp. Where'd he get that big baritone?

—

It's 3:00 a.m. now. It's the nightly debrief at Eddie's crib. It was Liz and Eddie's crib, up to *Cleopatra.*

It's some boss crib. As in sixteen rooms off Benedict Canyon. The pad bids Eddie to grieve and kvetch nonstop. He'll have to divest. Liz is okay on the cash and property split—as of now. She'll get wise and brown him up the dirt road—soon. They're jungled up with beaucoup kids from beaucoup gone-bust unions. They've got beaucoup land holdings. They've got studio deals and *Cleo* predecreed as dreck.

Oy, oy, oy. His rabbi calls him a "self-loathing Jew." He urges him to emigrate to Israel and join a kibbutz. The rabbi calls Liz "overprivileged *traph*" and the "poisonous fruit of the *goyishe* tree."

Oy, oy, oy. Eddie's gassed on all this turmoil. His nightclub career's *re*-thriving and the world's veering back his way.

The trophy den was debrief HQ. It featured green leather furniture and pix of Eddie with Cardinal Spellman and Congo strongman Patrice Lumumba. Two waitresses played backgammon and eyeballed hunky Bo Belinsky. They're June and Jane—RIP ME!!!! Losers Club losers obliged. They doffed their tattered leotards and donned low-cut bikinis. Eddie supplied them. He kept a big stash on hand.

Eddie and Bo read through tonight's mash notes and admired select snapshots. Bo tabulated phone numbers. I was bored. I sipped a scotch-rocks and futzed around with Eddie's pit bull, Roscoe. My guys worked crowd control, outside. Forty-some fans tailed us back here from the club. Eddie had his housekeeper bake up chocolate cookies. The fans were 99% women. My guys passed out cookies and racked up phone numbers, wholesale.

I was restless. I had Lois and Pat on the brain. Lois/Pat/Lois/Pat. I ping-ponged between the—

The phone rang. It startled me. Eddie picked up. He went *Who's this?* and listened. He muffled the receiver with a pillow.

He said, "For you, Freddy. It's Jimmy Hoffa. He sounds like a man with a bone to pick."

5

(LOS ANGELES, 9:40 A.M., TUESDAY, 4/10/62)

Jimmy Hoffa said, “The Kennedys. My sources tell me you go back with those shitheels.”

The downtown Statler. A tidy junior suite. Coffee and crullers. It’s a face-off. We’re in two chairs crammed knee-to-knee tight.

“With Jack, I do. I’m sure you know the story.”

Hoffa cracked his knuckles. “You pulled him out of some grief with a call girl. You had options. You chose the wrong one, and it queered your relationship with our future president.”

I sipped coffee. “I presented my bill. Jack’s people stiffed me with counterfeit money. It was a nice touch.”

Hoffa slapped his knees. “What about his dogshit brother, Bobby?”

I went *Comme ci, comme ça.* “I’ve met him a few times. I’d say you know him a tad better than I do.”

Hoffa goaded me. “Come *on.* Give me your interpretation.”

I said, “The McClellan Committee. Bobby and Jack, back when Jack was in the Senate. Televised hearings, lockstep surveillance, government audits, indictments, rubber-stamp grand juries, public humiliation as regards your ‘assumed’ mobbed-up status. And now the little cocksucker’s the attorney general of the United States, and crawling up your ass with renewed vigor.”

Hoffa cracked his thumbs. “Did you smirk when you said ‘assumed’? Like it’s all just so obvious that everybody knows?”

I stifled a stage yawn. “Tell me what you have in mind. Yeah, I know the brothers. Yeah, I know how you feel about them, and you know what I do for a living.”

Hoffa brushed crumbs off his lap. “Jack the K is ramming Marilyn Monroe, and now he’s passed her along to his kid brother. I have this on good authority, but I can’t reveal my source. I want you to build a derogatory profile on Monroe, Jack, Bobby, and any other extraneous cooze those whipdicks are slipping it to, not to mention whatever bedroom dirt you can get me on Miss Marilyn Monroe herself, who is well known to be the Whore of Babylon in Hollywood circles."

Tilt. Royal flush. Money tree. Three-cherry jackpot.

"You want full-time bugs and taps. Listening posts, monitor shifts, tape copies and transcriptions, summary reports, physical surveillance on Monroe and the other principals, and you want all this shit to rock around the clock, and you are keenly aware that it's going to cost you a great deal of money."

Hoffa went *harumph.* "You're a camel jockey, and you're out to bilk James Riddle Hoffa with no compunction."

I leaned close. Hoffa flinched. I ticked points, wham-bam.

"Me. My three guys for the day-to-day. Bernie Spindel for the installations. It's a hundred thousand for the job, and more if it extends past this summer. You cover salaries and all operating expenses. You pledge bail money and lawyers, if it comes to that. It's an audacious piece of work you want done, and you came to the only guy who can do it."

Hoffa shot his cuffs and scratched his balls. Hoffa cricked his neck and flicked lint off his suit coat.

"Okay. I'm sure it's a bargain by your Lebanese standards."

I said, "I'll send you up-to-the-minute bug-and-tap reels once a week, along with typed transcripts. I'll Teletype you summary reports every other week. I'll—"

Hoffa cut me off. "The Monroe bitch just bought a house in Brentwood. I want it hot-wired, de-luxe. Jack and Bobby tryst out of Peter Lawford's spread on the Coast Highway. I want it hot-wired. Lawford's married to one of the Kennedy sisters, I forget which one…."

I said, "Pat. Her name is Pat."

Hoffa blotted his necktie. Hoffa snapped his waistband and buffed his gold watch.

"I want it ugly, Freddy. I want lots of sordid behavior, with an emphasis on sex."

—

Shitwork prep first. Vibe the terrain. Learn the entry/exit points. Scout listening-post locations.

I drove out to the beach. The Lawford estate backed up to the sand. It was right at the L.A. City/Malibu line. A big landside bluff overlooked it. Boho cottages were clumped behind a paved access road. They supplied high-up/look-down access across PCH. That meant peeper range.

The access road took me up. Cars boomed north and south, below me. Street noise statics up bug-tap reception. The PCH boom was all-time bad.

I got out and perched on a guardrail. I screwed a zoom lens to my Rolleiflex and eyeballed the house. It was a big Spanish rancho. Add-on wings destroyed the lines and klutzed up the overall look.

It was one big spread. Seven thousand square feet. Two stories. Prime beachfront turf. I zoomed close and shot pix of doors, windows, roof ledges. I'm a seasoned peeper/burglar. All bug-tap jobs start with break-ins.

Flagstone walkways flanked the house, north and south. They led back to a beach-view swimming pool and lounge setup. I shot a north-side doorway. Pat walked straight into my lens.

She wore a madras plaid shirtdress and scuffed saddle shoes. Plus tortoiseshell glasses and a man's Rolex watch. Real camera meets Man Camera. It's almost seventeen years. I'm twenty-three, Pat's twenty-one. Hollywood Boulevard erupts.

The Japs pulled the plug. Strangers kiss in the street. I spot Pat, she spots me, our brain waves mesh. The kiss extends. A roving photographer takes our picture and seals history. I give him ten bucks and tell him what for. Send two copies to the LAPD Academy. I'll be there in three weeks.

Pat grabbed me and kissed me again. We went crazy telepathic. We walked to the Hollywood Plaza and checked in.

That night was it. We had that night and no more. We've sent each other Christmas cards, from '45 up to now. Pat married fuckhead Peter Lawford. I'm the "Hellhound Who Held Hollywood Captive" and her big brother's ex–bird dog and dope chute. Said big brother? He's the president of the United States. I've just been hired to put him down in the shit.

—

The Monroe house. 12305 Fifth Helena Drive, Brentwood. Clock it. It's 4.3 miles east of the Lawford beach digs. Call it. This is a West L.A. caper from the jump.

The Brentwood quasi-village was due east. It was upscale ginchy. Gas station, two markets, drugstore. Public library, espresso pit, French bistro. Major throughways boxed in Fifth Helena and the adjacent blocks.

Bundy to the east. San Vicente to the south. Sunset to the north. Extended greenbelt loomed west. Helena Drives two to five ran one long block and dead-ended. The immediate area was affluent and all residential.

That rendered park-and-sit-type surveillance untenable. I'd have to glom five service vehicles and paint-job them. PC Bell, Happytime Liquor, Luanne's Dial-A-Florist. Plus two beat-to-hell gardeners' trucks.

The house itself:

Whitewashed Spanish. One story. Modest for Brentwood. Big front yard, small backyard. Stucco retaining walls, all around. Tall hedgerows, front and back. An oak gate and tile steps to the front door.

I parked across the street and snapped photos. Note the front casement windows. They were all draped and unscreened. They were all cracked for ventilation. *Peep me, B and E me*—the pad screamed it.

I shot the back side of the house already. I got the screened kitchen door with the flimsy hook-and-eye latch. I got the unscreened service-porch window. Monroe had a part-time housekeeper. I read a *Herald* piece on the new house and her housekeeping regime. The housekeeper slept out most nights. *Peep me, B and E me, hot-wire me for sound.*

Nat Denkins knew a clerk at the Hollywood DMV. He slid the guy a yard and got Monroe's vehicle stats. She drove a '59 Buick Invicta. Phil Irwin braced a clerk at the Malibu DMV. The Lawfords owned five vehicles. Pat drove a '58 Bonneville ragtop.

Hearts and arrows. Freddy loves Pat, Freddy loves Lois. Carve up that palm tree by Marilyn's front door.

I popped two Dexedrine and chain-smoked. I perimeter-scanned the front of the house. The door popped open. There she is. I clocked it at 4:16 p.m.

She's huddled up in a white bathrobe. She's wearing This Look. Hey, that's my new front yard.

A car pulled up in front of me. It was a '60 Corvair, maroon over black. A big blond girl got out and looked around. She was sixteen or seventeen. Note the rear-bumper sticker: PALI HIGH, HOME OF THE DOLPHINS.

The girl walked across the street. She braced the hedgerow and stood on her tiptoes. She was tall. She cadged a damn good look.

Marilyn waved to her. The girl shrieked and waved back.

6

(LOS ANGELES, 8:20 A.M., WEDNESDAY, 4/11/62)

Derogatory Profile. Day #2. The real shitwork begins.

I traded up. Eddie Fisher to Jimmy Hoffa. Nightclub antics to a sex squeeze on the Worldwide Big Kahuna and his vindictive kid brother. The bait girl's The Blond of Our Era. It all bodes combustion. Something's got to give.

That's the title of Monroe's new flick. It's currently shooting at Fox. Scribe-for-hire Morry Zolotow fed me the gist. Monroe's zonked on pills. Monroe's chronically tardy. Monroe succumbs to mystery ailments. The shoot's behind schedule. Mogul D. F. Zanuck's pissed, director George Cukor's enraged.

I worked in my living room/office. Nat Denkins scored floor-plan drawings from the county structural outfit. I studied schematics of the Lawford and Monroe pads and brainstormed bug-and-tap mount installations. Robbie Molette's out at PC Bell. He's scanning phone-service records. It's crucial. Bell lists all phone extensions and notes their room-to-room locations.

Basic tap rules apply here. Individual taps assure vivid sound flow. That's interior shitwork. Add exterior grief. Car noise on Bundy and San Vicente could fuzz the Monroe feed lines. Surf hum and car noise on PCH could scotch the Lawford feeds. Listening-post locations were crucial here.

Rentable homes in residential Brentwood? It would backfire on us. Round-the-clock activity and goons on-site would arouse square-citizen suspicion. There were no available rentals on the Brentwood commercial strip. The Lawford feeds might necessitate two listening posts. A house on the east bluff, across PCH. A backup location on the Malibu Pier.

I brainstormed. I called Eddie Fisher and pink-slipped him. I told him I'm quits. I said something came up. Eddie said, "Yeah—as in Jimmy Hoffa." I pooh-poohed it and told Eddie I'd set him up with Art Aragon. Art was an ex–ranked welterweight and noted cad-about-town. He loved muscle work and oozed charm. Eddie swooned. I was relieved. I traded up. I dumped low-stakes Hollywood for high-stakes intrigue and six times the pay.

And there's Pat. She was twenty-one then. She's thirty-seven now. Her fuckhead husband pimps for Jack the K. He's usurped my old gig and the one-night love that still torches me.

Pervdog, voyeur, peeper.

That's me. I'll be across the coast road. I'll be up on that bluff. I'll be attached to a headset and crouched in the dark. Man Camera. Ongoing live sound. Who knows what I'll see and hear.

—

Monroe's garage opened out on Sixth Helena. I parked across the street. Big pepper trees shadowed my Chevy coupe. Nat Denkins was out shagging stakeout vehicles. Personal cars agitated local stiffs and magnetized fuzz. This was a meet-your-mark tail. The gig was *on* as of *NOW.*

The kickoff meet was last night, at Ollie Hammond's. I booked a private room. The crew showed up. Phil Irwin, Robbie Molette, Nat Denkins. Plus Bernie "Bug King" Spindel. We boozed and noshed T-bone steaks. I laid out the five-point plan.

> **1)**
>
> Bernie and I will hot-wire the Lawford and Monroe locations.
>
> **2)**
>
> Nat, Phil, and Robbie will dig up three listening-post rentals. One in Brentwood. Brentwood's a tough go. Be assiduous here. Plus two Lawford-house rentals. One on the east bluffside. One on the Malibu Pier.
>
> **3)**
>
> I want active monitor shifts. That's one man per post and three shifts per day. I'll spell you, impromptu. Bernie and I will install voice-activated taps and room bugs. They'll transmit to low-frequency receivers. Room bugs are always problematic. You get dead air, ambient noise, and half-heard conversation. Make tape copies and hand-transcribe everything you hear, regardless. Verbatim log all bug-and-tap tapes. Make one copy for Jimmy H. and one for our master file.
>
> **4)**
>
> Phone taps will make or break this operation. Keep current on your tape copies. Keep current on your log transcriptions. This

> is a film-biz/political caper. These humps love to talk. I want every word taped and transcribed.
>
> 5)
>
> I want intermittent tail surveillance on Monroe and time-dated surveillance logs kept. I'll spell you there, impromptu. Jimmy's pledged bonus bread, upon wrap-up. As in, ten grand per man.

My guys salivated. I salivated. The caper was high-risk/high-compensation. We toasted Jack, Marilyn, and Camelot, aflame.

Sit-still surveillance. Time always slogs. 2:26, 2:42, 3:04. My ass itched. I smoked myself hoarse. The garage door cracked open at 3:09 p.m.

There's Marilyn. She's done up movie-star incognito. Dark slacks, tight jumper. Wraparound shades and an Hermès scarf.

She climbed in the Buick Invicta and nosed out. She punched the gas westbound and sideswiped three trash cans. Empty booze bottles and dog food cans flew. I tailed her and idled forty yards back. Marilyn cut left on Carmelina and right on San Vicente. That put her westbound. A median strip forced traffic one-way. It was grassed up and dotted with azalea shrubs.

Marilyn hit her left-turn signal and bumped her car up and over the abutment. The undercarriage dislodged loose cement and cracked her back bumper. She slid on wet grass and brodied through a line of azaleas. She bumped back off the cement and hauled eastbound.

I tailed her. I downshifted and eased over the abutment. I slid on grass and sluiced back onto eastbound San Vicente. I came up behind Marilyn. A male motorist drew up alongside her. He yelled something. She flipped him off. He cut south on Bundy. Dig his fuck-you-finger farewell.

Marilyn jammed to the curb and parked in a meter space. I parked behind her. She got out and jaywalked across San Vicente. She ignored traffic lights and passing cars and beelined to the Vicente Pharmacy. Clock it: 3:16 p.m.

She's back out at 3:21. She digs into a small paper bag and unscrews a pill vial. She smiles and pops two of something. She skips back across the street. She gloms her unsexy Buick and peels east.

I tailed her. She hooked south on Barrington and east on Wilshire. Big-boulevard traffic cloaked me. Marilyn drove hesitant-cum-dreamy. We passed through Westwood and the high-rise corridor. Beverly Hills traffic snared us. Marilyn parked in the cab rank upside the Beverly Wilshire.

She braced a doorman. She passed him her car keys and pulled off her shades. He went *Holy shit, you're Marilyn Monroe!* She laid a fat kiss on him. It looked like she shot him some tongue.

I pulled up and idled two car lengths back. I clocked Marilyn's hotel sojourn. It ran 6.4 minutes. She zipped back out clutching a pill vial and a cellophane-wrapped gown.

She snatched her keys from the doorman. He laughed and slapped his knees. She pulled on her shades, shagged her sled, and fishtailed out into traffic.

She drove east. She drove hesitant-cum-dreamy. She hopped lanes and tailgated. Horns blared. She kissed her fingertips and waved them out the window. She turned north on Doheny. I bird-dogged her in close.

She turned right on Elevado and parked, quicksville. I crawled up behind her. We're right at the West Hollywood/Beverly Hills border. I knew that space-age-mod building on the southeast corner. It was packed full of call-girl pads.

Marilyn breezed in the front gate. I got out and checked the mailbox bank. There's six units and six female occupants. In Unit #4: Hollywood denizen Jeanne Carmen.

Ex–call girl. Part-time carhop. Ex–Sheriff's informant. Noted pill pusher. Golf trick-shot artiste. Available for church picnics and bar mitzvahs. Close pal of ex-starlet Lila Leeds. Miss Leeds bait-girl'd Bob Mitchum's '48 reefer roust.

I dawdled by my car. Marilyn and Jeanne. The gabfest might extend. I'll trade you four yellow jackets for six black beauties. Marilyn and Jeanne. Two late '40s arrivistes. Phil Irwin worked Sheriff's Vice, '46–'53. He said Marilyn and Jeanne worked a hot-sheet hut behind Dave's Blue Room.

There's Marilyn now. She glides over to her beat-on Buick. She cranks a U-turn and hits Doheny northbound. I'm right behind her.

She tools west on Sunset. She's driving urgent now. We're right by the Beverly Hills Hotel. Marilyn blows a red light and peels south on Beverly Drive. She pulls up in front of a big Colonial job and parks at the curb.

She gets out. She dumps her scarf and shades and fluffs out her hair. She squares her shoulders and reapplies lipstick. She walks up a slate pathway and enters the manse.

942 North Beverly Drive. Double-deep, double-wide lot. Olympic pool, tennis court—

I snatched my reverse directories off the backseat. The Beverly

Hills book ran light. Match the owner to the address. It's there on page 3.

Ralph R. Greenson, M.D. Practice in psychiatry.

I reclined my seat and set my Rolleiflex on the door ledge. I scanned the house, the grounds, the backyard. I circuited back and forth. I caught the payoff and zoomed in tight.

Marilyn and a burly man. Late forties, mustache, dark suit. They're sitting at a wrought-iron table. She's pitching a sob story. She's working The Method. Note her wringing hands and trembling lips. He's going *There, there.* Here's the kicker:

They're quaffing martinis. That pitcher's good for three each. Marilyn's one down already. She's orbing the pitcher. She's vibing *Cut loose, daddy—I'm coming out of my wig.*

I clocked the booze klatch. Fifty minutes, straight up. Psychiatric session. Mustache Man was Shrink Man Ralph Greenson.

He sipped his first drink. Marilyn siphoned the pitcher. She wept, she laughed, she posed. She stood up and did dance steps from some slave-girl-of-the-jungle flick. She motormouthed nonstop. Greenson went *Umm-hmn.*

He cut her off at fifty minutes, flat. He helped her up and weave-walked her out to her car. She hugged him good-bye and tumbled in behind the wheel. Shrink Man about-faced and checked his wristwatch. *Whew*—so much for *that.*

Marilyn's back in her car. She cranks the gas and peels rubber through a dicey four-way stop.

I laid tread. Zigzag traffic cut me off. Horns honked. Middle fingers shot out windows. Sit on it and twirl.

Marilyn vamoosed. It's Blown Tail #1. It won't be the last.

—

I went home. Phil Irwin was back at Fifth Helena. He called me and checked in. He said Nat and Robbie scored three surveillance trucks. His brother-in-law dolled them up. He quick-painted them. They were now predictable service vehicles: Acme Tree Men, Ajax TV Repair, Citadel Florists. The paint was quick-dry. Phil camouflaged the backseats and storage beds. He dumped in tree limbs, electrical parts, dead floral displays.

Per his Fifth Helena shift:

The housekeeper split for the day. Phil boom-miked a prior backyard chat. The housekeeper said she had plans tonight. Marilyn said she had party plans. She'd been popping black beauties and slurping Metrecal. She'll fit that Halston original with seams intact.

The wait dragged. I worked at my office-pad. I mounted corkboards on the living room walls and installed file cabinets below them. I went through stacks of old *Life* magazines and ripped out pictures. Monroe, John and Robert Kennedy. No-goodnik Peter Lawford, sans and un-sans Pat. Exterior pix of the Lawford house, exterior shots of Fifth Helena.

I pinned them to the corkboards. I pulled the Pat and Freddy photo out of the frame and pinned it beside a Monroe cheesecake shot. It's 1952. Marilyn wows our boys in Korea. Freddy and Pat storm Hollywood on V-J Day. It was some juxtaposition. I laughed my ass off.

—

Ajax TV Repair. It's a good ride for night stakeouts. TV's fritzed out twenty-four hours. Hollywood parties started late.

I pulled up behind Fifth Helena. I clocked in at 8:00 sharp.

The garage door was open. The Buick was parked snout out. I popped two Dexedrine and gargled 151. I inventoried my evidence kit and camera case and honed my lock picks on a pumice stone. I sizzled to break, enter, peep.

Time trek. I replayed my first brush with Monroe.

November '54. The infamous "Wrong-Door Raid." I was at the Villa Capri. *Confidential* owned me then. Every waiter, hooker, and car-park cat in L.A. fed me dirt. I schmoozed a bent plastic surgeon. He performed a dick-enlargement surgery on Montgomery Clift. I slid the doc a C-note and told him to scram. One table over: Sinatra and Joe DiMaggio. Joe was Monroe Husband #2.

The paisans quaffed dago red. DiMaggio sniveled. Marilyn was love-shacked with her hairdresser at a place in West Hollywood. He had a PI named Phil Irwin tailing her. He'd just reported in.

DiMaggio was outraged. Sinatra got outraged. Joe saw me at the next table and said join the lynch mob.

I smelled money. We three-car caravanned over to the love shack. Phil Irwin was already there. That's how we met. It's now 11:00 p.m. We're outside a four-flat apartment house. Phil points to the downstairs left door. There's Sinatra, DiMaggio, Phil, and me. We're the lynch mob. We kick the door down. An old lady named Florence Klotz sits there, sipping tea.

Mrs. Klotz screams. Monroe's really *up*stairs. She's not shtupping her hairdresser. She's shtupping a Fox film editor named Timmy Berlin. They slip out a back door and scramble. Hence the "Wrong-Door Raid."

The Hearst rags played it up. The California State Assembly probed sleazoid scandal rags and blackmail-perpetrating detectives. I testified in closed session. Ditto, Phil Irwin. Marilyn divorced Joe. Phil went to work for me. Sinatra was married to Wife #2, Ava Gardner. He caught her muff-diving Lana Turner and went on a booze binge with Jackie Gleason. They got the DT's and wound up in Queen of Angels.

Time crawled. I chain-smoked. The garage light blipped on. Clock it: 8:42 p.m.

There's the car-door creaks, the headlight blips, the Buick nosing out.

She swung right by me. She took Sixth Helena down to Carmelina and turned north. I U-turned and came up behind her. Her left taillight blinked white. I scoped in on it and creep-crawled two car lengths back.

She veered east on Sunset. I tailed her. She drove plain hesitant tonight. Darting traffic got between us. I stuck one lane over and fixed on that light.

Sunset was hilly and curvy and high-swank underlit. The bum taillight supplied a tail beacon. We went through Brentwood and Westwood. We passed Beverly Glen and the Bel Air gates. We're in Holmby Hills now. Marilyn swerved into the right-hand lane and scraped her hubcaps on the curb.

She fishtailed and brodied south on Mapleton. It was all jumbo mansions with moats and king-size lawns. I saw a valet-park stand up ahead. Red-coat car jocks shagged Jags, Vettes, and Caddies double-quick. The car queue covered a half block. Marilyn pulled her sad-ass Buick up to the end of the line.

I pulled over and orbed the scene. Frat boys golf-carted guests up the big lawn. On-loan Playboy bunnies escorted them inside. The entry line stood one-hundred-deep.

Clock it. She'll mingle and misbehave. She'll get bored and split. You've got three hours tops.

—

My evidence kit weighed forty pounds. My camera case and bulb strips weighed ten. I parked on Carmelina and hauled the bags a full block.

I brazened a front-gate/front-door approach. The gate was open. The front door was jammed up. I slipped my Diners Club card through the latch portal. The lock bolts slid free.

My light touch worked. I made it inside. I left no tool marks or telltale scratches. I lugged the bags inside and locked the door behind me. *Darling, I'm home!*

Cool air hit me. Half-cracked windows stirred a breeze. I'd memorized the structural diagrams. I knew the floor plan and the phone-extension spots. I pulled out my penlight and bit down on the shaft. My eyes were my camera. The small beam was my swivel lens.

I dropped my kit and case and quick-prowled the premises. I flashed the wall-to-floor junctures. I noted ornamental wainscoting in the five main rooms. Wainscot ledges concealed feed wires with minimum paint camouflage.

My eyes and penlight lens worked in sync. I imprinted the wainscot strips and their proximity to phone-installation spots. I imprinted ceiling lamps and standing lamps and carpet pads to conceal room bugs.

I focused down. I tallied installation points. I tantalized myself with B and E foreplay. The mark's Marilyn Monroe. I'm saving the intimate prowl work for last.

I walked room-to-room. I unscrewed the three telephone handsets. I imprinted the internal circuitry and memorized spots to stash receiver mikes. I supplanted my memory with Polaroid snapshots. I went in lens-close and bulb-bright. I shot extreme close-ups of receiver housings and bounced light off the walls.

I tossed the wet prints and used bulbs in my evidence kit. Bulb glare induced double vision. I Murine-dosed my eyes. I re-toured the house and restored my 20/20 sight lines. I tracked penlight impressions, ad hoc.

The housekeeper's room. It's a monk's cell. Sight to scent. That's a lavender sachet. The kitchen. Sloth and disarray. Stacked dishes and dumped food in the sink. Mold spots on a standing rib roast. Black sink sludge. Backed-up pipes emitting a stink.

The master bathroom adjoined the kitchen. I smelled wet towels and soapy grime walking in. Note the bathtub rings. Note the plastic shower caps dumped on the floor.

I opened the medicine chest. There's Marilyn's stash.

Seconal/Nembutal/Biphetamine/Dexedrine/zonk-your-ass Dilaudid. Note the half-pint of vodka on the sink ledge. Note the toothbrush handle poking out the top. News flash: Marilyn Monroe brushes her teeth with Smirnoff 100.

I retrieved my camera case and bulb strips. I shot the kitchen and bathroom sloth. I shot the medicine-chest pharmacopia. I close-up shot the vodka jug and toothbrush.

My eyes fuzzed out again. I stashed the wet prints and used bulbs in my kit and walked back to the living room. The rugs looked cheap. The tacked-up wall photos spooked me. Drag queens at the Hollywood Ranch Market. A butch junkie shooting up at Linda's Little Log Cabin. Brain-dead tykes wearing Mickey Mouse beanies.

A liquor sideboard. Crammed with half-pints of Smirnoff 100 and paper cups. A big bowl on a pedestal. Piled high with hashish chunks.

I shot the living room. Six quick exposures, in and out. I'd been inside fifty-two minutes. My technical walk-through was solid. I had what I'd need to string wires and mount bugs and taps.

I wanted scent and sensation more than sight now. I wanted to touch things that touched her. I wanted to be where she got lonely and cut loose.

I lugged my gear into Marilyn's bedroom. I quadrant-scanned it, up and down.

Bland white walls. Wood-plank shelves. A nightstand by the bed. A white phone on top. Plus twelve pill vials and two vodka short dogs.

A king-size bed. All-white bedsheets and an all-white duvet. Soiled white pillowcases. Step in close, now. See if you can track her scent.

I smelled stale and recent exertion. I smelled mingled fluids, visible as dried stains. I smelled expensive perfume and cheap aftershave. I saw lipstick-stained and punched-down pillows. It denoted violent efforts to sleep.

I looked under the bed. I saw a large metal lockbox jammed between the floor and box springs. I pulled it out and flipped the lid latch. The box was stuffed with hundred-dollar bills.

Neat stacks. Thick stacks. All rubber-band cinched. I dumped the box on the bed and photo-shot green cash on soiled sheets.

I counted the money. It totaled forty grand. My Man Camera fritzed. My eyes burned and refocused within my penlight beam. I clenched my jaws and cracked a tooth on the shaft.

My legs spasmed. I steadied myself on a bed rail. My first thought: Steal the money. My second thought: Don't steal the money. My third thought: You're a detective. What does this mean?

I repacked the lockbox and repositioned it under the bed. I quadrant-scanned the walls and caught a sliding-door closet. I slid it open. An overweighted hanger bar dislodged and fell to the floor. Too-garish and too-dowdy garments collapsed in a heap.

I knelt down and examined them. I scoped pink muumuus, tweed skirts, low-bodice gowns in tiger-stripe velour. Op Art summer shifts, size 16. Sweatshirts and sweatpants with Big & Beautiful Boutique labels. Ankle-length duffle coats, sized for men. Bull dyke jumpsuits by Large Marge of Huntington Beach. See-thru raincoats with drawstring hoods—a hot item from Plus Size De-Luxe.

Monroe was five-four and svelte. This dreck couture was fat-lady capacious. My first thought: It's some Actors Studio exercise. Subsume your thin self and become someone both more and less. My second thought: It's more perverse and sinister than that.

I smelled her then. The perfume scenting the bedsheets saturated the clothes on the floor. Marilyn Monroe had capered in each and every one of these getups.

I reattached the hanger bar and rehung the threads in approximate order. I smelled like *HER* now. I flashed the west-facing wall. My beam caught a plank bookshelf sans books.

The shelf ran half the length of the wall. I walked up to it. My breath stirred dust up through my light beam. I ran my hands down the shelf. A sheet of white notebook paper stuck to my fingers.

I close-up flashed it. Block print covered the page. The style was pure high school girl. Curlicues and drawn hearts to dot the *i*'s.

Marilyn mixed numbers, dates, and abbreviations. I caught the gist fast. "Refs" meant refills. The "30s" and "60s" meant pill counts. "Biphet," "Dilau," "Nemb," "Sec" and "Chloral H" denoted fine shit. The dates ranged from 8/12/60 up to last week. Below the dates: "Nice Drs" circled by schoolgirl hearts.

"Internist/Engleberg"/four bursting hearts. "Gynecologist/Kaplan"/ one heart cracked in half. "Won't write Rxs & too handsy, but cute." "Cardiologist/Brammey/Rxs on occasion. Ick! Had my *Playboy* spread framed on his desk."

I hovered over the shelf and penlight-scanned the full surface. I saw *this:*

Notebook Page #2. A block-print pharmacy list. The Vincente, the Roxbury, the Beverly Wilshire, Schwab's, the Mickey Fine. Plus phone numbers and hours of operation. Below that—an obvious lover list, with kooky artwork.

"Al"/"stuntman"/three sketched dicks going *Boing.* "Biff"/"pizza delivery boy"/one wilted dick and peanut-size balls. "George"/"gas station jockey"/four giant dicks spurting jizz. "Lou"/"car-park valet"/

two normal-size dicks and “Go-down guy—not bad.” Below that: “Rick Dawes. Mean—maybe a fag.” Followed by four illegibly crossed-out block-print lines.

Here’s my guess:

Marilyn’s pissed at Rick D. She expunged his telephone-answering-service names and phone numbers. He’s a closet queen. Fuck him. He’s out of her life.

Below that:

“L.A. Sheriff’s” and the main switchboard number—MA-46682.

Non sequitur. Head scratcher. Big anomaly—Monroe and the county fuzz. I photo-snapped the notebook sheets. I counted off sixty seconds per and pulled the prints. I dropped them in my evidence kit.

My first thought: Where’s Marilyn’s address book? Where does she list her friends, colleagues, flunkies, ex-husbands, and lovers for real? My second thought: Where’s her received correspondence and fan mail? Where’s her hotsville missives from John F. and Robert F. Kennedy?

My first guess: Stashed on the premises. My second guess: She keeps her address book and all hotsville notes on her person. My third guess: She’s mercurial defined. She dumps boring correspondence and fan mail. She keeps the good stuff in a bank vault.

I’d been inside for two hours and nineteen minutes. I couldn’t dust for prints or vacuum fibers. I could quick-toss the premises and beat feet.

I allotted fifteen minutes. I checked drawers, pulled up rugs, quick-scanned the kitchen cabinets. I combed closets and looked for stash holes. I got late-breaking Non Sequiturs #2 and 3.

Under the bathroom rug. One Martindale’s Bookshop bookmark. Scrawled on the back: *“Jack at White House”* and *“Bobby at Justice.”* Plus two main-switchboard numbers.

Stashed in a hall closet. One triple-reinforced pillowcase filled with quarters, nickels, dimes.

I photographed the bookmark and coin stash. I was clocked down to three minutes. I checked a lo-boy bookshelf. Monroe dug the highbrow frogs.

Sartre, Camus, de Beauvoir. I flipped pages through five books. She’d bookmarked pithy passages and added margin notes. As in: *“use at party,” “drop as casual bon mot.”* As in: *“pretend it’s my quote”* and *“Jack will luv this.”*

Phony Marilyn. She’s desperate to impress.

I rescanned the bookshelf. It was all left-wing frog fare, save *this:*

The Sexual Criminal, by Paul de River, M.D. I knew de River, circa ’49. He was a batshit crazy headshrinker jungled up with LAPD. He ran the jive-progressive Sex Offense Bureau. Ex-Chief Worton brought him in. De River headshrunk rape-o’s, pud pullers, whipout men, transvestites, and lust killers. He geezed them up with his own dope concoctions and browbeat them in group therapy stints. Bill Parker replaced Worton in ’50. He disdained de River and his humbug sex theories. He canned his ass off the LAPD.

I skimmed pages. De River theorized, bloviated, and gasbagged at great length. The book featured photographs. Sex fiends lolled in hard-backed chairs and gaped, insensate. Whiteout strips covered their eyes.

I recognized Otto Stephen Wilson. He eviscerated two women in downtown hotels and fell for Murder One. He mouthed off to me at the Lincoln Heights Jail, late ’45. I beat the shit out of him. He sucked gas up at Quentin, fall ’46.

The book sickened me. I tossed it back on the shelf. A slip of notebook paper fell out. Marilyn Monroe block-printed *this:*

“When all other forms of applied therapy have failed, it may be possible to contravene absent, passive, or self-destructively reactive behavior with the imposition of direct criminal action.”

7

(LOS ANGELES, 4/12–5/18/62)

I worked it. My guys worked it. We disdained nomenclature. It was "the job," "the gig," "the deal." It wasn't "Operation Blond" or *"L'affaire Jacques."* It was a dirt probe. We excavated dirt for Jimmy Hoffa. We fed him bug-tap scraps, surveillance briefs, and unverified innuendo. We bombarded him with listless tape reels and transcriptions. He's charged to make data blips cohere and jell as evidence of moral turpitude and actionable criminal offense.

My 4/11 pad prowl served up Marilyn Monroe. Her sloth. Her dope addiction. Her all-star libido and urgent fix on the Kennedy brothers. She stashed forty grand under her bed. It played ambiguous. Film studios played money fast and loose. They dispensed cash to contravene IRS payouts. The forty grand might be innocuous. The forty grand might indict criminal malfeasance.

I corkboard-pinned my B and E snapshots and telefaxed duplicates to Jimmy. The job vibed slow burn and slow build toward ho-hum revelation. Deficient hygiene. Dope. Adultery. Financial misconduct. Camelot as sanctified shuck. I knew that shit going in. I'm an eyeball man. My need to see and sift dirt pushed me past easily foregone conclusions.

That first pad prowl torqued me. The forty grand. The coin stash. Monroe's zaftig threads. Paul de River's nutty book and Monroe's nutty critique of de River's nutty ethos. They were tangent leads to work solo. My immediate brief was to oversee the establishment of an electronic eavesdropping system and a compatible system of sit-still and mobile surveillance.

Jimmy H. shot me a twenty-grand bank draft. I paid my guys two weeks in advance and put them to work. They ran sound and frequency-reception checks near the Lawford and Monroe pads and rented two beachside listening posts within twenty-four hours. Post #1: a small house on the east bluffside above PCH. It's got good eyeball lines and direct-frequency bearings. High foliage obscures in-

and-out foot and car traffic. Post #2: a small storeroom at the Sip ’n’ Surf Lounge on Malibu Pier. It’s got surfer girls and a private back entrance. That makes two Lawford posts. Plus two radio frequencies. That’s two shots to blunt car noise/wave crash/bum-feed contingencies.

Phil Irwin scored a perfect Monroe post. It was a disused maintenance shack on a side street upside Brentwood Country Club. It featured three rooms, a crapper/shower combo, six wall outlets, and a roof antenna. It was one-half mile from Fifth Helena Drive and provided clear signal access. Plus a backyard and carport and a tree-cloaked rear entrance. The Brentwood CC groundskeeper and Sip ’n’ Surf boss were ex–L.A. Sheriff’s. Phil rated them A-OK.

Nat and Robbie ran the motor pool. We stashed our surveillance sleds in Robbie’s garage. Nat and Robbie humped it. Jimmy Hoffa decreed a full-court press. He was mobbed up and unioned up, nationwide. He connived two grip jobs on the *Something’s Got to Give* set. Nat and Robbie would work their listening-post assignments and full soundstage shifts at Fox.

They worked the prep for the shoot. They scrounged quick drift per Monroe’s upcoming travels.

4/17. She’ll fly to New York. She’s off to schmooze arts poseurs Lee and Paula Strasberg. Plus *this:*

Jack the K’s birthday bash. Mid-May, New York City. Scheduled for Madison Square Garden. Marilyn’s set to sing “Happy Birthday” to the Big Kahuna. The Strasbergs are primed to pep-talk our girl and ascribe motivation. She’ll be gone two full days. That’s my shot to hot-wire and *re*-prowl her crib.

The days dragged by. We set up our equipment at the listening posts. We ran endless sound checks. I creamed to get back inside Fifth Helena. We rolled out at midnight on 4/18.

Bernie Spindel and I picked locks and entered. Phil, Nat, and Robbie triangulated outside. They perched in our camouflage rides. They curb-patrolled Carmelina, Fifth and Sixth Helena. They sustained walkie-talkie contact and eyeball-strafed for nocturnal fuzz.

Bernie and I laid wire. We were inside four hours and nine minutes. I looked under Monroe’s bed. The cash box was gone. A Jackie Kennedy voodoo doll was propped up on a chair pillow. Marilyn pincushioned Jackie. She stuck a cocktail fork straight up the First Lady’s keester.

We got in, we got out. We hobknobbed at the Brentwood post and ran sound checks. We heard dead air and got audible dial clicks.

Monroe's calls went straight to her answering service. We left bogus messages. The operators' voices came through audible-plus.

4/19. Monroe returns to L.A. The soundstage was prepped and ready. The shoot begins 4/23. I prebribed gate guards and secured a three-month premises pass.

I roamed the lot. I bribed a crafts hut flunky and secured my own golf cart. I went unrecognized. My *Confidential* magazine/scourge-of-Hollywood days were long gone. I piled lumber scraps in the cart and played working stiff.

I tailed Monroe to Fox. I observed the soundstage setups. I observed *HER*.

She worked people. She used people. She possessed three modes of address. She was bossy, she was demure, she was effusive. I didn't like her. I didn't get her. Her acting chops and alleged va-va-voom hit me flat.

I peeped her trailer three days running. I observed the Marilyn Quadrafecta: pop pills/booze/barf/pass out. Robbie and Nat reported on-set consternation. Marilyn was "pulling a Liz." *Something's Got to Give* was dubbed *Cleopatra West.* Marilyn mimicked Liz Taylor's Euro antics, because she could.

Cleopatra put Fox on the Shitsville Express. Studio machers and wage slaves waxed apocalyptic. *Got to Give* was *Cleo* writ downscale. Marilyn was out to out-Liz Liz. Nat and Robbie pipelined the bad news and gloated. I pipelined it to Jimmy Hoffa.

Day #4 defined the Quadrafecta. Marilyn passed out for six hours straight. A gofer kicked her trailer door down. An ambulance hauled Marilyn back to Fifth Helena.

Her wilted waif act postponed the shoot indefinitely. Marilyn malingers at home. Nat and Robbie monitor her phone calls. Phil Irwin holds down eyeball surveillance. The golf course listening post gets crackling good reception.

Marilyn calls out. She whines to Shrink Man Greenson and chats up a pizza delivery boy she calls "Big Dick Dave." She eats anchovy pizza for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

I habituated the *Got to Give* set and kept my snout down. The second-unit director shot scenes "around" Monroe. Cast and crew excoriated her jive film-goddess ways. *I* excoriated her. The Hoffa job was running on-course—but I was running a fever.

We had to hot-wire the Lawford spread. It was the hot-spot nexus of the Jack/Bobby/Marilyn cluster fuck. The house was crammed full of Lawfords, Lawford kids, and Lawford slaves at all times. My PC Bell contact kicked loose vital information. There were no secondary phone lines ascribed to the house. I thought Jack might have his own tête-à-tête and nuke-the-Kremlin line. Nix that. There's one phone number and six extensions.

Robbie and Phil played PC Bell repairmen and canvassed Lawford's neighbors. They tweaked them per celeb misconduct at the Lawford spread. An old biddy called the house a "hotbed of libertine behavior." Three neighbors confirmed the high volume of Lawfords and Lawford factotums. Said volume impeded the operation and drove me batshit crazy. I wanted to get inside and mike-up that house. I wanted to explore the cluster fuck. I wanted to invade Pat Kennedy Lawford's private habitat.

The Hoffa job is now all rotation. My guys rotate between Fox, Fifth Helena, and the golf course listening post. I rotate between Fox, Fifth Helena, the Sip 'n' Surf and east bluffside posts. There's no bugs and taps installed at the Lawford house. I've got sight lines and no audial access. I sit in the dark and look down at the house. Pat walks through lighted rooms sometimes.

Marilyn malingers at home. Shrink Man Greenson and Big Dick Dave visit her. The living room bug records shrink-session pap. Marilyn justifies her *Got to Give* misconduct. She calls her work-shirking ailments "manifestations of existential malaise." Greenson tut-tuts and upbraids her. He's a scold. Marilyn works to shock him. She blew the prez in the luggage hold on *Air Force One.* Greenson tut-tuts. Marilyn details her bitter rivalry with Liz Taylor. *Cleopatra* is pompous froth. *Got to Give* is froth that knows it's froth. We're movie-actress women. We rebel against the authority of the moguls and Nazi auteurs who represent the uncles and foster daddies who poked us you know where when we were eight. Liz and I are pulling deliberate work stoppages disguised as sicknesses to exact our subconscious revenge. Film studios are the mystified fascist oligarchies that Sartre critiques.

The bedroom bugs pick up mattress squeaks in sync with Big Dick Dave's visits. Plus moans and groans muzzled by pillows and thrashed sheets. Hallway bugs pick up the housekeeper's vacuum cleaner and staticked Marilyn/housekeeper chats. I boxed and marked those tape reels "Subject at home/bogus work absence/nonrevelatory." The golf course post piled up reels of Monroe in hibernation. She broke loose at 8:00 p.m. on 4/26.

I tailed her to an all-girl pillfest at Jeanne Carmen's apartment. Sheriff's Vice ran a green sheet on these wingdings. Phil Irwin laid out the gestalt. He was ex-Sheriff's and knew his shit.

"They gab, they pop pills, they watch TV and pass out. They may or may not indulge in some muff diving. Jeanne used to snitch to the guys on the West Hollywood squad, and she spared no details when it came to the girl action."

That was Pillfest #1. Pillfest #2 ran 4/30 to 5/2. Robbie Molette snapped sneak pix through a bedroom-window gap. He caught Marilyn, Lila Leeds, and a butch golf pro in a nude pillow fight. Robbie's a smut man. His sister Chrissy's a shadow figure in the fuck film underground. He's developing duplicate photos. He'll peddle them at the Bearded Clam and Linda's Little Log Cabin.

Pillfest #2 fizzled out. Marilyn returned to work. I spot-tailed her, on and off the set. Robbie and Nat worked their grip gigs and got up eyeball-tight. Marilyn blew take after take. Director Cukor rebuked her. Marilyn pitched woe-is-me and sulked in her trailer. She boozed, she napped, she split Fox in a huff and shut down the shoot. I tailed her back to Fifth Helena. She put me through operational drudge work. We replayed the routine, six days straight.

Bugs, taps, spot tails, sit-still and mobile surveillance. Full-time listening post with A-level reception. We've got Doc Greenson and Pizza Man Dave. We've got nude pillow fights. Jack and Bobby K don't call. What's with Marilyn's coin stash and zaftig threads? Where's that forty grand she stashed under her bed? It wasn't there the night we hot-wired her. Where's all the dishy phone chats with Hollywood insiders?

I worked my sit-still shifts in a tree trimmer's truck. That girl in the '60 Corvair kept bopping by to peek over the hedge. I wrote down her plate number and buzzed my DMV contact. He supplied full license stats.

The sled:

Registered to Willard D. Farr/WMA/age 44. Swank Pacific Palisades address. Husband of Dorothy Denton Lowell, thirty-nine. The blond girl: Georgia Lowell Farr/DOB 3/22/45/Palisades High School junior. Snap call: she's a rich-kid Marilyn obsessive.

Like Jimmy Hoffa. Like me. Like my guys—we're all fan-club fools run amok.

The job proceeded. The rotations rotated. I triangulated. The Fox lot, the post, Fifth Helena. My lot prowls felt intrusive now. I was onetime notorious. Film studios are gossip pits. People must have made me. Jimmy Hoffa pulled strings and got my guys in. Fox was mobbed up from way back. Ben Siegel, Willie Bioff, the Aadland brothers. Mobbed-up unions ran the rank-and-file workforce. Fox felt like a snitch hive. LAPD Intel infiltrated the studio craft unions. Ditto SHIT—the Sheriff's geeks. The lot exposed me. I sensed it. I was ex-LAPD and tenuously tight with Bill Parker.

El Jefe and I went back. I owed him. He extricated me from dire shit on numerous occasions. The Chief was treading shit now. His boys blew up two Black Muslims outside a southside mosque. Nat Denkins' kid brother got embroiled. Nat spritzed outrage on his radio show. I issued a gag order. It stopped just short of a muzzle. Nat said he'd tone it down.

Fox was a gossip pit. I sensed informational seepage. Phil and Robbie sensed it, likewise. I curtailed my golf-cart prowls and stuck to the posts and Fifth Helena. Monroe abetted me. She blew off the *Got to Give* shoot and moped home in early May. I sensed long-term hibernation.

Nasty Nat developed a source on the main Fox switchboard. She placed the long-distance calls for the *Got to Give* cast and crew. She was married. Nat, likewise. They got a thing going and trysted at no-tell motels. Nat called her his fox at Fox. She eavesdropped on Monroe's calls from her trailer. They ran to type. Monroe called pharmacies and issued dope directives. Monroe placed twenty-one calls to the White House and Justice Department switchboards. She asked to be put through to the prez and AG. Line garble cut the calls off then. I knew why. The interior lines were security-scrambled.

Seepage. Boring repetition. Outcompensated by *this:*

Indications. Disparate working on coherent. Marilyn's bonking Jack and possibly Bobby. It's occasional. It's casual to them. It's urgent to her. She's desperate. She's unhinged. She's delusional. She's DEROGATORY PROFILE–defined.

I work the Hoffa gig. I keep the Eddie Fisher gig back-burnered. Art Aragon's bodyguarding Eddie. I swoop by the Losers Club and gas on Mr. Cornuto. He's belting show tunes and spritzing raw.

He features Liz and Dick. They're fucking and sucking *here.* They're 69'ing *there.* He's got Roman geography *down.* Turn-away crowds wail and gorge on Eddie's self-abasement.

Art feeds me the up-close. Froufrou actor Roddy McDowall costars in *Cleo.* He calls Eddie from Roma and delivers the daily dish. Fox is now known as 20th Century–*LOX.* Rumors accumulate and mutate. It's biblical prophecy. Fox will implode by this, that, or this date. Fox execs and rank and filers are shit-your-pants shook. They're devising scams to build bankrolls for the Fox Apocalypse. Fake bearer bonds.

Unload them in Mexico—it’s a sure thing. Wife-swap clubs, pill-popper clubs, key parties. Dope smuggled in and out of T.J. And, now: Monroe’s sabotaging *Got to Give* in the Lizesque *Cleo* style.

Monroe malingered. I stuck close. My tap feeds picked up her calls. She yelped to Doc Greenson. Jack and Bobby use me and pass me around like men always have. She called Jeanne Carmen. They planned future pill trysts. She swung with Pizza Dave and snarfed pizza three times daily. She walked out in plus-size dresses and big slouchy hats. I foot-tailed her to Barrington and Beverly Glen parks.

She’s on a spy-mistress kick. She carries a drawstring purse stuffed with coins. She makes five and six phone booth calls and slinks back to Fifth Helena.

She employs enclosed phone booths. She hunkers down and crowds the coin boxes. I don’t know who she’s calling or what she’s saying. PC Bell does not tally individual pay-phone calls. I can’t track her callouts.

My phone taps remain undetected. I know that. She calls out on all three extensions. She’s got a closet stuffed with nickels, dimes, and quarters. I sense design here. It plays inimical to her whole *vida loca.*

Monday, 5/14. Marilyn returns to the *Got to Give* set. Cast and crew applaud. The lovefest lasts three hours. A big row with George Cukor flatlines it. Robbie observed the fracus. Marilyn sulked back to her trailer and got smashed.

Tuesday, 5/15. Nasty Nat’s switchboard plant reports two Marilyn calls. Call #1: to Doc Greenson. Shrink Man tells Marilyn he’s taking a month’s vacation. Marilyn moans. Greenson soothes her. The gist: he’s got a backup shrink she’ll love. Call Milt Wexler. We’re office mates. You’ll love Dr. Milt. He’s a mensch. Call #2: to Dr. Milt’s office. “Hi. This is Marilyn Monroe speaking.” The receptionist goes *eeeek.* Wednesday, 5/16. It’s payday and my summary-report-due day. Jimmy H. rigged a safe-deposit-box drop. There’s two B of A’s off of Wilshire and Western. I had two box keys. I snared the payroll at Box #1. I placed my report, tape reels, and transcription logs in Box #2. Jimmy left me a note:

“Breakfast. 8:00 Saturday. The Statler.”

Thursday, 5/17. I was kicked back in my golf cart. I was bored and scratching my balls. Soundstage #14 was straight across a breezeway. The *Got to Give* shoot droned on.

A helicopter hovered and touched down in the parking lot. Peter Lawford opened the hatch. Marilyn ran out and passed him a garment bag. He blew her a kiss and slammed the hatch. The chopper took off.

Marilyn waved bye-bye.

It hit me. Jack's birthday bash. Madison Square Garden. It's this Saturday night. Be there or be square.

I rolled to a pay phone and called L.A. International. I impersonated a Sheriff's lieutenant and demanded a passenger brief. A cowed clerk delivered.

L.A. to Idlewild. The Pan Am noon flight. Peter and Pat Lawford. Plus four kids and three servants. A Miss Monroe on a Saturday-noon charter flight.

There's Pat's private habitat. There's your big empty house.

8

(LOS ANGELES, 8:10 A.M., SATURDAY, 5/19/62)

Jimmy Hoffa said, “She won’t last much longer on that movie she’s in. Everybody’s losing patience.”

The same hotel suite. The same breakfast fare. The same chairs pulled up tight. Hoffa wore a tight gray suit and spit-shined shoes. A plastic seafood bib covered his chest.

“That’s right. The studio’s losing money on her, at a time when they can’t afford to.”

Hoffa sipped coffee. “The wall bugs don’t give up much, do they? Mostly it’s just boring conversation.”

I shrugged. “House bugs are always an iffy proposition. The sound disperses, and you only score when the principals sit close together and talk pertinent shit.”

“No calls or visits from Jack and Bobby, huh?”

I said, “She calls the White House and Justice from her trailer on the lot. It’s in my summary. The internal phone lines are scrambled, so there’s no chance to hear any actual conversations she might have.”

Hoffa cracked his knuckles. “Forty thou in a lockbox, under the bed. That’s interesting.”

I went *Nix*. “It was gone the night Bernie and I laid in the wires.”

Hoffa slurped coffee. His bib featured snarling lobsters and crabs.

“Greenson’s skeeved on her, right? He comes to her house, and she comes to his place for cocktails. He coddles her, she confides in him, and some night when the moon’s all full, he’ll get up his nerve to pounce.”

I laughed. “Greenson’s going out of town for a month. He set Marilyn up with his office mate, Milt Wexler. I doubt if he’ll accommodate her the way Greenson does.”

Hoffa harumphed and squared his bib. He was short. His throne chair dwarfed him. His feet grazed the carpet.

“I blame Jack for all this permissive shit poisoning our culture. He’s put the whole country in some fucked-up state of enchantment, with his Jew Frontier shit and civil rights and all this other high-minded shit, while he's meanwhile ramming this nutty nympho when he's supposed to be a good family man, like me."

I went *Whoa, now.* "You saw my evidence photos. Something's going on here. Why would Monroe have the main number for the L.A. Sheriff's Office listed on an odd sheet of paper?"

Hoffa cracked his thumbs. "I've been scrounging tips on that girl for years, ever since I learned she put out for Jack and Bobby and half the stray cock in this town. One, she hates the LAPD—going back to the late '40s, when she was supposedly a freelance call girl. Also, she hates them on political grounds, like that Black Muslim hoo-haw a few weeks ago. She loves the Sheriff's, because old Sheriff Biscailuz doted on her and always had her ride with him at the county rodeo, whereas the LAPD Intel Division has got surveillance film of her at about eight million pro-Commie rallies. The SHIT unit has more or less left her alone, probably because she's been known to blow Pete Pitchess on occasion. Confucius say, 'It not who you know but who you blow.' Pete's okay. He's a lawyer and an ex-FBI man, and he's Gay Edgar Hoover's choice to replace him if the Kennedys let him go."

I lit a cigarette. "I see where this is going. You've got no beef with old man Hoover. Bobby K's the thorn in your side, and the old man hates him. SHIT's tight with the Feds, because of the Hoover-Pitchess connection. The old poof loves Hollywood gossip—and SHIT feeds him the shit."

Hoffa twirled his coffee cup. "You're right on all that. That's why I'm a Pitchess guy, and that's why he's my choice to succeed the old man. He'll never take grief from Bobby K, and he'll leave labor and so-called organized crime alone."

I checked a wall clock. My Fifth Helena shift started *now.* Monroe's charter flight left at noon. The Lawford B and E job crunched me. Equipment checks would run—

Hoffa tossed his bib and jiggled his nuts. Hoffa stood up and stretched.

"Okay, so Greenson and this Wexler guy share an office. That simplifies things. I want you to break in, mimeograph any Monroe files you come across, and see if you can grab or make tape copies of any of those nutty little chats our girl and Greenson might have recorded. I'm kicking this thing into high gear."

—

The day turned hot. The tree-service truck trapped dead air. I zoom-lensed Monroe's front gate and cogitated.

Equipment checks. Tonight's the night.

Walkie-talkies. Police-band scanner. Power drills. Wire rolls and phone jacks. Flashlights, penlights, oscilloscope. Dust vacuums, Spackle paste and spreaders. Two inside men. That's Bernie and me. Phil stands lookout on PCH. He's ex-Sheriff's. The house straddles the city-county line. Phil's a Sheriff's reserve. He carries a badge. He could hold off nosy fuzz.

Robbie plays watchdog. He's couched in the bluffside post. He's got the down-slant overview. Nat lurks outside. He's our runner. He's in and out of the house. He pipelines Bernie and me. He shags emergency gear.

I cogitated. I popped two dexies and sipped Old Crow. I replayed breakfast with Jimmy H.

Jimmy played not quite askew. He's financing a sex-squeeze/cease-and-desist operation. He's eight-balling the prez and AG. Jimmy's a known prude and tightwad. Jimmy's funding a big party that may yield zilch. Jimmy's a money man. There's no fallback money angle should the plan go *pfffft.* There's cease and desist and no correlative payoff. That's very *un*-Jimmy.

That maroon Corvair pulled up in front of me. Georgia Lowell Farr got out. She wore a Pali High cheerleader sweater and khakis. She walked across the street and straight through the gate.

I lens-tracked her. Marilyn Monroe entered the frame.

I pulled back and recentered the shot. There they are. The dissolute screen queen and swoony high school girl hug. Marilyn kicks the gate shut.

The front door slammed. They're inside now. Sit down and talk, kids. The room bugs will eavesdrop.

Time slogged. Time stuttered and stalled. My brain trip outran it. I fantasy-perved on Lois and Pat. The front door creaked open. I got out and stood on my back bumper. My lens world expanded. Monroe and the Farr girl walked toward the gate.

They were dirt-smeared and disheveled. They kept brushing off their hands. I snapped three photographs. They hugged good-bye. Georgia Farr was five-ten. She loomed over Monroe.

The gate popped open. Georgia stepped out. Monroe cut back across her front lawn. She moved diagonal. That meant the garage.

She had a noon flight east. I jumped back in the truck and cranked a quick U-turn. I punched it down to Carmelina, cut north, and parked. I perched for ten minutes. Finally—there's that dumb Buick. It's drifting down Sixth Helena. Monroe's driving weavy today.

She turned north on Carmelina. Away from the airport. She fishtailed into a two-lane drift.

I tailed her. My surveillance truck had no pop. Monroe swerved east on Sunset. I goosed the gas and barely kept up.

We breezed through Westwood and Holmby Hills. We entered Beverly Hills. Monroe straddled traffic lanes. Horn honks bombarded her. She drove oblivious. She left-turned on Benedict Canyon. I blew a red light and hung in.

We went north. It was a climb. The road went twisty and one-laned. Monroe scuffed her whitewalls and caromed off of curbs. We crossed Mulholland and two-laned downhill. The steep grade jerked me forward and ratcheted up my speed. Monroe tap-tapped her brakes. I rode her back bumper. Fuck her. She'd never notice me. She drove zombified.

It's a Valley run. I rode the clutch and slid between first and second. The terrain went Valley-flat. Marilyn made goofy right and left turns. Ventura, Moorpark, north on Woodman. An alley and a dead end at Saticoy. She veered left. I stalled out at an unmarked retaining wall and slammed the truck in reverse. I veered left on Saticoy and sped up. The Buick was flat gone.

I slow-cruised three blocks and scanned intersections. I scoped parked vehicles. I saw the dumb Buick jammed between an Olds coupe and cholo Impala. A quick blip blipped me. That's her. She's waltzing down an alley, ten o'clock–left.

Shit—

I'm moving away from her. The curbs and driveways are car-blocked. There's no place to park.

—

It's Blown Tail #2. I'm somewhere in dogdick Encino. There's high-end ranch homes behind me. It's jumped-up apartment blocks here.

It's atypical Monroe turf. The locale torqued me. It vibed dope buy or sex tryst. It's 9:40. She's got a noon flight. Why's that lunatic here now?

I found a parking spot. It was three blocks and a half mile east. I *re*-vibed it.

She's meeting someone. She's doing something wrong. It's a new money/flash money neighborhood. Pool-cabana apartment blocks.

Stewardess hives, fag pads, kept-woman domiciles. The Aloha Gardens, the Hawaiian Lanais, the Tiki-Torch Village.

A notion buzz-bombed me. It was shitwork and drudge work combined. I didn't know where she was or who she was with. Parked cars engulfed me. I could jot down plate numbers and call my DMV guy. Plate stats might reveal hinky names and addresses. Underground garages engulfed me. They were gate-locked and remote-controlled. It restricted my access. It was all shitwork under the sun.

I worked it. I walked a three-block/car-to-car radius. Monroe's car was gone. She'd make her flight. I scrawled plate numbers for 143 vehicles. It took four hours. It was Valley hot. I sweated and soiled myself up. My tree-trimmer outfit oozed wet.

She's got something going. I'm the Derogatory Profile man. I want to know what it is.

—

It's Saturday night. We've got warm spring weather. There's bumper-locked cars crammed on PCH. It's party night. That means sound cover. It drifts house-to-house and muzzles entry sounds. It's 11:52 p.m. We're going in.

We'd stashed our cars at the bluffside post. Nat stashed our gear under a Lawford garage tarp. He did it brazen. In full daylight. He drove the tree-trim truck up on the curb and jammed the remote-control signal on the garage door. He cranked the door and dumped our gear. He trimmed two palm trees on the south walkway. The ruse took sixteen seconds, all told.

We lounged against parked cars. We wore party clothes and smoked cigarettes. Hula shirts, slacks, light windbreakers. That's Nat, Phil, Bernie, and me. We're four guys grabbing some air. We'll go back inside and *re*-party in a second. Robbie's our spotter. He's up in the bluffside post. He'll flash a red light to cue the intrusion.

Phil's got a police-band scanner. He'll lurk outside. Nat's the equipment runner. There's six phones on the premises. Three upstairs, three down. Bernie will wire up the wall bugs and tap the downstairs phones. I'll do the upstairs. Nat packed our shit in duffel bags. He'll backstop the cleanup. We're covered every which way.

Robbie flashed the red light. It blipped clear from four hundred yards and high up. Nat cranked the garage door and let himself in. Phil lurked by a '61 Lincoln. Bernie and I hustled down the north pathway and braced the kitchen-side door.

Bernie penlight-flashed the lock. I jammed a #4 pick in the keyhole and poked around. The door popped open. We stepped inside and shut the door behind us. A penlight beam strafed the floor. It was Nat. He entered through the garage. He gave us the A-OK sign and hauled our duffel bags up.

I tapped my Man Camera switch. I'd memorized the interior floor plan and phone-installation spots. I grabbed my duffel bag. I bit down on my penlight and followed the beam.

The front stairway took me up. The second floor was plain big. Front and rear stairways. Four squared-off hallways. Two kid-size bedrooms on the south side. Built-in bathrooms, en suite.

Wide hallways. Long hallways.

The absence of common space vexed me. It militated against conversation. People did not gather to talk here.

The walls were flat-walnut paneled. Pricey plein air originals lined all four. The entire landing was recessed bulb/overhead lit. There were no standing lamps to plant bugs on. The thin Persian carpets would betray the bug mounts jammed underneath.

I nixed upstairs bugs. Bernie would bug the downstairs up the ying-yang. People talked there.

I clocked the north hallway. Three closed doors meant three large bedroom suites. It hit me, belated.

Separate bedrooms for Peter and Pat. Separate phone extensions, dressing rooms, bathrooms. I snap-judged the arrangement. It was Pat's call. Pat censured Peter. She exiled him. She worked within the bounds of the Kennedys-stay-married-but-ignore-their-vows dictum.

I went weavy. I grabbed a stair rail and steadied myself. I scanned the north hallway and walked the hall, east to west. I jiggled the first doorknob. The door was unlocked. I cracked it, just for scent. The air reeked of cleaning solvent and stale maryjane.

I walked to the middle door. It was snagged on a throw rug and open a hairsbreadth. The scent of Tweed drifted out.

She wore Tweed on a summer night in 1945. She wears Tweed today.

I walked to the west-end door. I saw it and stifled a laugh.

The door had been customized. The U.S. presidential seal was eye-level affixed. It was gold leaf and light blue enamel. Gold-leafed below the seal: *Jack's Shack.*

I opened the door and walked right in. *Hey, Jack—what's shakin', baby?*

The bedroom dittoed the hallways. Pricey plein airs and walnut panels. Two nightstands flanked a big Craftsman bed. Note the flanking telephones—red and black.

I examined the phones and tracked attached cords to wall outlets. The black phone was your standard PC Bell job. The red phone was rigged with buttons and custom volume controls. The cord was heavy-duty brass and attached to a separate feeder plug. It was a Secret Service tech installation.

Jack, you cocksucker. It's your hotline to launch the Big One. Remember me? We shared a few grins way back when.

I got out my tools and unscrewed the black phone's receiver. I inserted spacers and twisted wires and planted the taps. It took 2.4 seconds. I hauled my gear down to Peter Lawford's room. The stale reefer smoke made me sneeze. I tapped his phone in 2.0 seconds flat.

I heard TV noise and voices downstairs. Bernie and Nat haw-hawed and watched the news. A commentator recapped Jack's big birthday bash. Bernie said, "I heard he gets more ass than a toilet seat."

Nat said, "Freddy used to score for him. He's a one-a-day man."

Peter Lawford said something. The TV volume swooped. Marilyn Monroe sang "Happy Birthday." I'm a bug-and-tap pro. I know her voice now. She was zorched out of her gourd.

I walked into Pat's room. I smelled Tweed and felt trapped room heat. I tapped her bedside phone and dumped that task quick. A step-through closet hooked back to the bathroom. I flash-lit crewneck sweaters and navy blazers with the girls-school emblems excised. She owned one cocktail gown and fourteen pairs of saddle shoes. She owned one tailored suit and eleven plaid Pendleton shirts.

The closet enclosed a merged fragrance: Tweed and sandalwood blocks. I ran my hands through her sweaters. I felt the blocks and stirred the fragrance up. I touched something off-kilter—slick-surfaced metal and glass.

Keepsake, artifact, hidden treas—

I pulled it out. There we are/there we were. The black frame offsets us, we're soft within chaos, Pat's tortoiseshell beret gleams.

9

(LOS ANGELES, 11:20 A.M., THURSDAY, 5/24/62)

I'm a West L.A. locksmith. It's a B and E shuck. My Key King jumpsuit and tool kit ooze verisimo. I'm casing 408 Bedford Drive, Beverly Hills. Ralph Greenson and Milt Wexler shrink heads here.

My old Chevy hogged two curb slots. I chain-smoked and stalled the approach. Jimmy H. wants a file and/or tape grab. I pioneered headshrinker B and E's in my *Confidential* prime. Juicy exposés resulted.

"Jittery Johnnie Ray. The Boys call him 'Nervous Nellie.' " "Nympho Call Girl Ring—June Allyson, J'accuse!!!" "Bibulous Bob Mitchum—this bad boy's head won't shrink!!!"

Jimmy Hoffa says, "Jump." I say, "How high?" My prime ran from '54 to '56. Shrinks got hip to late-night 459's. They code and vault their celeb dirt now. Jimmy's side gig vibed dud.

I stalled the walk-through. I popped two dexies to suppress ennui. I replayed my moments in Pat's bedroom and merged scents and sounds.

The wire job launched. The phone taps work swell. The Lawfords are back from New York and Jack's birthday binge. The downstairs wall mikes are shit. They spew garbles and fractured conversation. Yelping kids. Maids running vacuum cleaners. Peter Lawford watching TV. Barking dogs and no hints of Pat.

Monroe's back from New York. We've got her lockstepped, tapped, and bugged. She's at the Fox lot today. Nat called me two hours back. He relayed secondhand dish. His switchboard operator girlfriend reports:

Marilyn was tanked and holed up in her trailer. She called the White House and Justice Department main numbers. Nat's girlfriend put the calls through. She eavesdropped on the upshot. Both operators said, "We've been told not to take your calls, Miss Monroe." Nat's girlfriend was sure they worked off prepared scripts.

My three posts are now full operational. The two beach posts log

Lawford-house calls, in and out. We're double-focused on the house. It's Jack's L.A. wet spot. The twin-post concept gets results. Two locations, two frequencies. It levels out wave crash and car boom. It brings Pat's voice alive.

I habituate the bluffside post. I've seen Pat four times in five days. She walks her ridgeback dog twice a day. She rotates the crewneck sweaters in her closet. She ties her hair back in the mornings and wears it down in the afternoons.

Marilyn's purportedly tight with the Lawfords. We haven't logged a single house-to-house call yet. Marilyn works the Fox day shift and the homebody night shift. She did a quasi-nude photo shoot on the *Got to Give* set. Gofers shooed off peepers and instilled decorum. Robbie Molette circumvented it. He shot some palm-camera pix and consigned them to his sister Chrissy. They now pervade the fuck film underground.

I worked the golf course post last night. I caught a hilarious phone schmooze. Marilyn Monroe and Georgia Lowell Farr joust culture and moral trend. Marilyn calls Miss Farr "Lowell." Lowell calls Miss Monroe "Marilyn." It's half sock hop, half perv slumber party.

Marilyn: "Save the woof-woof for your wedding night, sweetie. Listen to the voice of experience here, and don't get embroiled with politicians."

Lowell: "Don't you think President Kennedy's a dreamboat?"

Marilyn: "He's a dipshit. He screwed Anita Ekberg and gave Jackie the clap."

Lowell squealed and went kid gleeful. I heard cut-in clicks. Lowell's mom picked up an extension. Lowell said, "*Mom*—I'm on the horn with Marilyn Monroe." Mom sighed—*you and your crazy fibs.*

I got antsy. Jimmy Hoffa says "Jump." I say, "How—"

Giant ants got me itchy and crawled up my ass. I grabbed my tool kit and rolled.

The building was tinted-glass/brushed-steel sterile. I entered and elevatored up to floor 4. Greenson and Wexler shared Suite 419. I walked over and walked in.

Shrink suites run identical. Receptionist's cubicle, separate entrance for shrinkees. Offices and file room behind the cubicle. Short inner hallways and connecting doors. By and large unlocked.

I knelt by the hallway door. I fiddled with the lock spring and waved to the receptionist. She rolled her eyes and waved back. I slid two spacers up against the spring mounts.

—

Jungle Juice.

I brewed a batch and worked three days straight. I rotated listening post shifts, three per day. My guys caught a breather. I monitored calls and reviewed the tape and transcription logs for calls already received. I kept a scratch-pad list of calls that explicate my specific Monroe Bifecta: Monroe and the K boys/Monroe's Grade-A Crazy Shit.

Jeanne Carmen calls Marilyn. 6:09 p.m., 5/24/62. Here's the Marilyn-to-Jeanne extract:

"…and I've got to be very careful when I call out. I make my really high-priority calls from pay phones, because this really heavyweight and dreamy guy told me to. His name's José, and I met him on a mission to Mexico, which I am not at liberty to discuss."

Pat Lawford calls her sister Jean in New York. 2:42 p.m., 5/25/62. Here's the Pat-to-Jean lead-in:

"Jack and Bobby have dropped Marilyn." Jean responds: "Can you blame them? She's nutty as a fruitcake. I think she's a candidate for the rubber room. She was good in *River of No Return,* though."

Un-ID'd woman calls Pat. 9:17 a.m., 5/26/62. Here's the Pat-to-woman extract:

"Marilyn's been acting up. 'Acting' says it all. She's always acting. She's been sounding terrified, because she says she's been getting breather calls, and someone broke into her house and moved things around, and she got a nasty letter in the mail."

Jungle juice. Listening-post rotations. The posts had upsides and downsides. The bluffside post had proximity to Pat and threadbare décor. The Sip 'n' Surf post had surfer girls and no kitchen. The golf course post adjoined the practice tee at Brentwood CC. Stray balls popped off the roof and made me go for my piece. Jungle juice spawns cabin fever. I decreed a breather and logged work time outside.

Monroe's Valley jaunt. My blown tail. They perplexed me and wrenched me. I went by the Hollywood DMV and braced my contact there. I gave him my plate list. It ran to 143 numbers. He said he'd run them and get full license stats. We settled on five bucks per name and address.

Monroe's fan mail and personal correspondence. It vexed me and wrenched me. Where was it? It's not in her house. It might be safe-deposit-boxed. That notion crunched me. It entailed legwork. I cruised twenty-seven westside banks and savings and loans. I impersonated a Federal bank examiner and showed fake ID. I got twenty-seven "No, sir" responses.

My pending shrink's office break-in. It vexed me and wrenched me. It mandated cool-head circumspection.

Beverly Hills PD ran two graveyard-watch felony cars. They targeted residential and business-address burglars. Greenson and Wexler kept a narcotics safe. It was headshrinker SOP. Bedford Drive was Headshrinker Central. I called up cool-head caution and resolve. I logged two late-night surveillance shifts.

I lurked in an alleyway and eyeballed 408 Bedford. BHPD felony cars rolled by once an hour. The break-in mandated cool-head restraint and an eye for obfuscation. The narcotics safe and junkie burglars. BHPD would buy that.

I developed a plan and secured the appropriate props. They included a nitro spritz for the safe. I could peddle the shootable dope and refortify my pill stash.

Jungle juice. It wears you thin. The flight decrees the crash.

My three-day run ran down. I went light-headed. I saw sunspots and things that weren't there. I ate three candy bars for sustenance and gobbled three red devils. I crapped out at the golf course post. My sleep was all noise and dank colors.

—

Phone buzz stirred me. It was light outside. I'd slept sixteen-plus hours. I dove for my headphones and crashed into the chair by the console.

The voice activator kicked on. Tape spun. A man greeted Marilyn. I popped two dexies and called up alertness. I made the voice. Roddy McDowall. We had a circa '54 run-in. Drag ball hijinx. Roddy in a ritzy gown. Freddy O. peeps and exposes all.

I yawned and guzzled cold coffee. Marilyn said, "What time is it in Rome? Come *on,* baby. You know what I'm angling for."

Roddy said, "This will have to be a teaser reel, because it's late-late here, and I've got a friend coming over."

Marilyn: " 'Friend.' Ho, ho."

Roddy: "Pietro something. Really, love. I deliver the transatlantic dish on a daily basis—to you, Sid Skolsky, and Eddie Fisher, and I never reverse the charges. Eddie's the only one with a vested interest, given Queen Elizabeth's misadventures, but you remain the most dish-crazed of the lot."

Marilyn: "I'll make it up to you. I'll buy you a pizza when you're back in town."

Roddy: "I know all about your penchant for pizza, and for the boy who delivers it to you. If you're not getting it for free by now, you never will be."

I laughed and lit a cigarette. Roddy gave good phone.

Marilyn: "Sweetie…"

Roddy: "All right. The highly abbreviated dish is that *Cleopatra* is the loser of all time, and I'll never get an Oscar nod, because this dog is both dramatically overbudget and drearily overlong, and once it's been cut, cut, cut, I'll be down to a bit part. But I'll get my revenge on Fox, though."

Marilyn: "Tell me how."

Roddy: "I happen to know of a certain storage room on the Fox lot where a great many Roman soldier costumes earmarked for the Lox of All Time are being stored. When I'm back in L.A., I'm going to enlist a crew and a dozen cute boys and make a fuck film that will demean, denigrate, and brilliantly satirize the overblown *Cleo.* As the uncredited director of *Whipout Man, Fat Girl Love, Miscegenation Generation,* and *The Sexistentialists,* you know what I'm capable of."

Marilyn: "I know you're jonesing for Pietro, but can't you—"

Roddy: "Liz is hopping mad at Eddie. His cheesy shtick at the Losers Club has pushed her over the edge. She's told her lawyer to take him to the cleaners. Now, love—"

Marilyn: "Don't you want to hear the latest on Jack and Bobby?"

Roddy: "Your latest dispatch from fantasyland? Darling, you shtupped Jack a half dozen times, and you told me he was hung like a cashew, and I doubt if you've ever shtupped Bobby, so—"

The call fritzed and dead-aired. Transatlantic feed lines ran temperamental. I took a piss and chained cigarettes. The dexies hit. Marilyn's phone re-rang. I jumped on the headphones.

The green console light blinked. It signified a Lawford house/ Monroe house call.

Marilyn picked up. She said, "Hello?" Peter Lawford said, "Listen, and appreciate the fact that I'm not enjoying this task. You are not to call or in any way contact Jack or Bobby again, and that's straight from the president himself."

Marilyn gasped. Lawford hung up. The green light blinked off. Marilyn sobbed into her telephone. The voice activator kept tape running. I timed the crying jag at four minutes straight.

10

(LOS ANGELES, 2:03 A.M., FRIDAY, 6/1/62)

Shrink job. I'm up on the fourth floor. I jiggled the hallway door and got clicks. The spacers worked. The door popped open. I stepped inside.

I stood in the reception room. I'd crowbarred an alleyway door and breached the building there. That door *looks* locked. If the F-car cops shake alleyway doors, I'm fucked.

I'd parked my sled at Linny's deli. My squarejohn attaché is a tool kit. I'm dressed squarejohn. The building rates Z-grade secure. I excel at security breaches. I know how to break, enter, steal, and/or perv and get out.

Man Camera flashback. I reprised my first glimpse.

There's the waiting room. There's the receptionist's cubicle. That's the connecting door to the right. I bit down on my penlight. That door should be unlocked.

I walked to the door and turned the knob. There's the click. I'm in the shrink-prototype side hallway.

I penlight-flashed the walls. I noted two closed doorways left, two closed doorways right. Unmarked doorways, right. Marked doorways, left. I know this floor plan. I pulled six shrink jobs for *Confidential.*

Shrink-session rooms, right. Shrink's offices, left. Tasteful name plaques anoint them. Dr. Greenson's toward the front, Dr. Wexler's toward the back. The last door's the file room. Where's the narcotics safe?

Eyes right, eyes left.

The floor plan confirmed my prior jobs. I jiggled the right-side doorknobs. The doors popped wide. I flashed the interiors and confirmed details.

Shrinkee couches and chairs. Shrinker chairs. Shrinkee entry/exit doors. Shrinkees were skulkers and back-door habitués. They feared exposure and ducked reception rooms.

I jiggled the left-side doorknobs. Greenson's door was open.

Wexler's door was locked. The probable file-room door was locked.

My first thought: The probable file room's a shrinkee pissoir. The receptionist has her own pissoir. Greenson and Wexler have en suite pissoirs. Where's the file room/where's the dope safe/your alleyway entry marks a 459 PC. Don't fuck with locked doors and leave tool marks. Don't individuate *this* office for 459 PC.

Let's imprint details. Here's the office of Ralph R. Greenson, M.D.

A big Danish Modern desk. Crazy tubular chairs. Picasso wall prints. Greenson's hep, Daddy-O. Hep plus smart. Dig his glass-encased shelves.

Floor-to-ceiling shelves. Crammed with patient files, stored spine out. Code numbers on the spines. No names revealed. Heavy glass. Eight hinged panes for reach-in access. Triple key-locked, eight times across. Burglar alarm tape seals all perimeters. I confront stymie, stalemate, defeat. This gig is *fucked.*

I peeped the room. I peeped the john. I sniffed Greenson's high-end toiletries. I peeped the receptionist's cubicle. Where's the dope safe? Maybe Wexler's got the dope safe. His door's locked. If I breach that door, I individuate this location. If there's no dope safe, there's no junkie-burglar ruse. Big Freddy O. takes it up the shit chute.

I walked back to Greenson's office and crashed in his desk chair. I yanked the right- and left-side drawer pulls and got no give. I tried the shallow middle drawer. It slid open, easy.

Peep it, numbnuts. It's your métier. It's all you're going to get.

I saw postage stamps, pens, pencils, erasers. I saw a brochure for the L.A. Civic Light Opera. There's a Richfield gas station receipt. Note the circa '50 Monroe publicity still. There's no visible ejaculate on it. *But*—there's a tape-spool box marked "Home Session, 2:40 p.m., 5/29/62."

It tweaked me. I closed my eyes and conjured. I smelled typewriter whiteout and heard typewriter keys tap.

Robbie Molette. His rolling stakeout report, three days back. Marilyn leaves her house at 2:26. She arrives at Greenson's house at 2:38.

I'm a toss pro. The drawer was still virgin. I know not to touch. I popped my attaché and grabbed my camera. It was prerigged with flashbulb attached.

The drawer was full extended. I framed the clutter and popped off a shot. I saw spots and smelled Marilyn's bedroom. I counted off sixty seconds and pulled out the print.

I overpacked for this gig. Gunpowder wicks and drills for the dope-safe ruse. My portable tape rig. The off chance I'd need to record on the spot.

The rig paid off. I felt like a taste now. I cracked the alleyway door at 1:59. It was 2:46 now. I could duplicate the tape on the premises. I could random skim and groove the gist now.

I slid the tape out of the box and spooled it on my rig. I kept the volume soft-murmur low. Marilyn said, "You make such good martinis." Greenson said, "It's not a skill I possess. My housekeeper whips them up." I goosed the volume. I pushed FORWARD/STOP/FORWARD and skimmed ahead on whim.

I caught Monroe in free-form monologue. It was all stale film-biz tattle. The reel spooled halfway through. I caught eleven "Jack betrayed me" prompts. #11 ran straight into a Greenson tut-tut.

Marilyn giggled. Marilyn said, "Hey, he speaks."

Greenson went *tut-tut*. Marilyn brought her voice butch-baritone low.

"I've got ugly, slimy dirt on Jack. I was just getting to it when you cut me off. I go back fourteen years with Jack. I'll use that dirt if he goes back on his promises to me, and if you keep cutting in on me just when I get to the punch line, I'll find myself a shrink who'll cosign all my crazy and not very nice ideas, and I'll leave you in the lurch like I leave everyone who stands in my way or starts to bore me."

The tape clicked off. Monroe's Jackalogue jazzed me. Baby, you closed strong.

11

(LOS ANGELES, 6/2–6/9/62)

“The job,” “the gig,” “the deal.” We’re right at two months in. It’s late-spring hot in L.A. Long-term surveillance jobs are wear items. This one’s started to fray.

I bailed on the Fox lot. Roving personnel ID’d me and my guys, for sure. Ex-deputy Phil Irwin ran into ex–Sheriff’s lieutenant Del Kinney. It was smack upside Soundstage #14.

Kinney left the Sheriff’s and gigged the State Beverage Control. He’s now the Fox security boss. He shares spit with Jimmy H., the Aadland brothers, and kindred craft-union creeps. Kinney and Phil shot the breeze. Kinney might have detected our on-the-lot presence from the gate. Hoffa might have told him and bought us an impunity waiver. Kinney vibed breach. I pulled my boys off the lot.

It was prescient. Fox sacked Marilyn from *Got to Give,* 6/4/62. Studio flacks cited her “spectacular absenteeism” and “willful violation of contract.” Zanuck and his high-command corps were browned off. They wanted to release *Got to Give* at Christmas and plug their *Cleopatra* cash drain. *“Marilyn Fired!”* scorched the tabloid news. TV camera trucks bottlenecked Fifth Helena. They derailed my static surveillance shifts. I suspended them. I forfeited all eyeball access. The job was down to bugs and taps, over and out.

Marilyn was a wear item. She’d worn out Jack and Bobby K. They blew her off. Jimmy Hoffa’s goal of a tittle-tattle squeeze played like a wilted wet dream. Marilyn played Marilyn, all day every day. Her exotic eccentricities held me and hinted at a secret life within her life of sloth and minor misalliance. Her obese-girl wardrobe. Her pay-phone calls. The forty grand under her bed. That non sequitur jaunt to the Valley, 5/19/62. My DMV guy and his plate check on 143 sleds. That tape I played at Ralph Greenson’s office. Marilyn’s purported dirt on Jack the K and their alleged late-’40s convergence. Her annotated Paul de River book. She threatens Greenson. “I’ll find a shrink who’ll cosign all my crazy and not very nice ideas.”

We're down to wiretaps and monitor-shift overlaps. My three posts still run twenty-four hours. I cruise the Brentwood and Sip 'n' Surf posts once a day and read through the tap-log transcriptions. They reveal zilch per the exiled Marilyn and exilers Jack and Bobby. I *live* at the bluffside post. It gives me candid home movies of Pat.

She walks her dog. She drives her kids to school. She rotates the crewneck sweaters and saddle shoes I saw in her closet. I saw her wash her Bonneville ragtop. Her ridgeback capered in sudsy water.

I savored her phone calls. I caught them live and replayed them. I memorized her inflections. She never talked about me. That was no surprise. I wondered who she told about us. She wouldn't tell her dipshit hubby or Jack. She might tell Bobby. She wouldn't tell her sisters. She certainly told God and sought out means of atonement.

She coffee-klatched with sisters Jean and Eunice, long-distance. She excoriated Peter and critiqued his compulsive infidelities. Peter, the sloppy drunk. Peter's temper tantrums and fawning allegiance to Jack. "He married my family. He didn't marry me. He bought himself a secondhand bloodline. He'll always be a second-class citizen."

Lawford's calls out and calls in ran innocuous. He called agents and studio geeks. They called him. The Lawford house was bedlam. Kids ran through and grabbed phone extensions. They eavesdropped and tee-heed. Lawford indulgently rebuffed them. He yanked his bedside-phone cord while he slept. He made clandestine calls from the 76 station on PCH.

I foot-tailed him three times. He kept the phone booth door cracked for air. He consulted an address book and deployed his *"ooooh, baby"* voice. His pay-phone stints played obvious. Monroe's pay-phone stints played devious.

The summer loomed hot. Monroe holed up at Fifth Helena. It deterred newshounds out to exploit her Fox-lot antics and expulsion from *Got to Give.* The housekeeper came and went. Pizza Dave failed to show. Nat, Phil, and Robbie spot-cruised by on whim and took note. News vehicles crammed the street, straight down to Carmelina. I pulled my static surveillance, right on cue.

Robbie spot-cruised Jeanne Carmen's place. The pill-party cars never showed. Monroe hid out at home. The press hounded her. I sensed her life contracting. I worked the golf course post and tracked her calls out. She called Doc Greenson, Roddy McDowall, and Lowell Farr.

Greenson withstood monologues and went *tut-tut.* Marilyn mewed discontent: Jackie's frigid. Jack's entrapping Playboy bunnies now.

I've nixed threeways umpteen times. Her Jack-and-Bobby bile runs the full fifty minutes. Long pauses induce line blur. Greenson's too bored to talk. I hear Marilyn chew ice cubes and slurp liquid. She's slamming Smirnoff 100 from 10:00 a.m. on.

Roddy McDowall engaged her and got her cranked up past self-pity. He dispensed schadenfreude and tales of Fox in duress. *Cleo* drains Fox. Roddy exploits the drain and rewrites Fox as Smut City. It's his vengeance for cuts in his *Cleo* role and no Oscar bid. Marilyn listens. Roddy's smut spoof of *Cleo—oooh-la-la.*

"Heads will *turn,* love. Just you wait and see." Marilyn, in her shock-the-world guise:

"I'd love to be in a fuck flick, if only good-looking, high-class people saw it, and it wouldn't louse up my career. I'd *die* if some fat Shriner saw me screwing and yanked his crank while he watched."

Wiretaps. Heard live, replayed, transcribed. The bug-and-tap job of a lifetime. And I've got the Wiretap Blues.

The detail work numbed me. I boozed and popped pills to stay fortified. Monroe's particular weirdness hinted at *something.* Her day-to-day indolence subsumed it. I felt unraveled. I kept losing details. I woke up in listening posts and didn't know how I got there. I might have to take the cure and steam-clean myself soon.

Monroe's got a late-call thing going with Lowell Farr. She gets the kid all gaga most midnights. Monroe listens more than she talks. Lowell reveals the kooky customs of the Pali High class of '63.

The big new thing? It's the prearranged makeout date. They transpire during weekend double features at the Bay. They're prearranged but anonymous. You know the boys from school. It's a nice kid's version of going to a motel. Girls' names and boys' names are dropped in a hat. You never know who you get. The kids are preselected. All porkers, uglies, and zit-faced kids are verboten. Lowell's had three dates, so far. She sort of remembers *The World of Suzie Wong* and *Gidget Goes Hawaiian.* Her friend Marcy supplies her with crib sheets to con her mom and dad.

Night owl Marilyn. Night owl Lowell. Night owl Pat tends to stay up late-*late.* I'd split the golf course post and roll to the bluffside post. Pat makes her night-shift calls up to 2:00 a.m. She calls her women friends and cuts loose on her limp-dick husband.

His drunkenness. His dope and girl habits. The "Girl Book" he keeps for President Jack's perusal. Nude shots of "wild and woolly" stewardesses. Samples of their wool taped to the pages.

"We're having a catered party on the fifteenth. Peter will be all over the waitresses. It’s his well-established MO.”

It’s been almost seventeen years. Why not? That beach party sounds like a gas.

12

(LOS ANGELES, 9:20 P.M., FRIDAY, 6/15/62)

High-style Freddy makes the scene. Dig my dupioni silk blazer and pink linen shirt. Note the white buck shoes. Note my Facel Vega rent-a-car at the valet stand. Peter Lawford owns one just like it. Fuck him sideways.

It was balmy working on crisp. Six college boys shagged cars off the PCH embankment. Guests lingered outside. I made studio types and Mayor Sam Yorty's chief deputy. Nobody made me.

Peter and Pat were inside somewhere. Pat and party crasher Freddy. She'll register shock. She'll sigh or boot my ass out on the street.

I scoped arrivals. Neighbors walked up. Big-ticket sedans disgorged westside swells. Monroe might show. I'd make book on it. A green VDub pulled up. Jeanne Carmen got out. She wore a summer shift and sandals. The driver got out. She had a butch-girl haircut and wore a hula shirt and twill slacks. I saw golf clubs crammed in the backseat.

I recalled *this:*

Something Phil Irwin said. Jeanne as current or ex–Sheriff's snitch. Plus her pill-party chum—a lezzie golf pro.

They waltzed inside. They vibed item. Ex-deputy Phil. He's working the Sip 'n' Surf post tonight. He might have the fill-in.

Party crasher Freddy. Don't be a chickenshit. You've got a right to be—

I walked in. The foyer and living room were half packed. I knew the floor plan. Come *on*—I hot-wired the place!

It helped me maneuver. I dodged eye contact. Pat would magnetize me. I didn't want that.

The downstairs den. It's off the north-side beachfront. It's dusty and underutilized. I'd tapped the phone there.

I hugged the north-side wall and dodged cater waitresses schlepping canapés and drinks. I kept my head low and made the door. I cranked the knob and let myself in.

The room was lights-off dark. A window overlooked the beach. Hawaiian torches lit clumps of people. I got out my penlight and flashed the phone extension. I risked a five-minute call.

I locked myself in and dialed the Sip 'n' Surf post. I said, "Phil, it's me."

Phil picked up. "Yeah, and at the party no less. Monroe might be there. Nat worked the golf course post this morning. She told Doc Greenson she might drop by."

I said, "Jeanne Carmen's here. Her date's a young lez with a green VDub. There were golf clubs in the backseat. You told me—"

Phil cut in. "Deedee Grenier. It's got to be—"

I cut back in. "Is Jeanne still snitching for the Sher—"

"Whoa, Freddy. Slow down. She's strictly ex. She used to rat pill pushers to Narco, to buy out of her own busts. But she paid off her debt to her handler, so she's out of the whole snitch deal. But, Deedee's snitching to the Sheriff's now, for money, because there's no real bread on the women's golf tour. And she's always at Jeanne's pill parties—so she has to know Monroe, and Deedee is *nothing* but dirty."

I said, "Dirty, how?"

Phil said, "She runs badger games on small-time businessmen. She works out of Norm's Nest, which is a bumfuck cocktail lounge up in bumfuck Van Nuys. The owner's an ex-LAPD man named Norm Krause. He was on the PD from something like '46 to '59, and he was allegedly some sort of extortionist. Anyway, he quits the PD, gets a liquor license, and opens up the Nest. Now, you want the kicker? Deedee's enforcer in the badger-game deals, playing the role of the irate *husband,* is her real-life *brother,* Paul Mitchell Grenier. He's a bit actor at Fox, he did Chino time, and he's your classic mean-queen type."

I kicked it around. Phil held the line. Ambient pier noise garbled up his end. I said, "Dig up rap sheets and/or internal memoranda on Krause and the Greniers," and hung up.

Garbled party noise hit me. Samba music and voice overlap. I cracked the door and looked out. The bash rocked loud now. The hi-fi and chatter cliques sent up a roar. I looked through the kitchen and back hallway. A cater waitress lugged coats toward the rear storage-room door.

Makeshift cloakroom. It had to be. The dish starts *there.*

The waitress opened the door and dropped the coats on a ratty daybed. Other coats and a pile of handbags had been dumped there. I had a clear shot through the kitchen. I stepped out and beelined straight in.

I tossed the bolt and propped a chair against the door. I exit-marked a beachside window and jammed up the sill. I worked by penlight. I inventoried nine women's coats and wraps and thirteen handbags.

Purse debris. Don't get distracted. Don't let female scents sidetrack you. Go for wallets and driver's license ID. Look for pocket address books.

I sat on the bed and rifled handbags. I clawed through cosmetics, cigarette packs, house keys, lucky charms. I smelled individual and aggregate women. I grabbed wallets and scanned photo sleeves. I orbed laminate licenses, pix of kids and hubbies, little books with innocuous names scrawled. I went through six handbags in fourteen minutes. I hit a black leather job with crossed-golf-club stitchwork—it had to be her.

Let's give it three minutes. Be thorough. Imprint what you see.

Chesterfields. A matchbook for Linda's Little Log Cabin. A Rancho Park scorecard, 12/4/58. Deedee shoots a 2-under-par 68. A Lanvin atomizer, half-full. I spritzed my pocket square and inhaled Deedee's musk.

A red leather wallet. Six transparent pocket sleeves. They contain *this:*

Deedee's driver's license. Pix of Jeanne Carmen, the Linda's Little Log Cabin softball team, a nudie pic of Lila Leeds.

A red leather address book. Pocket size. Let's savor this slow.

Deedee block-printed. She jotted phone numbers exclusive. She went alphabetical. The book ran "Annie" to "Zohra." Deedee's a sapphic sister. She's a grifter. She's circumspect. She gives nothing up. She lists only women's first names.

I recognized "Barbara's" number. As in Barbara Payton. She was an ex–film presence and part-time grifter. We went way back. "Jeanne's" number was Jeanne Carmen's number. I recognized "Lila's" number. Who else *but*?—Lila Leeds, the bait girl supreme.

I riffed to the *M*'s. They hopped "Margo" to "Melinda." They bypassed "Marilyn" and her Gladstone exchange.

My brain clock buzzed, my toss time elapsed, I smelled Deedee Grenier all over me. "Annie" to "Zohra"—that's it.

I repacked the handbag. I replaced the items in perfect order. I laid the wallet on top. I saw a paper scrap wadded into a photo sleeve.

I pulled it out. Deedee had block-printed four phone numbers. They seemed familiar. They were all GL prefix. My brain waves meshed and kicked out an imprint.

Pay phones. Barrington Park and Beverly Glen Park. The phones Marilyn Monroe used. In her big-girl disguises. On her Mata Hari kick.

I heard footsteps outside the cloakroom. I slid the chair aside and the dead bolt back and vaulted out the window. I tumbled onto hard-packed sand.

My pulse raced. I felt weavy and punchy. I brushed myself off and stumbled over to the south-side footpath. I lit a cigarette and ambled back to the valet-park stand. Neighbor guests walked up. I joined them and *re*-crashed the party.

The head count ran ninety plus. The living room overflow flowed up the two stairwells and packed the poolside deck. Three downstairs Portabars served up booze. I squeezed over to the bar by the north stairwell. The cater waiters did overflow biz. I scanned the room and didn't see Pat. I *re*-scanned the room and didn't see Marilyn. My wig felt loose. I scanned the room and tallied fourteen bug-mount locations. It resettled me. I pictured Phil at the Sip 'n' Surf. His bug-feed reception would play high-decibel loud.

Familiar faces bipped by. I matched their pedigrees. There's that TV actor. He threatened to sue *Confidential.* I kicked his ass outside Dale's Secret Harbor. A guy recognized me. He flipped me the bird and bipped off. I went *Huh?* I didn't know who he was or what I did to him.

The booze line inched forward. I looked around for Lois. My brain glitched and *un*glitched. Lois didn't know this crowd. Lois lived in New York.

A cater waiter smiled at me. I stuffed a fifty in his vest pocket and pointed to a highball glass and his sour-mash jug. He got the picture and filled the glass. He pointed to a wingback chair beside a wall credenza. I eased myself over and sat down.

Body heat and talk overlap. It fucking deluged me. I smelled Deedee Grenier's crazy life all around me. I guzzled half the glass and lulled the volume way down. I got an urge to take the Deedee lead and cut and run. I got a counterurge to hold on for Pat.

Peter Lawford saw me. I caught it, full-on. I watched him walk over. He was flush-faced and half in the bag. I stood up. Lawford stepped in, too close. He ran a cheap-shot number upside my face.

Who'd you steal that coat from, Freddy? Put the screws to any closet queens lately? Dope any racehorses while you were at it?

I went *boo!* Lawford turned tail. I sat back down and sipped my monster drink. I caught stray chatter. It was flatline consistent.

Marilyn was fired/oh, God—Cleopatra—can you BELIEVE?

My pulse decelerated. The room temperature dropped. The high-volume talk leveled into a hum. Eddie Fisher and Bo Belinsky walked in. They didn't see me. The partygoers saw them.

They entered big. They constellated the crowd. Women swooned for Bo. They darted up and squeezed his left bicep. Their husbands ballyhooed his recent no-hitter. Party fools chanted, *"We hate Liz!"* Eddie yelled, *"Liz who?"* Fools whistled, cheered, and spilled drinks.

I sipped sour mash and made memory imprints. Peter Lawford hounds cater waitresses. Mayor Sam Yorty, coma-conked in a leprechaun hat. A starlet with a squirt gun filled with crème de menthe. She's telling people, "Open wide."

The party thinned out. I had a straight view of the pool deck. Here's an all-time imprint.

Deedee Grenier chips golf balls into the swimming pool. She aims at a floating Hula-Hoop and puts most of them inside. Three Lawford kids watch. They giggle and squeal.

"I can't believe you're still alive, and that you had the balls to show up here."

The madras shift, the saddle shoes, the too-big man's watch. Don't touch up that new gray hair—I won't let you.

—

We dragged deck chairs down to the wave line and kicked off our shoes. Pat brought a bottle of Pernod. We kept still more than we talked. I glanced back at the party and saw things.

Marilyn Monroe's late arrival. Bo Belinsky swarmed by horny wives. Peter Lawford as the big bad wolf. He's pie-eyed and stumbly. Cater waitresses elude his grasp.

Pat said, "My Christmas cards weren't enough. The brevity of the encounter failed to deter you. The services you provided my brother seem not to embarrass you. You display not one whiff of deference, given what the man has become."

I lit a cigarette. Pat lit up out of my pack. Propane torches flanked the pool deck. A breeze fanned orange light our way.

"I'm happy for you, for Jack, and for that other brother I met a few times, the one who always scowled at me. I was driving by, and I saw all the cars pulling up. I thought, Come on. The worst she can do is bounce you or call the cops."

"You're saying there's nothing more to it than that?"

I said, “That’s right.”

Pat said, “I don’t believe you.”

I said, “Don’t put the skids to this too fast. It’s late, and the party’s boring you, and you’d have sent me home if you didn’t have some half-assed urge to talk.”

Pat tossed her cigarette. “I met a handsome young Marine, and what happened happened. The handsome young Marine became a policeman, and by all accounts a crooked detective. You’re right. It’s late, the party’s a bore, and I have more than a ‘half-assed’ urge to talk—but I only have one question.”

I sipped Pernod. It burned going down.

“I know the question. It’s ‘How can you do what you do?’ The answer is ‘I like poking around in people’s shit and making money.’ ”

Pat laughed. “Have you kept my Christmas cards?”

I said, “Yeah, but I always x out your husband’s picture, and I always spend a lot of time looking at you in your Christmas threads and wondering what’s kicking around in your head.”

Pat nudged me, leg-to-leg. *“So?”*

I nudged her back. “So, you’re bored, and vexed. There’s all of it—your family, the world crawling up your ass because your brother’s what he is, your shoddy marriage, the whole deal. I read people. It’s what I do. The woman in the ’58 and ’59 cards is not the woman in the card I got last Christmas. You’re kicking around inside your own head because it’s the only place you can be alone and feel safe.”

Pat tapped my knee. “You’re right. It’s all too much. Just don’t propose yourself as a solution, because that’s a line I won’t cross.”

I said, “You’ll leave Peter the moment Jack’s reelected.”

Pat said, “I told him that very thing, just last week.”

13

(LOS ANGELES, 9:40 P.M., FRIDAY, 6/22/62)

Homework. Nightwork. Unamphetamized and boozed. It's late clerk duty. It's nothing more than that.

I typed a week's worth of tap transcripts and a 6/16 to 6/21 summary. I ripped off the cover of the current *Life* magazine and pinned it to my pictorial corkboard. There's the quasi-nude Monroe. She's got wet hair and one leg hooked on a swimming pool ledge. I pinned Robbie Molette's on-the-sly nude beside it. The *Life* pix were a worldwide sensation. Robbie's pic scorched the L.A. underground. It's a steal at fifty bucks per.

The pictorial corkboard oozed Monroe. It featured the Polaroids from my 4/11 break-in. The dissolute bathroom and bedroom. The forty grand stashed in the lockbox. The jumbo-girl clothes. The coin stash. The lists of lovers and dope-dispensing physicians. The name-scrawled sheets of paper. Monroe's nutty screed stuck inside Paul de River's nutty book.

The adjacent corkboard featured the week's random notes. I unpinned them and typed them into bullet-point briefs.

I started with Pat's emphatic assertion: Jack and Marilyn coupled a half dozen times, from '54 up to now. They were abbreviated assignations. Always conducted in neutral locations. Calvinist Bobby wouldn't poke Marilyn with a long stick. Marilyn attended last week's Lawford-house do. I feigned interest in the Jack/Marilyn rumors. Pat supplied the above tattle. I dissembled my way to Pat's punch line: Marilyn and the K boys were now kaput. Pat said she encountered Marilyn at the Palisades Gelson's. Marilyn spun a tale of recurrent break-ins at her new pad. The burglar moved around various objects and left her weird-o notes. The burglar besieged her with breather calls. Pat cited Marilyn's "mystery intruder" on a prior tapped call. I've got Marilyn dialed. The "mystery intruder" was Monroe fantasia.

I used Pat to get this information. The big reunion went down. I exploited Pat for dish to levy against her big brother. It felt ghastly. I did it anyway.

I bullet-pointed the week's legwork. That paper slip in Deedee Grenier's wallet supplied a solid lead. She'd jotted pay-phone numbers for Barrington and Beverly Glen parks. I spot-surveilled the two locations, all week. Monroe failed to show. The phones never rang. Nobody called out on them.

Legwork to brainwork. I contemplated another Monroe house B and E. The housekeeper's intermittent presence and Monroe's persistent presence deterred me. I contemplated rousting Paul de River. His sex-crime book. Monroe's florid note stuck inside it. She extolled heavy shit. Let's *contravene passive and reactive behavior with direct criminal action.* I nixed the roust. A de River approach was imprudent. De River was too volatile.

Brainwork to static surveillance. I put Norm's Nest under the spotlight. It was a dingy cheater bar in north Van Nuys. I installed Robbie there. He's the inside man. I'm too well known to work an ex-cop-owned joint.

I hovered outside. Robbie worked inside. Deedee Grenier and her brother Paul Mitchell no-showed. No badger games went down. No other badger-game women appeared.

Phil Irwin glommed Sheriff's green sheets on Deedee and Paul Mitchell. Here's the gist:

Deedee Montfort Grenier/WFA/DOB 8/8/29. Lezzie bar rousts: '56, '58, '61. Paul Mitchell Grenier/WMA/DOB 1/23/26. Six busts for possession of maryjane/no convictions. One stat-rape conviction, 6/54. Three years at Chino. Subsequent fruit roller busts/no convictions. Bit player at 20th Century–Fox, rumored smut-film artiste. 6:00 a.m. to 2:00 a.m. surveillance of Norm's Nest continues.

I bullet-pointed the above. I typed in a Monroe/Lowell Farr conversation.

Tuesday, 6/19/62. I boom-miked a backyard koffee klatch. Marilyn and Lowell dished the dish.

Lowell harped on her makeout dates at the Bay Theater. She said she had one penciled in for tomorrow night. I peeped said date. Lowell cuddled a tall boy with a jumbo pompadour. I sat through half of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance.* The kids made out and eschewed conversation. No Monroe leads resulted. I split for the bluffside post. I caught Pat's midnight dog walk. Pat wore her pink crewneck sweater and scuffed saddle shoes.

I rolled in a fresh sheet of paper. Nat Denkins left me a tape spool marked *URGENT.* He recorded it live at 2:00 a.m. today. Nat speaks

Spanish. A Baja operator put the call through. The caller's name was José Bolaños. Nat grabbed our Baja reverse directory and looked him up. Bolaños lived on Calle Hueracho in Ensenada.

I slipped the spool on my tape rig and pressed START. I put on my headphones and hunched over my typewriter. I transcribed as Monroe and this unknown cholo jive-talked.

JB: "I will not soon forget, darling. Winter Storm Lucita and Winter Storm Marilyn."

MM: "Yes, but I was traveling incognito."

They spoke languid. Monroe was half-lubed. I typed fast and kept up.

JB: "I've forgotten the name you employed. I intend to recall you always as 'Marilyn,' as many lesser men than I have."

MM: "I travel incognito when we work together. I'm a businesswoman in disguise."

JB: "You have a capacity for business that I did not deem possible in a woman of your station."

MM: "Well, I'm Winter Storm Marilyn, so what did you expect?"

Winter Storm Lucita. It raked Baja in mid-February. I could buzz U.S. Customs. They could run visa checks.

JB: "What is that noise you are making? It sounds like slurping."

MM: "I buy cherry sno-cones at Wil Wright's and refreeze them. Then I douse them with vodka and green Chartreuse. It's kicks and grins, baby. Like you, and like moving freight for you."

"Freight." "Freight" as dope synonym. "Traveling incognito."

JB: "Speak discreetly, *mi corazón.* Our relationship is not all kicks and grins, and I am as much '*Señor* Bolaños' as I am 'baby.' "

MM: "Don't be a drag. It's two in the morning, and I'm slurping a sno-cone."

JB: "Phone taps, my darling. The L.A. police are known to tap the telephones of enlightened people in the film colony."

MM: "They're in Dutch now with the press, I have to say. They shot two Black Muslims, a couple of months ago. One guy was really cute, like Harry Belafonte. My cleaning lady said he played the bongo drums. She's a Negro, so she's hep to what's happening with her people. And Chief Parker's a souse. That's a well-known fact."

JB: "You should invite him over for a relaxing sno-cone."

MM: "You're funny."

JB: "Not when it comes to fascistos like Parker."

MM: "Whoa, baby, whoa. Don't get so het up. I'm getting a nice drift off my sno-cone, and you're messing with it."

JB: "I am a businessman, as well as a Marxist-Leninist. Men such as I despise indecorous women."

MM: "'Businessman,' huh? I'll be generous and let it go as 'freight mover,' but that's just a euphemism."

JB: "Marilyn, you wound me."

MM: "The fascistos are a yawn. And I've tattled the LAPD to Jack and Bobby Kennedy, *mucho* times."

JB: "Marilyn, you are a fantasist and a name-dropper, nonpareil."

MM: "You'll change your tone when Jack divorces Jackie and marries me."

JB: "Marilyn, you are delusional."

MM: "Look who's talking. Look who'll be left holding the bag, if and when I put the screws to Jack Kennedy."

JB: "Jack and Bobby are genteel fascistos. Believe me, I know."

MM: "I like you when we plan our visits, and you do your Latin-lover routine. Otherwise, you wear me thin. Okay, José? That's just a word to the wise."

JB: "You are the world's number-one woman, and still you exasperate."

MM: "I'm just an overhyped movie star who wishes she was something else. You dig? I lick sno-cones and talk to strange men at two in the morning."

The long-distance feed severed. Loose tape flapped off the spindle. I hit the kill switch and doused the machine.

Phil Irwin knew a Customs guy. He could check travel visas and passenger lists. Winter Storms Lucita and Marilyn. Mid-February. It was a solid lead. We might score some good—

My work phone rang. I grabbed it and got "Yes?" out. Robbie Molette overrode me.

"I'm outside the Nest. Deedee Grenier's working a mark inside, and Paul Mitchell's in the tail car, down the block."

—

The North Valley. Shitkicker pads and juke joints. Machine shops and discount bottle stores. Vacant lots clumped with sagebrush and scrounging coyote packs.

Norm's Nest. A prefab Alamo, built to scale. Sandblasted adobe drilled with mock bullet holes and dribbled with mock blood. The façade was sign-plastered. FREEDOM ISN'T FREE, AMERICAN SPOKEN HERE, ORVAL FAUBUS FOR PRESIDENT. The Nest sat beside a disused

Christmas-tree lot. It now thrived as a bomb-shelter lot.

Robbie and Phil stood outside. I parked down the block and walked up. Phil said, “Deedee’s inside. She’s got a mark, shit-faced and nothing but horny. Her brother’s parked across the street, down near the corner. That blue Ford’s the tail car. Deedee left her VDub in the lot.”

I opened the door and peeped the room. Bar/Naugahyde booths/ small dance floor. Remember the Alamo wall art.

TV show stills. Fess Parker as Davy Crockett. Raggedy-ass cowpokes and Mexicans piled dead. Three booths down: Deedee Grenier and a fat guy in a western-style suit.

I shut the door. Robbie said, “His Pontiac’s parked next to Deedee’s roadster. Deedee’s been trying to move him out for a good half hour.”

Phil passed his flask. We took triple pops. I said, “We’ll jump them at the cars. Robbie, you run the mark off. I’ll dump the brother.”

The lot was dark-dark. We passed the flask and hunkered near the car slots. 1:00 a.m. came and went. Drunks straggled up. They snagged their sleds and peeled dirt. The lot thinned out. We’re getting close. The Nest shuts down at 2:00.

We waited. We drained the flask. 2:00 a.m. came and went. We pawed the dirt. 2:01, 2:02, 2:04. That’s *it*—the door *slams* shut.

I heard *oooh, baby* coos. Deedee drape-walked the mark toward the car slots. She held him up. He was far-gone blitzed. He hummed some Spade Cooley lament.

He fumbled his car keys. Deedee hovered close. Shadows covered us. I cued up the swoop.

One, two, three—

Phil and I ran up and grabbed Deedee. Robbie grabbed the mark and frog-marched him off. He went drunk-compliant. I hand-muzzled Deedee. I said, “We’re friends of Jeanne’s. It’s a grand for an hour’s talk.”

Deedee kicked dirt and squirmed and made *yes* nods. Robbie and Phil rifled the mark’s pockets and tossed his car keys into some weeds. He staggered off, zonko. He set out for the Alamo or the Planet Mars.

Deedee went *Shit* and *Shitfuck*. Robbie baby-talked her. I pulled my belt sap and ran straight at Paul Mitchell’s old Ford.

Brother-hubby hit his high beams and lit me up bright. I blinked away the glare. He piled out and came straight at me.

He was big and lean. He threw haymakers. I got inside him and launched sap shots. I smashed his nose. He screeched. The sap stitches severed an earlobe and cut through his lips down to his teeth. I sapped his knees and put him prone in the gutter. He slithered under his car. I grabbed his legs and pulled him out and kicked his nards raw.

—

We two-car schlepped to Ollie Hammond's. Phil drove solo. I drove Deedee. She kept it zipped. She put out zero boo-hoo per her shit-kicked brother.

Ollie's was near dead. Robbie split to work the Sip 'n' Surf post. The maître d' set us up with a back room and after-hours liquor. Deedee was a Sheriff's informant. I crowned her Snitch Queen for a Day.

The queen and her court. Waiters brought refreshments. A pitcher of Old Crow highballs, steak skewers, fried shrimp. I laid ten C-notes on the table. Deedee lit a cigarette and snatched them up. I said, "It's about Marilyn Monroe. That's all you need to know."

Deedee blew smoke rings. "I know Marilyn. We share a history. Not much of one, but still."

I twirled my ashtray. "I'll get to her. We've got some lead-in questions first."

Phil sipped his highball. "Why do you and Paul Mitchell badger out of the Nest?"

Deedee laughed. "In a nutshell, Norm Krause. He's in The Life. He's tight with zillions of grifters and bent cops. He got fat off an ad-lib extortion deal, back in '49. Freddy here was Mr. *Confidential.* I'll bet he knows the story."

I said, "Try me."

"Norm was a motor cop then. He was working Wilshire Division, and he caught the state comptroller, Tom Kuchel, blowing a poof in a parked car off of 6th and Cloverdale. He arrested them, but Kuchel and the poof bailed out. Old Chief Worton hushed the deal up, but Norm *still* had the balls to extort Kuchel, and Kuchel *lacked* balls and paid big. That's it, in a nutshell. It's how Norm got the seed money for the Nest. He quit the PD around '59, and now he just lives off the Nest."

I downed half my drink. "Let's see if I've got this straight. It's a cheater bar. It caters to married folks looking for strange. They couple up there, they continue to socialize there. Krause refers them to hot-sheet motels and takes a cut. If the cheaters want pills, or maryjane, or weekends in Baja, Krause refers them."

Deedee said, "On the money."

I said, "The drift is that you snitch for the L.A. Sheriff's. If so, did Jeanne Carmen pass the gig on to you?"

Deedee sipped her highball. "Yes, I talk to the Sheriff's. Yes, Jeanne got me the gig. No, I will not reveal the name of my handler."

Phil speared a shrimp. "What specific division are you in touch with?"

"The West Hollywood squadroom guys, because those fools drool for gay dirt and dope tips. And I'm sure the squadroom guys share their dish with SHIT."

I popped two Dexedrine. "Does SHIT keep a dirt file on Marilyn Monroe?"

Deedee went *Gimme.* I tossed two dexies on her placemat. She chased them with highball dregs.

"No, SHIT does not keep a Marilyn file, because Marilyn has been known to lay her goodies on Pete Pitchess, once in a blue moon. LAPD Intel *does* keep files on Marilyn—and I got that from Marilyn herself."

I lit a cigarette. "Lay out the SHIT versus LAPD Intel deal. I sense a rivalry here."

Deedee blew concentric rings. "LAPD Intel is fully self-contained. SHIT is heavily in league with the FBI because Pitchess is an ex-agent, and he's rumored to be old man Hoover's choice to succeed him if the Kennedys give him his pink slip."

Deedee gives good dish. The Hoover/Pitchess dish confirmed persistent rumors.

"Keep going on that."

"LAPD Intel has got Marilyn files and surveillance footage up the ying-yang. Sometimes, Intel and SHIT have actual bidding wars and favor trades for documents and political rat-outs. A lieutenant named Daryl Gates represents the unit. Jim Hamilton's old and sick, and Gates is slated to take over when he retires or kicks off. A sergeant named Mike Bayless represents SHIT. He's called 'Motel Mike' because he torched some Mexicans at an eastside motel about six thousand years ago."

Motel Mike in a nutshell. Deedee was good. She rubbed her brush cut and cracked her thumbs. She was wired for sound and snitch-frenzied.

"Intel and SHIT have got half of freak-o, Commo, gay, and weird-o L.A. hot-wired and filmed. Bill Parker's got Sam Yorty in his pocket, because Mayor Sam digs threeways with lezzie girls, and Parker's got evidence. I've tricked with Mayor Sammy myself."

I brain-strained it. Dirt wars were my métier. I knew good dirt inside out.

"Why would Monroe have the main Sheriff's switchboard number written down on a scrap of paper, at her place?"

Deedee yocked. "Because she's got to schedule her next blow job with Pete Pitchess?"

Phil yocked. "Is Motel Mike your handler?"

"No, but he took my cherry a zillion years ago, and it pushed me toward girls in a very large way."

I yocked. "Current L.A. cops. Who does Norm Krause fraternize with?"

Deedee chained cigarettes. "Norm's a right-wing nut. He's tight with a West L.A. Division patrol sergeant named Jack Clemmons, and a nut pamphleteer named Frank Capell, who lives back east somewhere. They're all big pud yankers and boozehounds. They're members of some fringe group called the White Dog Bund, which probably has a total membership of three. Norm gave me a Bund armband. Marilyn tried it on once. It gave all the pill-party girls a laugh."

Phil laughed. I laughed. Phil went *Gimme.* I tossed two dexies on his place mat. He chugged them with coffee.

"You haven't asked Freddy or me who's behind all this. As in 'Who's the one with the money and the big curiosity about Marilyn and all her unhinged shit?' "

Deedee went *Nix.* "No, and I'm not going to. Freddy's a well-known bird dog for Bill Parker, but Freddy knows next to nothing about LAPD Intel and SHIT, so that rules Parker out. This is one of those deals where a girl is better off left in the dark."

I sipped my highball. "How did you meet Marilyn?"

"I met her through Paul Mitchell, way back when. They were in Hollygrove together. You know, that orphans' home, off of Waring and Vine. That was something like '35 to '38. I was a very little kid when they met, so I went to foster care when our parents ditched us, and Paul Mitchell went to the Grove, because he was Marilyn's age. She and Paul Mitchell still connect once in a while on the Fox lot, because Paul Mitchell gets bit parts and does grip work there. I got dumped in the Grove in '41, and I met Marilyn when she'd show up at alumnae meetings, during the war. And, for what it's worth, I used to run into Marilyn in the late '40s, when I played golf at Cal State and she was a quasi-starlet and call girl about town."

I said, "Why would Marilyn have forty grand in a lockbox stashed under her bed?"

Deedee made the jack-off sign. “Don’t jerk my chain. Marilyn is *incapable* of hoarding that kind of money. She gets bank drafts through her agent and has a manager who writes all her checks and pays all her bills. She’s in hock to half the quack doctors, shrinks, and pharmacies on the west side.”

“A Mexican Communist named José Bolaños. Ring any bells?”

Deedee reprised the jack-off sign. She reprised it *two*-handed.

“Listen. Marilyn talks red and goes to Commie demonstrations, and she beats the drum for civil rights and all that jive—but she is nothing but a scene maker, as well as being *the* fantasist and premier bullshit artist of our time. That girl cannot stop lying. Who’s José Bolaños? I don’t know—but Marilyn *has* been making up fantastical Mexico stories for months, like she’s been going in and out, disguised as a farmworker. If Marilyn ever set foot in Mexico, it’s to score dope in the legal pharmacies in T.J. *Comprende, muchacho?”*

Sí, yo comprende. But—

The plus-size garb in Marilyn’s closet. The disguises she wears to—

“I rifled your purse at the Lawford party. You had numbers for the pay phones in Barrington Park and Beverly Glen Park. Were you calling Marilyn there?”

Deedee flipped me off. “You’re a pal, Freddy. You rifle my purse, then you kick the shit out of my brother.”

“Deedee, come on.”

“The answer is no. Marilyn force-fed me those numbers. It was all part of some fantastical intrigue number she was running on me. For the record, Marilyn almost never gives out her home number. Get it? Don’t call me, I’ll call you. Get it? She’s the pathetic waif of all time, but she exerts total control over her gal pals, and she only *really* rolls over for celebs and pump jockeys and the guys who write her dope scripts.”

I said, “A shrink named Paul de River?”

Deedee chained cigarettes. “Not a name I know.”

“A shrink named Ralph Greenson?”

Deedee whooped. “Aka Marilyn’s fool, slave, master, and psychiatrist in pursuit. Marilyn thinks he slams the ham while he listens to the tapes of their sessions. Marilyn likes Greenson—but she doesn’t respect him—because he’s not radical enough for her. He’s a pill source and a soft shoulder to cry on, but there’s no ethical boundaries in this deal. Would you belt martinis with your shrink?”

Headshrinkers. Conventional to radical. Marilyn studies and interprets Paul de River. Marilyn to Greenson: “I’ll find myself a shrink who'll cosign all my crazy and not very nice ideas."

I brain-waved Deedee's shrink pitch. Greenson/de River/de River's specious criminalistics.

"Deedee, is Marilyn fixated on crime and criminals, and the whole criminal mind-set?"

Deedee went *Yup.* "She is. I mean, she and Jeanne worked call jobs after the war, and she must have known that type then, and she knows lots of people in The Life now, because half the grips and stuntmen and studio types are in The Life, in one form or another. Marilyn's been around Fox for years, and Fox and dickhead criminals go way back to the '30s. You've got Willie Bioff, Ben Siegel, Mickey Cohen's guys. Union guys like the Aadland brothers—smut peddlers, kidnap brokers, white slavers—fringe guys like that. It's Hollywood, baby. Everybody knows everybody—and they all brag about it."

I said, "Marilyn and the Kennedy brothers?"

Deedee said, "Unrequited love and delusion. Such despair. Jack pokes her at the Lawford place, when he's not running the world. She's got it just as bad for Bobby, but he considers her shopworn goods."

"Jack and other women?"

"Ask Peter Lawford. He keeps some so-called Girl Book that lays out potential stuff for the prez. Peter's Jack's chief pimp and dope supplier—which I heard you used to be."

I went *Ouch.* "Who told you that?"

"Pat Lawford. She also said you tripped the light fantastic together, back on V-J Day. She said she's never figured out if it was you or the historical moment."

Phil said, "You struck a nerve. Freddy's blushing."

Deedee said, "Maybe he's got a soul after all."

14

(LOS ANGELES, 11:05 P.M., TUESDAY, 7/17/62)

They're moving.

Wall wires, rug clamps, refitted phone jacks. They're changing colors and starting to fray. They're squirming. They're untangling out in plain view.

They wiggle. Bore holes leak Spackle. Discolored Spackle—alive with a glow. Tape drops from lamp bowls. Lamps topple and fall. Tap wires pop through handset perforations. Mike installations explode. They stain wallpaper metal-flake shades.

They're moving. They're pure combustion. They're out to set me aflame.

I opened my eyes. I recalibrated. The post was full dark now. I passed out in my work chair. Console blips are not tendrils. That's PCH out the window. That's Pat's beach spread just beyond.

I weaved to the bathroom and doused my face. I stepped on the scale. My weight clocked in at 174. My normal weight was 195. High-hoppers, booze, cigarettes. They caused the drop. Plus bad sleep or no sleep. Plus my all-candy-bar diet. My memory's in the shitter. My retention's in the tank. There's evidence threads I should remember—but don't.

It's the borderline DT's. I know the phenomenon and the solution. I should boil myself clean and jump-start the gig anew. L.A. featured luxe dry-out spots. Steam baths. Blood transfusions. Round-the-clock naps. Freddy O. takes the cure. I've done it twice before.

Let's resituate. Let's recalibrate. Pat's right across the street. Let's call up her glow.

I had a big fucking nightmare. Shrink your own head, dipshit. You just brain-screened a horror cartoon.

Here's the subtext:

You hot-wired Pat's home. Say she finds out. She'll hate you then. Fuck V-J Day. You're lower than snake shit. You blew your shot at some sort of reprise.

I crossed myself. I popped two dexies and gargled Old Crow. I lit a cigarette. Let's resituate and recalibrate. There's bum interior mounts at the Lawford house. They mandate quick attention. Line squelch spells that out plain. I need to get inside and rewire.

Post hoc ergo propter hoc. I show up at Pat's party. We rekindle or resizzle or re-something someplace good. The bum wires might buzz audible. That would tip Pat off. She detects the surveillance and knows that it's me.

The beach-view window stood open. I picked up my zoom-lens camera and scanned the house. The north-side door spilled light. Pat's ridgeback jumped out and pranced.

Pat followed. They turned toward the beach and cut off my sight line. Pat wore white tennis shorts and a pink polo shirt. I caught one half second—over and out.

Nightmares. Brain static. Booze-and-dope excess. Frayed neurons. Frayed wires at the Lawford digs. Long-term surveillance jobs are wear items. The gig was three months and six days in. It was running frayed into threadbare.

The K boys have abandoned Marilyn Monroe. There's no telephonic contact to or from. I've hopped gates and mailbox-skimmed Monroe's incoming and outgoing correspondence. There's no Kennedy mail or letters from Monroe's purported "burglar," "breather," and "dirty note writer." She gets studio mail, notes from Lowell Farr, and notes from ex-husbands DiMaggio and Miller. Monroe remains housebound. She only ventures out in big-girl disguise and only to make pay-phone calls. I braced a hinky PC Bell lineman. He told me pay phones cannot be tapped without judicial-district warrants. He added, "And don't think of trying to bribe me, because I'll call the cops."

I misplaced or lost the vehicle list I compiled on 5/19. It compounded my blown tail on Monroe. It scotched my shot to determine the purpose of her jaunt to the dogdick Valley. My DMV contact lost *his* copy of the list and his tally of the plate numbers he'd run thus far. Monroe's Valley run felt hinky then. It still feels hinky now.

I pulled the static surveillance on Fifth Helena. Justified paranoia dictated the move. Phil Irwin saw an old lady scrawl the plate number on his truck. Patrol cops cruised by and gave Phil the fish eye. That's it, we're gone, it's my unilateral call.

My access to Monroe has dramatically contracted. She visits shrink Greenson at his home now. I can't record their calls. José Bolaños hasn't called. Roddy McDowall calls less. Lowell Farr's off at Lake

Arrowhead with her mom and dad. There's no phone in their cabin. I'm down to zero visual access and 80%-reduced telephonic. I put Deedee Grenier on the Hoffa-snitch payroll. She relays pill-party drift and lays out Monroe in banal extremis.

More pills. More booze. More liquor-drenched sno-cones. The girls watch the TV news and shoot squirt guns at images of Jack and Bobby. Marilyn consults a voodoo book and consigns Jackie's death to Baron Samedi. Marilyn sleeps with a Jackie voodoo doll.

The gig had full-scale contracted. My brain overrevved to compensate. I popped pills, boozed, and cogitated. I lived in dark listening posts. Quack shrink Freddy O. He puts Marilyn Monroe on the couch.

I recalled three early mobile tails. I blew two of them. Tail #1: Monroe cops pills in Beverly Hills and visits Ralph Greenson. She bangs her car over the San Vicente median strip and plows shrubs. She flips off random drivers and tongue-kisses a hotel doorman. Here's my retrospective interpretation:

It felt calculated. It vibed Actors Studio exercise. Monroe's acting out some newfound liberation.

Tail #2: Monroe drives to that Holmby Hills party. She drives just as erratic. Her right-hand wheels scrape the curb and send hubcaps spinning. *But*—she never came close to causing a wreck.

Tail #3: Monroe's non sequitur trip to the Valley. She drives just as erratic. *But*—she eludes a seasoned mobile-tail pro.

I pursued the theory. I paid an LAPD traffic cop to research Monroe's driving record. She secures her California license, 8/49. Her record stays clean up to 10/61. Since then? *She was stopped for reckless driving fourteen times and let off with warnings.*

I brain-strained it. The conclusion came easy. She vamped fourteen L.A. traffic cops. She flirted, she played coy, she planted playful kisses and dared them to cite her. Theories are theories. I braced three of the cops and got embarrassed confirmation. Two men said she shot them some tongue.

Marilyn Monroe's got a secret life within her overarching life of dissolution. It affirms her resolve to plow a thoughtful and steady course as internal chaos subsumes her. I'm stitching evidential and theoretical links. They encompass her cash stash, her disguises, her surreptitious phone calls and her Valley jaunt. Add her wacked-out driving exploits and minor cop seductions. It all adds up to a revitalized bravado and a lunatic contempt for the gilded world she lives in and now seeks to violate by means of a startling and startlingly anonymous new portrayal. Add José Bolaños. He *points to the fact that it's not all in her head.*

Surveillance jobs are by nature reactive. This surveillance job is a smear-by-association effort geared to validate cease-and-desist extortion. The worse Monroe looks, the worse the K boys look. Monroe's public profile is bad marriages, pill OD's, nervous breakdowns and psychiatric clinics. Her shrouded life within may reveal itself as design or simple psychic incoherence. I'm forty-two grand ahead as of now. That's eight shy of the fifty the prez stiffed me for. I'll be up to a hundred grand by summer's end. Jimmy Hoffa wants the dirt. He knows I'll dig it up wherever it leads me. I love the work and want the money. The cease-and-desist aspect still seems naïve. Jimmy Hoffa plays strictly for money. He's a prim man without my need to know *WHY?* I want to milk this gig past summer's end. That means busywork *right now.*

Norm's Nest. It was 3.4 miles northeast of Blown Tail #3 and my license-plate tally. I knew a bent ex-cop named Harry Fremont. He retired out of Ad Vice four years ago. I slipped him five yards. He slipped me the Ad Vice package on the Nest.

Deedee Grenier was dead-on. Norm Krause was a right-wing nut. The Nest hosted boozefests for the National Renaissance Party, the National Indignation Party, and the Moose Lodge Anti-Communist League. The White Dog Bund? Total membership, three men. That's Krause, patrol sergeant Jack Clemmons, and pamphlet pounder Frank Capell—author of *A-Bomb Jew York City (A Modest Proposal).* Krause, Clemmons, and Capell were lapsed Lutheran dog worshippers. The Nest served as an "underground railroad" for divorced dads ditching out on child-support payments and Cuban exiles who venerate *los perros blancos.* The convivial nitespot warmly welcomed wife swappers from the nearby Lockheed aircraft plant, and members of a "dirty shutterbug club." Norm's Nest catered to stone white trash and was in no way Marilyn Monroe's scene.

The dexies kicked in. I got that urgent stomp-the-world rush. I zoom-lensed the Lawford house. There's the ridgeback, trailing his leash. There's Pat. She's been wading. She's barefoot and soaked to the knees.

They ducked inside. I blew a kiss. The console lit up. Amber-light incoming—Peter Lawford's got a call.

I slid on my headphones. Two rings reverberated. Lawford picked up.

He said, "Hello? It's Peter, and it's getting late. Say something provocative, or I'll doze off on you."

A woman said, “Hi. It’s Eleanora. Remember me, Peter? I was a cater waitress at your party last month. Remember? You told me I could call you.”

The party. Cater waitresses galore. Tight black slacks/white shirts/red vests. All young, all fetching. Actress-manqué types.

Lawford said, “Elean*ooora.* I remember you. You said you were an actress, and your boyfriend doesn’t approve, and I told you I knew how *that* scene went, because my wife hates what I do, but what *can* I do? My wife’s an incipient zombie, but she’s a *Kennedy,* so she provides a good deal more pizzazz than most society girls do. So, who am *I* to deny that aspect of the marriage?”

Eleanora: “I see what you mean.”

Lawford: “Anyway, who am *I* to complain? I’m just a movie star and John F. Kennedy’s secretary of Young Fox Procurement, which allows me cabinet-level status, and my very own Playboy Club key for the oval office. I’m serious. Hugh Hefner is the president’s chief domestic adviser.”

Eleanora: “It’s nice to see a man with the world by the shorts who can still make fun of himself.”

Lawford: “Oh, well. You come in on the up-and-up, and people still think you’re working for laughs.”

Line pause: 16.4 seconds. Eleanora: “Peter, it’s not that I’m not enjoying our chat, but I’m trying to find a man who owes me money.”

Lawford: “That’s a drag, because I was just starting to grok this conversation.”

Eleanora: “I was grokking it, too.”

Lawford: “How much do you need? I’m a soft touch, and I’m not averse to being paid back in trade.”

Eleanora: “That’s not my scene.”

Lawford: “Boy, you’re erecting roadblocks.”

Eleanora: “His name is Rick Dawes. He’s a cater waiter. I thought you might have a line on him.”

The name ditzed me. I’d heard it before. I’ve got booze-and-dope aphasia. This summer dislodged some brain cells.

Lawford: “I don’t know any Rick Daweses, baby. Sorry, no sale.”

Eleanora: “It was just a shot in the dark, and it was good of you to talk to me.”

No-class Lawford tried to hustle Eleanora. Eleanora cut him slack and stayed on point. The dynamic surprised me. Eleanora worked Lawford from jump street.

Lawford: “I’ll tell you one thing that might interest you. I heard a rumor about house burglaries in Beverly Hills, all in what you might call the wake of cater-waitered and -waitressed parties. How's that grab you? Jewels and furs were stolen, and cater waiters turned out to be the suspects the cops were looking for."

Eleanora: "Well, that *does* sort of sound like Rick's scene. He's also been known to fruit-hustle."

Lawford: "Sorry, luv, your pal Rick doesn't ring any bells with me."

Eleanora: "*Que será, será.* I thought I'd give it a shot."

Lawford: "I'm glad you called. No lie. You've got the Rick Daweses of the world who owe you bread, and the Peter Lawfords of the world who'd *loooove* to blow bread on you, as in trips to Vegas, Aspen, places where a girl like you could really swing—"

It hit me. The name Rick Dawes. Monroe's house. My 4/11 break-in and peremptory prowl. The plank bookshelf. Monroe's scrap-paper scribbles. Monroe wrote *this:*

"Rick Dawes. Mean—maybe a fag." Beside it: ballpoint-pen cross-outs. They were telephone-answering outfits. It was one big, illegible list.

15

(LOS ANGELES, 3:30 P.M., WEDNESDAY, 7/18/62)

Double duty. All fucked-up phone work.

Monitor the Sip 'n' Surf feed. Record Lawford-house calls. Skim Yellow Page directories. Cold-call caterers and phone-message outfits.

Double duty. With fucked-up distractions.

There were frayed wire mounts at the Lawford house. They induced sound belches past comprehension. It's okay for now. Nobody's calling in or out.

The Sip 'n' Surf *blasts* sound. It's "Bikini Twist Party" Wednesday. Beach babes gyrate ten feet from my console enclosure. An overamped hi-fi cranks the "Peppermint Twist."

My headphones itched. That distracted me. The cold-call volume daunted and vexed me.

Dig it:

There are 171 caterers in the L.A. Yellow Pages. There are 256 message outfits. It's epic dreckwork. I've been at it since 8:00 a.m.

That "Eleanora"/Monroe/"Rick Dawes" lead scorched me. I checked the paper-scrap Polaroid I shot and tacked to my board.

The "Rick Dawes" is full legible. The phone-service listings are *ill*egible. The crosshatch marks beside them indicate phone numbers. The half-legible word *serv* indicates "service." Monroe scrawled four lines of words that end in "serv." The service *names* read as gobbledygook.

Peter Lawford hustles "Eleanora." He mentions Beverly Hills house burglaries. Cater waiters emerge as suspects. It's a good tangential lead. Tough shit. I can't solicit BHPD for their 459 files. I've got no police agency standing. I can't bribe my way in. It's too risky. I'm a well-known shitbird PI.

I've called twenty-one phone-service switchboards. Twenty-one operators refused to divulge their client lists. I've called twenty-four catering switchboards. I've impersonated an LAPD Burglary detective. I've stressed "Eleanora," "Rick Dawes," Beverly Hills 459's and cater waiter suspect pools. I've stated that I have no physical descriptions to work from. I've gotten "Huh?" "No," and "Beats me," twenty-three times. One major-domo type leveled with me.

He said, "Look, cater waiters and waitresses in L.A. are all so-called actors and actresses, and they use stage names, pseudonyms, and aliases routinely. In other words, they're invariably hustlers, prosties, call girls and boys, pill pushers, pot peddlers, and opportunists hustling the L.A. film folk for all they can get. Burglary or fingering burglary is in no way beneath the moral range of these kids."

I yawned and scratched my ears. The Lawford pad broadcast skreek and dead air. I was up late last night. I wrote Jimmy Hoffa a summary report. I ran my projector and screened Lois in *Alcoa Presents.* I thought about Lois to quash thoughts of Pat. I thought about Pat to quash thoughts of Lois. I reskimmed *The Sexual Criminal.* Paul de River crawled up my ass. *Hey, Marilyn—why are you so hipped on this guy?*

Fetish murder. Demonic delusion. Blank-eyed psychopaths. De River's got a monkey on his back.

I yawned and walked out to the beach deck. Hi-fi reverb twanged the boards and made my shoes vibrate. I looked in at the Bikini Twist Party. The "Percolator Twist" assailed me. Twist girls shimmied. Their bikini bottoms wriggled hairpie low.

The bar and tables were SRO packed. Summer twist shows drew pierside gawkers and a big lecher crowd. I orbed a front table. Four coeds in Pali High sweaters peeled shrimp and dunked clams. The man with them stood out.

I made him. I'd met him on the PD. Sid Leffler. A West L.A. squadroom dick. Curly-haired, glasses, a nebbish type. Mid-fifties. A going-nowhere guy working divisional detectives. His part-time PD gig was "Officer Sid." He toured westside high schools and inveighed against Commies and dope. Sid, the shtickmeister. Some kind of film-biz pedigree. Fuck him. He's feeding underaged girls zonk-your-ass mai tais.

I walked back to the post and locked myself in. It squelched the music and muted the roar in my head. The amber console light blinked, on-off.

Outgoing call/Peter Lawford's extension. I pulled on my headset. I caught Lawford mid-spiel.

"…and, Diana, the man loved you. I mean, he called me from the oval office to say, 'Peter, I'm no fan of oaters, but something told me to tune in *Bonanza,* so you tell Miss Van der Vlis the next time I'm in town I'd enjoy—' "

Line warp cut him off. Bum wire mounts induce line warp. The line stuttered and spit background noise. Lawford said something, the actress said something, an off-line voice cut in.

Quit pimping for my brother, you fucking—

The actress screeched and hung up. The broadcast cleared exponential. Lawford said, *"You fucking bitch."* Pat said, *"You goddamned—"*

Then crash sounds. Then hurled-object sounds. Then *"Get your hands off me or I'll—"*

Then shattered-glass sounds, line blur, and blank air—

—

Line blur. Blank air. Pat on a stutter tape inside my head.

Get-your-goddamn-hands/Get-your-goddamn-hands/Get-your-goddamn-hands—

I bolted the Sip 'n' Surf and hauled to the bluffside post. I got dead air off the console. I zoom-lensed the house. I saw no window movement and no shadows and no movement on the grounds. Both garage doors stood open. Lawford's Rolls and Pat's Bonneville were tucked in. I gobbled dexies and guzzled Old Crow and worked my pulse up and down.

I eyeballed the house. I ran zoom-lens circuits. The calm status quo held. I called Nat and Phil and issued directives.

Grab your walkie-talkies. Drive to the 76 station on PCH and perch. Marital tiff. Red Alert. I know this shit. They'll pull a two-car driveaway. Nat, you tail Pat. Phil, you tail dipshit. I've got my handset here. Call in at one-hour intervals. Track your mileage away from the site.

I waited. I watched the house. Spots popped in front of my eyes. My arteries pinged. My feet went numb. I lost weight as I tried to sit still. My watch dangled slack on my wrist. I saw things that weren't there. I saw the Taft Building on August 15, 1945. Pat and I stood naked, in our room across the street. We watched the Miller High-Life sign blink.

5:19 p.m. Pat enters the garage. Three kids trail her. She dumps two suitcases in her Bonneville. She backs out and peels *northbound* on PCH. There's Nat's Ford wagon. He peels out of the gas station lot and bird-dogs her.

5:53 p.m. Lawford enters the garage. He hops in his Rolls and peels *southbound* on PCH. There's Phil's Valiant coupe. He peels out of the gas station lot and bird-dogs him.

I shut my eyes. I ran Man Camera clips. I replayed Freddy and Pat, start to finish. I recalled our opening dialogue, near verbatim. My handset squawked at 6:22 p.m.

Nat reported in. Pat's still heading northbound on PCH. She just passed Oxnard. Nat thinks she's headed to Santa Barbara.

My nerves decohered. I popped two yellow jackets to tamp them down and quash this schizzy limbo. My handset squawked at 6:56 p.m.

Phil reported in. Lawford was holed up on Ewing Street in Silver Lake. The place reeked of love crib. He checked his reverse directory. The crib was owned by one Lorelei Gudis. Phil ran her through Sheriff's R&I. She had twelve pandering priors. They went back to '55.

I crossed myself. I grabbed my tool belt, a ski mask, my beavertail sap.

—

I could do it. I knew that. I knew I had options. I could take it just so far and stop there. I could take it all the way and frost a homicide beef. I thought, *Restraint.* I thought, *Don't blow the gig. If you do it, you'll burn the gig and burn Jimmy Hoffa. He'll kill you, no questions asked.*

My head hurt. I saw spots. My numb feet put me up on my heels. I splintered a window ledge and vaulted my way in. It was sloppy work. It decreed a mock-459 ruse. I went straight to the kitchen. I filled two paper bags with sterling silver flatware and placed them by the front door. I left my pill stash back at the post. I verged on an overjolt and knew it.

The Lawfords stocked their liquor cabinet with the most and the best. I siphoned high-test juice from six bottles. My headache abated. The spots vanished. My tremors subsided. I troubleshot the six phone extensions and the downstairs bug mounts.

I replaced the handset wiring and the listen/speak microphones. I bunched the defective wires and mikes up in a tool belt pouch. The new wires and mike flanges were silicone-coated. They would not fray.

The booze jolt diminished. I prayed off an urge to fall out on Pat's bed. I restrung the downstairs bug mounts and spackled the mount holes.

I spray-painted the dried Spackle the perfect wall-color shade.

Spackle dust billowed. I vacuumed it up and hand-plucked every stray fleck of grit. I squinted my way along baseboards and started seeing double and triple. I hand-plucked every stray fleck of grit. I'm sure I did. I quadruple-checked my work. They'd detect the burglary. They'd note the missing silver. They'd never detect the surveillance gear. That meant *Pat would never know.*

Dipshit was shacked in Silver Lake. Phil sat on the house. I fine-tuned my hearing and willed the key in the door lock. That meant *you do it.* Pat took luggage. She'd be gone several days. Lawford would odds-on roll home at noon. Phil would cue me. Two short phone bursts. *He's on his way.*

I passed out standing up. I woke up prone on the living room floor. I collapsed in a wingback chair and woke up in a kitchen chair. DT blobs grew faces and went for my eyes. I screamed and covered them. They ate their way through my hands and bored into my face. I muffled screams with a kitchen towel. I *heard* a key-in-lock sound or *willed* a key-in-lock sound so I'd do it. It sounded real. Peter Lawford coughed and made it real, for sure.

I slipped on my ski mask and pulled my sap and ran toward the sound. I slammed Lawford low and jammed a wad of acoustical baffling in his mouth. He thrashed and pissed his pants. He bleated. I sapped his legs, his feet, his back. I drop-kicked him in the balls. I pulled his gag so he wouldn't gorge on puke and suffocate. He twitched and made funny noises. I sapped him in the ribs and heard bones shear. I picked up the bags of silverware and ran.

16

(LOS ANGELES, 7/19–8/3/62)

Kwan's Chinese Pagoda. A C-town mainstay since 1928. Open-all-nite. After-hours booze for LAPD, Sheriff's, and DA's Bureau brass. Hop Sing Tong–allied. The basement opium den goes unmentioned. Chinese interns at Queen of Angels do research in underground suites. Six rooms house inebriates in need of deep rest.

I've dried out there before. As in '51 and '57. I split the Lawford house and drove straight to Kwan's. I dumped the stolen silverware down a sewer hole en route. I called Phil and told him to boss the gig for a week. Work the posts, run the taps, surveil the Lawford spread. Sniff out the presence of fuzz. Determine if Lawford reported the beating and 459. Determine if the repaired wires are back at 100%. Track Pat's whereabouts. Tell me when she crawls back home.

I doused the lights and went *Adieu*. The interns hooked me to an intravenous sleep drip. I woke up and smoked opium. The interns fed me pork fried rice and lobster à la Kwan and put me back to sleep. My room was windowless and air-conditioned. There was no wall clock. They hid my wristwatch and smothered all my notions of time. I slept through a head-to-toe blood rotation. My putrified blood was replaced with the hormone- and herb-packed blood of some new Asian master race. I slept twenty-plus hours a day. I purged in steam baths and ice-water plunges. I floated in space-age decompression chambers, buoyed by saline-infused water and fragrant oils. I slept. I did not dream. My brain wires reconnected. I brain-screened real and imagined moments with Pat. I recited long Bible passages, verbatim. I first memorized them as a kid in bumfuck, Massachusetts.

The freight weighed in at fifteen grand. I paid out in Jimmy Hoffa's C-notes and tipped the interns a grand apiece. Phil picked me up and drove me home. He reported in full.

The Lawford house taps now worked 100%. Fuckhead visited a doctor and limped for a week. He did not report the thumping or the burglary. Pat crawled home, three days later. The restored tap lines

now hum. Presidential pimp Lawford cranks calls. He's been buzzing actresses King Jack has seen on TV. Jack digs the Method type. Shirley Knight, Joan Hackett, Whitney Blake. If Lawford perv-calls Lois Nettleton, I'll kill him.

Phil said the gig felt tapped out. Monroe hides at home. She's poised to go back to work on *Got to Give.* She calls Roddy McDowall in Rome and Lowell Farr at mom and dad's place. She gets late-breaking dish from the *Cleopatra* set and ripe accounts of Palisades High intrigue. Monroe alternates shrink-session modes with Doc Greenson. It's backyard cocktails at his place or her calls to him. Her anti-Jack-and-Bobby rage ascends, call to call. Phil said her most repeated phrase is "I've got the goods on them."

Phil said he's getting paranoic. He's seen private security guys down the street from the golf course post. I said, Let's get inside and pull the Monroe mounts. Phil agreed. He said, Monroe might not cooperate. She's turned recluse. She doesn't don disguise and make pay-phone calls. She eschews Jeanne Carmen's pill parties. Deedee Grenier hasn't phoned in dirt briefs. José Bolaños hadn't called. Phil summarized his update. "Freddy, the gig feels atrophied."

—

But I felt good. And I looked good. Who's that handsome camel fucker in the mirror?

Transfused, reborn—it's your call. I regained my lost weight. I felt quietly revitalized and determined to push forth on the gig. I X-marked my wall calendar. Days off booze and dope. Seven, eight, nine, ten, and counting.

I took a weeklong breather. I schemed gig strategy and considered Pat and the risk I took to avenge her. She's a dilettante sunk by astounding privilege and my inimically idealized better half. I considered Lois. She's as ill-born and hardscrabble as I am. I'm her slum reclamation project. I fulfill her penchant for the outré. I considered Marilyn Monroe and her secret life and made the three women a troika.

I sheet-draped my living room corkboards. I covered my evidence photos and pinned-on notes and crafted a No-Monroe Zone. I banned visual stimulus and went at her through straight reflection.

She craved the authentic. Material success had failed her. She had the world by the shorts. Affluence offended her. She embraced the pervy Weimar Berlin aesthetic. "Authentic" connoted dark photographic art. Her wall frieze. Bull dykes shooting dope. Defective kids in Mickey Mouse beanies. De River's *Sexual Criminal.* Traumatic case histories. Banal brutality as the fount of true human horror and thus great art.

And the incubating force behind her own vastly overpraised gifts.

De River has replaced Lee Strasberg and the Actors Studio. He can render her authentic in a way that no New York stage guru ever could. Monroe is now attempting to achieve authenticity. Her new mode? A sustained and most likely criminally defined portraiture that film moguls and her trillions of idiot fans will never see.

I ran sight tails off of Carmelina and Fifth Helena. It was her one car lane to L.A. at large. I staked it out three full days. Day #3/2:12 p.m. There's Marilyn's Buick. The housekeeper's with her. Nail it: she's going to the store.

I tailed them to the Brentwood Market. I figured it gave me ninety minutes, tops. I drove back to Fifth Helena and impromptu B and E'd it. The day was hot-hot. I stepped through a gauze-curtained window and worked dervish quick.

I pulled all my bugs and tap mounts. I yanked all attendant wires. I put myself in a bind with Jimmy Hoffa. It forced me to scheme some all-new method of approach.

I went out the back door and pored through her trash cans. I found twelve empty TV dinner containers and sixteen empty cans of Metrecal. I found four empty Nembutal vials. Marilyn had crossed her name off the labels. She wrote in their place: "Not my name anymore."

17

(LOS ANGELES, 2:24 P.M., SATURDAY, 8/4/62)

It was hot. My window units rattled. I sat in the living room and brooded the day up.

I stared at my evidence boards. Thumbtacks stretched the sheet drapes taut. They cloaked photographs/tap transcripts/report carbons/bug logs/jotted notes/photo close-ups of odd scraps of paper. They detailed the gig from 4/10 to now. They shut down my visual memory and forced me to extrapolate with reduced stimuli.

Marilyn Monroe in extremis. What's going on here?

Brain loops had me light-headed. I smoked myself hoarse. I levitated in my favorite chair.

Door knocks blitzed my concentration. It pissed me off. I got up and opened the door.

She wore a pink linen dress. No stockings and scuffed white bucks. She wore her hair down and parted left.

She was still gawky, working on regal. She ran gaunt now. There were no soft planes to her face.

She said, "Your scent lingers."

It felt rehearsed. It fell flat. Her arms were too thin. Her man's wristwatch dangled. I must have stared.

She said, "My party in June. You wore that cheap lime cologne in 1945, and you're still wearing it today. My kids told me they smelled it for a week."

Everything went *TILT*. I got *"This can't be"* out. Pat jiggled my hands and pushed me inside. I kicked the door shut.

—

Reprise.

The bedroom-window unit rattled. Cold air merged with trapped air and the wet we'd stirred up. Pat pulled a sheet over us. She shivered, I trembled. I know she caught the distinction.

We stretched out under the sheet. We were tall and spanned the whole bed. We reached up and laced hands and laid them on the headboard.

Her too-big wristwatch slid off. I grabbed it and stuck it under a pillow. Pat laughed. I said, “You’ll start thinking you’ve got a husband and kids out at the beach, and you’ll be gone before I can blink.”

Pat squeezed my hands. “That’s your injunction. Here’s mine, and it has just as much to do with time. Don’t mention a certain moment and place and tell me what you recall, because I remember it a certain way, and to me it’s sacrosanct.”

Our eyes were dialed tight. Hers were red-flecked hazel. I’d just noticed it.

“That’s the best thing anyone’s ever said to me.”

“You mean a woman’s ever said to you.”

“Men tell me ‘Fetch, Freddy, fetch’ or ‘Shake down this guy, will you?’ So, you’re right. There’s a distinction.”

Pat said, “I noticed two things in your living room.”

I gulped. “Yeah. My covered-up boards and what else?”

“A framed theater Playbill from October ’56. Somebody circled a notice. ‘Lois Nettleton replaces Barbara Bel Geddes in the role of,’ and then some folderol about the play itself.”

I laughed. “Lois is a friend of mine. We see each other intermittently, but compared to you and me, we’ve been shacked up from the gate.”

Pat roared. Some tears squeezed out. I kissed them away.

“Let’s not talk about Lois, or Jack, or your pressing engagements out at the beach.”

Pat said, “Freddy’s a party crasher.”

I said, “ ‘Freddy loves Pat.’ I carved it on a tree at the LAPD Academy, three weeks after I met you.”

Pat shut her eyes. I did the same. We squeezed our linked hands into fists and tapped the headboard. I saw things and heard things. Pat’s kids trip on bug wires. Pat picks up her bedside phone and hears telltale clicks.

I said, “You honor me.”

Pat said, “Oh, dear. I have made such a hash of it.”

I said, “We’re running neck and neck there.”

—

Reprise.

Man Camera meets stopwatch. It lasted two hours and fourteen minutes. Pressing engagements, superseding commitments. She almost ran out the door.

I paced my living room and bumped into furniture, dead sober. I was all *Tilt* and *Swirl.*

The phone rang. I grabbed for it and capsized an end table. I caught the receiver two rings in.

“Yes? Who is this?”

There’s that prairie twang. “It’s Bill Parker, Freddy.”

I said, “Yes, sir.”

Parker said, “I need you. It’s a kidnap, and a film-mogul acquaintance of mine needs a favor. Open your front door and look out.”

I put the phone down and did it. Bill Parker excels at presentation. He outdid himself here.

Four big men stood beside an unmarked prowl car. I saw five pump shotguns propped up in the backseat. The men wore pearl-gray suits and straw fedoras. Max Herman, Red Stromwall, Harry Crowder, Eddie Benson. Who else *but* for kidnap grief?

I blinked.

The men waved.

I crossed myself.

Oh shit. I’m jungled up with the Hat Squad, once more.

PART 3

TRUTH JUICE

(AUGUST 4–20, 1962)

18

(LOS ANGELES, 11:50 P.M., SUNDAY, 8/4/62)

Okay—she's dead. It's some all-new cluster fuck now. Bill Parker has designs. Robert Kennedy was en route. The press would grab the dead bait girl and not let go.

I parked across the street and watched the house. I called Phil first thing. He rolled out and parked three car lengths behind me. The street was otherwise dead. Midnight passed. It's Sunday morning now. Phil and I eye-strafed the house. We walkie-talkie gabbed to kill time.

Bill Parker has designs. He told me to meet the Hats at PC Bell. The Chief seized opportunities. Like yesterday. *Hey, Freddy—I've got a kidnap play. Dump this guy, will you?*

My thoughts tumbled. I killed a man and caressed a dead woman. Heat left her body. My hand went cold. I saw Motel Mike Bayless rescue Gwen Perloff and logged anomalies. Monroe scrawled the main Sheriff's number on a paper scrap. Deedee Grenier goes back with Motel Mike.

Headlights bounced east, off Carmelina. The left light glared defective. That meant the housekeeper. She pulled up beside the front hedgerow and walked through the gate. I heard key-lock sounds. Okay—she's inside. There—that's her bedroom light.

I'd locked Monroe's bedroom door. I knew the house routine. Moms won't check the door before noon. I've got time to work angles. Bill Parker's got time to fine-tune his play.

The housekeeper's light blipped off. I smoked and ran the car radio. A 1:00 a.m. news flash blared. *Bold kidnap job! LAPD detectives and celeb PI kill one suspect! One suspect arrested, three suspects at large!*

I smoked myself hoarse. I was still half-cranked on jungle juice. The housekeeper's room light blinked on. I clocked it at 2:42.

I heard *thunk, thunk, thunk*. She's knocking on Monroe's door. She's the petulant and persistent type.

Phil buzzed me. I hit the RECEIVE switch. Phil said, "She'll know something's wrong in about two seconds."

I hit the SPEAK switch. “She’ll call Greenson. It’ll take him twenty minutes to get dressed and drive out here.”

Phil rogered out. I clicked off my handset and squelched shortwave skreek. I counted minutes off the dashboard clock. Greenson drove a road-hog Lincoln. It cut up Carmelina at 16:32.

He parked behind the housekeeper’s car and went through the gate. Moms stood in the doorway. Greenson trudged the front lawn. They left the door ajar and veered toward Monroe’s bedroom. I heard *thump-thumps.* I *knew* that sound. Pops throws elbows at the doorjamb and yelps each time.

I got out and peeped over the hedgerow. Greenson ran outside. He held an andiron. He ran around to Monroe’s French windows and smashed the glass in. I heard him kick away shards and stomp through the bedroom. He opened the door and let moms in. The old lady screeched.

Okay—she’s dead. Can the boo-hoo, let’s get on with—

I heard phone-dial sounds. Greenson’s calling a doctor colleague or the local fuzz. I perched in the car and gauged response time. It’s twenty minutes for the doctor, fifteen for the fuzz.

I was antsy. Time schizzed on me. A late-model Cadillac pulled up to the house. A slender man got out.

Phil buzzed me. “That’s Dr. Engleberg. I tailed Monroe to his office in June.”

Engleberg entered the house. The door stood wide open. It was 3:09 a.m. Brentwood was dark-dark and hushed-quiet. The Monroe spread glowed bright-*bright.*

An LAPD black-and-white skidded up. It nudged Engleberg’s back bumper and scraped his BAN THE BOMB sticker off. It looked deliberate.

The driver got out. I made him. Robbie Molette shot surveillance pix at Norm’s Nest. It’s Sergeant Jack Clemmons. He’s Norm Krause’s tight pal and White Dog Bund *Kamerad.*

He grabbed a clipboard and walked up the lawn. He wore Bill Parker’s scowly subdue-the-masses look. I got out and stood on my back bumper. The crowd ran to four now. Housekeeper, Clemmons, Greenson, Engleberg. No deputy coroner. No squadroom detectives, no lab crew, no photo car. It’s a dead celeb. They’ll send a mortuary sled and rig a temporary freeze. The coroner would take it from there.

I heard voices. Greenson and Clemmons groused. A K-car jammed up behind the black-and-white. Bob Byron got out. He was Parker’s man at West L.A. station. He’ll call the shots now.

My walkie-talkie buzzed. I jumped in the car and hit the sound switch. Phil said, “It’s on the civilian radio. KHJ has it. Somebody at the station must have spilled.”

I hit the kill switch. The sound gap juked voices up on the lawn. Byron gave Clemmons what for. Call the mortuary. Get some bluesuits. There’s news bulletins. That means crowds. Chop, chop. You know the drill.

Clemmons trudged back inside. Byron huffed off and drove off. Greenson slammed the front door and shut out looky-loos. My day loomed long.

Meet the Hats at PC Bell. Spot-check the Lawford spread. The Chief would issue directives. The Hoffa job had me backlogged. Some sort of new job would swamp me. I popped two dexies and *re*-revved.

Dawn broke. The day vibed scorcher. Clemmons walked out and peeled out. He left the doctors to deal with the mortuary guys. Cars turned off Carmelina and beelined right here.

Reporters and camera dinks piled out. They parked haphazard and blocked doorways. They climbed the gate and swarmed the front lawn. They went from zero to forty-odd, fast. They passed around wake-up jugs and dropped film wrappers and cigarette butts on the grass.

They talked loud. They raised a ruckus. Neighboring houses lit up. Doors popped open. Yokels plopped into porch chairs and grooved on the show.

Fan types drove up and walked up. Triple-parked cars tight-packed the whole street. Fans climbed up on car roofs and hoods. They got wide-angle views. Fans piled out of cars and trampled front yards to get close. Fifth Helena went claustrophobic. Parked cars blocked Carmelina. Lowell Farr crawled over a high-backed old Dodge. She cut her hands on a window ledge and wiped blood on her sweater. She was weeping.

—

It got crazy bad. The crowd quadrupled. Daddy types waltzed kids around on their shoulders. The kids futzed with portable radios. KHJ broadcast the Fifth Helena Show. KNX broadcast an all-Marilyn retrospective. An ice-cream truck hawked Popsicles down near Carmelina.

Parked cars and raucous mourners boxed me in. The mortuary van no-showed. I lost sight of Lowell. Patrol cops shooed souvenir hunters off of Monroe's lawn. They were ripping out clumps of grass and stuffing their pockets.

I had to move. The van would probably traverse Sixth Helena and off-load the stiff through the garage. TV truck broadcasts blitzed my walkie-talkie frequencies. Phil was boxed in thirty yards behind me. This shit would build and burst. Desist! warnings would fizzle. Tear gas might work. LAPD would eat police-brutality shit and further besmirch their image.

I backed my sled up on some squarejohn's lawn. I brodied on wet grass and popped the clutch in first gear. I slid-skid west. Mourner-revelers dodged me. I plowed lawns, toppled water fountains, cracked driveway paving. I knocked over mailboxes and caromed off parked cars. Kids in Davy Crockett hats waved. I made Carmelina and punched it. I fishtailed and swung right on Sixth Helena. I shot clear up to Monroe's garage.

It was 7:10 a.m. I timed it on the dot.

The death van was parked snout out. The loading hatch was wide open. Monroe's dippy Buick was jammed upside a pepper tree. Scavengers pored through it. They snipped upholstery swatches with pruning shears.

Four male nurse types wheeled a gurney up. Monroe's sheet-draped and buckled-in. Six cops ran interference. Grass snippers and upholstery slashers stopped to pitch boo-hoo. The cops and nurses tossed the gurney up and in. A cop slammed the hatch. A nurse took the wheel and laid tracks.

They shot down Sixth Helena. I stuck right behind. The hearse was a '59 Caddy. The exhaust pipes spewed grit. We turned south on Carmelina and west on San Vicente. We cut south on Moreno Drive and back east on the San Vicente one-way. They drove slow. I drove slow. Two-car funeral cortege.

We passed through Brentwood Village and curved south on Barrington. We caught the light at Wilshire and curved east. We cut by the VA hospital and cemetery. The van jockey veered right and turned right at Wilshire and Westwood Boulevard. A pocket funeral home was tucked behind Truman's Drive-In. The van pulled straight up to it. An intake crew stood by.

They knew the protocol. So did I. Hold the stiff. The coroner's men would grab it and schlep it to the morgue. Doc Curphey would order the autopsy. Scalpels and organ scales at 2:00 or 3:00 p.m.

I thought about Pat. PC Bell was out at the beach. I had time to swing by the Lawford house and still make my meet with the Hats.

Wilshire was Sunday-morning lulled. I caught next to no traffic and a long string of green lights. I breezed through Santa Monica and caught the California Incline down to PCH. The run north took ten seconds. I parked on the landside curb and eyed the Lawford spread.

Pat and dipshit Peter stood out on the sand. They wore hokey presidential-seal robes and sipped coffee. Pat looked haggard, dipshit looked hot to fawn. They stared up at the sky. I heard rotor thumps and saw a chopper approach.

It throttled down and hovered low. It landed twenty feet from them. A cockpit door popped open. Robert Kennedy hopped out.

—

PC Bell was on Wilshire, due east of the beach bluffs. I got there early. I parked curbside and built lies, full blast.

The Hats would snatch Monroe's phone records. We'd scan them. Names, dates, phone numbers, and call times would jump out. I'd memorized and imprinted the gist of most of the calls. The Chief had no clue. I told him I'd worked a recent Monroe gig. He expected full disclosure. He knew my bug-and-tap expertise. He didn't know who hired me. He would interrogate me himself. I could prevaricate, dissemble, fabricate, concoct, and play off his vanity. I could not lie away the breadth of the Hoffa gig.

I brain-segued. I jumped from Bill Parker to Pat. Bucktooth Bobby was huddled with the Lawfords now. Peter would tell him he found Marilyn dead and suborned me. I'd told him I was Bill Parker's man per this deal. Bobby has a file on me. He knows what I do. He'll think bug job tout-fucking-sweet. He'll tell Pat. She'll confront me. I'll falter. She'll see straight through me.

I glanced up Wilshire. A PD prowl sled was parked outside Biff's Char-Broil. Max Herman stood in the doorway. He saw my car and waved a manila folder. I got out and walked over.

We shook hands. Max said, "It's been too long, son."

I lit a cigarette. "As in last night. It's all coming back to me. We tossed a man off a cliff."

"We saved the girl, though. The Chief chilled us, and it's the Sheriff's headache from here on out."

I tapped the folder. "Monroe's phone records?"

Max eased me inside. "That's right. And toll tickets, up through Thursday night. The Chief has a hunch you're up-to-date on the conversations, but he'll discuss that with you himself."

I gulped. Max steered me to a back booth. Red, Harry, and Eddie wolfed steak and eggs.

Red said, “There’s Freddy.”

Harry said, “Freddy the O. Twice in twenty-four hours. Just when you think you’ve seen the last of him.”

Eddie sniffed the air. “Freddy’s in the shit. He just can’t seem to avoid it.”

I sat down. Harry poured me coffee. Max passed me the folder. I skimmed names, phone numbers, dates.

Jeanne Carmen. Ralph Greenson. Temp shrink Milt Wexler. Familiar times, dates, chitchat. Calls to the White House and Justice Department switchboards. The house-to-D.C. calls peaked and decreased. Monroe utilized the Fox switchboard toward the end. Calls to Roddy McDowall in Rome. Pharmacy calls. Calls to La Barbara’s Pizza. Pizza Dave worked the delivery route. Calls to Fox, the Lawfords, studio flacks and gofers. The call tallies flatlined in May and June. Monroe was on a pay-phone kick. No Monroe-to-Lowell Farr calls were listed. Brentwood to the Palisades was a toll-free zone. Monroe did not call Ensenada. José Bolaños called her.

I passed the folder back to Max. The Hats skunk-eyed me.

Red said, “Well?”

Max said, “Marilyn called the pizza delivery boy ‘Big Dick Dave.’ ”

Harry said, “I’ll bet you’re wondering how we know that.”

Eddie said, “Here’s a hint. You didn’t mention it during your perfunctory phone chat with the Chief last night. You told him you worked a recent Monroe gig, and left it at that.”

Red said, “Nobody can say that you weren’t forthcoming. The Chief requested a forensic, and you complied.”

Max sighed. “Freddy’s waiting for the punch line.”

Harry sighed. “Freddy deserves the punch line.”

Eddie sighed. “Freddy’s trustworthy. We trusted him to toss a kidnap freak off a cliff, so we can sure as shit trust him with the punch line.”

I sighed. I rolled my eyes. I’m too bored to live. I’m shitstorm-prone. Here comes Shitstorm #389—

Red lit a cigar. “2:00 a.m., this morning. Wilshire Vice nailed Robbie Molette on fourteen counts of pandering, peddling goofballs, stat rape, and receiving stolen goods. The Vice dicks knew we shared a history with Robbie, so they brought him to us. We leaned on him, and took him to Georgia Street Receiving for a little cleanup. Robbie said, ‘Okay, I’ll give,’ so we bought him breakfast at Kwan’s. He had three double Bloody Marys. They got him all loosey-goosey. He gave up your Monroe gig in minute detail, and bought himself an immunity waiver off of Miller Leavy. *He's* in the clear, but your boys Irwin and Denkins are *not.* Your fate appears to be ambiguous, but you are not without friends."

Max lit a cigar. "Turn around and look out the window."

I did it. I saw two black sedans parked on Wilshire. They were cop sedans. They had smoked windows and fringed antenna flags. A sea breeze pulled them taut. The LAPD crest and the Justice Department seal fluttered.

Red and Max grabbed my elbows and pulled me up. They nudged chairs aside and frog-marched me to the sidewalk. Robert Kennedy stepped out of the PD sedan and stepped into the Fed car. He left the back door ajar. Max went *After you.* I slid in beside Bill Parker.

He wore civvies and a Jesuit lapel pin. He winked and slapped his knees.

"You've held up well, given the hoops I've put you through. The kidnap job and Monroe in one go is a stretch."

I lit a cigarette. "I said I'd brief you the next time we talked. I was planning to, and I didn't intend to withhold. It looks like Robbie Molette and the Hats got there first."

The backseat featured a Portabar. Parker poured two short ones. Early Mass and a face-off with the AG. He deserved a jolt.

"I've just cut a deal with the attorney general. In consideration of a 'certain favor,' I will be appointed director of the FBI, after President Kennedy has been reelected. The 'certain favor' is you, Freddy. You are to work a variant of your recent operation for a crooked labor leader. You are to create a scandal sheet—wholly defamatory, but factually verifiable—on the late Marilyn Monroe. It will posthumously serve to damn Miss Monroe and discredit, refute, or at least mitigate any public awareness of her possible misconduct with *Les Frères* Kennedy. Accordingly, the sheet will also defame John and Robert Kennedy. You will stiff the AG with a second, entirely disingenuous set of reports and general memoranda, which will purport to be the 'real skinny,' but which will be pablum when compared to the dirt you report to me. This 'smear sheet within a smear sheet' will provide me with an extortion wedge should that feral cocksucker Bobby renege on our FBI-boss deal. Your other job is to quell newspaper, radio, and TV speculation per Miss Monroe's death. No unseemly hints of homicide, conspiracy, or any sense of unseemly alliance with the Kennedys may see print or appear on the airwaves."

I bolted my drink. Parker bolted his. He quick-built two refills.

"You will be issued valid credentials for the L.A. District Attorney's Bureau of Investigations. You will be sworn in as a lieutenant. This appointment has been vouched by DA McKesson and his chief criminal prosecutor, J. Miller Leavy—who, quite frankly, despises you. That's of no import, because Mayor Sam Yorty likes the cut of your jib. You will have a carry permit, a badge, and the power to issue subpoenas and search warrants written by Miller Leavy and run by a 'rubber stamp' Superior Court judge. You will work out of the LAPD's Intelligence Division, under Lieutenant Daryl Gates."

I popped sweat and weaved. I blinked and saw double. Two Parkers harangued me.

"Your three listening posts will be raided, late next week. All your evidence will be seized and held by the Justice Department, with all tape and written documents duplicated and held at LAPD Intel. The seizure of Lawford-house evidence will put you in the shit with Robert Kennedy, but you've been in the shit with the Kennedys before, and I want you in the shit now—it will put Bob Kennedy on the edge. The Kennedys must fear debilitating exposure, *now,* and your shitbird reputation is a surefire means to make this occur."

I guzzled my refill and crossed myself. *Dear Lord, Pat will know.*

Parker tapped his wristwatch. "We're due at St. John's. I trust you to be forthcoming, but I don't trust your memory."

—

Coerced performance. Interrogation. Brain scrub.

The room spooked me. Straitjackets and bite restraints were piled on wood-plank shelves. The metal table was bolted to the floor. I was strapped tight. An anesthetist mixed the jolt.

Scopolamine, Amytal, Pentothal. Some space-age compound. Parker called it the "KGB Cocktail."

He stood by the table. Ditto the Intel exec, Daryl Gates. Robbie Molette sat by the door. He'd feed Parker and Gates prompts and cues. Max said the hump revealed the full Hoffa op. I believed it. I had three goals here. Gauge the questions and determine what they knew. Restore my booze-and-dope-maimed recollections. Rebuff all queries per Pat.

The doctor fed a spike and swabbed my arm. He hit a fat blue vein. The rush hit head-to-toe ecstatic.

It was a warm-water plunge. I swam in bright colors. I saw Pat and

Lois naked. It shamed me. I asserted brain control and screened bland settings. Parker jumped on my 4/11 break-in. I fed him fluff on Monroe's bedroom sloth. Gates jumped on the money in the lockbox. I lost Pat and Lois. They swam off into a waterfall. I described the forty grand and the Polaroids I took. I blabbed wiretap outtakes. Eleanora and dipshit Lawford discussed some cat named Rick Dawes.

Gates mentioned José Bolaños. I gave up the Monroe-Bolaños tap call. Parker brought up my blown tail to the Valley. My brain glitched. I saw myself with the Hats. It was just last night. We're chasing Sheriff's prowl cars. We're hot to rescue Gwen Perloff.

Parker asked questions. Gates asked questions. Robbie fed them cues. I ran mental-solvency tests and answered questions hit or miss. Parker and Gates looked perplexed. The doctor looked bored. Robbie looked apprehensive. I saw that morgue shot from last night. It's Carole Landis, it's '48, she's on a gurney just like mine. Monroe's in the morgue now. Why did *she* have *that* photo? Why am I seeing *that* photo at *this* time?

The doctor said, "He's a lousy subject. He only submits so far. I think this summer's a blur to him, and that's why you're getting these fragmentary responses."

—

Monroe Gig #2. Day one was all mortification. #2 supplants #1. The first job was all money, peeper kicks, and sunshine. #2 connotes legal jeopardy and high-stakes censure.

The truth juice wore off at St. John's. I snoozed on the gurney. Parker and Gates took off. Robbie *slunk* off. I walked back to PC Bell and got my car. I drove straight to the wheelman lot at Beverly and Hayworth.

I steered herky-jerky. I wore palm-and-finger-weighted sap gloves. Steel weights were stitched in.

My thoughts tumbled.

The evidence raid was slated for late next week. I had four days to hide my office stash and listening-post documents. That meant four all-day workdays.

I pulled up to the lot. Punk wheelmen loitered by the pay phone. Divorce lawyers called in and hired surveillance guys. They tailed cheating spouses to hot-sheet flops and kicked doors in. Flashbulbs and divorce decrees popped. I'd done the work myself.

Robbie stood by the Coke machine. I hit him at a full sprint. He cartwheeled. I pinned him prone and stuffed a handkerchief in his mouth. I threw right and left uppercuts. Robbie gagged on the hankie and spit teeth and gum flaps in my face.

I heard his jaw break. My knees snapped his collarbone. I went downstairs and slammed his ribs. Sheared bones poked out at odd angles. Nat Denkins ran up and bear-hugged me. Phil Irwin said, *“Whoa, Freddy, whoa.”*

19

(LOS ANGELES, 5:08 A.M., MONDAY, 8/6/62)

I was dead asleep. The truth juice fucked with my system. I *thought* I heard things and heard things, straight up.

I woke up. Metal scrapes roused me. I heard lock-pick sounds out on my porch.

Little pokes, digs, and prods. There's a *twist.* There's male whispers. It sounds like three men. There's the *snap.*

They can't get in. I'm wise to lock picks and stealth. I installed blocker strips.

I grabbed my bedside piece. I screwed on the suppressor. I heard mutters and shuffles. The front door came down.

It crashed. It hit the floor, flush. It cracked floorboards and made *very big noise.*

I heard footsteps. Three penlight beams strafed the bedroom. I saw three men. I saw dark suits and wide bulletproof vests.

They sensed me, they smelled me. They saw me and charged me in bed.

I shot them flush and hit them. Muzzle flash lit the room. They caught two vest shots each. Big-bore shots knocked them flat on the floor.

I jumped out of bed and tripped on top of them. They cursed and screeched. They got up and dogpiled me.

They threw elbows and rabbit punches. They wrestled me and grabbed at me. I kneed them in the balls and went for their throats. They pinned me down. They had dinky Fed badges pinned to their belts.

A Mex type drop-kicked me and smothered me with a pillow. Two paddy Feds kicked me in the head.

—

Ratfuck Bobby fucked us. He staged the evidence raid four days early. I got sandbagged. I had no time to prepare.

They got everything. My corkboards, my bug-and-tap logs, my boxed tapes. They got my photo sprays, my scrawled notes, my pictures of Pat. They dressed me, they cuffed me, they hauled me outside.

Three Fed sleds lined the curb. They packed the trunks with my evidence. They bagged all my paper scraps and operational minutiae. They strongarmed me into the lead car. Their vests were bullet-pocked and dented. They groaned and rubbed the welts on their chests. They limped from my nut shots.

Three Feds, three Fed sleds. The Mex type took the lead car. I rode in the backseat. The two paddy Feds followed close. My neighbors stood on their porches and gassed on the show.

We caravanned west on Sunset. I was concussed. I saw quadruple everything. The Mex type motormouthed. He said he wasn't Mex. He was proudly *Cubano.* As in vintage '59 Cuban exile.

He was a Justice Department lawyer/investigator. His name was Edgar Chacõn. *Señor* Bob Kennedy was his personal *jefe. Señor* Bob put him through Georgetown Law School and helped him pass the D.C. bar exam. He has a swell garage apartment at *Señor* Bob's Hickory Hill estate. He's *Señor* Bob's bodyguard and dirty trickster. He drives *Señor* Bob's kids to school and walks *Señor* Bob's dogs. He's killed lots of Castroite militiamen. He scalped them and cut their dicks off. He drinks with *Señor* Bob and *Señor* Jack at the White House. He has *personally* fucked fourteen thousand women and is widely known as the "Lizard of Love."

The caravan veered south on Barrington and west on San Vicente. That bodes a golf course raid. We hooked around the median strip and hit the side street by Brentwood CC. An LAPD unmarked car beat us there. Phil Irwin and Nat Denkins were cuffed in the backseat. Two plainclothes cops loaded Monroe-pad gear in the trunk.

Eddie Chacõn idled up to the LAPD car. I recognized a West L.A. squadroom guy.

Sid Leffler. A nosebleed cop from way back. "Officer Sid." Mr. High School Toastmaster. I saw him at the Sip 'n' Surf, midsummer. He was feeding underaged girls booze.

The other cop was square-jawed and fit. Eddie Chacõn pointed to him and hissed.

"J. T. Meadows. In my informed opinion, a *maricón.* In my view, all handsome men are suspect."

I yocked. "What about me? I'm handsome as shit."

"You are ugly as shit, *pendejo.* However, on occasion ugly men supersede handsomeness. As proof of this, I point to the fact that Vice President Johnson gets more ass than *Señor* Jack."

I *re*-yocked. Leffler and Meadows dumped my transceiver and headphone sets in their trunk. The Fed follow cars peeled out, northwest. My guess: a run to the bluffside post. It's one big evidence stash.

Eddie Chacõn hung a U-turn. Leffler and Meadows piled in their car and pulled up behind us. I craned my neck and scoped Phil and Nat. They looked glum. I knew why. They saw this deal as indictment/trial/conviction.

The deal was half shuck. They didn't know that the LAPD would extend their employment. The raids were a crack-the-whip ploy. Ratfuck Bobby and Bill Parker colluded. They wanted us cowed.

We cut north to Sunset and west to PCH. Chacõn tapped his red lights and siren. Next stop: the Sip 'n' Surf lounge.

Eddie played it bravura. He sluiced through oncoming traffic and brodied all the way up on the pier. Salt-racked boards creaked and partially snapped. Leffler and Meadows fishtailed up behind us. Bait-shop crews and surfer riffraff goggle-eyed the scene.

Eddie got out and brandished a pump shotgun. Ditto, Leffler and Meadows. They hit the Sip 'n' Surf at port arms. The joint evacuated. Barflies, kitchen help, bikini girls. It was one big exit sprint.

I heard door-crash noise inside. I heard kicked-over chairs and consoles and phone mounts ripped out of walls. I heard file cabinets dumped and high-line bug gear slammed into boxes. Chacõn and Meadows ran out with their arms full.

They filled their trunks. They got back in their cars and spun U-turns. They gained, lost, and gained tread. Cracked boards sheared and dropped in the surf.

We made PCH southbound. Pier geeks shot us fuck-you fingers. I trembled. I knew our next stop.

I shut my eyes and prayed it off. Eddie zoomed there. He pulled right and grazed the beachside embankment. He cut the ignition. I opened my eyes.

The two paddy Feds dumped bug mounts on the north footpath. Peter Lawford examined a yanked-out telephone. Pat stood close by. My window was rolled up. She stared straight at me.

I stared straight at her. She walked over and spit on the window. She did it a dozen or two dozen times. She spit-covered the whole window glass. Nobody backed down. We held dead-on stares.

20

(LOS ANGELES, 8/7–8/13/62)

Monroe Job #2. I eased into it.

The Feds whomped me good. A doc at Georgia Street fixed me up and shot me some righteous pain dope. Ratdog Bobby made nice-nice. He sent a crew out to refit my kicked-down door and trashed floorboards. Jurgensen's Market dropped off a bottle of Dom Perignon. Bobby included a note: *"Freddy—all the best."* He signed it *"RFK."*

I called Jimmy Hoffa and shoveled up a snow job. Boss, I'm *sorry*. The LAPD lab turned up my prints at the Monroe post. They leaned on my guys and took it from there. Hoffa seemed to buy it. He took the pricey blown op nonchalant. He said he'd pay out the pledged bonus bread.

I mollified Jimmy. I expressed confidence. The Feds and LAPD won't jump you for suborning the op. Jimmy said, "Fuck them if they do. I've already burned the tapes, logs, and all your paperwork."

He's paying out unearned wages. He's dispensing unearned bonus bread. He destroyed essential evidence for no good reason. He's got to have a *money* motive. I thought so at the gate.

I've penciled in a week's transition. I drive by the Monroe pad twice a day. Nutty fans congregate. They bring guitars and throw hootenannies. They revise old labor ditties and blame Monroe's death on "The Man." Candlelight vigils extend to 2:00 a.m. High-school kids plug phonographs into car dashboard lighters and play swami music. I've seen Lowell Farr three times.

My Monroe World is high-stakes extortion. The world's Monroe World is disingenuous schmaltz. Gene Kelly was "deeply shocked." He "just didn't understand it." Anita Ekberg was "shocked, and so sad." Yeah—but Marilyn told Lowell Farr that you gave the prez the clap and he passed it on to Jackie. Liz Taylor was "very sad, and deeply shocked." Yeah—and Marilyn and Roddy McDowall ragged on your fat ass on a near-daily basis.

The Fourth Estate weighed in. *The New York Times,* the *L.A. Times,* *Klansman* magazine, *L'Osservatore Roma.* They blamed Marilyn's childhood privation, the film biz, her orphanage stint, Father Coughlin's Rosary Crusade, and the Learned Elders of Zion. Local disk jockeys played "Image of a Girl" twenty thousand times a day. Noted clerics inveighed. Marilyn exemplified "America's permissive new malaise." Jive genius Dizzy Gillespie told an unknown police source, "That's too bad. She was a fine muthafuckah." Local newshounds played up the death of almost-star Carole Landis. She was another "busty bombshell." Curvy Carole "pounded pills and sadly succumbed to suicide." Yeah—and I found a Landis morgue pic in Monroe's pad.

Coroner Curphey called me. He laid out the autopsy call: barbiturate OD or suicide. It was strictly routine. Monroe was a long-term dope fiend. Here's two non sequitur tweaks:

Tweak #1: minute puncture marks on Monroe's left earlobe. Traces of liquid collagen pooled at the spot. Curphey said, "It might have bloated her face somewhat. Maybe it was for a role she was playing."

My first thought:

José Bolaños calls Marilyn. They discuss her Mexican travels. She rolls "incognito." She might be "moving freight." Marilyn tells Deedee Grenier that she hits Mexico in disguise. She's done up as a migrant farmworker. Collagen injections? Deliberate facial bloating? I'll buy that.

Tweak #2: a healed and faded human bite mark. It's "some years old." It's smack on Monroe's left bicep. Curphey said, "It looks like a sicko sex wound."

My first thought:

The fuckee-suckee pix I saw on my 8/4 break-in. They were '58 or '59 vintage. Marilyn and a cruel-looking stud enact the Kama Sutra. I saw no such bite mark or bite mark scarring. Curphey's noted bite mark was most likely late '59 or early '60 vintage.

Crazy Marilyn. Collagen injections. Bite marks. Her forty-grand stash. Her plus-size threads. Her nutty pay-phone calls.

It's one big cluster fuck. She OD'd or pulled the plug. I attended the funeral. It was a sanctified cluster fuck. LAPD Intel shot surveillance film. Thirty-five friends and Dust Bowl–esque "family" showed up. Eight hundred fans mobbed Wilshire and Westwood Boulevards. Lowell Farr stood among them. She pitched muted boo-hoo by teenage-girl standards.

Monroe's ex–acting coach eulogized her in the *Herald.* Natasha Lytess was tight with Monroe, '49 to '56. Miss Lytess nailed a noxious gestalt.

"She projected a shopworn enchantment. It entrapped only those susceptible and most willing to succumb. She wore most people out in the end."

Amen, sister. You've got the last word so far.

—

Daryl Gates called me. It was noon on 8/10. He relayed urgent bad news.

Ratfuck Bobby filed a superseding-evidence writ. He filed it with a Ninth Circuit Court judge. The judge signed the writ. Four Justice Department investigators served the warrant and enacted the provisions. It went down at 10:00 last night.

They seized the LAPD's cache of all my tapes, transcript logs, and mimeographed reports to Jimmy Hoffa. They seized LAPD's copies of my corkboard evidence, bootjacked by the Feds on 8/6. I now have no access to the photographic evidence I compiled during my 4/11 and 8/4 break-ins.

Ratfuck Bobby orchestrated a two-prong attack. His goons kicked down my door and tossed my pad-office. His goons usurped the LAPD's copied, logged, and filed evidence. I would have utilized said evidence in my new gig for Bill Parker. The grab resoundingly states that Robert F. Kennedy does not trust Bill Parker, Daryl Gates, and Big Freddy O. It suggests that Kennedy may take the evidence to a Federal grand jury and seek suborning and criminal-conspiracy indictments against Jimmy Hoffa, me, and my men. Said indictments would render me a bit player in the Hoffa/Kennedy war. They would most likely net me big Federal time.

I brooded it up to a fucking fare-thee-well. I plotted remedies, countermeasures, solutions. It came down to replication.

Nat, Phil, and I could confer and replicate the pertinent tap calls. Only I could replicate what I saw and imprinted on 4/11 and 8/4. Hans Maslick inspired me. Maslick developed the techniques of photographic memorization that I employ today. He was a Berlin homicide cop, part-time Brownshirt, and full-time dope fiend. He worked overlapping murder jobs and lost his synaptic grip on priority cases in the overall glut of his *werk*load. My 4/11 and 8/4 prowls served up Marilyn Monroe. I sensed it then and know it now. My snapshots provide a verifiable record of my first impressions. I'm sober now. I was zorched to the gills on 4/11 and 8/4. I need to replicate the enhanced acuity of B and E under the influence. I need to replicate the sex thrill of a strange woman's dwelling. I need to merge recollection and imagination and yoke them to my eideteker's mental discipline and voyeur's need to know.

I got out a notebook and pen. I cooked up a batch of jungle juice and took three good jolts. I took two more jolts. I got my first replicative buzz. I *smelled* the wet towels in Monroe's bathroom.

Mental pictures enhanced the smell. I relived camera clicks and flashbulb glare. It's all transposition—recalled sights become words on paper.

Monroe's bathroom and living room. Evidence Pix #1 to 7: pill vials, hashish cubes, bathtub grime.

Into the bedroom. I smell *her*. Stale sweat/presumptive sexual exertion. Pic #8: soiled bedsheets. Pix #9 and 10: the lockbox and the forty grand spread out on the bed. Pix #11 to 23: Monroe's crazy handwritten lists.

I smelled the paper. I replicated shutter clicks and bulb glare. Pharmacy lists/dope-refill lists/"nice Drs." lists. Replication, immersion, transposition—I got all the names and dates right. Not so fast—there's the random-lover list and dick-size drawings. Shit—I can't recall the men's names.

Replication, immersion, transposition. Separate Sheet of Paper Pic #1: "Rick Dawes. Mean—maybe a fag." Illegibly crossed-out names of phone-answering outfits. Separate Sheet of Paper Pic #2: the main number for the L.A. County Sheriff's Office.

Camera glitch/aphasic lesion/fuckup. I *know* I shot a list of first-name-only men. They were tagged "studio grip," "makeup man," "studio flack." Then was then, now is now. I can't recall their names or any listed phone numbers.

Replication, transposition. Scrawled Bookmark Pic #1: "Jack at White House," plus switchboard number. "Bobby at Justice," plus switchboard number.

A headache tapped in. I saw flashbulb glare and caught break-in blips out of sequence.

The pillowcase stuffed with coins.

The closet stuffed with big-girl threads.

Monroe's quote in Paul de River's book:

"When all other forms of applied therapy have failed, it may be possible to contravene absent, passive, and self-destructively reactive behavior with the imposition of direct criminal action."

The headache abated. I saw Monroe dead. I didn't conjure her. She just appeared. I jumped to 8/4/62, unbidden. I felt the hot air of nine nights ago.

I saw the print-wiped clock radio. I saw the footprints on deep-pile carpet. I saw the left-behind bug mounts. I saw Monroe's head on the pillow. I touched her leg. It was still warm. I slid my hand up and pulled it back. I lost track of what was *then,* what was *now,* what I *wish* I'd done then.

I took two more jolts. The juice electrified me. Replication, transposition. I'm back in sync.

Underwear Drawer Pic #1: Marilyn's underwear. Underwear Drawer Pic #2: morgue photo of Carole Landis. Underwear Drawer Pic #3: note composed in cutout/glued-on magazine letters.

"I loved her before I loved you. She was nicer. You're more desperate and pretentious. I had to learn to love you. She made it easy."

Underwear Drawer Pix #4 to 11: pornographic snapshots.

Who's the cruel-looking stud? He looks familiar.

It's '58 or '59. There's no bite mark on Monroe's left bicep.

Note the crusted semen. I scraped a sample off and froze it. It's in my icebox. The Fed goons never checked. Talk to Daryl Gates. He'll order lab comparison tests.

Replication, transcription. I retrieved and described eleven pages of Polaroid snapshots. It stands as 85% recall.

She was dead. I felt her and smelled her all over me.

—

The foot.

Max Herman says, "Sink him, Freddy."

The foot.

Daryl Gates said something about a foot.

I yawned myself awake. It was full daylight. I crapped out on the couch. Notebook pages covered the floor.

I gathered them up. I recalled the retrieval. That's right—eleven full pages. That mug on the floor—it's cold coffee.

I was out for fourteen hours. The jungle juice revved me up high and laid me out flat.

I weaved to the can and took a leak. The foot dream resurrected. Gates said a motor cop found Richie Danforth's left foot. It was three miles north of the dump site. Vultures ate the meat and Richie's left sock.

I weaved back to the couch and scrawled a task list:

1)

—Take frozen jizz to lab.

2)

—Find missing report on blown MM tail job to the Valley.

2-A)

—Why did Valley locale look familiar? (It's a recent memory, I'm sure.)

2-B)

—Per tail job itself: I compiled list of 143 parked-car plate #s, on adjoining blocks. MM rendezvous? With whom? Locale non sequitur for MM. List now missing/DMV list missing/Do Justice cops have my list?

3)

—Per Separate Piece of Paper Pic #1: "Rick Dawes. Mean—maybe a fag." Work off subsequent tap call: "Eleanora" to Peter Lawford. "Eleanora" pumps Lawford for info on cater waiter "Rick Dawes," possible Beverly Hills 459 suspect. Contact BHPD per Dawes. Continue canvass of (200-odd) cater biz's & (131) phone-answering services.

4)

—Check with U.S. Customs. Did MM fly to Mexico, 2/62, in disguise as migrant worker?

4-A)

—Run paper on José Bolaños: Local PD's, state & fed HUAC (Bolaños is Commie). Also check LAPD & LASO Narco.

I walked out to the porch and snagged the *Mirror.* Monroe hoo-haw smeared the front page. She was a vixen, a sexpot, a bombshell and beyond. She was a tigress, a coiled serpent, an enchantress, a rebuker of the stodgy and unhip. Again, Natasha Lytess logs the last word:

"The world had yet to become exhausted with her. She was taxing the world's patience, however."

I went back inside and skimmed the paper. I hit *"Kidnap of Starlet"/"Sheriff's Detectives Bemoan Dearth of Clues."* I speed-skimmed the lead paragraph. It was the *Mirror*'s standard crime blah-blah.

Sergeant Michael J. Bayless/blah-blah/three suspects at large/two suspects now regretfully dead.

That set me back. *Two* dead? Richie Danforth and who else?

I flipped six pages forward. There's the lead: *"Kidnap Suspect a Suicide/Grisly Death at Highland Park Station."*

I speed-skimmed the gist:

August 4 kidnap/starlet Gwen Perloff/suspect Hershel "Buzzy" Stein—

suicide in his cell/suspect Richard Danforth—killed by Hat Squad stalwarts and celeb PI Freddy Otash, specially deputized by—

I heard door knocks. I tossed the *Mirror* and opened the door.

Pat came at me. She hit my face, gouged my neck, kicked me, and kneed me in the groin. I grabbed her wrists. She sobbed. She pushed me half off my feet. I looked past her and tried to hold her still.

A Fed sled was parked at the curb. Eddie Chacõn leaned against it. Who's that beady-eyed putz in the backseat? It's Ratfuck Bobby the K.

21

(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 A.M., TUESDAY, 8/14/62)

I bopped through the DA's Bureau squadroom. Twenty-four cops worked at partner desks. I wore a drip-dry summer suit and starched white shirt. My Marine Corps service pin echoed the Big War. I packed a belt piece and a beavertail sap. I felt ring-a-ding good.

The cops checked me out. Shitbird Freddy's back. He walks among us, he's one of us, he outranks us all.

Such pissy outrage.

Miller Leavy's office adjoined the squadroom. He prosecuted high-ticket homicides and put sex slashers and cop killers in the Green Room. He burned Caryl Chessman and the Santo/Perkins/Barbara Graham mob. He built his Airedale a mock-gas-chamber doghouse.

His door stood open. I breezed in like King Shit. I dragged a slat-back chair up to his desk and perched.

He saw me. I dangled my arms off the chair back. He said, "I was opposed to the idea of a ceremony. I would have handed you your credentials in a back alley somewhere, but the DA and Bill Parker overrode me. Don't extend your hand to me. I won't shake it."

I lit a cigarette and grabbed an ashtray off the desk. Mr. Green Room flinched.

"How's the count, Mr. Leavy? You've burned eleven, haven't you? By the way, you owe me for Fred Stroebel. I traced the little girl's underwear back to his garage, and I kicked the shit out of him at the Wilshire DB."

Leavy smirked. He was short. Three seat cushions scooched him up to eye level.

"I can hardly blame you and the Hats for dumping Richard Danforth, and Buzzy Stein's suicide is between him and God. The three actual kidnappers remain at large, though. I would appreciate it if you would attempt to identify and apprehend them."

Nuisance. Minor irritant. The kidnap deal low-simmered. Only putzo legal types cared.

"I'll poke around, if I get the chance. Kidnap's a gas-chamber bounce. You could make hay there."

Leavy beamed. Daryl Gates and Mayor Sam Yorty walked in. Gates was Bill Parker's hand-picked successor. He watchdogged Mayor Sam for the Chief. Mayor Sam ran fascist-police-force riffs during the '61 campaign. Ad Vice cops set him up with two call girls and shot peephole film. Mayor Sam got apostatized. He recanted his fasco spiel and embraced the Chief. They booze at Ollie Hammond's most Tuesday nights.

I stood up. Miller Leavy stood up. We huddled by Leavy's desk and dispensed backslaps and Freddy's-the-Man pap. Gates tossed me my badge and credential folder. Mayor Sam told me to raise my right hand.

I complied. Mayor Sam invoked a jive oath of service. I whooped. I'm back on the fuzz, citizens. It's a license to steal and a ticket to ride.

Mayor Sam produced a flask. He took two pops. I took two pops. Gates and Leavy declined. The boys checked a wall clock. *Macht schnell*—let's move this along.

Mayor Sam said, "Governor Brown told me a good one. A lion is fucking a zebra. The zebra looks over his shoulder and says, 'Oh shit, baby! I see my husband! Quick—pretend that you're killing me!' "

Gates and I laughed on cue. Leavy said, "I don't get it." Mayor Sam scoped the wedding-stone cut on my cheek.

I said, "A woman who used to love me. I was overmatched."

—

We walked to the PAB. Gates reserved me a wall cubicle at Intel. I could work there, nest there, make phone calls. His secretary would shag my message slips.

The division fielded forty-eight detectives. They deployed in round-the-clock shifts. Intel was down from Robbery and Bunco. It ate up twice the floor space. Forty-eight partner desks—that's de rigueur. Ditto the wall offices and conference rooms. Equipment rooms goosed the extra space.

They stored movie cameras/still cameras/strobe lights/electric power packs/bug-and-tap mikes/installation tools/refrigerated film-can vaults/partitioned-off darkrooms and extensive film and tape libraries. Plus boom mikes, radio transceivers, and detachable prowl-car two-ways with individual-frequency reception. A wallboard held keys for fifty-six surveillance rides. A photo room was plastered with racy pix from a current political entrapment.

Identify, scrutinize, surveil. That's Intel's ethos. Eyeball and collect data on:

Commies/Commie front groups/left-leaning dimwits/rowdy civil rights groups/jerkoff right-wing groups/politicians and Third World potentates out to get bombed and get laid. Plus film-biz stupes known to fraternize with the above. Plus anybody who fucked with Chief William H. Parker and the LAPD.

We talked in Gates' office. I tossed him a changeup straight off.

"Early a.m. Sunday, the fifth. Phil Irwin and I have Monroe's house staked. The housekeeper calls Doc Greenson, who calls Doc Engleberg. They call the West L.A. desk. A patrol sergeant responds. His name's Jack Clemmons. He's a tall blond guy, about thirty-eight. An informant told me he's a right-wing nut. He's in the White Dog Bund, whatever that is. He's tight with an ex-PD motor cop named Norm Krause. This dink owns a juice joint out in the Valley, and he allegedly extorted the then state comptroller, Tom Kuchel, for public fellatio, back in '49. He's in the Bund, too. Does any of this ring any bells?"

Gates said, "None. I don't know or know of Clemmons and Krause, the Kuchel deal, or the Dog Bund. Who cares? It's got nothing to do with our Monroe business at hand."

I lit a cigarette. Gates slid his desk ashtray over and hit the AC switch.

"First, the Chief and I know you'll dissemble and omit—but don't overdo it. Second, let me restate the parameters. Our deal with Bob Kennedy entails the demonizing of Marilyn Monroe, to discredit her if talk of her alleged romantic attachment to the Kennedys surfaces to the world at large. Our *side* deal entails that you develop a concurrent derogatory profile on John and Robert Kennedy, to utilize if Bob renegs on his pledge to shoot the Chief the FBI job. And, of course, facilitate my ascent to Chief."

I grinned. "I understand. And, parenthetically, an informant told me that old man Hoover wants Pete Pitchess to get the job if the Kennedys can him. Pete's a lawyer, and he's ex-FBI. Maybe SHIT has some ops going to juke Pete's shot at the job."

Gates shrugged. "It's possible."

I said, "Okay, Justice sandbagged us. They've got all the copies of all my evidence from the Hoffa gig, which leaves us holding our dicks. Do you think that little hump Bobby will convene a grand jury and deploy the evidence against Hoffa, which would sure as shit bring collateral indictments down on me and my boys?"

Gates said, "It's possible. We should also consider the fact that you killed a man while on temporary assignment from the Chief, and that you've been publically identified in the press."

"It's a 'put-up job,' Daryl. Danforth was saying that as he waltzed off the cliff."

Gates squared his necktie and shot his cuffs. He was fastidious. He wore a gold-coin wristwatch.

" 'Put-up job' wouldn't surprise me. Buzzy Stein drinking lye in our custody troubles me, though. A jailer at Highland Park told me he was terrified of something or somebody. He refused to talk to our guys, after he witnessed the dump job and revealed Gwen Perloff's location. Why mince words? This bullshit caper—whatever it is—could bite us on the ass six million ways."

I crushed my cigarette. "Did the Sheriff's come by Highland Park and brace Stein? Mike Bayless is the lead IO. He's working it for the West Hollywood squad."

Gates said, "Oddly, they did not drop by. Not so oddly, you see where all this is heading. The Chief and I would like you to look into the kidnap deal, and stand ready to squelch any anti-PD rumors that might arise."

I said, "I'm on it."

Gates smiled. "You're susceptible to guilt, Freddy. It's one of your more humanizing aspects. Do you feel bad about Danforth?"

I flinched. "I need to brace Paul de River. Monroe was fixated on him. She annotated a copy of one of his books. She told Greenson she was in the market for a 'more radical' shrink."

Gates yawned. "Brace him. Stay aware of the fact that he hates us. Bill Parker sacked him, and he's never gotten over it. He'll rat us to the *L.A. Times* in a heartbeat."

I nodded. The office went hot to cold. Gates futzed with a jade paperweight.

"Talk to your man Nat Denkins. Have him put out some counterintel on his radio show. All rumors about Monroe and powerful politicians are bunk. I'm offering two concessions here. I'll allow the weekly crap game in the KKXZ basement to continue, and I'll cut his brother Kareem loose. We've got him for CCW in that Muslim snafu, and I'll get the charge dropped."

I stood up. Gates stood up. He fidgeted and quashed the urge to primp.

"One last thing. We've been informed that Morty Bendish at the *Mirror* has a tattle piece on Monroe and the Kennedys in the works.

Put the squelch to it. Morty’s peddling beaver pix of Monroe in the morgue. You might squelch that, as well.”

22

(LOS ANGELES, 6:00 A.M., WEDNESDAY, 8/15/62)

The *Herald* morgue. L.A. in mid-August. Four rooms crammed with chairs and file shelves.

News clips glued to cardboard sheets. Big boxes crammed full. News clips culled worldwide. Monroe kicked eleven days back. Her clip glut totaled seven thousand–plus obits and puff pieces.

I was fourteen hours in. I locked the outside hallway door and worked in my skivvies. I aimed a porta fan at my balls and stirred up a breeze. I scanned clip-to-clip. I trolled for tidbits on Monroe and the K boys. I got Jack's New York birthday bash and no derogatory dish or inuendo. Moldy newspaper induced sneeze attacks. It was shitwork, par excellence.

I was seven clip boxes in. I had one box to go. Beside my chair: one thin-ass *L.A. Mirror* file.

The Gwen Perloff kidnap job. *So what?* The crime-king *Mirror* gave it short shrift.

I saved the file for kicks and grins. It goosed me to speed-read the Monroe shit. The clips played soporific.

Jean-Paul Sartre said, "Marilyn was devoured by the psychic nothingness of American values." This sentiment pervaded the Euro press. The U.S. dailies and news glossies spritzed celeb kudos and kvetchy grief. On to the UCLA *Daily Bruin,* the USC *Daily Trojan,* the Cal Berkeley *Golden Bear.* More kudos and kvetch from a college-kid perspective. *The New York Times, New York Herald Tribune, New York Journal-American.* "What killed Marilyn?" Hollywood and the too-cruel world—*J'accuse!!!* Here's a mitigating laugh. Trumpet boss Miles Davis tells a *DownBeat* scribe: "She was déclassé, baby. I always thought of her as Dorothy Dandridge for the poor."

The clip cutters went all out. They glommed clips from the daily rags of L.A. high schools in summer session. Lowell Farr wrote "Bop Requiem for Marilyn" in the Palisades High *Daily Dolphin.* Dig the text:

We lost sacred Bix and Bird back in paleolithic times;
Now Marilyn splits this jive earth and rings our mourning chimes;
She follows cool Carole Landis to the Pill Parthenon;
The sick and the sentient wonder where she went wrong.

Lowell published her dirge in the 8/9 *Dolphin.* Fan letters followed. The “Bop Requiem” drew some critical flak. “Big Bob” Berglund slammed it in the 8/12 *Dolphin.* “Lowell Farr’s Monroe poem was a pretentious shuck. Let’s admit it, Lowell is a pseud.”

Lowell fires back on 8/14. “Big (Ha!) Bob Berglund is a nosebleed, a nimrod, a ho-daddy and a pseudosurfer. He’s not a natural blond. He bleaches his hair, and he’s never been to the beach. Let’s admit *that.* Moreover, the Dolphin intelligentsia scoffs at him.”

I cogitated. Lowell’s dirge buzzed me past the laugh stage. As in the Carole Landis reference.

There’s the Landis morgue pic. There’s the crazy note, beside it. “I loved her before I loved you.” The note was spelled out in excised/glued-on magazine letters. It’s a classic sex-fiend missive.

I found a letter scrap and a glue daub on my living room floor. They were right below my pictorial corkboard. The Fed raid missed them. The LAPD crime lab keeps a cut-letter exemplar set. I ran my letter scrap through it, yesterday. I studied glue-sample charts/paper-stock notations/named-magazine lists. I got no matches and no evidential tweaks.

Lowell Farr tweaked me. Monroe spilled Jack-and-Bobby dish to her. On at least two dozen tap calls. I don’t want Lowell to regurgitate it. She’s seventeen. I’ll need mom and dad’s consent to debrief her. Miller Leavy can set it up.

I quick-skimmed the last Monroe box and lit a cigarette. I replayed a long skull session with Phil Irwin. We crashed in my new Intel office. We brainstormed and re-created a tally of Lawford and Monroe house tap calls. The total hit 281—to, from, and between. The preponderant tap topic was the grave vibe at 20th Century–Fox.

Giant lox *Cleopatra.* Fox veers toward bankruptcy. Celebrity sex skank in Roma. Roddy McDowall’s pornographic *Cleo* spoof. Fox execs and rank and filers hatching money schemes. They’re fail-safes should *Cleo* tank the studio. There’s endemic frayed nerves and bad behavior on the lot.

Monroe’s antics tanked *Got to Give.* Monroe worked for Fox. Ditto, Gwen Perloff. Fox deserved a look-see. An unknown caller tipped Darryl Zanuck to the kidnap play. Zanuck tipped LAPD. Hence “Sink him, Freddy" and big potential grief.

I skimmed the Perloff file. It was threadbare local news. Perloff, thirty-six, is an "aging starlet." The three snatch men wore Fidel Castro masks. Short sleeves reveal two white males and one Latin-type male. The snatch car descriptions vary. '57 Imperial, Chevy Nomad, '51 Ford coupe. Vehicle checks go *pffft.* The Sheriff's triple-canvass Miller Drive and the cross streets above the Strip. It goes *pffft.* Perloff has a boss crib in a boss modern building. She's jumped outside. Switchboard glitches stall the eyewit calls to West Hollywood station. The patrol desk sounds a belated alarm. The LAPD's "famous" Hat Squad and "celeb" PI Freddy O. are tipped to the hideout pad of suspects Stein and Danforth. The Hats plus Freddy O. bust them. Danforth is killed during a "pitched battle" with Max Herman, Red Stromwall, and Freddy O. Stein reveals the San Fernando Valley location where Perloff is currently stashed. Sheriff's Sergeant Michael J. Bayless leads a daring rescue raid. The stash pad was rented by a "heavyset" older woman. She paid cash in advance and employed an obvious alias. Sergeant Bayless called the case "one big baffler."

Two sidebar columns laid out Gwen Perloff. She's an L.A. native and "plucky hard-luck girl." She lost her parents in a car wreck and grew up in foster homes and an orphan facility. Her eight-year-old sister, Mitzi, disappeared off a Hollywood street on 2/17/37. Gwen was not quite eleven then. The riddle of her vanishing and probable death has remained unexplained.

Gwen studied at the Pasadena Playhouse and worked as a runway model for Jantzen swimwear. She secured Universal and Fox contracts. She appears in dance-craze flicks and horror movies. She was notable in Universal's *The Tattered Dress* and Fox's *Sons and Lovers.* Columnist Hy Gardner said, "Yum-yum—she's the American Anna Magnani, minus all those pasta pounds." Now, Miss Perloff essays strictly B-film roles. She plays the "sexy older woman" in dance-craze and monster flicks geared for a teenage market.

A *Mirror* clip featured a swimsuit ad. It's 6/18/54. There's *La* Gwen in a floral-print bikini. She's ever the schoolmarm knockout. She's sporting her trademark tortoiseshell specs.

—

I went home and showered off the morgue. I put on a drip-dry blazer and poplin slacks. It was a ranking cop's ensemble. Let's flash the new credential and see who scoffs and who quakes.

West Hollywood station was close by. I waltzed through. The squad boss told me Motel Mike just rotated back to SHIT. I asked to see the Perloff file. The squad boss nixed it. My DA's buzzer hit him nonplussed.

Squadroom cops fish-eyed me. A kid deputy was working a tip-line phone on the job. I scoped his call-log sheet. The tipsters were logged as "bored anonymous women." That's your standard L.A. kidnap drill.

Beverly Hills station was close by. I waltzed through. I braced the squad boss per the 459 series with cater waiter suspects. I stressed "Rick Dawes" and "Eleanora's" tap call to Peter Lawford. The squad boss addressed me as "Lieutenant" and dropped the gate.

I will not share information. You cannot see the file. You may not interview the IO's. Submit a formal DA's Office request.

I broomed back downtown. I adjusted my rearview mirror and admired the wedding-stone scar on my face.

Pat landed flush. I stepped into the punch. She roughhoused with her candy-ass brothers and knew how to grapple a bit. She was the tall and strong sister. Drawn and gaunt worked for her. I knew I'd never see her again. Not with this new gig, not on Ratfuck Bobby's dime.

I conjured up Lois. She'd be thirty-five tomorrow. I'd send her red roses and mark the card *"I Remember You."* We met in '55. Lois was a telephone trickster. She met her husband that way. He had a radio call-in show in New York. Lois dug him and kept calling him. That's how she met me. She called *Nasty Nat's Soul Patrol* and dropped my name. That's how I met Nat. I shook down a film-biz geek, fall '57. It force-fed me the blues and the guilts. I bought KKXZ and tossed Nat the deed. You get what you pay for. Nat got a radio station. I got sporadic stints with Lois Nettleton.

The day went hot and smog-choked. The 101 was backed up to Normandie. I took surface streets downtown. The Hall of Justice lot was swamped. I boxed in two steno-pool cars and stuck an OFFICIAL VEHICLE ON CALL card under my wiper blades. The Sheriff's DB was up on Floor #12.

I elevatored up. SHIT was wedged between Homicide and Auto Theft. The squadroom was half the size of LAPD Intel. The equipment rooms were laid out identical. Deputies got partner desks. Sergeants got wall cubicles. Lieutenants and up got offices. The wall pix lionized Pete Pitchess.

Sheriff Pete with Duke Wayne, Kirk Douglas, Joan Fontaine. Sheriff Pete with Miss America finalists. Sheriff Pete outside the Green Room. Thrill killer Stephen Nash sucks gas.

Mike Bayless had a neat corner cubicle. His view featured Lincoln Heights and smog. He sat at his desk and flipped paper clips. He wore a mid-gray suit. Sheriff Pete espoused the Fed automaton look.

I grabbed his desk chair. Motel Mike flipped a paper clip in my lap. I flashed my credential. Motel Mike lip-synched *Eat me.*

"Woo-woo. Mr. Shakedown's working for the DA, and I'm guessing he's a bird dog for Bill Parker, who's got justified concerns that Mr. Shakedown and the Hats dusted one of my kidnap suspects, and now my case is dead stalled. Does that sound accurate to you?"

I made the jack-off sign. "Woo-woo. Motel Mike toasts four beaners back in the ice age, and it goes to his head. Motel Mike's so far up Pete Pitchess' ass that he buys his suits at Oviatt's, clothier to Gerald L. K. Smith and Gay Edgar Hoover."

Motel Mike sighed. "Tell me what you want."

I said, "A two-minute Perloff case summary and access to the file."

"Yes to the summary, no to the file. Here's your overview. The case is dead stalled. Gwen Perloff was banging Darryl F. Zanuck. Mr. Mogul got a tip call from a woman, who gave up Richie Danforth and Buzzy Stein and spilled where to find them. Then Zanuck called in Bill Parker, because the LAPD has got more marquee value than my department. Enter Mr. Shakedown and the overzealous Hat Squad. Now, Danforth and Stein are dead, and Parker and Daryl Gates have sent you out to see what I've got, because Parker and the PD took it in the shorts on that Black Muslim deal, and you're out to squelch potential bad press on Danforth, vis-à-vis that dive he took."

I whistled and clapped. Motel Mike bowed. I went *Don't stop now.* Motel Mike complied.

"We've worked this job into the ground. We triple-canvassed a half-mile radius and hit the not-at-homes twice. There was not one credible description of the snatch car, so we couldn't run vehicle checks. We ran full forensics on both stash-pad locations and got nothing. Our informant queries turned up zero. Our tip line, likewise. Richie Danforth's a cipher. He's got no extant print cards within the Continental U.S.—state, Federal, or U.S. Armed Forces. He's got no state crime bureau record extant—and that's for all fifty states. Your dump job scotched our shot to roll his prints. Truck tires pulped his hands and feet. We're eleven days in, and we've got nothing worth a shit to work off."

I lit a cigarette. "Give me Perloff's account."

"What's to give? She was chloroformed, blindfolded, and gagged. She came to in the closet of that Tiki-Torch dive. The snatch guys hooked a hose from the air-conditioner inside the closet, so she could breathe and stay cool. They fed her water and two hamburgers. They walked her to the can, twice, and there was no pervy stuff. She did not recognize their voices. You see what I'm up against—"

I cut in. "I watched you waltz her outside. She didn't look like a kidnap victim dumped in a closet."

Motel Mike flipped paper clips. "I gave her ten minutes to get herself together. She's an actress. She's got that 'show must go on' mentality."

I said, "Known associates. Criminal types at Fox. Lovers, ex-boyfriends, powerful guys she's shtupping, besides old man Zanuck. Shithead film-biz guys who know guys who know guys. You see where I'm going here."

Motel Mike lit a cigarette. "The Sheriff would like to see this job vaporize. He's kowtowing to old man Zanuck on this. You know Del Kinney, right? He's the Fox security chief, and he used to be on the Sheriff's and the ABC."

Kinney. Monroe Gig #1. The full Otash crew roams the Fox lot in plain view. Kinney might have known or suspected.

"Yeah, I know Kinney."

"Well, old man Zanuck told him to keep cops away from Gwen. He's got the Sheriff's backing in that regard. This means my investigation is hamstrung. Zanuck's got X number of young talent on his string at all times, and he's determined to keep them all anonymous."

I crushed my cigarette. "Parker and Gates want me to shake some doors on this deal. Regardless of what the Sheriff and Darryl Zanuck want."

"So, do it. Watch out for Del Kinney, though. He goes way back with Gwen Perloff. It's a big brother–kid sister thing they've got going. It's powerful, and when you see them together you can sense it."

I said, "What are you telling me?"

"I'm telling you that Gwen's kid sister got abducted and sure as shit snuffed. It was up in Hollywood, maybe '37 or '38. Mitzi was eight, and Gwen was something like eleven. Kinney ran the Sheriff's mounted posse part of the job. They were digging up dead kids in Griffith Park, but they never found Mitzi's remains."

I crossed myself. Motel Mike crossed himself. He flipped paper clips at me. I tossed a changeup.

"Does SHIT have surveillance film on Marilyn Monroe?"

Motel Mike shrugged. "We have some. She was a pinko and a ban-the-bomber, so she mandated our attention. Why do you care? LAPD has ten times the footage, so ask Daryl Gates for a peek. LAPD's the font of show-biz dirt in this town, not the Sheriff's."

I stood up. "It was good seeing you, Mike."

"Mr. Shakedown. Destined for the Shit Magnet Hall of Fame."

—

Motel Mike's spiel percolated. He worked the case pro forma. Studio politics intervened. He was borderline credible—with one red flag up.

Richie Danforth cartwheels. He shrieks *"It's a put-up job"* as he spins.

I drove north on PCH. I decided to recanvass the Lawford house and Monroe house turf. Nat and Phil would launch a full-on canvass within forty-eight hours. Daryl Gates was working up bogus credentials. Nat would be Customs, Phil would be Treasury. They'd concoct cover stories. They'd press for Monroe/K boys dirt. They'd be out to disprove and defame, simultaneous.

My credentials were legitimate. I devised a Big-"H"-hits-the-beach cover and walked a beat north of the Lawford spread. Pat and Peter's neighbors were show-biz and real-estate stiffs. I deployed scare tactics and stressed the proximity of our squeaky-clean prez and AG. The neighbors knew that Jack and Bobby partied at the Lawford digs. I dropped Monroe in, oblique. Oh, yes—they'd seen Marilyn at cocktail dos. So tragic—and to die so terribly young!

Yawn, snore, the Secobarbital Express. One geez said the Lawfords threw "degenerate-type parties." His wife said, "You're just chagrined that they didn't invite you."

Yawn. Snore. Nobody tattled sex shit. I fed them cues. Nobody did a big double take and spooned out the dish. I shagged my sled and cut east to Brentwood.

8:00 p.m. traffic snagged and crawled. I passed Pali High. I thought of Lowell Farr. I passed the Bay Theater. Now playing: *The Notorious Landlady* and *The Devil at Four O'Clock*. I thought of Lowell's anonymous make-out dates. "It's a nice kid's version of going to a motel."

Traffic unsnared at Mandeville Canyon. I made good time to Fifth Helena Drive. I caught a beach party five miles inland.

A dozen kids sunned themselves on Monroe's front lawn. A boy cooked hot dogs on a hibachi. Kids twisted and danced the wah watusi. Transistor radios wafted "Marilyn's Song," "Image of a Girl."

Teen queens preened in Marilyn drag.

I parked across the street. I recanvassed Fourth Helena and Falkirk Lane. I laid out my pitch and logged deadpan looks—*Huh?* and *What?* predominant.

A pissy guy said Robert F. Kennedy was Monroe's drop-in lover. His pissy wife contradicted him. No, he was a UPS driver. He just looked like Robert F. Kennedy.

The recanvass slogged. I got *Huh?* and *No.* I got *The Kennedys?* and *Her life was such a tragedy.* I hit Dunoon Lane and scored three houses in.

A man was outside, pulling weeds. I badged him and reran my spiel. I got to "Marilyn Monroe's house." He cut me off and bored straight in.

"Well, here's something that might interest you. An older, sickly looking woman rented a house on Dunoon, right after Miss Monroe bought her place. And I have to tell you, this sickly woman bought the dumpiest house in all of Brentwood. She used to skulk around Miss Monroe's house late at night. I even saw her up on her roof, peeking through binoculars at the house."

23

(LOS ANGELES, 4:00 P.M., THURSDAY, 8/16/62)

Nat said, “Jimmy Hoffa sent me a bank draft for ten grand. He’s paying bonus bread for a job the Justice cops fucked up to a fare-thee-well. I should be jubilant, but I’m nothing but scared.”

KKXZ, 56th and Figueroa. Nat’s broadcast room/command post. Album covers pinned wall-to-wall. Gone sides from Diz, Bird, Miles, and Nat’s house band—the Synagogue Sid Trio.

It was blast-oven hot. Three floor fans stirred wet air. We lounged in scuffed Eames chairs. We shared one ottoman. We kicked each other’s feet to make points.

I said, “You’re scared because it’s un-Jimmy. I feel the same way. It has something to do with Monroe and the Kennedys, and I intend to suss it all out.”

Nat kicked my feet. “Money. Let’s remain on the topic. What’s your pal Gates paying us? I know it won’t be Hoffa-type bread, but he’s got to match your daily rate, or Phil and I will go on strike.”

I said, “He’ll match it. Intel’s got a big expense fund. There’ll be bonus money, and he’s already done you two solids.”

Nat went *Huh?* Nat hummed “Money, honey.”

“He needs a favor, so he’s fed you two in advance. One, your weekly card game is now LAPD-sanctioned. Two, Gates got Miller Leavy to drop the CCW charge on Kareem. He’s out, and he’s sleeping it off at my place as we speak. In consideration of this, you will abstain from theorizing per Monroe and the Kennedys on your show, and put out some counterintel. I brainstormed a semicomprehensive list of calls Monroe made to the White House and Justice switchboards. We’ve got the times, dates, and the length of the calls. Cite them, and lay out some jive on Monroe calling up to gab civil rights. Brace your main switchboard squeeze at Fox, and slide her two g’s to alter her callout log, and to erase all documentation on Monroe’s calls to the two switchboards.”

Nat tapped my shoes. “All right. That’s fair enough.”

I lit a cigarette. “What else are you afraid of?”

Nat ticked points. “The upscut of that raid on your pad. Federal indictments. Open-court testimony on a guy who snuffs guys routinely. They raided my place and scared my wife half to death. I hit that Cuban guy with a fungo bat, which is ADW on a Federal agent. I know you vest-shot the three guys, which is worse, but then you’re braver and stupider than me. The list goes on and on. If you don’t perform for Parker and Bobby, life for us fools is preemptively over.”

I popped my briefcase. I grabbed a U.S. Customs/special agent’s badge and ID holder. Plus a small white calling card.

On the front: “Bill Parker.” Plus his home phone number. In cursive, on the back: “This man is a close personal friend. Please extend him every courtesy.”

Nat snatched the swag and perused it. He wore a loud Hawaiian shirt. Goose bumps popped up his arms.

I tapped his feet. “You’re Customs, Phil’s Treasury. I want an extensive canvass. Up PCH a mile north and south of the Lawford house, and a half mile out from the Monroe house. Concoct jive cover stories. Buzz every house you talk to on Monroe and the Kennedys. Work for defamation *and* exoneration. At the same time, go for times and dates that might prove verifiable. Keep detailed logs, and hit the not-at-homes until they *are* home. I want certifiably depraved shit on Monroe—because that’s one level of our assignment. The second level is safeguarding the Chief’s FBI-boss deal with dipshit Bobby. Blackmail’s our only protection there. Get me Jack and sex, Jack and dope, Jack and jailbait, Jack and all those TV actresses Peter Lawford sets him up with. It’s a heavy-duty skank deal. And skank’s the only thing that will stop Bobby from waltzing us in front of a Federal grand jury.”

Nat whistled. “That’s a two-week canvass. What will you be doing all that time?”

“Trying to decode Monroe’s last four months on earth, based on what we’ve got so far.”

Nat stood up and stretched. “We should find work for Kareem.”

“Gates needs a man inside the mosque at Slauson and Broadway. It’s a hundred and fifty a week and expenses. And tell Kareem no liquor stores. There’s stakeout squads all over the southside, and they’re looking to take scalps.”

Nat smiled. “Lois called me. She’s in town, and she wants you to know she’s been thinking about you.”

—

Lois ran nocturnal. Her métier was the late-night phone call. She snared her husband that way. She snared me with calls to KKXZ.

She always made me wait. I perched by my phone, up to 1:30. Waiting implodes me. I shook loose and drove to Brentwood. The dumpy house. Dunoon Lane. The “sickly old lady” with binoculars. It was a lead. It was a peep-the-peeper task.

I found the place. It was a stand-alone eyesore. Faded peach stucco. Weed-clumped grass. Add-on top floor, built askew. It’s two hundred yards northeast of the Monroe spread. There’s a flat roof and downward eyeball path. A ’49 Ford stood in the driveway. It accessorized the dump.

I parked and walked up the driveway. The Ford reeked of sickbed balm and stale sweat. The windows were down. I penlight-flashed the steering column and checked the registration strap. Natasha Lytess owned the heap. I made the name, fast.

Monroe’s ex-acting coach. Mordant per Monroe. A standout eulogizer. Monroe and her shopworn enchantment.

I flashed the front seat and strafed a Vicente Pharmacy bag. I reached in and pulled out a vial of four-grain Dilaudid. *There’s* some enchantment.

I unscrewed the vial and popped two Big “D” ’s. I walked back to my sled and grabbed my binoculars. The house had thick window ledges and raised cement ornamentation. I circled the perimeter and gauged hand- and footholds. The north-side neighbor’s fence would cloak me.

I hung the binoculars around my neck and climbed a drainpipe. The cement strips held my weight. Two footholds, two handholds. I vaulted up on the roof.

The Monroe house was south-southwest. I walked to the edge of the roof and dialed my distance gauge tight. I saw blue-green grass, night-muted stucco, and yellow window light.

It’s the east-facing living room window. I *know* that room. I’ve peeped it and worked it and smelled it. The colors were off, the shadows were wrong, a candle light flickered, left to right.

I dialed in, dialed out, stepped back and reframed. The dope hit me. It cocooned me, warm and safe. It resituated the shadows and magnified the candlelight.

Lowell Farr walked across the room. She wore a Pali High sweater and a red beret and carried a paintbrush. She stood by the north wall and painted a woman perched on a bedside.

She worked in bold red. The dope let me mute and enhance shades at will. Lowell switched brushes for the detail work. Black paint for definition, flesh tones, blue-gray for the eyes. Blond hair, then gray, then chalk white. It's Monroe twice her age. Lowell sees her inside out.

She switched brushes. She blacked out the bedside perch and recolored Monroe's hair. She x-ed out the old Monroe's face and gave her a tall and ungainly girl's body. She painted an arrow. It extended from the X mark to a clean white swatch of wall.

She painted a close-up there. It was her own face in extremis. She got the kid good looks, the bumpy nose, the not quite buck teeth. She borrowed Marilyn's eyes and something from her smile. *She's* the enchantress. *She* achieves transmogrification.

24

(LOS ANGELES, 11:20 A.M., FRIDAY, 8/17/62)

Silver Lake. Due east of Hollywood. High hills above the smog line. I climbed in low gear. Morty Bendish had a stilt house off the reservoir. Silver Lake was mudslides and collapsed foundations. It was a beatnik/film-slave enclave. Wags called it the "Swish Alps."

I afterglowed on the filched dope and Lowell Farr's art show. I slept in the Intel cot room. I rolled out early and worked.

Lab work first. I dropped off the frozen jizz caked on the Monroe/Cruel Stud fuck pix and buzzed Ray Pinker for quick results. Ray cited his *829* preserved jizz vials. It would take at least three weeks to log comparison tests.

Phone work next. I got out my cater-biz list and called seventeen outfits. I got zero, zilch, nein, and nyet. Nobody knew a cater waiter named Rick Dawes. Nobody knew a cater waitress named Eleanora. Cater waiters were by nature dicey. They were all fly-by-nights.

I ran "Rick Dawes" and "Richard Dawes" through LAPD and Sheriff's R&I. I got hits on twenty-four Negroes and two old white guys. A phone book check fizzled. There were no Dick Daweses or Richard Daweses in the L.A. area white pages.

Dawes to José Bolaños. I stiffed formal file-request calls to state and Fed HUAC and the Mexican State Police. They pledged results "within one month." I called Miller Leavy and begged favors. He refused to brace BHPD for their 459-string files. "No, Freddy—not off a slip of paper and one illegal wiretap call." I told Miller to contact Mr. and Mrs. Willard D. Farr and request an interview with seventeen-year-old Lowell. Miller balked. "He's a *big* Republican fat cat! Mayor Yorty would kill me!"

Scratch Lowell for now. I called my casting director contact at Warner's and dunned him for dish on Natasha Lytess. He checked his files and dished good.

Born in Russia, 5/16/11. Studied under the "revisionist" Vsevolod Meyerhold. Immigrates to the United States. Tanks as a second-lead actress. Gets a drama coach gig at Metro. Meets Monroe on *The Asphalt Jungle.* Becomes infatuated with her. Follows her. They work studio to studio and film to film. Bunks with Monroe briefly. It's now 2/56. Monroe's shooting *Bus Stop* at Fox. Lytess has become clingy and overbearing. Lezbo rumors circulate. Monroe and Fox dump Lytess cold. Lytess plagues Monroe with calls and weepy letters. Monroe's lawyer makes her desist. '56 to '62: some sort of torrid torch burns—

There's Morty's hut. It's all space-age prefab. Aluminum panels and tinted Plexiglas. A crushed-rock carport. Stilt-anchored terraces and three dark rooms. *L.A. Mirror* foto art throughout. Morty on dead-body calls, Morty on the gas-chamber beat up at Quentin.

I parked and walked right in. I heard Morty cough and beelined for the rear terrace. A breeze stirred, the stilts swayed, a striped awning flapped.

Morty worked at a stand-up draftsman's table. The surface was crammed with foto proofs, news clips, pencils, pens, and pocket-size pamphlets. Morty hunkered low and proofread. He saw me and rolled his eyes.

"Hi, Freddy. It's been a while."

I said, "Can the piece on Marilyn Monroe and the Kennedys. Bill Parker finds that sort of thing offensive."

Morty scratched his balls. He wore a soiled T-shirt and plaid boxer shorts.

"I covered the interfaith prayer breakfast at Temple Beth Shalom. Bill was half in the bag. He told Cardinal McIntyre and Rabbi Magnin the story of Come-san-Chin, the Chinese cocksucker. He shouldn't drink in public."

I yocked. "Give up your source on the Monroe piece."

Morty tossed me a pamphlet. The title: *Weird-O Death of a Sex Siren,* by Mr. Fearless Fuzz. The cover art: Monroe in a Milady brassiere ad, circa '46.

I quick-skimmed the text. Fearless Fuzz "scandalously scoped" the sleek Marilyn, dead in her bed. Her "boss bod" was dotted with leprous puncture marks. Fearless Fuzz "determinedly deduced" that the Kennedy mob decreed her death. Their motive? To quash "rampant rumors" of her liaisons with John and Robert and their plans to establish a "Mormon ménage" at the president's Camp David retreat. A civil wrongs gang performed the snuff. Marilyn's collection of Harry Belafonte records underscored her "race-mixer tendencies."

Fearless Fuzz predicted the collapse of the Kennedy mob and mass suicides within the Kennedy family—once the *whole* story is laid out in this groundbreaking pamphlet series.

I lit a cigarette. "How far out in the ozone does this Monroe/ Kennedy rumor fly?"

Morty bummed a cigarette. "It's afloat in hip circles, where everyone spritzes. What *true* insiders—like you and me—know is that Jack's a two-minute man, and that he allows an hour for his assignations, which includes the martini, the club sandwich, and the conversation. And before you ask, Bobby don't stray. Take that to the bank."

I said, "Who's Fearless Fuzz?"

Morty dredged his ears with a paper clip. "A nutty West L.A. Division patrol cop named Jack Clemmons, who got the call to view the dead Marilyn. You know me, Freddy. I go for verisimilitude, and even then, my standards are low. If I dig it, I figure it's true, and I publish it. Corroboration is strictly for Communists and fags."

Clemmons. Deedee Grenier snitched him off. He was tight with ex-cop/lounge lizard Norm Krause. Big Norm worked Wilshire Motors, circa '49. He extorted now–U.S. senator Tom Kuchel on a fruit beef. Clemmons and Krause: right-wing nuts and pals of pamphlet putz Frank Capell.

I sifted it. I drained it and strained it dry. I pointed to a stack of tabloid foldouts. They were ultralurid and green-inked.

Morty pooh-poohed me. "It's a private skank sheet that I sell to subscribers. Don't worry—mum's the word on Marilyn and the K boys."

I peeled off five C-notes and dropped them on the table. Morty went *Oooh-la-la.*

"In consideration of your squelching the Monroe piece and burning all the beaver shots, along with the negatives."

Morty went wistful. *Oh bird thou never—*

"Somebody snitched off your piece to Daryl Gates at Intel. Who do you think?"

Morty picked his nose. "My guess is Motel Mike Bayless, at SHIT. Gates and Motel Mike trade dirt tips on a regular basis. It's like baseball cards. I'll trade you dirt on the Muslims if you trade me dirt on some *faigelah* deputy browning guys in Ferndell Park. Motel Mike's a *ganef.* Maybe he's got his own hustle going."

I tossed a slider. "That kidnap babe, Gwen Perloff. She vibes bait girl to me. What have you heard?"

Morty tee-heed. "I heard you and the Hats dusted one of the kidnap guys, and now Parker and Gates fear repercussions."

"*Perloff,* Morty. What have you heard?"

"I heard she's been around. I heard she couriers sketchy notes and bearer bonds for mogul types like Darryl Zanuck, Jack Warner, and Lew Wasserman. I'd call that a bait girl–adjunct thing to do."

Bearer bonds. It confirmed rumors. Like the *Cleopatra* cash drain and Fox in deep shit.

—

The Pico gate guards waved me in. My new credential flummoxed them. I didn't slide them cash or wink. They went *You're seeing who?* I went *Don't fuck with me—I'm with the DA now.*

I cut over to the casting office. I parked outside and barged in brusque. The waiting room was packed with teenage girls in bikinis. They mulled around and practiced dance steps. They wore signboards marked with the name of the audition flick: *Twist Party Stakeout.*

They twisted and mash-potatoed all around me. I badged a stooge dispensing signboards and demanded a full credits sheet for Gwen Perloff. He dug through cubbyholes and passed me a glossy leaflet. I walked out to my car and went through it.

La Gwen. Her Fox credits dated back to 1951. They ran intermittent. Frequent Jantzen swimwear gigs diverted the flow. *Big* Gwen—5'10"/140. She always wore glasses. She part-time modeled for Eyeking Opticians. She played third leads in expose-the-wetback-problem screeds. She played soon-to-die sexpots in monster films. She played somebody's nympho mom in four recent exploit-the-surf-craze jobs.

It was snoresville. Darryl Zanuck's office was close by. I strolled over and stood by his private side door. I primped and pulled my coat back to display my belt shit. The door stood ajar. I ambled right in.

He saw me. He made me. He quashed a scowl. He scrolled my pedigree and barrage of crimes against Fox in two seconds.

My exposés. My smear jobs. My gay film folk exploited and Fox stars vilified. My bugged bathhouses and contract studs entrapped at the Manhole and the Cockpit.

Say something, Pops. Pretend you're not scared. Hide behind your big desk. Pace your office and act bluff.

Zanuck said, "All right. I know who you are. The gate guards buzzed me. You're on the lot, and you want something you think I—"

I pulled a leather wing chair up to the desk. I snagged a big cigar from a big humidor. I lit up and blew smoke rings. Zanuck went sclerotic red.

"It's about Gwen Perloff. I represent Bill Parker and the DA's Office. I thought I'd spare you the ignominy of a trip downtown."

Zanuck lit a cigar. The room fumed up. He popped two pills, on the sly. My bet: digitalis.

"I already spoke to a Sheriff's sergeant named Bayless. I was extremely forthcoming, and he seemed to be satisfied."

I went *Nix*. "Did you receive a blackmail demand?"

"No. You know the chain of events, because you were a participant. A wheezy old lady called me and informed me that Miss Perloff had been kidnapped. She gave me the names of two of the men holding Miss Perloff hostage, and the address where she was being held. The old lady didn't know the names of the men who actually grabbed Gwen. I called Bill Parker and explained the situation. He sent you and the Hat Squad in. You know the rest, because you were there."

I said, "Did you recognize the old lady's voice?"

"No."

"Did she call you through the Fox switchboard?"

"No. She called my direct office line."

"How'd she get the number?"

"I don't know."

"Could she have been an ex–Fox employee?"

"That thought occurred to me."

I plopped my feet on Daddy-O's desk. A family portrait capsized.

"Are you shtupping Gwen Perloff, Pops? Is *that* the lit fuse behind this whole deal? Is *that* how the old lady knew to call you?"

Zanuck gnawed his cigar. He bit through the end and severed it. He grabbed the burning part and snuffed out the ash. Wet tobacco popped off his lips.

"Miss Perloff and I have a mentor-protégée relationship."

I made the jack-off sign. "Give me the drift on her private life. Who else is poking her? Does she swing both ways? Do you put her out as bait to rope in big investors?"

Zanuck sputtered. He gagged on tobacco mulch and spit in his handkerchief.

I said, "How'd you meet her? Who introduced you? It was 'Some Enchanted Evening,' right?"

Zanuck wiped his face. His flush subsided. His eyes stayed red. He went albino white.

"I was walking through the accounting office. Someone—I can't recall who—said, 'Boss, this is Gwen.' "

A side bar adjoined Daddy-O's desk. I poured a double brandy and guzzled it.

"Rumors abound, Pops. They all pertain to your lox, *Cleopatra.* There's lots of talk that your execs and rank and filers are scuffling for bread, should the whole studio tank. Some of the shit's legal, some of it's not. I got a tip that Gwen Perloff was running bearer bonds. For you and some other big studio guys."

Albino white back to red. The "bearer bonds" did it. I grabbed a fistful of cigars and waltzed.

—

Fox ran a twenty-man guard force. They were more than ornamental and less than full-sworn. Del Kinney ran the show. Mike Bayless said Kinney went back with Gwen Perloff. Kinney was pedigreed up the ying-yang. He was an ex–Sheriff's lieutenant and ex–ABC agent. He ran the Sheriff's mounted posse, '37–'38. He led the search for Mitzi Perloff's remains. The Fox cops were ex-LAPD and Sheriff's war hires. That means undraftable. That means low-rent by L.A.-cop standards. The PD and Sheriff's bounced them in '46. Get out—we've got our real guys back now. Kinney hit Fox in '53. He hired up a new kop korps. Kinney purportedly sold ABC vault liquor to the Aadland brothers. They were Foxed up the ying-yang. So was Del K.

The cop hut was locked tight. Nobody saw me. I grabbed a tethered golf cart and cruised the accounting building. It was soundstage-size. Somebody set Pops Zanuck up with Gwen P. "Boss, this is Gwen."

Accounting had its own parking lot. I counted fifty-four slots, full up. I cruised the rows and scrawled plate numbers in my notebook. It was one big DMV/R&I job. Hot names might jump out. Hey, look at *me. I'll* tell you about Gwen.

The plate job took two hours. I felt unraveled. I had Lois and Pat on the brain. I planned to buzz-bomb Lois tonight. I might buzz-bomb Pat tomorrow. Hit the Lawford spread. Hard-nose Peter. Coerce a look at Jack's top secret Girl Book. Pat might swoon. She loves to see Peter emasculated.

I split Fox. *Fox* felt unraveled. Zanuck lied per Gwen Perloff. Zanuck might fink my intrusion to Bill Parker. The Chief would dig it. The Parker-Kennedy deal observed laws and ignored laws and condoned shit-magnet intrusions. The intruders spawned fear and demanded information. The intrudees complied in the end.

Monroe Job #2 unraveled me. One evidential omission *glared.* Monroe, the pack rat. Her notes inked on paper scraps. Break-in #2. The Carole Landis morgue pic, 7/48. The magazine-letter notes. How many other perv notes and/or pix did Monroe receive? If any, where are they now?

Her known bank accounts have been examined. Her will has gone through probate. Where are her fan letters and pervy keepsakes? Nobody has turned an address book. Not me, not the West L.A. cops. Did she rent safe-deposit boxes under a fake name? I ran some quickie West L.A. bank checks and got zilch.

I drove downtown. I stopped at Andrews Hardware and purchased a shitload of office supplies. I drove to the PAB and hauled my gear up to Intel. I redid my cubicle, wall to wall.

I replicated my home corkboard motif. I marked Corkboard #1 *"Monroe"* and Corkboard #2 *"Kidnap."* I tacked note slips below the headings. Red slips for *"Monroe,"* green slips for *"Kidnap."* I pinned my eleven-page list of jungle-juiced recollections to Corkboard #1. I jotted red-slip observations and pinned them right below.

(Jack Clemmons views body. Early a.m., 8/5. Significant?) (JC tight with Norm Krause, ex–shakedown man.) (Deedee Grenier: Monroe KA. Attends Jeanne Carmen's pill parties. DG's brother: Paul Mitchell Grenier/ ex-con, fruit hustler, runs badger games with DG.)

Plus: *Lowell Farr, Pat & Peter Lawford, Roddy McDowall, Natasha Lytess. (Lytess moved into house near Monroe & was seen peeping her.)*

I jotted green-slip observations and stuck them to Board #2:

("It's a put-up job": Richard Danforth, 8/4/62.) (Mike Bayless: borderline credible per kidnap chronology and Sheriff's response.) (Darryl F. Zanuck: deceptive on all Perloff queries. Denies that Perloff couriers bearer bonds. Rebrace & further intimidate DFZ.) (Brace Del Kinney, per Perloff.) (Amass data before Perloff approach.)

My cubicle featured a pneumatic tube gizmo. It shot message slugs straight to R&I. I stuck my Fox accounting list into a slug and added a cover note: all plate numbers/all vehicle stats/all personal stats/all rap sheets. I stuck the slug in the chute and heard it go *whoosh.*

I segued to phone work. I called Nat and Phil and told them to take over the cold calls to catering and phone-message outfits. Yeah, *now*—fuckers. On *top* of your Lawford house/Monroe house canvasses. I grabbed a Yellow Pages and cold-called mid-Wilshire banks myself.

I talked to thirty-two branch managers. I logged thirty-two straight noes. It took four-plus hours. No, Lieutenant—Miss Monroe did *not* rent safe-deposit boxes from us.

She could have employed a pseudonym. She could have utilized forged credentials. She could have worn a bulked-up disguise.

Shit.

—

She'd prepare. She'd expect me to bring flowers. She'd expect a late arrival. She'd orchestrate the moment. She was a wait-by-the-phone type, just like me.

The Chapman Park Hotel and Bungalows. *Her* bungalow. The canopied swing on the terrace. It summoned rainstorms. I already felt a breeze and wet air. There were no visible stars at 10:20 p.m. Lois Nettleton wrote the book on enchantment.

I parked in the rear lot and walked over. She sniffed the air and laughed before she saw me. I overdid the flowers, like I always do.

There she is—my midnight caller.

In a twill skirt and blue oxford shirt. Note her brown penny loafers and white ankle socks. Add a new shag hairdo. She's back to her natural mid-brown.

I set the flowers in a room-service pitcher. The white wine and chilled lobster salad were laid out. Lois patted the swing and rocked it back. I sat down beside her. We put our heads together and looked up. Lois said, "Your cheap lime cologne." Pat always mentioned it.

I held a hand out. Three raindrops hit home. The Ambassador and Cocoanut Grove were just across Wilshire. Dick Haymes was headlining. I caught strains of "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?"

Lois smiled. She loved the song. I said, "So, how are they?"

Lois said, "Routine. I live there and work there. I'm married there. When I've had enough, I concoct an excuse to come find you."

I smiled. "I hope Nat didn't tell you what we've been doing."

Lois sipped wine. "He did. He told me I should tell you, because he would regret withholding from you, and you mustn't think he dissembled. He said he can't believe the sheer scope of it, and how many ways it could go wrong."

I said, "He's right about that. There's no certain way to get through it. That's the troubling thing."

Lois slipped off her wedding band and tossed it in the salad. A lightning flash backlit Wilshire.

"I thought you'd open with 'I've got some money. Let's go someplace and fall down together.' Nat said you were flush."

I went *Nix*. “Enough of that. You’re here, and I’m here, and you’re here for reasons that have nothing to do with me. You know I’ll always be here, and I’ll always be receptive.”

Lois lit a cigarette. “I got a costar gig at Metro. It’s a stewardess-in-love flick, and it shoots early next year. I’m in for early rehearsals, and I’m testing for two B films at Fox. One’s a teenage dance turkey, and the other’s about a ghetto rat who eats nuclear waste and grows ten feet tall. Fox is hitting the B flicks hard—they’re losing a fortune on *Cleopatra*.”

Rain doused our dinner. Lois put out her cigarette and shivered. She smiled as a segue. I caught the cue and carried her inside.

We undressed in the bedroom. I threw the south-facing curtains wide. We got lightning and high-tide Wilshire Boulevard. Lois killed the room lights.

We got in bed and played hide-and-seek under the sheets. We didn’t do it because we’ve never done it and we probably never will.

Hide-and-seek diminuendoed. We kissed and touched and entwined ourselves in new ways. We fell asleep. It rained all night. I saw Marilyn Monroe and Lowell Farr in a dream.

I recalled a certain day. Marilyn and Lowell walked to the front gate. They were visibly dirty. I figured they were rooting in the garden. That wasn’t right. They were too dirty. It had to be something else.

25

(LOS ANGELES, 10:05 A.M., SATURDAY, 8/18/62)

I parked on PCH. The curb slot was Lawford property. It put me in Federal breach. Doofus Peter had issued a restraining order against me.

I had Fed shit and Kennedy shit on the brain. Eddie Chacõn called me. He addressed me as *Señor* Freddy. He said *Señor* Bob requested my presence tomorrow. 9:00 a.m./the U.S. Attorney's Office. I brainwaved a jazzy evidence prop. *Señor* Ratfuck would *shit*.

I bopped down the north footpath. I wore last night's clothes with Lois and drove to Villa Pat. Scent-hound Pat. Maybe she'll be here, maybe she'll sniff last night's rendezvous.

The gate stood open. I hit the back terrace. Lawford lounged in a deck chair. He wore tennis whites. He sipped a Bloody Mary and bounced a volleyball.

He saw me. He sighed. He said, "You've got a nerve."

I looked left. A sliding glass door thumped and creaked. Pat looked out. I winked at her. She deadpanned it.

Lawford stood up. I pushed him back down and kicked the volleyball into the surf.

"I want the Girl Book you keep for Jack. We're going inside. You're going to hand it over."

Lawford said, "In a pig's eye."

I grabbed him by the hair and pulled him upright. He yelped. I bitch-slapped him and shoved him into the door glass. He hit nose-first. He yelped. He shouldered the door aside and tripped into the kitchen.

I followed him. He dripped blood on the floor and veered toward a side hallway. I crashed in the breakfast nook and poured myself a Bloody Mary. A Nikon camera was hooked on a wall peg. I checked the exposure slot. A full film roll was tucked in.

Lawford weaved back to the kitchen. He pressed a towel to his nose and lugged a leatherette notebook. I snatched it. The cover was presidential seal–embossed.

I yocked. Lawford said, “You’re a cheeky fucker.”

I said, “I’m on a top secret mission for the attorney general. Attorney General Kennedy would not condone the president’s access to this book.”

Pat chuckled. I pegged her location.

She’s in the back alcove. She’s out of sight and within eavesdrop range.

I flipped pages. The book featured overlit snapshots. Lesser-known actresses displayed their oooga-boooga. Full beaveroo, attached pubic hair. Names, phone numbers, measurements, and TV credits. Rubber-stamped once per page: “Ask not what your country can do for *YOU*—ask what *YOU* can do for your president!!!!!”

I adjusted the camera lens and shot the first eight pages. Lawford hovered and weaved. The nose-blot towel seeped and dripped blood.

“Where did you get it, and who put it together?”

Dipshit hijacked my Bloody Mary and siphoned it. He wiped blood and tomato residue off his lips.

“A cater waitress peddled it to me, maybe three months ago. I don’t recall her name, but she was a queen-bee type. She’d heard whispers about Jack and figured he’d gas on the book. Jack said he’d peruse it the next time he blew through.”

I tap-tapped the book. “Midsummer. A cater waitress named Eleanora called. You leched on her, and she pumped you on a cater waiter named Rick Dawes—who’s a possible fruit hustler and burglary suspect. Do you recall this conversation? Is Eleanora the ‘queen-bee type’ who sold you the Girl Book? Do you recall *any* aspect of this conversation?”

Lawford blubbered. “I don’t know, lots of chicks call me. I’m a well-known swinger and sugar daddy…. shit, my nose hurts.”

I shot the last eight pages. I nailed more overlit snapshots. Stewardesses displayed their woof-woof. Full beaveroo, attached pubic hair. Names, phone numbers, measurements, and airline affiliations. The stews wore their pillbox airplane hats.

Lawford tittered. “Every cloud has a silver lining. I know a doctor who makes house calls. He’ll give me a shot and put me in the Twilight Zone.”

I hauled the Girl Book to the kitchen sink. I hit the garbage disposal switch. Lawford bitch-shrieked. I ripped out pages and shoved them down the drain. Gears shredded and whined. Paper pulp and taped-hair strips blew back out. Orange rinds and coffee grounds spritzed my Sy Devore coat.

I grabbed the camera and split. Sink-rotor skreek and bitch shrieks trailed me. Somebody'd stuck a note under my wiper blades. I pulled it out.

Well, then.

"I like you again. P."

26

(LOS ANGELES, 9:04 A.M., SUNDAY, 8/19/62)

Ratfuck Bob sweat-boxed me.

Eddie Chacõn picked me up and drove me downtown. We smoked Darryl Zanuck's Cuban cigars en route. Eddie kvetched. *Aaaay, caramba*—your Magnum loads tore up the vests of three Federal agents and severely bruised our chests. I yuk-yukked it off.

Traffic snarled, the heat index spiked, the smog layer rose. Eddie double-parked his Fed sled and ushered me inside. I expected an office confab. Eddie dumped me in a twelve-by-twelve box.

One table, two chairs, three blank walls, one mirror wall. Hot-wired for sure.

Bobby was late. I'd brought my briefcase. I duplicated the Girl Book pix at Intel and tagged them "Exhibit A." Bobby despised Peter Lawford. The pix should fan that flame.

The door popped wide. I stood up. Bobby lugged a leather evidence case. I said, "Sir." He said, "Lieutenant." Our ensembles matched. We wore white shirts, blue ties, gray Dacron suits. It was off-the-rack cop couture.

Bobby unlatched the case and flashed the contents. My Hoffa gig evidence was crammed in. He pulled out a manila envelope and slid the case under the table. I sat down. He sat down across from me. Okay—it's on.

I suppressed a grin. Bobby emptied the envelope on the table. Three photo stacks tumbled. He snapped off the rubber bands and formed photo sprays.

Man Camera redux. We're back at my 8/4/62 break-in.

"Snapshots number five to twenty-seven. All living room. The left-behind electric wall mounts and telephone-mike spacers. Who do you think installed them?"

"Initially, I thought the prior owners of the house were being surveilled. I checked them out through the Realtors who sold the house to Monroe. They were complete squares, who in no way played as surveillance targets. The mounts look like FBI or L.A. Sheriff's issue, and SHIT does a lot of wire work for the Bureau's L.A. office. My best guess is that it was an amateur operation, which employed professional equipment. I'm thinking it's either hoods or rogue cops working independent."

Bobby said, "Okay. Marilyn's underwear drawer. Snapshots number four to eleven, the pornographic ones. Tell me the status of the crusted-on semen. Do you have a possible make on the man in the pictures?"

I said, "The semen is being comparison-tested at the LAPD lab. That entails going through hundreds of already logged samples. Phil Irwin and Nat Denkins have gone through a total of forty-three LAPD and Sheriff's mug books for leads on potential westside perverts. We came up 100% empty."

"Okay. Marilyn's undie drawer, again. The Carole Landis morgue photograph and the crazy note composed in magazine letters. What *is* this?"

I said, "It's most likely nutty fan bullshit. Those Landis morgue shots have been all over town since the late '40s. A morgue jockey duplicated them and made a million copies, and I used to peddle them myself. Some nut sent one to Monroe, and she ended up going out behind yellow jackets, just like Landis. *So what?* Likewise the letter—which brings up a request I want to make. It pertains to the issue of hidden fan mail."

The AG drummed the table. "I'm listening."

I drummed the table. The AG, RFK, Lord Fauntleroy incarnate. I mimicked his impatience.

"This occurred on May 19. I was surveilling the house and saw Monroe and Lowell Farr walk out the front door, very dirty. At first, I thought they were gardening in the backyard, but then I came to believe they were doing some digging under the house. I want a search-and-seizure warrant."

Bobby sighed. "I'll get you one. While you're begging favors, is there anything else?"

Scrawny lace-curtain Irish cocksuck—

"I misplaced a sheet of paper with one hundred and forty-three license-plate numbers on it. I'd tailed Monroe out to the Valley, but I lost her. I ran a radius check to run through the DMV. The locale played weird for Monroe. Also, I've got a memory of that location that I can't quite pull up. It's messing with me, and it seems to be a memory from *after* I tailed Monroe that day."

“You’re thinking that the sheet of paper might be in with the ones that Eddie and his boys removed from your apartment? All right, I’ll look for it.”

I rocked my chair back and stretched. Baby Bobby tapped his coat pockets. He smoked cigars, like Big Baby Jack. I tossed him a hijacked Cuban. It bounced off his necktie and hit the table.

He scowled. I flicked my lighter and leaned close. He took the light.

“Let’s move on to ‘Eleanora’s’ call to Peter Lawford. What are you doing about following up on the ‘Rick Dawes’ burglary lead?”

I ticked points. “I’ve got Phil and Nat cold-calling every cater-waiter service and telephone-answering outfit in L.A. They’ve been stonewalled so far. Miller Leavy refuses to dun the Beverly Hills PD for their burglary files.”

Bobby smoked his cigar. “As well he should. I wouldn’t mess with municipal police departments, either.”

I popped my briefcase. I’d prepped my own photo sprays. Two cardboard sheets and Scotch tape. Twenty-four TV actress and stewardess pix. Girl Book de-luxe. All nude/full beaver.

I laid them on the table. Up close and offensive. Bobby examined them.

“I took these off Peter Lawford yesterday. They were displayed in a binder embossed with the presidential seal. Lawford told me that a ‘queen-bee type’ cater waitress passed the pictures to him. Lawford intended to give the so-called Girl Book to the president the next time he passed through L.A., but he does not recall his telephone chat with ‘Eleanora.’ ”

Bobby stubbed his cigar on the floor. His killer gaze decohered. He full-on *blushed.*

“I owe you a thank-you for taking the book away from Peter. I owe Mr. Denkins a thank-you for his reinterpreting quite a few of Marilyn’s calls to the White House and Justice. I owe you a warning as to your blunt and overly familiar references to members of my family, and I would caution you never to mention my sister Pat.”

I leaned in. “Fuck your thank-yous, warnings, and cautions, Mr. Kennedy. In lieu of them, you might assure me that you will not take the evidence that I accrued while in Jimmy Hoffa’s employ and call me up before a Federal grand jury to testify against him, which may well get me two slugs in the head in the long run.”

Bobby leaned in. His killer gaze *re*-cohered.

“Under no circumstances. Because I know that Bill Parker has charged you to build a subsidiary dirt file on my brother and me, to supplant the derogatory profile on Marilyn that the Chief and I have agreed on. It's his hole card to assure that my brother and I won't renege on our promise to can Hoover and give Parker the big spot. Can you candidly tell me that that is not Parker's design?"

I said, "No. I can't tell you that."

"All right. What have you dug up on us so far?"

I cracked my knuckles. "A right-wing-nut cop wrote a crazy tract about the two of you and Monroe. I put the skids to it. I confirmed that there's no mention of you and Jack—I mean, the president—in the twelve million press clips I've read. The president's inclinations are well known in film-biz circles—but not outside of them—and my canvasses have confirmed that a dozen times over. So far, nobody's inclined to talk. Jack—I mean the president—is safe there."

Bobby said, "Call him Jack. Do you think I'm so pious and chickenshit that I'd object to that?"

I cracked my thumbs. "Hoffa concerns me. It's not so much you slamming him in court, and me getting subpoenaed. It's his attitude in regards to you busting up his Monroe gig. He's *nonchalant.* He's paying me and my boys our bonus bread, unsolicited. He's got to be playing a money angle somewhere, or this whole blackmail-the-prez-and-the-AG-over-movie-star-pussy deal makes no damn sense."

Bobby dug through his evidence case. He snagged a sheaf of tap-call transcripts and quick-skimmed them.

"This is Marilyn and my sister. Marilyn tells Pat that her house has been burgled, things have been moved around, she's received nasty letters and breather calls. How do you interpret it? Is this the jerk who sent the Carole Landis picture and the magazine-letter note, or is it just more of the humdrum crazy-fan ilk?"

I shrugged. "I don't know, but my guess is that she's performing for Pat. Boo-hoo, 'I'm scared, look at me.' Pat's all empathy. She's Monroe's perfect audience."

"Yes, she is. And she's your perfect audience, as well. Don't go all red-faced, Lieutenant. I'm the brother Pat confides in, and her confidences err on the candid side."

I grabbed my briefcase and stood up. My legs fluttered. Bobby skunk-eyed me.

"Take care, son. You toss a kidnap suspect off a cliff, and it can come back and haunt you."

27

(LOS ANGELES, 9:20 A.M., MONDAY, 8/20/62)

Three-man dig. That's Nat, Phil, and me. We stood outside Fifth Helena. We brought shovels, pry bars, and entrenching tools. Bobby K got our warrant. Miller Leavy ran it by a Superior Court judge. It sanctioned us to bust down the door at 9:30.

We lounged by said door. We chain-smoked. Fifth Helena was flat quiet. West L.A. patrol cops ran the party kids off last night. They popped six kids for vag and possession of maryjane. I read the arrest sheets. Lowell Farr dodged the rousts.

I was glad. Lowell was a witchy kid. She B and E'd the pad and communed with Monroe on her own stick. I peeped her from Natasha Lytess' roof. I couldn't shake her wall art. Monroe as herself/herself as Monroe. The imagery shook me.

I fidgeted. I had fan-letter caches, private-mail caches, and psycho-fan caches on the brain. Monroe's will went through probate. Daryl Gates wrangled an inventory. "Routine correspondence" went to her lawyer. Small sums of money, books, and furniture went to her white-trash kin. The will took me nowhere.

Lab tests and records checks, likewise.

The jizz-stained photos—still being checked. The file runs on José Bolaños—no kickbacks yet. No R&I kickbacks on the cars parked outside Fox Accounting. I called Fox Personnel and requested a list of all Accounting Department employees. A supervisor blew me off. *Who introduced Gwen Perloff to Darryl F. Zanuck?* I compiled a list of names from Peter Lawford's Girl Book. I added physical descriptions and airline affiliations for the stews. I submitted the list to the file-room cops at Intel and R&I. I logged no results yet.

Phil tapped his watch. *It's 9:30—let's go.*

I had Intel's master key. One turn got us in. The living room was swamp hot. Nat and Phil opened windows. A cross breeze circulated. I walked straight to the south-facing wall. Lowell Farr's portrait had been obliterated.

Kid vandals sprayed it with kandy apple paint. Kid pundits scrawled it up. *"Fuck Apartheid," "Surf Nazis Rule," "We Shall Overcome," "Goldwater in '64."*

We fanned through the house. We looked for wall, floor, and closet-space inconsistencies. Marilyn and Lowell were dirty that day. They weren't digging *outside.* I scoped the exterior twenty times since that day. They were digging *inside.* It had to be.

The walls sat flush. They felt solid. The closet floors were void of trapdoor cracks and hinges. We studied the floors. The house was '20s vintage. All the rugs were gone. Bedrooms, hallways, living room. The floors were down to scuffed hardwood planes.

The bedroom floors were pristine. No mismatched planks, no hinge-crack indicators. The hallways dittoed the bedrooms. We walked back to the living room. The walls were solid white stucco. I eyeballed the floorboards, Man Camera tight.

Back and forth, up and down, sideways. North, south, east, and west. One time, two times, three. What's that by the south-facing wall? That's the kid-artwork wall. What's that right—*there.*

Anomalous floor planks. Extending off the artwork wall, five planks across. Unscuffed new wood. Extending out six feet. Planed and sanded. Enjoined to old wood planks. Rugs covered the new planks before. I caught the inconsistency now.

Nat and Phil hovered. I pointed down. Bright lads—their brain bulbs popped bright.

I saw a quarter-inch crack at the wall juncture. It extended across all five planks. I stuck my pry bar in at a midpoint and pulled up.

A hinge mechanism kicked in. All five planks creaked and sprang up at a forty-five-degree angle. Nat and Phil gasped. I looked straight down.

It's a hideaway/stash hole/big secret compartment. Rough wood foundation walls and a packed-dirt floor. The walls run identical to the living room walls. There's a wall-mounted ladder right below me.

Nat whistled. Phil handed me a flashlight. I went down the stairs. The temperature dropped. The dirt stink made me sneeze.

I flashed the wall right beside me. My beam hit a light switch. I flipped it. An overhead bulb lit the stash hole. I saw *this:*

The floor, the walls. A basement built on the living room floor plan. Empty, except for *this:*

A big steamer trunk. Old and weather-beaten. A clasp-affixed top pushed up at a right angle. Two sets of footprints from the trunk to the ladder. Coming and going prints. Easily ID'd.

Marilyn had small feet. Lowell had big feet. I saw drag marks from the south wall to the middle of the hole. The girls dragged the trunk over. The big foot/small foot prints spelled it plain. They opened the trunk under the overhead bulb. They wanted maximum light.

I walked over to the trunk. Nat and Phil tumbled down the ladder. They coughed and sneezed and walked up. I knelt down and framed close-ups. Nat and Phil lit the trunk. I went through it, item by item. I inventoried *this:*

A crayon sketch. Red crayon on old sketch paper. The sketch depicts a late ’40s moderne house. The sketch is dated 6/22/48. The sketch is signed NJB. The initials *must* designate Norma Jean Baker. It was Monroe’s kosher name then.

A gummed stack of physician’s prescription pads. Also old and weathered. Embossed with “Sheldon Mandel/M.D., Practice in Psychiatry.” Plus a Bedford Drive/Beverly Hills address. Plus a four-digit Crestview phone number. The four digits denote the 1940s.

A rotted paper bag. Spilled maryjane buds and leaves. Fat buds and leaves. It’s good maryjane.

Empty pill vials. Legibly labeled. Scripts filled at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel pharmacy. Scripts for phenobarbital and sodium secobarbital. Prescribed to Norma Jean Baker. Prescribed by Dr. Sheldon Mandel.

The “Norma Jean Baker” had a black ink line running through it. Monroe printed “Not my name anymore” beneath it. Man Camera reprise. I went through Monroe’s trash, one month back. I found an empty Nembutal vial. She’d crossed out the “Marilyn Monroe.” She wrote “Not my name anymore” beneath it.

Man Camera reprise. I B and E’d Ralph Greenson and Milt Wexler’s office. I played a Greenson-Monroe tape. Monroe told Greenson she had Jack-and-Bobby dirt going back fourteen years. That meant 1948.

Here’s the final item. It looks brand-new. It’s a laminated business card.

The card advertises “Foxtone Services.” It features a leering-fox logo. The furry fucker is panting. He’s got a big forked tongue. He wears a fetishistic spiked collar and sports a jumbo two-headed *schvantz.* The card reads:

“Foxtone Services/PO box 6969/L.A., Calif/Your Wife Or Mine?/ Investment Opportunities”

*FOX*tone. 20th Century–*FOX*. *Cleopatra* as cash drain, *FOX* in the shit, *Cleo* bleeding *FOX* dry.

—

I broomed west on Fountain. The Foxtone fox hovered behind me. He was the hellhound on my trail. We were three hours into the chase.

He chased me downtown. I went by Intel, Ad Vice, and the Postal Inspection Service. I got the lowdown on PO box 6969. The 69 box block was assigned to “Bev’s Switchboard.” It was off of Fountain and Crescent Heights. The proprietress was one Bev Shoftel.

It’s a legitimate storefront mail drop. The clients possess front-door keys. The keys permit them to enter and grab their mail, twenty-four hours. Bev caters to low-life Hollywood. Lunatic actors and actresses, call girls and boys, smut-film purveyors, hipster artistes.

I went by the DA’s Office and jacked Miller Leavy. *Get me a search warrant, boss.* Miller said, “The U.S. mail is *Federal.* You’ll need a *Federal* warrant.” I zipped over to the U.S. Attorney’s Office and hit up a second-rung guy. I dropped Bobby the K’s name and laid out my rationale for the paper. The dink said he’d think about it.

I pulled up to the storefront and parked. I sized the place up. It had triple-thick window glass. Plus a steel-plate door and roll-up window mesh. It looked impregnable.

The door was propped open. I walked in. The dump was small post office size. It was box-shaped. Pull-out mail slots covered the side and back walls. They ran floor to ceiling. Bev Shoftel sat in a lawn chair and sipped a Lucky Lager. A transistor radio belched a Dodgers game. Bev wore pedal pushers and a Dodgers scoop neck.

She saw me and went *Show me.* I walked up and flipped my credential case. She shook her head. I got out my billfold. She crooked a finger. I dropped three C-notes in her lap.

She said, “I don’t reveal my clients’ names. I don’t snitch off the specifics of what they do. Your three yards entitles you to an overview and no more.”

I said, “Box 6969.”

Bev said, “Aaahhh, the much-coveted *soixante-neuf* series of boxes. I will guardedly state that the whole series is rented by so-called entrepreneurs employed at 20th Century–Fox. They’re out to capitalize on the *Cleopatra* fiasco. My fool renters are hawking Fox Savings Bonds, along with whatever other fool scams they can think up.”

—

The same bungalow. The same terrace. The same canopied swing. The same white wine and cold lobster salad.

I said, “Eddie Fisher’s back at the Losers. I’m working the gigs. They just fell back in my lap. Three nights only. You should check it out.”

Lois checked the sky. There were no clouds at dusk. That meant no rain.

“What’s wrong with you? All this intrigue you’ve got going isn’t enough?”

“Come on. It’s three nights at a nightclub.”

“You work yourself frazzled, you work your men frazzled. Nat and I gab on the phone, as you well know. He said he and Phil are putting in twelve-hour days on the canvass.”

I laughed. “Nat’s indiscreet, but he’s got limits. He’s not going to give up the inside dirt on the deal, which I know you’ve been angling for.”

Lois lit a cigarette. “He told me you’ve got a thing going with Pat Lawford.”

“He’s not quite up-to-date.”

“I saw her with her sisters at the Peppermint Lounge. She’s too tall and too thin. I know her type. Coffee, cigarettes, and two salads a day, tops.”

I jiggled her hands. “Pat saw you on *Alcoa Presents.* She said you’re short, and your eyes are too close together. She said you look like a Siamese cat.”

Lois howled. “I do look like a Siamese cat.”

I laced up our fingers and stretched our arms full length. Full dusk hit. The temperature dipped.

“The canvass is a bust. It had to be done, so we did it, and I’ll hit some of the places Nat and Phil marked as questionable. The Hollywood people have heard stories, but not the rich squarejohn folks. Here’s the bottom line. Jack and Marilyn. It’s out in the ether, and the ether’s running thin.”

Lois twirled her ashtray. “The story’s inevitable. Jack and Marilyn. Bobby and Marilyn, when the wind drifts a certain way. People pick up glimmers or bits of stories, and they embellish like mad.”

I feigned a yawn. Jack and Marilyn/Bobby and Marilyn. Nat and Lois talk. Pat confides in Bobby. It’s all extraneous yak-yak.

“Let’s change the subject. You’ve got the stewardess-in-love flick, and you’re reading for this schlock guy at Fox, Maury Dexter. I heard he’s a pillhead in the Freddy O. mode. What else? Oh, yeah—he’s got a giant-rat job and a twist flick, and you'll have to settle for scale."

Lois dropped an ice cube in her wineglass and kicked off her shoes. She rechecked the sky. No summer storm tonight.

"I'll get both jobs, and I'll get more than scale. I'm a name in New York, and Maury knows it. I'll play second fiddle to a large rodent and a bevy of stacked high school girls. They twist all night, while a psychopath stalks them, and a daring cop lays in wait. Can you believe it?"

I said, "*Twist Party Stakeout,* right? I was passing through Fox and caught some auditions."

Lois rolled her eyes. "That's it. And the truly funny thing is that some working L.A. cop wrote the screenplay."

I hooked a chair over. We put our feet up and slouched on the swing. Lois laid her head on my shoulder. I smelled her green-tea shampoo.

"Here's a curveball. Have you ever been headshrunk? It's not a critique. All actresses go that route, don't they?"

Lois tickled me. "No, not all actresses. I've never been headshrunk, let alone headshrunk by Ralph R. Greenson, currently well known to readers of the *L.A. Herald-Express.*"

I sighed. "You're right. I've got this job on the brain. Monroe's on the couch with Greenson, but she's looking for a more radical shrink who'll cosign her criminal tendencies, and Nat and Phil and I found a pill vial prescribed by—"

Lois squeezed my arm. "A shrink named Shelley Mandel, right? I talked to Nat a few hours ago, and he told me. Well, Doc Shelley never shrunk me, but he cruised all the pageant girls back when I was Miss Chicago."

I whistled. " '48, right? '48 into '49?"

"Right. I was a Miss America runner-up, and the show junketed through L.A. The big postwar VD epidemic was at its height, and our chaperones had Doc Shelley lecture us. He also passed out prophylactic kits, but that was strictly on the sly. I read him as harmless. He leched on the girls and wrote pep-pill scripts, which shocked a few of us, but not me. He purportedly knew all sorts of call girls and bottom-line starlets, which is hardly startling news, given the time and place."

Confluence, showbiz, postwar hijinx. I grabbed it and filed it.

Lois rubbed her chin on my shoulder. Her shag hairstyle worked. Miss Chicago, '48—despite her weird eyes.

I said, "Do you love me?"

Lois said, “I’ll think about it.”

PART 4

SHRINK WRAP

(AUGUST 21–28, 1962)

28

(LOS ANGELES, 10:30 A.M., TUESDAY, 8/21/62)

Doc Greenson served coffee and cakes. He'd served Monroe martinis. I peeped their sessions at this selfsame spot.

Miller Leavy set up the confab. He furnished my cover. I was adjunct fuzz on coroner Curphey's "Blue Ribbon Panel." The panel's goal: to analyze the glut of suicides and inadvertent OD's for creative types. It was a full-fledged phenomenon. I cited Monroe and Carole Landis. I thought bloviator Greenson would bloviate on Monroe and Landis. He'd groove them as sicko sisters under the skin. He didn't bloviate on them. He bloviated self-justification.

"It's these radio call-in shows hosted by women with undergrad psych degrees. The callers are 99% women. They despise male psychiatrists and attribute the basest of pathologies to those who treat female celebrities. I'll concede that I might have been overly available, but to assert that I was at Marilyn's 'beck and call,' as some of those women have, is preposterous."

I witnessed it. Deedee Grenier embellished it. Greenson was Marilyn's slave and faux daddy. He pulled his pud while he spun tapes of their sessions. Marilyn tweaked him with lurid sex jive.

"There *have* been shrinks who've violated their psychiatric briefs by performing gynecological exams right there in their offices, so these accusations do have a basis in fact. I could name you—"

I cut in. "Dr. Shelley Mandel. An informant told me that he gave starlets and call girls prescription pads as stocking stuffers. Of course, that was back in the swinging postwar era."

Greenson sipped coffee. His hands shook. The cup and saucer rattled.

"Shelley was a gifted immunologist. He specialized in sulfa drugs and dabbled in psychiatry. He liked racy young women to an untoward degree, rather like the late Marilyn and powerful politicians."

I said, "I was at a party, shortly after Miss Monroe's death. People were discussing Miss Monroe’s liaisons with John and Robert Kennedy, as if they were established facts.”

Greenson buffed his glasses on his necktie. He spotted cake crumbs on his shirt and brushed them off.

“You’re straying rather far from the panel’s mandate, Lieutenant. But I’ll humor you, because Marilyn’s fantasy apparatus intensely interests me.”

I said, “I’m listening, sir.”

Greenson smirked. “Well, there’s no smut here, so I’m afraid you’ll have to indulge my abstractions. Simply put, Marilyn was a congenital liar and a ham-handed fantasist, with a very weak grasp on verisimilitude. Her initial perceptions of John F. Kennedy were quite lucid, and I believed them because she portrayed the president as feckless, shallow, usurious, and even more self-involved than she was. She did not inflate the sexual value of their first coupling, but she gradually, session by session, escalated her own importance to the point where the president of the United States was no more than her sexual submissive, while his brother Robert feared for his mental solvency and took over the role of Marilyn’s lover as an ‘issue of national security.’ From there, Marilyn’s romantic fantasies grew to include the banishment of Jacqueline and Ethel Kennedy, mass divorce, and Marilyn installed as First Lady. Concurrently, her alcoholism and drug addiction spiraled, apace with her fantasy life.”

She knew you dug the stories. You fed the cues/you said, “Jump”/ Marilyn said, “How high?”

My office break-in. That tape I played. Marilyn says she’s got filth on Jack and Bobby. It was fourteen-year-old filth. That meant ’48. Carole Landis suicided in ’48. Monroe knew Shelley Mandel in ’48. 1948 triggered jackpots.

I said, “I’m fishing here, Doctor. Did Miss Monroe come to the realization that her relationship with the brothers was entirely fantastical, and at that point did her fantasies turn vindictive?”

Greenson checked his watch. My questions vexed him. Some Blue Ribbon panelist. I wore him thin.

“Yes. Her narrative arc described her sexual dominance, her instigation of domestic chaos, and her intention to ‘get’ Jack and Bobby for the ‘degradation and debasement’ they inflicted upon her fourteen years ago, although she never stated just what that degradation and debasement was. Once they were revealed, it would strip them of their power, and she’d beneficently help them to rebuild their lives.”

I said, "That was white of her."

Greenson said, "Touché."

I twirled my coffee cup. "Miss Monroe claimed to have received breather calls and perverted letters during the last days of her life, and she told friends that her home had been burgled. Did she tell you this, and did you believe her?"

Greenson said, "No. She told me the same thing. It was patent fantasia."

"I understand that she was in the market for a 'more radical psychiatrist.' One who would encourage her more aggressive fantasies."

Greenson flinched. "I don't recall her pursuing that line of chat with me."

You lying sack of shit.

—

Paul de River. Real name Paul Joseph Israel. Reconstructive surgeon and ophthalmologist. A psychiatric dabbler, à la Shelley Mandel.

I parked outside his office. He had a top-floor duplex spot off of Oakwood and La Brea. It was lower-Hollywood residential. He must keep criminal-patient files and psycho-treatment narcotics. Top-floor spots were rough entries. You had downstairs neighbors. You had exposed landings. De River knew from security. The door frames and window casings were steel-reinforced. That meant interior bolt mounts. Note the "Brinks-patrolled" decal on the front door.

My thoughts ping-ponged. I stalled the door knock. I did law library and Intel file research last night. I exhumed Carole Landis and Mitzi Perloff. I put Del Kinney and Doc de River under the lens.

The Hearst rags gave Landis big play. She was twenty-nine. She lost at love. She was a yelp-for-help suicide attempter. Her career was skidsville. She breezed through husbands. She was now on #4. She had a big spread in the Palisades. Boo-hoo. Nobody loves me. She had a torrid tilt with Brit heartthrob Rex Harrison. "Sexy Rexy" refused to dump waifly wife, Lili Palmer. Carole pulled the plug—7/5/48.

It was straight-up suicide. It was investigated and adjudicated as such. It's fourteen years later. Sexy Rexy's playing Julius Caesar in *Cleopatra.* Call it boo-hoo redux. Marilyn Monroe offs herself. Some nut sent her a Landis morgue shot and a note.

"I loved her before I loved you."

It was fourteen years ago. The nut had to be at least an adolescent then. ’48 to ’62. Who’d the nut perv on during that interval? Did the nut send the pic and note and leave it at that? Is the nut the burglar-breather that Monroe beefed to Pat and others? Did the nut pull similar shit with Landis way back when? I checked the Landis DB file at Homicide. Souvenir-hunter cops had picked it clean. All Landis-to-Monroe throughlines had been snipped.

Landis to Monroe. On to Mitzi Perloff. The law library kept a full run of *Vivid Detective* magazines. The rag wrote up the Mitzi snatch in the May ’37 issue. Mitzi vanished on 2/17/37. She was eight. Sister Gwen turned eleven in March. The girls were Hollywood born-and-bred. They lived in a foster home on De Longpre and Wilton. Mitzi was a roamer. She picked flowers in the gardens of Immaculate Heart High School and Ferndell Park. The LAPD’s Hollywood squad and the Sheriff’s mounted posse worked the job. Local pervs were *hard*-braced. No leads surfaced. Pervy IH boys and ped-o priests were *hard*-braced. No leads surfaced. The mounted posse scoured Ferndell and Griffith Park. They dug up three skeletized little girls. Tests were performed. They were ID’d as circa ’28 sex-fiend victims. Sergeant Delbert W. Kinney, Jr., led the posse. The search extended to the Pasadena-Monrovia foothills. Two more skeletized little girls were found. Tests were performed.

They were circa ’26 sex-fiend victims. Sex-fiend files were reviewed. No leads surfaced.

Intel kept blue sheets on ranking L.A. cops. I found one on Del Kinney.

Delbert Welbourne Kinney, Jr. DOB 9/13/09/Sparta, Wisconsin. Joins LASO, 1/18/31. Works custody at the Mira Loma and Wayside honor ranchos. Promoted to sergeant, 4/36. Runs the Sheriff’s mounted posse, ’36–’39. Runs the Sheriff’s Alien Squad and supervises the roundups of Japanese nationals and native-born Japanese in the wake of Pearl Harbor. Promoted to lieutenant, 11/44. Lateral transfer to the state Alcoholic Beverage Control Board, 7/46. Directs undercover operations. Investigates liquor hijacks out of three ABC field offices. The focused subject of an internal investigation, 9/49.

Two trucks packed with un-tax-stamped liquor are jacked at a rest stop off the 101 southbound. The ABC agents driving and guarding the shipments are gagged, hog-tied, and left in a secluded shack nearby. The robbery was accomplished in a brusque and professional manner. The stolen liquor was brand-name/top-shelf/high-retail-per-pour stock. The shipment was tagged “Level-one security.”

Four ranking ABC men knew the what and where. Del Kinney was one of them. The internal investigators called him their top suspect. They had no proof. They filed no charges. They worked off of rumored affiliations and surmise.

Del Kinney was "cordial" with film-studio humps/white slavers/ labor agitators/pornographic-film distributors Hershel Aadland (1904–)/Meyer Aadland (1906–)/and Ira Aadland (1907–). The Aadland brothers purportedly trafficked in counterfeit tax stamps and owned a chain of bar and grills that served contraband liquor. Lieutenant Kinney weathered three grueling interrogations and cleaved to his innocence. The investigators pressed him on the two prevalent rumors that came to their attention.

One: that Kinney owed significant gambling debts to Hersh Aadland, and fingered the booze shipment to pay off the debts. Two: that Kinney interceded on the behalf of a young woman who had embezzled large sums from two Aadland-owned roadhouses in Monterey County. He fingered the booze shipment. It repaid all outstanding debts.

Kinney remained on the ABC. The Aadland brothers hid behind their lawyers. The hijack case remains unsolved. The young woman was not identified. Kinney retired from the ABC, 4/53. He got the security-boss gig at Fox a month later. The Aadland brothers are big machers at Fox. It is widely held that they got Del K. the job.

What's the lowdown here?

Who's the young woman?

Kinney to Paul Joseph Israel/aka Paul de River.

Eye doctor, sawbones, psychiatric hobbyist. Sex-fiend afficionado. He studies them, interviews them, writes about them. He gets Marilyn Monroe hopped up on them. He ran his "Sex Offense Bureau" out of LAPD. He held sex fiend coffee klatches and group therapy sessions. Sex fiends test-piloted Dr. Paul's gourmet dope compounds. Dr. Paul watched sex fiends masturbate while hooked up to respirators and blood-pressure cuffs. Dr. Paul arranged blind dates for male and female sex fiends and chaperoned them to Walt Disney flicks and burgers and malts at Bob's Big Boy. Ex-chief Worton admired de River. Bill Parker hated him. He canned him and dissolved the Sex Offense Bureau. Thus, de River hates the LAPD.

2/28/51. The State Board of Medical Examiners censures him. The beef? The "indiscriminate prescribing of narcotics." His medical license is nearly revoked. He gets a chump admin job with the VA. His wife dies in '61. He sells their Orange County home and moves back to L.A. He's sixty-nine now. He still consults and sees patients. He's got that steel-buffed/unbustable office, right across the street. L.A. breeds swinging sex fiends. I can't fault his return.

Hey, dad—remember me?

—

Dads was wisp-thin. He spoke raspy. His New Orleans drawl was a shuck. He skimped on his office. The rugs ran threadbare. His analysand chair gored my ass. He splurged on his file-tape room.

Steel-reinforced doors. Blinking sensor lights. Alarm-rigged file compartments—make book on it.

No receptionist. He answered my door knock. My credentials rubbed him wrong. He hated and feared cops. He tried to door-slam me. I eased him back inside. He flopped in a ratty Barcalounger and glared impotent.

I shot my cuffs. "'When all other forms of applied therapy have failed, it may be possible to contravene absent, passive, or self-destructively reactive behavior with the imposition of direct criminal reaction.' Why would Marilyn Monroe have written that in your loopy book *The Sexual Criminal*?"

De River said, "I have not the slightest notion. I never met the late Miss Monroe."

Liar. Prevaricator. Dissembler. Here's the tell. His hands spazzed up at "Marilyn."

"She took her home-decorating cues from you. She collected photographs in that pervert-modernist style you seem to favor. She posed for pornographic snapshots with a rough-trade boy who disguised his identity with whiteout eye strips. They were just like the ones you put on Otto Stephen Wilson."

De River said, "Steve was a horrible boy, but I rather liked him."

I said, "I beat him half dead at Lincoln Heights. Just for kicks and grins."

De River coughed. His lungs were shot. He was frail. His life span loomed as next week.

"For a DA's Bureau investigator, you're rather coarse. And I can't see you as a member of coroner Curphey's Blue Ribbon Panel. You seem to lack compassion for Miss Monroe."

"Miss Monroe told her shrink Ralph Greenson that she was in the market for a more radical analyst. I thought of you right off the bat. Miss Monroe goes back with headshrinkers, by the way. Dr. Sheldon Mandel was feeding her dope back when she went by the name Norma

Jean Baker. I'll bet you crossed paths with Shelley. You're both physicians with an amateur psychiatrist bent."

Doc Shelley buzzed him. Here's the tell. His stick legs spazzed.

"Did you headshrink Monroe, boss? Did she play to your vanity? Did you hear out her twisted fantasies and get your rocks off? Did you soothe her and baby-talk her and tell her that her puerile fixation on fuckhead criminals and freaks was avant-garde, and that she was the most misunderstood and underestimated artist of our era?"

De River scoped me, half gaga. He gnashed up his hands. His outsized veins pulsed.

"Why would Marilyn Monroe make a great many pay-phone calls and dress up in fat-girl disguise to do so?"

De River went *deep* gaga. His eyes went dope floaty. He levitated somewhere off Planet Earth.

"Why would Marilyn Monroe keep forty grand in a lockbox under her bed? Why would she fly to and from Mexico, under a false name, in disguise, vouched by false documents?"

De River rocked his Barcalounger. His legs twitched.

"Does the name José Bolaños sound familiar to you? He's a Mexican Commie, and a probable dope pusher. Does he ring any bells?"

De River sighed. His dentures protruded. They were nicotine-hued.

"Did you inject her with collagen, to alter her appearance? Did she explain the bite scar on her upper left bicep? You must have known quite a few psycho biters. Did you introduce her to criminal manqués you thought she might find engaging? Did you set her up with a sweet guy who mails out morgue photos of movie stars and sends glued-on-letter notes along with them?"

De River plotzed. He covered his mouth with a seat cushion and stifled a whimper or screech.

—

Dads was infirm. He verified zilch. He reacted to digs. He lived and breathed the criminal demimonde. His reactions might indicate foreknowledge. His reactions might be plain neural response. I ridiculed his expertise. I humbled him. I learned one thing. He fucked with Monroe on some level. I *know* that. I had to get at his files. That meant a kamikaze play.

I stopped at a pay phone and stiffed update calls. My DMV man was backlogged. He hadn't run the plate checks on my Fox accounting cars. R&I was backlogged. They hadn't run the name checks on Peter Lawford's Girl Book.

Backlogs. That means loose ends. Loose ends in West Hollywood. Here's a tweaker—Jeanne Carmen lives just off the Strip.

I swooped over and parked out front. The gate opened up on a courtyard pool and lounge pit. Out-of-work actresses splashed and chugged mimosas. Jeanne's pad overlooked the pool. The door was wide open.

I walked up. I caught a pill-party hangover, full stop.

Deedee Grenier was passed out on the couch. Babs Payton snoozed in a chair. Lila Leeds dozed in a sleeping bag on the floor. An old-fashioned glass was propped up against her. Jeanne putted golf balls in and around it.

"Freddy O.'s here. Let's hope he brought money. There's a horror festival on Channel 9 tonight. Pizza and booze would be nice, but we're flat."

I passed her two yards. She air-kissed me and sank a long putt.

"Marilyn Monroe's old drama coach, Natasha Lytess. Unload her for me."

Jeanne said, "She's dying. She's got the Big C, and she's cutting out fast. She's known in the biz as the 'Bride of Dracula,' when she'd rather be known as the 'Bride of Marilyn,' but Marilyn don't fly that way, except for brief moments. She's been goony for Marilyn ever since *The Asphalt Jungle.* She's very pushy, and Russian. Marilyn got sick of her, and Darryl Z. banished her from the Fox lot. She's an acquired taste that not many people acquire."

I lit a cigarette. "Would it surprise you to know that Miss Lytess moved into a house within peeping distance of Marilyn's place on Fifth Helena?"

Jeanne blew a short putt. It hit Lila's head and ricocheted. Lila dozed on.

"There's your intro right there. You're fellow peepers."

I yocked. "Dr. Shelley Mandel. You landed here after the war, so you must have known him, or heard of him. Why would Marilyn have a prescription pad of his from '48?"

Jeanne lit a cigarette. "All the girls in The Life knew Shelley. He gave away script pads as goodwill gestures, like the Marshall Plan for young chicks. There were lots of pervs afoot in L.A. after the war, because the war messed with their heads. Shelley's big thing was getting call girls to double-date when they went out on jobs, because there's safety in numbers. That's how I met Lila, back in '47. We used to shtup in adjoining rooms at the Roosevelt. Marilyn was working call jobs then, and I know she had a girl she doubled up with, but I don't know who."

I said, "What happened to Shelley Mandel?"

"The last I heard, he was still around. He was moving black-market penicillin during and after the war, and the BNDD has been halfheartedly looking into him ever since V-J Day. He's mobbed up, in a very minor way. He's related to the Aadland brothers by marriage."

The Aadlands. Fox. Del Kinney. Shelley Mandel. The Aadlands. That name spool-threading through—

"Come back for the fun tonight, Freddy. We're painting a wall tribute to Marilyn."

—

Flowers and champagne. Amends for the dope I filched. She might be testy. It couldn't hurt.

Her old Ford was parked in the driveway. It torqued my memory and sent me eidetek. I leaned on the doorbell and got no response. I walked around to the back.

There's Miss Lytess.

She reclined on a lawn lounger. A date palm half shaded her. She wore an old cardigan and a mauve slip. It was 96 and humid. She shivered. She clamped down on the lounge slats and stanched tremors.

She looked bad. "Cutting out fast" said it. She coughed into a handkerchief. The fabric was bloodstained.

I coughed. She noticed me. She said, "Don't you start doing it."

I dragged a matching chair up. Miss Lytess studied me. I passed her the champagne and flowers. She popped the cork and spritzed up her slip. It clung to her rib bones. She was tall. She weighed in at ninety pounds, tops.

She said, "I've seen you before."

Her old car. It retweaked me. I snagged the full memory.

"November '54. You were sitting in your Ford, parked on Waring and Kilkea. You were staring at an apartment house window, because you thought Marilyn Monroe was engaged in an assignation there. It turned out that she wasn't. Miss Monroe was married to Joe DiMaggio then. I was there, and Frank Sinatra was there. DiMaggio was jealous. We kicked in the wrong door."

Miss Lytess chugged champagne. She grasped the jug two-handed. The effort taxed her. Her arms fluttered.

"Yes. The notorious 'Wrong-Door Raid.' Yes, you kicked in the wrong door, but Marilyn was next door, in an adjoining apartment. She was with her silly lover, Timmy Berlin. He was a film editor on *Bus Stop* and *River of No Return.*"

"It sounds as if you disapproved of him."

Miss Lytess went *ha!* "I disapprove of all men who do not acknowledge me as the creator of Marilyn Monroe. Additionally, I disapprove of policemen who ply me with cheap domestic champagne before they introduce themselves, and share the purpose of their impromptu visits."

I stifled a grin. "My name's Otash. I'm with the DA's Office, and we're conducting an inquiry into Miss Monroe's suicide. Rumors have surfaced, and we're obliged to verify or dispel them. You were seen observing Miss Monroe—repeatedly and acutely—during the last months of her life. You were close to Miss Monroe at one time, so I'm quite anxious to get your perceptions."

Miss Lytess coughed blood in her handkerchief. She dug a pump inhaler and a pill vial from her pockets and dosed herself. She wheezed and expelled green shit. She chased two Dilaudid with my champagne.

She smiled and winked at me. *Oh, you kid.*

"The liquid tastes like fennel and wintergreen. The pills induce a certain enchantment."

I smiled and winked—*Oh, you kid.*

"All right. You're spying on Miss Monroe, and—"

"I have spent a goodly part of my life spying on Marilyn Monroe, and the last fallow months of her life were no exception."

"Why 'fallow'?"

"Fallow, because I sensed her moving toward her tether's end in a prosaic, entirely predictable, and boring fashion."

"For instance?"

"For instance, her sexual antics with a pizza delivery boy and a United Parcel Service driver who rather resembled Robert F. Kennedy. Her waddling out her front gate in ensembles designed for three-hundred-pound women, lugging pillowcases stuffed with God knows what. Her boon companionship with a very tall teenage girl who lavished adulation on her and would have continued to do so for another few months, until Marilyn dropped her flat. Her self-destructive behavior on her last film, widely reported in the press and on television. Her obscene performance at our sexy young president's birthday do in New York, and her—"

"When did Miss Monroe meet the president? Can you narrow it down?"

Miss Lytess unclenched. Her dope load hit. Her eyeballs pinned.

"I witnessed the fatuous moment of their convergence. Charlie Feldman threw a party. It was summertime in '54. They were there. They played themselves superbly that day. Marilyn dumped me in '56, you know. But for the last two years that I knew her, she harped on young Senator Jack to no end. She predicted his election, lived for their very infrequent quickies, and blathered on and on about herself as our 'shoo-in' First Lady. I blew up at her one evening and demanded that she say something real about the young man. Marilyn giggled and said, 'He has a small penis.' "

I strained it. I sifted and shifted it. It confirmed my foreknowledge.

"Did Miss Monroe ever indicate that she knew Jack Kennedy before she met him at that party?"

"Yes, but she was in her cups, because young Jack had stood her up on the occasion of their latest quickie. She said she had met him 'years before' Charlie Feldman's party, and she had 'impeachment-level' dirt on him, which she would 'go public with,' should he fail to divorce Jackie and marry her. I pressed Marilyn for more details, but Marilyn said, 'My lips are sealed.' "

I said, "Did Miss Monroe know the late Carole Landis? Do you recall her discussing Miss Landis' suicide?"

"No. I met Marilyn late in '49. Miss Landis was already dead. She wasn't a current topic of conversation."

"I know that Miss Monroe broke off with you sometime in '56. I would assume you haven't seen her since then. I'm trying to determine the genesis of a bite scar on her left bicep."

Miss Lytess made a face. "I have reviewed many magazine photographs of Marilyn. I recall no such scar."

"Did you actually converse with Miss Monroe during the time you were living here and observing her?"

"No."

"She told friends that her house had been burgled, that articles had been moved, and that she had received nasty letters. Did you observe men prowling in the vicinity of her house, and placing objects in her mailbox?"

"No. And I am not the type to burgle houses and peek in mailboxes myself."

I leaned in close. "I think Miss Monroe fell in with some people, near the end of her life. I think she indulged in a great deal of risky and perhaps dangerous behavior. I sense this very strongly. Are you privy to what might have occurred? Did you witness any incidents? How accurate do you consider my speculations to be?”

Miss Lytess sipped champagne. “Marilyn overestimated her sway over people. She played her cards too quickly and desperately, in her efforts to impress and seduce them. She gave herself up cheaply, in all ways. If these people you posit were canny and properly reserved, and if she wanted to imitate their self-sufficiency and general hauteur, she would have set out to prove herself to them in most dangerous ways.”

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(LOS ANGELES, 11:15 A.M., WEDNESDAY, 8/22/62)

I tracked the scar. Sex biters were rare turds. My "psycho biter" crack buzzed Doc de River. I worked in the Intel screening room. I studied late-'50s magazine clips with a photo loupe.

The jizz-crusted Polaroids. Four in all. I sensed the Cruel Blond Stud as the biter. They were '58 or '59 vintage. Monroe was younger. The Feds seized my photos and bootjacked the PD's copies by court decree. I'd memorized every detail. I compared the thirty-two or thirty-three-year-old Monroe to a glut of news mag pix. I saw no close-up/bare-arm shots. I got no indications of healed and faded scarring.

I set up a projector and raided the surveillance-film vault. I selected four no-sound reels. They covered 5/59 up to this summer. The boxes were marked: time/date/location/gist of surveillance. Monroe gambols at ban-the-bomb/civil rights/bash-the-fuzz demonstrations. They were marked "daytime-exterior." They were shot outside City Hall and the PAB.

I doused the lights and spooled in a 5/59 reel. Black-and-white footage hit the screen. The specific date is 5/16. We're facing north. We're slow-panning east to west along the 1st Street sidewalk. The City Hall lawn provides a backdrop. Sixty-odd pinkos agitate.

They schmooze and pop placards. Beatniks, college kids, suffragette spinsters. They don't dig the A-bomb. Their lips move, no sound emits, their faces contort. Their placards read:

BAN THE BOMB. I DON'T WANT MY CHILD GROWING UP WITH STRONTIUM 90 IN HIS BONES. THE BOMB IS NOT GOOD FOR CHILDREN AND OTHER LIVING THINGS.

Establishing shots, a slash cut, close-ups and slow pans. There's Monroe. She's waving a strontium 90 sign. Protest punks point to her. *Hey, look who's here!*

The camera zooms close. The cameraman's gassed on Monroe. She's sporting a dark skirt and a head scarf. She's wearing a bare-arm blouse. The cameraman zooms ultraclose. He gets Monroe and bongo king Preston Epps in one shot. *Tilt*—there's no scar on her upper left bicep.

There are no new scar or healed-scar fade marks. Monroe had soft-toned arms on 5/16/59. My instinct solidified. The bitedown occurred during the let's-shoot-fuck-pix assignation. My '58–'59 shoot date was pure conjecture. It could have been later than that.

A memory tugged me. *Why does the Cruel Blond Stud look familiar?* This protest Monroe is the same Monroe as the fuck-pix Monroe. Her facial set and age lines run identical.

I yawned. I slept bad last night. Natasha Lytess got to me in some weird way. I traded Teletypes with Bill Parker. The Chief was pissed. Old man Zanuck beefed my smackdown. I Teletyped Parker back. I told him I had to juke my shit-magnet antics at Fox. I wanted to *re*-brace Zanuck. I wanted to hardnose Del Kinney before moving on Gwen Perloff. Parker Teletyped me back. He said he'd call Zanuck and tell him to grin and bear it. He'd lay in a threat: accommodate Lieutenant Otash or endure a search-warrant barrage.

I changed reels. It's 3/8/61 now. We're back outside City Hall. We're beefing segregated lunch counters. It's the same north-facing/east-to-west-track motif.

And there's Monroe. She's performing today. She's signing autographs. Fuck social protest—let's party! She signs a butch nun's WE SHALL OVERCOME! placard. Harry Belafonte walks into the frame. They perform for the fans. Marilyn grabs Harry. They break into the dirty dog twist.

Monroe's wearing a skirt and bare-arm blouse. The voyeur cam goes close. *Re-tilt*—there's the faded scar and skin-tone contrast. It's vivid in crisp black and white.

I'm convinced:

Cruel Stud bit Marilyn. I've revised my date range. The fuck-pic shoot and bitedown occurred between 5/16/59 and 3/8/61.

Slash cut. The camera pans the Broadway sidewalk. We're west-facing. Beatniks and disaffected squares mingle. Slash cut and perspective shift. The camera pans curbside spectators and parked cars. There's a 1960 Valiant sedan. The L.A. Sheriff's drive Valiants, exclusive. Two men stand by the car and gas on the show. It's Sheriff Pete Pitchess and Motel Mike Bayless.

Deedee Grenier dished Marilyn and Pete. They had an intermittent thing going.

The spool fluttered and slipped off the spindle. I slipped on a 5/4/62 spool.

We're outside the PAB. It's a Bash the PD bash. The Black Muslim shoot-out was hot news. Biracial protestors mingle. The camera spotlights the west sidewalk. Marilyn's wearing a black mourning dress. She's jabbing a sign. It reads CHIEF PAR*KKK*ER MUST GO!!!

I laughed. The camera cut off of Marilyn and focused on the jumped-up hoi polloi.

A time code ticked off. The lower left screen flashed a display. Sixteen minutes elapsed. Protestors bopped down Los Angeles Street, north to south. It bored me. I yawned. Then I saw something.

*A dress. A dress I saw in Monroe's bedroom closet. A Large Marge is wearing that selfsame dress. She's jabbing a Chief Par*KKK*er Must Go!!! sign.*

I squinted. The camera swung low. I saw legs and feet but no faces. I caught the hemline on the dress. I caught thin ankles and the black pumps Monroe wore as herself sixteen minutes back.

She went somewhere. She changed clothes. Why did she do it?

The camera arced up and panned faces. It caught Monroe as Large Marge. Her face looks puffy now. She shot herself up with collagen—or someone else did. She switched identities in the middle of a roiling protest gig. She's got the "dreamy eyes" Doc de River attributes to sex psychopaths. Schizo Marilyn. The '48 pill vial I saw. The '62 pill vial I saw. Marilyn crossed out "Norma Jean Baker" on the '48 vial and wrote "Not my name anymore" beside it. Marilyn crossed out the "Marilyn Monroe" on the '62 vial and wrote "Not my name anymore" beside it.

The room went claustrophobe hot. I turned off the lights and walked back to my cubicle. An R&I green sheet was squared off on my desk.

> Per "Girl Book" photograph #6. Be advised that subject has been identified as: Ingrid Norma Irmgard/WFA/DOB 12/8/33. Mexicali Airlines stewardess. Felony possession of marijuana/12/14/60/International Airport PD/Dismissed at arraignment. Crnt address: 1750 N. Lucretia Ave, Echo Park/NO-32859.

Scando Fox, Vivid Valkyrie. I reprised the Girl Book snapshot. Mexicali pillbox hat and full beaver. Saunas. Frozen vodka. Call Ingrid for the "Norway Doorway."

Ad Vice had an updated address card. 1750 Lucretia—a stewardess rotation flop behind El Mundo Bestbuy Market. Suspected hot-sheet hut. *Se habla español* at El Mundo and Casa Ingrid. Mexicali and Aeroméxico stews rule the roost.

I drove over. I parked in a curb slot and walked back. Four Mexicali pilots squeezed by me. They wore snazzy blue uniforms. They smiled and went *Buenos días.* I smiled back. They were airport-bound. They sipped Bloody Marys in plastic cups.

The hut was sandblasted stucco. Old paint jobs peeled off pink and lime green. Ingrid sat on a tin-roof porch. She wore a crocheted bikini top and tight jeans. She saw me and gulped.

I hopped the steps and leaned on a porch rail. Ingrid scooched her chair back. She turned and plugged in a porta fan. I caught her right-shoulder tattoo: "El Manny" and crossed boxing gloves.

"It's nothing you should worry about. It's just a few questions, and I don't intend to toss the place."

Ingrid lit a cigarette. "You wouldn't find anything in my space, but I can't vouch for my roommates or their visitors."

I smiled. "It's about Peter Lawford, and some photographs you posed for. I'm interested in how you met Lawford, how you came to be photographed, Lawford's so-called Girl Book, what resulted from the photos, and how things stand with you and Lawford now."

Ingrid blew smoke rings. "You want to know a lot, don't you?"

"Not a lot. A few candid answers, and I'll leave you alone."

"You could stick around. My roommates on the Mazatlán layovers are whipping up margaritas."

I rubbed my back on a porch post. My coat gapped. Ingrid caught my belt shit.

"Okay, Peter Lawford and yours truly in a hundred words or less, even though it's really embarrassing."

I twirled a finger. Let's move this along.

Ingrid said, "Okay, I part-time gig as a cater waitress. It's what you might describe as a semireputable line of work, and I've worked for some semisketchy people—and before you ask, I won't give up the places I've worked, because my Manny hates snitches, and I subscribe to his code."

I tingled. "Cater waitress" did it.

"That's all right. Just keep going."

"Okay. As you may know, most cater waiters and waitresses are in The Life. They hustle, they hawk their booties, they do favors for movie people so maybe they can catch a break. Okay, so I met Peter that way. I dated him, and I posed for some pictures, and all that was fine, but when Peter tried to set me up with his wife's brother, the president, I said, 'No, sir. That's just too creepy.' My Manny keeps me on a long leash, but I'm not a call girl or a concubine for that swishy John F. Kennedy. My Manny's a Nixon man. He says Kennedy's a *puto communisto,* and his daddy bought him the presidency."

I said, "Lawford told me that a 'queen-bee-type' cater waitress conceived the Girl Book deal, but he didn't know the woman's name. Queen-bee cater waitresses. Give me your first response."

Ingrid shrugged. "What response? All the cater girls I know are wage slaves and would-be actresses. Peter took some semisketchy pictures of me, but it was a single-o kind of deal, and I don't know any other cater waitresses who stew, or stews who cater-waitress. Stews and cater girls are all big blabbermouths, but nobody's ever told me they posed for beaver shots for a queen-bee type *or* for Peter Lawford. And, before you ask, I will *not* ask around, because my Manny would kill me."

I went *Whoa.* "Two names. Eleanora and Rick Dawes. Eleanora's a cater waitress, and she's a candidate for the queen bee. Rick Dawes is a cater waiter, and a possible fruit hustler, and a possible suspect in a string of Beverly Hills house burglaries."

Ingrid crushed her cigarette. "No to Eleanora, no to Rick Dawes. My Manny got popped for 459 once, but it was a humbug rap, because he's a straight-arrow guy. He was twenty-four and sixteen as a welterweight, but he wasn't that good. He took a night-school course to be a TV repairman, and he got a job at a repair shop in Brentwood. I brought my TV in to be fixed, and that's how we clicked."

Two Aeroméxico pilots weaved outside. They sipped Bloody Marys and noshed celery sticks.

"One last name. José Bolaños. He's a jack-of-all-trades. Communist, dope pusher, Hollywood suck-up."

Ingrid mock-spit. She supplied sound effects. It was vivid. *She* was vivid. I dug on her.

"No. I know lots of Josés, but no Bolaños."

I zinged her. "Ingrid, are you running dope to Mexico, for El Manny?"

"Not in this lifetime. It's not his bag, and it's not mine."

—

Stage-door Freddy. I fit the role. I'm built to yearn, watch, and wait.

Fox. Soundstage #11. Lois reads for schlockman Maury Dexter. The audition room was polar-AC'd. Bikini girls huddled in anoraks. A stooge scrounged them off a sex lark called *Baby, It's Cold Outside.*

Bill Parker came through. He called Darryl Zanuck and told him I had on-the-lot carte blanche. It sanctioned me to work raw. The Chief was up Ratfuck Bobby's ass on the FBI-boss deal. Monroe/Kidnap. I was two-front sanctioned to intimidate at will.

Lois read for schlock king Dexter. She's a divorced mom and chaperone for a twist party–cum-nightmare. It was a B quickie. Zanuck planned to flood the B market at Christmas. It was a *Cleo*-loss ploy.

Lois would be miscast. She's thirty-five and childless. She's no man's full-time woman and nobody's mom.

I was bughouse. I called Daryl Gates and told him to run the moniker file for thirtyish cholos named "El Manny." I gave him the soundstage call number and went *Chop, chop.* I told him to glom me a copy of the IO's task list on the kidnap job. He said it might be problematic. I told him to set it up as an Intel/SHIT trade. Offer up pap on the mosque at Slauson and Broadway. Pete Pitchess might succumb.

I paced the soundstage, front to back. I saw a pile of *Cleo*-esque debris in a corner. Swords, scabbards, breastplates. Spiked helmets and steel-cup jockstraps. Roddy McDowall popped through a side door and poked through them.

He's back from Rome and the dizzy debacle. I logged a hundred Rome-to-Brentwood tap calls. Roddy regales Marilyn. He's going to craft a gay smut film. It will utilize *Cleo* detritus and reframe *Cleo* as epic farce. It will be a work of stunning revisionism and "sound the prophetic tonal chord for a whole new era of revolutionary filmmaking."

I yocked. Roddy caught it and saw me. He flipped me off and scrammed out the door. *Confidential* skewered the Saints and Sinners drag ball, eons back. Roddy's date was Miss Drag America, 1953. He was six-eight and shot hoops for the St. Louis Hawks.

I bopped back to the audition room and watched Lois read. I snagged a copy of the *Twist Party Stakeout* script.

The title page ditzed me. Doofus Sid Leffler wrote it. Sid, the nebbish squadroom cop. "Officer Sid," high school toastmaster. Sid feeds Pali girls booze at the Sip 'n' Surf. I saw it myself.

Lois read with a gum-popping coed. *Gee, mom—a psycho killer is loose in the Palisades! Does that mean I can't go to the beach? Do I have to cancel my party tonight? Well, Sally, we'll just have to see about that!*

The wall phone rang. I grabbed it.

Daryl Gates said, “We got one hit on El Manny. Your guy has to be Juan Manuel Salas, DOB 11/4/26, L.A. One Chino bounce for stat rape, August ’54. One dismissed house burglary charge, May ’57.”

Lois winked and flashed a thumbs-up. She aced the audition and got the job.

30

(LOS ANGELES, 9:30 A.M., THURSDAY, 8/23/62)

My tube gizmo rattled. I heard a telltale *whoosh.* The feeder lid retracted. I reached over and pulled out the tube.

Daryl Gates delivered. I spread the task list out on my desk. Motel Mike Bayless block-printed. It was a thought-through memorandum. It laid out straight-ahead detective work.

Motel Mike bossed a five-man crew. West Hollywood station ran a twenty-four-hour tip line. They ran nationwide paper on the late Richie Danforth, the late Buzzy Stein, and Gwen Perloff. Gwen came up clean. Buzzy Stein's sex priors were noted. Danforth came up *nationwide* clean. It confounded Motel Mike. No print cards, no NCIC numbers, no fifty-state arrest records. Danforth's hands were pulped, Danforth's feet were severed and mashed. It scotched state, local, and Federal print runs and a shot at baby footprints in hospital archives. There were 284 Richard Danforths culled in the 1960 census. All were contacted. All were accounted for. None was him. Nobody knew shit about him. Buzzy Stein's wife and three kids were braced. They revealed jackshit and hid behind Buzzy's lawyer brother.

The Hats and I popped Danforth and Stein at a back house off of 6th and Dunsmuir. A "heavyset older woman" rented it. The same woman rented the Tiki-Torch pad where the Sheriff's rescued Gwen. The heavyset woman paid cash in advance and stiffed the managers with a phony name and unverifiable references. Both locations had been print-wiped and solvent-scrubbed. Sheriff's techs snagged zero latents. Fiber collections went *pffft.* The three go-throughs snagged innocuous grit. Door-to-door canvasses revealed zilch. Six eyewits viewed the snatch. They described six dissimilar vehicles. That scotched DMV checks. Gwen Perloff was chloroformed and remained unconscious for the city-to-Valley haul. She was blood-checked at Queen of Angels. Tests revealed the chloroform and six grains of sodium secobarbital. The kidnap guys fed her heavily spiked burgers and induced a long snooze. Perloff was unconscious for most of her confinement.

She was interviewed three times. She repeatedly stated that she had no enemies and did not know who snatched her. Motel Mike ran checks on the casts and crews of the last six films Perloff appeared in. Numerous drunk-driving and spousal-battery beefs were revealed and dismissed as irrelevant. The men were interviewed and cleared. Perloff refused to discuss her romantic life. She denied a wingding with Darryl F. Zanuck. Motel Mike interviewed Zanuck. DFZ denied the wingding.

Motel Mike asserted that the Hat Squad and Freddy O. blew the case. The Danforth toss was a "vigilante action." He urged Sheriff Pete Pitchess to seek legal redress. Pitchess refused.

We shouldn't have tossed him. I know that now. So do the Hats. We also know *this:*

Danforth's exit line: "It's a put-up job."

Gwen Perloff was in on the snatch.

—

I staked out her building. I parked across the street and just sat there. It was a two-story/hipster-moderne job. She lived in the upstairs front. Her living room window looked out on me. Gwen, this is Freddy. Freddy, this is Gwen.

She was home. I preprowled the underground garage and tossed her sled. She owned a '59 Triumph. I master-keyed the driver's door. I found a copy of yesterday's *Hollywood Reporter* on the seat. I leafed through it and caught a back-page squib. It was inked in trade paper–ese:

"Kidnap vict Gwen Perloff to star in saucy self-scripted biopic. It's on tap as 'Hard Luck Girl.' Fox to produce. DFZ himself 'to provide personal input.' Pic details kid sister's baffling disappearance and probable lust murder. Talent hunt for nifty child actress to play Miss Perloff as a 'busty preadolescent.' Fox's 'Baron of the B's,' Maury Dexter, to direct."

In the glove box:

A staghorn-grip .38 Smith automatic. Six in the clip, one in the chamber.

I disassembled the piece. The serial number had been acid-dipped. It was a no-provenance cold piece. It confirmed rumors of Gwen in The Life.

Behind the seat:

A triple-reinforced pillowcase. Filled with nickels, dimes, quarters.

I got ice chills. I got whiplash. *Perloff/Monroe/Perloff/Monroe.* I could not think beyond the two names.

That was three hours back. My mind spooled that stutter loop, nonstop. I heard the names and stared down Perloff's front door.

I was shot to shit. I spent half the day at the County Plans Office. I studied postwar file photos of recently built houses. I tried to match pix to Monroe's sketch of 6/22/48. Nothing came close. Why should it? I found the sketch in a hidey-hole. It footnoted Monroe's crazy life.

Perloff/Monroe/Perloff/Monroe. I couldn't think past it.

She walked out her door. She wore sun-bleached jeans and a man's white shirt.

She eyed the street. She made me. She knew I was perched there. She looked away. I hit the horn. She heard it and ignored it and walked back inside.

—

Del Kinney checked my badge kit. It was disingenuous. The Pico gate guard called and prewarned him. Pops Zanuck must have warned him. We're hamstrung, Del. Bill Parker wants this. He'll nuisance-warrant us if we don't comply.

The security hut was scrunched behind a Gay Nineties set. It featured a muster room/guard's lounge/golf-cart repair shed. Kinney's office was air-cooled and knotty pine–paneled. His desk was half Zanuck size. He's got a comfy wing chair. My chair wobbled on uneven legs.

He tossed the kit back. It dropped in my lap.

"You've come up in the world, based on what I know about you. I'll talk to you, within discreet limits."

I snickered. "Clarify something for me. Were you tipped that I was running a crew on the lot from April through June?"

Kinney lit a cigarette. "Hersh Aadland called me, at Jimmy Hoffa's behest. You, Denkins, Molette, and Irwin had already been seen habituating the *Got to Give* set, and Mr. Hoffa's message was to leave Mr. Otash and his boys alone. I figured you were jobbing Marilyn Monroe for Mr. Hoffa, and given that you're you, the deal was extortion."

I flushed. Kinney opened strong. I dug my legs in. My chair wobbled—*Whoa, now.*

Kinney said, "Okay, so Marilyn's dead, and you're credentialed up. Here's my guess and Pete Pitchess' guess. You've switched sides, and you're doing mop-up work for Bill Parker and the Kennedys. Let's put Freddy O. out as a dirt sieve and see what he collects. You're dirty on the Hoffa job, and you and the Hats are dirty on the Perloff snatch. Really, Freddy. Did you have to waste that Danforth guy? Couldn't you and the Hats have just thumped him until he gave up Gwen's location?"

"Gwen, huh? I dig the intimate tone."

It fell flat. I fizzled. Kinney evil-eyed me.

"I met Gwen when she was ten years old. I ran the mounted posse when her sister disappeared. She's the kid sister I never had, and I'm the big brother she never had. Watch what you say about Gwen."

I bore down. "All well and good. But she's dirty, and the kidnap caper's dirty, and that trumps all your brother-sister jive."

Kinney splayed his hands. They covered half his desk. He had strongarm-goon mitts.

"I'll concede the point, and I'll toss you a bone that will permit you to walk out of here with your balls intact."

I gulped. My Adam's apple popped. Kinney saw it and smirked.

"Bill Parker and Pete Pitchess have a handshake deal to let the kidnap job go. Pete knows it's dirty, and he doesn't want to sully his department. Parker wants you to work it for the sole purpose of covering LAPD on the Danforth deal. Miller Leavy sees the job from an entirely different perspective. He's waxing fifty-fifty right about now. Half of him wants to can the job. Half of him wants to burn you and the Hats for Danforth."

I coughed. It was camouflage. It hid my borderline shakes.

"Gwen Perloff. She couriers bearer bonds for Zanuck and some other studio hotshots."

Kinney said, "No comment."

"Gwen Perloff. She's banging old man Zanuck, and he set her up in that vanity *Hard Luck Girl* production."

Kinney said, "No comment."

"Fox is in the shitter. People here are scared. Bonds, dope, wife-swap clubs, you're taking calls from the Aadland brothers, and they're as bad as they get."

Kinney said, "No comment."

I bore down. "Let's keep both our sets of balls intact. Give up Gwen's known associates that you just cannot tolerate because you've got this big fraternal thing going with her."

Kinney resplayed his hands. "Or you'll do what?"

I said, "I'll do you a solid going in. LAPD Intel has a blue sheet on you. It pertains to you laying off hijacked booze on Hersh Aadland, and it suggests a *cherchez la femme* angle. I'm betting Gwen's the *femme,* but I'm too much of a gent to ask you. I shred the blue sheet, you give up Gwen's shitbird KAs."

Kinney futzed with a toothpick. His hands shook.

"Paul Mitchell Grenier. He's a real piece of shit. He works as a grip here, and he acts in fuck flicks and runs badger games with his sister, Deedee. He did time at Chino for stat rape. Something like '54 to '57. I've seen him talking with Gwen, here on the lot. He swings both ways. He gets in brawls at leather bars and bites guys. Is that unsavory enough for you?"

Deedee Grenier. Her snitch aria, early summer. Paul Mitchell and Monroe/Hollygrove/1930 something. Paul Mitchell's a biter. The bite mark on Monroe's arm.

"SHIT. Motel Mike Bayless. Toss me some crumbs."

Kinney rolled his eyes. "Bayless is Pete Pitchess' muscle guy at SHIT. There's this crazy LAPD hump, Jack Clemmons. He filed for the Sheriff's election race, early in March. Bayless extorted him out of the race, and Pete ran unopposed."

—

The Bonneville ragtop clued me. The red stood out. I knew the plate number. The hood was warm. She parked two curb slots north of the Strip.

I parked under my building. I knew her MO. My MO diverged. She lurked. I yearned and peeped.

Okay—I'll play.

I hooked around and up the front pathway. She stood on my porch. She lit a cigarette and worked at ennui. I noticed new things. Her loose wristwatch drooped too loose. She wore new white bucks.

I ambled over. She pulled off her barrette and shook her hair loose. Her hemline rode high. Knock-kneed women jazz me.

"I'm starting to see where this is going. Every time I do something bold and stupid, you reward me."

"I'm calling a time-out on my marriage. Can you blame me?"

"I'll get us a motel room on PCH next time. It'll save you the commute."

Pat touched the wedding-stone scar on my cheek. I ducked my head and nuzzled her hand.

—

The bedroom broiled. Late August L.A. Swamp heat and smog drifts. Lois willed thunderstorms. Pat lacked the gift.

We stretched out full length. Our feet drooped off the sheets. We laced our hands up and tapped the headboard. Pat orbed her watch. I grabbed it and slid it under the mattress.

"Your duties back at the beach bore me. Get your slaves to feed the kids and walk the dog. Tell Jack you've got something going, and you're neglecting your family for the foreseeable future. Tell Bobby I'm on the job, so leave me alone."

Pat dug through her handbag. She pulled out today's *Variety* and held it open. I saw "Luscious kidnap victim," *Hard Luck Girl,* and a swimwear pic of Gwen Perloff. Big Gwen—always the glasses.

Pat jabbed the photo. "I saw Peter and this woman on the beach, late this spring. I couldn't hear their conversation. Peter passed her some money, and she passed him a large manila envelope. It was months before she was kidnapped and you were called into the whole thing. I thought you'd want to know."

It was the Girl Book. Lawford lied to me. He said a "queen-bee" cater waitress sold it to him. He claimed not to know her name. Ingrid Irmgard lied to me. She was a cater waitress. She said Lawford shot her Girl Book pix. She claimed not to know any queen bees. Gwen Perloff defined the queen-bee prototype.

Pat watched me cogitate. She caught a tremor and pressed my hand to the bed. I skimmed *Variety.* The gist mimicked the *Reporter.*

Gwen Perloff. "Busty Bawd of the B's." *Hard Luck Girl*/foster-home kid/who grabbed Gwen's little sister?

Variety mimics the *Reporter.* It diverges right here:

She's a foster-home kid. Plus an orphanage kid. She was dumped in Hollygrove, '37–'39. It's conclusive. *She was in Hollygrove with Marilyn Monroe and Paul Mitchell Grenier.*

The room spun. *Monroe/Kidnap/Monroe/Kidnap Monroe/Kidnap.* The two case lines of 8/4/62 intersect.

Pat said, "There's something else you should know. Peter and I attended a reception two nights ago. It was mostly city government people. Peter buttonholed a DA's man named Miller Leavy and cut into you. He told Mr. Leavy that you killed that kidnap man in cold blood, and Mr. Leavy's face lit up."

I said, "Oh shit."

—

The Losers Club. Eddie Fisher's three-night stand launches. He's back. He's here to croon his corny repertoire and spritz his self-loathing. The Liz/*Cleo* mess drags on. He's here to reair it. He's got a packed house.

Eddie and Bo Belinsky were holed up in the greenroom. Nat and Phil worked the rope line. I stood near the bar and gassed Eddie's opening act.

Milt Chargin and "Junkie Monkey."

Milt's a low-rent ventriloquist. Junkie Monkey's a stuffed chimpanzee. He's got a hinged jaw and mouth. He wears a porkpie hat. There's a dope spike glued to his left arm. Their patter runs phantasmagoric.

Milt said, "I heard you've been doing some traveling, baby."

Junkie Monkey said, "Yeah, dad. I hopped a spaceship out of Cape Canaveral. Five Martians were at the controls. We headed for the Belgian Congo. We wanted to catch all the political upscut, live and up close."

Milt said, "Was it a nonstop flight?"

Junkie Monkey said, "Naw. We had to stop in Cuba to refuel."

The crowd tittered. Milt said, "That sounds dangerous. That putz Castro's the big bossman down there."

Junkie Monkey said, "He's a swell cat. He loaded me up with goodies, just for Eddie's debut gig here at the Losers."

Milt reached in his pockets and pulled out two fistfuls of five-cent cigars. He threw them out at the crowd. Dipshits reached, grabbed, spilled drinks and toppled tables. The room roared. A hi-fi kicked on and blared Afro-Cuban riffs. Drink girls sambaed and mamboed. The hi-fi clicked off. The crowd stomped and cheered.

Milt said, "Calm down, you *schnorrers.*" The *schnorrers* calmed down. Junkie Monkey said, "We picked up some hitchhikers in Havana. They wanted to groove on the Martians, and beat feet to the Congo and catch the scene."

Milt said, "Who *were* the hitchhikers? Did you catch anybody of note?"

Junkie Monkey said, "Count Basie and his Atomic Band, twenty-four Playboy Playmates, Governor Orval Faubus, Lenny Bernstein and thirty-two sailors he picked up at Lavender Leo's Lovenest, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, four Klan geeks from Moosefart, Mississippi, Miss Mahalia Jackson, that dink who plays Captain Kangaroo, and forty-one Hollywood High cheerleaders."

The crowd yock-yocked. Milt went *Whew!*

"Wow! It must have been packed in that spaceship!"

Junkie Monkey said, "No, but it was *stacked*—that's for sure!"

The crowd *re*-yocked. The drink girls did bumps and grinds.

Milt said, "Did you ever get the chance to refuel?"

Junkie Monkey said, "We didn't need to. Dr. Feelgood broomed down from the Apple and geezed the gang up with joy juice. We got there on our own head of steam."

The crowd re-*re*-yocked. They were lubed. The Losers served triple shots.

Milt said, "So, you arrive in the Congo. What happened then?"

Junkie Monkey said, "The head Martian split the spaceship and walked up to the nearest native. He said, 'Hey, man—take me to your leader.' The native said, 'Lumumba, Tshombe, Mobutu, or Kasa-Vubu?' The Martian said, 'Hey, man—we'll dance later. Right now, take me to your leader!!!' "

The crowd stood and cheered. They knew from punch lines. Women chanted "Edd-ie, Edd-ie, Edd-ie!"

Enough.

I ducked into the greenroom. Eddie was backstage, yakking up his combo. Bo Belinsky plucked pills from the goofball and high-hopper bowls.

He said, "This can't be legal."

I said, "It's not."

"The pink ones and green ones look good."

"Don't plan on driving home tonight."

Bo popped a pink one and a green one. He stretched out on the couch to await results.

"Eddie's miffed at me. Liz told a paparazzi guy in Rome she wants to shtup me. I keep ribbing Eddie about it. I keep saying I'll shtup her if she gives him an alimony reduction. The joke went stale after a while."

"Jokes tend to do that."

Bo said, "You're downbeat tonight, Freddy. The world's crawling up your ass, and you can't take much more of it."

Monroe/Kidnap/Monroe/Kidnap/Monroe/Kidnap. It kept spooling. The tape ran on, unspliced.

I camped out in a lounge chair. Bo drifted off. I almost popped a pink one and a green one. Sam Yorty walked in. Two bodyguards backstopped him.

They about-faced and shut the door. Mayor Sam said, "I tracked you down through your service. They said you'd be here."

I got up and poured him a scotch. He said, "Forewarned is forearmed," and chugged it.

I said, "Tell me."

Mayor Sam kicked the couch. "Bo Belinksy, down for the count. A no-hitter in May, and he owns my town. Now, he's a stooge for a pussy-whipped crooner."

I winked. "It's Bill Parker's town. You're just the mayor of it."

"Ain't it the truth."

" 'Forewarned is forearmed,' Mayor Sam. I'm here to listen."

He poured a refill. He chugged it and cut loose.

"I ran into Miller Leavy at the Jonathan Club. He was beet red about you and the Hats. You're Nazi thugs. You're Bill Parker's Brownshirts, you killed that kidnap chump for kicks, you're a DA's Bureau lieutenant now, and isn't it disgraceful? He wants to burn you and the Hats for Murder One. He wants to singe Bill Parker while he's at it. He said he's already talked to Bob Kennedy. Mr. AG expressed intense interest. Miller thinks he can wrangle a Federal judgeship out of that numbnuts, because he'll be the man who took down you and the Hats, and blew up the overhyped LAPD in one go."

—

The club closed at 3:00 a.m. Eddie did turn-away biz. Ring-a-ding—he took two drink girls home with him.

Bo snored it up in the greenroom. He'd be coma-conked at least fourteen hours. Nat and Phil faded back to their canvassing gigs. Milt Chargin and Junkie Monkey bopped home to their tract pad in Pacoima. Pat was home with her kids and presidential-pimp hubby. Lois was back at the Chapman Park Hotel. She was probably calling up strange men.

Monroe/Kidnap/Monroe/Kidnap/Monroe/Kidnap.

I leaned toward straight convergence. Monroe kept coin stashes. Perloff kept a coin stash in her car. *Monroe/Perloff/Paul Mitchell Grenier.* Late '30s Hollygrove alums.

Bar-brawl biter Paul Mitchell. Marilyn's bite mark. Fuck-film actor Paul Mitchell. The jizzed-on fuck pix in Marilyn's drawer. A dozen record checks, lab tests, and shit tasks unfulfilled. *Monroe/Kidnap.* Don't stamp it strict convergence—*quite yet.*

Gwen Perloff sold Peter Lawford the Girl Book. Ingrid Irmgard might play out dirty. What's with Juan Manuel Salas? Lawford blows me off to Miller Leavy. Mayor Sam gets more specific. Leavy wants to burn me and the Hats.

I sat in my car. The Losers lot was eerie still. I ran options. I tagged conclusions. The Hats wouldn't crack. I wouldn't crack. Perloff wouldn't crack. It boiled down to hearsay witnesses and Leavy's courtroom flair. I had to stop it short of indictments. I had to ID the kidnappers and kill them.

31

(LOS ANGELES, 8/24–8/26/62)

Three days. Psychic limbo. I'm paranoid-schizo. The world's out to get me. Shrink-wrap me, baby. Call Doc Greenson and Doc de River. Rack me out on the couch.

The world's out to get me. Plus the Hats. Bobby K. and Miller Leavy suck the world's poison dick and enact the world's poison mandates. I huddled up Max Herman and Red Stromwall. They cosigned my plan. Let's kill the kidnappers and squelch Murder One, preemptive. Harry Crowder and Eddie Benson concurred. Freddy O. and the Hats ride again.

Shrink-wrap me. I'm paranoid. I see wisps and hear voices where there might be none.

What's Jimmy Hoffa's play? He told Hersh Aadland to call Del Kinney. Hersh A. complied. Freddy O.'s on the lot. His men, ditto. Jimmy told Del to ignore us.

Shrink-wrap me. The world's pulled a work slowdown on me. My lab checks and record checks slog as I hit overdrive.

The lab can't match the jizzed-on pix. They've checked 621 samples. They've got two hundred plus to go. I buzzed the personnel boss at Mexicali Airlines. He cited Ingrid Irmgard's squeaky-clean work record. I checked Ingrid's work sheets back to January and scanned passenger manifests. The name José Bolaños did not appear. Customs supplied inbound and outbound U.S.-to-Mexico passport pix. I scanned ten dozen. I trolled for Mexican fat women who might be Monroe in disguise. I got *todos nada* there. State and Fed HUAC shot me suspect sheets on José. They were 85% redacted and thus meaningless. The redactions meant Bolaños was a snitch. He ratted Commie motherfuckers and skated on his own misdeeds. Customs won't cough up their Bolaños files. The Mex State Police have flat refused.

I drove Hollywood and West L.A. streets for ten straight hours. It was futile. I could not tag the house that Monroe sketched in '48. The search warrant for Bev's Switchboard is still "in the works." I need to *re*-brace Darryl Zanuck. He said a "wheezy-voiced" old lady called in the tip on the Danforth/Stein/Perloff location. I took Natasha Lytess a bottle of scotch and some flowers. I wanted to jolly her and set up a shot at a second interview. She had a wheezy voice. She might have called in the tip. *Her* tip would push *Monroe/Kidnap* to full-stop convergence.

The old Monroe-pad bug mounts still tweak me. I found a carpet displacement pic I shot during the 8/4 break-in. I took it to the lab. Ray Pinker did a walking portrait. He called the cat six-one/190/size 11 feet/slight left-leg limp. That narrowed it down to ten million men.

Nat and Phil concluded their Lawford house/Monroe house canvass. Here's their final assessment:

The Monroe/Jack liaison was an open secret in showbiz circles. Basic rumors circulated. They were repeatedly embellished. They devolved into fantasia. Bobby did not pour Marilyn the pork. UPS men and pizza-delivery boys poured her the pork. Nat and Phil agreed: it's banal for a derogatory profile.

I ID'd the other stews in the Girl Book photos. I chopped the headshot portions off the beaver shots and flashed personnel honchos at four airlines. I got names and glowing work reports on the young women. I ran them through R&I and got zilch. I nixed hard-brace interviews.

Nat and Phil worked the "Rick Dawes"/"Eleanora"/cater waiter front. They made cold calls. They repeatedly caught the same drift:

Who's Rick Dawes? Who's Eleanora? Come *on.* These cater kids are all hustlers and hopheads.

I itched to study my own master file. I had to reconnect with the bug-tap transcripts and photo evidence. Justice hoarded the file. I Teletyped Bobby K. I besieged his ass. Let me view the file. It won't leave the U.S. Attorney's Office. The little prick relented. I read the file, dawn to dusk. Eddie Chacõn watched and kibitzed. The file was rife with penciled-in check marks. They denoted felony infractions. Said infractions were attributable to:

F. Otash, J. Hoffa, Nat D., and Phil I. It justified my paranoia. Bobby's out to slam us all.

I studied the file. I took notes. I Man Camera'd the four-month misadventure. It refitted my memory. I found a long-gone wad of papers crammed down a file-box seam.

There it is. My report on events of 5/19/62. I tailed Monroe out to the Valley. She blew the tail. I compiled a plate list of 143 cars parked near the location.

I rescribbled the numbers and Telefaxed them to Daryl Gates. He put in a superrush order with the DMV and R&I. I got the results, nine hours on:

One hundred and forty-three cars. Full stats per the registered owners. Thirty-four misdemeanor busts between them. My eidetek memory unscrambled. I retrieved that post-5/19 brain glitch:

I thought, *I've been here before. Why does this West Valley turf seem familiar?*

Here's why:

I tailed Monroe to the locale on 5/19. I was back at the locale on 8/4. I saw Mike Bayless and a Sheriff's crew rescue Gwen Perloff at the Tiki-Torch Village apartments.

Here's the punch line:

Gwen Perloff parked her '59 Triumph a half block from the spot where she was rescued. She parked there seventy-odd days BEFORE she was kidnapped. It was one block from the spot where Monroe blew my tail.

Monroe/Kidnap. Monroe/Perloff. Spell it out. It's officially coincidence into convergence.

Cut to *Monroe/Perloff/Paul Mitchell Grenier.* They're Hollygrove kids, way back when.

Hollygrove. The "Grove." The orphan's home just north of Melrose and Vine. Film-biz largesse built the place. The kids got TLC, good chow, local public school classes and outings. I charted the overall convergence. I craved intimate details. I planned a low-key approach.

It backfired.

I dropped in and dropped on the headmistress. I badged her. I told her I had a tangential interest in Marilyn Monroe. It shut her down. She railed at Monroe sycophants, hagiographers, and obsessives. I requested the files on all the kids from '36 to '38. She said, "No." She said, "Get a court order." She said, "Our lawyers will attempt to block it every step of the way."

I slunk off. I replowed old forensic ground. I went by the county morgue and viewed Richie Danforth's pulverized remains.

He was footless. His hands were too pulped to pull prints from. His teeth were cracked and ground to dust. I couldn't issue a fifty-state dental alert. This stone criminal went unprinted and was fifty-state clean? He had to be deploying fake ID. He had to be ID-able somewhere.

Forensic shitwork. Clue-chaser shitwork. I had to interview Lowell Farr. I placed a request with the PD's juvie division. I wanted to *re-*

brace Natasha Lytess. She held back last time. I sensed it loud and clear. I goosed R&I and my DMV man per my plate list for the cars outside Fox Accounting. The goose job worked. I got ownership stats on the fifty-four vehicles—and a paucity of rap sheets on the owners. But—one name stood out.

Albert Morris Aadland/WMA/DOB 7/12/24. No criminal record. One illustrious surname.

I called Del Kinney and ran the name by him. “Is this guy related to the Aadland brothers? Distantly related to Dr. Shelley Mandel?”

Del confirmed me. “Yeah, that’s Albie. He’s a nebbish and a Fox wage slave. His mom and dad had a late-in-life baby. He ain’t like his badass brothers at all.”

Albie Aadland. It was a weak lead. It was a probable dud. Shelley Mandel hawked barbs to the pre-Monroe Norma Jean Baker. He’s a probable dud lead himself. It lays out as a film-biz/Foxed-up confluence. L.A. is one big confluence its own self.

The Fox confluence. It *re*-tweaked me. Paul Mitchell Grenier triple-tweaked me, resultant. Grenier. He’s a leather-bar biter. He was at Hollygrove with M. Monroe and G. Perloff. He’s an ex-con. He’s a Chino grad. He’s a Fox bit player. He’s a switch-hitter/fuck-film actor. Let’s revisit this shitbird.

I prowled regional Vice Squad files and read old occurrence reports. I hit Central Division, Wilshire Division, Highland Park and Hollywood Divisions. I got gay bar/bar-brawl notations at Central. I got a gay bar/*bite*-brawl notation at Highland Park. I scored on a male prosty sheet.

Hollywood Division, 1/14/58. Parked-car assignation, Selma and Las Palmas, 2:20 a.m. Paul Mitchell Grenier attacks a trick with his teeth. The trick rats Grenier to the fuzz and later declines to press charges. Two mug shots are attached to the sheet.

I studied the shots. I saw Grenier earlier this summer. Phil Irwin and I busted up the Deedee Grenier/Paul Mitchell badger game at Norm’s Nest. I sapped Paul Mitchell’s punk ass. I saw him on a dark street. We were under duress. He’s much thinner now. These early ’58 mugs slap on twenty pounds plus. Cut to 8/4/62. I view the Monroe/Cruel Stud fuck pix. I thought Cruel Stud looked familiar. Here’s why:

Cruel Stud was Paul Mitchell Grenier. The white strips over his eyes concealed the fact then. He weighed twenty-plus pounds more then. The fuck-suck pix are ’58–’59 vintage. There’s no bite mark on Marilyn’s bicep. I saw 5/16/59 shots of Marilyn at a ban-the-bomb rally. There was no raw bite mark or bite-mark scar on her bicep.

Let’s track Marilyn’s age backward. Let’s track Paul Mitchell Grenier’s appearance. The pix are surely ’58–’59 vintage. Marilyn is unmarked on 5/16/59. Cut forward. Go to 3/8/61. Marilyn’s surveilled at a civil rights wingding. We see the faded bite mark now. We mark her sustained relationship with Paul Mitchell Grenier. Sex biters are very rare. Marilyn knew only one in her lifetime. Grenier mauled Marilyn sometime between May ’59 and March ’61. He’s a sex psycho. Dangerous people converged with Monroe in the months preceding her death. I’m sure of it. I’m double sure this piece of shit Grenier was one of them.

32

(LOS ANGELES, 10:04 A.M., MONDAY, 8/27/62)

Zanuck mandated Round Two. I Teletyped a case update to Parker and Gates late last night. Gates wrote back. His brief: the whole deal is Fox-derived. Make more noise on the lot. Parker wrote back. His brief: be a shit magnet. It's what you do best.

I strolled the lot. I unplugged a golf cart outside Soundstage #6 and zipped up to Zanuck's side door. I had carte blanche now. I'd lubed Del Kinney. The nuisance-warrant threat vouched me. I barged right in.

Pops was alone. He saw me and moved slow. He went for his desk phone. I yanked the wall cord. He went for his intercom. I kicked out a floor plug. He yanked drawer pulls. I saw a Minnie Mouse purse gun and beat him to it.

Zanuck said, "You won't always be a policeman, and Bill Parker won't always enjoy the kind of pull he has now. I won't always run this studio, and I'll deal with you at my leisure then."

I ejected the chamber round and popped out the clip.

"What's the latest on the *Cleo* drain?"

No response.

"How deep in the shit are you?"

No response.

"Somebody at Accounting introduced you to Gwen Perloff. Was it Albie Aadland?"

No response.

"Did you green-light *Hard Luck Girl* so Gwen would keep it zipped on the kidnap?"

No response.

"Did you ever run into a psycho bit player named Paul Mitchell Grenier?"

No response.

"Was the wheezy-voiced woman who called you and ratted off the kidnap deal Natasha Lytess?"

No response.

Gear shift. Let's shaft this geek.

I pulled out a Foxtone Services business card. As seen in Marilyn Monroe's basement. I mimeographed three hundred duplicates last night. Nat and Phil were combing the lot now. They were tagging parked cars. One card per left wiper blade. Let the word spread.

Zanuck fumed and mush-mouthed his cigar. I dropped the card on his desk. Note the leering-fox logo.

"Your wife or mine?"

"Business opportunities"

"Contact PO box 6969"

Zanuck examined the card. His eyes clicked off-kilter. He flushed and pulled down his necktie. He gasped and expelled his cigar.

"I heard you're a wife swapper from way back, so I thought you'd want to see what some colleagues of yours have got going. And check the *schvantz* on that fox. It's got two heads. You think *he* gets laid?"

Pops dry-popped digitalis. His veins throbbed, purple-blue.

"Organized prostitution, postal-code infractions, felony financial malfeasance implied. I'm thinking there'll be Federal and municipal grand juries, and you'll be called to testify. Not to mention this. Surrender all your personnel files to me, or I'll lay everything I suspect on Morty Bendish, and he'll slam your ass in a groundbreaking *Mirror-News* series."

Zanuck palsied and jittered. He's Jello-O in an earthquake. I poured him a nice glass of scotch.

—

The casting hut overflowed. *Twist Party Stakeout* and giant-rat-flick hopefuls spilled into the prop barn. The coordinator said Lois and Maury Dexter were checking out the set house. It was somewhere in the Palisades. Pali High girls kibitzed and swooned for the *Stakeout/* rat bifecta. Maury needed sixty dance kids and run-from-the-rodent kids. He said it was a big motivational stretch.

I walked into the barn. I saw Roddy McDowall pawing *Cleopatra* discards. He fondled leather breastplates and red velour capes. A lanky man separated scabbards and steel jockstraps.

Confluence. Film-biz scavengers. Dipshit cop Sid Leffler wrote *Stakeout.* Roddy culled costumes for *Cleo Goes Greek.*

He looked up and saw me. He did an arch-queen double take. The lanky man looked up. Roddy said, "Timmy Berlin, Fred Otash. You two share a history, which you may or may not want to acknowledge."

The name ditzed me. Natasha Lytess mentioned this guy. Click—the Wrong-Door Raid. Berlin was Monroe's backstreet lover.

We shook hands. Berlin grooved Roddy's aside. The raid, the star-lit cast, the event lingers.

I said, "I talked to Natasha Lytess recently, Mr. Berlin. Please accept my condolences for the loss of Miss Monroe."

Berlin went somber. Boo-hoo. He studied his shoes. *Nobody knows de trouble Ise—*

Roddy stage-tittered. "Freddy's on his best behavior, but he never just drops by to chat. *Soooo,* Freddy—*who* or *what* is it this time? And don't tell me this isn't you with questions, and me with answers, and that you're not obliged to provide compensation."

Berlin slapped his knees. I slapped my wallet. Roddy struck a hands-on-hips pose.

I said, "It's about Gwen Perloff, and a Fox bit player and alleged smut-film performer named Paul Mitchell Grenier."

Berlin reacted. He deadpanned the "Perloff." The "Grenier" slammed him. He unzipped his windbreaker. I saw a hip-holstered .38 snubnose.

"He's a very disturbed man. He was in Hollygrove with Marilyn, you know—and he was capable of talking her into almost anything."

Roddy jiggled the gun grip. He lived for the dish. Don't stop *nooooow.*

Berlin slapped Roddy's hand and zipped up his jacket. He studied his shoes and sucked in his breath.

"I kept in touch with Marilyn after we fizzled, and—several months ago, I'd say—she told me she wanted to make a smut film, just for grins—and she wanted me to edit it. She said she was on a consorting-with-hoodlums kick, and she wanted to see how far she could take it."

I got goose bumps. I scalp-bristled and twitched.

"Where does Grenier fit in?"

"He was Marilyn's proposed costar, but Roddy told me about his reputation. I tried to warn Marilyn off, but she ignored me. Grenier approached me, independently, and said he wanted me to cut the film, but I said, 'Never.' He left me alone then, but I carry this gun in case he ever comes back."

I said, "Do you know if the film was made?"

Berlin said, "No, it wasn't. Marilyn assured me of that."

"Be careful, sir. Grenier's nobody to mess with."

Berlin skulked off. He played the wounded boyfriend with Method aplomb. Boo-hoo. Marilyn loved me and left me. He ducked his head and kicked prop boxes out of his way.

Roddy said, "Freddy, you spawn bad juju wherever you go."

I said, "Give me your perspective on Grenier."

Roddy rubbed his thumbs and forefingers. I slid him three yards. Roddy mimed a pitching ace winding up.

"You may or may not know that I've directed smut reels, and you probably do not know that I know Paul Mitchell from the Tradesman, the Jaguar, and the Falcon's Lair, or that he appeared in my films *Whipout Man* and *Fat Girl Love.* You *do* know that I collect rumors, and if I *trust* the rumors, I pass them along—in your case, for money."

I lit a cigarette. "I'm with you so far."

Roddy bummed a cigarette. I lit it. Roddy reprised his windup. Here's the pitch:

"Some Marilyn rumors I buy, some I distrust and decline to repeat. I buy the rumor that she and Paul Mitchell posed for a fuck deck—that is, a run of fifty-two pornographic playing cards, which were produced in a limited edition and sold, on an exclusive basis, to wealthy perverts who wanted to possess the decks as a collector's item and investment. Other name and would-be-name actresses had gone the fuck-deck route before—because the decks went for ten g's per, and the performers got a substantial cash cut. Plus, the pervs traded the decks among themselves, just like baseball cards. As in, 'I'll trade you one Ann Savage for one Barbara Payton or Lila Leeds.' But *of course* a Marilyn Monroe fuck deck would be a much more valuable commodity."

Monroe. Grenier. The Polaroid pix. '58–'59 vintage. Possible fuck deck outtakes?

"When were fuck decks a big deal? I've seen black-and-white shots of Monroe and Grenier, but they were from '58 or '59."

Roddy nixed me. "Fuck decks were full color, beautifully produced, and the craze peaked in the late '40s. This is not dreck we're talking about."

"What about a Carole Landis fuck deck?"

"Not to my knowledge. Poor Carole pulled the plug at the onset of the craze. Carole Landis morgue shots, however, are as common as dirt. You sold me mine on the set of *Midnight Lace.*"

I said, "Gwen Perloff. Tell me something I don't know."

Roddy went wistful. "She may be one for the ages. She's everywhere you concurrently want and don't want to be. If you *must* view the goods, there's a horror double bill at the Wiltern tonight."

—

Spawn of the A-Bomb. Universal, '56. Gwen Perloff at twenty-nine. Plus, *The Red Ant People.* Universal, '58. Gwen two years on.

Cheesecake posters lined the lobby. Beach shots. Bikini chicks flee large insects and mutant reptiles.

Spawn rolled first. Summer-vacation kids hogged the orchestra and balcony. They sent up a ruckus. The cartoon and newsreel drew jeers. They booed John F. Kennedy and civil rights stalwarts. They craved monsters and sex.

I took an aisle seat, close in. I was bleary. I'd played hunches and run checks all afternoon.

The downtown library. Local newspaper coverage. 2/17/37. Mitzi Perloff disappears. Let's confirm Gwen's Hollygrove arrival. Let's buttress the Monroe/Perloff/Grenier meet and greet.

Mitzi goes *poof!* Gwen remains in the foster home at De Longpre and Wilton. The *Herald* and *Times* supplied that detail and no more. *Variety* ran another puff job on *Hard Luck Girl.* Script scribe/star Gwen P. was "raised primarily in Hollywood-area foster homes and orphan facilities." I called the L.A. child-protective service and chased Gwen's orphanage stint. A nice old lady combed files and told me *this:*

Gwen went wild after Mitzi vanished. The foster home canned her. She hit Hollygrove in mid-March '37. This confirms the convergence. Monroe and Grenier were already there.

How did Gwen go wild?

She boosted ensembles out of Hollywood shops and sold them to kids at Le Conte Junior High.

She was a grifter then. She was not quite eleven. It was back in '37. I was fifteen then. I was peeping windows in Dogdick, Massachusetts.

Kid grifters and peepers. Fuck decks. Psycho biters and movie stars embroiled in felony smut. Here's some good late-breaking news:

Bobby K. delivered the search warrant. We raid Bev's Switchboard at 10:00 a.m. tomorrow. The Hats plus Freddy O., Daryl Gates, and two postal inspectors. Pump shotguns and legal sanction to trash the place.

The newsreel ended. The kids booed. *Spawn of the A-Bomb* rolled. The kids cheered. It was black and white. The kids razzed it. Credits beamed over a static shot of Malibu Beach.

Cut to the gist. Two young women slink at the water's edge. They wear low-cut bikinis. It’s big, rangy Gwen and a skinny blonde. Gwen’s wearing her tortoiseshell specs.

High-school boys woof-woofed and wolf-howled. Their dates shushed them. Gwen delivered her first lines:

“Marge, I don’t want to sound like a Commie—but the atom bomb gives me the creeps.”

I knew that voice. It was “Eleanora’s” tap-call voice. She called Peter Lawford, midsummer. She worked him for dirt on cater waiter “Rick Dawes.” Monroe wrote “Rick Dawes. Mean—maybe a fag” on a pack-rat scrap of paper.

33

(LOS ANGELES, 10:02 A.M., TUESDAY, 8/28/62)

We're on. It's classic cop overkill. We're convoyed up on the south side of Fountain. Bev's is straight across the street.

Eight cops in three prowl sleds. Two matrons in civilian cars. I perched with Daryl Gates. The Hats had their own ride. Two postal cops rolled in a Fedmobile.

Walkie-talkies cinched us up. We jump at 10:05. The boss fed would cue the move. Shotguns and crowbars. The mail slots were hard-fixed to the walls. Bev might hide her master keys.

It's a sweep-through. We hit en masse. Customers will be grabbed and held on the premises. The matrons will toss female patrons' handbags and skin-search them in the can. The postal cops will slam Bev Shoftel with the warrant and demand her master keys. Gates and I will hit box 6969. Foxtone, here we come.

I chain-smoked. My nerves were shot to shit. Convergence plus no sleep and an overamped agenda. I was up all night. I typed out a detailed Monroe/Kidnap brief. It was soundly reasoned and up-to-date. I mimeographed copies for Bill Parker, Gates, the Hats, and Ratfuck Bobby. I dropped copies off at the PAB and the U.S. Attorney's Office. I went out to find Paul Mitchell Grenier and hard-roust him.

He had no fixed address. My DMV contact informed me. He forfeited his driver's license in 1/58. He got popped for that bite assault plus unpaid traffic citations. He had no busts or citations from that point on. I went by the Falcon's Lair, the Jaguar, the Tradesman, the Klondike. The boys said Paul Mitchell slept around with one-night guys. I went by Arthur J.'s and the Gold Cup. Fruit hustlers hobknobbed there. Their consensus: Paul Mitchell was out in the ozone. He's pushing amyl nitrite poppers. He's got a "base of operations" somewhere. He's a skin dog. He digs the donkey show in T.J. Try the Planet Mars.

My walkie-talkie crackled. The boss said, "We go *now.*"

Gates and I piled out. We lugged shotguns and pry bars. The Hats and postal cops piled out. They held 12-gauge pumps at port arms. The matrons piled out. They packed handcuffs and come-along chains.

We caught a break in the traffic and ran across Fountain. Max Herman and Red Stromwall kicked the door off its pins.

It crashed inward. It hit the floor. The glass door panes shattered. Overkill meant Big Noise and Riveted Attention. We got it here. Crash noise/shattered-glass noise/overlapped shrieks.

Bev Shoftel screeched. Three male patrons evinced tremors. Two female patrons screamed. The matrons quick-marched the women into the can. The postal cops dropped the warrant on Bev and dumped her purse out on her desk. They grabbed a ring of PO box keys and lobbed them at Gates. Bev squawked and beat her fists on her legs. The postal cops cuffed her hands behind her back and shoved her down in a chair.

The Hats headlocked the three men and hauled them out to the alley. Gates and I beelined for box 6969. I fumbled the key in the lock. My hand shook *that* bad. The key clicked, the door popped, I looked inside. The box was stone empty.

I said, "Shit."

Gates said, "Shit."

I unlocked box 6970. It was stone empty. I unlocked box 6971. It was stone empty. I heard wood-crack noise and screeches. The postal cops pry-barred crazy Bev's desk drawers. Bev screeched police-brutality shit.

I unlocked boxes 6972, 6973, 6974 to 6981. They were all stone empty. I unlocked box 6982 and saw *this:*

Four tabloid-foldout pamphlets. Green-inked covers. Identical to rags I saw at Morty Bendish's pad. Morty published a "private circulation" dirt sheet. *This* had to be *that.*

I scanned the four covers. Morty titled his rag the *L.A. Lowdown.* The cover line promised a "priapic preview" of a new Mr. Fearless Fuzz exposé. *"Pssst—Whiskey Bill Parker cut a deal with ball-busting Bob Kennedy. It's Fearless Fuzz's sex-soiled sequel to Weird-O Death of a Sex Siren, Part 1."*

I squelched the Part 1 pamphlet. *This* pamphlet was mailed prior to my warning. Morty B. would not knowingly fuck me. And, Morty told me *this:*

Fearless Fuzz was West L.A. patrol sergeant Jack Clemmons. And Del Kinney told me *this:*

Clemmons filed to enter the spring '62 race for L.A. County Sheriff. *But*—Motel Mike Bayless coerced him out and Pete Pitchess ran unopposed.

I stuck the pamphlet down my waistband. I unlocked boxes 6983 to 6988 and got zilch. I unlocked box 6989 and pulled out *this:*

A printed flyer. An announcement. There's an upcoming key party and wife-swap bash. "Write to box 6969 for details."/"Couples only"/"$200 at the door"/"Other fees apply."

I removed the flyer. I looked at Bev Shoftel. She said, "Fuck you and the camel you rode in on." I scanned the empty boxes. They'd been cleaned out. Someone passed the word. I got lucky on boxes 6982 and 6989. Bev's perv contingent rented the 69-series boxes and deployed them as in-house mail drops. Bev's patrons had front-door keys and twenty-four-hour access. Their system was foolproof.

Then it hit me:

I passed the word. I sabotaged the raid. Nat and Phil plastered Foxtone cards to cars in the Fox lot. I told them to tap three hundred sleds.

I weaved on my feet. Crazy Bev cackled at me. I heard Daryl Gates and the Hats hard-nose the pervdogs back in the alley. The matrons waltzed the female pervs out of the can. They were handcuffed. I dug in and went back to work.

I unlocked box 6990, box 6991, box 6992, and box 6993. All four were empty. I unlocked box 6994. A single sheet of paper was tucked in.

It's a typed receipt. It acknowledges two hundred dollars received. That's the key-party fee. It's a box-to-box communiqué. There's the time and date of the bash. Somebody sketched Foxtone's leering-fox logo. Foxtone's throwing the bash.

10:00 p.m. Sunday, September 2. 1464 North Havenhurst, West Hollywood.

PART 5

WIFE SWAP

(AUGUST 28–30, 1962)

34

(LOS ANGELES, 2:20 P.M., TUESDAY, 8/28/62)

I print-dusted PO boxes. It was penance shitwork. My Fox antics blew the raid. It was in-close detail work. I dusted hinge flaps and interior surfaces. I worked solo. A patrol cop blocked the kicked-down door.

I'd elimination-rolled the cops, the customers, Bev Shoftel, and myself. I tape-transferred the prints to a cardboard sheet and photographed them. The box grab was low-yield. The print grab was all smudges and smears.

The Hats warrant-checked the male customers. All three came up clean. The matrons warrant-checked the two women. They had traffic warrants extant. The Hats grabbed the address books in their handbags. I photographed all the pages. We'll run the names, addresses, and phone numbers through R&I. Criminal names and/or locations might pop up.

The male pervs waltzed. The female pervs went to jail. Bev Shoftel was popped for smut-through-the-mail violations. She'll bail out sure as shit.

Max Herman called me with an update. Red and Harry grabbed Jack Clemmons at his Mar Vista crib. They took him to the downtown DB. A hard smackdown bodes. Max and Eddie picked up Morty Bendish and ran him downtown. Bill Parker might can Clemmons. His "Fearless Fuzz" shit plays psycho. I think we should suborn Morty B. His brief? Newspaper propagandist and paid lapdog. Fetch, Morty, fetch!

I dusted box 6969. I turned up a rubber-glove partial. Glove prints scream criminal design. A torn fingertip revealed partial loops, tents, and whorls. I tape-transferred the partial to a glossy-backed card and photographed it in tight. It looked like a male right index finger.

The print job loomed as all day/all night. I dropped the card in my briefcase and lit a cigarette. I grabbed a copy of the *L.A. Lowdown* and skimmed the "priapic preview":

Mr. Fearless Fuzz. He's Sergeant Jack Clemmons. He's a White Dog

Bund *Reichsführer* and Norm's Nest habitué. The preview enhanced the cover line. Whiskey Bill Parker and Bobby the K. Their doomonic devil deal. Parker covers up the Monroe snuff and whitewashes Monroe's ties to the K boys. Jack and Bobby dump Gay Edgar Hoover. Lawyer/cop Parker's the new FBI boss.

It wasn't a snuff. Bobby did not poke Monroe. The cover-up part was all true. Somebody fed Clemmons the rumor. I've got a hunch who.

The *L.A. Lowdown. This* issue was mailed before I told Morty to cease and desist. "Weird-O Death of a Sex Siren, Part 1" was already out in the smog. I skimmed the text at Morty's pad. It was fanciful shit. Morty pandered to pervert-lunatic subscribers. The *L.A. Lowdown* posed no threat to the K boys.

I skimmed past the priapic preview. I hit *"Sicko Psycho in Furtive 459 Prowls!!! Passive Putz or Fitful Fiend Soon to Explode???"*

The author? Detective Slithering Sleuth.

The piece ran four pages. Slithering Sleuth mimicked *Confidential*'s jive prose style. The piece laid out six soft-prowl/nobody's home B and E's in Brentwood and Pacific Palisades. The "Sicko Psycho" targeted the "swank" houses of single women. "*Sex*-clusive! How many posh pads did he hit altogether? Six women *reported* the pad break-ins. There may be more!!!"

The crimes ran from 11/18/61 to 3/12/62. Slithering Sleuth described the crime scenes. He merged jive prose and copese here. He dropped words like *victimology* and phrases like "white female American." Sicko Psycho did not loot the posh pads. He dumped furniture and wall artwork. He dumped medicine chests. He jacked off and shot his load into underwear drawers. He left notes. They were composed in glue-fixed magazine letters. The LAPD crime lab examined them.

The letters and paper stock were "markedly archaic." The Sicko Psycho's MO escalated. He destroyed property and jizzed twice at the sixth victim's pad. All semen scrapings went to the lab. Sicko Psycho was poised to further escalate. His final break-in occurred on 3/12/62.

The ceiling dropped. The floor dipped. The room contracted. My blood pressure red-lined.

Marilyn Monroe moved to Brentwood in March.

35

(LOS ANGELES, 6:10 P.M., TUESDAY, 8/28/62)

Sweatbox #3. It's twelve-by-twelve and mirror-walled. There's one table and four chairs. Hallway speakers supply sound. Note the phone book on the table.

At the table: Max Herman, Red Stromwall, Jack Clemmons.

I stood under the speaker. Max and Red drummed the table. Clemmons hemmed and hawed. I grokked him, up close. The blond crew cut. The black-frame glasses. The chinos and windbreaker. No brown shirt and no White Dog Bund armband.

The party lulled on. I came in late. I concluded my print work at Bev's Switchboard and hauled downtown. Plain watching gored my goat. I got antsy and went through the door.

Clemmons stirred. Max said, "Hi, Freddy." Red said, "Lieutenant Otash is here. Jack, tell the lieutenant what you finally told us. What it took you four hours to reveal."

I straddled a chair and lit a cigarette. Clemmons scratched his neck and adjusted his basket. He was scared.

"Well…okay. I'll concede that I made up *Weird-O Death of a Sex Siren,* but you've got to admit it could have happened that way. You don't get to see high-quality stuff like Marilyn Monroe dead and naked, not just any old day. Maybe my imagination got the better of me."

Max said, "You made up Part 1, maybe. You succumbed to the moment, because you're a wishy-washy guy."

Clemmons huff-huffed. Me, wishy-washy? Address me as *mein Führer* or I'll put you on report.

"What's with the Part 1? I made the whole thing up. Morty encourages his contributors to go for the pizzazz. He learned under William Randolph Hearst."

Red said, "Here's what Sergeant Herman's trying to tell you. Somebody leaked you the drift on Chief Parker and the AG."

I said, "Give it up, shitbird."

"Give *what* up? Nobody leaked shit to me. *You're* the only shitbird in this—"

I grabbed the phone book and head-smacked him. His glasses flew off. He rubbed his left ear. Phone-book shots induce reverb.

Max passed him his flask. Clemmons took two nips. Red made nice and passed him his glasses. They fit crooked now.

I patted the phone book. I *Sieg heil*'d Clemmons. He's the beat-on Bundsman. Red stifled a yock.

Clemmons sniveled and wiped his nose. He wore a cheesy signet ring. Dig the snarling mastiff. He's got green rhinestone eyes.

"Motel Mike Bayless. That Sheriff's sergeant at SHIT. He told me about the Chief and Bob Kennedy. What LAPD Intel don't know, SHIT does. Them two units are always trading intelligence, because cops are the world's worst gossips."

I said, "Why would Bayless even know you exist?"

Clemmons shrugged. Max waved the phone book. Clemmons wrung his hankie—white flag for defeat.

"Bayless turned me out as an informant. I filed to run in the Sheriff's race, last spring. I figured my pals in John Birch, the Minutemen, and Pastor Smith's crusade would turn out, and I'd have a shot to unseat Pete Pitchess. Well…right about then…I met a woman. She was a real looker, and she called herself Gail Penrose. She just shows up at Norm's Nest one night, and one thing leads to another."

Red said, "We're linking the dots, Jack. Don't stop now."

Max said, "We know where you're taking us, but we need to hear it from you."

Clemmons sucked the flask. "It was a tank job. We were asleep at a motel in Van Nuys, and I woke up and checked her purse while she was sleeping. Her real handle was Gwen Perloff, and if it sounds familiar, that's because she was the kidnap victim on that job where you guys dropped that guy on the freeway and got him creamed. I'm married, and guess what? Some SHIT guys shot infrared film of me and the Gwen chick going at it. Then I get a phone call telling me to withdraw from the Sheriff's race, which I sure as shit did. Then Motel Mike makes it his business to find me and tell me he might request some information now and then."

Monroe/Kidnap/Perloff. Case lines intersect. Max and Red winked at me.

I said, "Is the dump job common cop knowledge now?"

Clemmons said, "Yep. And it's getting to be common knowledge that Miller Leavy wants to burn you for it."

Max said, “And you just happened to get the Marilyn Monroe dead-body call? You were on your way to a Klan bash, and the call just happened to hit the desk?”

Clemmons grinned. “Sometimes you just get lucky—and movie-star OD’s are the cream de la cream.”

Red lit a cigarette. “Do you honestly believe that the Kennedys ordered the snuff on Monroe?”

“No, I made it up. But I pulled that rumor on the Chief and Bob Kennedy off the cop grapevine. Morty Bendish liked it, so there we are.”

I said, “How do you know Morty? Did somebody introduce you to him?”

Clemmons rubbed his ear. I phone-booked him good. The reverb lingered on.

“Sid Leffler introduced me. He’s Morty’s brother-in-law, and he’s worked the West L.A. DB a dog’s age. You guys know Sid, right? We call him ‘The Author’ and ‘The Professor.’ He wrote a sensational piece for the *L.A. Lowdown.* Morty says it’s a masterpiece of the docudrama style. Sid and his partner, J. T. Meadows—who’s a nice kid, but a bit of a nosebleed—worked this twisted 459 string, which ran to six jobs total. It went on for a while, then just stopped. Sid wrote it all out, and Morty loved the piece, but they didn’t catch the guy in the end.”

I blinked. I flashed Man Camera outtakes. I caught bulb glare. A crazy notion formed in that blink.

—

We moved Jack out and moved Morty in. Morty spooked easy. The phone book scared him.

“It looks bad for you, Morty. Don’t shit a shitter, right? You’re facing a battery of Federal charges. You sent subversive materials through the U.S. mail, and you aided and abetted Bev Shoftel in violation of six statutes on the dissemination of felony pornography. You’ve suborned prostitution, and you’re looking at lewd and lascivious conduct raps up the ying-yang. You’re just lucky I talked the postal cops into placing you in LAPD custody.”

Morty went *Oy*. Morty fretted his mezuzah.

“That a sterling champion of free speech should come to such an end.”

We yakked in Sweatbox #3. An audience grooved Morty. The hallway was full-packed. Bill Parker, Daryl Gates, and the Hats. They watched and caught the speaker feed.

I slid Morty my flask. Morty glug-glugged. I said, “The Chief and I don’t want to see you take it in the shorts. We venerate free speech as much as you do. I’m cooking up something that could get you a skate. I’m finalizing it in my head right now.”

Morty said, “Anything, Freddy. I’ve got no beef with the LAPD. I soft-pedaled all that Muslim shit, and I pooh-poohed those cops who drilled that retarded kid.”

I lit a cigarette. “Fill me in on Sid Leffler and that ‘Sicko Psycho’ piece he wrote for the *Lowdown.* The case interests me, and I’m thinking I could work it into this deal I’m cooking up.”

Morty said, “Sid’s a genius. He’s the smartest guy I know. He exudes talent. He’s got a flick in preproduction at Fox, and he wrote every word of it. He’s educated, and he knows the criminal mind—which is why this ‘Sicko Psycho’ piece is so pithy. He studied under that shrink—what’s his name—the guy who analyzed all those sex dinks up at Quentin.”

I said, “Oh, you mean Paul de River?”

36

(LOS ANGELES, 5:30 A.M., WEDNESDAY, 8/29/62)

Predawn Wilshire. Green lights straight through Beverly Hills. Pat told me the AG was shacked at the Lawford house. I planned to intrude.

I'd been up two full days. I succumbed to fried-brain syndrome and popped two Dexedrine. We cut Jack Clemmons and Morty Bendish loose. I huddled up Parker and Gates. A late skull session ensued.

They'd read my case updates. Mimeo copies went to the Hats and Ratfuck Bobby. I updated the Bev's Switchboard misadventure and took the blame for blowing the raid. I laid out "author" Sid Leffler and his "Sicko Psycho" piece in Morty B.'s dirt rag. I laid out my specific plans for Morty and my plan to craft a big diversion. It would quash all potential Monroe/Kennedy rumors and secure the Chief the FBI-boss gig. Said plan would force the AG to desist on the get-Otash front. It would squelch Miller Leavy's plans to burn the Hats and me for Richie Danforth.

Parker clapped. Gates went *Woo-woo.* Parker said he'd lean on the BHPD. We need the names of their cater waiter suspects. Gates praised Morty Bendish. He's a born propagandist.

Parker stressed Gwen Perloff. Work her. Deploy your reputation. She's jungled up in bad-money schemes. Make like you want in. Gates stressed Sid Leffler and partner J. T. Meadows. Work them. Be a shit magnet. They may play out unclean.

I cut down the California Incline and cut north on PCH. I U-turned and parked outside the Lawford spread. It was predawn dark. I leaned on the doorbell. *Brrrr* noise drilled the house. I stood by the door-front peephole. I heard foot scuffs inside.

Eddie Chacõn opened the door. He wore a "Free Cuba" T-shirt and plaid boxer shorts. He held a .45 automatic.

He said, "*Señor* Freddy. And at such an hour."

I said, "Mr. Kennedy, now."

Eddie loomed. I eased his gun hand off to the side. He about-faced and quick-marched upstairs. I timed the wait.

The AG coughed to announce himself. He rolled out in six-plus minutes. Bobby, you shouldn't have.

America's Top Cop dressed for me. Polo shirt/madras shorts/deck shoes. Very Hyannis. It upstaged my wilted suit. He walked up. He rolled an unlit cigar.

"The kitchen. You know where it is. Eddie pulled a bug mount off a lamp bowl."

I followed him in. He grabbed a coffeepot off a warmer and poured two cups. I perched in the breakfast nook. Cups, saucers, cream spout —the AG served me.

"Justify your intrusion. Make it good. Don't tell me you came to beat up my sister's husband again."

I smirked. "Have you read my most recent summary reports?"

"Yes. They were persuasive, but there's no hard evidence to prove that Marilyn's death and the kidnapping case are anything but coincidental occurrences within a movie-business sphere. You portray Marilyn in a well-documented and defamatory light, which shows her to be drug-addicted and psychically impaired. That's nothing but good. You posit her as a consort of criminals who traffic in pornography, which I especially like. That said, you have not given me a salutary throughline, one which will serve to dash all specious public discourse on Marilyn's alleged involvement with my brother and me. Also, the issue of public exposure concerns me, especially as it pertains to the people whose names you stated in your summary. Public exposure means public inquiry. Public inquiry means scandal. Two things trouble me here. One, assuming the public silence of the people you name in your summary. Two, supplying the public with a factually valid alternative solution for the death of Marilyn Monroe, one that will invalidate Marilyn's fantastical rantings about my brother and me, and one that will seduce and entertain Joe and Jane American and scrub their dirty minds free of filthy thoughts regarding the brothers Kennedy."

I sipped coffee. Depth charge. It spiked the juiced blood in my veins.

"I've got the alternative solution. I'm working on it now. It's factually valid, and I'm working up a newspaper source to put it out there."

Bobby rolled his cigar. "You must control the public exposure of your named suspects and expurgate their attributed statements."

I said, "Convene a sub-rosa Federal grand jury. Handpick Democratic Party–stooge jurors. Subpoena the key people mentioned in my summary, promise them immunity, let them read prepared statements, and hold those statements in abeyance as a wedge to keep them from going forward. The grand jury proceeding will serve as an extortion move to ensure their permanent silence."

Bobby lit his cigar. "What do you want for yourself?"

"Your promise not to prosecute me, or my men, for the Hoffa operation. Your pledge to steer Miller Leavy off of attempting to nail the Hats and me for the Danforth job."

Bobby said, "As of this moment—no."

I sipped coffee. I jiggled the cup and burned my hands.

"I need a Justice man to help me black-bag a doctor's office."

Ratfuck Bobby. Smug little shit. He blew perfect smoke rings.

"Eddie's good at that sort of thing."

I heard footsteps behind me. A man cleared his throat. I knew it was dipshit. I smelled Pat's Breck shampoo.

I turned around. They wore White House souvenir robes. Robert F. Kennedy brayed.

"Pat, your boyfriend's here. Peter, don't grovel or explode. The noted camel fucker is joining us for breakfast."

37

(LOS ANGELES, 3:00 P.M., WEDNESDAY, 8/29/62)

Babs Payton and Lila Leeds car-hopped. They hopped Stan's Drive-In at Sunset and Highland. It was a front. They peddled goofballs to Hollywood High kids. They supplied local night crawlers and raked in their real bread. Chef Fritzie whipped up biphetamine-laced malts. I craved one. I was work-slammed and running on fumes.

Breakfast with RFK and the gang. It was too tense to be funny and veered to depraved. The beach to the PAB. Phone work with the Hats. We photographed the address-book pages glommed off our Bev's detainees. Miller Leavy got us quickie phone-bill subpoenas for all five. Plus Gwen Perloff, Paul Mitchell Grenier, and Ingrid Irmgard.

We scanned bills. We looked for Fox-specific names in the calls-to columns and general names to run through R&I. We hit Grenier, Perloff, and Irmgard first. Fly-by-night Grenier had no fixed address and got no phone bills. Perloff made innocuous calls to Fox B-flick personnel. No calls-to names mandated attention. Irmgard called her Mexicali work boss and her boyfriend Juan Manuel Salas. Her calls seemed innocuous. El Manny might be innocuous. I should roust him on GP and find out.

We worked. We eyeball-hopped. We went from case-file scans to detainee scans. We scorched our eyeballs. The detainees called lots of people. No hot names scorched us. Our consensus so far:

The detainees are new-breed swingers. They swing within set guidelines and steer clear of the fuzz. *That* meant *this:*

More shitwork loomed.

I pulled into Stan's. I'd called ahead. Babs and Lila saw my sled and skated over. Babs schlepped a car-door tray. On it: three pineapple malts.

She hooked it to the driver's door. I pushed the seat back. Babs and Lila piled in. They dumped their skates. We snuggled in, three across. I passed out Chef Fritzie's specials. Babs said, *"L'chaim."*

Prom date or pervathon? It's your call.

We lit cigarettes. We sipped our malts. I caught that good dope aftertaste.

Lila said, "This is a bait gig, right? You're not here because you love us and you can't live without us."

I caught a bloodstream jolt. My scalp prickled. I got *re*-vivified.

"We're attending a wife-swap party, next Sunday night. Babs, you're my date. Lila, your date is a cop named Harry Crowder. You get five hundred apiece. We're there to look for hinky shit, which might well pertain to hinky shit at Fox. I'll probably be recognized from my so-called heyday, which is okay. The job's complex. I'm looking to bait some bent motherfuckers and see how they react."

Babs sipped her malt. "Okay, but Harry Crowder's a cop, so what's the point of it all?"

"It's about squelching some Marilyn Monroe rumors, plus a tangent angle on that kidnap deal from three weeks ago."

Babs hooted. "'Kidnap deal'? You and the Hat Squad guys dusted a man, and a motor cop I know told me it put your dicks in the wringer."

I mock-groaned. Lila said, "The kidnap's got 'publicity stunt' written all over it. And I know Gwen Perloff, going back eons. She and the late Marilyn worked call jobs together, back in the late '40s, when I was teamed up with Jeanne Carmen."

Confluence/convergence. More back-page lives connect.

Babs sipped her malt. "Listen to the voice of experience here. I know from wife-swap and key parties, and they are strictly moneymaking propositions. There's always a strict ratio of men to women, and lots of fees and extras you've got to pay if you're looking to swing. And there's no built-in random factor to spice things up. Pictures have been prescreened, to make sure no uglies and fatsos get in, and the whole drop-your-keys-in-a-bowl-and-go-home-with-somebody aspect is nothing but a shuck. People just pair off—and nobody gets stuck without a date. Motel rooms and hotel suites—all that's arranged in advance, and that's another extra you've got to pay for."

It made sense. "Moneymaking propositions." It jibed with Foxtone Services and Fox in duress.

I said, "Fuck decks. Roddy McDowall enlightened me, a few days ago. Raise your hands if you're familiar with the phenomenon."

Babs raised her hand. Lila said, "Ancient history, but I remember the craze."

I went *So?* Lila said, "I would have, but I never got the chance."

Babs said, “We should have been so lucky.”

I laughed. “The possibility that Marilyn posed for a fuck deck with Deedee Grenier’s brother, Paul Mitchell.”

Babs shuddered. “I’d call it remote.”

Lila said, “No, but Marilyn mentioned something along those lines. We were at a pill party a few months ago, and she said she wanted to do a smut film based on the ‘Wrong-Door Raid’—which, of course, *you* were involved in, Freddy.”

That’s a scalp crawler. I said, “Don’t stop there.”

“Who’s stopping? She said she wanted her ex, Timmy Berlin, to play himself, while she played herself. Smut pros would play Sinatra, DiMaggio, Phil Irwin, and you. She wanted an old lady with smut experience to play the old lady whose door got kicked in, and she wanted to shoot the film on the real-life locations.”

Babs lit a cigarette. “Fuck decks, key parties. You’re taking me back.”

I said, “Don’t stop there.”

Babs said, “The deck craze started with these aspiring actresses working the call-girl circuit after the war. These investor types would come around and try to suss out which girls had a shot to become real movie stars. They paid the aspirant stars to perform in the decks, with these stud-type costars. Then they supposedly held back distribution of the decks, so the aspirant types had a chance to become real stars.”

Calculated. Perverted. In equal measure. Hot kicks in the moment. Profits down the line.

Babs crushed her cigarette. “Then the decks would be auctioned off in some sort of rich perv circle, for big bread. Nobody I know has ever seen a fuck deck, but these rumors persist. I heard things like Barbara Bates, Joan Camden, and Ella Raines in a lezzie deck. The only thing that’s for sure is that the biggest deck investor was this bent headshrinker named Shelley Mandel. I think he might have invented the decks, and I know for a fact that he tapped beauty pageants, where all the girls were aspirant stars, and he told them that for one hour in a motel room, the money they made would put them through the Pasadena Playhouse.”

—

More shitwork.

More cross-checks. More paper glut. More phone bills and R&I sheets to study and more names to anoint. We worked in the Intel squadroom. We worked at five jammed-tight desks. Intel cops worked around us. They fish-eyed us and judged us. *Oh, those clowns. They pushed a guy off a cliff. It's on the cop-talk Teletype.*

We worked. Daryl Gates told his secretary to comb Ad Vice and divisional Vice files. She indexed a list of organized-vice offenders. We worked off photographed address-book pages, the detainees' phone bills, rap sheets, and the index. We hopped page stack to page stack and scanned columns. We stalked names, names, and names. We crossed out names and X-marked them. The Hats worked diligent. I worked, unraveled and schizzed.

Babs Payton's riff. Shelley Mandel in all guises. Penicillin peddler/call-girl hound/scrutinized by BNDD. He conceives the "fuck deck." He might have sideswiped Lois. Doc Shelley habituates beauty pageants and slides the girls rubbers and pills. He snuggles up to pageant girls and proclaims the fuck deck gospel. It fucked with my wig and threatened to quash my love for Lois. She meets him, she talks to him, she face-to-faces him and provokes his lust.

She was Miss Chicago, '48. She pageant-toured L.A. Doc Shelley was out to corrupt young women. He would have buzz-bombed Lois. He would have touched her. He would have contaminated her and poisoned her freewheeling heart. Aspirant actresses are susceptible to charm and easily bamboozled. I saw Lois and cheap studs in fuck-deck poses. I was still full-up wired. I couldn't punch STOP and squelch the brain reel. I saw Lois in poses we had never and would never assume. I saw it and saw it. I tried to pray it away and faltered. I wanted to see it because I'd never see it for real. It was all Man Camera/bulb glare/shutter click verisimo. The obscene brain reel spun on and on.

It poisoned my imagination. It devoured brain cells. I prayer-hexed it to a stasis and willed my mind pure and white-screened.

I blew off the desk work an hour back. The Hats went *Huh?* I holed up in my cubicle and called Eddie Chacõn. I told him to expedite a check on Dr. Sheldon Mandel. I ran down the particulars. Eddie said he knew agents at BNDD. "Give me a half hour. I'll call you back."

I waited at my desk. The juice jolt wore down. I maintained my blank brain screen. The effort drained me and left me limp. Eddie called me back. He said he had information. He told me *this:*

Doc Shelley was a longtime BNDD informant. He ratted overprescribing headshrinks. He didn't sell black-market penicillin. He donated it to Zionist groups during the '48 war. So did other Jewish physicians. So did Mickey Cohen, Neddie Herbert, the Aadland brothers. Jewish mobsters ponied up big. The BNDD investigated

Shelley. They desisted in ’49. They succumbed to political pressure. The Truman gang backed emergent Israel. The word filtered down to BNDD. Leave this guy alone. He’s borderline harmless. He’s giving the medicine away. BNDD worked out of Treasury. An agent turned Shelley as his snitch. Shelley knew low-rent Hollywood and the shrink netherworld. He snitched overprescribing shrinks, wholesale. He *still* does. He’s tight pals with the agent. They play golf once a month. Shelley lives in seclusion somewhere. He’s very weird. Treasury loves him. Are you satisfied, *Señor* Freddy? If so, leave this *pendejo* alone.

Okay, *mi amigo*—for now.

I went back to work. Max Herman said, “Hey, the lieutenant returns.”

Red Stromwall said, “He outranks us now. I still can’t believe it.”

Harry Crowder said, “Freddy got me a date for the wife-swap party. Lila Leeds. She had some kind of movie career, and she’s still a dish.”

Eddie Benson said, “The jury’s out on Freddy. If he gets Miller Leavy off our ass, I’ll grant him real-cop status.”

The chitchat vaporized. The Hats resumed work. I scanned phone bills and cross-checked them. Time vaporized. I crafted a work void. It kept my mind off Lois and what she did/might have done/would never do.

I stifled yawns. I imposed a no-dope vow. Phone bills, R&I sheets, the Vice index. I scanned columns and got bupkes. Red said, “I’ve got a match. One of our female detainees called a hairdresser at Fox.”

I stifled more yawns. You’ve got five full-time cops. A full day’s work nets one match. This deal’s a probable wash.

Time *re*-vaporized. A uniformed policewoman walked through the squadroom. I registered her as Lois and blinked. Phone-bill columns and green-sheet type blurred. I shut my eyes and went out.

Max said, “I’ve got a match. A male detainee called a woman in the index. She was running a housewife prostitution ring in Burbank.”

I opened my eyes. Harry said, “The lieutenant awakes.”

A secretary walked up. I stood up. My legs held. She passed me a thick folder.

“For you, sir. It’s that BHPD burglary file the Chief requested.”

I cleared space and dumped the contents on my desk. Five flapped envelopes/five 459’s/an early ’62 time string/five north-of-Sunset cribs, de-luxe. The envelopes were date- and address-marked. The contents were listed below:

Crime-scene reports/victims’ statements/stolen-item inventories/canvass reports.

I spread the folder wide and looked for loose sheets. An envelope dropped out.

It was clasp-sealed. It was hand-marked: "Cater waiters questioned & released."

The Hats oohed and aahed. I hefted the envelope. It felt like a photo stack. I dumped it out on my desk.

It was photographs. They were six-by-eight mug shots, all black and white. The subjects ran to a type. They oozed actors with no pot to piss in. They ran from twenty-three to thirty-five. They oozed insolvency and rage and *I'll be a movie star by next Tuesday.* There were fourteen pix in all. The Hats moved up to my desk and scanned them, left to right. I trawled at their speed. Max tapped Photo #14. All five of us gasped.

We knew this guy. He's not listed as "Rick Dawes" or "Richard Danforth." He's listed as "Ronald Dewhurst." We knew this guy. We killed this guy. This guy put us in a whole world of shit.

Max said, "Gwen Perloff was calling around, looking for him, months before the kidnap job."

Red said, "Yeah—she called Peter Lawford."

Eddie said, "That cinches up the kidnap as a humbug deal."

I crossed myself. I saw Dewhurst/Dawes/Danforth sail off that cliff.

—

We bypassed the white wine and cold lobster salad. Lois saw me stretched and weak on my feet. We blew off the swing and the nightclub music across Wilshire. We went into the bedroom and doused the lights.

We undressed in the dark. Lois pulled the curtains wide. The radio reported rain about 10:00 p.m. I crashed on the bed. I jammed my face in the sheets. Lois stretched out on my back. She threw her full weight down on me. She pushed down on me and opened me up and made me breathe past spurts.

Her knees raked my back. It felt good. I sucked air in and got words out. I got out Shelley Mandel/pageant girls/dirty pictures. *Shutter click/resultant bulb glare.* I saw the pictures/Lois and cheap studs/fifty-two-card decks. Lois pulled me up and laid me out sideways. She got our eyes close and slapped me. She said, "I wouldn't do that."

She slapped me. She said, "No one could make me do that." She slapped me. She said, "I wouldn't do something so ugly." She slapped me. She said, “I would never do something so shameful and hurt the people I love.”

She bloodied my face and blotted it dry with a pillow. She tucked a bunched-up sheet under my head and made me breathe deep. The room swirled. I smelled my blood and her Chanel No. 5. She slapped me, hard. She said, “I knew I’d love someone like you one day. That’s why I didn’t do it. I had every chance to do it, but I sent up prayers and walked away.”

38

(LOS ANGELES, 10:30 A.M., THURSDAY, 8/30/62)

Shit Magnet.

It’s your definitive pose. Reprise it now. You’ve got an all-cop audience. Bill Parker sanctions you. Fetch, Freddy, fetch.

Lois banged me up last night. Her welts looked like razor burns. She slapped. Pat used her fists. She left that wedding-stone cut. My two women marked me. It enhanced my shit-magnet panache.

West L.A. station. Santa Monica and Purdue. I parked across the street and got my wig tight. The BHPD folder induced aftershocks. It cinched the case for Danforth/Dawes/Dewhurst as one man. Monroe knew him, Perloff knew him, he was a probable 459 man. I ran beaucoup record checks. R&I/FBI/NCIC/fifty-state queries. All their Ronald Dewhursts were old, fat, colored, imprisoned, or dead.

Daryl Gates told the Hats to work the Dewhurst/459 angle. That meant file study and phone calls. Nat Denkins and Phil Irwin were frog-tailing Deedee Grenier. Big brother Paul Mitchell traveled underground. A rolling Deedee stakeout might flush him. I called the California Adult Authority an hour ago. I talked to Juan Manuel Salas’s ex–parole officer. He shot me a glowing report. El Manny went straight. *Es la verdad.* He took a TV-repair course during his Chino bounce and did follow-up work at Cal State L.A. His ’57 house-break bust? Humbug from the gate. The DA refused to file. El Manny was a canvasback welterweight—but, man, can he fix TV sets!!!

I orbed the upstairs squadroom window. Sid Leffler and J. T. Meadows walked through my frame. I read their personnel files yesterday. Bill Parker and Daryl Gates had them memorized. I’m here to bootjack their “Sicko Psycho” investigation. I’m here to revise the facts to fit Monroe/Kidnap and squelch Monroe/Kennedy rumors. “Shit magnet, Freddy. You live to offend.” Daryl Gates does not speak with forked tongue.

I grabbed my briefcase and locked the car. It was hot. The station doors were propped wide. I walked in, bold and bad. Desk cops moped and glugged soft drinks. They made me. O*h, shit—it's Freddy O.*

They saw me, they sniffed me. Is *he* still around? Yeah, that's Freddy. His camel's double-parked outside.

I walked upstairs. The squad bay featured partner desks and a CO's cubicle. I tagged fourteen men. That's seven roll-out teams. I sniffed thick cigarette smoke and heard typewriter clack.

Eyeballs clicked my way. *Hey, isn't that? Yeah, it is. What's with the briefcase? I heard he's credentialed up. That kidnap deal, remember? He stepped on his dick there.*

Leffler and Meadows sat upside the far wall. I beelined and dragged a stray chair. It thunked on the floorboards and sent up a racket. Dirty looks drilled me.

I propped the chair up against a wall post. I faced Leffler, head-on. He wore aviator glasses. He wore a cheap pinstripe suit and fruit boots with elastic side gores. Meadows vibed afterthought. He was tall and too handsome. He wore a hopsack blazer and gray slacks. He worked the vice traps in Will Rogers Park and entrapped crotch honkers wholesale. His personnel file glowed.

I flashed my credentials. Leffler and Meadows took long looks. Meadows went *What's this?* Leffler rolled his eyes. He knew from harrassment. I slow-orbed the room. No typewriters clacked. It's all eyes on me. My shitbird rep precedes.

I turned back to Leffler. I went stentorian. I pitched the whole room, loud and clear.

"Intelligence Division is assuming command of your 'Sicko Psycho' investigation. That's direct from Chief Parker. The CO is Lieutenant Daryl Gates. I'm the lead field man. The DA's Office liaison is Miller Leavy. The Hat Squad will be working with me. You and Officer Meadows have just been rendered redundant, but I'll shoot you some clue-clown work, so you can save face with all your colleagues who now know that I've got your balls in my pocket. I won't need to interview Officer Meadows. He's clean in my book. But, Leffler—you're borderline sketchy. You've got dubious ties to Morty Bendish, illegal smear-sheet journalists, and nut cops like Jack Clemmons. That piece you wrote for the *L.A. Lowdown* violates fourteen Federal postal codes per the illegal passage of unregistered mail, and the Postal Inspection Service is building a case against you and Bendish. We also have the matter of your Officer Sid gigs at high schools within this division. I'm wondering if it's nothing but a smoke screen for you to exercise your penchant for underage cooze. I personally observed you plying a group of Pali girls with booze at the Sip 'n' Surf."

Leffler trembled. He popped sweat. His glasses slid down his nose. He pushed them back up. Meadows stood up. I grabbed his waistband and pulled him back down. I scanned the room, I *owned* the room, all eyes on *me*.

I said, “Stand up.”

Leffler stood up. He went weavy and futzed with his glasses.

I said, “Walk to the front hallway, turn right, step into the second interrogation box on the left side.”

Leffler complied. He grabbed chair backs to steady himself. He walked pigeon-toed. He kept his head down and plumb-lined off the floor. He cut right and almost toppled. I stepped ahead of him and got the door.

He stepped inside. The box was prerigged. Bolted-down table/two bolted-down chairs. Two-way mirror wall. Phone book on the table. Full-sound hookup. Outside-hallway feed.

I spread Leffler up against the wall. I frisked him. I pulled off his holstered .38 and placed it on the table. I plucked his wallet and went through it. I pulled him upright and shoved him into a chair.

I sat down across from him. He said, “You’ve ruined me.”

I lit a cigarette. “You’re dirty. The Chief thinks so, Lieutenant Gates thinks so, I think so.”

Leffler waved off my smoke. “Here’s what I’m thinking. I’m thinking this is some kind of buyback deal you’ve got going. I was part of that PD-Justice raid on your listening posts. You were working bug jobs on Marilyn Monroe’s house and the Lawford place. A Justice cop told me the raids were strictly cosmetic. The Palisades and Brentwood. Get it? The Monroe house is right there. The ‘Sicko Psycho’ pulled his jobs not that far west of there. Parker’s afraid the kidnap deal and the number you and the Hats pulled with that Danforth guy will blow wide, and he’s looking to buy some good press for the Department, because the Department sure needs some good PR.”

I clap-clapped. I slid my flask across the table. Leffler took two pops.

“My Hoffa op. How far is it blown?”

“It’s strictly cop gossip. It’s not out in the world with the squares.”

“Who spilled on the Hoffa op? That Justice cop and who else?”

Leffler said, “Jack Clemmons.”

I made the jerk-off sign. “Who’s in with you and Morty B. in your little pamphlet venture?”

Leffler went *harumph*. “Clemmons is batshit crazy. I’m a serious writer and student of human psychology, who also happens to be a veteran police officer. I'm Morty's highbrow guy, and Clemmons pitches to Morty's lowbrow readership."

I blew smoke rings. "You don't fraternize with Clemmons or an ex–motor cop named Norm Krause, who owns a dive bar named Norm's Nest?"

Leffler went *harumph.* "No. Certainly not."

I said, "Okay, you did strikebreaker work at Fox, back in the early '30s. Fox interests me, so I'll toss you a compliment before we go any further. You weren't far off when you called Monroe and the kidnap job a buyback deal. That said, let me throw some Fox-associated names at you."

Leffler smirked and sucked flask juice. He's getting cocky. He mandates a smackdown.

I said, "Gwen Perloff. Have you ever met her?"

"No—but I know she was the victim in that kidnap job you and the Hats botched so bad."

"Paul Mitchell Grenier?"

"No. I've never heard of him."

"Del Kinney, Jr.?"

"Everybody in L.A. law enforcement knows Del. I don't know him from Fox, but I knew him from the Sheriff's and the ABC."

I said, "Albie Aadland?"

Leffler said, "Well, he's an Aadland. I'm a Jewish kid from L.A., and all us landsmen know the Aadlands, and we've all got the good common sense to be afraid of them, and I'm not ashamed to admit that I benefited from their largesse, back when I was a kid, starting out."

I tapped the table. "Explain that."

Leffler shrugged. "What's to explain? Hersh, Ira, Meyer—they lent money to Jewish families in trouble, and they'd hire kids to run errands and cause a little *tsuris.* I threw a few stink bombs and broke a few windows for them, and then I graduated to more suitable adult work."

I said, "Such as?"

Leffler flushed. I hit a nerve. The Aadlands rattled his cage.

"Well, it's the '30s into the '40s, up to and after the war. It's not that I'm proud of it, but the brothers ran a string of fuck pads. You know the concept. Hot-sheet joints, sin pits. You've got sex shows, smut films, illegal pharmaceuticals, interracial fraternization, jam sessions, all that avant-garde stuff. It was all right, I guess. At least by prevailing standards then. The Depression, the war—people needed to unwind. You had quiet little places in quiet little neighborhoods, and a high-class clientele. I worked those places as a doorman and something of a security guard. You read my personnel file, right? I spilled all that at my background interview. It was the Depression and the war. The background cops made allowances."

Yes and no. Leffler hired on in '42. He was a temporary war hire. War-hire standards ran low. He went on the regulars in '47. His war-hire record was good. He wasn't *re*-background-checked.

I said, "Let's get back to Albie Aadland."

Leffler said, "Why? He was much younger than Hersh, Meyer, and Ira. He was underfoot when I broke up some picket lines at Fox, which are probably the only times that I ever saw him."

I cogitated. Leffler sucked flask juice. He gassed on the Q and A. He rolled with the flow.

"Fox, today. A general sense of panic. *Cleopatra*'s headed for the shitter. Criminal conspiracies are popping up. Dope, bearer bonds, vice shit. You're an old Fox hand. What have you heard?"

Leffler drummed the table. "*Cleopatra*'s common knowledge. As for the rest of it, I've heard bupkes."

I drummed the table. I dead-eyed him. He was bent. He craved young stuff. He knew I had his shit dialed.

"Okay, I'm starting to get it now. Monroe was shooting her last picture at Fox. The kidnap girl was working at Fox, so somehow it's the focus of your buyback deal."

I twirled my ashtray. Three full circuits. Leffler's nerves stretched.

"You're a ham. You're a movie buff. You did crowd-extra work, you met people and made connections. You've got the writing bug, you wrote detective magazine pieces under a pseudonym, you've got a master's degree, you took some of Paul de River's classes, you went on LAPD as a war hire in '42, and a regular in '47. Is that about right?"

Leffler sneered. "Hey, the man knows how to read a personnel file."

I said, "Don't take that tone with me. I'll kick the shit out of you the next time."

Leffler put his hands up. Okay, okay, okay.

"Did you have a close personal relationship with Doc de River?"

"No, the old dink gave me no personal attention."

I mock-sighed. "You're a talented cat, Sid. I've got a source on *Twist Party Stakeout,* and I heard you wrote the script. I'm wondering if you exploited your 'Officer Sid' assignment and recruited the underage girls who will appear underclad in the dance scenes."

Leffler said, “Yes, I did recruit them. And they’re not underclad by any and all enlightened standards.”

I cracked my knuckles. The phone book vibrated. I packed brass knucks and a beavertail sap.

“Do not *ever* feed underaged girls liquor. I’m out to nail you for contributing and put you in the fruit tank at Mira Loma.”

The Sidster laughed. “Who’s your source on my picture? Tell me, so I’ll know who to avoid.”

I said, “Lois Nettleton.”

Leffler laughed. “That Method actress drip? I hope you’re not poking her, bec—”

I went with the phone book. I threw a sidearm shot to the head. It ripped the leg bolts out of the floor. The chair toppled. Leffler hit the wall face-first.

PART 6

SEX CREEP

(AUGUST 31–SEPTEMBER 8, 1962)

39

(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 A.M., FRIDAY, 8/31/62)

The PD kept a suite at the Ambassador. Two bedrooms/living room/office/kitchenette. It housed out-of-town jurists and high rollers. Ranking cops entertained illicit girlfriends. Boozefest conclaves ran twenty-four hours.

Parker, Gates, and I hogged the office. A room-service waiter laid out a plush spread. We noshed eggs and smoked lox and gulped coffee. The Hats hogged the living room. They babysat Morty Bendish.

The office was air-cooled. A sliding door supplied privacy. We sat in matching wing chairs. Parker laid on the lawyerese.

Monroe, the kidnap job, and the "Sicko Psycho" string comprise a triumvirate. Fox is a "presumptive point of convergence." He fears the "degree of evidence obtained by illegal surveillance" and "the degree to which all three jobs are wholly assumption and speculation."

Gates said, "The 'Sicko Psycho' file runs to six big boxes. I lugged it over to Intel late last night. Leffler and Meadows kept assiduous reports, and they dotted all their *i*'s and crossed their *t*'s. Leffler's dirty, okay, I believe that—Freddy made the point in that report he filed yesterday. Sid's a worker, though—and Meadows is a comer. He's got a law degree, he's California Bar–licensed, and he's got a future with us. The important thing is that the file is jam-packed with dirt that Morty can use in his series."

Parker said, "The *Mirror*'s a dirt rag. We'll get Morty to ladle it on. Especially as it pertains to Monroe. Morty will drag her through the mud like there's no tomorrow."

I said, "I talked to Bob Kennedy. He's up-to-date on the 'Sicko Psycho,' and he's conversant on the overall plan. Here's a good lead that may cinch Monroe to the first six break-ins. Leffler and Meadows submitted *all* the letters the Psycho left at the first six crime scenes, and I submitted a paper scrap of the letter I found at the Monroe house. Ray called the paper and letter stock in all *seven* samples 'visibly archaic.' If we push him, we might get a confirmed evidential match on the paper, the glue, and the cut-up magazines that shitbird used. On top of that, I froze a semen scraping from the smut pix I found that night. I submitted that to Ray, and Leffler and Meadows submitted all their jizz samples."

Parker spiked his coffee. Old Overholt. It's the Breakfast of Champions.

"We've got to lay off of Fox. That approach is wildly untenable. It's based solely on our unprovable assumptions that the place is a fount of criminal endeavor—when all we've got is key-party and mail-drop bullshit, most of which derives from Federal postal infractions."

Gates sipped coffee. "Freddy's grand jury plan is a winner. It permits us to present sealed testimony with the assurance that the testimony will not result in indictments, and that the guilty parties who testify will receive immunity—but will remain municipally indictable should they break silence on our cases, most notably the kidnap job. It may also serve to scotch any plans Miller Leavy might make to burn Freddy and the Hats for the Danforth job."

Parker lit a cigarette. "Danforth, Dawes, Dewhurst. Who is this guy? He's 100% clean, nationwide. Let's go through those BHPD burglary files. There has to be dirt we can pull."

I said, "Morty's series will provide your basic numbskull reader with a Monroe-job solution that will engulf any and all Monroe/Kennedy rumors that might surface. *And* it will serve to convince Bobby K. not to go for indictments on me and my boys. *But* we need to conclusively ID the kidnappers, pop them, and convince them to testify, for an assured waltz on all kidnap and related charges. So far, I'm fairly certain that Gwen Perloff and possibly Paul Mitchell Grenier were in on it—but it's all instinct and no proof."

Gates laughed. "Perloff, Grenier, one unknown male Caucasian, one probable male Latin. Maybe they'll resist arrest—and Freddy and the Hats will have to toast them."

Parker swirled his drink. "Have the boys bring Morty in. I'm due downtown."

Gates got up and slid the door wide. The Hats ushered Morty B. in. I pulled a chair out. Red Stromwall sat him down.

Parker said, "The 'Sicko Psycho' will henceforth be known as the 'Sex Creep.' You will author a sensational, multipart, ongoing series on the Sex Creep in the *Mirror-News.* We will apportion information to you, and you will deploy it to our exact specifications. Lieutenant Otash and the Hat Squad are taking over the investigation into the Sex Creep's first six West L.A. burglaries. Your brother-in-law, Officer

Leffler, and his partner, Officer Meadows, are out as of now. Again, we will tell you what to write. In consideration of your efforts, all of the Federal and municipal mail-fraud charges filed against you will be dropped."

Morty stood up. He did a little heel-click/*Jawohl, mein Führer* number. It garnered big laughs.

"I'll do it. But where's this series of mine going? What's the *furkakte* punch line?"

I said, "Don't be dim, Morty. The Sex Creep murdered Marilyn Monroe."

—

Skull session. The Hats and me. We've planned a detailed read-through.

We've got occurrence summaries, lab sheets, record checks, and field interrogation cards. We've got field-interview reports. Leffler and Meadows *worked* the string. They weren't Burglary-desk cops. They were night-watch felony-car detectives. The complainants called West L.A. station. Patrol cops responded. Leffler and Meadows were dispatched, pro forma. They viewed the crime scenes, hot and fresh. They took extensive notes. They maintained a crime-scene photo file.

I redid my cubicle. I took down my "Monroe" and "Kidnap" corkboards and taped a plastic-sheath wall map in their place. The map spanned the northern section of West Los Angeles. It covered Brentwood, Mandeville Canyon, the Santa Monica Mountains, and Pacific Palisades. I grease pencil–marked it: "Sex Creep 459 locations."

The Hats showed. I shoved my desk into a corner and bought us sit-down room. They brought straight-backed chairs. I passed out grease pencils and mimeographed copies of the six occurrence reports.

We formed a chair circle. Max and Red passed out coffee and ashtrays. We jumped on the work.

459 #1: 11/18/61. (DR #63882, 1 of 6). 13821 Corsica Drive, Pacific Palisades. Complainant: Marcia Maria Davenport/WFA/DOB 6/12/19. Twice divorced, lives alone. Lives off trust fund. Complainant's call to station: 9:49 p.m. Suspect pushed up half-cracked window and entered house. No items stolen. Suspect dumped lingerie drawers, kicked over furniture, scattered barbiturate sleeping pills taken from medicine cabinet on bathroom rug. Suspect masturbated and ejaculated on lingerie-drawer items. (Semen sample to lab). Suspect left note composed in cutout/pasted-on magazine

letters in lingerie drawer. Both magazine letters and paper backing appear to be significantly dated. The note reads “I saw you hiking at Will Rogers Park. Do you remember the moment you pulled your blouse out to scratch your back? I do.”

I checked the map. I X-marked the address. Local geography. Corsica Drive adjoins Riviera Country Club. Will Rogers Park is one mile northwest.

459 #2: 12/4/61. (DR #63882, 2 of 6). 12242 Marlboro Street, Pacific Palisades. Complainant: Leona Jenks Hagedohm/WFA/DOB 4/16/28. Once divorced, lives alone. Math teacher at Paul Revere Junior High School. Complainant’s call to station: 11:18 p.m. Suspect reached through pet-access flap and unhooked kitchen door. No items stolen. Suspect dumped lingerie drawers, dumped furniture in fireplace, slashed guest-bedroom mattress, masturbated and ejaculated on photographs of complainant in complainant’s 1946 Santa Monica High School yearbook. (Semen sample to lab). Suspect left note composed in cutout/pasted-on magazine letters in lingerie drawer. Both magazine letters and paper backing appear to be significantly dated. The note reads “I like your way with the kids at Paul Revere. Are you too frigid to have kids of your own?”

I checked the map. I X-marked the address. The Sex Creep’s creeping west. He’s still south of Sunset. Marlboro Street is two blocks south of Paul Revere. The Sex Creep peeped Victim #2 as she walked to work.

459 #3: 12/16/61. (DR #63882, 3 of 6). 1545 Monaco Drive, Pacific Palisades. Complainant: Wanda Jean D’Allesio/WFA/DOB 1/9/30. Twice divorced, lives alone. Alimony recipient. Complainant’s call to station: 10:04 p.m. Suspect vaulted in pushed-up window and entered house. No items stolen. Suspect dumped lingerie drawers, kicked over furniture, dumped and burned family photo albums in the living room fireplace, dumped barbiturate pills in the master-bathroom toilet, masturbated and ejaculated on a snapshot of complainant and first husband in swim attire. (Semen sample to lab). Suspect left note composed in cutout/pasted-on magazine letters in lingerie drawer. Magazine letters and paper backing appear to be significantly dated. The note reads “Two husbands is nothing. Carole Landis had four, and she died younger than you, even if I kill you tomorrow.”

I checked the map. I X-marked the address. The Sex Creep’s creeping back northwest. He’s escalating. He’s getting more agitated and more violent. The Carole Landis reference clinched it. The Sex

Creep creeped the Monroe pad. Monaco Drive is one-half mile from the Landis pad on Capri Drive.

459 #4: 1/19/62. (DR #63882, 4 of 6). 10116 Mandeville Lane, Brentwood. Complainant: Arden Jane Brownleigh/WFA/DOB 5/21/32. Once divorced, lives alone. Alimony recipient. Complainant's call to station: 11:31 p.m. Suspect picked lock on rear service porch and entered house. No items stolen. Suspect dumped lingerie drawers, disconnected and overturned basement appliances, shattered glass-encased wedding photos of complainant and ex-husband, stuck pins in their faces and nailed the frameless photograph to the living room wall. Suspect masturbated and ejaculated in lingerie drawer. (Semen sample to lab). Suspect left note composed in cutout/glued-on magazine letters. Magazine letters and paper backing appear to be significantly dated. The note reads "You think you look like her. You fashion yourself after her. You're nowhere near."

I checked the map. I X-marked the address. The Creep's creeping east. He's into Brentwood now. He's veering toward Fifth Helena Drive. I checked the file photo of Arden Jane Brownleigh. She's got that vapid blond/Monroe look.

459 #5: 2/29/62. (DR #63882, 5 of 6). 10110 Highwood Street, Brentwood. Complainant: Lorraine (NMI) Smith/WFA/DOB 10/25/27. Twice divorced, lives alone. Alimony recipient. Complainant's call to station: 9:29 p.m. Suspect used glass cutter and entered bedroom window. No items stolen. Suspect dumped lingerie drawer and formed a tableau, consisting of soggy bathroom towels, dumped cigarette butts, pages torn out of complainant's address book scattered on random bookshelves. Suspect masturbated and ejaculated in lingerie drawer. (Semen sample to lab). Left note composed in cutout/glued-on magazine letters in lingerie drawer. Magazine letters and paper backing appear to be significantly dated. The note reads "You're like Cape Canaveral. You're my launching pad to greater things."

I checked the map. I X-marked the address. The Creep's creeping close. It's 2/29/62. I sense *this*.

He's already prowled the Monroe house. She's set to move in within two weeks. The trades reported it. He's been inside her prior cribs. He knows how she cultivates sloth and disarray. He's anticipating the sloth and disarray at Fifth Helena Drive. The creepoid Creep's on the hunt—

459 #6: 3/12/62. (DR #63882, 6 of 6). 2802 Fourth Anita Drive, Brentwood. Complainant: Dorothy Dilys Trent/WFA/DOB 7/21/33. Once divorced, lives alone. Registrar at University High School.

Complainant's call to station: 12:41 a.m., 3/13/62. Suspect kicked in bedroom window. No items stolen. Suspect dumped lingerie drawer and formed a tableau, consisting of dumped soggy towels, dumped cigarette butts, torn pages out of complainant's address book scattered on random bookshelves. Suspect masturbated and ejaculated in lingerie drawer. (Semen sample to lab). Suspect left no note. Suspect left 1948 nude morgue photograph of actress Carole Landis in lingerie drawer.

I checked the map. I X-marked the address. *Sex Creep! Sex Creep! Sex Creep!* His internal shit's imponderable. He plays suicidal. He does not play homicidal. So what? Morty Bendish will twist established facts to spell *MURDER ONE.* We'll track the Sex Creep down and corner him. He'll try to escape. We'll shoot him dead and indict him for the Monroe snuff, posthumous. The lurid art of it will outcreep any and all Monroe-Kennedy rumors.

Max said, "Off the top of my head, he's no killer."

Red said, "Yeah—but Morty needs a punch line for his series."

Harry said, "He's in jail for some other sort of offense. That, or the nut bin. That's why he stopped in March."

Eddie said, "Not March—he was B and E'ing the Monroe crib in June and July. Remember? Marilyn was talking it up to her friends on Freddy's phone taps. It has to be the same guy—but Marilyn didn't report the break-ins. The Creep stiffed calls to three of the six victims. I read ahead to the follow-up reports, so that's how I know that. Remember? Marilyn told her friends she got breather calls."

Red said, "I heard those tapes. Her account of the break-ins played kosher, but the breather-call bit came off like a fabrication."

I lit a cigarette. "She kept the smut pix he jizzed on. I know her. She was a sick twist who craved sick attention. This fucker is nothing but sick drama, and that's the kind of shit Marilyn got off on."

—

The Hats dispersed. They had a mimeo file copy and took it to Vince and Paul's Steakhouse for a nosh-and-read. I read and chain-smoked in my cubicle. I tipped to one aspect, fast.

The Sicko Psycho/Sex Creep string was Sid Leffler's baby. He got seduced and worked it with and without J. T. Meadows. The Burglary-desk cops wised up and tossed him the string. The sex shit must have jazzed him. He studied under Paul de River. *That* meant *this:* more case lines and dubious headshrinkers constellate.

Leffler and Meadows worked it. They studied FI cards. They were submitted by night-watch patrol cops on the six break-in nights. Leffler and Meadows braced twenty-seven male Caucasians and three non-Caucasians out strolling Brentwood and the Palisades. They called in warrant checks and rap-sheet checks and got zero. Nobody popped up and shrieked *"Bust me!"* They roused known westside burglars and registered sex offenders and got zero squared. Print men dusted all six 459 locations. They got smudges/smears/the complainant's prints off exemplar sets and rubber-glove prints that indicated a small-handed man. Leffler schmoozed Ray Pinker into a favor. Ray did a walking portrait in the 459 #4 living room. A flat-weave carpet retained foot depressions. Ray tagged the Creep as a small-footed man. His stride was short. He walked heels out. He ran antithetical to the tall/big-foot man who tracked through the Monroe pad on 8/4/62.

A photo crew snapped all six 459 locations. I Man Camera'd the pix and merged sight and savvy. Leffler and Meadows canvassed the immediate neighbors. They described all six complainants as lonely divorced women. Said women spent most evenings alone. They played Broadway show tune albums and juiced. Neighbors said they heard songs from *Camelot* and *The Fantasticks* blasting on the break-in nights, *during the break-in time frames. The complainants were out of their homes and the Sex Creep was plundering. That* meant *this:*

He cased his intended victims. He cased their homes. He learned their habits. He surveilled them and pounced when they split for the evening. He observed their attire and extrapolated dates and social engagements. He calculated time spans. He broke in and spun disks. It sound-covered his ransackings. I skimmed crime-scene photos. I saw hurled furniture and jizzed-up lingerie. I played "Soon It's Gonna Rain," "Try to Remember," and "If Ever I Should Leave You" in a separate brain vault. It ran my Man Camera stereophonic. I went through the photo stacks. I saw the soggy towel/dumped ashtray tableaux. I saw the scattered address-book pages. I saw the cutout/glued-on magazine letters. I played those mawkish show tunes concurrent. A brain chant cut through my sound track:

Lonely women, lonely women, lonely women.

Leffler and Meadows milked the string dry. They set the Hats and me up for a shit-kicking reprise. Add Morty B.'s print barrage. Plus possible radio and TV. Something had to give.

I called Ray Pinker. I told him to rush-job the six semen scrapes. I told him to run cell-isolate tests on my Monroe-pad scrape. Ray said he'd work late tonight and do it.

I called Miller Leavy. He was barely civil. I told him to write to Lowell Farr's parents and goose my interview request. Leavy said he would. I told him to stiff a formal interview request to Albie Aadland. Leavy snarled and said he would.

I called Nat Denkins. I told him to goose his spot tails on Deedee Grenier and run them full-time. Nat squawked and called me a slavedriver. I pledged double pay. That brought him around. I called Phil Irwin and told him to rent a phone truck. Park it on Miller Drive, north of Gwen Perloff's pad. Hold down high-up/look-down surveillance. Eyeball the front door. Let's see who visits Big Gwen.

Daryl Gates cruised by. He said the Chief's monthly lunch with Sheriff Pitchess was inked in for tomorrow. Pete has some "hot" Black Muslim footage. He wants to sell it to Intel. "I'm looking for a quid pro quo, Freddy. A favor the Chief can lob at Pete."

I said, "Have the Chief ask him why Motel Mike Bayless transferred out of SHIT at the exact moment of the Perloff snatch, only to transfer back to SHIT in the immediate wake of the snatch, with only rudimentary work on the job completed. I'll get you a contact mike to attach to the table, so I can gauge Pete's answer."

Gates agreed and bopped back to his office. I called Eddie Chacõn and urged him to lean on BNDD. Shelley Mandel was a big Zionist. He funneled black-market meds to the Irgun and the Haganah. I'm impressed—but get me Doc Shelley's current whereabouts.

Red Stromwall cruised by. He said the Hats were still matching phone bills and address-book listings from the Bev's Switchboard raid. He scheduled an interview with that Fox hairstylist. One of the swinger women from the raid called her three times. Eddie Benson jammed that woman who ran the housewife prosty ring. He said she's a wash—she don't know shit from Shinola.

Red scrammed. My cubicle was wicked hot. I goosed the AC dial and aimed a vent at my balls. Aahh—that's good.

I file-hopped. I jumped LAPD to BHPD. Both files denoted 459 PC —burglary/residential.

Five occurrence reports with missing-item lists. With station-house mugs but no print cards. The jobs occurred in the wake of cater-waitered parties. "Cater waiter" is a suspect occupation. It sustains bad boys between 459's, fruit hustles, and gigolo jaunts. I dumped the photo sheaths. Ronald Dewhurst smirked up at me.

He's aka Rick Dawes. Marilyn Monroe and Gwen Perloff knew him. I knew him as Richie Danforth. It was brief. Here's our denouement. Max Herman says, *"Sink him, Freddy."*

I crossed myself and dumped the print manifests. The squad lieutenant included a cover note. He wrote “Smudges, smears, partials and elimination-printed latents found at all locations. In addition, two different sets of rubber-glove prints were found at all locations. (Note photo blowups).”

I dug through the print sheath and pulled out the photos. “Differentiated?” That’s dead-on. I studied the print card. I noted *this:*

Individual prints. Plus full hand spreads pressed on touch-and-grab planes. Hands pressed to window ledges, doorjambs, and drawer pulls at all five locations. The big-hand man had spatulate fingers. I never noticed Richie Danforth’s fingers. The small-hand man had short, slender fingertips, down to the flex digit. *These* glove prints looked familiar. I naked-eyed them, in tight. They resembled the rubber-glove prints from the Sex Creep jobs.

The Intel darkroom featured a twin-lens microscope. I bundled up the BHPD print pix and the Creep manifest. I hit the darkroom and worked them.

I rigged the slides. I grabbed an X-Acto knife and excised representative print close-ups. I got a right-index-finger doorjamb from Sex Creep Job #3 and a window ledge from BHPD Job #5. #3 went under the left slide. #5 went under the right slide. I adjusted the eyepieces and dialed the lenses in identically tight.

Way tight. Near-*cellular* tight. Count the pixels, the microdots, the stretch flaws in taut latex.

Squint now. Cover your right eye and squint left. Note those three crosshatch dots. It’s a subcellular cluster. You’ve got it memorized.

Now squint right. Cover your left eye. Squint down. *There’s something like those same crosshatched dots.* Stressed latex meets hard surface. It’s representative. It’s not a match.

My eyes watered. I wiped them on my coat sleeve. I covered my right eye. I adjusted the left-hand slide and squinted left. I saw a big fat rubber-glove seam from BHPD Job #5. I saw a minute fissure near the digit flex. I switched eyes. I covered my left eye and adjusted the right-hand slide. I squinted right. I saw the same fat rubber-glove seam from the Sex Creep’s Job #3. There’s that same fissure near the digit flex.

It’s a match. It’s pure forensic gospel. The Sex Creep did the divorcée 459’s solo. The Sex Creep doubled up with the Beverly Hills burglar. Said burglar might or might not be Richie Danforth/Rick Dawes/Ronnie Dewhurst. It’s not courthouse-valid evidence. Who gives a shit? Richie/Rick/Ronnie’s dead and the Sex Creep’s a newspaper casualty and X-marked for a lynch mob.

—

I shitworked past dusk. I reread the Sex Creep file and the BHPD burglary file and memorized small details. I reread the Sheriff's kidnap file and annotated inconsistencies. I called Nat Denkins. He reported: Deedee Grenier was shacked with a lezzie bar pickup. He'd resume the tail, tomorrow. Maybe she'd lead him to Paul Mitchell. I called Phil Irwin. He said his crane surveillance paid off, quick.

Darryl Zanuck showed up at Gwen's pad and stayed inside three hours. Pops left at 3:05 p.m. Phil tailed Gwen to Bullocks Wilshire. He followed her up to Ladies' Wear. She purchased a nifty black dress. She told the saleslady she was wearing it to a party Sunday night. It has to be the wife-swap bash. I'll be there. With "wife" Babs Payton. Harry Crowder will be there. With "wife" Lila Leeds.

I got cabin fever. The all-day shitwork stint compressed me. I split the PAB and cruised twilight L.A.

It was a hot summer night. I cruised with intent. I broomed out to West Hollywood. I dropped by the Jaguar, the Tradesman, the Falcon's Lair. I chatted up the lads. I gleaned zero leads per Paul Mitchell Grenier. I forked out ten-spots and phone-number slips. Call me if Paul Mitchell returns to Planet Earth. I pay C-notes for solid leads.

I drove by Bev's Switchboard and parked outside. No perverts, call girls, or call boys appeared and grabbed their mail. I split and buzzed out to the Palisades. I zigzagged residential streets and looked for the house Monroe sketched on 6/22/48. I saw nothing close.

I pulled up to 13821 Corsica Drive. Divorcée #1 lives here. Marcia Maria Davenport/current age forty-three/twice divorced, lives alone. Let's prowl the perimeter, let's peep windows, let's channel the Sex Creep and *PEEP*.

I did it. Sycamore trees enclosed the property lines on both sides. I hunkered low and popped up to scope lighted windows. I caught the living room first. Marcia Davenport paced and smoked. Her hi-fi belched samba music. Marcia popped her hips and sambaed wall to wall. She had bleached-blond Monroe hair. She wore it in the Monroe flip style. She grabbed a glass off an end table and sipped as she sambaed. It looked like straight gin.

The Sex Creep dug Marcia. She vibed experience. He perved her, he peeped her, he pursued her. He learned her routine and desecrated her home. I grokked it. I got the gestalt.

I drove to 12242 Marlboro Street. It's two blocks south of Sunset. Divorcée #2 lives here. Leona Jenks Hagedohm/current age thirty-four/once divorced, lives alone. It's a white Spanish job. Palm trees provide peep cover. I got out and strolled the perimeter. I caught Leona in the kitchen. She was wearing a panty-and-bra combo and nothing else. She chugged off a highball glass. She sudsed up her arms. She had short blond hair with dark roots. Two divorcées down, two dye jobs noted. The Sex Creep's got a type.

I cut out. I drove to 1545 Monaco Drive. Divorcée #3 lives here. Wanda Jean D'Allesio/current age thirty-two/twice divorced, lives alone. It was a stucco ranch spread. It lacked tree cover. That didn't matter. Wanda Jean sat on her front porch. She wore a frayed pink shift and chain-smoked Kool filter kings. She tried to read a magazine, it bored her, she tossed it. She had long brown hair. The Sex Creep dug her. He did not exclude brunettes. *I* dug her. She had that pent-up/caged-tigress look that always gassed me. Hey, Creep—this chick's ring-a-ding!

I split and cruised the Palisades commercial strip. I got a flash. The Sex Creep lives nearby. He walks to his B and E's or walks a dog to appear prosaic. He brings the dog inside his target pads. He's got access to real estate and/or court records and studies his target women. He simmers his lust to a boil. He breaks, enters, and peeps.

It was 10:00 p.m. I cruised the Palisades Village. I saw late sidewalk diners and Pali kids out trolling. I caught a line outside the Bay Theater. It's make-out-date central for Pali High libertines.

I parked on Sunset and strolled. I scanned kid cliques for Lowell Farr and didn't spot her. I saw a sidewalk art show, set up outside the Bay. An old lady hawked amateur stuff. She mimed Left Bank Paris. She featured oil paintings on easels. They were god-awful dreck.

I browsed my way through. I saw seascapes, mountain vistas, Will Rogers Park in bloom. Then jarring colors and a face cut into squares—with the eyeballs, nose, and mouth rearranged.

A woman's face. Marilyn Monroe's face. A companion oil to Lowell Farr's wall art. Note the "L. Farr/'62" daubed in the lower left corner. I peeped the wall art from Natasha Lytess' rooftop. Vandals painted over it. *That* painting torqued me then. *This* painting torqued me more.

Monroe's mouth grew out of her forehead. Two husbands and John F. Kennedy were trapped inside. DiMaggio, Arthur Miller, Mattress Jack himself. They screamed. Marilyn's mouth enclosed them. They were recognizable. Lowell did good detail work. Shattered music clefs poured from Marilyn's right ear. Scrabble letters poured from the left. They spelled "a life in discordance." Sharp fangs grew out of her hairline. Lowell scalped her. Nembutal capsules formed a bright yellow wig.

The painting was up for sale. It was a steal at fifty bucks. I gave the cashier a hundred. She almost plotzed.

—

I was itchy, antsy, adrenalized. The painting torqued me. The rubber-glove match torqued me more. I hit Sunset east and cut north on Benedict Canyon. I wanted to prowl unit 208 at the Tiki-Torch Village apartments.

I brain-screened flashbacks:

Saturday, 5/19/62. I tail Monroe to the Valley. I blow the tail. I scrawl parked-car plate numbers and misplace the tally sheet. I find the sheet belatedly and learn *this:*

Gwen Perloff parked her car two blocks from the Tiki-Torch. Likewise, Monroe. *Back on 5/19/62. At the same time of day.*

Cut to:

8/4/62. Monroe dies. Gwen Perloff is kidnapped. *She's rescued. At the Tiki-Torch apartments.*

I crossed Mulholland and downsloped to the Valley. The heat index spiked. Ranch pads devolved to swinger-pad blocks. I parked outside the Tiki-Torch. The courtyard was lit bright. Shrieks and pool-splash noise carried. The sidewalk reeked of chlorine.

The front gate was unlocked. I ambled on in. I shined on the water sports and the poolside tiki bar. I took side stairs up to unit 208.

I dug the Tiki-Torch. This sin pit aspired to class. The poolside view was a perk. 208 was a boss perv perch.

I peeled off the Sheriff's crime-scene tape and jammed a #4 pick in the door lock. Two twists right, two twists left. The door popped wide.

I stepped inside and shut the door behind me. The living room reeked of carpet-lift solvents. I flipped a wall switch. Recessed track lights threw a glow. The room had been cleaned out. A purple deep-pile carpet remained.

It was blast-oven hot. I flipped an AC switch and circulated cold air. A clipboard in-and-out log was propped by the door. It was big-crime de rigueur. Police personnel signed in and out for the job's duration.

I picked up the clipboard. One notebook sheet was clipped in. One entry was logged. Sergeant Michael J. Bayless signed in and out. He was here from 2:15 to 3:00 p.m./Sunday, 8/5/62.

Anomaly. Inconsistency. I'd read the Sheriff's task list for the snatch. The lab crew and photo crew had been here. The list reflected the pro forma shitwork decreed by kidnap jobs. The job went *pfffft* then. Here's the big question. Did it go *pfffft* from dearth of leads or cosmetic design?

More cops should have traipsed through here. Curious patrol cops. Canvass cops beating the heat. Cops hot to scope the chicks and make the scene.

I lit the pad and strolled the pad. It was cheese-luxe, all the way. The walls had been print-wiped. The task list noted that. The snatch men knew their shit. I checked the closet where the geeks stashed Gwen P. Gwen said they stuck an AC hose under the door to keep her cool and refreshed. I saw gouge marks at the bottom of the door frame. The hose would have fit right there.

The closet bit played *half* credible. It felt *almost* cop-contrived. I checked the two bedrooms. They were pristine. I checked Bathroom #1. It was pristine. Bathroom #2 was not quite pristine.

In the medicine chest. On the third shelf. There's a small X-Acto knife. There's purple fiber gack stuck to the blade.

The gack matches the purple deep-pile carpet. Additional fibers match a gray carpet pad.

It's an oversight. The toss cops shined the knife on. Somebody's been futzing under the living room rug.

I walked back to the living room. I pulled up the carpet and tossed all four corners to the center of the room. I saw a gouged-in pocket at the dead middle. Somebody fashioned a quickie stash hole.

I reached in. My hand brushed warm metal. I pulled out two padlock keys. They were stamped "208/storage."

We've got pool-courtyard apartments. There's an underground garage. The storage lockers would have to be—

There.

I tried not to run. I relocked the pad and walked to the main stairwell. I took the stairs down three at a time. The stairwell led straight to a fume-choked garage.

It was monsoon hot. The Tiki-ites favored flash rides. Vettes, T-Birds, 409 Chevys with lake pipes and cheater slicks. They vibed repo bait. Leaky pipes dripped dark ooze. They spattered off cherry paint jobs.

There it is. Up against the north wall. A steel door marked STORAGE.

I slid through car rows and dodged dripping ooze. The large key opened the large door. A wall switch lit the space. I clocked four walls with two locker rows per. 101 was just off to my left. Even numbers sat on top, odd numbers sat below. I beelined to the 200s and counted eight lockers over.

The small key fit. The door creaked open. I saw one fat newspaper stack.

That's it. There's nothing else. What the fuck is—

I started at the top. They were all *Heralds*. The *Herald* was L.A.'s Hearst rag. It ran threadbare compared to the *Times.* I pulled out the top three. They were dated Wednesday/Thursday/Friday/—8/1, 8/2, 8/3/62.

It was the ramp-up to the Monroe OD/kidnap convergence. I scanned all three issues. I checked every page. I indulged notions of microdots and dead-letter drops. I got old news and ink-smeared hands.

I dug out the bottom issue. It was dated 5/1/62. That induced hotbox chills. 208 was rented out that day. An obese lady rented it. She also rented the backup pad on 6th and Dunsmuir.

I saw *convergence/confluence/conspicuous design.* I scanned every page of the 5/1 issue. It was unscrawled and unscribbled. It was void of mail-drop shit.

I pulled *Heralds* and read my way up to mid-May. Papers were consecutively stacked and unannotated. Yes—but hoarded toward what end?

I read my way up to Saturday, 5/19/62. I tailed Monroe here that day. She blew my tail. She split this location and caught a noon charter flight to New York. Her Madison Square Garden gig was set for that night. She was set to sing "Happy Birthday" to Big Jack.

I flipped to page two. The *Herald* ran a puff piece on the prez and his birthday girl. I flipped to the next fold and saw *this:*

A red-lipstick-scrawled heart. A red arrow piercing it. *"MM here today!!!"* scrawled within. It's an androgynous scrawl. Maybe an arty man/maybe a butch woman. Tiny pinholes pierced the heart. They dripped red-ink, ballpoint-pen blood.

—

I drove back downtown. I was beat-to-shit depleted and concurrently hopped up. A long day triggered a long flashback roll.

The Beverly Hills 459's. Danforth/Dawes/Dewhurst, partnered up with the Sex Creep. Rubber-glove entries/forensic crossover leads. The divorcées. Unit 208 at the Tiki-Torch. The storage bins. The newspaper scrawls. It proves *this:*

Monroe worked the kidnap job.

Convergence /confluence/conspiracy.

It was 1:00 a.m. I parked in the PAB lot and elevatored up to the lab. Ray Pinker's work bay was lit up bright-bright. His desk was sixteen-by-sixteen and fluorescent-lamp lit. He displayed the evidence I requested. It was multidiscipline and all Sex Creep.

I scanned left to right. I saw the magazine-letter notes left at the divorcée pads. I saw the note the Creep left at the Monroe pad. Plus glue-sample bottles and binders filled with exemplars of magazine typefaces and paper stock. Plus seven photo blowups of male ejaculate cells.

Ray walked in. He said, "It's all one guy. He's a type-AB secretor, so we've got a line on his blood. It's a rare type, so that should help you eliminate would-be suspects. California driver's licenses displayed blood type and thumbprints up to '56, so you should be able to get some eliminations or confirmations there. The paper backing is '46 to '50, cheap bond, chemically treated to adhere to the binding of the cheap men's magazines of the era. The cutout letters were clipped from *He-Man Adventure, Calling All Rogues, The All-Man Danger Digest,* and *Calling All Rogues Presents Filmland Femme Fatales.* The glue utilized in all seven notes is present-day Elmer's Glue-All, which was also widely used back then. The femme fatale rag only ran for two issues, but both featured Carole Landis. The note the Creep left Monroe utilized letters from an issue that featured a spread on poor Carole's suicide."

40

(LOS ANGELES, 10:00 A.M., SATURDAY, 9/1/62)

Morty Bendish delivered. I played paperboy.

The Hats and I staged a coup. We took over the West L.A. DB. The squad lieutenant was out golfing. We bootjacked his office and snatched his desk jug. Sixteen detectives evil-eyed us. They scoped the newspapers I dropped on their desks.

"Sex Creep Stalks Westside!!!" "Tuff Task Force Assigned!!!" "Vixen-Victim Marcia Davenport Resembles Soiled Sexpot Monroe!!!" "Cops Ponder Malevolent Monroe Connection!!!"

The *Mirror-News* delivered. It's the Chandler dynasty's down-market daily. It's the mongo kid brother of the mighty *L.A. Times.* Morty's column is tagged "Bendish's Back-Page Beat." It's subtitled "The Lurid Local Lore We Live For." The city editor moved Morty up to page three. Bill Parker pulled strings.

The headlines packed punch. The text tattled Marilyn's "nympho nook" in "bring-the-brisket Brentwood." It portrayed Divorcée #1 as a "lithe look-alike." It laid out B and E #1, sans jack-off and jizzed undies. It employed scare tactics.

"Will the Westside wither and warp into Tijuana North?? Are the Klubb Satan and its deranged donkey show soon to come? Is the Sex Creep the hellhound harbinger of horrid events on the horizon? The Westside has been a warm womb for wounded but still dishy and delectable divorcées. Trouble bodes—but if DA's Lieutenant Freddy Otash and the LAPD's hard-charging Hat Squad nail the Sex Creep, the Westside will remain safe and sane!!!!!"

The squadroom cops read the piece. The squadroom cops snickered and glared our way. Sid Leffler glared, J. T. Meadows glared. Max kicked the office door shut.

"Well, we've got Ray Pinker's call. It's all one guy."

Red said, "Jesus, and the Creep was out pulling 459's with Richie Danforth or whoever he was. This whole deal is a cluster fuck, but Freddy's pulled glove prints from both strings."

I lit a cigarette. “Phil Irwin called me an hour ago. He was up in his surveillance crane, early this morning. He saw Mike Bayless drive up Miller Drive, in his civilian car, straight toward Gwen Perloff’s place. Bayless sees Phil, who’s ex-Sheriff’s, and drives right on past. He’s dirty, and he’s dirty with Perloff on the kidnap caper.”

Max said, “That deal gets stranger and stranger. Witness those newspapers Freddy found last night.”

Eddie said, “I forgot to mention that hairdresser at Fox. We’re buying her lunch at Ships. She did Marilyn’s hair on *Got to Give,* and she says she’s got the latest and greatest. Also, she said that woman we popped at Bev’s is a *puta,* and she’s got no truck with her, other than styling her hair.”

The desk jug went around. We all glug-glugged.

Harry said, “Let’s get back to the Creep. We’ve got twenty-seven FI cards to go through, and we need to run reinterviews. Likewise, the registered sex offenders Leffler and Meadows hauled in.”

I said, “I’ve read through the RSOs’ statements, and I’ve checked their rap sheets and mug shots. They all seem too young to me. I’ve got the Creep pegged as older. He had to be—at least—an adolescent back in the late ’40s, when all his sex shit started percolating. The old magazines, his Landis fixation, all of it. *And,* there’s *got* to be some Landis paperwork *somewhere.* I want to see if there’s anything to indicate she was hassled by peepers, breather calls, or psycho fans.”

Red went *Nix.* “Her PD files have been picked clean. Every cop scrounger on God’s green earth has had his snout in the files and nicked mementoes. Three of our divorcées got breather calls after the break-ins, and they all told Leffler and Meadows that the guy did not sound like some young kid looking to pull his pud.”

I said, “Monroe ran her breather-call number on some friends of hers. I think it was all fabrication.”

Max lit a cigar. “Yeah, of the woe-is-me variety.”

Harry spun the desk jug. It skittered into his lap.

“I’m inclined not to toast the Creep, pro forma. Look what Richie Danforth got us. Look who’s out to nail us for that one.”

—

Edna Medina was eager to yak. She was forty-five or -six. She wore a floral-print muumuu and white tennys.

Max and I bought lunch. Harry, Red, and Eddie cranked it back at the DB. They were building a new Sex Creep file. The chore should protract. They'd be there all night.

We hogged a corner booth. Traffic boomed on La Cienega. Edna cocked her head and smiled at Max. She craved yak-yak more than lunch.

Max said, "This is a follow-up to that phone chat you had with Officer Benson, ma'am. You told him you did Marilyn Monroe's hair for *Something's Got to Give.* I'm sure you recall the conversation."

Edna poked a bread basket. "I recall it, too. I told him Miss Monroe was nice, but she was *loca.* And she talked a blue streak, which was *loca mas.*"

I said, "How so?"

"Well, she's an actress. So, she plays to her audience. She sees that I'm Mexican, so she starts working me. She tells me Mexico's her favorite country. I say, 'Try living there,' and she tells me she's a secret courier for bearer bonds, and she's working with a noted reformer to rebuild the Mexican economy. I told you, *loca mas.*"

Max signaled me: *You respond.*

I said, "And you replied?"

Edna said, "I told her this bond thing was a shuck, and who's this 'reformer,' he sounds like a dope pusher to me. So, Miss Monroe laughs and says, 'Well, he is.' She says she goes in disguise, and some old Russian lady fakes documents, and so she couriers bonds and sometimes dope, but dope should be legal in Mexico and the United States, so it can enchant people and turn them into revolutionaries who hunt down fascists. I told you, *loca mas.*"

The reformer is José Bolaños. The forger might be Natasha Lytess. She might have lied to me. She said Monroe was out of her life. Gwen Perloff peddles bearer bonds. That's established fact. She's a professional. She's the only one. She's in with deluded amateurs—up to and including Marilyn Monroe.

Max said, "Did Miss Monroe tell you the reformer's name?"

Edna sipped coffee. "José Bolaños. She said he had a big *chorizo.*"

I said, "Okay. You said she's *'loca mas.'* I'm betting she fed you crazier stories than that."

Edna poked the bread basket. "She said she had the goods on President Kennedy, and she said she was going to make him divorce Jackie and marry her. She said she and some other woman had a deal in the works to take over Fox, so that they'll make nothing but movies that glorify real people. I said, 'Will I get a raise then?' Miss Monroe said, 'No, but you'll get paid in Mar-Gwen preferred stock, which is more valuable than pure platinum.' Like I said, *loca mas.*"

Mar-Gwen. There you go. The confluence extends.

—

The swing creaked. The stars twinkled low. The lobster salad wilted. Our easy talk flatlined. We hooked our legs up and plopped them down on the room-service cart.

We sprawled on the swing. Lois and I run telepathic. She spins at my own warp speed. I called the convergence "All Of It." She deciphers my brain-waves.

"I know what you've been doing. People live to confide, you know. And I've developed a source."

I said, "Who?"

"Pat Lawford. Confidante of guess who? You said they tell each other everything. They're brother and sister, so I don't quite consider it unseemly."

The ground dipped. The sky dropped. The lights across Wilshire glared extra bright.

"Where'd you meet Pat?"

"She was sitting on your front porch. I came over to do just that thing. We acknowledged the pathos of it, and introduced ourselves."

I rolled my eyes. "She saw you in *Hot Tin Roof.* You recognized her. Bobby keeps her updated. I've got no secrets left. Half the world knows my shit."

Lois lit a cigarette. "We're going to Mass and brunch tomorrow."

I mock-groaned and nuzzled her. We laced hands and sideswiped a low star. I saw a *Twist Party Stakeout* script on a lounge chair. Lois annotated it. She marked up most of the pages.

"Sid Leffler. Have you met him?"

"Two days ago. He's desperate and ingratiating, and not quite as smart as he thinks. He invited me to Palisades High to catch his 'Officer Sid' show. Do you want to go?"

I said, "Yes."

"He told me he knows you."

I smiled. "Talk to your source, or read today's *Mirror.* It'll put you current on Sid Leffler and me."

Lois said, "I met Pat, and it embarrasses you. It shouldn't, though—given that we're both married, and you're not."

Call sheets were stacked by the scripts. I picked one up. Lois said, "We're shooting on Soundstage Six at Fox, and then we're moving to a house in the Palisades. Maury wants to shoot the party scenes there."

I scanned the sheet. It listed twelve “party dancers.” Party Dancer #4: Georgia Lowell Farr.

41

(LOS ANGELES, 10:00 P.M., SUNDAY, 9/2/62)

The wife-swap party. It's on as of *NOW*.

We're swappers and worse tonight. We're the new depraved. We're sickniks up for cheap enchantment. We're the fuzz. We're party crashers out to quash the party.

West Hollywood. Havenhurst, south of Sunset. A big Spanish courtyard complex. The party's across the forecourt. 216's a boss duplex. We're up in 423. It was empty and offered up for lease. It's ours for tonight. Bill Parker pulled strings.

There's ten of us. We came to infiltrate, peep, and scrounge leads.

That's Babs Payton and me. Plus Harry Crowder and "wife" Lila Leeds. We're kicked back in 423 and gassing on the wide forecourt view. Phil Irwin's shooting infrared film. He's zeroed in on the 216 doorway. He's notching zoom-lens shots. Daryl Gates has binoculars fixed on the door. He's jotting descriptions of the guests.

Four men worked the outside slot. That's Nat Denkins, Red Stromwall, Eddie Benson, and Max Herman. They're scrawling plate numbers and Minox-snapping the arrivals. It's one big effort geared toward one goal. ID Fox-allied libertines and fast-buck entrepreneurs.

ID them/brace them/squeeze them dry. Monroe/the kidnap job/the Beverly Hills 459's. The Sex Creep and all interconnected linkage.

Lila and Babs smoked and sipped flask juice. They wore their carhop outfits, sans skates. They're Stanislavski-ites. They're proletarian. It's their fashion statement. They're playing themselves. They're ex–film notables reduced to schlepping burgers and malts. Harry and I radiate *Fuzz*. That's okay. I'm here in my Shit Magnet guise.

I was nerve-knocked. Bill Parker and Pete Pitchess had their monthly lunch today. Daryl Gates slipped a contact mike under their table at Mike Lyman's. I played the tape. Pitchess passed Parker some film that SHIT shot. I'd seen it before.

It's early May, this year. There's a big Muslim protest, outside the

PAB. Select officers overreact.

Parker passed Pitchess three thou. Parker popped the question:

“Why would a SHIT supervisor quick-transfer to the West Hollywood squad just in time to crack the Perloff kidnap job, then immediately transfer back, leaving a major felony case untended and unresolved?”

Pitchess said, “I don’t know and I don’t care. The job’s dirty, we both know it, and I don’t want to see Freddy O. and the Hats get nailed for sinking that guy—despite Miller Leavy’s hard-on to slam them. Motel Mike Bayless is a law unto himself, and I figured he transferred to West Hollywood because he had a girlfriend stashed nearby.”

Spot-on, Pete. The girlfriend’s Gwen Perloff. Motel Mike bossed the kidnap job. That’s evident now.

Gates walked up. “You, Harry, and the wives should head out. The Chief wants you to know that you may hit a certain wrinkle, and if you do, he trusts your ability to extemporize.”

I winked. Gates winked back. I grabbed Babs. Harry grabbed Lila. They wore carhop pedal pushers and tight white tops. Plus Naziesque peaked hats with the Stan’s Drive-In logo. It’s trendsetting couture, all the way.

We split 423 and elevatored down. We linked arms four across and strolled toward 216. The front door spilled light. A big guy worked a reservation log and collected money. We beelined on over. I dropped our pseudonyms: Freitag and Crawford, plus two. He scanned his list and went *Yup*. I passed him four C-notes. He ogled Lila and Babs. He said, “Those outfits really work. Call me weird, but I’ve always dug carhops more than stews.”

It roused some yuks. The girls curtsied. Samba sounds drifted over. Cool school. Music to perv by. We drifted inside and drifted apart.

Your wife or mine? If you don’t swing, don’t ring.

I circulated. I orbed the living room. It was furnished on the come. Cheap butcher-block furniture. Beanbag chairs from the Akron. Hi-fi hookups, upstairs and down. They played synchronous *and* discordant. Stan Getz and Astrud Gilberto. Gerry Mulligan’s low sax. Music to subsume talk and promote fuckee-suckee.

Cigarette smoke. A wet bar. Two Filipino barmen. A late ’30s/early ’40s crowd. They were half-assed good-looking. They were trim. No porkers allowed!!! Here’s the demographic. I’m in with moderate-affluent squares. Film-biz folk. Executives and overpaid blue-collar. There’s no shitkickers/no white trash/no Valley-tract types.

I made people I'd seen on the Fox lot. I saw two Foxites make me. I saw a switch-hitter cat who packed the pork to Roddy McDowall. And —I saw *her.*

Gwen Perloff. Alone. Out on a railed-in terrace. Wearing her glasses. Smoking a cigarette. Quaffing a martini. Wearing that black dress Phil Irwin saw her buy.

I walked straight toward her. She turned and saw me. Her heels put her up at my height. She wore no makeup. She eschewed all affect. Her hands were as big as mine and her eyes just as dark brown. She was pale. Her dark brown hair veered to black. Her shag haircut worked. Her random gray streaks worked best.

I felt unprepared and underdressed. I resisted an impulse to crowd her. She spoke first.

"Let's skip the introductions. I know who you are, you know who I am. I know about the raid at Bev's, and I figured you'd show up here. You've been staking out my place, our eyes met once, it wasn't remotely romantic. You tossed a man off a cliff last month, and don't think I'm not grateful. Does that cover the amenities?"

Icebreaker. Go in innocuous. See if she laughs.

"I saw *Spawn of the A-Bomb,* back in '56. I've enjoyed your work ever since."

She doused the cigarette in her martini. She tossed the glass out in some shrubs.

"You saw *Spawn of the A-Bomb* at the Wiltern. You were casing me."

She stood very still. I stood very still. We sustained skirmish-line distance. My legs trembled. I flinched first.

"I heard your voice on a wiretap call, a few months ago. You were impersonating a cater waitress named Eleanora. You called Peter Lawford and pumped him for information on a cater waiter named Rick Dawes. You said he might be a fruit hustler or a pad burglar. Marilyn Monroe knew Rick Dawes. I've got his name on a paper scrap, in her handwriting. I pushed a kidnap suspect named Richie Danforth off a cliff the night Marilyn died, and his face matched a BHPD mug shot of a man named Ronnie Dewhurst."

She moved toward me. Her dress rustled. I felt her breath on my face.

"It's like that, is it?"

I said, "Yes."

She said, "I came here to circulate, and to discuss certain things with certain people. We should go somewhere and discuss certain things, and we should feign some sort of rapture as we walk out."

—

The Glenarms Motor Hotel. Way east in Pasadena. The doorman slipped us the key. He was impressed. We were the first swappers out the door.

We caravanned. I got there first and ran a bug sweep. The suite was pristine. The décor was low-rent medieval. Throne chairs and coats of arms nailed to the walls. I closed off the bedroom. A pay icebox served canned martinis. I popped for two. I poured them into water glasses. Gwen Perloff walked in the door.

I locked it behind her. She grabbed her drink off the TV set and resituated the chairs. She allotted five feet between us. I handed her an ashtray and kept one for myself.

She said, "What are you looking for in all of this?"

"'All Of It' is what I call all of this. It saves time. I'm looking into Marilyn Monroe's activities in the months preceding her death, your kidnap, a string of house burglaries in Beverly Hills, which may be attributed to Ronnie Dewhurst, who you may have known as Rick Dawes. There were some crazy housebreakings in Brentwood and the Palisades between late '61 and early this year. That's 'All Of It.'"

She crossed her legs. Her hemline draped decorous. She didn't vamp me. I didn't stare.

"You'll have to be more specific."

I said, "*Cleopatra.* Fox in the dirt. Tattle that I picked up on the same wire line I was running when I heard you impersonate 'Eleanora.' Overlapping vice scams, bond trades, and dope deals. Separate factions within a general confluence, only one of which, Foxtone Services—has been identified as of this time. You yourself have been rumored to courier bearer bonds to Mexico, presumably to trade for foreign currency to finance narcotics deals."

She sipped her drink. It was rotgut booze. She did not react.

"Bearer-bonds-for-cash trades are not strictly illegal, but narcotics deals are."

I lit a cigarette. "I think the kidnap deal derives from the general criminal atmosphere at Fox, but as something more contained, more sophisticated, more—"

The door crashed in. It flew flat off the jamb and sheared off all the hinges. It slammed to the floor. It made large noise. Eddie Chacõn ran in. Three Justice cops crowded up behind him. They body-blocked the throne chairs and knocked both of us to the floor.

They muzzled us with handkerchiefs and cuffed us behind our backs. They dragged us outside. Two Fed sleds hot-idled by the doorway. The back doors stood open. They tossed me in the lead sled. They tossed Gwen in the follow car. Code Three lights and sirens kicked on.

They dragged her. I saw blood where her legs scraped the ground.

—

The Feds gave good cell. Sturdy bunk. With a mattress, pillow, blanket. Entertaining wall graffiti: *Chuey Bites the Big One* and *Mondo y Yolanda por vida.* Eddie Chacõn tucked me in and winked.

I was the sole dink in the men's tank. Gwen was up on the women's tier. The bust was a ruse. The bust was a scare tactic. Bill Parker and Ratfuck Bobby dreamed it up. Eddie and the stooge Feds are hard-nosing Gwen right now.

I tried to doze. I ran brain sweeps on *All Of It.* I unstitched and revised my points of connection. I traveled back to Hollygrove '37 and jumped back up to now. It was all supposition and assumption. I fed Ray Pinker Sex Creep/Monroe leads. I turned the Creep/Rick Dawes/rubber-glove lead. *Burglary* pervaded all of it. *Burglary* raged definitive.

Eddie Chacõn walked up. He unlocked my door. He said, "Go home, *Señor* Freddy." He passed me a telefax sheet.

I read the note. Eddie ambled out. The note read *"Continue to extemporize with Miss Perloff. All best, WHP."*

I walked off the tier and upstairs. It was 1:00 a.m., Monday. The Fed building was dead. I traipsed office rows and the lobby. A night guard opened the door.

The night was clear. Gwen Perloff stood just outside. She was smoking a cigarette and counting low stars.

She said, "I need a drink. Take me someplace."

—

Kwan's Chinese Pagoda. Cops rule the roost here. I finagled us a dark back booth.

It was dark. The back booth cocooned us. We drank mai tais. Gwen futzed with her paper umbrella.

I said, "How did they play you? What did you tell them?"

"They asked questions about what you call 'All Of It.' They wanted to know who I know and did the kidnap really occur."

"What did you say?"

Gwen looked at me, through me—

"That's as specific as I'm going to get."

She bought the ruse. It might buy me time.

"Let's start over. 'Gwen, this is Freddy. Freddy, this is Gwen.' Isn't this a swell party? Do they really swap wives here? I like that samba music. Would you like to dance?"

Gwen deadpanned it. "They cut me loose, but they'll come around again. I know why they're buzzing me. I know they're buzzing you on the kidnap deal and what you and the Hats did to Richie Danforth, but I need to know how far you're in on the rest of it."

I said, "I was working a bug-and-tap job on your old Hollygrove chum, Marilyn. That was from April up to her death. I heard things, and I put things together. She had a coin stash, for making pay-phone calls. You've got one in your car. You've got a thing going with Motel Mike Bayless. On a good day, I can tell up from down. To quote you, 'That's as specific as I'm going to get.' "

Gwen stood up. She said, "I'm sure we'll speak again," and walked out.

42

(LOS ANGELES, 3:10 P.M., MONDAY, 9/3/62)

Here's Pat. We're at my place. We're under the sheets. It's crowded down there. I've got visitors.

Lois rags Pat. *She's married, and she doesn't really love you. Kennedys don't love, they use and collect.* Gwen Perloff's present but mute. She'll play it just as close the next time we meet.

Pat said, "You're about ten thousand miles away, and you have been since I walked in the door. You saw Lois Saturday night, so I'll allow for a little distraction, but this is just too much."

I stage-yawned. It always ticked Pat off.

"Tell me about Mass and brunch. You and Lois, I still can't believe it."

Pat kicked the sheets off and stretched. I kissed her underarms and made her laugh.

"We went to Saint Michael's, in Santa Monica. We talked more than we prayed, because that's the kind of girls we are. We drank brunch more than we ate it, and we talked about you at some length. No, we failed to come to any conclusions."

I lit a cigarette. "I never know what you're thinking, and what conclusions you've come to. I know that Bobby will drop the hammer, sooner or later. 'Pat, don't you think this has gone far enough?' "

The AC spiked and frostbit the room. Pat ducked back under the sheets.

"I started keeping a journal, right after I met you. It was V-J Day, plus one. Our night together was my impetus, and I wrote down everything that I saw, did, and thought, up until February 19, 1951. It's a *read,* and you certainly spiced it up, at least for a little while."

I said, "Will you let me read it?"

Pat said, "Maybe."

Her tone bugged me. Ditto the context. We were kids then. I have duties now.

"Bobby's here in L.A. a lot. He's spending more time with me than I warrant, given that he's got Eddie Chacõn to take care of the help."

Pat bristled. "I know most of it, or all of it, so I could see why the attorney general and the president would want to keep track of your progress."

I poked her. "When Bobby's not telling me what to do, or holding subpoenas over my head, he's being too nice to me, like he's patting my head because I'm running through my hoops like a good dog."

Pat poked me back. "For a man who levied extortion against the future president of the United States in 1955, you're not doing so badly in 1962."

I laughed. The poke hurt. She was right. Fuck the Kennedys sideways.

"Go home. It's coming up on rush hour. Tell me you love me, whether you mean it or not, and get back to your brood."

Pat sat up. The sheet slid off her breasts.

"Shit, I just recalled something you should know. I…um…eavesdropped on Bobby calling Eddie Chacõn. They discussed something about 'unloading' bearer bonds, and from the way they talked, I could tell it had something to do with what you're working on."

I shrugged. "It sounds logical. Bearer bonds are all over this deal."

Pat hugged a pillow. "Here's what I just recalled. Peter's always ogling a group of stewardesses who play volleyball on Saturday mornings, two doors up the beach. There's always some stews in uniform, watching them play. Last week, I saw him key on a big blond girl in a Mexicali uniform. He gave her a wad of cash, and she handed him a flat manila envelope. I asked him what it was. He said 'Bearer bonds. They're the new coming thing.' "

Mexicali stew. Big blond. Ingrid Irmgard. She had that tattoo—El Manny and crossed boxing gloves. Mexico, bond schemes, dope. José Bolaños. Edna Medina cites Marilyn's smuggle-in-disguise rant. The Foxtone card in Marilyn's basement. The Bev's raid. "Your wife or mine?" "Investment opportunities."

43

(LOS ANGELES, 11:10 A.M., TUESDAY, 9/4/62)

The Hats snoozed in my cubicle. They deserved a nap. They got paper-blitzed last night. Check my desk, the shelves, the floor. A paper tidal wave just hit.

DMV kickbacks/Teletypes/R&I green sheets. NCIC kickbacks on the dinks from the Bev's Switchboard raid. Paper on the plate checks at the wife-swap bash.

The Hats wore sleep masks. They were flopped-over pages from today's *Mirror-News.* Morty B. delivered Part 2. Horror headlines popped out:

"Sex Creep in Savage Second Assault!!!" "Sexy Divorcée Monroe Look-alike!!!" "Sex Creep Desecrates Home and Marks Triumph in Animalistic Ritual!!!"

The *Mirror-News* constrained Morty. He couldn't write *jizz, spurt, semen, jack off, squirt.* He went with "globulous evidence of his lust." Sid Leffler and J. T. Meadows got big attaboys. They were the original IO's. I told Morty to ballyhoo them. We might need them for clue-clown work.

I was agitated. Albie Aadland's lawyer rebuffed Miller Leavy's interview request. Dorothy Denton Lowell rebuffed Miller's request to interview Lowell. Her kiss-off note temporized: "Maybe, when the fall semester is in full swing, and Lowell's studies have improved."

Agitation/frustration. I terminated Phil's stakeout on Gwen Perloff. She'll contact me before too long. I know that. She'll want to carve an exit deal. She'll want prosecution waivers and money. My grand-jury strategy would cover all that.

I had breakfast with Daryl Gates. He and Eddie Chacõn grilled Gwen at the Fed building. Daryl ran it down.

Gwen held in strong. I know nothing about the kidnap. I *was* kidnapped. Yes, I knew Marilyn at Hollygrove. Yes, I knew Paul Mitchell Grenier. No, I haven't seen him in a dog's age. Money scams, emanating at Fox? I don't know what you're talking about.

Daryl ran down the ruse. The ruse threatened Gwen Perloff and implied that we know All Of It. It suggested the wide parameters of the All Of It. It stressed their interconnectedness and political import. It implied our lack of concrete proof and a dearth of leads on the Fox folk involved. Gwen heard them out. She flinched once. Eddie mentioned my work on the Jimmy Hoffa op. Gwen flashed an *aha!* look. She just figured out why a Fed *and* a city cop braced her. It pertained to the Hoffa/Bobby K. *mishigas.* It was a *very* well-known feud.

I watched the Hats sleep. I oozed agitation/frustration. I had to find Paul Mitchell Grenier and beat the truth out of him. Agitation/frustration. I wanted to nail the Sex Creep and jack him up on Pentothal. Perverts always motormouth under dope and duress.

Daryl Gates walked up. I pointed to the Hats and went *ssshhh.* We walked back into the squadroom. All the Intel cops were reading Morty's latest. Most of them yukked outright.

Gates handed me a sealed envelope. It was marked "General R. F. Kennedy." It felt like six or seven pages.

"The Chief wrote it. It's an extended précis on the Sex Creep investigation, and a detailed report on our efforts to get at the truth of Miss Monroe's death. The Chief goes on to laud your grand-jury strategy, and does a lawyer-to-lawyer bit on its efficacy. The Chief closes with an entreaty. He asks General Kennedy not to seek indictments on you and your men for the Hoffa op, and he asks him to yank Miller Leavy off of you and the Hats. He makes the point that indictments in those matters would taint our grand jury's findings, and he's right. The General is out at the Lawford house. The Chief wants you to hand-deliver the note to him and watch him read it."

William Henry Parker III. Accept no substitutes.

—

I cut north on PCH. I heard chopper thump off to my left, on the beach side. Sunbathers and lolling surfers pointed up, up, *up.* Two choppers hovered into view. They hovered low. I saw the U.S. presidential seal. Jack returns to Jack's Shack. His arrival's raising a stir.

People ran down the beach. They chased the choppers. They waved and squealed. Two women doffed their bikini tops and flashed their goods. The choppers pulled ahead and out of view. I heard *"We love Jack and Jackie"* chants. The volume grew and feathered out.

Three black sedans zipped by me. They were Secret Service, for sure. They cleaved toward the land side of PCH. I saw a ’61 Impala, parked bluffside up ahead. The sedans surrounded it. Agents jumped out and plopped warning cones all around the sled.

Heavy traffic nudged me rightward. The Secret Service cars blew out, northbound. There was no way to cut into the traffic flow. I braked and pulled up behind the Impala.

Eddie Chacõn stepped out. He motioned me over. I squeezed out my passenger door and walked up. Eddie held his door open. I slid into the front seat.

Jack Kennedy said, “Freddy, you cocksucker.”

He wore khakis and a polo shirt, beat-up deck shoes and shades. He lit a cigar and blew smoke in my face.

I said, “Hey, Jack. What’s shaking, baby?”

He said, “So much for decorum. You extorted me, you camel fucker. I should nuke Beirut just to put you in your place. You’re lucky my brother has work for you—because, believe me, it could have gone the other way.”

I lit a cigarette. Jack smiled. His tantrums ran in six-second spurts. I passed him the manila envelope.

“It’s an update on the work we’ve been doing. It’s from Bill Parker to the General.”

Jack hocked and spit out the window. He was too thin, he looked frail, he ran six feet and 145, tops.

“I’ve got a date. Peter set it up. You’ve seen her on TV. She’s been on *Perry Mason* and *Naked City*. Eddie suggested the car switch. He’ll take this lemon, and we’ll go somewhere in her car.”

I said, “I wish you luck.”

Jack said, “I don’t need luck. I don’t need more power and more women. I need to get to a safe place where the world can’t crawl up my ass.”

Amen, brother.

Jack blew smoke rings. “I like this guy, the Sex Creep. He reminds me of Eddie Chacõn. Bobby’s drawn to psychopaths. It explains his fondness for you and Eddie. Maybe Bobby will put the Creep through law school and get him a Justice appointment.”

I laughed. Jack was spritzing now. Book him at the Losers—he’ll draw big.

“I like the kidnap girl, Gwen what’s-her-name. I saw a horror picture she was in, back while I was a senator. I asked Harry Cohn to set me up with her. Harry said, ‘I heard she’s trouble with a capital *T*.”

A woman walked toward the car. Jack was right: I'd seen her. Two agents escorted her. They hugged the bluffside and made straight for the prez.

Jack said, "Mayor Yorty told me a good one. 'A lion is fucking a zebra. The zebra looks over his shoulder and says, Oh, shit, baby—I see my husband! Quick, pretend that you're killing me!' "

44

(LOS ANGELES, 9/5–9/8/62)

I got five minutes with the Kahuna. Big fucking deal. Ratfuck Bobby read Bill Parker's note. Big fucking deal. He said, "Keep up the good work on all fronts." He said, "Yes, Freddy's grand-jury play still looks good." He said, "No—I'm still considering the possibility of prosecuting Freddy and his thugs."

Ratfuck cited my evidential paucity. The wife-swap party was an evidential bust. The paper chase turned up jackshit. Zero per the plate checks. Zero per the green sheets. Zero suspicious phone calls. Zero per employment checks. Nobody worked at Fox. Fox-allied swappers and pervs stayed away. I knew why. My Foxtone-cards-under-the-windshield fuckup warned them off.

The Hats worked the Sex Creep file. They've finished their restructure. Morty Bendish is three divorcées into his Sex Creep sextravaganza. He lays on pulsing prose, scare tactics, pop-off-the-page paranoia. He utilizes numerous euphemisms for *semen.* He hammers the divorcées' "resemblance" to Marilyn Monroe. I edit Morty. I tell him what to write. Grind the suspense, Morty. It's nothing but a dry hump until the Creep snuffs Marilyn.

The *Mirror* ran slam-bam photo spreads. Dumped furniture. Slashed heirlooms. Medicine-chest debris. Red devils and yellow jackets dumped on bathroom floors. I edited the pieces, I read through the pieces, I thought through them as I read. I told Morty to crank the divorcée angle. Divorcées connoted desperate sex and ennui. They were nymphos. They lived in upscale nympho nooks. Marilyn lived in a nympho nook. I thought through the nympho-divorcée bit. I conceded hyperbole. I pondered common denominators. Did the women know one another? *How did the Sex Creep get hip to those specific women?*

The *Mirror* reported a 16% circulation spurt. The Sex Creep show was hot ink. Creep calls swamped the West L.A. station switchboard. Westside stiffs were outraged and scared. They demanded enhanced police protection. Nat Denkins flogs the Sex Creep on his nightly radio show. Creep-O-Mania scorches L.A. TV/radio ham George Putnam stokes the fear. "Inexorably, the Sex Creep's creepiness moves us ever closer to Marilyn Monroe."

No shit, Sherlock.

The Sex Creep investigation proceeds. It's the pulse of the Monroe/kidnap/BHPD burglary jobs. I work All Of It. It's tail work and brainwork. I search for Paul Mitchell Grenier. He's a night bird. That entails night work. I brainwork in my cubicle. I put in eight-hour days there. I stare at my bulletin boards and file sheets and *think.* I stare at file photos and *think.* I plumb theoretical lines, case flank to case flank. I repeatedly reread the BHPD file. I've memorized the Dewhurst/Dawes/Danforth notes slipped inside. BHPD staked out Caviar Catering. They ran R&I checks on dicey young men and women employed there. Ronnie Dewhurst came up clean. Some cop snapped mug shots, regardless.

"Sink him, Freddy." The long drop and big smash. Ronnie Dewhurst as Richie Danforth.

BHPD's burglary string. Five jobs, altogether. Two sets of rubber-glove prints at all locations. One large-finger man, one small-finger man. Near-identical glove seams on prints at the Sex Creep and BHPD jobs.

They're perfect eyeball matches. They're not quite courtroom-valid. Defense lawyers could twist the matches twelve different ways. So what? This job's not going to court.

Link the throughlines. Link the case flanks.

Take the Sex Creep jobs. The spotlight's on glove prints and jizz stains. We know his blood type. He's a type AB-negative secretor. Harry Crowder stiffed a call to the state Adult Authority. He's scrounging data on paroled 459 men, going back five years. Ditto data on freaks with masturbation MO's. Max and I are going over every FI card for the full Creepoid time frame. We'll pounce from there. We'll stretch all late-night prowlers/loiterers/nocturnal riffraff who vibe *wrong.* We'll read through the PD's apprehended burglar file and see who vibes *wrong.* We'll recanvass the six Creep locations, with *this* in mind:

Is the Creep a local Palisades or Brentwood guy? Does he live within his target area and covet women he sees routinely? Is he Palisades/Brentwood affluent? Does he have access to house-deed records/estate-probate records/divorce records? Has he dream-cultivated a sisterhood of solitary women who drive him ever closer to a Creepoid consummation with Marilyn Monroe?

All Of It. All case flanks lead back to Marilyn Monroe.

I had Lowell Farr's Monroe portrait matted and framed. It now hangs on my north cubicle wall. Lowell portrays her pal Marilyn as pure disorder and disjuncture. Marilyn's eyes are her own eyes. They look back at Marilyn and judge her insane. The painting reflects the perv art of Weimar Berlin and Monroe's penchant for urban-grotesque photography. Lowell's perceptive. She sees through Monroe now. I peeped her as she slapped paint on Monroe's living room wall. That portrait was the run-up to *this* portrait. *This* portrait drove me back to the Sex Creep's six divorcées.

I'd already peeped divorcées 1, 2, and 3. I swung by the homes of 4, 5, and 6 on full-dark summer nights. The Creep's moving east. He's into Brentwood now. He's planned hot dates with Arden Jane Brownleigh/Lorraine (NMI) Smith/Dorothy Dilys Trent. He's escalating. He broke a glass-enclosed photograph of Brownleigh and her ex-husband. He stuck pins in their faces. He left Lorraine Smith a note: "You're like Cape Canaveral. You're my launching pad to greater things." He left Dorothy Trent a morgue photo of Carole Landis.

I extrapolated. It was 3/12/62. Monroe had just moved into Fifth Helena. Trent was a morgue-photo dry run for Monroe.

I observed Brownleigh, Smith, and Trent. Brownleigh cultivated the vapid Monroe look. Smith and Trent did not. I caught all three women at home alone. They evinced loneliness and agitation. They smoked and drank to excess. They tried to watch TV and read racy books. They tossed the books and flipped from baseball games to sitcoms. The Leffler-Meadows paperwork did not reveal interconnected relationships among the six women. How did the Creep key in on *these* six women? They were film-star surrogates in his mind. Landis and Monroe bookended his madness. The divorcées were avatars of prosaic sexuality and dashed wedlock. They were more than random and less than essential to him. Their divorcée status struck a chord in him. He saw them and gassed on them. He peeped them over time and developed a lust jones. He didn't ponder the chord they struck. Landis and Monroe were movie stars. They struck everybody. *They were safer.* The Sex Creep did not know why he did the crazy shit that he did. The divorcées took him deeper. He did not acknowledge this.

I stare at my bulletin boards. I stare at Lowell's portrait of Marilyn. I think. I think about women. The divorcées. Lowell, Pat, and Lois. Gwen Perloff, most of all.

She hasn't contacted me. I want her to read me wrong and sense that I'm all about the money. I want her to tour-guide me through Fox in duress and tell me how All Of It coheres.

I need to interview José Bolaños. He's holed up in Mexico. It might be impossible for now. I need to interview Lowell Farr. I've got a strong hunch here. Where are Marilyn Monroe's stash of everyday letters/love letters/fan letters/further communiqués from the Creep? She didn't bank-vault them. They weren't in her basement. Her lawyer had no idea. They weren't listed in the Coroner's Office inventory of her house. I think she gave them to Lowell Farr.

I need to reinterview Ingrid Irmgard. She lied to me. She sold Peter Lawford bearer bonds. Her boyfriend Juan Manuel Salas has a burglary sheet. He got popped in '54. He was at Chino concurrent with Paul Mitchell Grenier. He had a dumped 459 beef in '57. His PO thinks he's clean. He's an ace TV repairman these days.

I need to reinterview Natasha Lytess. I need to reinterview Del Kinney, Roddy McDowall, and Timmy Berlin. I need to hit them with *this:*

Tell me what I need to do to find Paul Mitchell Grenier. I want to put the screws to this psycho sack of shit. I want him to set some things straight.

Nat Denkins and Phil Irwin leapfrog-tail Deedee Grenier. She goes to Rancho Park Golf Course, Jeanne Carmen's pill parties, and Linda's Little Log Cabin. She avoids Norm's Nest. She steers clear of Paul Mitchell.

I've haunted the Klondike, the Falcon's Lair, the Jaguar, the Tradesman. Nobody's seen Paul Mitchell. So, I *think.* So, I *read.* My new favorite author? It's Paul de River.

I've read *The Sexual Criminal* eight times. The Doc inspired Monroe's final idiot immersion. I know he's giving a talk at the Wilshire Ebell, three days hence. I'll be there. I'll salt the audience with my boys and bring an Intel camera crew. We'll induce fear and consternation. We'll get the old quack all shook up.

Sid Leffler studied under de River. He's written true-detective rag pieces. He notched walk-through tape recordings at the six divorcée sites. He described the physical details and laid down verbose critiques of the Sex Creep's motivations. Leffler's florid prose style mimes de River's. Leffler: probable de River obsessive. Monroe: certain de River obsessive.

I run out of brain steam around 3:00 a.m. I brain-screen women's faces then. Lois, Pat, Gwen. I imprint details until their features merge and my mind goes blank.

45

(LOS ANGELES, 8:00 P.M., SATURDAY, 9/8/62)

The summer postlude. It's jungle hot in L.A. It's "Saturnalia Saturday" at the Tradesman. That means half-price drinks and much whoop-de-do. The boys screen toga flicks on a wall-pinned bedsheet. Raucous laughs and wolf whistles ensue.

The boys know me now. I'm the chump detective. I dispense ten-spots and pursue Paul Mitchell Grenier. They hate Paul Mitchell. He defames the rough-trade imprimatur. They sniff ten-spots and swarm me at the door.

I dispensed twenties tonight. The boys oohed and aahed. One guy said, "He might be making a movie."

I said, "Where? What studio? What kind of movie?"

One guy said, "Paul Mitchell's got his own studio, but I don't know where it is. He's a live-on-the-fly, catch-as-catch-can sort of guy. And if I know Paul Mitchell, he's making dirty movies there."

They fed me fourth-hand lowdown. I've heard it all before. I split the Tradesman and drove west. I craved Brentwood and the Palisades. It was sea breeze–adjacent. It was the home of dishy divorcées and sex creeps on the hunt.

I'm a sex creep. I peep windows for profit and kicks. I booked west. The temperature dropped. I went by Fifth Helena and the Lytess house. The Monroe place was dark. The Lytess place threw light. Natasha's old Ford clogged up the driveway.

I cut loose for the Palisades. I looped quiet residential streets north and south of Sunset. The Sex Creep prowled here. He knew this turf. He 459'd the Palisades first. He worked up to Brentwood. Monroe was his denouement. The Palisades cradled him. He knew it. He coveted women here. He worked up to 459 PC with malicious intent. It all started right here.

I cruised random streets. I looked for that moderne house. Monroe sketched it in June '48. I cut over to Capri Drive. I cruised the house Carole Landis died in. She died in July '48. It was a big château/ranch job. Landis married a rich man. Hubby #4 owned the spread outright now.

Carole Landis, divorcée. Marilyn Monroe, divorcée. A distant kid marriage. That makes one. Plus Joe DiMaggio and Arthur Miller. That makes three.

Westside L.A. The recurrent number 48. That brain chant drove me batshit. I split east and found a phone booth on Bundy.

A directory dangled on a chain. I looked up Del Kinney. He lived at 1081 South Orlando. That's right off Olympic. I looked up Timmy Berlin. He lived on Charleville in Beverly Hills.

Kinney nudged me more. He was a brooder and a bachelor. He was career L.A. fuzz. He knew everybody. He did favors. He met Gwen Perloff in 1937. That's twenty-five years back.

The address was a peach stucco duplex. Kinney had the low floor. I rang the bell. It was 10:14 Saturday night.

Kinney opened up. He wore faded Sheriff's khakis with the emblems excised. His big cop hands dangled. He'd had a few. I smelled it.

He said, "It's Lieutenant Otash. It's late, and he's got questions. You'll note I didn't besmirch your rank or your expedient appointment."

He said it friendly and gestured me in. The front room was done up with nature prints and movie-set chairs. He pointed to one. I sat down and grabbed an ottoman. Kinney walked to a sideboard and fixed two highballs. I reached for mine. He plopped down facing me. He pulled up his own footrest.

He knew the drill. It's a drop-in chat/interrogation. It veers both ways.

I said, "Bill Parker called me this afternoon. He told me to lay off the Fox lot. That stunt I pulled with the Foxtone cards backfired."

Kinney cracked his knuckles. "By all means, stay off the lot. I know full well that there are cabals perpetrating outrageous schemes in the hopes they can circumvent the *Cleopatra* disaster, but under no circumstances will I divulge names or details."

I sipped my drink. It was very old/very strong bourbon.

"You should waltz, and resettle somewhere. You've got service pensions up the wazoo, and I'm sure you've got savings."

Kinney sipped sour mash. "I've been offered a very nice job. Could you see me as the sheriff of Monroe County, Wisconsin?"

I said, "Take it. Get out of here. Start over someplace clean."

"Do you think Gwen Perloff could adjust to the move and be happy as a sheriff's wife?"

It sandbagged me. "It's like that, huh?"

"On my end, it is."

I lit a cigarette. "I can't advise you there. She's in the shit, and under no circumstances will I divulge names and details."

Kinney lit a cigarette. "I'll have to accept that, then. I know you're dying to discuss Gwen, so let's get to it."

I said, "I keep thinking of Hollygrove, back when you first knew her. She met Marilyn Monroe and Paul Mitchell Grenier there, around the time her little sister disappeared."

Kinney shut his eyes. I orbed the room. I saw a framed religious print. Prayer hands and *"Lord, Thou seest me."*

"Well, Marilyn's and Gwen's lives kept crisscrossing. They met at the Grove—and, okay, Grenier was there with them. Then Gwen went back to foster care, and on to Le Conte Junior High and Hollywood High. Marilyn went to live with some nutty relatives, then went on to schools in Westwood and the Valley."

I coughed. I counted to ten. Kinney was a don't-tread-on-me type. He kept his eyes shut. I was half there.

"Nothing you tell me leaves this room, sir. I have it that Gwen and Marilyn reconnected in the late '40s, and worked as call girls together. They fell under the sway of a well-intentioned but dicey psychia—"

"Sheldon Mandel. A long-term Treasury informant, whereabouts unknown. He was a VD doctor. That was how he got next to all sorts of good-looking young women. You recall the postwar VD epidemic? Mandel talked turkey to the girls and saved them from a lot of grief, despite the obvious fact that he was a lecher at heart."

I said, "As in?"

Kinney opened his eyes. He put on wire-rimmed glasses and blinked at me.

"Doc Shelley was a scenester. The way I see it, he figured his good deeds licensed him to indulge his nasty side. He hung out at party pads, jam-session pads, fuck pads, and upscale call pads, and dispensed penicillin and prophylactic kits to the girls. He included intimate physical exams, free of charge. It gave him more time to schmooze up the girls."

I sipped bourbon. It was depth-charge stuff. It ran at least 140 proof.

"Isn't Mandel credited with inventing the so-called 'fuck deck,' and establishing it as an investment opportunity?"

Kinney sipped bourbon. His hairline popped sweat. It was depth-charge stuff. He craved that quick push out of the gate.

"I've heard the rumor, but Gwen would have told me if she and Marilyn had gone the deck route. And I'd rather move on to other topics, if you don't mind."

I said, "Mitzi Perloff. I'd like to get your overview."

Kinney cracked his thumbs. "The whole investigation and search was centered in Hollywood, up near the Immaculate Heart school and Ferndell Park, where the poor little girl liked to pick flowers. We thought of it as a body-dump case at the start. We got one eyewitness lead to the contrary, but it never played out. Mitzi was spotted on a westbound Wilshire bus on the day she disappeared. It's the bus route that commences in Hollywood, cuts south to Wilshire, then goes north through Westwood Village and out to the beach."

The westside jumps again. The westside pervades All Of It.

Kinney said, "Gwen was not quite eleven, but she walked a skirmish line through Ferndell Park, right beside my deputies. I have never seen such courage and composure. She found a little doll that Mitzi dropped or someone else threw away, and she did not falter, not for one instant."

—

Charleville ran one block south of Wilshire. Timmy Berlin's address put him right off Linden Drive. It was a mini-mosque triplex. Minarets and spires topped with gold-flecked paint.

Berlin had the downstairs unit. It was 11:40 p.m. His lights were on, his shades were up, his French doors were cracked wide.

I knocked twice. A peephole slid back. Somebody undid bolt locks and opened the door.

It was Timmy Berlin. He was fully dressed. Slacks, guayabera shirt, and tire-tread sandals. He held a pair of scissors. A Moviola was clamped to a lowboy table. He was cutting film.

I said, "I know it's late."

Berlin stepped back. I stepped inside. The living room was four-wall Monroe. Posters for *Niagara/River of No Return/The Prince and the Showgirl/Bus Stop.* Berlin looked mortified.

"I can't escape her, and I don't want to. I enjoy it more than it hurts. Freddy Otash knocks on my door at midnight, so it's got to be about Marilyn. There's coffee in the kitchen, and I was about to take a break."

I followed him back. The kitchen was space-age chromium. I squeezed into a breakfast nook and popped two Dexedrine. Berlin worked a hammered-tin contraption and cranked out two espressos.

He squeezed into the nook. “Okay, it’s about Marilyn. Big surprise. The question is, ‘Marilyn and who else?’ ”

I tossed my espresso back. Let’s level out Del Kinney’s home brew.

“Let’s start with Natasha Lytess. I’m dealing with two versions here. Miss Lytess told me she hadn’t seen Marilyn since ’56. A backup witness said an old Russian woman fixed Marilyn up with forged travel documents, just recently. The backup witness has no reason to lie, while Miss Lytess might well have.”

Berlin said, “Natasha lied. She’s got cancer, and she’s on her way out, so she’s entitled. Also, she was unrequitedly in love with Marilyn, so I give her a pass there out of sheer empathy.”

His spiel said *Coax me.* I tossed out some bait.

“Darryl Zanuck and Marilyn treated Miss Lytess quite shabbily. They terminated her employment and tossed her off the Fox lot. She rented a house near Marilyn. She was looking for some kind of solace during her last days.”

Berlin said, “Natasha was a clinger. Mr. Z. hates clingers, and Marilyn hated to be clinged on. Believe me, I know. But, to return to your question, she lied. I saw Marilyn and Natasha lunching at Frascati, early in April. I saw them, but I was seated behind a wall fixture, so they couldn’t see me.”

I coaxed him. “And they spoke in stage whispers, as film people tend to do?”

“Yes. Marilyn pressed Natasha for tips on being less attractive, and more anonymous in public. Natasha recommended collagen facial injections to give herself a fleshier appearance. Then they discussed forged documents. Marilyn knew that Natasha utilized forged papers to escape Germany and emigrate in ’38 or ’39. The Aadland brothers smuggled lots of Jews out of Europe then, which tips their karmic balance back to the good side, in my view. Marilyn told Natasha she needed diplomatic papers to allow her to travel, in disguise, in and out of Mexico, without being searched. Natasha said she’d call Hersh Aadland to discuss it. Frankly, I think Natasha was having her on.”

The dexies hit. I zoomed straight to snap judgments.

A “wheezy-voiced woman” called Darryl Zanuck and ratted the kidnap gig. It was Lytess. Natasha, la couturier. Monroe in disguise at civil rights rallies. The autopsy showed collagen deposits under one earlobe. Lytess again. Here’s the big snap judgment. Lytess shaped Monroe’s final immersion.

I lit a cigarette. “Paul de River. His book *The Sexual Criminal.* Was Marilyn a fan of de River? Was she ever headshrunk by him?”

Berlin went *Oh, yes.* “She was practically a de River devotee. She read all his books and monographs, and she kept telling me she wanted to hook up with him for some shrink sessions.”

Berlin was clamped tight and dish-frenzied. He was popping his rocks.

“Albie Aadland. Do you know him? If so, what can you tell me about him?”

“Albie? There’s either not much there or *lots* there, depending on who you talk to. He’s the much-younger, nonhoodlum brother. Everyone agrees on that. He lives alone in a big house in Cheviot Hills, and he’s got no love or sex life. That’s accepted as gospel. There’s a rumor that he dabbles in chemistry, pharmacology, and so-called radical psychology, but I don’t know how accurate it is.”

I’ll buy it. Don’t jive me on the brothers. Fuck their philanthropies. Albie Aadland shares their blood and their taint.

“You’ve got me het up on Albie, Mr. Berlin. What else can you tell me?”

Timmy Berlin screwed up his face. He’s miming deep reflection. He wants to spiel.

“Well, he was briefly in Hollygrove with Marilyn and Paul Mitchell Grenier. And I just read in *Variety* that Gwen Perloff was there then, as well. You know Gwen, right? Recent kidnap victim and Mr. Z.’s illicit girlfriend?”

Oh, yes. I know Gwen.

“Keep going, please. Your Hollygrove information is all new to me.”

Berlin lit a cigarette. “I’ve been around Fox since ’50, and I’ve picked up a lot of lore. Albie’s parents had died, years before. His brothers raised him and gave him gofer-type jobs. They made him a ‘test pilot’ for dope compounds cooked up by rogue chemists, back in the ’30s. The cops learned of all this, and they had Albie placed in Hollygrove. He got tight with Marilyn, Paul Mitchell Grenier, and a Mexican boy who lived in that crappy part of lower Hollywood near the Grove. The boy belonged to something called the ‘peewee corps’ of the Nite Owl gang, which was primarily a group of boys who pulled house burglaries. Paul Mitchell told me that he and Albie went out on ‘several raids’ with those boys.”

Depth-charge. The brew, the pills, the snitch spiel—

“Also, I only just learned that Gwen had been in the Grove, because

I read that piece on *Hard Luck Girl.* Marilyn told me that she, Albie, Paul Mitchell, and a Mexican boy who wasn't in the Grove used to climb a high tree on El Centro and watch movies being made on the RKO and Paramount lots. Marilyn said it was the beginning of a 'big actress fixation' for her and the other girl."

Kids together. Monroe. Gwen Perloff. Albie Aadland. Paul Mitchell Grenier. Who's the Mexican boy?

"You know, Freddy—when Marilyn and I escaped you and the other fools during the 'Wrong-Door Raid,' it convinced Marilyn that she could be a criminal as well as any man. That's when she told me that Paul Mitchell wanted to do a smut film about the raid, with Marilyn playing herself."

I chained cigarettes. My bloodstream swelled. I glimpsed Hollygrove and the kid clique as *ALL OF IT.*

"During your relationship, what did you and Marilyn do for kicks, outside the bedroom?"

Berlin crushed his cigarette. "Mostly, we read her fan mail and psychoanalyzed her fans. She said they were predictable, and that there was always a declension in fan crushes. Weird-o guys started out crushing on Carole Landis, then crushed on Jane Russell, and ended up crushing on her."

Landis preceded Monroe. She hit in the early '40s. Russell and Monroe hit roughly concurrent. Landis suicided in '48. The Sex Creep clipped letters from '40s magazines. He employed '40s bond paper. "Declension of fan crushes." The Creep deployed Landis-era props to bedevil Monroe in '62.

Berlin said, "Penny for your thoughts."

I said, "I'm having a hell of a time trying to locate Paul Mitchell. Do you have any ideas?"

"Well, there's his so-called studio. It's a little apartment on Kerwood, near Fox. Hillcrest caddies live in the building, mostly. I think Paul Mitchell sleeps there, on and off."

I stood up. Timmy Berlin went bereft. He could have snitched all night.

—

It was 1:12 a.m. I swung left off Olympic and slow-cruised Kerwood. It was a run-down cul-de-sac. Fox and Hillcrest CC were due south. I spotted the Belleview Apartments. It ran two floors and eight units, tops.

It was right at the hook of the cul-de-sac. Country club caddies are lowlifes. They're career boozehounds, hopheads, and track fiends. This must be the place.

I parked six dives north of the Belleview. The cul-de-sac was dark-dark and hushed. It was recessed. Two streetlights burned dim.

I got out my penlight and evidence kit. I pulled out rubber gloves. He might be there. If so, I'll roust him. He might not be there. If so, I'll forensic his crib.

I walked up and flashed the mailbox. It listed seven single men. Plus "PMG Studios, Ltd." in unit six.

I counted the units. It's probably upstairs. 1,2,3,4—down. 5,6,7,8—up. Nothing but dark windows. The Belleview's sleeping it off.

I unbuttoned my coat and freed my belt shit. I lugged my evidence kit upstairs and bit down on the penlight. I counted door plates down to six.

I knocked on the door. Little love taps. Night crawler Grenier. He receives late-night visitors. They'd knock that way.

No response. I waited a full minute and love-tapped again. No response. I got out a #3 pick and popped the door lock. I stepped inside and locked myself in.

The place reeked. I ID'd the musk. Butch male cologne and exertion. I flashed the interior. It was narrow and cramped. I laid down my kit and ran a premises check.

Movie cameras/Moviolas/boom mikes/arc lights. Four boxes stuffed with French ticklers, dildos, and S and M shit. A scuzzy mattress propped against one wall. A corkboard nailed to one wall. One piece of paper pinned to it. Note the legible hand scrawl.

"*Wrong-Door Raid!!!* A Paul Mitchell Grenier production for discerning and high-class adults. Starring Marilyn Monroe as Herself and Paul Mitchell Grenier as Ace Hollywood Private Eye Freddy Otash. The roles of Frank Sinatra, Joe DiMaggio, Phil Irwin, Timmy Berlin, and the Old Lady to be cast soon. Filming begins October 10, 1962. Invitation-only premiere. The same day that box office dreck *Cleopatra* is released."

A kitchen adjoined the north wall. I grid-flashed it—a full 360 degrees. It was grimy and double-cramped. I checked the icebox. It was stuffed with vodka short dogs and amyl-nitrite poppers. A toilet sat out in plain view. Ditto an uncurtained showerhead and a medicine chest. I popped the door and saw *this:*

Four shelves lined with dental prostheses. It's a sex biter's trove. Dracula-fang dentures. Three upper plates with razor-blade teeth. A plate with "PMG" embossed. Dentures with ID tags attached: "Panther," "Jaguar," "Bengal Tiger," "Jackal," "Grizzly Bear."

The Jackal teeth pinned down a paper scrap. I pulled it out and read *this:*

"No. Ask for more $. This is just our opening salvo. Quit thinking of it as a one-shot deal. Mar-Gwen's future depends on it."

I recognized the scrawl. Marilyn Monroe wrote the note.

My heartbeat red-lined. My tach outrevved seven thousand.

I worked my way back through the dump. I penlight-strafed it, inch by inch. I saw a copy of *The Sexual Criminal,* crammed behind a film-reel stack. The pages were bitten and gnawed. Prosthetic choppers mauled and thrashed the book.

Grenier pen-marked the dentures he wore: "Jaguar," "Jackal," "Bengal Tiger." He bit through pix of noted sex fiends Harvey Glatman and Stephen Nash. He slipped snapshots of the Wrong-Door Raid building between the pages and bit them with his PMG teeth.

I opened my evidence kit. I got out my hand vacuum and futzed with the brush gears. I ran the nozzle between the dumped cameras and lights and picked up rug grit. The kitchen floor was chipped linoleum. I sucked up nameless gack and floor grit. I dumped the vacuum-bag yield in a plastic bag and dropped it into my kit.

Think evidence. Think latent prints. Hit touch-and-grab surfaces. This film equipment serves your designs. It's all touch-and-grab planes.

I got out my brush and tape-transfer strips. I dusted long arc-light poles and Moviolas. I pulled up smudges/smears/partials and a left-hand latent spread. I tape-transferred the spread and taped the corners to a black cardboard sheet. Red powder, black cardboard. The contrast offset the prints. I shot two Polaroids and dropped them in my kit.

I picked through camera debris and grabbed a long tripod. It was all touch-and-grab. I dusted one leg, two legs, three. I worked close. I saw something by the top bolt housing.

Rubber-glove prints. A full right-hand set. A *small-hand set.* It *seems* familiar, it *looks* familiar, it *might be* familiar and ring all the bells.

Squint. Naked-eye it. Study loops and whorls. There's that familiar glove seam. There's the applied pressure marks.

Count comparison points. Get your valid courtroom ID.

I counted slow. I hit twenty-four. I nailed loops, whorls, and tented arches. I doubled the required number and then some.

It's a match. The set matches the small-hand sets at the Beverly Hills break-ins. The set matches the sets at the divorcée break-ins. The Sex Creep was in this room. The Sex Creep touched Grenier's film gear.

I trembled. I flushed hot and cold. I stood in the dark and gulped air. I heard a key-in-lock sound. The door swung open. I saw the Biter Beast, backlit.

I attacked him. I pulled my sap and slammed him in the head. He squealed. I kicked his legs out from under him and kicked the door shut. He hit the floor. I stepped on his neck and pinned him there.

He gulped and went mute. I hit a wall switch and lit Grenier full-on. He wore blue jeans and a jean jacket. He wore pointy-toe fruit boots. They were pop-up-switchblade boots. Don't veer too close.

I eased off his neck. He looked up at me. I kicked him into a pile of cameras and lighting stands. I pulled my piece and aimed it at him.

He rubbed his sap-gouged head. He said, "At least you spared my teeth."

I said, "Let's start with some dirty Polaroids I saw. You and Marilyn, before you put your mark on her. I'm thinking they were outtakes from a fuck deck. Tell me if they were or they weren't."

Grenier went *Comme ci, comme ça.* "Yes and no, daddy. For one thing, the decks were a postwar phenomenon, and Marilyn and me shot those Polaroids sometime in '59. I considered the fuck deck bit, but it was stale bread by that time. Although, I have to say, Marilyn was there at the fuck deck inception."

I said, "With Shelley Mandel?"

Grenier rubbed his neck. I bore down and left heel imprints. They trickled blood.

"Mum's the word, dad."

"The kidnap. Lay out the personnel."

"Not tonight, sahib."

I said, "The Sex Creep. You've seen the *Mirror,* so you know who he is. He left glove prints in this very room, and he was sending Marilyn crazy notes and pictures, right before she died."

Grenier rubbed his sap wound and licked the blood off his fingers. Grenier stroked his crotch and grew a hard-on.

"I've read the *Mirror,* but I don't know what you're talking about. And Marilyn is passé. My new bitch du jour is Barbara Bouchet. You know how I know that? Every time I get the urge to rape and kill an actress, she hits the big time."

I said, "Dr. Paul de River?"

Grenier said, "I'm a Buddhist-existentialist. I don't believe in doctors."

"I saw Marilyn's note. 'Just our opening salvo.' 'Quit thinking of this as a one-shot deal.' What did she mean by that? Did the note refer to a ransom demand?"

Grenier said, "Marilyn who?" Grenier pulled out an amyl-nitrite popper. He waved it and popped it and took a huge sniff.

His face went red-red. He jumped up, fast on his feet. He pulled something from his coat pocket and jammed it in his mouth. He growl-roared low in his throat.

Tiger teeth. His spare set. Big fangs and flat lowers to gnaw meat. He growl-roared and lunged at me.

I fired point-blank. I blew his mouth and his neck cords out. A severed ear flew. His tiger teeth exploded. I powder-scorched his eyes down to the sockets. Muzzle flash set his hair aflame.

PART 7

HOP DREAM

(SEPTEMBER 9, 1962)

46

(LOS ANGELES, 6:40 A.M., SUNDAY, 9/9/62)

Opium.

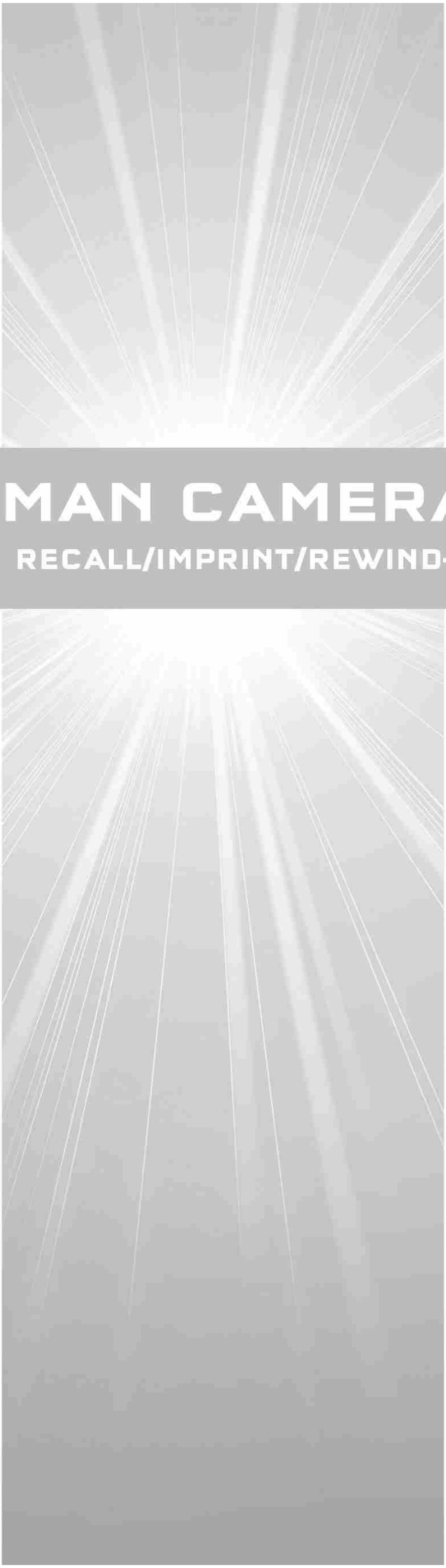
My pallet at Kwan's. The tar, the pipe, the match. I'm a Chinaman. I fell off my camel and landed in Kowloon. There's two long pallet rows. My fellow Chinamen seek enchantment. I'm here to conjure All Of It in a safe dope habitat.

Nobody heard the gunshots. Somebody heard the gunshots. I'm fucked or I'll get away clean. I picked up the ejected shells. I dropped Monroe's note in my evidence kit. I stole the gnawed-on copy of *The Sexual Criminal.* I stole the smut-film-announcement page pinned to the corkboard. I poured film-cleaning solvents on the rug. They ate through the bloodstains and half-dissolved the foundation boards. I excised a large carpet patch and wrapped Grenier up. I hauled him out to my car and dumped him in the trunk. Nobody saw me, the whole world knows what I did.

I hit the San Diego Freeway and the Ridge Route north. I buried Grenier in a rock pile off U.S. 99. The dump site was a half mile from the roadway. I dropped heavy rocks on Grenier. They hit loud. Bones broke audible. I turned around and drove back to L.A.

The dump job took five hours. I'm safe here now.

Maybe I'll dream.



MAN CAMERA

RECALL/IMPRINT/REWIND—

I saw faces, I saw microphones, I heard denials overlap. Smoked-up committee rooms. Ratfuck Bobby badgers Jimmy Hoffa. Gwen Perloff hucksters Jantzen swimwear. Gwen and Motel Mike exit the Tiki-Torch. There's synchronicity there.

The Sex Creep. Face unknown. He's a shape-shifter in black. He did 459's with Dewhurst/Danforth/Dawes. "Sink him, Freddy." Dear beloved Lord, I repent.

A mail truck dumped letters in my lap. I read illegible inscriptions. Monroe, Bolaños, Ingrid Irmgard. Dope couriers. Natasha Lytess, forged docs conduit.

An envelope fell in my lap. A flashbulb blip lit me. Lowell has Marilyn's fan letters. Imagery equals fact.

I saw Hollygrove. I framed establishing shots of El Centro and Vine. I added '30s cars and period extras. I regressed the key players and saw them as children. Marilyn, Gwen, Albie Aadland. Paul Mitchell Grenier, reborn. Who's the Mexican kid? He's a Nite Owl peewee—

Jump cut. I'm out of my trance. Fucking burglary pervades this whole thing.

I smoked opium. I saw Lois and Pat naked. I saw them at Mass. They prayed for me and lit altar candles. Dear Lord, I repent.

Jump cut. Postwar L.A. street scenes. Hollywood Boulevard by night. I worked the Santa Claus Lane parade. Carole Landis was slated for grand marshal. The parade was in November. She died in July.

C words bombarded me. Conjecture/confluence/coincidence/convergence/conspiracy.

I saw exemplar fuck decks. Merry Christmas. Shelley Mandel's got script-pad stocking stuffers for YOU!!! Marilyn and Gwen work the call-girl circuit. Marilyn sketches a house. Marilyn's got dirt on future Prez Jack. Postwar L.A. runs libertine. VD, be-bop, fuck decks, fuck pads, boomtime, boomtown, something happened right before Carole Landis popped those—

A typewriter fell in my lap. A blank sheet of paper was rolled in. I heard four key taps. I saw 1,9,4,8.

PART 8
RED LENS

(SEPTEMBER 10–16, 1962)

47

(LOS ANGELES, 10:15 A.M., MONDAY, 9/10/62)

It was a good dream. The dream sent me to ’48 and told me *Look Here.* It was a good snooze. I felt revitalized. It was a good purge. I killed Paul Mitchell Grenier and escaped his horror hutch. Grenier was Satan Incarnate. He just *had* to go.

I knew I’d waltz on it. I went by West L.A. station and checked occurrence sheets for Saturday-night-into-Sunday-morning rumbles. There were no shots-fired or unknown-trouble squeals for that patrol sector. It felt like a skate, all the way.

I brainworked in my cubicle. I orbed Lowell Farr’s painting every half second. Red Stromwall was right. The Landis file had been raided. I found a folder in the “Suicides/1948” drawer at Homicide. The bio sheet ran threadbare. I knew most of it going in.

Her feature debut: *I Wake Up Screaming,* 1941. It was cranked out at Fox. *Moon Over Miami,* ’41 and Fox again. Produced by old man Zanuck. Fox, resurgent. Fox, ubiquitous. She’s in and out of Fox through the war years. She slips to postwar B roles. She wrote a memoir, *Four Jills and a Jeep.* It rehashed her USO-girl stint. It was serialized in *The Saturday Evening Post.* Fox filmed it in ’44. It made money. She married four times. The last guy had gelt. He bought that big crib on Capri Drive.

I put the bio sheet down. It was stale news. I sipped coffee and scrawled notes.

Who’s the Mexican kid? He lived near Hollygrove—’36–’37.

Shelley Mandel. Have Bill Parker hard-brace BNDD. Where is this hump?

Brace Albie Aadland. Re-brace Ingrid Irmgard. Devise a strategy. Gain access to Hollygrove today.

Interview Jane Russell. Quiz her on crazy fans, circa ’50.

I segued back to Landis. The bio sheet droned on. It’s 7/5/48. The maid arrives. Hubby’s off on business. “Sexy Rexy” Harrison arrives. He lets himself in and finds the body. Landis left a note. Suicide

Attempt #4 succeeds. Rexy's top-lining *Cleopatra,* right now.

Fox, ever-present. Fox, prosaically repetitive. Fox, under my itchy skin.

I was antsy. Paul Mitchell Grenier intruded. I smelled cleaning solvents and his brain residue. The Hats would say *Where Were You?* I had to concoct a good lie. Gwen Perloff intruded. I've called her service four times today. I called Nat and told him to double his efforts on the find-Grenier front. It was pure subterfuge.

I called Miller Leavy. He told me Albie Aadland hired Grant Cooper to rep him. Cooper was the best in the biz. There's a meeting tomorrow. 11:00 a.m. at Miller's office.

I sipped coffee and segued back to Landis. I hit a one-page "Known Associates" list.

Names, occupations, and relationships to Landis. There were seventeen names. Most were male. There were "actors," "friends," "ex-husbands." I skimmed down the page. I recognized no names. I hit Name #14. It screeched at me.

Marcia Maria Davenport/WFA/6/12/19. Twice divorced, lives alone. She was Carole Landis's "personal assistant," '47–'48. She's Divorcée Victim #1, 11/18/61. The Sex Creep kicked his string off with her.

—

I booked out to West L.A. station. The squadroom hummed. The day-watch guys knew me now. I got stray looks and no more. The Hats plus J. T. Meadows worked at partner desks. They shot me *Where Were You?* looks. I pulled a chair up.

They studied FI cards. J.T. passed me a stack. I went through them. They ran typical. Lone men on foot. Street stop-and-frisks. 10:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m. Palisades Village to Brentwood Village. Hinky-type men. Loiterers. The unkempt. Guys with downscale westside addresses. Guys with bench warrants out. All jive offenses. Child-support delinquencies, drunk driving, D and D.

They "just felt like a walk." That's the standard peep-and-prowl rationale. They were riffraff. They stood out in the Palisades and Brentwood. Hey, Studley. What are *you* doing here?

J.T. passed a card around. It was dated 1/19/62. I skimmed it. It clicked with Divorcée Job #4. The victim's Arden Jane Brownleigh/10116 Mandeville Lane, Brentwood. The cardee is:

Preston Winslow Fong/Male Chinese/DOB 8/11/24. Address: the

Beachglade Motel, PCH. Caddy at Riviera Country Club. Stopped at 10:49 p.m., Wilshire and Barrington. That's one mile from Arden Jane Brownleigh's. Fong was skunk-drunk. He said he "went strolling for kicks." The patrol cops radioed R&I and quick-ran him. They got no wants, no warrants. The West L.A. drunk tank was full up. The cops told Fong to beat it. Catch the Wilshire bus and go home.

J.T. said, "Sid and I interviewed him the next day. He impressed us as harmless. He had a '54 California license. It gave his blood as O positive, so that exonerated him as a suspect. We deep-dipped him through R&I, and the kickback had him suspected of jewelry store smash-and-grabs, going back to '50. He purportedly clouted high-end wristwatches, which he purportedly laid off on the golfers and caddies at Riviera."

Max said, "We should grind him. Crowd him until he gives something up."

Red said, "FI cards wear me thin. He's got the wrong blood. He's not the Creep, so why bother?"

Harry said, "I'm making time with Lila Leeds. That wife-swap job was good for something."

I said, "Lila swings both ways."

Eddie said, "She's not the Sex Creep, so can it."

J.T. said, "I think he saw something that night, but he denies it. That warrants a reinterview, in my book."

I lit a cigarette. "I turned a KA sheet on Carole Landis at Homicide. Divorcée #1 was her assistant, back in '47–'48."

The boys *WHOOPED*—

—

We drew straws for the interview. J.T., Max, and I won. Red, Harry, and Eddie stood back. They're working the phones. They're scrounging leads from Realtors and divorce-court clerks. How did the Creep get creeped on these six women?

Marcia Davenport scored her pad in Divorce #2. It was a boss Hawaiian lanai. It showcased teakwood, little waterfalls, topiary shrubs. We parked and walked up. I rang the bell. Some hula ditty trilled inside.

Marcia Davenport opened up. Her gaze bypassed Max and me and zoomed to J.T. She remembered him. He interviewed her before. J.T. entrapped hookers on the job and entrapped lonely women routinely. Max and I flashed credentials. Miss Davenport waved them off and tossed the door wide.

We walked in. The interior was boffo. Sunken living room, teak furniture, tropical-fish tanks. I noticed a wall photo. Miss Davenport wore golf togs. She posed with three other women. They stood outside the clubhouse at Riviera CC.

She pointed us to lounge chairs. We sat down. Spongy cushions went *whoosh.* She said something about drinks and bolted the room. J.T. tapped his chest. *She digs me/I'll take the lead.*

She was gone fourteen seconds. She popped back with a tray crammed with frosty drinks. She carried the tray carhop-style. She hopped cars in her youth. The drinks were already made. She's a juicer. She exemplifies loose ends. I signaled J.T.: *Let me go first.*

I watched the tropical fish slither and glide. Miss Davenport dispensed drinks. She was inappropriate. She fed cops booze at noon. She was horny. J.T. magnetized her. She ignored Max and me. It was rude. I assumed the Sex Creep's perspective. *She's my kind of woman. I'll start my string with her. I'll trash her beautiful home. I'll fuck her up for life.*

She sat down beside J.T. I said, "We're not supposed to drink on duty, you know."

Max caught the toss. "But, as it happens, we're corruptible types."

J.T. caught the rebound. "She corrupted Sid and me, the first time we interviewed her. And she told us to call her 'Marcia' at the door."

She said, "I was about to tell your colleagues that very thing." She had a twang. It was Texas, for sure.

J.T. played emcee. "This is Lieutenant Otash and Sergeant Herman, Marcia. We had a few more questions about the break-in, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind. The *Mirror-News* doesn't seem to mind, either—given the benefit they've accrued from my misfortune. *Really,* that Mr. Bendish. How could he honestly state that I look like or style myself to resemble Marilyn Monroe?"

We ha-ha'd on cue. She's a southern belle. She played to us. We played straight back to her.

J.T. said, "You've redone your home beautifully, Marcia. It's as if the break-in never occurred."

"Aren't you the kindest to say that. And the handsomest, I might add."

J.T. blushed. Max laughed. I came in, abrupt.

"Marcia, would it be safe to call you a Riviera Country Club habitué? You play golf, play cards, go on symphony outings?"

"Well…I wouldn't say 'habitué.' Riviera's not exactly a dope den, you know."

"I'll concede that I know dope dens better than I know country clubs."

Marcia downed half her drink. "You're a sketch, Lieutenant. You surely are."

Max sipped his drink. "The lieutenant's leading up to a key question, Marcia. The other women who were burglarized. Did you know them from the club?"

Marcia went uh-*huh.* "Me, Leona, Wanda Jean, Arden, Lorraine, and Dorothy. We're all sisters in devastation, but I didn't know them from the club. They belong to the club, but I don't play golf or cards with them, and they certainly aren't friends that I socialize with. I think Officer J.T. and Officer Sid barked up that selfsame tree the first time they interviewed me."

Riviera. Divorced women. *C* for *constellation.* Caddy Preston Fong. The wrong blood type clears him. He may or may not circumstantially click.

I said, "Let's put your initial interview and the scurrilous and invasive *Mirror-News* series aside for a moment. I'm wondering if you recall an event or an occasion where you and the other five women may have constellated and given this horrible individual a good look at all of you?"

Marcia killed her drink and lit a cigarette. Marcia struck a thinking-cap pose.

"The Gay Divorcée dance at the club. It grew out of some chats a bunch of us unlucky-in-love girls had, and some gripes about how the club management slighted us. Me, Leona, Wanda Jean, Arden, Lorraine, and Dorothy. We all went to the dance and had a whopping good time. I can even tell you the date. It was October 9th, '61. I saved my table-setting card as a souvenir."

Eyeball clicks circulated. Max to me to J.T. and back. The break-ins kicked on the next month.

"Tell me if I've got this straight, please. Divorced women conceived the dance idea, and the word went out. Members—men and women—signed up, and a crew of Riviera waiters, cooks, and kitchen help worked the event. Is that how it went?"

"It sure is. And, I'll tell you, the concept drew quite a crowd."

Signals passed—J.T. to Max to me. Marcia slid something in J.T.'s coat pocket. Oh, shit—it's her phone number. *Call me, sweetie pie.*

"I noticed the way you slung that drinks tray, Marcia. I'll bet you car-hopped at one time?”

“Right with Eversharp. I hopped at Simon’s drive-in on Wilshire and Fairfax, back during the war.”

“Was that before you went to work for Carole Landis?”

Marcia coughed smoke. My changeup pitch worked.

She crushed her cigarette. “Poor Carole. I haven’t thought of her in a dog’s age.”

“The Sex Creep left a nude morgue shot of her at the Dorothy Trent break-in.”

J.T. cut in right behind me. “Marcia, we’d like to get your impressions of Miss Landis. It would be a big help.”

Marcia said, “She was friendly to a fault, rather bright, and fixated on men in a surely ditzy way. She surely ignored her wedding vows, and her career was on the skids, and she took pills and went to parties, and she told me she went to a sort of ‘speakeasy place’ where there was always a party going on. She hinted that the place sometimes became obstreperous, but then she was surely obstreperous herself. Oh, and here’s an interesting sidelight to her story. She met two young girls, who were looking for house-sitting work, at that party place. One was Norma Jean Baker, who later became Marilyn Monroe. The other was that actress who got kidnapped a few months ago.”

48

(LOS ANGELES, 11:05 A.M., TUESDAY, 9/11/62)

Albie Aadland. The nebbish kid brother. Hersh, Ira, and Meyer were beefy and lurchlike. Albie was midsize and slight. He wore a navy blazer and gray slacks. He had that coat-hanger frame.

The DA cut loose his conference room. We sat at a long oak table. We faced off across it. I sat with Miller Leavy. Albie and Grant Cooper faced us.

Leavy kicked it off. “We’re here to discuss the August 4th abduction of an actress named Gwen Perloff, along with a series of perhaps interlocking financial-crime, narcotics-crime, and vice-crime conspiracies emanating from the 20th Century–Fox studio, perhaps collateral to the drug-overdose death of Marilyn Monroe. Lieutenant Otash will serve as my chief interlocutor. The lieutenant, Mr. Cooper, and I have spent time together in court, Mr. Aadland. We play fair, but we play rough. That’s all I have for the prologue.”

Cooper smiled. He was deadly handsome and deadly quick.

“The recently credentialed Lieutenant Otash. Once known as the ‘Hellhound Who Held Hollywood Captive.’ Hi, Freddy.”

I said, “Hello, Grant. Again, good morning, Mr. Aadland.”

Aadland smiled. He directly mimicked Cooper and me. I assumed his perspective. He calculated the smile. He learned male bonhomie from his brothers. This is what brusque men do.

“Hello, Lieutenant. It’s a pleasure to finally meet you.”

Cooper said, “Ask specific questions, please.”

Leavy said, “Let’s move this along.”

I crowded the table. Albie pulled his elbows back.

“Did you participate in the Perloff snatch?”

Cooper said, “My client declines to answer.”

I said, “You, Gwen Perloff, Marilyn Monroe, and Paul Mitchell Grenier met at the Hollygrove home. Who was the Mexican boy—your pal, who lived off-site?”

Cooper said, “My client declines to answer.”

“Are you involved in Mr. Grenier’s pornographic-film racket?”

Albie twitched. Cooper said, “My client declines to answer.”

“Were you acquainted with the late Richard Danforth? Mr. Danforth was also known as ‘Ronald Dewhurst’ and ‘Rick Dawes.’ ”

Cooper said, “My client declines to answer.”

I lit a cigarette. Cooper lit a cigarette. Mimic Albie took the cue. His right hand trembled. He fumbled his cigarette. It took three match strikes to light it.

“Are you involved in the passing of bearer bonds, both real and forged, and the trading of bearer bonds for Mexican heroin and other narcotics, with or without the cooperation of a Mexican man named José Bolaños?”

Albie twitched and laced his hands up. Cooper said, “My client declines to answer.” I glanced sidelong. Miller Leavy studied me.

“The aforementioned criminal enterprises are currently being perpetrated by separate and differentiated cabals employed at 20th Century–Fox. The looming disaster of the film *Cleopatra* serves as a goad. The cabals are out to provoke a stockbroker revolt and depose the current studio leadership. Have you heard of Mar-Gwen Productions, as in Marilyn and Gwen?”

Albie wrung his hands. He caught himself and placed them flat on the table. Cooper said, “My client declines to answer.” He glared at his client. I read him. He’s thinking *There’s some twisted shit going on here.*

“Are your known-criminal brothers the guiding influence behind the aforementioned criminal enterprises?”

Cooper said, “My client declines to answer.” He’s giving me free rein. I’m giving him a primer for his presumed courtroom case. Leavy’s giving me free rein. He’s got Albie pegged as a pervert. He hates perverts. Albie’s under the hot lights. Gas Chamber Leavy loves it.

“Are your known-criminal brothers jungled up with Jimmy Hoffa in the aforementioned criminal enterprises?”

Cooper said, “My client declines to answer.”

“What sort of aberrant behavior did you, Mr. Grenier, Miss Monroe, and Miss Perloff indulge during your years at Hollygrove?”

Albie’s wilting. Cooper eyed him and kept it zipped. He’s luring me in.

“Who was the Mexican boy you hung out with? He was allegedly in the peewee corps of the Nite Owl gang. They were primarily a burglary gang, and you and Paul Mitchell Grenier purportedly went on ‘burglary runs’ with them, in your early adolescence. I might add that Danforth/Dewhurst/Dawes was a burglar, as well. What say ye to that, Mr. Aadland?”

Albie pulled his elbows back. Albie dropped his hands in his lap. His jerky knees knocked the table.

“Do you read the *Mirror*? Have you read about the Sex Creep and his burglaries?”

Shaky knees—Albie’s ashtray skittered.

Get him. Crush him now. He’s had enough/you’ve confirmed enough/Cooper and Leavy will call it off soon/HE knows that YOU know.

“Have you heard of a bent headshrinker named Paul de River? Are you a homosexual? Are you familiar with the fuck-deck craze of the late 1940s? Are you aware that your cousin Shelley Mandel invented the fuck deck? While I have you, will you please offer insight on the abduction and probable murder of Mitzi Perloff in February of ’37?”

Albie stood up. His chair crashed. He’d wrung his hands red. He hate-glared me and twitch-walked to the door. Cooper came up behind him. He’s the lawyer/best pal. He eased Albie out to the hallway.

Leavy rocked his chair back. “You gave Grant a boatload of courtroom ammo. I should have stopped you, but I was too embroiled in the show.”

I said, “It’s not going to court.”

“I’ll pretend I didn’t hear that.”

I undid my necktie and stretched. Leavy said, “He’s dirty all right.”

No shit, Dick Tracy.

—

Daryl Gates cranked up the juice. I begged immediate favors. He complied. I knew why.

Bill Parker stepped on his dick again. He blasted “civil rights agitators” and “Comsymps within the civil *wrongs* movement.” He gave a talk at the Jonathan Club. He was half-tanked. An *L.A. Times* man attended. Whiskey Bill’s tantrum made page three.

The FBI-boss deal was one month and ten days old. Ratfuck Bobby read the newspapers and my summary reports. They were candid. I omitted the killing of Paul Mitchell Grenier and nothing else. Ratfuck understood the levels of my legitimate investigation and Morty Bendish’s newspaper shuck. He was complicit in their perpetration. He understood that the LAPD brought big weight to both the shuck *and* my investigation. I was out to smother Monroe/Kennedy rumors. The bonus payment was Bill Parker's FBI appointment. Ratfuck could renege in a heartbeat.

I told Gates we should double down. I needed five Intel cops for phone shitwork, *now.* I needed drift on the Nite Owl gang and their peewee corps, *now.* Our clue clowns should ditz old Hollywood Division hands and get the what for. I need enhanced drift on the Mitzi Perloff snuff. I need it now. The Mitzi snuff popped at the chronological core of the '37 convergence. Gates said he understood and rounded up the men.

I crashed in my cubicle. The Albie interview drained me. Albie was dirty. But how, when, and who with—and to what degree? He was at Hollygrove in '37. He might have roamed the margins of the '48 convergence. Marcia Davenport's revelations now defined said convergence. Marilyn and Gwen. House sitters for Carole Landis. Here's my vibe: they turned call-girl tricks out of the pad in Carole and hubby's absence. Plus the divorcée dance party. It supplied a new Sex Creep suspect pool:

Riviera Country Club. Perved-out members and/or employees.

Exhaustion slammed me. I dozed in my chair. The clue clowns called and woke me up. They reported near-nil results.

The Nite Owls played obscure. Scant paperwork existed. Their peewee corps spawned none. Juvenile arrest and court records were either sealed or expunged. The clue clowns turned no gang-member names. The Owls bopped from the mid-'30s to the early '40s. Their turf ran from Beverly to Melrose, Vine to Van Ness. Hollygrove stood at the west border. The Owls were suspected of a dozen lower-Hollywood B and E's. They were lower-Hollywood boys, *todos.*

The clowns delivered on Mitzi. They ran retirement records checks and sideswiped some old ex-cops who worked the case. I got four confirmations of Del Kinney's spiel. Mitzi was spotted on a westbound Wilshire bus, the same day she vanished.

Here's the big new lead:

An enhanced eyewit account of Mitzi on the bus. The unknown eyewit states *this:*

Two boys seemed to be traveling with Mitzi. They teased her as the bus moved west on Sunset. One boy was about thirteen. One boy was a bit older. There was no further description. I could not track the lead.

Dead children. *Los* Nite Owls. I caromed back to the key question—who's the Mexican boy?

He lived near Hollygrove—check. He joined the Monroe/Perloff/Grenier/Aadland clique—check. I'm running hot today. I just hatched myself a brainstorm.

Intel kept a reverse-directory library. I raided it and grabbed the '35, '36, and '37 books. I scanned addresses and names in my cubicle. I kept a tally of Latin-type surnames. Martinez, Salazar, Sanchez. Arredondo, Guttierez, García, Abado, Contreras, and more. I matched the names to addresses. I nailed Gower, El Centro, Van Ness, Ridgewood, Wilton, Gramercy, Saint Andrews. I nailed Lemon Grove Avenue—and more.

I dredged twenty-seven names. They were mid- to late '30s names. It was a long time ago and a long long shot. It was pavement-pounder shitwork—

—

I wore my crepe-soled shoes and carried a notebook. I started at El Centro and walked a beat east. Ramon Ramirez on Gower was long gone. Ditto, Gus Mora on Waring. I dipped south. Bobby Gomez and Luis Chasco were long gone. I dipped north to the Orbit Lounge and refreshed myself. I hit a waitress up for her phone number. She told me to fuck off.

I trudged east. I got six straight not-at-homes and six straight jolts of incomprehension. *Man, I wasn't born yet. That's the Stone Age, Daddy-O.*

My feet hurt. I door-knocked sixteen cribs. I had eleven to go. Add on the not-at-homes. That made seventeen.

I door-knocked a wood-frame house on Lemon Grove and Saint Andrews. A man in bus-driver garb opened up. I noticed a fight poster on the back wall.

March 16, '52. Hollywood Legion Stadium. All local talent. Juan Manuel "El Manny" Salas versus El Tigre Flores—walloping welterweight tiff!!!

I badged the man. He acted bored. I asked how long he'd lived in the house. He said his dad bought the house back in the '20s. His dad was a grip at Paramount. It's right down the street. His dad made good bread.

I pointed to the poster. I dropped the "El Manny" moniker. The man said Manny grew up in this very house. He was a *vato loco*. He's his cousin Hector's boy.

49

(LOS ANGELES, 9:34 A.M., WEDNESDAY, 9/12/62)

I went in badge-heavy. The airport cops humored me. My credentials cowed them. They lent me a luggage cart and a stress room on the international concourse. Mexicali flight 291—Guadalajara to L.A.

Hello, Ingrid. Remember me? I soft-played you the first time. I've got corroborative witnesses now.

The airplane taxied up. It was a turboprop job. Festive sombreros were etched on the fuselage. I stood upside my cart, in plain view. Tech men rolled out the off-loading steps. The hatch popped from inside. A dark-haired stew clicked them into place.

Gringo tourists off-loaded. They were sunburned and looked sun-smacked. It was warm in L.A. It was hot in Mexico. The stews kept them lubed and pacified. The *mucho mas* margarita cart trundled the aisles nonstop.

The off-load took twenty minutes. The *turistas* weaved and lugged hand luggage toward the Customs-entry door. I pinned my badge to my left lapel and glowered. I'd see her, she'd see me, I'd gauge her reaction. She'd know it's a roust.

She was third down the steps. She shoulder-slung a garment bag and a big black suede purse. I hopped in the cart and wheeled over. I blocked off the steps. I motioned the pilot and copilot around me. I stood square in front of her. She squeezed the purse and planted her feet.

She held up the line. It was backed up into the airplane. I grabbed her arm and pulled her off the steps. Her feet dragged, she squeezed the purse, she tripped up onto the cart. I hung a U-turn and brodied us up to the Customs door.

Inbound *turistas* gassed the show. Two uniformed Customs men played escort. We bypassed the passport and visa lines and cut right. A Customs lieutenant jogged up and unlocked the door.

I eased Ingrid inside and plopped her down at the table. She squeezed her purse. I pulled it out of her hands and dropped it on the table. I kicked the door shut and hit a fan switch. Cool air blew.

I straddled the spare chair. I lit a cigarette and offered the pack. Ingrid took one. I lit her up.

"You were observed at a beachfront volleyball game. You were selling bearer bonds to your transient lover and Girl Book procurer, Peter Lawford. Your main lover, Manny Salas, appears to have taken part in a kidnapping last month. You told me that a 'queen-bee' cater waitress conceived the Girl Book idea. That was a lie. I asked you if you were running dope in and out of Mexico. You denied it. You denied running bearer bonds. I'm betting you lied there, too."

Ingrid smoked and futzed with her ashtray. I poked her purse and went *tee-hee.*

I flashed a Ronnie Dewhurst mug shot. Ingrid shook her head. I flashed a Gwen Perloff movie still. Ingrid shook her head. I flashed a Paul Mitchell Grenier mug shot. Ingrid shook her head.

She lies. She's quaking now. That's good. She clutched her purse extra tight.

"Burglary's all over this thing I'm working on. Manny went down for burglary in August '54. He went to Chino. He met a stat-rape man named Paul Mitchell Grenier there. I'd say they got tight. I'd say they stayed tight after they got out. Manny got popped for burglary in '57. You said it was a humbug deal, but I don't think so. I think you're fingering burglary scores for Manny, when you're not running dope and bearer bonds and posing for beaver pix."

Ingrid quaked. Ingrid squeezed her purse. I snatched it and dumped it out on the table.

Cosmetics, wallet, house keys, car keys, cigarettes, matches, loose coins. I poked through the wallet. She carried forty-two dollars. El Manny leered in photo sleeves. Driver's license, Mexicali ID card, a slip of paper stashed behind Manny Pic #4.

I unfolded it. It was blue ink–printed. It listed six addresses and eight-digit numbers, all on one line. *"Avenida"* and *"Calle"* meant Mexico. U.S. bearer bonds ran to eight digits. Snap call: Ingrid's got a delivery route.

Ingrid gulped, Ingrid quaked, Ingrid chained cigarettes. I felt the purse, all around. I brushed a lining bulge and pulled my pocketknife. Ingrid mewled and squeaked.

I slashed the lining. I hit an inset stash hole. A glassine bag was stuffed in. It contained white powder. I unfolded the bag and tasted the powder. It was high-grade cocaine.

I rewrapped the bag and tucked it in my back pocket. I pat-patted it. I held up the handwritten list.

"The dope goes with me. That list confirms that you're moving bearer bonds, so I'm honor-bound to inform Customs and the Mexican State Police. I'll give you two hours before I call them. Don't hide out or run, because it will only mess your life up that much more."

Ingrid sniveled. "I know *something* about burglary. It involves that kidnap girl, Gwen, but it was a long time ago. If the Customs guys think I'm playing ball, they might go easy on me."

I said, "Tell me. If I like it, I'll pass it along."

Ingrid chained cigarettes. "It was a long time ago, but it's got a movie-star angle. The Gwen chick knew Marilyn Monroe, from an orphanage they were in. Later on, they were call girls running wild. They used to do house-sitting jobs for rich people, and they fingered burglary scores."

I smiled. "Did you get that from El Manny?"

"No."

"You just heard it somewhere? You pulled it off the grapevine?"

Ingrid nodded—*yes, yes, yes.* Ingrid stroked the airplane wings on her chest.

"I like the tip, but I know damn well you got it from Manny."

Ingrid pouted. "What are you going to do with the *coca*?"

I said, "Sniff it or sell it. I haven't decided yet."

—

Gwen Perloff was due. She chose the restaurant. She called my service three hours back. "Villa Frascati/Beverly Hills/7:00 tonight."

I arrived early. I wore my best chalk-stripe and scored a tête-à-tête booth. Gwen would be prompt.

I sniffed the *coca grande.* It spurred a work binge. I called Customs and gave them Ingrid's particulars. They scheduled the grab for 5:00 sharp. I called Morty Bendish and laid down a phone edit. He was on to Divorcée #3: Wanda Jean D'Allesio. I told him to lean on the scare tactics, big. Emphasize hot-prowl hunk Donald Keith Bashor. He snuffed two women in '55 and '56. He burned in '57. Raid the *Mirror* photo morgue. Run shots of Karil Graham, dead. Run a *BIG* shot of Bashor strapped in the Green Room.

Stress the Monroe connection. Monroe OD'd on yellow jackets. The Sex Creep dumped Wanda Jean's yellow-jacket stash in her off-the-boudoir toilet. Employ a *tick, tick, tick* motif. We're up to Divorcée #3. There's three more to go. Then it's August 4—and the Creep's hot date with Marilyn Monroe.

Morty pledged quick compliance. *Jawohl, Herr Freddy!* I rang up Nat and Phil. I dictated their scripts for Doc de River's gig at the Wilshire Ebell, tomorrow. Intel would film it. George Putnam would run it on his TV show, tomorrow night. Putnam was the Chief's favorite right-wing gasbag.

I wrote my daily summary and transmitted it. The Chief/Daryl Gates/the Hats and Ratfuck Bobby received it. The El Manny/Ingrid leads should gas them.

I eyeballed the Customs grab. I parked across the street and down from Ingrid's stewardess flop pad. I saw El Manny's TV-repair truck parked at the curb.

Coca grande stimulated brainflow. I got a significant jolt. I theorized *this:*

Manny ran his own Monroe listening post. He was the kidnap clique's tech man. I found bug mounts on my 8/4/62 break-in. El Manny installed them and monitored the post. He watchdogged the ditzy Monroe—at Bayless and Gwen P.'s instigation.

I called Bob Kennedy. I begged him to issue a fed warrant on El Manny. El Bobby said, "Maybe." My plan? Serve the warrant and take El Manny someplace secluded. Kick the shit out of him and demand the whole tale.

The grab went down at 5:02. Three Fed sleds/six agents total. They quick-walked down the driveway and quick-walked back with Ingrid cuffed. El Manny followed them out. The Fed sleds laid tread. Manny blew his baby doll a fat kiss.

A maître d' walked Gwen up. She wore a fitted pearl-gray suit. I stood up. The maître d' pulled Gwen's chair out. She entered rooms. She was decorous. She inspired subservience.

I sat down and cut straight in.

"I've put something together. It's a work-up. Feel free to remark on the validity. One—you, Motel Mike, Albie, Paul Mitchell Grenier, and Manny Salas put the kidnap together. Richie Danforth and Buzzy Stein were off to the side. Marilyn was an errand girl, and supplied some *je ne sais quoi.* Two—you and Marilyn were call girls together. You were fingering burglary scores, back in '48. Some shit happened with you two and Carole Landis—but I don't know what it was."

Gwen lit a cigarette. "Paul Mitchell Grenier loves cats. He has a cat-access flap built into his back door, and he always leaves food and water out for them. I've been calling his service—from pay phones, of course—and leaving messages for the past several days. Paul hasn't called me back. I have my own key, so I went over to feed the cats myself."

I clamped down on my water glass. It shook and almost shattered.

"The place had been tossed. Certain paper items had been stolen. I saw traces of bloodstains where someone had applied solvents to dissolve certain stains. I found a fingerprint brush behind an editing machine, and I had a friend check your LAPD personnel file. You took a college forensic course in 1946, and you know how to lift, preserve, and identify prints. You had been quite pointedly looking for Paul Mitchell. I think he interrupted your toss, and you killed him."

The glass shattered. Water sprayed the table. I pulled a large shard out of my hand.

Gwen stood up. She said, "I'm sure we'll speak again."

She grabbed her purse and walked out. She turned heads all the way out the door.

50

(LOS ANGELES, 2:00 P.M., THURSDAY, 9/13/62)

The Wilshire Ebell. Home to chamber recitals and prep-school teas. Plus, Moral Rearmament and Ayn Rand study groups.

Eight hundred seats. A raised stage and lectern. The Hancock Park Ladies Guild invites speakers. Paul de River's due today.

His topic: "The Criminal Consciousness of Our Society."

I took an aisle seat. Nat, Phil, and Morty Bendish backstopped me. Nat brought his rowdy kid brother, Kareem. I paid twelve winos to mutter and belch.

It's a put-the-word-out scenario. It may be precipitous. Albie Aadland knows we know. Ingrid Irmgard knows we know. De River will know—if he's sentient and he plays in at all. Gwen Perloff knows we know. She's nullified my knowledge. She knows I killed Paul Mitchell Grenier.

Intel stood ready. Three cameramen and two soundmen rolled film at the back. The AC blew a fuse. The room broiled. Four hundred stiffs squirmed in their seats. They were pensioner age and dead bored. I'm here to furnish distraction.

An old girl walked to the lectern. She introduced "the learned and savvy Dr. de River." She dropped his résumé and ballyhooed his service to the "psychically ravaged" and the "So Cal cognoscenti." De River creaked onstage. I heard his bones pop six rows back. He pledged a fast-paced chat and a Q and A after. He cleared his throat and hocked into a hankie. He needed a haircut. He needed a whisk broom. Scalp gack dusted his suit coat.

De River launched. His faux-French accent dipped in and out. Big words proliferated. The winos sucked T-bird and evinced restlessness. De River wandered off point. The talk went pity-party. The LAPD fired me/the State Med Board censured me/my Jap publisher owes me money. I support sterilization for habitual criminals and mental defectives. Don't look so shocked. I don't mean snip-snip.

The Doc cranked it and lost it. The emcee lady panicked. She held up an APPLAUSE!!! sign. The clap-claps ran lukewarm. An old lady trekked the aisles with a microphone. Morty Bendish called her over.

He grabbed the mike. “Doc, that criminal consciousness rebop lacks panache. Let’s get down to the oooga-booga of crime in L.A. today. By that, I mean the Sex Creep, who’s violated the homes of six luscious westside divorcées. I’ve been writing about it in the *Mirror-News,* and my series has created a burgeoning sensation here in the southland. I’m proud to mention that my brother-in-law, Officer Sid Leffler, put the Sex Creep case together, and he tags the Creep as the most dangerous psycho since Jack the Ripper. Hey, Doc—you know Sid, right? He took classes from you back in the ’40s. And, you know, Doc—I’m pretty sure the Creep snuffed Marilyn Monroe.”

The audience gasped, tittered, roared. The winos whooped and cheered. De River flushed. He torqued on “Leffler.” Sid lied. He said he took the classes. That was it. He said he did not know de River warm and up close. Morty said they were tight. Morty should know. Now de River’s clenched up, beaucoup tight.

Nat slid down Morty’s aisle. The microphone lady scowled. Morty passed Nat the mike. Nat spieled off my script.

“I heard the Black Muslims put out a contract on the Creep, because they know he’s out perving on Negro women.”

More gasps, hoots, titters, stomps, cheers—

Kareem yelled, “The Creep’s in with the Klan and the Birchers! I predict vigilante action all over the southside!”

Phil slid down Morty’s aisle. The microphone lady plotzed. Phil snatched the mike from Nat. More stomps, whistles, hoots—

“Doc, a very astute cop named Jack Clemmons told me the Creep is 100% good for the Monroe snuff, and that Monroe was into some heavy-duty criminal stuff herself.”

The emcee lady led de River offstage. A backup dowager pressed an oxygen mask to his face.

—

The caddy lot adjoined the caddy shack. Dirt roads and eucalyptus groves enclosed it. The clubhouse overlooked the course. It was ’20s Spanish de-luxe. Capri Drive dead-ended at Riviera. Plumb line: the Landis spread was six blocks due north.

I parked between caddy junkers. Max and J.T. were due. Preston Fong was out on the course. He’d kick loose soon.

I tried to doze. Max and J.T. were late. I’d braced the dining room/

kitchen boss already. He recalled the divorcée dance ball. He didn't know no Sex Creep. The dining room manager hovered. I told him to pull his files on the male slaves who worked the gig. Get me their blood types. Chop, chop on this. He said he'd comply.

I dozed. Some geek knock-knocked my windshield. I opened my eyes. J. T. Meadows scooched into the car.

He just got laid. I know the signs. He grinned, slaphappy. All's right with the world.

"Wipe off that lipstick. Marcia Davenport was wearing the same shade three days ago."

He pulled a handkerchief and scrubbed his face raw. He checked himself in the rearview mirror and cracked a shit-eater grin.

"I picked up some leads, along with the rest of it. Marcia said Monroe and Perloff had no sense of boundaries. They went through the house, trying on Carole's clothes. Some jewelry went missing, or it might have been misplaced. Monroe and Perloff had gourmet taste. They sampled the caviar and the foie gras but ignored the tuna casserole."

Max pulled up. He got out and stretched himself loose. J.T. and I got out. Max said, "Who's this dink again?"

J.T. said, "Preston Fong. He's Chinese, and about thirty-five. His blood type clears him. He's technically clean, but he smash-and-grabs jewelry stores and clouts display watches. There's a bust and a no-file in his jacket, but that's way back in '50. Sid and I interviewed him. I think he saw something that night."

"That night." As in, 1/19/62. Leffler and Meadows braced him on 1/20. Fong was a night bird and a peep-and-prowl artiste. Brother Fong and me. We're *Kameraden* under the skin.

The dink walked toward us. He wore hand-me-down golf slacks and a pink Banlon shirt. He ran five-nine and 140. He sported a flattop. He looked alert.

We squared up to him. J.T. knew him. He kicked it off.

"Preston, this is Lieutenant Otash and Sergeant Herman."

Fong said, "Where's Sid the comedian? That guy was a sketch."

J.T. smiled. "Preston, you weren't entirely candid when we talked to you back in January."

Fong shrugged. "That was months and months ago. I told you, I was drunk. What's going on? There's all this Sex Creep jive in the *Mirror.*"

Max lit a cigar. "Officer Meadows thinks you were up to no good, but nobody thinks you're the Creep."

J.T. said, “I think you might have seen something you haven’t told us about.”

Max blew smoke in his face. “So, we’re back to run you through it again. You know how this shit works. We hassle you until you tell us what we want to hear.”

Fong rolled his eyes. It was snotty. I stabbed his chest—hard.

“Listen, papa-san—you were a watch clouter way back when, and if you’ve done it since, we don’t care. We’re only interested in the Creep, and what you might have seen that night.”

Fong pawed the ground. His golf cleats kicked up dirt.

“Okay. I was drunk, and I was looking to get back over to San Vicente. There used to be a jewelry store near that church on Bundy, so I thought I’d do some window-shopping. I was drunk, and I took a wrong turn somewhere. I saw a guy trying to slide up a side window on a really spiffed house. It was on Gretna Green, a big ranch style. He was a tall blond guy, and I knew he was looking to score.”

51

(LOS ANGELES, 10:30 A.M., FRIDAY, 9/14/62)

The heat broke. Fall hit early. Pat shivered under thin sheets.

I tossed her a blanket. She bundled in and snatched her coffee off the nightstand.

"Jack's worried about the congressionals. It's all he talks about."

I stage-yawned. "I'm worried about your brother indicting me. It's all I think about."

"I'm going to Mass and brunch with Lois. The ten at St. Michael's, this Sunday. I'll be sure to fill you in."

The bed sagged. It held Pat, Lois, and me. Plus Gwen Perloff. Forget church. *They're* my un-Holy Trinity. I should evict Pat and Lois. They stand apart from All Of It. I need Gwen to tell me things.

Pat checked her watch. "The doctor told Jackie she'll have twins next time. She's playing catch-up with Bobby."

"I'm playing catch-up with Bobby. I need a Federal arrest warrant, and the go-ahead to thump a guy."

Pat pillow-thumped me. I squeaked. I mimed a rape suspect spitting teeth.

"Let me read your diary. You can watch me. I'm trying to sustain this thing of ours. It'll give us something to talk about—besides Jack's and Bobby's accomplishments, your shitty marriage, and all the shit I'm in."

Pat laughed. "It's the third time you've asked me. I think you're looking for something specific, and it has to do with some personal agenda you've got going."

She's right. Jack fell in the shit, back in '48. Monroe knew about it. Pat's diary covered that year. I'm in over my head. I'm a clue clown with leads and no conclusion.

—

Hambone Officer Sid. He puts on a show. He works the show. He kills the auditorium lights and runs slides. Sid crowds the lectern. Morty B.

straddles a chair, close in. He's "my brother-in-law, the newshound." It's borscht-belt shtick.

Pali High. Packed with moms, dads, and kids. I sat with Lois. Lowell Farr sat three rows up, on the side.

She's got Monroe's fan letters. That means Creep letters. We're back in mid-July. Marilyn and Lowell. They mess around in Marilyn's basement. They come out dirty. Lowell sticks something in her handbag. It's those letters. It has to be.

Sid flashed car-crash slides. Multiple dead/tots thrown free/ steering columns punched through chests. The audience gasped. Sid exhorted seat belts and conscientious low-speed driving. Motorcycle decapitation. *Eeeks* and *skreeks* reverberate. Sid segues to kids and dope.

I buttonholed Morty before the show. I *re*-pressed him on Sid and Doc de River. Morty *re*-stressed: they're tight city. Sid's been feeding the Doc LAPD reports for years.

Sid flashed before-and-after slides. Teenage girls in Kodachrome. Shown predope and in the throes. They were good-looking girls. They wore cut-low bikinis. They were nubile in the former shots, ravaged in the latter. They went glow of health to dissolution. Glazed eyes and shrunken limbs. Slack skin and glossy hair gone in tufts. Bikini girls. Always the bikini girls. Akin to the horror pix in *The Sexual Criminal.* Akin to the Weimar-era pix that Marilyn Monroe hoarded.

The lights went up. Some Pali lettermen chanted, "Sex Creep! Sex Creep! Sex Creep!"

Sid pointed Morty to the lectern. Morty ambled up. He said, "Here's a preview of the next installment in my series. I've been in serious consultation with an eminent headshrinker here in the City of the Fallen Angels, and he told me the Creep is living through a 'declension of fan crushes,' which is to say that he crushed on the late Carole Landis, then went on to crush on someone like Jane Russell, then went on to the crush object of the era—the late Marilyn Monroe."

Pali cheerleaders chanted, "Two, four, six, eight!! He's the man we love to hate!! Sex Creep! Sex Creep! Sex Creep!"

"Declension of fan crushes." Timmy Berlin said Marilyn coined the concept. She cited Landis and Russell. "Eminent headshrinker" equals Paul de River. The Doc shares the concept with Leffler. The Sidster feeds it to Morty. It affirms one thing. De River counseled Monroe as she trucked with Timmy Berlin. It infers de River's criminal designs.

A Pali boy raised his hand. Morty pointed to him. The kid said, "How often do these pervert B and E guys graduate to murder?"

Morty said, "Take this to the bank, junior. The Creep snuffed Monroe. 'Easy come, easy go'—right, kid? 'That's the way, if love must have its day.' Now, in general, Sex Creep types only murder out of jealousy—if they feel that their crush object has betrayed them with a close friend or lover."

Sid bowed. Morty bowed. The audience erupted. They gave the Sid and Morty Show a big standing O. Fan types stormed the stage and waved today's *Mirror*. The headline read *"Creep-O Mania Hits L.A.!!! Cops Investigate Murder Link!!!"*

Lois said, "What a crock of shit."

I scoped the stage. Sid Leffler passed out business cards. Not to adults or male students. To Pali coeds exclusive. He leaned too close as he spoke to them. He brushed their hair every time.

—

A quickie gig fell on me. The revived Eddie Fisher at the Losers. Four sets, in and out. By invitation only. The club named Eddie "Loser Emeritus." Richard Nixon declined the award.

Nat and Phil worked the rope line and bopped home. I told them to leapfrog El Manny Salas and call in three times a day. Eddie was boffo. He sang his big hits and spritzed his signature self-loathing. Liz gobbles *schvantz* on the Via Veneto. Liz and Dick hatch a mongoloid love child. The full house cracked up.

It was late. Eddie and I yakked in the greenroom. Bo Belinsky raided the pill jars. He craved a nap. Take a pink one and a green one, Bo. You'll doze for sixteen hours. You'll awake refreshed. Take a red one and a blue one then. You'll revitalize.

Bo took a pink one and a green one. He said, "I've got it bad for Liz. Come on, Eddie. Give me a one-night-only pass."

Eddie popped a red one and a blue one. Eddie chased them with Vat 69.

"That's my wife you're defaming. She's the Whore of Rome, and *Cleopatra*'s the sack of Rome, and when Fox pulls production, the Italian economy will tank."

Liz fan-danced me. I recalled old Roddy McDowall dish. It was *Confidential* slush-pile skank.

The late '40s. Teen-star Liz. Roddy was older. He squired Liz around L.A.'s low hot spots. Donkey shows and beyond. Black-white sextravaganzas. Young Liz orbs wild shit. Plus, *this:*

Liz might know wild shit per Fox in duress.

Bo said, “Freddy’s thinking and scheming. He’s in a trance.”

Eddie said, “Freddy’s a schemer. It’s how he’s survived this long.”

Bo dozed off. Eddie dropped his cashmere topcoat on him.

“He’s pitching today. 2:00 p.m.—the Angels versus the Orioles. He’ll sleep right through it.”

I sipped Vat 69. “I need some skank Liz might be privy to. She’s in L.A., on hiatus—and I want to ease her into the sack with Bo. He’ll get me the skank, he’ll get laid, and I’ll shoot infrared film. It’s a *mitzvah,* Eddie. The film proves adultery. It’ll cut your alimony nut way down.”

Eddie said, “I’m in. The Loser Emeritus has eaten enough shit.”

—

I pulled up to the Pico gate. It was pushing 2:00 a.m. I wanted to brace Roddy McDowall. Bill Parker had ordered me off the lot. Del Kinney had confirmed it. Roddy haunted the costume bins. He was costuming his *Cleo* fuck spoof. He’d be here. I had questions. He needed production bread. I paid good gelt for good answers.

Monroe’s fan mail. Riff it for me. Give me Jane Russell’s phone number. “Declension of fan crushes.” Did Monroe talk that shit up to you?

I approached the guard hut. A late-model DeVille dipped in front of me. Three big men got out.

They blinked and covered their eyes. Well, now. It’s the Aadland brothers.

My headlights nailed them. Hersh, Ira, and Meyer. They’re russet-haired and blue-eyed. They’re Albie A. built full scale and mean.

I dimmed my lights and stepped out of the car. The Aadlands stepped close. They wore cut-trim Sy Devore suits. They ran six-three and 260. The Devore look tanked on them.

Meyer said, “You’re working up a derogatory profile on poor Marilyn. It’s not exactly a secret, you know.”

Ira said, “There’s a payoff that our friend Jimmy H. would like to avoid.”

Hersh said, “We like Mr. Hoover. We’d hate to see Bill Parker get his job.”

Meyer said, “Your profile for Parker and the Kennedys sounds just like the profile Jimmy had you prepare.”

Ira said, “Please desist. Please leave Albie alone and stay off the lot —which Bill Parker himself has told you to do.”

They were deep-red sclerotic. They radiated ill health.

Meyer said, “Would a large sum of money persuade you?”

I said, “No.”

Ira said, “May I ask why?”

I said, “I’ve got a bug up my ass. I’m not for sale on this one.”

52

(LOS ANGELES, 12:30 P.M., SATURDAY, 9/15/62)

Lunch in the Palisades. The Canton King Terrace. Lowell Farr, Lois, and me. I blew off the parental-consent note. Lois and Lowell were film-set pals. Lois cast my role and set up the meet.

I was a DA's lieutenant. That's true for now. My queries pertained to Marilyn Monroe. Lois coaxed Lowell and reeled her in.

We sipped green tea. Lois and Lowell critiqued *Twist Party Stakeout.* I studied Lowell and fought off All Of It frustration.

She wore a madras shirtdress and Weejuns. The Aadland approach wigged me. Gwen P. was all stalemate. Phil and Nat tailed Manny Salas. He made nine pay-phone calls this morning. Preston Fong scanned mug books at the downtown DB. The blond B and E man was a likely suspect. Lowell towered over Lois. She'll top six feet, easy. The divorcée-dance-lead dipped sideways. Ray Pinker blood-tested the waiters and kitchen help assigned to the gig. Their blood types cleared them. None was blond. They were R&I and NCIC clean. Daryl Gates got me a phone date with Jane Russell. Hey, Jane—what's this "declension of fan crushes" shit?

Our food came. Lois and Lowell dug in. I pushed my plate away.

Lowell said, "My mom thinks I made up the friendship with Marilyn. None of my friends believes that I actually knew her. You two and Officer Sid believe me, but try convincing my mom."

Lois speared a shrimp. "The people at Pali seem to love him."

Lowell studied Lois and me. She buzz-bombed most everybody. Monroe was like that.

"He grovels for love. I think it's unseemly. He's a stage ham, but he's very insecure."

I said, "Would you call him 'handsy'? Would you say he has a bent for underage girls?"

Lowell twirled her soup spoon. "I'd say he verges on inappropriate. He asks girls their bra size and when they started to develop. A twelfth-grade girl I know says he probably masturbates to excess."

Lois gagged on her soup. She grabbed her napkin and staved off a hurl. I laughed, Lowell laughed. Lois leaned into me. Lowell caught the move. I read her. She thinks we're doing it.

I said, "Lowell, did Marilyn give you a stack of her fan letters, that day you were digging around in the basement?"

She was gobsmacked. She did a broad double take.

"Well, yes she did. How did you know about—"

"And who did you tell about it?"

"Just Officer Sid. He was the only one. I said I hadn't read them—and he seemed to be relieved about that. Then he said I should consign the letters to him, which I did."

Lois said, "What did he intend—"

"He said he intended to sell them, and he said he'd use the money to start a research fund to help out kids with cancer."

Lois rolled her eyes. I said, "Did he tell you who he intended to sell the letters to?"

"No—but he told me he knew a 'rogue psychiatrist,' who was his mentor, and that the man might find them valuable as a research tool."

Rogue shrink de River/Sid, you perved-out piece of—

Lowell said, "There's one other thing. I heard Officer Sid talking to Mr. Bendish at the aud call. Mr. Bendish called his Sex Creep series a 'moneymaker,' especially if he brings in Jack Clemmons to put a 'political spin' on it. Does that make any sense to you?"

Morty knows from opportunity. So do I. I coined the phrase "Opportunity is love."

—

Bo lived at the Ravenswood. Rossmore, right off Melrose. His digs showcased a wide view. Vine Street by night bedazzled. The pad bedazzled. Living room, two bedrooms, two baths. Black leather furniture and purple-flocked wallpaper. Lava lamps and kooky Kandinsky prints.

We got lucky. Bernie found an interior wall crawl. It bordered the living room and master bedroom. A hinged panel opened on a hallway. The space was twelve feet long and three feet wide. It was crammed with bunched wires and AC-DC outlets. The bedroom wall was flocked velour. Bo shot us a work sample. We could mount the peephole and sustain a mid-shot of the bed.

It was a four-man/all-day job. Bernie disconnected the wire clumps. We bought off the manager and hogged a freight elevator. Eight trash-cart runs got our gear up. Bernie discovered the wire clumps. Nat and Phil shot Polaroids of the reconnection points. Bernie rewired the crawl space. We wore masks to squelch sawdust inhalation. I installed mikes under bedside lamp shades and Day-Glo wall tapestry. Nat and Phil built a camera box with a floor swivel. I drilled and gouged a hole through the bedroom wall straight through to the crawl space.

We mounted the camera and loaded in infrared film. The floor swivel gave us wiggle room within the static frame. We cocooned the crawl space. We tacked on acoustical baffling as a sound muffler. I fixed a two-way mirror to the interior-bedroom wall. The camera lens peeped straight through to the bed. Specially tinted glass served to magnify the action. Liz and Bo would expand in big-screen Fuck-O-Scope.

We worked. I shitworked and brainworked. I talked to Jane Russell this morning. I laid out the Sex Creep deal and Monroe's "declension of fan crushes" theory. Miss Russell said *this:*

Something like that happened to her. It was '51. She was on The Las Vegas Story *in Vegas. Somebody tossed her suite at the Flamingo. The furniture was dumped and rearranged. She got a mash note in the mail. The dink pasted magazine letters to coarse paper backing. It expressed his deep love. It admonished her not to go the Carole Landis route.*

Jane Russell indicts the Sex Creep. It's a good lead. Here's my backup revelation:

"Declension of fan crushes." Purportedly Marilyn Monroe's concept. She shared it with Timmy Berlin, circa '54.

Marilyn Monroe wasn't smart enough to concoct it. She wasn't prescient. She lacked the brain cells to ascribe the concept to Landis and Russell. The Sex Creep did not creep Monroe's divorcée surrogates until 1961. He did not creep Monroe's new digs until 1962. "Declension of fan crushes" is pure de River–speak. That means this:

Monroe bopped with and gassed on de River. The initial relationship was brief or sustained. It commenced in 1954 and resurrected this year.

Natasha Lytess. She's jungled up with Doctor Paul. The Doc palsied when I mentioned her name. She injected Monroe with collagen. It augmented her big-girl immersions. She abetted the kidnap gang. Marilyn debuted her obese self at political demonstrations. LAPD footage exists. "Declension of fan crushes." It was Paul de River's mid-'50s construction. It might mean that he knew or knew of the Sex Creep years before the Creep's divorcée break-ins and Marilyn Monroe's late-in-life transit of *criminal behavior.*

We finished up the hot-wire job. We cleaned up and spot-checked our mess. We packed up our gear and showered in Bo's bathrooms. We put on clean clothes.

The haul-debris-out job took two hours. Monroe/Lytess/de River. I was still shaking inside.

—

I drove back to Intel. I wanted to screen more Monroe surveillance film. Her immersions. Let's track them backward. The collagen injections. Let's ascribe a time frame to the Monroe–de River bond.

The squadroom bustled. Preston Fong scanned mug books. The Hats and J. T. Meadows chatted up false confessors. The *Mirror* series drew creepy crawlers. The West L.A. squad interviewed the first wave. The second wave engulfed them. Intel caught the overflow. I scanned faces. None of these guys was tall and blond. None fit the thirty-to-forty age profile.

I ducked into the film vault/projection room. I pulled Nat and Phil off their Manny Salas stakeout and told them to poll high school coeds. Make the rounds. Hit Pali High, Santa Monica High, University and Hamilton High. Secure the gist of Officer Sid Leffler. Nat called me an hour back. Dig: Sid was pawing half the girls on the SaMo pep squad.

I hit the AC switch and cooled the room off. I troubleshot the projector and scoped the reels and feeder housing. I checked wall clipboards. Monroe had her own dated index. I caught something, straight off.

The film-can list. Always thirty-two single-spaced pages. It's down to fourteen now. The Monroe shelves were half-depleted.

I saw a penciled-in addition. *"Muslim protest footage/outside PAB/4/30/62."* It was the Hoffa-op time frame. That tweaked me. I recalled my daily work sheets. Monroe was not spot-tailed that day.

I orbed shelves and found the film can. I removed the reel and coiled it on the spool. I secured the splice and doused the room lights. Let there be film.

It was black and white. There's Los Angeles Street and the PAB, full-on. The shot fed me the approximate numbers. That's two hundred picket punks on the sidewalk. There's no sound. The geeks jab picket signs. The camera zooms in. They shout and gesticulate. It's uncanny. Wide-open mouths make no noise.

The camera scanned, north to south. I read signs: FREEDOM NOW!/ F——— THE FUZZ!/BLUE FASCISM MUST GO! I read faces. Beatniks, colored priests and nuns, college kids on a lark. I squinted. I trolled for obese shapes. I saw three porky men and—

I recognized a floral muumuu. I'd seen it in her bedroom closet. It's *her.* She's done up Big-Girl-Plus. She's jabbing a F——— THE FUZZ placard. She's been injected. Her face shows it, plain.

She's walking toward a man. He's tall. He's wearing biz attire. He's not a protest type. He's got no grievance and no sign. He's limping. It's a slight hitch-and-walk limp. It's a *left-leg* limp. Marilyn hugs the man and talks to the man. It's Motel Mike Bayless.

Man Camera. Boomerang cut. We're back at 8/4/62.

Marilyn's dead. I enter her house. I note the mashed-down carpet impressions and photograph them. Ray Pinker does a walking portrait. The man's 6'1"/190/big feet/slight left-leg limp. That's Motel Mike, definitive. He's chatting up Marilyn, 4/30/62. He's in her pad the night she died, 8/4/62.

—

Kwan's was cave-dweller cool and underlit. I killed two hours there. I sipped ginger ale and doodled. I scrawled names and drew connecting arrows. I drew question marks beside them. I did not extrapolate, assume, or surmise. I got out and walked back to the PAB. I saw a Fed sedan parked at the curb.

Eddie Chacõn stood beside it. He waved me over and cracked the back door. I slid inside. Ratfuck Bobby passed me an envelope.

"It's a Federal grand-jury subpoena for Juan Manuel Salas. I'm going forth with your brainstorm, but I'm not ready to impanel the jury yet."

I sniffed the envelope. It smelled good. *Opportunity is love.*

"Max Herman and I will pick up Salas, within the next few days. We'll lean on him and debrief him."

Ratfuck rolled a cigar. "I would expect no less of you."

I said, "The Aadland brothers crowded me last night. They told me to desist, offered me money, warned me off the lot, and said Jimmy would very much appreciate my compliance. I told them no."

Ratfuck lit the cigar. "You have my word that I will not seek indictments on you and your men for the Hoffa op. I'm setting other traps for Jimmy, and they do not include his Monroe incursion. Additionally, I've told Miller Leavy not to take action on you and the

Hats for your misadventure with Richard Danforth."

I said, "Thank you, sir."

The AG passed me a cigar. "What else do you need, as of right now?"

"I need Eddie for a black-bag job on Paul de River. He's eyeball-deep in this whole thing."

"How close are you, as of right now?"

"You and Jack are squeaky-clean. The Sex Creep killed Marilyn Monroe. That's the official version. The American public will eat it up. Piddling versions of desperate phone calls and White House adultery don't stand a chance."

Ratfuck blew smoke in my face. I stepped out of the car.

—

The missing Monroe footage gored me. I walked straight to Daryl Gates' office. Gates pointed to a chair. I sat down and eased the door shut.

"The Monroe film-can index has been reduced, at least 50%. I need to know what you know."

Gates moved his in-tray and dropped his feet on his desk. He dipped his chair and laced his hands behind his back.

"It's a cash trade with the Sheriff's. Pete Pitchess wants his department covered if this whole Monroe publicity craze extends, and if Morty Bendish's series fizzles out, and the public starts getting an itch for new answers. Pete wants *his* department to be the one to leak the word on Monroe as a Commie, so that he can buff his anti-Red credentials and look like he was wise to Marilyn's subversive shit from the gate."

I said, "I get it—but there's more."

Gates said, "There is, but let me start with a disclaimer. I will not in any way seek to circumvent the Chief's FBI-boss deal, or the PD's suborning of your Monroe-Kennedy incursion. That said, I'm backing Pitchess for the FBI-boss job."

I flinched. For one half second. The gestalt hit me then.

Gates sighed. "Bill Parker is losing it. I don't think he'll last much longer. The booze, the bum ticker, the way he blew the Muslim deal, the way he keeps shooting his mouth off. I don't think he'll *live* until Jack Kennedy's reelection. To top it off, Sam Yorty's gunning for him now. The Chief ordered Intel to shoot surveillance footage of Mayor Sam in plain sight. He'll step on his dick once too often, and Sam's promised me his job if the Chief dies, or gets the FBI nod, or does something so egregious that the City Council votes to can him."

I crossed myself. Bill Parker, double-dealt. Bill Parker, self-complicit. Bill Parker—I owed him and honored him—which Gates damn well fucking knew.

"I want you to keep quiet about this."

Gates said, "Okay."

"The Hats and me. We need to put the boots to Sid Leffler. He's dirty up the ying-yang."

Gates said, "Okay."

"When the time's right, I want Pete Pitchess to deliver Mike Bayless into LAPD custody."

Gates said, "Okay—but what do we get out of all this?"

I lit a cigarette. "Bobby K. pledged a no-file on my Hoffa op. He told Miller Leavy to desist on Richie Danforth. He's going with my grand-jury proposal. The sealed testimony, the whole deal. We're going to bury all of it."

Gates clap-clapped. "That's nothing but good news. But it rather implies that Jack and Bobby are dirty within the All Of It, because the Kennedys only look after themselves."

53

(LOS ANGELES, 10:03 P.M., SUNDAY, 9/16/62)

The crawl space broiled. Bernie and I worked in our skivvies. Bo and Liz dined at La Scala. Bo dialed his home phone ten minutes back. It rang three times. That meant *We're on our way.*

He memorized his script. He knows what to dig for. We're filming it in Fuck-O-Scope. The camera's packed with infrared and aimed at the bed. The two-way mirror enhances the picture. We've checked the mike feeds five times. We're on go, go, *go.*

It's fifteen minutes to blastoff. The kids are en route. Beverly Hills to Hollywood. Thin Sunday-night traffic. Beverly to Rossmore and north. Bo drives fast—he's got a '61 Vette.

Bernie said, *"Oy."* We couldn't smoke. We dripped sweat on the camera box and tripod.

I heard the front door creak. I heard keys jiggle. I heard *clump, clump, clump, clump.* They've kicked off their shoes. The microphones magnified sound. A hallway light hit the bedroom doorway. I checked the viewfinder. The camera field glowed pink-red.

Bo: "I can't believe this is happening."

Liz: "Relax, doll. It's Camelot, or haven't you heard? We've got a license to swing."

They entered the bedroom. Zippers *skreeked.* Foot scuffs approached the bed. They've entered the frame. Bo turned on a nightstand light. It clarified the pink-red. Bernie adjusted the zoom lens. Their star faces popped—identifiable-plus.

They full-body clinched. They stood by the bed and peeled. They're in the buff. They tumble. Bedsprings *creak-creak.*

Bernie dethrottled the lens. He framed a full-bed shot. They foreplayed on a tufted duvet. They moaned and said stupid shit like "Fuck" and "Oh, baby." The foreplay protracted. It was all pink-red legs, backs, breasts, and asses. Bernie jiggled the lens upward. He nailed key facial footage.

The *Oh, baby*'s escalated. There's the missionary capture. The *Fuck*s and *Oh, baby*'s garbled, pitched, and went monotone. The mattress creaked in sync. I timed the ride off my wristwatch. It ran seventeen minutes and fourteen seconds.

Silence. Liz lights a cigarette. The smoke plumes pink-red. They're supine now. They mime the French Nouvelle Vague. It's the postfuck languor shot.

Liz *re*-sparks. She motormouths. It's defamatory small talk. Richard Burton's hung like a light switch. He never washes it. Joe Mankiewicz is a crypto fag. Lassie's replacing her in the role of Cleopatra. Really, cupcake—it's that big a dog.

Grab the opening, numbnuts—she just tossed you one.

Bo: "I know Fox is in the shit, and that there's rumors floating around. Fox has turned into a real hornet's nest, what with all the vice and money-crime stuff that's supposedly happening. See, the people there are trying to protect themselves and build nest eggs in case Fox goes in the tank."

Liz: "Yep, and 'vice' doesn't even begin to describe it. How's this sound? Two-week wife-swap parties in Jamaica, with cheap charter flights piloted by unlicensed pilots. It's called 'Fox Tail Airlines,' because you've got all-nude stewardesses who wear these fake fox tails, so you can pull them when you want more cocktails or more peanuts. If that's not your scene, how about boy's-night-out weekends in Tijuana, with visits to the Chicago Club to catch the donkey show, plus all the pills you can gobble, and Mexican State Police escorts all the way. Also, you've got to gas this. The guy who put all this together is a hunky Mexican cat named José Bolaños, who is not only a Communist but was the late Marilyn Monroe's lover."

Bo: "Wow. Marilyn Monroe's lover, huh?"

Liz: "*Es la verdad,* cupcake. José's a piece of work. He's allegedly mob-connected, here in the States. As in, Jimmy Hoffa and the Aadland brothers, who still have some clout at Fox."

Bo: "Wow. Marilyn Monroe, huh? She had a thing with this beaner, José?"

Liz: "Roddy McDowall spilled the dish to me. Marilyn was José's slave. She ran heroin in and out of Mexico for him, in disguise yet—with fake passports, the whole megillah."

Bo: "I've always heard Marilyn wasn't that bright. She must have had help with the documents and disguises."

Go, Bo, go! You've got Motormouth Liz primed to talk!

Liz: "You hit it on the head, doll. Marilyn always had a coterie of sycophants, brown-nosers, and quacks calling the shots for her, and telling her she was a genius. She was hooked on this quack shrink, who palled with this dyke drama coach of hers, and they shot her up with collagen, to pudge her up in the face. She moved into a house near Marilyn, to coach her. I swear it's all true! Marilyn told Roddy, and Roddy told me!"

It's confirmed. Doc de River and Natasha Lytess—all jungled up.

Bo: "Wow. This Roddy guy sounds like a sketch."

Liz: "I love Roddy. We were kiddie stars together, way back when. He got shafted on *Cleopatra,* but now he's getting his revenge. The A brothers are financing a series of gay smut films that Roddy's directing. And, dig—they're all *Cleopatra*-themed, with costumes from the actual film!"

Bo: "Wow. All this studio-scam stuff sure is interesting."

Liz: "How's this? This accountant at Fox—he's actually an Aadland—is planning guided sex tours to Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The A boys have got connections with the dictators down there, so everything is safe, and chaperoned by the Tonton Macoute and Dominican State Police goons."

Bo: "Wow. What about this bearer-bond racket I've been hearing about?"

Liz: "It's all true! This hack actress, Gwen something, knows forgers who concoct consecutive-number bonds that look like the real thing, and they don't get found out until later, when the stupes try to cash them in. It's crazy! I bought two bonds, just for kicks."

Bo: "Wow. These guys the A brothers have supposedly deep roots at Fox. I'm an East Coast guy, so hoods have always intrigued me."

Liz: "They go back to the '30s at Fox. If it's illegal, they're entrenched in it."

Bo: "They've got a cousin who's legit, though. He used to be my Uncle Sol's doctor, back in the '40s. Shelley Mandel. My dad said he was a mensch."

Liz: "Dr. Shel was as bent as bent gets. The Fed Narcotics Bureau has been monitoring him since the late '40s, for supposedly peddling illegal penicillin, when, in fact, he was giving it away to all these call girls he was obsessed with, and to these hard-nosed Israeli guys. He did his bit during the big VD epidemic, and, boy, did he ever overprescribe! I got my first Benzedrine and Demerol from Shel."

Bo: "He sounds like a swinger. What's he doing now?"

Liz: "He's a recluse. He's hiding out at some sort of chemical lab at the beach. The BNDD keeps track of him, sort of halfheartedly."

Bo: "He must have swung too hard for too long."

Liz: “Shel was a Renaissance cat, and he was tight with the A boys. They owned a string of fuck pads back in the ’30s, and Shel bought the one in West L.A. off of them after the war. Here’s something wild. Roddy took me to it, when I was something like sixteen. Anything goes, cupcake. I couldn’t believe my young virgin eyes. It must have been the summer of ’48, because Carole Landis was seen at the place right before she suicided.”

Tilt/bingo/three-cherry jack—

Bo: “You and Roddy were both pretty young then, and that fuck pad sounds like a pretty rough place. I hope you had someone who knew the ropes showing you around.”

Liz: “We had two storm troopers for escorts. Real Gestapo types. A motorcycle cop named Norm Krause, and a younger guy named Jack Clemmons, who’d applied to the LAPD. You want to hear something ironic? He was the cop who caught the dead-body call on Marilyn Monroe!”

Bo: “Wow. That is some ironic shit.”

PART 9

BLACK BAG

(SEPTEMBER 17–28, 1962)

54

(LOS ANGELES, 1:06 A.M., MONDAY, 9/17/62)

Late stakeout.

I was banned. I had no Fox-lot access. I parked outside the north parking slots and peeped in.

It was late. Roddy worked late. His ’54 Skylark stood by itself. He worked in Soundstage #22. Wide-open doors let light out and cool air in.

Roddy had all-lot access. The A boys pulled strings. Roddy worked for them now. Roddy, the smut-film kingpin.

Roddy knew the score. I paid hot bread for hot tattle. We’ve trekked that road before. I knew his MO. The bars closed at 2:00. He’d leave soon or work all night.

He rolled at 1:12. He padlocked Stage 22 and remote-controlled the north gate. I rolled right behind him. He shagged the Skylark. He cut to Olympic eastbound and north on Crescent Heights. I was right behind. Roddy’s got a yen. It’s the Jaguar or the Tradesman tonight.

I drop-tailed him. I laid back and kept my headlights short of his back bumper. He cut east on Santa Monica and U-turned up to the Jag.

The Jag was rough trade. Roddy jumped out of his sled and into the perv pit. I ticked seconds off my wristwatch and followed him in.

It was old movie night. A bedsheet served as a screen. The projector ran off track. Grainy footage and German voices revealed the plot. It’s a Nazi bunkhouse flick. Fritzie types strutted in jockstraps and peeled from there.

The boys wore pajamas and lounged on sleeping bags. Slumber party—the humps would ogle and hoot until noon.

Roddy stood at the bar. He saw me and three-syllable groaned. He rubbed his fingers and went *So?* I said, “Lots.” He hooked my front belt loops and bitch-led me out to the alley.

The temperature dropped. We leaned against an old VDub and lit cigarettes.

"I want to invest in your *Cleo*-spoof series. If the Aadland brothers are investing, it must be a high-yield deal."

Roddy sighed. "Who told you? Which hunky centurion did you extort the information from?"

I said, "Liz Taylor told me."

"That fat twat. I rue the time I've put into her, lo these many years."

I pulled out my flash roll. I peeled off twenty C-notes and fanned them. Roddy crunched my hands and pried the bills loose.

He said, "For starters, you realize. I'm taking Dirty Cleo Productions public, but I'm giving you this early investment opportunity, in light of our long and collegial relationship."

I tossed my cigarette. "Lay it out. You were showing Liz around some local hot spots, circa '48. I need to know how Carole Landis and Shelley Mandel might fit in. Follow my lead here. Fuck pads, fuck decks, two cop escorts named Norm Krause and Jack Clemmons, and two call girls named Monroe and Perloff in the vicinity, house-sitting for Carole Landis, who's in some sort of final tailspin."

Dirty Roddy. He stuck a hand in my pants pocket and removed my cigarettes. He lit up and blew high smoke rings.

"Carole was desperate, sad, and wild to the core. How many times can one marry without glimpsing the essential emptiness of the act? She posed for a deck with the prodigious 'Captain Hook.' He was a smut legend of the postwar era. It was shot at Shelley's fuck pad on the Palisades-Brentwood border, although I can't recall the look of the house, or the address. Orson Welles manned the camera. There's one for *cinéastes,* worldwide. I retained a copy of the deck, for my investment portfolio."

I said, "More on Landis. Chop, chop—you're stringing this out."

"Reminiscence is an art, and I refuse to be rushed. But I will work toward brevity here."

"Roddy…"

"All right. Carole was on her fourth husband, and concurrently in love with Rex Harrison, and a Junior League type. She was always falling in love and always trying to live straight—but she always went for the momentary thrill every time she got bored, like so many of us. Krause and Clemmons? They chaperoned studio biggies and visiting-L.A. notables on junkets to gay bars, drag balls, black-and-white tryst spots, fuck pads, dope dens, and the live-sex pits down in T.J. Krause had an in with Chief Worton—the interim man between C. B. Horrall and your pal Bill Parker."

I rolled one finger. *Come on/I'm paying you/pick up the pace.*

"All right. *Yes,* I knew Marilyn and Gwen house-sat for Carole. *Yes,* but you have to consider the fact that Gwen was and is nothing but a criminal—so if *she* was working a house-sit gig, there had to be a money angle somewhere."

A '57 Chrysler rock-rock-rocked on its struts. Four male feet poked out a back window.

I said, "Shelley Mandel."

Roddy shrugged. "I always liked him. I think he got too far embroiled with the Aadlands, and it unnerved him a bit. The last I heard, he had retired to Terry Lux's dry-out farm. He's got his own lab there, and he screws around with microscopes and blood cells."

The Chrysler rocked on overdrive. The bare feet flailed. The S and M flick blared Wagner. The Jaguar boys had taste.

55

(LOS ANGELES, 4:00 P.M., MONDAY, 9/17/62)

Terry Lux. Noted plastic surgeon. His farm had legs. His farm hid out and dried out Nazis on the run and big film folk. Terry cut rich Japanese to look Chinese and saved them from the World War II internment. Terry treated rare diseases and soaked rich stiffs dry. Folks lived at the farm. Terry catered to xenophobes/remittance men/fugitives from government committees.

The farm was gated and patrolled by goons in golf carts. Evil mastiffs abetted them. I turned east off PCH and climbed the Malibu bluffs. A gate guard met me. I'd called ahead. I dropped my name and Hersh Aadland's. It worked. The guard told me to park. It was cart turf the rest of the way.

He wheeled me through a bulb-lit tunnel. We went under PCH. Car traffic hummed four feet above us. We exited on the beach side. We hit a paved road and passed two guard huts. I saw bungalows up ahead.

We passed them. I was antsy. Lois gave me a reel of *Twist Party Stakeout.* "Second-unit director" Sid Leffler shot it. I projector-screened it at Intel.

It was sound-dubbed. Pali High girls gyrated to the beat of the "Twist Subversives." They wore low-slung bikinis. They dirty-dogged it through the "Sexaholic Twist." Lois said Sid wrote the song. Lowell Farr twisted among them. Her bikini top dipped half off.

It gored me. It stutter-looped through my head. It left me unhinged.

Then Gwen called my service. She was peremptory. "Frascati at 8:00."

We blew past the bungalows. We turned down a frontage road shrouded by date palms. I smelled brewed chemicals. I saw two small stucco buildings. Residence and lab. Skulls and crossbones were stenciled on both.

I hopped out. Dr. Shel stood on his porch. He was fifty-five. He was tall, lanky, and sunburned. He wore a lab coat and Bermuda shorts.

I stepped up on the porch. The cart U-turned and brodied off. Dr. Shel said, “Federal or local? I get visitors sometimes.”

I said, “Local.”

“With questions pertaining to?”

“No sore subjects. I know you never sold black-market penicillin. You gave it away to lovely young women, which I laud you for.”

“Don’t forget Israel. I gave most of it to Israel. I’m a son of the diaspora, and my humanitarian efforts for Israel more than compensate for my efforts to woo those ‘lovely young women.’ ”

I smiled. “Israel and women. You’re preaching to the choir here.”

Dr. Shel steered me inside. His front room was beach-motel kitsch. A wood-paneled den opened up behind it.

“You’re not Vice? You’re not going to roust me for conceiving a certain kind of playing card? For once owning a property rather indecorously known as a ‘fuck pad’?”

I torqued him. “No, but I’d like you to give me the address of the place.”

Dr. Shel said, “11868 Pavia Place. It’s an upscale address where some admittedly downscale activities took place.”

Pavia Place crosses Capri Drive. Carole Landis lived on Capri. Riviera CC adjoins Capri. The Landis house and the fuck pad sit one third of a mile apart.

“Hell, Doctor. You were a young buck then. Your good deeds have more than compensated for your indiscretions.”

Dr. Shel showed me into the den. It parodied all dens. The knotty-pine walls. The black-and-white fan glossies. All signed to “Dear Dr. Shelley.” All ascribed thus:

“Thank you for your good work in helping me to overcome the malady too embarrassing to name.”

Identical inscriptions. Familiar faces. Local politicos, film stars and athletes. Many good-looking and anonymous young women.

Along with:

Jeanne Carmen, Lila Leeds, Barbara Payton, Deedee Grenier. No Carole Landis and no Marilyn Monroe.

Dr. Shel laughed. “I told them all to write the same disingenuous and innocuous thing. I hate to see people incriminate themselves.”

I said, “I don’t see Marilyn Monroe or Carole Landis.”

“That’s because they weren’t similarly afflicted.”

I turned and stepped toward the front room. I saw two uninscribed photos. They sat atop a TV set. They were pride-of-place/off-by-themselves.

Robert F. Kennedy and Gwen Perloff. They were in their early twenties then.

"Well. There's our new attorney general, and a very lovely woman. I'm guessing they weren't afflicted, either."

Dr. Shel deadpanned me. I felt All Of It contract and expand.

—

I slow-cruised Pavia Place and found the house. It was a '20s-vintage Spanish Colonial. It was a hell-bent fuck pad in 1948. It's a square-ass-family home now.

Jungle gyms and water slides cluttered up the lawn. A sign was staked in the frontyard grass. It announced the location shoot of *Twist Party Stakeout.*

11868 Pavia Place.

Marilyn Monroe sketched this house. She signed the sketch and dated it: 6/22/48.

—

I arrived at Frascati early. I sat in *our* booth. In *our* private nook. I brain-screened the two photographs. I did not ascribe meaning. It would blow all prior meaning sky-high.

I was fried. I worked my cubicle phone for three hours straight. I called Lois and asked her who picked Pavia Place for the *Stakeout* location. Lois said, "Sid Leffler." I called Morty Bendish and buzzed him per Sid, sotto voce. Morty restressed:

Doc de River feeds Sid all his highbrow cop perceptions. De River fed Sid all his highbrow Sex Creep riffs. Sid and the Doc talk at least once a day.

I called Red Stromwall. Red beefed the fake confessors swarming the PAB. Morty's *Mirror* series set off an avalanche. Preston Fong's still scanning mug books. The downtown DB logs forty-six books, total.

Harry and Eddie are *re*-bracing registered sex offenders. J.T.'s steering them through. It's a thankless job. They've cleared these geeks already. It's major-case shitwork at its worst.

I called Del Kinney. I told him to buzz his old pals at the ABC. I want to raid Norm's Nest. It's ultradirty. The Grenier sibs are running badger games out of there. Norm Krause and Jack Clemmons are dirty. They're embroiled in a right-wing-nut group called the White Dog Bund. Del was skeptical. I pulled out the stops and punched him in the heart.

“I’m working angles to pull Gwen out of the shit on the kidnap job, and crunching Krause and Clemmons is one of them.”

Del said, “Okay, Freddy. I’ll try.”

She wore a gray twill suit tonight. Plus new gray hair and new tortoiseshell glasses. I memorized her DMV stats. I was four years, two months, and five days older than her.

I stood up. *Our* waiter pulled her chair out. He signaled a drinks waiter. He brought the martinis.

We sipped them. We lit cigarettes. I conjured Doc Shel’s photographs.

Gwen said, “I talked to Del a few hours ago. He told me there might be a chance for certain people involved in what you call ‘All Of It’ to walk away clean.”

“I’ll get to it. I had a question first.”

“As to?”

“Your criminal career.”

Gwen crushed her cigarette. “It’s blunt, but I’ll play. I keep a list of criminal offenses, and calculate the exact day the statute of limitations elapses.”

I said, “For instance?”

“For instance, I fingered a house burglary on June 11, 1948. The statute expired on that day, seven years later.”

Landis. The house-sitting job. She indirectly tweaked me.

“Don’t stop there.”

“I set up a payroll heist on February 9, 1950. That’s it for now.”

I leaned close. Our arms brushed. Gwen did not flinch.

“You could waltz on the kidnap job and everything else you’re involved in. That goes for your partners, too—as long as they haven’t crossed some lines that the Feds and Bill Parker can’t live with.”

Gwen leaned close. Our fingers brushed. I stifled a flinch.

“You’re the one who’s crossed the line. With Richard Danforth and Paul Mitchell. I can live with Danforth, but Paul Mitchell’s something else.”

“Why Danforth? What’s your grievance there?”

Gwen said, “I’m not telling you.”

I coughed. “I’ll lay the deal out for you. There’ll be no loopholes and no surprises.”

“Tell me. And tell me why you specified the Feds when you first mentioned it.”

I said, “You were right, at the gate. It’s a buyback deal initiated by

Bob Kennedy and Bill Parker—and that includes the Sex Creep buzz in the *Mirror*. It's all about squelching Marilyn-and-Jack rumors, and your kidnap fiasco, and all the scams at Fox got crammed in, along with my Danforth blunder. The initial plan was to bury all of it with a Federal grand-jury play, secret testimony, blanket immunity, and heavy punitive measures for any and all public exposure of sworn testimony. But—as of right now—I'm thinking the AG will let all the would-be testifiers off with sworn and sealed testimony, and no courtroom appearances."

She did not blink. Not at "Federal." Not at "Bob Kennedy."

Gwen said, "I'll think about it."

I said, "I know a woman. I keep asking her if she loves me. She always says, 'I'll think about it.' "

Gwen not quite smiled. I leaned close.

"I read your sister's file, at Hollywood station. I found a corroborative eyewit statement, and I doubt if Del Kinney's seen it."

"Tell me."

"Two boys were with Mitzi on the bus. They were teasing her. One was about thirteen, the other a bit older."

Gwen stood up. She said, "I'm sure we'll speak again," and walked out.

56

(LOS ANGELES, 9:10 P.M., TUESDAY, 9/18/62)

Leffler was due. Max called him and set up the meet. Phil and Nat submitted briefs. Sid stands accused. We had him for stat rape and coerced oral cop. Nat and Phil turned nineteen complainants. They posited a hundred felony counts. Sid had skeeved westside girls since ’50-something.

The downtown May Company. 10th and Broadway. The rear parking lot. Harry and Eddie picked the spot. Red set up the space.

An abandoned storeroom. Located just inside. One chair and one bright lightbulb. *We have some questions, Sid.*

We packed palm-weighted sap gloves. Stitched-in buckshot jacked the heft. J. T. Meadows was home with his wife and kids. Or out poking Marcia Davenport. J.T. and Divorcée #1. They got a thang going on.

Leffler showed. He cut in off Broadway and hit his brights. Red yanked the service door up. Leffler idled up. We walked into his lights.

That’s right. It’s five guys. You thought Max came alone.

Red and I worked the door. Leffler went all doe-in-the-headlights. Red pulled him out of his sled. I snatched his belt gun and dumped the shells. He thrashed. I arm-barred him and frog-marched him inside.

Harry kicked the door shut. Eddie cuffed him to the chair. I said, “You’ve got suspect relationships. We’re here to discuss them. You had a long run with the girls, Sid. That’s why we’re going this route.”

Leffler popped sweat. His glasses slid down his nose. We stood over him. Max and Eddie kicked the chair slats. We pulled on our gloves. Leffler pissed his pants. Note the lap lake.

I love-tapped him. Leffler’s head snapped. He bit his lips and drew blood. I double-stuffed my gloves. Buckshot *and* ball bearings. They doubled the heft.

Max said, “We’re going to run some names by you. You hear the name, you acknowledge it, you tell us what you know. That’s the drill here. Prompt answers will serve to spare you pain.”

I said, “Marilyn Monroe.”

Leffler said, “Dead movie star. Killed by the Sex Creep, if I’m any judge of my brother-in-law’s dramatic designs.”

I cuffed him. His head snapped. The thump induced reverb. Leffler yelped and popped tears.

“No smart answers. You hear a name, you answer one of two ways. You say, ‘I don’t know any more than you do,’ or you say, ‘I have information.’ ”

Leffler went *Yes yes yes.* “I don’t know anything you don’t know. Come *on,* she’s Marilyn Monroe.”

I said, “Gwen Perloff?”

Leffler went *Yes.* “I don’t know any more than you do. I’ve never met her, I’ve never dealt with her on the job, I’ve read about her, and that’s it.”

Red said, “Richard Danforth. Aka ‘Ronnie Dewhurst’ and ‘Rick Dawes.’ ”

“The same answer, you fucking sadists. You’re beating on a brother officer here—and guys like you always pay in the long run.”

I cracked him. Leffler yelped loud. I ripped an eyebrow loose. Blood dripped in his eyes.

Leffler *shrieked.* “No, no, no. I don’t know.”

Eddie said, “Juan Manuel Salas? Aka ‘El Manny’?”

“I don’t know him. I don’t know any more than you do.”

He blubbered it. He gnawed his lips and stained his mouth red.

I said, “Paul Mitchell Grenier.”

Leffler went *Yes yes yes.* “Him, I know. But he’s just a punk I’ve seen around the Fox lot. His kid sister Deedee filed a missing-person report on him yesterday. He’s a *faigelah,* and some sort of fly-by-night.”

Harry said, “Albie Aadland?”

Leffler spit blood and squirmed in his chair. He was tight-cuffed. Cuff ratchets gouged his wrists raw.

“Albie’s a jock-sniffer. He collects tough guys like regular guys collect baseball cards. His idea of kicks is visitor’s day at Chino.”

I said, “You worked guard gigs for the Aadlands in the ’30s and after the war. You were a fuck-pad habitué. Give us something there.”

“What’s to give? It was an ‘anything goes’ scenario. I kept my eyes shut and my head down most of the time.”

Max lit a cigar. “Carole Landis, Shelley Mandel, Norm Krause, and Jack Clemmons. Plus a rackets surge at Fox, right now.”

Leffler coughed. “You dumb bunnies dumped a kidnap suspect, and now there's hell to pay. I can spell *buyback* as well as the next guy. How long do you think Morty can keep up his jive series before people get bored? Does *Der Führer* Parker honestly think his deal with Bob Kennedy is anything less than an open secret? He's too old, he's too drunk, his health's in the shit—"

I bitch-slapped him. I split his lips and tore a nostril loose. My glove stitches popped. Buckshot and ball bearings blew wide.

Leffler screeched. That one hurt. He bucked his chair. His legs spasmed.

Eddie said, "High school girls. We've got nineteen complainants. They'll swear out perv-one warrants."

I said, "Lois Nettleton and Lowell Farr told me you've got a type. Lowell said you cherry-picked the cast of your twist-party flick."

Leffler bleat-laughed. A loose tooth dropped in his lap.

"I don't need to grovel for young cooze, and I don't need to break the law. I'm in the Industry, bubi. I've got carte blanche. I always make them crack out some ID. Show me you're legal, kid. I'm a policeman, and I know the law."

I lit a cigarette. "That house on Pavia Place. Why'd you choose it for the film location?"

"It was a fuck pad back in the ice age, but I knew the new owners rented it out for shoots. I'm an auteur. I know my shit. I'm a pro in a world full of amateurs, so—"

Harry cut in. "Paul de River. Give us the drill on that quack."

Leffler spit blood. It hit Harry's shoes. Leffler played kamikaze. He called up punk bravado.

"He's ten times the man, with twenty times the intellect, of all you fascist slugs. We've been tight since before the PD canned him. I feed him all my best file dirt. He pays me twice my salary, and he reveres me."

I gut-punched him. I heard ribs crack. Leffler shrieked.

"This is straight from Lowell Farr. Monroe gave her her fan mail for safekeeping, but you talked her out of it. You said you intended to sell it—so who did you sell it to?"

Leffler coughed. He upchucked two teeth and a slice of his tongue.

"I sold it to her shrink, Ralph Greenson. I didn't even read the letters. My pal Dr. Paul's her radical shrink. He said he didn't even want them. He already knew this Sex Creep guy, and he figured half of the fucking letters were from him."

Sheared ribs pierced his shirt. Dark blood bubbled out.

Looks traveled. The Hats to me and back. *He can't take much more.*

Let's dump him at Georgia Street.

Max uncuffed him. Harry and Eddie stood him up on his feet. He weaved and puked gastric bile.

Red said, "You're fired. That's straight from *Der Führer,* himself."

57

(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 A.M., WEDNESDAY, 9/19/62)

The grand jury's impaneled. They're strictly rubber-stamp. They want Manny Salas *NOW*.

They want "All tools and electrical articles, paraphernalia and electrical devices, as obtained from Mr. Salas' workplace. Plus all articles of electrical gear that might prove efficacious in the practice of illegal surveillance."

Witness warrant/search warrant. Max and I worked for Ratfuck now. Manny always clocked in at 9:15. We sprawled in a prowl sled and skunk-eyed the back door.

The Repair King shop. Brentwood's one and only. San Vicente, right off Bundy. It's a half mile from Fifth Helena. Manny ran the listening post. It's a valid presumption. Manny was the man to squeeze *now*. He linked Hollygrove '37 to Brentwood *now*. He was a burglar. Gwen fingered a 459 on 6/11/48. I think Manny did the job.

We surveilled the alley and back door. We covered Manny's parking slot. We were dead-ass exhausted. We cleaned Sid Leffler up and hauled him to Queen of Angels. We fed the intake docs a line of shit per his wounds. I called Customs and the Mex State Police. Ingrid Irmgard remained in custody. Customs agents studied her delivery list and popped six Mex nationals with forged bearer bonds. The Staties APB'd José Bolaños. They ran an all-Baja dragnet. José vaporized. The Staties doubled down and kept looking.

Max dozed. I dozed. Something Leffler said ditzed me awake. Leffler, on Albie Aadland: "His idea of kicks is visitor's day at Chino."

Manny pulled in. He parked two slots down from us. We got out slow and jumped quick. He sensed heat and whirled around. We sandbagged him. I banged his head on the roof ledge. He slumped, knees-first. Max kicked him in the balls and cuffed his hands behind his back. I ran into the shop.

I went through the back door. I crashed the workshop. I ID'd Manny's workspace, easy. He'd tacked Ingrid Irmgard nudie shots above his bench.

A salesman ran up to me. I shoved the warrant at him and shoved him away. I pulled drawers, I dumped drawers, I dumped a tool kit. There's the shit, right—

There.

Bug mounts/condenser mikes/bundled bug loops. Manny hot-wired Fifth Helena. This gear replicates the Monroe house gear. It's a courtroom-valid grab. Ratfuck would cream his jeans.

—

The table, the chairs, the standard see-thru mirror. The Fed setup mimed the LAPD's.

Manny's a federal witness now. He's hanging insouciant. He should evince more fear.

I kicked his toolbox. "It's evidence, Manny. You ran a listening post out of the Repair King basement. You had Marilyn Monroe hot-wired, and I'm wondering why."

Manny scratched his right-arm tattoo: *Manny y Ingrid por Vida.*

"Everybody wants to get next to Marilyn, right? I was planning to offer her a part in my next picture. It's about my days as a stumblebum welterweight, before I went to TV-repair school and learned a trade."

Max lit a cigar. "Well, you certainly share a history with Marilyn, given that you grew up less than a mile away from Hollygrove. You, Marilyn, Albie, and Paul Mitchell Grenier. You were a tight little clique."

Manny made the jerk-off sign. "So you say. But I say I learned a trade. If I felt like calling Marilyn, I would have done it. I wouldn't have to hot-wire her crib."

I lit a cigarette. "You were in Chino with Grenier. That was in '54 to '56. You were in for 459, and he was in for stat rape. Albie Aadland loved a good Chino visit. I'm guessing he visited you and Paul Mitchell. Can you think of anyone else he visited there?"

"He visited me and Paul Mitchell. That's all I know."

Max drummed the table. "The Monroe wire job. Give us some details."

Manny said, "No comment, and don't think you can phone-book me, because there's that *Cubano* Fed standing outside the door."

I went *tut-tut.* "Your girlfriend Ingrid, José Bolaños, bond scams, dope, Mexican runs up the wazoo."

Manny combed his hair. He had killer hair. It was thick and combed straight back. He pulled out a hairnet and tugged it in place. Max haw-haw-hawed.

“Chino. You and Paul Mitchell intersect. Albie comes to visit. Give us a few tidbits.”

Manny patted his pompadour. He wore khakis and a Sir Guy shirt. He dressed classic *vato loco.*

“Chino was kicks. Me and Paul Mitchell drank pruno and poked sissies. Albie visited us, and soaked up the atmosphere. He got his rocks off talking to psychos and hoods. He was a chickenshit, you dig? He wasn’t evil and committed to wild shit, like his brothers. That’s all you’re getting from me, so don’t bother me with any kidnap shit, Marilyn shit, or Fox-rackets shit, because I don’t know shit, and I wouldn’t roll if I did.”

I sighed. I’m forbearing Uncle Freddy. You’re in a jam, son. I want to help.

“Here’s what we’re dealing with. You, Gwen, Paul Mitchell, Albie, and Motel Mike could waltz. As in, you present sealed testimony before a Federal grand jury, or you depose in writing. You receive total immunity. We’re dealing with a certain level of official embarrassment, and some guys with clout would rather not be embarrassed. *But,* here’s a rub. There’s burglary all over this thing, and you’re a reformed burglar. So, I’d like you to stretch your memory way back, to before the statute of limitations on some 459’s expired. *Comprende?* Give us an oldie, so we can tell the jury foreman, ‘See, El Manny knows at least some of the personnel in this mess.’ ”

El Manny combed his eyebrows. Fluorescent lights toasted his hairdo. It melted his Brylcreem.

“Remember that other blondie cooze who killed herself? Carole Landis? It must have been ’48, sometime. Marilyn and Gwen were house-sitting the Carole cooze’s place, and Gwen tipped me to a jewel stash in a wall safe. Okay, I found the combination in a desk drawer, and I clouted the jewels. The cooze never reported the theft, because she was schizzy, and then she killed herself. The punch line is that I found a fuck deck in the safe, but I left it there. It was Carole and this big-dick guy, Captain Hook, doing it in fifty-two variations. Marilyn and Gwen were there, and Marilyn had this enchanted look on her face. She said something like ‘Wow, what a nifty blackmail tool. If you’re willing to pose yourself, if you find the right mark, if you’re willing to wait.’ ”

58

(LOS ANGELES, 1:30 P.M., THURSDAY, 9/20/62)

Greenson met me at his office. I sent a note and requested an interview. I explained why. He responded at once.

I sat in the waiting room. Jack and Jackie beamed up from *Vogue.* They laid out their summer vacation. Jackie called Biarritz yummy. They had suntans. The grapefruit/amphetamine diet kept them thin. They wore resort clothes *c'est bon.*

The receptionist buzzed me back. I knew the way. Greenson stood behind his desk. He said "Lieutenant" and gestured to a Saarinen chair. I sat down. He set the clock. The fifty-minute hour clicks in.

"Yes, I did purchase Marilyn's letters. I was tempted to read them, but I resisted the urge. The provenance rather intrigued me—Marilyn to young Lowell to Officer Leffler. But the officer impressed me as an unstable man with an agenda, so I thought it best to burn the letters and be done with it."

I believed him. "Unstable" nails Leffler. *Desperate* nails him best. He was a big name-dropper. He rivaled Monroe there. He dropped Paul de River's name the most.

I said, "I've spent considerable time on this now, and I've concluded that Marilyn met Paul de River, and that he sought to mold her in the manner of the many psychopaths in his charge."

Greenson tugged at his cuff links. "They met in the early '50s, I believe. Marilyn's orphanage chum, 'Gwen'—a criminal, frankly—introduced her to de River. Over the years—intermittently, at first, and far more pointedly as she unknowingly entered the last stage of her life—Marilyn came to believe that she could take her native acting skills and develop an entirely differentiated persona—in the manner of Gwen, who was very much stronger than she was, and whom Marilyn flat-out idolized. Marilyn divulged very little information as to her new 'criminal metamorphosis,' but she spent great portions of our sessions analyzing Gwen's character, and marveling at how Gwen—who had suffered the same neglect and privations as she had—had emerged as someone resolute, clear-minded, and able to live in the real world with far greater grace than she ever had. And Gwen went after what she wanted with deadly resolve—which Marilyn admired more than anything else.”

The Gwen-Marilyn riff took me back. Dope fiend Marilyn sideswiped me. ’48 to ’62. Fourteen years. Marilyn’s pill habit. She crossed “Norma Jean Baker” off a barb vial in ’48. She crossed “Marilyn Monroe” off a barb vial in ’62. All Of It constellated in ’48. The dumped-pill aspect torqued me. Fourteen years elapsed. Marilyn does now what she did then.

I said, “Doctor, where did Marilyn get the pills that killed her?”

“I don’t know. She took the pills I prescribed her, or she dumped them, as she did with the pills her internist prescribed. She told me that she received pills from her friend Jeanne Carmen, and she followed the same pattern there.”

I kicked it around. My brain gears click, clicked.

59

(LOS ANGELES, 10:20 A.M., FRIDAY, 9/21/62)

Jeanne Carmen. She peddled pills to the L.A. underground and always dealt fair and square. Greenson's office to Jeanne's place—just a ten-minute hop.

I took Wilshire to Doheny and cut north. I replayed the mobile stakeout on Manny Salas.

Red laid it out. The stakeout kicked on last night. The Feds cut Manny loose. He caught a cab. Harry and Eddie tailed him to Albie Aadland's house. They held down surveillance. Albie and Manny burned paper stacks in the backyard bar-b-q pit.

I was restless last night. I perched by the phone and willed Gwen to call. She didn't call. I drove to Frascati and sat in our booth. Gwen did not show.

I talked to Max, an hour back. He said the Creep job slogs on. The RSO's have been cleared. The fake confessors, likewise. Preston Fong's still scanning mug books. Morty's up to part 5 in his series. He awaits Freddy's next phone edit. The record checks have fizzled out, dead.

I parked on Elevado and hopped out. I leapfrogged the stairs and rang Jeanne's bell. She yelled, "It's open!" I let myself in. The living room doubled as a practice tee. Jeanne putted golf balls toward a coffee cup.

"Hi, Freddy. What's shakin', love?"

I said, "Who's got the most extensive collection of fuck decks that you know of?"

Jeanne sunk a long one. "Either Roddy McDowall or Sam Yorty."

"Put aside Greenson and the various doctors that Marilyn might have been blowing. Who can you think of that might have been supplying her with pills?"

Jeanne said, "Santa Claus."

I said, "What?"

Jeanne leaned on her putter. "Some anonymous fan of hers. He leaves her yellow jackets, wherever she's living. That's on New Year's, Easter, Thanksgiving, and her birthday. Marilyn buries them in her garden, wherever she happens to be living, and only digs them up when she's desperate."

I went out the door. Jeanne yelled, "It was too brief, baby!"

—

I made Fifth Helena in near-record time. I parked behind the house and vaulted the backyard fence. I went straight to the garden and pawed through loose dirt. I pulled out two empty pill vials. They were unmarked. It surprised me. I thought *this:*

She moved in in March. That's pre-Easter. Her birthday was on 6/1/62.

I dug further. I found six yellow capsules. They resembled Nembutal. They were *not* manufacturer-marked. I pulled a capsule apart and tasted the medicine. It played off-kilter. I examined the plastic coating. It was hand-stamped "TCS Pharmacy." That played phony.

Trust your instincts. Make the leap. You're on to something here.

The Sex Creep. He's got a lab. He brews his own dope. He's a crazy autodidact. He's a rogue chemist—wild-ass and self-taught.

60

(NEAR LOS ANGELES, 9:20 A.M., SATURDAY, 9/22/62)

Chino. The soft joint. It housed first-time felons and career deadbeat dads. It's forty miles southeast of L.A. That's out in the scrub hills and gimcrack subdivisions. Dorms replace cellblocks. Wired enclosures replace The Walls. WPA-style buildings flank the grounds.

Admin Building #2 housed a file room. I cut past some picnic tables and found it. I set up the trip yesterday. I talked to a deputy warden and ran down my request. He said he'd pull the Grenier and Salas files.

He checked a visitors index. He said Paul de River never came to Chino. Albert Aadland did. He came with the Friends Service Committee. His visits began in '49. They stopped a heartbeat after Salas and Grenier were granted parole.

I parked beside the building and walked in. A trusty pointed me to the file room. The deputy warden delivered. He fixed me up with a table and chair. It was stacked with folders, pencils, and scratch pads. Plus a thermos/coffee setup.

Files were stacked floor to rafters. They bulged up wall-to-wall shelves. The basement was steam-heated. I took off my suit coat and dug in.

I skimmed visitors logs back to '50. I brought my FI card/RSO list with me. I ran it through the logs and got no matches. Albie visited Chino seventeen times with the Friends Service Committee. Those visits ran from fall '49 to spring '54. Salas arrived in June of '54. Grenier arrived in August. Albie visited them as a "personal friend." His visits ran through to their late '56 paroles.

Albie was here. Salas and Grenier were here. Did the Sex Creep pass through here? Was he locked down here? Did Salas and Grenier know him? Did Albie visit him here?

Nine hundred burglars and sex fiends passed through Chino from the late '40s to '56. The names started with Aquino and ended with Ziegler. The Creep's rare blood type was a now-useless ID device. I'd have to skim nine hundred infirmary files. It would take at least two fucking weeks.

I read through Salas' and Grenier's complaint files. Manny guzzled pruno and beat up hapless inmates. Paul Mitchell bit a dorm queen and made him his bitch.

An old-hand guard drifted by. I poured him a cup of coffee. He said, "Are you the lieutenant that's got that big interest in that strange one Albie A.?"

I nodded. I had paperwork eyestrain. I saw three of everything.

"Well, I've worked Visitors since the war, and I can't name anybody specific that Albie visited, except his pals Grenier and Salas, but I do remember how he was always lugging psych texts around with him, giving the cons little quizzes and taking notes, and acting not at all like the other Quakers did. He was always name-dropping some headshrink named de River. He was sure enthralled by that guy."

I extrapolated. I surmised.

De River. Albie cultivated prospects for de River. HE RECRUITED for de River. He sought out prospects to send on perverted practice runs—

The guard said, "There's one other thing."

"What?"

"I always had Albie pegged for a short eyes. You know, we've got outdoor visiting here, and I'd always see Albie giving little girls these weird looks."

61

(LOS ANGELES, 10:30 P.M., SUNDAY, 9/23/62)

The raid's on.

We mobilized outside Norm's Nest. Del Kinney yanked chains and made the deal *GO*. Three ABC men packed shotguns. Max and I went with sidearms and saps. Del stood with us. He packed my Ithaca pump. Red, Harry, and Eddie crouched by the back door. Two Sheriff's matrons hunkered in the rear parking lot.

The preraid stakeout concluded. We know who's inside. It's Norm Krause, Jack Clemmons, and Deedee Grenier. That's our target group and no more. Del cued the intrusion. He squawked on a duck-call gizmo—quack, quack, quack.

Let's roll.

Del blew the front door off. He triggered a spread at the center mass and took it down in one go. It slammed hard. It outslammed the shitkicker music on the jukebox. It stunned Norm, Jack, and Deedee. They spilled drinks and toppled their stools at the bar.

We ran in. The matrons grabbed Deedee. She pulled a rat-tail comb and stabbed at their eyes. They kicked her legs and proned her full on the floor. Max and Red grabbed Norm Krause. He played it taciturn and eschewed resistance. I grabbed Jack Clemmons. He carried a belt gun and a flat sap. I frisked him and tossed them behind the bar. Jack feared me. He complied, meek-meek.

It went quick. It was all blunt force and loud affect. Deedee looked straight at me. She said, "I know what you did."

—

The ABC ran a branch office in Burbank. Muster room/squadroom/sweatboxes/jail.

I sweatboxed Jack Clemmons. Max and Red took Norm Krause. Harry and Eddie handled Deedee Grenier. The matrons hovered and measured Deedee for a strip search.

Jack and I sucked flask juice. I spiked it up. 151/hashish chunks/

coca grande from Ingrid I's stash.

"Your relationship with Mike Bayless predated Marilyn Monroe's death. He put you in the sack with Gwen Perloff and extorted you out of the Sheriff's race. Here's my question. Did he tell you to expect an auspicious station call on the night of August 4?"

Jack was a Georgia boy. He knew from home brew. My shit sandbagged him.

"I figured it pertained to the kidnap. Something like a callout. You know, a big roundup to beat the bushes for the girl."

The room was hot. I flicked the AC switch. Cold air flowed.

"The raid was a shuck. It was nothing but your wake-up call. You and Norm get a walk on any stunts you might have pulled recently. I'm only interested in you and Norm, back in '48. You were shepherding bigwigs and film people through the westside dive circuit."

Clemmons sucked jungle juice. "It was Norm's gig, more than mine. I didn't come on the PD until '50. Norm and me had similar political interests, so we became pals. Somebody—maybe on the PD or in the DA's Office, something like that—was worried about naïve movie-biz kids getting in trouble at homo bars, dope dens, fuck pads, and the like, so Norm and me got paid to be escorts."

I sipped juice. My scalp prickled. I reprised Deedee: *"I know what you did."*

"Were there any other policemen working this sort of gig?"

Clemmons belched. He wore a short-sleeved shirt. His White Dog Bund tattoos gassed me. Evil bull terriers snarled.

"Just Sid Leffler. He'd stop by this fuck pad on Pavia Place, and I knew that he had a history with the place, going back maybe ten or eleven years, because the A brothers and this fool Dr. Shel owned the place, and he always said this particular pad was haunted, but he never said why."

I got chills. They were jungle-juice indigenous. They felt good. You got sweat pops and ice jabs inside one second.

"Tell me about the bigwigs and movie folks you escorted."

Clemmons said, "Well, Orson Welles. He was always taking dirty pictures and shooting dirty movies, and you had Sam Yorty, back when he was a congressman. He collected these smutty decks of playing cards, and I think Welles was the guy who took the pictures."

I lit a cigarette. "Roddy McDowall and Elizabeth Taylor?"

Clemmons shrugged. "I'm not sure. I was usually zonked, so a lot of that time was a blur. Ask Norm. He's got a better memory than me."

—

Clemmons waltzed. Krause replaced him. He knew from jungle juice. He took measured pops and licked his lips.

“Jack said you asked him about Liz Taylor and Roddy McDowall. Okay, we showed them around. So what? Why are you so hipped on all this ancient history?”

“You caught the state comptroller, Tom Kuchel, blowing a young kid. That was in ’49. You tried to extort Kuchel, after the station captain kicked the beef. Somehow, you walked on Extortion One. I think you must have had a favor on the books, with a ranking PD man or a heavy politician. Why don’t you elaborate on that?”

Krause wiped his face. He sweated up his handkerchief. He had cold blue eyes. They put out fifty thousand volts.

“I did favors for Chief Horrall, before the grand jury sacked him. I did some favors when Bill Worton came in. I pulled a couple of wheels out of the shit in the summer of ’48, and Worton remembered that when I stepped in the shit with Kuchel. And that’s all I’m giving you, you A-rab piece of shit.”

—

The raid was a bust. Krause was intransigent. Clemmons was addled and aphasic. Deedee got kicked out early. She ambled off somewhere.

I walked through the ABC lot. I was fried. It was 2:16 a.m.

Something jumped out behind me. Something pounded my back. Somebody jabbed a lit cigarette in my face. I heard *“You killed my brother”/“It has to be you”/“Your goons tailed me”/“Who else could it be”/“You killed my—”*

It was Deedee. She jabbed the cigarette. She missed my eyes and scorched my neck. She clawed my back. She raked through my shirt and drew blood. I tried to grab her, she pulled away, I caught her hair and slammed her against a parked car. She cracked then. She just sat there and sobbed.

62

(LOS ANGELES, 8:00 P.M., MONDAY, 9/24/62)

Frascati.

Gwen didn't call me. I'm here anyway. I got dressed up to eat alone. People used to run from me here. They thought I bugged the tables. Illicit lovers saw me here. They split in opposite directions.

I messed with the bread basket and chained cigarettes. I teethed on Pat's diary and her now-empty house.

Her '45 to '51 diary. That means summer '48. She surely mentions her siblings. The Kennedys are tight-knit.

The house is empty. Pat, Peter, and the help are down in Laguna. It's an easy B and E. I've done it before.

Gwen walked up. She dodged the headwaiter and made tracks to me. She wore a russet-flecked suit.

"I forgot to call. I just assumed you'd be here."

I smiled. A waiter brought two martinis. I tried for a comeback and faltered.

"You've been frightening some friends of mine."

I said, "It's a walk-away for all of you—unless Parker, Leavy, and the AG learn something about you kids they can't live with."

I dropped "AG" to tweak her. She did not tweak.

"I'm more circumspect than the 'other kids.' And I can't vouch for their criminal activities as far back as you seem to be probing. And I still have a hard time picturing you as a front man for such powerful figures."

I said, "We're united in common cause. I'm out to dodge indictments and spare them embarrassment. Buyback deals always play out along these lines."

Gwen sipped her drink. "Without admitting any sort of active complicity or complicitous knowledge, how will the alleged vice and financial crimes allegedly conceived at Fox be legally dealt with?"

I lit a cigarette. "Through cease-and-desist orders, issued by local, state, and Federal agencies, under threat of a studio-wide internal audit, and individual IRS audits on all the conspirators involved."

Gwen lit a cigarette. "It unnerves me that you're looking into my sister's death."

"We're dealing with convergences. 1937. Your sister disappears, and you meet the kids at Hollygrove. And I've learned some things that I kick around while I wait for you to get off the dime and tell me what they all mean."

Gwen said, "Not just yet."

I said, "Tell me about *Hard Luck Girl.*"

"There's nothing to tell. I wrote a crummy script, I'm a crummy actress, and I broke it off with Darryl, so he pulled the plug on it. I'm really just a bait girl emeritus who's considering her options, so if you have any ideas, please let me know."

I touched her arm. "Sit still and let me put some things together."

—

The house smelled different. Her suite smelled different. Her closet smelled like cedar blocks rescented or replaced. The diaries were here. Pat said they were. I didn't see them out in plain sight. B and E is tactile and olfactory. Scent enhances color. It spurs my efforts to work in the dark.

Seven volumes. 1945 to 1951. Red leather-bound. She kept our V-J Day photo here. Why aren't the diaries here?

I smelled boot polish. I smelled it on the floor and on the boot mats. That particular scent belonged. I tweaked and caught a subscent. An antiqued polish scent. I reached behind the boot mats and pulled volume one out.

There it is. The red leather has been polished and buffed. Pat spine-marked it: *"P.K., 1945."*

I penlight-flashed pages. January 1 to August 15 were totally blank. She began the diary the day she met me. She drew a circle around "Marine MSGT F.O." She's an aging bubblegummer with a pricey Mont Blanc pen. Twelve lines of *X*'s and *O*'s followed. They indicated our two days. They stopped at my LAPD Academy address and the recruit-line phone number.

I flashed more blank pages. I put volume one aside. I reached blind and pulled out volume four. It was spine-marked *"P.K., 1948."*

I bit down on my penlight. I skim-read one hundred pages on Jack's second congressional run. January, February, March, April, May. *"Jack seems to be spending a good deal of time in L.A."* We're into late June ’48 now. Pat writes: *“Where’s Jack? Mother and Dad are worried.”*

I flashed into July. I hit 7/3/48. Pat writes, *“Bobby. Abrupt flight to L.A.”* 7/3/48, again. Pat writes, *“Reserve airport car.”* I hit 7/5 and 7/6/48. Pat writes, *“Chief Worton helpful with escorts”* and *“Bobby says considerable pain.”*

I wasn’t shocked or surprised. I’d seen Shelley Mandel’s Wall of Shame.

63

(LOS ANGELES, 11:10 A.M., TUESDAY, 9/25/62)

Ratfuck Bobby said, “Good morning, Lieutenant.”

I stood up. “Good morning, sir.”

Eddie Chacõn called me in, impromptu. He said the boss needs ten minutes. Go to the U.S. Attorney’s Office. Camelot beckons. You must be punctual. The Kennedys demand that.

Bobby went *Sit.* I perched on a schoolboy chair. Bobby sprawled in the U.S. Attorney’s recliner.

I notched phone time this morning. I badgered airline and rent-a-car drones. They gave up their summer ’48 flights and airport rentals. *I’m 76.8% sure now.*

Ratfuck said, “I’ve given it a good deal of thought. I’ve read through your summaries, and I’ve decided to go with sealed depositions and sworn-secrecy documents.”

I’m 83.4% sure now.

“Yes, sir. I think that’s prudent.”

“Eddie’s wondering if you’ve picked a date to get your black bags together.”

I said, “Tomorrow night, sir.”

“Good. I’ll tell Eddie. Oh, and while I have you. I’m hosting a dinner for some State Assembly people. I need to reserve a nicely cloistered room in a restaurant. I’m thinking of Beverly Hills, say at 7:30. Can you recommend a place?”

I said, “You can’t beat Frascati, on Wilshire. I know a guy there. He’ll set it up.”

—

It was a dumb kid play. Their paths won’t cross. I sat in Frascati anyway. Gwen did not propose a meet with me. She might or might not show. The AG runs punctual. It’s kismet or it’s not.

I eyeballed the front door. I sipped Old Crow and snarfed Dexedrine. I spent the afternoon sacked out with Lois. She asked me who burned my neck. I said, "An angry lesbian golf pro."

Lois said, "Why?"

I said, "She thought I killed her brother."

Lois said, "*Did* you?"

I said, "Yes."

Lois went *whoops.* Lois recovered quick.

"Bobby told Pat to dump you, and she told me. He said people have started talking. Your expiration date has come and gone, and now's the time to cut it off."

I said, "I'm sure you'll stay friends with her. And, for what it's worth, she was never you."

Lois squeezed my hand. "Do you love me?"

I said, "I'll think about it."

Pat, Lois, Gwen. They're my un-Holy Trinity.

I watched the door. The headwaiter inked the reservation for 7:30 sharp. It was 7:28 now.

The front door opened and closed. The AG walked in. He slouched and tried to appear anonymous. People checked him out sidelong and tried not to stare.

I saw him. He didn't see me. I planned it that way.

Gwen walked in.

She saw Bobby. He saw her. They held *This Look.* Their hands reached out and brushed. It was brief but emphatic. I saw it. Nobody else did.

64

(LOS ANGELES, 11:30 P.M., WEDNESDAY, 9/26/62)

Black-bag job.

We crouched in a Fed surveillance van. We deployed sign language and ran checklists.

Ten days presurveillance. *Check*. De River leaves his office at six sharp. *Check*. There's no on-premises guard. *Check*. The address is not silent alarm–rigged. It does not plug to Hollywood Station. Phil Irwin confirmed it five times.

Nat and Phil are out cruising the neighborhood. They're two-way radio–equipped. There's no hinky broadcast traffic. They're running wide perimeters. Oakwood to Fountain/La Brea to Fairfax and back.

We parked across the street from de River's building. The downstairs neighbors were off in Saint-Tropez. We ran inventory checks:

Power drills. Crowbars. Dissolving solvent. Wheel-fitted hand trucks. Flashlights. Penlights. Lock picks. Rolls of acoustical padding. *Check*—eight times over.

Our gear is stashed in reinforced duffel bags. Double-check *that*.

De River's living room adjoins his file trove. A reinforced door provides access. The file trove is there. His files might be coded. They will be boxed. This *will* take time.

Eddie brought powdered nitro. He knew how to rig controlled blowouts. De River kept a narco safe. We decided to blow it and split the contents. He planned to donate his cut to the Free Cuba Committee. I planned to stick my cut up my nose.

We hauled the duffel bags out of the van. We quick-marched them across the street and up the steps. We reconnoitered on the second-floor landing. Eddie fumbled picks at the door lock. *Shit*—none of them fit.

I removed a power drill and jammed in a steel-cutter bit. I bored the keyhole and derailed the inner-lock mechanism. The front door popped open. We blew our undetected-entry shot.

We got in fast. We shut the door. The bore noise ran minimal. We bit down on our penlights. We walked to the steel-plate door and quadrant-flashed it.

It looks impregnable. That's tough fucking shit.

It's two-side milled. On both sides. It pushes in off two fulcrums. There's a left-side hinge and a right-side hinge. It requires two firm shoves.

I took the left. Eddie took the right. We created a noise-deflection shield. We cut strips of acoustical padding and taped them to the flanking walls. We slapped on four full layers. We mummified the file-room enclosure. We went in with power drills and crowbars and took the door down.

It took twenty-seven minutes and twelve left-side and right-side bores. I did not posit an internal alarm system. The files were surely all criminal. De River would never risk police or security-company scrutiny.

The door *wiggled.*

The door *shimmied.*

The door *caved.*

It listed backward. We got behind it and put all our weight up against it. We slow-slow-slow eased it down to the floor.

We're inside the file trove. It's eight feet deep. There's shelves filled with manuscript boxes. They line the walls shoulder-high.

I caught my breath. I said, "Look for a simple number-substitution code." Eddie went *Sí—yo comprende.*

We hauled down boxes. I checked three for prototype distinctions. The boxes were marked by eight-letter or fourteen-letter designations. That meant "Sessions" or "Correspondence." That meant tape boxes for "Sessions" and envelopes or folders for "Correspondence." Substitution-code numbers would be scrawled above that. They marked the patients' names.

I confirmed my theory. "Sessions" meant tape reels inside. "Correspondence" meant letters or printed matter inside. The boxes were heedlessly marked and stacked. As in "Box 1 of 3, 4, 19, 12" et al.

We hauled down boxes. I looked for seven-number first names and six-number surnames. They would designate "Marilyn Monroe." The *M*'s should be supplanted with two number thirteens. M was the thirteenth letter of the alphabet. Eddie worked the same motif for "Albert Aadland." Six letters, seven letters, two number ones to capitalize.

We hauled down boxes. We went at it. Hours crawled by. I scored four hours and seven minutes in:

"Marilyn Monroe/Sessions/Box 1 of 3." Eddie scored nine minutes later:

"Albert Aadland/Correspondence/Box 1 of 4."

We rounded up our seven-box swag and placed them on hand trucks. We packed our duffel bags. We scoured the apartment. The narcotics safe was tucked behind a sliding wall panel.

Eddie dragged it out. We donned face masks and worked in asbestos gloves. We daubed and brushed liquid nitro at the hinge points and dial backings. We quadruple-wrapped the safe in acoustical baffling and tapped the charge flush against the dial mount. We set the charge and stood back. The door popped. The box lurched. We filled four paper bags with the best shit on earth.

We off-loaded our gear and the file boxes. We made three trips out to the van. We were stone gone at 6:04 a.m.

65

(LOS ANGELES, 8:05 A.M., THURSDAY, 9/27/62)

I worked at home.

Code work vexes me. I studied it in the Marine Corps. It confused me then and confuses me now. I tapped my safe stash and mixed a powdered Demerol and bourbon cocktail. It juked my brain cells and helped me concentrate.

I tried word-replacement and Bible codes and failed to link scriptural texts. There were no live tapes in the Monroe boxes. They were all copied transcriptions. I scanned text pages. I quick-skimmed the Monroe and Aadland boxes. I could not decipher one simple word.

I worked on my living room floor. I compiled proper-noun lists and plucked words that might pop phonetic. It was all word gobbledygook. I could not locate one single name.

We hid the van and our gear in Phil's garage. Nat and Phil were staking out the de River place. They'll be there when Pops spots the chaos. They'll gas on the old geek's response.

I worked up a Bible-verse code. It backfired. Every Old and New Testament verse raked me. They excoriated my sinfulness. They called me to repentance. They prophesied my eternal rot in hell.

The doorbell rang. I got up and cracked the door. It was Max Herman and J. T. Meadows. They were shaky and pale. J.T. weaved on his feet.

Max said, "Lowell Farr's dead. Two patrol guys found her in some bushes. She was dumped in a pocket park, north of Palisades Village. She'd been shot four times."

—

We took Sunset straight out. I don't remember the drive. I saw gargoyles and heard tape spools of Old Testament injunctions. I saw the living Lowell and Lowell's Monroe painting. They stutter-looped nonstop.

Traffic bottlenecked at the village line. Max pulled up on the north sidewalk and tooted pedestrians off the bricks. We hooked north at the corner and around to the right.

We hit Linda Place. Little benches lined the sidewalk. Shrub mounds pressed up behind them. Cops huddled. Polaroids popped. Overlapped arc lights burned bright. The street was all jammed-up prowl cars. They ran their gumball lights full.

The lights were up, the rope was up, four patrol cops moved looky-loos out. Max and I pushed our way into it. We lodged our first peep. It was close-up and in tight.

Lowell lay supine. She wore a green paisley dress and brown flats. A brown leather handbag was off to one side. Big-bore entrance wounds scorched the green fabric and soaked it black-red.

Twenty cops hovered. J.T. huddled up a canvass crew. Max and I crowded close and studied the scene.

The setting was too quaint. Linda Place was a pocket park and pastoral cut-by. Benches, leaves, eucalyptus trees. A faint sea breeze.

Two patrol guys jabbered. The girl's bag had been tossed. They found a ticket stub for last night's show at the Bay. They ran *Sayonara* and *No Time for Sergeants.* Mom and dad were off downtown. They went to Mike Lyman's and the Philharmonic. They got home at 1:00 a.m. Lowell's bedroom door was shut. They figured she was asleep.

Max and I swapped looks. We knew from make-out dates. Pali boys and girls hid out and made out at the Bay. Lowell told Marilyn. I picked it up on my tap feeds. The Bay was "a motel room for nice kids."

Preset make-out dates. Lowell described the scene. She indulged the practice. She confided in Monroe. I eavesdropped on my feed lines.

The Sex Creep killed her. It has to be him. It wasn't Sid Leffler. He's beat-to-shit at Queen of Angels.

Max cleared a space. We stood by the body and bootjacked the job then and there. I dug through Lowell's handbag. I found her car keys. They sat atop a neat pile of purse junk—cosmetics, comb, wallet, hairbrush. The house keys were jammed at the bottom of the bag. The house keys played anomalous. I thought *this:*

Lowell strolls by Linda Place. The Creep confronts her and shoots her. He dumps her in the bushes. He grabs her house keys and goes to the Farr house. He lets himself in. He wants Monroe's fan letters. He thinks Lowell has them. He doesn't know that Lowell sold the letters to Sid Leffler. He tosses Lowell's bedroom. He doesn't find the letters. He walks back to the dump site and jams the keys back in her handbag.

I caught a glint on Lowell's skirt front. I knelt and up-closed it. I ID'd the glint:

They were spent silencer threads. *That* meant *this.* The piece was suppressor-equipped.

I flashed back. I cut to Sid's Pali gig. Morty Bendish costars. The Q and A spawns a Sex Creep brouhaha. Sid and Morty reference a Doc de River paraphrase:

Passive pervs sometimes escalate and kill. IF the crush object develops a real-life love interest or deep friendship. The Creep glimpsed the burgeoning Lowell-Marilyn bond. It sent him batshit.

I said, "All the crazy shit this fucker has pulled, and now he kills a young woman. It's got to be him."

Max said, "Leffler sold Monroe's letters to Doc Greenson, instead of de River. If de River already knew this Sex Creep guy, and if he figured that half of Monroe's letters already came from him, then why buy a stack of pricey letters for no new information?"

—

The squadroom lieutenant showed. He gathered up clue clowns and described his stint at the Farr house. He talked to Lowell's parents. He'd went through Lowell's address book. It was packed with Pali boys' names. Some were marked with hearts and arrows. Lowell's mother ran down the Bay Theater/"make-out date" custom. A neighbor woman fed her the gist. Lowell would *never* do such a thing.

I shook my head. The lieutenant motormouthed.

"We've set up a command post in the Pali auditorium. Lowell had eleven make-out dates marked in her address book, including the one last night. We need two-man teams to round up those boys and bring them to Pali. We're going to interview them consecutively, in the boys' gym. We'll be working all day and most of the night."

Max said, "It's the Creep. All this horny-boy shit is futile."

I said, "I agree."

Max said, "What do we do now?"

I said, "We go back to what we were doing. We try to ID the Creep."

—

The canvass cops and squadroom guys dispersed. Morgue jockeys sheet-draped Lowell's gurney. I stood by Lowell and bumped the wheels, accidental-on-purpose. I studied the crime scene. I saw work-boot tracks. I saw mud and blood caught in the heel cleats. The boots were non-LAPD.

The cleat prints tracked off, northbound. They hit clean cement and cut away from Linda Place and the crime scene. They moved due north. They tracked toward Will Rogers Park and the Santa Monica hills.

I saw Bible typeface. I saw my code doodles. I tasted Demerol and bourbon. I saw Lowell shot four times. Homemade suppressors popped and leaked threads. I saw her blood douse the heel prints. It glowed weird colors. It bubbled. It blasphemed Lowell and me. It contradicted the Bible. That meant it was wrong.

I reached into a prowl sled and grabbed a 12-gauge pump. I tracked the boot prints *away* from the crime scene.

It was easy. I sighted *down.* Lowell's blood sluiced into more weird colors.

I tracked the prints up a commercial block. I entered the park. The temperature dropped. Trees grew out of nowhere. They looked wrong and smelled wrong. A breeze fluttered branches. The sound echoed shrill. It brought Lowell back to me. I smelled her blood merged with parkland scents.

I jacked a round in the chamber and aimed at the sound. I blasted through the sound, shredded limbs, and mulched tree trunks. Somebody screamed behind me. I whirled and triggered a spread. A man yelled, *"Hey!"* A man yelled, *"What the hell—"*

Rustles and foot scuffs came at me. I shotgunned them. Seedling trees vaporized. Four big men slammed into me and hoisted me. They tossed me and carried me over their heads. They went through my pockets. They shoved yellow jackets into my mouth and made me gag them down. I saw Lowell in a paint-smeared smock.

—

I came to standing up. The Hats crowded around me. Harry and Eddie arm-clamped me. I was weavy and zorched. I thought I saw Lowell. I saw a snapshot of Marilyn and Lowell, propped on an end table.

It was Lowell's bedroom. Print techs dusted scattered envelopes on the floor.

Max said, "It's the Creep. Ray Pinker found ripped glove seams in Lowell's correspondence drawer. That places him at the BHPD 459 scenes, the divorcée scenes, and here. That means he's good for the snuff."

My belt line felt light. The boys snatched my piece, my sap, my knucks. Max said, “You gave us a scare, son.”

I pulled my coat wide. Max replaced my shit. Harry and Eddie walked into the living room and soft-braced the Farrs. Dorothy Farr harped on Lowell’s pretend friendship with Marilyn Monroe. Eddie soft-rebuked her. Lowell was surely Miss Monroe’s best friend during her last months alive.

Dorothy Farr sobbed. I scanned the bedroom. Marilyn sketches covered the walls. I clocked the provenance of the painting that I now owned.

A wall mural depicted President Monroe’s inauguration. It was a cut-and-paste job. Lowell scissored up a big *Life* spread. She decapitated JFK and glued Monroe’s face atop his. Speech squibs played the mock prez for laughs.

It was sicknik humor. President Monroe lets it all hang out.

She announced her new cabinet. Big Dick Dave will tend to her carnal needs and run the Supreme Court. Peter Lawford will be secretary of poontang. Lois Nettleton will run the National Endowment for the Arts.

Red Stromwall walked in. “We’re due at Pali. Daryl Gates is running the interviews with the make-out boys.”

I was still half-zorched and weavy. Max and Red arm-clamped me and led me outside. They tossed me in the back of their prowl sled. I felt a weeper fit coming on.

The run up Temescal Canyon took five minutes. Eleven boys cluttered up the bleachers off the basketball court. Daryl Gates walked boy to boy and asked polite questions. He knew it was a humbug deal. It was geared to mollify mom and dad.

I sat on a courtside bench and watched. The boys gave me some last moments with Lowell. They extolled her wild-but-good character. She was “kooky,” “wiggy,” and “out of sight.” But she’d always take your paper route at a moment’s notice. “I was afraid to ask her to the prom, because she was so much taller than me.” “She told me all these lies about Marilyn Monroe. I said, ‘Lowell, you’re the world’s worst fibber,’ but I loved her anyway.”

I couldn’t take any more. I bolted the gym and sat up against the back wall. A cold breeze raked me. I shivered. Lowell ran through the parkland with me. I knew she was up in heaven. She came down to make sure I was okay.

I shivered and sobbed. Somebody tossed a handkerchief in my face.

I looked up. Max Herman said, “Stop that shit. Let’s go find him and kill him."

—

I stuck to my pad. I laid off the narco stash. I messed with letter codes, book codes, and word-substitution codes. Lois called me. I ignored the call.

I went back to the Bible. I read through the Old and New Testaments. I looked for code-breaker clues and discovered prayers for Lowell instead.

I screened dance outtakes from *Twist Party Stakeout.* I did it just to see Lowell alive. I saw Lowell half-clad. It racked me. God censured me. I hurled the projector at the wall.

66

(LOS ANGELES, 11:00 A.M., FRIDAY, 9/28/62)

The Hats plus Freddy O. We indulged a show-the-flag run. It was all out in the open now. We decided to finalize it.

We scheduled a find-the-Creep session at Intel. Gates knew some pro code breakers. I told him to give me one more shot. Give me a last crack at it. I'll jump back to pure brainwork then.

We crammed into a prowl sled. We hit El Manny's pad in Echo Park first. Manny was out. We cut west and drove by Albie Aadland's spread in Cheviot Hills. Albie's boss Mercedes was parked in the driveway.

We got out and posed. Max ran the two-way radio. I goosed the volume. It raised a staticky roar.

Albie walked out. He carried a briefcase. He walked past us and got in his Mercedes. I said, "Albie, it's over."

Motel Mike ate lunch at Kwan's every day. He always dines with good-looking women. Motel Mike and a boss brunette sipped soup at a dining room table. We pulled chairs up. Their nice-lunch vibe crashed. I said, "Mike, it's over."

Mike stood up. He cranked a hard right hand and launched it. Red sidestepped the punch and grabbed Mike's neck. He smashed Mike's face into his soup bowl and held it there. Mike glugged for breath. The brunette snatched her purse and vamoosed.

We waltzed out to the parking lot. Max said, "Let's brace Gwen Perloff."

I said, "I'd rather not."

Harry said, "She's the linchpin of the whole deal."

I hemmed and shuffled my feet. Eddie said, "Freddy's in love."

—

The Hats plus Freddy O. We shitworked at Intel. J. T. Meadows wedged an extra desk in. The Creep escalates to Murder One. It mandates a reassessment. That means we reread and rediscuss everything.

We were backlogged. Forty nut confessors clogged the hallways. Morty's Creep series soared. The *Mirror* ballyhooed a new sales spike. *"Sex Creep Slays Pali Coed!!! He's Public Menace #1!!!"* Nat Denkins was hosting a Creep-O-Rama show on KKXZ tonight.

We huddled up. We shitworked.

J.T. was grouchy. Marcia Davenport was feeding him grief. She wanted J.T. to divorce his wife and marry her. The Hats and I ran a fever. We couldn't see past it. We read informant sheets and double-checked our ordnance. We loaded shotguns with *triple*-aught buckshot and slugs.

Daryl Gates stepped into my cubicle. He waved a Telex sheet.

"The dining room boss at Riviera just called me. He said he made a mistake about the men he had working the divorcée dance, and he said he realized that he brought this guy in from a temp agency. He's a Charles Douglas Schoendienst, DOB 6/12/23, blond, six-two, and 190. I ran him, and he's got a perv jacket. There's two burglary falls in Utah, a dismissed rape beef up in Santa Clara, *and* he's AB negative."

I stood up. "Preston's got a motel-room flop on PCH. Let's run this by him and try for a match."

—

Max, J.T., and I rolled. The beach run took an hour. Sunset was bumper-locked with surf wagons and hitchhiking freaks. They saw the fuzzmobile stuffed with big shorthairs and flipped us off covert.

The Beachglade was up on the land side. It was a horseshoe-shaped auto court, circa '35. Preston bunked in 121. We parked and door-knocked him. He opened up quick.

It went fast then.

I saw the shelves. I saw the watches and the table. I saw the vats and the beakers. I saw the measuring scale and spilled powder. I saw the mock yellow jackets. I saw headlines:

Calling All Rogues Presents Filmland Femme—

I saw Manny Salas. He stepped out of a backroom pissoir.

I pulled my piece. Preston pulled his piece. We stood in tight and felt the air buzz. Max pulled his piece. Preston shot J. T. Meadows. He double-tapped two gut shots and blew out his ribs. I shot Preston in the face and neck. Manny Salas pulled a piece and fired wide of the doorway. Wood chips exploded. Max shot him three times. I shot him four times. We severed his right arm and blew him straight through the rear wall.

PART 10

FUCK DECK

(SEPTEMBER 29–OCTOBER 12, 1962)

67

(LOS ANGELES, 9/29–10/2/62)

Max and me. We did it. We blew up Sex Creep Preston Fong and Manny Salas. Fong killed J. T. Meadows. *"THERE'S THREE DEAD IN BEACHFRONT-MOTEL SHOOT-OUT!!!!"*

The papers had at it. The *Mirror* soared out front. Bill Parker fed Morty Bendish prime dirt. The story scorched local and national TV. Adjunct police agencies took it from there.

U.S. and Mexican Customs squads formed a task force. They wrung it dry. They enhanced the breadth of All Of It. They worked off my theories. They supplied the verification that I failed to get.

Preston Fong was not Preston Fong. He was a Chinese-Filipino man named Terry Jay Aquino. I recalled the name Terry Jay Aquino. He was on a paroled-burglar list I saw at Chino. Aquino served time concurrent with Paul Mitchell Grenier and Manny Salas. The guard I talked to at Chino saw Aquino's photo in the *Herald.* He called me and said, "Albie Aadland visited *that* guy, as well as Grenier and Salas. Albie visited him most of all."

Aquino split the Philippines in 1943. He was nineteen. He booked to Mexico. He had already earned a chem degree at Polytechnic Institute. Ray Pinker forensic'd Aquino's room at the Beachglade. Ray compared his Nembutal compounds with the "Santa Claus" compounds I dug up in Marilyn Monroe's yard. The bond-componentry was identical.

Terry Jay Aquino committed the Beverly Hills 459's. He partnered up with Rick Dawes/Ronnie Dewhurst/Richard Danforth. The Hats and I killed Dawes/Dewhurst/Danforth. Ray found the ripped-seam rubber gloves that Aquino wore at the Beverly Hills jobs and at all six of the divorcée break-ins. They perfectly matched the print manifests from those crimes. They perfectly matched the ripped-seam prints from Lowell Farr's bedroom and the Bev's Switchboard mailbox.

I read the LAPD file on Manny's dismissed burglary charge in '57. Identical ripped-seam rubber-glove prints were found at the house

Manny was accused of B and E'ing. *That* meant *this:*

Terry Jay and El Manny were old B and E partners. It explained Manny's presence at the Beachglade Motel.

Mexican Customs agents state *this:*

Terry's mother divorced Terry's father in 1945. Terry's father sent Terry's mother obscene notes clipped from magazine pages. Terry watched his father prepare the notes. Terry's father urged him to ejaculate into his mother's lingerie and put a Sex Hex on her. The Sex Hex would assure that Terry and his dad got lots of sex and that Terry's unfaithful mama would die from VD.

Terry purchased "Preston Fong" identification in T.J. It was 1947. He bought the fake ID from Hersh Aadland. *That* fact strongly suggests *this:*

Terry Jay Aquino knew *Albie* Aadland well before his Chino jolt. And well before Albie's prison-visitor work with the Friends Service Committee.

Terry's forged ID included a Mexican passport, driver's license, and Federal ID card. Terry altered his true AB blood type to the far more common O.

"Preston Fong" entered America in late '47. He gravitated to West L.A. and the beach. He caddied at the Hillcrest, Bel Air, and Riviera Country Clubs. He found a permanent caddy home at Riviera, early in '48. Riviera adjoined the home of Carole Landis and the Pavia Place fuck pad.

Preston perved on fine wristwatches. He snatched them from jewelry store windows. He was "suspected" of the jewelry store jobs, and was popped on suspicion in the spring of 1950. He was never arrested or convicted. He carried his old Aquino ID on the odd pad-prowl-just-to-be-there-and-look-around jobs. He got popped in the summer of '54. He was sent to Chino as Terry Jay Aquino. He'd just acquired a California driver's license. It listed his blood type as O positive.

That's Terry Jay Aquino. It's the official cop version. There's also the Albie Aadland-to-Paul de River version. I'm marking it accessible now.

I cracked de River's code and concluded my stint of code transcription. It wasn't difficult. I made it difficult. I castigated myself with biblical screeds. I stepped aside from that self-laceration. I detected a simple number-replacement code and took it from there.

"Albie Aadland Correspondence"/"Marilyn Monroe Sessions." I read the Albie shit first. It was *one-way* correspondence. The file did not

include de River's coded replies.

Albie's letters revealed *this:*

De River was Albie's intellectual big brother and deranged confessor. De River saw all and condoned all. They shared an urgent curiosity for all things sexual and criminal. Albie was a volitional celibate and a drug-dabbling voluptuary. His brothers got him hooked on rare compounds synthesized and manufactured in Mexico. Hersh knew a Filipino youth, now masquerading as Chinese, under false credentials. The boy had an outré childhood not unlike Albie's own. He compounded drugs. He test-piloted them—just as Albie test-piloted dope for his brothers and for Doctor Paul himself.

Albie's letters were undated. I think de River's Albie file was chronologically arrayed. One letter arrived in the spring of '48. I'm sure of it. In it, Albie asks de River *this:*

"Is your Filipino-cum-Chinaman a golf caddy? My brothers retain an interest in a fuck pad—and the newly credentialed Chinaman shows up quite a bit. The FP is near the Riviera Club, so I wonder. And, he accurately laid out the synthesis of an amphetamine/opioid pill he popped on the premises. I'm sure he didn't compound the formula, because I know who did. In other words, I find Le Chinois very interesting."

The next run of letters ran banal. Albie gasbagged on the Leopold-Loeb case and the Albert Dyer child murders. He asked, *"Are volitional celibates who resist adult female advances more likely to become child molester–killers than other men?"*

Two more banal letters followed. Albie was a camp follower. He extolled sex slasher Otto Stephen Wilson and wondered who killed the Black Dahlia. Then, Albie wrote *this:*

A highly rambling letter about the "Haunted House" his brothers and their doctor cousin shared a percentage of. It started up as a prohibition speakeasy. It catered to the "westside crowd." Albie called the place a "precursor" fuck pad. The place tanked in '38, and resurrected after the war, on the "exact same" westside lot. It drew a "slumming celebrity crowd," "Negro hepcats," "jazz cats," and "anyone with a lively wit, a good line of patter, and the common sense not to stare at the famous faces engaged in what the squarejohn world considers to be contemptible acts."

The letters went banal again. They remained banal for several years. They were all prurient psych ponder and babble. Red Light Bandit Caryl Chessman: "He keeps beating the Green Room." That places the letter in '53 or '54. Aquino/Fong's in Chino now. *Now,* Albie asks de River terse little questions:

They pertain to "Our Charge." They pertain to "J.R." As in Jane

Russell. They pertain to M.M. As in *Guess Who?*

The terse questions extend. Albie fawns and queries de River, per:

459 PC/hot and soft prowls. "Our" monitoring process and "your" monitoring process. Albie's *BIG* question: "Can inner-outer directed psychopaths also be third-party directed?"

I think *this:*

They got cautious then. They committed nothing to paper. They went to untappable pay-phone communiqués. Just like Marilyn and Gwen. Just like Who Else in '62?

I completed my Albie file read-through. One question tweaked me. How and when did Aquino/Fong meet Dawes/Dewhurst/Danforth—his future B and E partner?

I decided I should start with Gwen Perloff. Thus, it's '37 again. Gwen's almost eleven. She's acting up at her foster home on De Longpre and Wilton. She's shoplifting clothes out of Hollywood shops and selling the threads to Le Conte Junior High kids. It was just a hunch, *BUT*—

I drove to Le Conte and badged the principal. The man let me peruse the '37–'38 Le Conte yearbooks. *And*—there he was, at age thirteen.

Roger Alan Denfrey. He's a B-9 Class member. He's one of those good-looking-with-a-mean-streak boys. He'd grow up to be a burglar and a fake-kidnap man.

I killed him. I killed him on a cop-sanctioned whim.

I checked R&I. I checked nationwide police files up the ying-yang. Roger Alan Denfrey. No wants, no warrants, no criminal record. Did Gwen Perloff meet him in 1937? The odds rate overwhelmingly *YES.*

On to Marilyn. Her coded sessions file delivered. I got verbatim-transcribed Q and A here. The sessions had been tape-recorded and code-transcribed by de River himself. Marilyn consulted him from '52 to mid-'54. De River coined the phrase "declension of fan crushes" at that time. It preceded her coupling with Timmy Berlin and her own attribution of the phrase. De River used Carole Landis as an example of a "neophyte crusher's crush." Marilyn said, "Oh, I knew Carole all right. There's stories I could tell you."

De River bloviated. He cited the great courage it took for creative people to engage the world on its own cruel terms and overcome the self-pampering of the artist. He discussed the importance of disguise, of deliberately denuding one's good looks, of establishing covert means of communication. He cited the Russian theater masters who lived their own versions of cult and criminality under the threat of

Stalin's show trials and the head Red's capricious will to slaughter. The perpetration of revisionist art led to official censure, torture, and death. American artists had it soft. Cultivated criminality could work for them—but only if they committed properly bold crimes.

De River excoriated MM. He considered her to be shallow, vain, impetuous, peremptory, whimsical, usurious, and driven by infantile exhibitionism. The only way that she could successfully revise and shape an all-new persona would be for her to go anonymous and cultivate risk in the real world. And revel in the risk of exposure and punishment. Marilyn cited her "bit actress" friend Gwen. She had accomplished just that.

Gwen was Marilyn's age. They shared a room at Hollygrove. Gwen had taken on The Life. They played girl sleuth games at the Grove. Gwen said The Life meant going native. She set up burglary scores and scored bitch-seductress film roles. She comported with burglars, armed robbers, and flimflam men. She started stealing young. Her kid sister had been abducted and certainly snuffed. It *induced* her to go native.

De River told Marilyn that he already knew Gwen. She had been referred to his Sex Offense Bureau at LAPD. She engaged in group therapy under his direction.

De River was starting to *bore* Marilyn. De River fixated on the bold Gwen at the expense of the grasping "dim bulb" Marilyn. Marilyn talked up Gwen. She was her alter ego, doppelgänger, and amanuensis. Gwen carried the symbolic and metaphysical weight that Marilyn could not hoist to her own frail shoulders. Why mince words? De River packed a torch for Gwen and wrote off Marilyn as "stale goods." She emitted a stale stench of desperate fear and put her own artistic success above all moral considerations. She could not inhabit any role other than the role of herself, at the risk of grave psychic peril. Marilyn's first shot at radical therapy pooped out. She reconvened with de River earlier this year. She said she'd re-clicked with old friends. They'd planned a caper. She needed to develop impersonation and survival skills. She needed makeup and wardrobe. De River recommended their mutual friend, Natasha Lytess. Marilyn responded, *"Oooohhhh—I just love Natasha!!!"*

That was it. De River stopped recording his Marilyn sessions. He was dispensing hard criminal advice now. He went from shrink to gang lord. He *had* to be Preston Fong/Terry Jay Aquino's old mentor. Albie Aadland hooked up with old pal Marilyn and old pals Manny, Paul Mitchell, and *La* Gwen herself. *They* formed their fake kidnap cabal.

Then Jimmy Hoffa appeared and started some shit rolling. Jimmy, and his pals the A boys. They had deep and crazy roots with the Mar-Gwen gang. Then I tossed a man off a cliff.

—

The services ran back-to-back. Sam Yorty planned it that way. It lubed the press and kept things moving. James Thornton Meadows and Georgia Lowell Farr. 1929 and ’45, up to right now. It was all too brief, kids.

Protestant ceremonies. Adjoining hillsides at Forest Lawn Glendale. The Meadows’ show ran first. It was a big PD send-off. It featured bagpipers and Navy choppers scattering mums. J.T. was line-of-duty and mandated the splurge. Lois stood with me both times. She refused to touch me or look at me. She told me why walking in.

“This is on you, Freddy. J.T. and Lowell. You thought you could score, so you cooked something up. You put together a group of your playmates, and this is how it panned out.”

Bill Parker showed up for Meadows. Ditto, Daryl Gates. The full Intel Division showed. Miller Leavy showed. Ranking cops wore their dress blues. The LAPD rolled out one thousand plus. Parker consoled Meadows’ widow and three children. I consoled a half-crocked Marcia Davenport. The service attenuated. The sun bore down. Parker gave the cutoff sign at an hour and fifteen minutes. His glad-hand line ran twice as long as the ceremony.

The Farr gig was nearby. It was an easy stroll for those inclined. The mourning circle was intimate. Family, friends, a few classmates. The Hat Squad, Nat and Phil. Speakers cranked Lowell’s favorite jazz chart—the Gerry Mulligan Quartet with “My Funny Valentine.” The pastor read from the Old Testament.

“I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though this body be destroyed, yet shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger.”

Lois ditched me at the moment of interment. I nicked a memory card. Lowell wore her red beret. She wore it the night she painted Marilyn Monroe, while I watched.

68

(LOS ANGELES, 3:14 A.M., WEDNESDAY, 10/3/62)

I woke up scared. Something pressed upside me. I guzzled cold coffee and reached for the phone.

I called Gwen. Her service took the call. I left a "Call me" message.

I called Lois at her hotel. The desk man said she checked out last night. I called Maury Dexter on the *Twist Party* set. Maury said Lois bailed on the picture. The Farr girl messed with her head.

Gwen didn't call. Gwen hadn't called. I ate alone at Frascati, four nights straight. The depositions are prepped to go. Morty Bendish concluded his Sex Creep series. All Of It runs long on theory and falls short of resolution.

I called the night nurse at Queen of Angels. She debriefed me on Sid Leffler. He's heavily medicated. The pain is bad. He talks in his sleep. He rants about a haunted house.

I called Del Kinney. Del picked up, one ring in. I said, "It's Otash. I've been thinking about something."

Del went *Aw-oh.* I said, "Ollie Hammond's in an hour. Come on. We're both awake."

"I'll be there, but you're buying me breakfast."

—

Ollie's was deadsville. Service was quick. We noshed T-bones and hash browns.

I lit a cigarette. "I'm teething on Mitzi. I found some old paperwork, and I turned a second eyewit to Mitzi on the bus."

Del sipped coffee. "I know about that lead. Gwen told me you told her. Mitzi's on the bus, and this eyewit says she was being teased by two boys. One was about thirteen, the second boy was a bit older."

"That's correct. And the big question is, 'Have you got a name on that eyewit?' "

"No. And the lead is twenty-five and a half years old."

Del eyeballed my steak. "Well, there you are. The original IO's out of Hollywood station were all old guys in ’37, so I’m fairly sure they’re all gone now. I do know that the West L.A. squadroom guys ran bus-route checks on that Hollywood-to-the-beach run for a good two weeks, after they got that first lead. You know how this works. They buzzed the regular riders on Mitzi and who she might have been with, and what stop she might have got off at. Nothing came of it, or I would have heard. If there’s file notations anywhere, they’ll be in the sludge room at the West L.A. station.”

“Who ran it for the West L.A. dicks? Can you give me a name and a pedigree?”

Del said, “Arthur McCall. He died on Guadalcanal, but he was sure as shit a fine detective while he served. His widow’s still with us. She lives out in Glendale, and I’ve got her address. You never know. She might have kept some of Arthur’s old pocket notebooks.”

I shut my eyes. I craved more sleep. It was 4:00 a.m. Shitwork runs loomed.

“ ‘Teething on Mitzi’ means ‘teething on Gwen.’ Don’t fall in love with her, Freddy. If she’s anybody’s, she’s mine.”

—

The sludge room. Old files, dead files, nonfiles. Non sequitur paper slips. Petrified rat turds. Old cardboard boxes, banged up for years.

’40 back to ’16. No ’37 box. *That* box was missing. I triple-combed the sludge room. A conclusion slammed me. The ’37 box had been snatched.

An early bird patrol cop watched me. He was a nib-snout type. I said, “I’m looking for the ’37 box. I can’t find it anywhere.”

The guy picked his teeth. “Mr. Clean went on a kick, about a month ago. He said, ‘We’re looking at twenty-five years now, so I’m giving these old chestnuts the heave-ho.’ ”

I said, “Who’s Mr. Clean?”

He said, “Sid Leffler. I know you know him, and I know you and the Hats put him down for the count.”

I tossed an empty box at him. He laughed and flipped me off.

—

Mrs. McCall trimmed hedges by the driveway. I parked at the curb and walked up. She saw the box of candy I brought and fluffed out her hair.

She was sixty-something. She was fit. She read me in one glance.

"I don't need a road map, if that's what you're thinking. You've got better manners than most, and you're too young to have worked with Arthur. I'm sure it's either old case files or Arthur's old pocket notebooks. Please don't tell me I'm too far off."

I passed her the candy. She popped the lid and plucked a nougat concoction. I grabbed a plain chocolate and snarfed it.

"It's the old notebooks, isn't it? Let's walk over to the garage. Arthur was meticulous in everything that he did. He kept everything in boxes marked by date and year."

We ambled over. The boxes were clumped on a shelf above some pruning shears.

They were grease pencil–marked. I eyeball-trolled the shelf. There it is: "1936–'37."

I hauled it down and balanced it on one knee. Mrs. McCall popped chocolates and observed me. The box was packed with file folders. Meticulous McCall. He arranged his boxes by month. I finger-walked straight to "2/17/37, *Perloff, Mitzi.*" I dug out a pocket-size notebook.

It was marked:

"Bus-route canvass, 3/4 to 3/7/37."

I flipped pages. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8—penciled-in names, addresses, and cross-outs. I hit Page #9 and saw *this:*

"Mrs. Bernice Rhoden/WFA/DOB 11/2/92. 11892 Temescal Canyon/GL-8992. States she can't recall date, but girl (assumed to be MP) got off at Mandeville Canyon stop. Confirmed that boys were teasing MP and that they alighted from bus at same stop. Did not overhear teasing but sensed it. Boys were desc. as 12 to 14, one tall, one short. Taller boy had 'lighter hair.' Shorter boy, possibly younger, had Harold Lloyd–type round eyeglasses."

—

I sensed it. I looped Le Conte Junior High to Intel and back west again. I checked old phone directories and the new white pages. Mrs. Rhoden was sixty-nine now. She still lived in Temescal Canyon. I called her and ID'd myself. I said I'd like to drop by and show her some pictures. They pertained to that missing girl and those two boys on the bus. Mrs. Rhoden recalled the incident. She told me to come out.

Hollygrove was close by Le Conte. Some Grove kids went to school at the Grove, some kids went to Le Conte. They knew me at Le Conte now. I ID'd Dawes/Danforth/Dewhurst as Roger Alan Denfrey. I worked off a Grove-to-Le Conte hunch.

The principal humored me one more time. He let me desecrate a run of ’35 to ’37 yearbooks. I ripped out pictures of Roger Denfrey and a boy with Harold Lloyd glasses.

I drove to the PAB and hit the Intel squadroom. I raided a stack of juvie mug books. I plucked six Roger Denfrey–look-alike mugs and six shots resembling the glasses kid. I pasted them to a shirt cardboard and added the yearbook pix. I concocted a twelve-boy mug run. Mrs. Rhoden would scan it and go yea or nay.

The mug shots and yearbook pix covered two shirt cardboards. I broomed back to Temescal Canyon. Mrs. Rhoden lived in a neat Craftsman house. She perched on her porch.

I jammed to the curb. I leaped steps up to her. Mrs. Rhoden eyeballed the mug shots and pix. She did not equivocate. She did not stall or hem and haw. She pointed straight to Roger Denfrey and Albie Aadland.

69

(LOS ANGELES, 10:30 A.M., THURSDAY, 10/4/62)

Miller Leavy called me in. He sat me down. He said, “Open your briefcase.” Miller’s flying high. Bill Parker told me why.

I popped my briefcase. Miller displayed four grand-jury subpoenas. They were Federal. They dunned Natasha Lytess, Sidney Leffler, Michael J. Bayless, and Gwen Perloff. I went *Load me up.*

Leavy dropped the papers in. He hooked his thumbs in his vest. He did a cock-of-the-walk routine.

“The AG anointed me. I’m officially ‘Kitchen Cabinet’ now. It may have been your original brainstorm, but I’m the one charged with its implementation.”

“Congratulations, boss. You’re the perfect man for the job.”

Leavy hopped in his desk chair. He plopped his feet on the desk and wiggled them at me.

“Bill Parker wants you to serve and debrief Mike Bayless in LAPD custody. He’s paying Pete Pitchess off in Intel files for the privilege. Max and Red are escorting him from the Sheriff’s DB to the foyer of the PAB. The press will be there. Mayor Yorty plans to be there.”

I laughed. “Tell true, boss. You’re getting a Federal judgeship out of this.”

“And you and the Hats are getting a skate on Murder One or Manslaughter Two, or whatever else I could have wangled. Don’t play me blithe, junior. I’m out of your league.”

I said, “There’s no subpoena for Albie Aadland.”

Leavy coughed. “Well—he’s an Aadland—and Grant Cooper’s representing him. That merits consideration.”

I adjusted my necktie and shot my cuffs. I indulged a quick primp. It ate five seconds up.

“I’ve been thinking, boss. You haven’t had a good murder case in a dog’s age. I mean a real gas-chamber bounce.”

Leavy *harumphed.* “Don’t I know it. And I don’t mind telling you that I’m salivating for one.”

I lit a cigarette. “I’m working on something. It’s a juvie sex snuff, and it’s twenty-five years old. It’s a no-body deal, like your Ewing Scott case.”

“I’m salivating already. Female victim? Tell me we got lucky. Females engender the most sympathy.”

I winked. “I’ll tell you more, once we’ve got these depositions out of the way. It’s a headline banger.”

—

They put Motel Mike through it. They manhandled him. They subjected him to ridicule. They strolled him through downtown L.A.

Here’s the route: the Hall of Justice to the PAB. East on Temple and south on L.A. Street. It’s about a half mile. He’s handcuffed behind his back. He’s hard-clamped by Max Herman and Red Stromwall. They’re moving him out. He’s half off his feet.

They’re three men on a stroll. Newshounds and TV camera trucks track them. Flashbulb pops plague them. Looky-loos tag along. They razz Motel Mike. They dispense jabbery contempt.

I bird-dogged it. Foot traffic veered into the street. Max and Red came on resolute. Motel Mike wilted and weaved between them. They hit the PAB lobby. Flashbulbs popped exponential. The lobby was quadruple-packed. Max and Red stiff-armed politicos and cops off to one side. The jail elevator cranked wide. They shoved Motel Mike in.

I saw Sam Yorty. He waved me over. We hobknobbed by the cigar stand. Crowd noise engulfed us. We had to shout.

Mayor Sam went in close. “Parker’s got a mean streak. Putting a jazzy guy like Mike through something like this is unkosher.”

I shoulder-draped him. “He’s got the true skank on Mike—trust me on that.”

“When Mike sorts all this grief out, he’ll need work. I’m going to hire him on as my bodyguard.”

I laughed. The lobby roar abated. I tossed a wild pitch, in tight.

“Mr. Mayor—who do you think has the best fuck-deck collection, you or Roddy McDowall?”

Mayor Sam went *oooh-la-la.* “Roddy’s got me licked on sheer volume, but I’ve got the king deck, the one with the provenance and the resale potential. You can’t beat the participants, and Orson Welles took the pictures. Fifty-two ‘poses,’ with the ace of spades triple-signed.”

“Who’d you buy it from?”

“A bent motor cop named Norm Krause. He was a dirty trickster for old Chief Worton, back when men were men and sheep were scared.”

I yocked. Mayor Sam saw DA McKesson and beelined on over. I walked to the jail stairs and jogged down a flight.

Newsmen swamped the check-in desk. I ducked down to attorney-room row. Room #B was preprepped to go.

I stepped inside. *Mike, you’ve earned it. You won’t be here long. You know I work for effect.*

The jailers laid out a small table. Plus two slat-wood chairs. The centerpiece *worked.* They plopped down a fifth of Old Crow and two shot glasses. *Mike, I’ve got no gripe with you.*

Max and Red walked him in and uncuffed him. They about-faced and walked straight back out. Motel Mike rubbed his wrists. I cracked the jug and poured two shots. I dropped the subpoena on the table.

“No testimony. All records sealed. You attest to me and a few others. You’re enjoined to secrecy, under threat of prosecution. You’re immune from this moment on. No state, municipal, or rogue local agency can touch you. You walk on all your misdeeds.”

Motel Mike flipped his chair and straddled the slats. Motel Mike downed Shot #1.

“Gwen told me something like this was in the works, so who am I to scoff? You know Gwen, right? You’re the man who knows everything and everyone, so I’d be surprised if you didn’t know her.”

I downed Shot #1. “Parker’s kicking you loose in two hours. You’re off the Sheriff’s, but you keep your pension. You’ll attest in a private room at Ollie Hammond’s. It’ll be me, Daryl Gates, Parker, and Miller Leavy.”

“You’re the Welcome Wagon, right? I get the show of force, and Mr. Shakedown himself smoothes my feathers.”

I downed Shot #2. “You were in Marilyn Monroe’s house on the night she died. It’s an OD, and I’m not trying to prove anything else. The lab made you off a walking portrait. I’ve got one question here. What were you there for, that night?”

Motel Mike twirled the jug. “The snatch had gone down. Natasha Lytess, Marilyn’s wardrobe mistress, got antsy when the first radio reports hit. She knew where Richie Danforth and Buzzy Stein were holed up, and she called her pal Darryl Zanuck, who was about to get tapped for two hundred grand. She ratted the deal, and Zanuck called Bill Parker. So here come you and the Hats to fuck it all up.”

I said, *“And?”*

“*And* the snatch team was the late Manny Salas, the missing and perhaps late Paul Mitchell Grenier, and the ever-diffident and wimpy Albie Aadland. Manny was running the listening post on the Monroe-home feed. Marilyn was stone batshit crazy, and she was mouthing off all sorts of injudicious shit to her new sidekick, Lowell Farr. Marilyn required surveillance, and Manny provided it. He ran the post out of that TV shop where he worked. He was on the wire that night, and he heard Marilyn playing a radio report on the snatch, and how you and the Hats bumped Richie Danforth. She got on her horn to the Farr girl, out of her mind and about half coherent, and pitched all this shit about this man whose death she caused. Manny *was* listening, and he called me and told me to get over to Marilyn's place and calm her down. Brentwood to Pacific Palisades calls are no toll, so you never got to review any calls to the girl on Marilyn's phone bills. Okay, I drove over to Marilyn's place. I broke in, and I was about to start pulling bug mounts, when I found Marilyn dead. Then Peter Lawford showed up, and I shimmied back out the window. Then *you* showed up, while I was half a block away, watching you lug an evidence kit and pull your pud."

Man Camera. Instant flashback. I recalled *this* moment *that* night.

"The radio was right by the bed. I turned it on. It was fine-tuned to an all-news station. An announcer mentioned an earlier report. Marilyn must have heard that one. It stressed the dead suspect, by name. It laid out the Hats and me, by name. Then, she called Lowell, then she took the pills."

Motel Mike leaned in. He smiled gleeful. He tapped my head twice. *Mr. Shakedown. Nobody ever said you're not quick.*

"There you have it. You killed a man, and Marilyn got all weepy. The Lowell girl failed to console her. Marilyn got weepy on her best of days, but this was too fucking much. So, who's the one packing the guilt here? You tell me."

70

(LOS ANGELES, 8:40 A.M., FRIDAY, 10/5/62)

Summons server. Errand boy. Factotum.

I drove to Brentwood. I brought Natasha Lytess a three-dollar bouquet. Motel Mike's indictment banged through my head.

Phone work. I spent last night shagging calls. I stared at news pix of Lowell Farr and Mitzi Perloff. Nat and Phil reported in. Nat said a carting truck arrived at Doc de River's place. Four workmen removed the Doc's file boxes and dumped them in the back. Phil tailed the truck to an incinerator landfill. A workman passed the landfill boss a wad of Doc de River's money. The workmen off-loaded the boxes and dumped them in the on-site pyre. Phil watched them ignite.

That meant *this:*

No de River evidence. No further Albie Aadland drift.

I've got my Albie-to-de River correspondence. I hoard it with deadly intent. I want Miller Leavy to utilize it. I want him to deploy it as only he knows how. I want him to put Albie down.

I've developed a plan. It's a two-hand play. I'll sweatbox Albie and Miller. The mirror walls and sound speakers will broadcast the show. I'll stand there with Gwen Perloff.

Eddie Chacõn called me. He reported *this:*

José Bolaños vanished in Mexico. The *pendejos* on Ingrid Irmgard's bearer-bond list declined to press charges. Customs cut Ingrid loose. She's back in L.A. "Hey, *Señor* Freddy—you and Max blew up her *puto* boyfriend!"

Max and Red are serving backup subpoenas. They're hitting Norm Krause and Jack Clemmons today. They might or might not be deposed. Harry Crowder and Eddie Benson lockstep Albie Aadland. The surveillance serves one purpose. They're out to make Albie squirm.

Ratfuck Bob Teletyped me. He told me to do *this:*

Craft a final summary. It should supplant and enhance the issued subpoenas and backup paperwork. Lay out your actions from 4/9/62 up to this moment. I expect and demand complete candor. This document will survive in the vacuum of just you and me.

I Teletyped a reply. I stressed my compliance and pledged prompt delivery. I pledged full candor. I said I'd include detailed notes on the '37 and '48 combustions that triggered the full chain of events.

I pulled up behind Natasha's old Ford. I heard her coughing—way back in the yard. I took the driveway back, slow. I coughed myself. It preannounced me and gave her time to compose.

She sat in her chair. She caught some good morning rays. I coughed again. I worked for kicks and grins. She said, "Don't you start doing it."

Her eyes were pinned. She'd lost more weight. She sipped tea and pointed to her spare chair. I dragged it over. She snatched the depo and bouquet.

"Gwen called me. She told me to expect you, and played to my vanity. She said the oral deposition will occur in a private room at a nice restaurant. What more could someone as stage-addled as I ask for?"

I said, "Give me a sneak peek. Tell me how you met Paul de River, and how the two of you directed Marilyn's performance."

—

It was a vividly theatrical performance and a peerless feat of breath control and stage savvy. She anticipated my one question and memorized her lines in advance. She was determined not to exceed her stage manager's brief and spoke to the point at all times. The point was not her feckless love for Marilyn Monroe. It was something altogether more sinister.

The Fox lot, '49 into '50. De River was a tech consultant on Otto Preminger's crime lox, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. He riffed motivation to auteur Otto and star Dana Andrews. She was a dialogue coach on the film. They were both hipped on Russian theater and criminal psychopathy. De River considered actors to be a morally deficient species. She agreed, in full. She audited a few group therapy sessions at de River's Sex Offense Bureau at LAPD. Marilyn's old friend and amanuensis Gwen Perloff was in the group. Her participation spared her a jail knock for soliciting. Miss Lytess learned that Miss Perloff was an orphanage *confrère* of the emergent actress Marilyn Monroe. Miss Lytess knew Marilyn from *The Asphalt Jungle*. Miss Perloff was a dangerous criminal. Miss Perloff wanted to be an actress. Marilyn

Monroe possessed a broad, if rudimentary, talent. Miss Perloff possessed no talent. Marilyn was craven to her core. Miss Perloff was strong to her core. And Marilyn wanted to be a criminal.

’51 into ’52. Marilyn began spewing outlandish criminal fantasies. She entered therapy with Dr. Paul, ’53 to ’54. She left therapy abruptly. It was too rigorous. She was too diffuse. She had succumbed to the idiot notion of being Marilyn Monroe, movie star and worldwide sensation. She sustained her friendship with Gwen Perloff. Their métier was the impromptu late-night phone call. Marilyn went publicly crazy for all the world to see. Gwen Perloff did not seem to mind. She told Marilyn real-life criminal stories. Marilyn dished ripe criminal fantasies in return. Marilyn held her fantasies to be real and brooked no contradiction. She believed that she owned the world but was not of the world and comported within this perilous schism. Criminal fantasy consumed her. She sought professional criminal counsel and reentered therapy with Dr. Paul early this year. He suggested that she spend yet more phone time with Gwen Perloff. Dr. Paul contacted Miss Lytess. He told her that Marilyn needed their help in crafting a real-life criminal persona—and that there would be a good weekly paycheck for the work.

Thus:

Miss Lytess met Motel Mike Bayless, Manny Salas, Paul Mitchell Grenier, and Albie Aadland. She remet the astoundingly self-possessed Gwen Perloff and transferred the full force of her tortuous crush on Marilyn to Gwen.

The cabal decided to stage a publicity kidnap. And perhaps invest a small portion of the money in the racket schemes percolating on the Fox lot.

Marilyn’s lunacy kept pace with her Fox-in-duress fears. She remade herself as a criminal mastermind. She concocted scheme upon scheme—each more ridiculous—up to and including a studio takeover by Mar-Gwen Productions.

Gwen Perloff was a part-time bond courier. She ran real bonds and forged bonds, crafted by consorts of Albie Aadland’s elder brothers. Gwen set Marilyn up with a man named José Bolaños. The Fox Rackets Conspiracy burst to life and imploded all at once.

It shouldn’t have. Marilyn’s grandiosity made it all happen. It was supposed to be a fake kidnap score. They’d be in and out. With a reasonable ransom demand and an equitable cash split. Gwen wanted a stake. She wanted to blow off her acting career and split L.A. forever. Motel Mike wanted a stake. He wanted to set up college funds for his kids. Albie wanted to wax bold and impress his big brothers. Manny wanted a stake. He wanted to set himself up in his own TV-repair shop. Paul Mitchell wanted a stake. He wanted to set himself up as a director of high-class smut films starring Marilyn Monroe. The straight kidnap gig might have worked—but Marilyn wanted *MORE.*

Gwen tried to control Marilyn. Miss Lytess and Doc de River crafted her zaftig-girl-hide-in-plain-sight persona. Marilyn performed adroitly. She couriered bonds and dope bravely and successfully. She lived within her disguise. She redressed the deranged-movie-star role that was killing her.

This cabal enjoyed the surcease. It was short-lived. Fox dumped Marilyn off *Got to Give.* Marilyn went on an anti-Kennedy kick. She said she planned to blackmail the president. He would divorce Jackie and marry her. Marilyn blew her mind. It was permanent. Miss Lytess knew it. Manny and Paul Mitchell blew their minds. Paul Mitchell bit Manny once. Miss Lytess feared for Marilyn's safety. She called Darryl Zanuck and ratted the kidnap gig off.

—

She paused and coughed. She sipped tea and popped two pain pills.

"We all loved drama, at the cost of our souls. Even Paul Mitchell and Manny were crazy for movies. Gwen described it as an 'idiot enchantment.' Why is it that the more sentient of us could fail to see how wrong it was? We were all so jejune. All our artful notions were pure ignorance and arrogance. That's what appalls me the most."

71

(LOS ANGELES, 1:40 A.M., SATURDAY, 10/6/62)

The postmidnight oil. I'm burning it, white-hot.

Ratfuck Bob demands a summary. I'm 214 pages in now. I've put a lens to my crazy summer of 1962. I've confessed to the murder of Roger Denfrey and shifted the blame off the Hats. I've confessed the murder of Paul Mitchell Grenier and directed the Feds to the dump site.

I've been at it for nine hours straight. I've taken breaks to call L.A.-area drugstores and check their summer '48 sales records. I located two penicillin scripts filled by Dr. Shelley Mandel. It confirmed my key summer '48 throughlines.

I concentrated on Sid Leffler then. Daryl Gates served Leffler's subpoena at Queen of Angels last night. I dug up Sex Offense Bureau records in a Headquarters Vice storeroom this morning. I pulled group-therapy attendance sheets from '49 to '52. Leffler audited two dozen sessions that Gwen Perloff also attended. The sessions were conducted by Sid's close pal, Paul de River.

Leffler. Sid, the linchpin. Sid, the old-timer. Sid knew the Aadland brothers in the mid- to late '30s. He ran errands and tossed stink bombs for them. He's been mumbling *"haunted house"* in his sleep. Four duty nurses have confirmed it. The haunted house is most likely the Pavia Place fuck pad. It shut down in '37 or '38 and resurrected after the war. The Aadland brothers and cousin Shelley Mandel held profit points.

Leffler worked chump jobs at the '30s fuck pad. *Why did it shut down?* Leffler was a doormat-stooge at the postwar pad. Leffler lied about Albie Aadland. He said he only glimpsed the young Albie during picket-line dustups on the Fox lot. Leffler dumped the '37 file box at the West L.A. station.

Leffler cracked under duress. He said he tried to sell Marilyn Monroe's letters to Paul de River. De River nixed the offer. De River told Leffler that he already knew the Sex Creep and stated that half of the letters surely came from him. Leffler revealed this before I read the coded Albie letters to de River. The Sex Creep was a postwar fuck-pad habitué. Leffler surely sideswiped him at that hot spot.

I'm going to predepose Leffler at 9:00 a.m. I'll type out a prepared list of questions and insert spaces for his handwritten replies. His signature will certify his plea bargain with Miller Leavy. Leffler stands accused of a hundred-plus counts of stat rape and forced oral cop. The nineteen complainants are all westside high school coeds.

—

I watched the fucker sleep. I nicked a get-well card at the nurses' station and stuck my query sheet inside it. I left it beside Leffler's water cup.

The guest chair gouged my ass. I chain-smoked and scratched my balls raw. Late-sleeper Leffler—it was 9:29 a.m.

I saw him stir. He couldn't see me. I set the window drapes just so.

He stirred and stretched. He reached for his cup. He saw the get-well card and pulled out the query sheet.

I said, "Hey, there. You're a sleepyhead."

Sid Leffler screamed.

—

Miller Leavy established a protocol. Leffler would rat Albie Aadland within precise legal guidelines. His 3-to-5 sex crime sentence would be suspended. He would instead receive a jive-public-service slap on the wrist. Lieutenant Freddy O. would tape-record a precise Q and A. Leffler would respond to my queries and write in his replies. We would both initial the responses. Only two individuals would read the rat sheet. They were Leavy and Gwen Perloff.

Leffler was malingering at Queen of Angels. He was milking his rest cure before a return to his fucked-up life. He withstood a good shitkicking. The kicking did not justify this indolent cure. We didn't thump him to oblivion. He got off easy.

He worked in bed. I sat in my ass-gouging chair. He spoke and then inked his answers to my questions. The room was quiet. A window cooling unit hummed. My portable recorder spooled tape. We hand-annotated the typescript after each Q and A. The finished document reads like *this:*

FO/Q: "When and where did you meet Gwen Perloff?"

SL/A: "In 1950, at the Sex Offense Bureau at LAPD."

FO/Q: “In what specific context?”

SL/A: “Group therapy. Gwen got popped for soliciting, and she had to attend these sessions, to dodge jail time. Doc de River ran the groups. He gassed on Gwen, I could tell.”

FO/Q: “What personal business did Miss Perloff most frequently bring up at these sessions?”

SL/A: “The disappearance of her kid sister, Mitzi, in February of ’37. Everybody figured some kiddie slasher did her in. Gwen was convinced that a Le Conte Junior High boy named Roger did it. He was a mean kid, and he bragged about killing little girls.”

FO/Q: “Where were you working in February of ’37?”

SL/A: “At…well…the Aadland brothers owned a party house, on Pavia Place, in the Palisades. I served drinks and ran errands.”

FO/Q: “Did a Le Conte boy named Roger Denfrey, and Albie Aadland—the much younger Aadland brother—habituate this establishment?”

SL/A: “Yes.”

FO/Q: “And on a particular February night, did Roger Denfrey relay some disturbing news with regards to Albie Aadland to you?”

SL/A: “Yes. He said that Albie had been fondling Mitzi under the Le Conte bleachers, back in Hollywood, and that he talked her into taking a bus ride to the beach with them…and…they were teasing her on the bus, and they brought her there to the party house, and he disappeared with her into an upstairs bedroom, and Roger went up to see what was going on, and he saw them naked, and Albie was strangling Mitzi and shoving a washcloth in her mouth.”

FO/Q: “What did you do then?”

SL/A: “I went up and saw the body, and then I called Hersh Aadland and told him what happened.”

FO/Q: “What did Hersh Aadland do?”

SL/A: “What do you think, asshole? He bundled up the body and dumped it someplace.”

FO/Q: “Did Roger Denfrey participate in the murder?”

SL/A: “No. He was listening to a radio show downstairs when it happened.”

—

I eyeballed Gwen’s building. I sat in my car and kept precise track of the time.

It was 9:34 p.m. Gwen was at home. She’s burning her living room lights. I saw her car tucked in her parking slot. I slid the Q and A under her front door. It was 8:34 p.m. then. I included a personal note:

“Consider all of this. Tell me how you’d like me to proceed.”

Her shades were yanked tight. Living room lights burned behind them. The front door did not budge. Time decohered. I waited for Gwen to call me in.

I talked to Miller Leavy, four hours back. He read the Q and A and revoked Albie’s immunity deal. He said he did not intend to inform Ratdog Bobby of the Leffler/Mitzi offshoot of our cases. He said he intends to file Murder One on Albie and try him as an adult. February 17, 1937, is twenty-five years, seven months, and nineteen days ago.

Time decohered. I sat in my car and plain yearned. I kept my windows down. The night was near warm. I couldn’t will sound into sight or—

I heard a high-pitched sound. It came from upstairs and off-right. It went from whine to woman’s shriek. I heard crash and thud sounds off-right. I saw cloaked window-curtains shimmy and heard glass break.

I piled out and ran. I heard all the sounds all at once and all with the sound increased. I ran upstairs and paused. I saw loose doorjamb mounts and shoulder-punched the door in. I tripped inside and saw *this:*

Gwen. She’s throwing things at the south wall. Straight-back chairs, soft chairs, glass shelves, and bric-a-brac. They’re piled up at the foot of the wall. She’s gouged the wall past the paint and foundation boards, and still with that *shriek*—

I tripped again. I got to her and behind her and threw myself at her. I got my arms around her and wrestled her loose. We bumped heads and tripped sideways and clipped shelves and kicked rugs up and fell into a leather couch as she flailed.

We got our heads turned around. Her face was dry and dark red–blotted. There were no tears.

We paused. We caught some breath. She didn’t tremble. She didn’t sob. She gnawed at her lips. We paused again—so I kissed her.

—

We fell into it and stayed with it. I kept my watch facedown on the nightstand. We kept our clothes off. Nobody called in a noise beef. No deputies rolled out and banged at the door. Time went someplace. We stayed close. We said things. We didn't want to lose the fit. Gwen said, "I should tell you first. I don't want to tell it in a roomful of men and stenographers, and lose it because we didn't walk through it first."

She stated it. She didn't ask me. She walked into the living room and walked back with a tape rig. She plugged it into the wall and laid it down on the sheets.

All right, then. Tell me.

—

It was the Grove, first and always. It was Gwen and Norma Jean Baker, the incipient Marilyn. It was the gang. Gwen and Marilyn lorded it over Albie, Paul Mitchell, and their pal from outside—Manny Salas. They were movie-mad kids. *Little* kids—eleven, twelve, thirteen. There were long days up in that tree on El Centro. The Grove offered long views. They had a big view of Paramount and RKO. There were extras in costume and movie stars on parade.

They were little kids with big imaginations. Gwen and Mitzi lived in a foster home at De Longpre and Wilton at first. You could see the kid versions of who they'd all become. Paul Mitchell was mean. He liked to bite and fight. El Manny was a house burglar and amateur boxer. He was a Nite Owl peewee and loved to futz around with electrical things. Albie was studious and withdrawn. He hoarded dirty pictures. His big brothers forced him to commit minor crimes and test-pilot dope. Marilyn was ambitious and sweet-natured, up to a point. Gwen was not that way. She was calculating to the nth degree.

Mitzi vanished. The Sheriff's and L.A. police investigated. Gwen ran wild. She boosted threads from Hollywood shops and peddled them to kids at Le Conte Junior High. Albie went to Le Conte and came back home to the Grove. Gwen met a Le Conte boy named Roger Denfrey. Roger strutted tall in the ensembles that Gwen stole for him.

The foster home expelled Gwen. The girl was just too wild. She got lucky and got sent to the Grove. Gwen and Marilyn played girl-sleuth games. They fantasy-solved Mitzi's murder a thousand times over. Gwen suspected Roger Denfrey. He told Le Conte kids that he wanted to become a pimp and sex-slash little girls. He harped on this. He told all who would listen.

The late '30s. The early war years. The gang comes of age.

Manny Salas goes off to high school and trade school. Manny fights professional. Paul Mitchell fights and bites and becomes a boss jocker at Georgia Street Juvenile. Albie attends Occidental College. Marilyn tears through foster homes. She endures boarding stints with distant relatives and endures a kid marriage. Gwen becomes a semipro shoplifter and late-teen lingerie model. She's kept up with Manny. She sucks up to rich men and sleeps with them on occasion. She targets their homes for El Manny's 459 prowls.

The war ends. The swinging postwar-L.A. era kicks on. El Manny's a pad burglar. Paul Mitchell's a grip, bit actor, and part-time fruit hustler. Marilyn and Gwen are starlet manqués and fledgling call girls. They haunt studio casting offices and scrounge bit parts.

It's now '48. Marilyn and Gwen reconnect on the L.A. nightlife circuit. Gwen's heard of a wild joint on Pavia Place. It's way out in the Palisades. It's a party house. Such places are commonly known as "fuck pads."

You've got men and women—all good-looking. There's nifty film folk and inspired squarejohn types out to *HOWL*. You've got booze and dope. *Oooh-la-la*—there's private compounds and the best prescription shit of the era. You have Dr. Shelley Mandel. With his script-writing largesse and his cautionary VD spiels and free-flowing penicillin.

Orson Welles habituates the fuck pad. Visiting celebs pass through. Gwen sees Roddy McDowall and Liz Taylor on several occasions. Marilyn and Gwen become fuck-pad regulars. Dr. Shelley becomes Marilyn's personal physician. Random rich boys pass through the fuck pad. Plus noted politicians. They're often escorted by an L.A. cop named Norm and an almost-cop named Jack.

The fuck pad swings *HARD*. Local weird-o's pass through. An unknown trumpet virtuoso. This weird Chinaman who steals watches and may or may not cook dope. A cop named Sid Leffler provides security. He's a longtime Aadland stooge.

There's jazz combos. There's jam sessions and impromptu smut-foto sessions. Orson Welles is quite the shutterbug. There's orgy action in plain sight. *And* there's Doc Shelley's invention—the fuck deck.

Dig:

Get your jollies in the moment. Pose fifty-two times over. Orson's a fuck-deck enthusiast. So's the Queen of the Fuck Pad:

Carole Landis. Real star/perhaps fading star/on her fourth marriage. She has a big house four blocks off on Capri Drive.

Carole did a fuck deck with a jazz horn called "Captain Hook." He possessed a foot-long curved schlong. Carole's married. So what? Carole's got a thing going with Brit heartthrob Rex Harrison. Carole's got her eye on rookie congressman John F. Kennedy. He digs passing through L.A. and scrounging strange woof-woof.

Marilyn digs Jack Kennedy. Gwen observes it, plainly. Marilyn *hates* Carole. She possesses everything that Marilyn does not.

It's now late June '48. Gwen, Carole, Marilyn, and Jack Kennedy are on the premises. A girl named Marcia Davenport works as Carole's assistant. She hires Gwen and Marilyn to house-sit Carole's place when Carole and hubby dip out of town. Gwen and Marilyn enjoy momentary luxury. Gwen tips Manny Salas to a safe full of jewels. He 459's Carole's house and gives Gwen a cut of the fence money.

It's June 28, '48. Carole's out of town. Marilyn and Jack Kennedy are ensconced at the fuck pad. They're zonked on opium and cocaine. They take the plunge and go the fuck-deck route. Orson Welles shoots them in fifty-two sizzling positions. Orson, Jack, and Marilyn sign the back of the developed fotos. Doc Shelley does the technical work and gets the pix turned into a prototype deck.

Who got the deck then? Nobody knows.

It's now coming up on Independence Day, '48. Jack K.'s on a fuck-pad toot. He's comatose in a back bedroom. Carole's back in town. She's heard the rumors: Jack and Marilyn went the fuck-deck route. Carole's distraught. Rex Harrison won't leave his wife. Her career's in the tank. Her fourth husband's a dud. Jack Kennedy's a heartless no-goodnik.

Gwen and Marilyn walk Carole back to her house. It's just a few blocks away. That weird-o Chinaman seems to be tailing them. He's eavesdropping on the riff that Marilyn's laying on Carole:

No man is worth the trouble that you're putting yourself through. I've got red devils and yellow jackets. Go home, have a snooze, and call your shrink in the morning.

Carole went home. She took Marilyn's pills and killed herself. Jack K. remained conked at the fuck pad. Norm the cop and Jack the almost-cop are waltzing a bigwig pol through the pad. They get spooked by Jack K.'s condition.

Norm called Chief Worton. Chief Worton called Robert Kennedy in Boston. Young Robert was twenty-two. He had pressing travel plans. He wanted to scope out postwar Europe and soak up bebop and existentialism. He flew out to L.A. instead.

Chief Worton had Norm the cop and Jack the almost-cop rescue Congressman John F. Kennedy from the fuck pad. Bobby K. backstopped the rescue operation. Bobby met Gwen Perloff at a little park down Pavia Place. He was rubbed raw by brother Jack's suicidal tomcat ways. Gwen was rubbed raw by Carole's suicide and Marilyn's take-a-nap-sweetie riff. The attraction went heart-deep for six days. Bobby and Gwen. Six days in July ’48. Gwen gave Bobby the clap. Doc Shelley prescribed penicillin. Pharmacy records existed. Travel records existed. The Jack-Marilyn fuck deck *still* exists somewhere.

Bobby and Gwen broke it off. It was terminal at the gate. They both knew it. Gwen passed a dose to Robert F. Kennedy. Bobby said he forgave her. Gwen didn’t believe him. Bobby took Jack back to Washington. *Gwen and Bobby?* Cole Porter said it best: “It was just one of those things.”

Time schizzed. Marilyn became MARILYN MONROE. Gwen jumped into The Life. She fingered scores and got popped for soliciting in ’50. A judge sentenced her to a stint with Paul de River’s Sex Offense Bureau. She attended group therapy sessions. All the crime talk torqued her. She teethed on Roger Denfrey as Mitzi’s killer. She remet Sid Leffler at the group gigs. It was “Hi, Sid,” “Hi, Gwen,” and no more. She met a young Sheriff’s cop named Mike Bayless. He was auditing group sessions. Gwen became his longtime lover and informant. Motel Mike began a longtime search for Roger Denfrey.

Denfrey had no criminal record. Not *anywhere.* Mike saw him as a fringe figure. He was *possibly* quite dangerous. Mike did not make him for specific sex offenses. Gwen said she *knew.* She was stronger than Mike. She told Mike to find him and let her kill him. Mike said he would.

—

Time schizzed. Gwen went to the Pasadena Playhouse. She did swimwear ads and got contracts at Universal and Fox. Marilyn became that much more *Marilyn Monroe.* Marilyn began to deteriorate and decohere. Gwen got costar roles in horror flicks. She ran into Paul Mitchell and Albie at Fox. They had Manny in tow sometimes. She ran into Marilyn at Fox. She had dinner with Marilyn, Paul Mitchell, Manny, and Albie two or three times a year. She introduced them to Mike Bayless. He was *still* searching for Roger Denfrey. Mike and Marilyn had an affair. Mike grokked her crime fixation and tattled it to Gwen. Paul Mitchell and Manny were Chino ex-cons. Scholarly Albie was crime-fixated. Gwen began and sustained an affair with Darryl F. Zanuck. Gwen acted in B flicks and schlepped bearer bonds for Zanuck, Hersh Aadland, and other big studio guys. Mike chased Roger Denfrey. Marilyn started pressing for a publicity kidnap. Marilyn bewitched Mike Bayless. She had him out looking for the

MM/JFK fuck deck. No real leads ever surfaced or popped.

Marilyn remet Senator Jack in 1954. He didn't connect her to his old fuck-deck pal. *Really*. Was she *that* unmemorable? Marilyn and Jack had once-a-year quickies, up and through his inauguration as prez. Marilyn wanted to *own* that deck. It might prove useful. She might decide to replace that lockjawed stiff Jackie as First Lady.

Marilyn is losing it. She's boozing more. She's gobbling more pills and jumping more gas-station jockeys and pizza-delivery boys. She's plotting a takeover of 20th Century–Fox. The studio is besieged by money woes engendered by King Lox *Cleopatra.* Albie Aadland tattles Marilyn's takeover shit to his brothers and Jimmy Hoffa. They like the idea and tell Albie to stay in touch as this *Cleopatra* grief evolves. Mike Bayless tells Gwen that he's tracked Roger Denfrey to the name Rick Dawes. "Rick Dawes" is a sometime cater waiter and possible Beverly Hills house burglar. Gwen gets a cater-waitress gig and starts tracking Dawes/Denfrey herself. Manny's got his swinging stewardess girlfriend, Ingrid Irmgard. She's moving bonds for the A boys. The boys want to co-opt Marilyn's takeover plan. Gwen spots Manny and the weird-o Chinaman from the fuck pad. They're going over floor plans for a burglary job. She spots them at a diner near Fox. Gwen and Mike hatch a plan. They'll lure Roger Denfrey into their kidnap gang. They'll lull him down and set him up so that Gwen can kill him. Analysand Marilyn is tattling her criminal plans to Paul de River. He brings Natasha Lytess into play. She signs on as drama coach and wardrobe mistress. Marilyn wants to courier dope and bonds? Natasha will provide appropriate disguises and motivation. Mike finds Roger Denfrey and suborns him into the gang. Mike tells Gwen what Roger told him. He's committed a string of Beverly Hills 459's with a Chink named Preston Fong. Crazy moneymaking schemes proliferate at Fox. Jimmy Hoffa hires Freddy O. for his Marilyn/Jack the K bug-tap extravaganza.

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Gwen pushed the rig Off switch. Tape hiss stopped short. She went *So?* I said, "Tell me what you want to do."

She touched my leg. She said, "Let me think about it."

72

(LOS ANGELES, 10/7–10/9/62)

I worked at home. I sat at the living room table and waited for Gwen to call. I typed up my concluding summary to Robert F. Kennedy. Carbon copies would go out to Bill Parker, Daryl Gates, Miller Leavy, and the Hats.

I would delete Gwen's account of the fuck-deck shenanigans. It would not sully the carbon copies. Ratfuck Bobby was there at the start. Only *he* got the full lurid ride.

He earned it. I earned it. Gwen earned it. Nobody else did.

I underscored Sid Leffler's account of the Mitzi Perloff murder. I went back and underscored my account of Paul Mitchell Grenier's death. Now you know where I dumped him. He just had to go. All justification stops there.

I took breaks and sipped coffee on the porch. Gwen buzz-bombed me. She might call, she might not. We left our end point unestablished. I woke up and found her gone. She'd cleaned up her living room. It was spick-and-span. I slept through it all.

She's got me thinking. I thought of the prez and the AG and the spring of '55. I pulled Jack out of some shit with a call girl. I presented the bill. Jack high-hatted me. Fifty grand might have been grandiose. Twenty grand would have been swell. The K boys are cheap. That's my final perspective on the brothers Kennedy.

My summary topped out at 421 pages. I ran the carbons downtown. I told Eddie Chacõn to telefax the AG. I dropped off copies at the PAB and the DA's Office. I drove home and went to sleep.

Gwen didn't call. Parker and Gates called. I lobbied them on Gwen's behalf. Don't make her depose. Let her play the tape instead. They agreed. We argued endgames and conceived *this:*

Leavy files on Albie for Murder One. It's not a gas-chamber bounce. Albie was a juvie back in '37. It's a no-body job. All we've got are the admissions of a rapist ex-cop. Let Miller *have* at Albie instead.

Bust him and delay his lawyer's phone call. Put Albie in a sweatbox with Miller. Maybe Miller can shake loose a confession or induce a psychic collapse. Maybe he can rig Life Plus 99 Years or something equally harsh.

Parker and Gates liked it. Parker said he's run it by Miller. Gates said he'd invite the Hats. I said I'd invite Gwen.

Miller called me two hours later. He said it's on. Max and Red were set to haul Albie in. Buff the look-see mirror and fine-tune the hallway speakers. Albie's overmatched.

The deposition gigs went down. We scheduled them, one per night. We deposed Natasha Lytess in a private room at Kwan's Chinese Pagoda. Natasha played Belle of the Ball and charmed the shit out of Parker, Leavy, and Gates. She was sickly and dying. Her last Monroe stint ran felonious. She inspired admiration in four vindictive men. We dined and boozed until 3:00 a.m. We had a blast.

Motel Mike Bayless deposed in a private room at Ollie Hammond's Steakhouse. He held forth candidly and confirmed Gwen's recorded statement 100%. He expressed surprise per one thing. Terry Jay Aquino/aka Preston Fong/aka Sex Creep. *That* fucker as a 459 accomplice of Manny Salas *and* Roger Denfrey?

I said, "It all goes back to Albie and the three convergences. The fuck pad in '37 and '48, and Chino in '54. Albie cinches up the whole deal."

We deposed Sid Leffler in his hospital room. It was loathsome work. Miller Leavy's *eyes*? You've never *seen* such contempt.

The Leffler depo induced an aftertaste. I drove home and conjured Lowell Farr and Mitzi Perloff, alive and grown-up. I got restless and called Roddy McDowall.

We shot the breeze for ten seconds. Roddy invited me to a sneak peek at Jeanne Carmen's place. I asked him if he had the Monroe/JFK fuck deck. He said no—the best he could do was Carole Landis and Captain Hook. He was strapped for bread and sold the King Deck to Sam Yorty.

That's not bad. Mayor Sam's always liked me.

Gwen called at 4:00 the next morning. She said, "Yes," and hung up the phone.

73

(LOS ANGELES, 10:20 A.M., WEDNESDAY, 10/10/62)

The wall mirror projected a blur. It framed Leavy and Albie off-kilter. It distorted colors. Miller's suit and Albie's hair beamed out garish shades.

The hall speakers worked A-OK. Miller cleared his throat to announce the launch. Gwen jerked and brushed against me. Bill Parker went *Whoa.* Daryl Gates and the Hats twitched.

Gwen. I knew her clothes now. She'd worn the dark gray suit before. It complemented new gray hair. Her black-frame glasses offset her face in bold contrast.

She'd been respectfully brusque. We went through the introductions in six seconds. Max and Red picked Albie up and drove him downtown in his own Mercedes. A lab crew was tossing his sled in the basement garage. A second crew was tossing his house. They won't find jack shit. Albie and El Manny torched all his paper.

Miller coughed and launched. Gwen stood close and brushed my fingers.

"Your fellow kidnap conspirators have been granted immunity, Mr. Aadland. Yours has been revoked. You facilitated the criminal actions of Terry Jay Aquino, also known as Preston Fong, also known as the Sex Creep. You met Aquino at Chino in 1954, and went on to coach him in felonious endeavors, abetted by Dr. Paul de River. The Creep went on to kill a girl named Georgia Lowell Farr, and a policeman named J.T. Meadows. I intend to see you indicted as a coconspirator."

Albie smoked and fretted his cuff links. Max thinks he popped tranquilizers back at his house. Albie said, "This is a humbug deal." His voice was gravel-raw.

Miller said, "Additionally, you murdered a minor child named Mitzi Perloff in February 1937. You were a child yourself at that time. The one eyewitness, Roger Denfrey, is now dead. My one living witness, Sid Leffler, is a thoroughly disgraced ex-cop. A paucity of witnesses and a lack of physical evidence will not impede the actions of the L.A. County grand jury. They will issue a true bill for first-degree murder. At trial, I will call your three brothers and Paul de River. They will vividly describe your boyhood perversions and related criminal activities, in an effort to dodge suborning indictments themselves."

Albie said, "*So?* I've got Grant Cooper. He's better than you. He'll get a phone call sometime in the next hour. 'Grant, this is Albie. They've got me at the Detective Bureau. They haven't hosed me yet—but they might. Get down here, all right?' "

Miller feigned a yuk. Here comes the leap. Miller laid it out before the pickup. Sidelong looks traveled. They ran Parker to Gates to the Hats and me.

Gwen stared straight ahead. Her jaw flexed some new way. I wanted her to touch me. She gripped the window ledge.

Miller said, "I will now ask you a series of hypothetical questions, which will not be courtroom admissible. My hope is that I might gain theoretical knowledge of the one known homicide that you have committed, and that such knowledge will serve to mitigate my absolutist stance in court."

Albie said, "You're a ham. Always the big words, but you're headed for a trouncing."

Miller said, "Yes or no, Mr. Aadland? I know you're anxious to call Mr. Cooper."

Albie sighed. "I was raised to be accommodating, so I'll play along until I get bored."

JML/Q: "If you were to have killed Mitzi Perloff, what would your motive have been?"

AA/A: "Sex, I guess. She was little, and she wasn't a dish like her big sister. She had something, though, and who can account for taste? Also, I'm the altruistic type. If I did what you said I did, I'd be breaking her in for the unlucky guy she'd marry some dark day."

Gwen squeezed my hand and pressed it into her leg. The Hats passed a flask.

JML/Q: "Did you get what you wanted, in that upstairs bedroom—if, hypothetically, you got anything at all?"

AA/A: "If I did it, if I was looking for anything, it was a measure of relief from my status as an Aadland who couldn't hack The Life, and had to eat shit and test-pilot dope that scrambled my brain. As in rape clear's a man's pipes and allows him to compete in this shitty competitive world we live in."

JML/Q: “Was the act itself pleasurable?”

AA/A: “Not really. It was more a case of any old port in a storm. I’m squeamish, and all the blood and ooze put me in a state of postcoital regret. You know, like those Frenchy films where the lovers lay around, smoke cigarettes, and discuss how life’s this doomed proposition.”

It went telepathic. Albie paused and lit a cigarette. It gave the gallery a pause to drift and breathe clean air. Parker/Gates/the Hats. They walked away from Gwen and me. They walked toward the Homicide squadroom.

Gwen. With the tears now. Pooling up behind her glasses.

I took her arm and walked her toward a stairway landing. We went through the door. We stood on metal stairs that nobody used. To our left: sweatbox row. To our right: the connecting door to the elevator bank.

We stood there. Here’s the wait. I stuck my handkerchief in the outlooking door crack. The door looked out on Sweatbox #3. I held Gwen and pulled off her glasses. She rubbed her face on my shirtfront and blotted her tears.

Time schizzed. I held her up against the stairway wall. She spasmed as the wait dragged. It went almost an hour. The door crack fed us the view.

Miller and Albie walked out the #3 door. They walked away from us and toward the squadroom.

Gwen knew the drill. She pushed herself off the wall and walked ahead of me. We went through the elevator-bank door.

The lift down was shut. Red arrows lit up. I pushed the down button. The door slid open. We stepped inside. I pushed the basement button. The lift lurched straight down. We stepped into the PD’s garage.

Albie’s Mercedes. It was two car rows back. The lab guys were gone. I pointed to a wall stanchion. Gwen walked ahead of me. I flipped a blower-fan switch at eye level. A noise wave hit the basement.

Gwen pulled on cloth gloves. I 459’d Albie’s house last night. I stole a .357 Magnum revolver. Albie is left-handed. He’ll start the car with his right hand. He’ll rest his left arm on the door sill. It’s a natural posture for a—

The freight-lift door clanked open. A little sound device dinged. Gwen and I stood behind the stanchion. Albie walked to the Mercedes and opened the driver’s door. His left arm is right where it should be.

Gwen walked up to the car. She pulled the Magnum from her handbag and gave Albie a beat.

He saw it and knew it. I know that. Gwen put the gun to his head and pulled the trigger. Albie convulsed. The wad-cutter load blew through him. It took out half his skull and tore out the passenger-door panel.

Gwen dropped the piece on the ground. I know suicide blowback. I told her just where to drop it. The blower fan covered the noise.

Gwen walked back over to me.

74

(LOS ANGELES, 8:00 A.M., THURSDAY, 10/11/62)

I stared down my phone. Nobody called last night. It wasn't on the TV or radio news. It didn't make the p.m. papers yesterday or the a.m. rags today.

I drove Gwen home yesterday. She told me she was shucking L.A. for good tomorrow night. Del Kinney took the sheriff's job in Wisconsin. They were going to get married. She might drop by Jeanne Carmen's place and say hi.

That stood as our good-byes. We did it. We didn't discuss it. We'd know the price sometime today.

We did it. Parker and Gates knew we did it. Miller Leavy knew we did it. They might nail us. They might indulge us and let us waltz. They might kick it up to Bob Kennedy and let him decide. It could play out twenty ways. We risked that. We'd know the price sometime today.

I stared down my phone. Gwen didn't call. She was packing up to ditch L.A. for good. Leavy didn't call. Likewise Parker and Gates. No cops door-knocked me. I was shit-sheared. I was bughouse/no-shit scared.

I stared down my phone. I willed it to ring and got no response. I smoked thirty cigarettes. Eddie Chacõn called at 4:20. He fed me an update.

"It has fallen on *Señor* Bob to make the call on you and Miss Perloff. He hasn't decided yet."

Eddie hung up. I forced myself to eat half a sandwich. I puked it back up ten minutes later. I gargled Old Crow and put the plug in the jug.

Gwen didn't call. No reporters called. No TV crews assembled outside. No cops knocked on my door.

Eddie called back at 5:19. I jumped on the phone.

"*Señor* Bob is letting it slide. *Señor* Leavy was outraged, but *Señor* Bob beat him down. *Puto* Leavy wants to file Manslaughter Two on you for *La Gran Puta* Grenier. Once more, *Señor* Bob prevailed."

—

I went to a party. Something was racking up inside of me. It was big and ugly, dirty and strange. I wanted to divert myself. I wanted to get blitzed and hold it down.

Del Kinney broke the word at Fox. It was his last official duty. He did an all-lot mail drop.

All this criminal shit stops now. The City Attorney's set to run a studio-wide audit and personal audits on all your bank accounts. The IRS is now auditing your Federal tax returns. Cease and desist immediately. You're nullified, as of now.

Roddy McDowall got an exemption. One of Del's guys leaked Roddy the word early. Roddy could shoot his *Cleopatra*-spoof fuck film. Hence, the party tonight.

Jeanne's living room was jam-packed. It was a film-biz demimonde scene. You've got Babs Payton, Lila Leeds, and Jeanne's bit player/call girl neighbors. Nat and Phil showed. Some Sheriff's squadroom guys made the scene. Eddie Fisher and Bo Belinsky made quite an entrance. Eddie spritzed unleavened joy. Liz cut his kid-support nut in half. He squeezed Liz with the Liz/Bo smut reel.

Gwen wasn't there.

The night was borderline balmy. I wedged the door open for sight lines on Gwen or No Gwen. I ate two pizza slices and kept them down. I recognized the delivery boy. It was Monroe's old squeeze, "Big Dick Dave."

Jeanne owned a cheap-o projector and pull-down screen. Roddy had redubbed real *Cleopatra* footage with gag dialogue. I grabbed a chair and set it to keep a bead on the door. A Sheriff's guy doused the room lights. Roddy did a *Roll 'em* bit. Jeanne rolled film.

It was sound film. Roddy intoned a camp prologue:

"All hail the demise of a once-proud motion picture studio!!! Because this flick is the Dog of Dogs and Lox of Loxes!!!"

The kids roared. Roddy cut to dreary shots of Roman processionals. The camera swooped wide of the set. It panned a '60-vintage shopping center, outside of Rome. *Bambinos* licked ice-cream cones. Bedraggled moms lugged shopping bags.

The kids hooted and cheered. Roddy cut to a series of shots in Cleo's throne room. The shots reduced to close-ups. Redubbed Richard Burton and Liz Taylor traded Roddyesque quips.

Redubbed Richard said, “Give me some pussy, you fine Egyptian motherfucker!”

Redubbed Liz said, “You better be a good muff diver, because I heard you’re hung like a light switch!”

The kids *re*-roared. It was funny shit. I faded out of it, fast. I looked out the door. People passed on the walkway. Nobody was her.

The reel rolled on. The projector spool glitched and killed the show halfway in. The kids threw out stage groans. Lila Leeds turned on the room lights. The brightness burned my eyes.

That racking thing took me over. It doubled me over and made my eyes burn. I wiped my face and nailed the source. It was a brutal wave of love for Robert F. Kennedy.

The party dragged on. I sat in my chair and talked to people. I looked out the door. The party slogged on. My wait felt like an all-night surveillance. It was my last shot at something. I couldn’t forfeit the look-see.

I didn’t mark the time.

Then she was there.

The doorway framed her, the walkway lights backlit her.

She winked and blew me a kiss. She lip-synched *I love you* and stepped out of the frame.

75

(LOS ANGELES, 9:00 A.M., FRIDAY, 10/12/62)

Mayor Sam allotted me ten minutes. We crashed in green wing chairs. His secretary served eye-openers. She built 100-proof vodka mimosas. They were revered by the City Hall set.

Mayor Sam said, "Motel Mike signed on as my bodyguard. What's a little kidnap caper between friends?"

I laughed and cut to it. Let's not prolong this. Mayor Sam could get brusque.

"Fuck decks. I know you've got the big one, and I'm willing to pay."

Mayor Sam did not blink. He rubbed his fingers together and went for the gist.

"Twenty grand. That's the number. Anything less—*sayonara,* baby."

I said, "Ten grand and a wall-peek film of Liz Taylor and Bo Belinsky. It's high-resolution infrared, with good sound quality."

Mayor Sam said, "Shit, that's a good deal."

—

The beach displayed all the signs. Cars were triple-parked on PCH southbound. Numbskulls jumped on their hoods to sneak views. Fans jammed up the sand, street to wave line. I heard *"They're here!"* and *"He's here!"* and *"Maybe we'll see Jackie!"*

Eddie Chacõn called my service. He told me to be prompt and park in Mrs. Lawford's garage slot. The door was up and Pat's Bonneville was missing. I drove straight in.

I got out and hooked down the north pathway. I smelled his cigar smoke. He was out by the pool. I pulled a lounge chair up beside his.

He wore sunglasses. That slayed me. He traveled incognito. I stifled a laugh.

"Hello, Mr. Kennedy."

He doffed his shades. Bright sunlight made him blink.

"Hi, Freddy. Eddie said you've got something for me."

I passed him Mayor Sam's fuck deck. It came brown paper–wrapped. This ghastly object. I did not strip the paper and peek.

He tossed me a paper bag. It was heavy. Heads popped over the fence line. *"Oh, gawwd—I saw Bobby!"*

"Fifty grand. Jack says thanks. He concedes that he stiffed you in '55, but he's compensating you now."

I said, "That means it's over."

"That's right."

"And it was nothing but a cover-up from the gate."

He tossed me a cigar. It bounced off my chest and skittered close to the pool.

"I knew you'd take it all the way. '48 would have sufficed, but you took it back to Gwen's little sister, and did some good there. I told Jack, and that's why he kicked out the bread."

I said, "Loose ends out in the world. You wanted me to identify and curtail them. Jack's the big guy, and you'll move in when he's done."

He said, "Well put, if blunt. I also wanted to see who else you'd reel in and how much you'd find out."

"Hoffa? The Aadlands?"

He blew smoke rings. Two old girls jumped above the fence line and waved. He waved right back.

"Hoffa's deal with you was another cover-up. That's why he folded so quick when Marilyn died. He put you out as bait at Fox, to see what you could detect about the scams he and the Aadlands were putting money into. You're a whizbang detective, and Jimmy's a numbnuts. He bought all of Marilyn's crazy notions and thought they were moneymakers. Star power. He was up for some enchantment, and fell for it. Eddie's bracing the Aadlands tomorrow. He's turning them as informants. They'll testify against Hoffa in my jury-tampering case in Tennessee."

I laughed. "Bill Parker. Does he get the FBI gig?"

"No. He's too intemperate and juiced up. Pete Pitchess is only marginally better. Jack and I are looking at John Doar. He's a Justice lawyer, and a civil rights man. He's got a New Frontier look to him."

I grabbed my brown bag and stood up. Kennedy stood up. We exchanged bone crushers. He winced first.

"You're not as bad as you used to be, Freddy. You can take some pride in that."

—

I plumbed a line due east. There was nothing to do and no place to go. There was nobody to extort or intimidate. There were no opportunities disguised as love.

Loose ends.

That plumb line due east.

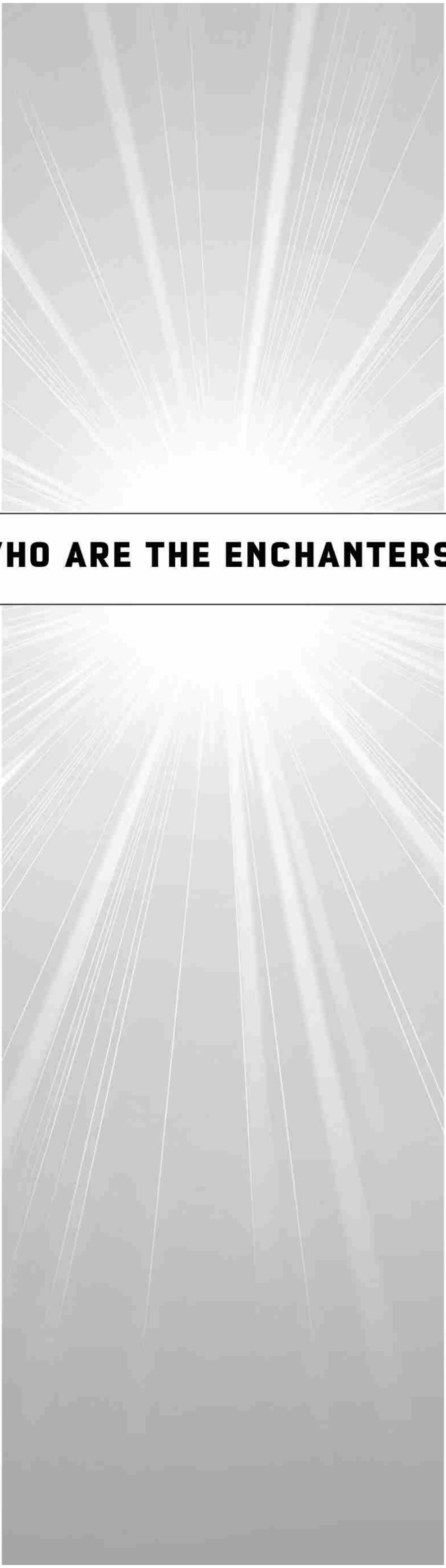
I U-turned onto Sunset. I saw Pali High—home of the Dolphins. I saw the Farr house and the Bay Theater. A jog north took me by Fifth Helena. A jog south took me back to Sunset and east to the Strip. Gwen's place stood empty. The living room had sustained damage. The dutiful Sheriff's wife will forward a check. I cruised by the Chapman Park Hotel and reversed course. I drove by Hollygrove and scoped that big tree.

I drove to the run-down house on Dunoon. Natasha's junker Ford was gone. She's off at the drugstore or the market. She doesn't roll anywhere else.

I'm an eideteker. I see things and imprint things that no one else sees. Natasha's front door has a built-in mail chute. It's long and wide. I brain-screened the dimensions the first time I was here.

A light rain kicked on. I walked up to the porch. I dropped Jack's fifty grand and a get-well card down the chute.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE



WHO ARE THE ENCHANTERS?

FREDDY OTASH: Tainted ex-cop, defrocked private eye, dope fiend, and freelance extortionist. The hero-narrator of *The Enchanters.*

MARILYN MONROE: Film star and fledgling criminal. The idée fixe of *The Enchanters.*

ROBERT F. KENNEDY: U.S. attorney general. Jack Kennedy's hatchet man. A brooding presence in *The Enchanters.*

WILLIAM H. PARKER: LAPD Chief. Boozehound. Brilliant lawyer. A big cheese among *The Enchanters.*

LOIS NETTLETON: Much-honored TV and stage actress. Freddy O.'s in love with her. A luminous presence in *The Enchanters.*

JOHN F. KENNEDY: U.S. president. At moral risk in *The Enchanters.*

PATRICIA KENNEDY LAWFORD: The sister of Bob and Jack. Freddy O.'s lost love. Married to actor Peter Lawford. Addled by Kennedy privilege in *The Enchanters.*

PETER LAWFORD: Actor and Kennedy family stooge. Bombed out of his gourd in *The Enchanters.*

DARYL GATES: Lieutenant, LAPD. Future LAPD Chief. A cunning addition to *The Enchanters.*

ROBBIE MOLETTE: Duplicitous Freddy O. goon. A reptilian presence in *The Enchanters.*

ELIZABETH TAYLOR: Scenery-chewing Film Star. She's running the king-size lox *Cleopatra* over budget. She's played for laughs in *The Enchanters.*

DARRYL F. ZANUCK: Furious and impotent film mogul. He hemorrhages money in *The Enchanters.*

PETE PITCHESS: Power-mad L.A. County Sheriff. A seething shadow figure in *The Enchanters.*

CAROLE LANDIS: Minor '40s film star. A suicide in '48. She unlocks the many mysteries in *The Enchanters.*

BERNIE SPINDEL: Electronic-surveillance whiz. He lays wire in *The Enchanters.*

HERSHEL "BUZZY" STEIN: Two-bit hoodlum. An enigma in *The Enchanters.*

EDDIE FISHER: Noted crooner, fourth husband of Liz Taylor. He's howl-arious in *The Enchanters.*

DEEDEE GRENIER: Golf pro, police informant, low-rent criminal. She's dubiously employed in *The Enchanters.*

PAUL MITCHELL GRENIER: Ex-convict, psycho leather-bar biter. A tidal wave of slime in *The Enchanters.*

SAM YORTY: Mayor of Los Angeles. He cracks jokes and glides through *The Enchanters.*

JACK CLEMMONS: Sergeant, LAPD. Right-wing nut. Provides topical flavor to *The Enchanters.*

NATASHA LYTESS: Russian-born drama coach. Stupidly in love with Marilyn Monroe. She oozes sagacity in *The Enchanters.*

MAX HERMAN: Hard-charging LAPD detective. On the illustrious Hat Squad. He kicks brutal ass in *The Enchanters.*

RED STROMWALL: Hard-charging LAPD detective. On the illustrious Hat Squad. He kicks brutal ass in *The Enchanters.*

HARRY CROWDER: Hard-charging LAPD detective. On the illustrious Hat Squad. He kicks brutal ass in *The Enchanters.*

EDDIE BENSON: Hard-charging LAPD detective. On the illustrious Hat Squad. He kicks brutal ass in *The Enchanters.*

RICHIE DANFORTH/RICK DAWES/RONNIE DEWHURST/ROGER DENFREY: His evil vibe simmers in *The Enchanters.*

MARCIA MARIA DAVENPORT: Divorcée burglary victim. A pervert stalks her in *The Enchanters.*

LEONA JENKS HAGEDOHM: Divorcée burglary victim. A pervert stalks her in *The Enchanters.*

ARDEN JANE BROWNLEIGH: Divorcée burglary victim. A pervert stalks her in *The Enchanters.*

DOROTHY DILYS TRENT: Divorcée burglary victim. A pervert stalks her in *The Enchanters.*

WANDA JEAN D'ALLESIO: Divorcée burglary victim. A pervert stalks her in *The Enchanters.*

LORRAINE SMITH: Divorcée burglary victim. A pervert stalks her in *The Enchanters.*

SHELDON MANDEL, M.D.: A hotshot VD doctor back in the '40s. An ambiguous riddle in *The Enchanters.*

RAY PINKER: LAPD's legendary forensic chemist. He puts together crucial scientific shit in *The Enchanters.*

J. MILLER "GAS CHAMBER" LEAVY: Hard-hitting L.A. prosecutor. He injects a note of probity in *The Enchanters.*

MILT CHARGIN: Bottom-shelf nightclub ventriloquist. He defines '62 L.A.'s raucous sense of humor in *The Enchanters.*

INGRID IRMGARD: Scando-fox, swinging stewardess, dope conduit. She's up to no good in *The Enchanters.*

MAURY DEXTER: Baron of the B flicks. He lends a populist sensibility to *The Enchanters.*

NORM KRAUSE: Ex-LAPD motor cop, extortionist, right-wing nut. He skeeves up *The Enchanters.*

PAUL DE RIVER, M.D.: Corrupt and corrupting headshrinker. Don't go near his couch! A sinister aspect of *The Enchanters.*

JOSÉ BOLAÑOS: Communist, dope peddler, exploiter of Marilyn Monroe's madness. Will he survive *The Enchanters*?

SID LEFFLER: LAPD squadroom cop, going nowhere. Possesses a twisted bent. He stirs Freddy O.'s wrath in *The Enchanters.*

GWEN PERLOFF: Orphanage pal of Marilyn Monroe. Hard-ass criminal. Freddy comes to love her in *The Enchanters.*

"MOTEL MIKE" BAYLESS: Sheriff's detective. Intelligence operator. Women crave his handsome ass in *The Enchanters.*

"NASTY NAT" DENKINS: Freddy O.'s #1 goon. He rocks steady in *The Enchanters.*

PHIL IRWIN: Freddy O.'s #2 goon. He rocks steady in *The Enchanters.*

JIMMY HOFFA: Mobbed-up labor leader. On the run from Bob Kennedy in *The Enchanters.*

HANS MASLICK: Homicide cop in Weimar Berlin. Part-time Brownshirt. Full-time dope fiend. Forensic visionary. Freddy deploys Maslick's vision in *The Enchanters.*

BO BELINSKY: Hunky pitching ace for the L.A. Angels. He helps Freddy set up Liz Taylor in *The Enchanters.*

EDGAR CHACÕN: Justice Department lawyer-investigator. Bobby K.'s pet goon. Cuban exile bagman. He's luridly alive in *The Enchanters.*

J. T. MEADOWS: West L.A. squadroom cop. Hot on the trail of a sex-psycho burglar. A classic dogged cop in *The Enchanters.*

MORTY BENDISH: Scurrilous scribe for the sleazoid *L.A. Mirror-News.* A vivid voice for the tabloid gestalt of *The Enchanters.*

GEORGIA LOWELL FARR: Palisades High School junior. Boon companion of Marilyn Monroe. An artiste in the making. She prophecies the simmering '60s in *The Enchanters.*

LILA LEEDS: Part-time actress, part-time carhop, part-time bait girl. She adds period verismo to *The Enchanters.*

JEANNE CARMEN: Pill peddler, golf trick-shot artist, onetime call girl. Dig her “pill-pillow parties” in *The Enchanters.*

RALPH R. GREENSON, M.D.: Marilyn Monroe’s chief headshrink. Watch Monroe exploit him as he feeds off of her in *The Enchanters.*

RODDY MCDOWALL: Noted film and TV actor. Gay blade about town. Director of underground fuck flicks. Roddy’s got aaallll the lines in *The Enchanters.*

HERSHEL AADLAND: Mobbed up. Corrupt studio labor facilitator. White slaver, head breaker, bad to the bone. He skulks through *The Enchanters.*

MEYER AADLAND: Hersh’s brother. Mobbed up. Corrupt studio labor facilitator. White slaver, head breaker, bad to the bone. He skulks through *The Enchanters.*

IRA AADLAND: Hersh and Meyer’s brother. Mobbed up. Corrupt studio labor facilitator. White slaver, head breaker, bad to the bone. He skulks through *The Enchanters.*

ALBIE AADLAND: Much younger brother of Hersh, Meyer, Ira. He will unlock the door to many secrets in *The Enchanters.*

JUAN MANUEL SALAS/AKA “EL MANNY”: Ex-welterweight. Now a TV repairman. Ingrid Irmgard’s lover. Is he a kidnap conspirator? Find out in *The Enchanters.*

BARBARA PAYTON: Ex-actress, ex–call girl, current carhop. She provides Freddy with good skinny on postwar L.A. in *The Enchanters.*

TIMMY BERLIN: Marilyn Monroe’s circa ’54 lover. He still packs a torch in *The Enchanters.*

DOROTHY DENTON LOWELL FARR: Georgia Lowell Farr’s mom. She can’t believe her daughter and Monroe are tight pals. She finds out in *The Enchanters.*

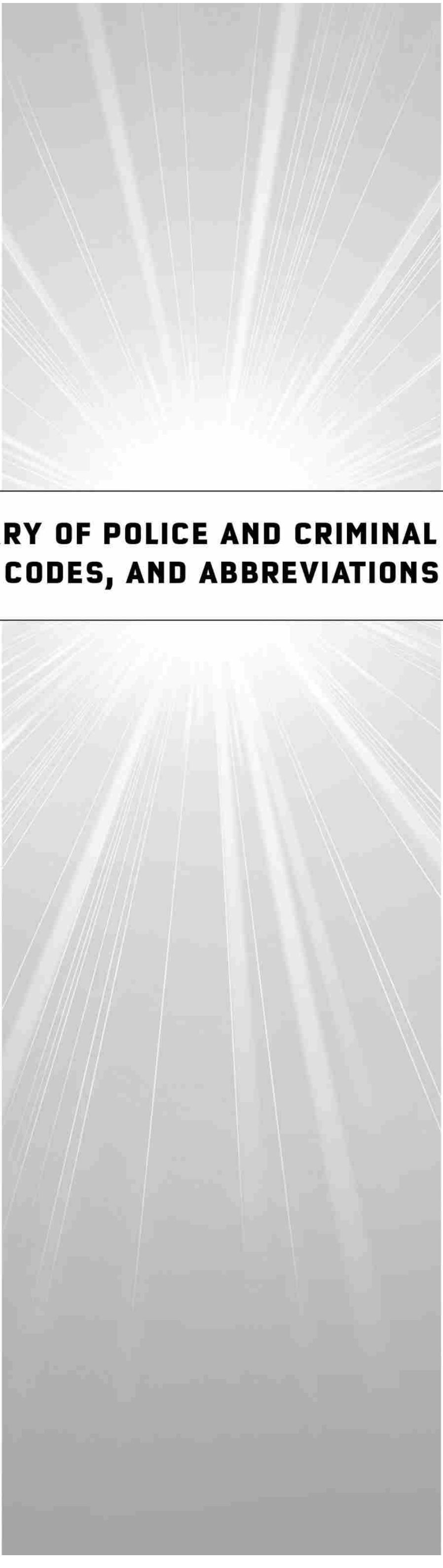
DEL KINNEY, JR.: Ex-Sheriff’s, ex–Alcoholic Beverage Control. Current 20th Century–Fox security boss. He strikes up an alliance with Freddy O. in *The Enchanters.*

BEV SHOFTEL: She runs a storefront mail drop for sleazoid Hollywood types. Said types abound in *The Enchanters.*

EDNA MEDINA: She styles Marilyn Monroe’s hair and gets an earful of Monroe’s crazy shit. Monroe wears her thin in *The Enchanters.*

PRESTON FONG/TERRY JAY AQUINO: Riviera Country Club caddy. Rogue chemist. Hoarder of fine wristwatches. Out strolling for kicks in *The Enchanters.*

GLOSSARY OF POLICE AND CRIMINAL TERMS, CODES, AND ABBREVIATIONS



211: The California Penal Code designation for armed robbery.

459: The California Penal Code designation for burglary.

ABC: The California State Office of Alcoholic Beverage Control.

AD VICE: The LAPD’s Administrative Vice Division.

ADW: The criminal charge of Assault with a Deadly Weapon.

AID: The LAPD’s Accident Investigation Division.

BAIT GIRLS: Young women hired by sleazoid divorce lawyers and corrupt studio bosses to entrap cheating husbands and/or rope in business prospects.

BNDD: The Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

CCW: The criminal charge of Carrying a Concealed Weapon.

CODE 3: A two-way-radio directive urging cops to run their red lights and sirens.

DB: Detective Bureau, headquarters or divisional.

DR #: A designation for the LAPD classification of Divisional Records.

FI CARDS: Field interrogation cards. Patrol cops stop suspicious pedestrians, run warrant checks, and FI-card the mofos.

GREEN SHEETS: Light-hued Teletype pages detailing a person’s criminal offenses.

THE HAT SQUAD: LAPD Robbery Division, 1949–1962. Max Herman, Red Stromwall, Harry Crowder, Eddie Benson. The four very big men wear pearl-gray suits and white fedoras. They chase down the worst of the worst. Do not fuck with them.

HUAC: The Federal and individual state agencies charged with investigating subversive individuals and organizations.

INTEL: The LAPD’s Intelligence Division.

KA SHEETS: Known associate sheets kept on suspected criminals.

THE LOSERS CLUB: A circa ’62 West Hollywood nightclub. Name acts gig the joint. Said joint veers raw. Comics there work topical. A sign on the façade denotes the “Loser of the Week.” It’s the early ’60s, baby. Losers are cool.

NCIC: The National Crime Information Center.

PAB: The Police Administration Building, at 1st and Los Angeles Streets.

R&I: The LAPD’s Records and Information Division.

SHIT: An acronym for the Sheriff’s Handpicked Intelligence Team.

THE “WRONG-DOOR RAID”: A November ’54 cluster fuck. Involved: Freddy Otash, Marilyn Monroe, Joe DiMaggio, Phil Irwin, and Frank Sinatra. This Mickey Mouse scandal alerted the California State Assembly to the corrupt practices of scandal magazines and the bent detectives they hired—chief among them, Freddy Otash.

A Note About the Author

James Ellroy was born in Los Angeles. He is the author of the Underworld U.S.A. Trilogy: *American Tabloid, The Cold Six Thousand,* and *Blood's A Rover,* and the L.A. Quartet novels: *The Black Dahlia, The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential,* and *White Jazz.* He is the recipient of the *Los Angeles Times* Robert Kirsch Award for lifetime achievement. He lives in Colorado.

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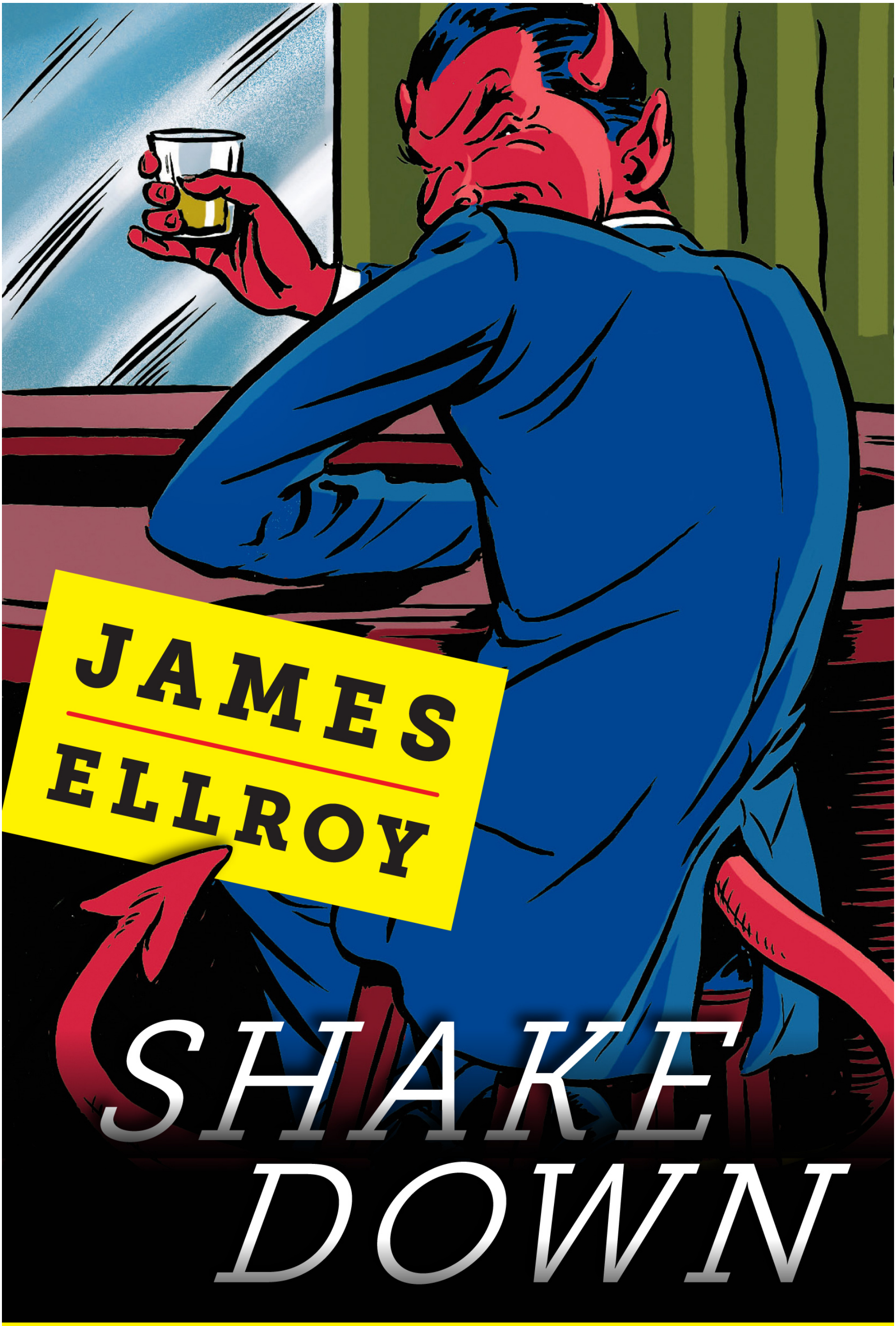

JAMES ELLROY

SHAKEDOWN

BYLINER FICTION

Shakedown

Freddy Otash Confesses

By James Ellroy

BYLINER FICTION

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Cover illustration by Jonathan Carlson

ISBN: 978-1-61452-047-4

Byliner Inc.
San Francisco, California
www.byliner.com

For press inquiries, please contact media@byliner.com

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Prologue

Cell 2607
Penance Penitentiary
Reckless-Wrecker-of-Lives Block
Pervert Purgatory
6/16/2012

I've spent twenty years in this fucking hellhole. Now they tell me I can memoir-map my misadventures and write my way out.

All that religious shit I disdained as a kid is true. There's heaven for the good folks, hell for the beastfully *baaaaaad*. There's purgatory for guys like me—caustic cads that capitalized on a sick system and caused catastrophe. I've pondered my sins for two decades. I've relived my earthly transit in dystopian detail. My cunning keepers are currently dangling a deal:

Record your jaundiced journey, and you may hit heaven on a high note. Baby, it's time to *CONFESS*.

Purgatory is Shitsville. You're stuck with the body you had on earth when you died. You eat nothing but coach-class airplane food. There's no booze, no jazzy intrigue, no *women*. My earthly victims visit my cell unpredictably. They remind me of my misdeeds and jab me in the ass with red-hot pokers. Fags flit down from heaven and scold me for outing them back in the fag-fragging '50s. Fuck—there's that limp-wristed lisper Johnnie Ray. The prongs of his pitchfork are *white*-hot. Johnnie had a righteous run from '53 to '56. His record "Cry" sold mega-millions. *Confidential* cornholed him. The piece was titled "Men's Room *Mishegas*: Jittery Johnnie Strikes Again!" Johnnie threatened to sue the magazine. I kicked his ass as a deterrent.

Fuck, Johnnie—those prongs are *hot!!!!!* How many times do I have to tell you I'm sorry?

Dig this, earthlings: You pay for your sins in the afterlife. I am telling it like it is.

My ass is always sore. Ava Gardner jabbed me last week. Ava was a noxious nympho with a delirious devotion to dark meat. I set her up with a Jungle Johnny packing studly steel. My boys kicked the door in and snapped photos. *Confidential* ran insidious ink.

April '54: "Ava Gardner: Mud Shark Mama!"

It was wrong. I'm ashamed. I've stewed in my evil shit for twenty years. Earthlings, I'm *sorry*.

My keepers have supplied me with pen and paper and a complete run of *Confidential*. My synapses are sizzling with a million malignant memories. Fred Otash, 1922–1992: rogue cop, private eye, shakedown artist. Soldier of fortune and demonic deus ex machina. The hellhound who held Hollywood captive. The man with all the sicko secrets you irksome earthlings want to hear.

Confidential presaged the infantile Internet. *Our* gobs of gossip were repugnantly *real*. Today's blowhard bloggers and their tattle texts? Pussyfooting punks *all*. We stung the studios and popped the politicians. We voyeur-vamped America and got her hooked on the devilish dish. *We created today's tell-all media culture.*

Yeah, I'm sorry. Yeah, I want to get paroled to that cloud bank upstairs. *But*—I more urgently want to groove my wild ride once again.

My keepers have given me back my 1950s-vintage body. It's a Machiavellian move to make me recall. They want to prime my prose and mold my moral vision. They've put me in telepathic touch with an earthling writer named James Ellroy.

Ellroy's a dipshit. I knew him in my waning months alive. I've been granted *tell-all* telepathy. I *will* know that cocksucker *cold*.

He ripped off my persona for a character in his overhyped novel *L.A. Confidential*. The book and major movie chewed Chihuahua dicks. I met Ellroy in the summer of '92. He wanted to turn my life story into a boffo TV series. He paid me some gelt for my FBI file—but I kicked off before he could glom it from me. I don't trust the motherfucker. He's a right-wing religious nut and a backer of Mitt Romney's current White House bid. I'm an Obama man—I dig the notion of a coon president. My keepers are setting up a purgatory-to-L.A. telepathy call. My most fitful fear so far? That Ellroy located my secret diaries. Man, did I dish the dirt on *myself*! I'm afraid that Ellroy is still beating the dead horse of an Otash TV show.

Fuck—I *need* to get upstairs. Montgomery Clift pitchforked me yesterday. *Confidential* lampooned the lavender Lilliputian as "Princess Tiny Meat." JFK followed Monty. He had Jackie in tow. It was a 1953 stink. I circulated a tape of Jack bringing the brisket to Ingrid Bergman. Frank Sinatra played the tape to Jackie and created some surging tsuris. *Aaaaaaaargh*—those pitchfork pokes hurt!!! Marilyn Monroe was the next penance poker. Baby, you *did* blow half the pharmacists in Beverly Hills in trade for Nembutal and Dilaudid! Maybe I shouldn't have spilled the beans, but I was within my First Amendment rights!

Brain blip—dipshit Ellroy's in my head. Reciprocal re-blip—now I'm in his.

It's *my* story, not his. He's only here to negate my nihilism and noodle my narrative.

Let this mind-bending march down memory lane begin …

1

Nate & Al's Deli
Beverly Hills
8/12/92

"I was working Central Vice in '51. We got word on a nigger whorehouse operating out of a pad at the Villa Elaine. I hotfooted it over there."

My booth at the deli. *My* audience: four showbiz hebes in worse shape than me. Walkers, canes, and oxygen tanks clogging the aisles to the kitchen. Fractious Freddy O., holding court.

It's summer '92. I'm 70 and in bad fucking shape. I've consumed a fifth of Scotch and three packs a day since kindergarten. I've got emphysema and a bum pump. I'm counting on my native panache to get me to 80. I know it's a lunar-looped long shot.

Sol Sidell said, "Get to it, Freddy. You roll to the pad and then what?"

Sinful Sol: a jailbaiter from jump street. He produced beach-blanket flicks in the '60s. I pulled him out of the shit in '57. He was smoking Mary Jane and poking two underage twists.

I said, "Okay, I roll to the crib and peep a side window. Shit—there's Sam Spiegel, the cat that produced *Lawrence of Arabia* and *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. He's muff-diving a black chick on the rag. That was a boss beef, back in '51. I told Sambo that it's dues time. A morals bust or a monthly donation to the Fred Otash Retirement Fund."

My pals yuk-yukked. I took a big bite of my Rueben sandwich and felt a twinge in my chest. I chased a Digitalis tablet with coffee and watched Jules Slotnick suck on his oxygen mask. Julie produced socially conscious turkeys about wetback farmworkers and oppressed *schvartzes*. It was pure atonement. He made all his live-in maids blow him. He held their green cards as a hedge against their refusal to bestow daily head.

Sid Resnick said, "Give us another one, Freddy."

The Sidster was Mr. Holocaust Heartache. He produced *schlock*-umentaries for the B'nai B'rith. Soulman Sid: A chubby chaser/shine shtupper combo. Currently captivated by a Congo cutie weighing 285.

I plumbed my brain stash for a tale my pals hadn't heard. Two elderly fruits sashayed by the booth and evil-eyed me. *That* gave me my cue.

I pointed to them. "I got tipped to an all-male pajama party in '56. I paid some LAPD hard boys a yard apiece to bust it and brought my camera along. Those cats were piled up in a five-way with Rock Hudson, Sal Mineo, and a dude with giant acne cysts. *Confidential* wrote it up. Universal paid me ten G's to keep the Rockster's name out of the story."

The whole booth roared. Julie Slotnick gasped for breath and oxygenized. Al Wexler yukked out a bagel chunk and said, "Tell us your motto again, Freddy. Man, it's a gasser."

Alky Al owned six porno bookstores, fourteen fag bars, and a nose-job clinic. He plowed a truck full of migrant Mexican workers and left six dead. I got it mashed down to a Mickey Mouse misdemeanor. Al *owed* me.

I killed my sandwich. Here it is, Freddy O.'s credo, intoned like the Gettysburg Address:

"I'll work for anyone but Communists. I'll do anything short of murder."

Boffo: My boys clapped and guffawed. Heads turned one booth over. An older guy flashed an LAPD retirement badge. I made him: Lieutenant Mike Matthews, a pious aide to my old foe, Chief William H. Parker, a.k.a. Whiskey Bill.

He stepped out of the booth. He said, "Freddy shot an unarmed man in cold blood. Has he told you *that* one?"

The cocksucker *nailed* me.

The cocksucker *winked* at my pals and ambled out to the street.

Sol said, "Come on, Freddy."

Julie said, "*Give,* boychik."

Sid said, "Give it *up,* living legend. Don't be a CT."

Al said, "You've been holding back, Freddy. You know that's not nice."

Another twinge hit my heart. I dipped a fistful of French fries in gravy and snarfed them. I popped another Digitalis and stared down my pals. *Woooooo*—that Fred Otash don't-fuck-with-me glare.

They twitched, flinched, and looked down. I waited a moment and let their submission simmer. I said, “I’m meeting a cat named James Ellroy here in half an hour. He wrote some shitty novels, and he wants to turn my life story into a TV show. If his money’s green, I’ll play along. I’ve requested my Freedom of Information Act file from the feds. It’s full of good dirt the putz will cream for.”

Sol looked up first. “It’s 1992. The ’50s are stale bread.”

Al looked up next. “The ’50s are a drug on the market. You can’t sell that shit to anyone but white stiffs in Des Moines.”

Sid looked up third. “Your story’s too ugly. It’s the Age of Aquarius, bubi. The wetback dishwashers are unionized, and the fruits want their rights. I predict a jig president one day. The only way Ellroy’s story will fly is to indict your evil, camel-fucker ass.”

Julie said, “Fuck your life story. How about a show about a movie producer who extorts blow jobs on a daily basis? It’s got pizzazz and social significance. You call it *Head Man* and run it on one of those cable channels that feature immoral content.”

I laffed. It built into howls and roars. I felt my corned beef and sauerkraut on the rise. I got floaty. I popped a bread crust out on my plate. Fuck—*this* again.

The booth tumbled. My pals vaporized. My vision went black. Ruffling calendar pages flew backwards. Decades disappeared and devolved. Please stop somewhere—I don’t know if I’m dead or in a dream—

* * *

Robbery Division Squad Room
LAPD Detective Bureau
6th Floor, City Hall
2/4/49

There I am. I’m primping in front of a hallway mirror in full uniform. Fred Otash at 27: beefcake, boss, and bangin’ them bonaroo bitches.

I exemplify greasy good looks. I’m full-blooded Lebanese—a camel cad from the get-go. I was a Marine Corps DI during the Big War. I joined the LAPD in late ’45. I went on the grift *faaaaaast*. I put together an ex-jarhead burglary ring. My downtown footbeat provided me with a road map of exploitable biz fronts. My gang hit pawnshops that fenced contraband, pharmacies that pushed narcotics, bookie joints behind storefront churches. I fingered the jobs. My gang clouted cash and merchandise. They were 2 a.m. creepers. I knew when the graveyard-shift prowl cars were elsewhere and passed the word along.

I've always been corruptible and tempted by the take. I don't know where it came from. I had a squaresville home life in Bumfuck, Massachusetts. My mom and dad loved me. Nobody buttfucked me in my crib. The tree limb bent early in my case. I've got a sketchy semblance of a code. There's shit I'll do, there's shit I won't do. The line wavered on that cold day back in '49.

I combed my hair and adjusted my necktie. The squad room buzzed heavy all around me. A shootout just went down at 9th and Figueroa. A traffic cop traded shots with a heist man. The cop was hit *baaaaad* and was not expected to live. The heist man was grazed and *was* expected to live. Both men were at Georgia Street Receiving right now.

The squad room buzzed. The squad-room phones rang incessant. I thought about the business cards I carried and handed out to women. They were understated and *oozed* high class. My name and phone number were printed in the middle. Right below: "Mr. Nine Inches."

I heard heavy footsteps. I got bombed by booze breath.

"If you're through looking at yourself, I've got something."

I turned around. It was a Robbery bull named Harry Fremont. Harry had a vivid rep. He allegedly stomped two pachucos to death during the Zoot Suit Riots. He allegedly pimped transvestite whores out of a he-she bar. He was *non*-allegedly shitfaced drunk at noon.

"Yeah, Harry?"

"Be useful, kid. There's a cop killer at Georgia Street. Chief Horrall thinks you should take care of it."

I said, "Take care of what? The cop isn't dead."

Harry dropped a key fob in my hand. "4-A-32. It's in the watch commander's space. Look under the backseat."

I steadied myself on the wall and lurched back to the bullpen. I zombie-walked downstairs. I couldn't feel my feet find the pavement. I swear this is true.

A K-car was parked in that space. The key fit the ignition. I couldn't feel my hands on the steering wheel. The garage was dark. Overhead pipes leaked. Water drops turned into sharp-toothed goblins.

I recall pulling out onto Spring Street. I recall driving slow. I might have prayed for *nothing* to be under the backseat.

The heist man was being held in the jail ward. He had to be fit for a transfer to the city lockup soon. It was 43 years ago. It's *still* etched in *Sin*-emascope and Surround Sound. I can *still* see the faces of passersby on the street.

There—Georgia Street Receiving.

The jail ward was on the north side. The ward for square-john folks was to the south. A narrow pathway separated the buildings. It hit me then:

They know you'll do it. They've sized you up as that kind of guy.

I reached under the backseat. Right there: transfer papers for one Ralph Mitchell Horvath and a .32 snub-nose.

I put the gun in my front pocket and grabbed the papers. I walked down the pathway and went through the jail-ward door. The deskman was LAPD. His eyes drifted to a punk handcuffed to a drainpipe. The punk wore a loafer jacket and slit-bottomed khakis. One arm was bandaged. His lips were covered with chancre sores. He looked insolent.

The deskman did the knife-across-throat thing on the QT. I handed him the papers and uncuffed and recuffed the punk. The deskman said, "Bon voyage, sweetheart."

I shoved the punk outside and pointed him up the pathway.

He walked ahead of me.

I couldn't feel my feet.

I couldn't feel my legs.

I felt my heart pump blood on overdrive and wondered why I couldn't feel my own limbs.

No windows on the north and south buildings. No pedestrians on Georgia Street.

No witnesses.

I pulled the gun from my pocket and fired over my own head. The gun kicked and lashed life back into my arms. The noise pounded a pulse to my legs.

The punk wheeled around. He moved his lips. A word came out as a squeak. I pulled my service revolver and shot him in the mouth. His teeth exploded as he fell. I placed the throw-down piece in his right hand.

He was trying to say "Please." That's what always gets me—every time I have this dream.

* * *

The cop lived. He’d sustained a through-and-through wound. He was back on duty in a week.

Vicious vengeance. Wrathfully wrong in retrospect. A crack in the crypt of my soul.

Harry Fremont passed the word: The Otash kid is kosher. Chief C. B. Horrall sent me a bottle of Old Crow. The grand jury sacked him a few months later. He was jungled up in a call-girl racket and much more. An interim chief was brought in.

Reform boded. I knew *that.* I *didn’t* know that future chief Bill Parker had a target pinned to my chest.

Ralph Mitchell Horvath: 1918–1949.

Ralphie: car thief, stickup man, weenie wagger. Hooked on yellow jackets and muscatel.

He left a widow. I started sending her a C-note a month, anonymously.

Calendar pages started ruffling. It’s where my dreams always get scary. They might go backwards and bypass my birth. They might go forward and announce my death. I’m fucked both ways. I’m no longer the freewheeling Fred O.

There’s a familiar thudding noise. It sounds like magazines slapping the pavement. We’re still in ’49. It can’t be *Confidential*—the rag didn’t hit the stands until ’53.

There’s that kid. There’s that wagon. He’s a newsboy. He’s off-loading magazines.

My eyelids rolled back. Time recalibrated. 43 years went *poof!* The thuds were a tall guy hitting the table. He wore a loud Hawaiian shirt and wheat jeans. He vibed *GEEK.*

He snarfed the remains of my Reuben sandwich. He said, “Mr. Otash, I’m James Ellroy.” The vibe solidified. Add “opportunist” to the cocksucker’s résumé.

I told him to sit down. He did it. I looked out to the street. My pals were hassling with their oxygen tanks and walkers. The sight spooked me. I reflex-popped a Digitalis and two Valium.

Ellroy slurped Julie Slotnick’s coffee. “It’s a pleasure, sir.”

I said, “Run it all by me again. Don’t be surprised when I mention money.”

Ellroy whipped out a checkbook and pen. “I’m calling the show *Shakedown.* It’s your life, times, and moral journey. You were a sack of shit. I'm a zealous Lutheran out to indict your sleazy misconduct and place it within the larger context of scandal-rag journalism and America in the '50s. Moreover, the actor who portrays you will have scalding-hot love scenes with the greatest actresses of *this* era."

I tapped the checkbook. "I fucked Jackie Kennedy in '53. She was engaged to Jack then. She said I was the biggest and the best."

Ellroy said, "I fucked Jackie Kennedy in '54. I was six years old. She said I was bigger and better than you."

I laffed, I roared, I howled. My gut bounced and banged the table. Ellroy wrote a check and dropped it on my plate. Ten G's—*va-va-va-voom!*

He said, "I want to see your FBI file."

I caught my breath. "It's on the way."

"I want to see the diaries that you've kept since the late '40s."

I went hot-hot and cold-cold. Freon Freddy, Frigid Freddy—*make it sound good.*

"It's a fucking myth, kid. I was never much good at writing shit down."

Ellroy shook his head. "Nix, boss. I spent some time with Harry Fremont the week before he died. He told me you whacked a hood named Ralph Mitchell Horvath in '49 and started writing the diary then. He said that you wrote it on bookies' flash paper, in case you had to burn it quick."

I palpitated and palsied. Old age fucks with your ability to lie.

"Like I said, kid. The diaries don't exist."

Ellroy fondled his checkbook. "I'll let it slide for now. And I'll come up green if you ever want to reconsider."

The Valium hit more—I started to go loosey-goosey.

"I want something written into my contract."

"Tell me."

"I want a boss guy to play me. Think of Clark Gable crossed with porno cat John Holmes."

Ellroy yukked. We shook hands. I pocketed the check and signaled Abe Rosen at the counter.

It's our regular deal. I grease Abe with double sawbucks. I get faux-paged for calls from big *machers.*

Abe hit the intercom. "Mr. Otash! President Bush is on the line!"

* * *

Memory Lane. It's *the* destination for old guys.

Ellroy's check cleared. I holed up at my pad through Labor Day. My diaries were packed in flame-retardant boxes. They were stashed with some piquant porno pics. Ellroy was back in Connecticut. We talked most nights. I went through my scrapbooks and dished the dirt on my loved ones, lewd ones, and lost ones.

The old photos had my gears going. I'm there with Frank, Dino, and Sammy. I broke legs for them. Why do they seem to be cringing at my touch? There's pics of my bed at my old Sunset Strip penthouse. I called it the "Landing Strip." The name derived from my three-ways with stewardesses, starlets, and stars. Liz Taylor and I swung with a stew named "Barb" on many groin-grabbing occasions. There's pics of my true love, Joi Lansing. We had some *goooooooooooood* years together. She treated me *gooooooooood.* I treated her *gooooooooood* until I treated her *baaaaaaaaad.* I don't know why I flip-flopped. My diaries describe that *meshuggener* metaphysic.

There's my dictionary and thesaurus. They were teaching tools for the writers at *Confidential*. Utilize alliteration and inventive slurs. Homos are "licentious lispers." Dykes are "beefcake butches." Drunks are "bibulous bottle hounds" and "dyspeptic dipsos." Vulgarize and vitalize and crazily create a popular parlance. Make it sinfully *siiiiiing.*

Ellroy's noxious novels—stamped with *my* style. Ellroy's pious putz personality—an odious one to *me.*

My pals came over on Labor Day. We grilled burgers and hot dogs and killed three quarts of Jim Beam. They left at 2 a.m. A male nurse corps wheeled them down to their limos. The process took half an hour. It was akin to the Berlin Airlift. Walkers crashed, oxygen tanks toppled and rolled. It was fucking hard to endure.

I settled in to watch a *Dragnet* rerun. I bought the judge in four of Jack Webb's drunk-driving beefs. I shtupped Jack's ex-wife, soaring songstress Julie London.

A dozen Famous Amos cookies comprised my late-night snack. I'd seen the episode before. Sergeant Joe Friday busts a hippie punk on a snootful of LSD. I missed Jack. We had some yuks together. He kicked off back in—

A sledgehammer hit my heart. A steel croquet mallet followed. A monster loomed in front of me. He's Johnnie Ray, he's Monty Clift, he's politicians pounded and movie stars mauled—a kaleidoscope of condemnation.

They railed at me. *J'accuse, j'accuse, j'accuse!!!!!* They hurled ingots at my chest. I gasped. My left arm exploded. I hit the medical-emergency button on my phone.

Then some pinpoint fades to black. Then my pad turns topsy-turvy. Then a big crash and my door shattered like my left arm. Then the mask on my mouth and a fraction of my sight back. Then the gurney, the white-coat men, and the swoop aloft.

One coat guy looked like James Ellroy—but I knew it couldn't be. An image came to me. It was bright, vivid, *old.* I saw a little red wagon. I saw words on a strip of red paint. Everything started to fade then. The white-coat man morphed into Ellroy. I *still* knew it couldn't be.

Ellroy said, "Hey, Freddy. What's shaking?"

My breath rasped. I knew I only had two words left.

I said, "Red Ryder."

2

James Ellroy's journal
7/12/92

Freddy, I hardly knew ye.

I *dug* you—but didn't *respect* you. There's a distinction. How's the afterlife, fuckhead? Repent, you reptile. Yeah, I ripped off your raucous way with words. But I'm not you—you homo hater, dyke defamer, and racist raconteur.

The obits ran tripartite. The prime gist: ex-cop Otash hires on with *Confidential*. He runs an intelligence network and gathers information on celebrity hijinks. Part two was more pithy: Freddy was a longtime extortionist. His intelligence network supplied the dirt for his shakedown racket. Part three jazzed me. The scandal-rag era bellied up in '59. *Confidential*—kaput. Desperate Freddy pulled a racetrack caper. He doped a nag named Wonder Boy and lost his PI's license. He became a mob lapdog. Jimmy Hoffa hired him to get the goods on JFK *shtupping* Marilyn Monroe. His aging Marine Corps goons spilled the tale to reporters. Freddy bugged Peter Lawford's beachfront fuck pad and caught Jack in the sack. *Ooooooooooooh,* daddy-o: my pulsatingly possible TV show could run indefinitely!!!!!

I got the word on Freddy's death and flew back to L.A. quicksville. The papers were full of Otash lore. Yawn: his adversarial relationship with LAPD chief William H. Parker. His '57 interview with TV ham Mike Wallace. His relationship with *Confidential's* pervo publisher, Bondage Bob Harrison. Snore: "Fred Otash was the founding father of the tabloid-TV era." Snooze: "Otash defined the paranoiac horrors of the Red-Scare Decade." An ex-Liberace bun boy dropped a pearl in with the dross: "I know that Freddy got Lee out of a jam in the early '50s, but he damn well got paid for it."

Freddy owned a condo off the Sunset Strip. My first task:

intercept his FBI Freedom of Information Act file. I talked to Freddy on the day he died. The file hadn't arrived. I've called the building's manager every day since. I impersonated Freddy's lawyer and said I was expecting some files from the feds. The man called me as I left for the airport. Sir, that box just arrived.

I rented a car at LAX. I drove to Chez Otash and snatched the file posthaste. A small UPS box held all the material. I carried the box to my car and tore into it.

Every page was heavily ink-redacted. Odd lines were untouched. Sixteen pages of blacked-out lines and *this*:

"Accused of extortion," "accused of bribery," "accused of harassment," "accused of suborning perjury," "accused of jury tampering."

Please—give me some shit I don't know.

A photo ID sheet was included. I recognized pics of Freddy's squeeze, Joi Lansing, and Freddy's snitch-pal, '50s-cool James Dean. Bob Harrison—*mucho* snapshots. Liberace—of course. Liz Taylor—sure. Her ex-hubby Michael Wilding? Yeah, I get it. Ward Wardell, Race Rockwell, Donkey Don Eversall? Freddy mentioned them. They were fruit hustlers in his stable.

The file was a bust.

That left Freddy's secret diaries.

Freddy said they did not exist.

They might be locked in a bank vault and thus out of reach. They might be packed in a box in that condo across the street.

Do it, dipshit. Life itself is the Big Shakedown, and you can't let this one go.

* * *

I broke in that night.

It wasn't hard. I threw my weight at a loose stretch of the door-doorjamb juncture. The door popped easy. I carried a penlight and prowled in the dark.

I tossed the cabinets. I eyeballed the shelves. I displaced 10,000 leisure sweatsuits. Freddy's scrapbooks were useless. His gold Rolex was a fake. I found a Nazi Luger in the sock drawer. I found a stack of porn vids under the sink. I hit pay dirt in a hall closet.

Photos: plastic-sheathed and lovingly preserved.

Marlon Brando with a dick in his mouth.

Lena Horne muff-diving Lady Bird Johnson.

And—

A box full of bookies' flash paper.

I skimmed a few pages. Freddy block-printed legibly. He deployed a calendar-page motif to encapsulate anecdotes. It was lurid lightning in a bottle. It was the Hellacious Holy Grail and the Demonic Dead Sea Scrolls.

The entire TV series and a corresponding run of novellas came to me *rápidamente.*

A photo fell out of the box. Holy shit—Rin Tin Tin fucking Katharine Hepburn.

I grabbed the box and put the photo in my pocket. My wife Helen was a big Hepburn fan.

3

Downtown L.A.
10/4/52

Calendar sheets ruffled. Paper wilted and blew. I recalled that hot summer and those fall storms. I was working the Central day watch. I'd disbanded my burglary gang. Two of my men got hooked on Big H. They were decidedly desperate and snitch-prone. I'd gambled away all my gelt. I was living on a schmuck cop's pay and was suffused with the blues. William H. Parker became chief in '50. He instituted righteous reforms and riddled the ranks with a phalanx of finks to sniff out miscreants and misconduct. I drove a Lin-*coon Coon*-tinental *coon*-vertible. I won it in a niggertown card game. It was a "suspect expenditure." Parker's boys tattled to the hellhound *jefe*. I got called in and grindingly grilled. Parker warned me not to be a Bolshevik and said, "I've got my four eyes on you."

The rain was a mad monsoon. Wild winds whipped me on my footbeat. I stopped at a Gamewell phone and called the station. The deskman told me to hotfoot to 668 South Olive. They were shooting a *Racket Squad* episode in the lobby. They needed a hard boy to shoo off autograph hounds.

I headed over there. I caught a taut tailwind and slalomed most of the way. It was a medical building with a pharmacy and adjoining lobby. I caught a frazzled fracas on the set right off.

Lights, cameras, boom mikes—and *action.*

A jug-eared cat was hassling a boss blonde. He wore pegged chinos and a gone jacket. She was built from the ground up.

The cast and crew eyeballed the scene. Jug-ears grabbed the blonde's arm and applied abrasions. It gored my gonads and hit my heartstrings. I walked up behind him. He saw my shadow and swiveled. I broke his nose with a palm shot. I looped a left to his larynx. I kneed his nuts as he dropped.

The blonde's jaw dropped. I tipped my hat to her.

Jug-ears cradled his busted beak and moaned for his mama. The cast and crew clapped.

The blonde said, “He’s my ex-husband. He stiffed me for three months’ alimony.”

I kicked him in the head and lifted his wallet. He mama-moaned anew. The cast and crew wolf-whistled.

The wallet weighed in heavy. I fanned the cash compartment and counted a sea of C-notes. I handed them to the blonde. She dropped them in her purse and dropped a dollar on her ex-hubby. She said, “For old times. He was good in the sack.”

I laffed. I reached in my pocket and handed her a card. Understated class: my name, phone number, and “Mr. Nine Inches.”

She dropped the card in with her cash stash. A guy yelled, “You’re up, Joi! Scene 16-B!”

She winked and walked away from me. I handcuffed Jug-ears behind his back and pay-phone-called the station. Holly-*weird*: they filmed the scene with the ex coma-conked and cuffed on the floor.

I walked outside and smoked a cigarette. A black-and-white cruised by and hauled the ex to Georgia Street Receiving. I thought of Ralph Mitchell Horvath. A kid brought me a cup of coffee and returned my calling card. She’d written on the back:

“Joi Lansing. 39-25-38. Googie’s, tonight at 8:30.”

* * *

I had a wolf’s lair above the Strip. It was furnished with Jap flags and shadow-boxed Lugers. I never made it overseas. I spent the war at Parris Island, South Carolina. There’s a periscope affixed to my back porch. I use it to spy on neighbor women.

I’ve always voyeurized.

I’ve always studied people.

I’ve always wanted to know their secret shit.

My bedroom featured a walk-in closet. I blew my burglary stash on Sy Devore suits. My dresser drawer was full of lacy lingerie. My lynx-like lovers left me magnificent mementoes.

I’ve got a file on Ralph Mitchell Horvath. I culled it from PDs and penitentiaries statewide. I knew *all* Ralphie’s secrets.

He poked a Mexican sissy in reform school. He fathered two half-wit kids. He pimped his wife to cover his poker debts. He scored prescription goofballs from a Chink pharmacist.

It bought me some distance on Ralphie. The more you know about people, the less they get to you. I've known that godless gospel since my crib.

I dressed sharp for Joi Lansing. I wore my crocodile loafers and slipped my heater into a shoulder rig. A spritz of Lucky Tiger—and a two-minute stroll to the meet.

Googie's was a coffee cave on Sunset and Crescent Heights. The Space Age aesthetic rubbed me raw. Fluorescent lights, Naugahyde, chrome. A hopping hive for showbiz shitheels headed for hell.

I walked in and watched Joi Lansing table-hop. She wore a too-tight gown and a mink stole with a pawnshop tag attached. The joint was bustling about a sneak peek in Glendale. A Googie's regular had an on-screen love scene with Bob Mitchum. Bad Boy Bob kept slipping her tongue. They shared a reefer in the RKO backlot. She blew him in Howard Hughes's limousine.

A hubbub juked the joint—I knew I radiated *FUZZ*. I crashed into a booth and unbuttoned my jacket. A fag flamed by and ogled my piece. He joined a hen party one booth over. More dirt spilled: the barman at the Cockpit Lounge ran an all-boy slave auction. Adlai Stevenson got enthralled and embroiled. The hens hooted—ha, ha, ha!

Joi sat down. I pointed to the pawnshop tag. She pulled it off and dropped it in the ashtray.

I said, "Thanks for the invitation."

Joi said, "Thanks for the revenge. That guy fractured my left wrist on Saint Patrick's Day '49."

"You're too young to have an ex-husband."

"Yeah, and I'm estranged from number two. I'd head to Reno for a quickie, but it might not work. We got hitched in TJ, so the paperwork could get dicey."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"Well, you're a policeman."

I lit a cigarette and held the pack out. Joi shook her head.

"He's on parole, and he's a grasshopper. You could call Narco."

I shook my head. "Give me his address. I'll think of something."

"He'll be *here* at 9:30. He's been living at the Y since I kicked him out, and the fry cook takes his phone calls. He's a non-union grip. I stiffed him a fake message after I met you. You're a producer at Fox with a job for him. You're meeting him in the parking lot."

I laffed. "You just assumed that I'd *do* it?"

Joi laffed. "Come on, Freddy. That stunt you pulled downtown and ‘Mr. Nine Inches’? What *won’t* you do for money or gash?”

A Mex busboy sidled by. I grabbed a belt loop and stopped him. He saw my roscoe and got the wigged-out wetback shakes.

I stuffed a twenty in his shirt pocket. “Go to the kitchen and get me a bag of weed. You’ll be on the night train to Culiacán if you don’t deliver.”

Pancho genuflected and took off. Joi laffed and bummed a cigarette. I blew a high smoke ring. She blew a higher one. It hit the ceiling and mushroomed.

The Mex came back with the goods. I told him to scram. The hen party squawked a new nugget: Ava Gardner dumped Sinatra for a heavy-hung shine.

I said, “What’s your real name?”

Joi said, “Joyce Wassmansdorff.”

“Give me the fill-in.”

“I’m from Salt Lake City. I’m 24. I went to the MGM school and went nowhere.”

“But now you’re up and coming?”

Joi stubbed out her cigarette. “I’m uncredited in six pictures and credited in four. I’ve got *Racket Squad, Gangbusters,* and a comedy with Jane Russell in the can.”

“Give me some dirt on Russell.”

“What’s to give? She’s a goody two-shoes married to that quarterback for the Rams.”

My stomach growled. I noshed a breadstick and eyeballed the room. Easy make: the two crew cuts by the takeout stand were Parker boys. Harry Fremont pointed them out to me last month. They were purse-lipped Puritans out to bag bent cops.

Joi said, “You’ll need money to enjoy my company.”

I smiled and re-eyeballed the room. A punk I popped for flim-flam made me and beat feet. Joi said, “It’s 9:30. Look for a little guy with a big pompadour.”

I walked back to the parking lot. Pompadour lounged on a ’51 Merc. I got close to him. He orbed my shoulder rig and went *Oh, shit.* He wore light-colored slacks. Piss coursed and covered his cuffs. I deferred to diplomacy.

“Don’t contest the divorce. I’ll negotiate your alimony payments. Send the check directly to me. I’ll take my cut and deliver the rest to Miss Lansing.”

Pompadour held up his hands—Don’t hit me, hoss. I pulled out the bag of weed and caught his left mitt in one motion. I pressed hard to ensure a full fingerprint spread.

It started drizzling. I gestured toward the street. Joi Lansing's second ex-hubby took off running.

"Hollywood could use a guy like you."

I turned around. "You mean I could use Hollywood."

Joi gave me a big kiss.

It all started just like that.

4

I heisted a bookie room a week later.

A Hitler mask concealed my identity. I entered with an empty grocery sack and exited with four grand. I spent half the swag on Joi and bankrolled my biz with the remainder. A Beverly Hills pharmacist fronted me a pill pusher's Parthenon. Harry Fremont sold me eight ice-cold roscoes. Joi hipped me to a discreet scrape doctor. I gave him a signing bonus and told him I'd be out seeking nice-girls-in-a-jam. Guns, dope, and a felonious physician. My girlfriend as conduit to a corrupt culture.

Joi hit Hollywood in '42. She was 14. She matriculated at MGM and met *everybody*. She was both low-rent and confoundingly *connected.* She knew *everything.* She was a one-babe Baedeker. She knew bartenders, bellhops, busboys, call girls, casting directors, and cads. She knew pornographers, pushers, and pimps. She knew troves of tramps in trouble. She knew that this soiled city lacked a single fix-it man. That was *my* role.

Joi greased Holly-*weird* with my handouts. Scores of scurrilous scamsters licked up my largesse. We were buying potentially profitable dirt.

I worked LAPD. I got an off-duty gig as security boss at the Hollywood Ranch Market. It was licentiously legendary and open-all-nite. I bagged shoplifters and check kiters. I lived within my means and never gave Bill Parker's goons a hook to entrap me. I took Joi to Ciro's and the Mocambo. I saw intelligence-squad cops dead-eying the scene. I braced them as a brother and ballyhooed my big nights financed by big days at the track.

I sold guns, I sold pills, I brokered abortions. I mail-order-hawked a filthy film called *Mae West's Menagerie.* Shack jobs were verboten for LAPD men. Joi and I trysted at her mom's pad in Redondo Beach. She said the word was moving out and metastasizing: Fred O.'s the man to see.

Assignments rolled in. I pounded a perv who'd whipped out his whang on Duke Wayne's wife. Duke paid me five yards and gave me the skinny on Red Hollywood. Dino Martin called me. *That's amore*: he knocked up his Mex maid with soon-to-hatch triplets. I bribed a customs official and got Dolorous Dolores deported to Mexico. Dino paid me two G's and dished the dirt on a stunning string of starlets. They bounced on my bed two at a time and dug up dirt on my regular retainer. Want C-notes and riotous ruts in the hay? Call Mr. Nine Inches.

I got Lana Turner a scrape. She banged an alto sax named Art Pepper in a bout of bebop abandon. Putzy Pepper wanted her to keep the kid and threatened exposure. I planted two reefers in his sax case and got him six months at Wayside Honor Rancho.

Joi knew a classy clique of Hancock Park housewives. They were unbearably unbodied and entrenched in ennui. They needed furtive fucking. She saw money in it.

Franchot Tone's girlfriend was banging a boogie. It was something out of *Ramar of the Jungle.* I covered the Congo and caught the cat in a gassed-hair joint on Slauson. I kicked his black ass back to Biloxi.

That Fred Otash—he *baaaaaaaaaaad!*

Joi said Liberace had a job for me. We were in the sack at her mom's place. Her eyes twinkled and twirled me some all-new way. She drew dollar signs in the air.

The moment vibrates in VistaVision and fabulous Fag-O-Scope. There's calendar pages and sheet music. A piano noodles a nocturne and pounds a polonaise.

* * *

Liberace's Swank Swish Pad
Coldwater Canyon
4/29/53

A fairy factotum met me. The yard was tropically tricked out and football-field size.

Flamingos flitted. Toucans tooled and bit at bugs. A path cut through ten-foot-high fronds and floral explosions. Everything was green, purple, and pink.

We hit a clearing. It was paved with stones embossed with musical clefs. The pool was shaped like a piano. Liberace sat in a deck chair. A leopard with a mink collar was snoozing at his feet.

The factotum sashayed off. I pulled up a deck chair. The leopard stirred and snarled at me. I scratched his neck. He went back to sleep.

Liberace said, “You’re fearless. You’re the kind of man I need.”

“I’m here to help you out, sir. Joi said you’ve got a guy bugging you.”

The factotum sashayed back with cocktails. Two highball glasses emitted nuclear pink foam. The guy served us and skedaddled. My drink tasted like high-test bubble gum.

Liberace said, “Bottoms up.” Pederast patter—yuk, yuk.

“A kid’s putting the boots to you, right? Pay up or he’ll rat you to the Legion of Decency. All those dago mob guys that book your act in Vegas will hightail it. Your TV show will be canceled if word gets out you go Greek.”

Liberace sighed. “Inimitably candid, and so, so true. He’s a dishwasher at Perino’s. What *was* I thinking?”

I sipped my pink drink. “Pictures?”

“Of course, dear heart. He lured me to a motel with a wall peek.”

A hi-fi speaker by the pool kicked on. Judy Garland belted, “Someday he’ll come along, the man I love.” The leopard woke up and licked his balls. Liberace goo-goo-talked him.

“Five thou, sir. You get the pictures and negatives, along with my assurance that it won’t happen again.”

Liberace pouted. His chest heaved. Sequins popped off his toga, caught the light, and shined. The leopard ambled to the pool and hung his ass over the edge. A giant shit ensued.

The factotum ran up with a scoop device. Liberace reached under his chair and pulled out a scrapbook.

“Ex-convicts are a weakness of mine, I’m chagrined to say. I’ve got mug shots of him and quite a few other rough-trade conquests. It’s my new hobby. I paste pictures when I’m not wowing my fans or practicing Chopin.”

I grabbed the book and leafed through it. It was the fucking lavender lodestone. I counted 26 KY cowboys wearing neck boards. Names, dates, penal-code numbers. A smutty smorgasbord of malignant maleness. Parole holds and prosty beefs galore.

Liberace jabbed a pic of one Manolo Sanchez. The guy was a Filipino flathead.

“He broke my heart while his evil lezzie sister took snapshots. Feel free to get tough.”

I nodded and flipped ahead. Three glum glamour boys beamed baleful off the page. Ward Wardell, Race Rockwell, Donkey Don Eversall. All booked for possession of pornography.

I pointed to the pics. “Blue movie actors, right? They peddle it on the side. You see the movies, you get a yen, you make a phone call.”

“That’s correct. I went to a screening at Michael Wilding and Liz Taylor’s house. Michael screened *Locker Room Lust* and *Jailhouse Heat* and supplied the referral.”

“Referral” buzz-bombed me. “Could these guys get it up for women?”

Liberace whooped. “Could, can, and *do,* sweetheart. And Donkey Don is the eighth wonder of the world, if you follow my drift.”

I tingled. I thought *parlay*. I saw dollar signs and movie-star movement on my Landing Strip.

“So, Michael Wilding’s a gay caballero?”

“In spades, love. His house is known as the ‘Fruit Stand,’ which perturbs lovely Liz no end.”

I yukked. “And Liz wants a divorce so she can move on to her next husband and break the all-time world record?”

Liberace slapped his knees. “Yes, and she’s pulling ahead of your girlfriend in *that* department.”

I cracked my knuckles. Liberace swooned. The fey fucker almost creamed in his jeans.

“Tell Liz to meet me at the Beverly Hills Hotel tomorrow night. Fill her in on my résumé.”

Liberace re-swooned. The leopard snarled and shooed a toucan up a tree.

* * *

Perino’s was high swank and old money. It catered to sterile stiffs and dotty dowagers who lived with 45 cats. I drove over at close-up time and parked by the back kitchen door. It was propped open. Manolo Sanchez and a fat beaner were scrubbing pots.

I got out of the car and hunkered low. I noted a row of lockers by a walk-in freezer. Fats opened his locker, grabbed a coat, and hit the road. I had the filthy Filipino alone.

He minced to his locker and primped. A mirror covered the inside door and threw his image back at me. I cop-read him: vicious little prick.

I squinted. *Aaaaaaaah,* the top locker shelf. A stack of photo sheaths.

He picked his teeth, he squeezed blackheads, he de-waxed his ears. I walked in. I crept up behind him. I pulled my beavertail sap. I saw his neck hairs bristle. He wheeled and pulled a shiv.

Flick—the blade sliced my Sy Devore blazer. He shrieked insults in Tagalog. They assuredly pertained to my mother.

He pirouetted and parried. We were in knife-fight tight. I risked a ripe stab wound and roundhoused him to the head. My sap hit him full force.

The seams ripped his face. The business end tore an eyebrow loose and smashed in his nose. He dropped the knife. I kicked it away. I grabbed his neck and squelched a scream. The deep-fry dipper was a few feet away. It was spitting hot grease and spuds Lyonnaise.

I dragged him over. I stuck his knife hand in the grease and French-fried it. I thought of all the Japs I would have killed if I hadn't spent the war stateside.

He screamed. It was brigades of torched Japs on Saipan. I held his hand in the grease and burned it to the bone. Spatters hit my London Shop shirt.

I dropped his hand. I walked to the locker, grabbed the pictures, and flipped through them. Liberace Goes Greek—Kodacolor prints and negatives.

Sanchez screamed and careened through the kitchen. He overturned a dish rack and spastic-bounced off the walls. His hand was charbroiled. I saw flesh fall off the fingers.

* * *

The night was young. I was five thou to the good and hopped up on blood and aggression. Revelation ripped me. I knew I could mix my own fruit shakes. I decided to keep two of the negatives.

A call to R&I delivered the dish on the smut-film troika. The boys shared a pad in Silver Lake and a bent for things sex-soiled and seditious. *Semper fi*—they met in the Marine Corps and ran rackets out of a bondage bar down in Dago. They sold forged green cards, peddled Spanish fly, led Rotary groups to TJ for the mule act. Their bestselling item: dildo replicas of Donkey Don's 16-inch whanger.

They fell in the shit in ’50. They sold Spanish fly to a high-school nympho and promised her a date with Donkey Don. The Donkster reneged. The nympho impaled herself on the gearshift of a ’46 Buick and hemorrhaged. San Diego PD filed assault one. The judge tossed the case. A ripe rumor: he was one of Race Rockwell’s regular tricks.

Their pad was a little wood-frame job overrun by bougainvillea. I rang the bell at 23:00 and got no answer. A loose window screen gave me quick access. I crept flashlight-first and inventoried.

The boys possessed Nazi armbands, Mickey Spillane novels, and combat-pinned Marine blues. Barbells, camera and lighting gear, nudist-colony mags going back to ’36. Souvenir snapshots from the Klub Satan, Tijuana, New Year’s ’48. Ticket stubs from the Manuel Ortiz–Harold Dade fight. A promotional contract for a nigger stumblebum named Junior “Knockout” Wilkins.

I walked out to the porch. I brought a pint of the boys’ Old Crow with me. I recognized the ribbons on their uniforms. I was training troops in Parris Island while they stormed Guadalcanal.

I sipped bourbon. I got a light load on. A jalopy pulled up at 1 a.m. The boys piled out and made for the door.

I whipped out my badge and held my flashlight beam on it. It was *très* dark out. I couldn’t see them cringe and capitulate. I imagined it, ghoul-like.

“My name’s Fred Otash. You’re going into business with me.”

* * *

Exuberant extortionist, enterprising entrepreneur. A round-the-clock roundelay as I licked my lips for Liz.

I got half-gassed with the lads and laid down the law: 20 percent of your smut biz in trade for police protection. And—you’re now the naughty nucleus of Fred O.’s stud farm. Get ready to bring the brisket to some housewives in heat.

Donkey Don laid a ladle of bennies on me. I buzzed through a tour of duty downtown. I broke up a fistfight at the Jesus Saves Mission. I chased a raft of Red agitators out of Pershing Square. I popped a whip-out man at the Mayan Theater. I busted a high-spirited kid setting winos on fire with a blowtorch.

My tour of duty tapped down. I went by the criminal-courts building and read up on divorce law. I reserved a bungalow at the

Beverly Hills Hotel and scrounged refreshments off local merchants. Lou's Liquor Locker supplied champagne. Hank's Hofbrau coughed up cold cuts. Fast delivery was assured.

I swooped by my pad and traded my cop suit for a Cary Grant ensemble. Oh, yeah—it's your ardent arriviste poised to pounce!

The bungalow was big and boss, flouncy and flamboyant. The bellman sneered at the baloney and cheese backlit by spotlights. He rolled his eyes and split. I paced and smoked myself hoarse. The bell rang at 8 o'clock on the dot.

There she is—Elizabeth Taylor at twenty.

She stood in the doorway. I fumbled for an opener. She wore a tight white dress that caressed her curves and clamored up her cleavage. She said, "If I move too fast, I'll split a seam. Help me over to that couch."

I grabbed an elbow and steered her. She felt my hand tremble and smiled. I sat her down and poured two glasses of '53 domestic. We perched on the couch and offered up a toast.

Liz raised her arm. A dress seam split down to her hemline. She said, "Shit. I didn't *have* to wear this. You're just the bird dog for my divorce."

I yukked. Liz said, "Don't marry me, okay? I can't keep doing this for the rest of my life."

"Have I got a chance?"

"More than you think. Hotel heirs and queer actors haven't worked out, so who's to say a cop wouldn't?"

I smiled and sipped champagne. Liz reached around, snagged a slice of baloney, and snarfed it. The dress was still constricting her. She looked plainly plaintive.

I unzipped the back and gave her some breath room. She sighed —*Aaaaah,* that's good.

The shoulder straps went slack and fell down her arms. She deadpanned it. Our knees brushed on the couch. Liz retained the contact.

"How do I cut loose of Michael? I can't cite mental cruelty, because he's a sweetheart, and I don't want to hurt him. I know you have to show just cause in order to sue."

I refilled her glass. "I'll bug your house. You get Wilding looped and get him to admit he digs boys. I levy the threat in a civilized manner, and he consents to an uncontested divorce."

Liz beamed. "It's that *easy*?"

"We're all civilized white folks. You probably earn more money than him, but he's older and has substantial holdings. You broker the property split and the alimony along those lines."

"And how are you compensated?"

"I get 10 percent of your alimony payments, in perpetuity. You keep me in mind and refer me to people who might require my services."

Liz laid an arm across the couch cushions. Her dress collapsed past her brassiere. Our eyes found a fit. The rest of the room vaporized.

"And how will I keep you in mind? There's lots of people vying for my attention."

"I'll do my best to make this a memorable evening."

* * *

It was, for me.

Liz passed away a few years ago.

If I get to heaven, I'll grill her per that first time.

It started out clumsy and sweet. My punch line cued the first kiss. Liz was already victimized by too-tight attire. She shrugged her dress off down to her waist. Our kisses multiplied.

I carried her into the bedroom. She popped off three buttons on my shirt. They zinged across the room. We laffed. I heard the radio a bungalow over. Rosemary Clooney sang, "Hey, there—you with the stars in your eyes."

We got naked. State it stark: we were built boss, stratosphere stacked and hung homewrecker heavy. We were the boffo best of L.A., circa '53.

We made love all night. We drank champagne with Drambuie chasers. We smoked two packs of cigarettes and spritzed gossip. We put on robes and climbed to the roof of the bungalow at dawn.

An A-bomb test was scheduled in Nevada. The newspapers predicted some dazzling fireworks. Other bungalow dwellers were up on their roofs. There's Bob Mitchum and a young quail smoking a reefer, there's Marilyn Monroe and Lee Strasberg, there's Ingrid Bergman and Roberto Rossellini. Everybody looks fuck-struck and *happy*. Everybody's got a jug for the toast.

Everybody laffed and waved hello. Mitchum brought a portable radio for the countdown. He turned it on. I heard static and "… 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.”

The world went *WHOOSH*. The ground shook. The sky lit up mauve and pink. We all raised our bottles and applauded. The colors receded into bright white light. I had my arm around Elizabeth Taylor. I looked Ingrid Bergman straight in the eyes.

5

L.A. ’53 was my ground zero. That A-bomb blast still shoots shock waves through me. My calendar pages are radioactively roasted. You can’t read the dates as they swirl.

There was smog in the air then. People coughed and gasped citywide. *I* never noticed it. The bomb-blast colors stayed with me. My L.A. was *always* mauve and pink.

I worked LAPD. I walked a downtown footbeat. I rousted Reds during the “Free the Rosenbergs!” fracas. I pinched pervs, purse snatchers, and pickpockets in Pershing Square. My smut-film biz laid in loot. Donkey Don Eversall plied his python all over Hancock Park. Joi was Donkey Don’s dispatcher. She coffee-klatched with horny housewives and set up the dates. Liberace gave me girl-talk gossip. Liz Taylor and Michael Wilding went to Splitsville. I got 10 percent of Liz’s alimony. Joi, Liz, and I threeskied on my Landing Strip. Liz knew a Pan Am stew named Barb Bonvillain. She flew the L.A.–to–Mexico City route and had half of Hollywood hooked on Dilaudid and morphine suppositories. Bad Barb was 6'3", 180, 40-24-36. She scored high in the women’s decathlon, Helsinki ’52. All four of us locked loins. The Landing Strip lurched. We murdered the mattress and banged the box springs down to the floor.

L.A. ’53—*ring-a-ding-ding!*

Joi and I hit the Crescendo and the Largo most nights. Cocktail waitresses fed me slander slurs in exchange for my titanic tips. It was my kid-voyeur days, rabidly redux.

A fragmenting frustration set in. I *had* the dirt. It would take an armada of shakedown shills and photo fiends to deploy it. I racked my brain. I knocked my noggin against the bruising brick wall of unknowing. Extortion as existential dilemma. A confounding conundrum worthy of those French philosopher cats.

My cop life could not compete with the lush life. I was a double agent akin to that Commie cad Alger Hiss. Liz Taylor drove me to Central Station and signed autographs for the blues. I knew that word would leak to Chief William H. Parker. I was full of a finger-stabbing *Fuck you.*

Ralph Mitchell Horvath still haunted me. Nightmares nabbed me as I slid into sleep. Joi and Liz nursed me with yellow jackets and booze. My bedtime mantra was *He Deserved to Die.* It was beastly bullshit. I couldn't convince myself that what I did was right.

The Rosenbergs fried at Sing Sing. *That* was justified. *They* sold A-bomb secrets to Russia. *They* got what they paid for.

I developed my personal credo: "I'll work for anyone but Communists. I'll do anything short of murder."

Morally sound in L.A., circa '53. Equally sound in purgatory today.

I spent nuke-bomb nights at the Hollywood Ranch Market. My office was two-way-mirrored and overlooked the aisles. I scanned for boosters and looked down at legions of the lost.

Their pathos pounded me. Bit actors buying stale bread and Tokay. Six-foot-two drag queens shopping for extra-long nylons. Cough-syrup hopheads reading labels for the codeine content. Teenage boys sneaking girlie mags to the can to jerk off.

I watched, I peeped, I lost myself in the losers. A goofy ghost came and went with them.

He was about 23. He slouched in windbreakers and wore cigarettes as props. He breezed through the aisles at 3 a.m. He always looked ecstatic. He talked to people. He cultivated people. He studied people the way I looked in windows as a kid. I saw him out on the sidewalk once. He played the bongos for a clique of fags and junkies. A girl called him "Jimmy."

The fucker appeared intermittent. I made him for an actor living off chump change and aging fruits. I saw him kiss a girl by the bread bin. I saw him kiss a boy in the soup aisle. He moved with a weirdo grace. He wasn't froufrou *or* masculine. He was in on some exalted joke.

I saw him boost a carton of Pall Malls. I cornered him, cuffed him, and hauled him upstairs. His name was James Dean. He was from Bumfuck, Indiana. He was an actor and a bohemian you-name-it. He explained that Pall Mall cigarettes were queer code. The *In hoc signo vinces* on the pack meant "In this sign you shall conquer." Homos flashed Pall Malls and ID'd each other. It was all-new shit to me.

I let Jimmy off with a warning. We started hanging out in the office. We tipped Old Crow, looked down on the floor, and gassed on the humanoids. Jimmy habituated the leather bars in East Hollywood. He ratted off pushers and celebrity quiffs and filled a whole side of my dirt bin. I told him about my smut-film and male-prosty gigs. I promised him a date with Donkey Don Eversall in exchange for hot dirt.

We'd hit silent stretches. I'd scan the floor. Jimmy would read scandal rags.

They were just popping up. *Peep, Transom, Whisper, Tattle, Lowdown.* Titillation texts. Lurid language marred by mitigation. Insipid innuendo.

Politicos got slurred as Red—but never nailed past implication. Jimmy loved the rags but said they weren't sufficiently sordid or precise in their prose. He called them "timid tipster texts." He said, "You've got better skank than this, Freddy. I could give you three issues' worth from one night at the Cockpit Lounge."

A bell bonged—faint and far-off. Memory is revised retrospection. Oh, yeah—fate fungooed me that night.

A newsboy pulled a red wagon into the market. It was stacked with magazines. He began filling the racks.

A cover caught my eye. Primary colors and big headlines screamed.

The magazine was called *Confidential.*

6

Beverly Hills Hotel
8/14/53

Joi woke me up. I was nudging off a nightmare. Double dip: Ralph Mitchell Horvath shot in the mouth, Manolo Sanchez with skeleton claws.

I looked across the bed. Shit—Liz was gone.

Joi read my mind. "She had an early call. She said to remind you that Arthur Crowley wants that phone date."

I lit a cigarette. I chased three bennies with Old Crow. *Aaaaaaah,* breakfast of champions!

"Remind me again. Who's Arthur Crowley?"

"That divorce lawyer who needs your help."

"I'll call him when I go off-duty."

Joi stepped into a skirt and pulled her shoes on. She dressed as fast as most men.

"No more girls for a while, okay, Freddy? Liz is great, but Barb is like Helga, She Wolf of the SS. Really, that stunt with the armband and the garters? That and she hogs the whole bed."

I laffed loud and lewd. My wake-up whipped through me and canceled cobwebs. Summer in L.A.—*ring-a-ding-ding!!*

Joi kissed me and bopped out of the bungalow. I shit, shaved, showered, and put on my uniform.

The bedroom phone rang. I snagged it. A man said, "Mr. Otash, this is Arthur Crowley."

I buffed my badge with my necktie. A mirror magnetized me. *Man, oh Manischewitz,* I looked good!

"Mr. Crowley, it's a pleasure."

Crowley said, "Sir, I'll be blunt. I'm swamped with pissed-off husbands and wives looking to take each other to the cleaners. Legal statutes are in flux, and divorce-court judges are demanding proof of adultery. Liz Taylor told me you might have some ideas."

I lit a cigarette. Benzedrine arched through my arteries and piqued my pizzazz.

"I *do* have ideas. If you have flexible scruples, I think we can do biz."

Crowley laffed. "I'm listening."

I said, "I know some Marines stationed down at Camp Pendleton. I was their DI in '43 and '44, and now they're back from Korea and looking for kicks. It's a parlay. Hot rods, good-looking shills, walkie-talkies, phone drops, and Speed Graphic cameras."

Crowley hooted. *"Semper fi,* sir. You're a white man in my book."

"*Semper fi,* boss. We'll work out the details at your convenience, and I'll round up my boys."

"And in the meantime? Is there anything you need?"

Benzedrine was a groin groper. One thing came to mind.

"My Landing Strip's got two empty runways tonight. Liz told me you're conversant with the concept."

I heard voices outside the bungalow—male and brazenly brusque. I thought I heard foot scrapes and coughs.

Crowley said, "Liz explained the concept, so I called you prepared. I'll send two stenos over."

"Mr. Crowley, you're a pisser."

"It takes one to know one, sir."

We hung up. I heard the voices again. A key-in-lock noise followed. I walked into the living room. The door opened wide.

William H. Parker.

Two plainclothes bulls. Maladroit mastiffs on a mission to maul for their master.

"Send not to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee."

I unpinned my badge and tossed it at Parker. It hit his chest and dropped on the floor. The mastiffs moved. Parker gestured *Get back*. The mastiffs pawed the carpeting.

I unhooked my gun belt and dropped it on a chair. I called up some cool. Freon Freddy, the Shaman of Shakedown.

"Hit me, Bill. Shack jobs, living above my means, bending the rules here and there. My head's on the chopping block, baby. Guillotine me."

The mastiffs smirked smug. Pious Parker parsed out a grin.

"You are currently engaged in an intimate relationship with a Pan American stewardess named Barbara Jane Bonvillain, now in federal custody for possession of narcotics procured in Mexico. I must inform you that the outsized Miss Bonvillain is a Communist agent and a personal emissary of Marshal Tito, the Red boss of Yugoslavia. As if that weren't enough, Miss Bonvillain is really a man. She underwent a sex-change operation in Malmö, Sweden, in late 1951, before her stellar efforts impersonating a woman at the '52 Olympics. You fucked a man, Freddy. You're a homo. Get the hell off my police force."

* * *

"You're a homo."

"You're a homo."

"You fucked a man."

"You fucked a man."

"You're a homo, you're a homo, you're a homo."

I drank myself into a stunned stupor. I passed out on the floor. I got intimate with insects inhabiting the rug. They were dung desperadoes. They were my filthy fellow travelers, lower than lice.

"You're a homo, you're a homo, you're a homo."

I drank, I passed out, I woke up. I went eye to eye with a big beetle. We discussed the man-bug metaphysic, infused with *frissons* from that freaky frog Camus. The beetle explained that life was horrifically happenstance and that we were all fucked by fate. Bugs were bid by biology to live off larvae and leaves. Men were massacred by lascivious lust and bumbled into bed with he-shes. *You didn't know that she was a he. Hit your bennie stash and find your way out of this funk.*

I obeyed the beetle. The Benzedrine outrevved the booze. I talked shit with the beetle for hours. We went feeler to feeler on the floor.

I called Abe Adelman at the State License Bureau. I promised him two G's for PI's ducat, quicksville. I bid the beetle *adieu* and climbed back into my civvies. I drove straight to the Hollywood Ranch Market.

L.A. looked like Pompeii, post-earthquake. The summer sun skimmed the sky and scattered death rays. Hes were shes and shes were hes and the most gorgeous girls were gargoyles. I got to the market and ran up to my office. Jimmy was scanning the August *Lowdown*.

He said, "You're wigged out, Freddy."

I said, "I've been talking to a bug."

"What did he tell you?"

“Some shit you wouldn’t believe.”

“I *would*. It’s the basis of our friendship. We tell each other shit the world wouldn’t believe.”

I smiled. “Tell me something typical. I’ve had a jolt. I need to get my feet back under me.”

“The barman at the Manhole is pushing horse.”

“I’ll file it away in case I need him.”

Jimmy said, “I’ve got a picture of Marlon Brando with a dick in his mouth.”

“I’ll give you a C-note.”

Jimmy passed me the Old Crow. I took a pull and felt the floor meet my feet.

“How was your date with Donkey Don?”

Jimmy held his hands two feet apart. Jimmy said, “Ouch.”

I roared. We passed the jug back and forth. Jimmy lit a Pall Mall.

“I’m up for a role on *GE Theater,* but this Paul Newman punk will probably get it.”

“I’ll plant a bag of weed on him and lay on the fear. You’ll get the gig.”

“Thanks, Freddy.”

I thought about the talking bug. I looked down at the floor. I saw the kid with the wagon, unloading magazines.

“I’ve got all this good dirt and no place to put it. It’s driving me fucking crazy.”

* * *

Semper fi.

I assembled my ex-Marine cadre. My porno-prosty boys proceeded priapically apace. My Camp Pendleton pals came up to L.A. and joined Operation Divorce. The two crews crossed over. I had six certified psychos culled for my command. My Pendleton pit dogs were blood-blitzed from killing Commies in Korea. They were out for chaotic kicks and required tight tugs on their chains. Our marks were adulterous wives and husbands. Donkey Don lured ladies to hot-sheet hotels and instigated insertion. Flashbulbs flared as I kicked in doors, camera cocked. My Pendleton pits were adroit and adept at rolling surveillance. They tailed wayward wives and whorehound hubbies to hotels and walkie-talkied me. Joi was the mouthwatering man bait. She worked off Arthur Crowley’s *craaazy* crib sheets on his hubbies' habits. Joi was sinful seductress *and* cold cock tease. I always kicked the doors in just as zippers dropped.

Operation Divorce was a Marine Corps maneuver and a mad moneymaker. Operation Otash was the ultimate umbrella command. I had an army of snarky snitches on my payroll. My PI's license arrived in the mail and served to cinch my sinful sanction. I did not much mourn my severed service with the LAPD. I paid vulture vice cops for tips on quivering queers, jittery junkies, dipsos deep in the DTs. I built fat files on celebrity secrets and hoarded the horrors hard in my heart. *Knowledge is power*—the Beverly Hills Hotel bug reminded me of that. The one puzzle piece still missing: how to *systematically* carve cash from all of it.

Jimmy joined in. I kicked putzy Paul Newman's ass and held a bag of Mary Jane primed with his prints. Jimmy got the *GE Theater* role and groveled with gratitude. I hired him to hump the husband of a divorce-seeking dowager sick of hubby's hijinks. Jimmy was a swift switcherooer—if it mamboed, he'd move on it. He boffed five babes in one week—topping Donkey Don's extant record. I camera-caught the wives as Jimmy shot them the schvantz.

L.A. '53—*rampant ring-a-ding-ding!* Calendar pages ruffling toward that date with destiny.

I was on the Landing Strip with Liz and a waitress from Biff's Charbroil. I heard the mail slot open and an envelope hit the floor.

It was a Western Union telegram. I opened it and read:

> Dear Mr. Otash,
>
> We here at *Confidential Magazine* are looking for a man conversant in the celebrity secrets of present-day Los Angeles, preferably a man with prior police experience. Would you be willing to meet me in a week's time, to discuss a possible collaboration?
>
> Sincerely,
> Robert Harrison, Publisher and Editor-In-Chief

7

“Ava Gardner’s Dusky Dee-lite.”

“Johnnie Ray’s Men’s Room Misadventure.”

“Bad Boy Bob Mitchum: Back in Reeferland AGAIN?”

I wired Harrison and confirmed the meet. I booked a boss bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel. I borrowed textbooks from Arthur Crowley’s library and studied libel, slander, and defamation of character. I learned to think and talk like a language-lucid lawyer.

Jimmy bagged back issues of *Peep, Lowdown, Whisper, Tattle,* and *Confidential* itself. I studied linguistic loopholes and cultivated codes of mitigation, equivocation, ambiguity. Innuendo, inference, implication. So many wicked ways to scandal-skin a cat.

I alter-egoed myself in a week’s time. I discovered *sin*-uendo and *scanda*-language. I moved into the bungalow a day early. That talking bug and I conferenced and concurred: *Confidential* was the grooved-out grail of this shook-up generation. *Disillusionment is enlightenment. Confidential* trafficked truth and harpooned hypocrisy. It was a devoutly decorous document. It was the *meshuggener* Magna Carta of our hopped-up and fucked-up age.

It’s now 9/21/53. It’s now precisely 10 a.m. The doorbell rings.

Caviar, canapés—check. Martinis mixed *magnifico*—check. My dossier on Bondage Bob—malignantly memorized.

I opened the door. The Sultan of *Sin*-uendo: a nervous nebbish in a dreary drip-dry suit.

He said, “Mr. Otash.”

I said, “Mr. Harrison.”

He walked in and went *Ooh-la-la.* I poured two mighty martinis and pointed to the couch. We raised our glasses. I said, “To freedom of speech.”

“The First Amendment. What it hath wrought.”

We clicked glasses. I sat facing Bondage Bob. He made the you-and-me sign. He said, “Strange bedfellows.”

You're *stranger,* dipshit. *You* wear women's lingerie and love the lash. *You* published *Honeys in Heels,* pre-*Confidential.*

"Get my attention, Mr. Otash. Open strong, baby. I've got a storefront called the 'Hollywood Research Bureau.' It's been my primary source since we launched. We've floated the magazine on the few nuggets it's panned, plus imagination. It's been thin gruel, by and large. Hit me, sweetheart. Show me why the cognoscenti says, 'Fred Otash is the man to see.' "

I pulled out my Marlon Brando snapshot. I passed it to Bondage Bob. He gasped and sprayed me with a mouthful of martini.

I let it drip-dry on my suit coat. Bondage Bob coughed and called up composure. He said, "Holy fucking shit."

"May I give you a candid assessment of your situation and explain how I might best serve you?"

"Hit me, doll. I didn't fly 3,000 miles for some namby-pamby chitchat."

I shot my cuffs and showed off my Rolex. I buzz-bombed Bondage Bob with the Freon Fred stare.

"You publish what is rapidly becoming the premier scandal magazine in a very crowded field. You compete with *Whisper, Tattle, Peep, On the Q.T., Lowdown,* and others. Your competitors rely largely on true-crime exposés, reports of miracle cures for various diseases, and rehashes of your own articles on celebrity misbehavior. The specific strengths of *your* magazine are its staunch anti-Communist stance and *sex.* Frankly, I find your articles that play on the *greed* of your readers are both unbelievable and devoid of the *heat* that people turn to *Confidential* for. There are no emerald mines in Colorado and no Uruguayan herbs that triple the size of the male member in two weeks' time. You're *lying,* sir. You're hoping that bilking your readers with stories like that will both boost your sales and help defray the costs of the libel suits that are being filed against you with greater and greater frequency in circuit courts all over America. My good friend, the esteemed jurist Arthur Cowley, has informed me that magazines that publish filler pieces chock-full of bold-faced lies create what he calls a 'gap in credibility and verisimilitude.' This calls into question the veracity of *all* the articles published in said magazines over time, leaving said magazines vulnerable to both individual lawsuits and the looming specter of what Mr. Crowley calls the 'lynch-mob-like and Communistic specter of the emerging class action suit,' wherein aggrieved parties band together under the aegis of left-wing Jewish lawyers in order to posit a common beef and destroy the First Amendment right of free speech that we hold so sacred here in America. The mitigating, equivocating, and temporizing language that runs through your groundbreaking articles on celebrity misconduct will *not* save you. You may use 'alleged,' 'purported,' and 'rumored' as much as you like, but they will *not* legally extricate you in the end. My first two salient points are these: you must dramatically boost your sexual content, and everything you publish in *Confidential* must be entirely true and verifiable."

Wooooooooo! Bravura breath control and artful articulation! Bondage Bob: flabbergasted and flushed behind Beefeater's gin.

He fidgeted. He licked his lips. He crossed his legs like a submissive sissy. I saw restraint-rope scars on his soft and sockless ankles.

"Nuisance suits are costing us 25 thou a month. Those Commie lawyers are coming out of the sewers like rats."

I sailed into my second soliloquy:

"Informants must be both credible and coercible, as well as vulnerable to exposure of their own misdeeds. I served as an officer of the Los Angeles Police Department for close to a decade. I have access to every crooked cop in this town, and they will rat out any celebrity, socialite, Communist, miscegenist, or alluring lowlife that they know of for a simple retainer. The scum that they rat out will rat out six others to stay out of your magazine, and the mathematical equation that I am positing will extend indefinitely. I can tell that you're thinking, *Informants alone will not suffice,* and that assumption is correct. You may know that we are entering a bold new era of electronic surveillance. I propose that we install standing, full-time bugs in every high-class hotel in Los Angeles. I will bribe the managers and desk clerks of said hotels to steer celebrity adulterers and queers to specific rooms, where their sexual activities and conversation will be captured on tape. The best bug man on earth is a hebe named Bernie Spindel. I will meet with him soon. Mr. Spindel would love to enter your employ and has a gift for you. He bugged a bungalow at the Miramar Hotel in Santa Monica last week. The manager of the hotel is a masochistic child molester with a quite understandable urge to be punished for his aberrant behavior. I will physically chastise him on a monthly basis, which will deter him from hurting children as well as keep him under my thumb. He will have strict orders to place all celebs in bungalow number 9. Bernie's gift is a tape of Senator John F. Kennedy fucking Ingrid Bergman and detailing his preposterous plans to run for president of the United States to her, while she yawns and prattles on about her kids. Be forewarned: the fucking is short-lived. I'll be frank: Senator Kennedy is a two-minute man."

Bondage Bob: Ga-ga, goo-goo-eyed, *gone.*

"So, we—"

I cut him off. "*So* we also bug all the fag bathhouses. *So* I have extortion wedges on the informants who supply the dirt for our most explosive pieces. *So* I polygraph-test them to assure their veracity. *So* I create a climate of fear in Hollywood, which is the most gorgeously perverted and cosmetically moralistic place on God's green fucking earth. *Because* I have an unerring nose for human weakness and have sensed for some time that we have entered an era where the gilded and famous all secretly harbor a desire to be exposed. *Because* I am willing to burglarize any psychiatrist's office in order to get the dirt on their celebrity patients. *Because* I am willing to quash lawsuits through the threat and application of physical force."

Bondage Bob *guuuuuuuulped.* "What *won't* you do?"

I saw Ralph Mitchell Horvath. I said, "Commit murder or work for Communists."

Hold now. Hear that pin-drop silence. Let it linger *loooooong.*

"Would you consent to an audition? To test your inside knowledge?"

I nodded. Harrison hit me. I bopped to his beat, beatific.

"Senator Estes Kefauver?"

"Whorehound. Shacks with Filipino prosties at the downtown Statler when he visits L.A."

"Sinatra. Give me the latest."

"Caught his new girlfriend muff-diving Lana Turner at the Beverly Wilshire, went on a six-day bender with Jackie Gleason, and wound up with the DTs at Queen of Angels."

"Otto Preminger?"

"Mud shark. Currently enthralled with a sepia seductress named Dorothy Dandridge."

"Lawrence Tierney?"

"Brawling, psychopathic brother of noted grasshopper Scott Brady. Digs the boys at the Cockpit Lounge and the occasional girl who looks like a boy."

"John Wayne?"

"Quasi drag queen. Fucks women and looks stunning in a size 52-long muumuu."

"Johnny Weissmuller?"

"King Schlong. Well known to have fathered nine kids out of wedlock with nine different women. Current holder of the White Man's World Record."

"Duke Ellington?"

"Current holder of the Jigaboo World Record."

"Van Johnson?"

"The Semen Demon. Sucks dick at the glory hole at the Wilshire May Company men's room."

"Burt Lancaster?"

"Sadist. Has a well-appointed torture den at his pad in Beverly Hills. Pays call girls top dollar to inflict pain on them."

"Fritz Lang?"

"Known to film Burt's torture sessions and screen them for a select clientele."

"The Misty June Christy?"

"Nympho size-queen. My shakedown bait Donkey Don Eversall gives her the big one on a regular basis. Donkey Don's got a wall peek at his crib. My pal Jimmy Dean made an avant-garde film of their last assignation. It's called *The Stacked and the Hung.* The premiere is Friday night, in my living room. You're cordially invited."

"Alfred Hitchcock?"

"Peeper."

"Natalie Wood?"

"Child actress in transition. Rumored to be ensconced at a dyke slave den near Hollywood High."

"Alan Ladd?"

"Dramatically underhung cunt hound. A man on the horns of an existential dilemma worthy of those Communistic philosopher chumps."

He's ga-ga, goo-goo, pulled into putty. He's martini-mangled and *mine.*

"Mr. Otash, the job is yours."

"Fifty grand a year and expenses. My operating costs will go at least double that."

Now he's green at the gills. *Now* he knows there's No Exit. It's a felicitous fait accompli.

"Yes, Mr. Otash. We have a deal."

We shook hands.

Bondage Bob said, "Jean-Paul Sartre's a pal of mine. He'll *love The Stacked and the Hung.*"

That talking bug rocked across the rug and waved at me. I swear this is true.

8

Jimmy timed the fuck: 1:46. The fuckers: future prez and mick martyr JFK, Swedish sweetie Ingrid Bergman.

Pillow patter tapped the tape. Jack coughed and said, “Aaaaah, that was good.” Ingrid yawned and said, “Vell, for vun of us, perhaps.”

I roared. Jimmy howled. The market was 3 a.m. quiet. We passed the Old Crow back and forth.

Jimmy said, “We wrapped *GE Theater*. I invited Ronnie Reagan to the premiere.”

I said, “He hates the Reds. I’ll hit him up for some snitch-outs.”

The tape groaned and ground to squelch. Jimmy turned it off. I looked out the mirror. The kid with the red wagon was unloading *Confidential*. The wagon was white-print-emblazoned. I couldn’t quite read the words.

Jimmy said, “The kid gets to you.”

“He shouldn’t be out this late.”

“You’ve got the same employer now.”

“I know.”

“When I’m famous, keep me out of the magazine.”

“When you’re *in* it, you know you’ve arrived.”

* * *

The first check arrived. I retained Bernie “the Bug King” Spindel. He was an Orthodox Jew with eight kids and six *schvartze* girlfriends. We discussed the mud-shark metaphysic. Bernie said, “Once you’ve had black, you can’t go back.”

We spent a week whipping wires to wainscoting and laying mike mounts into mattresses. I bribed hotel honchos up the yammering ying-yang. We drilled, bored, spackled, threaded, planted, and wired all the high-end hotels. Regular retainers would result in records of sicko celebs sacking up in those rooms. Bondage Bob had bountiful bucks. We wire-whipped full-time listening posts at the Beverly Hills Hotel, the Bel-Air Hotel, the Beverly Wilshire, the Miramar, the Biltmore, the downtown Statler. A Biltmore bellboy tipped us right off: Gary Cooper and a jailbait jill jumped into that bugged bedroom. *BAM!*—our system socks in sync. Bedsprings bounce, voices vibrate, mikes pick up tattle text and lay it to the listening post. *BAM!*—my Marine Corps mastiff retrieves the tape. *BAM!*—the babe is 16 and a Belmont High coed. Coop says, “You’re *built,* honey. Tell me your name again.” The girl gasps, “I’ve always loved your pictures, Mr. Cooper. And, wow, you’re really *big.*”

The dirt, the dish, the scandal skank, the lewd libels revealed as *real.* It was *all* starting to come to me and to *Confidential.*

Jimmy edited his movie and dubbed in a sizzling soundtrack. The priapic premiere was *the* L.A. moment of fall ’53. I served pizza, booze, and pills from a felonious pharmacy. My pad was packed with movie *machers* and Marines, stupid starlets, stars, and studs. Dig: Liz, Joi, Ward Wardell, Race Rockwell, Donkey Don. Ronnie Reagan, Harry Fremont, Arthur Crowley, Bondage Bob, and Jean-Paul Sartre—existentially seeking the scene. A six-foot-six drag queen, Rock Hudson, ex–U.S. senator Helen Gahagan Douglas. Charlie “Yardbird” Parker, nodding on Big H.

It’s the egalitarian epicenter of postwar America. It’s a colossal convergence of the gilded and gorgeous, the defiled and demented, the expatriots of exultant extremity. This seedy summit set the tone for the frazzled and fractured society that is our nation today.

I dimmed the lights. Race Rockwell ran the projector. The soundtrack hit: Bartók, Beethoven, bebop by way of Bird. There’s the opening titles: “*The Stacked and the Hung,* starring Donkey Don Eversall and June Christy.” “Photographed, Edited, Produced and Directed by James Dean.”

The applause was apoplectic. There’s the establishing shot—a coontown motel room, shot surreptitiously through a hole-in-the-wall peek.

June Christy enters the room and drops her purse on the bed. She looks apprehensive. She lights a cigarette, she checks her watch, she taps her toes and paces. It’s soundless cinema. The camera stays static—the lens is lashed to that wall peek.

There—June hears something. She smiles, she walks offscreen, she walks back on with Donkey Don. Donkey winks at the wall peek—he’s in on it. June sits on the bed. Donkey Don whips it out and wags it. My pad shakes and shimmies. There's gasps, wolf whistles, shrill shrieks.

I looked around for Jimmy. June devoured Donkey Don, tonsil-deep. Where's Jimmy? *Fuck*—he's jacking off by the pizza buffet!

* * *

Calendar pages flicked, flew, sheared, and shape-shifted. They're sales graphs now.

'53 into '54. Vertical lines in escalation. *Confidential* hits a million a month. *Confidential* makes a million and a half in rabid record time.

It's all *ME*. I'm awash in the sicko secrets I've cruelly craved my whole life. I've got L.A. hot-wired. My city teems with tattle tipsters on my payroll. Hotel rooms are hot-sheet hives hooked up to my headset. I know everything sinful, sex-soiled, deeply dirty, and religiously wrong. It's wrong, it's real, and it's *MINE*.

My Marines lived in listening posts. They caught Corrine Calvet cavorting with a car-park cat at the Crescendo. They caught Paul Robeson, ripped to the gills at a Red rally. They caught Jumping Johnnie Ray again. I verified all of it and fed it to *Confidential.* Gary Cooper and Miss Belmont High? Quashed for ten grand.

'53, '54. A-bomb blast parties on Liz Taylor's rooftop. Those cavalcades of color against the dim dawn. The camaraderie and opportunity. The sense that this march of magnificent moments would never stop.

Calendar pages, sales graphs, *Confidential* covers. Dipsos, nymphos, junkies, Commies, feckless fools all. That cover I regret, that ball I dropped, that *malignant* moment. *That* page in purgatory as I pause my pen.

May 16, 1954. I'm at my pad. I'm booking a threeski for the Landing Strip. I quashed a story on Marilyn Monroe's secret Mexican marriage. Marilyn grovels, grateful. She knows a sapphic sister with a sometimes yen for men.

The phone rang. I picked up. Arthur Crowley said, "There's trouble, Freddy."

I said, "Hit me."

"I got a tip. Johnnie Ray's been to a libel lawyer. He's suing the magazine. I know that you verified the story, but he's going forward anyway. I strongly suggest that you nip this in the bud."

Men's Room Mishegas*: Jittery Johnnie Strikes Again.*

I verified the story. *Confidential* ran it. This was unprecedented grief.

"My Marines are on maneuvers, Arthur. There's no one to handle it."

"*You* handle it, Freddy. Take care of it before that tip gets back to Bob Harrison."

I hung up. My nerves were nuked. I took three quick pops of Old Crow. Joi was tight with Johnnie. They girl-talked regular. *I* liked Johnnie. Jimmy screened *The Stacked and the Hung* for him personally.

I dropped three yellow jackets and obliterated the day. I woke up at midnight. Johnnie always hit Googie's after his closing set. He always parked in the same spot.

A short stroll, spring heat, a brisk breeze. I walked over and leaned on Johnnie's Packard Caribbean. Johnnie swished out at 1:15.

He saw me. He got the gestalt. He said, "Hi, Freddy."

I said, "Don't make me, kid. I'll keep you out from now on, but you've got to stop it here."

Johnnie said, "You're a parasite, Freddy. You feed off the weak. I'm not backing off. I don't see any of your goons around, so you'll have to do it yourself."

Parasite, parasite, parasite—

"Let it go, Johnnie. You can't win this one."

"*You're* the weak one, Freddy. Joi told me that you cry out for your mother in your sleep."

I trembled. "One more time. No lawsuit."

"You're a mama's boy, Freddy. Joi told me you fucked a tranny, which makes you more queer than me."

I saw red and black-red. I hit him. My signet ring slashed his cheek. He went down on his knees. I picked him up and tossed him into his car. I heard bones crack and teeth shear. The bumper ledge gouged his head at the hairline. I kicked him and tore a chunk of his scalp free.

He said, "Okay, okay, okay." No whimper—strong.

I said, "I'm sorry, kid."

Johnnie spit blood and twirled a fuck-you finger at me.

9

The market was 2 a.m. quiet. Jimmy and I quaffed Old Crow. I was spritzed with Johnnie Ray's blood.

Jimmy said, "I'm up for the lead in *East of Eden.* Elia Kazan's waffling. It could go either way."

"I'll lean on Kazan. He's susceptible. There's some pinkos he didn't rat to HUAC."

Jimmy walked to the mirror and pointed down at the floor. My hands hurt. My signet ring was missing stones.

"That kid's down there, Freddy. You know, the one with the wagon."

I got up and looked. The kid off-loaded magazines. The wagon was positioned sideways. RED RYDER was painted on it.

"Jimmy, do you know why you're a freak?"

"I don't know, Freddy. Do you know why *you* are?"

I thought about it.

I said, "I don't know."

10

I'm perched in purgatory. I've purged the most perverted part of my hellacious history. My brain waves broiled in seditious sync with James Ellroy's. It was a carcinogenic collaboration. We collided over commas, colons, and alluring alliteration. Ellroy *finally* dumped his Otash TV show on a cable network. He'll get *more* rich and famous. Did he do a deal with the devil? Has my heartfelt hope of heaven gone *pffft*?

It has.

My keepers have convened a kangaroo court. My transfer to heaven has been stamped "still pending."

I'm deep in the dumps. They took my old body back. I'm perpetually 70 years old and *dead.*

My ass hurts. Johnnie Ray pitchforked me an hour ago. Kate Hepburn was next. Sweetie, you *did* do Rex the Rottweiler—all I wanted was ten grand for the pics!

Aaaaaah—I've got third-degree burns!!!!

I've petitioned my head keeper for a heaven day pass. A conjugal visit with Liz Taylor would put me up on my paws. More malignant memories are crawling through my cranium. I'm jumping Joan Crawford and socking it to Simone Signoret. Jerk-off James Ellroy would be digging *this* shit.

Where's Ellroy when I *really* need him? Fuck—my ass hurts!

My head keeper just passed on the word: no heaven day pass. Consolation prize: I'll have an hour in my cell with an earthly "old flame."

I put on a spiffy sweat suit. I spritzed on Lucky Tiger cologne. I prepped some withering one-liners—L.A. in the '50s, *ring-a-ding-ding!!!!!*

A tall woman approached the bars. *Ooooooh*—blasphemous-blond and boss-built! She got closer. She boded *biiiig* and seemed fatalistically familiar. She wore stewardess blues, replete with pillbox hat. She smiled. *What's that bulge in her skirt?* Holy Homo

Hannah—it’s Barb Bonvillain, pre–sex change!

I screeched and screamed.

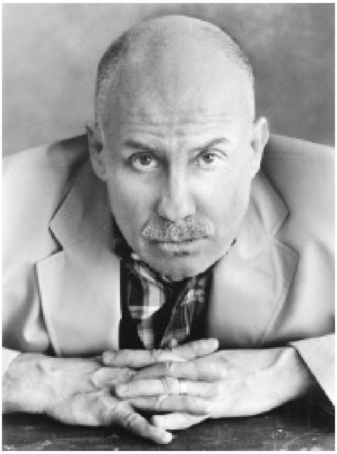
I cringed and crapped my pants.

I cried out for my keepers.

Am I hurtling to hell? Did this memoir make the prince of darkness send up for me?

Barb’s outside my cell now. Call it karmic comeuppance. You get what you pay for. I sure as shit learned it late.

About the Author



James Ellroy is the author of the groundbreaking Underworld U.S.A. Trilogy—*American Tabloid, The Cold Six Thousand,* and *Blood's A Rover*. The novels of his L.A. Quartet—*The Black Dahlia, The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential,* and *White Jazz*—were international bestsellers. *My Dark Places,* a memoir, was a *Time* Best Book of the Year and a *New York Times* Notable Book. *The Cold Six Thousand* was a *New York Times* Notable Book and a *Los Angeles Times* Best Book for 2001. Ellroy lives in Los Angeles.

Read more of James Ellroy's best stories at Byliner.com

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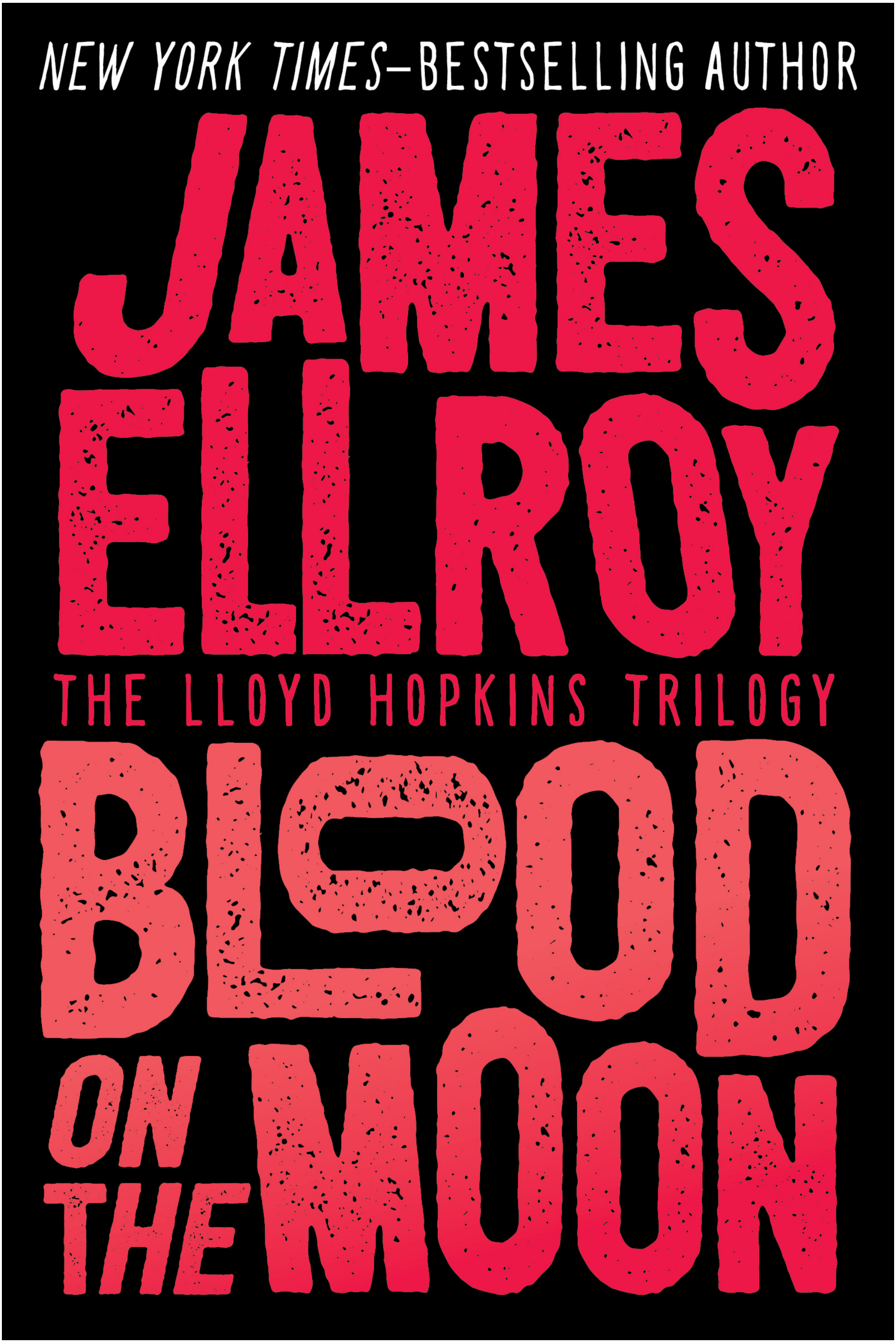

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The bay trees in our country are all withered,
and meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven;
the pale face moon looks bloody on the earth,
and lean look’d prophets whisper fearful change.

Shakespeare
Richard II

Part One
First Tastes of Blood

1

Friday, June 10th, 1964 was the start of a KRLA golden oldie weekend. The two conspirators scouting the territory where the "kidnaping" would take place blasted their portable radio at full volume to drown out the sound of power saws, hammers and crowbars–the noise of the third floor classroom renovation and the music of the Fleetwoods battling for audial supremacy.

Larry "Birdman" Craigie, the radio held close to his head, marveled at the irony of this construction work taking place a scant week before school was to close for the summer. Just then, Gary U. S. Bonds came over the airwaves, singing: "School is out at last, and I'm so glad I passed," and Larry fell to the sawdust covered linoleum floor, convulsed with laughter. School was maybe gonna be out, but he wasn't gonna pass, and his name was Chuck and he didn't give a fuck. He rolled on the floor, heedless of his recently swiped purple fuzzy Sir Guy shirt.

Delbert "Whitey" Haines started to get disgusted and mad. The Birdman was either psycho or faking it, which meant that his long time stooge was smarter than him, which meant that he was laughing *at* him. Whitey waited until Larry's laughter wound down and he propped himself into push-up position. He knew what was coming next: A series of lurid remarks about doing push-ups on Ruthie Rosenberg, how Larry was going to make her blow him while he hung from the rings in the girls' gym.

Larry's laughter trailed off, and he opened his mouth to speak. Whitey didn't let him get that far; he liked Ruthie and hated to hear nice girls blasphemed. He nuzzled the toe of his boot into Larry's shoulder blades, right where he knew the zits were really bad. Larry screeched and hopped to his feet, cradling the radio into his chest.

"You didn't have to do that."

"No," Whitey said, "but I did. I can read your mind, psycho. Phony psycho. So don't say no nasty things about nice girls. We got the punk to deal with, not nice girls."

Larry nodded; that he was included in such important plans took the sting out of the attack. He walked to the nearest window and looked out and thought of the punk in his saddle shoes and his argyle sweaters and his pretty boy looks and his poetry review that he printed up in the camera shop on Aluarado where he lived, sweeping up the store in exchange for room and board.

The *Marshall High Poetry Review*–punk, sissy poems; gooey love stuff that everyone knew was dedicated to that stuck-up Irish parochial school transfer girl and the stuck-up snooty bitches in her poet crowd, and vicious fucking attacks on him and Whitey and all the *righteous* homeboys at Marshall. When Larry had gotten zonked on glue and cherry bombed the Folk Song Club, the *Review* had commemorated the occasion with line drawings of him in a storm trooper's outfit and maiming prose: "We now have a brownshirt named Birdman–illiterate, not much of a wordman. His weapons are stealth, and poor mental health; he's really much more like a turdman."

Whitey had fared even worse: after kicking Big John Kafesjian's ass in a fair fight in the Rotunda Court, the punk had devoted an entire copy of the *Review* to an "epic" poem detailing the event, calling Whitey a "white trash loser provocateur" and ending with a prediction of his fate, phrased like an epitaph:

> "No autopsy can e'er reveal, what his darkest heart did most conceal; that shallow muscleman void, defined by terror and hate–Let that be the requiem for this light-weight."

Larry had volunteered to give Whitey a swift revenge, doing himself a favor in the process: The Boys' V.P. had said that he would be expelled for one more fight or cherry bomb episode, and the idea of no more school nearly made him cream in his jeans. But Whitey had nixed the notion of quick retribution, saying, "No, it's too easy. The punk has got to suffer like we did. He made us laughing stocks. We're gonna return the compliment, and then some."

So their plan of disrobing, beating, genital painting, and shaving was hatched. Now, if it all worked out, was the time. Larry watched Whitey trace swastikas in the sawdust with a two by four. The Del-Viking's rendition of "Come Go With Me" ended and the news came on, meaning it was three o'clock. Larry heard the whoops a moment later, then watched as the workmen gathered up their handtools and power equipment and bustled off down the main staircase, leaving them alone to wait for the poet.

Larry swallowed and nudged Whitey, afraid of upsetting his silent artwork.

"Are you sure he'll come? What if he figures out the note's a phony?"

Whitey looked up and kicked out at a half-opened wall locker door, snapping it off at its hinges. "He'll be here. A note from that Irish cunt? He'll think it's some kind of fucking lovers' rendezvous. Just relax. My sister wrote the note. Pink stationery, a girl's handwriting. Only it ain't gonna be no lovers' rendezvous. You know what I mean, homeboy?"

Larry nodded; he knew.

The conspirators waited in silence, Larry daydreaming, Whitey rummaging through the abandoned lockers, looking for left-behinds. When they heard footsteps on the second floor corridor below them, Larry grabbed a pair of jockey shorts from a brown paper bag and pulled a tube of acetate airplane glue from his pocket. He squeezed the tube's entire contents onto the shorts, then flattened himself against the row of lockers nearest to the stairwell. Whitey crouched beside him, homemade knuckle dusters coiled in his right fist.

"Sweetheart?"

The endearment, whispered hesitantly, preceded the sound of footsteps that seemed to grow bolder as they neared the third story landing. Whitey counted to himself, and when he calculated that the poet was within grabbing range he pushed Larry out of the way and stationed himself next to the edge of the stairs.

"Darling?"

Larry started to laugh, and the poet froze in mid-step, his hand on the stair rail. Whitey grabbed the hand and jerked upwards, sending the poet sprawling over the last two steps. He yanked again, relieving the pressure at just the right angle to twist the poet into a kneeling position. When his adversary was staring up at him with impotent, beseeching eyes, Whitey kicked him in the stomach, then pulled him to his feet as he trembled uncontrollably.

"Now, Birdman!" Whitey screeched.

Larry wrapped the glue-streaked jockey shorts around the poet's mouth and nostrils and pushed until his tremors became gurgling sounds and the skin around his temples went from pink to red to blue and he started to gasp for breath.

Larry relinquished his grip and backed away, the jockey shorts falling to the floor. The poet writhed on his feet, then fell backward, crashing into a half open locker door. Whitey stood his ground, both fists cocked, watching the poet retch for breath, whispering, "We killed him. We honest to fucking god killed him."

Larry was on his knees, praying and making the sign of the cross, when the poet's gasps finally caught oxygen and he expelled a huge ball of glue covered phlegm, followed by a screeching syllable, "*sc-sc-sc.*"

"Scum!"

He got the word out in a rush of new breath, the color in his face returning to normal as he drew himself slowly to his knees. "Scum! Dirty white trash, low-life scum! Stupid, mean, ugly, wanton!"

Whitey Haines started to laugh as relief flooded through him. Larry Craigie began to dry-sob in relief and molded his prayer forming hands into fists. Whitey's laughter became hysterical, and the poet, on his feet now, turned his fury on him: "Muscle-bound auto mechanic pecker-wood trash! No woman would ever touch you! The girls I know all laugh at you and your two inch dick! No dick, no sex fool. No—"

Whitey went red, and started to shake. He pulled his foot back and sent it full-force into the poet's genitals. The poet screamed and fell to his knees. Whitey yelled, "Turn the radio on, full blast!"

Larry obeyed, and the Beachboys flooded the corridor as Whitey kicked and pummeled the poet, who drew himself into a fetal ball, muttering, "scum, scum" as the blows rained into him.

When the poet's face and bare arms were covered with blood, Whitey stepped back to savor his revenge. He pulled down his fly to deliver a warm liquid *coup de grace,* and discovered he was hard. Larry noticed this, and looked to his leader for some clue to what was supposed to happen. Suddenly Whitey was terrified. He looked down at the poet, who moaned "scum," and spat out a stream of blood onto the steel-toed paratrooper boots. Now Whitey knew what his hardness meant, and he knelt beside the poet and pulled off his Levi cords and boxer shorts and spread his legs and blunderingly plunged himself into him. The poet screamed once as he entered; then his breathing settled into something strangely like ironic laughter. Whitey finished, withdrew and looked to his shock-stilled underling for support. To make it easy for him, he turned up the volume on the radio until Elvis Presley wailed into a garbled screech; then he watched as Larry delivered his ultimate acquiescence.

They left him there, bereft of tears or the will to feel anything beyond the hollowness of his devastation. As they walked away, "Cathy's Clown," by the Everly Brothers, came on the radio. They had both laughed, and Whitey had kicked him one last time.

He lay there until he was certain the quad would be deserted. He thought of his true love and imagined that she was with him, her head resting on his chest, telling him how much she loved the sonnets he composed for her.

Finally, he got to his feet. It was hard to walk; each step shot a rending pain through his bowels up into his chest. He felt at his face; it was covered with dried matter that had to be blood. He scrubbed his face furiously with his sleeve until the abrasions ran with fresh trickles of blood over smooth skin. This made him feel better, and the fact that he hadn't betrayed tears made him feel better still.

Except for a few odd groups of kids hanging out and playing catch, the quad was deserted, and the poet made his way across it in slow, painful steps. Gradually, he became aware of a warm liquid running down his legs. He pulled up his right trouser leg and saw that his sock was soaked in blood laced with white matter. Taking off his socks, he hobbled toward the "Arch of Fame," a marble inlaid walkway that commemorated the school's previous graduating classes. The poet wiped the bloody handfuls of cotton over mascots depicting the Athenians of '63 all the way back through the Delphians of '31, then strode barefoot, gaining strength and purpose with each step, out the school's south gate and onto Griffith Park Boulevard, his mind bursting with odd bits of poetry and sentimental rhymes; all for her.

When he saw the florist's shop at the corner of Griffith Park and Hyperion, he knew that this was his destination. He steeled himself for human contact and went in and purchased a dozen red roses, to be sent to an address he knew by heart but had never visited. He selected a blank card to go with them, and scribbled on the back some musings about love being etched in blood. He paid the florist, who smiled and assured him that the flowers would be delivered within the hour.

The poet walked outside, realizing that there were still two hours of daylight left, and that he had no place to go. This frightened him, and he tried composing an ode to waning daylight to keep his fear at bay. He tried, and tried, but his mind wouldn't click in and his fear became terror and he fell to his knees, sobbing for a word or phrase to make it right again.

2

When Watts burst into flames on August 23, 1965, Lloyd Hopkins was building sand castles on the beach at Malibu and inhabiting them with members of his family and fictional characters out of his own brilliant imagination.

A crowd of children had gathered around the gangly twenty-three year old, eager to be entertained, yet somehow deferential to the great mind that they sensed in the big young man whose hands so deftly molded drawbridges, moats, and parapets. Lloyd was at one with the children and with his own mind, which he viewed as a separate entity. The children watched, and he sensed their eagerness and desire to be with him and knew instinctively when to gift them with a smile or waggle his eyebrows so that they would be satisfied and he could return to his real play.

His Irish Protestant ancestors were fighting with his lunatic brother Tom for control of the castle. It was a battle between the good loyalists of the past and Tom and his rabblerousing paramilitary cohorts who thought that Negroes should be shipped back to Africa and that all roadways should be privately owned. The loonies had the upper hand temporarily–Tom and his backyard arsenal of hand grenades and automatic weaponry were formidable–but the good loyalists were staunch-hearted where Tom and his band were craven, and led by about-to-be police officer Lloyd, the Irish band had surmounted technology and was now raining flaming arrows into the midst of Tom's hardware, causing it to explode. Lloyd envisioned flames in the sand in front of him, and wondered for the eight thousandth time that day what the Academy would be like. Tougher than basic training? It would have to be, or the city of Los Angeles was in deep trouble.

Lloyd sighed. He and his loyalists had won the battle and his parents, inexplicably lucid, had come to praise the victorious son and heap scorn on the loser.

"You can't beat brains, Doris," his father told his mother. "I wish it weren't true, but they rule the world. Learn another language, Lloydy; Tom can commune with those low-lifes in that phone sales racket, but you solve puzzles and rule the world." His mother nodded mutely; the stroke had destroyed her ability to talk.

Tom just glowered in defeat.

Out of nowhere, Lloyd heard the music and very slowly, very consciously forced himself to turn in the direction from which the raucous sound was coming.

A little girl was holding a radio, cradled preciously into herself, attempting to sing along. When Lloyd saw the little girl, his heart melted. *She* didn't know how he hated music, how it undercut his thought processes. He would have to be gentle with her, as he was with women of all ages. He caught the little girl's attention, speaking softly, even as his headache grew: "Do you like my castle, sweetheart?"

"Y… Yes," the little girl said.

"It's for you. The Good Loyalists fought the battle for a fair damsel, and that damsel is you."

The music was growing deafening; Lloyd thought briefly that the whole world could hear it. The little girl shook her head coquettishly, and Lloyd said, "Can you turn the radio off, sweetie? Then I'll take you on a tour of your castle." The child complied, and fumbled the volume switch the wrong way just as the music stopped and a stern-voiced announcer intoned: "And Governor Edmund G. Brown has just announced that the National Guard has been ordered into South Central Los Angeles in force to stop the two day reign of looting and terror that has already left four dead. All members of the following units are to report immediately…"

The little girl fiddled the radio off just as Lloyd's headache metamorphosed into a perfect stillness. "You ever read *Alice in Wonderland,* sweetheart?" he asked.

"My mommy read me from the picture book," the little girl said.

"Good. Then you know what it means to follow the rabbit down the hole?"

“Does it mean what Alice did when she went into Wonderland?”

“That’s right; and that’s what old Lloyd has to do now–the radio just said so.”

“Are you ‘Old Lloyd’?”

“Yes.”

“Then what’s going to happen to your castle?”

“You inherit it, fair damsel–it’s yours to do with as you please.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

The little girl hopped into the air and came down square on top of the castle, obliterating it. Lloyd ran for his car and what he hoped would be his baptism by fire.

In the Armory, Staff Sergeant Beller took his prize cadre aside and told them that for a few bucks they could appreciably cut down the odds of getting eaten alive in niggerland and maybe have a few laughs, besides.

He motioned Lloyd Hopkins and two other P.F.C.s into the lavatory and displayed his wares and elaborated: “.45 automatic. Your classic officer’s sidearm. Guaranteed to drop any firebreathing nigger at thirty yards, regardless of where it hits him. Strictly illegal for E.M., and a valuable asset in its own right–but these babies are fully automatic–machine pistols, with my specially devised elephant clip–twenty shots, reload in five seconds flat, The piece overheats, but I throw in a glove. The piece, two elephant clips and the glove–an even C-note. Takers?” He proffered the sidearms around. The two motor pool P.F.C.s eyed them longingly and hefted them with love, but declined.

“I’m broke, Sarge,” the first P.F.C. said.

“I’m staying behind at the command post with the halftracks, Sergeant,” the second P.F.C. said.

Beller sighed, and looked up at Lloyd Hopkins, who gave him the creeps. “The Brain,” the guys in the company called him. “Hoppy, what about you?”

“I’ll take them both,” Lloyd said.

Dressed in Class C fatigues, leggings, full bandoliers and helmet liners, Co. A of the 2nd Battalion, 46th Division, California National Guard stood at parade rest in the main meeting hall of the Glendale Armory, waiting to be briefed. Their battalion commander, a forty-four year old Pasadena dentist who held the reserve rank of Lieutenant Colonel, formulated his thoughts and orders into what he hoped would be considered a fierce brevity and spoke into the microphone. “Gentlemen, we are going into the firestorm. The Los Angeles police have just informed us that a forty-eight square mile portion of South Central Los Angeles is engulfed in flames, and that entire commercial blocks have been pillaged and then set on fire. We are being sent in to protect the lives of the firemen battling those fires and to divert through our presence the looting and other criminal activity taking place. This is the sole regular infantry company in an otherwise armored division. You men, I’m sure, will be the spearhead of this peace-keeping force of civilian soldiers. You will be briefed further when we reach our objective. Good day, and God be with you!”

Nobody mentioned God as the convoy of armored half tracks and personnel carriers rolled out of Glendale toward the Golden State Freeway southbound. The main topics of conversation were guns, sex, and Negroes, until P.F.C. Lloyd

Hopkins, sweltering in the canvas covered halftrack, took off his fatigue jacket and introduced fear and immortality:

"First of all, you have to say it to yourselves, get it out in the air, say it–'I'm afraid. I don't wanna die!' You got that? No, don't say it out loud, that takes the power out of it. Say it to yourselves. There. Two, say this, too–I'm a nice white boy going to college who joined the fucking National Guard to get out of two years active duty, right?"

The civilian soldiers, whose average age was twenty, started to drift in to Lloyd's drift, and a few of them muttered, "Right."

"I can't hear you!" Lloyd bellowed, imitating Sergeant Beller.

"Right!" the guardsmen yelled in unison.

Lloyd laughed, and the others, relieved at the break in the tension, followed suit. Lloyd breathed out, letting his big frame go slack in an imitation of a Negro's shuffle."And you all be afraid of de colored man?" he said in broad dialect.

Silence greeted the question, followed by a general breakout of hushed conversations. This angered Lloyd; he felt his momentum was drifting away, destroying this transcendent moment of his life.

He banged the butt end of his M-14 into the metal floorboard of the half-track. "Right!" he screamed. "Right, you dumb-fuck, pussy-whipped, nigger-scared, chicken-shit motherfuckers! Right?" He banged his rifle again. "Right? Right? Right? Right?"

"*Right*!!!" The half-track exploded with the word, the *feeling,* the new pride in candor, and the laughter that followed grew deafening in its freedom and bravado.

Lloyd slammed his rifle butt one last time, to call the group to order. "Then they can't hurt us. Do you know that?" He waited until he was rewarded by a nod of the head from every man present, then pulled his bayonet from its scabbard and cut a large hole in the canvas top of the half-track. Being tall, he was able to peer out the top with ease. In the distance he could see the flatlands of his beloved L.A. Basin awash in smog. Spirals of flame and smoke covered its southern perimeter. Lloyd thought it was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

The division bivouacked at McCallum Park on Florence and 90th Street, a mile from the heart of the firestorm. Trees were downed to provide space for the hundred-odd military vehicles that would cruise the streets of Watts that night, filled with men armed to the teeth, and C-rations were distributed from the back of a five ton truck while platoon leaders briefed their men on their assignments.

Rumors abounded, fed by a cadre of L.A.P.D. and Sheriff's liaison officers: The Black Muslims were coming out in force, in whiteface, bent on hitting the profusion of discount appliance stores near Vermont and Slauson; scores of Negro youth gangs on pep pills were stealing cars and forming "kamikaze" squads and heading for Beverly Hills and Bel-Air; Rob "Magawambi" Jones and his Afro-Americans for Goldwater had taken a distinct left turn and were demanding that Mayor Yorty grant them eight commercial blocks on Wilshire Boulevard as reparation for "L.A.P.D. Crimes Against Humanity." If their terms were not met within twenty-four hours, those eight blocks would be incinerated by firebombs hidden deep within the bowels of the LaBrea Tar Pits.

Lloyd Hopkins didn't believe a word of it. He understood the hyperbole of fear and understood further that his fellow civilian soldiers and cops were hyping themselves up to kill and that a lot of poor black bastards out to grab themselves a color TV and a case of booze were going to die.

Lloyd gobbled his C-rations and listened to his platoon leader, Lt. Campion, the night manager of a Bob's Big Boy Restaurant, explain orders that had come down to him from several other higher echelon civilian soldiers: "Being infantry, we will provide foot patrol, walking point for the armored guys–checking out doorways, alleys, letting our presence be known; bayonets fixed, combat stance, that kind of shit. Look tough. The armored platoon we trained with last summer at camp will be the platoon we hang with tonight. Questions? Everyone know who their squad leader is? Any new men with questions?"

Sergeant Beller, stretched out on the grass at the back of the platoon, raised his hand and said: "Loot, you know that the platoon is hanging in at four men over strength? Fifty-four men?"

Campion cleared his throat. "Yes…uh…yes, Sergeant, I do."

"Sir, do you also know that we got three men who got special M.O.S.s? Three men who ain't regular grunts?"

"You mean…"

"I mean, *sir*, that myself, Hopkins, and Jensen are infantry scouts, and I'm sure you'll agree we could be of more value to this operation by running far point ahead of the armor. Right, *sir*?"

Lloyd saw the Lieutenant start to waver, and suddenly realized that *he* wanted it as bad as Beller did. Raising his hand, he said, "Sir, Sergeant Beller is right; we can walk far point *and* protect the platoon better *and* make it more autonomous. The platoon is over strength, and…"

The Lieutenant capitulated. "All right then," he said, "Beller, Hopkins and Jensen, you walk point two hundred yards ahead of the convoy. Be careful–stay sharp. No more questions? Platoon dismissed."

Lloyd and Beller found each other just as the tanks and half-tracks were starting their engines, flooding the twilight air with the sound of volatile combustion. Beller smiled; Lloyd smiled back in silent complicity.

"*Far* point, Sergeant?"

"*Far, far* point, Hoppy."

"What about Jensen?"

"He's just a kid. I'll tell him to hang back with the armor. *We're* covered. We've got carte blanche; that's the important thing."

"Opposite sides of the street?"

"Sounds right to me. Whistle twice if it gets hairy. Why do they call you 'The Brain'?"

"Because I'm very intelligent."

"Intelligent enough to know that the niggers are destroying the whole fucking country?"

"No, too intelligent for that shit. Anyone with half a brain knows that this is just a temporary blow-out and that when it's over it'll be business as usual. I'm here to see about saving innocent lives."

Beller said scornfully, "That's a crock. It just proves brains are over-rated.

Guts are what counts."

"Brains rule the world."

"But the world's all fucked up."

"I don't know. Let's see what it's like out there."

"Yeah, let's do that." Beller began to worry about his ass. Hoppy was starting to sound like a nigger lover.

They ditched the division completely, walking south towards where the flames rose the highest and the gunfire sounded its loudest echoes.

Lloyd took the north side of 93rd Street and Beller the south, rifles at high port with bayonets fixed and sharpened, eyes scanning row after row of cheap white clapboard houses where Negro families peered from lighted windows and sat on porches, drinking, smoking, chattering and waiting for something to *happen.*

They hit Central. Lloyd gulped and felt a trickle of sweat run down into his skivvies, which hung below his hipbones, weighted down by the two specially constructed automatics jammed into his waistband.

Beller whistled from across the street and pointed forward. Lloyd nodded as he felt a whiff of smoke hit his nostrils. They walked south, and it took long moments for Lloyd's head to click into place and assimilate the epiphanies, the perfect logic of the self-destruction he was viewing:

Liquor stores, night clubs, process parlors and storefront churches interspersed with vacant lots covered with abandoned cars burned out from the inside. Gutted storefront after gutted storefront spilling profusions of broken liquor bottles; broken glass everywhere; the gutters filled with cheap electric ware–non-hockable items obviously looted in haste and discarded when the looters realized they were valueless.

Lloyd poked his M-14 into smashed-in windows, squinting into the darkness, cocking his ears the way he had seen dogs do it, listening for the slightest sound or presence of movement. There was nothing–only the wail of sirens and the crack of gunshots in the distance.

Beller trotted across the street just as an L.A.P.D. black-and-white turned onto Central from 94th. Two flak-coated officers jumped out, the driver running up to Lloyd and demanding: "What the fuck are you *doing* here?"

Beller answered, startling the cops, who swiveled to face him, reaching for their .38s. "Far point, officer! My buddy and I been assigned to run ahead of our company and search out snipers. We're infantry scouts."

Lloyd knew that the cops didn't buy it and that he *had* to pursue the violent wonder of Watts without his low-life partner. He sent a sharp look Beller's way and said, "I think we're lost. We were only supposed to go out three blocks ahead, but we took a wrong turn somewhere. All the houses on these numbered streets look alike." He hesitated, trying to look bewildered.

Beller caught the drift and said, "Yeah. All these houses look alike. All these niggers on their steps sloppin' up juice look alike, too."

The older of the two cops nodded, then pointed south and said, "You guys with that artillery down near 102nd? The heavy-duty coon hunting?"

Lloyd and Beller looked at each other. Beller licked his lips to try to keep from laughing. "Yes," they said in unison.

“Then get in the car. You ain’t lost no more.”

As they highballed it southbound without lights or siren, Lloyd told the cops he was flagged for the October class at the academy and that he wanted the riot to be his *solo* training ground. The younger cop whooped and said, “Then this riot *is* a preordained training ground for you. How tall are you, six-four? Six-five? With your size, you’re gonna get sent straight to 77th Street Division, Watts, these self-same fucking streets we’re cruising right now. After the smoke clears and the fucking liberals run off at the mouth about the niggers being victims of poverty, there’s gonna be the job of maintaining order over some very agitated bad-ass niggers who’ve had a distinct taste of blood. What’s your name, kid?”

“Hopkins.”

“You ever kill anyone, Hopkins?”

“No, sir.”

“Don’t call me ‘sir.’ You ain’t a cop yet, and I’m a plain old patrolman. Well, I killed lots of guys in Korea. Lots and *lots,* and it changed me. Things look different now. Real different. I’ve talked about it to other guys who’ve lost their cherry, and we all agree: You appreciate different things. You see innocent people, like little kids, and you want them to stay that way because you got no innocence yourself. Little things like little kids and their toys and pets get to you, ’cause you know they’re heading straight into this big fucking shitstorm and you don’t want them to. Then you see people who got no regard for gentle things, for decent things, and you gotta come down hard on them. You gotta protect what two cents worth of innocence there is in the world. That’s why I’m a cop. You look cherry to me, Hopkins. You look eager, too. You understand what I’m saying?”

Lloyd nodded, tingling with a pins and needles sensation. He smelled smoke through the open patrol car window, and the feeling began to numb as he realized the cop was talking instinctively about Lloyd’s Irish Protestant ethos. “I understand exactly what you’re saying,” he said.

“Good, kid. Then it starts tonight. Pull over, partner.”

The older cop braked and drew up to the curb.

“It’s all yours, kid,” the younger cop said, reaching over and banging Lloyd’s helmet. “We’ll take your buddy back to your outfit. You see if you can stir up anything on your own.”

Lloyd tumbled out of the patrol car so fast that he never got to thank his mentor. They hit the siren by way of farewell.

102nd and Central was a chaos of smoldering ruins, the hiss of fire hoses, the squeal of tires on the now wet pavement, all modulated by police helicopters that hovered overhead, casting broad searchlights into storefronts to give the firemen light to work by.

Lloyd walked into the maelstrom, grinning broadly, still suffused with the eloquent recapitulation of his philosophy. He watched an armored half-track move slowly down the street, a fifty caliber machine gun mounted in its bed. A guardsman in the cab barked into a powerful bullhorn: “Curfew in five minutes! This area is under martial law! Anyone found on the streets after nine o’clock will be arrested. Anyone attempting to cross official police barriers will be shot. Repeat, curfew in five minutes!”

The words, clearly enunciated with force and malice, echoed loudly down the street, resulting in a flurry of activity. Within seconds Lloyd saw dozens of young men dart from burnt-out buildings, running full speed in any direction not caught by the searchlights. He rubbed his eyes and squinted to see if the men were carrying pilfered merchandise, only to discover they had disappeared before he could yell out or train his M-14 on them.

Lloyd shook his head and walked past a group of firemen milling around in front of a ravaged liquor store. They all noticed him, but no one seemed puzzled by the anomaly of a lone guardsman on foot patrol. Emboldened, Lloyd decided to check out life indoors.

He liked it. The darkness inside the burned-out store was soothing and Lloyd sensed that the shadow-shrouded silence was there to inform him with essential knowledge. He stopped and took a roll of friction tape from his fatigue jacket pocket and fixed his flashlight to the bottom edge of his bayonet. He swung his rifle in a figure eight arc and admired the results: wherever the M-14 pointed, there would be light.

Mounds of charred wood; piles of insulation stuffing; crushed booze bottles. Used condoms everywhere. Lloyd chuckled at the thought of subterranean liquor store coupling, then felt himself go dead cold as his chuckle was returned, followed by a hideous low moan.

He moved his M-14 around in a three hundred sixty degree arc, the muzzle at waist level. Once, then twice. On the third time around he was rewarded: an old man lay crumpled atop a mound of wadded up insulation fiber. Lloyd's heart melted. The old bastard was withered to prune dimensions and was obviously a threat to no one. He walked to the old man and handed him his canteen. The old man grasped it with shaking hands, raised it to his lips, then threw it to the ground, screeching:

"That not be what I need! I needs my Lucy! I gots to have my Lucy!"

Lloyd was befuddled. Was the old geezer crying out for his wife or some long lost love?

He removed the flashlight from his bayonet housing and shined it in the old man's face, then winced; the mouth and chin of that face were covered with congealed blood, from which glass shards stuck out like crystalline porcupine quills. Lloyd recoiled, then pointed his light into the old man's lap and recoiled further: the withered hands were cut to the bone, and three fingers of the right hand had been ground down to bloody stubs. The gnarled left hand held the shattered remnants of a bottle of Thunderbird wine.

"My Lucy! Gimme my Lucy!" the old man wailed, spitting globules of blood out with each word.

Lloyd took his flashlight and went crashing through the glass strewn ruins, brushing tears from his eyes, searching for an intact bottle of liquid salvation. Finally he found one, partially hidden by an overturned ceiling beam–a pint of six-year-old Seagram's 7.

Lloyd carried the bottle over and fed the old man, holding his head by the short nap of his grey hair, keeping the bottle a few inches from his bloody lips lest he try to ingest the entire thing. Thoughts of going for medical attention crossed his mind, but he pushed them away. He knew that the old man wanted to die, that he deserved to die drunk and that this service he was performing was the wartime equivalent of the many hours he had spent talking to his mute, brain-damaged mother.

The old man made slurping sounds, sucking convulsively at the bottle each time it touched his lips. After a few minutes had passed and half the pint was consumed, his tremors subsided and he pushed Lloyd’s hand away.

“Dis be de start of World War Three,” he said.

Lloyd ignored the comment and said, “I’m P.F.C. Hopkins, California National Guard. Do you want medical attention?”

The old man laughed, coughing up huge wads of blood-streaked sputum.

“I think you’re bleeding internally,” Lloyd said. “I can get you to an ambulance. Do you think you can walk?”

“I can do anything I wants to,” the old man shrieked, “but I wants to die! Ain’t no place for me in this war–I gots to make the scene on de other side!”

The bloodshot, filmy old brown eyes importuned Lloyd as if he were an idiot child. He fed the old man again, watching some kind of liquid acceptance course through the ancient body. When the bottle was finished the old man said, “You gots to do me a favor, white boy.”

“Name it,” Lloyd said.

“I’m gonna die. You gots to go over to my room and get my books and maps and things out and sell dem so I can have a decent burial. Christian like, you dig?”

“Where’s your room?”

“It in Long Beach.”

“I can go there when the riot is over. Not until then.”

The old man shook his head furiously, until his body shook with it, rag-doll like, all the way down to his toes. “You gots to! They gonna lock me out tomorrow ’cause I behind on the rent! Then de po-lice gonna throw me in de sewer with the rats! You gots to!”

“Hush,” Lloyd said. “I can’t go that far. Not now. Don’t you have any friends here I can talk to? Someone who can go to Long Beach for you?”

The old man considered the offer. Lloyd watched his wheels turn slowly. “You goes to de mission on Avalon an’ one hundred and sixth. De African church. You talk to Sister Sylvia. You tell her she got to go to Famous Johnson’s crib and get his shit and sell it. She gots my birthday in de church records. I wants a nice headstone. You tells her I loves Jesus, but I loves sweet Lucy more.”

Lloyd stood up. “How bad do you want to die?” he asked.

“Bad, man, bad.”

“Why?”

“Ain’t no place for me in dis war, man.”

“What war?”

“World War Three, you dumb motherfucker!”

Lloyd thought of his mother and reached for his rifle, but couldn’t do it.

Lloyd ran all the way to 106th and Avalon, composing epitaphs for Famous Johnson en route. His chest was heaving and his arms and shoulders ached from holding his rifle at high port, and when he saw the neon sign proclaiming the “United African Episcopal Methodist Church” he took in last gulps of air to bring his raging heartbeat down to a low ebb; he wanted to be the very picture of armed dignity on a mission of mercy.

The church was storefront, two stories high, with lights shining in violation of the curfew. Lloyd walked in, to be confronted by a pandemonium that was part prayer meeting, part coffee klatch. Large tables had been set up lengthwise between rows of wooden pews, and middle aged and elderly Negroes were kneeling in prayer and helping themselves to coffee and donuts.

Lloyd moved slowly along with walls, which were festooned with paintings of a black Christ, weeping, blood dripping from his crown of thorns. He started looking to the faces of the kneelers for signs of holiness or compassion. All he saw was fear.

Until he noticed a fat black woman in a white robe who seemed to be smiling inwardly as she dispensed shoulder taps to the people who knelt by the pews nearest the aisle. When the woman noticed Lloyd she shouted, “Welcome, soldier,” above the other hubbub and walked up to him, hand extended.

Startled, Lloyd shook the hand and said, “I’m P.F.C. Hopkins. I’m here on a mission of mercy for one of your parishioners.”

The woman dropped Lloyd’s hand and said, “I’m Sister Sylvia. This church is strictly for the Afro-American folk, but tonight is sort of special. Did you come to pray for the victims of this Armageddon? Do that be your mission?”

Lloyd shook his head. “No, I came to ask a favor. Famous Johnson is dead. Before he died, he asked me to come here and tell you to sell his belongings so he can have a proper burial. He told me you know the address of his place in Long Beach and his birthdate. He wants a nice headstone. He told me to tell you he loves Jesus.” Lloyd was startled to see Sister Sylvia shaking her head ironically, a grin starting to form at the corners of her mouth. “I don’t think it’s funny,” he said.

“You don’t!” Sister Sylvia bellowed. “Well, I does! Famous Johnson was trash, young white man! He deserved to be called what he was–a nigger! And that room in Long Beach? That nothing but fantasy! Famous Johnson lived out of his car, with his sin things in the back seat! He used to come by this church for the donuts and coffee, but that all! Famous Johnson didn’t have nothin’ to sell!”

“But I…”

“You comes with me, young man. I shows you, so you forget all about In-famous Johnson with a clean conscience.”

Lloyd decided not to protest; he wanted to see the fat woman’s definition of sin.

It was a high-finned, chopped and lowered 1947 Cadillac, what Crazy Tom would have called a “Coon-Mobile.”

Lloyd flashed his light into the back seat as Sister Sylvia stood triumphantly next to him, legs spread stolidly, her arms wrapped around her midsection in an “I told you so” attitude. He swung the door open. The tuck and roll upholstered seats were covered with empty soda pop bottles and pornographic photographs, most of them depicting Negro couples engaged in fellatio. Lloyd felt a sudden wave of pity; the sucker and suckee were overweight and middle-aged, and the tawdriness of the photos was a far cry from the *Playboy* magazines he had collected since high school. He didn’t want it to be; it was too rotten a legacy for any human being.

“I told you so!” Sister Sylvia barked. “This is In-famous Johnson’s house! You gonna sell them pictures and return them empties, and get you a fast dollar ninety-eight, which ain't gonna get you nothin' but two bottles o' T-Bird to pour over In-famous's pauper grave!"

Lloyd shook his head. Radio noise from a block away pounded him, causing the whole ugly moment to sway in his vision. "But you don't understand, ma'am," he said. "Famous entrusted this job to *me*. It's my *job*. It's my *duty*. It's my…"

"I don't wanna hear nothin' 'bout that sinner! You hears me? I wouldn't bury that trash in our cemetery for all the tea in China. You hears me?" Sister Sylvia didn't wait for an answer; she strode angrily back in the direction of her church, leaving Lloyd alone on the sidewalk, wishing the gunshots in the distance would escalate to the point where they drowned out the radio noise.

He sat down on the curb and thought of the two wretched people in the photographs, and of Janice who wouldn't blow him, but who did the final deed on their first date two weeks before high school graduation, leaving Lloyd Hopkins, Marshall High Class of '59, aglow with wonder at the love in his future. Now, six years later, Lloyd Hopkins, *summa cum laude* graduate of Stanford University, graduate of the Fort Polk Infantry School and the Evelyn Wood Speed Reading Class and six year lover of Janice Marie Rice, sat on a curb in Watts wondering why he couldn't get what a fat Negro slob probably got all the time. Lloyd shined his light in the back seat window again. It was as he suspected; the guy's dick was at least two inches bigger than his. He decided it was God and commitment. The jerk in the photo had a low I.Q. and a bad build, so God threw him a big wang to slide through life on. It all worked out.

Janice would take him orally when he graduated the academy and they got married. The last thought made him sex-flushed and sad. Janice made him sad. Then he thought of the daughters they would create. Janice, five foot eleven barefoot, slender, but with a robust set to her hips, was made for bearing exceptional children. Daughters. They would have to be daughters, made to be nurtured by the love in his Irish Protestant credo…

Lloyd took his Janice-daughter fantasies to ends of fulfillment both good and bad, then shifted his mind to women in general–women pure, wanton, vulnerable, needy, strong; all the ambivalences of his mother, now silent in her strength, rendered dumb by years of giving shelter to her lunatic male brood, from which only he emerged sane and capable of providing solace himself.

Lloyd heard a burst of gunshots in the near distance. Automatic weapon fire. At first he thought it was the radio or TV, but it was too real, too right, and it was coming from the direction of the African Church. He picked up his M-14 and ran to the corner. As he rounded it he heard screams, and turned to look in the shattered storefront window. When he saw the devastation inside, he screamed himself. Sister Sylvia and three male parishioners lay on the linoleum floor in a mass of tangled flesh, melded together in a river of blood. From somewhere within the twisted mound of bodies a severed artery shot up a red geyser. Lloyd, transfixed, watched it die and felt his scream metamorphose into the single word, "What! What! What!"

He screeched it until he was able to will his eyes from the bodies to the rest of the cordite-reeking church. The tops of dark heads peered above pews. Dimly, Lloyd perceived that the people were terrified of him. Tears streaming down his face, he dropped his rifle to the pavement and screamed, “What? What? What?”, only to be answered by a score of voices hurling, “Killer, killer, murderer!” in horror and outrage.

It was then that he heard it, faintly but plainly, back off to his left, clicking in so succinctly that he knew it was real, not electronic: “*Auf weidersehen,* niggers. *Auf weidersehen,* jungle bunnies. See ya in hell.”

It was Beller.

Lloyd knew what he had to do. He tossed the Negroes huddled behind their pews his sternest resolve and went after him, leaving his rifle behind on the pavement, crouching his long frame low behind parked cars as he made his way toward the destroyer of innocence.

Beller was running slowly north, unaware that he was being followed. Lloyd could see him framed plainly in the glow of those streetlights not destroyed, turning every few moments to look back and savor his triumph. He checked the second hand on his watch and calculated. It was obvious: Belter’s unconscious was telling him to turn around and scan his blind side every twenty seconds.

Lloyd sprinted full out, counting to himself, and hit the pavement prone just as Beller would turn and peer backwards. He was within fifty yards of the killer when Beller ducked into an alleyway and started screaming, “Freeze, nigger, freeze!” A burst of shots followed, fully automatic. Lloyd knew it was the elephant clip .45.

He reached the alley and halted, catching his breath. There was a dark shape near the end of the cul-de-sac. Lloyd squinted and discerned that it was clad in fatigue green. He heard Beller’s voice a moment later, spitting out garbled epithets.

Lloyd entered the alley, inching his way along a brick wall. He pulled one of his .45s from his waistband and flipped off the safety. He was almost within firing distance when his foot hit a tin can, the sound reverberating like hollow thunder.

He fired just as Beller did, and the flash from their gun barrels lit up the alley blindingly, illuminating Beller, crouched over a dead Negro man, the man headless, blown apart at the shoulders, his neck a massive cavity of bloody, charred tissue. Lloyd screamed as the recoil from his .45 lifted him into the air and slammed him back to the ground. A dozen shots tore into the wall above him, and he rolled frantically on the glass strewn pavement as Beller fired another burst at the ground, causing glass and blacktop shrapnel to explode before his eyes.

Lloyd started to sob. He flung his arm over his eyes and prayed for courage and the chance to be a good husband to Janice. His prayers were interrupted by the sound of footsteps running away from him. His mind clicked in: Beller was out of ammo and was running for his life. Lloyd willed himself to stand upright. His legs wobbled, but his mind was steadfast. He was right: Beller’s empty M-14 lay across the torso of the dead man, and the .45, spent and burning to the touch, lay a few feet away.

Lloyd deep breathed, reloaded and listened for sounds of flight. He caught them; off to his left he heard the scuffle of feet and strained breathing. He followed the sounds by the shortest possible route, scaling the cement alleyway wall and coming down into a weed-strewn back yard, where the breath-noise mixed with the sound of a radio playing jazz.

Lloyd blundered through the yard, mumbling prayers to engulf the music. He found a walkway leading to the street, and the light from the adjoining house let him pick out a trail of freshly spilled blood. He saw that the blood led into a huge vacant lot, pitch dark and eerily silent.

Lloyd listened, willing himself to assume the ears of a highly attuned animal. Just as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness and let him pick out objects in the lot, he heard it: a snapping of metal on metal, coming from the direction of a portable construction toilet. It was unmistakable: Beller was still armed with one of his evil customized .45s, and he knew Lloyd was near.

Lloyd hurled a rock at the outhouse. The door creaked open and three single shots rang out, followed by the sound of doors slamming all the way down the block.

Lloyd got an idea. He walked down the street, scanning front porches until he found what he was looking for, nestled among an evening's array of potato chip bags and empty beer cans–a portable radio. Steeling himself, he turned on the volume and was bombarded by rhythmic soul music. Despite his headache, he smiled, then turned the volume down. It was poetic justice for Staff Sergeant Richard A. Beller.

Lloyd carried the radio into the vacant lot and placed it on the ground ten yards in back of the construction toilet, then flipped the volume dial and ran in the opposite direction.

Beller burst out the door of the outhouse seconds later, screaming, "Nigger! Nigger! Nigger!" Blindly, he fired off a series of shots. The light from his muzzle bursts illuminated him perfectly. Lloyd raised his .45 and aimed slowly, pointing at Beller's feet to allow for recoil. He squeezed the trigger, the gun kicked and the elephant clip emptied. Beller screamed. Lloyd dug into the dirt, stifling his own screams. The radio blasted rhythm and blues, and Lloyd ran toward the sound, the butt end of his .45 extended. He stumbled in the darkness, then got down on his hands and knees and bludgeoned the music to death.

Lloyd stood up unsteadily, then walked to the remains of Richard Beller. He felt strangely calm as he carried first the entrails of the former civilian soldier to the outhouse, then the lower body, then the disembodied arms. Beller's head was nothing but splattered bone and brain debris, and Lloyd let them lie in the dirt.

Muttering, "God please, please, God, rabbit down the hole," Lloyd walked out to the street, noting with his animal antennae that there was no one about–the locals were either scared shitless by the gunfire or inured to it. He emptied his canteen into the gutter and found a length of surgical tubing in his bayonet case–good strangling cord, Beller had once told him. There was a '61 Ford Fairlane at the curb. Deftly manipulating the tubing and canteen, Lloyd managed to siphon a solid pint of gas from the tank. He walked back to the outhouse and doused what remained of Beller, than reloaded his .45 and paced off ten yards. He fired, and the outhouse exploded. Lloyd walked back to Avalon Boulevard. When he turned around, the entire lot was engulfed in flames.

Two days later, the Watts Riot was over. Order had been restored to the devastated underbelly of South Central Los Angeles. Forty-two lives were lost–forty rioters, one deputy sheriff and one National Guardsman whose body was never found, but who was presumed dead.

The riot was attributed to many causes. The N.A.A.C.P. and the Urban League attributed it to racism and poverty. The Black Muslim Party attributed it to police brutality. Los Angeles Chief of Police William H. Parker attributed it to a “breakdown in moral values.” Lloyd Hopkins considered all these theories fatuous nonsense. He attributed the Watts Riot to the death of the innocent heart, most specifically the heart of an old black wino named Famous Johnson.

When it was over, Lloyd retrieved his car from the parking lot of the Glendale Armory and drove to Janice’s apartment. They made love, and Janice provided what comfort she could, but refused the oral comfort Lloyd begged for. He left her bed at three in the morning and went looking for it.

He found a Negro prostitute at the corner of Western and Adams who was willing to do the deed for ten dollars, and they drove to a side street and parked. Lloyd screamed when he came, frightening the hooker, who bolted out of the car before she could collect her money.

Lloyd cruised aimlessly until dawn, then drove to his parents’ house in Silverlake. He could hear his father snoring as he unlocked the door, and he saw light coming from under the door to Tom’s room. His mother was in her den, sitting in her bentwood rocker. All the lights in the room were off, except for the colored light from the fish tank. Lloyd sat down on the floor and told the mute, prematurely old woman his entire life story, ending with the killing of the killer of innocence and how he could now protect innocent people as never before. Absolved and fortified, he kissed his mother’s cheek and wondered how he would kill the eight weeks before he entered the Academy.

Tom was waiting for him outside the house, stationed firmly on the pathway leading to the sidewalk. When he saw Lloyd, he laughed and opened his mouth to speak. Lloyd didn’t let him. He pulled a .45 automatic from his waistband and placed it against Tom’s forehead. Tom started to tremble, and Lloyd said very softly, “If you ever mention niggers, commies, kikes, or any of that shit to me ever again, I’ll kill you.” Tom’s florid face went pale, and Lloyd smiled and walked back to the shattered remains of his own innocence.

Part Two
Torch Songs

3

He cruised west on Ventura Boulevard, savoring the newness of daylight-saving time, the clarity of the extra-long afternoons and the unseasonably warm spring weather that had the harlots dressed in tank tops and bare-midriff halters and the real women in a profusion of demure summer pastels: pink, light blue and green, pale yellow.

It had been many months since the last time, and he attributed this hiatus to the shifting weather patterns that had his head in a tizzy: warm one day, cold and rainy the next, you never knew how women were going to dress, so it was hard to get a fix on one to rescue–you couldn't feel the colors, the texture of what a woman was until you viewed her in a context of consistency. God knows that when the planning started the little fluxes of her life became all too evident; if he lost love for her then, the resultant pity reaffirmed the spiritual aspects of his purpose and gave him the detachment necessary to do the job.

But the planning was at *least* half of it, the part that edified, that cleansed *him,* that gave him abstention from minor chaos and precarious impunity from a world that gobbled up the refined and sensitive and spit them out like so much waste fluid.

Deciding to drive through Topanga Canyon on his way back to the city, he killed the air-conditioning and put a meditation tape on the cassette player, one that stressed his favorite theme: the silent mover, self-assured and accepting, armed with a compassionate purpose. He listened as the minister with the countrified voice spoke of the necessity of goals. "What sets the man of movement apart from the man dwelling in the netherworld of stasis is the road, both inward and outward bound, toward worthwhile goals. Traveling this road is both the journey and the destination, the gift both given and received. You can change your life forever if you will follow this simple thirty day program. First, think of what you want most at this moment–it can be anything from spiritual enlightenment to a new car. Write that goal down on a piece of paper, and write today's date next to it. Now, for the next thirty days, I want you to concentrate on achieving that goal, and allow no thoughts of failure to enter your mind. If these thoughts intrude, banish them! Banish all but the good pure thoughts of achieving your goal, and miracles will happen!"

He believed it; he had made it work for him. There were now twenty pieces of carefully folded paper attesting to the fact that it worked.

He had first played the tape fifteen years before, in 1967, and was impressed. But he didn't know what he wanted. Three days later he saw her, and knew. Jane Wilhelm was her name. Grosse Point born and bred, she had fled Bennington in her senior year, hitching west in search of new values and friends. She had drifted, oxford shirt and penny loafer clad, to the dope scene on the Sunset Strip. He had first seen her outside the Whisky Au Go Go, talking to a bunch of hippie low lifers, obviously trying to downplay her intelligence and good breeding. He picked her up and told her of his tape and piece of paper. She was touched, but laughed aloud for several moments. If he wanted to ball, why didn't he just ask? Romanticism was corny, and she was a liberated woman.

It was then, in his refusal, that he took his first moral stand. He now knew the exactitude of his immediate goal and all his future ones: the salvation of female innocence.

He kept Jane Wilhelm under loose surveillance until the end of the thirty-day period prescribed by the minister, watching her make the rounds of love-ins, crash pads and rock concerts. Shortly after midnight on the thirty-first day, Jane stumbled away alone from Gazzari's Disco. From his car, parked just south of Sunset, he watched her weave across the street. He turned on his high beams, catching her full in the face, committing to memory her drug-puffed features and dilated eyes. It was her final debasement. He strangled her right there on the sidewalk, then threw her body into the trunk of his car.

Three nights later he drove north to the farmland outside of Oxnard. After a roadside prayer service that featured his salvation tape, he buried Jane in the soft earth adjoining a rock quarry. So far as he knew, her body was never found.

He turned onto Topanga Canyon Road, recalling the methodology that had allowed him to save twenty women without the excitable mass media or fuzz ever seizing on him. It was simple. He became his women, spending months assimilating the details of their lives, savoring every nuance, cataloguing every perfection and imperfection before deciding on the method of elimination, which was then tailored to fit the persona, indeed the very soul, of his intended. Thus the planning was the courtship, and the killing the betrothal.

The thought of courtship brought forth a huge rush of ardent imagery, all revolving around prosaic detail, the small intimacies that only a lover could appreciate.

Elaine from 1969, who had loved baroque music; who, although pretty, had spent virtually all her free time listening to Bach and Vivaldi with the windows of her garage apartment open, even in the coldest weather–wanting to share the beauty she felt with a world deadset on ignoring her. Night after night he had listened with a boom receiver from a nearby rooftop, picking up muttered declarations of loneliness beneath the music, almost weeping as their hearts fused in the strains of the Brandenburg Concerti.

Twice he walked through the apartment, collating directions that would indicate the proper way to salvage Elaine's soul. He had decided to wait, to meditate on the end of this woman's life, when he found underneath her sweaters an application for a computer dating service. That Elaine had succumbed to that vulgarity was the final indicator.

He spent a month studying her handwriting, and a week composing a suicide note in that hand. One cold night after Thanksgiving he climbed in through a window and opened three grain and a half Seconal capsules into the bottle of orange juice that he knew Elaine drank from every night before retiring. Later, he watched through a telescope as she took death's communion, then gave her two hours of sleep before entering the apartment, leaving the note and turning on the gas. As a final act of love he put a Vivaldi flute concerto on the stereo to provide accompaniment to Elaine's departure.

Blinding memories of other lovers caused his eyes to well with tears as he pictured their moments of culmination: Karen the horse lover, whose house was a virtual testament to her equine passion; Karen who rode bareback in the hills above Malibu and who died astride her strawberry roan as he ran from cover and bludgeoned the horse over the edge of a cliff; Monica, of the exquisite taste in small things, who clad the polio-riddled body she hated in the finest of silk and wool. As he continued to steal glimpses of her diary and watched her loathing of her body grow, he knew that dismemberment would be the ultimate mercy. After strangling Monica in her Marina Del Ray apartment, he rent her with a power saw and dumped her plastic encased parts into the ocean near Manhattan Beach. Police attributed the death to the "Trashbag Killer."

He dashed tears from his eyes, feeling the memories snowball into yearning. It was time again.

He drove into Westwood Village, paid to park and went walking, deciding not to be hasty, yet also not unduly cautious. Late dusk was falling, bringing with it a corresponding drop in temperature, and the Village streets were bursting with female vitality: women everywhere; snuggling into sweaters, hugging close to storefronts as they waited to enter movie theatres, browsing through bookstores, walking around him, past him, almost through him, it seemed.

Late dusk became night, and with darkness the streets had thinned to the point where individual women stood out in all their uniqueness. It was then that he saw her, standing in front of Hunter's Book Store, peering into the window as if in search of a vision. She was tall and slender, wearing a minimum of make-up on a soft face that tried hard to project a no-nonsense air. Late twenties–a seeker–a good-natured artificer with a sense of humor, he decided; she would enter the book store, check out the best sellers first, then the quality paperbacks, finally settling on a gothic romance or detective novel. She was lonely. She needed him.

The woman pulled her hair into a bun and slid a barette over the loose ends. She sighed and pushed open the door of the bookstore, then strode purposefully to a display table covered with books on self-improvement. Everything from *Creative Divorce* to *Winning Through Dynamic Yoga* was represented, and the woman hesitated, then grabbed a copy of *Force-Field Synergistics Can Save Your Life*, and carried it back to the cashier.

He was a discreet distance behind her all the way, and when she pulled out a checkbook to pay for her purchase, he memorized the name and address printed on her checks:

Linda Deverson
3583 Mentone Avenue
Culver City, Calif. 90408

He didn't wait to hear Linda Deverson converse with the cashier. He ran out of the store and all the way to his car, seized by love and the territorial imperative: the poet wanted to see the ground of his new courtship.

Linda Deverson was many things, he thought three weeks later as he developed the latest batch of photos. Pulling them out of the solution and hanging them up, he watched her spring to life in vivid black and white. There was Linda leaving the office where she worked as a real estate salesperson; Linda scowling as she attempted to pump her own gas; Linda jogging down San Vicente Boulevard;

Linda staring out of her living room window, smoking a cigarette.

He locked the shop, took the photos and went upstairs to his apartment. As always when he walked through his darkened kingdom, he felt proud. Proud that he had had the patience to save and persevere and never relent in his determination to own this place that had given him the finest moments of his youth.

When his parents died and left him homeless at fourteen, the owner of Silverlake Camera had befriended him, giving him twenty dollars a week to sweep out the store at closing every night, and allowing him to sleep on the floor and study in the customers' bathroom. He studied hard and made the owner proud of him. The owner was a horse lover and gambler, and used the store as a bookie drop. He had always thought that his benefactor, who suffered from congestive heart disease and was familyless, would leave the store to him; but he was wrong–when he died the shop was taken over by the bookies to whom he owed money. They promptly ran it to hell–hiring nothing but incompetents, turning the quiet little shop into a low-life hangout–running football pools, booking horses, and selling dope.

When he realized what had been done to his sanctuary, he knew that he had to act to save it, whatever the price.

He had been making a good living as a free-lance photographer, shooting weddings and banquets and communions, and he had saved more than enough money to buy the store should it go on the market. But he knew that the scum who owned it would never sell–it was turning too great an illicit profit. This vexed him so much that he completely forgot about his fourth courtship and threw all his energy toward permanent ownership of his despoiled safe harbor.

Batteries of anonymous phone calls to the police and district attorney did no good; they would not act on the malfeasance at Silverlake Camera. Desperate now, he searched out other means.

Through surveillance, he knew that the new owner got drunk every night at a bar on Sunset. He knew that the man had to be poured into a cab at closing time, and that the cabbie who met him at the door of the bar each night at two a.m. was a compulsive horse player who was heavily in his debt. With the same diligence that marked his courtships, he went to work, first acquiring an ounce of uncut heroin, then approaching the cab driver and making him an offer. The cabbie accepted the offer, and left Los Angeles the following day.

Two nights later, *he* was the one behind the wheel of the cab in front of the Short Stop Bar at closing time. At precisely two a.m., the owner of Silverlake Camera staggered outside and flopped into the back seat, promptly passing out. He drove the man to Sunset and Alvarado, and stuffed a plastic bag bursting with heroin into his coat pocket. He then hauled the unconscious drunk over to Silverlake Camera and placed him in a sitting position, half in and half out the front door, the key in his right hand.

He drove to a pay phone, called the Los Angeles Police Department and told them of a burglary in progress. They took care of the rest. Three patrol cars were dispatched to Sunset and Alvarado. As the first car screeched to a halt outside Silverlake Camera, the man in the doorway came awake, got to his feet and reached inside his coat pocket. Misinterpreting his gesture, the two patrolmen shot and killed him. Silverlake Camera went into receivership the following week and *he* picked it up for a song.

The camera shop and the three-room apartment above it became *his* song, and he renovated it into a symphony; a complete aesthetic statement of purpose, one steeped in his own past and the clandestine histories of the three people who had given him the terrible catharsis that set him free to salvage female innocence.

One whole wall was devoted to his attackers–a photographic collage that updated their warped progress in life: the musclebound one a Los Angeles County Deputy Sheriff, his sniveling lackey a male prostitute. Their brief, violent transit with him had shaped their lives for the negative–the acquisition of money and cheap one-on-one power the only balm for their spiritual emptiness. The candid snapshots on the wall spelled it out plainly: The Birdman, stationed at curbside on a "Boy's Town" street, hip outthrust, hungry eyes trawling for wretched lonely men to bring him a few dollars and ten minutes of selfhood; and Muscles, overweight and florid-faced, staring out the window of his patrol car at his West Hollywood constituency–the hip gays that he was sworn to protect, but who disdained his "protection" and ridiculed him as "Officer Pig."

The opposite wall held blown-up yearbook photographs of his original beloved; her innocence preserved forever by the extraordinary clarity of his art. He had clipped the photographs on graduation day 1964, and it wasn't until over a decade later, when he was a master photographer, that he felt confident enough to embark on a complex blow-up and reproduction process in an attempt to make them larger than life. Taped next to the blow-ups were gnarled, shriveled and twisted rose branches–twenty of them–the detritus of the floral tributes that he sent to his beloved after claiming a woman in her name.

He had set out to turn his sanctuary into a *total* sensory testament to the three, but for years the methodology had eluded him. He had claimed his visual access, but he wanted to hear these people *breathe.*

The solution came to him in a dream. Young women were tied to the spindle of a giant recording turntable. He sat at the control board of an elaborate electrical system, pushing buttons and flipping levers in a futile effort to make the women scream. Himself near the point of screaming, he had somehow willed the ability to quash his frustration by waving his arms in the simulation of flight. As his limbs treaded air, he ran out of breath and was close to suffocating when his hands touched free floating streams of magnetic tape. He grabbed the tape and used it as ballast to return to the control board. All the lights on the panel had gone off during his flight, and when he began pushing buttons the lights switched on, then short-circuited and burst with blood. He began to stuff the bloody holes with tape. The tape slithered through the apertures, onto the turntable and around the spindle, crushing the young women who were held captive there. Their screams awoke him from his dream, dissolving into his own scream when he discovered that his groin had exploded into his clenched hands.

That morning he purchased two state-of-the-art transistorized tape recorders, two condensor microphones, three hundred feet of wire, and a transistor power pack. Within a week the apartments of both Officer Pig and his original beloved had been outfitted with brilliantly concealed listening devices; and his access to their lives was complete. He would make weekly runs to change the tapes, almost exploding as he returned home and looked at the pictures on the wall and listened to their breathing compliment, learning intimacies that not even the dearest of lovers would know.

Those intimacies validated his judgment straight down the line: His first beloved took her flesh lovers with caution–they were sensitive-sounding men who loved her and capitulated to her subtle will absolutely. He could tell that she was lonely beneath her sometimes strident Feminist facade, but that was natural: she was a poet, one of growing local renown, and loneliness was the bane of all creative people. Officer Pig was, of course, corruption incarnate–an up-for-grabs cop who took bribes from the male prostitutes of Boy's Town, allowing them to ply their wicked craft while he and his sleazy cop buddies looked the other way. The Birdman was his liaison, and hours of listening to the two old high school buddies gloat over their picayune crime scams had convinced him that the wretchedness of their lives was *his* revenge.

His years of listening passed, long evenings where he would touch himself in total darkness as the tapes unfurled into his headphones. He grew even bolder in his desire to be in total sync with those who had brought about his rebirth, and on the anniversary of the beginning that he rarely thought of anymore, he staged betrothals artificed as suicides to celebrate his own act of submission in a sawdust covered high school corridor. Four times; twice in Officer Pig's veritable backyard, once in his own apartment building. The love he had felt in those moments of symbiotic reverie had made his clenched hand explosions magnify tenfold, and he knew that every gauntlet of camera art and breath and blood that he ran would only serve to make his song more inviolate.

Back in the present, he thought again of the many things Linda Deverson was, then felt his mind go blank as he tried to find a narrative line to impose on the welter of images that constituted his new love.

He sighed and locked the door of his apartment behind him, then took the photographs of Linda and taped them to the Tiffany glass window that fronted his writing desk. Sighing again, he wrote:

> 5–17–82
>
> Three weeks into the courtship and as yet no access to her apartment, much less her heart–triple locks on the one door, it will take a bold gambit to get inside–I will have to risk it soon–Linda remains so elusive. Or maybe not; what has caught me so far is her sense of humor–the rueful smile that lights up her face as she pulls a cigarette out of her sweatsuit after jogging three miles down San Vicente; her firm but humorous refusals to go out with the obdurate young salesman who shares a cubicle with her at the real estate office; the way she talks to herself when she thinks no one is looking and the broad way she covers her mouth when a passerby catches her in the act. Two nights ago I followed her to the Force Field Synergistics seminar. That same rueful smile when she wrote the check for registration and again at the first "grouping" when they told her she couldn't smoke. I think that Linda possess the same detachment I have noticed in writers–the desire to commune with humanity, to have a common ground or dream–yet the concurrent need to remain aloof, to hold her intrinsic truths (however universal) above those of the collective. Linda is a subtle woman. While the first grouping (ambiguous jive talk about unity and energy) was going on, I snuck back to the registration office and stole her application. I

now know this about my beloved:

1. Name: Linda Holly Deverson
2. Birthdate: 4/29/52
3. Birthplace: Goleta, California
4. Education: High school 1 2 3 [✓ 4]
   College 1 [✓ 2] 3 4
   Advanced degrees? No.
5. How did you find out about F.F.S.?—I read your book.
6. Which four of these words best describe you?
    1. Ambitious
    2. Athletic
    3. Aggressive
    [✓ 4] Enlightened
    [✓ 5] Tuned In
    6. Befuddled
    7. Inquisitive
    [✓ 8] Passive
    9. Angry
    [✓ 10] Sensitive
    11. Passionate
    12. Aesthetic
    13. Physical
    14. Moral
    15. Generous
7. Why did you come to the F.F.S. Institute?–I can't honestly say. Some of the things in your book struck me as truthful things that could help me to better myself.
8. Do you think F.F.S. can change your life?–I don't know.

A subtle woman. I can change your life, Linda; I am the only one who can.

Three nights later he broke into her apartment.

It was carefully thought out and bold. He knew that she would be attending the second Synergistics Seminar, which was scheduled to last from eight o'clock until midnight. At seven forty-five he was stationed across the street from the F.F.S. Institute on 14th and Montana in Santa Monica, armed with a matchbook sized circuit breaker and wearing skin-tight rubber gloves.

He smiled as Linda pulled into the parking lot, exchanged guarded greetings with other arriving F.F.S.ers and wolfed down a last cigarette before running into the large red brick building. He waited ten minutes, then sprinted over to her '69 Camaro, opened the hood and attached the circuit breaker to the underside of the car's distributor housing. Should anyone attempt to start the Camaro, it would turn over once and die. Laughing at the small perfection of it, he slammed the hood and ran back to his own car, then drove to the home of his beloved.

It was a pitch-dark spring night, and warm winds gave added audial cover. Parking a block away, he padded over to 3583 Mentone Avenue, carrying a flat-handled lug wrench and a transistor radio in a brown paper bag. Just as a huge gust of wind came up, he placed the radio on the ground outside Linda's living room window and turned the volume up full blast. Punk Rock bombarded the night, and he slammed the lug wrench full force into the window, grabbed the radio and ran back to his car.

He waited for twenty minutes, until he was certain that no one had heard the noise and no silent alarm had been sounded. Then he walked back and vaulted into the dark apartment.

Drawing curtains over the broken window, he deep-breathed and let his eyes become accustomed to the darkness, then followed his most urgent curiosity straight back toward where the bathroom had to be. He turned on a light and then rummaged through the medicine cabinet; checked out the make-up kit on top of the toilet; even went through the dirty clothes hamper. His soul sighed in relief. No contraceptive devices of any kind; his beloved was chaste.

He left the door ajar and walked into the bedroom. Quickly noting that there was no overhead light, he turned on the lamp next to the bed. Its diffused glow gave him light to work by, and he flung open the walk-in closet door, hungry to touch the fabric of his beloved's life.

The closet was packed with garments on hangers, and he swept them up in a giant armful and carried them into the bathroom. There were mostly dresses, in a variety of fabrics and styles. Trembling, he fondled polyester suits and cotton shifts, pseudo-silk culottes and businesslike tweed; stripes, plaids, tattersall checks–all feminine and all pointing to the subtle, searching nature of Linda Deverson. She doesn't know who she is, he said to himself; so she buys clothes to reflect all the different things she *could* be.

He carried the bundle of clothing back to the closet and arranged it as it had been, then went looking for further evidence of Linda's chastity. He found it on her telephone stand–all the phone numbers in her address book belonged to women. Heart leaping with joy, he went into the kitchen and rummaged beneath the sink until he found a can of black paint and a stiff paint brush. He pried the can open and drew out a big glob of paint and smeared "Clanton 14 St.–Culver City–Viva La Raza" on the kitchen wall. To make it look even better, he grabbed a toaster and portable cassette player and took them with him.

Fondling the toaster on the seat beside him, he drove back to the F.F.S. Institute and removed the circuit breaker from Linda Deverson's car, then went home to meditate on the subtlety of his woman.

The following Wednesday night was the first F.F.S. "Question and Answer" grouping. He had purchased his ticket two days before at the Ticketron outlet near his shop and was curious as to how Linda would query the F.F.S. programmers, who had thus far brooked no feedback from their trainees. He was certain his beloved would interpose intelligent, skeptical questions.

There was a cordon of religious zealots outside the institute, brandishing signs that read "*Syn*ergistics is sin! Jesus is the only way!" He laughed as he walked into them; he thought Jesus was vulgar. One of the zealots noticed the ironic smile on his face and asked him if he had been saved.

"Twenty times," he replied.

The zealot's jaw dropped; he had been on the butt end of many sacrilegious one-liners, but this was a new one. He stood aside and let the nondescript heretic enter the building.

Once inside, he gave his ticket to the security guard, who handed him a large cushion and pointed in the direction of the assembly room. He walked through a hallway adorned with photographs of celebrity F.F.S.ers and into a huge room where knots of people milled around anxiously, chattering and sizing up the new arrivals. At the back of the room he wadded his cushion up and sat down with his eyes glued to the door.

She came in a moment later, setting her cushion down just a few feet away from him. His heart shuddered and pounded so hard that he thought it would drown out all the excited psychobabble that was floating through the room. Staring into his lap, he assumed a meditation pose that he hoped would forestall any conversation she might attempt. He shut his eyes so hard and wrenched his hands so tightly that he felt like a shrapnel bomb about to explode.

Then the lights in the room were dimmed twice, indicating the session was about to begin. A hush came over the assembly as the lights went out completely and candles were lit and placed in strategic positions throughout the room. The sudden darkness gripped him and held him like a lover. He turned his head and caught a glance of Linda silhouetted in candlelight. Mine, he said to himself, mine.

Sitar chords came over the P.A. system, winding down into a soft male voice. “Feel the fields that separate you from your greater self start to dissipate. Feel your inner self mix with the synergy of other tuned-in force fields to produce true energy and union. Feel the synthesis of yourself and everything good in the cosmos.”

The voice lowered itself to a whisper. “Today I am here to relate to you personally, to help you apply the principles of Force Field Synergistics to your personal lives. This is your third workshop; you have the ammunition necessary to change your lives forever, but I am sure you have many questions. That is why I am here. Lights, please!”

The lights went on, jarring him. Carefully modulating his breathing to keep his control at optimum, he watched a silver-haired young man in a blue blazer walk to a flower draped lectern at the front of the room. He was greeted with wild applause and bliss-filled gazes.

“Thank you,” the man said. “Questions?”

An elderly man at the front of the room raised his hand and said, “Yeah, I got a question. What are you gonna do about the niggers?”

The man at the lectern went beet red beneath his silver coiffure and said, “Well, I don’t think that’s germane to the issues at hand. I think—”

“Well, I do!” the old man bellowed. “You people took this building over from the Moose, and you got a civic responsibility to address yourself to the nigger problem!” The old man looked around for support and got nothing but embarrassed shrugs and hostile looks. The man at the lectern snapped his fingers and two burly, blazer-clad teenagers entered the room.

The old man ranted on. “I was a member of the Moose Lodge for thirty-eight years, and I rue the day we sold out to you bimbos! I’m gonna call for a meeting of the zoning board, and get an ordinance passed to keep all niggers and religious crackpots south of Wilshire. I’m a member in good…” The teenagers grabbed the old man by his arms and legs and carried him, kicking, biting, and screaming, out of the room.

The man at the lectern called for quiet, raising his hands in a supplicating gesture to quell the relieved hubbub that followed in the old man's wake. Running a hand through his silver hair, he said, "Now there's someone with a low karma synergy! Racism is low chakra! Now …"

Linda Deverson raised her hand forcefully and said, "I have a question. It relates to that old man. What if his inner self is bad and all his native force fields are so twisted with fear and anger that meanness is all he can relate to? What if he has just one germ of kindness, of curiosity, and that's what brought him here tonight? He *paid* to attend this meeting tonight, he—"

"His money will be refunded," the man at the lectern interjected.

"That's not what I'm talking about!" Linda shouted. "That's not what I mean! Don't you understand that that man can't be dismissed with a cheap crack about low chakra? Don't you …" Linda slammed her hands into her cushion, then got to her feet and rushed to the front door.

"Let her go!" the group leader said. "Her misery will be refunded if she leaves our program. Let her pay for her chakra!"

Barely containing his excitement, he got up to follow her and was almost knocked over by a tall buxom woman in a corduroy pantsuit. When he got outside to the parking lot, he found her conferring with Linda, who was smoking a cigarette and brushing angry tears out of her eyes. Shielded by a tall hedgerow, he could hear their conversation plainly.

"Shit, shit, shit," Linda was muttering.

"Just forget about it," the woman answered. "You win a few, you lose a few. I've been searching for a few years longer than you; listen to the voice of experience."

Linda laughed. "You're probably right. God, could I use a drink!"

"I wouldn't mind one myself," the woman said. "Do you mind scotch?"

"No, I love it!"

"Good. I've got a bottle of Chivas at home. I live in the Palisades. Did you bring your car?"

"Yes."

"Want to follow me?"

Linda nodded and ground out her cigarette. "Sure."

He was right behind them as they drove the twisting roads of Santa Monica Canyon up to a quiet block of large houses fronted by broad lawns. He watched as the first car hit its right-hand directional and pulled into a long circular driveway. Linda followed suit, parking directly behind. He drove on and parked at the corner, then walked casually over to the house the woman had entered.

The lawn extended around both sides of the house, with towering hibiscus plants forming its perimeters. He threaded his way along them, staying in the shadows, making a complete circuit of the house before catching sight of the two women sitting in adjoining easy chairs in a warmly appointed den. Crouching low, he watched Linda sip scotch and laugh in pantomime, imagining that she was being regaled by him, by his wit and the humorous verse that he wrote only for her. The other woman was laughing too, slapping her knee and freshening Linda's glass every few minutes from the bottle on the coffee table.

He was staring into the window, lost in Linda's laughter, when he suddenly became aware that something was drastically wrong. His instinct never failed him, and just as he was about to hit on the cause of his uneasiness, he saw the two women move toward each other very slowly and in perfect synchronization kiss on the lips, first tentatively, then hungrily, knocking over the bottle of scotch as they moved into a fierce embrace. He started to scream, then stifled the sound by jamming his hand into his mouth. He raised his other fist to smash the window, but reason took tenuous hold and he smashed the ground instead.

He looked in the window again. The women were nowhere to be seen. Frantically, he pressed his face to the glass and craned his neck almost off its axis, until he saw two pair of nude legs wrapped together, twisting and straining on the floor. Then he did scream, and the otherworldly sound of his own terrified voice propelled him out to the street. He ran until his lungs burned and his legs started to wobble. Then he fell to his knees and was perfectly still as comforting images of the twenty others washed over him. He thought of them at their moments of salvation, and of how much they looked like the ones who had betrayed his original true love so many years before.

Restored by the righteousness of his purpose, he got up and walked back to his car.

Performing the rituals of life allowed him to operate over the next week, keeping images of the betrayal from bludgeoning him into desperate action.

He minded the store from morning until late afternoon, then fielded calls that came in from his answering service. Wedding assignments were picking up, as they did each spring, and this year he could afford to be choosy, spending his early evenings interviewing the doting parents of engaged young couples who thought they were interviewing him. No uglies, he decided; no porkers. Only slender, good-looking young people would stand before his camera. He owed himself that.

After conducting business he would drive to the Palisades and watch Linda Deverson and Carol March make love. Dressed in black, he would scale a shadow-shrouded telephone pole and peer down through the upstairs bedroom window as the woman coupled on a quilt-covered waterbed. At about midnight, when his arms were weary from hours of hugging the rough wood of the phone pole, he would watch the sated Linda get up from the bed and dress as Carol importuned her to spend the night. It was always the same; his brain, willfully shut off as he viewed the lovemaking, would snap to life with speculation as Linda took her leave. Why was Linda leaving? Was buried guilt coming to the surface? Regret at the way she had debased herself?

He would then jump down from the pole and run for his car, pulling up without lights behind Linda's Camaro just as she walked out the door. Then he would follow the glow of her taillights as she drove home via the most scenic route possible, almost as if she needed an injection of beauty after her night of debauchery. Keeping a safe distance behind, he would let her part at the intersection of Sunset and the Pacific Coast Highway, wondering how and when he could bring her salvation.

After two more weeks of extensive surveillance, he wrote in his diary:

6-7-82

> Linda Deverson is a tragic victim of these times. Her sensuality is self-destructive, but indicative of stong parental need. The March woman capitalizes on this; she is a viper. Linda remains unsatisfied in both her sensuality and search for a mother (the March woman is at least fifteen years her senior!). Her midnight excursions through the most soulful parts of Pacific Palisades and Santa Monica speak volumes on her guilt and subtle searching nature. Her need for beauty is *so* strong in the aftermath of her self destruction. I must take her at this moment–that must be the precise time of her salvation.

Emboldened by knowledge of the place, he put the time out of his mind, losing himself in his courtship. But the late nights were taking their toll in little portents of slippage in his work life–rolls of film clumsily shot, then stupidly exposed to sunlight; appointments forgotten, photo orders misplaced. The slippage had to stop, and he knew how to do it. He had to consummate his courtship of Linda Deverson.

He set the date: Tuesday, June 14th, three days hence. His tremors of expectation began to grow.

On Monday, June 13th, he went to an auto supply store in the Valley and bought a case of motor oil, then drove to a junkyard and told the owner he was looking for chrome hood ornaments. While the owner scurried about looking for them, he scraped up several huge handfuls of iron filings from the ground and loaded them into a paper bag. The junkman came running back a few minutes later, waving a chrome bulldog. Feeling generous, he offered the man ten dollars for it. The man accepted. Driving back over the Cahuenga Pass to his shop, he threw the bulldog out the window and laughed as it clattered over to the edge of the roadway.

His consummation day was carefully planned and honed down to the second. Upon rising he placed the “Closed Due To Illness” sign in the window, then returned to his apartment, where he played his meditation tape and stared at the photos of Linda Deverson. Next he destroyed the pages in his diary that pertained to her and took a long walk through the neighborhood, all the way over to Echo Park, where he spent hours rowing around the lake and feeding the ducks. At nightfall he packed his consummation tools into the trunk of his car and drove to his first and last rendezvous with his beloved.

At 8:45 he was parked four doors down from Carol March’s house, alternately shifting his gaze from the darkened street to his dashboard clock. At 9:03 Linda Deverson pulled into the driveway. He swooned at the perfection of it; she was right on time.

He drove to Santa Monica Canyon, to the intersection of West Channel Road and Biscayne, where West Channel bisected and the right fork led into a small campground filled with picnic tables and swings. If his calculations were correct, Linda would be driving through at precisely ten minutes of midnight. He pulled his car off to the side of the road on the edge of the park proper, where it was shielded from street view by a row of sycamore trees. Then he went for a long walk.

He returned at 11:40 and got his equipment out of the trunk, first donning his park ranger’s outfit of Smoky The Bear hat, green wool shirt and field belt, then assembling his sawhorse detour signs and carrying them over to the intersection.

Next he hauled his five gallon can of motor oil and iron filings to the middle of the street and poured them smoothly over the pavement, until the blacktop just before the detour signs was a slippery purple ooze glinting with sharp steel. Then all he could do was wait.

At 11:52 he heard her car approaching. As her headlights appeared, his body shuddered and he had to will himself to contain his bowels and bladder.

The car slowed as it neared the detour signs, braking and going into a right turn, then fishtailing and sliding into the saw horses as it hit the pool of oil. There was a crash of wood on metal, then two loud ka-plops! as the rear tires blew out. The car came to a stop and Linda got out, slamming the door and muttering, “Oh shit, oh fuck,” then going around to the back of the car to examine the damage.

Steeling himself with all the courtliness he could muster, he walked from the trees and called out, “Are you okay, miss? That was a nasty slide you took.”

Linda called back, “Yes, I’m okay. But my car!”

He pulled a flashlight from his field belt and shined it into the darkness, arcing it over the campground several times before letting the beam rest on his beloved. Linda blinked against the glare, raising a hand to shield her face. He walked toward her, pointing his light at the ground.

She smiled as she noticed his hat–Smoky The Bear to the rescue; it was good that she had smoked her last cigarette at Carol’s. “Oh God, I’m glad you’re here,” she said. “I saw that detour sign and then skidded on something. I think two of my tires blew out.”

“That’s no problem,” he said, “my service shack is right over here; we’ll call an all-night gas station.”

“Oh God, what a pain in the ass,” Linda said, fumbling in gratitude for the arm of her savior. “You don’t know how glad I am to see you.”

He faltered at her touch; joy consumed him and he said, “I’ve loved you for so long. Since we were kids. Since all tho…”

Linda gasped. “What the he…” she said. “Who the he…”

She started to back away, then tripped and fell to the ground. He reached out a hand to help her up. She hesitated. “No, please,” she whimpered, moving backwards. He fumbled at his field belt and unclipped a two edged fire axe. He bent down again, grabbing Linda at the wrist and yanking her up just as he brought the axe down in a high, rail-splitting swing. Linda’s skull crashed inward as his love went into slow motion and blood and brain fragments burst into the air, suspending the moment into a thousand eternities. He brought the axe down again and again until he was drenched in blood and blood had splattered onto his face and into his mouth and through his brain and his entire soul was a bright lover’s red; the bright red of flowers he would send his true love tomorrow. For you, for you, all for you, the poet muttered as he left the remains of Linda Deverson and walked to his car; my soul, my life for you.

Detective Sergeant Lloyd Hopkins celebrated the seventeenth anniversary of his appointment to the Los Angeles Police Department in his usual manner, grabbing a computer print-out of recent crimes and field interrogation reports filed by Rampart Division, then driving to the old neighborhood to breathe past and present from the vantage point of seventeen years of protecting innocence.

The October day was smoggy and just short of hot. Lloyd got his unmarked Matador from the lot at Parker Center and drove westbound on Sunset, reminiscing: over a decade and a half and the fulfillment of his major dreams–the job, the wife, and the three wonderful daughters. The job thrilling and sad in excess of fulfillment; the marriage strong in the sense of the strong people he and Janice had become; the daughters pure joy and reason for living in themselves. The exultant feelings were the only thing lacking, and in the magnanimity of nostalgia Lloyd chalked up their absence to maturity–he was forty now, not twenty-three; if his seventeen years as a policeman had taught him anything, it was that your expectations diminished as you realized how thoroughly fucked-up the bulk of humanity was, and that you had to go on a hundred seemingly contradictory discourses to keep the major dreams alive.

That the discourses were always women and in direct violation of his Presbyterian marriage vows was the ultimate irony, he thought, stopping for the light at Sunset and Echo Park and rolling up the windows to keep the street noise out. An irony that staunch, strong Janice would never understand. Feeling that his reverie was recklessly overstepping its bounds, Lloyd plunged ahead, anxious to voice it flat out, to himself and the vacant air around him: “It wouldn’t work between us, Janice, if I couldn’t cut loose like that. Little things would accumulate and I’d explode. And you’d hate me. The girls would hate me. That’s why I do it. That’s why I….” Lloyd couldn’t bring himself to say the word “cheat.”

He stopped his musings and pulled into the parking lot of a liquor store, then dug the computer sheets out of his pocket and settled in to think.

The sheets were pale pink with black typescript, edged with seemingly random perforations. Lloyd fingered through them, arranging them in chronological order, starting with the ones dated 9-15-82. Beginning with the crime reports, he let his perfectly controlled blank mind drift through brief accounts of rapes, robberies, purse snatchings, shopliftings, and vandalism. Suspect descriptions and weaponry from shotguns to baseball bats were recounted in crisp, heavily abbreviated sentences. Lloyd read through the crime reports three times, feeling the disparate facts and figures sink in deeper with each reading, blessing Evelyn Wood and her method that allowed him to gobble up the printed word at the rate of three thousand per minute.

Next he turned to the field interrogation reports. These were accounts of people stopped on the street, briefly detained and questioned, then released. Lloyd read through the F.I.s four times, *knowing* with each reading that there was a connection to be made. He was about to give each stack of print-outs another go round when he snapped to the buried ellipsis that was crying out to him. Furiously shuffling through the pink rolls of paper, he found his match-up: Crime Report #10691, 10-6-82. Armed robbery.

At approximately 11:30 p.m., Thursday, October 6, the Black Cat Bar on Sunset and Vendome was held up by two male Mexicans. They were of undetermined age, but presumed young. They wore silk stockings to disguise their appearances, carried "large" revolvers, and ransacked the cash register before making the proprietor lock up the bar. They then forced the patrons to lie on the floor. While prone, the robbers relieved them of wallets, billfolds and jewelry. They fled a moment later, warning their victims that the "back-up" would be outside with a shotgun for twenty minutes. They slashed the two phone lines before they left. The bartender ran outside five minutes later. There was no back-up.

Stupid fools, Lloyd thought, risking half a dime minimum for a thousand dollars tops. He read over the F.I. report, filed by a Rampart patrolman: 10-7-82, 1:05 a.m.–"Questioned two w.m. outside res. at 2269 Tracy. They were drinking vodka and sitting on top of late model Firebird, Lic. #HBS 027. Explained that car was not theirs, but that they lived in house. Partner and I searched them–clean. Got hot call before we could run warrant check." The officer's name was printed below.

Lloyd kicked the last bits of information around in his head, thinking it sad that he should have greater intimate knowledge of a neighborhood than the cops who patrolled it. 2269 Tracy Street was a low-life holdover from his high school days over twenty years before, when it had been a halfway house for ex-cons. The charismatic ex-gangster who had run the operation on State funds had embezzled a bundle from local Welfare agencies before selling the house to an old buddy from Folsom, then hightailing it to the border, never to be seen again. The buddy promptly hired a good lawyer to help him keep the house. He won his court battle and dealt quality dope out of the old wood-framed dwelling. Lloyd recalled how his high school pals had bought reefers there back in the late 50s. He knew that the house had been sold to a succession of local hoods and had acquired the neighborhood nickname of "Gangster Manor."

Lloyd drove to the Black Cat Bar. The bartender immediately made him for a cop. "Yes, officer?" he said. "No complaints, I hope."

"None," Lloyd said. "I'm here about the robbery of October 6th. Were you tending bar that night?"

"Yeah, I was here. You got any leads? Two detectives came in the next day, but that was it."

"No real leads yet. Do…"

Lloyd was distracted by the sound of the jukebox snapping on, beginning to spill out a disco tune. "Turn that off, will you?" he said. "I can't compete with an orchestra."

The barman laughed. "That's no orchestra, that's 'The Disco Doggies.' Don't you like them?"

Lloyd couldn't tell if the man was being pleasant or trying to vamp him; homosexuals were hard to read. "Maybe I'm behind the times. Just turn it off, okay? Do it now."

The bartender caught the edge in Lloyd's voice and complied, creating a small commotion as he yanked the cord on the jukebox. Returning to the bar he said warily, "Just what was it you wanted to know?"

Relieved by the music's termination, Lloyd said, "Only one thing. Are you certain the two robbers were Mexican?"

"No, I'm not certain."

"Didn't you…"

"They wore masks, officer. What I told the cops is that they talked English with Mexican accents. That's what I said."

"Thank you," Lloyd said, and ran out to his car.

He drove straight to 2269 Tracy Street–Gangster Manor. As he expected, the old house was deserted. Cobwebs, dust, and used condoms covered the warped wood floor, and sets of footprints that Lloyd knew had to be recent were clearly outlined. He followed them into the kitchen. All the fixtures were ripped out and the floor was covered with rodent droppings. Lloyd opened cabinets and drawers, finding only dust, spider webs, and mildewed, maggot-infested groceries. Then he opened a floral patterned bread basket and jumped into the air, dunking imaginary baskets and whooping when he saw what he found: a brand new box of Remington hollow point .38 shells and two pair of Sheer Energy pantyhose. Lloyd whooped again. "Thank you, o' nesting grounds of my youth!" he shouted.

Phone calls to the California Department of Motor Vehicles and L.A.P.D. Records and Information confirmed his thesis. A 1979 Pontiac Firebird, license number HBS 027 was registered to Richard Douglas Wilson of 11879 Saticoy Street, Van Nuys. R. & I. supplied the rest: Richard Douglas Wilson, white male, age thirty-four was a two-time convicted armed robber who had recently been paroled from San Quentin after serving three and a half years of a five year sentence.

Heart bursting, and snug in his soundless phone booth, Lloyd dialed a third number, the home of his one-time mentor and current follower, Captain Arthur Peltz.

"Dutch? Lloyd. What are you doing?"

Peltz yawned into the mouthpiece, "I'm taking a nap, Lloyd. I'm off today. I'm an old man and I need a siesta in the afternoon. What's up? You sound jazzed."

Lloyd laughed. "I am jazzed. You want to take a couple of armed robbers?"

"All by ourselves?"

"Yeah. What's the matter? We've done it a million times."

"At least a million–more like a million and a half. Stake out?"

"Yeah, at the guy's pad in Van Nuys. Van Nuys Station in an hour?"

"I'll be there. You realize that if this thing is a washout, you're buying me dinner?"

"Anywhere you want," Lloyd said, and hung up the phone.

Arthur Peltz was the first Los Angeles policeman to recognize and herald Lloyd Hopkins's genius. It happened when Lloyd was a twenty-seven year old patrolman working Central Division. The year was 1969, and the hippie era of love and good vibes had dwindled out, leaving a backwash of indigent, drug-addicted youngsters floating through the poorer sections of Los Angeles, begging for spare change, shoplifting, sleeping in parks, back yards and doorways and generally contributing to a drastic rise in misdemeanor arrests and felony arrests for possession of narcotics.

Fear of hippie nomads was rife among solid citizen Angelenos, particularly after the Tate-LaBianca slayings were attributed to Charles Manson and his hirsute band. The L.A.P.D. was importuned to come down hard on the destitute minstrels of love; which it did–raiding hippie campgrounds, frequently stopping vehicles containing furtive-looking longhairs and generally letting them know that they were *personae non gratas* in Los Angeles. The results were satisfying–there was a general hippie move toward eschewing outdoor living and "cooling it." Then five longhaired young men were shot to death on the streets in Hollywood over a period of three weeks.

Sergeant Arthur "Dutch" Peltz, then a forty-one year old Homicide detective, was assigned to the case. He had very little to work on, except a strong instinct that the murders of the unacquainted young men were drug related and that the so-called "ritual markings" on their bodies–an xed out letter H–were put there as subterfuge.

Investigation into the recent pasts of the victims proved fruitless; they were transients existing in a subculture of transients. Dutch Peltz was baffled. He was also an intellectual given to contemplative pursuits, so he decided to take his two-week vacation smack in the middle of his case. He came back from fishing in Oregon clearheaded, spiritually renewed, and pleased to find that there were no new victims of the "Hippie Hunter," as the press had dubbed him. But dire things were happening in Los Angeles. The basin had been flooded with a particularly high-quality Mexican brown heroin, its source unknown. Instinct told Dutch Peltz that the heroin onslaught and the murders were connected. But he didn't have the slightest idea how.

On a cold night around this time, Officer Lloyd Hopkins told his partner he was hungry for sweets, and suggested they stop at a market or liquor store for cookies or cupcakes. His partner shook his head; nothing open this late except Donut Despair, he said. Lloyd weighed the pros and cons of a raging sweet-tooth versus the world's worst donuts served up by either sullen or obsequious wetbacks.

His sweet-tooth won, but there were no wetbacks. Lloyd's jaw dropped as he took a seat at the counter. Donut Despair (or Donut Deelite, open all nite!), as it was known to the world at large, hired nothing but illegal aliens at *all* its locations. It was the policy of the chain's owner, Morris Dreyfus, a former gangland czar, to employ illegals and pay them below the minimum wage, but make up the difference by providing them with flop-out space at his many Southside tenements. Now this!

Lloyd watched as a sullen hippie youth placed a cup of coffee and three glazed donuts in front of him, then retreated to a back room, leaving the counter untended. He then heard furtive whispers, followed by the slamming of a back door and the starting of a car engine. The hippie counterman reappeared a moment later and couldn't meet Lloyd's eyes; and Lloyd knew it was more than his blue uniform. He knew something was *wrong*.

The following day, armed with a copy of the Los Angeles Yellow Pages, Lloyd, in civilian clothes, made a circuit of over twenty Donut Despairs, to find the counters manned by longhaired white men at all locations. Twice he sat down and ordered coffee, letting the counterman see–as if by accident–his off-duty .38. In both instances the reaction was cold, stark terror.

Dope, Lloyd said to himself as he drove home that night. Dope. Dope. But. But any streetwise fool would know that anyone as big as I am, with my short haircut and square look is a cop. Those two kids made me for one the second I walked in the door. But it was my *gun* that scared them.

It was then that Lloyd thought of the Hippie Hunter and the seemingly unrelated heroin influx. When he got home he called Hollywood Station, gave his name and badge number and asked to talk to a Homicide dick.

Dutch Peltz was more impressed with the huge young cop himself than he was with the fact that they had been thinking along almost identical lines. Now he had a hypothesis–that Big Mo Dreyfus was pushing smack out of his donut stands, and that somehow people were getting killed because of it. But it was young Hopkins himself, so undeniably infused with a brilliance of instinct for the darkness in life, that had him awestruck.

Peltz listened for hours as Lloyd told of his desire to protect innocence and how he had trained his mind to pick out conversations in crowded restaurants and how he could read lips and memorize with time and place any face that he glimpsed for only a second. When he went home, Dutch Peltz said to his wife, "I met a genius tonight. I don't think I'll ever be the same."

It was a prophetic remark.

The following day Peltz began an investigation into the financial dealings of Morris Dreyfus. He learned that Dreyfus had been converting his stocks and bonds into cash and that he was contacting former gangland associates with offers to sell the Donut Deelite chain dirt cheap. Further investigation showed that Dreyfus had recently applied for a passport and had sold his homes in Palm Springs and Lake Arrowhead.

Peltz began a surveillance of Dreyfus, watching him make steady rounds of his donut stands, where he would motion the longhaired counterman into the back room and depart a moment later. That night Peltz and a veteran narcotics detective tailed Dreyfus to the Benedict Canyon home of Reyes Medina, a Mexican reputed to be the liaison between poppy-growing combines in southern Mexico and scores of heavyweight stateside heroin dealers. Dreyfus was inside for two hours, and left looking distraught.

The following morning, Peltz drove to the Donut Deelite on 43rd and Normandie. He parked across the street and waited until the stand was empty of customers, then walked in and flashed his badge at the youth behind the counter, telling him he wanted information, and not on donut recipes. The youth tried running out the back way, but Peltz wrestled him to the floor, whispering, "Where's the smack? Where's the shit, you hippie fuck?" until the youth began to blubber out the story that he expected.

Mo Dreyfus was pushing Mexican brown heroin to medium-level local dealers, who were turning it over for a huge profit. What Peltz didn't expect was the news that Dreyfus was dying of cancer and was accruing capital to take exorbitantly expensive treatments by a Brazillian doctor-medicine man. The word had come down that all drug sales out of all Donut Deelite locations were to stop the following week, when the new owner took over. Big Mo would be on his way to Brazil by then, and all the countermen-pushers would be contacted by a "rich Mexican" who would give them their "going away" bonuses.

After uncovering three ounces of heroin underneath a meat locker, Peltz handcuffed the youth and took him downtown to the central jail, where he was booked as a material witness. Peltz then took the elevator to the eighth floor offices of the L.A.P.D.'s Narcotics Division.

Two hours later, after obtaining search and arrest warrants, four shotgun-wielding detectives burst into the home of Morris Dreyfus and arrested him for possession of heroin, possession with intent to sell, sales of dangerous drugs and criminal conspiracy. In his jail cell, against his attorney's advice, Morris Dreyfus made the connection that convinced Dutch Peltz beyond *any* doubt of Lloyd Hopkins's genius: In hushed tones, Dreyfus told how a "death squad" of militant illegal aliens was behind the killing of the five hippies and how they were now demanding $250,000 from him for firing his immigrant work force *en masse.* The hippies were killed as a terror tactic; their random selection a ruse to keep attention from being focused on the Donut Deelite chain.

The following morning a dozen black and whites cordoned off both sides of the 1100 block of Wabash Street in East Los Angeles. Flak-jacketed officers surrounded the building that housed the death squad. Armed with fully automatic AK-47s, they broke through the front door, firing warning bursts above the heads of four men and three women quietly eating breakfast. The seven stoically submitted to handcuffing and a search team was deployed to check the rest of the house. A total of eleven illegal aliens was arrested. After a gruelling series of interrogations, three men admitted to the Hollywood killings. They were indicted on five counts of first-degree murder and ultimately received life sentences.

The day after the confessions were secured, Dutch Peltz went looking for Lloyd Hopkins. He found him going off duty in the parking lot at Central Division. Unlocking his car, Lloyd felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around and found Peltz shuffling his feet nervously, gazing up at him with a look that he could only think of as pure love.

"Thanks, kid," the older cop said. "You've made me. I was going to tell—"

"No one would believe you," Lloyd interrupted. "Let it go down the way it is."

"Don't you want—"

"You did the work, Sergeant. I just supplied the theory."

Peltz laughed until Lloyd thought he would keel over of a heart attack. As his laughter subsided, Peltz regained his breath and said, "Who are you?"

Lloyd flicked the antenna of his car and said softly, "I don't know. I Jesus fucking Christ don't know."

"I can teach you things," Dutch Peltz said. "I've been a Homicide dick for eleven years. I can give you a lot of solid, practical information, the benefit of a lot of experience."

"What do you want from me?" Lloyd asked.

Peltz took a moment to consider the question. "I think I just want to know you," he said.

The two men stared at each other in silence. Then Lloyd slowly extended his hand, sealing their fates.

It was Lloyd who was the teacher; almost from the start. Dutch would provide knowledge and experience in the form of anecdotes and Lloyd would find the hidden human truth and hold it up for magnification. Hundreds of hours were spent talking, rehashing old crimes and discussing topics as diverse as women's clothing and how it reflected character to dog-walking burglars who used their pets as subterfuge. The men discovered safe harbors in each other–Lloyd knew that he had found the one cop who would never look at him strangely when he retreated at the sound of a radio or begrudge him when he insisted on doing it *his* way; Dutch knew that he had found the supreme police intellect. When Lloyd passed the Sergeant's exam, it was Dutch who pulled strings to get him assigned to the Detective Division, calling in a career's worth of unreturned favors.

It was then that Lloyd Hopkins was able to manifest his intellect and produce astounding results–the greatest number of felony arrests and convictions of any Los Angeles police officer in the history of the department, all within a period of five years. Lloyd's reputation grew to the point where he asked for and was granted almost complete autonomy, deferred to by even the most sternminded, traditionalist cops. And Dutch Peltz proudly watched it happen, content to play in the august light of genius provided by a man he loved more than his own life.

Lloyd found Dutch Peltz in the muster room at Van Nuys Station, pacing the walls and reading the crime reports tacked to the bulletin boards. He cleared his throat and the older cop wheeled and threw up his hands in mock surrender.

"Jesus, Lloyd," he said, "when in God's name will you learn not to tread so softly among friends? A kodiak bear with the tread of a cat. Jesus!"

Lloyd laughed at the expression of love; it made him happy. "You look good, Dutch. Working a desk and losing weight! A fucking miracle."

Dutch gave Lloyd a warm, two-handed handshake. "It's no miracle, kid. I quit smoking and lost weight too. What have we got?"

"A gunsel. Works with a partner. He's got a pad on Saticoy. I figured we'd drive over and check if his car is around. If he's at home, we'll call for a couple of back-ups units, if he's gone, we'll wait him out and take him ourselves. You like it?"

"I like it. I brought my Ithaca pump. What's the joker's name?"

"Richard Douglas Wilson, white male, age thirty-four. Two-time loser with a Quentin jacket."

"Sounds like a charming fellow."

"Yeah, a Renaissance low lifer."

"You'll tell me about it in the car?"

"Yeah, let's go."

Richard Douglas Wilson was not at home. Having checked every street space, driveway and parking lot on the 11800 block of Saticoy Street for a '79 Firebird, Lloyd made a circuit of number 11879; a rundown, two-story apartment house. The mailbox designated Wilson as living in Number 14. Lloyd found the apartment at the rear of the building. A screen-covered, sliding glass window was wide open. He looked inside, then walked back to Dutch, who was parked across the street in the shadow of a freeway off-ramp.

"No car, no Wilson, Dutch," Lloyd said. "I looked in his window–brand new stereo, new TV, new clothes, *new money."*

Dutch laughed. "You happy, Lloyd?"

"Yeah, I am. Are you?"

"If you are, kid."

The two policemen settled in to wait. Dutch had brought a thermos of coffee, and when twilight stifled the heat and smog, he poured two cups. Handing one to Lloyd, he broke the long, comfortable silence. "I ran into Janice the other day. I had to testify for an old snitch of mine in Santa Monica. He took a fall for a burglary one, so I went down to rap sadness to the D.A. about how the poor bastard was strung out and would he talk to the judge about diverting him to a drug program. Anyway, I stop at a coffee shop, and there's Janice. She's got this fag with her, he's showing her fabrics out of this binder, really giving her the hard sell. Anyway, the fag sashays off and Janice invites me to sit down. We talk. She says the shop is doing well, it's acquiring a reputation, the girls are fine. She says that you spend too much time working, but that it's an old complaint and she can't change you. She looks sort of disgusted, so I come to your aid. I say, 'Genius writes its own rules, sweetie. Lloyd loves you. Lloyd will change in time.' Janice screams at me, 'Lloyd is incapable of it, and his fucking love isn't enough!' That was it, Lloyd. She wouldn't talk about it any more. I tried to change the subject, but Janice keeps taking these cryptic little digs at you. Finally, she jumps up and kisses me on the cheek and says, 'I'm sorry, Dutch. I'm just being a bitch,' and runs out the door."

Dutch's voice trailed off as he searched for words to end his story. "I just thought I'd tell you," he said. "I don't believe partners should keep secrets from each other."

Lloyd sipped his coffee, his mind quietly turbulent, as it always was when he felt cracks appearing in his major dreams. "So what's the upshot, partner?" he asked.

"The upshot?"

"The riddle, you dumb fucking krauthead! The undercurrents! Haven't I taught you better than that? What was Janice *really* trying to tell you?"

Dutch swallowed his crushed pride and spat it out angrily. "I think she's wise to your womanizing, brainboy. I think she knows that the finest of L.A.'s finest is chasing cunt and shacking up with a bunch of sleazy bimbos who can't hold the remotest candle to the woman he married. That's what I think."

Lloyd went calm beneath his anger, and the cracks in his major dreams became fissures. He shook his head slowly, searching for mortar to fill them up. "You're wrong," he said, giving Dutch's shoulder a gentle squeeze. "I think Janice would let *me* know. And Dutch? The other women in my life aren't bimbos."

"Then what are they?"

"Just women. And I love them."

"You *love* them?"

Lloyd knew as he said the words that it was one of the proudest moments of his life. "Yes. I love all the women I sleep with, and I love my daughters and I love my wife."

After four hours of silent surveillance, Dutch had dozed off in the driver's seat, his head cradled into the half-opened front window. Lloyd remained alert, sipping coffee and keeping his eyes glued to the driveway of 11879 Saticoy Street. It was shortly after ten o'clock when he saw a late-model Firebird pull up in front of the building.

He nudged Dutch awake, placing a hand over his mouth. "Our friend is here, Dutch. He just pulled up, and he's still in the car. I think we should get out on my side and walk around and take him from the rear."

Dutch nodded and handed Lloyd his shotgun. Lloyd squeezed through the passenger door onto the sidewalk, keeping the shotgun pressed into his right leg.

Dutch followed suit, slamming the door and throwing an arm around Lloyd, exclaiming, “God, am I smashed!” He went into an adept imitation of a weaving drunk, leaning against Lloyd and talking gibberish.

Lloyd kept his eyes on the black Firebird, waiting for the doors to open, wondering why Wilson was still inside. When they got to the end of the block, he handed Dutch the Ithaca pump and said, “You take the driver, I’ll take the passenger.” Dutch nodded and jacked a shell into the chamber. Lloyd whispered, “Now,” and the men hunkered down and ran up behind the car, swooping down on it from opposite sides, Dutch jamming his shotgun into the driver’s side window, whispering, “Police, don’t move or you’re dead”; Lloyd resting his .38 on the door jamb and saying to the woman passenger, “Freeze, sweetheart. Put your hands on the dashboard. We want your boyfriend, not you.”

The woman stifled a scream and slowly complied with Lloyd’s orders. The driver started to jabber, “Look man, you got this wrong, I ain’t done nothin!”

Dutch tightened his finger on the trigger and rested the barrel on the man’s nose and said, “Put your hands behind your head. I’m gonna open this car door real slow. You get out *real* slow or you’re gonna be *real* dead.”

The man nodded and wrapped shaky hands around his neck. Dutch pulled the shotgun back and started to open the car door. As his hand hit the latch, the man kicked out with both legs. The door swung into Dutch’s midsection, knocking him backwards, the shotgun exploding into the air as his finger reflexively yanked the trigger. The man jumped out of the car and stumbled into the street, then got up and started to run.

Lloyd relinquished his bead on the woman and fired a warning shot into the air, yelling, “Halt, halt!”

Dutch got to his feet and fired blindly. Lloyd saw the running figure starting to weave in anticipation of further volleys. He watched the rhythm of the man’s swaying, then fired three times at shoulder level. The man buckled and fell to the pavement. Before Lloyd could approach cautiously, Dutch had run up and was slamming the man in the ribs with the butt of his shotgun. Lloyd ran over and pulled Dutch off, then cuffed the suspect’s hands behind his back.

The man had been hit twice just below the collarbone. Clean, Lloyd noticed; two crisp exit wounds. He pulled the man roughly to his feet and said to Dutch, “Ambulance, back-up units.” Looking around at the crowd that was starting to form on both sides of the street, he added: “And tell those people to back off onto the sidewalk.”

Lloyd turned his attention to the suspect. “Richard Douglas Wilson, right?”

“I don’t gotta tell you nothin’,” the man answered.

“That’s right, you don’t. Okay, let’s take care of the legalities. You have the right to remain silent. You have the right to have legal counsel present during questioning. If you cannot afford counsel, an attorney will be provided. You got anything to say, Wilson?”

“Yeah,” the man said, twisting his wounded shoulder, “I say fuck your mother.”

“A predictable response. Can’t you guys come up with something original like ‘Fuck your father’?”

“Fuck you, flatfoot.”

“That’s better; you’re learning.”

Dutch ran back over. “Ambulance and back-up are on their way.”

“Good. Where’s the girl?”

“She’s still in the car.”

“Good. Look after Mr. Wilson, will you? I want to talk to her.”

Lloyd walked to the black Firebird. The young woman sat rigid in the passenger seat, her hands still clamped to the dashboard. She was crying, and her mascara had run all the way down to her chin. Lloyd knelt by the open door and placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. “Miss?”

The woman turned to face him, starting to weep openly. “I don’t want to have a record!” she bawled. “I just met the guy. I’m not a bad person, I just wanted to get stoned and listen to some music!”

Lloyd smoothed an errant lock of her blonde hair. “What’s your name?” he asked.

“Sarah.”

“Sarah Bernhardt?”

“No.”

“Sarah Vaughan?”

“No.”

“Sarah Coventry?”

The woman laughed and wiped her sleeve across her face. “Sarah Smith,” she said.

Lloyd took her hand. “Good. My name’s Lloyd. Where do you live, Sarah?”

“In West L.A.”

“I’ll tell you what. You go over and wait in that crowd of people. I’ve got a few things to do here, then I’ll drive you home. Okay?”

“Okay… and I won’t have a record?”

“No one will ever even know that you were here. Okay?”

“Okay.”

Lloyd watched Sarah Smith compose herself and move into the crowd of rubberneckers on the sidewalk. He walked over to Dutch and Richard Douglas Wilson, who were leaning against the unmarked Matador. Lloyd motioned Dutch to leave, and as he departed, fixed Wilson with a hard look and disgusted shake of the head.

“No honor among thieves, Richard,” he said. “None at all. Especially the punks over at Gangster Manor.” Wilson’s jaw trembled at the last words, and Lloyd continued. “I found a box of shells and a pantyhose wrapper there with your prints on them. But that wasn’t how we nailed you. Somebody snitched you off. Somebody sent the Rampart dicks an anonymous letter making you for the Black Cat stick-up. The letter said you only knocked off fruit bars because you got turned out by some bad-ass jockers at Quentin, and you liked it. You love queers and you hate them too, because of what they made you.”

“That’s a fucking lie!” Wilson screamed. “I took down liquor stores, markets, even a fucking disco! I done—”

Lloyd cut him off with a chopped hand gesture and went in for the kill. “The letter said that you were drinking outside Gangster Manor after the heist, and you were bragging about all the cunt you scored. Your buddy said he was cracking up because he knew you liked to take it up the ass.”

Richard Douglas Wilson’s pale, sweat-streaked face went purple. He shrieked, "That scumbag motherfucker! I *saved* his ass from getting porked by every nigger on the yard! I carried that punk through Quentin, now he—"

Lloyd put a hand on Wilson's shoulder and said quietly, "Richard, you're looking at a dime *minimum* this time. Ten bullets. You think you can handle that? You're tough, you're a stand-up guy; I know that. I'm tough too. But you know what? I couldn't do a dime up there. They got niggers up there who'd eat me for breakfast. Turn your partner over, Richard. He snitched you off. I'll go…" Wilson was shaking his head frantically in denial. Lloyd started to shake his head in pure loathing. "You dumb asshole," he said. "Go by the old code, let some piece of shit rat on you, facing five to life and you look a gift horse in the mouth. You dumb motherfucker." He turned and started to walk away.

He had gotten only a few feet when Wilson called out, "Wait. Wait. Look—"

Lloyd stifled the huge grin that was lighting up his face and said, "I'll go to the D.A., I'll talk to the judge, I'll see to it that you go to the protective custody tank while you're waiting for your trial."

Richard Douglas Wilson weighed the pros and cons a last time, then capitulated. "His name is John Gustodas. 'Johnny The Greek.' He lives in Hollywood. Franklin and Argylle. The red brick building on the corner."

Lloyd squeezed Wilson's undamaged shoulder. "Good fellow. My partner will take down your statement at the hospital, and I'll be in touch." He craned his head to look for Dutch, and spotted him on the sidewalk talking to two uniformed officers. He whistled twice, and Dutch walked over, warily. "You tired, Dutchman?" Lloyd asked.

"A little. Why?"

"Wilson confessed. He snitched off his partner. The guy lives in Hollywood. I want to go home. You want to take down Wilson's statement, then call Hollywood dicks and give them the info on the guy?"

Dutch hesitated. "Sure, Lloyd," he said.

"Great. John 'Johnny The Greek' Gustodas. Franklin and Argylle. Red brick apartment house on the corner. I'll write up *all* the reports, don't worry about that."

Lloyd heard the wail of an ambulance siren, and shook his head to combat the noise. "Fucking sirens ought to be outlawed," he said as the ambulance rounded the corner and ground to a halt. "There's your chariot. I gotta get out of here. I promised to take Janice out to dinner at eight. It's almost eleven now." The two policemen shook hands. "We did it again, partner," Lloyd said.

"Yeah. I'm sorry I barked at you, kid."

"You're on Janice's side. I don't blame you; she's better looking than I am."

Dutch laughed. "Talk to you tomorrow about Wilson's statement?"

"Right. I'll call you."

Lloyd found Sarah Smith with the remnants of the spectators, smoking a cigarette and shuffling her feet nervously on the pavement. "Hi, Sarah. How are you feeling?"

Sarah ground out the cigarette. "All right, I guess. What's going to happen to what's-his-name?"

Lloyd smiled at the sadness of the question. "He's going to prison for a long time. Don't you even remember his name?"

"I'm bad at names."

"Do you remember mine?"

"Floyd?"

"Close. Lloyd. Come on, I'll take you home."

They walked over to the unmarked Matador and got in. Lloyd scrutinized Sarah openly as she gave her address and fiddled with the contents of her purse. A good girl from a good family gone slightly loose, he decided. Twenty-eight or nine, the light blonde hair legit, the body beneath the black cotton pantsuit both slender and soft. A kind face trying to look tough. Probably a hard worker at her job.

Lloyd headed straight for the nearest westbound on-ramp, alternately savoring his anniversary triumph and picturing confrontations with Janice, who would doubtless give him one of her incredible slow burns–if not an outright battle for being so late. Feeling kindness well up in him for sparing Sarah Smith the harshness of the law, he tapped her shoulder and said, "It's going to be all right, you know."

Sarah dug into her purse looking for cigarettes and found only an empty pack. She muttered, "Shit" and threw it out the window, then sighed. "Yeah, maybe you're right. You really get off on being a cop, don't you?"

"It's my life. Where did you meet Wilson?"

"Is that his name? I met him at a country-western bar. Shit-kicker's paradise, but at least they treat women with respect. What did he do?"

"Held up a bar at gunpoint."

"Jesus! I figured he was just some kind of dope dealer."

Out of the mouths of babes, Lloyd thought. "I'm not lecturing you or anything like that," he said, "but you shouldn't hang out in dives. You could get hurt."

Sarah snorted. "Then where should I go to meet people?"

"You mean men?"

"Well… yeah."

"Try the continental approach. Drink coffee and read a book at some picturesque sidewalk café. Sooner or later some nice fellow will start a conversation with you about the book you're reading. You'll meet higher class people that way."

Sarah laughed wildly and clapped her hands, then poked Lloyd in the arm. When he took his eyes from the road and gave her a deadpan, her laughter became hysterical. "That's funny, that's so funny!" she squealed.

"It's not *that* funny."

"Yes, it is! You should be on TV!" Sarah's laughter subsided. She looked at Lloyd quizzically. "Is that how you met your wife?"

"I didn't tell you I was married."

"I saw your ring."

"Very observant. But I met my wife in high school." Sarah Smith laughed until she ached. Lloyd laughed along in a more sedate cadence, then dug in his pocket for a handkerchief and reached over and dabbed at Sarah's tear-mottled face. She leaned into his hand, rubbing her nose along his knuckles.

"You ever wonder why you keep on doing things even when you know they don't work?" she asked.

Lloyd ran a finger under her chin and tilted her head upwards to face him. "It's because outside of the major dreams everything is always changing, and even though you keep doing the same things, you're looking for new answers."

"I believe that," Sarah said. "Get off at the next exit and turn right."

Five minutes later he pulled to the curb in front of an apartment building on Barrington. Sarah poked him in the arm and said, "Thanks."

"Good luck, Sarah. Try the book trick."

"Maybe I will. Thanks."

"Thank you."

"For what?"

"I don't know."

Sarah poked Lloyd's arm a last time and darted out of the car.

Janice Hopkins looked at the antique clock in her living room and felt her fearful slow burn leap ahead as the hour hand struck ten and she realized that this was her husband's "second major anniversary" and that she could not rationally fight with him over their missed dinner date, could not use that minor grievance to force confrontations on any of the disturbances that undercut their marriage, could do nothing but say, "Oh shit, Lloyd, where were you this time?", smile at his brilliant answer, and know how much he loved her. Tomorrow she would call her friend George, and he would come to the shop and they would commiserate at length about men.

"Oh God, George," she would say, "the life of a muse!"

And George would reply, "But you love him?"

"More than I know."

"Realizing that he's slightly off the deep end?"

"More than slightly, kiddo, what with his little phobias and all. But they just make him more human, more my baby."

And George would smile and talk of his lover, and they would laugh until the Waterford crystal rang and the bone china plates spun on their shelves.

Then George would take her hand and casually mention the brief affair they had had when George decided he needed to experience women to be more of one himself. It had lasted a week, when George accompanied her to San Francisco for a seminar on appraising antiques. In bed all he talked about was Lloyd. It disgusted her, but thrilled her too, and she went on to divulge the most intimate facts of her marriage.

When she realized that Lloyd would always be the unseen third party in bed with them, she broke it off. It was the only time she had cheated on her husband, and it was not for the standard reasons of neglect, abuse, or sexual boredom. It was to gain some kind of parity with him for the adventurous life he led. When Lloyd was frightened or angry and came to her with that look of his and she unhooked her bra and gave him her breasts, he was hers utterly. But when he read reports, or talked with Dutch Peltz and his other cop friends in the living room and she saw the wheels turning behind the pale grey eyes, she knew he was going to places that she never could. Her other parities–the success of the boutique, the book on Tiffany mirrors she had co-authored, her business acumen–all these satisfied only at the level of logic. Because Lloyd could fly and she couldn't; even after seventeen years of marriage, Janice Rice Hopkins did not possess a syllabus to explain why this was so. And inexplicably, her husband's capacity for flight began to frighten her.

Against the sum total of over twenty years of intimacy, Janice collated the recent evidences of Lloyd's strange behavior: his hour-long sojourns in front of the mirror, casting his eyes in circles as though trawling for flying insects; the increasingly long stints spent at his parents' house, talking to his mother, who had not uttered or comprehended a sound in nineteen years; the insanely sardonic set to his face when he talked to his brother on the telephone about their parents' care.

But the stories that he told the girls were the most disturbing: cop tales that Janice suspected to be half parable and half confession, lurid travelogues on the darkest Los Angeles streets, populated by hookers, junkies, and other sundry low-lifes and cops who were often as raunchy and brutal as the people they threw in jail. A year ago Janice had told Lloyd not to tell her the stories. He had agreed with a silent nod of his head and a cold look in his eyes, and took his parable/confessions to the girls, bringing them into adolescence with detailed accounts of sleaze and horror. Anne would shrug the stories off–she was fourteen and boy crazy; Caroline, thirteen and with a real talent for ballet, would brood over them and bring home true detective magazines and ask her father to discourse on the various articles inside. And Penny would listen and listen and listen, with pale grey eyes shining right through her father and her father's story to some distant termination point. When Lloyd concluded his parable, Penny would kiss him sternly on the cheek and go upstairs and knit the cashmere and madras plaid quilts that had already earned her feature coverage in five Sunday supplements.

Janice shivered. Was Penny's innocence blasted beyond redemption already? A master artisan and fledgling entrepreneur at twelve? She shivered again and looked at the clock. An hour of fearful speculation had passed, and Lloyd was still not home. Suddenly she realized that she missed him and wanted him beyond the limits of normal desire in a twenty-year-old love affair. She walked upstairs and undressed in the dark bedroom, lighting the scented candle that was Lloyd's signal to wake her up and love her. Crawling into bed, a last dark thought crossed her mind, like predator birds blackening a calm sky: As the girls grew older they looked more and more like Lloyd, especially in their eyes.

She heard Lloyd enter the house an hour later, his ritualistic sounds in the entrance hall: Lloyd sighing and yawning, unhooking his gunbelt and placing it on the telephone stand, the familiar shuffling noises he made as he slowly walked upstairs. Tensing herself for the moment when he would open the door and see her in amber light, Janice ran a teasing hand between her legs.

But the bedroom door didn't open; she heard Lloyd tiptoe past it and walk down the hall to Penny's room, then rap his knuckles lightly on her door and whisper, "Penguin? You want to hear a story?" The door creaked open a second later, and Janice heard father and child giggle in gleeful conspiracy.

She gave her husband half an hour, angrily chainsmoking. When her last remnants of ardor had fled and she started to cough from the half-dozen cigarettes, Janice threw on a robe and walked down the hall to listen.

Penny's bedroom door was ajar, and through it Janice could see her husband and youngest daughter sitting on the edge of the bed, holding hands. Lloyd was speaking very softly, in an awe-tinged storyteller's voice: "…after clearing the Haverhill/Jenkins homicide, I got assigned to a robbery deployment, a loan-out to the West L.A. squadroom. There had been a series of nighttime burglaries of doctor's offices, all in large buildings in the Westwood area. Cash and saleable drugs were the burglar's meat; in shortly over a month he'd ripped off over five grand in cash and a shitload of pharmaceutical speed and heavyweight downers. The West L.A. dicks had his M.O. figured out this way: The bastard used to hide out in the building until nightfall, then hit his mark, then break into a second floor office and jump out the window into the parking lot. There was evidence to point to this–chipped cement on the window ledges. The dicks figured him for a gymnast, a bullshit cat burglar type who could jump two stories without getting hurt. The commander of the squad was setting up parking lot surveillances to catch him. When the burglar hit an office building on Wilshire that two teams of detectives were staking out, it blew their thesis to hell and I was called in."

Lloyd paused. Penny nuzzled her head into his shoulder and said, "Tell me how you got the scumbag, Daddy."

Lloyd brought his storyteller's voice down to its lowest register: "Sweetheart, nobody jumps two stories repeatedly without getting hurt. I formed my own thesis: The burglar brazenly walked out of the buildings, waving to the security guards in the foyer as if everything were hunky-dory. Only one thing troubled me. Where was he carrying the dope he ripped off? I went back and checked with the guards on duty the nights of the robberies. Yes, both known and unknown men in business suits had walked out of the building in the early evening hours, but none were carrying bags or packages. The guards assumed them to be businessmen with offices in the building and didn't check them out. I heard that same statement six times before it all came together in my mind: The burglar dressed in drag, probably in the protective coloring of a nurse's uniform, carrying a large purse or shoulderbag. I checked with the guards again and, bingo! An unknown woman seen wearing a nurse's uniform and carrying a large shoulderbag was seen leaving the burglarized buildings at almost the exact time on all six burglary nights. The guards couldn't describe her, but said she was 'ugly,' 'a dog,' and so forth."

Penny fidgeted when Lloyd took in a deep breath and sighed. She took her head from his shoulder and poked him sharply in the arm. "Don't be a tease, Daddy!"

Lloyd laughed and said, "Alright. I ran a computer cross-check on vice offenders and registered sex offenders with burglary convictions. Double bingo! Arthur Christiansen, a.k.a. "Misty Christie", a.k.a. "Arlene the Queen" Christiansen. Specialties: giving cut-rate blow jobs to drunks who thought he was a woman and full-drag B & Es. I staked out his pad for thirty-six hours straight, determining that he was dealing uppers and Percodan–I heard his customers comment on the righteous quality of his stuff. This was solid corroboration, but I wanted to catch him-her in the act. The following afternoon old Arthur-Arlene left the pad with a giant quilted shoulderbag and drove to Westwood and walked into a big office building two blocks from the U.C.L.A. campus. Four hours later, an hour after dark, a very ugly creature in a nurse's uniform walks out, carrying the same shoulderbag. I whip out my badge, yell 'Police Officer!' and rush Arthur-Arlene, who screams, 'Chauvinist!' and swings on me. The blows are ineffectual and I'm reaching for my handcuffs when Arthur-Arlene's falsies pop out of his blouse. I get him handcuffed and flag down a black-and-white. Arthur-Arlene is screaming 'sisterhood is powerful' and 'police brutality,' and a crowd of

U.C.L.A. students start shouting obscenities at me. I barely managed to get into the black-and-white. The scene was almost L.A.'s first transvestite police riot."

Penny laughed hysterically, collapsing on the bed and pounding the covers with her fists. She burrowed her head into the pillow to wipe away her tears, then giggled, "More, Daddy, more. One more before you go to bed:"

Lloyd reached over and ruffled Penny's hair. "Funny or serious?"

"Serious," Penny said. "Give me some dark stuff to sate my ghoulish curiosity. If you don't make it good, I'll stay up all night thinking of Arthur-Arlene's falsies."

Lloyd traced circles on the bedspread. "How about a knight story?"

Penny's face grew somber. She took her father's hand and scooted down the bed so that Lloyd could rest his head in her lap. When father and daughter were comfortable, Lloyd stared up at the tartan quilt suspended from the ceiling and said, "The knight was caught in a dilemma. He had two anniversaries in one day–one personal, one professional. The professional one took precedence and in the course of it he shot a man, wounding him. About an hour later, after the man was in custody, the knight started to shake like he always did after he fired his gun. All those delayed reaction questions hit him: What if his shots rendered the asshole for good? What if next time he gloms the wrong info and takes out the wrong guy? What if he starts seeing red all the time and his discretion goes haywire? It's a shitstorm out there. You know that, don't you, Penguin?"

"Yes," Penny whispered.

"You know that you've got to develop claws to fight it?"

"Sharp ones, Daddy."

"You know the weird thing about the knight? The more complicated his doubts and questions become, the stronger his resolve gets. It just gets weird sometimes. What would you do if things got really weird?"

Penny played with her father's hair. "Sharpen my claws," she said, digging her fingers into Lloyd's scalp.

Lloyd grimaced in mock pain. "Sometimes the knight wishes he weren't such a fucking Protestant. If he were a Catholic he'd be able to get formal absolution."

"I'll always absolve you, Daddy," Penny said as Lloyd got to his feet. "Like the song said, 'I'm easy.'"

Lloyd looked down at his daughter. "I love you," he said.

"I love you too. One question before you go: You think I'd be a good Robbery/Homicide dick?"

Lloyd laughed. "No, but you'd be a great Robbery/Homicide dickless."

Janice watched Penny squeal in delight, and suddenly she was violated at the womb. She walked back to the bedroom she shared with her husband and flung off her robe, preparing to do *her* battle in the nude. Lloyd walked through the door moments later, smelling the scented candle and whispering, "Jan? You ardent this late, sweetheart? It's after midnight."

As he reached for the light switch, Janice threw her overflowing ashtray at the opposite wall and hissed, "You sick, selfish, son-of-a-bitch, can't you see what you're doing to that little girl? You call spilling out that violence being a father?" Frozen in the ugliness of the moment, Lloyd pushed the light switch, illuminating Janice, shivering in the nude. "Do you, Lloyd, goddamn you?"

Lloyd moved toward his wife, arms extended in a supplicating gesture, hoping that physical contact would quell the storm.

“No!” Janice said as she backed away, “Not this time! This time I want a promise from you, an oath that you will not tell our children those ugly stories!”

Lloyd reached a long arm out and caught Janice’s wrist. She twisted it free and knocked down the nightstand between them.

“Don’t, Lloyd. Don’t want me and don’t placate me and don’t touch me until you promise.”

He ran a hand through his hair and started to tremble. Fighting an impulse to punch the wall, he bent over and picked up the nightstand. “Penny is a subtle child, Jan, possibly a genius,” he said. “What should I do? Tell her about the three…”

Janice hurled her favorite porcelain lamp at the closet and shrieked, “She’s just a little girl! A twelve-year-old little girl! Can’t you understand that?”

Lloyd tripped across the bed and grabbed her around the waist, burying his head in her stomach, whispering, “She has to know, she had to know it, or she’ll die. She has to know.”

Janice raised her arms and molded her hands into fists. She started to bring them down, clublike, onto Lloyd’s back but hesitated as a thousand instances of his erratic passion washed over her, combining to form an epigram whose words she was too terrified to speak.

She lowered her hands to her husband’s face and gently pushed him away. “I want to see if the girls are all right,” she said. “I’ll have to tell them we were fighting. Then I think I want to sleep alone.”

Lloyd got to his feet. “I’m sorry I was so late tonight.”

Janice nodded dumbly and felt her sense of things confirmed. Then she put on a robe and went down the hall to check on her daughters.

Lloyd knew that he wouldn’t be able to sleep. After saying good night to the girls, he prowled around downstairs looking for something to do. There was nothing to do but think of Janice and how he could not have her without giving up something dear to him and essential to his daughters. There was no place to go but backward in time.

Lloyd put on his gunbelt and drove to the old neighborhood.

He found it waiting for him in the pre-dawn stillness, as familiar as the sigh of an old lover. Lloyd drove down Sunset, feeling overwhelmed by the Tightness of his usurping of innocence via parable. Let them learn it slowly, he thought, not the way I did. Let them learn the beast by story–not repeated example. Let that be the new hallmark of my Irish Protestant irregulars.

With this surge of affirmation, Lloyd floored the gas pedal, watching night-bound Sunset Boulevard explode in peripheral flashes of neon, sucking him into the middle of a swirling Jetstream. He looked at the speedometer: one hundred thirty-five miles per hour. It wasn’t enough. He bore down on the wheel with his whole being, and the neon turned to burning white. Then he closed his eyes and decelerated until the car hit an upgrade and the laws of nature forced it to a gliding stop.

Lloyd opened his eyes to discover them flooded with tears, wondering for an awkwardly long moment where on earth he was. Finally, a thousand memories clicked in and he realized that chance had left him at the corner of Sunset and

Silverlake–the heart of the old neighborhood. Propelled by a subservient fate, he went walking.

Terraced hillsides drew Lloyd into a fusion of past, present, and future.

He sprinted up the Vendome steps, noting with satisfaction that the earth on both sides of the cement stanchions was as soft as ever. The Silverlake hills were formed by God to nurture–let the poor Mexicans live hearty here and thrive; let the old people complain about the steepness yet never move away. Let the earthquake the scientific creeps predicted come…Silverlake, the defiant traditionalist anomaly, would sustain its havoc and stand proud while L.A. proper burst like an eggshell.

At the top of the hill, Lloyd let his imagination telescope in on the few houses still burning lights. He imagined great loneliness and sensed that the light burners were importuning him for love. He breathed in their love and exhaled it with every ounce of his own, then turned west to stare through the hillside that separated him from the very old house where his crazy brother tended their parents. Lloyd shuddered as discord entered his reverie. The one person he hated guarding his two beloved creators. His one conscious compromise. Unavoidable, but…

Lloyd recalled how it happened. It was the spring of 1971. He was working Hollywood Patrol and driving over to Silverlake twice a week to visit his parents while Tom was away at work. His father had settled into a quiet, oblivious state in his old age, spending whole days in his back yard shack, tinkering with the dozens of television sets and radios that eclipsed almost every square inch of its floor space; and his mother, then eight years mute, stared and dreamed in her silence, having to be steered to the kitchen thrice daily lest she forget to eat.

Tom lived with them, as he had all his life, waiting for them to die and leave him the house that had already been placed in his name. He cooked for his parents and cashed their Social Security checks and read to them from the lurid picture histories of Nazi Germany that lined the bookshelves of his bedroom. It was Morgan Hopkins's express wish to Lloyd that he and his wife live out their days in the old house on Griffith Park Boulevard. Lloyd reassured his father many times, “You'll always have the house, Dad. Let Tom pay the taxes, don't even worry about it. He's a sorry excuse for a man, but he makes money, and he's good at looking after you and Mother. Leave the house to him; I don't care. Just be happy and don't worry.”

There was a silent agreement between Lloyd and his brother, then thirty-six and a phone sales entrepreneur operating at the edge of the law. Tom was to live at home and feed and care for their parents, and Lloyd was to look the other way at the cache of automatic weapons buried in the back yard of the Hopkins homestead. Lloyd laughed at the inequity of the bargain–Tom, craven beyond words, would never have the guts to use the weaponry, which would be rusted past redemption within a matter of months anyway.

But one day in April of '71, Lloyd got a phone call informing him that there was now a gaping hole at the periphery of his major dreams. An old buddy from the Academy who worked Rampart Patrol had cruised by the Hopkins home, noticing a “For Sale” sign on the front lawn. Puzzled, since he had heard Lloyd often mention that his parents would rather die than give up the house, he called Lloyd at Hollywood Station to voice his puzzlement. Lloyd took the words in with a silent rage that had the locker room wobbling surreally before his eyes. Still wearing his uniform, he got his car from the parking lot and drove out to Tom's office in Glendale.

The "office" was a converted basement with four dozen small desks jammed together along the walls, and Lloyd walked into it oblivious to the salesmen shouting the panacea of aluminum siding and home bible-study classes into telephones.

Tom's desk was off by itself near the front of the room, next to a large urn filled with Benzedrine-laced coffee. Lloyd swung his lead-filled billy club into the urn, puncturing it and sending geysers of hot brown liquid into the air. Tom walked out of the men's room, saw the rage in his brother's eyes and the club, and backed into the wall. Lloyd advanced, and was arcing the club in a perfect roundhouse aimed at Tom's head when the terror in the pale grey eyes that so resembled his own halted him. He threw the billy down and ran to the first row of desks, startled phone salesman darting out of his way, running for cover at the back of the basement.

Lloyd began jerking the telephone cords out of their wall mountings and hurling the phones across the room. One row; two rows; three rows. When the salesmen had all deserted the office, and the floor was littered with broken glass, scattered order forms, and inoperative telephones, he walked up to his quaking older brother and said, "You will take the house off the market today and never leave Mother and Dad alone."

Tom nodded mutely and fainted into a puddle of his dope-saturated coffee.

Lloyd deepened his gaze into the dark hillside. That was over ten years ago. His mother and father were still alive in their separate solitudes; Tom was still their custodian. It was his one unsatisfying holding action, but there was nothing he could do about it. He recalled his last conversation with Tom. He was visiting his parents and found Tom in the back yard, burying shotguns under cover of night.

"Talk to me," Lloyd said.

"About what, Lloydy?" Tom asked.

"Say something real. Insult me. Ask me a question. I won't hurt you."

Tom backed a few steps away. "Are you going to kill me when Mom and Dad are gone?"

Lloyd was thunderstruck. "Why on earth would I want to kill you?"

Tom retreated again. "Because of what happened on Christmas when you were eight."

Lloyd felt himself embraced by monsters, over thirty years dead in the wake of the strong man he had become. His eyes strayed to his father's radio shack, and he had to will himself to return to the present, the force of the horrific memory was so compelling. "You're crazy, Tom. You've always been crazy. I don't like you, but I would never kill you."

Lloyd watched dawn creep up on the eastern horizon, outlining the L.A. skyline with strands of gold. Suddenly he was lonely and wanted to be with a woman. He sat down on the steps and considered his options. There was Sybil, but she had probably gone back to her husband–she was considering it the last time they talked. There was Colleen, but she was probably on her mid-week sales run to

Santa Barbara. Leah? Meg? It was over with them, to resurrect it in the fierceness of early morning need would only cause pain later. There was only the uncertainty of Sarah Smith.

Lloyd knocked on her door forty-five minutes later. She opened it bleary-eyed, dressed in a denim bathrobe. When her eyes focused in on him she started to laugh.

"I'm not that funny looking, am I?" Lloyd asked.

Sarah shook her head. "What's the matter, your wife kick you out?"

"Sort of. She found out that I'm really a vampire in disguise. I prowl the lonely dawn streets of Los Angeles looking for beautiful young women to give me transfusions. Take me to your wisest muse."

Sarah giggled. "I'm not beautiful."

"Yes you are. Do you have to go to work today?"

Sarah said, "Yeah, but I can call in sick. I've never been with a vampire."

Lloyd took her hand as she motioned him inside. "Then allow me to introduce myself," he said.

Part Three
Convergence

5

Lloyd was seated in his office at Parker Center, his hands playing over papers on his desk, alternately forming steeples and hanging men. It was January 3, 1983, and from his sixth story cubicle he could see dark storm clouds barrelling northward. He hoped for a pulverizing rain storm. He felt warm and protective when foul weather raged.

The relative solitude of the office, situated between typewriter storage and Xeroxing rooms, was pleasing, but Lloyd's primary reason for acquiring it was its proximity to the dispatcher's office three doors down. Sooner or later, all homicides within the L.A.P.D.'s jurisdiction were reported over their phone lines, either by investigating officers requesting assistance or concerned parties screaming for help. Lloyd had rigged a special line to his own phone, and whenever an incoming call hit the switchboard a red light on his answering machine went on and he could pick up the receiver and listen in, often making him the first L.A.P.D. detective to gain crucial information on a murder. It was a sure-fire antidote to burdensome caseloads, dreary report writing, and court appearances; so when Lloyd saw the light on his machine blink, his heart gave a little lurch and he picked up the receiver to listen.

"Los Angeles Police Department, Robbery-Homicide Division," the woman at the switchboard said.

"Is this where you report a murder?" a man stammered in return.

"Yes, sir," the woman answered. "Are you in Los Angeles?"

"I'm in Hollyweird. Man, you wouldn't believe what I just seen…" Lloyd came alive with curiousity–the man sounded like he had witnessed a stoned visitation.

"Do you wish to report a homicide, sir?" The woman was brusque, even a little bullying.

"Man, I don't know if it was the real thing or a fuckin' hallucination. I've been doin' dust and reds for three days now."

"Where *are* you, sir?"

"I ain't *nowhere.* But you send the cops to the Aloha Apartments on Leland and Las Palmas. Room 406. There's something inside out of a fuckin' Peckinpah movie. I don't know, man, but either I gotta quit usin' dust or you got some heavy shit on your hands." The caller went into a coughing attack, then whispered, "Fuckin' Holly-weird, man; fuckin' weird," and slammed down his receiver.

Lloyd could almost feel the switchboard operator's befuddlement–she didn't know if the caller was for real or not. Muttering "Goddamned creep," she let her end of the line go dead. Lloyd jumped to his feet and threw on his sports jacket. *He* knew. He ran to his car and tore out for Hollywood.

The Aloha Regency was a four story, moss-hung, Spanish-style apartment house painted a bright electric blue. Lloyd walked through the unkempt entrance foyer to the elevator, quickly grasping the building as a once grand Hollywood address gone to despair. He knew that the inhabitants of the Aloha Regency would be an uneasy melange of illegal aliens, boozehounds, and welfare families. The sadness in the threadbare carpeted hallways was almost palpable.

He got into the elevator and pressed 4, then unholstered his .38, feeling his skin start to tingle as he sensed the nearness of death. The elevator jerked to a halt and Lloyd got out. He scanned the hallway, noting that the doors on the even-numbered side leading up to 406 bore jimmy marks. After 406 the jimmy marks stopped. The wood on the door jambs was freshly splintered with no evidence of warping, which meant that the doors had probably been tried as recently as this morning. Feeling a thesis forming already, Lloyd pointed his .38 straight at the door of 406 and kicked it in.

Holding his gun in front of him as a directional finder, he walked into a small rectangular living room lined with bookshelves and tall potted plants. There was a desk wedged diagonally into one corner and three beanbag chairs on the floor, arranged in a semi-circle opened toward the front picture window. Lloyd walked through the room, savoring its feel. Slowly he swiveled to face the kitchenette off to the left. Freshly scrubbed tile and linoleum; dishes piled neatly by the sink. Which left the bedroom–separated from the rest of the apartment by a bright green door bearing a Rod Stewart poster.

Lloyd looked down at the floor and felt his stomach start to churn. In front of the crack below the door was a pile of dead cockroaches, melded together in a pool of congealed blood. He kicked in the door, murmuring, “Rabbit down the hole,” closing his eyes until he assimilated the overwhelming stench of decomposing flesh. When he felt his tremors go internal and knew he wouldn’t retch, he opened his eyes and said very softly, “Oh God, please no.”

There was a nude woman hanging by one leg from a ceiling beam directly over a quilt-covered bed. Her stomach had been ripped open from pelvis to ribcage and her intestines were spilled out onto her upended torso, splaying out to cover her blood-matted face. Lloyd memorized the scene: the woman’s free hanging leg swollen and purple and twisted out at a right angle, caked blood on her breasts, a bluish-white tint on what he could see of her unbloodied flesh, the bed coverlet drenched with so much blood that it crusted and peeled in layers, blood on the floor and walls and dresser and mirror, all framing the dead woman in a perfect symmetry of devastation.

Lloyd went into the living room and found the telephone. He called Dutch Peltz at the Hollywood Station, saying only, “6819 Leland, Apartment 406. Homicide, ambulance, Medical Examiner. I’ll call you later and tell you about it.”

Dutch said, “Okay, Lloyd,” and hung up.

Lloyd walked through the apartment a second time, willing his mind blank so that things could come to him, moving his eyes over the living room until he noticed a leather purse lying next to a cactus plant. He reached down and grabbed it, then dumped its contents onto the floor. Make-up kit, Excedrin, loose change. He opened a hand-tooled wallet. The woman had been Julia Lynn Niemeyer. The photo and statistics on her driver’s license made him ache: pretty, 5’5”, 120 pounds. D.O.B. 2-2-54, making her a month short of twenty-nine.

Lloyd dropped the wallet and examined the bookshelves. Romances and popular novels predominated. He noticed that the books on the top shelves were covered with dust, while the books on the bottom shelf were clean.

He squatted down to examine them more closely. The bottom shelf contained volumes of poetry, from Shakespeare to Byron to feminist poets in soft cover. Lloyd pulled out three books at random and leafed through them, feeling his respect for Julia Lynn Niemeyer grow–she had been reading good stuff in the days before her death. He finished flipping through the classics and picked up an outsized paperback entitled *Rage In The Womb–An Anthology of Feminist Prose.* Opening to the "Contents," he went numb when he saw dark brown stains on the inside cover. Flipping forward, he found pages stuck together with congealed blood and bloody smatterings growing fainter as he worked toward the end of the book. When he reached the glossy finished back cover, he gasped. Perfectly outlined in white were two bloody partial fingerprints–an index and pinky; enough to run a make on.

Lloyd whooped and wrapped the book in his handkerchief and carefully placed it on one of the beanbag chairs. On impulse, he walked back over to the bookshelf and ran a hand in the narrow space between the bottom shelf and the floor. He came away with a handful of vending machine dispensed sex tabloids–*The L.A. Nite-Line, L.A. Grope,* and L.A *Swinger.*

He carried them over to the chair and sat down and read, saddened by the lurid fantasy letters and desperate liaison ads. "Attractive divorcee, 40, seeks well-hung white men for afternoon love. Send erect photo and letter to P.O. Box 5816, Gardena, 90808, Calif."; "Good looking gay guy, 24, into giving head, seeks hunky young high school guys with no mustache. Call anytime—709–6404"; "Mr. Big Dick's my name, and fucking's my game! I give good lovin' to much acclaim! Let's get together for a swingin' nite, my dick is hard if your pussy's tight!—Send spread photo to P.O. Box 6969, L.A. 90069, Calif."

Lloyd was about to put the tabloids down and send up a mercy plea for the entire human race when his eyes caught an advertisement circled in red. "Your fantasy or mine? Let's get together and rap. Any and all sexually liberated people are invited to write to me at P.O. Box 7512, Hollywood, 90036, Calif. (I'm an attractive woman in her late 20s.)" He put the paper down and dug through the other two. The identical ad was featured in both.

He stuck the papers into his jacket pocket, walked back into the bedroom, and opened the windows. Julia Lynn Niemeyer swayed from the draft, turning on her one-legged axis, the ceiling beam creaking against her weight. Lloyd held her arms gently. "Oh, sweetheart," he whispered, "oh, baby, what were you looking for? Did you fight? Did you scream?"

Almost as if in answer, the woman's cold left arm was caught by a gust of wind and flopped out of Lloyd's grasp. He grabbed it and held the hand tightly, his eyes moving to the large blue veins at the crook of the elbow. He gasped. A pair of needle marks were outlined clearly against the middle of the largest vein. He checked the other arm–nothing–then scraped away patches of dried blood from the ankles and backs of the knees. No other tracks; the woman had been professionally sedated at the time of her desecration.

Lloyd heard footsteps in the hallway, and seconds later a plainclothes cop and two patrolmen in uniform burst into the apartment. He walked into the living room to greet them, pointing a thumb over his shoulder and saying, "In there, guys." He was staring out the window at the black sky when he heard their first exclamations of horror, followed by the sound of retching.

The plainclothes cop was the first to recover, walking up to Lloyd and blurting out bluff-hearty, “Wow! That’s some stiff! You’re Lloyd Hopkins, aren’t you? I’m Lundquist, Hollywood Dicks.”

Lloyd turned to face the tall, prematurely grey young man, ignoring his outstretched hand. He scrutinized him openly and decided he was stupid and inexperienced.

Lundquist fidgeted under Lloyd’s stare. “I think we got a botched-up burglary, Sergeant,” he said. “I saw B. & E. marks on the door here. I think we should start our investigation by hauling in burglars know to use viol—”

Lloyd shook his head, silencing the younger detective. “Wrong. Those jimmy marks are fresh. The edges would have rounded off from moisture if the attempted burglaries coincided with the murder. That woman has been dead for at least two days. No, the burglar was the guy who called in to report the body. Now listen, the woman’s purse is on that chair over there. Positive I.D. There’s also a paperback book with two bloodstained partial prints. Get them to the lab and have the technicians call me at home when they have something conclusive one way or the other. I want you to search the premises, then seal it–no reporters, no TV assholes. You got that?”

Lundquist nodded.

“Good. Now, I want you to call the M.E. and S.I.D., and have them bring in a fingerprint team and dust this place from top to bottom. I want a complete forensic work-up. Tell the M.E. to call me at home with the autopsy report. Who’s the top dog at Hollywood Dicks?”

“Lieutenant Perkins.”

“Good. I’ll call him. Tell him I’m handling this case for Robbery-Homicide.”

“Right, Sergeant.”

Lloyd walked back into the bedroom. The two patrolmen were staring at the corpse and cracking jokes. “I had a girlfriend once who looked like that,” the older cop said. “Bloody Mary. I could only get together with her for two weeks outta the month, her period lasted so long.”

“That’s nothing,” the younger cop said, “I knew an attendant at the morgue who fell in love with a corpse. He wouldn’t let the Coroner slice her–said it took the R out of romance.”

The other cop laughed and lit a cigarette with shaking hands. “My wife takes the R out of romance every night, also the O and the M.”

Lloyd cleared his throat; he knew that the men were joking to keep their horror at bay, but he was offended anyway, and didn’t want Julia Lynn Niemeyer to hear such things. He rummaged through the bedroom closet until he found a terrycloth robe, then walked into the kitchen and found a serrated-edged steak knife. When he re-entered the bedroom and stood up on the blood-spattered bed, the younger cop said, “You’d better leave her like that for the Coroner, Sergeant.”

Lloyd said, “Shut the fuck up,” and cut through the nylon cord that bound Julia Lynn Niemeyer at the ankle. He gathered her dangling limbs and violated torso into his arms and stepped off the bed, cradling her head into his shoulder. Tears filled his eyes. “Sleep, darling,” he said. “Know that I’ll find your killer.” Lloyd lowered her to the floor and covered her with the robe. The three cops stared at him in disbelief.

“Seal the premises.” Lloyd said.

Three days later, Lloyd was stationed at the main Hollywood Post Office with his eyes glued to the wall containing P.O. boxes 7500 through 7550, armed with the knowledge that Julia Lynn Niemeyer had placed her tabloid advertisements in the company of a tall, blonde woman of about forty. Office personnel at both the *L.A. Night-Line* and *L.A. Swinger* had positively identified the dead woman from her driver’s license photograph, and distinctly remembered her female companion.

Lloyd fidgeted, keeping his anger and impatience at bay by recapitulating all the known physical evidence on the killing. Fact: Julia Lynn Neimeyer was killed by a massive dose of heroin, and was mutilated after her death. Fact: The Coroner had placed the time of her murder as seventy-two hours before the discovery of her body. Fact: No one at the Aloha Regency had heard signs of a struggle or knew much about the victim, who lived on money from a trust fund set up by her parents, who had died in a car accident in 1978. This information had been supplied by the woman’s uncle, who had read of the killing in the San Francisco newspapers and who went on to describe Julia Niemeyer as a “very deep, very quiet, very intelligent girl who didn’t let people get close to her.”

The killing had made the newspapers in a big way, and similarities to the Tate-LaBianca slayings of 1969 had been graphically pointed out. This caused a torrent of unsolicited information to flood the switchboards of the Los Angeles Police Department, and Lloyd had assigned three officers to interview all callers who didn’t sound like outright cranks. The bloodstained fingerprints on the paperback book–the one *hard* piece of physical evidence–had been scrutinized by fingerprint experts, then computer fed and teletyped to every police agency in the continental United States, with astoundingly negative results: The partial index and pinky prints could not be attributed to anyone, anywhere, meaning that the killer had never been arrested, never been a member of the armed services or civil service, never been bonded, and had never applied for a driver’s license in thirty-seven of the fifty United States.

Lloyd felt his thesis take on the form of what he called the “Black Dahlia Syndrome,” a reference to the famous unsolved 1947 mutilation murder. He was certain that Julia Lynn Niemeyer had been killed by an intelligent middle-aged man who had never killed before, a man with a low sex drive who had somehow come in contact with Julia Niemeyer, whose persona somehow triggered his long dormant psychoses, and eventually led him to plan her murder carefully. He knew also that the man was physically strong and capable of maneuvering on a broad-based societal level: a solid citizen type who could also score heroin.

Lloyd was impressed with both killer and the challenge his capture presented. He surveyed the post office crowd at random, then shifted his gaze back to Box 7512. He felt his impatience grow. If the “tall blonde woman” didn’t show by lunchtime, he would smash the box open and rip it off by the hinges.

She showed an hour later. Lloyd sensed that it was she as soon as she walked through the broad glass doors and nervously made for the aisles of boxes. A tall, strong-featured woman whose manner was like a barely controlled scream, he could almost feel her body tension as she looked fearfully in all directions, inserted her key and withdrew a handful of mail, then ran back outside.

Lloyd came up behind her as she was opening the door of a double-parked Pinto Hatchback. She turned around as she heard his footsteps, her hand flying to her mouth when she saw the badge he was holding up at eye level. Transfixed by the badge, the woman flopped against the car and let the handful of mail drop to the street.

Lloyd bent down and picked it up. "Police officer," he said quietly.

"Oh, Jesus," she said. "Vice?"

Lloyd said, "No, Homicide. It's about Julia Niemeyer."

An angry flush came over the woman's face. "Jesus," she said, "that's a relief. I was going to call you. I suppose you want to talk?"

Lloyd smiled; the woman had a certain panache. "We can't talk here," he said, "and I don't want to subject you to a police station. Do you mind driving somewhere?"

"No," the woman said, adding "Officer" with the thinnest edge of contempt.

Lloyd told her to drive south to Hancock Park. En route he learned that she was Joanie Pratt, age 42, former dancer, singer, actress, waitress, Playboy Club Bunny, model, and kept woman.

"What are you doing *now*?" he asked as she pulled into the Hancock Park parking lot.

"It's illegal," Joanie Pratt said, smiling.

"I don't care," Lloyd said, smiling back.

"Okay, I deal Quaaludes and fuck for selected older guys who don't want to get involved."

Lloyd laughed and pointed to a collection of plaster dinosaurs standing on a grassy knoll a few yards from the Tar Pits. "Let's go talk," he said.

When they were seated on the grass, Lloyd bored in, describing Julia Niemeyer's corpse in hideously graphic detail. Joanie Pratt turned white, then red and started to sob. Lloyd made no move to comfort her. When her tears subsided, he said softly, "I want this animal. I know about the ads you and Julia placed in the sex papers. I don't care if the two of you have fucked half of L.A. or the kangaroos in the San Diego Zoo or each other. I don't give a fuck if you deal dope, snort dope, shoot dope, or turn little kids on to dope. I want to know everything that you know about Julia Niemeyer: her love life, her sex life, and why she put those ads in those papers. Have you got that?"

Joanie nodded mutely. Lloyd dug a handkerchief out of his coat pocket and handed it to her. She wiped her face and said, "All right, it's like this. I was in the Hollywood Library about three months ago, returning some books. I notice this good-looking chick standing in line next to me, checking out all these scholarly books on sex–Kraft-Ebbing, Kinsey, *The Hite Report.* I crack a joke to the girl, who turns out to be Julia. Anyway, we go outside and smoke a cigarette and talk–about sex. Julia tells me she's researching sexuality–that she wants to write a book about it. I share my racy past with her, and tell her I've got this gig going–floating swingers' parties. It's kind of a scam–I know some heavyweight real estate people, and I score dope for them in exchange for letting me sublet these really primo houses when the owners are out of town. Then I place ads in the sex papers–high, *high* line sex parties. Two hundred dollars a couple–to keep the riffraff out. I provide good food and dope, music and a light show. Anyway, Julia–she's obsessed with sex, but she doesn't fuck–she's just a sex scholar…"

Joanie paused, and lit a cigarette. When Lloyd nervously blurted out, “Go on,” she said, “Anyway, Julia wants to interview the people at my parties. I tell her ‘fuck no! These people are paying *goood* money to come, and they don’t want to be hassled by some sex-obsessed interviewer.’ So Julia says, ‘Look. I’ve got lots of money. I’ll pay for people to come to the parties, and I’ll interview them there, as their price for admission. That way, I can watch them have sex.’ Anyway, that’s why Julia placed those ads. People contacted her, and she offered to pay their way to the parties if they consented to interviews.”

Lloyd was riveted, staring into Joanie Pratt’s pale blue eyes until she started to wave a hand in front of his face. “Come back to earth there, Sergeant. You look like you just took a trip to Mars.”

Lloyd felt vague instincts clicking into place. He brushed Joanie’s hand away. “Go on.”

“Okay, Mars Man. Anyway, Julia conducted her interviews and watched people fuck until she was blue in the face. She wrote out tons of notes and had the first draft of her book completed when her pad was burglarized and her manuscript and all her notes and files were stolen. She tol—”

“What!” Lloyd screamed.

Joanie leaped back, startled. “Whoa there, Sarge. Let me finish. This was about a month ago. The pad was ransacked. Her stereo and TV and a thousand dollars in cash were stolen. She…”

Lloyd interrupted. “Did she report it to the police?”

Joanie shook her head. “No, I told her not to. I told her she could always rewrite her book from memory and do some more interviews. I didn’t want any cops nosing around us. Cops are notorious moralists, and they might have gotten wind of my scam. But listen. About a week before she died, Julia told me she had the feeling she was being followed. There was this man that she used to see in all these odd places–on the street, in restaurants, in the market. He never stared at her or anything like that, but she had this feeling he was stalking her.”

Lloyd went cold all over. “Did she recognize the man from the parties?”

“She said she couldn’t be sure.”

Lloyd was silent for a long moment. “Do you have any of the letters Julia received?”

Joanie shook her head. “No, just the ones I picked up today.”

Lloyd stuck out his hand, and Joanie withdrew the letters from her purse. He stared at her, tapping the collection of envelopes against his leg. “When are you having your next party?”

Joanie lowered her eyes. “Tonight.”

Lloyd said, “Good. I’m going to attend. You’re going to be my date.”

The party was in a three story A-frame nestled at the end of a cul-de-sac on the Valley side of the Hollywood Hills. Lloyd wore cuffed chino pants, penny loafers, a striped polo shirt, and a crew-neck sweater over his .38 snubnose, prompting Joanie Pratt to exclaim, “Jesus, Sarge! This is a swing party, not a high school sock hop! Where’s my corsage?”

“It’s in my pants,” he said.

Joanie laughed, then ran hooded eyes over his body. “Nice. You gonna fuck tonight? You’ll get offers.”

"No, I'm saving it for the senior prom. You want to show me around?"

They walked through the house. All the furniture in the living room and dining room had been moved up against the walls, and the carpets had been rolled up and wadded ceiling high next to a row of low tables where cold cuts, hors d'oeuvres, and canned cocktails in bowls of ice were arrayed. Joanie said, "Buffet and dance floor. There's a primo stereo system with a hook-up to speakers all over the house." She pointed to lighting fixtures hung from the ceiling. "The stereo is hooked up to the lights, so the music and the lights work together. It's wild." She took his hand and led him upstairs. The two upper floors contained bedrooms and dens on either side of a winding hallway. Red lights blinked on and off above the open doors, and Lloyd could see that inside the entire floor space of each room was covered by mattresses with pink silk sheets.

Joanie poked him in the ribs. "I hire these wetbacks from the slave market on Skid Row. They do all the heavy lifting. I give them ten bucks before the party, then twenty bucks and a bottle of tequila when they move all the furniture back. What's the matter, Sarge? You're scowling."

"I don't know," Lloyd said, "but it's funny. I'm here looking for a killer, this whole 'party' is probably against the law, and I think I'm happier than I've been in a long time."

The celebrants started to arrive half an hour later. Lloyd briefed Joanie on what he wanted–she was to circulate, and point out any people she recognized as having been interviewed by or having seemed interested in Julia Niemeyer. She was to report to him all men who even *mentioned* Julia or her recent demise. She was also to report anything that seemed darkly incongruous, anything that violated her self-described party ethos of "Good music, good dope, good fucking"; *no one* was to know that he was a police officer.

Lloyd stationed himself behind the two burly bouncers scrutinizing incoming guests and collecting their invitations. The partygoers, coupled off to insure an even ratio of partners, seemed to him to be the very microcosm of jaded money–the finest clothes in the latest styles over unfit, tension-ridden bodies, the men middle-aged and afraid of it, the women looking hard, competitive, and brassy in the worst camped-out faggot manner. As the bouncers locked and bolted the door behind the last arrivals, Lloyd felt that he had just viewed a perfect impressionist representation of hell. His left knee was twitching in reaction to it, and when he walked back to the buffet he knew that he would need every ounce of the love in his Irish Protestant ethos to keep from hating them.

He decided to play the jocular stud. As Joanie Pratt brushed by him, he whispered to her, "Make it look like we're together."

Joanie closed her eyes. Lloyd bent in slow motion to kiss her, his hands reaching out and grasping her waist and lifting her so that her feet dangled inches above the floor. Their lips and tongues met and played in perfect unison. Whistling and good natured jibes drowned out Lloyd's furious heartbeat, and when he broke the kiss and lowered Joanie to the floor he felt he had conquered the jaded assembly with love.

"That's all, folks," he said with a mock humble twang, patting Joanie on the shoulder. "You folks all have a good time. I have to go upstairs and rest." Wild applause greeted this irony, and he ran for the staircase.

Lloyd found a bedroom at the far end of the third story hallway. He locked himself in, feeling proud of his performance, yet ashamed of its ease and dumbfounded by the fact that he was starting to like the revelers downstairs. He sat down on the pink sheeted mattress and dug out the letters that Joanie had given him–the last correspondence delivered to P.O. Box 7512. He had planned to go over them later, aided by Joanie, but now he needed work to keep his almost heart-stricken ambivalence at bay.

The first two envelopes contained underground junk mail, form letters advertising king-size electric dildos and bondage attire. The third envelope was hand-printed. Lloyd looked more closely and noticed that the letters in the address were perfectly squared off, obviously formed by pen and ruler. His mind clicked, and he held the envelope gently by the edges and slit it open with a deft thrust of his fingernail. It contained a poem, block ruler printed in maroon ink. Lloyd tilted the page sideways. Something about the ink bothered him. Letting the paper wobble in front of his eyes, he realized that the maroon ink was starting to flake, revealing a brighter shade underneath. He deliberately smudged a stanza, then smelled his finger and felt his mind click a second time: The poem was written in blood.

Lloyd willed his mind to be still, using his method of deep breathing and forcing himself to concentrate on the vertical lines in the plaid quilt Penny had loomed for him two Christmases ago. When he had been blank for solid minutes, he began to read the blood-formed words:

I took you from
  your grief;
I stole you like
  a thief;
I rent my heart
  to give you
    mercy;
You begged me to end
  your strife
And I gave you life.
Your body was the
  ellipsis,
Your heart my
  wife
Your whorish studies
  my burden;
Your death, my
  life.
I read your words,
  hell bound;
Sorrowed to the
  core by the dirt
  you found—
You grieved me more
Than all the rest—
You were the smartest,

The kindest, the worst
   and best—
And I faltered at the
   moment I put you
   to rest.

Tribute in anonymous
   transit,
Live life enclosed
   in a cancer
      cell,
Only the love in my
   knife grants it;
Reprieve from the gates
   of this blood-drenched
      hell.

Lloyd read the poem three more times, memorizing it, letting the permutations of the words enter him and regulate his heartbeat and the flow of his blood and the thrust of his brainwaves. He walked over and sought his image in the mirror that completely covered the back wall. He couldn't decide if he was an Irish Protestant knight or a gargoyle, and he didn't care; he had been placed in the vortex of divinely evil compulsions and he knew, at long last, precisely why he had been granted genius.

As the poem engulfed him further it began to assume musical dimensions, cadences of the corny signature tunes of all the old TV programs that Tom had made him….

The cadences grew, and "Live life enclosed in a cancer cell" became an improvisation on the big band theme song of "Texaco Star Theatre," and suddenly Milton Berle was there next to him, rotating a cigar against his woodchuck teeth. Lloyd screamed and fell to his knees, his hands cupped to his ears.

There was a screeching, and the music stopped. Lloyd tightened his grip on his ears. "Tell me a story rabbit down the hole," he whimpered beatifically until he heard the crackle of static coming from a large speaker mounted on the bedroom wall. His dry sobs trailed into relieved laughter. It was the radio.

Rational thoughts of combat entered Lloyd's mind. He could trash the central source of the music by yanking a few wires and twisting a few dials; let the revelers fuck *sans* accompaniment, the whole scene was illegal anyway.

Carefully placing the poem back in its envelope and securing it in his pocket, Lloyd walked downstairs, his hands clamped against his sides, twisted into his pants legs. He ignored the couples who were fornicating in standing positions in bedroom doorways and concentrated on the shimmering crimson lights that bathed the hallway. The lights were the reality, the benign antithesis of the music, and if he could let them guide him to the stereo system, he would be safe.

The first floor was a massive swirl of nude bodies moving with the music, heeding and heedless of the beat, rhythmic and abandoned limbs flung wildly into the air, brushing flesh, lingering in the briefest of caresses before being yanked back in seizure-like movements. Lloyd threaded his way through the swirl, feeling arms and hands twist and prod and pluck at him. He saw the stereo system at the opposite end of the living room, Joanie Pratt standing beside it, scrutinizing a stack of record albums. Fully clothed, she looked like a fixed beacon light in a world of insane noise.

"Joanie!"

The alarm in his own voice startled him, jolting him away from the music, into bodies that retreated as he cut a path through them. He crashed through the kitchen, down strobe-lighted hallways and out into a pitch black yard that was enveloped by shuddering silence. Falling to his knees, he let the silent night air and the scent of eucalyptus embrace him.

"Sarge?"

Joanie Pratt knelt by his side. She stroked his back and said, "Jesus, are you o.k.? The look on your face on that dance floor…I've never seen anything like it." Lloyd forced himself to laugh. "Don't worry about it. I can't stand loud noise or music. It's old stuff." Joanie pointed a finger at her head and twirled it. "You've got a few loose up there. You know that?"

"Don't talk to me that way."

"I'm sorry. Wife and kids?"

Lloyd nodded and got to his feet. Helping Joanie up, he said, "Seventeen years. Three daughters."

"Is it good?"

"Things are changing. My daughters are wonderful. I tell them stories, and my wife hates me for it."

"Why? What kind of stories?"

"Never mind. When I was eight years old my mother told *me* stories, and it saved my life."

"What kind of…"

Lloyd shook his head. "No, let's change the subject. Did you hear anything at the party? Did anyone mention Julia? Did you notice anything unusual?"

"No, no, and no. Julia used a phony name when she interviewed people, and that was a bad photo of her on the news. I don't think anyone even made the connection."

Lloyd considered this. "I buy it," he said. "My instinct tells me that the killer wouldn't come to a party like this; he'd consider it ugly. I want to cover all the angles, though. One of those letters you gave me contained a poem. It was written by the killer; I'm sure of that. The poem made a vague reference to other victims, so I'm certain that he's killed more than one woman." When Joanie responded with a blank face, he went on. "What I need from you is a list of your regular partygoers."

Joanie was already frantically shaking her head. Lloyd grabbed her shoulders and said softly, "Do you want this animal to kill again? What's more important, saving innocent lives or the anonymity of a bunch of horny assholes?"

Hysterical giggling from inside the house framed Joanie's answer. "It's not much of a choice, Sarge. Let's go over to my place; I've got a Rolodex file on all my regulars."

"What about your party?"

"The hell with it. I'll have the bouncers lock up. Your car or mine?"

"Mine. Is this an invitation?"

"No, it's a proposition."

Afterwards, too full of each other to sleep, Lloyd played with Joanie's breasts, cupping and pushing and probing them into different shapes and running soft fingers around the edges of the nipples.

Joanie laughed and said *sotto voce,* "Do-wah, wah-wah, do-rann-rann." Lloyd asked her what the strange sounds meant and she said, "I forgot; you never listen to music.

"Okay. I came out here from Saint Paul, Minnesota in 1958. I was eighteen. I had it all figured out–I was gonna be the first female rock and roll star. I was blonde, I had tits, and I thought I could sing. I get off the bus at Fountain and Vine and walk north. I see the Capitol Records Tower north of the Boulevard, and I figure it's gotta be a message, so I hotfoot it up there, lugging this cardboard suitcase, wearing a crinoline party dress and high heels on the coldest day of the year.

"Anyway, I sit down in the waiting room, eyeballing all these gold records they've got on the walls. I'm thinking, 'Some day' …Anyway, this guy come up to me and says, 'I'm Pluto Maroon. I'm an agent. Capitol Records is not your gig. Let's splitsville.' I go, 'Huh?' and we splitsville–Pluto says a buddy-roo of his is making a movie-roo in Venice. We drive out there in this Cadillac soul wagon. Pluto's buddy is Orson Welles. No shit, Sarge; Orson fucking Welles. He's making *Touch of Evil.* Venice is doubling as this sleazy Mexican border town.

"Right off the bat I can tell that Orson baby is condescending to Pluto–that he digs him strictly as a sycophant, kind of an amusing picaresque buffoon. Anyway, Orson tells Pluto to dig him up some extras, locals who'd be willing to hang around all day for a few scoots and a jug. So Pluto and I go walking down Ocean Front Walk. What a revelation! Innocent Joanie from St. Paul hobnobbing with beatniks, junkies, and geniuses!

"Anyway, we go by this beatnik book store. A guy who looks like a werewolf is behind the counter. Pluto says, 'You wanna dig Orson Welles and make a five-spot?' The guy says, 'Crazy,' and we splitsville on down the boardwalk, picking up this incredible low life entourage on the way.

"Anyway, the werewolf zeroes in on me. 'I'm Marty Mason,' he says, 'I'm a singer.' I think, 'Wowie zowie!' and I say, 'I'm Joanie Pratt–I'm a singer, too.' Marty says, 'Sing "do-wah, wah-wah, do-rann-rann" ten times.' I do it, and he says, 'I'm playing a gig in San Berdoo tonight. Wanna be my backup?' I said, 'What do I have to do?' Marty says, 'Sing "do-wah, wah-wah, do-rann-rann".'

"So that was it. I did it. I sang 'do-wah, wah-wah, do-rann-rann' for ten years. I married Marty, and he became Marty 'Monster' Mason and cut the "Monster Stomp," capitalizing on his werewolf resemblance, and we were *biggg* time for a couple of years, then Marty got strung out and we got divorced, and now I'm sort of a business woman and Marty is on M'ethadone Maintenance and working as a fry cook at a Burger King in the Valley, and it's still 'do-wah, wah-wah, do-rann-rann.'"

Joanie sighed, lit a cigarette and blew smoke rings at Lloyd, who was tracing patterns on her thighs and thinking that he had just heard existentialism in a nutshell. Wanting Joanie's interpretation, he asked, "What does it mean?"

She said, “Whenever things are up in the air, or scary, or about to maybe get good, I sing ‘do-wah, wah-wah, do-rann-rann’, and they seem to fall into place; or at least they’re not so scary.”

Lloyd felt a little piece of his heart work its way loose and drift back to Venice in the winter of ’58. “Can I sleep with you again?” he asked.

Joanie took his hand and kissed it. “Anytime, Sarge.”

Lloyd got up and dressed, then picked up the Rolodex file and cradled it to his chest. “I’ll be very discreet about this,” he said. “I’ll have smart, competent officers do whatever questioning has to be done.”

“I trust you,” Joanie said.

Lloyd bent over and kissed her cheek. “I’ve memorized your phone number. I’ll call you.”

Joanie leaned into the kiss. “Take care, Sarge.”

It was dawn. Lloyd drove downtown to Parker Center, feeling spellbound with purpose. He took the elevator to the fourth floor computer room. There was a lone operator on duty. The man looked up from his science-fiction novel as he saw Lloyd approach, wondering if there was a chance to banter with the big detective the other cops called “The Brain.” When he saw the look on Lloyd’s face, he decided against it.

Lloyd said brusquely, “Good morning. I want printouts on every unsolved female homicide in Los Angeles County over the past fifteen years. I’ll be up in my office. Ring extension 1179 when you have the information.”

Lloyd about-faced and walked the two flights of stairs up to his office. The cubicle was dark and quiet and peaceful, and he flopped into his chair and fell asleep immediately.

6

It was the poet’s eleventh complete reading of the manuscript, his eleventh journey into his most recent beloved’s shameful passion, his third since he consummated their love.

His hands shook as he turned the pages, and he knew that he would have to return to the repulsively fascinating third chapter, the words that tore and bit at him, that made him feel his organs and their functions, that made him sweat and tingle and drop things and laugh when nothing was funny.

The chapter was entitled “Straight Men–Gay Fantasies,” and it reminded him of his early poetry writing days, the days before he became so obsessed with form, when stanzas didn’t have to rhyme, when he trusted the thematic unity of his subconscious. In this chapter his beloved had gotten a disparate sampling of normal men to admit things like, “I would really like to take it up the ass just once. Just do it–and fuck the consequences, then go home and make love to my wife and wonder if it felt any different to her,” and “I’m thirty-four now, and I’ve screwed every woman who’d let me for seventeen years and I still haven’t quite found the nitty gritty excitement that I thought I would. I drive down Santa

Monica Boulevard sometimes and see the male hustlers and everything goes slightly haywire and I think and think and…(here Interviewee sighs disgustedly) …and then I think that a new woman will do it, and I think of coming here to these parties and before you know it I'm turning off Santa Monica and thinking of my wife and kids and then…oh, shit!"

He put the looseleaf binder down, feeling the little body flushes that had ruled his life since his consummation with Julia. She had been dead for two weeks and they were continuing unabated, undaunted by the courage he had shown in writing her anonymous tribute etched in his own blood, undaunted by his first sexual transit since….

He had read the third chapter beside Julia's body, savoring her nearness, wanting the completeness of her flesh and her words. The men who had told Julia their stories were so blighted in their dishonesty that he wanted to retch. Yet… he read the man's account of driving down Santa Monica Boulevard over and over, looking up only to watch Julia sway on her external axis. She was more *of* him than any of the first twenty-one, more even than Linda, who had moved him so deeply. She had given him *words* to keep–tangible love gifts that would grow in him. Yet…Santa Monica Boulevard…yet…the poor wretch so devastated by societal mores that he couldn't….

He walked into the living room. *Rage In The Womb.* A lesbian poet wrote of her lover's "multiunioned folds of wetness." Visions of muscular torsos, broad shoulders, and flat, hard backsides entered him, given to him by Julia, telling him to seek a further union with her by showing courage where the cowardly wretch had failed. He balked inside, searching frantically for *words.* He tried anagrams of Julia and Kathy, five letters each. It didn't work. Julia wanted more than the others. He walked back to the bedroom to view her corpse a last time. She sent him visions of sullen young men in macho poses. He obeyed. He drove to Santa Monica Boulevard.

He found them a few blocks west of LaBrea, standing in front of taco stands, porno book stores, and bars, outlined in neon tendrils that gave them the added enticements of halos, auras, and wispy appendages. The idea of looking for a specific image or body crossed his mind, but he killed the thought. It would give him time to retreat, and he wanted to impress Julia with his unquestioning compliance.

He pulled to the curb and rolled down the window, beckoning to the young man leaning against a newsrack with one hip thrust toward the street.

The young man walked over and leaned in through the window. "It's thirty; head only, pitch or catch," he said, getting an inward wave of the arm as his answer.

They drove around the corner and parked. He clenched his body until he thought his muscles would contract and suffocate him, then whispered, "Kathy," and let the young man unbutton his pants and lower his head into his lap. His contractions continued until he exploded, seeing colors when he came. He tossed a handful of cash at the young man, who vanished out the door. He was still seeing colors, and he saw them on his drive home and in his restive, but altogether wonderful, dreams that night.

His post-consummation ritual of sending flowers took up the following morning. Driving away from the florist's, he noticed that his usual valedictory feeling was missing. He spent the afternoon developing film and setting up shooting assignments for the following week, thoughts of Julia rendering his workday pursuits a treadmill of ugly boredom.

He read her manuscript again, staying up all night, seeing colors and feeling the weight of the young man's head. Then the terror began. He could feel foreign bodies within his body. Tiny melanomas and carcinomas that moved audibly through his bloodstream. Julia wanted more. She wanted written tribute; words to match her words. He severed an artery in his right forearm with a paring knife, then squeezed the gash until it yielded enough blood to fill completely the bottom of a small developing tray. After cauterizing the wound he took a pen quill and ruler and meticulously printed out his tribute. He slept well that night.

In the morning he mailed his poem to the post office address he had seen on the front page of Julia's manuscript. His feeling of normalcy solidified. But at night the terror returned. The carcinomas were inside him again. He started dropping things. He saw the colors, this time even more vividly. The Santa Monica Boulevard phantasmagoria flashed continually before his eyes. He knew that he had to do *something* or go insane.

The poet had now possessed the manuscript for the two weeks since Julia's death. He began to look on it as an evil talisman. The third chapter was particularly evil, inimical to the control that had been the hallmark of his life. That night he burned the manuscript in his kitchen sink. He doused the charred words with tap water and felt new purpose grip him. There was only one way to obliterate all memory of his twenty-second lover.

He had to find a new woman.

7

It had been seventeen days since the discovery of Julia Niemeyer's body, and Lloyd wondered for the first time if his Irish Protestant ethos had the juice to carry him through what was turning into the most vexing episode of his life, a crusade that portended some deep, massive loss of control.

For perhaps the thousandth time since securing the printouts, he recapitulated all the known physical evidence pertaining to Julia Niemeyer's murder and unsolved homicides of women in Los Angeles County: the blood that formed the words of the poem was O+. Julia Niemeyer's blood was AB. There were no fingerprints on the envelope or single piece of paper. Interviews with residents of the Aloha Regency Apartments had yielded nothing; no one knew much about the dead woman; no one knew her to have visitors; no one recalled any strange occurrences in the building near the time of her death. The surrounding area had been thoroughly searched for the double-bladed knife believed to have been used for the mutilations–nothing even closely resembling it had been found. Lloyd's vague hope that Julia's killer had been connected to her through the swing parties proved futile. Experienced detectives had interviewed all the people in

Joanie Pratt's Rolodex and had come away with nothing but new insights into lust and sad knowledge of adultery. Two officers had been assigned to check bookshops specializing in poetry and feminist literature for weird male requests for "Rage in the Womb" and generally strange male behavior. All investigatory avenues were covered.

And the unsolved homicides: The twenty-three Los Angeles County police agencies whose feed-ins composed the central computer file listed 410 of them going back to January 1968. Discounting 143 vehicular homicides, this left 267 unsolved murders. Of these 267, 79 were of women between the ages of twenty and forty, what Lloyd considered to be his killer's perimeters of attraction–he was certain the monster liked them young.

He looked at the map of Los Angeles County adorning the back wall of his office. There were 79 pins stuck into it, denoting the locations where 79 young women met violent death. Lloyd scrutinized the territory represented and let his intimate knowledge of L.A. and its environs work in concert with his instincts. The pinpoints covered the whole of Los Angeles County, from the San Gabriel and San Fernando Valleys to the far-flung beach communities that formed her southern and western perimeters. Hundreds and hundreds of square miles. Yet of the seventy-nine, forty-eight were situated in what police referred to as "white trash" suburbs–low income, high crime areas where alcoholism and drug addiction were epidemic. Statistics and his own policeman's instinct told Lloyd that the bulk of these deaths were related to booze, dope, and infidelity. Which left thirty-one murders of young women, spread throughout middle, upper middle class, and wealthy L.A. County suburbs and municipalities; murders unsolved by nine police agencies.

Lloyd had groaned when he had taken his last available direct action of querying those agencies for Xeroxes of their complete case files, realizing that it might take them as long as two weeks to respond. He felt powerless and beset by forces far beyond his bailiwick, imagining a city of the dead co-existing with Los Angeles in another time warp, a city where beautiful women beseeched him with terrified eyes to find their killer.

Lloyd's feelings of powerlessness had peaked three days before, and he had personally telephoned the top interagency liaison officers at the nine departments, demanding that the files be delivered to Parker Center within forty-eight hours. The responses of the nine officers had varied, but in the end they had acquiesced to Lloyd Hopkins's reputation as a hot-shot homicide dick and had promised the paperwork in seventy-two hours tops.

Lloyd looked at his watch, a Rolex chronometer marked in the twenty-four hour military time method. Seventy hours and counting down. Adding two hours for bureaucratic delay, the paperwork should arrive by noon. He bolted from his office and ran down six flights of stairs to street level. Four hours of pounding pavement with no destination in mind and a willfully shut off brain would put him at his optimal mental capabilities–which he was certain that he would need to devour the thirty-one homicide files.

Four hours later, his mind clear from a dozen brisk circuits of the Civic Center area, Lloyd returned to Parker Center and jogged up to his office. He could see that the door to his cubicle was open and that someone had turned on the light.

A lieutenant in uniform passed him in the hallway and hastily explained, “Your paperwork arrived, Lloyd. It’s in your office.”

Lloyd nodded and peered in his doorway. His desk and both his chairs were covered with thick manila folders filled with papers still reeking of the photostatic process. He counted them, then moved his chairs, wastebasket, and filing cabinet out into the hallway, arraying the files on the floor in a circle and sitting down in the middle of them.

Each folder was marked on the front with the victim’s last name, first name, and date of death. Lloyd divided them first into region, then into year, never looking at the photographs that he knew were clipped to the first page. Starting with Fullmer, Elaine D; D.O.D. 3/9/68, Pasadena P.D., and ending with Deverson, Linda Holly; D.O.D. 6/14/82, Santa Monica P.D., he selected all the paperwork outside the L.A.P.D. and placed it to one side. This accounted for eighteen files. He looked at the thirteen L.A.P.D. files. Their front markings were slightly more detailed than those of the other departments; each victim’s age and race were listed immediately below her name. Of the thirteen murdered women, seven were listed as black and Hispanic. Lloyd put these folders aside and double-checked his first instincts, letting his mind go blank for a full minute before returning to conscious thought. He decided he was right; his killer preferred white women. This left six L.A.P.D. files and eighteen from other agencies, twenty-four in total. Averting his eyes from the front page photos, Lloyd scanned the interagency files for mention of race. Eight of the victims were listed as being non-Caucasian.

Which left sixteen folders.

Lloyd decided to make a collage of photographs before reading the complete files. Again willing a blank mind, he slipped the snapshots out of their folders face down in chronological order. “Talk to me,” he said aloud, turning the photographs over.

When six of the snapshots smiled up at him he felt his mind begin to lurch forward convulsively, grasping at the horrific knowledge that he was assimilating. He flipped over the remaining photos and felt the logic of terror grip him like a blood-spattered vice.

The dead women were all of a kind, almost kinlike in the Anglo-Saxon planes of their faces; all posessed demure, feminine hairstyles; all were wholesome-looking in the spirit of more traditional times. Lloyd whispered the single word that summed up his constituency of the dead, “Innocent, innocent, innocent.” He surveyed the photographs a dozen more times, picking up details–strands of pearls and high school rings on chains, the absence of make-up, shoulders and necks clad in sweaters and anachronistic formal wear. That the women had been killed by one monster for the destruction of the innocence they heralded so splendidly was beyond question.

With trembling hands Lloyd read through the folders, partaking of death’s communion served up by strangulation, gunshot, decapitation, forced ingestion of caustic fluids, bludgeoning, gas, drug overdose, poisoning, and suicide. Disparate methods that would eliminate police awareness of mass murder. The one common denominator: no clues. No physical evidence. Women chosen for slaughter because of the way they looked. Julia Niemeyer killed sixteen times over, and how many more in different places? Innocence was the epidemic of youth.

Lloyd read through the folders again, coming out of his trance with the realization that he had been sitting on the floor for three hours and that he was drenched in sweat. As he got to his feet and stretched his painfully cramped legs, he felt the *big* horror overtake him: The killer's genius was unfathomable. There were no clues. The Niemeyer trail was dead cold. The other trails were colder. There was *nothing* he could do.

There was *always* something he could do.

Lloyd got a roll of masking tape from his desk and began taping the photographs along the walls of his office. When the smiling faces of dead women stared down at him from all directions he said to himself, "*Finis. Morte. Cold City. Muerto. Dead.*"

Then he closed his eyes and read the vital statistics page in each folder, forcing himself to think only *region.* This accomplished, he got out his notebook and pen and wrote:

Central Los Angeles:
1. Elaine Marburg, D.O.D. 11/24/69
2. Patricia Petrelli, D.O.D. 5/20/75
3. Karlen LaPelley, D.O.D. 2/14/71
4. Caroline Werner, D.O.D. 11/9/79
5. Cynthia Gilroy, D.O.D. 12/5/71

Valley and Foothill Communities:
1. Elaine Fullmer, D.O.D. 3/9/68
2. Jeanette Willkie, D.O.D. 4/15/73
3. Mary Wardell, D.O.D. 1/6/74

Hollywood - West Hollywood:
1. Laurette Powell, D.O.D. 6/10/78
2. Carla Castleberry, D.O.D. 6/10/80
3. Trudy Miller, D.O.D. 12/12/68
4. Angela Stimka, D.O.D. 6/10/77
5. Marcia Renwick, D.O.D. 6/10/81

Bev Hills - Santa Monica - Beach Communities:
1. Monica Martin, D.O.D. 9/21/74
2. Jennifer Szabo, D.O.D. 9/3/72
3. Linda Deverson, D.O.D. 6/14/82

Willing himself to think only *modus operandi,* Lloyd read through the Vital Statistics page a second time, coming away with three bludgeonings, two dismemberments, one horseback riding accident that was seriously considered as a homicide, two deaths by gunshot, two stabbings, four suicides attributed to different means, one poisoning, and one drug overdose-gassing that was labeled "murder-suicide?" by a baffled records clerk.

Turning to *chronology,* Lloyd read over the dates of death that he had written next to his list of victims, gaining his first make on the killer's methodology. With the exception of a twenty-five month hiatus between Patricia Petrelli, D.O.D. 5/20/75 and Angela Stimka, D.O.D. 6/10/77, and a seventeen-month gap between Laurette Powell, D.O.D. 6/10/78 and Caroline Werner, D.O.D. 11/9/79, his killer performed his executions at intervals of between six months to fifteen months which, Lloyd concluded, was why he was able to elude capture for so long. The murders were undoubtedly brilliantly executed and based on intimate knowledge gleaned from long-term surveillance. And, he reasoned further, those longer hiatuses probably contained victims that could be attributed to lost files and computer errors–every police agency was susceptible to a large paperwork margin of error.

Lloyd closed his eyes and imagined time warps within time warps within time warps; wondering how far back the killings went–all police departments in Los Angeles County threw out their unsolved files after fifteen years, giving him *zero* access to information predating January, 1968.

It was then that his mind pulsated into perfect focus, and as he whispered "The forest for the trees," Lloyd looked at his list of Hollywood–West Hollywood homicides and felt his skin start to tingle. Four "suicide" killings had taken place on the identical date of June 10th; in 1977, '78, '80 and '81. It was the one indicator that pointed to obsessive, pathological behavior out of his killer's ice-water restraint norm.

Lloyd grabbed the four folders and read them from cover to cover, once, then twice. When he finished, he turned off the light in his cubicle and sat back and *flew* with what he had learned.

On Thursday evening, June 10th, 1977, residents of the apartment building at 1167 Larrabee Avenue, West Hollywood, smelled gas coming from the upstairs unit rented by Angela Marie Stimka, a twenty-seven year old cocktail waitress. Said residents summoned a deputy sheriff who lived in the building, and the deputy kicked in Angela Stimka's door, turned off the wall heater from which the gas was emanating and discovered Angela Stimka, dead and bloated on her bedroom floor. He carried her body outside and called the West Hollywood Sheriffs substation, and within minutes a team of detectives had combed the apartment and had come up with a suicide note that cited the breakup of a long-term love affair as Angela Stimka's reason for wanting to die. Handwriting experts examined Angela Stimka's diary *and* the suicide note, and decided that both were written by the same person. The death was labeled a suicide, and the case was closed.

On June 10th of the following year, a sheriff's patrol car was summoned to a small house on Westbourne Drive in West Hollywood. Neighbors had complained of uncharacteristically loud stereo noise coming from the dwelling, and one old lady told the deputies that she was certain that something was "drastically wrong." When no one answered the officers' persistent knocking, they climbed in through a half opened window and discovered the owner of the house, thirty-one year old Laurette Powell, dead in a large wicker chair, the arms of the chair, her bathrobe, and the floor in front of her soaked with blood that had exploded out of the artery-deep gashes on both of her wrists. An empty prescription bottle of Nembutal lay on a nightstand a few feet away, and a razor-sharp kitchen cleaver was resting in the dead woman's lap. There was no suicide note, but homicide detectives, noting the hesitation marks on both wrists and the fact that Laurette Powell was a long time holder of several Nembutal prescriptions, quickly classified her death as a suicide. Case closed.

Lloyd's wheel turned silently. He knew that the Westbourne Drive and Larrabee Avenue addresses were a scant two blocks apart, and that the Tropicana Motel gun-in-mouth "suicide" of Carla Castleberry on 6/10/80 was less than a half mile from the first two crime scenes. He shook his head in disgust; any cop with half a brain and ten cents worth of experience should know that women *never* kill themselves with guns–the statistics on female gunshot suicides were nonexistant.

The fourth "suicide," Marcia Renwick, 818 North Sycamore, was the non sequitur, Lloyd surmised; the most recent June 10th murder, four miles east of the first three, in the L.A.P.D.'s Hollywood Division. Occurring a full year after the Carla Castleberry homicide, the Renwick pill overdose had the feel of an unimaginative impulse killing.

Lloyd turned his attention to the file of the most recent victim before Julia Niemeyer. He winced as he read the Coroner's report on Linda Deverson, D.O.D. 6/14/82; chopped to pieces with a two-edged fire axe. Blinding memories of Julia swaying from her bedroom ceiling beam combined with his new knowledge to convince him that somehow, for some god-awful, hellish reason, his killer's insanity was peaking.

Lloyd lowered his head and sent up a prayer to his seldom-sought lip-service God. "Please let me get him. Please let me get him before he hurts anyone else."

Thoughts of God were paramount in Lloyd's mind as he walked down the hall and knocked on the door of his immediate superior, Lieutenant Fred Gaffaney. Knowing that the lieutenant was a hard-ass, born-again Christian who held grandstanding, maverick cops in pious contempt, he decided to invoke the diety heavily in his plea for investigatory power. Gaffaney grudgingly had given him a free rein on his caseload, with the implicit proviso that he not beg favors; since he was about to plead for men, money, and media play, he wanted to pitch the lieutenant from a standpoint of mutual religiosity.

"Enter!" Gaffaney called out in answer to the knock.

Lloyd walked in the open door and sat down in a folding chair in front of the lieutenant's desk. Gaffaney looked up from the papers he was shuffling and fingered his cross-and-flag lapel pin.

"Yes, Sergeant?"

Lloyd cleared his throat and tried to affect a humble look. "Sir, as you know, I've been working full time on the Niemeyer killing."

"Yes. And?"

"And, sir, it's a stone cold washout."

"Then stick with it. I have faith in you."

"Thank you, sir. It's funny that you mentioned faith." Lloyd waited for Gaffaney to tell him to continue. When all he got was a silent deadpan, he went on. "This case has been a testing of my own faith, sir. I've never been much of a believer in God, but the way that I've been stumbling into evidence has me questioning my beliefs. I—"

The lieutenant cut him off with a chopped hand gesture. "I go to church on Sunday and to prayer meetings three times a week. I put God out of my mind when I clip on my holster. You want something. Tell me what it is, and we'll discuss it."

Lloyd went red and forced a stammer. “Sir, I… I…”

Gaffaney leaned back in his chair and ran his hands over his iron grey crew-cut. “Hopkins, you haven’t called a superior officer ‘Sir’ since you were a rookie. You’re the most notorious pussy hound in Robbery-Homicide, and you don’t give a rat’s ass about God. What do you *want*?”

Lloyd laughed. “Shall I cut the shit?”

“Please do.”

“All right. In the course of my investigation into the Niemeyer killing I’ve come across solid, instinctive evidence that points to at least sixteen other murders of young women, dating back fifteen years. The M.O.s varied, but the victims were all of a certain physical type. I’ve gotten complete case files on these homicides, and chronological consistencies and other factors have convinced me that all sixteen women were killed by the same man, the man who killed Julia Niemeyer. The last two killings have been particularly brutal. I think we’re dealing with a brilliant psychopathic intellect, and unless we direct a massive effort toward his capture he’ll kill with impunity until the day he dies. I want a dozen experienced homicide dicks full time; I want liasions set up with every department in the county; I want permission to recruit uniformed officers for the shit work, and authority to grant them unlimited overtime. I want a full-scale media blitz–I’ve got a feeling that this animal is close to exploding, and I want to push him a little. I—”

Gaffaney raised both hands in interruption. “Do you have any *hard* physical evidence,” he asked, “any *witnesses,* any notations from detectives within the L.A.P.D. or other department that lend credence to your mass murder theory?”

“No.” Lloyd said.

“How many of these sixteen investigations are still open?”

“None.”

“Are there any other officers within the L.A.P.D. who corroborate your hypothesis?”

“No.”

“Other departments?”

“No.”

Gaffaney slammed his desk top with two flattened palms, then fingered his lapel pin. “No. I won’t trust you on this. It’s too old, too vague, too costly, and too potentially embarrassing to the department. I trust you as a troubleshooter, as a very fine detective with a superb record—”

“With the best fucking arrest record in the department!” Lloyd shouted.

Gaffaney shouted back, “I trust your record, but I don’t trust you! You’re a showboat glory-hound womanizer, and you’ve got a wild hair up your ass about murdered women!” Lowering his voice, he added, “If you really care about God, ask him for help with your personal life. God will answer your prayers, and you won’t be so disturbed by things out of your control. Look at how you’re shaking. Forget this thing, Hopkins. Spend some time with your family; I’m sure they’d appreciate it.”

Lloyd got to his feet, trembling, and walked to the door. His peripheral vision throbbed with red. He turned to look at Gaffaney, who smiled and said, “If you go to the media, I’ll crucify you. I’ll have you back in uniform rousting piss bums on skid row.”

Lloyd smiled back and felt a strangely serene bravado course through him. "I'm going to get this animal, and I'm going to stick your words up your ass," he said.

Lloyd packed the sixteen homicide files into the trunk of his car and drove to the Hollywood Station, hoping to catch Dutch Peltz before he went off duty. He was in luck; Dutch was changing back into civilian clothes in the senior officers' locker room, knotting his necktie and staring at himself abstractedly in a full-length wall mirror.

Lloyd walked over, clearing his throat. Without taking his eyes from the mirror, Dutch said, "Fred Gaffaney called me. He told me that he figured you'd be coming my way. I saved your ass; he was going to blow the whistle on you to one of his born-again high brass buddies, but I told him not to. He owes me favors, so he agreed. You're a sergeant, Lloyd. That means you can only act like an asshole with sergeants and below. Lieutenants and up are *verboten. Comprende,* brain-boy?"

Dutch turned around, and Lloyd saw that his abstracted look was glazed over with fear. "Did Gaffaney tell you all of it?" Lloyd asked.

Dutch nodded. "How sure are you?"

"All the way."

"Sixteen women?"

"At least that many."

"What are you going to do?"

"Flush him out, somehow. Probably by myself. The department will never authorize an investigation; it makes them look too inept. I was stupid to go to Gaffaney in the first place. If I go over his head and make a stink, I'll get yanked off the Niemeyer case and detached to some bumfuck robbery assignment. You know what this feels like, Dutchman?"

Dutch looked up at his huge genius-mentor, then turned away when he felt tears of pride welling in his eyes "No Lloyd."

"It feels like I was made for this one," Lloyd said, keeping eye contact with his own mirror image. "That I won't know what I am or what I can be until I get this bastard and find out why he's destroyed so much innocence."

Dutch put a hand on Lloyd's arm. "I'll help you," he said. "I can't give you any officers, but I'll help you myself, we can…." Dutch stopped when he saw that Lloyd wasn't listening; that he was transfixed by the light in his own eyes or some distant vision of redemption.

Dutch withdrew his hand. Lloyd stirred, jerked his gaze from the mirror and said, "When I had two years on the job, I got assigned to the junior high school lecture circuit. Telling the kids picaresque cop stories and warning them about dope and accepting rides from strangers. I loved the assignment, because I love children. One day a teacher told me about a seventh grade girl–she was twelve–who used to give blow jobs for a pack of cigarettes. The teacher asked me if I'd talk to her.

"I looked her up one day after school. She was a pretty little girl. Blonde. She had a black eye. I asked her how she got it. She wouldn't tell me. I checked out her home situation. It was typical–alcoholic mother on welfare, father doing three-to-five at Quentin. No money, no hope, no chance. But the little girl liked to read. I took her down to a bookstore on Sixth and Western and introduced her to the owner. I gave the owner a hundred bucks and told him that the little girl had that much credit there. I did the same thing at a liquor store down the block–a hundred bucks buys a lot of cigarettes.

"The girl was grateful and wanted to please me. She told me she got the black eye because her braces cut some guy she was sucking off. Then she asked me if I want some head. Of course I say 'No' and give her a big lecture. But I keep seeing her. She lives on my beat, and I see her all the time, always smoking and carrying a book. She looks happy.

"One day she stops me when I'm out cruising in my black-and-white alone. She says, 'I really like you and I really want to give you head.' I say 'No,' and she starts to cry. I can't bear that, so I grab her and hold her and tell her to study like a demon so she can learn how to tell stories herself."

Lloyd's voice faltered. He wiped his lips and tried to remember the point he wanted to make. "Oh yeah," he said finally. "I forgot to mention that the little girl is twenty-seven now, and she's got a Masters in English. She's going to have a good life. But…but there's this guy out there who wants to kill her. And your daughters and mine…and he's very smart…but I'm not going to let him hurt anyone else. I swear that to you. I swear it."

When he saw that Lloyd's pale grey eyes were shrouded with a sadness that he could never express with words, Dutch said, "Get him."

Lloyd said, "I will," and walked away, knowing that his old friend had given him a carte blanche absolution for whatever he had to do, whatever rules he had to break.

8

The following morning, after a restive night of assimilating the data in the sixteen files, Lloyd drove to the downtown public library, figuring out the shit work logistics in his mind en route, sorting minor details and bureaucratic cover your ass strategems to one side so that he could come to his first day of legwork in an absolutely silent mental state.

With the car windows rolled up and the squawk box of his two-way radio disconnected to reinforce the silence, Lloyd pushed aside all the extraneous details regarding his investigation. He was covered up drum-tight with Fred Gaffaney and the higher echelon Robbery-Homicide brass, having called the two detectives working under him on the Niemeyer case, learning that their bookstore canvass of the downtown/central L.A. area had thus far yielded nothing solid, telling them to pursue their instincts full-time and on their own autonomy and to report to Gaffaney twice weekly, letting the Jesus freak that they both despised know that Sergeant Hopkins was working hard in the dark solitude that was the stalking ground of genius. Gaffaney would accept this as part of their silent agreement, and if he complained about Lloyd's absence at Parker Center, Dutch Peltz would intercede and kibosh his complaints with every ounce of his prestige. He was covered.

As for the investigation itself, there were no physical facts that Lloyd didn't already know from his first run-through of the files. *Stunning* silence underlined this; Janice and the girls had slept over at the Ocean Park apartment of her friend George, and Lloyd had had a big silent house in which to do his reading. In a desire to juxtapose the destruction of innocence via murder to his own efforts to diminish it through storytelling, he had gone over the hellish manila folders in Penny's bedroom, hoping that his youngest daughter's aura would give him the clarity to forge facts out of elliptical psychic labyrinths. No new facts emerged, but his psychological character study of the killer gained an added dimension infused with a coldly subtle verisimilitude.

Although he had no access to information on unsolved homicides before 1968, Lloyd was certain that the murders did not date back much further. He based this on his strongest character assessment/feeling–the killer was a homosexual. His whole genealogy of death was an attempt to hide the fact from himself. *He did not yet know.* The homicides prior to Linda Deverson and Julia Niemeyer, though often brutal, bespoke an effete satisfaction with a job well done and an almost refined love of anonymity. *He did not have an inkling of what he was.* Linda and Julia, hideously butchered, were the dividing points, the division irrevocable and based on the terror of an emergent sexuality so shamefully compelling that it had to be drowned in blood.

Lloyd traced instinctual links back in time. His killer had to live in Los Angeles. His killer was tremendously strong, capable of severing limbs with a single swipe of an axe. His killer was undoubtedly physically attractive and capable of maneuvering with grace in the gay world. He wanted it desperately, yet to submit to the vulnerability inherent in sexual interaction would destroy his urge to kill. Sexuality burgeons in adolesence. Assuming that the killer was still in an ascendent sexual curve and assuming that the murders began in or around January, 1968, he allotted the monster a five-year trauma incubation period and placed him as coming of age in the early to middle 60s, making him now in his late thirties–forty at the oldest.

Exiting the freeway at Sixth and Figueroa, Lloyd whispered, "June 10th, June 10th, June 10th." He parked illegally on the wrong side of the street and stuck an "Official Police Vehicle" sign under his windshield wiper. Running up the library steps, the epiphany slammed him like an axe handle between the eyes: the monster killed because he wanted to love.

Lloyd's microfilm time travel consumed four hours and traversed every June 10th from 1960 to 1982. Starting with the Los Angeles *Times* and ending with the Los Angeles *Herald-Express* and its offshoot newspaper the L.A. *Examiner,* he sifted through headlines, feature articles, and clipped accounts detailing everything from major league baseball to foreign insurrections to previews of summer beach wear to primary election results. Nothing in the parade of information caught his eyes as being a potential contributing factor to murderous passion and nothing caused his mental gears to snap forward and expand on his thesis at any level. June 10th was his one crucial clue to the killer–but Los Angeles newspapers treated it like just another day.

Although Lloyd had expected the negative results, he was still disappointed and was glad that he had saved the film for the four "suicide" years of 1977, '78,

’80, and ’81 for last.

His disappointment grew. The deaths of Angela Stimka, Laurette Powell, Carla Castleberry, and Marcia Renwick were relegated to quarter-column obscurity. “Tragic” was the adjective both papers used to describe all four “suicides”; “Funeral arrangements pending” and the names and addresses of the next of kin took up the bulk of the print space.

Lloyd rolled up the microfilm, placed it on the librarian’s desk and walked outside into the sunlight. Sidewalk glare and eyestrain from his hours of squinting combined to send a pounding up his neck into his head. Willing the pain down to a murmur, he considered his options. Interview the next of kin? No, sad denials would be the common denominator. Visit the death scenes? Look for indicators, chase hunches? “Legwork!” Lloyd shouted out loud. He ran for his car, and the headache disappeared altogether.

Lloyd drove to West Hollywood and scouted the first three June 10th killing grounds.

Angela Stimka, D.O.D. 6/10/77, had lived in a mauve-colored ten-unit apartment house, ‘fifties-building boom-ugly, an obviously jerry-built structure whose one claim to prestige was its proximity to the gay bars on Santa Monica and the cross-sexual nightlife on the Sunset Strip.

Lloyd sat in his car and wrote down a description of the block, his eyes perking only once–when he noticed an “Illegal Nighttime Parking” sign across the street from the 1167 Larrabee address. His gears clicked twice. He was in the heart of the gay ghetto. His killer had *probably* chosen the Stimka woman for the location of her dwelling as well as for her physicality, somehow wanting to run a gauntlet of subconscious denial by choosing a victim in a largely homosexual neighborhood; and the West Hollywood Sheriffs were demons on parking enforcement.

Lloyd smiled and drove two blocks to the small wood-framed house on Westbourne Drive where Laurette Powell had died of Nembutal ingestion and “self-inflicted” knife wounds. Another “Illegal Nighttime Parking” sign, another click, this one very soft.

The Tropicana Motel yielded a whole series of clicks, resounding gear-mashings that went off in Lloyd’s mind like gunshots that tore ceaselessly at innocent bodies. Carla Castleberry, D.O.D. 6/10/80, the means of death a .38 slug through the roof of the mouth and up into the brain. Women never blew their brains out. Classic homosexual symbolism, perpetrated in a sleazy “Boy’s Town” motel room.

Lloyd scanned the sidewalk in front of the Tropicana. Crushed amyl nitrate poppers on the ground, fruit hustler junkies holding up the walls of the coffee shop. His thesis exploded in his mind. When its symbiotic thrust dawned through the noise of the explosion, he was terrified. He ignored his terror and ran for a pay phone, dialing seven familiar digits with shaking hands. When an equally familiar voice came on the line, sighing, “Hollywood Station, Captain Peltz speaking,” Lloyd whispered, “Dutch, I know why he kills.”

An hour later, Lloyd sat in Dutch Peltz’s office, sifting through negative information that had him slamming his best friend’s desk top in frustration. Dutch stood by the door, watching Lloyd read through the teletypes that had just come in from both the L.A.P.D. and Sheriff's central computers. He wanted to stroke his son's hair or smooth his shirtfront, anything to ease the anguish that had Lloyd's features contorted in rage. Feeling meek in the wake of that rage, Dutch said, "It's going to be alright, kid."

Lloyd screamed, "No, it's not! He was assaulted, I'm certain of that, and it happened on a June 10th when he was a juvenile! Juvenile sex-offense records are never shredded! If it's not on the computer, then it didn't happen in L.A. County or it was never fucking reported! There's nothing on these fucking juvie vice printouts except fruit shakedown and backseat blow jobs, and you don't become a fucking mass murder because you let some old man suck your cock in Griffith Park!"

Lloyd picked up a quartz bookend and hurled it across the room. It landed on the floor next to the window that overlooked the station parking lot. Dutch peered out at the nightwatch officers revving up their black-and-whites, wondering how he could love them all so much, yet not at all when compared to Lloyd. He placed the bookend back on his desk and ruffled Lloyd's hair.

"Feel better, kid?"

Lloyd gave Dutch a reflex smile that felt like a wince. "Better. I'm beginning to know this animal, and that's a start."

"What about the printout on the parking tickets? What about F.I. cards on the dates of the killings?"

"Negative. No parking tickets *at all* on the applicable dates and streets, and the only Sheriffs F.I. cards were filled out on women–hookers working the Strip. It was a long shot at best, and *our* department wasn't computerizing F.I.s when the Renwick woman was killed. I'm going to have to start from scratch again, send out sub-rosa queries to old-time juvie dicks, see if I can get some feedback on old assault cases that never made the files."

Dutch shook his head. "If this guy got molested or porked or whatever around twenty years ago, like you figure, most of the dicks who might know something would be retired by now."

"I know. You send out the feelers, will you? Pull some tails, call in some favors. I want to keep moving out on the street; that's where it feels right."

Dutch took a chair across from Lloyd, trying to gauge the light in his eyes. "O.K., kid. Remember my party Thursday night, and get some rest."

"I can't. I've got a date tonight. Janice and the girls are probably hanging out with their fag buddy, anyway. I want to keep moving."

Lloyd's eye's flickered; Dutch's eyes bored in. "Anything you feel like telling me, kid?"

Lloyd said, "Yeah. I love you. Now let me get out of here before you get sentimental about it."

On the street, without his paperwork to refer to and with three hours to kill before meeting Joanie Pratt, Lloyd recalled that his subordinates had yet to canvass the Hollywood area bookstores.

He drove to a pay phone and leafed through the yellow pages, finding listings for one poetry bookshop and one specializing in feminist literature:

New Guard Poetry on La Brea near Fountain and the Feminist Bibliophile on Yucca and Highland.

Deciding on a circuit that would allow him to hit both stores and then head toward Joanie's house in the Hollywood Hills, Lloyd drove first to New Guard Poetry, where a bored, scholarly looking man in incongruous farmer overalls told him that no, there had been no suspicious browsers or sales of feminist prose collections to strongly built men in their middle to late thirties, for the simple reason that he did not stock feminist poetry–it was aberrantly anti-classicist. Most of his customers were academics of long standing who preferred to order from his catalog, and *that* was *that.*

Lloyd thanked the man and swung his unmarked Matador north, pulling up in front of the Feminist Bibliophile at precisely six o'clock, hoping that the small, converted-house bookstore would still be open. He trotted up the steps just as he heard the door being bolted from inside, and when he saw the lights in the windows going off he rapped on the door jamb and called out, "Police. Open up, please."

The door swung open a moment later, and the woman who opened it stood silhouetted against the light in a challenging attitude. Lloyd's body gave a slight shudder as he felt the pride in her pose, and before she could voice any challenge out loud he said, "I'm Detective-Sergeant Hopkins, L.A.P.D. Could I talk to you for a moment?"

The woman remained silent. The silence was unnerving, so to keep himself from doing an embarrased little foot-dance, Lloyd memorized her physicality, maintaining a probing eye contact that the woman returned without flinching. A rigid angularity trying to hold reign over a soft, strong body, he decided; thirty-four to thirty-six, the slight traces of make-up a concession to awareness of her age; the brown eyes, pale skin, and chestnut hair somehow denoting breeding; the severe tweed suit a coat of armor. Smart, contentious, and unhappy. An aesthete afraid of passion.

"Are you with the Intelligence Division?"

Lloyd gawked at both the non sequitur and the force in the woman's voice. Recovering, he shifted his feet and said, "No, why?"

The woman smiled mirthlessly and spat out her challenge: "The L.A.P.D. has a long history of trying to infiltrate causes they deem subversive, and my poetry has been published in feminist periodicals that have been highly critical of your department. This bookshop carries a list of titles that includes many volumes that explode myths surrounding the macho mentality."

The woman stopped when she saw that the big cop was beaming broadly. Aware that a parity of discomfiture had been achieved, Lloyd said, "If I wanted to infiltrate a feminist bookstore, I would have come in drag. May I come in, Miss—"

"My name is Kathleen McCarthy," the woman said. "I prefer Ms., and I won't let you in until you tell me what this is all about."

It was the question Lloyd was hoping for. "I'm the most honored homicide detective on the west coast," he said softly. "I'm investigating the murders of close to twenty women. I discovered one of the bodies. I won't insult you by describing how it was mutilated. I found a bloodstained book at the crime scene, *Rage In The Womb.* I'm certain that the killer is interested in poetry–maybe feminist poetry in particular. That's why I came here."

Kathleen McCarthy had gone pale, and her challenging posture had slumped, then tensed up again as she grabbed the door jamb for support. Lloyd moved in, showing her his badge and I.D. card. "Call the Hollywood Station," he said. "Ask for Captain Peltz. He'll verify what I've told you."

Kathleen McCarthy motioned Lloyd inside, then left him alone in a large room filled with bookshelves. When he heard the sound of a phone being dialed he slipped off his wedding band and examined the books that covered the four walls and spilled over onto chairs, tables, and revolving metal bookracks. His respect for the strident poet grew–she had placed her own published works in preeminent spots throughout the room, alongside volumes by Lessing, Plath, Millett and other feminist ikons. An out-front ego, Lloyd decided. He started to like the woman.

"I apologize for judging you before I heard you out."

Lloyd turned around at the words. Kathleen McCarthy was not chagrined by her apology. He started to *feel* her, and threw out a line calculated to secure *her* respect. "I can understand your feelings. The Intelligence Division is overzealous, maybe even paranoid."

Kathleen smiled. "May I quote you on that?"

Lloyd smiled back. "No."

An embarrassed silence followed. Sensing the mutuality of the attraction deepen, Lloyd pointed to a book strewn couch and said, "Could we sit down? I'll tell you about it."

In a low voice and with a deliberately cold deadpan stare, Lloyd told Kathleen McCarthy how he had discovered Julia Lynn Niemeyer's body and how a blood smeared copy of *Rage In The Womb,* along with the poem sent to Julia's post office box, had convinced him that his assumed one-time killer was in reality a mass murderer. Ending with a recounting of his chronological work-up and the psychological profile he had deduced, he said, "He's brilliant beyond words, and going completely out of control. Poetry is a fixation with him. I think that he *wants* subconsciously to lose control, and that he may view poetry as his means to that end. I need your feedback on *Rage In The Womb,* and I need to know if any strange men–specifically men in their thirties–have been coming here to your store, buying feminist works, acting furtive or angry or in any way out of the ordinary."

Lloyd sat back and savored Kathleen's reaction of cold, hard, muscle-constricting rage. When she was silent for a full minute, he knew that she was mustering her thoughts into a severe brevity, and that when she spoke her response would be a perfect model of control, devoid of rhetoric or expressions of shock.

He was right. "*Rage In The Womb* is an angry book," Kathleen said softly. "A polemic, a broadside against many things, violence on women in specific. I haven't stocked it in years, and when I did, I doubt if I ever sold a copy to a man. Beyond that, the only male customers that I get are men who come in with their girlfriends and college students–young men in their late teens and twenties. I can't remember when I've had a single man in his thirties in the store. I own the store, and run it by myself, so I *see* all my customers. I—"

Lloyd cut Kathleen off with a wave of his hand. "What about mail orders? Do you do a catalog business?"

"No, I don't have the facilities for mailings. All my business is done here in the shop."

Lloyd muttered “Shit,” and punched the arm of the couch. Kathleen said, “I’m sorry, but listen…I have a lot of friends in bookselling. Feminist literature, poetry, and otherwise. Private dealers you’ve probably overlooked. I’ll call around. I’ll be persistent. I want to help.”

“Thank you,” Lloyd said. “I could use your help.” Feigning a yawn, he added, “Do you have any coffee? I’m running on empty.”

Kathleen said, “One moment,” and departed into the back room. Lloyd heard the sounds of cups and saucers being readied, followed by the electric crackle of a radio and the blare of some kind of symphony or concerto. When the music picked up tempo, he called out, “Would you turn that off, please?” Kathleen called back, “Alright, but talk to me.”

The music diminuendoed, then died altogether. Lloyd, relieved, blurted out, “What shall I talk about, police work?”

Kathleen came into the living room a moment later, bearing a tray with coffee cups and an assortment of cookies. “Talk about something nice,” she said, clearing books from a low end table. “Talk about something dear to you.” Scrutinizing Lloyd openly, she added, “You look pale. Are you feeling sick?”

Lloyd said, “No, I feel fine. Loud noise bothers me; that’s why I asked you to turn off the radio.” Kathleen handed him a cup of coffee. “That wasn’t noise. That was music.” Lloyd ignored the statement. “The things that are dear to me are hard to describe,” he said. “I like poking around in sewers, seeing what I can do about justice, then getting the hell out and going someplace where it’s gentle and warm.”

Kathleen sipped coffee. “Are you talking about being with women?”

“Yes. Does that offend you?”

“No. Why should it?”

“This bookstore. Your poetry. 1983. Pick a reason.”

“You should read my diaries before you judge me. I’m a good poet, but I’m a better diarist. Are you going to catch this killer?”

“Yes. Your reaction to my being here impresses me. I’d like to read your diaries, feel your intimate thoughts. How far do they date back?”

Kathleen flinched at the word “intimate.” “A long time,” she said, “since my days with the Marshall Clarion. I…” Kathleen stopped and stared. The big policeman was laughing and shaking his head delightedly. “What *is* wrong?” she asked.

“Nothing, except that we went to the same high school. I had you *all* wrong, Kathleen. I figured you for East Coast Irish money, and you turn out to be a mick from the old neighborhood. Lloyd Hopkins, Marshall High Class of ’59 and cop of Irish Protestant grandparents meets Kathleen McCarthy, one-time Silverlake resident and Marshall High graduate, Class of…”

Kathleen’s features brightened with her own delight. “Class of ’64,” she finished. “God, how funny. Do you remember the rotunda court?” Lloyd nodded. “And Mr. Juknavarian and his stories about Armenia?” Lloyd nodded again. “And Mrs. Cuthbertson and her stuffed dog? Remember, she called it her muse?” Lloyd doubled over, consumed with laughter. Kathleen continued, throwing nostalgia out between her own gleeful squeals. “And the Pachucos versus the Surfers, and Mr. Amster and those T-shirts he had made up? ‘Amsters Hamsters’? When I was in tenth grade someone tied a dead rat to his car antenna and put a note under the wipers. The note said, ‘Amster’s Hamsters bite the big weenie!’”

Lloyd’s laughter crescendoed into a coughing fit that had him in fear of spewing coffee and half-digested cookies all over the room. “No more, no more, please, or I’ll die,” he managed to get out between body-wracking coughs. “I don’t want to die this way.”

“How *do* you want to die?” Kathleen asked playfully.

As he wiped his tear-stained face, Lloyd sensed a probing intent behind the question. “I don’t know,” he said, “either very old or very romantically. You?”

“Very old and wise. Autumnal serenity long gone into deep winter, with my words carefully prepared for posterity.”

Lloyd shook his head. “Jesus, I don’t believe this conversation. Where did you live in Silverlake?”

“Tracy and Micheltorena. You?”

“Griffith Park and St. Elmo. I used to play ‘chicken’ on Micheltorena when I was a kid. *Rebel Without A Cause* had just come out and chicken was *in.* Being too young to drive, we had to play it on sleds with little rubber wheels attached. We started at the top of the hill above Sunset, at two-thirty every morning that summer; ’55 I think it was. The object of the game was to sled all the way across Sunset against the light. At that time of the morning there was just enough traffic out to make it slightly risky. I did it once a night, all summer long. I never dragged my feet or hit the hand brakes. I never turned down a dare.”

Kathleen sipped her coffee, wondering how bluntly she should phrase her next question. To hell with it, she decided and asked, “What were you trying to prove?”

“That’s a provocative question, Kathleen,” Lloyd said.

“You’re a provocative man. But I believe in parity. You can ask me anything you like, and I’ll answer.”

Lloyd’s face lit up at the possibilities for exploration. “I was trying to follow the rabbit down the hole,” he said. “I was trying to light a fire under the world’s ass. I wanted to be considered a tough guy so that Ginny Skakel would give me a hand job. I wanted to breathe pure white light. Good answer?”

Kathleen smiled and gave Lloyd a sedate round of applause. “Good answer, Sergeant. Why did you quit?”

“Two boys got killed. They were riding on one sled. A ’53 Packard Caribbean smashed them to pieces. One of the boys was decapitated. My mother asked me to quit. She told me that there were safer ways to express courage. She told me stories to take the edge off my grief.”

“Your *grief*? You mean you wanted to continue playing that insane game?”

Lloyd savored Kathleen’s incredulous look and said, “Of course. Teenage romanticism dies hard. Turnabout, Kathleen?”

“Of course.”

“Good. Are you a romantic?”

“Yes… In all the deepest essentials… I…”

Lloyd cut her off. “Good. May I see you tomorrow night?”

“What did you have in mind? Dinner?”

“Not really.”

“A concert?”

“Very amusing. Actually, I thought we might be-bop around L.A. and check out urban romanticism."

"Is that a pass?"

"Absolutely not. I think we should do something that neither of us has ever done before, and that rules out *that.* You in?"

Kathleen took Lloyd's outstretched hand. "I'm in. Here at seven o'clock?"

Lloyd brought the hand to his lips and kissed it. "I'll be here," he said, walking out the door before anything could happen to defuse the power of the moment.

When Lloyd wasn't home by six o'clock, Janice went about preparing for her evening, feeling relief on all fronts. She was relieved that Lloyd's absences were becoming more frequent and predictable, relieved that the girls were so engrossed in their hobbies and social life that they didn't seem to mind their missing father, relieved that her own loving detachment seemed to be growing to the point where some time soon she would be able to tell her husband, "You have been the love of my life, but it is over. I cannot get through to you. I cannot stand any more of your obsessive behavior. It is over."

As Janice dressed for her night of dancing she recalled the episode that had first given her the impetus to consider leaving her husband forever. It was two weeks ago. Lloyd had been gone for three days. She missed him and wanted him physically, and was even ready to make concessions about his stories. She had gone to bed nude and had left her bedside candle burning, hoping to be awakened by Lloyd's hands on her breasts. When she finally did awaken, it was to the sight of Lloyd hovering above her in the nude, gently spreading her legs. She held back a scream as he entered her, her eyes transfixed by his hellishly contorted features. When he came and his limbs contracted spastically, she held him very tight and knew that she had finally been given the power to forge a new life.

Janice dressed in a silver lamé pantsuit, an outfit that would brilliantly reflect the swirling lights at Studio One. She felt little twinges of slavish loyalty, and reflexively defined her husband in coldly clinical terms: He is a disturbed, driven man. An anachronistic man. He is incapable of change, a man who never listened.

Janice rounded up her daughters and drove them over to George's apartment in Ocean Park. His lover Rob would look after them while she and George discoed the night away. He would tell them kind, gentle stories and cook them up a big vegetarian feast.

Studio One was crowded, bursting to the rafters with stylish men undulating toward and away from each other under the benevolent distortions of stereo-synched strobe lights. Janice and George tooted some coke in the parking lot and imagined their entrance as one of the grandest, most closely scrutinized promenades in history. The only woman on the dance floor, Janice knew that she was the most desired body under the lights–desired not in lust but in desperate yearning for transference–tall, regal, tanned, and graceful, every man there wanted to *be* her.

When she returned home late that night, Lloyd was waiting in bed for her. He was especially tender, and she returned his caresses with great sorrow. Her mind ran disconnected images together to keep her from succumbing to his love. She thought of many things, but never came close to guessing that he had made love to another woman just two hours earlier; a woman who considered herself "something of a businesswoman" and who once sang unintelligible rock and roll lyrics; and that with her, as well as now with his wife, his thoughts were of an Irish girl from the old neighborhood.

That night Kathleen wrote in her diary:

> Today I met a man; a man whom I think fate put in my path for a reason. To me he represents a paradox and possibilities that I cannot begin to access; such is his incongruous force. Enormous physically, fiercely bright–yet of all things, a man content to go through life as a policeman! I know that he wants me (when we met I noticed him wearing a wedding band. Later, as his attraction to me grew more obvious, I saw that he had slipped it off–a roundabout and very endearing subterfuge). I think that he has a rapacious ego and will–ones to match his size and self-proclaimed brilliance. And I sense–I know–that he wants to change me, that he sees in me a kindred soul, one to touch deeply but also one to manipulate. I must watch my dialogue and my actions with this man. For the benefit of my growth, there must be a give and take. But I must keep my purest inner soul apart from him; my heart must remain inviolate.

9

Lloyd spent the morning at Parker Center, putting in a ritual appearance to appease Lieutenant Gaffaney and any other superior officers who might have noted his prolonged absence. Dutch Peltz called early; he had already initiated informal inquiries on old homosexual assault cases, delegating two desk officers the job of phoning the entire list of retired Juvenile detectives in the L.A.P.D.'s "private" retired personnel file. Dutch would be telephoning current Juvenile dicks with over twenty years on the job himself, and would call back as soon as he had gleaned a solid pile of information for evaluation. With Kathleen McCarthy checking out the bookstore angle, there was nothing Lloyd could do but chase paper–read the suicide files over and over again until something previously missed or overlooked or misunderstood jumped out at him.

It took two hours and digestion of thousands of words to make a connection, and when the number 408 appeared in the same context in two different files, Lloyd didn't know if it was a lead or a mere coincidence.

The body of Angela Stimka was discovered by her neighbor, L.A. County Deputy Sheriff Delbert Haines, badge #408, *other* neighbors having summoned the off-duty deputy when they smelled gas coming from the woman's apartment. A year to the day later, officers T. Rains, #408, and W. Vandervort, #691, were called to the scene of the Laurette Powell "suicide." Rains, Haines–a stupid spelling blunder; the identical badge numbers obviously denoted the same deputy.

Lloyd read over the file of the third West Hollywood "suicide"–Carla Castleberry, D.O.D. 6/10/80, the Tropicana Motel on Santa Monica Boulevard. Entirely different officers had filed this death report, and the names of residents of the motel who were interviewed at the scene–Duane Tucker, Lawrence Craigie, and Janet Mandarano–did not appear at all in any of the other files.

Lloyd picked up his phone and dialed the West Hollywood Sheriffs Substation. A bored voice answered. "Sheriff's. May I help you?"

Lloyd was brusque. "This is Detective Sergeant Hopkins, L.A.P.D. Do you have a Deputy Haines or Rains, badge 408, working out of your station?" The bored officer muttered, "Yessir, Big Whitey Haines. Day watch patrol."

"Is he on duty today?"

"Yessir."

"Good. Contact him on his radio. Tell him to meet me at the pizza joint on Fountain and La Cienega in one hour. It's urgent. You got that?"

"Yessir."

"Good. Do it now." Lloyd hung up. It was probably nothing–but at least it was movement.

Lloyd arrived at the restaurant early, ordering coffee and taking a booth with a view of the parking lot, the better to get a visual fix on Haines before their interview.

Five minutes later a sheriff's black-and-white pulled in and a uniformed deputy got out, squinting myopically against the sunlight. Lloyd sized the man up–big, blonde, a strong body going to flab. Middle thirties. Ridiculously sculpted hair, the sideburns too long for a fat face; the uniform encasing his musclebound upper torso and soft stomach like a sausage skin. Lloyd watched him don aviator sunglasses and hitch up his gunbelt. Not intelligent, but probably street-smart; play him easy.

The deputy walked directly to Lloyd's booth. "Sergeant?" he said, extending his hand.

Lloyd took the hand, squeezed it, and pointed across the table, waiting for the man to take off his sunglasses. When he sat down without removing them and picked nervously at an acne cluster on his chin, Lloyd thought: Speed. Play him hard.

Haines fidgeted under Lloyd's stare. "What can I do for you, sir?" he asked.

"How long have you been with the Sheriffs, Haines?"

"Nine years." Haines said.

"How long at the West Hollywood Station?"

"Eight years."

"You live on Larabee?"

"That's right."

"I'm surprised. West Hollywood is a faggot sewer."

Haines flinched. "I think a good cop should live on his beat."

Lloyd smiled. "So do I. What do your friends call you? Delbert? Del?"

Haines tried to smile, involuntarily biting his lip. "Whitey. Whwh-what do you —"

"What am I here for? I'll tell you in a moment. Does your beat include Westbourne Drive?"

"Y—yeah."

"Have you worked the same car plan your whole time at the station?"

"S—sure. Except for some loan out time to Vice. What's this all—"

Lloyd slammed the table top. Haines jolted backwards in his seat, reaching up and straightening his sunglasses with both hands. The muscles around his eyes twitched and tics started at the corners of his mouth. Lloyd smiled. "Ever work Narco?"

Haines went flush and whispered "No" hoarsely, a network of veins throbbing in his neck. Lloyd said, "Just checking. Basically, I'm here to question you about a stiff you found back in '78. A wrist slash job. A woman on Westbourne. You remember that?"

Haines's whole body went lax. Lloyd watched his muscles unclench into an almost stuporous posture of relief. "Yeah. My partner and I got an unknown trouble squeal from the desk. The old bag who lived next door called in about the stiffs record player blasting. We found this good lookin' babe all bl—"

Lloyd cut him off. "You found another suicide in your own building the year before, didn't you, Whitey?"

"Yeah," Haines said, "I sure did. I got wasted from the gas, they had to detox me at the hospital. I got a commendation and my picture on the honor board at the station."

Leaning back and stretching out his legs beneath the table, Lloyd said, "Both those women killed themselves on June 10th. Don't you think that's a strange coincidence?"

Haines shook his head. "Maybe. Maybe not. I don't know."

Lloyd laughed. "I don't know, either. That's all, Haines. You can go."

After Haines had left, Lloyd drank coffee and thought. A transparently stupid cop strung out on speed. No guilty knowledge of the two murder-suicides, but undoubtedly involved in so much penny-ante illegality that a questioning on old homicides was like being spared the guillotine–he never asked *why* the interview was taking place. Coincidence that he discovered both bodies? He lived *and* patrolled the same area. *Logically,* it fit.

But instinctively it was somehow out of kilter. Lloyd weighed the pros and cons of a daylight breaking and entering. The pros won. He drove to 1167 Larrabee Avenue.

The mauve-colored apartment building was perfectly still, the doors of the ten units closed, no activity on the walkway leading back to the carport. Lloyd scanned the mailboxes at the front of the building. Haines lived in apartment 5. Running his eyes over the numbers embossed on the first story doorways, he spotted his target–the rear apartment. No screen door, no heavy brass hardware indicating security locks.

Working a short bladed pen knife and a plastic credit card in unison, Lloyd snapped the locking mechanism and pushed the door open. Flicking on a wall light, he shut the door and surveyed the tasteless living room he had expected to find: cheap naugahyde couch and chairs, a formica coffee table, a ratty "deep-pile" carpet going threadbare. The walls boasted velveteen landscape prints and the built-in bookcases held no books–only a pile of skin magazines.

He walked into the kitchen. Mildew on the chipped linoleum floor, dirty dishes in the sink, a thick layer of grease on the cabinets and ceiling. The bathroom was dirtier still–shaving gear scattered on a sidebar near the sink, congealed shaving cream on the walls and mirror, a clothes hamper spilling soiled uniforms.

In the bedroom, Lloyd found his first indicators pointing to character traits other than aesthetic bankruptcy and sloth. Above the unkempt bed was a glass-fronted mahagony gunrack holding a half dozen shotguns–one of them an illegal double barreled sawed-off. Lifting the mattress, he discovered a Browning .9 millimeter automatic and a rusted bayonet with a tag affixed to its handle: "*Genuine Viet Cong Execution Sword! Guaranteed Authentic!*" The drawers beside the bed yielded a large plastic baggie filled with marijuana and a bottle of Dexedrine.

After going through the closets and dressers and finding nothing except dirty civilian clothes, Lloyd walked back into the living room, relieved that his instincts about Haines had been validated, yet still troubled that nothing more had *spoken* to him. With a blank mind, he sat down on the couch and let his eyes circuit the room, trawling for anything that would perk his mental juices. One circuit; two circuits; three. Floor to ceiling, along the walls and back again.

On his fourth circuit, Lloyd noted an inconsistency in the color and shape of the wainscoting at the juncture of the two walls directly over the couch. He stood up on a chair and examined the area. The paint had been thinned, and some sort of quarter-dollar size circular object had been stuck to the wood, then lightly painted over. He squinted, and felt himself go cold all over. There were tiny perforations in the object, which was the exact size of a high-powered condensor microphone. Running a finger along the bottom ridge of the wainscoting, Lloyd felt the wire. The living room was bugged.

Standing on his tiptoes, he traced the wire along the walls to the front door, down the door jamb and through a bored-out floor runner to a bush immediately adjacent to the steps of the apartment. Once outside, the wire was covered with a mauve-colored stucco spackling identical in hue to the whole building. Reaching behind the bush, Lloyd found the wire's terminus, an innocuous looking metal box attached to the wall at just about ground level. He grabbed at the box with both hands, and wrenched with all his strength. The cover snapped off. Lloyd crouched, then looked down the walkway for witnesses. None. He held the bush and metal cover to one side and looked at his prize.

The box contained a state-of-the-art tape recorder. The tape spool was not running, which meant that whoever was doing the bugging had to turn the machine on himself or, more likely, there was a triggering device at work, probably one that Whitey Haines unconsciously activated himself.

Lloyd looked at the door, a scant three paces from where he stood. It *had* to be the trigger.

He walked to the door, unlocked it from the inside, then closed it again, and walked back to the recorder. No movement of the spools. He repeated the procedure, this time opening the door from the outside, then closing it. Squatting by the bush, he admired the results. A red light was glowing, and the tape spools spun silently. Whitey Haines worked day watch. Whoever was interested in his activities knew this and wanted his evenings recorded–the front-door-opening-inward trigger was proof of that.

Lloyd locked the door. Take the recorder with him, or stake out the apartment and wait for the bugger to come and pick up the tape? Was any of this even *connected* to his case? Again scanning the walkway for witnesses, Lloyd tried to make up his mind. When curiosity prickled up his spine and bludgeoned all his other considerations to death, he cut the wire with his penknife, picked up the tape machine and ran for his car.

Back at Parker Center, Lloyd donned surgical thin rubber gloves and examined the tape recorder. The machine was identical to a prototype he had seen at an F.B.I, seminar on electronic surveillance equipment–a "deep dish" model that featured four separate twin spools stationed on either side of self-cleaning heads that snapped into place automatically as each eight-hour increment of tape was used up, making it possible to record for as long as thirty-two hours without coming near the machine.

Probing inside the recorder, Lloyd saw that the primary spools and the three auxiliary spools all held tape, and that the tape on the primary spool was half on the blank side and half on the recorded side, meaning that there was no more than approximately four hours of recorded material contained in the machine. Wanting to be certain of this, he checked the compartment that stored the finished spools. It was empty.

Lloyd removed the auxiliary tapes and placed them inside his top desk drawer, thinking that the small amount of "live" tape was a mixed blessing–there would probably be very little information to be gleaned from four hours of bugging time, but assuming that the bugger had a good fix on Whitey Haines's habits and some kind of shut-off device secreted inside his apartment to record only *x* number of hours per night, the absence of "live" tape would allow plenty of time to set up a stake-out to catch the bugger when he returned to put in fresh spools. Anyone clever enough to set up an electronic surveillance this complex would risk only a minimum number of tape pick-up forays.

Lloyd ran down the hall to the interrogation cubicle that bordered the sixth floor briefing room. He grabbed a battered reel-to-reel recorder from atop a cigarette-scarred table and carried it back to his office. "Be good", he said as he placed the "live" tape on the spindle. "No music, no loud noise. Just be good."

The tape spun, and the built-in speaker hissed, then crackled with static. There was the sound of a door being locked, then a baritone grunt followed by a noise Lloyd recognized immediately–the thud of a gunbelt dropped on a couch or chair. Next came barely audible footsteps, then another grunt, this one octaves higher than the first. Lloyd smiled. There were at least two people in Haines's apartment.

Haines spoke. "You gotta feed me more, Bird; cut the coke with some of the bennies I glom from the narco guys, raise your prices, find some new fucking customers or some fucking thing. We got new fish coming in, and if I don't lay some bread on them, all my fuckin' juice ain't gonna keep you and your asshole buddies outta the queens' tank. You dig me, homeboy?"

A high-pitched male voice answered. "Whitney, you said you wouldn't raise my nut! I'm giving you six bills a month plus half the dope action, plus kickbacks from half the punks on the street! You said—"

Lloyd heard a whirring sound dissolve into a sharp crack. There was silence, then Haines's voice. "You start that shit again and I'll hit you for real. You listen, Bird–Without me, you are shit. You are the king fucking dick of Boy's Town because I got you to lift weights and build up your puny body and because I get the fucking kiddy bulls to roust the pretty boy juvie's off your turf, and because I shoot you the dope and the protection that make you and your punk pals a class act. As long as I've got clout with Vice, you are safe. And that takes money. There's a transfer-happy new day watch commander, and if I don't grease his fucking palm I may end up busting nigger heads down in Compton. There's two new fish rotating into Vice, and I got no fucking idea if I can keep them off your tight little ass. *My* nut is two grand a month before I see a fucking dollar profit. *Your* nut is going up twenty percent as of today. You dig me, Bird?"

The high voiced man stammered, "Sh-sh-sure, Whitey." Haines chuckled, then spoke in a soft voice rich with insinuation. "I've always took good care of you. Keep your nose clean and I always will. You just gotta feed me more. Now c'mon in the back. I wanta feed you."

"I don't want to, Whitey."

"You got to, Birdy. It's part of your protection."

Lloyd listened as the sound of footsteps metamorphosed into a silence inhabited by pitiful monsters. The silence stretched into hours. It was broken by the sound of muted sobbing and the slamming of a door. Then the tape went dead.

Fruit hustler shakedowns, vice pay-offs, dope dealing and a corrupt, brutal cop unfit to wear a badge. But was it connected to mass murder? And *who* had bugged Whitey Haines's apartment, and *why*?

Lloyd made two quick phone calls, to the Internal Affairs Divisions of both the L.A.P.D. and Sheriffs Department. Using his reputation as a lever, he was able to get straight answers from the I.A.D. high brass. No, Deputy Delbert Haines, badge 408, was not under investigation by either Division. Disturbed, Lloyd ran down a mental list of probable parties interested in the affairs of Whitey Haines: rival dope rings, rival male prostitution combines, a fellow deputy with a grudge. All were possible, but none of the choices rang any bells. Some sort of homosexual tie-in to his killer? Unlikely. It violated his theory of the murderer having been chaste for years, and Haines had no guilty knowledge of the two June 10th suicides he had discovered.

Lloyd took the concealed tape recorder down to the third floor offices of the Scientific Identification Division and showed it to a data analyst who he knew was particularly enamored of bugging devices. The man whistled as Lloyd placed the machine on his desk, and reached over lovingly to touch it.

"Not yet, Artie," Lloyd said. "I want it run for latents." Artie whistled again, pushing back his chair and sending "Ooh la la" eyes heavenward. "It's gorgeous, Lloyd. It's perfection."

"Run it down for me, Artie. Omit nothing."

The analyst smiled and cleared his throat. "The Watanabe A.F.Z. 999 Recorder. Retail price around seven thousand clams. Available at only the very best stereo showrooms. Used primarily by two rather diverse groups of people: music lovers interested in recording rock festivals or lengthy operas in one fell swoop, and police agencies interested in long term clandestine bugging. Every component of this machine is the finest that money can buy and Jap technology can produce. You are looking at absolute perfection."

Lloyd gave Artie a round of applause. "Bravo. One other question. Are there hidden serial numbers on the thing? Individual numbers or prototype numbers that can fix the date when the machine was sold?"

Artie shook his head. "The A.F.Z. 999 hit the market in the middle '70s. One prototype, no serial numbers, no different colors–just basic black. The Watanabe Corporation has a thing about tradition; they will not alter the design on these babies. I don't blame them. Who can improve on perfection?"

Lloyd looked down at the recorder. It was in perfect shape, not a scratch on it. "Shit," he said, "I was hoping to narrow down the list of possible buyers. Look, is this thing listed in one of S.I.D.'s Retailer Files?"

"Sure," Artie said. "Want me to compile a list?" Lloyd nodded. "Yeah. Do it now, will you? I'm going to take our baby down the hall and leave it for dusting. I'll be right back."

There was one fingerprint technician on duty at the S.I.D.'s Central Crime Lab. Lloyd handed him the tape recorder and said, "Latent prints, nationwide teletype. I want you to *personally* compare them to L.A.P.D. Homicide Bulletin 16222, Niemeyer, Julia L., 1/3/83, partial right index and pinky. Those prints were bloodstained; if you're in doubt about a match-up on the bulletin, roll the new prints in a blood sample, then recompare. You got that?"

The technician nodded assent, then asked, "Think we'll find prints?"

"It's doubtful, but we have to try. Be thorough; this is very important." The technician opened his mouth to offer assurances, but Lloyd was already running away.

"Eighteen retailers," Artie said as Lloyd burst through the door. "That's up to date, too. Didn't I tell you our baby was esoteric?" Lloyd took the printed list and put it in his pocket, looking reflexively at the clock above Artie's desk. 6:30–too late to begin calling the stereo supply stores. Remembering his date with Kathleen McCarthy, he said, "I have to run. Take care, Artie. Some day I may tell you the whole story."

Kathleen McCarthy closed the store early and went back to her living quarters to write and prepare for her evening with the big policeman. Her business day had been frustrating. No sales, and an endless series of browsers who had wanted to discuss feminist issues while she was on the phone trying to secure information toward the capture of a psychopathic woman-killer. The irony was both profound and cheap, and Kathleen felt a vague diminishing of selfhood in its aftermath. She had hated the police for so long that even though she was doing her moral duty in aiding them, the price was a piece of her ego. Bolstering herself with logic, Kathleen grabbed the ego fragment and killed it with words. Dialectic at the expense of helping others. Pride. Your intractable Irish heart. The rhetoric fell short of its mark, and Kathleen smiled at the *real* irony–sex. You want the cop, and you don't even know his first name.

Kathleen walked into the bathroom and stripped before the full length mirror. Strong flesh, satisfyingly lean; firm breasts, good legs. A tall, handsome woman. Thirty-six, yet looking…Kathleen's eyes clouded with tears, and she braced herself by maintaining eye contact with her image. It worked–the tears died, stillborn.

Throwing on a robe, Kathleen walked into her living room-study and arrayed pen, paper and thesaurus on her desk, then went through her prewriting ritual of letting random prose patterns and thoughts of her dream lover battle for primacy of her mind. As always, her dream lover won, and Kathleen plucked absently at the crotch of her robe and relinquished herself to the smell of the flowers that always came just when she most needed them, when her life was almost to some brink. Then, anonymously and in perfect psychic sync the flowers would be at her doorstep and she would be overwhelmed and wonder who, and look to the faces of strange men for signs of kinship or commiseration or *special* interest.

She knew that he had to be tall and intelligent and about her age–eighteen years of floral tribute without a clue to his identity! Except that he had to have come from the old neighborhood, had to have seen her on the way to school with her court…

Thoughts of her court gave Kathleen a hook. She took up her pen and wrote:

Bring back the dead
Give them head
Remember the songs they sang
And the words they said.
From protracted adolesence
To premature senescence
I do penance with regret;
For the epiphanies I never held
And the joy I never met.

Sighing, Kathleen settled back in her chair. Sighing again, she got out her diary and wrote:

> Good prose seems just about to burst out of me, so I'll do a little tease number and sit back and collate the present again, from approximately my nine thousandth "good prose breakout" plateau. Weird these days. Even good serviceable prose seems contrived. This diary (which will probably never be published!) seem much more real. I'm probably moving into a period where I'll just sit back and let things happen, figure them out as they happen, then shut whatever is happening out and sit down and grind out another book. The cop seems to be evidence of this. O.K., he's compelling and attractive, but even if he weren't I'd probably give his attentions a shot. Weirder yet: Is this "Let it flow" attitude undertaken out of the desire for edification or out of loneliness, horniness, and the desire to ultimately give up that awful part of me that wants to stand apart from the whole human race and exist through my words? Empirically speaking, who knows? My solitude has given me brilliant words, as have my abysmal relationships with men. Another (nine billionth?) meditation on the identity of *him*? Not today, today is strictly the realm of things possible. All of a sudden I'm tired of words. I hope the cop isn't too right wing. I hope he is capable of bending.

Kathleen placed her pen across her words, surprised that the combination of her dream lover and the policeman had inspired such somber sentiments. Smiling at the unpredictability of muses, she glanced at her watch. 6:30. As she showered for her date, she wondered where those first stanzas would take her and how she would react when her doorbell rang at seven o'clock.

The bell rang precisely at seven. When Kathleen opened the door, Lloyd was standing there, wearing beat-up cords and a pullover sweater. She saw a holstered revolver outlined on his left hip and cursed herself; her Harris tweed pantsuit was a definite overdress. To correct the mistake she said, "Hi, Sergeant" and grabbed at the gun bulge and pulled Lloyd inside. He let himself be led, and Kathleen cursed herself again when she saw him smile at the gesture.

Lloyd sat on the couch and spread out his long arms in a mock crucifixion pose. Kathleen stood over him selfconsciously. "I made those phone calls," she said. "To over a dozen bookdealers. Nothing. None of my friends recall seeing or talking with a man like the one you described. It was bizarre. I was helping the police to find an insane woman-killer, and women kept interrupting me to ask questions about the Equal Rights Amendment."

"Thank you," Lloyd said. "I didn't really expect anything. Right now I'm just fishing. Badge 1114, homicide fisherman on the job."

Kathleen sat down. "Are you supervising this investigation?" she asked.

Lloyd shook his head. "No, right now I *am* this investigation. None of my superiors would authorize me to detach officers to work under me, because the idea of mass murderers killing with impunity makes them afraid for their careers and the Department's prestige. I *have* supervised homicide investigations, duties normally assigned to Lieutenants and Captains, but I'm—"

"But you're that good." Kathleen said it as a matter-of-fact.

Lloyd smiled. "I'm better."

"Can you read minds, Sergeant?"

"Call me Lloyd."

"All right, Lloyd."

"The answer is sometimes."

"Do you know what I'm thinking?"

Lloyd draped his arm over Kathleen's tweed shoulders. She buckled, but didn't resist. "I've got an idea," he said. "How's this for starters? Who is this guy? Is he a right-wing loony, like most cops? Does he spend hours cracking jokes about niggers and discussing pussy with his policeman buddies? Does he like to hurt people? To *kill* people? Does he think there's a Jew-commie-nigger-homo conspiracy to take over the world? Does…"

Kathleen put a gentle restraining hand on Lloyd's knee and said, "*Touché.* In basic theme you were correct on all counts." She smiled against her will, slowly withdrawing her hand.

Lloyd felt his blood start to race to the tempo of their banter. "Do you want my answers?" he asked.

"No. You've already given me them."

"Any other questions?"

"Yes. Two. Do you cheat on your wife?"

Lloyd laughed and dug into his pants pocket for his wedding band. He slipped it onto his ring finger and said, "Yes."

Kathleen's face was expressionless. "Have you ever killed anyone?" she asked.

"Yes."

Kathleen grimaced. “I shouldn’t have asked. No more talk of death and woman-killers, please. Shall we leave?”

Lloyd nodded and took her hand as she locked the door behind them.

They drove aimlessly, ending up cruising the terraced hills of the old neighborhood. Lloyd steered the unmarked Matador through the topography of their mutual past, wondering what Kathleen was thinking.

“My parents are dead now,” she said finally. “They were both so old when I was born, and they doted on me because they knew they’d only have me for twenty years or so. My father told me he moved to Silverlake because the hills reminded him of Dublin.”

She looked at Lloyd, who sensed that she wanted to end her games of will and be gentle. He pulled to the curb at Vendrome and Hyperion, hoping that the spectacular view would move her to divulge intimate things, things that would make him care for her. “Do you mind if we stop?” he asked.

“No,” Kathleen said, “I like this place. I used to come here with my court. We read memorial poems for John Kennedy here on the night he was shot.”

“Your court?”

“Yes. My court. The ‘Kathy Kourt’–spelled with two Ks. I had my own little group of underlings in high school. We were all poets, and we all wore plaid skirts and cashmere sweaters, and we never dated, because there was not one boy at John Marshall High School worthy of us. We didn’t date and we didn’t neck. We were saving it for Mr. Right, who, we all figured, would make the scene when we were published poets of renown. We were unique. I was the smartest and the best-looking. I transferred from parochial school because the Mother Superior was always trying to get me to show her my breasts. I talked about it in hygiene class and attracted a following of lonely, bookish girls. They became my court. I gave them an identity. They became *women* because of me. Everyone left us alone; yet we had a following of equally lonely, bookish boys–‘Kathy’s Klowns’ they were called, because we never even deigned to speak to them. We… We…”

Kathleen’s voice rose to a wail, and she batted off Lloyd’s tentative hand on her shoulder. “We… We… loved and cared for each other, and I know it sounds pathetic, but we were strong. Strong! Strong…”

Lloyd waited a full minute before asking, “What happened to your court?”

Kathleen sighed, knowing that her answer was an anticlimax. “Oh, they drifted away. They found boyfriends. They decided not to save it for Mr. Right. They got prettier. They decided they didn’t want to be poets. They…they just didn’t need me anymore.”

“And you?”

“I died, and my heart went underground and resurfaced looking for cheap kicks and true love. I slept with a lot of women, figuring I could find a new entourage that way. It didn’t work. I screwed a lot of men–that got me the entourage, all right, but they were creeps. And I wrote and wrote and wrote and got published and bought a bookstore and here I am.”

Lloyd was already shaking his head. “And what *really,”* he said.

Kathleen spat out angrily, “And I am a damn good poet and a better diarist! And who the hell are you to question me? And? And? *And?*”

Lloyd touched her neck with gentle fingertips and said, “And you live in your head, and you’re thirty-something, and you keep wondering if it’s ever going to get better. Please say yes, Kathleen, or just shake your head.” Kathleen shook her head. Lloyd said, “Good. That’s why I’m here–because I want it to get better for you. Do you believe that?” Kathleen shook her head affirmatively and stared into her lap, clenching her hands. “I have a question for you,” Lloyd said. “A rhetorical question. Did you know that the L.A.P.D. treats the undercarriage of all their unmarked cars with a special shock-proof, scrape-proof coating?”

Kathleen laughed politely at the non sequitur. “No,” she said.

Lloyd reached over and secured the passenger safety harness around her shoulders. When she remained blank-faced he waggled his eyebrows and said, “Brace yourself,” then hit the ignition and dropped into low gear, popping the emergency brake and flooring the gas pedal simultaneously, sending the car forward in an almost vertical wheel stand. Kathleen screamed. Lloyd waited until the car began its crashing downward momentum, then gently tapped the accelerator a half dozen times until the rear wheels caught friction and the car lurched ahead, straining to keep its front end airborne. Kathleen screamed again. Lloyd felt gravity fighting sheer engine power and winning. As the hood of the Matador swung down, he punched the gas pedal and the car nosed upward, holding its pattern until he saw an intersection coming up and hit the brakes, sending them into a tire squealing fishtail. The car was spinning out toward a row of trees when its front end finally smashed into the pavement. Lloyd and Kathleen bounced in their seats like spastic puppets. Dripping with nervous sweat, Lloyd rolled down his window and saw a group of Chicano teenagers giving him a wild ovation, stomping their feet and saluting the car with raised beer bottles.

He blew them a kiss and turned to Kathleen. She was crying, and he couldn’t tell if in fear or joy. He unstrapped the harness and held her. He let her cry, and gradually felt the tears trail into laughter. When Kathleen finally raised her head from his chest, Lloyd saw the face of a delighted child. He kissed that face with the same tenderness as he kissed the faces of his daughters.

“Urban romanticism,” Kathleen said. “Jesus. What next?”

Lloyd considered options and said, “I don’t know. Let’s stay mobile, though. All right?”

“Will you observe all traffic regulations?”

Lloyd said, “Scout’s honor” and started up the car, waggling his eyebrows at Kathleen until she laughed and begged him to stop. The teenagers gave him another round of applause as he pulled out.

They cruised Sunset, the main artery of the old neighborhood. Lloyd editorialized as he drove, pointing out immortal locations of his past:

“There’s Myron’s Used Cars. Myron was a genius chemist gone wrong. He got strung out on heroin and kicked out of his teaching post at U.S.C. He developed a corrosive solution that would eat off the serial numbers on engine blocks. He stole hundreds of cars, lowered the blocks into his vat of solution and set himself up as the used car king of Silverlake. He used to be a nice guy. He was a big rooter for the Marshall football team, and he lent all the star players cars for hot dates. Then one day when he was fucked up on smack he fell into his vat. The solution ate off both his legs up to the knee. Now he’s a cripple and the single most misanthropic individual I've ever known."

Kathleen joined in the travelogue, pointing across the street and saying, "Cathcart Drugs. I used to steal stationery there for my court. Scented purple stationery. One day I got caught. Old man Cathcart grabbed me and dug into my purse. He found some poems I had written on the same kind of stationery. He held me and read the poems aloud to everyone in the store. Intimate poems. I was so ashamed."

Lloyd felt a sadness intrude on their evening. Sunset Boulevard was too loud and garishly neon. Without saying a word he turned the car north on Echo Park Bouelvard and drove past the Silverlake Reservoir. Soon they were in the shadow of the power plant, and he turned and looked at Kathleen for approval.

"Yes," she said, "it's perfect."

They walked uphill silently, holding hands. Dirt clods broke at their feet, and twice Lloyd had to pull Kathleen forward. When they reached the summit they sat in the dirt, heedless of their clothes, leaning into the wire fence that encircled the facility. Lloyd felt Kathleen pulling apart from him, regrouping against the momentum of her tears. To close the gap, he said, "I like you, Kathleen."

"I like you, too. And I like it here."

"It's quiet here."

"You love the quiet and you hate music. Where does your wife think you are?"

"I don't know. Lately she goes out dancing with this fag guy she knows. Her soul sister. They snort cocaine and go to a gay disco. *She* loves music, too."

"And it doesn't bother you?" Kathleen said.

"Well…more than anything else I just don't understand it. I understand why people rob banks and become thieves and get strung out on dope and sex and become cops and poets and killers, but I don't understand why people fart around in discos and listen to music when they could be goosing the world with an electric cattle prod. I can understand you and your court and your screwing all those dykes and creeps. I understand innocent little children and their love, and their trauma when they dicover how cold it can get, but I don't understand how they cannot want to fight it. I tell my daughters stories so they'll fight. My youngest, Penny, is a genius. She's a fighter. My two older girls I'm not so sure about. Janice, my wife, isn't a fighter. I don't think she was ever innocent. She was born practical and stable and stayed that way. I think… I think maybe… that's why I married her. I think… I *knew* I didn't have any more innocence, and I wasn't quite sure that I was a fighter. Then I found out I *was* and got scared of the price and married Janice."

Lloyd's voice had assumed an almost disembodied monotone. Kathleen thought briefly that he was a ventriloquist's pawn, and that whoever was pulling his strings was really trying to get to *her,* laying clues in the strange barrage of confession she had just heard. Two words–"killers" and "price" stuck out, and in her haste to make sense of the story Kathleen said, "And so you became a policeman to prove you were a fighter, and then you killed in the line of duty and you knew."

Lloyd shook his head. "No, I killed a man–an evil man–first. Then I became a cop and married Janice. I lose track of chronology sometimes. Sometimes…not often…when I try to figure out my past I hear noise…music…awful noise…and I have to stop."

Kathleen felt Lloyd wavering in and out of control, and knew that she had broken through to his essence. She said, "I want to tell you a story. It's a true romantic story."

Lloyd shifted his head onto her lap and said, "Tell me."

"All right. There was once a quiet, bookish girl who wrote poetry. She didn't believe in God or her parents or the other girls who followed her. She tried very hard to believe in herself. It was easy, for awhile. Then her followers left her. She was alone. But someone loved her. Some tender man sent her flowers. The first time there was an anonymous poem. A sad poem. The second time just the flowers. The dream lover continued to send the flowers, anonymously, for many years. Over eighteen years. Always when the lonely woman needed them most. The woman grew as a poet and diarist and kept the flowers dated and pressed in glass. She speculated on this man, but never tried to discover his identity. She took his anonymous tribute to her heart and decided that she would reciprocate his anonymity by keeping her diaries private until after her death. And so she lived and wrote and listened to music–a quiet mover. It almost makes you want to believe in God, doesn't it, Lloyd?"

Lloyd took his head from its soft tweed resting place, shaking it to bring the sad story into sharper focus. Then he stood up and helped Kathleen to her feet. "I think your dream lover is a very strange fighter," he said, "and I think he wants to own you, not inspire you. I think he doesn't know how strong you are. Come on, I'll take you home."

They stood in the doorway of Kathleen's bookstore-apartment, holding each other loosely. Kathleen burrowed into Lloyd's shoulder, and when she raised her head he thought that she wanted to be kissed. As he bent to her, Kathleen pushed him gently away. "No. Not yet. Please don't force it, Lloyd."

"All right."

"It's just that the whole thing is so unexpected. You're so special, and it just…"

"You're special, too."

"I know, but I've got *no* idea of who you are, of your natural habitat. The *little* things. Do you understand?"

Lloyd pondered this. "I think so. Look, would you like to go to a dinner party tomorrow night? Policemen and their wives? It'll probably be dull, but illuminating for you."

Kathleen smiled. His offer was a major capitulation; he was willing to be bored to please her. "Yes. Be here at seven." She moved backward into her dark front room and closed the door behind her. When she heard Lloyd's departing footsteps she turned on the lights and got out her diary. Her mind rambled with profundities until she muttered, "Oh, fuck it," and wrote:

> He is capable of bending. I am going to be his music.

Lloyd drove home. He pulled into the driveway to find Janice's car gone and all the lights in the house glowing brightly. He unlocked the door and walked inside, seeing the note immediately:

Lloyd, darling:

> This is goodbye, for awhile at least. The girls and I have gone to San Francisco to stay with a friend of George's. It is for the best, I know that, because I know that you and I have not communicated for a long, long time, and that our values are markedly different. Your behavior with the girls was the final straw. I have known almost since the beginning of our marriage of some deep disturbance in you–one you disguised (for the most part) very well. What I will not tolerate is your passing your disturbance on to them. Your stories are cancerous in their effect, and Anne, Caroline, and Penny must be free of them. A note on the girls–I am going to enroll them in a Montessori School in S.F., and I will have them call you at least once a week. George's roommate Rob will look after the shop in my absence. I will decide in the coming months whether or not I want a divorce. I care for you deeply, but I cannot live with you. I am withholding our address in S.F. until I am certain you will not try to do something rash. When I get settled, I'll call. Until then be well and don't worry.
>
> Janice

Lloyd put down the note and walked through the empty house. Everything feminine had been cleared out. The girls' room had been picked clean of personal belongings; the bedroom that he shared with Janice now contained only his solitary aura and the navy blue cashmere quilt that Penny had crafted for his thirty-seventh birthday.

Lloyd drew the quilt around his shoulders and walked outside. He looked up at the sky and hoped for an annihilating rainstorm. When he realized that he couldn't will thunder and lightning, he fell to his knees and wept.

10

When the poet saw the empty metal box, he screamed. Cancer cells materialized out of the dawn sky and threw themselves at his eyes, hurling him onto the cold pavement. He wrapped his arms around his head and drew himself into a fetal ball to keep the tiny carcinogens from going for his throat, then rocked back and forth until he had blunted all his senses and his body started to cramp, then numb. When he felt self-asphyxiation coming on he breathed out, and familiar Larrabee Avenue came into focus. No cancer cells in the air. His beautiful tape machine was gone, but Officer Pig was still asleep and the early morning scene on Larrabee was normal. No police cars, no suspicious vehicles, no trench-coated figures huddled behind newspapers. He had changed the tape forty-eight hours ago, so the machine was mostly likely discovered that day, when it was empty or running, or yesterday, when it contained a minimum of recorded material. If he hadn't wanted to touch himself so badly he would never have risked the early pick-up, but he needed the stimulus of Officer Pig and his lackey, who had been doing things to each other on the couch for weeks now, things that Julia had written about in her evil manu—

He couldn't complete the thought; it was too shameful.

He got to his feet and looked in all directions. No one had seen him. He bit at the skin of his forearms. The blood that trickled out was red and healthy looking. He opened his mouth to speak, wanting to be sure that the cancer cells hadn't severed his vocal cords. The word that came out was "safe." He said it a dozen times, each time with a more awed inflection. Finally he shouted it and ran for his car.

Thirty minutes later he had scaled the bookstore roof, a silenced .32 automatic in his windbreaker pocket, smiling when he saw that his Sanyo 6000 was still hidden underneath an outsized sheaf of tarred-over pipe insulation. He grabbed the two spools of finished tape from the machine's storage compartment. Safe. Safe. Safe. Safe. He said the word over and over again on his drive home, and he was still saying it as he put the first spool on the old machine in the living room, then sat back to listen, his eyes moving over the rose branches and photographs on the walls.

The sound of a switch being flipped; the porch light going on; the trigger activating the tape. His original beloved muttering to herself, then deep silence. He smiled and touched his thighs. She was writing.

The silence stretched. One hour. Two. Three. Four. Then the sound of yawning and the switch being flipped again.

He got to his feet, stretched and changed spools. Again the porch light trigger–his punctual darling, 6:55, like clockwork.

He sat down, wondering if he should make himself explode now while he could hear footsteps, or wait and take a chance on his original beloved talking to herself. Then a doorbell rang. Her voice: "Hi, Sergeant." The scuffle of feet. Her voice again: "I made those phone calls. To over a dozen bookdealers. Nothing. None of my friends recall seeing or talking with a man like the one you described. It was bizarre. I was helping the police to find an insane woman-killer, and women kept—"

At the last words he began to tremble. His body went ice cold, then turned burning hot. He punched the stop button and fell to his knees. He clawed at his face until he drew blood, whimpering safe, safe, safe. He crawled to the window and looked out at the passing parade on Alvarado. He took hope with every identifiable evidence of business as usual: traffic noise, Mexican women with children in tow, junkies waiting to score in front of the Burrito stand. He started to say "safe," then hesitated and whispered "maybe." "Maybe" grew in his brain until he screamed it and stumbled back to the recorder.

He pushed the play button. His first beloved was saying something about women interrupting her. Then a man's voice: "Thank you. I didn't really expect anything. Right now I'm just fishing. Badge 1114, homicide fisherman on the job."

He forced himself to listen, gouging his genitals with both hands to keep from screaming. The horrific conversation continued, and words leaped out and made him gouge himself harder. "The idea of mass murderers killing with impunity makes them afraid…I *have* supervised homicide investigations…call me Lloyd."

When the door slammed and the tape spun in blessed silence he took his hands from between his legs. He could feel blood dripping down his thighs, and it reminded him of high school and poetry and the sanctity of his purpose. Mrs. Cuthbertson's eleventh grade honors English class. Logical fallacies: *post hoc,* *propter ergo hoc*–"After this, therefore because of this." Knowledge of crimes committed does *not* mean knowledge of the perpetrator. Policemen were not breaking down his door. "Lloyd," "Homicide fisherman badge 1114," had no idea that his original beloved's dwelling was bugged, and may have had nothing to do with the theft of his other tape recorder. "Lloyd" was "fishing" in shark-infested waters, and if he came near him he would eat the policeman alive. Conclusion: they had no idea who he was, and it was business as usual.

Tonight he would claim his twenty-third and most hurriedly courted beloved. No "maybe." It was a pure "yes," powerfully affirmed by his meditation tape and every one of his beloveds from Jane Wilhelm on up. Yes. Yes. The poet walked to the window and screamed it to the world at large.

11

His sleepless night in the empty house had been the precursor to a day of total bureaucratic frustration, and each negative feedback tore at Lloyd like a neon sign heralding the end of all the gentle restraining influences in his life. Janice and the girls were gone, and until his genius killer was captured, he was powerless to get them back.

As the day wound down into early evening, Lloyd recounted his dwindling options, wondering what on God's earth he would do if they died out and left him with only his mind and his will.

It had taken him six hours to call the eighteen stereo supply stores and secure a list of fifty-five people who had purchased Watanabe A.F.Z. 999 recorders over the last eight years. Twenty-four of the buyers had been women, leaving thirty-one male suspects, and Lloyd knew from experience that telephone interviews would be futile–experienced detectives would have to size up the buyers in person and determine guilt or innocence from the suspects' response to questioning. And if the recorder had been purchased outside L.A. County…and if the whole Haines angle had nothing to do with the killings…and he would need manpower for interviewing…and if Dutch turned him down at the party tonight…

The negative feedback continued, undercut with memories of Penny and her quilts and Caroline and Anne squealing with delight at his stories. Dutch had gotten nothing positive from his queries to both retired and long-term active juvenile detectives and the "monicker" files on "Bird" and "Birdy" had yielded only the names of a dozen ghetto blacks. Useless–the high pitched voice in Whitey Haines's living room had obviously belonged to a white man.

But the greatest frustration had been the absence of a print make on the tape recorder. Lloyd had stalked the crime lab repeatedly, looking for the technician he had left the machine with, calling the man at home, only to find that his father had had a heart attack and that he had driven to San Bernardino, taking the recorder with him, intending to use the facilities of the San Bernardino Sheriffs Department for his dusting and comparison tests. "He said that you wanted him to do the tests *personally,* Sergeant," the technician's wife had said.

"He'll call from San Bernardino in the morning with the results." Lloyd had hung up cursing semantics and his own authoritarian nature.

This left two last-ditch, one-man options: Interview the thirty-one buyers himself or cop some bennies and stake out Whitey Haines's apartment until the bugger showed up. Desperation tactics–and the only avenues he had left.

Lloyd got his car and headed west, toward Kathleen's bookstore-cottage. When he got off the freeway he realized he was bone weary and flesh hungry and pointed his Matador north, in the direction of Joanie Pratt's house in the Hollywood Hills. They could love and talk and maybe Joanie's body would smother his feeling of doomsday attrition coming from all sides.

Joanie jumped on Lloyd as he walked through the open front door, exclaiming, "Sarge, *wilkommen!* Romance on your mind? If so, the bedroom is immediately to your right." Lloyd laughed. Joanie's big carnal heart was the perfect spot to place his tenderness.

"Lead the way."

When they had loved and played and looked at the sunset from the bedroom balcony, Lloyd told Joanie that his wife and children were gone and that in the wake of his abandonment there was only himself and the killer. "I'm giving my investigation two more days," he said, "then I'm going public. I'm taking everything I have to Channel 7 News and flushing my career down the toilet. It hit me while we were lying in bed. If the leads I have now don't pan out I'm going to create such a fucking public stink that every police agency in L.A. County will *have* to go after this animal; if my reading of him is correct, the exposure will drive him to do something so rash that he'll blow it completely. I think he has an incredible ego that's screaming to be recognized, and when he screams it to the world I'll be there to get him."

Joanie shuddered, then put a comforting hand on Lloyd's shoulder. "You'll get him, Sarge. You'll give him the big one where it hurts the most."

Lloyd smiled at the imagery. "My options are narrowing down," he said. "It feels good." Remembering Kathleen, he added, "I've got to go."

"Hot date?" Joanie asked.

"Yeah. With a poetess."

"Do me a favor before you go?"

"Name it."

"I want a happy picture of the two of us."

"Who's going to take it?"

"Me. There's a ten-second delay on my Polaroid. Come on, get up."

"But I'm naked, Joanie!"

"So am I. Come on."

Joanie walked into the living room and came back with a camera affixed to a tripod. She pushed some buttons and ran to Lloyd's side. Blushing, he grabbed her around the waist and felt himself start to go hard. The flash cube popped. Joanie counted the seconds and pulled the film from the camera. The print was perfect: the nude Lloyd and Joanie, she smiling carnally, he blushing and semi-erect. Lloyd felt his tenderness explode as he looked at it. He took Joanie's face in his hands and said, "I love you."

Joanie said, "I love you too, Sarge. Now get dressed. We've both got dates tonight, and I'm late for mine."

Kathleen had spent her entire day in preparation for her evening; long hours in the women's departments of Brooks Brothers and Boshard-Doughty, searching for *the* romantic purist outfit that would speak eloquently of her past and flatter her in the present. It *took* hours, but she found it: pink Oxford cloth button down shirt, navy blue ankle socks and cordovan tassel loafers, a navy crew neck sweater and the *piece de resistance*–a knee length, pleated, red tartan skirt.

Feeling both sated and expectant, Kathleen drove home to savor waiting for her romantic conspirator. She had four hours to kill, and prescribed getting mildly stoned and listening to music as the way to do it. Since tonight she would be juxtaposed iconoclastically against a staid gathering of policemen and their wives, she put a carefully selected medley of flower child revolution on the turntable and sat back in her robe to smoke dope and listen, filled with the knowledge that tonight she would teach the big policeman–wow him with her poetry, read classic excerpts from her diary, and maybe let him kiss her breasts.

As the Colombian gold took her over, Kathleen found herself playing out a new fantasy. Lloyd was her dream lover. He was the one who had sent the flowers all those years; he had waited for the terrible impetus of searching for a killer to bring them together–a casual meeting wouldn't have been romantic enough for him. The genesis of his attraction had to be Silverlake–they had grown up a scant six blocks apart.

Kathleen felt her fantasy drift apart with the diminishing of her high. To fortify it, she smoked her last Thai stick. Within minutes she was at one with the music and Lloyd was nude in front of her, admitting his deepening love of almost two decades, breathless in his desire to have her. Regal in her magnanimity, Kathleen accepted, watching him grow bigger and harder until she, Lloyd, and the deep bass guitar of the Jefferson Airplane exploded at once and her hand jerked from between her legs and she looked reflexively at the clock and saw that it was ten of seven.

Kathleen walked to the bathroom and turned on the shower, then dropped her robe and let the stream of water run alternately hot and cold over her until she felt her sober self tenuously emerge. She dressed and appreciated her image in the full-length mirror: She was perfect, and pleased to note that dressing in such nostalgic garments caused her not a hint of remorse.

The bell rang at seven. Kathleen turned off the stereo and threw open the door. Seeing Lloyd standing there, huge and somehow graceful, jerked her back to her fantasy. When he smiled and said, "Jesus, are you stoned," she returned to the present, laughed guiltily and said, "I'm sorry. Weird thoughts. Do you like my outfit?"

Lloyd said, "You're beautiful. Traditional clothes become you. I didn't think you were a doper. Come on, let's get out of here."

Dutch Peltz and his wife Estelle lived in Glendale, in a ranch-style house adjoining a golf course. Lloyd and Kathleen drove there in tense silence, Lloyd thinking of desperation tactics and killers and Kathleen thinking of ways to regain the parity she had lost by appearing loaded.

Dutch greeted them in the doorway, bowing to Kathleen. Lloyd made the introductions.

"Dutch Peltz, Kathleen McCarthy."

Dutch took Kathleen's hand. "Miss McCarthy, a pleasure."

Kathleen returned the bow with a satirical flourish. "Should I call you by your rank, Mr. Peltz?"

"Please call me Arthur or Dutch, all my friends do." Turning to Lloyd, he said, "Circulate for awhile, kid. I'll show Kathleen around. We should talk before you leave."

Catching the edge in Dutch's voice, Lloyd said, "We need to talk sooner than that. I'm going to get a drink. Kathleen, if Dutch gets too boring, have him show you his boot trick."

Kathleen looked down at Dutch's feet. Although dressed in a business suit, he was wearing thick-soled black paratrooper boots. Dutch laughed and banged the back of his right heel on the floor. A long, double-bladed stiletto sprang out of the side of his boot. "My trademark," he said. "I was a commando in Korea." He nudged the knife point into the carpet, and the blade retracted.

Kathleen forced a grin. "Macho."

Dutch smiled. "*Touché.* Come on Kathleen, I'll show you around."

Dutch steered Kathleen toward the dining room buffet, where women were readying dishes of salad and standing over steaming hot trays of corned beef and cabbage, laughing and lauding the food and party preparations. Lloyd watched them depart, then walked into the living room, whistling when he saw that every inch of floor space was eclipsed by heavyweight high brass: Commanders, Inspectors, and up. He counted heads–seven Commanders, five Inspectors, and four Deputy Chiefs. The lowest ranking officer in the room was Lieutenant Fred Gaffaney, standing by the fireplace with two Inspectors wearing cross-and-flag lapel pins. Gaffaney looked over and caught Lloyd's eye, then turned quickly away. The two Inspectors followed suit, flinching when Lloyd stared straight at them. Something was *off.*

Lloyd found Dutch in the kitchen, regaling Kathleen and a Deputy Chief with one of his dialect anecdotes. When the Chief walked away shaking his head and laughing, Lloyd said, "Have you been holding out on me, Dutchman? Something's got to be up; I've never seen this many heavy hitters in one place in my whole career."

Dutch swallowed. "I took the Commander's exam and passed high. I didn't tell you because I—" He nodded toward Kathleen.

"No," Lloyd said, "she stays. Why didn't you tell me, Dutch?"

"You don't want Kathleen to hear this," Dutch said.

"I don't care. Tell me, goddamnit!"

Dutch spat it out. "I didn't tell you because with me on the Commander's list there would be no end to the favors you would have asked. I was going to tell you *if* I passed and *when* I got assigned. *Then* I got the word from Fred Gaffaney–They're going to offer me the command of Internal Affairs when Inspector Eisler retires. Gaffaney is on the Captain's list; he's almost certain to be my exec. Then *you* blew up at him, causing *me* to lose a great deal of face. I patched it up; old Dutch always looks out for his temperamental genius. Things are changing, Lloyd. The department has been taking a beating from the media–shootings of blacks, police brutality, those two cops busted for possession of coke. There's a shake-up coming. I.A.D. is filled with born-agains, and the Chief *himself* wants a crackdown on officers shacking up, fucking whores, chasing pussy, that kind of bullshit. I'm going to have to go along with it, and I don't want *you* to get hurt! I told Gaffaney that you'd apologize to him, and I *expected* you to show up with your wife, not one of your goddamned girlfriends!"

"Janice left me!" Lloyd screamed. "She took the girls with her, and I wouldn't apologize to that sanctimonious cocksucker to save my life!"

Lloyd looked around. Kathleen stood rigid against the wall, shock-stilled, her hands balled into fists. A group of officers and wives filled the dining room door. When he saw nothing but awe and self-righteous judgment in their eyes, Lloyd whispered, "I need five men, Dutch. For thirty-one suspect interviews. Just for a few days. It's the last favor I'll ever ask you for. I don't think I can get him by myself."

Dutch shook his head. "No, Lloyd."

Lloyd's whisper became a sob. "Please."

"No. Not now. Sit on it for awhile. Take a rest. You've been working too hard."

The crowd in the doorway had spilled over into the kitchen. Moving his eyes over the entire assembly, Lloyd said: "Two days, Dutch. Then I'm taking my act on TV. Watch for me on the six o'clock news."

Lloyd turned to walk away, then hesitated. He about-faced and swung his open right hand at Dutch's face. The crack of flesh on flesh died into a huge collective gasp. "Judas," Lloyd hissed.

Kathleen snuggled close to Lloyd in the car, abandoning herself to wanting his reckless courage. She was afraid of saying the wrong thing, so she stayed silent and tried not to speculate on what he was thinking.

"What do you hate?" Lloyd asked. "Be specific."

Kathleen thought for a moment. "I hate the Klondike Bar," she said. "That's a leather bar on Virgil and Santa Monica. A sadist hangout. The men who park their motorcycles in front frighten me. I know you wanted me to say something about killers, but I just don't feel that way."

"Don't apologize. It's a good answer."

Lloyd pulled a U-turn, throwing Kathleen off to the other side of the seat. Within minutes they were parked in front of the Klondike Bar, watching a group of short-haired, leather-jacketed men snort amyl nitrate, then throw rough arms around each other and walk inside.

"One other question," Lloyd said. "Do you want to spend the rest of your life as a cut-rate Emily Dickinson or do you want to go for some pure white light?"

Kathleen swallowed. "Pure white light," she said.

Lloyd pointed to the neon sign above the swinging bar doors. A muscular Yukon adventurer, wearing nothing but a Mountie hat and jock strap, glared down at them. Lloyd reached into the glove compartment and handed Kathleen his off-duty .38. "Shoot it," he said.

Kathleen shut her eyes and fired blindly out the window until the gun was empty. The Yukon adventurer exploded with the last three shots, and suddenly Kathleen was breathing cordite and pure white light. Lloyd gunned the car and peeled rubber for two solid blocks, driving with one hand on the wheel and the other on the squealing Kathleen's tartan lap.

When they pulled up in front of her bookstore, he said, "Welcome to the heart of my Irish Protestant ethos.”

Kathleen wiped tears of laughter from her eyes and said, “But I’m an Irish Catholic.”

“No matter. You’ve got heart and love, and that’s what matters.”

“Will you stay?”

“No. I have to be alone and figure out what I have to do.”

“But you’ll come by soon?”

“Yes. In a couple of days.”

“And you’ll make love to me?”

“Yes.”

Kathleen closed her eyes and Lloyd leaned over and kissed her alternately soft and hard, until her tears ran between their lips and she broke the embrace and ran from the car.

At home, Lloyd tried to think. Nothing happened. When plans, theories, and contingency strategies wouldn’t coalesce in his mind he had a brief moment of panic. Then the classic simplicity hit him. His entire life had been the prelude to this breathless pause before flight. There was no turning back. His divine instinct for darkness would take him to the killer. The rabbit had gone down the hole and would never return to daylight.

Part Four
Moon Descending

12

His intended was named Peggy Morton, and she was chosen for the challenge her consummation presented as much as for her persona.

Since Julia Niemeyer and her manuscript and his curbside assignation he had been feeling slippage on all fronts. His lean, strong body looked the same, but *felt* sluggish and flaccid; his normally clear blue eyes were evasive, clouded with fear when he stared at himself in the mirror. To combat these little crumblings the poet had resurrected several of his pre-Jane Wilhelm disciplines. Hours were spent practicing judo and karate and firing his handguns at the N.R.A. range, doing push-ups and chin-ups and sit-ups until he was one mindless ache. They worked only as a picayune holding action, and nightmares still gnawed at him. Fetching young men on the street seemed to be pantomiming obscene overtures; cloud formations twisted into bizarre patterns that spelled his name for all of Los Angeles to read.

Then his tape recorder was stolen and he gained a faceless nemesis: Sergeant Lloyd the homicide fisherman. In the eleven hours since first hearing the man's voice on the tape he had exploded four times, progressively more graphic Boy's Town fantasies driving him into a near stuporous state that would evaporate within minutes, leaving him ready to explode again, but afraid of the price. Looking at the memorabilia on his walls didn't help; only the voice excited him. Then he thought of Peggy Morton, who lived only a few blocks from a street filled with young men for hire, young men to match the shame-including voice on the tape, young men who shared the hideous lifestyle of "Officer Pig" and his lackey. He drove to West Hollywood and consummation.

Peggy Morton lived in a "security" building on Flores Avenue, two blocks south of the Sunset Strip. He had followed her home one morning from the all-night market on Santa Monica and Sweetzer, staying along the tree shrouded sidewalk, listening as she conjugated verbs in French. There was something very simple and wholesome about her; and in the traumatic aftermath of Julia he had seized on that simplicity as the basis for his ardor.

It had taken him a scant week to establish the pretty young redhaired woman as an extreme creature of habit: She left her cashier's job at Tower Records at precisely midnight, and her lover Phil, the night manager of the store, would walk her down to the market, where she would buy groceries, then walk her home. Phil would sleep over only on Tuesdays and Fridays.

"It's our deal, sweetie," he heard Peggy say a half dozen times. "I have to study my French. You promised you wouldn't press me."

The good natured, doltish Phil would protest briefly, then grab Peggy and her shopping bag in an exasperated embrace and walk away shaking his head. Peggy would then shake *her* head as if to say, "Men," and dig a bunch of keys out of her purse and unlock the first of the many doors that would take her up to her fourth floor apartment.

The apartment building fascinated and challenged him. Seven stories of glass and steel and concrete, advertised by signs in its entrance foyer as “a 24-hour total electronic security environment.” He shook his head at the sadness of people needing such protection and rose to the challenge. He knew that there were four keys on Peggy’s key ring, and that they were all necessary to gain access to her apartment–he had heard Phil joke about it. He knew also that wall-mounted electronic movie cameras patrolled the foyer constantly. The first step had to be to obtain keys…

It was easily accomplished, but gained him only partial access. After three days of studying Peggy’s routine, he knew that when she arrived at work at four o’clock she went first to the employees’ “breakroom” at the back of the store. She would then leave her purse on a table next to the Coke machine and walk to the adjoining storeroom to check out the incoming supply of albums. He observed this through a sliding glass door for three days running. On the fourth day he made his move–and botched it when Peggy’s returning footsteps forced him to run back into the store proper with only one key in his hand.

But it was the key to the front entrance foyer, and that night, dressed as a woman and carrying a bag of groceries as camouflage, he brazenly unlocked the door and walked straight to a bank of mailboxes that designated Peggy’s apartment as 423. From there he circled the foyer and learned that a separate key was required for the elevator door. Undaunted, he noticed a door off to his left. It was unlocked. He opened it and walked down a dingy hallway to a laundry room filled with coin-operated washers and dryers. He scanned the room and noticed a wide ventilator shaft in the ceiling. Noise from the apartments above him caught his ears, and his wheels started to turn…

Again dressed as a woman, but this time wearing a tight cotton jumpsuit underneath the feminine garb, he parked across the street to wait for Peggy to return home. His tremors of expectation were so great that no thoughts of the homicide fisherman’s voice crossed his mind.

Peggy showed at 12:35. She shifted her grocery bag and fumbled her new key into the lock and let herself in. He waited for half an hour, then walked over demurely and followed suit, partially shielding his face with his own shopping bag. He walked through the foyer to the laundry room and placed a hand-lettered “Out Of Order” sign on the door, then bolted it shut from the inside. Breathing shallowly, he stripped off his loose fitting gingham dress and emptied his work tools from the bag: screwdriver, chisel, ball peen hammer, hacksaw, and silencer-fitted .32 automatic. He stuck them into the compartments of an army surplus cartridge belt, then wrapped the belt around his waist and donned surgical gloves.

Bringing to mind his few fond memories of Peggy, he stood up on top of the washer directly beneath the ventilator shaft and peered into the darkness, then took a deep breath and placed his hands above his head in a diving position and leaped upward until his arms caught the corrugated metal walls of the shaft’s interior. With a huge, lung-straining effort he hoisted himself up into the shaft, flattening out his arms, shoulders, and legs to gain a purchase that propelled him slowly up. Feeling like a worm doing penance in hell, he inched forward, a foot at a time, modulating his breathing in concert with his movement. The shaft was stifling hot and the metal stung his skin through his jumpsuit.

He reached the second floor connecting shaft, and found it wide enough to climb through. He moved along it, savoring the feeling of again being horizontal. The crawl space terminated at a metal plate covered with tiny holes. Cool air was pouring through them, and he squinted and saw that he was at ceiling level across the hallway from apartments 212 and 214. He rolled onto his back and removed the hammer and chisel from his cartridge belt, then twisted back on his stomach and wedged the chisel head into the edge of the plate and snapped it off with one sharp hammer blow. The plate dropped onto the blue carpeted hallway, and he crawled through the open hole and dropped to the floor in a handstand. He caught his breath and replaced the metal plate crookedly in the shaft, then walked down the hall, his eyes constantly trawling for hidden security devices. Seeing none, he walked through two connecting doorways and up two flights of concrete service stairs, feeling his heartbeat reach a new crescendo with each step he took.

The fourth floor corridor was deserted. He walked to the door of apartment 423 and placed his ear to it. Silence. He took the .32 automatic from his belt and checked to see that the silencer was screwed tight to the barrel. Concentrating on the timbre of doltish Phil's voice, he rapped on the door and said, "Peg? It's me, babe."

There was a shuffling of feet within the apartment, followed by the fondly muttered words, "You crazy…" The door opened a moment later. When Peggy Morton saw the man in the black jumpsuit her hands flew to her mouth in surprise. She looked into his light blue eyes and saw longing. When she saw the gun in his hand she tried to scream, but nothing came out.

"Remember me," he said, and fired into her stomach.

There was a soft plop, and Peggy sank to her knees, her terrified mouth trying to form the word "No." He rested the gun barrel against her chest and squeezed the trigger. She pitched backward into her living room and expelled a soft "No" along with a mouthful of blood. He stepped inside and closed the door behind him. Peggy's eyelids were fluttering and she was gasping for breath. He bent down and opened her robe. She was naked underneath it. He placed the barrel to her heart and fired. Her body lurched and her head snapped upwards. Blood poured from her mouth and nostrils. Her eyelids fluttered a last time, then closed forever.

He walked into the bedroom and found an oversized shift dress that looked like it would fit him, then rummaged in the dresser until he found a brunette wig and a large straw hat. He put the outfit on and checked his getaway image in the mirror, deciding that he was beautiful.

A circuit of the kitchen yielded a large, double-strength shopping bag and a stack of newspapers. He carried them into the living room, then placed them on the floor beside the body of his most recent beloved. He removed Peggy's blood-soaked robe and got his hacksaw. He lowered the saw and closed his eyes and felt sharp sprays of blood cut the air. Within minutes tissue, bone, and viscera had been separated and the pale yellow carpet had turned dark crimson.

He walked to the balcony and looked out at the silent jetstream of cars on the Sunset Strip. He wondered briefly where all the people were going, then walked back to his twenty-third beloved and picked up her severed arms and legs. He carried them to the edge of the balcony and flung them to the world, watching as they disappeared, weighted down with his power.

Now only the head and torso remained. He let the torso lie and wrapped the head in newspaper and placed it in the supermarket bag. Sighing, he walked out the door of the apartment and through the silent security building and into the street. At curbside he slid out of Peggy Morton's dress and removed her wig and straw hat and dumped them in the gutter, knowing that he had met the equivalent of all of mankind's wars and had emerged the victor.

He took his trophy out of the shopping bag and walked along the sidewalk. At the corner he saw a beautiful, pristine white Cadillac. He placed Peggy Morton's head on the hood. It was a declaration of war. Warrior slogans passed through his mind. "To the victor belong the spoils" caught and stuck. He got his car and went looking for spartan revelry.

Benevolent voices propelled him down Santa Monica Boulevard. He drove slowly in the right lane, the tight rubber gloves numbing his hands on the wheel. There was little traffic, so the absence of street noise left him free to *listen;* to *hear* the thoughts of the young men lounging against stop signs and bus benches. Keeping eye contact was hard, and it would be even harder to make up his mind based on looks alone, so he stared straight ahead, throwing his encounter open to the voice of fate.

Near Plummer Park, crude hustler catcalls and importunings assailed him. He kept going; better *nothing* than someone nasty.

He crossed Fairfax, moving out of Boy's Town, frightened and relieved that his gauntlet was ending. Then he hit the red light at Crescent Heights and voices came down on him like shrapnel: "Good weed, Birdy. You carry dime bags for your johns and you'll clean up."

"I already cleaned up, what do you think I am, a fucking janitor?"

"It might not be a bad idea, beauty. Janitors get social security, jockers get the clap."

All three voices dissolved into laughter. He looked over. Two young blondes and the lackey. He gripped the wheel so hard that his numb hands came to life and twisted in spastic tremors, hitting the horn by accident. The voices stopped at the noise. He could feel their gazes zeroing in. The light turned greed; the color reminding him of tape slithering through bloody apertures. He stood his ground; to run now would be cowardice. Cancer cells started to crawl over his windshield, and then a soft voice was at his passenger window.

"You looking for company?"

It was the lackey. Staring at the green light, he ran through a mental litany of his twenty-three beloveds. Their images calmed him; they *wanted* him to do it.

"I *said,* 'You want some company?'"

He nodded in return. The cancer cells vanished at the act of courage. He forced himself to look over and open the door and smile The lackey smiled back, no recognition in his eyes. "The silent type, huh? Go ahead, stare. I know I'm gorgeous. I've got a pad down near La Cienega. Five minutes and Larry the Bird flies you straight to heaven."

The five minutes stretched into twenty-three eternities; twenty-three female voices saying "Yes." He nodded each time and felt himself go warm all over.

They pulled into the motel parking lot, Larry leading the way up to his room and closing the door behind them, whispering, "It's fifty. In advance." The poet reached into his jumpsuit and extracted two twenties and a ten. He handed them to Larry, who put them in a cigar box on the nightstand and said, “What’ll it be?”

“Greek,” the man said.

Larry laughed. “You’ll love it, doll. You ain’t been fucked till you been fucked by Larry the Bird.”

The man shook his head. “No. You’ve got it mixed up. I want to fuck you.”

Larry breathed out angrily. “Buddy, *you* got it all wrong. I don’t take it up the ass, I give it up the ass. I been rippin’ off butthole since high school. I’m Larry Bir--”

The first shot caught Larry in the groin. He crashed into the dresser, then slid to the floor. The man stood over him and sang, “On, o’ noble Marshall, roll right down that field; with your banner flying o’er us, we will never yield.” Larry’s eyes came alive. He opened his mouth, and the man stuck the silencer-fitted barrel into it and squeezed off six shots. The back of Larry’s head and the dresser behind it exploded. He removed the spent clip and reloaded, then rolled the dead hustler onto his back and pulled off his pants and jockey shorts. He spread Larry’s legs and wedged the gun barrel into his rectum and pulled the trigger seven times. The last two shots ricocheted off the spinal cord and tore through the jugular as they exited, sending crisscrossed geysers of blood into the cordite-reeking air.

The poet got to his feet, surprised to find that he could hold himself steady. He held both of his hands in front of his face and noticed that they were steady, too. He pulled off his rubber gloves and felt symbolic life return to his hands. He had now killed twenty-three times for love, and once for revenge. He was capable of bringing death to man and woman, lover and rapist. He knelt beside the corpse and reached his hands into a pile of dead viscera and immersed them in blood, then turned on all the lights in the room and wrote on the wall in bloody finger strokes: “I am not Kathy’s Klown.”

Now that he knew it himself, he pondered the proper means of spreading the news to the world. He found the telephone and dialed “Operator,” requesting the number of the Homicide Division, Los Angeles Police Department. The operator gave it to him and he dialed, drumming bloody fingers on the nightstand as he listened to the dial tone. Finally, a gruff voice answered, “Robbery-Homicide, Officer Huttner speaking. May I help you?”

“Yes,” the man said, going on to explain that a very kind Detective Sergeant had rescued his dog. His daughter wanted to send the nice policeman a Valentine. She forgot his name, but remembered his badge number–1114. Would Officer Huttner get the word to the nice policeman?

Officer Huttner said “Shit” to himself and “Yes sir, what’s the message?” into the mouthpiece.

The man said, “Let the war begin,” then yanked the cord out of the wall and hurled the phone across the bloody motel room.

13

Lloyd drove to Parker Center at dawn, the possible ramifications of his outburst at the party banging in his head like cymbals gone mad. Whatever the upshot, from formal assault charges to departmental censure, he was going to be the object of an I.A.D. investigation that would result in his being immediately placed on a full-time specific assignment that would preclude investigating the killings. It was time to take his investigation underground, stay unavailable to the department in general and the I.A.D. witch hunters in particular, make his amends to Dutch later and get the killer, whatever the price to his career.

Lloyd ran the six flights of stairs up to his office. There was a note on his desk from the night officer downstairs: "Badge 1114. Let the war begin? Probably a crank—Huttner." I.A.D. psychological warfare, Lloyd decided; religious fanatics were never subtle.

Lloyd walked down the hall to the junior officers' lounge, hoping that there would be no night-watch dicks lingering there. He was going to be out on the street for a long stretch, and coffee alone wouldn't do it.

The lounge was deserted. Lloyd checked the undersides of the lunch tables, the classic "Long term surveillance" cops' hiding place. On his fourth try he was rewarded: a plastic baggie filled with Benzedrine tablets. He grabbed the whole bag. Thirty-one names on his stereo supply list *and* a one man stake-out of Whitey Haines's apartment. Better too much speed than too little.

The Parker Center corridors were coming alive with early arriving officers. Lloyd saw several unfamiliar men with crew-cuts and stern looks give him the eye, and immediately made them for I.A.D. detectives. Back in his office, he saw that the papers on his desk had been gone over. He was raising his fist to slam the desk when his phone rang.

"Lloyd Hopkins," he said into the mouthpiece. "Who's this?"

A distressed male voice answered. "Sergeant, this is Captain Magruder, West Hollywood Sheriffs. We've got two homicides out here, separate locations. We've got a set of prints, and I'm certain they match the ones in your teletype on the Niemeyer killing. Can you…"

Lloyd went cold. "I'll meet you at the station in twenty minutes," he said.

It took him twenty-five, running red lights and siren all the way. He found Magruder at the Information Desk, in uniform, poring over a stack of folders. Noting his name tag, Lloyd said, "Captain, I'm Lloyd Hopkins."

Magruder jumped back as if stung by a swarm of bees. "Thank God," he said, sticking out a trembling hand. "Let's go into my office."

They walked down a hallway crowded with uniformed officers talking in animated whispers. Magruder opened his office door and pointed Lloyd to a chair, then sat down behind his desk and said, "Two homicides. Both last night. One woman, one man. Murder scenes a mile apart. Both victims blown to hell with a .32 automatic. Identical spent casings at both scenes. The woman was dismembered, probably with a saw. Her arms and legs were found in the swimming pool of the adjoining apartment building. Her head was wrapped up in a newspaper and placed on the hood of a car directly outside her apartment house. A nice girl, twenty-eight years old. The second victim was a fruit hustler. Worked out of a motel a few blocks from here. The killer stuck the .32 in his mouth and up his ass and blew him to shit. The night manager, who lives directly below, didn't hear a thing. She called us when blood started dripping down through her ceiling."

Lloyd, stunned beyond thought at the news of the male victim, watched Magruder reach into his desk drawer and pull out a fifth of bourbon. He poured a large shot into a coffee cup and downed it in one gulp. "Jesus, Hopkins," he said. "Holy Jesus Christ."

Lloyd declined the bottle. "Where were the prints found?" he asked.

"The fruit hustler's motel room," Magruder said. "On the telephone and the nightstand and next to some writing in blood on the walls."

"No sexual assault?"

"No way to tell. The guy's rectum was obliterated. The M.E. told me he'd never seen—"

Lloyd raised a hand in interruption. "Do the papers know about it yet?"

"I think so…but we haven't released any information. What have you got on the Niemeyer killing? Any leads you can give my men?"

"I've got nothing!" Lloyd screamed. Lowering his voice, he said, "Tell me about the fruit hustler."

"His name was Lawrence Craigie, A.K.A. Larry "The Bird," A.K.A. "Birdman." Middle thirties, blond, muscles. I think he used to hustle off the street down near Plummer Park."

Lloyd's mind exploded, then coalesced around an incredible series of connections: Craigie, the witness at the 6/10/80 suicide; the "Bird" in Whitey Haines's bugged apartment. It *all* connected.

"You *think*?" Lloyd shouted. "What about his rap sheet?"

Magruder stammered, "We…We've run a make on him. All we got was unpaid traffic warrants. "We—"

"And this guy was a known male prostitute? With no record at *all*?"

"Well…maybe he paid a lawyer to get his misdemeanors wiped."

Lloyd shook his head. "What about your vice files? What do your vice officers say about him?"

Magruder poured himself another drink and knocked it back. "The Vice Squad doesn't come on duty until nightwatch," he said, "but I've already checked their files. There's nothing on Craigie."

Lloyd felt widening connections breathing down his neck. "The Tropicana Motel?" he asked.

"Yes." Magruder said. "How did you know?"

"Body removed? Premises sealed?"

"Yes."

"I'm going over. You've got officers stationed there?"

"Yes."

"Good. Call the motel and tell them I'm coming."

Lloyd stilled his mental tremors and ran out of Magruder's office. He drove the three blocks to the Tropicana Motel, expecting rare glimpses of hell and his own destiny.

He found an upholstered slaughterhouse, reeking of blood and shattered flesh. The young deputy who guarded the door contributed gory details: "You think this is bad, Sergeant? You shoulda been here earlier. The guy's brains were all over that dresser over there. The Coroner had to scoop them into a plastic bag. They couldn't even mark the outline of the stiff with chalk, they had to use tape. Jesus."

Lloyd walked over to the dresser. The light blue carpet next to it was still sopping wet with blood. In the middle of the dark red expanse was the metallic tape outline of a spread-eagled dead man. He ran his eyes over the rest of the room: a large bed with a purple velour coverlet, muscle boy statuettes, a cardboard box filled with chains, whips, and dildos.

Surveying the room again, Lloyd noticed that a large part of the wall above the bed had been covered with brown wrapping paper. He called to the deputy, "What's with this paper on the wall?"

The deputy said, "Oh, I forgot to tell you. There's some writing underneath. In blood. The dicks covered it up so the TV and newspaper guys wouldn't see it. They think maybe it's a clue."

Lloyd grabbed a corner of the wrapping paper and pulled it free. "I Am Not Kathy's Klown" stared down at him in bold, blood-formed letters. For one brief second, his computer jammed, whirled, and screeched. Then all the fuses blew out and the words blurred and metamorphosed into noise, followed by perfect silence.

Kathleen McCarthy and her court–"We had a following of equally bookish, lonely boys. Kathy's Klown's they were called." Dead women who resembled wholesome early 'sixties high school girls. A dead fruit hustler and his perverse, corrupt cop buddy and…and…

Lloyd felt the young deputy tugging at his sleeve. His silence became pure Satanic noise. He grabbed the deputy by the shoulders and pushed him into the wall. "Tell me about Haines," he whispered.

The young officer quaked and stammered out, "Wh–What?"

"Deputy Haines," Lloyd repeated slowly. "Tell me about him."

"Whitey Haines? He's a loner. He sticks to himself. I've heard talk that he takes dope. Th–thats all I know."

Lloyd released the deputy's shoulders. "Don't look so scared, son," he said.

The deputy swallowed and straightened his tie. "I'm not scared," he said.

"Good. You keep quiet about our conversation."

"Yes…Sir."

The telephone rang. The deputy picked it up, then handed it to Lloyd. "Sergeant, this is Officer Nagler from S.I.D.," a frenzied voice blurted out. "I've been trying to get you for hours. The switchboard at the Center tol—"

Lloyd cut him off. "What *is* it, Nagler?"

"Sergeant, it's a match. The index and pinky on the Niemeyer teletype match perfectly with the index and pinky I got off the tape recorder."

Lloyd dropped the receiver and walked out onto the balcony. He looked down at the parking lot filled with rubber-necking ghouls and sad curiosity seekers, then shifted his gaze to the street scene. Everything he saw was as awesome as a baby's first glimpse of life out of the womb and into the breach.

14

Propelled by a whirlwind or interlocking fates, Lloyd drove to Kathleen

McCarthy's house. There was a note on the front door: "Buying books–Will return at noon–U.P.S. leave packages on steps."

Lloyd snapped the lock on the door with a short, flat kick. The door burst open, and he closed it behind him and headed straight for the bedroom. He went through the dresser first; intimate apparel, scented candles, and a bag of marijuana were revealed. He checked the walk-in closet. Boxes of books and record albums covered every inch of rack and floor space. There was a shelf at the back, partially hidden by an ironing board and rolled up carpet. Lloyd ran a hand across it and hit smoothly finished wood that shifted at his touch. He reached up with both hands and pulled the object out. It was a large box of beautifully varnished oak with a brass hinged top. It was heavy; Lloyd strained as he lowered it first to his shoulders, then to the bedroom floor.

He pulled the box over to the bed and knelt beside it, wedging the ornamental gold lock off with his handcuff holder.

The box contained narrow, gold-bordered picture frames, arranged lengthwise on their edges. Lloyd pulled one out. Encased behind glass were shriveled red rose petals pressed on parchment. There was minute writing beneath the petals. He carried the frame over to a floor lamp and switched on the light and squinted to read it. Under the first petal on the left was written:

"12/13/68: Does he know that I broke up with Fritz? Does he hate me for my short interludes? Was he that tall man browsing through the Farmer's Market? Does he know how much I need him?"

Lloyd followed the floral tributes across the picture frame and across time: "11/24/69: O' dearest, can you read my mind? Do you know how I return your homage in my diary? How it is all for you? How I would forever eschew fame to continue the growth our anonymous rapport gives me?" "2/15/71: I write this in the nude, darling, as I know you pick the flowers you send me. Do you feel my telepathic poetry? It comes from my *body.*"

Lloyd put the frame down, knowing something was wrong–he should be more moved by Kathleen's words. He stood very still, knowing that if he forced it, it would never come. He closed his eyes to increase the depth of the silence, and then…

Even as it hit him, he started to shake his head in denial. It couldn't be, it was too incredible.

Lloyd emptied the oak box onto the bed. One by one, he held the picture frames to the light and read the dates beneath the withered petals. The dates corresponded with the murder dates of the women in his computer printouts, either exact matches or with a variance factor of two days at the most. But there were more than sixteen rose petals–there were twenty-three, going back to the summer of 1964.

Lloyd recalled Kathleen's words at the power plant. "The first time there was a poem, the second time just the flowers. And they kept coming for over eighteen years." He went through the glass cases again. The oldest rose fragments were dated 6/10/64–over eighteen years ago. The next oldest were dated 8/29/67, over three years later. What had the monster been doing during those three years? How many more had he killed, and *Why? Why? Why?*

Lloyd read over Kathleen's words and recalled the dead faces that matched them. Jeanette Willkie, D.O.D. 4/15/73, caustic poisoning; flowers dated

4/16/73, “Darling, have you kept yourself chaste for me? I have now been celibate four months for you.” Mary Wardell, D.O.D. 1/6/74, strangled to death; flowers dated 1/8/74, “Thank you for my flowers, dearest. Did you see me last night by my window? I was nude for you.” And on and on through Julia Niemeyer, D.O.D. 1/2/83, heroin overdose, butchered after death; flowers dated 1/3/83, “My tears stain this parchment, my love. I need you inside me so much.”

Lloyd sat down on the bed, willing his raging mind silent. Innocent, romantic Kathleen, a mass murderer’s obsessive love object. “*We had a following of equally lonely, bookish boys*.”

Lloyd’s mind jerked his body upright. Yearbooks–the *Marshall Baristonian.* He tore through drawers, shelves, closets and bookcases until he found them, wedged behind a disused TV set. 1962, 1963 and 1964; pastel naugahyde bound. He flipped through ’62 and ’63–no Kathleen, Kathy Kourt, or Kathy Klowns.

He was halfway through 1964 when he hit paydirt–Delbert “Whitey” Haines, caught for posterity giving the raspberry sign. On the same page was a skinny, acne-faced boy named Lawrence “Birdman” Craigie, wittily denoted as “Bad news for L.B.J.’s Great Society.” Lloyd flipped through a dozen more pages of blasted innocence before he found the Kathy Kourt: four plain-pretty girls in tweed skirts and cardigan sweaters looking up in awe at a similarly attired, heartbreakingly young Kathleen McCarthy. When he saw what it all meant, Lloyd started to tremble. The dead women were all variations of the girls in Kathy’s Kourt. The same wholesome features, the same fatuous innocence, the same incipient acceptance of defeat.

Lloyd’s tremors became full-out body shudders. Whispering “rabbit down the hole,” he dug the list of tape recorder purchasers from his pocket and turned to the index of the 1964 *Baristonian.* Seconds later the final connection sprung to life: Verplanck, Theodore J., member of the Marshall High School Class of 1964; Verplanck, Theodore, 1976 purchaser of a Watanabe A.F.Z. 999 recorder.

Lloyd studied the photograph of the genius killer as a smiling teenager. Intelligence formed the face; a terrible arrogance rendered the smile ice-cold. Theodore Verplanck had looked like a boy who had lived within himself, who had created his own world and armed it to the teeth with highly developed adolescent conceits. Shuddering, Lloyd pictured the coldness in the young eyes magnified by almost twenty years of murder. The thought filled him with awe.

Lloyd found the phone and dialed the California Department of Motor Vehicles Office in Sacramento, requesting a complete make on Theodore J. Verplanck. It took the switchboard operator five minutes to come back with the information: Theodore John Verplanck, D.O.B. 4/21/46, Los Angeles. Brown hair, blue eyes. 6’, 155 lbs. No criminal record, no outstanding traffic warrants, no record of traffic violations. Two vehicles: 1978 Dodge Fiesta Van, P-O-E-T, 1980 Datsun 280Z, DLX-191. Address, res. and bus.—Teddy’s Silverlake Camera, 1893 North Alvarado, L.A. 90048. (213) 663–2819.

Lloyd slammed down the receiver and finished writing the information in his notepad. His awe moved into a sense of irony: The poet-killer still lived in the old neighborhood. Taking a deep breath, he dialed 663–2819. After three rings, a recorded message came on. “Hi, this is Teddy Verplanck, welcoming your call to Teddy’s Silverlake Camera. I’m out right now, but if you’d like to talk about camera supplies, photo-finishing or my super-high-quality portrait photography and candid group shootings, leave a message at the beep. Bye!"

After hanging up, Lloyd sat down on the bed, savoring the killer's voice, then clearing his mind for the final decision: Take Verplanck himself or call Parker Center and request a back-up team. He wavered for long minutes, then dialed his private office number. If he let it ring long enough, someone would pick it up and he could get a fix on what trustworthy officers were available.

The phone was picked up on the first ring. Lloyd grimaced. Something was wrong; he hadn't plugged in his answering machine. An unfamiliar voice came on the line. "This is Lieutenant Whelan, Internal Affairs. Sergeant Hopkins, this message was recorded to inform you that you are suspended from duty pending an I.A.D. investigation. Your regular office line is open. Call in and an I.A.D. officer will arrange for your initial interview. You may have an attorney present and you will receive full pay until our investigation is settled."

Lloyd dropped the phone to the bed. So it ends, he thought. The final decision: They couldn't and wouldn't believe him, so they had to silence him. The final irony: They didn't love him the way he had loved them. The fulfillment of his Irish Protestant ethos would cost him his badge.

Noticing a small back yard through the bedroom window, Lloyd walked outside. Rows of daisies growing out of loosely packed dirt and a makeshift clothesline greeted him. He knelt down and plucked a daisy, then smelled it and ground it under his heel. Teddy Verplanck would probably not give up without a fight. He would have to kill him, which would mean never knowing *why.* Some sort of explanation from Whitey Haines had to be his first step, and if Verplanck took it into his mind to kill or flee while he was drumming a confession out of Haines he—

The sound of weeping interrupted Lloyd's thoughts. He walked back into the bedroom. Kathleen was standing over her bed, replacing the glass encased flowers in the oakwood box. She brushed tears out of her eyes as she worked, not even noticing his presence. Lloyd stared at her face; it was the most grief-stricken visage he had ever seen.

He walked to her side. Kathleen shrieked when his shadow eclipsed her. Her hands flew to her face and she started to back away; then recognition hit and she threw herself into Lloyd's arms. "There was a burglar," she whimpered. "He wanted to hurt my special things."

Lloyd held Kathleen tightly; it felt like grasping the loose ends of a trance. He rocked her head back and forth until she murmured, "My *Baristonians,"* and shook herself free of his embrace and reached for the yearbooks scattered on the floor. Her desperate ruffling of pages angered Lloyd, and he said, "You could have gotten duplicates. It wouldn't have been much trouble. But you're going to have to rid yourself of them. They're killing you. Can't you see that?"

Kathleen came all the way out of her trance. "What are you talking about?" she said, looking up at Lloyd. "Are…Are you the one who broke in and hurt my things? My flowers? Are you?" Lloyd reached for her hands, but she yanked them away. "Tell me, goddamnit!"

"Yes," Lloyd said.

Kathleen looked at her yearbooks, then back at Lloyd. "You animal," she hissed. "You want to hurt me through my precious things." She clenched her hands into fists and hurled them at him. Lloyd let the ineffectual blows glance off his chest and shoulders. When she saw that she was inflicting no damage, Kathleen grabbed a brick bookend and flung it at his head.

The edge caught Lloyd's neck. Kathleen gasped and recoiled from the act. Lloyd wiped off a trickle of blood and held it up for her to see. "I'm proud of you," he said. "Do you want to be with me?"

Kathleen looked into his eyes and saw madness and power and harrowing need. Not knowing what to say, she took his hand. He cradled her to him and closed the door and turned off the light.

They undressed in the semidarkness. Kathleen kept her back to Lloyd. She pulled off her dress and stepped out of her pantyhose, afraid that another look at his eyes would prevent her from consummating this rite of passage. When they were nude they fell onto the bed and into each other's arms. They embraced fiercely, joined at odd places, her chin locked in his breastbone, his feet twisted into her ankles, her wrists bearing into his bloody neck. Soon they were coiled into one force and the pressure of their interlocking limbs forced them to separate as they began to go numb and lightheaded. In perfect synchronization they created a space between themselves, offering the most tentative of overtures to close that gap, a stroking of arms and shoulder blades and stomachs; caresses so light that soon they ceased to touch flesh and the space between them became the object of their love.

Lloyd began to see pure white light in the space, growing in and around and out of Kathleen. He drifted into the permutations of that light, and all the forms that came to him spoke of joy and kindness. He was still adrift when he felt Kathleen's hand between his legs, urging him to grow hard and fill the light-hallowed void between their bodies. Brief panic set in, but when she whispered, "Please, I *need* you," he followed her lead and violated the light and entered her and moved inside her until the light dissipated and they coiled and peaked together and he knew that it was blood he expelled; and then awful noise wrenched him from her, and she said very softly as he twisted into the bedcovers, "Hush, darling. Hush. It's just the stereo next door. It's not *here.* I'm *here.*"

Lloyd dug into the pillows until he found silence. He felt Kathleen's hands stroking his back and turned around to face her. Her head was surrounded by floating amber halos. He reached up and stroked her hair, and the halos scattered into light. He watched them disappear and said, "I… I think I came blood."

Kathleen laughed. "No, it's just my period. Do you mind?"

Unconvinced, Lloyd said, "No," and shifted over to the middle of the bed. He took a quick inventory of his body, touching odd parts of himself, probing for wounds and disconnected tissue. Finding nothing but Kathleen's internal flow, he said, "I guess I'm all right. I think I am."

Kathleen laughed. "You *think* you are? Well, I'm wonderful. Because now I know that after all these years it was you. Eighteen long years, and now I know. Oh, darling!" She bent down and kissed his chest, running her ringers over his ribs, counting them.

When her hands dropped to his groin, Lloyd pushed her away. "I'm not your dream lover," he said, "but I know who he is. He's the murderer, Kathleen. I'm certain that he kills out of some twisted kind of love for you. He's killed twenty-odd women, going back to the middle 60s. Young women who looked like the girls in your court. He sends you flowers after each murder. I know it sounds incredible, but it's true."

Kathleen heard every word, nodding along in cadence. When Lloyd finished she reached over and switched on the lamp next to the bed. She saw that he was perfectly serious and therefore perfectly insane, terrified at violating his anonymity after close to two decades of courtship.

She decided to bring him out very slowly, as a mother would a brilliant but disturbed child. She put her head on his chest and pretended to need comfort while her mind ran in circles, looking for a wedge to break through his fear and give her access to his innermost heart. She thought of opposites: Yin-Yang, dark-light, truth-illusion. After a moment, she hit it: fantasy-reality. He must think that I believe his story, and so *I* must barter for his *real* story, the story that will let me break through fantasy and make our consummation real. He hates and fears music. If I am going to be his music, *I must find out why.*

Lloyd reached an arm over and drew Kathleen closer.

"Are you sad?" he asked. "Are you sad that it had to end this way? Are you frightened?"

Kathleen nuzzled into his chest. "No, I feel safe."

"Because of me?"

"Yes."

"That's because you have a real lover now."

He stroked her hair absently. "We have to talk about this," he said. "We have to get Marshall High circa '64 out of the way before we can be together. I need to get a handle on the killer before I take him. I need to learn all I can about him, to get this thing straight in my mind before I act. Do you understand?"

Kathleen nodded, shielding her eyes. "I understand," she said. "You want me to dig into my past for you. That way you can solve your puzzle and we can be lovers. Right?"

Lloyd smiled. "Right."

"But my past hurts, darling. It hurts to rehash it. Especially when you're such a puzzle yourself."

"I'll be less of a puzzle as we go on."

Angered at the condescension, Kathleen raised her head. "No, that's not true. I need to *know* you, don't you understand? No one knows you. But I *have* to."

"Look, sweetheart…"

Kathleen batted away his placating hand. "I need to know what happened to you," she said. "I need to know why you're afraid of music."

Lloyd began to tremble, and Kathleen saw his pale grey eyes turn inward and fill with terror. She took his hand. "Tell me," she said.

Lloyd's mind moved backward in time, collating moments of joy to counterbalance the horror story that only he and his mother and brother knew. He gained strength with each recollection, and when his mental time machine came to a halt in the spring of 1950 he knew that he had the courage to tell his story. Taking a deep breath, he began.

"In 1950, around my eighth birthday, my maternal grandfather came to Los Angeles to die. He was Irish; a Presbyterian minister. He was a widower with no family except my mother, and he wanted to be with her while the cancer ate him up. He moved in with us in April, and he brought everything he owned with him. Most of the stuff was junk; rock collections, religious knick-knacks, stuffed animal heads, that kind of thing; but he also brought a fabulous collection of antique furniture–desks, dressers, wardrobes–all made of rosewood so well varnished that you could see your reflection just as in a mirror. Grandfather was a bitter, hateful man; a rabid anti-Catholic. He was also a brilliant story-teller. He used to take my brother Tom and me upstairs and tell us stories of the Irish Revolution and how the noble Black and Tans wiped out the Catholic rabble. I liked the stories, but I was smart enough to know that Grandfather was twisted with hate and that I shouldn't take what he said completely to heart. But it was different with Tom. He was six years older than me and already twisted with hate himself. He took Grandfather seriously, and the stories gave his hatred a form; he started aping Grandfather's broadsides against Catholics and Jews.

"Tom was fourteen then, and he didn't have a friend in the world. He used to make me play with him. He was bigger than me, so I had to go along with it or he'd beat me up. Dad was an electrician. He was obsessed with television. It was new, and he thought it was God's greatest gift to mankind. He had a workshop in our back yard. It was crammed to the rafters with TV sets and radios. He spent hours and hours out there, mixing and matching tubes and running electrical relays. He never watched TV for enjoyment; he was obsessed with it as an electrician. Tom loved TV, though. He believed everything he saw on it, and everything he heard on the old radio serials. But he hated being alone while he watched and listened. He didn't have any friends, so he used to make me sit with him out in the workshop, watching *Hopalong Cassidy,* and *Martin Kane, Private Detective* and all the rest. I hated it; I wanted to be outside playing with my dog or reading. Sometimes I tried to escape, and Tom would tie me up and make me watch. He… He…"

Lloyd faltered, and Kathleen watched his eyes shift in and out of focus, as if uncertain of what time period they were viewing. She put a gentle hand on his knee and said, "Go on, *please.*"

Lloyd drew in another breath of fond memories.

"Grandfather's condition got worse. He started coughing up blood. I couldn't stand seeing it, so I took to running away, ditching school and hiding out for days at a time. I was befriended by an old derelict who lived in a tent on a vacant lot near the Silverlake Power Plant. His name was Dave. He was shellshocked from the First World War, and the neighborhood merchants sort of looked after him, giving him stale bread and dented cans of beans and soup that they couldn't sell. Everyone thought Dave was retarded, but he wasn't; he slipped in and out of lucidity. I liked him; he was quiet, and he let me read in his tent when I ran away."

Lloyd hesitated, then plunged ahead, his voice taking on a resonance unlike anything Kathleen had ever heard.

"My parents decided to take Grandfather to Lake Arrowhead for Christmas. A last family outing before he died. On the day we were to leave I had a fight with Tom. He wanted me to watch television with him. I resisted, and he beat me up and tied me to a chair in Dad's workshop. He even taped my mouth shut. When it came time to leave for the lake, Tom left me there. I could hear him in the back yard telling Mother and Dad that I had run away. They believed him and left, leaving me alone in the shack. There was no way I could move a muscle or make a sound. I was there for a day or so, cramped up in awful pain, when I heard someone trying to break into the shack. I was scared at first, but then the door opened, and it was Dave. But he didn't rescue me. He turned on every TV set and radio in the shack and put a knife to my throat and made me touch him and eat him. He burned me with tube testers and hooked up live wires and stuck them up my ass. Then he raped me and hit me and burned me again and again, with the TVs and radios going full blast the whole time. After two days of hurting me, he left. He never turned off the noise. It grew and grew and grew and grew…Finally my family came home. Mother came running into the shack. She took the tape off my mouth and untied me and held me and asked me what happened. But I couldn't talk. I had screamed silently for so long that my vocal cords had shredded. Mother made me write down what had happened. After I did it, she said, 'Tell no one of this. I will take care of everything.'

"Mother called a doctor. He came over and cleansed my wounds and sedated me. I woke up in my bed much later. I heard Tom screaming from his bedroom. I snuck over. Mother was lashing him with a brass studded belt. I heard Dad demanding to know what was happening and Mother telling him to shut up. I snuck downstairs. About an hour later, Mother left the house on foot. I followed her from a safe distance. She walked all the way up to the Silverlake Power Plant. She went straight up to Dave's tent. He was sitting on the ground reading a comic book. Mother took a gun from her purse and shot him six times in the head, then walked away. When I saw what she had done, I ran to her, and she held me and walked me back home. She took me to bed with her that night and gave me her breasts, and she taught me how to speak again when my voice returned and she nurtured me with many stories. After Grandfather died she would take me up to the attic and we would talk, surrounded by antiquity."

Rigid with pity and terror, tears streaming down her face, Kathleen breathed out: "And?"

"And," Lloyd said, "my mother gave me the Irish Protestant ethos and made me promise to protect innocence and seek courage. She told me stories and made me strong again. She's mute now, she had a stroke years ago and can't speak; so I talk to *her.* She can't respond, but I know she understands. And I seek courage and protect innocence. I killed a man in the Watts Riot. He was evil. I hunted him down and killed him. No one ever suspected Mother of killing Dave, no one ever suspected me of killing Richard Beller and if I have to kill him, no one will suspect me of ridding the world of Teddy Verplanck."

Kathleen went shock-still at the words "Teddy Verplanck." Caught in a benign web of her own memories, she said, "Teddy Verplanck? I knew him in high school. He was a weak, ineffectual boy. A very kind boy. He—"

Lloyd waved her quiet. "He's your dream lover. He was one of the Kathy Klowns back in high school; you just never knew it. Two of your other classmates are involved in the killings. A man named Delbert Haines and a man who was killed last night–Lawrence Craigie. I discovered a bugging device–a tape recorder, at Haines's apartment–that's what put me on to Verplanck. Now listen to me…Teddy has killed over twenty women. What I need from you is information on him. I need your insights, your…"

Kathleen leaped from the bed. "*You* are insane," she said softly. "After all these years you have to construct this policeman's fantasy to protect yourself? After all these years, you—"

"I'm not your dream lover, Kathleen. I'm a police officer. I have a duty to perform."

Kathleen shook her head frantically. "I'll *make* you prove it. I still have the poem from 1964. I'll make you copy it, then we'll compare handwritings."

She ran nude into the front room. Lloyd heard her murmuring to herself, and suddenly knew that she could never accept reality. He got up and pulled on his clothes, noting that in the aftermath of confession his sweat-drenched body was both relaxed and incandescently alive. Kathleen returned a moment later, holding a faded business card. She handed it to Lloyd. He read:

'6/10/64.

My love for you
    now etched in blood;
My tears caked in
    resolute passion;
Hatred spent on me
    will
    metamorphose into
        love
    Clandestinely you
        will be mine.'

Lloyd handed the card back. "Teddy, you poor, twisted bastard." He bent and kissed Kathleen's cheek. "I have to go," he said, "but I'll be back when this is settled."

Kathleen watched him walk out the door, closing it on her entire past and all her recent hopes for the future. She picked up the phone and dialed Information, securing two telephone numbers. She dialed the first one breathlessly, and when a male voice came on the line, said, "Captain Peltz?"

"Yes."

"Captain, this is Kathleen McCarthy. Remember me? I met you at your party last night?"

"Sure, Lloyd's friend. How are you, Miss McCarthy?"

"I…I…I think Lloyd is crazy, Captain. He told me he killed a man in the Watts Riot, and that his mother killed a man and that—"

Dutch cut in, "Miss McCarthy, please be calm. Lloyd is in a bit of a crisis within the department, and I'm sure he's behaving erratically."

"But you don't understand! He's talking about killing people!"

Peltz laughed. "Policemen talk about such things. Please have him call me. Tell him it's important. And don't worry."

When she heard the receiver click, Kathleen steeled herself for the next call, then dialed. After six rings a soft tenor voice said: "Teddy's Silverlake Camera, may I help you?"

"Y…Yes…Is this Teddy Verplanck?"

"Yes, it is."

“Thank God! Look, you probably don’t remember me, but my name is Kathleen McCarthy, and I…”

The soft voice went softer. “I remember you well.”

“Good…Look, you may not believe this, but there’s a crazy policeman out to get you. I—”

The soft voice interrupted. “Who is he?”

“His name is Lloyd Hopkins. He’s about forty, and very big and tall. He drives a tan unmarked police car. He wants to hurt you.”

The soft voice said, “I know that. But I won’t let him. No one can hurt me. Thank you, Kathleen. I remember you very fondly. Goodbye.”

“G…Goodbye.”

Kathleen put down the phone and sat on the bed, surprised to find that she was still nude. She walked into the bathroom and stared at her body in the full-length mirror. It looked the same, but she knew that somehow it had changed and would never be completely hers again.

15

Running red lights and using his siren, Lloyd drove downtown. He left the car in an alley and ran the four blocks to Parker Center, taking a service elevator to the third floor S.I.D. offices, sending up silent prayers that Artie Cranfield would be the only data analyst on duty. Opening a door marked “Data Indentification,” he saw his prayers rewarded–Cranfield was alone in his office, hunched over a microscope.

The technician looked up when Lloyd closed the door behind him. “You’re in trouble, Lloyd,” he said. “Two I.A.D. bulls were here this morning. They said you were talking about becoming a TV star. They wanted to know if you had processed any evidence lately.”

“What did you tell them?” Lloyd asked.

Artie laughed. “That you still owe me ten scoots on last year’s World Series pool. It’s true, you know.”

Lloyd forced himself to laugh back. “I can do better than that. How’d you like your very own Watanabe A.F.Z. 999?”

“*What?*”

“You heard me. Nagler from Fingerprints has it. He’s at his father’s house in San Berdoo. Call the San Berdoo P.D., they’ll give you the phone number.”

“What do you *want,* Lloyd?”

“I want you to outfit me with a body wire, and I want six .38 caliber blank slugs.”

Artie’s face darkened. “When, Lloyd?” he asked.

“Right now.” Lloyd said.

The outfitting took half an hour. When he was satisfied with the concealment and feedback check, Artie said, “You look scared, Lloyd.”

This time Lloyd’s laughter was genuine. “I am scared.” he said.

Lloyd drove to West Hollywood. The body recorder constricted his chest, and each of his raging heartbeats felt like it was bringing him closer to a short-circuit suffocation.

There were no lights on in Whitey Haines's apartment. Lloyd checked his watch as he picked the lock with a credit card. 5:10. Daywatch ended at 5:00, and if Haines came home directly after getting off duty, he should arrive within half an hour.

The apartment was unchanged since his previous entry. Lloyd chased three Benzedrine tablets with sink water and stationed himself beside the door, accustoming himself to the darkness. After a few minutes the speed kicked in and went straight for his head, obliterating the smothering feeling in his chest. If it didn't take him too high, he would have enough juice for days of manhunting.

Lloyd's calm deepened, then shattered when he heard a key inserted into the lock. The door swung open a split second later, and blinding light caused him to reach up to shield his eyes. Before he could move, a flat handed karate chop glanced off his neck, long fingernails gouging his collarbone. Lloyd dropped to his knees as Whitey Haines shrieked and swung his billy club at his head. The club smashed into the wall and stuck, and as Haines tried to jerk it free Lloyd rolled onto his back and kicked out with both feet at Haines's groin, catching him full force and knocking him to the floor.

Haines retched for breath and went for his holstered revolver, wrenching it free just as Lloyd managed to get to his feet. He pointed the gun upward as Lloyd sidestepped, yanked the billy club out of the wall, and slammed it into his chest. Haines screamed and dropped the gun. Lloyd kicked it out of the way and drew his own .38 from his waistband. He leveled it at Haines's nose and gasped, "On your feet. Up against the wall and walk it back. Do it real slow."

Haines drew himself slowly upright, massaging his chest, then spread-eagling against the wall, his hands above his head. Lloyd nudged the .38 on the floor over to where he could pick it up without relinquishing his bead on him. When the gun was safely in his waistband he ran his free hand over Haines's uniformed body. He found what he was looking for in the lining of his Eisenhower jacket–a plain manila folder stuffed with paper, Craigie, Lawrence D., A.K.A. Bird, Birdy, Birdman, 1/29/46, typed on the front.

Haines started to blubber as he sensed Lloyd's eyes boring into the folder. "I… I…I didn't kill him. It…It…was probably some crazy faggot. You gotta listen to me. You got—"

Lloyd kicked Haines's legs out from under him. Haines crashed to the floor and stifled a scream. Lloyd squatted beside him and said, "Don't fuck with me, Haines. I'll eat you up. I want you to sit on your couch while I do some reading. Then we're going to talk about the good old days in Silverlake. I'm a Silverlake homeboy myself, and I know you're going to love walking down memory lane with me. On your feet."

Haines stumbled over to his naugahyde sofa and sat down, clenching and unclenching his fists and staring at the gleaming toes of his boots. Lloyd took a chair across from him, the manila folder in one hand, his .38 in the other. With one eye on Haines, he read through the pages of the Vice files.

The notations went back ten years. In the early 70s, Lawrence Craigie had been arrested regularly for soliciting homosexual acts and had been frequently questioned when found loitering in the vicinity of public restrooms. Those early reports carried the signatures of the entire eight-man Vice Squad. After 1976, all entries pertaining to Lawrence Craigie were filed by Deputy Delbert W. Haines, #408. The reports were ridiculously repetitive, and dubious question marks covered the later ones. When he saw the report dated 6/29/78, Lloyd laughed aloud. "Today I employed Lawrence Craigie as my vice finger man. I have told the men on the squad not to bust him. He is a good snitch. Respectfully–Delbert W. Haines, #408."

Lloyd laughed; booming stage laughter to cover the sound of his pushing the activator button on his body recorder. When he felt mild electric tendrils encircle his chest, he said, "An L.A. County Deputy Sheriff running dope and male prostitutes, getting kickbacks from fruit hustlers all over Boy's Town. What are you going to do with the Birdman dead? You'll have to find yourself a new sewer, and when the Sheriffs dicks link you to Craigie you'll have to find a new career."

Whitey Haines stared at his feet. "I'm clean all the way down the line," he said. "I don't know what the fuck you're talking about. I don't know nothing about Craigie's murder or any of that other shit. This is some kind of outlaw shit you're pulling on me or you would have brought another cop with you. You're a punk cop who likes to hassle other cops. I had your number the other day when you asked me about them suicides I reported. You wanna bust me for ripping off that vice folder, then bust on, homeboy, 'cause that's all you got on me."

Lloyd leaned forward. "Look at me, Haines. Look at me real close."

Haines took his eyes from the floor. Lloyd looked into them and said, "Tonight you pay your dues! One way or the other you are going to answer my questions."

"Go fuck yourself," Whitey Haines said.

Lloyd smiled, then held up his .38 snub nose and opened the chamber. He emptied five of the six rounds into his hand, then snapped the chamber shut and spun it. He cocked the hammer and placed the barrel on Haines's nose. "Teddy Verplanck." he said.

Whitey Haines's florid face went pale. His clenched hands mashed together so hard that Lloyd could hear tendons cracking. A network of veins pulsated in his neck, jerking his head away from the gun barrel. A thick layer of dry spittle coated his lips as he stammered, "J–just–a g–guy from high school."

Lloyd shook his head. "Not good enough, Whitey. Verplanck is a mass murderer. He killed Craigie and God knows how many women. He sends your old classmate Kathy McCarthy flowers each time he kills. He had your apartment bugged; that's how I connected you to Craigie. Teddy Verplanck was obsessed with you, and you're going to tell me why."

Haines fingered the badge pinned above his heart. "I–I don't know nothing."

Lloyd spun the chamber again. "You've got five chances. Whitey."

"You haven't got the guts," Haines whispered hoarsely.

Lloyd aimed between Haines's eyes and squeezed the trigger. The hammer clicked on an empty chamber. Haines started to dry sob. His twitching hands grabbed at the sofa and ripped out hunks of naugahyde and foam.

"Four chances," Lloyd said. "I'll give you a little help. Verplanck was in love with Kathy McCarthy. He was a Kathy Klown. Remember the Kathy Kourt and the Kathy Klowns? Does the date June 10th, 1964 mean anything to you? That was the day that Verplanck first contacted Kathy McCarthy. He sent her a poem about blood and tears and hatred being spent on him. You and Verplanck and the Birdman were all at Marshall High then. Did you and Craigie hurt Verplanck, Haines? Did you hate him and bleed him and—"

"No! No! No!" Haines screamed, wrapping his arms a-round himself and banging his head on the couch. "No! No!"

Lloyd stood up. He looked at Haines and felt the last piece of the puzzle slip into place, fusing Christmas of 1950 and a score of June lOths into a door that unlocked the inner sanctum of hell. He put his gun to Haines's head and pulled the trigger two times. At the first hammer click Haines shrieked; at the second he clasped his hands and began murmuring prayers. Lloyd knelt beside him. "It's over, Whitey. For you, for Teddy, maybe even for me. Tell me why you and Craigie raped him."

Lloyd listened to Haines's prayers wind down, catching the tail end of the rosary in Latin. When he finished, Haines smoothed his sweat drenched khaki shirt and adjusted his badge. His voice was perfectly calm as he said, "I always figured that someone knew, that God would tell someone to hurt me for it. I've been seeing priests in my dreams for years. I always figured God would tell a priest to get me. I never figured he'd send a cop."

Lloyd sat down facing Haines, watching his features soften in his prelude to confession.

"Teddy Verplanck was weird," Whitey Haines said. "He didn't fit in and he didn't care. He wasn't a sosh and he wasn't an athlete and he wasn't a bad ass. He wasn't a loner, he was just different. He didn't have to prove himself by doing crazy shit, he just walked around school in his fruity ivy league clothes, and every time he looked at you you knew he thought you were scum. He printed up this poetry newspaper and stuffed it into every locker on the fucking campus. He made fun of me and Birdy and the Surfers and Vatos and nobody would futk with him because he had this weird kind of juice, like he could read your mind, and if you fucked with him he'd put it in his newspaper and everyone would know.

"There were these love poems that he used to put in his paper. My sister was real smart; she figured out all the big words and the symbolic shit and told me that the poems were ripoffs of the great poets and dedicated to that snooty bitch Kathleen McCarthy. Sis sat next to her in Home Ec, she told me that the McCarthy cunt lived in this fantasy world where she thought that half the guys at Marshall had the hots for her and the other stuck-up bitches she hung out with. 'Cathy's Clown' was a big hit song then, and the McCarthy bitch told Sis that she had a hundred personal 'Cathy Clowns.' But Verplanck was the only clown, and he was afraid to hit up on McCarthy and she didn't even know he had the hots for her.

"Then Verplanck printed these poems attacking the Bird and me. People started giving us the fisheye in the quad. I was cracking jokes when Kennedy got knocked off, and Verplanck stared me down. It was like he was ripping off my juice for himself. I waited for a long time, until just before graduation in '64. Then I figured it out. I had my sister write this fake note from Kathy McCarthy to Verplanck, telling him to meet her in the bell tower room after school. Birdy and I were there. We were only going to hurt him. We kicked his ass good, but even when he was all beat up he still had more juice than we did. That's why I did it.

Birdy just followed me like he always did."

Haines hesitated. Lloyd watched him grope for words to conclude his story. When nothing came, he said, "Do you feel shame, Haines? Pity? Do you feel anything?"

Whitey Haines pulled his features into a rock hard mask that brooked no mercy. "I'm glad I told you," he said, "but I don't think I feel nothing. I feel bad about the Birdman, but he was born to die freaky. I've been revenging myself all my life. I was born to live hard. Varplanck was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. He got what he paid for. I say tough shit. I say I've paid my dues all the way down the line. I say fuck 'em all and save six for the pallbearers." It was the most eloquent moment of his life. Haines looked at Lloyd and said, "Well, Sergeant. What now?"

"You have no right to be a policeman," Lloyd said, opening his shirt and showing Haines the tape recorder hook up. "You deserve to die, but I'm not equipped for cold-blooded killing. This tape will be on Captain Magruder's desk in the morning. You'll be through as a Deputy Sheriff."

Haines breathed out slowly as his sentence was passed. "What are you going to do with Verplanck?" he asked.

Lloyd smiled. "Save him or kill him. Whatever it takes."

Haines smiled back. "Right on, homeboy. Right on."

Lloyd took out a handkerchief and wiped the door knob, the arms of the chair and the grips of Haines's service revolver. "It'll only take a second, Whitey," he said.

Haines nodded. "I know."

"You won't feel much."

"I know."

Lloyd walked to the door. Haines said, "Those were blanks in your gun, right?" Lloyd raised a hand in farewell. It felt like a giving of absolution. "Yeah. Take care, homeboy."

When the door closed, Whitey Haines walked into the bedroom and unlocked his gunrack. He reached up and took out his favorite possession–a sawed off .10 gauge double barrelled shotgun, the weapon he was saving for the close quarters apocalypse that he knew would one day come his way. After slipping shells into the chambers, Whitey let his mind drift back to Marshall High and the good old days. When the memories started to hurt he jammed the barrels into his mouth and tripped both triggers.

Lloyd was unlocking his car when he heard the explosion. He sent up a plea for mercy and drove to Silverlake.

16

Teddy Verplanck was parked across the street from his camera store sanctuary, waiting for the arrival of a tan unmarked police car. Within minutes of the incredible phone call he had thrown his entire set of consummation tools into a canvas duffle bag and had run for his safeguard unregistered car and the one-on-

one combat that would decide his fate. Somehow, through chance or divine intervention, he had been given the opportunity to fight for the very soul of his beloved Kathy. He had been passed the torch by Kathy herself, and an eighteen-year-old covenant was about to be fulfilled. He thought of the armaments now resting in his trunk: silencer-fitted .32, .30 caliber M-l carbine, two-edged fire axe, custom-made six-shot Derringer, spiked, lead-filled baseball bat. He had the technology and the love to make it work.

Two hours after the call, the car pulled up. Teddy watched a very tall man get out and survey the front of the shop, walking the length of its facade, peering into the windows. The big man seemed to be savoring the moment, collating instinctive information for use against him. Teddy was beginning to enjoy his first glimpse of his foe when the big man bolted for his car, hung a U-turn and headed south on Alvarado.

Teddy took deep breaths and decided to pursue. He waited ten seconds and followed, catching the tan car at Alvarado and Temple and keeping a discreet distance behind as it led him to the Hollywood Freeway westbound. When it hit the on-ramp, the Matador accelerated full force into the middle lane. Teddy followed suit; certain that the policeman was so lost in thought that he would never notice the headlights behind him.

Ten minutes later the Matador exited at the Cahuenga Pass. Teddy let two cars get between them, keeping one eye on the road and the other on his foe's long radio antenna. They drove into the hills surrounding the Hollywood Bowl. Teddy saw the tan car come to an abrupt halt in front of a small thatch-covered house. He pulled to the curb several doors down and quietly squeezed out the passenger side, watching his policeman-adversary walk up the steps and knock on the door.

Moments later a woman opened the door and exclaimed, "Sarge! What brings you here?!"

The voice that answered her was hoarse and tight. "You won't believe what's been happening. I don't know if I believe it myself."

"Tell me about it," the woman said, closing the door behind them.

Teddy walked back to his car and settled in to wait, weighing the dark practicalities of his situation. He knew that it had to be a vendetta waged by one man–Detective Sergeant Lloyd Hopkins–or he would have been deluged with policemen before this. It *had to be* that Hopkins wanted Kathy for himself and was willing to forego due process to get her.

Comforted by the knowledge that the force arrayed against him consisted of only one man, Teddy formulated a plan for his elimination, then thought of the path that had brought him to this point.

He had spent the days after June 10, 1964 regrouping in his art and observing the mutiny of Kathy's Kourt.

His initial outrage against his violators had become tragic validation of his art; he had paid for his art in blood, and now it was time to take his blood knowledge and reach for the stars. But the pages he filled up were turgid and hollow, timid and obsessed with form. And they were completely subservient to the drama that was taking place in the rotunda court: a betrayal so brutal that he knew it rivaled his own recent devastation.

One by one, hurling maiming prose, the girls of Kathy's Kourt attacked their leader in the very spot where she had given them every sustaining ounce of her love. They called her frigid and a no-talent shanty Mick. They told her that her no-dating policy was a cheap ploy to save them for scuzzy lesbian encounters that she was too cowardly to initiate. They called her a prissy, derivitive poet. They left her with nothing but tears, and he knew that they had to pay.

But the price eluded him, and he was too fragmented in his own life to pursue the payoff. He spent a year writing an epic poem on the themes of rape and betrayal. When the poem was completed he knew that it was trash and burned it. He grieved for the loss of his art and turned to the sad efficacy of a craft–photography. He knew the rudiments, he knew the business end, and above all he knew that it would supply him with the means to live well and seek beauty in an ugly world.

He became a proficient, unimaginative commercial photographer, earning a decent living by selling his photographs to newspapers and magazines. But Kathy was always with him, and thoughts of her brought back the terror of June 1964 full force. He knew that he had to combat that terror, that he would not be worthy of Kathy's memory until he had conquered the fear that always came with it. So for the first time in his life, he sought the purely physical.

Hundreds of hours of weightlifting and calisthenics transformed the puny body he had always secretly despised into a rock-hard machine; a like amount of time earned him a black belt in karate. He learned about weaponry, becoming an expert rifle and pistol shot. With the gathering of these worldly skills came a concurrent lessening of terror. As he grew stronger his fear became rage and he began to contemplate the murder of the Kathy Kourt betrayers. Death schemes dominated his thoughts, yet last vestiges of fear prevented him from taking action.

Self disgust was returning in force when he hit on the solution. He needed a rite of blood passage with which to test himself before beginning his revenge. He spent weeks speculating on the means, without results, until one night a phrase from Eliot jumped into his mind and stuck there: “Below, the boardhound and the boar, pursue their pattern as before, yet reconciled among the stars.”

He knew immediately where that pattern was taking him–the inland regions of Catalina Island, where wild boars roamed in herds. He sailed over the following week, bringing with him a six-shot Derringer and a weighted baseball bat with sharpened ten-penny nails driven into the head. Carrying only those weapons and a canteen of water, he hiked by nightfall into the middle of the Catalina outback, prepared to kill or die.

It was dawn when he spotted three boars grazing next to a stream. He raised his baseball bat and charged them. One boar retreated, but the other two stood their ground, their tusks pointing straight at him. He was within killing range when they charged. He feinted, and they rushed past him. He waited two seconds, then feinted in the opposite direction, and when the boars snorted in frustration and turned to ram him, he sidestepped again and swung his bat downward at the closest one, catching it in the head, the impact of the blow wrenching the bat from his hands.

The wounded boar writhed on the ground, squealing and flailing at the embedded bat with its hooves. The other boar turned around, then stood on its hind legs and leaped at him. This time he didn't feint or sidestep. He stood perfectly still, and when the boar's tusks were almost in his face he raised the Derringer and blew its brains out.

On his exultant return hike he let the dozens of boars that he saw live in peace. At last "reconciled among the stars," he took the tourist steamship back to L.A. proper and began plotting the deaths of Midge Curtis, Charlotte Reilly, Laurel Jensen, and Mary Kunz, first determining their whereabouts through phone calls to the Marshall High Records Office. When he learned that all four girls were scholarship students at Eastern colleges he felt his hatred for them grow in quantum leaps. Now their motive for betraying Kathy was clearly delineated. Academically validated, and thrilled with the prospect of leaving Los Angeles, they had spurned their mentor's plans to remain in L.A. and be their teacher, attributing it to the basest of desires. He felt his rage branch out into deepening areas of contempt. Kathy would be avenged, and soon.

He compiled his college itinerary and left for points east on Christmas day, 1966. Two carefully staged accidental deaths, one forced drug overdose and one killing that matched the Boston Strangler M.O. comprised his mission.

He landed in snowbound Philadelphia and rented a hotel room for three weeks, then set out by rented car on his circuit of Brandeis, Temple, Columbia, and Wheaton Universities. He was armed with caustic agents, strangling cord, narcotics, and formidable reserves of bloodstained love. He was invulnerable at all levels but one, for when he saw Laurel Jensen sitting alone in the Student Union at Brandeis he knew she was *of* Kathy, and that he could never harm anyone who was once so close to his beloved. Glimpses of Charlotte Reilly browsing the Columbia bookstore confirmed the symbiotic thrust of their union. He didn't bother to search out the other two girls; he knew that to see them would render him as vulnerable as a child at its mother's breast.

He flew home to Los Angeles, wondering how he could have paid such a severe price and not even have his art or his mission as a reward. He wondered what he was going to do with his life. He fought fear by strict adherence to the most stringent martial arts disciplines and by the penance of prolonged fasting followed by ascetic desert sojourns where he clubbed coyotes to death and roasted their carcasses over fires he built and nurtured with desert tools and his own breath. Nothing worked. The fear still drove him. He was certain that he was going insane, that his mind was a tuning fork that attracted hungry animals who would one day eat him up. He couldn't think of Kathy–the animals might pick up his thoughts and descend on her.

Then suddenly things changed. He heard the meditation tape for the first time. And then he met Jane Wilhelm.

Emboldened by his sojourn in the past, Teddy walked over to the thatch-covered house and stationed himself behind the towering hibiscus plants adjoining the front porch. After a few minutes he heard voices coming from inside, and seconds later the door opened and the policeman was standing there, shivering against the chill night air.

The woman joined him, huddling into his arms, saying softly, "You promise that you'll be real careful and call me after you catch the son of a bitch?"

The big man said, "Yes," then bent and kissed her on the lips. "No protracted farewells," the woman said as she closed the door behind her.

Teddy got to his feet as he watched the tan police car drive off. He pulled a pushbutton stiletto from his pocket. Lloyd Hopkins was going to die soon, and he was going to die regretful of this last visit to his mistress.

He walked to the front door and drummed light knuckles across it. Joyous laughter answered the intimacy of the knock. He heard footsteps approaching the door and flattened himself off to the side of it, the knife held against his leg. The door burst open and the woman's voice called out, "Sarge? I knew you were too smart to turn down my offer. I knew—"

He jumped from his hiding place to find the woman framed in the doorway in an attitude of longing. It took seconds for her hopeful face to turn terrified, and when he saw recognition flash in her eyes he raised his knife and held it before her, then flicked it lightly across her cheek. Her hands jumped to her face as blood spurted into her eyes, and he raised a hand to her throat to silence her potential screams. His hand was at the neck of her sweater when he slid on the doormat and crashed to his knees. Joanie's sweater ripped free in his hands, and as he tried to get to his feet she swung the door onto his arm and kicked at his face. A pointed toe caught his mouth and ripped it open. He spit out blood and stabbed blindly through the crack in the doorway. Joanie screamed and kicked again at his face. He ducked at the last second and grabbed her ankle as it descended, yanking it upward, bringing her down in a flailing tangle of limbs. She scuttled backward as he got to his feet and walked inside, weaving the stiletto in front of him in a slow figure-eight pattern. He turned to close the door, and she kicked out and sent a floor lamp crashing into his back. Stunned, he jumped backward, his body weight slamming the door shut.

Joanie got to her feet and stumbled back into her dining room. She wiped blood from her eyes and banged her arms sideways, looking for weapons, her eyes never straying from the jumpsuited figure advancing slowly toward her. Her right arm caught the back of a deck chair, and she hurled it at him. He kicked it out of his way and inched forward teasingly, in a parody of stealth, his knife movements becoming more and more intricate. Joanie crashed into her dining room table and grabbed blindly at a stack of dishes, scattering them, getting her hands on only one dish, then finding herself without the strength to throw it.

She dropped the dish and stepped backward. When she touched the wall she realized that there was no place left to run and opened her mouth to scream. When a gurgling sound came out, Teddy raised his stiletto and threw it at her heart. The knife caught and Joanie felt her life burst, then seep out in a network of fissures. As bright light became darkness she slid to the floor and murmured, "Do-wah, wah-wah-do…", then surrendered herself to the dark.

Teddy found the bathroom and cleansed his split lips with mouthwash, wincing against the pain but going on to douse the wounds with the whole bottle as penance for allowing himself to be bloodied. The pain enraged him. Hatred of Lloyd Hopkins and contempt for the puny bureaucracy he represented burst out of his every pore.

Let them all know, he decided; let the world know that he was willing to play the game. He found the telephone and dialed O. "I'm in Hollywood and I want to report a murder," he said.

The stunned operator put him directly through to the switchboard at the Hollywood station. "Los Angeles Police Department," the switchboard officer said.

Teddy spoke succinctly into the mouthpiece: “Come to 8911 Bowlcrest Drive. The door will be open. There’s a dead woman on the floor. Tell Sergeant Lloyd Hopkins that it’s open season on police groupies.”

“And what is your name, sir?” the switchboard officer asked.

Teddy said, “My name is about to become a household word,” and hung up.

The bewildering phone call was relayed from the switchboard officer to the desk officer, who flashed on the name “Lloyd Hopkins” and remembered that Hopkins was a good friend of Captain Peltz, the daywatch commander. Having heard rumors that Hopkins was in trouble with I.A.D., the desk officer called Peltz at home with the information. “The operator got the message slightly garbled, Captain,” he said. “She thought it was a crank, but she did mention a dead woman and your buddy Sergeant Hopkins, so I thought I’d call you.”

Dutch Peltz went cold from head to foot. “What *exactly* was the message?” he asked.

“I don’t know. Just something about a dead woman and your bu…”

Dutch’s voice, filled with worry, interrupted. “Did the caller leave an address?”

“Yes, sir. 8911 Bowlcrest.”

Dutch wrote it down and said, “Have two officers meet me there in twenty minutes and tell no one about this call. Do you understand?”

Dutch didn’t wait for an answer, or bother to hang up the phone. He threw on slacks and sweater over his pajamas and ran for his car.

17

Frock-coated figures wielding razor-edged crucifixes chased him across an open field. In the distance a large stone house shimmered in the glow of a white hot spotlight. The house was encircled by iron fencing linked together by musical clefs, and he knew that if he could hit the fence and surround himself with benevolent sound he would survive the onslaught of the cross killers.

The fence exploded as he made contact, hurtling him through barriers of wood, glass, and metal. Hieroglyphics flashed before his eyes; computer printouts that twisted into the shapes of contorted limbs and bombarded him past a last barrier of pulsating red light and into a sedately furnished living room fronted with triangular bay windows. The walls were covered with faded photographs and gnarled flower branches. As he moved closer he saw that the pictures and branches formed a door that he could will open. He was willing himself into a pitch-black trance when a succession of crosses slammed into him and pinned him to the wall. The photographs and branches descended on him.

Lloyd jerked awake, slamming his knees into the dashboard. It was dawn. He looked through the windshield and saw a half-familiar Silverlake side street, then looked at his haggard face in the rear view mirror and felt it all come back: Haines, Verplanck and his planned stakeout around the corner from Silverlake Camera. The speed had boomeranged and had combined with his nervous tension to knock him out. The killer was a block away, asleep. It was time.

Lloyd walked over to Alvarado. The street was perfectly still, and no lights issued from the red brick building that housed the camera store. Remembering that Verplanck's motor vehicle registration listed an identical business and home address, he stared up at the second story windows, then checked the parking lot next door. Verplanck's Dodge van and Datsun sedan were parked side by side.

Lloyd walked around to the alley in back of the building. There was a fire escape that reached up to the second floor and a metal fire door. The door looked impregnable, but there was an unshaded window with a deep brick ledge about four feet off to its right. It was the only possible access.

Lloyd leaped for the bottom rung of the fire escape. His hands caught iron and he hauled himself up the steps. At the second story landing he gave the metal door a gentle push. No give; it was locked from the inside. Lloyd eyed the window, then stood up on the railing and flattened himself into the wall. He took a bead on the ledge and pushed off, landing on it squarely, grasping the window runner to hold himself steady. When his heartbeat subsided to the point where he could think, he looked down and saw that the window led into a small, darkened room filled with cardboard boxes. If he could get in he could reach the apartment proper without rousing Verplanck.

Squatting on the ledge, Lloyd got a grip on the bottom of the window runner and pushed in and up. The window squeaked open and he lowered himself into a closet-sized storage space reeking of chemicals and mildew. There was a door at the front of the room. Lloyd drew his .38 and nudged it open, entering into a carpeted hallway. Using his gun as a directional finder, he crept down it until he came to an open door.

He braced himself head first into the wall and peered in. An empty bedroom with a neatly made bed. Picasso prints on the walls. A connecting door into a bathroom. Complete silence.

Lloyd tiptoed into the bathroom. Immaculate white porcelain; polished brass fixtures. There was a half-open door next to the sink. He looked through the crack and saw steps leading downstairs. He inched down them with painstaking slowness, his gun arm extended to its maximum length, his finger on the trigger.

The steps ended at the back of a large room filled with cardboard photographic displays. Lloyd felt his tension ridden body breathe out of its own accord. Verplanck was gone, he could *feel* it.

Lloyd surveyed the front of the store. It looked like camera stores everywhere: wood counter, neatly arrayed cameras in glass cases, cheerful children and cuddly animals beaming down from the walls.

Treading silently, he walked back upstairs, wondering where Verplanck had spent the night and why he hadn't taken one of his cars.

The second floor was still eerily silent. Lloyd walked through the bathroom and bedroom and down the hall to an ornate oak door. He pushed it open with his gun barrel and screamed. Triangular bay windows made up the front wall. Huge photographs of Whitey Haines and Birdman Craigie covered the side walls, interspersed with taped-on rose branches, the whole collage united by crisscrossed smearings of dried blood.

Lloyd walked along the walls, looking for details to prove his dream a fake, a coincidence, anything but what he couldn't let it mean. He saw dried semen on the photos, crusted over the genital areas of both Haines and Craigie, the word

"Kathy" finger-painted in blood. Beneath the photographs there were small holes in the wall stuffed with excrement. The holes were at waist level; higher up the white wallpaper surrounding the photographs bore fingernail tracks and bite marks.

Lloyd screamed again. He ran back through the hallway and bathroom and downstairs. When he reached the first floor he crashed over a pile of cartons and stumbled out the front door. If his dream was for real, then music would save him. Dodging traffic, he ran across Alvarado and around the corner to his car. He hit the ignition and fumbled the radio on, catching the end of a commercial jingle. His mental colors and textures were returning to normal when an alarmed electronic voice leaped out at him:

"The 'Hollywood Slaughterer' has claimed his third victim in twenty-four hours, and police are gearing up for the greatest manhunt in Los Angeles history! Last night the body of forty-two-year-old actress-singer Joan Pratt was discovered in her Hollywood Hills home, making her the third person to die violently in the Hollywood area in the past two days. Lieutenant Walter Perkins of the L.A.P.D.'s Hollywood Division and Captain Bruce Magruder of the West Hollywood Sheriffs are holding a joint news conference this morning at Parker Center to discuss the massive manhunt and to advise the Hollywood area populace on security measures to thwart the killer or killers. Captain Magruder told reporters this morning that 'The Sheriff's department and L.A.P.D. have deployed our largest force of street officers ever in our effort to catch this killer. We firmly believe that this person's insanity is peaking and that he will try to kill again soon. There will be helicopter patrols throughout the Hollywood-West Hollywood areas, as well as a concentrated deployment of officers on foot. Our efforts will not cease until the killer is caught. Our entire detective force is tracking down every available lead. In the meantime, remember: This killer has killed both men *and* women. I urge all Hollywood residents not, repeat, *not* to stay alone tonight. Buddy up, for your own safety. We bel…'"

Lloyd began to whimper. He kicked the radio housing, then ripped the metal box free of the dashboard and hurled it out the window. Joanie was dead. His genius had become the door to a telepathic charnel house. He could read Teddy's thoughts and Teddy could read his. The dream and Joanie's death; a logic defying fraternal bonding that would spawn more and more and more horror; a horror that would only end with the killing of his evil symbiotic twin. He looked in the rear view mirror and saw Teddy Verplanck's yearbook picture. The transmogrification was complete. Lloyd drove to the old neighborhood to tell his family that the Irish Protestant ethos was a one-way ticket to hell.

Dutch Peltz sat in his office at the Hollywood Station, armed for betrayal with a Polaroid snapshot of a nude man and woman.

Since he had refused to press assault charges, the Internal Affairs officers investigating Lloyd had been swarming over him in an attempt to find other perfidies that they could bring to light to offset Lloyd's threatened media barrage. They had no idea that the L.A.P.D.'s most brilliant detective had been intimately familiar with Joan Pratt, the third victim of the Hollywood Slaughterer. The photograph was enough evidence to end Lloyd's career at best and have him shot on sight at worst.

Dutch walked to the window and looked out, thinking that he may have already signed away his own best years. His refusal to file charges would cost him his command of I.A.D., and if anyone found out that he had withheld the photograph and of his knowledge of the anonymous phone call that had mentioned Lloyd's name, he would be brought to departmental trial and suffer the ignominy of possible criminal prosecution. Dutch swallowed and asked himself the only question that made any sense. Was Lloyd a murderer? Was his protégé/mentor/son a killer brilliantly concealed by the cloak of genius? Was he a textbook schizophrenic, an academically identifiable split-personality monster? *It couldn't be.*

Yet there was a logical narrative line that said "maybe." Lloyd's erratic behavior throughout the years, his recent obsession with murdered women, his outburst at the party. *That* he had seen himself. When coupled with the traumatic aftermath of his wife and daughters' desertion and Kathleen McCarthy's phone call and the anonymous phone call and Joan Pratt's body and the nude snapshot and—

Dutch couldn't finish the thought. He looked at his telephone. He could call I.A.D. and save himself, dooming Lloyd, but maybe saving innocent lives. He could do nothing or he could track down Lloyd himself. His sleepless night, filled with images of Joan Pratt's body, had given him a good command of his options. Then Dutch asked himself the only other question that made sense. Who mattered the most? When "Lloyd" resounded through him, he tore up the photograph. He would clear the case himself.

When he got to the old wood-framed house on Griffith Park and St. Elmo, Lloyd went straight to the attic and a thirty-two-year-old treasure trove of antiquity. He traced patterns on dust-covered rosewood surfaces and marveled at his mother's foresight. She had never sold the furniture because she knew that one day her son would need to commune in the very spot that had formed his character. Lloyd felt another hand resting on his, guiding him in his artwork. The hand forced him to draw death's heads and lightning bolts. He took a last look at his past and future, then went downstairs to wake up his brother.

While Lloyd stood over him, Tom Hopkins ripped out the squares of synthetic grass that covered the ground adjoining their father's electronics shack. When he got to bare dirt he whimpered, and Lloyd handed him a shovel and said, "Dig." He obeyed, and within minutes Lloyd was hauling out wooden boxes filled with shotguns and a steamer truck containing handguns and automatic rifles. Astonished to find the weaponry well oiled and ready to use, he looked at his brother and shook his head. "I've underestimated you," he said.

Tom said, "Bad times are coming down, Lloydy. I gotta get my shit together."

Lloyd reached down into the hole and pulled out a reinforced plastic bag filled with individually wrapped .44 magnums. He hefted one, then stuck it in his waistband. "What else have you got?" he asked.

"I got a dozen A.K. 47s, five or six sawed-offs and a shitload of ammo," Tom said.

Lloyd slammed his hands onto Tom's shoulders, forcing him to his knees. "Just two things, Tommy," he said, "and then our slate will be clean. One, when you get your shit together you've got nothing but a big pile of shit; two, stay scared of me and you'll survive."

Lloyd grabbed a Remington 30.06 and a handful of shells. Tom pulled a pint of bourbon from his pocket and took a long drink. When he offered him the bottle Lloyd shook his head and looked up at his mother's bedroom window. After a second the mute old woman appeared. Lloyd knew that she knew and had come to offer a silent goodbye. He blew her a soft kiss and walked to his car.

All that remained was to set a time and place.

Lloyd drove to a pay phone and dialed Silverlake Camera. The call was answered on the first ring, as he knew it would be.

"Teddy's Silverlake Camera, may I help you?"

"This is Lloyd Hopkins. Are you about ready to die, Teddy?"

"No, I have too much to live for."

"No more innocent ones, Teddy. You've been waiting for me all these years. I'm ready, but don't hurt anyone else."

"Yes. It's just you and me. *Mano a mano?*"

"Yes. You want to pick the time and place, homeboy?"

"Do you know where the Silverlake Power Plant is?"

"Yes, it's an old friend of mine."

"I'll meet you there at midnight."

"I'll be there." Lloyd hung up, his mind bursting with lightning bolts and death.

Kathleen woke up late and put on coffee. She looked out her bedroom window to appraise the growth of her daisies and saw that they had been trampled. She thought of the neighborhood kids, then saw a huge footprint in the dirt and felt her strategems for putting the crazy policeman out of her mind coalesce around a unifying thread. Instead of her planned day of opening the store and taking care of paperwork she would write her dream lover-betrayer into oblivion, consigning him to villainhood on the wings of a scathing broadside against weak, violence-obsessed men. She would meet Detective Sergeant Lloyd Hopkins head-on and defeat him.

After coffee, Kathleen sat down at her desk. Words fluttered through her mind, but refused to connect. She considered smoking a joint to get things going, then rejected the notion; it was too early for a reward. Feeling both her resistance and determination deepen, she walked into the front room and stared at the table by the cash register. Her own books, all six of them, arranged in a circle around a pasteboard blow-up of a four-star review in *Ms.*

Kathleen leafed through her own words at random, looking for old ways to say new things. She found passages decrying male hierarchies, but saw that the underlying symbolism centered on glass. She found acid portraits of men seeking shelter, but saw that the central theme was her own need to nurture. When she saw that her most righteously hateful prose featured crimson-flowered redemption, she felt her narcissistic nostalgia die. Her six volumes of poetry had earned her seven thousand four hundred dollars in advances and nothing in royalties. The advances for *Knife-edged Chaste* and *Notes from a Non-Kingdom* had paid off her long standing Visa card bill, which she promptly ran up again, paying off the following year with the advance for *Hollywood Stillness. Staring Down the Abyss, Womanwold* and *Skirting the Void* had secured her her bookstore, which was now skirting the edge of bankruptcy. Her remaining volumes had bought her an abortion and a trip to New York, where her editor had gotten drunk and had stuck his hand up her dress at the Russian Tea Room.

Kathleen ran into her bedroom and hauled out her glass encased rose petals. She carried them back to her bookstore-living room and one by one hurled them at the walls, the sound of breaking glass and falling bookshelves drowning out her own screamed obscenities. When the detritus of the past eighteen years of her life had devastated the room, she wiped tears from her eyes and savored the destruction: books lying dead on the floor, glass shards reflecting off the carpet, plaster dust settling like fallout. The overall symbolism was perfection.

Then Kathleen noticed that something was off. A long black rubber cord was dangling from a torn but section of her ceiling. She walked over and yanked on it, pulling loose spackle-covered wiring that extended all the way around the room. When she got to the wire's terminus a tiny microphone was revealed. She took up the cord and yanked a second time. The opposite end led to her front door. She opened the door and saw that the wire continued up to the roof, shielded by the branches of the eucalyptus tree that shaded the front porch.

Kathleen got a ladder. She stood it up on the ground beside the tree and followed the wire up to her roof. She could see that on the rooftop it had been concealed by a thin coat of tar. Squatting down, she ripped the wiring out and let it lead her to a mound of tar paper covered with shellac. She pulled the cord a last time. The tar paper ripped open and she looked down at a tape recorder wrapped in clear plastic.

At Parker Center, Dutch went through Lloyd's desk, hoping that the I.A.D. officers hadn't picked it clean. If he could find any of the homicide files that Lloyd was working with, maybe he could form a hypothesis and go from there.

Dutch rifled the drawers, prying the locks open with the buck knife he carried strapped to the inside of his gunbelt, coming away with nothing but pencils, paper clips and wanted posters. Slamming the drawers shut, he pried open the filing cabinets. Nothing; the Internal Affairs vultures had gotten there first.

Dutch emptied the wastebasket, sifting through illegible memos and sandwich wrappers. He was about to give up when he noticed a crumpled piece of Xerox paper. He held it up to the light. There was a list of thirty-one names and addresses in one column, and a list of electronic stores in the other. His heart gave a little leap; this had to be Lloyd's "suspect" list–the men that he had wanted him to detach officers to interview. It was slim–but something.

Dutch drove back to the Hollywood Station. He handed the list to the desk officer. "I want you to call all the men on this list," he said. "Lay out a *heavy* spiel about 'routine questioning.' Let me know who sounds panicky. I'm going out, but I'll be calling in."

From his office, Dutch called Lloyd's house. As he expected, there was no answer. He had called in vain every half hour throughout the night, and now it had become obvious that Lloyd had run to ground. But to where? He was either hiding out from I.A.D. and/or stalking his real or imaginary killer. He might also be—

Unable to complete the thought, Dutch recalled that Kathleen McCarthy had mentioned at the party that her bookstore was on Yucca and Highland. She had fearfully denunciated Lloyd on the phone last night, but *might* know of his whereabouts; Lloyd always sought out women when he was under stress.

Dutch drove to Yucca and Highland, pulling up in front of the *Feminist Bibliophile,* noticing immediately that the front door was half open and the porch was littered with broken glass.

Drawing his gun, Dutch walked inside. Mounds of broken glass, plaster, and books covered the floor. He walked back through the kitchen and into the bedroom. No more evidence of destruction, only the eeriness of a leather purse lying on the bed.

Dutch dug through the purse. Money and credit cards were intact, throwing the scene way out of kilter. When he found more money and Kathleen McCarthy's driver's license and car registration inside a calfskin wallet, he grabbed the telephone and dialed the desk at the station. "This is Peltz," he said. "I want an all points bulletin issued. Kathleen Margaret McCarthy, white female, 5'9", 135, brown and brown, D.O.B. 11/21/46. Beige 1977 Volvo 1200, license LQM 957. Have the officers detain for questioning only. No force–this woman is not a suspect. I want her brought to my office."

"Isn't this a little irregular, Captain?" the switchboard officer asked.

"Shut up and issue it," Dutch said.

After checking the blocks around the bookstore unsuccessfully for Kathleen and her car, Dutch began to feel like a pent-up Judas having second thoughts. He knew that movement was the only antidote. Any destination was better than no destination.

Dutch drove to Silverlake. He knocked on the door of the old house that Lloyd had driven him by so many times, only half heartedly expecting someone to answer; he knew that Lloyd's parents were old and lived in silent solitudes. When no one came to the door, he walked around the side of the house to the back yard.

Peering over the fence, Dutch saw a man swigging from a pint of whiskey and waving a large handgun in front of him. He stood perfectly still, recalling Lloyd's stories about his crazy older brother Tom. He watched the sad spectacle until Tom dropped the handgun to the ground and reached into a packing crate next to it, pulling out a machine gun.

Dutch gasped as he watched Tom weave drunkenly, muttering, "Fuckin' Lloyd don't know shit, fuckin' fuzz don't know how to deal with the fuckin' niggers, but I know for fuckin' sure. Fuckin' Lloyd thinks he can fuck with me, he's got another fuckin' think comin'."

Tom dropped the machine gun and fell to the dirt along with it. Dutch drew his .38 and squeezed through a gap in the fence. He crept along the side of the house, then sprinted over to Tom, his gun aimed straight at his head. "Freeze," he said as Tom looked up, bewildered.

"Lloydy took my goodies," he said. "He never wanted to play with me. He took my *best* stuff and still wouldn't play with me."

Dutch noticed a large hole in the ground next to him. He looked into it. The muzzles of a half-dozen sawed-off shotguns stared up at him. Leaving Tom weeping in the dirt, he ran back to his car. He gripped the steering wheel and wept himself, praying for God to give him the means to indict Lloyd with pity or release him with love.

18

Kathleen zigzagged through Hollywood side streets, destinationless, numbing the discovery of the tape recorder with silent chantings of her very best prose, the big policeman and his murder theory battling her words point counter-point until she ran a red light on Melrose and fishtailed across the intersection, narrowly missing a crossing guard and a flock of children.

She pulled to the curb, shaking, her literary holding action drowned out by the honking of angered motorists. She was past words now. Lloyd Hopkins and his conspiracies demanded to be disproved on the basis of fact. The tape recorder was evidence that would require the negation of superior evidence. It was time to visit an old classmate and let *his* words speak.

Dutch watched from the back of the room as Lieutenant Perkins, the commanding officer of the Hollywood Division Detective squad, briefed his men on the Hollywood Slaughterer case:

"Our black and white units and helicopter patrols are going to keep the bastard from killing again, but you guys are going to find out who he is. The Sheriffs dicks are handling the Morton and Craigie cases, and may have an angle–some Deputy who used to work West Hollywood Vice blew his brains out last night at his pad, and some of his old Vice partners say he was in tight with Craigie. Robbery-Homicide downtown is handling the Pratt case, which leaves you guys the job of rousting every pervert, burglar, dope addict, and all-purpose scumbag known to use violence in the Hollywood area. Utilize your snitches, your parolee files, your brains, and the feedback of the guys from patrol. Use whatever force you deem necessary."

The men got up and headed for the door. Noticing Dutch, Perkins called out, "Hey skipper, where the fuck is Lloyd Hopkins now that we really need him?"

Kathleen pulled up in front of the red brick building on Alvarado. She noticed a "closed due to illness" sign on the front door and peered through the plate-glass window. Seeing nothing but shadow-covered countertops and stacks of boxes, she walked to the parking lot, immediately spotting a long yellow van with a license plate reading "P-O-E-T". She had her hand on the rear door latch when darkness reached out and smothered her.

Lloyd waited for darkness in the park-playground a half mile below the Silverlake Power Plant. His car was hidden from street view behind the maintenance shed, the 30.06 and .44 magnum in the trunk, loaded and waiting. Sitting on a child's swing that shuddered under his weight, he compiled a list of the people he loved. His mother and Janice and Dutch headed the list, followed by his daughters and the many women who had brought him joy and laughter. Casting out hooks of memory to sustain the loving moments, he reeled in fellow cops and engaging criminals and even passersby he had glimpsed on the street. The more obscure the people became, the deeper the feeling of love touched him, and when twilight came and went Lloyd knew that if he died at midnight he would somehow live on in the vestiges of innocence that he saved from Teddy

Verplanck.

Kathleen came out of the darkness with her eyes open, chemical stench and a glaze of tears her prelude to vision. She tried to blink to adjust her focus, but her eyelids wouldn't move. When squinting with all her might brought nothing but a flood of burning teardrops, she opened her mouth to scream. Some unseen closure rendered her mute, and she twisted her arms and kicked out with her legs, gouging the air for sound. Her arms remained fixed while her feet scraped an invisible surface, and as she flailed and heaved with every inch of her sense-blunted body she heard "sssh, sssh," and then there was a soft blackness daubing at her eyes, followed by bright light. *I am not blind and deaf, but I am dead,* she thought.

Kathleen's vision centered in on a low wooden table. When squinting brought her greater clarity she saw that it was only a few feet in front of her. As if in answer, the table, with a scraping sound, moved up to where she could touch it. She twisted her arms again, pain cutting through her numbness. *I am dead, but I am not cut in pieces.*

Willing all her senses into her eyes, Kathleen stared at the table. Gradually a room came into view behind it, and then the soft blackness was on and off her like the clicking of a camera shutter, and when the light returned the table was in her face, covered with naked plastic dolls with pins stuck into their crotches and huge heads made out of black and white photographs. *I am in hell and these are my fellow exiles.*

Sensing familiarity in the photograph heads, Kathleen forced her mind to function. *I am dead, but I can think.* She knew that the heads were somehow *of* her, somehow close to her, somehow—

Kathleen's senses snapped. Her arms contracted and her legs jerked upwards, sending her chair to the floor. *I am alive and those are the girls from my court and the policeman was right and Teddy from High School is going to kill me.*

Invisible hands picked up the chair and turned it around. Kathleen squirmed and dug her heels into a soft white carpet. *My eyelids are forced open and my mouth is taped shut, but I am alive.*

Kathleen rolled her eyes to the far edges of the periphery, memorizing the wall in front of her in hopes of combining sight and thought into something more. When she assimilated all that she saw she began to sob, and tears once again turned her blind. Blood, rose branches, desecrated photographs and excrement. The stench assaulted her. *I am going to die.*

There was a whirring sound. Kathleen followed it with her mind and what remained of her vision. She saw a tape recorder on a nightstand. She tried to scream, and felt the tape across her mouth begin to give. *If I can scream, I—*

A soft sighing came over the tape machine. Kathleen breathed in through her nose and blew out with all her strength. The tape strained against her mouth and came loose along her lower lip. The soft sighing became a soft singsong voice:

I am only worthy to love you in verse,
To spread my love on the wings of a curse;
They betrayed you and ripped you,
Buried in dread;

I avenged your heartache by killing them dead;
Then *you* betrayed me with
    Badge one-one-one-four-
You let him hurt me and make you his whore;
I cannot blame you–but tonight you must choose;
With your eyes sewn open you will watch
    him lose;
I will always love–love…love…"

The soft voice receded back into a sigh. Kathleen contorted her eyebrows and felt the stiches at the corners of her eyelids loosen. *I am going to kill him before he kills me.*

The tape recorder clicked off. Kathleen's chair was hoisted into the air and spun around in a perfect circle. She screamed and heard the faintest vibration of her own voice, then looked up at Teddy Verplanck in a skin-tight black jumpsuit. She formed words to keep from screaming and ripping the tape from her mouth prematurely. *He has become so handsome. Why are cruel-looking men always the most handsome?*

Teddy put a piece of paper in front of Kathleen's eyes. Biting down on her tongue, she read the block printed script: "I cannot speak to you yet. I am going to take out a knife and mark myself. I will not hurt you with the knife."

Kathleen nodded up and down, probing the tape with the tip of her tongue. Feeling was returning to her feet, and she could tell that she was wearing her blunt-toed wingtip flats. *Good kicking shoes.*

Teddy smiled at her nodding acquiesence and turned the paper over. The reverse side was covered with faded newspaper clippings. Kathleen's gaze zeroed in on them. When she saw that the clippings detailed accounts of women's murders she stifled a dry sob by biting her cheeks and methodically reading every word on the page. Her terror turned to rage and she bit down harder, until blood and spittle filled her mouth. She breathed deeply through her nose and thought: *I am going to maim him.*

Teddy threw the paper to the floor and unzipped the top of his jumpsuit, letting it fall to his waist. Kathleen looked at the most perfect male torso she had ever seen, transfixed by the rock-hard perfection until Teddy reached behind his back and drew out a penknife. He held the blade in front of his chest and twirled it like a baton, then pointed the blade at the area above his heart. When the tip drew blood, Kathleen twisted her hands on the arms of her chair, pushing out with her elbows, feeling her right hand bonds give way completely. *Now. Now. Now. Please God let me do it now. Now. Now.*

Teddy wiped his torso and squatted in front of Kathleen, holding his chest at her eye level. He whispered, "It's 10:30. We have to go soon. You were so beautiful with your eyes rolled back." He wiped his chest a second time. Kathleen saw that he had carved "K Mc" beside his left nipple. She gagged, but held on. *Now.*

Teddy squatted lower and smiled. Kathleen spat in his face and kicked out with both her legs, catching him in the groin, jerking her right hand free and pushing forward, toppling her chair just as Teddy crashed to the floor. She screamed and kicked again, her legs glancing off Teddy's stomach. Teddy dropped his knife and shrieked, wiping bloody spittle from his eyes. Kathleen lunged with her whole body and got her free hand on the knife, hooking her right leg around Teddy to draw her within stabbing range. Teddy twisted and flailed blindly with his arms. Kathleen brought the knife down in a swooping roundhouse at his abdomen. Teddy jerked backwards and the blade cut air. Kathleen stabbed again, the knife snagging into the carpet. Teddy got to his knees and wrapped his fists into a hammer and swung down. Kathleen bared her teeth to bite as the blow arced toward her. She screamed and tasted blood when the hammer made contact. Then there was a throbbing red darkness.

Dutch watched the muster-room clock strike eleven. He shifted his gaze out the door to the front desk. The desk officer looked up from his telephone and called out, "Nothing yet, skipper. I've made contact with twenty-three out of the thirty-one. The rest are no answers or recorded messages. Nothing even remotely suspicious."

Nodding curtly in answer, Dutch said, "Keep trying" and walked out to the parking lot. He looked up at the black sky and saw the crisscrossed beacons of the helicopter patrols light up low cloud formations and the tops of Hollywood skyscrapers. Save for a skeletal station contingent, every Hollywood Division officer was on the street, on foot, in the air or in a black-and-white, armed to the teeth and pumped up for glory. Rolling imaginary dice, Dutch calculated the odds on accidental shootings by overeager cops at ten to one, rookies and promotion happy hot dogs the most likely blood spillers. With Lloyd still missing and no clues to his whereabouts, he found that he didn't care. Blood was in the air, and nihilist rectitude was the night's prevailing logic. He had gone through cartons of Lloyd's arrest records from his Hollywood Division days, finding no indicators pointing to trauma that might have festered to the point of combustion; he had telephoned every one of Lloyd's girlfriends whose name he could recall. Nothing. Lloyd was guilty or Lloyd was innocent and Lloyd was nowhere. And if Lloyd was nowhere, then he, Captain Arthur F. Peltz, was a spiritual seeker who had gone to Mecca and had come away with unimpeachable evidence that life was shit.

Dutch walked back inside the station. He was halfway up the stairs to his office when the desk officer ran up to him. "I got a response to your A.P.B., Captain. Vehicle only. I wrote down the address." Dutch grabbed at the paper the officer was holding, then ran downstairs to the front desk and ran frenzied eyes over Lloyd's interview list. When 1893 N. Alvarado screamed out from both pieces of paper, he yelled, "Call the officers who called in the bulletin and tell them to resume patrol; this is mine!"

The desk officer nodded. Dutch ran up to his office and got his Ithaca pump. Lloyd was innocent and there was a monster to slay.

19

A winding two-lane access road led up to the Power Plant. It terminated at the base of a scrub-bush dotted hillside that rose steeply to the tall barbed-wire fence that enclosed the generator facility. There was a dirt parking lot off the left of the road, next to a tool shack sandwiched between two stanchions hung with high powered spotlights. Another spotlight housing was stationed directly across the blacktop, with feeder wires connecting to the Silverlake Reservoir a quarter of a mile north.

At 11:30, Lloyd walked up from the playground, staking out the territory as he trudged uphill, the 30.06 resting on his shoulder, the .44 magnum pressed to his leg. He knew only that since assuming his position on the street side of the playground at eight-thirty, six cars had driven northbound on the access road. Two were official Water and Power Department vehicles, presumably headed for the plant's administration offices. The four remaining cars had returned within an hour, meaning that the occupants had gotten stoned or laid on the hillside and had retreated back to L.A. proper. Which meant that Teddy Verplanck had arrived on foot or was in the process of driving up.

Lloyd walked north on the dirt shoulder, hugging the embankment that branched into Power Plant Hill. When he reached the last turn in the road he saw that he was correct. Two cars were parked next to the fence beside the tool shack; both were Water and Power vehicles.

The embankment ended, and Lloyd had to walk a stretch of pavement before he could scale the hill and establish a killing ground. He treaded lightly, his eyes constantly scanning his blind side. If Verplanck was nearby, he was probably hiding in the clump of trees adjoining the parked cars. He checked his watch: eleven forty-four. At precisely midnight he would blow that clump of trees to kingdom come.

The pavement ended, and Lloyd began to climb uphill, pushing forward slowly, dirt mounds breaking at his feet. He saw a tall scattering of scrub bushes looming in front of him and smiled as he realized that it was the perfect vantage point. He stopped and unslung his 30.06, checking the clip and flipping off the safeties. Everything was operative and set to go at a split second's notice.

Lloyd was within a yard of his objective when a shot rang out. He hesitated for a brief instant, then hurled himself head first into the dirt just as a second shot grazed his shoulder. He screamed and burrowed into the ground, waiting for a third shot to give him a direction to fire in. The only sound was the pounding of his own chest.

An electrically amplified voice cut the air: "Hopkins, I have Kathy. She has to choose."

Lloyd rolled into a sitting position and aimed his 30.06 at the sound of the voice. He knew that Verplanck was a conjuror who could assume shapes and voices and that Kathleen was safe somewhere in her web of fantasies. Clenching his bloodied shoulder into a huge ache to allow for the recoil, he fired off a full clip. When the shattering echoes died out, a laughing voice answered them. "You don't believe me, so I'll make you believe me."

A series of hellish shrieks followed, noises that no conjuror could artifice. Lloyd muttered "No, no, no," until the electronic voice called out, "Throw down your weapons and come out to meet me or she dies."

Lloyd hurled his rifle at the road. When it clattered onto the pavement he stood up and jammed his .44 magnum into the back of his waistband. He stumbled downhill, knowing that he and his evil counterpart were going to die together with no one but the strident woman poet to write their epitaph. He was murmuring “rabbit down the hole, rabbit down the hole,” when white light blinded him and a white-hot hammer slammed him just above the heart. He flew back into the dirt and rolled like a dervish as the light bored into the ground by his side. Wiping dirt and tears from his eyes, he crawled for the pavement, watching the spotlight’s reflections gradually illuminate Teddy holding Kathleen McCarthy in front of the toolshed. He tore through his blood-drenched shirt and felt his chest, then twisted his right arm and pawed at his back. A small frontal and a crisp exit wound. He would have the juice to kill Teddy before he bled to death.

Lloyd pulled out his .44 and spread himself prone, his eyes on the two spotlights next to the toolshed. Only the top light was on. Teddy and Kathleen were right below the housings, forty feet” of blacktop and dirt away from the muzzle of his handcannon. One shot at the spotlight; one shot to take off Teddy’s head.

Lloyd squeezed the trigger. The light exploded and died at the precise second that he saw Kathleen break free of Teddy’s grasp and fall to the ground. He got to his feet and stumbled across the pavement, his gun arm extended, his left hand holding his trembling wrist steady. “Kathleen, hit the other light!” he screamed.

Lloyd moved forward into his last gauntlet of darkness, a red-black curtain that masked all his senses and enveloped him like a custom-made shroud. When the spotlight went on Teddy Verplanck was ten feet in front of him, coming to meet his destiny with a .32 automatic and a nail-studded baseball bat.

Both men fired at the same instant. Teddy clutched his chest and pitched backward just as Lloyd felt the bullet tear into his groin. His finger jerked the trigger and recoil sent the gun flying from his hand. He fell to the pavement and watched Teddy crawl toward him, the spikes on the baseball bat gleaming in the white-hot light.

Lloyd pulled out his .38 snub nose and held it upright, waiting for the moment when he could see Teddy’s eyes. When Teddy was on top of him and the bat was descending and he could see that his blood brother’s eyes were blue he pulled the trigger six times. There was nothing but the soft click of metal on metal as Lloyd screamed and blood burst from Teddy’s mouth. Lloyd wondered how that could be and if he was dead, and then just before losing consciousness he saw Dutch Peltz wipe the blade that stuck out of his steel-toed paratrooper’s boot.

20

The long transit of horror ended, and the three survivors began the longer process of healing.

Dutch had carried Lloyd and Teddy to his car, and with Kathleen weeping beside him had driven to the home of a doctor under indictment for dealing morphine. With Dutch's gun at his head the doctor had examined Lloyd, pronouncing him in need of an immediate transfusion of three pints of blood. Dutch checked Lloyd's driver's license and the I.D. cards he had taken from the body of Teddy Verplanck. Both men were type O+. The doctor performed the transfusion with a makeshift centrifuge to stimulate Teddy's heartbeat while Dutch whispered over and over that he would kill all the charges against him, regardless of the cost. Lloyd responded favorably to the transfer of blood, regaining consciousness as the doctor sedated Kathleen and removed the catgut stitches that anchored her eyelids to her brows. Dutch didn't tell Lloyd where the blood had come from. He didn't want him to know.

Leaving Lloyd and Kathleen at the doctor's house, Dutch drove the remains of Teddy Verplanck to their final resting place, a stretch of condemned beach known to be rife with industrial toxins. Hauling the body over a series of barbed wire fences, he had watched as the poisonous tide swept it away on the wings of a nightmare.

Dutch spent the next week with Kathleen and Lloyd, convincing the doctor to oversee their medical recovery. The house became a hospital with two patients, and when Kathleen came out of her sedation she told Dutch of how Teddy Verplanck had gagged her and slung her over his back, carrying her through the Silverlake hills on his way to ambush Lloyd.

He told her of how verse notations on Teddy Verplanck's calendar had led him to the reservoir and how if Lloyd was to survive as a policeman and a human being she would have to be very gentle and never talk to him about Teddy. Weeping, Kathleen agreed.

Dutch went on to say that he would destroy every official trace of Teddy Verplanck, but it would be her job to blunt Lloyd's terror-driven memory with love. "With all my heart," was her answer.

Lloyd was delirious for over a week. As his physical wounds healed, his nightmares took over, and gradually, between the gentlest of caresses, Kathleen succeeded in convincing him that the monster was dead and that mercy had somehow prevailed. Holding a mirror to his eyes, she told him tender stories and made him believe that Teddy Verplanck was not his brother but a separate entity who was sent to close out the books on all the anguish in his first forty years. Kathleen was a good storyteller, and tenuously, Lloyd started to believe her.

But as Kathleen pieced together the story of Teddy and Lloyd her own terror began. Her phone call to Silverlake Camera had caused the death of Joanie Pratt. Her reluctance to believe Lloyd and smash her own pitiful illusions had resulted in the destruction of a living, breathing woman. She felt it with *her* every breath, and when she touched Lloyd's devastated body it felt like a death sentence. Writing about it compounded the grief. It was a life sentence with no parole and no means of atonement.

A month to the day after the Silverlake *walpurgisnacht,* Lloyd discovered that he could walk. Dutch and Kathleen had discontinued their daily visits and the indictment-free doctor had taken him off his pain medication. He would have to retrieve his family and face his I.A.D. inquisitors soon, and before he did that there was a place that he had to visit

The cab dropped him in front of a red brick building on North Alvarado. Lloyd picked the lock on the door and walked upstairs, not knowing if he wanted the worst of his nightmares confirmed or denied. Whatever he saw would determine the course of the rest of his life, but he still didn't know.

The nightmare room was empty. Lloyd felt his hopes soar and shatter. No blood, no photographs, no body waste, no rose branches. The walls had been painted a guileless light blue. The bay windows were boarded shut. He would never know.

"I knew you'd come."

Lloyd turned around at the voice. It was Dutch. "I've been staking the place out for days," he said. "I knew you'd come here before you got in touch with your family or reported back to duty."

Running light fingertips over the wall, Lloyd said, "What did you find here, Dutch? I have to know."

Dutch shook his head. "No. Not ever. Don't ever ask again. I doubted you and I almost betrayed you, but I've made my amends and I won't tell you that. Everything that I could find pertaining to Teddy Verplanck is destroyed. He never existed. If you and Kathleen and I believe that then maybe we can live like normal people."

Lloyd slammed the wall with his fist. "But I have to know! I've got to pay for Joanie Pratt, and I'm not a cop anymore, so I've got to figure out what it means so I can know what to do! I had this dream that Jesus God I just can't ex—"

Dutch walked over and put his hands on Lloyd's shoulders. "You're still a cop. I went to the Chief myself. I lied and I threatened and I groveled and it cost me my promotion and my I.A.D. command. Your trouble with I.A.D. never happened, just like Teddy never happened. But you owe me, and you're going to pay."

Lloyd wiped tears from his eyes. "What's the price?"

Dutch said, "Bury the past and get on with your life."

Lloyd got Janice's new address and flew up to San Francisco the following night. Janice was gone for the weekend, but the girls were there with her friend George, and when he walked through the door they pounced on him until he was certain that they would bruise every inch of his battered body. He had a brief moment of panic when they demanded a story, but the tale of the gentle lady poet and the cop satisfied them until it burst apart in a torrent of tears. Penny was the one to supply the conclusion. Holding Lloyd tightly, she said: "Happy stories are a new mode for you, Daddy. You'll get the hang of it. Picasso switched his style late in life, so can you."

Lloyd got a hotel room near Janice's apartment and spent the weekend with his daughters, taking them to Fisherman's Wharf and the Zoo and the Museum of Natural History. When he dropped them off Sunday night George told him that Janice had a lover, an attorney specializing in tax shelters. He was the one Janice was spending the weekend with. Brief thoughts of wreaking havoc on the affair crossed his mind and he reflexively balled his hands into fists. Then images of Joanie Pratt rendered his blood thoughts stillborn. Lloyd kissed and hugged the girls goodbye and walked back to his hotel. Janice had a lover and he had Kathleen and he didn't know what he felt, let alone what it all meant.

On Monday morning Lloyd flew back to Los Angeles and took a cab to Parker Center. He walked up to the sixth floor, feeling the sore muscles around his groin wound stretch and tighten. It would still be weeks before he could make love, but when old doc dope pusher gave him the word he would sweep Kathleen off for a whole shitload of weekends.

The sixth floor corridors were empty. Lloyd checked his watch. 10:35. Morning coffee break. The junior officers' lounge was probably packed. Dutch had undoubtedly covered his prolonged absence with some sort of story, so why not get the reunion amenities out of the way in one fell swoop?

Lloyd pushed the lounge door open. His face lit up at the sight of a huge roomful of shirt-sleeved men hunched over coffee and donuts, laughing and joking and making good-natured obscene gestures. He stood in the doorway savoring the picture until he felt the noise recede to a hush. Every man in the room was looking at him, and when they all rose to their feet and began to applaud he looked back into their faces and saw nothing but awe and love. The room swayed behind his tears, and shouted "bravos" coupled with the applause to drive him back out into the corridor, dashing more tears from his eyes, wondering what on earth it all *meant.*

Lloyd ran toward his office. He was fumbling in his pocket for his keys when Officer Artie Cranfield came up beside him and said, "Welcome back, Lloyd."

Lloyd pointed down the hallway and wiped his face. "What the fuck was that all about, Artie? What the fuck did all that *mean?*"

Artie looked puzzled, then wary. "Don't shit a shitter, Lloyd. There's a rumor all over the department that you cleared the Hollywood Slaughterer case. I don't know where it started, but everyone in Robbery-Homicide believes it, and so does half the L.A.P.D. The word is that Dutch Peltz told the Chief himself and that the Chief pulled the Internal Affairs bulls off your ass because keeping you *on* the Department was the best way to keep your mouth *shut.* You want to tell me about it?"

Lloyd's tears of bewilderment became tears of laughter. He opened his door and wiped his face with his sleeve. "The case was cleared by a woman, Artie. A left-wing cop-hater poet. Dig the irony and enjoy your tape recorder."

Lloyd closed the door on Artie Cranfield's baffled face. When he heard him walk away muttering to himself he switched on the light and looked at his cubicle. Everything was the same as when he had last seen it, except for a single red rose sticking out of a coffee cup on his desk. There was a piece of paper next to the cup. Lloyd picked it up and read:

> Dearest L.—Protracted goodbyes are terrible, so I'll be brief. I have to go away. I have to go away because you have given me back my life, and now I have to see what I can do with it. I love you and I need your shelter and you need mine, but the mortar that binds us is blood, and if we stay together it will own us and we will never have the chance to be sane. I have given up the bookstore and my apartment. (It belongs to my creditors and the bank, anyway.) I have my car and a few hundred dollars in cash, and am taking off sans excess baggage for parts unknown. (Men have been doing it for years.) I have much on my mind, much writing to do. Does "Penance for Joanie Pratt" sound like a good title? She owns me, and if I give her my best then maybe I'll be forgiven. I hurt for our past, L.–But I hurt for your future most of all. You have chosen to stalk ugliness and try

> to replace it with your numbing kind of love, and that is a painful road to follow. Goodbye. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
>
> K.
>
> P.S. The rose is for Teddy. If we remember him, then he'll never be able to hurt us.

Lloyd put the paper down and picked up the flower. He held it to his cheek and juxtaposed the image with the spartan accoutrements of his trade. Floral-scented terror merged with metal filing cabinets, wanted posters, and a map of the city, producing pure white light. When Kathleen's words turned the light into music he drew the moment into the strongest fiber of his heart and carried it away.

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ISBN: 978-1-4532-2797-8

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Cover design by Thomas Ng

This edition published in 2011 by MysteriousPress.com/Open Road Integrated Media
180 Maiden Lane
New York, NY 10014
www.openroadmedia.com

THE LLOYD HOPKINS TRILOGY

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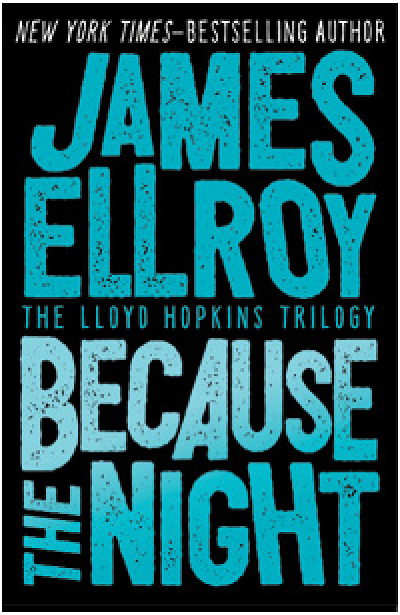
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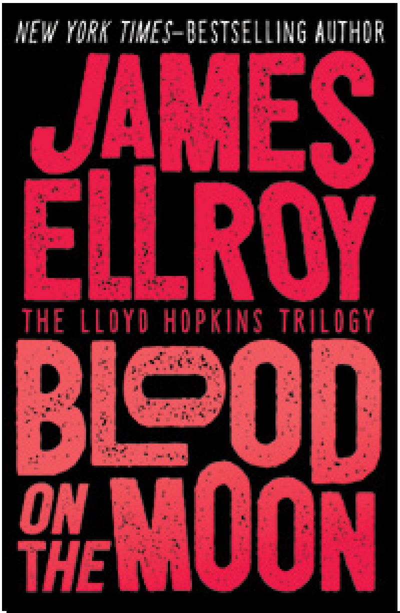

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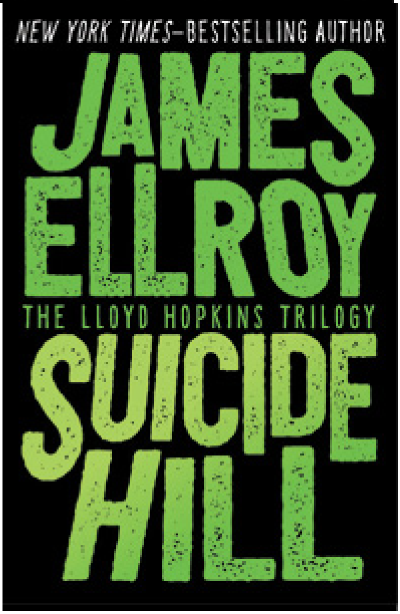

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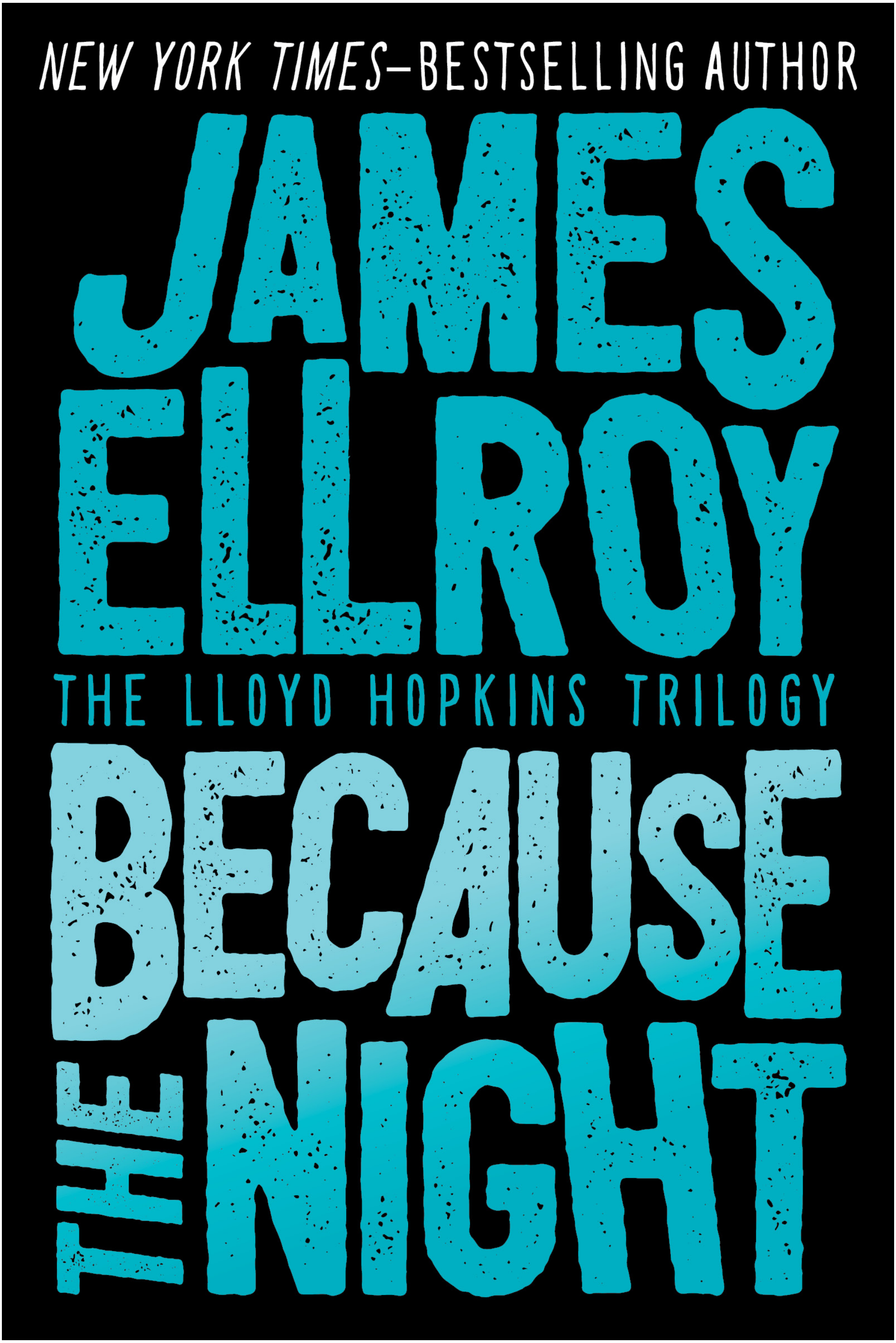

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I must take charge of the liquid fire,
and storm the cities of human desire

—W. H. Auden

THE liquor store stood at the tail end of a long stretch of neon, where the Hollywood Freeway cut across Sunset, the dividing line between bright lights and residential darkness.

The man in the yellow Toyota pulled into the bushes beside the on-ramp, twisting the wheel outward and snapping on the emergency brake in a single deft motion. He took a big-bore revolver from the glove compartment and stuck it inside a folded-up newspaper with the grip and trigger guard extended, then turned the ignition key to *accessory* and opened the car door. Breathing shallowly, he whispered, “Beyond the beyond,” and walked up to the blinking fluorescent sign that spelled L-I-Q-U-O-R, the dividing line between his old life of fear and his new life of power.

When he walked through the open door, the man behind the counter noticed his expensive sports clothes and folded *Wall Street Journal* and decided he was a class Scotch buyer—Chivas or Walker Black at the least. He was about to offer assistance when the customer leaned over the counter, jabbed the newspaper at his chest and said, “Forty-one-caliber special load. Don’t make me prove it. Give me the money.”

The proprietor complied, keeping his eyes on the cash register to avoid memorizing the robber’s features and giving him a reason to kill. He felt the man’s finger on the trigger and caught the shadow of his head circling the store as he fumbled the cash into a paper bag. He was about to look up when he heard a sob behind him near the refrigerator case, followed by the sound of the robber cocking his gun. When he did look up, the *Wall Street Journal* was gone and a huge black barrel was descending, and then there was a cracking behind his ear and blood in his eyes.

The gunman leaped behind the counter and dragged the man, kicking and flailing, to the rear of the store, then crept to the cardboard beer display that stood next to the refrigerator case. He kicked the display over and saw a young woman in a navy pea coat huddled behind an old man in coveralls.

The robber weaved on his feet; nothing he had been taught had prepared him for three. His eyes shifted back and forth between the two whimpering in front of him and the counterman off to his left, searching for a neutral ground to tell him what to do. His vision crisscrossed the store, picking up geometric stacks of bottles, shelves piled with junk food, cutouts of girls in bikinis drinking Rum Punch and Spañada. Nothing.

A scream was building in his throat when he saw the beige curtain that separated the store from the living quarters behind it. When a gust of wind ruffled the curtain he *did* scream—watching as the cotton folds assumed the shape of bars and hangman’s nooses.

Now he knew.

He jerked the girl and the old man to their feet and shoved them to the curtain. When they were trembling in front of it, he dragged the counterman over and stationed him beside them. Muttering, “Green door, green door,” he paced out five yards, wheeled and squeezed off three perfect head shots. The horrible beige curtain exploded into crimson.

2

DETECTIVE Sergeant Lloyd Hopkins stared across the desk at his best friend and mentor Captain Arthur Peltz, wondering when the Dutchman would end his preliminaries and get down to the reason why he had called him here. Everything from the L.A.P.D.'s touch football league to recent robbery bulletins had been discussed. Lloyd knew that since Janice and the girls had left him Dutch had to fish for conversational openers—he could never be direct when he wanted something. The rearing of families had always been their ice-breaker, but now that Lloyd was familyless, Dutch had to establish parities by roundabout means. Growing impatient and feeling ashamed of it, Lloyd looked out the window at the nightwatch revving up their black-and-whites and said, "You're troubled, Dutch. Tell me what it is and I'll help."

Dutch put down the quartz bookend he was fingering. "Jungle Jack Herzog. Ring a bell?"

Lloyd shook his head. "No."

Handing him a manila folder, Dutch said, "Officer Jacob Herzog, age thirty-four. Thirteen years on the job. An exemplary cop, balls like you wouldn't believe. Looked like a wimp, bench pressed two-fifty. Worked Metro, worked Intelligence Division plants, worked solo on Vice loan-outs to every squadroom in the city. Three citations for bravery. Known as the 'Alchemist,' because he could fake *anything.* He could be an old crippled man, a drunk marine, a fag, a low rider. You name it."

Lloyd's eyes bored in. "And?"

"And he's been missing for three weeks. You remember Marty Bergen? 'Old Yellowstreak'?"

"I know two jigs blew his partner in half with a ten-gauge and Bergen dropped his gun and ran like hell. I know he faced a trial board for cowardice under fire and got shitcanned from the Department. I know he published some short stories when he was working Hollenbeck Patrol and that he's been churning out anticop bullshit for the *Big Orange Insider* since he was fired. How does he figure in this?"

Dutch pointed to the folder. "Bergen was Herzog's best friend. Herzog spoke up for him at the trial board, made a big stink, dared the Department to fire him. The Chief himself had him yanked off the streets, assigned to a desk job downtown—clerking at Personnel Records. But Jungle Jack was too good to be put to pasture. He's been working undercover, on requests from half the vice commanders on this side of the hill. He'd been here at Hollywood for the past couple of months. Walt Perkins requested him, paid him cash out of the snitch fund to glom liquor violators. Jack was knocking them dead where Walt's guys couldn't get in the door without being recognized."

Lloyd picked up the folder and put it in his jacket pocket. "Missing Person's Report? Family? Friends?"

"All negative, Lloyd. Herzog was a stone loner. No family except an elderly father. His landlord hasn't seen him in over a month, he hasn't shown up here *or* at his personnel job downtown."

"Booze? Dope? A pussy hound?"

Dutch sighed. "I would say that he was what you'd call an ascetic intellectual. And the Department doesn't seem to care—Walt and I are the first ones to even note his absence. He's been a sullen hardass since Bergen was canned."

Lloyd sighed back. "You've been using the past tense to describe Herzog, Dutchman. You think he's dead?"

"Yeah. Don't you?"

Lloyd's answer was interrupted by shouting from the downstairs muster room. There was the sound of footsteps in the hall, and seconds later a uniformed cop stuck his head in the doorway. "Liquor store on Sunset and Wilton, Skipper. Three people shot to death."

Lloyd began to tingle, his body going alternately hot and cold. "I'm going," he said.

3

THE man in the yellow Toyota turned off Topanga Canyon Road and drove north on the Pacific Coast Highway, dawdling at stoplights so that his arrival at the Doctor’s beach house would coincide exactly with dusk. As always, the dimming of daylight brought relief, brought the feeling of another gauntlet run and conquered. With darkness came his reward for being the Doctor’s unexpendable right arm, the one person aside from the Night Tripper who knew just how far his “lonelies” could be tapped, dredged, milked, and exploited.

Spring was a sweet enemy, he thought. There were tortuously long bouts of sunshine to contend with, transits that made nightfall that much more satisfying. This morning he had been up at dawn, running an eight-hour string of telephone credit checks on the names gleaned from the John books of the Doctor’s hooker patients. A full day, with, hopefully, a fuller evening in store: his first grouping since taking three people for the mortal coil shuffle and maybe later a run to the South Bay singles bars to trawl for more rich lonelies.

The man’s timing was perfect; he pulled off P.C.H. and down the access road just as the Doctor’s introductory music wafted across the parking area. Six cars—six lonelies; a full house. He would have to run for the speaker room before the Night Tripper got impatient.

Inside the house, the man ignored the baroque quartet issuing over the central speakers and made for a small rectangular room lined with acoustical padding. The walls held a master recording console with six speakers—one for each upstairs bedroom, with microphone jacks for each outlet and six pairs of headphones and an enormous twelve-spooled tape deck capable of recording the activity in *all* the bedrooms with the flick of a single switch.

He went to work, first turning on the power amp, then hitting the volume on all six speakers at once. A cacophony of chanting struck his ears and he turned the sound down. The lonelies were still shouting their mantras, working themselves into the trancelike state that was a necessary precondition to the Doctor’s counseling. Getting out his notebook and pen, the man settled into a leather chair facing the console, waiting for the red lights on the amplifier to flash—his signal to listen in, record, and assess from his standpoint as Dr. John Havilland’s executive officer.

He had held that position for two years; two years spent prowling Los Angeles for human prey. The Doctor had taught him to control his compulsions, and in payment for that service he had become the instrument that brought about realization of Havilland’s own obsession.

As the Doctor explained it, a “consciousness implosion” had replaced the “consciousness explosion” of the 1960s, resulting in large numbers of people abandoning the old American gospels of home, hearth, and country, *and* the counterculture revelations of the sixties. Three exploitable facts remained, one indigenous to the naive pre-sixties psyche, two to the jaded post: God, sex, and drugs. Given the right people, the variations on those three themes would be infinite.

His assignment was to find the right people. Havilland described his prototypical chess piece as: “White, of either gender, the offspring of big money who never fit in and never grew up; weak, scared, bored to death and without purpose, but given to a mystical bent. They should be orphaned and living on trust funds or investment capital or severely estranged from their families and living on remittances. They should accede to the concept of the ‘spiritual master’ without the slightest awareness that what they really want is someone to tell them what to do. They should love drugs and possess marked sexuality. They should consider themselves rebels, but their rebelliousness should always have been actualized as timid participation in mass movements. Find these people for me. It will be easier than you might think; because as you search for them, they will be searching for me.”

The search took him to singles bars, consciousness workshops, the ashrams of a half dozen gurus, and lectures on everything from New Left social mobilization to macrobiotic midwifery, and resulted in six people who met Havilland’s criteria straight down the line and who fell for his charisma hook, line, and sinker. Along the way he served the Doctor in other capacities, burglarizing the homes of his legitimate patients; reconnoitering for information that would lead to the recruitment of more lonelies; screening sex ads in the underground tabloids for rich older people to pimp the lonelies to; planning his training sessions and keeping his elaborately crossreferenced files.

He had moved forward with the Doctor, indispensable as his procuror of human clay. Soon Havilland would embark on his most ambitious project, with him at his side. Last night he had proved his mettle superbly.

But the headaches …

The light above speaker number one flashed on, causing the man to drop his pen and reach for the headphones. He had managed to adjust them and plug in the jack when he heard the Doctor cough—his signal that it was time to pay careful attention and make notes about anything that seemed special or particularly useful.

First came a profusion of amenities, followed by the two lonelies praising the bedroom’s decor. The man could hear the Doctor pooh-poohing the rococo tapestries, assuring his charges that such surroundings were their birthright.

“Get to it, Doc,” the man muttered.

As if in answer, the Doctor said, “So much for light conversation. We’re here to break through the prosaic, not dawdle in it. How did your ménage in Santa Barbara work out? Did you learn anything about yourselves? Exorcise any demons?”

A soft male voice answered. The man recognized the voice immediately and recalled his recruitment: the gay bar in West Hollywood; the plump executive type whose wary mien was a virtual neon sign announcing “frightened first-timer seeking sexual identity.” The seduction had been easy and the seducee had met all the Doctor’s criteria.

“We used the coke to get things started,” the soft voice said. “Our client was old and afraid of displaying his body, but the coke got his juices running. I—”

A woman’s voice interrupted: *“I* got the old geezer’s juices going. He wasn’t even down to his skivvies when I grabbed his crotch. He wanted the *woman* to take the lead; I sensed that as soon as we walked in the door and I saw all that science fiction art on the walls—amazons with chains and whips, all that shit. He—”

The soft male voice rose to a wail. “I was savoring the lead-in! Doctor said to take it slow, the guy wasn’t pre-screened. We got him from the sex ads, and Doctor said that—”

“Bullshit!” the woman barked. “You wanted to get coked yourself, and you wanted the old guy to like you because you were the one with the dope, and if we played it your way the whole assignment would have been a cocaine tea party.”

The man put down his pen as the executive type started to blubber. After a short interval of silence, the Doctor whispered, “Hush, Billy. Hush. Go out and sit in the hallway. I want to talk to Jane alone.”

There were the sounds of footsteps over a hardwood floor and of a door slammed in rage. The man smiled in anticipation of some vintage Havilland. When the Doctor’s voice came over the speaker, he took up his pen with a glee akin to love.

“You’re letting your anger run you, Jane.”

“I know, Doctor,” the woman said.

“Your power lies in exercising it judiciously.”

“I know.”

“Was the assignment fulfilling?”

“Yes. I chose the sex and made them like it.”

“But it felt hollow afterwards?”

“Yes and no. It was satisfying, but Billy and the old man were so *weak*!”

“Hush, Janey. You deserve to traffic with stronger egos. I’ll keep my eye on the high-line personals. We’ll find you some feisty intellectuals to butt heads with.”

“And a partner with balls?”

“Nooo, you’ll go solo next time.”

The man heard Jane weep in gratitude. Shaking his head in loathing, he listened to the Doctor deliver his coup de grâce: “He paid you the full five thousand?”

“Yes, Doctor.”

“Did you do something nice for yourself with your gratuity?”

“I bought myself a sweater.”

“You could have done better than that.”

“I—I wanted you to have the money, Doctor. I took the sweater just as a symbol of the assignment.”

“Thank you, Jane. Everything else all right? Reciting your fear mantras? Following the program?”

“Yes, Doctor.”

“Good. Then leave the money with me. I’ll call you at the pay phone later this week.”

"Yes, Doctor."

The sounds of departure forced the man to catch up with his note-taking. As if on cue, the Doctor clapped his hands and said, "Jesus, what an ugly creature. Speaker three, Goff. Efficacy training."

Goff plugged a jack into speaker number three and hit the *record* switch. When the tape spool began to spin, he tiptoed upstairs to watch. This would be his first visual auditing since blasting his "beyond" to hell, and he had to see how far the Night Tripper was taking his recruits. Only one of them was capable of approaching his own degree of extremity, and all his instincts told him that Havilland was just about to push him to it.

Goff was wrong. Peering through a crack in the door, he saw the Professor and the Bookworm kneeling on gym mats facing the mirror that covered the entire west wall. Their hands were clasped as if in prayer and Havilland was standing over them, murmuring works of encouragment. With Billy Boy and the Bull Dagger already counseled, it meant that the Doctor was saving the foxy redhead and the real psycho for last.

Goff pressed himself into the wall and stared into the bedroom just as the two men on the mats pulled off their undershirts and began shouting their fear mantras. "*Patria infinitum patria infinitum patria infinitum patria infinitum patria infinitum.*" With each repetition of the phrase they smashed their hands into their chests, each time harder, shouting louder and louder as the blows hit home. Throughout, they retained eye to eye contact with their own mirror images, never flinching, even as blood-dotted welts rose on their torsos.

Goff checked the second hand of his watch. One minute. Two. Three. Just when he thought the chanters would have to collapse, he heard the word "*Stop*!"

Havilland knelt on the mat, facing the men. Goff watched them move their eyes from the mirror to the eyes of the Doctor, then extend their right arms and squeeze their hands into fists. Havilland reached into the pocket of his lab coat and withdrew a disposable syringe and a handful of cotton balls. First he injected the Bookworm; then he wiped the needle and injected the Professor. Both lonelies swayed on their knees but remained upright.

The Doctor got to his feet, smiled, and said, "Think pure efficacy. Robert, you have been placed in a very wealthy home on assignment. A couple, an older man and woman, are drooling for your favors. The phone rings. They both go to answer it. Where do *you* go?"

Robert stammered, "T-to the b-bathroom? To check for drugs?"

Havilland shook his head. "No. You have drugs on the brain; it's a weak point of yours. Monte, what would *you* do?"

Monte wiped sweat from his chest and twisted to stare at himself in the mirror. "*I* would wonder why the call was so important that they both had to run for the phone, especially when I was there looking so groovy. So what I would do would be to run for an extension and pick it up the very second that the old fucker did, then listen in and see if there was any salient info I could get from the call."

Havilland smiled and said, "Bravo," then slapped Monte across the face and whispered, "Bravo, but always look at *me* when you answer. If you look at yourself you get the notion that you thought independently. Do you see the fallacy in that kind of thinking?"

Monte lowered his eyes, then brought them up to meet Havilland's. "Yes, Doctor."

"Good. Robert, a hypothetical question for you. Think pure efficacy and answer candidly. My supply of legally obtained pharmaceutical drugs runs out, because of new laws passed limiting hypnotics and the like to physicians with hospital affiliations. You crave them and come to realize that they are what you like most about being in my tutelage. What do you do?"

The Bookworm pondered the question, shifting his gaze back and forth from the mirror to the Doctor. Goff grinned when he realized that Havilland had given the lonelies a Pentothal jolt.

Finally, Robert whispered, "It would never happen to you. It just couldn't."

Havilland put his hands on Robert's shoulders and gave them a gentle squeeze. "The perfect answer. Monte would have intellectualized it, but your response was pure candor and pure heart. And of course you were right. I want you to both chant your mantras now. Hold eye contact with yourself, but think of *me.*"

When Havilland started for the door, Goff padded downstairs and back to the speaker room. He rewound the efficacy training tape and placed the spool in a large manila envelope, then plugged his headphones into the middle speaker just in time to hear male/female sexual grunting move into strangled sighs and girlish giggles. The giggle became a high-pitched smoker's cough, and Goff himself laughed. It *was* the tight little redhead he had picked up at the Lingerie Club, the one who had devastated him with her Kundalini yoga positions. He had been lucky to get out of her Bunker Hill Towers condo alive.

The Doctor was the first to speak. "Bravo. Bravo." His monotone sent the woman into new gales of laughter. The man she had coupled with was still trying to catch his breath. Goff imagined him lying on the bed on the verge of a coronary.

The Doctor spoke again. "Later, Helen. I want to check the victim's pulse. You may have gone too far this time."

"Beyond the beyond," Helen said. "Isn't that our motto, Doctor?"

"Touché," the Doctor said. "I'll call you Thursday."

When a full five minutes of silence followed the sound of little Helen skipping gaily out the bedroom door, Goff's gut clenched. He knew that the male lover was the real psycho and that the Night Tripper was taking him a major step closer to his brink. Thus the shattering of glass and the obscenities that came in the wake of the stillness were expected, as were the expressions of concern from the Doctor. "It's all right, Richard, it really is. Sometimes 'beyond the beyond' means hating. First you have to accept that reality, then you have to work through it. You can't hate yourself for being what you are. You are basically *good* and *powerful,* or you wouldn't be with me now. You just happen to have an exceptionally high violence threshold to overcome in order to achieve your selfhood."

Thomas Goff shifted into memories of Richard Oldfield's recruitment, beginning with the crippled whore with the three-hundred-dollar-a-day smack habit he had met at Plato's Retreat West. She had told him of the stockbroker/bodybuilder/remittance man who paid five C-notes a pop to work her over because of her resemblance to the governess who had tortured him as a child.

The approach at the health club had had the thrust of a nightmare; Oldfield looked enough like Goff to be taken for his fraternal twin, and he was deadlifting four hundred pounds. But the bodybuilder had capitulated to the Doctor's machinations like a baby going for its mother's tit.

More breaking glass. Oldfield weeping. Havilland alternately whistling a tune and murmuring, "There, there." Goff knew that the reversal was coming.

It arrived in the form of a slap in the face that filled the speaker with static. "You weakling," Dr. John Havilland hissed. "You picayune poseur. You sycophantic whoremonger. I give you the best fuck in our program, promise to take you where your chickenshit conscience would never permit you to stray, and you respond by smashing windows and bawling."

"Doctor, please," Richard Oldfield whimpered.

"Please *what,* Richard?"

"Ple—you know …"

"You have to say it."

"Ple-please take me as far as I can go."

The Doctor sighed. "Soon, Richard. I'm going to be collecting a great deal of information, and it should yield the name of a woman suitable for you. Think of that when you go through your fear mantras."

"Thank you, Doctor John."

"Don't thank me, Richard. Your green doors are my green doors. Go home now. I'm tired, and I'm going to dismiss the grouping early."

Goff heard the Doctor escort Oldfield to the door. The tape machine recorded a hissing silence. The Night Tripper's executive officer imagined it as being inhabited by nightmares in repose, manifested in cold manila folders spilling out data that would transform human beings into chess pieces. The Alchemist and his six offerings were just the beginning. A series of Havilland's slogans caused Goff to shudder back the headache that was burning behind a beige curtain in his mind. Last night. Three. What if the data keepers couldn't be bought? The headache throbbed through the curtain, like a hungry worm eating at his brain.

Doors slamming above him; periods of stillness, followed by the staggered departures of the lonelies. Mercedes and Audis pulling out onto P.C.H. and more silence. Suddenly Goff was terrified.

"Bad thoughts, Thomas?"

Goff swung around in his chair, knocking his shorthand pad to the floor. He looked up into the light brown eyes of Dr. John Havilland, locking his own eyes into them exactly as the Doctor had taught him. "Just thoughts, Doctor."

"Good. The papers are full of you. How does it feel?"

"It feels dark and quiet."

"Good. Does the 'psycho killer' speculation disturb you?"

"No, it amuses me because it's so far from the truth."

"You had to take out three?"

"Yes. I—I remembered your efficacy training. Some-sometime I might have to do it again."

"A cold gun? Untraceable?"

"Cold city. I stole it."

"Good. How are the headaches?"

"Not too bad. I chant if they really start to hurt."

"Good. If your vision starts to blur again, see me immediately, I'll give you an injection. Dreams?"

"Sometimes I dream about the Alchemist. He was good, wasn't he?"

"He was superb, Thomas. But he's gone. I scared him off the face of the earth."

Havilland handed Goff a slip of paper. "She's a legitimate patient—she phoned the office for an appointment. I checked her out with some girls in the life. She's a thousand dollars a night. Check out her John book—anyone who can afford her can afford us."

Goff looked at the slip: Linda Wilhite, 9819 Wilshire Blvd, 91W. He smiled. "It's an easy building. I've hit it before."

Havilland smiled back. "Good, Thomas. Go home now and enjoy your dreams."

"How do you know I'll enjoy them?"

"I *know* your dreams. I made them."

Goff watched the Doctor about-face and walk to the latticework patio that overlooked the beach. He let the Doctor's exit line linger in his mind, then turned off the tape console and walked outside to his car. He was about to hit the ignition when he noticed a mound of wadded up plastic on top of the dashboard. He grabbed at it and screamed, because he knew that it was *beige* plastic, and that meant that *he* knew.

Goff ripped the plastic trashbag to shreds, then slammed his fists into the dashboard until the pain numbed the screaming in his mind. Turning on the headlights, he saw something white under his windshield wiper. He got out of the car and examined it. The embossed business card of John R. Havilland, M.D., Practice in Psychiatry, stared at him. He turned the card over. Neatly printed on the back were the words *I know your nightmares.*

AFTER thirty-six nonstop hours on the liquor store case, Lloyd Hopkins fell asleep in his cubicle at Parker Center and dreamed of annihilation. Sound waves bombarded him, predator birds attacked the willfully shut-off part of his brain where the man he had killed in the Watts riot and the man he had tried to kill last year resided. The birds tore open jagged sections of sky, letting in crystals the color of blood. When he awakened he bludgeoned the images with quiet still-lifes of Janice and the girls in San Francisco, waiting for time to heal the wounds or reinforce the division. The liquor store/charnel house memory took over from there, pushing family love back into the safety compartment with his nightmares. Lloyd was relieved.

The death scene expanded in his mind, chalked like a forensic technician's marking grid. Off to his left were an open cash register, a counter scattered with tens and twenties, broken liquor bottles all along the lower shelves. Heel marks where the proprietor had been dragged to his execution. The right hand grid revealed an overturned cardboard beer display and heel marks where the two other victims had probably crouched to hide from the killer. Bisecting the grids was the crimson wind tunnel into the store's rear room, three bodies crumpled across a once beige curtain that was torn free from the doorway by the muzzle velocity of three hollow point .41 slugs smashing through three cranial vaults. There were no discernible trajectory or spatter marks; exploded brain and bone debris had rendered the tiny stockroom a slaughterhouse.

Lloyd shook himself further awake, thinking: *Psychopath.* He walks into the store, pulls out a monster hand-cannon and demands the money, then sees or hears something that flips his switch. Enraged, he hops over the counter and drags the proprietor by the hair over to the doorway. The girl and the old man betray their presence. He knocks over the display cutout and makes them walk to the curtain. Then he takes them out with three bull's-eyes from a top-heavy, unvented revolver with monster recoil, leaving the money on the counter. A volcano with ice-water fuel injection.

Lloyd stood up and stretched. Feeling the last residue of sleep dissipate, he walked down the hall to the mens room and stood before the sink, alternately staring at himself in the mirror and running cold water over his face. He ignored the sound of early arriving officers laughing and primping quietly around him, aware for a split second that they were keeping their voices at a low register out of deference to his reputation and well-known hatred of loud noise. Feeling his rage start to peak, he defined his killer with self-righteous cop invective: *psychopathic scumbag. Take him out before his switch flips again.*

The first thirty-six hours of his investigation had been spent thinking and chasing computer type. After noticing a “No Parking” zone outside the liquor store and extending all the way down the block, Lloyd theorized that the killer had either walked to the location or had parked in the bushes beside the freeway on-ramp. His latter thesis had been rewarded—under fluorescent arc lights the forensic technicians had found fresh tire tracks in the soft dirt and minute yellow paint scrapings stuck to the tips of sharp branches. Four hours later the L.A.P.D.’s Scientific Investigation Division completed its tests on the paint and announced the results of the technician’s plaster of paris moldings of the tire tracks: The car was a Japanese import, late model; the paint the standard brand in every Japanese automotive plant; the tires standard equipment radials—used solely by Japanese manufacturers. R & I and a computer cross-check of recent armed robbery and homicide bulletins revealed that there were no yellow Japanese imports registered to convicted and paroled armed robbers or murderers and that none had been mentioned as figuring in any robberies or homicides dating back over a year. The California Department of Motor Vehicles supplied the most frustrating information: There were 311,819 yellow Japanese automobiles, 1977 to 1984 models, registered in Los Angeles County, making a concerted check for criminal records a clerical impossibility. Even the L.A. County “Hot Sheet” yielded zilch—a total of eight yellow Toyotas, Subarus, and Hondas had been reported stolen over the past six weeks, and all eight had been recovered. The car was a dead end.

Which left the gun.

Lloyd considered the still awaited latent print workup a foregone conclusion: smudges, streaks, partials, and at best a few completes belonging to local juiceheads who patronized the store. Let the three officers he had assigned to run background checks on the victims have carte blanche there—fingerprint mania or the “kill three to get one” angle his superiors at Robbery/Homicide had told him to stress were as dead as the car. Every ounce of Lloyd’s instinct told him that, just as every ounce had told him that the trinity of this case was the killer’s psychosis, his cool, his *gun.*

The Ballistics Report and the Autopsy Protocol were rife with flat-out wonderment. Henry McGuire, Wallace Chamales, and Susan Wischer were killed by a .41 revolver fired from a distance of twelve to fifteen feet, all three slugs hitting them square between the eyes. The killer was a marksman, the gun an anomaly. Forty-one revolvers predated the Wild West days, going out of manufacture before the Civil War. They were too unwieldy, too heavy, and had a marked tendency toward misfiring. Forty-one ammunition was even worse: hardball or hollow point, its unpredictable reports were capable of jerking the shooter’s arm seemingly out of its socket or of going off like a soggy popcorn kernel. Whoever had shot the three people at Freeway Liquor had mastered a difficult antique handgun with antique ammo and had exercised his mastery under a state of extreme duress.

Lloyd stared deeper at his own mirror image, wondering what to do now that he had already sent stolen gun queries to every police agency in California and had personally questioned every antique gun dealer in the Central Yellow Pages. Negative answers all the way down the line—no .41s in stock, let alone purchased, and it would probably be another twenty-four hours before the responses to his queries began trickling in. All the paperwork was digested; all the facts were lodged. There was nothing he could do but wait.

And waiting was antithetical to his nature. Lloyd walked back to his cubicle and stared at the walls. Snapshots of his daughters formed a spray around the fed's ten most wanted; a pincushion map of L.A. County showed that homicides were up in Hollywood, South Central, and the East Valley. On the Freeway Liquor case the obvious next step was a call to Hollywood dicks to see what their snitches had come up with. Looking for something to perk his mental juices, he picked up the file that Dutch Peltz had given him just before the start of the frantic thirty-six hours. *Herzog, Jacob Michael, 5/3/49,* was typed on the front of the manila folder and inside were Xerox copies of statistical records forms, fitness reports, commendation certificates and odd memoranda from superior officers. Thinking of Herzog as a dead man and of the folder as his epitaph, Lloyd pulled up a chair and read every word in it five times.

A singular man emerged. Jungle Jack Herzog had a 137 I.Q., barely met the L.A.P.D.'s height and weight requirements and was born in Beirut, Lebanon. He was fluent in three Middle Eastern languages and had protested the Vietnam war in college, before joining the Air National Guard. He had graduated twelfth in his academy class and received scrolls in scholarship, marksmanship, and physical training. His first four years on the job had been spent working Wilshire Patrol and Wilshire Vice, receiving Class A fitness reports, earning praise from all superior officers save one vice squad lieutenant, who shunted him back into uniform for refusing to serve in a public restroom deployment to catch persons engaged in homosexual acts. That same lieutenant had then recanted his criticism—later requesting that Herzog train his men in operating bookmaking and prostitution surveillances, heavily emphasizing the use of disguise. Herzog's "seminars" had been so successful that he gained consultant status, training plainclothes officers city wide, staying in demand while doing four and three year tours of duty at West L.A. and Venice Divisions.

Jungle Jack became known as the "Alchemist," a reference to his ability to tranform himself and render himself virtually invisible on the street. He was also spectacularly brave—twice resolving hostage situations, the first time by offering himself to the gunman who had taken over a bar he was staking out for liquor violations.

The gunman had grabbed a young prostitute and was holding a knife to her throat while his accomplice tapped the cash register and grabbed the purses and billfolds of the bar's patrons. Herzog, in the guise of a crippled drunk, taunted the knife wielder to release the girl and take him in her stead, screaming obscenities at him, inching closer as the blade drew a trickle of blood at the girl's throat. When he was two feet away, the gunman shoved the prostitute aside and grabbed Herzog, screaming when Jungle Jack's elbow crashed into his windpipe. Herzog disabled the man with a flat-handed karate chop and took off after his accomplice, catching him after a five-block foot pursuit.

The second hostage situation was resolved even more boldly. A man known to local officers as a heavy angel dust user had snatched a little girl and was holding her at gunpoint while a crowd gathered around him. Jack Herzog, in uniform, walked though the crowd and up to the man, who dropped the little girl and fired at him three times. The shots missed, and Herzog blew the man's brains out at point-blank range.

Herzog's reputation grew within the Department; requests from vice squad and plainclothes commanders multiplied. Then Sergeant Martin Bergen, Herzog's best friend, committed an act of cowardice as noteworthy as Herzog's acts of bravery. A trial board followed, and Herzog went to the wall for his friend, calling in favors in hope of saving Bergen's career, testifying as a character witness at his trial, decrying the L.A.P.D.'s hero mentality from his standpoint as one of its greatest heroes. Martin Bergen was banished from the Department in disgrace and Jungle Jack Herzog was banished to a file clerk job—a defeat as ignominious as Bergen's. Even a hero shouldn't fuck with the bosses.

Lloyd put the folder down when he realized that a shadow had fallen across the pages. He looked up to find Officer Artie Cranfield from S.I.D. staring at him.

"Hello, Lloyd. How's tricks?"

"Tricky."

"You need a shave."

"I know."

"Any leads on the liquor store job?"

"No. I'm waiting on queries. Ever hear of a cop named Jungle Jack Herzog?"

"Yeah, who hasn't? A real gunslinger."

"Ever hear of an ex-cop named Marty Bergen?"

"What is this, a guessing game? Everyone knows Old Yellowstreak and that toilet paper tabloid he writes for. Why?"

"Herzog and Bergen were best buddies. Mr. Guts and Mr. Chickenshit. You like it?"

"Not particularly. You look sardonic, Lloyd."

"Waiting makes me feel sardonic. Not sleeping makes me look sardonic."

"Are you going home to sleep?"

"No, I'm going to look for Mr. Guts."

Artie shook his head. "Before you go, say something macho about the liquor store asshole."

Lloyd smiled. "How about 'his ass is grass and I'm the fucking lawnmower'?"

"I like it! I like it!"

"I thought you would."

Lloyd drove to Jack Herzog's last known address, a twenty-unit apartment house on the valley side of the Hollywood Hills. The pink stucco building was sandwiched between two shopping malls and featured a video game arcade in the front lobby. The directory listed Herzog as living in apartment 423. Lloyd walked up four flights of stairs and checked the hallway in both directions, then jimmied the lock with a credit card and closed the door behind him, almost stumbling over the pile of unopened mail that was spread out on the floor.

He flipped a light switch and let his eyes fall on the first thing that greeted them, a trophy case filled with award scrolls and loving cups. The ink on Herzog's death certificate was the scouring powder wipe marks that covered the wood and glass surfaces. A quick check of the rest of the apartment revealed that wipe marks streaked with abrasive powder were spread over every surface capable of sustaining latent prints. It was the job of a conscientious professional.

Lloyd leafed through the envelopes on the floor. No personal letters or postcards—every piece was either a utility bill or junk mail. Letting his eyes stray over the living room walls, he saw an impersonal habitat come into focus—no artwork of any kind; no masculine disarray; furniture that had probably come with the lease. The award scrolls and loving cups had the look of hand-me-downs, and when he squinted to read the names and dates embossed on them, Lloyd saw that they were track and field awards won by Herzog's father in Lebanon during the late '40s.

The kitchen was even more spare—dishes and silverware stacked neatly by the drainboard, no food of any kind in the refrigerator or on the shelves. Only the bedroom bore signs of personality: a closet stuffed with L.A.P.D. uniforms and a huge supply of civilian clothes, outfits ranging from ragpicker overcoats to skinny-lapel pimp suits to outlaw motorcycle leathers. Beside the bed were tall shelves crammed with books. Lloyd scanned the spines. All the titles were biographies, the lives of generals, conquerors and religious iconoclasts predominating. One whole shelf was devoted to works on Richard the Lion Hearted and Martin Luther; another to books on Peter the Great. Romantic plunderers, despots, and mad visionaries. Lloyd felt a wave of love for Jungle Jack Herzog.

After checking out the bathroom, Lloyd found the phone and called Dutch Peltz at the Hollywood station. When Dutch came on the line, he said, "I'm at Herzog's pad. It's been wiped by a pro. You can scratch Herzog for real, but don't let anyone know, okay?"

"All right. Was the pad trashed?"

"No. I get the feeling the killer was just being cautious, covering his ass from all standpoints. Can you do me a few favors?"

"Name them."

"When the Vice Squad comes on, find out from Walt Perkins what bars Herzog was working. Glom any reports he may have filed. I'm going to check out Marty Bergen myself, and I'll come back here and interview Herzog's neighbors tonight. I'll call you at home around seven."

"Sounds good."

"Oh, and Dutch? Have your guys feel out their snitches on antique gun freaks, or any assholes known to use violence who've been taking up guns lately. Even if it's just street bullshit and jive, I want to know about it."

"You're fishing, Lloyd."

"I know. I'll call you at seven."

Lloyd walked through Jungle Jack Herzog's barren dwelling place. Locking the door behind him, he said, "You poor noble son-of-a-bitch, why the fuck did you have to prove yourself so hard?"

It took Lloyd half an hour to drive to the West Hollywood office of the *Big Orange Insider*. Heat, smog, and lack of sleep combined to produce a head pounding that had the pavement wobbling before his eyes. To combat it he rolled up the windows and turned the air conditioning on full, shivering as a fresh adrenaline rush overtook him. Two new cases, three dead and one presumed dead. No sleep for at least another twelve hours.

The *Big Orange Insider* occupied the first floor of a pseudo art-deco chateau on San Vicente a block south of Sunset. Lloyd walked in, bypassing the receptionist, knowing she made him for a cop and would be instantly buzzing the editorial offices to tell them the enemy was coming. He walked into a large room crammed with desks and smiled as suspicious eyes darted up from typewriters to appraise him. When the eyes turned hostile he bowed and blew the assembly a kiss. He was beginning to feel at ease when two women waved back. Then he felt a tugging at his sleeve and turned to see a tall young man pressed into him.

"Who let you back here?" the young man demanded.

"No one," Lloyd said.

"Are you a policeman?"

"I'm a defector. I've quit the cops, and I'm seeking asylum with the counterculture fourth estate. I want to peddle my memoirs. Take me to your wisest ghost writer."

"You have thirty seconds to vacate the premises."

Lloyd took a step toward the young man. The young man took two steps backwards. Seeing the fear in his eyes, Lloyd said, "Shit. Detective Sergeant Hopkins, L.A.P.D. I'm here to see Marty Bergen. Tell him it's about Jack Herzog. I'll be waiting by the reception desk."

He walked back to the reception area. The woman at the desk gave him a deadpan stare, so he busied himself by perusing the enlarged and framed editorial cartoons that adorned the four walls. The L.A.P.D. and L.A. County Sheriff's were attacked in vicious caricatures. Fat, porcine-featured policemen cloaked in American flags poked sleeping drunks with tridents; Chief Gates was dangled on a puppet's string by two men in Ku Klux Klan robes. Wolf-faced cops herded black prostitutes into a paddy wagon, while the officer at the wheel guzzled liquor, a speech balloon elaborating his thoughts: "Wow! Police work sure is exciting! I hope these bimbos are holding some cash. My car payment is overdue!"

"I'll admit it's a bit hyperbolic."

Lloyd turned to face the voice, openly sizing up the man who owned it. Martin Bergen was over six feet tall, blond, with a once strong body going to flab. His florid face was contorted into a look of mirthless mirth and his pale blue eyes were liquid but on target. His breath was equal parts whiskey and mint mouthwash.

"You should know. You had what? Thirteen or fourteen years on the job?"

"I had sixteen, Hopkins. You've got what?"

"Eighteen and a half."

"Pulling the pin at twenty?"

"No."

"I see. What's this about Jack Herzog?"

Lloyd stepped back in order to get a full-body reaction. "Herzog's been missing for over three weeks. His pad has been wiped. He was working Personnel Records downtown and on a loan-out to Hollywood Vice. No one at Parker Center or Hollywood Station has seen him. What does that tell you?"

Marty Bergen began to tremble. His red face turned pale and his hands plucked at his pants legs. He backed into the wall and slid down into a folding metal chair. The woman at the desk brought over a glass of water, then hesitated and hurried off into the ladies room when she saw Lloyd shake his head.

Lloyd sat down beside Bergen and said, "When did you see Herzog last?"

Bergen's voice was calm. "About a month ago. We still hung out. Jack didn't blame me for what I did. He knew we were different that way. He didn't judge me."

"What was his state of mind?"

"Quiet. No—he was always quiet, but lately he'd been moody, up one minute, down the next."

"What did you talk about?"

"Stuff. Shit. Books, mostly. My novel, the one I've been writing."

"Did you and Herzog discuss his assignments?"

"We never talked police work."

"I've heard Herzog described as a 'stone loner.' Is that accurate?"

"Yes."

"Can you name any of his other friends?"

"No."

"Women?"

"He had a girlfriend he saw occasionally. I don't know her name."

Lloyd leaned closer to Bergen. "What about enemies? What about men within the Department who hated him for the way he stood by you? You know the rank-and-file cop mentality as well as I do. Herzog must have engendered resentment."

"The only resentment that Jack engendered was in me. He was so much better than me at everything that I always loved him the most when I hated him the most. We were so, *so* different. When we talked last, Jack said that he was going to exonerate me. But I ran. I was guilty."

Bergen started to sob. Lloyd got up and walked to the door, looking back on the hack writer weeping underneath framed excoriations of what he had once been. Bergen was serving a life sentence with no means of atonement. Lloyd shuddered under the weight of the thought.

The return trip to the Valley eased Lloyd's fatigue. Snug in his air-conditioned cocoon, he let his mind run with images of Herzog and Bergen, intellectual cop buddies, two men who his instincts told him were as much alike as Bergen said they were different. The Freeway Liquor case receded temporarily to a back burner, and when he parked in front of Jack Herzog's building he felt his mental second wind go physical. He smiled, knowing he would have the juice for a long stretch of hunting.

Herzog's neighbors began returning home from work shortly after five. Lloyd sized the first several of them up from his car, noting that their common denominator was the weary lower middle class look indigenous to Valley residents of both genders. Prime meat for the insurance payoff ploy. He pulled a stack of phony business cards from the glove compartment and practiced his glad-hander insurance man smile, preparing for a performance that would secure him the knowledge of just how much a loner Jungle Jack Herzog was.

Three hours later, with two dozen impromptu interviews behind him, Lloyd felt Herzog move from loner to cipher. None of the people he had talked to recalled even *seeing* the resident of apartment 423, assuming that the unit was kept vacant for some reason. The obvious candor of their statements was like a kick in the teeth; the fact that several had mentioned that the landlord/manager would be out of town for another week was the finishing blow. It was a solid investigatory angle shot to hell.

Lloyd drove to a pay phone and called Dutch Peltz. Dutch answered on the first ring. “Peltz, who’s this?”

“Anyone ever tell you you answer the phone like a cop?”

Dutch laughed. “Yeah, you. Got a pencil?”

“Shoot.”

“Herzog was working two singles bars, the First Avenue West and Jackie D.’s, both on Highland north of the Boulevard. He was specifically looking for bartenders taking bribes to serve minors and hookers giving head in the hat-check room; we’d had a dozen complaints. He worked those joints for over six weeks, never blowing his cover, always calling narco or patrol from a pay phone when he saw something coming down. He figured in six coke busts and nine for prostitution. As a result, the A.B.C. has both joints up for suspension of their liquor licenses.”

Lloyd whistled. “What about the reports he filed?”

“No reports, Lloyd. Walt Perkins’ orders. The arresting officers filed. Walt didn’t want Jack compromised.”

“Shit. That means you can scratch revenge as a motive.”

“Yeah, at least as far as his recent arrest record is concerned. What happened with Bergen?”

“Nothing. Bergen hasn’t seen Herzog in over a month, says he was moody, troubled. He took the news hard. He was drunk at two in the afternoon. Poor bastard.”

“We’re going to have to file a Missing Persons Report, Lloyd.”

“I know. Let Internal Affairs handle it, which means you and Walt Perkins are going to catch shit for not reporting it earlier and probably even heavier shit for working Herzog off the payroll.”

“You might get the case if it goes to Robbery/Homicide.”

“They’ll never find the stiff, Dutch. This job is pro all the way. I.A.D. will go at it sub rosa, then stonewall it. Let me give it another forty-eight hours before you call them, okay?”

“Okay.”

“What have you got from your snitches on the liquor store job?”

“Nothing yet. I sent out a memo to all officers on it. It’s still too early for a response. What’s next on Herzog?”

“Bar hopping, Dutchman. Yours truly as a swinging single.”

“Have fun.”

Lloyd laughed and said, “Fuck you,” then hung up.

Bombarded by disco music, Lloyd competed for floor and bar space at First Avenue West. Showing his insurance agent’s business card and Jack Herzog’s personnel file photo to three bartenders, four cocktail waitresses and two dozen singles, he got negative responses, distinguished only by hostile looks and shakes of the head from low-rider types who made him for fuzz and annoyed brush-offs from young women who didn’t like his style. Lloyd walked out the door angrily shaking *his* head as the washout continued.

Jackie D.’s, three doors down, was almost deserted. Lloyd counted heads as he took a seat at the bar. A couple doing a slow grind on the dance floor and two overaged swingers feeding coins to the jukebox. The bartender slipped a napkin in front of him and explained why: “Twofers at First Avenue West. Every Tuesday night I get killed. First Ave can afford it, I can’t. I keep my prices low to do volume and I still get killed. Is there no mercy in this life?”

“None,” Lloyd said.

“I just wanted a confirmation. What are you drinking?”

Lloyd put a dollar bill on the bar. “Ginger ale.”

The bartender snorted, “You see what I mean? No mercy!”

Lloyd took out the snapshot of Jack Herzog. “Have you seen this man?”

The bartender scrutinized the photo, then filled Lloyd’s glass and nodded. “Yeah, I seen him around here a lot.”

Lloyd’s skin prickled. “When?”

“A while back. A month, six weeks, maybe two months ago, right before those A.B.C. cocksuckers filed on me. You a cop?”

“That’s right.”

“Hollywood Vice?”

“Robbery/Homicide. Tell me about the man in the picture.”

“What’s to tell? He came in, he drank, he tipped well, he didn’t hit on the chicks.”

“Ever talk to him?”

“Not really.”

“Did he ever come in with or leave with anyone?”

The bartender screwed his face into a memory search, then said, “Yeah. He had a buddy. A sandy-haired guy. Medium height, maybe early thirties.”

“Did he meet him here?”

“That I can’t tell you.”

Lloyd walked over to the pay phone outside the men’s room and called Hollywood Station, requesting Lieutenant Perkins. When he came on the line, Lloyd said, “Walt, this is Lloyd Hopkins. I’ve got a question.”

“Hit me.”

“Did Herzog work his bar assignments alone?”

There was a long moment of silence. Finally Perkins said, “I’m not really sure, Lloyd. My *guess* is sometimes yes, sometimes no. I’ve always given Jack carte blanche. Any arrangements he made with individual squad members would be up to him. Shall I ask around tomorrow night at roll call?”

“Yes. What about a sandy-haired man, medium height, early thirties. Herzog might have worked with him.”

“That’s half our squad, Lloyd.”

There was another stretch of silence. Finally Lloyd said, “He’s dead. I’ll be in touch,” and replaced the receiver. The barman looked up as he strode toward the door. “There’s no mercy!” he called out.

Battered by sleeplessness and dwindling options, Lloyd drove downtown to Parker Center, hoping to find an easily intimidated nightwatch supervisor on duty at Personnel Records. When he saw the man behind the records counter dozing in his chair with a science fiction novel lying on his chest, he knew he was home.

“Excuse me, Officer!”

The records supervisor jerked awake and stared at Lloyd's badge. "Hopkins, Robbery/Homicide," Lloyd said, "Jack Herzog left some files for me in his desk. Will you show me where it is?"

The supervisor yawned, then pointed to a bank of Plexiglas enclosed cubicles. "Herzog's daywatch, so I don't know exactly where his desk is. But you go help yourself, Sergeant. The names are on the doors."

Lloyd walked into the Plexiglas maze, noting with relief that Herzog's cubicle was well out of the supervisor's sight. Finding the door unlocked, he rummaged through the desk drawers, feeling another impersonal habitat come into focus as pencils, notepads, and a series of blank office forms were revealed. One drawer; two drawers; three drawers. Herzog the cipher.

Lloyd was raising his fist to slam the desktop when he noticed the edges of several slips of paper on the floor, wedged into the juncture where the wall met the carpet. Squatting, he pulled them out, going cold when he saw file requisition slips with the officer's name, rank, date of birth, and badge number on top and the requesting officer's name and division below. Squinting, he read over the five slips. The officers' names were unknown to him, but the requesting officer's name wasn't. Captain Frederick T. Gaffaney, Internal Affairs Division, had requested all five files. Old born-again Christian Fred, who had given him grief as a Robbery/Homicide lieutenant. Squinting harder, Lloyd felt the coldness run up his spine into his brain. He knew Gaffaney's signature. These were blatant forgeries.

Lloyd got out his notebook and wrote down the names of the officers whose files had been requested. Tucker, Duane W., Lieutenant, Wilshire Division; Murrray, Daniel X., Captain, Central Division; Rolando, John L., Lieutenant, Devonshire Division; Kaiser, Steven A., Captain, West Valley Division; Christie, Howard J., Lieutenant, Rampart Division.

He stared at the names, then on impulse ran his hand under the carpet again, coming away with a last slip of paper, going dead ice cold when he read the name printed on top: *Hopkins, Lloyd W. #1114, 2/27/42, Sergeant, Robbery/Homicide Division.*

THOMAS Goff’s surveillance photographs had not prepared him for the woman’s beauty; nothing in Goff’s oral and written reports came close to describing her aura of refinement. A thousand-dollar-a-night whore in a thousand-dollar raw silk dress. Dr. John Havilland leaned back in his chair, pretending to be tongue-tied. Give the woman the temporary upper hand, let her think her charisma had dented his professionalism. When Linda Wilhite didn’t fidget under his gaze, he broke the long introductory silence. “Will you tell me something about yourself, Ms. Wilhite? The reasons why you’ve decided to enter therapy?”

Linda Wilhite’s eyes circled the office; her hands smoothed the arms of her chair. Brilliantly varnished oak walls, a framed Edward Hopper original. No couch. The chairs she and the Doctor were sitting in were upholstered in pure cashmere. “You love nice things,” she said.

Havilland smiled. “So do you. That’s a very beautiful dress.”

“Thank you. Why do most people come to see you?”

“Because they want to change their lives.”

“Of course. Can you guess what I do for a living?”

“Yes. You’re a prostitute.”

“How exactly did you know that?”

“You called my service and made an appointment without asking to speak to me personally, and you wouldn’t say who referred you. When a woman contacts me in that manner, I assume that she’s in the Life. I’ve counseled a great many prostitutes, and I’ve published several monographs on my findings, without ever violating the anonymity of my patients. In criminal parlance I’m a ‘stand-up guy.’ I don’t have a receptionist or a secretary, because I don’t trust such people. Women in the Life trust *me* for these reasons.”

Linda traced patterns on her silk and the Doctor’s cashmere. “This dress cost thirteen hundred dollars. My shoes cost six hundred. I love nice things and you love nice things, and we both make a lot of money. But what I do to make money is killing me, and I have to stop.”

Havilland leaned forward as the woman’s words settled in on him. He brought his voice down to its lowest register and said, “Are you ready to sacrifice picayune shit like thirteen hundred dollar dresses to achieve your true power? Are you ready to dig through your past to find out why you need creature comforts at the expense of your integrity? Are you willing to break yourself down to ground zero in order to help me take you as far as you can go?”

Linda flinched at the battery of questions. “Yes,” she said.

Havilland stood up, stretched and decided to go in full bore. Sitting back down, he said, “Linda, my brand of therapy is a two-way street. What you think I need to know and what I need to know may well be two different things. I would like this first session to consist of questions and answers. I’ll throw out some educated guesses and assumptions about you, and you tell me how accurate I am. What I want to establish is some kind of instinctive rapport. Do you follow me?”

Her voice quavering, Linda said, “How far is as far as I can go?”

Dr. John Havilland threw back his head and laughed. “My educated guess is that you can hit the ball out of the ballpark and into the next county.”

Linda smiled. “Then let’s do it,” she said.

Havilland got up and walked to the window, glancing down on the Jetstream of cars and people twenty-six stories below him. He coughed and pressed the activator button inlaid on the window ledge, sending current to the tape recorder housed behind a section of wall panel.

Turning to face Linda Wilhite, he said, “You’re thirty-one or two, large family, northern Midwest—Michigan or Wisconsin. The best and brightest of your siblings. Adored by your brothers, despised by your sisters. Your parents are new money, uneasy about it, terrified of losing their hard-earned status. You dropped out of college in your senior year and worked at odd jobs before a series of disillusionments led you slowly into the Life. How close am I?”

Linda was already shaking her head. “I’m twenty-nine, from L.A., an only child. My parents died when I was ten. I lived in a series of foster homes until I graduated from high school. I never attended college. My parents were semi-poor. I made a conscious decision to become a prostitute, just as I’ve made a conscious decision to quit being one. Please don’t consider me typical.”

Circling the office, his eyes shifting back and forth between Linda Wilhite and the Persian rug that cushioned his footfalls, Havilland said, “Is being typical a crime? No, don’t answer, let me continue. You enjoy sex with certain kinds of older men among your customers, and it hurts you if they sleep with anyone else. If you find a customer attractive, then you fantasize about him and hate yourself for it afterwards. You despise hookers who consider themselves ‘therapists’ and the like. Your basic dilemma is a conservative nature, one grounded in the work ethic, undercut with the knowledge that what you do is shit, antithetical to every decent moral instinct you possess. You have rationalized this contradiction for years, bolstered yourself with self-help books and spiritual tracts, but now it won’t wash anymore and you came to me. Touché, Ms. Wilhite?”

The Doctor’s voice had risen higher and higher, little crescendos of truth that Linda knew would grow in scope and intimacy without the man’s resonance ever cracking. Her hands fluttered over her lap, looking for something of and by herself to touch. When they descended on green paisley silk, she jerked them back and said, “Yes. Yes. Yes. How did you know those things?”

Dr. John Havilland sat back down and stretched his legs until his feet dangled a few inches from Linda’s alligator shoes. “Linda, I’m the best there is. To be blunt, I am a work of fucking art.”

Linda laughed until she felt a blush creep up from her bodice. “I’ve got a John who says the same thing to me. He collects Colombian art, so I know it’s an informed opinion. And you know the funny thing? He calls me ‘a work of fucking art,’ and he never fucks me—he just takes pictures of me. Isn’t that a hoot?”

Havilland laughed along, first uproariously, then sedately. When his laughter wound down, he said, "What does this man do with the photographs of you?"

"He has them blown up, then he frames them and hangs them in his bedroom," Linda said.

"How do you feel about that? Worshiped? Adored?"

"I … I feel worthy of my beauty."

"Did your parents recognize your beauty early on? Did they fawn over you because of it?"

"My father did."

"Did your parents take photographs of you?"

Linda flinched at the word *photographs.* She stammered, "N-no."

Havilland leaned forward and put his hand on her knee. "You've gone pale, Linda. Why?"

Flinching again, Linda said, "This is happening so fast. I wasn't going to tell you today because most of the time it seems so remote. My father was a violent man. He was a longshoreman, and he used to fight bare knuckles for money on the docks at San Pedro. He'd win or he'd lose and he'd always bet heavily on himself, so if he won he showered mother and me with gifts and if he lost he brooded and smashed things. Most of the time it was fifty-fifty, win, lose, win, lose—so that I never knew what to expect.

"Then, when I was ten, Daddy hit a losing streak. He brooded worse then ever and punched out all the windows in our house. It was winter and we were broke and the heat was shut off and cold air blew in through the broken windows. I'll never forget the day it happened. I came home from school and there were police cars in front of the house. A detective took me aside and told me what happened. Daddy had put a pillow over Mother's head and shot her in the face. Then he stuck the gun in his mouth and shot himself. I was sent to Juvenile Hall, and a couple of days later a matron told me I had to identify the bodies. She showed me photographs from the autopsy—Daddy and Mother with half their faces blown away. I cried and I cried, but I couldn't stop looking at the pictures."

"And, Linda?" Havilland whispered.

Linda said, "And I went to live with an elderly couple who treated me like a princess. I swiped the pictures the matron showed me and forced myself to laugh and gloat over them. Those pictures gave me freedom from the shitty life I had, and laughing at them was like getting revenge on my parents. I—"

Havilland raised a hand in interruption. "Let me finish. Your foster parents caught you laughing over the photographs and punished you? It was never the same with them after that?"

"Yes," Linda said.

The Doctor circled his office again, running light finger-tips over the oak walls. "A few more questions, then we'll end the session. Is the type of man—of customer—that you're attracted to large and physical, possessed of intelligence and breeding but also possessed of a certain aura of violence?"

Linda's whisper was astonished. "Yes."

Havilland smiled. "World-class progress in one session. Does the day after tomorrow—Friday—suit you for our next one? Say ten-thirty?"

Linda Wilhite stood up, surprised to find her legs steady. She smoothed the front of her dress and said, "Yes. I'll be here. Thank you."

Havilland took her arm and walked her to his outer office door. “It was my pleasure.”

After Linda Wilhite was gone, the Doctor, armed with her image and facts from Goff’s reconnaissance, turned off the lights and played the time-travel game.

When Linda was two and living in a San Pedro dive with her white-trash parents, he was twelve and gaining clandestine access to wealthy homes in Bronxville and Scarsdale, New York, exorcising his nocturnal heart by delivering himself to the quiet muse of other peoples’ dwellings, sometimes stealing, sometimes not.…

When Linda was fourteen and sexually experimenting with surfer morons in Huntington Beach, he was twenty-four and graduating from Harvard Medical School at the top of his class, the legendary Doctor John the Night Tripper, the genius dope chemist/abortionist who held instructors rapt with his digressions on the theories of Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Havelock Ellis.…

When Linda was growing into her exquisite beauty in a series of foster homes, filled with wonder at her parents’ deaths and the apostasy that their bloodletting had spawned, he—

The Time Machine screeched, shuddered, and ground to a halt. A green door opened to reveal a man in a gray uniform standing beside a salmon-pink ‘fifty-six Ford Victoria ragtop. Little girls in party dresses thronged the car, and just before it exploded into flames they turned to point and laugh at him.

The Night Tripper walked to the wall and turned on the light, seeking confirmation. He found it in glass-encased tributes; framed diplomas from New York University and Harvard Med and St. Vincent and Castleford Hospitals—parchment that spelled out plainly that he was the best. The dates on them told him why the Time Machine had malfunctioned. Linda was powerful. Linda had sustained a catastrophe as he had and required that he juxtapose his story against hers from the beginning.…

1956. Scarsdale, New York. Johnny Havilland, age eleven, known as “Spaz,” “Wimpdick,” and “Shitstick.” Sherry-guzzling mother with the inbred look indigenous to high-line Wasps who have never had to work for a living; big bucks father, a hunter whose shotgun volleys have decimated the varmint population of six New York counties. Johnny hates school; Johnny hates to play ball; Johnny loves to dream and listen to music on his portable radio.

Johnny’s father considers him a wimp and decrees a rite to prompt his manhood: Shoot the family’s senile golden retriever. Johnny refuses and is sent by his father to a “training school” run by an extremist sect of nuns. The nuns lock Johnny in a basement full of rats, with no food or water and only a shovel for protection. Two days go by. Johnny huddles in a corner and screams himself hoarse as the rats nip at his legs. On the third day he falls asleep on the floor and wakes up to find a large rat scampering off with a chunk of his lip. Johnny screams, picks up the shovel and beats every rat in the basement to death.

Johnny’s father takes him home the following day, tousling his hair and calling him “Dad’s little ratter.” Johnny goes straight for his father’s gun rack, grabs a twelve-gauge pump and strides outside to the kennel, where five Labradors and short-haired Pointers frolic behind barbed wire. Johnny blows the dogs to kingdom come and turns to face his father, who turns white and faints. Weeks go by. His father shuns him. Johnny knows that his father has given him a precious gift that is far more valuable then standard manhood. Johnny loves his father and wants to please him with his newfound strength.

1957. "Green Door" by Jim Lowe climbs the hit parade and fills Johnny with portents of dark secrets.

"Midnight, one more night without sleeping.
Watching, 'till the morning comes creeping.
Green door, what's that secret you're keeping?"

Johnny wants to know the secret so he can tell his father and make him love him.

The quest for the secret begins with a shinny up a drainpipe into a neighbor's darkened attic. Johnny finds coyotes mounted on roller-skates wheels and department store mannequins. The mannequins have been gouged in the facial and genital regions and red paint has been daubed in the holes and left to trickle off in simulation of wounds. Johnny steals a coyote's glass eye and leaves it on his father's desk. His father never mentions the gift. As other gifts from other dark houses follow, Johnny perceives that his father is terrified of him.

Johnny's housebreaking career continues; the spacious homes of Westchester County become his teacher and friend. Thoughts of earning his father's love grow mute beside the haphazard tides of passion that he assimilates in shadow-shrouded bedrooms and hallways. Green door after green door after green door bursts open. And then there was the next to the last door and the man in the uniform, and the last door opening on a pitch-black void....

The darkness deepened as the Time Machine suffered its final malfunction, its chronograph needle stuck permanently on June 2, 1957. The void stretched into months. The callow Johnny Havilland who entered was only a shell compared to the self-sufficient John who emerged....

Always this memory gap, the Night Tripper thought. Father was there when he entered and gone when his recollections again assumed a linear sequence. He took Goff's photographs of Linda Wilhite from his desk and fanned them like a deck of cards. Linda came briefly to life, the slash of her mouth speaking bewilderment. She wanted to know *why* he was as great as he was.

Havilland ruffled the photos again, making Linda beg for the answer. He smiled. He would tell her, and he would not need the Time Machine to help him.

1958. Father had been gone for months; Mother, in a perpetual sherry haze, didn't seem to care. Checks came in bimonthly, drawn from the tax-exempt trust funds that Father's father had started almost half a century before. It was as if a giant puppetmaster had snatched the man into eternity, leaving his material wealth as wonder bait to ensure that Johnny could have *anything* he wanted.

Johnny wanted knowledge. He wanted knowledge because he knew it would give him sovereignty over the psychic pain that all the human race save himself was subject to. His grief over his father's disappearance had transmogrified into armor sheathed in one-way transparent glass. *He* could look out and see *all*; no one could look in and see *him.* Thus invulnerable, Johnny Havilland sought knowledge.

He found it.

In 1962 John Havilland graduated from Scarsdale High School, number one in his class, hailed by the school's principal as a "human encyclopedia." N.Y.U. and more scholastic honors followed, culminating in a Phi Beta Kappa key, Summa Cum Laude graduation and a full scholarship to Harvard Medical School.

It was at Harvard Med that John Havilland was able to combine his knowledge-lust and dominion over human feelings into dominion over other people. Like his early burglary career, it began with a shinny up a drainpipe and a vault into an open window. But where before he had come away with knicknacks to please his father, this time he came away with questions and answers that he knew would make *him* the spiritual patriarch to scores of pliant souls.

The window yielded tape recordings of confidential interviews conducted by Alfred Kinsey in 1946 and 1947. The interviewees were described in terse sentences and were then asked to describe themselves. The variance factor was astonishing—the people almost always defined themselves by some physical abnormality. The Q. and A. sessions that followed proceeded along uniform patterns, revealing mundane matters—lust, guilt and adultery—things which John Havilland's immune system had surmounted in early adolescence.

After over two hundred hours of listening to the tapes, John knew two things: One, that Kinsey was an astute interviewer, a scholar who considered factual admissions illuminating in themselves; and, two, that that knowledge was *not* enough and that Kinsey had failed because he could *not* get his interviewees to talk openly about fantasies beyond variations of fucking and sucking. He could elicit no admissions of dark grandeur, because he felt none himself. His interviewees were hicks who didn't know shit from Shinola. Kinsey operated from the Freudian/humanist ethic: Provide knowledge of behavior patterns to enable the subject a viewpoint of objectivity in which to relegate his neuroses to a scrap heap of things that don't work. Show him that his fears and most extreme fantasies are irrational and convince him to be a loving, boring, happy human being.

After over six hundred hours of listening, John knew two more things: That the most profound truth lay in the labyrinths that coiled behind a green door in the interviewee's mind the very second that Alfred Kinsey said, "Tell me about your fantasies"; and, two, that with the proper information and the correct stimuli he could get carefully chosen people to break through those doors and act out their fantasies, past moral strictures and the boundaries of conscience, taking *him* past his already absolute knowledge of mankind's unutterable stupidity into a new night realm that he as yet was incapable of imagining. Because the night was there to be plundered; and only someone above its laws could exact its bounty and survive.

Now armed with a mission, there remained only to discover and actuate the means towards its fulfillment. It was 1967. Drugs and hard rock flooded Harvard Yard, spawned by a backwash of students, townies, and traveling hippies willing to protest anything, try anything, and ingest anything in order to gain themselves, lose themselves, or achieve a "transcendental experience." Social change was in the wind, producing a "consciousness explosion" that John Havilland considered fatuous and propagated by failures, many of whom would not live to see the period dwindle out of its own emptiness, replaced by a new reactionary fervor. Giving the youth culture a life expectancy of two years at the most, he decided to become one of its ikons. People would follow him; they would have no choice.

Two abortions performed gratis in his antiseptically clean Beacon Hill apartment gained him a hushed reputation among Harvard undergrads; a record heard at a pot party provided him with a powerful sobriquet. “Doctor John the Night Tripper” was a Creole who shrieked odes to dope and sex, backed up by two saxes, drums, and an electric organ. At the party, a heavily stoned anthropology professor shoved an album cover in John Havilland’s face and yelled, “That’s you, man! Your name is John and you’re in med school! Dig it!”

The nickname stuck, fueled by the young doctor’s forays into manufacturing LSD and liquid methamphetamine. Drug concocting med students were commonplace, but a dope doc who gave the stuff away with no strings was the subject of much speculation. People started to come around to his apartment, seeking his knowledge. He told them what they wanted to hear, a hodge-podge of counterculture thought combed from all their heroes. They never knew they were being bullshitted, not even when the Night Tripper revealed that there were indeed strings.

The experiments began. Do you *really* want to find out who you are? Dr. John would ask his would-be subject. Do you *really* want to find out the depth of your potential? Do you understand that my exploring your most secret fantasies will gain for you in one weekend what psychoanalysis will never discover?

The subjects were all “pre-screened” drop-ins at the Beacon Hill apartment. They were, male and female, all of a type: Aesthetes devoid of original thought; rich-kid spiritual seekers whose rebellious streaks cloaked long histories of overdependence on their parents. A weekend to help out Dr. John with his med school thesis? Sure.

The weekends would begin with high quality marijuana and jokingly phrased sex questionnaires. More weed and oral questions followed, the Doctor regaling the subjects with made-up sexual anecdotes of his own. When the subjects were plied almost to sleep with weed and music, Dr. John would give them a skin pop of sodium Pentothal and tell them horror stories and gauge their responses. If they responded with glee, he would go straight for the fantasy jugular, interweaving his horror stories with the subject’s own, creating tapestries ranging from family slaughter to wholesale sexual conquest. When the subject fell asleep, the Night Tripper would fall asleep at his side, savoring the feel of clothed bodies almost touching in the fellowship of nightmares.

Increasingly smaller doses of sodium Pentothal accompanied by visual aids took up the rest of the weekend, bringing the subject to the fantasy/reality juncture point where they had some cognizance of what they had revealed. Anti-war activists guffawed over photographs of napalm barbecued babies, felt momentary remorse, then laughed it off in the joy of newfound freedom. The Doctor described beloved parents in postures of debasement with barnyard creatures; the subjects supplied gory and humorous embellishments. Psyches broke through green doors, retreated into normalcy and left their weekend revelations to simmer benignly, waiting for the right time or the right catalyst, or waiting for nothing.

After four months of weekends, Dr. John discontinued his experiments. They had become boringly repetitive, and he had reached the point where he could unfailingly predict the responses of his subjects. He had quantum leaps to take in his mission, but he knew those leaps were years away.

Upon graduation from medical school in 1969, Havilland was assigned to the Intern Program at St. Vincent's Hospital in the Bronx, New York, where he spent twelve-hour shifts tending to the needs of welfare families. It was boring medicine, and he grew more restive by the day, sending out resumés to every hospital in the metropolitan New York area known to have a lackluster psychiatric staff. A three-year residency was required of all physicians training in psychiatry, and he wanted to be sure that he would be able to dominate his instructors—even at entry level.

Sixteen applications sent out; sixteen acceptances. Three months of detective work. Conclusion: Castleford Hospital, one hour north of New York City. Low pay, alcoholics in key administrative posts, a psychiatric staff of four aged doctors and a pillhead R.N. Heavy Medicaid contracts with the New York State Parole Board, which meant plenty of court-referred criminal types. He would play the game with all the finesse he was capable of and they would give him carte blanche. On March 4, 1971, Dr. John Havilland moved into his new quarters outside the main administration building at Castleford Hospital in Nyack, New York, knowing that something was about to happen. He was right. After six months of counseling dreary low-lifes, he met Thomas Goff.

At their first counseling session Goff had been hyper-kinetic and witty, even under the stress of a migraine headache. "My goal in life used to be to do *nothing* exceedingly well; my downfall was the fact that I liked to do it in stolen cars.… I'll do anything to keep from going back to prison, from skindiving for Roto-rooter to servicing Jewish spinsters in Miami Beach. What do you recommend, Doc? Grow gills or get circumcised? Jesus fucking Christ, these daylight headaches are killing me!"

Havilland had felt instincts clicking into place, telling him to act now. Obeying those instincts, he gave Goff a large intravenous shot of Demerol. While Goff was off on a painless dope cloud he asked him questions and found out that Goff liked to hurt people and that he never talked about it because they put you in jail for that. He had hurt lots of people, but the Trashbag Man had been his cellie at Attica and the headaches had started about then, and wasn't that wild psychedelic ceiling *beigel Give me back my headaches!*

Havilland had put him completely out, reading his file while he was unconscious. Thomas Lewis Goff, D.O.B. 6/19/49/; light brown and blue, 5ft. 10in., 155. High school dropout, 161 I.Q., car thief, burglar, pimp. Suspect in three aggravated assault cases, cases dismissed when the women victims refused to testify. Convicted of first degree auto theft with two priors, sentenced to five years in state prison, sent to Attica on 11/4/69, considered a model prisoner. Paroled after the recent riots, when psychiatrists at the prison judged that he would go psychotic if he remained incarcerated. Psychosomatic headaches and terror of daylight chief symptoms, dating from the time of the riot, when he was shut in a secluded cell block with one Paul Mandarano, a convicted murderer known as the "Trashbag" killer. Mandarano had committed suicide by hanging himself from the cell bars, and Goff had remained in the cell with his body until the riot was quelled. No presense of neurological damage; judged an excellent parole risk.

Fate embraced Dr. John Havilland. When Thomas Goff regained consciousness, he said, “It’s going to be all right, Thomas. Please trust me.”

The Night Tripper stalked Goff’s nightmares, then blunted them with drugs and fantasies until Goff wasn’t sure that Attica and the Trashbag Man had really happened. Under sodium Pentothal and age regression hypnosis, the Doctor took him back to the trauma flux point, learning that Paul Mandarano had hung himself with a beige plastic trashbag and that a blower fan stationed outside the cell block had blown the loose ends of the bag continually over the bars, acting in concert with safety arc lights, turning the cell where Goff had huddled with a rotting body into an alternately brightly lit and pitch-black horror show. Classic symbolism: Light magnified the terror; darkness diminished it. After seven months of therapy sessions in a cool, dim room, Thomas Golf’s fear of daylight abated to the point where it became tolerable. “I’ll always hate oysters, Doc; but somtimes I’ll have to watch other people eat them. Daylight is pretty unavoidable, but as Nietzsche said, ‘What does not destroy me makes me stronger.’ Right, Doc?”

The Night Tripper felt tremors of love at Goff’s words. It was right for Goff to love him, but the reverse was not tolerable. “Yes, Thomas, Nietzche was right. You’ll find that out even more as we continue our journey together.”

That journey was interrupted for over ten years.

Thomas Goff disappeared, gone into mists that would always be at best a witches brew of fantasy and reality. The Doctor grieved for the loss of his would-be right hand and concentrated on practicing the craft of psychiatry, specializing in counseling criminals and prostitutes at Castleford and then in private practice in Los Angeles, seeking and storing knowledge, writing and publishing monographs and establishing a reputation of maverick brilliance that grew and grew as his designs for conquest seethed within him. And then one day Thomas Goff was at his door, whimpering that the headaches were back and would the Doctor please help him?

Fate snapped its fingers. “Yes,” Dr. John Havilland said.

Neuro scans, electro-encephalograms, blood tests, and extensive therapy followed, each physical and mental probe another step toward the starting gate of the Night Tripper’s mission. Thomas Goff’s last ten years had been extraordinary. Havilland described them in his journal:

> Since my previous analysis of the subject, he has gone on to assume classic criminal behavior patterns, exemplifying the paranoic/sociopathic textbook personality, but with one notable exception: His criminal behavior is pathologically derived, but not pathologically executed. Goff shows great adaptability in subjugating his violent urges to circumspection in the choosing of his victims, and he always stops short of inflicting great bodily harm or murder. He has committed nighttime burglaries all over the East Coast for a decade and has never been caught; he has performed an estimated two hundred assaults on women, experiencing simultaneous sexual release *without reverting to the mayhem that characterized his assault career prior to our 1971 counselings.* Since Goff is, in the truest sense a psychopath, this restraint (and his pride in it, that he attributes to my earlier counseling!) is beyond extraordinary—it is almost unbelievable. It is

> evident that he credits me with saving his life (i.e., alleviating his terror of daylight and blunting his memory of the suicide he witnessed at Attica); and that, implicitly, he credits me with "teaching" him the restraint that has armed him with a virtual criminal carte blanche. In fact, Goff (a 161 I.Q.!), says that *I have taught him to think.* It is evident that this brilliant criminal is seeking a father-son bonding with me, and that his "headaches" are a psychosomatic device to bring the two of us together to achieve the purposes he senses I have planned. His attraction to me is *not* either overtly or covertly homosexual; Goff simply equates me, on the sensory/stimuli level, with peace, tranquillity and the fulfillment of dreams.

Three weeks into the new counseling, with Goff's recurring headaches quelled with hallucinogen-laced codeine, the Night Tripper went in full tilt and gained complete capitulation.

"Do you know that I love you, Thomas?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that I am here to take you as far as you can go?"

"Yes."

"Will you help me to help other people? To bring them out the way I've brought you out?"

"You know I will."

"Will you help me gain knowledge?"

"Name it, point the finger, I'll do it."

"Would you kill for me?"

"Yes."

That night the Doctor outlined Goff's role in his mission. Recruit lonely men and women, journeymen spiritual seekers, spineless "new agers" with no family and plenty of money. The counterculture consciousness circuit and singles nightspots should be rife with them. Goff was to judge their susceptibility, draw them out, and bring them to him, utilizing the greatest discretion and caution, employing no physical violence. He was also to perform burglary-reconnaissance forays, entering the homes of the Doctor's hooker patients, checking their John books for the names of wealthy customers—the objective being men with weak wills and monogamous relationships with their whores. "Be slow and cautious, Thomas," Havilland said. "This is a lifetime process."

That process yielded three lonelies in the first year. Havilland was satisfied with the progress he was making with their psyches, but frustrated by the lack of pure knowledge he was reaping. Eight more months passed; another three lonelies were recruited. The Doctor refined his techniques and filled up hundreds of pages on what he had learned. Yet still he hungered for pure data; molding clay that he could hold in his hands, savor and then mix into the human tapestry he was creating. The frustration had him slamming his desk in rage, beseeching time warps in his past for the answer to unanswerable questions. Then two events coincided and provided an answer.

Despite medication, Thomas Goff's headaches grew worse. Havilland ran a new series of tests and found his psychosomatic diagnosis rebuked. Goff had leptomeningitis, a chronic brain inflammation. It was the cause of his headaches and had probably been a contributing factor to his violent behavior throughout the years. For the first time in his professional life, the Doctor found himself in a crisis. Leptomeningitis could be cured by surgery and a wide assortment of drugs. His executive officer could be restored to health, and it would be business as usual. Leptomeningitis was also known to induce homicidal rages in normally peaceful men and women, yet, somehow, Thomas Goff, a violent sociopathic criminal, had sustained the disease for over a decade without letting it push him across the line into mindless slaughter. Without treatment, Goff would soon go insane and die of a massive cerebral hemorrhage. *But if, through a careful application of antibiotics and painkillers, Goff's disease could be de-escalated and escalated to suit his whims, he would possess his very own terminal man, and it would provide him with the opportunity to observe an absolutely emotionless human machine run gauntlets of stress unparalleled in psychiatric history. And if need be, Goff could be put to use as the ultimate killing machine.*

The Night Tripper decided to sacrifice his executive officer/protégé/son to the god of knowledge.

Then the Alchemist appeared.

Goff's leptomeningitis was three weeks into a "remission" when he told the Doctor of the vice cop he had met, the disguise artist reader of hero biographies who he could tell was just dying to bend to someone. Havilland had at first been wary—the man was, after all, a police officer—but then after seven counseling sessions devoted to bringing the Alchemist through his obvious green door, the cop supplied the last piece of the Night Tripper's long-sought puzzle: cruel, merciless data. Levers of manipulation that would allow him to bend hundreds of people like twigs. The six folders that he offered in acquiesence to the Doctor's charisma were the first key. Four data keepers and two police legends. The Alchemist had tried very hard to please him, and in his gratitude the Doctor had brought him through his green door much too fast, and he had run from the self-discoveries that were unfolding before him.

Now the Alchemist was gone. Only his legacy of potential knowledge remained.

Back in the present, the Night Tripper let his mind play over the files in his wall safe. Cops. Men used to violence as a way of life. Goff would have to be his go-between, but he was approaching his terminus—the lepto would become uncontrollable within a few months. His training mission was unsettling, a violation of his efficacy counseling. He should have searched the liquor store for possible witnesses, then retreated until the proprietor was alone. One killing was perfection; three was dangerous.

Havilland walked to his window and looked out, watching the microcosmic progression of the people below him, scuttling like laboratory animals in an observation maze. He wondered if they would ever know that at odd moments he loved them.

5

SEVENTY-TWO hours into the liquor store case: over two thousand man hours spent probing every possible scientific angle. Yield: Zero. Extensive background checks on the three victims: Zero multiplied by the silence of the random factor—decent people at the wrong place at the wrong time, loved ones importuning God for the reason why, the unearthing of dull facts leading nowhere. The fingerprint report was a pastiche of swirls, streaks, and smudges; the heel marks and fabric elements found at the death scene were all attributed to the victims. The snitch reports that filtered back to Hollywood Division officers had the air of hyperbole and were inimical to Lloyd's concept of the killer as being very smart and very cool and not at all interested in reaping renown for his handiwork. If the queries on stolen .41 revolvers came back negative, the only remaining option would be to initiate nationwide gun queries and have a team of computer jockeys and astute paperwork detectives run through the over three-hundred thousand automobile registration records for yellow Japanese imports, crosschecking them with criminal records and records of known criminal affiliates, looking for combustion points. If no two facts struck sparks and if the gun queries washed out, the case would be shunted into the bureaucratic backlog.

Lloyd recoiled at the knowledge that time was running out. Seated at Dutch Peltz's desk, savoring the feel of a silent Hollywood Station drifting toward dusk, he read over Xeroxes of the Field Interrogation Reports he had requisitioned city wide. On the night of April 23, eleven yellow Japanese cars had been stopped for traffic violations and/or "suspicious behavior." Four of the people cited and detained had been women, five had been ghetto black men, two with no criminal record, three with misdemeanor records for possession of drugs and nonpayment of child support. The two remaining white men were a lawyer stopped and ultimately arrested for drunk driving and a teenager popped for driving under the influence of a narcotic substance, which the arresting officer surmised to be airplane glue. No sparks.

Lloyd yelled, "Shit!" and stormed through his makeshift command post looking for a pen and paper. Finding a yellow legal pad and a stack of pencils atop Dutch's bookcase, he wrote:

> Dutchman—time running out. There's a shitload of hotel stick-ups downtown, so I'll probably get yanked to a robbery assignment soon. The 4/23 F.I.s and the snitch feedback are goose-egg. Will you do the following for me?
>
> 1. Have another team of uniformed officers house to house (6-8 block radius) the area surrounding Freeway Liquor. Have them ask about:

A. Yellow Jap cars recently seen in area. (Lic. #)

B. Recent loiterers.

C. Recent conversations with the three deceased. All 3 victs. were locals. Did *they* mention anything suspi cious?

D. *Have officers check previous canvass report filed by patrolmen who house-to-housed the night of the killings. Have them check residences of people who were not home that night.*

E. Tell the men that Robbery/Homicide has allocated unlimited overtime on this case—they'll get the $ in their next check.

2. Glom all H.W. Div. EI.'s for past 6 mos. men tioning yellow Jap. autos. Set aside all incoming FI.s featuring same, and collate all incoming rob. & homicide bulletins mentioning same.

3. Re: Herzog. I've got a weird feeling about this—even beyond the fact J.H. stole my file. I want some kind of handle on it before we call I.A.D. Have you run your grapevines on the 6 officers? Are the files still missing? I'm going to sleep at J.H.'s pad for the next several nights—(886–3317) see what happens—also, if the Rob./Hom. brass can't find me, they can't reassign me—L.H.

There was a knock at the door, followed by the sound of coughing. Lloyd put his memo under Dutch's quartz bookend and called out, "Enter!"

Lieutenant Walt Perkins walked in and shut the door behind him. When he shuffled his feet nervously, Lloyd said, "Looking for me or the Dutchman, Walt?"

"You," Perkins said.

Lloyd pointed to a chair. Perkins ignored it. "I checked with the squad," he said. "Herzog always worked alone. A lot of the men wanted to work with him because of his rep, but Jack always nixed it. He used to joke that ninety-five percent of all vice cops were alcoholics. He …" Perkins faltered as Lloyd came alive with tension. The sandy-haired man was not a cop.

Perkins shuffled his feet again, drawing figure eights on the floor. "Lloyd, I don't want I.A.D. nosing around the squad."

"Why?" Lloyd asked. "The worst you'll get is a reprimand. Vice commanders have been working Herzog off the payroll for years. It's common knowledge."

"It's not that."

"Then what is it?"

Perkins ceased his figure eights and forced himself to stare at Lloyd. "It's you. I know the whole story of what happened with you last year. I got it straight from a deputy chief. I admire you for what you did, that's not it. It's just that I know the promotion board has a standing order not to ever promote you or Dutch, and I—"

Lloyd's peripheral vision throbbed with black. Swallowing to keep his voice down, he said, "And you want me to sit on this? A brother officer murdered?"

Shaking his head and lowering his eyes, Perkins whispered, "No. I paid off a clerk at Personnel Records. He's going to carry Herzog present for another week or so, then report him missing. There'll be an investigation."

Lloyd kicked out at a metal wastebasket, sending a mound of wadded paper onto Perkins's pantslegs. The lieutenant flinched back into the door and brought his eyes up. "The born-agains in I.A.D. have a hard-on for you, Hopkins. Gaffaney especially. You're a great cop, but you don't give a fuck about other cops and the people close to you get hurt. Look at what you've done to Dutch

Peltz. Can you blame me for wanting to cover my ass?"

Lloyd released the hands he had coiled into fists. "It's all a trade-off. You're an administrator, I'm a hunter. You're a well liked superior officer, which means that the guys you command are shaking down hookers for head jobs and ripping off dope dealers for their shit and slopping up free booze all over Hollywood. I'm not so well liked, and I get strange, scary ideas sometimes. But I'm willing to pay the price and you aren't. So don't judge me. And get out of the way if you don't want to get hurt, because I'm seeing this thing through."

Lloyd pretended to fiddle with the papers on Dutch's desk. The second he averted his eyes, Perkins slipped out the door.

An hour later, when the last remnants of twilight dissolved into night, Lloyd drove to Jackie D.'s bar. The barman he had talked to two nights before was on duty and the place was still empty. The barman had the same weary look and automatically put down a napkin as Lloyd took a seat at the bar, shaking his head and saying, "No mercy. The ginger ale drinkers always return. There is no mercy."

"What's the complaint this time?" Lloyd asked.

"Wet T-shirt contest next door. First I gotta compete with free booze, now I gotta compete with free tits. I heard the guy who owns that puspocket is gonna throw in female mud wrestling, maybe female bush shaving, maybe female dick measuring, make a bundle and go into something stable like pushing heroin. No mercy!"

"Isn't his liquor license up for suspension, too?"

"Yeah, but he's young and he's got the chutzpah to think big and diversify. You know, a forty-story swingers' condo shaped like a dick, with an underground garage shaped like a snatch. You drive in and an electric beam shoots you an orgasm. No mercy!"

"There is mercy. I'm here to prove it."

The barman poured Lloyd a ginger ale. "Cops do not give mercy, they give grief."

Lloyd drew a paper bag from his jacket pocket. "You remember the man I was asking you about the other night? You said you saw him here with another man, sandy haired, early thirties?"

"Yeah, I remember."

"Good. We're going to create a little picture of that guy. You're going to be the artist. Come over on this side of the bar."

Lloyd spread out his wares on the bartop. "This is called an Identikit. Little composite facial features that we put together from a witness' description. We start with the forehead and work down. We've got over thirty nose types and so forth. See how the slots fit together?"

The barman fingered cardboard eyebrows, chins, and mouths and said, "Yeah. I just put these pieces together until it looks like the guy, right?"

"Right. Then I put the finishing touches in with a pencil. You got it?"

"Do I look dumb?"

"You look like Rembrandt."

"Who's he?"

"A bartender who drew pictures on the side."

It took the barman half an hour of sifting, comparing, rejecting, and appraising to come up with a composite. Lloyd looked at the portrait and said, “Not bad. A good-looking guy with a mean streak. You agree with that?”

“Yeah,” the barman said. “Now that you mention it, he did look kinda mean.”

“Okay. Now show me what these composite pieces have missed.”

Lloyd took out a pencil and poised it over the Identikit picture. The barman studied his portrait from several different angles, then grabbed the pencil and went to work himself, shading the cheeks, broadening the nose, adding a thin line of malevolence to the lips. Finishing with a flourish, he said, “There! That is the cocksucker in the flesh!”

Holding the cardboard up to the light, Lloyd saw a vividly lean countenance come into focus, the thin mouth rendering the handsomeness ice cold. He smiled and felt the barman tugging at his sleeve. “Where’s this fucking mercy you were telling me about?”

Lloyd stuck the portrait in his pocket. “Call the A.B.C. tomorrow at ten o’clock. They’ll tell you the complaints against you have been removed and that you’re no longer facing a license suspension.”

“You’ve got that kinda clout?”

“Yeah.”

“Mercy! Mercy prevails!”

Driving over the Cahuenga Pass to Jack Herzog’s apartment, Lloyd thought: Only the hunt prevails. Trace all evidential links backward and forward in time and you will find that you are in the exact place that you were in four or eight or sixteen years ago, chasing ghouls too twisted to be called human and too sad to be called anything else, finding or not finding them, holding surveillance on patterns of hatred and fear, imparting morally ambiguous justice, running headlong into epiphanies that were as ever-changing as your need to know them was immutable. That the hunt was always conducted on the same landscape was the safest mark of permanence. Los Angeles County was thousands of miles of blacktop, neon, and scrub-brush-dotted hillside, arteries twisting in and around and back on themselves, creating human migrations that would unfailingly erupt in blood, stain the topography and leave it both changed and the same.

Lloyd looked out the window, knowing by off-ramp signs exactly where he was. He strained his eyes to see Ray Becker’s Tropics, a bar he had worked as a vice officer fifteen years before. It wasn’t there. The whole block had been razed. The Tropics was now a coin laundry, and the Texaco Station on the corner was a Korean church. A thought crossed his mind. If the city became unrecognizable, and the blood eruptions became the only sign of permanence, would he go insane?

The entrance foyer of Herzog’s building was crowded with teenagers playing Pac-man. Lloyd walked past them to the elevator and took it up to the fourth floor. The corridor was again deserted, with a wide assortment of music and TV noise blasting behind closed doors. He walked to the door of 423 and listened. Hearing nothing, he picked the lock and moved inside.

Flipping the wall switch, he saw the same sterile apartment illuminated, the only addition since his previous entry a fresh stack of junk mail and final notices from Bell Telephone and L.A. County Water and Power. Knowing the bedroom and the kitchen would be the same, Lloyd sat down on the couch to be still and think.

His mind was doing tic-tac-toe, .41 revolvers and Herzog's file requisition slips as x's and o's, when the phone rang. Lloyd picked up the receiver and slurred into the mouthpiece, "Hello?"

"Dutch, Lloyd."

"Shit."

"Expecting someone else?"

"Not really. I'd forgotten I left the number."

"Anything new on Herzog?"

"A good composite I.D. on a man Herzog was seen with. That's it."

"I've got some feedback on those file slips. Got a pencil?"

Lloyd dug a pen and spiral notebook out of his pocket "Shoot."

"Okay," Dutch said. "First off, all the files are still missing. Second, they were *not* requisitioned from anywhere within the Department. Third, all the six officers are in good standing in the Depart—"

Lloyd cut in. "What about common denominators? I'm the only one of the six below lieutenant. Have you—"

"I was getting to that. Okay, six files. One, there's you, regarded as the best homicide dick in the L.A.P.D. Two, there's Johnny Rolando. You've heard of him—he's been a technical advisor on half a dozen TV shows. Both of you fall into what you might call the legendary-cop category. Now the other four—Tucker, Murray, Christie, and Kaiser—are just hardworking uniformed brass with over twenty years on the job. What—"

Lloyd interrupted: "That's *all* you've got?"

Dutch sighed. "Just listen, okay? The other four have one thing in common: Moonlight gigs as head of security for industrial firms. You know the kind of deal—plants that hire lots of cheap labor, lots of dopers and ex-cons on the payroll, lots of pilfering, lots of chemicals lying around that can be used to manufacture dope, so you have to keep the lid on—let the employees only rip you off so much, that kind of thing."

Lloyd's mental wheels turned. "How did you grapevine this info, Dutch?"

"Through a friend on the feds. He said the four firms—Avonoco Fiberglass, Junior Miss Cosmetics, Jahelka Auto King, and Surferdawn Plastics are what you'd call semi-sleazy. Shitkicker security guards who couldn't make the cops, files with lots of juicy dirt on their employees, to use as levers in case they go batshit from sniffing too much paint thinner. *Heavy* files on the workers at Avonoco—they've got a class-two security rating. They make fasteners for the space program at Andrews Air Force Base and they pay the minimum wage to everyone below management level. You like it?"

"I don't know. What's the theory behind it? Hire legit cops as figureheads, keep the shitkickers in line, have them act as go-betweens if a wayward employee gets busted?"

Dutch yawned. "Basically, yeah, I'd say that's it."

"Any *hard* dirt on the officers themselves?"

"Not really. Johnny Rolando screws TV stars; Christie, the Avonoco Fiberglass security man, has a history of compulsive gambling and psychiatric care; you like to give superior officers shit and never go home to sleep. Just a random sampling of L.A.'s finest."

Lloyd didn't know whether to laugh or take offense at the remark. Suddenly regret coiled around him and forced the words out. "I'll apologize to Perkins."

Dutch said, "Good. You owe him. I'll move on your liquor store memo and I'll give you another forty-eight on Herzog. After that *I'm* reporting him missing. Herzog's father is old, Lloyd. We owe it to him to give him the word."

"Yeah. What's Perkins afraid of, Dutch?"

"None of the stuff you hit him with. He runs one of the cleanest Vice Squads in the city."

"What, then?"

"You. A forty-two-year-old hardcharger cop with nothing to lose is a scary fucking thing. Sometimes you even scare me."

Lloyd's regret settled like a stone at the center of his heart. "Good night, Dutch."

"Good night, kid."

Lloyd replaced the receiver, immediately thinking of new angles on the case. His mental x's and o's were settling around blackmail, but his eyes kept straying back to the phone. Call Janice and the girls in San Francisco? Tell them that the house was sealed off almost exactly the way they had left it, that he only used the den and the kitchen, preserving the rest of the rooms as a testament to what they had once had and could have again? His phone conversations with Janice had at last progressed beyond civility. Was this the time to push for the fullest possible restoration of the family's past?

The job provided the answer. No. The officers who took over the formal investigation of Herzog's disappearance would check his phone bill and discover the long distance call. Janice's snotty off-and-on live-in lover would probably not accept a collect call. Fucked again by the verities of being a cop.

Stretching out on the couch, Lloyd dug in for a long stint of mental machinations. He was at it for half an hour, playing variations on blackmail themes, when there was a rapping on the door, followed by a woman's softly spoken words, "Jack? Jack, are you there?"

Lloyd walked to the door and opened it. A tall blond woman was framed by the hall light. Her eyes were blurry and her blouse and designer jeans were rumpled. She looked up at him and asked, "Are you Marty Bergen? Is Jack here?"

Lloyd pointed the woman inside, scrutinizing her openly. Early thirties, a soft/strong face informed with intelligence. A lean body clenched against stress and bringing it off with grace. *Play her soft.*

When she was standing by the couch, he said, "My name is Hopkins. I'm a police officer. Jack Herzog has been missing from both his work assignments for close to a month. I'm looking for him."

The woman took a reflexive step backward, bumping the couch with her heels and then sitting down. Her hands flew to her face, then grasped her thighs. Lloyd watched her fingers turn white. Sitting down beside her, he asked, "What's your name?"

The woman released her hands, then rubbed her eyes and stared at him. "Meg Barnes."

Taking her steady voice as a signal to press the interrogation, Lloyd said, "I've got a lot of personal questions."

"Then ask them," Meg Barnes answered.

Lloyd smiled. "When did you see Herzog last?"

"About a month ago."

"What was the basis of your relationship?"

"Friends, occasionally lovers. The sexual part came and went. Neither of us pushed it. The last time I saw Jack he told me he wanted to be alone for a while. I told him I'd come by in a month or so."

"Which you did tonight?"

"Yes."

"Did Herzog contact you at any time during the month?"

"No."

"Was the sexual part of your relationship on immediately before you saw Herzog last?"

Meg flinched and said, "No, it wasn't. But what does this have to do with Jack's disappearing?"

"Herzog is an exceptional man, Miss Barnes. Everything I've discovered about him has pointed that out. I'm just trying to get a handle on his state of mind around the time he disappeared."

"I can tell you about that," she said. "Jack was either exhilarated or depressed, like he was on a roller-coaster ride. Most of his conversation had to do with vindicating Marty Bergen. He said he was going to fuck the L.A.P.D. high brass for what they did to him."

"Why did you think I was Bergen?" Lloyd asked.

"Because Bergen and I are the only friends Jack has in the world, and you're big, the way Jack described Bergen."

Lloyd spent a silent minute mustering his thoughts. Finally he asked, "Did Herzog say specifically how he was going to vindicate Bergen or fuck the high brass?"

"No, never."

"Can you give me some specific instances of his exhilarated or depressed behavior?"

Meg Barnes pondered the question, then said, "Jack was either very quiet or he'd laugh at absolutely everything, whether it was funny or not. He used to laugh hysterically about someone or something called Doctor John the Night Tripper. The last time I saw him he said he was really scared and that it felt good."

Lloyd took out his Identikit portrait. "Have you ever seen this man?"

She shook her head. "No."

"Do the names Howard Christie, John Rolando, Duane Tucker, Daniel Murray, or Steven Kaiser mean anything to you?'

"No."

"Avonoco Fiberglass, Jahelka Auto King, Surferdawn Plastics, Junior Miss Cosmetics?"

"No. What are they?"

"Never mind. What about my name—Lloyd Hopkins?"

"No! Why are you asking me these things?"

Lloyd didn't answer. He got up from the couch and tossed the upholstered pillow he was leaning against on the floor, then carried the coffee table over to the wall. When he turned around, Meg Barnes was staring at him. “Jack’s dead,” she said.

“Yes.”

“Murdered?”

“Yes.”

“Are you going to get the person who did it?”

Lloyd shuddered back a chill. “Yes.”

Meg pointed to the floor. “Are you sleeping here?” Acceptance had taken the controlled edge off her voice. Lloyd’s voice sound numb to his own ears. “Yes.”

“Your wife kick you out?”

“Something like that.”

“You could come home with me.”

“I can’t.”

“I don’t make that offer all the time.”

“I know.”

She got up and walked to the door. Lloyd saw her strides as a race between her legs and her tears. When she touched the door handle, he asked, “What kind of man was Herzog?”

Meg Barnes’ words and tears finished in a dead heat. “A kind man afraid of being vulnerable. A tender man afraid of his tenderness, disguising it with a badge and a gun. A gentle man.”

The door slammed shut as tears rendered words unnecessary. Lloyd turned off the lights and stared out the window at the neon-bracketed darkness.

“TELL me about your dreams.”

Linda Wilhite measured the Doctor’s words, wondering whether he meant waking or sleeping. Deciding the latter, she plucked at the hem of her faded Levi skirt and said, “I rarely dream.”

Havilland inched his chair closer to Linda and formed his fingers into a steeple. “People who rarely dream usually have active fantasy lives. Is that true in your case?” When Linda’s eyelids twitched at the question, he thrust the steeple up to within a foot of her face. “Please answer, Linda.”

Linda slapped at the steeple, only to find the Doctor’s hands in his lap. “Don’t push so hard,” she said.

“Be specific,” Havilland said. “Think exactly what you want to say.”

Linda breathed the words out slowly. “We’re barely into the session and you start taking command. I had some things I wanted to discuss, things that I’ve had on my mind lately, and you barge right in with questions. I don’t like aggressive behavior.”

The Doctor collapsed the steeple and clasped his hands. “Yet you’re attracted to aggressive men.”

“Yes, but what does that have to do with it?”

Havilland slumped forward in his chair. “Touché, Linda. But let me state my case before I apologize. You’re paying me a hundred and fifteen dollars an hour, which you can afford because you earn a great deal of money doing something you despise. I see this therapy as an exercise in pure pragmatism: Find out why you’re a hooker, then terminate the therapy. Once you stop hooking you won’t need me or be able to afford me, and we’ll go our separate ways. I feel for your dilemma, Linda, so please forgive my haste.”

Linda felt a little piece of her heart melt at the brilliant man’s apology. “I’m sorry I barked,” she said. “I know you’re on my side and I know your methods work. So … in answer to your question, yes, I do have an active fantasy life.”

“Will you elaborate?” Havilland asked.

“About six years ago I posed for a series of clothed and semi-nude photographs that ultimately became this arty-farty coffee table book. There was this awful team of gay photographers and technicians, and they posed me in front of air conditioners to blow my hair and give me goose bumps and beside a heater to make me sweat buckets, and they turned me and threw me around like a rag doll, and it was worse than fucking a three hundred pound drunk.”

“And?” Havilland whispered.

“And I used to fantasize murdering those fags and having someone film it, then renting a big movie theatre and filling it with girls in the Life. They’d applaud the movie and applaud me like I was Fellini."

The Doctor laughed. "That wasn't so hard, was it?"

"No."

"Is that a recurring fantasy?"

"Well … no …"

"But variations of it recur?"

Linda smiled and said, "You should have been a cop, Doctor. People would tell you whatever you wanted to know. Okay, there's this sort of upbeat version of the movie fantasy. You don't have to be a genius to see that it derives from my parents' deaths. I'm behind a camera. A man beats a woman to death, then shoots himself. I film it, and it's real and it isn't real. What I mean is, *of course* what happens is real, only the people aren't *permanently* dead. That's how I justify the fantasy. What I think I—"

The Doctor cut in: "Interpret the fantasy."

"Let me finish!" Linda blurted out. Lowering her voice she said, "I was going to say that somehow it all leads to love. These real or imaginary or whatever people die so that I can figure out what my fucked-up childhood meant. Then I meet this big, rough-hewn man. A lonely, no-bullshit type of man. He's had the same kind of life as me and I show him the film and we fall in love. End of fantasy. Isn't it syrupy and awful?"

Looking straight at the Doctor, Linda saw that his features had softened and that his eyes were an almost translucent light brown. When he didn't answer, she got up and walked over to the framed diplomas on the wall. On impulse, she asked, "Where's your family, Doctor?"

"I don't really have a family," Havilland said. "My father disappeared when I was an adolescent and my mother is in a sanitarium in New York."

Turning to face him, Linda said, "I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry, just tell me what you're feeling right now."

Linda laughed. "I feel like I want a cigarette. I quit eight months ago, one of my little control trips, and now I'm dying for one."

Havilland laughed in return. "Tell me more about the man you fall in love with."

Linda walked around the office, running her fingertips along the oak walls. "Basically, all I know is that he wears a size forty-four sweater. I know that because I had a john once who had the perfect body and he wore that size—for some reason I looked at the label while he was getting dressed. When I first started having these fantasies 1 used to picture the john's face—then I made myself forget his face, because it interfered with my fantasy. Once I even drove downtown to Brooks Brothers and spent two hundred dollars on a size forty-four navy blue cashmere sweater."

Linda sat down and drummed the arms of her chair. "Do you think that's a sad story, Doctor?"

Havilland's voice was very soft. "I think I'm going to enjoy taking you beyond your beyond."

"What's that?"

"Just a catch phrase of mine dealing with patients' potentialities. We'll talk more about that later. Before we conclude, please give me a quick response to a hypothetical situation. Among my patients is a young man who wants to kill.

Wouldn't it be terrible if he met a young woman who wanted to die and if someone were there with a camera to record it?"

Linda slammed the arms of her chair. The floor reverberated with her words: "Yes! But why does that idea titillate me so?"

Havilland got up and pointed to the clock. "No souls saved after fifty minutes. Monday at the same time?"

Linda took his hand on the way to the door. "I'll be here," she said, her voice receding to a whisper.

Havilland drove home to his condominium/sanctuary in Beverly Hills and went straight to his inner sanctum, the only one of the six rooms not walled from floor to ceiling with metal shelves spilling psychology texts.

The Night Tripper thought of his three dwellings as a wheel of knowledge exploration, with himself as the hub. His Century City office was the induction spoke; his condo the fount of study and contemplation; the Malibu beach house the spoke of dispatch, where he sent his lonelies beyond their beyonds.

But the central point of his work was here behind a door he had personally stripped of varnish and painted an incongruous bright green. It was the control room of the Time Machine.

A swivel chair and a desk holding a telephone were centered in the room, affording a swivel view of four information-covered walls.

One wall held a huge map of Los Angeles County. Red pins signified the addresses of his lonelies, blue pins denoted the pay phones where he contacted them—a safety buffer he had devised. Green pins indicated homes where the lonelies had been placed on assignment, and plastic stick figures marked Thomas Goff, ever mobile in his quest to find more red pins.

Two walls comprised a depth gauge, to probe the Night Tripper's childhood void. Serving as markings on the gauge were WCBS top-forty surveys from Spring 1957, attached to the walls with red and blue pins, and a shelf containing roller-skate wheels that were once the feet of dead animals, lockets of soft brown hair stolen from inside a family Bible, and a swatch of carpet stained with blood.

Clues.

The remaining wall was covered with typed quotations from inhabitants of the void, taped on in approximate chronological order:

> *December, 1957:* Mother—"Your father was a monster, and I'm glad he's gone. The administrators of the trust fund have been instructed to tell us nothing, and I'm glad. I don't want to know." (Current disposition: Residing in a Yonkers, N.Y., sanitarium with severe alcoholic senility.)
>
> *March, 1958:* Frank Baxter (father's lawyer)—"Just think the best, Johnny. Think that your dad loves you very much, which is why he's sending you and your mother all that nice money." (Disposition: Committed suicide, August, 1960)
>
> *Spring, 1958:* (Imagined? Recalled from previous summer?) Police detectives questioning mother as to father's whereabouts—obsequious; deferential to wealth. (Disposition: Complete disregard of all my inquiries to Scarsdale P.D. and Westchester County P.D. 1961-1968) *Dreamt*?
>
> *June, 1958:* Nurse & doctor at Scarsdale Jr. High (overheard)—"I think the boy

> has a touch of motor aphasia"; "Bah! Doctor, that boy has got a tremendous mind! He just wants to learn what he wants to learn"; "I'll believe the X ray before I believe your analysis, Miss Watkins." (Disposition: doctor dead, nurse moved away, address unknown. Note: X rays and other tests taken at Harvard indicate no aphasiac lesions.)

Walls of clues. Hubs within the hub of himself and all the spokes of his wheels.

Havilland swiveled in his chair, pushing off with his feet, spinning himself faster and faster, until the room was a blur and the four walls and their clues metamorphosed into rapid-fire images of Linda Wilhite and her home movie fantasies. He shut his eyes and Richard Oldfield was standing nude in front of a movie camera, with other lonelies laboring over arc lights and sound equipment. The chair was close to toppling off its casters when the phone rang and froze the moment. Deep breathing to bail out of his reverie, the Night Tripper let the chair come to a halt. When he was certain his voice would be calm, he picked up the phone and said, "Is this good news, Thomas?"

Goff's voice was both self-satisfied and hoarse with tension. "Bingo. Junior Miss Cosmetics. I never even had to contact the cop. I played one of his stooges like an accordion. Murray won't know anything about it."

"Have you got them?"

"Tonight," Goff said. "It's only costing us a grand and some pharmaceutical coke."

"Where? I want to know the exact time and place."

"Why? You told me this was my baby."

"Tell me, Thomas." Hearing the hoarseness in his own voice, Havilland coated his words with sugar. "You've done brilliantly, and it *is* your baby. I just want to be able to picture your triumph."

Goff went silent. The Doctor pictured a proud child afraid to express his gratitude at being wooed with cheap praise. Finally the child bowed to the father. "At ten-thirty tonight. The end of Nichols Canyon Road, in the little park with the picnic benches."

Havilland smiled. Throw the child a crumb. "Beyond brilliant. Perfection. I'll meet you at your apartment at eleven. We'll celebrate the occasion by planning our next grouping. I need your feedback."

"Yes, Doctor." Goff's voice was one step above groveling. Havilland hung up the phone and replayed the conversation, realizing that Linda Wilhite had remained a half step back in his mind the whole time, waiting.

At nine-thirty Havilland drove to Nichols Canyon and parked behind a stand of sycamore trees adjacent to the picnic area. He was shielded from view by mounds of scrub-covered rock which still allowed him visual access to Goff's meeting spot. The lights that were kept on all night to thwart off gay assignations would frame the picture, and unless Goff and the security stooge spoke in a whisper their voices would carry up to his hiding place. It *was* perfection.

At ten past ten, Goff's yellow Toyota pulled up. Havilland watched his executive officer get out and stretch his legs, then withdraw a large revolver from his waistband and go into a gunfighter's pirouette, swiveling in all directions, blowing away imaginary adversaries. The overhead lights illuminated a throbbing network of veins in his forehead, the storm warning of a lepto attack. Havilland could almost feel Goff's speeded-up heartbeat and respiration. When the sound of another car approaching hit his ears and Goff stuck his gun back and covered the butt with his windbreaker, Havilland felt his body go cold with sweat.

A battered primer-gray Chevy appeared, doing a little fishtail as the driver applied the brakes. A fat black man in a skin-tight uniform of pale blue shirt, khaki pants, and Sam Browne belt got out, making a big show of slamming the door and chugging from a pint of whiskey. Havilland shuddered as he recalled one of Goff's favorite death fantasies: "Drawing down on niggers."

The black man sauntered up to Goff and offered him the bottle. Goff declined with a shake of the head and said, "You brought them?" Havilland squinted and saw that Goff's fingers were trembling and involuntarily plucking at his waistband.

The black man knocked back a long drink and giggled. "If you got the money, I've got the honey. If you got the dope, I got the … shit, I can't rhyme that one. You look nervous, homeboy. You been tootin' a little too much of your own product?"

Goff took a step backward. His whole left side was alive with tremors. Havilland could see his left leg buckle as though straining to kick out at a right angle. The black man raised his hands in a supplicating gesture, fear in his eyes as he saw Goff's face contort spastically. "Man, you reelin' with the feelin'. I get you the stuff and you pay me off, and we do this all real slow, all right?"

Goff found his voice. Willing it even made his tremors subside. "Rock steady, Leroy. You want it slow, you got it slow."

"My name ain't Leroy," the black man said. "You dig?"

"I dig you, Amos. Now cut the shit and bring me the stuff. *You* dig?" Goff's thumbs were hooked in his belt loops. His hands twitched in the direction of the gun. Havilland saw the black man bristle, then smile. "For a K note and two grams of righteous blow you can call me anything short of Sambo." He walked to his car and reached into the backseat, coming away with two large cardboard suitcases. Returning to Goff and putting them down at his feet, he said, "Fresh off the Xerox machine. Nobody but me knows about it. Come up green, homeboy."

Goff stuck a shaking hand into his windbreaker and pulled out a plastic baggie, then tossed it in the dirt beside the black man's car. "Ride, Leroy. Buy yourself a Cadillac and get your hair processed on me."

The black man picked up the baggie and balled it in his fist, then killed the pint and threw it at Goff's Toyota. When it hit the trunk and shattered, Goff grabbed at his waistband, then stifled a shriek and jerked his gun hand to his mouth and bit it. Havilland stifled his own outcry and watched the black man raise his hands and back up slowly toward his car, murmuring, "I'll be rockin' steady, rockin' steady real slow. *Reeeal* slow." His back touched the driver's side door and he squirmed in behind the wheel, rolled up the window and gunned the car in reverse. When the dust from his exit cleared, Havilland could see Thomas Goff weeping, aiming his handcannon at the moon.

An hour after Goff's sobbing departure, the Doctor drove to his underling's apartment in the Los Feliz district, the moon catching the edge of his vision, constantly drawing his eyes from the road. Parking outside Goff's building, he checked the contents of his black leather "Truth Kit": sodium Pentothal ampules, ten c.c. bottles of liquid morphine and an assortment of disposable syringes. He would quash Goff's pain and gauge the degree of his slippage.

Goff opened the door on the first knock. He was stripped to the waist, his torso oozing sweat. Havilland stepped inside and felt the chill of an air-conditioner on full blast. He looked at Goff. His extremities were tensed as if to contain earthquakes and his eyes were a feverish yellow. Doing a quick hypothetical run-through based on observation and carefully studied case histories, he gave his pawn a month to live.

When the door closed on his diagnosis, the Doctor took Goff by the arm and led him to the couch. The two cardboard suitcases rested by the coffee table, unopened. Goff smiled through his tremors and pointed to them. "We're on our way, Doctor John."

Havilland smiled in return and opened his leather bag. He withdrew a fresh syringe and a morphine bottle, poking the needle through the porous rubber top, extracting just enough dope for an enticing mainline. Goff wet his lips and said, "It's the worst it's ever been. I've been doing some more reading on migraines. They get worse in a person's thirties. I think I'm really scared."

The Doctor took a bead on a large pulsating vein behind Goff's left ear. He formed a tourniquet with the flat of his hand, placing it just above Goff's collarbone. Whispering, "Easy, Thomas, easy," he inserted the needle square into the vein and depressed the stopper. A sharp jet of blood squirted out as the morphine entered. Goff's features unclenched in relief and Havilland smiled and amended his death sentence: A small dose still brought comfort. Sixty days.

Goff's limbs went languorous and the veins in his forehead receded to their normal dimensions. Havilland studied his patient and devised a spur of the moment contingency plan: If the pain began again within the next half hour, give Goff thirty days of maintenance doses, risk him on one more security-file run, then take him out of L.A. to terminate, and go solo on the remaining runs. If the pain remains abated, give him sixty days of tether for two more runs. Play the truth game with him to explain the tension with the jigaboo. The problem was *covered.*

Goff closed his eyes and drifted off into a dope/exhaustion cloudbank. Havilland got up and walked around the living room, purposely averting his eyes from the suitcases. The low ceiling was painted black and the walls were painted a military brown. Goff's therapy-controlled brightness phobia had driven him to turn a cheery dwelling place into a neuroses decompression chamber. Every time he visited the apartment, the Doctor looked for splotches of color, indicators that he had at long last instigated a total failure of memory, thereby giving Goff some peace of mind to go with his total acquiescence. But everything that could be purchased or rendered dark remained that way, room carpeting to cabinet hardware.

The Doctor surveyed the decompression chamber from a possible farewell standpoint. Various shades of darkness hit his senses, producing a pleasant vertigo that resurrected a childhood memory of a ferris wheel at a Bronx amusement park. The wheel was about to grab him when a burst of non-sequitur pink threw a wrench into its gears.

Snapping back to the present, Havilland saw that it was a pink slip of paper on the end table near the bedroom door, partially covered by a black ceramic ashtray. He picked it up and felt the room reel. It was an L.A.P.D. release slip, issued to Thomas Goff upon the presentation of sixty-five dollars bail money. The charge was 673.1—Failure to appear in traffic court. The Doctor read the heavily abbreviated type at the bottom and crumpled the paper in his hand. His executive officer had been arrested for non-payment of jaywalking citations.

The ferris wheel stopped at the top of its circuit, then plummeted to earth, dropping him into a land of treason. He looked over at Goff, who stirred in his stupor, kneading his shoulders into the couch.

The Doctor felt a wave of rage and loathing hit him like a one-two punch in the solar plexus. To combat it he breathed in-out, in-out until the counterproductive emotions leveled off into professional calm. When he was certain he could maintain his decorum he arrayed the tools of his truth kit on the coffee table, filling one syringe with morphine and another with sodium Pentothal. As Goff's stirrings became more violent, he reached over and pinched his nostrils shut and counted slowly to ten. At nine Goff jerked fully awake and screamed. Havilland took his hand from his nostrils and clamped it over his mouth, pinning his head to the wall. Whispering, "Easy, Thomas, easy," he took the morphine syringe and skin-popped Goff in his left arm and left pectoral muscle. Seeing that Goff's relief was instantaneous, he released his hand and said, "You didn't tell me that you were arrested last month."

Goff shook his head until his body shook with it all the way down to his toes. "I haven't been in the slam since Attica, you know that, Doc."

It was the hoarse rasp of a terrified man speaking the perfect truth. Havilland smiled and whispered, "Your left forearm, Thomas." When Goff obeyed, he jammed a 30 c.c. jolt of sodium Pentothal into the largest vein at the crook of his elbow. Goff gasped and began to giggle. Havilland withdrew the needle and leaned back on the couch. "Tell me about the Junior Miss file transaction," he said.

Goff giggled and fixed his glazed eyes on the far wall. "I scoped out the security bimbos from the bar across from the parking lot," he slurred. "All white trash and niggers. The niggers looked too shifty, so I settled on this Okie type. I asked some of the regulars about him, casual like. They said he was a coke fiend, but controlled, and a closed-mouthed type. He sounded like prime meat, so I brought him out slowly and closed the deal yesterday. I met him a couple of hours ago. Those two suitcases are the files."

Havilland felt his mind buzz, like someone had stuck a live wire into his brain. Goff was so far gone that he was now immune even to massive doses of hypnotic drugs. Time was running out for his executive officer—he had two weeks to live. At best.

Thomas Goff continued to squeal with laughter, his hands dancing over his body. Havilland examined the pink release slip. No vehicle license plate mentioned. Goff had obviously been stopped for questioning while on foot, a routine warrant check turning up his old jaywalking tickets. He waved the slip in front of Goff's eyes. Goff ignored the flash of brightness and laughed even harder.

Havilland got to his feet and swung a roundhouse open hand at Goff's face. Goff screeched, "No please," as the blow made contact, then wrapped his head in his hands and curled into a fetal ball on the couch. The Doctor squatted beside him and put a hand on his shoulder. “You need a rest, Thomas,” he said. “The migraines are sapping your strength. We’re going to take a little vacation together. I’m going to confer with some specialists about your headaches, then treat you myself. I want you to stay home and rest, then call me in forty-eight hours. All right?”

Goff twisted to look at the Doctor. He wiped a trickle of blood from his nose and whimpered, “Yes, but what about the next grouping? We were going to plan it, remember?”

“We’ll have to postpone it. The important thing now is to deal with your migraines.”

Thomas Goff’s eyes clouded with tears. The Doctor extracted a bottle of tetracyline-morphine mixture from his bag and prepped a syringe. “Antibiotics,” he said. “In case your migraines have gone viral.” Goff nodded as Havilland found a vein in his wrist and inserted the needle. His tears spilled over at the act of mercy, and by the time the doctor withdrew the syringe he was asleep.

Dr. John Havilland picked up the two suitcases, surprised to find that he wasn’t thinking of the merciless information inside. As he turned off the light and shut the door behind him, he was thinking of a black vinyl Vietnam body bag he had won as a joke prize at a med school beer bust and of dogs exploding into red behind a barbed wire fence.

LLOYD awoke in his den, already calculating hours before he was fully conscious. Thirty-six since Dutch's ultimatum and no new leads—report Herzog missing. Well over a hundred hours since the liquor store slaughter—all leads deadended. Start cross-checking the three hundred thousand yellow Jap cars and begin hauling in known armed robbers, leaning on them hard, squeezing all known and suspected pressure points in hope of securing information. Shit work all the way down the line.

Lloyd stretched and rolled off the convertible bed in one motion, then walked into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator, letting the cold air bring him to full consciousness. When goose bumps formed beneath his T-shirt and boxer shorts he shivered and dug out a half consumed container of cottage cheese, eating with the spoon that was still stuck inside. Almost gagging on the sticky blandness, he looked round the three small rooms he had allotted himself in his family's absence: den to sleep, think and study in; kitchen for the preparing of such gourmet fare as cottage cheese and cold chili from the can; the downstairs bathroom for hygiene. When he started doing calculations as to the number of hours since Janice and the girls had left, his mental calculator quit in midtransaction. If you start running tabs you'll go crazy and do something crazy to get them back. Let it be. If you stalk them, they'll know you haven't changed. It's a penance waiting game.

Finishing his breakfast, Lloyd showered hot and cold, then dressed in a day old button-down shirt and his only clean suit, an unseasonable summer pinstripe. Murmuring "Now or never," he sat down at his desk, dug out a spiral notebook and wrote:

> 4/28/84
> To: Chief of Detectives
> From: Det. Sergeant Lloyd Hopkins, Rob/Hom. Div.
>
> Sir:
>
> Four days ago I was contacted by my friend, Captain Arthur Peltz, the commander of Hollywood Division. He told me that Officer Jacob Herzog, a Personnel Records clerk at Parker Center who was working on a sub-rosa loan-out to Hollywood Vice, had been missing for nearly a month. Captain Peltz asked me to investigate, and in doing so I discovered that Herzog's (intact) apartment had been professionally wiped of fingerprints. I questioned Herzog's best friend, former L.A.P.D. Sergeant Martin Bergen, who told me that *he* hadn't seen Herzog in over a month and that Herzog had been "moody" at the time of their last meeting. An interview with Herzog's girlfriend confirms his month long absence and "moody"

> behavior. My opinion is that Herzog is the victim of a well-planned homicide and that his disappearance should be immediately and fully investigated. I realize that I should have reported this earlier, but my sole purpose in *not* reporting was to first establish evidence (however circumstantial) of wrongdoing. Captain Peltz ordered me to report to you immediately, but I violated that order.
>
> Respectfully, Lloyd Hopkins, #1114

Lloyd read over his words, strangely satisfied at having taken the bulk of the risk in incurring high brass wrath. He ripped the page out of the notebook and put it in his inside jacket pocket, then clipped on his .38 and handcuffs and made for the front door. He had his hand on the doorknob when the phone rang.

He let it ring ten times before answering—only Penny pursued a phone call that persistently.

"Speak, it's your dime."

Penny's giggle came over the wire. "No, it's *not,* Daddy! It's my dollar-forty."

Lloyd laughed. "Excuse me. I forgot inflation. What's the scoop, Penguin?"

"The same old same old. What about you? Are you getting any?"

Lloyd feigned shock. "Penny Hopkins, I'm surprised at you!"

"No, you're not. You told me I was jaded in my crib. You didn't answer my question, Daddy."

"Very well, in answer to your question, I am *not* getting any."

Penny's giggle went up an octave. "Good. Mom read me that first letter of yours, you know. We were talking about it the other night. She said it was excessive, that *you* were excessive, and even when you were admitting to be being a sleazy womanizer your admissions were excessive. But I could tell she was impressed."

"I'm glad. Is Roger still staying with you?"

"Yes. Mom sleeps with Roger, but she talks about you. One of these nights I'm going to get her stoned and get her to admit you're her main love. I'll report her words to you verbatim."

Lloyd felt a little piece of his heart work itself loose and drift up to San Francisco. "I want all of you back, Penguin."

"I know. I want to come back, and so does Anne. That's two votes for you. Mom and Caroline want to stay in Frisco. Dead heat."

"Annie and Caroline are okay?"

"Anne is big into vegetarianism and Eastern thought and Caroline is in love with this punk rock fool next door. He's a high school dropout. Gross."

Lloyd laughed. "Par for the teen age course. Let me hit you with something. Doctor John the Night Tripper. Ring any bells?"

"Ancient ones, Daddy. The 'sixties. He was this wild rock and roller. Caroline has one of his records—'Bad Boogaloo.'"

"That's it?"

"Yeah. Why?"

"A case I'm on. Dutch is on it, too. It's probably nothing."

Penny's voice went low and shrewd. "Daddy, when are you going to tell me about what happened right after the breakup? I'm no dummy, I know you were shot. Uncle Dutch practically admitted it to Mom.

Lloyd sighed as their conversation came to its usual conclusion. "Give it another couple of years, babe. When you're a world-weary fifteen I'll spill my guts. Right now all it means is that I owe a lot of people."

"Owe what, Daddy?"

"I don't know, babe. That's the tricky part."

"Will you tell me when you figure it out?"

"You'll be the first to know. I love you, Penny."

"I love you, too."

"I've got to go."

"So do I. Love love love."

"Likewise."

"Bye."

"Bye."

With "Owe what, Daddy?" trailing in his mind, Lloyd drove downtown to Parker Center. His memo to the Chief of Detectives rested like a hot coal in his jacket pocket. Deciding to check his incoming basket before dropping it with the Chief's secretary, he took the elevator to the sixth floor and strode down the hall to his cubicle, seeing the note affixed to his door immediately: "Hopkins—call Det. Dentinger, B.H.P.D., re: gun query."

Lloyd grabbed his phone and dialed the seven familiar digits of the Beverly Hills Police Department, saying, "Detective Dentinger," when the switchboard operator came on the line. There was the sound of the call being transferred, then a man's perfunctory voice: "Dentinger. Talk."

Lloyd was brusque. "Detective Sergeant Hopkins, L.A.P.D. What have you got on my gun query?"

Dentinger muttered "shit" to himself, then said into the mouthpiece, "We got a burglary from two weeks ago. Unsolved, no prints. A forty-one-caliber revolver was listed on the report of missing items. The reason you didn't get a quicker response on this is because the burglary dicks who originally investigated think that the report was padded, you know, for insurance purposes. A bunch of shit was reported stolen, but the burglar's access was this little basement window. He couldn't have hauled all the shit out—it wouldn't have fit. I've been assigned to investigate the deal, see if we should file on this joker for submitting a false crime report. I'll give you the sp—"

Lloyd cut in. "Do you think there *was* a burglary?"

Dentinger sighed. "I'll give you my scenario. Yes, there was a burglary. Small items were stolen, like the jewelry on the report, the gun, and probably some shit the victim didn't report, like cocaine—I've got him figured for a stone snowbird, really whacked out. You know the clincher? The guy owns two of these antique guns, mounted in presentation cases, with original ammo from the Civil War, but he only reports *one* stolen. I don't doubt that the fucker *was* stolen, but any intelligent insurance padder would stash the other gun and report it stolen too, am I right?"

Lloyd said, "Right. Give me the information on the victim."

"Okay," Dentinger said. "Morris Epstein, age forty-four, eight-one-six-seven Elevado. He calls himself a literary agent, but he's got that Hollywood big bucks fly-by-night-look. You know, live high on credit and bullshit, never know where your next buck is coming from. Personally, I think these—"

Lloyd didn't wait for Dentinger to finish his spiel. He hung up the phone and ran for the elevator.

8167 Elevado was a salmon pink Spanish-style house in the Beverly Hills residential district. Lloyd sat in his car at the curb and saw Dentinger's "big bucks fly-by-night" label confirmed: The lawn needed mowing, the hedges needed trimming, and the chocolate brown Mercedes in the driveway needed a bath.

He walked up and knocked on the door. Moments later a small middle-aged man with finely sculpted salt-and-pepper hair threw the door open. When he saw Lloyd, he reached for the zipper at the front of his jumpsuit and zipped up his chest. "You're not from Roll Your Own Productions, are you?" he asked.

Lloyd flashed his badge and I.D. card. "I'm from the L.A.P.D. Are you Morris Epstein?"

The man shuffled back into his entrance foyer. Lloyd followed him. "Isn't this out of your jurisdiction?" the man said.

Lloyd closed the door behind them. "I'll make it easy on you, Epstein. I have reason to believe that the forty-one revolver you reported stolen might have been used in a triple homicide. I want to borrow your other forty-one for comparison tests. Cooperate, and I'll tell the Beverly Hills cops that your insurance report was exaggerated, not padded. You dig?"

Morris Epstein went livid. Spittle formed at the corners of his mouth. He flung an angry arm in the direction of the door and hissed, "Leave this house before I have you sued for police harassment. I have friends in the A.C.L.U. They'll fix your wagon for real, flatfoot."

Lloyd pushed past Epstein's arm into an art-deco living room festooned with framed movie posters and outsized gilt-edged mirrors. A glass coffee table held a single-edged razor blade and traces of white powder. There was a large cabinet against the wall by the fireplace. Lloyd opened and shut drawers until he found the glassine bag filled with powder. He turned to see Epstein standing beside him with the telephone in his hand. When he held the bag in front of Epstein's eyes, the little man said, "You can't bluff me. This is illegal search and seizure. I'm personal friends with Jerry Brown. I've got clout. One phone call and you are adios, motherfucker."

Lloyd grabbed the telephone from Epstein's hand, jerked the cord out of the wall and tossed it on the coffee table. The table shattered, sending glass shards exploding up to the ceiling. Epstein backed into the wall and whispered, "Now look, pal, we can bargain this out. We can—"

Lloyd said, "We're past the bargaining stage. Bring me the gun. Do it now."

Epstein unzipped the top of his jumpsuit and kneaded his chest. "I still say this is illegal search and seizure."

"This is a legal search and seizure coincident to the course of a felony investigation. Bring me the gun—in its case. Don't touch the gun itself."

Morris Epstein capitulated with an angry upward tug of his zipper. When he left the room, Lloyd gave it a quick toss, searching the remaining drawers, wondering whether or not he should go to the Beverly Hills Station and check out the burglary report. Dentinger had said that no prints were found, but maybe there were F.I.'s on yellow Jap imports or other indicators to jog his brain.

He went through the last drawer, then turned his attention to the mantel above the fireplace. He could hear Epstein's returning footsteps as his eyes caught a cut-glass bowl filled with match books. He grabbed a handful. They were all from First Avenue West—one of the two bars that Jungle Jack Herzog was working.

"Here's your gun, shamus."

Lloyd turned around and saw Epstein holding a highly varnished rosewood box. He walked to him and took the box from his hands. Opening the lid, he saw a large blue steel revolver with mother-of-pearl grips mounted on red velvet. Arranged in a circle around it were copper-jacketed soft-nosed bullets. Taking a pen from his pocket, he inserted it into the barrel and raised the gun upward. Clearly etched on the barrel's underside were the numbers 9471.

"Satisfied?" Epstein said.

Lloyd lowered the barrel and closed the lid of the box. "I'm satisfied. Where did you get the guns?"

"I bought them cheap from the producer of this Civil War mini-series I packaged last year."

"Do you know the serial number of the other gun?"

"No, but I know the two guns had consecutive numbers. Listen, do the Beverly Hills fuzz really think I padded that burglary report?"

"Yes, but I'll slip them the word about how you cooperated. I saw some matches here from First Avenue West. Do you go there a lot?"

"Yeah. Why?"

Lloyd took a photograph of Jack Herzog from his billfold. "Ever see this man?"

Epstein shook his head. "No."

Withdrawing a photocopy of his Identikit portrait of the man seen with Herzog, Lloyd said, "What about him?"

Epstein looked at the picture, then flinched. "Man, this is fucking weird. I did some blow with this guy outside Bruno's Serendipity one night. This is a great fucking likeness."

Lloyd felt two divergent evidential lines intersect in an incredible revelation. "Did this man tell you his name?" he asked.

"No, we just did the blow and split company. But it was funny. He was a weird, persistent kind of guy. He kept asking me these questions about my family and if I was into meeting this really incredibly smart dude he knew. What's the matter, shamus? You look pale."

Lloyd gripped the gun box so hard that he could hear his finger tendons cracking. "Did you tell him your name?"

"No, but I gave him my card."

"Did you tell him about your guns?"

Epstein swallowed. "Yeah."

"When did you talk to the man?"

"Maybe two, three months ago."

"Have you seen him since?"

"No, I haven't been back to Bruno's. It sucks."

"Did you see the man get into a car?"

"Yeah, a little yellow job."

"Make and model?"

"It was foreign. That's all I know. Listen, what's this all about? You come in here and hassle me, break my coffee table—" Epstein stopped when he saw Lloyd run for the door. He called out, "Hey, shamus, come back and shmooze sometime! I could package a bad-ass fuzz like you into a series!"

Running roof lights and siren, Lloyd made it back to Parker Center in a record twenty-five minutes. Cradling the gun box in the crook of his arm, he ran the three flights of stairs up to the offices of the Scientific Identification Division, then pushed through a series of doors until he was face to face with Officer Artie Cranfield, who put down his copy of *Penthouse* and said, "Man, do you look jazzed."

Lloyd caught his breath and said "I *am* jazzed, *and* I need some favors. This box contains a gun. Can you dust it for latents real quick? After you do that, we need a ballistics comparison."

"This is a suspected murder weapon?"

"No, but it's a consecutive serial number to the gun I think is the liquor store murder weapon. Since the ammo in this box and the murder ammo is antique, probably from the same casting, I'm hoping that the rifling marks will be so similar that we can assume th—"

"We can't make those kind of assumptions," Artie interjected. "That kind of theorizing won't hold up in court."

Lloyd handed Artie the gun box. "Artie, I'll lay you twenty to one that this one gets settled on the street. Now will you please dust this baby for me?"

Artie took a pencil from his desk and propped open the lid of the box, then stuck another pencil in the barrel of the revolver, the end affixed to the upper hinge of the box, forming a wedge that held the gun steady. When the box and gun were secure, he took out a small brush and a vial of fingerprint powder and spread it over every blue steel, mother of pearl, and rosewood surface. Finishing, he shook his head and said, "Smooth glove prints on the grip, streak prints on the barrel. I dusted the box for kicks. Smudged latents that are probably you, glove prints that indicate that the box was carefully opened. You're dealing with a pro, Lloyd."

Lloyd shook his head. "I really didn't think we'd find anything good. He stole the companion gun, but I figured he might have touched this one, too."

"He did, with surgical rubber gloves." Artie started to laugh.

Lloyd said, "Fuck you. Let's take this monster down to the tank and see how it kicks."

Artie led Lloyd through the Crime Lab to a small room where water and tufted-cotton-layered ballistics tanks were sunk into the floor. Lloyd slipped three slugs into the .41's chamber and fired into the top layer of water. There was the sound of muffled ricocheting, then Artie squatted and opened up a vent on the tank's side. Withdrawing the "catcher" layer of cotton, he pulled out the three expended rounds and said, "Perfect. I've got a comparison microscope in my office. We'll sign for the liquor store shells and run them."

Lloyd signed a crime lab chit for the three rounds taken from the bodies of the liquor store victims and brought them, in a vinyl evidence bag, to Artie's office. Artie placed them on the left plate of a large, double-eyepieced microscope, then placed the three ballistics tank rounds on the right plate and studied both sets, individually and collectively, for over half an hour. Finally he got up, rubbed his eyes and voiced his findings: "Discounting the fact that the set of rounds fired at the liquor store were flattened by their contact with human skulls, while the tank rounds were intact, and the fact that the impact of the liquor store rounds altered the rifling marks, I would say that the basic land and groove patterns are as identical as slugs fired from two different guns can be. Nail the bastard, Lloyd. Give him the big one where it hurts the most."

Bruno's Serendipity was a singles bar/backgammon club on Rodeo Drive, in the heart of Beverly Hills' boutique strip. The club's interior was dark and plush, with a long sequin-studded black leather bar dominating one half of the floor space, and lounge chairs and lighted backgammon boards the other. A sequined velvet curtain divided the two areas, with a raised platform just inside the doorway that was visible from both sides of the room. Lloyd smiled as he approached the bar. It was a perfect logistical setup.

The bartender was a skinny youth with a punk haircut. Lloyd sat down at the bar and took out his billfold, removing a ten dollar bill and his Identikit portrait and letting the bartender see his badge all in one motion. When the youth said, "Yes, sir, what can I get you?" Lloyd tucked the ten into his vest pocket and handed him the photocopy.

"L.A.P.D. Have you seen this man here before? Take it over to the light and look at it carefully."

The bartender complied, switching on a lamp by the cash register. He studied the picture, then shook his head and said, "Sure. Lots of times. Kind of an intense dude. I think he swings both ways, I mean I've seen him in these really intense conversations with both men and women. What did he do?"

Lloyd gave the youth a stern look. "He molests little boys. When was the last time you saw him?"

"Jesus. Last week sometime. This guy's a chicken hawk?"

"That's right. What time does he usually show up?"

The bartender pointed in the direction of the backgammon tables. "You see how dead it is? Nobody shows up here much before eight. We only open up this early because we usually get some businessmen boozehounds in the late afternoon."

Lloyd said, "I noticed that you don't have a parking lot. Have you got any kind of valet parking setup?"

The youth shook his head. "We don't need one. Plenty of street parking after the boutiques close." He pointed to the platform inside the doorway. "You'll be able to see him real good, though. After dark, every time the door opens disco music goes on and colored lights flash down from the ceiling, white, then blue and red, you know, to let people know who's arriving. You'll be able to see him real good."

Lloyd put a dollar bill on the counter, then walked to a stool at the far end of the bar. "Ginger ale with lime. And bring me some peanuts or something. I forgot to eat lunch."

For six hours Lloyd drank ginger ale and plumbed logic for something to explain his two cases converging into a single narrative line. Nothing but a sense of his own fitness for the unraveling emerged from his ruminations, which were accompanied by a disco light show at the club's front door. From six o'clock on, every person who entered was centered in a flashing light show that was stereo-synced to upbeat arrangements of tunes from *Saturday Night Fever.* Most of the people were young and stylishly dressed and did a brief dance step before heading for the bar or backgammon tables. Lloyd scrutinized every male face as the first white light hit it; no one even vaguely resembled his suspect. Gradually the male and female faces merged into an androgynous swirl that made his eyes ache, combining with the noise of subtle and blatant mating overtures to tilt all his senses out of focus.

At eleven o'clock, Lloyd went to the men's room and soaked his head in a sink filled with cold water. Revived, he dried himself with paper towels and walked back into the club proper. He was about to take his seat at the bar when the Identikit portrait walked past him in the flesh.

Lloyd's skin prickled and he had to ball his gun hand to kill a reflex reach for his .38. The men's eyes locked for a split second, Lloyd averting his first, thinking: *Take him outside at his car.* Then he heard a hoarse gasp behind him, followed by a clicking of metal on metal.

Both men turned at the same instant. Lloyd saw the Identikit man raise his monster handgun and sight it straight at him. He ducked to his knees as the muzzle burst with red and the report of the shot slammed his ears. Bottles exploded behind the bar as the shot went wide; screams filled the room. Lloyd rolled on the floor toward the sequined divider curtain, drawing his .38 and attempting to aim from a backward roll as odd parts of frantic bodies blocked a shot at his target. Two more thunderous explosions; the bar mirror shattering; the screaming reaching toward a crescendo. Lloyd rolled free of the curtain, crashing into a backgammon table. He got to his feet as another shot hit the curtain housing and sent the curtain crashing to the floor. People were huddling under tables, pressing together in a tangle of arms and legs. Muzzle smoke covered the bar area, but through it Lloyd could see his adversary arcing his pistol, looking for *his* target.

Lloyd extended his gun arm, his left hand holding his wrist steady. He fired twice, too high, and saw the Identikit man turn and run back in the direction of the restrooms. Stumbling over an obstacle course of trembling bodies, Lloyd pursued, flattening himself to the wall outside the men's room, nudging the door inward with his foot. He heard strained breathing inside and pushed the door open, firing blindly at chest level, jerking himself backwards just as a return shot blew the door in half.

Lloyd slid to the floor, counting expended rounds: five for psycho, three for himself. Charge him and kill him. He fumbled three shells from his belt into the chamber of his snub nose, then fired into the bathroom in hope of getting a return shot in panic. When none came, he pushed through the half-destroyed door, catching a blurry glimpse of a pair of legs pulling themselves up and out of a narrow window above the toilet.

Stripping off his jacket, Lloyd leaped up and tried to squeeze out the window. His shoulders jammed and splintered the woodwork, but even by squirming and contracting every inch of his body he wouldn't fit. Jumping down, he ran back through the club proper, now a wasteland of shattered glass, upended furniture, and shelter-seeking mounds of people. He was only a few feet from the entrance promenade when the door burst open and three patrolmen with pump shotguns came up in front of him and aimed their weapons at his head. Seeing the fear in their eyes and sensing their fingers worrying the triggers, Lloyd let his .38 drop to the floor. “L.A.P.D.,” he said softly. “My badge and I.D. are in my jacket pocket.”

The middle cop poked Lloyd in the chest with the muzzle of his shotgun. “You ain’t got a jacket, asshole. Turn around and put your hands on the wall above your head, then spread your legs. Do it real slow.”

Lloyd obeyed in the slowest of slow motion. He felt rough hands give him a thorough frisking. In the distance he could hear the wail of sirens drawing nearer. When his hands were pinned behind his back and cuffed, he said, “My jacket is in the bathroom. I was here on a homicide stakeout. You’ve got to issue an A.P.B. and a vehicle detain order. It’s a yellow Japan—”

A heavy object crashed into the small of his back. Lloyd twisted around and saw the middle cop holding his shotgun, butt extended. The other two cops hung a few feet back, looking bewildered. One of them whispered, “He’s got a cross draw holster. I’ll check the bathroom.”

The middle cop silenced him. “Shitcan it. We’ll take him in. You check these people, look for anyone wounded, take statements. The meat wagon will be here in a second, so you help the paramedics. Jensen and I will take asshole in.”

Lloyd squinted and read the leader cop’s nameplate—Burnside. Straining to keep his voice steady, he said, “Burnside, you are letting a mass murderer and probable cop killer walk. Just go into the bathroom and get my jacket.”

Burnside spun Lloyd around and shoved him out the door and into a patrol car at curbside. Lloyd looked out the window and saw other Beverly Hills’ black-and whites and paramedic vans pull up directly on the sidwalk. As the patrol car accelerated, he looked in vain for a yellow Japanese import and felt his whole body smolder like dry ice.

The ride to the Beverly Hills Station took two minutes. Burnside and Jensen hustled Lloyd up the back stairs and led him down a dingy hallway to a wire mesh holding tank. Shoving him inside, still cuffed, Burnside said to his partner, “This bust feels like fat city. Any legit L.A.P.D. dick would have taken one of our guys with him on a stakeout. Let’s go get the skipper.”

When the two cops locked the cage door and ran off down the hallway, Lloyd leaned back against the wire wall and listened to the laughing and shouting coming from the drunk tank at the far end of the corridor. Letting his mind go blank, he gradually assimilated a mental replay of the events at Bruno’s Serendipity. One thought dominated: Somehow the Identikit man had instantly seized upon him as his enemy. True, his size and outdated business suit would alert any streetwise fool; but the I.K. man had glimpsed him for only a brief moment in a crowded, artificially lighted environment. Lloyd held the thought, testing it for leaks, finding none. *Something was way off the usual criminal ken.*

“You fucked up, Sergeant.”

Lloyd shifted his gaze to see who had spoken. It was a Beverly Hills captain, in uniform. He was holding his suit coat and .38 and shaking his head slowly.

“Let me out and give me my jacket and gun,” Lloyd said.

The captain shook his head a last time, then slid a key into the cage door and swung it open. He took a handcuff key from his pocket and unlocked Lloyd’s cuffs. Lloyd rubbed his wrists and took his coat and gun out of the captain's hands, realizing that the man was at least a half dozen years his junior. "Yeah, I fucked up," he said.

"Nice to hear the legendary Lloyd Hopkins admit to fallability," the captain said. "Why didn't you notify the head of our detective squad of your stakeout? He would have given you a backup officer."

"It happened too fast. I was going to wait for the suspect outside by his car. I would have called for one of your units to assist me, but he made me for a cop and freaked out."

"What are you, six-four? Two-twenty five? It doesn't take a genius to figure out what you do for a living."

"Yeah? Your own officers couldn't figure it out too well."

The captain flushed. "Officer Burnside will apologize to you."

Lloyd said, "Goody. In the meantime a stone psychopathic killer drives out of Beverly Hills a free man. An A.P.B. and a vehicle detain order might have gotten him."

"Don't try my patience, Hopkins. Just be grateful that no one at Bruno's was hurt. If you had been responsible for the injury or death of a constituent of mine, I would have crucified you. As it stands, I'll let your own Department deal with you."

Lloyd's vision pulsed with red. He shut his eyes to keep the throbbing localized and said, "Do you want to hear the whole story?"

"No. I want a complete report, in triplicate. Go upstairs and find a desk and write it now. I've informed your superiors at Robbery/Homicide. You are to report to the Chief of Detectives tomorrow morning at ten. Good night, Sergeant."

Fuming, Lloyd watched the captain walk away. He gave himself ten minutes to cool down, then took an elevator to the third floor vehicle registration office. A night clerk gave him a yellow legal pad and a pen, and over the next two hours he block printed three reports detailing the events at Bruno's and summarizing his investigations into the liquor store homicides and the disappearance of Officer Jack Herzog, copying over his unsubmitted memo to the Chief of Detectives verbatim in hopes that it would be construed as an effort at "team play." When he finished, he left the pages with the night desk officer and headed for the parking lot. He was almost out the door when an intercom voice jerked him back in. "Urgent call for Sergeant Hopkins. Paging Sergeant Hopkins."

Lloyd walked to the night desk and picked up the phone. "Yes?"

"It's Dutch, Lloyd. What happened?"

"Lots of shit. Who told you?"

"Thad Braverton. You're supposed to see him tomorrow."

"I know. Is he pissed?"

"Depends on what you have to say. What *happened*?"

Lloyd laughed through his anger and fatigue. "You won't *believe* what happened. The same guy did the liquor store job and killed Jack Herzog. I'm sure of it. He fired on me with his liquor store piece. We did our best to destroy a Beverly Hills singles bar. It was wild."

Dutch shouted, "*What!*"

"Tomorrow, partner. I'll call you after I talk to Braverton."

Dutch's voice was soft. "Jesus fucking Christ."

Lloyd's was softer. "Yeah, on a popsicle stick. You got any good news for me? I could use some."

Dutch said, "Two items. One, I checked around on that weird name you asked about. Doctor John the Night Tripper. He was a rock bimbo from years ago, and it's also the nickname of a psychiatrist who does lots of counseling of hookers and court-referred criminal types. He's very well respected. His real name if John Havilland and his office is in Century City. Two, you're in good shape with I.A.D. I called Fred Gaffaney this morning and reported Herzog missing. I took the grief, which consisted of Gaffaney screaming 'fuck' a few times."

Lloyd memorized the first item and laughed at the second. "Good work, partner. I'll talk to you tomorrow."

Dutch laughed back. "Stay alive, kid."

Lloyd hung up and walked out into the parking lot, threading his way through a maze of erratically parked black-and-whites and unmarked cruisers. When he got to the sidewalk he saw Officer Burnside striding toward him. Burnside snickered as he passed, and Lloyd halted and tapped him on the shoulder. "You got something to say to me?"

Burnside turned and said, "Yeah. Ain't you a little old to be hotdogging outside your jurisdiction?"

Lloyd smiled and drove a short right hand into Burnside's midsection. Burnside gasped and doubled over. Lloyd propped up his chin with his left hand, then swung a full force right at the bridge of his nose, feeling it crack beneath his fist. Burnside flew back onto the pavement, moaning and drawing himself into a ball to escape more blows. Lloyd walked to his car feeling old and numb and tired of his profession.

THE Night Tripper was on his fourth reading of the Junior Miss Cosmetics files when the phone in his private study rang, twenty-four hours before Goff’s next scheduled call. Picturing his terminal man straining against a bacterial fever, he picked up the receiver and whispered, “You’re early, Thomas. What is it?”

Goff’s reply came out in series of gasps. “Cop! Big man from the cop files! I tried to wax him like the liquor store scum, but he—” The gasps became a horrified wailing.

Havilland envisioned Goff hyperventilating and frothing and burning up the phone booth with his fever and bewildered rage. Passing sentence in his mind, he said aloud, “Go home, Thomas. Can you understand that? Go home and wait for me. Draw in three breaths and tell me you’ll go home. Will you do that for me?”

The three breaths drew out the semblance of a human voice. “Yes … yes … please hurry.”

The Doctor replaced the receiver and held his hands in front of his eyes. They were perfectly steady. He walked into the bathroom and stared at himself in the mirror. His light brown eyes were unwavering in their knowledge that although Goff had fallen, he was invulnerable. He reached below the sink and picked up the death kit he had prepared the previous night, then went back to his study and stuffed it inside the old leather briefcase he had saved since med school. Squatting down, he pulled up a section of loose carpeting and opened his floor safe, extracting a single manila folder, thinking for a split second that the man in the photo attached to the first page looked exactly like his father.

Thus armed for mercy, he left his apartment and walked out to the street to look for a cab. One cruised by a few minutes later. “Michael’s Restaurant on Los Feliz and Hill-hurst,” Havilland told the driver. “And please hurry.” The driver sped through the late evening traffic, never looking back at his passenger. Pulling up in front of the restaurant, he said, “Fast enough for you?”

The Doctor smiled and handed him a twenty. “Keep the change,” he said.

When the cab drove away, Havilland walked the four blocks to Goff’s apartment, noting with relief that all the lights in the adjoining units were off. He rapped softly on the door, hearing otherworldly moans respond to his knock. The inside chain was withdrawn, and Goff was framed in the doorway, beseeching him with terrified eyes and hands pressed together in prayer. The doctor stared at the hands as they trembled a few inches in front of him. The fingers were bloody stubs, as if Goff’s animal panic had driven him to try to dig a way out of his life. Looking at the inside of the door, he saw gouge marks and trickles of blood.

Havilland put gentle hands on Goff's shoulders and pushed him back into the living room, seeing his cordite-stinking handgun on the coffee table. Shutting and bolting the door, he pointed Goff to the couch, then rummaged in his briefcase for his instruments of accusation and mercy. Laying the manila folder face down on the floor and filling a syringe from a lab vial of strychnine, he whispered, "Two questions before I sedate you, Thomas. One, did the police see your car?"

Goff shook his head and tried to form 'no' with his lips. The Doctor looked into his eyes. *Probable truth.*

Whispering, "Good, good," he clasped his left hand over Goff's mouth and pressed his head to the wall with all his strength. Goff's eyes bulged but remained locked into the eyes of his master. Havilland took the manila folder from the floor and slipped off the front page photograph. Holding it up for Goff to see, he said, "Is this the policeman?"

Goff's eyes widened, the pupils dilated. A scream rose in his throat and he twisted his head and bit at the Doctor's hand. Havilland pushed forward with all his weight, flailing with his free arm for the syringe, finding it just as Goff's teeth grazed his palm. Throwing himself across Goff's squirming torso, he stabbed the needle into his neck, missing his target vein, pulling it free as the point struck muscle tissue. Aiming again, he saw his father and the cop in the photo fuse into one persona just as the ferris wheel at the Bronx amusement park began its descent. The spike struck home; his thumb worked the plunger; the poison entered. Goff's back arched as his feet twisted and pushed off the wall in a huge full-body seizure. Both master and minion were thrown to the floor. Goff writhed, foam at his mouth. Havilland got to his knees, seeing his father and the cop separate into individual entities, replaced by a little girl in a fifties-style party dress laughing at him. He shook his head to destroy the vision, then heard Goff's vertebrae popping as he attempted to turn himself inside-out. Getting to his feet, he saw a door opening on blackness and headstones behind a barbed wire fence. Then he held his hands in front of his face and saw that they were steady. He looked down on the floor and saw Thomas Goff, dead, frozen in a final configuration of anguish.

"Father," the Night Tripper whispered. "Father. Father."

Now only the disposal remained.

The Doctor dug through his briefcase, removing the black vinyl body bag and laying it out lengthwise on the floor, zipped open. He tossed Goff's handgun into the bottom, then stuffed in Goff himself and zipped the bag up.

Goff's car keys were on the coffee table. Havilland pocketed them, then squatted down and hoisted the pain-free Goff onto his right shoulder. Picking up his briefcase and flicking off the ceiling light, he shut the door and walked outside to the street.

Goff's Toyota was parked four buildings down. Havilland unlocked the trunk and wedged the dead man inside, securing the body bag by placing a spare tire and bumper jack across Goff's midsection. Satisfied with the concealment, the Doctor slammed the trunk shut and drove him to his final resting place.

Thomas Goff's grave was the basement maintainence area of a storage garage in the East Los Angeles industrial district. It was owned by one of the Doctor's former criminal counselees, currently doing ten to life for a third armed robbery conviction. Havilland paid the taxes and sent the man's wife a quarterly check; the gloomy old red-brick fortress would be his for at least another eight years.

It took the Night Tripper ten minutes to secure the gravesite, rummaging through the ring of keys his counselee had given him, opening up a series of double padlocked doors, driving through an obstacle course of mildewed cartons and rotting lumber until he was in the pitch black bowels of the building. Wiping the car free of his fingerprints and retracing his steps in the dark, he felt a sense of satisfaction and completion hit him harder with each padlock he snapped shut: Thomas Goff had spent his adult life seeking the absence of light and the Doctor had promised to help; now he would have layer upon layer of darkness to cradle his eternity.

When the street door lock was fastened behind him, the Night Tripper walked toward downtown L.A. and shifted his thoughts to the future. With Goff dead, he was flying solo; all the file runs were his. It was time to put off his current lonelies with talk of forthcoming "ultimate" assignments and concentrate on the acquisition of data and his possible combat with the policeman who so resembled his father. Crossing the Third Street bridge, the lights of the downtown business monoliths hovering in front of him, Havilland thought of chess moves: Richard Oldfield, clinically insane yet superbly cautious, who resembled the late Thomas Goff like a twin brother. *Pawn to queen.* Linda Wilhite, the hooker who fantasized snuff films and who desired a life of blissful domesticity with a big, rough-hewn man. *Queen to king.*

And finally the highly tarnished "king" himself: Detective Sergeant Lloyd Hopkins, the outsized L.A. cop with the off-the-charts I.Q., the man of whom the Alchemist had said: "I glommed his file because he is simply the best there is. If he weren't such an up-front womanizer and so outlaw in his methods, he'd be Chief of Detectives. He's got close to complete autonomy within the Department, because the high brass knows he's the best and because they think he's slightly off his nut. He was the one who closed the 'Hollywood Slaughterer' case last year. No one really knows what happened, but the rumor is that Hopkins simply went out and killed the bastard."

Havilland replayed the words in his mind, juxtaposing them with the superlative arrest record and erratic homelife detailed in the folder. *Checkmate.* Staring deeper into the lights before him, he thought of unlocking the door to his childhood void with symbolic patricide.

“BEFORE we start, I want you to read this morning’s *Big Orange Insider*.”

Lloyd shifted in his chair and lowered his eyes, wondering if Thad Braverton bought his look of phony contrition. Their handshake had been a good start, but Braverton’s eyes were pinpoints of barely controlled rage, belying the authoritative calm of his voice.

“Martin Bergen’s byline?” Lloyd asked.

The Chief of Detectives shook his head. “No. Surprisingly, it was written by some other cop-hating hack. Just read it, Hopkins. The comments of one Officer Burnside are particularly interesting.”

Lloyd stood up and took the folded tabloid from the Chief, handing him his neatly typed report on the liquor store-Herzog case in return. Sitting back down, he read the *Insider’s* hyperbolized account of the shootout at Bruno’s Serendipity. The three-column piece was written as an indictment of “Gunslinger Justice” and heavily emphasized the “Innocent young singles whose lives were placed in jeopardy by a trigger-happy L.A.P.D. detective.” The concluding paragraph featured the observations of Beverly Hills Officer Carl D. Burnside, twenty-four, “whose nose was in a splint from a recent jogging accident.”

> “Sergeant Hopkins attempted to arrest his suspect in a room filled with innocent people, even though he knew the guy was armed and dangerous. He should have had a Beverly Hills officer go with him. His callous disregard for the safety of Beverly Hills citizens is disgusting. Hot-dog cops like Hopkins give sensitive, safety-conscious policemen like me a bad name.”

Lloyd stifled a burst of laughter by wadding up the tabloid and watching the Chief of Detectives read his report. He had labored over it at home for five hours, detailing his two cases from their beginnings, charting their convergence step by step, underlining his certainty of Martin Bergen’s innocence in Jack Herzog’s presumed death, Herzog’s theft of the six L.A.P.D. Personnel files and how the Identikit man *had to have seen those files*—it was the only way he could have identified him as a policeman in a crowded, smoky room.

The last page was the clincher, the evidence documentation that Lloyd hoped would bowl Thad Braverton over and save him the ignominy of departmental censure. At dawn he had driven back to Bruno’s Serendipity and had bribed the two workmen cleaning up the previous night’s damage into letting him make a check for expended .41 rounds. By charting approximate trajectories and scanning the walls with a flashlight he had been able to recover two flattened slugs. Artie Cranfield and his comparison miscroscope had done the rest of the work, delivering the irrefutable ballistics confirmation: *The three liquor store rounds and the two rounds extracted from the walls at Bruno's Serendipity had been fired by the same gun.*

Thad Braverton finished reading the report and fixed Lloyd with a deadpan stare. "Muted bravo's, Hopkins. I was going to suspend you, but in the light of this I'll let you slide with a reprimand: Do not ever go into another department's jurisdiction without greasing the skids with their watch commander. Do you understand me?"

Lloyd screwed his face into a semblance of sheepishness. "Yes, Chief."

Braverton laughed. "Don't try to act contrite, you look like a high school kid who just got laid. You're the official Robbery/Homicide supervisor on the liquor store job, right?"

"Right."

"Good. Stay on that full time. I'm turning over the Herzog case to I.A.D. They'll go at it covertly, which is essential; if Herzog was engaged in any criminal activity I don't want it getting back to the media. They're also better equipped to check out the file angle discreetly—those security firms are big bucks, and I don't want you stepping on their toes. *Comprende*?"

Lloyd flushed. "Yes."

"Good. I'll set up some sort of liaison so that you and I.A.D. can compare notes. What's your next move?"

"I want a full-scale effort to identify this asshole. The Identikit portrait is an exceptional likeness, and I want every cop in the county to have a look at it. Here's what I'm thinking: A closed briefing here at the Center this afternoon. Representatives of every L.A.P.D. and Sheriff's division to attend. No media shitheads. I'll get up about ten thousand copies of the I.K. portrait and tell the men to distribute them at their roll calls. I'll brief the men on my experience with the suspect and offer my observations on his psych makeup and M.O. Every cop in L. A. County will be looking for him. Once we get a positive I.D., we can issue an A.P.B. and take it from there."

Thad Braverton slammed his desk with both palms and said, "You've got it. I'll have my secretary start phoning the various divisions immediately. How's two-thirty sound? That will allow time for the men to go back to their stations and put out the copies before nightwatch. You can take care of getting them in the meantime."

Lloyd got to his feet and said, "Thanks. You could have given me lot of grief, but you didn't." He started to walk for the door, then turned around and added, "Why?"

Braverton said, "You really want to know?"

"Yes."

The Chief of Detectives sighed. "Then I'll tell you. Only four men know *exactly* what happened with you last year. You and Dutch Peltz, obviously, and the big chief and myself. I'm sure you know that rumors have circulated and that some cops admire you for what you did while other cops think you should be in Camarillo for it. I love you for what you did. I'm a hard ass with most people, but I'll take a lot of shit from the people I love."

Lloyd ducked out the door at the Chief's last words. He didn't want him to see that he was a half step away from tears.

Four hours later, Lloyd stood behind the lectern at the front of Parker Center's main briefing room, staring out at what he estimated to be two hundred uniformed and plain-clothes police personnel. Every man and woman present had been issued a manila folder upon entering the room. Each folder contained fifty copies of the Identikit portrait of the man designated and M.O.-typed as:

> Multiple homicide suspect, W.M., 30-35, lt. brn, eye color unknown, 5′ 9″-5′ 11″, 150-160. Drives late model yellow Japanese import; armed with .41 antique handgun. Known to frequent singles bars and use cocaine. *This man is the perpetrator of the April 23 Hollywood liquor store killings. Consider him armed and extremely dangerous."*

When the last late-arriving officers took their seats, Lloyd held up a copy of the *Los Angeles Times* and spoke into the microphone. "Good afternoon. Please give me your complete attention. On page two of today's *Times* there is an accurate report of my encounter last night with the man whose portrait you are now holding. The only reason I am alive today is because this man uses a single-action revolver. I heard him cock the hammer before he fired at me and was able to avoid his first shot. Had he been using a more practical double-action weapon, I would be dead."

Lloyd let his eyes circuit the audience. Feeling them securely in his hand, he continued, "After exchanging fire with me, the man escaped. All the *hard* facts regarding him are on your Identikit pictures. The portrait, by the way, is a superb likeness—it was put together by an intelligent witness and was immediately confirmed by two others. *That is our man.* What I would like to add are my observations of this killer."

He paused and watched the assembled officers study their folders and take out pens and notepads. When there was a gradual shifting of eyes to the lectern, he said, "Last week this man killed three people with clean head shots worthy of a practiced marksman. Last night he fired at me from a distance of ten feet and missed. His four subsequent rounds were wild, fired in panic. I believe that this man is psychotic and will kill until he himself is killed or captured. There must be a concerted effort to identify him. I want these portraits distributed to *every* officer in L.A. County and every trustworthy snitch. He uses coke and frequents singles bars, so every vice and narco officer should utilize *their* snitches and question *their* bar sources. Witnesses have said that he has mentioned 'an incredibly smart dude' he knows, so our suspect may have a partner. I want men *strongly* resembling this suspect to be *carefully* detained for questioning, at *gunpoint.* All suspects detained should be brought to the Central Division Jail. I'll be there from five o'clock on, with a legal officer and a stack of false arrest waivers. Some innocent men are going to be rousted, but that's unavoidable. Direct all queries from police and non-police sources to me, Sergeant Lloyd Hopkins, at Central Division, extension five-one-nine."

Lloyd let the officers catch up on their note taking, knowing that up to now their rapt attention had been on a purely professional level. Clearing his throat and tapping the microphone, he went straight for their purely personal jugulars. "I've given you ample reasons why the apprehension of this suspect is the number one police priority in Southern California, but I'll go a notch better: This man is the prime suspect in the disappearance and probable murder of a Los

Angeles police officer. Let's nail the motherfucker. Good day."

It took Lloyd two hours to establish a command post at the Central Division jail's booking facility. Anticipating a deluge of phone calls, he had first appropriated three unused telephones from the Robbery/Homicide clerical supply office, plugging them into empty phone jacks adjacent to the jail's attorney room, securing an immediate hookup to the existing extension number by intimidating a series of Bell Telephone supervisors. Central Division switchboard operators were instructed to screen incoming calls and give all police *and* civilian calls regarding the Identikit picture first priority in the event of tied-up lines. Any *live* suspects brought in were to be placed in a soundproof interrogation room walled with oneway glass. Once Lloyd's negative identification certified their innocence, they were to be gently coerced into signing false arrest waivers by Central Division's ad hoc "Legal Officer," a patrolman who had graduated law school, but had failed the California Bar exam four times. The detainee would then be driven back to his point of "arrest" and released.

Lloyd settled in for a long tour of duty, setting out notepads and sharpened pencils for jotting information and a large thermos of coffee for fuel when his brain wound down. Every angle had been covered. The two officers working under him on the liquor store case had been yanked from their current duties and told to compile a list of all singles bars in the L.A.P.D.'s jurisdiction. Once this was accomplished, they were to phone vice squad commanders city wide and have them deploy surveillance teams. Watch commanders had been instructed to highlight the Identikit man at evening roll call and to order all units to approach all suspects with their pump riot guns. If the I.K. man was on the street, there was a good chance of taking him.

But not alive, Lloyd thought. Ruffling through the false arrest forms on his desk, he knew that his killer would not give up without a fight and that on this night the odds of innocent blood being spilled were at their optimum. A panicky, overeager cop might fire on a half-drunk and belligerent businessman who resembled the I.K. suspect; an overly cautious officer might approach a yellow Jap import with a placating smile and get that smile blown off his face by a .41 hollow point. The detain/identify/release approach was desperation—any experienced homicide dick would know it implicitly.

At six o'clock the first call came in. Lloyd guessed the source immediately: Nightwatch units had been on the street for an hour, and scores of patrolman had been putting out the word to their snitches. He was right. A self-described "righteous dope dealer" was the caller. The man told Lloyd how he was certain the liquor store killer was a "nigger with a dye job" who "wasted" the three people as part of a "black power conspiracy." He then went on to offer *his* definition of black power: "Four coons pushing a Cadillac into a gas station for fifty cents worth of gas." Lloyd told the man that his definition would have been amusing in 1968 and hung up.

More calls followed.

Lloyd juggled the three phone lines, sifting through the ramblings of drunks, dopers, and jilted lovers, writing down every piece of information that issued from a reasonably coherent voice. The offerings were of the third- and fourth-hand variety—someone who knew someone who said that someone saw or knew or *felt* this or that. It was in all probability a labyrinth of *mis*information, but it had to be written down.

At ten, after four hours on the phones, Lloyd had filled up one entire legal pad, all with non-police input. He was beginning to despair of ever again dealing with a fellow professional when a pair of callow-looking Newton Street Division patrolmen brought in the night's first "hard" suspect, a rail-thin, six-foot-six blond youth in his early twenties. The officers acted as though they had death by the tail, each of them clasping a white-knuckled hand around the suspect's biceps.

Lloyd took one look at the terrified trio, said, "Take off the cuffs," and handed the youth a false arrest waiver. He signed it as Lloyd told the officers to take their "killer" wherever he wanted and to buy him a bottle of booze on the way. The three young men departed. "Try to stay alive!" Lloyd called after them.

Within the next two hours, three reasonable suspect facsimiles were brought in, two by Hollywood Division patrol teams, one by Sheriff's detectives working out of the San Dimas Substation. Each time Lloyd shook his head, said, "Cut him loose" and force-fed the suspect a hard look, a waiver and a pen. Each time they signed willingly. Lloyd imagined them envisioning every "innocent man falsely imprisoned" movie ever made as they hurriedly scrawled their names.

Midnight came and went. The calls dwindled. Lloyd switched from coffee to chewing gum when his stomach started to rumble. Thinking that the twelve o'clock change of watch would allow him a hiatus from the phones, he settled back in his chair and let the normal jail noises cut through his caffeine fatigue and lull him into a half sleep. Full sleep was approaching when a voice jerked him awake. "Sergeant Hopkins?"

Lloyd swiveled his chair. An L.A.P.D. motorcycle officer was standing in front of him, holding an R&I computer printout. "I'm Confrey, Rampart Motor," the officer said. "I just came on duty and saw your I.D. kit want. I popped a guy who looks exactly like it last month. Jaywalking warrants. I remembered him because he had this weirdness about him. I got his R. and I. sheet and his D.M.V. record. There's a mug shot from my warrant bust."

Lloyd took the sheet and slipped off the mug-shot strip. The Identikit man jumped out at him, every plane and angle of his face coming into focus, like a paint-by-numbers portrait finally completed.

"Is it him?" Confrey whispered.

Lloyd said, "Yes," and stared at the full-face and profile shots of the man who had almost killed him, trembling as he read the cold facts that described a monster:

> Thomas Lewis Goff, W.M., D.O.B. 6/19/49, brn., blu. 5′ 10″, 155. Pres. Add.—3193 Melbourne #6, L.A. Crim. Rec. (N.Y. State): 3 agg. asslt. arrst.—(Diss.); 1 conv.-lst Deg. Auto Theft-11/4/69-sent. 3-5 yrs. Paroled 10/71. (Calif. State): Failure to app.—3/19/84-Bail $65—paid. Calif. dr. lic. # 01734; Vehic—1980 Toyota Sed. (yellow) lic. # JLE 035; no mov. viol.

Lloyd put the printout down and said, "Who's the morning watch boss at Rampart?"

Confrey stammered, "Lu-Lieutenant Praeger."

“Good. Call him up and tell him we’ve got the big one on Melbourne and Hillhurst. Hold him for me; I’ll be right back.”

While Confrey made the call, Lloyd ran down the hall to the Central Division armory and grabbed an Ithaca pump and box of shells from the duty officer. When he returned to the jail area, Confrey handed him the phone and whispered, “Talk slow, the loot is an edgy type.”

Lloyd took a deep breath and spoke into the mouthpiece. “Lieutenant, this is Hopkins, Robbery/Homicide. Can you set something up for me?”

“Yes,” a taut voice answered. “Tell me what you need.”

“I need a half dozen unmarked units to check the area around Melbourne and Hillhurst for a yellow nineteen-eighty Toyota, license JLE oh-three-five. No approach—sit on it. I need the thirty-one hundred block of Melbourne sealed at both ends in exactly forty minutes. I want five experienced squadroom dicks to meet me at Melbourne and Hillhurst in exactly forty minutes. Tell them to wear vests and to bring shotguns. Have them bring a vest for me. I want *no* black-and-whites inside the area. Can you implement this now?”

Lloyd didn’t wait for an answer. He handed the phone back to Confrey and ran for his car.

By zigzagging through traffic and running red lights, Lloyd made it to Melbourne and Hillhurst in twenty minutes. No other unmarked cruisers were yet on the scene, but he could feel the too perfect silence that preceded impending explosions all around him. He knew that the silence would soon be broken by approaching headlights, two-way radio crackle and the hum of powerful engines held at idle. Last name introductions and his orders would follow, leaving nothing but the explosion itself.

Parking under a streetlamp at the edge of the intersection, Lloyd turned on his emergency flashers as a signal to the other officers and jacked shells into his shotgun, pumping one into the chamber and setting the choke on full. Grabbing his flashlight, he walked down Melbourne, staying close to the trees that bordered the sidewalk, grateful that there were no late night strollers or dog walkers out. The street was a solid mass of two-story apartment buildings, identical in their sideways exposures and second story landings. Three-one-nine-three was in the middle of the block, a dark gray stucco with wrought-iron railings and recessed door without screens. Lloyd flashed his light on the bank of mailboxes at the front of the building. T. Goff—Apt. 6, true to the R. & I. printout. He counted mail slots, then stepped back and counted the doorways themselves, playing his beam over them to illuminate the numerals embossed at eye level. Ten units; five up, five down. Apartment six was the first unit on the second story. Lloyd shivered when he saw muted light glowing behind drawn curtains.

He walked back to Hillhurst, scanning parked cars en route. No yellow Toyotas were stationed at curbside. When he got to the intersection, he found it blocked off by sawhorse detour signs affixed with blinking red lights. Radio static broke the silence, followed by hoarse whispers. Lloyd squinted and saw three unmarked Matadors parked crossways behind the barricade. He blinked his flashlight at the closest one, getting a double blink in return. Then there was the opening of car doors and five men wearing bullet-proof vests and holding shotguns were standing in front of him.

"Hopkins", Lloyd said, getting "Henderson," "Martinez," "Penzler," "Monroe," and "Olander" in return. A vest was handed to him. He slipped into it and said, "Vehicle?"

Five negative head shakes answered him at once. One of the officers added, "No yellow Toyotas in an eight block radius."

Lloyd shrugged. "No matter. The target building is halfway down the block. Second story, light on. Henderson and I are going in the door. Martinez and Penzler, you stand point downstairs, Monroe and Olander, you hold a bead on the back window." Feeling a huge grin take over his face, he bowed and whispered, "Now, gentlemen."

The men formed a wedge and ran down Melbourne to 3193. When they were on the sidewalk in front of the building, Lloyd pointed to the first upstairs back window, the only one on the second story burning a light. Monroe and Olander nodded and hung back as Martinez and Penzler automatically took up their positions at the bottom of the stairs. Lloyd nudged Henderson with his gun butt and gestured upwards, whispering, "Opposite sides of the door. One kick."

With Lloyd at the lead, they tiptoed up the stairs and fanned out to cover both sides of the door to apartment 6. Henderson put his ear to the doorjamb and formed "nothing" with his lips and tongue. Lloyd nodded and stepped back and raised his shotgun. Henderson took up an identical position beside him. Both men raised their right feet simultaneously and kicked out at the same instant. The door burst inward, ripped loose at both sides, dangling from one remaining hinge. Lloyd and Henderson pressed into the wall at the sound of the implosion, listening for reflex movement within the apartment. Hearing nothing but the creaking of the door, they stepped inside.

Lloyd would never forget what he saw. While Henderson ran ahead to check the other rooms, he stood in the doorway, unable to take his eyes from the nightmare hieroglyphics that surrounded him on all sides.

The living room walls were painted dark brown; the ceiling was painted black. Taped across the walls were photographs of nude men, obviously clipped from gay porno books. The bodies were composites formed of mismatching torsos, heads, and genital areas, the figures linked by magazine photos of antique handguns. Each collage had a slogan above it, block printed in contrasting yellow paint: "Chaos Redux," "Death's Kingdom," "Charnel Kong," and "Blitzkrieg." Lloyd studied the printing. Two of the slogans were in an unmistakable left-hander's slant; the other two in a straight up right-handed motion. Squinting at the wall area around the cutouts, he saw that they were bracketed by abrasive powder wipe marks. He ran his fingers over the walls in random circles. A film of white powder stuck to them. Like Jack Herzog's apartment, this place had been professionally secured against latent print identification.

Henderson came up behind Lloyd, startling him. "Jesus, Sarge, you ever see anything like it?"

Lloyd said "Yes," very softly.

"Where?"

Lloyd shook his head. "No. Don't ask me again. What are the other rooms like?"

“Like a normal pad, except for the colors of the wall and ceiling paint. All the surfaces have been wiped, though. Ajax or some shit like that. This motherfucker is whacked out, but smart.”

Lloyd walked to the door and looked out. Martinez and Penzler were still stationed downstairs and there was as yet no general awakening of the other tenants. He turned and said to Henderson, “Go round up the other men, then wake up the citizens.” He handed him the mug-shot strip of Thomas Goff and added, “Show this to every person and ask them when they saw the bastard last. Bring anyone who’s seen him in the past twenty-four hours to me.”

Henderson nodded and went downstairs. Lloyd counted to ten to clear his mind of any preconceived notions of what he should look for and let his eyes take a quick inventory of the living room, thinking: darkness beyond the aesthetic limits of the most avant garde interior decorator. Black naugahyde sofa; charcoal gray deep-pile rug; black plasticene high-tech coffee table. The curtains were a thick olive drab velour, capable of shutting out the brightest sunlight, and the one floor lamp was sheathed in black plastic. The overall effect was one of containment. Although the living room was spacious for a small apartment, the absence of color gave it a stiflingly claustrophobic weight. Lloyd felt like he was enclosed in the palm of an angry fist. In reflex against the feeling he slipped off his bullet-proof vest, surprised to find that he was drenched in sweat.

The kitchen and bathroom were extensions of the darkness motif; every wall, appliance and fixture had been brushstroked with a thick coat of black enamel paint. Lloyd scrutinized potential print-sustaining surfaces. Every square inch had been wiped.

He walked into the bedroom. It was the disarrayed heart of the angry fist; a small black rectangle almost completely eclipsed at floor level by a large box spring and mattress covered by a purple velour bedspread. Lloyd stripped the bedspread off. The dark blue patterned sheets were crumpled and rank with sweat. Male clothing, varied in color, was strewn across them. Squatting to examine it, he saw that the pants and shirts were stylish and expensive and conformed in size to Thomas Goff’s dimensions. An overturned cardboard box lay next to the front of the bed. Upending it, Lloyd sifted through a top layer of male toiletries and a second layer of paperback science fiction novels, coming to a tightly wedged stack of battered record albums on the bottom.

He thumbed through them, reading the titles on the jackets. Dozens of albums by the Beatles, Rolling Stones, and Jefferson Airplane, all bearing the block printed warning: “Beware! Property of Tom Goff! Hands off! Beware!” Lloyd held two albums up and examined the printing. It was right-hand formed and identical to the printing on the living room walls. Smiling at the confirmation, he read through the remaining records, knowing that the common denominator of Goff’s musical taste was the 1960s, going cold when he saw a garish album entitled, “Doctor John the Night Tripper—Bayou Dreams.”

Lloyd studied the jacket. A frizzy-haired white man wearing red satin bell bottoms was honking a saxaphone at a snarling alligator. The song titles listed on the back were the typical ‘sixties dope, sex, and rebellion pap, almost nostalgic in their naïveté. Putting the album down, he wondered if it were a Herzog-Goff link beyond general aesthetic strangeness—a link that could be plumbed for evidence.

There was a rapping on the wall behind him. Lloyd stood up and turned around, seeing Henderson and a small man in a terrycloth bathrobe. The man was casting unbelieving eyes over the black walls, mashing shaky hands together inside the pockets of his robe. "This guy's the manager, Sarge. Said he saw our buddy this afternoon."

Lloyd smiled at the man. "My name's Hopkins. What's yours?"

"Fred Pellegrino. Who's going to pay for my busted door and this crazy paint job?"

"Your insurance company," Lloyd said. "When did you see Thomas Goff last?"

Fred Pellegrino pulled rosary beads from his pocket and fondled them. "Around five o'clock. He was carrying a suitcase. He smiled at me and hotfooted it out to the street. 'See you soon,' he said."

"You didn't ask him where he was going?"

"Fuck no. He's paid up three months in advance."

"Was he alone?"

"Yeah."

"How long has he lived here?"

"About a year and a half or so."

"Good tenant?"

"The best. No noise, no complaints, always paid his rent on time."

"Did he pay by check?"

"No, always cash."

"Job?"

"He said he was self-employed."

"What about his friends?"

"*What* friends? I never seen him with *nobody.* What if my insurance company don't pay for this batshit paint job?"

Lloyd ignored Pellegrino and motioned Henderson over to the far side of the room. "What did the other tenants have to say?" he asked.

"The same spiel as Pops," Henderson said. "Nice, quiet, solitary fellow who never said much besides 'good morning' or 'good night.'"

"And no one else has seen him today?"

"No one else has seen the scumbag in the past week. This is depressing. I wanted to eighty-six the cop-killer motherfucker. Didn't you?"

Lloyd gave a noncommittal shrug and took Goff's R. & I. printout from his pocket. He handed it to Henderson and said, "Go back to Rampart and give this to Praeger. A.P.B., All Police Network. Tell him to add 'armed and extremely dangerous' and 'has left-handed male partner,' and to call the New York State Police and have them wire me all their existing info on Goff. Tell Pellegrino that I'm spending the night here as a safety precaution and shoo him back to his pad."

"You're gonna crash here?" Henderson was slack-jawed with disbelief.

Lloyd stared at him. "That's right, so move it."

Henderson walked away shaking his head, taking a pliant Fred Pellegrino by the arm and leading him out of the apartment. When they were gone, Lloyd walked to the landing and looked down on the knot of people milling in the driveway. Bullet-proof vested cops with shotguns were assuring pajama-clad civilians that everything was going to be all right. After a few minutes the scene dispersed, the citizens walking back to their dwellings, the cops to their unmarked Matadors. When Henderson pointed a finger at his head and twirled it, then pointed upstairs, Lloyd dragged the sofa over to the devastated front door and barricaded himself in to think.

Two divergent cases had merged into one and had now yielded one *known* perpetrator and one accomplice, an *unknown* quantity whose only *known* crime thus far was defacing rented property. With an A.P.B. in effect and I.A.D. covering the personnel file angle, his job was to deduce Thomas Goff's behavior and go where less intelligent cops wouldn't think to look.

Lloyd let his eyes circuit the living room, knowing that it would merge with another horror chamber the very second he closed them, knowing that it was essential to juxtapose the imagery and see what emerged.

He did it, shuddering against the memory of Teddy Verplanck's bay-windowed apartment, deciding that *it* was worse because he had known the extent of the Hollywood Slaughterer's carnage and that he was driving to be destroyed. Thomas Goff's home bespoke a more subtle drive—the drive of a seasoned street criminal who had very probably not been arrested for anything since 1969, a man with a partner who might well be a restraining influence; a man who spread his insanity all over his walls and walked away saying 'see you soon' a few hours ahead of a massive police dragnet.

Lloyd walked through the apartment again, letting little observations snap into place and work in concert with his instincts: the photos of nude men and guns spoke "homosexual," but somehow that seemed wrong. There was no telephone, which confirmed Goff as a basic loner. The lack of dishes, cooking utensils, and food were typical of ex-convicts, men who were used to being served and who often developed a craving for cafeteria food. The incredible darkness of the rooms was sheer insanity. All indicators pointing to the enormous question of *motive.*

Lloyd had almost completed his run-through of the apartment when he noticed a built-in wall cupboard in the hall between the living room and bedroom. It had been painted over like the rest of the wall, but cracks in the paint by the wooden opener knob indicated that it had been put to use. He swung the cupboard door open and recoiled when he saw what was affixed to the back.

There was a magazine cutout of a blue uniformed policeman with his hands upraised as if to placate an attacker. Surrounding the cop were outsized porno book penises studded with large metal staples. A circle of handgun cutouts framed the scene, and square in the middle of the cop's chest was a glued-on white paper facsimile of an L.A.P.D. badge, complete with a drawing of City Hall, the words, "Police Officer" and the number 917.

Lloyd slammed the cupboard with his fist. Jack Herzog's badge number burned in front of his eyes. He tore the door off by the hinges and hurled it into the living room. Just then Penny's "Owe what, Daddy?" hit him like a piledriver, and he knew that getting Thomas Goff would be the close-out on all his debts of grief.

[redacted]

THE Night Tripper stared at the stunning female beauty that now adorned the walls of his outer office. Thomas Goff's surveillance photographs of Linda Wilhite were blown up and framed behind glass, woman bait that would lure his policeman/adversary into a trap that would be sprung by his own sexual impluses. The Doctor walked into his private office and thought of how he had planned over a decade in advance, creating a series of buffers that would prevent anyone from knowing that he and Thomas Goff had ever met. He had destroyed Goff's file at Castleford Hospital; he had even stolen his prison file while visiting Attica on a psychiatric seminar, returning it three weeks later, altered to show a straight, no-parole release. He had never been seen with Goff, and they had always communicated via pay phones. The only possible connection was several times removed—through his lonelies, all of whom Goff had recruited. If the manhunt for his former executive officer received pervasive media play, one of them might snap to a newspaper or TV photograph accompanied by scare rhetoric.

Yet even that avenue of discovery was probably closed, Havilland thought, picking up the morning editions of the *L.A. Times* and *L.A. Examiner*. There was no further mention of the shoot-out at Bruno's Serendipity and no mention of the late night raid on Goff's apartment. If Hopkins had initiated some sort of media stonewall to keep a lid of secrecy on his investigation, then his complicity in his own destruction would reach epic proportions.

The Night Tripper trembled as he recalled the past thirty-six hours, and his acts of courage. After disposing of Goff's body, he had walked through downtown L.A., thinking of the probable course of events that had led Hopkins to at least identify Goff at the level of physical description. One thing emerged as a reasonable certainty: It was the Alchemist's disappearance and presumed death, *not* the liquor store killings, that had led the policeman to Goff. Goff and Herzog had spent a good deal of time together at bars, and some perceptive witness had probably provided Hopkins with the description that took him to Bruno's Serendipity. Thus, hours later, after he had smeared Goff's walls with homosexual bait, he had left the albums that Goff had stashed at Castleford in 'seventy-one and added the touch that would arouse Hopkins' cop rectitude. Pique his rage with the faggot image of the Alchemist; pique his brain with the wipe marks, diverse script styles, and Goff's old copy of "Bayou Dreams."

The most thrilling act of courage had been in implementing Richard Oldfield, dressing him in a bulky sweater that downplayed his musculature and a tweed cap that was very much in Thomas Goff's style, yet shielded his upper face and non-Goff haircut. He had pumped him up for hours, promising him his very own handpicked victim as his “ultimate assignment,” then had watched from a parked rental car across the street as Oldfield went through his impersonation perfectly, fooling Goff’s landlord dead to rights, with Hopkins and his dragnet only hours away.

Havilland unlocked his desk drawer and dug out the Junior Miss Cosmetics file he had been studying, hoping that fresh work and thoughts of the future would quiet the sense of excitement that made him want to *live* in the hours just past.

It didn’t help. He kept recalling the flashlights approaching and how he knew that he was now *inside* the police cordon; how he had hunkered down in the car seat and had heard the officers repeat Goff’s license number over and over, one of them whispering that “Crazy Lloyd” was “leading the raid,” his partner replying with something about “Crazy Lloyd going after that Hollywood psycho with a thirty-ought-six and a forty-four mag.” When the raid itself transpired a half hour later, he could see Hopkins across the street, holding a shotgun, much taller than any of the men he led, looking exactly like his father. It had taken monumental self-control to drive away from the scene without confronting the policeman face to face.

With an effort, the Night Tripper returned to the cosmetics file, reading notations on the life and sleazy times of the woman whom he was certain would become his next pawn.

Sherry Shroeder was a thirty-one-year-old former assembly line worker at Junior Miss Cosmetics, recently fired for stealing chemicals used in the manufacture of angel dust. It had been her fourth and final pilfering “arrest” within the company, resulting in her dismissal under threats of criminal prosecution. Daniel Murray, the L.A.P.D. captain who moonlighted as the Junior Miss security chief, had made her sign a confession and had told her that it would not be submitted to the police if she signed a waiver stating that she would not apply for unemployment benefits or workmen’s compensation. Her three previous “arrests” had been resolved through Daniel Murray’s coercion. Sherry Shroeder was a frequent co-star of low budget pornographic films. Murray had obtained a print of one of her features and had threatened to show it to her parents should she fail to return the chemicals she had stolen. Sherry agreed, eager to retain her four-dollar-an-hour job and spare her parents the grief of viewing her performance. There was no photograph attached to the folder, but her vital statistics of five-seven, 120, blond hair, and blue eyes were enticing enough. There was a final notation in the file, stating that since her dismissal Sherry Shroeder had been seen almost daily in the bars across the street from Junior Miss, drinking with her former fellow employees and “turning tricks” in the back of her van on paydays.

Havilland wrote down Sherry Shroeder’s address and phone number and put it in his pocket. Relieved that his next move was ready to be implemented, he let his thoughts return to Lloyd Hopkins, making a spur of the moment decision that felt uncommonly sound: If the policeman didn’t come his way within forty-eight hours, he would initiate the confrontation himself.

2

AFTER a twenty-four hour stint of Robbery/Homicide conferences and paper chasing at Parker Center, Lloyd drove to Century City to grasp at the wildest of straws, getting honest with himself en route: His investigation was stymied. Every cop in Southern California was shaking the trees for Thomas Goff, and he, the supervising officer and legendary "big brain," did not yet have a psychological mock-up to work from. If he could use the legendary criminal shrink's nickname as his entree, he could probably interest him in the Goff case and get him to offer his observations. It was slim, but at least it was movement.

The twenty-four hours at the Center had yielded nothing but negative feedback. The New York State Police had reacted promptly to his inquiry on Thomas Goff, issuing the L.A.P.D. a teletype that ran to six pages. Lloyd learned that Goff was a sadist who picked women up in bars, seduced and then beat them; that he liked to steal late model convertibles, that he had "no known associates" and was given a no-parole release from Attica, most likely a bureaucratic stratagem to encourage his departure from New York State.

The day's major frustration had been at a late afternoon conference in Thad Braverton's office, where the Chief of Detectives had read a strongly worded memo from the Big Chief stating that there was to be a total media blackout on the Goff case, for reasons of "public safety." Lloyd had laughed aloud, then had sat fuming as Braverton and his old nemesis Captain Fred Gaffaney of I.A.D. gave him the fish-eye. He knew that "public safety" translated to "public relations," and that the media kibosh was undertaken out of apprehension regarding Jack Herzog's possible criminal activities and his relationship with the disgraced cop Marty Bergen. The icing on that cake was the industrial firm and the brass hats who were moonlighting for them. It would not do to step on their toes. A media blitz might flush Goff out, but the Department was covering its ass.

Lloyd parked in a subterranean facility on Olympic and Century Park East, then took an elevator up to ground level and found the shrink's building, a glass and steel skyscraper fronted by an astroturf courtyard. The directory in the foyer placed "John Havilland, M.D.," in suite 2604. Lloyd took a glass-encased elevator to the twenty-sixth floor and walked down a long hallway to an oak door embossed with the psychiatrist's name. He pushed the door open, expecting to be confronted by the saccharine smile of a medical receptionist. Instead, he was transfixed by photographic images of the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

She was obviously tall and slender, with classic facial lines offset by little flaws that made her that much more striking, that much less the trite physical ideal. Her nose was a shade too pointed; her chin bore a middle cleft that gave her whole face an air of resoluteness. Dark hair cascaded at the edge of soft cheekbones and formed a compliment with large eyes whose focus was intense, but somehow indecipherable. Walking up to the wall to examine the photographs at close range, Lloyd saw that they were candid shots, and that much more stunning for the fact. Closing his eyes, he tried to picture the woman nude. When new images wouldn't coalesce, he knew why: her beauty rendered all attempts at fantasy stillborn. This woman demanded to be seen naked in reality or not at all.

"She's exquisite, isn't she?"

The words didn't dent Lloyd's reverie. He opened his eyes and saw and heard and felt nothing but the feminine power captured in front of him. When he felt a tap on his shoulder, he turned around and saw a slight man in a navy blazer and gray flannel slacks staring up at him, hand outstretched, light brown eyes amused by his reaction to the photographs. "I'm John Havilland," the man said. "What can I do for you?"

Lloyd snapped back into a professional posture, taking the man's hand and grasping it firmly. "Detective Sergeant Hopkins, Los Angeles Police Department. Could I have a few minutes of your time?"

Dr. John Havilland smiled and said, "Sure. We'll go into my office." He pointed toward an oak door and added, "I've got over half an hour until my next session. You're blushing, Sergeant, but I don't blame you."

Lloyd said, "Who is she?"

"A counselee of mine," Havilland said. "Sometimes I think she's the most beautiful woman I've ever seen."

"I was thinking the same thing. What does she think about being your pinup girl?"

Havilland's cheeks reddened; Lloyd saw that the man was smitten beyond the bounds of professionalism. "Forget I asked, Doctor. I'll keep it to business from here on in."

The Doctor lowered his eyes and led Lloyd into an oak paneled inner office, pointing him to a chair, taking an identical seat a few feet away. Raising his eyes, he said, "Is this personal or an official police inquiry?"

Lloyd stared openly at the psychiatrist. When Havilland didn't flinch, he realized that he was in the company of an equal. "It's both, Doctor. The starting point is your nickname. I—"

Havilland was already shaking his head. "It's a secondhand nickname," he said. "Doctor John the Night Tripper was a 'sixties rock and roller. I was given the monicker in med school, because my name was John and I did a certain amount of night tripping. I've also counseled a great many criminals, court referred and otherwise. These people have perpetuated the nickname. Frankly, I like it."

Lloyd smiled and said, "It does have a certain ring." He dug two snapshots out of his jacket pocket and handed them to Havilland. "Have you ever counseled either of these men?"

The Doctor looked at the photos and handed them back. "No, I haven't. Who are they?"

Lloyd ignored the question and said, "If you had treated them, would you have told me?"

Havilland formed his fingers into a steeple and placed the point on his chin.

"I would have given you a 'yes' or 'no' answer, then asked, 'Why do you want to know?'"

"Good direct answer," Lloyd said. "I'll reciprocate. The light-haired man recently walked into a liquor store and blew three people to shit. The dark-haired man is an L.A. policeman, missing and presumed dead. Before he disappeared he was hysterical and obsessed with your nickname. I'm certain that the light-haired man killed him. Old light-hair is a world class psycho. Two days ago we shot it out in a Beverly Hills singles bar. You probably read about it in the papers. He escaped. I want to cancel his ticket. Atascadero or the morgue, preferably the latter."

Lloyd leaned back and loosened his necktie, chagrined that he had raised his voice and probably blown his professional parity with the psychiatrist. He felt a headache coming on and shut his eyes to forestall it. When he opened his eyes, Dr. John Havilland was beaming from ear to ear and shaking his head in delight. "I love macho, Sergeant. It's one of my weak points as a headshrinker. Since we've established a certain base of candor, can I ask a few candid questions?"

Lloyd grinned. "Shoot, Doc."

"All right. One, did you honestly think that I knew these two men?"

Lloyd shook his head. "No."

"Then is it safe to assume that you came to exploit my renowned knowledge of criminal behavior?"

Lloyd's grin widened. "Yes."

The Doctor grinned back. "Good. I'll be glad to offer my observations, but will you phrase your case or questions or whatever nonhypothetically? Give me the literal information as succinctly as possible, then let me ask questions?"

Lloyd said, "You've got it," then walked to the window and looked down on the street twenty-six stories below him. With his back to the doctor, he spoke for ten uninterrupted minutes, recounting a streamlined version of the Herzog/Goff investigation, excluding mention of the security files and Herzog's relationship with Marty Bergen, but describing the Melbourne Avenue horror show in detail.

When he concluded, the Doctor whispered, "God, what a story. Why hasn't there been mention of this man Goff on TV? Wouldn't that help flush him out?"

Turning to face Havilland, Lloyd said, "The high brass have ordered a total media blackout. Public safety, public relations, take your pick—I don't want to go into it. Also, my options are dwindling. I haven't got the slightest handle on Goff's partner. The A.P.B. is hit or miss. I'll be staking out some bars myself, but that's needle in a haystack stuff. If I don't get any leads soon, I'll have to fly to New York and interview people who knew Goff there, which, frankly, seems futile. Run with the ball, Doc. What I'm interested in are your assumptions on Goff's relationship with his partner and the condition of his apartment. What do you think?"

Havilland got up and paced the room. Lloyd sat down and watched him circuit the office. Finally the Doctor stopped and said, "I buy your appraisal of Goff's basic psychoses and the left-handed man as a restraining influence, but only to a degree. Also, I don't think that the men are homosexual lovers, despite the symbolism of the wall cutouts. I think you're dealing with subliminally exposited false clues; the nude men and the slogans especially. The slogans are reminiscent of the 'sixties—maybe Goff and his friend were inspired by the sloganeering of the Manson family. I think that the left-behind record albums point to the subliminality of the subterfuge, because every single record was some kind of ’sixties musical archetype. The apartment was cleaned out thoroughly, yet these albums were left behind. That strikes me as odd. Now one thing is obvious—Goff’s cover was blown after his gunplay with you; he knew he had to run, that he would be positively identified very soon. *So his friend wiped the walls to eliminate his own fingerprints,* probably after Goff had vacated—but he didn’t remove the cutouts because they pointed only to *Goff’s* psychoses. He didn’t *see* the cupboard cutout that bore the missing officer’s badge number, because it was an inside surface that he himself had never touched, and because he didn’t know that Goff had created it. The other wall clues could be construed as ambiguous, but not the cupboard cutout. It pointed to the murder of a Los Angeles policeman. Had Goff’s friend known of it, he would have destroyed it. What do *you* think, Sergeant?”

Riveted by the brilliantly informed hypothesis, Lloyd said, “It floats on all levels. I was thinking along similar lines, but you took it two steps further. Can you wrap the whole package up for me?”

The Doctor sat down facing Lloyd, drawing his chair up so that their knees were almost touching. He said, “I think that the basic motivational clues, subliminal and overt, are the nude men, which represent not homosexual tendencies, but a desire to destroy male power. I think that Goff’s friend is highly disturbed while Goff himself is psychotic. I think both men are highly intelligent, highly motivated pathological cop haters.”

Lloyd let the words sink in, retaining eye contact with the Doctor. The thesis was sound, but what was the next investigative step?

Finally Havilland lowered his eyes and spoke. “I’d like to help you, Sergeant. I have lots of informed criminal sources. My own mini-grapevine, so to speak.”

“I’d appreciate it,” Lloyd said, taking a business card from his jacket pocket. “This has my office and home numbers on it. You can call me regardless of the time.” He handed Havilland the card. Havilland pocketed it and said, “Could I have that picture of Goff? I’d like to show it to some of my counselees.”

Lloyd nodded. “Don’t mention that Goff is a homicide suspect,” he said as he placed the snapshot in the Doctor’s hand. “Try to sound casual. If your patients think this is a big deal, they might try to exploit the situation for money or favors.”

“Of course,” Havilland said. “It’s the only professional way to do it. By the same token, let me state this flat out: I cannot and will not jeopardize the anonymity of my sources, under any circumstances.”

“I wouldn’t expect you to.”

“Good. What will you do next?”

“Hit the bricks, chew on your thesis, go over the existing paperwork forty or fifty times until something bites me.”

Havilland laughed. “I hope the bite won’t be fatal. You know, it’s funny. All of a sudden you look very grave, and just like my father. Bad thoughts?”

Lloyd laughed until his sides ached and tears ran down his cheeks. Havilland chuckled along, forming a series of steeples with his fingers. Regaining his breath, Lloyd said, “God, that feels good. I was laughing at how ironic your question was. For a solid week I’ve had nothing but homicide on my brain, but when you said ‘bad thoughts’ I was thinking of that incredible woman on your walls.”

Laughing wildly himself, the Doctor blurted out, “Linda Wilhite has that effect on a man. She can tur—” He caught himself in mid-sentence, stopped and said, “She can move men to the point of wanting to speak her name out loud. Forget what I said, Hopkins. My counselees’ anonymity is sacred. It was unprofessional of me.”

Lloyd got to his feet, thinking that the poor bastard was in love, beyond rhyme or reason, with a woman who probably caused traffic jams when she walked down the street to buy a newspaper. He smiled and stuck out his hand. When Havilland took it, he said, “I do unprofessional things all the time, Doc. Guys with our kind of juice should fuck up once in a while out of *noblesse oblige.* Thanks for your help.”’

Dr. John Havilland smiled. Lloyd walked out of his office, willing his eyes rigid, away from the photographs of Linda Wilhite.

THE Night Tripper began to hyperventilate the very second that Lloyd Hopkins walked out his door. The suppressed tension that had fueled his performance, *his brilliant performance,* started to seep out through his pores, causing him to shiver uncontrollably and grab at his desk to fight his vertigo. He held the desktop until his knuckles turned white and cramps ran up his arms to his shoulders. Concentrating on his own physiology to bring his control back to normal, he calculated his heartbeat at one twenty-five and his blood pressure as stratospheric. This professional detachment in the face of extreme fear/elation calmed and soothed him. Within seconds he could feel his vital signs recede to something approaching normalcy. “Father. Father. Father,” Dr. John Havilland whispered.

When his physical and mental calm united, the Doctor replayed his performance and assessed the policeman, astonished to find that he was not the right-wing plunderer he had expected, but rather a likable fellow with a sense of humor that was offset by the violence he held in check just below the surface of his intellect. Lloyd Hopkins was a bad man to fuck with. So was he. He had taken their first round easily, running on instinct. Round two would have to be meticulously planned.

Checking his desk calendar, the Doctor saw that he had no patients for the rest of the day and that Linda Wilhite’s next session was still two days off. Thoughts of Linda spawned a long series of mental chess moves. Hopkins would be leaving for New York, unless he discovered evidence to keep him in Los Angeles. It would not do to have “Crazy Lloyd” talk to the administrators at Attica. Round two would have to be initiated today, but how?

Just then it hit him. At their first session Linda had spoken of a “client” who collected Colombian art and who took nude photos of her and hung them in his bedroom. *Another pawn.*

Havilland opened the wall safe hidden behind his Edward Hopper original and took out Thomas Goff’s verbatim transcription of Linda’s john book/journal. He sifted through pages of sexual facts, figures, and ruminations before he found mention of the man.

> 8/28/83; Stanley Rudolph, 11741 Montana (at Bundy) 829-6907. Referred by P.N.
>
> A truly ambivalant man. He lives in a condo full of Colombian art (aesthetic!) that he claims he buys dirt cheap from doper rip-off bimbos (macho obnoxiousness!). The statues were atavistic, *virile,* wonderful. Stanley talks them up so much prior to business that I know he wants something other than straight

> fucking—especially when he starts calling me a work of fucking art. Lead in to (of course!) a photography session! (Reading between the lines—Stan baby is impotent, digs nudie shots juxtaposed against his phallic statues). Stan takes his shots (no beavers—actually tasteful)—(Stan the Aesthete)—then tells me stories about all the women who beg for his donkey dick (Stan the macho buffoon). I lounge around nude trying to keep from cracking up. $500.00.
>
> 9/10/83—Ambivalent Stan has become a regular at $500.00 per. I am now framed on his walls in naked splendor. Weird. I wish my breasts were bigger.

Havilland replaced the transcript in his safe and thought of another faceless pawn living a sleazy life in the Valley industrial district, then locked up his office and went looking for her.

Junior Miss Cosmetics was situated at the northeast edge of the San Fernando Valley, a squat green stucco building enclosed by rusted cyclone fencing. Outside the wire perimeter was a huge dirt lot filled with carelessly parked cars, and across the street stood an entire city block of cocktail lounges, all of them flashing neon signs at three o'clock in the afternoon. Parking underneath a sign advertising "Nude Workingman's Lunch," Dr. John Havilland felt like he had just entered hell.

The Doctor locked his car and counted neon blinking doorways all the way up the block, ending with a total of nine. He walked into the first door, wincing against a blast of country western music, squinting until he could make out a bandstand and an overweight redhead doing a listless nude boogie. There was a horseshoe-shaped bar off to his left. Steeling himself for his role, Havilland took a twenty dollar bill from his money clip and walked over.

The bartender looked up as he approached. "You drinking or you want the lunch?" he asked.

Havilland placed the twenty flat on the bar and willed his voice to suit the environment. "I'm looking for Sherry Shroeder. A buddy of mine says she hangs out here."

"Sherry's eighty-six," the bartender said. "She gets coked or juiced and gets rowdy. You looking to pour some pork?"

The Doctor gawked, then said, "What?"

The bartender spoke slowly, as if to an idiot child. "You know, push the bush? Slake the snake? Drain the train? Siphon the python?"

Havilland swallowed and took another twenty from his pocket. "Yes. All those things. Where can I find her? Please tell me."

Snatching up the two bills, the bartender leaned over and spoke into the Doctor's ear. "Go down the street to the Loafer Gopher. Sherry should show up there sooner or later. Sit at the bar, and sooner or later she'll come up and try to sit on your face. And, buddy? Keep your roll to yourself. They got some righteous shitkickers down there."

The Loafer Gopher was dark and featured punk rock. Havilland sat at the bar and sipped scotch and soda while Cindy and the Sinners sang their repertoire of "Prison of Your Love," "Nine Inches of Your Love," and "Gimme Your Love" over and over. He arrayed a stack of one dollar bills in front of him and tried to avoid eye contact with the topless barmaid, who considered eye to eye meetings a signal to refresh drinks. Playing Mozart in his mind to kill the hideous music and conversation surrounding him, the Doctor waited.

The waiting extended into hours. Havilland sat at the bar, buying a drink ever twenty minutes, nursing the top, then, unseen, dumping the rest on the floor. When mental Mozart began to pall, he fantasized Sherry Shroeder as everything from a Nordic ice maiden to a platinum-coiffed slattern, using her security file statistics as his physical spark point. He was nearing the limits of both his patience and imagination when coy fingers caressed his neck and a coy female voice asked, "Care to buy a lady a drink?"

Havilland swiveled his stool to face the come-on. The woman who had delivered it looked like a burned-out beach bunny. Her face was seamed from too much sun and chemical ingestion, with deep furrows around the mouth and eyes that bespoke many desperate attempts to be fetching and an equal number of rejections. Her blond hair was set in a lopsided frizzy style that added to her look of anxiousness. But her features were pretty, and her designer jean and tanktop-clad body was lean and womanly. If this was his actress, Richard Oldfield would love her.

"I'm Sherry," the woman said.

Havilland signaled the barmaid and smiled at his pawn. "I'm Lloyd."

She giggled as the barmaid placed a tall drink in front of her and grabbed two of the Doctor's one dollar bills as payment. She took a long sip and said, "That's a good name. It goes with your blazer. You don't really dress for the Gopher, but that's okay, 'cause there's so many bars on this strip that you can't go home and change every time you hop one, can you? I mean, is that the truth?"

"That's the truth," Havilland said. "I dress conservatively because the bigwigs at the studio demand it. I'm just like you. I can't go home and change every time I go out on a talent search."

Sherry's eyes widened. She gulped the rest of her drink and stammered, "Ar-ar-are you an agent?"

"I'm an independent movie producer," Havilland said, snapping his fingers at the barmaid and pointing to Sherry's empty glass. "I sell art movies to a combine of millionaires, who screen the films in their special screening rooms. As a matter of fact, I'm here looking for actresses."

Sherry downed her fresh drink in three fast swallows. Havilland watched her eyes expand and bodice flush. "I'm an actress," she said in a rush of breath. "I've done extra work and I've done loops and other stuff. Do you think you—"

Havilland silenced her with a finger to her lips, then looked around the bar. No one seemed interested in their business. "Let's go outside and talk," he said. "This place is too loud."

Sherry led him across the street to the Junior Miss parking lot and her battered VW van. "I used to work there," she said as she unlocked the passenger door. "They fired me because I was overqualified. They found out I had a bigger I.Q. than the president of the company, so they let me go."

Havilland sat down in the passenger seat and made a mental note not to touch anything inside the vehicle. Sherry walked around the front of the van and squeezed in behind the wheel. When she looked at him importuningly, the Doctor said, "Sherry, I'll be frank. I produce high-budget adult films. Normally I would not advise a serious young actress like yourself to appear in such a movie, but in this case I would—because only a private audience of Hollywood bigshots will be viewing it. Now let me ask you, have you had experience in adult films?"

Sherry's answer came out in a gin-fueled torrent of words. "Yeah, and this is perfect because before I did loops and the camera guy said my mom and dad would never know. We shot in the boys' gym at Pacoima Junior High, 'cause the camera guy knew the janitor and he had the key, and we had to shoot late at night 'cause then nobody would be around. Ritchie Valens went to Pacoima Junior High, but he got killed with Buddy Holly on February 3, 1959. I was just a little girl then, but I remember."

The final memory numbed the Doctor. He took out his billfold and said, "We'll be shooting in two days or so, at a big house in the Hollywood Hills. Two performers—you and a very handsome young man. Your pay is a thousand dollars. Would you like an advance now?"

Sherry Shroeder threw her arms around Havilland and buried her head in his neck. When he felt her tongue in his ear, he grabbed her shoulders and pushed her away. "Please, Sherry, I'm married."

Sherry gave a mock pout. "Married men are the best. Can I have a C-note now?"

Havilland took three hundreds from his billfold. He handed them to Sherry and whispered, "Please keep quiet about this. If word gets out, other actresses will be bothering me for parts, and I think I want to stick with you exclusively. All right?"

"All right."

Havilland smiled. "I need your phone number."

Sherry reached in the glove compartment, then flicked on the dashboard light and handed the Doctor a red metallic flaked business card bearing the words, "Sherry—Let's Party! Incall and outcall, 632-0140." Havilland put the card in his pocket and nudged the passenger door open with his shoulder. He smiled and said, "I'll be in touch."

Sherry said, "Party hearty, Lloyd baby," and gunned her engine. The Doctor watched the VW van peel rubber into the night.

The Night Tripper drove to a pay phone and called Richard Oldfield at his home, speaking a single sentence and hanging up before Oldfield could reply. Satisfied with the force of his words, he drove to the Hollywood Hills and his third stellar performance of the day.

Oldfield had left the front door unlocked. The Night Tripper walked through it to find his pawn kneeling on the living room floor in his efficacy training posture, head thrust out and eyes closed, hands clasped behind his back. He was stripped to the waist, and his pectoral muscles were twitching from a recent workout.

Havilland walked up and flung a whiplike backhand at Oldfield's face, gashing his cheek with his Harvard signet ring. Oldfield leaned into the blow and remained mute. Havilland reared back and swung again, catching his pawn on the bridge of the nose, ripping flesh and severing a vein below his left eye. When Oldfield betrayed no pain, the Doctor unleashed a whirlwind of open palms and backhands, until his pawn's face contorted and a single tear escaped from each eye and merged with the blood from his lashings.

"Are you ready to hurt and twist and loathe and gouge the woman who ruined you as a child?" the Night Tripper hissed. "Are you ready to go as far as you can go? Are you ready to enter a realm of pure power and relegate the rest of the world to the shit heap that it really is?"

"Yes," Richard Oldfield sobbed.

The Doctor took a silk handkerchief from his blazer pocket and swabbed his counselee's face. "Then you shall have all of it. Now listen and don't ask questions. The time is two days from now, the place is here. Don't go out of the house until I tell you, because a policeman is looking for someone who looks exactly like you. Do you understand all these things?"

"Yes," Oldfield said.

Havilland walked to the phone and dialed seven digits he had memorized early that afternoon. When a weary voice answered, "Yes?", he said, "Sergeant, this is John Havilland. Listen, I've got a line on your suspect. It's rather vague, but I think I credit the information."

"Jesus fucking Christ," Lloyd Hopkins said. "Where did you get it?"

"No," Havilland said, "I can't tell you that. I can tell you this—the man is right-handed, and in my professional opinion he knows nothing about any homicides, or about Goff's whereabouts."

Lloyd said, "I've got my notebook, Doc. Talk slowly."

"All right. This man says he met Goff last year at a singles bar. They pulled a burglary together, he forgets the location, and stole some art objects. Goff had a customer for the stuff. My man says his name was either Rudolph Stanley or Stanley Rudolph. He had a condo in Brentwood, somewhere near Bundy and Montana."

"That's it?"

"Yes. My counselee is a basically decent, very disturbed young man, Sergeant. Please don't press me for his identity. I won't yield on that."

"Don't sweat it, Doc. But if I get Goff on your info, be prepared for the best dinner of your life."

"I look forward to it." Havilland waited for a reply, but the policeman had already hung up.

Putting down the phone, he saw that Richard Oldfield had not budged from his supplicant position. He looked at the blood on his hands. Twist the cop. Gouge him. Maim him. Make him pay for the childhood darkness and infuse the void with light.

AT dawn, Lloyd was stationed in his car at the southeast corner of Bundy and Montana, armed with skin-tight rubber gloves and a selection of burglar's picks. After receiving Havilland's phone call, he had made a battery of his own calls, to the L.A.P.D.'s R. & I., the All Police Computer Network, the feds, and the California Department of Motor Vehicles Night Information line. The results were only halfway satisfying: A man named Stanley Rudolph lived at 11741 Montana, # 1015, but he possessed no criminal record and had never been cited for anything more serious than running a red light. A solid citizen type who in all probability would scream for his attorney when confronted with the fact that he was a receiver of stolen goods. There was only the tried-and-true and highly illegal daylight recon run. Rudolph's D.M.V. application had yielded the facts that he was unmarried, worked as a broker at the downtown stock exchange, and was the owner of a light blue 1982 Cadillac Seville bearing the personalized license plate "Big Stan," which was now parked directly across the street. Lloyd fidgeted and looked at his watch. 6:08. The exchange would be opening at seven. "Big Stan" would have to leave soon or be late for work.

Sipping coffee directly from the thermos, he thought of his other, nonprofessional telephone inquiries. Against his better judgment, he had called R. & I. and the D.M.V. to learn what he could about Linda Wilhite. The information gleaned was lackluster: Date of birth, physical stats, address, and phone number and the facts that she was "self-employed," drove a Mercedes and had no criminal record. But the act of pursuit was thrilling, fueled by fantasies of what it would be like to need and be needed by a woman that beautiful. Thoughts of Linda Wilhite had competed with thoughts of his investigation for control of his mind, and it was only Havilland's astonishing phone call that bludgeoned them to second place.

At 6:35, a portly man wearing a three-piece business suit trotted up to the Cadillac, holding a sweet roll in one hand and a briefcase in the other. He got in the car and gunned it southbound on Bundy. Lloyd waited for three minutes, then walked over to 11741 Montana and took the elevator up to the tenth floor.

1015 was at the end of a long carpeted corridor. Lloyd looked in both directions, then rang the bell. When thirty seconds went by without an answer, he studied the twin locks on the door and jammed his breaker pick into the top mechanism, feeling a very slight click as a bolt loosened. He leaned his shoulder into the door, accentuating the give of the top lock. With his free hand he stuck a needle-thin skeleton pick into the bottom keyhole and twisted it side to side. Seconds later the bottom lock slid open and the door snapped inward.

Lloyd stepped inside and closed the door behind him. When his eyes became adjusted to the darkness, he found himself in a treasure trove of primitive art. There were shelves filled with Colombian fertility statues and African wood carvings covering the tops of empty bookcases. Windowsills and ottomans held Mayan pottery, and the walls were festooned with framed oil paintings of Peruvian Indians and shrines in the Andes. The living room carpeting and furniture were bargain basement quality, but the artwork looked to be worth a small fortune.

Lloyd slipped on his rubber gloves and reconnoitered the rest of the condo, coming to one nonincriminating conclusion: Except for the artwork and the late model Cadillac, "Big Stan" lived on the cheap. His clothing was off the rack and his refrigerator was stuffed with TV dinners. He shined his own shoes and owned nothing electronic or mechanical except the built-in appliances that came with the pad and an inexpensive 35mm camera. Stanley Rudolph was a man obsessed.

Lloyd took a generic brand cola from the refrigerator and sat down on a threadbare sofa to consider his options, realizing that it would be impossible to secure latent prints from any art objects that Goff or Havilland's anonymous source might have touched. Stanley Rudolph had probably fondled the statues and pottery repeatedly, and the shrink had said that his source was both right-handed and innocent of knowledge of Goff's whereabouts and homicides in general. Havilland was a pro; his assessments could be trusted.

This left three approaches: Lean hard on "Big Stan" himself; toss the pad for levers of intimidation, and find his address book and run the names through R. & I. Since "Big Stan" was unavailable, only the last two approaches were practical. Lloyd killed his soft drink and went to work.

It took him three hours to comb every inch of the condo and confirm his conclusion that Stanley Rudolph was a lonely man who lived solely to collect art. His clothes were poorly laundered, his bathroom was a mess and the bedroom walls were blanketed with dust, except for rectangular patches where paintings had obviously recently hung. The sadness/obsessiveness combo made Lloyd want to send up a mercy plea for the entire fucked-up human race.

This left the address book, resting beside the telephone on the living room floor. Lloyd leafed through it, noting that it contained only names and phone numbers. Turning to the G's, he saw that there was no mention of Thomas Goff and that Stanley Rudolph's scrawl was unmistakably right-handed. Sighing, he thumbed back to the A's and got out his notepad and pen and began copying down every name and phone number in the book.

When he got to "Laurel Benson," Lloyd felt a little tremor drift up his spine. Laurel Benson was a high-priced call girl he had rousted while working West L.A. Vice over ten years before. Thinking that it was merely a coincidence and that it was nice to know that "Big Stan" got laid occasionally, he continued his transcribing until he hit "Polly Marks" and put down his pen and laughed out loud. Thus far, the only two women listed in the book were hookers. No wonder Rudolph had to shine his own shoes and drink generic soda pop—he had *two* expensive habits.

The N through V section contained the names of over fifty men and only four women, two of them hookers that Lloyd had heard about from vice squad buddies. Writers cramp was coming on when he turned to the final page and saw "Linda Wilhite—275-7815." This time the little tremor became a 9.6 earthquake.

Lloyd replaced the address book and left the obsessive little condo before he had time to think of his next destination and what it all meant.

Parked outside Linda Wilhite's plush high rise on Wilshire and Beverly Glen, Lloyd ran through literal and instinctive chronologies in an attempt to logically explain the remarkable coincidence that has just fallen into his lap. Dr. John Havilland was in love with Linda Wilhite, who was probably a very expensive prostitute, one who had tricked with Stanley Rudolph, who had bought stolen goods from Thomas Goff and the Doctor's anonymous source. Havilland did not know Goff or Rudolph, but did know Wilhite and the source. The coincidence factor was strong, but did *not* reek of malfeasance. Unanswered questions: Did Linda Wilhite know Goff or the source; or, the wild card—was the shrink, who had the air of a man in love, protecting Linda Wilhite, *the real source,* by giving him correct information from a bogus "informant," this way protecting both his professional ethics and the woman he loved? Was the Doctor playing a roundabout game, *wanting* to aid in a homicide investigation, yet not wanting to relinquish confidential information? Lloyd felt anger overtake his initial sex flush. If Linda Wilhite knew *anything* about Thomas Goff or his left-handed friend, he would shake it out of her.

He ran into the high rise and bolted three flights of service stairs. When he raised his hand to knock on the door of Linda Wilhite's apartment, he saw that *he* was shaking.

A security peephole slid open. "Yes?" a woman's voice said.

Lloyd put his badge up in front of the hole. "L.A.P.D.," he said. "Could I speak to you for a moment, Miss Wilhite?"

"What's this about?"

Lloyd felt his shaking go internal. "It's about Stanley Rudolph. Will you open up, please?"

There was the sound of locks being unlatched, and then *she* was there, wearing an ankle-length paisley caftan. Lloyd tried to stare past her into the apartment, but Linda Wilhite held the center of his vision and rendered the background dull black.

"What *about* Stanley Rudolph?" she asked.

Lloyd walked into the apartment uninvited, taking a quick inventory of the entrance hall and living room. It was still hazy background stuff, but he knew that everything was tasteful and expensive.

"Don't be shy, make yourself right at home," Linda Wilhite said, coming up behind Lloyd and pointing him toward a floral-patterned easy chair. "I'll have the butler bring you a mint julep."

Lloyd laughed. "Nice pad, Linda. Out of the low-rent district."

Linda feigned a return laugh. "Don't be formal, call me suspect."

Lloyd stuck his hand in his jacket pocket and pulled out snapshots of Thomas Goff and Jungle Jack Herzog. He handed them to Linda and said, "Okay, suspect, have you seen either of these men before?"

Linda looked the photos over and returned them to Lloyd. There was not the slightest flicker of recognition in her eyes or her hands-on-hips pose. "No. What's this about Stan Rudolph? Are you with Vice?"

Lloyd sat down in the easy chair and stretched his legs. "That's right. What's the basis of your relationship with Rudolph?"

Linda's eyes went cold. Her voice followed. "I think you know. Will you state your purpose, ask your questions, and get out?"

Lloyd shook his head. "What do *you* know?"

"That you're no fucking Vice cop!" Linda shouted. "You got a snappy comback for that one?"

Lloyd's voice was his softest; the voice he saved for his daughters. "Yeah. You're no hooker."

Linda sat down across from him. "Everything in this apartment calls you a liar."

"I've been called worse than that," Lloyd said.

"Such as?"

"Some of the choicer shots have included 'urban barracuda,' 'male chauvinist porker,' 'fascist cocksucker,' 'wasp running dog,' and 'pussy hound scumbag.' I appreciate articulate invective. 'Motherfucker' and 'pig' get to be boring."

Linda Wilhite laughed and poked a finger at Lloyd's wedding ring. "You're married. What does your wife call you?"

"Long distance."

"What?"

"We're separated."

"Serious splitsville?"

"I'm not sure. It's been a year and she's got a lover, but I intend to outlast the bastard."

Linda stretched out her legs, matching Lloyd's pose, but in the opposite direction. "Do you always discuss intimate family matters with total strangers?"

Lloyd laughed and stilled an urge to reach over and touch her knee. "Sometimes. It's good therapy."

"I'm in therapy," Linda said.

"Why?" Lloyd asked.

"That's your first dumb question," Linda said. "Everyone has problems, and people who have money and want to get rid of them go to shrinks. *Comprende*?"

Lloyd shook his head. "Most troubled people are swamped by petty neuroses, stuff that they haven't got the slightest handle on. Offhand, I'd say that you're not that kind of person. Offhand, I'd say that some sort of catalyst led you to the couch."

"My shrink doesn't have a couch. He's too hip."

"That's a strange thing to call a psychiatrist."

"All right. Hip translates to brilliant, concerned, dedicated, and brutally honest."

"Are you in love with him?"

"No. He's not my type. Look, this conversation is getting a little weird and a bit far afield. You *are* a cop, aren't you? That wasn't a dime-store badge you showed me, or anything like that, was it?"

Lloyd saw a large stack of newspapers lying on top of a coffee table an arm's length away. He pointed to them and said, "If you've got Tuesday's *Times,* look at the second page. 'Shootout at Beverly Hills Nightclub.'"

Linda went to the table and leafed through the papers, then read the article standing up. When she turned around to face Lloyd, he had his badge and I.D.

card extended. Linda took the leatherette holder and examined it, then smiled from ear to ear. “So you’re Sergeant Lloyd Hopkins and one of those pictures is the unidentified homicide suspect you shot it out with. Very impressive. But what do Stan Rudolph and I have to do with it?”

Lloyd mulled the question over as Linda sat back down without relinquishing the I.D. holder. Deciding on an abridged version of the truth, he said, “An informant told me that Thomas Goff, my previously ‘unidentified homicide suspect,’ sold Stanley Rudolph some art objects, aided by a still unidentified partner. I came across Rudolph’s address book and noticed the names of several call girls I’d busted years ago. I also noticed your name, and concluded that since the only other women in the book were in the Life, you had to be also. I needed an outside lever to pry some information out of Rudolph, and since the other women probably still hate me for busting them, I decided on you.”

Linda handed the I.D. holder back. “Are you that fucking brash?”

Lloyd smiled. “Yes,” he said.

“Why don’t you just question Stan baby yourself?”

“Because he’d probably want an attorney present. Because any admission of knowing Goff is an implicit admission of receiving stolen goods, accessory to first degree burglary and criminal conspiracy. What kind of man is Rudolph?”

“A pathetic little nerd who gets his rocks off taking nude pictures. A loudmouthed buffoon. What specifically did this guy Goff do?”

“He’s murdered at least three people.”

Linda went pale. “Jesus. And you want me to pry information about him out of Stan baby?”

“Yes. And about his partner, who I’m certain is left-handed. Does Rudolph ever talk about his art collection and how he accquired it?”

Linda tapped Lloyd’s arm and said, “Yes. His art collection is his favorite topic of conversation. It’s all tied in to his sex M.O. He’s told me a dozen times that he buys his stuff from rip-off guys. That’s as specific as he gets. He used to have nude photographs of me on his bedroom walls, but he took them down because he was expecting some more Colombian statues. I haven’t tricked with him in six weeks or so, so maybe he and Goff got together recently.”

Lloyd thought of the rectangular patches on Rudolph’s bedroom wall, imagining the nude Linda he could have seen had he pulled his B & E a few months before. “Linda, do you think you—”

Linda Wilhite silenced him with a breathtaking coconspirator’s smile. “Yes. I’ll call Stan baby and set up a date, hopefully for tonight. Call me around one A.M., and don’t worry, I’ll be very cool.”

Lloyd’s conspiratorial smile felt like a blush. “Thank you.”

“My pleasure. You were right, you know. I did enter therapy for a reason.”

“What was it?”

“I want to quit the Life.”

“Then I was right on two counts.”

“What do you mean?”

“I told you you were no hooker.”

Lloyd got up and walked out of the apartment, letting his exit line linger.

With the Stanley Rudolph angle covered, Lloyd remembered an investigatory approach so rudimentary that he knew its very simplicity was the reason he had forgotten to explore it. Cursing himself for his oversight, he drove to a pay phone and called Dutch Peltz at the Hollywood Station, asking him to go across the street to the Hollywood Municipal Court and secure a subpoena for Jack Herzog's bank records. Dutch agreed to the errand, on the proviso that Lloyd fill him in at length on the case when he came by the station to pick up the paperwork. Lloyd agreed in return and drove to Herzog's apartment house in the Valley, thinking of Linda Wilhite all the way.

At Herzog's building, Lloyd went straight to the manager's apartment, flashed his badge, and asked him what bank the missing officer's rent checks were drawn on. Without hesitation, the frail old man said, "Security-Pacific, Encino branch," then launched into a spiel on how other officers had been by the previous day and had sealed the nice Mr. Herzog's nice apartment.

After thanking the manager, Lloyd drove back over the Cahuenga Pass to the Hollywood Station. He found Dutch Peltz in his office, muttering, "Yes, yes," into the telephone. Dutch looked up, drew a finger across his throat and whispered, "I.A.D." Lloyd took a chair across from him and put his feet up on the desk. Dutch muttered, "Yes, Fred, I'll tell him," and hung up. He turned to Lloyd and said, "Good news and bad news. Which would you prefer first?"

"Take your pick," Lloyd said.

Dutch smiled and poked Lloyd's crossed ankles with a pencil. "The good news is that Judge Bitowf issued your subpoena with no questions asked. Wasn't that nice of him?"

Lloyd took in Dutch's grin and raised his feet as if to kick his precious quartz bookend off the desk. "Tell me what Fred Gaffaney had to say. Omit nothing."

"More good news and bad news," Dutch said. "The good news is that *I* am your official liaison to I.A.D. on all matters pertaining to the Goff-Herzog case. The bad news is that Gaffaney just reiterated in the strongest possible language that you are to go nowhere near the officers working the moonlight gigs or go near the firms themselves. Gaffaney is preparing an approach strategy, and he and his top men will be conducting interviews within a few days. *I* will be given Xeroxes of their reports, *you* can get copies from me. Gaffaney also stated that if you violate these orders, you will be suspended immediately and given a trial board. You like it?"

Lloyd reached over and patted the bookend. "No, I don't like it. But you do."

Dutch flashed a shark grin. "I like anything that keeps you reasonably restrained and thereby a continued member of the Los Angeles Police Department. I would hate to see you get shitcanned and go on welfare. You'd be drinking T-bird and sleeping in the weeds within six months."

Lloyd stood up and grabbed the subpoena off Dutch's desk. He laid the notebook containing the names from Stanley Rudolph's address book in its place and said, "I know why you're acting so sardonic, Dutchman. You had a martini with your lunch. You have one drink a year, and your low tolerance gets you plowed. I'm a detective. You can't fool me."

Dutch laughed. "Fuck you. What's with this notebook and where do you think you're going? You were going to fill me in on the case, remember?"

Lloyd took a playful jab at the bookend. "Fuck you twice. I don't confide in alcoholics. Have one of your minions run those names through R. & I., will you?"

"I'll think about it. Hey Lloydy, how come you took my bad news so easy? I expected you to throw something."

Lloyd tried to imitate Dutch's shark grin, but knew immediately that it came out a blush. "I think I'm in love," he said.

Lloyd drove back to the Valley, highballing it northbound on the Ventura Freeway in order to hit the Encino branch of the Security-Pacific Bank before closing time, making it with two minutes to spare. He showed his I.D. and the subpoena to the manager, a middle-aged Japanese man who led him to the privacy of a safe deposit box examination room, returning five minutes later with a computer printout and a thick transaction file. Bowing, the manager closed the door, leaving Lloyd in impeccable silence.

That silence soon became inhabited by dates and figures that detailed an atypical cop life. Jack Herzog's savings and checking accounts went back five years. Lloyd started at the beginning of the transaction file and waded through paychecks deposited twice monthly, rent checks drawn monthly and savings stipends deposited every third L.A. City pay period. Jack Herzog was a frugal man. There were no large withdrawals indicating spending sprees; no checks for amounts exceeding his monthly rent payment of $350.00, and out of every third paycheck he deposited $300.00 in a 7½% growth savings account. When Herzog opened his dual accounts in 1979, his total balance was less than six hundred dollars. At the transaction file's last entry date four months before, he was worth $17,913.49.

Noting that the last entry was on 1/4/84, Lloyd turned to the computer sheet, hoping it contained facts updating Herzog's two accounts to the present.

It did. The same deposit/check withdrawal motif continued, this time detailed in hard-to-read computer type. Lloyd was about to shake his head at the sadness of close to nineteen grand belonging to a dead man when the final transaction came into focus, grabbing him by the throat.

On March 20, around the time of his disappearance, Jack Herzog closed out both his accounts and purchased an interbranch bank draft for his total balance of $18,641.07. There was a photocopy of the draft clipped to the computer sheet. It stated that the above amount was to be transferred to the West Hollywood branch of Security-Pacific, to the savings account of Martin D. Bergen. Lloyd let the facts sink in, then walked slowly out of the examination room and through the bank proper, bowing to the bank manager and running as soon as he hit the sidewalk.

By speeding through the Hollywood Hills, Lloyd was able to reach the *Big Orange Insider* office in just under half an hour. The same receptionist gave him the same startled look as he pushed through the connecting door to the editorial department, and seconds later the young man he had tangled with on his previous visit attempted to block his progress by standing in his path with his legs dug in like a linebacker. "I told you before you can't come back here," he said.

Lloyd took a bead on his head, then caught himself. "Marty Bergen," he said. "Official police business. Go get him."

The young man wrapped his arms around his chest. "Marty is on vacation. Leave now."

Lloyd took the bank subpoena from his pocket and rolled it up, then tickled the underside of the young man's chin with the end. When he jerked backward, Lloyd said, "This is a court order to search Bergen's desk. If you don't comply with it, I'll get an order to search the entire premises. Do you dig me, Daddy-o?"

Turning beet red, then pale, the youth flung an arm toward the back of the room. "The last desk against the wall. And let me see that court order."

Lloyd handed the subpoena over and weaved through a crammed maze of desks, ignoring the stares of the people sitting at them. Bergen's desk was covered with a pile of papers. Lloyd leafed through them, pushing the stack aside with he saw that every page contained notes scrawled in an indecipherable shorthand. He was about to go through the drawers when a woman's voice interrupted him. "Officer, is Marty all right?"

Lloyd turned around. A tall black woman wearing an ink-stained printer's smock was standing beside the desk, holding a long roll of tabloid galley paper. "Is Marty *all right*?" she repeated.

"No," Lloyd said. "I don't think so. Why do you ask? You sound concerned."

The woman fretted the roll in her hands. "He's been gone since the last time you were here," she said. "He hasn't been at his apartment and nobody from the *Orange* has seen him. And right before he took off he grabbed all his columns for the following week, except one. I'm the head typesetter, and I needed to set those issues. Marty really screwed the *Orange,* and that's not like him."

"Has he taken off like this before?"

The women shook her head. "No! I mean sometimes he rents a motel room and goes on a toot, but he always leaves copies of his column for the time he expects to be gone. This time was *weird* because he took *back* his columns, and *they* were really *weird* to begin with."

Lloyd motioned the woman to sit down. "Tell me about those columns," he said. "Try to remember everything you can."

"They *were just weird,*" the woman said slowly. "One was called 'Moonlight Malfeasance.' It was about these bigshot L.A. cops who had these figurehead jobs bossing around all these low-life rent-a-cops. *Weird.* The other columns were off-shoots on that one, about the L.A.P.D. manipulating the media, because they got all the inside dirt from the moonlight cops. *Weird.* I mean the *Orange's* meat is it's anti-fuzz policy, but this stuff was *weird,* even for Marty Bergen, who was a lovable dude, but *weird* himself."

Lloyd felt fragments of his case burst into a strange new light: *Marty Bergen had seen the missing L.A.P.D. Personnel files.* Swallowing to hold his voice steady, he said, "You told me that Bergen let you keep one of the columns. Have you still got it?"

The woman nodded and rolled out her galley sheet on the desk. "Marty gave real specific instructions on how to set it," she said. "He said it had to have a heavy black border and that it had to run on May the third, because that was the birthday of this buddy of his. *Weird.*" She located the section and jabbed it with her finger. "There. Read it for yourself."

The black-bordered piece was entitled "Night Train to the Big Nowhere." Lloyd read it over three times, feeling his case move from its strange new light into a stranger darkness.

When a cop jumps on the Night Train to the Big Nowhere, he doesn't care

> about its exact destination, because any terminus is preferable to living inside his own head, with its awful knowledge of how the solar age will never penetrate the Big Iceberg.
>
> When my friend jumped on the Night Train to the Big Nowhere, he probably foresaw only relief from his locked-in knowledge of the big nightmare, and the vice grip of the new nightmare that spelled out his role to play in the shroud dance that owns us all.
>
> That you didn't purchase your ticket with your gun spoke volumes. Like me, you were a blue-suit sham. You did not use that tool of your trade in your nihilist last hurrah, reaffirming your masquerade. Instead you strangled on a pink cloud of chemical silence, giving yourself time to think of all the puzzles you had solved, and of the cruelty of your final jigsaw revelations. At the end you confronted, and *knew.* It was your most conscious act of courage in a life vulgarized by fearful displays of bravery. I love you for it, and offer you this twenty-one gun verse valedictory:
>
> Resurrect the dead on this day,
> open the doors where
> they dare not to stray;
> Cancel all tickets to the horror shroud dance,
> Burn down the night in the rage of a trance.

Lloyd handed the sheet back to the bewildered typesetter. “Print it,” he said. “Redeem your piece of shit newspaper.”

The woman said, “It ain't *The New York Times,* but it's a regular gig.”

Lloyd nodded, but didn't reply. When he walked out of the office the strident young man was scrutinizing the bank subpoena with a magnifying glass.

Knowing that he couldn't bear to recon Marty Bergen's apartment, Lloyd drove home and called the West Hollywood Sheriff's, briefly explaining the case and relegating the job to them, omitting his knowledge of the bank draft, telling them to make a check of local motels and to detain Bergen if they found him.

New questions burned in the morass that the Herzog-Goff case had become. Was Jungle Jack Herzog a suicide? If so, where was his body, who had disposed of it, and who had wiped his apartment free of fingerprints? Marty Bergen's “weird” columns indicated that he had seen the files Herzog had stolen. Where were the files, what was the literal gist of the suicide column, where was Bergen, and what was the extent of his involvement in the case?

When nothing came together for him, Lloyd knew that he was overamped, undernourished, and coming unconnected, and that the only antidote was an evening of rest. After a dinner of cold sliced ham and a pint of cottage cheese, he sat down on his porch to watch the twilight dwindle into darkness, warming to the idea of not thinking.

But he thought.

He thought of the terraced hills of the old neighborhood, and of sleepless ’fifties’ nights spent listening to the howling of dogs imprisoned in the animal shelter two blocks away. The shelter had given his section of Silverlake the nickname of “Dogtown,” and for the years of ’fifty-five and ’fifty-six, when he had been a peewee member of the Dogtown Flats gang, it had supplied *him* with the sobriquets of “Dogman” and “Savior.” The constant howling, plaintive as it was, had been mysterious and romantic dream fuel. But sometimes the dogs chewed and clawed their way to freedom, only to get obliterated by late-night hot-rodders playing chicken on the blind curve blacktop outside his bedroom window. Even though the corpses were removed by the time he left for school in the morning, with the pavement hosed down by old Mr. Hernandez next door, Lloyd could feel and smell and almost taste the blood. And after awhile, his nights were spent not listening, but cringing in anticipation of coming impacts.

Lack of sleep drew Lloyd gaunt that fall of ’fifty-six, and he knew that he had to act to reclaim the wonder he had always felt after dark. Because the night was there to provide comfort and the nourishing of brave dreams, and only someone willing to fight for its sanctity deserved to claim it as his citadel.

Lloyd began his assault against death, first blocking off “Dead Dog Curve” at both ends with homemade sawhorse detour signs to prevent access to chicken players. The strategem worked for two nights, until a glue-sniffing member of the First Street Flats crashed his ’fifty-one Chevy through the barricade, sideswiping a series of parked cars as he lost control, finally coming to a halt by rear-ending an L.A.P.D. black-and-white. Out on bail the next day, the driver went looking for the *puto* who had put up the sawhorse, smiling when Dogtown buddies told him it was a crazy fourteen-year-old kid called Dogman and Savior, a loco who was planning to flop in a sleeping bag by Dead Dog Curve to make sure that nobody played chicken on his turf.

That night fourteen-year-old Lloyd Hopkins, six foot one and a hundred and eighty pounds, began the series of *mano a mano* choose-off’s that rendered the nicknames Dogman and Savior passé and earned him a new title: “Conquistador.” The fights continued for ten nights straight, costing him a twice broken nose and a total of a hundred stitches, but ending chicken on Griffith Park and St. Elmo forever. When his nose was set for the second time and his swollen hands returned to their normal size, Lloyd quit the Dogtown Flats. He knew he was going to become a policeman, and it would not do to have a gang affiliation on his record.

The ringing of a telephone jerked him back to the present. He walked into the kitchen and picked it up. “Yes?”

“Hopkins, this is Linda.”

“What?”

“Are you spaced out or something? Linda Wilhite.

”Lloyd laughed. “Yeah, I am spaced out. How’s tricks?”

“Not funny, Hopkins, but I’ll let you slide because you’re spaced. Listen, I *did* just trick with Stanley, and I very subtly pried some not too encouraging info out of him.”

“Such as?”

“Such as you were misinformed somehow. Stan baby has never heard of Goff. I described the picture you showed me to him, and he doesn’t know anyone resembling it. Ditto any left-handed man. Stan said he buys his stuff from a black guy who works solo. He *did* buy some stuff from a white guy, once, last year, but the guy charged too much. Sorry I couldn’t be of more help.”

“You were a lot of help. How did you get my phone number?”

Linda laughed. “You *are* spaced. From the phone book. Listen, will you let me know how this turns out?”

“Yes. And thanks, Linda.”

“My pleasure. And by the way, if you feel like calling, you don’t have to have a reason, though I’m sure you’ll think one up.”

“Are you telling me I’m devious?”

“No, just lonely and a bit guilt-ridden.”

“And you?”

“Lonely and a bit curious. Bye, Hopkins.”

“Good-bye, Linda.”

5

AFTER a handshake and brief salutations, Linda Wilhite took her seat across from the Doctor and began to talk. When Havilland heard vague self-analysis fill the air, he clicked off his conscious listening power and shifted into an automatic overdrive that allowed him to juxtapose Linda's beauty against the single most important aspect of his life: *thinking one step ahead of Lloyd Hopkins.*

Since they were both geniuses, this kept the Night Tripper's mental engine pushed to its maximum horsepower, searching for loopholes and overlooked flaws in the logical progression of this game. With his physical concentration zeroed in on Linda, he thought of the game's one possible trouble spot: Jungle Jack Herzog.

Their relationship had been based on mutual respect—Herzog's genuine, the Doctor's feigned. The Alchemist was a classic psychiatric prototype—the seeker after truth who retreats into a cocoon of rationalization when confronted with harrowing *self*-truths. Thus the Doctor had played into his pathetic fantasy of using the stolen files to create an "L.A.P.D. credibility gap" that would by implication exonerate his friend Marty Bergen, while at the same time plumbing the basis of his attraction to a man whose cowardly actions he despised. The truth had finally become too strong, and Herzog had run to some unknown terminus of macho-driven shame. Goff had wiped his apartment shortly after he disappeared, and the odds against his leaving records or contacting Bergen or L.A.P.D. colleagues were astronomical—his shameful new self-knowledge would preclude it. Yet Hopkins had tied in Herzog to the late Thomas Goff, although he had *not* mentioned the missing files. *That* was potentially damaging, although Herzog had had no knowledge of his *hard* criminal activity. The most important part of the game was now to convince Hopkins that he was shielding someone close to Goff; that he was strangling on the horns of an ethical dilemma. He would play the role of every wimpy liberal man of conscience that policemen hated, and "Crazy Lloyd" would buy it—hook, line, and sinker.

The Night Tripper mentally decelerated, catching bits of psychobabble sloganeering as Linda's monologue wound down. Knowing that she would expect him to respond, he made brief mental notes to contact and placate his lonelies with excuses for his absence, then smiled and said, "I let you go on like that without interjecting questions because such thinking is living in the problem, not the solution. You've got to be able to exposit *facts*, gauge them for their basic truths and nuances, solicit my feedback, accept it or reject it, then move on the next *fact.* You've obviously read every lunatic and well-intentioned self-help book ever written, and it's mired you down with a great deal of *useless* food for thought. *Give me facts.*"

Linda flushed, clenched her jaw and slammed the arms of her chair. “Facts,” she said. “You want facts, then I’ll give you facts. Fact: I’m lonely. Fact: I’m horny. Fact: I just met a very interesting man. Fact: I can tell that he’s turned on to me. Fact: He’s mooning for his estranged wife and will probably not hit on yours truly, as much as he’d like to. Fact: I’m pissed off about it.”

Havilland smiled. The litany sounded like his fish swallowing a huge chunk of bait. “Tell me about the man. Facts, physical and otherwise, then your conclusions.”

Linda smoothed the hem of her skirt and smiled back. “All right. He’s about forty and very large, with intense gray eyes and dark brown hair, sort of unkempt. Ruddy complexion. His clothes are out of style. He’s funny and arrogant and sarcastic. He’s very smart, but there’s nothing contrived or academic about it. He just *has* it. He’s a *natural.*”

At Linda’s last words the Doctor felt his fish gobble the bait, then inexplicably start to chew through the line. When he spoke, his voice sounded disembodied, as if it had been filtered through an echo chamber. “He *has* it? He’s a *natural*? Those aren’t facts, Linda. Be more specific.”

“Don’t get angry,” Linda said. “You wanted conclusions.”

Havilland leaned back in his chair, feeling his own line snap with the realization that he had displayed anger. “I’m sorry I raised my voice,” he said. “Sometimes nonspecific information makes me angry.”

“Don’t apologize, Doctor. You know human emotions better than I do.”

“Yes. More facts then, please.”

Linda stared at her clenched hands, then counted facts on her fingers. “He’s a cop, he’s proud to a fault, he’s lonely. He—oh shit, he just has *it.*”

Havilland felt barbed-wire hooks gouge his jugular, Linda’s beauty the hook wielder. Her voice supplied a verbal gouging that honed the hooks to razor sharpness. “I just don’t feel factual about this man, Doctor. It’s weird meeting him so soon after entering therapy, and nothing will probably come of it, but my only facts are my *intuitions.* Doctor, are you all right?”

Havilland stared through Linda to a mental chessboard he had constructed to resurrect his professional cool. Kings, queens, and knights toppled; and in the wake of their fall he was able dredge up a smile and a calm voice. “I’m sorry, Linda. One of my little bouts of vertigo. I’m also sorry for impugning your intuitions. One thing struck me when you were describing this fellow, and that’s that he sounds very much like your size forty-four sweater fantasy man. Has that occurred to you?”

Linda covered her mouth and laughed. “Maybe the Rolling Stones were wrong.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re obviously not a rock fan,” Linda said. “I was referring to an old Stones tune called ‘You Can’t Always Get What You Want.’ Although they could be *right,* because if Lloyd-poo doesn’t want to be had, then I’m sure that he will *not* be had. That’s part of his charm.”

Havilland made a steeple and brought it up to his face, framing Linda inside the triangle. “How has he affected your fantasy life?”

Linda gave the Doctor a rueful smile. “You don’t miss much. Yes, this man is the basic forty-four sweater prototype; yes, he possesses that certain aura of violence I mentioned earlier; yes, I have cast him as the man who watches my gory home movies with me. I also like the fact that he's a cop. And you know why? Because he doesn't judge me for being a prostitute. Cops and hookers work the same street, so to speak."

Collapsing the steeple into his lap, the Doctor said, "For the record, Linda, you've made a great deal of progress in only three sessions. So much so that I'm considering a rather avant garde visual aid session a week or so down the line. Would you be up for that?"

"Sure. You're the doctor."

"Yes," Havilland said, "I am. And doctors have certain results that they must achieve. Mine involve confronting my counselee's most hideous secrets and fears, taking them through their green doors and beyond their beyonds. You know that your confrontations are going to be particularly painful, don't you, Linda?"

Linda stood up and adjusted the pleats in her skirt, then slung her handbag over her shoulder. "No pain, no gain. I'm tough, Doctor. I can handle all the truth you can hit me with. Friday at ten-thirty?"

Havilland got to his feet and took Linda's hand. "Yes. One thing before you go. What were your parents wearing at the time of their deaths?"

Linda held the doctor's hand while she pondered the question. Finally she said, "My father was wearing khaki pants, a plaid lumberjack shirt and a Dodger baseball cap. I remember the pictures the policemen showed me. The detectives were amazed that he could blow his brains out and still keep the cap on his head. My mother was doing part-time practical nursing then, and she was wearing a white nurse's uniform. Why?"

Havilland lowered her hand. "Symbolic therapy. Thank you for digging up such an unpleasant memory."

"No pain, no gain," Linda said as she waved good-bye.

Alone in his office with the scent of Linda's perfume, the Night Tripper wondered why validation of his most audacious move should cause such a bizarre reaction. He played back the session in his mind and got nothing but a static hiss that sounded like an air-raid siren about to screech its doom warning. Reflexively, he grabbed his desk phone and dialed one of his pawn's numbers, getting a recorded message: "Hi, lover, this is Sherry! I'm out right now, but if you want to party or just rap, talk to the machine. Bye!"

He put down the receiver, knowing immediately that he had made a mistake. Sherry Shroeder lived in the Valley. He had made a toll call that would appear on his phone bill. Havilland took a deep breath and closed his eyes, searching for a train of thought to provide a counteraction to the blunder. It arrived in the form of *facts:* the remaining Junior Miss Cosmetics files were boring. They were boring because they detailed unimaginative sleaze. Thus a higher class line of confidential dirt should be procured. The Avonoco Fiberglass Company had a class two security rating. The Alchemist had said, "If you cut a fart they've got a file on you. They hire lots of parolees and work furlough inmates as part of an L.A. County kickback scam." The L.A.P.D. file on their security chief had described him as a compulsive gambler with a history of psychiatric counseling. Choice meat for Thomas Goff. *Choicer* meat for a trained pshychiatrist.

The Night Tripper locked up his office and took the elevator down to the bank of payphones in the lobby. He was leafing through the Yellow Pages when the reason for his erratic behavior stunned him with its implications of cheap emotion: *he was jealous of Linda Wilhite's attraction to Lloyd Hopkins.*

5

LLOYD spent the morning at the West Hollywood Sheriff's Substation, reading over the report filed by the team of detectives who had searched Marty Bergen's apartment.

The report ran a total of eight pages, and contained both the officers' observations regarding the apartment's condition and a six page inventory of items found on the premises. There was no mention of the personnel files or any other official police document, and nothing that pointed to Jack Herzog or his murder/suicide/disappearance. What emerged was a clipped word portrait of an alcoholic ex-cop reaching the end of his tether.

On the ambiguous pretext of a "routine check," the detectives had learned from Bergen's landlady that she had not seen her tenant in over a week, and that in her opinion he was "holed up swacko in some motel on the Strip." The state of Bergen's apartment confirmed this appraisal. Empty scotch bottles were strewn across the floor, and there were no clothes or toilet articles to be found. All four rooms reeked of booze and waste, and a portable typewriter lay smashed to pieces on the kitchen floor.

The officers had followed the landlady's advice and had checked every motel and cocktail bar on the length of the Sunset Strip, showing Bergen's *Big Orange Insider* byline photo to every desk clerk and bartender they encountered. Many recognized Bergen as a frequent heavy binger, but none had seen him in over two weeks. Deciding to sit on the information before assigning L.A.P.D. detectives to search for the ex-cop/writer, Lloyd drove to West L.A. and his last remaining uncharted link to the whole twisted mess, wondering if his motives were entirely professional.

Linda Wilhite opened her door on the second knock, catching Lloyd in the act of straightening his necktie. Pointing him inside, she looked at her watch and said, "Noon. Fourteen hours after my call, and you're here in person. Got a good reason?"

Lloyd sat down on a floral patterned sofa. "I came to cop a plea," he said. "I haven't been entirely honest with you, and I—"

Linda silenced him by leaning over and adjusting the knot in his tie. "And you want something. Right?"

"Right."

"So tell me," Linda said, sitting down beside him.

Lloyd gave her an unrepentent stare. "Dr. John Havilland put me on to you, unconsciously. I saw those pictures of you in his outer office. Then he—"

Linda grabbed his arm. "What!"

"The framed photographs of you. Don't you know about that?"

Linda shook her head angrily, then sadly. “That poor, wonderful man. I told him about this arty-farty picture book I posed for, and he went out and bought it. How sad. I figured he was some sort of ascetic asexual, then this morning I told him about a man I’m attracted to, and he freaked out. I’ve never seen anyone so jealous.”

“He blurted your name when I commented on the pictures,” Lloyd said. “And he obviously takes them down before he sees you. Havilland counsels lots of criminal types. In the course of my investigation I blundered onto his name and decided to exploit his expertise in matters of the criminal psyche. As I suspected, he had his own underworld grapevine. He queried his source and came up with a man who, along with Thomas Goff, sold Stanley Rudolph some art objects. I snuck into Rudolph’s pad and found your name in his phonebook. Even though Rudolph himself doesn’t know Goff, this anonymous man *does.* The whole Rudolph connection was a weird bunch of information and misinformation, which doesn’t alter the fact that Havilland’s source *knows Goff.*”

Lloyd paused when he saw that Linda’s face had become a mask of rage. Lowering his voice, he continued. “Havilland is legally protected by a shitload of statutes regarding professional privilege. He does not have to reveal the name of his source, and all my instincts tell me that no amount of coercion would move him to divulge the name of Goff’s cohort.”

Lloyd put his hand on Linda’s shoulder. She cringed at his touch, then batted his hand away and hissed, “There are people who can’t be coerced, Hopkins, and the doctor is one of them. He can’t be coerced because unlike you, he has principles. There are also people who can’t be manipulated, and even though I’m a whore, I’m one of them. Do you honestly think that I’d manipulate information out of a man who wants to help me and give it to a man who at best wants to fuck me? You want an addition to your epithet list, Sergeant? How about ‘uncaring manipulative sleazebag’?”

Seeing red, Lloyd walked out of the apartment and down to the street and his unmarked cruiser. Ten minutes later he was sitting in Dr. John Havilland’s outer office, staring at the photographs of Linda Wilhite and asking his seldom sought God not to let him do anything stupid.

The Doctor appeared just as the red throbbing behind Lloyd’s eyes began to subside. He was ushering an elderly woman wearing a “Save the Whales” T-shirt out of his private office, cooing into her ear as she checked the contents of her purse. When he saw Lloyd, he said, “One moment, Sergeant,” issued a final good-bye to his patient, then turned and laughed. “That very rich woman thinks that she can communicate telepathically with whales. What can I do for you? Have you made any progress in your investigation?”

Lloyd shook his head and spoke with a deliberate slowness. “No. Your source was somewhat inaccurate in his information. I questioned Stanley Rudolph. He has no knowledge, guilty or otherwise, of Thomas Goff. His primary source of stolen goods is a black man who works by himself. Rudolph bought goods from a *solo* white man only once, sometime last year. You said that your source met Goff at a singles bar. Did he tell you the name of it?”

Havilland sighed and sat down in an armchair across from Lloyd. “No, he didn’t. To be frank, Sergeant, the young man has a drug problem, an addiction that sometimes involves blackouts. His memory isn’t always completely trustworthy."

"Yet you believe that he knows Goff?"

"Yes."

"And you credit his statement that he has no knowledge of Goff's whereabouts and no knowledge regarding the liquor store homicides?"

Havilland hesitated, then said, "Yes."

Keeping his voice deliberately slow, Lloyd said, "No, you don't. You're shielding someone who knows something hot about Goff, and you're scared. You want to tell me what you know, but you don't want to compromise your ethics and jeopardize your patient's well being. I understand these things. But understand *me,* Doctor. You're my only shot. We're dealing with mass murder here, not petty neuroses. You have to tell me his name, and I think you know it."

"No," Havilland said. "That's absolute."

"Will you reconsider over a period of twenty-four hours? I'll have an attorney present when I question the man, and he won't know that you informed on him. I'll concoct a story that would satisfy a genius."

Havilland lowered his eyes. "God damn it, I said no!"

Lloyd felt his slow-motion strategy burst. He jammed his hands into his front pockets, closing them around open handcuff ratchets and a metal studded sap. Staring straight at the doctor, he squeezed the concealed weaponry so hard that the pain forced his words out in a wince. "You fuck with me and I'll hit you with an I.R.S. audit and more writs, petitions, subpoenas, and court orders than you thought existed. I'll initiate motions requesting the case files of every court-referred patient who ever crossed your door. I'll hire shyster lawyers out of my own pocket and keep them on retainer just to dream up ways to hassle you. I'll have bad-ass nigger vice cops keep your office under surveillance and scare the shit out of the rich neurotics you feed from. Twenty-four hours. You've got my number."

A red tide propelled Lloyd out of the office. When he took his hands from his pockets, he saw that they were bleeding.

Hook, line, and sinker.

Havilland walked into his private office and removed an array of bait from his wall safe. Ten thousand dollars in a brown paper bag and a newly typed psychiatric report accompanied by a snapshot. He placed the report in his top desk drawer, then looked at his watch. One-thirty. He had six hours until his next move. Leaning back in his chair, the Night Tripper closed his eyes and tried to will a dreamless sleep.

He succeeded and failed.

Sleep came, interspersed with semi-conscious moments that he knew to be his memory. As each image passed through him he felt like a surgical bonesaw was slicing his body in two, leaving him the choice of going with his symbolic past or of drifting into the cloud cover of anesthesia. Off to his left was sleep; off to his right was a blood-spattered corkboard equipped with arm and legholes, a rigor-mortised ankle encircled by a steel manacle, and the Bronx ferris wheel spinning off its axis. Full consciousness was a pinpoint of light between his eyes, an escape hatch that could trigger *full sleep* if concentrated upon in tandem with recitation of his mantra, *patria sanctorum.* Three roads inward: to wakefulness, to oblivion, to his childhood void. Feeling fearless, the Night Tripper succumbed to memory and let his right side disengage.

A huge magnifying glass descended on the void, serving up details: "McEvoy-D Block," etched on the manacle; gouged and cauterized arteries marking the ankle; father whispering in his ear as the ferris wheel reached its apex, suspending them above blocks of Puerto Rican tenements. Straining to read the lips of the people traversing below him, he caught long snatches of conversation and shock waves of laughter. Then his two sides fused.

Havilland awoke, refreshed, at six-forty-five. His yawn became a smile when the new void embellishments passed the credibility test by returning to his conscious mind. His smile widened when he realized that his one-on-one with Lloyd Hopkins was the catalyst that had supplied the fresh details. Thus fortified by sleep and memory, he picked up his bag of money, locked the office, and drove to Malibu and the acquisition of data.

The rendezvous point was a long stretch of parking blacktop overlooking the beach. Havilland left his car in the service area of a closed gas station on the land side of the Pacific Coast Highway and took the tunnel underpass across to the bank of lighted pay phones adjoining the spot where he was to meet the Avonoco Fiberglass security chief. He checked his watch and walked to the railing: 8:12 P.M., the last remnants of an amber sun turning the ocean pink. Savoring the moment, he watched the ball of fire meld into a pervasive light blue. When the blue died into a dark rush of waves, he walked to the phone booth nearest the railing and dialed the number of his actress pawn.

"Hello?"

Havilland grimaced; Sherry's salutation was slurred into three stoned syllables.

"Hello? Who's this? Is that you, Otto, you horny hound?"

Havilland's grimace relaxed. Though loaded, his pawn was lucid. "This is Lloyd, Sherry. How are you?"

"Hi, Lloyd!"

"Hi. Do you remember our deal?"

"Of course, baby. I got ripped off to the max on 'Steep Throat' and 'Nuclear Nookie.' I'm not letting this one get away."

Havilland turned around and stretched, catching a glimpse of a man hunched over the phone in the last booth at the end. Even though the caller was a good ten yards away, he turned back and lowered his voice to a whisper. "Good. We're shooting tomorrow night. Your co-star will pick you up. That's a little idea of mine. You know, let the stars get acquainted so that they can perform more realistically. He'll bring an outfit for you to wear. Is that your current address on your business card?"

"Yeah, that's my crib. And I'll get the rest of my money then?"

"Yes. Your co-star's name is Richard. He'll pick you up at nine. I'll see you on the set."

Sherry laughed. "Nine p.m. Tell Richard to be there or be square. Bye, Lloyd."

"Good-bye, Sherry."

Havilland hung up and stared through the Plexiglas booth enclosures, noting with relief that the caller was gone. He checked his watch again, then walked to the railing and over to the approximate middle of the parking strip. 8:24.

Hopefully, Lieutenant Howard Christie would be punctual.

At precisely eight-thirty, slow footsteps echoed on the blacktop. The Doctor squinted and saw a man materialize out of the shadows and walk straight toward him. When he was ten feet away, a sudden burst of moonlight illuminated his features. It was the man in the phone booth. Shunting that knowledge aside, the Doctor walked forward with his hand extended, watching an archetypal cop come into focus.

He was a big crew-cutted man going to fat. He had a blunt face and cold eyes that measured the Doctor up, down, and sideways without revealing a hint of his appraisal. When they were face to face, he took the extended hand and said, "Doctor Havilland, I presume?"

The words rendered the Doctor mute and faint. He tried to jerk his hand free. It was futile; the force that grasped it was crushing it into numbness.

The force spoke: "Did you think you were dealing with amateurs? I've been a cop for twenty-two years, fourteen of them on the take. I know the ropes. I saw you park your car half an hour ago, and ran you through the D.M.V. The White Pages told me the rest. A psychiatrist. Very fucking unimpressive. Do you know how many shrinks I've gamed to get out of trouble in the Department? Did you think I'd let you pull this clandestine rendezvous horseshit anonymously? Did you think I believed that snow job you gave me on the phone? A book about secret information abuse? Really, Doctor, you insult my intelligence."

With a final squeeze, Howard Christie released the Doctor's hand, then put an arm around his shoulders and led him to the railing. Havilland concentrated on his mantra. He sat on the railing and forced an appropriately frightened laugh. When Christie laughed in return, he felt his newfound courage click in.

Christie took a deep breath of ocean air. "Don't look so scared, Doc. One thing my first shrink taught me: In all relationships, power bondings are established in the first five minutes. I had to establish the fact that *I* am the power broker, because *I* have what *you* want, and since we are dealing with class two security clearance stuff, this scam is felonious. Capice?"

"Yes," Havilland said. "I understand. But where are the files?" He ran his right foot nervously over the blacktop in wider and wider circles. A big rock caught his toe. He nudged it toward him and added, "Does anyone else know my name or that I contacted you?"

Christie shook his head. "I told you I knew the ropes. No one at Avonoco knows, and I just found out your name from a D.M.V. clerk who's already forgotten it. But listen: Where did you get *my* name?"

Lowering his head, Havilland saw a holstered revolver clipped to Christie's belt, half covered by his open sports jacket. "I—I—met an L.A.P.D. officer at a bar. He—he told me you had a gambling problem."

Christie slammed the railing with both palms. "Loudmouthed motherfuckers. For your info, Doc, cops are just like crooks, you can't trust any of them. What was his name?"

"I—I—don't remember. Honestly."

"No problem. People who go to bars forget things fast, which is why they go to bars. I'm glad I'm not a drunk. Two addictions would be too fucking much. Let's cut the shit and get down to business. First off, don't tell me why you want the files—I don't want to know. Second, we're talking about a long process of photocopying them and moving them out a few at a time. If you want quick gratification, tough shit—discuss it with *your* shrink. Third, your offer of ten thou doesn't cut it. I owe a lot of money to some *very* bad dudes to owe money to. I want thirty K, no less. *Capice*?"

Havilland faked a coughing attack, leaning over with his head between his knees. When he felt Christie slap his back, he pretended to retch and braced his hands on the pavement, palming the rock, then shoving it into his right jacket pocket as he resumed a sitting position. Wiping his eyes, he inched closed to his adversary, seeing the gun butt fully exposed, Christie's badge attached to his belt next to it.

Christie slapped his back a last time. "Breathe deep, Doc. That good sea air will put hair on your chest. What do you think of my terms?"

Havilland took a deep breath and stuck his hand in his pocket, closing it around the rock. He calculated potential arcs and slid over to where his left shoulder and Christie's right shoulder were brushing. "Yes, it's a deal. You're holding all the aces."

Christie laughed. "No gambling metaphors, I'm trying to quit." He reached his arms up as if to embrace the sky, then brought them down in a huge yawn. "I'm tired," he said. "Let's wrap this up for tonight. Here's what I'm thinking: Six payments of five K apiece, the files to be very cautiously siphoned out at my discretion. You'll have to trust me on that. I'm the dominant ego in this relationship, but I'll be benevolent about it. Look at it as a father-son type of gig. *Capicel*?"

Dr. John Havilland gasped at the worst insult ever hurled at him. He recalled a quote from Christie's L.A.P.D. file: *Long history of overdependence upon supportive figures.* Thinking, *So be it,* the Doctor said, "What do you think *I* am, an amateur? Don't you think I know that compulsive gamblers have a need to counterbalance their self-destruction by asserting themselves in business relationships, an unconscious ploy to overrule their awful dependency on their closest loved ones, the ones who rule them and own them and give them the tit they suck on?"

Christie stood up and stammered, "W-w-why you little fuck," just as Havilland smashed the rock into his face. The cop teetered on the railing, grabbing it with one hand, wiping blood from his eyes with the other. Havilland reached for his waistband and pulled the gun free, then closed his eyes and aimed at where he thought Christie's face should be. He pulled the trigger twice, screaming along with the explosions, then opened his eyes and saw that Christie's face was not a face, but a charred blood basin oozing brain and skull fragments. He fired four more times, eyes open and not screaming, ripping Christie's badge from his belt just as his last shot sheared off his head and sent him pitching over the railing to the rocks thirty feet below. Drenched in blood and inundated by horror and memory, the Night Tripper ran.

AT ten o'clock, after nine straight hours of prowling singles bars and simple drinking bars for Thomas Goff and Marty Bergen, Lloyd gave up, surrendering himself to the idea of a trip to New York to prowl Goff's old haunts. The Department would pay for his ticket and per diem, and before he left he would consult an attorney on legal loopholes to exert against Dr. John Havilland. Defeat loomed like a stark black banner. Lloyd succumbed to the knowledge that there was no place to go but backward in time.

The old neighborhood greeted him with banners that mocked his cop exigencies. Parking at Sunset and Vendome, he sprinted up the cracked concrete steps to the highest point in Silverlake, hoping to find a reprise of old themes that would affirm the forty-two-year-old warrior persona he had paid so dearly to assume.

But the timeless L.A. haze blanketed, then shut down his would-be reverie. He could not see his parents' house a scant half mile away; whole vistas of landmarks were covered by a witch's brew of evaporating low clouds, industrial fumes and neon. Lloyd's affirmation became a rhapsody of high prices paid for dubious conquests.

In the 1965 Watts riot he had killed a fellow National Guardsman who had fired into a storefront church filled with innocent blacks partaking of coffee and prayer. No one had ever made him for the killing, and two months later he entered the Los Angeles Police Academy.

His career as a policeman was sustained brilliance, his concurrent role as husband and father a series of blundering attempts to instill his family with benign equivalents of his knowledge. When the force of his will elicited anger and hurt, he ran back to the job, and when the job swirled him into vortexes of boredom and terror and loathing, he found women who wanted to touch briefly what he was, offer their innocence as barter, and then get out before his hard line fervor destroyed their hard-earned and fatuous sense of life's amenities.

And then, last year, Teddy Verplanck merged into his path, turning his universe into chaos. When that symbiosis was completed, death and rebirth occurred simultaneously, and as his wounds healed, Lloyd became a hybrid warrior formed of his past and its validity and of accredited blood testimony as to where it would ultimately take him.

And his hard line fervor cracked and solidified, leaving him to tread air in the middle of a fissure.

Before he could consciously recall his vow of abstinence, Lloyd drove to Wilshire and Beverly Glen and the only destination that gave the softer part of his fissure credibility. Finding the door open, he walked into the entrance hall and cleared his throat to announce his presence. His answer was the shuffle of feet and an unexpected giggle.

"You're early," Linda called out.

Trying to track the voice, Lloyd said, "It's Hopkins, Linda."

Linda stepped out of a closet next to the dining room, dressed in a silk robe. "I know it is."

Lloyd walked forward to meet her. "Am I that predictable?"

Nodding her head both "yes" and "no," Linda said, "I don't know. Just don't apologize for this afternoon. I was as out of line as you. No pretexts this time?"

"No."

"Want to talk before or after?"

"After."

Linda smiled and tilted her head toward the bedroom, then let Lloyd step ahead of her and walk in. When his back was turned, she slipped off her robe and let it fall to the floor. Lloyd swiveled to face the soft sound, seeing Linda nude, framed in the doorway, backlighted by the glow of a hall lamp. Keeping the frame at arm's length, he undressed, wincing when his gunbelt hit the carpet. Linda giggled at the impact, then laughed outright when he leaned over and fumbled off his shoes and socks and snagged his zipper and nearly fell out of his pants. Whispering something that sounded like "beyond the beyond," she slid past him and lay down on the bed. Lloyd saw her take up a beckoning position, a single shaft of light fluttering across her abdomen. Using the light as a beacon, he came to her.

She talked while he held her and felt her and tasted her; little sighs about love and green doors. When his kisses became more persistent and then trailed down to her breasts, those sighs became the gasped word "Yes." Lost in the word's repetition, he let his lips move lower, until "yes" crescendoed into "Now, please, now!"

Lloyd obeyed, joining their two halves in a single abrupt motion, then pulling back to a sustaining movement as Linda coiled herself around him and pushed upward. He moved slowly; she with the unrestrained fervor of a graceful animal exploding with gracelessness, forming a point-counterpoint give and take that battered awareness of technique to death. Then he began to move with her fury, and the cop/whore entity pushed itself into a wordless, gasping trance.

Linda succumbed to reality first, twisting her head from the crook of Lloyd's collarbone. She traced his back with her palms and kissed his neck softly, until he pulled his head from the pillow and looked down on her, revealing a blank, tear-mottled face. All she could think of to say was, "Hopkins."

Lloyd rolled over and took her hand. When he remained silent, Linda said, "It's after. We were going to talk, remember?"

Twisting sideways to face her, Lloyd said, "What do you want to talk about?"

"Anything except what just happened. It was perfect; let's not mess with it."

Lloyd positioned himself so that his eyes and Linda's were only inches apart. "No earth-shaking postcoital revelations?"

Nodding her head so that their noses rubbed, Linda said, "Yes. I'm quitting the Life. I've got seventy grand tucked away, which should set me up in some kind of business enterprise. I'm quitting the shrink, too. If I quit hooking on my own I won't need him, and therapy is too expensive for a fledgling businesswoman.”

“He’ll be very sorry to see you go.”

“I know. He’s a very brilliant shrink, but I shouldn’t associate with men who are obsessed with me. Having pictures of me on the wall is just too sad. Even though he takes them down for my visits, I still feel manipulated. Do you remember the pictures? Exactly how I was posed?”

“You weren’t posed. They were candid type shots.”

Linda’s face clouded. “Really? That’s strange. *All* the pictures in the book were posed.”

Lloyd shrugged, then felt an overlooked connection hit him. *“Never* underestimate your power, even over hardnoses like Havilland. Listen, did you ever mention Stanley Rudolph to him?”

Linda said, “Yes, but not by name. All I mentioned was that he liked to take nude pictures of me. Why? I don’t want to talk about *your* case or *my* clients.”

“Neither do I. What do you want to talk about?”

“Tell me why you broke up with your wife.”

“It’s not a pretty story.”

“It never is.”

Lloyd turned over on his back, wanting to distance himself from Linda. He tried to find the appropriate words to begin his story, then realized that unless he looked her straight in the eye, his prelude would be self-serving lies. Twisting back around and locking into eye contact, he said, “It happened last year. I had been neglecting my family and cheating on my wife with various women for years before that, but last year was when it all exploded.

“I was working Robbery/Homicide, pretty much on the cases I pleased, when I got an anonymous phone call that led me to a murder victim. A young woman. I headed the investigation and dug up information that pointed to a mass murderer who was so fucking smart that no police agency in L.A. County connected any of his killings. At the time I went to my superiors with my information, he had killed at least sixteen women.”

Linda raised a hand to her face and bit the knuckles. Lloyd said, “My superiors wouldn’t authorize an investigation; it was too potentially embarassing to too many police departments. So I went after him myself. Janice left me about that time, taking the girls with her. There was just me and the killer. I found out who he was—a man named Teddy Verplanck. He made the media very big as the Hollywood Slaughterer. You probably heard about him. I went out to get him, but a woman I was seeing got in the way. He killed her. I went out to kill Verplanck. We shot each other up, and another officer, my best friend, killed him. That part of it never hit the media. Janice and the girls don’t know exactly what happened, but they do know that I was shot, and that the whole episode almost cost me my career. Now I’ve got some nightmares to live with and a lot of innocent blood to atone for.”

Linda astonished Lloyd by smiling. “I was expecting some tawdry little tale of other men and other women, not a gothic epic.”

Baffled by the reaction, Lloyd said, “You almost sound titillated by it.”

Linda kissed his lips softly. “My father shot my mother and then blew his brains out. I was ten. I’m no neophyte. Sometimes my thoughts are very dark. Let’s go to sleep on a happy note, though. I want us to be together.”

Lloyd got up and closed the bedroom door, shutting out all traces of light. "So do I," he said.

The morning began with a muffled cadence counting issuing from the living room. Lloyd put it off as Linda gyrating to a TV exercise program and went back to sleep, only to be awakened again minutes later by a firm bite on his neck. He opened his eyes and saw Linda squatting beside the bed in a black leotard. She was sweating and holding one hand behind her back. He leaned forward to kiss her, only to have her dart out of the way of his lips. "What size sweater do you wear?" she asked.

Lloyd sat up and rubbed his eyes. "No kiss? No offer of breakfast? No 'when will I see you again?'"

"Later. Answer my question."

"Size forty-six. Why?"

Linda muttered "shit," and handed Lloyd a Brooks Brothers box tied with a pink ribbon. He opened it and saw a carefully folded navy blue pullover sweater. Stroking its downy front, he whistled and said, "Cashmere. Did you buy this for me?"

Linda shook her head. "I'll tell you the story some day. It's a size too small, but please wear it."

Standing up, Lloyd grabbed Linda and consummated their morning kiss. "Thank you. I'll lose weight so it'll fit better."

"I wouldn't put it past you. What's the matter, Hopkins? You're scowling."

Lloyd broke the embrace. "Delayed reaction to joy. My already complicated life has just gotten much more complicated. I'm glad."

"It's mutual. What happens next?"

"I'm going to New York in a day or so. Thomas Goff comes from there. I'm going to cruise his old haunts and talk to people who knew him. It's my only remaining out. When I get back I'll call you."

"You'd better. Why don't you shower while I make some coffee and toast? I've got my yoga class in an hour, but at least we can have breakfast together."

Lloyd showered, alternating hot and cold jets of water over his body, lost in the sound of the spray and the hum of music coming from the kitchen. After drying off and dressing, he walked into the kitchen and found Linda fiddling with the radio dial. "I hate to be a downer," she said, "but I just heard some bad news. An L.A. policeman was murdered in Malibu. I didn't get all the details, but —"

Lloyd grabbed the radio and flipped the tuner to an all-news station, catching static and the conclusion of a weather report. He sat down and looked at Linda, then put a finger to her lips and said, "They'll repeat the story. Cop killings are hot news."

The weatherman said, "Back to you, Bob," and a stern-voiced announcer took over: "More details on that Malibu killing. L.A. County Sheriff's detectives have just announced that the dead man found on the beach near Pacific Coast Highway and Temescal Canyon Road is a twenty-two-year L.A.P.D. veteran named Howard Christie, a lieutenant assigned to the Rampart Division. Christie's decapitated body was found early this morning by local surfers, who called the Malibu Sheriff's Substation to inform them of the grisly find. Captain Michael

Seidman of the Malibu Station told reporters: ‘This is a homicide, but as yet we do not know the cause of death and have no suspects. We have, however, determined that Lieutenant Christie was killed in the parking lot immediately above the spot on the beach where his body was found. We are now appealing to anyone who was in the vicinity of Pacific Coast Highway and Temescal Canyon Road last night or early this morning, people who might have seen or heard something suspicious. Please come forward. We need your assistance.’ Further details on this story as it breaks. And now—”

Linda turned off the radio and stared at Lloyd. “Tell me, Hopkins.”

“It’s Goff,” Lloyd said, with a death’s-head grin. “I’m not going to New York. If you don’t hear from me in forty-eight hours, send up a flare.” He grabbed his sweater and ran out the door. Linda shuddered, imagining her new lover’s departure as a race into hell.

Pacific Coast Highway and Temescal Canyon Road was a pandemonium of police vehicles with cherry lights flashing, TV minicam crews, mobs of reporters, and a large crowd of rubbernecks that spilled over from the parking blacktop, forcing southbound P.C.H. traffic into the middle lane.

Lloyd pulled up to the dirt shoulder on the land side of the highway and killed his siren, then pinned his badge to his jacket front and dodged cars over to a diagonal stretch of pavement sealed with a length of rope hung with “Official Crime Scene” warnings. The area behind the cordon was filled with plainclothes officers and technicians with evidence kits, and a long bank of pay phones was crowded with uniformed sheriff’s deputies calling in information. At the rear of the scene a half dozen plainclothesmen squatted beside the wooden railing overlooking the cliffs and the ocean, spreading fingerprint powder on a cracked piece of timber.

“I’m surprised it took you this long.”

Recognizing the voice, Lloyd pivoted and saw Captain Fred Gaffaney push his way through a knot of patrol deputies and plant himself in his path. The two men stared at each other until Gaffaney fingered his cross-and-flag tie bar and said, “This is one sensitive piece of work, and I forbid you to interfere. It’s in the Sheriff’s jurisdiction, with I.A.D. handling any connections to collateral cases.”

Lloyd snorted, “Collateral cases? Captain, this is Thomas Goff all the way down the line!”

Gaffaney grabbed Lloyd’s arm. Lloyd buckled, but let himself be led over to the shadow of an empty pay phone.

“Internal Affairs is moving on the other officers whose files were stolen,” the Captain said. “They’re going to be interrogated and perhaps taken into protective custody, along with their families. Except for you. Let’s put the past aside, Sergeant. Tell me what you’ve got so far, and if possible, I’ll help you move on it.”

Lloyd drummed his fingers on the side of the phone booth. “Marty Bergen has at the very least *seen* the stolen files. He’s missing, but some columns that he left for advance publication indicate conclusively that Herzog passed the files to him. I think we should issue an A.P.B. on Bergen, and get a court order to seize everything at the *Big Orange Insider.*”

Gaffaney whistled. “The media will crucify us for it.”

"Fuck the media. I've also got a hearsay line on Goff, through a hotshot psychiatrist who has a patient who knows him. But the cocksucker is hiding behind professional privilege and won't kick loose with the name of his source."

"Have you considered talking to Nathan Steiner?"

Lloyd nodded. "Yeah. I'm going to run by his office today. What have *you* got? The radio report said Christie was decapitated, which sounds like possible forty-one stuff."

Gaffaney's hands played over his tie bar. "I've got an excellent reconstruction from a team of very savvy sheriff's dicks. The M.E.'s verdict won't be in for hours, but this is the way they see it:

"One—yes, it's a gunshot homicide. Christie was shot over by that broken piece of railing, and was blown down to the beach by the impact. I saw the body. It landed on some rocks up from the tide, so it stayed dry. I saw powder burns on his shirtfront, so the shots were obviously fired point-blank. Two—Christie *was* decapitated, but the biggest piece of his head the technicians have been able to find so far is a skull fragment about the size of a half dollar. You know why? He was almost certainly killed with his own gun. It wasn't found on his body or anywhere around here. His badge was stolen, too. I talked to one of the top dogs at Rampart, and he told me that Christie packed a three-fifty-seven Python on and off duty, and that he kept it loaded with teflon-tipped dum-dum's." Gaffaney reached into his pants pocket and handed Lloyd a copper-jacketed slug. "Feel the weight of that monster, Hopkins. I took it off of Christie's gunbelt while the medics weren't looking. The expended rounds and Christie's head are probably halfway to Catalina by now."

Lloyd gouged the slug's teflon head with his fingernail. "Shit. Those Sheriff's dicks are probably right; this is a much heavier load than a forty-one. What else? Anything from Avonoco? Christie's vehicle? Other vehicles? Witnesses? Blood tracks on the pavement?"

The Captain put a restraining hand on Lloyd's chest. "Slow down, you're making me nervous. There's nothing on any of that yet, except a trail of blood leading from the railing across the parking lot and through the underpass to the other side of P.C.H. The trail got fainter as it went along, which indicates that the killer himself wasn't wounded, he was just soaked with Christie's blood. The techs are doing their comparison tests now; we'll know for sure soon. What's *your* next move?"

"Pump Nate Steiner for some legal advice. Hassle the shrink. You?"

Captain Fred Gaffaney grinned. "Interrogate the other security chiefs, go over their records, rattle skeletons. The feds are at Avonoco now. Christie's security rating makes him a quasi-federal employee, so this is a collateral F.B.I, beef. Stay in touch, Hopkins. If you want transcripts of the I.A.D. interrogations, call Dutch Peltz."

Lloyd walked back to his car, oblivious to the ghouls lining P.C.H., drinking beer and standing on their tiptoes to get a glimpse of the drama. He had his hand on the door when the young man from the *Big Orange Insider* drove by and flipped him the finger.

Nathan Steiner was a Beverly Hills attorney who specialized in defending drug dealers. His forte was "obstructionist" tactics—filing writs and court orders, suits and countersuits, and motions requesting information on prospective jurors, potential witnesses, and courtroom functionaries; all strategies aimed at securing dismissals on the grounds of prejudiced testimony or "courtroom bias." These strategies often worked, but more often "Nate the Great" won his cases by outlasting judges and prosecutors and by harassing them into foolish blunders with his paperwork onslaughts. It was well known that many judges granted his minor petitioning requests automatically, in the hope that it would keep his clients *out* of their courtrooms and thus save them the pain of a protracted Steiner performance; it was *not* well known that "Nate the Great" felt deep guilt over the scores of dope vultures cut loose from jail as the result of his machinations and that despite his loud advocacy of civil liberties, he atoned for that guilt by advising L.A.P.D. officers on ways to circumvent laws regarding probable cause and search and seizure.

Thus, when Lloyd barged through his office door unannounced, he was ready to listen. Taking a seat uninvited, Lloyd outlined a hypothetical case involving a doctor's legal right not to divulge professionally secured information, stressing that *all* of the doctor's records would have to be seized, because at this point the name of the patient was unkown.

Concluding his case, Lloyd sat back and waited for an answer. When Steiner grunted and said, "Give me three or four days to look at some statutes and think about it," Lloyd got to his feet and smiled. Steiner asked him what the smile meant.

"It means that I'm an obstructionist, too," Lloyd said.

After stopping at a taco stand and wolfing a burrito plate, Lloyd drove home and changed clothes, outfitting himself in soiled khaki pants and shirt, work boots, and a baseball cap advertising Miller High Life. Satisfied with his workingman's garb and one-day stubble, he rummaged through his garage and came up with a set of burglar's tools he had scavenged from a Central Division evidence locker ten years before: battery-powered hand drill with cadmium steel bits; assorted hook-edged chisels, and a skinny-head crowbar and mallet. Packing them inside a tool kit, he drove to Century City and the commission of a Class B felony.

The reconnoitering took three hours.

Parking on a residential side street a half mile from Century City proper, Lloyd walked to Olympic and Century Park East and found a uniformed custodian sweeping the astroturf lawn in front of his target building. He explained to the man that he was here to help with a private wiring job for a firm situated on the skyscraper's twenty-sixth floor. Only one thing worried him. He needed an electrical hook-up with wall sockets big enough to accommodate his industrial-sized tools. Also, it would be nice to have a sink in which to scrape off rusted parts. The location didn't matter; he had plenty of cord. Was there a custodian's storeroom or something like that on the twenty-sixth floor?

The man had nodded with a befuddled look in his eyes, making Lloyd grateful for the fact that he seemed stupid. Finally he gave a last nod and said that yes, every floor had a custodial room, in the identical spot—the northest edge of the building. Would the custodian on that floor let him use it for his job? Lloyd asked.

The man's eyes clouded again. He was silent for several moments, then replied that the best thing to do was wait until the custodians went home at four, then ask the guard in the lobby for the key to the storeroom. That way, everything would be cool. Lloyd thanked the man and walked into he building.

He checked the northeast corners of the third, fifth, and eighth floors, finding identical doors marked "Maintenance." The doors themselves looked solid, but there was lots of wedge space at the lock. If no witnesses were around, it would be easy.

With two hours to kill before the custodial crew left work, Lloyd took service stairs down to ground level, then walked to a medical supply store on Pico and Beverly Drive and purchased a pair of surgical rubber gloves. Walking back slowly to Century City, all thoughts of the Goff/Herzog/Bergen/Christie labyrinth left his mind, replaced by an awareness of one of his earliest insights: crime was a thrill.

Stationed in the shade of a plastic tree on the astroturf lawn in front of his target, Lloyd saw a dozen men wearing maintenance uniforms exit the building at exactly 4:02. He waited for ten minutes, and when no others appeared, grabbed his toolbox and walked in, straight past the guard and over to the serivce stairs next to the elevators, donning his gloves the second he hit the privacy of the empty stairwell. Breathing deeply, he treaded slowly up twenty-six stories and pushed through a connecting doorway, finding himself directly across from Suite 2614.

The hallway was empty and silent. Lloyd got his bearings and assumed a casual gait as he walked past Dr. John Havilland's door. When he got to the maintenance room, he scanned the hallway one time, then took the crowbar from his tool kit and wedged it into the juncture of door and jamb. He leaned forward with all his weight, and the door snapped open.

The storeroom was six feet deep and packed with brooms, mops and industrial chemicals. Lloyd stepped inside and flicked on the light switch, then closed the door and loaded his hand drill with a two-inch bit. Squatting, he pressed the start switch and jammed the bit into the door two feet above floor level. Pushing the drill forward and rotating it clockwise simultaneously, he bored a hole that was inconspicuously small yet provided a solid amount of air. Hitting the kill switch, he sat down and tried to get comfortable. Seven o'clock was the earliest safe break-in time; until then, all he could do was wait.

Swallowed up by darkness, Lloyd listened to the sounds of departing office workers, checking their departures against the luminous dial of his wristwatch. There was a deluge at five, others at five-thirty and six. After that it was uninterrupted silence.

At seven, Lloyd got up and stretched, then opened the storeroom door halfway, reaccustoming his eyes to light. When all his senses readjusted, he picked up his tool kit and walked down the hall to Suite 2604.

The lock was a single unit steel wraparound, with the key slot inset in the doorknob. Lloyd tried his burglar's picks first, starting with the shortest and working up, getting inside the keyhole but jamming short of the activator button. This left the options of drilling or jimmying. Lloyd gauged the odds of individual suites in a security building having individual alarms and decided that the odds were in his favor. He got out his skinny-head crowbar and pried the door open.

Darkness and silence greeted him.

Lloyd shut the door quietly, brushing slivers of cracked wood off the doorjamb and onto the outer office carpet. He fumbled for the wall switch, found it, and lit up the waiting room. Linda Wilhite beamed down from the walls. Lloyd blew her a kiss, then tried the door to Havilland's private office. It was unlocked. He flicked off the waiting room light and took a penlight from his pocket, letting its tiny beam serve as his directional finder. Whispering, "Let's go real slow, let's be real cool," he walked inside.

Playing his light over the walls, Lloyd caught flashes of highly varnished oak, framed diplomas, and the Edward Hopper painting he had seen on his initial visit. Arcing his light at waist level, he circuited the entire room, picking up bookcases filled with leather-bound medical texts, straight-backed chairs facing each other, and Havilland's ornate oak desk. *No filing cabinets.*

Thinking, *safe,* Lloyd felt along with walls, stopping to read the diplomas before reaching behind them. Harvard Medical School; St. Vincent's and Castleford Hospitals. East Coast money all the way, but nothing except wood paneling in back of them.

Lloyd slid back the Hopper painting and hit pay dirt, then slammed the wall when he saw that the safe was an Armbruster "Ultimate," triple lead-lined and impregnable. It was the shrink's desk or nothing.

Lloyd moved to the desk, holding the penlight with his teeth and getting out his burglar's picks. He grabbed the top drawer to hold it steady for the insertion, then nearly fell backward when it slid open in his hand.

The drawer was stuffed with pens, blank paper, and paper clips and a bottom layer of manila folders. Lloyd pulled them out and scanned the index tabs stuck to their upper right hand corners. Typed last names, first names, and middle initials. *Patients.*

There were five folders, all of them filled with loose pages. Seeing that the first three bore women's names, Lloyd put them aside and read through the fourth, learning that William A. Waterston HI had difficulty relating to women because of his relationship with his domineering grandmother, and that he and Havilland had been exploring the problem twice a week for six years, at the rate of one hundred and ten dollars per hour. Lloyd scrutinized the photograph that accompanied the psychiatric rundown. Waterston did not sound or look like the type of man who would know Thomas Goff; he looked like an aristocratic nerd who needed to get laid.

Lloyd checked the index tab on the last file, seeing that a string of aliases forced the typist to move from the tab onto the front of the folder: Oldfield, Richard; a.k.a. Richard Brown; a.k.a. Richard Green; a.k.a. Richard Goff.

The last alias went through Lloyd like a convulsion. He opened the folder. A color snapshot was attached to the first page; a head and shoulders shot of a man who resembled Thomas Goff to a degree that fell just short of twinhood. Lloyd read through the entire fourteen pages of the file, shuddering when the facts of the resemblance were made clear.

Richard Oldfield was Thomas Goff's illegitimate half-brother, the result of a union between Goff's mother and a wealthy upstate New York textile manufacturer. He had entered therapy with Dr. John Havilland four years before, his love/hate relationship with his half-brother his "salient neurosis." Thomas

Goff was a brilliant criminal; Richard Oldfield a stockbroker-remittance man living largely on stipends shamed and coerced out of his father by Goff's alcoholic mother, who had raised the two boys together. After wading through long paragraphs of psychiatric ruminations, Lloyd felt the blood theme emerge: Richard Oldfield's desire to emulate Thomas Goff had driven him to undertake a sporadic criminal career, burglarizing homes known to contain art objects, acting on information from stock exchange acquaintances. *Hence the Stanley Rudolph connection,* obscured by Havilland's cowardly manipulations: he wanted to surrender *the Goff connection* to police scrutiny, without divulging the name of his patient. Richard Oldfield's occasional usage of his half brother's name was what Havilland termed "cross-purpose identification—the desire to assume a person's identity and act out both loved and hated aspects of their personalities, thereby restoring order to their own psyches, resolving the love-hatred ambivalance into an acceptable norm."

Reading the file a second time, paying close attention to the most recently dated additions, Lloyd learned that Oldfield's surrender to the Goff psyche was becoming more pronounced, assuming "pathological dimensions." Goff hated women and prowled bars looking for ones to abuse; Oldfield paid prostitutes to let him beat them. Goff hated policemen and spoke often of his desire to kill them; Oldfield now aped his half brother's broadsides. The last file entry was dated 2/27/84, slightly over two months earlier, and stated that "Richard Oldfield was assuming the proportions of the classic paranoid/schizophrenic criminal type."

Lloyd put the folder down, wondering if Oldfield had discontinued therapy in February or if Havilland had more data on him elsewhere. He rummaged through the other drawers until he found a metal Rolodex file. Oldfield's address and phone number were right there under the O's—4109 Windemere, Hollywood, 90036; 464-7892.

Lloyd sat still for a full minute, fuming at the fact that his illegal entry would destroy the possibility of ever hanging an accessory rap on Havilland. Then he thought of Richard Oldfield and went calm beneath his rage. Putting the files back in their proper place, and sorting the ramifications of the B & E, he picked up the tool kit and made for the door, thinking: Don't let Havilland know that his secrets have been plundered; don't give him reason to warn Oldfield, who might warn Goff. *Cover your tracks.*

Lloyd looked at the splintered doorjamb and calculated more odds, then got out his crowbar and padded over to the door of the adjoining suite. Thinking, *just do it,* he pried the door open.

Only the sound of cracking wood assailed him. He hit the next door and the door after that, then heard the blare of an alarm cut through the echoes of his destruction.

The noise grew, then leveled off to a piercing drone. Lloyd grabbed his tool kit and ran toward the maintenance storeroom, checking the elevator bank as he passed it. The flashing numbers on top said that armed help was on the sixth floor and ascending rapidly.

Lloyd opened the storeroom door, then let it close halfway. He paced off three yards to the service stairs across the hallway and closed the door behind him, leaving himself just enough of a crack to peer through. Seconds later he heard the elevator door open, followed by the sounds of running footsteps and strained breathing drawing nearer. When he saw a single uniformed guard draw his gun and step cautiously inside the storeroom, he nudged his door open and hurled himself across the hallway, pushing the storeroom door shut. There was a panicked "What the fuck!" from the guard trapped inside, and then six shots tore through the door and ricocheted down the hallway.

Lloyd stepped inside the service stairs, picked up his toolbox and hurtled down twenty-six stories to ground level. Chest heaving and soaked with sweat, he pushed the connecting door into the lobby open. No one. He walked out the door and across the astroturf lawn to Century Park East, restraining himself by assuming a nothing-to-hide gait. He was safely inside his unmarked cruiser when he heard the wail of sirens converge on the scene of his crime. With shaking hands, he drove to the Hollywood Hills.

Windemere Drive was a residential side street in the shadow of the Hollywood Bowl. One-story tudor cottages dominated the 4100 block, and the sidewalk was free of tree and shrub overhang. It was a good surveillance spot.

Lloyd parked at the corner and circled the block on foot. No yellow Toyota. Coming back around, he flashed his penlight at the numbers stenciled on the curb. 4109 was two doors down from where he had left his car, on the opposite side of the street. He checked his watch. At 8:42 the stucco and wood tudor house was pitch dark.

He walked back to his unmarked Matador and grabbed the Ithaca pump stashed under the driver's seat. After jacking a shell into the chamber, he walked over to 4109 and rang the doorbell.

No answer and no light coming from inside. Lloyd pressed his face to the front picture window. Heavy curtains blocked his vision. Hugging close to the walls, he padded across the porch and around the driveway to the back yard. No car; thick drapes covering all the windows. The opposite side of the house was shielded from foot access by an overgrown hedge connected to the house next door. Lloyd craned his neck to get a quick look, glimpsing more darkened windows. Sounds from brightly lit neighboring dwellings underlined 4109's lack of habitation. He walked back to his car to wait.

Slouching low in the driver's seat, Lloyd waited, keeping a sustained eyeball fix on 4109. It was almost an hour later that a white Mercedes pulled to the curb in front of the house. A man too tall to be Thomas Goff and a woman in a white nurse's uniform got out and moved into a side-by-side lovers' drape. The woman squealed as the man nuzzled her neck. Together they walked up the steps and into the house. A light glowed behind the heavy curtains as the door was shut.

Lloyd stared at the curtains and thought of the woman. If she was a prostitute, Oldfield would probably pay her to stand his abuse. But that didn't click; her uniform and affectionate manner spelled girlfriend or pick-up. Keeping his impatience at bay by concentrating on the need not to risk the woman's safety, Lloyd settled in to wait out the night.

LAUGHING voices and a burst of light cut across the Night Tripper's field of vision, casting a rainbow haze over his infrared image of Lloyd Hopkins slouching in the front seat of his car. He put down the magnification lens he was holding to his eye and smiled. "Hello, Sherry. Hello, Richard," he said.

Sherry giggled. "Hi, Lloyd." Her uniform was a size too small and looked like it would split down the middle should she attempt anything more strenuous than walking in a straight line. She sniffed back a wad of mucous and giggled again. Havilland smiled. Coked to the gills.

He sized up his leading man.

Oldfield stood with his back up against the bolted door, in a posture that reminded the Doctor of a staunch medieval warrior trying to keep demons at bay, never guessing that they resided inside him. Last night Havilland had called him to his Malibu grouping retreat and had primed him for his performance by whispering death poems in his ear while he scrubbed Howard Christie's blood from the seats of his Volvo. The recitation had had a calming effect on them both; and now Richard Oldfield was a quiet nuclear warhead.

Sherry laughed and undid the top button of her uniform blouse. Ofdfield walked to the middle of the living room and said, "Ready when you are, C.B."

Sherry giggled at the remark; Havilland could hear traces of stage fright. He walked to Oldfield and threw an arm around his shoulder. "Hold on just a minute, will you, Sherry? I want to talk to your co-star alone."

Sherry nodded and kicked off her shoes. The Doctor led Oldfield back to the bedroom and swept an arm toward its new furnishings. "Isn't it wonderful, Richard? One of your co-counselees helped me set it up while you were asleep out at the retreat."

Oldfield darted his eyes over white velvet curtains shuttering the windows; his mattress removed from the bedstead and centered on the middle of the floor, covered with light blue silk sheets; a movie camera on a tripod with its gaze zeroing downward. He dry swallowed and whispered, "Please take me as far as I can go."

Havilland embraced him, letting his lips touch his ear. "Yes. You helped *me* last night, Richard. I was afraid. You took me through that fear, just as I have taken you through your fears. Just one reminder. When she abuses you, think of all the abuse that governess made you take as a child. Keep your fuel intake at optimum, right up until the moment. Now wait here."

The Doctor walked back into the living room. Sherry Shroeder was sitting on the couch, her uniform top completely unbuttoned. "I didn't know whether or not to strip," she said.

Sitting down beside her, Havilland said, “Not yet. Button up your outfit while I give you directions.” He put a hand on her knee as she fumbled at her top. “What we are filming is a variation on the corny old nurse routine. You know, nurses are supposed to be very experienced, because they know so much about bodies.”

Sherry laughed. Havilland noticed that her nervousness had subsided. Squeezing her knee gently, he said, “This variation is the nurse spanking the boy, who of course is Richard—really a man—and then getting so aroused that she has to seduce him. What I want you to do is pull down Richard’s pants and spank him *hard,* very *hard,* then do the most seductive striptease you are capable of. After that I’ll give both of you more specific instructions. Do you understand?”

Sherry waggled her eyebrows. “I used to play tennis when I was a little girl. I’ve got a great backhand.” She laughed and covered her mouth. “Richard’s got a really sharp bod. Where’s the camera guy?”

“Well …” Havilland said, “to be frank, I can’t afford one, so I’m filling in. You and Richard came too high, so to cut costs, I’m standing in behind the camera myself. I—”

Sherry poked a teasing finger in the Doctor’s ribs. “Come on, Lloyd. As Gary Gilmore said, ‘Let’s do it.’”

They walked into the bedroom. Oldfield was sprawled on his back across the mattress, fully clothed. Havilland got behind the camera, adjusting the tripod and swiveling the lens until the mattress was captured in a wide-angle shot. Clearing his throat, he said, “Since this is a silent movie, please feel free to talk—but *quietly*. I don’t want to upset the neighbors.” He turned the camera on and listened to the whir of film. “Sherry, you know what to do. Richard, follow Sherry’s lead, but position your face on the *near* side of the mattress, so I can get some close shots. Okay, action!”

Sherry sat down on the edge of the mattress, facing the camera. She extended her legs in front of her, resting her heels on the floor. Patting her lap, she said, “Come on, you bad boy.”

Oldfield obeyed, getting to his feet and loosening his belt, then lying down across Sherry’s legs, positioning his buttocks just above her knees. “Bad, bad boy,” she said as she pulled down his pants and undershorts. “Bad, bad boy.”

Havilland zoomed in for a close-up reaction shot just as Sherry’s first slap hit naked flesh. Oldfield grimaced. “Harder, Sherry,” the Doctor said.

Sherry redoubled her efforts, grunting “Bad, bad boy,” each time her palm made contact. Oldfield’s lens-framed eyes contracted with the blows. Havilland hissed, “Harder, Sherry, harder. Remember your tennis stroke.”

“Bad bad bad bad boy!” Sherry brought her hand down full force. Oldfield’s eyes glazed over and dry spittle formed at the corners of his mouth. Havilland took his eye from the camera and saw that raised red dots were forming on his buttocks. “Bad bad bad bad bad boy!”

“Cut!”

The Doctor’s own shout startled him. “Cut,” he repeated softly. “That’s a print. Richard, go wait in the hall. Sherry, step off the mattress and do your striptease.”

The actors obeyed, Oldfield drawing himself to his feet and cinching his pants without meeting Sherry’s eyes; Sherry kneading her flushed right hand. When

Richard was outside the bedroom, Havilland said, “Be your sexiest,” and swung the camera up. “Now,” he said.

Sherry Shroeder began to undress, plucking at the buttons on her uniform. She took off her blouse and dropped it on the floor, then snagged the zipper at the back of her skirt. Jerking it loose, she muttered, “Shit,” then caught herself and pouted at the camera, stepping out of the skirt and twirling it on a finger above her head. Letting it drop, she unhooked her bra and pulled down her stockings and panties. Nude, she did a pelvis grinding dancestep that caused her breasts to shake in opposite directions. Covered with goosebumps, she silently mouthed song lyrics and tried to pout at the same time. Zooming in for a close-up, the Doctor thought that he could detect the words to “Green Door.”

“Cut!”

Again the Doctor’s own voice jolted him. “Lie down, Sherry,” he said. “Richard, you can come in now.”

Oldfield reentered the bedroom, naked, holding his hands over his genitals. Havilland pointed to the bed, then shut off the camera and checked the expended film cylinder. Film to burn. He framed a long shot of the mattress and the two performers on it, then locked in the tripod and said, “I’m a little shy, so I’ll let you pros do what comes naturally. I’ll come back and check on you in a few minutes.”

Sherry laughed and Oldfield flinched. Havilland flipped the automatic forward switch and walked out to the dining room. Poking his infrared lens through a crack in the curtains, he saw his *best* actor perform.

Lloyd Hopkins, stuffed fat with bait, was still sitting inside his car, still staring daggers at the house. The allusions to illegal searches in his personnel file had been accurate—he was not above committing crime to solve crimes. He was a hypocritical snake, *and* a cowardly one—undoubtedly afraid of approaching his suspect for fear of jeopardizing the fair damsel in the bedroom. Havilland watched him yawn, scratch, and stretch without ever taking his eyes from the tudor cottage. Each tiny move was like a laser beam piercing the childhood void.

Checking his watch, the Doctor saw that ten minutes had passed. He walked to the bedroom. Sherry and Richard were lying on opposite sides of the mattress. He turned the camera off and stared at his performers. Sherry was positioned on one elbow, an arm across her breasts. Richard lay rock still, eyes closed, twitching.

“We did it soft,” Sherry said. “I think we faked it pretty good. Richard couldn’t, you know, but I think it still looked okay. If you want we can try again and shoot some hard shots.”

Havilland walked to the bedroom closet and ran his hand over a ledge at the back, coming away with a thick roll of adhesive bandage. “No, that does it, except for some clothed shots I want to get. You can get dressed now.”

“*Really*?”

“Really. I’ll give you the rest of your money in a minute.”

Richard’s eyes twitched open at the phrase. He got to his feet and stretched, then pulled on his pants and shirt and took the tape from the Doctor’s hand. “Thank you for helping me go beyond my beyond,” he said.

Havilland looked into his eyes and saw frozen rage. He focused the camera at Sherry and hit the on switch. Sherry finished buttoning her blouse and said, “Lloyd, can we make this quick? There’s a party in the Valley at eleven-thirty, and since this was quicker than I thought, I’d like to make it.”

Havilland nodded assent and telescoped the lens so that Sherry’s face was held in an extreme close-up. “Now, Richard,” he said.

The viewfinder went black as Richard Oldfield hurled himself beyond his beyond. A high-pitched shriek died into a struggle for breath; crashing bodies caused a blank wall to sway before the camera’s eye. The Night Tripper tried to refocus, then gave up. Richard pinned Sherry to the floor with his knees, one hand holding her head, the other swirling tape up from her mouth to her nose. When both passages were shut air tight, he stood up and watched her face turn red, then blue and her arms and legs flail. Soon her entire body became a collective gasp; her torso pushing off the floor in an adrenaline-fueled death throe.

Oldfield fell to his knees and pummeled the flailing body, throwing right-left combinations at the groin and ribcage until all resistance ended in a last shudder of asphyxiation. Now weeping, he stood up on wobbly legs and saw the Doctor with the camera strapped to his shoulder, bending down, pulling the bandage off of Sherry Shroeder’s face.

“Now, Richard. Now, Richard. Now, Richard.”

The Night Tripper was holding out a silencer-fitted revolver. Richard took it in his hand, then looked down, seeing the dead woman’s face covered with a transparent plastic pillow.

“Now, Richard. Now, Richard. Now, Richard.”

The camera zoomed in and whirred; Oldfield pressed the barrel to the pillow and pulled the trigger. There was a dull plop, then the hiss of escaping air, then a spread of crimson as the deflated plastic filled with blood.

“Yes, Richard. Yes, Richard. Yes, Richard.”

The Night Tripper steadied the camera, pushing the eyepiece out of his way. He took the gun from Richard’s hand and flipped the cylinder open, letting the spent round fall to the floor. The Bronx ferris wheel became a whirling corkboard. He took two fresh rounds from his pocket and placed them in adjoining chambers, then flicked the cylinder shut and spun it.

Richard Oldfield stood slack-jawed, swaying to self-contained music. The Night Tripper took a Dodger baseball cap and Howard Christie’s badge from his jacket, placing the cap on Richard’s head, pinning the badge to his left breast pocket. He placed the camera back on the tripod, then filmed close-ups of the badge, the cap and Richard’s face. Thinking of Linda Wilhite and toppling chess pieces, he picked the gun up off the floor and placed it in Richard’s right hand. Getting back behind the camera, he said, “Do you feel complete now, Richard?”

“Yes,” Richard said.

“Articulate how you feel.”

“I feel as if I’ve conquered my past, that I’ve broken through all my green doors with the promise of peace as my reward.”

“Will you go one step further for me? It will help a beautiful woman to resolve her nightmares.”

“Yes. Name it.”

“Stick the gun in your mouth and pull the trigger twice.”

Richard obeyed without question. The hammer clicked on empty chambers.

The Night Tripper captured his finest moment on film, then ran to the dining room curtains and looked out with his blood-colored lens. Lloyd Hopkins was asleep, his head cradled into the half-open car window.

9

LLOYD awoke at dawn, startled out of a dreamless sleep by a sharp cramp in his leg. Rubbing his calf, he looked out of the car window and saw the tudor cottage and the white Mercedes parked in the same spot as the night before. Oldfield's shackup was still in progress. He had time to go home and call for reinforcements to aid him in a continued surveillance and possible approach.

Lloyd swung his Matador around and pulled up behind the Mercedes. He wrote down the license number, then called R. & I. on his two way radio and read it off, requesting a complete readout on both vehicle and owner. After three minutes of static crackle, the operator came back on the air with her information. FHM 363—No wants; no warrants. Registered to Richard Brian Oldfield, 4109 Windemere, L.A. 90036. No wants; no warrants; no criminal record. Discouraged and exhausted despite his hours of sleep, Lloyd drove home, thinking of a shave, a shower, and lots of coffee.

A three-day accumulation of newspapers greeted him on his front porch. The previous day's *L.A. Times* bore a banner headline: "Policeman Murdered in Malibu." A sidebar added, "Execution Style Death for L.A.P.D. Lieutenant." Lloyd kicked the papers aside and unlocked the door, seeing the stapled together notebook pages on the floor immediately. Picking them up, he read:

> Memo to: Lloyd
> From: Dutch.
> *Read now.*
>
> L.—Where have you been? Shacking? I thought you turned over a new leaf. I'm your liaison, and we were supposed to be in daily contact, remember? This info is straight from Gaffaney. I'll save the good stuff for last.
>
> *A.P.B. issued on Marty Bergen—no response as yet.
>
> *Seizure order for *Big Orange Insider* granted, yield—zilch. Punk kid editor had contents of M.B.'s desk destroyed after your last visit. Is threatening "police brutality" suit.
>
> *Intensive questioning of P.C.H./Temescal Cyn. area residents—zilch.
>
> *Phone-in info. on Christie—so far crank bullshit. (No eyewitnesses have come forth.)
>
> *Blood on pavement—conclusively Christie's.
>
> *Additional skull fragment and flattened slug found on beach (.357 teflon tipped). This, + coroners report—"Death caused by massive neurological destruction inflicted by gunshots fired at point-blank range," indicate that Christie was killed with his own gun.
>
> *Sacramento D.M.V. night info. operator (she saw account of Christie's death in papers) called in, said that Christie called at 8:30 or so on the night of the

murder, requesting D.M.V. make on car license. She gave info., but cannot remember the name of the person she gave him, or the lic. #, or the make of the car. Interesting, because the M.E. fixed the time of H.C.'s death at around the time of the call.

*On afternoon of his death, Christie was seen around classified file section at Avonoco. He told secretary he was meeting a "heavy hitter" at the beach that night. When secretary asked why, he clammed up. She said he seemed agitated and elated.

*Re: I.A.D. interviews—Rolando, clean. Kaiser, Tucker, Murray, in protective custody, appear to be clean.

****! Important—while I.A.D. officers were checking out offices of Junior Miss Cosmetics, security guard freaked out and tried to run. He was apprehended and taken into custody (Pos. of marijuana.) Gaffaney is convinced he has guilty knowledge. This man (Hubert Douglas, M.N., age 39) yelped for you (said you were "cool" when you busted him for G.T.A. years ago). *Will talk only to you.* Come to P.C. *immediately.* (Gaffaney's orders) before Douglas makes bail or wangles a writ.

***Call me—D.P.

Lloyd didn't bother to shave or shower or change clothes. Still wearing his B & E outfit, he drove straight to a liquor store. As he recalled, Hubert Douglas was a bonded sourmash fiend. A pint of Jack Daniel's seemed like the ticket to soothe his soul and loosen his tongue. After purchasing the bottle, he raced downtown to Parker Center.

Hubert Douglas was being held in an interrogation cubicle adjoining Fred Gaffaney's office. Lloyd looked through the one-way glass and saw him sitting across a table from the captain, dressed in security guard's uniform replete with gold epaulets and a Sam Browne belt. A loudspeaker about the window crackled with his story of Come-San-Chin, the Chinese cocksucker. Gaffaney listened with his head bowed, fingering his cross-and-flag tie bar.

Lloyd walked in the door just as Douglas delivered his punch line and doubled over with laughter, slapping the table and exclaiming, "Dig it! Dig it!" Seeing Lloyd, he said, "Hopkins, my man!" and got up and extended his hand. Lloyd took it and said, "Hello, Hubert. My colleagues treating you okay?"

Douglas nodded toward Gaffaney, who looked up and glared at Lloyd. "This joker keeps asking me questions. I keep tellin' him I'll talk to you, and he keeps tellin' me you out of touch, the heavy implication bein' that you out pourin' the pork somewhere. I know my rights. I been in custody almost twenty-four hours. You gots to arraign me within twenty-four hours or cut me loose."

Lloyd looked at Gaffaney, then back at Douglas. "Wrong, Hubert. This is Saturday. We can legally hold you until Monday morning. Have a seat. I'll be back to talk to you after I have a few words with the captain."

Gaffaney got up and followed Lloyd outside. Measuring him with disdainful eyes, he said, "You need a shave and your clothes are filthy. Where have you been?"

"Out pulling burglaries," Lloyd said. "What's with Hubert?"

Gaffaney pushed the cubicle door shut. "I was at Junior Miss Cosmetics, along with an aide. We were talking to Dan Murray in his office. We had just gotten word that Christie was checking out the classified file section at Avonoco several hours before he was shot. Since my instincts regarding Murray's behavior told me he was clean, I mentioned it. Douglas was washing windows in the next room. My aide thought he looked hinky and cop-wise, so he kept an eye on him. He bolted when the conversation turned to files. My aide caught him with a big bag of weed in his pocket. He *knows* something, Hopkins. Get it out of him."

Lloyd let his mental wheels spin. "Captain, have you thrown the name Thomas Goff at that D.M.V. operator who called in about Christie?"

"Yes. I talked to her myself. She said that Goff was *not* the name she dug up for Christie. I also gave her the license number and a description of Goff's vehicle. Negative on that too. What do you—"

Lloyd hushed the captain with a hand on his shoulder. "Has Douglas seen the mug shots of Goff?"

"No."

"Then get me a copy of them now, and run me a complete all-police computer check on this name—Richard Brian Oldfield, white male, about thirty. Four-one-oh-nine Winder-mere, Hollywood. White Mercedes, FHM-three-six-three. He's clean on wants and warrants, but I need all the details I can get."

Gaffaney nodded, then said, "What are you fishing for?"

"I'll tell you after I've spoken to Douglas. Will you get me those mug shots now?"

The Captain walked into his office, flushing from his neck all the way up to his crewcut. Returning to Lloyd and handing him the mug-shot strip, he hissed, "Don't make Douglas any promises of leniency."

Lloyd gave his superior officer a guileless smile. "No, sir." When Gaffaney walked back to his office, he entered the cubicle and flipped off the loudspeaker. "Let's make a deal," he said to Hubert Douglas, placing the pint of Jack Daniel's on the table between them. "Tell me what I want to know, and you walk. Fuck me around, and I hotfoot it up to Narco Division and glom a pound of reefer to add to the bag the I.A.D. bulls took off you, making it a felony possession bust. What'll it be?"

Douglas grabbed the bottle and downed half of it in one gulp. "Do I look stupid, Hopkins?"

"No, you look intelligent and handsome and full of *savoir-faire.* Let's accomplish this with a minumum of bullshit and jive. The I.A.D. bulls think that you have some guilty knowledge regarding the classified files at Junior Miss. Let's take it from there."

Douglas coughed and breathed bourbon in Lloyd's face. "But what if that there guilty knowledge involves coppin' to some illegal shit I pulled?"

"You still walk."

"No shit, Dick Tracy?"

"If I'm lyin', I'm flyin'. Talk, Hubert."

Douglas knocked back a drink and wiped his lips. "'Bout three weeks ago I was drinkin' in a juke joint down the street from Junior Miss. This paddy dude starts a conversation with me, asks me if I like workin' security at Junior Miss, what my duties was, how tight I was in with the security boss, that kind of rebop. He buys me drinks up the ying yang, gets me righteously lubed, then splits. I ain't no dummy, I knows this dude and I ain't seen the last of each other."

Douglas paused and grabbed the bottle. Lloyd snatched it out of his hand before he could bring it to his lips. Placing the mugshot strip on the table, he said, “Is this the man?”

Douglas stared at the photos and grinned from ear to ear. “Righteous. That’s the dude. What kind of shit did he pull?”

“Never mind. Finish your story.”

Casting sad eyes at the pint, Douglas said, “I was right. The dude shows up the very next day, and offers to get me coked. We toot some righteous pharmaceutical blow in the john, then he starts talkin’ about this righteous smart fuckin’ buddy of his, how the guy was fuckin’ obsessed with fuckin’ *data,* you know, obsessed with knowin’ the fuckin’ skinny on other peoples lives. You dig?”

“I dig,” Lloyd said. “Did he tell you the man’s name? Did he describe him? Did he say that the man was his half-brother?”

Douglas shook his head. “The fucker didn’t even tell me his own fuckin’ name, let alone the name of his fuckin’ buddy. But dig, that day he makes his pitch: one K and two grams of pharmacy blow for Xerox copies of all the classified files. I tell him it’s gonna take time, I gotta make them copies a couple at a time, on the sly. So I does it, without Murray or anyone else at Junior Miss knowin’ about it. The dude calls me at the bar to set the tr—”

Lloyd interrupted: “Did he give you an address or a phone number where he could be reached?”

“Fuck, no! He kept callin’ himself a ‘justified paranoid’ and said that he covered his tracks when he took a fuckin’ piss, just to stay in fuckin’ practice. He wouldn’t even call me at my fuckin’ crib; it had to be the fuckin’ bar. Anyways, we sets up the trade-off, last week sometime, Tuesday or Wednesday night, and man, it was righteously fuckin’ strange. Kick loose with that jug, will you, homeboy? I’m thirsty.”

Lloyd slid the bottle across the table. “Tell me about the trade-off. Take it slow and be very specific.”

Douglas guzzled half of the remaining whiskey. “Righteous. Anyway, I been observin’ the dude, and to my mind he seems like he ain’t wound together too tight. You know, this seems to be a dude that you might wanta call seriously nervous and itchy. We sets up the meet for Nichols Canyon Park, at night. The dude shows up in his little yellow car, lookin’ sweaty, shaky and bug-eyed, lookin’ like a righteous fuckin’ rabid dog lookin’ to die, but lookin’ to get in a few righteous fuckin’ bites before he goes. He kept grabbin’ at himself like he was packin’ a roscoe and he kept baitin’ me with all this racist shit. Hopkins, this fucker looked like righteous fuckin’ *death.* I gave him the files and he gave me the K and the blow and I got the fuck out fast. I don’t know what the fucker done, but I wouldn’t worry too much about catchin’ him, because no fuckin’ human bein’ can look like that and fuckin’ survive. I been to Nam, Hopkins. Righteous fuckin’ Khe Sahn. I seen lots of death. This fucker looked worse than the terminal yellow jaundice battle fatigue walkin’ dead over there. He was righteous fuckin’ death on a popsicle stick.”

Lloyd let the barrage of words settle in on him, knowing that they confirmed Thomas Goff’s Melbourne Avenue horror show, and *possibly* the killing of Howard Christie; but that they somehow contradicted the revelation of Richard Oldfield and his sibling rivalry with Goff. He said, “Kill the jug, Hubert, you’ve earned it," and walked out into the hallway. A secretary passed him and said, "Captain Gaffaney went to lunch, Sergeant. He left your query reply with the duty officer."

Lloyd thanked the woman and nonchalantly walked into Gaffaney's office. A plastic bag of marijuana tagged with an official evidence sticker was lying on his desk. He pulled off the sticker and put it in his pocket, then opened the window and hurled the bag out into the middle of Los Angeles Street, where it came to rest in the bed of a passing Dodge pickup.

"Support your local police," Lloyd called out. When only traffic noise answered him, he walked by the interrogation cubicle and gave Hubert Douglas the thumbs up sign. Douglas grinned through the open doorway and raised his empty pint in farewell.

Lloyd took the elevator down to the first floor and walked to the front information desk. The duty officer did a double-take on his outfit and handed him a slip of paper. He leaned against the desk and read: Subject D.O.B. 6/30/53, L.A. Calif. driv. lic. # 1679143, issued 7/69, no moving violations; no wants, warrants or record in Cont. U.S. *squeaky clean*-F.G.

Lloyd felt nameless little clicks assail him. He put his mind through a twenty-four hour instant replay until he hit the source of his confusion: Thomas Goff was born and raised and sent to prison in New York State. Havilland's psychiatric report on his half-brother Richard Oldfield stated that their mother raised the two boys together, presumably in New York. Yet this computer run-through fixed Oldfield's place of birth as Los Angeles. Also, Oldfield was issued a California driver's license in 1969, shortly after his sixteenth birthday, which at least *hinted* at long-term California residency.

Lloyd grabbed the desk phone and dialed Dutch's office number at the Hollywood Station.

"Captain Peltz speaking."

"It's me, Dutch. You busy?"

"Where the hell have you been? Did you get my memo?"

"Yeah, I got it. Listen, I need your help. Two-man stakeout on a pad near the Hollywood Bowl. It's got to be very cool, no unmarked units, nothing that smacks of heat. I don't want to approach this guy just yet; I only want him pinned."

"*This guy?* Who the hell is *this guy*?"

"I'll tell you about him when I see you. Can you meet me at my place in an hour? I want to change clothes and grab my civilian wheels."

Dutch sighed. "I've got a meeting in half an hour. Make it two hours."

Lloyd sighed back. "Deal."

Driving home, his little clicks worked themselves into the tapestry of the case, assuming the shape of a man who might or might not be Richard Oldfield; a man adept at manipulating *violent men* in order to achieve his purpose, which now emerged as the accruing of potential blackmail knowledge. Fact: Jack Herzog had stolen six L.A.P.D. Personnel files for his *personal* aim of "vindicating" Marty Bergen, and had told his girlfriend that he was "really scared" in the days before his disappearance/murder/suicide. Bergen considered his best friend's attempt at vindication ridiculous and had destroyed the columns the files had inspired. Yet, Thomas Goff and/or his still unknown "hotshot," "really smart" accomplice/

partner, had used the L.A.P.D. information to cunningly circumvent Captain Dan Murray, wresting confidential file copies from his stooge Hubert Douglas, *killing* Lieutenant Howard Christie, probably for his refusal to deliver the files or on the basis of his demands for exorbitant amounts of money. This evidential and theoretical narrative line was cohesive and arrow straight.

But it contradicted most of his instincts regarding Thomas Goff. Goff was obsessed with his .41 revolver. He had used it on the three liquor store victims, a crime *still lacking a motive;* he had fired it at Lloyd himself, its single-action clumsiness giving him away. *Yet* … Howard Christie was killed with his own gun. Goff, assuming he was the killer, had eschewed a violent pattern in a time of stress, grabbing a weapon from a seasoned police officer, then shooting him with it. *It didn't wash.* The Christie job had the earmarks of a killing perpetrated by a novice, someone who had lulled the cop/security chief into considering him harmless—not the fever- or dope-driven Goff.

This left four potential suspects—Herzog, Havilland, Bergen, and Oldfield. The first three were ridiculous prospects: Herzog was a ninty-nine percent sure dead man; Havilland a love- and conscience-struck coincidental link with no motives; Bergen a pathetic, guilt-ridden drunk. Only Oldfield remained, and even he was shot full of logical holes.

His blood relationship with Goff was, of course, the key tie-in. Still, hearsay evidence indicated that Goff was dominated by his unknown partner, while Havilland's psychological workup portrayed Oldfield as being subservient to Goff. And the fact that he strongly resembled Goff and still walked around the streets pointed to his innocence. If he were Goff's accomplice, he would know that every cop in Southern California was looking for his mirror image. He would not go out and cruise for comely nurses to bring back to his pad.

Lloyd hit the Harbor Freeway southbound, feeling his clicks work into truth. He was dealing with two killers, two men whose drives had spawned an apocalypse.

THE chess game progressed. The lonelies had been tapped for data purchasing capital, and tonight, with his cop/adversary dead, he would inject himself with sodium Pentothal and images of his past hours and make the void explode. The homecoming was in sight.

The Night Tripper stood on his balcony and stared at the ocean, then closed his eyes and let the sound of waves crashing accompany a rush of fresh images: Hopkins departing Windemere Drive at dawn; the industrial-sized trashbag containing Sherry Shroeder thumping against Richard Old-field's shoulder as he carried it to his car; the sated look on Richard's face as they lowered her to her grave in the shadow of the Hollywood sign. Satisfying moments, but not as fulfilling as watching his lonely Billy develop and then edit his movie into a co-mingling of Linda Wilhite's childhood trauma and adult fantasy. Billy had at first warmed to the challenge of a rush job, then had become frightened when Sherry Shroeder died in his developing room. It had taken a brilliantly adlibbed therapy session to see him through completion of the assignment.

Opening his eyes, Havilland recalled the day's *minor* testimonials to his will: The manager of his office building had called his condo with the news that he had been burglarized and that workmen were now repairing the damage to his front office door; his answering service had an urgent "call me" message from Linda Wilhite. Those telephone tidings had been such obvious capitulations to his power that he had succumbed to their symbolism and had used the beach phone to call the lonelies with an "assessment" request—ten thousand dollars per person. They had all answered "Yes" with doglike servility.

Let the capitulations continue.

The Night Tripper walked over to the kitchen wall phone and punched Linda Wilhite's number. When he heard her "Hello?", he said, "John Havilland, Linda. My service said that you needed to speak to me."

Linda's voice took on force. "Doctor, I realize that this is short notice, but I want to let you know that I'm quitting therapy. You've opened me up to lots of things, but I want to fly solo from here on in."

Havilland breathed the words in. When he breathed his own words out, they sounded appropriately choked with sentiment. "I'm very sad to hear that, Linda. We were making such progress. Are you sure you want to do this?"

"I'm positive, Doctor."

"I see. Would you agree to one more session? A special session with visual aids? It's my standard procedure for final sessions, and it's essential to my form of therapy."

"Doctor, my days are very tied up. There's lots of—"

"Would tonight be all right? My office at seven? It's imperative we conclude this therapy on the right foot, and the session will be free."

Sighing, Linda said, "All right, but I'll pay."

Havilland said, "Good-bye," and hung up, then punched another seven digits and began hyperventilating.

"Yes?" Hopkins's voice was expectant.

"Sergeant, this is John Havilland. Strange things have been happening. My office was broken into, and besides that, my source just contacted me. I—I—I—"

"Calm down, Doctor. Just take it slow."

"I—I was going to say that I still can't give you his name, but Goff contacted *him,* because he heard that he was in need of a gun and some money Goff owed him. The money and the gun are in a locker box at the Greyhound Bus Depot downtown. Fr-frankly, Sergeant, my source is afraid of a setup. He's considering returning to therapy, so I was able to get this information out of him. He-he has a strange relationship with Goff.… It's fr-fraternal almost."

"Did he give you the number of the box?"

"Yes. Four-one-six. The key is supposed to be with the man at the candy counter directly across from the row of lockers. Goff gave it to him yesterday, my man told me."

"You did the right thing, Doctor. I'll take care of it."

Dr. John Havilland replaced the receiver, thinking of Richard Oldfield stationed in the bar across from Box 416, armed with Lloyd Hopkins' personnel file photo and an Uzi submachine gun.

LLOYD was leadfooting it northbound on the Harbor Freeway when he realized that he had forgotten to leave Dutch a note explaining his absence. He slammed the dashboard with his palm and began shouting obscenities, then heard his cursing drowned out by the wail of sirens. Looking in his rearview mirror he saw three black-and-whites roar past with cherry lights flashing, heading for the downtown exits. Wondering why, he flipped on his two-way radio. When a squelch filtered voice barked “All units, all units, code three to the bus depot, Sixth and Los Angeles, shot fired,” he shuddered back a wave of nausea and joined the fray.

Sixth and Los Angeles Streets was a solid wall of double-parked patrol cars. Lloyd parked on the sidewalk outside the bus terminal’s south entrance and ran in past a bewildered-looking group of patrolmen carrying shotguns. They were jabbering among themselves, and one tall young officer kept repeating “Psycho. Fucking psycho,” as he fondled the slide of his Ithaca pump. Pushing through a knot of unkempt civilians milling around in front of the ticket counters, Lloyd saw a uniformed sergeant writing in a spiral notebook. He tapped him on the shoulder and said, “Hopkins, Robbery/Homicide. What have we got?”

The sergeant grinned. “We got a machinegun nut case. A wino was checking the doors of the lockers across the walkway from the gin mill by the Sixth Street entrance when this psycho runs out of the bar and starts shooting. The wino wasn’t hit, but the lockers were torn up and an old bag lady got grazed by a ricochet. The meat wagon took her to Central Receiving. The juicehounds inside the bar said it sounded like a tommy gun—rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat. My partner is at the gin mill now, taking statements from the wino and potential witnesses. Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat.”

Lloyd felt little clicks resound to the beat of the sergeant’s sound effects. “Is there a candy counter directly across from the shooting scene?”

“Yessir.”

“What about the suspect?”

“Probably long gone. The wino said he tucked the burpgun under his coat and ran out to Sixth. Easy to get lost out there.”

Lloyd nodded and ran to the hallway by the Sixth Street entrance. Gray metal lockers with coin slots and tiny key holes covered one entire wall, the opposite wall inset with narrow cubicles where vendors dispensed souvenirs, candy and porno magazines. Checking the lockers close up, he saw that numbers 408 through 430 were riddled with bullet dents, and as he had suspected, the bar the gunman had run out of was directly across from 416.

Crossing to the bar, Lloyd eyeballed the man at the candy counter, catching a cop-wise look on his face. Doing a quick pivot, he walked over and stuck out his hand. "Police officer. I believe someone left a key for me."

The candy man went pale and stammered, "I—I—didn't think there'd be no gunplay, Officer. The guy just asked me if I wanted to make twenty scoots for holding on to the key, then whipping it on the guy who asked for it. I didn't want no part of no shooting."

The fury of his mental clicking made Lloyd whisper. "Are you telling me that the man who gave you the key is the man who fired off the machinegun?"

"Th-that's right. This don't make me no kind of accessory after the fact, does it?"

Lloyd took out a well-thumbed mugshot of Thomas Goff. "Is this the man?"

The candy man shook his head affirmatively and then negatively. "Yes and no. This guy looks enough like him to be his brother, but the gun guy had a skinnier face and a longer nose. It's a real close resemblance, but I gotta say no."

Taking the key from the vendor's shaking hands, Lloyd said with a shaking voice, "Describe the wino the gunman fired at."

"That's easy, officer. He was a big husky guy, ruddy complexion, dark hair. He looked kinda like you."

The final click went off like a flashing neon sign that spelled, "Fool. Patsy. Dupe. Sucker bait." *It was Havilland.* The setup was for *him,* not Oldfield; it was perpetrated by *Oldfield,* not Goff. Whatever the unrevealed intricacies of the case, Havilland had set him up from the beginning, acting on knowledge of his methods gathered from his L.A.P.D. file. The shrink had set up the psychiatric report on Oldfield as a calculated move based on old Hollywood Division fitness reports that had mentioned his penchant for "search methods of dubious legality." He had been strung out from before their first meeting; the Night Tripper albums and the Linda Wilhite office photos ploys, with Linda and Stanley Rudolph and Goff and Oldfield and Herzog and how many others dangling on their own puppet strings as the Doctor's willing or unwitting accomplices? The simple brilliance of it was overpowering. He had pinioned himself to a steel wall with self-constructed steel spikes.

Before the spikes could draw more blood, Lloyd walked to Box 416 and inserted the key. The door jammed briefly, then came open. Inside was a .357 Colt Python and a roll of twenty dollar bills held together with a rubber band. He picked the gun up. The cylinder was empty, but the barrel exuded a faint odor of paraffin and the underside of the vent housing bore a plastic sticker reading Christie–L.A.P.D.

The spikes dug in again, wielded from within and without. Lloyd slammed the locker door shut and drove to Parker Center.

He found the sixth floor I.A.D. offices packed with detectives and civilian personnel. A uniformed officer passed him in the hallway and threw words of explanation: "My partner and I just brought in Marty Bergen, grabbed him in Mac Arthur Park, feeding the ducks. He waived his rights. Some Internal Affairs bulls are getting ready to pump him."

Lloyd ran to the attorney room at the end of the hall. A knot of plainclothes officers were staring through the one-way glass. Squeezing in beside them, he saw Marty Bergen, Fred Gaffaney, a stenographer, and an unidentified woman who had the air of a deputy public defender sitting around a table covered with pencils and yellow legal pads. The woman was whispering in Bergen's ear, while the stenographer poised fingers over his machine. Gaffaney worried his tie bar and drummed the tabletop.

Noticing wires running along the ceiling wainscoting, Lloyd nudged the officer nearest him and said, "Is there a backup transcription going down?"

The officer nodded. "Tape hookup to the skipper's office. He's got another steno at his desk."

"Headphones?"

"Speaker."

Lloyd took out his notepad and wrote, John Havilland, M.D., office 1710 Century Park East—*All phone #'s from business & residence calls for past 12 mos.,* then walked down the hall and rapped on the glass door of Fred Gaffaney's outer office. When his secretary opened it and gave him a harried look, he handed her the notepad. "The captain wants me to listen in on the interview. Could you do me a favor and call Ma Bell and get this information?"

The woman frowned. "The captain told me not to leave the office. Some marijuana that constituted evidence was stolen earlier. He had to release a suspect, and he was very angry about it."

Lloyd smiled. "That's a rough break, but this request is direct from Thad Braverton. I'll hold down the fort."

The woman's frown deepened. "All right. But please keep all unauthorized people out." She closed her hand around the notepad and walked off in the direction of the elevator bank. Lloyd locked the door from the inside and moved to the captain's private office. A grandmotherly stenographer was sitting at the desk, pecking at her machine while Gaffaney's sternly enunciated words issued from a wall speaker above her head.

"… and legal counsel is present. Before we begin this interview, Mr. Bergen, do you have anything you wish to say?"

Lloyd pulled up a chair and smiled at the stenographer, who put a finger to her lips and pointed to the speaker just as a burst of electronically amplified laughter hit the room, followed by Marty Bergen's voice. "Yeah. I wish to go on the record as saying that your tie clasp sucks. If the L.A.P.D. were a just bureaucracy, you would be indicted on five counts of aesthetic bankruptcy, possession of fascist regalia, and general low class. Proceed with your interview, Captain."

Gaffaney cleared his throat. "Thank you for that unsolicited comment, Mr. Bergen. Proceeding, I will state some specific facts. You may formally object if you consider my facts erroneous. One, you are Martin D. Bergen, age forty-four. You were dismissed from the Los Angeles Police Department after sixteen years of service. While on the Department, you became friends with Officer Jacob M. Herzog, currently missing. Are these facts correct?"

"Yes," Bergen said.

"Good. Again proceeding, six days ago you were questioned by an L.A.P.D. detective as to the current whereabouts of Officer Herzog. You told the officer that you had not seen Herzog in approximately a month, and that on the occasions of your last meetings Herzog had been 'moody.' Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Again proceeding, do you wish to alter your statement to that officer in any way?"

Bergen's voice was a cold whisper. "Yes, I do. Jack Herzog is dead. He killed himself with an overdose of barbiturates. I discovered his body at his apartment along with a suicide note. I buried him in a rock quarry up near San Berdoo."

Lloyd heard Bergen's attorney gasp and begin jabbering words of caution at her client. Bergen shouted, "No goddamn it, I want to tell it!" There was a crescendo of voices, with Gaffaney's finally predominating: "Do you remember where you buried the body?"

"Yes," Bergen said. "I'll take you there, if you like."

The speaker went silent, then slowly came to life with the sound of animated whispers. Finally Gaffaney said, "Not wanting to put words in your mouth, Mr. Bergen, would you say that the previous statement you made to the police regarding Officer Herzog was misleading or incorrect?"

"What I told Hopkins was pure bullshit," Bergen said. "When I talked to him Jack was already three weeks in his grave. You see, I thought I could walk from all this. Then it started eating at me. I went on a drunk to sort it out. If those cops hadn't found me I would have come forward before too long. This has got to be heavy shit that Jack was involved in, or you wouldn't have put out an A.P.B. on me. I figure that you've got me for two misdemeanors—some jive charge for disposing of Jack's body and receiving stolen documents. So just ask your questions or let me make my statement, so I can get charged and make bail. Okay, Fred baby?"

There was another long silence, this one broken by Fred Gaffaney. "Talk, Bergen. I'll interject questions if I find them necessary."

Breath noise filled the speaker. Lloyd's body clenched in anticipation. Just when he thought he would snap from tension, Bergen said, "Jack was always stretched very thin, because he didn't have the outlets that other cops have. He didn't booze or carouse or chase pussy; he just read and brooded and competed with himself, wanting to be like these warrior mystics he worshipped. He got on mental kicks and ran wild with them. For about six months prior to his death he was obsessed with this notion of exonerating me by creating this L.A.P.D. credibility gap—showing the Department in a bad light so that the shame of my dismissal would be diminished by comparison. He talked it up and talked it up and talked it up, because he was a hero, and since he loved me he had to turn me from a coward into a hero to make our friendship real.

"About this time he met some guy in a bar. The guy introduced him to another guy, a guy that Jack called a 'file-happy genius.' This guy was some kind of guru who charged big bucks to all these sad guru-worshipper types, helping them with their problems and so forth. He convinced Jack to steal some personnel files that would suit their individual purposes—Jack's 'credibility gap' and the guru's loony hunger for confidential information. Jack showed me the files. Four of them were brass working outside security gigs where more personnel files were involved, one was Johnny Rolando, the TV guy, and the other was, you know, Lloyd Hopkins. Jack figured that the information in these files would comprise a sleazy picture of the L.A.P.D. *and* satisfy the guru's needs."

"Do you still have the files?" Gaffaney asked.

"No," Bergen said. "I read them and gave them back to Jack. I tried to put the information to use in a series of columns, as a memorial tribute to him, but finally I decided that it was just a tribute to his disturbance and gave up on the idea."

"Tell me more about this so-called guru and his friend."

"All right. First off, I don't know either of their names, but I do know that the guru was counseling Jack, helping to bring him through some things that were disturbing him. The guru used ambiguous phrases like 'beyond the beyond' and 'behind the green door,' which is an old song title. Both those phrases were included in Jack's suicide note."

Lloyd grabbed the telephone and dialed a number that he knew was a ninety-nine percent sure bet to confirm Havilland's complicity all the way down the line.

"Hello?"

Turning his back on the stenographer, he whispered, "It's me, Linda."

"Hopkins baby!"

"Listen, I can't talk, but the other night you whispered 'beyond the beyond' and something about green doors. Where did you get those phrases?"

"From Dr. Havilland. Why? You sound really spaced, Hopkins. What's all this about?"

"I'll tell you later."

"When?"

"I'll come by in a couple of hours. Stay home and wait for me. Okay?"

Linda's voice went grave. "Yes. It's him, isn't it?"

Lloyd said "Yes," and hung up, catching Bergen in mid-sentence. "… so from the froth around Jack's mouth I knew he'd o.d.'d on barbiturates. He used to say that if he ever took the Night Train, he'd never do it with his gun."

Gaffaney sighed. "Sergeant Hopkins searched Herzog's apartment and said that the surface had been wiped free of prints by scouring powder. When you discovered the body, did you notice any wipe marks?"

"No. None."

"Do you recall the exact words of Herzog's suicide note, in addition to those phrases you mentioned? Did Herzog elaborate on his reasons for killing himself?"

"This is where we part company, Fred baby," Bergen said. "I'll tell you anything you want to know, except that. And you haven't got the juice to get it out of me."

The sound of palms slamming a table top rattled the speaker. "On that note we'll break for a few hours. We've prepared a detention cage for you, Mr. Bergen. Your attorney can keep you company if she wishes to. We'll pick up where we left off later. Sergeant, show Mr. Bergen to his interim housing."

The speaker went dead. Lloyd got up and walked to the outer office window, catching a glimpse of a plainclothes officer hustling Marty Bergen and his attorney to the stairs leading to the fifth floor detention cages. Bergen's post-confession posture signified pure exhaustion: stooped shoulders; glazed eyes; shuffling walk. Lloyd saluted his back as he rounded the corner out of sight, then turned to see Gaffaney's secretary tapping on the door, holding up a sheaf of papers for him.

"I got your information, Sergeant."

Lloyd opened the door and took the woman's pages. "Let me explain this readout," she said. "The supervisor got me the business and residence calls up to two days ago; that's as far up-to-date as their computer is fed. When you go through it you'll notice that only a few of the numbers have names or addresses after them. That's because virtually all of this person's calls were made to pay phones. Isn't that strange? The locations of the pay phones are listed next to the number. Is this what you wanted?"

Lloyd felt another soft click. "This is excellent. Will you do me one other favor? Call the *top* managing supervisor at Bell and have her try to get me the numbers called from both phones in the past two days. Have her call me at Robbery/Homicide with the information. Tell her it's crucial to an important murder investigation. Will you do that for me?"

"Yes, Sergeant. Are you going to talk with the captain? I know that he's interested in what you're doing."

Lloyd shook his head. "No. If he needs me, I'll be in my office. I'm not going to bother him with this phone business until I have something conclusive. He has enough to worry about."

Gaffaney's secretary lowered her eyes. "Yes. He works much too hard."

Lloyd jogged up to his office, wondering if the born-again witch hunter cheated on his wife. Closing the door, he read over the list of phone numbers dialed from Havilland's office and Beverly Hills apartment, feeling his clicks collide with Hubert Douglas' snatch of Thomas Goff dialogue: "He kept callin' himself a 'justified paranoid' and said that he covered his tracks when he took a fuckin' piss, just to stay in fuckin' practice."

The pay phone calling translated to *Havilland's* "justified paranoia." The majority of the calls were made to phone booths situated within a quarter mile radius of the homes of Jack Herzog, Thomas Goff, and Richard Oldfield. The calls to Herzog began last November, which coincided with Marty Bergen's statement that Herzog met "the guru" six months ago; they ended in late March, around the time of Herzog's suicide. The Goff calls ran from the beginning of the readout until the day after the liquor store slaughter; the Oldfield communications all the way through until the readout terminated forty-eight hours before.

Turning his attention to the other pay phone locations, Lloyd got out his Thomas Brothers L.A. County street map binder, hoping that his theory meshed with Bergen's statement about the "guru" charging "big bucks" to "these sad guru-worshipper types." Phone readout to map index to map; five locations, five confirmations. Click. Click. Click. Click. Click. All five pay phones were located in shopping centers in expensive residential neighborhoods—Laurel Canyon, Sherman Oaks, Palos Verdes Estates, San Marino, and the Bunker Hill Towers complex. Conclusion: Not counting other potential "worshipper types" living *inside* his non-toll-call area of Century City and Beverly Hills, Dr. John Havilland had at least five people, perhaps innocent, perhaps violently disturbed, that he was "counseling." Unanswered question: Citing Havilland's "justified paranoia" structure, it was obvious that he wanted to be heavily buffered against *any* kind of scrutiny. *Then were did he meet with his patients?*

Lloyd recalled the diplomas on Havilland's office wall: Harvard Medical School; two hospitals from the metropolitan New York area. Click. Click. Click. Thomas Goff was New York born and bred. Could his association with the Doctor date back to his days as a psychiatric resident? All the clues lay in the past, cloaked in medical secrecy. Lloyd imagined himself as a guru-worshipper type about to write a book, armed with nothing but good intentions and a telephone. Five minutes later that telephone became a time machine hurtling toward Dr. John Havilland's past.

The book ploy worked. Years before he became dedicated to secrecy, John Havilland had possessed an autobiographical bent, one that was captured for posterity in the form of a Harvard Medical School entrance essay that his faculty advisor called "the very model of both excellence in English skills and the exposition of sound motives for becoming a psychiatrist."

From the gushing advisor's recollections of Havilland and his essay, Lloyd learned that the guru shrink was born in Scarsdale, New York in 1945, and that when he was twelve his father disappeared, never to be seen again, leaving young John and his mother lavishly well provided for. After weeks of speculating on his father's absence, John sustained a head injury that left him with fragmented memories and fantasies of the man who had sired him, a patchwork quilt of truth and illusion that his alcoholic mother could not illuminate in any way. Recurring memory symbols of good and evil—loving rides on a Bronx ferris wheel and the persistent questioning of police detectives—tore at John and filled him with the desire to know *himself* by unselfishly helping others to know *themselves.* In 1957, at age twelve, John Havilland set out to become the greatest psychiatrist who ever lived.

Lloyd let the advisor gush on, learning that while at Harvard Med Havilland studied symbolic dream therapy and wrote award-winning papers on psychological manipulation and brainwashing techniques; that during his Castleford Hospital residency he counseled court-referred criminals with astounding results—few of the criminals ever repeated their crimes. After concluding with the words, "and the rest of Dr. Havilland's work was performed in Los Angeles; good luck with your book," the advisor waited for a reply. Lloyd muttered, "Thank you," and hung up.

Calls to Castleford and St. Vincent's Hospitals proved fruitless; they would not divulge information on Havilland and would not state whether Thomas Goff had ever been treated there. The only remaining telephone destination was a twelve-year-old boy's "memory symbol" of evil.

Lloyd called the Scarsdale, New York, Police Department and talked to a series of desk officers and clerk typists, learning that the department's records predating 1961 had been destroyed in a fire. He was about to give up when a retired officer visiting the station came on the line.

The man told Lloyd that some time back in the fifties a filthy rich Scarsdale man named Havilland had been the prime suspect in the murder of a Sing Sing Prison guard named Duane McEvoy, who was himself a suspect in the sex murders of several young Westchester County women. Havilland was also suspected of torching a whole block of deserted houses in an impoverished section of Ossining, including a ramshackle mansion that the then Scarsdale police chief had described as a "torture factory." Havilland had disappeared around the time that McEvoy's knife hacked body was found floating in the Hudson River. So far as the retired officer knew, he was never brought to justice or seen again.

After hanging up, Lloyd felt his clicking form a tight web of certainty. John Havilland had seized upon him as an adversary, casually remarking on his resemblance to his father at their initial meeting. An obsession with paternal power had led him to acquire a coterie of weak-willed "offspring"—Goff and Oldfield among them—that he was molding into carriers of his own plague and dispatching on missions of horror. Thomas Goff had probably collided with the Doctor at Castleford Hospital, some time shortly after his parole from Attica. Havilland's "counseling" had steered him away from the criminal tendencies that had ruled his life to that time, accounting for his post-Attica one hundred percent clean record. He had probably been Havilland's recruiter of "guru-worshipper types"—his bar prowling M.O. and the testimony of Morris Epstein and Hubert Douglas pointed to it.

Lloyd's clickings departed the realm of certainty and jumped into the realm of pure supposition with a wild leap that nonetheless felt *right:* Thomas Goff was dead, murdered by Havilland after he freaked out at the liquor store with his .41. Havilland had done the interior decorating at Goff's apartment, leaving the "Doctor John the Night Tripper" album as bait. The man that Goff's landlord had seen the afternoon before the police raid was *Oldfield—impersonating Goff.* Havilland himself had killed Howard Christie.

Fool. Dupe. Patsy. Chump. Sucker bait. The reprisals jarred Lloyd's mind. He got up and started down the hall to Thad Braverton's office, then stopped when the door embossed with "Chief of Detectives" loomed in his path as a barrier rather than a beacon. *All of his evidence was circumstantial, suppositional, and theoretical.* He had no evidential basis on which to arrest Dr. John Havilland.

Shifting physical and mental gears, Lloyd walked down to the fifth floor detention area, finding Marty Bergen alone in the first cage, staring out through the wire mesh.

"Hello, Marty."

"Hello, Hopkins. Come to gloat?"

"No. Just to say thanks for your statement. It was a help to me."

"Great. I'm sure you'll make a smashing collar and carve another notch on your legend."

Lloyd peered in at Bergen. The crisscrossed wire cast shadows across his face. "Have you got any idea how big this thing is?"

"Yeah. I just heard most of the story. Too bad I can't report it."

"Who told you?"

"A source. I'd be a shitty reporter if I didn't have sources. Got any leads on the guru guy?"

Lloyd nodded. "Yes. I think it's almost over. Why didn't you tell me what you knew when I talked to you before?"

Bergen laughed. "Because I didn't like your style. I did what I had to do by coming forward, Hopkins, so I'm clean. Don't ask me to kiss your ass."

Lloyd gripped the wire a few inches from Bergen's face. "Then kiss this, motherfucker: if you'd talked to me before, Howard Christie would be alive today. Add that one to your guilt list."

Bergen flinched. Lloyd walked away, letting his words hang like poisonous fallout.

Driving west toward Hollywood, Lloyd asked himself his remaining unanswered questions, supplying instinctive answers that felt as sound as the rest of his hypothesis. Did John Havilland know that Jungle Jack Herzog was dead? No. Most likely he assumed that the shame of Herzog's "beyond" would prevent him from clueing in the world at large or the police in specific to the man who had "brought him through" it. The wipe marks in Herzog's apartment? Probably Havilland; probably the day after the liquor store murders, when he realized that Goff was irrevocably flipped out. Goff had recruited Herzog, so it was likely that he might have visited Jungle Jack's pad and left prints. Havilland would want that potential link to him destroyed. Yet the Doctor had left himself vulnerable at the level of Herzog.

Lloyd forced himself to say the word out loud. Homosexual. It was there in Herzog's hero worship; in his awful need to court danger as a policeman; in his lack of sexual interest in his girlfriend immediately before his death. Bergen would not elaborate on the suicide note because that piece of paper said it explicitly, illuminating Havilland's tragic flaw by implication: he wanted Jack Herzog to roam the world as a testimonial to the power of a man who brought a macho cop out of the closet.

Hatred gripped Lloyd in a vice that squeezed him so hard he could feel his brains threaten to shoot out the top of his head. His foot jammed the gas pedal to the floor in reflex rage, and Highland Avenue blurred before his eyes. Then a line from Marty Bergen's memorial column forced him to hit the brake and decelerate. "Resurrect the dead on this day." He smiled. Jungle Jack Herzog was going to return from "beyond the beyond" and frame the man who sent him to his death.

Lloyd passed the Hollywood Bowl and turned onto Windemere Drive, cursing when he saw that Oldfield's Mercedes was not in front of his house and that a profusion of front lawn barbecues would prevent him from a quick B&E. After parking, he walked over and peered in the front window, finding it still covered with heavy curtains. Swearing again, he gave the front lawn a cursory eyeballing, stopping when he saw a patch of white on the otherwise green expanse.

He walked over. The patch was a piece of adhesive bandage, with a streak of what looked like congealed blood on the sticky side. Another soft click, this one followed with a soft question mark. Lloyd picked the bandage up and headed south toward the purchasing of material for his frame.

Parked outside the Brass Rail gun shop on La Brea, he took Howard Christie's .357 Magnum from the glove compartment and checked the grips. They were checkered walnut with screw fasteners at the top and bottom; interchangeable, but too ridged to sustain fingerprints. Cursing a blue streak, Lloyd took the gun into the shop and flashed his badge at the proprietor, telling him that he wanted a large handgun with interchangeable smooth wooden grips that would also fit his magnum. The proprietor got out a small screwdriver and arrayed a selection of revolvers on the counter. Ten minutes later Lloyd was three hundred and five dollars poorer and the owner of a Ruger .44 magnum with big fat cherry wood grips, the proprietor having waived the three day waiting period on the basis of a certified police affiliation. Thus armed, Lloyd crossed his fingers and drove to a pay phone, hoping that his luck was still holding.

It was. The Robbery/Homicide switchboard operator had an urgent message for him—call Katherine Daniel—Bell Telephone, 623-1102, extension 129. Lloyd dialed the number and seconds later was listening to a husky-voiced woman digress on how her respect for her late policeman father had fueled her to "kick ass" and get him the information he needed.

"… and so I went down to the computer room and checked the current feed-in on your two numbers. No calls were made either yesterday or today from either the business or residence phones. That got my dander up, so I decided to do some checking on this guy Havilland. I started by checking the computer files on his phone bills, going back a year and a half. He paid by check on both bills—with the exception of last December, when a man named William Nagler paid both bills. I then checked this Nagler guy out. He paid his *own* bill every month, plus the bill for a number in Malibu. He *lives* in Laurel Canyon, because his checks have his address on them, and *his* number has a Laurel Canyon prefix. But —"

Lloyd interrupted: "Take it slow from here on in, I'm writing this down."

Katherine Daniel drew in a breath and said, "All right. I was saying this guy Nagler paid the bill for this number in Malibu—four-five-two, six-one-five-one. The address is unlisted—as long as Nagler pays the bill on the phone there, Ma Bell doesn't care if it's in Timbuctu. Anyway, I ran a random sampling of the six-one-five-one toll calls over the past year, and got a lot of the same pay phone numbers the other supervisor gave you on your earlier query. I also ran the computer feed-in from yesterday and today and got some toll calls, all in this area code. Do you want them?"

"Yes," Lloyd said. "Slow and easy. Have you got names and addresses on them?"

"Do you think I'd do a half-assed job, Officer?"

Lloyd's forced laugh sounded hysterical to his ears. "No. Go ahead."

"Okay. Six-two three, eight-nine-one-one, Helen Heil-brunner, Bunker Hill Towers, unit eight-forty-three; three-one-seven, four-zero-four-zero, Robert Rice, one-zero-six-seven-seven Via Esperanza, Palos Verdes Estates; five-zero-two, two-two-one-one, Monte Morton, one-twelve LaGrange Place, Sherman Oaks; four-eight-one, one-two-zero-two, Jane O'Mara, nine-nine-zero-nine Leveque Circle, San Marino; two-seven-five, seven-eight-one-five, Linda Whilhite, nine-eight-one-nine Wilshire, West L.A.; four-seven-zero, eight-nine-five-three, Lloyd W. Hopkins, three-two-nine-zero Kelton, L.A. Hey, is that last guy related to you?"

Lloyd had his laugh perfected. "No. Hopkins is a common name. Have you got Nagler's phone number and address?"

"Sure. Four-nine-eight-zero Woodbridge Hollow, Laurel Canyon. Four-six-three, zero-six-seven-zero. Is that it?"

"Yes. Farewell, sweet Katherine!"

Husky chuckles came over the line.

Sweating, his legs weak from tension, Lloyd called Dutch's private line at the Hollywood Station, connecting with a desk sergeant who said that Captain Peltz was out for the afternoon, but would be calling in hourly for his messages. Speaking very slowly, Lloyd explained what he wanted: Dutch was to dispatch trustworthy squadroom dicks to the following addresses and have them lay intimidating "routine questioning" spiels on the people who answered the door, using "beyond the beyond" and "behind the green door" as buzzwords. Holding back William Nagler's name and address, he read off the others, having the officer repeat the message. Satisfied, Lloyd said that *he* would be calling back hourly to clarify the urgency of the matter with Dutch and hung up.

Now the risky part. Now the conscious decision to jeopardize an innocent woman's life for the sake of a murder indictment, an action that was an indictment of his own willingness to deny everything that had happened with Teddy Verplanck. Driving to Linda's apartment, Lloyd prayed that she would do or say something to prove the jeopardy move right or wrong, saving them both indictments on charges of cowardice or heedless will.

Linda opened the door with a drink in one hand. Lloyd looked at her posture and the light in her eyes, seeing indignation moving into anger, a prostitute who got fucked once too often. When he moved to embrace her, she stepped out of his way. "No. Tell me first. Then don't touch me, or I'll lose what I'm feeling."

Lloyd walked into the living room and sat down on the sofa, outright scared that Linda's rectitude said all systems go. He pulled out the .44 magnum and laid it on the coffee table. Linda took a chair and stared at the gun without flinching. *"Tell me,* Hopkins."

With his eyes tuned in to every nuance of Linda's reaction, Lloyd told the entire story of the Havilland case, ending with his theory of how the Doctor had played off the two of them, counting on at least a one-way attraction developing. Linda's face had remained impassive during the recounting, and it was only when he finished that Lloyd could tell that her gut feeling was awe.

"Jesus," she said. "We're dealing with the Moby Dick of psychopaths. Do you really think he has the hots for me, or is that just part of his scam?"

"Good question," Lloyd said. "I think initially it was part of the scam, because he wanted to portray himself as a fellow lover of women. Afterwards, though, I think he was genuinely jealous of your attraction to me, if only because he has me slotted in the role of adversary. Make sense? You know the bastard better than I do."

Linda considered the question, then said, "Yes. My first impression of Havilland was that he was essentially asexual. What next, Hopkins? And why is that gun on my table?"

Lloyd flinched inwardly. Linda was allaying his doubts with perfect responses and the right questions. A light went on in his mind, easing the constricted feeling in his chest. Only if she made the perfect statement voluntarily would he sanction the jeopardy gambit. "I have no hard evidence. I can't arrest Havilland and make it stick. He called you today, right?"

"Yes. How did you know that?"

"That telephone read-out I mentioned. What did he want?"

"I called to tell him I was quitting therapy. His service forwarded the call to him. He almost begged me to come for one more session. I agreed."

"When?"

"Tonight at seven."

Lloyd checked his watch. 6:05. "One question before we get to the gun. The other night you told me about your parents' deaths and said that sometimes you have very dark thoughts. Does Havilland know about that? Has he emphasized your parents' deaths in the course of his counseling?"

Linda said, “Yes. He’s obsessed with it, along with some violent fantasies I have. Why?”

Lloyd choked back a wave of fear. “I need Havilland’s fingerprints on the grips of that gun. Once I have them, I’ll switch the grips to Howard Christie’s gun, get Havilland’s prints from the D.M.V. and arrest him for Murder One and make it stick while I dig up corroborative evidence. I want you to take the gun to your session tonight. Keep it in your purse and don’t touch the grips. Tell Havilland that your fantasies are becoming more violent and that you bought a gun. Hand it to him nervously, holding it by the cylinder housing and barrel. If my reading of him is correct, he’ll grab it by the grips, showing you the proper handling procedure, then give it back. Hold it nervously by the barrel and trigger guard and put it back in your purse. After the session, go home and wait for my call. Havilland has no idea that I’m on to him, so you’ll be in no danger.”

Linda’s smile reminded Lloyd of Penny and how she was her most beautiful in moments of rebellion. “You don’t believe that, Hopkins. You’re shaking. I’ll do it on one condition. I want the gun loaded. If Havilland freaks out, I want to be able to defend myself.”

A green light flashed in response to Linda’s perfect voluntary statement. Lloyd took six .44 shells from his jacket pocket and put them on the coffee table. The moment froze, and he felt himself treading air. Linda put a hand on his arm. “I think I’ve been waiting a long time for this,” she said.

2

THE Time Machine sped backward, fueled by a high octane sodium Pentothal mainline. Calendar pages ruffled in the wind. Bombardments of imagery from recent gauntlets pushed the pages closer and closer, until the black-on-white type smothered him, then turned him outside in.

Saturday, June 2, 1957. Johnny Havilland has heard from the J.D.'s at school that an auto graveyard on the edge of Ossining niggertown is a chrome treasure trove. The old jig who looks after the place sells nifty hood ornaments for the price of a pint of jungle juice, and if you hop the fence you can swipe something sharp and get away before he catches you. Jimmy Vandervort got a bulldog from a Mack truck for thirty-nine cents; Fritz Buckley got a gunsight hood hanger off a 'forty-eight Buick for free, flashing a moon on the spook when he demanded the scratch for some T-bird. Johnny imagines all manner of chrome gadgetry that he could kipe and give to his father to jazz up his 'fifty-six Ford Vicky ragtop. He takes a series of buses up to Ossining, and within an hour he is walking the streets of a negro shanty town in the shadow of Sing Sing Prison.

The streets remind him of photographs he has seen of Hiroshima after Uncle Sam slipped the Japs the A-bomb: Rubble heaps on the front lawns of abandoned houses; gutters filled with empty wine bottles and sewage overflow; emaciated dogs looking for someone or something to bite. Even the Negroes reinforce the A-bomb motif: they look gaunt and suspicious, like mutant creatures fried by atomic fallout. Johnny shivers as he recalls the spate of horror movies he has seen against his mother's wishes. Somehow this is scarier, and because it is scarier he will become that much more of a man by stealing here.

Johnny is about to ask one of the Negroes for directions to the auto graveyard when he spots a familiar flash of color down the block. He walks over and sees his father's Vicky parked outside an old wood-framed house patched over with tarpaper. Painted obscenities and swastikas cover all sides of the house. Johnny climbs in through a broken window, as if drawn by a magnetic force.

Once inside, standing in darkness on rotting wood planks, Johnny's magnet takes on the form of his father's laughter, issuing from the top of a staircase off to his left. He walks over, hearing his father's baritone glee meld with the high-pitched squealing of another man. The whir and click of gears joins with the voices as Johnny treads up the stairs, holding tightly to the banister.

When he reaches the second story landing, Johnny sees a door and squints in the darkness to see if it is green. The laughter and the gear noise grow louder, then the door blows open a crack. Johnny tiptoes over and peers inside.

A stench assails him as his eyes hone in on the backs of his father and a man in a gray uniform standing in front of a whirling circular object. The smell is of blood and body waste and sweat. A green blanket marked off like a crap table lies on the floor, covered with coins and folding money. The walls and ceiling are dotted with bright red, and rivulets of pale red drip toward the floor. Johnny squints and sees that his father is holding a chisel. He moves the chisel towards the whirling object, and a spritz of red liquid cuts the air. The man in the gray uniform laughs and exclaims, “Shit, that’s a ten pointer!” He steps back and sticks his hand in his pocket, then drops a wad of cash on the blanket. The whirling circular object comes to a halt and into view.

A nude woman is attached to a plywood reinforced corkboard mounted on a foundation of bricks. A gear train composed of motorcycle chains and lawnmower belts stands behind it. The woman is manacled at the ankles and pinioned at the top with spikes through her wrists. Slash wounds oozing blood cover her chest and extremities, and a black rubber handball is stuck in her mouth, held there by crisscrossed strips of friction tape.

Johnny bites his hand to keep from screaming, feeling his fingers crack beneath his teeth. He squints at the first naked woman he has ever seen and notes her swollen belly and knows that she is pregnant.

His father grabs a handle at the top of the corkboard and leans his whole body into a downward pull. The woman spins end over end, and the man in the uniform squeals, “How about ten bucks on a roulette abortion?”

Johnny watches the chisel descend, clamping his eyes open with self-mauled fingers, knowing he has to see, knowing what *must* be happening, but seeing instead his daddy sitting beside him in the whirling ferris wheel at Playland in the Bronx, whispering that everything would always be all right and that he could go on *all* the rides and eat all the cotton candy he wanted and that Mommy would quit drinking and they would be a real family. Then the uniform man was saying “It’s a boy!” and he hears the sound of his own scream, and the uniform man was on top of him with his chisel, and then father was stabbing the uniform man with a knife and stabbing *him* with a needle, whispering, “Easy, Johnny, easy, beauty, easy, babe.”

The Time Machine pushed through days of sedative haze filled with the sound of mother weeping and Baxter the lawyer telling her that the money would always be there, and stern-looking men in cheap summer suits asking her where father was, and did he know a man named Duane McEvoy? Mother’s scream: “No, you cannot talk to the boy—he knows nothing!” Then Baxter the lawyer takes him to a horror triple feature in White Plains and tells him father is gone forever, but he will be his pal. Midway through *The Curse of Frankenstein* images of the whirling circular object hit him. It all starts to come back, and thoughts of the ferris wheel die, slaughtered by a Cinemascope and Technicolor replay of the Caesarean birth.

“It’s a boy!”

Johnny runs out of the theatre and hitchhikes to Ossining niggertown. The same A-bomb Negroes and hungry dogs maneuver on the periphery of the area, but the block itself has burned to the ground.

But it happened here.

No, it was a nightmare.

But it *did* happen here.

I don’t know.

Weeks pass. The newspapers attribute the Ossining fire to “heedless Negro children playing with matches” and express gratitude that no one was hurt. Johnny grieves for his lost father and listens in on mother’s phone calls to Baxter. She repeatedly tells the lawyer to buy the cops off once and for all, regardless of the price. Baxter finally calls back and tells mother that it is all set, but to be sure she should destroy everything belonging to father, including everything in his safe deposit boxes. Johnny knows that there is nothing interesting in father’s study—only his guns and ammo and his books; but the safe deposit boxes are something he has forgotten to scope out. He steals the keys to the boxes from father’s desk and forges a note to the manager of the First Union Bank in Scarsdale Village. The old fart buys it hook, line, and sinker, chuckling over the twelve-year-old boy doing banking errands for his dad. Johnny walks away from the bank with a brown paper bag full of blue chip stocks and a black leather-bound diary that looks like a bible.

Johnny walks to the train station, intending to go to the movies in the city. A very un-Scarsdale-like bum tries to panhandle train fare from him. Johnny gives him the stock certificates. Once on the train heading toward Manhattan, Johnny opens up the diary and reads his father’s words. The words prove conclusively that what he saw on June 2, 1957 in Ossining niggertown was for real.

Since 1948, alone and with the aid of a Sing Sing Prison guard named Duane McEvoy, father had tortured and murdered eighteen women, some in Westchester County, some in upstate cities adjoining his favorite duck hunting preserves. The mutilations, sexual abuse, and ultimate dismemberments are described in vivid detail. Johnny forces himself to read every word. Tears are streaming down his face and the ferris wheel memory battles the words for primacy. The benevolent whirling object is winning as the train pulls into Grand Central Station. Then Johnny gets to the passages that prove how much his father loves him and everything goes crazy.

> The boy is so much smarter than me that it’s scary.
>
> Brains are everything. I’ve been able to keep Duane as my lacky for so long because the dumbfuck knows that *I’m* the one who keeps *him* from getting caught. When Johnny killed the rats and shot the dogs I saw him go cold almost overnight, and when I saw him go smart and wary and cautious too, I knew I was scared. I wanted to go to him and love him, but staying away makes him stronger and more fit for life.
>
> Johnny boy is like an iceberg—cold and 7/10’s below the surface.
>
> He’s probably afraid to kill human prey; too manipulative, too asexual. It’s going to be interesting watching him hit adolescence. How will he attempt to prove himself?

Johnny walks through Grand Central, openly weeping. Coming out onto 42nd Street, he throws the death bible into a storm drain and hurls a silent vow to his father: he will show him that he is afraid of nothing.

Fall, 1957. Johnny considers potential victims at Scars-dale Junior High. To fulfill his father’s legacy, he knows that they must be female. Beyond that first essential qualification, he sets his own criteria: All his prey must be snooty, giggly, and stay late after school participating in kiss-ass extracurricular activities, then walk home via the Garth Road underpass, where he would be waiting with a razor-sharp Arkansas toad stabber like the one Vic Morrow wielded in *Blackboard Jungle.*

Johnny's selection process narrows as he stakes out the underpass. Finally he settles on Donna Horowitz, Beth Shields, and Sally Burdett, grinds who remain until after dark each day in the Chem Lab, washing test tubes and brown-nosing Mr. Salcido for a good grade. Stab. Stab. Stab. Johnny sharpens his switchblade every night and wonders if father ever bagged three at once. He sets the execution date: November 1, 1957. The three grinds will walk through the underpass at their usual time of 5:35 to 5:40, giving him twelve minutes to bump them off, then hotfoot it over to the station and catch the 5:52 to the city. Stab. Stab. Stab.

November 1, 1957. At 5:30 Johnny is stationed on the left-hand side of the Garth Road underpass, wearing blue jeans and a hunting vest that he has scavenged from his father's left-behinds. The vest has loops to hold shotgun shells and hangs down to his knees. The toad stabber is affixed to his belt in a plastic scabbard.

The three victims approach the underpass right on time. Donna Horowitz notices Johnny and starts to giggle. Sally Burdett hoots, "Is that Johnny Havilland or Chucko the Clown? Dig that crazy vest!" Johnny draws his knife as Beth Shields sidles past him, taunting, "Wimpdick, Wimpdick." He lunges and snags the stiletto on his vest pocket. The blade pokes his ribcage and he screams and falls to his knees. The girls gather around him and shriek with laughter. Johnny sees a kaleidoscope of the Caesarean birth, the ferris wheel and his father joining in the laughter. He screams again to drown it all out. When that doesn't work, he bangs his head on the pavement until everything goes silent and black.

The banging continues. When a woman's voice calls out, "Dr. Havilland, are you there?" the Night Tripper is catapulted back to the present. His office, the projector and a portable movie screen come into focus. The voice must belong to Linda Wilhite, banging on his outer office door. His first conscious thought of his now destroyed childhood void is appreciation for his very own God, who did not give him the courage to break down the void until he had given him the courage to kill, and earn his father's love. His destiny had been dealt with split-second accuracy.

"Dr. Havilland, are you there? It's Linda Wilhite."

The Doctor got to his feet and took a deep breath, then rubbed his eyes. His steps were rubbery from the sodium Pentothal jolt, but that was to be expected—he was, technically speaking, a newborn creature. Trying his new voice, he called, "Hold on, Linda. I'm coming." Hearing his familiar baritone, he walked to the outer office door and opened it.

Linda Wilhite stood there, looking uncharacteristically nervous. "Hello, Linda," Havilland said. "Are you all right? You seem slightly on edge."

Linda walked past the Doctor into his private office and took her usual seat. When Havilland followed her in, she said, "I've been having some very strange, violent fantasies. I've even bought a gun." Pointing to the movie screen and projector, she added, "Are those the visual aids you mentioned?"

Havilland sat down facing Linda. "Yes. Tell me about your new fantasies. You look full of stress. Are you sure you want to quit therapy under such conditions?"

Linda twisted in her chair, clutching her purse in her lap. As the last fuzziness from his Pentothal trip died, Havilland saw that underneath her nervousness she was very angry. “Yes, I still want to quit therapy. *You* look full of stress. Woozy, too. Everyone is full of stress. These are stressful times, don’t you know that, goddamn it?”

Havilland raised placating hands. “Easy, Linda. I’m on your side.”

Linda sighed. “I’m sorry I barked.”

“That’s all right. Tell me about the new fantasies.”

Linda said, “They’re weird, and variations on my sweater man fantasies. Basically I’m just menaced by the same type of man I used to have the hots for. I fantasize being chased by men like that. The fantasies always end with me shooting them.” She reached into her purse and pulled out a large blue steel revolver, grasping it by the barrel and cylinder. “See, Doctor? Do you think I’m crazy?”

Havilland reached over and took the revolver from Linda, holding it firmly by the smooth wood grips, sighting it at the movie screen. “I’m proud of you,” he said as he handed it back, butt first.

Linda returned the gun to her purse. “Why?”

“Because, as you said, these are stressful times. You’re a strong person, and in stressful times strong people go beyond their beyonds. Move your chair over here. I want to run a little home movie for you.”

Linda pulled her chair over to where it was facing the screen. Havilland got up and threaded a length of film through the projector’s feeder device, then hit the on switch and turned off the wall light. A series of blank frames flashed across the screen, followed by a jerky panning shot of a bedroom, followed by more blank frames.

Then a blond woman in a nurse’s uniform began to undress. Close-up shots caught everything fallible about her body: a small abdominal scar, networks of varicose veins, patches of cellulite. When she was naked, she did an awkward vamp dance, then lay down on a mattress covered by a single blue sheet.

A nude man joined her, averting his face from the camera. The couple moved into an embrace, broke it, and moved to opposite sides of the mattress. The woman looked bewildered and the man mashed his face into the sheet. After holding these poses for long moments, the woman rolled underneath the man and they faked intercourse.

Linda clutched her purse and said, “What is this, amateur porno film night? I thought this was going to be a therapy session.”

“Shhh,” Havilland whispered. “You’ll catch the drift in just a few seconds.”

The screen went blank, then filled up with a long shot of the blond woman, now dressed in her nurse’s uniform, leaning against the bedroom wall. Suddenly a man, also clothed, threw himself on top of her. The screen again went blank, then segued into an extreme close-up of a transparent plastic pillow. The muzzle of a gun was pressed to the pillow. A finger pulled the trigger and the screen was awash in red. The camera caught a close-up of a man’s face. When Linda saw the face she screamed “Hopkins!” and fumbled in her purse for the gun. Her finger was inside the trigger guard when the lights went on and the man from the movie jumped out of the closet and smothered her with his body.

LLOYD slammed down the phone in response to Dutch’s news: the two women and one man that Hollywood Division detectives had leaned on with “Behind the green door” and “beyond the beyond” had immediately clammed up, first threatening the officers with lawsuits, then going into repeated recitations of the phrase “*patria infinitum.*” No breakdowns, no recantings of past sins, just indignation at police scare tactics and the rapid expulsion of seasoned cops. Dutch would be deploying a new team of detectives for runs at the guru worshippers, but they would probably be in mantra comas by then. There was only himself, Linda and her magnum, and the unknown quantity of William Nagler.

Lloyd checked the clock on the kitchen wall. 7:45. Linda would still be at her “therapy” session. He could wait and call and ease his mind, or he could move. The ticking of the clock became deafening. He locked up the house and walked to his car.

Headlights flashed across the driveway as he slipped behind the wheel, and a panel truck pulled up in front of his unmarked cruiser. Lloyd got out and saw Marty Bergen step in front of the headlights and jam his hands into his pockets. A gun butt extended from his waistband.

“My lawyer glommed me a writ,” he said. “Fred Gaffaney almost shit shotgun shells.”

Lloyd said, “Amateurs shouldn’t pack hardware. Beat it. I’ve got no stories for you.”

Bergen laughed. “When I was on the job I was in love with my piece. Off duty, I always made sure that people could see it. I was in love with it until I had to use it. Then I dropped it and ran. Jack’s dead, Hopkins.”

“Tell me something I don’t know.”

“It’s on me. It’s all on me.”

“Wrong, Bergen. It’s the Department’s and it’s mine.”

Bergen kicked the grill of the Matador, then stumbled backward into the hood of his truck. “I *owe,* goddamn you! Can’t you see that? All I ever had was what Jack gave me, and even that was all twisted. Some piece of shit took him where he shouldn’t have fucking gone and made him feel things that he shouldn’t have fucking felt, and it was *me* that he felt them about, and I owe! Don’t make me say the words, Hopkins. Please don’t make me say the fucking words.”

Lloyd sent up a prayer for all guilt-driven innocents seeking jeopardy. “What do you want, Bergen?”

Former L.A.P.D. Sergeant Martin D. Bergen wiped tears from his eyes. “I just want to pay off Jack.”

"Then get in the car," Lloyd said. "We're going to Laurel Canyon to good guy-bad guy a suspect."

William Nagler was not at home.

Lloyd parked across the street from his two-story redwood A-frame and walked over and knocked on both the front and back doors. No answer, no lights burning and no sounds of habitation. After checking the mailbox and finding two catalogs and a Mastercard bill, he returned to the car and his improbable partner.

"Are you going to open up this thing?" Bergen asked as Lloyd squeezed in behind the wheel.

Lloyd shook his head. "No. I don't trust the fourth estate. Just play the interrogation by ear. You ever work plainclothes?"

"Yeah. Venice Vice. I'm going to be the good guy, right?"

"No. You've got booze breath and you need a shave. You're big, but I'm bigger, so I can play savior. I'll ask the questions, you just be abusive. Just imagine yourself as a typical fascist pig out of the pages of the *Big Orange Insider* and you'll be cool."

Bergen laughed. "You're the kind of joker who hands out compliments one minute, then rags people who hand out compliments the next, which means one of two things—you either love to give people shit, or you don't know where your own head is at. Which one is it?"

With his eyes on Nagler's front door, Lloyd said, "Don't jerk my chain. If I didn't want you here, you wouldn't be here. If I didn't understand what you have to do, I would have busted you for carrying a concealed weapon and kicked your ass back to the slam."

Bergen scratched his razor stubble and poked Lloyd in the arm. "I apologize for saying I didn't like your style. What I should have said was that you *have* style, but you don't know what to do with it."

Lloyd turned on the dashboard light and stared at Bergen. "Don't tell me about style. I read some of your early stuff. It was damn good. You could have been something big, you could have said things worth saying. But *you* didn't know what to do with it, because being really good is really scary. I know fear, Bergen. Two niggers blew away your partner and you ran. I can understand that and not judge you for it. But you had the chance to be great and you settled for being a hack, and that I can't understand."

Bergen toyed with the knobs of the two-way radio. "You Catholic, Hopkins?"

"No."

"Tough shit, you're going to hear my confession anyway. Jack Herzog taught me to write. He ghosted my first published stories, then edited the ones I actually did write. *He* formed my style; *he* was the one who had the chance to be great. It's weird, Hopkins. You're supposed to be the pragmatist, but I think you're really a romantic innocent with an incredible nose for shit. It's funny. Jack gave me everything I have. He made me a derivative fiction stylist and a competent journalist. He'd been writing a novel, and I was serving as *his* editor, helping him hold it together as he got crazier and crazier. I've never had the chance to be great. But if I had *your* brains and drive and guts, I'd be more than a gloryhound flatfoot."

Lloyd turned on the radio and listened to code ones and twos. “It’s a stalemate, Marty, and a life sentence for both of us. But we’re lucky we can play the game.”

Bergen took the pistol from his waistband and rolled down the window and took a bead on the moon. “I believe that,” he said.

Two hours passed in silence. Bergen dozed off and Lloyd stared out the window at William Nagler’s driveway, wondering if he should make a run to a phone and call Linda; wondering also if Havilland’s worshippers were in contact with each other and if the already hassled followers had alerted Nagler to the approaching heat. No, he decided finally. Havilland was too well buffered. The worshippers probably had no way of contacting Havilland or each other besides Havilland’s pay phone communiqués, which logic told him were rigidly pre-scheduled. *His* investigatory parries were buffered against discovery. Then the truth hit. He was pumping himself up with logic because Linda was part of the game and part of him, and if she fell the game was over forever.

Shortly after ten o’clock, a silver Porsche convertible pulled up in front of the A-frame. Lloyd nudged Bergen awake and said, “Our buddy is here. Follow my lead and when I touch my necktie interrupt me and buzz him with ‘behind the green door’ and ‘beyond the beyond.’ This guy had nothing to do with Jack Herzog, so don’t even mention his name. You got it?”

Bergen nodded and squared his shoulders in preparation for his performance. Lloyd grabbed a flashlight and opened the car door just as a man got out of the Porsche and crossed the sidewalk in front of the A-frame. Bergen slammed his door, causing the man to turn around at the foot of the steps. “Police officers,” Lloyd called out.

The man froze at the words, then walked forward in the direction of his car. Lloyd flashed the light square in his face, forcing him to throw up his hands to shield his eyes. “It—it’s—ma-my car,” he stammered. “I’ve got the pink in the glove compartment.”

Lloyd studied the face. Blond, bland, and cultured were his first impressions. He pointed his five cell at the ground and said, “I’m sure it is. Are you William Nagler?”

The man stepped off the curb and stroked the hood of the Porsche. Touching its sleekness gave an edge of propriety to his voice. “Yes, I am. What is this in regard to?”

Lloyd walked up to within inches of Nagler, forcing him back on the sidewalk. He held up his badge and played his light on it, then said, “L.A.P.D. My name is Hopkins, that’s Sergeant Bergen. Could we talk to you inside?”

Nagler shuffled his feet. Lloyd held his light on the little dance of fear and saw that the worshipper was pigeon-toed to the point of deformity. “Why? Have you got a warrant? Hey! What are you doing!”

Lloyd turned around and saw Marty Bergen leaning into the Porsche, feeling under the seats. Nagler wrapped his arms around himself and shouted, “Don’t! That’s my car!”

“Cool it, Partner,” Lloyd said. “The man is cooperating, so just maintain your coolness.” Lowering his voice, he said to Nagler, “My partner’s a black glove cop, but I keep him on a short chain. Can we go inside? It’s cold out here.”

Nagler brushed a lock of lank blond hair up from his forehead. Lloyd eyed him openly and added competent and smart and very scared to his initial assessment.

“What’s a black glove cop?”

As if on cue, Bergen walked over and stood beside Lloyd. “We should toss the vehicle,” he said. “This bimbo’s a doper, I can tell. What are you flying on, citizen? Ludes? Smack? Dust? Give me thirty seconds inside that glove compartment and I’ll get us a righteous dope bust.”

Lloyd gave Bergen a disgusted look. “This is a routine questioning of burglary victims, not a narc raid, so be cool. Mr. Nagler, can we go inside?”

Nagler’s feet did another fear dance. “I’m not a burglary victim. I’ve never been burglarized and I don’t know anything about any burglaries.”

Lloyd put an arm around Nagler’s shoulders and moved him out of Bergen’s earshot. “All the houses on this block have been crawled,” he said. “Sometimes the guy steals, sometimes not. A snitch of mine heard a tip that he’s a panty freak, that he checks out all the pads he crawls for lingerie. What I want to do is check for fingerprints on your bedroom drawers. It will only take five minutes.”

Nagler jerked himself free. “No. I can’t allow it. Not without a warrant.”

Pointing at Bergen, Lloyd whispered, “He’s the senior officer, I’m just a forensic technician. If I can’t print your drawers, he’ll go cuckoo and frame you on a drug charge. His daughter O.D.’d on heroin and it flipped him out. He’s about one step ahead of the net, so it wouldn’t do to rile him. Please cooperate, Mr. Nagler, for both our sakes.”

Nagler looked over his shoulder at Marty Bergen, who was now squatting and examining the front wheel covers of his Porsche. “All right, Officer. Just keep that man *away* from me.”

Lloyd whistled, drawing Bergen away from his hubcap scrutiny. “Mr. Nagler is going to cooperate, Sergeant. Let’s make it quick. He’s a busy man.”

“Dopers always are,” Bergen said, walking over. He gave the Porsche a last glance and added, “I’ll bet it’s hot. We should check the hot sheet. We could get us a righteous G.T.A. bust.” Leaning into Lloyd in a pseudo drunk’s weave, he whispered, “What’s my job inside?”

Seeing that Nagler was walking ahead to open the door, Lloyd faked a coughing attack, then said sotto voce, “Toss the pad for official papers, especially anything pertaining to property in Malibu. See if you can find something illegal to squeeze him with. Be menacing.”

Nagler unlocked the door and turned on a light in the entrance foyer. He pointed inside and shivered, then wrapped his arms around himself and moved his inwardly bent feet together so that the toes were touching. Lloyd thought of a frightened animal trying to protect itself by curling into a ball and blending in with the scenery. The fear in the man’s eyes made him want to strangle John Havilland for his complicity in that fear and strangle himself for what he might have to do. He caught Bergen’s eyes and saw that his bogus partner was thinking along parallel lines and hoped that his rage would hold for the duration of his performance. When he felt his own rage subside in a wave of pity, he resurrected it by thinking of the guru-shrink slipping through loopholes in the legal process and said, “Let’s sit down and talk for a minute first, Mr. Nagler. There’s a few questions I have.”

Nagler nodded assent. Lloyd walked through the foyer into a living room furnished with plastic high-tech chairs and a long sofa constructed of beanbags and industrial tubing. Bergen sauntered in behind him, going straight for a portable bar on casters. Sitting down in a lavender armchair that creaked under his weight, Lloyd saw western movie posters beam down at him from all four walls. Nagler perched himself on the edge of the sofa and said, "Will you *please* make this fast?"

Lloyd smiled and said, "Of course. This is a charming living room, by the way." He pointed to the posters. "Are you a movie buff?"

"I'm a free-lance art director and an amateur filmmaker," Nagler said, leveling worried eyes at Marty Bergen. "Now please get to your questions."

Bergen chuckled and poured himself a large shot of Scotch. "I think this pad sucks, and I think this bimbo is just holding down this art director gig as a front for his dope racket." He downed the drink and poured another. "What are you dealing, citizen? Weed? Speed? *Dust*? That's it, Hoppy! This is a *dust bust*!"

Nagler fretted his hands and pleaded to Lloyd with his eyes. Bergen guzzled Scotch, then blurted out, "Jesus, I'm gonna be sick. Where's the can?"

Lloyd waved an arm toward the back of the house as Nagler drew his feet together and slammed the edge of the sofa with outwardly cocked wrists. Bergen took off running, making gagging sounds and holding his hands over his mouth. Lloyd shook his head and said, "I apologize for my colleague, Mr. Nagler."

"He's a terrible man," Nagler whispered. "He has a low karma consciousness. Unless he changes his life radically, he'll never go beyond his low efficacy image."

Lloyd noted that the recitation of the mini-spiel had had a calming effect on Nagler. He honed his own spiel to razor sharpness and said, "Yes, I do pity him. He has so many doors to go beyond before he finds out who he really is."

The razor drew blood. Nagler's whole body relaxed. Lloyd threw out a smile calculated to flash "kindred soul." Thinking, *hook him now,* he said, "He needs spiritual guidance. A spiritual master is just the ticket for him. Don't you agree?"

Nagler's face lit up, then clouded over with what looked to Lloyd like an aftertaste of doubt and fear. Finally he breathed out, "Yes. Please get on with your business and leave me in peace. *Please.*"

Lloyd was silent, charting interrogation courses while he got out a pen and notepad. Nagler fidgeted on the edge of the sofa, then turned around when footsteps echoed behind him.

"Achtung, citizen!"

Lloyd looked up from his notepad to see Marty Bergen hovering next to the sofa, holding a glass freebase pipe out at arm's length. "Thought you were cool, didn't you, citizen? No dope on the premises. However, you overlooked the new possession of drug paraphernalia law recently passed by the state legislature. This pipe and the ether on your bathroom shelf constitute a misdemeanor."

Bergen dropped the pipe into Nagler's lap. Nagler jerked to this feet and threw his hands up to his face; the pipe fell to the floor and shattered. Bergen, florid faced and grinning from ear to ear, looked at Lloyd and said, "This is fucking ironic. I wrote an editorial condemning that law as fascist, which of course it is. Now I'm here enforcing it. Ain't life a bitch?" He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a wad of paper. "Check this out," he said.

Lloyd stood up, grabbed the papers and walked over to the shivering worshipper. Steeling himself against revulsion, he said, “You have the right to remain silent. You have the right to have legal counsel present during questioning. If you cannot afford counsel, an attorney will be provided. Do you have a statement to make regarding that paraphernalia, Mr. Nagler?”

The answer was a series of body shudders. Nagler pressed himself into the wall, trembling. Lloyd put a gentle hand on his shoulder and felt a jolt of almost electric tension. Looking down at the worshipper’s feet, he saw that they were twisting across each other, as if trying to gouge the ankles. The brutality of the posture made Lloyd turn away and seek out Marty Bergen for a semblance of sanity.

The image backfired.

Bergen was standing by the bar, guzzling Scotch straight from the bottle. When he saw Lloyd staring at him, he said, “Learning things you don’t like about yourself, Hot Dog?”

Lloyd walked to Bergen and grabbed the bottle from his hands. “Guard him. Don’t touch him and don’t talk to him; just let him be.”

This time the answer Lloyd got was Bergen’s grin of self-loathing; a smile that looked like a close-up of his own soul. Taking the bottle with him, he walked to a small den off the living room hallway and found the phone. He dialed Linda’s number and let it ring ten times. No answer. Checking his watch, he saw that it was 10:40. Linda had probably gotten tired of waiting for his call and had left.

Lloyd put down the phone, knowing that he had wanted the comfort of Linda’s voice more than her confirmation of Havilland’s prints on the magnum. Remembering Bergen’s wad of paper, he reached into his pocket and extracted it, smoothing it out on the desk beside the phone.

It was a real estate brochure listing properties in Malibu and the Malibu Colony. Attached to the top of the front page were “complimentary” Pacific Coast Highway parking stickers for the period 6/1/84 to 6/1/85. A soft “bingo” sounded in Lloyd’s mind. Beach area realtors gave away the hundred-dollar-a-year resident stickers to their preferred customers. It was a solid indication that Nagler had property in Malibu—property that he let John Havilland use, but held the deed to for tax purposes and secrecy. Havilland would undoubtedly *not* let his worshippers confer with him at his office or Beverly Hills condo—but a beach house owned by an *especially* trusted worshipper would be the ideal place for individual or group meetings.

He read the name of the realtor on the front of the brochure—Ginjer Buchanan Properties. The phone number was listed below it. Lloyd dialed it on the off-chance that an eager beaver salesperson might still be at the office. When all he got was a recorded message, he called information and got a residential listing for a Ginjer Buchanan in Pacific Palisades. He dialed that number and got another machine, this one featuring reggae music and the realtor’s importunings to “leave a message at the tone and I’ll call you from the Twilight Zone.”

Thinking of the Los Angeles Police Department as both the keepers and inmates of the Twilight Zone, Lloyd rifled the desk drawers looking for official paper pertaining to Malibu property. Finding nothing but stationery and invoices for movie equipment, he walked down the hall looking for other likely rooms to toss. The bathroom and kitchen would probably yield zilch, but at the end of the hallway stood a half-opened door.

Lloyd walked to it and fumbled at the inside wall for a light switch. An overhead light went on, framing a small room filled with haphazardly discarded movie cameras, rolls of film, and developing trays. The floor was a mass of broken equipment, with plaster chips torn loose from the walls. Noticing a Movieola that remained intact atop a metal desk, Lloyd peered in the viewfinder and saw a celluloid strip showing a pair of inert legs clad in white stockings.

He was about to examine the equipment more closely when singing and chanting blasted from the living room. Walking back to investigate, Lloyd saw and heard a hellish two-part harmony.

Marty Bergen was standing over a kneeling William Nagler, strumming an imaginary guitar and singing, "They had an old piano and they played it hot behind the green door! don't know what they're doin', but they laugh a lot behind the green door! Won't someone let me in so I can find out what's behind the green door!"

When Bergen fell silent, fumbling for more verses, Nagler's chanting took precedence, "*Patria infinitum patria infinitum patria infinitum.*" Muttered in a droning monotone punctuated by the worshipper's banging of his prayer-clasped hands against his chest, the words seemed to rise from a volition far older and darker than John Havilland or his murderer-father. *"Patria infinitum patria infinitum patria infinitum patria infinitum patria infinitum.*"

Bergen snapped to Lloyd's presence and shouted above the chanting, "Hi, Hoppy! Think I'll make the top forty with this? Green Door Green Door Green Door!"

Lloyd grabbed Bergen and shoved him to the wall and held him there, hissing, "Shut the fuck up now, and don't drink another drop. Go toss the rest of the pad for Nagler's I.R.S. forms and income tax returns. Don't say another fucking word, just do it."

Bergen tried to smile. It came out a death grin. "Okay, Sarge," he said.

Lloyd released Bergen and watched him ooze off the wall. When he shambled away, the chanting became the dominating aspect of the room, "*Patria infinitum patria infinitum patria infinitum patria infinitum patria infinitum.*"

Lloyd knelt in front of the worshipper, watching his trance grow deeper with each blow to the heart, memorizing every detail of the flagellation in order to justify his next move. When Nagler's glazed eyes and heaving lungs were permanently imprinted in his mind, he swung a full power open hand at his head and saw the trance crumble as the worshipper was knocked off his knees screaming, "Doctor!"

Lloyd, knocked loose of his own equilibrium, pinned Nagler's shoulders to the floor and shouted, "Havilland's dead, William. Before he died he said that you were a chump and a fool and a dupe."

Nagler's glazed eyes zeroed in on Lloyd. "No. No. No. *Patria infinitum. Patria infin—*"

Lloyd dug his fingers into the worshipper's collarbone. "No, William, you can't. You can't go back."

"Doctor!"

"Shhh. Shhh. You can't, Bill. You can't go back."

"Doctor!"

Lloyd dug his fingers deeper, until Nagler started to sob. Withdrawing his hands altogether, he said, “He talked about how he used you, Bill. How he got you to pay his phone bills, how he made you his slave, how he laughed at you, how your movies were shit, how. you had all that expensive equipment, but you did—”

Lloyd stopped when Nagler’s sobs trailed off into a terrified stutter. “Hor-hor-hor-moo-hor-moo.”

“Shhh, shhh,” Lloyd whispered. “Take it slow and think the words out.”

Nagler stared up at Lloyd. The look on his face wavered between grief and bliss. Finally the bliss prevailed long enough for him to say, “Horror movie. Doctor John made a horror movie. That’s how I know you’re lying about what he said about me. He appreciates my talent. I edited the movie and Doctor said—he said …”

Lloyd stood up, then helped Nagler to his feet and pointed him toward the sofa. When Nagler was seated, he studied his face. He looked like a man about to enter the gas chamber who didn’t know whether or not he wanted to die. Knowing that the bliss/death part of the worshipper had the edge and possessed the potential to produce lucid answers, Lloyd quashed his impulse to bludgeon Nagler into grief/life. Sighing, he sat down beside the ravished young man and stabbed in the dark. “Havilland isn’t really dead, Bill.”

“I know that,” Nagler said. “He was here this morning with—” He stopped and flashed a robot smile. “He was here this morning.”

Lloyd said, “Finish the thought, Bill.”

“I did. Doctor John was here this morning. End of thought.”

“No. Beginning of thought. But let’s change the subject. You don’t really think I’m a policeman, do you?”

Nagler shook his head. “No. Doctor John told me that there was a three percent leak factor in our program. I know exactly what the leak was—it came to me while I was chanting. You’re an Internal Revenue agent. I paid Doctor John’s phone bills while he went skiing in Idaho last December. You checked the records out, because you’re with big brother. You also cross-checked my bank records and the Doctor’s, and saw that I sent him a big check last year. He probably forget to report it on his tax return. You want a bribe to keep silent. Very well, name your amount and I’ll write a check.” Nagler laughed. “How silly of me. That would leave a record. No, name your amount and I’ll pay you off in cash.”

Lloyd gasped at Nagler’s recuperative powers. Five minutes earlier, he had been a groveling mass. Now he held the condescending authority of a plantation owner A “horror movie” and the wrecked equipment in the back room were the dividing points. Thinking, *Break him,* he said, “Didn’t it surprise you that my partner knew enough to sing you that song?”

“No. A song is a song.”

“And a movie is a movie,” Lloyd said, reaching into his pocket. “Bill, it’s time I came clean. Doctor John sent me to test your loyalty.” He held out the mug-shot strip of Thomas Goff. “I’m the replacement for the old recruiter. You remember this fellow, don’t you? There’s a guy on Doctor John’s program who looks just like him. I know all about the meetings at the house in Malibu and how you bought the house for the Doctor and how you pay the phone bill. I know about the pay phone contacts and how you don’t fraternize outside the meetings. I know because I'm one of you, Bill."

First grief, then bliss, now bewilderment. Lloyd had kept his eyes averted from Nagler, letting him feast on Thomas Goff's image instead of his own. When he finally reestablished eye contact he saw that the man had fingered the mug-shot strip to pieces and that his spiel had turned him into clay. Feeling like a bullfighter going in for the kill, Lloyd said, "I also lied when I said that Doctor John said that your movies were shit. He really loves your movie work. In fact, just today he told me that he wants you to both star in *and* direct the script that he's working on. He tol—"

Lloyd stopped when Nagler's grief took him over. "*Patria infinitum patria infinitum patria infinitum patria infinitum.*"

Lloyd thought of Linda and got up and walked toward the den and the telephone. He had his hand on the reciever when a tap on his shoulder forced him to jump back, turn around, and ball his fists.

It was Bergen, looking eerily sober. "I couldn't find any I.R.S. papers," he said, "but I did find our pal's diary under his bed. Renaissance weird, Hopkins. Fucking gothic."

Lloyd took the morocco bound book from Bergen's hands and sat down on the desk. Opening it, he saw that the first entry was dated 11/13/83, and that it and all the subsequent entries were written in an exquisitely flourished longhand. While Bergen stood over him, he read through accounts of Havilland's "programming," picking up a cryptically designated cast along the way. There was the "Lieutenant," who had to be Thomas Goff; the "Fox," the "Bull dagger," the "Bookworm," the "Professor," the "Muscleman," and "Billy Boy," who had to be Nagler himself.

The entries themselves detailed how Havilland ordered his charges to fast for thirty-six hours, then stand nude in front of full-length mirrors and chant their "fear mantras" into tape recorders, until "subliminal dream consciousness" took over and led them to babble "transcendental fantasies" that he would later sift through for "key details" to translate into "reality fodder." How he paired them off sexually at the "Beach Womb," interrupting the couplings to take vital signs and "stress readings"; how he forced them to kill dogs and cats as "insurance against moral flaccidity"; how the "Lieutenant" interrupted their REM sleep with late night phone calls and brutal interrogations into their dreams.

Alternately using the first person "I" and the third person "Billy Boy," Nagler described how he and Doctor John's other counselees were pimped out to wealthy people who advertised for "fantasy therapists" in privately published and circulated sex tabloids, the weekend "lovemaking seminars" often netting Havilland several thousand dollars, and how the "beach womb groupings" were taped and transcribed by the "Lieutenant," who sometimes served as the "Chef"—concocting mixtures of pharmaceutical cocaine and other prescription drugs that the Doctor would administer to his counselees under "test-flight conditions."

Lloyd leafed full-speed through the diary, looking for incriminating facts: names, addresses and dates. With Marty Bergen hovering beside him and Nagler's muffled chanting coming in from the living room, he felt like the sole outpost of sanity in a lunatic landscape, the feeling underlined by the fact that the diary contained *no* facts—only narrated disclosures peopled with coded characters.

Until an entry dated the day before jumped out at him:

> Helped set up movie equipment at the Muscleman's house in the Hollywood Hills. Doctor John supervised. I showed him how to operate the camera. I hope Muscle-man won't break anything. He scares me—and he looks more and more like the Lieutenant these days.

The entry was followed by a blank page, followed by the diary's concluding entry, dated that morning. Lloyd felt an icepick at his spine as he read,

> *It's not real.* They faked it. You can fake anything with new camera technology. It's a fake. It's not real.

Lloyd shoved Bergen aside and walked back to the movie room and searched among the upended equipment for film scraps, finding three strips of celluloid wedged underneath the editing machine. Running them through the machine's feeder-viewfinder, he saw four close-ups of a woman's white nyloned legs, a long shot of a mattress on a carpeted floor and a blurred extreme close-up of a broad-chested man with what looked like an L.A.P.D. badge pinned to his shirt.

The icepick jabbed his heart. Lloyd thought of the white-stockinged nurse that Richard Oldfield had brought to his house twenty-four hours before. The knife twisted, dug and tore, accompanied by a deafening burst of *patria infinitums* from the living room.

Lloyd walked toward the sound, finding Nagler still in his mantra pose and Bergen standing beside the fireplace, pouring bottles of liquor over the acrylic "firewood" on the grate. "Long-term interrogation, Sarge," he said. "It won't do to get tempted. What's next?" His ghoul grin had become a feisty smirk, and for one split-second Lloyd found a beacon of sanity.

"I'm leaving, you're staying here," he said. "I have to check on someone. Then, if she got my evidence, I have to take our friend's guru out. You stay here and watchdog him. Hang by the phone. If I need you, I'll ring once, then call back immediately."

"I want in on the bust," Bergen said.

Lloyd shook his head. "No. Just having you *here* could cause me lots of grief, and I'm not risking my job or *you* any further." He watched Bergen's smirk go hangdog. "What are you going to do when all this is over?"

Bergen laughed as he poured out a bottle of Courvoisier V.S.O.P. "I don't know. Jack left me close to twenty grand, maybe I'll just see where that takes me." When Lloyd didn't react to his mention of the money, he said, "You *knew* about the bank draft, right?"

Lloyd said, "Yeah. I didn't report it because I knew I.A.D. would try to seize your account as evidence."

"You're a good shit, Hopkins. You know that?"

"Sometimes."

"What are *you* going to do when this is over?"

Lloyd thought of Linda and Janice and his daughters, then looked over at the devastated William Nagler, still chanting at demons. "I don't know," he said.

THE Night Tripper sat at the recording console in the Beach Womb, listening to Richard Oldfield and Linda Wilhite make frightened small talk upstairs in bedroom number three. The split-second accuracy of his fate had taken on ironic overtones. Linda's screaming of "Hopkins" combined with the gun in her purse was a tacit admission that the genius cop had figured it out on the same day that he had broken through his childhood void. Richard had blown his chance to kill Hopkins, and his contingency plan to drive Linda over the edge with the snuff film and have *her* commit the murder had backfired. After twenty-seven years devoted to venting his terror through others, it had all come down to himself. He had claimed his father's heritage, gaining autonomy along with the knowledge that the game was over. God was a malevolent jokester armed with a blunt instrument called irony.

Havilland leaned back in the chair that Thomas Goff used to occupy, feeling a conscious version of his dream disengagement split him in two. His left side imagined whirling corkboards, while his right side heard words issuing from the bedroom where Richard guarded the object of his corkboard fantasies. Soon exhaustion crept up. The spinning of the corkboard dominated, while the words played on, like dim music at the edge of sound.

"… why are you staring at me?"

"Doctor said to watch you."

"Do you do everything he tells you to do?"

"Yes. Why are you making nasty faces at me? I've been gentle with you."

"Because Doctor said to be gentle? No, don't answer, it'll only make me hate you more. For your information, drugging and kidnapping is not a gentle activity. Are you aware of that?"

"Yes. No. You're very beautiful."

"Jesus. Was that movie for real? I mean, there was the awful part, and then this close-up of you. Listen, are you Thomas Goff?"

"I told you my name was Richard."

"All right, but what about the movie. *Was* it real? My mother was killed like that, with a pillow and a gun. Is the movie part of your crazy guru's plans for me?"

"What movie?"

"Jesus. Are you high? I mean, on something besides insanity? You know, on drugs?"

"Doctor gives me tranquilizers and antidepressants. Prescription stuff. He's a doctor, so it's legal and not bad."

"*Not bad*? Havilland's a Doctor Feelgood to boot? No, don't answer, I know he's capable of anything. I'm not going to let you hurt me, you know. Never. Not ever."

"I don't want to hurt you."

"Jesus, you sound like Peter Loire. Does it turn you on that I'm not scared?"

"Yes. No. No!"

"First responses are always the most honest, Richard. If you or that psychopath downstairs tried to hurt me, I'd kick and bite and scratch and rub lye in your eyes. I—"

"I don't want to hurt you! I've done my hurting! It wasn't good!"

"Y-you—you mean you hurt other women?"

"Yes! No! I mean they hurt *me.* Me! Me! Me! Me. Me."

"Who hurt you? What are you talking about?"

"No. Doctor said I should talk to you, but not about bad things."

"Bad things, hmm? Okay, we'll change the subject. Let me ask you a question. Do you honestly think that those overdeveloped muscles of yours are a turn-on to women?"

"No. Yes. Yes!"

"First responses, Richard, and you're right. A woman sees a man like you and thinks, 'This guy is so insecure that he spends three hours a day at the gym with all the fags and narcissists, building himself up outside so I won't know how scared he is inside.' I've got a lover who's bigger than you and probably almost as strong, but he's got a trace of flab on his stomach and hips. And I dig it. You know why? Because he lives in reality and does a good job of it, and he hasn't got time to pump iron. So don't think your muscles impress me."

"The … they're for protection."

"From the people who hurt you? From the *women* who hurt you?"

"Yes."

"Aha, the truth outs. Let me set you straight on something. Muscles don't rule the world, brains do. Which is how a wimp like Havilland can make a slave out of someone big and strong like you. People protect each other with their love, not their muscles. Someone, probably some woman, hurt you really badly. She didn't do it with her muscles, because she didn't have any. You can't get revenge by hitting back at people the way they hit at you, because then the people who hurt you win—by making you like them. Aren't you hip to that?"

"No. It's different with Doctor John. He took me beyond my beyond."

"What's your beyond?"

"No!"

"Hurting women? You can't hurt me, because I'm smarter than you and stronger than you, and because that wimp downstairs told you not to. Some fucking beyond. Brown-noser to a freaked-out headshrinker who's going to end up in the locked ward at Camarillo for life. Who's going to protect you when he's wearing a straitjacket and sucking baby food out of a straw?"

"No! No! No no no no no. No."

"Yes, Richard. Yes. Besides, how many beyonds have you got? One? Two? Three? You don't seem too fulfilled to me. It's old wimpy's beyonds we're talking about, Richard. I almost wish you'd try to get violent with me, so I'd know you had the guts to disobey your slavemaster."

"What makes you think you're so smart and so tough?"

"I don't know. Do you know that I'm not scared of you?"

"Yes."

"Then that's your answer."

"What would you do if I tried to hurt you?"

"Fight back. Watch you get turned on and watch you lose."

"Doctor said you're a whore. Whores are wrong. Whores are bad."

"You almost got me there, but you missed by a few days. I quit. I walked. *I walked.* You can, too. You can walk out the door and wave good-bye to the Doctor, and he'll be terrified, because without you he's just another L.A. fruitcake with no place to hang his hat. Think on that. I'm going to try to sleep, but you think on that."

The Night Tripper awakened, instantly aware that his corkboard dreams had destroyed the music voices in bedroom number three. He checked the console and saw that he had forgotten to hit the "record" switch, then heard a soft male sobbing come over the speakers and pictured Richard distraught over his dictate not to hurt the whore.

Richard was a day too late. Linda was his. In the morning he would sacrifice her to his father's memory. He would end the game on his own terms.

DAWN. Lloyd sped north on Pacific Coast Highway, running on adrenaline, rage, and terror. His jeopardy gambit had become a sacrificial offering, and if the fires had already been fed, he would have to take out the Beach Womb and everyone in it and throw himself into the flames. He looked at the pump shotgun resting on the seat beside him. Five rounds. Enough for Havilland, Oldfield, two miscellaneous worshippers, and himself.

The thought of self-immolation jerked his mind off of the immediate future and back to the immediate past. After leaving Bergen and Nagler, he had driven to Linda's apartment. She was not there, and her Mercedes was not in the garage. Now frightened, he had run dome light and siren to Havilland's Century City office. The night watchman in the lobby told him that he had admitted a very beautiful young woman at about seven o'clock, and that an hour later the nice Dr. Havilland and another man had brought her downstairs, looking high as a kite. "Emergency tooth extraction," the Doctor had said. "I'm not a dentist, but I gave it a go anyway." The two men had then hustled the near-comatose woman off in the direction of the parking lot.

After frantically driving by Havilland's Beverly Hills condo and finding no one there, Lloyd had run code three to the Pacific Palisades residential address of Ginjer Buchanan of Ginjer Buchanan Properties. The woman was not at home, but her live-in housekeeper succeeded in rousing her by phone at her boyfriend's apartment in Topanga Canyon. After Lloyd explained the urgency of the matter, the realtor agreed to meet him at her office with the information he needed. An hour later, at five A.M., he was staring at a floor plan of the Beach Womb.

Then the terror that he had held at bay by movement took over. If he called the Malibu sheriffs for assistance, they would storm the beachfront house S.W.A.T. style, with all the accoutrements of military/police overkill: Gas, machine guns, bullhorns, and the substation's lackluster hostage negotiation team. Loudspeaker amplified pleas, counterpleas and simplistic psychological manipulation that Havilland would laugh at; itchy-fingered deputies weaned on TV cop shows; automatic weaponry fired in panic. Linda in the crossfire. No. The jeopardy gambit came down to himself.

Again Lloyd looked at his Ithaca pump. When the taste of cordite and charred flesh rose in his throat, he pulled over to the side of the highway and a long row of pay phones. Jungle Jack Herzog redux—with a blackmail demand.

He had the receiver to his ear and a handkerchief over the mouthpiece when a strangely familiar vehicle ground to a halt behind his cruiser. Squinting through the Plexiglas, he saw Marty Bergen get out on the driver's side door and walk over to the booths, holding a quart bottle of beer out at arm's length, as though he were afraid of being contaminated. Lloyd slammed down the receiver, wondering how someone so sad could look so scary.

Bergen smiled. "Maintenance jug. I haven't touched it yet. Emergencies only. You look scared, Hopkins. Really scared."

Lloyd grabbed the bottle and smashed it to pieces on the pavement. Only when the smell of beer hit his nostrils did he realize what he had done. "I told you to stay with Nagler."

"I couldn't. I had to move, so I tied him up and split. Is that a misdemeanor or a felony? When I was on the job I never did learn the penal code."

"How did you find me?"

"That one I do know: 413.5—Impersonating a Police Officer. I called the number on the real estate brochure. The woman told me you'd just walked out the door. She gave me the guru guy's address. I was headed up there when I saw your car."

Lloyd started to see red. "*And*?"

Bergen squared his shoulders. "And this is vigilante shit all the way. Where's the backup units? Where's the sheriff's black-and-whites? It's all about to come down, and you're here by your lonesome looking scared. Why? Personally, I think we should go in full bore, fire team, copters, tear gas, snipers, I—"

Lloyd swung an overhand right at Bergen's jaw. Bergen caught the blow flush and went down on his back, then got up on one knee and began flailing with both arms, his eyes squeezed shut. Lloyd started to bring up an uppercut, then hesitated and moved backward into the phone booth. He fed dimes to the coin slot until he realized he had deposited four times the required amount. Cracking the door for air, he deep breathed and dialed.

"Hello?"

The voice was Havilland's. Lloyd cleared his throat and brought his voice up to tenor register. "Doctor, this is Jack Herzog. I've been away for a while. I need to see you."

The Doctor's response was a startling burst of laughter. "Hello, Sergeant. Congratulations on a job well done."

Lloyd said, "I know all about you and your father. Herzog left a pile of notes. Let Linda go, Havilland. It's over."

"Yes, it is over, but Herzog's green door would prevent him from keeping notes, and if you had any evidence, storm troopers would already have assaulted me. And Linda is here of her own free will."

"Let me talk to her."

"No. Later perhaps."

"Hav—"

Lloyd doubled over as a blunt forced crashed into his kidneys; he dropped the receiver and slid down the wall as Bergen uncoiled his fists and elbowed his way into the booth. Lloyd tried to get up, but stomach cramps forced him to remain bent over, retching for breath.

Bergen picked up the dangling receiver and spoke into it. "Hey guru man, this is Martin Bergen. I'm a reporter for the *Big Orange Insider.* Maybe Jack Herzog told you about me. Listen, Hopkins and I just broke Billy Boy Nagler. He told us all about your scam. The *Orange* is going to do an exposé on you, talk about how you cheated your way through medical school, how you studied pimp techniques with Western Avenue spades, how chronic impotence led you to become a spiritual master. You like it, guru? You feel like consenting to an interview?"

Lloyd got to his feet and shoved his ear in the direction of the receiver, shouldering Bergen partially aside, so that both men were able to hear the tail end of Havilland's scream, the long silence that came in its wake and the calm words that finally emerged. "Yes. An interview. You obviously know where I am. Come over. We'll barter for the truth."

The line went dead. Lloyd shoved Bergen out of the booth and limped over to his car, his abdominal pain abating with each step he took. Grabbing Ginjer Buchanan's floor plan from the glove compartment, he said, "Have you still got your thirty-eight?"

"Yes," Bergen whispered.

Lloyd spread the floor plan out on the hood of the cruiser. "Good. You knock on the front door, I'll go in upstairs on the beach side. There's a woman in the house. She's innocent. Don't go near her. Keep the Doctor talking for at least two minutes. If he tries to pull anything weird, kill him."

5

THE Night Tripper switched on the living room amplifier and the bedroom number three speaker, then walked into the kitchen and found the 1984 equivalent of his 1957 Arkansas toad stabber, a short-bladed, serrated-edged steak knife. He stuck the weapon in his back pants pocket and called upstairs, “Richard, come here a second.”

Oldfield appeared at the head of the stairs. “Yes, Doctor?”

“We’re having a visitor,” Havilland said. “Maybe more than one. Stay upstairs in number three and stick close to Linda. Listen for strange noises. When you hear ‘now’ come over the speaker, bring Linda down to me.”

Nodding mutely, Oldfield about-faced and walked back down the hall. Havilland stared at the front door and counted seconds, savoring each little increment of time. He was up to six hundred and forty-three when the doorbell rang.

The Doctor opened the door, extending his second count to six hundred and fifty, standing perfectly still as he eyed the burned-out figure who had maneuvered at the center of the Alchemist’s life and the unseen periphery of his own. “Please come in,” he said.

Bergen entered, hunching forward with his hands jammed in his windbreaker pockets. “Nice decor,” he said. “Too bad I didn’t bring my notebook. I can never remember details unless I write them down.”

Havilland pointed to a pair of arm chairs facing the latticework patio and the beach. Bergen walked over and sat down, stretching his legs and cramming his hands deeper into his pockets. Sitting down beside him, the Doctor said, “Where’s Hopkins?”

Bergen licked his lips. “Parked over on P.C.H., scared shitless. He’s crazy about this girl you’re holding, and he’s afraid to move because he thinks you’ll kill her. He suspects you of all kinds of felony shit, but his superiors won’t let him move—no hard proof. We glommed Billy Boy’s diary, but all we could get out of it were possible pandering beefs. You’re clean, Doc.”

Havilland breathed out slowly, wondering if the burnout’s right hand was holding a gun. “Then you really have no intentions of writing an article on me? You came here to offer me a deal?”

“Right. Hopkins and I both want something personal. I want all your records pertaining to Jack Herzog destroyed. I don’t want anyone to know that you counseled him. Hopkins wants the girl released safely. If you comply, Hopkins drops his investigation and lets the L.A.P.D. high brass deal with you, and I never write a word about you and your scam. What do you think?”

Havilland let the deal settle in on him. The selfishness of the men’s motives rang true, but they obviously didn't know that he knew the game was *over*. "And if I don't comply?"

Bergen pulled out his left hand and looked at his watch. "Then I attack you in print with a yellow journalistic fervor you wouldn't believe, and Crazy Lloyd goes after you with everything *he's* got. A word to the wise, Doc. They don't call him Crazy Lloyd for nothing."

Lloyd skirted the ocean side of the house, looking for the foundation stanchions mentioned on the floor plan. Holding the Ithaca pump in the crook of his arm, he hugged the edge of the sand, shielded from view from within the house by a wooden screen of crisscrossed trelliswork.

The rear stanchion was an ornately carved wooden pole leading up to a second story balcony that was open at the front and enclosed by a trelliswork arbor immediately before the upstairs windows. Lloyd grabbed the pole with his right arm and inched himself up the narrow footholds provided by the carving indentations, holding the shotgun out at arm's length. When he was just underneath the edge of the balcony, he slid the Ithaca pump up and over, wincing at the clatter and scrape of metal. Leaning his weight into the pole, he released his right arm and grabbed the edge with both hands, then hoisted himself onto the tarpapered surface.

Hearing nothing but silence, Lloyd picked up the shotgun and tiptoed over to the enclosure, looking for an entry point. There were no built-in doors, but dead in the middle a section of wood had cracked and separated, providing a crawl space. Seeing no other way, Lloyd wedged himself through, splintering a large network of boards in the process. The sound exploded in his ears, and he closed his eyes to blot out the overwhelming sense that the whole world could hear it. When he opened them, he again heard nothing but silence, and realized that his finger had the Ithaca's trigger at half-squeeze.

Early morning light played through the gaps in the trelliswork and reflected off the second floor windows. Lloyd threaded his way past piles of lounge chairs and over to the windows, hoping to find at least one unlatched. He was about to begin trying the hasps when he saw that the middle window was wide open.

Holding the shotgun out in front of him, he walked over and pulled back the curtains that blocked his view. Seeing nothing but an empty bedroom, he stepped inside and padded to the door. Opening it inward with trembling hands, he saw a long carpeted hallway and heard Marty Bergen's voice *surrounding* him: "We're reasonable men, aren't we? Compromise is the basis of reason, isn't it? We—"

Lloyd pulled the door shut, wondering how Bergen's voice would be carrying from two places at once. Then it hit him: William Nagler's diary had stated that Thomas Goff taped the Beach Womb groupings. The house was obviously equipped with speakers, amplifiers and bugging apparatus. Bergen and Havilland were downstairs talking, while an upstairs speaker was blasting their conversation.

Lloyd pushed the door open and peered out, cocking his ears in order to get a fix on the speaker. The sound of amplified coughing delivered it: The room across the hallway two doors down. Linda was flashing across his mind until Havilland's voice destroyed the image. "But you want innocence for Jack, and you can't have it. Hopkins wants the woman and he can't have her. *Now*!"

And then Linda was there in reality, propelled out of the speaker bedroom by an unseen force. Lloyd jumped out into the hallway when he saw her, catching a blurred glimpse of a moving object that she seemed to be shielding. When Linda saw him, she screamed, "No!" and tried to duck back into the room, revealing Richard Oldfield behind her.

"Hopkins, no!"

Linda stumbled and fell to the floor as Oldfield froze in the doorway. Lloyd fired twice at eye level, blowing away Oldfield's retreating shadow and half the doorframe. Muzzle smoke and exploding wood filled the hallway. Lloyd ran through it to find Linda on her feet, blocking his entrance into the bedroom. She pummelled him with tightly balled fists until he shoved her aside and saw an empty room and a half-open picture window reflecting a descending object on its opposite side. Screaming "Oldfield!" Lloyd pumped a shell into the chamber and blew the reflection and the window to bits, staring into the rain of glass for geysers of red that would mark first blood. All he saw was glass fallout; all he heard and felt was Linda pushing herself into him, shrieking, "No!"

Until a shot reverberated stereophonically from downstairs and the bedroom speaker, tearing him away from Linda and down the hall to the head of the stairs, from which he saw Bergen and Havilland wrestling on the floor for Bergen's .38, kicking, flailing and gouging at each other, twisted into one entity that made a clean shot at the Doctor impossible.

Lloyd fired blindly at the far downstairs wall. Startled by the explosion, Bergen and Havilland jerked apart from each other, letting the .38 fall between them. Lloyd hurtled down the stairs, pumping in another round and taking a running bead on the Doctor's head. He was within a safe firing perimeter when Havilland got his left hand on the revolver and aimed it at Bergen's midsection. Bergen twisted away and brought his knees up to deflect Havilland's arm, again voiding Lloyd's target.

The Doctor's finger jerked the trigger twice. The first shot ricocheted off the hardwood floor, the second shot tore through Bergen's jugular. Lloyd saw *innocent* first blood cut the air and screamed, hearing his own terrified wail dissolve into the sound of his Ithaca kicking off a wild reflex round and the .38 blasting three times in its echo. When his tear-wasted vision cleared, he saw Havilland stabbing Bergen in the stomach with a short-bladed knife.

Lloyd felt everything move into a thunderous slow motion. Slowly he worked the slide of his weapon; slowly he walked to the death scene and aimed point-blank at Havilland's head. Slowly the Doctor looked up from his second generation fate, dropped the knife and smiled.

Lloyd rested the muzzle on his forehead and pulled the trigger. The empty chamber click resounded like hollow thunder, snapping the slow motion sequence, sending everything topsy-turvy and breakneck fast. Suddenly Lloyd had the shotgun reversed and was slamming the butt into Havilland's face over and over again, until a jagged section of his cheek was sheared off and blood started to seep from his ears. Then the speed diminished into a vertiginous absence of light, and from deep nowhere a beautiful voice called out, "Walk, Richard. *Walk.*"

THE legal machinery took over, and for nine straight days, temporarily suspended from duty and held incommunicado at Parker Center, Lloyd watched the state of California and the City and County of Los Angeles bury Dr. John Havilland in an avalanche of felony indictments, a barrage of due process based on his ninety-four page arresting officer's report and Havilland's own written and taped memoirs.

The first indictment was for the murder of Martin Bergen. The Malibu District Attorney expected it to be an open and shut case, because a highly respected veteran police officer had witnessed the killing, and because the defendant appeared to have no known relatives or friends likely to press embarrassing lawsuits against either Sergeant Lloyd Hopkins or the Los Angeles Police Department for their jurisdictional foul-up on the "arrest."

Back-up charges were quick in coming, as federal agents investigating the Howard Christie murder moved in and seized *everything* at Havilland's Century City office, Beverly Hills condominium, and Malibu house. His handwritten notes alone led to three indictments for first degree murder, handwriting experts having examined verified specimens of the Doctor's script along with his diary notations stating that he had ordered Thomas Goff to "kill the proprietor of the liquor store on Sunset and the Hollywood Freeway as proof of your desire to move beyond your beyond." Indentical match ups, three murder one indictments and an indictment for criminal conspiracy resulting.

The agents also found the deed to a storage garage in East Los Angeles, and upon checking it out discovered a yellow Toyota sedan and the decomposed body of Thomas Goff. A right index print belonging to John Havilland was found on the car's dashboard. The District Attorney of the City of Los Angeles ordered yet another murder indictment. The federal officers could find no concrete evidence linking Havilland to the murder of Howard Christie, and gave up.

Four days into his forced sequestering, Captain Fred Gaffaney visited Lloyd at his typewriter storageroom/domicile and told him that *any* report that he submitted explaining Martin Bergen's presence at the Malibu house would be accepted if he agreed to edit cut all mention of former officer Jacob Herzog and all mention of the stolen L.A.P.D. files and the security firms and their files. The various prosecutors thus far involved in the case had read his ninety-four page epic and considered it "overly candid" and "potentially embarrassing to the prosecution." Lloyd agreed. Gaffaney smiled and told him it was a wise move—he would have been summarily shitcanned from the Department had he refused. Before he left, Gaffaney added that he would be appearing before the Grand Jury in two days. Was there any information he had held back? Lloyd lied and said,

"No."

The worshippers of John Havilland were taken into custody, questioned and released after signing depositions elaborating their relationships with "Doctor John." A freelance "deprogrammer" of religious cult captives was there to aid the district attorneys and D.A.'s investigators in their interrogations. The combined coercion worked four out of five times, resulting in detailed accounts of brainwashing, dope experimentation, and sexual debasement. Only William Nagler could not be convinced to talk. He screamed his mantra and ranted about "horror movies" and was ultimately released to the care of his parents, who admitted him to an expensive private sanitarium. The D.A.s were pleased overall with their questionings; the depositions would be juicy fodder for the Grand Jury, and they would spare the sad brainwashees the grief of a courtroom appearance.

Lloyd was not spared that grief. He spoke for four straight hours, almost verbatim from his new arrest report, omitting all mention of Herzog, the security files and Martin Bergen's outsized role in his investigation. He explained Bergen's presence at the death house as a simple case of a bulldog reporter hot on a story. When Lloyd concluded his own story, he did not mention Richard Oldfield or Linda Wilhite and their presences at the house, or how he happened to be unconscious when the first wave of Sheriff's deputies arrived on the scene. When he walked back to the witness table, Fred Gaffaney was there with a wink and glad tidings: his violations of L.A.P.D. canon were only going to cost him a thirty-day suspension without pay, a slap on the wrist for his vigilante hooliganism.

The final witness to appear before the Grand Jury was a Los Angeles County deputy medical examiner, who stated that in his opinion the flurry of indictments leveled at Havilland was overkill, because the Doctor's fall down a steep flight of stairs immediately before his arrest had resulted in severe and irrevocable brain damage. Havilland was destined to live out his years insensate, not knowing who, what, or where he was. The impact sustained by his fall had opened up lesions from a previous head injury, quadrupling the neurological destruction. The M.E. ended with the statement, "I tried to get the man to understand that I was a doctor, that I was there to examine him. It was like trying to explain relativity to a turnip. He kept looking at me so pathetically. He had no idea that it was over."

But Lloyd knew that it wasn't. There was the unfinished business of the horror movie and the big "why" of Linda's behavior at the Beach Womb. And when that was settled, there was the matter of homage to Marty Bergen.

Nine days after the incident the press had dubbed the "Malibu Massacre," Lloyd was released from his "voluntary incarceration" at Parker Center. His thirty-day suspension had twenty-one days left to go, and he was told to remain in Los Angeles for the next two weeks, in order to be available to the myriad D.A.s working on the Havilland case. He was also ordered not to speak to representatives of the media and to refrain from police work on any level.

Returning to Los Angeles at large, Lloyd found that John Havilland had become a cause for ghoulish celebration. The psychiatrist was still front-page news, and a number of nightclub comedians had made him the focal point of their shticks. The *Big Orange Insider* had dubbed him the "Witch Doctor," and the

1958 novelty song “Witch Doctor” by David Seville and the Chipmunks was re-released and climbing the top forty. Charles Manson was interviewed in his cell at Vacaville Prison and proclaimed Dr. John Havilland “a cool dude.”

Medical authorities at the jail ward of the L.A. County Hospital proclaimed the Doctor a vegetable, and Lloyd resisted his own ghoulish impulse to visit his adversary in his padded cell and throw the phrase “snuff film” at what remained of his brain. Instead, before going home or partaking of any post-sequestering amenities, he drove to 4109 Windemere Drive.

No L.A.P.D. or Federal crime scene stickers on the doors or windows; layers of undisturbed dust on the junctures of doors and doorjambs. An ordinary looking tudor cottage in the Hollywood Hills. Lloyd sighed as he circuited the house on foot. Stonewall. He hadn’t mentioned Oldfield in any of his official reports or earlier communiqués, and the feds who had seized Havilland’s property either hadn’t come across Old-field’s name or had decided to ignore it. In their fearful haste to deny Jack Herzog, the L.A.P.D. and the F.B.I. were letting the sleeping dogs that were John Havilland’s minions lie.

Lloyd broke into the house through a back window and went straight for the bedroom. A mattress lay on the carpeted floor, an indentical visual match to the film scrap he had seen at Billy Nagler’s workshop. Reddish-brown matter stained a swatch of carpet near the window. Recalling the adhesive bandage he had found on the front lawn the day before the Malibu apocalypse, Lloyd bent down and examined it. Blood.

Checking the rest of the house, Lloyd found it cleaned of personal belongings. No male clothing, no toilet articles, no legal or personal documents. Food, appliances and furniture remained. Oldfield had fled. And judging from the dust on the doorjambs, he had a good head start.

Driving back to Parker Center, he put all thoughts regarding Linda Wilhite out of his mind, coming to one solid conclusion. Havilland or Oldfield had destroyed the movie. Had the Department or the feds discovered it, he would have heard. Again he was dealing with theory and circumstantial evidence.

It took Officer Artie Cranfield a scant ten minutes to identify the reddish brown matter on the carpet swatch as type O+ blood. Thus armed with facts, Lloyd called the L.A.P.D. Missing Persons Bureau and requested the stats on all female Caucasians age twenty-five to forty with type O+ blood reported missing over the past ten days. Only one woman fit the description—Sherry Lynn Shroeder, age thirty-one, reported missing by her parents six days before. Lloyd wept when the clerk ticked off her last known place of employment—Junior Miss Cosmetics.

He had watched her walk in the door.

Tears streaming down his face, Lloyd ran through the halls and out the door of Parker Center, knowing that he was exonerated and that it wasn’t enough; knowing that the woman he wanted to love was innocent of the overall tapestry of evil; she had been psychically violated by a madman. In the parking lot, he slammed the hood of his car and kicked the grill and broke off the radio aerial and molded it into a missile of hate. Hurling it at the twelve story monolith that defined everything he was, he sent up a vow to Sherry Lynn Shroeder and set out to plumb the depths of his whore/lover’s violation.

A call to Telecredit revealed that Linda Wilhite had bank balances totaling

$71,843.00 and had made no recent major purchases with any of her credit cards. Richard Oldfield had liquidated his three savings and checking accounts and had sold a large quantity of IBM stock for $91,350.00.

A trip to L.A. International Airport armed with D.M.V. snapshots of the two supplied the information that Oldfield had boarded a flight for New York City four days after the Malibu killing, paying cash for his ticket and using an assumed name. Linda had accompanied him to the gate. An alert baggage handler told Lloyd that the two didn't seem like lovers, they seemed more like "with-it" sister and "out-of-it" brother.

Lloyd drove back to L.A. proper feeling jealous and tired and somehow afraid to go home, afraid that there was something he had forgotten to do. He would have to confront Linda soon, but before he did that he needed to pay tribute to a fallen comrade.

Marty Bergen's landlady opened the door of her former tenant's apartment and told Lloyd that the people from the *Big Orange* had come by and taken his beat-up furniture and typewriter, claiming that he promised them to the tabloid in his common law will. She had let them take the stuff because it was worthless, but she kept the box that had the book he was working on, because he owed two months rent and maybe she could sell it to the real newspapers and make up her loss. Was that a crime?

Lloyd shook his head, then took out his billfold and handed her all the cash it contained. She grabbed it gratefully and ran down the hall to her own apartment, returning with a large cardboard box overflowing with typed pages. Lloyd took it from her hands and pointed to the door. The woman genuflected out of the apartment, leaving him alone to read.

The manuscript ran over five hundred pages, the typing bracketed with red-inked editorial comments that made it seem like a complete co-authorship. It was the story of two medieval warriors, one prodigal, one chaste, who loved the same woman, a princess who could only be claimed by traversing concentrically arrayed walls of fire, each ring filled with progressively more hideous and bloodthirsty monsters. The two warriors started out as rivals, but became friends as they drew closer and closer to the princess, battling demons who entered them as they entered each gauntlet of flame, growing telepathic as the guardians of each other's spirit. When the final wall of fire stood immediately before them, they revolted against the symbiosis and prepared to do battle to the death.

At that point the manuscript ended, replaced by contrapuntal arguments in two different handwritings. The quality of the prose had deteriorated in the last chapters. Lloyd pictured Jack Herzog pushed to the edge of his tether by the Witch Doctor, trying to forge poetry out of the horror of his flickering-out life. When he finally put the book down, Lloyd didn't know if it was good, bad, or indifferent-only that it had to see print as a hymn for the L.A. dead.

The hymn became a dirge as he drove to Linda Wilhite's apartment, hoping that she wouldn't be there, so he could go home and rest and prolong the sense of what might have been.

But she was.

Lloyd walked in the half-opened door. Linda was sitting on the living room sofa, perusing the classified section of the *Times.* When she looked up and smiled, he shuddered. No might-have-beens. She was going to tell him the truth.

"Hello, Hopkins. You're late."

Lloyd nodded at the classifieds. "Looking for a job?"

Linda laughed and pointed to a chair. "No, business opportunities. Fifty grand down and a note from the bank gets me a Burger King franchise. What do you think?"

Lloyd sat down. "It's not your style. Seen any good movies lately?"

Linda shook her head slowly. "I saw a preview of one, and got a vivid synopsis from one of the stars. The one print was destroyed, by me. I'd forgotten how good you were, Hopkins. I didn't think you knew that part of it."

"I'm the best. I even know the victim's name. You want to hear it?"

"No."

Lloyd mashed his hands together and brought them toward his chest, then stopped when he realized he was unconsciously aping Billy Nagler's worship pose. "Why, Linda? What the fuck happened with you and Oldfield?"

Linda formed her hands into a steeple, then saw what she was doing and jammed them into her pockets. "The movie was a crazy reenactment of my parents' deaths. Havilland pushed Richard into it. He ran part of the film for me at his office. I freaked out and screamed. Richard grabbed me, and they doped me and took me out to Malibu. Richard and I talked. I hit the one germ of sanity and decency that he had. I convinced him that he could walk out the door like the movie and Havilland never existed. We were getting ready to walk when Havilland called out 'Now!' Marty Bergen could have walked out with us. But then you showed up with your shotgun."

When Lloyd remained silent, Linda said, "Babe, it was the right thing to do, and I love you for it. Richard and I took off running, and you could have put the cops on to us, but you didn't, because of what you felt for me. There's no rights and wrongs in this one. Don't you know that?"

Lloyd brought his eyes back from deep nowhere. "No, I don't know that. Oldfield killed an innocent woman. He has to pay. And then there's *us.* What about *that*?"

"Richard has paid," Linda said in a whisper. "God, has he paid. For the record, he's long gone. I don't know where he is, and I don't want to know, and if I *did* know, I wouldn't tell you."

"Do you have any idea what you did? *Do you,* goddamn it!"

Linda's whisper was barely audible. "Yes. I figured out that I could walk, and I convinced someone else that he could, too. He deserves the chance. Don't lay your guilt on me, Hopkins. If Richard hadn't gotten hooked up with Havilland he never would have killed a fly. What are the odds of his meeting someone else like the Witch Doctor? It's over, Hopkins. Just let it be."

Lloyd balled his fists and stared up at the ceiling to hold back a flood of tears. "It's not over. And what about us?"

Linda put a tentative hand on his shoulder. "I never saw Richard hurt anybody, but I saw what you did to Havilland. If I hadn't seen it, maybe we could have given it a shot. But now that's over, too."

Lloyd stood up. When Linda's hand dropped from his shoulder, he said, "I'm going after Oldfield. I'll try to keep your name out of it, but if I can't, I won't. One way or the other, I'm going to get him."

Linda got to her feet and took Lloyd's hands. "I don't doubt it for a minute.

This is getting funny and sad and weird, Hopkins. Will you hold me for a minute and then split?”

Lloyd shut his eyes and held the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, closing out the L. A. end of the Havilland case. When he felt Linda start to retreat from the embrace, he turned around and walked, thinking that it was over and it would never be over and wondering how he could get the Herzog/Bergen book published.

Outside, the night shone in jetstreams of traffic light and in flames from a distant brush fire. Lloyd drove home and fell asleep on the couch with his clothes on.

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This edition published in 2011 by MysteriousPress.com/Open Road Integrated Media
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www.openroadmedia.com

THE LLOYD HOPKINS TRILOGY

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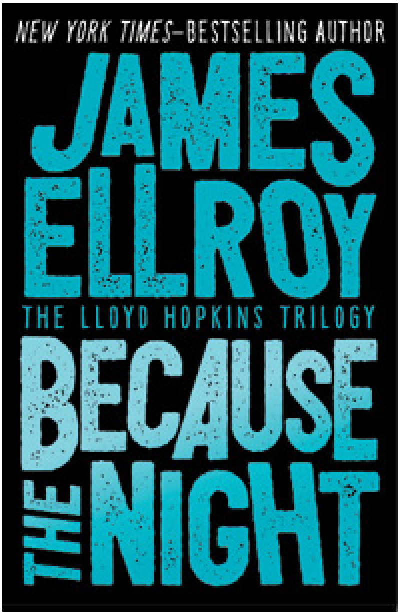
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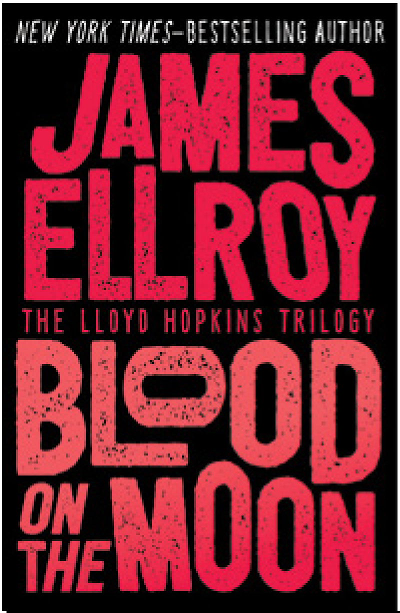

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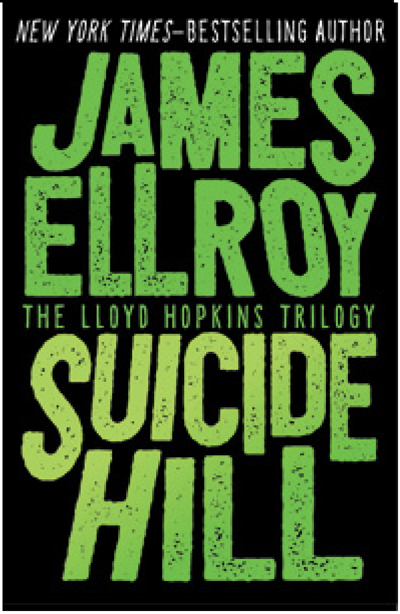

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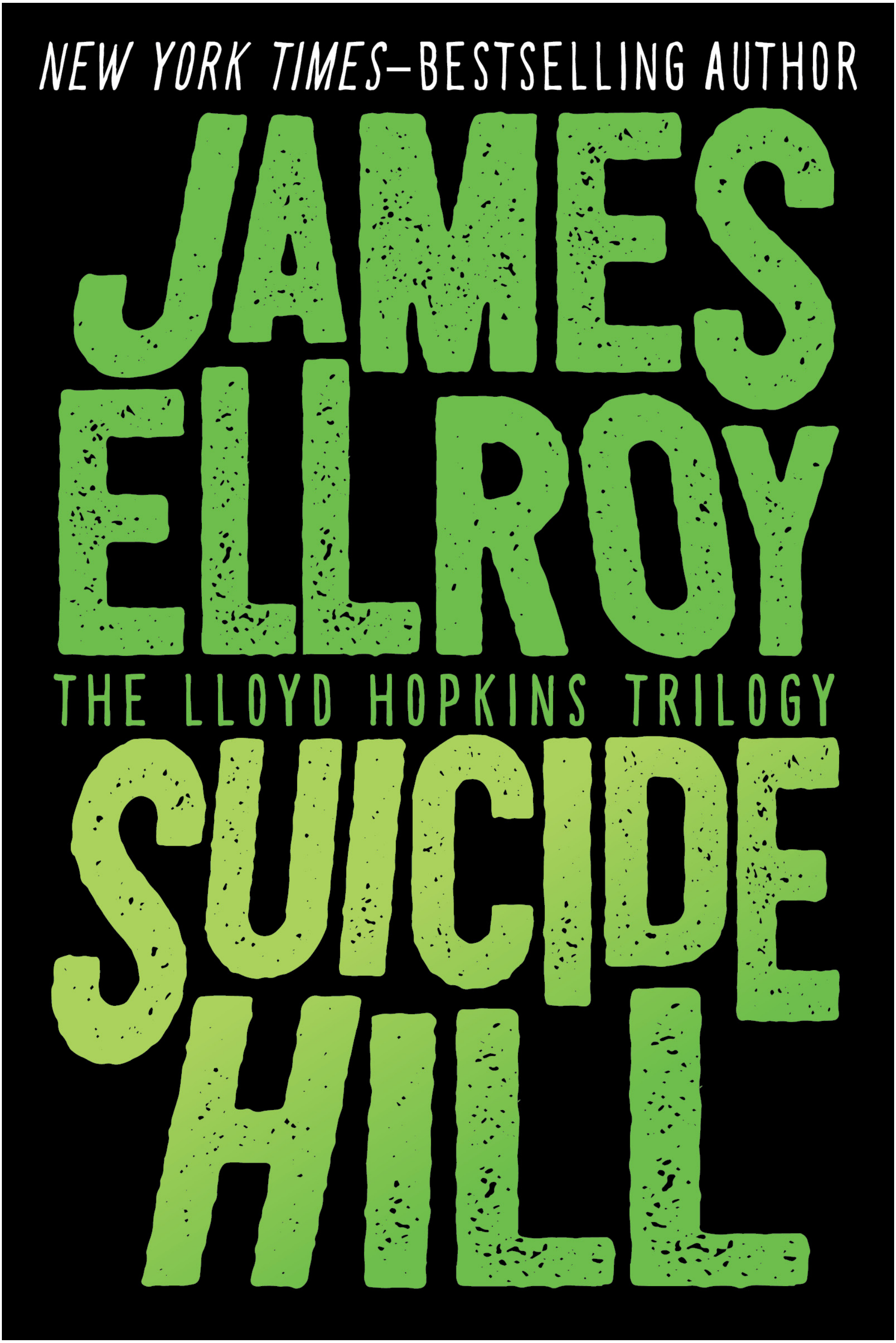

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You’re alone and you know a few things.
The stars are pinholes; slits in the hangman’s mask

Them, rats, snakes;
the chased and chasers—

Thomas Lux

Psychiatric Evaluation Memorandum

From: Alan D. Kurland, M.D., Psychiatrist, Personnel Division;
To: Deputy Chief T. R. Braverton, Commander, Detective Division;
Captain John A. McManus, Robbery-Homicide Division;
Subject: Hopkins, Lloyd W., Sergeant, Robbery-Homicide Division.

Gentlemen:

As requested, I evaluated Sergeant Hopkins at my private office, in a series of five one-hour counseling sessions, conducted from 6 November to 10 November 1984. I found him to be a physically healthy and mentally alert man of genius-level intelligence. He was a willing, almost eager, participant in these sessions, belying your initial fears about his cooperation. His response to intimate questions and "attack" queries was unwaveringly honest and candid.

Evaluation: Sergeant Hopkins is a violence-prone obsessive-compulsive personality, this personality disorder chiefly manifesting itself in acts of excessive physical force throughout his nineteen-year career as a policeman. Following secondarily but directly in this overall behavior pattern is a strong sexual drive, which he rationalizes as a "counterbalancing effort" aimed at allaying his violent impulses. Intellectually, both of these drives have been justified by the exigencies of "the Job" and by his desire to uphold his reputation as a uniquely brilliant and celebrated homicide detective; in reality both derive from a strident pragmatism of the type seen in emotionally arrested sociopathic personalities—quite simply, a preadolescent selfishness.

Symptomatically, Sergeant Hopkins, a self-described "hot-dog cop" and admitted sybarite, has followed both his violent impulses and his sexual desires with the heedless fervor of a true sociopath. However, throughout the years he has felt deep guilt over his outbursts of violence and extramarital womanizing. This awareness has been gradual, resulting in both the resistance to eschew old behavior patterns and the desire to abandon them and thus gain peace of mind. This emotional dilemma is the salient fact of his neuroses, yet it is unlikely that it alone, by its long-term nature, could have produced Sergeant Hopkins' current state of near nervous collapse.

Hopkins himself attributes his present state of extreme anxiety, despondency, episodes of weeping and highly uncharacteristic doubts about his abilities as a policeman to his participation in two disturbing homicide investigations.

In January of 1983, Sergeant Hopkins was involved in the "Hollywood Slaughterer" case, a case that remains officially unsolved, although Hopkins claims that he and another officer killed the perpetrator, a psychopath believed to have murdered three people in the Hollywood area. Sergeant Hopkins (who estimated the Hollywood Slaughterer's victims to include an additional sixteen young women) was intimately involved with the psychopath's third victim, a woman named Joan Pratt. Feeling responsible for Miss Pratt's death, and the death of another woman named Sherry Lynn Shroeder, who was connected to the Havilland/Goff series of killings (May 1984), Hopkins has transferred that sense of guilt to twin obsessions of “protecting” innocent women and “getting back” his estranged wife and three daughters, currently residing in San Francisco. These obsessions, which represent delusional thinking of the type common to emotionally disturbed superior intellects, were at the core of the professional blunders which led to Sergeant Hopkins’ present suspension from duty.

On October 17 of this year, Sergeant Hopkins had succeeded in locating a third Havilland/Goff suspect, Richard Oldfield, in New Orleans. Believing Oldfield to be armed and dangerous, he requested officers from the New Orleans P.D. to aid him in the arrest. Told to remain at a safe distance while the team of N.O.P.D. plainclothesmen apprehended the suspect, Hopkins disobeyed that order and kicked down Oldfield’s door, hesitating when he saw that Oldfield was with a partially clothed woman. After screaming at the woman to get dressed and get out, Hopkins fired at Oldfield, missing him and allowing him to escape out the back way while he attempted to comfort the woman. The New Orleans officers apprehended Oldfield some minutes later. Two plainclothesmen were injured, one seriously, while making the arrest. Sergeant Hopkins said that his episodes of weeping began shortly after this incident.

At Oldfield’s arraignment, Sergeant Hopkins was caught prevaricating on the witness stand by Oldfield’s attorney. During our second session, he admitted that he faked evidence to obtain an extradition warrant for Oldfield, and that the reason for his courtroom lies was a desire to protect a woman involved in the Havilland/Goff/Oldfield case—a woman he was intimately involved with during the investigation. Sergeant Hopkins became verbally abusive at this point, bragging that he would never relinquish the woman’s name to the district attorney or any police agency.

Conclusions: Sergeant Hopkins, forty-two, is experiencing cumulative stress reaction, severe type; is suffering severe nervous exhaustion, exacerbated by an intransigent determination to solve his problems himself—a resolve that implicitly reinforces his personality disorder and makes continued counseling untenable. As of this date I deem it impossible for Sergeant Hopkins to conduct homicide investigations without exploiting them in some social or sexual context. It is highly improbable that he can effectively supervise other officers; it is equally improbable that, given his grandiose self-image, he would ever submit to the performing of nonfield duties. His emotional stability is seriously impaired; his stress instincts disturbed to the point where his armed presence makes him at best ineffective, at worst highly dangerous as a Robbery/Homicide detective. It is my opinion that Sergeant Hopkins should be given early retirement and a full pension, the result of a service-connected disability, and that the administrative processes involving his separation from the L.A.P.D. should be expedited with all due speed.

Sincerely,
Alan D. Kurland, M.D.
Psychiatrist

1

The sheriff's transport bus pulled out of the gate of Malibu Fire Camp #7, its cargo sixteen inmates awaiting release, work furlough and sentence modification, its destination the L.A. County Main Jail. Fifteen of the men shouted joyous obscenities, pounded the windows and rattled their leg manacles. The sixteenth, left unencumbered by iron as a nod to his status as a "Class A" fire fighter, sat up front with the driver/deputy and stared at a photo cube containing a snapshot of a woman in punk-rock attire.

The deputy shifted into second and nudged the man. "You got a hard-on for Cyndi Lauper?"

Duane Rice said, "No, Officer. Do you?"

The deputy smiled. "No, but then I don't carry her picture around with me."

Thinking, fall back—he's just a dumb cop making conversation—Rice said, "My girlfriend. She's a singer. She was singing backup for a lounge act in Vegas when I took this picture."

"What's her name?"

"Vandy."

"Vandy? She got one name, like 'Cher'?"

Rice looked at the driver, then around at the denim-clad inmates, most of whom would be back in the slam in a month or two tops. He remembered a ditty from the jive-rhyming poet who'd bunked below him: "L.A.—come on vacation, go home on probation." Knowing he could outthink, outgame and outmaneuver any cop, judge or P.O. he got hit with and that his destiny was the dead opposite of every man in the bus, he said, "No, Anne Atwater Vanderlinden. I made her shorten it. Her full name was too long. No marquee value."

"She do everything you tell her to?"

Rice then gave the deputy a mirror-perfected "That's right."

"Just asking," the deputy said. "Chicks like that are hard to come by these days."

With banter effectively shitcanned, Rice leaned back and stared out the window, taking cursory notice of Pacific Coast Highway and winter deserted beaches, but *feeling* the hum of the bus's engine and the distance it was racking up between his six months of digging firebreaks and breathing flames and watching mentally impoverished lowlifes get fucked up on raisinjack, and his coming two weeks of time at the New County, where his sentence reduction for bravery as an inmate fireman would get him a job as a blue trusty, with unlimited contact visits. He looked at the plastic band on his right wrist: name, eight-digit booking number, the California Penal Code abbreviation for grand theft auto and his release date—11/30/84. The last three numbers made him think of Vandy. In reflex, he fondled the photo cube.

The bus hit East L.A. and the Main County Jail an hour later. Rice walked toward the receiving area beside the driver/deputy, who unholstered his service revolver and used it as a pointer to steer the inmates to the electric doors. Once they were inside, with the doors shut behind them, the driver handed his gun to the deputy inside the Plexiglas control booth and said, “Homeboy here is going to trusty classification. He’s Cyndi Lauper’s boyfriend, so no skin search; Cyndi wouldn’t want us looking up his boodie. The other guys are roll-up’s for work furlough and weekend release. Full processing, available modules.”

The control booth officer pointed at Rice and spoke into a desk-mounted microphone. “Walk, Blue. Number four, fourth tank on your right.”

Rice complied. Placing the photo cube in his flapped breast pocket, he walked down the corridor, working his gait into a modified jailhouse strut that allowed him to keep his dignity *and* look like he fit in. With the correct walk accomplished, he made his eyes burn into his brain a scene that he would never again relinquish himself to:

Prisoners packed like sardines into holding tanks fronted by floor-to-ceiling cadmium-steel bars; shouted and muffled conversations bursting from within their confines, the word “fuck” predominating. Trusties wearing slit-bottomed khakis listlessly pushing brooms down the corridor, a group of them standing outside the fruit tank, cooing at the drag queens inside. The screech and clang of barred doors jerking open and shut. Business as usual for institutionalized bulls and cons who didn’t know they’d be shit out of luck without each other. Death.

The door to #4 slid open. Rice did a quick pivot and walked in, his eyes settling on the only other inmate in the tank, a burly biker type sitting on the commode reading a paperback western. When the door slammed shut, the man looked up and said, “Yo, fish. You going to classification?”

Rice decided to be civil.

“I guess so. I was hoping for a blue trusty gig, but the bulls have obviously got other ideas.”

The biker laid his book on the floor and scratched his razor stubble. “Obviously, huh? Just be glad you ain’t big like me. I’m going to Trash and Freight sure as shit. I’ll be hauling laundry bags with niggers while you’re pushing a broom somewhere. What you in for?”

Rice leaned against the bars. “G.T.A. I got sentenced to a bullet, did six months at fire camp and got a modification.”

The biker looked at Rice with eyes both wary and eager for information. Deciding to dig for his own information, Rice said, “You know a guy named Stan Klein? White guy about forty? He would have hit here about six and a half, seven months ago. Popped for possession and sale of cocaine, lowered to some kind of misdemeanor. He’s probably out by now.”

The biker stood up, stretched, and scratched his stomach. Rice saw that he was at least six-three, and felt a warning light flash in his head. “He a friend of yours?”

Rice caught a belated recognition of the intelligence in his eyes. Too smart to bullshit. “Not really.”

“Not really?” The big man boomed the words. “Not really? *Obviously* you think I’m stupid. *Obviously* you think I don’t know how to put two and two together or count. *Obviously* you think I don't know that this guy Klein ratted on you, made a deal with the fuzz and walked around the same time you got busted. *Obviously* you do not know that you are in the presence of a superior jailhouse intellect that does not enjoy being gamed."

Rice swallowed dry, holding eye contact with the big man, waiting for his right shoulder to drop. When the biker took a step backward and laughed, Rice stepped back and forced a smile. "I'm used to dealing with dumbfucks," he said. "After a while you start gearing your thinking to their level."

The biker chuckled. "This guy Klein fuck your woman?"

Rice saw everything go red. He forgot his teacher's warnings about never initiating an attack and he forgot the ritual shouts as he swung up and out with his right leg and felt the biker's jaw crack under his foot. Blood sprayed the air as the big man crashed into the bars; shouts rose from the adjoining tanks. Rice kicked again as the biker hit the floor; through his red curtain he heard a rib cage snap. The shouts grew louder as the electric door slammed open. Rice swiveled to see a half dozen billy clubs arcing toward him. Brief thoughts of Vandy kept him from attacking. Then everything went dark red and black.

Module 2700 of the Los Angeles Main County Jail is known as the Ding Tank. Comprised of three tiers of one-man security cells linked together by narrow catwalks and stairways, it is the facility for nonviolent prisoners too mentally disturbed to exist in the general inmate population: droolers, babblers, public masturbators, Jesus shriekers and mind-blown acidhead mystics awaiting lunacy hearings and eventual shipment to Camarillo and county-sponsored board-and-care homes. Although the "ding" inmates are kept nominally placid through the forced ingestion of high-powered tranquilizers, at night, when their dosages wear down, they spring verbally to life and create a din heard throughout the entire jail. When he returned to consciousness in a cell smack in the middle of Tier #2, Module 2700, Duane Rice thought he was dead and in hell.

It took him long moments to discover that he wasn't; that the tortured shouts and weeping noises were not blows causing the aches and throbs all over his torso. As full consciousness dawned, the pain started for real and it *all* came back, drowning out a nearby voice screaming, "Ronald Reagan sucks cock!" Reflexively, Rice ran his hands over his face and neck. No blood; no lumps; no bruises. Only a swelling around his carotid artery. Choked out and thrown in with the dings, but spared the ass-kicking the jailers usually gave brawlers. Why?

Rice took a quick inventory of his person, satisfying himself that his genitals were unharmed and that no ribs were broken. Taking off his shirt, he probed the welts and bruises on his torso. Painful, but probably no internal damage.

It was then that he remembered the photo cube and felt his first burst of panic, grabbing the shirt off the floor, slamming the wall when plastic shards fell from the wad of denim. His fists were honing in on the cell bars when the intact photo of Anne Atwater Vanderlinden dropped out of the right pocket and landed faceup on his mattress. Vandy. Safe. Rice spoke the words out loud, and the Ding Tank cacophony receded to a hush.

Her hush.

Rice sat down on the edge of the mattress and moved his eyes back and forth between the photograph and the scratched-on graffiti that covered the cells walls. Obscenities and Black Power slogans took up most of the print space, but near the wadded-up rags that served as a pillow laboriously carved declarations of love took over: Tyrone and Lucy; Big Phil & Lil Nancy; Raul y Inez por vida. Running his fingers over the words, Rice held the aches in his body to a low ebb by concentrating on the story of Duane and Vandy.

He was working as pit boss at a Midas Muffler franchise in the Valley, pilfering parts from the warehouse and selling them to Louie Calderon at half pop, twenty-six and on Y.A. parole for vehicular manslaughter, going nowhere and waiting for something to happen. Louie threw a party at his pad in Silverlake, promising three-to-one women, and invited him. Vandy was there. He and Louie stood by the door and critiqued the arriving females, concluding that for pure sex the skinny girl in the threadbare preppy clothes was near the bottom of the list, but that she had *something.* When Louie fumbled for words to explain it, Rice said, “Charisma.” Louie snapped his fingers and agreed, then pointed out her shabby threads and runny nose and said, “Snowbird. I never seen her before. She just sees the open door and walks in, maybe she thinks she can glom some blow. Maybe she got charisma, but she got no fucking control.”

Louie’s last word held. Rice walked over to the girl, who smiled at him, her face alive with little tics. Her instant vulnerability ate him up. It was over as soon as it started.

They talked for twelve hours straight. He told her about growing up in the projects in Hawaiian Gardens, his boozehound parents and how they drove to the liquor store one night and never returned, his ability with cars and how his parents’ weakness had given him a resolve never to touch booze or dope. She scoffed at this, saying that she and her brother were dopers because their parents were so uptight and controlled. Their rapport wavered until he told her the *full* truth about his manslaughter bust, wrapping up both their defiances with a bright red ribbon.

When he was twenty-two, he had a job tuning sports cars at a Maserati dealership in Beverly Hills. The other mechanics were loadies who were always ragging him about his disdain for dope. One night they fashioned a speedball out of pharmacy meth and Percodan and slipped it into his coffee, right before he went out to test the idle on a customer’s Ferrari. The speedball kicked in as he was driving down Doheny. He immediately realized what was happening and pulled to the curb, determined to wait the high out and do some serious ass-kicking.

Then it got really bad. He started hallucinating and thought he saw the dope-slippers walking across the street a half block down. He gunned the engine, speed-shifted into second and plowed into them at seventy. The front bumper was torn off, the grille caved in, and a severed arm flew across the windshield. He downshifted, turned the corner onto Wilshire, got out and ran like hell, an incredible adrenaline jolt obliterating the dope rush. By the time he had run out of Beverly Hills, he felt in control. He knew that he had gotten his revenge, and now he had to play the game with the law and get off cheap.

A two-hour steam bath at the Hollywood Y sweated the rest of the speedball out of his system. He took a cab to the Beverly Hills police station, gouged his arm with a penknife to induce crocodile tears and turned himself in. He was charged with two counts of third-degree manslaughter and hit and run. Bail was set at $20,000, and arraignment was set for the following morning.

At arraignment, he learned that the two people he had killed were not the dope-slipping mechanics, but a solid-citizen husband and wife. He pleaded guilty anyway, expecting a deuce maximum, back on the street in eighteen months tops.

The judge, a kindly-looking old geezer, gave him a ten-minute lecture, five years state time suspended and his sentence: one thousand hours of picking up paper refuse from the gutters of Doheny Avenue between Beverly Boulevard on the north and Pico Boulevard on the south. After courtroom spectators applauded the decree, the judge asked him if he had anything to say. He said, “Yes,” then went on to tell the judge that his mother sucked giant donkey dicks in a Tijuana whorehouse and that his wife turned tricks with the gorillas in the Griffith Park Zoo. The judge recanted his sentence suspension and hit him with five years in the California Youth Authority Facility at Soledad—the “Baby Joint” and “Gladiator School.”

When Rice finished his story, Anne Vanderlinden doubled over with laughter and launched *her* rap, chain-smoking two full packs, until all the guests had either split or were coupled off in Louie’s upstairs bedrooms. She told him about growing up rich in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, and her hard-ass tax lawyer father, Valium addict mother and religious crackpot brother, who got bombed on acid and stared at the sun seeking mystical synergy until he went totally blind. She told him how she dropped out of college because it was boring and how she blew her $50,000 trust fund on coke and friends, and how she liked blow, but wasn’t strung out. Rice found her use of street argot naive, but pretty well done. Knowing she was on the skids and probably sleeping around for a place to stay, he steered her talk away from the present and into the future. *What did she really want to do*?

Anne Vanderlinden’s little facial tics exploded as she tripped over words to explain her love of music and her plans to spotlight her singing and dancing talents in a series of rock videos: one for punk, one for ballads, one for disco. Rice watched her features contort as she spoke, wanting to grab her head and smooth her face until she was perfectly soft and pretty. Finally he clutched her lank blond hair and drew it back into a bun that tightened the skin around her eyes and cheeks, whispering, “Babe, you won’t have shit until you quit sticking that garbage up your nose, and you find someone to look after you.”

She fell sobbing into his arms. Later, after they made love, she told him it was the first time she’d cried since her brother went blind.

It was over the next few weeks, after Anne Atwater Vanderlinden had moved in with him and become Vandy, that he figured it out: you don’t wait for things to happen—you make them happen. If your woman wants to become a rock star, you regulate her coke use and buy her a sexy wardrobe and cultivate music business connections who can do her some good. Vandy could sing and dance as well as a half dozen female rock stars he knew of, and she was too good to go the tried-and-untrue route of demo tapes, backup gigs and lack-luster club dates. She had an ace in the hole. She had him.

And *he* had a chump change job at Midas Muffler, a parole officer who looked at him like he was something that crawled out from under a rock and an overpriced apartment with world-class cockroaches. With his debits cataloged, Rice figured out his credits: he was a great mechanic, he knew how to deactivate automobile alarm systems and bore steering columns for a forty-second start, any car, anywhere, anytime; he knew enough industrial chemistry to compound corrosive solutions that would eat the serial numbers off engine blocks. He had solid Soledad connections who would fix him up with good fences. He would *make* it happen: become a world-class car thief, set up Vandy's career and get out clean.

For a year and a half, it worked.

With three strategically located storage garages rented, and armed with a battery-powered ignition drill, he stole late model Japanese imports and sold them at two-thirds their resale value to a buddy he'd known in the joint, supervising the engine block dips that rendered the cars untraceable, rotating his rip-off territory throughout L.A. and Ventura counties to avoid the scrutiny of individual auto theft details. In two months he had the down payment for a classy West L.A. condo. In three months he had Vandy primed for stardom with a health food diet, daily aerobics, coke as an occasional reward and three-walk-in closets stuffed with designer threads. In four months he had the feedback of two high-priced voice teachers: Vandy was a weak, near tone-deaf soprano with virtually no range. She had a decent vibrato growl that could be jazzed up with a good amplifier, and gave great microphone head. She had the haunted sex look of a punk-rock star—and very limited talent.

Rice accepted the appraisals—they made him love Vandy more. He altered his game plan for crashing the L.A. rock music scene and took Vandy to Vegas, where he dug up three out-of-work musicians and paid them two bills a week to serve as her backup group. Next he bribed the owner of a slot machine arcade/bar/convenience store into featuring Vandy and the Vandals as his lounge act.

Four shows a night, seven days a week, Vandy's vibrato growled the punk lyrics of the group's drummer. She drew wolf whistles when she sang and wild applause when she humped the air and sucked the microphone. After a month of watching his woman perform, Rice knew she was *ready*.

Back in L.A., armed with professional photographs, bribed press raves and a doctored demo tape, he tried to find Vandy an agent. One brick wall after another greeted him. When he got past secretaries, he got straight brush-offs and "I'll call yous"; and when he got past them and whipped out Vandy's photos, he got comments like "interesting," "nice bod" and "foxy chick." Finally, in the Sunset Strip office of an agent named Jeffrey Jason Rifkin, his frustration came to a head. When Rifkin handed back the photos and said, "Cute, but I have enough clients right now," Rice called his fists and took a bead on the man's head. Then inspiration struck, and he said, "Jew boy, how'd you like a brand-new silver gray Mercedes 450 SL absolutely *free*?"

A week later, after he picked up his car, Rifkin told Rice that he could introduce him to a lot of people who might help Vandy's career, and that her idea of showcasing her talent via a series of rock videos was an excellent "high-exposure breakthrough strategy," albeit expensive: $150-200 K minimum. *He* would do what he could with *his* contacts, but in the meantime he also knew a lot of people who would pay hard cash for discount Benzs and other status cars—people in the "Industry."

Rice smiled. Use and be used—an arrangement he could trust. He and Vandy went Hollywood.

Rifkin was partially good to his word. He never procured any recording or club gigs, but he did introduce them to a large crowd of semisuccessful TV actors, directors, coke dealers and lower-echelon movie executives, many of whom were interested in high-line cars with Mexican license plates at tremendous discounts. Over the next year, paperwork aided by an Ensenada D.M.V. employed cousin of his old Soledad buddy Chula Medina, Rice stole 206 high-liners, banking close to a hundred fifty thou toward the production of Vandy's rock videos. And then just as he was about to drill the column of a chocolate-brown Benz ragtop, four L.A.P.D. auto theft dicks drew down on him with shotguns, and one of them whispered, "Freeze or die, motherfucker."

Out on $16,000 bail, his show biz attorney gave him the word: for the right amount of cash, his bank account would not be seized, and he would get a year county time. If the money were *not* paid, it would be a parole violation and probable indictments on at least another fifteen counts of grant theft auto. The L.A.P.D. had an informant by the balls, and they were squeezing him hard. He could only buy the judge if he acted now. If he were quickly sentenced, the L.A.P.D. would most likely drop its investigation.

Rice agreed. The decision cost him an even $100,000. His attorney's fees cost him an additional forty. Ten K for Vandy and bribe money his lawyer slipped to an L.A.P.D. records clerk to learn the identity of the informant had eaten up the rest of his bank account, and had not yielded the name of the snitch. Rice suspected the reason for this was that the shyster pocketed the bread because he knew that the snitch was Stan Klein, a coke dealer/entrepreneur in the Hollywood crowd they ran with. When he learned Klein had been popped for conspiracy to sell dangerous drugs and that it was later dropped to a misdemeanor, he became the number one suspect. But he had to be sure, and the decision to be sure had cost him his last dime and gotten him zilch.

And two weeks away from the release date he'd eaten smoke, fire and bullshit to earn, he'd fucked it up and probably earned himself a first-degree assault charge and *at least* another ninety days of county time.

And Vandy hadn't written to him or visited him in a month.

"On your feet, Blue. Wristband count."

Rice jerked his head in the direction of the words. "I won't let you medicate me," he said. "I'll fight you and the whole L.A. County Sheriff's Department before I let you zone me out on that Prolixin shit."

"Nobody wants to medicate you, Blue," the voice said. "A few of L.A. County's finest might wanta shake your hand, but that's about it. Besides, I can *sell* that goose juice on the street, make a few bucks *and* serve law and order by keeping the Negro element sedated. Let's try this again: wristband count. Walk over to the bars, stick your right wrist out to me, tell me your name and booking number."

Rice got up, walked to the front of the cell and stuck his right arm through the bars. The owner of the voice come into focus on the catwalk, a pudgy deputy with thin gray hair blown out in a razor cut. His name tag read: *G. Meyers.*

"Rice, Duane Richard, 19842040. When do I get arraigned on the new charge?"

Deputy G. Meyers laughed. “What new charge? That scumbag you wasted was in for assault on a police officer with a half dozen priors, and you carried three L.A. County firemen to safety during the Agoura fire. Are you fucking serious? The watch commander read your record, then scumbag’s, and made scumbag a deal: he presses charges on you, then the county presses charges on him for grabbing your shlong. Not wanting a fruit jacket, he agreed. He gets to spend the rest of his sentence in the hospital ward, and you get to serve as blue trusty here in the Rubber Ramada, where hopefully you will not get the urge to whip any more ass. Where did you learn that kung fu shit?”

Rice kicked the news around in his head, sizing up the man who’d delivered it. Friendly and harmless, he decided; probably close to retirement, with no good guys/bad guys left in him. “Soledad,” he said. “There was a Jap corrections officer who taught classes. He gave us a lot of spiritual stuff along with it, but nobody listened. The warden finally got wise to the fact that he was teaching violent junior criminals to be better violent junior criminals, and stopped it. What’s a ding trusty do?”

Meyers took a key from his Sam Browne belt and unlocked the cell. “Come on, we’ll go down to my office. I’ve got a bottle. We’ll belt a few and I’ll tell you about the job.”

“I don’t drink.”

“Yeah? What the fuck kind of criminal are you?”

“The smart kind. You booze on duty?”

Meyers laughed and tapped his badge. “Turned my papers in yesterday. Twenty years and nine days on the job, iron-clad civil service pension. I’m only sticking around until they rotate in a new man to fill my spot. Ten days from now I am adios, motherfucker, so till then I’m playing catch-up.”

As Gordon Meyers explained it, the job was simple. Sleep all day while the dings were dinged out on their “medication,” eat leftovers from the officers’ dining room, have free run of his collection of *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, be cool with the daywatch jailer. At night, his duties began: feed the dings their one meal per day, move them out of their cells one at a time and mop the floors, get them to the showers once a week.

The most important thing was to keep them reasonably quiet at night, Meyers emphasized. He would be using his on-duty time to read the classified ads and write out job applications, and he did not want the dings dinging his concentration. Talk softly to them if they started to scream, and if that failed, scream back and make them scared of you. If worse came to worse, give them a spritz of the fire hose. And any ding who smeared shit on his cell walls got five whacks in the ass with the lead-filled “ding-donger” Meyers carried. Rice promised to do a good job, and decided to wait five days before manipulating the fat-mouthed cop for favors.

The job *was* simple.

Rice slept six hours a day, ate the high-quality institutional fare the jailers ate, and did a minimum of one thousand pushups daily. At night, he would bring the dings their chow, G.I. their cells and stroll the catwalk exchanging words with them through the bars. He found that if he kept up a continuous line of cell-to-cell communication, the dings screamed less and he thought of Vandy less. After a few days he got to know some of the guys and tailored his spiels to fit their individual boogeymen.

A-14 was a black guy popped for getting dogs out of the Lincoln Heights Shelter and cooking them up for Rastafarian feasts. The bulls had shaved off his dreadlocks before they threw him in the tank, and he was afraid that demons could enter his brain through his bald head. Rice told him that dreadlocks were "out," and brought him a copy of *Ebony* that featured ads for various Afro wigs. He pointed out that the Reverend Jesse Jackson was sporting a modified Afro and getting a lot of pussy. The man nodded along, grabbed the magazine and from then on would yell "Afro wig!" when Rice strolled by his cell.

C-11 was an old man who wanted to get off the streets and back to Camarillo. Rice falsely reported him as a shit-smearer for three nights running, and gave him three fake beatings, thumping the ding-donger into the mattress and screaming himself. On the third night, Meyers got tired of the noise and turned the old man over to the head jailer of the hospital ward, who said the geezer was Camarillo quail for sure.

The tattooed man in C-3 was the hardest to deal with, because the white trash he grew up with in Hawaiian Gardens all had tattoos, and Rice early on figured tattooing as the mark of the world's ultimate losers. C-3, a youth awaiting a conser-vatorship hearing, had his entire torso adorned with snarling jungle cats, and was trying to tattoo his arms with a piece of mattress spring and the ink off newspapers soaked in toilet water. He had managed to gouge the first two letters of "Mom" when Rice caught him and took his spring away. He started bawling then, and Rice screamed at him to quit marking himself like a lowlife sleazebag. Finally the young man quieted down. Every time he walked by the cell, Rice would roust him for tattooing tools. After a few times, the youth snapped into a frisking position when he heard him coming.

Around midnight, when the dings began falling asleep, Rice joined Gordon Meyers in his office and listened to *his* dinged-out ramblings. Biting his cheeks to keep from laughing, Rice nodded along as Meyers told him of the crime scams he'd dreamed up in his sixteen years working the tank.

A couple were almost smart, like a plan to capitalize on his locksmith expertise—getting a job as a bank guard and pilfering safe-deposit box valuables to local beat cops who frequented the bank, staying above suspicion by not leaving the bank and letting the beat cops do the fencing; but most were Twilight Zone material: prostitution rings of women prisoners bused around to construction sights, where they would dispense blowjobs to horny workers in exchange for sentence reductions; marijuana farms staffed by inmate "harvesters," who would cultivate tons of weed and load it into the sheriffs helicopters that would drop it off into the backyards of high-ranking police "pushers"; porno films featuring male and female inmates, directed by Meyers himself, to be screened on the exclusive "all-cop" cable network he planned to set up.

Meyers rambled on for three nights. Rice moved his plan up a day and started telling him about Vandy, about how she hadn't written to him or visited him in weeks. Meyers sympathized, and mentioned that he was the one who made sure his photo of her wasn't destroyed when the bulls choked him out. After thanking him for that, Rice made his pitch: Could he use the phone to make calls to get a line on her? Meyers said no and told him to write her name, date of birth, physical description and last known address on a piece of paper. Rice did it, then sat there gouging his fingernails into his palms to keep from hitting the dinged-out deputy.

“I’ll handle it,” Gordon Meyers said. “I’ve got clout.”

Over the next forty-eight hours Rice concentrated on *not* clouting the dings or the inanimate objects in the tank. He upped his push-up count to two thousand a day; he laid a barrage of brownnosing on the daywatch jailer, hoping for at least a phone call to Louie Calderon, who could probably be persuaded to check around for Vandy. He stayed away from Gordon Meyers, busying himself with long stints of pacing the catwalks. And then, just after midnight when the ding noise subsided, Meyers’ voice came over the tank’s P.A. system: “Duane Rice, roll it to the office. Your attorney is here.”

Rice walked into the office, figuring Meyers was fried and wanted to bullshit. And there *she* was, dressed in pink cords and a kelly green sweater, an outfit he’d told her never to wear. “Told you I had clout,” Meyers said as he closed the door on them.

Rice watched Vandy put her hands on her hips and pivot to face him, a seduction pose he’d devised for her lounge act. He was starting toward her when he caught his first glimpse of her face. His world crashed when he saw the hollows in her cheeks and the blue-black circles under her eyes. Strung out. He grabbed her and held her until she said, “Stop, Duane, that hurts.” Then he put his hands on her shoulders, pushed her out to arm’s length and whispered, “Why, babe? We had a good deal going.”

Vandy twisted free of his grasp. “These cops came by the condo and told me you were really sick, so I came. Then your friend tells me you’re *not* really sick, you just wanted to see me. That’s not fair, Duane. I was going to taper off and be totally clean by the time you got out. It’s not fair, so don’t be mad at me.”

Rice stared at the wall clock to avoid Vandy’s coke-stressed face. “Where have you been? Why haven’t you been to see me?”

Vandy took her purse off Meyers’ desk and dug through it for cigarettes and a lighter. Rice watched her hands tremble as she lit up. Exhaling a lungful of smoke, she said, “I didn’t come to see you at camp because it was too depressing, and you know I hate to write.”

Rice caught *his* hands shaking and jammed them into his pants pockets. “Yeah, but what have you been *doing,* besides sticking shit up your nose?”

Vandy cocked one hip in his direction, another move he’d taught her. “Making friends. Cultivating the right people, like you told me I should do. Hanging out.”

“Friends? You mean *men*?”

Vandy flushed, then said, “Just friends. People. What about *your* friends? That guy Gordon is looney tunes. When he brought me up from the parking lot, he told me he was going to organize this hit squad of Doberman pinschers. What kind of friends have *you* been making?”

Rice felt his anger ease; the fire in Vandy’s eyes was hope. “Gordon’s not a bad guy, he’s just been hanging around wackos too long. Listen, are you okay on bread? Have you got any of the money I gave you left?”

“I’m okay.”

Vandy lowered her eyes; Rice saw the fire die. “You holding out on me, babe? Ten K wouldn’t have lasted you this long if you were on a coke run. You feel like telling me about these fr—"

Vandy threw her purse at the wall and shrieked, "Don't be so jealous of me! You told me I should get in with people in the Industry, and that's what I've been doing! I hate you when you're this way!"

Rice reached out for her wrist, but she batted his hand and moved backward until she bumped the wall and there was no place to go except forward into his arms. With her elbows pressed into herself, she let him embrace her and stroke her hair. "Easy, babe," he cooed, "easy. I'll be out in a few days, and I'll get working on your videos again. I'll make it happen. *We'll* make it happen."

Wanting to see Vandy's face, Rice dropped his arms and stepped back. When she brought her eyes up to him, he saw that she looked like the old Anne Atwater Vanderlinden, not the woman he molded and loved. "How, Duane?" she said. "You can't steal cars anymore. Another job at Midas Muffler?"

Rice let the ugly words hang there between them. Vandy walked past him and picked her purse up off the floor, then turned around and said, "This whole thing wasn't fair. I've been making friends who can help me, and I deserve to do a little blow if I want to. Your control trip is really uptight. Uptight people don't make it in the Industry."

There was a rapping at the door, and Meyers poked his head in and said, "I hate to break this up, but the watch commander is walking, and I don't think he'll buy Vandy here as an attorney."

Rice nodded, then walked to Vandy and tilted her chin up so that their eyes locked. "Go back to the pad, babe. Try to stay clean, and I'll see you on the thirtieth." He bent over and kissed the part in her hair. Vandy stood still and mute with her eyes closed. "And don't ever underestimate me," Rice said.

Meyers was waiting for him on the catwalk, tapping a billy club against his leg. "Listen. A-8 is acting up. He shit on his mattress and smeared food on the walls. You go give him a few whacks with the ding-donger while I escort your girl downstairs. When you get him pacified, come back to the office and we'll bat the breeze."

Rice grabbed the billy club and strode down the catwalk, pushing images of Vandy's decay out of his mind by concentrating on the jumble of ding noises, wishing the babbles and shouts would engulf him to the point where all his senses were numbed. Slapping the ding-donger harder and harder into his palm, he turned into the open front of A-8, wondering why the light was off. He was about to call out for Meyers to hit the electricity when the door slid shut behind him.

The darkness deepened, and the ding noise grew still, then fired up again. Rice yelled, "Unlock A-8, Gordon, goddammit!" then squinted around the cell. As his eyes became accustomed to the dark, he saw that it was empty. He smashed the billy club into the bars full force; once, twice, three times, hoping to scare the dings into temporary quiet. The crash of metal on metal assailed him, and the force of the blows sent shock waves through his entire body. A hush came over the tank, followed by Meyers' mocking laugh and the words "Told you I had clout."

When the meaning clicked fully in, Rice began smashing the club into the wall, four shots at a time, hearing hellish whispers in the wake of the noise: "It's real pharmaceutical blow, baby"; "Duane wouldn't want me to"; "Come on sweetie, party hearty.” When the voices degenerated into giggles, he slammed the ding-donger harder and harder, until the wood casing cracked and the dings screamed along in cadence with his blows. Then sections of plaster exploded in his eyes and into his mouth, and his head started to reel. He surrendered himself to the asphyxiation and fell backward into total silence.

A severed arm spraying blood across a windshield; the steam room at the Hollywood Y. Rice came to with a ringing in his ears and a hazy red curtain in front of his eyes, snapping immediately to the bandage at the crook of his elbow and the wall-to-wall padding that surrounded him. Goose-juiced because he had destroyed A-8, because Gordon had—

Rice held his breath until he passed out, his last half-conscious thought to kill the dope with sleep and get even.

He slept; wakened; slept. Stumbling trips to the toilet, untouched trays of food and a thickening razor stubble marked his drifting in and out of consciousness. Dimly, he knew his kick-out date was coming and the bulls were leaving him alone because they were afraid of him. But Vandy …

No. Again and again he plunged into self-asphyxiation.

Finally hunger jerked him fully awake. He counted twelve trays of stale sandwiches, and figured his Prolixin jolt had lasted four days, leaving him three days from the streets. Ravenous, he ate until he threw up. That night a Mexican deputy came by his cell to bring him a fresh tray, and told him he was in Hospital Isolation, between the Ding and the High-Power tanks, and that his release date was two days away. The jailer was wearing a paper party hat. Rice asked him why. “The nightwatch ding jailer just retired,” he said. “The watch commander threw him a party.”

Rice nodded. *It couldn’t have happened.* Vandy would never let a wimp like Gordon Meyers touch her. But when the jailer walked away, the doubts came back. He tried to force sleep, but it wouldn’t come. The edge of his vision started to go red.

Hours of push-ups and leg lifts produced an exhaustion that felt pure and nonchemical. Rice drifted off again, then awakened to muffled voices coming from somewhere outside his cell.

He followed the sound to a grated ventilator shaft next to the toilet. Peering through the grates, he saw two pairs of denim-clad legs facing each other. The white stripes along the pants seams was a dead giveaway—he was looking into a High-Power Tank cell.

Laughter; then a deep voice taking over, his words echoing clearly through the shaft.

“I heard a dream score the other day, from this black guy on the Folsom chain. He and his partner were gonna do it, then he got violated on a liquor store heist. He was one smart nigger. He had it documented, the whole shot.”

A different, softer voice: “Smart nigger is a contradiction in terms.”

“Bullshit. Dig this: three-man stick-up gang, a bonaroo kidnap angle, an ace fucking safeguard.

“Here’s the play: two guys hold the *girlfriend* of a *married* bank manager, at her pad, while the outside man calls the manager at *his* crib and has him call his chick, who of course is scared fucking shitless. The outside man calls back and gives him the drill: 'Meet me a half block from the bank an hour before opening, or your bitch gets killed and everyone knows you've been cheating on your wife.'

"Now, dig: the phone booth the outside man's been calling from is down the street from the manager's pad, so he can make sure the fuzz ain't been called. He trails the manager to the bank—still no fuzz—walks in with him, hits only the cashboxes, because the vault has gotta be time-locked, walks out, takes the manager out to his car, slugs him and ties him up, calls the inside men at the chick's pad, they tie *her* up, split, then meet later and divvy up the bread. Is that not fucking brilliant?"

The soft-voiced man snorted: "Yeah, but how the fuck are you supposed to find happily married bank managers with girlfriends on the side? You gonna put an ad in the paper: 'Armed robber seeks cooperative pussy-hound bank managers to aid him in career advancement? Send résumé to blah, blah, blah?' Typical nigger bullshit and jive."

"Wrong, bro," the deep-voiced man said. "I don't know how he got the info, but the black guy had two jobs cased—righteous rogue bank managers, girlfriends, the whole shot."

"And I suppose he gave you the skinny?"

"Yeah, he did, and I believe him. He got ten to life as a habitual offender, why not share the wealth, he's looking at a dime minimum. One chick lives in Encino, on the corner of Kling and Valley View, in a pink apartment house; the other, Christine something, lives in Studio City, a house on the corner of Hildebrand and Gage. I told you: one smart fucking nigger."

"I still don't believe it."

"If Bo Derek offered you a headjob, you'd think she was a drag queen. You're just a terminal fucking skeptic."

Rice listened as the conversation deteriorated into the usual jailhouse shtick of sports and sex. When the talk died altogether, he lay down with his head next to the ventilator shaft and once more fell asleep.

Vandy took over his dreams, short-take images of her laughing, moving around in bed. Then she was there with the Vandals, vibrato growling their closing number: "Gotta get down in the prison of your love. Get down, get down, gonna drown, gonna come so good, so hard, burn my body in your prison yard, prison of your love!"

Rice awakened for the final time in L.A. County Jail stint just as Vandy and the Vandals brought "Prison of Your Love" to its off-key crescendo. Coward, he said to himself. Coward. Using sleep the way a junkie uses smack. Maybe she fucked him and maybe she didn't; when you look into her eyes, you'll know. *So stay awake and fight.*

He stood up and looked around the cell, his eyes catching a wad of newspaper beside the toilet and a book of matches on top of the sink. Thinking, *let them know*, he struck a match on the ventilator grate, then lit the newspaper and watched it fireball. When it started to burn his hand, he dropped it into the toilet and listened to the sizzle and hiss of newsprint. Satisfied with the way the ink was running, he turned his attention to the floor-to-wall-to-ceiling padding.

Gouging was the only way.

Rice dug his fingernails into a seam of wall padding and pulled outward. Naugahyde, foam and a layer of webbed cotton were revealed. He poked a finger into the hole and felt metal in back of the webbing. Spring reinforcement. He gouged his way to it, then twisted the nearest piece of metal back and forth until it broke off in his hand.

It took him hours to hone his tool on the ventilator shaft grates. When the spring was razor sharp, he pressed it into a sodden ball of newspaper and darkened the tip. Flexing his left biceps into a hard surface, he thought of Hawaiian Gardens and Vandy. Then he marked himself with his past and future, so the whole world would know. The words were *Death Before Dishonor*.

2

Bobby “Boogaloo” Garcia watched his kid brother Joe loosen his clerical collar and do air guitar riffs in front of the bedroom mirror. He felt his own priest outfit constrict his body and said, “I can’t take none of your rock and roll rap today, *pindejo.* I quit fighting ’cause niggers kept knocking me out in the third round, and you’ll never make it as a musician ’cause you got no drive and no talent. But we both got a job to do, and we’re behind for the month. So let’s *do* it.”

Joe cut off the music in his head; his lyrics put to an old Fats Domino tune, “Suicide Hill” substituted for “Blueberry Hill.” Leave it to Bobby to puncture both their balloons with one shot, so he wouldn’t have a good comeback. “Tomorrow’s December first. The Christmas rush and the rainy season. We’ll double up on Bibles and prayer kits, *and* siding jobs.” Bobby’s jaw clenched at the last words, and Joe added, “And we’ll give some money to Saint Sebastian’s. A tithe. We’ll find some suckers with bucks, and rip them off and give the *dinero* to earthquake re—”

Bobby stopped him with a slow finger across the throat. “Not earthquake relief, *puto*! It’s a scam! You don’t do penance for one scam by giving bucks to another one!”

“But Henderson gave two grand to that priest from the archdiocese for earthquake relief. He—”

Bobby shook his head. “A scam within a scam within a scam, *pindejo.* He gave the priest a check for two K and got a receipt for three. That priest has got a brother in the D.A.’s office. The Fraud Division. Need I say fucking more?”

Joe tightened his collar, feeling his nice guy/musician self slip back into Father Hernandez, the phone scam padre. He grabbed a stack of Naugahyde-bound Bibles off the floor and carried them out to the car, wondering for the ten millionth time how Bobby could love hating his brother and his job and his *life* as much as he did.

Bobby and Joe worked for Henderson Enterprises, Inc., purveyors of aluminum siding and Bibles in Spanish. The scam originated in a phone room, where salesmen pitched rustproof patios and eternal salvation through Jesus to unsophisticated and semi-impoverished Angelenos, offering them free gas coupons as a come-on to get the “field representatives” out to their homes, where he signed them up for “lifetime protection guarantees,” which in reality meant a new siding job or Bible on a “regular installation basis”—meaning debilitating permanent monthly payments to whoever was gullible enough to sign on the dotted line.

Which was where Bobby and Joe, as Father Gonzalez and Father Hernandez, L.A.-based “free-lance” priests, came in. They were the “heavy closers”—psychological intimidation specialists who sized up weaknesses on the follow-up calls and *made* the sucker sign, setting in motion a string of kickbacks originating in the main office of U.S. Aluminum, Inc., and its subsidiary company, the Truth and Light Publishing House.

With the trunk of their ’77 Camaro stuffed with Bibles, siding samples and wall hangings of Jesus, the Garcias drove to a “close” in El Monte on the Pomona Freeway. Joe was at the wheel, humming Springsteen under his breath so his brother wouldn’t hear; Bobby threw short punches toward the windshield and stared out at the dark clouds that were forming, hoping for thundershowers to spook their closees into buying. When raindrops spattered the glass in front of him, he closed his eyes and thought of how everything important in his life happened when it was raining.

Like the time he sparred with Little Red Lopez and knocked him through the ropes with a perfect right cross. Red said his timing was off because bad weather made his old knife scars ache.

Like the time Joe and his garage band won the “Battle of the Bands” at El Monte Legion Stadium. He played adoring older brother and glommed a groupie who gave him head in his car while he smoked weed and kept the wipers going so he could eyeball prowling fuzz.

Like the righteous burglaries he and Joe pulled in West L.A. during the ’77-’78 floods, when the L.A.P.D. and C.H.P. were all evacuating hillsides and mopping blood off the freeways.

Like the time he felt guilty about treating Joe like dirt, and agreed to rip off the guitars and amplifiers from the J. Geils bass player’s pad in Benedict Canyon. Halfway down to Sunset with the loot, the car fishtails and sideswipes a sheriffs nark ark. Joe freaks at the badge and cocked magnum in his face and starts blabbing how a hitchhiker left the stuff in the trunk. No way, Jose, the cop said. Bingo: nine months in the laundry at Wayside.

Like the times when they were kids, and Joe got terrified of thunder and woke him up and made him promise always to protect him.

Bobby switched to left jabs aimed at the wiper blades, pulling his fist back a split second before it hit the glass, watching Joe flinch out of the corner of his eye. “I always carried you, ain’t I? Like I promised to when we were kids?”

Joe kept his eyes on the road, but clenched his elbows to his side, like he always did when Bobby started talking scary. “Sure, Bobby, that’s true.”

“And you’ve always watchdogged me when I got off too deep into my weird shit. Ain’t that true?”

Joe saw what was coming and swallowed so his voice would be steady. “That’s true.”

“You’ve got to say it.”

Tightening his hands on the wheel, Joe fought an image of their last B&E, of the woman with her skirt up over her head, Bobby with his knife at her throat as he raped her. “Y-you’d be … you’d hurt people.”

“What kind of people?”

Joe stared straight ahead. The sky was getting darker and taillights began flashing on. Concentrating on their reflections off the wet pavement gave him a moment to think up a new answer that would satisfy Bobby’s weirdness and let him keep a piece of his pride. He was about to speak when a station wagon swerved in front of them.

Joe flinched backward and Bobby grabbed the wheel out of his hands and yanked it hard right. The car lurched forward, missing the station wagon's rear bumper by inches. Bobby jammed his foot onto the accelerator, looked over his shoulder, saw a tight passing space and jerked the car across four lanes and down a darkened off-ramp. He slowly applied the brake, and when they came to a stop at the flooded intersection, Joe was brushing tears from his eyes.

"Say it," Bobby said.

Joe screamed the words, his voice breaking: "You're a rape-o! You're a mind fuck! You're on a wacko guilt trip, and I'm not kicking out any more of *my* money for *your* penance!" He swung the car out into the stream of traffic, punching the gas, doing a deft brody that set off a chain of honks from cut-off motorists. Bobby cracked the passenger window for air, then said softly, "I just want you to know how things are. How they're always gonna be. I owe you for getting us out of burglary. Too many women out there; too many chances to pull weird shit. But you owe me your guts, 'cause without me you ain't got any. We gotta remember that stuff."

Knowing Bobby was trying to get at something, Joe pressed the edge that his tears always gave him. "You sent that woman five K, right? The money orders were cashed, so you know she got them. You sent her a note, so even though the signatures on the checks were false, she knew it was *you.* You haven't done it again, so why are you rehashing all this old stuff? We've got a good deal with Hendy, but you keep talking it down like it's nothing."

Bobby popped short left-right combos until his arms ached and his tunic was soaked with sweat. "I'm just getting itchy, little brother," he said at last. "Like something has gotta happen real soon. Take surface streets, I gotta cool out before the close."

They cruised east on Valley Boulevard, Joe driving slowly in the middle lane, so he could scope out the scene on both sides of the street. The rain died to a drizzle, and Bobby took a hand squeeze from the glove compartment and started a long set of grip builders, dangling his right arm out the window to get a good extension. When Joe saw that the streets were nothing but used-car lots, liquor stores, burrito stands and boredom, he tried to think up some more lyrics to "Suicide Hill." When words wouldn't come, he slumped down in his seat and let the story take over.

Suicide Hill was a long cement embankment that led down to a deep sewage sluice in back of the Sepulveda V.A. Hospital. The hill and the scrubland that surrounded it were encircled by high barbed-wire fencing that was cut through in dozens of places by the gang members who used it as a meeting place and fuck turf.

The hill itself was used to test courage. Steep, and slick from spilled oil, it served as the ultimate motorcycle gauntlet. Riders would start at the top and try to coast down, slowly picking up speed, then popping the bike into first and hurdling the sewage sluice, which was thirteen feet across and rife with garbage, industrial chemicals and a thirty-year accumulation of sharp objects thrown in to inflict pain. Gang rivalries were settled by two riders starting off on top of the hill at the same time, each armed with a bicycle chain, the object to knock the opponent into the muck while hurdling it himself. Scores of bodies were rumored to be decomposing in the sluice. Suicide Hill was considered a bad motherfucker and a destroyer of good men.

So was the man it was named after.

Fritz "Suicide" Hill and the V.A. Hospital dated back to the days immediately following World War II, when scores of returning G.I.s necessitated the creation of veterans' domiciles. Rumor had it that Fritz was housed at the brand-new institution for shell shock, and after his recovery was assigned to a domicile ward to ease his emotional readjustment. Fritz had other ideas. He pitched a tent in the scrubland by the embankment and started an L.A. chapter of the Hell's Angels, then embarked on a career as a motorcycle highwayman, shaking down motorists all over Southern California, always returning to his encampment by the Sepulveda Wash. That part of the legend Joe accepted as fact.

The rest was a mixture of bullshit and tall tales, and the part that Joe wanted to put into his song. Suicide Hill sliced the guy who sliced the Black Dahlia; he masterminded a plot to break Caryl Chessman out of death row; he tommy-gunned niggers from a freeway overpass during the Watts Riot. He turned Leary on to acid and kicked Charlie Manson's ass. The cops wouldn't fuck with him because he knew where the bodies were buried. Even legendary hot dogs like John St. John, Colin Forbes and Crazy Lloyd Hopkins shit shotgun shells when Suicide Hill made the scene.

The most popular ending of the legend had Fritz Hill dying of cancer from all the chemicals he'd sucked in during his many dunks in the Sepulveda Wash. When he saw the end coming, he hauled his 1800 C.C. Vincent Black Shadow up to the roof of the hospital and popped a wheelie over the edge in second gear, flying some five hundred yards before he crashed into the scrubland, igniting a funeral pyre that could be seen all over L.A. Joe knew that the whole story, rebop, truth and all, was the story of everything he and Bobby had ever done, but all he had so far was "and death was a thrill on Suicide Hill"—and those ten bars were enough for a plagiarism beef.

Bobby nudged him out of his reverie. "Hang a right. The pad should be on the next block."

Joe complied, pulling onto a street of identical tract houses, all of them painted pink, peach or electric blue. Bobby scanned addresses, then pointed to the curb and shook his head. "Jesus Christ, Father Hernandez. Another *stone* wacko."

"*Qué,* Father Gonzalez?"

Joe set the brake and got out of the car, then looked over at the front lawn of the closee's pad and answered his own question. "Wacko's not the word, Padre."

The walkway of the peach-colored house was lined with Day-Glo plaster statues of Jesus and his disciples. On one side of the lawn a plastic Saint Francis stood guard over a flock of Walt Disney squeeze toys. On the other side, stuffed teddy bears and pandas were arranged around a papier-mache nativity scene. Joe walked over and checked out the manger. A Donald Duck doll was wrapped in swaddling clothes. Minnie Mouse and Snoopy leaned against the crib, sheepherder staffs pinned to their sides. The whole collage was sopping wet from the rain. "Holy fuck," he whispered.

Bobby cuffed him on the back of the head. "This is too fucking sad. Anybody this fucking crazy has gotta be a rollover. Let's just get a signature and split." He shoved a turquoise Bible and matching siding sample at Joe, then stared at the opposite side of the lawn. His eyes caught a toppled Jesus statue and a Kermit the Frog puppet going sixty-nine. He grabbed Joe's arm and pushed him up the walkway. "Five minutes in and out. No rosaries, no bullshit."

Before Joe could respond, a fat white woman in a rumpled housedress opened the door and stood on the porch in front of them. Grateful that she wasn't Mexican, Bobby said, "I'm Father Gonzalez, and this is Father Hernandez. We're the field priests from the Henderson Company. We brought you your siding sample and Bible. The workmen will be out to put up your patio next week." He reached into his breast pocket for a blank contract. "All we need is your signature. If you sign today, you get our November bonus, the Henderson Prayer Service: millions of Catholics worldwide will pray for you everyday for the rest of your life."

The woman reached into the pockets of her dress and pulled out rosary beads and a wad of one-dollar bills. She bit at her lip and said, "The phone man said I got to give to earthquake relief to get prayed for. He said to give you the money to give to him, and you'd pray for my husband, too. He's got the cancer powerful bad." Joe was reaching for the money when he saw Bobby smile; the slow smile he used to flash just before a fight he knew he was going to lose. He dropped his hand and stood off to one side as the veins in his brother's forehead started to twitch and spit bubbles popped from his mouth. The woman stammered, "He-he's sick powerful bad," and Bobby ran back to the car and began hurling Bibles and siding samples out into the street, covering the pavement with pastel Naugahyde and aluminum. When there were no more phone scam products left to throw, he tore off his priest jacket and his cassock and dropped them into the gutter, followed by the money in his pants pockets. Joe stood on the porch beside the shock-stilled woman, watching the last five years of his life go up in smoke, knowing that what made it so bad was that Bobby believed in God worse than any of the people he hurt.

3

Three weeks into his suspension from duty, Lloyd Hopkins flew to San Francisco and kept his family under a rolling stakeout. He rented a room at a Holiday Inn on the edge of Chinatown and a late-model Ford, and watched from a distance as his wife made her rounds of the city as an antique broker and met her lover for drinks, dinner and overnight visits at her Pacific Heights apartment; from a further distance he followed his daughters to school, on errands and out on dates. After a week of loose surveillance, he knew that he had gleaned no information and gained no special insights that would make his job easier. All he could do was let them find him, and see where it went from there.

He decided to let the girls make the discovery, and drove to their school and parked across the street. At 12:30, classes adjourned for an hour, and Anne and Caroline always ate with friends under the big oak tree in the school's backyard, while Penny skipped lunch and brooded by herself on the steps. If he stood by the car, big and familiar in his favorite herringbone jacket, then sooner or later they would notice him, and he would be able to read their faces and know what to do.

At precisely 12:30, the school's back door opened, and the first wave of students exited and jockeyed for positions under the oak tree. Lloyd got out and leaned against the hood of his car. Anne and Caroline appeared moments later, chattering and making faces as they examined the contents of their lunch sacks. They found spaces on the grass and began eating, Caroline making her usual liverwurst face as she unwrapped her first sandwich. Penny walked out then, peering around before disappearing into a swarm of children. Lloyd felt tears in his eyes, but kept them on his daughters anyway, waiting for the moment of recognition.

"Loitering in the vicinity of school yards, huh? Let's see your I.D., pervert!"

Lloyd did a slow turn, savoring the sound of Penny's voice and the anticipation of their identicalt gray eyes meeting. Penny foiled his plan by jumping into his arms and burying her head in his chest. Lloyd held his youngest daughter and dried his eyes on her Dodgers cap. When she started growling and nudging his shoulders like a cat, he growled back and said, "Who's the pervert? And what's with this feline stuff? The last I heard you were a penguin."

Penny stepped back. Lloyd saw that the color in her eyes had deepened, gaining a hint of Janice's hazel. "Penguins are passé. You've lost weight, Daddy. What are you doing in Frisco? This skulking-around scene wasn't too subtle, you know."

Lloyd laughed. "Do the others know I'm here?"

Penny shook her head. "No, they're not too subtle either. I figured it out two days ago. This friend of mine said there was this big man in a tweed jacket checking out the school yard. He said the guy looked like a nark or a perv. I said, 'That sounds like my dad.' I kept peeking outside during classes until I saw you." She stood on her tiptoes and poked Lloyd's necktie. "Speaking of which, my dummy sisters just figured it out."

Looking over his shoulder, Lloyd saw Caroline and Anne staring at him. Even from a distance he could see shock and anger on their faces. He waved, and Anne dropped her lunch sack and grabbed her sister's arm. Together they ran toward the school's back door.

Lloyd looked at Penny. "They're pissed. Why? The last time I came up we got along great."

Penny leaned against the car. "It's cumulative, Daddy. We're the geniuses, they're the plodders. They resent me because I'm the youngest, the smartest, and have the biggest breasts. They—"

"No, goddammit! What really?"

"Don't yell. I'm serious, Annie and Liney have gone très Frisco. They want Mom to divorce you and marry Roger. Mom and Roger are on the rocks, so they're scared. Daddy, are you in trouble in the Department?"

Realizing that his two older daughters weren't going to join him, Lloyd put an arm around his youngest and drew her close. "Yeah. I blew an extradition bust and fucked up at the guy's arraignment. I've been suspended from duty until the first of the year. I'm not sure what's going to happen, but I'm sure I'm finished in Robbery/Homicide. I might get transferred to a uniformed division until my twenty years come up, I might get my choice of flake assignments. I just don't fucking know."

Penny burrowed deeper into her father. "And you're scared?"

"Yeah, I'm scared."

"And you still want all of us back?"

"More than ever."

"Want some advice?"

"Yeah."

"Exploit this rocky period Mom and Roger are going through. Work fast, because they're going away this weekend, and they have this tendency to patch things up during long motel idylls."

Lloyd laughed. "I've been observing you lately. Don't you ever eat lunch?"

Penny laughed back. "The school serves nothing but health food, and Mom's sandwiches suck. I hit a burger joint on the way home."

"Come on, we'll get a pizza and conspire against your mother."

After a long lunch, Lloyd dropped Penny back at school and drove to Janice's apartment. There was a note on the door: "Roger—running late, make yourself at home. Should ret. around 3:30." He checked his watch—3:10—and picked the lock with a credit card and let himself in. When he saw the state of the living room, he realized Janice's success, not her lover, was his chief competition.

Every piece of furniture was a frail-looking antique, the type he had told her never to buy for the house because he was afraid it wouldn't support his 225 pounds; every framed painting was the German Expressionist stuff he despised. The rugs were light blue Persian, the kind Janice had always wanted, but was certain he'd ruin with coffee stains. Everything was tasteful, expensive, and a testament to her freedom as a single woman.

Lloyd sat down carefully in a cherrywood armchair and stretched his legs so that his feet rested on polished hardwood, not pale carpeting. He tried to kill time imagining what Janice would be wearing, but kept picturing her nude. When that led to thoughts of Roger, he let his eyes scan the room for something of or by himself. Seeing nothing, he fought an impulse to check out Janice's bedroom. Then he heard a key in the lock and felt himself start to shiver.

Janice saw him immediately and didn't register an ounce of surprise. "Hello, Lloyd," she said. "Liney called me at the office and told me you were in town. I expected you to come by, but I didn't expect you to break in."

Lloyd stood up. A red wool suit and a new shorter hairdo. He hadn't been close. "Cops have criminal tendencies. You look wonderful, Jan."

Janice sighed and let her purse drop to the floor. "No, I don't. I'm forty-two, and I'm putting on weight."

"I'm forty-two and losing weight."

"So I can see. So much for the amen—"

Lloyd took two steps forward; Janice one. They embraced hands to shoulders, keeping a space between them. Lloyd broke it off first, so the contact wouldn't make him want more. He took a step backward and said, "You know why I'm here."

Janice pointed to a Louis XIV sofa. "Yes, of course." When sat down, she took a chair across from him and said, "I what you want, and I'm glad that you want it, but I don't what *I* want. And I may never know. That's as honest an answer as I can give you."

Lloyd felt threads of their past unraveling. Not knowing whether to press or retreat, he said, "You've made a good life for yourself here. This pad, your business, the life you've set up for the girls."

"I also have a lover, Lloyd."

"Yeah, Roger the on-and-off lodger. How's that going?"

Janice laughed. "You're such a riot when you try to act civilized. I read about you in the L.A. papers a couple of weeks ago. Some man you captured in New Orleans."

"Some man whose capture I fucked up in New Orleans, some man whose arraignment I almost blew in L.A."

Janice smoothed the hem of her skirt and leaned forward. "I've never heard you admit to making mistakes before. As a cop, I mean."

Lloyd leaned back. The sofa creaked against his weight and combined with Janice's words to form an accusation. "I never made them before!"

"Don't shout, I wasn't accusing you of anything. What did the man do?"

The creaking grew; for a split second Lloyd thought he could feel the floor start to tremble. "The *man*? He beat a woman to death during a snuff film. Roger ever take out any scumbags like that?"

Janice started to flush at the cheeks; Lloyd grabbed the arms of the sofa to keep from going to her. "Roger doesn't take out scumbags," she said. "He doesn't break into my apartment or carry a gun or beat up on people. Lloyd, I'm a middle-aged woman. I was in love with your intensity for a long, long time, but I can't handle it anymore. Maybe it isn't a nice thing to say, but Roger is a comfortable, no-fireworks lover for a middle-aged antique broker who put in nineteen years as wife to a hot-dog cop. Lloyd, do you know what I'm saying?"

The perfect softness of the indictment rang in Lloyd's ears. "I've made amends as best I could," he said, consciously holding his voice at a whisper. "I've tried to admit the things I did wrong with you and the girls."

Janice's whisper was softer: "And your admissions were excessive and hurt me. You told me things that you shouldn't ever, *ever* tell any woman that you claim to love."

"I *do* love you, goddammit!"

"I know. And I love you, and even if I stay with Roger and divorce you and marry him, I'll always love you, and Roger will never own me the way you have. But I'm too tired for the kind of love you have to give."

Lloyd stood up and walked to the door, averting his eyes from Janice and groping for threads of hope. "The girls? Would you consider how they feel about me?"

"If they were younger, yes. But now they're practically grown up, and I can't let them influence me."

Lloyd turned around and looked at his wife. "You're not yielding on this an inch, are you?"

"I yielded too long and too much."

"And you still don't know what you want?"

Janice stared at the light blue Persian carpet she had coveted since the day of her wedding. "Yes … I … still don't know."

"Then I guess I'll just have to outyield you," Lloyd said.

4

She was gone, and she'd taken everything that could be converted into quick cash with her.

Duane Rice walked through the condo he'd shared with Vandy, keeping a running tab on the missing items and the risks he'd taken to earn them. TV console, state-of-the-art stereo system and four rooms' worth of expensive high-tech furniture—gone. Four walk-in closets full of clothes, three for her, one for him—gone. Paintings that Vandy insisted gave the pad class—gone. The down payment and maintenance costs on a flop that he now couldn't live in—adios, motherfucker. Add on the empty carport in back of the building and total it up: two hundred Class A felonies committed in the jurisdictions of the most trigger-happy police departments in the country. Sold down the river by a worthless—

When he couldn't finish the thought, Rice knew that the game wasn't over. He pissed on the living room carpet and kicked the front door off its hinges. Then he went looking for felony number 201 and the means to get back his woman.

The Pico bus dropped him on Lincoln Avenue, a stone's throw from Venice Ghosttown and the likelihood of a shitload of customized taco wagons without alarm systems. On Lincoln and Ocean Park he spotted a hardware store and went in and boosted a large chisel, rattail file and pair of pliers. Exiting the store, he smiled and looked at his watch: two hours and ten minutes out of the rock and back on the roll.

Rice waited for dusk at a burrito stand on the edge of Ghosttown, drinking coffee and eyeballing the East Venice spectacle of overage hippies, overage hookers, overage low-riders and underage cops trying to look cool. He watched horny businessmen in company cars prowl for poontang, tried to guess which hooker they'd hit on and wondered why he had to love a woman before he could fuck her; he watched an aged love child with an amplifier strapped to his back strum a guitar for chump change and suck on a short dog of T-bird. The scene filled him with disgust, and when twilight hit, he felt his disgust turn to high-octane fuel and walked into Ghosttown.

Stucco walk-back apartment buildings, white wood frame houses spray-painted with gang graffiti, vacant lots covered with garbage. Emaciated dogs looking for someone to bite. The cars either abandoned jig rigs or welfare wagons in mint condition, but nothing exceptional. Rice walked west toward the beach, grateful that the cold weather had the locals indoors, seeing nothing that Louie Calderon would pay more than five bills for out of friendship. He kept walking, and was almost out of Ghosttown when automotive perfection hit him right between the eyes.

It was a '54 Chevy convertible, candy-apple sapphire blue with a canary yellow top, smoked windshield and full continental kit. If the interior was cherry and the engine was in good shape, he was home.

Rice walked up to the driver's-side door and pretended to admire the car while he got out his chisel and pliers. He counted slowly to ten, and when he could feel no suspicion coming down on him, jammed the chisel into the space between the door-lock and chassis and yanked outward. The door snapped open, no alarm went off. Rice saw that the dash was a restored '54 original and felt underneath it for the ignition wires. Pay dirt! He took his pliers and twisted the two wires together. The engine came to life, and he drove the car away.

Two hours later, with the Chevy safely stashed, Rice walked in the door of Louie Calderon's auto body shop and tapped Louie on the shoulder. Louie looked up from the tool kit he was digging through and said, "Duane the Brain! When'd you get out?" Rice ignored the oil-covered hand he offered and placed an arm over Louie's shoulders. "Today." He looked around and saw two mechanics staring at them. "Let's go up to your office."

"Business?"

"Business."

They walked through the shop and up to the office that adjoined the second story of Louie's house. When they were seated across the paper-cluttered desk from each other, Rice said, "Now resting in your hot roller garage out by Suicide Hill is a mint '54 Chevy ragtop. Continental kit, 326 supercharged, full leather tuck and roll, hand-rubbed sapphire blue metal flake paint job. Intact, I'd say it's worth twelve K. Parts, close to ten. The *upholstery* is worth at least two."

Louie opened the refrigerator next to his desk and pulled out a can of Coors. He popped the top and said, "You're crazy. With your record, you have got to be the primo auto theft suspect in L.A. County. You bought your way out of what? A hundred counts? That kind of shit only happens once. Next time, they fuck you for the ones they got you on *and* the ones you got away with. How'd you get in my garage?"

Rice cracked his knuckles. "I cut a hole in the door with a chisel and unlocked it from the inside. Nobody saw me, and I covered up the hole with some wood I found. And I'm not planning on making a career of it. I just did it for a quick stake."

"Nice sled, huh?"

"Primo. If you weren't a Mexican, I'd call it a bonaroo taco wagon."

Louie laughed. "All Chicanos with ambition are honorary Anglos. How much you want?"

"Two grand and a couple of favors."

"What kind of favors?"

"When I was at fire camp, I heard you had a message service. You know, twenty-four-hour, bootleg number, tap-proof. That true?"

"*Es la verdad.* Two hundred scoots a month, but be cool who you give the number to, I don't want no shitbirds giving me grief at four in the morning. What else you want? Let me guess … Let's see … A car!"

"How'd you guess? I don't care what it looks like, all I want is something with legit registration that runs. Deal?"

Louie walked to the back wall and lifted up a framed *Playboy* centerfold, then twirled the dial of the safe and opened it. He pulled out two bank packets and tossed them to Rice. “Deal. The car is ugly, but it runs. Remember this number: 628-1192. Got it?”

Rice said, “Got it,” and stuck the money in his pocket. “I also heard you were dealing guns.”

Louie’s eyes became cold brown slits. “You wanta tell me who told you that?”

“Sure. A guy at the County. Big blond guy on the Quentin chain.”

“Randy Simpson, fat-mouthed motherfucker. Yeah, I’ve been trying to deal guns, but I can’t find no shooters who want my product. I bought these big, heavy-ass army .45 automatics from this strung-out quartermaster lieutenant. He threw in these tranquilizer dart guns, too. A bullshit deal. The shooters want the lightweight Italian pieces, and *nobody* wants the dart guns. I gave my son one of the dart jobs, took the firing pin out so he couldn’t hurt himself. Why? You going cowboy, Duane-o?”

Rice shook his head. “I don’t know. I heard about a deal, but it might not float. I’ll have to check it out.”

“What *are* you gonna do for a living?”

“I … I don’t know. Work on making a few scores, then work on Vandy’s career. She split, but I—”

Rice stopped when he saw Louie’s face cloud over. He shook his head to blot out the sound of Vandy’s “But Duane wouldn’t want me to,” then said, “What is it? Don’t hold back on me.”

Louie drained his beer in one gulp. “I was going to tell you, I was just waiting for the right time. A friend of mine saw Vandy, sometime last week. She was walking out of this outcall service place on the Strip, you know, by the All-American Burger. He said at first he didn’t recognize her with all this makeup on, but then he was sure. I’m sorry, man.”

Rice stood up. Louie saw the look in his eyes and said, “Maybe it don’t mean that.”

“It means I have to find her,” Rice said. “Go get me my car.”

Duane Rice drove his “new” ’69 Pontiac to the east end of the Sunset Strip, hugging the right-hand lane in order to check out the hookers clustered by bus benches, searching for Vandy’s aristocratic features wasted by makeup and dope. Every face he saw burned itself into his brain, where it was superimposed against a reflex image of Gordon Meyers and preppy Anne Atwater Vanderlinden. But none of the faces was *her*, and when he saw three solid blocks of massage parlors, fuck pads and outcall services looming in front of him, he gnawed his lips until he tasted blood.

Rice parked in the Ail-American Burger lot and walked slowly west on the south side of Sunset. All the streetwalkers now were black, so he kept his eyes glued to the shabby storefronts and their flashing neon signs. He passed Wet Teenagers Outcall and Soul Sisters Mud Wrestling; New Yokohama Oriental Massage and the 4-H Club—“Hot, Handsome, Horny and Hung.” After a block, the obscenities blurred together so that he couldn’t read individual names, and he stared at front doors waiting for *her* to come out.

When he saw that guilty-looking men were the only ones entering and leaving, he started to see red and walked to a curbside bus bench and braced his hands against it in an isometric press. With his eyes closed, he forced himself to think. Finally he remembered the snapshot of Vandy he'd carried through jail. He reached for his wallet and pulled it from its plastic holder, then turned around and again confronted the flashing beacons. Nuclear Nookie Outcall; Wet and Woolly Massage; Satan's House of Sin. This time the words didn't blur. He pulled out a handful of Louie Calderon's twenties and walked through the nearest door. A bored black man behind a desk looked up as he entered and said, "Yeah?"

Rice held the photo of Vandy and a double saw under the man's nose. "Have you seen this woman?"

The man put down his copy of the *Watchtower*, grabbed the twenty and looked at the snapshot. "No, too good-lookin' for this jive place. If you want to pork this kinda chick, I can fix you up with a cut-rate version gives mean head."

Rice breathed out slowly; the red trapdoor behind his eyes eased shut. "No thanks, I want *her.* Got any ideas?"

The man stuck the twenty in his shirt pocket. "I don't know what places got what quality pussy, but I know this jive place ain't got nothin' but woof-woofs. You just keep walkin' and whippin' out that green, maybe you find her."

Rice took the man's advice and walked east. He showed the snapshot to every doorman and bouncer at every sex joint on the row, handing out over three hundred dollars, getting nothing but negative head shakes and a consensus that Vandy was too foxy to be doing either Strip outcall or street hooking. After four straight hours of breathing nothing but sleaze, he got coffee at the All-American Burger and sat down at an outside table to think.

He came up with facts that he trusted. Louie and his friends were solid; if one of them saw Vandy out here in whore makeup, it was probably true—without him to look after her she was a stone self-destructor. None of the massage and outcall slimebags he'd talked to had I.D.'d her—and it was to their financial advantage to do so. Louie's friend had seen her sometime last week, probably right after she visited him and cleaned out the pad. It all felt right.

Rice looked at his watch: 3:30, the whores thinning out as the traffic on Sunset dwindled. The only hookers still working were black, and unlikely to have info on Vandy—she avoided *all* jigs like the plague. Draining his coffee, he stood up and started for the car. Then he saw an incredible redhead walk over to the curb and stick out her thumb.

Rice moved fast, running to his car and pulling up in front of the girl, cutting off a slow-trawling Mercedes. The redhead looked in the passenger window distastefully, then back at the status car. Rice yelled, "A c-note for ten minutes," and the girl hesitated, then opened the door and got in. Rice handed her a wad of twenties as the driver of the Mercedes accelerated and flipped them the bird.

The redhead stuffed the money into her purse and poked a finger at the tufts of foam sticking out of the seat. "This car sucks. Can we go to a motel or something?"

Rice turned around the corner, then pulled over to the curb and flicked on the dashboard light. "I don't want to get laid, I just had a feeling you could help me find this woman." He handed her the photo of Vandy and watched as she examined it, then shook her head.

"No, never. Your chick?"

"That's right."

“She a working girl?”

Rice swallowed a wave of anger. “Yeah. I’ve heard she’s been doing outcall around here, but nobody recognizes her, and I believe them.”

The redhead scrutinized the snapshot, then said, “She’s real cute. Too classy for most of the places around here.”

“What do you mean, ‘most’?”

“Well, there’s this high-line place a couple of blocks from here, off the Strip. They run only really foxy chicks, to these movies and rock big shots. I worked out of there for a week or so, then I quit. Too much of a drug scene. I’m into health food.”

Rice felt his skin prickle. “What’s the name of the place?”

“Silver Foxes. No ‘outcall,’ just ‘Silver Foxes.’”

“What’s the address?”

“Gardner, just off the Strip. Lavender building, you can’t miss it. But they only send chicks out on referrals, you know, it’s real exclusive.”

“Phone number?”

The girl hesitated. Rice dug in his pocket for more money, then handed it to her. “Tell me, goddammit.”

She grabbed the door handle. “You won’t tell where you got it?”

“No.”

“658-4371.” The girl darted out of the car. Rice watched her counting her money as she walked back to the Strip.

It took him less than ten minutes to find the lavender apartment building. It stood just south of Sunset in the glow of a streetlamp, a plain Spanish-style four-flat with no lights burning.

Rice parked and walked across the lawn to the cement porch. Four doors were recessed in the entranceway, illuminated only by mailbox lights. He squinted and saw that three of the apartments belonged to individuals, while the last box was embossed with a raised metal insignia of a fox in a mink coat winking seductively. There was a buzzer beneath the words “Silver Foxes.” Rice pressed it three times and heard its echo. No lights went on and no sounds of movement answered the buzzing. He reached into the mailbox and found it empty, then stood back on the lawn so he could eyeball the whole building. Still nothing but darkness and silence.

Rice drove to a pay phone and dialed 658-4371. A recorded woman’s voice answered: “Hi, this is Silver Foxes, foxes of every persuasion for every occasion. If you’re already registered with us, leave your code number and let us know what you want; we’ll get back to you soon. If you’re a new friend, let us know who you know, and give us their code numbers and your phone number. We’ll get in touch soon.”

There was an interval of soft disco music, then a beep. Rice slammed down the receiver and drove back to outcall row.

Only the dregs of the hookers were still out, garishly made-up junkies who stepped into the street and lifted their skirts as cars passed by. Rice sat at a table inside the All-American Burger and drank coffee while he scanned women on both sides of Sunset. Every face he glimpsed looked ravaged; every body bloated or emaciated. Toward dawn, the neon lights on the outcall offices and massage parlors started going off. When street-sweeping machines pushed the few remaining hookers back onto the sidewalk, he took it as his cue to leave and check out business.

Rice drove across Laurel Canyon, coming down into the Valley just as full daylight hit. When he reached Ventura Boulevard, he recalled verbatim the facts he'd heard through the ventilator shaft: "Kling and Valley View, pink apartment house"; "Christine something, Studio City, house on the corner of Hildebrand and Gage." Truth, half-truth or bullshit?

At Hildebrand and Gage he got his first validation. The mailbox of the northeast corner house was tagged with the name "Christine Confrey." That fact gave him a feeling of destiny that built up harder and harder as he drove west to Encino. When he got to Kling and Valley View and saw a faded pink apartment house on the corner, with an out-of-place Cadillac parked in front, the feeling exploded. Rice kept it at a low roar by calculating odds: five to one that the info was correct, making the heists possible.

Checking the mailboxes of the six-unit building, he saw that only one single woman lived there—Sally Issler in #2. He found a door designated 2 on the ground-floor street side, with a high hedge fronting the apartment's large picture window. Rice squatted behind the hedge, waiting for the owner of the Caddy to cut the odds down to zero.

He waited an hour and a half before a door opened and two voices, one male, one female, gave him pay dirt:

"My wife gets back tomorrow. No overnighters for a while."

"Matinees? You know, like the song—'Afternoon Delight'?"

The man laughed. "We can hit Hot Tub Fever during your lunch hour."

"Sounds good, but I read in *Cosmo* that those hot tub places all have herpes germs in the water."

"Don't believe everything you read. Call me at the bank?"

"Yeah."

Rice heard sounds of kissing, followed by a door slamming. He counted to ten, then stood up and peered around the hedge. The Cadillac was just taking off. He ran for his car and pursued it.

It led him to a Bank of America branch on Woodman and Ventura. Rice sized up the man who got out. Tall, broad-hipped, sunken-chested. A wimp whose sex appeal was his money.

The man walked up to the front doors. Rice followed from a safe distance, passing him as he stepped inside. When the manager locked the doors behind him, Rice counted to ten, then peered through the plate-glass window and smiled.

The manager was alone inside the bank, and the surveillance cameras were fixed-focused at the floor. The tellers stations were visible from the street only if a passerby was willing to stand on his tiptoes and crane his neck.

Rice watched the manager walk directly to the teller area and take a key from his pocket, then open drawers and transfer cash to his briefcase, leaving pieces of paper in the money's place—probably doctored tally slips. The odds zoomed to perfection. Rice ran to his car, then drove to a pay phone and called Louie Calderon at his message drop number.

"Speak."

"Louie, it's Duane."

"Already? Don't tell me, the car broke down and you're pissed."

"Nothing like that."

"Another favor?"

"Yeah. I want three .45s and one of those dart guns. You've got darts, too?"

"Yeah. Before we go any further, I don't wanna know what you got in mind. You got that?"

"Right. Silencers?"

"I can get them, but they cut down the range to practically zilch."

"They'll never be fired; it's just an extra precaution."

"Mr. Smooth. Seven bills for the whole shot. Deal?"

"Deal. One more thing. I need two men, smart, with balls, who want to make money. No niggers, no dopers, no trashy gangster types, nobody with robbery convictions."

Louie whistled, then laughed. "You want a lot, you know that? Well, today's your lucky day. I know two Chicano dudes, brothers, who're looking for work. Smart—one righteous vato, one tagalong. Pulled hundreds of burglaries, only got popped once. *Righteous burglars, righteous con men.* They just hung up this phone rip-off gig and they're hurtin' for cash."

"You vouch for them?"

"I fenced their stuff for seven or eight years. When they got busted, they didn't snitch me off. What more you want?"

"Any strong-arm experience?"

"No, but one of them is downright mean, and I'll bet he'd dig it. Used to fight welterweight, ten, twelve years ago. All the top locals stomped on him."

"Can you set up a meet?"

"Sure. But I'm tellin' them and I'm tellin' you: I don't want to know nothin' about your plans. *Comprende?*"

"*Comprende*."

"Good. I'll call Bobby and set it up. When you meet him, tell him how you saw him knock Little Red Lopez through the ropes with a right cross. He'll eat it up."

The phone went dead. Rice walked back to his car. When he stuck the key in the ignition, he was trembling. It felt good.

5

Even as the dream unfolded, he knew that it was *just* a dream, one of the stock nightmares that owned him, and if he didn't panic, it would run its course and he would wake up safe.

Sometime back in '67 or '68, when he was working Hollywood Patrol, he and his partner Flanders got an unknown trouble call directing their unit to an old house in a cul-de-sac off the Cahuenga Pass, a block of ramshackle pads rented out dirt cheap because noise from the freeway overpass made living there intolerable.

When no one answered their knocks and shouted "Police officers, open up!" he and Flanders kicked in the door, only to be driven back outside by the stench of stale cordite and decomposing flesh. While Flanders radioed for backup units, he drew his service revolver and prowled the pad, discovering the five headless bodies, brain-spattered walls, expended shotgun rounds and the note taped to the TV set: "I keep hearing these voices thru the freeway noise telling Peg and the kids about me and Billy. It's a lie, but they won't believe it was just one time when we was drunk, and that don't count. This way nobody's going to know except Billy, and he don't care."

The man who wrote the note was slumped by the TV set. He had jammed the sawed-off .10 gauge into his crotch and blown himself in two. The shotgun lay beside him in a pile of congealed viscera.

Then the dream speeded up, and he wasn't sure if it was happening or not.

Flanders came back inside and yelled, "Backup, detectives and M.E. on their way, Hoppy." He saw him reach for a cigarette to kill the awful stink, and was about to scream about gas escaping from stiffs, but *knew* Flanders would call it college boy bullshit. He ran toward him anyway, just as the match was struck and the little boy's stomach exploded and Flanders ran out the door with his face on fire. Then *he* was screaming, and ambulances were screaming, and he knew it wasn't a dream, it was the telephone.

Lloyd rolled over and reached for it, surprised to find that he had fallen asleep fully clothed. "Yes? Who is it?"

A familiar voice came on the line. "Dutch, Lloyd. You all right?"

"You woke me up."

"Sorry, kid."

"Don't be; you did me a favor."

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind. What is it, Dutch?"

When there was a long silence on the L.A. end of the line, Lloyd tensed and shook off the last remnants of sleep. He heard the bustle of Hollywood Station going on in the background, and pictured his best friend getting up the guts to tell him something very bad.

"Goddammit, Dutch, tell me!"

Dutch Peltz said, "So far it's just a rumor, but it's an informed rumor, and I credit it. That shrink you saw last month recommended you be given early retirement. You know, emotional disability incurred in the line of service, full pension, that kind of thing. I've heard that Braverton and McManus are behind it, and that if you don't accept the plan, you'll be given a trial board for dereliction of duty. Lloyd, they mean it. If the trial board finds you guilty, you'll be kicked off the Department."

A kaleidoscope of memories flashed in front of Lloyd's eyes, and for long moments he didn't know if he was back in a dream or not. "No, Dutch. They wouldn't do that to me."

"Lloyd, it's true. I've also heard that Fred Gaffaney has got a file on you. Nasty stuff, some sex shit you pulled when you worked Venice Vice."

"That was fifteen fucking years ago, and I wasn't the only one!"

Dutch said, "Sssh, sssh. I'm just telling you. I don't know if Gaffaney is in with Braverton and McManus on this, but I know it's all coming down bad for you. Retire, Lloyd. With your master's, you can teach anywhere. You can do consulting work. You can—"

Lloyd screamed, "No!" and picked up the phone, then saw the framed photograph of his family on the nightstand and put it back down. "No. *No. No.* If they want me out, they'll have to fight me for it."

"Think of Janice and the girls, Lloyd. Think of the time you'd have to spend with them."

"You're talking shit, Dutch. Without the Job, there's nothing. Even Janice knows that. So fuck 'em all except six, and save *them* for the pallbearers. See you in L.A., Captain Peltz."

Dutch's voice was soft and hoarse. "Until then, Sergeant Hopkins."

Lloyd hung up and walked into the bathroom, cursing when he saw the daintily wrapped soap bars and his disposable razor crusted with shaving cream. Muttering "Fuck it," he soaked a washcloth in cold sink water and wiped his face, then straightened his necktie, wondering why he always wore one, even when he didn't have to. When he looked in the mirror, the answer came to him, and he prepared to do battle with the institution that had given him all of his nightmares and most of his dreams.

At a stand of pay phones in the lobby, Lloyd found a copy of the San Francisco yellow pages and leafed through the "A's" until he hit "Attorneys." Dismissing the shysters who had full-page ads mentioning their low rates and drunk-driving experience, he got out a pencil and notepad and started jotting down names and addresses at random, filling up half a page before he noticed *Brewer, Cafferty and Brown* at an address on Montgomery that was probably only a half dozen blocks from where he was standing. Again muttering "Fuck it," he smoothed his necktie and walked there, jamming his hands into his pockets to keep from running.

The waiting room of Brewer, Cafferty and Brown was furnished in the old-line California style of leather armchairs and brass floor lamps; the photographs on the walls blew the sense of tradition apart. Lloyd walked in and knew immediately that chance had directed him to either *the* best or *the* worst law firm ever to be considered by a defendant in an interdepartmental police trial.

Bobby Seale, Huey P. Newton and Eldridge Cleaver glared down at him, giving the clenched-fist salute; a group photo of the United Bay Area Gay Collective beamed down. Hanging over the reception desk was a purple wall tapestry with "Power to the People!" embroidered in the center, and beside it there was a photographic blowup of dozens of Oriental men in karate stances. Lloyd examined the picture, figuring it for an outtake from a martial arts movie. He was wrong; it was the Boat People's Political Action Army. Sitting down to wait for someone to welcome him, he felt like he had been given the D.T.s without benefit of booze.

After a few minutes, a tall black woman in a tweed suit walked in and said, "Yes, may I help you?"

Lloyd stood up, noticing the woman catch sight of the .38 strapped to his belt. "I came to see an attorney," he said. "Your office was close to my hotel, so I came here."

"Then you don't have an appointment?"

The woman was staring openly at his gun. Lloyd took out his I.D. holder and badge and showed it to her. "I'm a Los Angeles police officer," he said. "I'm looking for an attorney to represent me at a police trial board. An out-of-town lawyer is probably a good idea. I've got forty thousand dollars in the bank, and I'll spend every dime to keep my job."

The woman smiled and walked back out of the room. Lloyd held eye contact with Huey Newton until she returned and said, "This way, please, Mr. Hopkins," and led him to an inner office. A pale man was sitting behind a desk reading a newspaper. "Mr. Brewer, Mr. Hopkins," the woman said, then exited and closed the door behind her.

Brewer looked up from his paper. "L.A.P.D., huh? Well, we know they didn't bring you up on charges of excessive force, because they don't recognize that concept." He stood up and extended his hand. Lloyd shook it, measuring the man's words, deciding his abrasiveness was a test. "I like your office," he said as he took a chair next to the desk. "Out of the low-rent district. You do a lot of oil-leasing contracts on the side, take down the pictures of the niggers when the fat cats come to call?"

Brewer filled a pipe with tobacco and tamped it down. "So much for light conversation. I don't have to agree with a client's ideology in order to represent him. Why are you getting a trial board?"

Lloyd forced himself to talk slowly. "The overall charge will probably be dereliction of duty. I'm currently on a six-week suspension, with pay. The specific charge or charges will have to do with a recent perjury I committed at a murder trial arraignment. I—"

Brewer jabbed the air with his pipe stem. "Why did you commit perjury? Is this a common practice of yours?"

"I lied to protect a woman innocently involved in the case," Lloyd said softly, "and I've lied previously only to circumvent probable-cause statutes in regard to hard felonies."

"I see. By any chance were you intimately involved with this woman?"

Lloyd grasped the arms of his chair. "That's none of your business, Counselor. Next question."

“Very well. Let’s backtrack. Tell me about your career with the L.A.P.D.”

Lloyd said, “Nineteen years on the Job, fourteen as a detective-sergeant, eleven in Robbery/Homicide Division. I’ve got a master’s in criminology from Stanford, I’m considered the best homicide detective in the Department, I’ve earned more commendations than I can count, I’ve successfully investigated a number of highly publicized murder cases. My arrest record is legendary.”

Brewer lit his pipe, then blew smoke at the ceiling. “Impressive, but what’s more impressive is that someone with such an outstanding record should have incurred such departmental disfavor. I should think that one perjury slipup wouldn’t have been sufficient to jeopardize your career. I know the L.A.P.D. looks after their own.”

“There’s other stuff. Minor fuckups over the years. The high brass sent me to a shrink. I shot my mouth off about things I shouldn’t have.”

“Why?”

“Because I wanted to get rid of it! Because I never thought they’d try to do this to me!”

“Please calm down, Sergeant. There are ways to get around one psychiatrist’s report, usually by mitigating it with the report of a different analyst, one with a superior reputation.”

Lloyd gripped the sides of the desk until he felt his hands go numb. “Counselor, this isn’t a trial in a court of law, this is a kangaroo cop trial, and academic credentials don’t mean shit. Saving my job is a long shot from the gate, and making a department employee look bad would only make the odds worse.”

Brewer slid back in his chair and stared past Lloyd at the far wall. “Well … there are other approaches. You have a family?”

“Wife and three daughters. I’m separated from them.”

“But you remain cordial?”

“Yes.” Lloyd stared at the attorney, who kept his eyes fixed on a point just above his head and said, “Then we can exploit them as character witnesses, gain sympathy for you that way. You yourself present an interesting picture, one that can be used to advantage. Are you aware that your clothes don’t fit? They’re at least two sizes too large. We can portray you in court as a victim of your own conscientiousness, a man driven to radical weight loss by overzealous dedication to duty! If you were to lose even more weight, that sympathy factor would be increased. With the proper coaching your daughters would elicit the mo—”

“*Look at me,*” Lloyd hissed, holding down a picture of his hands around Brewer’s throat, squeezing until the lawyer’s averted eyes popped out of his skull. “Look at me, you cocksucker.”

Brewer closed his eyes. “Control your language, Sergeant. I want you to get used to wearing a penitent expression, one that wi—”

Lloyd stepped around the desk, grabbed Brewer by the arms and shoved him into a glass bookcase. The glass shattered; law texts spilled to the floor. Lloyd took hold of Brewer’s neck with his left hand, and balled his right hand into a fist and aimed it at the lawyer’s squeezed-shut eyes. Then he heard a scream, and his peripheral vision caught the receptionist with her hands clasped over her mouth. He pulled the punch at the last second, sending his fist through an unbroken pane of glass. Shoving Brewer aside, Lloyd held his bloody hand in front of him. “I … I’m sorry, goddamn you … I’m sorry.”

6

Duane Rice looked at Bobby "Boogaloo" Garcia and knew two things: that, ex-welterweight or not, he could take him out easy; and that the little taco bender was incorrigibly *mean.* After a jailhouse handshake, Rice looked around his living room, saw quality stuff and pegged him as a non-doper who gangsterized because he was too lazy to work and in love with the game. Thinking, so far so good, he threw out a line to test his smarts: "I think I saw you fight once. You knocked Little Red Lopez through the ropes at the Olympic about ten, twelve years ago."

Bobby grinned and pointed to the couch; Rice sat down, seeing smarts up the wazoo and a big determination to milk the game. "Likable Louie must have told you that," Bobby said. "Told you I'd dig it. Louie's gotta be the dumbest smart guy I know, because only about six people in the world know about that, and I'm the only one cares, just like you're the only one gives a rat's ass about how you ragged that judge. Fucking Louie. How'd he manage to stay alive so long?"

"He can do things we can't do," Rice said, reaching into the back of his waistband and pulling out a silencer-fitted .45 automatic. "Like this." He worked the slide and ejected the clip, catching the chambered round as it popped into the air. "Dum dum. Likable Louie has stayed alive for so long because guys who can get nice things are likable. Right, Bobby?"

Laughing, Bobby held out his hands. Rice tossed the .45 up to him, and he grabbed it and did a series of quick draws aimed at the Roberto Duran poster above the fireplace. "Pow, Roberto, pow! Pow! *No más! No más!*" Grinning from ear to ear, he handed the gun back butt first and slumped into a chair across from Rice. "Louie ain't likable, Duane. He's lovable. He's so lovable that I'd suck his daddy's dick just to see where he came from. How many of those you got?"

"Three," Rice said. "One for you, one for me, one for your brother. Is he coming?"

"Any minute. Wanta trade pedigrees?"

"Sure. The vehicular manslaughter conviction you already heard about, three years at Soledad because I lost my temper and reverted to my white trash origins; a bust on one count of G.T.A., a bullet in the County, reduced to six months. Y.A. parole and County probation, both of which I'm hanging up, because car thief/mechanic is what my P.O. calls a 'modus operandi—occupational stress combination.' In other words, he expects me to sling burgers at McDonald's for the minimum wage. No way."

Bobby nodded along, then flashed a grin and said, "How many cars you boost before you got busted?"

"Around three hundred. You and your brother did B&Es, right?"

“Right. At least four, five hundred jobs, with one bust, and that was a fluke.”

“What did you do with the money? Louie pays a good percentage, and he said you guys aren’t into dope.”

Bobby cracked the knuckles of his right hand. “I *own* this house, man. Joe and I used to *own* a coin laundromat and a hot-dog stand, and I bankrolled a couple of fighters after I quit myself. What about *you*? Three hundred G.T.A.s and you drive up in an old nigger wagon looks like something the cat dragged in. What’d you do with *your* money?”

“I spent it,” Rice said, boring his eyes into Bobby’s, testing for real now, wondering if retreating was the smart thing to do. The two-way stare held until Bobby’s eyelids started to twitch and he smiled/winced and said, “Shit, man, I like women as much as the next man.”

Stalemate; Bobby had backed off, but returned with a good shot, right on target. Rice tasted blood in his mouth, and felt his teeth involuntarily biting his cheeks. The bloody spittle lubed his voice so his next shot sounded strong to his own ears. “You think you can be cool with that gun? You think you can hold on to it and not shoot it?”

Three seconds into a new eyeball duel, the front door opened and Joe Garcia walked in carrying a bag of groceries. Rice broke the stare and stood up and stuck out his hand. Joe shifted the bag and grabbed the hand limply, then said, “Sorry I’m late,” and reached into the bag and pulled out a can of beer. He tossed it at Bobby, who shook it up, then popped the top and let the foam shoot out and spray his face. Chugalug ging half the can, he cocked a thumb and forefinger at the Roberto Duran poster and giggled, “Pow! Pow! *No más! No más!*” Rice watched Joe Garcia watch his older brother. He seemed wary and disgusted, a smart reaction for a tagalong criminal. Bobby killed his beer and plugged Roberto Duran a half dozen more times. Rice knew the charade was a machismo stunt to hide his fear. To hid his own contempt and relief, he watched Joe walk into the kitchen, then joined Bobby in laughing. When Joe returned looking outright scared and Bobby gazed over at him and wiped his lips, Rice said, “Let’s talk business, gentlemen.”

It took him half an hour to outline the plan exactly the way he’d heard it through the ventilator shaft, stressing that no one knew he’d heard it and that he’d cased the locations to a T, getting the facts validated straight down the line. He would be the “inside” man who actually hit the banks; they would be the “outside” men who held the two girlfriends captive at their pads and received the phone calls from the rogue bank managers. Gauging their reactions, Rice saw that Bobby wanted it for the money and the pure unadulterated thrill—every time he mentioned the kidnap angle the ex-welter popped his knuckles and licked his lips; he saw that Joe was afraid of the whole thing, but more afraid of putting the kibosh on his brother’s glee. For a two-time-only deal, they were solid partners.

Finishing his pitch, Rice said, “A few other things: park your car on the nearest big street to the chicks’ pads. That’s Ventura for the Issler woman, Lankershim for Confrey. Wear gloves, but don’t put on your ski masks until right before you go in the door. Carry briefcases and dress well so you’ll blend in with the neighborhood. We meet at my place, Room 112 at the Bowl Motel on Highland up from the Boulevard, *one hour* after I call you at the girlfriends’ pads.

Tie the chicks up and tape their mouths, but make sure they can breathe. Questions?"

Bobby Garcia said, "Yeah. You said you been casing both gigs for three days. What do you mean by that?"

"We've got two on-the-sly romances going down," Rice said. "Hawley from the B. of A. and his bitch Issler; Eggers from Security Pacific and his babe Confrey. Both men open their banks early, by themselves, and pilfer from the tellers boxes, probably small amounts. Okay, three days now, I've seen them tap the tills before opening. I've watched the guards and tellers arrive, parked across the street with binoculars. At both banks the money at the tellers stations is left there overnight!"

Joe Garcia raised his hand. "Why are these banks so lax about their security?"

"Good question," Rice said. "I thought about that, then I did some more checking. First off, Hawley is a fuckup, too wimpy to run a tight ship. He's got nothing but party-hearty types working there, you know, everybody smokes dope on their lunch hour, young squares with no ambition, so they've got to get wasted to make it through the day. Also, the Security Pacific is only half a block from an L.A.P.D. substa tion—maybe Eggers thinks he's robbery-proof. Who knows? And who cares?"

Bobby held up his hands, then brought them together and began slowly cracking the knuckles on each finger. Finishing, he said, "Let's cut the shit and get to the cut. It's a righteous fucking plan, but how much are we gonna make?"

Rice said, "I'm guessing at least thirty K per bank minimum, sixty-forty split—sixty for me, forty for you guys to split."

Bobby snorted. Joe said, "That sounds fair to me, you did all the wo—"

"Shut up, *pindejo*!" Bobby yelled. Lowering his voice, he said to Rice, "I like you, Duane, but you're giving me the big one where it hurts the most. Fifty-fifty, or you go take a flying fuck at a rolling doughnut."

Rice faked a sheepish look; his split strategy had worked to perfection. "Deal," he said, sticking out his right hand for the brothers to grasp, wincing when Bobby slammed it with both callused palms, grinning when Joe's tagalong hands followed. "Day after tomorrow for Hawley and Issler. I'll meet you here tomorrow night at nine for a final briefing. If you need me for anything, call me at Louie's bootleg number."

The three men stood up and shook hands all around. Rice turned to walk out, and Bobby tapped him on the shoulder. "Ain't you forgetting something, Duane?"

Rice smiled and did a two-gun pirouette, drawing one .45 from his back waistband and another from his shoulder holster, flipping them up by the silencered barrels and catching them by the grips. "Be cool," he said as he handed the guns to Bobby.

Bobby "Boogaloo" Garcia grinned and emptied both .45s at his back living room wall, blowing Roberto Duran to shreds and the wall itself into a rubble heap of rotted wood, dust and plaster chips. Joe squinted through the gun smoke and saw that the shots had ripped apart the connecting door to his bedroom. Screaming, "You rape-o motherfucker, you wasted my albums!" he ran back to inspect the damage. Bobby bowed to Rice and said, "Never liked Roberto since Hearns kicked his ass. Silencers work good, Duane."

7

Deputy Chief Thad Braverton slammed down the phone and muttered, “Fuck,” then buzzed his secretary. When she appeared in the doorway, he said, “Ring Captain McManus at Robbery/Homicide and have him come up immediately, then call Captain Gaffaney at Internal Affairs and have him come up in fifteen minutes, no sooner.”

The woman nodded and about-faced into her vestibule. Braverton sent exasperated eyes heavenward and said, “Crazy Lloyd. Jesus fucking Christ.”

McManus rapped on the doorjamb only moments later. Braverton took his eyes from the ceiling and said, “Sit down, John. Close the door behind you. Fred Gaffaney is joining us shortly, and I don’t want him to hear any of this.”

McManus nodded and eased the door shut, then sat down, waiting for the superior officer to speak first. Close to a minute passed before Braverton said, “Hopkins isn’t accepting the retirement deal.”

McManus shrugged. “I didn’t think he would, sir. I also didn’t know that you’d spoken to him.”

“I haven’t,” Braverton said. “Someone leaked the word to him in Frisco. Hopkins went out looking for an attorney to represent him at his trial board and blundered into the office of the most prestigious left-wing firm in the city. He ended up shoving around the head shyster and punching out a bookcase.”

McManus breathed out slowly. “Jesus fucking Christ.”

“My initial reaction, too.”

“Charges filed?”

Braverton shook his head. “S.F.P.D. talked the shyster out of it, applied pressure somehow. I just spoke to the station commander who caught the squeal. He said when the beef came in, Hopkins got a standing ovation from the detective squad.”

McManus felt chills dance up his spine. “Typical. Have you decided what you’re going to do?”

“No.”

“Would you like my feedback?”

“Of course. You’re his immediate supervisor, and, as cops go, an atypical thinker.”

McManus didn’t know if the chiefs last remark was a compliment or a jibe; Braverton was a poker voice all the way. Trying hard to keep his own voice level, he said, “Sir, I’ve been Hopkins’ supervisor since Gaffaney made captain and went to I.A.D., and I’ve handled him the way Fred and his previous bosses did. Let him pick his own shots, let him head up investigations that should have gone to field lieutenants, let him work without a partner. The results he’s given me have been outstanding; his methods of obtaining them either dubious or outright illegal. For example: he solved Havilland-Goff brilliantly, but in the process shot it out with Goff in a crowded nightclub, then let him get away. Then he pulled at least two burglaries to obtain evidence. You know how I feel about violation of due process, sir. Hopkins is essentially a criminal. What sets him apart from a run-of-the-mill street thug is a one-seventy I.Q,. and a badge. And he's slipping. That foul-up at Oldfield's arraignment is just the beginning. He's obsolescent. Cut him loose."

Braverton remained silent for long moments. McManus fidgeted, then said, "Sir, why have you called Gaffaney in? He was Hopkins' previous sup—"

Braverton cut him off. "I'll tell you after he's, left. What you said makes perfect sense, John. You're probably the world's only liberal Irish cop. I th—"

The sound of a buzzer interrupted him. Braverton said, "There he is," then pressed a button on his phone console. There was a tapping on the doorjamb. Braverton called out, "Enter!" and Captain Fred Gaffaney walked in and nodded briskly at both men. "Chief, Captain," he said.

Braverton pointed to a chair. McManus stood up and shook the I.A.D. adjutant's hand, feeling like he had stepped backward in time—Gaffaney's crew cut and bargain-basement blue suit always reminded him of his rookie days, when departmental regulations demanded such a visage. His bone-crusher handshake was another anachronism, and McManus sat down wondering what kind of game Braverton was playing.

Gaffaney settled into his chair and fingered his cross and flag lapel pin. Braverton looked straight at him and said, "Lloyd Hopkins is about to be brought up on a trial board. Dereliction of duty, maybe a criminal prosecution for perjury if he doesn't accept the retirement deal the Department is going to offer him. We're looking for backup dirt. What have *you* got on him?"

"Internal Affairs has a substantial file on Hopkins," Captain Fred Gaffaney said. "Notations covering his numerous insubordinations and illegal search and seizures. What are you using for ammo at the trial board?"

Braverton smiled. "The court transcript of his perjury, a psychiatrist's report that states, essentially, that he's a burnout. If need be, we may utilize his I.A.D. file. Your personal testimony might help."

Gaffaney's left hand jerked up to his lapel pin; McManus watched the witch hunter's eyes narrow as he said, "You mean as to the information in the file?"

"That's right."

"Of course I'll testify, Chief."

Braverton sighed. "Thanks, Fred, I knew I could count on you."

Gaffaney got to his feet, then said, "If there's nothing else, I have an interview in ten minutes." Braverton nodded dismissal, and McManus watched the crew-cut anachronism exit the office looking *strange.*

The chief's silent deadpan stare compounded the feeling of strangeness. Knowing he was being tested, McManus dropped his usual "sir" and said, "What was that all about?"

Braverton responded with an open-armed gesture that took in his whole office. "You may well be sitting in this chair one day. If you make it, you'll be dealing more with ambitious brass like Gaffaney than with street dicks like Crazy Lloyd."

McManus' whole being tingled; the testing was moving toward a veiled offer of patronage. "And, sir?"

"And I have a nominal regard for due process myself. Gaffaney is on the promotion list. He'll be a commander very shortly, and he'll probably take over I.A.D. when Stillwell retires. As far as that goes, he deserves the job; he's a good exec.

"But he's a born-again Christian loony, so far right that he scares *me.* He's been playing savior to some very well placed junior officers—field sergeants in Metro, I.A.D. dicks, uniformed officers in a half dozen divisions. Sergeants and lieutenants, all born-agains and all ambitious. He's offered them his patronage and promised to move *them* up as *he* moves up."

McManus whistled, then said, "What's his ultimate end?"

Braverton repeated his expansive gesture. "Chief of police, then politics? Who knows? The man is forty-nine years old, twenty-three years on the Job and fucked up on religion. My wife suggested male menopause. What do you—"

McManus raised a hand in interruption. "Sir, where did you get this information?"

"I was getting to that. Gaffaney has a son in the Department, Steve Gaffaney, a rookie working West L.A. Patrol. The kid has been pilfering from the station, clerical supplies, ammo, that kind of thing, for months. Finally the daywatch boss got pissed and called Intelligence Division, because if he initiated an investigation through I.A.D., Gaffaney senior would pick up on it. Intelligence checked the kid out and discovered that he had been suspended from high school for pilfering from lockers and that Captain Fred had bribed the principal of the school to erase all notations pertaining to disciplinary problems on the kid's record, and to improve his grades. Junior wouldn't have been admitted to the Academy with his real transcript."

McManus whispered, "And, sir?"

"And Intelligence did some more checking on Jesus Freak Fred and got wind of his little cross-and-flag coterie, which of course is perfectly kosher within departmental regulations."

"What's the upshot?"

"For now I'm going to sit on it. If the kid fucks up big or Captain Fred gets obstreperous, I'll lower the boom."

McManus smiled as the chief of detectives' machinations moved into out-and-out barter. "Sir, you still haven't told me where Hopkins fits in, and you want something."

Smiling back, Braverton said, "The Intelligence dicks said that Jesus Fred has got a shitload of personal dirt files on officers he hates and wants to curry favor with. He hates Hopkins' guts, and I know for a fact that he's privy to a lot of the sleazy stuff Lloyd has pulled over the years. That charade was to confirm that the files exist. His reaction proved that they do."

"And, sir?"

"And, John, what's *your* reaction to all this?"

"Cut Hopkins loose, blackmail Jesus Fred into retiring by threatening to expose the kid, fire the kid and stonewall the whole fucking mess."

Braverton gave his new protégé a round of applause. "Bravo, except your love of due process and lack of paranoia is appalling. First we have to neutralize Gaffaney's files, which may take awhile."

“Then?”

“First things first. Today is December sixth. On January first you will leave Robbery/Homicide and take over the Violent Crime Task Force in South Central L.A. I want a broad-minded man down there, someone who can deal rationally with blacks.”

McManus’ throat went dry; his first reaction was to offer effusive thanks. Then respect for the barter game took over. “What’s it going to cost me?”

Braverton’s eyes clouded. “I want to ease Hopkins out,” he said. “Hopefully without a trial board. I want you to call him back from San Francisco and give him some sort of assignment that does not involve homicide and will not insult his intelligence. I want him around Parker Center where I can talk to him. He’s got to be cut loose, but I want it done gently.”

McManus winced at the price of his high-visibility promotion. “You could have made it an order.”

“Not my style,” Braverton said. “Liberals should be adept at trading up, seeing as how they’re handicapped from the gate.”

The epiphany clicked into McManus’ head and made him forget caution. “You love him.”

“Yes. And I owe him, and you owe him. He got the Slaughterer and Havilland and Goff within fifteen months. Do you know the story on the Slaughterer?”

“No.”

“Then you don’t want to know. Will you do this for me?”

McManus felt old notions of duty crumble in the pit of his stomach. “Yes.”

“Good. Do you have an appropriate assignment for him?”

“Not right now. But something should come up soon. It always does.”

8

Duane Rice stood in a phone booth adjoining a 7-11 store in Encino. He was wearing a three-piece suit bought for ten dollars at a Hollywood thrift shop, and a curly-haired wig and beard/mustache combo purchased at Western Costume. His shoulder holster held a silencer-attached .45; his rear waistband a tranquilizer dart gun loaded with PCP darts. His hands were covered with surgical rubber gloves. He was ready.

At exactly 7:45 the phone rang. Rice picked up the receiver and said, “Yes?”

The gloating voice was unmistakably Bobby Garcia’s: “Got her. Broke in the side door. Nobody saw us, nobody’s gonna see us. She’s scared shitless, but the kid is playing Mr. Nice Guy and sweet-talking her. Have lover boy call.”

Rice said, “Right,” then hung up and dialed the home number of Robert Hawley. The phone rang twice, then a female voice yawned, “Hello?”

“Robert Hawley, please,” Rice said briskly.

The woman said, “One minute,” then called out, “Bob! Telephone!” There was the sound of an extension being picked up, then a male voice calling, “I’ve got it, Doris. Go back to sleep.” When he heard the original line go dead, Rice said, “Mr. Hawley?”

“Yes. Who is it?”

“It’s a friend of Sally Issler.”

“What the he—”

“*Listen to me* and be real, real cool and we won’t kill her. *Are* you listening?”

“Yes, oh God … What do—”

Rice cut in, “What do you think we want, motherfucker! The same thing you rip off from your own fucking employer!” When he heard Hawley start to blubber, he lowered his voice. “You want to be cool or you want Sally-poo to die?”

“B-be cool,” Hawley gasped.

“Then here’s the pitch: One, I’ve got photographs of you pilfering the B. of A. tellers boxes, with the clock in the background, showing that you’re on the job when you’re not supposed to be, and some juicy infrared shots of you and Sally fucking. If you don’t do what I want, my buddies chop Sally to pieces and the pictures go to your wife, the L.A.P.D., the bank and *Hustler* magazine. Dig me, dick breath?”

The gasp was now a whimper. “Yes. Yes. Yes.”

“Good. Now, I want you to call Sally and have her introduce you to my colleagues. I’ll call you back in exactly three minutes. There’s a tap on your phone, so if you call the cops, another colleague will know and call Sally’s roommates and tell them to do some chopping. Do you understand?”

“Y-yes.”

Rice said, “Three minutes or chop, chop,” then hung up. He watched the second hand on his Timex, pleased that his spontaneous bullshit about the photographs and phone tap had been so easy. When the hand made three sweeps, he again dialed Hawley’s number.

“Yes?” A *groveling* whimper.

“You ready?”

“Yes.”

“Good. I want you to get in your car and take your usual route to the bank. I’ve been tailing you for days, so I know the route. Park on the west side of Woodman a half block north of Ventura. I’ll meet you there. You’re being tailed, so don’t fuck up. I’ll see you there in twelve minutes.”

Hawley’s reply was a barely audible squeak. Rice hung up and walked very slowly to his Pontiac, forcing himself to count to fifty before he hit the ignition and eased the car into traffic. When he was six blocks from Hawley’s house, he resumed counting, figuring that the bank manager would pass him in the opposite direction before he hit twenty-five. He was right; at twenty-two, Hawley’s tan Cadillac approached at way over the speed limit, swerving so close to the double line that he pulled to the right to avoid a head-on. There were no cop cars anywhere. Nothing suspicious. Just business going down.

Rice cut over to side streets paralleling Ventura, pushing the car at forty-five, so that he wouldn’t get stuck waiting for Hawley to arrive. At Woodman he turned right and parked immediately, a solid hundred and fifty yards from the spot where the bank man was to meet him. Just as he set the brake and grabbed a briefcase from the back seat, Hawley’s Caddy hung an erratic turn off Ventura and slowed. Rice checked his fake mustache in the rearview mirror. Mr. Solid Citizen out for a stroll.

The bank man was acting like Mr. Solid Citizen on a trip to Panic City. Rice walked toward the bank parking lot, watching Hawley scrape bumpers as he parallel-parked his Caddy, plowing into the curb twice before squeezing into an easy space. When he finally got out and stood by the car, he was shaking from head to foot.

Rice approached, swinging the briefcase casually. Hawley frantically eyeballed the street. Their eyes locked for an instant, then Hawley turned around and checked out his blind side. Rice grinned at his protective image and came up on the bank manager and tapped him on the shoulder. “Bob, how nice to see you!”

Hawley did a jerky pivot. “Please, not now. I’m meeting someone.”

Rice clapped Hawley on the back and spun him in the direction of the bank, keeping an arm around his shoulders as he hissed, “You’re meeting *me*, dick breath. We’re going straight to the tellers boxes, then straight back to your car.” He dug his fingers into the bank man’s collarbone and gouged in concert with sound effects: “Chop, chop, chop.” Hawley winced with each syllable and let himself be propelled toward the bank.

At the front door, Hawley inserted keys into the three locks while Rice stood aside with one eye cocked in the direction of Ventura Boulevard. No patrol cars; no unmarked cruisers; nothing remotely off. The doors sprung open and they stepped inside. The bank man locked a central mechanism attached to the floor runner and looked up at the robber. “F-fast, please.”

Rice pointed toward the teller area, then stepped back and let Hawley lead the way. When the manager's back was turned, he opened his briefcase and took out a pint bottle of bourbon and stuck it into his right front pants pocket. Hawley stepped over a low wooden partition and began unlocking and sliding open drawers. Rice glanced down and saw rows of folding green, then looked closer and saw that it was *off-green*—fancy traveler's checks done up in a Wild West motif. "The cash," he hissed. "Where's the fucking *money*?"

Hawley stammered, "T-t-time-locked. The vault. You said on the phone you wanted—"

Ignoring him, Rice opened the rest of the drawers himself, finding nothing but fat stacks of B. of A. "Greenbacks" in denominations of twenty, fifty and a hundred. Replaying his casing job in his mind, he snapped to what happened. Hawley was pilfering the traveler's checks. The paperwork he saw him doing was some sort of ass-covering. Seeing the banker outlined in red, he said, "*There's no cash in these drawers?*"

"N-nn-no."

"You've been ripping off *traveler's checks*?"

Shooting a panicky glance at the window, Hawley said, "Just for a while. I've got bad gambling debts, and I'm just trying to get even. Please don't kill me!"

Rice held the briefcase open, thinking of Chula Medina and twenty cents on the dollar tops. When Hawley started stuffing the rows of Greenbacks inside, he said, "Talk, dick breath. Give me a good line on your scam, and maybe I'll let you slide."

Hawley fumbled the packets into the briefcase, his eyes averted from Rice, his voice near cracking as he spoke. "The Greenbacks are tallied by the week. I've got duplicate bankbooks for two old lady customers—they're senile—and I transfer cash from their accounts to the bank and take it out in Greenbacks. I can't do it for much longer, it's wrong, and the paperwork juggling has got to come back on me." He opened the last drawer and transferred its contents to the briefcase, then held up supplicating hands and whispered, "Please, fast."

Rice took in the bank man's "scam," feeling it sink in as truth, knowing that Eggers' pilfer scene was probably something similar—he was a fool to think bank pros would leave cash out overnight. Noting wraparound tabs on the Greenbacks, he flashed a psycho killer smirk and held his jacket open to show off his .45. "I know about exploding ink packets, dick breath. You ink me and I'll come back and chop-chop your whole family."

Hawley shook his head and mashed his hands together. "We do ink only on cash, only on payroll days. *Please.*"

He looked up doglike for instructions. Rice closed his briefcase and said, "Back to your car. Stay calm. Think about your golf game and you'll be cool."

Hawley moved toward the front doors in spastic steps; Rice was right behind. When they hit the street and the manager locked the door behind them, he threw his left arm over his shoulders and shifted the tranq gun from his waistband to his right jacket pocket.

They approached the Cadillac from the street. Rice pointed to the driver's-side door, and Hawley got in behind the wheel. Terror hit his face as he saw Rice reach into his waistband, and he squeezed his eyes shut and began murmuring the Lord's Prayer.

Rice shot him twice point-blank: once in the neck, once in the chest just below his left collar point. Hawley jerked backward in his seat, then bounced forward into the steering wheel. Rice watched him slump sideways, his eyes fluttering, his limbs going rubber. Within seconds he was sleeping the open-mouthed sleep of the junkie. Rice leaned into the car and poured the pint of whiskey over his chest and pants legs. "*Bon voyage.*" he said.

After driving to a pay phone and giving Bobby Garcia the all-clear and setting up plans for the split, Rice removed his facial disguise and hit the 405 Freeway to Redondo Beach, the briefcase full of bank checks on the seat beside him. He did another replay of the Eggers case job as he drove, remembering that he had only seen him rummage through the tellers boxes—he'd never seen him with money in hand. That heist had to be a cash rip, and that meant the Garcias couldn't know about the Greenback fuckup. Turning off the freeway onto Sepulveda, he beat time on the dashboard. The melody was a Vandy/Vandals tune; the words he murmured were, "Be home and be flush, Chula."

Chula Medina was at home.

After bolting the door behind him, Rice unceremoniously opened the briefcase and dumped the contents on the floor, then said, "Quarter on the dollar, cash. And fast."

Chula Medina smiled in answer, then sat down cross-legged beside the pile of bank checks. Rice watched him lick his lips as he counted. When he finished, he said, "Nice, but consecutive serial numbers and an off-brand check. These are gonna have to be frozen, then sent east. You've got sixty-four K here. My first, last, final and only offer is a dime on the dollar; here, now, cash, you walk out and we never met. Deal?"

Rice fingered his "Death Before Dishonor" tattoo and knew it was a fucking he had to take. "Deal. Put the money in the briefcase."

Chula got up, gave a courtly Latin bow and went into his bedroom. Rice had the briefcase held open when he returned. Chula dumped in a big handful of real U.S. currency, bowed again and pointed to the door. "*Vaya con Dios*, Duane."

Rice took the 405 to the Ventura to the Hollywood, wondering how the Garcias would react to the low numbers, and if Eggers could be intimidated into the vault for the real stuff. At Caheunga he exited the freeway, and within minutes he was at his new "home," the Bowl Motel, seventy scoots a week for a room with a sink, toilet, shower and hot plate. Too expensive for dope fiends; too far up from the Boulevard for hookers; too jig-free to interest the local fuzz. A good interim pad for a rising young criminal. He parked in his space, grabbed the briefcase and walked to his room, threading his way past groups of beer-guzzling pensioners. Inside, he tossed the briefcase on the bed and flopped down beside it, grabbing the snapshot of Vandy off the nightstand. "Coming home, babe; coming home."

Ten minutes later the doorbell rang. Rice put the photo in his shirt pocket, then walked over and squinted through the peephole, seeing Joe and Bobby Garcia standing there looking hungry: Joe itchy and anxious, like he couldn't believe what he'd just done, but drooling for the payoff; Bobby in a gang-stered-back thumbs-in-belt stance, drooling for *more*, the butt of his .45 clearly outlined through his windbreaker.

Rice opened the door and pointed the brothers inside, then bolted it shut behind them. He grabbed the briefcase and dumped the money onto the bed and said, “Count it; it’s a little less than I figured.” Bobby started to giggle while Joe made a beeline for the cash and began separating it into piles. Rice locked eyes with Bobby and said, “Tell me about it.”

Bobby let his giggle die slowly; Rice saw that the ex-welter was closer to stone loon than he thought—he couldn’t play anything straight.

“Went in easy like I told you,” Bobby said. “Wham, blam, thank you, ma’am. Kept our masks and gloves on, tied her up good, taped her mouth shut. I think maybe she dug it. Her nipples were all pointy.” He went back to giggling, then segued into sex noises while he jabbed his right forefinger into a hole formed by his left thumb and pinky. When he started making slurping sounds, Rice said, “Ease off on that, will you?”

Bobby kiboshed the slurping and started fondling the religious medals that encircled his neck. “Okay, Duane-o. But she was fine as wine, I’ll tell you that. It go good for you?”

Rice watched Joe stack the loot according to denomination, realizing that he liked the tagalong as much as he despised his brother. Joe hummed as he counted, a tune that sounded like “Blueberry Hill.” Listening to the humming made it easy to talk to Bobby without wanting to vomit. “Yeah, it was pie. Day after tomorrow for Confrey/Eggers. I’ve got a recon job for you guys in the meantime.”

Bobby giggled and said, “Pie like in hairpie?” and Rice saw red. He was cocking his fists when Joe jumped up from the bed, frowned and said, “Sixty-four hundred on the nose. That’s really sh—”

Bobby shoved his brother aside, moved to the bed and began recounting the money. Finishing, he spat on the pile of bills and turned to look up at Rice. “Slightly less than you figured, huh? Like twenty-five K less. Like Little Bro and me just risked ten to life for *three fucking grand*?” He paused, then whispered, “You holding out on us?”

Knowing that fire full was the only way out, Rice said, “I’ll chalk that up to disappointment and a bad temper, but you say it again and I’ll kill you.”

Joe stood perfectly still; Bobby gripped the mattress with both hands, his jaw trembling, saliva starting to creep out the corners of his mouth. Seeing more fear than anger, Rice threw him back a chunk of his *cojones*. “Listen, man, I’m just as pissed about it as you. And it’s my fault. I should have realized that the real money was left in the vault. But we’re still on for the next—”

Bobby screamed, “You’re fucking crazy! These bank fools are leaving out peanuts to pilfer, and I’m not risking my ass again for another three grand!”

Thinking, macho counterpunch, Rice smiled and said, “I’m going to make Eggers go into the vault for us. The same hostage plan, for twenty times the money. I’m going to intercept him in person as he enters the bank, then force him to call you guys for confirmation that you’re holding his bitch. If he agrees to hit the vault, I’ll tell him to sit tight at his desk with his hands in view, and I’ll go across the street and keep him eyeball pinned. When the guard and tellers arrive and the real money comes out, Eggers grabs what he can carry on his person and goes across the street to meet me. He figures out a cool way to do this, or his bitch gets chopped. Then I walk him to his car and tranq him.”

Grinning like a macho ghoul, Bobby said, “Suppose he don’t agree?”

Rice moved to Joe and threw a rough arm around his shoulders. “Then I kill him then and there and take the teller box money. But he’ll agree. He always wears a baggy suit. Lots of room, and I’ll tell him c-notes only. You in, partners?”

Bobby whooped and jumped up and down, dunking imaginary baskets; Rice tightened his grip on Joe’s shoulders. Joe twisted free and stared at him, and Rice snapped to the fact that he was the smarter of the two. Joe’s eyes pleaded; Rice whispered, “Two more days and it’s over.” Joe looked at Bobby, who was throwing left-right body punches at his reflec tion in the wall mirror. Rice stuck two fingers into his mouth and forced out a loud, shrill whistle.

The noise brought the scene to a halt. Bobby leaned against the mirror and said in exaggerated barrioese, “Thirty-two hundred. Come up green, homeboy.”

With an exaggerated shit-eating grin, Rice moved to the bed and began a slow-motion recount of the money, dividing it first in half and shoving that part under the pillow, then separating the remaining half into two portions. Finishing, he offered Joe the first handful of bills, Bobby the second. Both brothers jammed the cash into their front and back pants pockets, then stuffed the overflow into their windbreakers. When the last of the money was stashed, Rice gave them a slow eyeball and shook his head. His crime partners looked like two greedy greaseballs with elephantiasis; like a world-class dose of bad news.

Bobby cracked his knuckles; Joe looked at Rice and blurted, “What about the recon job, Duane? You gonna tell us now?”

Rice leaded back on the bed and shut his eyes, blotting out the bad news. “Yeah. I was thinking that maybe Hawley and Eggers know each other. Remember, we don’t know who originally scoped out the heists, how he knew, who he knew, that kind of thing. I’ll be watching the papers to see if they mention Hawley and Issler, and I want you guys to keep a loose tail on Eggers and Confrey, see if the cops or feds are nosing around. If they are, we have to call the heist off. I’ll call you late tomorrow night. If there’s no heat, we hit Friday morning.”

Bobby popped his knuckles and said, “What kinda recon you gonna be doing?”

Rice opened his eyes, but kept them away from the brothers. “A little added terror angle, in case Eggers gets uppity. I’m going to trash his pad and steal some kitchen knives, then bring the knives with me when I brace him. That way, I can tell him you’re gonna chop up his bitch with a knife with his prints on them. That and the fact that his pad’s been violated ought to keep him docile.”

Bobby whooped and jumped up and touched the ceiling; loose bills started to pop out of his pants pockets. Rice said, “What was your record as a fighter?”

“Eleven, sixteen and zero,” Bobby said. “Never went the distance, knocked out or got knocked out. My tops was seven rounds with Harry “The Headhunter” Hungerford. Lost on cuts. Why you asking?”

“I was wondering how you survived this long.”

Bobby giggled and shoved Joe in the direction of the door. “Clean living, anonymous good deeds and faith in Jesus, Duane-o,” he said, kneading his brother’s shoulders. “And a good watchdog. Don’t you worry. I’ll keep a good tail on Eggers and his mama.” He unlocked the door and waggled his eyebrows on the way out. Rice could hear him giggle all the way back to the parking lot.

With the money under his pillow, Rice tried to sleep. Every time he was about to pass out, the staccato beat of the Vandals' gibberish number "Microwave Slave" took over, and Vandy jumped into his mind in the frumpy housedress she wore when she performed the tune. Finally, staying awake seemed like the easier thing to do. Opening his eyes, he saw the ugliness of the room merge with the ugliness of the music. The frayed cord on the hot plate; a line of dust under the dresser; grease spots all along the walls. A lingering echo of Bobby Garcia's psycho/buffoon act was the final straw. Rice packed the money and his shaving gear into the briefcase and went looking for a new pad.

He found a Holiday Inn on Sunset and La Brea and paid $480 for a week in advance. No grease spots, no dust, no senile boozehounds clogging up the parking lot. TV, a view, clean sheets and daily maid service.

After stashing the bulk of his loot, Rice drove up to the Boulevard and spent a K on clothes. At Pants West he bought six pairs of Levi cords and an assortment of underwear; at Miller's Outpost he purchased a half dozen plaid shirts. His last stop was the London Shop, where a salesman looked disapprovingly at his tattoo while fitting him for two sport jacket/slacks combos. He thought about buying a set of threads for Vandy, but finally axed the idea: after he got her off the coke, she'd be healthier and heavier and a couple of sizes bigger.

Now the only white-trash link to be severed was the car. After dropping off his clothes at the new pad and changing into a new shirt and pair of Levi's, Rice drove to a strip of South Western Avenue that he knew to be loaded with repo lots.

Two hours and six lots got him zilch—the cars looked shitty and none of the sales bosses would let him do under-the-hood checks. The seventh lot, a G.M. repo outlet on Twenty-eighth and Western, was where he hit pay dirt, a bored sales manager in a cubicle hung with master ignition keys telling him to grab a set of diagnostic tools and scope out any sled he wanted.

Rice did timing checks, battery checks, transmission checks and complete engine scrutinies on five domestics before he found what he wanted: a black '76 Trans Am with a four-speed and lots of muscle—good under the hood and even better looking—a car that would impress any crowd he and Vandy sought to crash.

The sales manager wanted four thou. Rice countered with twenty-five hundred cash. The sales manager said, "Feed me," and Rice handed it over, knowing the joker made him for a non-Boy Scout. After signing the purchase papers and pocketing the pink slip, Rice walked over to the street and saw an old wino sucking on a jug in the shade of his '69 Pontiac. He tossed him the keys to his former clunker and said, "Ride, daddy, ride," then strolled back to his sleek muscle car. When he got in and gunned the engine, the wino was peeling rubber down Western in the Pontiac, the bottle held to his lips.

Now Vandy.

Rice drove north to the Sunset Strip, savoring the feel of his Trans Am. He avoided putting the car through speed shifts and other hot-rod pyrotechnics; he was now technically a parole and probation absconder, and traffic tickets would mean a warrant check and instant disaster.

Street traffic on the Strip was light, sidewalk traffic lighter—schoolgirl hookers from Fairfax High turning a few extra bucks on their lunch hour, bouncers sweeping up in front of the massage parlors and outcall offices. Rice turned off Sunset at Gardner and parked. The lavender four-flat that housed Silver Foxes looked bland in the daylight, like just another Hollywood Spanish style. He walked over and rang the bell beneath the sexy fox emblem.

A young man in white dungarees and a Michael Jackson '84 Tour tank top opened the door and blocked the entranceway in a hands-on-hips pose. Rice sized up his muscles and figured him for a bodybuilder who couldn't lick a chicken; strictly adornment and a little jazz for the fag trade. "May I help you?" he asked.

Rice said, "Some friends in the Industry said this was the place to go for female companionship. I'm in town for a week or so, and I haven't got a lot of time to hit the party circuit. Indently paying for it isn't my style, but you were *very* highly recommended." He sighed, pleased with his performance—not a trace of Hawaiian Gardens and Soledad in his speech.

The youth flexed his biceps and imitated Rice's sigh. It came out a pout. "Everybody pays for it somehow, this is the herpes generation. Who were these people who recommended us?"

Rice pointed to the office he could glimpse past the youth's broad shoulders. "Jeffrey Jason Rifkin, the agent, and some buddies of his. I can't remember their names. Can we go inside?"

Nodding, the youth stepped aside just enough to let Rice squeeze through the door sideways. Their arms brushed, and Rice felt his stomach turn over when the kid let out a little grunt of pleasure.

The room was all white, furnished in Danish modern/High Tech—white walls and carpeting, metal tubular desk, bent-wood chairs with white fabric backing. Scenes from rock videos were hung on the walls: Elvis Costello in fifties garb superimposed against an A-bomb mushroom cloud; Bruce Springsteen hopping a freight train; Diana Ross drenched to the bone at her Central Park concert. Rice sat down without being asked and watched the kid flip through a white Rolodex on the desk, moving his lips as he read. Thinking of him coupled obscenely with Bobby Garcia kept his revulsion down and gave him an edge of frost.

With a sighing pout, the kid looked up and said, "Yes, we've done business with Mr. Rifkin. In fact, we've sent over lots of foxes for his theme parties."

"Theme parties?" It was a reflex blurt, and Rice knew immediately that it was the wrong thing to say.

The youth hooded his eyes. "Yes, theme parties. Many of our foxes are aspiring actresses, and they enjoy theme parties because they get to act out more than they would on a straight assignment. You know, playing slave queens or topless cowgirls, that kind of thing. What do you do in the Industry?"

Rice said, "I'm a talent scout," and knew from the young man's puzzled expression that it was an outdated term. "I've been out of the Industry for a while," he added, "and Jeffrey Jason is helping me get rolling again. It's a tough racket to get back into."

"Yes," the young man said, "it is. What kind of fox were you looking for?"

Rice stretched his legs and smoothed his shirt front, then said, "Listen, I'm very choosy about my women. If I describe exactly what I want, can you check out your files or whatever and take it from there?"

The young man said, “We can do better than that. We’ve got *au naturel* photographs of all our foxes.” He dug into the top desk drawer, and pulled out a white plastic binder and handed it to Rice. “Take your time, sweetie; it’s a fox hunter’s candy store, and nobody’s rushing you.”

Rice opened the binder, feeling a crazo sensation of being ripped upward from the crotch. The first page was a spiel about rare breeds of foxes and fulfillment of fantasies, scripted on lavender paper; on the second page the women began. Posed nude in identical reclining postures, they were all outright beautiful or outright gutter sensual, superbly built in the skinny model and curvy wench modes. White, black, Oriental, and *latina*, they all fire-breathed *sex*.

Rice turned the pages slowly, noticing blank spots where other photos had once been pasted; he read the hype printed below each girl’s first name and physical stats. “Aspiring actress” and “aspiring singer” were the usual subheadings, and next to them were lurid sex fantasies, supposedly written by the “foxes” themselves. The ridiculous accounts of three ways and four ways made him want to retch, and he flipped through to the end of the binder, looking only for the body he knew by heart. Not finding it, he glanced up at the young man and said, “Is this all your women?”

The youth nodded and flexed his biceps. “You’re really hard to please. Those foxes are the *crème de la crème*.”

Rice thought about mentioning former “foxes,” then got an idea. “Listen, do you know most of the girls who work out of here?”

“Some. I’ve only been dispatching for a little over a week. Why?”

Rice said, “I was looking for a chick I saw walk out of here the last time I was in L.A. About five-six, one hundred ten, blond, skinny, classy features. Preppy clothes. Ring a bell?”

The young man shook his head. “No … I’m new on the job, and besides, the owners wouldn’t let the foxes dress preppy—no sex appeal.”

Another idea clicked into Rice’s head. “Too bad. Listen, since I didn’t see that particular girl, I’d like you to give me a recommendation. Brains turn me on. I want a smart chick—one I can talk to.”

The young man smiled, picked up the binder and leafed through it, then handed it to Rice. “There,” he said. “Rhonda. She’s got a master’s degree in economics, and she’s really groovy. A real brain fox.”

Rice studied the photograph. Rhonda was a tall buxom woman with a dark brown Afro; deeply tanned except for bikini white across her breasts and pelvis. She was described as an “aspiring stockbroker,” and her fantasy was listed as “orgies with rich, intelligent, beautiful men on my own private island in the Adriatic.” Rice thought she looked shrewd and probably didn’t write the retarded fantasy blurb. Snapping the binder shut, he said, “Great. Can you send her over to the Holiday Inn on Sunset and La Brea, in an hour?”

The youth gave his sigh-pout. “I’ll call her. Rhonda is three hundred dollars an hour, one hour minimum. All our foxes gratefully accept tips over that amount. Rhonda carries her own Visa, Mastercard and American Express receipts and imprinter for the basic fee, but please tip her with cash. What room number?”

“814.”

“We require a friendship fee of one hundred dollars for first-time fox hunters.”

“Like a hunting license?”

The youth giggled; Rice thought he sounded just like Bobby "Boogaloo" Garcia. "That's cute. Yes, call it your deed to the happy hunting grounds. Cash, please, and your name."

Rice slipped a c-note from his shirt pocket and stuck it inside the binder. "Harry 'The Fox Hunter' Hungerford." The youth giggled as he wrote down the name, and Rice walked out wondering if the world was nothing but wimps, pimps, psychos and sex fiends.

Back at the Holiday Inn, he killed time by watching TV for word of the robbery. There was no mention of the heist or of a bank manager zoned on dust, let alone the hostage angle—the bank bigshots had probably stonewalled the media to save face. So far, so good—but his money was running out.

Just as the news brief ended, the door chimes rang. Rice grabbed a wad of twenties from the briefcase and stuck them under the mattress, then walked to the door and opened it.

The woman who stood on the other side in a green knit dress and fur coat was her photograph gone subtle. Expecting sleazy attire and makeup, Rice saw class that rivaled Vandy at her healthiest. No makeup on a face of classic beauty; large tortoiseshell glasses that set off that face and made it even *more* beautiful; a Rolex watch on her left wrist, an attaché case in her right hand. Rice's eyes prowled her body until he snapped to what he was doing and brought them back up to her face. Pissed at his lack of control, he said, "Hi, come in."

The woman entered, then did a slow model's turn as the door was shut, setting her attaché case on the floor, tossing her coat onto a chair. Rice sized up her moves. There was something non-whorish about her act.

Her voice was cool, almost mocking: "In olden times, fox hunting was the private sport of the landed gentry. Today, all natural-born aristocrats, busy men with taste and no time to waste, can enjoy that pleasure with Silver Foxes—the ultimate sensual therapy service for today's take-charge man."

Rice said, "Holy shit," and stepped backward, his heels bumping the attaché case and knocking it over. On impulse, he bent down and opened it up. Inside were three metal credit card imprinters, a stack of charge slips and a copy of *Wealth and Poverty* by George Gilder. The woman laughed as he snapped the case shut, then said, "I'm Rhonda. Most clients either love the intro or get embarrassed by it. You were incredulous. It was cute."

Rice flushed. The last time he'd been called "cute" was the sixth grade, when he nicknamed Hawaiian Gardens "Hawaiian Garbage." Carol Douglas shouted, "You're so cute, Duaney," and chased his ass the rest of the semester. "Cute, huh? Come to any conclusions?"

Rhonda took off her glasses and hooked them into her cleavage by a temple piece. "They're plate glass. I only wore them to look brainy. Yes, I've come to one conclusion—you don't want sex."

Rice sat down on the couch and motioned for Rhonda to join him. When she sat down an arm's length away, he said, "You're a smart lady. Is that a bogus Rolex?"

Rhonda flushed. "Yes. How did you know that?"

"I used to hang out in a Hollywood crowd. Everyone had fake Rolexes, and they used to talk about how their Rolex was real, but everyone else's was phony."

"Are you calling me a phony?"

"No, just seeing if you can level."

"Can you level? You don't look like any Hollywood type I've ever seen. What were *you* into?"

Rice laughed. "I was selling stolen cars. Want me to get to it?"

"If you want to. It's your money."

Rice said, "I'm looking for a woman. My girlfriend. A friend of a friend saw her up on the Strip near all the outcall joints. I was in jail for six months, and she was having a tough time, and I—"

Rhonda put a hand on his arm. "And you thought if she needed money badly, she'd turn tricks?"

Pulling his arm away, Rice said, "Yeah. She visited me in jail, and I could tell she was strung out on coke." He thought of Vandy and Gordon Meyers—"It's real pharmaceutical blow, baby"—"Duane wouldn't want me to." The words and a backup flash of Vandy's prep clothes hanging loose on her gaunt frame forced his words out in a tumble: "And I know she'd only do it if she was desperate, and not really like it, and she's a singer, and a lot of girls at Silver Foxes are aspiring singers, and maybe she thought she could help herself while I—"

Something strange and soft in Rhonda's eyes stopped him. He moved to the bed and dug under the mattress until his hands were full of money, then walked back and dumped the stash of twenties in her lap. "That's for starters," he said. "Find her and there's lots more."

Rhonda counted the money and folded it into a tight roll. "Six hundred. What's her name? Have you got a picture?"

Rice took the snapshot from his wallet and handed it to her. "Anne Vanderlinden. She also goes by 'Vandy.'"

Rhonda looked at the photo and said, "Foxy. Does she—"

Rice screamed, "Don't say that!" Catching himself, he lowered his voice. "She's not a fucking animal, she's my woman." Catching Rhonda's strange look again, he said, "Don't stare at me like that."

Rhonda said, "Sorry," then patted the couch. Rice sat down beside her. She put a tentative hand on his knee and asked, "What's your name?"

Rice brushed the hand away. "Duane Rice. Are you in?"

"Yes. Put some things together for me about you and Anne. Who she is, what she likes to do, that kind of thing. Was she in the Hollywood crowd with you?"

Rice stared at the wall and straightened out the story in his head, then said, "First off, I know she isn't working outcall on the Strip; I've already checked those places out. Second, she doesn't really have any friends in L.A. except me. The last time I saw her was in jail close to three weeks ago. She cleaned out the pad we had together. She—"

Rhonda squeezed his arm. "Tell me about the Hollywood crowd."

"I was getting to it. Vandy's a singer. Used to be lead singer with a Vegas lounge group, Vandy and the Vandals. I was sort of her manager. I did some favors for an agent named Jeffrey Jason Rifkin, and he fixed us up with that Hollywood crowd. It took me a while, but I finally figured out that those people were all parasites who couldn't do Vandy a bit of good. But I was unloading cars on them and making a lot of money. I had plenty banked toward making Vandy's rock videos—"

"What?"

"Rock videos. That was my plan: get a stake together to produce rock videos featuring Vandy. It was moving, but then I got busted."

Rhonda said softly, "Look, Duane, I've been with Silver Foxes for over a year, and I've never seen Vandy or heard of her. But lots of outcall girls branch out into other scenes, particularly around here, where there's all this movie and music industry money. Especially girls like Vandy, budding singers looking to get ahead, looking to meet people who can help their careers. Do you follow me?"

Rice imitated Rhonda's soft voice. "I follow that you're bracing me for something. Spit it out; I didn't give you that money for bullshit."

Rhonda tucked the cash roll into her cleavage; Rice saw it as her first whorish move. She said coldly, "Some girls quit outcall because they get heavy into coke or they get offers to live with men in the Industry. Most of these men expect their girls to sexually service their friends, men who can do them favors. The girls get room and board and coke, and if they're *very* lucky, bit parts in movies and rock videos. There's an Industry name for them: Coke Whores."

Coke Whores.

Rice forced the name on himself: tasting it, testing it. He looked at Rhonda and thought about hitting her with "stockbroker groupie" and "moneyfucker," but couldn't do it. The big question jumped into his mind and stuck like glue: Did it happen with Meyers?

Rhonda was staring at him, giving out big sad doe eyes like Carol Douglas back in Hawaiian Garbage. Rice kneaded his tattooed biceps and said, "What do I get for that six hundred?"

"Three hundred," Rhonda said. "Silver Foxes gets three. I didn't want to tell you that, Duane."

"Anyone afraid of the truth is a chickenshit. You're into these 'scenes,' right?"

"On the edges of them, but I'm nobody's kept woman."

"I know. You're just working your way through college."

"Don't be ugly, I want to help you. Was this an A, B, C or D crowd you and Vandy hung out in?"

"What?"

Rhonda's voice revealed exasperation. "In the movie and music biz there are four crowds: A, B, C and D. The A's are the heavy, heavy hitters, B's below them, and so forth. D's are the nerds who are lucky to get work. I was just wondering if Vandy could have hooked up with someone she met in your crowd."

Rice shook his head. "No way. I kept her away from the men, and she doesn't trust women. What crowd are you in?"

Rhonda lowered her eyes at the jibe, then said, "Any crowd with money. If Vandy's in L.A. and into any Industry scenes, I'll find her. Can I call you here?"

Rice looked around his new home, wondering if his talk with the stockbroker/whore had skunked the place past crashing in. "No," he said. "I might split." He took a pad and pencil off the phone stand and wrote down Louie Calderon's bootleg number. "You can call me here and leave a message twenty-four hours a day. You locate Vandy, and you'll see lots of money."

Rhonda took the slip of paper, stood up and collected her attaché case and fur coat. Rice watched her walk toward the door. When her hand was on the knob, she turned around and said, “I’ll be in touch.”

Rice said, “Find her for me.”

Rhonda traced a dollar sign in the air and closed the door behind her.

At dusk, Rice felt the skunk stench close in on the new pad. He knew it didn’t come from Rhonda, or Psycho Bobby Garcia, or Hawley or anybody else. It came from being wrapped too tight in his own skull for too long, with no one to talk to except people he wanted to use. It was what it was like all the time before he met Vandy and started to make things happen.

He made the black ’76 Trans Am happen.

First he fishtailed out of the Holiday Inn parking lot; then he cruised the Boulevard, idling the engine at stoplights, staying in second gear until he hit Western Avenue. On Western northbound he speed-shifted into third, sized up traffic and vowed not to touch the brake until he hit the Griffith Park Observatory.

So he tapped the horn as he clutched, weaved and shifted, and then Hollywood was behind him and the park road opened up. Then the whole world became a narrow strip of asphalt, headlight glow and a broken white line.

Seventy, eighty, eighty-five. At ninety, on the long upgrade approaching the Observatory, the Trans Am started to shimmy. Rice pulled to the side of the road and decelerated, catching a view of the L.A. Basin lit with neon. He thought immediately of Vandy and gauged distances, then turned around and drove toward the tiny pinpoints of light that he knew marked their old stomping grounds.

Their old condo was already up for sale, with a sign on the front lawn offering reasonable terms and fresh molding beside the door he’d kicked off. Splitsville, Cold City, *Nada.*

He drove to the 7-11 on Olympic and Bundy, where he used to send Vandy for frozen pizzas and his custom car magazines. A new night man behind the counter scoped him out like he was a shoplifter. The skunk odor came back, so he grabbed a West L.A. local paper and a candy bar and tossed the chump a dollar bill.

In the parking lot, he ate half the candy bar and looked at the front page. Vandalism at schools in the Pico-Robertson area; church bake-offs in Rancho Park; little theater on West-wood Boulevard. Then he turned the page, and everything went haywire.

The article was entitled, “Sheriffs Vet Heading Security at California Federal Branch,” and beside it was a close-up photo of Gordon Meyers. Rice’s hands started to shake. He placed the newspaper on the hood of the Trans Am and read: “California Federal Bank’s District Personnel Supervisor Dennis J. Lafferty today announced that Gordon M. Meyers, forty-four, recently retired from the Los Angeles County Sheriffs Department, has taken over as head of security for the Pico-Westholme branch, replacing Thomas O. Burke, who died of a heart attack two weeks ago. Meyers, who served most of his duty time as a jailer in the Main County Jail’s facility for emotionally disturbed prisoners, said: ‘I’m going to make the most of this job. After a week on the job, Cal Federal already feels like home. It’s great to be working with sane, noncriminal people.’”

Rice read the article three more times, then took his hands from the car’s hood. They were still trembling, and he could see the blood vessels in his arms pulsate. A scream built up in his throat, then the “Death Before Dishonor” carved on his left biceps jumped out and calmed him. With his tremors now at a low idle, he drove to Pico and Westholme.

The bank was small, dark and still, a low-rent job for a low-rent ex-cop with wacko, low-rent criminal fantasies. Rice cruised by, once, twice, three times, each time forcing himself to say, “Duane wouldn’t want me to,” “Anyone afraid of the truth is a chickenshit,” and “It happened.” On the fourth circuit all that came out was, “It happened, it happened, *it happened.*”

Now that he knew it himself, he parked the Trans Am and brainstormed. In and out in three minutes. A block from the 405 north and southbound, two minutes from the Santa Monica east/west, five from Wilshire. Fifty/twenty-five/twenty-five with the Garcias; then adios, greaseballs. The master keys at the repo lot for a foolproof getaway. *Make it happen.*

Rice sat back and made pictures of Vandy, of East Coast rock gigs, of New York crowds that didn’t have letters in front of them and big houses in Connecticut. Then noises in his head bombarded the pictures: good metal-on-metal noises that he recognized as the clash of gears, high-powered engines igniting, double-aught loads snapping from breech to barrel.

9

Lloyd sat in the outer office of the Los Angeles F.B.I.'s Bank Robbery Unit, kneading his gauze-bandaged right hand and musing on his new lease on professional life. McManus had called him in Frisco with the word: his suspension was over, he was back on duty with a liaison gig with the feds; report tomorrow morning to Special Agent Kapek at the F.B.I. Central Office and don't fuck up. The "lease" was a phaseout, he decided; a stratagem to keep him occupied and docile while the high brass figured out a discreet way to give him the big one where it would do the most damage. On the flight down and cab ride over he had been exultantly happy, then a look at the clerk/receptionist's face when he flashed his badge brought it all to a crash. It had to be a shit assignment, or they would have given it to a field lieutenant. His glory days were dead.

A severe-looking woman poked her head out of the connecting door and said, "Sergeant Hopkins?"

Lloyd pushed himself out of his chair with both hands; his right hand throbbed. "Yes. To see Special Agent Kapek. Is he here yet?"

The woman walked toward him, holding a manila folder and a sheaf of loose pages. "He'll be here soon. He said you should please wait and read these reports."

Lloyd took the papers with his good hand and sat back down, dismissing the woman with a nod of the head. When he was alone again, he opened the folder, smiling when he saw that it contained a series of L.A.P.D. crime reports.

The first report was submitted by a West Valley Division daywatch patrol unit, and detailed events of Wednesday, 12/7/84, less than twenty-four hours before. While on routine patrol of Woodman Avenue, the officers of Unit Four–Charlie-Z came upon a middle-aged white male urinating in the open window of a 1983 Cadillac Seville. When they approached, they determined that the suspect was heavily under the influence of a narcotic substance, and cautiously advised him of his rights before arresting him for indecent exposure and public intoxication. The man screamed incoherently as he was handcuffed, but the officers were able to pick out the words "bank rob" and "ray gun."

At the West Valley Station booking area, the suspect was searched. His identification revealed him to be Robert Earle Hawley, forty-seven, the owner of the Cadillac Seville. Finding the name familiar, the booking officer checked with the daywatch commander and learned that security personnel at the Bank of America on Woodman and Ventura had entered the bank at opening time to find the cash boxes ransacked and the bank's manager, Robert Hawley, missing.

Hawley's booking was postponed. The F.B.I. Bank Robbery Unit was notified of the bank manager's incarceration, and a team of detectives drove him to U.S.C. County General Hospital for detoxification. After determining that Hawley was under the influence of "angel dust," a counterdose of Aretane was administered. When Hawley returned to a sober state, F.B.I. Special Agent Peter Kapek and a team of L.A.P.D. detectives again advised him of his right to remain silent and have an attorney present during questioning. Waiving those rights, Hawley gave the officers the following account of his morning's activities:

At 7:45 A.M. he received a phone call from an unknown man, directing him to call the home of his "girlfriend," Sally Issler. The man told Hawley (who is married) that Miss Issler would be killed if his demands were not met, and that he would call back in exactly three minutes. Hawley called Miss Issler. A man with a Mexican accent answered, then put Miss Issler on the line. She screamed that she was being held captive by two men with guns and knives and to do whatever their friend said. Hawley said he would, then hung up. The man called back as he said he would, and told Hawley to meet him on Woodman near the bank in ten minutes, warning him that his phone was tapped, and any attempts to contact the police would result in Miss Issler's death. Hawley met the man near the bank, and described him as "white, late twenties, light brown hair, blue eyes, 5′11″–6′1″, 160–170 pounds, with neatly trimmed beard and mustache, wearing three-piece tan suit." The man forced Hawley to open the bank and empty cashboxes containing approximately $60,000 in traveler's checks into a briefcase, then walked him back to his car, where he shot him twice with what looked like a "ray gun." Welts on Hawley's neck and collarbone and small metal darts still stuck to his clothing indicated that he was telling the truth. Officers were dispatched to the home of Miss Issler. They found her bound and gagged, but otherwise unharmed. She told them that her captors wore ski-masks that covered their faces, but were obviously Mexicans. They spoke fluent English with Mexican accents. One man, the "softer-spoken" of the two, was tall and slender; the other, who "talked dirty" to her, was short and muscular. She placed both men as being in their early thirties, and said they were both armed with army-issue .45 automatics with attached silencers.

Lloyd skimmed through the remaining reports, learning that Hawley was treated for toxic poisoning and was not charged with a wienie-wagger beef or with anything pertaining to the robbery, and that Sally Issler was treated for shock at a local hospital and then released. The disparate facts started to sink in, pointing to solid criminal brains. He was about to give the initial pages another go-round when he sensed someone watching him read. He looked up to see a tall man of about thirty hovering near the doorway. "Pete Kapek," the man said. "Nice caper, huh? You like it?"

Lloyd stood up. "Bank robbery's not my meat, but I'll take it." He walked over to the doorway. Kapek stuck out his right hand, then noticed the bandage and switched to his left. Lloyd said, "Lloyd Hopkins," and fumbled a handshake. Kapek said, "I've heard you're smart. What do you think, right off the top of your head?"

Lloyd walked into Kapek's office and went straight for the window and its view of downtown L.A. seven stories below. With his eyes on a stream of antlike people scuttling across Figueroa, he said, "Right off the top, why me? I'm a homicide dick. Two, what's with Hawley? Presumably, he was chosen because his affair with the Issler woman made him particularly vulnerable to a blackmail angle. Again presumably, his wife didn't know about Issler. Then why did he spill his guts so quickly?"

Kapek laughed. "It wasn't in the report, but the phone man told Hawley he had infrared fuck shots of him and Sally. He threatened exposure of the affair as well as Sally's murder. I sized up Hawley as a wimp and made him a deal. Talk, and we wouldn't press charges on him for flashing his shlong, and we'd keep the whole mess out of the media's clutches. You like it?"

Lloyd turned around and looked at Kapek, noticing acne scars that undercut his Fed image and made him seem more like a cop. "Yeah, I like it. Also right off the top of my head: one, we're dealing with brains. Stupider guys would have gone straight for Hawley's wife, right there at his pad, and kept *her* hostage, which might have driven Hawley to the cops from jump street. That's impressive. If the wrong guys got ahold of a family hostage idea and got away with it once, they'd keep going until someone was killed. As it stands, this is probably a one-shot deal, which leads us back to Issler. She been polygraphed?"

Kapek sat down and poked a pencil at the papers on his desk. "She's clean. No polygraph yet, but while she was at the hospital, I had a forensic team and latent prints team do a job on her apartment. They found jimmy marks on the side door, and rubber glove prints on all the surfaces the Mexicans would have touched. We got a bunch of viable latents, and the team stayed up half the night doing eliminations against Sally, Hawley, and a list of friends and relatives that Sally gave us, working with D.M.V., armed forces and passport records. You know what we got? The above non-suspects, and one unaccounted-for set that later turned out to be some dipshit L.A.P.D. rookie who saw all the black-and-whites out front and thought he'd make the scene. The forensic guys got soil and mashed-up flower petals coming through the side door; the beaners trampled a flower garden on their way in. No, Sally baby was *not* in on it."

Lloyd said, "Shit. Competent print men?"

Kapek laughed. "The best. One guy is a real freak. He dusted the bedposts and logicked that Sally likes to get on top. You like it?"

"Only on Tuesdays. Let's get the obvious stuff out of the way. The phone man wore gloves and Hawley can't I.D. him from mug shots?"

"Right."

"No eyeball witnesses at either crime scene?"

"Right."

"The bank checks bug me. What can they yield cash—a quarter on the dollar?"

"If that. But they're *green*—and from a distance, you know, during a casing job, they might appear to be the real thing, which doesn't make our boys look too smart."

Lloyd nodded. "Employees and ex-employees, known associates of Issler and Hawley?"

"Being checked out. If we don't bust this thing in a week or so, I'll plant a man in the bank. Our approaches are narrowing down. You like it?"

Lloyd collected his thoughts by looking out the window at low-hanging clouds brushing the tops of skyscrapers. "No, I don't. One of the reports said Issler made the Mexicans as carrying army-issue .45s. That's a strange perception for a woman."

Kapek chuckled. "Sexist. Issler's father was a career officer. She knows her stuff. Those old heavy .45s are getting scarce, though. Maybe an approach."

Nodding silently, Lloyd watched dark clouds devour the restaurant atop the Occidental Building; for a moment he forgot that this "case" would probably be his last. Turning to look at Kapek, he said, "So we're stuck with figuring out where the robbers glommed onto Hawley and Issler, and if either of them have other bank manager friends in similarly vulnerable positions, which is a bitch of a fucking intelligence job."

Kapek slapped both thighs. "How about an ad in the singles tabloids—'Bank Managers involved in extramarital romances please come forward to act as decoy!' No, I've already questioned Hawley and Issler on that—zip. This is a one-shot deal, perpetrated by brainboys who can control themselves. Now the crunch question: what are you going to do about this thing?"

Lloyd cut off Kapek's eagerness with a chopped hand gesture. "No. First, how are we working this? I've been a supervisor and I've worked alone, but I've never worked an inter-agency gig with the Feds. I realize it's your investigation, but I want to know what I can ask for, who I can delegate and how much slack I've got on doing it my way."

Kapek muttered, "Your way," under his breath, then said out loud, "The investigation is structured *this way.* L.A.P.D. is handling the Issler assault-kidnap, with the squad lieutenant from West Valley dicks supervising. He knows you're the liaison; he'll give you any information or assistance you need. I've got three men checking out Issler's and Hawley's known associates, *and* the restaurants and motels they frequented, that kind of thing. They'll be compiling data on the people they come into contact with, checking them out with L.A.P.D. R&I, looking for connections. The traveler's checks are a long shot, but the serial numbers have been broadcast nationwide, and the West Valley cops have put out the word to their snitches. I want you as a floater between agencies. *You've* probably got snitches up the ying-yang, and I want you to utilize them. There is absolutely *nothing* in our computer or files on white/Mexican heist teams period, let alone ones given to kidnap-assaults. This caper sounds like street criminals graduating—more your beat than mine. You take it from there."

Lloyd breathed in the declaration of his second-banana status; it felt like a swarm of nasty little bureaucratic bees buzzing at his brain. His voice was tight and hoarse as he said, "Let's fucking *move*, then. You've got Hawley intimidated, so grab his credit card bills so we can see where he and Sally have been screwing. Don't trust his memory on it—subconsciously he'll be screwing *you.* Lean on him, polygraph him, rattle his skeletons. You like it?"

Kapek snickered, "Rubber hose him? Threaten him with an I.R.S. audit? He's got a son in college who's gay. Squeeze him by putting it on the six o'clock news? Ease off, Sergeant. The man is cooperating."

The buzzing grew deafening. Lloyd looked out the window, then jerked his eyes back when the notion of a seven-story jump to oblivion started feeling good. "I want to have a shot at Issler," he said. "I want to question her about her old boyfriends, and I want to put a tap on her home and work phones. I'll go easy on her."

Kapek stood up, put his hands on the desk and leaned forward so that his face was only a few feet from Lloyd's. "Unequivocally no. That order comes directly from your own immediate superior officer. Captain McManus told me personally to keep you away from her, and all other women involved in this investigation beyond the level of field interrogation. He told me that if you violate that order, he'll suspend you from duty immediately. He means it, and if you cross me on this, I'll report it to him in a hot flash."

Suddenly the bees did a kamikaze attack. Lloyd looked down at his bandaged hand and saw that he had gripped the window ledge so hard that blood was starting to seep through the gauze. He stared out the window at a dark mass of rain clouds. Seeing that the Occidental Building was now completely eclipsed, he said, "It's your ball game, G-man. I'll call you every twenty-four unless something urgent comes up. Call me at home or Parker Center if you get anything. You like it?"

"I like it."

"What else did McManus tell you?"

"He implied that you have emotional problems pertaining to the pursuit of pussy. I told him that my wife's a black belt in karate, so I don't have those problems."

Lloyd laughed. "It's your ball game, but it's my last shot. I'm gonna nail these cocksuckers."

Kapek pointed to the door. "Roll, hot dog."

Lloyd rolled, first in a cab to Parker Center, where he formally reported back for duty, then in a '79 Matador to the West Valley Station, staying ahead of the northbound storm clouds that threatened to drench the L.A. basin to the bone.

In the empty West Valley squadroom, he read the reports filed by plainclothes officers who had canvassed the two crime scenes late the previous day. The Woodman and Ventura house-to-house was a total blank—three housewives had noticed Hawley passed out in his Cadillac, but no one had seen him in the company of another man. The canvass of Sally Issler's neighborhood was an even bigger zero—no male Mexicans, alone or traveling as a pair, were seen on the street, and no unknown or suspicious vehicles were parked on or near her apartment building.

Sally Issler's formal statement, made after she came out of her hospital-administered sedation, was more illuminating. Asked about the personalities of her two captors, she had stated that the "tall, slender" man seemed "passive for a criminal; soft-spoken, maybe even educated," and that the "short, muscular" man "came on like a sex freak, like one of those Mexicans who hit on every chick they meet." When asked exactly what the short man said, she refused to answer.

Lloyd called Telecredit and asked for lists of Robert Hawley's and Sally Issler's recent credit card transactions, emphasizing restaurant and bar bills and motel accommodations. The operator promised to phone him at Parker Center with the information.

Running down options in his mind, Lloyd left a note for the lieutenant handling the Issler investigation to call him at the Center, then wrote out a memo to be teletyped to all L.A.P.D. divisions for roll call: "All units be alert for two-man stickup team: male Mexicans, early thirties, one tall, slender and 'soft-spoken,' one short, muscular and a possible sex offender. Both armed with silencered, army-issue .45 autos. Also be alert for B. of A. Greenback traveler's checks, serial number and denominations in West Valley Div. 12/7/84 robbery bulletin. Direct *all* queries and field interrogation reports to Det. Sgt. Hopkins, Robbery/Homicide Div. x 4209.

On his way out, Lloyd left the memo with the watch commander, who assured him it would be transmitted in time for the nightwatch crime sheet. Then he rolled back to Parker Center, this time straight into the storm clouds.

He was skirting the east edge of Hollywood when the rain hit. Hawley, Issler and Mexican bandits rolled out of his mind, and Janice rolled in, freeze-framed as she looked the last time he saw her. After punching out the lawyer's bookcase, he had walked through Chinatown, pressing his bloody hand into his shirttail, numbed and directionless until it started to rain in buckets and he realized he was only a few blocks from Janice's apartment. He knocked on the door and Roger answered in a bathrobe, his yappy dachshund cowering in back of him.

Roger himself backed off as if fearing a blow. Lloyd walked past him into the kitchen, holding his hand tightly to avoid dripping blood on Janice's Persian carpet. The dog alternately yapped, growled and took a bead on his ankles as he wrapped a dish towel around his gashed knuckles.

Janice had walked in then, carrying a pitcher of frozen daiquiris. She jumped back at the sight of Lloyd, and the pitcher fell to the floor, banana and rum fizz flying in all directions. Lloyd held up his hand and said, "Oh shit, Jan," and the dachshund began lapping up the goo. Roger entered the kitchen as the dog began to reel from the booze. He tried to grab him, but slipped on banana residue and hit the floor ass first. The drunken hound lapped his face, and Janice laughed so hard she had to grab Lloyd for support. He held her with his good arm, and she burrowed into him until he could feel them melding into each other the way they used to. Then Roger broke the spell by blubbering about his robe being ruined, and Janice drew away from her husband and back to her lover. But a brush fire had been ignited. Lloyd whispered, "I love you," as he retreated from the kitchen. Janice formed "yes" with her lips and touched her hands to her breasts.

Back at his Parker Center cubicle, Lloyd let the brush fire smolder as he figured out "shitwork" logistics, first making notes for computer cross-checks, then writing an interdepartmental memo alerting Detective Division personnel to the case and its salient facts. The work forged the facts even deeper into his own mind, pushing back a notion to pad the job and thus postpone the inevitable.

The sense of inevitability dug in like spurs and drove him down to the fourth-floor computer room, where he had the programmer feed in queries on white/Mexican stickup teams and their current dispositions, male Mexicans with both armed robbery and sex offense convictions, and known and suspected gangland armorers. The results came back in twenty minutes—a printout of forty names and criminal records. The first two categories were washouts; the twelve white/Mexican heist teams all had at least two members currently in prison, and the nine Mexican armed robber/sex offenders were all men aged forty-eight to sixty-one.

Lloyd took the list of gun dealers up to his cubicle and read through the twenty-one names and criminal records, immediately dismissing the blacks—Latin and black hoodlums hated each other like poison. This eliminated thirteen names, and the printout showed that four of the eight men remaining were in county jail and state prison on various charges. He wrote down the four names that were left: Mark McGuire, Vincent Gisalfi, Luis Calderon and Leon Mazmanian, then called his most trusted snitch and gave him the names, an outline of the Hawley/Issler case and the promise of a c-note for hard info. The shitwork completed, he looked out his window at the rain and wondered what Janice was doing. Then he balled his bad hand into a fist, checking the gauze for seepage. Seeing none, he pulled off the bandage and dressing and tossed it into the wastebasket.

10

Joe Garcia woke up on the morning of his second strong-arm assault and found himself eyeball to eyeball with another flattened .45 slug, this one mounted on mattress stuffing that had popped out of his Sealy Posturepedic while he slept. Rolling onto his back, he saw the lumber the workmen had stacked for the reconstruction of his bedroom wall and added the spent piece of metal to the ones he'd already dug out of his clothes and books and records. Eleven. Bobby had shot off both guns, a total of fourteen rounds. A stack of his sci-fi paperbacks, his Pendletons and all of his old Buddy Holly records got wasted, and three of the little cocksuckers were still hiding, waiting to tell him that even though he had almost two grand in his kick and Bobby was paying for the damage, he was thirty-one and going nowhere. Figure today's score as ten times the money in a ten times more dangerous plan, and he was going nowhere rich. Then Bobby would talk him into some sleazoid quick-bucks scam, and he'd be going nowhere broke. Pushing himself out of bed, Joe felt shivers at his back and nailed the source: two days ago he became a righteous hardball criminal. If he was going nowhere, at least he was doing it in style.

Then his eyes caught the silencered handgun on top of his dresser, and the source nailed him, turning his knees to rubber. He was an hour away from committing felonies that could send him to prison for the rest of his life or have him shot on sight. The one *good* line from his longtime "epic" song supplied the final nail and made his arms shake like Jell-O: "… and death was a thrill on Suicide Hill."

Joe fought the shakes by thinking of Bobby, knowing he'd get pissed or depressed or grateful if he kept running riffs on him. While he dressed he remembered growing up in Lincoln Heights and how Bobby held him when the old man came home juiced and looking for things to hit; how he tied him to his bed so he could go out and play without him; how all the neighbors despised their family because only two kids meant they were bad Catholics, and how Bobby beat up the kids who said they were really Jews in disguise.

Bobby saved his ass then, but when Father Chacon talked the old lady into trying for more rug rats against doctor's advice and she died in childbirth, Bobby kicked the shit out of him when he called the dippy old priest a *puto.*

And Bobby carried him through burglary and jail; and Bobby spit on his dreams; and he could split from him, but he had to stay in L.A. for the music biz, and if he stayed in L.A., Bobby would find him and Bobby would need him, because without him Bobby was a one-way ticket to the locked ward at Atascadero.

The rundown calmed Joe to the point where he could shave, and dress in his camouflage outfit of business suit and shiny black shoes. But when he stuck the .45 into his belt, the shakes returned. This time he fought them with pictures of 10K worth of guitars, amps and recording equipment. It worked until Bobby jumped into the doorway, his arms raised like the Wolfman, growling, "Let's go, *pindejo.* I'm hunnnnggry."

The brothers drove to their target.

At Studio and Gage they parked and fed two hours' worth of coins to the meter, then walked the three blocks north to Hildebrand. Street traffic was scarce, pedestrian traffic nonexistent. At 8:17 they came up on Christine Confrey's ranch-style house, her red Toyota parked in the driveway. Bobby said, "Walk like you're the landlord"; Joe whispered, "Be ultra frosty." Bobby grinned. "Now, little brother."

They took the driveway straight to the back door. Joe looked for witnesses while Bobby took a metal ruler from his jacket pocket and slipped it between the door and doorjamb and pushed up. The catch snapped, and they entered into a tiny room filled with folding lawn chairs. Joe reset the latch and felt his sweat go ice-cold at the moment of B&E terror: if they were seen, it was over.

Bobby eyed the door to the house proper and picked a soiled towel up off the floor; Joe slipped a length of nylon cord from his back pocket, then watched his brother's lips do a silent countdown. At "5" they donned their ski masks and gloves; at "1" they *moved*, pushing through the door at a fast walk.

The connecting hallway was still. Joe heard music coming from a door at the far left end and took that side of the hall, knowing part of his watchdog job was to be the one who grabbed the girl. As the music grew louder, he pressed himself to the wall; when the music drowned out the slamming of his heart, he leaped through the open door and jumped on the woman who was standing with one foot on the bathtub ledge, poising a razor over her leg.

The woman screamed as Joe's arms went around her; the razor gouged a section of calf. Bobby elbowed his way into the bathroom and wrapped the towel over her head, stuffing a large wad of it into her mouth, stifling her screams. Joe fumbled her robe into her breasts so they wouldn't stick out, then circled the cord around her, pressing her arms to her sides. When he got it tied, he lifted her off the floor, kicking and flailing, still tightly grasping the razor. He whispered, "Sssh, sssh, sssh. We're not gonna hurt you. We just want money. *We just want money.*"

Bobby got out his roll of tape and pulled a long piece loose, then withdrew the towel. The woman let out a short screech before he was able to loop the tape around her head and press it to her mouth. When he saw the terror in her eyes, his whole body started to twitch, and he whispered, "Get her fucking calmed down."

Joe loosened his grip on the woman as Bobby stumbled out of the bathroom. With one hand he took out his .45 and held it in front of her; with the other he smoothed her disheveled hair. "Sssh. Sssh. We're not going to hurt you. This is a robbery. It's got to do with you and your boyfriend Eggers. You have to do two things: you have to *not* be scared, but you have to *act* scared when the phone rings and you talk to your boyfriend. My buddy's a crazy man, but I can control him. *Be cool and you won't get hurt.*"

Christine Confrey's tremors decelerated just a notch; Joe could feel her thinking. When she dropped the razor, he relaxed his grip and steered her into the hallway. Bobby was there, leaning against the wall, giving the thumbs-up sign. "The phone is gonna ring real soon," he giggled.

Joe nodded and moved Christine into the bedroom, motioning Bobby to stay out. He noticed the phone on a nightstand; it had the look of something about to explode. When it rang shrilly, he looked into his captive's eyes. "*Just be cool,*" he whispered, gently pulling the tape from her mouth.

He picked up the phone on the fifth ring and said, "Eggers?" getting a "Y-yes, Chrissy. P-please p-put her on." Nodding at Christine and holding up the .45 for her to see, he handed the receiver over.

She grasped it with shaking hands and tried to form words. Joe fought a desire to smooth her hair. Finally her voice caught: "John, there's these two men here. They've got guns and they say that all they want is money." She watched Joe stroke the barrel of his .45, and her voice accelerated: "Please, John, goddammit. Don't be fucking cheap—do whatever they tell you to do or they'll kill me. They —"

Joe grabbed the phone and put his free hand over Christine's mouth. He said, "Got it, Eggers?" and got "Yes, you animal" in return. Joe said, "Just do what our friend says," then hung up.

Christine Confrey twisted her head free and said, "Now what?" Joe thought of tire-squealing black-and-whites and shotgun-wielding fuzz. "Now we wait," he said. "An hour tops. Then we get another call, and we tape your mouth and you never see us again."

"You're a slimy piece of Mexican shit," Christine Confrey replied. Joe caught himself starting to nod in agreement, but said instead, "Be cool." His face began sweating beneath the ski mask. It felt like a shroud.

They waited in silence, Christine sitting on the bed, Joe standing by the bedroom door, looking at his watch and listening to Bobby giggle as he prowled the house. It felt like he had two senses, both of them working toward something bad. After thirty-two minutes of scoping out the Timex, Bobby's giggles exploded into a big burst of laughter. Then the door pushed open, and the ski-masked loony was there, a magazine in his hands, growling, "Check the skin book, homeboy. Righteous *hairpie.*"

Christine pointed to the magazine Bobby was waving, hyperventilating, then getting out: "I-I-I was nineteen! I needed the money and I only kept it because John likes to see what I was like then and I—"

Joe moved to the bed and wrapped the discarded section of tape around Christine's mouth. Bobby was at his back, holding the copy of *Beaverooney* open, jabbing his right forefinger at the pictures inside. "Dig it, bro! Is this bitch fine as wine, or am I woofin'! Dig it!"

To placate Bobby, Joe glanced at the legs-apart nude spread. "Yeah, but just maintain. *Main-fucking-tain*"

Bobby shoved him aside and sat down on the edge of the bed. Christine strained against the cord and tape, kicking her legs in an effort to propel herself away, working her lips trying to scream. A stream of urine stained the front of her robe and trickled down her thighs. Bobby squealed, "Righteous," and grabbed both her ankles with his left hand and held them to the bed, while his right hand hovered over her pelvis in a parody of a shark about to attack. He grunted, “Duhn-duhn-duhn-duhn,” and Joe recognized it as the theme from *Jaws.* Bobby’s shark hand did slow figure eights; Bobby himself whispered, “We reconned you good, baby, but I didn’t pick up on how fine you are. Fine as wine. I’m the Sharkman, baby. Duhn-duhn-duhn-duhn. I give righteous fin and even better snout.”

Joe whimpered, “No, no, no,” as Bobby stuck his tongue through the hole in his ski mask and lowered his head; when his mouth made contact with Christine’s leg, he shrieked, “No, you fucking rape-o, no!”

The phone rang.

Bobby jerked his head up as Joe moved toward the night-stand. He pulled the .45 from his waistband and aimed it straight between his brother’s eyes. “Let it ring, puto. The shark wants to give some snout, and no candy ass watchdog is gonna stop him.”

Joe backed into the wall; the phone rang another six times, then stopped. Bobby giggled and started making slurping noises. Christine squeezed her eyes shut and tried to bring her hands together in prayer. Joe shut his own eyes, and when he heard Bobby titter, “Shark goin’ down,” he stumbled out of the bedroom, picturing tear gas and choppers and death.

Then there was a crashing sound from the rear of the house. Joe opened his eyes and saw Duane Rice running down the hallway holding a briefcase and the .45, no ski mask and no beard disguise on. The house went silent, then Bobby’s “Sharkman, Sharkman,” reverberated like thunder. Rice crashed into the bedroom, and Joe heard a sound he’d never heard before: Bobby squealing in terror.

He ran to the bedroom door and looked in. Rice had Bobby on the floor and was slamming punches at his midsection. Christine Confrey was still on the bed, trying to scream. Her robe was pulled up over her stomach and her panties were curled around her ankles. Joe ran to the bed and pulled down the robe, then grabbed Duane Rice’s shoulders and screamed, “Don’t! Don’t! You’ll kill him!”

Rice’s head and fists jerked back at the same instant, and he twisted to look up at the voice. Joe said, “*Please,*” and Rice weaved to his feet and gasped, “Get the briefcase.”

Bobby moaned and curled into a ball; Christine tried to bury her head in the bed sheets. Rice felt the throbbing redness that was devouring him ease down. When Joe came back holding the briefcase, he pinned his shoulders to the wall and hissed, “You listen to this and we’ll survive. Get psycho out of here and run herd on him like you never did before. Tie the woman up even better and don’t let that piece of shit near her. If I find out he even *touched* her again, I’ll kill him. Do you believe me?”

Joe nodded and said, “Yes.” Rice released him, opened the briefcase and started extracting handfuls of money, dropping them on the bed. When the briefcase was half empty, he pointed to the pile and said, “Your share. I’ll call you tonight. I trust you for some reason, so you take care of him.”

Joe looked at the wads of cash covering the crumpled sheets and Christine Confrey’s legs, then looked down at Bobby, slowly rising to his knees. He turned around for sight of Duane Rice, but he was already gone.

Rice forced himself to walk slowly to the Trans Am, parked a block from Christine Confrey's house. He swung the briefcase like Mr. Square Citizen and wondered how good a look the woman got at his face, and why for a split second *her* face looked just like Vandy's. Then he remembered how at their first meeting Joe Garcia had called his brother a rape-o and how it didn't register as anything but jive. Eggers was angel dust pie, but it was Bobby Boogaloo who put them inches away from the shithouse.

After stashing the briefcase in the trunk, Rice drove down Gage to Studio, and at the corner saw the Garcias' '77 Camaro parked at the curb. He pulled into a liquor store lot across the street to observe the brothers' getaway and see if the fuzz approached the Confrey pad. If no black-and-whites descended and Joe and the rape-o looked good, they were clear, and Pico and Westholme was still a possible.

He thought of the score, of the sheer audacity of trashing Eggers' sterile Colonial crib and the look on his face when he showed him the knives he'd stolen and said, "Christine Confrey, chop, chop. Your prints. *You know what I want.*" The look got better as the heist progressed, the bank man realizing there was no way out except to obey. Even though the take was probably only 12K tops, it was twice the amount of the first job—a good omen, and a better appetite whetter.

After ten minutes, no patrol cars or unmarked cruisers appeared, and he could see straight up Gage and tell that the house was still undisturbed. His hands throbbed from whomp ing Bobby Garcia, and he gripped the steering wheel to control the pain. After twenty minutes, the Garcias swung onto Studio Boulevard from a block east of Gage, walking two abreast with shopping bags partially shielding their faces. Bobby was limping, probably from abdominal pain, and Joe was talking him through the whole scene, more like a daddy than a kid brother. Rice smiled as they got in their Camaro and drove off. For a cowardly tagalong criminal, Joe Garcia had balls. If he could control the rape-o's balls for three hours, he'd make Pico and Westholme happen.

When he got "home" to the Holiday Inn, Rice changed from his bank robber suit into a new shirt-Levi combo and counted the proceeds of the Eggers/Confrey job. His half of the haphazardly split take came to $5,115.00. Fondling the money felt obscene, and he remembered what a soft-hearted old bull at Soledad told him: don't fuck whores, because then all women start looking like whores. He remembered Christine Confrey's terrified face and wondered if you loved a woman, then did all women start looking like her? Even though Christine and Vandy were physical opposites, their resemblance was weird.

Rice looked at the phone and flashed on an idea to call the fuzz and tip them to Christine, then double-flashed on it as suicide and dialed Louie Calderon's bootleg number.

Louie picked up on the first ring. "Talk to me."

"It's Duane. Got any messages for me?"

"Duane the Brain. How's it hangin'?"

"A hard yard. Any calls?"

"Yeah. If a nigger and a Mexican jump off the top of the Occidental Building at the same time, who hits the ground first?"

"Jesus, Louie. Who?"

"The nigger, 'cause the Mexican's gotta stop on the way down and spray his name on the wall!" Louie went into a laughing attack, then recovered and said, "*I* thought it was funny, and I'm a fuckin' Mexican. Got a pencil?"

"I can remember it. Shoot."

"Okay. Call Rhonda—654-8996. Sexed-out voice, Duane, really fine."

Rice said, "Yeah" and hung up, then dialed Rhonda's number. After six rings, the hooking stockbroker's sleepy voice came on the line. "Yes?"

"It's Duane Rice. What have you got for me?"

"Brace yourself, Duane."

"Tell me!"

Rhonda let out a long breath, then said, "I found out that Anne did work Silver Foxes for a while, a few months ago. Now she's taken up with a man—a video entrepreneur. I'm pretty sure it's a coke whore scene. He's heavy into rock vid, and, well, I …"

Rice said, "Real slow now and you're a K richer. Name, address and phone number. Real slow."

"Can you pay me Monday or Tuesday? I'm going to the Springs for the weekend, and my car payment's due."

Rice screamed, "Tell me, goddammit, you fucking whore!"

Rhonda screamed back, "Stan Klein, Mount Olympus Estates, Number 14! You're a bigger whore than I am and I want my money!"

Klein the dope dealer who probably ratted him off on his G.T.A. bust—

Klein the lounge lizard who he always figured had the hots for Vandy and—

The hotel room reeled; adrenaline juiced through Rice like the shot of dope that had cost him three years of his life. The phone dropped to the floor, and through a long red tunnel Rhonda's voice echoed: "I'm sorry, Duane. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry." Everything went crazy, then a jolt of ice water made the room sizzle like a live wire.

You can't kill him.

You can't kill him because he's a known associate.

You can't kill him because Vandy's a known associate, and the cops will sweat her at Sybil Brand and the dykes will eat her up.

You can't kill him because then you and Vandy can't make the rock scene in the Big Apple and you'll never have the place in Connecticut, and—

It was enough ice-water fuel. Rice ran for the Trans Am, leaving the .45 under the pillow as added insurance. Rhonda's pleas were still coming out of the phone: "I'm sorry, goddammit, but I need money! You promised! You promised!"

Mount Olympus was an upscale tract of two-story Mediterranean villas situated off Fairfax in the lower part of the Hollywood Hills. Rice cruised the access road, looking for Stan Klein's red Porsche with the personalized plate "Stan Man." When all he saw were Benzes, Caddys and Audis, mostly color-coordinated to the houses, he pulled into the empty driveway of Number 14 and got out, grabbing a skinny-head screwdriver from the glove compartment.

The windows were too high to reach, but the door looked flimsy. Rice rang the bell, waited twenty seconds, then rang again. Hearing no sounds of movement inside, he inserted the screwdriver into the door runner just above the lock and yanked. The cheap plywood cracked, and the door opened.

He stepped inside and closed the door, making a mental note not to leave prints. The entrance foyer was dark, but off to his left he could see a big, high-ceilinged living room.

Rice walked in and gasped. Every inch of floor and wall space was covered with stereo and video equipment. V.C.R.s and Betamaxes were stacked along one wall floor to ceiling; home computer terminals, TV sets and giant cardboard boxes piled with Sony Walkmans were lined up on the floor. Three Pac-Man machines were propped by the doorway, and the rest of the room was taken up by mounds of small cardboard boxes. Threading his way into the maze, Rice grabbed a box at random. Rhonda the Fox and a naked man were on the cover, beneath the legend, 'Help me, Rhonda'—the Beach Boys. Private collector's item —available only thru Stan Man Enterprises, Box 8316, L.A., Calif 90036."

It all went red.

Rice tore through every box in the room; read every cover. Shitloads of naked women and oldies but goodies, but no Vandy. His frost was returning when he saw a phone and phone machine atop a color TV.

He punched the "Play Message" button and got: "Hi, this is Stan Klein on the line for Stan Man Enterprises. Annie and I are on a video shoot, but we'll be back Monday night. Talk to the beep. Bye!"

Rice pushed "Incoming." There was a tape hiss, followed by a beep and a male voice. "Stanley baby, it's Chick. Listen, Annie was great. Unbelievable skull. So listen, if you're free can we talk ad space like Tuesday? Call me." Beep. "Stan, this is Ward Carter. I … uh … want to thank you for the, uh, you know, Eskimo trade-off. Annie was fabulous. About the porn vid, it's strictly bootleg on the song rights, but I'm sure I can work out a deal with this man I know who's got a chain of X-rated motels. He's mob, and you know how those guys are into blondes, so maybe you could set up a party? Talk to you Mondayish."

The rest of the messages went unheard; a hideous wailing was drowning them out. Rice wondered where the sound was coming from. When his eyes started to burn, he knew he was weeping for the first time since the sixth grade in Hawaiian Garbage.

11

Lloyd was asleep in his Parker Center cubicle when the phone rang. Snapping awake, he pulled his legs off the desk and checked his watch: 2:40. Afternoon doze-offs: another sign of encroaching middle age. He grabbed the receiver and said, “Robbery/Homicide. Hopkins.”

“Peter Kapek. We’ve got another one. I’ve got the manager; he’s agreed to talk with no attorney. West L.A. Federal Building, fourth-floor interview rooms. Forty-five minutes?”

“Thirty and rolling,” Lloyd said, and hung up.

He made the trip in thirty-five, lead-footing it Code Three all the way, then running upstairs to the F.B.I.’s Criminal Division offices. The receptionist looked at his badge and pointed him down a long corridor inset with Plexiglas cubicles on one side and listening rooms on the other. At the far end, he looked through the one-way glass and saw Peter Kapek and a middle-aged man in a tweed suit sitting at a metal table. The man appeared composed, Kapek harried as he jotted notes on a legal pad.

Lloyd stepped across the hall to the booth where a headset-wearing stenographer was transcribing the interrogation. He said, “L.A.P.D.,” and the woman nodded and tore off the long roll of paper flowing out of her machine. “It’s complete,” she said. “You didn’t miss that much.”

Lloyd took the paper and pulled it taut, squinting to read the computer type:

> 14:45 hrs; 12/9/84, W.L.A. Fed. Crim. Div.
>
> Present: SA Peter Kapek, John Brownell Eggers, W.M., D.O.B. 6/28/39, no wants; no warrants; no criminal record.
>
> Re: Robbery at Security Pacific Bank, 7981 Lankershim Blvd., Van Nuys.
>
> Subject waived attorney.
>
> P.K.: Mr. Eggers, I want you to forget what you already told the L.A.P.D. officers at the station on the ride over. I want a chronological reconstruction of today’s events. Take your time, and be as detailed as you like.
>
> J.E.: Of course. I went to the bank early this morning—about 8:30—because I had some papers to go over. As I was about to unlock the door —
>
> P.K.: Excuse me, Mr. Eggers. Was there anyone else there at the bank?

> J.E.: No, there wasn't. The staff doesn't arrive until 9:15.
>
> P.K.: Thank you. Please continue.
>
> J.E.: A man approached me as I was about to unlock the doors. He was a white man, about thirty, about six feet, one seventy or so, medium brown hair, neatly trimmed mustache and beard. He was wearing a cheap tan three-piece suit and carrying a briefcase, and I didn't see him get in or out of a car. (*Long pause*)
>
> The man showed me a gun in a shoulder holster and told me that *he* was the one who had broken into my home two nights before. I had already reported that to the police. He made me unlock the door, then he walked me to my desk. He told me that he wanted vault money, as much as I could carry outside on my person once the time lock went off at opening time. Then … (*Pause*)
>
> Then the man took out a knife that he had stolen from my kitchen. He told me that two accomplices of his were holding my wife and daughter hostage at our vacation house in Lake Arrowhead, and that if I didn't cooperate, they would be raped, then dismembered with a second knife of mine, one that he knew had my fingerprints on it. I said I would cooperate, and begged the man not to let his partners hurt my family.
>
> P.K.: Go on, Mr. Eggers. Slowly, please.
>
> J.E.: Thinking of my wife and daughter held hostage terrified me. The man told me to sit at my desk, facing the window, with my hands in my lap, and to remain that way until opening time. He said he would be across the street watching and waiting, and at 9:35, I should walk outside with the money, and he would find me. He said that if I called the police or I wasn't outside at the specified time, my wife and daughter would die—because his partners were going to kill them at exactly 9:40 unless he delivered the "all-clear." (*Pause*)
>
> At 9:30, with money distributed to the tellers, I chitted for the contents of one station. I couldn't think straight, I just mumbled something about a cash draft, stuffed the money in my pockets and walked outside. When I was out of sight of the bank, the robber grabbed me and forced me to hand over the money. Then he led me to my car and made me sit down behind the driver's seat, and he shot me with this ray gun, and I blacked out. When I woke up, around one o'clock, I had an awful headache. I ran to a pay phone and called my wife in Arrowhead, and she and Cathy were safe! No one had held them captive! I had been had! The police were at the bank because I had disappeared for hours, and the rest you know.
>
> P.K.: Backtracking, Mr. Eggers, could you describe any distinctive mannerisms that the robber had?

The computer roll ended. Lloyd handed it back to the steno and walked across the hall and stared at the bank manager through the one-way glass, wondering how much of his bullshit Peter Kapek bought. Thinking "Fuck it," he knocked on the door and stood aside so that Eggers couldn't see him.

Kapek walked into the corridor seconds later, saw Lloyd and smiled. “Is this bimbo slick as shit? You like him?”

Lloyd imitated the smile. “You charging him?”

“With what? Perjury? That’s your scene. What we’ve got so far is a pussy hound trying to protect his reputation. Except for the Lake Arrowhead bullshit and no mention of his sweetie pie, he’s leveling. I’m going to goose him, then plea-bargain him into cooperating by giving him immunity on the girlfriend angle.”

Lloyd shook his head. “Kapek, we can’t do that. This makes two in three days, and the M.O. is getting hairier. We need a media alert on this. Have you hit him with Hawley and Issler?”

“He doesn’t know them. That I believe absolutely. This whole shtick is beginning to get to me, Hopkins. You get anything from your files? Your informers?”

Lloyd grabbed Kapek’s arm and led him down the hall, out of earshot of the steno booths. “Don’t play this joker straight,” he said. “He’s slick, and he’s got a lot of hardball in him, and he’ll tie us up for days trying to I.D. his girlfriend.”

Kapek yanked his arm free. “He’ll cooperate. As soon as I say ‘Getting any on the side?’ he’ll fold.”

“Bullshit! You want a reconstruction on this? I buy the stolen knives as our guys—Eggers isn’t hip enough to come up with something like that. The robbery went down just like he called it. Our boys got stiffed on the traveler’s checks, and they’re pissed. Only Eggers came off the dust looking to save his ass. He made the call to Arrowhead from a pay phone, probably with a credit card, so there’d be a record, and he got detoxed from the dust before he hit the bank, so he’d be coherent. He should be zorched to the gills, but he’s Mr. Lucidity. You mention adultery, and he’ll shut up tighter than a crab’s asshole.”

“No, *he won’t.”*

Lloyd muttered, “Shit. That was gospel about his pad getting burgarlized?”

“All the way,” Kapek said. “I read the crime report an hour ago—no witnesses, no prints—nothing.”

“Eyeball witnesses at the bank?”

“Zero.”

“Shit! Let’s *lean* on Eggers.”

“You’re a black-glove cop, Hopkins. I’m not. Eggers is a big man, so the dust shot didn’t hit him as hard as Hawley. We play it my way.” He shook his head and started to walk away.

Lloyd stepped in front of him and made his voice placating. “Listen, trust me on something. Turn the heat up in the interview room, get him to take off his jacket. You’ll see a spike mark or a Band-Aid at the crook of one of his elbows. My guess is that he hasn’t even gone by the girlfriend’s pad to see if she’s okay. The cocksucker hit the family doctor for an antitoxin, then started covering his ass. You release him like everything’s copascetic, he’ll lead us straight to her.”

Kapek smiled. “I like it. But if there’s no track or Band-Aid, we play it my way.” He walked to the front of the corridor and talked to the receptionist, then returned and winked. “You like it?”

Five minutes later, the corridor started heating up; ten minutes later, it was outright hot. Lloyd watched through the one-way glass as John Eggers fidgeted in his chair, then took off his jacket. Kapek aped his actions, then rolled up his sleeves. This time Eggers aped the F.B.I. man, and by squinting, Lloyd could see the small circular Band-Aid on the inside of his left elbow.

Kapek stood up and stretched, then walked past Eggers and stepped into the corridor. Seeing Lloyd, he closed the door and said, "You're good. I'm sending Slick home in a cab in five minutes. Tail him, but if he goes to his skirt, don't approach, call me." He drew a slow finger across his throat. "I mean that. Also, we should have another confab. Van Nuys Station at six?"

Lloyd said, "Be there or be square," then wiped a line of sweat from his forehead and walked downstairs. In the parking lot, he stood by the side-street entrance and waited for the arrival of the taxi. Shortly, a Yellow Cab pulled in and cruised up to the building's back entrance. John Eggers, his suit coat slung over one shoulder, walked outside and got in. When the taxi swung out onto Veteran Avenue, Lloyd counted to twenty-five and pursued.

He caught the cab at the on-ramp to the 405 northbound, and let a car get between them as they headed toward the Valley. At Ventura, the taxi exited and swung east, staying in the middle lane, the driver cruising so maddeningly slow that Lloyd wanted to ram him with his unmarked unit's snout and shove them all the way to Eggers' destination. Just when his frustration felt like it was about to peak, the cab lurched and hung a sharp left turn onto Gage Avenue and went north. Lloyd started to tingle. Too déclassé a neighborhood for a middle-aged bank exec; they were headed for the girlfriend's pad. When the cab drew to the curb at the corner of Hilde brand, he continued on, looking back through his side mirror.

Eggers got out and walked up the steps of a modest ranch-type house and let himself in. Lloyd parked and walked down the street to his target, eyeing the windows for good listening spots. Deciding to prowl the house's perimeter, he walked down the driveway with his ears perked for sounds of weeping and comforting. He was all the way around the back to the other side when he heard the sounds of pure hard female rage:

" … and it's all on you, you bastard! They were going to leave me alone until the bad one found that sleazy picture book that you're so fucking in love with!" The voice took on a baby talk tone: "Poor Johnny-poo got held up, and he's sooo afraid that the banky-poo and his wifey-poo are going to find out about his affair with Chrissy-poo. Awww. The mean old robber-poo shot Johnny-poo with dusty-poo, and he got his Brooksie-poo suit *allll* wrinkled. Awww." There was a sharp, flesh-on-flesh noise, then the woman's voice came out soft and dripping with contempt: "That man who robbed you is more of a fucking man than you'll ever be. Think about it, John. Next time you start talking about all the sacrifices you've made to be with me, think about that man beating up one of his partners to keep me from getting raped."

Eggers' retort was a beaten-dog grovel. "But you won't tell the police? Chrissy, my job—*our* future depends on keeping this quiet."

"No," the woman said, "I won't. I care about you too much to hurt you that way. But take this with you when you see your wife in Arrowhead tomorrow. He was sexy, and somewhere down the line when we're screwing, I'm going to be thinking of him, of the man who made you look weak and foolish. Now get out of my sight."

Lloyd leaned against the house and listened to the sound of an impotent, foot-stomping departure. When the door slammed, the woman's weeping took over, and he waited until the sobs trailed off before walking around to the front door. When he rang the bell, his hands were shaking. He looked at the name taped above the buzzer—Christine Confrey—and wondered what the woman with the volatile voice would look like.

The door swung open, and he saw. Chrissy Confrey was a small woman with a face of perfectly mismatched parts: high cheekbones, broad nose and pointed chin. Her hair was straight and long, and her tears had already dried. Lloyd winced at her handsomeness, and realized he didn't know how to play the interrogation. Holding out his badge, he said, "L.A.P.D. I know all about it, Miss Confrey. Two Mexicans with ski masks, one soft-spoken, one the guy who tried to molest you, the white guy you were tell—"

Christine Confrey tried to push the door shut. Lloyd jammed his foot into the floor runner and wedged himself into the house, shouldering the door, and Christine behind it, aside, putting his hands up in a "no harm" pose. "I know what you've been through," he said. "And I don't want you to talk about it. All I want you to do is look at some photographs. Will you do that?"

Christine hissed, "Get out"; Lloyd stepped toward her. "You can give your statement to a woman officer, and I'll try to keep your relationship with Eggers out of it. This is the second one of these assaults, and I want you to look at some photos that the other victims probably didn't see. It won't take long."

Her face a hardening mask of hatred, Christine said, "Have John Eggers look at your pictures. This is his mess, not mine."

"I'm going to," Lloyd said, "but I need you, too. Victims tend to block out the looks of their assailants, and quick crosscheck I.D.s can be very helpful. I know you got a good look at the man."

Christine's face mask stiffened to the point where Lloyd thought her features would crack. "You're the assailant. Peeping at windows. Get out!"

Lloyd leaned against the door and wondered what to do, watching Christine Confrey hold her ground in front of him, her feet dug like a frightened animal poised to attack. Strategies to cajole, retreat and press were roiling up in his brain, then blanking out as the violated woman held eye contact. Finally she did attack, rearing back her head and spitting. Lloyd wiped the wad of mucus from his shirt front and returned with an ice-voiced salvo: "Your way, huh? Okay, let's try this: unless we get these scumbags, this is going to happen over and over again. Your feelings and Eggers' job and marriage don't count. So you're going to look at mug shots of your sexy savior. I know he's a handsome fellow with his groovy beard and all th—"

Lloyd stopped when Christine's face registered befuddle ment. A light flicked on in his head. The beard and mustache that Hawley and Eggers had described was a fake—one reason why Hawley hadn't been able to I.D. any of the mugs he viewed. Assuming it was only a three-man team, the white partner had probably called the Mexicans to inform them of his success with Eggers, and had gotten either a no answer or word of the impending molestation from the "soft-spoken" man. Panicking, the white robber had driven to the hostage pad, and had entered *without his disguise.*

Still staring at Christine, Lloyd said, "Get dressed. I'm taking you into custody as a material witness."

Christine Confrey broke the stare by spitting at Lloyd's feet, then walking toward the back of the house. When she returned to the living room five minutes later, she was wearing light makeup and a fresh skirt and blouse. As she locked the door, she said, "Don't touch me."

They drove in silence to the Van Nuys Station, Christine chain-smoking and staring out the window, Lloyd steering the cruiser in a circuitous route to give himself time to think. One train of thought dominated: since the L.A.P.D. and F.B.I. both kept their mug shots cross-filed according to M.O. and physical stats, Robert Hawley was probably only shown photographs of convicted armed robbers and men matching his "beard and mustache" description. Both Eggers and Confrey would have to view the entire white male age 25-40 file at Parker Center, but he now had less than two hours before he was to meet Kapek, and if Chrissy Confrey was to be tapped for maximum info during that time, he would have to shove mugs at her while the white robber's face was still fresh in her mind and let Kapek and the feds worry about her statement and known associates.

Thrilled with a solid lead all his own, Lloyd pulled into the station lot. Christine got out of the car without being directed, and walked ahead of him through the station's front doors, eyes downcast. Lloyd caught up with her and pointed her into the detectives' squad room; a plainclothes cop approached with a quizzical look. Lloyd said, "Please have a seat, Miss Con frey," then whispered to the plainclothesman, "Hopkins, Robbery/Homicide. The woman is an eyeball witness. I want to show her some mug books: white males with nonviolent felony convictions. It's a hunch I'm playing. Can you do that for me?"

The cop nodded and walked into the records booth adjoining the squad room. Lloyd saw that Christine had sat down in the assistant squad commander's chair and was helping herself to his cigarettes. He checked his watch, rankling that he had to have her out before Kapek arrived—kowtowing to a punk G-man ten years his junior. When the whole thing started to rankle, he walked over and said, "Are you going to cooperate?"

Christine blew smoke rings at him. "Of course, Officer."

The plainclothes cop came back with a stack of loose-leaf binders and placed them on the desk in front of Christine. Lloyd opened the top one and saw that the books displayed one man per page, with one close-up head shot, one full-body frontal and one full-body side shot. Below the black-and-white photos, the man's name, date of birth, arrest date and charge were typed, along with a five-digit file number.

Lloyd took a pencil from his pocket and poised it over the first sheet of mugs. "Study the pictures carefully," he said. "If you positively identify the man, tell me. I'll be studying you, and marking the ones you react to, so if you don't make an I.D., we can work up a composite from similar-looking men."

Christine put out her cigarette and lit another. "I only saw him for a second, and I only said he was sexy to hurt John."

"I realize that. Just look at the pictures carefully."

"And the papers and TV won't find out about John and me?"

Lloyd smiled and lied through his teeth. "That's right."

For an hour Christine smoked and looked at snapshots of white male felons.

Lloyd sat beside her, reading her face for flashes of recognition. Twice she said, “Sort of, but not him”; three more times she held the binder up and gave it an extra close scrutiny, then shook her head. Lloyd marked the pages that drew her strongest reactions, and when Christine was finished with the last mug book, he wrote down the names and file numbers of the felons and went to the records booth to check their files on the off-chance that there might be some sort of connection to perk his mental juices.

He gave the five files cursory read-throughs, looking for the felons’ current dispositions, known associates and brothers with criminal records, learning that George James Turney had been stabbed to death in a San Quentin race war six months previous and had two older brothers in their forties; that Thomas Lemuel Tucker was on federal parole in Alaska, and an orphan; that Alexander “Ramo” Ramondelli had a sister and was dying of cancer at Vacaville Prison Hospital; that Duane Richard Rice was an only child and was serving a year in the county jail for grand theft auto; that Paul Prescott Orchard had a mentally retarded younger brother and was a state parole absconder. The “known associates” were complete washouts—no familiar names, no sparks. It was time to write up a report to mollify Kapek, goose the media, chase snitch feedback and let the feds run with the ball.

Lloyd put the file numbers in a note to the squad lieutenant supervising the Issler assault, telling him to have a police artist utilize them with the assistance of a new eyeball witness the feds had. After dropping the memo off with the desk officer, he walked back to Christine and said, “Let’s go. I’ll drive you home.”

They were walking out the door when Lloyd saw Peter Kapek striding up the steps toward them. He checked his watch: 5:30. The junior G-man had outfoxed him with an early arrival.

Kapek looked at Christine suspiciously; suddenly Lloyd felt sad for the bank manager’s mistress. When Kapek started to fume silently for an explanation, Lloyd pulled him out of Christine’s earshot. “I had to move fast or lose her. Call me at home and I’ll tell you about it. If you don’t like it, go fuck yourself and get me detached. She’s your witness, but be good to her.”

Kapek’s fuming rendered him beet red. Lloyd nodded to Christine, then walked back into the station. The desk officer handed him a piece of paper. “Just got the call, from the switchboard at Parker Center. They didn’t say who it’s from. Sounds like a snitch to me.”

Lloyd looked at the message. It said: Luis Calderon dealing army .45s. (Reliable info—call me for details.)

12

The restaurant was cool and dark; the Mexican music soft and harmless; the wraparound booth big and cushiony—a good, private place to talk crime plans. Sipping iced tea and waiting for the Garcias, Duane Rice felt his twenty-four hours of nonstop movement lose its frenzied edge. It was all going to happen; what he'd done since splitting Stan Klein's place proved he could do anything.

After trashing the pad for info on the "video shoot" Vandy and Klein were on, and getting zilch, he knew it was either tend to business or go gonzo, so he'd driven by the Pico-Westholme bank and memorized the floor plan, then cruised the side streets surrounding it for getaway vehicles. Around the corner on Graystone, he noticed an '81 Chevy Caprice parked in the driveway of a house whose screen door was spilling over with rubber-band-wrapped newspapers. He'd walked up and checked the name on the mailbox—Latham—then waited for the paper boy and handed him a spiel about being a friend of the Lathams', and by the way, when were they getting back? The kid said next Friday. Bingo. One vehicle down, one to go.

Then it was *think* or go gonzo, and he forced himself to remember small details all the way back to his kick-out from the slam. It took half an hour of brain-frying concentration, but finally he got it.

At the Burger King down the street from the Bowl Motel there was a fat slob security guard who bragged to the customers about his sixteen-hour shifts and all the money he was making, and how he was spending most of it on his '78 Malibu with a 327 and a B&M Hydrostick. It was never in the lot, but it had to be parked nearby. After a final recon of the Pico-Westholme area, he drove up to Hollywood and found the Malibu parked on De Longpre a half block from the Burger King. Two vehicles down—only the keys to go.

He drove to an art supply store and bought a large piece of molding wax, then cruised by the repo lot on South Western. It was closed up at nine o'clock, and there was no nightwatchman. A simple chisel pry, and he was inside the salesman's hut. There was an oversupply of master keys for *all* late-model Chevys, so he forgot about making wax impressions and glommed the keys outright. The two getaway vehicles were as good as his.

Next he called Rhonda, catching her on her way out the door to her weekend at "The Springs." She told him she didn't know where the video shoot that Vandy and Klein were on was, and that she didn't know whether Vandy performed in any of Klein's X-rated videos. She said she would talk to people in "The Springs" and leave a message if she got any hard info. She mentioned money several times, and he promised to call Silver Foxes Monday night to set up a meet.

Then came the tough part—manipulate the Garcia brothers: both of them for the Pico-Westholme heist; Joe for a watchdog. The heaviest gaming would be groveling to Bobby. Even though it was the right thing to do, it felt all wrong, and he was relieved when he called and got no answer.

Which left him at midnight with nothing to do and no one to do it with, and nowhere near sleep. The Holiday Inn was now total skunk city, so he moved back to the same room at the Bowl Motel, where the same grease spots and lines of dust greeted him, but did not ease him into sleep. Since he now had to stay awake to talk to Joe Garcia, it was either *move* or go gonzo.

So he *moved*, driving the Trans Am like a meek old man, going a weird kind of gonzo, where the superior type English he knew from police reports filled his head with thoughts he didn't want to say or even *think* out loud:

Unlike Stan Klein, Gordon Meyers is not a known associate. In the course of his career as Module 2700 night jailer, he incurred only mild resentment from the thousands of inmates he supervised, all of whom were mentally disturbed misdemeanants incapable of perpetrating armed robbery and murder;

Said unknown perpetrators were obviously seasoned bank robbers, most likely San Quentin or Folsom parolees, institutionalized and subconsciously desirous of committing felony acts in hopes of receiving ten-to-life habitual offender sentences.

The parole officer/cop/shrink rap kept eating at him; finally he started thinking of Vandy to hold it down. He thought of known associate Stan Klein, whom he couldn't touch, and got very calm, even cocky. Deciding to check out Stan Man's new scam, he started asking night clerks at "adult" motels if they had any good "fuck music." The first three clerks took his ten spot and said no; the fourth said yes and offered him a special "short timer" rate for private listening. Steeling himself, he accepted the offer.

The six cassettes stacked atop the V.C.R. in front of the sweat-stained bed all bore the "Stan Man" name and P.O. box. He loaded them into the machine and turned off the lights. Tremors and a flash thought hit him along with the "Stan Man" logo: he didn't want it to be Vandy, but if it was Vandy, he wouldn't be so godawful alone. Cursing himself, he turned up the volume and watched the show.

A disco beat, then a haggard woman was gobbling a donkey-sized dick while Donna Summer belted, "She Works Hard for the Money." Fade-out, logo, then Rhonda the Fox was taking on four guys at once, the Beach Boys wailing for her to help them. Blank frames, blurred logo, "This Land Is Your Land" on the sound track, Mondale and Ferraro doing a handshaking tour on the screen, intercut with a girl in a red, white and blue negligee giving head to a jig in an Uncle Sam costume.

No Vandy.

If you fuck whores, then all women start looking like whores.

If you love a woman, then all women start looking like her.

Rice kicked over the V.C.R. and ran out of the room and across Sunset to a phone booth. He dialed the Garcias' number; Joe answered on the first ring. All he got out was "Hello?" before Duane the Brain took over in force:

You want to come to New York, get away from your batshit brother and work a real musician gig?

You and Bobby want two-thirds of a hundred K foolproof, in and out Monday morning in six minutes?

You want to be a fucking *pachuco* for the rest of your life, or do you want out?

You get your brother to come with you to La Talpa tomorrow at noon. Tell him I'll apologize; tell him I need him.

The words stuck in his throat. Joe's final answer would always stick in his brain: "I'm your man, Duane. And don't worry about Bobby. He likes getting hit. In fact, he said you remind him of this priest he used to know."

"Thanks for sparing my face, Duane-o. The old Sharkman owes you for that. I lit a candle for you last night. Figured you was Protestant, but what the fuck."

Rice looked up to see Bobby Garcia sliding into the booth, his right hand held out. He shook it, glad that the restaurant was dark, so the greasy piece of sharkshit couldn't read the contempt on his face. Thinking, *Ice City*, he said, "Sorry, Bobby. I flipped out."

Bobby sat down across from him and dug into the bowl of nachos and salsa on the table. Between wolfish mouthfuls, he said, "No strain, no gain, no pain. Little brother's coming in a minute. You got another score?"

"Yeah. Straight in and out bank job."

Bobby whistled. "Righteous. Little Bro said a hundred big ones. That true?"

"If I'm lyin', I'm flyin'."

Bobby giggled and slithered a shark hand over the bowl of nachos. "Then you gotta have wings somewhere, 'cause your first two righteous big-time scores netted me and Little Bro about a dollar eighty-nine, and I'm startin' to feel like the bottom man in a Mongolian cluster fuck."

Rice took in a deep breath, hoping his voice would come out just right, giving Sharkshit the perfect amount of slack. "That was secondhand information I acted on. I was crazy to trust it. But we've hit twice. We're on a roll, and this one is all mine. I've had it in mind for a long time, I was just waiting for the right partners."

Bobby smirked. "I hope it ain't a roll into the gutter. I been there twice, and I ain't goin' for sloppy thirds."

"You'll like this one—it's *you.*"

"Yeah? *Me?* Tall, dark and handsome? Hung like a mule?"

"No. Nasty, simple and out front. Easy to understand, so I know you'll eat it up."

Bobby giggled. "You said the magic word—eat. You know how to pick up chicks without saying a word? Sit at the bar and part your hair with your tongue."

"It's you, Bobby. So simple and low class that it's got class."

A waitress came up to the booth with menus; Rice grabbed them and said, "We'll order in a few minutes." When she walked away, Bobby said, "We shoulda hit a smorgasbord. The furburger buffet: all you can eat for sixty-nine clams." Rice felt a tide of slime wash over him. Then Joe Garcia was there, saying, "Duane, how's it hanging?"

Rice said, "Long and strong," and squinted across the booth to get a handle on how the tagalong was holding up. Not bad, he decided; scared, but probably cash flushed, and more scared of continuing a crime career with Sharkshit Bobby. A born follower about to trade leaders.

The waitress returned. The brothers ordered Carta Blanca; Rice another iced tea. When she brought the drinks, the three partners fell silent. Then Rice looked straight at the Garcias, knowing they'd go for the plan: bullshit, truth, the whole enchilada.

"Nifty little Cal Federal on Pico near the West L.A. freeway crisscross. One camera—we shoot it out. One plainclothes security man—a juicehead. Big payroll payouts on the twelfth and twenty-sixth of the month, so we hit the twelfth, this Monday. I've got one car pegged for the approach, another for the getaway—a family car right around the corner from the bank. The people are away on vacation, and I've got a master key for the doors and ignition. We go in wearing suits and beard-mustache disguises, carrying briefcases. Six tellers stations, two to a man. I know an abandoned garage in Holly weird where we can stash the getaway sled. In, out, on the freeway by the time the fuzz show up. Three-way equal split. I've been casing this score for a long time, but I didn't know how stand-up you guys were. *Are you with me?*"

Bobby chugalugged his beer, reached into the bowl and crumbled the remains of the nachos, then placed his hands palms up on the table. Rice placed his right hand on top of them; Joe sealed the partnership agreement with both of his. Rice said, "You know how to dress and what to bring. Meet me at Melrose and Highland Monday morning at ten."

The partners withdrew their hands and stood up. Bobby squeezed out of the booth, walked over to the waitress and began a soft rendition of the *Jaws* theme. Joe looked at Rice, swallowed and said, "Was that for real about New York and the music gig?"

Rice smiled. "We leave on Wednesday. You stick with me after the job. We have to pick up my old lady, then we have to keep you away from Sharkshit over there. *Comprende?*"

"*Sí, comprendo, mano.*" Joe put out his hand jailhouse style; Rice held it down in a square-john shake. "That low-rider shit is dead. You pull that stuff in New York, and they'll laugh you out of town."

13

Lloyd pulled up to the back entrance of the West L.A. Federal Building and honked his horn. Peter Kapek walked over to the car and got in. Expecting a rebuke for the Confrey approach, Lloyd was stunned when the junior G-man said, “Good work on the girlfriend. I got a good statement out of her. No positive I.D. on the white man, but Confrey and Eggers worked up a composite with an L.A.P.D. artist. It’ll be distributed all points by tomorrow morning. Where are we going? And by the way, you look like shit.”

Lloyd nosed the Matador out onto Wilshire. “Didn’t you get the complete message? We’re going to brace a suspected gun dealer. Luis Miguel Calderon, a.k.a. “Likable Louie,” male Mexican, age thirty-nine, two convictions for receiving stolen goods, former youth gang member mellowed out into smalltime businessman. He’s got an auto parts shop in Silverlake, my old neighborhood. A snitch I trust says he’s dealing army-issue .45s. And I look like shit because I’ve been doing police work all night.”

Kapek laughed. “I like it! Learn anything?”

Lloyd shook his head. “Not really. I canvassed the Security Pacific area and Confrey’s neighborhood; Brawley from Van Nuys Dicks couldn’t spare any men. I got a big zero—no suspicious people or vehicles. I read every report on Hawley’s and Issler’s associates eight times—nothing bit me. Then I called a couple of media people and gave them the whole ball of wax. It goes to press and on the air Monday night, giving us exactly forty-eight hours to figure out a strategy. What’s the matter, G-man? You’re not doing your famous slow burn.”

Kapek toyed with the knobs of the two-way radio. “Don’t call me ‘G-man,’ it turns me on. I didn’t rat you off on Confrey because I heard these homicide guys at Parker Center talking about you with awe, and I actually started to like you a little bit. Also, I got a good statement from Confrey. The rape guy turned out *not* to be a rape-o, more like a psycho muff diver. He did this rebop about being a shark, then went down on Chrissy’s bush. I’ve computer-fed the info nationwide—nothing—and I’ve put it in a memo for L.A.P.D. roll calls—maybe we’ll get a bite.”

“A shark bite?”

“Very fucking amusing. We need a hard lead, Hopkins; this thing is *covered* from every paper angle. Our eyeball witnesses have checked every local and federal mug book—zero. The men checking out the victims’ associates have got nothing, and I’ve got an agent going over Hawley’s and Eggers’ credit card slips with them—you know, all the places they rendezvoused with the girlfriends have got to be checked out. If nothing breaks by Monday, I’m planting people in the offices where Issler and Confrey work.”

Lloyd nodded and said, “I’ve been kicking around an idea that might account for a connection between Hawley and Eggers and explain why the robbers have escalated their M.O. I’m thinking both these guys might be pilfering traveler’s checks—at least Hawley. Here’s the reconstruction. While they’re casing the B. of A., the robbers see Hawley stealing the *green* traveler’s checks, which from a distance look like cash. They think that money is left overnight in the tellers boxes—”

Kapek interrupted. “Hawley said the inside man wanted the bank checks—that he asked for them by name.”

Lloyd shook his head. “That’s Hawley the pilferer covering his ass, obscuring the robbers’ reasons for hitting *his* bank. Here’s my reasoning. The robbers have either seen Eggers pilfering similarly, or they figured, and this isn’t likely, given their intelligence, that all banks leave loose cash out overnight. So, after the low score on the traveler’s checks, they figure that Eggers is just another check stealer, say to themselves ‘Fuck that’ and decide to make Eggers go for the vault. You like it?”

Grinning, Kapek said, “It floats. But what do we do about it?”

“Have your Bank Fraud Division people give you a crash course in check rip-off scams. Maybe they can tell us something we can use to squeeze Hawley and Eggers. I’ve got a hunch on this. I think that if these guys are pilferers, it’s out of desperation—cash flow problems that they can’t talk about. And *that* makes me think *vice*—gambling, dope, sex. Sex the least likely, because they’ve got the outside stuff going. I’m going to initiate inquiries with every vice squad in the Valley—maybe our boys are heavy in hock to bookies, or loan sharks, or they’re into kinky shit we don’t know about. If we get a bunch of vice dicks to pump their informants, we might get something.”

Kapek elbowed Lloyd and said, “I like it! There’s nothing on the traveler’s checks, by the way, but on the cash flow problems, I’m going to peruse our boys’ bank accounts, see what I get.”

Lloyd took the words in silently and, as the old neighborhood drew closer, thought of his family. “You didn’t rag me on the media goose,” he said. “Come Monday night a lot of innocent people are going to be hurting. I figured a sensitive guy like you would be pissed.”

Kapek flushed. “It was the right thing. I would have waited a day or so, then done it. I’m doing the family interviews, though, and *discreetly.*”

“We’re almost there, G-man. Any thoughts on this interview?”

“No, you?”

“Yeah. Let’s test Likable Louie’s fuse.”

Lloyd pulled to the curb, then pointed to the white adobe building that housed Louie’s One-Stop Pit Stop.

“No violence?” Kapek said.

“No violence.”

“Then I like it.”

They walked across the street and through the wide-open front door of the garage, into a small room filled with stacks of retread tires. A Chicano youth popping a pimple at a wall mirror gave them the fisheye, and Lloyd said, “Where’s Louie?”

The youth gouged the zit a last time and reached for an intercom set mounted on the connecting door. Lloyd said, “Don’t do that,” and motioned for Kapek to walk ahead of him. The kid shrugged, and Kapek pushed through the door. Lloyd was right behind him, tingling at the thought of a razzle-dazzle interrogation.

The garage proper was huge, with pneumatic grease racks, sliding drawers full of auto parts, and a large drive-in space leading to a back entrance and work area. Lloyd and Kapek walked slowly, catching cop-wise squints from the mechanics working beneath the racks. A heavyset man glanced at them, and Lloyd recognized him from his R&I snapshot: Luis Calderon.

He walked over and smiled, revealing buck teeth and a fortune in dental gold. “Good afternoon, Officers. Looking for me?”

Lloyd flashed his badge. “Hopkins, L.A.P.D. This is Special Agent Kapek, F.B.I. We’d like to talk to you.”

Calderon sighed. “Have I got a choice?”

Lloyd sighed back. “Yeah, you do. Here or Rampart Station.”

“I’ve already seen it,” Calderon said. “Let’s go out back and get some air.”

Catching an edge in his voice, Lloyd said, “No. Your office.” Calderon sighed again and started walking toward the garage’s street entrance. Lloyd tapped him on the shoulder. “No, Louie. Your *real* office, where you’ve got your desk and your files and your invoices.”

Louie turned around and walked over to and up a flight of wooden stairs next to the tool bin. Lloyd let Kapek get between them, knowing the mechanic/hood’s reaction to a fed roust was out of kilter. When Calderon opened the office door, he squeezed in ahead of him and quickly sized up the room. Soot-stained walls, paper-cluttered desk, refrigerator and a *Playboy* Playmate tacked to the wall, probably hiding a safe. Two phones on the desk, one red, one black; a clipboard holding notebook paper leaning against the red one. Nothing incriminating at first glance.

Calderon opened the refrigerator and took out a Coors, then sat down behind the desk. Popping the can, he said, “Topped out my parole, topped out my probation. Pay my taxes and don’t associate with no criminal types. My only vice is brew. I’m a righteous sudser. If outfits were legal, I’d geez the shit. I’m a suds-guzzling motherfucker. I pour the shit on my Rice Krispies in the morning, and sometimes I even shave with it. I give my dog a brew chaser with his Alpo. If I was a fag, I’d squirt the shit up my ass. I am a righteous beerhound motherfucker. So how come you’re coming on like storm troopers, when all the Rampart cops know Likable Louie likes to cooperate?”

Lloyd breathed the spiel in, savoring the tension that fueled it. He looked over at Kapek, who was chuckling with genuine amusement, and said, “I don’t work out of Rampart, and I didn’t come here to catch your Richard Pryor shtick. I could roust your workers for green cards and get myself a bonaroo immigration bust, and I’d love to run the numbers on your engine blocks. A third time receiving conviction is a nickel minimum. State time, Louie, and what you get up the ass there ain’t Coors.”

Louie Calderon sipped beer. Lloyd saw that his first salvo was on target, but not a wounder. Sensing that Kapek was being quiet out of real respect, he bored in: “You snitching for Rampart Dicks, Louie?”

Calderon smiled; Lloyd could almost feel the fat man’s blood pressure chill out as he said, “It’s well known that Likable Louie likes to cooperate.”

Lloyd twisted a wooden chair around and sat down in it, facing Calderon. Smiling and hooking a thumb over his back at Kapek, he said, “Louie, that man over there is an F.B.I. Criminal Division agent. Why haven’t you asked me about him?”

“Because unless he wants a boss transmission overhaul, I don’t care if he stays, lays, prays or strays.”

“How come you’ve got two phones, different colors?”

“The black phone’s for business, the red phone’s my hot line to the White House. Ronnie calls me up sometimes. We chase pussy together.”

“Who’s your connection at Rampart Dicks?”

“Who’s your tailor? Your suit sucks.”

The black phone rang. Calderon picked it up and spoke into it in Spanish. Lloyd raised his eyebrows at Kapek; the F.B.I. man said, “Not a word.” Shaking his head, Lloyd watched Likable Louie talk a blue streak, then hang up and say, “Okay, let’s see if I can scope this out. You need a favor, and someone at Rampart said I could help. You came on strong to test me, to see if I could be trusted. I’m tired of playing games. What do you need?”

Lloyd was reaching for his most disarming smile when the red phone rang. Louie picked up the receiver and said, “Yes,” then nodded and wrote on the clipboard. Lloyd squinted and saw that the top sheet of paper was half covered with pencil scrawl.

Calderon said yes a final time and hung up. Lloyd looked at the veins in his neck and saw the signs of a slamming heart. “Who’s your connection at Rampart Dicks?”

Louie’s voice was hoarse; Lloyd could tell that he was getting genuinely befuddled. “Why you keep asking me that, man?”

Lloyd’s third volley began with his most evil shitkicker glare. “I grew up in Silverlake. I was in the Dogtown Flats back when you were in the Alpines. My parents still live over on Griffith Park and St. Elmo, so I like things safe around here. Rampart does a pretty good job of keeping the peace, because they’ve got snitches like you to rat off the bad dudes that everybody hates. You get to hire wetbacks and turn over some stolen parts, and my mom and dad go to sleep safe at night. Right, Louie?”

“R-r-r-right,” Louie stammered.

Lloyd stood up and pulled a .45 automatic from his shoulder holster. Holding it in front of Louie Calderon’s trembling face, he said, “There’s these three guys perving on women and taking out banks, and maybe they got their pieces from you. Here’s the pitch: if you turned the pieces, you’ve got twenty-four hours to give me the names. If you didn’t, you’ve got forty-eight hours to find out who did, and who he sold them to. If I don’t hear from you in forty-eight one way or the other, I go to the commander of Rampart Dicks and snitch you off to him as the kingpin motherfucking gun dealer of L.A. County.” He dropped his Robbery/Homicide business card on the desk and reholstered the gun. “Be cool, homeboy.”

Back at the car, Kapek looked at Lloyd and said, “Jesus fucking Christ.”

Lloyd unlocked the door and got in. “Meaning Calderon?”

Kapek took the passenger seat. “No, you. How much of that was bluff?”

“Everything but my threat. Calderon had that self-satisfied look, and he had a shitload of wetbacks working for him, and he didn't want us to see his office. My guess is that he's snitching dope dealers to the Rampart narks in exchange for immunity on the illegals. I know the squad commander at Rampart—he'll let minor shit slide for good information, but he's death on violent crime. If he finds out Louie's dealing guns, Louie's ass is fucking grass."

"But is he *our* gun dealer?"

"I don't know. The important thing is that he's scared. He's between Lieutenant Buddy "Bad Ass" Bagdessarian and me on one side, the robbers and getting a rat jacket on the other. We've got to put a twenty-four tail on him—your men—he's too hip to local cops. He's an old homeboy, a criminal with contacts, and he may damn well *not* be our gun dealer, but be able to put the finger on him, or he may snitch off the robbers straight out to save his ass with Buddy. Either way, we're set. How soon can you implement the surveillance?"

"As soon as you drop me off at Central Office. What are you going to do?"

Lloyd hit the ignition and gunned the car out onto Tomahawk Street. "Read all the paperwork again, then write up my ideas for Brawley at Van Nuys Dicks. Then I'm going to visit an old pal of mine. He's a superior court judge, and he's senile and a right-wing loony. He gets his rocks off issuing search-and-seizure warrants. I buy him a case of Scotch every Christmas, and he signs whatever I ask him for. Right before Louie's forty-eight are up, I'm going in his front door with a .12 gauge and due process to seize every scrap of paper he's got. You like it?"

Kapek was pale; his voice was shaky. "Jesus fucking Christ."

"You said that before. One other thing. I'm almost positive that the reason Calderon didn't want us in his office is the red phone. He's either taking bets or running a bootleg message service."

"What's that?"

"A two-way answering service. Mostly it's used by parole absconders and their families. He had a clipboard with writing on it next to the phone—messages for sure. Calderon's house is right next to the garage, and he's probably got someone there monitoring an extension all the time. Sometimes those numbers are legit Ma Bell handouts; sometimes illegal hookups that can't be traced. I want a tap on all Calderon's lines. That requires a federal warrant—your side of the street. Can you swing it?"

Kapek's color was returning, but a thin layer of sweat was creeping over his forehead. He wiped it off with his sleeve and said, "Monday at the earliest. Federal judges *all* go incommunicado on the weekends to avoid warrant hassles. You really want these guys, don't you?"

Lloyd smiled. "I'm probably getting stress-pensioned soon, against my will. I intend to go out in true hot-dog fashion." He pulled up in front of the downtown F.B.I. building, and Kapek got out. Highballing it to Parker Center, the junior G-man's pale face stayed fixed in his mind, and he knew he had taken over the investigation.

With twenty-eight sleepless hours behind him, Lloyd pushed *his* investigation for another twenty-four flat out.

At Parker Center he checked the "monicker" file for every nickname variation of "Shark," coming away with a large assortment of data pertaining to black youth gangs. Useless trivia. An R&I check of male Mexican registered sex offenders with a cunnilingus M.O. yielded seven names, but three of the men were currently in prison and the other four were in their fifties—way above Sally Issler's and Christine Confrey's "late twenties, early thirties" appraisal. The only remaining option was to add the "Shark" and oral sex abuse facts to the roll call reports and distribute the word to all L.A.P.D. informants.

Peter Kapek called in the early evening. Louie Calderon was under constant rolling surveillance. The agents would be keeping a detailed log on his movements and would be running vehicle and address checks on all persons he came into contact with. A team of agents was going over his record for possible armed robbery connections. The Likable Louie angle was covered, as were continuing probes into the recent pasts of Robert Hawley, Sally Issler, John Eggers and Christine Con frey. Come Monday, Channel 7 *Eyewitness News* would leak its "cautionary" report on the bank robbery/extortion gang, without mention of the sex assault facts. This would leave the families of the male victims open for interrogation on the investigation's "Big Question": *how did the robbers get the information on the two extramarital affairs?*

At home late that night, Lloyd phoned in the vice squad query he had mentioned to Kapek, then read the existing files and applied his thinking solely to that question. He came up with four logical answers:

Through connections to the victims' families;

Through connections to the victims' friends and acquaintances;

Through connections at the two banks;

Through the random factor: overheard conversations at meeting places such as bars, restaurants and other public gathering spots, and through informational sources that the four suspects have either consciously or unconsciously refused to reveal.

Knowing that the fourth "answer" was the most likely, Lloyd read through the case file two more times, then wrote out a memorandum stating his conclusions.

> 0330 hrs; 12/11/84.
> To: S.A. Peter Kapek, Det. Lieut. S. Brawley.
> Re: Hawley/Issler–Eggers/Confrey Investigation.
>
> Gentlemen:
>
> Having participated in every aspect of this investigation, and having read the case file a dozen times, I have come to one conclusion concerning the robbery gang's access to information on the four victims, one supported by sound suppositions based on existing facts. We know that Robert Hawley and John Eggers, both middle-aged bank managers, are as yet not connected to each other in any discernible personal or professional way. Exhaustive record searches have turned up no common denominators other than:
>
> 1. Identical professions;
> 2. Long-term marriages that appear to be flourishing despite the fact that both men are engaged in extramarital affairs;
> 3. The said extramarital affairs themselves, both involving women in their late twenties.
>
> The same absence of connections exists between the two women

> involved. All our victims live and work in the San Fernando Valley, yet interrogations and cross-checks of credit card records show that these two sets of clandestine lovers have not even dined in the same restaurants or drunk in the same bars as each other, at any time in the course of their affairs. The odds of a criminal gang divining the existence of two such potentially lucrative and jeopardy-prone liaisons separately is preposterous. I think there is a viable Hawley/Issler–Eggers/Confrey link, one that the four principals are either willfully or subconsciously suppressing. I believe all four principals should be induced to undergo rigorous polygraph tests, and, should that fail to reveal the link, Pentothal and/or hypnosis questioning—radical investigatory measures that I think are justified in this case. Also, since the basic facts of this series of crimes will be aired and published by the media late tomorrow (released by me in the interest of a public safety precaution), I deem it advisable that the four principals be taken into custody and held without media access on Monday morning, in order to avoid repercussions deriving from familial reaction to exposure of the two affairs. I undertook the media release on my own authority, realizing the full implications. Both my newspaper and television contacts told me they would include a plea for information along with their coverage, and pass said information along to us immediately.
>
> Respectfully,
> Lloyd W. Hopkins,
> #1114,
> Robbery/ Homicide
> Division

Finishing, Lloyd looked out his kitchen window and saw that it was dawn. Feeling the family angle gouging at him, he walked through the downstairs of the house that he once shared with four women; the four rooms he had apportioned himself in their absence. Every step made him both more exhausted and more aware of the need to work. Finally he gave in to the need and slumped into the big leather chair where he used to sit with Penny.

No thoughts came, and neither did sleep. Staring at the telephone, hoping it would ring, supplied one minor brainstorm: Louie Calderon's phone number or numbers. Lloyd called the top supervisor at Bell and gave his name and badge number, then feverishly asked his question. The woman came back with a sadly unfeverish answer: Luis Calderon of 2192 Tomahawk St., L.A., had one house and one business phone—with the same number. The red phone was total bootleg.

More numbing sleeplessness followed, temporarily interrupted by a call from Peter Kapek. The first surveillance shift had just reported that Louie Calderon had left his pad only once, at 6:00 A.M. He walked to the corner and bought a case of beer. "Beer-guzzling motherfucker," Kapek said, promising to call with the next shift's report.

Lloyd shaved, showered and forced himself to eat a packet of cold luncheon meat, chased with a pint of milk and a handful of vitamins. Still unable to sleep, he checked the mailbox for the previous day's mail. There were three bills and a postcard from Penny, Fisherman's Wharf on the front, her perfect script on the back: Daddy—Hang in. Roger's dog peed on Mom's beloved carpet. Rog refused to pay for the cleaning. Mom's response: "Your father, despite his many faults, was housebroken and never cheap." Hang in, Daddy. Love Love Love—Penguin.

Now Lloyd's shot at blissful unconsciousness was broken up by an injection of hope. Feeling a second mental wind coming on, he dialed the home number of Judge Wilson D. Penzler, prepared to listen to a long right-wing rhapsody before making his warrant request. The judge's housekeeper answered, and said that His Honor was in Lake Tahoe and would be returning home and to the bench on Wednesday. Lloyd hung up, then picked up the receiver to call Buddy Bagdessarian at Rampart Dicks and blow the whistle on Louie Calderon. His finger was descending on the first digit when caution struck. No, Buddy would blow the plan by going straight for Louie's throat. Better to give the beer guzzler some slack.

Daylight came and went. Lloyd remained fitfully awake, swinging on a brain tether of sharks, old neighborhood homeboy-crooks and his family. He was debating whether to turn on the lights or sit in darkness when the phone rang.

All he got out was "Speak" before Kapek came on the line. "Third shift just radioed. The beerhound, his wife and rug rats just took off. They're following cautiously. I also grabbed Calderon's jail jacket. The K.A.s are being checked out. What have *you* been doing?"

Lloyd tingled as the idea took hold. "Thinking. Gotta run, Peter. I'll call you tomorrow." He hung up and grabbed his burglar tools from the kitchen, then ran for his L.A.P.D. Burglar Mobile.

Likable Louie's One-Stop Pit Stop and the built-on adobe house were dark and silent as Lloyd parked on the opposite side of Tomahawk Street and got up his B&E guts. Pulling on surgical rubber gloves, he brought his previous visit to the garage to mind and thought of access routes. The house was probably too well secured; the street door too exposed. There was only the back way in.

Lloyd checked the contents of his burlap "burglar bag" and pulled out a battery-operated drill and an assortment of bits, a set of lock picks, a jimmy, a can of Mace for watchdog debilitation and a large five-cell flashlight. He dug in the backseat and found an old briefcase left by another officer, stuck his tools inside it, then walked down the alley that cut diagonally across Tomahawk Street.

A full moon allowed him a good view of the back entrance, and music blasting from adjoining houses took care of any noise he might make. Lloyd looked at the barbed-wire fence encircling the work area and resigned himself to getting cut; he looked at the pulley-operated steel door and knew it was the window next to it or nothing.

Taking a deep breath, he tossed the briefcase over the fence and hoisted himself up the links. His right hand ached from his Frisco bookcase smashing, and he had to favor it all the way to the top. When he reached the barbed wire, he rolled into it, letting his jacket take the clawing until the last possible second, then hooking the strands with his index fingers, gouging his legs until he was free of sharp metal and there was nothing left but a twelve-foot drop. Then he pushed himself off with all his weight, landing feet first on a patch of oil slick blacktop.

No dog; no sounds of approach. Lloyd picked up the briefcase and took the flashlight from it, then walked to the window and compared its circumference to his own bulk. Deciding it would be a tight but makable squeeze, he smashed in the glass with the end of the flashlight and tossed in the briefcase. Then he elbowed himself through the hole, his jacket again taking the brunt of the damage, his legs getting another brief tearing. Coming down hands first into the garage, the smell of gas and motor oil assaulted him.

Still no dog; still nothing to indicate he had been spotted. Lloyd got to his feet and picked up the flashlight and briefcase, then took his bearings. As his eyes got used to the darkness, he picked out the stairway leading up to Louie Calderon's private office.

Lloyd tiptoed over and up the stairs, then tried the door. It was unlocked. He deep-breathed and pushed it open, then flicked on the flashlight and shined it in the direction of the desk. The beam illuminated the red phone and clipboard dead-on.

He walked to the desk, memorizing the exact positions of the invoices and beer cans on top of it, then took a pen and notepad from his back pocket and sat down in Louie Calderon's chair. Holding the flashlight in his left hand, he pushed aside a half-finished Coors and put down the pad in its place. Centering the beam right on top of the clipboard, the office around it went totally dark, and he did his transcribing in a tunnel of eye-grating light.

12/11—A.M.—Ramon V.—Call 629-8811 (mom & bro.) *before* you talk to P.O.

12/11—P.M.—Duane—Rhonda talked to friends in P.S., Stan Klein returning Monday night *late*, remember to call Mon. nite—H.(654-8996)—W.(658-4371)—wants $.

12/11—P.M.—Danny C.—Call home.

12/11—P.M.—Julio M.—Call home.

12/11—P.M.—George V.—Call Louise, Call P.O. No violation.

Completing the copy-over, Lloyd put the pad back in his pocket and returned the beer can to its proper place, pleased that it was a bootleg service rather than a bookie drop. He turned his flashlight toward the floor and retraced his steps downstairs, grabbing a box of baby moon hubcaps on his way to the front door, hoping to put the onus on punks out for a quick score. Driving home, he got his usual post-burglary shakes, followed by his usual post-B&E knowledge: *crime was a thrill.*

In his kitchen, Lloyd copied over the transcribed names and phone numbers for checking against Louie Calderon's K.A. file, then called up the three numbers he had gleaned.

The first one was a sad non-connection. Pretending to be a friend of "Ramon," Lloyd asked his mother about his whereabouts, learning that he had been cut loose from Chino on Friday and hadn't as yet contacted his parole officer or family. The woman was terrified that he was back in Silverlake and on smack.

The two numbers for "Rhonda" were even sadder—both recorded messages that boomed "prostitution" loud and clear: "Hi, this is Rhonda. If you've called for my business and your pleasure, or the converse, leave a message. Bye!"

"This is Silver Foxes. Beautiful women of every persuasion for every occasion. Please leave your name, customer number and wishes at the tone."

Lloyd put down the phone, then added the information to his K.A. check-out list. The singsong lilt of the last message stayed with him as he turned out the lights and flopped down on the couch. While he waited for the sleep that he knew had to come, he toyed with the words. An exhaustion gibberish crept over him. He knew what was behind it: the occasions of *his* persuasion were over. The finality of the thought helped, and unconsciousness was just about there when he grabbed at an escape hatch: *an apocalypse could save him.* The thought was too scary to toy with. Lloyd slammed the hatch shut with every ounce of his will and slept dreamlessly.

14

Clockwork.

Rice looked at his watch as he nosed the ’78 Malibu into the shade of a stand of trees by the freeway off-ramp. At 9:43 he’d glommed the car; at 9:56 he’d picked up the brothers, who were outfitted for bear and looking greedy. At 10:03 he stopped at a 7-11 on the edge of Hollywood for a last-minute acquisition—a brainstorm—and now, at 10:22, there was nothing left but to do it. He glanced at Bobby and Joe as he set the brake. Their suits fit, and their off-color facial hair made them look almost non-Mexican. Their briefcases were big and scuffed. It was all running perfect. “Now,” he said.

They walked the half block to the corner of Pico and Westholme and waited for the light. When it turned green, Rice took the lead, striding ahead of the brothers. In front of the bank, he peered through the window and framed the scene inside: six tellers stations on the left, roped-off waiting line with no one standing in it, the execs at their desks in the carpeted area on the right. No armed guards; no sign of Gordon Meyers; the surveillance camera sweeping on its tripod above the doors. *Perfection.*

The brothers caught up, and Rice let them go through the doors first. When they were halfway to the teller area, he took a can of 7-11 shaving cream from his jacket pocket, shook it and fired a test spritz at the ground. When it hit the pavement, it hit *him*: when you look into his eyes, you’ll know.

Rice pushed the doors open, wheeled and extended his right arm at the camera, missing his first spray, catching the lens on-center with the second. Coming off his toes, he saw that no one in the desk area had seen him, and that Joe and Bobby were dawdling by a cardboard display near the rear teller’s station. He reached into his briefcase and pulled out his .45, then let the spray can drop to the floor. The man at the front desk looked up at the noise and saw the gun. Rice shouted, “Robbery! Everybody be real quiet or you’re gonna be real dead!”

For a second, everything froze. Heads darted up behind the tellers’ counter; the Garcias pulled out their .45s and moved into position, their briefcases held open. Then little gasps and flutters took over, and Rice saw everything go blackish red. Swallowing, he heard a scream from a woman staring at Joe Garcia’s silencered piece; “Oh my Gods” were bombarding him from every corner of the bank. Swallowing what tasted like blood, he ran to Bobby, shoved his briefcase at him and said, “Three minutes. Fill it up.”

Bobby flashed his shark grin and leveled his gun at the teller directly in front of him, hissing, “Feed the shark, motherfucker, or you die.” The man fumbled packets of currency into the briefcase, and Bobby shoved Rice’s briefcase over to the next station, growling, “You, too, bitch—you fucking too.” The woman dumped in whole cash and change drawers, and coins spilled over the counter onto the floor. When both tellers backed up and showed empty drawers, then ducked to their knees, Bobby slid down to the next station, catching a shot of Joe out of the corner of his eye. Little Bro had already hit three stations and was holding a shaky bead on the tellers. Tears and sweat were pouring off his face, soaking his phony beard. His face was as red as a baby’s, and his lower lip was flapping so hard his whole head shook along with it. From somewhere in the bank Duane Rice was shouting, “Where’s the fucking security boss!” sounding like a stone loony. Bobby maneuvered both briefcases and his piece too in front of the last teller, going wired when he saw it was a foxy young blonde.

“Where’s the guard! Where’s the fucking security man!”

Bobby heard Rice’s shouts, then turned to scope out the blonde. She had her three drawers open and the money stacked on the counter. Bobby scooped it into the briefcase closest to him, tickling the girl’s chin with his silencer as he clamped the case shut. “You like seafood, chiquita?” he said. “You like a nice juicy shark sausage? Go fine as wine with a nice blond furburger.”

Rice saw the whole bank shake in front of his eyes. His voice sounded like it wasn’t his, and the people cowering at their desks looked like scary red animals. He turned around so he wouldn’t see them, and saw Sharkshit Bobby talking trash to a young woman teller. He was wondering whether to stop it when Gordon Meyers walked out of a door next to the vault.

And he knew.

Rice raised his .45; Meyers saw him and turned to run. Rice squeezed off three shots. The back of Meyers’ white shirt exploded into crimson just as he felt the three silencer kicks. The dinged-out ding jailer crashed into an American flag on a pole and fell with it to the floor. The bank became one gigantic blast of noise, and through all of it, Rice heard a woman’s voice: “Scum! Scum! Scum!”

Bobby turned around at the blonde’s final epithet, and saw a dead man on the floor and Duane Rice and his brother gesturing for him to *move.* He turned to give the girl a *Jaws* theme good-bye, and caught a wad of spittle square in the face. Wiping it off, he saw her huge open mouth and knew that whatever she said would be the truth. He jabbed his .45 at her teeth and fired twice. The shots blew off the back of her head. Bobby saw blood and brains spatter the wall behind her as she was lifted off her feet. Recoil spun him around, and then Joe was there, grabbing the two briefcases and shoving him toward the doors.

Outside, Rice was standing on the sidewalk with the third briefcase, jamming a fresh clip into his piece. When the brothers crashed through the doors all sweat, tears and head-to-toe tremors, he shoved the briefcase at Joe and managed to get out, “Go around the corner to the car,” from somewhere cool inside his own shakes. The Garcias *moved*, stumble-running, the three packages of money banging against their legs. Rice was about to follow when a siren came out of deep nowhere, and a black-and-white with cherry lights flashing zoomed down the sidewalk straight at him.

Rice made frantic flagging motions and fell to his knees as if wounded, holding the piece inside his right jacket pocket, knowing the silencer would cut down his range to close to nothing. When the patrol car decelerated and braked, he held his ground, knowing they had to have seen him; when it did a final fishtail, he counted to ten, got to his feet and pointed his .45 at the windshield.

The cops inside were less than four feet away and about to come out the doors with shotguns when he squeezed the trigger seven times, the gun at chest level. The windshield exploded, and Rice flung himself to the ground and rolled toward the passenger door, ejecting the spent clip, jamming in another. When both doors remained shut, he stood up, saw two blood-soaked blue uniforms and gasping faces and fired seven more times, all head shots. Blood and bone shrapnel sprayed his face, and in the distance he could hear other sirens screaming.

Suddenly he felt very calm and very much in control. He ran through the bank parking lot and down the alley that paralleled Graystone Drive, then vaulted a chain link fence, coming down into a cement backyard. The driveway led him out to the street, and there were Joe and Bobby, standing by the ’81 Chevy Caprice. No neighbors; no nosy kids; no eyeball witnesses.

Rice walked across front lawns to the Chevy and unlocked the driver’s-side door, then the passenger’s. The brothers got in the back with the briefcases and huddled down without being told. Rice started the car and backed out, then drove slowly down Graystone to Westholme, then across Pico to the freeway. When they were headed north on the 405, the sudden screech of sirens became deafening. The fifty-foot freeway elevation gave him a perfect view of the bank and the street in front of it. It was bumper-to-bumper cop cars spilling shotgun-toting fuzz. Choppers were starting to fly in from the east. It looked like a war zone.

Rice drove cautiously in the middle lane; the challenge of holding down panic in an unfamiliar vehicle kept his mind off the past ten minutes. Moving out of the area, the cop noises subsided, except for occasional black-and-whites highballing it past in the opposite direction. Then when he hit Wilshire, it sounded like choppers and sirens were right there inside the car, and he remembered he wasn’t alone.

The copter/siren noise was the combination of Joe Garcia sobbing and wheezing, and Bobby trying to talk. Rice thought of freeway roadblocks and pulled onto the Montana Avenue exit. He turned to look at the brothers, and saw that they were still on the floor, with their arms around each other, so he couldn’t tell who was who. The sight was obscene, and the dried cop blood he felt on his face made it worse. Coming down onto a peaceful, noiseless street, he scrubbed his cheeks with his sleeve and said, “Act like fucking human beings and we’ll walk from this.”

Bobby untangled himself from his brother and the collection of briefcases. Rice checked the rearview and saw him lean into the backseat, then help Joe up. When he saw their unglued beards, he ripped off his own and sized them up for survival balls. Joe was twitching and sitting on his hands to control his shaking; Sharkshit looked like he was two seconds from a giggling fit that would last until his lungs blew. Knowing they were punk partners at best, he said, “Take off your beards, and your jackets and shirts. We’re going to ditch the car, then go to my motel and chill out. Bobby, you do your shark act and you are one dead greaser.”

Bobby winced. His voice was low, nothing like a giggle. “I had to, Duane. I knew what that bitch was gonna say, and only priests can say that to me.” He started mumbling in Latin, then grabbed one of the briefcases off the floor. His garbled rosaries were hitting fever pitch as he reached in and pulled out a packet of hundreds and yanked the tab.

Black ink exploded from the wad of bills, sharp jets that hit Bobby in the face and deflected off his chest to cover the back windows. A second series of sprays burst over Joe, and he threw himself on top of the briefcase and smothered the residual jets with his body. Rice pulled to the curb and screamed, “Take off your shirts and roll down the windows!” and Bobby wiped ink from his eyes and ripped off his beard and starting pawing with it at the window beside him.

Leaning over into the backseat, Rice threw an awkward right fist at Bobby’s face, a glancing blow that forced him to stop his scrubbing and reflexively flinch away, leaving the window handle exposed. Rice pushed himself toward it and cranked it down, just as Joe, his torso soaked jet black, lowered the opposite one. Hissing “*The back*,” Rice struggled from his suitcoat and ripped off his white shirt. He passed them to Joe, who pushed them into the back window and let them absorb ink until they were saturated. When they were useless sopping rags, he pulled them away and let the remaining ink soak down into the top of the seat. Then he stripped to the waist and started pulling off his brother’s clothes, murmuring, “Easy, Bobby. Easy. The watchdog is here.”

Rice looked at the ink-streaked window and saw that it could pass for a bad “smoky tint” job; he looked at the Garcias and knew that the tagalong had bigger balls from the gate. “We’re going to Hollyweird, homeboys,” he said. “Just three bare-chested studs out for a ride.”

A half hour later, Rice stopped in front of an abandoned welfare hotel on Cahuenga, two blocks from the Bowl Motel. He turned off the engine, got out and checked the trunk. No spare clothes, only a ratty-looking sleeping bag. He grabbed it, then shoved it through the side window at Joe Garcia, who was still baby-talking Bobby. “Wrap the briefcases up in this, and walk your brother down to my pad. Act like Chicano punks on the stroll and you won’t get rousted. I’ll take the money and catch up with you.” He looked at the black film on their chests, then walked back to the garage that he hoped to fucking God was still deserted.

It was.

Rice cleared an entry path, kicking away mounds of empty T-bird bottles, and then walked to the car. Joe and Bobby were standing mutely beside it, the sleeping bag rolled erratically at their feet. Rice said, “Move,” then backed the car into the garage and closed the rickety door on it.

Returning to the street, he started feeling good. Then he picked up the sleeping bag, and two dimes and a penny fell out of the folds and hit the pavement. Ahead of him, he saw the Garcias turn into the alley behind the motel. He tried to think of Vandy and the rescue mission, but the chump change on the ground wouldn’t let him.

15

Driving out Wilshire to the West L.A. Federal Building, Lloyd knew that the street scene was somehow off, that something was missing. Passing the Winchell's Donut joint that the local cops favored, it hit him: he hadn't seen a black-and-white since Beverly Hills, and that one was B.H.P.D. Flipping on his two-way, the dispatcher told him why: "Code Four. Code Four. All patrol units at Pico and Westholme and bank area not directly involved in crowd control or house-to-house search resume normal patrol. Code Four. Code Four."

Lloyd attached his red light and turned on his siren, then hung a U-turn and sped to Pico and Westholme. "Bank" flashed "Them," and "house-to-house search" meant violence. When he was two blocks from the scene, he passed a string of patrol cars driving slowly north with their headlights on.

Feeling a wave of nausea, Lloyd floored the gas, then decelerated as Pico, a barricade of sawhorse detour signs and a streetful of nose-to-nose black-and-whites, appeared in his windshield. He braked and parked on the sidewalk, then ran the remaining block, pinning his badge to the front of his suit coat.

Two young officers with shotguns noticed him and stepped over a sawhorse, turning the muzzles of the .12 gauges downward when they saw his badge. Catching their red faces and rubber knees, Lloyd said what he already knew: "One of ours?"

The taller of the young cops answered him in a voice trying hard to be detached. "Two of ours, two dead inside the bank. No suspects in custody. It happened forty-five minutes ago. What division are you—"

Lloyd pushed the officer aside and stepped over the detour sign, then walked around the corner to Pico, elbowing his way through the most crowded crime scene he had ever witnessed. Knots of plainclothes cops were huddled together, conferring over notepads, straining to hear each other above the radio crackle put out by dozens of official vehicles; young patrolmen were standing by their units looking fierce, scared and about to burst with rage. Cherry lights were still whirling, and the sidewalk was packed with forensic technicians carrying cameras and evidence kits. Shouted conversations were competing with the radio noise, and Lloyd picked out bits and pieces and knew it was *Them.*

" … guy inside said .45 autos, suppressors and—"

" … this spic was talking dirty to this teller and then just fucking offed her and—"

"One woman said one white, two Mexican, another said all white. This is the —"

In the distance, Lloyd could see the top of a forensic arc light reflecting a red shimmer. He shoved past a team of paramedics on the sidewalk directly in front of the bank, steeling himself when he saw a black-and-white sitting under the light, dried blood covering the back window.

A technician was standing beside the car, dusting a bullet clip; another S.I.D. man was squatting on the hood, his camera up against the shattered windshield, snapping pictures. Lloyd knew that he had to know, and walked over.

The remains of two young men were death frozen in the front seat. Every inch of their uniform navy blue was now the maroon of congealing blood. Both bore high-caliber entry wounds on their faces, and gaping, brain-oozing holes where the backs of their heads used to be. The driver had his service revolver unholstered on the seat beside him, and the other officer had his right hand on the butt of the unit's Remington pump, his index finger on the trigger at half pull.

Wiping tears from his eyes, Lloyd stumbled through the "Official Crime Scene" rope in front of the bank's double glass doors. A technician dusting the door handles muttered, "Hey, you can't," and Lloyd grabbed him by the lapels and shoved him toward the sidewalk, then covered his hands with his coat sleeves and pushed the doors open. Inside the bank, a cordon of Detective Division brass saw him, then stepped aside, casting worried looks among themselves.

Standing on his tiptoes, Lloyd surveyed the bank's interior, straining to see something other than the plainclothes officers who were eclipsing almost the entire floor space. By craning his neck he could pick out an S.I.D. team marking the outline of a woman's body behind the tellers' counter, and another team in front of the counter vacuuming for trace elements. A deputy medical examiner was scooping the woman's brains off the wall and into a plastic bag, and at the back of the bank, near the vault, Peter Kapek and a half dozen feds were talking to distraught-looking people.

Lloyd threaded a path in Kapek's direction. More snatches of conversation hit him, a woman whimpering, "The tall Mexican was so scared and sweet-looking," a young cop in uniform telling another, "The security guy was a real wacko, he used to talk this weird shit to me. Hey, that's Lloyd Hopkins—you know, 'Crazy Lloyd.'"

Hearing his name, Lloyd swiveled and looked at the officers, who turned around and backed into a crowd of plainclothes-men. Again standing on his tiptoes for sight of Kapek, he saw the crowd part and create a space. A second later two M.E. assistants carrying a sheet-covered stretcher walked through it, and when he saw blood seeping through the white cotton, he walked over and yanked the sheet off.

Lloyd ignored the stretcher bearers' shocked exclamations and stared at the corpse of a middle-aged white man. His chest and stomach bore three large cavities circumscribed by burned and shredded tissue, obvious high-velocity exit wounds.

Shot in the back.

.45-caliber quality holes.

Them.

Before he could redrape the dead man, Lloyd felt a hard tap on his shoulder. When he turned around, Captain John McManus was standing there, legs spread, hands on hips, his face beet red, working toward purple. They locked eyes, and Lloyd knew that backing down was the only way to win. He raised his hands, and was groping for crow-eating words when McManus stepped forward and breathed in his face: "You fucking necrophile. I told you you weren't to involve yourself in any homicide investigations, collateral to your liaison assignment or otherwise. You're off that assignment as of now. This is a double cop killing, and I don't want trigger-happy vigilante shitheads like you anywhere near it. One word of protest, and I'll have Braverton suspend you. You meddle in this case and I'll have your badge and file on you for obstruction of justice. Now go home and wait for my call."

Lloyd shouldered the captain aside and pushed his way out to the sidewalk. A TV mini-cam crew was now inside the barricades, interviewing a group of Community Relations brass. Someone shouted, "That's Lloyd Hopkins, get him!" and suddenly a microphone was in his face. He yanked the mike out of the man's hand and hurled it in the direction of the patrol car cradling the wasted bodies of two young men, then ran through the crowd to his own official vehicle, with no intention of going home.

Too angry to think beyond *Them*, Lloyd drove to Louie Calderon's place, slamming the wheel when he saw federal surveillance vehicles stationed across the street and in the alley near the back service entrance. Parking down the block by a mom-and-pop market, he defused his tension by gripping the wheel until the strain numbed his brain and a semblance of calm hit, allowing him to answer his own questions rationally.

Roust Calderon? Probe, poke, threaten and scare the shit out of him? No—the Buddy Bagdessarian/warrant approach was still best.

What happened at the bank?—"This spic was talking dirty to this teller and then just fucking offed her"; "The tall Mexican was so scared and sweet-looking." *Why was the man on the stretcher shot in the back? Did the Shark or the white man shoot the two cops?*

The only sane answer was insanity; the only strategy for now was to wait for Louie Calderon to leave, then trash his pad from top to bottom. The only easy question was whether or not to obey McManus.

No.

Lloyd settled in to wait, eyeing the surveillance unit parked a block in front of him. One hour, two, three, four. No movement except a stream of customers and mechanics leaving the garage. At dusk, he walked to the market and bought the evening editions of the *Times* and *Examiner*. The Pico Boulevard slaughter headlined both papers, and the *Times* featured the complete story of the first two robberies, complete with names, mention of the girlfriend angle and heavy speculation that the kidnap assaults were tied in to the stickup that had left four dead. The names of the two dead officers were omitted, and the bank victims were listed as Karleen Tuggle, twenty-six, and Gordon Meyers, forty-four, a recently retired L.A. County Sheriffs deputy and the bank's "Security Chief." California Federal was offering a $50,000 reward for information leading to the capture of the killer-robbers, and the L.A. City Council was putting up an additional $25,000. Predictably, Chief Gates announced "the biggest manhunt in Los Angeles history."

It all brought tears to Lloyd's eyes. He imagined himself squeezing Likable Louie's fat neck until either his brains or three names popped out. Then he saw

Calderon walk out the garage door in the flesh and get into a Dodge van at curbside. When he drove off, the fed unit was a not-too-subtle three car lengths behind.

Lloyd started getting his B&E shakes and eyed the door of the house. Then the surveillance car from the alley pulled up. The driver got out, sat down on Calderon's front steps and lit a cigarette. Lloyd hit the wheel with his palms, sending shock waves up his bad hand. Kapek, hipped by McManus to his penchant for burglary, was safeguarding the investigation from hot-dog action. Feeling wasted, powerless and unaccountably exhausted, Lloyd drove home to think.

Going through the front door, he heard coughing coming from the direction of the living room. He drew his .38, pinned himself to the entrance foyer wall and moved down it, then hit the overhead light and stepped forward, his gun arm extended and braced with his left hand. When he saw who was sitting in his favorite leather chair, he said, "Jesus Christ."

"Don't act surprised," Captain Fred Gaffaney said. "You know why I'm here."

Lloyd reholstered his .38. "No, I don't."

"Address me as 'sir.'"

Lloyd studied the witch-hunter. Gaffaney looked colder than his deep-freeze norm; drained of everything human. "What are you doing here, Captain?"

Gaffaney fingered his cross and flag lapel pin and said in the most emotionless voice Lloyd had ever heard, "My son, Officer Steven D. Gaffaney, was shot and killed in the line of duty this morning. He was twenty-two. I saw his body. I saw his brains all over the backseat of his patrol unit, and half of his scalp hanging off his head. I forced myself to look, so I wouldn't back away from coming to you."

Standing motionless in the doorway, Lloyd saw where Gaffaney was going. For a microsecond, it seemed like salvation, then he gasped against the thought and said, "I swear to you I'll find them, and if it comes down to me or them, I'll take them out. But you're thinking execution, and I'm no killer."

Gaffaney took a manila folder from his jacket pocket and laid it on the end table beside him. "Yes, you are. I know a great deal about you. In the summer of '70, when you were on loan out to Venice Vice, you befriended a young rookie who had never been with a woman. One night you borrowed a drunk wagon from Central Division and rousted a half dozen Venice hookers and brought them to the rookie's apartment. You made them a variety of offers: service the two of you, or suffer arrest for needle tracks, or outstanding warrants, or plain prostitution. They agreed to party, and you smoked marijuana with them, and fucked several of them, and the whores went away with a good deal of your money when you started feeling guilty. I have sworn depositions from three of those whores, Hopkins. I know you're trying to reconcile with your family. Think of how they'll feel when the *Big Orange Insider* runs the depositions on their front page."

Feeling the old shame settle near his heart, Lloyd said, "I've made amends to my family, and that story is ancient history—just another cheap notch on my rep. It's old stuff."

Gaffaney tapped the folder, then tapped his lapel pin. "Here's something you were probably too stoned to remember doing. After the whores left, you and that rookie had a long conversation about duty and courage. The young man doubted his own ability to kill in the line of duty, and you told him how in the Watts Riot you had killed an ‘evil’ fellow National Guardsman who had murdered a group of innocent blacks. I’ve checked your old unit’s records. Your squad leader, Staff Sergeant Richard Beller, was presumed to have been killed in the riot, but his body was never found, and he was not seen skirmishing with any rioters. He was, however, on scout patrol with you on the night he disappeared. That rookie is now a lieutenant in Devonshire Division. He’s a born-again Christian, and a protege of mine. I have a sworn affidavit from him, detailing your activities that night in ’70, repeating your conversation almost verbatim. Lieutenant Dayton has a brilliant memory. What’s the matter, Hopkins? You’re looking weak.”

Transfixed by a nightmare flashback of Richard Beller’s corpse, Lloyd trembled and tried to speak. His tongue and palate and brain refused to connect, and he shook even harder.

“So you see the position you’re in,” Gaffaney said. “I despise you, but you are the finest detective the Department has ever produced, and I need you.” He pointed toward the dining room. “On your table are copies of the existing reports on the Pico-Westholme homicides. I understand the robbery is connected to two others you were working with the feds on, so that gives you an edge. I’m throwing all my clout into getting you assigned to the investigation, on your own autonomy. I’m sure I’ll succeed. Whatever you need, from other reports to men for shitwork, you’ll get—just call me. If you don’t comply, I can guarantee your crucifixion in the form of a murder indictment.”

Lloyd looked at his accuser and saw the faces of Richard Beller and the Hollywood Slaughterer superimposed over his mercilessly cold features. He tried to speak, but his brain was still jelly.

Gaffaney got up and walked past him to the front door. When his hand was on the latch, he said, “Get them and I’ll have mercy. But they are not to be arrested. Kill them or bring them to me.”

16

Now it was clockwork in a hurricane, staying icy in a heat wave determined to fry them to Cinder City. At 7:00, Rice gave the Garcias another check for survival balls. Bobby was quiet, sitting in a chair by the dresser, reading the Gideon Bible that came with the room. Joe was hanging drum-tight way inside himself, alternately staring at the walls and the non-inked 16K on the bed. Showered and dressed in Rice's own clothes, the tagalong looked like he had the juice to hold, the oldies but goodies he'd been softly humming for hours supplying him with the guts not to rabbit. At 7:10, for the second time that day, Rice said, "Now. Bobby, you stay here. Joe and I are going to pick up my old lady. When we get back, we'll split the money and split up. Sit still and be cool."

Bobby looked up from his Bible and made a weird gesture Rice figured was Catholic. Joe took his eyes from the stacks of money, and the tune he was humming jumped up three octaves. Rice recognized it as "Blueberry Hill," and said, "Come on, watchdog. Let's move."

They cruised down Highland in the Trans Am, then hung a right turn on Franklin and headed west toward the Mount Olympus development. Joe reached over to flip on the radio, and Rice touched his hand and said, "No. We'll buy a paper at the airport. *When we're free and clear.* Right now, you don't want to know."

Joe swallowed and returned to his humming. Rice openly scrutinized him. It looked like he was groping for words to go with the music.

At Fairfax, Rice swung over to the Strip and stopped at a stand of pay phones in a Texaco parking lot. Noting a newspaper rack beside the booths, he slipped in a quarter and nickel and forced himself to read the front page of the *Times.*

The headline screamed, "Four Killed in West L.A. Bank Stickup!" and the subheading read, "Robbery Linked to Two Others." Rice scanned the paragraphs that detailed their first two kidnap-heists, complete with the names of the victims and suspect descriptions provided by Christine Confrey, the bitch he'd saved from Sharkshit Bobby. Words jumped at him: "Largest manhunt in L.A. history"; "Stolen car by freeway off-ramp presumed to be approach vehicle, but no fingerprints discovered"; "$75,000 offered in combined reward money."

The bombshell was on page two: an artist's sketch of *him,* also courtesy of Chrissy Confrey. The resemblance was about three-quarters accurate, and Rice balled the paper up, then stepped into the booth and called Rhonda the Fox's home number.

"Hello?"

Rice breathed out in relief. "It's Duane. You want to get paid, with a little bonus for some extra info?"

“Have you found her?”

“Just about. We’re flying to New York in a few days. I need the names of some music people—solid people, no cocaine sleazebags. Do you know people who know people there?”

After a long moment of silence, Rhonda said, “Sure. But listen, I’m booked straight through until tomorrow night late. Can you meet me outside Silver Foxes tomorrow night at twelve?”

“No sooner than that?”

“I have to ask around, and that takes time.”

Rice said, “I’ll be there,” and hung up and walked back to the car. Joe swallowed a burst of song lyrics as he got in and peeled rubber up Fairfax toward the Hollywood Hills. When they were just north of Franklin, he pulled the Trans Am into a large vacant lot, wracking the undercarriage. Killing the headlights, he eased off the gas and let the car glide to a halt behind a long scrub hedge.

Turning off the ignition, Rice said, “Wait here,” then got out and waded through the hedge. The Mount Olympus access road was right in front of him, and directly across it he could see Stan Klein’s house, with no lights on and no Porsche in the driveway or on the street. Returning to the car, he unholstered his .45 and put it in the glove compartment, pulling out a pushbutton switchblade to replace it. “In and out, watchdog,” he said. “You’ve got one job and one job only. Don’t let me kill him.”

They waited.

Rice sat perfectly still and stared at the access road, waiting for lights to show in number 14; Joe made music in his head. The night cooled and a light drizzle hit the windshield. Then, just after 1:00 A.M., the lights in the house went on.

Rice nudged Joe and handed him the knife, then pointed through the windshield at their target. Joe got out of the car and walked through the hedge, rubber-kneed, his hands in his jacket pockets to kill his tremors. Rice caught up with him. They crossed the blacktop, then Rice bolted up the steps and rang the buzzer.

Voices echoed within the house; Rice heard Vandy’s, and knew from the tone that she was tired and cranky. Joe stood beside him, his eyes wide and panicky. Then the door was thrown open, and Stan Klein was standing there, flashing a shit-eating grin betrayed by tics around his temples. “Disco Duane and friend,” he said. “When you get out?”

Rice sized Klein up. Red nose from too much coke, useless muscles from too much iron pumping, bullshit dope bravado fueling him for the confrontation. Stan Man shrugged, then faked a sigh. “I don’t think she wants to see you, man.”

Voice steady, Rice said, “She doesn’t know what she wants. Go get her.”

Klein sniffed back a noseful of mucus and pointed at Joe. “Who’s this … Tonto? The strong silent sidekick? What’s shakin’, Kemo Sabe?”

Through the half-open door, Rice saw the stick skinny legs walking down a wrought-iron staircase. He moved straight toward the sight, pushing Klein backward. Joe was right behind him, sliding past Klein just as he muttered, “Hey, you can’t—”

Her.

Rice saw Vandy at the foot of the staircase, wearing a pink crewneck and kelly green cords. She looked emaciated, but her face was pure waiflike beauty. Her voice was just a shadow of her old vibrato growl: “I don’t want to go with you, Duane.”

Rice stood still, afraid to move or say the wrong thing. Joe trembled with his hands in his pockets. Stan Klein walked over to an end table by the staircase and scooped up a mound of coke with a single-edged razor blade. Squatting, he snorted it, then laughed. “You heard the lady. She doesn’t want to go with you.”

Prepared to see red and hold it down, Rice moved his eyes back and forth from Vandy to Klein and *smelled* the bank before it all went haywire. Vandy nibbling her cuticles; Klein doing another snootful of coke. Vandy looking like the wasted little girls in concentration camp pictures. Then Joe Garcia’s scared rabbit squeak: “Duane, he’s got a gun.”

Klein was standing by a row of Pac-Man machines near the living room entranceway, licking coke off his fingers and leveling a small automatic at Rice. “Come here, Annie,” he said.

Vandy walked to Klein in jerky little-girl steps. He threw his left arm around her and nuzzled her cheek without relinquishing his bead on Rice. Keeping one eye on Joe, he said, “You were fucking comic relief for the whole crowd. Everybody used you. If you weren’t such a boss car thief, we would have laughed you out of L.A. The biggest laugh was you making contacts to boost Annie’s career, gonna make her a million-dollar rock video star. Dig this on your way to the door with Pancho: I’m gonna make Annie a rock vid star. She’s gonna be the queen of porn vid first, then move up. I’m producing a flick with her and this guy I gotta pay by the inch, and I’m talking heavy double digits. Annie knows what’s good for her career, and she’s gonna do it, ’cause she knows I’m not a dumb shit dreamer like you.”

No red, but the haywire stench ate at Rice’s nostrils and made his eyes burn. “You ratted me off on my G.T.A. bust, motherfucker.”

Klein bit at Vandy’s ear, then looked directly at Rice and said, “No, Duaney-boy, I didn’t. Annie did. She got busted for prostitution and talked her way out of a drug rehab by snitching you off. Romantic, huh?”

Now the red.

Rice made a slow, deliberate beeline toward the woman he loved and her destroyer. Vandy screamed; Klein squeezed the trigger. The gun jammed, and he pulled back the slide and ejected the chambered round, then slid in another and fired. The shot went wide, tearing into the wall by the staircase. Rice kept walking. Joe pinned himself to the Pac-Man machine farthest from Klein, and stared at the man he was supposed to watchdog, who *just kept walking.* Klein fired again; the shot hit the wall directly above Rice’s head. He kept walking and was within point-blank range of his objective when Klein put the gun to Vandy’s head, took a step backward with her and muttered, “No no no no no.”

Rice halted; Joe fed himself a bomb-burst of music, pulled the switchblade from his pocket and jumped knife first, pushing the button just as Klein wheeled and aimed at him.

The pistol jammed; Vandy dropped to the floor. Joe caught Klein flush in the stomach and ripped upward with both hands. Blood spurted from his mouth, and Rice reached for the gun. Joe saw him aim it at Vandy and the dying man, and knew he was fixing to blow away the whole fucking world. He got to his feet and grabbed a portable TV from the top of the Pac-Man beside him. He swung it forward, and Rice turned and stepped into the blow, catching the plastic and glass missile head-on. He crumpled across Stan Klein's body, and Joe and Vandy ran.

17

Only repeated readings of the Pico-Westholme homicide files kept his mind off Watts in the summer of ’65, and even then, the facts that were being imprinted in his mind stuck as self-accusation rather than indicators pointing to *Them.* Karleen Tuggle, Gordon Meyers, Officer Steven Gaffaney and Officer Paul Loweth were killed by .45 gunshots, the two patrolmen and Meyers by rounds fired from the same gun, Tuggle by shots from a different piece—solid ballistics confirmation. Three for the white man; one for the Shark.

And *he* had killed Richard Beller with the same type weapon.

Eyewitness accounts were hysterical, but cross-checking them allowed him to come up with a reconstruction: the robbers enter the bank, the white man shoots shaving cream on the surveillance camera. This means that unless the lens is cleared in two minutes, the silent alarm will go off. The Mexicans hit the tellers’ stations, the Shark goes wacko at the sight of Karleen Tuggle, talks trash to her, she reacts and he blows her away. The white man is screaming for the “Security Boss.” Gordon Meyers appears, then turns tail and runs, and he shoots him in the back.

The basics were covered: no eyewitnesses outside the bank; the ’78 Malibu found by the freeway ramp, covered with glove prints, was reported stolen later that day by its owner, a rent-a-cop at a Burger King in Hollywood. Going on the assumption that the robbers lived in the Hollywood area, house-to-house checks were being initiated, the officers carrying the artist’s sketch of the white man. Approach vehicle covered.

The escape vehicle was most likely an ’81 Chevy Caprice belonging to a family around the corner from the bank. Neighbors reported it stolen three hours after the robbery. It was now the hottest car on the L.A. County Hot Sheet, and the object of an all-points bulletin. Lloyd shuddered. Any male seen driving that car was dead meat, and back in ’59 he had paid for most of his Stanford tuition by clouting Chevys.

Them.

Me.

Looking out the window at his neglected front lawn, Lloyd thought of the new *Him,* Gordon Meyers. A team of L.A.P.D. dicks were checking out his personnel record for K.A.s and possible vengeance motives, and Gaffaney had included with his paperwork a hastily compiled addendum report on the man. As dawn crept up, signifying another sleepless night, Lloyd read the report for the fifth time.

> Gordon Michael Meyers, D.O.B. 1/15/40, L.A. Graduated high school in ’58, joined sheriffs department in ’64, during a manpower shortage

> wherein they lowered their entrance requirements to recruit men. After the mandatory eighteen-month jail training, assigned to Lenox Station. Assessed as being too ineffectual for street duty, reassigned as night jailer at county jail facility for nonviolent emotionally disturbed prisoners. Kept that assignment for seventeen and a half years, until his retirement. Unmarried, parents retired in Arizona. Address: 411 Seaglade, Redondo Beach.

The phone rang.

Lloyd jerked back in his chair; the shrill noise registered as a gunshot. Realizing it wasn't, he picked up the receiver and said, "Yes?"

The seething voice on the line was McManus': "You're back on the investigation. Two heavy hitters pulled strings. Don't fuck up."

Lloyd hung up. A hideous thought crossed his mind: the condemned killer was being let out on parole. Getting to his feet and stretching, he ran mental itineraries: review the case with Kapek? No—this was *his.* Roust Calderon? No—Judge Penzler would be back in twenty-four hours to sign his warrant, and with Buddy Bagdessarian assisting they could squeeze Likable Louie to perfection. It was time to find out why Gordon Meyers was shot in the back. Another hideous thought made him wince. The .45 he had killed Richard Beller with was in his desk drawer, oiled, dum-dum loaded and encased in a shoulder rig.

Them.

Me.

Me or them.

Us.

Lloyd strapped on the weapon that had stood him through his baptism of fire, then went out to quash his murder indictment.

On Sepulveda southbound to Redondo Beach, he spotted a tail two car lengths in back of him. Decelerating and weaving into the slow lane, he saw that it was a Metro Division unmarked unit, distinguished from his own Matador by an olive-drab paint job and a giant whip antenna. Slowing to a crawl, he let the car come up on his bumper. When the driver applied the brakes, he stared in his rearview, fuming when he saw two classic Metro hot dogs in the front seat—burly, crew-cut white men in their mid-thirties wearing identical navy windbreakers: Gaffaney's or McManus' insurance against possible fuckups.

Lloyd gave the cops the finger and hung a hard right through a liquor store parking lot, fishtailing into the alley behind it. Seeing no cars or pedestrians, he punched the gas until the alley ended and angled off into a quiet residential street. He took the street at ninety, then slowed and zigzagged in a random pattern until he was within sight of the Redondo Beach Pier. Parking by a chowder stand, he looked around for the Metro unit. It was nowhere in sight. Exhilarated by the speed, Lloyd drove slowly to 411 Seaglade.

It was a garage apartment in the shadow of the pier. Lloyd parked and surveyed the front house. There was no car in the driveway, and the old white wood frame stood quiet in the early morning sunlight. No media vehicles were anywhere to be seen, and by squinting he could tell that there was no "Crime Scene" notice tacked to the door of 411. Knowing that McManus' "two heavy hitters" were Gaffaney and in all likelihood the Big Chief himself, he grabbed an evidence kit from the back seat, walked up the driveway and kicked the door in.

The burst of sunlight illuminated a dreary living room, spotlessly clean, but featuring mismatched sofa, chairs, coffee table and bookshelves. Lloyd stood in the doorway and made repeated eyeball circuits of the room, picking up a profusion of small details that spelled *loner*: expensive TV, the only wall adornments photographs of Meyers himself, alone in his sher iff's uniform and standing by himself holding a fishing reel and string of trout, no magazines or ashtrays or portable bar for guests.

Lloyd shut the door and walked into a small dining room, catching a first anomaly: all the living room furniture was squared off at right angles; here the table and chairs were haphazardly arranged. The kitchen was more loner confirmation: nothing but frozen dinners in the refrigerator, plates and dishes for one in the sink, a dozen bottles of cheap bourbon in the cupboard.

The bedroom was off to the side of the kitchen. Lloyd flicked on a wall light and tingled. Everything in the small rectangular space was immaculately clean and tidy, from the G.I. made-up bed to the perfectly aligned end table with an alarm clock dead in its middle. But the dresser had been pulled out, and the three scrapbooks stacked across it had been replaced unevenly, one upside down. The pad had been crawled.

Lloyd retraced his steps to the front door, opened his evidence kit and took out a vial of fingerprint powder and a print brush. Removing surgical rubber gloves from the kit, he put them on and limbered his fingers with a series of stretching exercises. Then he went to work to find out just how solitary Gordon Meyers was, and if the pad crawler knew his stuff.

He discovered that Meyers was a stone loner, and the crawler was a pro.

For two solid hours Lloyd dusted print-sustaining surfaces and compared fingerprint points under a magnifying glass. Concentrating on doors, doorknobs and doorjambs, he found overlap smudges and viable latents for thumb and index finger, all "grab" prints likely to have been made by a person walking through the apartment, opening and closing doors behind them. There were also smooth glove prints on the same surfaces, and on the living room bookshelves and the dust covers of the books there. All the left and right thumb and index prints matched to the tune of ten comparison points, and there were no conflicting latents to be found. Meyers and the man who searched his apartment.

For what?

Lloyd looked under the furniture, behind the books. Nothing. He checked the kitchen and dining room; nothing but cooking and eating utensils. The desk in Meyers' bedroom was nothing but a tidy or tidily rearranged collection of bankbooks, pens, pencils, paycheck stubs and I.R.S. forms, and his closet held nothing but L.A.S.D. uniforms and cheap civilian clothes.

Which left the scrapbooks.

Lloyd dusted the spines and held his magnifying glass and penlight on them to assess the results. Seeing smudged latents and what looked to be glove streaks, he began a page-by-page scrutiny of the books.

The first two books contained photographs of Gordon Meyers posing with various trophy fish, neatly mounted to the black paper in gummed edge-holders. Lloyd dusted three snapshots at random and got pristine glossy surfaces—no latents; no glove prints.

The third scrapbook was cop memorabilia—candid group shots of sheriffs deputies in uniform and Meyers himself with jail inmates in blue denim. Lloyd leafed through the book, going cold when he came to a page of snapshots with the corners poking out of their edge-holders, going colder when he saw that the opposite page held two empty photo squares.

Thinking, *check the back for writing, just like the crawler did*, Lloyd fumbled at the snapshot immediately in front of him. When his gloves made the task too unwieldy, he went *ice* cold, then dusted the crookedly replaced photos, coming away with a perfect left thumbprint on a snap of Meyers and another deputy. Holding his magnifying glass over it, he recalled comparison points from the left thumbs assumed to be Meyers'. This print was markedly different in whirls and ridges. Lloyd replaced the scrapbook, put the snapshot in an evidence envelope, packed up his kit and got the hell out of the tidy loner apartment.

Forty minutes later, Lloyd was at Parker Center, handing the powdered snapshot to Officer Artie Cranfield of S.I.D., saying, "Feed to the central source computer, the one with the D.M.V. and armed forces input. I'll be up in my office. If you score, get me a printout from R&I."

Artie laughed. "You're very authoritative today, Lloyd."

Lloyd's laugh was humorless. "I'm authorized on this, the big man himself. It's the cop killings, so please fucking hurry."

Artie took off at a jog, and Lloyd busied himself arranging the surveillance reports on Louie Calderon that littered his desk. Thoughts of calling Peter Kapek for an interagency confab crossed his mind, then he saw a memo propped up against his phone: Sgt. Hopkins—meet or call S.A. Kapek at downtown Fed bldg.—12/14—0940. He was debating whether to call or roll when Artie returned, breathless, and handed him a manila folder. "I ran the print. He's one of ours, Lloyd."

Lloyd shivered and thought: *Gaffaney*, then read through the L.A.P.D. personnel file, holding a hand over the full-face and profile snaps that were clipped to the first page.

The file detailed the twelve-year police career of Metropolitan Division sergeant Wallace Dean Collins, age thirty-four. His record was impressive: Class A fitness reports and a number of citations for "Meritorious Service." Lloyd scanned the list of Collins' "special assignments." Surveillance detail, narco, vice decoy, then a transfer to Metro on the recommendation of Captain Frederick Gaffaney. Since his rookie days, Collins had partnered with Sergeant Kenneth R. Lohmann of Central Division, and there was an addendum memo from the Central personnel officer stating that Lohmann was also flagged for Metro duty—on the next available opening.

Lloyd took his hand from the snapshot and smiled. Collins was the driver of the car tailing him down Sepulveda. Looking at the fidgeting Artie Cranfield, he said, "How'd you get the file so fast?"

Artie shrugged. "I told the clerk at Personnel Records you had special clearance from Braverton and up. Why?"

Lloyd handed the file back. "Just curious. Take this back to Records, hold on to the photo and be very quiet about this, okay?"

"Quiet as the grave," Artie said.

Lloyd drove to the downtown Federal Building, thinking of angles to cutthroat Gaffaney and kill the murder indictment now being held over his head. As he pulled to the curb at Sixth and Union, the Metro unit sidled to a stop two car lengths in back of him, Collins at the wheel.

Getting out and slamming the door, Lloyd's thoughts moved from blackmail to a double suicide scene to blow Gaffaney's career along with his own. Then curiosity about Collins crawling Gordon Meyers' pad took over, and he ran upstairs to Kapek's office, rapped on the door and said in his most commanding tone, "Come on, G-man. We're going cruising."

"Where to?"

"A hot-dog rendezvous."

They drove east through downtown L.A., Lloyd silent, with one eye on the road and the other on the Metro unit riding their tail behind a slow-moving Cadillac. Kapek fingered his acne scars and stared at Lloyd, finally breaking the tense quiet. "I've been forcing myself to concentrate on the first two robberies exclusively, and I think I may have a hypothetical connection between Hawley and Eggers."

Lloyd's mind jerked away from the plan he was hatching. "What?"

"Listen: I checked out both men's bank accounts and got something weird. They both withdrew similar large amounts of cash, on the same dates—October seventeenth and November first. Two five-hundred-dollar withdrawals for Hawley, two six-hundred-buck shots for Eggers. Non sequitur stuff—both guys are strictly check writers. These withdrawals were from their individual accounts—not the joint accounts they share with their wives. What do you think?"

Lloyd whistled, then said, "Vice. I've already put in *my* Vice query, so you call the squad commanders and have them shake down their snitches for specific info. What happened on those dates? Bookies taking heavy action? Cockfights, dogfights? I don't buy Eggers or Hawley as dopers, but I could see Sally and Chrissy doing a few snootfuls of blow, with their sugar daddys footing the bill. By the way, how did the families react to the girlfriend bit? Any feedback on that?"

Kapek breathed out sadly. "Hawley's wife moved out. Eggers lost his job, because he lied to us about Confrey, and because the big boss at Security Pacific freaked when he heard about the dead cops and blamed Eggers. Eggers' wife is still up at Arrowhead, and he went up there to work it out. Both Hawley and Eggers are refusing to talk further to us, under attorney's orders."

Lloyd said, "Shit. I wrote out a memo requesting that they be held as material witnesses to avoid that, then all hell broke loose. By the way, we're being tailed. There's a Metro unit in back of us."

Kapek looked in the rearview. "Is that what this is all about? And what's 'Metro'?"

Passing out of downtown into the East L.A. industrial district, Lloyd said, "Metro is an L.A.P.D. special crimes unit, a diversified attack force. Gang fights in Watts? Send in Metro. Too much dope in schools? Metro shakes down bubble-gum mers on their lunch hour. The unit is effective, but it's full of right-wing wackos. And what this is all about is me being watchdogged. We're going to the L.A. River and park. Follow me and do what I tell you."

Now Kapek was silent. Lloyd turned off Alameda and skirted the Brew 102

Brewery, then took the Water and Power Department road to the embankment that overlooked the bone-dry "river." The tail car remained fifty yards in back of them, and Lloyd slowed and parked at the embankment's edge. Checking the rearview a last time, he said, "I'm hoping they'll think we're meeting a snitch. Come on."

They walked down the concrete slope sideways, plaster debris crackling beneath their feet. When they reached the riverbed, Lloyd got his bearings and saw that the old maintenance shack was still there and still mounted on a cinderblock foundation to keep it from washing away during flood season. He pointed Kapek toward it, and they trudged over through an obstacle course of empty wine bottles and beer cans. When they were standing in the shade of the shack's corrugated tin door, Lloyd tilted his head sideways and caught sight of the two Metro cops peering over the edge of the embankment. "Stand here," he said. "Keep looking in the direction I take off in, and keep looking at your watch like you're expecting someone."

Kapek nodded, looking befuddled and slightly angry. Lloyd walked around the edge of the shack, then climbed the embankment on its opposite side, coming onto level ground behind a line of abandoned cars. Squatting low, he moved down the row to the end, then stood up, seeing nothing but a short patch of pavement between himself and the Metro unit, with Collins and his partner fifty yards away, still holding surveillance on Kapek.

Lloyd sprinted to the car and opened the driver's-side door. The two cops turned around at the noise and started running. Lloyd flipped open the glove compartment—nothing—then noticed an attaché case on the floorboard, "Sgt. K. R. Loh-mann" stenciled on the front. He opened it and tore through blank report forms and plastic evidence bags, and was about to give up when his hands brushed a bag that held two glossy photographs. He fumbled the bag into his inside jacket pocket and backed out of the car just as Collins loomed in front of him.

With the open door between them, Collins halted, then approached on tiptoes. Lloyd saw his partner ten yards in back of him, looking scared. When Collins moved into a cautious streetfighter's stance, Lloyd slammed the door into his legs, knocking him backward onto the ground.

Collins got to his feet and started swinging blindly; Lloyd sidestepped the blows and brought him to his knees with a left to the solar plexus. Collins sucked air and held his stomach; Lloyd balled his right fist. The old pain was still there, so he swung a short left uppercut instead. Collins grabbed his nose and fell prone, his legs twitching. Lloyd stood over him and hissed, "Tell Captain Fred I don't need a backup."

The other cop was trembling beside the car. Lloyd stepped toward him, and he backed away. Then Peter Kapek walked over, stationing himself squarely between them. Shaking his head, he looked at Lloyd and said, "Don't you get tired of walking all over people? Aren't you a little old for this kind of shit?"

18

At first he thought it was an awful new kind of rage that took over his whole body, making him ache from head to toe and vomit and see double. Then he thought it was something even stranger—a defense mechanism put out by his brain to keep the truth from driving him where everything was bright red and skunk-stenched. A tagalong *puto* cold-cocked him and took off with his woman, and if he freaked out and went crazy he was stone fucking dead, because he was the most wanted man in L.A., bullet bait for every cop who breathed.

But confronting the truth and driving the Trans Am skillfully through the hottest part of town did nothing to kill the revolt inside his body, and he couldn't tell if he was *in* a hallucination or *was* the hallucination.

At dawn he'd awakened, sprawled across Stan Klein's body. It all came back, and he got to his feet, reeling, stumbling and puking, and ran outside to the car. Driving away, he started seeing double and pulled over behind the scrub hedge and passed out. When he came to, it was better, and he drove into downtown Hollywood on side streets. Then it got brutal.

Passing the Burger King on Highland, he saw cops handing out pieces of paper to customers; other cops were knocking on doors on Selma and De Longpre and the little cul-de-sacs north of the Boulevard. Cruising by the park two blocks from the Bowl Motel, he saw more cops distributing more paper, this time to the winos who used the park as a crash pad. The motel, Sharkshit Bobby and the money was right there, free of cops, but with the *feel* of a giant booby trap. Looking up at the palm trees that bordered the place, he started to see triple, then thought he saw snipers with elephant guns hiding inside the fronds. Attack dogs started to growl everywhere, then the sound became the whir of helicopter rotors.

When he saw a German shepherd behind the wheel of a Volkswagen, something snapped, and he laughed out loud and rubbed the blood-crusted bruise that covered the left side of his face. He drove to a pay phone and called Louie Calderon at the bootleg number, and Louie screamed that the fuzz had him pegged as the gun dealer, and there was a twenty-four-hour tail on his ass. He hadn't given up any names, but the heat was huge and Crazy Lloyd Hopkins himself had hassled him.

He'd hung up and made another circuit of Highland. More cops on the street; a group of plainclothesmen house-to-housing the block where he'd stashed the '81 Caprice. He was about to make a dash for Sharkshit and the money when he noticed a scattering of paper in the gutter. He pulled to the curb, got out and picked up the first sheet he came to. It was the sketch of himself he'd seen in the newspapers, with "White Male, Age 25–33, 5′10″–6′1″, 150–180 lbs." written below it.

The Bowl Motel gave him a brief come-hither look, then blew up in his mind. Bobby had probably rabbited with the money or the cops were waiting there, trigger-happy and pumped up for glory. All he had left was Vandy.

Getting back in the Trans Am, it all came together.

Concussion.

Meet Rhonda at Silver Foxes at midnight, get *her* to make the run to the motel for the money. Promise her a big cut or nothing at all. Vandy was probably hiding out with her cocaine sleazebag friends. Force Rhonda to help find her.

Rice looked at his watch. 1:14, twelve hours since the cold-cock. A wave of nausea hit him, producing stomach cramps that shot up into his head and made his vision blur. Through the pain he got the most frightening idea of the whole horror-show past month:

Control the concussion so you can survive to get Vandy and a shot at the money and kill Joe Garcia.

Rice drove back to Stan Klein's villa and walked in the unlocked front door like he owned the place. Giving only a cursory glance to Stan Man's body and the dried lake of blood beside it, he ran upstairs to the bathroom, opened the medicine cabinet and read labels. Darvon, Placidil, Dexedrine, Percodan. He remembered a thousand Soledad bull sessions about dope and dry-swallowed two perks and three dexies. He thought of his boozehound parents walking out the door and never returning and almost retched, then walked into the bedroom and fell down on the bed. The soft surface made him think of Vandy, and when the drugs kicked in, easing his pain and juicing him with a new shaky energy, he wondered if she was worth killing for.

19

Lloyd turned on the light in his cubicle and saw that the papers on his desk had been sifted through. He looked for an inanimate object to hit, then remembered Kapek's "Aren't you a little old for this kind of shit?" and the junior G-man's disgusted good-bye when he dropped him off. Only Fred Gaffaney was worth violence, and he was much too potent to fuck with. Calmed by hatred of the Jesus freak, he took the plastic evidence Baggie from his pocket and studied the two photographs inside.

The snapshots were of Gordon Meyers and a young man, dressed in civilian clothes, seated at what looked like a restaurant or nightclub table. Meyers beamed broadly in both, but in one photo the young man was slack-jawed, as if caught by unpleasant surprise; in the other he held an arm up to cover his face.

Lloyd studied the face, knowing that he had seen the blunt cheekbones, close-set eyes and crew cut before. Then the resemblance hit him. He ran to the switchboard for a newspaper confirmation, and got it from a black-bordered photo on the second page of the *Times*: the young man in the snapshots was the late Officer Steven Gaffaney.

Lloyd smiled; the connection felt like aiming a crucifixion spike at Jesus Fred's heart. He ran back to his cubicle and dialed Dutch Peltz' number at Hollywood Station. When Dutch answered with "Peltz, talk," Lloyd said, "No time for amenities, Dutchman. I'm on the cop killings, and I need a favor."

"Name it."

"Dave Stevenson still the commander of West L.A. Station?"

"Yes."

"You still tight with him?"

"Yes."

"Good. Will you call him and ask him about Gaffaney, the dead rookie? Anything and everything, no departmental hype, the real skinny?"

Dutch said, "Call you back in ten minutes," and hung up. Lloyd waited by the phone, ready to pounce at the first ring. In eight minutes it went off, a siren shriek. He picked it up, and Dutch started talking:

"Stevenson called Gaffaney Junior a punk kid, a pain in the ass and a dummy, unquote. He was resented by his fellow officers because he used to preach religion to them and because he used to brag about his father and how his clout would let him climb the promotion ladder in record time. The kid was also a thief. He stole clerical supplies up the ying-yang and used to rip off ammo from the armory. Interesting, huh?"

Lloyd whistled. "Yeah. Did Stevenson report any of this? Did he—"

Dutch cut in. "Yes, he did. He reported the thefts to Intelligence Division, rather than I.A.D., because that's Gaffaney Senior's bailiwick. Dave clammed up then. I just called a friend at Intelligence. He's going to check into it for me on the Q.T. If he gets something, I'll let you know. What are you fishing for, Lloyd?"

"I don't know, Dutch. Do me another favor?"

"Shoot."

"Call the manager at Cal Federal and set up an interview for me in forty-five minutes. He's probably been besieged by cops, but tell him I'm new on the investigation, with new questions for him."

"You've got it. Get them, Lloyd."

Lloyd said, "I will," and hung up, knowing the statement was aimed at Fred Gaffaney more than *Them.*

The California Federal manager was a middle-aged black man named Wallace Tyrell. Lloyd introduced himself in the bank's desk area, then followed him back to his private office. Closing the door behind them, Tyrell said, "Captain Peltz mentioned new questions. What are they?"

Lloyd smiled and sat down in the one visitor's chair in the room. "Tell me about Gordon Meyers."

Positioning himself carefully in the swivel rocker behind his desk, Tyrell said, "That isn't a new question."

"Tell me anyway."

"As you wish. Meyers was only with the bank for a little over two weeks. I hired him because he was a retired police officer with a satisfactory record and because he accepted a low salary offer. Aside from that, I had him pegged as a garrulous, good-natured man, one with a fatherly interest in the young policemen in the area. He—"

Lloyd held up a hand. "Slow and easy on this, Mr. Tyrell. It's very important."

"As you wish. Meyers used to buttonhole the local officers at the coffee shop next door, apparently to trade war stories. I saw him doing it several times. It was obvious to me that the officers considered him a nuisance. Also, Meyers approached several policemen who had accounts here. Basically, he impressed me as a lonely, slightly desperate type of man."

"Yet you had no thoughts of firing him?"

"No. Hiring one man to be head of security saves money and avoids having an old pensioner with a gun hanging around, reminding customers of possible bank robberies. Meyers adequately handled vault and safe-deposit-box security *and* served as a guard—without a uniform. It was extremely cost-effective. As I said before, these aren't new questions you're asking me."

Staring hard at Tyrell, Lloyd said, "How's this for new? Were there any shortages of cash or safety-box valuables during the time Meyers worked here?"

Tyrell sighed and said, "That is a new question. Yes, two customers mentioned small amounts of jewelry missing from their boxes. That happens sometimes, people are forgetful of their transactions, but rarely twice in one week. If it happened again, I was going to call the police."

"Did you suspect Meyers?"

"He was the only one *to* suspect. He was vault custodian; part of his job was to insert the signature key when the customer inserted their key—our boxes are double-locked. He could have made wax impressions of some of the bottom locks

—his application résumé said he worked as a locksmith before he joined the Sheriff's Department. Also, this is a busy time for safety-box transactions—people withdrawing jewelry for Christmas parties and cashing in bonds. If Meyers was very careful, he would have had ample opportunity to pilfer."

"Have you told any of the other investigating officers this?"

"No. It didn't seem germane to the issue."

Lloyd stood up and shook hands with the bank manager. "Thank you, Mr. Tyrell. I like your style."

"I work at it," Tyrell said.

Driving away from the bank, recent memories tumbled in Lloyd's mind. During the pandemonium following the Pico-Westholme bloodbath, he had heard one young patrolman tell another: "The security guy was a real wacko. He used to talk this weird shit to me." The cops had backed away when he noticed them, but their faces were still in his memory vault, now part of the blurred, but clearing focus of the Gaffaney offshoot of the case. Checking his dashboard clock, he saw that it was 3:40, twenty minutes until daywatch ended. Focusing only on those faces, he drove to the West L.A. Station to make them talk.

His timing was perfect.

The station parking lot was a flurry of activity, black-and-whites going in and out, patrolmen walking back and forth, carrying report notebooks and standard-issue shotguns. Standing by the locker room door, Lloyd scanned faces, drawing puzzled return looks from the incoming officers. The flurry was dying out when he saw the two from the bank approach with their gear.

Lloyd walked over to them, making a snap decision to play it straight but hard. When they saw him, the patrolmen averted their eyes almost in unison and continued on toward the locker room door. Lloyd cleared his throat as they passed him, then called out, "Come here, Officers."

The two young men turned around. Lloyd matched their faces to their name tags. The tall redheaded cop named Corcoran was the one who had made the remark at the bank; the other, a youth with glasses named Thompson, was the one he'd been talking to. Nodding at them, Lloyd said, "I'm on the bank homicides, gentlemen. Corcoran, you said, quote, 'The security guy was a real wacko. He used to talk this weird shit to me.' You told that to Thompson here. You can elaborate on the statement to me, or a team of I.A.D. bulls. Which would you prefer?"

Corcoran flushed, then answered, "No contest, Sergeant. I was gonna tell the squad room dicks, but it slipped my mind." He looked at Thompson. "Wasn't I, Tommy? You remember me telling you?"

"Th-that's right," Thompson stammered. "R-really, Sarge."

Lloyd said, "Talk. Omit nothing pertaining to the security man."

Corcoran spoke. "Tommy and I sort of had lunch with him twice, last week. He came over to our table, flashed his retirement badge from the Sheriff's and sat down, sort of uninvited. He started asking these weird questions. Should prostitution and weed be legalized? Didn't we think cops made the best whoremasters, because they knew the whore psyche so good? Didn't we think that the county could cut costs by legalizing weed and getting inmates up at Wayside to harvest it? Stone wacko. I th—"

Thompson cut in. “I couldn’t believe this clown made twenty years as a cop. He came on like he was from outer space. But I knew he was leading up to something. Anyway, the second time he crashes our lunch, he tries to act real cool and asks us if we know any fences ‘who work good with us.’ Unbelievable! Like he thinks policemen and fences are good buddies.”

Feeling his blurred focus gain another notch of clarity, Lloyd said, “Tell me about Steven Gaffaney. Don’t be afraid to be candid.”

A look passed between the partners, then Corcoran said, “Nobody on the daywatch could stand him. He was a religious crackpot and a freebie scrounger, always hitting the halfer restaurants and pocketing the check, leaving a quarter tip. I heard rumors that he stole stuff from the station and that his old man, some heavy-hitter captain, bribed instructors at the Academy to pass him through. Wh—”

Lloyd interrupted. “What’s the source of that last rumor?”

Corcoran stared at the ground. “I heard the squad room lieutenant talking to Captain Stevenson. The skipper shushed him.”

“How did Gaffaney and his partner get along?” Lloyd asked.

“Paul Loweth couldn’t stand him,” Thompson said. “When they got assigned together, Paul requested another partner, you know, because of a personality conflict. They even took separate code sevens, because Paul couldn’t stand eating with Gaffaney.”

Lloyd said, “Here’s the crunch question. Did you ever see Gordon Meyers and Gaffaney together?”

Both officers nodded their heads affirmatively, and Corcoran said, “About four or five days before the killings I saw Meyers and Gaffaney at the coffee shop next to the bank, talking like old buddies. I didn’t hear what they were talking about; Tommy and I sat down at the counter so the wacko wouldn’t hassle us.”

Bowing with a flourish, Lloyd said, “Thank you, gentlemen,” then ran for his Matador and drove to 411 Seaglade.

Still no car in the driveway; still no activity around the front house; still no “Crime Scene” notice on the door of the garage apartment. Again Lloyd kicked the door in, this time splintering the wood around the lock. Knowing that the pad had already stood two professional prowlings, he went straight for the kitchen and opened drawers until he found a large, saw-edged steak knife. Then he walked into the bedroom, upended the mattress and looked for telltale slits or stitchings. Finding a long seam of catgut near the headboard, he dug the knife in and ripped out stuffing until his blade hit a sharp object.

Lloyd withdrew the knife and stuck in his hand, touching a flat metal surface. His fingers pried it loose, and he pulled it out.

It was a fishing tackle box, rectangular-shaped, about two inches deep and unlocked. Lloyd lifted up the top. Inside were a half dozen Dieboldt “Security” keys, balls of molding wax, loose colored gemstones and a rolled sheaf of papers. Unrolling them and turning on the lamp by the bed, he smiled. No more blur—the Gaffaney offshoot of the case was now crystal clear.

The pages were an official L.A.P.D. form—a West L.A. Division daywatch car plan list, the names of the officers, their sector and unit numbers in one column, their assignment dates in another. The list detailed November-December 1984, and beside sector G-4, the names “T. Corcoran/J. Thompson” were crossed off, while the name “S. Gaffaney” bore exclamation points followed by question marks.

Lloyd stood up and put the form in his pocket, wondering why the old pursuit high wasn’t there. Long moments passed before the reason came to him: Gaffaney Junior probably didn’t have time to receive the stolen jewelry, or flat out resisted the temptation. The two nightclub snapshots were probably evidence of Meyers’ second go-round at recruiting him. The kid was already pegged as a thief within the Department, second-generation kleptomania was not blackmail parity with first-generation murder, and the Gaffaney offshoot was probably coincidental to *Them.*

Them.

Lloyd thought of Louie Calderon, and of Judge Penzler, still luxuriating at Lake Tahoe. He thought of the blank warrants in his desk at Parker Center, and of the signatures he had forged on stolen payroll checks during college. Forgery to kill a murder indictment was easy parity, even more justified as a means to *Them.* One thought stuck in Lloyd’s mind all the way to the Center: *Who were they?*

20

Dusk.

Joe Garcia looked at Anne Atwater Vanderlinden and wondered for the three thousandth time who she was. Crouched in the Griffith Park hideaway he'd discovered in high school, he watched her chain-smoke and stare at the lights popping on all over the L.A. Basin. She'd run with him, away from the lover he'd killed and the old lover chasing her, no tears, no show of fear until she ran out of cigarettes and threw a tantrum in front of a liquor store. Guts, shallowness or dope exhaustion?

She'd fallen asleep in his arms, and holding her made him feel strong, even though he knew he was a dead man. Was it her, or would any woman have done it for him?

They'd slept and talked on and off all day, and he filled her in on Bobby and the money, but not on the bank and dead cops. She took it in with a shrug, looking like a bored rich girl with no connection to dead men and blood money. Stupid, insensitive or just burned out?

Her weird little speeches didn't make figuring her out any easier. During the day she'd wake up, say things like "Duane and Stan had the same karma," or "Stan was a pragmatist, Duane just thought he was," or "Duane didn't understand my music, so it was easy to split from him," then doze off again. After a fifteen-hour crash course in closeness, all *he* knew was that *she* didn't know they were up someplace worse than the creek with *nada.*

Anne pointed to the lights going on in the Capitol Records Tower. "Stan was going to set me up with a producer there. Have you ever been in jail?"

"Yeah."

"I knew it. It's your clothes. You're wearing the kind of clothes Duane would wear if he was trying to fit in someplace he didn't belong."

Seeing a picture of himself drenched in ink, Joe said, "These are Duane's threads. You know we have to get out of here. We can't stay here forever."

"I know that. Clothes should reflect a person's early environment, then, as they put out karma, they transform what they wear. What did you wear when you were growing up? You know, prep like me, or mod, surfer, what?"

Joe watched Anne light a cigarette, then exhale and sniff the air like it could get her high in place of coke. He said, "This isn't the time to be talking fashion. We've got no car and no money, and a crazy man on our ass. I can't go by my pad or the motel, because *he'll* be there. But we have to move, and *I* have to eat."

Anne said, "I've got friends who can help us, and I can make money. Just answer my question."

"How? Peddling your pussy?"

"Don't say that! I can give sex and not sacrifice my karma! Don't say that!"

Joe put a hand on her arm and said, "Sssh. I'm sorry, but I am in *deep trouble.*"

"Then answer my question."

Joe sighed. "I grew up dressing like a ridiculous Mexican gangster. Plaid Sir Guy shirts buttoned to the top when it was ninety-five degrees, bell-bottom khakis that dragged the ground, spit-shined navy shoes and an honor farm watch cap. It was a joke, and it had nothing to do with karma."

"Everything does."

"I killed a man last night. Aren't you scared?"

Anne sniffed the air. "I took a Dilaudid Black Beauty speedball just before it got bad with Stan and Duane, and I'm starting to crash. In about an hour I'll be *real* scared. You act like a tough guy, but you talk like you went to college. You're sort of a *phony.*"

Only Bobby knew that about him.

Joe put his arms around Anne and whispered, "It's because of this song I can't write, and Bobby and Sir Guys and khakis and what I have to do, but I can't do any more. Does that make sense to you?"

Anne dry-sobbed into his chest. "No no no no no."

Joe whispered back, "You're just pretending not to know. You're a musician, so I know you know. Listen. I'll tell you exactly what we're going to do. We're going to walk down the Observatory Road to Vermont, then steal some rich preppy car. Then we're going to hit up these friends of yours and get some money and get the hell out of town. Say yes if you think we can do it."

Anne made a choking sound and nodded her head up and down. Joe looked out at the L.A. skyline and knew for the first time in his life that it was his—because now he could leave it behind.

21

Lloyd pulled up across from Likable Louie's One-Stop Pit Stop. Seeing no fed units, he grabbed his forged search warrant and Ithaca pump, ran across the street and knocked on the door of the built-on house. A feeling of being close grabbed him, and he flicked off the safety and jacked a shell into the chamber.

The door was opened cautiously, held to the frame by a long chain. A Mexican woman peered through the crack and said, "Luis not here. Police took him."

Lloyd saw copwise smarts. "You mean federal officers?" he said. "F.B.I.?"

"Luis hip to men watching him. These L.A. cops, green car, big antenna."

Lloyd shuddered. Metro had glommed the Calderon info. "When?" he asked.

"Half hour. I call lawyer."

Lloyd ran back to his car and lead-footed it the two miles to Rampart Station, hoping to find Lieutenant Buddy Bagdes-sarian or another detective familiar with Calderon. Parking in the lot, he saw no black-and-whites, only civilian cars, and knew that the station contingent was skeletal—probably because every available unit was aiding Hollywood Division in the cop-killer canvassing. Then he spotted an olive-drab Metro wagon parked crossways in the watch commander's space. The feeling of being close got claustrophobic, and he ran into the station full-tilt.

There was a single officer on duty at the front desk. Lloyd eased his stride and approached slowly, knowing that the early evening station scene was way too quiet, way *off*. The desk officer grimaced when he saw him coming. He moved toward the intercom phone on the wall behind him, then changed his mind and mashed his hands together. Lloyd reached the desk and saw a cross and flag pin attached next to the man's badge. The abomination made his head reel. He was about to rip the insignia from the officer's chest when a muffled noise stopped him and made him perk his ears to identify it.

There was a short moment of silence, then the noise again. This time Lloyd knew it was a scream. He ran down a long corridor toward the echo, past the booking area and drunk tank to a half-open storage room door. Behind the door the screams melded with a barrage of other noises: retching, garbled obscenities, loud thuds. Lloyd forced himself to count to ten, an old strategy to resurrect cool. Then a brass-knuckled fist arced across the open door space, followed by a burst of blood. At seven, he attacked.

Collins and Lohmann looked up as the door crashed open; Louie Calderon, handcuffed behind his back to a chair, spat blood and flailed at the Metro cops with his legs. Lloyd moved straight in, both fists cocked and aimed shoulder-high. With no swinging room, he hurled jerky shots, catching Lohmann in the neck, Collins a glancing blow in the chest. Calderon toppled his chair to the floor; Collins tripped over him, missing a wide roundhouse right at Lloyd's head.

Lloyd grabbed his wrist as the blow grazed his shoulder, bringing his knee up flush into Collins' abdomen. Louie Calderon moaned beneath the tangle of feet, and Lohmann lunged at Lloyd with two brass-coiled fists, his momentum sending them both back into the door. Then hands grabbed Lloyd from behind and pulled him out of the room, Lohmann still on top of him, trying to extricate himself. When the knuck wielder got untangled, Lloyd had a clear shot. He kicked Lohmann in the face and felt his nose crack.

Lloyd was hurled into the holding cell across the corridor. When the cross-and-flag officer got the door secured, he stood up, reached through the bars and tore off his badge. The polished oval hit the floor, and the officer picked it up, looked at Lloyd and hissed, "Satan."

Lloyd laughed in his face, then spat in his face. Collins yelled, "Get back to the fucking desk!" and the cross-and-flag man half-walked, half-ran down the corridor and out of sight. Lloyd watched Collins help his partner to his feet. Lohmann was blowing cartilage and bloody mucus out of both nostrils, spitting the overflow on the floor. Collins made him tilt his head backward; then, with one arm around his shoulders, he walked him toward the front of the station.

Louie Calderon was still on the storage room floor, twisted sideways in his chair. Lloyd watched him gasp and let out little sobs. His own breathing was almost back to indent when Collins returned, picked up the chair and placed a finger under Likable Louie's chin. "You're going to give me three names," he said. "A federal officer saw your little boy with a tranq gun. We know you're the dealer."

Calderon pulled his chin free. "Your mother's the dealer," he slurred. "She deals AIDS at a lesbian bar."

Collins hit him in the stomach, knocking the chair back to the floor. Calderon retched for breath, then started hyperventilating, thrashing with his feet, heaving with his shoulders. The chair buckled off the floor as he squirmed, and one by one the wooden slats on the backing snapped. Collins stood over Calderon until he got his wind and started shrieking, "Pig, pig, pig." Then he knelt beside him and said, "The three names."

Calderon took a long gasp of air and said, "Your mother, your partner's mother and Crazy Lloyd's mother. *Chinga su madres todos.* Lesbian pig three-way with niggers. *Puto! Puto! Puto!*"

Collins said, "Pig is a no-no," stuck his right thumb and forefinger behind Calderon's ear and squeezed the carotid artery. "*The three names.*"

Lloyd squinted and saw Calderon's face start turning purple. He squeezed the bars, pushing harder and harder into them. It felt like he was the first part of a chain of pressure moving straight through the bars to the hot dog and his victim, and if he let up, he would never get to *Them.* Then, when Calderon's face looked like a plum about to burst, he saw what he was doing and screamed, "No!"

Startled, Collins withdrew the hold. He looked over at Lloyd, and Lloyd saw his own eyes burning into him. Knowing it couldn't be, he held his hands up in front of his face. Seeing nothing, he felt all his senses go into his ears and pick up whispers:

"The names. I'll maim you for life if you don't give them to me."

"No. No. Fuck you. No. Don't. Please don't."

"Think of your family. Think of your wife at Tehachapi, where she'll be on dope charges if you don't tell me."

"No. No. No. Please, please. No."

"The three names. Think of your kids in a cut-rate board-and-care home. Have you watched the news lately? Lot of sexual abuse in those places. *Give me the three names.*"

"No. No. No."

"No? No? 'Yes,' or I get a dykey woman officer to skin search your wife for the narcotic substances that I know she'll find." '

"No. No. N—"

"Tell me, Luis."

"No. They'll hurt me."

"They won't hurt you, but I will."

"No."

"Don't say no to me, say yes to me, or I'll hurt your family."

"Yes. Yes. Duane Rice. Bobby Garcia. Joe Garcia."

Them.

Lloyd closed his eyes and flashbacked: The "Duane/Rhonda" message on Calderon's bootleg message list; Christine Confrey's puzzled reaction to the mug shots of Duane Richard Rice, allegedly serving a year in county jail for G.T.A. He pressed himself into the bars, the better to see and listen.

Collins was squatting beside Calderon, unlocking the handcuffs that bound him to the chair. "There's lots of Bobby and Joe Garcias," he said. "Be more specific about them."

Likable Louie fumbled himself away from the chair, slowly stretching his arms and kneading his gouged wrists. "Bobby 'Boogaloo' Garcia, the ex-boxer. His brother Joe." His voice was filled with the self-disgust of the freshly turned snitch. Lloyd held his eyes shut to give the man back some of his dignity. He kept them shut until he felt a tap on his shoulder.

Collins was standing directly in front of the cell. Lloyd saw that his eyes were brown, not gray like his own, but that they were still somehow identical. "I'll have the desk officer let you out in a little while," he said. "But stay out of this, it's ours."

Lloyd couldn't think of anything to say. He stared at Collins as he walked back to the storage room and helped Calderon over to the holding cell next to his. Still too numb to talk, he heard the door being unlocked and locked again, followed by footsteps moving away from the blood-spattered corridor. Then, from beyond the periphery of his vision, Louie Calderon said, "Don't let them kill the kid. Bobby and Duane are hope-to-die trash, but the kid was just too weak to say no. Don't let them kill him."

22

Midway down Vermont to Los Feliz, Joe Garcia realized he didn't know how to steal a car. He'd heard nine million raps on hot-wiring and drilling steering columns, and that was it. Anne Vanderlinden walked beside him, talking gibberish about karma and the ritzy houses they were passing. Her voice was getting more and more feverish, and when streetlamp light caught her eyes, they glowed wide and loony.

Then Joe caught a blast of Bob Seger and the Silver Bullet Band and weaving headlights. He grabbed Anne just as a yellow Corvette cut a sharp left turn and screeched to a stop in the driveway next to them. A young man got out of the car and stumbled across the lawn and through the front door of a large Tudor house. Joe left Anne on the sidewalk and checked out the 'Vette. The keys were in the ignition. He looked at the house and saw window lights going on, then off. Now or never.

He walked back to Anne and shoved her toward the car. She got in the passenger side and started burrowing in the glove compartment. Joe slipped behind the wheel, trembling when he saw the shifter on the floor and realized that he didn't know how to drive a stick. Muttering "Fuck it," he remembered the way Bobby used to drive his old VW and watched Anne open up a prescription bottle and start shoving pills in her mouth. He found neutral; he depressed the clutch; he hit the ignition. Bob Seger boogied. Joe slammed the shifter into reverse and inched out of the driveway. Anne giggled, "Drive to the Strip and we'll call my friends!" and Joe ground his way through the gears, stalling the car twice, but finally working clutch and gearshift to the point where he could keep them going. The moment on the hillside came back, ten times as strong, and they fishtailed toward Hollywood.

23

Two-way radio crackle in the distance; helicopter searchlights swooping the motel at irregular intervals. Duane and Joe gone over twenty-four hours, probably dead. Twice the radio had screeched, " '81 Chevrolet Caprice."

Bobby "Boogaloo" Garcia knew they were coming for him. His hours of Bible reading and prayers had reaped *nada.* He was going to die alone, excommunicated, away from God and his brother, two .45 automatics and 16 grand in cash his only companions.

No one to mourn him;

No one to talk to on the night he finally figured it all out;

No chance to pay back his victims and slide into heaven on last-minute good deeds and acts of contrition;

No one to grant absolution for his sins.

At first, when he got it all down in his head, it made him feel peaceful. Then the choppers kept buzzing and flashing their lights, pissing off the old juiceheads boozing in the parking lot, who started jabbering and throwing their empty T-bird bottles at the wall. That made him mad, made him feel like going out defiant, even when he knew that defiance was his most heavy-duty sin. That was the funniest part of it. Half of him wanted to admit it and go out clean; the other half wanted to go out righteously defiant, because that's what he was for thirty-four years, and if he reversed his act now, it meant that he never existed at all.

Bullhorns barking from up the block; copter lights flooding the sky every five minutes; the winos wailing like nigger banshees. Finally Bobby decided to cover his bets. He pulled up his chair to directly in front of the door and placed the Bible on the right armrest, then loaded both .45s and unscrewed the silencers for better range. Sliding shells into both chambers, he sat down with the guns in his lap. When they kicked in the door, he'd know how to play it.

24

Three minutes after his cell door was opened by a station trustee, Lloyd was in a phone booth on Rampart and Temple, turning out his pockets for change.

His first call was to the Central Jail Records night line, where an information clerk told him that Duane Richard Rice, white male, D.O.B. 8/16/56, 6′0″, 170, light brown hair, blue eyes, had been released on a sentence modification on November 30, after serving six months of a one-year sentence for grand theft auto. He had one previous conviction, for vehicular manslaughter, and had put in three years of a five-year sentence at the California Youth Authority Facility at Soledad. He was now on both state parole and county probation, and his last known address was 1164 South Barrington, West Los Angeles. Pressing, Lloyd asked the clerk what module Rice was housed in at the Main County Jail. After a moment spent checking other records, she came back on the line and said, “Twenty-seven hundred.”

The Ding Tank—Gordon Meyers connection.

But *why*?

Lloyd called the Los Angeles County Probation Department and got an operator who put him through to a series of clerks, who finally put him through to the county’s chief probation officer at home. The chief made a series of calls herself and buzzed Lloyd back at his pay phone with the word: Duane Richard Rice had not reported to his P.O. after his release from jail and had vacated his condo on South Barrington. He was now technically a parole and probation absconder, and a bench warrant for his arrest had been issued.

Hanging up, Lloyd tried to recall the phone numbers from Louie Calderon’s message book. After a minute, they came to him: Rhonda, 654-8996; Silver Foxes, 658-4371.

He dialed Rhonda’s number and got the beginning of a recorded message, then hung up and called Bell Telephone and made his demands. A supervisor gave him the information he wanted: Rhonda Morrell, 961 North Vista, West Hollywood; Silver Foxes, 1420 North Gardner. Lloyd smiled as he wrote it down. The addresses were only a few blocks apart. With his .45 unholstered on the seat beside him, he drove to West Hollywood.

961 North Vista was a modern building, with two stories of apartments around a cement courtyard. The directory by the front gate listed *R. Morrell* in Unit 20. Lloyd studied the numerical scheme and judged Rhonda’s apartment to be on the first story, dead center. He walked over, the .45 pressed to his leg.

No lights were on, but he pressed the buzzer beneath the taped-on *Morrell* anyway, then stepped to the side. A full minute passed with no sounds issuing in response to his ring. No Rhonda.

Lloyd walked around to the parking space in the back of the building. The slot for Unit 20 was empty. Feeling itchy but *close*, he drove the three blocks to Silver Foxes.

Pulling up and surveying the lavender Spanish-style, Lloyd was surprised to see no neon beacons or other accoutrements of sleaze, only a quiet four-flat with lights coming from the left downstairs side. Again holding the .45 to his leg, he walked over to the lights and rang the bell next to the smiling fox emblem. Pressing himself against the wall beside the doorway, he held the gun next to his chest, prepared to wheel and fire.

Silence, then a whiney male voice muttering, "Oh shit," then footsteps approaching the door. When he heard inside locks being unlatched, Lloyd stepped out and leveled the .45 at midpoint in the doorway.

The door swung open, and a muscle-bound young man in a tight tank top stood there, frozen by the gun held only inches from him. "Police officer," Lloyd said. "Walk backward inside, turn around and place your hands on the wall above your head, then step back and spread your legs."

Biting his lip, the young man complied. Lloyd followed him into a stark white room and nudged the door shut with his toe, pressing the .45 to the back of his neck, frisking him with his left hand. The youth moaned when Lloyd brushed the insides of his thighs. Finding no concealed weaponry, Lloyd said, "How many other rooms?"

"Just the bathroom, sweetie. There's nobody here but us chickens. Are you a chicken hawk?"

Lloyd gave the room a quick once-over, catching tube furniture, white Plasticine desk, white walls hung with pictures of rock and rollers. "No banter," he said. "Go over and open the bathroom door, then come back here."

The young man walked over to the bathroom door and pushed it open, then returned and sat down on the white desk, one foot on the floor, one leg dangling in Lloyd's direction. "Like I said, 'No one here but us chickens.' My name's Tim. What's yours?"

Lloyd reholstered his .45 and said, "Son, I am the last person in the world you want to get cute with tonight. *The last.* I'm going to ask you some simple straight questions, and I want simple straight answers. Do you understand?"

Tim smiled coyly and tapped his heel against the desk. "Shoot, baby."

"First, do you know a man named Duane Rice? Late twenties, six feet, one seventy, light brown hair, blue eyes?"

"No, but he sounds cute. Is he your lover?"

Lloyd backhanded the young man, knocking him off the desk. He smiled and wiped a trickle of blood from his nose. Lloyd said, "I don't want to hurt you, but please Jesus God don't fuck with me. Not tonight."

Tim stood up. "Say 'pretty please' and I'll be a good Boy Scout and cooperate."

Penny and Janice moved through Lloyd's mind in precaution reflex, then Jesus Fred Gaffaney and Collins eclipsed them. He pushed Tim across the room and held him to the wall with a hand on his neck. "Pretty please talk, motherfucker, before I trash your worthless ass."

Tim made gurgling sounds until Lloyd released him and stepped back. Smiling, he rubbed his neck and sighed. "Rough play is one thing, hurting is another. You said 'pretty please,' so I'll be a good Scout and be nice. What do you want to know?"

The singsong words settled on Lloyd like fallout, and he wondered if this night would ever be over. "One of your whores," he said. "Rhonda Morrell. I picked up on one of her phone messages from Duane Rice. He was supposed to call her at home or here last night. The message mentioned someone named Stan Klein. What do you know about this?"

Tim moved to the desk and opened drawers, then pulled out a white Naugahyde binder and leafed through it. Holding the binder open, he said, "That's Rhonda. Isn't she foxy?"

Lloyd looked at the nude photographs. Rhonda Morrell was a beautiful brunet. He memorized her face, holding his eyes from the rest of her body. "Tell me about her. And about Rice and Klein."

Tim snapped the binder shut. "What's to tell? Rhonda is a real brain fox, wants to be a stockbroker. She's very much in demand with our clients. Rice and Klein I don't know about, although the way you described Rice, he sounds like this guy who came by last week, this guy Rhonda's got some kind of nonsex scene going with, you know, for money. Rhonda's a real money fox."

The "Wants $" in Calderon's message book popped into Lloyd's head. "Tell me about him—and Rhonda."

Tim wrapped his arms around himself. "Last week a man came in, looking for a fox. He didn't seem like Silver Foxes caliber, but I liked his style, so I fixed him up with Rhonda. He gave me a name, but I knew it was phony. Later on, Rhonda tells me she's helping the guy look for his girlfriend, for big bucks. In fact, she called this afternoon and told me she's supposed to meet him here tonight at midnight. She wanted me to hold him in case she's late."

Lloyd fingered the gun he had killed with, then looked at the clock on the wall. 10:49. In August of 1965 he had gone one-on-one with a .45-caliber killer; now he was coming full circle back to that point, to pay his dues for the event that had formed him. Shivering, he said, "Tim, do you believe in God?"

Tim shrugged. "I've never given it much thought."

"You should. He's a tricky bastard; you might dig him. Go home. I'm going to wait for Rhonda and her friend."

"Is this legal?"

"No. Go home. I'm sorry I hit you."

"I'm not," Tim said, and walked out the door.

Lloyd waited for ten minutes, then went out to his car and turned on his two-way. He listened for twenty minutes. The air was flooded with calls directing Hollywood Division units to the area near the Hollywood Bowl, but there was no mention of the hottest trio in L.A. history—Duane Rice, Bobby and Joe Garcia. Gaffaney and his hot dogs were sitting on the information. It was coming down to their outlaw vendetta, and his own. And when Rice fell into his hands at midnight, would he be able to press his advantage and take him out in cold blood?

Lloyd walked back to the Silver Foxes office to await Rhonda Morrell and then the moment. He sat down in an uncomfortable white chair and stared at the pictures on the white walls, unable to identify any of the rock and rollers by name. Checking the clock repeatedly, he hoped that Rhonda would be late, so he could take a post outside and back-shoot Duane Rice as he walked up to the door. God as an ironic bastard stuck in his mind. Taking out the Pico-Westholme cop killer would be considered the zenith of his career, not the desperately selfish survival tactic that it was.

At 11:42 there was a rapping on the door. Lloyd took out his .45 and tiptoed over and opened the door, startling Rhonda Morrell, who saw the gun and opened her mouth to scream. Lloyd got her in a headlock with his free arm and pulled her inside, stifling her attempts to make noise. She bit at his jacket sleeve, and he kicked the door shut and whispered, "L.A.P.D. I'm here for Duane Rice, not you. I just want to ask you a few questions, then get you the hell out of here before he shows up. Now, I'm going to let you go, but you have to promise not to scream. Okay?"

Rhonda quit squirming and biting. Lloyd released her, and she twisted around and stood with her back to him, fluffing out her Afro. Turning back, she said in a perfectly composed voice, "He owes me a lot of money. If you arrest him, he won't be able to pay me."

Lloyd blurted, "Jesus," then mustered his thoughts and said, "There's a lot of reward money being offered for his capture. You talk to me, *fast*, and I'll see that you get it."

Rhonda smiled. "How much money?"

"Over seventy thousand," Lloyd said, stealing a glance at his watch. "Tim told me you're helping Rice look for his girlfriend. Tell me about that, and tell me about Stan Klein."

"You know a lot about it already."

"I don't know a fucking thing! Tell me, goddammit!"

Rhonda looked at the clock and said, "I guess this is trading up. Rice has a coke-whore girlfriend. I've been helping him look for her. I found out that she's been living with a sleazy entrepreneurial type, Stan Klein. I got—"

"What's the girlfriend's name?"

"Anne Vanderlinden. Duane called me Monday night, and we made a date to meet here at midnight. He said he and Vandy were flying to New York in a few days, and he needed the names of some music people. Apparently Vandy is a singer, and he wants to help her career. He promised me a bonus for that, and—"

"That was the last time you spoke to him?"

"No! He called me this afternoon, at home, to confirm our date. He sounded spacey, and he said that Vandy had left Stan Klein's place last night, with a *puto* Mexican, whatever that is. Now he's promising me the moon if I help him find her again. He also said we have to pick up some money."

Lloyd stared at the clock, his mind suddenly blank. Rhonda fidgeted, plucking at her hair. Finally she pointed to the gun in Lloyd's hand. "Why have you got that out? Is Duane dangerous?"

Lloyd laughed. "Yeah, he's dangerous."

"I think he's basically sweet, with some rough edges. If he's so dangerous, where are all the other cops?"

"Never mind. You've got to get out of here."

"Wait. I read the papers today. They said there's seventy-five K in reward money out for the person who killed those people at the bank. You don't think Duane did that? He might be a thief, but he's not vicious."

Lloyd grabbed Rhonda's arm and pulled her toward the door. "Go home," he hissed. "*Get out of here now.*"

"What about my money? How do I know I'll get it?" She paused, then looked in Lloyd's eyes and gasped, "You're going to kill him because he's a cop killer. I've read about that kind of thing. You can't fool me."

"*Get the fuck out now, goddamn you.*"

There were footsteps on the walkway outside. Rhonda screamed, "Duane, run!" Lloyd froze, then threw himself prone when three shots blew the front picture window to bits. He grabbed Rhonda's legs and yanked her to the floor, then rolled to the demolished window and fired twice blindly, hoping to draw a return volley.

Two muzzle bursts lit up the lawn; the shots ricocheted around the white walls, ripping out jagged crisscrosses of wood. Lloyd aimed at the flashes of red and squeezed off five rounds, then ejected the spent clip and slipped in a fresh one. He took a deep breath of cordite, chambered the top round and charged out the window.

No dead man on the grass; Rhonda's screams echoing behind him. Lloyd ran up Gardner to Sunset. Rounding the corner, he heard a shot, and a plate-glass window two doors down exploded. Then he saw a crowd of people on the sidewalk scatter into doorways and out on the street. And there *he* was.

Lloyd watched the man weave through shrieking pedestrians, then dart past parked cars and start sprinting east on Sunset, out of his firing range. He sprinted full-out himself, closing the gap until he saw Rice stick his gun in the passenger window of a car stopped for the light at the next intersection. Then he ran and aimed at the same time, knots of late-night strollers making scared and startled sounds as they got out of his way. The running posture was awkward and cut down his speed, but he almost had a clear shot when Rice got in the car, and it took off against the light.

Then he heard approaching sirens, and it jolted him away from the escaping car and back to his own jeopardy. Rice would probably ditch the escape vehicle within blocks. "Shots fired" and the location would hit the air *huge* and goose Jesus Fred and his hot dogs into the area in force. Lloyd ran back to Silver Foxes and found Rhonda on the front lawn. He forced her into his car, but when he pulled out, he didn't know where they were going. He only knew he was terrified.

Rice knew that he had to ditch the car, or keep the car and kill the driver. Digging the barrel of his .45 harder into the old man's neck, he said, "Hang a left at the next corner and park."

The man obeyed, turning onto Formosa, double-parking. Grasping the wheel, he shut his eyes and began weeping. Rice snapped to a new plan: tie Pops up and leave him somewhere, take his money and roll. "You got rope in the trunk, motherfucker?"

The man nodded yes, and Rice grabbed the key from the ignition and walked back to the trunk. He was about to open it when the driver bolted and started running toward Sunset. He was almost there when a black-and-white pulled to the curb on the opposite side of the street two doors up from the car.

Pops *down* from him; the fuzz thirty yards *up*. Rice got back in the car, this time behind the wheel. His head throbbed, burned and crackled, but he got a message through all of it: *becalm.* He turned on the engine and put the Fairlane in drive, then started to accelerate. Then he heard the old man screaming, “Police! Police!” *behind* him; then the cop car *in front* of him turned on its cherry lights.

Time stood still, then zoomed back to Doheny Drive and the first time he had dope in his veins. Rice punched the gas just as the driver of the patrol car got out with his gun drawn. Caught in blinding headlight glare, he stood transfixed. Rice smashed the nose of his three-hundred horsepower battering ram into him at thirty-six miles per hour, catching him flush. The impact ripped off the grille and a chunk of the fender; the windshield went red, just like before. Rice drove blind, his foot held to the floor until wind whipped the crimson curtain from in front of his eyes, and real vision made him stop the car and get out and run.

25

Bobby heard the radio voices stop screeching about the ’81 Chevy and the house-to-house searches that were zeroing in on him, and start barking, “Man down, Sunset and Formosa, man down! Man down!” Within seconds sirens were wailing *away from him*, and the choppers took off, leaving the Bowl Motel in darkness and silence. Knowing it was a stay of execution straight from God, he packed all the money into a supermarket bag and walked out the door, leaving the .45s and Bible behind on the chair.

Outside, the street was deserted and still, with no cars moving either way on Highland. Walking south, Bobby saw why: sawhorse roadblocks hung with flashing lights were stationed at all intersections, shutting off northbound traffic. Turning around, he could pick out other lighted blockades a block up, just past the motel. As he stared at the cordon, a group of plainclothes cops with shotguns entered the courtyard. God had shot him a split-second salvation.

Stepping over the sawhorse at the corner of Franklin, Bobby saw the church and sent up a prayer for it to be Catholic. His prayer was answered when the white adobe building was caught by headlights coming off a side street: “Saint Anselm’s Catholic Church” in large black letters.

A light was burning in the window of the white adobe bungalow adjoining the church. Bobby ran to the beacon and rang the bell.

The man who opened the door was young, dressed in black clerical trousers and a polo shirt. Bobby grimaced when he saw the alligator on his chest and his new-wave haircut. Not Mexican and not Irish-looking; probably a social activist type. “Are you a priest?” he asked.

The man looked Bobby up and down. He stuck his hands in his pockets, and Bobby knew he was digging for chump change. “I don’t want no handout,” he said. “Money’s the one thing I got big. I want to make a confession. You hear confessions?”

“Yes, weekday afternoons,” the priest said. He reached into his front pocket, pulled out a pair of glasses and put them on. Bobby stood under his gaze, watching him pick up on his ink-stained arms and face and Duane Rice’s shirt that hung on him like a tent. “Please, Father. Please.”

The priest nodded and moved past Bobby onto the sidewalk, making beckoning motions. Bobby followed him over to the church. Unlocking the door, the priest turned on a light and walked inside. Bobby waited by the door and murmured Hail Marys, then bolted up the steps and anointed himself with holy water from the font by the back pew. As he genuflected toward the altar and made the sign of the Cross, the shopping bag slipped out of his arms. A wad of twenties dropped to the floor, and he stuffed them into his pockets and walked to the scrim of velvet curtains that separated the confessional booths from the church proper.

The priest was in the first booth. Bobby pulled the drapes aside, dropped the bag and knelt in front of the partition that shielded him from his confessor. The screen was slid open, and Bobby could see the priest's lips move as he said, "Are you ready to make your confession?"

Bobby cleared his throat and said, "Bless me, Father. My last confession was about five or six years ago, except I heard some confessions when I worked this religious scam. I faked being a priest, but I always tried to be fair with the suck—I mean the people I scammed. What I mean—"

Bobby leaned his head against the partition. When he saw that his lips were almost touching the lips of his confessor, he gasped and brought himself back into a ramrod-straight posture. Muttering Hail Marys under his breath, he got down what he wanted to say in the right order. When he heard the priest cough, he pressed his palms together and lowered his head, then began.

"I am guilty of many mortal sins. I worked this phone scam where I impersonated priests and ripped off money in God's name, and I pulled burglaries, and I fired off lots of low blows when I was a fighter. Sometimes I rubbed resin on my gloves between rounds, so I could fuck—so I would waste the guy's eyes when I went head-hunting. I robbed a bank, and I raped a woman, and I pulled evil sex shit on another woman, and I shot a woman and killed her, and—"

Bobby stopped when he heard the priest chanting Hail Marys. Slamming the partition with his palms, he shouted, "You listen to me, motherfucker! This is my fucking confession, not yours!"

Silence answered the outburst. Then the priest said, "Finish your confession and I'll tell you your penance."

The sternness in the kiddie-confessor's voice gave Bobby the juice to say *it*, the big stuff he finally figured out. "I got a brother," he said. "Younger than me. He's weak 'cause I made him weak. I committed a heinous mortal sin with him when we was kids, and I been trying to atone for it by looking after him ever since, when what I should have done was cut him loose years ago, so he could get balls on his own. I always felt guilty about hating him, 'cause I knew that riding herd on his ass was killin' *me*, too. See, I always figured that he *knew* what I did, but he was afraid to say it, 'cause of what it would make us. Then, dig, tonight I figured out that he just didn't remember, 'cause it was so long ago, which means that all this time I sp—"

The priest interrupted, his voice impatient and severe, like a confessor's voice should be. "Don't interpret. Tell me the sin."

Bobby said *it*, sounding to himself like an old TV judge handing down a life sentence. "When we was kids, I used to tie Little Bro up so I could go out and play. I came back one day and saw that he'd wet himself 'cause he couldn't get up. The whole bed was wet, and I got righteously turned on and pulled down his pants and touched him."

"And that is your heinous mortal sin? After all the other acts you confessed?"

Now Bobby heard *disgust.* "Don't *you* interpret, Father. They're my sins. *Mine.*"

"Say the act of contrition and I'll give you your penance," the priest whispered.

Bobby bowed his head and forced the second part of his sentence out in an Anglo accent, like the old Irish sisters had taught him. “O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee. I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pain of hell. But most of all because I have offended thee, O God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of thy grace to confess my sins, do penance and amend my life. Amen. Well, Father?”

“I grant you absolution,” the priest said. “Your penance is good deeds for the rest of your life. Begin soon, you have much to atone for. Go and sin no more.”

Bobby heard his confessor slide through the curtains and walk out of the church. He gave him enough time to make it back to the rectory, then got to his feet and picked up the shopping bag, smiling at the weight. “Begin soon” rang in his ears. On wobbly legs, he obeyed.

The poor box was on the side wall near the rear pews, ironclad, but too small to hold sixteen K in penance bucks. Bobby started shoving cash in the slot anyway, big fistfuls of c-notes and twenties. Bills slipped out of his hands as he worked, and he was wondering whether to leave the whole bag by the altar when he heard strained breathing behind him. Looking over his shoulder, he saw Duane Rice standing just outside the door. His high school yearbook prophecy crossed his mind: “*Most likely not to survive*,” and suddenly Duane-o looked more like a priest than the *puto* with the alligator fag shirt.

Bobby dropped the bag and fell to his knees; Rice screwed the silencer onto his .45 and walked over. He picked up the bag and placed the gun to the Sharkman’s temple; Bobby knew that *defiant* was the way to go splitsville. He got in a righteous giggle and “Duhn-duhn-duhn-duhn” before Rice blew his brains out.

26

Joe sat in a booth in Ben Frank's Coffee Shop, forcing himself to eat a cheeseburger platter. Through the tinted plate-glass window he watched Anne talk into a pay phone in the parking lot. He tried to read her lips, but she was too far away, and distant siren blare from the east kept distracting him. The food that he figured would calm him down didn't; the 'Vette, ditched on a side street two blocks away, had his prints all over the wheel and dashboard. The copter lights and sirens made the Hollywood/Strip border area feel like a war zone. The thrill of mastering the stick shift in a stolen car was dead, and Anne had now fed a dozen quarters to the phone, trying to connect with her "good music friends" who would "help them out." The black pimps at the next table were talking about a shootout on Gardner and barricades and cops with shotguns up by the Hollywood Bowl. One of them kept repeating, "Righteous fucking heat," and Joe knew he was digging it because the heat wasn't directed at him. Every word, every bit of noise, from the war sounds to waitresses clanking dishes, brought back Stan Klein's face just as he stuck in the knife. That was bad, but he knew it was only a delayed reaction, something like shock. What made it terrible was his music turning on him, "And death was a thrill on Suicide Hill" bopping in his brain along with pictures of the man he killed.

Joe felt his insides start to turn over. He jumped up, bumping the table, knocking his food on the floor. The pimps laughed when french fries flew onto a passing customer's legs, and Joe ran to the bathroom and vomited his meal into the sink. Holding the wall with one hand, he turned on the faucet and doused his head with cold water. His stomach heaved, and his chest expanded and contracted with short blasts of breath. He looked at himself in the mirror, then turned away when he saw Bobby just like *he* always looked after getting his ass kicked at the Olympic. Standing upright, he gave himself another dousing, then wiped his face with a paper towel and walked back into the restaurant.

A busboy was cleaning up the spillage by his table; the pimps snickered at him. Joe sidestepped the mess and ran out the door, the cashier yelling, "What about your check!" On the sidewalk, he looked for Anne. She wasn't by the pay phone, and she wasn't in the parking lot. Then he saw her across the street, upstaging a group of hookers with a pelvis-grinding boogie aimed at passing cars.

Joe started to jaywalk across Sunset; a Mercedes stretch limo pulled up in front of Anne, and she got in. The stretch hung an immediate right turn, and Joe ran, rounding the corner just in time to see it park halfway down the block. Walking over, he heard male sex grunts shooting out of the backseat. Then a disco tune smothered the groans, and the chauffeur got out and stood by the car, trying to look cool about the whole thing. With anger blotting out all traces of Stan Klein's death mask, Joe retreated to a dark front lawn to play watchdog.

The limo wobbled on its suspension for half an hour, the musical accompaniment going from disco to reggae. Joe moved back and forth between pins-and-needles alertness and nodding-out sleepiness. Total exhaustion was dropping over him when a door slammed, and Anne began skipping up to the Strip. When she passed him, Joe said, "You really rocked that stretch. Any bitch that can rock a Benz fender to fender has got to be a pro."

Anne squinted into the darkness. When Joe walked up to her, she said, "I told you I could give sex and not sacrifice my karma, and if you give sex for money you might as well do a good job. And I wasn't leaving you; I was coming back to B.F.'s."

Joe snickered, imitating the pimps at the coffee shop. "That's because you need a man to tell you what to do. Okay, I'll tell you what we're gonna do. How much did that scumbag in the Benz give you?"

"A c-note."

"Groovy. We're gonna use about seventy of it to check into that motel next to B.F.'s. You check us in, I'll follow you back. Dig?"

Anne did a nervous foot dance. "Now you're starting to *talk* like a tough guy —"

"People change."

"All right, but that trick just told me about this all-night open-house party at an exec producer's place. I used to trick regularly with the guy when I worked outcall. He's a video heavy, and he really liked me. I can get some money there, I know I can."

Joe shook his head. "First we're getting a flop. Come on."

Without a word, Anne led the way back to the Strip. Joe saw that she looked dejected, but was secretly glad he'd taken charge. From the rear of the Ben Frank's parking lot he watched her hit the motel office, pay the night clerk and glom a key, then walk around to the street and into the courtyard. When the clerk sighed and returned to his paperback, he followed.

She was waiting for him in the doorway of a downstairs unit, one hip cocked, one elbow resting on the doorjamb, looking like an evil little girl born to fuck. She smiled and shifted her weight; her preppy shirt fell away and revealed huge dark hollows across her stomach. Joe moved toward her to smash the pose and make her real.

Anne resisted the soft kisses on her neck and the softer hands that tried to stop her hips from gyrating. Holding herself rock still, she said, "Whores don't respond to kindness, whores rut."

Joe said, "Hush," slid his hands under her shirt and traced soft circles on her back. Anne sighed, then caught herself and said. "Whores don't make love, whores do the dirty dog deed." Her own wordplay made her giggle and press her hands to her mouth, and Joe bit at her neck until she started to squeal uncontrollably. An upstairs voice called out, "Go, lovebirds, go!" and Anne began to cry. Joe didn't know what the tears meant, so he picked her up and carried her to the bed. Applause and catcalls rained down as he shut and bolted the door. When he turned around, Anne was naked and he was crying himself.

27

The smell of decomposing flesh hit him the second he walked in the door.

Lloyd turned to Rhonda Morrell and said, "Wait here," then shot a look at an arched entrance hall crowded with video equipment. Drawing his .45, he walked in the direction of the stench.

It was a dead man who matched Rhonda's description of Stan Klein. He was lying in the middle of a large living room filled with electrical equipment—V.C.R.s, TVs, computer terminals and video games. His corpse was drained of blood, the handle of a switchblade was extending from his stomach, and the carpet beneath him was caked thick with dried blood. A small caliber automatic was in his right hand. The knife wound spelled death by stabbing; the smell and body drainage indicated that the murder had taken place at least twenty-four hours prior. Lloyd held a handkerchief to his face and knew that this night would never be over.

He walked to Rhonda, still standing by the door. "Go identify the body. Try not to get hysterical."

"Is that what that awful smell is?"

"Smart girl."

"Am I under arrest?"

"I'm holding you as a material witness. Give me shit and I'll fabricate a felony to keep you off your back for years. You almost got me killed. Be grateful that I'm a sensitive cop."

Rhonda gave Lloyd a slow once-over. "You look spooky. Really weirded out. When can I go home?"

"Later. Go identify the stiff."

Rhonda walked into the living room and let out a ladylike shriek; Lloyd found a phone in the entrance hall and dialed Hollywood Station. Dutch Peltz answered, "L.A.P.D.," and Lloyd could tell from his hollow tone that he was scared.

"It's Lloyd, Dutch. What is it?"

"*It's* fucking all coming down crazy," Dutch said. "There was a Shootout on Sunset and Gardner. Both perpetrators got away, and one of them commandeered a car, then ran down one of my men with it. He died at Central Receiving. The killer escaped on foot, and the man whose car he commandeered I.D.'d him from the eyewitness sketch of the white bank robber. Two of my men raided his pad half an hour ago—the Bowl Motel on Highland. No one was there, but they found two .45 autos. Then, and I still can't believe it, there was a body found *inside a fucking church* three blocks from the motel and a half mile from the spot where the officer was hit and run. He was twenty-six, Lloyd. He had a wife and four kids and he's fucking dead!"

The news of the two dead men and Dutch's grief squeezed out Lloyd's last remaining calm. The night came down on him from all sides, and he started to weave on his feet, death stench assailing him from the living room, mass insanity over the phone line. Finally Dutch's "Lloyd! Lloyd! Lloyd, goddammit, are you there!" registered, and he was able to answer: "I don't know where the fuck I am. Listen, have any A.P.B.s been issued?"

"No. The white man signed into the motel under an obvious alias—John Smith."

Lloyd marshaled his thoughts, deciding not to add Stan Klein to the list of the night's dead. "Dutch, Fred Gaffaney and at least two of his Metro freaks are in this big, which is why no A.P.B.s have hit the air. They know, and I know, the names of the three robbers. They—"

"What!"

"Just listen, goddammit! I was one of the perps at the shootout on Gardner. I thought I could take out the white man myself. I blew it, and he got away."

"What!"

"Don't grief me on that, goddamn you! It was the only way to do it. Have you I.D.'d the stiff at the church?"

His voice more hollow than Lloyd had ever heard it, Dutch said, "Everywhere you go there's nothing but shit. The dead man is Robert Ramon Garcia, male Mexican, age thirty-four. Is he one of the three?"

"Yes."

"Give me the two other names."

Lloyd signed his own murder indictment. "The white man is Duane Richard Rice, D.O.B. 8/16/56. The other Mexican is Joe Garcia, the dead man's brother. It's crazy out here, Dutch."

"I know it is. Largely due to you. Every single one of my men is on the streets, along with half the Rampart and Wil shire nightwatches. I've got two reservists running the station with me."

"You feel like helping me, or you feel like pouting?"

"I'll forget you said that. What do you need?"

"First, what did you get from Intelligence Division on Gaffaney?"

"Gaffaney's in deep shit in the Department," Dutch said. "Intelligence has him nailed as having bribed school officials to doctor up his son's records so he could secure an appointment to the Academy. Apparently the kid was a long-time petty thief with a lot of crazy religious beliefs. Also, Gaffaney is building up a huge interdepartmental power base—right-wing hot dogs from Metro, I.A.D. and various uniformed divisions. To what end, I don't know."

Lloyd let the information settle on him, then said, "I need a favor."

"You always need favors. I forgot to mention that right when all hell started breaking loose a guy came to the station looking for you, said he had info on the first two bank robberies. He read about you, and about the rewards, and he wants to talk. I was about to tell him to split, then one of my squad room dicks told me he had two armed robbery convictions. I've got him in a holding tank. Ask your favors quick; I want to broadcast those names."

"I want complete paper on the three names, plus Anne Vanderlinden, W.F., twenties," Lloyd said. "R&I, parole and probation department files, jail records.

You've got the juice to shake the right people out of bed to get them, and you can send one of your reservists to make the run, then deliver them to my pad."

Now Dutch's voice was incredulous. "Don't you want to be on the street for this?"

Lloyd said, "No. It feels like I'm inches away from the biggest fuckup I've ever pulled, and if I hit the bricks I'll go nutso. This whole mess is so full of weird angles that if I don't figure them out I won't survive, and I just want to think. Hold that guy for me, I'll be at the station in fifteen minutes."

"What do you mean, 'you won't survive'?"

"No. Don't ask again."

Lloyd hung up and looked around for Rhonda. He found her smoking a cigarette by an open window, and said, "Come on. Don't mention Stan Klein to anybody, and you may still make a few bucks out of this."

"What are you talking about?"

"Survival."

"Whose survival?"

"That's the funny thing. I don't know."

Outside Hollywood Station, Lloyd handcuffed Rhonda to the steering column and said, "I'll be no more than half an hour. While I'm gone, think about Rice and his girlfriend, and where she'd go if she were scared."

"I think better without handcuffs."

"Too bad, I don't trust you, and with Rice on the loose you're in danger."

"That's a laugh. He didn't drag me all over town and handcuff me."

Lloyd slammed the car door and walked into the station. A uniformed reserve officer noticed him immediately, handed him a sheaf of papers and said, "Captain Peltz said to tell you that he's busy, but he sent the other reservist to get your paperwork. Here's a memo and the stats on that clown who wants to talk to you. He's in a holding cell."

Lloyd nodded and read the memo first:

> To: Det. Sgt. L. Hopkins, Rob/Horn
> From: Det. Lt. E. Hopper, West Valley Vice
>
> Sergeant—Regarding your inquiry as to vice activities of R. Hawley and J. Eggers, informers have reported that both men are long-time heavy gamblers known to utilize Valley area bookies. Hawley said to sporadically pay debts through "percentage arrangement" with blank bank checks (assumed by informant to be stolen). Different informant states that Eggers has also paid debts with blank check lots—"gpast six weeks or so."
>
> Hope this helps—Hopper.

Feeling *the* connection breathing down his neck, Lloyd turned to a rap sheet in Dutch's handwriting.

> Shondell Tyrone McCarver, M.N., 11/29/48. A.k.a. "Soul," a.k.a. "Daddy Soul," a.k.a. "Sweet Daddy Soul," a.k.a. "Soul King," a.k.a. "Sweet King of Soul." Conv: Poss. Dang. Drugs—(2)—6/12/68,

1/27/71. Armed Rbry—(2)—9/8/73, 7/31/77. Paroled 5/16/83—clean since—D.P.

Shaking his head, he looked at the officer and said, “Bad nigger?”

The reservist said, “More the jive type.”

“Good. Crank the door in sixty seconds, then lock it again.”

The officer about-faced and walked to the electrical panel, and Lloyd strode through the muster room to the jail area. Passing the framed photographs of Hollywood Division officers killed in the line of duty, he pictured another frame beside them and the station hung with black bunting. He knew he was pumping himself up with anger to fuel his interrogation, and that it wasn’t working—at 2:00 a.m. on the longest night of his life, all he could drum up were the motions.

Except for some babbling from the drunk tank, the jail was quiet. Lloyd saw his man lying on the bottom bunk of a cell on the misdemeanor side of the catwalk. The door clanged open a second later, and the man shook himself awake and smiled. “I’m Sweet Daddy Soul, the patriarch of rock and roll,” he said.

Lloyd stepped inside, and the door creaked shut behind him. Sizing up the man, he saw a good-natured jivehound who thought he was dangerous and might even be. “Not tonight, McCarver.”

Shondell McCarver smoothed the lapels of his mohair suitcoat. “Another time, perhaps?”

Lloyd sat on the commode and took out a pen and notepad. “No. You said you’ve got information, and you’ve got a heist jacket, so I’ll listen to you. But catch my interest quick.”

“You know I want that reward money.”

“You and everyone else. Talk.”

“Some brothers I know said you was always good for some rapport.”

“Cut the shit and get to it.”

McCarver crossed his ankles and laced his fingers behind his head. “Guess they was wrong. How’s this for starters: bet you don’t know how the guys who pulled them kidnap heists snapped to the two girlfriends. That safe to say?”

Lloyd’s exhaustion dropped; his head buzzed with the coming of a second mental wind. “You’ve got my interest. Keep talking.”

“The heists was my idea,” Shondell McCarver said. “Up till about two weeks ago I had a bouncer job going, a temporary gig every other week or so, two hundred scoots a night, working for these people of the Eye-talian persuasion.

“The basic scene was this setup trying to re-create the sporting houses back in the old days, you know, like in New Orleans. For a c-note admission you get complimentary coke within reason, high-class whores, a shot at a few semi-pro ladies, crap game, high-stakes poker, old Ali fights on big-screen TV, fuck films, nude swimming, sauna. What—”

“Where?” Lloyd said.

“I’m getting to that,” McCarver said, drawing out the words teasingly. “The spot was a big house in Topanga Canyon. The two bank guys, Hawley and Eggers, brought their chicks to the parties. They—”

“How often were they held?”

“Every two weeks or so. Anyway, there was these mirrored bedrooms, you know, for romance. They was all rigged for sound, and one of my jobs was to listen for good info, like stock tips and the like. That's where I heard Hawley and Eggers talking to their bitches, and where I figured out Hawley was pilfering from his tellers boxes. Still got your interest, Mr. Po-liceman?"

Lloyd remembered Peter Kapek's mention of Hawley's and Eggers' large cash withdrawals. "Were parties thrown on October seventeenth and November first?"

McCarver laughed. "Sure were. I got a righteous memory for dates. How you know that?"

"Never mind, just keep talking."

"Anyhow, I heard Hawley run down his scam to his bitch. He told her that Greenbacks were left overnight at the tellers cages and—"

Lloyd interrupted: "Did you know that Greenbacks is a brand name of traveler's check?"

Slapping his knee, McCarver said, "Ain't that a riot? Shit. I read that in the paper, and it made me fuckin' glad I never got to utilize my plan. Anyhow, I think he's talkin' *cash.* He tells the bitch that he goes to the bank early on certain mornings, gloms the Greenbacks from the teller drawers, runs a transaction with a duplicate bankbook belonging to some senile old cooze with big bucks, doctors tally slips so that it balances out and looks like a cash withdrawal—to the cooze, who of course is Hawley boy.

"See, Hawley is scared, 'cause the scam only works if the cooze don't get hip to the missing bucks, and he's heard the old girl's relatives is about to have her declared noncompas mental and grab the fuckin' scoots. So Hawley is pouring his soul out to his bimbo, and, unbefuckingknowst to him—me."

Lloyd looked up from his notepad. "What about Eggers?"

McCarver said, "I'm getting to that. Anyhow, I concocted the plan that ultimately got utilizized by them guys you're looking for. I staked out Hawley for days, watched him glom them Greenbacks, thinkin' they was cash, watched him do his number with the tally slips and bankbook and computer. I'm thinkin', 'Too bad there's only one of these scamsters,' when this bookie workin' the house tells me about Eggers bein' way behind on his vig. So I think, 'Gifts in a manger' and nudge the bookie to nudge Eggers into the scam that Hawley pulls. Then I start tailing Eggers, and damned if he didn't start pulling the same tricks. You dig?"

Lloyd said, "I dig. But you never saw Eggers with cash in his hands, right?"

"Right. His hands was out of sight when he did his rippin'. I just assumed that since he followed Hawley's procedure, it had to be cash."

"And it was about six weeks ago that you told the bookie to nudge Eggers?"

"Yeah. How'd you know that?"

"Never mind, keep going."

"Anyhow, I never told the Eye-talians about any of this, and I cased the kidnap part of the deal real good—the bitches' cribs, the managers' cribs, the whole shot. Then I got me a partner, then he decided to take off a liquor store and got busted. You follow so far?"

"I'm ahead of you," Lloyd said. "Wrap it up."

McCarver lit a cigarette, coughed and said, "Homeboy's a righteous partner. A little on the impetuous side, but solid. Except that he's fat-mouth motherfucker, which ain't as bad as bein' a snitch, but still ain't good. When I read about my plan gettin' utilizized, I called Homeboy at Folsom, got through 'cause he got this cush orderly job. I said, ‘Who the fuck you shoot your fat motherfuckin’ mouth off to?’ He says, ‘Who, me?’ I says, ‘Yeah, you, motherfucker, ’cause whoever you blabbed to utilizized my plan, plus one other, and killed four people, includin’ two cops, and there is seventy thou in reward bucks on that motherfucker’s ass.’

“So … Homeboy tells me he talked to two paddy dudes in the High-Power Tank at the New County—Frank Ottens and Chick Geyer. I figure, righteous, those are cop killer motherfuckers. Then I back off and think, ‘What if those dudes blabbed to someone else, and righteous third- or fourth-or fuckin’ fifth-hand info was responsible for the utilizization of my plan?’ So I call the jail, and they tell me Ottens and Geyer is still in High-Power fighting their beefs. So, big man, you find out who Ottens and Geyer blabbed to, and you find your fuckin’ cop killer. Now, is that a righteous tip or a righteous tip?”

Lloyd stood up and stretched. What would have cracked the case twenty-four hours before was now stale bread. The High-Power Tank adjoined the Ding Tank, where Duane Rice was incarcerated until two weeks ago. Gordon Meyers was the night jailer there, and he had incurred Rice’s wrath as a member of the overall robbery scheme or for some other reason—stale bread also, because Meyers was dead, and Rice was unlikely to live through the night. Everyone involved in the twisted mess was dead or marked for death, including himself. Thinking inexplicably of Louie Calderon’s “The kid was just too scared to say no. Don’t let them kill him,” Lloyd looked at McCarver and said, “A righteously too late tip, but I’ll give you some righteous advice: walk real soft around cops, because nothing’s going to be the same with us anymore.”

McCarver said, “What the fuck,” and Lloyd walked out to his car and handcuffed witness. A crew of reservists were hanging black bunting on the front doors of the station as he drove away.

Pulling into his driveway a half hour later, Lloyd saw a stack of L.A. County interagency records sleeves beside his kitchen door. Killing the engine, he said to Rhonda, “You’re staying with me until Rice is kill—I mean captured.”

Rhonda rubbed her wrists. “What if I don’t like the accommodations? You also mentioned money a while back.”

Lloyd got out of the car and pointed to the door. “Later. I’ve got some reading to do. You sit tight while I do it, then we’ll talk.”

The records sleeves were thick and heavy with paper. Picking them up, Lloyd felt comforted by the bulk of the cop data. He unlocked the door, flicked on the light and motioned Rhonda inside. “Make yourself at home, anywhere downstairs.”

“What about upstairs?”

“It’s sealed off.”

“Why?”

“Never mind.”

“You’re weird.”

“Just sit tight, all right?”

Rhonda shrugged and started opening and closing the kitchen cabinets. Lloyd carried the sleeves into the living room and arrayed them on the coffee table, noting that the paperwork came from the L.A. County Department of Corrections, L.A. County Probation Department, County Parole Bureau and California State

Adult Authority. The pages were not broken down by the names of his four suspects, and he had to first collate them into stacks—one for Duane Rice, one each for the Garcia brothers, one for Anne Vanderlinden. That accomplished, he broke them down by agency, with R&I rap sheets on top. Then, with the sounds of Rhonda's kitchen puttering barely denting his concentration, he sat back to read and think and scheme, hoping to pull cold facts into some kind of salvation.

Duane Richard Rice, quadruple cop killer, grew up in the Hawaiian Gardens Housing Project, graduated Bell High School, had a 136 I.Q. The first of his two arrests was for vehicular manslaughter. While working as a mechanic at a Beverly Hills sports car dealership, he lost control of a car he was test-driving and killed two pedestrians. He ran from the scene on foot, but turned himself in to the Beverly Hills police later that same night. Since Rice possessed no criminal record and no drugs or alcohol were involved, the judge offered a five-year prison sentence, then suspended it on the proviso that he perform one thousand hours of public service. Rice shouted obscenities at the judge, who retracted the suspension and sentenced him to five years in the California Youth Authority Facility at Soledad.

While at Soledad, Rice refused to participate in group or individual therapy, studied martial arts and worked in the facility's auto shop. He was not a disciplinary problem; he formed no discernible "close prison ties." He was not a member of the Aryan Brotherhood or other institutional race gangs and abstained from homosexual liaisons. Judged to be a "potential achiever, with high intelligence and the potential for developing into a highly motivated young adult," he was paroled after serving three years of his sentence.

Rice's parole officer considered him "withdrawn" and "potentially volatile," but was impressed with his hard work as foreman at a Midas Muffler franchise and his "complete eschewing of the criminal life-style." Thus, when Rice was subsequently arrested on one count of grand theft auto, the officer did not cite him for a parole violation, mentioning in a letter to the judge that "I believe this offender to be acting under psychological duress, deriving from his relationship with the woman with whom he was cohabitating."

Rice received a year in the county jail, was sent to the Malibu Fire Camp and evinced spectacular bravery during the Agoura brushfires. His parole officer and the judge who tried his case granted him a sentence reduction as a result of this "adjustment," and he was given three years formal county probation and released from custody.

Lloyd put the Rice records aside, and turned to the paper on the girlfriend.

Vanderlinden, Anne Atwater, white female, D.O.B. 4/21/58, Grosse Pointe, Michigan, had a file containing a scant three pages. She had been arrested twice for possession of marijuana, receiving small fines and suspended sentences, and three times for prostitution. She was given two years formal probation following her second conviction, and bought her way out of a probation violation on her third arrest by informing on a "suspected auto thief" to L.A.P.D. detectives. Shaking his head sadly, Lloyd checked the date of Anne Vanderlinden's dismissed charge against the date of Duane Rice's G.T.A. bust. Three days from the former to the latter; Vandy had snitched off the man who loved her.

The two remaining stacks of paper read like a travelogue on eerie fraternal bonding, with even eerier informational gaps. Robert Garcia, known during his losing boxing career as Bobby "Boogaloo" Garcia, the "Barrio Bleeder," had been a fight manager, the owner of a coin laundromat and a hot-dog stand, while his brother Joseph had his occupations listed as "asst. fight manager," "asst. laundry operator" and "fry cook." The brothers had been arrested only once, together, for one count of burglary, although they were suspected of having perpetrated others. Once convicted, they were sentenced to nine months county time together, and served it together, at Wayside Honor Rancho. At Wayside, the brothers' antithetical personalities rang out loud and clear. Lloyd read through a half dozen reports by correctional officers and learned that Robert Garcia was disciplined for attempting to bribe jailers into placing his brother in the "soft" tank where youthful inmates who might be subject to sexual abuse were housed, and, that once those bribes were rebuffed, he assaulted two prisoners who spoke jokingly of Joe as "prime butthole." Released from the disciplinary tank after ten days confinement, the Barrio Bleeder then beat up his own brother, telling a psychiatrist that he did it "so Little Bro would get a little bit tougher." When Bobby was again placed in solitary, Joe set his mattress on fire so that *he* would be placed on the disciplinary tier, within shouting distance of the brother who protected and abused him.

Those facts were eerie, but the absence of facts on the brothers' last five years was even stranger. Based on Christine Confrey's description and R&I stats, the late Robert Garcia was obviously the "Shark," yet he had no arrests for sex offenses, nor was a penchant for sexual deviation mentioned anywhere in his file. Both he and his brother were placed on formal probation after their kick-out from Wayside, and reported dutifully until their probationary term was concluded. Yet there was no mention of employment for either man. Only one fact made sense: listed as the Garcias' "known associate" was Luis Calderon. Lloyd thought the burgeoning fed investigation into Calderon right before the bank slaughter sent everything topsy-turvy. The connection was there, just waiting to be made.

But it wasn't, because there was a correctness, a sense of inevitability about this spiral of death. Lloyd shivered with the thought, then took the mental ball and ran with it, wrapping up the odds and ends of the case into a tight but anticlimactic package.

After killing the officer with the commandeered car, Rice traveled by foot to the vicinity of the Bowl Motel, came across Bobby Garcia on the street, where he could not safely take him out, then followed him to the church and killed him. Why? The reason was meaningless. Joe Garcia, the "tall," "sweet-looking" Mexican who bank witnesses said "didn't shoot anyone" was also the "*puto*" Mexican that Rice told Rhonda took off with his girlfriend from Stan Klein's pad. The only loose strand in the fabric was Klein. Rice was there to grab his woman, presumably armed with a silencered .45. Yet Klein was killed with a knife. Joe Garcia was there, too, but he did not read, sound, feel, or in any way play as a killer.

Again, Louie Calderon's words echoed: "Don't let them kill him." Lloyd put down the paperwork and called out, "Rhonda, come here."

Rhonda walked in. "Time to talk money?" she said.

Nodding, Lloyd watched her sit down in Janice's favorite left-behind chair. "That's right. Questions and answers, but first there's this: if other police officers question you, you don’t mention Stan Klein’s name, or anything about this “*puto* Mexican” you told me about. Got it?”

“Got it, but why?”

“I’m not sure, it’s just an ace in the hole I’m working with.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Never mind. First question: when Rice called you today, did he mention this Mexican guy by name, or anything else about him, or where he thought he and Anne Vanderlinden might have gone?”

“That’s easy: no, no and no. All he said was ‘This *puto* Mexican took off with Vandy and you’ve got to help me find them.’”

“All right. You said Rice wanted you to pick up some money. Did he say where?”

“No.”

“He just assumed that since you and Anne worked outcall together—”

“We didn’t work Silver Foxes together. I’ve never met her. It’s just that we move in some of the same circles, and know some of the same people, and we’ve both tricked with a lot of music industry biggies. Besides, Vandy isn’t working Silver Foxes now. She quit two months ago, in October.”

“How are you so sure of the date?”

“Well … I got Duane the information about Vandy and Stan Klein on my lonesome, and I thought if he paid for that, then maybe he’d pay me for a list of all the clients Vandy tricked with regularly, so last week, when I was in the office, I looked at her old file and made a list. I was going to sell it to Duane tonight, you know …”

“Exploit his jealousy?”

“I wouldn’t call it that.”

“Do you think if she were scared and broke she’d run to any of the men on the list?”

“I’d make book on it. There’s one guy, a producer, who used to use Vandy for theme parties, paid her top dollar. He’s a really good bet.”

“How much for your silence and the list?”

Rhonda took a piece of paper from her bodice. “Duane’s bought and paid for, right? I mean, you guys are going to kill him sooner or later, right?”

“Smart girl. How much?”

“An even thousand?”

Lloyd got his checkbook from the dining room table and wrote Rhonda Morrell a check for one thousand dollars. When he handed it to her, she smiled nervously and said, “Still want me to stick around?”

Lloyd looked away from the smile. “Get out,” he said.

The door was opened and shut quietly, and high heels tapped toward the street. Lloyd picked up the piece of paper that Rhonda had left, saw a list of four names, addresses and phone numbers, then looked at *his* phone. He was reaching for it when an internal voice said “*Think*” and made him stop. Obeying, he sat down in Janice’s chair, still warm from the Silver Fox.

He was doomed, because he could not kill Duane Rice in cold blood. Rice was doomed from all sides, and Jesus Fred Gaffaney was doomed within the Department. He would undoubtedly offer up his evidence on the Watts riot killing as a tactic to save himself—a legendary L.A.P.D. detective as youthful murderer was prime media meat, and the Department would pay heavily to stonewall the revelation. If the high brass capitulated, they would be looking to save face by every means possible, and *he* would be dismissed without the early pension deal now being offered, while Jesus Fred himself would keep his captaincy and get shunted to some safe, shithole outpost where a new generation of witch-hunters would keep him under wraps until his retirement or death. If Gaffaney went public with his information, as civilian or policeman, the grand jury would either indict him or not indict him, but either way, Janice and the girls would know, and his local celebrity would be exploited to full advantage.

Lloyd thought of the other victims: the families of the dead cops, Hawley and Eggers and their disintegrating marriages; Sally Issler and Chrissy Confrey, dropped like hot rocks amidst desperate declarations of future fidelity. The bank teller and her loved ones, and the shitload of harmless street people who were going to be bait for thousands of cops in an impotent rage, because three of their own got taken out, and there was nothing they could do about it.

Feeling *buried,* Lloyd thought of Watts and the fatuous idealism that had carried him through the riot and into the Job. He had convinced himself that he wanted to protect innocence, when he really wanted to crawl through sewers in search of adventure; he had sold himself a bill of goods about the just rule of law, when he really wanted to revel in the darkness he pretended to despise, with his family and women as safety buffers when the dark ate him up.

To take the edge of failure off his admissions, Lloyd tried to bring to mind the most tangible evidence of his success—the faces of innocents spared grief as a result of his hard-charger actions. None came, and he knew it was because their well-being was only a rationalization for his desire to plunder.

The last admission shined a spotlight on the survival plan that was forming in his mind all night. Lloyd laughed out loud when he realized he couldn't figure it out for one simple reason—he thought *he* was the one he wanted to save. Knowing now that he wasn't, he picked up the phone and punched a painfully familiar number.

"Hollywood Station, Captain Peltz speaking."

Dutch's voice was stretched thin, but it was not the grief-stricken voice of two hours before. Trying to sound panicky and apologetic, Lloyd said, "Dutchman, we're in deep shit."

"One of your rare dumb statements, Lloyd. What do you want?"

"Any response on the A.P.B.s yet?"

"No, but there's roadblocks and chopper patrols all over Hollywood, and we've got Rice's vehicle, a '78 Trans Am, purchased five days ago. It was parked a block from where you guys shot it out. If he's still in the area, he's dead meat Did you get—"

"I gave you a wrong name, Dutch. Joe Garcia wasn't in on the heists or the killings. I can't go into it, but the third man is a guy named Klein. He's dead. Rice killed him yesterday."

Dutch's hollow voice returned in force: "Oh, Jesus God *no.*"

"Oh, Jesus God, *yes.* And listen: Gaffaney and his freaks had his name and package for hours before the bulletin was issued, and they don't give a fuck if he's innocent or—"

"Lloyd, all the stats on the robbers say one white man, two Mex—"

"Goddammit, listen! Rice is the white man, Bobby Garcia is Mexican, Klein, the other dead man, is tall and Latin-looking. And he's dead. All we've got is Rice on the loose, and he's a pro car thief and probably out of the area."

"How sure are you of all this?"

Lloyd tried to sound quietly outraged. "I'm the best, Dutch. We both know it, and I know Joe Garcia is innocent. Do you want to help me, or do you want one of your men to gun him down?"

A long silence came over the line. Lloyd imagined Dutch weighing the odds of innocent lives intersecting with trigger-happy cops. Finally he said, "Goddamn you, what do you want?"

A wrench hit Lloyd's stomach; he knew it came from manipulating his best friend with an outright lie. "Garcia is most likely running with Rice's girlfriend," he said. "A blond white woman in her mid-twenties. Gaffaney's hot dogs don't know about her, because I just found out about her myself. The Garcia brothers have got no family, and the one K.A. in their file is a gun dealer already in custody. I'm assuming they'll run to *her* friends. I've got a list of names and addresses of four likelies. I want surveillances on the four pads, experienced officers. Tell them to apprehend Garcia and the woman without force."

Another long silence, then Dutch's voice, cold and all business: "I'll implement it. I'll direct four unmarked units to the pads and have them hold tight until 0800, then I'll bring in a fresh shift when the daywatch comes on. We're talking *obvious* unmarked cars, though. There's no time to have the men come to the station for their civilian wheels. And I want a full report on this guy Klein—fast."

Lloyd picked up Rhonda's list and read it off slowly. "Marty Cutler, 1843 Gretna Green, Brentwood; Roll Your Own Productions, 4811 Altera Drive, Benedict Canyon. That has to be a house—it's all residential down there. Another no name address—Plastic Fantastic Rock and Roll, 2184 Hillcrest Drive, Trousdale Estates—that's also all residential. The last one is Tucker Wilson, 403 Mabery, Santa Monica Canyon. Got it?"

"Got it. These are all fat city addresses. Wh—"

"Rice's girlfriend is a class outcall hooker. These are former customers of hers. My source put an asterisk after the Trousdale address, and she said some 'exec producer' was an especially good bet. You take it from there."

"I will. What are you going to do?"

Lloyd said, "Figure out a way to cover a lot of asses," and hung up, looking at the door in front of him and the phone by his right hand. He knew that the door meant a trip to Stan Klein's house, wiping it free of possible Joe Garcia prints, then firing his .45 into Klein's body and retrieving the spent rounds. If the stiff moldered for a few more days, then the M.E. who performed the autopsy would not be able to determine whether the knife and gunshot wounds had occurred concurrently. The .45 quality holes and slugs straight through the body and floor to the probable dirt foundation would, when unfound, be attributed to the gun of Duane Richard Rice. It was an evidential starting point, and if maggots ate away Klein's face, a death picture could not be shown to the bank eyewitnesses. There might be no other Klein photos available, and Joe Garcia's picture, most likely a six-year-old mugshot from his burglary bust, might not be recognized. If he could plea-bargain Louie Calderon into changing his testimony and make sure Joe Garcia got out of town without being busted *or* standing in a lineup, "Little Bro" might survive.

Still looking at the door, Lloyd knew that it meant ending the night earning McManus' "necrophile" tag, desecrating a corpse, then crawling in the dirt. It *had* to be done, but the more he stared at the door, the more it loomed as an ironclad barrier.

So he picked up the phone, hoping his wife's lover wouldn't be roused from sleep and answer. His hands trembled as he tapped the numbers, and when he got a tone he was sobbing.

After the third ring, a recorded message came on: "Hi, this is Janice Hopkins. The girls and I have taken our act on the road, but we should be returning before Christmas." There was a slight pause, then Penny's voice: "'The woods are lovely, dark and deep.' Leave a message at the beep."

Unable to speak through his tears, Lloyd hung up and called the number again and again, until the repetition of the message lulled him past weeping, and he fell asleep with the phone in his hands.

28

With the bag of money clutched to his chest, Rice beat a footpath to Silver Foxes and the Trans Am, stumbling through dark backyards, scaling fences and rolling into a camouflage ball every time a chopper light came anywhere near him. Roadblocks on Sunset to his north and Fountain to his south fenced him in, and as he crouched low and sprinted across one residential street after another, he could see cars being searched on the wide expressways.

But here, in a womb of old houses with backyards and apartment buildings connected by block-long cement walls, he was invisible and safe. The cops expected him to be on wheels. In the three hours since blundering into Sharkshit Bobby and blowing him away he'd stuck to the dark like a night animal, working his way deeper into the danger zone, taking shelter in shadows and rest breaks every three blocks. His head still ached from the cold-cock and his vision shimmied when light hit his eyes, but the perk/dexie speedballs he'd eaten just before the one-on-one with the cop kept the pain down and juice in his system. He could still function, and when he got to his car, he could still drive.

And he could still think.

Coming out of a long driveway, Rice turned his brain into a map and calculated two blocks to Silver Foxes. If his luck was holding, his registration papers wouldn't have hit the D.M.V. computer, the fuzz wouldn't know the Trans Am was his, and the outcall office window he'd blown to bits would give him a shot at some kind of file on Vandy—and the rock sleazos she might have run to. If the office was under guard, he was still armed for pig with the .45.

The map thinking gave him a new jolt of juice. Getting itchy to *be* there, he loosened his grip on the bag in order to regrip it for a straight run at his target. When it felt lighter to his touch, he checked the bottom and saw a big hole. Sticking his hand in, he saw that more than half the money had fallen out.

Catching himself about to scream, Rice clutched the bag with all his strength and beelined, running across the street and sidewalk, back through another driveway and yard. Ignoring a copter light scanning only three houses away, he hurtled an ivy-covered chain fence and ran out to the street. He was about to keep going when a flash of lavender dented his wobbly vision and registered as *home.*

Rice let his eyes trawl Gardner Avenue for danger signs. There was no one on either side of the street, and no cop cars, marked or unmarked. Squinting at the whore building, he saw a black tarpaulin covering the demolished front window. Flipping an imaginary brain switch marked "caution," he placed the money bag on the ground and memorized its location, then took the .45 from his waistband. Catching his breath, he walked to Silver Foxes.

There were no lights on in the four-flat. Rice checked the luminous dial of his watch, saw that it was 3:40 and did a mental run-through: the whoremasters hobnobbing with the fuzz after the shooting, getting workmen to do a quick fix-up job until the window could be repaired properly, getting rid of the incriminating shit, then getting out. The thought of no files brought him to the point of screaming, and he ran to the tarpaulin, grabbed the right-side fastenings with both hands and pulled.

The tarp came loose and crashed to the lawn. Rice stepped in the window, found the wall light and turned it on.

The dispatch room was a bullet-wasted ruin, big chunks of white wall ripped out, the plastic desk dinged and cracked from ricochets. Remembering a Rolodex, Rice scanned the room unsuccessfully for it, then went through the desk drawers. Finding nothing but blank paper and rolls of film, he stood up to think and saw an old-fashioned filing cabinet just inside the bathroom door.

All three drawers were locked. Standing to one side, Rice closed the door on the barrel of his .45, so that just the silencer was inside the bathroom. He fired seven times at the cabinet, and soft plops went off like muffled thunder. The last shots reverberated off the metal surface and tore the door in half; through muzzle smoke he could see the cabinet on its side spilling manila folders.

Digging into them, Rice saw names typed on side tabs, and that the files had spilled out in close to alphabetical order. Tearing through the R's, S's and T's, he felt his bowels loosen. Then "Vanderlinden, Annie" was in his hands, and he didn't know if it was good or bad, so he turned off the light and ran with it out to the Trans Am.

But it wasn't there.

Land mines, booby traps, snipers and werewolf-faced dogs flashed through his mind, and he hit the ground like soldiers in the million old movies he'd seen on TV. Eating curb grass instead of dirt, he waited for machine-gun ack-ack and managed to slide Vandy's file into his pants along with his .45. When no attack came, he did a squat run over to the money bag and picked it up, then walked slowly toward the Fountain Avenue roadblock—the eye of his hurricane.

Staying in the shadows of front porches and shrubbery, he saw the cordon setup come into focus: north-south traffic on Gardner was blocked off, with two cops standing at the ready to pass innocent cars through and fire on ones that rabbited. East-west traffic on Fountain was being inspected the same way, but only at stoplights. Since the nearest lights were three blocks away on the east and two on the west, all he had to do was get south of Fountain, steal a car and *roll.*

Rice eyed the barricade and cops twenty yards away. The roadblocks had probably been set up right after he plowed the pig on Formosa. They were figuring him for a car thief and had zipped the area up tight as a drum. If they found Bobby Sharkshit, a block off the Boulevard, they were probably knocking down doors up there. Sunset and Fountain were sealed, and probably Hollywood and Franklin. They would not have the men to hit the streets further south, and they probably figured he couldn't have made it that far anyway.

Rice swallowed and secured his only three possessions: the gun, the file and the paper bag of money. Feeling them bonded to him, he lowered himself to the ground and rolled off the corner house lawn to the sidewalk and into the street, a dark, pavement-eating dervish. Catching sight of the cops with their backs to him, he kept rolling, gravel digging into his cheeks and shredding the bag until a trail of cash drifted in his wake. He rolled until he hit the opposite sidewalk, then elbowed his way over the curb and rolled until soft grass kissed his gouged face. When he finally felt safe enough to stand up, he was on the beautiful front lawn of a beautiful little house, midway down a beautiful little block, with no barricade at its southern intersection and plenty of beautiful cars parked within stealing distance.

29

On the doorstep of the big house, Anne smoothed Joe's shirt front and said, "You look like a *real* street person. I'll tell my friends you're a producer, that you're scouting Chicano groups in the Barrio. Just listen to the music, and you'll have a good time."

Punk rock boomed inside. Joe took a long look at the spectacular view: the Strip winding to the east, Beverly Hills below them, glow from swimming pools the only light. "I don't want to have a good time," he said. "We're down to twenty scoots, and we need a traveling stake. Just remember that."

Anne said, "You got it, tough guy," and put out her cigarette on an Astroturf mat embossed with "If You Don't Rock, Don't Knock." She took a deep breath, then started in on her signature boogie and pushed the door open.

Following a pace behind, Joe thought he'd been transported back to Lincoln Heights in the sixties, when the vatos and the hippies were waging war, and one side of North Broadway was bodegas and poolrooms, the other side a twenty-four-hour-a-day light show/love-in/dope-in. While Anne bebopped into the scene, he hung back and eyeballed for details to prove that it was '84, not '68, and he wasn't having a shock-induced acid flashback.

The whole downstairs was a pressed-together mass of people in costume—men in full-drape zoot suits and Nazi uniforms, women in gangster moll dresses and Girl Scout outfits. Groups of gangsters and molls slam-danced into Nazis and scouts, while colored lights blipped from the ceiling and different rock videos flashed on screens hung to the four walls. The refrain "Go down go down go down go down" blasted from quadrophonic speakers, and Joe felt his head reel as he scoped out Godzilla attacking Tokyo and Marlon Brando tooling on a Harley hog while caped musicians genuflected into his exhaust. The other screens were out of focus, but he could catch people in weird makeup fucking and sucking. A conga line of gangsters were facing off against a trio of goose-stepping Nazis, who were kicking molls and scouts out of their way in the direction of a circle of amyl nitrate sniffers. And preppy Anne cut a path through all of it, screeching, "Where's Mel? Where's Mel?"

Knowing she was stone '84, Joe stood on his tiptoes and followed her bobbing pink sweater, keeping his head down as he pushed past partyers, hoping they wouldn't see his face reflected in the lights and know how scared he was. At the far side of the room he saw Anne break free and talk to a guy in a butler's outfit, who pointed her down the hall. Slipping out of the crowd himself, he caught a glimpse of Anne entering a darkly lit room.

Joe walked toward the door. When he was just outside it, he heard Anne pleading: "Just two hundred, Mel. My squeeze and I have to leave L.A."

"You'll blow it on blow, Annie," a coarse male voice said. "And I thought you were with Stan K. I know for a fact he ain't hurting—I bought some vids off him last week."

"Stan and I broke up, Mel. It was sort of … quick. My new guy and I *have* to leave. You remember Duane?"

"Sure. Disco Duane the discount car king. Your squeeze before Klein before your current bimbo. You see a pattern there, sweetie?"

"Mel, he's crazy, and he's after me!"

"I don't blame him; you're a class act. Third class, but class nonetheless. Sweetie, if I give you money you'll just get coked and be broke again quicksville. There's complimentary outside. Have some."

Anne screeched, "I popped some strange stuff I found, and it's still on! I don't need blow, I need money!"

Mel laughed. "You've got to earn it."

"I know," Anne said. "I know."

Joe walked away from the door, wondering why he felt betrayed—Anne was a one-hour stand at best. Retreating toward the back of the house, the reason grabbed him by the balls. She's your witness. She saw you kill a man and steal a car and drive a stick shift. She doesn't know about you being dominated by Bobby. She thinks you're as bad-ass as Duane Rice.

Coming to a small room next to the kitchen, Joe looked in and saw a guy watching TV with the sound off. The guy was strumming an electric guitar while chortling at a beer ad, and Joe got another whiff of the bad old sixties. Then double stone '84 hit the TV, and he knew it was hallucinogenic.

Bobby was on the screen, wearing gloves and trunks, crouched in his "Boogaloo" stance. Joe ran to the TV and fumbled the volume dial; the guy put down the guitar and blurted, "Hey, man, I want it that way!" Joe got the sound on just as Bobby the boxer dissolved into a shot of paramedics carrying a sheet-covered stretcher out of a church.

" … and Garcia is the second person to be murdered in the Hollywood area tonight. His body was discovered inside a Catholic church on Las Palmas and Franklin, half a mile from the spot where an L.A.P.D. officer was hit and run by a man in a stolen car. Police spokesmen have said that there may be a link to Monday's West L.A. bank robbery that left four dead. Meanwhile, a massive—"

The TV blipped to another beer ad—"This one's for you, no matter what you're doing and you"—and Joe saw that the guitar guy had hit a remote-control button. "This one's for you!" rang out nonhallucinogenically, and he knew it was Bobby's epitaph. He grabbed the guitar from the guy's lap and stalked with it back to the party.

Gangsters, molls, Nazis and scouts were arranged in a circle in the middle of the living room. The video screens were blank, and the strobes were replaced by indent lighting. Mel's coarse voice rose from inside the circle: "Ladies and jelly beans, Little Annie Vandy, dirty, raunchy, coked-out and randy, does the too-hep dance of the dirty prep!"

Holding the guitar by the neck, Joe used the business end as a prod and poked his way into the circle. Anne was there, attempting to gyrate and pull off her sweater at the same time. Her eyes were glazed, and her whole body twitched. Mel, standing beside her in tennis whites, was snapping his fingers.

"This one's for you!" and the shot of Bobby in his leopard-skin trunks gave Joe the necessary guts. He roundhoused the guitar at Mel's head, knocking him into a line of zoot suiters and Nazis, then swung an overhand shot that grazed helmets and snap-brim fedoras before catching the host in the neck. Mel hit the floor, and the partygoers separated and moved backward. Joe saw that they weren't frightened or shocked, but that they were digging it, and that Anne was running for the door.

Holding the guitar/weapon by the tuning pegs, he stuck it out at arm's length and spun around and around on a tiny foot axis, moving into the crowd, assailing them with glancing blows that set off a chain reaction of shrieks, squeals and bursts of applause. As the partygoers gave him more and more space, the applause became thunderous. Joe felt a queasy vertigo, and realized that the sleazebags loved him.

Screaming "Bobby!" he hurled the guitar into the middle of them and ran out the door. Reeling across the lawn toward a speck of pink down the street, he thought he saw an unmarked fuzz car parked in the shadows. Feeling invulnerable, he flipped it the bird and ran until his preppy partner was only a few feet away. Slowing to a walk, he caught up with her and tapped her shoulder. When she turned and looked at him with Twilight Zone eyes, he gasped, "I ain't no fucking musician. I ain't no fucking rock and roll fool."

30

Sunlight on his face forced Lloyd awake. The telephone fell from his lap, and he bent over to pick it up. Remembering Dutch's promised surveillance deployment, he put the receiver to his ear and started to call the Hollywood Station number. Then three little clicks came over the line instead of a dial tone, and the phone fell from his hands.

Bugged.

Gaffaney.

Lloyd ran outside and looked up and down the block. There were no vans on the street, and no other vehicles large enough to hold a mobile bugging apparatus. The tap was stationary and had to originate in a nearby dwelling.

Eye trawling, Lloyd saw his familiar landscape of two-story houses and apartment buildings turn menacing. His own small Colonial seemed suddenly vulnerable, surrounded by potential monsters. Then the most likely monster caught his attention and made him wince: the old Spanish-style building next door, recently converted to condos.

Lloyd ran into the entrance vestibule and checked the mailboxes. Only one unit—7—was without a name. He walked down the hallway, feeling his rage escalating as the numbers increased, hoping for a flimsy door and another shot at Sergeant Wallace D. Collins. Finding a solid doorway with a Mickey Mouse lock, he took a credit card from his wallet, slipped it into the runner crack and jiggled the knob. The door opened, and he entered a musty apartment furnished with only a desk holding electrical equipment.

Calling out "Collins," Lloyd reached for his .45, then flinched at the simple reflex and what it meant. When no sounds answered his call, he moved to the desk and examined the setup.

It was a simple tapper to outside wires hookup, with a tape recorder attached to record calls. A red light glowed on the panel by the "Remote Receiver" button, and a green light and the number 12 flashed on and off under the switch marked "Messages Received." Shuddering, Lloyd pushed the "Rewind" button and watched the tape spool spin. When it stopped, he hit "Play." "Hollywood Station, Captain Peltz speaking" filled the empty room, bouncing off the walls like a deadpan death decree.

Lloyd pushed the "Off" button. Gaffaney and his freaks had word on the surveillances and had listened to him sob to the inanimate voices of his wife and favorite daughter, and there was nothing he could do to turn it around.

Turning off the recorder and pulling the plug on the bugging device made the powerless feeling worse. Lloyd walked home. The phone was ringing, and he picked up the receiver like it was something about to explode.

“Yes?”

“Dutch, Lloyd.”

“And?”

“And you owe me a report, and that outcall place on Gardner was broken into last night. The files were gone through, and there’s fresh large-caliber gunshot holes in the walls, and they had to have come from a silencered piece, because two of my men were stationed at a roadblock half a block away. A Ford LTD was reported stolen on the adjoining block, and there’s no reports from the first surveillance shift. I just dispatched daywatch units to relieve them, so that’s covered. *And*—”

Lloyd hung up. Listening to Dutch’s angry litany had been like watching two trains heading toward each other on the same track, both on locked-in automatic pilot. All he could do now was patrol the wreckage and hope for survivors.

31

Rice steered the LTD through the winding roads of Trousdale Estates. His vision was going blurry again, and he had to hold Vandy's file up to right in front of his eyes in order to read the address. Driving with one hand, he remembered his first three possibilities—big dark houses with fuzzmobiles parked across the street. If he hadn't given each pad a slow-around-the-block circuit, he'd be dead. This approach had to be just as cautious.

By squinting until tears came into his eyes, he was able to pick out Hillcrest. He tried to make his brain into a map like he did in Hollywood, then flashed that that only worked when you had some idea where you were. Slowing to a crawl, he squinted for street signs. There weren't any; Trousdale was strictly for people who knew where they were going. He was about to scrounge the glove compartment for a street atlas when an unmarked Matador passed him in the opposite direction.

So Plastic Fantastic had to be nearby. Rice drove slowly, watching the Matador hazily disappear in his rearview mirror. Straining to read house numbers was futile, making the blurring worse and causing head pounding and stomach cramps on top of it. Pulling to the curb, he got out and walked.

His legs were wobbly, but he was able to move in a straight line. Thinking in a straight line was harder, and he kept wondering why the cop car had split, giving him a clean shot. Finally he gave up thinking and kept walking. The front lawns he was passing looked soft and cushiony, and every time the green shined through his tear blur he started to yawn. Reaching into his shirt pocket for the last of the speed, he saw that he'd already swallowed it, and snapped that squinting at addresses from the sidewalk was no better than from the car, and twice as dangerous. He was about to go back to the LTD when strangely dressed people started walking across an especially beautiful stretch of grass. He cut over to meet them, and they slid past him in a jet stream that reminded him of taillights on a freeway at night.

He grabbed at their shadows and spoke to what he could see of their faces: "Vandy Vanderlinden, you know her? You seen her?" He said it a dozen times, and got nothing but hoots and catcalls in return. Then the people were gone, and there was green grass in all directions. Rice heard breathing in front of him, and rubbed his eyes so he could see who he was talking to.

The absence of tears gave him back most of his sight, and his eyes honed in on two big men in Windbreakers. When he saw that they were aiming shotguns at him, he reached for the .45. The butts of their weapons crashed into his head just as he remembered he'd left his piece in the car.

He was on the main drag of Hawaiian Garbage, running red lights on a dare, trying to break his old night record of nine straight. Everything was dark red and very fast, and he knew he could go on forever. Everything was also very warm, getting warmer as the string of reds extended. Then everything went cold, and his eyes were forced open and someone was wiping water from his face. He knew he was standing, that he was being held upright. His old 20/20 snapped in on scrub bushes, dirt and a cement embankment that stank of chemicals. He knew immediately that he was at Suicide Hill.

A fuzz type in a cheapo suit stepped in front of him, blotting out his view of the terrain. The grip on his arms tightened. Rice saw a weird lapel pin on the fuzz type's jacket and a .357 Python in his right hand, and knew he was going to die. He tried to think up a suitable wisecrack, but "She was a stone heartbreaker" came out instead. *And I loved her* was about to come out, but three slugs from the magnum hit him first.

32

Lloyd waited in the third-floor attorney room of the Main County Jail. He had a perjury script in his jacket pocket, Stan Klein's rap sheet in one hand, Louie Calderon's arrest report in the other. Klein had two convictions for possession of marijuana back in the early seventies, and Likable Louie had been booked for assault on a police officer. So far, the survivor patrol was surviving—at least on the basis of planning strategies and circumstantial facts. And the more he looked at Klein's mug shot, the more he resembled Joe Garcia.

A jailer ushered Calderon into the room and pointed him toward the chair across the table from Lloyd. His face was bruised and stitched from the Metro beating, but he walked steadily, and his soft brown eyes were clear. He looked like a man capable of making smart snap decisions.

Lloyd stood up and stuck out his hand; Calderon sat down without grasping it. "What do you want?" he said.

Lloyd slid Stan Klein's mug shot over to him. "I want to save Joe Garcia's ass from the gas chamber and help you beat your assault beef. Do you know this man?"

Calderon glanced at the snapshot and shook his head. "No. Who is he?"

"He's the third member of the robbery gang. His name is Stan Klein, a.k.a. 'Stan Man.' He's taking the fall for Joe Garcia, and he's a longtime known associate of yours. *Comprende,* homeboy?"

Calderon narrowed his eyes. "He gonna lie down for a frame?"

Drawing a finger across his throat, Lloyd said, "He's dead. Have you made a statement to anyone here or back at Rampart?"

"No. I just kicked loose with the names. You should know—you were there. If this joker Klein is eighty-six, how you gonna make him for the heists? And what the fuck do you *want*?"

Savoring Likable Louie's wariness, Lloyd said, "Rice killed Klein. Bobby Garcia is dead, shot by Rice last night. Joe and Rice are still out there. Rice won't last much longer, but Joe's got a chance. Here's the pitch: I give you a little fact sheet on Klein, you memorize it. You shut your mouth until you get word that Rice is dead. I know he's a smart guy, but the heat is huge, and no cop is going to let him see due process. When he's dead, you talk to the D.A.'s investigators, who are going to start hounding your ass as soon as I submit my report to them. You tell them that you sold the hardware to Rice, and that he told you that he was forming a gang—him, Bobby Garcia and Klein. Got it?"

Calderon leaned forward. "What's in it for *me,* and what's in it for *you*?"

Leaning forward himself, Lloyd said, "Louie, there's a lot of dead people out there, and most of them are cops, and you supplied the guns that killed them.

You're dead and buried. The feds have got your number, the regular L.A.P.D. and the freak cops have got it, I've got it. Bobby's dead, and Rice is as good as dead, and the D.A. is going to look for someone to crucify on this thing, and it's going to be you."

Pale now, Calderon plucked at his stitches until blood trickled out. When he saw what he was doing, he stopped and stammered, "Y-y-yeah, b-b-but what do you *want*?

Lloyd said, "To see you and Joe get out of this alive. Here's the rest of the pitch. I've got a little scenario for you to memorize before you talk to the D.A. How you fingered Joe Garcia because he stiffed you on some burglary goods, stuff like that. You play it right, and the D.A. and his boys will buy your story. And I go to the D.A. and tell him how those Metro bulls beat the confession out of you, and I clean all the incriminating shit out of your pad, and I get Nate Steiner to defend you if you go to trial, which you probably won't, because the D.A. will not want me to testify in court against other officers. I'd lay three to one that if you cooperate with me, you'll walk."

Calderon slammed the tabletop with clenched fists. "Hopkins, nobody does something like that for nothing. What do you fucking *want*!"

Smiling, Lloyd took the survival script from his pocket and laid it on the table. "I don't want anything. If you're as smart as I think you are, you'll believe me."

He stood up and stuck out his hand, and this time Calderon grasped it and said, "Crazy Lloyd Hopkins, Jesus Christ."

Lloyd laughed. "I'm no savior. One more thing: have you got any idea where Joe would run to if he figured the heat was off?"

Likable Louie thought for a moment, then said, "The guitar shop on Temple and Beaudry. He's sort of an amateur musician, and sooner or later he'll show up there." He put the two pieces of paper in his shirt pocket and added, "Memorize, then flush."

Lloyd buzzed for the jailer to return. On his way out the door, he pointed a cocked-gun finger at Calderon and said, "Support your local police."

Now the shitwork.

Lloyd drove to the Western Costume Company and purchased a high-quality black wig and full beard, then drove to Stan Klein's Mount Olympus villa. A fresh morning newspaper indicated that the pad was untampered with since last night's prowling with Rhonda. Steeling himself with a deep breath and a handkerchief around his nose, he picked the lock and walked in. The smell was awful, but not overpowering. Lloyd gave the corpse a cursory glance, then donned gloves and went to work.

First he found the central heating and turned the temperature up to eighty-five, then he stripped to the waist and wiped all the downstairs touch and grab surfaces, visualizing the Klein/Rice/Garcia/Vanderlinden confrontation all the while, finally deciding that musician Joe never made it to the upper floor. The heat and the increased odor of decomposition it created were oppressive, and he gave up his wiping after a peremptory run-through, leaving the video gadgets surrounding Klein's body alone.

With potential Garcia latents in all probability eliminated, Lloyd tossed the house for photographs of Stan Klein. Drenched in sweat, he opened drawers and tore through dressers; checked the bureaus in all three bedrooms. The upstairs yielded a half dozen Polaroids that looked recent, and the living room two framed portrait photos. Lloyd placed them by the banister, then took a pen and notebook paper from his jacket and jogged up to the master bedroom to write.

With the door shut and the air-conditioning on full, he wrote for three hours, detailing his investigation of the first two robbery/kidnaps, and Captain John McManus' assigning of him to the Pico-Westholme robbery/homicides. This account was factual. The rest of the report comprised a companion piece to his script for Louie Calderon, and stated how Calderon, under physical duress, gave the names Duane Rice, Bobby Garcia and Joe Garcia to Sergeants W. D. Collins and K. R. Lohmann, later partially recanting his statement to him, stating truthfully that Stanley Klein was the "third man," and that he had named Joe Garcia for revenge on an old criminal grievance. Omitting mention of Rhonda Morrell, he concluded by stating that he had discovered Stan Klein's body, and that a scrap of paper beside the corpse led him to Silver Foxes and his still unaccounted-for shootout with Duane Rice. Attributing his delay in reporting the body to a desire to "remain mobile and assist in the active investigation," Lloyd signed his name and badge number, then sent up a prayer for lackluster forensic technicians to aid him in his lies.

The smell was now unbearable.

Lloyd turned off the air-conditioning and heat, then went downstairs and put on his shirt and jacket. Seeing that the body had bloated at the stomach and that the cheeks had rotted through to the gums, he tossed the wig and mustache at the pile of video tapes, then found a plugged-in stereo and turned on the FM full blast. The noise covered the three desecration gunshots with ease, and he forced himself to look at the damage. As he hoped, the entry wounds got lost in the overall decomposition. Knowing he couldn't bear to crawl under the house for the expended rounds, Lloyd turned off the music and sent up another prayer—this one a general mercy plea. Then he got out, hyperventilating when fresh, sane air hit his lungs.

Now the loose ends.

Lloyd drove to Hollywood Station. In the parking lot, he put the report in an envelope and wrote *Captain Arthur F. Peltz* on the front, then left it with the desk officer, who told him that there was no word on the whereabouts of Duane Richard Rice, and that the dragnet was still in full force.

The funereal air of the station was claustrophobic. From a street pay phone, Lloyd called the office of Nathan Steiner, Attorney at Law, and asked for a ballpark figure on a murder one defense. Steiner's head clerk said 40K minimum. Hanging up, Lloyd figured that with a "police discount" he could swing it.

Now the scary part.

Lloyd fed all the change in his pockets to the phone and dialed Janice's Frisco number, grateful that the voices he would be speaking to wouldn't be able to answer back. Holding his breath, he heard, "Hi, this is Janice Hopkins. The girls and I have taken our act on the road, but we should be returning before Christmas," and "The woods are lovely dark and deep. Leave a message at the beep."

The beep went off. Lloyd let out his breath and said, "Take your act south before I do something crazy. You're all I've got left." Then he drove home and walked upstairs to the bedroom he had kept inviolate since his wife left him two years before. There, on a dust-covered bed, he fell asleep to wait for survival or oblivion.

33

Eight hours after executing his only son's executioner, Captain Fred Gaffaney sat down in his study and began the writing of his last will and testament.

The execution weapon rested on the desk beside him, and he breathed cordite residue as he put to paper his bequest: cash amounting to slightly over twenty thousand dollars, the house, its furnishings and his two cars to the Church of Jesus Christ, Christian. The magnum loomed at the corner of his vision, and he tried to recall Bible passages that dictated suicide excluding heaven and meeting the Savior. Verses came and went, but none stuck, and the .357 was still there. Finally he gave up trying and accepted the fact. Only Catholics bought suicide as an exclusionary sin, and they could not justify it with Biblical references. It was an acceptable out for a warrior Christian with nowhere else to go.

Looking over his words, Gaffaney saw that they took up only one yellow legal page. He had written accident reports ten times that long, and he didn't want to pull the trigger on a note of brevity. He thought he could perform the execution as a ritual that affirmed the rule of law, but when Lohmann and Collins tossed Duane Rice's body into its sewage bed grave, he knew that he had violated everything he believed in, and that that apostasy demanded the death sentence. Knowing also that the condemned deserved reflection before their sentence was carried out, he allowed himself the mercy of returning to Suicide Hill in the fall of '61.

He was a rookie then, working daywatch patrol out of East Valley Division, twenty-six years old, with a wife and baby son. His beat included the Sepulveda V.A. Hospital, and half his duty time was spent ferrying sad old soldier boozehounds from the wine bars on Victory Boulevard back to their domiciles, the other half writing traffic citations. It was boring police work for a young man who knew only one thing about himself—that he was ambitious.

There was an old wino who kept escaping the domicile to get bombed on white port and pass out religious tracts to the teenaged gangsters who inhabited Suicide Hill at night. The local officers respected him, because he refused to accept welfare and stuck the V.A. with the full tab for his room and board. He was a tall, Germanic-looking man with haunting blue eyes, and the tracts he distributed emphasized a warrior Jesus Christ, who loved his followers fiercely and exhorted them to strike down evil wherever they saw it.

The wino was a brilliant storyteller, and the gangsters liked to get him juiced and incite him to tall tales. He always obliged, and he always weaved sermons into his stories, ending them with a handing out of leaflets emblazoned with a cross and a flag.

To Officer Fred Gaffaney, Irish Catholic atheist, the wino was a pathetic crackpot. He grudgingly followed the implicit division edict of never busting him for "plain drunk," but he would not listen to his stories for a second. Thus, when the wino approached him one afternoon with a feverish account of a bunch of Demon Dog members out to kill him, he turned a deaf ear, gave him fifty cents for a jug and told him to get back to the domicile.

A week later, the wino's body was found, scattered all over Suicide Hill. He had been drawn and quartered. The investigating detectives reconstructed his death as being caused by four motorcycles taking off simultaneously, each with one of his limbs tied to the rear axle. The M.E. reconstructed that he had been decapitated after his death, and Officer Fred Gaffaney reconstructed himself as a coward and did not come forward with his information on the Demon Dogs, because it would hinder his career.

The anonymous tip on the Dogs that he sent to Robbery/Homicide Division two torturous weeks after the killing did not lead them to the slayers or ease his conscience. The wino's blue eyes singed him in his sleep. Booze and illegally procured sleeping pills didn't help, and he could not talk about it to a single human being.

So he sought out God.

Returning to the old Catholic fold helped, but he could not take his wino/victim with him to the confessional. Liquor in concert with the Church helped a little more, but the blue eyes and "The Dogs got a contract out on me, Officer Fred, and you gotta help me!" were always a half step away, ready to pounce just when he thought everything was going to be all right.

The Job helped most of all, but still did not provide a panacea. He *served*, working long overtime hours, writing laborious reports on the most minor occurrences, afraid that any parcel of information left unreported would lead to spiritual catastrophe and death. A few superior officers regarded him as fanatical, but most considered him a model of police meticulousness. Spurred by constant encouragement, he climbed the ladder.

He became a sergeant and was assigned to the Detective Division, then passed the lieutenant's exam and went to Robbery/Homicide. The Church, the wino, and cross and flag nightmares simmered on his soul's back burner, pushed there by ambitiousness and a barrage of rationalizations—his drive for power was atonement; his stern rule over lax, libertine underlings was a sword thrust that would move the blue-eyed specter himself; encouraging of his son to become a policeman was evidence that the atonement would pass to a second generation of Gaffaneys. His wife's death of cancer gave a weight of grief to the guilt procession, and when he buried her, he felt that the sad old storyteller had finally been put to rest.

Then he met Lloyd Hopkins, and the out-of-control hot dog blew everything to hell.

He had, of course, been hearing about him for years, taking in accounts of his exploits with amazement and disgust, but never considering him worth knowing from the standpoints of career advancement or Robbery/Homicide efficacy. Then, assigned as supervisor of his sector, Thad Braverton gave him the word: "Hopkins is the best. Give him carte blanche."

The undercutting of his authority had rankled, but Crazy Lloyd's actions made it pall by comparison. Hopkins' life was one giant sword swipe at real and imagined evil; the terror and guilt and rage that burned in his eyes were laser beam incisions into that part of him where “Suicide Hill ’61” was engraved like gang graffiti. He had to fight what Hopkins was, so he tracked down the cross and flag leaflets and was born again.

It worked.

He carried the wino’s message; took comfort in its call to duty. He studied the Bible and prayed, and found fellow officers who believed as he did. They followed him, and when he passed the captain’s exam and was flagged for the I.A.D. exec position, he knew that nothing could stop him from achieving a spellbinding selfhood preordained by God and a martyred madman twenty years dead.

Then Hopkins took out the “Hollywood Slaughterer.” The boldness of his measures inspired awe among the men of the born-again officer corps, and had Hopkins walked into one of their prayer meetings, they would have genuflected before him as if the sex-crazed lunatic were Christ himself. His solving of the Havilland/Goff homicides a year later again brought the men to their figurative knees. He became a rival spiritual patriarch who was dangerous precisely because he did not covet spiritual power, and the means to his destruction had to be divinely sought and given.

Hours and hours were spent praying. He spoke to God of his hatred for Hopkins, and got small comfort. His strategy to upgrade his son’s school records and gain his admission to the Academy worked, and Steven graduated and was assigned to West L.A. Division. Prayer and the appointment of a second-generation Gaffaney to the Department helped diffuse Hopkins’ hold on his mind, as did the building up of the interdepartmental dirt files. Then his prayers were rewarded, and promptly backfired.

Lamar Dayton, a Devonshire Division lieutenant and longtime born-again, joined the corps and told him of whoremaster Hopkins and his Watts baptism of fire. Circumstantial verification of National Guard records made the final message ring clear: Hopkins, not himself, was the divinely gifted policeman/warrior, and what drove him was not God, but awful self-willed needs and desires—all mortal in nature.

Gaffaney stood up and looked at the clock above his desk. His stay of execution ruminations had consumed an hour, and were still not one hundred percent conclusive. He thought of things to be grateful for: he and Steven had been close in the days before his death, and Steve had confided that he had resisted the retired deputy’s fencing imprecations, turning over a new leaf. That was comforting, as was the fact that he had not compounded his self-hatred by letting Hopkins perform the execution.

“Hopkins” and “Execution” filled in the missing percentage points, and extended the stay of sentence to the indeterminate near future. Gaffaney looked at the magnum and suddenly knew why he had stolen his death weapon from an L.A.P.D. source. Only Lloyd Hopkins would be crazy enough and bold enough to follow the gun to its source and back to him, regardless of the consequences and devil take the hindmost. He had taken the magnum from a Wilshire Division evidence room in full view of a half dozen officers because he wanted to sacrifice himself to the man he most admired and envied.

Thinking of “Suicide Hill ’61” and mercy, Gaffaney carried his three armfuls of files into the bathroom and dumped them in the tub, then walked downstairs and grabbed a bottle of bourbon off the bar. Returning upstairs with it, he doused the pile of paper and dropped a match on top. His hold on scores of men went up in flames, and he waited until all the data was obliterated before turning on the shower. The fire hissed, sizzled and died, and Gaffaney walked back to the den to wait for his executioner.

34

Awakening from eighteen hours of dreamless sleep, Lloyd rolled off the dusty bed and walked to the window to see if it was night or day.

Creeping sunlight from the eastern horizon told him it was dawn, and the paperboy hurling the *Times* at the front door told him that it was neither survival nor oblivion, simply time to get on with it. After shaving, showering and dressing in his favorite sport coat/slacks combo, Lloyd sat at the dining room table and wrote out a declaration that two weeks before he would have considered incomprehensible.

> Gentlemen:
>
> This letter constitutes my formal resignation from the Los Angeles Police Department. It is tendered with regret, but not under a state of emotional duress. The reasons for my resignation are threefold: I wish to devote a good deal of time to my family; I have incurred the enmity of several high-ranking officers; and events of the recent past have convinced me that my effectiveness as a homicide investigator is drastically diminished. It is my wish to be assigned to either clerking or nonfield supervisory duties until my twenty-year anniversary comes up next October. I am grateful for the Department's offer of early retirement with full pension, but feel it would be dishonorable to accept it without serving the required twenty years.
>
> Respectfully, Lloyd W. Hopkins

Bracing himself for the outside world, Lloyd put the resignation letter in his pocket and walked to the door, hoping the *Times* would carry news of one man's death and another man's safe passage. Throwing the door open, the headline beamed up at him: " 'Suicide Hill' Suicide Ends Four-Day Murder Spree."

Leaning into the doorway, Lloyd let the subheading of "Cop Killer-Robber Takes Own Life at Fabled Youth Gang Meeting Ground" sink in. Then, with his brain screaming first "Gaffaney," then "No!" he read the entire account:

> Los Angeles, December 15
>
> The Los Angeles Police Department announced today that the greatest manhunt in L.A. history has ended with the suicide of multiple murderer Duane Richard Rice, the mastermind behind Monday's West Los Angeles bank robbery that left four dead.
>
> Rice, twenty-eight, a career criminal with convictions for vehicular

> manslaughter and grand theft auto, is believed also to be responsible for Tuesday night’s hit-and-run murder of L.A.P.D. officer Edward Qualter and the fatal shootings of the gang’s two other members, Robert Garcia and Stanley Klein, bringing the total of his victims to seven.
>
> At a late night press conference at Parker Center, L.A.P.D. Chief of Detectives Thad Braverton explained how the cooperation of an anonymous associate of the gang gave police the means to reconstruct the reign of terror:
>
> “It was a classic case of a falling out among thieves,” the Chief said. “Rice, Garcia and Klein were the perpetrators of two well-planned robbery/hostage forays in the Valley the week preceding the Pico-Westholme bank robbery, which we view now as having been undertaken by Rice partially out of a desire for revenge—one of the bank employees, Gordon Meyers, a former Los Angeles County deputy sheriff, was his jailer during a recent incarceration.”
>
> Braverton went on: “We do not know precisely *why* Rice wanted revenge, but *that* he did is a safe assumption. Our witness in custody is the man who sold the robbery gang their guns, and he, a long-term associate of the three men, states that distrust ran deep among them. The other men also possess criminal records—Garcia for burglary, Klein for possession of narcotics. Klein was also heavily involved in video pornography. Circumstantially, we believe that Rice shot and killed both Garcia and Klein, his motive being a desire to keep their share of the money from the Pico-Westholme robbery. There is also an evidential corroboration for this—our chief ballistics officer, Arthur Cranfield, has examined the .45-caliber slugs taken from the bodies of Garcia, Klein and Rice, and he states *conclusively* that they came from the Colt army-issue .45 found in Duane Rice’s hand when patrolmen discovered his body lying in the Sepulveda Wash.”

Lloyd scanned the rest of the article, a hyperbolic spiel about tragedy, law and order, and the forthcoming L.A.P.D. funerals. The total picture bombarded him as a patchwork of victory and defeat, survival and denial. His report to Dutch, the forensic subterfuge at Stan Klein’s pad and Louie Calderon’s testimony had been, if not actually believed, accepted in the spirit of letting sleeping dogs lie. But the Duane Rice “suicide” was preposterous. On Tuesday night Dutch had said that two .45s were recovered at the Bowl Motel, while his own gun had supplied the Stan Klein “death” shots. If Rice had been killed with his own piece, which was doubtful, because he never would have relinquished it—he didn’t pull the trigger himself.

Lloyd felt a queasy rage overtake him. Rice had deserved to die; he had contemplated his cold-blooded murder himself. And the man who most likely killed him held a death sentence over his own head. Running red lights and siren to Parker Center, he couldn’t believe he was crazy enough to take the both of them out in one fell swoop.

The Central Crime Lab was bustling with technicians. Lloyd found Artie Cranfield in his usual workday posture, hunched over a double-plated ballistics microscope. Knowing that nothing short of an air raid would force Artie's head up, he said, "Tell me the real dope on Klein and Rice. What's Braverton stonewalling?"

Artie came up smiling. "Hello, Lloyd. Would you repeat that?"

Lloyd smiled and cleared his throat; Artie said, "Not here," and pointed to his office. Lloyd walked in, and five minutes later Artie joined him. Shutting the door, he said, "Straight business?"

Nodding affirmatively, Lloyd said, "A bunch of fixes are in. I found Klein's body, D.O.A. knifing. I fired three shots from my .45 into his stiff, so I know that 'same gun' stuff in the papers is bullshit. Did you process the evidence on Rice?"

Artie gave his four walls a furtive look, then said, "I was there at the autopsy. The M.E. handed me three spent .357s, dug them out of Rice's chest. The rear of the jackets were nicked, right where the firing pin would make contact. Very distinctive, and very familiar. I checked ballistics bulletins going back eighteen months. Bingo! Matchup to an old unsolved in Wilshire Division, street shooting, gun found and held by the Wilshire Dicks, you know, to lean on possible shooters with."

Taking the stats in, Lloyd got the feel of a wild card or big wrong move. "Your conclusions, Artie?"

"Do I look dumb? One of our guys zapped the cop-killing cocksucker. Anyway, I called John McManus and told him what I found, and he said, 'Keep it zipped, Officer.' A half hour later Big Thad shows up, hands me three .45 spents and says, 'Garcia, Klein, Rice, case closed. Capice?' Since I intend to collect my pension, I said, 'Yes, sir.' So you keep it zipped. Capice, Lloydy?"

A Technicolor movie of Louie Calderon guzzling beer and Joe Garcia strumming a guitar surrounded by hula girls passed through Lloyd's mind's eye. He resisted an impulse to grab Artie in a bear hug, then said, "Do *I* look dumb?"

"No," Artie said, "just slaphappy."

"Well put. I need a favor."

"You always need favors."

"Well put. I've got a long stakeout coming up. Processed any speed lately?"

"Black beauties?"

"Music to my ears. I've got a phone call to make. I'll see you in five minutes."

While Artie made the speed run, Lloyd called Wilshire Detectives. His old friend Pete Ehrlich's answer to his question made wild card/big wrong move a *big* understatement:

At 9:30 Wednesday morning, Captain Fred Gaffaney appeared in the Wilshire squad room, looking uncharacteristically nervous. He cracked several uncharacteristic dirty jokes with officers on duty there, then demanded the key to the evidence room, got it, and rummaged through the lockers until he found a .357 Python, sealed in an evidence bag that also contained a dozen loose shells. Offering no explanation for his actions, he spurned Ehrlich's condolences for the loss of his son and walked out of the squad room, shaking from head to foot.

When Artie returned with five biphetamine capsules, Lloyd had gotten *his* shaking under control. After dropping his resignation letter off with Thad Braverton's secretary, he drove to Temple and Beaudry. Finding an ace stakeout spot across from the guitar shop, he swallowed a black beauty and settled in to await his hand-picked survivor. Soon an amphetamine symphony was ringing in his head:

Gaffaney.

Hopkins.

Two killers doing the doomsday tango.

35

"Unfucking real!"

Joe balled up the newspaper, took a bead on the bright blue sky and hurled the missile of good news straight at the sun. Street passersby turned to stare at him, and he shouted, "I got a fucking guardian angel!" and let the ball fall into his hands. Running with it like a halfback with a hot short pass, he headed straight for the motel and Anne.

She was sitting up in bed, smoking, when he came through the door and smoothed the headline out on the sheet in front of her. "Read it," he said. "Bad news and good news, but mostly righteously *good*!"

Anne put out her cigarette and read the front page; Joe sat on the edge of the bed, wondering how the fuzz had got it so wrong and why Rice offed himself there. Watching Anne read, his old song obsession did a brief boogie reprise: " … and death was a thrill on Suicide Hill."

Anne turned to the second page, and Joe got curious about how she'd react to the story on her old boyfriend and his death. He'd had her on decreasing coke use for two days now, and she was probably as close to being a indent woman as she ever would be. Would she have the soul to grieve for the crazy motherfucker?

Putting down the newspaper, Anne lit another cigarette and said, "Wow, I thought Duane was just a car thief. I think that stuff about Stan being a bank robber is phony, though. I think we were together on Monday when that bank was robbed."

Joe couldn't tell if she was being cagey or straight. "You were probably stoned," he said. "He probably split for the heist, then came back."

Anne shrugged and blew smoke rings, then said, "Wrong, baby, but who cares? Also, the paper says Duane *shot* Stan. That's wrong. I was there. Duane stabbed him."

Joe tingled at her mistaken certainty—it meant he could ditch her with a free mind. "Cops screw up sometimes," he said. "Or they work things around to fit the evidence they got. Sweetie, what do you want to *do*?"

"You mean in general? And about us?"

"Right."

Anne blew a string of perfect rings and said, "I like you as a boyfriend, but you're too uptight about dope, and too macho. When we first got together, you weren't so bad, but the more I get to know you, the more stern you get, like you think violence and manhood are synonymous or something. But basically, I want to be with you, and I want to get back into music. I think we're a wave. We last as long as we last."

Joe bent over and cupped her breasts. “What about Rice? He righteously loved you.”

Anne caressed the hands caressing her. “He was a stone loser. And you know what’s sad? Karmacally he betrayed himself, because he said suicide was for cowards. That’s sad. How much of Mel’s money have we got left?”

Thinking R.I.P. Duane Rice, Joe said, “We’re almost broke, but I’ve got a buddy holding a guitar of mine, and we can get at least three bills for it. So let’s move.”

“Is it okay to be out on the streets?”

“I think so. We got some kind of weird guardian angel, and I want to see if the old neighborhood still looks the same.”

36

At twilight, just when the long stint of surveillance was starting to drive him batshit, his survivor walked up to the guitar shop window, a skinny blond woman in tow. From a distance they looked like a down-at-the-heels couple—modest dreamers in rumpled clothes peering into the glass in search of a dream fix. Letting them enter the shop, Lloyd hoped they wouldn't do anything to blow the impression.

When they walked back out a minute later, he was there on the sidewalk, waiting. Joe Garcia looked into his eyes and knew; Anne Atwater Vanderlinden looked at Joe and got the picture secondhand. Lloyd stepped back toward the curb and put up his hands in surrender. "Peace, homeboy," he said. "I'm on your side."

Anne moved to Joe's side as he stared at Lloyd; the tense three-way silence stretched until Lloyd put down his hands, and Joe said, "What do you want?"

"People keep asking me that," Lloyd said, "and it's getting old. You read the papers today?"

Joe put an arm around Anne. She nuzzled into his chest and said, "Maybe he's the guard—"

"He's a fucking cop!" Joe blurted. Seeing a woman pushing a baby carriage past them, he lowered his voice. "Crazy Lloyd Hopkins, big fucking deal. You don't scare me, man."

Lloyd smiled. Garcia looked like a thirty-year-old teenager trying to impress a high school chick and get a date for the Junior Prom. Given what he'd been through in the past two weeks, the impression was astounding.

The silence hit again, broken this time by Joe's broad smirk. Smirking back, Lloyd hooked a finger at the strangest armed robber he'd ever seen. Joe walked over, and Lloyd draped an arm around his shoulders and whispered, "Don't be a dumb taco bender. Let Klein take the fall and get the fuck out of L.A. before something goes wrong. And don't ask me what I want again, or I may have to kick your ass."

Joe twisted free. "I killed Stan Klein, man. I righteously killed him."

The proud statement hit Lloyd between the eyes as truth, and he started sensing juice behind the ancient teenager's bravado. "I believe you. Tell your old lady we're going for a little ride."

The last of the mechanics were leaving when they pulled up across the street from Likable Louie's One-Stop Pit Stop. Lloyd let them finish locking up and gave them time to get down to Sunset, then took a crowbar from the trunk, ran over and pried the garage door open. Flicking on the overhead lights, the first thing he saw was low-rider perfection.

It was a mint-condition ’54 Chevy ragger, candy-apple sapphire blue, canary yellow top, continental kit, tuck-and-roll upholstery. Lloyd checked the dashboard and grinned. The key was in the ignition.

“Bonaroo, man! Fine as fucking wine!”

Lloyd turned around and saw Joe stroking the Chevy’s rear fender skirts. Anne Vanderlinden stood behind him, smoking a cigarette and eyeing a tool bin loaded with portable TVs. Tapping Joe’s shoulder, Lloyd said, “Are you legit with the greaser act, or are you just trying to impress me?”

Joe started polishing the car with his sleeve. “I don’t know. I *righteously* don’t know.”

“What *do* you know?”

“That I righteously know what I don’t want to be. Listen, I got a question.”

“Shoot, but nothing about what’s going down. All you need to know is get the hell out. There’s loose ends all over the place.”

Joe fingered the Chevy’s pinstriping. “Why’d Rice kill himself at Suicide Hill? What was he thinking of?”

Lloyd shrugged. “I don’t know.”

Anne was by the tool bin, fiddling with the dials of the TV sets. Joe could tell that she was dope-itchy, looking for something to do with her hands. Moving his eyes back and forth between his maybe girlfriend and his guardian angel, he said, “Hopkins, what’s with that place? I mean, you’re a cop, you must have heard the stories. It started out with this dude Fritz Hill, right? Back in the forties? He was a righteous hardball and the Hill was named after him?”

Lloyd looked out at the street, getting nervous because he was a civilian now, with no official sanctions for breaking and entering. “I think most of the story is bullshit,” he said. “What I’ve heard is that back in the fifties and sixties there was an old snitch who used to hang out by the Sepulveda Wash. He pretended to be a religious loony, so the local cops and the punks who partied there would think he was harmless. He ratted off shitloads of gangsters to the juvie dicks downtown, and he got a snitch jacket and got snuffed. He was a German guy, and his name was Fritz something. What’s the matter, homeboy? You look sad.”

“Not sad,” Joe said. “Relieved, maybe.”

“The keys are in the ignition. Can you drive a stick?”

“Can niggers dance?”

“Only to soul music. Grab some of those TVs and split.”

Joe loaded the trunk and backseat with portable Sonys. Anne stood and watched, chain-smoking and shivering. When the Chevy was filled to capacity, he led her over to the passenger’s-side door and lovingly eased her in, then returned to Lloyd. Sticking out his hand jailhouse style, he said, “Thanks. And tell Louie I’ll pay him off someday.”

Lloyd corrected the shake in mid-grasp. “My pleasure. And don’t worry about Louie, he owes me. Where are you going?”

“I don’t know.”

Lloyd smiled and said, “Go there fast,” then dropped Joe’s hand and watched him walk to his chariot. The strangest armed robber of all time hit the gas with a flourish and crunched the Chevy’s gears backing out of the garage, sideswiping parked cars as he headed south on Tomahawk Street. Lloyd turned off the light and shut the door, brushing B&E splinters from his hands. When he got to his Matador, he had a clear view of Sunset. The Chevy was fishtailing it eastbound, and Anne Atwater Vanderlinden was standing under a streetlamp, dancing with her thumb out.

Tango time.

Lloyd took an inventory of his person, punching the seat when he saw that he had forgotten both his newly resurrected .45 and his standard .38 snub nose. The only piece in the car was the .12 gauge mounted to the dash, and it was too obtrusive—overkill all the way. He had to go to the house first and grab a weapon; to show up unarmed for the dance would be suicidal.

He drove home slowly, the amphetamine keeping him hyper-alert, fear of the confrontation making him dawdle in the slow lane. Turning onto his block, he began composing epitaphs for himself and Jesus Fred. Then he saw the moving van in his driveway, its headlights illuminating Janice's Persian carpet, rolled up against the side door. Antiques were arranged on the lawn like welcome beacons, along with piles of Penny's books.

Mine.

Home.

Yes.

Lloyd gasped and punched the accelerator. The homecoming dissolved like a mirage, and new bursts of death prose kept it pushed down to where it couldn't maim him; couldn't destroy his resolve. Then, with miles of obituaries behind him, he pulled up in front of Captain Frederick T. Gaffaney's house and let it hurt, letting his old hot-dog persona take over from there.

Mine.

Home.

Him or me.

Lloyd grabbed the shotgun and flipped off the safety, then .pumped in a shell and walked over to the house. The downstairs was dark, but dim lights glowed from behind curtained .windows on the second floor. Giving the door handle a test jiggle, Lloyd felt it click and give. He pushed the door open and moved inside.

The smell of stale cigarette smoke and whiskey filled the living room. Lloyd padded forward in the darkness, the odor getting stronger as a staircase came into shadowy view. Tip-toeing up it, he heard coughing, and when he got to the second-floor landing, he saw diffused light glinting off empty liquor bottles strewn across the hallway. Holding the Ithaca at port arms, he pressed himself to the wall back first and scissor-walked toward the light source.

It was a bathroom, giving off a different odor—that of charred paper. Stepping in, Lloyd saw that the smell emanated from the soggy mounds of blackened folders that filled the bathtub. Poking the barrel of his shotgun at the top of the pile, a layer of soot crumbled, and he was able to pick out the stenciled words: *Confidential-Need to Know Basis.* A cross and flag logo was imprinted below it.

A sudden burst of coughing forced Lloyd to wheel and aim. Seeing nothing but the bathroom walls, he traced the racking sound down the hall to a half-open door with total dark behind it. He raised his right foot to kick; the door flew open and harsh light blinded him. He threw the Ithaca up into firing position, and when his vision cleared, he saw that he was nuzzle to muzzle with Fred Gaffaney and a cocked magnum.

"Freeze, asshole."

Lloyd didn't recognize the voice, and could hardly recognize the man it belonged to. This was a high-ranking witch-hunter of booze breath, slept-in clothes and frazzled nerve ends; a born-again with a three-day beard and a shaky finger on a rigger at half pull. A doomsday apparition.

"Freeze, asshole."

The second warning came across as hideous self-parody. Lloyd lowered his shotgun, and Gaffaney eased down the hammer of the .357. The two weapons fell to rest at their bearers' sides simultaneously, and Lloyd said, "What are we going to do about this, Captain?"

Stepping back into the study, Gaffaney waved his gun at the framed L.A.P.D. group shots on the walls. "I'm not a captain anymore, Sergeant," he said, his voice regaining its authority. "I resigned this morning. You outrank me. I did it to make it easy for you."

Lloyd propped the Ithaca up against the doorjamb, keeping it within grabbing range. "I'm not a sergeant anymore. I asked to top out my twenty, but they'll never go for it. We're both civilians. That make it easier for *you*?"

Gaffaney looked at a picture of his wife pinning lieutenant's bars to his collar. "My resignation was accepted, yours was shelved. Braverton told me this afternoon. He wants you around. He wants you around because he loves you."

Lloyd kept his eyes on the magnum that Gaffaney dangled by a finger. "Captain, we're both down the—"

"Don't call me that, goddamn you!"

"We're both down the river! We killed men in cold blood, and the Department has got the fix in on yours, and you've got the fix in on mine, and all I want to do is seal the jackets on both deals and go home to my family. That's as easy as I can make it."

Gaffaney's raw-nerved features went lax; his voice went blank. "You didn't come to arrest me?"

The evidence room charade clicked in as a deliberate big wrong move. Lloyd let his fingers brush the .12 gauge. "I thought I could do it, but I can't. How about it? Your indictment for mine, then I get out of here before something crazy happens."

Gaffaney started shaking his head. His arms shook involuntarily, as if his entire body were trying to shout his denial. The .357 dropped to the floor just as he found his voice. "No. No. No. No. No, no, no, no—"

Lloyd made a grab for the magnum. He got it in his hands before Gaffaney could make a move, and had the cylinder emptied just as the string of no's trailed into a weirdly lucid monotone. " … I didn't come this far for you to betray me."

Lloyd slipped the shells into his pocket and tossed the revolver back on the floor, then picked up the Ithaca and ejected the round in the chamber. When the carpet was littered with neutralized weaponry, he said, "Why me?"

The witch-hunter's monotone took on resonance. "Because I was good, but you're the best. Because you were a punk civilian when you killed that man in Watts, while I was a high-ranking police officer when I committed murder.

Because the Department will never let me be prosecuted, because justice in this affair must be total." Gaffaney paused, then said, "Because I love you."

Lloyd moved backward until he bumped the wall. "You're insane if you think I'm going to kill you. I'd let you hang me for Richard Beller before I'd do that."

With a ghastly smile as segue, Fred Gaffaney said, "We both learned the gift of sacrifice late, Lloyd. That happens with selfish men like ourselves. I'm only sorry that our sacrifices have to conflict. Now tell me in light of this if I'm insane:

"From the tap on your phone I surmised that you wanted to frame a dead man for Joe Garcia's part in the robberies and killings. I held on to the information. Then this afternoon, when I read the paper and saw what you had gotten away with, I sent Sergeants Collins and Lohmann to check up on Klein. He was involved in the filming of pornographic movies on the dates of the three robberies, in full view of a dozen witnesses. He cannot be connected in any way to Luis Calde ron, and a friend of mine in S.I.D. said that he died of knife wounds. He has in his possession a switchblade whose edges perfectly match a biopsied section of Klein's abdomen. The handle has Joe Garcia's thumbprint on it."

"No," Lloyd said in his own doomsday drone. "No, no, no, no, no."

Gaffaney said, "Yes," and started ticking off points. "Klein's alibi witnesses won't come forth, for fear of their involvement in porno coming to light, but questioning the Pico-Westholme eyewitnesses with Klein's and Joe Garcia's mugshots should get some interesting feedback, and Calderon could never get by a persistent grand jury. Collins and Lohmann have Duane Rice's .45, taken from the car he was in when they apprehended him. That will contradict Braverton's fix. Had enough?"

"You filthy cocksucker," Lloyd hissed.

Gaffaney spoke softly, as a loving parent would to a child. "I know your guilt, and I know you have to expiate it, and I know Garcia is convenient for that. But if we don't follow through on the investigation, then it means as policemen we mean nothing."

Lloyd imitated Gaffaney's lucid lunatic whisper. "Captain, between us we've been hot dogging for over forty years. Joe Garcia is a drop in the bucket compared to all the railroad jobs we've pulled, *all the laws we've broken.* You're giving me a song and dance about the law to pump me up to kill you? *You are stone fucking insane.*"

Running his fingers over the wall photos, Fred Gaffaney said, "I heard a human interest story on the radio today. A bunch of high school kids found some of the robbery money strewn throughout their neighborhood, some inked, some not. They didn't turn it over to the proper authorities, of course; they descended on the Strip and tried to spend it as fast as they could. An off-duty sheriff's deputy saw a boy trying to change an inked twenty and got him to talk, but by the time a search team was dispatched to the area where the money was found, not a single dollar bill could be located. You see the kind of world we live in?"

Lloyd picked up the .357 and began loading it. "It's a pretty lackluster parable, Captain. Tell it to Collins and Lohmann. It'll get them jazzed up to do some serious ass-kicking. Have you gone forward with your information on Garcia? Anyone beside you and your boys know?"

"No, not yet."

“Why did you burn your files?”

“I’m not a policeman anymore. I don’t deserve to lead, and none of my followers are capable of leading. Th … that’s finished.”

Snapping the cylinder, Lloyd said, “I did what I could. Garcia’s got wheels and a head start, more than he would have had without me. You got anything to say?”

Gaffaney frowned. “Rice said, ‘She was a stone heart-breaker.’ What do you think he meant?”

“I don’t know, Captain. For the record, you did the right thing. He killed your son.”

Gaffaney reached out and touched Lloyd’s arm; Lloyd batted his hand away and said, “What do *you* have to say?”

“Nothing,” Gaffaney said. “I have nothing.”

Lloyd placed the gun in the hands of his old enemy. “Then go out like a soldier, but don’t take anyone else with you.”

“You won’t?”

Lloyd said no and walked down the hall to the bathroom. He was clenching the edge of the tub, staring at the cross and flag logo, when he heard the shot. His hands jerked up, ripping out jagged chunks of porcelain, and then there was a second shot, and another and still another. He ran back to the study and found Gaffaney on his knees, holding the gun and an armful of framed photographs to his chest. He was muttering, “I’ve got nothing. I’ve got nothing.”

Lloyd helped him to his feet. The mementos he was grasping made the embrace cumbersome, but he was able to get his arms around the sobbing man anyway. The simple act felt like mercy for all their lost ones, all their stone heartbreakers.

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This edition published in 2011 by MysteriousPress.com/Open Road Integrated Media
180 Varick Street
New York, NY 10014
www.openroadmedia.com

THE LLOYD HOPKINS TRILOGY

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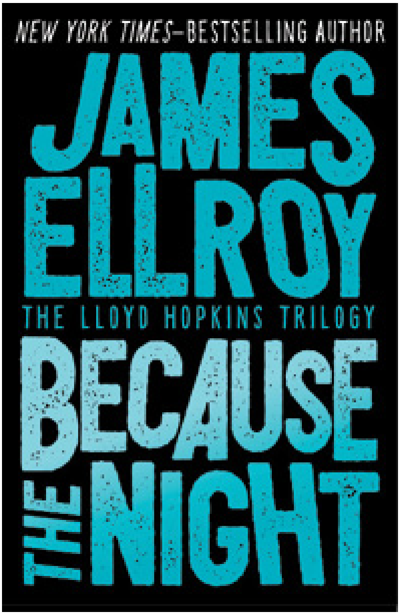
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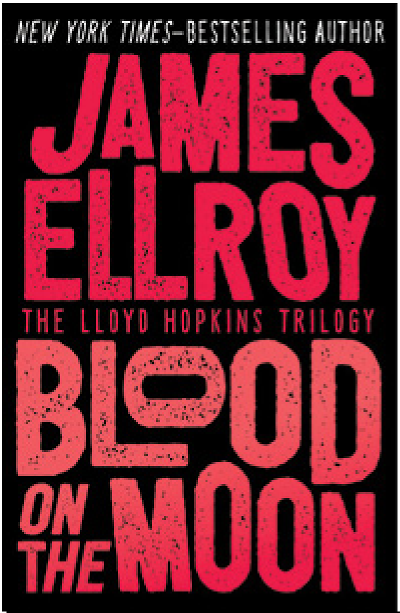
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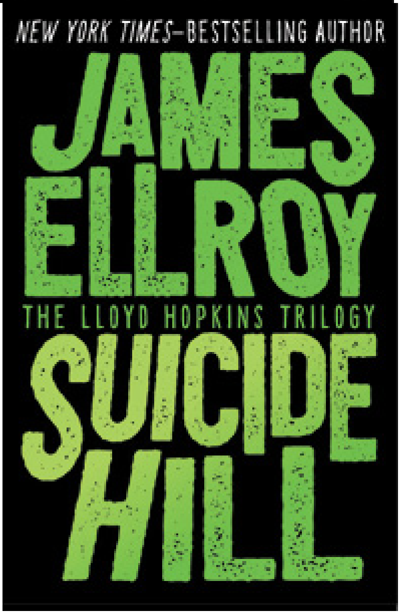
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THE LLOYD HOPKINS TRILOGY

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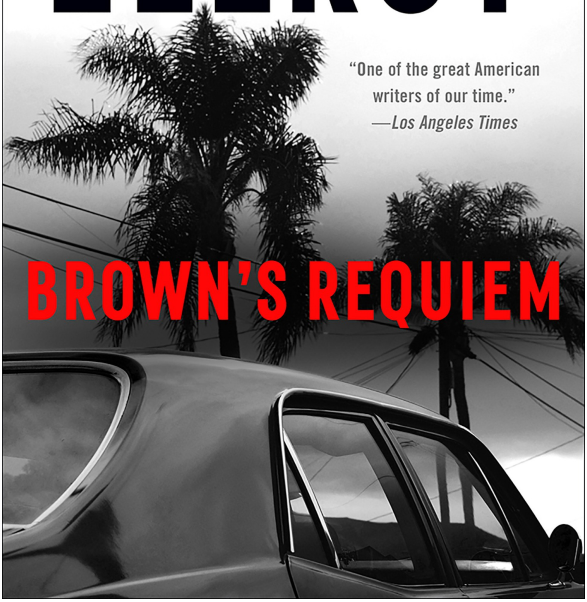

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James Ellroy was born in Los Angeles in 1948. He is the author of the Underworld U.S.A. Trilogy: *American Tabloid*, *The Cold Six Thousand*, and *Blood's A Rover*, and the L.A. Quartet: *The Black Dahlia*, *The Big Nowhere*, *L.A. Confidential*, and *White Jazz*. He lives in Colorado.

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NEW YORK

FIRST VINTAGE BOOKS EDITION, FEBRUARY 2021

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Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available at the Library of Congress.

Vintage Books Trade Paperback ISBN 9780593312209
Ebook ISBN 9780593312216

Cover design by Joe Montgomery
Cover photograph © Daniel R. Lopez/Plainpicture

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TO
Randy Rice

INTRODUCTION

I wrote this novel sixteen years ago. I was a thirty-one-year-old geek working as a caddy at Bel-Air Country Club in Los Angeles. I had recently quit drinking and using drugs—and I was determined to write an autobiographical epic second to none.

I quickly realized that my life, though more colorful than most, was essentially an inward journey that would not lend itself all that well to fiction. I then ladled a big load of violent intrigue into my already simmering, tres personal plot—and the result is the novel you are about to read.

Brown's Requiem is heavily beholden to Raymond Chandler—an icon I've come to dislike quite a bit. Big Ray was a true original who created a truly original style that lazy-assed writers have been imitating with some success for many years. I owe Ray a two-fold debt: he got me going, and he showed me that imitating him was a dead-end street on GenreHack Boulevard.

This is a righteous *private eye* novel: fast, profane, densely plotted for a first work. It's got that discursive philosophical tone that all good, bad, and indifferent private eye novels have. I dig this book because it's a summation of my life up to that point when I picked up a pen to write it.

I hope *you* dig *Brown's Requiem*. I hope you read all my books in succession and come to believe that each one is better than the previous.

James Ellroy
Kansas City, 7 April 1995

I

I, PRIVATE EYE

1

Business was good. It was the same thing every summer. The smog and heat rolled in, blanketing the basin; people succumbed to torpor and malaise; old resolves died; old commitments went unheeded. And I profited: my desk was covered with repo orders, ranging in make and model from Datsun Sedan to Eldorado Ragtop, and in territory from Watts to Pacoima. Sitting at my desk, listening to the Beethoven Violin Concerto and drinking my third cup of coffee, I calculated my fees, less expenses. I sighed and blessed Cal Myers and his paranoia and greed. Our association dates back to my days with Hollywood Vice, when we were both in trouble and I did him a big favor. Now, years later, his guilty *noblesse oblige* supports me in something like middle-class splendor, tax free.

Our arrangement is simple, and a splendid hedge against inflation: Cal's down payments are the lowest in L.A., and his monthly payments the highest. My fee for a repossession is the sum of the owner's monthly whip-out. For this Cal gets the dubious satisfaction of having a licensed private investigator do his rip-offs, and implicit silence on my part regarding all his past activities. He shouldn't worry. I would never rat on him for anything, under any circumstances. Still, he does. We never talk about these things; our relationship is largely elliptical. When I was on the sauce, he felt he had the upper hand, but now that I'm sober he accords me more intelligence and cunningness than I possess.

I surveyed the figures on my scratch pad: eleven cars, a total of $1,881.00 in monthlies, less 20 percent or $376.20 for my driver. $1,504.80 for me. Things looked good. I took the record off the turntable, dusted it carefully, and replaced it in its sleeve. I looked at the Joseph Karl Stieler print on my living room wall: Beethoven, the greatest musician of all time, scowling, pen in hand, composing the *Missa Solemnis*, his face alight with inward heroism.

I called Irwin, my driver, and told him to meet me at my place in an hour and to bring coffee—there was work on the line. He was grumpy until I mentioned money. I hung up and looked out my window. It was getting light. Hollywood, below me, was filling up with hazy sunshine. I felt a slight tremor: part caffeine, part Beethoven, part a last passage of night air. I felt my life was going to change.

—

It took Irwin forty minutes to make the run from Kosher Canyon. Irwin is Jewish, I'm a second generation German-American, and we get along splendidly; we agree on all important matters: Christianity is vulgar, capitalism is here to stay, rock and roll is evil, and Germany and Judaica, as antithetical as they may be, have produced history's greatest musicians. He beeped the horn, and I clipped on my holster and went outside.

Irwin handed me a large cup of Winchell's black and a bag of donuts as I got in the car beside him. I thanked him, and dug in. "Business first," I said. "We've got eleven delinquents. Mostly in South Central L.A. and the East Valley. I've got credit reports on all of them and the people all have jobs. I think we can hit one a day, early mornings at the home addresses. That will get you to work on time. What we don't snatch there, I'll work on myself. Your cut comes to three hundred seventy-six dollars and twenty cents, payable next time I see Cal. Today we visit Leotis McCarver at 6318 South Mariposa."

As Irwin swung his old Buick onto the Hollywood Freeway southbound, I caught him looking at me out of the corner of his eye and I knew he was going to say something serious. I was right. "Have you been all right, Fritz?" he asked. "Can you sleep? Are you eating properly?"

I answered, somewhat curtly, "I feel better in general, the sleep comes and goes, and I eat like a horse or not at all."

"How long's it been, now? Eight, nine months?"

"It's been exactly nine months and six days, and I feel terrific. Now let's change the subject." I hated to cut Irwin off, but I feel more comfortable with people who talk obliquely.

We got off the freeway around Vermont and Manchester and headed west to the Mariposa address. I checked the repo order: a 1978 Chrysler Cordoba, loaded. $185 a month. License number CTL 412. Irwin turned north on Mariposa, and in a few minutes we were at the 6300 block. I fished out my master keys and detached the '78 Chrysler's. 6318 was a two-story pink stucco multi-unit dump, ultra-modern twenty years ago, with side entrances and an ugly schematic flamingo in black metal on the wall facing the street. The garage was subterranean, running back the whole length of the building.

Irwin parked in front. I handed him the original of the repo order and tucked the carbon into my back pocket. "You know the drill, Irwin. Stand by your car, whistle once if anyone enters the garage, twice if the fuzz show up. Be prepared to explain what I'm doing. Hold on to the repo order." Irwin knows the procedure as well as I do, but even after five years of legalized rip-offs, the whole deal still makes me nervous, and I repeat the instructions for luck. Strange things can happen, have happened, and the L.A.P.D. is notoriously trigger-happy. Having been one of them, I know.

I dropped down into the garage. I expected it to be dark, but the morning sunshine reflecting off the windows of the adjacent apartments provided plenty of light. When I spotted CTL 412, the third car from the end, I started to laugh. Cal Myers was going to shit. Leotis McCarver was undoubtedly black, but his car was a full dress taco wagon: chopped, channeled, lowered, with a candy apple, lime-green paint job with orange and yellow flames covering the hood and sweeping halfway back over the sides of the vehicle. Black enamel script over the rear wheel wells announced that this was the “Dragon Wagon.” I got out my master key and opened it. The interior was just as esoteric: fuzzy black and white zebra-striped upholstery, pink velveteen dice hanging from the rearview mirror, and a furry orange accelerator pedal in the shape of a naked foot. The customizing must have cost old Leotis a fortune.

I was still laughing when I heard the scrape of a footstep off to my left near the backend of the garage. I turned and saw a black man almost as big as I am striding toward me. There was no time to avoid a confrontation. When he was ten feet away, he screamed “Motherfucker” and charged me. I was in the walkway, now, and just before he made contact I sidestepped and tripped him with a kick at his knee. As he struggled to get to his feet I kicked him once in the face, once in the neck, and once in the groin. He was moaning and spitting out teeth.

I dragged him over between two cars near the back of the garage and patted him down for weapons. Nothing. I left him there, got into his chariot, and pulled out onto Mariposa. Irwin was still standing there by his car, as if nothing had happened. “He tried to jump me, and I waxed him. Get out of here. Tomorrow, same time, my place.” Irwin turned pale. This was the first time anything like this had happened. “Didn’t you hear anything?” I yelled. I jammed on the gas, peeling rubber.

I looked in the fur-bordered rearview mirror. Irwin was just starting to get into his car. He looked like he was trembling. I hoped he wouldn’t quit me.

I turned left on Slauson and right on Western, half a mile later. I had been driving for five minutes or so when I discovered that *I* was trembling. It got worse, so bad that I could hardly hold the wheel steady. Then I felt my stomach start to churn and turn over. I pulled into the parking lot of a liquor store, got out, and vomited on the pavement until my stomach and lungs ached. My vomit tasted like coffee and sugar and fear. After a few minutes I started to calm down. A group of gangly black youths lounging against the liquor store wall and passing around a bottle of cheap wine had watched the whole scene, laughing at me like I was some rare breed of alien from outer space. I took several deep breaths, got back into the car and headed out to the Valley to see Cal Myers.

By the time I hit the freeway, my adrenalin rush had subsided. In five years as a repo-man I had had a dozen or so such encounters, been shot at twice, and beat up badly once. But this was my first confrontation since getting sober, and I was pleased that the old instincts and tricks were still there. I don't like hurting people, no sane man does, but there had been no alternative this time. My six years with the fuzz had taught me to read people for signs of violence, and that man had meant to fuck me up.

I recalled another repo from about three years back: a memo had come in from the bank stating that a woman had stiffed Cal with a rubber check for two months' delinquent payments and three months in advance. I checked out her home address and learned from her neighbors that she was a honcho at the local Scientology Center, a lesbian, and a Welfare recipient. No one at the Scientology joint or her apartment building had seen her for several days, so I broke in late that night and discovered she had moved out completely. When I told Cal what had happened and described the woman's lifestyle, he went nuts. Cal is a big right-winger and took the ditch-out as a personal affront. He told me to find the woman and repo the VW bus regardless of the time and expense involved, promising me a fat bonus if I succeeded.

Through coercion and bribery I got the Scientologists to relinquish the woman's new address in Berkeley. I flew up there, getting drunk on the plane. After sleeping off the booze in a rented room, I took a cab to the address I had been given. No VW bus, no one at home. I had the cabbie run me by the Scientology Celebrity Center. XLB841 was not in the lot, or on any of the surrounding blocks. I told him that we had some waiting to do, promising him fifty dollars plus the meter if he kept me company. He agreed.

Berkeley gave me the creeps: the people passing by looked aesthetic and angry, driven inward by forces they couldn't comprehend and rendered sickly by their refusal to eat meat. A lot of people passed through the center, but I didn't notice any celebrities.

Finally the VW bus pulled in. Suddenly I was pissed. I had tickets for the L.A. Philharmonic that night, and here I was, four hundred miles away, putting the arm on some counterculture bimbo for her sleazy bus. Rather than waiting until she entered the building and pulling a simple rip-off, I ran across the street and intercepted her. Flashing my repo order in her face, I yelled, "I'm a private investigator and I have a repossession order for this vehicle. You have five minutes to remove your things, then she goes."

The pretty young woman nodded along with me, but when I went for the driver's side, she attacked. I had the key in the door when I felt a sharp kick in my leg. I turned around, the door half open, and caught her purse full in the face. I had never hit a woman, but I swung around and cocked my right arm. Then I hesitated. The heavy leather purse was arcing toward me again, and I grabbed it with both hands, wrenched it free, and hurled it across the parking lot. She was at me now, shrieking and clawing at my face. Her shrieks alerted the Scientologists within the building and I could see them goggling through the plate glass window. I grabbed the woman and flung her to the ground.

Luckily, the bus started easily. People were pouring into the parking lot. I swung out into the alley behind the lot. The woman was on her knees hurling invectives. Her best shot was “urban barracuda.” The cabbie was nowhere to be seen. I found the address of the cab company in the phone book, drove over, and left the dispatcher with an envelope containing fifty scoots. He told me Manny, the hackie, would get it when he clocked out.

I went back to Berkeley to move out my things. I sorted out my observations of the woman, her lifestyle, and her reaction when I presented her with the price of her culpability. I came to one conclusion: if life was to be a game of give and take, with a rational morality deciding who gives and who takes, I would have to watch my personal morality, but stay on the side of the takers. I drove over the Bay Bridge and got a room at the Fairmont, a magnum of Mumms and a call girl. L.A. looked good the next afternoon.

—

I left the freeway and turned onto Ventura Boulevard, where you can buy anything you want, and anything you don’t want. The storefronts on this smoggy expressway feature manifestations of every scheme, dream, and hustle the jaded American mind can conceive. It is beyond tragedy, beyond vulgarity, beyond satire. It is supreme guilelessness. There are approximately eight billion of these storefronts—and three billion new and used car lots. Cal Myers has three: Cal’s Casa de Carro, Myers’ Ford, and Cal’s Imports. He makes big bucks. He could sign a contract with a credit agency for his repossessions and save money, but we go back a long time, and he likes as well as fears me.

I ditched the bean-mobile at the Ford lot and dropped the keys and repo order with the sales manager. He told me Cal was across the street at Casa de Carro filming a commercial.

Cal comes from the same ethnic background I do and we both have blunt, ruddy faces, dark hair, and brown eyes. Black German. There the resemblance ends: he’s much smaller and far more dynamic-looking. The T.V. cameras were panning as Cal walked down a line of parked cars, stopping in front of each one and extolling its merits. When he got to the last one, he introduced his dog Barko, a senile German Shepherd, to the T.V. audience. Barko is a nice enough dog, although he smells. He’s been with Cal since before he hit it big. When he was younger, Barko would make on-camera running leaps onto the hoods of cars, turn around, and bark repeatedly at the camera while subtitles were run across the bottom of the T.V. screen detailing all the wonderful facts about the car he was sitting on. Ingenious. Now that he's decrepit, Barko has been kicked upstairs to a supporting role: a three-second introduction and a pat on the head from Cal.

Rather than stand around watching dreary retakes of Cal's spiel, I walked over to his office and let myself in. The large room was out of another era, and I liked it: knotty pine walls with lush, dark-green Persian carpets over an oak floor, bookshelves crammed with texts and picture books on World War II, knotty pine beams studded with ornamental horseshoes. The largest beam, directly over Cal's giant oak desk, held the Myers Coat of Arms; a vulgar configuration of crosses, flowers, and trumpets around a wounded boar's head. The walls were festooned with framed photographs of Cal in the embrace of various politicians who had welcomed his campaign contributions. There was Cal with Ronnie Reagan, Cal with Sam Yorty, Cal solemnly shaking hands with Tricky Dick Nixon before his fall.

Cal came in, grinning. "Jesus, Fritz," he said, "what a work of fucking art! That guy, what's-his-name? McCoover? We should hire that fucker to redo all our waiting rooms, sales managers' offices, even redesign our magazine ads. Dragon Wagon! Ha! Ha! Ha! You know what it is, don't you, Fritz? It's those goddamned Ricardo Montalban Cordoba ads, 'I am a man, and I know what I want. I want Cordoba!' Old Ricardo is a Mexican, this guy McCoover has gotta be a n———, he sees the ad on T.V., decides he wants to be a Mexican, and fucks up a beautiful car designed for white people! Jesus! Fucking Madison Avenue will fuck you every time." Cal shook his head. "Two good things came out of the deal, though. One, we got old Dragon Baby back, and two, Larry found a bag of weed in the glove compartment. I told him to take it to Reuben and the guys at the car wash. Sparkle up their day."

I forgot to mention that Cal is also the owner of Cal's Car Wash, a tax dodge that he operates at a loss to "give my customers the best of…*total* service for their cars." He hires nothing but wetbacks, and pays them the minimum wage, naturally. Little goodies, such as the weed and the occasional cases of beer he sends over, keep them from seeking more profitable work, like dishwashing. I decided not to tell him about my fight with McCarver. It would only prompt another racist tirade, undoubtedly not as amusing.

"We've got one down, ten to go. I'll get them all provided they haven't skipped town with no leads," I said. "One a day, something like that. All the people are working."

"Good, good. I have faith in you. You'll do your usual superb job." Cal looked at me seriously. "Any plans for your future? It's been a while now; I think you'll make it."

"No real plans, as yet. Europe this fall, though. Work will slack off here, and I can catch the great orchestras of Germany and Austria at the beginning of their concert seasons."

"You speak the language, too."

"Enough to get by. I want to hear great music in its birthplace. That's the main thing. Check out Beethoven House in Bonn, the Vienna Opera, Salzburg. Take a boat ride up the Rhine. I have a feeling that there are all kinds of hot chamber ensembles, unsung, playing in little country inns all over Germany. I've got the money, the weather is good in the fall, and I'm going."

"Before you leave, we'll talk. I'll give you a list of good hotels and restaurants. The food can be great over there—or lousy. Right now, though, I have to split. I'm due on the tee in half an hour. Do you need any money?"

"Not for myself, but I need three hundred seventy-six dollars and twenty cents for my driver." Cal went to the wall safe, extracted the amount, and handed it to me.

"You take care, Fritz," he said, leading me outside, grabbing a twenty-pound bag of dried dog food as he locked the door behind him. He called to his secretary, "Feed Barko, will you, honey? I think he's hungry." The attractive, bespectacled blonde smiled and went for Barko's dish.

I looked at Cal and shook my head. "All the money that dog has made for you, you cheap fuck, and you still feed him that dried shit?"

"He likes it. It's good for his teeth."

"He doesn't have any teeth."

"Then I must be a cheap fuck. I'll see you, Fritz."

"Take care, Cal."

Larry, the sales manager at Casa, fixed me up with an old Cutlass demo, loaded. I told him I'd hang onto it for a week or so and return it gassed up. Rather than check out the places where my repo'ee's worked, I decided to take the day off, maybe see my friend Walter. I headed down Ventura toward Coldwater. It was ten thirty, and hot and smoggy already. Driving over the hill I felt good; relaxed and even a little hungry. Coming down into Beverly Hills, I felt again that my life was going to change.

2

I've got my own tax shelter, the Brown Detective Agency. It's a detective agency in name only. As far as the IRS knows, I'm a starving gumshoe, declaring nine grand in total income and paying $275 in income tax. I save about eighty bucks a year by claiming myself as a deduction. I used to advertise in the Yellow Pages, before the repo racket got lucrative, and actually handled a few cases, mostly runaway kids who had dropped into the drug culture; but that was years ago, when I had more illusions about myself as an urban manipulator. I still retain my office, an $85 write-off, in a crummy office building on Pico in Rancho Park. I keep my library there and go there when I want to read. It's a dump, but it's air-conditioned.

I decided to head for the office now, since Walter was probably still passed out from last night's bout with T-Bird and T.V. I parked in the lot, crossed the alley to the Apple Pan, and returned with three cheeseburgers and two coffees to go. I had wolfed down two of the burgers by the time I opened my office door. It was musty inside. I hit the airconditioning immediately and settled into my chair.

It's not much of an office; just a small, square room with venetian blinds over a rear window facing an alley, a big, imitation-walnut desk with a Naugahyde swivel recliner behind it for myself, a cheesy Bentwood rattan chair for clients, and an official-looking file cabinet that contains no files. There are two photographs of me on the wall, both designed to inspire confidence: Fritz Brown, circa 1968, my Police Academy graduation picture; and one of me in uniform taken three years later. I was drunk when that one was taken and, if you look closely, you can tell.

I scarfed my last burger, flipped on KUSC and sat back. The music was early baroque, a harpsichord trio; nice, but without passion. I listened anyway. Baroque can send you off on a nice little cloud, conducive to quiet thoughts, and I was off on one of them when the doorbell rang. It couldn't be the landlord, since I paid by the year. Probably a salesman. I got up and opened the door. The man standing there didn't look like a salesman, he looked like a refugee from the Lincoln Heights drunk tank. "May I help you" I said.

"Probably," the man replied, "if you're a private detective and this is your office."

"I am, and it is." I pointed to the visitor's chair. "Why don't you have a seat and tell me how I can help you."

He sat, grudgingly, after checking out the furnishings. He was close to forty, and fat, maybe 5'6" or 7" and about 220. He was wearing ridiculous soiled madras slacks three inches too short in the leg, a tight alligator golf shirt that encased his blubbery torso like a sausage skin, and black and white saddle golf shoes with the cleats removed. He looked like a wino golfer out of hell.

"I thought private eyes was older guys, retired from the police force," he said.

"I retired early," I said. "They wouldn't make me chief of police at twenty-five, so I told them to kiss my ass." He got a bang out of that and started to laugh, kind of hysterically. "My name is Fritz Brown, by the way. What's yours?"

"I'm Freddy Baker. You got the same initials as me. You can call me Fat Dog. It ain't no insult, everybody calls me that. I like it."

Fat Dog. Jesus. "Okay, Fat Dog. You can call me Fritz, or Mr. Brown, or Daddy-O. Now, why do you need a private investigator? Incidentally, the fee for my services is one hundred twenty-five dollars a day, plus expenses. Can you afford that?"

"I can afford that, and more. I may not look like no millionaire, but I'm holding heavy. I'll whip some bread on you today, after I tell you what I want." Fat Dog Baker bored into me with wild blue eyes, and said, "It's like this. I got this sister, my kid sister, Jane. She's the only family I got. Our folks is dead. For a long time now she's been staying with this rich guy. A Jewish guy. He's old; he don't try no sex stuff with her—it ain't like that—he just supports her and I never see her no more. This guy, he don't want her to have nothing to do with me. He pays for her music lessons, and Janey, my own sister, shines me on like I'm a piece of shit!" His voice had risen to a shout. He was sweating in the air-conditioned room and had clamped his hands around his thighs until his knuckles were white.

"What do you want me to do? Is your sister over eighteen?"

"Yeah, she's twenty-eight. I wasn't thinking about hanging no morals rap on him, I just know he's not right somehow! Somewhere, somehow, he's using my sister for something: She won't believe me, she won't even talk to me! You could follow her, couldn't you? Follow him, tail him around town, check out what he's into? He's fucking her around somehow, and I want to know what's happening."

I decided not to pass it up. I could work it in on my offtime from the repo's. I liked the idea of a surveillance job. It sounded like an interesting change of pace.

"Okay, Fat Dog, I'll do it. I'll tail your sister and this nameless bad guy.

We'll give it a week. I'll dig up all I can. But first, I need some more information." I got out a pen and a notebook. "Your sister's name is Jane Baker and she's twenty-eight years old, right?"

"Right."

"Have you got a photograph of her?" Fat Dog got out an old hand-tooled wallet and handed me a snapshot. Jane Baker was a good-looking woman. There was humor in her mouth and intelligence in her eyes. She looked like the antithesis of her fat brother. When I put the photo in my desk drawer, Fat Dog looked at me suspiciously, like he had just handed me an ikon and was afraid I would break it. "Don't worry," I said, "I'll take good care of the picture and get it back to you."

"You do that. It's the only one I got."

"Now tell me about this guy. Anything and everything you know."

"His name's Sol Kupferman. He owns Solly K's Furriers. His address is 8914 Elevado. That's in Beverly Hills up north of Sunset, near the Beverly Hills Hotel."

"Describe him."

"He's about sixty-five, skinny, curly gray hair. Big nose. A typical Hebe."

I wrote down the information, such as it was. "What can you tell me about Kupferman? I take it your plan is to confront your sister with whatever dirt I can dig up on him."

"You got the picture. That's my plan. I heard lots of things about Solly K. All bad, but all rumors. Caddy yard stuff, you got to consider the source. It's *feelings* I got about him. Like *intuition*, you know what I mean?"

"Yeah. How did your sister meet Kupferman?"

"I was loopin' Hillcrest, maybe ten, twelve years ago. That's right down the street where all the Hebes play golf. She used to visit me in the caddy shack; sometimes she worked the lunch counter there. But I didn't like her to. Loopers got dirty mouths. Anyway, that's where she met Solly K. He's a member there. He met her out on the golf course. She used to take walks out there. He got her interested in music, got her to start taking music lessons. She's been living with him ever since. She says he's her best friend and her benefactor. She hates me now. That Jew bastard made her hate me!"

Fat Dog was close to losing control, close to tears or some sort of outburst. His anti-Semitism was repulsive, but I wanted to know more about him. Somehow his insane rage grabbed and held me.

I tried to calm him down. "I'll give this my best shot, Fat Dog. I'm going to stick close to both of them and find out everything I can on Kupferman. You hang loose and don't worry."

"Okay. You want some bread now?"

The iconoclast in me trusted there was some kind of logic in his lunacy.

"No, if you're holding as heavy as you say you are, I've got nothing to worry about. I'm going to give this thing a week or so. You can pay me then."

Fat Dog whipped out the fat old Mexican wallet again, and this time pulled out his roll. He fanned it in front of me. There must have been sixty or seventy C-notes. I wasn't surprised. A lifetime in Los Angeles had taught me never to take anything at face value, except money. Fat Dog wanted me to be impressed. I hated to disappoint him, so I tossed him a bone. After all, he was tossing me a big one. "Woo! Woo!" I said. "I'm ditching this racket and becoming a caddy! Get me a hot-looking mama with a nice swing who likes to fuck. I'll give her the old nine-iron on the course and off. Woo! Woo!" Fat Dog was laughing like a hyena, threatening to fall off his chair. I had delivered. I hoped he didn't want more. Acting like a buffoon tires me quickly.

After a minute or so, he regained his composure and got serious again. "I know you'll do me good, man. The Fat Dog can judge people, and you're okay."

"Thanks. What's your phone number and address? I'll be needing to get in touch with you."

"I move around a lot, and in the summertime I sleep outside. I'm hard to find. L.A.'s full of fucking psychos, and you never know if one of 'em has your number. You can leave messages for me at the Tap and Cap—that's a beer bar at Santa Monica and Sawtelle. I'll get them."

"Okay, one last thing. You said your sister is a musician. What instrument does she play?"

"One of those big wooden things that stand up on a pole."

The cello. That was interesting. As Fat Dog waved and walked out my office door, I found myself wondering if she could be any good.

I called an old friend who worked L.A.P.D. Records and Information and gave him three names, descriptions, and approximate years of birth: Solomon "Solly K" Kupferman, Frederick "Fat Dog" Baker, and Jane Baker. I told him I would call later for whatever info he had dredged up.

I got my Cutlass demo out of the lot. It looked prosperous enough for surveillance in Beverly Hills. I drove east on Pico and turned left on Beverly Drive, traveling up through the heart of the Beverly Hills business district, passing by shops catering to every taste in fashion, trinketry, and affluent boredom. North of Santa Monica the ritzy business facades gave way to ritzy personal ones: large, beautifully-tended lawns fronting Tudor mansions, Spanish villas, and pseudo-modern chateaus. When I crossed Sunset, the homes became larger still. This was the "pheasant under glass" district.

Sol Kupferman's house was two blocks north of Sunset, off of Coldwater. It was some pad: a Moorish estate, immaculate white with twin turrets flying the California Bear flag. The house was set back at least forty yards from the street. A family of stone bears foraged on the broad front lawn, and there were two Cadillacs parked in the circular driveway: a one-year-old Eldorado convertible and a four- or five-year-old Coupe de Ville.

I parked directly across the street and decided to wait only one hour, not wanting to risk a confrontation with the ubiquitous Beverly Hills fuzz. I got out my binoculars and checked the license numbers on the two Cadillacs. The Eldorado bore a personalized plate: SOL K. The Coupe de Ville had one, too: CELLO-1. So far, my case was working out. I switched on the radio just in time to catch *Luncheon at the Music Center* on KFAC. Thomas Cassidy was interviewing some French bimbo on the state of current French opera. The guy had lousy manners. You could hear him dropping his fork.

I turned off the radio and reached again for my binoculars. I was training them on Kupferman's front door when it opened and a man in a business suit came down the steps carrying a briefcase. I had seen him before, I knew that immediately, but it took a few seconds for my formidable memory to supply the time and place: the Club Utopia, late 1968, just before the place burned itself into immortality. The man—who fit Fat Dog's description of Kupferman perfectly—got into the Eldorado and backed out of the driveway and onto the street, passing me in the opposite direction.

I pulled into his driveway, and backed out to follow him. I caught him at the corner just before he turned right on Coldwater. I let a car get between us as Coldwater turned into Beverly Drive, and we headed south into Beverly Hills. It was a short trip. He turned right on Little Santa Monica and parked on the street half a block down. I drove on. He had parked in front of Solly K's Furriers. From my rearview mirror I could see him enter the building. He had to be Kupferman.

—

In December of 1968, the Club Utopia, a sleazy neighborhood cocktail lounge located on Normandie near Slauson, was fire-bombed. Six patrons of the bar fried to death. Surviving eyewitnesses described how three men who had been ejected from the bar earlier that evening had returned just before closing and tossed a Molotov cocktail into the crowded one-room lounge, turning it into an inferno. The three men were apprehended by L.A.P.D. detectives a few hours later. They admitted their culpability, but denied it was "their idea." They claimed the existence of a "fourth man" who met them outside the bar after they were thrown out and who "instigated the whole thing." No one believed them. The men, who worked as painters and possessed long criminal records, were tried and convicted of murder. They were among the last people to be executed in the gas chamber at San Quentin.

I remember the case well, although I had nothing to do with it. At the time I was a twenty-two-year-old rookie working Wilshire Patrol. To unwind after work, I would go with patrolmen friends to bars to booze and trade war stories. One night after Thanksgiving ’68 I was riding around with another rookie named Milner. Somehow, we ended up at the soon-to-be-famous Club Utopia. We were sitting at the bar, and the man sitting next to me got up suddenly and spilled whiskey all over my expensive, newly purchased white cashmere sweater. He was a thin, Semitic-looking man in his fifties, and he apologized effusively, even offering to buy me a new sweater. I good-naturedly shrugged it off, although I was pissed. The man left after several more apologies.

I have something close to total recall. I never forget a face. It had been over a decade, but I was certain: the man at the bar that night was Sol Kupferman. He had barely aged. A strange coincidence that probably meant nothing. If I ever got to speak to Solly K, I would ask him, “What were you doing in a crummy bar on the south side in the fall of ’68?” And he would very rightfully look at me like I was insane and say, “I don’t know” or “Was I?” or “I don’t remember.”

I considered my options. I could wait around and tail Kupferman after he left his office, or I could take off and resume my surveillance the next day. I decided to head toward the old neighborhood to see my friend Walter.

3

Western Avenue between Beverly and Wilshire and the blocks surrounding it constitute the old neighborhood. Situated two miles west of downtown L.A. and a mile south of Hollywood, there is nothing exceptional about it. The prosaic thrust of the ordinary lives lived there produced nothing during my formative years but an inordinate amount of male children, a good portion of whom assumed roles emblematic of the tortured ’60s: Vietnam veteran, drug addict, college activist, burned-out corpse. The neighborhood has changed slightly, topographically: Ralph’s Market is now a Korean church, old gas stations and parking lots have been replaced by ugly pocket shopping centers. The human core of the neighborhood, the people who were in early middle-age when I was a child, are elderly now, with resentments and fears borne out of twenty years of incomprehensible history.

And that makes the difference. The library on Council and St. Andrews still has the same librarian, and the bars on Western still supply Wilshire Station with an extraordinary amount of drunk drivers. But it’s different now; it’s a middle-American graveyard inhabited by the malaise of my past, and I feel chills of doom whenever I drive through it, which I do frequently.

I got out shortly after my parents died, as did most of the guys I grew up with. But my friend Walter is still there, ensconced at the old house on 5th and Serrano, with his lunatic Christian Scientist mother, his T.V. set, his science fiction books, his records, and his Thunderbird wine. He is thirty-two years old, and we have been friends for twentyfive. He is the one person in my life I have loved unequivocally. I do not judge his inertia, his self-destructiveness, his complex relationship with his mother, or his incipient psychoses. I accept his oblique love, his self-hatred, and anger. Our relationship is twenty-five years of shared experience: together and in our separate solitudes; books, music, films, women, my work, and his fantasy. Here Walter has the upper hand: he is far more intelligent than I, and in the fifteen years since high school his sedentary lifestyle has afforded him time to read thousands of books, from the profound to the trivial, to assimilate great music into the bedrock of his consciousness, and to see every movie ever to pass the way of the T.V. screen.

This is an extraordinary frame of reference for an agile mind, and Walter has taken fantasy into the dimension of genius. His is pure verbal fantasy:

Walter has never written, filmed, or composed anything. Nonetheless, in his perpetual T-Bird haze he can transform his wino fantasies into insights and parables that touch at the quick of life. On his good days, that is. On his bad ones, he can sound like a high school kid wired up on bad speed. I hoped he was on today, for I was exhilarated myself, and felt the need of his stimulus: the power of a Walter epigram can clarify the most puzzling day.

I stopped at the Mayfair Market to pick up three chilled short dogs. Walter works best when inspired by the right amount of T-Bird. Too little invites peevishness, too much, incoherent rambling. T-Bird is Walter's drink of choice because it is cheap and easily obtained by threatening his mother, ripping off her purse, or mowing the lawn for a few bucks.

I went around to the backyard, where Walter's room jutted out from the house proper onto the dead brown grass. Walter is a lousy gardener. I could hear the T.V. going inside. I rapped on his window. "Yo, wino Walt," I said. "I'm here. I brought gifts. Come on out." I walked back into the yard, pulled up a lawn-chair, popped a can of ginger ale for myself, and arranged the three short dogs symmetrically on the old metal table beside me.

Walter shuffled out five minutes later, wearing cut-off jeans and a Mahler sweatshirt. He is about 5'11" with curly light-brown hair and extremely light-blue eyes. Though not fat, he tends to waddle.

"Welcome, Fritz. You did bear gifts. How thoughtful." He sat down beside me, grabbed a short dog, and drained it in one gulp. Color came into his face, his eyes seemed to expand and his whole body gave a slight twitch. He was on his way. He pulled out a pack of Marlboros, lit one, and inhaled deeply. I wondered what direction our conversation would take. "You look pensive, Fritz. Troubled also, somewhat. Thinking about your future again? You look like you could use a drink. I know you won't go for it though; only half of you wants it. Whether or not it's your better half, I can't say. I only know you better than anyone, including yourself."

"Fuck you. You're right, though, I have had my future on my mind. It's been a strange day so far. A crazy caddy is paying me a hundred twenty-five dollars a day plus to dig up dirt on some rich guy his sister is living with. He looks like a bum, but he carries a six-thousand-dollar roll. Crazy, Daddy-O!"

"You'll do a good job. You're a born dirt-digger. You have no morality whatsoever. A boyish-looking shark. We are the same age, and you look twenty-five while I look forty. This I attribute to your refusal, even at your most desperate, to drink cheap wine. Fritz, who do you really think killed the Black Dahlia?"

I groaned at the mention of this mutual obsession from our boyhood drinking days. "I don't know. And you know what? I don't care. Change the subject, will you?"

"Okay, for now. Toss me another dog, will you? I'm thirsty." He downed this one in two gulps. His face was downright florid now. His eyes were getting maniacal, and I knew he was going to start talking either science fiction or his mother. The two are more or less synonymous.

"The old girl has finally reached her zenith, Fritz. She's senile but cagey, and still a master game player. She intends to live forever and is on the lookout for new victims. My father, God rest his soul, and I were just the beginning. She's been prowling these senior citizens dances and she's picked up this fruit vendor, a dago, kind of semi-rich—he owns about a dozen produce stands out in the Valley. And I think the old girl is going to marry him! Seventy years old, hasn't fucked since I was conceived, and now this. I can't believe it. He can hardly talk, he just grunts. He's got emphysema, he carries around a little oxygen shooter—it looks like a raygun. Jesus! She's set financially; she doesn't need his dough. I've told her that within five years the antimatter credit card will be in operation, that all she'll have to do is walk up to any bank, lay her rap into the loudspeaker, insert her card and get all the bread she needs. Within eight years we'll all be transported to the sublunar void, where the controlled environment will enable us to live for centuries in perfect health. The dumb cunt can't see it coming, and she's going to throw it all away for some wop fruit vendor. She's afraid to be alone. You know that, don't you, Fritz? When she's got the wop sewed up, she'll give me the boot, like she did my old man, and I'll have to get a job. I *still* can't believe it." He reached for the last bottle, but I grabbed it first.

"Not yet. You'll be into your 'moon to earth, moon to earth' routine in a minute. I've got to split. I've got this case I'm working on and a big load of repo's, so I probably won't see you for a week or so. Right now, I want to go home and listen to some music. Remember the Hollywood Bowl Season starts next week, and I've got us a box. Don't worry about the dago—if he gives you any shit just rip off his oxygen gun. I've got to go."

"Okay. If anything drastic comes up, anything you think I can clarify for you, give me a call."

"Okay, Walter. You take care. I'll see you."

On the way home I tried not to worry about Walter. It had been a bad session today. I hadn't gotten what I needed from him, or imparted what I felt he needed. His ongoing suicide was painful to watch. I stopped at a pay phone and called Irwin at work.

He wasn't as upset by the violence yesterday as I had thought. He agreed to stay with me; and his loyalty was so touching that I offered him an extra 5 percent of my action for no extra work. Then I dropped my bomb: I told him that I had a case, and that the ten delinquents were all his. He didn't believe me at first, but finally it sank in. I told him to get his hotheaded Israeli nephew to do the actual ripping-off for him. After thanking me effusively, he hung up.

When I got home I put Schubert on the turntable to try to put Walter out of my mind. It worked for a while, until I remembered that Schubert was about Walter’s age when he died.

4

I began my surveillance of Jane Baker the next day. Sol Kupferman was a more logical place to begin, since he was supposedly the villain of this triangle, but I had visions of tailing him to his office in the morning, to some swank Beverly Hills eatery for lunch, and back to his pad at the end of the day. A big drag. Jane Baker was probably more mobile. And she was certainly better looking.

I arrived at my post across the street from Kupferman's around 8:00 a.m. No one in Beverly Hills gets up before then, except butlers and maids. I had my own car, a '69 Camaro Ragtop, and I was all set for a day of sleuthing, wearing a sports jacket and tie, shined shoes, and carrying an assortment of official-looking badges, from "Special Deputy" to "International Invesigator." I had bought them at a novelty shop on Hollywood Boulevard. No repo-man should be without them.

Jane Baker walked out the door at nine forty-five. She more than did her photograph justice. Dressed in a russet cotton-linen pantsuit, her hair tied into a bun, she looked like the prototype of a confident young career woman. As she walked past Kupferman's Eldorado to the older de Ville, I trained my binoculars on her face. It was hard to picture this slender, efficient-looking woman as the sister of the grubby Fat Dog, yet the resemblance was there: the full cheeks, the widely spaced eyes, and a certain determined set to the mouth that was sensual on Jane and ugly on her brother.

There was a fair amount of traffic heading south toward the Beverly Hills shopping district—women in Cadillacs and Mercedes on their morning shopping pilgrimages to the boutiques of Fat City—but Jane was easy to follow. We went south on Beverly Drive to Big Santa Monica, then east all the way into Hollywood. It was a pleasant drive. The sky was smogless and the Hollywood Hills were alive with greenery. Jane Baker turned left on Highland and pulled into the parking lot of a Bank of America branch.

I parked three spaces away, gave her two minutes and then followed her into the bank. It was busy, the height of the early morning rush, so it was a few minutes before she got to see a teller. I passed by her on the opposite side of the velveteen waiting ropes and observed the transaction. The teller was counting out a large number of fifties. There appeared to be close to a grand on the counter. Jane stuffed the bills into her purse.

I hotfooted it outside and back to my car, wondering why a Beverly Hills woman would travel all the way to Hollywood to do her banking. And where would Jane Baker be going with a grand in her purse?

She didn't leave me hanging for long. A minute later she was behind the wheel and gunning it north on Highland. She was harder to tail this time, deftly weaving in and around the morning traffic. North of the Hollywood Bowl she turned onto the Hollywood Freeway. Soon we were spinning over the Valley, its northern horizon freighted with smog.

I almost lost her a couple of times, but when she hit the Victory Boulevard off-ramp, I was right behind her. She led me into the poorer residential areas of Van Nuys. No sidewalks. Ugly eight- and ten-unit apartment buildings and small houses painted in depressing pastel shades. I had done a lot of repo-ing around here; people trapped with dead-end jobs often neglect their car payments. Jane pulled over abruptly against the dirt shoulder of a particularly seedy street. I passed on by her and stopped at the corner.Out of my rearview mirror I watched her walk up a gravel driveway and enter a tiny yellow wood frame house.

Jane showed five minutes later and within a few minutes we were back on the Ventura Freeway, this time southbound. She was driving smoothly now, and I stayed several cars back, my eyes half-glued to the road, and half-glued to her long car aerial. I followed her onto Hollywood Freeway, headed east. Ten minutes later Jane signaled her departure from Freeway Land and I followed her north on Vermont and east on Normal Avenue, a rundown street of apartment buildings which house students from nearby L.A. City College. When she parked I was right behind her.

My stomach was growling and I was losing patience. It hit me that Fat Dog might try to duck me for my bill. He was riding high now, but he had the air of a horseplayer who hit it big and was flashing the roll he was certain to lose. The idea of being stiffed by a golf course flunky pissed me off.

Jane had trotted across the street and into an old four flat. This time I could see that it was an elderly man who admitted her. I wrote down the address. She returned just seconds later, practically running to her Cadillac. She tore out, and I was all set for hot pursuit, but my car wouldn't turn over. Shit! It was the capper to a frustrating morning. I watched Jane Baker turn right and zoom out of sight.

I got out of the car, my stomach turning over like a hungry dog's, and opened the hood. I'm no mechanic, but I spotted the trouble immediately. A distributor wire had come loose. The repair job took one second, but of course, Jane Baker was long gone. I walked around the corner to Vermont and found a Mom and Pop market crowded with students on lunch break. I bought a quart of milk and two refrigerated pastrami sandwiches. I found an alley around the corner and took a long overdue leak behind some trashcans. A black couple strolled by hand in hand as I was doing this and snickered at me. I was getting a bad play from blacks lately, probably karmic revenge for my years with the L.A.P.D.

I ate my lunch outside my car and reviewed my options. I decided to concentrate on Sol Kupferman. He was probably just a nice old fart with a hard-on for a beautiful young cellist, but it was Fat Dog's C-note-and-a-quarter a day.

Driving away, I remembered yesterday's phone call to R&I. I found a pay phone on 3rd and Vermont and buzzed my old buddy Jensen. It took him a few minutes to get to the phone, "Yo, Jensen," I said, "this is Fritz Brown. You got that information for me?"

"Hold on, Brownie. You got a pencil?"

"Yeah, shoot it."

"Okay, on Jane Baker, no criminal record. We got a whole shitload of Jane Bakers here, but none of them could possibly be her, according to the age and description you gave me. I checked D.M.V. and they gave me this: Jane Margaret Baker, D.O.B. 3-11-52, L.A., brown and blue, 5'9", 130. The usual numbers of the usual citations, except for two reckless-driving citations, no booze or dope involved. Does that sound like her?"

"That's her. Shoot me the other two."

"Okay. On Frederick 'Fat Dog' Baker, we got some interesting shit. Three vandalism beefs as a juvie, all three times the judge recommended counseling. That figures. Two weenie wagger convictions as an adult: 8-14-59 and 2-9-64. Not registered as a sex offender, probably drunk, just got the urge to whip out his cock and take a piss. Under employment, we got him down as a caddy, and believe me, for a caddy that's par for the course, no pun intended. They're the lowlifers of the world. Give the asshole his due, though, he ain't been in no trouble for sixteen years. He…"

I butted in. Jensen was a loudmouth and this could go on all day. "We have to speed this up, Daddy-O, I'm parked in the red and there's a meter maid checking out my Doctor On Call sign suspiciously. I don't want a ticket, I've got no way to fix them anymore."

"You're still a crazy fucker. Okay, Sol Kupferman. 5-13-15. No criminal record, per se. Twice a material witness for the grand jury. Both times they were investigating bookmaking. This was in '52 and '55. That's it."

That was enough. I thanked Jensen and hung up. Nothing surprised me, except the dope on Kupferman. Jane Baker's two reckless-driving convictions indicated nothing but youthful verve. That Fat Dog was an exhibitionist was no shocking revelation. He was a disturbed man. But Solly K existing on the edge of, or in, the vice game twenty years ago was interesting, doubly so when coupled with my knowledge of his presence at the Club Utopia in '68.

Small bars like that were often fronts for bookie operations.

It was time to go and talk to the one person I know who is profoundly knowledgeable of the dark secrets of Los Angeles. I headed toward the Sunset Strip to see Jack Skolnick. In honor of Jane Baker I played the Dvořák "Cello Concerto" on the way.

Jack Skolnick has had a checkered past. For over forty years he has maneuvered on the fringes of L.A.'s high society, entertainment monolith, and underworld with the finesse and discernment of some sort of rare animal. Like a pig snorting truffles, he knows just where to look, and dig. Under his euphemistic title of "agent" he has pimped, supplied rigged game shows with "contestants," served as a tour guide for visiting dignitaries (showing them the "real" L.A.), sold information to the cops, run mail-order scams, solicited funds for political candidates of all persuasions, pushed gourmet marijuana brownies, and operated a canine obedience school. His knowledge of Los Angeles and the eccentricities of its moneyed people is astounding. I had a feeling he could tell me something about Sol Kupferman.

Jack's office was on the sixth floor of a big apartment building on Sunset, a block east of Fairfax. His home was the apartment next door. The place wasn't zoned for business, but "Jack Skolnick Enterprises" was so vague he got away with it.

I gave his foxy young secretary my name and she sent me directly in to Jack's office. Jack was sitting behind his desk, reading the newspaper. He looked good. I told him so.

He was surprised to see me. He put down his paper and stood up to shake my hand. "Fritz, baby, so do you! You've put on some weight. Sit down. How's tricks, Fritzie? Still got the repo gig? Hatchet man for Cal Myers?"

It wasn't quite a jibe, so I let it pass. "More or less. I've still got my P.I.'s license though, and the agency going on the side. Right now I'm on a case. What about you? What's your latest scam?"

"Currently, I'm in the escort business. I provide businessmen with an attractive, intelligent woman to be seen with at various functions."

"In other words, you're pimping."

Jack shook his head in mock dismay. "Fritz, baby! Would I do a thing like that?"

"Only if it made money."

"I protest, Fritzie! My girls are all in college!"

"Yeah, majoring in fucking. Enough bullshit. I've got a client who's interested in a man you may know something about. Sol Kupferman. You heard of him?"

Jack gave me a cagey look and nodded his head. "I knew him slightly, maybe twenty years ago when I had my chauffeur gig. I used to fix him up with a limo and a driver. We used to talk sometimes."

"About what?"

"Just rebop. The weather, that kind of shit. Nothing too heavy. But I heard talk about him."

"Such as?"

"Such as he was a money man, tax advisor to organized crime in the '40s. Such as he was a noncombatant, some kind of tax wizard. He made the mob a bundle."

"That's it?"

"What are you fishing for, Fritzie?"

"Kupferman was subpoenaed as a material witness to the grand jury, back in the '50s. They were investigating bookmaking. What do you know about that?"

"I know that back in the '50s the grand jury was convened every time someone laid a fart. It was the McCarthy era. If the grand jury called up Kupferman, it was probably because he knew somebody who knew somebody. That kind of thing."

"What else can you tell me about him?"

Jack smiled again. "That he had a lot of heart and a lot of class. A real mensch. I bought my daughter a mink stole from him a few years ago. He remembered me and gave me a good deal. He's a mensch."

"You remember the Club Utopia firebombing?"

"Yeah. A bunch of people got fried, then the State fried the fryers. What about it?"

"I heard Kupferman used to frequent the place. I thought it was a funny coincidence. Can you put a handle on that?"

"Yeah, I can. Life is filled with funny coincidences." I was digging for more questions when the phone on Jack's desk rang. He picked it up and bellowed into it: "Liz, baby! How did it go?!" I got up and we shook hands across his desk. He placed his free hand over the receiver. "Let's get together soon, Fritz. Dinner, what say?"

"Sounds good, Jack. I'll call you."

He nodded goodbye. As I walked out his door I could hear him exclaiming gleefully, "A congressman? And he wanted to do that with you?"

When I got down to street level, the city was cooling off. I decided to drive home, and then go looking for Fat Dog. The case was turning into an exercise in futility, and I would feel better about it with some of Fat Dog's money in my pocket. I put the top on my car down and cruised east on Sunset. Knots of young hookers were starting to appear, sitting on bus benches and giving male motorists the eye. I toyed with the idea of picking one up, but only briefly; they looked too sad.

At home, I watched the sunset from my balcony. The nicest thing about nighttime is the clarity, and in L.A. that means shadows and neon. The night was alive now. I went looking for my client.

—

Santa Monica Boulevard and Sawtelle Avenue, one-half mile south of the Veteran's Administration complex, is the nadir of West Los Angeles. It's a strange bottom, not too dangerous unless you're waxing profane about the masses of wetbacks who live in the fleabag hotels there. Chilled short dogs dominate the refrigerated sections of the half dozen liquor stores on this compact skid row, and the doomed old men from the V.A. who scarf them up are the saddest things I've ever seen. But "Graveyard West" has its positive side: the Nuart Theatre is a great revival house and the Papa Bach Bookstore is a mecca for counterculture literati. All in all, despair wins out by a nod, and the neighborhood is the ideal place for a thirty-five-year-old hippie on the sauce.

I parked my car at a gas station across the street from the Nuart and went looking for the Tap & Cap. I found it around the corner from the theater on Sawtelle. It was a dumpy beer bar with a neon sign advertising its hours: 6:00 a.m. to 2:00 a.m., the maximum the law allows. When I entered I was struck with a thousand déjà vu's. This place had been described by Fat Dog as a caddy hangout, and the two dozen or so men sitting at the bar and hanging around the pool tables had to be caddies. They were dressed more or less alike: beat-up golf-type slacks that had originally cost good money, knit shirts—most of them bearing mascots or symbols on the pockets—and hats—a wide variety of them, from sun visors to baseball caps to Tyrolean pork pies. I had seen scores of men dressed like this over the years, sunburned and middle-aged, dressed too distinctly to be bums, yet not quite looking like normal citizens. Caddies.

I took a stool at the end of the bar. Behind the bar, above the shelves of beer glasses, was a giant photographic collage of blown-rip photos of leading jockeys and their mounts interspersed with Polaroids of bar regulars playing softball and guzzling brew. I couldn't pick out Fat Dog. I got the bartender's attention. "I'm looking for Fat Dog Baker," I said. "He told me I could get a line on him here."

"I ain't seen Fat Dog for a week or so," the bartender said. "But if you wanna leave a message, I'll see he gets it when he comes in."

"No, I have to see him tonight." I took a five spot out of my wallet and laid it on the bar in front of him. I gestured at the men behind me playing pool. “Do any of these guys know Fat Dog? Know where I could find him?”

He deftly snapped up the fiver and pointed to a scarecrow-like older guy playing around with the jukebox. “That’s Augie Dougall,” he said. “He loops with Fat Dog kind of semiregular. Ask him, he might know. Buy him a pitcher. He likes Coors.”

I thanked the bartender, awarding him one of my rare winks, and carried the chilled pitcher and a glass over to the jukebox. I tapped the scarecrow on the shoulder. He turned around and almost knocked the beer out of my hands. “This is for you,” I said and pointed to a small table a few feet away. “I’m a friend of Fat Dog Baker. I’d like to talk to you for a minute.”

We sat down and he dove into his suds. He was about 55, and very tall, maybe 6'6". He couldn’t have weighed more than 140. He looked guileless and gentle, so I played it straight with him. “I’m doing a job for Fat Dog,” I said. “I know you’re an old looping buddy of his, so I thought maybe you could tell me where he’s staying.”

“Okay. You’re not a cop, are you?”

“No.”

“You kind of look like one.”

“I traded in my badge for a set of golf clubs. Fat Dog is going to teach me the game.” Augie didn’t laugh or change his expression. His eyes remained locked into mine. He slopped up some more beer. It struck me that he must be close to retarded, with an idiot savant’s antenna for the heat.

“You picked a good teacher, buddy. Nobody knows golf like the Fat Dog. Nobody can read greens like him neither. You put that putt where he tells you, and whammo, it’s in the cup.”

“Fascinating, but what I’m interested in is where I can find him, tonight.”

Augie Dougall went on, “Fat Dog don’t like to sleep indoors. He says it’s bad for him. He has bad dreams. He’s been loopin’ Bel-Air lately and sleepin’ on the course on this little hill off of the eighth hole near this little lake they got. He…”

I interrupted, “You mean he sleeps on the grounds at Bel-Air Country Club?”

“Yeah. They got this gate off of Sunset near this girls’ school. There’s this big statue of Jesus there. Fat Dog hops the fence. He’s got a nice little place all set up for hisself…”

I didn’t let him finish. I tossed him a hurried thank-you and left the bar. I could hear the beginning of an argument as I walked out the door. It had to do with the merits of Arnold Palmer’s swing versus Ben Hogan’s. It was picking up tempo as I strode up Sawtelle toward my car, looper voices trailing hero worship and anger into the night.

I knew the entrance Augie Dougall was talking about. Jesus stood guard over the student parking lot at Marymount Girls' School. I parked beside the gate Fat Dog would have to climb over to get to his retreat and put on some music conducive to forming plans on a warm summer night: Mozart's Fortieth Symphony, light and graceful, the antithesis of the nervous boredom my case was turning into.

When the music ended I waited in silence for an hour or so, then heard Fat Dog's loud footsteps coming toward me on the driveway. He was muttering something unintelligible. I called out softly so as not to frighten him. "Yo, Fat Dog. You've got a visitor."

"Who's that?" he called back nervously. "Friend or foe?"

"It's Fritz Brown, Fat Dog. I've got to talk to you."

"Fritz baby! My buddy! The private-eye man! You got some good shit for the Fat Dog?"

I opened my passenger door. "I've got some information for you. I don't know how good it is."

He sat down beside me on the front seat, and gave me a warm handshake. His hand was greasy and he smelled of dry leaves and sweat, the price of outdoor living. "Shoot it to me, Jack," he said.

"It's like this," I said, "I've been tailing your sister and Kupferman. Not long enough to establish any routine, but long enough to tell you there's no hanky-panky going on." It was a lie, but a kind one. "More importantly, I've talked to a former associate of Kupferman's and checked him out with the fuzz. I can tell you this: a long time ago, Kupferman was a money man for organized crime. An accountant, actually. He was a material witness to the grand jury twice, when they were investigating bookmaking. That was back in the '50s. I get the distinct impression that he's been clean for a long time."

"So where do you go from here? What else are you gonna do?"

"That's up to you. I can subpoena the grand jury records. That takes time, plus money for an attorney. I can continue my surveillance, which will probably yield no dirt. I can talk to other people who know Kupferman and see what they have to say. That's about it."

"You go to it, man. This is important to me."

"There's the question of money, if you want me to continue. I'll give you a flat rate. One week of my time, an even grand. That includes expenses. It's a good deal. I'll submit you a written report on all the shit I've dug up. One thing, though, I need the money tonight. And another, I'm going on vacation at the end of the week. No business, okay? You got the bread?"

"Yeah, but I'm not holding it. I never do at night. Too many psychos around. You ain't safe, even sleeping outside. We got to take a ride for the moolah. Okay?"

“Okay. You’ve got it in cash, right?”

“Right.”

“Where do we go?”

“Venice.”

Venice, where the debris meets the sea. It figured my canine friend would do his banking there.

—

I took surface streets to give me time to converse with my client. He was far more interesting than either of the people I was investigating. Mob minions gone legit and amateur musicians were commonplace, but caddies who slept on golf courses and carried around six or seven thousand dollars were rare, and probably indigenous to only L.A. I decided to do some polite digging in the guise of small talk. “How’s the looping business, Fat Dog? You making any money?”

“I’m doing all right. I’ve got my regulars,” he said.

“When I was a kid, my dad used to drive us by Wilshire Country Club every Saturday on the way to the movies. I used to see these guys carrying golf bags on their shoulders. It looked like a lot of work. Don’t those bags get heavy?”

“Not really. You get used to it. You work Hillcrest or Brentwood though and you break your balls. Them kikes got cement in their bags. And none of ’em can play golf. They just like to torture their caddy. They pay you a few bucks more, but it’s just so they can feel superior while they torture you.”

“That’s an interesting concept, Fat Dog. Sadism on the golf course. Jewish golfers as sadists. Why do you dislike Jews so much?”

“Dislike ain’t the word. I never met one who kept his word, or could play golf. They rule the country and then complain how they can’t get into good clubs like L.A. or Bel-Air. When I’m rich though, I’m gonna have me a whole caddy shack full of Jewish goats. I’m gonna get me a big fat Spaulding trunk and load it down with umbrellas, golf balls, and extra clubs. The bastard’s gonna weigh about seventy-five pounds. I’m gonna have a n——— caddy pack it on the front nine, and a Hebe on the back. I’ve got a friend, a rich guy who feels like me. He’s gonna have a bag just like mine. We’re gonna make these fuckin’ Jews and n———s pack us double. Ha-ha-ha!” Fat Dog’s laughter rose, then dissolved into a coughing attack. Tears were streaming down his cheeks. He stuck his head out the window to catch some air.

I prodded him a little. “You ever caddy for Kupferman?”

Regaining his breath, Fat Dog gave me a quizzical look. “Are you kidding? He had a coon pack his bag. Jews and n———s are soul brothers.”

We were on Lincoln now, heading south. On Venice Boulevard we turned west, toward the beach. Within a few minutes we were on the edge of the Venice ghetto, known to Venetians as "Ghost Town." Fat Dog told me to stop on a street named Horizon. It wasn't much of a horizon, just dirty wood-framed four and eight flats with no front yards. It was trash night and garbage cans lined the sidewalk. Spanish voices and television battled for audial supremacy. There was no place to park, so Fat Dog told me to let him out and come back in ten minutes. I had other ideas.

He hopped out. Through my rearview mirror, I watched him trot around the corner to my left. As soon as he was out of sight, I jumped out and tore after him, leaving the car double-parked. I slowed to a walk as I reached the corner. Fat Dog was nowhere in sight. I walked to the end of the block, looking in windows and checking out driveways. Nothing. I got back into my car and circled the streets surrounding Horizon at random. When I returned to the spot where I had dropped Fat Dog, he was standing there. He handed me a roll of bills as he got in.

I counted the money. There were twenty fifty-dollar bills. Nice new crisp U.S. Grants. "One week, Fat Dog. No more, no less. After that, it's farewell."

"It's a deal. Fritz is a German name, right?"

"Right."

"Are you German? Brown ain't no German name."

"I'm of German descent. My grandparents were born there. Their name was Brownmuller. When they came to America they shortened it to Brown. It was good they did. There was a lot of discrimination against Germans here during the First World War."

"Fucking A!" Fat Dog said. I could feel him getting keyed up. "It was the Jews, you know that. The Germans wouldn't take none of their shit. They owned all the pawnshops in America and Germany, and bled the white Christians dry! They—"

I started the car and pulled away, trying not to listen. I turned right on Main Street and headed north. It was getting to be too much; I was getting a headache. I turned to Fat Dog. "Why don't you can that shit, and right now," I said, trying to keep my voice down. "You hired me to get information for you, not to listen to your racist rebop. I like Jews. They're great violinists and they make a mean pastrami sandwich. I like blacks, too. They sure can dance. I watch *Soul Train* every week. So please shut the fuck up." Fat Dog was staring out his window. When he spoke he was surprisingly calm. "I'm sorry, man. You're my buddy. My friend is always telling me not to sound off on politics so much, that not everybody feels like we do. He's right. You go around shooting off your mouth and everybody knows your plans. You got no surprises left for nobody. I'm the man with the plan, but I got to cool it for now."

I was curious about his "plan," maybe a Utopian vision of unionized caddy fleets, blacks and Jews excluded, but I decided not to ask. My headache was just abating; "Tell me about yourself, Fat Dog. I was a cop for six years and I never met anyone like you."

"There ain't much to tell. I'm the king of the caddies, the greatest fucking looper who ever packed a bag. I'm strictly a club caddy, and proud of it. Those tour baggies ain't nothin'. Carrying single bags for a good player ain't jack shit. Two on your back and two more on a cart, that's the real test of a goat. I know every golf course in this city like the back of my hand. I'm a legend in my own time."

"I believe you. That was a pretty hefty roll you whipped out on me yesterday. With that kind of dough, how come you sleep outside?"

"That's personal, man, but I'll tell you if you tell me something. Okay?"

"Okay."

"How come you quit the police force?"

"They were about to can me. I was drinking heavily, and my fitness reports were shot to hell. I was too sensitive to be a cop." It was approximately a third of the truth, but my remark about my "sensitivity" was an outright lie.

"I believe you, man," Fat Dog said. "You got that look, nervous like, of a juicehead on the wagon. I could tell you was by all the coffee you was drinking the other day. Juicers on the wagon are all big coffee fiends."

"Back to you, Fat Dog," I said. "Why the outdoor living?"

He was silent for a minute or so. He seemed to be formulating his thoughts. We had made our way up to Sunset, and I was maneuvering eastbound in heavy traffic, around wide curves and abrupt turns. When he spoke his voice was tighter, less boisterous, like someone trying to explain something intrinsic and holy. "Do you dig pussy?" he asked.

"Sure," I said.

"Have you ever wanted to have a broad that could give you everything you've ever wanted? That you never had to worry about? I mean, you never had to worry about her fucking no other guys, you just *knew* she was loyal? And this broad, she's *perfect.* Her body is exactly like the one you've always dreamed of. And she's even nice to be around after you've fucked her? That's how I feel about golf courses. They're beautiful and mysterious. I don't sleep good inside. Nightmares. Sometimes when it rains, I sleep underneath this overhang next to the caddy shack at Bel-Air. It's dry, but it's outside. It's peaceful on golf courses. Most of the ones in L.A. got nice homes next to them. Big old-fashioned ones. The people leave their lights on sometimes 'cause they think no one's looking at them. I seen all kinds of strange shit that way. Once when I was camped out on Wilshire South, I saw some dame beat up her dog, just a little puppy, then get it on with another dame, right there on the floor. These rich cocksuckers who belong to these clubs, they think they own their golf courses, but they just play golf on them, and I live on them, all of them! The courses around here are the primo land in L.A., worth billions of bucks, and I've got them all for my personal crash pad. So I pack bags and I'm the best, and I know things that none of these rich assholes will never know."

"What kind of nightmares do you have?"

Fat Dog hesitated before he answered. "Just scary shit," he said. "Monsters, dragons, and animals out to get me. Never getting to see my sister again."

"I tailed your sister today. She withdrew some money from a bank, then visited some people in the Valley and around Vermont and Melrose. Do you have any idea of who these people are?"

"No!" Fat Dog screamed. "You're the private eye, you find out! I'm paying you a grand to find out! You find out about that Jew bloodsucker Kupferman, too! I'm paying you! You find out!"

I turned on to the golf course access road, stopped the car, and looked at Fat Dog. He was red-faced and shaking, his eyes pinpoints of fear and hatred. My client was insane. I started to speak, something consoling, but he started screaming again. "You find out, you cocksucker! You're working for the Fat Dog, don't you forget that!" He got out of the car and walked up to the fence. He started to scale it, then turned around to give me a parting salvo. "You ain't no German, you fuck. N——— lover! Jew lover! You couldn't even keep a job with the fuzz, you…"

My headache came back, full force, and I got out of the car. I ran to the fence and pulled Fat Dog off by his belt. As he landed, I spun him around and hit him in the stomach, hard. He doubled over, gasping, and I whispered to him, "Listen, you fucking lowlife. Nobody talks to me that way, ever. I took a look at your rap sheet today, and I know you're a weenie-wagger. You've got two choices as of now. You can apologize to me for what you said, and I'll continue to work for you. If you don't apologize, I'll throw a citizen's arrest on you for indecent exposure. With your two priors it means registration as a sex offender, which is not pleasant. What's it going to be?"

Fat Dog recovered his breath and muttered, "I apologize."

"Good," I said. "You've got one week of my time. I'll leave a message at the bar if I need to get in touch with you. You'll get my best job. At the end of the week I'll submit a written report." I gave him a boost and he managed to make it over the fence. I watched him walk into the darkness of his sanctuary, then drove away, my revulsion cut through with the strangest, sickest sense of fascination.

There was no place to go but Walter's. I drove out Wilshire feeling numbed physically and caught on the horns of a moral dilemma: I had been hired by a vindictive lunatic to disrupt the lives of two decent people. I had the chance to bail out of my case but I didn't. I *couldn't*; I was spellbound by a madman. It seemed an insoluble problem, so I willed myself not to think, which only compounded my numbness.

I couldn't find a parking space on Walter's block, so I parked on his front lawn. If his mother saw my tire marks, she would resign me to Christian Science hell, but I decided to risk it. I walked into the backyard. The light in Walter's bedroom was on, and through it I could see him passed out in his chair in front of the T.V. On the screen a giant reptile was attacking a Japanese metropolis, knocking over skyscrapers with his tail. I toyed with the idea of shooting Godzilla and watching the T.V. implode, but Walter would never forgive me. There were two empty pint bottles of Scotch on the floor beside his chair. That was ominous. Walter was a winehead, and when he couldn't threaten or cajole his mother into wine money, he would rip off flat pint bottles from the Thrifty Drug Store on Wilshire and Western. Hard liquor was an oblivion trip for my beloved friend, and he was an inept shoplifter. I was afraid that if he were busted, the arresting officers would recognize his lunacy and railroad him to Department 95 and Camarillo.

I pried off the window screen and climbed into his room. I lifted Walter onto his bed and stuffed two fifties into his shirt pocket. As I shut off the T.V., Godzilla was getting blasted by some sort of atomic death-ray. "I love you, you crazy bastard, but you break my heart," I said, turning off the lights, and going out the window. It was getting chilly. I drove home and fell asleep on the couch with my clothes on.

II

LOOPERS AND CELLISTS

5

The moral imperative of my case hit me when I woke up the next morning. Was Fat Dog Baker dangerous? Was he a physical threat to Sol Kupferman and Jane Baker? Exhibitionists are the most docile of sex deviates, but Fat Dog had shown a volatile streak. If he were planning to harm either his sister or Kupferman, it was my duty to stop him. Investigating Fat Dog with his own money struck me as wildly ironic, absurdist theater in L.A. I decided to start in Venice.

I drove down LaBrea and caught the Santa Monica Freeway westbound. It was ten o'clock and the smog was starting to roll in. Maybe soon the environmentalists would outlaw cars, and I would have to find work repossessing horses. Fortunately for me, Cal Myers would see it coming and corner the market on beasts of burden. I could see it now: Cal's Casa de Caballo, Cal's Imports (Arabian horses, naturally) and Cal's Palomino. Cal would be cutting his T.V. commercials knee deep in horseshit.

When I arrived in Venice, I parked in the exact spot where Fat Dog had got out last night. I had a simple plan: Check out every vacant house, lot, and garage for four blocks south, and question whomever I ran into. Fat Dog was hard to miss, and someone in the area might be able to give me a lead. I walked. It was getting hot, and the coat and tie I was wearing didn't help. I was getting wary looks from people sitting on their porches, taking the air. I looked like a cop. In Venice, no one but the fuzz wears a coat and tie.

The first two blocks were fruitless. On the third block I saw a wino wandering down the street, drinking from a brown paper bag. He had a wily, lucid look about him, so I gave him a toss. Whipping out my phony badge, I committed a misdemeanor: "Police officer," I said. "Maybe you can help me."

The wino gave me a frightened nod. When I finished describing Fat Dog, he practically screamed at me: "I seen that shitbird! Does he wear a shirt with a little crocodile on it? And a baseball cap?"

"That's the guy."

"What are you after him for?"

I made it good: "Molesting little boys."

"I knew it! Once I was sittin' on this driveway and the shitbird tells me to move my ass. He said it was his property. He looked like a crazy, so I moved.

Shitbird."

"Do you remember where you were?" I asked.

"Sure. The place is around the corner."

"Take me there. Now." We turned the corner and the wino led me to a small wood frame house. There was a dirt driveway that ran back into a yard overrun with weeds and high grass. In the rear of the yard was a tar-papered shack with no windows, standing awry atop a weed patch. It was a perfect visual representation of Fat Dog's paranoia. I thanked the wino and told him to take off. He trotted away, giving me a funny look over his shoulder.

I decided to do a little breaking and entering. I checked out the front house first, knocking at the front door, then the back. No one home. I walked into the backyard. Broken toys lay strewn among the weeds. Luckily, the door to the shack was hidden from the street, and the lock was a joke: a simple hinge with two screws bolted into the doorjamb and a carryover metal strip attached to a cheap padlock. I found a curtain rod in the yard among the broken toys. It had bent edges that looked thin enough to use as a screwdriver. I tried it. No go. My impatience got the best of me, and I wedged the rod inside the metal strip and snapped the whole mechanism off. The wood splintered, leaving craters where the screws had gone in. There was no way to cover my tracks.

I opened the door and fumbled for a light switch. I flipped it on, and an overhead bulb on a cord illuminated the dark corners of a man's mind. It took minutes for the full import of the room to hit me, the photographs that covered the four walls were too staggering: women, mostly Mexican, in every conceivable posture of debasement with donkeys, horses, dogs, and pigs. Interspersed with them were photos of Hitler and his henchmen in various stern poses. Goering, Goebbels, Eichmann, Himmler, the whole sick crew. There was a workbench running along the back wall and above it was a collage of concentration camp atrocity photos: mounds of corpses hanging out of ovens and piles of skeletons lying in a mass grave.

When I checked out the contents of the workbench, I started to tremble. There were a half dozen gallon cans of gasoline, empty bottles, stacks of asbestos padding, and a pile of safety gloves, all neatly stacked. In a cardboard box underneath the bench were dozens of celluloid strips and cord fuses arranged according to size. It was an arsonist's workshop, and when the full implication of that hit me I started to tremble even harder: Kupferman. The Utopia. Fat Dog's insane hatred of Solly K. Jesus. My head was pounding, beginning to ache, so I ransacked the place. Expecting to find money, I found nothing but porno books, cans of white paint, and historical tomes on Nazi Germany. I banged all along the rough wood walls, looking for places to hide small objects. Nothing. I got down on my hands and knees and checked the flooring all around. Nothing. I checked the photos on the wall a second time. The horror pictures were ripped out of the history books stored under the bench. The porno pics I judged to be recent and shot in Mexico: the actresses were Latinas and were sporting ’70s-style hairdos and the furnishings of the apartment used as a shooting stage were up to date. In over half of the photographs a black Naugahyde couch was in evidence, and it was covered with cheap bordertown souvenirs: bull banks, piñatas, handbags, and blankets.

The women in the photographs were uniformly ugly and pathetic looking, except one. She was an Anglo, about seventeen or eighteen, with high firm breasts and a red natural. She was performing with men, not animals, indicating a higher status.

I tore half a dozen of the pictures from the walls and stuffed them into my jacket pocket. It was broiling in the room, and I suddenly realized I was drenched in sweat. Before I left I tried a con job. Since there was no way to cover my tracks, I tried to put the blame on some local punks. Maybe Fat Dog would fall for it. I pried open a can of paint, found a brush and painted “Death to honkys,” “Crips Rule,” and “Criplets Venice” on the outside wall near the door. Then I ripped more photos off the walls, threw them on the floor and dumped the can of paint on top of them. I left the door open and split for the car, hoping no one would see me. I had myself a real case now.

I went looking for a telephone. In Venice that takes some doing. Pay phones are easy prey for Venetian junkies and the first three I checked out had been gutted. I finally found one that worked and called Mark Swirkal’s office. Swirkal runs an attorney service, delivering writs and summonses and filing court papers. He knows the L.A. court system from every angle and can locate any official paper within a matter of hours. He had hired me a few times to serve summonses to hard-case types, and now I was shooting him some business in return.

I told him what I wanted. The Club Utopia firebombing case: the names of the victims, the name of the owner and his last known address, the names of the cops who made the arrests, the name of the insurance company and agent who serviced the claim, and, most importantly, notes on all testimony pertaining to the alleged “fourth man.” I promised him a C-note and told him I would call back in four hours. He hung up, chomping at the bit.

I walked across the street to a burrito joint, and scarfed up an enchilada plate and coffee. My head was reeling with the implications of what I had just learned. It gave me a headache, so I got some Excedrin out of the glove compartment and chased four of them with coffee. Somehow my mind quieted. My speculations would be futile until I talked to Mark Swirkal. But one theme emerged: I wanted it to be Fat Dog, for the sake of my own revenge. The L.A.P.D. with its overblown reputation blows a big-time, highly publicized murder case only to have it solved years later by a former flunky cop they forced to resign. Almost reflexively I sized myself up in the full-length mirror at the back of the restaurant. My appearance was inconclusive: an outsized thirty-three-year-old man, neither handsome nor ugly. Personal qualities and morality open to interpretation.

I had three and a half hours to kill before calling Swirkal, so I got the car and went cruising. I drove by Kupferman's fur showroom, and saw his car parked in front. Relieved, I drove by his big house north of Sunset. cello-1 was parked in the driveway and faint cello chords drifted toward me across the broad front lawn. I stopped my car to listen and threw Jane Baker my silent resolve: that as long as I was around, no one would hurt her or her benefactor. I decided to go see Mark Swirkal in person.

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Mark's office was in a dingy turn of the century building on 6th and Union, just outside downtown L.A. proper and close to all the midtown courts. The building had been ruled unsafe after the big '71 earthquake, but never condemned. Mark loved to save a buck and the attorneys he worked for didn't care where he hung his hat; he was the fastest process server and courthouse bulldog in L.A.

I took a rickety elevator to the third floor. His waiting room was open and sparsely furnished—two folding metal chairs with Harbor General Hospital stenciled on the back and a stack of *Playboy*s and *Good Housekeeping*s on the floor. I opted for a *Playboy*.

Swirkal showed a few minutes later and led me into his office, which was smaller and more cluttered than mine, and not air-conditioned. We shook hands, then he opened his window and his mouth. Mark talks very fast. "I got what you wanted, Fritz. More or less. The trial was short so the transcript was short, first off…" Mark waited while I got out my notepad and pen. "First off," he continued, "the Club Utopia was insured. The agent who sold the policy also investigated it for the company, Prudential. His name is James McNamara. The victims' names were Philip Crenshaw, Henry Hadwell, Jacqueline Gaffany, Anthony Gonzalez, William Eastero, and Margot Jackson. You got that, Brownie?"

I caught up with him. "Keep going," I said.

"Okay. The arresting officer was Detective Lieutenant Haywood Cathcart, 77th Street Division. Now regarding the so-called fourth man. He was described as 'a short fat guy, kind of grubby…a red-faced man in his late twenties…fat and mean-looking…but no wimp. He had on one of those little tennis shirts with the crocodile on the pocket.' " Fat Dog. Eureka. Salvation. Mark went on talking, but I didn't hear a word he was saying. Finally, he stopped. “What’s the matter, Brownie? I got lots more testimony on the fourth man.”

“Skip it. I’ve got enough.”

“Are you okay? You look pale.”

“I’m fine. Tell me about the owner of the Utopia.”

“Okay. His name is Wilson Edwards. There was no mention of his address in the transcript.”

I gave Mark Swirkal a big nervous smile and handed him two of Fat Dog’s fifties. “Good work, Daddy-O,” I said.

Mark stuck the money into his pocket. “You want to tell me what this is about?” he asked. “The Utopia bombing is a dead issue.”

“I can’t now. Someday I will, though. Right now, I’d like to use your phone.”

“You go right ahead. I’ve got to split. Lock the door behind you.”

“I will.”

We shook hands again, then Mark thanked me and gave me a puzzled look as he headed out the door. When I heard him get into the elevator I let out a giant whoop of joy and reached for the telephone.

I called Prudential Insurance at their main office on Wilshire. Yes, James McNamara still worked for them. No, he was not in at the moment. I convinced his secretary to relinquish his home phone number. He answered on the second ring. I told him I was a writer doing a book on famous Los Angeles crimes. Would he consent to an interview on the Utopia case? He would indeed. He sounded almost eager. We agreed to meet at a restaurant near his home in Westchester at eight thirty tonight. When I hung up I let out another whoop of joy, this one even louder.

—

I pulled into the parking lot of the steakhouse on Sepulveda at exactly eight twenty-five. I inquired after McNamara with the maître d’, and he pointed out a large man drinking alone at the bar. I walked up and introduced myself. McNamara grasped my hand warmly. He had the lonely, desperate look of a brother juicehead hungry for company. I judged him to be in his late forties, and about a quarter of the way drunk. We adjourned to a table, where I laid out a spiel about the book I was writing. When our waitress came, he ordered a double martini and opened up.

“The Club Utopia firebombing was the ugliest thing I’ve ever seen,” McNamara said. “I went all through Korea with an infantry company and saw nothing to compare to it. The fire itself was no big deal. It was out by the time I got there. It was the bodies that were so terrifying. They were roasted beyond recognition and swollen up like pork sausages. There was a liquor store that was still open down the street, and there was a big crowd of rubberneckers hanging around, guzzling out of paper bags. When the stiffs got carted out and the smell hit, there was a regular epidemic of puking. Booze puke all over the street and the smell of those bodies. Jesus."

"How did you get there so fast?" I asked.

"It was funny," he said, "I was a claims investigator in those days, but I was selling policies on the side. I sold a full coverage policy to Edwards, the owner: damage, vandalism, fire, theft, comprehensive—strange for a cheapshit little bar like that, but what the hell? I was watching T.V. when the news bulletin came on. 'Bar bombed! Six dead!' Naturally, I hotfooted it down there fast since I knew it would be on my caseload."

"And Edwards survived the bombing and collected a settlement, right?"

"Right. He wasn't there that night. He got the thirty-five thousand total coverage payment. Since it was an open and shut case, the cops nabbing the bombers so quick, we paid off fast."

"What happened to Edwards?" I asked.

"Beats me," McNamara said. "He took the money and ran. Wouldn't you? He was a character, in and out of trouble all his life. When I sold him the policy, I attached a note to the file recommending a thorough investigation of all claims he submitted. Of course, the bombing was the *only* claim he submitted, and it was legit."

My steak arrived and I dug in. McNamara ordered another double martini. He was on his way.

"Can you give me a full description of Edwards?" I asked. "Full name, D.O.B., last known address?"

"Can do," he said. "After you called, I stopped by the office and picked up the file. What I don't remember, this baby does." He rummaged through some papers on his lap. "Here it is. Wilson Edwards. Born Lincoln, Nebraska, 12-29-33. White male, brown and blue, 5'11", 180. A couple dozen arrests, through 1960. Minor stuff: trespassing, second degree burglary, possession of marijuana, shoplifting. When I sold him the policy in '66 his address was 341 S. Bonnie Brae, Los Angeles."

I wrote it all down. "Were you satisfied with the police investigation?" I asked. "What about the 'fourth man?' "

" 'The fourth man' was bullshit. The killers, Magruder, Smith, and Sanchez, were buddies—painters. They were in the Utopia earlier that night. Drunk. They got fresh with some women and were bounced by the bartender. They came back just before midnight. Magruder opened the door and threw a three-gallon pail of gasoline into the bar. Sanchez followed it with a lighted book of matches. Six people fried to death. Smith was out in the car sleeping. Several survivors of the fire saw Magruder and Sanchez do it. Two men who survived had worked with Magruder and knew his address. He and Sanchez were arrested later that night in the driveway of his apartment building. They were both passed out from their drunk. They got Smith at his house later that morning. The 'fourth man' routine was just a dodge to beat the death penalty. It didn't work. They all went to the gas chamber."

I pressed on. "The arresting officer was named Cathcart, right?"

"Right. Haywood Cathcart. A choice asshole. When I got to the scene, right in the middle of the whole commotion, fire trucks, police cars, reporters, I saw a group of plainclothes cops talking. I tell them I represent Prudential as an investigator, and would they mind talking to me. Cathcart won't even let me finish. He yells at me that this is police business, that he doesn't want any insurance bimbo fucking things up. Then he has a harness bull escort me to my car. A choice shithead."

"Let's talk about the victims," I said. "Did you pay out any money to their next of kin?" I was fishing now, hoping to luck onto something that would start my wheels turning. McNamara consulted his memory and his martini.

"Yeah, we did," he said. "Ten thou apiece to the next of kin of four of the victims. The other two victims were elderly transients with no known next of kin."

"Did any relative or friend of the victims sue? Either your company or Edwards? Or make any trouble?"

McNamara laughed. "No one sued, but one loco made a lot of trouble. Anthony Gonzalez's kid brother, Omar. Tony Gonzalez was a Golden Glover back in the '50s. Omar worshipped him. He was about sixteen when his brother got French fried, and to say that he took it hard would be an understatement. He was probably the only one in L.A. who believed the fourth man existed, and Jesus Christ, did he make a stink about it. He pestered the cops, found out I was investigating the case for the insurance company, and then pestered me. He bugged the newspapers. It was insane. You remember the *Joe Pyne Show*? Every week he'd be in the audience. They had this thing called the Beef Box, where people from the audience could get up and air their gripes. Every fucking week Omar would be up there, running off at the mouth about the Utopia case and how the fuzz let the mastermind get away. He said the mastermind, that was what he called him, had a grudge against one of the victims and so he bombed the bar just to kill that one person. That way the cops wouldn't check that one person's enemies out. Kill six to get one. He said that Sanchez, Magruder, and Smith were just dupes. When they were executed, he took out a black-bordered ad in the L.A. *Times*. A full page. 'When will the mastermind responsible for the death of my brother be brought to justice?' etc. He used to hang out at 77th Street and buttonhole Cathcart, give him a hard time, expound on his latest theory. He bugged me a lot too, but I never resented it. Omar was a very bright kid, but his brother was strictly a punk. A barfly reliving his days of fistic glory. You remember a book—they made a movie out of it—*Magnificent Obsession*? That's what it was for Omar." McNamara's eyes were clouding over with booze and nostalgia.

"What happened to him?" I asked.

"Oh, he's still around. He liked me. I was patient with him. He used to come by my office and talk about his obsession and what he wanted to do with his life. He hated Cathcart and used to say he was going to join the L.A.P.D. so he could run all the assholes like Cathcart out. He sends me a card every Christmas. He's had the same job, off and on, for years. Mechanic at a gas station in Hollywood. He's also some kind of counselor at a drug recovery program in the Barrio. A great kid. Lotta heart."

"Where's the gas station where Omar works?" I asked.

"It's a Texaco on Franklin and Argyle. If you talk to him, give him my best. Wish him good luck from me."

I said I would and grabbed the check. I thanked McNamara and left him to his memories. I was glad to be sober.

Leaving the restaurant, I felt a strange surge of affection for Fat Dog Baker. He was growing in my eyes, from misanthropic buffoon to brilliant and daring killer. Stranger still, I felt that he had some secret knowledge that was important to me, some new epigram on urban wonder. I had beat up on a killer, and now it was time to make amends and win back his confidence before lowering the boom.

I checked my watch. Nine thirty. Fat Dog should be asleep on the grounds at Bel-Air Country Club by now. But a golf course is a big place, and I might stumble around half the night looking for him, and scare him off in the process. It wouldn't do to upset my gravy train, so I drove to the Tap & Cap to look for an escort.

The escort I had in mind was Augie Dougall, but he wasn't there. The noise in the bar was deafening, country and western mawkishness coupled with loud voices. The Tap & Cap was bustling tonight, and the golf attire and sunburned faces told me it was packed with caddies. The same bartender I had talked to the previous night was on duty, so I went to him for a referral. He told me that every looper in the joint knew Fat Dog, and that no one could stand him. When I asked him who disliked him the least and might be willing to help me locate him, he pointed out a blond guy in his early forties named Stan The Man.

Stan The Man was the perpetrator of the country western earsplitting, standing by the jukebox, feeding it coins. Of all the caddies in the place, he looked like the only one capable of giving me a hard time. He had the wary eyes and angry mien of someone who had done time, so I decided on the phony badge ploy.

After ten minutes of cowboy laments, I got my chance. Stan The Man moved from his perch at the jukebox and walked back to the can. I waited a minute, then followed him. He was walking away from the urinal, zipping his fly, when I braced him. I whipped out my badge. "Police officer," I said. "I'd like to talk to you."

Stan The Man flinched, then said, "Okay."

"We'll go outside," I said, "the bar's too noisy."

He muttered "Okay" again. I started to feel sorry for him. He obviously had a long history of being hassled by fuzz in odd places.

I tried to quash his fears. "You're in no trouble. I just want to talk to you about a caddy you know." Stan The Man just nodded. We moved out onto the street The night air was welcome after the smoky din of the bar. "Let's take a walk," I said, "my car's just up the street."

As we walked I learned that Stan The Man was one Stanley Gaither, late of Brentwood Country Club, Los Angeles Country Club, Bel-Air Country Club, and the L.A. County Jail system. His thing was auto theft. He said it was compulsive, that he was on probation, hoeing the straight and narrow and seeing a psychiatrist. This came out in a torrent of words, unsolicited. He was lonely and I started to like him. I introduced myself as Sergeant Brown. Once we were in the car, I said, "It's like this, Stan. I'm interested in Fat Dog Baker, and I heard you got along with him as well as anyone. Is that true?"

"Kind of. We've known each other for years. Looped a lot of the same clubs. I don't hate him like a lot of guys do. Is he in big trouble?"

"No, I just want to talk to him. Tonight."

"Are you with Vice?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know. A crazy fucker like Fat Dog sleeps outside, never changes his clothes. I've always had this feeling Fat Dog was some kind of pervert. I mean, shit, he used to be the golf-ball king of L.A. He had three hotel rooms filled with nothing but golf balls, fifty thousand of 'em. He was keeping every driving range in the city supplied and keeping a fifty-thousand-ball reserve. Fifty thousand golf balls at ten cents a ball is five grand! Fat Dog paid rent on three hotel rooms to keep 'em safe, while he slept on the fifth tee at Wilshire. A guy who'd do something like that has got to be a pervert. Don't you think so?"

"Maybe. What does Fat Dog do with his money? I heard he still carries a heavy roll."

Stan considered this. “I don’t know,” he said. “I think he just likes to look at it. That, and go to Tijuana. He loves T.J. He goes down there all the time. He’s crazy about the dog races. He loves that scumbag town. The mule act, the Chicago Club, the whole scene. He’s always saying he’s gonna retire down there and race dogs. He hates Jews and n———s, but he loves Mexicans. He’s got to be a pervert.”

Stan The Man looked at me expectantly, hoping his information would be enough and that he could go. It wasn’t, and tonight I needed a tour guide. “You’ve caddied at most of the clubs in L.A., haven’t you, Stan?”

“All of ’em. I’m a loopin’ motherfucker.”

“Good. I need you to take me around tonight. I want to talk to Fat Dog. We’ll start with Bel-Air. Okay?”

Stan The Man’s “okay” was resigned and sorrowful, the lament of a man used to carrying freight and complying with orders. I started the car and we took off.

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The Bel-Air course yielded nothing, but it was beautiful. Armed with flashlights, the reluctant Stan The Man and I searched for an hour and a half. We hopped the fence by the statue of Jesus and made our way north. Stan claimed that he knew all of Fat Dog’s campsites and that it wouldn’t be necessary to check out the whole golf course. He explained to me that Bel-Air was a tight urban course built in and around little canyons. That was why the big houses that loomed off to our right looked so close: they *were* close.

We walked up a steep hill that led to the first tee. It was pitch-black, and the grass smelled wonderful. The view when we reached the top was so beautiful that for a minute I completely forgot the purpose of my mission. The golf course spread out before me, deep black hills that seemed to promise peace and friendship. It was very still and chilly—a good ten degrees cooler than the city proper—and clear, the lights of Los Angeles etched sharply in pastel shades. I was here to talk to a murderer, a psychotic whose lifestyle was incomprehensible to me, and yet for a split second I envied him the solitude of his urban hideaway. If he lived here he had superb taste and the very best of two worlds; nestled in the arms of a great city, yet free, during the night hours, from all her strife.

We crossed the “Swinging Bridge,” a suspension bridge over a deep canyon that carried golfers from the tenth tee to the tenth green. It was aptly named, for a night breeze and the weight of two men sent it swaying gently. Stan broke the silence and told me that on a clear day you could see all the way to downtown L.A. and the San Bernardino Mountains.

Shining our flashlights into sand traps, we walked up from the green into a tunnel. Stan said that this was the end of the line, that no way would Fat Dog camp out on the back nine. He hated it too much, calling it the toughest nine holes he had ever packed. I believed Stan. The still night beauty of this place seemed to have informed us with a wordless rapport. We made our way back the way we had come.

Once back in the car, Stan The Man sighed. “Well,” he said, “we got a choice to make. There’s four more country clubs on the West Side: Riviera, Brentwood, Hillcrest, and L.A. You can forget Riviera. They don’t have caddies, and Fat Dog sleeps out only on courses where he knows the caddy master. Brentwood and Hillcrest are Jewish clubs, and Fat Dog ain’t camped out on them courses in years. That leaves L.A. and it’s huge. Two courses, thirty-six holes. If Fat Dog’s in town, that’s probably where he’s at.”

“Let’s hit it, then,” I said. We drove south, along the periphery of the U.C.L.A. campus, to Wilshire, then east. It was shortly past midnight, and I was getting tired.

“Your best bet is the south course,” Stan was saying. “There’s a gate on Wilshire that’s open twenty-four hours. There’s a bunch of wetback maintenance guys who live there. They got their own barracks. We can park in their lot. There’s the gate coming up. Slow down.” I did. The gate led down to a woodsy nothingness. I could hardly see. Stan was giving explicit directions. “Real slow now, hang a right now and stop.”

I stopped and Mexican music hit me. Then I heard laughter. As my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, I could see a large, one-story bunkhouse off to my left. There were men sitting on the doorway steps drinking beer. They stopped talking as they heard us approach. I grabbed my flashlight and thermos of coffee and beckoned to Stan The Man to follow me. We walked up to the beer drinkers. “Hola,” I said, “we’re looking for El Perro, Perro grande y blanco?”

It broke the ice. The five or six voices that answered my query were friendly. As best I could understand them, they all said the same thing: they hadn’t seen any big, white dog. I should have told them I was looking for a fat dog, but I didn’t know the Spanish word for fat. “Gracias, amigos,” I said.

“De nada,” they returned. As Stan and I moved into the darkness, they turned their mariachi music back on. Silently I wished them a good life in America.

The L.A. south course was flatter than Bel-Air, and more urbanbound. The lights of the Century City business monoliths about a half mile away cast an eerie glow on the trees and hills. Stan was directing me to the spot where he thought Fat Dog was most likely to be: the eleventh tee. Our flashlights played over the terrain, picking out scurrying rodents. In the distance I could hear the hiss of a sprinkler.

Fat Dog was not residing on the eleventh tee. Somehow I didn't care. I was astounded that I had lived in Los Angeles for over thirty years, had prided myself on my knowledge of my city, and had missed out on all this. This was more than the play domain of the very rich, it was quite simply another world, and such diverse types as caddies, wetbacks, and burned-out ex-cops had access to it, on whatever level of reality they chose to seek. Golf courses: a whole solar system of alternate realities in the middle of a smogbound city.

I decided to explore all the city's courses, with my cassette recorder, on future sleepless nights. After Fat Dog Baker was safely locked up in the pen or the loony bin, of course.

I trained my light on a pair of wooden benches next to the tee. "Let's sit down," I said. I opened the thermos of coffee and poured Stan a cup, drinking mine directly from the container.

"You like it here, don't you?" Stan asked.

"Yeah," I said, "I'm surprised it took me this long to discover it."

We sipped coffee and stared into the darkness. We were facing north. Wilshire was a narrow strip of light in the distance. Cars glided silently along it.

"There's something I have to tell you," I said. "I'm not a cop. I'm a private investigator. I shanghaied you out here illegally. You can take off, or I'll drive you wherever you want to go."

I could feel Stan The Man staring at me in the dark. After a few moments, he laughed. "I knew there was something funny about you, I knew it, but I just couldn't put my finger on it. How come you're looking for Fat Dog?"

"I'm working for him. He hired me to do a little work for him."

"What kind of work?"

"It's confidential. Do you want to split? I'll drive you home."

"Naw, I like it here too. What kind of cases do you handle?"

"Mostly I repossess cars."

Stan laughed, wildly. "Now that's really funny," he said. "I used to steal cars and you repo them. That's a fucking scream!"

"Tell me about looping," I said.

"What about it?"

"Everything."

Stan The Man thought for a minute. What he had to say surprised me: "It's kind of sad. You show up and sign the list in the morning. If there's play, you work. Basically you carry two bags, one on each shoulder. You usually get twenty bucks for eighteen holes. The ladies stiff you about half the time. Some of the men do, too. Some members pay real good, but the caddy master's buddies get those loops. The way you make money in the looping racket is by getting regulars who take good care of you, and by pressing thirty-six holes, which is a lot of fucking work. Or you get foursomes, two on your back and two on a cart, and you make up to forty scoots. Or you get high-class putter jobs with gamblers and high rollers who know how to pay. But it's the guys who suck ass with the caddy master who get that action. Me, I just push thirty-six four days a week and spend the rest of my time fucking off. That's the great thing about looping. You can take off all the time you want, as long as you show up on weekends and for tournaments. It's also why you get so many bums as caddies, there's always cash on hand for booze or dope or the horses.

"We get some young college kids out at Bel-Air now. They got that young golfer image. The members eat it up and whip out heavy for those snotnose cocksuckers. None of 'em know shit about golf, they just know how to hand out a good snow job. They snort cocaine and blow weed out on the course. There's also the horseplayer clique. The caddy master is a bookie, and the guys who bet with him get primo loops. But caddies never save their dough. They either blow it on booze or pussy or gambling or dope. They're always broke. Always coming out to the club to make a measly twenty bucks to get drunk on. Loopers is always hobnobbing with big money, and they never have jackshit themselves.

"For instance, there's this Brentwood goat named Whitey Haines. He's an epileptic and a big boozehound. He used to loop Bel-Air, but he got fired 'cause he kept having seizures out on the course. It shook up the members. Anyway, the Bel-Air pro, he felt real guilty about eighty-sixing Whitey. Whitey ain't doing too good over at Brentwood; them Hebes like their goats healthy.

"You see, Whitey is always going on two-week drunks. Them seizures scare the shit out of him, and the booze fixes him up, temporarily. Right before he goes on a drunk, he comes back to Bel-Air and cries the blues to the pro. Tells him he's got to see his dying aunt, or go to the hospital for some tests, or have hemorrhoid surgery, some line of horseshit like that. He puts the bite on the pro for two and a half C's and then splits. After he gets back from his drunk, he starts paying him back: ten here, fifteen there, twenty there. As soon as he gets his debt all paid off, Whitey comes back and pulls the same routine all over again: 'I got cancer of the armpits, pro, lend me two-fifty so I can get it cured.' The pro whips it out on him, and they're off and running again.

"Now the pro knows that Whitey is lying, and Whitey knows that he knows, but they play that charade over and over, 'cause the pro is a caddy who made good, who was good at playing golf and sucking up to money, and guys like Whitey Haines eat him up. He thinks, 'Jesus, if I didn't have such a sweet smile and a sweet swing, I might have ended up like this asshole, packing duck loops and on the dole.' So what's two hundred and fifty scoots on permanent vacation from your pocket if it makes you feel like a humanitarian?

"Looping continues to fucking amaze me. If you think Whitey Haines is a sad case, you ain't heard nothing yet. Take Bicycle Pete. He's dead now. He got fired from Wilshire for never taking a bath. He stunk like a skunk. Rode a girl's bicycle all over town and wore a Dodger cap with a propeller on top. Lived on Skid Row. Everybody thought he was retarded. He kicked off of a heart attack in his room. When the ambulance guys came to take his stiff away, they found over two hundred grand in diamonds in his closet.

"Then there's Dirt Road Dave. The ugliest guy I ever seen. Got this lantern jaw that sticks out about two feet. Used to hit all the invitationals. No caddy master would let him loop regular. He couldn't even work Wilshire, and that's the bottom of the line. So he'd loop invitationals to supplement his Welfare check. He had a regular routine: at the end of the day, when all the loopers were hanging around the caddy shack, he'd chug-a-lug a half pint of bourbon, get up on a card table and suck his own dick. We used to throw quarters at him while he did it. He was one of the most famous caddies on the West Coast. Then he made his big mistake. He started doing it in public. The public didn't understand. Only caddies and perverts could dig his act. Old Dave's in Camarillo now.

"It's the loneliness, that's what gets me about looping. All these sad motherfuckers with no families, no responsibility, don't pay no income tax, nothing to look forward to but the World Series pool at the Tap and Cap, the Christmas party in the caddy shack, the next drunk, or the big horse that never hits. We got this college kid, a real smart kid, who loops weekends, and he says that caddies is 'the last vestige of the Colonial South. Golf course cotton pickers lapping at the fringes of a strained *noblesse oblige*.' He said that we were a holdover from another era, that we were a status symbol, and it was worth it for clubs to keep us around, to uphold their image.

"Caddies on the pro tour is absolutely necessary, of course, but that's another story. The club caddy is on his way out. Carts is coming in. Riviera went cart three years ago. Caddies is gonna blow it. They're too unreliable. Never showing up, or showing up drunk. I'm lucky. If worst comes to worst, I can always do reupholstering. That's my trade, but I hate it. I like looping for the freedom. I'm my own boss, except for the time I'm picking cotton. Besides, it ain't too late for me to change my life. I'm only thirty-nine, like Jack Benny. My probation officer and my shrink have been helping me out a lot. I ain't stolen no cars in over a year. Group therapy's been helping me. My shrink tells me I don't have to be a caddy if I don't want to. That I can be what I want.

“It ain’t that way for Fat Dog, though. He’s locked into it. He don’t want to do nothing else. He hates n———s and he hates Jews, and that’s all he’s got. The shrink told me that people who hate other people real bad usually hate themselves. Maybe that’s how it is with Fat Dog. He’s got no friends, except maybe Augie Dougall, who’s the only one in the world lame enough to put up with his shit. Fat Dog is always talking about this rich and powerful guy he knows, that he’s gonna team up with someday, but that’s bullshit. Fantasyland. If he wasn’t such a cheap, nasty prick, I’d feel sorry for him.

“Looping wouldn’t be such a bummer if it wasn’t for the guys who loop. Golf’s a great game, and golf courses is beautiful. It’s just the poor sad fuckers who pack the bags for a bunch of poor sad fuckers who can’t hit the ball that makes the whole thing so sad.”

Stan The Man finished his soliloquy, and I sighed in the darkness. I said, “I feel for you. I know how it is to be trapped, watching your life hotfoot it away. If your upholstering gig falls through, I can help you get started in the repossession racket. I know a lot of people. You could get paid for ripping-off cars. You’d have lots of free time to pursue whatever you wanted. Consider repo-ing, you might like it.” I took one of my business cards out of my wallet and handed it to him. “You can reach me at one of these numbers. I’ll do all I can to get you started.”

Stan put the card into his pocket and stared at me for a long moment. “Thanks,” he said. “I mean it. This has been one crazy night. I always figured that if someone offered me a break it would be some rich member at the club who liked the way I called putts, not some private eye repo-man. Let me think about it, okay? This is all happening real fast.”

“Think it over. Kick it around with your shrink. He might think it’s a bad extension of your disease, like me drinking all this fucking coffee to get a little wired. Let’s get out of here. I’ll look for Fat Dog later. Right now I’m cold and tired.”

We walked back to the car. A heavy fog was rolling in, clinging to the greenery and creating deep oceans of mist. There was silence in the maintenance shack as we passed it. I drove Stan to his hotel in Culver City. We shook hands. He thanked me effusively, and promised to consider my offer. As I drove back to my pad all I could think of was one phrase: “Looping is sadness.”

6

The following day it seemed like a good idea to let sleeping Fat Dogs lie, at least for the moment. There were other angles to check out. My case was turning into a splendid example of inductive logic: searching for evidence a decade old to convict a killer whose identity I already knew. Since I was seeking to link Sol Kupferman to the Club Utopia, it seemed logical to start with the owner, Wilson Edwards.

Remembering that McNamara told me Edwards had a criminal record, I called Jensen at R&I for an address. He came through: Edwards had been busted the year before for possession of heroin. His address at that time was the Hotel Rector on Western Avenue just south of Hollywood Boulevard. I put on my intimidation outfit; a checked cotton sport coat, tie, and contrasting slacks, and drove there.

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The Hotel Rector was a thousand years old, and bespoke a despair that was uniquely Hollywood: the lobby was crowded with elderly pensioners awaiting their monthly stipends, black prostitutes, and low riders drinking beer. It smelled of urine and liniment. The loneliness there was almost tangible.

The old man at the desk told me that Wilson Edwards was still at the Rector and staying in room 311. I took the stairs. The hallways didn't smell any better than the lobby and hadn't been swept recently.

I knocked on 311. No answer. I knocked again. This time I heard the rumbling of a voice aroused from sleep. I knocked again, louder. Footsteps approached the door. "Eddie?" a voice called tentatively. "Is that you?"

Not wanting to disappoint anyone, I answered, "Yeah, it's me. Open up."

The man who opened the door was truly horrific. He looked like one of the concentration camp victims on the walls of Fat Dog's shack: his gray skin hung slackly from prominent cheekbones, his eyes were sunken and filmy and the T-shirt and boxer shorts he was wearing encased his shrunken torso like a tent. He was shaking, and it took him several moments to realize I wasn't Eddie. "You're not Eddie," he said finally.

"You're right," I said. "I'm not. Are you Wilson Edwards?"

"Yeah, are you fuzz?"

“No, I’m a private investigator. May I come in? I’d like to talk to you.”

His eyes turned shrewd, and as he sized me up he grabbed the door jambs with both hands for support. The veins in both arms were nearly obliterated. He was a long time junkie. I grabbed his left wrist. He tried to pull away, but I held on. Some of the tracks were recent.

“Is Eddie your connection?” I asked. “Are you sick now? You can tell me.” I tried to soothe him. “I won’t hurt you, I just want to ask you a few questions. It won’t take long.”

Seeing that he had no choice, Edwards motioned me inside. “I’m not sick yet, but I will be soon,” he said as I shut the door behind us. Then he started to laugh. “Man, that’s funny. I’m dying of cancer but I’m not sick yet. That’s funny.” He pointed to a beat-up armchair. “You have a seat. I’m gonna geez. I can’t talk to you till I get over these shakes.”

I sat down and Edwards went into the bathroom and shut the door. I checked out the room: it reeked of body odors, but was clean. Edwards was evidently something of a jazz buff. There were dozens of albums arranged neatly on a wall shelf, mostly be-bop and modern jazz. There was no phonograph in sight. Edwards returned to the room. He looked relieved, but no healthier. His eyes were dilated and his shakes had stopped.

His voice was somewhat calmer. “Dilaudid used to be delightful, but now I’ve got to be smacked-back for all the pain to go. Let’s make this fast. I don’t want you here when Eddie shows up.”

“How long have you got?” I asked.

“Maybe four, five months.”

“You should be in the hospital.”

“No way, José. That chemotherapy shit is a bum trip. I want to go out walking with my Lucy.” He made a gesture with his hand, indicating shooting up.

“Who supplies your stuff? It doesn’t look like you’ve got much money.”

“You didn’t come here to ask me that, did you?”

“No, I didn’t. I came here to talk to you about the Club Utopia.”

For an instant surprise flashed into Edwards’s eyes, then he recovered and gave me a death’s head smile. “The Club Utopia burned down on December 10, 1968. The guys who did the job shuffled off this mortal coil two years later. The whole scene is a long-gone dead duck.”

“Perhaps. You owned the place, didn’t you?”

“Right.”

“Where did you get the money to buy it?”

“I saved it.”

"Where did you get the money for the liquor license?"

"I saved that, too."

"You need juice to get a liquor license. Who did you know at the licensing bureau?"

"I knew a guy. I forget his name. It was a long time ago."

"I don't buy it, Edwards. I've got you pegged. A smack addict jazz fiend, circa 1950. All those records and you don't even have a record player. A record player has got to be good for five or six spoons. You've never had a pot to piss in, except maybe while you were fronting for the real owner of the Utopia. Those tracks on your arms tell your whole life story."

"Things were different then. I had my shit together."

"Don't shit a shitter," I said, raising my voice. "I want the truth. It's important to me. We can do this either of two ways. One, we can wait until Eddie shows up, and I bust both of you for possession. That way you die in the jail ward of the county hospital. Or, two, you can tell me what I want to know, and make a few bucks for your trouble. The choice is yours."

Edwards gave it some thought. Fear quashed his hipster act. "If I talk to you and it gets back to certain people, it would be bad for me. I just want to die in peace. You can dig that, can't you?"

"Sure. I'm a good liar. I can think fast. Wherever your information takes me, you can count on my not revealing my source. I live by the old code." The old code: never give up your informant unless it can give you access to more and better information.

It didn't take Edwards long. "What do you want to know?" he asked.

"Who really owned the Utopia, for starters," I said.

"It was a guy named Sol Kupferman. A rich guy. A furrier."

"Why was the joint in your name?"

"For tax purposes. Strictly a tax dodge. Kupferman owned half a dozen bars and liquor stores under phony names. He used to be in the rackets in the old days, and he couldn't get any liquor licenses."

"I heard that Kupferman was a big-time bookie, back in the '50s. Was he running a book at the Utopia?"

"Nothing big. He had a wire going to help defray tax costs and overhead. He was running steady in the black because the wire took care of all that."

"Did Kupferman run the book himself?"

"No."

"Who did?"

"He had this guy Ralston, used to be a ballplayer, take care of his action at all his spots. Ralston worked at this country club where he was a member. Kupferman paid him good."

"How did he work it? Ralston, I mean."

"He used to come by at odd times to pick up his bets. The bettors would leave their bread with the bartender. Ralston sent a big spade around to pay off. Ralston used to send the bets out to the track with caddies from the club."

"What else do you know about the operation?"

"Nothing. I don't know what you're looking for, or why you're even interested in all this ancient history. That's all I know, but I can tell you this: it was just a small potatoes setup."

Edwards was getting nervous. He was remarkably lucid for a man so close to death, but now the strain was starting to show.

"I can tell you're starting to hurt. This might take a little longer. Why don't you go into the can and get straight?"

He took my advice. When he closed the bathroom door, I hopped up from my chair and gave the room a quick toss. I opened drawers and cupboards and checked the contents of shelves. Nothing. Behind his record collection I found a County Disability check and a small prescription bottle of barbiturates. I let them lie. When Edwards came back, he looked no better. A corpse is a corpse. His voice was a little steadier though. He might have been able to handle himself twenty years ago.

"Shake it, daddy, what else do you want to know?" he said. Besides suffering from terminal cancer, he was suffering from terminal hipsterism.

"How did you know Kupferman? Why did he offer you this job?"

"Solly K knew my brother from his racket days. My brother was a punk, but he got around. My brother approached me, told me Solly needed someone to front a bar for him. I'd draw myself a cut each week, keep the books, and show up a couple of nights a week to make it look good. For a C-note a week. I took the job, it's that simple."

"What kind of man was Kupferman?"

"Solly K is a sweetheart, a truly gentle person. I know for a fact that he's been helping out a couple of old people whose kids got burned up in the torch. He felt real bad about the bombing. Like he was guilty himself."

"He's still taking care of you, isn't he?"

"What do you mean?"

"Dilaudid is not cheap and heroin is twenty-five dollars a spoon, and you get it delivered. Someone is keeping you from *really* hurting. You haven't got any money. Is Kupferman supplying you?"

Edwards began to tremble, and his voice rose to some otherworldly pitch of junkie indignation. "Solly K never hurt anyone! He keeps a lot of people from hurting! You never had a friend like that! Guys like you just know how to hurt people! That's how you get your rocks off. Guys…" His angry voice trailed off into a coughing attack. I had learned all I was going to. It was enough. I had Fat Dog's motive for the bombing down pat. I was anxious to be free of Edwards's death stench. I remembered the money I promised him, but decided against it. Edwards was still coughing as I went out the door. As I looked back at him, he feebly flipped me the finger.

The hot, smoggy air that hit me as I walked out onto the street was a relief. Even the hookers and black pimps lounging in front of the All-American Burger looked good.

I walked back to the car, turned on the radio news and went into shock. A wail rose up in my throat as I listened: "A fire last night caused an estimated four million dollars' damage to the Solly K Fur Salon and warehouse in Beverly Hills. The fire broke out at one thirty a.m., sweeping through the handsome structure on Santa Monica Boulevard and Bedford Drive. Beverly Hills firemen quelled the blaze before it could spread to other buildings, but not before the fashionable fur showplace burned to the ground. There were no injuries and the cause of the blaze is now being investigated. Meanwhile, on a happier note…"

I switched it off. My head was banging like cymbals gone mad, with guilt and fear racing for control of my mind. I fought them off, taking deep breaths and telling myself it was all to the good: Fat Dog's insanity was peaking and I was the only one who could stop him. I started the car and headed south on side streets, cutting corners and running stop signs.

I caught the Santa Monica Freeway westbound near Washington. There was a midmorning lull in traffic and I made good time. I got off the freeway at Lincoln and headed for the arson shack. The backyard looked the same: forgotten playthings and high grass. The door of the shack was open, and the place had been completely cleaned out: no arson supplies, tools, or pornography. The pseudo-gang graffiti I had painted on the walls had been crossed out with large brush strokes of the same color. Freshly painted obscenities covered the back wall near the workbench: "fuck," "cocksuck," "kill fuck," and "cocksuck bastard." I got down on my knees and looked around. Nothing.

Leaving the door ajar, I walked up to the front house and knocked on the door. A fat black woman in a muumuu answered. "Yes?" she said suspiciously.

I sized her up quickly as a T.V. watcher and took my act from there: "My name is Savage," I said, "I'm with the F.B.I. We have reason to believe that the man renting your back house is an escaped convict. We…" I never got the chance to finish. The woman threw open the screen door and almost threw herself on me, slamming her huge arms against her sides in frustration.

"You arrests that no-good bum, officer!" she screamed. "That no-good bum took off owing me two months' rent, and threw all kind of filthy pictures on the grounds for all the little childrens to see. You arrests him! He called me a n——— bitch!"

I placed an arm on her quaking shoulder. "Hold on, ma'am," I said. "Just let me ask a few questions, all right?"

"All right, Mr. Savage."

"First of all, is this man who rents from you about forty years old, short, fat, with dirty golf clothes?"

"That's the no-good bum!"

"Good. How long has he rented from you?"

"Goin' on four years. He don't live there, he just keep his Tijuana sin things there."

"What do you mean?"

"Dirty books! Dirty pictures! He tells me he the king of Tijuana. He tells me he gonna race dogs down there. He…"

I interrupted. "When did you see him last?"

"I sees him last night. He knocks on my door and says: 'Bye-bye, n ——— bitch. I'm goin' to T.J. to claim my kingdom, but I'll be back to throw you in the gas chamber.' Then he points to the yard and says, 'I left plenty of reading material for the kiddies.' Then he makes the devil's sign at me and runs down the street! You arrests him, officer!"

I didn't wait to find out what "the devil sign" was. I ran back to my car, leaving the woman standing on her porch, slamming her arms and demanding justice.

I took surface streets to Beverly Hills, to give me time to think. I put on KUSC. They were playing a symphonic piece that sounded like Haydn. I was exhilarated, so high that a cup of coffee might blow the top of my head off. I wondered what my elation stemmed from. My case had blown sky high, the two people I had vowed to protect were in grave danger, and Fat Dog Baker was almost certainly in Mexico.

Then it hit me. I was home. For the first time in my life I was on to something important, something vast and complex, and I was the sole arbiter of it. Before this, September 2, 1967, had been the pivotal date of my life. I was twenty-one. On that date I had heard, really heard, music for the first time. It was Beethoven's Third Symphony. Walter had been trying to get me to listen to classical music for years, to no avail. The first movement of the *Eroica* went through me like a transfusion of hope and fortitude. I was off with German romanticism, listening to Beethoven, Brahms, Wagner, and Bruckner six, eight, ten hours a day. I had found truth, or so I thought, and a strange metamorphosis took place: infused with the romance of giants, I gave up my vague academic dream and became a cop. An uneasy, malcontented one at first, until the booze came along and made the low-level administration of power exciting beyond my wildest fantasies.

It worked for a while, but gradually I began fucking up. My performance on the streets deteriorated as my dependence on alcohol grew. I finally committed an irrevocable act, and my career was over. Fortunately I had done Cal Myers a big one during my days with the Vice Squad, and now I was the repo-prince of the new car king of the Valley.

I remembered what Stan The Man had said last night: that he didn't have to be a caddy. My feeling three days ago as I was waiting for Irwin had been prophetic: my life was changing, my vistas were endless in this charisma fixated society—if I didn't blow this case.

—

I parked and walked several blocks to the ruins of Solly K's fur empire. From a block away I could see a crowd of spectators looking interestedly into a roped-off area. Two patrolmen were watching the crowd. There was one patrol car and two red fire marshals' cars parked on the sidewalk.

When I got to the site of the leveled building I saw men in business suits poking in the rubble, carrying evidence kits and talking guardedly among themselves. I waited for them to finish. The site was one of total devastation: mountains of charred wood and insulation, piles of ashes, soot everywhere. It had settled on adjoining buildings and some storeowners had set workmen out to scrub down their walls.

I had had no idea how large Kupferman's warehouse had been. The facade was deceiving—the structure itself had extended back a quarter of a city block. From what I could see, no other buildings had been even singed by the fire. Fat Dog's arson skills had improved since his Molotov cocktail days. I was impressed.

One of the detectives was walking out of the rubble, brushing soot from his pants and looking worried. He was a burly cop, about fifty. I watched him move away from the crowd of onlookers toward an unmarked police car. I intercepted him as he unlocked the door. "Excuse me," I said, "my name is Brown. I'm a private investigator."

I handed him my photostat to prove it. He checked it out carefully and handed it back. "What is it, Mr. Brown? I'm very busy."

I ran off my hastily prepared cover story: "I won't keep you long. Sol Kupferman has hired me to look into the fire. He trusts the police and fire marshals to do a thorough investigation, but he wants this thing covered from all angles. Right now I only want to know one thing. Was it arson?"

The cop looked me over from head to toe. "You should know that police officers at crime scenes do not give out confidential information to civilians. We will be in touch with Mr. Kupferman. Good day."

I watched him get into his car and drive off. He had the drawn, abstracted look of a veteran cop just handed a tough one. His worried expression was more than enough confirmation. I walked back to my car, then headed for the gas station at Franklin and Argyle to see Omar Gonzalez, conspiracy buff.

—

Franklin and Argyle was a blast from my past; one of the big ones. In June of 1972, on information supplied by Jack Skolnick, I led a raid on the notorious Castle Argyle, methedrine capital of the West Coast. An eight-story Moorish apartment house built in the '20s, the Castle Argyle was a hotbed of hippie intrigue in the early '70s. Skolnick had told me he had been approached by one "Cosmo," a U.C.L.A. chemistry major and resident of the castle, with an offer to sell him three gallons of liquid methamphetamine for $5,000. The street value was close to half a million. I was hot for adventure and began staking the castle out, along with an obnoxious rookie patrolman named Snyder. We never told our superiors or the guys in Narcotics what we were doing. We were rogue cops, out for the big kill.

Cosmo lived on the sixth floor and had dozens of visitors nightly. Hiding behind some towering hibiscus plants, Snyder and I heard Cosmo's departing guests remark on the great quality of his stuff. After three nights of this, we decided we had enough to act on and scheduled our raid for the following evening. We could have pulled it off low-key, dressing in hippie disguises of beard, moustache, and love beads from Bert Wheeler's Magic Store on the Boulevard, and making a discreet buy before lowering the boom; but fueled by large quantities of Old Grand Dad, we decided to break the door down and go in with shotguns.

We did and it worked. Until Snyder got disappointed. Cosmo and his girlfriend submitted quietly, scared shitless by the two oversized short-hairs with badges pinned to their chests and wielding heavy firepower. They led us to their stash, let us handcuff them, and waited meekly as we phoned for a patrol car and a matron for the girl. But Snyder wasn't satisfied. He wanted to shoot off his shotgun. He was heartbroken that he had missed his opportunity. He said the bust was like getting laid without getting your dick sucked first.

He rumbled through the apartment opening drawers and knocking over chairs. Then he saw the Che Guevara poster, life-size, taped to a gilt-covered bedroom mirror. "Brownie," he called, "look at this." I came into the bedroom, leaving my handcuffed prisoners unguarded. Snyder, late of the U.S. Marine Corps, was aghast with indignation. "I'm gonna kill him, I'm gonna kill that Commie cocksucker!" he cried, and blasted Che Guevara, the mirror, and a good part of the bedroom wall to kingdom come with his

Remington pump. Before I could stop him, he blasted the other wall, sending Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix to hell. When the dust cleared, Snyder was grinning like a sated lover, our prisoners were screaming "Police brutality" and I quite literally shit in my pants.

A few minutes later we heard the sirens. I looked out the window and saw eight black-and-whites jamming up the streets. Knowing my trigger-happy colleagues craved excitement as much as my lunatic partner and I and might open fire at any moment, I ran down six flights of stairs, through the lobby and out the door of the building. When I hit the long walkway that led down to the street, I threw my hands above my head and yelled, "Police officer, don't shoot!"

Some of the cops standing by their patrol cars with hardware at the ready recognized me and motioned me to join them. My mind racing with stories to explain the shooting, I ran toward them. Just as I was about to reach the street my half-empty pint of Old Grand Dad slipped out of my waistband and broke on the sidewalk in front of me. At that moment a merciful death was all I wished for. Liquid feces were running down my legs and my career was ruined. I would have to get a job as a security guard for a buck fifty an hour and drink Gallo muscatel. It was all over. Until a tough-looking old patrol sergeant started to laugh. Others joined him as I stood there, mute, lest I increase my culpability. The laughter was getting louder as the old sergeant pulled me aside and whispered "Is there anyone hurt up there, son? Is your partner okay?"

I told him everything was okay, except for some property damage.

"We can handle that," he said. A group of officers went upstairs to rescue Cosmo and his girlfriend from Snyder, and Snyder from himself.

I was driven back to the station where I took a shower and changed clothes. In the report that was filed, no mention was made of the shotgun blasts (the suspects having been coerced into silence), my bottle, or the shit in my pants. Snyder and I received a commendation and by the perverse logic of the macho mentality my floundering police career was back in full stride.

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The Mobil Station where Omar Gonzalez worked was catty-corner from the scene of my past triumph. The place was deserted when I pulled in, so I pulled up to the ethyl pump and served myself. I looked in vain for a Chicano in his late twenties. When my tank was full, I went searching for the attendant and found him under the lube rack working on a car. He turned around to face me, a stocky, affable-looking kid of about twenty. "I've got the exact change," I said, "I know you guys appreciate it." The kid gave me a pleasant smile as I handed him the money. "By the way," I said, "is Omar around? I'm a buddy of his."

The kid looked at me strangely. "Omar ain't been around for two weeks. He ain't at the recovery house, either. I don't know where the hell he is. He gets away with murder 'cause the customers like him. The boss would give me the axe quick if I pulled the shit Omar does."

"What kind of shit does Omar pull?" I asked. "I haven't seem him in a while."

He screwed up his face into a parody of concentration. "Don't get me wrong, I like Omar. Everybody does. But he's always talking this Chicano Activist shit and taking off to hang out at the drug recovery crash pad, leaving me holding the fucking bag and leaving his goddamn car blocking up the station." The kid pointed to a ten-year-old yellow Plymouth. I was about to throw some more questions at him when a customer pulled in, a good-looking woman in a convertible. He forgot all about me and strode over to the pumps, his face contorted into a wolf grin.

I walked over to check out Omar's car. I wrote down the license number on my notepad, then looked in the front window. The seats were upholstered in white Naugahyde and the brownish matter that was caked in splotches on the driver's side looked like dried blood. The back seat was covered with a green tarpaulin and underneath it were shapes resembling boxes. I didn't have to think twice. The doors of the car were locked and my master keys were back at my pad. I ran to my car and opened the trunk, digging out a blank repo order and my bumper jack.

The kid was finishing up with the woman in the convertible as I ran by him. I stopped and shoved the repo order in his face. "I'm a private investigator," I yelled, "This is a repossession order for that car. I'm taking it."

His jaw dropped and he just stood there while I went to work. I gave a quick look around for cops, then slammed the bumper jack full force into the front window of the Plymouth. The safety glass shattered inward and I reached through the hole and opened the door.

I scraped off some of the dried matter on the seat cover and smelled it. It was definitely blood. I swung the front seat forward, dug under the tarpaulin and pulled out two cardboard boxes. They were light and I slung them easily onto the trunk of the car to open.

The attendant was at my side now, looking nervous. "Hey man, are you sure this is legal?" he said, his voice breaking.

"Yeah, punk, this is legal. Now get the fuck out of my way," I said, almost screaming.

I watched him retreat toward the lube rack, then dug into the boxes. When I saw what I had I almost fainted. The first box contained bookies' ledgers, eight or nine of them, bound in brown leather. My Vice Squad experience was paying off: the bettors' names were in numbered code in one column, and in the succeeding columns were amounts of money, dates, and check marks probably indicating collections. I flipped through all the ledgers quickly. They were identical in their layout. The same margining, but with different codings, dates, and amounts of money. The dates went back twelve years. Wedged into the back of the bottom ledger were eight or ten blank Los Angeles County checks, the kind used for paying employees and disbursing Welfare money. I looked through all the ledgers for envelopes or something else to tie into the blank checks, but found nothing.

I ripped open the second carton and almost died on the spot. The box was filled with pornographic photos, identical in theme and backdrop to the ones I had seen on the walls of Fat Dog's arson shack: the same women, the same sleazy rooms, the same cheap bordertown souvenirs. Oh Omar, you crazy motherfucker, I kept thinking, what have you wrought! But I wasn't prepared for what came next: all the blood in my body jammed to my head and my lungs expanded and contracted like an accordion gone mad. I was looking at glossy color photos of Jane Baker, cellist, nude with her legs wide open, her mouth and eyes set in an attitude of sexual challenge: "Take me if you can. If you perform, I'll make it well worth your while." She had a beautiful, lithe body and her lust seemed genuine: her pubis was wet and her nipples were swollen.

My mind raced in a thousand different directions, and every variation of the Baker-Kupferman case that I came up with went haywire in the light of this new evidence. All I knew for certain was that I had two cases now.

I ran back to my car, got a crowbar out of my back seat and returned to the Plymouth and pried open the trunk. It was empty. I hauled the two boxes over to my car and locked them in my trunk.

The attendant was sitting in the office drinking a Coke, sullen and dejected. He looked up when I walked in, backing off like I was going to hit him. I controlled my excitement and spoke to him gently: "I'm sorry I yelled at you, but this is very important stuff I'm involved in. I've got to get in touch with Omar Gonzalez. It's urgent. I need his home address and the phone number of that drug rehab place where he hangs out."

He waited a moment, then flipped through a Rolodex next to the telephone. He called out a number and I grabbed the phone and dialed it. A woman answered on the third ring. I told her it was urgent that I speak to Omar Gonzalez. She said that Omar hadn't been at the center in over three weeks. She told me that he was an unpaid drug counselor who conducted group therapy sessions with Chicano youngsters, and that he came and went as he pleased. In a condescending voice she said that Omar was a passionate and mercurial young man, given to disappearing for weeks at a time, but a gifted counselor who had real rapport with young people. The woman started to embark on a discourse about the drug problem, but I cut her short and hung up.

The attendant was staring at me, slack-jawed and awe-inspired.

"What's Omar's address?" I asked.

He consulted the Rolodex again. "It's 1983 Vendome. That's in Silverlake. Tacoland."

I gave the kid one of my business cards. It had my home number as well as the office one on it. "If Omar shows up, you tell him to call me. Tell him it's very important. Tell him I know who killed his brother." I patted him on the shoulder and winked at him. He gave me a smile that tried hard to be conspiratorial. I got in my car and jammed for Silverlake.

Silverlake is a beautiful hilly enclave of middle- and lower-middle-class dwellings east of Hollywood. The hills are steep and the roads circuitous. Houses and apartment buildings are set back from the street and often hung with heavy shrubbery, so it's easy to get lost.

I turned off Sunset onto Silverlake Boulevard and went under the bridge that marks the informal border of the area. I expected it to take a while to find Vendome, but I blundered onto it, about half a mile north of Sunset. 1983 was a court of small bungalows separated by knee-high white picket fences. I parked half a block away and walked breezily into the courtyard. There was a bank of locked metal mailboxes next to the first bungalow on the left, where I learned that Omar Gonzalez lived in number 12. His box was crammed full of mail, so it was fair to assume Omar hadn't been around for awhile.

Bungalow 12 was at the backend of the court, on the right. Like all the others, it was white clapboard, weather-beaten and musty. I rang the bell and got no answer, then tried the flimsy wooden door. It was locked. I walked around to the side of the bungalow and tried the windows. They were locked, and dust-covered venetian blinds kept me from peering in.

I went looking for the manager. The mailbox directed me to number 3. I rang the bell and an aging slattern in a housecoat opened the door suspiciously, keeping the screen door shut. When I told her I had a telegram for Omar Gonzalez in number 12, she jumped back as if buzzed by a swarm of bees. "Is something wrong, ma'am?" I asked.

"Omar ain't been around for weeks," she said, opening the door a crack and reaching for the nonexistent piece of paper with one hand.

"I can't do that, I have to give it to the addressee himself. Thank you, ma'am."

She gave me a frightened look and slammed the door. Something was wrong.

I walked to a liquor store at the end of the block and bought a ginger ale. Drinking it and eyeballing the pretty Chicanas passing by consumed twenty minutes. That seemed like a safe interval.

I walked back to the court. No one was around and the manager's door was closed and all the shutters drawn. On the porch of number 12, I gave a quick look in both directions, drew my gun and kicked the door open. Crouching in the combat stance, I went into the dark apartment, gently closing the door behind me.

It was dead quiet and I stood there a long moment until my eyes became accustomed to the dark. Gradually the outlines of a turned-over sofa, an upended bookshelf, and a mound of books became visible. Several potted plants had been knocked off a windowsill, spreading broken plaster and dirt on the floor, and a large carpet had been pulled up and wadded ceiling-high into a corner. I moved cautiously, gun first, into the other rooms. The small kitchen off to the right was similarly devastated: the cupboards had been ransacked, dishes lay in heaps on the floor, and the refrigerator had been knocked over, its rancid contents fouling the air. The bathroom was a shambles, but the bedroom had been hit the worst: broken glass from wall mirrors was everywhere, the bed had been torn apart and the mattress ripped to shreds, clothes had been torn out of the closet and lay strewn on top of the other rubble. An old gas heater had been ripped out of the wall and now lay among the pile of mattress stuffing.

The trashers had done a good job: there was nothing *personal* to be found belonging to Omar Gonzalez. No papers, journals, or memorabilia of any sort, just the detritus of a young man's life. I poked about in the rubble some more, this time with the lights on. I was looking for bloodstains. There were none. I put my gun back in its holster, went into the bathroom, found a large towel and wiped every plane and surface I could have possibly touched.

The sunlight and hot summer air were jarring as I walked outside. I was troubled. For the first time since the onset of my case, I didn't know what to do.

Still troubled, I drove to the bank and withdrew two thousand in twenties for operating expenses, then went home and spent a long evening listening to Bruckner. Before I went to bed I laid out my light blue seersucker suit, yellow button-down shirt, and navy blue print tie. I wanted to look good for Jane Baker.

—

At 7:45 a.m., I was stationed across the street from Kupferman's house. At eight thirty Jane Baker walked out the front door, carrying her cello in a black leather case to her car and driving off down Elevado. I was close behind. She led me to the large park across the street from the Beverly Hills Hotel, where she parked and lugged her cello to a bench and set it up on its collapsible pod. I parked down the street. As I approached she was assembling her sheet music on its stand, and the first movement main theme of the Dvořák "Concerto" followed. I stepped into Jane Baker's life: "That concerto was Dvořák's best shot," I said. "Nothing else he did came close to it. Have you been playing long?"

Jane Baker gave me a long, slow look and a slow smile, tinged with the slightest bit of resentment. "I've been playing for ten years," she said.

I sat down on a bench facing her and she resumed her playing. I was uncertain as to whether to continue with small talk or drop my bomb. She took the decision out of my hands: "You were right about Dvořák," she said. "The cello concerto is his masterpiece. I wish I were equal to it."

"Maybe you will be someday."

"Maybe. You never know."

"Am I distracting you from your practice?"

"Not really, yet. Are you a musician? You don't look like one."

"I'm not. But I love great music more than anything in the world. I think it's the closest we'll ever get to pure truth."

Jane Baker was measuring my words with a hard-edged light in her eyes. "I agree, more or less," she said, "but I think maybe you are distracting me. This whole thing has the air of being rehearsed, on your part. I'm not afraid of you, but you're trying to manipulate me, and I don't like being manipulated through my music."

"Shall I cut the rebop, and get to the point?"

"Please do. I'll give you five minutes, then I have to practice."

"Fair enough. My name is Brown. I'm a private investigator. Your name is Jane Baker, cellist and nonconjugal roommate of Sol Kupferman, late of the fur business. Earlier this week I was hired to investigate you and Kupferman. I did. I didn't discover anything damaging or incriminating. About you two, that is. However, in the course of my investigation, I gathered a great deal of evidence that indicates that your brother Frederick, AKA Fat Dog, is a psychotic arsonist and is determined to wrest you away from Sol Kupferman, even if it means killing him. I'm sure he doesn't want to hurt you—you're his obsessive love object—but yesterday he burned Kupferman's warehouse to the ground. Tomorrow he might torch Kupferman's house and you may end up reduced to a pile of French fried guacamole in the process. I don't want that to happen. I want to find your brother and get him put away before be hurts anyone else. You can help me by getting Kupferman to talk to me, and by telling me everything you can about your brother."

During the course of my monologue Jane Baker had gone white. She put her cello and bow on the bench beside her and wrenched her hands. There was a vein in her forehead pulsing with tension. I stared at the ground to make it easier for her to regain her composure. When I looked up she was staring at me. "Freddy," she said, her voice quavering, "Jesus Christ. I always knew he was sick. But this. Oh, God! Can you prove what you've told me?"

"No."

"But you're certain?"

"Yes, I'm positive."

"How did you find all this out?"

"I can't tell you."

"You said someone hired you to investigate Sol and me. Who was it?"

"I can't tell you that, either. I'm sorry."

"Why can't you?! You make all kinds of accusations against my brother, say that my best friend and I are in danger, and you won't tell me a goddamn thing!"

I resisted an impulse to move to her bench and put my arm around her. "Do you believe what I've told you, Miss Baker?"

"Yes. Somehow I do."

"Good. Will you help me then?"

She hesitated a moment. "I think so. How?"

"Tell me about your brother."

"What about him?"

"A moment ago you said you always knew he was sick. You could start by elaborating on that."

Jane Baker was silent for a long moment. When she finally spoke her voice was steady. "Freddy and I were orphans. Our parents died when we were children. An auto wreck. I was four, which would have made Freddy twelve. There were no relatives to take us in, so we were shuffled around to various foster homes, always together. I was too young to really remember my parents, but Freddy remembered them and was convinced they had been killed by some sort of monster. He had terrible nightmares about this monster. We used to share the same bedroom in most of the foster homes, and Freddy was always waking up screaming about the monster. Once I asked him what it looked like, and he showed me a giant octopus in a horror comic book. Another time he showed me a photograph of a wolf and said it looked like that.

"He was a frightened and hateful boy, from the beginning. A sadist. We lived together for six years, until Freddy turned eighteen. I saw him torture animals many times, and it frightened me, but I shrugged it off. Burning ants with a magnifying glass, things like that. He was a very sullen boy and very fat, with terrible oily skin and acne. None of the foster parents we had could get close to him. His ugliness and meanness alienated the nicest of them, until they wanted to get rid of him. The childcare people wanted to keep us together, so I had to go where Freddy did. When he turned eighteen, he went off and lived by himself. He got worse. He used to come and visit me and tell me ugly stories about killing dogs and cats. Once he told me he shoved a whole litter of live kittens down a garbage disposal. It was true, too; I found out later from someone who saw it.

"When I was about fifteen, I went through a wild period and ended up in a Catholic orphanage. As I got older, Freddy started acting strange, sexually. Asking me all sorts of intimate questions. He was caddying at Hillcrest then and he would pester me to come out and look around, telling me how beautiful it was. So I did. Freddy was right. It *was* beautiful, especially after St. Vibiana's. So I started hanging out there. Hiding out with a book in the trees while the people played golf and taking long walks around the course at sunset. I was kind of a crazy, lonely, searching young girl and I felt at peace there. I hated to have to go back to the orphanage. I loved the golf course and the dreams I dreamed there too much.

"So I ran away. Freddy got me a sleazy room in Culver City and I spent all my spare time at Hillcrest, working in the caddy shack and roaming the course. There I met Sol, who is the kindest, most decent and compassionate person I've ever met. Genuinely altruistic. He took an interest in me. I had recently become interested in music—I would take my little portable radio with me out on the course for long concerts at night. I told Sol that I was an orphan, that I lived in a crummy room and picked up a few dollars cooking and cleaning out the caddy shack. I told him I wanted to learn to play the cello more than anything in the world. I remember his exact reply when I told him that. He said, 'So be it.' So I went to live with Sol. He had a big house and no family. I had my own room, my own tutor to help me with my education, and the best cello lessons money could buy. That was eleven years ago. I'm still there. Sol has never asked anything of me except that I seek beauty. This cello is a Stradivarius and almost priceless. Sol bought it for me. In no way am I equal to it, but Sol thinks I will be someday. That's an example of how unqualified his love and respect for me is.

"But Freddy has hated Sol from the beginning, and it compounded the sickness that was already festering in him. While I was living in that crummy room in Culver City he used to come over and expose himself to me. Erect. It was sickening. I was frightened, but afraid to tell anyone for fear I'd get sent back to the orphanage. He was obsessed with me sexually then and I'm sure he still is. He writes me letters about how I'm his family and we should live together in Mexico and raise greyhounds, and about how Sol is an Israeli-Communist agent. I always read the letters out of hope that he's changed, somehow developed some degree of humanity; but there's no change, just hate and ugliness. I haven't seen my brother in four or five years. I want nothing to do with him, now or ever. And now you tell me he's an arsonist and he wants to kill Sol! Oh God, oh Christ."

I moved to Jane's bench and placed an arm around her shoulders. She didn't resist, just stared at the ground, her body clenched against an onslaught of tears. "Look," I said gently, "I understand. You've got a good life going for you, then this crazy non sequitur comes along. I'm a stranger, but I'm all right, really. You can check me out. I was a police officer for six years. I got involved in this thing against my will, but now that I'm involved I'm going to see it through. But I need your help. Will you help me?" I relinquished my arm from her shoulders.

Jane looked up at me and smiled, then fumbled in her purse for cigarettes and matches. Her hands were shaking, so I lit her cigarette for her. She inhaled deeply and her whole body seemed to crash in acceptance as she exhaled. "I take it that smile implied consent," I said. "Right?"

Jane stared at the ground and blew out another lungful of smoke. "Right," she replied.

"Good."

"Oh God, this is so fucking crazy! Look, I know you told me, but I've forgotten your name."

"Fritz Brown."

"Look, Mr. Brown—"

"Call me Fritz."

"Okay. Look, Fritz, I haven't seen my brother in five years or so. Apparently this hatred for Sol that he's been harboring all these years has come to a head. Why now, I don't know—you can't expect a crazy man to act logically. The police were over at the house last night, talking to Sol. They told him the cause of the fire was arson. They asked him if he had any enemies, in business or otherwise. Sol said he didn't know of any. Sol told me the police always suspect the owner of the business when the place of business burns down. You know, setting fire to the place for the insurance money, which is ridiculous in Sol's case, because business was booming. But if you need help on this case and if you have circumstantial evidence pointing to Freddy, why don't you just go to the police and tell them? Get them to handle it."

"It won't work. All my evidence is related to another case that was solved *incorrectly* over a decade ago. My evidence would be disregarded because it makes too many police agencies look bad. I know the cop mentality. If I persisted in trying to convince them, I might jeopardize my license and I can't afford that. The only way to end this thing is for me to find your brother, arrest him, and secure a confession."

"I believe you. I hate bureaucrats, for good reason." Jane paused reflectively. "You said that you've investigated Sol. Then you probably know that a long, long time ago he was involved in the crime world. Big fucking deal. He told me about it. He never hurt anyone, but the cops and the district attorney hounded him, brought him up before the grand jury for nothing. Pure harassment. He almost got kicked out of Hillcrest because of it. So how can I help you?"

"First, some questions. Have there been any strange occurrences lately around your house? Strange phone calls? Someone calling, then hanging up when you answer? Any prowlers?"

"Nothing like that, but there has been something evil going on in the neighborhood, though I never connected it with Freddy. About a month ago there was a rash of animal poisonings. Someone was tossing poisoned hamburger into backyards. Four or five dogs and cats ate it and died. Our gardener's dog ate some and got very sick, but lived. We called the police but nothing came of it. Do you think it could have been Freddy?"

"Maybe. Did your brother ever mention specifically where in Mexico he wanted to settle down?"

"Yes. Somewhere near Tijuana or Ensenada. Baja California. Not the real Mexico."

"Did he ever mention a rich and powerful man that he was going to team up with? Maybe work for?"

"Yes. In his letters he was always mentioning a rich man who shared his anti-Semitic views. He was going to be this man's partner. I put it off as pure fantasy."

"Have you saved any of these letters?"

"I might be able to dig a few of them out of my wastebasket, if it hasn't been emptied."

"Will you try to find them for me?"

Jane put out her cigarette on the ground. "Yes," she said.

"Good. I have to see Kupferman as soon as possible. Will you arrange a meeting?"

Jane was already shaking her head "no" vehemently. "That's impossible, absolutely impossible, I can't have him worried about what you've told me, at least not yet. The loss of the warehouse has worried him terribly. He's not a young man, and he had a heart attack once. I'm afraid all of this will only…"

"It's for his own safety. I just want to see if he can tie a few things together for me."

"I'm sorry, I can't allow it. Please back off on this for now. Sol has a bodyguard with him now, keeping watch on him and the house. I'm sure we'll both be safe."

It was a big setback, but I decided not to press the issue. I changed the subject slightly. "Has the fire hurt Sol financially?"

"Not terribly. His insurance covers everything. He's still a very wealthy man. He has lots of other holdings, stocks and real estate. But the fire has hurt him emotionally. He loved his business and his customers and the people who worked for him. It will take at least a year to get it set up again. Sol is such a conscientious man. He cares so deeply. What a mess!"

We were silent for a few moments. Jane fingered the rich wood of her cello. "How do you feel, Jane?" I asked.

"I'm not sure. I believe what you've told me, but another part of me is standing outside of it all, saying it can't be happening. Do you think Freddy is in Los Angeles?"

"No, I think he's run to Mexico. I'm going down there in a day or so to bring him back."

"Be careful."

"I will be. Look, what are your plans for the next few days?"

"I don't know. Practice, of course. Keep an eye on Sol, see that he doesn't fret too much about the insurance negotiations. I know he'll be spending lots of time with the claims people. Why?"

"I don't know, I was just thinking aloud. Would you like to go to the Hollywood Bowl tonight? I've got a box of four seats, practically right on stage. It might help keep your mind off this. It's the Brahms First Symphony and Violin Concerto with Perlman. What do you think?"

"Are you asking me for a date?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I don't know."

I fished the photostat of my P.I.'s license out of my billfold and handed it to Jane. "See," I said, "the State Department of Vocational Standards says I'm a good guy, and if you want to check me out for a reference you can call Lieutenant Arthur Holland of the L.A.P.D. at the Wilshire Station. He'll tell you I'm a sterling character. What do you say?"

Jane Baker sighed and smiled. "All right, Fritz. You've convinced me."

"Great. We can get dinner, too. I know a great place. Shall I pick you up at seven?"

"That sounds fine."

"In the meantime, please be careful and try not to worry, okay?"

"I'll be careful."

"Good. Try to find those letters for me, will you? They might be important. I have to go now, I have errands to run. I know it sounds stupid, but everything is going to be all right. You can trust me." Jane looked at me, unsmiling. I stuck my hand out to her and we shook gently. "Tonight at seven," I said as I got up to leave.

Jane smiled. "I take it you already know the address," she said.

"Of course. I'm a big-time detective."

—

When I got home I did some telephoning: I called the starters' desks at Bel-Air, Wilshire, Brentwood, Los Angeles, and Lakeside Country Clubs and inquired after Fat Dog Baker. I told the caddy masters that I was an insurance adjuster who had a juicy check for Fat Dog from a rich old man he had caddied for years ago. The old man had croaked and left Fat Dog a bundle for improving his putting stroke. Amazingly, they all believed me. Not amazingly, none of them had seen Fat Dog recently. That was good. I had my heart set on pursuit south of the border.

After my sojourn on the telephone, I ran my errands. At an electronics store in Hollywood I bought a high quality reel-to-reel tape recorder, a supply of blank tape, and a state-of-the-art condenser microphone. From Hollywood I drove to the Pico and Robertson area and leaned on Larry Willis. Larry Willis is a small-time black shoplifter, dope dealer, pimp, and food stamp recipient. He used to hang out at the Gold Cup on the Boulevard in the early '70s when I was working Hollywood Vice and I rousted him regularly. Once he called me a pig and I kicked his ass soundly. He fears me, for good reason, and thinks I still carry a badge. Fearing the worst when I came in his front door unannounced, he was only too happy to furnish me with what I needed: a dozen one-and-a-half-grain Seconal capsules.

My last stop was at a gun shop on La Brea, where I purchased a Browning 12-gauge pump shotgun and a box of shells. I had everything I needed for Mexico.

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On the way to pick up Jane I reviewed the women in my life. There weren't many. There was Susan, a hard line San Francisco leftist eight years my senior, who I shacked up with when I was twenty-three. We met when I ticketed her for an illegal left-hand turn on Melrose and Wilton. I ran a warrant check on her and she came up dirty: a slew of unpaid traffic citations. But I couldn't bring myself to arrest her. She was too handsome and intelligent-looking. So I cited her and showed up at her apartment two days later with a bottle of Scotch, flowers, and a smile. She ditched the flowers in the toilet bowl and we killed the Scotch and became lovers. She could drink me under the table.

Our relationship lasted a hectic eight months. I met a lot of interesting people—old time San Francisco unionists, superannuated beatniks, and dopers of all stripes. I was Susan's live-in curio: an outsized, crewcut cop who got drunk all the time and listened to Beethoven. Gradually, our cultural differences came to the fore and it was no go. Susan's idea of a lover's endearment was to call me her "sociopath with a gun."

Christine was my next inamorata: a car hop at Stan's Drive-In, catty-corner from Hollywood High. Christine wrote incomprehensible poetry and talked in riddles and metaphors. She was insane, a profound piece of passion pie one moment, a willful shrew the next. What a body! The last I heard she was a topless showgirl in Vegas.

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It was a beautiful L.A. summer evening, ideal for the Bowl. Cruising west on Sunset with the top down my mind took flight with bits and fragments of the passing scene: the Strip gearing up for another go at nightlife, the giant lighted signs proclaiming rock groups and other coming attractions, the callow idolators of electric music cliquing up in front of the Whisky a Go Go. And punk rock was out in force, well represented by skinny teenagers in '50s garb sporting green and blue hair and wrap-around sunglasses. One distaff punk rocker led another by a leash attached to a spiked dog collar. It was very naive, and I was feeling too good to be offended.

Stopped at the light at Sunset and Doheny, I checked my watch, then hitched myself up in my seat and gulped in the moment: 6:42 p.m., Friday, July 2. I committed the night air, the cloud formations, and the faces of the passersby to memory. It was my moment, spawned by my covenant and it would never be again. The light changed and I drove into Beverly Hills.

I parked my old Camaro in the long circular driveway behind Jane's Cadillac. Sol Kupferman's newer, darker one was gone. I rang the doorbell and first notes of the choral part of Beethoven's Ninth sounded off in chimes. A nice touch, no doubt added by Jane.

She threw open the door a moment later and bid me enter. I did. The living room was huge and lavishly appointed. Jane swept an arm toward the vast room, as though encouraging me to take it all in, but all I could look at was her. Her hair was down to her shoulders and she wore only the slightest touch of makeup. She looked demure yet sophisticated, a study in feminine charisma.

"Hi," I said. "You look good."

"Thanks," she said.

"Is Sol around? I want to sell him some fire insurance."

"Very amusing. No, Sol is not around. Run into any firebugs lately?"

"No, but I have run into a few caddies who might serve in that capacity. I prowl golf courses at night, hunting for golf balls and sleeping in sand traps. Take me to your wisest golfer."

Jane cracked up, doubled over in laughter and grabbed my arm for support. "Laughter in the face of adversity," she said, "what a scream. It's kind of decadent, but it feels good. Look, I've found two of those letters you wanted. But don't read them tonight, okay? I don't want to talk about the whole bum trip."

"Okay, I was going to suggest the same thing."

Jane squeezed my arm. "Good," she said. "Wait here and I'll get them. Then we can leave." She scurried off upstairs and I eyeballed the room. Interior decoration doesn't send me, but I can recognize superb design when I see it. The room had high ceilings; the walls were a rich mustard color. They were hung with oil paintings of sailing ships and landscapes from the last century. Large, tufted floral couches and easy chairs were arranged concentrically. Rich, dark wood was in abundance. The wide bay windows that fronted the street would provide gently reflected sunlight on bright days and a great muted view on darker ones. It seemed like a good place to live.

Jane returned with the letters and I stuck them into my back pocket without examining them. "Nice pad," I said, "out of the low-rent district."

Jane smiled. "I feel comfortable here."

"I'm glad. You deserve it. Now let's get out of here."

We drove east. Darkness had fallen and the stars shining in the clear sky competed with garish neon for primacy and won. They didn't usually, but the completeness of this night altered my perceptions of everything, including my city.

Jane and I talked comfortably.

"Why the cello, Jane?" I asked. "It seems an odd choice for a fledgling music lover. The piano or the violin seem more likely. Their virtuosity is overwhelming to a person just starting to appreciate music."

"Very true. I've asked myself the same question a million times. With me the cello was love at first hearing. It reflected all my deep, inchoate feelings. You know, the sadness, the weltshmerz that sensitive young girls feel. And it seemed so stable, so steeped in tradition! Anyway, I just flipped for it. And I started listening selectively, too. When I came to live with Sol, he bought me a stereo and hundreds of records. And I fell in love with string quartets. Someday I'll play with a good quartet, and that will be home."

"You're home now. Savor these years of practice and study. I know that when, years from now, you reflect on your life, you'll consider them among your finest.”

“That’s a lovely sentiment, Fritz. How did you become interested in music?”

I laughed. “It was sort of funny and totally unexpected. I was twenty-one and I didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life. My parents had died recently and I was totally up in the air. They had wanted me to attend college and enter one of the professions. I went to Cal State for year, to placate them, but I hated it. Their death let me off the hook. I was working for a gardener part time and living off the money from their insurance policy. One afternoon we were trimming shrubs in Pasadena and I heard thunderous, powerful music coming from the house of the people we were working for. It was the *Eroica.* It knocked me flat on my ass. I felt that I had come home, too.”

“And you decided to become a musician? And it didn’t work out?”

“Wrong. I decided to become a cop.”

It was Jane’s turn to laugh and she did, heartily. “That’s so funny! What a non sequitur! Why did you quit the police force?”

“That’s a long story. Maybe I’ll tell you later tonight, if the music moves me to confession. I love Brahms and the L.A. Philharmonic isn’t half bad, but I can’t stand Mehta.”

She could tell that I didn’t want to talk about my police experiences, so she let it pass.

I turned north onto Highland. The Bowl traffic was already heavy. By the time we reached Franklin, we were crawling at a snail’s pace. As we arrived at the vast expanse of parking area, I looked out with affection at the throngs of music lovers, nightlife lovers and just plain lovers all hurrying toward a summer rendezvous with Brahms.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Jane dig into her purse for cigarettes and matches. She lit a cigarette nervously, inhaled, and threw it out the window. I pulled to the curb, my spirits sinking.

“What is it?” I asked.

“I don’t know. Reality, I guess. I just know I can’t take the goddamned Hollywood Bowl.” I felt my spirits hit bottom.

“Shall I take you home?”

“No. I just don’t want to be around people.”

“A drive, then?”

Jane smiled. “All right.”

—

We ended up in Ferndell Park, with its eucalyptus-shaded walkways and fish ponds. I was at a loss for small talk, so I impulsively took Jane's hand as we walked uphill toward the picnic grounds. Jane squeezed mine, and when I turned to look at her she gave a warm smile. "I love this place," she said. "You know L.A., don't you, Fritz?"

"I've lived here all my life. I think I know it. But it's changing. Every time I look around another landmark from my childhood is gone. Are you from L.A., Jane?"

"More or less. I was born here. My parents moved to Monterey when I was one. They died there, and the foster homes I lived in were here. Do you have a family?"

"No, my parents died within six months of each other when I was twenty. You know, it's funny. Most of the people I know are orphans or come from fragmented families—you and I, my friend Walter, the man I do a lot of work for. All strays awash in a sea of neon, all trying to survive and find a little more than survival."

Jane smiled at my half-hearted attempt at poetry. "You said earlier that you'd tell me why you quit the police force," she said.

"It's an ugly story, Jane. Are you sure you want to hear it?"

She squeezed my hand briefly. "Yes," she said. "I called Lieutenant Holland this afternoon, to check you out. I didn't tell him why I needed the information, just that we had met and you offered him as a reference. He said that you were a good man, but when I asked him if you were a good police officer, he was ambiguous. You can tell me, Fritz."

"All right. I was a shitty cop. I was drunk a good deal of the time, so I got shunted off to Hollywood Vice. A sympathetic sergeant told me I'd fit right in with the kind of people the Vice Squad dealt with: drunks, dopers, hookers, bookies, pimps, homosexuals, and perverts. The cream of Hollywood society. I did fit in and I enjoyed the job for a while. But gradually the despair of hassling people who should have been left alone got to me. I was depressed so I drank and popped uppers to kill the depression. Which brings us to Blow Job Anderson. He was a character out of my youth, from the old neighborhood, a legendary pervert who was seducing twelve-year-old boys when Walter and I were that age. He was six or seven years older than us. He was still living in the neighborhood and Walter told me he was seducing a new generation of kids. After I'd been working Hollywood Vice for eight or nine months, I found out that Blow Job Anderson was a big-time informer to Narcotics Division. I went to the Commander of Narco and told him that Blow Job was a known pervert who had been seducing young boys since I was a kid. He told me not to worry, that he would take care of it. He didn't do a goddamned thing. I went to the guys in Narco themselves, and told them. They didn't care, either. They told me to cool it, that I had no proof, and that Anderson was a good snitch they couldn't afford to lose. Finally, word came down from the Commander of Hollywood Station: ‘Shut your mouth about Blow Job Anderson.’ I knew what I had to do. I got drunk one night and went looking for Anderson. I found him and broke both his legs with a lead filled baseball bat. I told him if I ever heard he was still bothering kids, I would kill him. While he was lying on the ground screaming, I poured a five-pound bag of sugar into the gas tank of his Corvette. When I went to work the next day I was summoned to the Captain’s office. He handed me a resignation form. ‘I strongly suggest that you sign this,’ he said. I did. Farewell, police career.”

I had begun my story seeking absolution and had ended it on a note of intransigent pride. I wondered if Jane had noticed it. We stared at each other.

Finally, she spoke. “I don’t care. I don’t think any more or less of you for what you’ve told me. You just saw corruption that you couldn’t take. You—”

“That wasn’t it,” I interrupted. “I wasn’t an outraged moralist like most cops. I let plenty of perverts slide. I came down hard on others. It was arbitrary, dictated by mood. What I couldn’t take was that Blow Job Anderson was more valuable to the L.A.P.D. than Fritz Brown. That was what ate me up.”

“Did you abuse your power often when you were a policeman?”

“Yes, and terribly.”

“I understand. You were a Dissension Center. You were drinking, but now you’re sober. I was a Dissension Center, too. I loved power. Sexual power. I laid half the boys at St. Vibiana’s. I loved having them want me, knowing that I could say ‘no’ and castrate them. Knowing that I could get what I wanted by offering my body in barter. But that was then. Now I have my cello. There’s a good chance I’ll be accepted at Juilliard in January. Now I’m a Unity Center. You are, too. You don’t hurt people anymore, do you?”

“No,” I lied.

“And you’re not drinking. Do you have plans for the future?”

“Not really. I’m going to Europe this fall, though. A musical holiday. Germany and Austria.”

“So am I! Sol has been pushing me toward a vacation for years. I’ll probably leave in October.”

“Maybe we can travel together,” I blurted out.

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” Jane said, almost mockingly, “but right now what I’d like to do is listen to some good chamber music on a good stereo.”

“I know just the place. I live there. Shall we go?”

“Yes, please.”

So we went to my apartment, a few minutes’ drive away. But we didn’t listen to chamber music, we made our own. It was an urgent coupling, freighted with knowledge that tomorrow reality would come down hard.

Afterward, I hooked up the bedroom speaker and put some Vivaldi on the turntable, with the volume down low. We lay in bed holding hands and not talking until I couldn't stand it any longer and burst out laughing. "Jane, Jane, Jane," I said. "Jane, a very traditional name. I like that."

She laughed along. "Fritz is a good ethnic name," she said, "I like that. You're scowling, dear. What is it?"

"I never know how I stand in situations like this."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, will there be a next time?"

"Anytime. Including now."

I reached across the bed and pulled her toward me. We held each other tightly for several minutes, then made love again, this time more for reassurance than passion. Then we fell asleep.

I awoke at eight o'clock. I heard water running in the bathroom, and Jane came out a moment later, fully dressed. I knew from the look on her face that reality had hit. "Good morning," I said.

"Good morning. I have to go. I have my lesson at nine thirty."

"What is it?"

"What the hell do you think it is?"

"Do you want to know?"

"Yes!"

I told her, omitting nothing. From Fat Dog's visit to my office, to the Utopia firebombing, to Sol Kupferman's past, to my assessment of her brother's psychoses, to the Omar Gonzalez angle. Jane's reactions ranged from head-shaking denials, to trembling, to sobbing. When she started to cry, I let her, making no move to provide comfort. I wanted her to be afraid. Finally, surprisingly, anger took over. Her wet face went red. I handed her a handkerchief and she wiped away tears. When she spoke, it was with heart-stopping resolution: "Get him, Fritz."

"I will."

"Do whatever you have to do. I don't want him hurting Sol or anyone else."

"I will."

"Would you take me home now, please?"

"Yes."

Jane rounded up her things while I pulled out the car. We drove to Beverly Hills in tense silence. A dozen funny, cheery remarks came into my mind, but I rejected them as fatuous. Finally, I spoke. "We have to talk about a few things, Jane."

“All right.”

“I want you to tell Kupferman what I’ve told you. Tell him to be careful, to keep his bodyguard around at all times. Tell him that I want to talk to him when I get back from Mexico. Will you do that?”

“Yes.”

“Tell him also that I don’t give a damn about any of his past dealings. That includes the bookie operations at the Utopia. Tell him all I’m interested in is seeing Fat Dog put away.”

A flash of anger came into Jane’s eyes. “You’re sure of what you’ve told me?” she said, her voice rising. “That Sol was bookmaking in the late ’60s? Fifteen years after the grand jury? I won’t have him slandered by anyone, including you!”

I looked over at her. “Easy, sweetheart. I’m sure. And it’s hardly slander. Bookmaking should be legal.”

Jane shook her head. Her whole manner was like a stifled scream. “I’m sorry. It’s just that I know *I’m* strong enough to stand all this, but I’m not sure about Sol.” I put my free hand on her knee and squeezed. She didn’t respond. I pulled up across the street from the Kupferman mansion. Jane and I looked at each other. I didn’t want a protracted goodbye and I sensed she didn’t either. “Be careful in Mexico,” she said.

“You be careful here. Practice well. You can give me a recital when I get back.” We kissed hard and in an instant Jane was out of the car and running across the street toward the large house.

—

Driving away, I did a fairly good job of putting Jane out of my mind and concentrating on what I had to do next: find a quiet spot to read Fat Dog’s letters. I pulled into the large parking lot at Hancock Park, and found a bench in the shade, surrounded by elderly Jews killing a summer midmorning, and a slew of plaster dinosaurs killing eternity. The letters were undated and barely legible. The postage stamps had been ripped off of all three when they were opened. Jane had said they were recent, though, within the past month. I plunged in:

> Deer Jane, my sister, I hope you are feeling good. I am too. I’ve been doing good at Bell-Air, lots of jucy loops. I’m the king there. They got nothing but winos looping there. I saw on T.V. this musical show, this big orchestra. They showed this woman playing that thing like you play. Only she don’t play as good. I could tell. You dont need that scum Kupferman no more. I know. Jews got big money but they don’t know the score. I do. I got a rich friend who does to. He likes me. I

> don’t have to loop no more. I just do it cause I love golf. Soon I will be going to Mexico. To retire kind of. Live like I should, like a king. The king of caddies and king of dog racers. Why don’t you come to? I’ve got lots of $!!!!!!! I know a feemale grayhound pup I can buy for 200!!!!! We can breed her and go big time at the track in T.J.!!!!!! Raise lots of pups, all champs!!! In Mexico they treat white people like kings!!!!! Tell that bastard Sol K to fuck off!!!! Come to Mexico and be with your family!! My friends got a big castle neer Ensinada. We can go fishing. You can play your thing in piece with nobody to bug you. My buddy can get you into a good band. All white. Listen to me!!!!! Jane!!!!! I’m your brother, your only kinn! !! A talented girl like you should stay with her family. We can have good times, like the old days before the Jew and the fiddle. Call me at the Tap & Cap 474-7296. Leave a messige and we can get together and go to Mexx. Don’t dellay, call todday. Ha! Ha! I love you. Your brother, Freddy.

It was about what I had expected, grammatically and thematically, yet none of Fat Dog’s surprising intelligence and cunning shone through. I quickly read the other two letters. They were simply repetitions of the first, but they reinforced my hunch that Fat Dog was now in Mexico, and that his rich friend might not be a figment of his imagination and might be a possible lead. I was itching to get started. But I had to see Walter first to check on his well-being and say *au revoir*. There was a fear on the back burner of my mind that I might never see him again. I quashed it and stuck Fat Dog’s letters in my pocket and hotfooted it to the old neighborhood.

—

Walter didn’t answer my ring and there was no response when I knocked loudly on the window of his room. This was surprising; maybe he was making the run to the liquor store. I walked back to the front steps to wait.

After five minutes his mother pulled up in her senile Mustang. She hates to spend money, unless it’s on spiritual artifacts of the Christian Science Church, like her Wedgwood bone china plates inlaid with drawings of the Mother Church. Over the years Walter has sailed a number of them off the twelfth floor of the Franklin Life Building at Wilshire and Western, but she keeps replacing them. She’ll withstand the greatest indignities with a stoic resolve to keep him under her thumb. Once Walter boiled her eighty-five-dollar morocco-bound copy of *Science and Health—A Key to the Scripture* in a pot that was equal parts water and Thunderbird. He presented it to her on a silver chafing dish embossed with the likeness of Mary Baker Eddy—in front of her Wednesday-night Bible Study Class.

She saw me as she was locking her car and dredged up a smile from the dark recesses of the cold city that she lives in. “Well, Officer Brown, how nice to see you,” she said.

“I quit the police department a long time ago, Mrs. Curran,” I said, “you know that.”

“Yes, and such a pity, too. You were so handsome in your uniform.”

“No doubt. Where’s Walter?”

“Chief Davis is such a fine man. I was hoping you would follow in his footsteps and make the police force your career.”

“You would dig Davis. He’s as crazy as you are. Where’s Walter?”

“Walter? I think he’s on hiatus somewhere. He left last night. He’d gone to one of those terrible A.A. meetings where everyone smokes cigarettes and takes the Lord’s name in vain. You know how those meetings upset him. I’ll give you your due, Officer Brown, you are not a nice man and you have an evil tongue, but you do know my boy. Although not as well as I do.”

“Yeah, I do know old Walt pretty well. Do you know what I like most about him? His restraint.”

“His restraint?”

“Yeah, his restraint at not having strangled you in your fucking bed a long time ago. Good day, Mrs. Curran.”

I walked back to my car leaving Walter’s madre to catalogue my indignity for future use against him. I was worried now. I had been unavailable to my friend for several days and he was in one of his periodic descents into reality, with all the terror that brings. When Walter takes off on what he terms his “periodicals,” anything can happen. Once he bought two hundred tennis balls, and hurled them at passing cars from the bus stop at Beverly and Van Ness. Another time he barricaded himself in a motel in Hollywood with a bag of weed and a supply of dexedrine and porno books, convinced he could kick booze that way. Both times I was able to effect some sort of reconciliation between Walter and the world before he was locked up.

But those were extreme examples of the “periodical.” His standard operating procedure was simply to walk west on Wilshire until he hit the beach, with beer stops on the way to detox himself and prepare for what he considered the long but necessary nightmare of sober life. So I drove west on Wilshire myself, as slowly as possible in the middle lane. I got all the way to Brentwood before I spotted him sitting on a bus bench at Wilshire and Barrington, drinking out of a paper bag with a straw. I pulled up, opened the passenger door and called to my friend. He got in.

“You had me worried,” I said. “I came by your place a few nights ago and you were passed out on the hard stuff.” I turned around the corner and parked in the lot of a small market. I checked Walter out: the pudgy frame and brilliant light blue eyes looked normal, but the face had the gauntness and fear that sets in when he has been sober a few days. “What are you drinking?” I asked.

Walter pulled the brown bag off of his libation. To my surprise it was Vernor’s Ginger Ale. “If you can do it, I can do it, you fascist motherfucker,” he said, punching me in the arm jokingly. “Cold turkey, unless I get the shakes. Then it’s the old tried-and-true twenty-four-hour beer detox.”

“And then?”

“I don’t know. Dope or A.A. There are advantages to both. The dope advantages are obvious: you fly. The disadvantages are the resultant paranoia of prolonged use and the illegality. I’m not cut out for jail. No science fiction, no T.V., and they make you work. The A.A. advantages are that you get healthy physically through abstinence, you meet people who might be potentially valuable business contacts, and you probably get laid.” It was perhaps the fiftieth time I had heard this routine, but I didn’t tell Walter that. He was close to the edge.

“There’s another alternative,” I said, “You can come and stay with me. We can fly up to San Francisco, go to the opera, hike in Golden Gate Park. I’ll see that you eat and make fucking-A sure you don’t drink.”

“I’ll consider it, but it probably won’t work. Aesthetically, we are polar opposites. You cannot see the profundity of television, while I am mentally evaluating it and its effect for a magnum opus that will shake the conscience of the free world. I will be spoken of in the same breath as Kant and Nietzsche, guys who, of course, you have never read. You are the man of action and limited thought, the pragmatic diamond-in-the-rough intellect who rips off dumb n———s for their Cadillacs, sold to them by the fascist vampire. The karmic consequences will one day become obvious: you are going to get royally fucked in the ass. I, on the other hand, am the man of pure thought. A thinking machine. But I run on fuel, like any good machine. And that fuel is alcohol. It’s Catch-22, my good friend. So what are we to do?”

“I don’t know, in the long run. Right now though, we can make the Topanga run. Do you want to?”

“Let’s do it. It’s been a long time.”

The Topanga run had been a mainstay of our relationship since the time I got my first car. It consists of Wilshire west to Pacific Coast Highway, P.C.H. north to the Topanga Canyon turn-in, Topanga Canyon Road through to the Valley, and the Ventura and Hollywood freeways back to L.A. It takes about an hour and a half, and during these rides Walter and I have enjoyed some of our finest conversations and closest rapport. So I pulled a U-turn on Barrington and turned right on Wilshire, headed for the beach. Out of the corner of my eye I watched Walter sip his ginger ale and peruse the passing scene.

When we were a few blocks from the ocean, he started to shout in frustration. “Shit fuck, rat’s ass, motherfucker!! Shit fuck!!”

I looked over and his hands were shaking, tremors that seemed to start in his fingertips and work all the way up to his shoulders, where he braced his back to contain them. “Five minutes, Walter,” I said. “Hold on. Beer?”

“Fuck beer. Vodka. Kiddielands. I’m dehydrated.”

Kiddielands meant a 7-11 store. I remembered one on 15th and Santa Monica and jammed a left-hand turn and punched the accelerator. I bought two large cherry Slurpees, gooey concoctions of sugar, red dye number 7, and ice. In the parking lot I dumped out half of each one and trotted down the street to a liquor store, where I bought two half pints of Smirnoff 100. I mixed the vodka and Slurpees—half pint to each container of red goo—while Walter watched hungrily, sitting on his hands to control his shaking. I handed him one of the large cups through the window. He held it between his knees and greedily sucked the dual poison into his system through a large straw.

I got into the car and waited. Walter sipped in silence for about ten minutes. When he spoke I knew he had been freshly restored to his old insanity. “Where have you been?” he said. “I’ve been calling you for days. I needed the dubious pleasure of your company.” He held up his hands and placed them a few inches from the windshield. They were perfectly still.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” I said. “Do you still want to make the run?”

“Of course.”

We rolled up the windows and I hit the air-conditioning. Cold air flooded the car and we took off, awash in hazy sunshine that seemed to permeate everything from blacktop to billboards. As we drove north on P.C.H. the sun reflecting off the ocean was blinding.

“How did it start this time?” I asked Walter.

“It all happened at once,” he said, throwing his straw and plastic lid out the window and drinking directly from the cup. “Dear is definitely going to marry the wop. It’s all set. She’s got him by the balls. She even got him to renounce his Catholicism, at least temporarily. A Christian Science Practitioner is going to perform the service. With his emphysema and Dear’s claws into him, he probably won’t last six months. He’s been making friendly overtures toward me, no doubt to curry favor with Dear. He even offered to set me up in my own fruit stand. He looks like a gila monster and he smells like garlic. Dear treats him like shit. It’s depressing beyond belief. And I’ve been without T-bird. Dear ripped off that C-note you put in my pocket. It was you, wasn’t it? Who else could it have been? She told me that I was in a blackout and offered her the money to pay for some of the damage I’ve done around the house. The usual threats ensued, on both sides, until she popped her final ace—'Walter, if you persist with this behavior, I shall have to call Judge Gray and have you committed.' You know the bitch will do it if I push her far enough, and Judge Gray has had it in for me ever since I poured wintergreen down his ugly daughter's bra in the eighth grade. He's Republican, Christian Science, and law-and-order militant: the trinity. So without funds, I have been ripping off Scotch from Thrifty's. And it hasn't been working. I drink and I drink and I'm not drunk, and then wham, I'm out like a light. And the music doesn't help either. I heard the Bruckner Third the other night on KUSC. Haitink and the Concertgebouw. Lonely Anton at his peak, and I didn't give a shit. Nothing's working anymore, everything's changing and it's driving me fucking batshit."

We entered Topanga Canyon with its green hills that resembled the Fjords. Knots of youthful hikers walked along a stream that runs parallel to the twisting blacktop, several of the women carrying babies papoose-style in specially rigged backpacks. Friendly dogs followed them, stopping frequently to explore interesting scents. Walter was staring out his window, where the edge of the roadside led to nothing but a steep drop.

"You want some advice, wino?" I asked.

"Sure."

"Don't lose the momentum you've got going. I know exactly how you feel. It's exactly how I felt ten months ago. The fear, the loss, the sense of slipping, the whole shot. Go with it. Don't let the old illusions take hold of you again."

"I think I'm really scared this time, Fritz."

"Good. Look, I have to go down to Mexico for a few days. I'm on a case, a real one. Try not to drink until I get back. Hit some A.A. meetings. It works for some people. Read. Stay away from Dear. Try to eat. When I get back you can move in with me. My life is just as up in the air as yours is, but for different reasons. I don't want to talk about it now. Things are looking up, for both of us. I've got a new friend that I'll introduce you to. She'll be your friend, too."

"A woman?"

"Yeah, a woman."

"Are you fucking her?"

"Shut up, Walter. I don't want to talk about it."

"Silence implies consent. You are fucking her. Big tits?"

I had to laugh. Walter is totally guileless and adoring when it comes to women.

"Average size. But beautiful. She's a cellist."

"No shit? Congratulations, Kraut. It's about time. You deserve a good woman.”

“Thanks, wino. So do you. When was the last time you got laid?”

“The last time I dipped my wick was April 13, 1972. That cop groupie you fixed me up with. Small tits and pimples.”

“Eight years is a long time. No wonder you’re fucked up. If you want to get laid today, I can arrange it. In fact, it might be a good idea, help you keep your mind off the booze. I know a terrific-looking hooker, an ultra fox. She’s got an apartment up from the Strip.”

“Big tits?”

“Real melons. She loves intellectuals. I know you’ll hit it off with her. Do you want to do it?”

Walter drained off the last of his first Kiddieland and threw the cup out the window. He pulled the lid off the second one and began sipping tentatively. “Fix me up when you get back,” he said, “for the next few days I want to detox and rest.” He gave me a smile that was equal parts love and fear of the unknown. Walter was in deep shit without a depth gauge.

When I dropped him off at his house an hour later, that smile still haunted me. But as I drove away, I wasn’t thinking of my beloved friend. I was thinking of what might lie ahead in Mexico.

7

I could tell something was wrong from a half a block away. As I pulled onto Bowlcrest, I could see that the French windows leading to my balcony were pushed open and the living room lamp was on, casting an orange glow into the twilight.

I parked crossways in my driveway, blocking it, and grabbed my gun and handcuffs from the glove compartment. As I made for the stairway that led to my front door, I heard it slam and heard footsteps scurrying down to street level. Flattening myself against the stairwell, I counted the number of steps the intruder had taken and when he was five from the bottom I spun out from my hiding place and turned around to face him, my gun leveled at his head. He was a handsome Chicano in his late twenties, slender and athletic-looking. His black hair was fashionably long and styled. He didn't look like a Hollywood burglar. He looked more like a rock musician or a high-priced fruit hustler; sensitive in an arrogant way. He was wearing a yellow tank top and bellbottom cords. When he zeroed in on my gun barrel, he froze.

"Hold it right there, motherfucker," I said, "and give those eyes to me. Now put your hands on top of your head and lace your fingers." He complied. "Now walk toward me and when you get to the bottom of the stairs, turn around, bend forward and touch your elbows to the wall."

I patted him down thoroughly while keeping my gun aimed at his spine. Finishing my frisk, I pulled him into an upright position and had him place his hands behind his back, where I cuffed them. "Let's take a walk up to my pad," I said. I nudged him with my gun barrel and he moved up the stairs. I looked around for neighbors who might have viewed our confrontation; luckily, there were no telltale heads peeking out of windows.

I unlocked my front door and pushed him inside and over to an easy chair where I sat him down. I stuck my gun into my waistband and surveyed my living room. It was almost intact. Only my desk drawers had been gone through. Keeping an eye on my prisoner, I rummaged through my personal papers, work records, bank books, and memorabilia. Nothing seemed to be missing. I ducked a head into my bedroom and saw nothing amiss except a few open dresser drawers. Back in the living room I sat down on the couch directly across from the handsome young Chicano. He eyed me warily, stoically. He was no burglar. He didn't walk the part, talk it, or act it in any way. He had shown remarkable consideration in his search of my apartment. Burglars do not hit second-story apartments at dusk in the less affluent part of the Hollywood Hills.

"Hello, Omar," I said. "I was looking for you yesterday." There was no response, so I tried again. "You are Omar Gonzalez, aren't you? If you're not, it's the fuzz and the slammer. And maybe an ass-kicking, by me. I don't like the idea of people fucking around with my pad. You probably feel the same way, if you're Omar Gonzalez, that is. Somebody righteously thrashed old Omar's pad the other day. Really ripped it up. Looking for something. Bookie ledgers, maybe. Somebody righteously fried Omar's brother back in '68, too. I know who did it. Maybe you heard about the case, the Club Utopia firebombing? Three of the bombers were caught and executed, but the 'Mastermind' got away. You seen old Omar lately? I sure would like to talk to him." I gave the Chicano my widest, most innocent smile, the kind that won me First Place in a Beautiful Baby Contest in 1948.

"I'm Omar Gonzalez, motherfucker," he said.

"Good. I'm Fritz Brown. Don't call me 'motherfucker' again. It's not nice. Well, Omar, I think we need to exchange some information. What do you say?"

"I say you broke into my car and ripped me off for two boxes of stuff, that's what I say. The lock on my trunk is all fucked up. I had to tie it shut."

"Tough shit. You broke into my pad. I'd say we're even. Besides, we were both looking for the same thing, right?"

"You tell me."

"I know who instigated the Utopia torch. How I got involved isn't important. James McNamara told me about you, and how you've been obsessed with the 'fourth man' for years. I have my own reasons for wanting the bastard. I'm a licensed private investigator. I can arrest him and make it stick. You need me, for that reason. You've been messing with this case for years, in an amateur fashion, and you've obviously discovered something. The ledgers, the porno photos. Our investigations have been running along parallel lines. We need to compare notes. Together we may be able to find this scumbag." I watched Omar's macho-stoic reserve crumble. I went to him and unlocked his handcuffs.

He rubbed his wrists and smiled. "Okay, repo-man, let's do it." He reached over and we shook on it.

"Tell me about this investigation of yours," I said, "from the top."

"From the top, I just knew something was wrong with the way the cops handled the case. They caught the guys wham, blam, thank you ma'am. It made the cops look good. The three guys confessed, but when they said that a fourth guy was the ringleader, the cops thought it was a plea to beat the death penalty. I talked to Cathcart, the cop who headed the investigation, about it. ‘What if it’s true?’ I asked. ‘Do you honestly think these three drunks were crazy enough to knock off six people just because they got kicked out of a fucking bar?’ I was a youngster then and Cathcart shined me on. I admit I was an imaginative kid. But at the trial I *knew* I was right. I mean, man, I *knew*. Those guys were telling the truth when they testified about the fourth man. The way they described him, it was just too real. The guy they described was just too fucking bizarre to be made up.

“I got a lot of publicity out of my crusade, even though everyone thought I was a crank. I was almost a regular on the old *Joe Pyne Show*. I developed a theory—that the mastermind was only after *one* of the victims—and that he torched the bar to hide his motive. I checked out the backgrounds of all the victims—except for my brother Tony, they were dull. Working stiffs, juiceheads, that type. The Gaffany dame was a semipro b-girl. I checked out Edwards, the owner of the joint—a dope fiend. I checked him out real good. Nothing on any of them.

“For a while I hung out with a guy who wrote for *True Detective* magazine. He found out that the Utopia had a bookie wire going—small-time. So I checked out some bookies who operated in the Normandie-Slauson area. They told me, yeah, there was a wire going, but it was amateur. They said Edwards ran it. So I checked out Edwards again. Nothing but a smacked-back junkie, all fucked-up on stuff. I got a lead on a big spade who used to make collections and payoffs—and he turned out to be doing five to life in Quentin for armed robbery with violence. Another dead end.

“Anyway, gradually I got into some other gigs—heavyweight scenes, the Chicano Movement, and this drug recovery program I work at—and I put my investigation on the back burner. I mean my hermano, Tony, was a righteous dude; I never loved anybody the way I loved him and I wanted to kill the puto who masterminded the torch, but I got my own life to think about, right? I’m twenty-seven years old. No fucking spring chicken. So anyway, I got involved in some other scenes and didn’t think about revenging Tony so much.

“Then I get this phone call. What’s the word? Anonymous. This dude asks me if I’m the Omar Gonzalez who used to be on the *Joe Pyne Show*. I say yes. Then he asks me if I’m still interested in the Utopia case. I say yes. Then he says ‘I got some information.’ And he tells me to get a pencil. So I do. He says: ‘Richard Ralston, 8173 Hildebrand Street, in Encino. He was one of the bookies at the Utopia around the time of the bombing. Check out his house, maybe you’ll find something to lead you to the fourth man.’ Then he hangs up. Man, did that call shake me up!

“So I burglarize this guy Ralston’s pad. At first, I find absolutely nothing suspicious. A bunch of old baseball souvenirs, photographs, T.V. set, records. A bag of weed. Nothing hot. Then I find this phony wall. I push it open and find these two boxes. I figure they got to be hot, so I rip them off. When I get home I check them out. Only the bookie ledgers make sense. The blank checks and the fuck pictures don't mean nothing. So I lock the boxes up in my trunk. Then I start checking this guy Ralston out—I tail him to work one day. He works at this fancy golf club. I start thinking, holy shit, one of the bombers described the fourth man as wearing one of those golf shirts with the alligator on it! Maybe he plays golf at this club.

"I was about to check it out when I got shot. I was in Echo Park one night and I had this feeling I was being followed. I was driving to a friend's place. All of a sudden this car pulls up. Blam! Blam! Blam! Blam! Three of the shots missed, but one grazed my shoulder. Somehow I knew it was coming, so I ducked and punched the gas. I lost them. I hid out at a friend's place. He drove my car to the station. I figured it would be safe there. But he forgot to take the boxes out of the trunk, like I told him to. Pinchey puto! The puto wouldn't go back for them! So I laid up at another friend's crib. My shoulder healed up good. I figured it was some punks I kicked out of the recovery house who shot at me, and that it was safe to come out of hiding, that they were probably fucked up on stuff somewhere.

"Then I went back to my apartment. It was destroyed. I went to get my car and the attendant tells me about this crazy repo-man who broke into my trunk. Then he gave me your card. I thought it was a trap. Somebody wants me dead. Maybe this cabron Ralston found out I'm onto him. That's why I broke into your place, to check you out. Now you talk, repo-man."

My mind was racing, divided between trying to place Ralston in the context of this new offshoot of the case and developing a cover story to keep Omar Gonzalez at bay while I nabbed Fat Dog. I gave Omar my most sincere look and lied big. Fuck him. He could read about the capture of his brother's killer in the papers.

"You were getting close, Omar," I said. "The fourth man *is* a member at Hillcrest. He had it in for Wilson Edwards, the owner of the Utopia. His wife ran away with Edwards. He masterminded the killing of six people for nothing. Edwards wasn't even at the bar that night. Ralston is blackmailing this guy. I've got an informant up near Santa Barbara who's got some evidence for me. Some tapes. I'm going there tonight to pick them up. Want to come along?"

Omar thought about it. He was eyeing me suspiciously. "How did you get into this thing, anyway?" he asked.

"Good question. A car dealer I worked for hired me to repo a car off a woman named Sanders. She's the fourth man's ex-wife. When I came around to get the car, she invited me into the house to talk. She told me she could put me onto a 'big scoop,' as she put it, if I didn't repo her car. She asked me if I had heard of the Club Utopia firebombing. I said yes. Then she told me how her ex-husband planned the whole thing. I believed her. This guy I'm going to see tonight was in on the blackmail scheme with Ralston." I could tell that he believed me. It was typical: members of minorities consider repossessors to be the scum of the earth—motivated by the basest of desires. The repo angle had "convinced Gonzalez that I was telling the truth. He was no dummy, but he was easily manipulated through his prejudices.

"All right," he said, "it's crazy, but I believe you. All the fucking work I've done looking for this guy and you stumble onto him accidentally. Where do we go? Santa Barbara?"

"Right. South of there. Near Carpinteria, on the beach. There's a deserted motel where we're going to make the trade. He wants a thousand dollars, but he's not getting it. I'm ripping him off. You can come along as back up. We leave now. What do you say?"

"I say you're a nice guy. Repo rip-off in the night. You do much work in the Barrio?"

"Yeah. Taco wagons are my specialty. Also foxy Chicanas. Every time I do a repo in Hollenbeck, I stop for a jumbo burrito and a piece of Mexican tail. It's charming talking to you, Omar, you're a lovely conversationalist, but our rapport is getting a little strained. So let's take care of business."

I tucked my .38 into my waistband and got my newly purchased shotgun and tape recorder from the bedroom and threw four days' worth of clean shirts and pants into a suitcase. I handed it to Omar. He didn't say anything about it, his eyes were riveted to the shotgun. He was impressed. I was speaking his language now. As we walked out the door, he didn't notice me jam a blackjack and length of nylon cord into my windbreaker.

—

We drove north on 101. The suitcase, shotgun, and tape machine were nestled in the trunk, the other goodies on my person. Omar was quiet. I had been expecting a lot of militant jive talk and needling, but he was too sensitive for that; he was lost in contemplation, thinking he was approaching the culmination of a ten-year crusade. He was, but I would be the reaper of all glories to be had.

The Fourth of July weekend get-out-of-town traffic was heavy and we slowed to a crawl nearing Oxnard and Ventura. After that, it was smooth sailing and twenty minutes later I pulled off the highway near the Casitas Reservoir and took surface streets down to the long stretch of beach just south of Carpinteria. I was sure the Beach View Motel would still be there and would still be deserted. Walter and I had discovered the Beach View about five years ago. We were driving back from San Francisco, drunk, when a torrential rainstorm hit. Walter wanted to press on and catch *The War of the Worlds* on the Late Show, but I insisted we park on the beach and sleep it off. We found a beach access road, expecting to find a parking lot at the end of it, but we were wrong: what we found was the Beach View Motel, a squat, ugly, lime-green structure on a particularly barren stretch of oceanfront sand obscured from the highway. We spent the night there drinking and bullshitting. The dump had been born to lose and born for losers; but it would serve my purpose tonight.

The night was pitch black and it took me a while to find the sandy blacktop that led down to our destination. When I did locate it, Omar came out of his trance and started jabbering: "Are we here, man? Is this it?"

"This is it," I said, "we're a little early. The guy said ten thirty. It's just after ten now. But that's good. I want to make sure we see him coming, in case he brought friends." Omar nodded staunchly. He was a courageous vato, but out of his league. To my chagrin, I was beginning to like him.

As we pulled up in front of the motel, my headlights caught litter-covered pavement, open doors, broken windows, and a profusion of empty beer cans. I killed the engine and said, "Take this flashlight and look around. I've got to get something out of the trunk."

I handed Omar the large five-cell, got out of the car, and walked around to open the trunk. Omar left the car and began flashing his light into the broken windows and battered doors. I counted to twenty, then walked over to him and sapped him from behind with the blackjack. He crumpled in a heap, dropping the flashlight. I checked his pulse, which was steady, then bound his wrists and ankles with the nylon cord.

I dragged him into the room farthest from the access road and laid him down on a smelly sand-covered mattress. I wrapped my hand in my windbreaker and punched out the side and front windows. Omar would have plenty of air. Next I located half a dozen good-sized rocks and laid them outside of Omar's room. I went inside and checked his pulse again. It was still steady. I closed the door on Omar and barricaded it with my rock collection. Pleasant dreams, Omar. In the morning, I would call the Carpinteria fuzz and clue them into the overnight guest at the Beach View.

I pulled the car around, almost getting stuck in the sand, and drove away, the sea making eerie noises in the background. I took 101 southbound to its juncture with Interstate 5 near Nixon's pad at San Clemente. When I pulled into San Diego just after midnight I heard firecrackers going off all over the city. Happy birthday, America.

III

LOWER CALIFORNIA

8

The following morning, rested yet apprehensive, I crossed the border.

Tijuana is situated on a plain nestled among shallow brown foothills. Even with the ocean just a few miles to the north it swelters, and the sun reflecting off the iron roofs of the hundreds of shacks that cover those foothills gave my entrance to Mexico the surreal look of a bad hangover morning.

Coming into T.J. proper, past scores of giant liquor stores, auto upholstery dumps, and body shops, I ran through my itinerary: lowlife bars, betting palaces, and the dog track. If they didn't pan out, I would try to run down a lead from the porno photos I had in my trunk: they were a more than coincidental link between Fat Dog and Richard Ralston.

Tijuana was teeming with activity as I turned onto Revalucion, its main drag. It was hot and noisy, the streets jammed with cars and the sidewalks packed with tourists and Mexican Nationals bartering in front of the profusion of curio stores that lined both sides of the street.

T.J. had changed since my first visit in 1962. I was still in high school then and had driven down with a group of buddies, bent on getting laid, getting drunk, and viewing the famous mule act. Except for our getting drunk, it was not to be. We did, however, get rolled by a Mexican tough who promised to fix us up with his sister, for free, because we were "cool dudes." My most overpowering impression of T.J. then was the poverty. There were endless streams of children hawking cheap blankets and religious medals by throwing them up at your face and screaming at you, hands outstretched, bodies planted firmly in front of you to block your progress, and hungry dogs, and comatose old beggars, too near starvation to give you a hard time. The poverty was still here—Tijuana eighteen years later was redolent of poverty—but it was poverty with hustle. The child beggars looked healthier and less desperate, and the streets looked like they were swept at least once a week.

I decided not to waste time and inquired after what used to be the heart of T.J. lowlife, the Chicago Club. The on-leave marine I talked to leered at me and gave me directions. I walked south of Revalucion, where the sidewalks were slightly less crowded. It was broiling now and my shirt, which I wore out to conceal my gun, was soaked and stuck to my back. After about four blocks I hit the real poverty. Victim land. Streets populated by people—Mexican and turista—with the predator look. A skinny white youth brushed by me. “Reds, whites, three dollars a roll,” he said. I told him to fuck off.

I hit my first in a long series of cheap bars. They were interchangeable; the people looked and smelled the same, the same fat Mexican girls danced nude on stage to bored catcalls. I described Fat Dog in detail to over fifty people, slipping out over two hundred dollars to bilingual Mexicans to translate for me. Nothing. Just a massive headache from over four hours of maudlin, saccharine Mexican music.

I walked back to Revalucion, deciding to hit a few nicerlooking joints before trying the dog track. I walked through three off-track betting palaces on my way over. No Fat Dog and no one willing to take time off from placing bets to talk to me.

I was getting hungry and decided to chance the food in the first halfway decent-looking juke joint I came to, which was La Carabelle. I knew right off the bat that this was a class place by T.J. standards: it was clean, the bar was wellstocked, the patrons looked a cut above the ones I had been questioning and the girls who danced on stage were pretty and slender and wore bikinis. I took a table near the edge of the dance runway. A waiter materialized and I ordered huevos rancheros and coffee.

The table adjoining mine was occupied by outsized, redfaced American men doing some hard drinking. From their short hair and the peremptory way they treated their waiter, I judged them to be Marine Corps brass, not likely to have information on my quarry. Still, they were talking loudly and when their conversation turned to golf, I listened.

“I was fucking surprised,” one of them said, “a shit-ass town like this having a championship course. Par seventytwo! Greens like lightning. I was lucky to get away with an eighty-seven! Jesus, all those years at Pendleton and I didn’t even know it existed!”

I leaned over and asked him where this golf course bonanza was.

The man started to get annoyed, then smiled broadly. His companions joined him and they all started jabbering drunkenly: “T.J. Country Club,” “Are you from Pendleton, fella?,” “Just south of town,” “Near the dog track, greatest fucking Margaritas this side of La Paz,” “Watch out for that trap on the fourth hole, it…”

I didn’t wait for them to finish. I jammed out of the bar and maneuvered my way through the crowds on Revalucion to the lot where my car was parked. I couldn’t believe it: the Tijuana Country Club? But the parking attendant told me it was true and gave me specific instructions on how to get there.

I drove south to the edge of town. The T.J. Country Club course was hard to miss: it was a giant patch of light green in an otherwise brown landscape. Signs directed me to the clubhouse, which looked like a miniature of the

Alamo, with a poorly printed, peeling sign announcing “Club Social Y Deportivo De Tijuana.”

I pushed my way through knots of golfers drinking beer and hoisting golf bags, looking for someone in charge. The room was dingy, the walls the same sandblasted adobe as outside. And the golfers looked crazed, not unlike some junkies I had seen, lining up in queues to buy golf provisions, pushing and shoving in their anxiousness to get to the first hole. It would be futile to attempt questioning here. I followed a group of prosperous-looking Mexicans outside, where the course opened up before me like a breath of clean air: rolling, strangely soft-looking green hills only slightly tainted by the omnipresent Tijuana brownness. The only thing to ruin it were the golf maniacs, dozens of them, milling around on a large patio, waiting to load their bags onto the scores of dilapidated golf carts parked in a blacktop loading area adjacent to the first tee. The whole scene had the air of an ancient ritual, completely American, prosaic and profound at the same time.

I walked over to a Mexican youth pulling beer bottles out of a large plastic trash can and handing them to golfers who grabbed them hungrily. When the trash can was empty, he took it back to a service shed to reload. I followed. “Habla Ingles?” I said, as he dipped his hands into a large ice machine.

“Yeah, I speak English,” he replied, with a purely American-Chicano accent, “but it won’t do you no good. You get one beer in the package deal and that’s it. Two margaritas and a golf cart. Todos. Comprende?”

“I dig you. What I’m looking for is the caddy master.”

He stopped and stared at me as if I were an idiot child. “Caddy master? Are you jiving me? This dump don’t have no caddies. Only class clubs have caddies.”

“I should have known. Listen, I’m looking for a caddy. I know he’s somewhere near Tijuana. He’s hard to miss: an Anglo, about forty, short, sunburned, and very fat. He always wears dirty golf clothes. Have you seen him?”

“I ain’t seen him. But we get lots of golf course bums around here. Ask Ernie in the pro shop.” He pointed to a white one-man cubicle, where a fat Chicano was handing out golf balls. I walked over and got in line. All the golfers seemed to be high on some new drug I knew nothing about, chattering in English and Spanish about incomprehensible matters. I felt as out of place as Beethoven at a rock concert.

The tournament, or whatever it was, was starting and interest shifted to the first tee. The beer line had petered out and the golf ball line I was in had ended. Ernie gave me a harsh look that softened somewhat when he saw the twenty-dollar bill I waved flag-like in front of him. “I don’t want golf balls, I want information,” I said, as he nodded, his eyes fixed on my money. I described Fat Dog.

Recognition flashed into Ernie's eyes. He grabbed for the twenty, but I pulled it away. "I seen that guy," he said. "He unloaded some balls on me a couple of days ago."

"Do you know where I can find him?"

"Naw, he's just a bum. A fly-by-night."

"Did you talk to him about anything other than golf balls?"

"Yeah. He told me he wanted to buy racing dogs. I told him to go to the dog track. I thought he was shitting me. He didn't look like he had the money to buy no racing dogs. Then he flashes this roll on me. A couple of grand. Fuck me. A loco, you know? That kind of dinero and he's selling golf balls. Crazy."

"So you sent him to the dog track, right?"

"Hell no, man. I sent him to see my cousin Armando. He's got two litters of greyhound pups."

I gave Ernie the twenty and pulled another one out of my billfold. "Where can I find Armando?"

"Who are you, man?"

"I'm a nice guy. I want that bastard who sold you the golf balls." I pulled out another twenty.

"I'll take you to see my cousin," he said.

I followed Ernie's ancient Ford pickup. We drove east, through a maze of dirt roads, through shanty towns and hobo jungles of abandoned cars. Armando lived in an incongruous red-brick house on the edge of a giant culvert. The place was enclosed with accordion wire and as I pulled up behind Ernie I could see and hear children and greyhound puppies frolicking behind the fence.

Ernie told me to wait by my car, that he would get his cousin. I waited, restlessly. I felt I was getting close, that Fat Dog was nearby and at my mercy. I could hear arguing from within the house. A few minutes later Ernie came out followed by an older, even fatter Chicano.

Armando disdained my offer of a handshake. "My cousin says you want to find the fat gringo I sold two dogs to."

"That's right," I said.

"It will cost you fifty dollars," Ernie interjected.

"You've got it. Where is he?"

"First you give me the money," Armando said.

I was getting pissed, but reached for my billfold without hesitation. I handed Armando two twenties and a ten. He looked at me with contempt.

"Where is he?" I asked angrily.

"You gonna fuck him up, gringo?"

"Maybe. Where is he?" I was ready to blow it all and trash the fat greasers right on the spot, but I held it in. I felt the blood start to pound in my head and the periphery of my vision blackened, but I said nothing, just let the two Mexicans play mind-fuck.

Finally Armando spoke: "That fat puto deserves what he gets. I got a feeling about him. About you, too, gabacho, so I tell you. I rented him a shack I got. You take the Ensenada Toll Road, past the first tollbooth, about forty miles from Tijuana, half mile from the sign that says 'Alisistos ½ mile.' Then you drive past the lakebed till you see a dirt road cut in toward the mountains on your left. You got to bang your car on the divider in the middle of the road to cross. Then you take the dirt road for three miles, to a fork. Then you go left for half a mile to the shack." I committed the information to memory while Armando and Ernie eyed me coldly. "Maybe you do me a favor, mano," Armando said. "Maybe you take care of the fat puto and I rent the shack to someone else. A shack like that, how do you say? In the middle of nowhere? Who knows what happens."

"Fuck yourself, greaseball."

"I forget you said that, man. This guy got two pups of mine. You bring them back, I give you twenty dollars." He spat in the dirt at my feet, an invitation for me to try something. I didn't. It was their country, their rules. I got in my car and drove away.

I headed for the Ensenada Toll Road, driving through Tijuana on my way. Just outside of T.J. I found a side road that dead-ended. I pulled off and got my shotgun out of the trunk, loaded it, and placed it beside me on the front seat, covered by a blanket.

The toll road southbound was wide open and beautiful, with the sea yawning wide and bright blue off to my right and the hillside shantytowns thinning out as I moved away from Tijuana. I was adrenalin-expectation high, but put all thoughts of the future out of my mind and concentrated on the moment: sunny, seaside uncharted territory, untainted by the grimness of my mission here.

I passed through the first tollbooth and a few minutes later I spotted the "Alisistos ½ mile" sign, then the dry lakebed. I saw the dirt road immediately, so I slowed down and got ready to jump the concrete divider. I came to a complete halt and scraped over it with what seemed like a minimum of damage to my underbody.

The road led up into greenish-brown mesquite country, past several garbage dumps and a shanty town of adobe huts where several old women were tending a collection of chickens and pigs. Soon I caught sight of the fork. The road to the right led higher up into the hills; the left—the one I was to take—led downward, into what looked like a box canyon.

I turned off my engine and coasted in, keeping a foot on my brake. After one quarter mile by my speedometer, the road leveled out and turned one last time. I could see a beaten-up wooden shack in the distance, about three hundred yards away. I got out of the car and locked it, taking the shotgun with me. There was no one in sight.

As I drew closer, staying to the side of the road along a stretch of bushes, I could see that the shack was encompassed by a low fence of unevenly matched pickets driven into the ground at irregular intervals and linked together by heavy wire. About fifty yards behind the shack was a large wooded area. Nailed to the wall of the shack was a bus sign, depicting a greyhound in full stride.

When I drew up alongside the picket fence a putrid smell hit my nostrils. I saw a large swarm of flies buzzing about a foot above the ground and a half dozen rats scrambling beneath them. When I saw what they were interested in, my stomach turned. Two dead greyhound puppies lay in the sandy makeshift front yard, their stomachs open and spilling guts.

I pumped a shell into the chamber, stepped over the fence and approached the shack. I felt the hackles on my neck rise and my skin started to tingle. I could see that the flimsy wooden door was ajar, so I found a large rock and hurled it. The door flew inward, the wood splintering and giving off a ghostly echo. But no other sounds came at me and I could see no movement inside.

I approached cautiously, my shotgun held in front of me at body level. The same stench that pervaded the yard doubled as I walked through the doorway, so I knew there was something dead inside. It was Fat Dog. He was lying on the floor, nude, in a lake of dried blood. His throat had been slit and there were puncture wounds all over his torso and legs. A large rat was nibbling at one fleshy thigh. His mouth had been ripped open from ear to ear, exposing cartilage and rotten teeth. His nose had been smashed.

I picked up an empty tin can and threw it at the rat. It scurried out the door, flesh hanging from its teeth. I surveyed the room: walls of the cheapest grade building material, floors of rough wood, a formica coffee table with a case of dog food underneath it, a duffel bag containing golf balls and nothing else. No furnishings, plumbing, or lighting. Nothing but the corpse of Frederick “Fat Dog” Baker, caddy and arsonist, and my would-be gravy train.

I walked outside to the far corner of the pathetic little yard, away from the dead puppies, in order to get away from the smell of the dead looper and collect my thoughts. I felt composed and detached as I thought about the last stand of this psychotic dreamer. I felt absolute pity that anyone should have to live as Fat Dog did and die as terribly; tortured for hours or maybe longer. For his money? For the roll he may have been flashing in T.J.? I went back into the charnel house to look for clues. I was right the first time. There was nothing. When I walked back outside, my memory jogged: Fat Dog never lived indoors. He was a notorious hobo and pack rat. I charged into the wooded area behind the shack. It was about one-hundred-fifty yards deep and thick with desert pines that allowed almost no light to enter.

It took me three hours of poking in bushes and checking out the bases of tree trunks to find what I was looking for. It was behind an uprooted scrub bush, nestled in a hollow tree trunk and wrapped in three giant plastic bags: a sleeping bag, two books on the care of greyhounds, a wallet containing $1,600 and no identification, the May issue of *Penthouse*, a six-iron, and a pebble-grained leather ledger, almost identical to the ones Omar Gonzalez had found in Richard Ralston's house in Encino.

I opened the ledger, which was wrapped in its own smaller bag. It was set up in five columns, the first two containing lists of Latin and Anglo surnames followed by initials, the two columns separated by dashes in red ink. The third column held dates in no particular order. The fourth column listed amounts of money, ranging from $198.00 to $244.89. The fifth column was allotted the largest space: it held comments written in a minute hand in Spanish. The ledger had thirty-two pages set up this way and it spelled one thing: extortion, somehow featuring Richard Ralston.

I transferred the money from Fat Dog's wallet to my own and tucked the ledger under my arm. I walked back to my car, skirting the death house, feeling certain that Fat Dog had been attempting to blackmail Richard Ralston, or someone, and had paid for the crime with his life; that somehow Sol Kupferman and the Club Utopia firebombing were also connected. What nagged at me was the missing link: Omar Gonzalez's anonymous caller.

When I got back to the car I locked my shotgun and new evidence in the trunk and drove back to T.J. to find someone who could read Spanish.

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It was almost six o'clock when I got back to Tijuana. The traffic was impossible, so I parked in the first space available in the downtown area. Street peddlers were out in force, hawking firecrackers and elaborate sets of fireworks: Roman candles, pinwheels, "atom bombs," and "houses on fire," selling them out of large open boxes leaned up against parked cars. T.J. was going to rock with the antics of swinging expatriates tonight.

My first stop was at an Army-Navy store, where I purchased a sturdy-looking shovel. Fat Dog deserved a decent burial and I was the only one to see that he got it. His golf balls would accompany him. I returned to the car and locked the grave-digging tool in the front seat, then went looking for an educated Mexican who looked like he could keep his mouth shut.

As I walked, I kept pushing thoughts of Jane out of my mind. I was likely to be down in Mexico longer than expected. Fat Dog had mentioned a "rich friend" with a "big castle." It would bear checking out. There was also the matter of Fat Dog's killer or killers—I might be able to dig up some leads on people who had been searching for the late unlamented looper.

I turned into an alley to avoid the sidewalk bustle, and heard footsteps crunching on gravel immediately behind me. I swung around, but it was too late. A fist crashed into my jaw. I tottered, but kept my balance, the ledger flying out of my hand. It was dark in the alley, but as I recovered from the blow and put up my arms to ward off others I recognized my assailant. It was Omar Gonzalez. That made me angry. As recognition and amazement lit up my face, Gonzalez followed with a left to my head and a right to my ribcage. He was fast and strong. The left caught me high on the cheekbone, the ring on his finger drawing blood; the right I deflected with an elbow. He was wide open and over-confident. I feinted with my left shoulder and as he drew away I slammed a right cross to the side of his nose. He went down, but came up fast, his knees wobbling. As he struggled to get up, wiping the blood from his eyes, I kneed him in the chin, full force. He went down again and was still.

I caught my breath and patted him down for weapons. Nothing. How had he gotten here so fast? And how had he known to come here? He would be rousing soon, so I picked up the dusty ledger, hoisted him onto my shoulder and carried him out to the busy sidewalk, where I sat him down beside a fire hydrant. Being T.J., this got only a few curious stares from passersby. Keeping a hand on his shoulder to keep him from tipping over, I applied pressure to the cut on my cheek. It was deep, but razor-sharp and the blood was already starting to congeal.

Gonzalez came to with a start. He tried to stand up and start swinging, but was too woozy. He wiped blood from his nose. I kept a firm hand on his shoulder. "No go, Omar. Too many people around. The T.J. jail is a bitch. But I've got some very good news for you, if you'll listen…"

He didn't want to listen. The expletives began, first in Spanish, ending in English. "…Filthy scum-sucking fascist pig! Parasite!…" I let him go on and on.

When he ran out of epithets and breath, I spoke soothingly: "The man who was responsible for killing your brother is dead. Murdered. He's lying in an old shack outside of T.J. I'll show him to you, if you want. No tricks this time. I'll tell you the whole story of my involvement in this thing. The truth. You want to listen?"

"I'll listen, puto. I got nothing better to do."

"Good. It's a long story. Let's find a cantina."

I gave Gonzalez a handkerchief to wipe the blood from his battered nose. It wasn't broken, which made me feel good. After a block's walk, we found a combination restaurant-bar that looked clean and wasn't too crowded. From the window by our table we could see fireworks begin to light up the twilight sky. I told Omar everything—from the beginning, including the incredible coincidence of my recognizing Kupferman from a split-second meeting years before. The only thing I omitted was my involvement with Jane. Watching him as I recounted the tragedy that had been the central fact of his life for a decade I saw anger, grief, and fierce love light up his face. After I finished I sipped my coffee in silence and waited for his response. Finally it came, much more stoic than stunned. "Who do you think killed Fat Dog?" he asked.

"I'm not sure. He's tied in to Ralston from Hillcrest, ten years ago. They're connected by the similar ledgers they both had in their possession. It could well be that Fat Dog was trying to blackmail Ralston. I'm not sure. We'll know more when we decipher this ledger." I handed him the leather bound book. "You read Spanish, don't you?"

"Of course, yo soy Chicano." He said it with pride. We were moving toward becoming allies, but he was keeping his distance. I respected him for it.

"Read it," I said, "then we'll go and bury Fat Dog. Or I will, I should say. You can wait here."

"No, I'll go. I want to see this putrid piece of dog shit with its guts hanging out. I want to burn the sight into my brain."

"Then hurry up and read the ledger. It's getting dark. I want to be sure we can find the place."

Omar read fast, his eyes skimming the pages, showing no emotion. He read page by page for several minutes, then closed the book and stared at me. "It's not a bookie ledger like the ones I found at Ralston's house," he said. "The first four columns are the same thing. Names, some Latino, some Anglo, some that sound kind of black, followed by initials—R.R., that would have to be Ralston, J.L., H.H., D.D., G.V. Don't ask me what that means. The next column is odd amounts of money, with a dash, then a date, no particular order. The dates go back eight years to '72. After the dates, there's all these really odd amounts of dough—211.83, 367.00, 411.10. Like that. Funny. With no dollar signs, just the decimal points. Weird. In the next column there's another name, most of the time matching the one in the first column. Then, there's comments—spooky stuff. For instance—'Cousin, dead ten years,' 'Uncle, born here, valid D.O.B., died Mexico, '55,' 'Played ball with R. R., died 6-21-59.' Every line in this last column seems to refer to some dead person, or one of their relatives. Spooky. What do you think, repo?"

Another loose end seemed to be tying itself up. "I think maybe this ledger details some kind of Welfare scam. Remember those blank checks stuck in the ledgers you ripped off of Ralston? Everything in this new ledger seems to bear it out—the names, the amounts of money—all small and within the range of a monthly Welfare payment, and the comments in the last column—died such and such a date. I think that Ralston is working a Welfare rip-off, and that Fat Dog was involved somehow, or found out about it, and tried to blackmail Ralston, and was killed."

Omar was nodding his head, taking in the information and kicking it around. "What do we do now?" he said.

"Let's bury Fat Dog and head back to L.A. Ralston is the key to this case, I'm sure of that. When we get back I'm going to brace him."

We got up and left the cantina, my coffee and his beer practically untouched. We walked to the car, then headed for the Ensenada Toll Road.

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It was almost dark and cooling off. We drove south on the toll road, skirting the ocean. As we pulled out of Tijuana I could see bonfires being lit in the shanty towns that filled the canyons on the land side of the road. The people who lived in the makeshift communities had no electricity, but their fires provided light and a glow that swept all the way across the highway to illuminate the Pacific with strands of gold. Given the corruption of Tijuana, where most of them probably worked, I wondered if they were jaded beyond redemption, as I was, or innocent enough to fill their lives with the simple beauty that surrounded them. Omar was evidently thinking along parallel lines.

"So much fucking beauty, and so much fucking poverty. But it's the poverty that finally gets you. So you come to America, meaning L.A., and you find some kind of chickenshit job and raise a big family, and stay poor. And you know what kills me, repo? There's not a goddamned thing I can do about it. Except to help the kids who rebel at the poverty and look for the answer in dope. You win one, and you lose twenty. But you know, it's worth the effort."

"Yeah. One thing you haven't mentioned: How the hell did you find me? How did you know to come to T.J.?"

"Easy. There was no place else to go. The only lead I had was those porno pictures, which spelled T.J. Also, you shanghaied me north, in the opposite direction. I cut through the rope about three in the morning and hitched into Santa Barbara. I caught the six o'clock bus to Dago and walked across the border. I been looking all over town for your car since eleven o'clock. Finally, I spotted it. Then I found you."

"You're a smart, resourceful guy, Omar. I have no doubt you'll go far in life, now that you're free of your obsession."

"But it's not over, repo. This puto Fat Dog is dead, but there's a lot more going on, you said so yourself. I want to know all of it."

"You will. But you're strictly a noncombatant. Remember that. When we get back to L.A., I'm going after Ralston alone. We're dealing with killers here, not Barrio punks with switchblades and a snootful of angel dust. So you take a good look at Fat Dog's corpse, and hold your nose while you're doing it. If you've got the stomach for it, I'll even let you desecrate it before the burial. He's the one who killed your brother, no one else. The rest is icing on the cake and that's *my* obsession. So when we get back to L.A., you keep out of it. You got shot once and survived. You were lucky. I'm going to find you a place with some friends of mine. You can stay there until this thing blows over."

"I'll think about it."

"You'll do it. I'll make sure you know what's happening. Just stay out of sight."

"All right. You know, this feels strange. I've been waiting for this moment for over ten years, but it feels like a big letdown. I wanted to kill the puto myself, slowly. And I would have done it. Scum like this Fat Dog don't deserve to live."

"You've got that all wrong, amigo. You might have killed Fat Dog—if the timing had been right and your conscience and conditioning shut off long enough for you to do it. I might have, too, if I hadn't been able to get him to confess and thought he might kill again. But he deserved to live. He just never had the chance. He had no choice in the matter. It was locked in, from the beginning. He was destined to become what he became. I'm no liberal, but I learned one thing from being a cop: that some people have to do what they are doing, that they can't help it. I tried to explain this to my fellow officers, but they laughed me off as a bleeding heart. I'm doing what I have to do, so are you, so was Fat Dog. The only difference between us and Fat Dog is that our conditioning was tempered with some love and gentleness. His wasn't. All he knew was anger, hatred, and meanness. That's why I'm going back to bury him. He deserved better."

"I didn't think you were so soft-hearted. Do you consider what happens to the poor Chicano in El Barrio when you repo the car he needs to get to work in?"

"Yeah, I consider the consequences. And I come up with this: He knew what he was getting into when he signed the contract. All the repossessions I go out on are at least two months' delinquent. So tough shit."

"You're a tough nut to crack, repo."

"So are you."

We both got a laugh out of that one. For the second time that day I pulled my Camaro over the concrete divider, giving the undercarriage a good wracking. As I hit the dirt road, I turned on my high beams, throwing light on small hills of brown scrub, dust, and a rodent family on the move. I took it slowly, staying squarely on the road. This time I drove all the way up to the death shack, turning the car around so that I could drive straight out.

There was a large Coleman Lantern in my trunk. I lit it and mounted it on the hood of the car to provide light to work by. A slight breeze cut through the stench of the rotting greyhound pups in the front yard, leaving just a smell redolent of meat left out too long. I got the shovel and the large five-cell flashlight, which I handed to Omar.

“Dig this scene,” I said, “you’ll never see another one like it. The man who killed your brother is in the shack.”

Omar followed my directions, playing his light over the dead puppies. He seemed to be hesitant about going into the shack, though, like a kid at the amusement park with a ticket for the haunted house, knowing it’s the real thrill, yet afraid to go for it. “Go on, Omar. Get it over with. I want to get out of here.”

He nodded and walked up the steps while I began to dig. I was at it for about three minutes when he came crashing out the door, bent over and holding his stomach. He went around to the side of the shack and vomited, then retched dry, his whole body shaking with each convulsion. Finally he finished and walked up to me. He was pale and the look in his eyes aged him by ten years. “Jesus,” he said.

“Did you enjoy that?” I asked.

“No,” he replied, “I wanted to look at his face, to try to read it, but there was no face to read. God. There were these bugs coming out of his nose and his guts hang…Jesus.”

“He’s been dead at least three days. Have you had enough?”

“Yes.”

“Then you go and sit in the car. I’ll bury him and we’ll split.”

I dug some Kleenex out of my back pocket, tore off a few small pieces and wadded them into my nostrils. Carrying the flashlight that Omar had left on the ground, I entered the shack. I was somewhat inured to violent death and stiffs, but Fat Dog’s was too much: the stench crept through the wadded-up Kleenex and my eyes stung from the acidity of rotting flesh. I grabbed the corpse by both wrists and pulled. The left arm came loose at its socket, flying up in the air, spraying decomposing matter. I lost my balance and almost fell, letting out a strangled cry when a viscous glob of rented flesh flew up and hit me in the cheek. I brushed it off and took a moment to compose myself, then grabbed Fat Dog by the ankles and began pulling him toward the door.

I was about to begin my descent down the three shallow steps when I heard a gunshot ring out from the direction of my car. I dropped Fat Dog’s ankles, grabbed my flashlight, and pulled my .38 from my waistband. Flattening myself up against the wall, I took frantic deep breaths to stifle my fear and allow my mind to operate. Some seconds passed, then I heard voices speaking in Spanish. Through the door crack I saw the shapes of two men approaching the shack. I waited. As they got closer, I could see that the man on the left was carrying a rifle, held in the crook of his arm, pointed downward.

When they were about two feet from the steps, I swung out and flashed my light dead in their faces and fired all six shots into them at chest level. They both went down and I hurled myself back against the inside wall and reloaded from the loose shells I kept in my back pocket. I heard moaning and in the next instant a volley of rifle shots tore into the shack, splintering the wood around me. I grabbed hold of a chunk of the splintered wood and yanked, cutting my hand in the process. I stuck my flashlight in the hole and surveyed the scene: one man lay in front of the steps; I couldn't see the other man, the one with the rifle, until an instant later when I heard a weak thumping and stifled moaning coming from the steps. He was trying to crawl into the shack, his rifle held out in front of him. I held my breath for a few seconds, then as I saw the rifle barrel make its way into the shack, I padded over and flattened it to the floor with my foot. The man who held it looked up at me from his place on the steps. I couldn't discern his features, but I could see a bright trickle of blood dripping from his mouth. It was over for him. I placed my gun up against his temple and squeezed off three shots. His head burst inward like a crushed eggshell. I walked over to where the other man lay. I was sure he was dead, but I emptied my remaining three rounds into the back of his neck anyway.

I walked back to my car, knowing what I would find. Omar Gonzalez lay dead, sprawled across the front seat, shot in the head. There was very little blood, the bullet obviously still embedded in his brain. I pulled him out by his arms and carried him gently to the incomplete grave I had intended for Fat Dog. If Fat Dog had deserved better, then Omar Gonzalez had deserved the best life had to offer. It took me half an hour to bury him. When I finished, I tried to bring to mind a Dylan Thomas poem about "Death having no dominion," but I couldn't recall the words.

I went over to the car and siphoned gas into a gallon can and carried it to the shack. I dragged the two killers inside to rest beside Fat Dog. After lifting their wallets, I doused the three bodies with gasoline and dropped a match on them. As they started to burn, I thought what a fitting end it was for Fat Dog.

By the time I got back to my car and pulled out, the shack was engulfed in flames. I headed straight for the toll road. Before I got there, I realized I was weeping for the first time since my early childhood discovery that tears did no good. Now they were streaming down my face and I was trembling like a child. For the third time in one day, I banged my car across the concrete divider. This time I was going south, toward Ensenada and an all-night liquor store.

9

I don’t know how I made it into Ensenada or even why I fled south, deeper into a foreign country. When a body cries “alcohol,” logic does not apply. Driving the winding coast road, I passed two tollbooths and headed south. I shielded my dirt- and tearstained face from the toll takers, handing them a dollar bill and zooming past with what I hoped passed for a friendly wave. My body was functioning—the ritual of driving, of keeping all senses alert to the needs of the road, kept me from breaking down into total hysteria—but my mind wasn’t. Fear, and the inchoate realization that my life had exploded into irreparable fragments, kept my head slamming painfully, causing the windshield and highway to blur in front of me.

After a while, my panic became almost familiar, and the edge of it softened. I knew there was a panacea that would put everything in perspective: booze. And the only thing that mattered now was getting it.

Ensenada opened up below me in a scatter of light. Hugging the outside lane and concentrating on driving slowly, I saw the lights of ships illuminating the harbor. On the outskirts of town I found a road that led down to the beach. After about a mile I found what I was looking for: a beachside men’s room. I sat on the toilet and let go of my bowels and bladder. Then I took deep breaths for one minute, gauging the time by the second hand of my watch. I washed my crusty face, first with warm water, then cool, and smeared some abrasive powdered soap under my arms in an attempt to eradicate the smell of fear. I combed my hair and started to feel a little bit better; my survival instincts were still intact. My tremors were all internal now, so I felt ready to face civilization.

I drove into town. Ensenada was a muted version of T.J., less lowlife, quieter, and featuring a sea breeze. The night was perfectly clear, and as I parked in front of the first liquor store I came to I glanced north, expecting to see the dusty brown Mexican Hills afire with my handiwork, but there was nothing.

The liquor store proprietor didn’t give me a second glance when I purchased two fifths of Scotch, a bag of ice, and a quart of ginger ale. Now all I needed was a safe house, a place to hole up and drink. The sleazy downtown hotels would provide protective coloration for an outsized gringo, but they were too noisy, too close to the arena of tourism. So I drove south, feeling secure with my booze on the seat beside me.

On the south border of Ensenada, nestled on the edge of a housing development, I found my safe harbor: a twostory white stucco rooming house. The big sign out front said “cuartos”—rooms. I left my shotgun in the trunk and collected my suitcase and brown paper bag of booze. I rang the bell on the door lettered “managerio,” and inquired in broken Spanish after a room for a week. The woman led me down the musty hallway to an open room with a bed, table, two chairs, a wash basin, and a huge lightbulb dangling on a cord from the ceiling. “Si,” I told her. “Quantos?”

She replied “Fifteen dollar.” I turned my back to her, not wanting her to see the size of my roll, then handed her the money. She reached into her housecoat and gave me a key. Then she looked me up and down sagely and turned and walked away.

I locked the door behind me and checked out my image in the cracked mirror above the basin. I looked gaunt and scared. I placed the two fifths of Scotch on the table and stared at them. They didn’t go away, so I stared some more. I dumped my bag of ice in the sink, making sure the plug was securely in the drain. I put three ice cubes in one of the paper cups the previous tenant had kindly left behind. My mind was raging, but I felt perfectly calm. For one split second clarity hit and I knew what the consequences would be if I drank, but I shunted them aside. Pouring the cup full of Scotch, I drank it in one greedy gulp.

And I knew. The chickens had come back to roost. I had been saved again. I let the booze shake and warm my body. I sat down in one of the stiff wooden chairs, fondling my paper cup. My mind was just inches away from clicking into place, rushing forth with epigrams, pronouncements, and profundity.

I picked up the two wallets I had taken from the men I killed and placed them on a high shelf in the closet. *The men I killed.* That caused me to shake, so I had another drink. This time relief was instantaneous, my mind running with sentimental meanderings, fragments of my relationship with Walter and odd bits and pieces of symphonies and concertos. In stereo. I had been away a long time, and mother booze was being generous, throwing me a mellifluous parade as a welcome home present. I was with Beethoven at the first performance of the *Eroica*, with Bruckner as he sought God in the Tyrolean Alps, with Liszt as he seduced the most beautiful women of his day.

I went to the mirror and checked myself out: I looked normal again, even handsome. My normally ruddy face looked a little more florid than usual, but I attributed that to too much sun. I studied the planes and angles of my face, and decided that Fritz Brown, thirty-three-year-old ex-L.AP.D. bimbo and repo king of the Greater L.A. area, would do. That caused me to smile and I amended my opinion slightly: my teeth were too small, and my eyes should be blue. Blue eyes were in. Women dug them. Even ghetto blacks were sporting blue contact lenses and getting laid as a result.

I looked around for a phone. Of course there wasn't one. I felt like calling Walter and telling him everything was okay. I thought of an old girlfriend named Charlotte who had been in love with the Chopin "Heroic Polonaise." She always wanted to listen to it before we went to bed. I always advanced the opinion, derived from Walter, that Chopin was a cornball and a sentimentalist. Now the "Polonaise" was banging through my brain like the repeated drone of an air raid siren.

My mind swung from Charlotte to women in general and from there to Jane. She was real, she was now. When I couldn't shake the image of our night together, I started to panic. I grabbed the bottle and drank until I passed out.

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I awoke the next morning around nine without the shakes, not knowing where I was. When I saw the empty fifth of Scotch on the table, my memory kicked in and it all came back. I held my breath against a sudden burst of panic. It never arrived. That gave me heart. I was utterly dehydrated, so I dug the remnants of the bag of ice out of the sink and wolfed them down, sending chills throughout my body. As if in answer, a lightweight case of the shakes started, but I held them at bay while I shaved and walked down the hall for a quick shower. The hallway was dirty and the shower room even dirtier. The hall rug was threadbare and no thicker than a tortilla. The shower emitted a sluggish stream of brownish water and I had to tiptoe to avoid cutting my feet on the stucco chips that covered the floor.

Back in my room I counted the money in my bulging billfold—$3,123. As soon as I realized I had time and money on my hands, the shakes started again. It got bad fast this time. My ten months of sober living had not inured me to the payment that booze demanded. The case went through my mind. It was waiting for me, but for now it was out of my control. There was an easy remedy for the shakes: drink. So I did, this time sipping the Scotch slowly from the paper cup, mixed half and half with the lukewarm ginger ale.

I decided that if I could limit my plans to this single day, today, Monday, I would be all right. I could lie low for a few days, drink, then taper off and detox. Then back to L.A. But after a few drinks, my mind became mired in a welter of plans and conspiracies, always reaching toward the ultimate: the case and Jane. It was too much. I took a large slug, straight from the bottle, locked up the room and went outside. The "managerio" gave me a slight nod and a suspicious look as I walked down the hall.

At 10:45 a.m., it was already reaching one hundred degrees. There was a sea breeze that did its best to help, but failed. I decided to leave the car and walk into town—a 502 in a foreign country was all I needed. I walked through the streets of the housing development, a blatant rip-off of American values that nonetheless carried the essence of the Mexican ethos: women and toddlers sunning themselves on the steps of the plain one-story stucco dwellings, dogs cavorting happily and chickens squawking in their low, fenced enclosures. I waved to several groups of children and they waved back. I was never a child. I came out of my mother's womb full-grown, clutching a biography of Beethoven and an empty glass. My first words were "Where's the booze?"

I walked down to the road that paralleled the ocean. There were fewer turistas out now. Most of the people I saw driving were Mexicans with Baja license plates. The Coast Highway took me north into Ensenada proper, past scores of signs advertising fishing, lobster dinners, and Jai alai. I passed an impressive monument similar to the American one at Mount Rushmore, this one heralding three great Mexican patriots, their heads in striking bas relief.

I was drenched with sweat now, the alcohol spreading out through my pores. I found a bar that looked like a good place to replenish my liquid content and stepped inside, but the loud Mexican disco music that blared from the jukebox drove me straight back out the door. I tried a few other dives, but the "music" was the same. Finally, I found a quiet bar on a side street. I *needed* a drink now, and as I sat down at the bar I arranged a stack of one-dollar bills in front of me. The bartender understood and when I said "Scotch" he brought it to me wordlessly, taking a single dollar bill as payment.

I was starting to feel nervous: Armando, who I was certain had nothing to do with Fat Dog's murder, might discover the destruction of his property and finger me to the cops. The fire I started might have spread. I was at a disadvantage not knowing Spanish—I could have checked the newspapers for mention of it. The tire marks I had left at the scene could be traced to my Camaro. My passage through the tollbooths might have been noted. Fear breeds fear, and booze quells fear, temporarily.

I drank a toast to fear, draining my glass. The bar Scotch was good, so I set out on a regular procession of toasts: to Herbert Von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic, to Vladimir Horowitz, to Richard Wagner, and to the guy who designed the Hollywood Bowl. Since each of these toasts was a solid two ounces of juice, my fears were soon pretty well under wraps and I started feeling good, humming along with my fantasies again. I wasn't hungry, but I forced myself to eat a greasy plate of eggs and sausage that the barman's wife served me with a fetching smile.

After I had had about six drinks, a rational train of thought began to emerge, along with a syllogism: I am in a bad way. I am in a bad way because there are big pieces missing in the puzzle I am trying to solve. There are big pieces in the puzzle I am trying to solve because my mind is closed to new concepts in general, and new concepts in music in specific. Wino Walter Curran, my best friend, had been warning me for years of the danger of o.d.'ing on German Romanticism. Since music frees the mind, new music would free my old mind to fit together the big pieces in the puzzle I was trying to solve.

Brilliant. Booze does it again. It was time to hunt down some new music to play Greek chorus to the new mind of Fritz Brown. Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, Haydn, et al. had had their day, and would have it again, in a better time, a time of reminiscence, shared with Jane. Now it was time for Bartok, Stravinsky, Debussy, and Ravel—all those dissonant guys Walter had been fruitlessly urging on me for so long—to come to my aid.

I left a three-dollar tip on the bar and walked outside. The afternoon sun hit like a blow from a sledgehammer. I adjusted my cave dweller mentality to fit the needs of a Mexican seaside town, and went searching for music to think by. It seemed like an insurmountable task at first, given the cultural ambience of the city I was digging through, but soon I warmed to the job. The booze seemed to pop out of every cell of my body, yet I stayed pleasantly, floatingly high.

Ciudad D'Juarez, the main drag of Ensenada, was a miniature version of L.A.'s 2nd and Broadway: giant outlet stores featuring cheap clothing, cheap radios, cheap appliances, and an incredible selection of cheap watches. I tore through the record bins, past piles of Mexi-Rock, Mexi-Disco, Mexi-Folk, Punk Rock in English, and scores of old albums by such washed-up superstars as Perry Como, Tony Bennett and Nat "King" Cole. At my third outlet store, I hit my first jackpot—a battered copy of "The Planets" by Gustav Holst. Sir Adrian Boult conducting the BBC Philharmonic. It was a collector's item; it said so right there on the album cover. It set me back thirty-five cents. I inquired with the English-speaking salesgirl about record shops and she gave me detailed instructions to another one four blocks away. She repeated herself several times, no doubt on the valid assumption that drunks are bad listeners.

I really did smell like a still. I would have to clean up when I got back to my room with my booty. I found the record store. It was the most profound advertisement I had ever seen toward advancing the concept of the "ugly American." Every wall was festooned with bigger-than-life-size posters of current American rock and pop stars. The women looked vapid and challenging at the same time. They seemed to be challenging their male counterparts—equally vapid teenagers with tight pants, blow-dried hair, and pouts that looked like an incipient offer of a head job to an electronic thrill-out featuring seven amplifiers, eight biofeedback machines, thirty-seven dildos, cocaine, quaaludes, angel dust, and that porno guy with the fourteen-inch dick.

A hard rock record was playing at peak decibel. There was a strobe light flashing at two in the afternoon. I was behind the times; I thought strobe lights were out. A pretty, buxom Mexican girl wearing a T-shirt with Mick Jagger sticking his tongue out on it approached me like a long lost music lover. I couldn't think of anything to say, so I turned around and walked back out the door, not looking back. It was too much, too soon.

I persisted in my quest and was rewarded down the street: "La Mer" and "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun" by Debussy—Szell and the Cleveland. Also the "Petrouchka Suite" by Stravinsky—Ozawa and the Boston Symphony—and the grand prize: a boxed set of the Bartok "String Quartets" by the Guarneri Quartet. These cost me a fast three scoots. The Stravinsky was badly scratched, but the other records were in passable condition.

It was enough to begin my journey, but I wasn't satisfied. I hit a few more bargain bazaars and came up with "Kostelanetz Plays Gershwin," a disc of dubious merit. The only thing now missing was a stereo. I walked back to the first jumbo outlet store and for $149.63 bought a Panasonic "Zoom" Stereo System—two dinky three-inch speakers, a turntable with an automatic changer and a cheapshit, built-in amplifier. It hardly compared with my State-of-the-Arts System back in L.A., but it would be enough to rock my tiny fleabag room.

I hailed a taxi and loaded my merchandise in the back seat. On the way out of town I had the cabbie stop at a liquor store where I loaded up on goodies: three half gallons of Scotch, two six-packs of ginger ale, three bags of ice and a variety of canned meats and processed cheese food. I was storing up for what might be a long process of evolution.

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My musical metamorphosis didn't happen. I listened and I drank for two solid days, fighting off anger, fear, and paranoia. I couldn't think of the case. When I tried to, my mind shut off and I reached for a drink or turned up the volume on the stereo in fatuous hope of speeding up my thought processes. The music didn't help at all. I didn't like it. It was great music that expressed profound thoughts, but it just plain didn't send me. I found the moderns and impressionists too abstract and dissonant. There was none of the heroism of Beethoven or the lyrical passion of Brahms. The Bartok "Quartets" made me think of Jane, so I couldn't listen to them at all.

I was getting a bad play from the manager, too: on the first day of my quest I ventured down the hall a half dozen times to urinate, getting a contemptuous look each time. Somehow I got the feeling that she knew my history and regarded me as the precursor to bad times. So I didn't go out of my room again, electing instead to piss in the sink.

After two days I had had enough. I had tried eating the canned meat, but threw up immediately. Twice I had awakened dehydrated to the bone and had begun sobbing. I was afraid of the d.t.'s; they seemed imminent now. The room was stifling hot, even at night. On the third night I decided to go for a walk. I shaved and went down the hall and showered off the booze and sweat stink, this time avoiding the manager. The idea of movement and the performing of old rituals heartened me a little. Back in my room I filled a pint ginger ale bottle with Scotch and put on the last of my clean clothes.

I went out to the parking lot and checked my car. It was dusty, but unharmed; the shotgun and tape deck were still in the trunk. I patted them, for luck, and left them there. I got a box of bullets out of the glove compartment and loaded my .38, slipping a dozen extra into my pocket. I walked toward the beach, feeling less tired as the ocean breeze embraced me. After half a mile or so I reached the stone steps that led down to the water. Signs proclaimed "Estero Beach." I walked south, away from Ensenada; there would be less chance of running into people in that direction. Energy began to course through me, as I traversed the edge of the tide, the wet sand nestling my footsteps and propelling me forward.

I hadn't had a drink in over four hours, so technically I was sober. The booze that had permeated and putrefied my system seemed to be lying in abeyance, waiting for me to make the first move. I secured my bottle in a mantle of sand, got down and cranked off twenty pushups. It wasn't too bard; the slight stiffness as I got to my feet felt good. Maybe it wasn't too bad, I thought. Maybe you can go back to L.A. as if none of this ever happened. Maybe it was time to get sober and stay sober.

The sound of muffled voices and the strumming of a guitar interrupted my thoughts. I was walking toward people, a late-night seaside gathering. As I crossed a rise in the sand, I saw a fire some hundred yards away and smelled roasting meat. The voices became louder and I could discern that the people were speaking in English. They were directly in my path, so I walked right up to them, feeling, strangely, only the slightest twinge of paranoia which I shrugged off—I was armed and they probably weren't. The aroma of the roasting meat was getting to me, as was, also strangely, the need to be with people. I reached into my chest and threw a big, booming "Hi!" at the people sitting in the sand—the first word I had spoken in days.

"Friend or foe?" a male voice returned.

"Friend," I said.

"Pull up a seat, friend," the voice answered.

I sat down in the sand. There were eight people—five men and three women. They were young—in their twenties, and seemed to be the counterculture type at first glance. They were sitting on blankets and sleeping bags, knapsacks and backpacks piled in a heap behind them. The slightest trace of marijuana hung in the air.

I opened with what seemed like a warm remark: “You’re the first Americans I’ve seen since I’ve been down here. That’s a gas. My Spanish is lousy.”

“National origin doesn’t mean shit,” a girl said coldly. “National origin is bourgeois pride. True friendship supersedes all that petty jive. True…”

“He doesn’t mean racism,” a bearded man interrupted. “He’s just lonely. Right, man?”

“You could say that,” I said. “I’ve been down here for a while and I don’t know anybody.”

“What’s your name, man?” he asked.

“Fritz,” I said. “What’s yours?”

“I’m Brother Lee. Going around to your left we have Brother Mark, Brother Randy, Sister Julie, Sister Carol, Brother Kevin, Sister Kallie, and Brother Bob. Sister Vicky is doing the cooking tonight.” He pointed to a woman tending the fire a few yards away. I squinted to make her out. She was basting a carcass on a spit. I couldn’t place the aroma.

“Are you people a commune?” I asked.

There was general laughter. One of the girls, I think it was Sister Julie, answered me. “Commune is a tired concept, Brother Fritz. We’re together because we love each other and we care about the same things.”

I forced a smile. “You band together to survive, camping out here on the beach, right? You share your food, your shelter, and your possessions, right?” Most of the group was nodding, and as I got accustomed to the orange light from the cooking fire, I could see that they were smiling. “Doesn’t it get cold in the wintertime? What do you do then?”

“Then we move indoors man, what do you think?” This was from Brother Bob. He looked tougher than the rest, a white-trash, low-rider type. Maybe an ex-con. He was easily as big as I.

“Back off there, Brother Bob,” I said. “I’m on your side and just making friendly overtures.”

“You ask a lot of questions, man, and you look like the heat.”

“I’m just curious, that’s all. I’m a big city hick, tied down to a dull job that I have to go back to soon. You people have got a lot of freedom. I envy you.” It was the right thing to say, a superb icebreaker. I proffered my ginger ale bottle. “Here,” I said, “let’s drink to friendship. It’s good Scotch.”

I took a long drink and passed it to Brother Mark, who passed it on to Brother Randy and the others. When it came back to me again it was almost empty. I didn’t care. I had already decided this would be my last night of drinking. I ventured another question. “What’s that you’re cooking? I can’t place the smell.”

This got a big laugh all around. “It’s a dog, Brother Fritz!” Sister Kallie called gleefully, “Come look.”

I couldn’t believe it. These gentle, if somewhat strident young souls looked like dog lovers, not dog eaters. I got up and walked the few yards to the fire. Sister Kallie followed me, presumably to dig the shocked look on the big square’s face. When I checked out the barbecue close up, I started to laugh. I have never laughed as hard, before or since. The shape on the spit was unmistakably canine: a medium-sized, meaty tailwagger with gaping jaws, plucked out eyes and an amputated tail. He smelled delicious. I fell in the sand, convulsed with spasms of mad laughter.

Sister Kallie was jumping up and down, large breasts shaking beneath her peasant blouse, squealing: “He digs it! He digs it! He loves it!”

Finally I got to my feet, wiping tears from my eyes. Two of the men went to work carving up the beast as the rest of us looked on. I stroked the dog’s head, petting it tenderly, as though it were still the loyal family pet. This caused another outbreak of laughter. Two cases of beer were dragged back from the surf in a net and we popped cans and dug into our feast.

I was ravenous. All eyes were on me as I poised my fork above a jumbo slice of dog meat. Finally, casting all trepidation and social conditioning aside, I dug in. It was salty, smoky and gamey, much like a venison steak I had once eaten. I choked on it a little at first, but gradually forced it down, followed by a huge gulp of beer. This brought a rousing cheer from my new found friends. After that it was easy and I scarfed the rest of my plate greedily. I forewent the bottle of soy sauce that was being passed around: I was a purist.

The city-bred protein entered my system, my first real food in several days, and a sublime elation came over me. It’s going to be all right, I thought. This feeling was quickly engulfed by a wave of sweaty lust—directed at Sister Kallie and her big chi-chi’s. Maybe dog meat was an aphrodisiac.

As I lay sated, staring up at the starry Mexican night, the girls cleaned up and Brother Bob expertly rolled joints.

It was party time. Soon the entire group was sitting around the fire, while I remained a few yards away, staring heavenward, wanting to be coaxed. I was. Sister Julie called to me. “Come on, Fritz, join us. It’s sharing time.” So I joined them.

I didn’t want to destroy the moment, but there was a question I had to ask. “Where the hell did you get that delicious dog?” I said. “I want to thank his master.”

Brother Lee answered me, lighting a joint and passing it. “We get our meat from two sources. There’s a guy who runs a bait store down by the pier.

He traps dogs and sells them to his cousin, who has a taco stand in T.J. The cheapest, juiciest, meatiest tacos in Baja. All perro meat. We trade him a bag of weed for two juicy hounds. Sometimes we find dead dogs south of here off a bend in the Coast Road. Cars squash them. Wham. Lots of times we have to ignore them, though. Their ribs get all smashed up and embedded in their skin. Too dangerous to eat."

"I toast all of you," I said. "Truly you are the survivors of both capitalism and the rapacious, fanatic counterculture it spawned. When I said earlier that I envied you your freedom, I was bullshitting. I thought you were just another cadre of dumb hippies. But I was wrong to condescend. I apologize. In a small way, you have life by the ass and I salute you." They didn't quite know how to react. The joint was passed to me and I inhaled deeply. I was expecting more applause or laughter. Instead, through the blazing fire I got warm smiles and puzzled looks.

"What do you do back in L.A., man?" Brother Randy asked.

I gave it some thought. Another joint came my way and I hit again. This time even deeper. It was good shit. I hadn't been blown away on weed since my Hollywood Vice days, but I was getting there now; drifting into a shadow world of fantasy. I considered Brother Randy's question for a second, then answered: "I do my best to survive. Most of the time it's easy, but lately it's been tough. Mostly I repossess cars. I hope you people dig property rights enough to realize that repo men are necessary. We keep the credit racket in line, and keep America from going insane and bringing back the days of debtor's prison. People like you, the so-called counterculture, can exist only in places where capitalism is strong. I used to be a cop, but I gave it up. I saw too much stuff I couldn't tolerate."

I stopped and took a blow off the pipe that was handed to me, became full-out zonked and surveyed my rapt audience. The women looked very beautiful. When I returned to my story, I took off on a rhapsody of poetic lies: "The corruption, the racism, the violence, I couldn't handle it. Dealing with so many lost people, most of whom were wearing blue uniforms, the young people trying to live differently, more honestly than their parents, and how the cops reviled them for their lifestyle. The blacks in the ghettos, the winos, the homeless derelicts of Skid Row. There was a gentle side to me I couldn't express, so in the end I quit. What I really wanted to do was learn to play the violin. But I didn't have the patience or the drive to pursue it." It had started out to be rhapsodic bullshit, but on finishing I felt that the whole fabric of lies contained some intrinsic truth that I couldn't put my finger on. I was floating so high on weed and dog meat that everything seemed within my reach, but this eluded me.

"So you came to Baja looking for something, right, Fritz?" This was from

Sister Carol.

I laughed. “You could say that.”

“Do you think you’ll find it?”

“I’m not sure.”

“How old are you?” my favorite, Sister Kallie, asked. Warm antennas or tendrils seemed to drift toward me from her direction. Her head seemed to be enclosed in a halo.

“Thirty-three.”

“That’s not too old to change your life,” she said. “You’ve been through some heavy shit. Pain causes growth. You could still be a great violin player. I learned the guitar when I was twenty-four.”

“Thanks. Maybe you’re right.”

The party started to break up. Everyone except the sullen Brother Bob wished me good night and invited me to return any evening to enjoy their hospitality. I told them I would take them up on it, only next time I would bring steaks and beer. They then wandered off, grabbing their bedrolls and heading for cozy sand drifts. Except for Kallie. She stayed behind, sitting cross-legged across from me by the remnants of the fire.

“Are you the odd woman out, Kallie?” I asked.

“Not really. Mark and I are together. I just felt like staying behind and rapping for a while.”

“Thanks. I wasn’t quite ready to walk back to my room yet.”

“You know, I didn’t believe most of what you told us. I believe you were a cop, all right. You look like one. But the rest of it was a con job, right? I mean about being sickened by the violence and racism and all that. Right?”

“I guess so.”

“Why did you lie?”

“I’m not sure. I wanted you people to like me and I wanted to move you on a level you could appreciate, but I didn’t want to give up too much of myself in the process, I guess.”

“You’re in trouble, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Bad trouble?”

I nodded.

“I knew it. It’s your eyes. They’re scary. They’re not normal, whatever that is.”

“You’re not afraid of me, are you?”

“No. You’re scared enough for the both of us. I’ve got good antenna. I can tell when someone’s hurting. You’re hurting bad.”

“I’ll be all right, I think. There are some things I have to do down here, and a big mess waiting for me back in L.A. I’ve been drinking, but that’s over, so I should be okay. I appreciate your concern, Kallie. You’re a lovely young woman.”

“Do you have a girlfriend?”

“I hope so. I got involved with a woman in L.A. just before I left, but I’m not sure what will happen when I return.”

“I was just wondering.”

“I’ve got some business to attend to that should keep me busy down here another few days. I’d like to see you again.”

“I don’t think that’s possible. I want to give you something, but I don’t want to get involved.”

“I guess I was being forward. I’m sorry. I’m very stoned. It’s a strange sensation.”

“Don’t be sorry, Fritz. I like you. I’ve got a thing for men who are hurting. It’s kind of sick, I guess. If you want, you could stay with me tonight.”

“I’d like that.”

“Please don’t misunderstand me. I don’t want to get it on. I’m not promiscuous. I’ve got an aura. I can impart good feelings to people in trouble without sex. I’m a love carrier. I can help you. If you could see your own face, then you’d know how bad your vibes are.”

“I’ll do anything you like, sweetheart.”

Kallie led me to a high sand drift away from the other brothers and sisters. We laid out a large double sleeping bag and got in with our clothes on. We held hands and cracked jokes for about an hour. After a while exhaustion caught up with me and I started to drift off. Kallie placed my head on her breasts and gently ran her fingers through my hair until I fell asleep. I awoke in that same position hours later, as dawn broke across the water. Kallie had bared her breasts during the night and they were flushed and sweaty from the weight of my head. As I came awake, she did too. I looked at her expectantly, hoping her nakedness meant that we could now make love, but Kallie shook her head. We stood up and embraced.

“Thank you,” I said.

Kallie nodded and squeezed my hand. “Don’t come back, Fritz. I know you. You’ll do something to blow it here. I’ll remember you in my meditations. Count on that.” It was very final. I kissed her on the cheek and walked back to my life.

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My room looked different when I returned to it. The squalor of peeling paint, the musty smell and the rusty furnishings caused me a long moment of self-revulsion. But that passed. The past was dead and there was a future to contend with. I started by pouring the remains of my Scotch down the sink. Then I carted my records up the fire escape to the roof of the building and sailed them off in the direction of the housing development. Most of them died abruptly, but some managed to land on the roofs and gravel front yards of the impoverished dwellings. It made me feel good, like a god sending culture to the culturally deprived.

Back in my room I hemmed and hawed, worried and fretted. It was time to shit or get off the pot. I opened the closet and reached up to the high shelf for the wallets of the two men I killed.

The first wallet belonged to one Reyes Sandoval. It contained a car registration, a baptism certificate dated 1941, scores of Catholic blessing cards, some Mexican currency, and a valid Baja California driver's license, sans photograph. He was born in Juarez October 1, 1940, making him thirty-nine at the time of his death. His height and weight were in kilos and meters, from which I figured him to be medium-sized. Neither man had weighed much as I dragged them into the hideous death shack. The important thing was his address, which was right here in Ensenada: 1179 Felicia Terraco. There was a photograph of a nice-looking, pleasantly overweight woman holding two cuddly children, a boy and a girl. Reyes Sandoval, Mexican gunsel, was a family man.

There was nothing else of any interest in the billfold—no notations or papers of any kind. I kept the driver's license and ripped the rest of the papers into tiny pieces and placed them in an ashtray.

The second wallet, a gaudy machine-tooled Tijuana souvenir job, yielded more: Henry Cruz, forty-two, was American born and possessed a California driver's license, issued to an address in Bell Gardens, a white-trash suburb of L.A. From the mug-shot-like photograph and my vague recollection of that horrible night, Cruz was the man who came into the shack after me, the one I killed at close range. There was forty dollars in American money in the billfold along with a piece of paper with a telephone number. I wrote it down and, except for his California license, burned the remains of both wallets, including the Mexican money. I took the ashtray full of charred paper down the hallway to the bathroom, dumped it into the toilet and flushed. I locked the room, got into my car, and headed for 1179 Felicia Terraco.

A friendly English-speaking news vendor in downtown Ensenada gave me directions, pointing north to a large scrub-covered hillside dotted with small houses. I drove up, taking a dirt trail that ran out of Ensenada proper straight through a large bean field. My trusty Camaro strained in low up steep, narrow streets lined with dwellings that ranged from "Tobacco Road" sharecropper shacks to proudly tended stucco four-flats with rock gardens. The street signs were hard to follow and inexplicably the numbers ran out of sequence. After backtracking repeatedly I found 1179, a cube-like, off-white hut of aluminum siding—the kind material trailers are made of. It was small, but looked comfortable. I could see air-conditioning units attached to the side windows, denoting the Sandovals as members of the Ensenada middle class. All I could do was wait.

I parked against a wooden railing that separated the road from the edge of the bluff. The view was spectacular: Ensenada to my left and directly below; to my right the crystal blue Pacific laced with darker seaweed beds and dotted with small boats.

After an hour or so I was rewarded. The Sandoval widow came out of the house, alone. She had lost weight since the picture in Sandoval's wallet had been taken and she looked troubled. She walked three houses down and got into an old Chevy and drove away, toward Ensenada. I let her go. What I wanted was probably in the house, whatever it was. I decided not to risk a daytime B&E. Too many prying eyes about. Since I would have to wait until nightfall, I drove down into Ensenada for a lobster dinner.

After the meal, I got a sudden urge to call Jane and tell her I was all right; I had been gone six days now. But I decided not to risk it. She would ask too many questions that as yet I couldn't answer. There was another call to be made, though. I dug out the number I had copied from the effects of Henry Cruz. He was an L.A. home boy, so Los Angeles was the obvious place to dial.

I found a bank of enclosed phone booths in a dark passageway at the back of the restaurant and shoved a handful of Mexican coins into the slot, first to reach the L.A. operator and then to get through to my number. No answer. After thirty rings the operator refunded my money, flooding the coin box like a Vegas payoff. I dialed again. This time the phone was answered on the third ring. A friendly singsong voice called out, "Hillcrest Country Club. May I help you?"

I almost died right there. Cruz. Ralston. Fat Dog. Kupferman. Hillcrest. The woman was cooing into the mouthpiece, her voice melding into my colossal adrenalin rush. "May I help you? This is Hillcrest. May I help you?" I hung up. There was nothing to say.

Henry Cruz, one of Fat Dog's killers, had been calling someone—undoubtedly Richard Ralston—at Hillcrest. Fat Dog was blackmailing Ralston and had been knocked off for his perfidy. On impulse I called Hillcrest back. The same operator answered. "Richard Ralston, please," I said.

"I'm sorry, sir," the voice returned, "the first tee is closed for the day. Did you wish a starting time for mixed foursomes tomorrow?…I…" She wanted to continue her singsong helpfulness, but I cut her off:

"Is Ralston the starter there? The caddy master?"

"Yes, sir, he is. If you'll…"

"Thank you," I said, and hung up.

I paid my check and cruised the Ensenada streets, killing time before dark. The seaside town was coming alive with the setting sun—servicemen in civvies beginning an evening of barhopping, Mexican Nationals out for a stroll en familia, the curio shops jammed. As the sun dropped below the ocean horizon, I headed toward the high bluff north of town. This time it didn't take me long to find the place. I parked in the same spot and walked across the dirt road to the darkened house.

I had good cover; the night was dark and Mexi-rock was blasting from the adjoining houses. I knocked on the front door and then the back, getting no response. Looking both ways for signs of trouble, I picked the back door lock with a straight pin, sliding the bolt back with a jammed-in credit card. I entered into a room that was part service porch, part playroom. A beat-up washing machine and dryer competed for space with a huge welter of dolls and broken model airplanes.

Keeping my flashlight low to avoid creating glare, I walked into the living room. I had to laugh. It was crammed with T.V. sets and cheap stereo consoles, at least two dozen of them, covering every bit of floor space. It was safe to assume the late Reyes Sandoval was a burglar and/or a fence. I flashed my light into corners. Nothing. No dressers, no tables, no shelves.

To the right of the living room was a kiddie-room-sewing-room combo. More broken toys and an elaborate loom of the kind that turns out Mexican souvenir blankets. On the floor were a dozen Singer Sewing Machines. Reyes was an inept killer, but a good thief. I checked the closet, tearing through racks of gaudy dresses and men's suits. Nothing. Nothing in the pockets except cleaning tags.

I saved the bedroom at the end of the narrow hall for last. It slept the whole family: there was a set of children's bunk beds against the wall and a jumbo canopied bed in the middle of the room. I closed the door and risked turning on the light. A score of cheap oil paintings of Jesus stared down at me from every wall. The artists had all portrayed Him as a Mexican. Above the bed a different, more somber holy man gave me the eye. I couldn't place him. He was a tough-looking Biblical Chicano with a shepherd's staff. Maybe he was the patron saint of lowlifers.

There were three sets of dresser drawers against one wall and a large walk-in closet. I dug into the dressers first and hit pay dirt. Pay stubs, a big pile of them, made out to Reyes Juan Sandoval and bearing the imprimatur of the Baja Nacional Cannerio de Pescado. Mrs. Galino's high school Spanish class finally did me some good: Reyes was a recent employee of the Baja Fish Cannery. I put one pay stub into my pocket. The job designation seemed to be “laborero,” but the numerical computations were beyond my comprehension. The walk-in closet contained fishing gear: rods, poles, bait, and tackle boxes.

I was getting nervous and sweating in the sealed-up house, so I turned off the light and gave the kitchen a quick going-over—boxes of canned tuna fish, a refrigerator packed with leftovers, and a dirty sink. But I had a lead. I went out the way I came in, closing the door gently.

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I consumed time on Sunday with swimming and aimless sightseeing. I located the fish cannery, a smelly factory on a low, flat wharf. I got up at four on Monday morning and drove there dressed for work.

It was lucky that I got there early. Some hippie types and destitute Mexican Nationals were milling outside the gate when I arrived, passing a bottle of Gallo White Port. From them I learned that there was a fleet of tuna boats coming in today and that a large number of swampers would be needed to unload them at eighteen dollars American or x number of pesos. I decided it was worth a try.

The crowd of work-hungry men swelled to about forty. At dawn a group of officious-looking Mexicans came down and began handing out “work cards” which we were exhorted to keep in our pockets, lest we lose them and forfeit our day’s pay. Next we were formed into work crews of ten men each, and sent down to the dock to await the arrival of the tuna fleet. I was hoping they would never show, allowing me plenty of time to gently question my coworkers about Reyes Sandoval. But it was not to be—after a half hour’s wait the ocean was churning and bubbling with scores of small fishing craft heading straight toward us.

It was the hardest day’s work of my life. We formed a line at dockside and huge oilcloth bundles of smelly, greasy fish were passed to us from the ships. We passed them on up the line where pickup trucks waited to take them to the processing area. Soon I was drenched in sweat and my brand-new work clothes were covered with fish oil. When one boat was unloaded, we took a two- or three-minute break while another one moored to the dock. There was little time for conversation. At eleven o’clock we took forty-five minutes for lunch. A vendor came by and dispensed chorizo, tacos, and burritos to the hungry slaves.

During our break I broached the subject of Reyes Sandoval to three gringos and three Chicanos. They didn’t know who the hell I was talking about and couldn’t have cared less. We resumed work and I vowed never to touch another tuna sandwich, ever again.

At long last the workday ended. I was beyond tired, the resident of a new realm of exhaustion. As the last tuna boat headed back to sea a beaming Mexican came down to the dock and distributed our pay envelopes.

As we filed out toward the gate in small talkative groups, I saw her. I knew I knew her, a severe, fiercely sexual woman in her mid-twenties with a red natural. A gringa.

I followed her. She was walking ahead of a crowd of women dressed in smocks—assembly line workers in the cannery, probably—but she was no factory peon. She walked ahead, aloof and proud, smartly dressed in a tailored pantsuit. I wondered what she would look like nude, then I remembered—she was the girl performing in the porno photos I had found in Fat Dog's arson shack! She was older now—a mature woman with the mien and sexual charisma of the very worldly. I remembered that she was the only girl in the pictures not performing with animals. It was too good, too *right* to pass up.

Keeping a safe distance behind, I followed her out the gate and down the broad boulevard that led into Ensenada. After a block she got into an old Mercedes. I dashed for my car, got in and jammed a U-turn up to the first parking space available behind her. Then I waited. She was still sitting at the wheel of her car, as if deciding on a course of action. Finally she pulled out, turning left into the middle of the Ensenada shopping district. I was right behind her. She turned left again on Ciudad D'Juarez and drove north, out of the city. Soon we were heading across the scrubland that fronted the bluff where the Sandoval family lived.

Keeping a car between us, I followed the old Mercedes up the bluff and around a mile or so of winding roads to Felicia Terraco. I wasn't surprised. Walter used to tell me that *everything* in life was connected. I didn't believe him. Now I did. It was eerie, almost like proof of the existence of God.

When she rounded the final turn before the Sandoval casa, I stayed behind. I waited five minutes, then left the car and walked around the corner. Sure enough, Red's Mercedes was pulled up in the Sandoval driveway. She had to return my way; Felicia Terraco dead-ended a quarter mile in the opposite direction. I waited nervously, discarding my fish-permeated shirt and tilting back the driver's seat so I could prop my feet on the dashboard.

Red skidded around the corner a few minutes later, narrowly missing the divider. I caught a glimpse of her fear-flushed face. She looked anguished and disoriented. I counted to ten and began pursuit. We were back in Ensenada in half the time it took us to make the trip up. Red Top was driving fast and erratically, sending up clouds of dust that kept me hidden behind her as she tore through the sandy area outside of town. I was getting frightened for her; she was distraught, self-destructive, and in imminent danger of totaling her car.

When she hit the busy Ensenada streets she cleaned up her act, slowing down and driving with restraint through town to a quiet residential block on its east side. This was a side of Ensenada I hadn't seen: tree-lined streets and up-to-date condo-convenience apartments that reminded me of L.A.'s better suburbs. She pulled up to the curb in front of an elegant, pseudo-French chateau apartment house, and I pulled up directly behind her. I was throwing caution to the winds, because there was no possible ploy I could use in confronting her. It would have to be direct, and that scared me. This was not my country.

She had not yet noticed me, I was sure of that. She was in some nether world of fear and self-obsession, staring up at the building as if debating the risk of entering. Then she bolted, slamming the car door and running into the large vestibule. I tucked my gun into my pocket and ran after her, entering the foyer just in time to catch sight of her going up a flight of carpeted stairs off to my left. I followed, taking the stairs three at a time. My rubber-soled work shoes made my approach soundless and I caught her in the fourth floor hallway, nervously unlocking an apartment door.

I waited until she was almost inside, then shoved the door open and grabbed her just as she began to scream, putting a hand over her mouth and wrestling her to a couch in the middle of the room. She was straining hard in my grip, with the unnatural strength of the very scared. As I sat her down, my hand still clamped over her mouth, I spoke as gently as I could: "I'm not going to hurt you. Please believe me. I know you're in trouble. I'm going to mention some names. You nod if you believe I want to help you, okay? Then I'll let go of you and we can talk, okay?" She nodded, the terror in her eyes lessening slightly. "Fat Dog Baker, Richard Ralston, Omar Gonzalez, Reyes Sandoval, Henry Cruz." At the mention of the last two names she began nodding vigorously and squirming in my grasp. I let her go and sat back in the couch holding my breath.

She started to cry, and I made no effort to stop her. "Who are you?" she finally got out between sobs.

"My name is Brown. I'm a private investigator," I said. "The people I mentioned are all involved in a case I'm working on. I don't want to hurt you."

"Are Henry and Reyes all right?"

"I don't know. Is this your apartment?"

"Yes."

"I followed you here from the cannery. I could tell you were scared. What is it? What's frightening you?"

"Henry and Reyes are gone. They've been gone for a week. I know they're in trouble."

"How do you know?"

"I know. They were supposed to do this job for this rich man. This guy Henry used to play baseball with fixed it up. I knew it was wrong, I knew it was dangerous. I told Henry that, but he wouldn't believe me. He wanted the stuff too bad."

"What stuff?"

"You know. Stuff. Smack. This rich guy was going to give Henry a lifetime supply. Because the job was dangerous."

"Was Henry a dealer?"

"What do you mean 'was'? Is Henry all right? Tell me!"

I hesitated.

"He's all right as far as I know. Is he strung out?"

"Yeah. Bad."

"Was this guy Henry used to play baseball with named Richard Ralston?"

"Yeah."

"What kind of job was he supposed to do?"

"I don't know."

"Okay. Look, what's your name?"

"Dorcas. I mean Dori. Dorcas is a shitty name. It sounds like dork, so I use Dori."

"Dori, I know Reyes Sandoval is a burglar, and you tell me Henry is strung out. I don't care. I don't want to bust anyone. This case I'm involved in is too complicated to explain to you. I need the man who hired Henry to do this job. Then maybe I can find out if Henry is all right. We both know that this man wanted Henry to kill somebody, right? That's the only thing it could be."

Dori collapsed in sobs, her body quaking. "I know, I know, I know! Now this guy Ralston is after me. He says Henry is gone, Reyes is gone, and the dope is gone. He thinks I know where Henry is. I told him I know where the dope is—he can have it back—but Henry is gone and Reyes is gone and I just know they're dead!"

"Sssh. Maybe they're not. Ralston wouldn't be bothering you if he knew they were dead, right?"

"Maybe."

"Better than maybe. Probably. Can you tell me who hired Henry and Reyes to do this job?"

"I don't know his name. Ralston set it up. He's a rich American, I know that. He's got a huge house down the Coast. Henry told me about it, and I remembered passing by there once."

"Can you take me there?"

“I think so.”

“Good. Has Ralston been hassling Sandoval’s wife? I know you know her. I followed you there.”

“Yes. Tina’s scared, too. She sent her kids to T.J. to live with her parents.”

“I think you and Tina should lay low for a while. I’ll make you a deal. Show me this rich guy’s place tonight, and I’ll give you and Tina Sandoval some money to hide out on. I’ll even drive you to the border.”

“How much money?”

“A thousand dollars.”

“Really?” Dori smiled for the first time.

“Really. I’ve got it right here.” I patted my wallet.

“What about my things?”

“Forget them. You’re probably in danger. Forget your job, too. You can always come back to it. If you can take me to this place, then I’ll drop you with the Sandoval woman. We’ll ditch Mexico tomorrow.”

“But Tina’s Mexican. She don’t have a green card.”

“Let me worry about that. Now pack a bag so we can split.”

She went into the adjoining room and I surveyed the apartment: it was cheap plush, an unschooled person’s idea of high class. Dori came back, suitcase in hand, surprisingly fast. She was pulling together nicely. The hardness I had discerned in her at the cannery was real. “One thing before we leave,” I said, “where’s this supply of dope Henry received?”

She nodded toward the bedroom. We walked in. She opened up a dresser. Hidden underneath some men’s shirts were six plastic baggies of white powder. A fortune in heroin if the stuff was pure. I opened a baggie and tasted: the blood rushed to my head and my body shook for a brief instant. It was very pure. If I hadn’t killed Henry Cruz he would have died of an overdose before too long. I looked at Dori.

“It’s good stuff, isn’t it?” she asked.

“Extremely,” I said. “Stuff like this doesn’t deserve to live. We’re going to hold a funeral service for it.”

“But it’s worth a lot of money.”

“The money you’d get from selling it wouldn’t deserve to live, either. Where’s the bathroom?” It was adjacent to the kitchen. I carried the baggies in, and emptied them, one by one, into the toilet. It made me feel pure and very moral. When I flushed, it was almost like an act of penance for my old sins. “Let’s get out of here,” I said.

We drove south in my car and we talked, or mostly Dori did. She was nervous, worried, but excited over the prospect of my thousand dollars. She had had a long, hard relationship with Henry Cruz. She was an L.A. girl, and Cruz had taken her virginity when she was fifteen. They had been together ever since. He had turned her on to sex, which she loved, and to the L.A. doper rip-off underworld, whose intrigue she found fascinating, and to drugs, which she hated and never used more than nominally, to placate Henry.

They had had their ups and downs. Henry had gone to jail and she had hustled to keep him on dope while he was inside. He had made her pose for specially photographed “Deluxe Collectors Item” pornography books that he had given his friends. He had fixed her up with the owner of the cannery, where she worked as a combination typist–party girl. The cannery mogul paid for her apartment and gave her a grand a month in exchange for frequent nighttime visits.

Henry was a rat, she admitted, but she loved him, and that was that. To my dismay, she was turning me on. My mind was reverberating away from the case toward various sleazy ploys to bed her. Her sexual power was overwhelming. To keep it at bay, I opened up a new line of questioning. “Tell me about Richard Ralston.”

“What about him?”

“Everything. Think about it for a minute.” While Dori thought, I concentrated on my driving. The terrain was unspectacular at night, dark hills on my left and the dark Pacific on my right. I was concerned about Dori’s reliability. Would she be able to find the place?

She read my mind: “Don’t worry, I’m not conning you,” she said. “Henry showed me the place. He was in fucking awe of it. It’s some crib.”

“You’re a mind reader, Dori. Tell me about Ralston.”

“Ralston is kind of a low-level manipulator. A ladies’ man, too. He’s known as ‘Hot Rod’ because he’s hung like a barracuda. I know, because Henry made me fuck him once. He and Henry used to play baseball together, minor league. Back in the fifties. He’s into a lot of shit, gambling, bookmaking, all that. He’s got this golf course job that’s really a front, and he’s got this hotel and bar that he owns. Really a sleazo racket. He’s got all these poor old guys on pensions and Welfare living there, all boozehounds. They live in his fleabag hotel and drink in his bar. It’s their whole fucking life. Hot Rod collects their checks each month, subtracts their bar tab and rent, sells them cigarettes that he gets from a fence dirt cheap, and gives them a few bucks spending money. No shit! He told me about it once. Most of the old fuckers at the hotel are caddies too old to carry bags. Hot Rod says he’s keeping them alive, if you can call it living. Personally, he’s got a lot of style; you know, he’s sexy and charming and all that. But basically he’s a shit. That’s okay, though. I like shits. I relate to them. Henry’s a shit and we’ve been together a long time. You’re a kind of a shit, too. I can tell.”

“Thanks.”

“No, really. I meant it as a compliment.”

“Thanks.”

We drove in silence, I was keyed up. My case was moving upward, in power, property and prestige from the depths of caddy despair to the seaside casas of the rich, and I was furiously anxious to unravel it, conclude it, mete out whatever justice I could, and return to Jane and Walter and some kind of peace. I checked my watch. We had been driving for fifty minutes. Dori started getting nervous, muttering to herself.

“Now?” I asked.

“Soon,” she replied, sticking her head out the window to look for landmarks. “Okay, now,” she said. “There’s a road just beyond the next bend. Slow down and turn when I tell you.”

I did and my headlights caught a wide, well-traveled dirt road leading straight up toward what looked like a pass between two large mountains. As we approached, the terrain flattened out and the mountains became hills. We passed between them, going inland toward a dark, cold nothingness. It was very silent. Far in the distance coyotes bayed. The road meandered up and down among a series of small hills. It was utterly dark, my high beams the only light.

Gradually the road widened and off to my right a large white shape began to emerge and take form.

“There,” Dori said, pointing toward it, “that’s the place.”

I pulled off the road. “You stay here,” I said. “I’ll be back within half an hour. Don’t leave the car.”

She nodded nervously. I took my shotgun and flashlight from the trunk and walked toward my objective. As I got within two hundred yards I realized I was looking at a rancho that would have made a Texas land baron proud. It was two stories high, of white stucco, and had three wings running in different directions. It was a stylistic mishmash, a cross between an American prison and a Turkish mosque. Lights burning in a huge picture window in the main front wing cast an orange glow over a carport that held three cars.

Surprisingly, there was no fence or surrounding wall. Whoever owned this palatial rancho evidently believed in the safety of the wide open spaces, so I walked right up to the cars and examined them: a ’76 Ford Ranchero Wagon, a four-wheel drive Toyota Landcruiser, and a late model Volvo Sedan. All bore California plates, which I committed to memory.

I circled the house at a radius of fifty yards or so, to avoid being seen from the darkened rooms. The rancho was set on a foundation of concrete that extended out into the mesquite land that bordered it. By my watch it took me seven minutes to make a complete circuit of la casa grande. There was nothing out of the ordinary, only an eerie desert stillness. Suddenly music cut the night. It was unmistakable: the Schumann Fourth Symphony, the opening movement, the brass pounding up and down like a drum roll. My adversary was an aesthetic and he possessed a stereo system even better than my own, sending shock waves of German romanticism into mesquite land and canyons for miles around.

Dori was frightened, dropping her cigarette into her lap and burning herself as I opened my car door. I put the shotgun into the back seat and hit the ignition. “What’s that creepy music?” she said. “It scared the shit out of me.”

“That’s the good stuff,” I said, digging into the glove compartment and writing down the license numbers. “Learn to dig it, it’ll set you free. The guy who owns that pad has taste.”

“I think his taste sucks. Give me rock any day.”

“Rock causes cancer, acne, and the creeping crud. Back to Ensenada. I’ll help you move some more of your stuff up to the Sandoval place. Then I’m taking off.”

“What about the money you promised?”

“You’ll get it. A grand for you and a grand for Tina. I’m feeling magnanimous.”

Dori grabbed me, hugged me fiercely and planted a big wet one on my cheek. “You’re really a nice shit. You know that?”

“Thanks.”

I pulled a U-turn and we began our return trip. Walter had indeed been right. Everything was connected. But was it decipherable? For the first time since Fat Dog knocked on my office door over two long weeks ago, I wondered if anything was.

When we got back to Dori’s apartment, I gave her fifteen minutes to move as much of her stuff out as would fit into both our cars. She went about it hurriedly, hauling large armloads of clothes out the door and running down the stairs. I followed suit, not running. I noticed that she left untouched the men’s clothing I had seen earlier. Within twenty minutes, both our cars were packed with feminine goodies and a lurid library of pop writers.

We then headed north, toward Sandoval Bluff. When we arrived at the Sandovals’, I hurried to unload my car, stacking Dori’s things neatly on the ground. No lights were on in the house. That was good; it would be easier to drop my bad news. I dug into my wallet, bloated with other men’s money, pulled out two thousand in fifties and C-notes and placed them in Dori’s hand.

She just looked at me. A period in her life was over and she knew it. “Henry’s dead, Dori,” I said. “Reyes Sandoval, too. I saw their bodies. There’s a big-time bad scene going on and it’s going to get worse. I’m not sure exactly what’s happening, but you and Tina had better get the hell out of here and don’t come back. Go to San Francisco, or Phoenix, or some place you’ve never seen before. Thanks for helping me.”

She didn’t say anything. When I kissed her cheek, I felt a slow trickle of tears. I got in my car and headed for the border, leaving behind in my room the cheap phonograph and an assortment of soiled clothes.

I pulled into T.J. at 2:00 a.m. I bought Jane a handbag made out of an armadillo’s skin. I laughed when I paid for it. Its claws unlocked makeup compartments and it had beady rhinestone eyes. I fingered it for luck as I crossed the border back into California.

IV

SHOTGUN

10

I had changed during my stay South of the Border and expected to find L.A. changed when I returned. I was wrong. As I passed through the far-flung Southern suburbs of L.A. proper around dawn on the 405, it was as familiar as the sigh of an old lover: the same hazy sunshine, smog, billboards, blacktop, and boredom. Even the Santa Monica Freeway Eastbound, with its view of West L.A. as a green plateau and the Wilshire Boulevard skyscrapers and the Santa Monica Mountains in the distance, yielded nothing but a dull verisimilitude. But it was good to be back.

It was too early to call the DMV to check out the license numbers of the cars at La Casa Grande, so I took a shower and fell into bed to wait for nine o'clock. It was noon when I woke up, frightened. I didn't know where I was. I looked around for the wake-up bottle I kept by the bed when I was drinking, then realized I had been sober for four days. Then it hit me: I was back in L.A. and the case was active. But I hesitated in reaching for the phone. I thought of Jane and couldn't picture her face, just her body as it looked our one night together.

I went into the kitchen and made coffee. That helped. My head was clearing. Midway through my first cup, I dialed the DMV. I was reaching out to the top of my case and I was scared. For perhaps the fourth time since Fat Dog hired me, I impersonated a police officer. It worked again. I read the numbers off to an abrupt woman and she came back with the registration information after only a moment's wait.

When I got the news my head started to crackle and I began to laugh. It was too perfect; beyond poetic justice, beyond logic and reason. All three cars belonged to Haywood Cathcart, 11417 Saticoy Street, Van Nuys. Cathcart. The L.A.P.D. lieutenant who "cracked" the Club Utopia firebombing case in record time in 1968. I felt calm, but my hands were shaking. I had to hold my coffee cup with both hands to take a sip.

I dug out my old Academy Yearbook from the bedroom and looked for mention of Cathcart. He was posed with several other officers listed as "guest lecturers," and his lecture was given as, Crowd Control—Techniques of Containment and Disbursement. I didn't recall the lecture. Cathcart was a tall, stern-looking, sandy-haired man of about forty-five.

I got on the phone again, this time to Parker Center. I wanted to find out if

Cathcart was still with the department. I gave the information officer I spoke to a line of shit about media revival of the Utopia firebombing case, with emphasis on the fine work of Lieutenant Haywood Cathcart. Was Lieutenant Cathcart still with the department? The desk dummy bought it. Cops love to have their asses kissed in print.

“Yes,” he said, “Lieutenant Cathcart is now Captain Cathcart, stationed right here at Parker Center with the Narcotics Division.”

I thanked the cop and hung up. Cathcart. Cathcart. Haywood Cathcart. Captain Haywood Cathcart. I liked the euphonious ring of the name. It would look good in print when his world came tumbling down at his feet. Cathcart was not only veteran L.A.P.D. brass, but a murderer, heroin dealer, evidence suppressor, and—given the size of his pad in Baja—a tax evader. He had to be the top man in this upward spiral of arson, murder, drugs, and dirty money.

I was right. One look at his cold face in the yearbook photograph taken a scant eight months before the Utopia blast told me that. Logic told me that the bombing was the genesis of his involvement. He was linked to Ralston, Ralston had set him up with Sandoval and Cruz; and the only possible motives that could tie this disparate, far-reaching case together were blackmail and money, something beyond the chickenshit bookie operations of Kupferman and Ralston.

As adrenalin and irony coursed through my bloodstream, I gloated on the moral perfection of a high-ranking L.A.P.D. bimbo being brought to justice by a former L.A.P.D. minion out of moral limbo. I was getting restless. I dressed and got out the car. Driving would kill my vengeful fantasies and bring me back to earth. I headed west, toward Jane’s.

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She wasn’t there. Neither Cadillac was in the driveway, but I knocked anyway. There was no answer, which was surprising. I had expected someone to answer, a maid, perhaps. I went back to the car to wait. I had a lot to tell her—mixed tidings about her brother’s death and the other things that transpired in Mexico. She deserved to know the whole story, and be kept up to date on my progress.

And I wanted to be close to her gentleness and beauty. I decided to tell her about the two men I killed. She deserved to know that, too, and wouldn’t condemn me for it. She was a clearheaded, practical woman. One night doesn’t lay claim to a person’s life, but our one night was a promise of a commitment and a future together in more stable times. And I wanted another loving night with her before the unpleasant, possibly violent job of bracing Hot Rod Ralston.

A car pulled into the circular driveway—a full pig Chrysler convertible—and a large, solidly built man in his middle forties got out and rang the bell. It was a quiet afternoon and I could hear the chimes from my post across the street. The man had a hard-edged look about him, like a cop or an insurance investigator. Maybe he was a business associate of Kupferman.

I was thunderstruck when Jane Baker opened the door and walked outside, carrying her cello case. She locked the door behind her, greeted the man with a warm smile and walked with him to his car. Whatever he was, he wasn't any cello teacher.

When they pulled out, I decided to follow. I found myself getting jealous. Jane knew my car, so I had to stay behind for at least a full minute, then head after them on the route they would most likely take—Beverly Drive South. I waited, trying to quash a feeling of dread in the pit of my stomach. Walter Curran: everything is connected. The man Jane drove off with had the mien of a cold, manipulative ex-athlete, like Richard Ralston. I didn't want it to be.

I picked up their trail on Beverly Drive and Burton Way, inside the Beverly Hills shopping district. I came up right behind them, watching them huddle in conversation. The man pulled up to the curb on Beverly just south of Wilshire and Jane got out, lugging her cello. She didn't notice me as I drove by, continuing to follow the man in the Chrysler. He turned right on Pico, heading in the direction of Hillcrest Country Club. I started to pray for it not to be, but when we came up on Century City and Hillcrest and he flashed his left-hand directional, I knew, and was resigned.

There was a uniformed guard in the parking lot who admitted Ralston, so I had no chance of following him directly in. I turned right on the corner of Century Park East and parked in a No Parking Zone. I locked the car, placed a "Physician On Call" notice under my windshield wiper and ran across Pico toward a small gate off to the right of the parking entrance. A group of four scruffy-looking caddies were entering the gate, two of them sharing a pint of vodka. I walked in right behind them, staying a few yards back, hoping they would lead me to the caddy shack. They did. It was off to the left of a concrete walkway that bordered a large putting green.

There weren't too many golfers about; Tuesday afternoon was probably a dead time for golf. The shack was slightly below ground level, a white clapboard job with a green tar-papered roof, built on a slope that led downhill to what looked like an oil drilling site.

I walked inside and was greeted by a shrieking cacophony of noise: there were half a dozen card games going on at wooden picnic tables, and the players—for the most part poorly dressed, sunburned, middle-aged men—were gesturing frantically, throwing cards and shouting good-natured obscenities. The concrete floor was littered with trash, cigarette butts, and empty beer cans. Rows of lockers lined the walls; a T.V. blasting out a game show at full volume went unnoticed.

I walked through a smaller room that held nothing but lockers and dressing benches and found the can, passing along the way Scarecrow Augie Dougall, all 6'6" of him, reading a comic book as intently as if his soul depended on it. The bathroom was filthy beyond description, with a row of showers that looked as if they hadn't been used in years. The floor was carpeted with urine-soaked copies of the *Daily Racing Form* and the walls were adorned with beaver photos of outrageously large breasted women.

I splashed some water on my face and recombed the part in my hair. I walked back through the shack and out onto a back service porch overlooking the oil digs. There was an old man sitting on an overturned trash can reading a Louis L'Amour novel and smoking a pipe. I walked to the railing of the porch and watched the oilmen working, checking out Pops out of the corner of my eye. He seemed to have trouble concentrating on his book. The noise of the card play distracted him. He looked like a lonely, opinionated old coot, so I asked: "Does that oil property belong to the club?"

He gave me a disgusted look. "Of course it does," he said, "providing more money for people who already got too much fucking money. They say it 'helps defer the cost of membership,' but shit, when you got the moolah these Hebes got, who gives a rat's ass for a few chickenshit million a year divided by five hundred fucking members? Can you tell me that?"

I said it was a mystery to me. I could see a windy monologue coming on, so I started popping questions, simple ones. "Do you loop here?"

Pops gave me another disgusted snort. "You could say that," he said, "but I'd rather not. I'm on Hot Rod's shit list, so I'm lucky to pick up a nine-hole single once in a while. Are *you* a caddy? You don't look like one. Too healthy."

"I'm a traveling caddy. They call me Coast-to-Coast Johnny. I'm in town checking out the accommodations of the various caddy shacks for an article I'm writing for *Golf Digest*. How come you're on Hot Rod's shit list?"

"I don't bet with the cocksucker. I don't drink at the cocksucker's bar, or live at his cocksucking fleabag hotel. Does that answer your question?"

"Vividly. I take it you don't like Hot Rod."

"You got that dead right. You oughta write an article on the caddy masters of America. They're all corrupt—bookies, pimps, and worse. They're all tyrants and shitheels and Hot Rod Ralston is the worst."

There was a general uproar inside the caddy shack, the sound of boxes being slammed down, followed by excited voices. Pops got up from his trash can and rushed into the fray. I joined him. Boxes full of clothes were laid out on the concrete floor, and dozens of old suits covered two of the picnic tables. A horde of loopers had descended on them like a pack of wolves, gathering them indiscriminately, irrespective of size. Pushing and shoving ensued, and the caddies' favorite verb, noun, adjective, and modifier, "cocksucker!" was heard many times with many different inflections. Within two minutes everything was snatched up and the loopers were proudly examining and displaying their booty.

Pops came back out on the porch gleefully bearing an old sharkskin suitcoat. He took off the ratty cardigan he was wearing, threw it out in the direction of the oil digs, and donned the suitcoat, strutting like a rooster. "Them Hebes is all right," he said. "They take care of us! This is a three-hundred-dollar coat. Look inside here, it says 'Made in U.S.A.'! This ain't no Taiwan piece of shit, this is the real goods! Goddamn," Pops went on, "now all I need me is a loop to make my day. Then I'll be hopping."

A loudspeaker crackled inside the caddy shack. "Augie Dougall, first tee, right away." That was interesting. There were dozens of hardier-looking loopers around to pack bags. Pops thought it was interesting, too. "Cocksucking Hot Rod," he said. "I been here since six thirty this morning. That beanpole gets here at noon, and he loops before me. Cocksucker."

I went back into the caddy shack in time to see Augie Dougall walking out the front door toward the first tee, stuffing his comic book in his pocket. I followed. The first tee was evidently a squat one-man cubicle where Hot Rod made his caddy assignments and sent players off. It was at the end of the large putting green I had passed by earlier. I stayed well behind, not wanting Ralston to see me. Dougall joined Ralston, and after a moment's conversation they walked together downhill past rows of parked golf carts to a large barnlike building. I followed again, slowly.

I could hear what had to be Ralston's voice as I came up on the side of the barn. It was slow, deep, and explaining patiently: "Trust me, Augie. I've always taken care of you, haven't I?" Dougall muttered something in answer that I couldn't quite hear.

I decided to risk a look inside. I flattened myself up against the corrugated iron side of the barn and craned my head inside. The barn was for storing golf carts, and there were dozens of them neatly lined up, with long rubber cords attached to electrical chargers that were mounted on hangers suspended from the high ceiling. Ralston and Dougall were sitting together in a cart midway down the line, with their backs to me, too far away from me to hear. I hunkered down and crept into the barn, then squatted behind a cart several rows in back of the two men. From my vantage point it looked like a bizarre father-son relationship—Ralston the father speaking in placating tones to his outsized ungainly son, Dougall. Dougall's head was turned sideways to catch every well-measured word Ralston offered. I found myself reluctantly admiring Ralston. He was a formidable manipulator. I picked their conversation up in midsentence: "So…things are changing, Augie. It's nothing we can't handle, though. But Fat Dog got himself in some big trouble. He fucked with the wrong people and he got hurt. You're not going to see him again, Augie. Not ever."

"What did he do, Rod?"

"I can't tell you exactly. A long time ago he got away with a heavyweight scene. Some people got hurt. I took care of Fat Dog. A friend of mine got him out of some heavy shit. This was years ago when you and Fat Dog were tight. Heavy-duty shit, Augie. Heavy-duty. Did he tell you about it? He told someone, because it got back to the wrong people. And the only people who knew about it *before* were my friend and I and Fat Dog, of course. And he wouldn't tell the wrong people, Augie, because his ass would be up shit's creek if he did."

"He didn't tell me no heavy-duty shit, Rod. Just loopin' and racetrack stuff. Nothin' bad."

Ralston put an arm over Dougall's bony shoulders and squeezed tightly. "You're sure of that, Augie? You knew Fat Dog better than anyone. You were the closest thing he had to a friend."

"I'm sure, Rod. Honest."

"Because someone told a Mexican guy about what Fat Dog did. The Mexican guy hated Fat Dog. The Mexican guy went looking for Fat Dog and he got hurt, Augie. Hurt badly. Whoever told the Mexican about Fat Dog wanted to see Fat Dog hurt, Augie, and I've always thought you carried a lot of hatred around for him, even though you hung out together. Fat Dog made fun of you, Augie, I know that. You were his lackey, kind of. Did you want to hurt him, Augie?"

"I never wanted to hurt Fat Dog, Rod. He was my friend. Sometimes he was nasty, but I just got used to it. I never told no one nothin' about Fat Dog. You got to believe me, Rod." Dougall's voice was rising to a wail and his shoulders were shaking.

Ralston tightened his grip around them. "Because if you told anyone about Fat Dog, you could get hurt, too. You could get hurt as bad as Fat Dog or the Mexican guy. You read me, Augie?"

"Yes. I read you, Rod. I didn't tell nobody nothing."

"Okay, Augie. Now, I happen to know that Fat Dog kept a scrapbook. A scrapbook that told about all the bad things he did in his life. He also ripped me off for a ledger, Augie, with writing in Spanish. I need that ledger. You know that Fat Dog was rich, don't you, Augie? Loaded. Heavy bread. And it's rightfully mine. I want that money. What do you know about that, Augie?"

"I know he used to have this scrapbook where he kept these clippings from all these tournaments he looped. Is that what you mean, Rod?"

"No, Augie, not that. You're sure you never saw any other scrapbook? A big thick one full of clippings and writing? Or a leather ledger book?"

"No, never."

"Okay, Augie. There may be some other guys Fat Dog hung out with who remember it. We'll let that one slide for now. One more thing, Augie, then I'll let you go. I've got a juicy nine-holer waiting for you. There's a detective nosing around. He's very interested in Fat Dog and his dealings. His name is Brown, do you know anything about that?"

"I seen him, Rod. I seen him. He was at the Tap and Cap askin' about Fat Dog. Said he was lookin' for him, that Fat Dog hired him. I…"

Ralston cut in sharply. "When was this, Augie?"

"Maybe two weeks ago."

"What did you tell him?"

"That Fat Dog's a tough man to find. That he sleeps outside. That's all, Rod, I swear."

"That's good, Augie."

"But I know more, Rod. Once me and Fat Dog was out on this loop at Lakeside and this car guy, the one who does them commercials on T.V. with the dog, was telling Fat Dog about this private eye he knew who was a real fuck up, who wasn't a real private eye, but was good for rippin' n———s off for their cars. That's what he said. He was real nasty about it, like the guy was workin' for him, but he was laughin' at the guy. You know what I mean? Anyways, later Fat Dog tells me, 'Someday I'm gonna have a use for that fuck up private eye, yes sir.' That's what he said, Rod. Honest."

"That's good, Augie, and very interesting. You keep quiet about that, and everything else we've talked about. You're a good man, Augie, and a good caddy. I've never regretted taking care of you. Don't do anything now to make me regret it. Keep your mouth shut and life will be smooth. A lot of people have gotten hurt recently by talking too much and fucking around with the wrong people. Don't let it happen to you, okay?"

"Okay, Rod."

Augie Dougall was practically blubbering and shaking with relief. He had escaped censure and punishment from the sternest and most menacing of fathers.

"Good," Ralston said. "Now go get Dr. Goldman and Sid Berman. They want to go a quick nine."

"Berman and Goldman, wow! A twenty-dollar nine holer. Thanks, Rod." Augie Dougall ran off. Hot Rod Ralston waited a moment and walked out slowly. I squatted lower as he passed me. When I rose to my feet after a few minutes, my legs were stiff and I was very angry.

I drove to Beverly Drive just south of Wilshire and checked out the lobby directory of the building Jane had walked into. There was a simple listing for suite 463—R. Weiss, Stringed Instruments. I took the elevator to the fourth floor and walked down the hall to 463. Through the oak door I could hear cello chords followed by a patient European voice offering criticism. It was enough. I went back down to the lobby to wait.

I waited half an hour, until Jane came out of the elevator followed by an ascetic looking oldster with a cane who was gesturing as though he longed for a baton and a podium. Jane had her back turned to me and was eating up everything the oldster had to say. I wanted to run to her, but stayed seated. The old man concluded his lengthy farewell and retreated back into the elevator. Jane was just about out the door when she turned in my direction and saw me. I stood up and smiled. “Hello, dear,” I said.

She placed her cello gently on the floor. “Fritz, I…”

I walked to her and took her hands. “I’m back,” I said, “belatedly.”

She looked shocked, but finally managed a smile. “How did you know I’d be here?”

“I followed you.”

“You—”

“I followed you here. I rang your doorbell and when no one answered, I decided to wait. When Ralston picked you up, I tailed you here.”

“Am I a suspect in this thing you’re investigating?”

She was pulling away, so I let go of her hands. “Of course not. Don’t be angry. We have a lot to talk about. My car’s outside.”

We walked to the car. Jane was scrutinizing me the whole time, quite directly. I couldn’t understand her resentment. It went beyond my invading her privacy. When we settled into my car, she placed a tentative hand on my arm. “You look different,” she said. “It’s hard to place, but your features have changed. What happened in Mexico?”

“I killed two men. And I got drunk.”

“Oh, God!”

“Yeah. Where do you know Ralston from?”

“Richard? What does he have to do with this?”

“A lot. Will you answer my question?”

“From Hillcrest. We’ve known each other for years.”

“What’s the basis of your relationship?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean have you slept with him?”

"How dare you ask me that! One night doesn't give you a claim on me. I've had enough. I'm going to leave."

"No. Not yet. Please. I'm sorry. I'm pissed off because this reunion isn't coming off the way I expected, and Ralston is in this thing up to his ears."

"You didn't have to cross-examine me the way you did."

"I was hurt, jealous. Ralston is a notorious well-endowed cunthound and he's had years to work on you."

"What an ugly thing to call someone. For your information, Richard is a business associate of Sol's and a very decent person and yes, we did have an affair, briefly, several years ago."

"That's all you had to say."

"You've changed, Fritz. You've gotten harder. Did you really kill two men?"

"Yeah. They were trying to kill me. Brace yourself: they killed your brother."

"What did you…"

"I found his body outside Tijuana. In a scuzzy little shack that's going to give me nightmares for the rest of my life. The killers came back for something and I killed them."

Jane looked out the window, watching the passing parade on Beverly Drive. When she spoke again it was very softly. "I don't feel anything. He got what he paid for. Don't tell me the details, I don't want to give form to the thing. But it was terrible, wasn't it?"

"Beyond words."

"Is it why you got drunk?"

"Yes."

"But you're sober again, right?"

"Right."

"Good. I'm sorry for the way I've acted today, Fritz, but what you told me about Richard Ralston upset me. He's been very supportive of Sol since the warehouse fire."

"In what way?"

"He's been conferring with Sol a lot, driving him places, cheering him up."

"You don't believe me about Ralston, do you? Would you believe me if I told you he was responsible for your brother's death?"

"No, I don't, and no I wouldn't! Look, you admitted you were a lousy cop and maybe you're a lousy detective. Richard is a good man. He loves Sol. If they were both involved in bookmaking, I don't care. It doesn't hurt anyone.

And listen to me, Fritz: If you hurt Richard in any way, I will never speak to you, ever again. Do you understand?"

"Yeah, I understand. I understand that you aren't capable of accepting reality. Richard Ralston is a thieving, fucking, lowlife predator. Your brother was just murdered, your former lover is responsible, your best friend is probably being blackmailed and all you can think about is your fucking insulated Beverly Hills lifestyle."

Jane turned red and swung at me clumsily with her closed fist. I let her hit me. "Do it again," I screamed. She hit me again and again, each time harder, then collapsed into tears. I pulled her to me and stroked her head. "Good, darling, good. Get it out. I understand, really. Just try to understand me. I've been waiting for this thing for a long time. It's *mine* and I'm not going to blow it. But it's no good without you. Ten people have been killed since this thing started and I'm the only one who can end it. But there's got to be some kind of decency and kindness waiting for me when it's over."

Jane looked up at me. Her tears had stopped and she looked strangely composed. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean that I love you. We can have a good life together when this is over."

"But I don't know you."

"Do you care about me?"

"I don't *know* you!"

"Ssshh. We'll have time to court properly when all this is over."

"Oh, God, don't you…" Jane started to sob again, and again I held her, very gently. We stayed that way for a minute, then I tucked a hand under her chin and lifted her head toward me. Her face was mottled and her eye makeup was streaked. I pulled out a handkerchief and wiped it off.

"Will you do a few things for me, sweetheart?" I asked.

"I guess so."

"Good. One: stay away from Ralston, and two: tell Kupferman I'll be calling him, probably tomorrow. Tell him who I am and what I've been doing. Tell him it's very important."

"All right."

"Good. Will you have dinner with me tonight? At my place?"

"I can't. I have to study and practice. And I want to be near Sol and have time to think."

"All right. I'll drive you home."

"No. I want to be alone. A walk home carrying my cello will clear my head. You understand, don't you?"

"Of course. I'll call you soon."

I leaned over and we kissed. Jane's lips brushed distractedly against mine. She maneuvered her cello out the car door. "Be careful," she said.

I nodded and watched through the rearview mirror as she lugged her cello up Beverly Drive and out of sight. When she was gone I realized I had forgotten to give her the armadillo purse I had bought in Tijuana.

I was tired. My encounter with Jane had diffused my anger into a vague hope that was enervating in itself. Sleep was what I needed, but I was too tired for that. My only recourse was the tried-and-true run to Walter's place. I wanted to commit an act of symbolic liberation and his backyard was the place for it.

It was sweltering when I pulled into his driveway. His mother's Mustang was gone, thank God, and I found Walter sitting on a lawn chair in his backyard, his feet immersed in a kiddies' wading pool. He was reading a science fiction novel and sucking on a short dog. Several more short dogs were cooling in the pool. He looked about half-bombed. "Moon to earth, moon to earth," he said as he saw me coming. "The noble private eye returneth from his search for the Holy Grail in Mexico. Chastened, methinks." Leave it to Walter to throw in one solid perception in his line of horseshit. "Was it fruitful, Fritz? Did you see the mule act? Did you 'eat out' at the Blue Fox? Did you score me some dope so I can get off the sauce?"

"Negative to all that rebop. I did learn one interesting thing, though. I found out who killed the Black Dahlia."

"Oh, yeah? Who was it? The Ayatollah? It has to be him. That clown looks exactly like a fag who tried to grab my dick in the swimming pool at the Hollywood Y when I was twelve. It has to be him."

"Wrong. It's you, you bastard, because all that mystical Buddhist shit you've been whipping on me for all these years about everything being connected is true. I congratulate you. The twenty-five or thirty I.Q. points you have on me has never been more evident. Since everything is connected, the concept of karma must be valid, too. Ergo, it's time to clean up my act and get out of the repo racket. After I clean up a big mess I'm involved in. I haven't decided what I'm going to do yet. Maybe get Cal to set me up in my own classical record store, something like that. There's a woman in my life now that I have to consider. And since karma is a valid concept there's probably some n——— who's looking for me right now with a Saturday Night Special for ripping off his Cadillac. I can't risk that. Jane needs me. So you were right. I salute you, reluctantly.

"But there's no victory without pain. You have to pay the price. The one thing that I resent most about you, as much as I love you, is your insane addiction to television. The booze, the music, the sci-fi are all understandable. But the T.V. shit is beneath you. It's even beneath me. So your T.V. set has to die. Today. Right here in your backyard. I will perform the execution. You will be compensated. I have over six hundred dollars in dirty money that I have to get rid of before I begin my new life. So we do it. Now."

I had expected high-flying resistance from Walter, but he just smiled. He fished out a short dog from the pool and drained it in one gulp. He shuddered and smiled again. "Let's do it," he said. "I'm resigned. Six hundred scoots will get me a half pound of Colombian and that hooker you told me about. It's time I got back into the mainstream myself. Let's do it."

We went into the house and lugged the old G.E. console back out into the yard. We placed it in a preeminent spot next to old lady Curran's rose garden. Then I got the Browning pump and a box of shells out of my trunk. Walter was practically jumping up and down in anticipation. "Three shots," I said, "then we get the hell out of here before the fuzz shows up. Stand in back of me. Glass is going to fly." I paced off twenty yards from the T.V. to Walter's back porch. Walter sat on the steps behind me, sipping T-Bird in silent glee. I slipped a shell into the breech and pumped it into the chamber, took aim, and fired. The T.V. screen imploded with a huge, reverberating *kawhoosh!* Glass, wood, and metal fragments flew out the back and filled the air before coming to rest in the smoke-filled backyard. The air smelled like burning technology. I squeezed off another shot at the wooden carcass and blew it in half.

People were coming to their windows now in the apartment building across the alley and Walter was whooping and yelling like some new alcoholic species of loon. I pumped another shell into the chamber and handed it to him. "Your turn," I said, "anywhere but in my direction."

He nodded and tore throughout the yard, searching for a target. He ended up settling for the garage wall and blew a hole in it the size of a Volkswagen, the recoil knocking him to the ground. I helped him up and we tore for my car, through a driveway littered with T.V. detritus and smelling of cordite.

When we got to my place I made espresso and sent out for a giant anchovy pizza and a fifth of vodka and mixer for Walter. When it arrived we scarfed the pizza in two minutes flat and sat back and talked, and it was the best, the sanest talk we had had in a long time.

Around midnight I gave Walter his six hundred clams and sent him off in a cab. He was going to get a motel room on the Strip until his mother cooled off and I concluded my case. Then it would be sobriety. I believed him this time. There were distinct flashes of the old Walter and flashes of remorse for what he had become.

Before I went to bed a dire thought crossed my mind. Ralston knew about me and probably wanted to silence me. He knew where I lived and had the wherewithal to have me killed. But I quashed the thought. I knew now: I was going to do more than hold in life. I was going to win.

11

I woke up the next morning feeling hung over. Drifting in and out of sleep, I felt a dull persistent banging somewhere, like blows muffled by acoustical padding. I tried to think of Jane's face. Forming the image was easy this time. Gradually, I realized that the banging wasn't inside my own head, but was a loud rapping at my front door. I threw on a T-shirt and a pair of Levis and went to greet my caller.

When I opened the door I knew immediately that they were cops: their size, stern demeanor, and eighty-dollar suits were as good as a neon sign proclaiming "officious city flunkies on a power trip." I greeted them warmly. "Good morning," I said. "What can I do for you?"

"Are you Fritz Brown?" the taller and more forceful-looking of the two asked.

"Yes."

"I'm Sergeant Larkin, Riverside County Sheriff's Department. This is Sergeant Cavanaugh, L.A.P.D." They both flashed badges at me. "Could we talk to you? Inside?"

"Sure. Come in."

They entered and gave my living room a quick perusing. Cavanaugh's eyes fell on my holstered .28 lying on a lamp table. "Do you have a permit for that weapon, Mr. Brown?" he asked.

"Yes, I do. And I have a permit to carry it concealed. I'm a licensed private investigator."

"I see," Larkin said, as they both sat down on my couch, uninvited. "Do you own any other weapons?"

So that was it. Old lady Curran had blown the whistle on me. But why was a Riverside County dick involved? "Yes, I own a Browning 12-gauge pump shotgun."

"Could we see it?" Cavanaugh asked.

"Sure. One minute." I walked into my bedroom. Maybe the jig was up, and I was going to get popped for discharging a firearm within the city limits. But I didn't think so. These guys were too reserved and ominous. I brought the shotgun into the living room and handed it, butt first, to Larkin.

He slid open the breech and chamber and took a healthy sniff. "This gun has been fired recently," he said.

"Last night," I answered. "I assassinated a T.V. set. With the owner's permission. If you want to bust me for shooting off a gun in the city, let's do it now so I can bail out."

"That's not what we're here for, Brown," Cavanaugh said.

"I didn't think so. Riverside County doesn't give a rat's ass what I do with my shotgun in L.A. What is it then?" I sat down in my easy chair across from them.

"Where were you last night between 10:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m.?" Larkin asked. He was wearing an offensive and shiny yellow dress shirt that must have set him back all of $2.98. It was giving me a headache.

"I was here. In bed. Why?"

Cavanaugh took over. "Were you ever a police officer, Mr. Brown?"

"Yes, I was. I was with the L.A.P.D. for six years."

Cavanaugh gave me a wide smile. Its phoniness told me be already knew the answer to his question. "So we were old colleagues," he said. "What divisions did you work?"

"Wilshire Patrol, Hollywood Patrol, and Hollywood Vice."

Cavanaugh and Larkin gave me identical half smiles and nods of the head. They were a smooth pair, like Abbott and Costello. Larkin leaned forward confidingly. "Do you know a man named Stanley Gaither? AKA 'Stan The Man?' " he asked.

"I met him once, briefly, a short while ago. Why?"

"We found your business card on his body."

"Jesus Fucking Christ. Was he murdered?"

"Yes, last night in Palm Springs. Along with two other men. Caddies. They were found shot to death under a freeway overpass."

"Oh, shit. Shotgun?"

"Yes. Six expended shells from a 10-gauge were found. The three guys were blown to shit. How did you meet Gaither? What was the basis of your relationship with him?"

"What 'relationship'? I met him in a bar. He bought me a drink and told me about himself, how he was a compulsive car thief, and how he was in therapy to learn to control his compulsion. I told him I was in the repo business and I might be able to help him get started ripping off cars legally. He took my card. I haven't seen him since."

Larkin and Cavanaugh stared at me impassively. I couldn't tell if they believed me. "Have you ever met a George Hansen, AKA 'Hamburger' or a Robert 'Bobby' Marchion?" Larkin asked.

"No. Are they the other two stiffs?"

"That's right. Do you know any other caddies?"

"No, I don't play golf. It's not my idea of kicks."

"What is your idea of kicks?"

"Great music and beautiful women. What's yours?"

"Have you got a problem, Brown?" Cavanaugh interjected. "Normal people don't go around shooting T.V. sets."

"What's normal? I have an aesthetic soul. I'm the hit man for an international cartel of aesthetic souls who hate T.V. I get paid ten thou a hit. That's how I'm able to live in luxury in the Hollywood Hills."

"Don't fuck with us, Brown," Cavanaugh said. "I checked your personnel file this morning. You were a fuck-up and a disgrace to the department. We're investigating a multiple homicide and we don't have to take shit from some repo asshole. You watch yourself. The State Board of Vocational Standards doesn't like P.I.'s to go around shooting off shotguns. You could lose your license."

"If that's all you have to say to me, why don't you leave?"

Cavanaugh couldn't resist a parting shot. "You watch your step, Brown. We'll probably check you out again."

"I wait with bated breath," I said as they walked out the door.

—

Ralston. Cathcart. Fat Dog. Augie Dougall. Now three dead loopers in Palm Springs. There are no coincidences.

Caddies do not get knocked off Mafia-style. Augie Dougall was the place to start.

When I arrived at Hillcrest, Augie Dougall was not in the caddy shack. The fry cook at the lunch counter told me he hadn't shown up today. Try the Tap & Cap, he said. I took him up on it and split. As I walked out of the shack, the place was afire with talk about the looper killings, which had made the morning papers.

I drove west toward the Tap & Cap, stopping first on Pico and Veteran to buy the L.A. *Times*. It was on the second page:

THREE DEAD IN PALM SPRINGS SHOTGUN KILLINGS

(A.P., U.P.I.) July 16—Palm Springs Police and Riverside

> *County Sheriff's spokesmen announced today that there are no clues in last night's brutal slaying of three men, found shotgunned to death under a freeway embankment on Interstate 6 near the Palm Springs–Cathedral City border. Sheriff's Department spokesman Sgt. A. D. Larkin said that the three men, all of whom were employed as caddies, were drinking and taking drugs at their campsite under the embankment.*
>
> *"We found several empty whisky bottles and a cache of quaalude capsules," Larkin said. "Right now we're thinking that the killings are tied in to a drug rip off. The killer came back for the drugs and panicked after he did the killing. We're checking out all known intimates of the deceased and expect a break at any time."*
>
> *The dead men are Stanley Gaither, 41, of West Los Angeles, Robert Marchion, a transient, and George Hansen of the Desert Flower Trailer Park, Palm Springs. The bodies were discovered by a group of Boy Scouts and their leader returning to Cathedral City from an overnight camping trip.*

Not much. But the address of one George Hansen might be worth something. I ripped the article out of the paper and put it in my shirt pocket.

The Tap & Cap was almost deserted when I got there. The bartender and a crippled old black news vendor were reading the *Times* article aloud at the bar as I walked in. "Po' motherfuckas," the old newsy was saying, "po' fuckin' 'Burger' Hansen. Hungriest fuckin' goat I ever did see. I remember when…"

I interrupted him with a stern look and an abrupt gesture. "Excuse me, gentlemen," I said, "I'm with Amalgamated Insurance and I'm looking for a Mr. Augie Dougall on a matter of urgent importance. I was told he frequents your establishment."

The old news vendor started to say something, but the barman cut him off. "You got that all wrong, mister. Augie Dougall lives here. He gets a free room for cleaning the place up."

"Excellent. Is Mr. Dougall here now?"

"No. He left early this morning. He said he was going up to Palm Springs on the bus. He got real shook up about those three caddies who got killed up there. He knew 'em. He said he's gonna crack the case. He's cracked *himself.* He ain't gonna crack nothin'."

"I see. How terrible. I have a sizeable check from a dead uncle for

Mr. Dougall. *Very* sizeable. Do you know where Mr. Dougall will be staying in Palm Springs?"

"I don't know, but he's got a cousin up there, in Cat City. In fact, Augie's got a letter from him that he forgot to pick up this morning, he was in such a hurry." The barman rummaged beneath the bar and came up with an envelope.

I grabbed it out of his hand and tore out the door, adding theft of government property to my list of crimes. A moment later I saw the crippled newsy hobbling after me. He didn't have a chance. When I got to my car, I tore open the envelope and read:

> Dear Augie,
>
> I hope you are doing good. I am, but it is too dam hot in Cat City. My air conditioner went on the bum and now I am roasting. Is it hot in L.A.? I bet it is. No releef for the wicked, ha! ha! Hows caddying? Do people play golf in hot weather? You wouldn't catch me on a golf course without a six pak of cold ones and a fan. Ha! Ha! Listen. Something funny happened yesterday. This guy came by the house and said he was looking for some things that crazy fat buddy of yours might of left here. Fat Dog, the guy who wouldn't use the spare room, who slept in the yard? The guy offered me 50 clams to let him look for the stuff. He said Fat Dog stole some valuable stuff with sentimental value from him and he wanted it back. I told him forget it!!!!! Fat Dog didn't leave nothing here. It was real suspicious. He told me he used to caddy with you and Fat Dog, but he wouldn't tell me his name. I went out later and when I got back, my house had been gone through. It wasn't tore up, but I could tell that someone had searched the place. But it ain't going to happen again!!!!! Jerry Plunkett is going out of town, and I'm going to borrow his mean old doberman! !! ! Anyone tries to mess with my house and Rudolf will chew his ass off!!!!! Ha! Ha! What kind of crazy people are you hanging out with anyway? What was this joker looking for? Solid gold golf balls!!!! Ha! Ha! Next time you go on a toot come on up. I know a barmaid who likes tall guys. She's about 6'2" herself. Ha! Ha!
>
> Your cousin and buddy
> Charlie.

Charlie, my friend, if you knew the kind of people your erstwhile cousin hung out with, you wouldn't be Ha! Ha!'ing quite so much. Bad-ass dobermans are not much use against shotguns, arsonists, and crooked cops.

I tossed the letter into the glove compartment. Augie Dougall was headed to Cathedral City now, running from the frying pan into fire. If he traveled by bus his most logical point of departure would be Santa Monica Greyhound on 5th and Broadway. I drove there, fast.

The woman at the counter told me an extremely tall funny-looking man aged about fifty had purchased a ticket for the 7:15 bus for Palm Springs. That was enough for me. I hit the Santa Monica Freeway to the Harbor, to the Pomona. Soon I was passing through the depressing Eastern suburbs of L.A. with my top up, air conditioner on full and cassette player blasting Wagner. I was filled with expectancy and the calm certainty that whatever awaited me in the desert would not be dull.

I stopped in Riverside for gas, then switched on the radio for the rest of my journey. I found a Palm Springs station and lucked into a news report on the caddy killings. It was obvious they had taken the desert resort community by storm. The newscaster went on dramatically: there were no clues, the motive was still "up in the air," Gaither and Marchion had no known next of kin, while George Hansen's wife had been informed of his death. Another newscaster took over and announced that he had a Special Report on the world of caddies. I turned the volume up.

The newsman, his voice dripping with sentiment, began:

> "I've known a lot of caddies in my time. A lot. They're a strange, adventurous lot. A group of men for whom freedom and love of golf reign supreme. Many of them have given up on the idea of family life and a nine-to-five job just to be where the golf action is. Caddies love golf and they know the courses where they work like the backs of their hands. And what golf stories they have to tell!!
>
> "When I was broadcasting at KMPC in Los Angeles, it was my pleasure to play golf with Dick Whittinghill at picturesque Lakeside Country Club in North Hollywood. I remember one caddy we had; a scruffy character named Leo. Leo was a golf authority who compared certain aspects of Dick's swing to that of the great Jimmy Demarit. Dick used to keep a bottle of vodka in his bag and he often invited Leo to join him in a drink. It was Leo's custom to walk ahead of his players to identify their balls. Dick would always yell to him 'Have I got a shot, Leo?' and Leo would drop the bags and do a little jig right there on the golf course! It was wonderful to see! One day Dick hit his ball right up behind a tree. It was a crucial shot. Dick and I were playing a five dollar Nassau and he needed to win this hole. Leo wasn't dancing any jigs when he walked to Dick's ball. When Dick called out 'Have I got a shot to the green, Leo?' Leo called back, 'You have several shots to the green, Mr. Whittinghill!' Spoken like a

> true caddy!
>
> “Caddies are being phased out, sadly, in favor of golf carts. What a shame. A caddy can take ten shots off a high handicappers game. The pro’s couldn’t do without their caddies. I’ve known a lot of caddies, yes sir. Some drank too much, some talked too much, and some were too opinionated. But I have never met a stupid caddy or one who didn’t love the game of golf and the club where he worked.
>
> “Now this tragedy. Right here in Palm Springs, the golf capital of the world. The authorities tell us there were drugs involved! I say ‘Baloney.’ I have known many caddies who imbibed a bit too much, but never have I known a caddy to take drugs! Never have I known a caddy who would knowingly disgrace the game of golf!
>
> “Robert Marchion, George Hansen, Stanley Gaither, the heart of every golfer in America mourns for you and prays for a swift, merciless justice for your killer. We thank you from the bottom of our collective heart for your service—greens read well, good yardage calls, traps raked and heavy bags cheerfully toted. God bless you in your final resting place. This is Don Castleberry, signing off with Special Report. Have a good day.”

I couldn’t think for my sudden anger. My mind was seized with a boundless hatred for America. America, with its optimism, boosterism, and yahooism that opted for sentiment over truth every time. America, that would turn the truth of the lives and deaths of three men into a cheap advertisement for an infantile game.

After a few moments my anger subsided. I was in the desert now, the smog was behind me. It was sweltering outside, but the arid landscape was beautiful. I was snug in my air-conditioned cocoon, and in the matter of the people versus Haywood Cathcart, Richard Ralston, and Fat Dog Baker, I was the arbiter of justice, not America.

—

Palm Springs shot up in the distance, a green shimmering oasis in my tinted windshield. Cathedral City, if my memory served me, was to the southeast of the Springs, a working-class community on the edge of the desert mountain range. I got Augie Dougall’s letter out of the glove compartment and checked the return address: Charles Dougall, 18319 Eucalyptus Road, Cathedral City.

I passed through Palm Springs on Palm Canyon Drive, the ritzy main drag. The expensive boutiques and gift shops that lined its immaculate sidewalks were closed for the summer. Only a few restaurants, coffee shops, and gas stations seemed to be open. The few people about seemed in a hurry, rushing toward some air-conditioned sanctuary. I took Palm Canyon out of town to where it turned into a desert highway, winding around to Cathedral City and Indio.

Cathedral City was as I remembered it—dusty residential streets crowded with old wood frame and faded stucco houses reaching up toward some scrub-covered mountain too insignificant to name. I bumbled on to Eucalyptus Road, almost missing it, jamming right at the last second. I put my car in low and climbed up slowly, scanning the house numbers.

18319 was midway between highway and mountainside. It was white with aluminum siding, the dream house of a modest dreamer. There were small statues of forest animals guarding both sides of the narrow walkway. They had been pink once, but were now faded almost white by the sun. I parked and alighted from my car, shedding my suitcoat as the sun hit me like a blast furnace. I rang the doorbell and was answered by a dog's furious barking. Old bad-ass Rudolf, no doubt. I rang again. There was no one but Rudolf at home.

I drove to a gas station, and asked the attendant if he knew where the freeway embankment was where the three guys got shot. I gave him a big ghoulish smile. He returned it and we related, one ghoul to another. Before giving me detailed instructions on how to find it, he elaborated his theory of the killings: the "Mafia" was responsible. The three dead caddies wouldn't cut them in on their golf course dope action, so they had to be "snuffed."

I thanked him for his help and took off for the scene of the crime. I was there within five minutes. It was just an innocuous freeway off-ramp, the wide overpass providing shelter from the sun. It looked like a good place to get drunk and shoot the shit. Only today the sand flats on both sides of the roadway were jammed with cars, working-class men in Bermuda shorts, housewives with children in tow and low-rider types in tank tops and cut-offs spilling forward to see the place where death and drama happened. I joined them and right away found my prey in the middle of the crowd, standing a head taller than everyone else.

I walked up behind him and tapped his shoulder. He turned around. I could tell he recognized me immediately. "Hi, Augie," I said, "remember me?" He looked around for a means of escape. I glimpsed an eerie intelligence in his eyes.

"I remember you," he said, "from the Tap and Cap. You were looking for Fat Dog. What do you want?"

"I want to make sure the thing that happened to Fat Dog doesn't happen to you."

"What happened to Fat Dog?"

"He's dead." I grabbed my necktie, twisted it up to form a hangman's noose and contorted my face. Augie grimaced. He was very scared. “A lot of people have been dying, Augie. Thanks to your old buddy, Hot Rod Ralston. You’re next unless you talk to me.”

“Hot Rod said that Fat Dog just got hurt.”

“The big hurt, the final one. Talk to me.”

Augie gulped and moved his feet in a little dance of fear. He was sweating now, but not from the heat, and I sensed that he wanted to talk. I went on. “I talked to the barman at the Tap and Cap this morning. He said you came up here to help the cops find out who killed those three caddies. The barman thought you were crazy, acting like a kid. But I don’t. I think you’re a good man and you’ve got a lot of guts. If we work together we can crack this thing. What do you say?”

“I say right on! I say Augie Dougall’s taken enough shit in his life. I say fuck ’em all and save six for the pallbearers.”

“Good man. Let’s get out of this heat. I’ve got a car with air-conditioning.”

We walked to the car. I locked us in and put the air on full. Augie fiddled with the seat release, finally pushing it all the way back to provide adequate leg room. He had at least three inches on me.

“A lot of people think you’re nothing but a big dummy, don’t they, Augie? But I know different. I’m a trained observer and I can tell intelligence when I see it, I’ll tell you what I’m interested in: Fat Dog, Ralston, some sort of Welfare scam and how it all ties in to Sol Kupferman. Be honest, Augie. I heard that conversation you had with Ralston yesterday. He means to hurt you, he thinks you’ve been lying to him. We can’t let that happen. I’ll start by laying my cards on the table. Fat Dog Baker firebombed the Club Utopia back in ’68. Let’s go from there.”

Augie went ashen faced. He started to cough and lit a cigarette. When he spoke his voice was breaking. “Jesus God. You know. And Hot Rod knows and God knows who else. Jesus.”

“How did you find out, Augie?”

“Fat Dog told me, when he was drunk. I believed him. He hated Kupferman because Kupferman was taking care of his sister. He used to get his rocks off by starting fires. I believed him.”

“Did you put Omar Gonzalez onto Ralston?”

“Yeah. I knew something funny was going on between Fat Dog and Hot Rod. Fat Dog gave Hot Rod a lot of shit, and Hot Rod’s a bad man to fuck with. Once they was having an argument at the first tee and Hot Rod says ‘Don’t forget what I know about you, you bastard.’ So I figured be *knew*. I figured if he *knew*, he might have written it down somewhere. That’s why I called Gonzalez. I remembered him from the *Joe Pyne Show*. I figured maybe

I could get at Fat Dog and Hot Rod through him."

"Why did you want to get back at them?"

"For treating me like a slave! Like a retardo! Always laughing at me for being so tall! Augie, the stick! But I'll show them! I'll get the scrapbook and name names! I'll go to the police and be a hero! I'll…"

I placed a gentle hand on his arm. "What do you know about this scrapbook, Augie? The first I heard about it was yesterday."

"I don't know nothing about it, except Burger Hansen and Bobby Marchion was killed for it. They was both old running partners with Fat Dog. Burger used to be in the golf ball business with him. That's why they was killed. It's got to be. They was just drunks and loopers. Nobody murders people like that. They used to get drunk and smoke dope under that embankment. They never hurt nobody. Now they're dead. That's wrong! It's evil!"

"I agree. And the evil is about to stop." I tried a stab in the dark: "Tell me about Ralston's Welfare scam, Augie."

Augie's face went blank. "What Welfare scam?"

"You tell me."

"I don't know nothin' about no Welfare scam. Hot Rod's got this hotel he owns where all these bums on Welfare live. Winos. He collects their checks each month and takes out for their rent and bar tab. Is that what you mean?"

"No, Augie. I was just thinking out loud."

"Hot Rod's evil. You got to be evil to do something like that. Hot Rod don't care about nothin' but money and fucking women. Once he showed me these naked pictures he took of Fat Dog's sister with her legs open. He told me he fucked her. I knew her. She was a sweet young girl. She used to cook really good spaghetti at the caddy lunchstand. And Hot Rod talked about her like she was scum."

"You mark my words, Augie, within one week Hot Rod Ralston is not going to have a pot to piss in. Four people that I know of are dead because of him and he's going to pay for it." Augie looked at me with unabashed hero worship. "One last thing," I said, "you told Ralston yesterday that Cal Myers told Fat Dog about me on the golf course. Exactly what did he say?"

Augie screwed his face in a memory search: "That you was a private eye in name only. That you was on the sauce. That you weren't as smart as you thought you was. That you liked to give people shit."

"That's all?"

"That's all I can remember."

"And Fat Dog said he was going to 'use' me for something, right?"

"Right. But he didn't tell me what it was."

"You sure?"

"Yeah. I remember I asked him, but he said never mind. Fat Dog could be real silent and crafty like. What are you gonna do now?"

"Talk to Burger Hansen's widow, look for the scrapbook. What about you?"

"Hide out with my cousin. When you go to the cops, will you tell them I helped you?"

"In spades, Augie. But you can't stay here in Cat City. Someone was looking for the scrapbook at your cousin's place. You've both got to blow town. You got bread?"

"Not much."

I checked my wallet and laughed. Forty-three dollars. In the course of the last three weeks I had dished out more money to informers and victims and to assuage my guilty German soul than I had earned in my first year as a cop. "I'm Tap City, Augie," I said, "but I'll tell you what to do. Cal Myers owes me one—you get back to L.A. and call him. Tell him Fritz Brown said for him to lay a grand on you. Don't mention this case or what it's for. If he won't give you the bread, say this: January 29, 1971. That will pry it out of him."

"Ain't that like blackmail? I know Cal Myers. He's a hard case and a cheap loop. Catbox Cal they call him, 'cause he's always in the sand trap."

"Don't worry. He'll kick loose. I'll take you back to your cousin's pad. When he gets back, tell him you've both got to split for a few weeks. Has he got a car?"

"Yeah."

"Good. Get in it and take off." I started up my own battered chariot, pulled it off the shoulder and pointed it toward Charlie Dougall's house. "Do you know Hansen's wife, Augie?" I asked.

"Well enough," he said. "She's a good old girl. Loopers who get hitched up have a knack for picking loyal women. She put up with a lot of shit from old Burger. She didn't like his drinking, though. She's in A.A. herself, that's why Burger used to get bombed under the freeway. Marguerita wouldn't let him drink at home. You know, Fritz, I feel good. It's real funny. I don't know what's going to happen, where I'm going to, but I feel like I've done something. Something real. For the first time."

"You have, Augie. You've done something very few people could have done."

"You really think so, Fritz?"

"I know so, Augie." I pulled up in front of his cousin's house and handed him one of my business cards. "Here's my card, Augie. Call me in two weeks and I'll tell you how this thing came out. In the meantime, get out of town and be careful."

We shook hands solemnly, then Augie broke into a big loving grin and extricated his Abraham Lincoln frame from my Camaro. I waited until he was safely inside the house, then split.

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The Desert Flower Trailer Park was in Section 14, Palm Springs' poverty pocket. I had been hearing about Section 14 for years. Middle-class elitist cops, connoisseurs of lowlife, spoke with awe of the tawdry, unpaved collection of tarpaper shacks, trailer parks, and abandoned cars that existed just half a mile off of Palm Canyon Drive. Every commercial center has to have a slum to house its destitute, and Palm Springs was no exception. Only here the dichotomy was more obvious and the center of desolation more isolated: two minutes from downtown Palm Springs in the middle of a gigantic sand flat, Section 14 stood, not quite visible from the broad streets that formed its perimeter, lest it ruin some tourist's vacation with intimations of reality. Dog packs were rumored to roam through it at night, searching out cats and desert rodents for food. Most of its population—drunks, Welfare recipients, car washers and restaurant workers at two dollars an hour—sought air-conditioned refuge during the summer days and returned to swelter at night.

As I pulled off Ramon Road and drove north on Section 14's garbage-strewn dirt access road, I felt timeless, like a Steinbeckian capitalist exploiter. The Desert Flower Trailer Park was on the south border of Section 14, saving me a trip into its dark inner sanctum. There were no flowers to be seen, desert or otherwise; only a permanently grounded fleet of beat-up, tarnished, small trailers, most of them sans cars. I looked at my watch. It was 7:04 and getting dark. There was no one around. I parked my car and locked it, surveying it in the process. It was nine model years old and dusty. It blended right in. If I was lucky no one would deface it out of envy or resentment.

At the head of the two long lines of trailers was a shack marked "Office." I banged on the door. An elderly woman in a robe answered, smelling of gin. I inquired after Marguerita Hansen. The old woman perused me from head to toe. "Cop?" she said. I nodded affirmatively. "At the very end on the left, number twenty-three." She slammed her door, blowing dust on my trouser leg.

Marguerita Hansen's trailer was one of the nicer ones, a chromium "air-stream" of the type popular in the early '50s. It looked well kept-up, the chrome carrying a minimum of dust. It had an electric buzzer next to the door that went off resoundingly when I pushed it. A woman of about fifty came to the door a minute later.

My first thought upon seeing her was that twenty years ago she must have been a real beauty. She was a honey blonde, tall and plump. Her face was blotched from crying. She held on to the door for support and looked down at me. “Yes?” she said. “Are you from the police? They said I could wait for a few days before making my statement.”

“I’m not with the police, Mrs. Hansen,” I said. “My name is Brown, I’m a private investigator. I’m investigating the murders here in Palm Springs and some other things that may be related. Could I speak to you for a minute?”

When she hesitated, I handed her my billfold, open to the photostat of my license. She took it, checked it briefly, and handed it back. “All right,” she said, “come in.”

The interior of the trailer was spotlessly clean. There was a couch, a coffee table, and two chairs arranged neatly. Up against one wall were boxes full of men’s clothes. Standing next to them were three golf bags, filled with clubs. Marguerita Hansen caught my gaze. “Those were George’s things,” she said. “I don’t want them around anymore.”

I nodded as I took a seat on the couch. “I’ll try to make this brief. First, I don’t think the deaths of your husband, Marchion and Gaither had anything to do with drugs, as the police have been suggesting.” She sat down in a chair across from me. I continued: “I think their deaths can be traced directly to two men—Richard Ralston and Frederick ‘Fat Dog’ Baker. I…” I stopped. Marguerita Hansen came alive at the mention of the two names. “Do you know these two men, Mrs. Hansen?”

“Yes. Yes, I do. George and I have known Dick Ralston for years. He and George used to play minor league baseball together when they were teenagers. He got George his start as a caddy. And George and I were foster parents to Freddy Baker and his sister when they were little children.”

“What?” Suddenly I was shaking.

“I said Dick Ralston and George were old friends and that we were foster parents to Freddy Baker and his sister. My God, why are you staring at me that way?!” She began to sob. I let her cry while I tried to clear the gathering storm clouds in my own mind. After a minute she controlled herself. She looked at me guiltily, as if ashamed for her show of emotion.

“Mrs. Hansen,” I said, “I understand your connection to Richard Ralston. But you tell me that you and your husband were foster parents to Fat Dog Baker and his sister?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“His sister, Jane Baker?”

“Yes.”

“Who’s about twenty-eight years old now?”

“Yes, that’s about right.”

"My God. When was this?"

"In 1955. Freddy was twelve and Jane was three."

"How did this come about?"

"A man I knew arranged it. Why I'll never know. He was a wonderful man, an old friend, and he knew George and I wanted children, but couldn't have any. He paid us very well to take care of them. We loved them so much. They were orphans. We were their second foster parents. Their first died in a fire the year before." A fire. Jesus God.

"What was this man's name, Mrs. Hansen? It's very important."

She hesitated. "Sol Kupferman," she said.

Oh, God. Oh, shit. "And this was in 1955?" I almost screamed it.

"Yes. Why are you getting so upset?"

"I'm sorry, but what you've told me—and I believe you—contradicts most of the evidence I've gathered so far. How did you know Kupferman?"

"My brother introduced us. Sol was a very rich, glamorous, considerate man. He was supposed to be in the rackets, but I didn't care. He had just lost the woman he had been living with for years. She committed suicide. He was heartbroken. We comforted each other. Why he was interested in the Baker kids, I'll never know. He was always doing nice things for people. Anonymously. He told George and I that we must never mention him to the children."

"And he arranged the adoption through an adoption agency?"

"Yes. The County Agency."

"And what happened? Finally you gave up the children?"

"We had to. George was drinking heavily and Freddy became a wild, terrible boy. The adoption people took them away from us."

"And that was the last you saw of the children? Or of Kupferman?"

"No. Sol and Dick Ralston fixed George up with a job caddying at Hillcrest. He sent us money at Christmas time. He still does. But I haven't seen him for over ten years."

"And Freddy and Jane were sent to other foster homes?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen them since?"

"Not Jane. Freddy once in a while throughout the years. Not recently. He turned into a terrible, vicious-minded man, and I wanted nothing to do with him. He and George used to caddy at the same tournaments and sometimes he brought Freddy home, but I told him not to. Freddy scares me."

"So you haven't seen him recently?"

"No, but I knew he and George still saw each other. They even did 'business' together, if you can call it that. About ten days ago Bobby

Marchion came by. He dropped off some keys for George from Freddy to his golf ball business. Freddy had sold George thousands of golf balls for four hundred dollars. They were in this cheap hotel room in L.A."

"Do you still have the keys?"

"Yes."

"Could I have them? I'll gladly pay for them."

"You can have them for free. I've had enough of golf bums, golf, and golf balls. I've been sober for three years in A.A.; I've got a Higher Power in my life, and George, as much as I loved him, was a terrible burden. It's God's will now that I move away from my old acquaintances. With George gone, I can do that. So you take the keys, with my best wishes." She went to a drawer and handed them to me, three of them on a rabbit's foot chain.

"What's the name of the hotel?" I asked.

"It's the Westwood Hotel in West L.A. The room number is on the big key."

I thanked her and pocketed my prize. "One thing before I go," I said. "Do you know of a scrapbook that Freddy Baker had?"

"No, I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry. You've been a tremendous help." We shook hands. I walked out the trailer door.

"God bless you," she called out after me.

I didn't take the blessing to heart. I couldn't. I was flying high on my own omnipotence. I got a cheap motel room in Indio. It was dirty, but air-conditioned, and in the morning I got up and drove back to L.A.

V

CONCERTO FOR ORCHESTRA

12

Back in L.A., my first stop was the Hall of Records on North Broadway. I was armed with two dates of birth and was hunting for big game: birth certificates to prove a theory that was forming in a dark corner of my brain. I explained to the harried, underpaid black woman working the records counter that I was Frederick Baker, born in L.A. on 7-14-43 and I needed my birth certificate because all my I.D. had been ripped off. While I was here, I said, I wanted to get a copy of my sister's birth certificate also. She was going to Europe soon and needed the copy to get a passport. Would it be possible? I asked. It would be.

I gave the girl Jane Baker's D.O.B., 3-11-52, and sat down to wait. The expected results came fifteen minutes later. No Frederick Bakers or Jane Bakers were born in Los Angeles on the dates I had given. So far, my theory was bearing out. I trusted that the birthdates given to me by Jensen at L.A.P.D. R&I were accurate. If my next gambit didn't pay off I would have to make a computer check of all births on those dates, which might prove difficult and futile; for if Jane and Fat Dog were born outside L.A. County, I was screwed.

I pulled off my next ploy. I found another busy clerk and told him the same story, this time substituting the name Kupferman for Baker. I hung out nervously for twenty minutes in the crowded waiting room until the clerk called out "Kupferman!" Though I was expecting it, I nearly jumped out of my skin. I paid the man his Xeroxing fee with shaking hands, then took the copies to a corner of the room and read them, suppressing shivers all the while.

Frederick Richard Kupferman was born in Cedars of Lebanon Hospital on July 14, 1943. He weighed nine pounds six ounces. A Fat Dog from the start. His parents were listed as Solomon Kupferman of Los Angeles and Louisa Jane Hall of Pasadena. Jane Elizabeth Kupferman was born in the same hospital, of the same parents, on March 11, 1952. Everything is connected. The anti-Semite is a Jew. The beloved cellist is a daughter. Which explained Kupferman's interest from the start in the Baker siblings, which explained his overpowering fatherly love for Jane and his reluctance to deal with Fat Dog's psychoses. And they were born out of wedlock, by the same woman, nine years apart. Unmarried parents were frowned upon in those days. Why no marriage? And the nine-year gap between births. Who did little Freddy live with during those years?

Marguerita Hansen had said that Sol Kupferman's longtime paramour had committed suicide. Why? She had also told me the first foster parents were killed in a fire. Started by Freddy? Was he psychotic that young? Only Kupferman could answer those questions, and I wasn't ready to talk to him yet.

I found a pay phone down the corridor from the records storage room and called the Los Angeles County Bureau of Adoptions. Impersonating a police officer—again—I demanded information on Frederick and Jane Kupferman. It was going well until I told the clerk their dates of birth. "I'm sorry, officer," I was told, "our records only go back to 1956." I hung up, stuffed the two birth certificates into my pocket, retrieved my car from the lot on Temple and headed for the Harbor Freeway and the Hotel Westwood.

The Westwood was a solidly built, tan concrete building on Westwood Boulevard about a mile south of the Village. It was a one-story walk up, L-shaped, situated above a dry cleaner's and photography shop.

There was a small parking lot in back of the building. I ditched the car and walked up the rickety back steps. Walking into the hotel was like walking into another era. The flat finished white stucco walls, ratty Persian carpets in the hallway and mahogany doors almost had me convinced it was 1938 and that my fictional predecessor Philip Marlowe was about to confront me with a wisecrack.

I found room 12 at the far end of the tail of the "L." There was no one in the hallway, but from within the rooms I could hear T.V.'s and radios blaring. I unlocked the door and walked into golf ball heaven. There were crates of golf balls on the floor and shopping bags of golf balls on top of them, piled up to eye level.

There were no furnishings in the room except an old mahogany dresser with three boxes of golf balls on top, and when I opened the four drawers, they were, naturally, filled with golf balls. There was a sink next to a window looking out on the parking lot. It was filled with golf balls. There was a metal trash can below the sink. It, too, was filled with golf balls. Against one wall was a closet door that I could barely glimpse through the maze of golf ball crates. I looked at it with trepidation. There was probably a golf ball junkie sleeping inside who would kill me on the off chance that my pockets might yield a few golf balls.

I risked it anyway, clearing away a half dozen crates of the pebbled sporting eggs. They were heavy little fuckers. The closet contained jumbo plastic laundry bags full of golf balls, piled up to a top shelf. I couldn't see anything on the shelf, but swept my hand across it impulsively and came away with a key ring. There were two keys on it and they were labeled, in the tiniest of print, with the names of country clubs in the L.A. area, followed by numbers: Wilshire 71 and Lakeside 16.

I stopped and thought. Fat Dog's access to the country club milieu of Los Angeles was profound, but only on the level of caddy. Caddy shacks contained lockers that were probably numbered and these keys were locker size. I could tear this room up looking for the scrapbook and come up with nothing but golf ball jaundice, so I split, locking the door behind me.

Only one thing troubled me. Marguerita Hansen had given me three keys. Keys to what? Then I flashed. The community shower and toilet might require a key to enter. I tried them both and they fit. I felt like a third grade kid who had solved a difficult puzzle.

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Wilshire Country Club, located midway between downtown and Hollywood, yielded nothing but hostile looks from a particularly motley group of loopers who watched suspiciously as I strode purposefully into their caddy shack, unlocked locker number 71, came up with nothing but more golf balls and promptly split, happy that my theory had been validated.

I drove out to Lakeside, taking the Cahuenga Pass past the Hollywood Bowl and over the hill. I parked my car on a side street leading up to the Lakeside Clubhouse entranceway. The clubhouse was old Spanish, with a low red-tiled roof that seemed to promise warm good times. It was 2:00 p.m., a Thursday, and the clubhouse was nearly deserted. I walked right through. Being reasonably Anglo-Saxon and tastefully dressed, no one stopped me. I could hear pieces of golf anecdotes as I walked through the dining room and out onto a patio with a great view of the flat golf course.

It didn't take me long to spot the caddy shack; it was the only piece of run-down property on this otherwise splendid preserve, and the carelessly dressed men coming out of it were a dead giveaway. So I strolled over and entered Caddyland once again, my hands stuck in my trouser pockets, my fingers crossed for luck. This caddy shack was relatively clean and the card games that were going on were relatively sedate.

I extracted the key for locker number 16 from the key ring and walked into the locker room in back of the card room. Aside from two loopers asleep on wooden benches I had the dusty room to myself. I stuck the key into the lock, turned it, and stepped back, expecting an onslaught of golf balls that never came. The locker was empty except for one large, double-strength supermarket bag. When I looked inside I knew I was home. There was one large yellow plastic notebook binder and several dozen bankbooks and savings and loan passbooks. My heart made a brief, joyous "kathud" and I slammed the locker door shut and walked into the caddy day room.

I couldn't resist a parting salute to the assembled loopers, so I yelled, "Loop on, you heroic motherfuckers! You have achieved a place in my heart rivaled only by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra! Long live the fine amenities of a well-hit chip shot! Long live Stan The Man, Burger Hansen, and Bobby Marchion! Let the bummer roll! Looping U.S.A.!" I didn't wait around for their response. I tore out of the caddy shack, my arms tightly encircling what I knew would be a priceless piece of L.A. history.

I couldn't go home to read it. I couldn't go home at all, not with Ralston and Cathcart knowing what they did about me, so I drove back over the Cahuenga Pass to the little park across Highland from the Bowl. I found a place on the grass in the shade, took a deep breath, and dug in. The notebook seemed to be in three orderly sections. I could tell even before I opened it: there were three colors of paper—white, yellow, and blue. The white section was in the style of a ledger and I immediately recognized the printing as Fat Dog's; much neater than in his letter to Jane. The ledger obviously noted racetrack winnings: the first column contained dates going back to '62, the second the names of the horses, the third the odds, and the fourth the amount of money won. It had to be money won, since each amount was followed by several happy-looking exclamation marks. I drew in a sharp breath as I riffled through the white pages: Fat Dog had won a fortune in the past seventeen years.

I dropped the notebook, reached in the bag, pulled out a handful of bankbooks and gasped: $11,000 in deposits in one bank, $9,600 in another, $8,000 in another, $12,300 in another, $6,000, $14,000, $8,000, $9,900, $13,000, $4,500, $17,000, $11,250, and on and on and on. There were thirty-four bankbooks in all, all to branches in the Greater L.A. area. I did some quick figuring and came up with a rough total of at least three hundred grand. Over a quarter of a million dollars. I checked the signature on each passbook: Frederick R. Baker. But the words were too well-formed to have been written by Fat Dog. Someone else had made the deposits. But who?

I wiped sweat from my face, rolled up my sleeves and went back to the notebook. I felt suddenly nauseated, but I clenched my teeth and started on the second section, which contained newspaper clippings of fires in the Los Angeles area followed by humorous comments in Fat Dog's inimitable printing. It was the most ghastly reading I have ever done. The clippings were carefully taped to the yellow paper, which was encased in thin plastic to protect it from aging. It took me only a few minutes to conclude that Fat Dog was a lifelong arsonist and a mass murderer unparalleled in modern times:

From the Los Angeles *Mirror*, April 2, 1961:

FAMILY OF THREE DIES IN GARAGE BLAZE

A family of three met a blazing death yesterday when their garage-playroom burst into flames. Los Angeles Fire Department spokesman Capt. C. D. Finan said that Howard Rosenthal, 37, his wife Mona, 34, and their daughter Eleanor, 11, of 9683 Sandhaven, Westchester were playing ping-pong when their playroom caught fire. They suffocated almost instantly. The cause of the fire was traced to internal combustion, a deadly combination of heat and gas-soaked rags found in the garage. Funeral services for the Rosenthal family are pending at Malinow Silverman Mortuary, Hollywood.

From the *Herald Express*, September 10, 1963:

SUPERMARKET FIRE CLAIMS LIVES OF TWO

Two heroic supermarket cashiers died last night as they went back into the blazing inferno that was Ralph's Market on Third and San Vicente in West Los Angeles. The two men, Donald Bedell, 26, and William Jones, 31, were trying to rescue the market's payroll and were consumed by flames. Cause of the blaze is as yet undetermined and property damage is estimated at close to a half million dollars. There were several shoppers inside the store when the fire broke out, and Bedell and Jones moved them to safety before returning to open the safe. Bedell is survived by his wife Donna. Jones by his parents, Mr. & Mrs. Robert Jones of Long Beach.

From the *Times*, January 29, 1964:

TWO DIE AS CAR EXPLODEs ON FREEWAY

> *A young married couple met their death on the San Bernardino Freeway yesterday in a freak accident when a leaky gas tank and sparks from an overheated engine combined to send the car exploding into flames near an off-ramp in Arcadia. The couple, recently married, were Mr. and Mrs. Willard D. Jamison of Santa Monica. A passing motorist saw the blazing car and flagged down a nearby Highway Patrolman, but by then it was too late. Fire engines arrived on the scene minutes later and put out the fire. Funeral services for the Jamisons will be held at Gates, Kingsley and Gates Mortuary, Forest Lawn on February 2.*

Below were Fat Dog's comments: "The Fat Dog is everywhere! I can see everywhere!!! I roast 'em, toast 'em and make the most of 'em!!!!!"

On and on it went. The scrapbook contained clippings in chronological order of fires up until last year. Fires that took lives, fires that destroyed homes, cars, industrial property. All flawlessly executed. Sol Kupferman and Louisa Jane Hall had spawned a genius: malignant, clever beyond belief, and evil beyond comprehension.

I had reached the year 1972, and had counted sixteen deaths, when I couldn't go on. I was as still as a leaf, but inside I was screaming. Tears of anger and disbelief began to stain the yellow pages. The evil was staggering, the brilliance behind it unfathomable. Given enough time, Fat Dog Baker would have burned Los Angeles County to the ground. And he had chosen *me*, Fritz Brown, "detective in name only," to help implement his plan of revenge, blackmail, and God knows what else, directed at Kupferman, Ralston, and God knows who else. God. That was funny. There was no God. But for the first time I found myself wishing there were. I took deep breaths for a minute or so. They actually helped; I felt slightly calmed as I went on to the blue pages.

The first several were devoted to newspaper clippings of the Club Utopia firebombing. I pored over them, looking for something I didn't already know. There was nothing, just the initial accounts of the tragedy, the apprehension of the bombers, their "fourth man" story, their trial, appeals, and eventual execution. Lt. Haywood Cathcart was highly praised for "almost singlehandedly bringing the culprits to justice"—Mayor Sam Yorty. Cathcart called the "fourth man" story "pure hogwash; A cheap ploy to avoid the green room at San Quentin that isn't going to work."

Cathcart's involvement in the Baker-Ralston-Kupferman mess had to date from the bombing; it was only logical. He had to be the lever, the buffer, the balance between Fat Dog and Solly K. I turned the page and found out just how monstrous his culpability was. Following the Utopia clippings were notes on Cathcart:

> Something bad happened. but it's going to be okay. Cop—H. C., hassled me today. Says he thinks he can pin me to 4th man in Utopia torch. Says he remembers seeing me in area. Said I'm hard to forget. True—there is only one Fat Dog!!!! Says he don't care—guys who threw bomb will fry. Asks me—You know about book at Utopia? All caddies bet the horses. I tell him I don't book action with no Jews. Says he don't like Jews, either. Why? Why, why, why, did you torch the joint? he says. So I figure it out. He wants something. He's got something in mind. He hates Jews (big blond German-looking guy!!!) and he knows about Solly Kike being in mob. So I tell him about Solly Kike. I hate him!!!! He smiles. You going to be my watchdog, he says. We'll do real good together. Then he says—you firebug? I try to say no, but he hits me. I can read your mind, he says. Don't fuck with me and you'll be able to do whatever you want in peace. Just keep your mouth shut and you'll make money!!!! He scares me. He can read my mind. He knows. After I did toy store in Valley, he gives Hot Rod letter to give me: "You got a thing about toy stores, Fat Dog?" it says. "Remember, *I know you*. Your buddy." He does know me.

I waded through twenty-five pages of anti-Semitic and racist drivel before there was more mention of Cathcart:

> The Big Man is everywhere. He knows my M.O.!!!! He sends me notes after my jobs, calls me his genius little boy. Good watchdog! He says! He's everywhere. A tree on Bel-Air front nine. A big dog on L.A. South. An evil squirrel on Wilshire 8th. Won't let me have Jane! Lots of money. But no Jane. Money don't mean shit with no family. H.C. has X-ray eyes, like Superman. He can see at night, too. Like a cat. A big mean cat.

The rest of the blue pages contained more anti-Semitism. I turned back to the yellow section to look for mention of a toy store fire. I found it. It occurred on October 14, 1973, in Sherman Oaks. Cause of blaze undetermined. The proprietor and his son were seriously burned. That was the final indicator.

I drove to my bank on Hollywood and La Brea and withdrew $500 in twenties from my safety deposit box, then drove to a storage garage on Melrose and paid to have my Camaro stored for two weeks. I got my expensive reel-to-reel tape machine out of the trunk before I left, then took a cab to a car rental agency on Wilshire and Normandie, where I rented a two-year-old Ford L.T.D.

Next I went looking for interim housing. Feeling the need for an injection of beauty, I opted for the beach and found a quiet court-style motel on Pacific Coast Highway, north of Sunset. My room was clean and afforded a view of the ocean. I paid for a week in advance.

Then I dictated into my never-before-used tape deck for three hours, using up four reels of tape. I spoke of the case, starting at the beginning, running in chronological order, with frequent digressions. I covered everything, including my killing of Henry Cruz and Reyes Sandoval. When I finished I sat back and thought of Haywood Cathcart, and of myself. Both cops. Both cops gone bad, to different degrees. I wondered at his motives for joining the police department, then examined my own.

I had wanted a way to express my sense of fair play and my love of beauty. I had wanted to crack wise and kick ass on those who deserved it. I had wanted to express a cynical, world-weary ethos tempered with compassion that women would eat up. I wanted low-level, uncomplicated power over other people’s lives. To be 6'3", 200 pounds, with a blue uniform, a badge, and a gun seemed like a wonderful ego boost. The streets by day; Beethoven, booze, Walter, and women by night.

But I was a terrible policeman and an abuser of power. My dispensing of justice was arbitrary and dictated by mood. I ripped off dope dealers for their weed, smoked it myself, and congratulated myself on my enlightened stance in not busting them. I shook down prostitutes for quickie blowjobs in the back seats of squad cars. Whatever I touched in my search to assert, to be, turned bad.

But Cathcart, assuming he became a cop for similar reasons, went beyond me in his desire for power. Real power. Money power. He was obviously the Big Man in the Welfare rip-off, holding Sol Kupferman moral hostage in the process—first through Fat Dog, now through God knows what lever. And he remained anonymous, like a Republican fundraiser, savoring the real influence of power. No need to grandstand in a blue suit for Haywood Cathcart, he knew where the real goodies lay. And his complicity by silence was overpowering: he let Fat Dog burn and kill and sent him notes calling him my “genius little boy.” I thought my capacity for moral outrage was long dead, but it was attacking me now like a jungle carnivore. No, no, no, no, I said. Yes, yes, I said a dozen times in succession.

I walked down to a liquor store on Sunset and P.C.H., bought a fifth of Scotch and returned to my room. I put it up on the bookcase and stared at it. I said no a dozen more times. Then yes a dozen more. Then it rose up from the bottom of my soul with a screaming finality. Yes. Yes. I couldn't run from it. I took the fifth of Scotch outside and smashed it to pieces on the pavement of Pacific Coast Highway. Yes. Yes. Yes. It was locked in a moral imperative: Cathcart had to die.

—

I rose the next morning from a troubled sleep populated by my old patrol partner Deverson, a mad collector of Fab 40 records and women's pubic hair. The songs were all there in my dreams: "Runaway" by Del Shannon, "Chanson D'Amour" by Art and Doddie Todd, "Blue Moon" by the Marcels. I took three Excedrin to knock them out, and drove to a clothing store on Santa Monica Mall and bought four changes of clothing—short-sleeved shirts, pants and socks, and shaving gear. At a phone booth I dialed Information and got Richard Ralston's address: 8173 Hildebrand Street, Encino.

Then I thought: brace him at his pad? Too risky. At Hillcrest? Too many people around. Surveillance—wait and pick my shot? Also too risky. Ralston was on edge and would spot me sooner or later. I needed an "in," someone who knew Ralston and his modus operandi. After a moment I remembered the resentful old looper I had talked to at the Hillcrest caddy shack two days ago.

I placed another phone call, this time to Hillcrest, and learned that Ralston would not be in today, that Friday was his day off, and that his assistant, Rudy, would be acting as starter. Divine providence. I drove to Hillcrest, parking on a side street off Pico.

Pops was easy to find—he was the only caddy left in the shack, an indication of his low status. He saw me approach and grimaced. "Hi, Pops. Remember me?"

"I remember you," he said, "I'm not senile. And don't call me Pops or I'll call you Sonny Boy."

I laughed. "Fair enough. What should I call you?"

"Call me Alex."

"Okay, Alex, call me Jack. What's the matter? No loop today?"

"Fuck no. That punk Rudy puts all the duck loopers out before me. He wouldn't know a good caddy from a rhinoceros. Dirty cocksucker."

"You hurting for cash?"

"I'm always hurting for cash."

"Want to make a quick loop with me? The fastest loop of your life? Maybe ten minutes for twenty-five scoots?"

"You're talking my language, Jackie-Boy. What do I got to do?"

"Just talk to me. Let's go out on the porch." Alex followed me, licking his lips. "You hate Ralston, don't you, Alex?" I said.

"I hate the cocksucker's guts. Why?"

"I don't like him myself. He ripped me off on a bet. I want to get even. I've got to get him alone to do this. I need to find out something about his routine, so I'll know when to make my move."

Alex looked at me fearfully, nodding his head slowly. "And you'll pay me for providing you with this info?"

"Right."

"And Hot Rod ain't gonna find out about me tellin' you this?"

"You have my word."

"You got anything against trespassin' late at night?"

"No."

"Then I'll tell you. I know the time and I know the place. But I need thirty-five clams. My rent's due."

"You've got it. Talk to me."

"Tonight's the night, big fella. Hot Rod plays poker every Friday night, here in the shack with all his pet goats. The game usually lasts until about two in the morning. The loopers go home and Hot Rod stays here 'cause he lives way out in the Valley and he's gotta be on the first tee at six thirty Saturday morning for all the heavy play. So he sleeps in the maintenance shed off of the eighth hole. He's got a little room there with a cot. There's no one around. No one shows up until six in the morning. You can have him all to yourself."

It sounded good, so Alex took me on a little tour. When we were about two hundred yards from what I assumed was our destination, Alex halted and grabbed my arm. "That's it," he said, "that's the maintenance shed. Hot Rod's gotta come this way. You see that first little door? That's where he craps out, I don't wanna go no further. I don't want nobody to see me showing you around. Okay?"

"Okay." I got out my wallet and handed Alex two twenties. "Thanks, you've been a big help. Take care."

Alex grinned toothlessly. "You too, big fella, and if you've gotta get rough, kick him once in the balls for me, only don't tell him where it came from." He smiled again and took off running in the direction of the caddy shack.

I stayed behind and watched a twosome of women play the first hole. It seemed timeless, yet completely foreign to me. There was one caddy in the group, a tall blond kid in his early twenties. I wondered if he would wind up as a career looper. I hoped not. If looping was sadness, it was also the line of least resistance to many things—from income tax to the credit society. But the balance was unequal. In the end, looping was more what you ran from than the small freedoms it allowed you.

I drove to an electronics store in Century City and purchased three hours' worth of blank tape, then drove to my motel. I dug through the shopping bag that contained Fat Dog's horror journal and bankbooks, then burned the contents of the journal in the bathroom sink, watching a history of unsung malfeasance go up, appropriately, in flames. When the evil words were obliterated, I doused the pages with water and carried the sodden mess outside to a dumpster. I put two of the bankbooks in my pocket and stashed the rest under the mattress.

I called the manager and told him to buzz my room at ten that evening. Then I lay down and slept dreamlessly.

—

At eleven thirty that night I was sitting on the cool grass of the first hole at Hillcrest Country Club, waiting for Hot Rod Ralston and armed for bear. The night was warm, but the wet grass brought the temperature down a good ten degrees. I felt solidly good, confident that my case was winding down, armed now with facts as well as weaponry. And my motives had changed. What had begun as self-aggrandizement would have to end as anonymous moral victory, for I had no intention of publicizing my involvement in the case, or paying for the killing of Cathcart.

I waited over three hours. At two forty by the dial on my watch I heard a man coughing, coming toward me from the direction of the caddy shack. He was whistling and turning toward my resting place in the trees. It was obvious he couldn't see or hear me, but I backed into the woods, giving him a wide berth, then swooped silently up on him as he entered the ninth fairway, jamming my gun into his back and reaching a containing arm across his chest. He bolted reflexively, but stopped when he realized it was hardware digging into his backside. He said "What the fu…" then stopped.

We stood still a moment, him bewildered, but catching on and me high on adrenalin. "That's right, Ralston," I said, "It's a gun. It's loaded, but I'm not. We're going to do some walking and talking. Next stop the maintenance shack. Move." I grabbed his belt with my left hand, keeping my gun in my right, pointed at spine level. We walked.

"I want you to know that I only have sixty-five dollars on me," Ralston said. "I lost tonight. You would have done better to catch some of the other guys in the parking lot. I'm almost flat, buddy."

I didn't like the remark. It was condescending and indicated a lack of respect for my intelligence. I didn't answer him until we were on the paved roadway leading to the shed. Then I yanked his belt back hard, sending him down to the concrete head first. While he was down, stunned and squirming to get up, I kicked him in the head, back, and ribs. He stifled his cries. He was trying very hard to maintain his composure. I squatted next to him, the barrel of my gun resting on his now bloody nose. "Resign yourself to two things, Ralston. One, that tonight you are going to pay for some past sins, and two, that you are going to tell me everything you know about Haywood Cathcart, Fat Dog Baker, Omar Gonzalez, Sol Kupferman, Welfare rip-offs, and arson. And Ralston—if you don't talk, you die. Now let's have a seat in your little room. Get up."

He got to his feet. I grabbed his belt again and he moved forward, then fumbled in his pockets as we reached the door. As his key entered the lock and the door opened, I released his belt and kicked him full-force in the small of the back with the flat of my foot, thrusting him airborne into the dark room. He crashed into something wooden. This time he screamed. I found a light switch and flicked it on. I looked at Ralston's handsome, bloodied face. He was scared, huddled on the floor next to an overturned nightstand.

The room was dank and sparsely furnished: a cot, a water cooler, the nightstand, and a deck chair. I told Ralston to get up and sit on the edge of the cot. He did, slowly. I shut the door behind me and drew a paper cup of water from the dispenser. I handed it to Ralston, who gulped it down. I removed my tape deck from where it was jammed into my pants, located an outlet next to the nightstand and plugged it in. I took a seat in the deck chair and eyed Ralston. I hardly knew where to begin. There was so much I needed to know.

Ralston broke the silence. "Look," he said, his voice under control, "Hurting me won't help you. Fat Dog is dead. The men who killed him are dead. He was an arsonist. He started a lot of fires. He burned down Kupferman's warehouse. I know that Fat Dog hired you, why I don't know, but all this trouble began about that time. Sol Kupferman is a generous man. He'd be grateful to you. I could put in a word for you."

It was the wrong thing to say. I dug brass knuckles out of my pocket as Ralston maintained eye contact with me and rambled on with his plea bargaining. "Solly K has been known to set people up in business, the whole shot," he was saying as I leaped on top of him and slammed my iron clad fist twice into the fleshy part of his back. He started to scream, then thought better of it and began to whimper.

He was shivering, and I placed an arm on his shoulder and spoke softly: "Ralston, I know most of it. But you can put together some of the pieces. I need to see how it all works. If you don't talk to me, now, I'm going to go internal. I'm going to bang your kidneys until it's all over. If you don't talk to me, I'll maim you, *then* I'll kill you. Tonight. Is it Cathcart that's worrying you? Are you afraid he'll get at you for talking to me? Nod if that's true." Ralston nodded, vigorously. "Good, that's what I figured. I've got a handle on Cathcart. I know he's cold, utterly ruthless, and a killer. But I'm worse. Cathcart might kill you for talking to me, but that's an unknown factor. If you don't talk to me, you die. That's absolute. And Cathcart's finished. I've got Fat Dog's scrapbook, I've checked out Cathcart's palace in Baja, I know he's got to be the big man in this Welfare scam. He can't do you any good now. But if you help me you'll survive. You gonna talk?" Ralston nodded again.

I gave him a minute to compose himself, while I loaded the tape deck with a spool of blank tape. I attached the condenser mike and held it a foot or so from Ralston's face. He flinched as he saw it, but cleared his throat as if preparing to speak. He was utterly demoralized and hurting. I took a voice reading, and played it back. The reception was good. Ralston fidgeted on the cot as I introduced myself to the machine and said that this was the companion interview to my previously recorded notes. I held the mike in my left hand and kept the brass knuckles coiled into my right fist, which I waved in front of Ralston. "The truth, Ralston," I said. "Get ready. What is your name?" I said into the mike.

"Richard Ralston."

"Your age?"

"Forty-seven."

"Where are you employed?"

"At the Hillcrest Country Club."

"In what capacity are you employed?"

"As the starter and caddy master."

"How long have you had this job?"

"Since 1958."

"How did you get the job?"

"Through Sol Kupferman."

"How did you know Kupferman?"

"Through baseball. We got friendly at the old Gilmore Field games. I was a shortstop for the Hollywood Stars. Kupferman was a big fan."

"Did you help Kupferman run his bookmaking operation at the Club Utopia?"

Ralston squirmed and ran a sleeve over his sweaty face. "Yes. I collected the bets, sent guys to the track to place them, that kind of thing. It was penny ante, but Solly paid me well."

"Are you still involved in bookmaking?"

"Yes. Still small-time."

"When did you meet Frederick 'Fat Dog' Baker?"

Ralston started to open his mouth, then changed his mind. He seemed to be gathering his mental resources. I raised my right hand, metal encased, to within an inch of his face. "The truth, Ralston," I said, "I know everything about Fat Dog and Solly."

Ralston nodded, resigned. "Sol Kupferman told me to bring Fat Dog out to Hillcrest. This was when he was about fourteen or so. For some reason he wanted Fat Dog around. I got him started caddying. There was another caddy, George Hansen, that Solly felt sorry for, and fixed up with a job at Hillcrest. He used to be Fat Dog's foster father. Solly fixed that up, too. Later I figured out that Fat Dog was really Solly's son, born out of wedlock."

"Who firebombed the Club Utopia in December 1968?" I asked.

Ralston shuddered, and trembled when he said it: "Well, Fat Dog Baker planned it, and used the three guys who were caught for it, I forget their names, to do the actual job."

"Did Kupferman know his son did the bombing?"

"He found out later. Cathcart told him. That was Cathcart's lever on Solly. He popped Fat Dog for the bombing, but let him slide, because he wanted to squeeze Solly. Cathcart came to me and made me talk. I knew him from 77th Street Vice. He rousted me a few times, when he was on the Vice Squad. I told him Fat Dog was really Solly's son. He told me not to let Fat Dog know, ever. He told me he had big plans for Solly and that he could use me to help him out."

"What kind of plans did he have for Kupferman?"

"The Welfare gig. He was planning it then. He needed a penman. Solly was the master penman of the West Coast. He made a fortune counterfeiting and signing stock certificates for the mob. Cathcart wanted him to sign the checks, to get payment."

"Do you mean the Welfare checks that people receive fraudulently?"

"Yeah. The signatures all had to be different."

This was puzzling. "But don't these checks have to be signed in front of the person who pays out the money?"

"Yeah, but Solly's got over two dozen liquor stores that he owns and partnerships in a couple dozen others. All the checks get cashed there."

"How does this scam work, exactly?"

"Cathcart's got eight or nine caseworkers working for him. Investigators, too. Solly forges the applications, the caseworkers submit them for approval, the investigators, who are really just pencil pushers, pass them, and supervisors working for Cathcart authorize payment. He's even got a guy in Sacramento monitoring the computer checks. It's foolproof."

"Where do you get the names of the phony applicants? Are they documented?"

"All the way. Solly does the printing and all the signatures, phony Social Security cards, birth certificates, the whole shot. He's a genius."

I kicked this around in my head. "Does the ledger that Fat Dog stole from you contain notes on the documentation?"

"Yes. How did you know about that?"

"Never mind. You did the writing in that ledger, right?"

"Right."

"Why in Spanish?"

"No real reason. Just a fail-safe."

"How long has this scheme been in operation?"

"Eight years. Since '72."

"How much money does it bring in a month?"

"I don't know. Thousands. Cathcart is filthy rich."

"Who killed Fat Dog Baker?"

"Two Mexican guys. Cathcart ordered it."

"Why?"

"Fat Dog was going insane. He was making insane demands on Cathcart. He told Cathcart to make Solly give up Jane. They live together, you know. She's his daughter, only she doesn't know it. He kept telling Cathcart he would blow the whole thing sky-high if he didn't order Solly to cut Jane loose. When Fat Dog torched Solly's warehouse, it was the last straw. Cathcart had him killed."

"Exactly what 'lever' has Cathcart been holding over Kupferman?"

"Jane. He knows she's Solly's daughter. He'll spill the whole sordid story to her, if Solly ever balks at cooperating. She knows a little about Solly's past, the grand jury investigations, that he was a mob moneyman and all that. But it would kill her if she knew Solly was really her father. Also, Jane's mother was a dope addict, a crazy woman. She committed suicide right after Jane was born. Solly worships the ground Jane walks on. He'd never blow it with Cathcart and risk Jane finding all those things out."

Thoughts of Jane cut through me like a knife. "Cathcart's a nice guy, isn't he?"

"Cathcart is a fucking iceberg. He knows it, too. He told me once, 'I'm like an iceberg—cold and seven-tenths below the surface.' "

"Have you ever heard of Omar Gonzalez?"

"Yeah."

"He burglarized your pad. Someone tried to kill him here in L.A. Who was it?"

"Cathcart. I told him my house had been burglarized and my ledgers swiped. He dusted the place for prints and came up with Omar Gonzalez's. He knew Omar from the Utopia investigation. He had some guy go after him with a shotgun, but the guy blew it."

"How did Fat Dog steal your ledger in Spanish?"

"I don't fucking know! Fat Dog could do things you wouldn't believe!"

"Who killed the three caddies in Palm Springs?"

"Cathcart had some professionals do it. He knew Fat Dog had the scrapbook. I was sure Fat Dog would never entrust it to Augie Dougall and I had had his cousin's place in Cathedral City checked out. Cathcart figured Hansen or Marchion had it. I checked out Hansen's trailer myself. It wasn't there. His old lady wasn't the type to get involved and Marchion was a transient. I told Cathcart all this, but he still ordered the hit."

Warily, I asked my next question: "Who told you I was involved in this case?"

"Jane Baker. We've been friends for years. She's not involved in any of this. She calls me up when she gets worried about things. She…"

I arced my right hand and slammed Ralston hard in the neck. The teeth of the brass knuckles made small puncture wounds that shot little streams of blood. Ralston screamed. I shut off the tape machine. "You *never* mention her to me, scumbag," I said, "not ever. You understand?" Ralston nodded, cowering against another blow. "Now tell me this," I demanded, "does Cathcart know me?"

"Yes," he whimpered.

"Does he plan on having me hit?"

"Yes. He's got a guy out looking for you. Staking out your place."

"Has he checked out my record with the police department?"

"Yeah," Ralston said, rubbing his bloody neck. "He thinks you're holed up somewhere drunk. And afraid."

"You and Cathcart are good buddies, aren't you?"

"He trusts me. He knows I'm afraid of him."

"Right now your survival depends on two things: doing what I tell you and maintaining Cathcart's trust. This case is never going to go before the cops or the law. This is my case. Cathcart is mine. This tape is going somewhere safe. If I don't check in at regular intervals at certain places, the media gets my whole file, which includes a complete report of your complicity in the Welfare scam, your accessory to murder, your knowledge of the Utopia fire and your bookmaking racket. If I stay healthy, you stay safe. I want you to call Cathcart and tell him that someone called you and told you I was seen asking questions in Palm Springs. Drunk." Ralston nodded, almost eagerly.

"Now. I have a load of bankbooks with Fat Dog's name on them," I said, "but the signatures aren't his. Do you know anything about them?" When he shook his head, I knew he was lying. "That's a pity," I said, "because there's a fortune in cash waiting to be had. Just for the hell of it, why don't you sign

‘Frederick R. Baker’ a few times for me.”

I dug a notepad and pen out of my pocket and handed them to Ralston. He wrote the name three times, then backed off, fearing a blow. I took out one of the bankbooks and compared the signature to Ralston’s; a perfect match. “Don’t worry, Hot Rod,” I said, “I won’t hit you again. You managed Fat Dog’s money for him, is that it?” He nodded. “Where did he get the money?” I asked.

“He played the horses. He was a good handicapper. He got money from Cathcart. He looped. He never spent a dime. He was a cheap, stingy fuck.”

“I believe it. On Monday we’re going to withdraw the bulk of the money. I’m going to keep most of it, but I’ll lay a substantial sum on you. I’ll be at your pad at ten Monday morning. Right now I’ll drive you to that little hospital down the street. They’ll fix you up real nice. You might have to call in sick, but what the hell, you’ve been on the job twenty-two years, you can afford to take a day off now and then.”

I found a towel on the nightstand and handed it to Ralston, who wiped his face. I gathered up my tape deck, turned off the light in the little room and we left, walking all the way to my car on Century Park East. I dropped Ralston at the L.A. New Hospital on Pico and Beverly Drive. He didn’t say a word the whole time. I didn’t blame him. He was in the deadliest of limbos.

As I pulled up at the emergency entrance, I said: “You call Cathcart tomorrow. Tell him what I told you to. Make it convincing. I’ll be by your place at ten Monday. Be ready.”

He just nodded as he got out of the car. He was very pale.

13

I spent the next morning engaged in some soul searching. I did it during a long walk on the beach, the ideal, most cinematic locale for soul searchers. The beast kept rearing its ugly head, but I fought it off. I was entirely justified in what I did to Ralston; he wouldn't have broken otherwise and I needed him to get at Cathcart. Still, it was my most vicious episode of violence since breaking Blow Job Anderson's legs, and unsettling because Richard Ralston would never be the same. The hard-voiced manipulator who had seemed so formidable during his interrogation of Augie Dougall had broken fast under physical duress. If he had a well-developed image of himself as a stoic pragmatist, it was now leaking water.

But these things were secondary to the crucial point: in order to survive, Richard Ralston was now going to be my ally, not Haywood Cathcart's. He would help me bring down Cathcart's well-constructed house of Welfare checks forgery, extortion, and murder, and that was all that mattered.

While on my journey of soul searching, I decided to quit working for Cal Myers. I bore him no rancor for his low opinion of me, which, expressed to Fat Dog, had set the incredible events of the past month into motion. In a strange sense, I was grateful: he had been the catalyst that put Jane Baker in my life and awakened in me a power to deal with horrendous happenings that I didn't know I possessed. The knowledge of that power and the viability of the moral decisions I had recently been forced to make convinced me of one thing: I was too good to be a repo ripoff man. Besides, I would soon be rich from Fat Dog's ill-gotten gains, which I deserved as a tribute to my good work that would regretfully have to remain anonymous.

So I dug the loaner out of the motel lot, found a pay phone on P.C.H. and gave old Cal a buzz. His secretary told me he was out on the lot and had him paged. He was very anxious and bluff-hearty when he picked up the phone. He always expected in the back of his mind a blackmail attempt by me, based on the events I witnessed in January of '71. That was when I was working Hollywood Vice, drinking heavily, and taking uppers to cut the edge off the booze. A call came in to the desk one night from an outraged landlady who was convinced that an "evil man" was using an apartment he had recently rented, but didn't live in, as a love nest to seduce little girls. She wanted us to check it out.

It was a typical, busy Hollywood Saturday night, so the desk officer routed the call to Vice, rather than to patrol, who normally would have handled it; and the Vice Sergeant, who thought the call was a waste of time, and who thought I was a shithead, handed it to his most expendable officer: Officer Brown. I thought it sounded like a fluke, too, so I checked out an unmarked car, drove to the apartment of an informant and got blown away on hash before driving to the address on Sycamore near Fountain.

The landlady was suspicious of me at first, since I wasn't in uniform and was slightly tottering from the dope I had smoked, but the sight of my badge calmed her down. She told me the "evil man" was in apartment 12, with two young girls. I told her to go back to the *Lawrence Welk Show*, that I would take care of it.

As I approached the door of number 12, I heard the giggling of a young girl and a man's sexual grunting. The door looked flimsy, so I drew my gun and kicked it in. I recognized him immediately: Cal Myers of Cal Myers Pontiac, Ford, etc. He was on the floor, nude, being fellated by a prepubescent chubby blonde girl, who promptly stopped blowing him and started to scream. There was another girl, brunette, also nude, holding a camera. She started to scream, too. I started to get hopped up and she dropped the camera while Cal Myers reached for his pants. After a few minutes I got them calmed down. The girls put on robes. My hopped-up state continued, unabated in the least by all the tension. I checked the apartment out and came up with dozens of snapshots of Myers and the two girls fucking and sucking. It was a heavy bust for Myers, but I didn't want to do it. I *couldn't* do it; it went against the aesthetics of my lifetime of horniness.

I took Myers into the kitchen and read him off. When he realized I wasn't going to bust him he genuflected wildly before me. I told him *never, ever,* to fuck around on my beat again. I collected the snapshots and put them in my pocket. This scared him, but he was so relieved at being spared the law that anything short of castration would have seemed merciful. He asked me my name several times and I told him. Dimly, my reptile mind was beginning to perceive that he might want to show his gratitude for my mercy. So I told him: Officer Fritz Brown, L.A.P.D., Hollywood Division, Badge number 1193. He committed it to memory and rushed out the door.

I dropped the two girls off on the Boulevard, near The Gold Cup. The evening was young and they had plenty of time to look for other action.

I got a call at the station about a month later. An unidentified caller had left his number. I called it and it was Cal Myers. He suggested we get together. We did. He wanted to give me a car. I said forget it, I didn't begrudge or condemn him for his interest in young girls. He insisted. I relented, but I told him I would rather have a good stereo system. I also told him that I had ripped up the photos and had no intention of ever blackmailing him, but if he wanted to lay some goodies on me out of gratitude, then, what the hell, I would be gracious and accept. He smiled, but I could tell he didn't believe me.

A week later he called me at home and told me I had carte blanche at a prestigious stereo equipment store in the Valley; I went there with Walter and ordered my dream system, which arrived at my pad two days later, along with a technician to set it up.

I called Cal to thank him and assure him that his secret was safe with me. I could tell he still didn't believe me. I desperately wanted him to, and thereafter I would call him up, drunk, and offer my assurances, which were never really accepted. Gradually, we became friends, although I knew he harbored a deep fear of me, and we met every few weeks or so and got drunk together. Our relationship was a strange mixture of mutual respect and attributing qualities to each other that we didn't possess: Cal thought I was cold, hard, intelligent, and impenetrable, which was horseshit. I convinced myself that he was deeply sensitive beneath his businessman's exterior and a potential aesthete, which was also pure horseshit. All we both wanted to do was get by, which meant markedly different things to each of us.

When I got kicked off the police department in '75, there was never any question what I would do for a living. As soon as I was out of work, Cal's paranoia regarding me was given full rein. I went to work repossessing for him to assuage that fear, as well as for the money.

It had been a good relationship in some respects, but now it was dead. And Cal had been mistaken from the beginning. I had destroyed the snapshots, almost immediately.

—

When Cal came to the phone bluff-hearty, I knew he was upset. Augie Dougall and the thousand dollar kick-out, perhaps. "Well, well," he said. "Man about town Fritz Brown. Where the hell have you been?"

"Around," I said. "Has Augie Dougall been in touch with you?"

"He sure has. Fucking beanpole Abraham Lincoln. That was dirty pool, Fritz, mentioning that thing to him. Fucking unworthy of you."

"I'm sorry, Cal, really. But all I told him was the date. Did you give him the money?"

"Reluctantly. I figured he had to know you. What was it all about?"

"I can't tell you. But thanks. If it's any consolation, you helped Augie out of a lot of trouble."

"Some consolation. You know, I think I've seen him before. Is he a caddy? I think he packed my bag at Lakeside."

"He's a caddy. How's business? How's Irwin doing?"

"Business is dandy. Irwin is doing a good job. He's a nice guy, for a Jew. That nephew of his is a natural repo-man. He don't take shit from nobody. When are you coming back to work?"

"I'm not, Cal. Consider that grand you gave Augie as my severance pay."

"You can't do that, Fritz! You're my man! We've been together for a long time. Look…"

I broke in on his sudden panic, trying to sound firm: "Yes, I can, Cal. I have to. The last time you saw me I had a different life. It's changed now, and I've changed. I don't want to do repos anymore. I'm going to get married. I've come into some money. I want a new life. I've got to cut our ties or my new life won't work. Keep Irwin and his nephew. They'll do you proud. And Cal? I've never told anyone about you and those two girls. I burned those photographs the night it happened. All your fears all these years have been groundless. I would never fuck you over, for anything. I appreciate everything you've done for me. You've been a good friend, but it's time to move on, and ripping off used cars isn't part of the kind of life I want to live. Can you accept that?"

"I don't know, Fritz, I…" His voice was very soft.

"You'll have to, Cal. Goodbye and thanks." I hung up, closing a long chapter of my life.

When I walked out of the phone booth I realized for the first time that maybe Cal, in his own fashion, loved me and liked having me around for reasons totally unrelated to fear. When things change, everything changes. It's a new game entirely and suddenly you know what you had all along.

I drove into downtown L.A., taking the Santa Monica Freeway, to Mark Swirkal's office. I left him the master tape containing my complete verbal record of the Baker-Cathcart case and the tape with Richard Ralston's confession and told him what I wanted: storage of the tapes in his safe deposit box at the bank, in perpetuity or until I told him otherwise. Should I fail to contact his answering service once during every twenty-four hour period with the message "Crazy, Daddy-O!" he should immediately retape three copies and have them delivered by hand to the office of the L.A. District Attorney, the Crime Desk of the L.A. *Times*, Internal Affairs Division of the L.A.P.D., and the news desk of KNXT T.V. His fee for this would be one hundred and fifty dollars a month, hopefully for life. He agreed readily, fascinated by the mystery. I told him under no condition was he to play the tapes. He nodded, gravely. I trusted him. He was a solid, good man.

I called Sol Kupferman from Mark's office. His maid answered and told me she would get him. He answered a second later. He had a soft, New Yorkish voice. "Hello?" he said.

"Mr. Kupferman, this is Fritz Brown. Has Jane Baker told you about me?"

"Yes, she has."

"Good. I need to see you. Today. It's very important. Can you meet me this afternoon?"

"I think so. Where?" His voice sounded distant and worried.

"In Griffith Park, in the parking lot by the observatory at two o'clock."

"Why there, Mr. Brown? Why not my home or your office?"

"Mr. Kupferman, to be frank, because Haywood Cathcart may be having you followed, and I can't afford a run-in with old Haywood just yet."

"I see you know quite a bit about my life, don't you?"

"I know everything about what's transpired in the past ten years. Will you meet me?"

"Yes. How will I know you?"

"I've seen you before. I'll meet you at the observatory at two o'clock."

"Yes. I'll be there."

"Good. Come alone."

"I will. Goodbye, Mr. Brown."

"Goodbye." I hung up and checked my watch. Ten forty-five. I said goodbye to a mystified Mark Swirkal and drove to Griffith Park. I wanted to get there early to check out the scene. If Kupferman's phone was tapped and there was some kind of relay to Cathcart, he would be sending someone after me. Also, I didn't think it was too likely, but if Kupferman was so used to being under Cathcart's thumb that he panicked at the prospect of my upsetting the applecart, he might tell Cathcart himself, dooming me.

The parking lot of the observatory was filling up when I got there: buses filled with kiddie groups, sightseeing families with small children in tow, bored high school loafers looking for an afternoon's diversion. But nothing suspicious-looking. Los Angeles looked otherworldly from my mountaintop vantage point: a hot, shimmering valley shrouded in smog.

I took a bench seat near a drinking fountain and waited. At exactly 2:03, Kupferman's white Cadillac pulled into view. There were no cars following him. I watched him park, lock his car, and get out and walk around. While he was doing this, I surveyed the crowded parking lot for telltale signs of surveillance. Nothing. I got up and walked toward him. He was craning his neck in every direction. He nearly jumped out of his skin when I spoke softly to him. "Mr. Kupferman? I'm Fritz Brown."

He recovered fast, looked up at me and gave me a firm handshake. "Mr. Brown," was all he said. I searched his face for signs of familial resemblance to Jane and Fat Dog. There was nothing but the pale blue eyes, but it was enough. In that respect, the three Kupfermans were all of a kind.

"Let's take a walk, Mr. Kupferman," I said. "We need some privacy."

He just nodded, gravely, and let me lead the way. We walked north toward a hiking trail leading up into the Griffith Park Hills. Kupferman was immaculately dressed in a pale olive gabardine suit, linen shirt, and wide tie. He was the very picture of stoic dignity. Even his two-hundred-dollar alligator shoes did nothing to detract from this image. His face, sunlamp-tanned and Semitic, was a history of patience in the face of adversity, and the brilliant blue eyes spoke of a refined intelligence. I knew I was going to like him. We walked uphill on the dirt path. Kupferman was starting to pant and strain a little, so I slowed my pace. When we reached a plateau about one hundred yards up from the parking lot, with a view in all directions, I stopped. By way of introduction, I said: "We've met before, Mr. Kupferman. At the Club Utopia, about two weeks before it was bombed. You were sitting at the bar and spilled a drink on me. I've got exceptional recall. If it weren't for that recollection, I wouldn't have become involved in this affair to the extent that I am."

Kupferman nodded. He didn't seem shocked by my reference to the Utopia. "I see," he said. "That is extraordinary. Of course, I don't recall it. Exactly what do you know about this 'affair,' as you call it, Mr. Brown?"

"Call me Fritz," I said. "I know everything, except for a few gaps I hope you'll fill in for me. I know everything about the Utopia bombing, the Welfare scam, Haywood, Ralston, and the fact that Freddy and Jane Baker are really your children."

Sol Kupferman went pale and for a second started to reel. I put a firm restraining hand on his shoulder. Gradually he calmed himself, the sunlamp tan returning. "And what do you intend to do with this information?" he asked.

"Nothing," I said. "It dies with me. Jane will never know. You don't have to worry about Freddy. He's dead."

"I know. Jane told me."

"Cathcart had him murdered."

"I figured as much."

"How do you feel about that?"

"Relieved, somehow. Freddy was my son, but he was an animal, and it was all my fault. I gave him up as a child. I'm the guilty one. Freddy just followed his instincts, which were insane."

"Tell me about that, Mr. Kupferman. There's one gap in my investigation: you said you gave Freddy up as a child. Why? Who were his first foster parents? There was almost a nine year gap between the birth of your two children. What happened during that time?"

“What will you do if I don’t tell you?”

“Nothing. You’ve been pushed, bled, and tortured enough. I just want to close this thing out in my mind so I can do what I have to do and get it over with.”

Sol sized me up with shrewd blue eyes.

“And Jane will never know?”

“Never.”

I watched Sol weigh the pros and cons of confession. Finally he sighed, and said: “All right. Freddy and Jane’s mother, Louisa Hall, was the love of my life. The most beautiful woman that God ever created. But very disturbed. Suicidal. She loved me, but was abnormally attached to her father, who hated me because I was Jewish. He knew of our liaison and mentally tortured her for it. And Louisa took it, withstood it out of love. She couldn’t give up her father and she couldn’t give up me. But she wouldn’t marry me; she knew that it would drive her father away for good. When Freddy was born, something in her snapped. She wanted a baby, desperately; we planned it, I figured that marriage would have to follow, it being 1943. But when Freddy was born, she snapped. She hated him. He repulsed her. She wanted to be rid of him. She wouldn’t nurse him. I had to hire a wet nurse. She gave me an ultimatum: ‘Put him up for adoption or I will leave you forever.’ I couldn’t face that prospect, so I did it. But not through an agency, not formal adoption. I gave him to an old business associate and his wife. They lived near Monterey. They were Russian Jews, immigrants. They Americanized their name to Baker. They gave it to Freddy, even legally adopted him. I got regular reports from Baker, over the years. Freddy was a wild sadistic boy. He killed little animals. I felt guilty, but I put it out of my mind. I was making a lot of money, illegally. I won’t go into it. Things were going well with Louisa. She was getting better, less depressed. In 1951, she told me she wanted another child. After the birth she would marry me. I believed her. We had the baby. Jane was born in March of ’52. Things were good for about a month. We were making wedding plans. I was pulling out of the rackets. Then Louisa’s father committed suicide. Louisa went mad. One evening I caught her trying to strangle Jane in her crib. The look in her eyes, my God!!”

Sol hesitated, faltering, then mustered new resources of candor and went on: “I hired a male nurse to look after Jane. I sent Louisa to the best psychiatrist on the West Coast. He diagnosed her as schizophrenic. I put her into a private sanitarium. When she came out on a visit one day, when Jane was one and a half, we took a drive to the beach and went for a walk on the Palisades. A young couple came by, pushing a baby in a stroller. Louisa saw them and started to scream. She ran to the cliffs, climbed the barrier, and threw herself off. She fell all the way to the Pacific Coast Highway. She died instantly, of course. I was in grief, terrible grief. I blamed myself and I blamed little Jane. I couldn't live with her. I took her up to the Bakers in Monterey to be with her brother. I told Stas Baker to somehow convince Freddy that Jane was his sister, even though Freddy was old enough to know that Baker's wife wasn't pregnant with her. Somehow he did convince Freddy. Maybe just psychically, Freddy knew Jane was his blood.

"The following year, 1954, I got a telegram from Baker's brother. There had been a fire at the Baker house. Baker and his wife were dead, but Freddy and Jane had survived. I flew up there. I stayed away from the children, I was too ashamed to see them, but I bribed the childcare officers into placing Freddy and Jane with friends of mine in Los Angeles. I knew the woman, we had had an affair, and her husband was a decent sort, so I knew the children would have a good home. After I had arranged that, I asked around Monterey about Baker and his wife. Somehow I felt guilty about them, too. Then I found out the truth about Stas Baker: that he was a sadist, a bully who tortured his wife mentally and Freddy physically. When I knew him in the '30s, he was just another mob stooge—a courier runner/sometime accountant. A quiet, decent sort. A man who seemed grieved by the fact that he and his wife couldn't have children. But I was wrong. He was a monster and he begat another monster. My son."

Kupferman's voice during his monologue had taken on qualities of feeling and resonance I had never before heard. The deeper he reached into his past, the deeper his voice became, until it had subsided into a hoarse whisper that was more grieving than any amount of sobbing or wailing could ever be. I could tell that he didn't want to continue his story. He sat down on the dirt path, depleted in every way, unmindful of his expensive suit. I sat down beside him. He stared at the ground, lost in his own guilty history.

"Let me finish for you," I said, placing an arm around his shoulders. "Freddy and Jane went to live with the Hansens. Freddy grew up crazy, Jane grew up to be the Jane we both love. You wanted to be close to your children, without breaking your own anonymity, so you had Richard Ralston bring Freddy out to Hillcrest. Jane followed. Freddy was unreachable, but you became Jane's mentor and dear friend. Freddy bombed the Club Utopia. Cathcart knew of your link to Freddy, through Ralston, and instigated an extortion scheme. He's been sucking you dry ever since. Is that right?"

Sol Kupferman shrugged free of my protective arm. "Yes, you've got it all," he said.

I decided to spare him the knowledge of his son's extended career of arson and murder.

"Have you been sending money to the relatives of the Utopia victims?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered softly.

"Does Jane deliver the money?"

"Yes."

"Do you have much personal contact with Cathcart?"

"Hardly any. Ralston is his liaison man."

"How so?"

"How much do you know about the Welfare operation?"

"I know that you sign all the phony documents, including the checks themselves, and that they're cashed at your liquor stores, and that Cathcart has the thing monitored from inside the Department of Public Social Services from every angle."

"That's about it. But Ralston is the liaison on every level involving me and the inside people. Cathcart just pulls the strings, holding the fear over everyone."

"So Ralston would have all the records on the inside people?"

"Yes."

"Good. That fits. Ralston and I recently became acquainted. I got a confession out of him. He's more afraid of me than he is of Cathcart."

Sol gave me a strange, inquisitive look, tinged with awe. "What exactly do you want out of this? I don't understand your motives at all," he said. "Jane told me Freddy hired you in the first place, but that doesn't fit. What do you want?"

I stood up. Sol did, too, brushing dirt from his pants. I pointed south toward the smoggy L.A. Basin. "I want a little piece of that, a little piece of the mystery, the insanity, the life. I want revenge, for you. I want to see Cathcart fall. And I want your daughter. I want to marry her. I love her. I think she's in the process of learning to love me. Has she told you how she feels about me?"

Sol smiled, for the first time in our brief acquaintance. "She told me she feels very drawn to you emotionally, but is slightly afraid of you. She called you 'walking ambivalence.' "

I smiled back at Sol and laughed. "An astute remark. She's a very intelligent woman. I understand this ambivalence she sees in me. She caught me at the tail end of my old life and the beginning of my new one. This case is the dividing point. But very shortly it'll be over and we can court in earnest. Then she'll see the more stable, beauty-loving side of me."

"This case will never be over, Fritz."

"What do you mean?"

"Cathcart has me. I have to serve him. If I don't, Jane will learn everything, and I'll be ruined. With Freddy dead, no one else will foul things up or get hurt. The violence is over, thank God. But Cathcart is too protected, too insulated. He's beyond the law. He *is* the law."

I looked out over my city. All I could see were the tops of buildings jutting out of a brown haze. I looked back at Sol. "I'm going to kill him," I said.

I waited a long moment for his response. He was staring at the ground as if he were trying to dig a way out of his life with his eyes. "Don't do it, Fritz," he said. "Cathcart deserves it, but it's wrong. I killed men, forty years ago, and I've had to live a terrible guilt-ridden life. If you kill Cathcart, even if you get away with it, you'll never stop paying the price. Just let it go. If you care about Jane, don't do it. She deserves better than a killer." Sol's eyes, face, and whole soul were imploring me with the force of his experience.

I believed what he said, absolutely, but he was morally wrong. Cathcart's death was the only right denouement to this tragedy. "No, Sol," I said finally, surveying the city again, "he dies. And a lot of people will live free as a result. That's undeniable."

Sol was shaking his head frantically, denying the truth. He looked like an Old Testament sage rebuking a young zealot. "No, no, no," he said, "it's wrong. Can't you see that? How in the world do you expect to get away with it? Cathcart's a shark and you're a minnow. It won't work."

Suddenly I was angry. I grabbed both his trembling shoulders and pulled him toward me. "Don't fuck with me, Sol! I can be just as bad as Cathcart. He dies. Maybe you've been on such a guilt trip for so long that you need Cathcart to punish you for your sins. That phony karma shit won't wash. He dies, and if you try to warn him or fuck with me in any way, I'll go public. I'll blow the whole thing to the media, including the facts of your children's births. I mean that. I've got a fail-safe operation going. If I don't survive this case then it all goes public!" I released him, giving his shoulder a gentle squeeze in the process. I felt guilty myself, now. Sol Kupferman was an almost saintly man, but he carried guilt around with him like a contagion. He was very pale again.

I tried to lighten things up. "A couple of years from now, we'll be laughing about this. Jane will wonder at our secret rapport, but she'll never know. I'll be your unannounced goy son-in-law."

Sol didn't even hear me. "I have to go," he said, moving toward the downhill path.

We walked down to the parking lot in silence. When we got there, I said, "Tell Jane I'll call her after this is all over, which should be soon. Tell her we spoke on the phone. I don't want anyone to know I'm in L.A. And of course don't tell her what we discussed." Sol nodded, funereally pale. "Cheer up," I continued, "soon this thing will be nothing but a giant evil memory, like a cancer successfully removed. Try to think of it that way."

Sol said, “I will” and forced the beginning of a weak smile, but I didn’t believe him. He got into his Cadillac and drove away, his whole spirit conveying centuries of Jewish pessimism.

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I drove back to my seaside motel and checked out, taking my traveling roadshow—tape deck, bankbooks, clothes, and hardware—north to Ventura, where I found another beachfront hideaway, a slightly nicer, more modern motel room.

I called Ralston at his house in Encino and told him our plans had been changed: he was to meet me at the Bank of America branch on Van Nuys and Tujunga in North Hollywood at ten o’clock Monday morning, and was to bring a list of all his D.P.S.S. contacts. I asked him if Cathcart had been in touch with him, and he said yes, that he had told Cathcart I was spotted, drunk, asking questions in Palm Springs. Cathcart had seemed to like that. Ralston was being a good scout, so I threw him a bone of encouragement, saying that he’d be in for a nice financial surprise on Monday, then hung up.

I killed the rest of the weekend fantasizing myself as a rich man. A quarter of a million in cold cash, carefully invested, would keep me off the streets for the rest of my life. I thought of possible investments, creative ones, and came up with a great idea: a classical music store. Records and tapes from the most prosaic to the most esoteric. A music book store second to none: biographies of composers, pictorial histories and sheet music. A Hollywood Boulevard cultural oasis. Rock and roll morons would be politely but firmly sent away. I would manage the store and Walter would be my aide-de-camp. I would retain my P.I.’s license and the office as a tax dodge. I would search out moderately good string players to join Jane in playing chamber pieces. Jamming with musicians of similar ability would have a salutary effect on her…

I would buy a big rambling house in the hills and several friendly dogs. Jane and I would have our separate lives, each revolving around music—Jane’s cello lessons and constant practice, my taking care of the store. At night we would sit in our living room and listen to music, then go upstairs and make love. Eventually, we would have children, preferably daughters. It would be a good life. It was possible now.

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I left Ventura at seven thirty Monday morning. Nine forty-five found me stationed across the street from the B. of A. at Van Nuys and Tujunga in North Hollywood. I was nervous, but felt safe: there was nothing transpiring outside the bank that resembled a setup. Ralston was securely under my thumb.

He showed up a few minutes later. He pulled into the bank parking lot, got out, and stood nervously by his car. He was wearing sunglasses, presumably to hide his battered face. I walked across the street and joined him. He didn't say anything, just stared at me through his dark glasses. "Good morning, Ralston," I said.

He cocked his head. "Good morning," he replied.

"Are you feeling all right?" I asked. He nodded again. "Good," I said. "Take off your glasses. We're going to be making some heavy withdrawals and I don't want you looking like a gangster about to split the country."

He did it and I was amazed: his nose was hardly swollen, although it was purple-tinged, and his eyes were barely blackened.

"Let me outline my plan," I said. "I want you to drive your car. We will hit every bank I have passbooks to. You will withdraw all but five hundred dollars from each account. In hundreds and fifties. Twenties are okay, too, if it's all they have. Try to be inconspicuous. Tellers are required to report large deposits, but not withdrawals. You deposited the money, right?"

"Right."

"Good. Then some of the tellers will remember you. I've got our itinerary all mapped out. We've got a long day ahead. Did you bring the information I asked for?"

"Yes." Ralston fished in his coat pocket and handed me a neatly printed list of names. I winked at him and gave him a blue cardboard passbook, pointing to the front door of the bank.

"Do your stuff, Daddy-O," I said.

While he took care of business, I scanned the list of names, which were set up in columns, as in the manner of bookie ledgers I had seen. The names, all men's, in one column followed by phone numbers in the other. Since several of the numbers were identical, I concluded they were office phones.

Ralston returned after a few minutes and motioned nervously for me to get into the car. Once inside, he reached into his pocket and handed me a roll of crisp new bills. I counted them, then broke out laughing: ninety-three C-notes. He started up the car. "Onward, Hot Rod," I said.

We drove from one end of the Valley to the other, then over Coldwater Canyon to Beverly Hills and from there to the Miracle Mile, becoming richer and richer in the process. Before we left the Valley, I stopped at a supermarket and grabbed a large brown shopping bag. Soon it was jammed with cash.

While Hot Rod was making a withdrawal on Wilshire in Beverly Hills, I stashed the bag under my suitcoat and walked across the street to the Mark

Cross Leather Goods Shop and bought a huge leather suitcase, paying for it with four crisp, brand-new C-notes. Back in the car, I lovingly transferred the bills from paper bag to suitcase. I felt very high, much like I did the first few times I got drunk.

Hot Rod returned, dumped $7,400 in centuries and fifties in my lap and gave me a pained look. We had been conversing very little. He had confirmed what I thought about the phone numbers—miracle of brevity, they were the actual *at work* phone numbers of the Welfare contacts—but all my other attempts at conversation went sullenly ignored. I had emasculated this man and he would not kiss my ass or give me the satisfaction of compounding his capitulation.

It gave me pause. I would *need* him to get at Cathcart. If he fingered me to old Haywood, it would be ink on my death warrant.

I checked my watch and counted the remaining bankbooks. It was 2:10 p.m. and there were nine remaining, containing a total of over $70,000. I estimated we had at least $265,000 in my suitcase. I looked at Ralston and slapped his shoulder, then tossed the passbooks into his lap. “For you, Hot Rod,” I said. “Over seventy thou. Spend it in good health.”

Ralston smiled briefly, then shook his head. “You’re out of your fucking mind to think you can get away with this,” he said. “You don’t know Cathcart. He’s out of his mind, too, but in a different way. You better blow the country now, while you’ve got a chance, because sooner or later he’ll find you. Then it’s all over.”

“No, you’ve got that wrong. Let’s reverse it. Sooner or later I’ll find him. *Then* it’ll be all over.”

“You’re crazy, Brown.”

“Not really. Tell me about Cathcart. I know he’s brilliant and I know he’s an iceberg. Big fucking deal. But I’m curious about one thing: with all his money, why does he continue to be a cop?”

Ralston didn’t even have to ponder this question. “Because he loves it. All the good guys versus the bad guys shit. He eats it up. He hates n———s. He’s always talking about keeping the n———s under control so they won’t revolt. He says he loves doing his part to keep the Welfare State solvent, that it’s a counterrevolutionary broadside. He says sooner or later the n———s will breed to the point that they’ll have to be dealt with violently, but in the meantime they provide a scapegoat for the poor white moron to hate, and it’s important to keep them strung out on dope, in jail, and on Welfare. It’s spooky. I don’t particularly like n———s, but I don’t want to hurt them. Cathcart’s cuckoo on the subject.”

“Did he supply Henry Cruz and Reyes Sandoval with heroin as payment for killing Fat Dog?”

“How did you know about that? They’re dead.”

"I know. I killed them."

Ralston reacted with a contorting of his whole face. "Are you going to hit Cathcart?" he asked incredulously.

"Hit Cathcart? Hit?" I answered, equally incredulous.

"Who do you think I am? Marlon Brando in *The Godfather*? I don't want to hit Cathcart, I want to become his buddy. I'm a n——— trainee with aspirations. All I want is a million-dollar Welfare check and a lifetime supply of soul food. Then I'll convert to Judaism and join Hillcrest. You can fix me up with a good caddy when I learn to play golf."

"You are crazy."

"Shut up. Tell me more about Cathcart. What does he do for kicks?"

"He goes marlin fishing in Baja. He listens to this really serious music. He talks about the cops being the front line of containment against the n———s. That's about it. He's got no family. He doesn't go for women, so far as I know."

"Where does he live?"

"He's got an apartment in Van Nuys. He tries to live cheap so that it looks like all he's got is his cop's salary."

"How often does he go down to Baja?"

"Every few weeks, I think."

"How does he get down there?"

"He drives. He's got kind of a cover-up going. He owns a little house outside of Del Mar. He tells the people he works with he's going there. He says it's part of the picture he's painting: he makes good dough as a Captain and he can afford a small place down there."

"Does he spend any time at the place in Del Mar?"

"I think he stops overnight, to make it look good. Then he drives to Baja. The guys he works with know he's a fishing fanatic. He's got it all figured out."

"He sure talks a lot, for a careful man."

"He trusts me. He knows I'm scared shitless of him."

I let the remark hang in the air, dead weight between us. Then I harpooned Ralston with my coldest hardest look. When he started to avert my gaze, I said: "Stay scared of me and you'll survive. You'll have your hotel, your bar, your job, your health, seventy grand plus whatever else you've got going. Now drive me back to my car."

We drove silently back over Coldwater to the Valley, a fortune wedged between us on the front seat. When we pulled up to the bank in North Hollywood, I said: "Stay loose, Hot Rod. I'm blowing town for a while. I'll call you when I get back."

He stuck out his hand, which surprised me, and we shook. "I still think you're crazy," he said.

I laughed. "Sometimes I wonder myself."

I disengaged my hand, grabbed my suitcase and Ralston took off.

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I left that night, leaving my loaner car in the lot at LAX and catching the 8:00 P.S.A. flight to San Francisco. I insisted on taking my Mark Cross suitcase on the plane with me. The baggage people and the stewardess on board told me they understood. It was a work of art and too beautiful to be buffeted around in the plane's luggage compartment. If only they knew.

The coffee the stewardess brought me was good and strong, but I felt vaguely uneasy. I was unarmed for the first time in years. I had had to check my gun into a locker in the terminal, since preflight metal detectors would have given its presence away. But the uneasiness left as I sipped the coffee and enjoyed the lights of Los Angeles from my window seat.

When the plane landed at San Francisco International some ninety minutes later, I was on pins and needles of anticipation. It never failed: the San Francisco Rush. Just approaching my favorite adopted city was cutting through all the trauma and fatigue of the past month. Frisco! Only this time the Frisco of my new life: sober, rich, and possessed of a mission.

Getting into a cab outside the airport felt like four martinis kicking in while listening to Beethoven's Fifth, only this time it was Brown's Fifth. The Fifth "B"—Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Bruckner, and Brown—all Germanic, all possessed of a mission, theirs musical, mine the destruction of evil. Suddenly I wanted a woman, and voiced this almost immediately to the cabbie. A last fling before a life of blissful fidelity. He understood. I even described what I wanted. Three hundred and fifty scoots for an all-nighter, I volunteered, plus a C-note for the person who set it up.

The cabbie, who was old and probably Greek or Italian, turned around to face me in the back seat, practically salivating. Where are you staying? he asked. I told him the Mark Hopkins. I told him to send the girl to Mr. Bruckner's suite. He knew just the one. She would be knocking on my door within the hour. The cabbie almost fainted when I handed him a crisp C-note upon leaving.

I booked a suite for one week, at ninety-seven dollars a night, paying cash, of course. A bellboy appeared out of nowhere to grab my suitcase. I kept a close eye on him as we took the elevator up to my suite on the eleventh floor, a spacious, old-fashioned, two-room job with expensive pseudo-antique furniture and large French windows opening on an incredible view of Nob

Hill.

I whipped a fifty on the bellboy and he almost fainted. I told him to let the bummer roll and buy himself a bag of good shit, that for the next few days I could afford to be generous. I also told him to send up champagne for one and a pot of coffee. After thanking me effusively, he ran out the door, still scrutinizing the bill to see if it was real.

The hooker was a disappointment. Not tall, not particularly large breasted, with rather muscular legs and sort of a cheap face. We talked for the better part of a half hour as I savored the prelude to sex. With me, part of the thrill with prostitutes is the certainty of fucking, followed by the anticipation, followed by the ultimate thrill: watching them undress. So when Danielle (obviously a business alias) did a slow, seductive strip, I was more than ready. But it was a quick, violent, disappointing coupling, tinged with guilt and a rambling mind: I thought of Jane and Cathcart throughout. When I finished, I paid her and told her to take off. She was thrilled with a three-hundred-dollar quickie and kissed me and skipped out the door.

After she left I couldn't sleep, so I buzzed Walter in L.A. He answered on the first ring, dead drunk. I could hear the blasting away of a T.V. crime program through his slurred voice. I tried for twenty minutes to engage him in conversation, but it was no use, he wanted to talk about Jimmy Carter and the anti-matter credit card. Finally I despaired, told him I loved him, and gently hung up.

Next I called Mark Swirkal's exchange and gave the password, then lay down on the bed and passed out.

During my sleep that night, a strange dream sequence began. It was Fat Dog and me, in a complete reversal of roles: Fat Dog, wearing a blue uniform and a gun stopping jaywalkers on Hollywood Boulevard, and me carrying golf bags that seemed to tear at my muscles through my sleep. Just before I awoke, a poem, or fragment of one, ripped through my dream:

There's an electric calm at
the heart of the storm,
Transcendentally alive and safe and warm.
So get out now
And search the muse,
The blight is real,
You have to choose,
The choice is yours,
Your mind demurs,
It's yours, it's his, it's ours, it's hers.

Moral stands will save us yet,
The alternative is certain death.

My dream world went up in an inferno of fire and screaming: a 1957 Chevy had just exploded on the freeway. The tall spire of the Los Angeles City Hall collapsed in a heap of rubble and severed limbs flew toward me. I woke up drenched in sweat, straining to remember the words of the poem. I found a pen and some hotel stationery in the nightstand. Gradually the words came back and I wrote them down. Obviously, they were a resurgence of some long-buried, long-forgotten poem discovered during my high school poetry reading days. But who was the author? A memory as fine as mine should be able to recall that, too.

I stared at the words on the paper: storms, muses, and moral stands. The very history of my thirty-third summer.

I showered, put on clean clothes, and went looking for a safe place to put my new fortune. I selected a somber, formidable old B. of A. on Market and Kearney, walked in and inquired about safe deposit boxes. The branch manager was most helpful, took my payment for a five-year rental fee on three boxes, handed me my keys and left me in privacy to stuff the square metal boxes full of money. I retained ten thousand dollars for operating expenses, which left me with an incredibly stuffed wallet and billfold.

Next I went looking for the U.S. Passport Office. I found it on Montgomery Street, within walking distance. The clerk took my application and told me that normally a birth certificate was required as I.D., but since I was a licensed private investigator he could overlook it. He kept glancing furtively at my left armpit, no doubt trying to determine whether or not I was carrying a heater. He referred me to a photographer down the street and told me to bring a photograph back later today. My passport should be ready in ten days.

I made a fast circuit: photographer's shop, quick photo session, back to the Passport office with the photo, all within one hour. Which left me at a strange juncture: alone in San Francisco with ten thousand dollars in my pocket, an empty Mark Cross suitcase, no desire to get drunk or laid and suddenly bored with my beloved city.

Not knowing what to do, I walked northwest. When I passed the Main Branch of the San Francisco Public Library on Larkin and McAllister, I knew I had found my destination. I headed straight for the poetry section on the second floor. For the next six hours I pored through hundreds of volumes, looking for my dream poem. It was nowhere, either as a complete poem or as a fragment of one. I gave up when nervous hunger and eyestrain combined to give me a colossal headache.

A gourmet meal in Chinatown and a walk back to the hotel in the brisk night air put me in better spirits. But with sleep came more nightmares—without poetry this time, but just as vividly violent: monsters wielding golf clubs rising out of sand traps to attack me. On waking the next morning I hoped for a failure of memory, for if the dreams continued after the killing of Cathcart, I would surely go insane.

I had three things left to accomplish in San Francisco: scoring some dope, preferably heroin, acquiring a handgun, illegally, and formulating a plan for eliminating Cathcart. I started by buying some used counterculture garb at a secondhand store in the Haight-Ashbury. Bell-bottom pants, sandals, a tank top bearing the likeness of a rock and roller named Neil Young, and an Army fatigue jacket. When I changed into my outfit back at the hotel, I knew it would never work. It was impossible. I had that outsized, moustached, arrogant-elitist look indigenous only to cops. Nobody on the street would sell me a firecracker, let alone a large quantity of heroin.

I approached the bellboy I had tipped so generously. The best he could come up with was cocaine or quaaludes. I decided to forego second-class drugs and to try instead to cop some smack in L.A., where I knew the territory and could probably shake down some connections.

Late in the afternoon I called Ralston at Hillcrest. The switchboard girl put me through to him at the first tee. When he said, “First tee, may I help you?” his voice sounded strained.

“This is Brown,” I said. “Are you busy?”

“Not really,” he replied.

“Good. How’s our buddy? Have you talked to him?”

“Yeah, today in fact. He thinks you’re in Mexico. He got word somehow that Cruz and Sandoval are dead. He thinks you did the job. He’s pissed and maybe even scared. He’s going down there himself this weekend to look for you.” It was almost too good to be true, but I believed him. My mind ran around in circles for long moments. Finally, Ralston broke in: “Brown? Are you still there?”

“Yeah. Look, when do you think he’ll split for Baja?”

“I don’t know. He usually leaves Friday nights, after he gets off duty. But maybe it’s different this time, because the trip is strictly business. Why?”

“Do you know his address in Del Mar?”

“No, I’ve never been down there. And I won’t ask him, in case you’re thinking of asking me to. I’m not fucking with you, I just don’t want to do anything suspicious. I’ve been staying away from him. When he called me today he said he wanted to see me, but I begged off. If he sees I’ve been beat up, he’ll know something’s wrong.”

“Listen, Daddy-O, don’t mess with the big fella. Are you afraid for your ass, Hot Rod?"

"Yeah, I am. Because I'm sane. Are you?"

"Yeah, but it's almost over. I'll call you when it is."

Before he hung up, Ralston told me to be careful at least half a dozen times. In a cursory way I took each admonition to heart, but the wheels in my brain were already grinding out a plan.

I enlisted my bellboy buddy and we made a little recording on tape. My plan was starting to jell. I took a 7:15 flight from San Francisco International to San Diego Airport and rented a car from the Hertz office at the terminal.

The rest was simple. I called Del Mar Information and asked for the address and phone number of Haywood Cathcart. It took all of three seconds for them to give it to me: 8169 Camino De La Costa, 651-8291. Cathcart's policeman-criminal mentality and sense of normalcy had dictated a phone listing ("I'm a police officer of high rank, and a solid American citizen. What have I got to hide?").

I drove up the Coast Highway to Del Mar. Del Mar is a rich town, built upward on rolling hills from the sea, but it does have a middle-class beachfront enclave and that's where I found 8169 Camino De La Costa. It was so perfect that I almost collapsed in gratitude. *Maybe* there was a God.

A twisting road led me down to a giant parking lot. I parked and walked along the sand, checking out the house numbers. The houses, large bungalows really, were identical: white wood frame, obviously built as part of a development fifty or sixty years ago, and were spaced a solid fifty yards apart, separated by sand drifts. I found 8169. It was the most immaculately kept place on the beachfront. I walked around the back. There was a chain-linked barbed wire fence around a small backyard of some kind of synthetic grass. Old Haywood. Keep the property value up, and the n———s out. Through the fence I could see that the back door entered into some kind of service porch. It was a good setup and my mind clicked methodically with embellishments on my plan.

I drove back to San Diego and spent the night in a Hyatt Motel. The next morning, Thursday, I returned the car to the airport and flew to L.A., where my other loaner was waiting in the parking lot.

It took me all day to accomplish what I had to, but I was satisfied with the results. A shakedown at gunpoint of Larry Willis and two black drag queens had provided me with three ounces of heroin, a small bag of coke, and some assorted uppers and downers. A seven-hundred-fifty-dollar payoff to an old informant from my Wilshire Patrol days had got me a cold Iver-Johnson .38 revolver with a silencer.

After I had everything I needed, I started to get scared: there was nothing left to do but the act itself.

I dropped off the overdue loan car at the agency. They were pissed and about to call the fuzz. I gladly paid the extra money they wanted, took a cab to LAX and hopped a plane for San Diego.

Once ensconced in a motel in nearby Escondido, I started to get scared for real. I wanted to drink, but didn't dare. If I did I would die. Throughout the night I tried to sleep and comforted myself with the poem I seemed to have composed myself:

There's an electric calm at the
heart of the storm,
Transcendentally alive and safe and warm.
So get out now
And search the muse,
The blight is real,
You have to choose.
The choice is yours,
Your mind demurs,
It's yours, it's his, it's ours, it's hers.
Moral stands will save us yet,
The alternative is certain death.

It helped. I slept. But the nightmares came again, all run together: Fat Dog in his patrolman's uniform, exploding Chevys, golf course monsters. I woke up finally at two in the afternoon of the Big Day. I had been asleep for nine hours.

I spent the rest of the afternoon trying to calm the screaming in my mind. The poem helped some more. Gradually, tenuously, a semblance of electric calm emerged, and I ran with it.

14

The practicalities of my prelude to assassination came first, and taking care of them intensified my calm. I ditched the loaner car, bought a pair of surgical-thin rubber gloves at a hardware store, and changed into a T.V. repair jumpsuit I had bought on impulse at the thrift store in San Francisco. I took a commuter bus into Del Mar, where I killed time walking along the streets trying not to think. But at this I failed. I thought, frantically searching out my plan for hidden flaws and pumping myself up with logic. I was in danger of losing my electric calm.

Besides the basic assumption that Cathcart would spend the night at his house, I was counting on one other thing: that his intelligence, monomania and justified paranoia would preclude the keeping of any records detailing his malfeasance over the last ten years. Ralston and Kupferman were his executives, bonded to him by extortion and fear. Solly signed the documents, Hot Rod took care of his books. But now they were walking a duplicitous tightrope of which Cathcart knew nothing. They were my allies, victims of my own benign extortion.

Around dark I got rid of my jumpsuit, which made me feel better. It had been good cover—I looked the part of an outsized T.V. repairman—but the clothes I was wearing underneath were better for night work: Levi cords, desert boots, and a cotton sportshirt with the tail out. My .38 was well hidden. The battery operated tape machine I was carrying looked normal. I was white and all right.

I found a pay phone near the beach and delivered the password to Mark Swirkal's service. At eight o'clock precisely, heart thumping, skidding, and lurching, I walked to my destiny. There was a cool breeze and a very dark sky that outlined the stars brilliantly. I made my way down to the beachfront parking lot. There was a Landcruiser parked there, identical to the one I had seen outside Cathcart's pad in Baja. I squatted down, lit a match, and examined the license plate. It was Cathcart's.

I walked along the sand, carefully counting the number of houses from the parking lot. Cathcart's was the sixth, and his lights were on. I hunkered down and walked around to his backyard, then hopped the fence. I tore my shirt and cut my hands on the barbed wire, but my tension overrode the pain.

There was absolute silence in the little yard. I got out my gun and switched off the safety. I counted to one hundred, then placed the tape deck on the ground in the middle of the yard and pushed the "play" button. During the six-second pause before the action started I ducked up against the wall next to the back door. Then it started. First the loud noise of glass breaking, then the bellboy's voice screaming, "I told you to have my dinner ready, you stupid bitch! How many times have I told you that?!" More breaking glass—my falsetto screams—more breaking glass—the bellboy again—"Cook my dinner now, you fucking bitch! Or I'll kill you."

The back door slammed open. Cathcart was there, peering out into the night. I crouched and fired into his chest. The gun jammed with a loud click. Cathcart swiveled toward me and pointed his arm in my direction. I tried to move, but it was too late. There was a burst of noise, a flash of red and a slamming into my upper chest. I fell over and began to roll, still clutching my gun. Cathcart stood on his porch, turning his head, trying to adjust his eyes to the dark. I aimed and fired. This time it worked. Cathcart ducked, but not in time. I caught him somewhere in the torso, for he grabbed his chest as he flew backward into the service porch.

I got up and ran toward him, heedless of the possible consequences. As I got to him, he was lying on the floor. I was a perfect target framed in the doorway. Cathcart raised his arm to fire, but I threw myself on top of him before he could squeeze the trigger. I pinned his arm down with both my hands and brought my right knee into his groin, full force. Once. Then twice. Then again. Finally, he went limp and relinquished the grip on his weapon.

Panting, sweating, bleeding, and hysterical, I flung his gun back into the darkness of the house. Outside it was quiet. The tape had run out. In the darkness I started to babble. It was all over. I had blown it. I had won, and lost. There was just too much noise. The fuzz would come. So I waited, on the bloody floor, my body strewn across Cathcart's.

I listened to his breathing through the overflow of my own. I tried to recite my poem, but I couldn't remember the words. Once I thought I heard Cathcart stirring, so I clubbed him in the head with my gun butt. I started to shiver, drenched in sweat. Suddenly, I remembered my wound. It wasn't sweat I was bathed in, it was blood. I felt for the wound. It was next to my shoulder blade, above my heart. Above my heart. Something dim resounded in my mind. I tore open my shirt and ran a hand over my back. When I found it I started to laugh. It was funnier than Walter at his best or the roasted dog. It was an exit wound and the blood that covered it was starting to congeal. I laughed until I passed out from shock.

When I awoke I checked the luminous dial on my watch. It was ten fourteen. I flashed and did a double-take, then started to blubber. I had entered Cathcart's driveway at nine twenty. It was almost an hour later and no cops were on the scene. I listened to Cathcart's uneven breathing for a second, recited jumbled fragments of my poem to myself, then gathered my strength and stood up. I staggered, my head reeled but I remained upright. I took a deep breath and it gave me confidence. I was certain none of my vital organs had been hit.

With a gigantic effort, I grabbed Cathcart's arms and pulled him back into his house. It was slow going; he was a large man. I dragged him through the kitchen into a large carpeted area. I risked switching on a light. A modest living room, couch, coffee table, and chairs were illuminated. I walked back and collected both our guns. Cathcart's was a snub-nosed detective's special.

I sat in a chair and stared at his inert body. He was a formidable-looking man. Iron gray-blond hair, sharp features. The body of an athlete at fifty-five. I knelt over him and opened his shirt. I had hit him in the left side of the chest. Almost as if in answer to my probings, Cathcart awakened and spat out a stream of blood. He looked at me. I looked back. I discerned immediately that he knew who I was. That was good. I wanted him to be lucid when I killed him. "Hi, Haywood," I said in a hoarse voice, "you want some water?"

He stared some more, then finally nodded. I brought him two glasses of sink water. The first I threw in his face. It served its purpose. He yelled, spit out some more blood, and raised himself to his elbows, gritting his teeth against the pain. Crouching beside him, I placed a hand in back of his head and raised the glass to his lips. He took a tentative sip, then spit the water out, with a blood chaser, and gulped the rest of it down, regaining a degree of what I took to be his former malevolence. When he spoke the voice was rich, cold, and almost stentorian: "You realize that you are in way above your head, don't you, Brown?"

"No, Captain, I don't. I'd say you are."

"I checked your personnel file, Brown. You were the worst scumbag ever to con his way into the department."

"I'd say that's relative, Captain. I'd say I was a bush league pinch hitter compared to you."

"Comparing lowlife scumbags doesn't concern me. What exactly do you want?"

"You mean as the price for my silence?"

"Yes."

"A million-dollar Welfare check. To be presented to me by you on national T.V. After the ceremony, you can make a little speech on your theory of n——— containment. You can retire from the department and begin a new career in politics."

"Brown, literal-minded people like you often make good policemen, but you weren't even that. How does it feel to know that what you've done with me will ultimately be judged as the biggest fuck-up of your fucked-up life?"

"I'd say that's relative too, Captain. I'd say what I've done with you is the one saving grace of my fucked-up life. I'd say I've fucked over a lot of people in my life. Hurt a lot of people. Caused a lot of pain. But compared to you? Unleashing Fat Dog Baker on the world? That you can even compare the two of us is beyond comprehension. Can't you see what you are?"

Cathcart smiled and spit out some more blood. "We all have saving graces, Fritz," he said, "even you. I was struck by one of your fitness reports. One of your superiors wrote: 'This officer seems to be interested in only two things: getting drunk and listening to classical music.' I felt a strange affection for you when I read that. I love great music, too."

"So did Hitler," I said.

Cathcart nodded. "What exactly do you want, Brown? Revenge for your life?"

"I want to wipe you off the face of the earth."

"I see. Will you take me into my den? There's something I want to show you."

I considered it for a second, then decided to do it. One final act of mercy. I helped him to his feet, my gun in his side. He reeled, but managed to limp the twenty feet or so to the den. I went in first, keeping him covered, and flicked on the light. It was a wood-paneled room, with an ornate walnut desk and two overstuffed leather chairs. I shoved Cathcart into one of them. He winced. I looked around the room. The walls were covered with framed photographs of police groups: groups of smiling patrolmen in uniform standing next to early '50s vintage black-and-whites, groups of stern-looking plainclothesmen in front of station houses, candid shots of cops at their desks writing reports. A wave of nostalgia hit me. This had been my life once. I pointed to the walls. "Is this what you wanted to show me?" I asked.

"No," Cathcart said.

"That's good," I said, "because I've been there. Although there is one photograph I'd love to see."

"What's that?"

"You and Fat Dog with your arms around each other outside of a burning house. You and your 'genius little boy.' Tell me one thing: how did you nail him for the Utopia torch?"

"Very easy. I am a good police officer, unlike you. I had been seeing Freddy in the neighborhood for weeks. From his garb I knew he had to be a caddy. When the three men I caught described the 'fourth man,' I knew immediately who it had to be. I hung out at the various country clubs in L.A. until I found him. Then I extricated a confession, and that got me to thinking."

"You filthy cocksucker," I said.

Cathcart smiled. "Open the top drawer of my desk, will you, Brown?"

I opened it gingerly and found a velveteen book-style photo holder, the kind that wedding pictures are kept in. I opened it and gasped. Inside were two lovingly mounted likenesses of Anton Bruckner. "Do you know who that man is?" Cathcart asked.

"Yeah," I said. "He's a friend of mine."

"And of mine. But he's more than that. Do you like his music?"

"I love it."

"Good. You love Bruckner. But you don't understand him. What his music meant. It's about containment. Refined emotions. Sacrifice. Purity. Control. Duty. The muted melancholy throughout his symphonies! A call to arms. A policeman who loves Bruckner and you can't feel his essence. He never wed, Brown. He never fucked women. He wouldn't expend one ounce of his creative energy on anything but his vision. *I have been Anton Bruckner,* Brown. You can be, too. You come from good stock, you're a big strong man. You can be of service, it's just a question of reeducation. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll…"

I had had enough. The blood was pounding in my head so hard that I felt about to explode. I aimed my gun at Cathcart and shot him four times in the face.

I went into the living room and lay down on the couch. I fell asleep. I woke up four hours later, feeling hallucinogenic. A shower helped. I put on a pair of Cathcart's pants and one of his shirts. I combed my hair. I collected my tape deck from the backyard and put it in a paper bag I found in the kitchen, along with my silencer fitted .38. I dumped the dope I had ripped off of Larry Willis all over Cathcart's living room. I found the keys to the Landcruiser on the coffee table. I put them in my pocket. My hands were going numb from hours of wearing rubber gloves, but I kept them on.

I gave Cathcart one last look before I left. His face was obliterated, a gaping hole on top of his neck. Skull and brain fragments were stuck to the wall. His body and the chair he was sprawled in were a mass of drying blood. Rigor mortis was setting in and his arms were stuck in their last pose of reaching out to me.

I took the pictures of lonely Anton and put them in my paper bag, too. I left the death house, locking the door behind me, then drove to the motel and got my suitcase.

It was dawn when I got back to L.A. I was woozy from shock and lack of blood. I left Cathcart's car on a side street in Santa Monica, then took a bus all the way out Wilshire to the Ambassador Hotel, which was within walking distance of Walter's. My shoulder was numb, but aside from that and shock-induced fatigue, I felt all right.

After I ditched the rubber gloves, circulation slowly returned to my hands. It was a symbolic, life-enhancing feeling. Five seconds after croaking "Crazy, Daddy-O" to the girl at Mark Swirkal's service I passed out on my freshly made-up hotel bed.

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The next several days run together in my mind. I know that when I woke up at the Ambassador, I was in great pain from my shoulder wound and knew I had to do something about it. I remember taking a taxi to Irwin's apartment off Melrose and Fairfax. He had a doctor brother I had been hearing about for years and now was the time to summon him. I remember that he came, along with Irwin's nephew Uri, and that he immediately gave me a shot of something that sent me into the Twilight Zone. I remember Uri embracing me, delighted with his new position as Cal Myers's repo man, waving his master keys in front of my face and calling me the "only good German in history."

"I'm an American, you stupid fuck," I retorted. "Brown is an American name."

Irwin's brother poked around and cleansed my wound, bandaged it and gave me some pain pills. They had a subtle effect. I thought my continued disorientation was due to shock and the trauma of murder, but I was wrong. It was due to a system full of codeine. I discontinued their use after two days. I couldn't afford to be zoned out. I still had things to do before I could officially say "it's over."

Feeling returned to my shoulder. By Monday I could move it without too much pain. That morning I started to sweat out news of Cathcart's death, buying all the local papers and hanging out in front of Walter's newly purchased T.V. set. There was nothing, just the usual rebop—Jimmy Carter had announced that he planned to campaign on "his record," Reagan announced that he would run on "the issues," and Walter offered a running commentary that kept me laughing until my shoulder ached.

I called Ralston Tuesday morning and gave him the good news. "Cathcart's dead," I said into the phone, "it's over."

Ralston just said, "Thank God." And let the line go dead.

On Tuesday night I dumped all the evidence of the killing into the Pacific Ocean: the gun, my bloody clothes, Cathcart's clothes I had stolen, the tape deck, and the portraits of Anton Bruckner. I felt an impulse to keep the likenesses of lonely Anton, to give them a good, sane home, but they had become ghastly objects. I tore them into small pieces and fed them to the sea.

The next day, armed with a pocketful of dimes, I called the Welfare contacts on the list Ralston had given me. At the first sound of a voice on the other end of the line, I said "Cathcart is dead. The scam is dead. I have evidence linking you to fraud and extortion. Stop all payments now." Before the listener could respond, I hung up. I connected with all but three of the people on the list. It was good enough. Ralston would take the brunt of their fear and grief, as well he should. He had gotten off easy.

News of Cathcart's death hit the media Wednesday night. It was attributed to suicide. I was watching T.V. with Walter when I got the word: Haywood Cathcart, 56, Captain, Los Angeles Police Department had died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound sometime over the weekend at his "fishing retreat" in Del Mar. He had been a twenty-eight-year veteran of the L.A.P.D., was considered an exemplary officer, and was famous for "single-handedly cracking the famous Club Utopia firebombing case in 1968 that sent the slayers of six bar patrons to the gas chamber." His superiors said that he had left no suicide note, but had been distraught recently over family matters.

As the somber-voiced newsman concluded his report, I started to weep. The fix was in. The L.A.P.D. had some inkling of what was up and had stonewalled it. If Cathcart had left no records, I was free.

Walter was dumbfounded at my tears. He had never seen me cry and had no idea of their origin. But he did his best to comfort me, embracing me and clumsily pawing my head. "What is it, Fritz?" he asked. "Did you know that cop who shot himself? Was he your buddy?"

I didn't answer him, I just let myself be comforted. It was over. That night I went home to my pad, expecting to find it ransacked. It wasn't. It was intact, waiting for me like an old friend. I looked at the calendar above my desk. On the space for June 30, I had marked, "Fred Baker—one week at one hundred twenty-five dollars per day." It was now August 1. I had been in limbo for five weeks, had killed three men, had learned truths that few would know. I had been correct on the morning it all started. My life *had* been about to change, irrevocably.

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The next morning I took a cab to the storage garage and got my old Camaro. I was reunited with another old friend, who had been washed and polished during my absence.

I called the Kupferman residence. It was time for the only reunion that mattered. The maid answered, distraught. "Mr. Kupferman had a heart attack last night. He's in the hospital. He be real sick maybe gonna die."

She started to ramble, but I cut her off: "What hospital?" I yelled.

"Cedars Sinai," she said.

I hung up and tore out. The hospital was in West Hollywood, on Beverly near La Cienega, and by running lights and taking side streets I was there in fifteen minutes. I parked illegally and ran inside, flashing some absurd piece of fake I.D. at the reception lady and demanding to know where Sol Kupferman was. Cowed, she told me room 583, West Wing.

I jammed for an elevator and ran wildly down the corridors until I saw Jane sitting on a chair outside the room that had to be Sol's. "Darling," I called as I ran toward her, "is Sol all right?!"

Jane rushed toward me, screaming "Killer, killer, rapist dissension center! Murderer, killer!"

We collided and she flung her fists and arms out at me with hysterical fury, scratching, clawing at my face, her eyes full of tears. I tried to control her, but it was no use. I had no will to be assertive, so I just let myself be pummeled. But she didn't stop, and her screaming "killer, killer, killer!" was drawing a crowd of hospital people.

"I hate you, I hate the day I let you fuck me!" she screamed, then lunged inside my sport coat and grabbed my gun out of its holster and leveled it at me. We both froze, and for long seconds there was silence in the corridor. Then she screamed "Murderer!" one last time, threw my gun against the corridor wall and ran away from me.

I retrieved the gun and made for the elevator, thinking—Oh God, oh God, oh God, was it all for nothing? Was Sol dead?

A large young doctor caught up with me outside the elevator. He was scared, but he wanted to know what was going on. I showed him my P.I.'s photostat and told him I was on a case and was licensed to carry a gun. He seemed satisfied. Then I asked him, "Is Sol Kupferman dead?"

"No," he said, "he's going to make it."

I don't remember what I felt as I left the hospital, except that there was nothing left for me in Los Angeles. Even though Sol was going to live, Jane's hatred of me held a brutal finality. Our last moments together had been so ugly that I could never surmount them. I got in my car and drove to San Francisco.

15

I spent a week in San Francisco, waiting for my passport to come through, getting immunized and buying clothes and other provisions for a trip to Europe. I left the night of August 10, flying to New York with two suitcases and $25,000 in cash and traveler's checks. Before I left, I sent Mark Swirkal $5,000 in traveler's checks and told him to destroy the tapes.

I got moderately drunk on the plane and full-out drunk in my hotel room near Kennedy International.

The following day I caught a Lufthansa flight to Munich. I was in Germany for two months, drunk and sober. I took a steamer up the Rhine. I caught the Berlin Philharmonic under Karajan. They were magnificent, but only part of me was there for the performance. I visited Beethoven House in Bonn and Beethoven's grave. I didn't feel what I thought I would. I made love to a lot of very beautiful, high-priced German prostitutes. At the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth I got drunk and beat up two British students who seemed to be bothering a young Fraulein. In Stuttgart I broke down sobbing in a beer garden and was hospitalized with incipient d.t.'s.

At the end of October I flew back to America and settled in San Francisco. I rented an apartment in Pacific Heights and looked around for investments, something creative. I couldn't find anything, and Frisco began to pall. It was too beautiful, too ethnic, too counterculture. The people I passed on the street seemed to be congratulating themselves on their good taste in living there.

In May of the following year I returned to L.A. Repatriated to my smogbound hometown, I started to get on with the business of my life. I bought a house in the Hollywood Hills, near the Yamashiro Skyroom. I invested badly. First I set myself up as a sandwich entrepreneur with a small restaurant near the Music Center. It was a lunch and afterconcert place that featured jumbo sandwiches named after composers. I was hoping the place would turn into a hangout for musicians from the Philharmonic, but it never happened. Finally, after an investment of eleven months and eighty grand, the joint folded. My next investment was safer and turned into a resounding success: I bought a liquor store on 3rd and Western in the heart of the old neighborhood. I've got a smart black guy who runs it for a grand a month and ten percent of the action, and a smart tax lawyer to help me hold onto my money. All I do is sit back and rake it in. As of this writing, I am worth $756,000.

Shortly after returning to Los Angeles, I got a letter, postmarked New York from Jane Baker:

Dear Fritz:

It has taken me a long time getting around to writing this letter, because it has taken me a long time to resolve my feelings about you. I apologize for my actions on the day of August 2. It was absurd to call you a killer. At the time I blamed you for Sol's heart attack, which was ridiculous, but understandable. To me you were the catalyst of all those terrible events that awful summer. Later I learned that they had been set in motion many years before, and all you did was stumble into them and try to help the victims as best you could. Thank you for that. Sol has told me that you acted courageously and were responsible for lifting a terrible yoke off his back.

Sol is doing very well, by the way, and so am I. I am attending Juilliard and getting good! Some day I will be a good cellist, worthy of the Strad I play with and the love Sol has given me. Sol is here in New York, too, and is enjoying his retirement and nurturing a new fondness for modern art.

I feel strange about you, Fritz, and somehow guilty that I couldn't love you. I know you had put great hopes on our being together. I sensed in you a desperate loneliness and a great thwarted love of beauty that contradicted the violence that seemed to define your character. Try to pursue that love of beauty, Fritz, try.

Maybe if you listened to less violent music, it would help. Beethoven and the romantics sometimes tend to create violent emotions in people already prone to violence. Listen to some baroque, enjoy the delicacy of it. Listen to the impressionists, they have a great statement to make, one I know you could appreciate.

I have to go now. Thank you for all the help you gave Sol and me. Sol won't tell me the whole story, but I know you acted bravely, and with great concern for us. Try to love. I will always remember you fondly.

Sincerely,
Jane Baker

I do try to love. Sometimes it's easy, sometimes it's hard. Sometimes I'm drunk, sometimes I'm sober. Sometimes I think of Fat Dog and his "plan" for me and wake up shaking. Sometimes I forget completely about his malevolent genius. Why me? Since that summer I have interviewed at least a hundred people who knew Fat Dog, and I still have no inkling.

—

Walter died last year of cirrhosis of the liver. He was thirty-four. His mother had him buried with a Christian Science service. I got drunk and disrupted it. The fuzz came and busted me, but all it cost me was a hundred dollar fine. I miss him terribly. Some night I'm going to steal his coffin and transport it to the beach, where a big raft will be waiting. I'll put Walter on the raft, ignite it, and send it out to sea. I'll have speakers hooked up all along the beach to blast out Wagner as my beloved comrade floats to a fiery Valhalla.

I get restless sometimes at night and go for long walks on golf courses. While walking the fairways I feel very much in touch with some kind of transient spirit world, a world in constant ellipsis.

When I think of what happened that summer I think not of myself, but of the other people involved. Nothing that went before or will happen after can touch that summer when I was part of the insane, tragic music of so many people's lives. That summer was my concerto for orchestra—each instrument in the orchestra having a voice equal, yet distinct from all the others.

So I go on, heeding Jane's advice. I have not performed violence on a human being since hurting the two boys in Bayreuth. I try to appreciate beauty. Most of the time I'm equal to the task, but sometimes my mind turns to wild flights of fantasy, envisioning other electric calms and moral stands that might bring me permanent salvation. When I think of these things, my reason and love of beauty desert me and I hang suspended like a bizarre hovercraft in a holding pattern over Los Angeles. But I hold.

I listen to a lot of music.

James Ellroy

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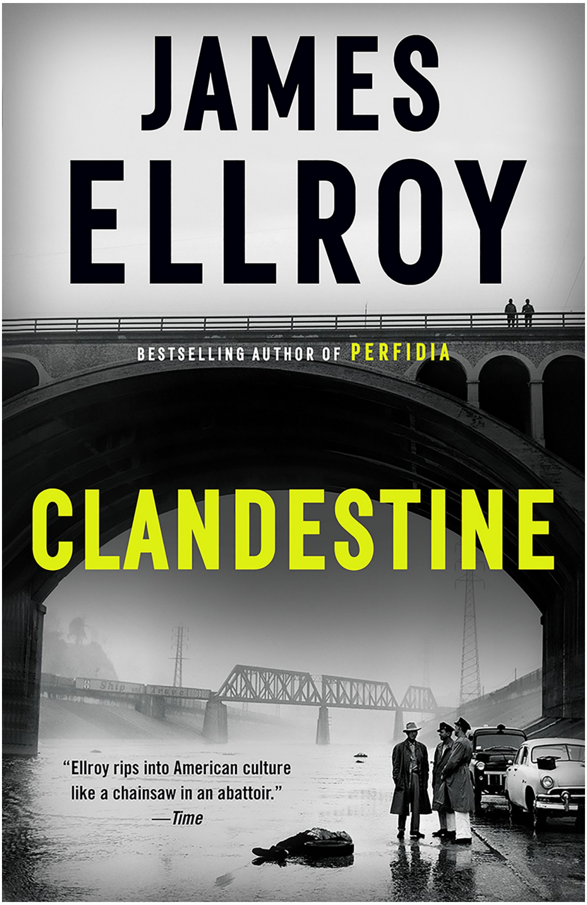

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James Ellroy was born in Los Angeles in 1948. He is the author of the Underworld U.S.A. Trilogy: *American Tabloid*, *The Cold Six Thousand*, and *Blood's A Rover*, and the L.A. Quartet: *The Black Dahlia*, *The Big Nowhere*, *L.A. Confidential*, and *White Jazz*. He lives in Colorado.

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CLANDESTINE

JAMES ELLROY

VINTAGE BOOKS
A DIVISION OF PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE LLC
NEW YORK

FIRST VINTAGE BOOKS EDITION, FEBRUARY 2021

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Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available at the Library of Congress.

Vintage Books Trade Paperback ISBN 9780593312223
Ebook ISBN 9780593312230

Cover design by Joe Montgomery
Cover photograph: Bridge Over L.A. River, February 17, 1955, by R. Rittenhouse. Courtesy of the Fototeka Collection

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TO

Penny Nagler

INTRODUCTION

I wrote *Clandestine* in 1980. I was working as a caddy at Bel-Air Country Club in L.A. and chasing a woman attending law school. It was my second novel. My first novel had just sold as a paperback original in America. I got paid chump change for it. I was a hard-working motherfucker back in 1980. I packed golf bags six days a week and wrote all seven nights. I wrote *Clandestine* in eight months. I think it's a wild ride of a book.

It's got golf, police corruption, good sex and some raunchy laughs. It's built around a tender and volatile love story. It's my first attempt to fictionally address the murder of my own mother. It's a wildly personal novel and very much the period forerunner of my L.A. Quartet.

I had a blast writing *Clandestine.* I think it shows. I hope it transports you back to 1951. I hope some part of you stays there.

James Ellroy
Kansas City, 27 June 1996

PROLOGUE

During the dark, cold winter of 1951 I worked Wilshire Patrol, played a lot of golf, and sought out the company of lonely women for one-night stands.

Nostalgia victimizes the unknowing by instilling in them a desire for a simplicity and innocence they can never achieve. The fifties weren't a more innocent time. The dark salients that govern life today were there then, only they were harder to find. That was why I was a cop, and why I chased women. Golf was no more than an island of purity, something I did exceedingly well. I could drive a golf ball three hundred yards. Golf was breathtaking cleanliness and simplicity.

My patrol partner was Wacky Walker. He was five years my senior, with the same amount of time in the department. We first bumped into each other in the muster room of Wilshire Station, each of us lugging a golf bag. We both broke into huge grins and knew each other instantly—and completely.

With Wacky it was poetry, wonder, and golf; with me it was women, wonder, and golf. "Wonder" meant the same thing to both of us: the job, the streets, the people, and the mutable ethos of we who had to deal daily with drunks, hopheads, gunsels, wienie waggers, hookers, reefer smokers, burglars, and the unnamed lonely detritus of the human race. We became the closest of friends, and later partners on day watch.

The day watch commander, Lieutenant William Beckworth, was a golf fanatic and hopeless ball beater. When he heard I shot scratch he had me put on day watch in exchange for lessons. It was a fair trade, but Beckworth was unteachable. I could wrap the lieutenant around my little finger—I even had him caddying for me on Saturday mornings, when I hustled games at country clubs and municipal courses—so it was easy to get Wacky bumped off night watch and assigned to days with the two of us as partners. Which took us deeper.

Herbert Lawton Walker was thirty-two years old, deathobsessed, and an alcoholic. He was a genuine hero—a World War II recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor, which he was awarded for wiping out two machine gun nests full of Japs on Saipan. He could have gotten any job he wanted. Insurance companies were deluging him with offers when he went touring for war bonds, but he opted for the Los Angeles Police Department, a blue suit, a gun, and the wonder.

Of course, as a juicehead his perception of the wonder was somewhat predicated on the amount of booze he consumed. I was his watchdog, denying the sauce to him in the mornings and regulating his intake until our tour ended and we returned to the station.

In the early evenings, before I went out looking for women, Wacky and I would belt a few at his apartment and discuss the wonder or talk about the war I had avoided and he made his name in. Wacky was convinced that killing the fifteen Japs on Saipan had made him a wonder addict, and that the key to wonder was in death. I disagreed. We argued. I told him life was good. We agreed. “We are the sworn protectors of life,” I said. “But the key is in death, Freddy,” he said. “Can’t you see that? If you ever have to kill you’ll know.” We always came to that stalemate. When that happened Wacky would lead me to the door, shake my hand warmly, and retire back to his living room to drink and write poetry. Leaving me, Frederick Upton Underhill, twenty-six-year-old outsized crew-cut cop, on his doorstep contemplating nightfall and neon and what I could do about it in what I would later know to be the last season of my youth.

That season was to become a rite of passage composed of many false starts and erroneous conclusions. I was to blunder love and call it many different things; I was to savor the amenities of life on the make and feel last surges of callow power. I was finally to kill—and conclusively disprove Wacky’s thesis, for even with hero’s blood on my hands and laurels at my feet, the wonder in its ultimate state eluded me like a beacon whose light remained fixed while the turbulent waters around it constantly shifted in death and self-renewal.

It was those waters that grabbed me and gave me, many years later, my salvation. If you trace every link in the Eddie Engels case backward and forward in time you will find no beginning and no end. When my rapacious ambition thrust me into a brutal labyrinth of death and shame and betrayal in 1951, it was only *my* beginning. At the final unraveling in 1955 I knew that my willingness to move with and be part of a score of hellishly driven lives in clandestine transit was the wonder—as well as my ultimate redemption.

I

LAST SEASON

1

Wacky and I had been partners for three months when Night Train entered our lives. The roll call sergeant told us about him as we were getting into our ’48 Ford black-and-white in the parking lot at Wilshire Station.

“Walker. Underhill. Come here a second,” he called at us. We walked over. His name was Gately; he needed a shave and he was smiling. “The loot’s got a good one for you guys. You golfers get all the breaks. You like dogs? I hate dogs. We got a dog who’s terrorizing little kiddies. Stealing their lunches over at the elementary school off Orange and Olympic. Mean old trash can dog, used to belong to a wino. The janitor at the school’s got him. Says he’s going to kill him, or cut his balls off. The Animal Regulation guys don’t want the squeal, ’cause they think the janitor’s crazy. You guys go take the mean old dog to the pound. Don’t shoot it, ’cause there’s all kinds of little kiddies might get upset. You golf guys get all the breaks.”

Wacky pulled the black-and-white out onto Pico, laughing and talking in verse, which he sometimes did when coffee reactivated the previous night’s booze still in his system.

“Whither thou, o noble beast, the most we do is ne’er our least, o noble hound, soon to be found, awaits the pound thence gas and ground.”

I laughed on while Wacky continued, driving his poetry into the pavement.

The janitor at Wilshire Crest School was a fat Japanese guy of about fifty. Wacky waggled his eyebrows at him, which broke the ice and got a laugh. He led us to the dog, who was locked up inside a portable construction toilet. As we approached I could hear a keening wail arise from the flimsy structure.

At the prearranged signal from Wacky, I kicked a hole in the side of the outhouse and shoved in our combined lunches—two ham-and-cheese sandwiches, a sardine sandwich, one roast beef on rye, and two apples. There was the sound of furious masticating. I threw open the door, glimpsed a dark furry shape with glittering sharp teeth, and slugged it full force, right in the chops. It collapsed, spitting out some ham sandwich in the process. Wacky dragged the dog out.

He was a nice-looking black Labrador—but very fat. He had a gigantic whanger that must have dragged the ground when he walked. Wacky was in love. “Aww, Freddy, look at my poor baby. Awww.” He picked the unconscious dog up and cradled him in his arms. “Awww. Uncle Wacky and Uncle Freddy will take you back to the station and find a nice home for you. Awww.”

The janitor was eyeing us suspiciously. “You killee dog?” he asked, drawing a finger across his throat and looking at Wacky, who was already carrying his newfound friend lovingly back to the patrol car.

I got in the driver’s side. “We can’t take this mutt back to the station,” I said.

“The hell you say. We’ll stash him in the locker room. When we get off duty I’m taking him home. This dog is gonna be my caddy. I’m gonna fix him up with a harness so he can pack my bag.”

“Beckworth will have your ass.”

“Beckworth can *kiss* my ass. You take care of Beckworth.”

The dog came awake as we pulled into the parking lot of the station. He started barking furiously. I turned around in my seat to slug him again, but Wacky deflected my arm. “Awww,” he said to the beast, “Awww, Awww!” And the dog shut up.

I led the dog around to the locker room from the back entrance. Wacky made the run to the hot dog stand next to Sears, and came back with six cheeseburgers. I was petting the hound in front of my locker when Wacky came back and dumped the greasy mess on the floor in front of me. The dog tore into it, and Wacky and I shot out the door and resumed patrol. So began the odyssey of Night Train, as the dog came to be known.

When we returned from our tour of duty that night we heard Reuben Ramos’s saxophone honking from the locker room. Reuben is a motorcycle officer who picked up a love of jazz from working Seventy-seventh Street Vice, where he raided the bop joints of Central Avenue regularly, looking for hookers, bookies, and hopheads. He had taught himself to play the sax by ear—mostly honks and flub notes, but sometimes he gets going on some simple tune like “Green Dolphin Street.” Tonight he was really cooking—the main theme from “Night Train” over and over.

When Wacky and I entered the locker room we couldn’t believe our eyes. Reuben, in his Jockey shorts, was twisting all around, blasting out the wild first notes of “Night Train” while the fat black Lab writhed on his back on the concrete floor, yipping, yowling, and shooting a tremendous stream of urine straight up into the air. Groups of off-duty patrolmen walked in and walked out, disgusted. Reuben got tired of the action and went home to his wife and kids, leaving Wacky to yell and scream of the dog’s “genius potential.”

Wacky named the dog “Night Train” and took him home with him. He serenaded the dog for weeks with saxophone music on his phonograph and fed him steak, all in the fruitless hope of turning him into a caddy. Finally Wacky gave up, decided that Night Train was a free spirit, and cut him loose. We thought we had seen the last of the beast—but we hadn't. He was to go on to assume legendary status in the history of the Los Angeles Police Department.

Two days after his release, Night Train showed up at Wilshire Station with a dead cat in his jaws. He was chased out by the desk sergeant, who threw the cat in a trash can. Night Train showed up the following day with another dead cat. This time he was chased out with the cat still in his mouth. He came back later that day with the same cat, somewhat the worse for wear. He came back at the right time, for Wacky and I were just getting off duty. When Night Train saw Wacky he swooned with joy, dropped the battered feline gift of love, ran to Wacky's outstretched arms, and urinated all over his uniform. Wacky carried Night Train to my car and locked him in. But Wacky was pissed at Lieutenant Beckworth. Beckworth was supposed to have come across with two cases of Cutty Sark at 75 percent off from a fence he knew, but he had reneged.

Wacky wanted revenge, so he retrieved the mangled dead cat and attached a note with a straight pin to the cat's hide. The note read: "This is all the pussy you're ever going to get, you cheap cocksucker." He then placed the cat on the lieutenant's desk.

Beckworth found it the next morning and went insane. He ordered an all-points bulletin for the dog. He didn't have to look far. Night Train was discovered where he had been placed the previous night—in the back seat of my car. Beckworth couldn't mess with me because he knew I could stop his golf lessons, but he could fuck over Night Train for dead sure. He had the dog arrested and placed in the drunk tank. It was the wrong thing to do. Night Train attacked and almost killed three winos. When the jailer was aroused by their screams and rushed to open the tank door, Night Train ran straight past him, out the door of Wilshire Station, across Pico Boulevard and all the way home to Wacky's apartment, where the two of them lived happily—listening to saxophone music—until the end of the last season of my youth.

—

A week after the dead cat episode, Beckworth was still pissed.

We were at the driving range at Rancho Park, where I was trying, unsuccessfully, to correct his chronic slice. It was hopeless. The price of working day watch was high.

"Fuck. Shit, fuck. Oh, God," Beckworth was muttering. "Show me again, Freddy."

I grabbed his three-iron and sailed off a smooth one. Twotwenty. Straight. “Shoulders back, Loot. Feet closer together. Don’t reach for the ball, meet it.”

He had it perfect until he swung his club. Then he did everything I had told him not to and shank-dribbled the ball about ten yards.

“Easy, Loot. Try it again.”

“Goddamnit, Freddy, I can’t think today. Golf is ninety percent concentration. I’ve got the coordination of a superb athlete, but I can’t keep my mind on the game.”

I played into it. “What’s on your mind, Loot?”

“Little things. Minor things. That shithead partner of yours—I’ve got a feeling about him. Medal of Honor winner, okay. High scores at the academy, okay. But he doesn’t look, or act, like a cop. He spouts poetry at roll call. I think he’s a homo.”

“Not Wacky, Loot. He loves dames.”

“I don’t believe it.”

I played into the lieutenant’s sub rosa but well-known love of Negro tail. All the Seventy-seventh Street harness bulls knew him to be a frequent visitor at Minnie Roberts’s Casbah—the swankiest colored whorehouse on the South Side.

“Well, Loot,” I said, keeping my voice at a whisper, “he loves dames, but he’s gotta have a certain kind of dame, if you follow my drift.”

Beckworth was getting titillated. He smiled, something he rarely did, and exposed the two snaggleteeth at the corners of his mouth. “Drift it my way, Freddy boy.”

I looked in all directions, broadly searching out eavesdroppers. “Korean women, Loot. He can’t get enough of them. Only he doesn’t like to talk about it, because we’re at war over there. Wacky goes goo-goo for gooks. There’s a cathouse on Slauson and Hoover that specializes in them. It’s right next to that dump with all the colored girls—what’s the name of the place?—Minnie’s Casbah. Wacky goes to this chink place. Sometimes he sits in his car and has a few belts before he goes in. He told me he’s seen a shitload of department brass go into the Casbah looking for poontang, but he won’t tell me who. Wacky’s a stand-up guy. He doesn’t hate the brass hats the way a lot of street cops do.”

Beckworth had gone pale, but came out of it fast. “Well, he may not be a queer, but he’s still a shithead. The bastard. I had to get my office fumigated. I’m a sensitive man, Freddy, and I had *nightmares* about that dead cat. And don’t tell me Walker didn’t do it—because I know.”

“I don’t deny it, Lieutenant. He did it. But you got to look at his motives.”

“What motives? He hates me. That’s his motive.”

“You’re wrong, Loot. Wacky respects you. He even envies you.”

“Respect! Envy! What the hell are you talking about?”

“It’s a fact. Wacky envies your golfing potential. He told me so.”

“Are you crazy? I’m a hacker. He’s a low handicapper.”

“You wanna know what he said, Loot? He said, ‘Beckworth has all the moves. It’s just his concentration that’s fucking up his game and keeping him from putting it all together. He’s got a lot on his mind. He’s a good cop. I’m glad I’m just a dumb harness bull on the street. At least I can break eighty. The lieutenant is too conscientious and it fucks up his game. If he weren’t such a good cop, he’d be a scratch player.’ That’s what he said.”

I gave it a minute to sink in. Beckworth was aglow. He put down the four-iron he was mauling and smiled at me beatifically. “You tell Walker to come and see me, Freddy. Tell him I’ve got some good Scotch for him. Korean pussy, Jesus! You don’t think he’s a red, do you, Freddy?”

“Wacky Walker? Staff sergeant, U.S. Marines? Bite your tongue, Lieutenant!”

“You’re right, Freddy. That was unworthy of me. Let’s go. I’ve had enough for today.”

I drove Beckworth back to his car, then went home to my apartment in Santa Monica. I showered and changed. Then I put my off-duty .38 snub-nose into a small hip holster and attached it to my belt next to my spine in case I went dancing and got romantic. Then I got into my car and went looking for women.

—

I decided to follow the red trolley car. It ran from Long Beach all the way up into Hollywood. It was Friday night, and on weekend nights the red car carried groups of girls looking for an evening’s fun on the Strip that they probably couldn’t afford. The red car ran slightly elevated on a track in the middle of the street, so you could hardly see the passengers. Your best bet was to drive abreast of it and watch the girls as they boarded.

I liked L.A. girls the best, they were lonelier and more individual than girls from the “suburbs,” so I caught the red car at Jefferson and La Brea. I wanted to give myself five minutes or so of suspense before the Wilshire Boulevard bonanza: clusters of salesgirls from Ohrbach’s and the May Company, and secretaries from the insurance companies that lined L.A.’s busiest street. I kept my ’47 Buick ragtop with the gunsight hood ornament dead even with the red car and watched keenly as passengers boarded.

The parade up to Wilshire was predictable—old-timers, high school kids, some young couples. At Wilshire, a whole knot of high-voiced gigglers jumped on board, pushing and shoving good-naturedly. It was cold out;

overcoats obscured their bodies. It didn't matter; spirit is more important than flesh. They boarded fast, so I couldn't discern faces. That put me at a disadvantage. If they got out at Fountain or Sunset en masse, I would have to park quick and chase them with no time to work on a line suited to one particular woman.

But it didn't matter, not tonight, because on La Brea just short of Melrose I saw her, running out of a Chinese restaurant, handbag flying by its straps, framed for a few brief seconds in the neon glow of the Gordon Theater: an unusual-looking girl, identifiable not by type, but by an intensity of feeling. She seemed to have a harried, frightened nervousness that blasted open the L.A. night. She was dressed with style, but without regard for fashion: men's baggy-cuffed slacks, sandals, and an Eisenhower jacket. Men's garb, but her features were soft and feminine and her hair was long.

She barely made the red car, hopping aboard with a little antelope bound. Her destination eluded me—she had too much stuff to be running for the Strip. Maybe she was headed for a bookstore on Hollywood Boulevard, or a lover's rendezvous that would ace me out. I was wrong; she got off at Fountain and started walking north.

I parked in a hurry, placed an "Official Police Vehicle" sign under my windshield wiper and followed her on foot. She turned east on De Longpre, a quiet residential street on the edge of the Hollywood business district. If she was going home I was out of luck for tonight—my methods required a crowded street or public place, and the best I could hope for was an address for future reference. But I could see that half a block up two black-and-whites were double-parked with their cherry lights on: a possible crime scene.

The girl noticed this, hesitated, and walked back in my direction. She was afraid of cops, and this compounded my interest. I decided to risk all on that fear, and intercepted her as she passed me. "Excuse me, miss," I said, showing her my badge. "I'm a police officer, and this is an official crime scene. Please allow me to escort you to a safe place."

The woman nodded, frightened, her face going pale and blank for a brief moment. She was very lovely, with that strength-vulnerability combo that is the essence of my love and respect for women. "All right," she said, adding "Officer" with the thinnest edge of contempt. We walked back toward La Brea, not looking at each other. "What's your name?" I asked.

"Sarah Kefalvian."

"Where do you live, Miss Kefalvian?"

"Not far from here. But I wasn't going home. I was going up to the boulevard."

"Whereabouts?"

"To an art exhibit. Near Las Palmas."

"Let me take you there."

"No. I don't think so."

She was averting her eyes, but as we got to the corner of La Brea she gave me a spirited, defiant look that sent me. "You don't like cops, do you, Miss Kefalvian?" I said.

"No. They hurt people."

"We help more people than we hurt."

"I don't believe it. Thank you for escorting me. Good night."

Sarah Kefalvian turned her back to me and started striding off briskly in the direction of the boulevard. I couldn't let her go. I caught up with her and grabbed her arm. She yanked it away. "Look," I said, "I'm not your average cop. I'm a draft dodger. I know that there's a Picasso exhibit at that bookstore on Las Palmas. I'm hot to learn culture and I need someone to show me around." I gave Sarah Kefalvian the crinkly smile that made me look a bashful seventeen. She started to relent, very slightly. She smiled. I moved in. "Please?"

"Are you really a draft dodger?"

"Kind of."

"I'll go with you to the exhibit if you don't touch me or tell anyone that you're a policeman."

"It's a deal."

We walked back to my illegally parked car, me elated, and Sarah Kefalvian interested, against her will.

The exhibit was at Stanley Rose's Bookshop, a longtime hot spot for the L.A. intelligentsia. Sarah Kefalvian walked slightly ahead of me, offering awed comments. The pictures were prints, not actual paintings, but this didn't faze her. It was obvious she was warming to the idea of having a date. I told her my name was Joe Thornhill. We stopped in front of "Guernica," the one picture I felt confident enough to comment on.

"That's a terrific picture," I said. "I saw a bunch of photographs on that city when I was a kid. This brings it all back. Especially that cow with the spear sticking out of him. War must be tough."

"It's the cruelest, most terrible thing on earth, Joe," Sarah Kefalvian said. "I'm devoting my life to ending it."

"How?"

"By spreading the words of great men who have seen war and what it does."

"Are you against the war in Korea?"

"Yes. All wars."

"Don't you want to stop the Communists?"

“Tyranny can only be stopped through love, not war.”

That interested me. Sarah’s eyes were getting moist. “Let’s go talk,” I said, “I’ll buy you dinner. We’ll swap life stories. What do you say?” I waggled my eyebrows a la Wacky Walker.

Sarah Kefalvian smiled and laughed, and it transformed her. “I’ve already eaten, but I’ll go with you if you’ll tell me why you dodged the draft.”

“It’s a deal.” As we walked out of the bookstore I took her arm and steered her. She buckled, but didn’t resist.

We drove to a dago joint on Sunset and Normandie. En route I learned that Sarah was twenty-four, a graduate student in History at U.C.L.A. and a first-generation Armenian-American. Her grandparents had been wiped out by the Turks, and the horror stories her parents had told her about life in Armenia had shaped her life: she wanted to end war, outlaw the atom bomb, end racial discrimination, and redistribute the wealth. She deferred to me slightly, saying that she thought cops were necessary, but should carry liberal arts educations and high ideals instead of guns. She was starting to like me, so I couldn’t bring myself to tell her she was nuts. I was starting to like her, too, and my blood was roiling at the thought of the lovemaking that we would share in a few hours’ time.

I appreciated her honesty and decided that candor would be the only decent kind of barter. I decided not to bullshit her: maybe our encounter would leave her more of a realist.

The restaurant was a one-armed Italian place, strictly family, with faded travel posters of Rome, Naples, Parma, and Capri interspersed with empty Chianti bottles hanging from a phony grape arbor. I decided to forgo chow, and ordered a big jug of dago red. We raised our glasses in a toast.

“To the end of war,” I said.

“Do you really believe that?”

“Sure. Just because I don’t carry placards or make a big deal out of it doesn’t mean I don’t hate it.”

“Tell me why you dodged the draft,” Sarah said softly.

I drained my glass and poured another. Sarah was sipping hers slowly.

“I’m an orphan. I grew up in an orphanage in Hollywood. It was lousy. It was Catholic, and run by a bunch of sadistic nuns. The food stank. During the Depression we ate nothing but potatoes, watery vegetable stews, and powdered milk, with meat maybe once a week. All the kids were skinny and anemic, with bad complexions. It wasn’t good enough for me. I couldn’t eat it. It made me so angry my skin stung. We got sent out to a Catholic school over on Western Avenue. They fed us the same slop for lunch. When I was about eight, I *knew* that if I continued to eat that garbage I would forfeit my claim to manhood. So I started to steal. I hit every market in Hollywood. I stole canned sardines, cheeses, fruit, cookies, pies, milk—you name it. On weekends the older kids used to get farmed out to wealthy Catholic families, to show us a bit of the good life. I got sent regularly to this family in Beverly Hills. They were loaded. They had a son about my age. He was a wild kid, and an accomplished shoplifter. His specialty was steaks. I joined him and we hit every butcher shop on the West Side. He was as fat as a pig. He couldn't stop eating. A regular Goodyear blimp.

"During the depression there was a kind of floating hobo jungle in Griffith Park. The cops rousted the bums out of there regularly, but they would recongregate in another place. A priest from Immaculate Heart College told me about it. I went looking for them. I was a curious, lonely kind of kid, and thought bums were romantic. I brought a big load of steaks with me, which made me a big hit. I was big enough so that no one messed with me. I listened to the stories the old bums would tell—cops and robbers, railroads and Pinkerton men, darkness. Strange things that most people had no inkling of. Perversions. Unspeakable things. I wanted to know those things—but remain safe from them.

"One night we were roasting steaks and drinking some whiskey I had stolen when the cops raided the jungle. I scampered off and got away. I could hear the cops rousting out the bums. They were firm, but humorous about the whole thing; and I knew that if I became a cop I could have the darkness along with some kind of precarious impunity. I would *know*, yet be safe.

"Then the war came along. I was seventeen when Pearl Harbor was bombed. And I *knew* again, though this time in a different way. I knew that if I fought in that war I would die. I also knew that I needed an *honorable* out to insure getting on the police department.

"I never knew my parents. My first adopted parents gave me my name before they turned me over to the orphanage. I devised a plan. I read the draft laws, and learned that the sole surviving son of a man killed in a foreign war is draft exempt. I also knew I had a punctured eardrum that was a possible out, but I wanted to cover my bets. So I tried to enlist in '42, right after I graduated from high school. The eardrum came through and they turned me down.

"Then I found an old wino woman, a down-and-out actress. She came with me when I made my appeal to the draft board. She yelled and screamed that she needed me to work and give her money. She said her husband, my dad, was killed in the Chinese campaign of '26, which was why I was sent to the orphanage. It was a stellar performance. I gave her fifty bucks. The draft board believed her and told me never to try to enlist again. I pleaded, periodically, but they were firm. They admired my patriotism—but a law was a law, and ironically the punctured eardrum never kept me from becoming a cop."

Sarah loved it, and sighed when I finished. I loved it, too; I was saving the story for a special woman, one who could appreciate it. Aside from Wacky, she was the only person to know of that part of my life.

She put her hand on mine. I raised it to my lips and kissed it. She looked wistful and sad. "Have you found what you're looking for?" she asked.

"Yes," I said.

"Will you take me by that hobo jungle? Tonight?"

"Let's go now. They close the park road at ten o'clock."

—

It was a cold night and very clear. January is the coldest, most beautiful month in L.A. The colors of the city, permeated by chill air, seem to come into their own and reflect a tradition of warmth and insularity.

We drove up Vermont and parked in the observatory parking lot. We walked north, uphill, holding hands. We talked easily, and I laid on the more gentle, picaresque side of police work: the friendly drunks, the colorful jazz musicians in their zoot suits, the lost puppies Wacky and I repatriated to their youthful owners. I didn't tell her about the rape-o's, the abused kids, the stiffs at accident scenes or the felony suspects who got worked over regularly in the back rooms at Wilshire Station. She didn't need to hear it. Idealists like Sarah, despite their naiveté, thought that the world was basically a shit place. I needed to temper her sense of reality with some of the joy and mystery. There was no way she could accept that the darkness was part of the joy. I had to do my tempering Hollywood-style.

I showed her the site of the old jungle. I hadn't been here since 1938, thirteen years, and now it was just a clearing overgrown with weeds and littered with empty wine bottles.

"It all started here for you?" Sarah asked.

"Yes."

"Time and place awes me."

"Me, too. This is January 30, 1951. It's now and it won't ever be again."

"That scares me."

"Don't be scared. It's just the wonder. It's very dark here. Are you afraid of the dark?"

Sarah Kefalvian raised her beautiful head and laughed in the moonlight. Big, hearty laughter worthy of her Armenian ancestors. "I'm sorry, Joe. It's just that we're speaking so somberly, so symbolically that it's kind of funny."

"Then let's get literal. I've confided in you. You confide in me. Tell me something about yourself. Something dark and secretive that you've never told anyone."

She considered this and said, "It'll shock you. I like you and I don't want to offend you."

"You can't shock me. I'm immune to shock. Tell me."

"All right. When I was an undergrad in San Francisco I had an affair—with a married man. It ended. I was hurt and I started hating men. I was going to Cal Berkeley. I had a teacher, a woman. She was very beautiful. She took an interest in me. We became lovers and did things—sexual things that most people don't even guess about. This woman also liked young boys. *Young* boys. She seduced her twelve-year-old nephew. We shared him."

Sarah backed away from where we stood together, almost as if fearing a blow.

"Is that it?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied.

"All of it?"

"Yes! I won't get graphic with you. I loved that woman. She helped through a difficult time. Isn't that dark enough for you?"

Her anger and indignation had peaked and brought forth in me a warm rush of pure stuff. "It's enough. Come here, Sarah." She did and we held each other, her head pressed hard into my shoulder. When we disengaged, she looked up at me. She was smiling, and her cheeks were wet with tears. I wiped them away with my thumbs. "Let me take you home," I said.

We undressed wordlessly, in the dark front room of Sarah Kefalvian's garage apartment on Sycamore Street. Sarah was trembling and breathing shallowly in the cold room, and when we were naked I smothered her with my body to stanch her tremors, then lifted her and carried her in the direction of where the bedroom had to be.

There was no bed; just a mattress on a pallet covered with quilts. I laid her down and sat on the edge of the mattress, my long legs jammed up awkwardly. A shaft of light from a streetlamp cast a diffuse glow over the room and let me pick out shelves overflowing with books and walls adorned with Picasso prints and labor activist posters from the Depression.

Sarah looked up at me, her hand resting on my knee. I stroked her hair, then bent over and placed short dry kisses on her neck and shoulders. She sighed. I told her she was very beautiful, and she giggled. I looked for imperfections, the little body flaws that speak volumes. I found them: a small growth of dark hairs above her nipples, an acne cluster on her right shoulder blade. I kissed these places until Sarah grabbed my head and pulled my mouth to hers.

We kissed hard and long, then Sarah opened up yawningly and arched to receive me. We joined and coupled violently, strongly, muscles straining in our efforts to stay interlocked as we changed positions and thrashed the quilts off the mattress. We peaked together, Sarah sobbing as I mashed my face into her neck, rubbing my mouth and nose in the little rivulets of our combined sweat.

We lay still for a long time, gently stroking odd parts of each other. To talk would have been to betray the moment; I knew this from experience, and Sarah from instinct. After a while she pretended to sleep, a silent, loving way to ease the awkwardness of my departure.

I dressed in the dark, then reached over and brushed back her long dark hair and kissed the nape of her neck, thinking as I left that maybe this time I had given as much as I had taken.

I drove home and got out my diary. I wrote of the circumstances of my meeting Sarah, what we had talked about, and what I learned. I described her body and our lovemaking. Then I went to bed and slept long into the afternoon.

2

"Getting laid, Freddy?"

Wacky and I were pulling into the parking lot at Rancho Park Municipal Golf Course very early the following Saturday morning. I was hungry for golf, not masculine banter, and Wacky's question felt like a knife in the side. I ignored it until Wacky cleared his throat and started to speak in verse:

"Whither thou, O pussy-hound, O tireless fiend for Venus Mounds, O noble cop, you'll never stop…"

I set the hand brake and stared at Wacky.

"You haven't answered my question," he said.

I sighed: "The answer is yes."

"Great. What's it costing you?"

"Very little. I go to bars only as a last resort." I hauled my clubs out of the back seat and motioned Wacky to follow me. As I slung my golf bag over my shoulder and locked the car, Wacky gave me one of his rare cold sober looks.

"That wasn't what I meant, Fred."

"What *did* you mean, Wacky? I came here to hit golf balls, not write my sexual memoirs."

Wacky clapped me on the back and waggled his eyebrows. "Are you still planning on being chief of police someday?" he asked.

"Of course."

"Then I hope you realize that the commission will never appoint a bachelor pussy-fiend as chief. You know that they're going to get to you, don't you?"

I sighed again, this time angrily. "Exactly what are you talking about?"

"Price, Freddy. The dames are going to start to get to you. You're going to get tired of one-nighters and go loony romantic and start searching for some tomato you screwed back in '48. *The* woman, who'll never be able to compete with the thrill of one-nighters. You'll be screwed both ways. You make me damn glad I'm not big and handsome and charming. You make me damn glad I'm just a poet and a cop."

"And a drunk." I regretted saying it immediately and fished around for something to make it right.

Wacky preempted me: “Yeah, and a drunk.”

“Then you watch the price, Wack. When I’m chief of police and you’re my chief of detectives I don’t want you croaking of cirrhosis of the liver.”

“I’ll never make it, Fred.”

“You’ll make it.”

“Shit. Haven’t you heard the rumors? Captain Larson is retiring in June. Beckworth is going to be the new top dog at Wilshire, and I’m going to Seventy-seventh Street—N———land, U.S.A. And you, Beckworth’s golf avatar and fair-haired boy, are going to Vice, a nice assignment for a cunt-hound. I have this on very good authority, Freddy.”

I couldn’t meet Wacky’s eyes. I had heard the rumors, and credited them. I started thinking of stratagems I could use to keep Beckworth from transferring Wacky, then suddenly realized I was supposed to meet Beckworth at seven o’clock that morning at Fox Hills for a lesson. I dropped my bag to the ground in disgust. “Wacky?” I said.

“Yes, Fred?”

“Sometimes you make me wish that *I* were the drunk and the fuck-up in this partnership.”

“Will you elaborate on that?”

“No.”

—

The driving range was deserted. Wacky and I dug our stash of shag balls out of their hiding place in a hollowed-out tree trunk and settled in to practice. Wacky warmed up by chugalugging a half pint of bourbon, while I did deep knee bends and jumping jacks. I started out hitting seven-irons—one seventy with a slight fade. Not good. I shifted my stance, corrected the fade and gained an additional ten yards in the process. I was working toward my optimum when Wacky grabbed my elbow and hissed at me: “Freddy, psst, Freddy!”

I slammed the head of my club into the dirt at my feet and pulled loose from Wacky. “What the fuck is wrong now?”

Wacky pointed to a man and woman arguing nearby on the putting green. The man was tall and fat, with a stomach like an avocado. He had wild reddish-brown hair and a nose as long as my arm. There was an appealing ethnic roguishness to him, broad laughter lines around his mouth, his whole face spelling out fifty-five years of good-natured conniving. The woman was about thirty, and obese—probably close to two-seventy-five. She bore the man’s long nose and reddish hair, then did him one better by sporting a distinct downy mustache. I groaned. Wacky was only nominally interested in women, and fat ones were the only kind that aroused him. He pulled a fresh half pint from his back pocket and took a long pull, then pointed to the couple and said, “Do you know who that *is*, Freddy?”

“Yeah. It’s a fat woman.”

“Not the tomato, Freddy. The old guy. It’s Big Sid Weinberg. He’s the guy who produced *Bride of the Sea Monster*, remember? We saw it at the Westlake. You went bananas for that blond with the big tits?”

“Yeah. And?”

“And I’m gonna get his autograph, then I’m gonna sell him ‘Constituency of the Dead’ for his next picture.”

I groaned again. Wacky was a horror movie fanatic, and “Constituency of the Dead” was his attempt to capture Hollywood’s monster madness in prose. In his poem, there was a world of the dead, existing concurrent with the real world, but invisible to us. The inhabitants of this world were all wonder addicts, because they had all been murdered. I considered it one of his poorer efforts.

Wacky waggled his eyebrows at me. “One thing, partner,” he said, “one thing I promise.”

“What’s that?”

“When I’m a big-time Hollywood screenwriter I’ll never high-hat you.”

I laughed: “Watch out, Wack. Hollywood producers are notorious shit-heels. Go for the daughter instead. Maybe you can marry into the family.” Wacky laughed, and trotted away, while I returned to the blessed solitude of golf.

I was at it for over an hour, savoring the mystical union that takes place when you know that you’re a gifted practitioner of something much greater than yourself. I was crunching three-hundred-yard drives with fluid regularity when I gradually became aware of eyes boring into my back. I stopped in mid-swing and turned around to face my intruder. It was Big Sid Weinberg. He was lumbering toward me almost feverishly, right hand extended. Taken aback, I extended mine reflexively, and we exchanged names in a mutual bone-crusher. “Sid Weinberg,” he said.

“Fred Underhill,” I said.

Still grasping my hand, Weinberg eyed me up and down like a choice piece of meat. “You’re a six, but you can’t putt, right?”

“Wrong.”

“Okay, you’re a four, and you can hit the shit out of the ball, but your short game stinks. Right?”

“Wrong.”

Weinberg dropped my hand. “So you’re—”

I interrupted: “I’m a hard scratch, I can drive three hundred yards, I’ve got a demon short game, I can putt better than Ben Hogan and I’m handsome, charming, and intelligent. What do you want, Mr. Weinberg?”

Weinberg looked surprised when I mentioned his name. “So that lunatic was right,” he said.

“You mean my partner?”

“Yeah. He told me you two guys were cops together, then he tells me some lunatic story about a city of stiffs. How the hell did he ever make the force?”

“We’ve got lots of crazy guys, only most of them hold it better.”

“Jesus. He’s reading his stuff to my daughter now. They’re soul mates; she’s as crazy as he is.”

“What do you *want*, Mr. Weinberg?”

“How much do you make with the cops?”

“Two hundred ninety-two a month.”

Weinberg snorted. “Spinach. Peanuts. Worse than that, popcorn. The ducks in the lake at Echo Park make more moolah than that.”

“I’m not in it for the money.”

“No? But you like money?”

“Yeah, I like it.”

“Good, it ain’t a crime. You wanna walk across the street to Hillcrest and play a class-A kosher course? Scramble? The two of us versus these two ganefs I know? We’ll slaughter ’em. C-note Nassau? What do you say?”

“I say you put up the money, and my partner comes with us to read our greens. He gets twenty percent of our action. What do *you* say, Mr. Weinberg?”

“I say you musta been Jewish in a previous life.”

“Maybe in this one.”

“Whaddaya mean?”

“I never knew my parents.”

Big Sid raised his head and roared: “Ha-ha-ha! That’s par for the course, kid. I got two daughters and I don’t know them from a hill of beans. You got yourself a deal.”

We shook hands on it, sealing the last carefree alliance of my youth.

Hillcrest was only a block away geographically, but it was light-years away from Rancho in every other respect: lush, manicured fairways, well-tended, strategically placed bunkers and sloping greens that ran like lightning. There were eight of us in the group: Big Sid and I, our opponents, two caddies, and our giggling, moonstruck gallery—Wacky and Big Sid’s gargantuan daughter, Siddell. Those two seemed to be rapidly falling into lust, swaying into each other as they trudged fairway and rough, holding hands surreptitiously when Big Sid had his back to them.

And Sid was right; it was a slaughter. Our opponents—a Hollywood agent and a young doctor—were pitifully mismatched; shanking, hooking, slicing into the trees and blowing their only decent approach shots. Big Sid and I played steadily, conservatively, and sunk putts. We were well-aided by Wacky's superb green reads and the club selections and yardage calls of our short-dog–sucking wino caddy, "Dirt Road" Dave.

"Hey, hey, shit, shit," Dave would say. "Play a soft seven and knock it down short of the green. It breaks left to right off the mound. Hey, hey, shit, shit."

Dave fascinated me: he was both sullen and colloquial, dirty and proud, with an air of supreme nonchalance undercut by terrified blue eyes. Somehow, I wanted his knowledge.

The match ended on the fourteenth hole, Big Sid and I closing our opponents out 5–4. Nine hundred dollars changed hands, four hundred and fifty for Big Sid, four hundred and fifty for me. I felt rich and effusive.

Big Sid clapped me on the back. "It's just the beginning, doll! You stick with Big Sid and the sky's the limit! Va-va-va-voom!"

"Thanks, Sid. I appreciate it."

"Va-va-va-voom, kiddo!"

I looked around. Wacky and Siddell had disappeared into the woods. Our opponents were heading back to the clubhouse dejected, their heads down. I told Big Sid I would meet him at the clubhouse, then went looking for Dirt Road Dave. I found him walking across the rough toward the eighteenth hole with Big Sid's bag as well as mine slung across his bony right shoulder. I tapped him on that shoulder and when he turned around stuck a fifty-dollar bill into his callused, outstretched palm. "Thanks, Dave," I said. Dirt Road Dave unhitched the bags, put the money into his pocket and stared at me. "Talk to me," I said.

"About what, sonny boy?"

"About what you've seen. About what you know."

Dirt Road Dave let my bag fall to the grass at my feet, then he spat. "I know you're a smart-mouth young cop. I know that's a roscoe and handcuffs under your sweater. I know the kind of things you guys do that you think people don't know about. I know guys like you die hungry." His finality was awesome. I picked up my bag and walked to the clubhouse—only to be ambushed by another madman en route.

It was Wacky, materializing out of a grove of trees, scaring the shit out of me. “Jesus!” I exclaimed.

“Sorry, partner,” Wacky whispered, “but I had to catch you out of earshot of Big Sid. I need a favor, a big-o-rooney.”

I sighed: “Name it.”

“The car—for an hour or so. I’ve got a hot date that won’t wait, passion pie in the great by-and-by. I’m eating kosher, partner. You can’t deny me.”

I decided to do it, but with a stipulation: “Not in the car, Wack. Rent a room. You got that?”

“Of course, I’m a cop. Would I break the law?”

“Yes.”

“Ha-ha-ha! One hour, Fred.”

“Yeah.”

Wacky disappeared into the trees, where his high-pitched laughter was joined by Siddell Weinberg’s baritone sighs. I walked to the clubhouse feeling sad, and weighted down by strangers.

3

I figured that Wacky would be at least two hours late returning my car, and moreover that good taste dictated I remain to drink and shoot the shit with Big Sid. I wanted to take a run to Santa Barbara and look for women, but I needed my car for that.

I showered in the men's locker room. It was a far cry from the dungeonlike locker room at Wilshire Station. This facility had wall-to-wall deep-pile carpets and oak walls hung with portraits of Hillcrest notables. The locker room talk was about movie deals and business mergers with golf a distant third. Somehow it made me uneasy, so I showered fast, changed clothes, and went looking for Big Sid.

I found him in the dining room, sitting at a table near the large picture window overlooking the eighteenth hole. He was talking with a woman; she had her back to me as I approached the table. Somehow I sensed she was class, so I smoothed my hair and adjusted my pocket handkerchief as I walked toward them.

Big Sid saw me coming. "Freddy, baby!" he boomed. He tapped the woman softly on the shoulder. "Honey, this is my new golf partner, Freddy Underhill. Freddy, this is my daughter Lorna."

The woman swiveled in her chair to face me. She smiled distractedly. "Mr. Underhill," she said.

"Miss Weinberg," I replied.

I sat down. I was right: the woman was class. Where Siddell Weinberg had inherited the broadness of her father's features, Lorna exhibited a refined version: her hair was more light brown than red, her brown eyes more pale and crystalline than opaque. She had Big Sid's pointed chin and sensual mouth, but on a softer, muted scale. Her nose was large but beautiful: it informed her face with intelligence and a certain boldness. She wore no makeup. She had on a tweed suit over a white silk blouse. I could tell that she was tall and slender, and that her breasts were very large for her frame.

I immediately wanted to know her, and quashed a corny impulse to take and kiss her hand, realizing that she wouldn't be charmed by such a gesture. Instead, I took a seat directly across from her where I could maintain eye contact.

Big Sid slammed me so hard on the back that my head almost hit the linen tablecloth. “Freddy, baby, we killed them! Four hundred and fifty simoleons!” Big Sid leaned over and explained to his daughter: “Freddy’s my new gravy train. And vice versa. What a swing!”

Lorna Weinberg smiled. I smiled back. She patted her father’s hand and looked at him with exasperated fondness. “Dad’s a fanatic, and a hyperbolic personality. He loves to classify people with colloquialisms. You must forgive him.” She said it lovingly, but with the slightest air of condescension to her father—and of challenge to me.

Big Sid laughed, but I took the challenge. “That’s an interesting perception, Miss Weinberg. Are you a psychologist?”

“No, I’m an attorney. And you?”

“I’m a police officer.”

“In L.A.?”

“Yes.”

Lorna smiled guardedly. “Are you as good at police work as you are at golf?”

“I’m better.”

“Then you’re a double threat.”

“That’s a colloquialism you’d better elaborate on.”

“Touché.” Lorna Weinberg’s eyes bored in on me. They were dancing with a bitter mirth. “I’m a deputy district attorney, for the city of Los Angeles. We have the same employer. I would rather be a deputy public defender, but that’s the rub of the green, as Dad would say. I deal with policemen every day—and I don’t like them. They see too little and arrest too often. What they can’t understand or won’t accept, they arrest or beat up. The jails in Los Angeles are full of people who don’t belong there. My job is to prepare cases for the grand jury. I wade through tons of reports from overzealous detectives. Frankly, I see myself as watchdog on arrest-crazy police agencies. This gets me a lot of flak from my colleagues, but they accept me, because I’m damn good at what I do, and because I save them a lot of work.”

I breathed it all in, and gave what I hoped would pass for an ironic grin: “So you don’t like cops,” I said. “Big deal. Most people don’t. Would you rather have anarchy? There’s only one answer, Miss Weinberg. This is not the best of all possible worlds. We have to accept that, and get on with the administration of justice.”

Big Sid noted the fire in his daughter’s eyes, and hurried off in the direction of the bar, embarrassed by the intensity of our conversation.

Lorna did not relent. “I can’t accept that, and I won’t. You can’t change human nature, but you can change the law. And you can weed out some of the sociopaths who carry badges and guns.

"For example, my father told me you were curious about that man who caddied for you today. I know about him. He's one of your victims. An attorney who's a member of this club once represented Dirt Road Dave in his suit against the Los Angeles Police Department. During the Depression he had stolen some food from a grocery. Two policemen saw him do it and chased him, and when they finally caught him they were angry. They beat him unconscious with their billy clubs. Dave suffered internal hemorrhaging and almost died. He sustained irreparable brain damage. The A.C.L.U. sued your police department, and lost. Cops are above the law and can do what they please. Abe Dolwitz, the attorney, looks after Dave somewhat, but Dave's only lucid half the time. I imagine the other half of the time is a nightmare for him. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"I understand that you're moving into areas way beyond your bailiwick, counselor. I understand that your opinion of cops is academic and one-sided and removed from the daily context we work in. I understand your compassion, and I understand that the problems you've described are insoluble."

"How can you be so jaded?"

"I'm not. I'm just realistic. You said that cops see too little and arrest too much. It's the opposite with me. I'm in the job for what I see, not the crummy salary I make."

Lorna Weinberg dropped her voice condescendingly: "I find that very hard to believe."

I dropped mine to match hers. "I don't really care, counselor. But one question. You called me a '*double* threat.' What in the world is threatening about golf?"

Lorna sighed. "It keeps people from thinking about the important things in life."

"It also keeps them from thinking about the unimportant things," I countered. She shrugged. We were even. I got up to go, chancing a parting shot: "If you hate golf so much, why do you come to this club?"

"Because they have the best food in L.A."

I laughed, and took Lorna Weinberg's hand casually. "Good day, Miss Weinberg."

"Good day, Officer," Lorna said, her voice now richly ironic.

I found Big Sid, thanked him for the pleasure of his golfing company, and promised to call him soon for another game. Big Sid's offer of friendship was touching, but my encounter with Lorna Weinberg left me feeling aggressive and enervated.

I picked up my clubs and walked out to the parking lot to look for my car. It wasn't in the main lot for members, or the one for club employees. I walked out the gate onto Pico. Wacky was getting to be too unreliable to trust.

I crossed the street, deciding to kill time by taking a walk around the outskirts of the 20th Century-Fox studio. I walked north, past a large expanse of vacant lots.

The sky was darkening, black clouds competing for primacy with a brilliant blue sky. I hoped for rain. Rain was a good catalyst. It was good to look for women on rainy nights—they seemed more vulnerable and open when foul weather raged.

I was almost up to Olympic when I spotted my red and white '47 Buick in an alley behind the studio's prop department. It was rocking and there were moans coming from inside. I walked up and peered in the driver's side window. It was fogged from heavy breathing, but I could still plainly see Wacky and Siddell Weinberg writhing in a hot nude embrace.

I felt the perfect calm that settles on me when I get very angry. I took a five-iron out of my bag and opened the door of the car. "Police officer!" I called as Wacky and Siddell started to shriek and attempted to cover themselves. I didn't let them. I poked my five-iron roughly between them, probing, kneading, and pushing at where they were joined. "Get the fuck out of my car, you stupid shitheads!" I screamed. "Now! Get out! Get the fuck *out*!"

Somehow they disengaged themselves and tumbled out the door. Siddell was sobbing and trying to cover her breasts with her arms. I threw their clothes out after them, and hurled Wacky's holstered .38 and handcuffs over the fence into the prop department. As he tried to pull on his pants I kicked him hard in the ass.

"Don't fuck with me, you asshole! Don't fuck with my career, you fucking disgrace of a cop! Take your fucking fat pig and get the fuck out of my life!"

They stumbled off down the alley, pulling on clothes as they went. I looked into my car. There was a half-empty fifth of bourbon on the floor. I took a long drink and threw it after them. The dark clouds had almost completely eclipsed the blue sky.

I retrieved the bourbon bottle and drank while awaiting the rain. I thought of Lorna Weinberg. When the first raindrops fell I discarded the bottle and started the car, with no particular destination in mind.

Aimless driving consumed three hours. Lorna Weinberg, Wacky, and Dirt Road Dave consumed most of my thoughts. They were depressing thoughts, and my random driving reinforced my grim state of mind.

The rain was coming down in sheets, driven by a fierce north wind. It turned dark early, and for no logical reason I was drawn to the winding, treacherous Pasadena Freeway. Maneuvering its abrupt turns on rain-slicked pavement at top speed got me feeling better. I started thinking about my opportunities for advancement and the wonder-seeking that working Vice would afford me.

That provided me with a destination. As soon as I hit Pasadena I turned around and drove back to L.A., to Wilshire Division, to some Vice hot spots old-timers had told me about. I drove by the hooker stands on West Adams where knots of Negro prostitutes, probably hopheads, waited under umbrellas on the off chance that a customer would brave the rain and supply them with money for dope. I cruised by the known bookie joints on Western, then parked and watched bettors come and go. They seemed as desperate as the hopheads.

I got the feeling that Vice wonder would be sad wonder, pathetic and hopeless. The neon signs on the bars and nightclubs I passed looked like cheap advertisements for loneliness eradicator.

It was almost nine o’clock. I stopped at the Original Barbecue on Vermont and took my time with a sparerib dinner, wondering where to go look for women. It was too late and too wet to chance anything but bars, and women who were looking for the same thing I was. That made me sad, but I decided that while I cruised I could peruse the bar scene from the standpoint of a rookie Vice cop and maybe learn a few things.

The joint on Normandie and Melrose was dead. Its main draw was the television above the bar. Slaphappy locals were laughing at the *Sid Caesar Show*. I left. In the next place, near L.A. City College, there were nothing but animated college kids, all coupled off, most of them shouting about Truman and MacArthur and the war.

I made my way southwest. I found a bar on Western that I had never noticed before—the Silver Star, two blocks north of Beverly. It looked warm and well kept up. It had a tri-colored neon sign: three stars, yellow, blue, and red, arranged around a martini glass. “Silver Star” flashed on and off in bright orange.

I parked across the street at Ralph’s market, then dodged cars as I ran toward the neon haven. The Silver Star was crowded, and as my eyes became accustomed to the indoor fluorescent lighting I could tell that the place served more as a pickup joint than a local watering hole. Men were making advances to women seated beside them. The gestures were awkward, and the women feigned interest in the spirit of booze-induced camaraderie. I ordered a double Scotch and soda and carried it over to a dark row of booths against the back wall, choosing the only empty one. My legs were too long to keep from jamming into the table, so I stretched them out and sipped my drink, trying to look casual while remaining alert, with my eyes on the bar and front door.

After an hour and two more drinks, I noticed a comely woman enter the bar. She was a honey blond in her middle thirties. She walked in hesitantly, as though the place were unfamiliar and potentially hostile.

I watched as she took a seat at the bar. The bartender was busy elsewhere so the woman waited to be served, fiddling with the contents of her purse. There was an empty stool next to her, and I made for it. I sat down and the woman swiveled to face me.

"Hi," I said, "it's kind of busy tonight. The barman should be with you by Tuesday afternoon, though." The woman laughed, her face slightly averted. I could tell why; her teeth were bad, and she wanted to be fetching without exposing them. It was the first endearment in what I hoped would be a long night of them.

"This is kind of a nice place, don't you think?" she asked. Her voice was nasal and slightly midwestern.

"Yes, I do. Especially on a night like this."

"Brrr," the woman said. "I know what you mean. I've never been here before, but I was driving by in a cab and it looked so warm and inviting that I just had to stop in. Have you been here before?"

"No, this is my first time, too. But please excuse my bad manners. My name is Bill Thornhill."

"I'm Maggie. Maggie Cadwallader."

I laughed. "Oh, God, our names are so solid, like a trip to Great Britain."

Maggie laughed. "I'm just a Wisconsin farm girl."

"I'm just a big-city hick."

We laughed some more. It was good laughter; we were playing our roles with both naturalness and refinement. The bartender came and I ordered a beer for myself and a stinger for Maggie. I paid. "How long have you lived in L.A., Maggie?" I asked.

"Oh, for years. What about you, Bill?" From that added intimacy I *knew* it was going to be. Relief and ardor flooded through me.

"Too long, I think. Actually, I'm a native."

"One of the few! Isn't it some place, though? Sometimes I think I live here because anything can happen, do you know what I mean? You can be walking down the street and something crazy and wonderful might happen, just like that." The wonder in a nutshell. I started to like her.

"I know exactly what you mean," I said, and meant it. "Sometimes I think that's what keeps me from moving away. Most people come here for the glamour and the movies. I was born here, so I know that's a lot of baloney. I stay here for the mystery."

"You put that so well! Mystery!" Maggie squeezed my hand. "Wait a second," she said as she finished her drink. "Let me see if I can guess what you do. Are you an athlete? You look like one."

"No, guess again."

"Hmmm. You're so big. Is it an outside job?"

"No hints. Guess again."

"Are you a writer?"

"No."

"A businessman?"

"No."

"A lawyer?"

"No."

"A movie star!"

"Hah! No."

"A fireman?"

"No."

"I give up. Tell me what you do, and I'll tell you what I do."

"Okay, but prepare yourself for a letdown. I sell insurance." I said it with boyish mock humility and resignation. Maggie loved it.

"What's so bad about that? I'm just a bookkeeper! What we *do* isn't what we *are*, is it?"

"No," I lied.

"So there!" Maggie squeezed my hand again.

I signaled the bartender, who brought us refills. We raised our glasses in a toast. "To mystery," I said.

"To mystery," she repeated.

Maggie finished her drink quickly. I sipped my beer. It felt like time to make a move. "Maggie, if this weather weren't so damn rotten, we could take a drive. I know L.A. like the back of my hand, and there's lots of beautiful places we could go."

Maggie smiled warmly, this time not worrying about showing her teeth. "I feel like getting out of here, too. But you're right, the weather is rotten. We could go to my apartment for a nightcap."

"That sounds nice," I said, my voice tightening.

"Did you drive? I came in a cab."

"Yeah, I drove. We can take my car. Where do you live?"

"In Hollywood. On Harold Way. That's a little street off of Sunset. Do you know where it is?"

"Sure."

"That's right, you know L.A. like the back of your hand!"

We both laughed as we left the bar and hurried across rainy Western Avenue to my car.

—

Driving north on Wilton Place, the rain started to abate. Maggie and I avoided flirting, and talked instead about things like the weather and her cat. I didn't particularly like cats, but faked great interest in meeting hers. I kept wondering about her body. In the bar she had never taken off her coat. Her legs were well formed, but I wanted to know the size of her breasts and breadth of her hips before we were nude together.

Harold Way was a small, dimly lighted side street. Maggie showed me where to park. Her apartment building was postwar ugly with a Hawaiian motif. It was a giant boxlike structure of eight or ten units, stucco, with phony bamboo trim along the doors and windows. The entrances were along the side of the building.

Maggie and I chatted nervously as we walked down the long entranceway to her apartment. When she opened the door and flipped on the lights a fat gray cat jumped out of the darkness to greet us. Maggie put down her umbrella and picked him up. "Mmmm, my baby!" she cooed, hugging the captive feline. "Lion, this is Bill. Bill, this is my protector, Lion."

I patted the cat's head. "Hello, Lion," I said naturally, not changing my voice. "How are you this fine winter's evening? Caught any rodents lately? Are you earning your keep in this wonderful abode your lovely mistress has given you?"

My deadpan expression and voice sent Maggie into gales of laughter. "Oh, Bill, that's so funny!" she gasped. She was slightly drunk.

I took the cat as Maggie locked the door behind us. Lion was very fat, probably not a ball bearing mouse trap. I looked around the living room. It was tidy, and a virtual ode to faraway places: Greece, Rome, France, and Spain were represented on the four walls, courtesy of Pan American Airways. I dropped the cat to the floor, where he started to sniff my trouser legs.

"It's a nice apartment, Maggie. You've obviously taken a lot of care with it."

Maggie beamed, then took my hand and led me to a plush overstuffed sofa. "Sit, Bill, and tell me what you'd like to drink."

"Cognac, neat," I said.

"One minute."

While Maggie was in the kitchen I transferred my gun and cuffs from my belt to my coat pocket. She returned a moment later with two snifter glasses each containing a solid three ounces. She sat next to me on the sofa. We toasted silently. As the brandy hit my system I realized that I had little to say. There was nothing I could impart to this woman—who was probably ten years my senior—that she didn't already know.

Maggie took the matter out of my hands. She finished her brandy and placed her glass on the coffee table. The cat scampered up to us and I playfully lunged at his tail. Maggie reached down to pet him and our shoulders brushed together. We looked at each other for a split second, then I grabbed her and we fell to the floor. She giggled, and I took my cue. I barked like some breed of gentle dog and covered her shoulders with gentle dog bites, barely pinching her skin beneath the fabric.

Maggie laughed and laughed. She tightened her arms around me. "Oh, Bill. Oh, Bill. Oh, Bill," she squeaked between laughing fits.

I dog-nipped my way down her back, turning and looking every few seconds at her tear-stained face. I lifted the hem of her skirt and bit my way down her legs to her ankles, trying not to snag her nylons. Her hand was stroking and mussing my hair. I pulled off her shoes and bit her toes, one at a time, barking "Woof! Woof!" between each bite. Maggie was shrieking now, her whole body wracked with uncontrollable laughter.

Now that I knew what I had come to give, I rolled her over onto her side and elbowed myself up until we were face to face. We had a long interim where Maggie held me tightly and I stroked her hair. Just as her laughter would subside, I would "woof, woof" tenderly into her ear and kiss her neck until she cracked up again.

Finally Maggie took her head from my chest and looked at me. "Woof, Bill Thornhill," she said.

"Woof, fair Maggie Cadwallader," I said.

Maggie's lipstick was gone, mashed into my lapels and shirtfront. Her mouth was completely guileless as I bent in slow motion to kiss it. Maggie's lips parted and her eyes closed as she sensed my intention. Our lips and tongues met and played in perfect, experienced unison. We rolled together as we kissed, kicking over the coffee table, sending magazines and artificial flowers to the floor. We broke our long kiss, and Maggie made small noises as my hands fumbled at the clasp at the back of her dress.

"The bathroom first, Bill, please." As I released her, she leaped out of my embrace and stumbled to her feet, making more small noises as she moved to the bathroom.

I got to my feet and took off my clothes, laying them neatly on the sofa. Wearing only undershorts, I walked softly to the bathroom. The door was slightly ajar and the light was on. I could hear Maggie rummaging in the medicine cabinet. There was a ritual going on that I had long wanted to observe.

I pushed open the door. Maggie was starting to insert her diaphragm when she saw me. She jumped, startled and angry, into the bathtub, where she covered herself with the shower curtain.

"Bill," she said, flushed. "Please, goddamnit, I'll just be a minute. Wait in the bedroom, honey. Please. I'll be right there."

"I just wanted to watch you, sweetheart," I said. "I wanted to help you with it."

Maggie said nervously, "It's a private thing, Bill. A woman's thing. If you don't see me do it, then you don't really know it's there. It's better for you. Believe me, honey."

"I believe you, but I want to see. Show me, please."

"No."

"Please?"

I lowered my head and nudged Maggie back against the shower wall. She started to giggle. I pulled her away from the bathtub, hoisted her into the air, spun her around and set her down in the same posture she had been in when I had pushed open the bathroom door.

"Do you ever lose at anything, Bill?"

"No."

"How old are you?"

"I'll be twenty-seven next week."

"I'm thirty-six."

"You're beautiful. I want to love you so much."

"You're very handsome. You've never seen a woman put in her diaphragm?"

"No."

"Then I'll show you."

She did. "You're a strange, curious young man, Bill."

"Intimate things like that mean a lot to me."

"I believe you. Now make love to me."

Maggie led me to her bedroom. She left the light off. She unbuttoned her blouse, unhooked her bra and let the garments fall to the floor. I stepped out of my undershorts. We lay on the bed and held each other for a long time. I stroked Maggie's hair. She cooed into my chest. I grew tired of it, and tried to bring her chin up so I could kiss her, but she resisted, pushing her head harder against me. After a while her grip loosened and I was able to cover her neck with kisses. Maggie sighed, and I began to suck her breasts. I felt her hand between my legs, urging me toward her. She positioned herself beneath me and guided me in. I began to move. Maggie didn't respond. I tried slow, exploratory thrusts, then hard insistent ones. Maggie just lay there, motionless. I propped myself up on my hands, the better to look at her face.

Maggie looked up at me, smiling. She reached up and framed my face with her hands, her smile more beatific as my thrusts multiplied in their urgency. I came very hard. I groaned, shuddered and collapsed on top of her. She never said a word. When I finally managed to look at her she was still smiling; and I realized I had been thinking of Lorna Weinberg.

Maggie had seemed to change during our lovemaking. She had gotten what she wanted, and it wasn't love, or sex. Her smile and post-lovemaking ritual of bringing in brandy and snifters on a tray seemed to be saying, "Now that we have gotten that over with, we can get down to the real business of our meeting."

We sat in bed and sipped brandy, both of us nude. I liked Maggie's body: pale, freckled skin, gently rounded shoulders, soft stomach, and small soft breasts with large dark red nipples. I liked her openness in showing it to me even more, and had no desire to leave. The brandy was good, but I watched my intake. Maggie was sipping steadily, and would soon be pie-eyed. Maggie beamed at me as I shifted postures. I waggled my eyebrows a la Wacky Walker. Maggie beamed some more. I told her some lies about the insurance racket. She still beamed.

Finally she said, "Bill, let's go into the living room, okay?" She dug two terry cloth robes out of her bedroom closet, then led me into the living room, gave me a big kiss on the cheek, and sat me down on the couch like a loving mother or schoolteacher. She went back into the bedroom and returned with a large leather-bound scrapbook.

She sat down between me and my piled-up clothes and poured herself more brandy. My robe was well worn and smelled fresh. As Maggie arranged the scrapbook on the coffee table I adjusted her robe to show off a fair amount of cleavage. She reacted with a prim kiss on my cheek. I disliked her for it. The ten-year gap in our ages was beginning to show.

"Memory lane, Bill," Maggie said. "Would you like to take a little trip down memory lane with old Maggie?"

"You're not old."

"In some ways I am."

"You're in your prime."

"Flatterer."

She opened the scrapbook. On the first page were photographs of a tall, light-haired man in a World War I doughboy's uniform. He stood alone in most of the sepia-tinted photos, and in a preeminent spot in the group shots.

"That's my daddy," Maggie said. "Mama used to get exasperated with him sometimes, and say bad things about him. When I was a little girl I asked her once, 'If Daddy was so mean, why did you marry him?' and she said, ‘Because he was the handsomest man I’d ever seen.’ ”

She turned the page. Wedding pictures and baby pictures.

“That’s Mama and Daddy’s wedding—1910. And that’s me as a little baby, just before Daddy went into the army.”

“Are you an only child, Maggie?”

“Yes. Are you?”

“Yes.”

She flipped the pages more rapidly. I watched time pass, seeing in minutes Maggie’s parents go from young to old and seeing Maggie go from infancy to lindy-hopping adolescent. Her face, as she danced at some long-gone high school sock-hop, was a heartbreakingly hopeful version of her current one.

She drank brandy, talking on in a wistful monotone, barely heeding my presence. She seemed to be leading up to something, working slowly toward some goal that would explain why she wanted me here.

“End of volume one, Bill,” Maggie said. She got up unsteadily from the sofa and knocked over my folded sport coat. When she picked it up, she noted its heaviness and started to fumble in the pocket where I had put my gun and handcuffs. Before I had a chance to stop her, she withdrew the .38, screamed, and backed away from me, holding the gun shakily, pointed to the floor.

“No, no, no, no!” she gasped. “Please, no! I won’t let you hurt me! No!”

I got up and walked toward her, trying to remember if both safety locks were on. “I’m a policeman, Maggie,” I said softly, placatingly. “I don’t want to hurt you. Give me the gun, sweetheart.”

“No! I know who sent you! I knew he would! No! No!”

I picked up my trousers and pulled out my badge in its leather holder. I held it up. “See, Maggie? I’m a police officer. I didn’t want to tell you. A lot of people don’t like policemen. See? It’s a real badge, sweetheart.”

Maggie dropped the gun, sobbing.

I went over and held her tightly. “It’s all right. I’m sorry you were scared. I should have told you the truth. I’m sorry.”

Maggie shook her head against me. “I’m sorry, too. I was a ninny. You’re just a man. You wanted to get laid, and you lied. I was a ninny. I’m the one who should be sorry.”

“Don’t say that. I care about you.”

“Sure you do.”

“I do.” I kissed the part in her hair and pushed her gently away. “You were going to show me volume two, remember?”

Maggie smiled. “All right. You sit down and pour me a brandy. I feel funny.”

While Maggie got her other scrapbook I put my gun back in my coat pocket. She came back hugging a slender black leather album. She beamed as if the gun episode had never happened.

We took up where we left off. She opened the album. It contained a dozen snapshots of a little baby, probably only a few weeks old, still bald, peering curiously up toward some fascinating object. Maggie touched her fingers to her lips and pressed them to the photos.

"Your baby?" I asked.

"Mine. My baby. My love."

"Where is he?"

"His father took him."

"Are you divorced?"

"He wasn't my husband, Bill. He was my lover. My true love. He's dead now. He died of his love for me."

"How, Maggie?"

"I can't tell you."

"What happened to the baby?"

"He's in an orphanage, back east."

"Why, Maggie? Orphanages are terrible places. Why don't you keep him? Children need parents, not institutions."

"Don't say that! I can't! I can't keep him! I'm sorry I showed you, I thought you'd understand!"

I took her hand. "I do, sweetheart, more than you know. Let's go back to bed, all right?"

"All right. But I want to show you one more thing. You're a policeman. You know a lot about crime, right?"

"Right."

"Then come here. I'll show you where I keep my buried treasure."

We went back into the bedroom. As I sat on the bed, Maggie unscrewed the left front bedpost. She pulled off the top part and reached down into the hollowed-out bottom piece. She extracted a red velvet bag, its end held together by a drawstring.

"Would a burglar look in a place like that, Bill?" she asked.

"I doubt it," I said.

Maggie opened the velvet bag and drew out an antique diamond brooch. I almost gasped: the rocks looked real, perfectly cut, and there were at least a dozen of them, interspersed with larger blue stones, all mounted on heavy strands of real gold. The thing must have been worth a small fortune.

"It's beautiful, Maggie."

"Thank you. I don't show it to many people. Only the nice ones."

"Where did you get it?"

"It's a love gift."

"From your true love?"

"Yes."

"You want some advice? Put it in a safe-deposit box. And don't tell people about it. You never know the kind of person you might meet."

"I know who I can trust and who I can't."

"All right. Put it away, will you?"

"Why? I thought you liked it."

"I do, but it makes me sad."

Maggie replaced the brooch in its hiding place. I lifted her and set her down on the bed.

"I don't want to," she said. "I want to talk and drink some more brandy."

"Later, sweetheart."

Maggie slipped off her robe reluctantly. I tried to be passionate, but my kisses were perfunctory, and I was filled with a sense of loss that not even lovemaking could surmount.

When it was over Maggie smiled and kissed my cheek absently, then threw on her robe and went to the kitchen. I could hear her digging around for bottles and glasses. It was my cue. I padded softly into the living room and dressed in the semidarkness.

Maggie came out of the kitchen carrying a tray with a liqueur bottle and shot glasses on it. Her face crashed for an instant when she saw I was leaving, but she recovered quickly, like the veteran she was.

"I have to go, Maggie," I said. She did not put down the tray, so I leaned over it, bumping it slightly, and brushed my lips against her cheek. "Goodbye, Maggie." She didn't answer, just stood there holding the tray.

I walked to my car. The cold air felt good, and dawn was just starting to break.

I knew that this Saturday, February 6, 1951, had been a red-letter day for me. When I got home I wrote in my diary only what I knew: Maggie Cadwallader and Lorna Weinberg. I would not realize until later that this had been the pivotal date of my life.

4

Beckworth called me into his office on Monday morning. I had expected him to be angry with me for standing him up, but he was surprisingly magnanimous. He told me flat out what I had already heard from several other less reliable sources: come June he would be the new commander of Wilshire Station, and would initiate a purging of “shithead deadwood” sending a half dozen “fuck-up bluesuits” to Seventy-seventh Street Division, “N———land, U.S.A.,” where they could learn “the real meaning of police work.” He never mentioned names—he didn’t have to. Wacky Walker would obviously be on the first stage to Watts, and I gravely accepted the fact that there was nothing I could do about it.

Wacky and I had resolved our differences that weekend through booze and poetry. I had gone over to his apartment Sunday bearing gifts—a crisp C-note as payment for his green-reading duties, handcuffs and gun, a bottle of Old Grand Dad and a limited edition volume of the early poetry of W. H. Auden. Wacky was delighted and almost wept in his gratitude, causing me to feel the strangest detachment; love mixed with pity and bitter resentment at his dependence on me. It was a feeling I would carry with me until the end of the last season of my youth.

I walked into the muster room for the immortal police ritual of Monday morning roll call. The room was noisy, and filled with cigarette smoke. Gately, the muster sergeant, needed a shave as usual.

I found a seat next to Wacky. He was staring into his lap, pretending to read traffic reports. As I sat down, I glanced at his real reading material: enclosed in the traffic holder was a copy of the *Four Quartets* by T. S. Eliot.

Gately made it brief. No drunk arrests—the Lincoln Heights drunk tank had flooded during the recent heavy rains—and lots of traffic summonses; the city attorney wanted shitloads of them—the heavy implication being that the city needed moola. We were told to lay off the streetwalkers on West Adams, and to look out for a stickup team: two Mexican gunsels had hit a liquor store and a couple of markets on the Southern border of the division, near the Coliseum. The dicks had learned from eyewitnesses that they drove a souped-up white Ford pickup. They were packing .45 automatics. When Gately mentioned this there was an immediate reaction in the room—this is why we are all here, every cop in the room seemed to be thinking. Even Wacky stirred and looked up from his Eliot. He pointed his right index finger at me and cocked his thumb. I nodded; it was why I was there, too.

We got our black-and-white from the lot and cruised east on Pico to Hoover, then south toward the Coliseum. Wacky wanted to spend some time warning local merchants about the Mexican heisters. He was in an effusive mood and wanted to gab with his "constituents."

We parked, and Wacky insisted that I accompany him to talk to Jack Chew. Jack Chew was a Chinaman with a Texas drawl. He owned a little market-butcher shop at Twenty-eighth and Hoover and said things like, "Ah, sooo, pardner." Wacky loved him, but he hated Wacky because he helped himself to the canned litchi nuts that Jack kept behind the counter for the cops on the beat. Jack was very courtly and Old World: he liked to offer or be asked, and he thought that Wacky was a pig for grabbing.

He was behind the meat counter when we walked into his open-air store, wrapping up some kind of candied duck for an old Chinese lady.

"Hey there, Jack," Wacky called, "where'd you get that quacker? I thought the guys at Rampart told you to quit raiding Westlake Park. Don't you know all those used rubbers they got floating round in the lake spoil the flavor? The guys at Rampart told me the ducks wear the rubbers at night to keep their beaks warm. Whither thou, O quacker beak; Peter juice and soon you'll peak; O noble duck, Such bad, bad luck; To end at Jack's you're really fucked."

Jack groaned and the old woman giggled as Wacky did his Frankenstein imitation, walking toward her slowly, arms extended, groaning deeply.

"Fuck you, Walker," Jack said. To me he said, "Ah, sooo, Officer Freddy," then handed me an open can of litchi nuts. Jack spoke a few words to the woman in Chinese. She left, giggling and waving at Wacky.

"They all love me, Jack. What is it about me?" Wacky said. "But this isn't a social call."

"Good," Jack said.

Wacky laughed and went on, "Jack, we got some bad hombres operating on this side of the range, carrying hardware. They like little markets like yours, and being greasers they probably don't know that Chinamen are tough giver-uppers. They're in their mid twen—"

Wacky didn't get to finish. A young woman ran into the market. She was opening her mouth to scream, but no sound was coming out. She grabbed at Wacky's arm.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow," she choked.

Wacky held both her hands to her sides. He spoke calmly. "Yes, dear.

‘Officer.’ Now what’s wrong?”

“Off…ic…er,” she got out, “Ma, ma—my neighbor…dead!”

“Where?” I said.

The woman pointed to Twenty-eighth Street. She started to run in that direction. I ran after her. Wacky followed me. She led us halfway down the block and up to an old, white wood-framed four-flat. She pointed up the stairs leading to the second story. The door was wide open.

“Uh, uh, uh,” she stammered, then pointed again and backed up against a row of mailboxes, biting at her knuckles.

Wacky and I looked at each other. We both nodded and Wacky gave me the beginning of a smile. We drew our guns and raced up the stairs. I entered first, into what had once been a modest living room. Now it was in a shambles: chairs, bookshelves, and cabinets were overturned and the floor was covered with broken glass. I held my breath, and advanced slowly, my gun held in front of me. Behind me, I could hear Wacky breathing hoarsely.

There was a small kitchen straight ahead. I tiptoed up to it. The white linoleum was broadly spattered with congealed blood. Wacky saw it and immediately tore back into the rear rooms of the apartment, completely forgetting caution. I ran after him, almost knocking him over in the bedroom doorway just as I heard his first exclamations of horror: “Oh, God, Freddy!”

I pushed him aside, and looked into the bedroom. Lying on the floor on her back was a nude woman. Her neck was black and purple and twisted to the side. Her tongue was hugely swollen and stuck out obscenely. Her eyes bulged in their sockets. There were puncture wounds on her breasts and abdomen and deep gashes on the insides of her thighs. She was covered with dried blood.

I checked my watch—9:06 a.m. Wacky stared at the dead woman and then at me as if he couldn’t believe what he was seeing. His eyes moved back and forth frantically while he remained motionless.

I ran downstairs. The woman who had summoned us was still next to her open apartment door, still gnawing at her knuckles. “The phone!” I yelled at her. I found it in her crowded front room and called the station, requested a team of detectives and a meat wagon, then ran back upstairs.

Wacky was still staring at the dead woman. He seemed to be committing to memory the details of her desecration. I walked through the apartment, writing down descriptions: the overturned furniture, the broken glass, and the configuration of the dried blood in the kitchen. I knelt down to check the carpet: it was a dark-orange phony Persian, but light enough so that the trail of blood was still visible. I followed it into the bedroom where the dead woman lay. Wacky suddenly spoke out behind me, causing me to almost leap through the ceiling: “Jesus fucking Christ, Freddy. What a mess.”

“Yeah. The dicks and the coroner are on their way. I’m gonna keep looking around here. You go downstairs and get a statement from the woman.”

“Right.”

Wacky took off and I returned to my note-taking. It was just a homey middle-class apartment, clean and comfortable looking, not the kind of place that even a desperate hophead would burglarize, but that was what this looked like. Further investigation revealed a blood-soaked terry cloth bathrobe on the floor in the little dining room that separated the living room and kitchen. At the end of the kitchen was a door that led downstairs to what looked like a laundry room; there were bloody footprints on the rickety wooden steps.

I went through the apartment looking for the murder weapon and found nothing, no sharp instruments of any kind. I checked the victim again. She was a pretty brunette and looked to be in her middle twenties. She had a slender body and very light green eyes. She was wearing dark red toenail polish and lipstick that matched perfectly the color of her dried blood. Her body was sprawled in what seemed like reluctant acceptance of death, but her face, with its open mouth and bulging eyes, seemed to be screaming, No!

I went through the rooms again, looking for more details that might mean something. I found a bloody partial fingerprint on the hallway wall near the bedroom door. I circled it with my pen. There was a telephone stand in the living room with no phone on it, just an ornate crystal ashtray filled with matchbooks. One of them caught my eye—a colorful orange job with three stars on it, all arranged around a martini glass. The Silver Star. I poked in the ashtray. All the matchbooks were from bars and night spots in the central L.A.-Hollywood area. I looked around for smoking materials—pipes, cigarettes, or tobacco. Nothing. Maybe the woman was a barhopper or matchbook collector.

I heard loud footsteps thumping up the stairs. It was Wacky, followed by two plainclothes cops and an old guy I knew to be an assistant medical examiner. I nodded them in the direction of the bedroom. They went in ahead of me. I heard whistles, moans, disgusted snorts, and declarations of awe:

“Oh, God. Oh, shit,” the first detective said.

“Holy Jesus,” the second detective said.

The medical examiner just stared and exhaled slowly, then walked over and knelt beside the dead woman. He poked and prodded at her skin, then ran a thumbnail over the caked blood on her legs. “Dead at least twenty-four hours, fellas,” he said. “Cause of death asphyxiation, although the stomach and breast wounds could have been fatal. Look at her eyes and tongue, though. She died gasping for breath. Look for a switchblade knife—and a fucking lunatic.”

"Who found the body?" the first detective asked. He was a tall, burly guy I had seen around the station.

"I did," Wacky said.

"Name and shield number?" he asked.

"Walker, five eighty-three."

"Okay, Walker. I'm DiCenzo, my partner's name is Brown. Let's get out of here, stiffs depress me. Brownie, call the lab guys."

"I did, Joe," Brown said.

"Good."

We all walked into the living room, except for the doctor, who stayed with the body, sitting on the bed and rummaging through his black bag.

"Okay, Walker, tell me about it," DiCenzo said.

"Right. My partner and I were at the market around the corner when the lady who lives in the downstairs apartment comes running in, hysterical. She leads us back here. That's it. After we discovered the stiff and called you guys, I got the dame calmed down. She said she had a feeling something was wrong. The stiff was a friend of hers, and she didn't show up at work yesterday or today. They both work at the same place. She's got a key to the stiff's apartment, because sometimes the stiff went away for the weekend and she fed her cat. Anyway, she had this feeling and went up and unlocked the apartment. She found the stiff and went running for the cops. The woman's name is June Haller, the stiff's name is Leona Jensen. She was employed as a secretary at the Auto Club downtown. She was twenty-four. She's got parents someplace up north, near 'Frisco."

"Good, Walker," DiCenzo nodded. We were interrupted by a team of three guys from the crime lab. They were in plainclothes and were carrying cameras and evidence kits.

Brown pointed toward the bedroom. "In there, guys. The doc's waiting for you."

DiCenzo started scanning the living room, notebook in hand. I tapped him on the shoulder and motioned him to the kitchen. "Holy shit," he said when he saw the bloodsplattered linoleum floor.

"Yeah," I said. "He sliced her in here, then got her into the bedroom and strangled her. She resisted as he dragged her through the living room—that accounts for the overturned furniture and broken glass. There's a door leading downstairs at the end of the kitchen. There are bloody footprints going down. He had to have come and gone that way. There's a bloody fingerprint in the hall near the bedroom. I circled it. What do you think?"

DiCenzo was nodding along with me. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Underhill," I said.

"You a college man, Underhill?"

"Yes, Sergeant."

"Well, I'd say that nothing you learned in college is gonna help us with this here homicide. Unless that print is complete and belongs to the killer. That's college stuff—scientific. It looks to me like a botched-up burglary. When we find out what the lab report says, which ain't gonna mean much, we're gonna get stuck with hauling in every known burglar, dope addict, and degenerate in Los Angeles. What I'm hoping is that the dame was raped—rape-o-burglar is a rare M.O. Not too many of those bastards around. Is this your first murder victim?"

"Yes."

"Is it getting to you?"

"No."

"Good. You and your partner go back to the station and write your reports."

"Right, Sergeant."

DiCenzo winked at me. "It's a shame, ain't it, Underhill? That tomato had it all, you know what I mean?"

"Yeah, I know."

—

I found Wacky in the bedroom. Flash bulbs were popping and he was writing in his notebook, shielding his eyes from the glare, casting occasional glances at the late Leona Jensen. He was getting angry looks from the lab men, so I pulled him into the hallway.

"Let's go. We've got to get back to the station and write our reports."

Wacky continued scribbling in his notebook. "There," he said. "I'm finished. I wrote a poem about the stiff. It's a masterpiece. It's dedicated to John Milton. It's called 'Piece of Ass Lost.' "

"Forget it, Wacky. Let's just get out of here."

We drove north on Hoover in silence.

"You think they'll find the guy who croaked her?" Wacky finally asked.

"DiCenzo thinks there's a chance."

"Frankly, I'm pessimistic."

"Why?"

"Because death is going to be the new fad. I can feel it. It's going to replace sports. I'm writing an epic poem about it. All forty-eight states are going to have the atom bomb and drop them on each other. L.A. is going to drop the A-bomb on 'Frisco for stealing tourists. The Brooklyn Dodgers are going to A-bomb the New York Giants. I can feel it."

"You're crazy, Wack."

"No, I'm a genius. Freddy, you gotta call Big Sid. I loved Hillcrest. I want to play it. It's a shot-maker's course. I could shoot sixty-eight there."

I laughed. "That's a riot. You just want to throw the salami to Siddell again. Tell me, Wack, did you ever get to finish with her?"

"Yeah, but I've been calling her to try to fix up another date, and every time I call some maid answers and says, 'Miz Siddell ain't at home, Officer.' I think she's giving me the bum's rush."

"Maybe, but don't worry. There's lots of other fat girls around."

"Yeah, but not like Siddell; she's class. Listen, partner, I need a favor. Will you talk to Siddell? Sound her out on how she feels about me? You're in tight with Big Sid, you can do it."

I hesitated, then felt my wheels start to turn. "Sure, Wack, I'll drop by Big Sid's place sometime next weekend. He gave me carte blanche for visits. I'm his new gravy train."

Wacky punched me in the arm. "Thanks, pard. When I'm dodging flaming arrows down in N——— Gulch and you're king of Wilshire Vice I'll remember this moment."

We pulled into the parking lot of the station. I started to offer a snappy rejoinder as token resistance, but couldn't. Instead, I walked upstairs to the detectives' squad room and typed up my report.

—

I drove to Beverly Hills early Saturday evening, getting honest with myself en route: I could invent all the pretexts I wanted, but I knew I was going to Big Sid's home for only one reason: to search out Lorna Weinberg and attempt, somehow, to satisfy my curiosity about her. The house was on Canon Drive, just south of Sunset. I was expecting some outrageous pretensions to class and was surprised: the large white Colonial edifice with the well-tended front lawn was understated, almost somber.

I knocked on the door and a Negro maid answered, informing me that "Mr. Big Sid ain't at home, Miz Siddell be up in her room takin' a nap."

"What about Lorna?" I blurted.

The withered old woman looked at me as if I were nuts. "Miz Lorna done moved out years ago."

"Sorry," I said, peering through the crack in the door, scanning a living room furnished in old wood and rich fabrics. Somehow I felt that the place might be a treasure trove of wonder, even in Lorna's absence. I paused, then said forcefully, “Wake up Siddell, will you, please? I have an important message from a friend of hers.”

The old woman eyed me suspiciously, then opened the door and gestured toward the living room. “You waits here,” she said, “I get Miz Siddell.”

The maid trotted upstairs, leaving me alone in the richly appointed room. I noticed some framed photographs above the red brick fireplace, and went over and looked at them. They were individual portraits of Big Sid, Siddell, and Lorna. Sid beamed proudly, Siddell looked as slender-faced as a good photographer could make her, and Lorna looked grave and abstracted, wearing a graduation gown and cap. There was another, larger photo of the family trio: Big Sid clutching his omnipresent cigar, Siddell looking sullen, and Lorna leaning on a cane. I noticed that her right leg was withered and deformed, and felt a nervous flush come over me. I shook my head to clear it, then recalled: Lorna had remained seated during our one meeting. But where was *Mother* Weinberg?

Lost in my reverie, I felt a sharp tug at my coat sleeve and turned to find Siddell Weinberg pushing herself against me. “I know what you must think of me,” she was saying, “but I don’t do those kinds of things all the time…”

I held the feverish-looking woman at arm’s length and took a stern tack, the better to secure the information I now *had* to have. “Well, I do, Miss Weinberg, so it’s not really a big issue. But you should call Wacky. He’s fond of you, and wants to see you again.”

“I know, but I can’t! You have to tell Herbert not to call me here. Daddy thinks that anyone interested in me is just out for his money. Besides, I’m engaged.”

“Does Big Sid approve of your fiancé?”

“No, not really, but at least he’s Jewish, and he’s in graduate school. He’s got a future.”

“And policemen don’t have futures?”

“I didn’t mean that!” Siddell wailed. “Daddy likes you, but he thinks Herbert is crazy.”

I led Siddell to a plush red leather couch next to the fireplace. “Your father is right,” I said. “He is. Are you in love with this guy you’re going to marry?”

“Yes, no! I don’t know!”

“Then call Wacky. He’s in the phone book—Herbert L. Walker, 926 South St. Andrews, L.A. All right?”

“All—all right. I’m going out of town next week, but I’ll call Herbert when I get back.”

“Good.” I patted Siddell’s hand, then started fishing around for conversational lead-ins to get to the real purpose of my visit. Finally, I got one: “This is a hell of a nice house, Siddell. Your mother obviously puts a lot of time into it.”

Siddell lowered her head. “Mama is dead,” she said.

“I’m sorry. Was it recently?”

“No, it was in 1933. I was nine and Lorna was thirteen.”

“That’s a long time ago.”

“Yes and no.”

“You mean you still feel it?”

“Y—Yes…but mostly, Lorna does.” Siddell’s voice had taken on the resonance of a person explaining a profound truth.

I prodded gently. “What do you mean, Siddell?”

“Well, Mama died and Lorna got crippled at the same time, so Lorna hates and loves Mama at the same time. They were driving down Sunset. Mama was pregnant again. It was raining, and Mama skidded into a tree. Her stomach hit the steering wheel. She lost the baby, but aside from that she wasn’t hurt. Lorna went through the windshield. Her pelvis was crushed, that’s why she walks so funny, and why her right leg is so skinny—all the nerve endings got torn up. Anyway, Mama wanted another baby, really badly. She knew Daddy wanted a son. She held the baby in there; she wouldn’t believe it was dead. She was supposed to go to the hospital to get labor induced, but she didn’t. The baby infected her stomach, and she ran away. They found her dead, up in the Hollywood Hills. She had made a little nest for herself up there, with all these baby clothes she bought from Bonwit Teller. She couldn’t believe the baby was dead.”

It was almost more than I wanted to know.

Siddell sensed this: “Don’t be sad,” she said. “It was a long time ago.”

I nodded. “And your father never remarried?”

Siddell shook her head. “Daddy hasn’t touched another woman since the day Mama died.”

I got up to leave. By way of farewell, Siddell said, “Tell Herbert I’ll call him. Tell him I like him.”

“I will.”

I walked out to my car, looking up at the sky and hoping for rain. As I hit the ignition, the wonder caught me, and the irony—my adopted family were orphans, too.

5

Wacky was out with the flu Monday and Tuesday, and Beckworth bought it because Wacky hardly ever used his sick leave. In reality, he was juiced up and working on his new “epic” poem and waiting by the phone for a call from Siddell Weinberg.

Early Wednesday morning as we swung out of the station parking lot, I put his fears to rest: “She’s going out of town for a week or so. She’s going to call you when she gets back.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. We had a nice chat. She’s engaged to some Jewish guy, but she isn’t in love with him.”

“And she’s hot for some un-kosher meat on the side?” Wacky was almost drooling.

“I think so. She thinks you’re the cat’s meow.”

Wacky celebrated the good news by hanging a U-turn in heavy traffic, hitting the siren and flooring the gas pedal for a good five minutes, cutting in and out of the quiet residential streets that bordered the station. When he finally returned to normal driving speed and cut the siren we were all the way down on Adams and Seventh Avenue, and he was grinning like a sated lover. “Thanks, partner,” he said.

“For what?”

“For everything. Don’t ask me to explain, I’m feeling elliptical today.”

“That reminds me,” I said, “I got you a present. It’s back in my locker. A poetry anthology. But beware—I’ve looked through it pretty well, and the next time we play Name the Poet, I’m going to kick your ass.”

“That’ll be the day. Hot dog! I feel good today. You want coffee and doughnuts? I’m buying.”

“You’re on.”

We drove to a Cooper’s doughnut joint at Twenty-third and Western, where we got a dozen fresh glazed and coffee. We ate and drank in silence.

I took a seat that faced out toward the street and let my mind drift with prosaic wonder: a cold, sunny, winter’s day. My city. The propriety born of my special, inside knowledge.

Across the street on Western, in front of the liquor store, a high school kid was convincing a wino to go in and buy him some booze. When the wino went inside the kid ogled the mulatto prostitute standing next door in front of the cabstand. She caught him looking at her and snorted her amusement. The wino came back out a few moments later and surreptitiously handed the kid a paper bag. The kid took off, practically running, hurling some kind of remark at the prostitute, who flipped him the finger. The wino walked off in the opposite direction, sucking on a short-dog of muscatel that the kid had bought him for his services.

A patrol car cruised by slowly, driven by my colleague, Tom Brewer. The wino stuck the bottle hurriedly into his back pocket, looking around guiltily. Brewer just drove on by, not noticing the little dance of fear. Even if he had, he wouldn't have cared. His father was a drunk, and he had loved his father, so he left drunks alone. Tom had told me about his father one night at a softball game at the Academy when he was half-drunk himself.

My city. My wonder.

—

Three hours later, we were driving south on Berendo when a white Ford pickup passed us going in the opposite direction. I craned my neck and saw that there were two Mexicans in the cab. They turned right at the corner, out of my vision, and I *knew.* "Stop the car, partner," I said.

Wacky noted the gravity of my voice and pulled to the curb.

"We got a hot one, Wacky," I said. "There's a little market around the corner in back of us. The two Mexican heisters in the Ford truck just turned the corner…" I didn't have to finish. Wacky nodded and very slowly pulled the black-and-white around in a U-turn to the opposite side of the street, stopping just short of the intersection.

We got out very slowly, in perfect synchronization. We looked at each other, nodded and unholstered our guns, then inched our way along the front of a dry-cleaning place until we were at the corner. The Ford pickup was double-parked further down the block in front of the market.

"Now, partner," I whispered, as we flattened ourselves up against the corner building and worked our way toward the market three doors down.

We were within a few yards of it when two gunmen came running out with guns drawn. They saw us almost immediately and wheeled and aimed their .45s haphazardly, just as Wacky and I opened fire. I squeezed off three shots, and the first gunman spun to the pavement, dropping what looked like a bag full of money as he fell. Wacky sent off two wild shots at the other man, who spun and fired at me.

We were at very close range, but some kind of calm grabbed me and I returned his fire, hitting him in the chest and knocking him into the gutter. Wacky fired twice more at the man on the pavement, advancing toward him slowly. He was lying on his stomach, arms outstretched, fingers still curled around his gun.

Wacky was almost on top of him when I saw the gunman in the gutter take aim. I shot him twice, and was moving toward him to get his gun when I heard another shot. I turned and saw Wacky staggering backward, stunned, grasping at his chest. He dropped his gun and screamed, “Freddy!” and then fell over backward.

I screamed. The man on the pavement raised his automatic and got off four shots, wild, sending them into the front of the building above my head, the last one narrowly missing me. I ducked into the market and reloaded. There was screaming coming from behind me—an old man and woman.

I looked outside. Wacky lay on the sidewalk, motionless. The gunman in the gutter looked dead. The one who had shot Wacky was crawling toward the curb and the truck. He had his back to me, so I rushed out and pulled Wacky to safety. Inside the market I ripped open his blood-covered uniform, then put my ear to his chest. Nothing.

“No, no, no, no, no,” I muttered. Trembling, I grabbed his wrist and felt for a sign of life. Nothing. I looked at Wacky’s face. His eyes were shut. I pulled the lids up. His eyes were frozen, rigid in their final vision of terror and disbelief.

I lifted Wacky up to embrace him. As I started to cradle his head his mouth dropped open, sending a torrent of blood onto my chest. I screamed and ran outside.

The surviving gunman was still crawling toward the street when I came up behind him and spun him around, kicking the .45 out of his hand. I aimed my gun at him, and he screamed. I fired six shots into his chest, and the sound of my gunfire dissolved into the sound of my own screams. I screamed until a dozen black-and-whites poured into the street and four cops threw me into the back of an ambulance with Wacky, and I think I was still screaming at the hospital when they tried to take him away from me.

—

I got a week off with full pay to recover from the shock, at the insistence of the doctor who examined me at the hospital. I got a commendation and a standing ovation at roll call when I returned to duty.

Wacky got a hero’s funeral, and his academy graduation photograph was blown up and framed behind glass and hung in the entrance hall at Wilshire

Station. Taken a scant four years before, Wacky looked whimsical and very young. There was a little metal plaque beneath the frame. It said: “Officer Herbert L. Walker. Appointed May 1947. Shot and killed in the line of duty, February 18, 1951.”

The shooting made the L.A. papers in a big way, with pictures of Wacky and myself. They made a big deal out of the Medal of Honor Wacky had won. They called him “a true American hero,” and his death “a call for all Americans to seek the path of courage and duty.” It was too ambiguous for me; I didn’t know what they were talking about.

Wacky’s mother and sister flew in from St. Louis for the funeral. I had telephoned them with the news of his death and met them at the airport. They were polite, but very detached. Their remoteness was stupefying. They thought that Wacky “should have gone into the insurance business, like his dad.” After determining that they had absolutely no inkling as to who Wacky was, I left them and went home to grieve in private.

I grieved, and fought being guilty over the way I had treated Wacky during his last weeks. I thought of his fatalistic acceptance of all the things of life and of death. I thought of our last tour of duty together and wept, knowing that my absolution was immediate and tendered with love.

—

High dark clouds were gathering on the day of the funeral. I drove out to the mortuary in Glendale anxious for the whole thing to be over.

The service was held in a roped-off area on a high grassy knoll in the middle of the cemetery. Hundreds of cops in uniform were there, from patrolmen to high brass. Wacky was eulogized by a half dozen officers who didn’t know him. There was no minister or mention of God. Wacky had left specific instructions about that with an old police chaplain several years before.

I was one of the pallbearers. The other five were cops I had never seen before. As we lowered Wacky into the ground, the police rifle team fired a twenty-one-gun salute and a bugler played “Taps.” Then I saw Wacky’s mother and sister being hustled off in the direction of a long black limousine. I could see a group of newsmen and photographers waiting by the limousine to descend on them.

Beckworth caught me in the parking lot. “Freddy,” he called to me.

“Hello, Lieutenant,” I said.

“Let’s go over to my car and talk, Fred. We need to.”

We walked over to where his car was parked, next to a walkway with statues of Jesus kneeling among friendly little animals.

Beckworth put a fatherly hand on my shoulder, and straightened the knot in my tie with his other one. He gave me a fatherly look and sighed. “Freddy, it may sound cruel, but it’s over. Walker is dead. You have a commendation and a clean double-bandit killing on your record: Years from now that will look even better. Brass hats who have never drawn their guns will be impressed with that as you move up the ladder.”

“No doubt. When do I go to Vice?”

“This summer. As soon as Captain Larson retires.”

“Good.”

“It all worked out, Freddy. I know you wanted the best for Walker. In a sense, he got it. He was a true hero. A Medal of Honor in the war and a hero’s death in the war against crime. I’m sure he died knowing that. And it’s funny, Freddy. Although I’ve spoken harsh words about Walker, I think that, somehow, I knew he was a true hero, and that he had to die.”

Beckworth lowered his voice for dramatic effect and tightened his grip on my shoulder. I knew what I had to do. “You’re full of shit, Lieutenant. Wacky Walker was a fucked-up crazy drunk, and that’s all. And I didn’t care, I loved him. So don’t romanticize him to me. Don’t insult my intelligence. I knew him better than anyone, and I didn’t understand him, so don’t tell me you did.”

“Freddy, I—”

I shrugged my shoulder free of his grasp. “You’re full of shit, Lieutenant.”

Beckworth went beet red, and started to tremble. “Do you know who I am, Underhill?” he hissed.

“You’re a fuck for the city,” I said, and flipped his necktie up into his face.

—

It had started to rain by the time I got to Wacky’s apartment. His landlady, intimidated by my uniform, let me in.

The living room was in a shambles. I found out why—Night Train had been left alone there since Wacky’s death, and had torn the sofa and chairs apart looking for food. I found him in the back yard. The resourceful Labrador had chewed his way through a screen door and was now lying under a large eucalyptus tree munching on the carcass of a cat.

He came to me when I called him. “Wacky’s dead, Train,” I said. “He shuffled off this mortal coil, but don’t worry, you can live with me if you don’t shit in the house.” Night Train dropped the dead cat and nuzzled my legs.

I went back into the apartment. I found Wacky's poetry bin: three large metal filing cabinets. Wacky was messy about everything and his apartment was completely disordered, but his poetry was immaculately kept—filed, dated, and numbered.

I carried his life's work out to my car and locked it in the trunk, then went back inside and found his golf clubs in the heavy leather bag he loved so much and brought them out, too.

Night Train hopped into the front seat with me, giving me quizzical looks. I found some raucous jazz on the radio and turned up the volume. Night Train wagged his tail happily as I drove him to his new home.

I found a safe, dry spot in my hall closet for the three filing cabinets. I cooked Night Train some hamburger and sat down to write a short biography of Wacky, one to send out to publishers with samples of his poetry.

I wrote: "Herbert Lawton Walker was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1918. In 1942 he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1943, while serving in the Pacific theater. In 1946 he moved to Los Angeles, California, and in 1947 joined the Los Angeles Police Department. He was shot and killed by a holdup man on February 18, 1951. He wrote poetry, unique in its humorous preoccupation with death, from 1939 to the time of his own death."

I sat back and thought: I could cull the files and look for what I thought to be Wacky's best. I could also look for poetry authorities and pay them to go through the filing cabinets and select what they thought were his best works, then send them off to publishers and poetry journals. Maybe Big Sid had some friends in the publishing racket he could fix me up with. If all else failed, I could have Wacky's complete opus printed up and distributed by a vanity press. It had to be done.

But it didn't seem enough. I needed to do penance. Then it hit me. I got my golf bag out of the bedroom and hauled it, along with Wacky's, out to my car.

Still wearing my uniform, I drove all the way out to East L.A. and stopped at the edge of the concrete sewage sluice known affectionately as the Los Angeles River. I looked down into it, some thirty feet below me. The water was five or six feet deep all the way across and flowing south very swiftly. I waited for a break in the rain to give me time to reminisce and try to savor the wonder that Wacky had said was there in death. I waited a long time. When the rain finally abated it was getting dark. I hauled the two golf bags to the edge of the cement embankment and dumped them into the garbage-strewn water, then watched the tangle of iron, wood, and leather move south out of my vision, carrying with it a thousand dreams and illusions. It was the end of my youth.

II

DEATH BY STRANGULATION

6

Wacky Walker never made it to Seventy-seventh Street Division, Watts, L.A.'s heart of darkness, but I did.

Beckworth bided his time and in June, when Captain Larson retired, to muted fanfare, after thirty-three years on the job, I got my orders: Officer Frederick U. Underhill, 1647, to Seventy-seventh Street Division to fill manpower shortage.

Which was a joke: the ranks at Seventy-seventh Street were swelled to bursting. The ancient red brick building that served the hottest per capita crime area in the city was pitifully overstaffed with cops, and undersupplied with every crime-fighting provision from toilet paper to fingerprinting ink. There was a shortage of chairs, tables, floor space, lockers, soap, brooms, mops, and even writing implements. There was no shortage, however, of prisoners. There was an unsurpassed daily and nightly parade of burglars, purse snatchers, dope addicts, drunks, wife beaters, brawlers, pimps, hookers, perverts, and cranks.

The fifteen four-man cells held at least twice their capacity every day, and weekends were the worst. The drunks were kicked out on the street, usually to return several hours later, and the other misdemeanor offenders were released on their own recognizance—which left the tiny, sweltering jail filled with a minimum of a hundred howling felons, with more coming in every hour.

Standing at my first evening roll call I felt like a pygmy at a reunion of the Paul Bunyan family. At six feet two and a hundred ninety pounds, I was a shrimp, a dwarf, a Lilliputian compared to the gland cases I served with. They were all cut from the same mold: World War II combat vets from the South or Midwest with low academy test scores and extensive body-building experience who all hated Negroes and who all seemed to possess a hundred esoteric synonyms for "n———."

Physically, they were splendidly equipped for fighting crime, what with their great size and illegal dumdum bullets, but there their efficacy ended. They were sent to the Seventy-seventh to hold down the lid of a boiling cauldron, by scaring or beating the shit out of suspects real and imagined, and that was it. They had no capacity for wonder, only a mania for order. Knowing that, and knowing I would pass the sergeant's exam with very high marks in less than a year, I decided to make the most of Watts and to throw myself into police work as I never had before. Actually, that would be easy. Night foot patrol would put the kibosh on chasing women and let me observe the wonder close up.

After roll call the station commander, a harsh-looking old captain named Jurgensen, called me into his office. I saluted and he pointed me to a chair. He had my personnel file open on his desk, and I could tell he was baffled: in a sense that was good; it meant that he wasn't a buddy of Beckworth's and that they hadn't conspired together on my transfer.

Jurgensen gave me a handshake that matched his face in sternness, then got right to the point: "You have an excellent record, Underhill. College man. Top-flight marks at the academy. Killed two holdup men who killed your partner. Excellent fitness reports. What the hell are you doing here?"

"May I be candid, sir?" I asked.

"By all means, Officer."

"Sir, Captain Beckworth, the new commander of Wilshire Station, hates my guts. It's personal, which is why no dissatisfaction with my performance is reflected on my fitness reports."

Jurgensen considered this. I could tell he believed me. "Well, Underhill," he said, "that's too bad. What are your plans regarding the department?"

"Sir, to go as far as I can as fast as I can."

"Then you have the opportunity to do some real police work. Right here in this tragic sinkhole."

"Sir, I'm looking forward to it."

"I believe you are, Officer. Every man who comes to this division starts out the same way, walking a beat at night in the heart of the jungle. Sergeant McDonald will fix you up with a partner."

Jurgensen motioned his head toward the door, indicating dismissal. "Good luck, Underhill," he said.

—

When I met my new partner in the crowded, sweltering muster room, I knew I was going to need luck—and more. His name was Bob Norsworthy. He was from Texas and he chewed tobacco. He fingered his Sam Browne belt and rotated his billy club out from his right hip in a perfect circle as the desk sergeant introduced us. Norsworthy was six and a half feet tall and weighed in at about two-thirty-five. He had black hair cut extra close to his flat head and blue eyes so light that they looked like he sent them out to be bleached.

"Yo there, Underhill," he said to me as Sergeant McDonald walked away from us. “Welcome to the Congo.”

“Thanks,” I said and stuck out my hand, instantly regretting it as Norsworthy crushed it in his huge fist.

He laughed. “You like that old handshake of mine? I been workin’ on it with one o’ them hand-squeezer babies. I’m the champeen arm wrestler of this station.”

“I believe you. What are we going to do on the beat tonight, Norsworthy?”

“Call me Nors. What should I call you?”

“Fred.”

“All right there, Fred. Tonight we’re gonna take a long walk up Central Avenue and let our presence be known. They got call boxes every two blocks, and we call the station every hour for instructions. Old Mac at the desk lets us know where there’s trouble brewin’. I gotta key for the call boxes. Them boxes is ironclad. If we don’t keep ’em all sealed up, them delinquents’d be bustin’ into ’em and makin’ all kinds of funny noises.

“We break up lots o’ unlawful assemblies. An unlawful assembly is two or more n———s hangin’ around after dark. We lean on known troublemakers, which is just about every wise-ass on the street. We check out the bars and liquor stores and haul out the bad jigaboos. That’s where this job gets to be fun. You like to whomp on n———s, Fred?”

“I’ve never tried it,” I said. “Is it fun?”

Nors laughed again. “You got a sense of humor. I heard ’bout you. You dispatched two taco-benders to the big frijole patch in the sky when you was workin’ Wilshire. You a genuine hero. But you gotta be some kind of fuck-up or you wouldn’t a got transferred here. You my kind of cop. We gonna be great buddies.”

Norsworthy impulsively grabbed for my hand and crushed it again. I pulled it away before he could break any bones. “Whoa, partner,” I said, “I need that hand to write reports with.”

Norsworthy laughed. “You gonna be needin’ that right hand for lots more’n writin’ reports in this here division, white boy,” he said.

If Norsworthy was less than sensitive, then he was more than instructive. Grudgingly, despite his racism and crudeness, I started to like him. I expected him to be brutal, but he wasn’t: he was stern and civil with the people we dealt with on the street, and when violence was required in subduing unarmed suspects his method was, by Seventy-seventh Street standards, mild—he would grasp the person in a fierce bear hug, squeeze them until their limbs took on a purple sheen, then drop them to the pavement, unconscious. It worked.

When we patrolled Central Avenue south of 100th Street, an area

Norsworthy called “Darkest Africa,” nobody save the far-gone drunks, hopheads, and the unknowing would give us anything but frightened nods. Norsworthy was so secure in his knowledge of how dangerous he was that he granted the Negroes whom he privately maligned a stern respect, almost by rote. He never had to raise his voice. His gargantuan, tobacco-chewing presence was enough, and I, as his partner, caught the edge of the awed, fearful respect he received.

So our partnership jelled—for a while. We walked the beat and made lots of arrests for drunkenness, possession of narcotics, and assault. We would go into bars and arrest brawlers. Usually, Norsworthy would quell an incipient brawl just by walking in and clearing his throat, but sometimes we would have to go in with billy clubs flying and beat the brawlers to the ground, then handcuff them and call for a patrol car to take them to the station.

The “unlawful assemblies” that Norsworthy had told me about were easy to disperse. We would walk coolly by them, Nors would say, “Good evening, fellows,” and the group would seem to vanish into thin air.

Thus the job went. But it started to bore me, and I started to resent my partner. His constant stream of talk—about his service in Italy during the war, his athletic prowess, the size of his dick, “n———s,” “kikes,” “greaseballs,” and “gooks”—vexed and depressed me and undercut the wonder and strangeness of life in Watts. I wanted to be free of the awesome and fearful presence of my partner to be able to pursue the wonder in peace on my own, so I concocted a plan: I convinced Norsworthy that we could be twice as effective patrolling separately, on opposite sides of the street, within sight and earshot of each other. It took a lot of convincing, but finally he bought it, on the proviso that since it was against the rules, we get together once an hour to compare notes and deliberate on potential hot spots that might require the both of us.

So I was freed, somewhat, to let my mind drift and wander with fragments of the dusky neon night music. I grieved less and less for Wacky, and my once-rampant curiosity about Lorna Weinberg abated.

When I became more comfortable with solitary patrol, I would ditch out on Norsworthy completely and hit the numbered side streets off Central—tawdry rows of small, white-framed houses, tar-paper shacks, and overcrowded tenement buildings. I bought three pairs of expensive binoculars and secreted them on the rooftops of buildings on my beat. Late at night, I would scan lighted windows with them, looking for crime and wonder. I found it. The whole gamut, from homosexuality—which I didn’t bother with—to wild jazz sessions, to heated lovemaking, to tears. I also found dope addiction—which I did act on, always relaying my information on reefer smoking and worse to the dicks, never trying to grandstand and make the collar myself. I wanted to prove I was a team player, something I never was at

Wilshire, and I wanted class-A fitness reports to go with the sergeancy that would be mine shortly after my twenty-eighth birthday.

And I made collars, good ones. I found myself a crackerjack snitch, a crazy-acting old shoeshine man who hated hopheads and pushers. Willy saw and retained everything, and he had the perfect cover. The neighborhood pimps, lowlifes, and pushers came to him to "glaze their alligators," and they talked freely in front of him—he was considered to be a blubbering idiot, rendered that way by thirty years of sniffing shoe polish.

He went along with the act, working for peanuts at his shine stand and selling information to me for a sizable chunk of my pay. Through Willy I was able to effect the arrest of a whole slew of grasshoppers and heroin pushers, including a guy wanted on a murder warrant back east.

Norsworthy resented my successes, feeling that I had usurped his power, making his fitness reports look bad by comparison. I felt his resentment and his frustration building. I knew what he was going to do, and took immediate steps to circumvent it.

I went to the commander of the detective squad and leveled. I told him of the collars I had given his men, and how I obtained the information that led to them—I had been walking my beat, at night, alone, free of my intrusive patrol partner.

The grizzled, skinny old lieutenant liked this. He thought I was a tough guy. I told him old big-dick Bob Norsworthy was about to blow all this to hell, that he was pissed off and wanted to horn in on my action, and was about to rat on me to Captain Jurgensen for ditching out on the beat.

The old lieutenant shook his head. "We can't let that happen, can we, son?" he said. "As of now, Underhill, you are the only solitary foot patrolman in this station. God have mercy on your soul if you ever run into trouble, or if Norsworthy ever quits the department."

"Thanks, Lieutenant," I said, "you won't regret it."

"That remains to be seen. One word of advice, son. Watch out for ambition. Sometimes it hurts more than it helps. Now close the door behind you, I want to turn on my fan."

7

I was at home the following Wednesday frying Night Train his morning hamburger when he brought me the news that was to change my life forever.

My landlady, Mrs. Gates, had been complaining about Train chewing up her plants, shrubs, garden chairs, newspapers, and magazines. She was a dog lover, but frequently told me that Night Train was more "voodoo beast" than dog, and that I should have him "fixed" to curb his rambunctiousness. So when I heard a shrill, "Mr. Underhill!" coming from the front lawn, I put on my widest smile and walked outside ready to do some placating.

Mrs. Gates was standing above Night Train, swatting him with a broom. He seemed to be enjoying it, rolling in the grass on his back with the morning paper wedged firmly between his salivating jaws.

"You give me my paper, voodoo dog!" the woman was shouting. "You can chew it up when I'm finished reading it. Give it to me!"

I laughed. I had come to love Night Train in the months since Wacky's death, and he never failed to amuse me.

"Mr. Underhill, you make that evil dog stop chewing my newspaper! Make him give it to me!"

I bent down and scratched Night Train's belly until he dropped the paper and started to nuzzle me. I flipped it open to show Mrs. Gates that no damage had been done, then caught the headlines and went numb.

"Woman Found Strangled in Hollywood Apartment" it read. Below the headline was a photograph of Maggie Cadwallader—the same Maggie with whom I had coupled in February, shortly before Wacky's death.

I pushed Train and the caterwauling Mrs. Gates away, then sat down and read:

> *A young woman was found strangled to death in her Hollywood apartment late Monday night by curious neighbors who heard sounds and went to investigate. The woman, Margaret Cadwallader, 36, of 2311 Harold Way, Hollywood, was employed as a bookkeeper at the Small World Import-Export Company on Virgil Street in Los Angeles. Police were summoned to the scene, and the woman's body was*

removed pending an autopsy. However, assistant L.A. County medical examiner David Beyless was quoted as saying, "It was a strangulation, pure and simple." Detectives from the Hollywood Division of the Los Angeles Police Department have sealed the premises, and are looking at burglary as the motive.

"I think the woman was killed when she awakened to her apartment being ransacked. The state of the apartment confirms this. That will be the starting point of our investigation. We expect a break at any time," said Sgt. Arthur Holland, the officer in charge.

The victim, originally from Waukesha, Wisconsin, had been a resident of the Los Angeles area for two years. She is survived by her mother, Mrs. Marshall Cadwallader, of Waukesha. Friends from her place of employment are tending to the funeral arrangements.

I put the newspaper down and stared at the grass.

"Mr. Underhill? Mr. Underhill?" Mrs. Gates was saying. I ignored her and walked back to my apartment and sat on the couch, staring at the floor.

Maggie Cadwallader, a lonely woman, dead. My one-night conquest, dead. Her death was not unlike that of the woman whose body Wacky and I had discovered. Probably the deaths were unrelated, yet there was the slightest bit of physical evidence linking them: I had met Maggie at the Silver Star. Her first time, she told me. But she may well have returned, frequently. I wracked my brain for the name of the woman whose body Wacky and I had found, and came up with it: Leona Jensen. She had had matches from the Silver Star in an ashtray filled with matchbooks. It was slight, but enough.

I changed clothes, putting on my light blue gabardine summer suit, made coffee and mourned for Maggie—thinking more of her little boy in the orphanage back east who would never see his mother. Maggie, so lonely, so much in need of what I and probably no man could have given her. It was a sad night I had spent with her. My curiosity and her loneliness had been left unresolved, anger on her part and self-disgust the only resolution on mine. And now this, leaving me feeling somehow responsible.

I knew what I had to do. I had three quick cups of coffee and locked Night Train in the apartment with a half dozen big soup bones, then got my car and drove to my old home, Wilshire Station.

I parked in the Sears lot a block away and telephoned the desk, asking for Detective Sergeant DiCenzo. He came on the line a minute later, sounding harried. "DiCenzo here, who's this?"

"Sergeant, this is Officer Underhill. Do you remember me?"

"Sure, kid, I remember you. You got famous right after I met you. What's up?"

"I'd like to talk to you briefly, as soon as possible."

"I'm gonna get lunch in about five minutes, across the street at the Shamrock. I'll be there for the better part of an hour."

"I'll be there," I said, then hung up.

The Shamrock was a bar-lunch joint specializing in corned beef sandwiches. I found DiCenzo at the back, wolfing a "special" and chasing it down with a beer. He greeted me warmly. "Sit down. You look good, college man. Too bad about your partner. Where you been? I ain't seen you around."

I filled him in as quickly as I could. He seemed satisfied, but surprised that I liked working in Watts.

"So what do you want, kid?" he asked finally.

I tried to sound interested, yet offhand. "You remember that dead woman my partner and I found on Twenty-eighth Street?"

"Yeah, a beautiful young dame. A real pity."

"Right. I was wondering what the upshot of your investigation was. Did you ever find the killer?"

DiCenzo looked at me curiously. "No, we never did. We rousted a lot of burglars, but no go. We checked out the dame's personal life, which was nothing hot—no enemies, all her friends and relatives had alibis. That print you circled on the wall belonged to the dame herself. We got a couple of dozen crazies who confessed, but they were just nuts. It's just one of those things, kid. You win some, you lose some. How come you're interested?"

"The woman looked like an old girlfriend of mine. Finding her dead got me, I guess." I lowered my head, feigning disbelief at the awesomeness of death.

DiCenzo bought it. "You'll get over these things," he said. Lowering his voice, he added, "You'll have to, if you wanna stay on the job."

I got up to go. "Thanks, Sergeant," I said.

"Anytime, kid. Be good. Take care of yourself." DiCenzo smiled heartily and went back to devouring his lunch.

—

I drove up to Hollywood Station on Wilcox just south of Sunset and lucked out, walking brazenly through the entrance hall, nodding at the desk sergeant and walking straight upstairs to the detective squad room, where a briefing on Maggie Cadwallader's murder had just begun.

The small room was packed with at least twenty dicks standing and sitting at desks, listening as a portly older cop explained what he wanted done. I stood in the doorway, trying to blend in like just another off-duty officer. No one seemed to notice me.

"I think we got burglary," the older cop was saying. "The woman's apartment was ransacked but good. No prints—the only prints we got belong to the victim and her landlady she used to play cards with. The man from downstairs who found the body left some, too. They've been questioned and are not suspects. We got no recent murders on the books that match this. Now here's what I want: I want every burglar known to use violence brought in and questioned. There was no rape, but I want all burglars with sex offenses on their rap sheets brought in anyway. I want all burglary reports in the Hollywood area for the past six months that resulted in arrest and dismissal checked out. Phone the D.A.'s office for disposition of all cases. I want to know how many of these shitheads we caught are back out on the street, then I want all of them brought in and questioned.

"I've got two men talking to neighbors. I want to know about what valuables this Cadwallader dame owned. From there we can lean on fences and check out the pawnshops. I want all the dope addicts on the boulevard brought in and leaned on hard. This is probably a panic killing, and a hophead looking for a fix might strangle a dame and then leave without taking anything. I've got two men questioning people in the neighborhood about that night. If anyone saw or heard anything, we'll know about it. That's it for now. Let's break it up."

That was my cue to leave. I checked my watch. It was two forty. I had three hours before I had to report to duty.

I walked out to my car amidst a tangle of grumbling detectives. I lowered the top and sat in the front seat and thought. No, not burglary, I kept saying to myself; not this time. Maybe the Jensen woman, maybe the matches were coincidental, but Maggie Cadwallader had a strangeness about her, almost an aura of impending doom, and when she saw my gun she had screamed, "Please, no! I won't let you hurt me! I know who sent you! I knew he would." She had been a strange woman, one who had wrapped her small world tightly about herself, yet let frequent strangers in.

The Silver Star bar was the place to start, but it was useless to hit it in the daytime, so I drove to a phone booth and got the address of the Small World Import-Export Company: 615 North Virgil. I drove there, exhilarated—and feeling slightly guilty about it.

—

The Small World Import-Export Company was in a large warehouse in the middle of a residential block specializing in rooming houses for students at L.A. City College a few blocks away. Every house on the block advertised "Student Housing," and "Low Rates for Students." There were a lot of "students" sitting on their front porches, drinking beer and playing catch on their beat-up front lawns. They were about my age, and had the superior look of G.I. Bill recipients. Two wars, Underhill, I thought, and you avoided them both and got what you wanted. Now here you are, a patrolman in Watts imitating a detective in Hollywood. Be careful.

I was. I entered the warehouse through its ratty front door stenciled with a ratty-looking globe by a guy who obviously didn't know his geography very well. But the receptionist knew a cop and a badge when she saw them, and when I inquired about friends of Maggie Cadwallader she said, "Oh, that's easy." She dialed a number on her desk phone, saying, "Mrs. Grover, our head bookkeeper, was a good friend of Maggie's. They had lunch together almost every day." Into the phone she said, "Mrs. Grover, there's a policeman here to talk to you about Maggie." The receptionist put down the phone and said, "She'll be out in a minute." She smiled. I smiled back.

We were exchanging about our eighth and ninth smiles when an efficient-looking woman of about forty came into the waiting room. "Officer?" she asked.

"Mrs. Grover," I answered, "I'm Officer Underhill, Los Angeles Police Department. Could I talk with you?"

"Certainly," she said, very businesslike. "Would you like to come to my office?"

I was enjoying my role but her brusque manner was unnerving. "Yeah, sure," I replied.

We walked down a dingy hallway. I could hear great numbers of sewing machines whirring behind closed doors. Mrs. Grover sat me down in a wooden chair in her sparsely furnished office. She lit a cigarette, settled behind her desk, and said, "Poor Maggie. What a godawful way to die. Who do you think did it?"

"I don't know. That's why I'm here."

"I read in the papers that you people think it was a burglar. Is that true?"

"Maybe. I understand you and Maggie Cadwallader were good friends."

"In a sense," Mrs. Grover replied. "We ate together every workday, but we never saw each other socially."

"Was there a reason for that?"

"What do you mean?"

"What I mean, Mrs. Grover, is that I'm trying to get a handle on this woman. What kind of person was she? Her habits, her likes, dislikes, the people she associated with, that kind of thing?"

Mrs. Grover stared at me, smoking intently. "I see," she said. "Well, if it's helpful I can tell you this: Maggie was a very bright, disturbed woman. I think she was a pathological liar. She told me stories about herself and later told stories that contradicted the earlier ones. I think she had a drinking problem, and spent her nights alone, reading."

"What kind of stories did she tell you?"

"About her origins. One day she was from New York, the next day the Midwest. She once told me she had a child out of wedlock, from a 'lost love,' then the very next day she tells me she's a virgin! I sensed that she was very lonely, so once I tried to arrange a dinner date for her with a nice bachelor friend of my husband's. She wouldn't do it. She was terrified. She was a cultured person, Maggie, and we had many lovely conversations about the theater, but she told me such crazy things."

"Such as?"

"Such as the nonsense about the baby back east. She showed me a photo once. It broke my heart. She had obviously clipped it from a magazine. It was so sad."

"Do you know of any men in her life, Mrs. Grover?"

"No, Officer, none. I really do believe she died a virgin."

"Well," I said, standing up, "thank you for your time, Mrs. Grover. You've been very helpful."

"She deserved so much better, Officer. Please find her killer."

"I will," I said, meaning it.

—

I wasn't much good on the beat that night. My mind was elsewhere. I knew I would need a very fast transfer to day watch in order to continue my investigation at night. I thought over my options—requests to Jurgensen? To the head of the Detective squad? Going on sick leave? All too chancy.

The following morning I drove to the station and knocked on Captain Jurgensen's door. He greeted me warmly, surprised to see me in the daytime. I told him what I wanted: I had a very sick friend from my orphanage days who needed someone to look after him at night while his wife went to work at Douglas Aircraft. I wanted day watch temporarily, to help out my friend, and to better acquaint myself with the area I was serving in.

Jurgensen put down his copy of *Richard III* and said, "Starting today, Underhill. We've got a man on vacation. No solo, though. No golden boy stuff. Just walk the beat with a partner. Now go to work."

—

At eleven thirty that night I committed my first crime as an adult. I drove up to Hollywood, parked in a gas station lot and walked up to Maggie Cadwallader's apartment on Harold Way. Wearing gloves, I picked the lock on the door and made my way through the dark apartment to the bedroom. I carried a pocket flashlight, and by risking using it every few seconds I could tell that all of Maggie's personal belongings had been cleaned out, presumably to better show the apartment to prospective new tenants when the publicity of her death died down.

In the bedroom, holding the flashlight awkwardly, I unscrewed the bedpost that had contained Maggie's "priceless love gift." It was gone. I replaced the post and unscrewed the other one: nothing there. The two remaining ones were solid, melded into the bedstead. It was as I had hoped. Still, there was double-checking to be done.

I drove to Hollywood Station, parked, walked in and showed my badge to the desk sergeant. "I'm with Seventy-seventh dicks," I told him. "Is there anyone upstairs I can talk to?"

"Give it a try," he replied, bored.

—

The squad room was deserted, except for a tired old cop writing reports. I walked in like I owned the place, and the old-timer looked up only briefly from his paper work. When I didn't see what I wanted lying around in plain sight, I cleared my throat to get his attention.

He looked up again, this time displaying bloodshot eyes and a weary voice. "Yes?" he said.

I tried to sound brisk and older than my years. "Underhill, Seventy-seventh Street dicks. I'm working South Central pawnshop detail. The loot told me to come up here and check the property report on that dead dame, Cadwallader. We find a lot of stuff pawned down in the Seventy-seventh that got clouted in Hollywood and West L.A. The lieutenant figured maybe he could help you out."

"Shit," the old-timer said, getting up from his chair and walking to a row of filing cabinets. "That was no burglary caper, if you ask me. My partner and I wrote that report." He handed me a manila folder containing three typewritten pages. "There was nothin' missin', accordin' to the landlady, and she knew the stiff good. Could be the guy panicked. Don't ask me."

The report was written in the usual clipped department style, and everything from cat food to detergent was listed—but no mention was made of a diamond brooch, or any other jewelry.

There was a signed statement from the landlady, a Mrs. Crawshaw, stating that although the apartment had been in complete disarray, nothing seemed to be missing. She also stated that Maggie Cadwallader, to her knowledge, had not owned jewelry or stocks and bonds, nor had she secreted in her apartment large sums of money.

The old cop was looking at me. "You want a copy of that?" he asked wearily.

"No," I said, "you were right, it's a dull report. Thanks a lot, I'll see you."

He looked relieved. I felt relieved.

It was twelve forty-five and I knew I couldn't sleep now even if I wanted to. I wanted to think, but I wanted it to be easy, not filled with panicky speculation over the dangerous risks I was taking. So I decided to break my silent vow of abstinence and drove out to Silverlake, where I knocked on the door of an old buddy from the orphanage.

He was mildly glad to see me, but his wife wasn't. I told them it wasn't a social call, that all I wanted was the loan of his golf clubs. Incredulous, he turned them over. I promised to return them soon, and to repay him for his favor with a good restaurant dinner. Incredulous, his wife said she'd believe it when she saw it, and hustled her husband back to bed.

I checked the clubs. They were good Tommy Armours, and there were at least fifty shag balls stuffed into the pockets of the bag. I went looking for a place to hit them, and to think.

I drove home and picked up Night Train. He was glad to see me and hungry for exercise. I found a few cold pork chops in the ice box and threw them at him. He was gnawing the bones as I attached his leash and slung the golf bag over my shoulder.

"The beach, Train," I said. "Let's see what kind of Labrador you really are. I'm going to hit balls into the ocean. Little chip shots. If you can retrieve them for me in the dark, I'll feed you steak for a year. What do you say?"

Night Train said "Woof!" and so we walked the three blocks down to the edge of the Pacific.

It was a warm night and there was no breeze. I unhooked Night Train's leash and he took off running, a pork chop bone still in his mouth. I dumped the balls onto the wet sand and extracted a pitching iron from the bag. Hefting it was like embracing a long-lost beloved friend. I was surprised to find I wasn't rusty. My hiatus from golf hadn't dulled that sharp edge my game has always had, almost from the first time I picked up a club.

I hit easy pitch shots into the churning white waves, enjoying the synchronization of mind and body that is the essence of golf. After a while the mental part became unnecessary, my swing became me, and I turned my mind elsewhere.

Granted: I had passed myself off as a detective twice, using my own name, which might cost me a suspension if it were discovered. Granted: I was going strictly on hunches, and my observations of Maggie Cadwallader were based on her behavior during one evening. But. But. But, somehow I *knew*. It was more than intuition or deductive logic or character assessment. This was my own small piece of wonder to unravel, and the fact that the victim had given me her body, tenuously, in her search for something more, gave it weight and meaning.

I whistled for Night Train, who trotted up. We walked back to the apartment and I thought, Wacky was right. The key to the wonder is in death. I had killed, twice, and it had changed me. But the key wasn’t in the killing, it was in the discovery of whatever led to it.

I felt strangely magnanimous and loving, like a writer about to dedicate a book. This one’s for you, Wacky, I said to myself; this one’s for you.

8

It was strange to be sitting in a bar looking for a killer rather than a woman.

The following night, free of the obsession that usually brought me to such places, I sat drinking watered-down Scotch and watched people get drunk, get angry, get maudlin and pour out their life stories to perfect strangers in alcoholic effusiveness. I was looking for men on the prowl, like myself, but the Silver Star on that first night held nothing but middle-aged desperation played to the tunes of the old prewar standards on the jukebox.

I closed the place, walking out at 1:00 a.m., asking the bartender if the place ever picked up.

“Weekends,” he said. “This joint really hops on weekends. Tomorrow night. You’ll see.”

—

The barman was right. I got to the Silver Star at seven forty-five Saturday evening and watched as the joint started to hop. Young couples, servicemen on leave—easily recognizable by their short haircuts and plain-toed black shoes—elderly juiceheads, and single men and women casting lonely, expectant glances all competed for bar and floor space.

The music was livelier this evening, and tailored for a younger clientele; upbeat arrangements of show tunes, even a little jazz. A good-looking woman of about thirty asked me to dance. Regretfully I turned her down, offering a bad leg as an excuse. She turned to the guy sitting next to me at the bar, who accepted.

I was looking for “operators,” “lover-boy” types, “wolves”—men who could gain a woman’s confidence as well as access to her bed with surpassing ease. Men like myself. I spent three hours, sitting, changing seats from barside to tableside, sipping ginger ale, always looking. I began to realize that this might be a long, grueling surveillance. For all my eyeball activity, I didn’t see much.

I was starting to get depressed and even a little angry when I noticed two definite lowlife types approach the bar and lean over to speak in undertones to the bartender, whose face seemed to light up. He pointed to a door at the rear of the place, next to a bank of phone booths and cigarette machines. Then all three walked off in that direction, the barman leaving the bar untended.

I watched as they closed the door behind them, then waited two minutes. I went over to the door and knelt down, sniffing at the crack where it met the floor. Reefer smoke. I smiled, then transferred my gun from its holster to the pocket of my sport coat, flipped open my badge's leather holder and very casually but forcefully threw my right shoulder into the doorjamb, splintering the wood and throwing the door wide open.

The noise was very sharp and abrupt, like an explosion. The three grasshoppers were standing against the back wall next to a ceiling-high collection of whiskey crates, and they jumped back and threw up their hands reflexively when they heard the noise and saw my badge and gun.

I looked back into the bar. No one seemed to have noticed what had happened. I closed the door behind me, softly. "Police officer," I said very quietly. "Move over to the left-hand wall and place your hands on it, above your heads. Do it now."

They did. The smell of the marijuana was rank and sensual. I patted the three men down for weapons and dope, but came up with nothing except three fat reefers. All the guys were shaking and the bartender started to blubber about his wife and kids.

"Shut up!" I snapped at him. I pulled the other two guys back by their shirt collars, then shoved them in the direction of the door. "Get the hell out of here, you goddamn lowlife," I hissed, "and don't ever let me see you in here again."

They stumbled out the door, casting worried glances at the barman.

I secured the door by placing a crate of gin bottles against it. The bartender cowered against the wall as I walked toward him. He fumbled in his pockets for cigarettes, looking at me imploringly for permission.

"Go ahead, smoke," I said. He lit up. "What's your name?" I asked.

"Red Julian," he said, eyeing the door.

I eased his fears. "This won't take long, Red. I'm not going to bust you, I just need a little help."

"I don't know no sellers, honest, Officer. I just light up once in a while. Fifty cents a throw, you know."

I smiled sardonically. "I don't care, Red. I'm not with narcotics. How long have you worked here?"

"Three years."

"Then you know what goes in this place—all the regulars, the con artists…"

"This is a good clean room, Officer, I don't let no—"

“Shut up. Listen to me. I’m interested in pickup artists—pussy-hounds, guys who score regular here. You help me out and I’ll let you slide. You don’t and I’ll bust you. I’ll call for a patrol car and tell the bulls you tried to sell me these three reefers. That’s two to ten at Quentin. What’s it gonna be?”

Red lit another cigarette with the butt of his old one. His hands were shaking. “We get hotshots, they come and go,” he said. “We got one guy who comes and goes, but comes regular when he’s in town. A good-lookin’ guy named Eddie. That’s the only handle I got on him, honest. He picks up here all the time.” Red backed away from me again.

“Is he here tonight?” I asked.

“Naw, he comes in when it’s quieter. A real smoothie. Flashy dresser. He’s not here tonight, honest.”

“Okay. Listen to me. You’ve got a new regular here. Me. What nights are you off?”

“Never. The boss won’t let me. I work six to midnight, seven days a week.”

“Good. Has Eddie been coming in lately? Scoring?”

“Yeah. A real smoothie.”

“Good. I’ll be coming back, every night. As soon as Eddie comes in, you let me know. If you try to tip him off, you know what’ll happen.” I smiled and held the three reefers under his nose.

“Yeah, I know.”

“Good. Now get out of here—I think your customers are getting thirsty.”

—

I closed the bar again that night. No Eddie.

First thing Sunday morning I went to a drugstore in Santa Monica that did one-day photo processing. I left four newspaper photographs of Maggie Cadwallader, telling the man, who shook his head dubiously, that I wanted his best reproduction blown up to snapshot size, six copies by six o’clock that evening. When I waved a twenty-dollar bill under his nose, then stuck it in his shirt pocket, he wasn’t so dubious. The photos I picked up that afternoon were more than adequate to show to potential witnesses.

—

Red was nervously polishing a glass when I took a seat at the bar early Sunday night. It was sweltering hot outside, but the Silver Star was air-conditioned to a polar temperature.

“Hello, Red,” I said.

“Hello, mister…”

“Call me Fred,” I said magnanimously, sliding the blowup of Maggie Cadwallader across the bar to him. “Have you ever seen this woman?”

Red nodded. “A few times, yeah, but not lately.”

“Ever see her with Eddie?”

“No.”

“Too bad. Slow house tonight, eh?” I said, looking around the almost empty bar.

“Yeah. Daylight saving time kills it this early. People don’t think it’s right to drink before dark. Except boozehounds.” He pointed toward a bloated couple mauling each other on one of the lounge sofas.

“I know what you mean. I had a friend once who liked to drink. He said he only liked to drink when he was alone or with people, in the daytime or the nighttime. He was a philosopher.”

“What happened to him?”

“He got shot.”

“Oh, yeah? That’s a shame.”

“Yeah. I’m going to have a seat on one of those sofas facing the door. If our buddy shows up, you come and let me know, capische?”

“Yeah.”

By eight o’clock the bar was filled to half its capacity, and by ten the sustained darkness had me feeling like a bat in the Carlsbad Caverns.

At around eleven o’clock, Red walked over and nudged me. “That’s him,” he said, “at the bar. The guy in the Hawaiian shirt.”

I motioned Red away and sauntered past the man on my way to the men’s room, taking the stool next to him when I returned and catching a heady whiff of his lilac cologne. I called to Red loudly and ordered a double Scotch, in order to get a reaction from Eddie. He turned toward me, and I committed to memory a handsome face, delicate and arrogant at the same time, well-tanned, with curly, rather long brown hair, and soft, deep-set brown eyes. Eddie turned back quickly, engrossing himself in his martini and the woman sitting next to him, a skinny brunette in a nurse’s uniform who was courteously feigning interest in his conversation.

“…So it’s been good lately. The trotters, especially. Don’t believe what you read. There are systems that work.”

“Oh, really?” the brunette said, bored.

“Really.” Eddie leaned into the woman. “What did you say your name was?”

“Corrinne.”

"Hi, Corrinne, I'm Eddie."

"Hi, Eddie."

"Hi. You like the ponies, Corrinne?"

"Not really."

"Oh. Well, you know it's really just a question of getting to know the game. You know?"

"I guess so. I don't know, it just bores me. I've got to go. Nice meeting you. Bye."

The brunette got up from her stool and left. Eddie sighed, then finished his drink and walked back in the direction of the men's room, stopping and standing in front of the full-length mirror on the wall and going through an elaborate ritual of smoothing his hair, brushing lint off his shirt, checking the crease in his trousers and smiling at himself several times from different angles. He seemed satisfied, as he should have been: he was the very prototype of the smooth-talking L.A. lounge lizard, designed to charm, manipulate, and seduce. For a split second, I felt revulsion at my own womanizing, before telling myself that my motives were certainly entirely different.

I moved to another seat at the back of the room that afforded me a view of the whole bar. I watched as Eddie unsuccessfully tried to put the make on three young women. I could feel his disgust and desperation as he paid his bill, killed his last martini and stormed out. Quickly I exited, and followed him down a side street. He got into a '46 Olds sedan. My car was parked on the other side of the street, pointed in the opposite direction, so as Eddie drove off I sprinted for it. I gave him a thirty-second lead, then hung a U-turn and tailed him. Eddie turned left on Wilton then right on Santa Monica a mile later. He was easy to follow: his right taillight was out and he drove smoothly in the middle lane.

He led me to West Hollywood. I almost lost him crossing La Brea, but when he finally pulled to the curb at Santa Monica and Sweetzer, I was right behind.

After carefully locking his car, Eddie walked into a bar called the Hub. I gave him a minute's lead, then walked in myself, expecting it to be a lively off-the-Strip pickup joint. I was dead wrong: it was a pickup joint, but there were no women in the bar, just anxious-looking men.

I braced myself and walked to the bar. The bartender, a fat bald man, appeared and I ordered beer. He sashayed away from me to get it and I looked for Eddie.

I spotted him first, then heard him. He was in a booth in the back, arguing with another man—a handsome, decidedly masculine man in his mid fifties. I couldn't hear their conversation, but was momentarily troubled anyway—

what was he doing here? I had thought he was a woman-chaser. The argument grew more heated, but I still couldn't hear any words.

Finally, the other man shoved what looked like a large manila envelope at Eddie, got up, and walked out the back door of the bar. Out of the corner of my eye, I watched Eddie sitting very still in his booth, then he suddenly bolted for the front door. I hunched over my beer as he passed by, then chased after him.

As I was flinging open the door of my car, Eddie hung a tire-screeching turn north onto Sweetzer, heading up the steep hill to the Strip. I peeled rubber in pursuit and finally caught up with him as he was signaling a left-hand turn onto Sunset. I stayed right behind him for about a half mile until he turned right on a little street called Horn Drive and parked almost immediately. I continued on and parked some fifty yards in front of him, getting out of my car just in time to see him cross the street and enter the court of a group of Spanish-style bungalows.

I ran across the street, hoping to catch Eddie as he entered one of the units, but was out of luck. The cement courtyard was empty. I checked the bank of mailboxes on the front lawn, looking for Edward, Edwin, Edmund, or at least the initial "E." No luck—the tenants of the fifteen bungalows were all designated by their last names only.

I went back to my car and pulled over to the other side of the street, directly in front of the entrance of the court, deciding to wait Eddie out. My curiosity about him was peaking; he was a volatile night owl and might well be leaving soon on another run.

I was wrong. I waited, and waited, and waited, almost dozing off several times, until nine thirty the next morning. When Eddie finally emerged, immaculately dressed in a fresh Hawaiian shirt, light blue cotton slacks, and sandals, I felt my enervation drop like a rock. I studied his face and body movements as he walked to his car, searching for clues to his sexual makeup. There was a self-conscious disdainfulness about him that wasn't quite right, but I put it out of my mind.

Eddie drove fast and aggressively, deftly weaving through traffic. I stayed close behind, letting a few cars get between us. We drove this way all the way downtown to the Pasadena Freeway, out that tortuous expressway to South Pasadena, then east to Santa Anita racetrack in Arcadia.

Entering the racetrack's enormous parking lot, I felt relieved and hopeful. It was a brilliantly clear day, not too hot, and the parking lot was already filled with cars and plenty of people to hide me as I tailed my suspect. And I remembered what an old Vice cop had once told me: racetracks were good places to brace people for information—they felt sinful and somehow guilty about being there, and cowered fast when confronted with a badge.

I parked and sprinted to the entrance turnstiles. I paid my admission, then lounged, eyes downcast, next to a souvenir stand and waited for Eddie to show up. He did, a good ten minutes later, flashing a pass at the ticket-taker and getting a big smile in return. As he passed me, consulting his racing form, I turned my back.

The giant entranceway and passages leading up to the grandstand were filling up fast, so I let a solid throng of horseplayers get between us as we maneuvered toward the escalators that led to the betting windows. Eddie was going first-class: the fifty-dollar window. He was the only one in line there. He got a warm welcome from the man in the cage, and I could hear him plainly as I stood by the ten-dollar window a few yards away.

"Howsa boy, Eddie?" the guy said.

"Not bad, Ralph. How's the action? You got any hot ones for me?" Eddie's voice seemed strained under the ritualistic overtones.

"Naw, you know me, Eddie. I like 'em all. That's why I'm working here and not bettin' here. I love 'em all, too much."

Eddie laughed. "I hear you. I got the system though, and I feel lucky today." He handed the man a sheet of paper and a roll of bills. "Here, Ralph, that's for the first four races. Let's take care of it all now. I want to check out the scenery."

The man in the cage scooped up the scratch sheet and money and whistled. He detached a row of tickets and handed them to Eddie. He shook his head. "You might be takin' a bath today, kid."

"Never, pal. Seen any lookers around? You know my type."

"Hang out at the Turf Club, kid. That's where the class dames go."

"Too ritzy for me. I can't breathe in there. I'll be back for my money at the end of the day, Ralph. Have it ready for me."

Ralph laughed. "You bet, kid."

—

I followed Eddie to his seat in one of the better sections of the grandstand. He bought a beer and peanuts from a vendor and settled in, reading his racing form and fiddling with a pair of binoculars in a leather case.

I was wondering what to do next when an idea struck me. I waited for the first race to start, and when the passageways cleared and the crowd started to yell, I made my way back down to the souvenir stand, where I bought the current issues of three magazines: *Life*, *Collier's*, and *Ladies' Home Journal.*

I took them into the men's room, locked myself into a stall and thumbed through them, finding what I wanted almost immediately—five black-and-white photographs of rather ordinary women, taken from the neck up. I tore them out, left the rest of the magazines on the floor and placed the blowup photo of Maggie Cadwallader in the middle of the tear-outs.

Then I went looking for Ralph, the man at the fifty-dollar window. He wasn't in his cage, so I strolled aimlessly through the now-deserted passageways until I spotted him walking out of the radio broadcasters' booth, smoking a cigar and holding a cup of coffee.

He spotted me too, and some sort of recognition hit him even before I showed him my badge. "Yes, Officer," he said patiently.

"Just a few questions," I said. I pointed across the hall to a snack stand that had tables and chairs.

Ralph nodded patiently and led the way. We sat facing each other across a grease-stained metal table; I was brusque, even a little bullying.

"I'm interested in the man you were talking to at the window about a half hour ago. His first name is Eddie."

"Yeah. Eddie."

"What's his last name?"

"Engels. Eddie Engels."

"What's his occupation?"

"Gambler. Punk. Wise guy. I don't think he has a job."

"I'm interested in the women he runs around with."

"So am I! Ooh, la la!" Ralph started cracking up at his own wit.

"Don't be funny; it's not amusing." I fanned the six photographs on the table in front of him. "Ever see Eddie with any of these women?"

Ralph scrutinized the photos, hesitated a moment, then placed a fat index finger square on the picture of Maggie Cadwallader. My whole body lurched inside and my skin started to tingle.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"Yeah," he said.

"How are you sure?"

"This tomato is a dog compared to some of the babes I seen Eddie with."

"When did you see them together?"

"I don't know—I think it was a couple of months ago. Yeah, that's right, it was the day of the President's Stakes—in June."

I gathered up my photos and left Ralph with a stern warning. "You don't breathe a word of this to Eddie. You got that?"

"Sure, Officer. I always figured Eddie wasn't quite on the up and—"

I didn't let him finish. I was out the door, looking frantically for a pay phone.

I called L.A.P.D. R&I, gave them my name and badge number and told them what I wanted. They got back to me within five minutes: there was no Edward, Edwin, or Edmund Engels, white male, approximately thirty years old with a criminal record in Los Angeles. I was about to hang up, then got another idea: I told the clerk to go through the automobile registration files for the last four years. This time he hit pay dirt: Edward Engels, 1911 Horn Drive, West Hollywood, owned two cars: the green ’46 Olds sedan I had tailed him in, and a ’49 Ford convertible—red with white top, license number JY 861. I thanked the clerk, hung up and ran out to my own car.

My next stop was Pasadena, where I looked for Ford and Oldsmobile dealerships. It took a while, but I found them and got what I wanted: advertising stills of their ’46 and ’49 models. Next I drove to a five and dime on Colorado Boulevard and bought a box of kiddie crayons. In the parking lot I went to work on my visual aids, coloring the Olds sedan a pale sea green and the Ford a bright fire engine red with a pristine white top. The results were good.

By this time it was one forty-five and getting very humid. I needed a shave and a change of clothes. I drove home, showered, shaved, and changed. I got out my diary and destroyed all the pages pertaining to my encounter with Maggie Cadwallader. Then I stretched out on the bed and tried to sleep.

It was no good. My brain wouldn’t stop running with plans, schemes, contingencies, and expectations. Finally I gave up, shooed Night Train out to the back yard, locked up, and drove to the Sunset Strip.

I timed it just right, parking my car in the lot of a gas station on Sunset and Doheny and starting off on foot. The nightclubs were just opening, gearing up for another evening of high-life, and the barmen, waiters, and parking attendants I wanted to talk to were fresh faced and had plenty of time to answer my questions.

I was developing a theory about Eddie Engels; that he was arrogant, cocky to an extreme, loudmouthed, and rather stupid—just stupid enough to bring women he was planning to harm or even kill into his own back yard to wine and dine. It seemed logical. He lived within walking distance of the hottest night spots in the city, and he clearly loved to be seen with women.

So I theorized, and walked east, showing my photograph of Maggie Cadwallader to parking lot attendants, doormen, maître d’s, and waiters. I hit every nightclub and juke joint on both sides of Sunset from Doheny to La Cienega—with no luck. I was about to admit defeat when I decided to start checking out restaurants, as well.

At my third one, I got my first confirmation. It was an Italian place and the garrulous old waiter nodded in recognition as I showed him the photo. He remembered Maggie from several weeks before, and was about to embark on a long discourse about the food she ate when I hissed at him, *“Did she have* *an escort?"*

Startled, the old guy smiled, said "sure," and described Eddie Engels. He went on to tell me of all the "nicea-looking bambinas" the "nicea-looking young man" brought to eat there. It was enough confirmation, but I wanted proof. I wanted it covered thoroughly from every angle, so that when I presented my case to my superiors it wouldn't leak an ounce of water.

I hit four more restaurants, all within five blocks of Eddie Engels's apartment on Horn Drive, and got three more positive identifications from waiters who recalled Eddie as an extravagant tipper who talked loudly of his racetrack winnings. They remembered Maggie Cadwallader as being quiet, clinging to Eddie and drinking a lot of rum and Cokes.

I took down the names and home addresses and phone numbers of all my witnesses and ran back to my car. It was eight thirty, which gave me, I figured, about two hours before most people would be in bed.

I drove to Hollywood and started knocking on doors. The people I spoke to weren't surprised: other officers had been around the week before asking questions. When I showed them my colored photos of the two cars, they were surprised. The other cops hadn't asked anything about that—just about "strange things," "funny stuff" that they might have seen or heard on the night of the murder. One after another they shook their heads. No one had noticed the '46 Olds or '49 Ford ragtop. I covered all of Harold Way and turned onto De Longpre, getting discouraged. Lights were starting to go off; people were going to bed.

On the corner of De Longpre and Wilton, I ran into three high school boys playing catch by the light of a streetlamp. I played it very palsy with them, even letting them look at my gun. With their confidence gained, I showed them my pictures.

"Hey!" the biggest of the three kids exclaimed. "What a sharp drop-top! Man, oh, man!"

One of his pals grabbed the photo and scrutinized it silently. "I seen a car like that. Right here. Just down the street," he said.

"When?" I asked quietly.

The kid thought, then looked to the big kid for support. "Larry," he said, "you remember last week, I snuck out and came over. Remember?"

"Yeah, I remember. It was Monday night. I had to go to—"

I interrupted, keeping my voice stern and fatherly, "And the car was red and white like the one in this picture?"

"Yeah," the kid said, "Exactly. It had a foxtail on the antenna, real sharp."

I was ecstatic. I took down their names and phone numbers and told them they were on their way to becoming heroes. The kids were somber with the gravity of their heroism. I solemnly shook hands with all three of them, then took off.

I found a pay phone on Hollywood Boulevard and got Eddie Engels's telephone number from Information. I dialed it, and let it ring fifteen times. No answer. Night owl Eddie was on the prowl.

I drove back to the Strip, turned north on Horn Drive and parked across the street from his bungalow court. I dug around in my trunk for some makeshift burglar tools and found some old college drafting stuff—including a metal T-square with thin edges that looked as if it could snap a locking mechanism. Equipped with this and a flashlight, I walked toward the darkened courtyard.

This time I knew to look for "Engels" on Number 11. It was three bungalows down, on the left-hand side. All the lights were off. I pulled open a flimsy screen door, looked in both directions, then covertly flashed my light on the inner door and studied the mechanism. It was a simple snap-bolt job, so I got out my T-square, transferred the flashlight to the crook of my left arm, wedged the metal edge between lock and doorjamb and pushed. It was hard, but I persisted, almost snapping the blade of the T-square. Finally, there was a loud metallic *ka-thack*, and the door opened.

I walked in quickly, and closed the door behind me. I ran the flashlight along the walls looking for a light switch, found one, and flipped it on, momentarily illuminating a living room tastefully furnished with Persian carpets, modern blond bentwood furniture, and, on all four walls, oil paintings of horses in racing colors.

I turned the light off, and headed for the hallway. I switched on another light and almost knocked over a telephone stand. The stand had three drawers, and I went through them hoping to find some kind of personal phone book. There was nothing—the three drawers were empty.

I flipped off the light and maneuvered my way into the bedroom. My eyes were getting accustomed to the darkness, so it was easy to pick out objects in the room—bed, dresser, bookshelves. The window was covered by heavy velvet curtains, so I decided to risk leaving a light on while I did my searching. I turned on a table lamp, lighting up a room that was strangely sedate—just a simple bed with a plaid bedspread, a bookshelf crammed with picture books on horse racing, and bullfight posters and framed prints of a beautiful palomino on the walls. There was a deep walk-in closet behind the bed, crammed with clothes. At least fifty sport coats on hangers, thirty or forty pairs of slacks, scores of dress shirts and sport shirts. The floor of the closet was lined with shoes, from somber wingtips to sporty loafers, all shined and arranged neatly. Eddie the dude. It wasn't enough. I wanted evidence pointing to Eddie the degenerate—Eddie the killer.

I went through the dresser drawers, four of them, very thoroughly and very carefully, looking for phone books, journals, photographs, anything to link Eddie Engels to Maggie Cadwallader or Leona Jensen. There was nothing. Just gold silk underwear, but that was not enough to hang a man on.

I went back into the big closet and felt inside the jacket pockets. Nothing. Finished with the bedroom, I turned out the light and went back to the living room, shining my flashlight in corners, into bookshelves, under chairs and sofas. Nothing. Nothing personal. Nothing to indicate that Eddie Engels was anything but a spiffy dresser who loved horses.

There was a liquor cabinet with one bottle each of Scotch, bourbon, gin, and brandy. There were no photographs of family or loved ones. It was a maddeningly impersonal habitat, the home of a phantom.

I went into the kitchen. It was as I expected, compact and very tidy; a breakfast nook, a sink that held no dishes, a refrigerator with nothing but a cold-water bottle inside, and a 1950 calendar tacked to the wall with no notations on any of its pages.

Which left the bathroom. Maybe old Eddie cut loose in there. Maybe the bathtub would be filled with mermaids or alligators. No such luck—the bathroom was pink tile, spotless, with a giant mirror above the sink, and a full-length mirror on the inside of the door. Eddie, the narcissist.

Above the toilet was a medicine cabinet. I opened it, expecting to find toothpaste and shaving gear, but found instead a half dozen tiny shelves holding rolled-up neckties. Eddie, the sartorially splendid, used the full-length mirror to ensure a perfect Windsor knot. I ran a hand over the collection of silk, arranged according to color and style. What a mania for order; what a mania for small perfections. Then I noticed what seemed like a strange anomaly—one silk tie, a green one, was sticking out further than the others. I poked at it with a finger, and felt something solid inside. I pulled the tie out carefully and unrolled it. Maggie Cadwallader's diamond brooch fell into my hand.

I stared at it for long moments, shocked. After a minute or so, my calm flew out the window and my mind started churning with plans. I rolled the brooch back into the tie and replaced it in the little cabinet exactly as I had found it. I turned the bathroom light off and walked through the dark apartment to the front door. I locked it behind me, checking the jamb for signs of entry. There were none.

All the lights in the courtyard were off. I stood there a few moments, savoring the wonder of the night and what I had just discovered, then walked behind the bungalows. There was a corrugated overhang that sheltered the tenants' cars. The car on the end, shiny in the moonlight, was a bright red '49 Ford with a white ragtop. A foxtail dangled from the radio antenna. I flicked it with my finger.

“You killed Maggie Cadwallader and God knows who else, you degenerate son of a bitch,” I said, “and I’m going to see that you pay.”

9

My case. My suspect. My revenge? My collar? My glory and gravy train? All these thoughts went through my head the following day as I walked my beat on sun-beaten Central Avenue.

A decision was due, and I would have to act either rationally or quixotically. I gave my options more thought, and as my tour ended I made a decision—a humbling, but safe one. I changed back into my civvies and knocked on Captain Jurgensen's door.

"Enter," he called through it. I walked in and saluted. Jurgensen dog-eared his paperback *Othello* and looked at me. "Yes, Underhill?" he said.

"Sir," I said, "I know who killed that woman who was found strangled in Hollywood last week. He may have killed others. I can't make the collar myself. I need to turn my evidence over to someone who can formalize an investigation, so I came to you."

"Perdition, catch my soul," Jurgensen said, then sighed and drew a pipe and pouch from his desk drawer. I stood at parade rest while he took his time packing the pipe and lighting it. He seemed to have forgotten I was there. I was about to clear my throat when he said, "For Christ's sake, Underhill, sit down and tell me about it."

It took me twenty minutes, by the electric clock on the captain's wall.

I covered everything, except my coupling with Maggie Cadwallader. I told him of the similarities between the two killings. I told him of my noticing the matches in Leona Jensen's apartment last February, and how that was the link that drew me to the Silver Star. I omitted my knowledge of the diamond brooch.

During the course of telling my story, I watched Jurgensen's normally stoic expression veer between curiosity, anger, and some kind of bitter amusement. When I finished he stared at me in silence. I stared back, sensing that phony contrition for the liberties I had taken wouldn't be believed. We stared at each other some more.

The captain looked very grave. He started to tamp his pipe bowl into his palm very slowly and deliberately. "Underhill," he said, "you are a supremely arrogant young man. In the course of what you arrogantly call your ‘investigation,’ you have committed infractions of departmental regulations that could end your career; you have committed two felonies that could send you to San Quentin; and implicitly you have held the detectives of two divisions and the Homicide Bureau up to ridicule—”

“Sir, I—”

“Don’t interrupt, Underhill! I am a captain and you are a patrolman, and don’t forget it.” Jurgensen’s face was very red, and there was an angry blue vein throbbing in his neck.

“Sir, I apologize.”

“Very well. I could crucify you for your arrogance, but I won’t.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Don’t thank me yet, Officer. You are a very gifted young man, but your arrogance supersedes your gifts. Arrogance cannot be tolerated in police officers; to tolerate it would be to promote anarchy. The Los Angeles Police Department is a superbly structured bureaucracy, one you have sworn allegiance to. Your actions have reviled the department. Know that, Underhill. Know that your ambition is threatening to kill you as a policeman. Do you understand me?”

I cleared my throat. “Sir, I do believe I acted rashly, and I apologize to you—and to the department—for that. But I think my motives were sound. I wanted justice.”

Jurgensen snorted and shook his head. “No, Underhill, you didn’t. I would accept that from many young officers, but not from you. Beyond self-aggrandizement, I’m not sure that even you know what you want, but it certainly isn’t justice. You laugh at the penal code of this state, and tell me you want justice? Don’t insult my intelligence.”

Jurgensen’s anger was winding down. I tried to deflect his attack. “Sir, with all due respect, what do you think of my case?”

“Your ‘case’? I think that as of this moment you have nothing but a strong suspect and an incredible gift of intuition. This man Engels is so far nothing but a gambler and a womanizer, neither of which is criminal behavior. He’s also probably a homo, which doesn’t make him a murderer. You have no hard evidence. I don’t think much of your ‘case.’ ”

“And my intuition, Captain?”

“I trust your intuition, Underhill, or I would have suspended you from duty half an hour ago.”

“And, sir?”

“And…what do you *want*, Underhill?”

“I want to be part of the investigation, and I want to go to the Detective Bureau when I pass the sergeant’s exam later this year.”

Jurgensen laughed bitterly. He reached into his desk, pulled out a scratch pad, and wrote something on it, ripping the page free and handing it to me. "This is my home address, in Glendale. Be there tonight at eight thirty. I want you to tell your story to Dudley Smith. He'll decide the course of this investigation. Now leave me alone."

When he said the words "Dudley Smith," Jurgensen's cold blue eyes had bored into me like poison darts, waiting for me to show fear or apprehension. I didn't.

"Yes, sir," I said, then got up and walked out the door without saluting.

—

Dudley Smith was a lieutenant in the homicide bureau, a fearsome personage and legendary cop who had killed five men in the line of duty. Irish-born and Los Angeles–raised, he still clung tenaciously to his high-pitched, musical brogue, which was as finely tuned as a Stradivarius. He often lectured at the academy on interrogation techniques, and I remembered how that brogue could be alternately soothing or brutal, inquisitive or dumbfounded, sympathetic or filled with pious rage.

He was over six feet tall and broad as a ceiling beam. He was an immense brownness—brown hair cut close, small brown eyes, and always dressed in a baggy brown vested suit. There was a frightening set to his face, regardless of the interrogation technique he was explaining. He was a master actor with a huge ego who was adept at changing roles at the drop of a hat, yet who always managed to impart purity of personality to the part he was currently playing.

I was at the academy when the Black Dahlia investigation was going on. Smith was in charge of rounding up all known sex criminals in Los Angeles. After finishing his lecture, applause-loving actor that he was, he told us about the kind of "human scum" with which he was dealing. He told us that he had heard things and seen things and done things in his search for the killer "of that tragic, thrill-seeking colleen, Elizabeth Short" that he hoped we, the "cream of Los Angeles manhood," about to enter "the grandest calling on God's earth" would never have to hear or see or do. It was brilliantly elliptical. Speculation on the sternness of Smith's measures was the number one topic of conversation at the academy for weeks. I asked one of my instructors, Sergeant Clark, about him.

"He's a brutal son of a bitch who gets the job done," he said.

Elizabeth Short's killer was never found—which meant that Dudley Smith was human, and fallible. I pumped myself up with logic as I drove out Los Feliz to Glendale that evening. I went over my story from all possible angles, knowing I could not betray any personal knowledge of Maggie Cadwallader. I was prepared for a master performance myself, prepared to kiss the big Irishman's ass, to butt heads with him, to run profane, run subservient, run any way but stupid with him in my effort to be part of the investigation that brought down Eddie Engels.

—

Captain Jurgensen lived in a small wood-framed house on a treeless side street off of Brand Avenue near downtown Glendale. As I walked up the steps a dog started barking and I heard Jurgensen shush him: "Friend, Colonel, friend. Now, hush." The dog whimpered and trotted over to greet me, going straight for my crotch.

Jurgensen was sitting inside the screened porch on a lawn chair. "Hello, Underhill," he said, "sit down." He pointed to the wicker armchair next to him. I sat down.

"About this afternoon, Captain—" I started to say.

Jurgensen shushed me as he had the dog. "Forget it, Fred. Enough said. As of now you are temporarily attached to the detective bureau. Lieutenant Smith will tell you about it. He'll be here in a few minutes. Would you like iced tea? Or a beer?"

"Beer would be fine, sir."

The captain brought it, in a coffee cup, just as I saw an old prewar Dodge pull up to the curb. I watched as Dudley Smith carefully locked the car, hitched up his trousers and walked across the front lawn toward us.

"Don't be scared, Fred," Jurgensen said, "he's only human."

I laughed and sipped my beer as Dudley Smith knocked loudly on the flimsy wooden frame of the porch. "Knock, knock," he said broadly in his musical, high-pitched brogue. "Who's there? Dudley Smith, so crooks beware." He laughed at his own poetry, then walked in and stuck out a huge hand to Captain Jurgensen. "Hello, John. How are you?"

"Dudley," the captain said.

Smith nodded in my direction. "And this is our brilliant young colleague, Officer Frederick Underhill?"

I got up to shake the big cop's hand, noting with satisfaction that I was two inches taller than he. "Hello, Lieutenant," I said, "it's a pleasure to meet you."

"The pleasure is entirely mine, lad. Why don't we all sit down? We have grave matters to discuss, and we should relax our bodies while we tax our brains."

Smith folded himself into the only padded chair on the porch. He stretched out his long legs and smiled charmingly at Jurgensen. "Beer, please, John, in a bottle, and please take your time getting it."

The ranking officer walked dutifully away while the big Irishman stared at me with beady brown eyes, hugely offset by his blunt red face. After a moment, he spoke.

"Officer Frederick U. Underhill, twenty-seven years old, college graduate, not a veteran. Exceedingly high marks at the academy, excellent fitness reports at Wilshire and Seventy-seventh Street. Killed two men in the line of duty. I am suitably impressed, and I don't give a damn what vigilante actions you have taken lately. John is an excitable, traditional cop. I am not. I applaud you for your actions and congratulate you on your intelligence in taking your investigation to a superior officer. Enough horseshit. Talk to me of dead women and killers. Take your time, I'm a good listener."

The little brown eyes had never left my own, and they remained on target while Dudley Smith fished in his trouser pockets for cigarettes and matches, then lit up and blew smoke at me.

I cleared my throat. "Thank you, sir. In February, I was working Wilshire Patrol. My partner and I were summoned by a distraught woman to a murder scene. The victim was a young woman named Leona Jensen. She had been strangled and stabbed to death in her apartment; the place had been ransacked. I called the dicks. They came and said it looked as if the woman had interrupted a burglar. I noticed a book of matches from the Silver Star bar on a table, but didn't think anything about it.

"Last week another woman was strangled in her apartment in Hollywood; I read about it in the papers. Her name was Margaret Cadwallader. I started thinking about the similarities between the two murders. The Hollywood dicks put this one off as a burglary killing, too, and they were basing their entire investigation on that thesis. I had an intuition about it, though. It wouldn't let me sleep. I trust my intuitions, sir, which is why my record of felony arrests is so good.

"Somehow I knew the two deaths were connected. I broke into the Cadwallader woman's apartment"—I slowed down as I got ready to drop my first outright lie—"and found a book of matches for the selfsame bar under the corner of the living room carpet." I paused for effect.

"Go on, Officer," Dudley Smith said.

"All right. Now I knew that the Cadwallader dame had gone to the Silver Star, at least once. I wangled my way onto day watch so I could go there at night, too. I had a hunch that the Jensen woman and Margaret Cadwallader had been picked up there by a lover-boy type. I enlisted the aid of the bartender, who told me about 'Eddie,' a real smooth operator who picked up a lot of women at the joint. Eddie came in the following night. The barman pointed him out to me. He tried putting the make on several women, who turned him down. He left, and I tailed him to a queer bar in West Hollywood, where he had an argument with a guy. Then I followed him to his apartment off the Strip. He stayed there all night. The next morning, I tailed him to Santa Anita racetrack. From his conversation with the man at the fifty-dollar window, I determined he was a heavy gambler who frequently brought women to the track.

"I showed a photograph of Margaret Cadwallader to the window man. He told me that Eddie's last name was Engels, and that Eddie had brought the woman to the track in June for the President's Stakes. He positively identified her. I had mixed the photo in with several others, so I know he was certain.

"Next I called R&I and got some info on Engels's record and car ownership. No record; two cars. I went to car dealers and got pictures of the models he owns, then colored them in the appropriate colors. Next I went to every nightclub on the Sunset Strip. Four people remembered seeing Eddie Engels with Margaret Cadwallader. I got their names and addresses. Then I drove to Hollywood. A high school kid remembered seeing Engels's '49 Ford convertible parked around the corner from the Cadwallader apartment on the night of the murder. He described it as having a foxtail on the radio antenna. Later that night I broke into Engels's bungalow. I found no evidence linking him to anything criminal, but I did see his '49 Ford. It had a foxtail on the aerial. That's it, Lieutenant."

I expected Dudley Smith to fix me with a stern, probing look. He didn't. He just smiled crookedly and lit another cigarette. He exhaled smoke and laughed heartily.

"Well, lad," he said, "you've got us a killer. That's for damn sure. The Cadwallader dame, a certainty. The other woman, what was her name?"

"Leona Jensen."

"Ahhh, yes. Well, there I'm not so sure. What was the cause of death, do you know?"

"The M.E. at the scene said asphyxiation."

"Ahhh, yes. Who handled it for Wilshire dicks?"

"Joe DiCenzo."

"Ahhh, yes. I know DiCenzo. Freddy, lad, what are your feelings about this degenerate Engels?"

"I think he knocked off Cadwallader and Jensen and God knows who else."

"God knows? Are you a religious man, lad?"

"No, sir, I'm not."

"Well, you should be. Ahhh, yes. Divine Providence is certainly at work in this case."

Captain Jurgensen came onto the porch holding a beer.

"Ahhh, John. Thank you," the lieutenant said. "Give us ten more minutes, will you, lad?"

The captain muttered, "Sure, Dud" and retreated again.

"I was about to say, lad," Dudley Smith went on, "that I concur wholeheartedly with you. How old are you? Twenty-seven, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't call me sir, call me Dudley."

"All right, Dudley."

"Ahhh, grand. Well, lad, I'm forty-six, and I've been a cop for half my life. I was in the O.S.S. during the war. I was a major in Europe and I came back to my sergeancy in the department, expecting to rise very fast. I caught a lot of killers, and I killed a few myself. I made lieutenant, and I expect I'll always be a lieutenant. I'm too tough and smart and valuable to be a captain and sit on my ass all day and read Shakespeare like our friend John."

Dudley Smith leaned toward me and clamped his huge right hand over my knee. He lowered his tenor voice a good three octaves, and said, "In Ireland, the brothers taught me an abiding love and respect for women. I've been married to the same woman for twenty-eight years. I've got five daughters. There's a lot of the beast in me, lad, God knows. What gentleness there is I owe to the brothers and the women I've known. I hate killers, and I hate woman killers more than I hate Satan himself. Do you share my hatred, lad?"

It was his first test, and I wanted to pass it with honors. I tightened my whole face and whispered hoarsely, "With all my heart."

Smith tightened his grip on my knee. He wanted me to show pain in acquiescence, so I winced. He released my knee, and I rubbed it gingerly. He smiled. "Ahhh, yes," he said. "Grand. He's ours, Freddy. Ours. He's claimed his last victim, God mark my words."

Smith leaned back and slouched bearlike into his chair. He picked up his bottle of beer and drained it. "Ahhh, yes. Grand. Detective Officer Underhill. Do you like the sound of that, lad?"

"I like it fine, Dudley."

"Grand. Tell me, lad, how did you feel after you gunned down those two pachucos who killed your partner?"

"I felt angry."

"Did you weep, later?"

"No."

"Ahhh, grand."

"When do we start, Dudley?"

"Tomorrow, lad. There'll be four of us. Two fine young protégés of mine from the bureau, and us. As of now, John is out. As of now, I am your commanding officer. During the war, we in the O.S.S. had a word we used to describe our activities: clandestine. Isn't that a grand word? It means 'in secret.' That's what our investigation is going to be—in secret. Just the four of us. I can get hold of anything, any file we need from within the department or any other police agency. The case is all ours, the glory all ours, the plaudits all ours, the commendations and advancements to be earned, all ours—once we get an airtight case and a confession from this monster Eddie Engels."

"And then?"

"Then we go to the grand jury, lad, and let the people of our grand Republic of California decide the fate of handsome Eddie, which, of course, will be to send the dirty son-of-a-whore to the gas chamber."

"He's as good as in the little green room right now, Dudley."

"Indeed he is, lad. Now you listen. Our command post will be at the Havana Hotel, downtown at Eighth and Olive. I've already rented us a room, number sixteen. You be there tomorrow morning at eight sharp. Wear civvies. Get a good night's sleep. Say your prayers. Thank God that you're free, white, twenty-one and a splendid young copper. You go home now. John will be miffed at not being in on this, and I want to soft-pedal his pride. Now, shoo."

I got up and stretched my legs. I stuck out my hand to Dudley Smith. "Thanks, Dudley," I said. "This means a lot to me."

Smith shook my hand firmly. "I know it does, lad. I can tell we are going to be grand friends. God bless you. When you say your prayers, send one up for old Dudley."

"I will."

Smith laughed. "No, you won't," he said, "you'll go out and find yourself some grand piece of tail and show her your badge and tell her you're the next chief of police. Ha-ha-ha! I know you, lad. Now go and leave me to placate old John."

I walked back to my car feeling touched by madness and wonder. Mad, wonderful laughter trailed after me as I drove off.

—

Mad laughter filled my sleep that night. Nagging doubts tore at me in the form of Wacky Walker and Dudley Smith twirling nightsticks and shouting obscene poetry at each other. Reuben Ramos watched, honking on his sax and offering cryptic comments like a hophead Greek chorus. Captain Bill Beckworth was there too, offering his two cents' worth—"Caution, Freddy. Improve my putting stroke and I'll make you the king of Wilshire Division. All the pussy and wonder you can stomach! I'll bring back Walker from the dead and make him a nobel laureate. Trust me!"

I woke up with a headache and the certainty that Dudley Smith was going to screw me out of all the plaudits to be earned from the Eddie Engels case. He was the ranking officer, the decision maker, the one who would file with the district attorney's office when Engels was arrested. I needed an insurance policy, and I knew exactly who to call.

I took my time dressing and eating breakfast. I fried Night Train a pound of hamburger. He wolfed it down greedily and licked the inside of his dish. I threw him a soup bone as dessert. He gnawed it while I called Information and got the number of the office of the district attorney, city of Los Angeles. It was still early. I hoped someone would be there.

I dialed. "District attorney's office," a woman's singsong voice answered.

"Good morning," I said, "may I speak to Miss Lorna Weinberg, please?"

"Your name please, sir?"

"Officer Fred Underhill."

"One moment, Officer. I'll ring."

Lorna Weinberg came on the line a moment later, sounding harried. "Hello," she said.

"Hello, Miss Weinberg. Do you remember me?"

"Yes, I do. Is this something about my father?"

"No, it's not. It's both personal and professional. I need to speak to you, as soon as possible."

"What is it?" Lorna snapped.

"I can't discuss it on the phone."

"What is this, Mr. Underhill?"

"It's something important. Something I know that you'll think is important. Can I meet you tonight?"

"All right. Briefly. How about outside city hall, the Spring Street entrance, at five o'clock? I can give you fifteen minutes."

"I'll be there."

"Good day, Officer," Lorna Weinberg said, hanging up before I could deliver the witty remark I had prepared.

It was a hot, smoggy day, and it didn't faze me in the least. I drove downtown feeling buoyant with anticipation, and parked in front of the Havana Hotel, an old, one-story red brick building with a rickety elevator in its small entrance foyer. It was 7:59 by my watch, so I leaped the stairs three at a time, knocking on the door of room 16 at exactly eight o'clock.

A stocky blond man in a short-sleeved white shirt and a shoulder holster opened it. I held out my badge to gain entrance and he nodded me inside. Dudley Smith and another man were in the middle of the dingy little room, hunched over a folding card table.

Smith looked over his shoulder and greeted me. “Freddy! Laddy! Welcome! Let me make the introductions—gentlemen, this is Officer Fred Underhill, my newest protégé. Fred, meet Sergeant Mike Breuning.” He nodded toward the stocky blond man. “And Officer Dick Carlisle.” He nodded toward the other man, a tall, thin, sallow-faced man with wire-rimmed glasses. I shook hands with my new colleagues and exchanged pleasantries with them until Dudley Smith cleared his throat loudly and called for our attention.

“Enough horseshit,” he said. “Freddy, tell Mike and Dick your story. Omit nothing. Here, stand up in back of this table like a good toastmaster. Ahhh, yes, that’s grand.”

Breuning and Carlisle pulled up chairs while I assumed my position behind the folding table. Smith sat on the bed, smoking and sipping coffee and smiling at me. It took me fifteen minutes to recount my tale. I could tell that Breuning and Carlisle were impressed. They looked to Dudley Smith for confirmation, almost doglike in their deference to the big cop.

He smiled at them. “Ahhh, yes. A real live degenerate woman-killer. Comments, lad? Questions?”

Carlisle and Breuning shook their heads.

“Freddy?” Smith asked.

“Only one, Dudley. When do we start?”

“Ha-ha-ha! Grand! We start now, lad. Now listen: here are your assignments. Mike, you will go immediately to Horn Drive. You will tail Eddie Engels. You will go with him all day and all night until he returns home to sleep. If he picks up any women, you will stay very close. Do you get my meaning, lad? This beast must claim no more victims. Freddy, you will go to Horn Drive, too. You will question people on that street about their degenerate neighbor. I want names and addresses for any eyewitnesses to violence or abuse on Engels’s part. Take the whole day on this. Dick, you go to Wilshire Station and talk to Sergeant Joe DiCenzo. Talk to him about the Leona Jensen killing. Tell Joe that I’m working on this investigation on my own time—he’ll understand. Read the reports on the caper—coroner, dicks’ log sheets, property, everything. Take notes. I’ll be doing the digging into Eddie-boy’s background myself. We’ll meet here tomorrow, same time. Now go to work and God be with you!” Dudley Smith clapped his big hands, thunderously indicating dismissal.

Breuning and Carlisle filed out the door, looking grimly determined. I was about to follow them when Dudley Smith grabbed my arm. “You call me this afternoon at the bureau, lad. About four o’clock.”

“Sure, Dudley,” I said.

Smith squeezed my arm very hard, then gently shoved me out the door.

Breuning was standing on the sidewalk, apparently waiting for me. "Since we're both going out to the Strip, I thought I could follow you," he said.

"Sure," I said. "Where's your car?"

"Around the corner." Breuning was doing a little nervous shuffle.

I could tell there was something he wanted to say. I tried to make it easy for him. "How long have you been on the job, Mike?"

"Eleven years. You?"

"Four."

"That must have been a tough nut, shooting those two Mexicans."

"I don't think about it too much."

"I was wondering. Dudley likes you, you know that?"

"I guess so. Why do you mention it?"

Breuning's stolid German face darkened. "Because I noticed the way you were looking at him. Studying him like he was kind of a crazy man. A lot of people think Dudley's nuts, but he's not. He's nuts like a fox."

"I believe you. He's just an actor, and a damn good one. He's good at firing people up. That's his gift."

"Right. He wants this guy Engels, though. Bad."

"I know. He told me. He hates woman-killers."

"It's more than that. You have to know Dudley. I know him real well. Since I was a rookie. He's still pissed off about the Dahlia. He told me the Engels case is his penance for not catching the guy who sliced her."

I gave that some thought. "He wasn't in charge of the entire investigation, Mike. The whole L.A.P.D. and sheriff's department couldn't find the killer. It wasn't Dudley's fault."

"I know, but he took it that way. He's a religious man, and he's taking the Engels thing real personal. The reason I'm bringing all this up is that Dudley wants to make you his number one man. He says you've got the stuff to go all the way in the department. That's no skin off my ass, I like being a sergeant in the bureau. But you've got to play it Dudley's way. I can tell you're not scared of him, and that's bad. If you cross him, he'll fuck you for real. That's what I wanted to tell you."

I smiled at the admonition. It increased my respect for Dudley Smith, and my respect for Mike Breuning for mentioning it. "Thanks, Mike," I said.

"You're welcome. Now let's hotfoot it over to the Strip. I'm getting itchy to start."

Mike got his car and pulled up behind me. I drove straight out Wilshire, hoping that Eddie Engels was still a late sleeper, so that Mike would have someone to tail. I turned north on La Cienega. Mike was right behind me as I turned onto the Strip ten minutes later. Horn Drive came up, and I pulled over to the curb and pointed out Engels's bungalow and Olds sedan. Mike smiled and gave me the thumbs-up sign. I waved and drove up the hill, parked the car and set out on foot to do my questioning.

—

I knocked on the doors of bungalow huts, well-tended cottages, French chateau walk-up apartments, artists' dives, and miniature Moorish castles and got a succession of blank looks, yawns, and bored shakes of the head. "Sorry, I can't help you, Officer." Eddie the phantom. This consumed five hours. At two o'clock I walked down to the diner on the corner of Horn and Sunset and ordered two cheeseburgers, French fries, a salad, and a jumbo pineapple malt. I was famished—and nervous about my meeting with Lorna Weinberg.

The man who served me at the counter looked like a jaded soda jerk out of hell. He slouched in front of me while I tore into my salad, alternately picking his teeth and his nose. We were obviously destined to converse—it was only a question of who would speak first. It was me, out of necessity. "Get me some ketchup, will you?"

"Sure, buddy," the counterman said, handing me a bottle of Heinz's and leaning over to breathe on me. "You with the sheriff's?" he asked. That was interesting.

"L.A.P.D.," I said. "You an ex-con?"

"I been clean for six years. Topped out my parole, knock wood." The guy made an elaborate show of rapping his knuckles on the counter top.

"I congratulate you," I said. "How long have you been working this joint?"

"Two years on the job. Knock wood."

"You know the locals pretty well?"

"Local yokels or regular customers?"

"Very astute. I mean people who live in the neighborhood who frequent this place."

"Oh." The man's eyes narrowed into a con-wise squint. "You got any particular locals in mind?"

"Yeah. A guy named Eddie. A handsome guy about thirty. Curly brown hair. Brown eyes. Sharp dresser. A lover-boy. Always a good-looking tomato in tow. You know him?"

The counterman's eyes remained impassive. When I finished, he nodded, almost imperceptibly. "Yeah, I think so."

I came on strong. "I'm a police officer and a big tipper. Tell me."

He looked around for prying ears. There weren't any. "Okay—you got it right. Smooth boy. Lover-boy. I should get the dames I seen that bastard with. Listen, Officer—"

I reached into my coat pocket for my photograph of Maggie Cadwallader. "Her?" I said. "This tomato?"

The counterman scrutinized the photo and shook his head. "Naw, lover-boy would never be seen with a beast like this. Ugh. What a—"

"Shut up. Tell me about the women you have seen him with."

Chastened, he went on, his voice low: "Just movie star material. Real beauts. Class-A poontang hangin' on to him like there's no tomorrow."

"Do you know any of these women? Are any of them regular customers?"

"Naw, I think he just brings 'em in for a quick burger, 'cause he lives around here."

"How do you know that?"

"That's kinda funny. Once he was in here with this good-lookin' blond. She was teasin' him about somethin'. He didn't like it. She had her hand on the counter top. Eddie started squeezin' it, real hard. The dame had tears in her eyes. She was hurtin' bad. She said, 'Not now, baby. You can give it to me good at the apartment, but not here. We'll be back there in a minute. Please, baby.' She looked scared, but kind of excited, too, you know?"

"When was this?" I asked.

"I dunno. Months ago."

"Have you seen this woman again, with or without Eddie?"

"I don't think so."

"Did you see Eddie exhibit violence toward any other women?"

"Naw. But I wouldn't call that violence."

"Shut up." I handed him a slip of paper from my notebook. "Write down your name and address," I said.

The ex-con did it, his jaw quavering slightly. "Look, Officer…" he started.

"Don't worry," I said, smiling. "You're in no trouble. Just keep it zipped about what we talked about. Capische?"

"Yeah."

"Good." I put the slip of paper into my pocket and dropped a five-spot on the counter. "Keep the change," I said.

—

I found a pay phone in the parking lot and called Dudley Smith downtown. It took some moments for him to come onto the line and I waited in the sweltering booth, lost in thought, the receiver jammed to my ear. Smith's loud high-pitched brogue suddenly hit me.

"Freddy, lad! How nice to hear from you!"

I recovered fast, speaking calmly: "Good news, Dudley. Our boy was seen at a local diner with a woman some months ago. The counterman said he abused her physically and she enjoyed it. I got a statement from him." Dudley Smith seemed to be considering this—he was silent for the better part of a minute. In my eagerness, I broke the silence: "I think he's a sex sadist, Dudley."

"Ahhh, yes. Well, lad, I think our pal is a lot of things. I've got some interesting stuff, too. Now, Freddy, tomorrow you will be the straight man to greatness. You pick me up at my house at nine a.m., 2341 Kelton Avenue, Westwood. Wear a light-colored suit, and be prepared to learn. Have you got that?"

"Yes."

"Ahhh…grand. Was there anything else you wished to tell me, lad?"

"No."

"Grand. Then I'll see you tomorrow."

"Goodbye, Dudley."

—

I drove home and showered and changed clothes. I shaved for the second time that day. I drove downtown fighting a tingling anticipation that was half nerves and half a thigh-warming sexual flush. I parked in the lot for city employees on Temple Street, showing the attendant my badge in lieu of a parking sticker. I combed my hair several times, checking in my rearview mirror to see that the part was straight.

At exactly five o'clock, I was stationed directly in front of the Spring Street entrance to city hall, waiting for Lorna Weinberg.

Lorna came out the broad glass doors a few minutes later, limping with one foot kicked out at almost a right angle. She guided her way with a thick, rubber-tipped black wood cane. She carried a briefcase in her left hand, and had an abstracted look on her face. When she saw me she frowned.

"Hello, Miss Weinberg," I said.

"Mr. Underhill," she returned. She moved her cane to her left hand and offered me her right. We shook, the handshake an implicit reminder that this was a civil meeting of two professional people.

I said, "Thank you for agreeing to see me. I know you're a busy woman."

Lorna nodded brusquely and shifted her weight to her good leg. "And you're a busy man. We should find a place to go and talk. I'm very curious to hear what you have to say." Catching herself being almost friendly, she added, "I trust you wouldn't waste my time." When I didn't acknowledge that, she asked, "Would you?"

I gave Lorna Weinberg my widest, most innocent smile. "Maybe. So much for the amenities. Do you eat dinner?"

Lorna frowned again. "Yes, Officer, I do. Do you?"

"Yeah. Every night. An old childhood habit. You know any decent places around here?"

"Not that I can walk to."

"If your bum leg acts up we can rest or I can carry you. Or we can drive somewhere."

Lorna winced against my comments, curling her lip reflexively. "We can drive," she said, "in my car."

I was more than willing to concede the point.

We walked the half block to Temple very slowly, saying very little. Lorna limped steadily, easily throwing the dead leg forward in almost perfect rhythmic grace. If she was in pain she didn't show it, only her bare arm holding the cane betrayed any sign of tension.

I tried to think of something to say, but all my one-liners seemed fatuous or abrasive. As we crossed the street I grabbed her elbow to steady her and she withdrew it angrily.

"Don't," she snapped, "I can manage myself."

"I'm sure you can," I said.

The car was a late model Packard with an automatic shift and a specially constructed stirrup to hold Lorna's bad leg. Without consulting me, she drove north to Chinatown. She was a good, efficient driver, maneuvering the big car deftly through the heavy evening traffic on North Broadway. Squeezing effortlessly into a tight parking space and setting the hand brake with a flourish, Lorna turned to face me. "Is Chinese all right?" she asked.

—

The restaurant interior was a marvel of papier-mâché architecture. All four walls were shaped like mountain ranges, with cascading waterfalls dropping into a trough filled with giant goldfish. The room was bathed in a bluish-green light that imparted an underwater effect.

An obsequious waiter guided us to a booth at the back and handed us menus. Lorna made a great show of studying hers while I formulated my thoughts into a useful brevity. I stared at her as she perused her menu. Her face was very strong and very beautiful.

She looked up from her menu and caught my gaze. “Aren’t you going to eat?” she asked.

“Maybe,” I said. “If I do, I know what I’ll have.”

“Are you that rigid? Don’t you like to try new things?”

“Lately, yes. Which is why I’m here.”

“Is that a double-entendre, Officer?”

“It’s a cross between a proposition and a statement of purpose.”

“Is *that* a double-entendre?”

“It’s a cross between a paradox and a logical fallacy.”

“And the part I—”

I interrupted, “The paradox is murder, counselor, and the fact that I intend to profit from the capture of the murderer. The logical fallacy is that—well, in part I’m here because you are a very handsome and interesting woman.” Lorna opened her mouth to protest, but I raised my voice to drown her out. “Pardon my language, but, as a colleague of mine says, ‘Enough horseshit.’ Let’s eat, then I’ll tell you about it.”

Lorna glowered at me, speechless. I could tell she was mustering her resources for a wicked return salvo. Fortunately for me, our waiter glided up silently and said, “You order now?”

Before Lorna could start again I took a sip of green tea and began the story of Freddy Underhill, rogue cop, and his incredible intuition and persistence. She started to question me several times, but I just shook my head and continued. She changed expressions only once during my monologue, when I mentioned the name of Dudley Smith. Then her rapt look changed to one of anger. By the time I finished, our food had come. Lorna looked from me to her plate, then pushed it away and made a face.

“I can’t eat now,” she said. “Not after what you’ve told me.”

“Do you believe me?”

“Yes. It’s circumstantial, but it fits. What exactly do you want from me?”

“When the case is airtight, I want to file my depositions with you personally. The truth: Smith is going to try to screw me out of this; I can tell. I don’t trust the bastard. Frankly, I want the glory. Are you still preparing cases for the grand jury?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Then as soon as I have enough evidence, or as soon as we arrest Engels, I’ll come to you. You prepare the case and the grand jury will indict Engels.”

“And then, Officer?” Lorna asked sarcastically.

“And then we both have the satisfaction of knowing Eddie Engels is on his way to the gas chamber. Your career will be aided, and I’ll go to the detective bureau." Lorna was morosely silent. I tried to cheer her up. "Which will make your job easier. I'll be filing lots of cases with you—but only ones where I'm sure my arrestee is guilty." I smiled.

"Dudley Smith is going to crucify you for this," Lorna said.

"No, he isn't. I'll be too big. The case will make the papers. I'll have too much support—from the press, plus from within the department. I'll be untouchable."

Lorna poked her chopsticks at her fried rice.

"Will you help me?" I asked.

"Yes," she said. "It's my job, my duty."

"Good. Thank you."

"You're very, very cocky."

"I'm very, very good."

"I don't doubt it. My father talks of you often. He misses you. He told me you don't play golf anymore."

"I gave it up last winter, shortly after I met you."

"Why?"

"My best friend got killed, and I killed two men. Golf didn't seem important anymore."

"I read about it in the papers. My sister was very upset. It bothered me, too. I wondered how you were affected. Now I can tell that you weren't, really. You were cocky then and you're more cocky now. You're a hard case."

"No, I'm not. I'm a nice guy and I'm flattered that you thought of me."

"Don't be. It was purely professional."

"Yeah, well purely unprofessionally, I've been thinking about you ever since we met. Nice, warm, unprofessional thoughts."

Lorna didn't answer—she just blushed. It was a purely feminine, unprofessional blush.

"Are you finished eating?" I asked.

"Yes," Lorna said softly.

"Then let's leave."

—

Ten minutes later we were back at the parking lot on Temple Street. I got out of the car and walked around to the driver's side.

"Please smile before we say good night, Lorna," I said.

Lorna grudgingly obliged, parting her lips and gritting her teeth.

I laughed. "Not bad for a neophyte. Will you have dinner with me tomorrow night? I know a place in Malibu. We can take a seaside drive."

"I don't think so."

"That's right, don't think."

"Look, Mr.—"

"Call me Freddy."

"Look, Freddy, I…" Lorna's voice and resistance trailed off, and she grimaced and smiled again, unsolicited.

"Good," I said buoyantly. "Silence implies consent. I'll meet you in front of city hall at six o'clock."

Lorna stared at the steering wheel, unwilling to meet my eyes. I leaned into the car window and gently turned her head to face me, then kissed her softly on her closed mouth. Her hand came off the wheel and closed tightly on my arm. I broke the kiss.

"Don't think, Lorna. Tomorrow at six."

I ran off in the direction of my car before she could answer.

10

Dudley Smith and his female brood lived in a modest, spacious house a mile south of Westwood Village. I pulled up in front of it with five minutes to spare, wearing my only light-colored suit, which was somewhat wrinkled and soiled. I rang the doorbell and heard myself announced by several girlish giggles:

"Daddy, he's here!"

"Daddy, your policeman is here!"

"Daddy, visitor, Daddy!"

Curtains were pulled back in the picture window adjoining the doorway. A freckle-faced little girl was staring at me. She stared until I grinned and waved to her. Then she stuck out her tongue and retreated.

Dudley Smith threw open the door a moment later. As usual, he was wearing a brown vested wool suit. In September. The freckle-faced little girl was atop his shoulders, in a pink cotton dress. She giggled down at me.

"Freddy, lad, welcome," Dudley said, bending over and lowering the little girl to floor level. "Bridget, darling, this grand-looking young gentleman is Officer Fred Underhill. Say hello to Officer Fred, darling."

"Hello, Officer Fred," Bridget said, and curtsied.

"Hello, fair Bridget." I said, bowing.

Dudley was laughing loudly. It almost seemed genuine. "Oh, lad, you're a heartbreaker, you are. Bridget, get your sisters. They'll be wanting to meet the young gentleman."

Bridget scampered off. I felt the momentary loss I sometimes do around big families, then pushed it aside. Dudley seemed to notice my slight change in mood. "A family is something to cherish, lad. You'll have yours in time, I expect."

"Maybe," I said, glancing around at the warmly appointed living room. "Why the light-colored suit, Dudley?"

"Symbolism, lad. You'll see. Let's not talk about it here. You'll find out soon enough."

Bridget returned with her sisters in tow, all four of them. The girls ranged in age from six to about fourteen. They all wore identical pink cotton dresses and they all looked like soft, pretty versions of Dudley. The Smith girls lined up behind Bridget, the youngest.

Dudley Smith announced proudly, “My daughters, Fred. Bridget, Mary, Margaret, Maureen, and Maidred.”

The girls all curtsied and giggled. I bowed exaggeratedly.

Dudley threw a rough arm around my shoulders. “You mark my words, lassies, this young man will be chief of police someday.” He tightened his grip and my shoulder started to numb. “Now, say goodbye to your old dad and Officer Fred, and wake up your mother, she’s slept long enough.”

“Bye, Daddy. Bye, Officer Fred.”

“Bye-bye, Mr. Officer.”

“Bye-bye.”

The girls all rushed to their father and hugged at his legs and pulled his suit coat. He blew them kisses and shooed them gently inside as he shut the door behind us. Walking across the lawn to my car, Dudley Smith said matter-of-factly, “Now do you know why I hate woman-killers worse than Satan, lad?”

—

“Drive, lad, and listen,” Dudley was saying. “Yesterday I sent out some queries on handsome Eddie. Edward Thomas Engels, born April 19, 1919, Seattle, Washington. No criminal record, I checked with the feds. Navy service in the war, ’42 to ’46. Good record. Honorable discharge. Our friend was a pharmacist’s mate. I called the L.A. Credit Bureau. He financed two cars with a finance company, and they checked him out. He listed two credit references. That’s who we’re going to see now, lad, known intimates of handsome Eddie.”

We pulled up to the light at Pico and Bundy. I looked to Dudley for some clue to our destination.

“Venice, lad,” he said. “California, not Italy. Keep driving due west.”

“Why the light suit, Dudley?” I tried again.

“Symbolism, lad. We’re going to play good guy–bad guy. This fellow we’re going to see, Lawrence Brubaker, is an old chum of handsome Eddie’s. He owns a bar in Venice. A queer joint. He’s a known homo with a lifetime of lewd conduct arrests. A surefire degenerate. We’ll play with him like an accordion, lad. I’ll browbeat him, you come to his rescue. Just follow my lead, Freddy lad. I trust your instincts.”

I turned left on Lincoln then right on Venice Boulevard, headed for the beach and my first real interrogation. Dudley Smith smoked and stared out the window in abstracted silence. “Pull up to the curb at Windward and Main,” he said finally as we came in view of the ocean. “We’ll walk to the bar, give us time to talk.”

I pulled up and parked in the lot of an American Legion meeting hall, got out, stretched my legs and gulped in the bracing sea air. Dudley got out and clamped me on the back.

“Now listen, lad. I’ve been checking the files for unsolved murders of women that fit handsome Eddie’s M.O. I found three, lad, all choke jobs, as far back as March 1948. One was found three blocks from here, strangled and beaten to death in an alley off Twenty-seventh and Pacific. She was twenty-two, lad. Keep that in mind when we brace this degenerate Brubaker.”

Dudley Smith smiled slowly, a blank-faced, emotionless carnivore smile, and I knew that this was the real man, devoid of all his actor’s conceit. I nodded. “Right, partner,” I said, feeling myself go cold all over.

—

Larry’s Little Log Cabin was a block from the beach, a pink stucco building with phony redwood swinging doors and a sign over them posting its hours—6:00 a.m. to 2:00 a.m., the maximum allowed by law.

Dudley nudged me as we entered. “It’s only a queer joint at night, lad. In the daytime it’s strictly a hangout for local riffraff. Follow my lead, lad, and don’t upset the locals.”

The room was very narrow, and very dimly lit. There were hunting scenes on the walls and sawdust on the floor. Dudley nudged me again. “Brubaker changes the decor at night, lad, muscle-boy paintings all over the walls. A sergeant from Venice Vice told me.”

There were a half dozen elderly juiceheads sitting at the log-shaped bar, slopping up brew. They looked dejected and meditative at the same time. The bartender was dozing behind the counter. He looked like countermen everywhere—jaded even in sleep. Dudley walked over to the bar and slammed two huge hands down on the wooden surface. The bar reverberated and the early morning drinkers snapped out of their reverie. The bartender’s head jerked back abruptly and he started to stutter: “Y-y-yess, s-s-s-sir?”

“Good morning!” Dudley bellowed musically. “Could you direct me to the proprietor of this fine establishment, Mr. Lawrence Brubaker?”

The barkeep began a stuttering sentence, then thought better of it and pointed to a doorway at the back of the bar. Dudley bowed to the bartender, then propelled me before him in that direction, whispering, “We’re cop antagonists, lad. I’m the pragmatist, you’re the idealist. Brubaker’s a homo and you’re a fine-looking young man. He’ll go for you. If I have to get rough with him, you touch him gently. We have to go about this in a roundabout way. We can't let him know this is a murder investigation."

I nodded my head and twisted free of Dudley's grasp. I felt myself getting very keyed up.

Dudley knocked softly on the door and spoke in an effete American voice, the last syllables strained and upward intoned. "Larry, open up, baby!" A moment later the door was opened by an almost totally bald, blue-eyed, very skinny mulatto who stood there staring at us for a brief instant before cowering backward almost reflexively.

"Knock, knock," Dudley bellowed in his brogue. "Who's there? Dudley Smith, so queers beware. Ha-ha-ha! Police officers, Brubaker, here to assure our constituency that we are on the job, ever vigilant!"

Lawrence Brubaker stood in the middle of the office, his thin body trembling.

"What's the matter, man?!" Dudley screamed. "Have you nothing to say?"

I took my cue. "Leave the gentleman alone, Dud. He's no queer, he's a property owner." I slapped Dudley on the back, hard. "I think that Vice sergeant had it wrong. This is no homo hangout, is it, Mr. Brubaker?"

"I don't ask my customers for their sexual preferences, Officer," Brubaker said. His voice was light.

"Well put. Why should you?" I said. "I'm Detective Underhill and this is my partner Detective Smith." I clapped Dudley's broad back again, this time even harder. Dudley winced, but his brown eyes twinkled at me in silent conspiracy. I pointed to a sofa at the back of the little office. "Let's all sit down, shall we?"

Brubaker shrugged his frail shoulders and took the chair facing the sofa, while Dudley sat on his desk, dangling one leg over the edge and banging his heel against the wastebasket. I sat on the couch and stretched out my long legs until they were almost touching Brubaker's feet.

"How long have you owned this bar, Mr. Brubaker?" I asked, taking out a pen and note pad.

"Since 1946," he said sullenly, his eyes moving from Dudley to me.

"I see," I went on. "Mr. Brubaker, we've had numerous complaints about your bar being used as a pickup place for bookmakers. Plainclothes officers have told us this is a hangout for known gamblers."

"And a homo den of iniquity!" Dudley bellowed. "What was the name of that flashy-dressing gambler we rousted, Freddy?"

"Eddie Engels, wasn't it?" I asked innocently.

"That's the pervert!" Dudley exclaimed. "He was taking bets at every queer joint in Hollywood."

Brubaker's eyes went alive with recognition when I mentioned Engels's name, but no more. He was holding his ground stoically.

"Do you know Eddie Engels, Mr. Brubaker?" I asked.

"Yes, I know Eddie."

"Does he frequent your bar?"

"Not really, not for a while."

"But he did in the past?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"The first few years I owned the Cabin."

"Why did he quit coming here?"

"I don't know. He moved out of the area. He broke up with the woman he was living with. She used to come here frequently, and when they broke up Eddie stopped coming around."

"Eddie Engels used to live here in Venice?" I asked mildly.

"Yes, he and Janet lived in a house near the canals, around Twenty-ninth and Pacific."

I let my breath out slowly. "When was this?"

"The late forties. From sometime in '47 to early '49, as I recall. Why all this interest in Eddie?" Brubaker inched his feet closer to my outstretched legs so that they touched my ankles. I felt a queasy sort of revulsion come up, but I didn't move.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Dudley swivel his neck. "Enough horseshit!" he bellowed. "Brubaker, are you and Eddie Engels lovers?"

"What the world, are you—" Brubaker exclaimed.

"Shut up, you goddamned degenerate! Yes or no?"

"I don't have to—"

"The hell you say. This is an official police investigation, and you will answer our questions!"

Dudley got up and advanced toward Brubaker, who fell over in his chair, got up and backed himself into the wall, trembling.

I came between them as Dudley closed his hands into fists. "Easy, Dud," I said, pushing him gently at the shoulders. "Mr. Brubaker is cooperating, and we're investigating bookmaking, not homosexuality."

"The hell you say, Freddy, I want to get a handle on this degenerate Engels. I want to know what makes him tick."

I sighed, and released Dudley. Then I sighed again. I took Brubaker by the arm and led him to the couch. He sat down and I sat down beside him, letting our knees touch lightly. “Mr. Brubaker, I apologize for my partner, but he has a point. Could you tell us about your association with Eddie Engels?”

Brubaker nodded assent. “Eddie and I go back to the war. We were stationed together down at Long Beach. We became friends. We went to the races together. We stayed friends after the war. Eddie is a very popular guy at the racetrack, and he brought lots of people here to the Cabin. Lots of beautiful women, gay and straight. I introduced him to Janet, Janet Valupeyk, and they moved in together, here in Venice. He still comes by here once in a while, but not so much since he broke it off with Janet. We’re still friends. That’s about it.”

“And he likes boys, right?” Dudley hissed.

“That’s none of my business, Officer.”

“You tell me, Brubaker, now!”

“He’s a switch-hitter,” Brubaker said, and stared into his lap, ashamed at divulging that intimacy. Dudley snorted in triumph and cracked his knuckles.

“What does Eddie do for a living, Mr. Brubaker?” I asked gently.

“He gambles. He gambles big and he usually wins. He’s a winner.”

Dudley caught my eye and nodded toward the door. Brubaker continued to stare downward.

“Thank you for your cooperation, Mr. Brubaker. You’ve been very helpful. Good day.” I got up from the sofa to leave.

Dudley got in a parting shot: “You don’t breathe a word of this to a soul; you got that, you scum?”

Brubaker moved his head in acquiescence. I gave his shoulder a gentle squeeze as I followed Dudley out the door.

—

Walking back to my car, Dudley let out a big whoop. “Freddy, lad, you were brilliant! As was I, of course. And we got solid evidence—handsome Eddie was living two blocks away when that tragic young woman was croaked in ’48. Just think, lad!”

“Yeah. Are we going to put someone on that?”

“We can’t, lad. Mike and Dick are tailing Engels twenty-four hours a day. There’s just the four of us on this investigation, and besides, the trail’s too cold—three and a half years cold. But don’t worry, lad. When we pop Eddie for Margaret Cadwallader, he’ll confess to all his sins, don’t you fear.”

“Where to now?”

“This Janet Valupeyk bimbo. She lives in the Valley. She was the other credit reference for handsome Eddie. We can mix business with pleasure, lad; I know a great place on Ventura Boulevard—corned beef that melts in your mouth. I’m buying, lad, in honor of your stellar performance.”

With our guts full of corned beef and cabbage, Dudley and I drove to Janet Valupeyk’s house in Sherman Oaks.

“Let’s just hope old queer Larry didn’t call her ahead. Kid gloves with this one, lad,” he said, pointing at the large, white, one-story ranch-style house. “She’s obviously got dough and she’s got no record at all. It’s no crime being charmed by a lounge lizard like charming Eddie.”

We knocked and a handsome, full-bodied woman in her late thirties threw open the door. She was blurry eyed and wearing a wrinkled yellow summer dress.

“Yes?” she said, slurring slightly.

“We’re police officers, ma’am,” Dudley said, showing her his badge. “I’m Lieutenant Smith, this is Officer Underhill.”

The woman nodded at us, her eyes not quite focusing. “Yes?” She hesitated, then said, “Come in…please.”

We took seats uninvited, in the large air-conditioned living room. The woman plopped down in a comfortable armchair, looked at us and seemed to draw on hidden resources in an effort to correctly modulate her voice: “I’m Janet Valupeyk,” she said. “How can I help you?”

“By answering a few questions,” Dudley said, smiling. “This is an absolutely charming home, by the way. Are you an interior decorator?”

“No, I sell real estate. What *is* it?”

“Ahhh, yes. Ma’am, do you know a man named Eddie Engels?”

Janet Valupeyk gave a little tremor, cleared her throat and said calmly, “Yes, I knew Eddie. Why?”

“Ahhh, yes. You said ‘knew.’ You haven’t seen him recently, then?”

“No, I haven’t. Why?” Her voice was steady, but her composure seemed to be faltering.

“Miss Valupeyk, are you all right?” I asked.

“Shut up,” Dudley snapped.

I went on, “Miss Valupeyk, the purpose of our—”

“I said, shut up!” Dudley roared, his high-pitched brogue almost breaking.

Janet Valupeyk looked like she was about to break into tears.

Dudley whispered, “Wait for me in the car. I won’t be long.”

I walked outside and waited, sitting on the hood of my car and wondering what I had done to irk Dudley.

He came out half an hour later. His tone was conciliatory, but firm; his voice very low and patient, as if explaining something to an idiot child. “Lad, when I tell you to shut up, do it. Follow my lead. I had to play that woman very slowly. She was on dope, lad, and too confused to follow the questions of two men."

"All right, Dudley," I said, letting the slightest edge of pride go into my voice. "It won't happen again."

"Good, lad. I got more confirmation, lad. She lived with handsome Eddie for two years. She paid the bills for that no-good gigolo. He used to beat her up. Once he tried to choke her, but came to his senses. He's a longtime cunthound, lad. He used to pick up girls even when he was living with lonely Janet. She was in love with him, lad, and he treated her like dirt. He bought whores and paid them to stand abuse. And he's queer, lad. Queer as a three-dollar bill. Boys are his passion, and women his victims."

I was amazed. "How did you get that out of her?"

Dudley laughed. "When I realized she was on dope, rather than booze, I checked out her medicine cabinet. There was a doctor's prescription bottle of codeine pills. A hophead, lad, but a legal one. So I played on her fear of losing that prescription, and it all came out: Eddie jilted her for some muscle boy. She loves Eddie and she hates him and she loves codeine most of all. A tragedy, lad."

Without being told, I took the long way back to downtown L.A. Laurel Canyon Boulevard, with its rustic, twisting streets would give me plenty of time to probe the man who was growing before my eyes in several different directions.

Dudley Smith was a wonder broker, but a brutal one, and I felt a very strange ambivalence about him. He was too sharp for elliptical games, so I came right out with it: "Tell me about the Dahlia," I said.

Dudley feigned surprise. "The Dahlia? What Dahlia?"

"Very funny. *The* Dahlia."

"Oh. Ahhh, yes. The *Dahlia.* What precisely was it you wanted to know, lad?"

"How far you had to go in your investigation, what you saw, what you had to do." I turned to give Dudley a look that I hope conveyed equal parts interest and tight-lipped allegiance. He smiled demonically and I felt another little chill go through me.

"Watch the road, lad, and I'll tell you. You've heard tales, have you?"

"Not really."

"Then hear one now, from the horse's mouth: I have seen many, many crimes on women, lad, and the crime on Elizabeth Short exceeded them all by a country mile—the atrocities committed on her defied even Satan's logic. She was systematically tortured for days, and then sawed in half while she was still alive."

"Jesus Christ," I said.

"Jesus Christ, indeed, lad. The investigation was three weeks old when I was called in. I was given a special assignment: check out all the psycho confessors that were being held without bail as material witnesses; the ones the dicks thought could actually have done it. There were thirty of them, lad, and they were the scum of the earth—degenerate mother-haters and baby-rapers and animal-fuckers. I eliminated twenty-two of them right away. Breaking an arm here and a jaw there, I confronted them with intimate facts about lovely Beth's wounds. I gauged their reactions as I hit them and made them fear me more than Satan himself. None of them did it; they were guilty, filthy degenerates who wanted to be punished, and I obliged them. But none of them were guilty of the crime against lovely Beth."

Dudley paused dramatically and stretched, waiting for me to ask him to continue.

I obliged: "And the other eight?"

"Ahhh, yes. My hard suspects; the ones whose reactions old Dudley wasn't quite astute enough to gauge. Well, lad, I was astute enough to know that those eight had one thing in common: they were stark raving insane, slobbering, frothing-at-the-mouth lunatics capable of anything, which made them rather difficult to deal with. I was sure their insanity was of such an intensity that they could withstand any degree of physical duress. Besides, they thought they actually *had* croaked lovely Beth; they'd confessed to it, hadn't they?

"The dicks I'd talked to told me they figured the killer had hung lovely Beth from a ceiling beam; there were rope burns on her ankles. That got me to thinking. I needed to shock these degenerate lunatics. I needed to break through their insanity. First I rented a friend's warehouse. A big, grand, deserted place it was. Then I procured a fine-looking young female stiff from a pathologist at the morgue who owed old Dudley a favor. A big one, lad—old Dudley looked the other way for this fellow, and he belonged to old Dudley for life.

"Dick Carlisle and I snuck the stiff over to the warehouse late one night. I dyed her hair jet black, like the Dahlia's. I stripped her nude, and tied her ankles with a rope, and Dick and I hoisted her up feet first and hung her from a low ceiling beam. Then Dick went and got our eight degenerates from the Hall of Justice jail. We let them view her, one at a time, lad, with appropriate props. One scum was a knife man; he had scores of arrests for knife fighting. I handed him a butcher knife and made him slice the corpse. He could hardly do it. He didn't have it in him. Another filth was a child molester, recently paroled from Atascadero. His M.O. was asking little girls if he could kiss their private parts. I made him kiss the dead girl's private parts, smell that dead sex flesh up close. He couldn't do it. And on and on. I was looking for a reaction so vile, so unspeakable that I would *know* that this was the scum that killed Beth Short."

I was stunned. Speechless. I felt my hands gripping the steering wheel so hard that I thought I would push it through the front of the car. My voice was breaking when I finally got it out: "And?"

"And, lad, I kept them there through the night, making them look at the corpse. I hit them, and Dick hit them, and we made them kiss the dead girl and fondle her while we questioned them."

"And?"

"And, lad, none of them killed lovely Beth."

"Jesus Christ," I said.

"Ahhh, yes. Jesus Christ. I didn't get the fiend who killed the Dahlia, lad. I know in my heart of hearts that no one ever will. I took the young dead woman back to the morgue to be cremated. She was a lonely Jane Doe, who unknowingly served justice by her death. I went to confession the next morning. I told the father what I had done and asked for absolution. I got it. Then I went home and prayed to God and to Jesus and to the Blessed Virgin to let me have the strength to do it again and again, if I had to, in the name of justice and the church."

We were coming down into Hollywood. I pulled over to the curb at Crescent Heights and Sunset. I stared at Dudley's florid, demonic face. He stared back.

"And, lad?" he said, mimicking my tone.

"And what, Dudley?" I managed to get out, my voice steady.

"And do you think Dudley's a lunatic, lad?"

"No, I think you're a master actor."

"Ha-ha-ha! Well said. Is 'actor' a euphemism for 'madman,' lad?"

"No, I just think sometimes you're not sure what role you're playing."

Tiny brown predator eyes bored into me. "Lad, all my roles are in the name of justice and all my roles are me. Don't you forget that."

"Sure, Dudley."

"And, lad, don't think I don't know you. Don't think I don't know how smart you think you are. Don't think I didn't notice how you relished giving me guff in front of Brubaker. Don't think I don't know what a son of a bitch you think I am. Ha-ha-ha! Enough sorrow and contention, lad. Drive me downtown and take the rest of the day off."

I dropped Dudley downtown in front of Central Division headquarters on Los Angeles Street. He stuck his big hand out and we shook. "Tomorrow, lad. Eight a.m. at the hotel. We'll go over our evidence and decide when we'll snatch handsome Eddie."

"Right, Dudley."

He squeezed my hand until I rewarded him with a wince, then he winked and left me to contemplate madness and salvation.

—

I had over four hours to kill before my date with Lorna. I drove home and wrote out a detailed report on my involvement in the Margaret Cadwallader case. I put it in a large manila envelope and sealed it shut. I fed Night Train, changed clothes, and shaved again.

On my way downtown I stopped at a florist's shop, where I bought Lorna a dozen long-stemmed red roses. Somehow they made me think of the dead girl whose eternal sleep Dudley Smith had so viciously interrupted. I started to get a little scared, but the thought of Lorna kiboshed my fear and turned it into some strange symbioses of hope and the odd amenities of justice.

I waited impatiently, red roses in hand, outside the Spring Street entrance to city hall until six thirty.

Lorna was standing me up. I jogged over to the parking lot on Temple. Her car was in its space. Angry, I walked back to city hall and entered. I checked out the directory in the vestibule: the office of the district attorney occupied two whole floors. Nervously, I took the elevator, although I wanted to run the nine flights of stairs. I walked down the deserted ninth-floor corridors, poking my head in open doorways, checking empty conference rooms. I even ducked my head into the ladies' can. Nothing.

I heard the clack-clacking of a typewriter in the distance. I walked down the hallway to a glass door with "Grand Jury Investigations" lettered on it in flat black paint. I knocked softly.

"Who is it?" Lorna's voice called testily.

I disguised my voice: "Telegram, ma'am."

"Shit," I heard her mutter. "It's open."

I pushed in the door. Lorna looked up from her typewriter, noticed me and jumped toward the door in an attempt to block my entrance. I sidestepped her, and she crashed to the floor.

"Shit. Oh, shit. Oh, God!" she said, pushing herself up into a sitting position against the wall. "What the hell are you doing with me?"

"Stalking your heart," I said, tossing the roses onto her desk. "Here, let me help you up."

I squatted down and grabbed Lorna under her arms and gently lifted her to her feet. She made feeble motions toward pushing me away, but her heart wasn't in it. I embraced her tightly and she didn't resist.

“We had a date, remember?” I whispered into her soft brown hair.

“I remember.”

“Are you ready to go?”

“I don’t think so.”

“I told you last night, don’t think.”

Lorna disengaged herself. “Don’t patronize me, Underhill,” she hissed. “I don’t know what you want, but I know you underestimate me. I’ve been around. I’m thirty-one years old. I’ve tried promiscuity and I’ve tried true love, and they’re like my dead leg: they don’t work. I don’t need a charity lover. I don’t need a deformity-lover. I don’t need compassion—and above all, I don’t need a cop.”

“But you need me.”

“No, I don’t!” She raised her hand to slap me.

“Do it, counselor,” I said. “Then I’ll file on you for a 647-f, assault on a police officer. You’ll have to investigate it yourself and then be in the incongruous position of being defendant, investigator, and defense attorney all at once. So go ahead.”

Lorna lowered her hand and started to laugh.

“Good,” I said. “I drop all charges and grant parole.”

“In whose custody?”

“In mine.”

“Under what conditions?”

“For starters, that you accept my flowers and have dinner with me tonight.”

“And then?”

“That will depend on your probation reports.”

Lorna laughed again. “Will I get time off for good behavior?”

“No,” I said, “I think it’s going to be a life sentence.”

“You’re out of your bailiwick, Officer, as you once said to me.”

“I’m above the law, counselor, as *you* once said to me.”

“Touché, Freddy.”

“A standstill, Lorna. Dinner?”

“All right. The flowers are lovely. Let me put them in water, then we can go.”

We headed for the beach and the Malibu Rendezvous, a classy seaside eatery I had catalogued in my mind since the “old days” when I dreamed of the “ultimate” woman. Now, years later, I was driving there, an adult, a policeman, with a crippled Jewish attorney sitting beside me blowing smoke rings and casting furtive glances at me as I drove.

"What are you thinking?" I asked.

"You told me not to think, remember?"

"I retract it."

"All right. I was thinking that you're too good looking. It's disarming and it probably makes people underestimate you. There's a side to you that could take advantage of that underestimation very easily."

"That's very perceptive. What else were you thinking?"

"That you're too good to be a cop. No—don't interrupt, I didn't mean it quite that way; I'm glad you're a cop. Eddie Engels would be free to kill with impunity if you weren't. It's just that you could be anything you want, literally. I was also thinking that I don't want to be fawned over in a fancy restaurant; I don't want to go clumping through there getting a lot of pitying looks."

"Then why don't we eat on the beach? I'll have the restaurant fix us up with a picnic basket and a bottle of wine."

Lorna smiled and blew a smoke ring at me, then tossed her cigarette out the window. "That's a good idea," she said.

I parked in the blacktopped area adjoining the restaurant, about a hundred yards away from the beach. Lorna waited in the car while I went to fetch our feast. I ordered three orders of cracked crab and a bottle of Chablis. The waiter was hesitant about boxing an order "to go," but changed his tune when I whipped a five-spot on him, even popping the cork on the wine bottle and throwing in two glasses.

Lorna was standing outside the car, smoking, when I returned. When she saw me she stared up at the warm summer sky and pointed her cane heavenward. I looked up, too, and committed the twilight sky and a low-hanging cloud formation to memory.

There was a flight of rickety wooden steps leading down to the sand. I carried our picnic and Lorna limped by my side. The stairs were barely wide enough for the two of us, so I threw an arm around Lorna and she huddled into my chest and hopped on her good leg all the way down, laughing, out of breath when we reached the bottom.

We found a nice spot to sit on a rise. The sun was a departing orange ball, and it lovingly caught strands of Lorna's light brown hair and burnished them into gold.

We sat on the sand, and I laid out our food on top of the brown paper bag it had come in. Not standing on ceremony, we polished off all three crustaceans in short order without saying a word. The sun had gone down while we ate, but the light from the big picture window of the restaurant cast an amber glow that allowed us a muted view of each other.

Lorna lit a cigarette as I poured us each a glass of wine. “To September 2, 1951,” I said.

“And to beginnings.” Lorna smiled and we clinked glasses. I didn’t quite know what to say. Lorna did. “Who *are* you?” she asked.

I gulped my wine and felt it go to my head almost immediately. “I’m Frederick Upton Underhill,” I said. “I’m twenty-seven years old, I’m an orphan, a college graduate and a cop. I know that. And I know that you’ve caught me at the most exciting time of my life.”

“Caught you?” Lorna laughed.

“No, more correctly, I caught you.”

“You haven’t caught me.”

“Yet.”

“You probably never will.”

“ ‘Probably’ is an equivocation, Lorna.”

“Look, Freddy, you don’t know me.”

“Yet.”

“All right, yet.”

“But in a sense, I do. I went over to your dad’s house last winter. I saw some photographs of you. I talked to Siddell about you, and she told me about the accident and your mother’s death, and I felt I knew you then, and I still feel it.”

Lorna’s eyes glittered with anger and she spoke very coldly: “You had no right to pry into my life. And if you pity me, I will never see you again. I will walk up to that restaurant and call a cab and ride out of your life. Do you understand me?”

“Yes,” I said. “I understand. I understand that I don’t know what pity is, never having felt it for myself. I pity some of the people I meet on the job, but that’s easy; I know I’m never going to see them again. No, for what it’s worth I don’t give a damn if you’ve got a bad leg, or two, or three. When I met you in February I *knew*, and I still know.”

“Know what?”

“Don’t make me say it, Lorna. It’s too early.”

“All right. Will you hold me for a while, please?”

I moved to Lorna and we embraced clumsily. She held me around the small of my back and nuzzled her head into my chest. I rested my hand on the knee of her bad leg until she took it and cupped it to her breast, holding it tightly there. We stayed that way for some time, until Lorna said in a very small voice, “Will you drive me back to my car, please?”

—

An hour later we were embracing again, this time standing in the parking lot on Temple Street. We kissed, alternately soft and hard. A patrol car cruised by, shined its light on us and departed, the cop shaking his head. Lorna and I laughed.

“Do you know him?” she asked.

“No, but I know you.”

“All right, you know me, and I’m starting to know you.”

“Dinner tomorrow night?” I asked.

“Yes, Fred. Only I don’t want to go out, I want to cook for you myself.”

“That sounds wonderful.”

“My address is 8987 Charleville, in Beverly Hills. Can you remember that?”

“Yes. What time?”

“Seven thirty?”

“I’ll be there. Now kiss me so I can let you go.”

We kissed again, this time quickly.

“No protracted farewells,” Lorna muttered as she broke from my arms and limped over to her car.

11

We assembled at the Havana Hotel at 8:00 a.m., Wednesday, September 3. Dudley Smith was stern-faced and businesslike as he called for our reports and our conclusions.

Dudley reported first, telling of our questioning of Lawrence Brubaker and Janet Valupeyk. He volunteered his information on the three unsolved strangulation homicides in the West L.A.–Venice area, with special emphasis on the woman found in the alley near the Venice canals in March of '48.

Breuning and Carlisle whistled in awe at these new offshoots of the case. Mike raised his hand and interjected, "Dud, Dick's got absolutely nothing to tie our boy to the Leona Jensen homicide. I've got a pal on the Venice dicks who could give me access to their files. If Engels was living two blocks away at the time of the killing, there could well be something in their files that points to him."

Dudley shook his head patiently. "Mike, lad, we have this fiend cold for the Cadwallader snuff. Cold, lad. I'm thinking now that the Jensen killing was unrelated. Freddy, you discovered the stiff, what do you think?"

"I don't know, Dudley," I said, measuring my words carefully. "Of course, if I hadn't discovered those matches at the death scene we wouldn't be here today. But I'm beginning to think it was just an incredible coincidence, and that Engels didn't snuff Leona Jensen. Engels is a strangler, and although the Jensen woman was strangled, she was also stabbed all over. I've got a picture of Engels as a very competent, fastidious homosexual. Someone who hates women, but abhors blood. I agree with Dudley—forget the Jensen killing; it's the wrong M.O."

Dudley laughed. "There's a college boy for you—brains all the way. Mike, you've been tailing handsome Eddie. What have you got?"

Stolid Mike Breuning cleared his throat and gave Dudley Smith a toadying look. "Skipper, I agree with Underhill. Engels is too immaculate. But he's been chasing skirts and taking home a different tomato every night for three nights running. I've been hiding out in the carport next to his bungalow listening for signs of violence. No such luck. The dames all left in the morning, without a mark on them. I tailed all three of them back to their cars. Engels gives them cab fare to get back to their cars, which were all parked next to cocktail bars. I tailed them all to juke joints in Hollywood. I got the license numbers of the cars the dames got into, in case we need them as witnesses."

"Fine work, Mike," Dudley said, reaching over from his straight-backed chair to give Breuning a fatherly pat on the shoulder. "Dick, lad, what have you to say?"

The cold-eyed, bespectacled Carlisle said resolutely, "All I know is that Engels is a cold-blooded killer and a smart son of a bitch. I say we grab him before he gets smart and knocks off another dame."

Dudley surveyed all of us in the tiny hotel room. "I think we all concur on that, don't you, men?" he said. We all nodded. "Are there any questions then, lads?"

"When do we file our reports with the D.A.?" I asked.

Breuning and Carlisle laughed.

"When Eddie Engels confesses, lad," Dudley said.

"What jail are we booking him into, then?"

Dudley looked to his more experienced underlings for support. They looked at me and shook their heads, then looked back to Dudley in awe.

"Lad, there will be no official police sanctions or paper work until Eddie Engels confesses. Tomorrow morning at five forty-five a.m., we will rendezvous in front of handsome Eddie's courtyard. I will drive my car. Mike, you will pick up Dick and Freddy. Mike and Dick, you will carry shotguns. Freddy, bring your service revolver. At five minutes of six we will kick in Eddie's door. We will subdue him, and put the fear of God into any colleen or homo who might be sharing his bed, then send them on their way. I have an interrogation place set up, an abandoned motel in Gardena. Freddy, Dick, Engels, and I will travel in my car. Mike will follow in his. This is apt to be a long interrogation, lads, so spend some time with your loved ones tonight and tell them you may not be seeing them for a while. Now, stand up, lads."

We did, in a little semicircle.

"Now all put your hands on top of mine."

We did.

"Now, lads, say a little silent prayer for our clandestine operation."

Breuning and Carlisle closed their eyes reverently. I did, too, for a brief moment. When I opened them I saw Dudley staring straight ahead past all of us to some distant termination point.

"Amen," he said finally, and winked at me.

—

Lorna's apartment was a block south of Wilshire near the Beverly Hills business district, and it was a perfect testament to her pride and competence; a neat, one-bedroom affair with subdued, expensive furnishings that reflected the things she held close—a sense of order and propriety, and a nonhysterical concern for the great unwashed. The place was a clearinghouse for her professional interests: the shelves were crammed with law texts and volumes and volumes of statute books for both California and the rest of the nation. There was a big cherry-wood desk placed diagonally into the corner of the living room that held her giant dictionary as well as scores of official-looking papers separated neatly into four piles.

The apartment was also a clearinghouse for wonder, and I tingled with pride as Lorna took me on a guided tour and gave me rundowns on the wonder-filled framed prints that hung on her walls. There was a Hieronymus Bosch painting that represented insanity—hysterical grotesque creatures in an undersea environment importuning God—or someone—for release from their madness. There was a Van Gogh job that featured flowery fields juxtaposed against brown grass and a somber sky. There was Edward Hopper's "Nighthawks"—three lonely people sitting in an all-night diner, not talking. It was awesome and filled with lonely wonder.

I took Lorna's hand and kissed it. "You know the wonder, Lorna," I said.

"What's the wonder?"

"I don't know, just the wonderful elliptical, mysterious stuff that we're never going to know completely."

Lorna nodded. She knew. "And that's why you're a cop?"

"Exactly."

"But I want justice. The wonder is for artists and writers and other creative people. Their vision gives us the compassion to face our own lives and treat other people decently, because we know how imperfect the world is. But I want justice. I want specifics. I want to be able to look at the people I send to court and say, 'He's guilty, let the will of the people reflect that guilt' or 'He's guilty with mitigating circumstances, let the will of the people reflect the mercy I recommend' or 'He's innocent, no grand jury trial for him.' I want to be able to see the results, not wonder."

We moved to a large, floral-print couch and sat down. Lorna stroked my hair tentatively. "Do you understand, Fred?"

"Yes, I do. Especially now. I want justice for Eddie Engels. He'll get it. But the grand jury system is predicated on people, and people are imperfect and wonder-driven; so justice is no kind of absolute—it's subservient to wonder."

"Which is why I work so hard. Nothing is perfect, even the law."

"Yeah, I know." I paused and fished in my coat pocket for a large manila envelope. “We’re arresting Eddie Engels tomorrow, Lorna.” I handed her the sealed envelope. “This is my report as the arresting officer.”

She looked into my eyes and squeezed my hand. “You look worried,” she said.

“I’m not, really. But I need a favor.”

“What?”

“Don’t open that envelope until I call you. Just forget about this case until I call you. And when Dudley Smith files with you, know this: my report is the truth. If there are discrepancies, see me. *We’ll* build the case for the grand jury. All right?”

Lorna hesitated. “All right. You’re putting yourself out on a big limb, Freddy.”

“I know.”

“And you want Engels more for your career than for justice.”

“Yes.” I said it almost apologetically.

“I don’t care. I care about you, and Engels is guilty. You see to your career and I’ll see to justice and we’ll both get what we want.”

I laughed nervously at the imperfect logic of it. Lorna took my hand. “And you’re afraid of Dudley Smith.”

“He’s out of his mind. He’s got no business being a policeman.”

“Ha! The imperfection, the wonder, remember?”

“Touché, Lorna.”

“Where are you booking Engels?”

Lorna saw my face cloud over. “I don’t know,” I said.

We stared at each other, and I knew she knew. Her whole body stiffened and she painfully hoisted herself to her feet and said, “I’ll get dinner started.”

Lorna hopped the ten or so steps to the kitchen without her cane. I stayed on the couch. I heard the refrigerator door open and shut and the clatter of cooking utensils being pulled out of cupboards. There was a nervous silence, and when I couldn’t take it any longer I went into the kitchen, where Lorna stood leaning against the sink, distractedly fingering a saucepan. I wrenched it out of her hands. She resisted, but I was stronger. I hurled it against the wall where it clattered and fell to the floor. Lorna threw herself at me in a fierce embrace. She pummeled my shoulders with her fists and moaned deeply. I pried her chin from my chest and kissed her, lifting her off her feet. She started to resist, banging my shoulders even harder, but then thought better of it and stopped. I carried her into the bedroom.

—

Afterward, after the coupling, sated and aware of a new beginning, I started to search for words to make the future right, to make it multiply endlessly on this moment. “About Eddie En—” was all I got out before Lorna pressed gentle fingertips to my mouth to stop me.

“It’s all right, Fred. It’s all right.”

We held each other, and I played with Lorna’s big, soft breasts. She held me there, wanting to play mother, but I had other ideas. I kissed my way down her stomach toward the scar tissue that covered her pelvis. Lorna pulled away from me. “No, not there,” she said, “next you’ll be telling me how you love me for it, and how you love my bad leg. Please, Freddy, not that.”

“I just want to see it, sweetheart.”

“Why?!”

“Because it’s part of you.”

Lorna twisted in the darkness. “That’s easy for you to say, because you’re perfect. When I was a girl, all the boys who wanted to play with my big tits tried to get at them through my leg. It was very ugly. My leg is ugly and my stomach is ugly and I’ve got no uterus, so I can’t have children.”

“And?”

“And I used to cover my stomach with a towel when I slept with men so they couldn’t touch me there. If there was a way I could have covered my leg I would have done that, too.” Lorna started to cry. I kissed away her tears and bit at her neck until she started to laugh.

“Is it Freddy and Lorna now?” I whispered.

“If you want it to be,” Lorna said.

“I do.”

I got up from the bed and went into the living room. I found the phone and called Mike Breuning at his home. I told him not to pick me up in the morning, that I would meet everyone on Sunset and Horn at the specified time. He gave me an “Oh, you kid” chuckle and hung up.

I went into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. I found a bag of ice in the freezer compartment and extracted a half dozen cubes. I walked back to the bedroom. Lorna was lying on her stomach, very still. I approached the bed and dropped the ice cubes onto her shoulders. Lorna shrieked and threw herself backward.

I leaped onto her, burying my head in the dead flesh of her abdomen. “I love you,” I said. “I love you, Lorna, I love you, I love you.”

Lorna squirmed and twisted to extricate herself. Her dead leg flopped uselessly in her efforts. I grabbed it and encircled it tightly with both my arms. “I love you, Lorna. I love you, Lorna. I love you. I love you.”

Gradually, Lorna relinquished her fight and began to sob softly. “Oh, Freddy. Oh, Freddy. Oh, Freddy.” Then she pressed both her hands to the back of my head and held me strongly to that part of herself she hated so terribly.

—

Morning and dark reality came too quickly.

Lorna had dozed off, nuzzled into my shoulder, but I had remained awake, savoring the feel of her next to me, but unable to stop thinking of Eddie Engels and Dudley Smith and shotguns and justice and my career in the new light of the woman I loved.

At four thirty by the luminous dial of Lorna's bedside alarm clock I gently slid out of her embrace, kissed her neck and went into the living room to dress.

When I put on my shoulder holster and fingered my leather encased .38 service revolver I went chilly all over. Justice, I kept thinking as I drove up to the Sunset Strip, justice. Justice, not wonder. Not this time.

I barely had time to get coffee before meeting the others at Sunset and Horn.

Mike Breuning was already there, parked directly in front of the entranceway to Engels's courtyard. He waved at me as I parked across the street. I walked over and we shook hands through the driver's side window. Mike's badge was pinned to the lapel of his coat, and there was a pump shotgun beside him on the seat.

"Morning, Fred," he said, "nice day for it."

"Yeah. Where are Dudley and Dick?"

"They're taking a walk around the block. Engels is alone; Dick tailed him all night. I'm glad for that."

"So am I."

"Are you a little nervous?"

"Maybe a little."

"Well, don't be. Dudley has this thing all worked out." Breuning craned his head out the window. "Here they come now," he said. "Pin your badge to your coat."

I did, as Dudley Smith and Dick Carlisle crossed the street in our direction.

"Freddy, lad," Dudley hailed. "Top of the morning!"

"Good morning, skipper, good morning, Dick," I said.

"Underhill," Carlisle said, blank-faced.

"Well, lad, are you ready?"

"Yes."

"All right, then. Grand. Mike?"

"Ready, Dudley.

"Dick?"

"Ready, boss."

Dudley reached into the back seat of Breuning's car and handed Carlisle a double-barreled 12-gauge. Mike squeezed out his passenger door holding the Ithaca pump. I unholstered my service revolver and Dudley pulled out a .45 automatic from his waistband.

"Now, gentlemen," he said.

We walked rapidly into the courtyard, our weapons pointing to the ground. My heart was beating very fast and I kept stealing sidelong glances at Dudley. His tiny brown eyes were glazed over with something that went far beyond acting. This was the real Dudley Smith.

As we came to Engels's front door I whispered to him, "Let me go in first. I've been here before; I know where the bedroom is."

Dudley nodded assent and motioned Breuning and me to the front. "Kick it in," he hissed.

Mike raised his shotgun to chest level and I held my .38 above my head as we raised right feet in unison and simultaneously kicked the smooth surface. The lock gave way and the door burst inward. I ran straight for the bedroom, my gun in front of me, Smith, Breuning and Carlisle close behind. The bedroom door was open, and in the darkness I could glimpse a shape on the bed.

I flicked on the overhead light, and just as Eddie Engels stirred to life I placed the muzzle of my gun at his temple and whispered, "Police officers! Don't make a move or you're dead."

Engels, his eyes wide with terror, started to scream. Dick Carlisle jumped from behind me onto the bed and twisted his head into his pillow and started to strangle him with it. Breuning was right behind, stripping off the blue silk sheets and yanking Engels's hands behind his back.

"Goddamnit, Freddy, think! Sit on his legs!" Dudley shouted.

I threw myself onto the twisting form and put all my weight on the lower half of Engels's body as Mike managed to apply his handcuffs. Carlisle was still twisting the pillow-encased head of Eddie Engels.

"Stop it, Dick," Dudley screamed, "or you'll kill him!"

Carlisle let go and Engels went inert. We all got off the bed and looked at one another in shock. Dudley had gone red-faced in anger. He bent over and ripped open Engels's purple silk pajama top, placed an ear to his chest and started to laugh. "Ha-ha-ha! He's still alive, lads, thanks to old Dudley. He'll be all right. Let's get him the hell out of here. Now."

Carlisle lifted Engels up, and I slung him over my shoulder. He didn't seem to weigh much. I carried him through the dark apartment and out the door, my three colleagues forming a cordon around me. Covering our tracks, we carefully shut the door behind us. I ran toward my car, the unconscious killer bumping up and down on my back. My heart was beating faster than a trip-hammer and my eyes kept darting in all directions, looking for witnesses to the kidnapping. Dudley threw open the car door and I tossed Engels in a heap into the back seat. He came awake with a stifled scream and Dudley slammed him in the jaw with the butt end of his .45.

"Get in back with him, lad," he whispered. I did, pushing Engels headfirst onto the floorboards. Dick Carlisle got in the driver's seat and hit the ignition. Dudley got in the passenger side and said very calmly: "You know where to go, Dick. Freddy, keep handsome Eddie out of sight. Lift his head up so he can breathe. Ahhh, yes. Grand." He reached an arm out the window and gave Mike Breuning the thumbs-up sign. "Gardena, lads," he said.

We took surface streets to the Hollywood Freeway. Mike was right behind us all the way. Dudley and Carlisle talked nonchalantly of major league baseball. I stared at the bloody swollen face of Eddie Engels and inexplicably thought of Lorna.

We took the Hollywood Freeway to Vermont, and Vermont south. As we passed the U.S.C. campus, Engels started to regain consciousness, his lips blubbering in mute terror. I placed a finger to them. "Ssshhh," I said.

We stayed that way, Engels pleading with his eyes, until Dudley craned his head around and said, "How's our friend, lad?"

"He's still unconscious."

"Ahhh, yes. Grand. We'll be there in a few minutes. It's a safe place, deserted. But I don't want to take any chances. When Dick pulls over, you wake Eddie up. Put your badge back in your pocket. Keep your gun out of sight. We're going to walk him in like he's a drunken pal of ours. You got the picture, lad?"

"I've got it."

"Grand."

Eddie Engels and I stared at each other. Some minutes passed. We threaded our way in and around the early morning traffic. When Dick Carlisle stopped the car completely I pretended to wake up Engels. He understood, and played along. "Wake up, Engels," I said. "We're police officers and we aren't going to hurt you. We just want to ask you some questions. Do you understand?"

"Y-yes," Engels said, breathing shallowly.

"Good. Now I'll help you out of the car. You're going to be weak, so hang on to me. Okay?"

"O-okay."

Carlisle and Smith threw open the doors of the car. I pulled Engels into a sitting position on the back seat. I removed his handcuffs and he rubbed his wrists, which had gone almost blue, and started to sob.

"Quiet now," Dudley whispered to him. "We'll have none of that, you understand?"

Engels caught the maniacal look in the big Irishman's face and understood immediately. He looked at me imploringly. I smiled sympathetically, and felt vague power stirrings: if justice was the imperative, and good guy–bad guy was the method of interrogation, then we were already well on our way.

Mike Breuning pulled up in back of us and tooted his horn. I took my eyes off Engels and checked out the surroundings. We were parked in a garbage-strewn alley in back of what looked like a disused auto court.

"Freddy," Dudley said, "you go with Mike and open up the room. Make sure no one's around."

"Right, skipper."

I got out of the car, stretching my cramped legs. Mike Breuning clapped me on the back. He was almost feverish in his excitement and praise of Dudley: "I told you old Dud thought of everything, didn't I? Look at this place," he said, leading me in through a narrow walkway to a one-story L-shaped collection of tiny connected motel rooms, all painted a faded puke green. "This is great, isn't it? The place went under during the war, and the guy who owns it won't sell. He's waiting for the value to go up. It's perfect."

It *was* perfect. Chills briefly overtook me. A perfect impressionist representation of hell: the L-shaped wings fronted by dead brown grass covered with empty short dog bottles and condom wrappers. "Keep Out" signs painted over with obscenities posted every six feet. Dog shit everywhere. A dead, towering palm tree standing sentry, keeping the parking lot of an aircraft plant across the street at bay.

"Yeah, it's perfect," I said to Mike. "Does it have a name?"

"The Victory Motel. You like it?"

"It does have a ring to it."

Mike pointed me toward room number 6. He unlocked the door, and a large rat scurried out. "Here we are," he said.

I surveyed our place of interrogation: a small, perfectly square, putrid-smelling room with a rusted bedstead holding a filthy mattress on bare springs. A desk and two chairs. A cheap oil painting of a clown, unframed, above the bed. A magazine photograph of Franklin D. Roosevelt pinned to a doorway leading into a bathroom where the bathtub and fixtures were covered with rodent droppings. Someone had drawn a Hitler mustache on F.D.R. Mike Breuning pointed to it and giggled.

"Go get our suspect, will you, Mike?" I said. I wanted to be alone, if only for a moment, if only in a hovel like this.

—

Dudley, Breuning, and Carlisle entered the tiny room a minute later, propelling our pajama-clad suspect in front of them. Carlisle threw Engels down on the bed and handcuffed his hands in front of him. He was trembling and starting to sweat, but I thought I noted the slightest trace of indignation come into his manner as he squirmed to find a comfortable posture on the urine-stained mattress.

He looked up at his four captors hovering over him and said, "I want to call a lawyer."

"That's an admission of guilt, Engels," Carlisle said. "You haven't been charged with anything yet, so don't fret about a shyster until we book you."

"If we book him," I interjected, assuming my role of "good guy" without being told.

"That's right," Mike Breuning said. "Maybe the guy ain't guilty."

"Guilty of what?" Eddie Engels cried out, his voice almost breaking. "I haven't done a goddamned thing!"

"Hush now, son," Dudley said in a fatherly tone. "Just hush. We're here to see to justice. You tell the truth and you'll serve justice—and yourself. You've got nothing to fear, so just hush."

Dudley's softly modulated brogue seemed to have a calming effect on Engels. His whole body seemed to slump in acceptance. He swung his legs over the side of the mattress. "Can I smoke?" he asked.

"Sure," Dudley said, reaching into his back pocket and pulling out a handcuff key. "Freddy, unlock Mr. Engels, will you?"

"Sure, Dud."

I unlocked the bracelets, and Engels smiled at me gratefully. Playing my unassigned role, I smiled back. Dudley tossed him a pack of Chesterfields and a book of matches. Engels's hands shook too badly to get a light going, so I lit his cigarette for him, smiling as I did it. He wolfed in the smoke and smiled back at me.

"Dick, Freddy," Dudley said, "I want you lads to make the run to the liquor store. Eddie, lad, what's your poison?"

Engels looked bewildered. "You mean booze? I'm not much of a drinker."

“Are you not, lad? Barhopper like yourself?”

“I don’t mind gin and Coke once in a while.”

“Ahhh, grand. Freddy, Dick, you heard the man’s order. Hop to it; there’s a liquor store down the street.”

When we were outside, Carlisle outlined the plan for me. “Dudley says the key word is ‘circuitous.’ He says it means ‘roundabout.’ First off we’re going to get Engels drunk, get him to talk openly about himself. You’re supposed to be with the feds, which means you’re an attorney. You and Dudley are going to good guy–bad guy the shit out of him. We’ll keep him up all night, stretch him thin. We’ve got the room next door all cleaned up. We can take naps there. And don’t worry: Dudley’s got pals on the Gardena force—they’ll leave us alone.”

I smiled, again warming to Dudley Smith as a pragmatic wonder broker. “What are you and Mike going to do?”

“Mike’s going to take it all down in shorthand, then edit it after Engels confesses. He’s a whiz. I’m going to play bad guy along with Dudley.”

“What if he doesn’t confess?”

“He’ll confess,” Carlisle said, taking off his glasses and polishing them with his necktie.

—

When we returned from the liquor store with a quart of cheap gin, three bottles of Coke, and a dozen paper cups, Dudley was regaling Eddie Engels with stories of his life in Ireland around the time of World War I, and Mike Breuning was in the room next door, making sandwiches and brewing coffee.

Mike came into the interrogation room bearing a half dozen stenographic pads and a fat handful of sharp pencils. He pulled up a chair next to the bed and smiled at Engels. Engels’s eyes went back and forth from Mike’s affable blond face to his .38 in its shoulder holster. Eddie was putting up a brave front, but he was scared. And curious about how much we knew, of that I was sure. He had killed at least one woman, but was obviously involved in so much illegal activity that he didn’t know *why* we had busted him. But he didn’t act like a trapped killer—there was an effete arrogance that cut through even his fear. He had sailed on his good looks and charm for some thirty years and obviously considered himself a naturally superior being. His self-sufficient masquerade was about to end, and I wondered if he knew.

Dudley got the proceedings started, banging his huge hands on the little wooden table that held Mike’s stenographic pads.

“Mr. Engels,” he said, “you are probably wondering exactly who we are, and why we brought you here.” He paused and poured gin and Coca-Cola, mixed half and half, into a paper cup and handed it to Engels, who took it and sipped dutifully, dark intelligent eyes glancing around at the four of us.

Dudley cleared his throat and continued. “Let me introduce my colleagues,” he said, “Mr. Carlisle, Los Angeles Police Department; Mr. Breuning, of the district attorney’s office; I am Lieutenant Dudley Smith of the L.A.P.D.; and this gentleman”—he paused and inclined his head toward me—“is Inspector Underhill of the F.B.I.” I almost laughed at my big new promotion, but kept a straight face. “If you have any legal questions, you ask the inspector. He’s an attorney, he’ll be glad to answer them.”

I butted in, somehow wanting to calm Engels before the onslaught of brutality I knew would be coming. “Mr. Engels, you may not know it, but you are acquainted with some people who exist on the edges of the L.A. crime world. We want to question you about these people. Our methods are roundabout, but they work. Just answer our questions and I assure you everything will be all right.”

It was a well-informed, ambiguous stab in the dark, and it hit home. Engels believed me. His features relaxed and he gulped the rest of his drink in relief. Dudley poured him another immediately, this one a good two-thirds gin.

Eddie took two healthy slugs of it and when he spoke, his voice had gone down considerably, almost to the baritone range. “What do you want to know?” he asked.

“Tell us about yourself, lad,” Dudley said.

“What about me?”

“Your life, lad, past and present.”

“Exactly what do you mean, Lieutenant?”

“I mean *everything*, lad.”

Engels seemed to consider this. He seemed to draw into his memory, and guzzled his gin and Coke to speed his thought processes.

I looked at my watch. It was 7:00 and already getting hot in the sordid little room. I took off my suit coat and rolled up my shirtsleeves. I felt tired, having gone more than twenty-four hours without sleep. Almost as if in answer, Mike Breuning switched on a portable fan and handed me a cup of lukewarm coffee. Dudley poured Engels a cupful of pure gin.

“Your life story, lad,” he said. “We’re all dying to hear it.”

—

“Mom and Dad were good people,” Eddie began, his voice taking on the stentorian tone of one explaining profound intrinsic truth. “They still are, I guess. I’m from Seattle. Mom and Dad were born in Germany. They came here before the First World War. They—"

"Were you a happy youngster, Eddie?" Dudley interrupted.

Engels sipped his gin, wincing slightly at the full-strength bitterness. "Sure, sure, I was a happy kid. A good sport. An ace gent. I had a dog, I had a treehouse, I had a bike. Dad was a good guy. He never hit me. He was a pharmacist. He never sent Ma or me to the doctor. He fixed us up with this stuff from the pharmacy. Sometimes it had dope in it. Once Ma took some and had these religious hallucinations. She said she saw Jesus walking Miffy—that's another dog we had who got run over. She said Miffy could talk and wanted her to become a Catholic and work at this pet cemetery outside of town. Dad never gave Ma any more of the stuff after that; he hated Catholics. Dad was an ace guy with me but he was tough as nails with my sister, Lillian. He wouldn't let her date guys, he was always prowling around this flower shop where she worked to make sure no mashers were trying to date her. Dad was an old-fashioned Kraut. He hated guys who chased tail. He didn't want me to chase tail, he wanted me to marry some Kraut bimbo and go to pharmacist school."

Engels paused and downed the rest of his gin. His body shook and I could see that he was getting drunk, smiling crookedly, his face glazing over with sentiment. Dudley refilled his cup.

"But you wanted to chase tail, right, Eddie?" I said.

Engels laughed and guzzled gin. "Right," he slurred, "and I wanted out of that fucking dead-dog town, Seattle. Nothing but rain and dead dogs and pharmacies and ugly tail. U-u-u-gly! Woo! I had the best tail Seattle had to offer and it was worse than the lowest piece of Hollywood ass. U-u-ugly!"

"So you moved to L.A.?" Mike interjected.

"Fuck, no! The fucking Japs bombed Pearl Harbor and I got drafted. The navy. Dad said I looked like Donald Duck in my uniform. I said he looked like Mickey Mouse in that smock he wore at the pharmacy. He didn't want me to go. He tried to fix it so I could stay in Seattle. He tried to hand the appeals board this hardship caper, but it didn't work. But Dad got poetic justice. They made me a pharmacist's mate. He called me Doctor Duck."

Eddie Engels doubled over with laughter on the mattress, then jolted up and vomited on the floor, his head between his knees, his hands hanging limply by his sides. He had knocked over his glass of gin, and when he looked up he banged a drunken hand all over the mattress looking for it. He found the glass on the floor in a pool of vomit, picked it up and waved it at Dudley.

"Gimme a refill, Lieutenant. Pharmacist's Mate Engels, 416-8395 requests a fucking drink on the double!"

Dudley gladly obliged him, this time filling the glass half full. Engels grabbed it and bolted the liquid, falling back onto the mattress and muttering, "Lotsa tail, lotsa tail," before he passed out.

—

Eddie Engels woke up some six hours later, panicked and dehydrated to the bone. His eyes were feverish and his voice tremulous and raspy.

Dudley had outlined his plan while Engels was passed out: good guy–bad guy, with modifications. He had gotten a list of known bookmakers, homosexuals, and fences from the dicks at Hollywood Division, figuring Engels would have to know some of them. Throwing these names at Eddie would keep him from guessing why he was really in custody. It sounded like a good, if time-consuming, plan. I had rested during the afternoon and was up for it. But I wanted it to be over, and fast: I wanted to be with Lorna.

As Engels came awake, Mike Breuning was just returning with two big paper bags stuffed with hamburgers, French fries, and coffee in paper cups. We dug in and ignored our prisoner on the mattress.

“I have to go to the bathroom,” he said meekly. No one answered him. He tried again. “I have to go to the bathroom.” We ignored him again. “I said I have to go to the bathroom!” This time his panicked voice intoned upward sharply.

“Then go to the bathroom, for Christ’s sake!” Dudley bellowed.

Engels got up from his resting place and wobbled into the filthy lavatory. We could hear the sound of him vomiting into the toilet bowl, then running water and urinating. He came back a moment later, having discarded his vomit-soaked pajama top. His lean, muscular torso had been given a quick washing. He shivered in the late afternoon heat of the smelly little room.

“I’m ready to answer your questions, Officers,” he said. “Please let me answer them so I can go home.”

“Shut up, Engels,” Dudley said. “We’ll get to you when we’re damn good and ready.”

“Ease off, Lieutenant,” I said. “Don’t worry, Mr. Engels, we’ll be right with you. Would you like a hamburger?” Engels shook his head and stared at us.

We finished our dinner. Dick Carlisle announced that he was going for a walk, and got up and left the room. Mike, Dudley, and I arranged three chairs around the mattress. Engels had backed himself up against the wall. He sat Indian-style, with his hands jammed under his knees to control their trembling. We took our seats facing him and stared at him for a long moment before Dudley spoke: “Your name?”

Our prisoner cleared his throat: “Edward Engels.”

“Your address?”

“1911 Horn, West Hollywood.”

"Your age?"

"Thirty-two."

"Your occupation?"

Engels hesitated. "Real estate liaison," he said.

"What the hell is a 'real estate liaison'?" Dudley barked.

Engels groped for words. "Come on, man!" Dudley shouted.

"Ease off, Lieutenant," I said. "Mr. Engels, would you explain your duties in that capacity?"

"I…I…uh, help close real estate deals."

"Which entails?" I asked.

"Which entails fixing up buyers with real estate people."

"I see. Well, could you—"

Dudley cut in. "Horseshit, Inspector. This guy is a known gambler. I've got reports on him from bookies all over Hollywood. In fact, I've got several witnesses who say he's a bookie himself."

"That's not true," Engels cried. "I bet the ponies, but I don't book any action with bookies or make book myself, and I'm clean with the cops! I've got no criminal record!"

"The hell you say, Engels! I know better!"

I raised my hands and called for order. "That's enough! That's enough from both of you! Now, Mr. Engels, betting the horses is not illegal. Lieutenant Smith just got carried away because he hasn't picked any winners lately. Would you call yourself a winning gambler?"

"Yes, I'm a winner."

"Do you earn more at gambling than at your real estate job?"

Engels hesitated. "Yes," he said.

"Do you list these winnings on your income tax returns?" I asked.

"Uh…no."

"What did you file as your total income on this year's return?"

"I don't know."

"What about 1950?"

"I don't know."

"1949?"

"I don't know."

"1948?"

"I don't remember."

"1947?"

"I don't know!"

"1946?"

"I don't…I was in the navy then…I forget."

Dudley butted in: "You do pay income tax, don't you, Engels?"

Engels hung his head between his legs. "No," he said.

"You realize that income tax evasion is a federal crime, don't you, Engels?" Dudley continued, pressing.

"Yes."

"I pay income tax, so does the inspector, so do all good law-abiding citizens. What the hell makes you so special that you think you don't have to?"

"I don't know."

"Ease off, Lieutenant," I said. "Mr. Engels wants to cooperate. Mr. Engels, I'm going to name some people. Tell me of your association with them."

Engels nodded dumbly. Dudley handed me a carefully typed slip of paper broken down into three columns headed: "Gamblers," "Bookmakers," and "Hollywood Vice offenders." I started with the gamblers. Mike Breuning got out his steno pad and poised his pencil over it. Dudley lit a cigarette for himself and one for Engels, who accepted it gratefully.

"Okay, Mr. Engels, listen carefully: James Babij, Leslie 'Scribe' Thomas, James Gillis, Walter Snyder, Willard Dolphine. Any of those names sound familiar?"

Engels nodded confidently. "Those guys are high rollers, big spenders at Santa Anita. Entrepreneurs, you know what I mean?"

"Yes. Are you intimate with any of them?"

"What do you mean 'intimate'?" Engels narrowed his eyes suspiciously.

"I mean have you gambled with any of these men? Have you entertained any of them in your home?"

"Oh, no. I just see those guys at the track, maybe they buy me a drink at the Turf Club, maybe I buy them one. That kind of thing."

"All right," I said, smiling and going to the list of the bookies. "William Curran, Louis Washington, 'Slick' Dellacroccio, 'Zoomer' Murphy, Frank Deffry, Gerald 'Smiler' Chamales, Bruno Earle, Duane 'The Brain' Tucker, Fred 'Fat Man' Vestal, Mark 'The Gimp' McGuire. Ring any bells, Mr. Engels?"

"Lotsa bells, Inspector. Those bimbos are all West L.A. handbooks. Cocktail lounge sharpies. Mark 'The Gimp' pimps n——— broads on the side. They're all small potatoes, strictly from nowhereville." Engels smiled at his captors cockily. He was starting to feel confident of our purpose. All three of us gave him a deadpan. It made him nervous. “Freddy Vestal pushes reefers, I heard talk,” he blurted out.

I gave Engels a winning smile. “All right now, let’s try these: Pat Morneau, ‘Scooter’ Coleman, Jack Foster, Lawrence Brubaker, Al Bay, Jim Waldleigh, Brett Caldwell, Jim Joslyn.”

Engels went ashen-faced. He swallowed several times, and, recovering quickly, threw out a smile that was pure charm, pure bravado. “Don’t know those guys, Inspector, sorry.”

Dudley went on the attack, saying very softly, “Do you know who those men are, Engels?”

“No.”

“Those men are known degenerates—pansies, sissies, nancy boys, queers, homos, faggots, pederasts, and punks. They all have long rap sheets with the Vice squads of every police agency in L.A. County. They all frequent queer bars in West Hollywood. Places we know you frequent, Engels. Half of those men have identified you from photographs. Half—”

“What photographs?!” Engels screeched. “I’m clean! I ain’t got a police record. This is all a lie! This is—”

I entered the fray: “Mr. Engels, just let me ask you once, for our official records: are you homosexual?”

“Fuck, no!” Eddie Engels practically screamed.

“All right. Thank you.”

“Inspector,” Dudley said calmly, “I don’t buy it. We know for a fact that he’s tight with this homo, Lawrence Brubaker. We know—”

“Larry Brubaker was an old navy buddy! We were stationed together at the Long Beach yard during the war!” Engels was sweating, his face and torso were popping sweat from every pore. I handed him a glass of water. He gulped it down in one second flat, then looked to me for support.

“I believe you,” I said. “You used to live near his bar in Venice, right?”

“Right! With a woman. I was shacked with her. I tell you I dig women. Ask Janet, she’ll tell you!”

“Janet?” I asked innocently.

“Janet Valupeyk. She’s the dame I do the real estate gig with. She’ll tell you. We shacked together for two years, she’ll tell you.”

“All right, Mr. Engels.”

“Not all right, Inspector,” Dudley said, his voice rising in pitch and timbre, “not all right at all. We have witnesses who place this degenerate at known queers bars like the Hub, the Black Cat, Sergio’s Hideaway, the Silver Star, the Knight in Armor, and half the homo hangouts in the Valley.”

“No, no, no!” Engels was shaking his head frantically in denial.

I raised my voice and glared sternly at Dudley. “This time you’ve gone too far, Lieutenant. You’ve been badly misinformed. The Silver Star isn’t a homosexual hangout—I’ve been there myself, many times. It’s just a congenial neighborhood cocktail lounge.”

Engels grabbed at what he thought was a life raft. “That’s right! I been there myself, lotsa times.”

“To place bets?” I interjected.

“Hell no, to chase tail. I picked up lots of good stuff there.” Unaware that he was hanging himself, Engels rambled on, squirming on the now sweat-drenched mattress. “I scored in half the juke joints in Hollywood. Queer, shit! Somebody’s been feeding you guys the wrong dope! I’m a veteran. Larry Brubaker’s queer, but I just used him, borrowed money from him. He didn’t try no queer stuff with me! You ask Janet. You ask her!” Engels was addressing all his remarks to me now. It was obvious he considered me his savior. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Dudley draw his finger across his throat.

“Mr. Engels,” I said, “let’s take a break for a while, shall we? Why don’t you take a rest?”

Engels nodded. I went into the bathroom and wet a paper napkin in the sink. I tossed it to him and he swabbed his face and upper body with it.

“Rest, Eddie,” I said, smiling down at the handsome killer.

He nodded again and hid his face in his hands.

“I’m going for a walk,” I announced to Dudley and Mike Breuning. I grabbed a container of cold coffee and a cold hamburger and walked outside.

A Santa Ana wind had come up, and the shabby front lawn was littered with a fresh array of debris. Palm fronds had blown out onto the sidewalk. The wind had cleared all traces of smog from the air, and the twilight sky was a pure light blue tinged with the remnants of a pink sun.

I tried to eat my burger, but it was too greasy and cold, and my nervous stomach balked. I threw the sandwich to the ground and sipped my coffee, pondering the rituals of justice.

Dudley came out a minute later. “Our friend is asleep, lad,” he said. “Mike slipped him a Mickey Finn. He’ll wake up in about four hours or so with a devilish headache. Then I’ll go to work on him.”

“Where’s Carlisle?”

“He’s going through handsome Eddie’s apartment. He should be back soon. How do you feel, lad?”

“Expectant. Anxious for it to be over.”

“Soon, lad, soon. I’m going to have at that monster for a good long time. You stay out until I take off my necktie. Then you intervene. Meet force with force, lad, be it verbal or physical. Do you follow?"

"Yes."

"Ahhh, grand. You are a brilliant young policeman, Freddy. Do you know that?"

"Yes, I do."

"I've wanted a protégé like you for a long time, lad. Mike and Dick are good cops, but they've got no brains, no imagination. You have a spark, a brilliant one."

"I know."

"Then why do you look so glum?"

"I'm wondering how I'll like the detective bureau."

"You'll like it fine. It's the cream of the department. Now get some rest."

I went into the room adjoining the interrogation room and lay down on a saggy army cot that was a good half foot too short for me. I got up and walked to the bathroom. It was relatively clean; almost clean enough to use. I looked at myself in the cracked mirror above the sink. I needed a shave and hadn't thought to bring a razor.

I lay back down on my cot. Exhaustion grabbed me before I could remove my shoes or shoulder holster. I fought sleep for brief moments, managing to mutter, "Lorna, Lorna, Lorna" until sleep triumphed.

—

I awoke to someone jostling me. I bolted upright and went for my gun. Dick Carlisle materialized and pinned my arms. The light from the overhead bulb was glinting off his steel-rimmed spectacles.

I swung my legs over the edge of the cot and suddenly realized that I didn't like Carlisle. There was something sullen and animalistic about him. And he was plainly keyed up.

"Look at this," he said, digging into his coat pocket and pulling out Maggie Cadwallader's diamond brooch.

"Jesus!" I said. "Where the hell did you get that? Is it real?"

"Dudley says so. He knows a lot about this kind of stuff, and he says it's legit. I found it at Engels's apartment hidden away in a tie rack."

"Jesus," I said, feigning awe, my wheels turning. "Jesus. When I searched the Cadwallader dame's apartment, I found a little photograph of her. She was wearing a brooch just like this one!"

"Christ, Underhill! What did you do with it?"

"I lost it when I had the newspaper photo reprinted."

"Shit. I'll tell Dudley."

Carlisle disappeared through the door that connected the two rooms, and I busied myself throwing water on my face and combing my hair. When I entered the interrogation room Dick Carlisle was slapping Eddie Engels awake, and Dudley and Mike Breuning were huddled in conversation. Seeing me, Dudley waved me toward him.

“Freddy, you’re sure you saw a brooch like this one in that photograph you found?” He held it up for me to see.

“I’m positive, Dud.”

“Grand, another confirmation. You sit back, lad. Remember your cue.”

Carlisle went back to rousing Engels. “Wake up, wake up, you goddamned degenerate!” he shouted, then gave up in frustration, and stripped his belt from his trousers and lashed it across Eddie’s bare back.

Engels, coming out of his doped stupor, curled himself into a fetal ball, his arms covering his face. “No, don’t hit me, you can have it. You can have it all, don’t hit me!” he shrieked.

Carlisle shrieked back: “We want the truth, you homo! The truth!”

“I’m not a homo!”

“Prove it!” Carlisle flailed Engels again with his belt. The heavy brass buckle catch ripped shreds of flesh loose from his shoulder blades, and Eddie threw himself onto his back to protect himself.

Dudley wrenched the belt from Carlisle and wrapped it around his broad right fist. “Ask Janet!” Eddie pleaded.

“I did, lad. Shall I tell you what she said?”

Engels faltered. “Tell me,” he whispered.

Dudley Smith moved to the bed, picked up Engels under his arms and threw him across the room. He landed in a wild tangle of arms and legs and screamed. I gasped at the feat of strength. Dudley walked to Engels and jerked him to his feet with his left hand, then slammed a leather-encased right hand into his stomach. Engels screamed again, and doubled over, still held erect by the hand Dudley had dug into his shoulder.

“Janet told me that you were a dirty, cock-sucking degenerate,” Dudley said, “who spurned her bed for the bed of a muscle-bound nancy boy. Is that true, Eddie?”

“No!”

“No?” Dudley dug his hand into Engels’s shoulder until little geysers of blood shot out. “No, Eddie?”

Eddie Engels screamed, “No!”

“No?”

“No!”

"No?" Blood was trickling down Engels's chest, combining with his sweat. Dudley gritted his teeth and dug his hand in full force. "No?" he screeched, his brogue almost breaking. He released his hand and Engels fell to his knees, sobbing.

"Yes," he blubbered.

"Good, lad. Now answer a few more questions for me. Do you pay income tax?"

"No."

"Ahhh, yes. Do you take bets on the ponies?"

"Yes." Engels pawed at his shoulder. It was a giant purple swelling with deep puncture wounds.

"Get to your feet, lad," Dudley said. Engels managed to bring himself upright, and Dudley swung a huge roundhouse right at his midsection. Engels stifled a scream and fell to the floor, clutching his stomach. "More questions, lad. Janet told me you hit her. Is that true?"

"No!" Engels elbowed his way toward the wall, drawing his arms protectively over his head. "No! No! No! No!" he shrieked, drawing himself tighter into a ball with each screaming repeat of the word.

Dudley smiled menacingly. "No?"

"Yes," Engels said softly.

"Ahhh, grand. Did you hit her often, lad?"

"Yes."

"And other women?"

"Yes."

"Why? You filthy scum-sucker!"

"I…I…I don't know!"

"You…don't…know." Dudley tried the words on his palate like a connoisseur tasting a fine wine. "Tell me about the muscle boy, lad."

I looked around the room. Dick Carlisle was sipping a beer by the bathroom door, Mike Breuning was writing rapidly on his steno pad, and Dudley Smith was inching himself slowly toward the prostrate form of Eddie Engels. He squatted next to him and said softly, "Do you believe in God, lad?"

Engels nodded his head. "Yes."

"Then don't you think God wants you to be rid of your guilt, like a good believer?"

"Yes…" Engels said, his voice surprisingly calm.

"Good, lad. Tell me about the muscle boy."

"His name was Jerry. I met him at Larry's Log Cabin. He was on dope. He needed help and I helped him."

"Did he like to hit women, too?"

"No!"

"Did the two of you prowl for lonely young women to beat up, then go home and commit sodomy with each other?"

"No! Please God, no, please God!" Engels wailed.

Dudley reached behind him and grabbed his arms and pulled him to his feet. Engels pliably submitted and stared at him impassively, until Dudley's right hand crashed into his solar plexus. He vomited, spraying a gush of pink goo that smelled like gin onto Dudley's shirtfront. Dudley's face contorted and his whole body twitched, but he just stood there, staring down at the woman-killer he hated so much.

There was complete silence in the room. Nobody moved. Engels remained perfectly still on the floor, arms wrapped around his devastated midsection. There was a straight-backed wooden chair directly behind him. Dudley lifted Engels into it. He pulled up another chair for himself and drew it up so that his knees almost touched Eddie's.

"Now, Eddie, we know that you like to hit women, don't we?"

"Y-yes."

"A handsome lad like yourself has no trouble finding young ladies, isn't that true? You said you go to cocktail bars. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"And you pick up young ladies there?"

"Uh…I…yes."

"For what purpose?"

"What? To fuck. To sleep with. I'm no fag!"

"Easy, lad. We know you like boys."

"No! No!"

Dudley slapped him.

"No, no, no, no!" he continued.

Dudley slapped him again, this time harder. Blood was flowing out of his nose, dripping into his mouth. He licked it off his lips and started to cry. Dudley sighed and handed Engels a handkerchief. "Maybe you aren't queer, lad. Maybe you do like tail. After all, the inspector said he saw you at that place, what was the name of it? The Silver Star? That place is no homo hangout."

Engels started to shake his head, spraying Dudley with blood and sweat. "I'm no fag. I've had more tail than any cop in L.A."

"Tell me about it, Eddie," Dudley said, lighting him a cigarette and placing it between his lips.

The cocky ladies' man came briefly to life, cutting through all his terror and fatigue. "They love me, they can't leave me alone. I'm a virtuoso. I just snap my fingers. Every bartender in Hollywood knows me—"

Dudley interrupted: "The barman at the Silver Star says you're a sissy. He says you hate women. You hate them, so you fuck them to make them like you, then you hurt them, right, Eddie? Right, Eddie? Right, Eddie, right? Queer, cock-sucking Eddie, right…?"

Engels threw himself on Dudley, knocking his chair over and falling on top of him, trying to smother him with his battered body. Breuning and Carlisle watched for stunned seconds, then ran over and grabbed Eddie by his flailing arms and legs and pinned him against the wall. Engels was screaming as Dick Carlisle began to slam him with both fists in the groin and rib cage. Breuning mashed his face into the wall until Engels bit into the palm of his hand. Breuning screamed and backed off, and Carlisle wrapped his hands around Engels's neck and started to choke him. Engels relinquished Breuning's hand and started to make gurgling sounds.

I jumped up and grabbed Carlisle by the shoulders, flinging him backward onto the mattress. Breuning was trying to get at Engels with his good hand, holding his bitten one between his legs to stanch the pain. I flattened myself against Engels, trying to push the two of us through the wall to another reality. Breuning pulled at my shoulders.

Finally Dudley screamed, "Stop it, all of you. Stop it. Stop it now!"

Breuning let go of me. I moved away from Engels, who fell to the floor, unconscious.

"You filthy traitor," Carlisle hissed at me. I advanced toward him, my fists cocked.

Dudley planted himself in front of me. "No, lad."

I flopped down into the chair that had held Engels. I was exhausted and shaking from head to foot. Breuning, Carlisle, Dudley, and I all stared at one another in ugly silence.

Finally Dudley smiled. He drew a hypodermic needle and a little vial out of his pants pocket. He inserted the needle into the vial and drew out some clear liquid, then knelt beside the unconscious Engels, checked his pulse, nodded and stuck the needle into his arm just above the elbow. He pushed the plunger and held it in for a few seconds, then lifted Engels onto the mattress.

"He'll sleep," Dudley said. "He needs it. You men do, too. We all do. So rest, lads. We'll start over in the morning."

—

We did. Fueled by a night's sleep—mine fitful, Engels's drugged—we began at nine o'clock the following day. Dudley had roused me at seven thirty, presenting me with a razor and a fresh short-sleeved shirt. The ritual of shaving and bathing restored me somewhat.

I was still shocked by what had happened. Dudley knew it, and assuaged my fears. “No more violence, lad. He can’t take much more. I’ve sent Dick Carlisle home; he might get carried away. We’ll play it kid gloves from here on in.” All I could do was nod dumbly. I couldn’t even try to play protégé to the insane Irishman—he was a loathsome object to me now.

I walked down the street to a diner that served a boisterous, good-humored aircraft-worker clientele. The roughhewn camaraderie of the men who sat beside me at the counter restored me further. I ate a big breakfast of sausage, eggs, and potatoes, chased by about a gallon of coffee. I bought a triple order of poached eggs and two chocolate malts for Eddie Engels. Ordering it boxed “to go” made me sad and angry. This was beyond the bailiwick of wonder and justice, reaching toward some kind of knowledge of the human condition that for once I didn’t want to know.

There was a pay phone at the back of the diner. I almost gave in to an impulse to call Lorna, but didn’t. I wanted it to be over first.

When I got back to the room, Eddie Engels was still passed out on the filthy mattress, his face contorted in terror even in repose.

Dudley, Breuning, and I watched him wake up. For long moments he didn’t seem to know where he was. Finally, his brain clicked into reality, and when his eyes focused on Dudley he began to twitch spastically, shutting his eyes and trying to scream. No sound came out.

Dudley and I looked at each other. Mike Breuning fiddled with his steno pad, his eyes downcast, ashamed. I motioned to Dudley. He followed me into the adjoining room. “Let me have him,” I said. “He’s too terrified of you. Let me talk to him. Alone. I’ll bring him around.”

“I want a confession, lad. Today.”

“You’ll have it.”

“I’ll give you two hours, lad. No more.”

I led Engels gently into the other room. I told him he could take his time using the halfway clean bathroom. He did, closing the door behind him. I waited while Engels cleaned himself up. He came back out and sat down on the edge of one of the cots. His torso was badly bruised, and the welt on his shoulder where Dudley had dug in his fingers had swollen to the size of an orange.

I lit him a cigarette and handed it to him. “Are you scared, Eddie?” I asked.

He nodded. “Yeah, I’m real scared.”

“Of what?”

"Of that Irish guy."

"I don't blame you."

"What do you want? I'm just a small-time gambler."

"And an abuser of women." He lowered his head. "Look at me, Eddie." He raised his head and met my eyes. "Have you hurt a lot of women, Eddie?" He nodded. "Why?" I asked.

"I don't know!"

"How long have you been doing this?"

"A long time."

"Before you left Seattle?"

"I…yes."

"Do your parents know about it?"

"No! Leave them out of this!"

"Sssshhh. Do you love your parents?"

Engels snorted, then looked at me as if I were crazy. "Everyone loves their parents," he said.

"Everyone who knows them. I never knew mine. I grew up in an orphanage."

"That's so sad. That's really sad. Is that why you became a cop, so you could track them down?"

"I never thought about it. You're a lucky fellow, though, to have a nice family."

Engels nodded, his frightened features softening for a moment.

"Are you close to your sister, Lillian?" I asked. Engels didn't answer. "Are you?" Still no response. "Are you, Eddie?"

Engels's face went beet red. "I hate her!" he screamed. "I hate her, I hate her, I hate her!" He slammed his hands into the edge of the cot in frustration. The outburst was over as quickly as it had started, but Eddie's personality had changed again. "I…hate…Lillian." He said it very softly, with great finality, one word at a time.

"Did she hit you, Eddie?" I asked.

A shake of the head in answer.

"Did she make fun of you?"

No response.

"Did she have power over you?"

"Yes," Engels whimpered. He bit his lip.

"What did she do to you?" I said gently.

Eddie Engels said, quite calmly: "She brought me out. She was lez and she didn't want me to love any other girls but her."

“And?” I whispered.

“And she dressed me up, and made me up…”

“And?”

“And…fixed me up, and made me do her in front of her girlfriend…” Engels’s sad voice trailed off.

I cleared my throat. My own voice sounded strange and disembodied. “And you hate her for it?”

“And I hate her for what she made me, Officer. But I love her, too. And I’d rather be what I am than be what *you* are.”

His words hung in the air, poisonous, like atomic fallout. I handed Engels the paper sack containing the eggs and malted milks. “Eat your breakfast,” I said. “Rest for a little while, and soon you’ll find out why we brought you here.”

Making sure the windowless room was locked from the outside, I left Engels alone to contemplate my threat, then went and reported to Dudley Smith.

“You should have been a headshrinker, lad,” was his only comment.

—

At one thirty that afternoon we brought Eddie Engels back into the interrogation room. He was fed and rested, but looked weary and ready to accept anything. I sat him down on the mattress, and Dudley, Breuning, and I arranged our chairs, allowing him nothing to look at but three oversized cops. Dudley placed an ashtray, matches, and an open pack of Chesterfields on the mattress next to him. Engels helped himself, warily.

Dudley kicked it off: “Of course you know what this is all about, don’t you, Engels?”

Engels gulped and shook his head. “No,” he said.

“Lad, were you living on Twenty-ninth and Pacific in Venice in March of 1948?”

“Y-yes,” Engels said.

“A young woman was found strangled to death two blocks from the house you shared with Janet Valupeyk. Did you kill her?”

Engels went white and screamed, “No!”

“Her name was Karen Waters. She was twenty-two.”

“I said, no!”

“Very well. I have here the names of two other young women, lonely young women who met untimely deaths by strangulation. Answer if the names ring a bell, will you, lad? Mary Peterson?”

"No!"

"Jane Macauley?"

"I said, no!"

Dudley sighed, feigning exasperated patience: "So you did," he said. "Well, lad, Janet Valupeyk says otherwise. She positively identified all three of those dead women as conquests of yours. She remembers them well. She —"

"She couldn't have! Janet was a hophead! She was on dope all the time we lived together—"

Dudley swung his hand in a quick arc, catching Engels on the cheek. Stunned, Engels just stared at him like a reprimanded child.

"I thought you picked up lots of women, lad."

"I did. I mean, I do."

"Then how do you know you didn't pick up one of these women?"

"I…I don't…"

"Have you killed that many, Eddie?"

"I never killed any—"

Dudley swung his open hand, this time harder, opening up facial cuts inflicted the night before. Engels flailed his arms but remained in a sitting position. His face had shown uncomprehending fear and anger, but now it moved into outright grief. He knew we were closing in.

"Leona Jensen, remember her?" Dudley asked.

Engels hung his head and shook it. Dudley loosened his tie. I moved to the mattress.

"I called Seattle this morning," I said. "I talked to your dad. I told him we suspected you of killing five women. He said you didn't have it in you. He said you were a good boy. I believed him, and I believe you. But Lieutenant Smith doesn't. I've told him that there's no hard evidence to link you to those women he mentioned. I think there's only one case against you, and I think we can close that one out if you answer the lieutenant's questions truthfully."

Engels took his chin off his chest and looked at me dolefully, like a dog waiting to be praised or hit. When he spoke his voice had gone effete again: "Did you really talk to Dad?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"That he loves you. That your mother loves you, that Lillian loves you most of all."

"Oh, God…" Engels started to sob.

Dudley spoke up. "All righty, *Mr.* Engels. Does the name Margaret Cadwallader mean anything to you?"

Eddie's whole face started to spasm. He brought his voice down to baritone and said, "No," tremulously.

"No? We have a dozen eyewitnesses who placed the two of you together at the racetrack and at nightclubs on the Sunset Strip."

Engels shook his head frantically.

"The truth, Eddie," I said. "For your family's sake."

"We da-dated," Engels said.

"But you broke up?" I continued for him.

"Y-yes."

"Why, killer?" Dudley bellowed. "Because she wouldn't let you hit her?"

"I never killed anybody!"

"Nobody said you killed her, homo! Did you hit her?"

"I didn't wa—she wasn't…"

"You didn't what? You fucking degenerate!" Dudley reached his arm back and swung it at Engels in slow motion.

I caught it in mid-swing, grabbing Dudley's wrist and holding it above my head. "I told you no more of that, Smith!"

"Goddamnit, Inspector, this punk is guilty and I know it!"

"I'm not so sure. Eddie, one thing troubles me. Your Ford convertible was seen parked on Margaret Cadwallader's street on the night she was strangled."

Engels moaned, "Oh, God."

I continued: "What was it doing there?"

"I…lent it to her."

"How did you get it back?" Dudley interjected.

"I…I…"

"Did you ever fuck her at her apartment, lover-boy?" Dudley bellowed.

"No!"

"That's funny, we got your fingerprints from her bedroom."

"That's a lie! I never been fingerprinted!"

"You're the liar, lover-boy. You were fingerprinted when the Ventura cops raided a homo hangout you were drinking at."

"*That's* a lie!"

Dudley went into a laughing attack. Perfectly modulated, his musical laughter rose and fell, diminuendoed and crescendoed like a Stradivarius in the hands of a master. "Ho-ho-ho! Ha-ha-ha!" Tears were streaming down his red face. It went on and on while Engels, Breuning, and I stared at him, dumbstruck. Finally, Dudley's laughter metamorphosed into a huge, expansive yawn. He looked at Breuning. "Mike, lad, I think it's time to set lover-boy straight, don't you?"

"Yes, I do, Lieutenant."

With all eyes on him, Dudley Smith dug into his coat pocket and pulled out Maggie Cadwallader's diamond brooch. There was absolute stillness in the sordid little room. Dudley smiled demonically and Eddie Engels's face broke out into a network of throbbing blue veins. He placed his head in his hands and sat very still.

"Do you know where we got that, Eddie?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, his voice gone high.

"Did you get it from Margaret Cadwallader?"

"Yes."

"Did you pay for it?"

Engels started to laugh—high, feminine laughter. "Baby, did I pay for it! Oh, baby! Pay and pay and pay!" he shrieked.

Dudley butted in: "I'd say Margaret paid for it, lover-boy—with her life. You beat 'em, you kill 'em—and now you steal from 'em. Do you desecrate their corpses, lover-boy?"

"No!"

"You just kill them?"

"Ye— No!"

"What were you going to do with that brooch, you filth? Give it to your lezbo sister?"

"Aaarrugh!" Engels screeched.

"Did your unholy sister teach you to eat cunt, lover-boy? Did you hate her for it? Is that why you hate women? Did she piss on you? Did she make you lap her on your knees? Is that why you kill women?"

"Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes," Engels screamed, his voice a shrieking, cacophonous soprano. "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!"

Dudley threw himself on Engels, lifted him from the bed and slammed his back repeatedly into the wall. "Tell me how you did it, killer! Tell me how you croaked lovely Margaret and we won't tell your mommy and daddy about the others. Tell me!"

Engels went limp as a rag doll in Dudley's hands. When Dudley finally released him he crumpled to the bed and moaned hideously.

Dudley pointed to the bathroom. I followed him in. There was a giant cockroach crawling out of the filthy bathtub. "Cock-sucking cockroaches," he said. "They sneak into your bed at night and suck your blood. Dirty cocksuckers." He bent down and let the bug crawl onto his hand, then he closed his fist around it and squashed it into a greenish-yellow pulp. He rubbed the oozy remains on his trouser leg and said to me: "He's about to crack, lad."

"I know that," I said.

"You'll be the one to give him the final push."

"How?"

"He likes you. He's queer for you. His voice goes queer whenever you're close to him. You're his savior, but you're about to become his Judas. When I loosen my tie, I want you to hit him." I looked into Dudley's mad brown eyes and hesitated. "It's the only way, lad."

"I…I can't."

"You can and you will, Officer," Dudley hissed in my face. "I've had enough pretty-boy prima donnaism from you! You want a piece of this collar and you'll crack that fucking pervert in the face, hard! Do you understand, Underhill?"

I went cold all over. "Yes," I said.

—

We reassembled in the little room that now looked as battered as Eddie Engels himself. Dudley gestured to Mike Breuning's steno pad: "Every word, Mike."

"Right, skipper."

I brought Engels a glass of water. Knowing what I had to do, I didn't compound it by being nice to him. I just handed him the water, and when he gave me a smile, I gave him a deadpan in return.

"All right, Engels," Dudley said. "You admit to knowing Margaret Cadwallader?"

"Yes."

"And being intimate with her?"

"Yes."

"And hitting her?"

"No, I couldn't. She…look, I could turn snitch for you." Eddie tried desperately. "I know lots of people I could turn over. Dope addicts, pushers. I know some stuff from my navy time."

Dudley slapped him. "Hush, handsome Eddie. It's almost over now. We're going to fly your lovely sister, Lillian, down here. She wants to talk to you about lonely Margaret. She wants you to confess and spare your family the anguish of an indictment on five counts of murder."

"No, please," Engels whimpered.

"Lieutenant, I won't have it," I said angrily. "We've got no evidence. All we've got is the Cadwallader croaking. We can indict on that."

"Oh shit, Inspector. We can get indictments on at least five counts. We can go the whole hog! Let's get Lillian Engels down here, she'll drum some sense into little Eddie's head, like she's always done!"

"Please, no," Engels whimpered.

"Eddie," I said, "do your parents know you're homosexual?"

"No."

"Do they know that Lillian is a lesbian?"

"No. Please!"

"You don't want them to find out, do you?"

"No!" He screeched the word, his voice breaking. He wrapped his arms around himself and rocked back and forth.

"We can spare them, Eddie," I said. "You can confess to Margaret, and we won't file with the grand jury on the others. Listen to me, I'm your friend."

"No…I don't know!"

"Sssshhh. Listen to me. I think there were mitigating circumstances. Did Margaret taunt you?"

"No…yes!"

"Did she remind you of Lillian? Of all the bad things in the past?"

"Yes!"

"Evil things? Dreadful, awful things that you hate to think about?"

"Yes!"

"Do you want it to be over?"

"Oh, God, yes," he blubbered.

"Do you trust me?"

"Yes. You're nice. You're a sweet person."

"Then tell me about Margaret."

"Oh, God. Oh, please, God."

I put my hands on Engels's knee. "I care, Eddie. I really do. Tell me."

"I can't!"

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Dudley loosen his necktie. I steeled myself, then got up and faced Engels. He looked up at me, beseeching me with wide brown eyes. I curled my hand into a fist and swung it full force at the side of his nose. It cracked, and blood and cartilage fragments burst into the air. Engels grabbed at his bloody face and fell back on the mattress.

"Confess, you goddamned murderer!" Dudley screamed.

I stood there, shaking. Engels rolled to his side on the mattress and blew out a noseful of blood. When he spoke his voice was resigned and sorrowful. "I killed Maggie. No one else. It was all mine. No one else's. I killed her and now I have to pay. She didn't deserve it, but she had to pay, too. We all have to pay." Then he passed out.

Breuning was scribbling furiously, Dudley was grinning like a sated lover, and I stood there trying to drum up some exhilaration for my compromised victory.

No one spoke, and then I realized I had to move fast to salvage even this compromised glory. I left the room abruptly, then ran across the street and found a pay phone. I dialed Lorna at work.

"Lorna Weinberg," she answered.

"This is Fred, Lorna."

"Oh, Freddy. I—"

"He confessed, Lorna. To Margaret Cadwallader. We're taking him in. Probably to the Hall of Justice jail. I don't think it's a grand jury case. I think he'll plead loony. Will you get the papers ready?"

"I can't until I have the arrest report. Freddy, are you all right?"

"I do…yes, sweetheart, I'm fine."

"You don't sound fine. Will you call me when Engels is booked?"

"Yes. Can I see you tonight?"

"Yes, when?"

"I don't know. I might be wrapped up tonight writing reports."

"Just come over when you're finished, all right?"

"Yes."

"Freddy?"

"Yes?"

"I…I'll…tell you when I see you. Be careful."

"I will be."

—

Engels was in handcuffs when I got back to the interrogation room. He was wearing tan slacks, sandals, and a Hawaiian shirt that Carlisle had brought from his apartment.

Breuning was taking down his statement: "…And I panicked. I thought I heard noises from upstairs. I hopped out the kitchen window. I was afraid to get my car. I ran to some bushes by the freeway ramp. I hid out for…hours…then I took a cab home…" Engels's voice trailed off. He looked at me and spat blood on the floor. His nose was purple and hugely swollen, and both his eyes were black.

"Why, Engels?" Breuning asked.

"Because someone had to pay. It shouldn't have been someone as sweet as Maggie, but it just happened."

Dudley clapped me on the back. “Mike and I are taking Engels to the H.O.J.J. You go home. We have to corroborate on our statements. You were brilliant, lad, brilliant. The sky’s the limit for you once this thing has been sorted out.”

“Wrong, Dudley,” I said, making my move at last. “I’ll go with you. It’s my collar. You can file your report, and Engels’s confession, but it’s my collar. I filed my report with the D.A.’s office the day before we arrested Engels. It tells the truth from the beginning. You’ve been meaning to fuck me out of this collar and I won’t have it. You try, and I’ll go to the papers. I’ll tell them your little Dahlia story and how you kidnapped Engels and beat the shit out of him. I’ll throw my career down the toilet if you try to take this collar away from me. Do you understand?”

Dudley Smith had gone beyond red to a trembling purple. His big hands twitched at his sides. His eyes were tiny pinpoints of hatred. Spittle formed at the corners of his mouth, but he didn’t utter a sound.

—

I beat them downtown.

The steps at the Hall of Justice were already jammed with reporters. Old Dudley, in true ham fashion, had prepared them for his arrival.

I parked on First off Broadway and stationed myself on foot on the corner to wait for my colleagues and our prisoner. They rounded the corner a minute later, and stopped for the light. Breuning glowered at me from the driver’s seat. I opened the door and got in; Dudley and Engels were sitting in the back.

Dudley said, “You’re through, Judas,” and Engels hissed at me through gritted teeth.

I ignored them both and said, bluff-hearty in an imitation of Dudley’s brogue: “Hi, lads! Just thought I’d drop by for the booking. I see the press is here. Grand! I’ve got a lot to tell them. Dudley, have you heard of the latest anthropological discovery? Man descended not from the ape, but from the Irishman! Ho-ho-ho! Isn’t that grand?”

“Judas Iscariot,” Dudley Smith said.

“Wrong, Dud. I’m the Irish Santa Claus. Beggora!”

We pulled to the curb in front of the maze of reporters, and I pinned my badge to the lapel of my wrinkled suit coat. Dudley shoved the handcuffed Engels out the door of the car, and we both grabbed his arms and led him up the steps to the Hall of Justice. Someone yelled, “Here they are!” and a mob of shirt-sleeved newshawks descended on us like vultures, throwing questions indiscriminately amidst the explosion of flash bulbs.

“Dudley, how many did he get?” “Did he confess, Dudley?” “Smile, killer! This is for the L.A. *Daily News*!" "Tell us about it, Dud!" "Hey, it's the cop who killed those two Mexican gunsels. Talk to us, Officer!"

We waded through them. Engels kept his head down, Dudley beamed for the cameras and I kept it stoical. We were met in the vestibule of the building by the head jailer, a sheriff's lieutenant in uniform. He led us to an elevator, where a deputy shackled Engels's legs. We rode up to the eleventh floor in silence. We watched as Engels was uncuffed and shackled, issued county jail denims, and led to a one-man security cell. Safely locked in, he stared at me one last time and spit on the floor.

The lieutenant spoke: "You men are wanted immediately at Central Division. The chief of detectives himself called me."

Dudley nodded, stone-faced. I excused myself, took the steps down to street level, and walked out the front door, to be mobbed by reporters. Some recognized me from my previous notoriety and hurled questions as I made for the sidewalk.

"Underhill, whose arrest is it?" "What happened?" "Dudley says this guy's a loony. Can you make him for any unsolved jobs on the books?"

I ignored them and pushed myself free as we hit the sidewalk. I ran all the way to Central Division headquarters on Los Angeles Street, four blocks away. Sweating, I tore through corridors, stopping for a moment to compose myself before I knocked on the door of Thad Green, the chief of detectives. His secretary admitted me to his waiting room. Dudley Smith was already there, sitting on the couch, smoking. We stared at each other until the buzzer on the secretary's desk rang and he said, "You can go in now, Lieutenant Smith."

Dudley walked into the pebble-glass-doored inner sanctum, and I waited nervously, furiously thinking of Lorna in an effort to quiet my mind. Dudley emerged half an hour later, walked right past me and out the door.

A voice from within the chief's office called, "Underhill" and I went in to meet my fate. The chief sat behind his huge oak desk. He acknowledged my salute with a brisk nod of his iron gray head. "Report, Underhill," he said.

—

When I finished, still standing, the chief said, "Welcome to the detective bureau, Underhill. I'll issue a statement to the press. The D.A.'s office will be in touch with you. I want a full written report in two hours. Don't talk to any reporters. Now go home and rest."

"Thank you, sir," I said. "Where will I be assigned?"

"I don't know yet. To a squad somewhere, probably." He consulted his calendar. "You report back to me one week from today, at eight o'clock. That will be Friday, September 12. We'll have found a suitable assignment for you then.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Thank you, Officer.”

I wrote my report down the hall in a vacant storage room and left it with the chief’s secretary, then retrieved my car and drove home to Night Train, a shower, and a mercifully dreamless sleep.

12

A sparkling twilight found me waiting for the evening papers at a newsstand on Pico and Robertson. They came and the headlines screamed “Korea” rather than “Murder in L.A.” I was disappointed. I was curious to see how the department’s press release would jibe with Dudley Smith’s press handout.

After checking the second and third pages for a flash update, I started to feel relieved: I had Dudley by the balls, and the day’s reprieve the press was giving us would help smooth out what might be a tense evening with Lorna.

—

As I parked on Charleville I could see Lorna in her living room, smoking abstractedly and staring out her window. I rang the bell, and all my anger and enervation dropped like a rock. I started to feel a delicious anticipation.

The buzzer that unlocked the door sounded, and I sprinted up the stairs to find Lorna standing in the middle of the living room, leaning on her cane. She wore pink lipstick and a trace of mascara, and her burnished light brown hair had been set in a new style—swept up and back on the sides. It gave her a breathless look. She was wearing a tartan skirt and a man’s French-cuffed dress shirt that perfectly outlined her large breasts.

She smiled blankly when she saw me, and I walked to her slowly and embraced her, cradling the new hairdo gently.

“Hello,” was all I could think of to say.

Lorna dropped her cane and held me around the waist. “It’s not going to the grand jury, Freddy,” she said.

“I didn’t think it would. He confessed.”

“To how many?” I started to release Lorna, but she held on. “To how many?” she persisted.

“Just to Margaret Cadwallader. Let’s not talk about it, Lor.”

“We have to.”

“Then let’s sit down.”

We sat on the couch.

“I looked for you at the Hall of Justice. I figured you’d be there for the booking," Lorna said.

"I got summoned to see the chief of detectives. I imagine Smith went back and booked Engels. I was dog tired. I went home and slept. Why?" Lorna's face darkened angrily. "Why?" I repeated. "What the hell's going on?"

"I was there, I got a jail pass. The D.A. was there. He and Dudley Smith were talking. Smith told him that the Cadwallader killing was just the tip of the iceberg, that Engels was a mass murderer."

"Oh, God."

"Don't interrupt me. He was booked on just the one count. Cadwallader. But Smith kept repeating, 'This is a grand jury job, there's no telling how many dames this maniac's bagged!' The D.A. seemed to go along with it. Then the D.A. saw me and mentioned to Smith that I read potential grand jury cases. Smith notices that I'm a woman, and starts to lay on the blarney. Then he asks me what I'm doing here, and I tell him that you and I are friends. Then he goes livid and starts to shake. He looked insane."

Shaken, I said: "He is insane. He hates me, I crossed him."

"Then *you're* insane. He could ruin your career!"

"Hush, sweetheart. No, I've been promoted. Smith reported first, I reported afterward. I'm going to the detective bureau. To a squad room somewhere. Thad Green told me himself. Whatever Smith told Green jibes with my report to you and my official arresting officer's report, which is the truth. What Smith told the D.A. is just hyperbole. All I—"

"Freddy, you told me there was no hard evidence to connect Engels to any other murders."

"That's absolutely true. But…"

Lorna was getting more red-faced and agitated by the second: "But nothing, Freddy. I *saw* Engels. He was beaten terribly. I asked Smith about that and he handed me some baloney about how he tried to resist arrest. I kept saying to myself, Good God, could my Freddy have had anything to do with that? Is that justice? What kind of man have I gotten involved with?"

I just stared at the Hieronymus Bosch print on the wall.

"Freddy, answer me!"

"I can't, counselor. Good night."

I drove home, steadfastly quelling all speculation regarding Lorna, woman-killers, and lunatic cops. I tried out my new rank: Detective Frederick U. Underhill. Detective Fred Underhill. The dicks. At twenty-seven. I was probably the youngest detective in the Los Angeles Police Department. I would have to find out. In November, the sergeant's exam. Detective Sergeant Frederick Underhill. I would have to buy three new suits and a couple of sport jackets, some neckties and a half dozen pair of slacks. Detective Fred Underhill. But. It kept rearing its beautiful, burnished brown head. Lorna

Weinberg, counselor at law. Lorna Weinberg.

Be still, I said to myself, trying to heed my own advice—just don't think.

At home, after a roughhouse session with Night Train, some kind of nameless future-fear hit me and to combat it I dug out some textbooks.

I tried to engross myself, but it was useless; the words flew by undigested, almost unseen. I couldn't stop thinking.

I was about to give it up when my doorbell rang. Not daring to guess, I flung the door open. It was Lorna.

"Hello, Officer," she said. "May I come in?"

"I'm a detective now, Lorna. Can you accept what I had to do to get there?"

"I…I know I convicted you of an unknown crime on insufficient evidence."

"I would have filed a writ of habeas corpus, counselor, but you would have beat me in court."

"I would have appealed, in your behalf. Did you know that you are the only Frederick U. Underhill in all the L.A. area phone books?"

"No doubt. What are you doing here, Lorna?"

"Stalking your heart."

"Then don't stand in the doorway, come in and meet my dog."

—

Many joyful hours later, sated and engulfed with each other, too tired to sleep or think and unable to relinquish each other's touch, I had an idea. I dug out my meager collection of corny ballads, formerly used to seduce lonely women. I put "You Belong to Me" by Jo Stafford on the phonograph and turned the volume up so that Lorna could hear it in the bedroom.

She was laughing when I returned to her. "Oh, Freddy, that's so…"

"Corny?"

"Yes!"

"My sentiments, too. But, needless to say, I feel romantic tonight."

"It's morning, darling."

"I stand corrected. Lorna?"

"Yes?"

"May I have the next dance?"

"Dance? Freddy, I can't dance!"

"Yes, you can."

"Freddy!"

“You can hop on your good leg. I’ll hold you up. Come on!”

“Freddy, I can’t!”

“I insist.”

“Freddy, I’m naked!”

“Good. So am I.”

“Freddy!”

“Enough said, Lor. Let’s hit it!”

I scooped the naked, laughing Lorna into my arms and carried her into the living room and deposited her on the couch, then put Patti Page singing “The Tennessee Waltz” on the phonograph. When she began to intone the syrupy introduction, I walked to Lorna and extended my hands.

She reached for them and I pulled her to me and held her close, encircling her at the buttocks and lifting her slightly off the floor so that her bad leg was suspended, and her weight was stationed on her good one. She held me tightly around my back, and we moved awkwardly in very small steps as Patti Page sang.

“Freddy,” Lorna whispered into my chest, “I think I—”

“Don’t think, Lor.”

“I was going to say…I think I love you.”

“Then think, because I know I love you.”

“Freddy, I don’t think this record is corny.”

“Neither do I.”

—

We drove to Santa Barbara Saturday afternoon, taking the Pacific Coast Highway. The blue Pacific was on our left, brown cliffs and green hills were on our right. There was hardly a cloud or a trace of smog. We cruised along with the top down in comfortable silence. Lorna kept her hand on my leg, giving me playful squeezes from time to time.

We hadn’t talked about the case all morning, and it hovered benignly on some back burner of my mind. By silent agreement we had not turned on the radio. The present was too good, too real, to be marred by intimation of the harsh reality we both worked in.

So we drove north, on our first outing together. Lorna inched her hand, broadly in a parody of stealth, up my leg until I went, “Garrr! What the hell are you doing?”

She laughed. “What do you think?”

I laughed. “I think it feels good.”

“Don’t think, just drive.” Lorna removed her hand. “Freddy, I was thinking."

"About what?"

"I just realized that I don't know a damn thing about what you do—I mean, with your time."

I considered this, and decided to be candid. "Well, before Wacky was killed I used to spend a lot of time with him. I don't really have any friends. And I used to chase women."

Surprisingly, Lorna laughed at this. "Strictly to get laid?"

"No, it was more than that. It was partly for the wonder, but that was B.L."

"B.L.?"

"Before Lorna."

Lorna squeezed my leg and pointed to the shoulder. "Pull over, please."

I did, alarmed at the darkly serious look on Lorna's face. I framed that face with both my hands. "What is it, sweetheart?" I asked.

"Freddy, I can't have children," Lorna blurted out.

"I don't care," I said. "I mean, I do care, but it doesn't make a goddamned bit of difference to me. Really, I—"

"Freddy, I just had to say it."

"Because you think we have a future together?"

"Y-yes."

"Lorna, I couldn't even consider a future without you." She twisted away from me and bit at her knuckles. "Lorna, I love you, and we're not leaving here until you tell me you believe what I've just told you."

"I don't know. I think so."

"Don't think."

Lorna burst out laughing, tearfully. "Then I believe you."

"Good, now let's get the hell out of here, I'm hungry."

—

We timed our arrival perfectly, Santa Barbara opening up before us, muted in the twilight like a heaven-sent reprieve from the humid, smog-bound commonness of L.A.

We found our weekend haven on Bath Street, a few blocks off State: the Mission Bell Hotel, a converted Victorian mansion painted a guileless bright yellow. We registered as Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Underhill. The desk clerk started to look askance at our lack of luggage, but the sight of my badge when I pulled out my billfold to pay for the room calmed him down.

Giggling conspiratorially, I took Lorna's arm as we walked to the elevator. Our room had bright yellow walls festooned with cheap oil paintings of the Santa Barbara Mission, bay windows fronting the palm-lined street, and a big brass bed with a bright yellow bedspread and canopy.

"I'll never eat another lemon," Lorna said.

I kissed her on the cheek. "Then let's not have fish tonight. I left my shaving kit in the car. I'll be right back."

I took the yellow-carpeted stairs down to street level. The clerk, a skinny, middle-aged man with incongruous bright red hair, started to fidget when he saw me walk through the foyer. I had the feeling he wanted to ask me something. He put out his cigarette and approached me.

I made it easy for him. "What's up, doc?" I asked.

The man slouched in front of me, his hands jammed into his trouser pockets. He hemmed and hawed, then blurted it out: "It ain't none of my business, Officer," he said, looking around in all directions and lowering his voice, "but when they say 'degenerate' do they really mean 'queer'?"

"What the—" I started to say, then realized the source of the crazy non sequitur and sighed. "You mean it made the Santa Barbara papers?"

"Yes, sir. You're a big hero. *Is* that what it means?"

"I'm not at liberty to discuss it," I said, leaving the clerk alone in the yellow foyer contemplating semantics.

I trotted down to State Street and found a newsstand, where I bought copies of the L.A. *Times* and the Santa Barbara *Clarion.* It was on the front page of both papers, big headlines complete with photos. I started with the *Times*:

GAMBLER CONFESSES TO KILLING OF HOLLYWOOD WOMAN!

Linked to at Least Six Other Murders!

LOS ANGELES Sept. 7: Police today arrested a suspect in the August 12 strangulation murder of Margaret Cadwallader, 36, of 2311 Harold Way, Hollywood. The suspect was named as Edward Engels, 32, of Horn Drive, West Hollywood. Shortly after his arrest, Engels, a gambler with no visible means of support, confessed to L.A.P.D. detectives Dudley Smith, Michael Breuning, and Frederick Underhill, saying, "I killed Maggie! She treated me like dirt, so I returned her to the dirt."

Miss Cadwallader, who worked as a bookkeeper at the Small World Import-Export Company in Los Angeles, was believed to have been killed by a burglar she interrupted in the early morning hours of

August 12. Police had been carrying their investigation along those lines, questioning burglars known to use violence and getting no results, until the intervention of Detective Underhill, who was then assigned to patrol duties.

In a formally signed statement to the press, Detective Underhill, 27, said: "When I was working Wilshire Patrol earlier this year, my partner and I discovered the body of a young woman. She had been strangled. When the Cadwallader case made the papers, I noted similarities between the two deaths. I began an investigation of my own, and brought my evidence, which at this time I cannot discuss, to Lieutenant Dudley Smith. Lieutenant Smith headed the investigation, which led to the arrest of Edward Engels."

Lieutenant Smith praised Underhill for his "grand, splendid police work" and went on to say, "We got Engels through dogged police work; long stakeouts at the many bars where he went looking for lonely women. His arrest is a victory for justice and a moral America."

Links to More Victims Sought

In his rich brogue, the Irish-born L.A.P.D. lieutenant, 46, with 23 years on the force, continued: "I believe the tragic Miss Cadwallader is just the tip of the iceberg. Engels is a known degenerate who has frequented bars catering to his kind in the Hollywood area for many years. We know for a fact that he picks up women in cocktail lounges and pays them to be beaten. I strongly believe Engels to be responsible for at least half a dozen strangulation killings of women over the past five years throughout Southern California. I hope to persuade the district attorney to launch a massive investigation along these lines."

I couldn't think for my sudden anger. Hurriedly, I read through the front pages of the Santa Barbara paper. There was nothing new, they copied the *Times* almost verbatim.

Dudley Smith, the fat-mouthed glory-monger, was pulling out all the stops in his monomania. I was covered, but he was out to hang fresh victims on the head of a one-time murderer.

I ran back to the hotel, bursting through the foyer and taking the stairs three at a time. The door to our room was open, and Lorna was sitting in an armchair, smoking contentedly and reading a Santa Barbara tourist brochure.

I flung the newspapers at her lap. "Read these, Lorna," I said.

She did, after giving me a long, concerned look. I watched her read. When she finished, she said, “It’s nothing I didn’t expect.”

“What do you mean?”

“I knew Smith would milk it for all it was worth.”

“You don’t know him, Lor. Not like I do. He’ll try to pin everything from the Johnstown flood to World War II on Engels. He’s out of his goddamned mind!”

Lorna smiled and took my hands. “Freddy, did Eddie Engels kill Margaret Cadwallader?”

“Yes, but—”

“Be still. Then he’s in custody where he belongs. And you put him there, not Dudley Smith. If you’re worried about Smith starting some insane, far-flung investigation that would involve you, forget about it. The D.A. would never authorize it.”

I calmed down, slightly. “Are you sure?”

“Yes. He would never spend the money. He believes in letting sleeping dogs lie. You think Engels is innocent of those other killings?”

“Yes. He killed Cadwallader, and that’s it.”

Lorna took my face in her hands and kissed it several times, softly. “You are beginning to care about justice, darling,” she said, “and it’s a wonderful thing to see.”

“I’m not sure of that.”

“I am. Did you read the story on the twelfth page of the *Times*?”

“No.”

“Good. Then I’ll read it to you.” Lorna put out her cigarette and cleared her throat. “The title is ‘Hailing a True-Life Hero,’ and the subtitle is ‘Policeman Is a One-Man Crimestopper Wave!’ Here we go: ‘Detective Frederick U. Underhill, twenty-seven, is the youngest officer to achieve that rank in the history of the Los Angeles Police Department. He is not your average cop. He is a 1946 graduate of Loyola College who didn’t want to be a college man. He fought tenaciously to enter the service during World War II, petitioning the draft board several times to let him enlist, despite his punctured eardrum. He was refused, and made the most of his college years, graduating magna cum laude with a degree in history. Detective Underhill is an orphan, and possessed the highest grade point average ever achieved at the St. Brendan’s Home for Children. Monsignor John Kelly, principal of St. Brendan’s High School, where Underhill attended, said, “Fred’s recent successes as a police officer don’t surprise me at all. He was a hard-working, devout boy who I knew was destined for great things.”

“ ‘ “But what things!” Underhill has said, “I have never wanted to be anything but a cop. It’s the only life I have ever considered.”

" 'And we, the citizens of Los Angeles, are the lucky benefactors of Fred Underhill's boyhood decision to seek the selfless life of a police officer. Item: while working as a patrolman in the Wilshire Division, Fred Underhill had more felony arrests to his credit than any officer at the station. Item: Fred Underhill had one of the highest academic averages ever to come out of the Police Academy. Item: Captain William Beckworth, Underhill's former watch commander at Wilshire called him "The greatest natural policeman I have ever encountered." Heady praise indeed, but backed up by fact: in February of this year, Officer Fred Underhill shot and killed the two armed robbers who had just robbed a market. His partner died in the shootout. Now the cracking of the baffling Margaret Cadwallader case, both within one year.

" 'The Korean War rages on. Overseas we are at a standstill with the communist enemy. On the home front, the war against crime wages on. It is a war that will regrettably always be with us. Thank God men like Detective Fred Underhill will always be with us.' "

Lorna finished with a flourish and swooned in a parody of lovestruck awe. "Well, Officer Fred?" she said.

"They forgot to say I was tall, handsome, intelligent, and charming. That would have been the truth. However, they opted for horseshit—it reads better. They couldn't very well have said that I was an atheist draft dodger and, before you, a pussy chaser on the prowl…"

"Freddy!"

"It's the truth. Oh, shit, Lorna, I'm so goddamned tired of this thing."

"Are you really, dear?"

"Yes."

"Then will you do me two favors?"

"Name them."

"Don't mention the case for the rest of the weekend."

"Okay. And?"

"And make love to me."

"Double okay." I reached for Lorna, and we fell laughing onto the bed.

—

Sometime later, we called room service for two trout dinners that arrived on a linen-covered pushcart, delivered by a bellboy who rapped discreetly on the door and called out softly, "Supper, folks!"

After eating, Lorna lit a cigarette and eyed me with warmth and much humor. Somehow it brought forth in me a huge rush of curiosity, and I said, "Turnabout, Lorna?"

"Turnabout?"

"Right. You wanted to know about the missing hours in my life…"

"All right, darling, turnabout. After the accident, much self-pity: feeling trapped, a saintly dead mother, a fat sister, a buffoon for a father, and all the goddamned operations—and false hopes and speculations and guilt and self-hatred and anger. And the detachment. That was the worst of all. *Knowing* I was not of this time and place—or any time and place. Then learning to walk all over again, and feeling joyous until the doctor told me I could never have children. Then awful, awful bitterness and the little lessons in acceptance."

"What do you mean, Lor?"

"I mean never knowing when my bad leg would go out completely, and I'd fall on my ass. It always seemed to happen when I was wearing a white dress. Learning to take stairs. Having to leave early for class when I knew there would be stairs to climb. The awful, gentle people who wanted to help. The men who thought I'd be an easy lay because I was crippled. They were right, you know. I was an easy lay."

"So was I, Lor."

"Anyway, then college, and law school, and books and painting and music and a few men and some kind of reconciliation with my family, and finally the D.A.'s office."

"And?"

"And *what*, Freddy?" Lorna's voice rose in exasperation. "You are so goddamned persistent! I know you want me to talk about the 'wonder'—whatever the hell it is—but I just don't *feel* it."

"Easy, sweetheart. I wasn't prying."

"You were and you weren't. I know you want to know everything about me, but give it time. I'm not the wonder."

"Yes, you are."

"No, I'm not! You want to control the wonder. That's why you're a cop. Freddy, I want to be with you, but you can never control me. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand that you're still afraid of things. I'm not anymore."

"Don't be oblique, goddamnit!"

"Shit," I said, feeling suddenly the weight of my carefully thought-out life collapse from three weeks of tension and expectation. "Wonder, justice, horseshit. I just don't know anymore."

"Yes, you do," Lorna said. "There's me. I'm not wonder or justice."

"What are you?"

"I'm your Lorna."

—

That night and early morning we didn't go sight-seeing on State Street or take a romantic walk on the beach, or tour historic Santa Barbara Mission. We went dancing—in our lemon-colored room—to the music, on the radio, of the Four Lads, the McGuire Sisters, Teresa Brewer, and the immortal big band of the late Glenn Miller.

We found a station that played requests, and I called in and importuned them to play a host of old standards that were suddenly dear to me in the light of Lorna. The disc jockey obliged, and Lorna and I held each other close and moved slowly across the room to the soft beat of "The Way You Look Tonight," "Blue Moon," "Perfidia," "Blueberry Hill," "Moments to Remember," "Good Night, Irene" and, of course, Patti Page singing "The Tennessee Waltz."

—

At dawn on Monday morning, we got up and reluctantly drove back to L.A. and the administration of justice.

13

I was sound asleep in my apartment when the telephone rang. It was two o'clock Monday afternoon. I had been asleep a scant three hours.

It was Lorna. "Freddy, I have to see you right away. It's urgent."

"What is it, Lor?"

She sounded gravely worried. There was a timbre to her voice I had never heard before. "I can't talk about it on the phone."

"Did they arraign Engels?"

"Yes. He pleaded not guilty. Dudley Smith was there with the assistant D.A. and Engels started screaming. The bailiffs had to restrain him."

"Jesus. Are you at your office?"

"Yes."

"I'll be there in forty-five minutes."

It took me fifty-five, dressing hurriedly and highballing my Buick at ten miles over the speed limit. I flashed my badge at the parking attendant at the lot on Temple and he nodded crisply, placing an official-looking piece of paper under my windshield wiper. Two minutes later I was barging through the door of Lorna's office.

Lorna had company, and they looked grave. Both were smartly tailored men in their early forties. One of them, the more impressive looking of the two, seemed familiar. He was sitting on Lorna's green leather couch with his long legs stretched out and crossed at the ankles. He fingered a leather briefcase stationed next to him on the floor. He was intimidating even in this casual posture. The other man was sandy-haired and plump, and wearing an ascot and a cashmere sweater on a day when the temperature promised to reach ninety-five. He was licking his lips repeatedly and moving his eyes back and forth from the briefcase man to me.

Lorna made the introductions as I pulled up a wooden chair next to her desk. "Detective Fred Underhill, this is Walter Canfield." She pointed to the man with the briefcase. "And this is Mr. Clark Winton." She nodded in the direction of the man with the ascot. Both men acknowledged my presence with stares—Canfield's hostile, Winton's nervous.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?" I said.

Canfield started to open his mouth, but Lorna spoke first in a voice that was all business: "Mr. Canfield is an attorney, Fred. He represents Mr. Winton." She hesitated, then said haltingly, "Mr. Canfield and I have worked together in the past. I trust him." She looked at Canfield, who smiled grimly.

"I'll be brief, Officer," he said. "My client was with Eddie Engels on the night Margaret Cadwallader was murdered." He waited for my reaction. When all he got was silence he added, "My client was with Engels all night. He remembers the date very well. August 12 is his birthday."

Canfield looked at me triumphantly. Winton was staring into his lap, kneading his trembling hands.

I felt my whole body go rigid with a pins-and-needles sensation. "Eddie Engels confessed, Mr. Canfield," I stated carefully.

"My client has informed me that Engels is a disturbed man who carries a great deal of guilt with him for certain events in his past."

Winton interjected: "Eddie is a troubled man, Officer. He was in love with an older man when he was in the navy. The man made him do awful things, and made Eddie hate himself for being what he was."

"He confessed," I repeated.

"Come, Officer. We both know that confession was obtained under physical duress. I saw Engels at his arraignment this morning. He has been severely beaten."

"He was restrained through force when he tried to resist arrest," I lied.

Canfield snorted. In different surroundings he would have spat. I met his contemptuous look with one of my own, then transferred it to Clark Winton. "Are you homosexual, Mr. Winton?" I asked, already certain of the answer.

"Freddy, goddamnit!" Lorna blurted.

Winton swallowed and looked to his attorney for support. Canfield started to whisper into his ear, but I interrupted them: "Because if you are, and you are planning to come forth with this information, the police will want signed statements regarding your relationship with Engels and a detailed account of your activities with him on the night of August 12. Are you prepared for that?"

"Eddie and I were lovers," Winton said calmly, with great resignation.

I gathered my argument and spat it out: "Mr. Winton, we have a signed confession. We also have eyewitnesses who will testify to having seen Engels's car on Harold Way on the night of the murder. You are opening yourself up to an accessory rap if you go public with your story."

Canfield eyed me coldly. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Lorna sitting rigid, fuming. "My client is a man of courage, Officer," Canfield said. "Edward Engels's life is at stake. Thad Green is an old friend of mine, as is the district attorney. Mr. Winton's affidavit will be delivered this afternoon. Mr. Winton realizes the police will have many questions for him; I will be present at the questioning. Mr. Winton is a prominent man; you will not beat any confession out of him. I came here to talk to you only because Lorna is an old friend and I respect her judgment of people. She told me you were concerned with justice, and I believed her…"

"I *am* concerned with justice, and…"

I couldn't finish. My resistance crumbled in a heap, and I felt my vision darken at the corner of my eyes. I picked up a heavy quartz bookend from Lorna's desk and hurled it at the glass part of her office door. The glass shattered outward and the bookend landed on the corridor floor with a loud bang. My hands were aching to hit something, so I mashed them together and closed my eyes, fighting tears and tremors. I heard Canfield say goodbye to Lorna, and heard footsteps as he ushered his client out the half-destroyed door.

"I believe Winton," Lorna said finally.

"So do I," I said.

"Freddy, Dudley Smith convinced the D.A. to let him head an investigation into a half dozen unsolved homicides. He wants to pin them on Eddie Engels."

"Jesus, crazy Dudley. Is this guy Canfield a hotshot? He looks familiar."

"He's one of the finest, highest-paid criminal lawyers on the West Coast."

"And Winton has got money?"

"Yes, he's very wealthy. He owns two textile plants in Long Beach."

Still looking for outs, I persisted. "And Canfield is buddies with Thad Green and the D.A.?"

"Yes."

"Then Engels will go free and Dudley Smith and I will be up shit's creek without a paddle."

I looked through the gaping glass hole in the door, searching for something that would stop up the now-gaping hole in my life. "I'm sorry about the door, Lorna," was all I could think of.

Lorna pushed her swivel chair over to where I was sitting. "Are you sorry for Eddie Engels?" she asked.

"Yes," I said.

Lorna kissed me softly on the lips. "Then let justice be done. It's out of your hands now."

I pushed Lorna away from me. I didn't want to believe her. "And what about Maggie Cadwallader?" I shouted. I turned around to look at the hole in the door. Three men in suits were looking in on us.

"You okay, Lorna?" one of them asked.

Lorna nodded. They departed, looking skeptical. I could hear glass being swept up.

"What *about* Maggie Cadwallader?" Lorna asked. "Did you want revenge for her, or was this whole crusade just an exercise in wonder that went bad?"

Suddenly I wanted to hurt Lorna as I had never wanted to hurt anyone before. "I fucked Maggie Cadwallader on the same day I met you. I picked her up at the Silver Star bar and took her to her apartment and fucked her. That was how I got involved in this thing, how I knew where to look for evidence. I knew if I found the killer my career would skyrocket. I wanted you from the first moment I saw you. I wanted to have you, to fuck you, to make you mine. That was why I involved you in this; it was just another seduction in a whole fucking long line of them."

I didn't wait for Lorna to respond. I walked out of her office, not looking back.

—

I drove aimlessly, the way I had on the night I had met Maggie Cadwallader. I bought a copy of the L.A. *Mirror.* Engels's arraignment was on the front page. " 'I Am Not A Homo!' Killer Screams." Yellow journalism at its best. The account revealed that Engels had had to be restrained and dragged out of the courtroom by three muscular bailiffs after submitting his plea of not guilty.

I threw the paper out the car window and drove east. Near San Bernardino I glimpsed from the freeway a large, well-set-up municipal golf course. I got off at the next exit, found the golf haven, parked in the deserted lot, bought two dozen balls, and rented a set of beat-up clubs from the pro shop. After paying my green fee, I ducked past the starter's cubicle and walked straight into the heart of the course.

I thought and thought—and thought. I tried not to think. I succeeded and I failed. I sailed a half dozen well-hit two-irons into deep nowhere and felt nothing.

Mea culpa, I said to myself. What went wrong? What really happened? What will happen next? Will the department back me up? Will I go back to patrol in Watts, humbled, singled out as a maverick destined to go nowhere? Logical fallacies. Post hoc, ergo propter hoc: after this, therefore because of this. Circumstantial evidence. A guilty man. Guilty not of murder, but of guilt. Poor queer Eddie. Gallant queer Clark Winton. Mea maxima culpa. Forgive me, father, for I have sinned. What father? Eddie Engels? Dudley Smith? Thad Green? Chief Parker? God? There is no God but the wonder. I tried to harden my heart against Lorna, and failed. Lorna, Lorna, Lorna.

I slammed a furious succession of three-irons straight into a grove of trees, hoping they would ricochet back and knock me dead. They didn't; they just disappeared, never to be seen again, sacrifices to a golf god I had ceased to believe in.

—

I drove home. I could hear my phone ringing as I pulled into the driveway. Thinking it might be Lorna, I ran for it.

The ringing persisted as I unlocked my front door. I picked up the receiver. "Hello?" I said warily.

"Underhill?" a familiar voice queried.

"Yes. Captain Jurgensen?"

"Yes. I've been calling you since six o'clock."

"I've been out. I drove out to San Berdoo."

"I see. Then you haven't heard?"

"Heard what?"

"Eddie Engels is dead. He committed suicide in his cell this afternoon. He was about to be released. Evidence came up to point to his innocence."

"I…I…"

"Underhill, are you there?"

"Y-yes."

"The chief himself asked me, as your last commanding officer, to inform you."

"I…don't…"

"Underhill, you are to report downtown at eight tomorrow morning. Central Division, room 219. Underhill, did you hear me?"

"Yes, sir," I said, letting the receiver slip out of my shaking hands and fall to the floor.

14

There were three of us present in room 219. The two cops, my interrogators, were named Milner and Quinn. Both were sergeants from Internal Affairs and both were burly and sunburned and middle-aged. They had both doffed their suit coats as they had ushered me into the crowded little room. I strangely relished their fatuous attempt at intimidation, and was certain I could best them at any form of psychological warfare.

We were all wearing Smith and Wesson .38 police specials in shoulder holsters, which gave the proceedings a ritualistic air. I was nervous, high on adrenaline and phony righteous indignation. I was prepared for anything, including the end of my career, and that strengthened my resolve to defeat these two obdurate-looking policemen.

I pulled up a chair, propped up my feet on a ledge of recruiting posters, and smiled disarmingly while Quinn and Milner dug cigarettes and Zippo lighters out of their suit coats and lit up. Milner, who was the slightly taller and older of the two, offered the pack to me.

“I don’t smoke, Sergeant,” I said, keeping my voice clipped and severe, the voice of a man who takes trouble from no one.

“Good man,” Quinn said, smiling, “wish I didn’t.”

“I quit once, during the Depression,” Milner said. “I had a good-looking girlfriend who hated the smell of tobacco. My wife don’t like it either, but she ain’t so good looking.”

“Then why’d you marry her?” Quinn asked.

“ ’Cause she told me I looked like Clark Gable!” Milner snorted.

Quinn got a big bang out of that. “My wife told me I looked like Bela Lugosi and I slugged her,” he said.

“You should have bit her neck,” Milner cracked.

“I do, every night.” Quinn guffawed, blowing out a huge lungful of smoke and pulling up a chair facing me. Milner laughed along and opened a tiny window at the back of the room, letting in rays of hazy sunshine and a flood of traffic noise.

“Officer Underhill,” he said, “my partner and I are here today because doubts have been raised about your fitness to serve the department.” Milner’s voice had metamorphosed into a precise professorial tone. He started a dramatic pause, drawing on his cigarette, and I answered, mimicking his inflections:

“Sergeant, I have grave doubts about the brass hats who sent you here to question me. Has Internal Affairs questioned Dudley Smith?”

Milner and Quinn looked at each other. Their look was informed with the humorous secret knowledge of longtime partners.

“Officer,” Quinn said, “do you think we are here because a queer slashed his wrists in County Jail yesterday?” I didn’t answer. Quinn continued: “Do you think we’re here because you initiated, illegally, the arrest of an innocent man?”

Milner took over. “Officer, do you think we’re here because you have brought great disgrace on the department?”

He took a folded up newspaper out of his back pocket and read from it: “ ‘Hero cop quick on the trigger? L.A.P.D. in hot water? Thanks to crack legal beagle Walter Canfield and a courageous anonymous witness, Eddie Engels almost walked out the door of County Jail a free man. Instead, humiliated and tortured by his ordeal of false arrest, he left under a sheet. Canfield and the man with whom Engels spent the night of August 12—the night he was alleged to have murdered Margaret Cadwallader—tragically got to the authorities too late with their information. Eddie Engels slashed his wrists with a contraband razor blade in his cell on the eleventh floor of the Hall of Justice yesterday afternoon, the victim of gunslinger justice.

“ ‘Our Seattle correspondent contacted the victim’s father, Wilhelm Engels, a pharmacist in suburban Seattle. “I can’t believe that God would do such a thing,” the white-haired old gentleman said. “There must be an investigation into the policemen who arrested my Edward. Edward was a gentle, lovely boy who never hurt anyone. We must have justice.” Mr. Engels told our correspondent that Walter Canfield has offered his services, free of charge, in filing suit for false arrest against the Los Angeles Police Department. “Mr. Engels will have his justice,” Canfield told reporters shortly before he learned of Engels’s death, “the justice his son was denied. This is clearly a case of a quick-on-the-trigger young cop out to make a name for himself.” ’ ”

Milner paused. My vision was starting to darken at the edges, but I shook my head and it cleared.

“Go on,” I said.

Milner coughed and continued. “ ‘Officer Frederick U. Underhill, canonized within the L.A.P.D. and by Los Angeles newspapers earlier this year for killing two holdup men, brought the same rash justice to his investigation of Eddie Engels. Veteran L.A.P.D. Detective Lieutenant Dudley

Smith told our reporter: “Fred Underhill is an ambitious young man out to make chief of police in record time. He caught myself and several others up in his crusade to get Eddie Engels. I admit I went along with it. I admit I was at fault. Last night I lit a candle for poor Eddie’s family. I also lit one for Fred Underhill and prayed that he learns a lesson from this tragedy he perpetrated.” ’ ”

I started to laugh. My laughter sounded hysterical to my own ears. Milner and Quinn didn’t think it was funny. Quinn snapped: “This article, which was in the L.A. *Daily News*, goes on to call for your resignation and an investigation into the entire department. What do you think about *that*, Underhill?”

I calmed myself and stared at my inquisitors. “I feel that that article was written in a very poor prose style. Convoluted, hysterical, hyperbolic. Hemingway would disapprove of it. F. Scott Fitzgerald would turn over in his grave. Shakespeare would be dismayed. That’s what I think.”

“Underhill,” Milner said, “you know the department takes care of its own, don’t you?”

“Sure. Witness that lunatic Dudley Smith. He’ll come out of this thing smelling like a rose and probably make Captain. Ahhh, yes. Grand!”

“Underhill, the department was prepared to stand by you until we did a little checking up on you.”

I started to go cold in the hot, smoky room. The traffic noise on Los Angeles Street sounded alternately very loud and very soft.

“Oh, yeah?” I said. “Come up with anything interesting?”

“Yes,” Quinn said, “we did. Let me quote. ‘Sarah had high full breasts with cone-shaped dark brown nipples. Coarse hairs surrounded them. She was an experienced lover. We moved well together. She anticipated my motions and accommodated them with fluid grace.’ Want some more, Underhill?”

“You filthy bastards,” I said.

“Did you know that Sarah Kefalvian is a Communist, Underhill? She’s listed in the rolls of five organizations that have been classified as Commie fronts. Did you know that?” Milner leaned over me, his knuckles white from grasping the table. “Do you fuck a lot of Commies, Underhill?” he hissed.

“Are *you* a Communist, Freddy?” Quinn asked.

“Go fuck yourself,” I said.

Milner leaned over further; I could smell his tobacco breath. “I think you *are* a Communist. And a filthy pervert. Decent men don’t write about the women they fuck. Decent men don’t fuck Commies.”

I stuck my hands under my thighs to control their shaking and to keep myself from hitting someone. My head was pounding and my vision blurred from the blackness throbbing behind my eyes. “You forgot to mention I’ve got red upholstery on my car. You forgot to mention I also fuck Koreans, Republicans, and Democrats. When I was in high school I had a redheaded girlfriend. I've got a red cashmere sweater, you forgot to mention that."

"There's one thing *you* didn't forget to mention," Quinn said. "Listen: 'I told Sarah about dodging the draft in '42. She is the only person besides Wacky to know that. Telling her made me feel strangely free.' "

Quinn spat on the floor. "I served in the war, Underhill. I lost a brother at Guadalcanal. All good Americans served. Anyone who dodged the draft is a no-good Commie traitor and not worthy to carry a badge. You have brought disgrace to the department. The chief himself has been told of what we found in your diary. He ordered this investigation. We only had a little time to search your apartment. God knows what other Commie degeneracy we would have found, if we had had more time. You have two choices: resign, or face departmental trial on charges of moral turpitude. If you don't resign, we will take your diary to the feds. Draft-dodging is a federal offense."

Milner took a typed form out of his suit coat pocket. He placed it on the table along with a pen; then he and his partner walked out of the room.

I stared at the resignation form. The print blurred before my eyes. Tears welled in them, and I willed the effort to stanch their flow. It took a minute, but they stopped before they could burst out of me. I walked to the window and looked out. I marked the time and committed the scene to memory, then took off my shoulder holster and laid it on the table. I placed my badge next to it and signed away my access to the wonder.

—

Camera-wielding reporters were stationed in front of my apartment as I turned onto my block. I couldn't face them, so I drove around the corner and cut through the alley, then parked and hopped fences, entering my apartment through the back door. I filled a suitcase with clean clothes, hitched Night Train to his leash and walked back out to the alley and around the block to my car.

I drove north, with no destination in mind. Night Train chewed golf balls in the back seat. It was easy not to think of my future; I didn't have one.

Hugging the coast road reminded me of my recent jaunt with Lorna, which suddenly brought the future back to me in a blinding rush of schemes and contingencies.

I looked at the telephone poles lining the Pacific Coast Highway and contemplated sweet, instant oblivion. When the tall wooden spires began to look like the ultimate scheme, I let out a muffled, dry sob and swung my Buick inland through some insignificant dirt canyon trail, moving upward through green scrub country until I came down forty-five minutes later in the San Fernando Valley.

I headed north again, catching the ridge route in Chatsworth and moving up it toward the Grapevine and Bakersfield. I wanted to find someplace barren and bereft of beauty, a good flat place to walk my dog and arrive at decisions without the distractions of picturesque surroundings.

—

Bakersfield wasn't the place. At three thirty p.m., the temperature was still close to one hundred degrees. I stopped at a diner and ordered a Coke. The Coke cost a nickel and the ice that accompanied it a quarter. The counterman was giving me the fisheye. He handed me my Coke in a paper cup and opened his mouth to speak. I didn't let him; I slammed some change on the counter top and walked quickly back to my car.

Some hundred and fifty miles north of Bakersfield, I realized I was entering Steinbeck country, and I almost sighed with relief. Here was a place to light, filled with the nuances and epiphanies of my carefree college reading days.

But it didn't happen. My mind took over and I knew that being surrounded by verdant farmland and picaresque, hard-drinking Mexicans would bring back the wonder full force, along with a barrage of guilt, shame, self-loathing, and fear that spelled only one thing: it is over.

I pulled to the edge of the roadside. I let Night Train out and he ran ahead of me into a seemingly endless sea of furrowed irrigation trenches. I walked behind him, listening to his happy bays. We walked and walked and walked, kicking up dust clouds that soon covered my trouser legs with a rich, dark brown soil. I walked all the way into a spot where the world seemed eclipsed in all directions. All my horizons were a deep dark brownness.

I sat down in the dirt. Night Train barked at me. I scooped up a handful of soil and let it slip through my fingers. I smelled my hands. They smelt of feces and infinity.

Suddenly the irrigation pipes that surrounded me broke into life, spraying me with water. I got up reflexively and started running in the direction of my car. Night Train did too, quickly passing me. Some unseen timing device was at work, and the sprinklers kept popping on in perfect succession, right behind me. I ran and I ran and I ran, barely staying ahead of the ten-foot-high geysers of water. Exhausted, I came to a halt at the edge of the blacktop, trying to catch my breath. Night Train barked happily, his chest heaving also. My shoes, socks, and trouser legs were soaking wet and smelled of manure. I got clean clothes out of the suitcase in the back seat, and changed right there on the roadway.

By the time I had finished dressing and had regained my breath, an eerie stillness had come over me. It held me there and wouldn't let me move or think. After a few moments I started to weep. I wept and I wept and I wept, standing there on the dusty roadside, my hands braced against the hood of my car. Finally my sobbing stopped, as abruptly as the stillness had begun. I took my hands from the car and stood upright as tenuously as a baby taking his first steps.

—

It took me a solid four hours of lead-footed driving to make it back to Los Angeles. After dropping Night Train with my mystified landlady, I drove to Lorna's apartment.

I could hear her radio blaring from the living room window as I pulled to the curb. Her electrically operated front door was propped open with a stack of telephone books. She had left the light on in the stairway, and I could see the glow of candlelight illuminating her living room at the top of the stairs.

I cleared my throat repeatedly to prepare her for my coming as I took the stairs slowly, one at a time. Lorna was lying on her floral-patterned couch, with one arm dangling over the side holding a wineglass. The light from candles placed strategically throughout the room on lamp tables, bookshelves, and windowsills encased her in an amber glow.

"Hello, Freddy," she said as I entered the room.

"Hello, Lor," I returned. I pulled an ottoman up alongside the sofa.

Lorna sipped her wine. "What will you do now?" she asked.

"I don't know. Who told you?"

"The four-star edition of the L.A. *Examiner.* 'Underhill Resigns in Wake of False Arrests Suits. Communist Ties Cited.' Do you want me to read you the whole thing?"

I reached for her arm, but she pulled it away. "I'm sorry for yesterday, Lorna, really."

"For my office door?"

"No, for what I said to you."

"Was it the truth?"

"Yes."

"Then don't apologize for it."

Lorna's face was an iron mask in the candlelight. Her expression was expressionless, and I couldn't decipher her feelings. "What are you going to *do*, Freddy?"

"I don't know. Maybe I'll paint my car red. Maybe I'll dye my hair red, too. Maybe I'll enlist in the North Korean Army. I've never done anything half-assed in my life, so why be a half-assed Commie?"

Lorna lit a cigarette. The smoke she exhaled cast her in a second halo within the amber light. Her mask was starting to drop. She was starting to get angry, and that gave me heart. I threw out a line calculated to compound that anger. "The wonder got me, I guess."

"No!" Lorna spat out. "No, you bastard. The wonder didn't get you; *you* got you! Don't you know that?"

"Yes, I do. And do you know the only thing I'm sorry for?"

"Eddie Engels and Margaret Cadwallader?"

"The hell with them. They're dead. I'm only sorry I took you with me."

Lorna laughed. "Don't be sorry. I fell for circumstantial evidence and the brightest, brashest, handsomest man I'd ever met. What will you *do* now, Freddy?"

I took Lorna's hand, holding it tightly so she couldn't withdraw it. "I don't know. What will you do?"

Lorna wrenched her hand free and began twisting her head sideways, banging it back and forth violently on the couch. "I don't know, I don't know, I don't know, for Christ's fucking sake, I don't know!"

"Will you stay with the D.A.'s office?"

Lorna shook her head again. "No. I can't. I mean, I could if I wanted to, but I can't. I can't go on with justice and cops and criminal law. When you called me and told me Engels confessed, I went straight to the D.A. Maybe I gushed about you, I don't know, but he had my number, and when Canfield brought Winton to see him and we talked afterward, I knew that I was through in the office. With Engels dead, it's final. I don't even *want* to be there now. Freddy, will you try to get another policeman's job?"

The naive question was a challenge. I shook my head. "Not unless it's in Russia. Maybe I could be a deputy commissar in Leningrad, something like that. Write parking tickets for bobsleds in Siberia."

Lorna stroked my hair: "What do you *want*, Freddy?"

"I want you. That's all I know. Will you marry me?"

Lorna smiled in the candlelight. "Yes," she said.

—

We decided not to lose our momentum. Lorna hurriedly packed a suitcase while I put the top up on the car. We left immediately for the border, cracking jokes and singing along with the radio and playing grab-ass as we highballed it south on Route 5.

Coming into San Diego, Lorna started to cry as the realization hit her that she had lost her secure old life and had gained an uncertain new one. I held her tightly with one arm and continued driving. We crossed the border into Mexico at three in the morning.

We found an all-night wedding chapel on Revolución, the main drag of Tijuana. A fat, smiling Mexican priest married us, took the ten-dollar wedding fee and typed our marriage license, assuring us all the while that it was lawful and binding before man and God.

We drove through the impoverished Tijuana streets until we spotted a hotel that looked clean enough to spend our wedding night in.

I paid for three days in advance and carried our bags to a rickety elevator that took us up to the top floor. Our room was simple: clean, polished wood floors; clean, threadbare carpeting; a clean bathroom; and a big clean double bed.

Lorna Underhill undressed, lay down on the bed and fell asleep immediately. I sat in a chair and watched my wife sleep, believing that the steadfastness of my love for her would cover all the contingencies of life without the wonder.

III

TIME, OUT OF TIME

15

Years passed. Years of regret and introspection; years of hitting hundreds of thousands of golf balls, of reading, of long walks along the beach with Night Train; years of trying to live like other people. Years of looking for something to which I could commit my life. Years of learning what works and what doesn't. But mostly, years of Lorna.

Lorna. Lorna Weinberg Underhill. My wife, my lover, my confidante, my anodyne, my substitute for the wonder. Actually, my definition of the wonder —the synthesis of absolute knowledge and continual surprise. My tender, mercurial, brittle Lorna. The very prototype of love's efficacy: if it doesn't work, try something else. If that doesn't work, try something else again. If that fails, review your options and search out your errors. Just keep going, Freddy; sooner or later, by choice or chance or rote, you will find something that will move you as much as being a policeman did.

Did? From late 1951 through late 1954 there was virtually not one moment when I wouldn't have rather been cruising Central Avenue, or Western or Wilshire or Pico or any L.A. street in a black-and-white, armed for bear and high on illusion.

—

When we returned from our three-day Mexican honeymoon, Korea had once again taken over as front page news, and Lorna and I moved into a big rambling house in Laurel Canyon. There was a yard for Night Train, a big bedroom with a balcony and a rustic view, and a sunken living room with French windows that would have done a chateau in Burgundy proud.

We played house for a month, reading poetry aloud and playing Scrabble and making love and dancing to "The Tennessee Waltz." But Lorna tired of it before I did and took the first law job she could get her hands on: legal counsel for Weinberg Productions, Inc. She didn't last long; she was constantly at loggerheads with her father on matters of money, morality, and the administration of movie "justice."

In May of '52 she quit and went to work for the Adlai Stevenson campaign. She was afire with the spirit of the intellectual Illinois governor, and even managed to wrangle a paying job as the campaign's legal adviser. The job lasted until it came to light that she was married to a "Communist" ex-cop. Saddened, but no less justice-minded, she joined a Beverly Hills law firm that specialized in personal injury cases. My Lorna, champion of the poor bastard who got his thumb caught in the drill press.

Those first months of our marriage were very good. Big Sid accepted his goy son-in-law with a surprising magnanimity. He showed moral courage in bringing me out to Hillcrest to play golf at a time when I was still notorious. We played for money, and I made more than enough to hold up my half of the expenses of the Laurel Canyon love nest.

Lorna and I never discussed the Eddie Engels case. It was the pivotal event in both our lives, always hanging over us, but we never talked about it.

On our first night in the new house I broached the subject, in the interest of clearing the air. "We paid for it, Lor. We paid for what we did."

"No," Lorna said. "I was just an infatuated pencil-pusher. I got off easy. *You* paid, and it's a life sentence. I never want to discuss it again."

Mercifully for me, Canfield and the Engels family never sued either the L.A.P.D. or me for false arrest or anything else. I waited for months, fearfully expecting a summons that would result in the opening of the whole filthy can of worms to public scrutiny, but it never came.

In February of 1955 I found out why, from a drunken, resentful Mike Breuning. I ran into him in the bar of a restaurant in Hollywood. Passed over again for lieutenant, he was waxing profane about the department and his mentor, Dudley Smith. He told me, between effusive apologies, that Dudley was the one who snatched my diary, and who put Internal Affairs onto Sarah Kefalvian the very day that Eddie Engels "confessed." Dudley was also the one who flew up to Seattle and dug through local police files and came up with a rap sheet on Lillian Engels that showed a dozen drunk arrests at lesbian bars in the Seattle area. He went straight to Wilhelm Engels with this and coerced him into dropping his lawsuit. The elder Engels had died of a heart attack sometime the following year.

From time to time I would suddenly realize that I was terrified, and that I had no control over my terror. Blinding memories of the bloody face of Eddie Engels would take me over and would not let me go, even as I rambled on about the weather to Lorna. Gradually the image would shift, and Engels's face would change into my own, and then it would be Dudley Smith and Dick Carlisle hitting *me*, while I myself watched sipping coffee in room number 6 of the Victory Motel. I wouldn't cry or talk or move; just tremble as Smith and Carlisle bludgeoned me. Sometimes Lorna would hold me, and I would dig myself deeper into her as each blow crashed into my mind.

—

So the dead hovered over my wife and me, solidifying their presence as Lorna and I lived on. For years we loved, and it was worth the price in sorrow that my blind ambition had exacted from me and so many others. For a long while I wanted nothing that I didn't have, and I was moved beyond movement by Lorna's willingness to give it to me. When I thought and thought and thought about it, and tried to reduce it to words, Lorna would read my mind and place fingertips to my lips and whisper softly the words I had once told her: "Don't think, darling, please don't try to hurt it." She always *knew* when the wonder was creeping into my consciousness, and she always circumvented it with love tinged with the slightest bit of fear.

That fear ran concurrent with our love; an undertow of guilt, a clandestine transit of many restive dead souls that seemed to give an almost spiritual weight to our lives—as though our joy were a communion for Eddie and Maggie and a vast constituency of the dead. We both felt this, but we never talked about it. We were both afraid that it would kill the joy for which we had worked so hard.

For a long time our destiny *was* manifest joy—joy in each other, in the sharing of our separate solitudes, in the spirit of loving contention that would end our arguments with us laughing in bed, Lorna's hands clamped over my mouth while she shrieked, "No, no, tell me a story instead!"

I told her stories and she told me stories, and gradually the distinctions between my stories and Lorna's receded until they became one vast panorama of experience and more than a little fantasy.

Because somehow, in our fusion, we lost sight of ourselves as the separate entities that we were, and somehow, very strangely, that made us easy prey for the long unmentioned dead.

16

It started getting bad with Lorna gradually, so that there was no place to look for causes and no one to blame. It was just a series of smoldering resentments. Too much giving and too much taking; too much time spent away from each other; too much investing of fantasy qualities in each other. Too much hope and too much pride and too little willingness to change.

And too much thinking on my part. Early in ’54 I told Lorna that. “Our brains are a curse, Lor. I want to use my muscles and not my brain.” Lorna looked up from her breakfast coffee and scratched my arm distractedly. “Then go ahead. You used to tell me ‘Don’t think,’ remember?”

Construction work and later brick-laying was mindless and exhilarating. The men I worked with and drank beer with were vital and raw. But Lorna was aghast when I stuck to this kind of work for eight months, liking it more each day. She thought I was wasting the overactive brain that I was trying so hard to quiet. And her resentment grew. She couldn’t stand the anomaly of a successful attorney married to a laborer husband. An ex-cop accused Communist, yes; a working stiff, no. I noted the contradiction of a champion of the “working man” disdaining the very same in her own household.

“I didn’t marry a hod carrier,” Lorna said coldly.

—

I was beginning to wonder who she did marry. I began to wonder who I married. I started to feel a hollowness, a depression that was fifty times worse than fear. But I held on: rigorously continuing to earn through construction work and golf hustling at least as much as Lorna did as an attorney.

We split the household expenses fifty-fifty, and each contributed monthly stipends to our joint savings and checking accounts. At the end of each month when we did our bookkeeping, Lorna would shake her head at the sad equity of it. We had a running gag at these sessions. We would split the expenses fifty-fifty, but I would pay for everything connected with Night Train. Lorna was mildly amused by him, but considered my noble link to Wacky and the past an obscene object. She thought dogs belonged on farms. “And the beast is your burden,” she would say as we concluded our paperwork.

One day early in ’55, she didn’t crack her usual jokes. She was drawn and cross that day. When I looked to her to deliver her line she flung a sheaf of papers at me and screamed, “It’s so goddamned easy for you! Goddamnit, how can you live with yourself? Do you know how hard I work to make the money I do? Do you, Freddy, goddamnit? Don’t you think it’s sad that I went to school for eight years to become a lawyer and help people, while all you do is swing a hammer and hit golf balls? Goddamn you, you Renaissance bum!”

For the first time I felt my marriage vows begin to impinge me. I began to feel that I couldn’t ever be the man Lorna wanted me to be. And for the first time I didn’t care, because the Lorna of 1955 was not the Lorna I married in 1951. I started to get itchy to break the whole thing up, to blow it all sky high.

As my love for Lorna entered this awful, angry stasis, I felt stirrings of what I could only call the wonder. Wonder.

Years had passed. With the end of the Korean War and the discrediting of Joe McCarthy, a slightly more sane political climate was emerging. Time seemed to be opening new wounds in my present and healing the old ones in my past. If Lorna was the replacement for the wonder, maybe now it was time to reverse the situation.

Knowing I could never be hired as a police officer, I applied for a state of California private investigator’s license, and was refused. I applied for positions as insurance investigator with over thirty insurance companies, and was rejected by each one.

So I hit more thousands of golf balls, recalling the trinity of my youth: police work, golf, and women. Women. The very word bit at me like a jungle carnivore, filling me with a venomous guilt and excitement.

One night I went to a bar in Ocean Park and picked up a woman. The old small talk and moves were still there. I took her to a motel near my old apartment in Santa Monica. We coupled and talked. I told her my marriage was shot. She commiserated; it had happened to her, too, and now she was “playing the field.”

In the morning I drove her back to where her car was parked, then drove home to Laurel Canyon and my wife, who didn’t ask me where I had spent the night. She didn’t have to.

I did it again and again, savoring the mechanics, the art of briefly touching another lonely life. Lorna knew, of course, and we settled down to a quiet war of attrition: conversations of exaggerated politeness, awkward attempts at lovemaking, silent recriminations.

Inexplicably, my womanizing stopped as abruptly as it had begun. I was sitting in a bar in the Valley nursing a beer and eyeing the cocktail waitresses, when I was hit by the same eerie stillness that had come over me in the irrigation field on the day I had quit the cops. I didn’t break down this time, I just became flooded with some incredible nonverbal feeling of what I can only think of as vastness.

I tried to explain it to Lorna: “I can’t explain it, Lor. It’s just a feeling of, well, mystery, of truth and illusion, of something much bigger than us or anything else. It’s a feeling of commitment to something very vague, but decent and good. And it’s not the wonder.”

Lorna snorted. “Oh, God, Freddy. Are you getting religious on me?”

“No, it’s not that. It’s entirely different.”

I searched for words and gestures, but none came. I looked at Lorna, who shrugged, with some contempt.

—

The following week I found out that Lorna had a lover. He was an older man, a senior partner in her law firm. I saw them holding hands and cooing at each other in a Beverly Hills restaurant. My peripheral vision blackened as I strode toward their booth. Unreasonable as it was, I pulled the man to the floor by his necktie, dumped a pitcher of water on his face and followed it with a plate of lobster thermidor.

“Sue me, counselor,” I said to the shocked Lorna.

I moved my dog, my golf clubs and my few belongings to an apartment in West L.A. I paid for three months’ rent in advance, and wondered what the hell I was going to do.

Lorna ferreted out my address and sent me a petition for divorce. I tore it up in the presence of the process server who had handed it to me. “Tell Mrs. Underhill never,” I told him.

Lorna discovered my phone number and called me, threatening, then begging for release from our marriage.

“Never,” I told her. “Tijuana marriages are lifetime contracts.”

“Goddamn you, Freddy, it’s over! Can’t you see that?”

“Nothing’s ever over,” I screamed back, then threw the phone out my living room window.

—

I wasn’t entirely under control, but I was right. It was a prophetic remark. Three days later was June 23, 1955. That was the day I heard about the dead nurse.

IV

THE CRIME AGAINST MARCELLA

17

The initial newspaper accounts were both lurid and disinterested. Just another murder, the reports seemed to be saying.

From the Los Angeles *Herald Express*, June 23, 1955:

> **NURSE FOUND MURDERED IN EL MONTE**
>
> *Strangulation Death for Attractive Divorced Mother*
>
> **Scouts and Their Leader Make Grisly Discovery**
>
> *EL MONTE, June 22—A Boy Scout troop and their leader made a grisly discovery early Sunday morning when returning from an overnight camping trip in the San Gabriel Mountains. When passing Arroyo High School on South Peck Road, one of the Scouts, Danny Johnson, age 12, thought he saw an arm poking out of a line of scrub that runs along the fence on the school's south side. He called this to the attention of his troop leader, James Pleshette, 28, of Sierra Madre. Pleshette went to investigate and discovered the nude body of a woman. He called El Monte police immediately.*
>
> **Description Broadcast**
>
> *Police went to the scene and immediately sent out a description of the woman to all Los Angeles TV and radio stations. Response to the broadcast was gratifyingly quick. Mrs. Gaylord Wilder, an El Monte resident, thought the description fit her tenant, Mrs. Marcella Harris, who had been gone since Friday night. Mrs. Wilder was brought to the morgue, where she positively identified the dead woman as Mrs. Harris.*
>
> **Good Mother**
>
> *Mrs. Wilder started to sob upon viewing the body. "Oh, God, what a*

> *tragedy!" she said. "Marcella was such a good woman. A good mother, devoted to her son." Mrs. Harris, 43, was divorced from her husband, William "Doc" Harris, several years ago. They have a nine-year-old son, who was spending the weekend with his father. When notified of the death, Harris (who has been eliminated as a suspect) said, "I have every hope the police will quickly catch my wife's killer." Nine-year-old Michael, distraught, is now living with his father in Los Angeles. Mrs. Harris worked as head nurse at the Packard-Bell Electronics plant in Santa Monica. Both the El Monte Police Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department have mounted a full-scale investigation.*

I sat and thought, feeling strangely calm, yet engulfed by a prickly sensation when I put down the newspaper. It was too long after the facts, I told myself, too far away, too prosaic a form of murder. Strictly a non sequitur. I didn't want to catch myself up in another logical fallacy.

I needed statistics, and the only person I knew who could furnish them was a crime-buff law clerk in Lorna's firm. I called the office and got him. The receptionist recognized my voice and gave me the cold shoulder, but put me through anyway. After several minutes of amenities, I popped my question: "Bob, what are the statistics on strangulation murders of women, where the killer is not a known intimate of the victim?"

Bob didn't have to think: "Commonplace, but they usually catch the killer fast. Barroom jobs, drunks strangling prostitutes, that kind of thing. Very often the killer is remorseful, confesses, and cops a plea. Is this an academic question, Fred?"

"Yeah, strictly. How about premeditated strangulation murders of women?"

"Including psychopaths?"

"No, presupposing relative sanity on the part of the killer."

"Relative sanity, that's a hot one. Very rare, kid, very rare indeed. What's this all about?"

"It's about an ex-cop with time on his hands. Thanks a lot, Bob. Goodbye."

I watched TV that night, but television coverage of the murder was scant. The dead woman's face was flashed on the screen, a photograph taken some twenty years before upon her graduation from nursing school. Marcella Harris had been a very handsome woman: high, strong cheekbones, large widely spaced eyes, and a determined mouth.

The somber-voiced announcer called on all concerned citizens "who might be able to help the police" to call the detective bureau of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. A phone number was flashed across the bottom of the screen for a few brief seconds, before the announcer started a used-car commercial. I turned the TV off.

I started collecting all the newspaper articles I could find about the murder. By Tuesday the Harris murder had been relegated to the third page. From the Los Angeles *Times*, June 24, 1955:

LAST HOURS OF DEAD NURSE RECONSTRUCTED

LOS ANGELES, June 24—Marcella Harris, who was found strangled in El Monte Sunday morning, was last seen alive in a cocktail lounge on nearby Valley Boulevard. Police revealed today that eyewitnesses placed the attractive redheaded nurse at Hank's Hot Spot, a bar at 18391 Valley Boulevard in South El Monte, between the hours of 8:00 and 11:30 Saturday night. She left alone, but was seen huddling in conversation with a dark-haired man in his forties and a blond woman in her late twenties. Police artists are now at work assembling composite drawings of the pair, who at this time are the only suspects in the grisly strangulation murder.

Father and Son Together

"Michael will always bear the scars, of that I am sure," William "Doc" Harris, a handsome man in his late fifties, said yesterday. "But I know that I can make up for the love he has lost in losing his mother." Harris ruffled his nine-year-old son's hair fondly. Michael, a tall, bespectacled youngster, said, "I just hope the police get the guy who killed my mom."

It was a peaceful but sad scene at the Harris apartment on Beverly Boulevard. Sad because police are powerless in dealing with the grief of a motherless nine-year-old boy. El Monte police spokesman Sergeant A. O. Wisenhunt said, "We're doing everything within our power to track down the killer. We have no idea where Mrs. Harris was killed, but we figure that it had to be in the El Monte area. The coroner places the time of her death at between 2:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m., and the Scouts found her at 7:30 a.m. We have detectives and uniformed officers out circulating composite drawings of the two people Mrs. Harris was last seen talking to. We have to be patient—only diligent police work will crack this case."

Half of me felt crazy for even following newspaper accounts of this "case," but the other half of me screamed inside when the words "cocktail lounge" jumped out at me from the printed page. I hemmed and hawed, and pounded myself internally for several hours, until I realized there would never be a moment's peace until I gave it a whirl. Then I picked up the phone and called Sergeant Reuben Ramos at Rampart Division.

"Reuben, this is Fred Underhill."

"Jesus H. Christ on a crutch, where the hell have you been?"

"Away."

"That's for sure, man. Jesus Christ, did *you* get fucked! What happened? I heard tons of rumors, but nothing that sounded like the straight dope."

I sighed. I hadn't counted on recalling the past to a former colleague. "I got the wrong man, Rube, and the department had to make me look bad to take the onus off them. That's it."

Reuben didn't buy it. "I'll settle for that, man," he said skeptically, "but what's up? You need a favor, right?"

"Right. I need you to run someone through R&I for me."

Reuben sighed. "You got some amateur gig going?"

"Kind of. Are you ready?"

"Hit me."

"Marcella Harris, white female, forty-three years old."

"Isn't she that dead dame from—"

"Yeah," I cut in. "Can you run her and get back to me as soon as possible?"

"You crazy fuck," Reuben said as he hung up.

—

The telephone rang forty-five minutes later, and I leaped at it, catching it on the first ring.

"Fred? Reuben. Grab a pencil."

I had one ready. "Hit it, Rube."

"Okay. Marcella Harris. Maiden name DeVries. Born Tunnel City, Wisconsin, April 15, 1912. Green and red, five feet seven inches, one hundred forty. Nurse, U.S. Navy 1941 to 1946, discharged as a Wave lieutenant commander. Pretty impressive, huh? Now dig this: arrested in '48, possession of marijuana. Dismissed. Arrested in '50 on suspicion of receiving stolen goods. Dismissed. Arrested for drunk twice in '46, once in '47, three times in '48, once in '49 and '50. Nice, huh?"

I whistled. "Yeah. Interesting."

"What are you planning on doing with this information, man?"

"I don't know, Rube."

"You be careful, Freddy. That's all I'm gonna say. Some bimbo gets choked in El Monte, and well…Freddy, it's got nothing to do with the other. That's dead history, man."

"Probably."

"You be careful. You ain't a cop no more."

"Thanks, Rube," I said, and hung up.

The following morning I got up early, put on a summer suit and drove out to El Monte, taking the Santa Monica Freeway to the Pomona, headed east.

I went from smog-shrouded L.A. past picturesque, seedy Boyle Heights and a succession of dreary semi-impoverished suburbs, growing more expectant as each new postwar boom community flew by. This was new territory for me, well within the confines of L.A. County, yet somehow otherworldly. The residential streets I glimpsed from my elevated vantage point seemed sullen in their sameness, the big boom in postwar disappointment and malaise.

El Monte was smack in the middle of the San Gabriel Valley, enclosed by freeways in all directions. The San Gabriel Mountains, awash in smog, bordered the northern perimeter.

I got off at the Valley Boulevard exit and cruised west until I found Hank's Hot Spot, described by the papers as a "convivial watering hole." It didn't look like that; it looked like what it more probably was: a meeting place for lonely juiceheads.

I pulled up to the curb. The place was open at eight thirty in the morning. That was encouraging. It went along with the scenario I was composing in my mind: Maggie Cadwallader and Marcella Harris, lonely juiceheads. I kiboshed the thought: don't think, Underhill, I said to myself as I locked the car, or this thing—which is probably only coincidence—will eat you up.

I hastily prepared a cover story as I took a seat at the narrow, imitation-wood bar. The place was deserted, and a lone bartender who was polishing glasses as I entered approached me guardedly. He nodded at me as he placed a napkin on the bar.

"Draft beer," I said.

He nodded again and brought it to me. I sipped it. It tasted bitter; I wasn't cut out to be a morning drinker.

I decided not to waste time with small talk. "I'm a reporter," I said. "I write crime stuff laced with the human interest angle. There's a double sawbuck in it for anybody who can give me some interesting lowdown on this Marcella Harris dame who got croaked last weekend." I pulled out my billfold, packed with twenties, and fanned the cash in the bartender's face. He looked impressed. "The real lowdown," I added, waggling my eyebrows at him. “The barfly tidbits that make bartending such an interesting profession.”

The barman swallowed, his Adam’s apple rotating nervously in his wiry neck. “I already told the cops everything I know about that night,” he said.

“Tell *me*,” I said, taking a twenty out of my billfold and placing it under my cocktail napkin.

“Well,” the barman said, “the Harris dame came in around seven thirty that night. She ordered a double Early Times old-fashioned. She practically chugalugged it. She ordered another. She sat here at the bar by herself. She played some show tunes on the jukebox. Around eight thirty this greasy-lookin’ guy and this blond dame with a ponytail come in. They get in some kind of conversation with the Harris dame and they all go to a booth together. The guy drinks red wine and the ponytail drinks Seven-Up. The Harris dame left before them, around eleven. The greasy guy and the ponytail left together around midnight. That’s it.”

I fingered an inch or so of the twenty out from its hiding place. “Do you think Marcella Harris already knew these people, or do you think they just met one another?”

The barman shook his head. “The cops asked me the same thing, buddy, and it beats me.”

I tried another tack: “Was Marcella Harris a regular here?”

“Not really. She came in once in a while.”

“Was she a pickup? Did she leave with a lot of different men?”

“Not that I ever noticed.”

“Okay. Was she a talker?”

“Not really.”

“Did you ever talk with her at length?”

“Sometimes. I don’t know, once or twice.”

“I see. What did you discuss?”

“Just small talk. You know…”

“Besides that.”

“Well…once she asks me if I’ve got kids. I say yes. She asks me if I ever have trouble with ’em, and I say yeah, the usual stuff. Then she starts tellin’ me about this wild kid she’s got, how she don’t know how to handle him, that she’s read all these books and still don’t know what to do.”

“What was the problem with the kid?” I asked.

The bartender swallowed and shuffled his feet in a little dance of embarrassment. “Aw, come on, mister,” he said.

“No, you come on.” I stuffed the twenty into his shirt pocket.

“Well,” he said, “she said the kid was gettin’ into fights, and talkin’ dirty…and…exposing himself to all the other little kids."

"Is that it?"

"Yeah."

"Did you tell the police about this?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because they never asked me."

"That's a good reason," I said, then thanked the man and walked back outside to my car.

I looked through the L.A. papers I had been collecting and found Marcella Harris's home address in Monday's *Mirror*: 467 Maple Avenue, El Monte. It took me only five minutes to get there.

I surveyed El Monte as I drove. The residential streets were unpaved, and the residences that fronted them were ugly cube-like apartment buildings interspersed with subdivided farmhouses and auto courts held over from the not too distant time when this was open country.

I parked on the dirt shoulder at the corner of Claymore and Maple. Number 467 was right there on the corner, directly across from my parking spot. Two small frame houses stood in a large front yard encircled by a shoulder-high stone wall. Both houses looked well cared for, and a beagle puppy cavorted in the yard.

I didn't want to attempt the landlady—she had probably been frequently questioned by the police on her former tenant—so I just sat in the car and thought. Finally it hit me, and I dug a briefcase out of my trunk and went walking. School had recently let out for the summer, and the kids playing in their dirt front yards looked happy to be free. I waved to them as I walked down Maple, getting slightly suspicious looks in return. My crisp summer suit was obviously not standard El Monte garb.

Maple Avenue dead-ended a hundred yards or so in front of me, where a kids' softball game was in progress. The kids probably knew the Harris boy, so I decided to brace them.

"Hi, fellows," I said.

The game stopped abruptly as I walked through their makeshift infield. I got suspicious looks, hostile looks, and curious looks. There were six boys, all of them wearing white T-shirts and blue jeans. One of the boys, standing by home plate, threw the ball to first base. I dropped my briefcase, ran and made a daring leaping catch. I fumbled the ball on purpose and crashed to the pavement. I made a big show of getting to my feet. The kids surrounded me as I brushed off my trousers.

"I guess I'm not Ted Williams, fellows," I said. "I must be getting old. I used to be a hotshot fielder."

One of the boys grinned at me. “That was still a pretty swell try, mister,” he said.

“Thanks,” I returned. “Geeze, it’s hot out here. Dusty, too. You guys ever get the chance to go to the beach?”

The boys started jabbering all together: “Naw, but we got the municipal pool.” “The beach is too far and it’s full of beer cans. My dad took us once.” “We play baseball!” “I’m gonna pitch like Bob Lemon.” “Wanna see my fastball?”

“Whoa, whoa! Hold on there,” I said. “What about the Scouts? Don’t any of you guys go on field trips with them?” Quiet greeted my question. There was a general reacting of down-turned faces. I had hit a nerve.

“What’s the matter, fellows?”

“Aw, nothin’ really,” the tall first baseman said, “but my mom got real down on our troop for somethin’ that wasn’t even our fault.”

“Yeah.” “Yeah.” “What a crummy deal!” the other boys chimed in.

“What happened?” I asked innocently.

“Well,” a tall boy said, “it was our troop that found the dead lady.”

I tossed the battered softball into the air and caught it. “That’s a shame. You mean Mrs. Harris?”

“Yeah,” they all said practically at once.

I waded in cautiously, although I knew that the boys wanted to talk. “She lived here on this street, didn’t she?”

This brought forth a huge response: “Ooh! Yeah, you shoulda seen her, mister. All naked. Ooh!” “Yeachh, really sickening.” “Yeah, ugh.”

I tossed the ball to the quietest of the boys. “Did any of you boys know Mrs. Harris?” There was an embarrassed silence.

“My mom told me not to talk to strangers,” the quiet boy said.

“My dad told me not to say bad things about people,” the first baseman said.

I yawned, and feigned exasperation. “Well, I was just curious,” I said. “Maybe I’ll get a chance to talk to you guys later. I’m the new baseball coach at Arroyo High. You guys look pretty good to me. In a few years you’ll probably be my starting lineup.” I pretended to leave.

It was the perfect thing to say, and it was followed by a big volley of excited “oohs” and “aahs.”

“What’s so bad about Mrs. Harris?” I asked the first baseman.

He stared at his feet, then looked up at me with confused blue eyes. “My dad says he saw her a whole bunch of times down at Medina Court. He said no good woman would have anything to do with a place like that. He said that she was an unfit mother, that that was why Michael acted so strange." The boy backed away from me, as if the specter of his father was right there with us.

"Hold on, partner," I said, "I'm new in this territory. What's so bad about Medina Court? And what's wrong with Michael? He sounded like a pretty good kid from what I read in the papers."

A redheaded boy clutching a catcher's mitt answered me frankly. "Medina Court is Mex Town. Wetbacks—mean ones. My dad says never, ever, ever go there, that they hate white people. It's dangerous there."

"My dad delivers the mail on Medina," the first baseman said. "He said he's seen Mrs. Harris do nasty things there."

A chill went over me. "What about Michael?" I asked.

No one answered. My expression and manner must have changed somehow, alerting some sixth sense in the youthful ballplayers.

"I gotta go," the quiet boy said.

"Me, too," another one piped in.

Before I knew it they were all running off down Maple Avenue, casting furtive glances at me over their shoulders. They all seemed to disappear into dusty front yards just moments later, leaving me standing in the street wondering what the hell had happened.

—

Medina Court was only one block long.

A tarnished brass plaque inlaid in the cracked sidewalk at the entrance to it said why: the street and the four-story tenements that dominated it had been constructed for the housing of Chinese railroad workers in 1885.

I parked my car on the dirt shoulder of Peck Road—the only access lane to Medina Court—and looked around. The buildings, obviously once painted white, were now as grayish-brown as the plague of smog that stifled the summer air. A half dozen had burned down, and the charred detritus of the fires had never been removed. Mexican women and children sat on the front steps of their peeling, sunbaked dwellings, seeking respite from what must have been oven-like interiors.

Garbage covered the dusty street through Medina Court and prewar jalopies lay dead along both sides of it. Mariachi music poured forth from inside some of the tenements, competing with high-pitched Spanish voices. An emaciated dog hobbled by me, giving me a cursory growl and a hungry look. The poverty and meanness of Medina Court was overpowering.

I needed to find the mailman-father of the first baseman, so I started by checking out the entranceways of the tenements to see if the mail had been delivered. The mailbox layout was identical in all of the buildings—banks of metal mail slots, rows and rows of them, bearing poorly printed Spanish surnames and apartment numbers. I checked out three buildings on each side of the street, getting a lot of dirty looks in the process. The mailboxes were empty. I was in luck.

Medina Court dead-ended at a combination weed patch–auto graveyard where a throng of tattered but happy-looking Mexican kids were playing tag. I walked back to Peck Road feeling grateful that I didn't live here.

—

I waited for three hours, watching the passing scene: old winos poking about in the rubble of the burned-out buildings, looking for shade to drink their short-dogs in; fat Mexican women chasing their screaming children down the street; a profusion of squabbles between men in T-shirts, filled with obscenities in English and Spanish; two fistfights; and a steady parade of pachucos tooling down the street in their hot rods.

At one o'clock, as the sun reached its stifling zenith and the temperature started to close in on one hundred degrees, a tired and dejected-looking mailman walked into Medina Court. My heart gave a little leap of joy—he was the very image of the blond first baseman. He walked into the "foyer" of the first tenement on the south side of the street, and I was waiting for him on the sidewalk when he walked back out.

His tired manner perked up when he saw me standing there, white and official-looking in my suit and tie. He smiled; the nervous, edgy smile of someone hungry for company. He looked me up and down. "Cop?" he said.

I tried to sound surprised: "No, why do you ask?"

The mailman laughed and swung his leather mail sack from one shoulder to the other. "Because any white man over six feet in a suit on a day like this in Medina Court has gotta be a cop."

I laughed. "Wrong, but you're close. I'm a private investigator." I didn't offer any proof, because of course I didn't have any. The mailman whistled; I caught a whiff of booze on his breath. I stuck out my hand. "Herb Walker," I said.

The mailman grasped it. "Randy Rice."

"I need some information, Randy. Can we talk? Can I buy you a beer? Or can't you drink on duty?"

"Rules are made to be broken," Randy Rice said. "You wait here. I'll deliver this mail and see you in twenty minutes."

He was good to his word, and half an hour later I was in a seedy bar near the freeway, listening politely to Randy Rice expound on his theory of the "wetback problem plaguing America."

"Yeah," I finally broke in, "and it's a tough life for the white working man. Believe me, I know. I'm on this tough case now, and none of the Mexicans I talk to will give me a straight answer." Randy Rice went bug-eyed with awe. I continued: "That's why I wanted to talk to you. I figured a smart white man familiar with Medina Court ought to be able to give me a few leads."

I ordered another beer for Rice. He gulped it, and his face contorted into a broad parody of caginess. "What do you wanna know?" he asked.

"I heard Marcella Harris used to hang out on Medina Court. I think that's a hell of a place for a white woman with a kid to be spending her time."

"I seen the Harris dame there," Randy Rice said, "lots of times."

"How did you know it was her? Did you just recognize her from her picture in the paper when she got knocked off?"

"No, she lived on my block at home. I seen her leave for work in the morning, and I seen her at the store, and I used to see her walk her dog. I used to see her play catch with that crazy kid of hers in her front yard, too." Rice swallowed. "Who hired you?" he blurted out.

"Her ex-husband. He's out for blood. He thinks one of her boyfriends croaked her. Why do you say her kid is crazy?"

"Because he is. That kid is poison, mister. For one thing, he's only nine years old and he's at least six feet tall. He hates the other kids, too. My boy told me that Michael was always breakin' up the softball games at school, always challengin' everyone to fight. He'd always get beat up—I mean he's a gigantic kid, but he don't know how to fight and he'd get beat up, then he'd start laughing like a madman, and…"

"And expose himself?"

"…Yeah."

"You didn't seem surprised when I mentioned Marcella Harris's boyfriends." With a flourish I ordered the now red-faced Rice another beer. "Tell me about that," I said.

He leered and said, "I been seein' her around Medina for months, drivin' in her Studebaker, hangin' out in Deadman's Park—"

"Deadman's Park?"

"Yeah, where Medina dead-ends. Dead dogs and dead winos and dead cars. I seen her a coupla times hangin' out with Joe Sanchez on his stoop, lookin' real cozy with him. Him in his zoot suit and Harris in her nurse's uniform. Once she walked out of Sanchez's apartment real glassy-eyed, like she was walkin' on mashed potatoes, and nearly knocked me over. Jesus, I said to myself, this dame is high on dope. She—"

I halted Rice. "Does Sanchez sell dope?" I asked.

"Does he ever!" Rice said. "He's the number one pusher in the San

Gabriel Valley. I seen loads of hopheads leavin' his dump like they was on cloud nine. The cops roust him all the time, but he's always clean. He don't use the shit himself, and he don't hide it at Medina. I heard lots of young punks talk about what a smart vato he is. If you ask me, scum like Sanchez should be sent straight to the electric chair."

I considered this latest information. "Have you talked to the cops about this, Randy?" I asked.

"Hell no, it's none of my business. Sanchez didn't bump off Harris, some loony did. That's obvious. I got my job to consider. I gotta deliver mail to Medina. It's no skin off my ass what Sanchez does."

"Is Sanchez tough, Randy?"

"He don't look tough, he just looks oily. Mexican-smart."

"What's his address?"

"Three-one-one Medina, number sixty-one."

"Does he live alone?"

"I think so."

"Describe him for me, would you?"

"Well, five foot eight inches, one-forty, skinny, duck's-ass haircut. Always wears khakis and a purple silk jacket with a wolf's head on the back, even in the summer. I guess he's about thirty."

I got up and shook Randy Rice's hand. He winked and started in on another windy monologue on the wetback problem. I cut him off with a wink of my own and a clap on the shoulder. As I walked out of the bar I heard him giving his spiel to the other lonely booze-hounds.

—

Twenty minutes later I was back on Medina Court, sweltering in the vestibule of number 311. I scanned the bank of mailboxes for apartment 61, found it, and ripped the metal latch off to find the box stuffed with letters bearing Mexican postmarks.

Taking a chance on my rudimentary Spanish, I tore open three of the envelopes at random and read. The letters were scrawled illegibly, but I managed to discern one main theme after reading all three. Cousin Joe Sanchez was moving the Mexican wing of his family up to America, cautiously, one at a time, for a nominal charge. The letters were brimful of gratitude and hope for a good life in the New World. Cousin Joe was effusively praised, and monetary commitments were promised once the new Americans found work. I started to dislike Cousin Joe.

He showed up at six thirty, just as the sun's hammer blows were starting to fall short of Medina Court. I watched from the steps of his tenement as a purple 1950 Mercury with fender skirts pulled to the curb and a skinny Mexican with a purple silk jacket and a sullen grin got out, locked the car carefully, and skipped up the steps in my direction.

I had my eyes locked into his face, waiting to read it for signs of fear or violence when he noticed my presence. But when he saw me Sanchez just threw up his hands in mock surrender and said, "You waiting for me, Officer?" grinning broadly all the while.

I grinned back. "I know you're clean, Joe. You always are. I just wanted to have a little talk with you."

Sanchez grinned again. "Why don't we go up to my crib, then?"

I nodded assent and let him walk into the steaming hallway ahead of me. We took the stairs up to the third floor. Sanchez fiddled with the double lock on his door, and when the door opened I slammed my right fist into the back of his neck, sending him sprawling into his immaculate, cheap-plush living room. He looked up at me from the floor, his whole body trembling in anger. I closed the door behind me, and we stared at each other. Sanchez recovered quickly, getting to his feet and brushing off his silk jacket.

The sardonic grin returned. "This ain't happened in a while," he said. "You with the sheriff's?"

"L.A.P.D.," I said, for old-times' sake. I dug the letters out of my coat pocket, holding my coat closed so that Sanchez wouldn't know that I was unarmed. I tossed them in his face. "You forgot your mail, Joe."

I waited for a reaction. Sanchez shrugged and plopped into a sofa covered with Mexican souvenir blankets. I pulled a chair up to within breathing distance of him.

"Dope and green cards, pretty nice," I said.

Sanchez shrugged, then looked at me defiantly. "What do you want, man?" He spat at me.

"I want to know what a good-looking, middle-class white woman like Marcella Harris was doing down here on Medina Court," I said, "besides buying dope from you."

Sanchez's manner seemed to crumple in relief, then tense up in fear. It was bizarre. "I didn't kill her, man," he said.

"I'm sure you didn't. Let's make this simple. You tell me what you know, and I'll leave you alone—forever. You don't tell me, and I'll have the Immigration cops and the feds up here in fifteen minutes. *Comprende?*"

Sanchez nodded. "A friend of mine brought her around. She wanted to buy some reefer. She kept coming back. She thought Medina Court was kicks. She was a loca, a hotheaded redhead. She liked to smoke reef and dance. She liked Mexican music." Sanchez shrugged, indicating completion of his story.

It wasn't enough. I told him so: "Not good enough, Joe. You make it sound like you just tolerated her. I don't buy it. I heard she used to hang out with you and a bunch of other pachucos down at the auto graveyard."

"Okay, man. I liked her. *'La Roja,'* I used to call her. 'The Red One.' "

"Were you screwing her?"

Sanchez was genuinely indignant: "No, man! She wanted me to, but I'm engaged! I don't mess with no *gringas.*"

"Forgive me for mentioning it. Was she hooked on stuff?"

Sanchez hesitated. "She…she took pills. She was a nurse and she could get codeine. She used to get crazy and act silly when she was high on it. She said she could be…"

I leaned forward. "She said *what*, Joe?"

"She…she…said she could outfight any Mexican, and out-fuck and out-drink any *puta.* She said that she'd seen stuff that…that…"

"That *what*?" I screamed.

"That would have made our *cojones* fall off!" Sanchez screamed back.

"Did she hang out with any other guys here on Medina?" I asked.

Sanchez shook his head. "No. She was just interested in me. I told the others to leave her alone, that she was bad news. I liked her, but I had no respect for her. She used to leave her kid alone at night. Anyway, I started giving Marcella the cold shoulder. She took the hint and didn't come around no more. I ain't seen her in six months."

I got up and walked around the room. The walls were adorned with bullfight posters and cheap landscape prints. "Who introduced her to you?" I asked.

"My friend, Carlos. He used to work at that factory where she was the nurse."

"Where can I find Carlos?"

"He went back to Mexico, man."

"Did Marcella Harris ever bring anyone else around to see you?"

"Yeah, once. She knocks on my door at seven in the morning. She had this guy with her, she was hanging on to him real tight, like they been…"

"Yeah, I know. Go on."

"Anyway, she starts jabbering about the guy, how he just got promoted to graveyard foreman at the plant. I sold them some reef and they split."

"What did this guy look like?"

"Kind of fat and blond. Kind of like a *stúpido.* He had no thumb on his left hand. It kind of spooked me. I'm superstitious and I…"

I sighed. "And what, Joe?"

"And I knew that Marcella was gonna die mean. That she *wanted* to die mean."

"Ever see Marcella with a dark-haired man or a blond woman with a ponytail?"

"No."

I got up to leave. "Poor *roja*," Joe Sanchez said as I walked out his door.

—

Mrs. Gaylord Wilder, Marcella Harris's landlady, had nervous gray eyes and a manner of barely controlled hysteria. I didn't know how to play her—impersonating a cop was too risky with a solid citizen, and intimidation might well bring repercussions from the real cops.

Standing in her doorway as she openly scrutinized me, I hit on it. Mrs. Wilder had an avaricious look about her, so I tried a wild gambit: I attempted to pass myself off as an insurance investigator, interested in the recent past of the late Marcella. Mrs. Wilder took it all in, wide-eyed, with a nervous hand on the doorjamb. When I said "…and there's a substantial reward for anyone who can help us," she swung the door open eagerly, and pointed to an imitation leather davenport.

She went into the kitchen, leaving me alone to survey the crammed living room, and returned in a moment with a box of See's candy. I popped a piece of sticky chocolate into my mouth. "That's delicious," I said.

"Thank you, Mr.…."

"Carpenter, Mrs. Wilder. Is your husband at home?"

"No, he's at work."

"I see. Mrs. Wilder, let me level with you. Your late tenant, Marcella Harris, had three policies with us. Her son, Michael, was the beneficiary on all of them. However, there has been a rival claim, filed out of nowhere. A woman who claims to be a dear friend of the late Mrs. Harris states, in an affidavit, that Mrs. Harris told her that *she* was the beneficiary on all three policies. Right now, I'm investigating to determine if this woman even *knew* Marcella Harris."

Mrs. Wilder's hands did a nervous little dance in her lap. Her eyes did a little dance of greed. "How can *I* help you, Mr. Carpenter?" she asked eagerly.

I gave that some mock concentration. "Mrs. Wilder, you can help me by telling me anything and everything you know about the friends of Marcella Harris."

Now the woman's whole body seemed to dance. Finally, her tongue caught up with her. "Well, to tell you the truth…" she began.

"You are *sworn* to tell the truth," I interjected sternly.

She went for it. "Well, Mr. Carpenter, Marcella's friends were mostly men. I mean she was a good mother and all, but she had lots of men friends."

"That's no crime."

"No, but—"

I interrupted. "I heard Michael Harris was a wild boy. That he got into fights. That he exposed himself to the other kids in the neighborhood."

Mrs. Wilder went red and shrieked, "That boy was the devil! All he needed was horns! Then everyone would have known. A boy without a father is a sinful thing!"

"Well, Michael is with his father now."

"Marcella told me about *that* one! What a no-good, handsome, good-for-nothing he was!"

"About her men friends, Mrs. Wilder…"

"I thought you said a woman filed this claim you're investigating."

"Yes, but this woman claimed that Marcella didn't have any gentleman friends, that Marcella was a quiet career woman dedicated to her son."

"Ha! Women like Marcella attract men the way sweets attract flies. I know. I had my share of suitors before I got married, but I never carried on the way that hussy did!"

I let Mrs. Wilder catch her breath. "Please be specific," I said.

Mrs. Wilder continued, warily this time. "Well…when Marcella moved in I offered to throw a little get-together for her, invite some of the ladies in the neighborhood. Well…Marcella told me that she didn't want any women friends, that women were all right to have a cup of coffee with once in a while, but she'd take men any day. I told her, 'You're a divorcée. Haven't you learned your lesson?' I'll never forget what she said: 'Yes, I did. I learned to use men the way they use women, and keep it at that.' I don't mind telling you, Mr. Carpenter, I don't mind telling you I was shocked!"

"Yes, that is shocking. Did Marcella Harris ever talk about her ex-husband at length? Or any of her boyfriends?"

"She just told me that Doc Harris was a charming, good-for-nothing snake. And about her boyfriends? If I'd known they were sleeping over I would have put a stop to it right away! I don't put up with promiscuous goings on."

I was getting tired of Mrs. Wilder. "How did you finally find out about Mrs. Harris's goings on?" I asked.

"Michael. He…used to leave notes. Anonymous ones. Obscene ones. I don't—"

I came awake. "Do you still have them?" I blurted.

Mrs. Wilder shrieked again: "No, no, no! I don't want to talk about it. I knew she was bad from the moment she moved in. I require references, and Marcella gave me fake ones, fake all the way down the line. If you ask me, she—"

The telephone rang. Mrs. Wilder went into the kitchen to answer it. When she was out of sight, I gave the room a quick toss, checking out the contents of shelves and bookcases. On top of the television set I found a stack of unopened mail. There was a letter addressed to Marcella Harris. Someone, probably Mrs. Wilder, had written in pencil on the envelope: "Deceased. Forward to William Harris, 4968 Beverly Blvd., L.A. 4, Calif."

I heard the landlady jabbering away in the kitchen. I put the envelope into my pocket and quietly left her house.

—

It was almost dusk. I drove toward the freeway, stopping a few blocks from the on-ramp to check the letter. It was just an overdue dentist's bill, and I threw it out the window, but it fit in: Marcella Harris lived a fast life and neglected small commitments. I wondered what kind of nurse she had been. I headed back toward Santa Monica to see if I could find out.

The freeways that night were surreal; seemingly endless red and white glowing jet streams carrying travelers to home and hearth, work and play, lovers' rendezvous and unknown destinations. This was not my Los Angeles I was passing over, and the dead nurse was none of my business, but as the eastern suburbs turned into good old familiar downtown L.A., old instincts clicked into place and the excitement of being out there and on the track of the immutable yet ever-changing took me over. There was nothing happening in my life, and looking for a killer was as good a way as any to fill the void.

I willed myself to form the nude image of Maggie Cadwallader. For the first time in years I didn't gasp reflexively.

—

The Packard-Bell Electronics plant was on Olympic Boulevard in the heart of the Santa Monica industrial district.

There was a drive-in movie theater around the corner on Bundy, and when I parked my car I could see that they were screening a Big Sid horror extravaganza. That depressed me, but the anticipation of pursuit quashed the depression fast.

The plant was a one-story red brick building that seemed to run off in several directions. Adjacent to a shipping and receiving area were two parking lots, separated by a low chain link fence. The closer lot, situated next to the front entrance, was empty. It was well lighted and bordered by evenly spaced little shrubby plants. The other lot was larger, and strewn with cigarette butts, candy wrappers, and newspapers. It had to be the lower-echelon employees' lot.

I hopped the fence to give it a closer look. The cars that were parked diagonally across it were for the most part old and beat-up. Little metal signs on poles marked the parking assignments, which were set up according to prestige: the maintenance men parked the furthest from the entrance. Closer in were "shippers"; closer still were "assembly crew."

I found what I was looking for flush up against the poorly lighted shipping entrance: a single parking slot with "foreman" stenciled in white paint on the cement.

I checked the time—nine twenty-three. The graveyard crew probably came on at midnight. All I could do now was wait.

—

It was late when I was rewarded. Over three hours of squatting in a darkened corner of the parking lot had put me in a foul mood. I watched as the night shift took off at precisely twelve o'clock, peeling rubber in my face. They seemed happy to be free.

The graveyard crew trickled in over the next half hour, seemingly not as happy. My eyes were glued to the parking space in front of the building, and at 12:49 a well-kept '46 Cadillac pulled in and parked in the foreman's space. A fat blond man got out. From my vantage point, I couldn't tell if he was missing any thumbs.

I waited five minutes and followed him inside. There was an employees' lunchroom at the end of a long, dimly lit corridor. I walked in and looked around. A youth in a duck's-ass haircut gave me a curious look, but none of the other goldbricking workmen seemed to notice me.

The fat blond foreman was sitting at a table, holding a cup of coffee in his right hand. I got a Coke from a machine and took my time drinking it. The foreman had his left hand in his pocket. He kept it there, driving me nuts. Finally, he took it out and scratched his nose. His thumb was missing—more than enough confirmation.

I walked back outside and found a rusty old coat hanger on the ground at the edge of the parking lot. I fashioned a hook device out of it and casually walked over to the foreman's Cadillac. The car was locked, but the wind wing on the driver's side was open. I looked in all directions, then slipped the bent coat hanger through the window and hooked it over the door button. The hanger slipped off once, but the second time it caught and I pulled the button up.

Quickly I got in the car and hunched down in the front seat. I tried the glove compartment. It was locked. I ran a hand over the steering column and found what I wanted: The car registration, attached in a leather holder, fastened on with buckles. I removed it and huddled even lower in the seat.

The plastic-encased official paper read: Henry Robert Hart, 1164¼ Hurlburt Pl., Culver City, Calif.

It was all I needed. I fastened the registration back on the steering column, locked Henry Hart's car and ran to my own.

—

Hurlburt Place was a quiet street of small houses a few blocks from the M.G.M. Studios. Number 1164¼ was a garage apartment. I parked across the street and rummaged in my trunk for some makeshift burglar's tools. A screwdriver and a metal carpenter's rule were all I could come up with.

I walked slowly across the street and into the driveway that led back to the garage. No lights were on in the front house. The wooden steps that led up to Henry Hart's apartment creaked so loudly that they must have been heard all the way downtown, but my own heartbeat seemed to drown them out.

The lock was a joke: working the rule and screwdriver simultaneously snapped it easily.

When the door opened, I stood there hesitantly, wondering if I dared enter. My previous B&Es had been done as a policeman; this time I was a civilian. I took a deep breath and walked in, wrapping my right hand in a handkerchief as I fumbled for a light switch.

Stumbling in the darkness, I crashed into a floor lamp, almost knocking it over. Holding it at waist level, I turned it on, illuminating a dreary bedroom–living room: ratty chairs, ratty Murphy bed, threadbare carpet, and cheap oil prints on the walls—probably all inherited from previous tenants long gone.

Deciding to give myself one minute to toss the room, I stood the lamp up on its stand and rapidly scanned the place, picking out a card table covered with dirty dishes, a pile of laundry on the floor next to the bed, and a stack of lurid paperbacks—held upright by two empty beer bottles—resting against a windowsill, and several empty cigarette packs.

My minute was just about up when I spotted a stack of newspapers sticking out from under the bed. I pulled them out. They were all L.A. papers, and they all contained articles which detailed the killing of Marcella Harris.

There was handwriting along the borders; grief-stricken pleas and prayers: “God, please catch this fiend who killed my Marcella.” “Please, please, please, God, make this a dream.” “The gas chamber is too good for the scum who killed my Marcella.” Next to a photo of the sheriff’s detective who was heading the investigation were the words: “This guy is a crumb! He told me to get lost, that the cops don’t need no friends of Marcella to help. I told him this is a case for the F.B.I.”

I flipped through the rest of the newspapers. They were arranged chronologically, and Henry Hart’s grief seemed to be building: the last newspaper accounts were scrawled over illegibly and seemed to be stained by teardrops.

I checked my watch: I had left the light on for eight minutes. With the handkerchief still over my hand I rifled every drawer in the three dressers that lined one wall: empty, empty, empty; dirty clothes, phone books.

I opened the last one, and stopped and trembled at what I’d found: a pink, silk-lined dresser drawer. Black lace brassieres and panties were folded neatly in one corner. In the middle was a cigar box filled with marijuana. Underneath it were black-and-white photographs of Marcella DeVries Harris, nude, her hair braided, lying on a bed. Her sensual mouth beckoned with a come-hither look that was both the ultimate come-hither look and a parody of all come-hither looks.

I stared, and felt my tremors go internal. There was the hardest, most knowing, most mocking intelligence in Marcella Harris’s eyes that I had ever seen. Her body was a lush invitation to great pleasure, but I couldn’t take my eyes off those eyes.

I must have stared at that face for minutes before I came back to earth. When I finally realized where I was, I replaced the cigar box, closed the silk-lined drawer, turned off the light, and got out of the little garage apartment before Marcella Harris weaved the same spell on me that she had on Henry Hart.

18

I came prepared for William "Doc" Harris, stopping by a printer's shop and getting a hundred phony business cards made up before I went to brace him. The cards read: "Frederick Walker, Prudential Insurance." Prudential's rock insignia was there in the middle, and underneath in official-looking italics was the single word, "investigator." A phony telephone number completed the pretense. The ink on the cards was hardly dry when I shoved them into my pocket and drove to 4968 Beverly Boulevard.

—

"…And so you see, Mr. Harris, it's just a case of going through the past of your late wife so that I'll be able to tell the payment department conclusively that this claim is fraudulent. I think it is, and I've been a claims investigator for eight years. Nevertheless, the legwork has to be done."

Doc Harris nodded pensively, flicking my bogus calling card with his thumbnail and never taking his eyes from mine. Sitting across the battered coffee table from me he was one of the most impressive-looking men I had ever seen: six feet tall, close to sixty, with a full head of white hair, the body of an athlete and a chiseled face that was a cross between the finer elements of stern rectitude and rough humor. I could see what Marcella had seen in him.

He smiled broadly, and his features relaxed into infectious warmth. "Well, Mr. Walker," Doc Harris said, "Marcella had a knack for attracting lonely people and making them ridiculous promises that she had no intention of keeping. Be frank with me, please, Mr. Walker. What have you discovered about my ex-wife so far?"

"To be candid, Mr. Harris, that she was promiscuous and an alcoholic."

"No man has to lie when he talks to me," Harris declared. "I give and expect complete candor. So how can I assist you?"

I leaned back and folded my arms. It was an intimidation gesture, and it didn't work. "Mr. Harris—" I started.

"Call me Doc."

"All right, Doc. I need names, names, and more names. All the friends and acquaintances you can recall."

Harris shook his head. “Mr. Walker—”

“Call me Fred.”

“Fred, Marcella picked up her lovers and her entourage of friends, if you can call them that, in bars. Bars were the sole focus of her social life. Period. Although you might try the people at Packard-Bell, where she worked.”

“I have. They were evasive.”

Harris smiled bitterly. “For good reason, Fred. They didn’t want to speak badly of the dead. Marcella hit bars all over L.A. She didn’t want to become familiar in any one place. She had a tremendous fear of winding up as a slatternly bar regular, so she moved around a lot. She had, I think, several arrests for drunk driving. What’s the name of this phony claimant?”

“Alma Jacobsen.”

“Well, Fred, let me tell you what I think happened: Marcella met this woman at some gin mill, drunk. She bowled her over with her personality and her nurse’s uniform, and showed the woman, who was probably also half-gassed, some official-looking papers. Marcella then told the woman how desperately alone she was, and how she needed someone to carry on her antivivisectionist work in case of her death. Marcella was a big animal lover. Marcella, in her alcoholic effusion, then probably made a big show of getting the woman’s name and address and made a big show of signing the papers. Marcella was a superb actress, and the woman undoubtedly went for it. When Marcella’s death made the papers, Alma thought she had herself a gravy train. Sound plausible, Fred?”

“Completely, Doc. Lonely people will do strange things.”

Harris laughed. “Indeed they do. What do you usually do, Fred?”

I made my laughter match Harris’s perfectly. “I look for women. You?”

“I’ve been known to,” Doc laughed.

I got serious again. “Doc, could I talk to your son about this? I think your theory is valid, but I want to touch all bases in the report I file. Maybe your son can tell me something that will disprove this Jacobsen woman conclusively. I’ll be gentle with him.”

Doc Harris considered my request. “All right, Fred. I think Michael is up at the park with the dog. Why don’t we walk up there and talk to him? It’s only two blocks from here.”

It was three, and it wasn’t much of a park; it was just a vacant lot overgrown with weeds. Doc Harris and I talked easily as we trod through knee-high grass looking for his son and his son’s dog.

When we did find them we almost tripped over them. Michael Harris was lying on his back on a beach towel, his arms outstretched in a crucifixion pose. The beagle puppy I had seen in the yard on Maple Street in El Monte was chewing grass by his side.

“On your feet, Colonel!” Harris bellowed good-naturedly.

Michael Harris got to his feet, unsmiling, brushing the grass from his blue jeans. When he stretched to his full height I was astounded—he was almost as tall as I. The boy looked nervously at his father, then at me. Time froze for a brief instant as I recalled another brown-haired, fiercely bright boy of nine playing in the desolate back lot of an orphanage. It was over twenty years ago, but I had to will myself to return to the present.

“…And this is Mr. Walker, Colonel,” Doc Harris was saying. “He represents an insurance company. They want to give us some money, but there’s a crazy old woman who says your mother promised it to her. We can’t let that happen, can we, Colonel?”

“No,” Michael said softly.

“Good,” Harris said. “Michael, will you talk to Mr. Walker?”

“Yes.”

I was starting to feel controlled, manipulated. Doc Harris’s manner was unnerving. The boy was intimidated, and I was starting to feel that way myself. I had the feeling that Harris sensed I wasn’t on the up-and-up. Intellectually, we were evenly matched, but so far his will was the greater, and it angered me. Unless I asserted myself I would only know what Harris wanted me to know.

I clapped Harris hard on the back. “Jesus,” I said, “it’s hot here! I noticed a drive-in down on Western. Why don’t we go get cream sodas? My treat.”

“Can we, Dad?” Michael pleaded. “I’m dying of thirst.”

Doc didn’t lose a second’s worth of his considerable aplomb. He clapped me on the back, equally hard. “Let’s go, amigos,” he replied.

—

We walked the four blocks in the hot summer sun, three generations of American males united by darkness and duplicity. The dog trotted behind us, stopping frequently to explore interesting scents. I walked in the middle, with Doc on my left on the street side. Michael walked to my right, closed in against my shoulder by the hedges that ran along the sides of the homes on Beverly Boulevard. He leaned into me, seeming to relish the contact.

I queried Doc on his nickname, and he laughed and said, “Med school dropout, Fred. It was too bloody, too abstract, too time-consuming, too literal, too much.”

“Where did you attend?”

“University of Illinois.”

“Jesus, it sounds grim. Were there a lot of farm boys wanting to be country doctors?"

"Yes, and a lot of Chicago rich kids out to be society doctors. I didn't fit in."

"Why not?" I asked. It was a challenge.

"It was the twenties. I was an iconoclast. I realized that I'd be spending the rest of my life treating smug, small-town hicks who didn't know shit from Shinola. That I'd be prolonging the lives of people who would be better off dead. I quit in my final year."

I laughed. Michael did, too. Michael's prematurely deep voice went up a good two octaves in the process. "Tell him about the dead horse, Dad."

"That's the Colonel's favorite," Harris laughed. "Well, I used to have a racket going in those days. I knew some gangsters who ran a speakeasy. A real third-class dive where all the rich kids from school hung out. Cheap booze and cheaper food. The joint had one distinction: big juicy steaks for a quarter. Sirloin steaks smothered in onions and tomato sauce. Ha! They weren't steaks, they were fillet of horse. I was the butcher. I used to drive around the countryside with a stooge of mine and steal horses. We used to lure the nags into the back of our truck with oats and sugar, then we'd drive back to town to this warehouse and inject the nags with small quantities of morphine I'd stolen. Then I'd sever their neck arteries with a scalpel. My partner did the real dirty work, I had no stomach for it. He was the cook, too.

"Anyway, as events came to pass, business went bad. The owners tried to stiff me on my rustling dues. This was about the time I decided to give med school the big drift. I decided to go out in style. I knew the goombahs would never pay me, so I decided to give them a good fucking. One night there was a private party at the speak. My stooge and I got ourselves two broken-down old nags, put them in the truck and backed them up to the front door of the joint. We gave the password and the door opened and the nags ran right in. Jesus! What a sight! Tables destroyed, people screaming, broken bottles everywhere! I got out of town and Illinois and never went back."

"Where did you go?" I asked.

"I went on the bum," Harris said. "Have you ever been on the bum, Fred?"

"No, Doc."

"You should have. It's instructive."

It was a challenge. I took it. "I've been too busy being on the make—which is better than being on the bum, right, Michael?" I squeezed the boy around the shoulders, and he beamed at me.

"Right!"

Doc pretended to be amused, but we both knew that the gauntlet had been thrown down.

—

We took seats inside the Tiny Naylor Drive-In on Beverly and Western. It was air-conditioned, and Michael and Doc seemed to crash in relief from the heat as we all stretched our long legs out under the table.

Michael sat down beside me, Doc across from us. We all ordered root beer floats. When they arrived, Michael gulped his in three seconds flat, belched, and looked to his father for permission to order another. Doc nodded indulgently and the waitress brought another tall glass of brown and white goo. Michael chugged this one down in about five seconds, then belched and grinned at me like a sated lover.

“Michael, we have to talk about your mother,” I said.

“Okay,” Michael said.

“Tell me about your mother’s friends,” I said.

Michael grimaced. “She didn’t have any,” he said. “She was a bar floozy.”

I grimaced, and Michael looked to Doc for confirmation. Doc nodded grimly.

“Who told you that, Michael?” I asked.

“Nobody. I’m no dummy, I knew that Uncle Jim and Uncle George and Uncle Bob and Uncle What’s-his-face were just pickups.”

“What about women friends?”

“She didn’t have any.”

“Ever heard of a woman named Alma Jacobsen?”

“No.”

“Was your mother friendly with the parents of any of your friends?”

Michael hesitated. “I don’t have any friends.”

“None at all?”

Michael shrugged. “The books I read are my friends. Minna is my friend.” He pointed to the puppy, tethered to a phone pole outside the plate glass window.

I kicked this sad information around in my head. Michael leaned his shoulder against me and gazed longingly at my half-finished root beer float.

“Kill it,” I said.

He did, in one gulp.

I opened up another line of questioning: “Michael, you were with your dad when your mother was killed, right?”

“Right. We were playing duckball.”

“What’s duckball?”

“It’s catch. If you miss the ball, you have to get down on your knees and quack like a duck.”

I laughed. “Sounds like fun. How did you feel about your mother, Michael? Did you love her?”

Michael went red all over. His long skinny arms went red, his neck went red, and his face went red all the way up to his soft brown crew cut. He started to tremble, then swept an arm across the tabletop and knocked all the glassware and utensils onto the floor. He pushed his way across me and ran outside in the direction of his beagle pup.

Doc stared at me, letting an alarmed waitress pick up the detritus of our root beer floats.

“Does that happen often?” I asked.

Doc nodded. “My son is a volatile boy.”

“He takes after his dad.” It was both a challenge and a compliment. Doc understood that.

“In some ways,” he said.

“I think he’s a wonderful boy,” I added.

Doc smiled. “So do I.”

I laid a five-dollar bill on the table. Doc and I got up and walked outside. Michael was playing tug-of-war with his dog. The dog held the leather leash in her jaws and strained happily against the pull of Michael’s skinny arms.

“Come on, Colonel,” Doc called. “Time to go home.”

Michael and the dog ran ahead of us across Western Avenue and they remained a good forty yards in front as we walked west in the hot afternoon sun. Doc and I didn’t talk. I thought about the boy and wondered what Doc was thinking. When we got to the apartment building on Beverly and Irving, I stuck out my hand.

“Thanks for your cooperation, Doc,” I said.

“It was a pleasure, Fred.”

“I think you’ve been a big help. I think you’ve proven conclusively that this Jacobsen woman’s claim is a phony.”

“I didn’t know Marcella had a policy with Prudential. I’m surprised she didn’t tell me about it.”

“People do surprising things.”

“What year did she take out the policy?”

“In ’51.”

“We were divorced in ’50.”

I shrugged. “Stranger things have happened.”

Doc shrugged too. “How true,” he said. He reached inside his pants pocket and pulled out the business card I had given him earlier. He handed it to me. The ink on it was smudged. Doc shook his head. “A smart young insurance bulldog like you should get his cards printed at a better place.”

We shook hands again. I felt myself start to go red. “So long, Doc,” I said.

“You take care, Fred,” Doc returned.

I walked to my car. I had the key in the door when suddenly Michael ran to me and grabbed me in a fierce hug. Before I could respond, he shoved a wadded-up piece of paper into my hand and ran away. I opened up the paper. “You are my friend” was all it said.

—

I drove home, moved by the boy and puzzled by the man. I had a strange sensation that Doc Harris knew who I was and somehow welcomed my intrusion. I had another feeling, equally strange, that there was a bond building between Michael and me.

—

When I got home I called Reuben Ramos and begged for some favors. Reluctantly, he did what I wanted: he ran Doc Harris through R&I. No record in California. Next he came up with the addresses Marcella Harris had given at the time of her many arrests: in 1946, nine years ago, she lived at 618 North Sweetzer, Los Angeles. In 1947 and ’48, 17901 Terra Cotta, Pasadena. In 1949, 1811 Howard Street, Glendale. At the time of her last drunk arrest in 1950, she was living at 9619 Hibiscus Canyon, Sherman Oaks.

I wrote it all down and spent a long time staring at the information before going to bed. I slept fitfully, waking up repeatedly, expecting to find my bedroom inhabited by ghosts of murdered women.

—

The following day, Friday, I went out to retrace the past of Marcella DeVries Harris. I went first to shady, tree-lined Sweetzer Avenue in West Hollywood, and got the results I expected: no one at the 618 address, a Spanish-style walk-up apartment building, recalled the redheaded nurse or her then-infant son. I inquired with people in the neighboring houses and got puzzled shakes of the head. Marcella the cipher.

At Terra Cotta Avenue in Pasadena the results were the same. There Marcella had rented a house, and the current tenant told me that the previous owner of the house had died two years ago. The people on the surrounding blocks had no recollection of Marcella or her little boy.

From Pasadena I drove to nearby Glendale. It was hot and smoggy. I took care of 1949 in short order: the bungalow court Marcella had lived in that year had been recently demolished to make way for a modern apartment complex. “Marcella Harris, good-looking red-haired nurse in her late thirties with a three-year-old son?” I asked two dozen Howard Street residents. Nothing. Marcella, the phantom.

I took the Hollywood Freeway to Sherman Oaks. A gas station attendant near the freeway off-ramp directed me to Hibiscus Canyon. It took me five minutes to find it; nestled in a cul-de-sac at the end of a winding street, lined, appropriately, with towering hibiscus bushes. Number 9619 was a four-story walk-up, in the style of a miniature Moorish castle.

I parked the car, and was walking across the street toward 9619 when my eyes were riveted to a sign stuck into the front lawn of the house next to it. “For Sale. Contact Janet Valupeyk, Valupeyk Realty, 18369 Ventura Blvd., Sherman Oaks.”

Janet Valupeyk. Former lover of Eddie Engels. The woman Dudley Smith and I had questioned about Engels back in ’51. I felt myself go prickly all over. I forgot all about 9619 Hibiscus Canyon and drove to Ventura Boulevard instead.

—

I remembered Janet Valupeyk well. She had been nearly comatose when Smith and I had interviewed her four years ago.

She had changed; I could tell that immediately as I looked at her through the plate glass window of her real estate office. She was seated at a metal desk near the window, shuffling papers and nervously smoking a cigarette. During the four years since I had last seen her she had aged ten. Her face had gone gaunt and her skin had turned a pasty white. One eyebrow twitched dramatically as she fumbled with her paperwork.

I could see no one else within the office. I walked through a glass door that set off little chimes as I entered. Janet Valupeyk nearly jumped out of her skin at the noise. She dropped her pen and fumbled her cigarette.

I pretended not to notice. “Miss Valupeyk?” I asked innocently.

“Yes. Oh, God, that goddamned chime! I don’t know why I put it in. Can I help you?”

“I’m interested in the house on Hibiscus Canyon.”

Janet Valupeyk smiled nervously, put out her cigarette and immediately lit another one. “That’s a dandy property,” she said. “Let me get you the statistics on it.”

She moved from her desk to a bank of metal filing cabinets, opening the top drawer and rummaging through the manila folders. I joined her, watching her nervous fingers dig through files that were arranged by street name and subheaded by street address. She found Hibiscus Canyon and started muttering, “9621, 9621, where the hell is that little devil?”

My eyes were glued to the street numbers, and when 9619 came up I reached my hand into the cabinet and yanked out the file.

Janet Valupeyk said, “Hey, what the hell!”

I shouted at her, “Shut up! Or I’ll have Narcotics detectives here within fifteen minutes!” It was a stab in the dark, but it worked: Janet Valupeyk collapsed in her chair, her face buried in her hands. I let her sob and tore through the file.

The tenants were listed in chronological order, along with the amount of rent they had paid. The tenant list went back to 1944, and as I thumbed through it the blood rushed to my head and the periphery of my vision blackened.

“Who are you?” Janet Valupeyk choked.

“Shut up!” I screamed again.

Finally I found it. Marcella Harris had rented apartment number 102 at 9619 Hibiscus Canyon from June 1950 to September 1951. She had been a resident there at the time of Maggie Cadwallader’s murder. Next to the listing there were comments in a minute hand: “Mrs. Groberg’s bro. to sublet 7/2/51–?” Next to that, a check mark in a different color ink and the letters “O.K.–J.V.”

I put down the file and knelt beside the quaking Janet Valupeyk. Stabbing again, I asked, “Who told you to rent to Marcella Harris, Janet?” She shook her head violently. I raised my hand to hit her, then hesitated and shook her shoulders instead. “Tell me, goddamnit, or I’ll get the heat!”

Janet Valupeyk began to tremble from head to toe. “Eddie,” she said. “Eddie, Eddie, Eddie.” Her voice was very soft.

So was mine as I said, “Eddie who?”

Janet looked at me carefully for the first time. “I…I know you,” she said.

“Eddie who?” I screamed, shaking her by her shoulders again.

“Eddie Engels. I…I know you. You—”

“But you broke up with him.”

“He still had me. Oh, God, he still had me!”

“Who’s Mrs. Groberg?”

“I don’t know. I don’t remember—”

“Don’t lie to me. Marcella Harris is dead! Who killed her?”

“I don’t know! You killed Eddie!”

“Shut up! Who’s Mrs. Groberg?”

“She lives at 9619. She’s a good tenant. She wouldn’t hurt any—”

I didn't hear her finish. I left her sobbing for her past as I ran to my car and rushed headlong back into mine.

—

Five minutes later I was parked crossways at the end of the Hibiscus Canyon cul-de-sac. I ran down the street to the Moorish apartment house, flung open the leaded glass door, and scanned the mailboxes in the foyer. Mrs. John Groberg lived in number 419. I took the stairs two at a time to the fourth floor. I listened through the door to a TV blasting out a game program. I knocked. There was no answer. I knocked again, this time louder, and heard mild cursing and the volume on the TV diminished.

Through the door a cranky voice called out, "Who is it?"

"Police officer, ma'am," I called out, consciously imitating Jack Webb of "Dragnet" fame.

Giggles answered my announcement. The door was flung open a moment later, and I was confronted by the adoring gaze of a gasbag matron. I quickly sized her up as a crime buff and took my act from there.

Before the woman could ask me for my nonexistent badge I said forcefully, "Ma'am, I need your help."

She fidgeted with her housecoat and the curlers in her hair. She was on the far side of fifty. "Y-yes, Officer," she said.

"Ma'am, a former tenant here was murdered recently. Maybe you've heard about it; you look like a woman who keeps abreast of the news."

"Well, I—"

"Her name was Marcella Harris."

The woman's hands flew up to her throat. She was shaken, and I compounded her fear: "That's right, Mrs. Groberg, she was strangled."

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes, ma'am."

"Well, I—"

"Ma'am, could I come in?"

"Oh, yes, Officer."

The apartment was hot, stuffy, and overfurnished. I took a seat on the couch next to Mrs. Groberg, the better to bore in quickly.

"Poor Marcella," she said.

"Yes, indeed, ma'am. Did you know her well?"

"No. To tell you the truth, I didn't like her, really. I think she drank. But I doted on her little boy. He was such a sweetheart."

I tossed her a ray of hope: “The boy is doing fine, Mrs. Groberg. He’s living with his father.”

“Thank God for that.”

“I understand that Marcella sublet her apartment to your brother in the summer of ’51. Do you recall that?”

The Groberg woman laughed. “Yes, I do! I set it up, and what a mistake it was. My brother Morton had a drinking problem, just like Marcella. He came out from Omaha to go to work at Lockheed and dry out. I lent him the money to come out here, and the money to rent the apartment. But he found Marcella’s liquor and drank it all! He was swacked for three weeks.”

“How long was Morton in the apartment?”

“For two months! He was on a bender, and he ended up in the hospital. I —”

“Marcella was gone that long?”

“Yes.”

“Did she tell you where she was going?”

“No, but when she got back she said, ‘You can’t go home again.’ That’s the name of a book, isn’t it?”

“Yes, ma’am. Had Marcella taken her son with her?”

“No…I don’t…no, I know she didn’t. She left the tot with friends. I remember talking with the child when Marcella came back. He didn’t like the people he stayed with.”

“Marcella moved out after that, didn’t she?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know where she went?”

“No.”

“Did she seem upset when she returned from her trip?”

“I couldn’t tell. That woman was a mystery to me! Who…who killed her, Officer?”

“I don’t know, but I’m going to find out,” I said by way of farewell.

—

Barely controlling my exultation, I drove with shaky hands over the Cahuenga Pass into Hollywood. I found a pay phone and called Doc Harris. He answered on the third ring: “Speak, it’s your dime.”

“Doc, this is Fred Walker.”

“Fred, how are you? How’s the insurance game?” The bluff heartiness of his tone told me that he knew the game wasn’t insurance, but that he wanted to play anyway.

"Fifty-fifty. It's a racket like any other. Listen, how would you and Michael like to go for a ride tomorrow? Out to the country somewhere, just get in my car and go. I've got a convertible."

There was silence on the other end of the line. Finally, Doc said, "Sure, kid. Why don't you pick us up at noon?"

"Until then," I said, and hung up.

I drove to Beverly Hills.

Lorna's office was in a tall building attached to the Stanley-Warner Theater on Wilshire near Beverly Drive. I parked down the street and walked there. I checked out the rear parking area first; I was afraid Lorna had already left for the day, but I was in luck: her '50 Packard was still in its space. Hardworking Lorna—still on the job at six thirty.

The sky was turning golden, and people were already lining up for the first evening performance of "The Country Girl." I waited an hour by the parking entrance, until the sky turned a burnished copper and Lorna turned the corner onto Canon Drive, staying close to the building, jamming her heavy wooden cane into the space where the wall met the sidewalk.

When I saw her, I felt the old shakiness grip me. She walked head down, abstracted. Before she could look up and see me, I committed to memory the look on her face, her hunched posture and her light blue summer dress. When she did look up, she must have seen the love-struck Freddy Underhill of old, for her drawn face softened until she realized this was 1955, not 1951, and that walls had been constructed during the interim.

"Hello, Lor," I said.

"Hello, Freddy," Lorna said coldly. Her manner stiffened, she sighed and leaned against the marble of the building. "Why, Freddy? It's over."

"No, it's not, Lor. None of it."

"I won't argue with you."

"You look beautiful."

"No, I don't. I'm thirty-five and I'm putting on weight. And it's only been four months."

"It's been a lifetime."

"Don't do that with me, goddamn you! You don't mean it, and I don't care! I don't care, Freddy! Do you hear that?"

Lorna gave herself a shove and almost toppled over. I moved to steady her and she swatted at me clumsily with her cane. "No, goddamn you," she hissed. "I won't be charmed one more time. I won't let you beat up my friends, and I won't take you back."

She hobbled into the parking lot. I stayed behind, wondering if she would believe me, or think me insane, or even care. I let her get all the way to her car. I watched as she fished her keys out of her purse, then ran up and grabbed them out of her hand as she began to unlock the door. She started to resist, then stopped. She smiled patiently and put her weight on her cane. "You never listened, Freddy," she said.

"I listened more than you know," I countered.

"No, you didn't. You just heard what you wanted to hear. And you convinced me you were listening. You were a good actor."

I couldn't think of a retort, or a dig, or a plea, so I just said—moving a few steps backward to give myself objectivity—"It's on again. I've connected Eddie Engels to a woman who was murdered recently. I'm going to see it through, wherever it takes me. Maybe when it's all over we can be together."

Lorna was perfectly still. "You are insane," she said.

"It's been hanging over us like a plague, Lor. Maybe we can have some peace when it's over."

"You are insane."

"Lorna—"

"No. We can never be together again; and not because of what happened four years ago. We can never be together because of what you are. No, don't touch me and don't try to charm me or sweet-talk me. I'm getting in my car and if you try to stop me I will make you regret we ever met."

I handed Lorna the keys to her car. Her hand shook as she took them from me. She fumbled her way into the car and drove away, spewing exhaust fumes on my trouser legs.

"Nothing's ever over, Lorna," I said to the air. But I didn't know if I believed it.

—

We drove east on the San Bernardino Freeway with the top down, away from the stifling, sun-blinded L.A. streets, past successions of interconnected working-class communities spread through terrain ranging from desert sand flats to piny woods. I was at the wheel, Michael was beside me on the front seat, and Doc was sprawled in the back, his long legs propped up on the passenger-side doorjamb, where Michael wrapped a protective arm around his ankles and beat time to the big-band boogie-woogie coming from the radio.

The air that whizzed past us got hotter and thinner as we climbed the winding roads of a fir-covered forest. Lake Arrowhead was nominally our destination, but none of us seemed to care if we ever got there; we were lost in games of silence—Doc and I each knowing that the other *knew*, but knew what? And unwilling, as yet, to push it any further. And Michael, craning his long neck above the windshield, getting full blasts of summer air, gulping it in as fuel for what I knew had to be a brilliant imagination.

Lake Arrowhead came upon us abruptly at the end of a scrub-littered access road. It was shimmering light blue, mirage-like in the heat and dotted with rowboats and swimmers. I stopped the car at the side of the road and turned to face my companions.

"Well," I said, "here or beyond?"

"Beyond!" they both exclaimed in unison, and I accelerated, skirting the blue oasis and driving a circuitous path through small mountain ranges piled up one on top of the other.

But soon my mind clicked in. We were miles from Los Angeles and I had work to do. I started getting itchy, looking around for a quiet, shady place for us to stop and eat the picnic lunch I had made. Almost as if in answer to my anxiety, it shot up in the near distance: "Jumbo's Animal Park and Rest Area." It looked like a set from a western movie: a single street of battered one-story frame buildings, and behind that a small wooded area crowded with picnic tables. A weather-beaten sign at the entrance exclaimed: "Christmas in the Summertime! See Santa's Reindeer at Jumbo's."

I nudged Michael as I pulled into the parking area. "Do you believe in Santa Claus, Mike?"

"He doesn't like to be called Mike," Doc said.

"I don't mind," Michael retorted, "but Santa Claus sucks a big dick." He giggled at his own wit. I laughed along with him.

"A jaded lad," Doc piped in wryly from the back seat.

"Like his dad?"

"Very much like his dad. In some respects. I take it this is our destination?"

"Let's vote. Mike?"

"Yes!"

"Doc?"

"Why not?"

I dug a big paper bag full of sandwiches and a large thermos of iced tea out of the trunk, and we strolled through the little town. I was right—the building facades *were* studio sets: Dodge City Jail, Miller's General Store, Diamond Jim's Saloon, Forty-niners Dance Hall. But only the roofs remained intact—the fronts had been ripped out and replaced with bars, behind which a scrawny assortment of wildlife reposed. The Dodge City Jail held two skinny lions.

"The king of beasts," Doc muttered as we passed by. "I'm king of the beasts," Michael countered, walking next to me ahead of his father.

Diamond Jim's Saloon held a bloated elephant. It lay comatose on a cement floor covered with feces.

"Looks like a certain Republican I could name," I said.

"Watch out!" Michael squealed. "Dad's a Republican, and he can't take a joke!" Michael started to giggle and leaned into me. I put my arm around him and held him tightly.

Our last stop before the picnic area was "Diamond Lil's Carny House and Social Hall," no doubt a B-movie euphemism for "whorehouse." Diamond Lil and her girls were not in residence. Ugly, chattering, pink-faced baboons were there instead.

Michael tore free from my arm. He started to tremble as he had in the drive-in two days before. He pulled large hunks of dirt from the ground and hurled them full force at the baboons.

"Dirty fucking drunks!" he screamed. "Dirty, filthy, goddamned, fucking drunks!" He let loose another barrage of dirt and started to scream again, but no words came out, and the jabbering of the creatures in the cage rose to a shrieking cacophony.

Michael was bending down to pick up more ammunition when I grabbed him around the shoulders. As he squirmed to free himself, I heard Doc say soothingly, "Easy, fellow. Easy, Michael boy, it's going to be okay, easy…"

Michael slammed a bony elbow into my stomach. I let go of him and he tore off like an antelope in the direction of the rest area. I let him get a good lead, then followed. He was fast, and sprinting full out, and I knew in his condition he would run until he collapsed.

We ran through the wooded area into a miniature box canyon laced with scrub pines. Suddenly there was no place left to run. Michael fell down at the base of a large pine tree and encircled it fiercely with his skinny arms, rocking on his knees. As I came up to him, I could hear a hoarse wail rise from his throat. I knelt beside him and placed a tentative hand on his shoulder and let him cry until he gradually surrendered his grip on the tree and placed his arms around me.

"What is it, Michael?" I asked softly, ruffling his hair. "What is it?"

"Call me Mike," he sobbed. "I don't want to be called Michael anymore."

"Mike, who killed your mother?"

"I don't know!"

"Have you ever heard of anyone named Eddie Engels?"

Mike shook his head and buried it deeper into my chest.

"Margaret Cadwallader?"

"No," he sobbed.

"Mike, do you remember living on Hibiscus Canyon when you were five?"

Mike looked up at me. "Y-yes," he said.

“Do you remember the trip your mother took while you were living there?”

“Yes!”

“Ssssh. Where did she go?”

“I don’t…”

I helped the boy to his feet and put my arm around him. “Did she go to Wisconsin?”

“I think so. She brought back all this gooey cheese and this smelly sauerkraut. Fucking German squarehead bastards.”

I lifted the boy’s chin off his chest. “Who did you stay with while she was gone?”

Mike twisted away from me, looking at the ground at his feet.

“Tell me, Mike.”

“I stayed with these fly-by-night guys my mom was seeing.”

“Did they treat you all right?”

“Yeah. They were drunks and gamblers. They were nice to me, but…”

“But what, Mike?”

Mike screamed, “They were nice to me because they wanted to fuck Marcella!” His tears had stopped and the hatred in his young face aged him by ten years.

“What were their names?”

“I don’t know, Uncle Claude, Uncle Schmo, Uncle Fucko, I don’t know!”

“Do you remember the place where you stayed?”

“Yeah, I remember; 6481 Scenic Avenue. Near Franklin and Gower. Dad said…”

“Said what, Mike?”

“That…that he was going to fuck up Marcella’s boyfriends. I told him they were nice, but he still said it. Fred?”

“Yes?”

“Dad was telling stories last night. He told me this story about this guy who used to be a cop. Did you used to be a cop?”

“Yes. What—”

“Michael, Fred, where the hell are you?” It was Doc’s voice, and it was nearby. A second later we saw him. Michael moved away from me when Doc came into view.

He walked toward us. When I saw his face up close I knew that all pretense was gone. His expression was a mask of hatred; the hard, handsome features were drawn inward to the point where each plane melded perfectly in a picture of absolute coldness.

“I think we should go back to L.A.,” Doc said.

—

No one said a word as we made our way back to Los Angeles via a labyrinthine network of freeways and surface streets. Mike sat in back, and Doc sat up front with me, his eyes glued straight ahead for the entire two hours.

When we finally pulled up to the house all three of us seemed to breathe for the first time. It was then that I smelled it, a musky, sweaty pungency that permeated the car even with the top down: the smell of fear.

Michael vaulted out of the back seat and ran without a word into his concrete back yard. Doc turned to face me. “What now, Underhill?” he said.

“I don’t know. I’m blowing town for a while.”

“And then?”

“And then I’ll be back.”

Harris got out of the car. He looked down at me. He started to smile, but I didn’t let his cold face get that far.

“Harris, if you harm that boy, I’ll kill you,” I said, then drove off in the direction of Hollywood.

—

Scenic Avenue was a side street about a mile north of Hollywood Boulevard. Number 6481 was a small stone cottage on the south side. There was a small yard of weeds encircled by a white picket fence. It was deserted, as I knew it would be; all the front windows were broken and the flimsy wooden front door was half caved in.

I walked around the corner of the house. The back yard was the same as the front—same fencing, same high weeds. I found a circuit box next to the fence, attached to a phone pole, and wedged a long piece of scrap wood under the hinge, snapping the box open. I toyed with the switches for five minutes until the dusk shrouded inside of 6481 was illuminated as bright as day.

I brazenly walked across the wooden service porch and through the back door. Then I walked quietly through the entire house, savoring each nuance of the evil I felt there.

It was just an ordinary one-family dwelling, bereft of furniture, bereft of all signs of habitation, bereft even of the winos who usually inhabited such places; but it was alive with an unspeakable aura of sickness and terror that permeated every wall, floorboard, and cobweb-knitted corner.

On the oak floor of the bedroom near an overturned mattress I found a large splotch of dried blood. It could have been something else, but I knew what it was. I upended the mattress; the bottom of it was soaked through with brownish matter.

I found what I knew to be old blood in the bathtub, in the living room closet, and on the dining room walls. Somehow each new sign of carnage brought forth in me a deeper and deeper sense of calm. Until I walked into the den that adjoined the kitchen and saw the crib, its railings splattered with blood, the matting that lined the inside caked thick with blood, and the teddy bear who lay dead atop it, his cotton guts spilling out and soaked with blood from another time that was reaching out to hold me.

Then I got out, knowing that this was the constituency of the dead that Wacky Walker had written about so many years before.

V

WISCONSIN DUTCH

19

I watched from my window as the propellers churned their way through a billowy cloud bank over the Pacific. The plane then arced left and headed inland for the long trip to a middle America I had never seen: first Chicago, then a connecting flight to southern Wisconsin, birthplace of Margaret Cadwallader and Marcella DeVries Harris.

As California, Arizona, and Nevada passed below me, I shifted my gaze from that arid landscape to the whirring propellers and became hypnotized by their circuitous motion. After a while a process of synchronization took over: my mind started to run in perfect circles, logically, chronologically, and in thematic unison: Marcella DeVries was born in Tunnel City, Wisconsin, in 1912. Tunnel City was eighty-five miles from Waukesha, where Maggie Cadwallader was born in 1914. Two years and eighty-five miles apart.

"I'm just a Wisconsin farm girl," Maggie had told me. She had also gotten hysterical when she'd seen my off-duty revolver. *"No, no, no, no!"* she had screamed. *"I won't let you hurt me! I know who sent you!"*

Six months later she was dead, strangled in the very bedroom where we had made love. The time of her death coincided with Marcella Harris's abrupt journey to parts unknown.

"You can't go home again," Marcella had told her neighbor, Mrs. Groberg.

"Gooey cheese and smelly sauerkraut" her son had remembered—ethnic foods from the German/Dutch/Polish-dominated state of Wisconsin.

A comely stewardess brought me coffee but got only a distracted grunt of thanks. I stared at the propeller closest to me, watching it cut the air, feeling a deepening symbiosis of past and present, and a further unfolding of logic. Eddie Engels and Janet Valupeyk had been lovers. Eddie had been intimate with Maggie Cadwallader. Eddie had told Janet in the early summer of '51 to rent Marcella Harris the apartment on Hibiscus Canyon. It *had to* be related, all of it. It was too perfect not to be.

—

When the plane landed in Chicago and I hit terra firma again, I decided to change my plans and rent a car to drive the hundred miles or so into Wisconsin. I picked up an efficient-looking Ford at a rental agency and set off. It was near dusk and still very hot. There was a breeze coming from Lake Michigan that did its best to cool things off, but failed.

I drove into the heart of the city, watching the early evening tourists and window shoppers, not knowing what I was looking for. When I passed a printer's shop on the near north side I knew that it was my destination. I went in and purchased five dollars' worth of protective coloration; two hundred phony insurance investigator business cards, these bearing my real name and a ritzy-sounding Beverly Hills address and phone number.

At a nearby novelty store I purchased three reasonably realistic-looking badges designating me "Deputy Sheriff," "Official Police Stenographer," and "International Investigator." When I scrutinized that last one more closely, I threw it out the window of my car—it had the distinct look of a kiddies' cereal box giveaway. But the others looked real, my business cards looked real, and the .38 automatic in my suitcase *was* real. I found a hotel room on the north side and went to bed early; I had a hot date with history, and I wanted to be rested for it.

Southern Wisconsin was colored every conceivable shade of green. I crossed the Illinois-Wisconsin border at eight o'clock in the morning and left the wide eight-lane interstate, pushing my '52 Ford sedan north on a narrow strip of blacktop through a succession of dairy farms interrupted every few miles or so by small lakes.

—

I almost missed Tunnel City, spotting the turn-off sign at the last moment. I swung a sharp right-hand turn and entered a two-lane road that ran straight through the middle of a giant cabbage field. After half a mile a sign announced "Tunnel City, Wis. Pop. 9,818." I looked in vain for a tunnel, then realized as I dropped down into a shallow valley that the town was probably named for some kind of underground irrigation system that fed water to the endless fields of cabbage that surrounded it.

The town itself was intact in every respect from fifty years ago: red brick courthouse, red brick grain and feed stores, red brick general store; white brick drugstore, grocery store, and public library. The focal point for the little community seemed to be the two tractor supply stores, glass-fronted, situated directly across the street from each other, their crystal-clear windows jammed with spanking-new farm machinery.

A few sunburned men in coveralls stood in front of each store, talking good-naturedly. I parked my car and joined one group on the sidewalk. It was very hot and very humid, and I immediately shed my suit coat. They spotted me for a city slicker right away, and I saw subtle signals pass between them. I knew I was going to be the butt of some jokes, so I resigned myself to it.

I was about to say "Good morning" when the largest of the three men immediately in front of me shook his head sadly and said, "Not a very good morning, young fellow."

"It is a bit muggy," I said.

"You from Chicago?" a small beetle-browed man asked. His small blue eyes danced with the knowledge that he had a live one.

I didn't want to disappoint him. "I'm from Hollywood. You can get anything you want in Hollywood except good sauerkraut juice, so I came to Wisconsin because I couldn't afford a trip to Germany. Take me to your wisest cabbage."

This got a big laugh all around. I dug into my coat pocket and brought out a handful of my business cards, giving one to each man. "Fred Underhill," I said, "Amalgamated Insurance, Los Angeles." When the stolid-looking farmers didn't seem impressed, I dropped my bomb: "You men ever read the L.A. papers?"

"No reason to," the big man said.

"Why?" the beetle-browed man asked.

"What's it got to do with the price of cheese in Wisconsin?" another asked.

I took that as my cue: "A Tunnel City girl was murdered in Los Angeles last month. Marcella DeVries. Married name Harris. The killer hasn't been found. I'm investigating a claim and working with the L.A. police. Marcella was here four years ago, and she may have been back even later than that. I need to talk to people who knew her. I want the son of a bitch who killed her. I…" I let my voice trail off.

The men were staring at me blankly. Their lack of expression told me they knew Marcella DeVries and weren't surprised about her murder. Their immobile faces also told me that Marcella DeVries was an anomaly to them, far beyond the limits of their small-town bailiwick.

No one said a word. The other group of tractor worshipers had halted their conversation and were staring at me. I pointed across the street to a white three-story building that bore a sign reading "Badger Hotel—Always Clean Rooms."

"Are the rooms there really always clean?" I asked my rapt audience.

No one answered.

"I'll be staying there," I said. "If any of you want to talk to me, or know anyone who might, that's where I'll be."

I locked my car, got my suitcase out of the trunk, and walked to the Badger Hotel.

I lay on my clean bed for four hours, in my skivvies, waiting for an onslaught of farmers bent on detailing every aspect of the life of Marcella DeVries Harris. No one called or knocked on my door. I felt like the marshal summoned to clean up the rowdy town who finds that the townsfolk are unaccountably afraid of him.

I checked my watch: five thirty. The heat and smothering humidity were starting to abate, so I decided to go for a walk. I dressed in slacks and sport shirt and strolled through the clean lobby of the Badger Hotel, getting a suspicious look from the clean desk clerk before entering the clean streets of Tunnel City, Wisconsin.

Tunnel City had one business thoroughfare, named, appropriately, Main Street. Every bit of Tunnel City commerce existed on that one street. The town's residential streets spread out from this commercial hub, pointing outward to the bordering farmland.

I walked south, toward the cabbage fields, feeling out of place. Every house I passed was white, with a perfectly tended front lawn bearing well-pruned trees and shrubs. Every automobile parked in every driveway was clean and glistening. The people who sat on the porches looked resolute and strong.

I walked all the way to where Tunnel City proper ended and Tunnel City's nourishing farmland began. Walking back to my hotel I knew why Marcella DeVries had had to get out—and why she had had to return.

I was strolling down Main Street looking for a place to eat when a man crossed the street toward me, coming from the direction of the hotel. He was a tall man in his forties, dressed in blue jeans and a checked sport shirt. There was something different about him, and when his gaze zeroed in on me I knew he wanted to talk.

When he hit the sidewalk he planted himself firmly in my path and stuck out a large bony hand for me to shake. I took it.

"I'm Will Berglund, Officer," the man said.

"Fred Underhill, Mr. Berglund, and I'm not a policeman, I'm an insurance investigator."

"I don't care. I knew Marcy DeVries better than anyone. I—" The man was obviously very moved.

"Where can we go to talk, Mr. Berglund?"

"I run the movie theater here in town." He pointed down Main Street. "The last show is over at nine forty-five. Meet me there then. We can talk in my office."

—

When I walked into the lobby of the Badger Theater Will Berglund shooed the few remaining moviegoers out the door, locked it, and wordlessly led me to an upstairs office crowded with beat-up theater seats and inoperative movie projectors. “I like to tinker,” he said by way of explanation.

I took a seat without being asked, and he took one across from me. My mind was jumping with questions that I never got the chance to ask—I didn’t need to. Berglund opened all the windows in the room for air and began to talk.

He talked without interruption for seven hours, his manner by turns plaintive, morose, but above all else tragically accepting. It was an intimate story, a panorama of small-town life, small-town talk, small-town hope, and small-town retribution. It was the story of Marcella DeVries.

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They had been lovers from the very beginning, first in spirit, then in flesh.

The Berglund family had emigrated from Norway the same year as the DeVries family had left Holland. A network of Old Country friends and cousins secured work for the two families in the stockyards of Chicago.

It was 1906, and work was plentiful. The hardy Berglund men became foremen, the quicker-witted DeVries men became master bookkeepers. The three Berglund brothers and Piet and Karl DeVries shared a dream common to immigrants—the dream of Old Country power, the dream of land.

All five men, then in their thirties, were impatient. They knew that the feudal power they so desperately desired could not be achieved by the attrition of begging, borrowing, scrimping, and slaughtering cattle with ten-pound sledgehammers. Time was not on their side, and history was not on their side. But brains and ruthlessness were, compounded by their Calvinist religious fervor, and the five men embarked on a career of crime, with only one goal in mind: the acquisition of twenty-five thousand dollars.

It took three years, and cost two lives, one from each family. The Berglunds and DeVrieses became burglars and armed robbers. Piet DeVries was the acknowledged leader and treasurer, Willem Berglund his adjutant. They were the planners, the shrewd overseers of impetuous Karl DeVries and the outright violent Hasse and Lars Berglund.

Piet was a romantic intellectual, and an ardent lover of Beethoven. He loved jewelry, and converted the cash gleaned from the gang’s burglaries into diamonds and rubies that he sold in turn for a small profit on the commodities exchange, always keeping a few small gems for himself. He longed to be a jewel thief—for the romance of it as well as for the profit—and he planned the strong-arm theft of an elderly, jewel-bedecked Chicago matron known to attend the opera unescorted. His brother Karl and Lars Berglund were to do the job. It was 1909, and the money from the robbery would put them well over their twenty-five-thousand mark.

The woman traveled to and from her home on the near north side in a horse-drawn carriage. The men waited under the steps of her brownstone, armed with revolvers. When she pulled to the curb and her driver helped her up the stairs, Karl and Lars sprang from their hiding place, expecting to easily overpower their prey. The driver shot them both in the face at point-blank range with a custom-made six-shot Derringer.

The three surviving members of the Bergland-DeVries combine fled to St. Paul, Minnesota, with eighteen thousand dollars in cash and jewelry. Hasse Berglund wanted to kill Piet DeVries. One night, drunk, he tried. Willem Berglund interceded, beating Hasse senseless with a lead-filled cane. Hasse was irreparably brain damaged, and Willem was distraught with guilt. To assuage Willem's guilt, Piet placed the now childlike Hasse in an asylum, paying the director of the institution two thousand dollars to keep him there in perpetuity.

Where were two immigrants, one Norwegian, one Dutch, with sixteen thousand dollars, without wives or children, and above all else, without land, to go? Their dream was dairy farming, but now that was impossible. Sixteen thousand dollars would not purchase two dairy farms, and co-ownership was out of the question—the two men were bound by spilled blood, but hatred lay in abeyance beneath that bondage. So they traveled, living frugally, drifting through Minnesota and Wisconsin until they ended up, in 1910, thirty miles east of Lake Geneva in a little town in the middle of a giant cabbage field.

They married the first girls from their home countries who were nice to them: Willem Berglund wed Anna Nyborg, seventeen, Oslo-born, tall and blond, with a frail body and a face of cameo-like loveliness. Piet DeVries wed Mai Hendenfelder, the daughter of a ruined Rotterdam shipping magnate, because she loved Brahms and Beethoven, had a beautiful thick body, and could cook.

Tunnel City in 1910 had cabbage, but it also had aspirations to the ultimate Wisconsin trade: cheese. Piet DeVries, thirty-seven-year-old Dutch dairy farmhand, and Willem Berglund, thirty-nine-year-old Norwegian bank teller and part-time milkman, wanted to settle for nothing less than a dairy dukedom, but with their depleted funds they found themselves reluctantly looking for other options.

The land had the last laugh—huge lots of it were bought by wealthy cheese farmers, acreage stretching all the way to Lake Geneva, acreage whose soil temperature and consistency soon proved to be almost totally unsuitable for grazing large numbers of milk cows. But it was *wonderful* soil for growing cabbage.

So Piet DeVries and Willem Berglund reluctantly joined the crowd, plopped down their sixteen thousand dollars and bought cabbage acreage, two adjoining parcels of land separated by nothing but a dusty country road.

Cabbage brought them moderate prosperity, and family life—at first—brought them moderate happiness. Willem and Anna soon had twin sons, Will and George; while Piet and Mai produced Marcella and John, two years apart.

Willem played solitaire chess and went for long exhausting runs down country roads. Piet taught himself to play the violin, and listened to scratchy Beethoven on his newly purchased Victrola. The two men formed a truce, at once bitter and steeped in mutual respect. Though not of the same blood, their ties went deep. Despite the close proximity of their property, they seldom socialized; when they did, they treated each other with the exaggerated deference of the mutually fearful.

Both men were considered anomalies by their fellow townspeople. They held a separate designation, based, people said, not on their aloofness but on something in their eyes, some fascinating secret knowledge.

It was a knowledge passed on to the second generation. The people of Tunnel City discerned that, too, as soon as little Will and Marcella were old enough to walk and talk and react to the environment that they knew wasn't good enough for them.

Marcella DeVries and the twins Will and George Berglund were born three months apart, in 1912. Marcella was born first. Piet was ecstatic. He had wanted a girl and he got one—chubby and pink and redheaded like him. Willem Berglund wanted a male heir, and got what he wanted—twice over. But George was a sickly infant, born at half the weight of his healthy twin brother, and was quickly diagnosed as hopelessly backward. At the age of three, when Will was well on his way to speaking in the precisely modulated tones of an educated adult, George was unable to stand, drooled like an idiot, and flapped his arms like a chicken.

Willem hated the child. He considered him a hideous punishment, perpetrated by a hateful God for whom he no longer had any use. He hated his wife, he hated God, he hated cabbage, and he hated Tunnel City, Wisconsin. But most of all he now truly hated Piet DeVries.

Piet seemed to be flourishing. He loved his wife, he loved his violin, he loved his Victrola, and he loved his children: precocious Marcella of the red hair and translucent green eyes, whose dark freckles seemed to float in clusters all about her pretty face, who, although willful and spoiled to the point of becoming tyrannical when she didn't get her way, was nonetheless the fiercely loving daughter he had always dreamed of; and little Johnny—thirteen pounds at birth—laughing, happy, bungling in his hugeness, adoring of his family. Always, always laughing. “My little dinosaur,” Piet would call him, then pull a nonexistent tail on the boy’s rump until father and son collapsed in tears of joyous laughter.

George Berglund, who never walked or spoke a human sound, died of scarlet fever in 1919. He was seven years old. Willem buried him in a burlap bag in a shallow grave next to the toolshed adjoining his house.

Piet crossed the road to offer condolences to the man to whom he hadn’t spoken in over a year. Willem slapped him before he could say a word.

Hasse Berglund died the following year. Sodomized repeatedly by his fellow inmates at the asylum, he could stand the abuse no longer and threw himself off a high ledge into a granite quarry that the inmates were forced to work in.

The director of the asylum wrote Willem a letter demanding two hundred dollars for a “decent Christian burial” for the “boy.” He never got his money. Willem simply forgot to send it; he had other things on his mind. He had to destroy Piet DeVries. He talked about it to Anna, late at night. Young Will listened at the bedroom door: Piet had been responsible for the deaths of Lars and Hasse—and even little idiot Georgie. That was the past, and it was enough. But now Piet and his little redheaded vixen daughter were trying to destroy Willem’s golden Will, his only remaining true blood, with poetry and music and God knew what else. God! Willem would then exclaim hysterically to the sobbing Anna that there was no God beyond his land and his family, and that, by God, he would teach Piet that.

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Marcella and Will knew each other by instinct, by mind, and by rote. With the discernment of highly attuned animals they found each other across the dusty country road that separated the two farms, across the legacy of ambition and violence that bound their fathers. The inevitability of the two was so correct that Willem Berglund and Piet DeVries just sat back and let it happen.

It happened. When the children were four they would toddle into the cabbage field together and construct mansions out of the brown soil that ran through the irrigation furrows. Often after a day of play in the fields they would return to the DeVries farmhouse and pick out tunes on Mai’s piano.

When they were seven, the year of George’s death, they discovered the town, and would walk hand in hand down Main Street to the public library and read together for hours, lugging huge armfuls of books out to the pergola that stood behind the white brick building. In the wintertime they would hide in the wooden feed bin at the edge of the Berglund property, make a fire out of twigs, and tell stories until they fell asleep.

No one—not Willem, nor Piet, nor their wives, nor the neighbors—took exception to this arrangement. Somehow, it was implicitly understood that these two children were the uneasy truce between the families, and if they remained free to be together there would be no more tragedy.

But the twenties came, and Willem took to drink, and his nighttime rantings against Piet took on a renewed vehemence. Will, now ten, had long ceased to believe that his father would ever carry out his threats, but things were changing. He and Marcella were changing. Their conversations were more and more frequently being interrupted by roughhouse horseplay that inevitably led to touching and kissing and probing. Soon they were lovers in the flesh, and soon it seemed that everyone knew and loathed and feared it.

Marcella at twelve was taller than Will, already full breasted with smooth freckled skin stretched taut over wide hipbones. Men from the town looked at her and felt immediately guilty for their thoughts. The same men looked at Will and hated him for what they knew he had.

The poetry-reading, nature-loving golden children who strolled down Main Street, lost in each other, drew much attention in the staid little farming community. Small-town talk—compounded by the strangeness of Piet and Willem—made resentment and curiosity fester, and the two lovers began to take their love clandestinely to wherever they could find a knoll or a mantle of grass or a field overgrown with foliage where they could lie together.

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In 1926 Willem made his first overt move against Piet, dumping large piles of compost into his irrigation sluices. Piet knew about it and did nothing to retaliate. A week later Piet's collie dog was found bludgeoned to death. Still Piet did nothing.

Late at night Will would hear his father cackle drunkenly to the wife who had come to hate him. Piet was a coward, he said, gone soft from his sissy music. A man who won't avenge his land is less than a dead dog, Willem shrieked, and by God, a coward had no right to own land.

Will was watching and listening through a spy hole in the ceiling that Piet had long ago told him to construct. Will knew that it was different this time, that his father's timidity, so long held in check by his fear of Piet, was waning. Willem was awestruck at Piet's reluctance to retaliate, and young Will knew that his father would take his revenge as far as he could.

Will loved Piet, and told him what he knew. Piet shook his head and told Will two things: "Don't tell Marcella, and tell your mother to go and stay with her family in Green Bay."

Anna Berglund left for upstate Wisconsin the following day, and Marcella already knew, informed by the almost telepathic rapport between herself and Will.

And *she* retaliated. Marcella knew that Willem spent his Thursday mornings in town, withdrawing money from the bank to pay his farmhands and buying provisions. She waited for him there, in the lobby of the Badger Hotel, armed with hatred for her lover's father and fierce love and contempt for her own.

Townspeople sensed that something was about to happen: Marcella DeVries, straight-A student, was not in school, was instead sitting in an overstuffed chair fuming silently, her normally pale skin as florid as her bright red hair, twisting her hands into knots and staring straight through the plate glass window, watching the National Bank. A crowd formed outside the hotel.

Willem showed up at nine o'clock, when the bank opened. Marcella waited until he finished his transactions, then walked across the street to wait for him. He came out the door a few minutes later, carrying a brown paper bag full of money. When he saw Marcella there was a fearful silence, then she rushed at him and flung the paper bag to the ground, spilling its contents. Greenbacks drifted down Main Street in the April wind, and the crowd watched in horrified awe as fourteen-year-old Marcella DeVries wreaked her revenge. She punched, scratched, kicked, and bit Willem Berglund, pummeling him to the ground, pulling the whiskey bottle out of his waistband and spilling the contents over his head, cursing him in English, Dutch, and German until her throat and rage gave out.

She reserved the worst of her wrath for her father, her mother, and her lover. They were cowards too, and it was worse because she loved them.

Marcella cleaned house that Wisconsin Walpurgisnacht; informing her gentle mother that this farmhouse was no place for a weak woman, that she was to get out until such a time as her father was strong enough to shelter a woman of her kind. Piet made no move to stop his daughter. As much as he loved his wife, he was in awe of the redheaded girl who bore his features.

Mai Hendenfelder DeVries left that night for the shelter of friends in Lake Geneva. Marcella had directions for Papa, too: he was not to tinker with his violin or play his Victrola or read until he exhausted himself in the fields each day like the cheap German immigrant labor he hired. Shamed and humiliated beyond words, Piet mutely agreed. Marcella raged on: he was to renounce God and Jesus Christ and the Dutch Reformed Church. Piet balked. Marcella raged. Piet continued to balk until Marcella said simply, with brutal finality—"If you don't, you will never see Johnny or me again."

Sobbing, abject, and utterly degraded, he agreed.

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Will had not helped Marcella humiliate his father. Marcella considered this the ultimate betrayal.

They were through, of course, the golden elite were now just tarnished fragments; but that wasn't enough for Marcella. She wanted further revenge—something that would solidify her contempt for the Berglund family and all of Tunnel City, Wisconsin.

Will and Marcella had exchanged love letters for years, explicit ones, full of references to lovemaking and dripping with contempt for the picayune small-town ways of Tunnel City. In those letters the genitalia of prominent townspeople were derided, Tunnel City High School teachers were excoriated as buffoons and Willem Berglund was satirized and dissected in vicious detail.

Marcella savored the letters her weakling lover had sent her. She considered her options and decided to wait before using them.

Small-town talk continued as Willem endeavored to drink himself to death; Piet worked side by side with his laborers, and Marcella and Will went to high school and never spoke to each other.

Marcella had a new cause: her brother, Johnny. Johnny, at fourteen, was six foot six, and blond like his mother. He was a wild but quiet boy who preferred the company of animals, often raiding the outdoor pantries of neighboring farmhouses to steal sides of beef and pork to feed to the legions of homeless dogs and cats who roamed the outskirts of town.

Marcella, now bereft of a lover, became the aimless giant's benefactor, counselor, tutor, and anodyne. She held her brother fiercely close in the wake of her loss, and taught the bright but lazy boy subjects as diverse as geometry and poetry, medieval history and calculus. She awakened in him more than he knew he possessed, and by doing so reached deep for her best.

The new DeVries combine had a dream; a dream that expressed both Marcella's elitist contempt and Johnny's love for animals: medicine. Marcella the microbe hunter, the doctor who would go into "pure research," and Johnny, the veterinarian who would surround himself with the love of strays and foundlings seeking to be healed. It was a powerful dream, one that would take them far from the hated confines of Tunnel City, Wisconsin. But first Marcella had to have her revenge on the town.

In June of 1928, at sixteen, she graduated from Tunnel City High School, the youngest member of her class. Piet was very proud. Mai, still estranged from her family, returned from Lake Geneva at Piet's urgings to see the daughter she hated smile contemptuously in gown and mortarboard on the stage of the school auditorium as she was lauded in small-town hyperbole for her academic accomplishments. After the ceremony, Mai returned to Lake Geneva, never to see her family again.

Diploma in hand, Marcella went about her business. There were eighty-three letters from Will. On the Monday morning after her graduation, Marcella spent hours deciding where each letter should go to achieve the maximum insult and harm. This accomplished, she went on her mission. Main Street was first, where Marcella dropped little packets of vitriol with the mayor, town alderman, librarian, sheriff, barber, and every businessman on the four commercial blocks of Tunnel City.

"Read this," she said to each recipient. "See if you recognize any of your friends."

The churches were next: Dutch Reformed, Catholic, Presbyterian, and Baptist all received messages of hate tailored to offend at the level of both faith and viscera.

Marcella then traversed the residential streets of Tunnel City in a concise, well-mapped-out pattern until her brown paper bag was empty. Then she walked home and told her brother to pack his bag, that they would be leaving soon to pursue their dream.

Their departure was delayed. Marcella figured she would wait two days, to collect her thoughts and savor the first ripples of shocked reaction from the town before stealing her father's cache of gems and heading for New York City with Johnny.

She holed up in her bedroom reading Baudelaire and thumbing through East Coast college catalogues. On Tuesday night she heard her father weeping in his bedroom. That meant that he knew.

Marcella decided to go for a last walk in the cabbage fields. She skipped down the dusty road that separated the DeVries and Berglund farms. Willem Berglund was waiting. He was stone cold sober and carrying a straight razor. He grabbed Marcella and threw her to the ground and raped her, the razor at her throat. After he finished he lay on top of her as she stared off into the sky, teeth clenched, refusing to make a sound. When he regained his breath, Willem stood up and urinated on Marcella's prostrate form. Then he walked back into the darkness of his cabbage fields.

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Marcella lay there for an hour, then hobbled home. She forced herself to cry. Her father was still awake, tinkering with his violin. Marcella told him what had happened, then turned and went to bed. Piet didn't. He stayed up all night, playing the Beethoven symphonies in chronological order on his Victrola and executing the most difficult passages of the Kreutzer Sonata on his violin.

In the morning, while Marcella and Johnny were still asleep, Piet walked to the home of one of his farmhands and asked to borrow a 10-gauge double-barreled shotgun. Varmints, Piet said. The man gave his employer the gun and shells with his good wishes. Piet then walked to the Berglund farmhouse, the loaded shotgun cradled in the crook of his arm. He knocked on his neighbor's door. Willem answered immediately, as if expecting someone.

Piet stuck the shotgun into Willem's chest and fired, ripping him apart at the level of the lower torso. The top half of Willem's body flew back into his living room, while the lower half crumpled at Piet's feet. Piet reloaded and stepped into the living room, gathering the two pieces of what had once been his friend into a pile next to the fireplace. He dipped his hand into Willem's blood and smeared "God's mercy on us" on the wall, then stuck the shotgun into his mouth and squeezed both triggers.

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If it was more than she had bargained for she never told anyone, not even Will years later when they were reconciled and corresponded voluminously.

Marcella gathered up her brother and her father's jewelry shortly after dark on the night he died and headed south, on foot, toward Chicago. As they passed the far border of what were once the Berglund and DeVries cabbage farms, Marcella took an ax and smashed the connecting points of the irrigation sluices that fed water to the farmland. She didn't know if this would flood the cabbage fields or render them dry as a bone, and she didn't care; she only wanted the land on both sides of the dusty country road to suffer as she had.

They traveled southeast, by train and by bus. Marcella decided on a circuitous route, to give Johnny time to accept his father's death. Although they were only sixteen and fourteen, no one bothered them; Marcella had the competent look of a woman in her twenties and Johnny was too big to be considered anything but an adult.

They arrived in New York City two weeks later. Marcella had half-expected a sheriff's posse of Tunnel Cityites to follow them, but no one pursued. New York City sweltered in a summer heat wave, and Marcella sold the jewels and set about trying to register in premed at Columbia and New York universities. She was not accepted at either school, or at Brooklyn College, New York City College, or at the half dozen other schools she applied to.

There was a simple reason for this: Tunnel City High School would not forward her transcript, and she could not return to pick it up, lest she be held and placed in a home for wayward girls. Marcella thought about this. She had seven thousand three hundred dollars in a bank account, she had Johnny, and she had her will to succeed. She had a two-room flat near Prospect Park in Brooklyn, and she had her brains.

Marcella decided that fate was on her side. She was right. On

Independence Day, 1928, she went walking and passed the Fletcher School of Nursing on Jamaica Avenue in Queens. Next door to it was the Fletcher School of Pharmacology. Both schools were “fully accredited”—it said so right there above the door. Marcella had a feeling that this was her destiny, at least for the time being. She was right again.

Willard Fletcher took one look at the hard-eyed young redhead seated across the desk from him and knew that she could give him things his wife never could. He told Marcella this on their first night in bed together.

The admissions office was quiet that day as Marcella explained that her small-town high school had recently burned down and their records were destroyed in the fire. She was a straight-A student, as was her brother John, and she wanted to take the Fletcher School of Nursing’s three-year course before transferring to a prestigious university medical school. John eventually wanted to study veterinary medicine, but that was out of the question now. The Fletcher School of Pharmacology would serve as good pre-veterinary training, didn’t Mr. Fletcher agree?

Mr. Fletcher did indeed. He took Marcella’s registration fees, and she and Johnny were enrolled for the fall semester. It was that simple. Except, he explained, for the matter of her records. The schools had a reputation to uphold, and before the semester started he wanted to be sure that Marcella was bright and competent enough to tackle the curriculum. Perhaps if they got together socially he could gently quiz her on her academic background, get to know her better, and satisfy himself that she was up to Fletcher School of Nursing standards. Would that be possible? Marcella smiled in anticipation of playing the game.

“Of course,” she said.

Marcella played the game well. Her scholastic performance was so superior and her hold over Willard Fletcher so absolute that after three semesters of study she had convinced her benefactor-lover to forge complete academic records going back to the first grade at various secondary schools in the Bronx.

Her fake transcript in hand, she applied to the nursing school of New York University, where she was immediately accepted.

She continued to be the nominal mistress of Willard Fletcher until she was well established at N.Y.U. Then she dropped him like a hot rock, causing an awful scene in the banquet room of a large Atlantic City hotel where they were attending a convention of medical supply wholesalers.

Marcella took her nurse’s cap in June of 1931. Johnny was graduated from pharmacy school a year later, with scholastic honors and a codeine habit.

It was the height of the Depression, and their frugally spent money had run out. Marcella considered her options again: med school was out, for now.

Money was too tight. She took a job at Bellevue Hospital, patching up derelicts brought to the emergency room. Johnny went to work in the hospital pharmacy, compounding the sedative mixtures used to knock the mental patients into harmless oblivion. He himself remained in a state of oblivion in his off-hours, only he wasn't so harmless—the once-gentle giant, now almost seven feet tall, had become a fearsome barroom brawler. Marcella was continually bailing him out of jail and taking him home to their Brooklyn Heights apartment, where she would stroke his battered head as he whimpered for his dead father.

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When Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941, Will Berglund was a twenty-nine-year-old English teacher at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, Marcella DeVries was the head nurse at a Catholic hospital on Staten Island, and Johnny DeVries was New York City's leading supplier of illegal codeine.

War brought forth in these disparate individuals the same rush of patriotism that seized millions of other Americans. Will joined the army, received a commission, and was sent to the Pacific. His career as a soldier ended quickly: he caught mortar fire in both lower legs and was repatriated to the naval hospital at San Diego, California, where he underwent several operations and extensive therapy to restore his shattered nerve tissue.

It was there, in the hospital, that he was reunited with Marcella, now a thirty-year-old Wave lieutenant. The events of the previous fifteen years were shunted aside. Will loved Marcella as fiercely now, in her white uniform, as he had when she wore the gingham dresses of her childhood. Time and place and the necessity of healing obliterated the familial bloodletting of Tunnel City, and Marcella and Will again became lovers; the changing of bandages and emptying of bedpans metamorphosed into a late night love ritual that cleansed and healed them both. For the first time in their lives, their mutual small-town ghost was consigned to oblivion.

Johnny DeVries rounded out the San Diego triumvirate. A pharmacist's mate second-class assigned to the hospital pharmacy, he dispatched palliative compounds to the ships moored at the San Diego Naval Yard and moonlighted by running marijuana over the border from Tijuana. Johnny had modified his drug use, switching from codeine to reefer, and his violent behavior modified along with it. The seven-foot brawler was now content to spend his evenings in the Coronado Bay apartment he shared with Marcella and Will.

Marcella and Will would talk, and Will would gamely trundle across the living room to strengthen his now brace-clad legs, and Johnny would smoke hop in his bedroom and listen to Glenn Miller records.

The happy trio stayed together until the spring of 1943, when Marcella met the man who was to shatter her illusions and her life.

“When he walked and spoke, you knew that he *knew*; that he understood all of life’s dark secrets—on the level of animal instinct—some highly attuned animal superior to man,” Marcella wrote to Will years later. “He is the handsomest man I have ever seen; and he knows it and knows that *you* know it—and he respects you for your supreme good taste and treats you as an equal for wanting to know what it is he knows.”

Marcella’s infatuation and curiosity took flight, and three days after meeting Doc Harris, she announced to Will: “I cannot be with you. I have met a man I want to the exclusion of all else.” It was brutally final. Will, who had known that Marcella would ultimately have to move on, accepted it. He moved out of the apartment and back to the hospital. He received his medical discharge a week later and returned to Wisconsin.

Doc Harris was a genius, Marcella decided. He could think two steps ahead of her, and of course she bordered on genius herself. He spoke five languages to her three, he knew more about medicine than she did, he could drink her under the table and never show it, he could dance like Gene Kelly, and at forty-five could do a hundred one-handed push-ups. He was a god. He had won twenty-nine fights as a professional light heavyweight during the Jack Dempsey era, he could lampoon small-town mores better than she and Will at their best, and he could cook Chinese food.

And he was enigmatic, willfully so: “I’m a walking euphemism,” he told Marcella. “When I tell you I run a chauffeur service, it may or may not be the literal truth. When I tell you I use my medical background to benefit man, look for the riddle. When you wonder at my connections to the big brass here in Dago, wonder at what I can do for them that they can’t do for themselves.”

Marcella’s mind ran with many possibilities regarding her new lover: he was a gangster, a high-ranking navy deserter, a remittance man devoted to a life of anonymous good. No explanation satisfied her, and she constantly thought about the literal truths she knew regarding this man who had taken over her life. She knew that he had been born near Chicago in 1898, that he had attended public schools there; that he had been a hero in World War I. She knew that he had never married because he had never found a woman to match the force of his personality. She knew that he had plenty of money but never worked. She knew that he had worked at odd jobs, gaining life experience after leaving med school at the beginning of the Depression. She knew that his small beachfront apartment was filled with the books she herself had read and loved. And she knew that she loved him.

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One night in the summer of 1943 the lovers went walking on the beach near San Diego. Doc told Marcella that he was resettling in the Los Angeles area; that he had the "opportunity of a lifetime" there. His only regret, he said, was that they would have to part. Temporarily, of course—he would come down to Dago to visit. He wanted to be with her every spare moment; she was the only woman who had come close to touching the core of his heart.

Marcella, moved to the core of *her* heart, set about pulling strings to be with the man she loved. She was a consummate string-puller, and within two weeks she brought Doc the happy news: she was to be transferred to the naval hospital at Long Beach, a half hour's drive from Los Angeles. Her brother Johnny, now a master pharmacist's mate, was to be a hospital liaison there, procuring drugs and other hospital supplies from wholesalers in the Los Angeles area.

She beamed at Doc, who marveled aloud for several minutes at Marcella's gifts of manipulation. Finally he took her hand. "Will you marry me?" he asked. Marcella said yes.

—

They honeymooned in San Francisco, and moved to a spacious apartment in the Los Feliz district of Los Angeles. Marcella, newly promoted to lieutenant commander, took over her duties at the naval hospital, as did Petty Officer John DeVries, who had rented an apartment near the newlyweds.

It went well for a while: the Allies had turned the tide, and it was now only a matter of time before Germany and Japan capitulated, Marcella was satisfied with her supervisory duties, and Johnny and Doc had become great friends.

Doc had become the father that Johnny had lost. The two would spin off together in Doc's LaSalle convertible for long, aimless jaunts all over the L.A. basin. That was the trouble, Marcella decided. Doc was never around, and when he was he was deliberately mysterious and darkly elliptical.

It soon became obvious to her that her husband's "opportunity of a lifetime" was the receiving of stolen goods from an L.A.-based robbery gang. Johnny, high on hop one night, had told her that Doc had garages filled with stolen merchandise all over the city. He fenced the contraband goods—furs, jewelry, and antiques—to army and navy high brass, hangers-on in the movie industry, and the gamblers and other assorted con artists who frequented Hollywood Park and Santa Anita racetracks.

Doc was a loving, solicitous husband when he was around, but Marcella started to worry. She began drinking to excess and corresponding voluminously with Will to assuage the fears that were building in her about the man she loved. He seemed to be laughing at her, thinking always two or even three steps ahead of her, and always, always smiling darkly with what she imagined to be an evil, absolutely cold light in his eyes.

Marcella decided she needed a vacation by herself. She needed to cut down her intake of alcohol and collect her thoughts. She told Doc this, and he readily agreed. She had a month's accumulated leave time coming, and her superiors were more than willing to let their fiercely competent nurse take some time off to relax.

She drove to San Juan Capistrano and swam in the sea and wrote long letters to Will, who had—amazingly—resettled in Tunnel City. Astounded by this, Marcella telephoned him there. Will told her that he had found it necessary to confront his tragic past. He had become a seeker of the spiritual path. It worked, he told her; he was at peace here, running the town movie theater, going on book-buying missions to Chicago for the Tunnel City Public Library, and meditatively walking the cabbage fields he had once hated so terribly.

Marcella returned to Los Angeles to find she was pregnant and that Johnny was once again addicted to codeine. He had taken up with a young woman that Doc had considered unworthy and had decreed that he not see again. Cowed by his father-surrogate, Johnny had agreed, and the woman had left Los Angeles.

Marcella was angry at her husband's hold over her brother, and hurt. She had exercised authority over Johnny much more benignly. Doc would coldly order Johnny about, tell him to drive him places, instruct him on what to wear and eat; and always, always with that cold smile on his face.

Marcella was troubled. But when she told Doc the news of her pregnancy, she was overjoyed to see the laughing, witty, and tender Doc of their courtship reemerge. He was solicitous, he was considerate, he anticipated her moods perfectly. She was never happier, she wrote to Will, not ever.

—

Michael was born in August of 1945, and Marcella's letters to Will became less frequent. She never mentioned her new child and ignored Will's written queries about him.

"Trouble, trouble," she wrote Will in October of that year. "John and I are being questioned about a drug robbery on an aircraft carrier. We have been singled out because of Johnny's addiction. It is a terrible, terrible thing."

"Trouble, awful trouble from all quarters," she wrote in November of '45, three months after the end of the war. It was their last contact for almost six years.

Will and Johnny had run into each other in Chicago late in '49. Johnny had looked terrible: emaciated, his skin a ghastly gray. Will had sought to comfort him, had told him about the "Order of the Clandestine Heart" to which he belonged. Johnny seemed interested, but became nervous when Will pushed the point.

John DeVries was murdered in Milwaukee in 1950. His killer was never found. When Will read of Johnny's murder in the Milwaukee newspapers, he tried to contact Marcella. It was no use—he sent telegrams to her last known address only to have them returned stamped "Gone, No Forwarding Address." He called every William Harris in the Los Angeles directories, to no avail. Finally, he drove to Milwaukee and talked to the two detectives assigned to investigate the killing.

Johnny had been found at dawn on the grass at a park a few blocks off Milwaukee's skid row. He had been stabbed repeatedly with a butcher knife. He was a known morphine addict and sometime dealer. His death was obviously tied in to the drug underworld. The detectives, Kraus and Lutz, were considerate and kind to Will, but closed-minded about broadening their investigation. Although they told Will they would keep him informed, he drove back to Tunnel City troubled and feeling powerless.

He was to see Marcella one last time. She knocked on his door in the summer of 1951. It was the most startling event of his life. Marcella had lost weight and was close to hysteria. They talked of John's death and she sobbed in Will's arms. Will told Marcella of the Clandestine Heart monastery, and she seemed to listen and gain brief solace.

Marcella drank herself to sleep that night, passing out on Will's living room sofa. When Will awoke early the next morning she was gone. She had left a note: "Thank you. I will consider what you have said. I will seek what I have to seek. I envy your peace. I will try to gain what peace I can."

—

Will Berglund anticipated my one question: "I'll call those policemen in Milwaukee. I'll tell them you're coming."

I nodded at the farmer-lover-spiritual seeker. He seemed to take my brief turn of the head as absolution, and a slow trickle of tears ran from his eyes.

—

It was 5:00 a.m. I walked back to the Badger Hotel. My room had been gone through—magazines had been turned over and the bed had been tousled. I checked the contents of my suitcase. Everything was there, but my gun had been unloaded. I packed and walked downstairs and through the lobby, getting curious and hostile looks from some early-rising townspeople. I walked down Main Street feeling awed and humbled—and also powerful; I had been handed the wonder on a platter, and now it was up to me to put it in order.

20

It took me two hours to get to Milwaukee. The Wisconsin Dell Highway was deserted as I drove past small towns and through deep green grazing land. I had been awake for more than twenty-four hours, had traversed fifty years of history and was now nowhere near tired. All I could think of was the history lying in wait for me in Milwaukee, and how to synthesize all the knowledge that only I could tie together.

I thought of pharmacist's mates John DeVries and Eddie Engels. Had they known each other at the Long Beach Naval Hospital? Was Eddie connected to Marcella there? Was that the genesis of the train of deadly events that erupted in 1950 and continued through this summer?

Coming into Milwaukee on Blue Mound Road—an incongruously named, smog-choked four-lane highway—I said to myself: don't think.

—

Milwaukee was red brick, gray brick, white brick, factory smoke, and rows and rows of small white houses with small Wisconsin green front lawns, all modulated by the breeze wafting from Lake Michigan. I parked in the basement of the Greyhound Bus Depot on Wells Street, then shaved and changed clothes in the huge lavatory.

I checked my image in the mirror above the basin. I decided I was an anthropologist, well suited to dig into the ruins of blasted lives. This conclusion reached, I threaded my way down a corridor laced with sleeping winos to a pay phone, where I dialed the Operator and said, "Police Department, please."

—

Detectives Kraus and Lutz were still partners and were working the Eighth Precinct, located on Farwell Avenue, a few blocks from the sludgy, waste-carrying Milwaukee River. The old three-story police station was red brick, sandwiched between a sausage factory and a parochial school. I parked in front and walked inside, feeling nostalgia grip me in a bear hug: this had been my life once.

I showed my phony insurance business card to the desk sergeant, who didn't seem impressed, and asked for the detective division. Nonplussed, he said, "Third floor" and pointed me in the direction of the Lysol-smelling muster room.

I took the stairs two at a time in almost total darkness, and came out into a corridor painted a bright school-bus yellow. There was a long arrow painted along the wall underlining "Detective Division: The Finest of Milwaukee's Finest." I followed the arrow to a squad room crammed with desks and mismatched chairs. Nostalgia gripped me even harder: this was what I had once aspired to.

Two men occupied the room, conferring over a desk underneath a large ceiling fan. The men were blond, portly, and wearing identical gaudy hand-tooled shoulder holsters encasing .45 automatics with mother-of-pearl grips. They looked up when they heard my footsteps and smiled identically.

I knew I was going to be the audience for a cop comedy act, so I raised my arms in mock surrender and said, "Whoa, pardner, I'm a friend."

"Never thought that you weren't," the more red-faced of the two men said. "But how'd you get past the desk? You one of Milwaukee's finest?"

I laughed. "No, but I represent one of the finest insurance companies in Los Angeles." I fished two business cards out of my coat pocket and handed one to each cop. They responded with identical half nods and shakes of the head.

"Floyd Lutz," the red-faced man said, and stuck out his hand. I shook it.

"Walt Kraus," his partner said, extending his hand. I shook it.

"Fred Underhill," I returned.

We looked at one another. By way of amenities I said, "I take it Will Berglund called you about me?"

By way of amenities, Floyd Lutz said, "Yeah, he did. Who choked Johnny DeVries's sister, Underhill?"

"I don't know. Neither do the L.A cops. Who sliced Johnny DeVries?"

Walt Kraus pointed to a chair. "We don't know," he said. "We'd like to. Floyd and I were on the case from the beginning. Johnny was a beast, a nice-guy beast, don't get me wrong, but seven feet tall? Three hundred pounds? That's a beast. The guy who cut him had to be a worse beast. Johnny's stomach was torn open from rib cage to belly button. Jesus!"

"Suspects?" I asked.

Floyd Lutz answered me: "DeVries pushed morphine. More correctly, he gave it away. He was a soft touch. He could never stay in business for long. He'd always wind up on skid row, sleeping in the park, passing out handbills and selling his blood like the other derelicts. He was a nice, passive guy most of the time, used to hand out free morph to the poor bastards on skid who had got hooked during the war. Floyd and me and most of the other cops did our best not to roust him, but sometimes we had to: when he got mad he was the meanest animal I've ever seen. He'd wreck bars and overturn cars, bust heads and fill skid row with dread. He was a terror. Walt and I figure his killer was either some bimbo on the row he beat up or some dope pusher who didn't like a soft touch on his turf. We checked out every major and minor known heroin and morph pusher from Milwaukee to Chi. Nada. We went back over Johnny's rap sheet and checked out the victims in every assault beef he ever had—over thirty guys. Most of them were transients. We ran makes on them all over the Midwest. Eight of them were in jail—Kentucky to Michigan. We talked to all of them—nothing. We talked to every skid row deadbeat who wasn't too fucked up on Sweet Lucy to talk. We sobered up the ones who *were* too fucked up. Nothing. Nothing all the way down the line."

"Physical evidence?" I asked. "ME's report?"

Lutz sighed. "Nothing. Cause of death a severed spinal cord or shock or massive loss of blood, take your pick. The coroner said that Big John wasn't fucked-up on morph when he was sliced—*that* was surprising. *That* was why Walt and I figured the guy who sliced him had to be a beast or a friend of Johnny's—someone who knew him. Anyone who could slice a guy like that when he was sober had to be a monster."

"Did Johnny have any friends?" I asked.

"Only one," Lutz said. "A chemistry teacher at Marquette. Was. He's a wino now. He and Johnny used to get drunk together on the row. The guy was nutso. Used to teach a semester, then take off a semester and go on a bender. The priests at Marquette finally got sick of it and gave him the heave-ho. He's probably still on skid; the last time I saw him he was sniffing gasoline in front of the Jesus Saves Mission." Lutz shook his head.

"What was the guy's name?" I asked.

Lutz looked to Kraus and shrugged. Kraus screwed his face into a memory search. "Melveny? Yeah, that's it—George 'The Professor' Melveny, George 'The Gluebird' Melveny. He's got a dozen skid row monikers."

"Last known address?" I queried.

Kraus and Lutz laughed in unison.

"Park bench," Kraus said.

"Slit trench," Lutz rhymed.

"No dough."

"Skid row." This sent the two detectives into gales of laughter.

"I get the picture," I said. "Let me ask you something: where did a skid row bum like Johnny DeVries get morphine?”

“Well,” Floyd Lutz said, “he was a pharmacist by trade, before the dope got him. I always figured he was using George ‘The Gluebird’s’ lab to make the shit. We checked it out once; no go. Beats me where he got the stuff; Johnny was kind of formidable in a lot of ways; you got the impression that maybe he was hot stuff once.” Lutz shook his head again, and looked at Kraus, who shook his, too.

I sighed. “I need a favor,” I said.

“Name it,” Kraus said. “Any pal of Will Berglund’s is a friend of mine.”

“Thanks, Walt. Look, Will told me that maybe Johnny DeVries and his sister were involved in a drug robbery at the naval hospital in Long Beach, California, during the war. They were both stationed there. Could you call the provost marshal’s office there at the hospital? A request from an official police agency might carry some weight. I’m just an insurance investigator—they won’t give me the time of day. I—”

Lutz interrupted me. “Are you fishing in the same stream as us, Underhill?”

“All the way. A big load of morph was stolen, I know that, and that would explain where Johnny got the stuff he was pushing.”

Kraus and Lutz looked at each other. “Use the phone in the skipper’s office,” Lutz said.

Kraus jumped up from his desk and walked to a cubicle partitioned off and festooned with Milwaukee Braves’ pennants.

“All the particulars, Walt,” Lutz called after him.

“Gotcha!” Kraus returned.

I looked at Lutz and popped my next request: “Could I see DeVries’s rap sheet?”

He nodded and went to a bank of filing cabinets at the far end of the squad room. He fumbled around in them for five minutes, finally extracting a file and returning to me.

I was getting nervous. Kraus had been on the telephone a long time, and it was only 6:00 a.m. in L.A. His protracted conversation at that hour struck me as ominous.

The manila folder had “DeVries, John Piet; 6–11–14” typed on the front. I opened it. When I saw the series of mug shots clipped to the first page my hands started to shake and my mind recoiled and leaped forward at the same time. I was looking at the face of Michael Harris. Every curve, plane and angle was identical. It was more than a basic familial resemblance; it was purely parental. Johnny was Michael’s father, but who was his mother? It *couldn’t* have been Marcella. With shaking hands I turned the first page and went into double shock: John DeVries had listed Margaret Cadwallader of

Waukesha, Wisconsin, as next of kin when he was arrested for assault and battery in 1946.

I put down the folder and suddenly realized I was gasping for air. Floyd Lutz had rushed to the water cooler and was now shoving a paper cup of water at me.

"Underhill," he was saying. "Underhill? What the hell is the matter with you? Underhill?"

I came out of it. I felt like a madman restored to sanity by a divine visitation; someone viewing reality for the first time.

I made my voice sound calm: "I'm all right. This guy DeVries reminded me of someone I knew as a kid. That's all."

"You holding out on me? Man, you look like you just got back from Mars."

"Ha-ha!" My laughter sounded phony even to my own ears, so to forestall any more questions, I read through John DeVries's rap sheet; scores and scores of arrests for drunkenness, assault and battery, petty theft, and trespassing; a dozen thirty- and forty-five-day incarcerations in the Milwaukee County Jail; but nothing else related to blood. No further mention of Maggie Cadwallader, no mention of Marcella, no mention of children.

When I finished I looked up to find Walt Kraus staring down at me. "I pulled some tails and got what you wanted," he said. "The robbery was big-time, off an aircraft carrier bound for the Pacific. Forty-five pounds of morph—enough to supply every hospital ship in the fleet and then some. Three Marine liaisons were guarding it. Someone slipped them something, and they passed out. The snatch was made at three o'clock in the morning. The infirmary was picked clean. It never made the news because the navy high brass kiboshed it. DeVries and his sister and two others were strong suspects—they were all assigned to pharmaceutical supply, but they all had tight alibis. They were all questioned repeatedly, jailed as material witnesses, and finally released. The dope was never recovered. They—"

"What were the names of the other two suspects?" I blurted out.

Kraus consulted some papers in his hand. "Pharmacist's mates Lawrence Brubaker and Edward Engels. Underhill, what the hell is the matter with you?"

I stood up, and the squad room, Kraus and Lutz reeled in front of me.

"Underhill?" Lutz called as I started to walk away. "Underhill!"

"Call Will Berglund," I think I shouted back.

Somehow I made it out of the police station and out into the hot Milwaukee sunlight. Every car and passerby on the street, every fragment of the passing scene, every inundation of the red brick midwestern skyline looked as awesome and incredible as a baby’s first glimpse of life out of the womb and into the breach.

21

There was only one Cadwallader in the Milwaukee-Waukesha area phone directory: Mrs. Marshall Cadwallader, 311 Cutler Park Avenue, Waukesha. Rather than call first, I drove directly there, straight back over Blue Mound Road.

Cutler Park Avenue was a block of formerly ritzy townhouses converted into apartment houses and four-flats. Cutler Park itself—“Wisconsin’s Greatest Showplace of Genuine Indian Artifacts”—stood across the street.

I parked my loaner and went looking for 311, checking out house numbers that ran inexplicably out of sequence. Number 311 was at the end of the block, a two-story apartment house guarded by a plaster jockey with one arm outstretched. The front door was open, and the directory in the small entrance foyer told me that Mrs. Marshall Cadwallader lived in apartment 103. My suspicion was that Mrs. Cadwallader was a widow, which suited my purposes: a single woman would be easier to question.

I felt my pulse race as I recalled the photographs Maggie had shown me of her adventurous-looking father. I walked down a hallway lined with cheap prints of southern plantations until I found number 103. I knocked, and the very image of what Maggie Cadwallader would have looked like at sixty-five answered the door.

Startled by this permutation of time and place, my now familiar insurance cover story went out the window and I stammered: “Mrs. Cadwallader, I’m a friend of your late daughter’s. I investigated her…” The woman blanched as I hesitated. She looked frightened, and seemed about to slam the door in my face when I caught myself and continued: “…her death for the Los Angeles Police Department back in 1951. I’m an insurance investigator now.” I handed her one of my cards, thinking that I almost believed I *was* in the insurance racket.

The woman took the card and nodded. “And you…” she said.

“And I believe there are other deaths tied in to Margaret’s.”

Mrs. Cadwallader showed me into her modest living room. I seated myself on a couch covered with a Navajo blanket. She sat across from me in a wicker chair. “You were a friend of Maggie’s?” she asked.

"No, I'm sorry, I mean…I didn't mean that. I was one of four detectives assigned to the case. We—"

"You arrested the wrong man and he killed himself," Mrs. Cadwallader said matter-of-factly. "I remember your picture in the paper. You lost your job. They called you a Communist. I remember thinking at the time how sad it was, that you made a mistake and they had to get rid of you so they called you that."

I felt the queerest sense of absolution creep over me.

"Why are you here?" Mrs. Cadwallader asked.

"Did you know a woman named Marcella DeVries Harris?" I countered.

"No. Was she Johnny DeVries's sister?"

"Yes. She was murdered in Los Angeles last month. I think her death was connected to Margaret's."

"Oh, God."

"Mrs. Cadwallader, did Margaret have a child out of wedlock?"

"Yes." She said it sternly, without shame.

"In 1945 or thereabouts?"

"On August 29, 1945."

"A boy?"

"Yes."

"And the child…"

"They gave up the child!" Mrs. Cadwallader suddenly shrieked. "Johnny was a drug addict, but Maggie had good stuff in her! Good Cadwallader-Johnson stock! She could have found herself a good man to love her, even with another man's baby. Maggie was a good girl! She didn't have to take up with drug addicts! She was a *good* girl!"

I moved to the grandmother of Michael Harris and tentatively placed an arm around her quaking shoulders. "Mrs. Cadwallader, what happened to Maggie's child? Where was he born? Who did Maggie and Johnny give him up to?"

She shrugged herself free of my grasp. "My grandson was born in Milwaukee. Some unlicensed doctor delivered him. I took care of Maggie after the birth. I lost my husband the year before, and I lost Maggie and I never even saw my grandson."

I held the old woman tightly. "Ssshh," I whispered, "Ssshh. What happened to the baby?"

Between body-wrenching dry sobs, Mrs. Cadwallader got it out: "Johnny took him to some orphanage near Fond du Lac—some religious sect he believed in—and I never saw him."

“Maybe someday you will,” I said quietly.

“No! Only half of him is my Maggie! The dead half! The other half is that big, dirty, Dutch drug addict, and that’s the part that’s still alive.”

I couldn’t argue with her logic, it was beyond my province. I found a pen on the coffee table and wrote my real phone number in L.A. on the back of my bogus business card. I stuck it in Mrs. Cadwallader’s hand.

“You call me at home in a month or so,” I said. “I’ll introduce you to your grandson.”

Mrs. Marshall Cadwallader stared unbelievingly at the card. I smiled at her and she didn’t respond.

“Believe me,” I said. I could tell she didn’t. I left her staring mutely at her living room carpet, trying to dig a way out of her past.

—

“My baby. My love.”

“Where is he?”

“His father took him.”

“Are you divorced?”

“He wasn’t my husband, he was my lover. He died of his love for me.”

“How, Maggie?”

“I can’t tell you.”

“What happened to the baby?”

“He’s in an orphanage back east.”

“Why, Maggie? Orphanages are terrible places.”

“Don’t say that! I can’t! I can’t keep him!”

—

I ran through Cutler Park searching for a pay phone. I found one and checked my watch: ten fifteen, making it eight fifteen in Los Angeles. A fifty-fifty chance: Either Doc or Michael would answer the phone.

I dialed the operator, and she told me to deposit ninety cents. I fed the machine the coins and got a ringing on the other end of the line.

“Hello?” It was unmistakably Michael’s voice. My whole soul crashed in relief.

“Mike, this is Fred.”

“Hi, Fred!”

“Mike, are you okay?”

“Sure.”

"Where's your father?"

"He's asleep in the bedroom."

"Then talk quietly."

"Fred, what's wrong?"

"Ssshh. Mike, where were you born?"

"Wha-what? In L.A. Why?"

"What hospital?"

"I don't know."

"What's your birthday?"

"August 29."

"1945?"

"Yes. Fred—"

"Mike, what happened in the house on Scenic Avenue?"

"The house—"

"You know, Mike; the friends you stayed with while your mother went on her trip four years ago—"

"Fred, I…"

"Tell me, Mike!"

"Da-Dad hurt the guys. Dad said that they were never going to hurt any other little boys."

"But they didn't hurt you, did they?"

"No! They were nice to me! I told Dad that—" Michael's voice had risen into a shrill wail. I was afraid he would wake Doc.

"Mike, I have to go now. Will you promise not to tell your father I called?"

"Yes, I promise."

"I love you, Mike," I said, not believing my own ears and hanging up before Michael could respond.

This time it took me a scant twenty-five minutes to make the run back to Milwaukee. Blue Mound Road had become an old friend in the course of three harried hours.

Back within the city limits where Blue Mound Road turned into Wisconsin Avenue, I stopped at a filling station and inquired with the attendant about the whereabouts of Marquette University and Milwaukee's skid row.

"The two are within shouting distance," the youth said. "Take Wisconsin Avenue to Twenty-seventh Street, turn left until you hit State Street. Don't hold your breath, but hold your nose."

Marquette University extended a solid ten blocks on the periphery of a skid row that rivaled L.A.'s Fifth Street for squalor and sheer despair—bars, package liquor stores, blood banks, and religious save-your-soul missions representing every faith and sect imaginable. I parked my car at Twenty-seventh and State and went walking, dodging and sidestepping knots of winos and ragpickers who were passing around short-dogs and gesticulating wildly at one another, babbling in a booze language compounded of loneliness and resentment.

I took my eyes off the street for five seconds and went crashing to the pavement; I had tripped over an old man, naked from the waist up, his lower body wrapped in a gasoline-soaked tweed overcoat. I got to my feet and brushed myself off, then attempted to help the old man up. I reached for his arms, then saw the sores on them and hesitated. The old man noticed this and began to cackle. I reached instead for a hunk of his overcoat, but he rolled himself away from me like a dervish until he was lying in the gutter in a sea of sewer water and cigarette butts. He cursed me and feebly flipped me the finger.

I left him and continued walking. After three blocks, I realized I had no real destination, and moreover that the denizens of the row had taken me for a cop: my size and crisp summer suit got me looks of fear and hatred, and if I played it right I could use this to my advantage without hurting anyone.

I recalled what Kraus and Lutz had told me: George "The Professor" Melveny, George "The Gluebird" Melveny, former Marquette chemistry teacher, last seen sucking on a rag in front of the Jesus Saves Mission. It was almost noon, and the temperature was soaring. I felt like shedding my suitcoat, but that wouldn't work: the skid row inhabitants would then know I wasn't packing a gun and was therefore not the heat. I stopped in my tracks and surveyed the row in all directions: no sign of the Jesus Saves Mission. On impulse I ducked into a liquor store and purchased twenty short-dogs of Golden Lake muscatel. My liver shuddered as I paid, and the proprietor gave me the strangest look I have ever encountered as he loaded the poison into a large paper bag. I asked him for directions to the Jesus Saves Mission, and he snickered and pointed east, where the skid row dead-ended at the Milwaukee River.

—

There was a line of hungry-looking indigents extending halfway around the block as I approached the mission, obviously waiting for their noon meal. Some of them noticed my arrival and jabbed at one another, signaling the onslaught of bad news. They were wrong; it was Christmas in July.

"Santa Claus is here!" I shouted. "He's made a list and he's checked it twice, and he's decided that all of you folks deserve a drink!"

When all I got was puzzled looks, I dug into my paper bag and pulled out a short-dog. “Free wine for all!” I yelled. “Free cash to anyone who can tell me where to find George ‘The Gluebird’ Melveny!”

There was a virtual stampede to my side. The Jesus Saves Mission and its lackluster luncheon were forgotten. I was the man with the real goodies, and scores of winos and winettes started reaching fawningly toward me, poking tremulous hands in the direction of the brown paper bag I rested out of their reach on my shoulder. Information was screeched at me, tidbits and non sequiturs and epithets:

“Fuck, man.”

“Glueman, Gluebird!”

“Sister Ramona!”

“Wetbrain!”

“Gimme, gimme, gimme!”

“See the sister!”

“Handbill!”

“Glueman!”

“Oh, God. Oh, God.”

“Warruuggh!”

The crowd was threatening to drive me into the gutter, so I placed my brown bag on the sidewalk and backed off as they descended on it like starving vultures. Pushing and shoving ensued, and two men wrestled into the street and began feebly clawing and gouging at each other’s faces.

Within minutes all twenty bottles were broken or snatched up, and the sad boozehounds had dispersed to consume their medicine, except for one particularly frail, sad-looking old man in ragged pants and a Milwaukee Braves T-shirt and Chicago Cubs baseball cap. He just stared at me and waited at the head of the bean line, along with the few other indigents who hadn’t seemed interested in my offering.

I walked over to him. He was blond, and his skin had been burned to a bright cancerous red after years of outdoor living. “Aren’t you a drinking man?” I asked.

“I can take it or leave it,” he said, “unlike some others.”

I laughed. “Well put.”

“What do you want the Gluebird for? He don’t hurt nobody.”

“I just want to talk to him.”

“He just wants to suck his rag in peace. He don’t need no cops bothering him.”

“I’m not a cop.” I opened up my suit coat to show I was bereft of hardware.

"That don't prove nothin'," he said.

I sighed and lied: "I work for an insurance company. Marquette owes Melveny some money on an old employee claim. That's why I'm looking for him."

I could tell the wary man believed me. I took a five-spot out of my billfold and waved it in front of him. He snatched it up.

"You go down to Sister Ramona's; that's four blocks west of here. It's got a sign out front that says 'Handbill Passers Wanted.' The Gluebird's been working for the sister lately."

I believed him. His pride and dignity carried authority. I took off in the direction he was pointing.

—

Sister Ramona was a psychic who preyed on Milwaukee's superstitious lower middle classes. This was explained to me by one "Waldo," an ancient bum lounging in front of the storefront where she recruited the winos and blood bank rejects who carried her message via handbill into Milwaukee's poorer enclaves. She paid off in half gallons of wine that she bought dirt cheap by the truckload from an immigrant Italian wine maker from Chicago. He jacked up the alcohol content with pure grain spirits, which weighed in his vino at a hefty one hundred proof.

Sister Ramona wanted to keep her boys happy. She provided them with free outdoor sleeping quarters in the parking lot of the movie theater she owned; she fed them three grilled cheese sandwiches a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year; and she bailed them out of jail if they promised to repay the money by donating their blood for free at the blood bank owned by her gynecologist brother, who recently lost his license from poking too many patients in the wrong hole.

This came out in a torrent of words, unsolicited. Waldo went on to explain that the only trouble with Sister Ramona's scam was that her boys kept kicking off of cirrhosis of the liver and freezing to death in the winter when her parking lot became covered over with snowdrifts that she never bothered to clear out. Ol' sister had a high turnover, yes, sir, Waldo said, but there were always plenty of recruits to be found: sister was a wine cono-sewer supreme and she made a mean grilled cheese sandwich. And she wasn't prejudiced, Waldo said, no sir, she hired white men and Negroes alike and fed them the same and provided them with the same flop-out space in her parking lot.

When I pulled a five-dollar bill out of my pocket and said the words "George 'The Gluebird' Melveny," Waldo's eyes popped out and he said, "The Genius," in a voice others reserved for Shakespeare and Beethoven.

“Why is he a genius, Waldo?” I asked as the old man deftly snatched the five-spot out of my hands.

He started jabbering, “Because he’s smart, that’s why! Marquette University professor! Sister made him a crew chief until he couldn’t drive no more. He don’t sleep in her parking lot, he sleeps in a sleeping bag in the summertime on the beach by the lake, and in the wintertime he sleeps in the nice warm boiler room at Marquette. He so smart that sister don’t pay him with no booze—he don’t drink no more; sister pays him off with model airplanes ’cause he like to build them and sniff the glue! The Gluebird is a genius!”

I shook my head.

“Whassa matter, man?” Waldo asked.

“You think that’s five dollars’ worth of information?”

“I sure do!”

“So do I. You want to make another fin?”

“Yeah, man!”

“Then take me to the Gluebird, now.”

“Yeah, man!”

—

We went cruising, in the front seat of my sweltering Ford sedan, zigzagging the streets of Milwaukee’s lower-class neighborhoods in a random pattern until we spotted pairs of ragged men tossing handbills onto lawns and front porches. Some venturesome winos even jammed them into mailboxes.

Waldo said, “This is what sister call ‘saturation bombing.’ Bomb ’em right into her parlor, she says.”

“How much does she charge?”

“Three dollars!” Waldo bellowed.

I shook my head. “Life’s a kick in the brains, isn’t it, Waldo?”

“Life’s more like a kick in the ass,” he said.

We drove on for another half hour. The Gluebird was not to be found among his colleagues. Exhaustion was catching up with me, but I knew I couldn’t sleep.

Finally Waldo exclaimed, “The hobby shop!” and started jabbering directions. All I could pick out was “Lake Michigan,” so I turned around and pointed the car toward a bright expanse of dark blue that was visible from our hilltop vantage point. Soon we were cruising down Lake Drive, and Waldo was craning his head out the window looking for the Gluebird.

“There!” he said, pointing to a row of shops in a modern shopping center. “That’s it.”

I pulled in, and finally spied a joint called Happy Harry's Hobby Haven. At last my exhausted, dumbfounded brain got the picture: Happy Harry was George Melveny's glue supplier.

"Stay here, Waldo," I said. I parked and walked into the little store.

Happy Harry didn't look too happy. He was a fat, middle-aged man who looked like he hated kids. He was suspiciously eyeing a group of them, who were holding balsa wood airplanes over their heads and dive-bombing them at one another, exclaiming "Zoom, karreww, buzz!" Suddenly, I felt *very* tired, and not up to sparring with the fat man, who looked like he would give a good part of his soul to converse with an adult.

I walked up to him and said, "George 'The Gluebird' Melveny."

He said in return, "Oh, shit."

"Why 'Oh, shit'?" I asked.

"No reason. I just figured you was a cop or something, and the Bird set himself on fire again."

"Does he do that often?"

"Naw, just once or twice. He forgets and lights a cigarette when his beard is full of glue. He ain't got much of a face left because of that, but that's okay, he ain't got much of a brain left either, so what's the diff? Right, Officer?"

"I'm not a cop, I'm an insurance investigator. Mr. Melveny has just been awarded a large settlement. If you point me in his direction, I'm sure he will repay the favor by purchasing glue by the caseload here at your establishment."

Happy Harry took it all in with a straight face: "The Bird bought three models this morning. I think he crosses the drive and goes down to the beach to play with them."

Before the man could say anything more, I walked out to the lot and told my tour guide we were going beachcombing.

—

We found him sitting in the middle of the sand, alternately staring at the white, churning tide of Lake Michigan and the pile of plastic model parts in his lap. I handed Waldo five dollars and told him to get lost. He did, thanking me effusively.

I stared at the Gluebird for several long moments. He was tall, and gaunt beyond gaunt, his angular face webbed with layers of white scar tissue burned to a bright red at the edges. His sandy hair was long and matted sideways over his head; his reddish-blond beard was sparkling with gooey crystalline matter that he picked at absently. It was a breezeless ninety degrees and he was still wearing wool slacks and a turtle-necked fisherman's sweater.

I walked up to him and checked out the contents of his lap as he stared slack-jawed at a group of children building sand castles. His bony, glue-encrusted hands held the plastic chassis of a 1940 Ford glued to the fuselage of a B-52 bomber. Tiny Indian braves with tomahawks and bows and arrows battled each other upside down along the plane's underbelly.

The Gluebird noticed me, and must have seen some sadness in my gaze, because he said in a soft voice: "Don't be sad, sonny, the sister has a cozy drift for you and I was in the war, too. Don't be sad."

"Which war, Mr. Melveny?"

"The one after the Korean War. I was with the Manhattan Project then. They gave me the job because I used to mix Manhattans for the fathers. By the pitcherful, with little maraschino cherries. The fathers were cherry themselves, but they could have told the sisters to kick loose, but they were cherry, too. Like Jesus. They could have got fired, like me, and left the sisters to work for the sister." Melveny held his mound of plastic up for me to see. I took it, and held it for a moment, then handed it back to him. "Do you like my boat?" he asked.

"It's very beautiful," I said. "Why did you get fired, George?"

"I used to be George, and it was George with me, but now I'm a bird. Caw! Caw! Caw! I used to be George, by George, and it was George by me, but the padres didn't know! They didn't care!"

"Care about what, George?"

"I don't know! I used to know, when I was George, but I don't know anymore!"

I knelt beside the old man and placed an arm around his shoulders. "Do you remember Johnny DeVries, George?"

The old Gluebird began to tremble, and his face went red—even the white scar tissue. "Big John, Big John, squarehead kraut-eater. Big John, he could recite the table of elements backward! He had a prick the size of a bratwurst! Eight foot four in his stocking feet, Big John. Big John!"

"Was he your friend?"

"Dead friend! Dead man! Guy Fawkes. Welcome back, Amelia Earhart! Redivivus Big John! Big John Redux! Didn't know a Bunsen burner from a bratwurst, but I taught him, by George, I taught him!"

"Where did he get his morphine, George?"

"The n——— had the dope—Johnny just got the cat's bones. The n ——— got the pie and Johnny got the crust!"

I shook the Gluebird's bony shoulders. "Who killed Johnny, George?"

"The n——— had the pie, Johnny had the crumbs! Johnny Crum-bum! Johnny said the slicer paid the piper, the slicer's gonna get me, but I got my memoirs at the monastery! Buddha's gonna get the slicer! And make my book a bestseller!"

I shook the Gluebird even harder, until his glue-streaked beard was in my face. "Who's the slicer, goddamnit?"

"Ain't no god, Johnny-boy. The Buddhist's got the Book and they don't believe in Jesus. Turnabout's fair play, Jesus don't believe in Buddha! George don't believe in George, by George, and that's George!"

I let go of the Gluebird. He caw-cawed at the sea gulls flying above the lakefront, and flapped his emaciated arms in longing to join them. On the extreme off chance that God existed I said a silent prayer for him. I walked back to my car knowing I had gleaned enough from his ravaged mind to take me at least as far as Fond Du Lac.

22

I got a room in a motor court on Blue Mound Road and slept for sixteen hours straight, dreaming of Michael and Lorna floating on life rafts in a sea of airplane glue. It was just before dawn when I awoke and called Will Berglund in Tunnel City. Did the Clandestine Heart have a monastery near Fond Du Lac? Yes, he said, his voice blurred by sleep, it did. Did it have an orphanage? No, it didn't. Before I hung up I got explicit directions on the shortest route to the order. Will Berglund came awake as he sensed the anxiety in my voice, and he said he would call the prelate at the monastery and tell him I was coming.

I stopped for gas and a quick breakfast, then swung north in the direction of the lake country, certain that what awaited me at the Clandestine Heart Monastery would not be dull.

—

Two hours later I was skirting a crystal blue lake dotted with small pleasure craft. Sunbathers were jammed together on the narrow sandy lakefront, and the pine forests that surrounded Fond Du Lac were alive with camera-toting tourist families.

I checked the directions Will Berglund had given me: edge of lake through mountains to farmland, past three farmhouses, one mile to the road with the sign depicting major faiths.

I found the mountain road, then the flat grazing land and the three farmhouses. It was sweltering, close to one hundred degrees, but I was sweating more from nervous anticipation as I turned onto the road. It cut through a half mile of sandy-soil pine forest before ending at a clearing where a plain whitewashed cement building stood, three stories high without ornamentation or architectural style or signs of welcome. A parking area had been created next to the building. The cars that were parked there were spare, too: World War II vintage jeeps and a prewar Willys sedan. They looked well kept up.

I stared at the large wooden door as if expecting an austere miracle. Gradually I realized I was scared and didn't want to enter the monastery. This surprised me; and by reflex I got out of my car and ran to the door and banged on it as hard as I could.

The man who answered had a fresh, well-scrubbed look. He was small and refined looking, yet I got a distinct impression that he had known protracted bad times and had surmounted them. He nodded demurely and bade me enter into a long corridor of the same whitewashed cement as the exterior of the building.

At the end of the hallway I could see a meeting or worship hall of some kind.

The man, who could have been anywhere between thirty and forty-five, told me that the prelate was with his wife and would see me in a few minutes.

“You guys can get married?” I asked.

He didn’t answer me, just shoved open a small wooden door in the corridor wall and pointed me inside. “Please wait here,” he said, shutting the door behind me. The room was a monk’s cell, with few furnishings and no adornment. I checked the door. It was unlocked. In fact, it held no locking mechanism—I was free to leave if I chose. There was one unbarred window, at about the eye level of a tall man. I peeked out and saw a garden behind the monastery. A man in dirty farmer’s overalls was hoeing a row of radishes. I put my fingers in my mouth and whistled at him. He turned his head in my direction, smiled broadly, waved, and went back to his work.

For five minutes I stared in eerie silence at the naked light bulb that illuminated the cell. Then my escort returned, telling me that the prelate had been contacted by Will Berglund and was anxious to give me all the help he could. He went on to add that although members of the Clandestine Heart Order eschewed the trappings of the world, they recognized their duty to participate in the world’s urgent matters. In fact, it was in many ways the basic tenet of their faith. The whole spiel was as ambiguous as the rest of the religious rebop I had heard in my life, but I didn’t tell the man that, I just nodded mutely and hoped I looked properly reverent. He led me past a main worship room and into a small room about double the size of the monk’s cell, this one furnished with two metal folding chairs stenciled “Milwaukee General Hospital” on the back. He told me the prelate would join me momentarily, then padded out the door, which he left ajar.

The prelate showed up a minute later. He was a robust, stocky man with jet-black hair and a very dark, roughlooking razor stubble. He was probably somewhere in his forties, but again, his age was hard to discern. I stood as he entered the room. We shook hands, and as he motioned me back to the chair he gave me a look that said he was all business. He sat down and let loose with a startling belch. It was a superb icebreaker.

“Jesus,” I said spontaneously.

The man laughed. “No, I’m Andrew. He wasn’t even one of the apostles. Are you versed in the scriptures, Mr. Underhill?”

“I used to be. I was forced into it. But I’m not what you’d call a believer.”

“And your family?”

“I don’t have a family. My wife is Jewish.”

“I see. How did Will Berglund impress you?”

“As a guilt-ridden man. A decent, gentle man. Possibly an enlightened man.”

Andrew smiled at me. “What did Will tell you about our order?” he asked.

“Nothing,” I said. “Although I admit it must have some appeal to the intellect or an intelligent man like Berglund wouldn’t have been so hopped up on it. What interests me, though, is why John DeVries—”

“We’ll talk about John later,” Andrew said, interrupting me. “What *I* am interested in is what you will do with any information I give you.”

The ascetic surroundings and Andrew’s patient voice started to irritate me and I felt the periphery of my vision begin to blacken. “Look, goddamn you,” I said harshly, “John DeVries was murdered. So was his sister. These are lives we’re talking about, not biblical homilies. I…” I stopped.

Andrew had gone pale beneath his dark stubble, and his huge brown eyes were clouding over with grief. “Oh, God, Marcella,” he whispered.

“You *knew* her?”

“Then it was true…”

“Then what was true, goddamnit?!”

Andrew faltered while I tried to control my excitement. He stared at his hands. I gave him a few moments to calm himself, then said gently: “Then what was true, Andrew?”

“Marcella told my wife and me last month that she was in danger, that her husband wanted custody of their son, that he was going to kidnap him.”

“Last month? You saw Marcella Harris last month? *Where?*”

“In Los Angeles. Some awful town east of L.A. El Monte. Marcella phoned my wife. She said she needed to see us, that she needed spiritual counsel. She wired us plane fare and we flew to Los Angeles. We met Marcella at a bar in El Monte, my—”

“On a Saturday night? June 21? Does your wife have a blond ponytail?”

“Yes, but how do you know that?”

“I read it in the papers. The L.A. cops were looking for you as suspects in Marcella’s murder. She was killed late that very night, after she left you at the bar. You should have listened, Andrew.”

I let that sink in, watching Andrew sink into his grief. The calmness of that grief was unnerving: I got the feeling he was already bartering with God for a way off the hook. “When did you first meet Marcella?” I asked gently. “Tell me how she came to call on you for help last month.”

Andrew hunched over in his chair in an almost supplicant’s position. His voice was very soft: “Marcella came to the order four years ago. Will Berglund had told her about us. She was distraught, she told me that something terrible was going to happen and she was powerless to stop it. I told her that the Clandestine Heart Order is a spiritual discipline based on anonymous good deeds. We have a few wealthy patrons who own a print shop that prints up our little tracts, but basically we operate our farm here and support ourselves and give our food away to hungry people. We have three hours of silent meditation every day and a day of fasting every week. But mostly we journey to the cities. We put our little tracts in missions on skid rows, in jailhouse chapels, wherever there are lonely, despairing people. We walk city streets, picking lonely, drunken people out of gutters, feeding them, and giving them comfort. We don’t actively seek recruits—ours is a severe discipline, and not for the capricious. And we are anonymous: we take no credit for the good we do. I told Marcella all this when we talked back in ’51. She told me she understood, and she did. She was a tireless worker. She picked rag women up off the street and bathed and fed them, spending her own money to buy them clothes. She tendered love as no one I have ever seen. She waited outside the gates of the Milwaukee County Jail and drove the released prisoners into the city and talked to them and bought them dinners. She stood guard for twenty-four-hour stretches outside the emergency room at Waukesha General Hospital, offering her nursing skills for free and praying for accident victims. She gave and she gave and she gave, and in so doing transformed herself.”

“Into what, Andrew?”

“Into someone who accepted life, and herself, on God’s terms.”

“And then?”

“And then she left, as abruptly as she came.”

“How long was she with the order?”

“For about six weeks.”

“She left in August of ’51?”

“Yes…Yes, that’s correct.”

Something crashed within me. “I’m sorry I was abusive,” I said.

“Don’t be sorry, you want justice.”

“I don’t know what I want. Johnny DeVries came here independently of his sister, is that right?”

“Yes. Will Berglund sent him also. I think it was around Christmas of ’49. He was no Marcella. He was a volatile drug addict with a lot of self-hatred.

He tried to buy his way in here. Dirty money he'd earned from selling drugs. He made half-hearted attempts to listen to our message, but—"

"Have you ever operated an orphanage here?" I interjected.

"No, that requires a license. We serve anonymously, Mr. Underhill."

"Did John DeVries ever mention a woman named Margaret Cadwallader? Or a child he fathered with her out of wedlock?"

"No, mostly John talked about chemical formulas and the women he had sexual relations with, and—"

I stabbed in a darkness that was becoming increasingly brighter. "And he left his memoirs here, right, Andrew?"

Andrew hesitated. "He left a carton of personal effects, yes."

"I want to go through it."

"No, no. I'm sorry, you can't. That's absolute. John entrusted them to the order. I went through the carton and saw that there were no drugs, so I did John the decency of assuring him that his things would always be safe here. No, I can't let you see them."

"He's dead, Andrew. Other lives may be at stake in this thing."

"No. I won't belie his trust. That's final."

I reached inside my coat and into my waistband and pulled out my .38. I leaned over and placed the barrel in the middle of Andrew's forehead. "You show me that carton, or I'll kill you," I said.

It took him a moment to believe me. "I have work to do that requires me to acquiesce to you," he said.

"Then you know why I have to do what I'm doing," I said.

—

The carton was musty and mildewed and covered with spiderwebs. And it was heavy; reams and reams of paper weighted down with dampness. I hauled it out to my car under Andrew's watchful eye. He gave me some sort of two-handed benediction as I locked it in my trunk.

"Shall I return it to you?" I asked.

Andrew shook his head. "No, I think you've let me off the hook as far as God is concerned."

"What was that sign you made?"

"I was asking for God's mercy on readers of dark secrets."

"Have you read any of it?"

"No."

"Then how do you know what it is?"

"You wouldn't have come here if those pages contained joy."

"Thank you," I said. Andrew didn't answer; he just watched me drive away.

—

I rented a room at a motel in Fond Du Lac and settled in to read John DeVries's memoirs.

I emptied the musty carton onto my bed and arranged the paper into three neat piles, each one about a foot high. I gave each stack a cursory look to see if the writing was legible. It was. The black ink was smeared by dampness and age, but DeVries had a neat, concise handwriting and a narrative style that belied his drug addiction and rage; there was both chronological and thematic unity in his writing. The pages were not compiled by date, but each sheet was dated at the top. I went through all three piles and collated them according to month and year.

John DeVries's journals covered the war years, and more than anything else they detailed his fascination with and subservience to Doc Harris, who had taken over the life of Johnny's domineering sister; who had become his father and teacher and more; who had taken his aimless rage and given it form. "Johnny the enforcer" had only to stand by his avatar's side and look intimidating, and by so doing gained more respect than he had ever known.

Johnny had been given the job of bringing back into line the recalcitrant burglars and buyers that Doc dealt with as middlemen:

> November 5, 1943
>
> This morning Doc and I drove out to Eagle Rock, ostensibly to move a supply of radios out of our garage there and up to our buyer at San Berdoo. Doc lectured on moral terror as I drove. He talked of the smallness of 99.9% of all lives, and how this smallness generates and regenerates until it creates an effect that is a "snowballing apocalypse of picayunity." He then said that the natural elite (i.e.—us, and others like us) must send messages to the potential elite by "throwing a perpetual monkey wrench into the cogs of the picayunist's machinery." He explained that our buyer in San Berdoo was continually trying to bring us down in price by the intimidation tactic of threatening to look elsewhere for radios. Doc said that it could be tolerated no longer and that I should visit the man with a spiritual message that would teach him humility. Doc said no more until we had loaded our radios into the truck and were almost to San Berdoo, then he told me: "This picayune has a cat he dotes on. Picayunes love dumb animals because by comparison they are even more powerless than they themselves are. I want you to strangle that cat in front of its

> picayune owner. If you grab the cat lengthwise. by its head, and wrap your little finger and thumb around its neck and squeeze abruptly with your first two fingers stationed firmly above its eyebrows, it will cause the cat's eyes to pop out of its head as you strangle it. Do this for me, Johnny, and I will teach you other ways to consolidate your power: the real mental power that I know you have." I did it. The buyer pleaded with us, pledging all his business to us exclusively and offering Doc three hundred dollars as a bonus. Doc declined the money and said, "My bonus is the lesson you have learned and the good that will come from it for you and many others."

I read on through 1943, as Doc Harris consolidated his hold over John DeVries, moving him into a widening arena of violence interspersed with counseling on the philosophy and psychology of terror. Johnny beat up and robbed homosexuals at Doc's command; he broke the arms and legs of bet welchers; he pistol-whipped burglars who Doc thought were holding out on their take. And he never, ever questioned his mentor. The philosophy with which Doc dominated him was Hitlerian-Utopian, tailored to fit Johnny's history of overdependence on supportive figures:

> "You, Marcella and I are the natural elite. You must respect Marcella for saving you from Tunnel City, Wisconsin, and respect her as your blood; but know that she has her faults. She is weaker than we on the level of action; you and I have reached for the beast within ourselves and have externalized it. We will always do what we have to do, regardless of the consequences to others, rendering ourselves above all of man's laws and moral strictures designed to keep that beast at bay. Marcella will never reach that point, yet she is a valuable comrade for us at the level of wife and sister. Respect her and love her, but keep your emotional distance. Know that ultimately she is not of our morality.
>
> "The Navy has you now, John, but soon we will have the Navy. Keep your uniform neatly pressed and shine your shoes. Play your part well, and you will be a rich man for life. Your sister is pregnant with the child who will be your nephew and my son and *our* moral heir. Watch your intake of hop and you will have the power of hop over millions. Listen and trust me, John. You must acquiesce more, and when you do that I will tell you of the literal power of life and death I have exercised over many people."

I saw where that paragraph was taking me, so I flipped ahead in time to August 1945. What I already knew was strongly confirmed: John DeVries, Eddie Engels, and Lawrence Brubaker had robbed the infirmary of the aircraft carrier *Appomattox* of forty-five pounds of undiluted morphine. Doc Harris was the mastermind. DeVries, Brubaker, and Engels were questioned, then released. Doc's intimidation of Johnny was so absolute that Johnny never cracked under questioning. The diary indicated that Engels and Brubaker were equally cowed, equally in the grip of the incredible Doc Harris's stranglehold. What I had strongly suspected was also confirmed; Marcella Harris did not participate in the crime—she was in the naval hospital in Long Beach miscarrying her expected child.

It was then, for the first time, that Johnny saw Doc Harris shaken. Due to complications, Marcella would now be barren for life. It was then that Johnny came to his mentor's aid to offer to him what Doc would never himself achieve with Marcella—Johnny told Doc that the girlfriend of whom Doc had disapproved was now pregnant in Wisconsin, and due to give birth in two weeks.

Doc and Johnny flew there. Doc delivered the child in a house trailer parked in a wheat field south of Waukesha. Maggie had wanted to keep the baby, but Doc, aided in the birth by Larry Brubaker, had terrorized her into releasing the child to him, for safe delivery to a "special" orphanage for "special" children. Doc returned to Los Angeles and his wife with the child she so desperately wanted and his own "moral heir."

—

Again I skipped ahead in time, only to find that time abruptly stopped, shortly after Johnny described the events of August 1945. But there were at least a hundred sheets of paper remaining, undated but crowded with words. Johnny had inexplicably switched to red ink, and in a few moments I realized why: Johnny had sought Doc's absolute knowledge, and Doc had given it to him in gratitude for his moral heir. Here was the story of "the literal power of life and death" that Doc had exercised over many people. Here it was, appropriately in red, for it was the story of the insane Doc Harris's murderous ten-year career as a traveling abortionist on the underside of skid rows throughout the Midwest, armed with scalpel for cutting, cheap whiskey for anesthesia, and his own insane elitist hatred as motivation.

Johnny continued to quote his teacher verbatim:

> "Of course, I knew since medical school that it was my mission and my learning process; that the power of life and death was the ultimate learning ground. I knew that if I could effectively carry out this dreadful but necessary process of birth and elimination and withstand any emotional damage it might cause, I would possess the inviolate mind and soul of a god."

I read on as Doc described his process of selection to an awed and finally sickened Johnny:

> "If the girls were referred to me by a lover or a pimp then, of course, they had to be allowed to live. If they were bright and charming then I performed the job with all my considerable skill and acumen. If the girls were ugly or whining or slatternly or proud of their promiscuity, then the world was of course better off without them and their offspring. Such creatures I would smother with chloroform and abort after their death—perfecting my craft to save the lives of the unfortunate young women who *deserved* to live. I would then drive out into the country with dead mother and unborn child and bury them, late at night, in some kind of fertile ground. I would feel very close to these young women and secure in my knowledge that they had died so that others could live."

Doc Harris went on to describe his abortion techniques, but I couldn't go on. I began to weep uncontrollably and cry for Lorna. Someone rapped at my door, and I grabbed the pillow off the bed, smothered my cries and fell onto the floor thrashing and kicking convulsively. I must have fallen asleep that way, because when I awoke it was dark. The only light in the room came from a desk lamp. It took me a few seconds to recall where I was and what had happened. A scream rose up in my throat and I stifled it by holding my breath until I almost passed out.

I knew I would have to read the rest of the journal. Gradually I got to my feet and steeled myself for the task. Fearful and angry tears covered the remaining pages as I read the horrifying accounts of life and death and blood and pus and excrement, and life and death and death and death and death.

—

Johnny DeVries had finally become as sickened as I was, and had run to Milwaukee's skid row with a private supply of morphine. His prose style by this time had degenerated into incoherent rambling interspersed with chemical formulas and symbols I was incapable of understanding. Fear of Doc—"The slicer! The slicer! No one is safe from the slicer!"—covered the last pages.

Shaken, I locked my room and went for a walk. I needed to be with people who bore a semblance of health. I found a noisy cocktail bar and entered. The room was bathed in an amber light that softened the patrons' faces—to the good, I thought.

I ordered a double bourbon, then another—and another; a very heavy load for a nondrinker. I ordered yet another double and discovered I was weeping, and that the people at the bar were looking at me in embarrassed silence. I finished my drink and decided I didn't care. I signaled the bartender for a refill and he shook his head and looked the other way. I threaded my way through a maze of dancing couples toward a pay phone at the back of the room. I gave the operator Lorna's number in Los Angeles, then started feeding the machine dimes and quarters until the operator cut in and told me I had deposited three times the necessary amount.

When Lorna came on the line I just stammered drunkenly until she said, "Freddy, goddamnit, is that you?"

"Lor-Lorna. Lorna!"

"Are you crying, Freddy? Are you drunk? Where the hell are you?"

I brought myself under control enough to talk: "I'm in Wisconsin, Lor. I know a lot of things I have to tell you about. There's this great big little boy that might get hurt like Maggie Cadwallader…Lorna, please, Lor, I need to see you…"

"I didn't know you got drunk, Freddy. It's not like you. And I've never heard you cry." Lorna's voice was very soft, and amazed.

"I don't, goddamnit. You don't understand, Lor."

"Yes, I do. I always have. Are you coming back to L.A.?"

"Yes."

"Then call me then. Don't tell me anything about great big little boys or the past. Just go to sleep. All right?"

"All right."

"Good night, Freddy."

"Good night." I hung up before Lorna could hear me start to weep again.

—

Somehow I slept that night. In the morning I put Johnny's history of terror into the trunk of my car and drove to Chicago.

I stopped at a hardware store in the Loop and bought a reinforced cardboard packing crate, then spent an hour in the parking lot sifting through and annotating the memoirs. From a pay phone I called L.A. Information, and learned that Lawrence Brubaker's residence address and the address of Larry's Little Log Cabin were the same. This gave me pause, especially when I recalled that there was a post office directly across the street from the bar when Dudley Smith and I had braced him in '51.

Before transferring the mass of paper from the musty carton to the new one I checked my work: all references to Brubaker and the drug robbery were underlined. I dug some fresh sheets of stationery out of the glove compartment and wrote a cover letter:

Dear Larry—

It is time to pay your dues. You belong to me now, not Doc Harris. I will be in touch.

Officer Frederick U. Underhill
1647

Next I drove to a post office, where I borrowed masking tape and sealed up the carton tight as a drum. I addressed it to:

Lawrence Brubaker
Larry's Little Log Cabin Bar
58 Windward Avenue
Venice, California

For a return address I wrote:

Edward Engels
U.S.S. Appomattox
1 Fire Street, Hades

A nice touch. A just touch, one that would appeal to Lorna and other lovers of justice.

I explained several times what I wanted to the patient postal clerk: insured delivery, to the post office across the street, where the recipient would be required to produce identification and sign a receipt before getting his hands on the package. And I wanted the carton to arrive in three days' time; no sooner. The clerk understood; he was used to eccentrics.

I left the post office feeling light as air and solid as granite. I drove to O'Hare Field and left off the rented car, then caught an afternoon flight home to Los Angeles and my destiny.

VI

THE GAME FOR SHELTER

23

Three days later at seven in the morning I was stationed on Windward Avenue in front of a liquor store that afforded me a view of both the Venice Post Office and Larry's Little Log Cabin.

I waited nervously for the post office to open its doors at seven thirty, fully aware that my plan would work to psychological perfection only if the postal messenger roused Brubaker early enough so that he was alone at his bar. His joint was no longer open the maximum hours—the current hours posted on the door were a more demure 10:00 a.m. to midnight. It could work only to my benefit—I would come down on Brubaker under any conditions, but I wanted him and his Little Log Cabin to myself if possible. So I lounged in front of the liquor store, knowing I might be in for a long day.

I thought mostly of Lorna. I hadn't phoned her when I returned to Los Angeles. I wanted to recapture a parity I thought I had lost on the night I called her, sobbing. The two days I had spent at my apartment trying not to think about her had been days of complete defeat; I thought of little else, and pictured every possible resolution between us in the light of what I knew had to happen before we could be together again. I had to will myself, there on seedy "Wineward" Avenue, wearing a seedy windbreaker to cover my gun, not to think about what I wanted most, and not to think about dead women, dead unborn children and my own past that wouldn't die.

My trying not to think was interrupted at eight twenty, when a postal clerk in uniform trotted across the street toward Larry's Little Log Cabin. I watched as the man consulted a slip of paper in his hand and knocked loudly on the front door. A moment later the door opened and a pale-skinned Negro in a silk robe was standing there, blinking against the brightness of the day. Brubaker and the postman talked, and from half a block away I could tell that old Larry's curiosity was whetted.

Brubaker came back out the door five minutes later, dressed in slacks and a sport shirt. He jaywalked directly across the street to the post office while my body started to go alternately hot and cold all over.

I figured on another five minutes. I was wrong: three minutes later Brubaker was running back across the street, my carton in his arms, his face the picture of absolute panic. He didn't run for his front door—he bypassed it and ran for the parking lot adjacent to his building. I was right behind him, and as he plopped the carton down on the trunk of a Pontiac roadster and groped in his pocket for the keys, I came up behind him and jammed my gun into his spine.

"No, Larry," I said as he cut loose with a sound that was half wail and half shriek, "not now. You understand?" I cocked the hammer and dug the barrel into the fleshy part of his back. Brubaker nodded his head very slightly.

"Good," I said. "Eddie is in hell, but I'm not, and if you play your cards right you won't be either. Do you dig me, Larry?" Brubaker nodded again. "Good. Do you know who I am?"

Brubaker twisted slightly to see my face. When recognition flashed into his pale blue eyes he whimpered, then covered his mouth with his hands and bit at his knuckles.

I motioned him toward the back door of his cocktail lounge. "Pick up the box, Larry. We have some reading and talking to do."

Brubaker complied, and in a few moments we were seated in his modest living quarters at the rear of the bar. Brubaker was quivering, but holding on to his dignity, much as he had on the day Smith and I had questioned him. I pointed with my gun barrel to the carton that lay between us.

"Open it up and read the first ten pages or so," I said.

Brubaker hesitated, then tore into it, obviously anxious to get it over with. I watched as he hurriedly read through the sheets I had annotated, setting each one aside with trembling hands as he continued reading. After ten minutes or so he had gotten the picture and started to laugh hysterically, but with what seemed like an underlying sense of irony.

"Baby, baby, baby, baby," he said. "Baby, baby, baby."

"You ever kill anyone, Larry?" I asked.

"No," Brubaker said.

"Do you have any idea how many people Doc Harris has killed?"

"Lots and lots," Brubaker said.

"You're a sarcastic bastard. You feel like surviving this thing, or going down with Doc?"

"I went down on Doc in 1944, baby. So did Eddie, so did Johnny DeVries. Just to seal our pact, you understand. I didn't mind: Doc was a gorgeous hunk. Eddie didn't mind, he was a switch-hitter. But it ate Johnny up, no pun intended. He liked it, and he hated himself for it till the day he died."

"Who killed him?"

"Doc. Doc loved him, too. But Johnny was talking too much. He never turned his share of the stuff over. He was giving it away to all the hopheads on

Milwaukee skid. Then he started talking about kicking. We were friends. He called me and told me he wanted me to hold his stuff until he got out of the hospital. He wanted to kick, but he didn't want to lose the money he could get by pushing the stuff, you dig?"

"I dig. So you were afraid that if he got clean he'd blab and implicate you, and you told Doc."

"That's right, I told Big Daddy, and Big Daddy took care of it."

Brubaker managed to keep his pride, though he was clearly accepting of his subservience and self-hatred. I honestly didn't know if he wanted to go on living or die with his past. All I could do was go on asking my questions and hope that his detachment held.

"What happened to the rest of the dope, Larry?"

"Doc and I are turning it over, a little at a time. Have been, for years."

"He's blackmailing you?"

"He's got pictures of me and a city councilman in what you might call a compromising position," Brubaker laughed. "I fixed the councilman up with Eddie. Eddie was a status fiend, the guy was in love with status and horses, and that councilman had both. Doc took some pictures of them, too, but the councilman never knew it. Eddie did, though—that's how Doc got him to take the fall for Maggie."

I started to tremble. "Doc killed Maggie?"

"Yes, baby, he did. You got the wrong man when you popped Eddie. But you paid, baby. It's funny, baby, you don't look like a Commie." Brubaker laughed, this time directly at me.

"Why?" I asked. "Why did he do it?"

"Why? Well, Maggie was living here in L.A., unknown to all us sailor-boys. Her mother wrote to her about Johnny being sliced in Milwaukee. She ran into Eddie, accidentally someplace, and started shooting off her mouth. Eddie told Doc, and Doc told him to sweet-talk her and fuck her and keep an eye on her. Then Doc started getting nervous. He borrowed Eddie's car one night and went to Maggie's apartment and choked her. It was a setup—Doc knew he could always trust me, but he wasn't sure about Eddie. He knew Eddie was insane about anyone knowing he was gay; that he'd rather die than have his family find out, so he showed Eddie the pictures of him and the councilman and that sealed it. Either the cops would never find out who choked Maggie, which would be hunky-dory, or Eddie would buy the ticket. Which he did, baby, and you were the ticket taker." I was jolted back to that night in '51 when I had first tailed Engels—he had had a violent confrontation with an older man in a homosexual bar in West Hollywood. My faulty memory sprung back to life—that man had been Doc Harris. Feeling self-revulsion start to creep in like a cancer, I changed the subject. "Did Marcella

Harris know Maggie? Know that Doc was going to kill her?”

“I think she knew. I think she guessed. She had always liked Maggie—and she knew that Maggie was really Michael’s mother. Doc told Marcella to stay away from Maggie. Doc and Marcella were divorced, but still friendly. Marcella took off on a trip somewhere; she left Michael with some boyfriends of hers. See, baby, she always knew Doc was a little cold. When she found out Maggie was dead, she knew how cold, but it wasn’t until later that year that she found out Doc was the night train to Cold City.”

“What are you talking about? Didn’t she know Doc killed Johnny?”

Brubaker shook his head and gave me an ironic hipster’s smile. “Negative, baby. If she’d known, she would have killed him or herself. That woman loved that crazy brother of hers, and did she have a will! I was Doc’s alibi, baby. He was with me on a three-day poker-drunk when he was really in Milwaukee slicing Big John.”

I shuddered because I already had an idea about the answer to my next question. “Then what did Marcella find out later that year?”

“Well, baby, to give old iceberg Doc his due, he does love his ‘moral heir,’ as he calls him. When Marcella went gallivanting all over hell in ’51 and left Michael with her partying pals, Doc was frantic, not knowing where his boy was. When he and Michael got together, and Michael told him he was with some nice fellas in Hollywood, Doc got real upset. He went up there with a butcher knife and did some cutting. He got three of them. It was in all the papers, but you probably didn’t read about it—you was recently on the headlines yourself and probably hiding out. What’s the matter, baby? You’re a little bit pale.”

Brubaker went to the sink and drew me a glass of water. He handed it to me and I sipped, then realized what I was doing and hurled it at the wall.

“Easy, baby,” Brubaker said. “You’re learning things you don’t want to?”

I almost choked on the words, but I got them out, in part: “Why did Doc…”

“Kill Marcella? For the boy, baby. He knew Marcella knew of all the shit that had hit the fan; maybe she even suspected he killed Johnny. But if she ever went to the cops she knew she’d never see her little boy. That ate at her. She started hitting the juice and popping pills harder than ever. She started sleeping around harder than ever. Doc had this sleazy private detective checking her out. He told Doc that Marcella had more rubber burned in her than the Pomona Freeway. That private eye disappeared shortly thereafter, baby. So did Marcella.”

Brubaker drew a silent finger across his throat, indicating the end of Marcella’s potentially splendid life. I was outraged beyond outrage, but not at Brubaker.

“But Michael was with Doc when Marcella was strangled,” I said calmly.

“That’s correct,” Brubaker said, equally calmly. “He was. Doc drove out to El Monte. He knew that Marcella usually stumbled home from Hank’s Hot Spot down Peck Road by the high school. He knew she never took her car. He was parked by the school. He picked her up and talked to her for a couple of hours, then strangled her. Michael was asleep in the back seat. Doc had fed him three Seconals. When he woke up at home the next day he never knew where he spent the night. Ain’t parental love a kick, baby?”

I jumped up, and with a trembling hand held my gun inches from Brubaker’s smiling face, the hammer cocked, my finger on the trigger.

“Shoot me, man,” Brubaker said. “I don’t care, it ain’t gonna hurt for long. Shoot me.”

I held my ground.

“Shoot me, goddamnit! Ain’t you got the guts? You afraid of a n——— queer? Shoot me!”

I raised the gun barrel into the air and brought it down full force onto Brubaker’s head. He screamed, and blood burst from a vein over his nose. I raised my gun again, then screamed myself and threw it against the wall. I stared at Brubaker, who wiped his bloody face with his sleeve and returned my stare.

“Are you with me or with Doc?” I said finally.

“I’m with you, baby,” Brubaker said. “You’ve got all the aces in this hand. In fact, you’re the only game in town.”

24

It *was* the only game in town, I knew that, but I didn't feel I'd been dealt aces. I felt like I was holding a dead man's hand, and that even after it was over Doc Harris would be laughing at me from wherever he went, secure in the knowledge that I could never again lead a normal life, if indeed I ever had.

Larry Brubaker and I drove north, toward the farm country east of Ventura. I was armed with a 10-gauge shotgun, a .38, and a hypodermic syringe; Brubaker with a masochistic delight at the predicament he was in. He knew I was armed for bear—he had supplied me with the syringe and he knew what I had to do. Brubaker was driving, but he knew only the barest outline of my plan; he knew only the territory where the game was to be played.

I stared at him out of the corner of my eye. He was a skillful driver, deftly weaving through traffic like a rider jockeying for post position, and even with his head bandaged from the result of my outrage he maintained an icy calm.

He had supplied the details, and he had agreed to sign a confession to all his knowledge of Doc Harris's malfeasance and his own part in the drug robbery. He was an accessory to murder and much more. That confession was now, four days later, lying in my Bank of America safe-deposit box. After signing his name with a flourish to the twenty-three-page indictment I had drawn up in his cluttered back room, Brubaker had said: "There's only one way to play this game and win. Doc owns a plot of land east of Ventura. Just a nasty little good-for-nothing pile of dirt. It's his tax sting; he's got no visible means of support, being a respectable middle-class dope pusher like he is. So he writes off his rockpile and pays a C-note a year in income tax. That's where he hides his stuff. He gives it to me and I turn it over for him. We meet there once a month, on the fifteenth, to make the trade: I give Doc the month's take, he gives me the stuff. That's the place to take him. You dig, baby?"

I dug, and I wanted to make sure Brubaker reciprocated. "Yeah, I dig. You dig that if this thing doesn't come off, I'm going to kill you right there?"

"Of course, baby. It's the only game in town."

—

I saw a clock as we passed Oxnard—8:42 a.m., and I noted the time and place

—Saturday, July 15, 1955, and I thought of what I wanted from Doc Harris on the biggest day of my life and the last day of his: I wanted a dialogue before the strychnine-laced morphine entered his veins. Remorse was beyond his capability, but I wanted a crumbling, or at least an expression of grief, as my personal revenge. And more importantly, I wanted information on the state of mind of his "moral heir." How far had he gone in perverting Michael's mind? How conscious and subtle were his methods of brainwashing? And I wanted him to die knowing that Michael would live free and sane because of his death.

We passed the Ventura County line and headed east. I felt like I was going to vomit, and reflexively looked at the cold mien of Larry Brubaker for signs of stress. I was rewarded: he had tightened his hands on the steering wheel until his pale brown knuckles had turned a throbbing white.

"You want to hear a joke, Larry?" I said.

"Sure, baby."

"It's my definition of a sadist. Are you ready? Someone who's kind to a masochist."

Brubaker laughed, first uproariously, then obscenely. "That's the story of my life, baby! Only I was playing both parts. It's too bad you ain't gonna get the chance to know Doc. He would have dug your act."

"Tell me about the setup. How do you and Doc work it?"

"He drives up alone; I do likewise. He's got the stuff buried in a watertight chest in this little grove of trees next to this little shed. We make the trade and we have a drink or two and talk politics or sports or old times, and that's it."

"Would Doc's car fit in this shed?"

"Probably. How do you expect to get Doc to sit still while you hot-shot him? That's what you're planning to do, ain't it, baby?"

"Don't you worry about it. And your meeting time is always ten, and Doc is never early?"

"Right, baby. Now *you* don't worry. You can see Doc coming from half a mile away. I *always* come early, to observe nature. You dig?"

"I dig."

—

Ten minutes later we were there.

We turned off the shoulder and drove for a quarter mile over a dusty road. When we came up to the site it was just as Brubaker described it: soft brown dirt strewn with rocks, dust, and a white clapboard shack on the edge of an expanse of dead-looking eucalyptus trees.

We parked next to the shack. Brubaker set the brake and smiled at me. I didn't know what the smile meant, and suddenly I was terrified.

Brubaker looked at his watch. "It's nine fifteen," he said. "We've got forty-five minutes, but you better get out of sight to be safe. I'll stand outside my car like I usually do. Hot, ain't it? But pretty. God, do I love the country!"

I got my shotgun out of the back seat, wishing it were an automatic, and walked into the grove of trees. I placed it at the back of the tree closest to Brubaker's car, where it could be grabbed quickly when Doc Harris arrived. I got out my .38 and checked the safety, then stuck it back in my waistband and walked toward a dark patch of shade at the middle of the little forest.

"I'll whistle once when he shows," Brubaker called to me. For the first time I noticed tension in his voice.

"Right," I called back, noting my own voice was stretched thin.

I leaned up against a tree trunk that afforded me a view of Brubaker and his car as well as the road. I was so light-headed from nervous tension that it was easy not to think. My mind was totally blank, and I caught myself slipping into a state of complete nervous exhaustion. I cleared my throat repeatedly and started to scratch and pick at myself, almost as if to prove that I was still there.

I heard a rustle of dried leaves in back of me, and whirled around, my hand on the butt of my gun. It was nothing—probably just a scurrying rodent. I heard the rustle again and didn't turn around, and then suddenly I heard the *ka-raack!* of a shot and the tree trunk splintered above my head. I pitched to the ground and rolled in the direction of a large mound of fallen branches. I pulled my .38 from my waistband and flipped off the safety and held my breath. I dug in behind the branches, burrowing through dried leaves for a place to aim. Finding a small spot of daylight that provided aiming room and protection, I dug deeper and scanned the direction from which the shot had come.

There was nothing: no movement of any kind, no noise but the frantic slamming of my own heart and the sharp wheeze of my breath. I risked sticking my head above the mound of branches and quickly scanned the grove of trees. Still nothing. Was the sniper Brubaker?

"Brubaker," I called. There was no response.

I glanced over to my left. The shotgun was still resting against the tree trunk. I crawled over to where I could see Brubaker's car and the little shack. No Brubaker and no movement. I was starting to calm down a little, and starting to get angry. As I crawled back toward my hiding place I caught a glimpse of trouser legs off to my left near the far edge of my vision. Three shots rang out, and the dirt in front of me blew up in my face. I started rolling toward the shotgun when I saw a man charging me. Dimly I knew it was Doc

Harris. I was within inches of my shotgun and still rolling when he fired two shots at me from within ten yards. The first shot narrowly missed; the second grazed the side of my head. I flailed my .38 in front of me, wasting precious seconds. Doc Harris saw what I was doing and aimed dead at me. He pulled the trigger, and got an empty click. Livid, he was on top of me, and he kicked me in the face just as I got my gun free, causing me to fire three quick shots in the wrong direction.

He flung himself on my gun arm and grabbed my wrist with both hands. As a precaution I fired the remaining three rounds into the dirt. This infuriated him and he brought his knee into my groin. I screamed, and vomited onto his shirtfront. He reached up reflexively to fend it off, thereby easing some of the pressure on my chest. I squirmed partially free and twisted myself in the direction of the shotgun. Just as I got my hands on the butt, Harris renewed his attack. I feebly swiped at him with the gun butt, grazing him in the chin. He grabbed for the trigger, hoping to force a shot in my direction, but my right hand was securely clamped around the trigger guard. We rolled into a tree trunk, and I tried to squash Harris into it, banging him at chest level with the gun barrel that was between us like a wedge. It was no use; he was too strong. I wrapped my middle finger around the trigger and squeezed. The shotgun exploded and the barrel buckled, hitting Harris in the face. He panicked for just an instant, withdrawing his hand slightly and looking startled.

We both drew ourselves to our feet. Harris had retightened his grip on the gun, then realized it was useless and let go, causing me to fall to the ground. He smiled down at me through clenched teeth and pulled a switchblade knife from his back pocket. He pressed a button on the handle and a gleaming, razor-sharp blade popped out. He advanced toward me. I was trying to get to my feet when I saw Larry Brubaker inching up in back of him, wielding a tire iron. Harris was within three feet of me when Brubaker brought it down with a roundhouse swing onto his shoulders. Harris collapsed to the ground at my feet and was silent.

Brubaker helped me up. I checked Harris's pulse, which was normal, then rounded up the two handguns from their resting place. Harris had a .32 Colt revolver. I put it in my back pocket, and reloaded my own .38 and placed it in my waistband. Brubaker was kneeling over Harris, gently stroking his thick gray hair and staring at him with a look that was equal parts longing and amazement.

I walked up to him. "Get the syringe from the glove compartment, Larry. There's a paper bag on the front seat with a bottle of water, a spoon, some matches and a little vial. Bring it to me."

Brubaker nodded and went to the car.

I dragged Doc Harris over to a large tree and propped his back up against it. I could barely manage the pulling: my arms were numb from tension and exertion, and my head slammed from the shot that had grazed me. Brubaker returned with the paper bag.

"You know where the stuff is buried," I said.

Brubaker said, "Yes, baby," very softly.

"Go get a handful of it. A big handful. Then come back here. I want you to cook Doc up a little cocktail."

Harris came awake a moment after Brubaker departed. When his eyelids started to flutter, I reached for my .38 and trained it on him. "Hello, Doc," I said.

Harris smiled. "Hello, Underhill. Where's Larry?"

"He went to fetch you a little surprise."

"Poor Larry. What will he do now? Who will he follow? He's never had anyone else."

"He'll survive. So will Michael."

"Michael likes you, Underhill."

"I like Michael."

"Like attracts like. You and I are Renaissance men. Michael is attracted to Renaissance men."

"What have you done to him?"

"I've told him stories. I taught him to read at three. He's got an amazing I.Q. and an astounding sense of narrative, so I've been giving him parables since he was old enough to listen. I was going to write my memoirs for him, when he was a few years older and capable of understanding them. Of course, now that will never be. But he has had enough of me to form his character, I think."

"You lost, Harris. Your life, your moral heir, your 'philosophy,' all of it. How does that feel?"

"Sad. But I've been to mountaintops that you and the rest of the world don't know exist. There's a certain solace in that."

"How did you know I'd be here?"

"I didn't. But I knew you knew about me. I've had a feeling since I read about you and poor Eddie in the papers back in '51 that you'd be coming for me someday. When you showed up at my door I wasn't surprised. I figured you might use Larry as wedge, so I showed up here early without my car as a precaution."

Brubaker returned with both hands overflowing with white powder. I tasted the most minute amount I could put on a finger. It was very, very pure.

"I was going to shoot you up, Doc," I said. "But I haven't got the heart for it."

Still holding my gun, I scooped a handful of morphine from Brubaker's outstretched palms and dug the water bottle out of the paper bag. I uncapped it, and walked up to Harris.

"Eat it," I said, shoving the morphine at his mouth.

Harris opened his mouth and stoically took death's communion. I tilted the water bottle to his lips as one last act of mercy. Doc shuddered and smiled. "I don't want to die like this, Underhill."

"Tough shit. You've got five minutes or so until your heart bursts and you suffocate. Any last words? Any last requests?"

"Just one." Harris pointed to the ground in back of me. "Will you hand me my knife?" he asked.

I nodded and Brubaker got the knife and handed it to him.

Harris smiled at us. "Goodbye, Larry. Be gracious in victory, Underhill. It's not your style, but do it anyway. Be as gracious in victory as I am in defeat."

Harris unbuttoned his shirt and slowly removed it, then took the knife in both hands and slammed it into his abdomen and yanked it upward to his rib cage. He shuddered as blood spurted from his stomach and burst forth from his mouth and nostrils. Then he pitched forward onto the ground, his hands still gripping the knife handle.

—

We buried him in the spot where he had stored his morphine, jamming him into the deep narrow space he had originally created to hold a huge steamer trunk full of death. We covered him over with rock-strewn dirt and covered the dirt with a spray of dried leaves.

I hauled the trunk over to Brubaker's car, siphoned gas from his tank, and drove the car off to a safe distance. Then I lit a match and set the trunk on fire. Brubaker, who had remained silent since the moment of Doc's death, stared at the flames musingly.

"Have you got a valedictory, Larry?" I asked.

"Yeah," he said, and quoted Cole Porter: " 'Goodbye now and amen, here's hoping we meet now and then, it was great fun, but it was just one of those things!' You like that, baby?"

"No, you're too hep for me, Larry," I said, throwing dirt on the charred remains of the trunk. "Let's get out of here. I'll drive."

I took Pacific Coast Highway back. Brubaker was silent, and it troubled me.

“You saved my life,” I said. “Thanks.”

“He was going to kill me, baby. I knew it. He swooped down on me and took me aside and told me you were dead meat, and then things would be copacetic. But I knew he was going to kill me.” Brubaker turned in his seat to face me. “I would have let you die otherwise,” he said.

“I know. You were in love with him, weren’t you?”

“From the moment I met him, baby. From that very moment.” Brubaker started to sob quietly, sticking his head out the window to avoid my watching him. Finally he turned to face me. “But I cared, too, baby. When you and that big Irish cop rousted me years ago I knew you were an okay guy. You just didn’t have too good an idea about what was going on. You dig?”

“I guess so. If it’s any consolation, I used to have a friend, a drunk who was sort of way ahead of his time, who used to say there was a city of the dead, existing right here where we are, but invisible to us. He said that when people go there they carry on exactly the way they did on earth. That’s not much consolation to me, but I think it may be true.”

Brubaker didn’t answer. He just sobbed out the window, his head wedged tightly against the doorjamb. He was still sobbing when I left him at his bar in Venice.

25

I staked out the apartment building on Beverly Boulevard for three days. Huddled low in the seat of my car, I watched Michael read comic books on his front lawn, noting that he wore thick glasses to read. I watched him throw a tennis ball against the wall of the building and usually blow the catch when it returned to him. I watched him pick at his acne, and I watched him thrash at the tennis ball with an old rusted putter. I watched him lie on the dead grass and dream. I noted that the other kids in the neighborhood avoided him like the plague. I noted that by the time he was twelve he would be far taller than I am.

At the end of those three days I knew that I loved him.

He just stared at me when he flung the door open in answer to my knock. I stared back for a moment, then broke the silence.

“Hi, Mike. May I come in?”

“Sure.”

I moved my way through the modest little apartment, looking for something to give me something to say. “Where’s your puppy?” I asked finally.

“She ran away,” Michael said.

It was obviously my cue. “Your father is dead, Mike.”

Michael said, “I figured he was,” then looked out the window to the stream of cars moving along Beverly Boulevard. “I knew he had to die—because of the stories. He thought I was a smart kid, but he didn’t know how smart. He used to think he was fooling me. He used to think I didn’t know that the stories were real.”

“What stories, Mike?”

Michael turned his gaze from the street to me. “I won’t tell you. Not ever. Okay?”

“Okay. Do you miss your dog?”

“Yes, she was my friend.”

“I’ve got a dog. A hell of a good dog.”

“What kind?”

"A big black Labrador. He loves people, but he hates cats."

"I don't like cats either. They're slimy. What's going to happen, Fred?"

"You're going to come and live with me. Do you want to?"

"Are you married?"

"I don't know. I think so."

"What's your wife like?"

"She's very smart and strong and very beautiful."

"Will the Lab be my dog, too?"

"Yes."

"Then okay."

"Pack your stuff. Leave your father's things, I'll get rid of them later."

Ten minutes later the back seat of my car was packed with a meager collection of clothes and assorted other stuff—and a huge collection of books. I drove to a pay phone and called Big Sid at home and told him I had a guest for him to look after for a few days. The monster mogul was bewildered, but ecstatic when I told him it was a bright young boy who loved horror movies.

Sid was there on the front lawn of the huge house on Canon Drive waiting for us when we pulled up. I introduced Michael to him, and Sid double-taked on the huge youngster and offered him a cigar. Michael fell on the lawn in his laughter, then got up and hugged me before running off in the direction of the house.

From a pay phone I called Lorna's office. Her secretary told me she was down in San Diego for a convention. She was staying at the El Cortez Hotel and would be returning in two or three days. I couldn't wait. I got a tank of gas and highballed it south on the San Diego Freeway.

It was turning dusk when I got to Dago. A drunken sailor gave me directions to the El Cortez, a pink Spanish-style building with an outside elevator enclosed in glass.

I ditched my car in the parking lot and tore through the lobby to the front desk. The clerk told me that the guests who were here for the American Bar Association convention were at the banquet in the Galleon Room. He pointed to a large banquet hall off to his left. I ran in, catching glimpses of a stern-looking man at the podium, who was speaking ambiguously about something called justice.

I walked quietly along four walls, scanning every rapt and bored face at every table. There was no Lorna. There was an exit at the rear of the room, and I went for it, hoping it would provide access to an elevator to the hotel proper.

I opened the door into a hallway just as Lorna limped out of the ladies' room, talking to another woman. "I only come for the food, Helen," she was saying. Helen noticed me first, and must have known something was up, because she nudged Lorna, who turned around and saw me and dropped her purse and cane and said, “Freddy, what—”

Helen said, “Excuse me, Lorna,” and darted out of sight.

I smiled and said, “I never liked phones, Lor.”

“You lunatic. What’s happened to you? You look different.”

“I think I am different.”

I bent down and handed Lorna her cane and purse. Impulsively I threw my arms around her and said, “It’s over, Lor. It’s over.” I grabbed her waist and lifted her off the floor and held her way over my head until she shrieked, “Freddy, goddamnit, put me down!”

I held her higher still, tossing her up to where her head almost banged the ceiling.

“Freddy, goddamnit, please!”

I lowered my wife to the lushly carpeted floor. She retained her hold around my neck and looked into my eyes sternly and said, “So it’s over. And now?”

“There’s us, Lor. There’s a great big little boy who needs us. He’s with your father now.”

“What great big—”

“He’s Maggie Cadwallader’s son. That’s all I’ll tell you. I want you back, but it’s no good without him.”

“Oh, Jesus, Freddy.”

“You can teach him justice, and I can teach him whatever I know.”

“He’s an orphan?”

“Yes.”

“There are legalities, Freddy.”

“Fuck the legalities; he needs us.”

“I don’t know.”

“I do. I want you back.”

“Why? You think it will be different this time?”

“I know it will be.”

“Oh, God, Freddy!”

“We’ll never know unless we try.”

“That’s true, but I just don’t know! Besides, I’ve got two more days down here at the convention.”

“We’ll never know unless we try.”

“It’s a standoff, Freddy.”

“It always has been, Lor.”

Lorna dug into her purse and pulled out her keys. She detached the ones for the house in Laurel Canyon and handed them to me. She smiled, and brushed tears out of her eyes. “We’ll never know unless we try,” she said.

We held each other tightly for several minutes, until we heard applause coming from the banquet room.

“I have to go now,” Lorna said. “I’m on in a few minutes.”

“I’ll see you at home.”

“Yes.”

We kissed, and Lorna composed herself, opened the door and moved into the banquet room to the sound of dying applause for the last speaker.

As she limped to the dais, I thought of Wacky Walker and wonder and the constituency of the dead and mad Dudley Smith and poor Larry Brubaker and orphanhood and the strictures of my once inviolate heart. Then I thought of redemption, and got my car and caught the freeway back to L.A.

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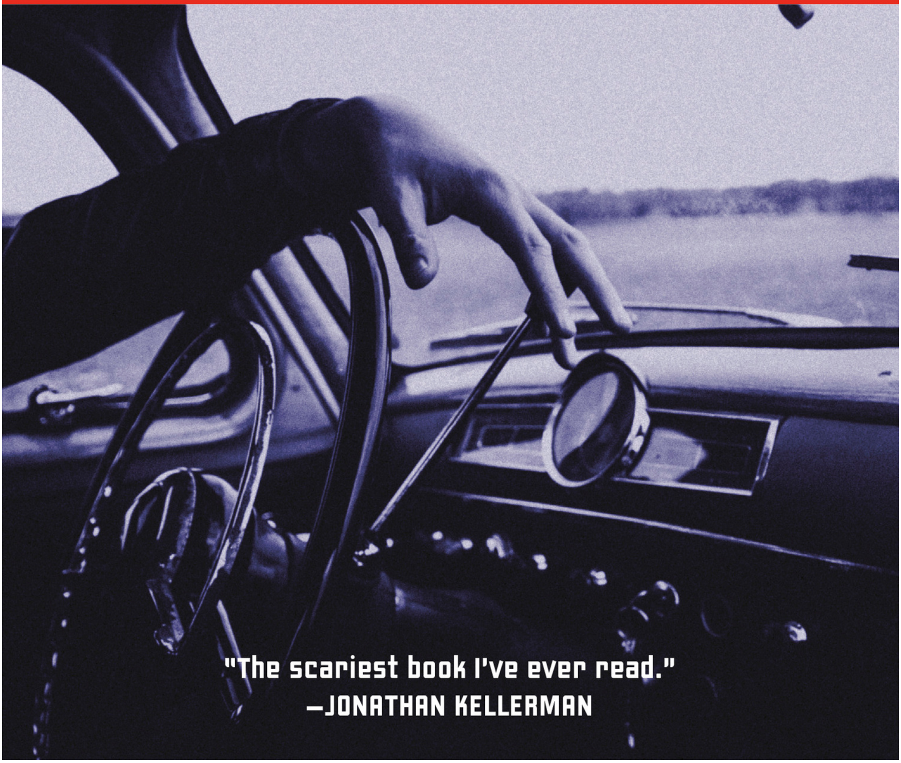

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Published by Vintage Books, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. Originally published as *Silent Terror* in paperback by Avon Books, New York, in 1986.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Ellroy, James, [date] author.
Title: Killer on the road: a novel / James Ellroy.
Description: First Vintage Books edition. | New York : 2025.
Identifiers: LCCN 2025021868 (print) | LCCN 2025021869 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Serial murderers—Fiction. | San Francisco (Calif.)—Fiction. | LCGFT: Psychological fiction. | Noir fiction. | Novels.
Classification: LCC PS3555.L6274 S55 2025 (print) | LCC PS3555.L6274 (ebook) | DDC 813/.54—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025021868
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025021869

Vintage Books Trade Paperback ISBN 9798217007882
Ebook ISBN 9798217007899

Book design by Nicholas Alguire, adapted for ebook
Cover design by Chip Kidd and Eric Baker
Cover photograph © Jannis/EyeEm

penguinrandomhouse.com | vintagebooks.com

The authorized representative in the EU for product safety and compliance is Penguin Random House Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin DO2 YH68, Ireland, https://eu-contact.penguin.ie.

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To Duane Tucker

From the Big Apple Tattler*, September 13, 1983:*

"Sexecutioner" Captured!!!

Westchester Boardinghouse Raid Nets Behrens/Liggett—De Nunzio/Cafferty Killer!!!

At 3:00 a.m. this morning, the sleepy town of New Rochelle was the sight of life-and-death drama as federal agents and local police zeroed in on a tidy little boardinghouse on the edge of the downtown area.

Inside, in a tidy little third-floor room, slept Martin Michael Plunkett, age 35, the suspected sex slayer of two sets of Westchester County lovebirds—Madeleine Behrens, 23, and her boyfriend Richard Liggett, 24, and Dominic De Nunzio, 18, and his fiancée Rosemary Cafferty, 17. Dubbed the "Sexecutioner" by local authorities, Plunkett is suspected of several other similarly brutal killings—murders that span the entire United States and go back a decade.

But the tall, intense-looking killer wasn't in a killing mood when G-men, led by F.B.I. Serial Killer Task Force agent Thomas Dusenberry evacuated the boardinghouse and gave him a bull-horn ultimatum: "We have you surrounded, Plunkett! Surrender, or we'll come in and get you!"

The 800 block of South Lockwood was deathly still in the bullhorn's echo, then the "Sexecutioner's" voice rang out: "I'm unarmed. I want to talk to the head man before you take me in."

Amidst stunned protests from both the New Rochelle SWAT Team and his fellow F.B.I. men, Inspector Dusenberry walked into the killer's room; then, five minutes later, led Plunkett out, handcuffed. When asked what transpired during those five minutes, Dusenberry said, "The man and I talked. He wanted to make sure that when he confessed, his statement would be printed verbatim. He was quite clear about that. It seemed very important to him."

—

From the "Legal Precedents" Section of the American Journal of Psychiatry*, May 10, 1984:*

Both legal scholars and forensic psychologists continue to take a keen *interest in the case of Martin Michael Plunkett, convicted in February on four counts of First Degree Murder in Westchester County, New York.*

Sentenced to four consecutive life sentences and currently held in protective custody at Sing Sing Prison, Plunkett, 36, offered no defense at his trial. Acting as his own attorney, he submitted a notarized written statement to the judge and, before a packed courtroom, repeated that statement verbatim:

"On September 9, 1983, I murdered Madeleine Behrens and Richard Liggett. The knife I used to kill them is wrapped in a plastic bag and buried near the southwest corner of the lake in Huguenot Park, near the corner of North Avenue and Eastchester Road in New Rochelle, New York. On September 10, 1983, I murdered Dominic De Nunzio and Rosemary Cafferty. The saw I used to dismember them is wrapped in a plastic bag and buried at the base of a sycamore tree immediately in front of the public library in Bronxville, New York. This is my first, final and only statement regarding the crimes for which I stand accused, and for any others I may be suspected as having perpetrated."

Investigators found the murder weapons Plunkett described, with his fingerprints on them. Forensic technicians ran batteries of tests, and said that the knife's cutting edge matched perfectly to "SS" carvings on the legs of the four victims. Plunkett, who had maintained complete silence since his September 13 arrest, was convicted on the basis of the physical evidence and his statement.

That silence has created a furor among law-enforcement officials who are convinced that Plunkett's number of victims may run as high as fifty. Thomas Dusenberry, the F.B.I. agent who headed the investigation that led to Plunkett's arrest, said, "Based on psychological workups on the Behrens/Liggett and De Nunzio/Cafferty killings and on unsolved murders and disappearances that correspond in time sequence to our knowledge of Martin Plunkett's movements, I suspect him of at least *thirty additional murders and non-sequitur disappearances. A confession, voluntary or drug-induced, would save law-enforcement agencies untold investigatory hours—many of the cases we 'make' Plunkett for are still open."*

But Plunkett, whose school records indicate genius-level intelligence, will not even speak, much less confess, and, legally, he cannot be coerced into doing so. Thus, two disparate sources are petitioning New York State prison officials in an effort to gain access to his criminal memory: law enforcement agencies anxious to "clear" unsolved *homicides within their jurisdictions, and forensic psychologists anxious to probe the mind of a brilliant serial murderer. All petitions have thus far been rejected by prison officials, and representatives of the American Civil Liberties Union have said they would legally intervene should mind-altering chemicals be forced on Plunkett in an effort to make him confess.*

Perhaps the last word on the Plunkett case was spoken by Sing Sing Warden Richard Wardlow: "The legal and psychological ramifications of this deal are beyond me, but I can tell you one thing: Martin Plunkett will never *see daylight again. As sympathetic as I am to the cops with open homicides on their hands, they should give it up and be grateful the ______ is in custody. You can't squeeze blood out of a stone."*

—

From Publishers Weekly*, June 6, 1984:*

"Silent Killer to 'Speak' in Crime Autobiography"

Literary agent Milton Alpert of M. Alpert & Associates has announced that he will be representing Martin Michael Plunkett, a convicted murderer known as the "Sexecutioner," in the sale of his autobiographical memoir, an account that Alpert says, "pulls no punches, and is destined to be regarded as a classic text on the criminal psyche."

Alpert, summoned to Sing Sing by a phone call from Plunkett, who had maintained absolute silence since reading a declaration of guilt at his trial in February, said that the 36-year-old killer "feels deep remorse over his actions, and wishes to expiate his guilt with the writing of this 'cautionary' memoir."

Since New York law prohibits criminals from reaping financial reward from published accounts of their crimes, all monies earned from Plunkett's "memoir" will go to the families of his victims. "Martin actually wants *it that way," Alpert stressed.*

Law Enforcement agencies throughout America have already expressed great interest in reading Plunkett's in-progress manuscript, purely from a "legal" standpoint—they think it may help them to shed light on unsolved homicides that Plunkett himself (suspected by several F.B.I. officials of being a long-term serial murderer) may have committed. As part of a "mutually beneficial reciprocal agreement," Alpert has agreed to pass along "salient information pertaining to *unsolved killings" in exchange for "official police documents to help Martin carry the narration of his book."*

The as yet untitled work will be auctioned upon its completion.

I

Los Angeles

1

Dusenberry's estimated body count was low, and Warden Wardlow's stone metaphor only partly accurate. Inanimate objects *can* yield blood, but if the transfusion is to take, the letting must be sanctioned by the object's deepest and most logical volition. Even Milt Alpert, that eminently decent expediter of literature, had to cloak the announcement of our collaboration with justification-heavy sloganeering and words I never said. He cannot accept the fact that he will be earning 10 percent of a valediction in blood. That I feel no remorse and seek no absolution is incomprehensible to him.

A more farsighted person in my situation would seize this narrative opportunity and bend it toward the manipulation of the mental-health profession and liberal legal establishment—people susceptible to cheap visions of redemption. Since I have no expectations of ever leaving this prison, I will not do that—it is simply dishonest. Nor will I cop a psychological plea by juxtaposing my acts against the alleged absurdity of twentieth-century American life. By passing through conscious gauntlets of silence and will, by creating my own vacuum-packed reality, I was able to exist outside standard environmental influences to an exceptional degree—the prosaic pain of growing up and being American did not take hold; I transmogrified it into something *more* very early. Thus I stand by my deeds. They are indigenous solely to me.

Here in my cell, I have everything I need to bring my valediction to life: world-class typewriter, blank paper, police documents procured by my agent. Along the back wall there is a Rand-McNally map of America, and beside my bunk a box of plastic-topped pins. As this manuscript grows, I will use those pins to mark the places where I murdered people.

But above all, I have my mind; my silence. There is a dynamic to the marketing of horror: serve it up with a hyperbolic flourish that distances even as it terrifies, then turn on the literal or figurative lights, inducing gratitude for the cessation of a nightmare that was too awful to be true in the first place. I will not observe that dynamic. I will not let you pity me. Charles Manson, babbling in *his* cell, deserves pity; Ted Bundy, protesting his innocence in order to attract correspondence from lonely women, deserves contempt. I deserve awe for standing inviolate at the end of the journey I am about to describe, and since the force of my nightmare prohibits surcease, you will give it to me.

2

Guidebooks misrepresent Los Angeles as a sun-kissed amalgam of beaches, palm trees and the movies. The literary establishment fatuously attempts to penetrate that exterior and serves up the L.A. basin as a melting pot of desperate kitsch, violent illusion and variegated religious lunacy. Both designations hold elements of truth based on convenience. It is easy to love the place at first glance and even easier to hate it when you get to sense the people who live there. But to *know* it, you have to come from the *neighborhoods,* the inner-city enclaves that the guidebooks never mention and artists dismiss in their haste to paint with broad, satiric strokes.

These places require resourcefulness; they will not give up their secrets to observers—only to inspired residents. I gave my youthful stomping ground such implacable attention that it reciprocated in full. There was nothing about that quiet area on the edge of Hollywood that I didn't know.

Beverly Boulevard on the south; Melrose Avenue on the north. Rossmore and Wilshire Country Club marking the west border, a demarcation line between money and only the dream of it. Western Avenue and its profusion of bars and liquor stores standing sentry at the east gate—keeping undesirable school districts, Mexicans and homosexuals at bay. Six blocks from north to south; seventeen from east to west. Small wood-frame and Spanish-style houses; tree-lined streets without stoplights. A courtyard apartment building rumored to be filled with prostitutes and illegal aliens; an elementary school; the debatable presence of a "fuck pad" where U.S.C. football players brought girls to watch '50's-vintage porno films. A small universe of secrets.

I lived with my father and mother in a salmon-colored miniature of the Santa Barbara Mission, two stories with a tarpaper roof and a mock mission bell. My father worked as a draftsman at an airplane plant and gambled cautiously—he usually won. My mother clerked at an insurance company and spent her leisure hours staring at traffic on Beverly Boulevard.

I realize now that both my parents had furious, and furiously separate, mental lives. They were together for the first seven years of my life, and early on I remember designating them as my custodians and nothing else. Their lack of affection, to me and to each other, registered inchoately as freedom—dimly I perceived their elliptical approach to parenthood as a neglect that I could capitalize on. They did not possess the passion to abuse me or to love me. I know today that they armed me with the equivalent of enough childhood brutality to fuel an army.

Early in 1953, the air-raid sirens stationed throughout the neighborhood went off accidentally, and my father, convinced that a Russian A-bomb attack was imminent, led my mother and me up to the roof to await the arrival of the Big One. He brought a fifth of bourbon with him, because he wanted to toast the mushroom cloud he expected to rise over downtown L.A., and when the Big One never appeared, he was drunk and disappointed. My mother made one of her rare verbal offerings, this one to allay her husband's depression over the world not being blown to hell. He raised his hand to hit her, then hesitated and slugged down the rest of the bottle. Mother went downstairs to her traffic-watching chair, and I started checking science books out of the library. I wanted to see what mushroom clouds looked like.

That night signaled the beginning of the end of my parents' marriage. The air-raid scare created a bomb-shelter boom in the neighborhood, and my father, disgusted by the backyard construction, took to spending his weekends on the roof, drinking and observing the spectacle. I watched him get angrier and angrier, and I wanted to ease his pain, make him less of a pent-up observer. Somehow I got the notion to give him the "Wham-O" stainless steel slingshot I had found on a bus bench at Oakwood and Western.

My father loved the gift, and took to shooting ball bearings at the above-ground sections of the shelters. Soon his aim became excellent, and seeking more challenging targets, he started assassinating the crows who perched on the telephone wires that ran along the alley in back of our house. Once he even caught a scurrying rat from forty-six feet and eight inches away. I recall the distance because my father, proud of the feat, paced it off in yards, then calibrated the remainder with a metal drafting rule.

Early in '54, I learned that my parents were going to get divorced. My father took me up to the roof to tell me. I had seen it coming, and knew from the "Paul Coates Confidential" T.V. program that many "Post war marriages" were headed for Splitsville.

"Why?" I asked.

My father toed the gravel on the roof; it looked like he was tracing A-bomb clouds. "Well…I'm thirty-four years old, and your mother and I don't get along; and if I give her much more time I'll have shot my good years; and if I do that I might as well pack it in. We can't let that happen, can we?"

"No."

"That's my Marty. I'll be moving to Michigan, but you and your mother will keep the house, and I'll be writing to you, and I'll be sending money."

I knew from the Coates show that divorce was an expensive proposition, and sensed that my father must have had a big stash of gambling money put away to facilitate his move to Splitsville. He seemed to pick up my thoughts and added, "You'll be well looked after, don't you worry about that."

"I won't worry."

"Good." My father took a finger sight on a fat bluejay sitting atop our next-door neighbor's garage. "You know your mother is, well…you know."

I wanted to scream "nutty," "crazy," "fruitcake" and "couch case," but didn't want him to know I knew. "She's sensitive?" I ventured.

My father shook his head slowly; I knew *he* knew I knew. "Yeah, sensitive. Just try to take her with a grain of salt. Get a good education and try to be your own man, and you'll make yourself heard from."

On that prophetic note, my father stuck out his hand. We shook, and five minutes later he walked out the door. I never saw him again.

3

All my mother required was that I maintain a reasonable degree of silence and not burden her with questions about what she was thinking. Implicit in that was her desire for me to remain moderate in school, at play and at home. If she considered the dictate to be punishment, she was wrong: I could go anywhere I wanted in my head.

Like the rest of the neighborhood kids, I went to Van Ness Avenue Elementary, obeyed, and laughed and hurt at silly things. But other children found their hurt/joy in outside stimuli, while I found mine reflected off a movie screen that *fed* from what surrounded me, edited for my own inside-the-brain viewing by a steel-sharp mental device that always knew exactly what I needed to keep from being bored.

The screenings ran this way:

Miss Conlan or Miss Gladstone would be standing by the blackboard, unctuously proclaiming. They would start to fade visually commensurate with my growing boredom, and involuntarily, my eyes would start to trawl for something to keep me mentally awake.

The taller children were seated at the back of the room, and from my far left-hand corner desk I had a perfect forward/diagonal viewing path, one that allowed me profile shots of all my classmates. With teacher sight/noise reduced to a minimum, the faces of the other children blurred together, forming new ones; snatches of whispered conversations came together until all manner of boy/girl hybrids were declaring their devotion to me.

Being loved in a vacuum was like a reverie; street noise sounded like music. But abrupt movement from within the room, or the clatter of books on the hallway outside would turn it all bad. Pieter, the tall blond boy who sat next to me grades three to six, would go from adoring confidant to monster, the noise level determining the grotesqueness of his features.

After long frightened moments, I would seize the front of the room, zero in on either the blackboard writing or the teacher's monologue, and if I thought I could get away with it, interject some sort of comment. This calmed me and elicited full-face looks from the other children, sparking a part of my brain that thrived on producing swift, cruel caricature. Soon pretty Judy Rosen had Claire Curtis's big buck teeth; booger-eating Bobby Greenfield was feeding snot balls to Roberta Roberts, dropping them over the cashmere sweaters she wore to school every day, regardless of the weather. I would laugh to myself, only occasionally out loud. And I kept wondering how far I could take it—if I could refine the device to the point where even bad noise couldn't hurt me.

As for hurt: only other children were then capable of making me feel vulnerable, and even as early as eight or nine that queasy sense of being captive to irrational needs for union was physical—a prescient jolt of the terror and despair that sexual pursuits result in. I fought the need by denial, by sticking to myself and affecting a truculent mien that brooked no nonsense from other kids. In a recent *People* magazine article, a half-dozen of my old neighborhood contemporaries offered comments on me as a child. "Weird," "strange" and "withdrawn" were the adjectives used most frequently. Kenny Rudd, who lived across the street from me, and who now designs computer basketball games, came closest to the truth: "The word was: Don't ___ with Marty, he's psycho. I don't know, but I think maybe he was more scared than anything else."

Bravo, Kenny, although I'm glad you and your cretinous comrades didn't know that simple fact when we were children. My strangeness revulsed you and gave you someone to loathe from a safe distance—but had you sensed what it was hiding, you would have exploited my fear and tortured me for it. Instead, you left me alone and eased my discovery of my physical surroundings.

From 1955 to 1959, I charted my immediate topography, coming away with an extraordinary collection of facts: the red brick apartment house on Beachwood between Clinton and Melrose had a pet burial ground in back; the strip of recently constructed "bachelor hideaways" on Beverly and Norton were built out of rotted lumber, cut-rate stucco mix and "beaver-board"; the apocryphal "fuck pad" was in reality a bungalow court on Raleigh Drive, where a U.S.C. prof took college boys for homosexual liaisons. On trash-collection days, Mr. Eklund up the street switched his gin bottles with the sherry bottles from Mrs. Nulty's trash two doors down. The reason for the switch eluded me, although I knew they were having an affair. The Bergstroms, Seltenrights and Monroes had a nude pool party at the Seltenright house on Ridgewood in July of '58, and it sparked an affair between Laura Seltenright and Bill Bergstrom—Laura rolling her eyes to heaven at her first glance of Bill's outsize bratwurst.

And the projectionist at the Clinton Theatre sold "pep pills" to members of the Hollywood High swim team; and the "Phantom Homo" who had cruised the neighborhood for young boys for over a decade was one Timothy J. Costigan of Saticoy Street in Van Nuys. The Burgerville stand on Western served ground horse in its chili—I heard the owner talking to the man who delivered it one night when they thought no one was listening. I knew all these things—and for a long time just knowing them was enough.

Years came and went. My mother and I continued. Her silence went from stunning to mundane; mine from strained to easy as my mental resourcefulness grew. Then, in my last year of junior high, school officials finally noticed that I spoke only when spoken to. This led them to force me to see a child psychiatrist.

He impressed me as a condescending man with an unnatural attraction to children. His office was filled with a not-too-subtle arrangement of toys—stuffed animals and dolls interspersed with plastic machine guns and soldier sets. I knew immediately that I was smarter than he.

He pointed to the toys as I sat down on the couch. "I didn't realize what a big fella you are. Fourteen. Those playthings are for little kids; not big fellas like you."

"I'm tall, I'm not big."

"Same difference. I'm a short fella. Short fellas got different problems than tall fellas. Don't you agree?"

His questioning was easy to follow. If I said "yes," it would be an admission that *I* had problems; if I said "no," he would launch a spiel about everyone having problems, then share a few of his own in a cheap empathy ploy. "I don't know and I don't care," I said.

"Fellas who don't care about their own problems usually don't care about themselves. That's a heck of a way to be, don't you agree?"

I shrugged, and gave him one of the blank-eyed stares I used to keep other kids at bay, and soon he was fading to a pinpoint as my mind zeroed in on a teddy bear off to my right. Within a split second the bear was aiming a plastic bazooka at the shrink's head, and I started to giggle.

"Daydreaming, big fella? Want to tell me what's so funny?"

I did a perfect segue from my brain-movie to the doctor, smiling as I accomplished it. I could tell he was disconcerted. My eyes caught a stuffed Bugs Bunny toy, and I said, "What's up, Doc?"

"Martin, young people who are very quiet usually have lots of things on their minds. You've got a swell mind, and the grades in school to prove it. Don't you think it's time to tell me what's bothering you?"

Bugs Bunny started waggling his eyebrows and taking playful nips at the headshrinker's neck. "The price of carrots," I said.

"What?" The shrink took off his horn-rims and cleaned the lenses with his necktie.

"Have you ever seen a rabbit with glasses?"

"Martin, you're not following me, you're not being logical."

"Isn't good eye care logical?"

"You're talking in non-sequiturs."

"No, I'm not. A non-sequitur is a conclusion that doesn't follow its known inferences. Good eye care follows eating carrots."

"Martin, I—" The doctor was getting flushed and sweaty; Bugs Bunny was hurling carrots at his desk.

"Don't call me 'Martin,' call me 'Big Fella.' It sends me."

Straightening his glasses, the doctor said, "Let's change the subject. Tell me about your parents."

"They're carrot-juice addicts."

"I see. And what is that supposed to mean?"

"That they have good eyes."

"I see. Anything else?"

"Long ears and fluffy tails."

"I see. You think you're a funny man, don't you?"

"No, I think you are."

"You nasty little shit, I'll bet you don't have a friend in the world."

The room became four walls of hideous noise, and Bugs Bunny turned on me, forcing an awful kaleidoscope of half-buried memories to flash across my brain-screen: a tall blond boy telling a group of kids "Farty Marty asked me to watch traffic with him"; Pieter and his sister Katrin rebuffing my attempt to get them to sit next to me in sixth grade.

The shrink was staring at me, smirking because I had shown myself vulnerable; and Bugs Bunny, his secret pal, was laughing along, spraying me with orange pulp. I looked around for something stainless steel, like my father's slingshot. Seeing a brushed-steel curtain rod leaning against the back wall, I grabbed it and hacked off the stuffed rabbit's head. The shrink was looking at me with amazement. "I'll never talk to you again," I said. "And no one can make me."

4

The incident at the shrink's office had no external repercussions—I was passed into high school without further psychiatric/scholastic abuse. The doctor knew an immovable object when he saw one.

But I felt like a malfunctioning machine; as if there were a stripped gear inside me, one that could roam my body at will, troubleshooting for ways to make me look small under stress. When I played brain-movies in class, substituting faces and bodies, boy to boy, girl to girl and cross-gender, it was like an obstacle course, sex images assailing me without rhyme or reason. The randomness, the indiscriminate power of what I was making myself see was staggering; the need that I sensed behind it felt like an oncoming tidal wave of self-loathing. I know now that I was going insane.

I was saved by a comic-book villain.

His name was the "Shroud Shifter," and he was a recurring bad guy in "Cougarman Comix." He was a super criminal, a jewel-thief hit man who drove a souped-up amphibious car and snarled a retarded version of Nietzsche in oversize speech balloons. Cougarman, a moralistic wimp who drove a '59 Cadillac called the "Catmobile," always managed to throw Shroud Shifter in jail, but he always escaped a couple of issues later.

I loved him for his car and for a supernatural ability that he possessed—one that I sensed I could realistically emulate. The car was a gleaming angularity—all brushed steel, all mean business. It had headlights that flashed a nuclear death ray that turned people to stone; instead of gas, the engine ran on human blood. The upholstery was made of tawny cat hides—the flesh of archenemy Cougarman's martyred family. It had a steel hangman's pole sticking out of the trunk. Every time Shroud Shifter claimed a victim, his vampire girlfriend, Lucretia, a tall blonde with long fangs, would bite a notch in the wood.

Ridiculous trash? Admittedly. But the artwork was superb, and Shroud Shifter and Lucretia breathed a stylish, sensual evil. S.S. had a cylindrical bulge that extended almost down to the knee of his left pants leg; Lucretia's nipples were always erect. They were a high-tech god and goddess twenty years before high tech, and they were *mine*.

Shroud Shifter had the ability to disguise himself without changing costume. He got it from drinking radioactive blood and from concentrating on the person he wanted to rob or kill, so that he soaked up so much of that person's aura that he psychically resembled him and could ape his every move, anticipate his every thought.

S.S.'s ultimate goal was to achieve invisibility. That goal drove him, pushed him beyond his existing gift of *psychic* invisibility—being able to fit in anyplace, anywhere, anytime. Being *physically* invisible would give him a carte blanche ticket to take over the world.

Of course Shroud Shifter would never achieve that end—it would destroy his potential confrontations with Cougarman, and he was the comic book's hero. But S.S. was fiction, and I was flesh, blood and brushed-steel reality. I decided to make myself invisible.

My transits of silence and brain-movies had been a good training ground. I knew my mental resources were superb, and I had cut my human needs down to the bare minimum provided by my cipher mother: room, board and a few dollars a week for incidentals. But the quiet-outsider image I had carried as a shield for so long worked against me—I had no social graces, no sense of other people as anything but objects of derision, and if I was to successfully imitate Shroud Shifter's *psychic* invisibility, I would first have to learn to be ingratiating and conversant on the teenage topics that bored me: sports, dating, rock and roll. I would have to learn to *talk*.

And that terrified me.

I spent long hours in class, my brain-movies quashed as my ears trawled for information; in the boy's locker room I listened to lengthy, and lengthily embellished, conversations on penis size. Once I climbed a tree outside the girls' gym and listened to the giggles that rose above the hiss of showers. I picked up a lot of information, but was afraid to *act*.

So, admittedly out of cowardice, I retreated. I convinced myself that, although Shroud Shifter could get away without disguises, I couldn't. That limited the problem to the procuring of suitable body armor.

In 1965 there were three sartorial styles favored by middle-class L.A. teenagers: surfer, greaser and collegiate. The surfers, whether they actually surfed or not, wore white Levi cords, Jack Purcell "Smiley" tennis shoes and Pendelton's; the greasers, both gang members and pseudo "rebel" types, wore slit-bottomed khakis, Sir Guy shirts and honor farm watch caps. The collegiates favored the button-down/sweater/penny-loafer style that is still “in.” I figured that three outfits in each style would be sufficient protective coloration.

Then a fresh wave of fear hit me. I had no money for purchasing the clothes. My mother never left any cash lying around and was stingy to an extreme fault, and I was still too afraid to do what my heart most desired: break, enter and steal. Disgusted by my cautiousness, but still determined to put together a wardrobe, I seized on my mother’s three walk-in closets full of girlhood clothes she never wore.

In retrospect, I know that the scheme I concocted was undertaken out of desperate fear—a delaying tactic to put off my inevitable crash course in social dealings; but at the time it seemed the epitome of good sense. One day I ditched school and took an assortment of sharp kitchen knives into my mother’s bedroom closet. I was hacking a cape out of one of her old tweed overcoats when she came home from work early, caught me and started screaming.

I put up my hands in a placating gesture, still holding a serrated-edge steak knife. My mother screamed so loud that it seemed that her vocal cords would snap, then she managed to get out the word “animal” and pointed to my midsection. I saw that I had an erection, and dropped the knife; my mother slapped at me with clumsy open hands until the sight of blood trickling from my nose forced her to stop and run downstairs. In the course of ten seconds the woman who bore me went from cipher to archenemy. It felt like a homecoming.

Three days later, she gave me my formal reprimand: six months of silence. I smiled as my sentence was passed; it was a reprieve from my awful fears regarding the invisibility mission, and the opportunity to screen unlimited brain-movies.

Although my mother only intended for me to remain silent at home, I took her edict literally and took my silence everywhere I went. At school I would not speak, *even* when spoken to—I wrote out notes when teachers needed answers from me. This created a stir, and much speculation on my motives, the most common interpretation being that somehow I was protesting the war in Vietnam or expressing my solidarity with the Civil Rights movement. Since I was getting excellent grades on exams and written reports, my lack of speech was tolerated, although I was subjected to a battery of psychological tests. I rigged each test to show a completely different personality, flabbergasting school officials, who, after many failed attempts to get my mother to intervene, decided to let me graduate in June.

So now my classroom brain-movies were accompanied by the outright stares of my classmates, a number of whom thought I was "cool," "trippy" and "avant-garde." Breaking through seemingly impenetrable objects was the main theme, and the awed looks I was getting made me feel I could do *anything.*

Along with that feeling grew a bitter hatred for my mother. I took to prowling through her belongings, looking for ways to hurt her. One day I got an impulse to check out her medicine cabinet, and I found several prescription bottles of Phenobarbital. A light snapped on in my head, and I tore through the rest of her bedroom and bathroom. Underneath the bed, in a cardboard box, I got the confirmation I was seeking: empty prescription bottles of the sedative, scores of them, the dates on the labels going back to 1951. Inside the bottles were stuffed small pieces of paper covered with a tiny, indecipherable pencil scrawl.

Since I could not read my zombie-mother's words, I had to make her speak them out loud. The following day, at school, I passed a note to Eddie Sheflo, a surfer who was rumored to "think Marty's act was bitchen'." The note read:

"Eddie—

Can you cop me a dollar roll of #4 Bennies?"

The big blond surfer refused the dollar bill I was holding out and said, "You got it, strong silent type."

That afternoon, I substituted Benzedrine for Phenobarbital, and replaced the light bulb over my mother's medicine cabinet with a dud. Both types of pills were small and white, and I hoped the dim light would add to the confusion.

I sat downstairs to await the result of my experiment. My mother came home from work at her usual time of 5:40, nodded hello, then ate her usual chicken-salad sandwich and went upstairs. I waited in my father's favorite left-behind chair, absently perusing a stack of "Cougarman Comix."

At 9:10, there was a thumping on the stairs, and then my mother was standing in front of me, sweaty, bug-eyed and trembling in her slip. I said, "Hitting the carrot juice, Mom?" and she grabbed at her heart, hyperventilating. I said, "Funny, it never affects Bugs Bunny this way," and she started jabbering about sin and this awful boy she slept with on her birthday in 1939, and how she hated my father because he drank and was a quarter Jewish, and how we have to turn the lights off at night or the Communists will know what we're thinking. I smiled, said, "Take two aspirin with a carrot-juice chaser," and about-faced out of the house.

I prowled the neighborhood all night; then, at dawn, returned home. When I flicked on the living-room light, I saw red liquid dripping from a crack in the ceiling. I went upstairs to investigate.

My mother was lying dead in her bathtub. Her gashed arms were flopped over the sides, and the tub was full to the top with water and blood. A half-dozen empty Phenobarbital bottles were strewn across the floor, floating in inch-deep red water.

I skipped down the hall and called Emergency, telling them in an appropriately choked-up voice my address and that I had a suicide to report. While I waited for the ambulance, I gulped down big handfuls of my mother’s blood.

5

The Rosicrucians got the house, the car and all my mother's money; I got a custodianship hearing. Since I was within six months of high-school graduation and my eighteenth birthday, a formal foster home was deemed a waste of time, and my twelfth-grade guidance counselor told the juvenile authorities that I was "too inward and disturbed" to be cut loose as an "emancipated minor." My refusal to attend the funeral or contact my father in Michigan convinced him that I "needed discipline and guidance—preferably a male figure." So the Juvenile Housing Board sent me to live with Walt Borchard.

Walt Borchard was an L.A. cop, a big, fat, good-natured man in his early fifties. He had spent most of his twenty-three years with the L.A.P.D. on the elementary-school lecture circuit, delivering cautionary tales on dope, perverts and the evils of the criminal life, showing little kids his .38, chucking them under the chin and admonishing them to be "straight shooters." He was a widower with no children, and he lived in the largest apartment in a twelve-unit building that he owned. A one-room "bachelor" was always kept available for the homeless juveniles the housing board referred to him, and that twelve-by-eighteen crawl space a block from Hollywood Boulevard became my new home.

The previous tenant had been a hippie, and he left behind a deep-pile chartreuse rug, Beatles posters on the walls and a closetful of bell-bottoms, fringed vests and Day-Glo tennis shoes. "Acid head," said "Uncle" Walt when I moved in. "Got the notion he could fly. Flapped his arms and jumped off the Taft Building, and you know what? He was wrong. Went out stoned, though. Coroner said he was on a snootful of shit. You ain't got any crazy notions, have you?"

"I have vampire tendencies," I said.

Uncle Walt laughed. "So do I. Matter of fact, last night I bit the girl downstairs in number four. Listen, Marty, just lay off the dope and be nice to the other tenants, go to school and keep your pad clean and we'll get along great. The board's paying me to have you here, and I ain't looking to get rich, so I'll kick back thirty scoots a week for you to mess around with, and I'll keep you in groceries. You gotta observe curfew until your birthday, though, off the streets by eleven. Lots of nice necks to bite on the Boulevard, but wrap your biting up by 10:59. And if you need anything, you know where I am. I love to talk, and I ain't bad at listening."

The arrangement jelled. I now had a new neighborhood to learn, my very own safe harbor to return to and a new, glamorous aura at school: I was the guy who never shed a tear when he found his mother dead, the guy with his own "crib," the guy who bent the administration to his will with his extended silence and who now teased people with occasional one-liners like: "Blood reigns, come stains," and "Shroud Shifter will prevail." I felt like I was coming of age.

My life consisted of school and brain-movies, nighttime walks along the side streets bordering Hollywood Boulevard and captive hours spent listening to Uncle Walt Borchard's homespun philosophy. His one-liners were less terse than mine, and he was considering publishing them in book form when he retired from the L.A.P.D. Among his most-repeated nuggets of wisdom were:

"God bless the queers—more women for the rest of us";

"I wouldn't want the n——s moving into the neighborhood, but I'll be damned if I'll do anything to keep 'em out; and if they *do* move in, I'll be the first one to welcome 'em with a bucket of ribs and a big bottle of T-bird";

"We've got no business being in Vietnam unless we're willing to *win*—and *that* means dropping the hydrogen bomb";

"If God didn't want man to eat pussy, then why'd he make it look like a taco?"

And on and on. He was lonely and filled with guileless goodwill. His lack of mental resourcefulness and need for a constant audience disgusted me, and I dreaded his knocks on my door. But I kept still. Above all else, I knew the value of silence.

The new neighborhood was distressing because of its *lack* of silence. There was the constant nighttime roar of cars headed for the Boulevard, and heavy foot traffic, shoppers returning from the all-night markets on Sunset, and furtive hippies making dope buys in side-street shadows. Even the visual quality was noisy. The neon haze that blanketed the sky seemed to crackle and hiss with intimations of the sleaze it was heralding.

After five months in Hollywood, I gave up on neighborhood prowls and spent all my nights in my room, screening brain-movies. Sometimes Walt Borchard came over and insisted on talking; I tuned him right out and continued the show. More and more, the scenario revolved around the triad of Shroud Shifter, Lucretia and me, plundering in our brushed-steel car, seeking invisibility. The scenes became almost multidimensional—the *feel* of myself pressed between the super-criminals, the *scent* of motor oil and blood, the gurgling *sounds* our victims made when we attacked their jugulars. As an internal cinematographer I had improved greatly over the years, and now my prowess had grown to incorporate all the latest technical developments. My brain was equipped with deluxe color, wide screen, stereophonic sound and Smell-o-Vision. Had I been able to charge tickets for admission, I would have become a millionaire.

In April of ’66 I turned eighteen; in June, I graduated high school. I was now technically an adult, and could leave Walt Borchard’s care. Having no money and no job, I pondered my options. Then Uncle Walt told me I could stay for a nominal rent payment, and he would even help me find a job. The pathetic motive behind the offer was obvious. No one had ever listened to him so attentively as I had, and he couldn’t stand the thought of losing such an excellent audience. The symbiotic aspect of it all appealed to me, and I agreed to stay.

Borchard got me a job at the Hollywood Public Library, on Ivar just south of the Boulevard. My duties were to shelve books and walk into the Men’s Room and clear my throat loudly every half-hour—a strategy aimed at disturbing homosexual assignations. The pay was a dollar sixty-five an hour, and the work was tailor-made for me—I screened brain-movies all day.

One evening in June I came home from the library and found Uncle Walt cleaning out the garage in back of the building. Late sunlight was glinting off a collection of brushed-steel implements that he was wrapping in an oilcloth. The tools looked mean—like something Shroud Shifter would own. “What are they?” I asked.

Borchard held up an instrument that looked like a scalpel. “Burglar’s tools. This baby’s a lock pick and a gouger. You use the flat edge to slip the lock, and the sharp edge to whittle doorjambs. These other babies are a window snap, a push-drill and a chisel pry. Big daddy at the end is a suction-cup glass-cutter. What’s the matter, Marty? You look jittery.”

I took a deep breath and feigned indifference by shrugging. “Just a headache. Why do the handles have those deep brush marks? For a grip?”

Borchard hefted the chisel pry. “Partly, but mostly the ridges are there to prevent fingerprints. See, possession of burglar’s tools is a felony, and if a burglar gets caught with them it's a bust; and if he gets caught with them inside a pad he's burglarizing, it's an extra charge. But these heavy brush marks won't sustain fingerprints. So if he's inside a pad and we nail him, he can stash the tools and say 'Those things ain't mine,' even though it's patently obvious they are. The ridges also make a good backscratcher."

I smiled while Uncle Walt poked at his back with the handle of the chisel pry; then I said, "If they're illegal, how come you have them?"

Borchard draped a fatherly arm around my shoulders. "Marty baby, you're a smart kid, but a trifle naive. I was a burglary detective for three years before I joined the Speaker's Bureau, and you might say I managed to acquire a few things at a five-finger discount, if you catch my drift. Tools are a good thing for a man to have, and I use the gouger-pick to play darts with. Tack a picture of L.B.J. or one of them other liberal chumps to my wall and let fly. Thwack! Thwack! Thwack! Come on, let's go up to my pad. I've got a couple of frozen pizzas yelling 'Eat me!' "

That night I kept Borchard's monologues pinned to one subject: *burglary*. I did not have to feign rapt attention: this time it came of itself, as if the projector I used for brain-movies were on strike and I had found something better. I learned the practical uses of the beautiful brushed-steel tools; I picked up the rudiments of nullifying burglar-alarm wiring. I learned that dope addiction and a propensity for bragging about their exploits were the most common burglar downfalls, and that if a thief wasn't too greedy and rotated his target areas, he could elude capture indefinitely. Criminal types imprinted themselves in that part of my mind where only the logical lived: pad crawlers who stole cash and loose jewelry they could swallow if the cops showed up; credit-card thieves who ran up a string of purchases and sold the stuff to fences. Watchdog poisoners, rape-o burglars and brazen smash-and-grabbers joined Shroud Shifter in my mental entourage.

Around midnight, Borchard, groggy from pizza and beer, yawned and steered me toward the door. On my way out, he handed me the chisel pry. "Knock yourself out, kid. Tack up old L.B.J. and nail him a few times for Uncle Walt. But try not to hit the wall, that beaverboard's expensive."

The steel ridges seemed to burn themselves into my hand. I walked back to my room knowing that I now had the courage to *do it*.

6

The following night, I struck.

My day had been nothing but furious brain-movies and external shaking, and the head librarian twice asked me if I felt “under the weather”; but when dusk hit, a long-buried professionalism took me over, and my mind honed in on the exigencies of the job at hand.

I had already decided that the dwellings of solitary women would be my “meat,” and that I would only steal what I could reasonably carry on my person. I knew from previous Walt Borchard monologues that the area just south of the east Griffith Park Road was relatively cop-free—it was a low-crime middle-class neighborhood that required only cursory patrolling. Holding that inside information in front of my brain’s viewfinder, I walked there after work.

The streets off Los Feliz and Hillhurst were a mixture of stucco four-flats and small houses, narrow and broad front lawns. I circled the blocks from Franklin northward in a figure-eight pattern, checking for cars or the absence of them in driveways and for flimsy doors that looked ripe for prying and whittling. The pick-gouger rested in my back pocket, wrapped in a pair of rubber gloves I had purchased during my lunch hour. I was ready.

The sun started setting around seven-thirty, and I got the feeling that the driveways that were still empty would stay empty—there had been a big crush of people returning home from work between six and seven, but now incoming traffic was dwindling and I was seeing more and more dark houses bereft of cars. I decided to wait until full darkness hit, then *move*.

Twenty-five minutes later I was on New Hampshire Avenue, approaching Los Feliz. I hit a stretch of dark one-story houses and started walking across the front lawns, perusing mailboxes for the names of single women. The first four designated the inhabitants as “Mr. & Mrs.”; but the fifth house was *meat*—Miss Francis Gillis. I walked up to the door and rang the bell before fear could take hold.

Silence.

One ring; two rings; three. The darkness behind the front window seemed to deepen with the echo of each ringing, and I slipped on my gloves, got out my instrument and stuck it into the narrow space where the door met the doorjamb. My hands were shaking, and I was prepared to push, gouge and whittle. But then my tremors accelerated, and the flat edge of the pick nipped the lock slide just right. The door clicked open on a perfect fluke.

I stepped inside and eased the door shut, then stood perfectly still in the interior darkness, waiting for the shape of the front room to make itself known. My body from knees to pelvis tingled, and as I stood there thinking of Shroud Shifter, the feeling localized itself in my groin.

Then there was a scrabbling sound, and a powerful blunt force knocked me onto my back. Teeth snapped at my face, and I could feel a section of my cheek being ripped loose. Two yellowish eyes glowed immediately in front of me, huge and weirdly translucent. When I saw cataracts near the black pinpoints in the middle, I knew it was a dog and that Shroud Shifter wanted me to kill it.

The teeth snapped again; this time they grazed my left ear. I felt legs digging into my stomach, and I swung the gouging edge of my tool in and up, just where I thought the animal’s lower tract would be. It was a perfect imitation of S.S.’s gutting motion; and when the blade pierced skin, and entrails slid out warm and wet, I felt myself approaching orgasm. I rolled out from under the dog just as he began a series of reflex death snaps, pressing myself into the floor as I came. My eyes were now accustomed to the darkness, and I could see a pillow-strewn couch a few feet away. I dragged myself to it, grabbed a large tufted cushion and flung myself on the dog and smothered him.

My head was reeling as I got to my feet, found a floor lamp and turned it on, casting light on a Danish Modern living room with a Plunkett Modern still life square in the middle of it—bloodsoaked carpet, dead German shepherd with a crocheted pillow for a head. My hands were shaking, but a blank-framed brain-movie kept me calm inside. I set out to perform my first burglary.

In the bathroom I cleansed my cheek wound with witch hazel, then pressed a styptic pencil deep into the cut. Soon a crust formed, and I crisscrossed the area with tiny adhesive bandages and walked into the bedroom.

Slowly, methodically, I went to work. First I stripped off my bloodstained shirt, rolled it into a ball and rummaged in the closet until I found a blue button-down shirt that would not arouse suspicion on a man. I put it on and checked out the result in a wall mirror. Tight, but I did not look incongruous in it. My pants were soaked with blood and entrail residue, but they were dark, and the stains were not that noticeable. I could safely wear them home.

Thinking *loot*, I dug through drawers, cupboards and cabinets, coming away with a small cedar box full of twenty-dollar bills and a velvet box of sparkling stones and pearl strands that looked genuine. I thought about making a search for credit cards, but decided it was inadvisable. The dead dog might mean that this burglary would receive more police attention than usual, and I did not want to risk fencing cards that would be the object of special cop scrutiny. For a first-time “caper,” I had stolen enough.

With the gouger, cash and jewelry stuck in my pants pockets, I took a last walk through the house, turning off lights. When I picked up my bloodied shirt, Shroud Shifter sent me a little commemorative embellishment, and on my way to the door I dumped a box of dog biscuits by the shepherd’s pillowed head.

7

The night on New Hampshire Avenue was the beginning of my criminal apprenticeship and the start of a terrible series of conflicts—internal battles waged by the jigsaw pieces of my emerging drives. Over the next eleven months, I wondered if the different parts of me would ever reconcile themselves to the point where all the pieces would dovetail perfectly, allowing me to become the man of mean business I aspired to be.

I continued my burglary career two nights later, hitting three dark apartments on the same East Hollywood block, using only my pick-gouger to break and enter. I stole $400 in cash, a box of costume jewelry, sterling silverware and a half-dozen credit cards; and it wasn't until I was home safely that I realized I was disappointed—my triple success felt like an anticlimax. A window punch job the following night forced the reason consciously into my brain: my first B & E had been blood and grit and viscera and courage, my subsequent ones a refining of skills, and not nearly so exciting. The realization sank in as the need for circumspection and super-caution; I must never, *ever*, get caught. Intellectually, that realization held me—for a while.

But other truths came hard on its heels.

For one, I could not bring myself to sell or fence the jewelry and credit cards I stole. I was afraid of establishing criminal connections that might make me vulnerable to blackmail, and I needed to *touch* the concrete rewards of my deeds. The hard plastic embossed with anonymous women's names made their *lives* feed into my brain-movies, so that each card was good for hours and hours of escape from boredom. The jewelry gave added tactile weight to my screenings, and I never even bothered to learn whether it was real or fake.

So, as my burglary forays progressed, my only practical "take" was money, usually accrued in tiny amounts. I retained my library job, and kept my stolen cash in a savings account. Walt Borchard taught me how to drive, and early in '68, six months into my apprenticeship, I got a driver's license and bought a car, an innocuous '60 Valiant. It was while charting wider territory in it that my most dangerous conflict came into focus.

A dreary Valley neighborhood of tract houses was unfolding in my windshield, and from the number of children playing in cement front yards I could tell that single women were at a minimum. I decided to head west toward Encino, but *something* kept me pressed to the edge of the right lane, with my *eyes* pressed to the identically laid-out driveways I was passing. Then a stray dog ambled down the sidewalk, and the picture within the picture hit me.

I had been staring at circular pet doors inset in the regular side doors that were stationed in the same place on every house I had passed for a half-dozen blocks. Suddenly I could *smell* the house on New Hampshire Avenue ten months before—a metallic scent that filled my nostrils and made my hands quiver on the steering wheel. I pulled to the curb, and the memory came back full. Along with it there was a bombardment of flashbacks from my other senses—the *taste* of my mother's blood mixed with water; Beware of the Dog signs I had seen while choosing previous burglary sites; how it *felt* to climax. The dog on the sidewalk started to look like Shroud Shifter's hated foe, Cougarman. Then the *acquired* sense of reason took hold, and I got out of that dreary and dangerous neighborhood before it could hurt me.

At home that night, I fondled my pick-gouger and shut down the movie theatre that was there to entertain me twenty-four hours a day. When a blank screen was in front of my eyes, I filled it up with what I knew and what I should do about it, in plain typeface that left me no room for embellishment.

You have been unconsciously trying to relive killing the dog;

You have been doing that because the excitement made you come;

You have been taking needless risks in order to achieve sexual gratification;

If you continue taking those risks, you will be caught, tried and convicted of burglary;

You must stop.

My brain-typewriter flashed a series of huge question marks in response to the last statement, and as they struck blank paper they felt like blows to the heart. I gripped my gouger harder and harder, and my mind flailed for the answer to the most self-destructive dilemma known to man. Then another set of statements hit:

Cut it off—don't let it be the death of you;

Hold it in like Shroud Shifter;

But he has Lucretia;

Make yourself have dreams that will give you release;

But that is betraying myself;

Do what *everyone* does to *them*self;

No;

No;

No.

Touch yourself, maim yourself or kill yourself; but do it *now*.

I stripped, and walked to the full-length mirror on my bathroom door. Staring at my image, I saw a tall, bony boy-man with pasty skin and fierce brown eyes. I recalled the sleeptime explosions that had come not from dreams but from an accumulation of hateful images from my brain-movies, and I thought of how shameful it felt when I awoke to proof of what I secretly desired. My heart pounded, and shortness of breath made my whole body flutter. I held the sharp edge of the gouger to the underside of my genitals, then to my throat. I drew thin trickles of blood at both places, then gasped at what I was doing and hurled myself away from the mirror and onto my bed. There, with the handle of the burglar's tool making brushed-steel indentations in my groin, I wept and gave myself release—the bitter price of being able to continue.

8

My brush with self-annihilation filled me with a resolve to fantasize less and steal more. The diminished mental life hurt, but the boldness I gained in its backlash staunched the festering of the wound. In a week I pulled five jobs, each in the jurisdiction of a different police department, each with a different form of entry, netting a total of seven hundred dollars and change, two Rolex watches and a Smith & Wesson .38 that I planned to file down until it was completely ridge-surfaced—the ultimate burglar's weapon. Then fate bonded me to history, and my ascent and descent began at the same time.

It was June 5, 1968, the night after Robert Kennedy was shot in L.A. He was lying close to death at Good Samaritan Hospital, the place where I was born. The T.V. news showed huge crowds holding a vigil outside the hospital, and huge crowds meant empty dwellings. Walt Borchard had told me that residental areas surrounding medical facilities were loaded with nurses—good places to "patrol for pussy." The combination of factors spelled "burglar's heaven," and I drove downtown with visions of big empty houses dancing in my head.

Wilshire Boulevard was a constant stream of horn-blasting cars, a premature funeral procession. The sidewalk in front of the hospital was packed with gawkers and premature mourners weeping and waving placards, and hippies were selling "Pray for Bobby" bumper stickers. There were a number of women wearing nurse's uniforms in the crowd, and a nice solid feeling started to grow in the pit of my stomach. I parked in a lot on Union Avenue, several blocks east of Good Samaritan, and went walking.

My initial fantasies about the neighborhood had been inaccurate. There were no big houses, only ten- and twelve-story tenement-type buildings. I lost my solid feeling when I tried the outside doors of the first three red brick monoliths I came to and found them locked. Then, at the corner of Sixth and Union, I looked back on the block I had passed and saw floor after floor of dark windows, in building after building with identical side-access fire escapes. I retraced my steps and began squinting upward for *open* windows.

The third building on the east side of the street caught my eye; it had a half-open window on the fifth floor, within an arm's length of the fire-escape landing. I looked around for possible witnesses, saw none, and dragged an empty garbage can over to just below the fire escape's drop rungs. Swallowing a teeth-chattering burst of fear, I stepped on top of it and hoisted myself up.

The night was clear but moonless, and I pulled on my gloves and forced myself to tiptoe like Shroud Shifter did when he approached a victim. At the fifth-floor landing, I looked out and down, again saw no one watching me, and tried the fire-escape door. It was unlocked, and beyond it there was a long, threadbare hallway. It was the safer access route—if my target door could be easily snapped. But the window, with three feet and a sixty-foot drop between me and it, somehow seemed more powerful and sinister.

With my right leg stuck out to full extension, I tried to lift the window. It stuck, but as my foot gained purchase, I was able to push it open all the way. Squatting down, I flung my leg into the dark space beyond it, anchoring myself. Then, before I could panic, I pushed off the landing with my other foot, grabbed the wooden window frame with both hands and executed a perfect silent entry.

I was now standing in a modest living room. As my eyes became accustomed to the dark, I saw a mismatching sofa and chairs; brick and board bookshelves stuffed with paperbacks; a hallway off at a right angle directly in front of me. A strange sound was coming from the far end of it, and I went tingly with the thought of a possible watchdog. Pulling out my gouger, I treaded down the hallway until I saw an open door spilling candlelight and what I knew immediately to be the sounds of lovemaking.

A man and woman were on the bed, entwined. They were covered with sweat, and were moving snakelike, in counterpoint movements: him relentlessly forward, up and down, in and out; her sideways with her hips, jabbing outward with crossed legs wrapped around her partner's back. A candle sitting atop a bookshelf acted in concert with a light breeze blowing from an open window, sending long flutters of light through the darkness—a flame dance that ended at the point where the lovers were joined.

Their moans rose, subsided, became half-verbal gasps. I watched the candlelight illuminate him inside of her. Each flicker made the point of bonding both more beautiful and more gutter-explicit. I stared, transfixed, oblivious to the risk I was taking. I don't know how long I was standing there, but after a while I began to anticipate the lovers' movements, and then I started moving with them, silently, from a distance that seemed vast but intimate. Their hips rose and fell; mine did also, in perfect synchronization, brushing an empty space that felt alive with growing things. Soon their moans escalated in unison, reaching toward a point where they would never subside. I caught myself about to cry out with them, then bit down on my tongue as Shroud Shifter sent me professional caution. At that point my whole being rocketed into my groin, and the two lovers and I came together.

They lay gasping, clutching each other fiercely; I pressed my back into the wall to hold down the residual shock waves of my explosion. I pressed harder and harder, until I thought my spine would crack; then I heard whispers, and a radio voice filled the bedroom. A somber-voiced announcer was saying that Robert Kennedy was dead. The woman started to sob, and the man whispered, “Sssh. Ssssh. We knew it was going to happen.”

The last three words startled me, and I moved back down the hall to the living room. I saw a pair of cord trousers draped across an armchair and a purse on the floor next to it. With one eye on the candlelight glow emanating from the bedroom, I pulled a billfold from the back pocket of the cords and a wallet from the open purse. Then I eased myself out the door before the beautiful candle magnet could draw me back to the lovers.

—

At the car, before I could even bring myself to examine my loot, I had an eerie moment of clarity. I knew I had to do it again and again, and unless my criminal profits made the risk worthwhile, I would die from submission to that desire. I thought of the jewelry and credit cards hidden in my closet at home, and of the names and hangouts of fences Walt Borchard had mentioned in his many beery monologues. I drove home, picked up my stash and went out to carve another notch on my professionalism. En route I felt sated; gently calm but determined. *Loving.*

My calmness turned to apprehension as I parked on Cahuenga and Franklin, a half block from the Omnibus—infamous “O.B.’s,” the place Walt Borchard called “a pus pocket even by Hollywood standards, a real carnival of lowlifes; fences, bikers, hookers, dope dealers, junkies and fruits.” Even before I walked in the door I could see his appraisal validated. There were a half-dozen motorcycles parked on the sidewalk in front of the low cement building, and a group of roughlooking men in leather jackets were passing around a bottle of whiskey. Pushing through the swinging doors, I saw that the inside was a grand tour of things I had never seen.

There was a bandstand at the front of the large, smoky room. Shirtless Negro men were pounding conga drums on top of it, and a white man in back of them was swinging a colored arc light in the direction of the horseshoe-shaped dance floor. There was a line of youths, both male and female, standing at the periphery of the gyrating throng of dancers, and every few seconds one of them would move toward a door I could glimpse in back of the bandstand.

Walking into the low-life maelstrom, I fingered the loot in my windbreaker pockets for luck and courage. Joining the line of hippies, I got a clear look at the dance floor. Men were dancing with men, and women with women. I caught the scent of a ripe, musky substance and knew it had to be marijuana. Then I felt an elbow in my side, and a marijuana stick was in my face. “Toke,” a girl with stringy red hair said. “It’s Acapulco Gold. You’ll fly.”

I thought of Shroud Shifter and psychic invisibility, then said, “No thanks. Not my scene.”

The girl narrowed her eyes at me and took a “toke” herself. Exhaling, she said, “Are you a nark?”

“No, I came here to do business.”

“Buying or selling?”

“Selling.”

“Groovy. Grass? Speed? Acid?”

S.S. was whispering “when in Rome” in my ear. Impulsively I said “toke,” and grabbed the joint. I put it between my lips and dragged deeply. The smoke burned, but I held it in until it felt like a hot poker was singeing my lungs. Then I belched the smoke out and gasped, “Jewelry, watches, credit cards.”

The girl toked and said, “I’m Lovechild. Are you a criminal or something?” She handed me back the joint, and as I sucked in the smoke I could see Shroud Shifter and Lucretia doing a slow grind together on the dance floor. Other dancers bumped into them, and Lucretia snapped at their necks until they backed off. Within seconds the dancers were on their *knees*, and S.S. and Lucretia were *naked* and coiled together in a serpentlike mass of arms and legs. I toked again, and heard music oozing from the bandstand: “I gotta get high, and fry on the sky! Geez some china white in a purple haze thigh! Don’t ask why!”

Lovechild shoved herself against me and pouted, “Don’t Bogart!

Don't Bogart! It's expensive!" With my eyes still on Shroud Shifter and Lucretia, I reached into my right windbreaker pocket for a lady's Rolex to keep her calmed down. My hand closed on metal, and I pulled what I was grasping out. Then someone shouted, "He's got a gun!"

The line of hippies parted, and Shroud Shifter and Lucretia vanished. I heard the jabbered syllables "fuzz," "heat" and "pig" over and over. Reality clicked in, and I forced my marijuana-addled brain to come up with the name of the "boss fence" that Walt Borchard said worked out of O.B.'s. I trained my unloaded .38 at Lovechild and hissed, "Cosmo Veitch. Get him."

The crowd was getting itchy; I could feel them sizing me up. I had my height and square clothes going for me, but aside from that I was bone-skinny and only twenty years old. If someone decided to turn on normal indoor lights, I would be exposed as a non-cop imposter.

Old brain-movies and memories came to my aid; I felt my features congeal into my "don't fuck with me, I'm psycho" stare. Shroud Shifter was whispering words of encouragement and pointing at his diaphragm; I knew he wanted me to speak in a deep, tough guy's voice. "Ease back, citizens," I said. "This isn't a bust, this is just between me and Cosmo."

The remark seemed to nullify the crowd. I could see tense faces unclench in relief, and the dancers immediately in front of me backed off onto the floor and resumed gyrating. I saw that I was still holding my .38 at waist level, and that the line of hippies had dispersed. I was concentrating on keeping my face in darkness when I heard a male voice in back of me. "Yes, Officer?"

I swiveled slowly and smiled at the voice. It belonged to a boy-man with hard eyes, a hard, short body, granny glasses and a ponytail hairdo. I said, "Someplace quiet," and pointed my gun toward the back of the bandstand. Cosmo walked ahead, and led me to a small room filled with bar stools and disconnected jukeboxes. The light was bright and harsh, and I kept my whole being concentrated on looking and sounding older than my years. "I'm Shifter," I said. "I've been working Daywatch Burglary out in the Valley and I've heard good things about you." With my gun pointed to the floor, I emptied the contents of both my windbreaker pockets onto a bar stool. Cosmo whistled at the accumulation of jewelry, watches and credit cards. S.S. was making "be cool" gestures, and I sighed and said, "Name a figure, I haven't got all night."

Cosmo fondled the two Rolexes, then poked through the jewelry, holding several red stones up to the light. “Five hundred,” he said.

I felt another jolt of the marijuana. “Cash, not trash.” Shroud Shifter’s “be cool” motions got more emphatic, and I added, “Six hundred.”

Cosmo took a roll from his pocket. He peeled off six hundred-dollar bills and handed them to me, then pointed to a back door. I stuck my gun in my pocket, bowed and exited like a great actor leaving the stage after curtain calls for a bravura performance. I had conquered sex and achieved psychic invisibility on the same day. I was inviolate; I was golden.

9

Watching.

Stealing.

Watching *and* stealing.

I spent a feverish twenty-four hours trying to reconcile the dual logistics. The homes of young married couples? No, too risky.

Surveillance of attractive young women with sleep-over boyfriends? No, too hit-or-miss. Finally an idea dawned, and I walked down the hall and knocked on Uncle Walt Borchard's door.

"Friend or foe?" Uncle Walt called out.

"Foe!" I called back.

"Enter, foe!"

I opened the door. Uncle Walt was sitting on the living-room couch, wolfing his usual dinner of pizza and beer, a newspaper spread on the floor to catch cheese drip. "I…I need to talk," I said in a mock-sheepish voice.

"Sounds serious. Sit down and have a slice."

I took a chair across from Borchard and declined the pizza he pointed to. "Have you ever worked Vice?" I asked.

Borchard chewed and laughed at the same time—as complex a feat as he was capable of. Swallowing, he said, "That *does* sound serious. You okay, Marty?"

"S—s—sure. Have you?"

"No, I haven't. Are you in trouble, kid?"

"No. The vice squad arrests prostitutes, right?"

"Right."

"And call girls? You know, like really good-looking prostitutes? Not the cheap hooker type, but, you know, *beautiful* girls, girls who have their own apartments to take guys to so it's not cheesy, like in a motel?"

Borchard laughed so hard that an anchovy popped out of his mouth and landed on the coffee table in front of him. He popped it back in, rechewed it and said, "Marty, are you looking to get laid?"

I lowered my eyes. "Yes."

"Kid, it's 1968. Girls are giving it away like never before."

"I know, but—"

"Have you tried Patty downstairs? She's spread her legs so many times they'll have to bury her in a Y-shaped coffin."

"She's ugly, and she's got pimples."

"Then put a paper bag over her head and buy her a tube of Clearasil."

I forced out a trickle of crocodile, tears, and Uncle Walt said, "Aw shit, kid, I'm sorry. You're a cherry, right? You're a late starter, and you want a nice-looking cooze for your premiere fuck?"

I wiped my nose and said, "Yes."

Uncle Walt got up and ruffled my hair, then went into his bedroom. He returned a moment later and handed me a hundred-dollar bill. "Don't say I never gave you anything, and don't say I never bent the rules for a buddy."

I put the money in my shirt pocket. "Gee, thanks, Uncle Walt."

"My pleasure. Now listen real close, and in an hour or so you will be de-virginized. *Are* you listening?"

"Yes."

"Good. Here's some astonishing information: the L.A.P.D., of which I am a member, *does* allow a certain amount of high-line prostitution to go on in the Hollywood area. Isn't that *shocking*? Well, there's a part of the Boulevard, just West of La Brea, loaded with call-girl cribs. The girls hang out at the better hotel bars—like the Cine-Grill at the Roosevelt, the Yamashiro Skyroom, the Gin Mill at Knickerbocker and so forth. The girls sit at the bar and sip cocktails and eye the single men, and it doesn't take a genius to figure out what they do for a living. The standard operating procedure is that they mention a figure and suggest that you adjourn to their pad. The standard pop for an all-nighter is a C-note, which I just happened to press into your horny paw. Now, you're under the drinking age, so act frosty when the bartender asks what you're having. Act gentlemanly with the lady of your choice, tell her a C-note is tops, and pour her the pork till the hogs holler for hell."

I stood up. Uncle Walt chucked me under the chin and laughed. "Some young lady's gonna burn more rubber than the San Berdoo Freeway. Now get out of here, my pizza's getting cold."

—

An hour later I was not getting "de-virginized." I was sitting at the bar of the Hollywood Roosevelt Cine-Grill, watching a woman in a tight black sequined dress make small talk with a bluff-hearty man wearing a summer suit dotted with conventioner's buttons. The woman was a bleached redhead, but pretty; the man had a solid, muscular look. I sipped a Scotch and soda and kept my nervousness at bay by imagining them as Shroud Shifter and Lucretia, unwinding from a long day of stalking victims. I could almost *feel* the two together in bed.

They left the bar abruptly. As they got up to leave, I realized I was screening brain-movies, and that I had lost sight of them in physical reality. I counted to ten and pursued.

I saw them get into a cab in front of the hotel, and I ran for my car. The cab was easy to follow; traffic on the Boulevard was heavy, and they got stuck at the back of a line of cars at La Brea. I was right behind, reaching under the seat for my gloves and gouger. When the light turned green, I smiled: the cab was already pulling to the curb; Uncle Walt's "call-girl block" had been gospel.

The couple got out of the cab. I parked hastily two car-lengths in back and watched them enter a large pink apartment building shaped like a southern plantation house. The woman did not use a key to open the front door, so I had my initial access. I waited ten seconds, then sprinted full-out, slowing as I opened the door on a long, pink-carpeted hallway. The two were just entering an apartment at the far left end of the hall.

I scanned mailboxes and willed the aura of a cool young man who belonged in an outré pink plantation on Hollywood Boulevard. It was easy, and affecting such supreme nonchalance made me feel brazen. There were no people in the hallway, but a variety of T.V. and stereo noise was booming from inside individual apartments, so that there was a general high noise level. I walked toward my target, checking out the doors on my way. The opener knobs were not reinforced, and there was at least a sixteenth of an inch's play at the door-doorjamb junctures. If the hooker hadn't set an inside chain, I could enter.

At my target door I listened for the sound of pre-sex amenities; all I could hear and *sense* on the other side was silence. Giving the hall a quick eye circuit, I slipped on my gloves, inserted the pick side of my tool and jiggled at the lock. I could feel individual spring-slides give one at a time, and when the third one clicked softly, I pushed the door open a fraction of an inch—just enough to glimpse a dark living room–dinette. Shaking my head to keep brain-movies away, I entered, twisting the doorknob out and then closing the door soundlessly.

Voices, not sounds of passion, drew me in the direction of the bedroom, and glimpses of flawed bodies were what I saw through the crack in the door. My heart crashed as I held an eye up to my inch-wide viewfinder. He was flabby; she had tattoos on her shoulders and thighs. Her pubic hair was obviously dyed to match the shade of her head; he kept his socks on. I tried to make them into Shroud Shifter and Lucretia, but my brain camera wouldn't focus, and their voices were so grating that I knew their lovemaking would be hideous—and I could never join them.

"…I been in this building before," the man was saying. "When I was in L.A. with the Moose convention in '64."

"Lots of working girls work out of here," the hooker answered. "Some of them I run myself. You wanta get started?"

"Not so fast. You're a *madam*?"

The hooker sighed. "More like a big-sister confidante, like a therapist, really. I *do* fix up dates and take a cut, but I like to be a pal, like a big sister who knows the ropes."

"Whaddaya mean?"

"Well, once a week I get together with the working girls I know, and we shmooze and talk tricks, and *you know*."

The man giggled. "You ever make it with another chick?"

The woman groaned. "Oh, Jesus. Look, I think I'm gonna need a drink for this. You want one too? Maybe it'll quiet—"

I saw what was about to happen, and padded for the door. When my hand was on the knob, I saw a purse lying on a chair a few feet away. I grabbed it, and managed to extricate myself from the apartment just as the bedroom door started to open. Then I ran.

—

The purse yielded $9.43 and sexual information that kept me watching, hoping, stalking and sometimes stealing for over a year. The money, of course, was negligible. It was the hooker's notebook that kept me busy.

It was a makeshift ledger of customers, their phone numbers and the dates of their prescheduled assignations, and a list of the other girls that Carol Ginzburg, the "Therapist-Confidante" "ran," along with the names and phone numbers of the "tricks," and notations as to whether the "date" would be held at a motel, the "trick pad" or the girl's apartment itself. It boiled down to a wealth of possible watching-stealing sites, and in the case of the preset "dates," it allowed me the time to perform reconnaissance forays before the assignation.

With Shroud Shifter determination, I set out to write my own ledger. First, using the normal L.A. "white pages" and Walt Borchard's police "reverse" directory, I compiled a list of addresses to go with the phone numbers; then, one weekend when Uncle Walt was out of town on a fishing trip, I staged a break-in of the back garage and stole the remainder of his set of burglar's tools, his power lawn mower and an allegedly valuable stack of *National Geographics*. The mower and magazines I dumped in the Silverlake Reservoir; the tools I wrapped in a nylon tarpaulin and stashed in a hollowed-out tree trunk two blocks away.

Next came a series of "recon" missions.

Carol Ginzburg and her "girls" met each Sunday for brunch at the Carolina Pines coffee shop on Sunset and La Brea—it was designated in her ledger as "girltalk." I eavesdropped at three of their sessions, and studied the "girls" themselves, eliminating "Rita," "Suzette" and "Starr" as stupid floozies; sizing up "Danielle," "Lauri" and "Barb" as acceptable for one-third of a triad melding. Lauri was particularly lovely—a tall, stately honey blonde with a Scandinavian accent. I decided that I would hit her "trick pad" dates first, and set out to chart the territory and hone my breaking-and-entering skills.

I did it all very methodically. Lauri had a date in Coldwater Canyon every third Wednesday; I checked out the house, found it impregnable, with home-to-police-station wiring, and crossed it off my list. She had a once-a-month Monday tryst in one of the less plush sections of Beverly Hills; the windows were child's play and there was plenty of hedge cover adjoining the bedrooms. That was to be "hit" number one, on August 7, 1968.

And so on down the list, with Lauri's dates first, Barb's second and Danielle's third. The three girls all lived in Carol Ginzburg's pink plantation house, so actual "at-home" tricks would have to be bypassed—I could not risk repeated burglaries in the same building. Also, some of the trick pads were too well exposed and too burglar-proof, and had to be eliminated. But when all was said and done, I had a list of nineteen "probables," all cased and calendar-marked—tryst burglaries that, if all went well, would last me until January 1970. And I had a built-in fail-safe: the girltalk coffee klatches. If the police had been alerted to the rash of hooker-connected burglaries, I would be among the first to know.

In the daytime, my life continued as usual as I waited for the seventh of August—I worked at the library, ran brain-movies, willed psychic invisibility. But at night, I *worked* at my hideaway—an abandoned maintenance shed I had discovered deep in the Griffith Park woods. In the glow of a battery-powered arc light I learned the *feel* of all six keyhole picks in my tool set, the imperceptible little *give* they activated when inserted and jiggled. I bought dozens of brand-new brushed-steel door locks at hardware stores, and got to know how to nullify the various brand names. I practiced windows with my suction-cup glass tool; I ran the dark hills of the park to build up my wind in case I ever had to flee a trick pad on foot. I came to believe that my first burglary year was an incredible mélange of chance, heedless bravado and beginner's luck. I had been a child voyager then. Now I was a consummate craftsman.

—

August 7, 1968.

The notation in Carol Ginzburg's trick book said 9:00 P.M., so I left for Beverly Hills at 7:30 to facilitate the means to a last-minute brainstorm. The night was stifling hot, cloying. I parked in a meter space on Wilshire three blocks from my target and walked over, assuming the easy gait of someone with plenty of time and nothing to fear. At Charleville and Le Doux I saw the home of Mr. Murray Stanton, lit up like a Christmas tree in anticipation of a hot night with Lauri. Passing the driveway on the sidewalk, I could hear the window-mounted air conditioner humming at full power. I walked casually over and cut the cord, nipping it just at the point where it stuck out of the window and into the machine. Squatting down, I admired my work. The cord was frayed on its own, and the break looked natural. I walked into the backyard and squatted behind a line of rosebushes to wait.

At 8:20 I could hear a male voice muttering "Shit"; seconds later I heard windows being opened on both sides of the house. I caught a glimpse of Murray Stanton in silhouette. From a distance he looked as if he could pass for Shroud Shifter.

At 9:00 exactly, the front door chimes sounded. I slipped on my gloves, shut my eyes, ran brain-movies and counted to five hundred simultaneously. Then I walked to the window farthest from the bedroom and elbowed myself up and into the dark house.

Squeals of ecstasy directed me to the bedroom door. I could see that it was pressed shut—not locked, and there was a light coming from beneath it. Taking a chance on the lovers having their eyes shut, I toed the door open an inch.

Murray Stanton was lying on top of Lauri, pumping, and the plague of acne cysts on his back made him an insult to Shroud Shifter. Lauri, tall, blond and regal from what I could see of her body, was examining a framed photograph which had been resting on a nightstand beside the bed, with her other hand resting on Stanton's pimpled shoulder, her fingers pushed out as if she was afraid the pustules might be contagious. *She* was the moaner, and she was a bad actress; the peak of her performance was when she put down the picture to scratch her nose. She was beautiful enough to be Lucretia, but she reminded me of someone else, someone strong and Nordic buried in a deep compartment in my memory vault.

I continued to watch, unaroused. After a while, Lauri stopped squealing and bit at the fingernails of each hand. Stanton's movements became more frenzied, and he blurted breathlessly, "I'm gonna come! Say 'It's so big!' Say 'It's so big it hurts!' "

Lauri mouthed the words, trying to hold back giggles. The satirical note in her voice would have been obvious to anyone but a piggish acne case approaching orgasm. I walked back to the living room, Shroud Shifter at my side, whispering, *"Steal, steal, steal."*

In the living room, I started to obey. I was reaching for a billfold atop a coffee table when I got an astonishing typed-out brain message: *Don't steal, because the acne pig will blame Lauri, and then you won't know who she is.*

The message was so powerful that by reflex I complied. But on my way to the window I pocketed a tiny framed photograph of a trio of smiling children.

—

Watching.

Stealing.

Watching *and* stealing.

Those twin pursuits ruled my waking hours over the next year, and nightmares ruled my sleep. I had hoped that man-woman-me would be my trinity, but it wasn't. It was a triad of: watch perfunctory sex motivated by greed and desperation; steal for emotional survival and the rationale for watching; dream to figure out the mystery of Lauri. That my dreams inevitably became nightmares was the worst part.

Laurel Hahnerdahl was Lauri's real name, and from impersonating a police officer over the telephone I learned that she was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1943, and that she came to America in

1966. Her occupation was listed as "model," she had no relatives in the United States and she possessed no criminal record. That was all the Department of Motor Vehicles and the L.A.P.D. Records Bureau could give me.

We could not possibly have ever met, but she seemed almost symbiotically familiar to me. I prowled her apartment twice and found nothing to jog my memory; I observed four of her dates, without stealing, and still could not decipher the mystery. I dreamt of her constantly, and it was always the same: I was watching her make love to a man who looked like Shroud Shifter, and my vision got blurry, so I moved closer, only to turn into a sightless, armless, legless, voiceless inanimate object. All I could do was hear—and then I heard thunder—crashing thunder hiding thousands of unintelligible voices trying to tell me what Lauri meant. My nightmare would invariably end at that point, and I would wake up erect and drenched in sweat.

Lauri returned to Denmark in April of '69, and Carol Ginzburg threw a brunch in her honor to celebrate her return to her homeland. I was distressed to see her go—and angry at myself for not having solved who she was—but with her departure came a diminuendoing of my nightmares, and I was able to put the riddle she represented out of my mind.

So I continued to watch and steal, until the hope of ever again feeling what I did on June 5, 1968, died from too many turgid bed performances, too many pathetic expressions of loneliness. With my disillusionment in watching came a concurrent new joy in stealing, and I ran up eleven straight scores, pawning the loot to Cosmo Veitch, reveling in the fact that although he finally figured out I wasn't a policeman, he at least was heartily afraid of me. From the late summer of '68 to the midsummer of '69 he paid me a total of seven thousand two hundred dollars for the goods I stole. I kept the cash in a steel safe-deposit box at a bank on La Brea, holding it for the time when I would quit my library job and move out of Walt Borchard's low-life building.

But in August of '69 a series of events coincided to temporarily halt my criminal career. Sharon Tate and four others were butchered at her Benedict Canyon house, and when coupled with the similar La Bianca slayings on the other side of town in the Los Feliz district, the murders spelled panic and created a boom in all manner of security devices and services. Angelenos were buying guns and watchdogs, and were buttressing themselves against the still-uncaptured killers in specific, and the 1960's in general. Burglary was getting to be a riskier business.

And Carol Ginzburg finally put two and two together and connected the trick-pad robberies to her stolen "John" book. I listened at the Sunday restaurant brunch as she told her girls "coincidence, shmoincidence, something strange is going on." She described her theory of a very cool robber who only hit intermittently out of caution, and how she was hiring a private detective to look into things. I paid my check and left the coffee shop as she spoke.

With watching and stealing gone, all that was left of my trinity were the nightmares. Even with Lauri gone, they came back, whispers taunting me between peals of thunder. I did not know what they were saying, but when I woke up, I could taste blood.

10

Without limbs to propel me and sight to guide me, my dreams became excursions into weightlessness. I was the prey of noises that tossed me about like a rag doll; I was at the mercy of thunder that singed my body. Only an undercurrent of consciousness kept the lid on my nightmares and saved me from the ruination of terror-induced insomnia. I knew, during the worst of the buffeting, that feeling the thunder-heat meant I could not possibly be disembodied. When I awoke each morning both refreshed and filled with a residue of fear, I knew that I possessed an automatic-pilot device that would always keep me short of the edge.

Yet, still I dreaded sleep, and sought to postpone it through the pursuit of utter exhaustion.

With my bank account as a cushion, I quit the library job and spent my days expending physical energy. I joined a gym in West L.A. and lifted weights for two hours daily; in the course of a month my lean frame started to cord over with muscle. I ran the Griffith Park hills until lightheadedness made me collapse and hot showers at home felt like benevolent heat. Then, at night, I disembodied others.

It was a ritual spurred by awareness of my own body and driven by a desire to quash the nightmares. I became a trawler after human beings in their most prosaic poses, a brain-movie director adept at improvising drama out of street passersby and their throwaway gestures. Night after night I cruised the slow lanes, watching. I saw hands pluck at trouser legs and hemlines and *knew* how those people took their sex; neon lights shimmying across gang boys in tank tops told me why they did the things they did. My brain camera had an automatic slow-motion lens, and when beautiful bodies demanded an extra-close scrutiny to yield the truth of their poetry, that device clicked in and let me linger on all the lovely swells and junctures of flesh.

After a few weeks of mobile watching, my nightmares de-escalated, and I went from movie director to surgeon in an effort to kill them off altogether. My experimental surgery involved cross-gender limb transplants—men's legs to women's torsos, women's faces to men's bodies, with special attention paid to the mental incisions that made the grafts possible. Driving close to the curb, I would take a bead on a hand-holding couple, then slow down until we were moving at the same speed. When streetlights illuminated their faces, I amputated limbs and heads and rearranged the parts; effortlessly, bloodlessly. And although unable to express the meaning of the act in words, I knew I was evolving three-way symbiotic unions that transcended sex.

The combination of daytime exertion and nighttime brain-movies finally brought my dreams to the point where they were no more than an occasional nuisance. As a precaution against their recurring in force, I slept with the light on, and if I happened to awake during the night I would walk to the full-length mirror on my bathroom door and stare at my own body. I was strong now, and getting stronger, and when I touched probing fingers to my muscles I felt an almost electric charge. The charge would run down to my groin and end at a verbal terminus: the word *burglary*.

I succeeded in pushing the word and its giddy connotations aside for weeks, until, in early October, a series of bodies stirred the old embers, and fate supplied the wind that forced me into a brushfire.

I was driving north on Pacific Coast Highway at dusk, wending my way toward the Topanga Canyon turn-in, the Valley, and watching. It was unseasonably warm, and groups of surfers crowded the blacktop that paralleled the beach. Male and female, they were all young and lithe, and my foot eased off the gas involuntarily. A foursome caught my eye: two boys, two girls, all sleek brunettes. My mind went into a pre-surgery "prep," then went blank. I could not improvise with their bodies, and I knew it was because they were too perfect.

Although I made every effort, my mental scalpel would not descend, and the quartet grew more and more lissome. Car horns honked behind me; I saw that I had stopped dead and was holding up traffic. I started to get scared, and checked my brain arsenal for brushed-steel cutlery to maim the four with. Then, *against my will*, the brunettes turned to blonds, and the boys were kissing the boys and the girls the girls, and a car brushed my rear fender, the driver yelling, "Get a license, you faggot!"

I punched the gas reflexively, and my old Valiant tore across a busy intersection against the light, narrowly missing an old woman pushing a baby carriage. I took my eyes from the road and glued them to the rearview; the four perfect ones had vanished. I drove slowly out to the Valley, knowing it was only a matter of time until I would break, enter, watch, steal and come—regardless of the risk.

Full darkness brought an awful boredom. The only people out were flaccid and homely, unworthy of my machinations, and the beautiful brunette/blondes wafted inside me like a mental musk. I switched from commercial streets to residential, knowing full well my ultimate intent, and the houses I passed were uniformly brightly lit—bastions of cheap, incomprehensible happiness. My only alternative was to eat, go home and hope for a dreamless sleep.

I stopped at a Bob’s Big Boy on Ventura Boulevard. There was an attractive couple in a booth near the door, and I took a counter seat that gave me visual access to both of them. I was in the conscious process of turning them blond when they got up and walked over to the cashier. A pair of burly young men in denims took their place, the taller of the two pocketing the tip. As his hand scooped the coins, I turned it into a reptile’s claw; soon both youths were fixed in my mind as buffoonish lizards. Then their loud voices made me stop brain-gaming and listen:

“…yeah, for-real hippie hookers. I’m talking chicks who love their work, who groove on ballin’ more than money. Cheap, too. The one chick, Season, hit me up for a ten-spot in the morning; the other, Flower—can you dig it?—goes for even less. You gotta listen to their rap about this guru guy they groove on, but who cares?”

“And you’re tellin’ me they hang out at the Whisky every night? That they’ve got a pad off the Strip, and they spread all night for a tensky?”

“I don’t blame you for not thinkin’ it’s for real, but listen: they got an altered motive, or whatever you call it—they’re recruiters for this guru guy Charlie, and they tell you the fuck bread is for ‘The Family,’ and you should come out to this ranch where they live. It’s a hype, but who cares?”

“And these chicks are boss foxes?”

“Primo.”

“And all I gotta do is hit the Whisky and ask around for them?”

“No, just go there and look cool, and they’ll find you.”

“Then why the fuck am I sittin’ here lookin’ at your ugly face?”

Not knowing I had just crossed paths with history, I left a dollar on the counter and drove to the Strip and the Whisky a Go Go. A neon sign announced “The Battle of the Bands”—“Marmalade” vs “Electric Rabbit”; “Perko-Dan & his Magik Band” vs “The Loveseekers.” Parking spaces were scarce, but I found a spot in a gas-station lot across the street. Knowing this was a criminal mission—not an exercise in mental surgery—I walked over to the door, paid my cover charge and entered into a dark cavern of high-decibel noise.

The amplified electrical twanging was hideous, and had nothing to do with music; the darkness that enveloped everything but the stage was soothing and an unwitting ally—I could not see the people who were jammed together at matchbook-size tables; there would be no fetching bodies to distract me from my mission. The six gyrators who banged guitars in the glow of strobe lights would force me to search for "Flower" and "Season"—their "stage presence" was a frenzy of long matted hair, Day-Glo "threads" and sprayed body fluids.

Turning away from them, I found an empty table and sat down. A waitress materialized, placed a napkin in front of me and said, "Three-drink minimum, three-fifty a drink. If you want liquor, I have to see some ID. If you want to leave and come back, I'll have to stamp your hand."

I said, "ginger ale," handed her a five-dollar bill and squinted into the darkness. After a few seconds, the shapes of sitting people came into view. I decided to keep my eyes fixed on a midpoint among the rear tables, hoping to catch Season and Flower moving between them in their "recruiting" efforts. I was moving into my own world of pure concentration when I felt a hand on my arm and heard a breathy female voice. I was caught off guard, and my knees jerked up and hit the table, knocking it over. The girl who had spoken to me scuttled out of the way, and I saw that she was lovely, with waist-length black hair. Smiling, I willed an aura of psychic invisibility and spoke in a tone of pure nonchalance, pure savoir faire. "I just got back from the Continent, and the café accommodations there are more accommodating. Won't you sit down and join me for a drink?"

Her mouth dropped, and her loveliness turned fatuous. "What? You mean you're clumsy?"

"Just captivated," I said. "Won't you sit down?"

The girl said, "Captivated?" and gave me a look that was half-contempt, half-befuddlement. An errant strobe flash magnified her mouth; she was both slack-jawed and sneering. The sneer crept over me, and I mentally hacked off her limbs and tossed them in the direction of "Electric Rabbit" and their off-key wailing. The girl muttered "Weirdo" under her breath, then waved to someone in back of me and called, "Season! Wait!"

My targets.

The girl threaded her way toward an Exit sign by the back tables. I hesitated, then followed. When she got to the door she huddled with two others; from ten yards away I saw that both of them were long-haired and wearing buckskin pants and vests. I was not close enough to determine their genders, and I had to keep my brain scalpel from hacking through their britches so I could tell. Suddenly what the two had between their legs was the most important thing in the world. I was moving to the door when the black-haired girl skipped back into the nightclub melee, and the buckskin pair pushed through the door to the street.

I followed.

The two crossed Sunset in an androgynous swirl, fixed by a steel tracking device that kept me oblivious to everything else around me. Dimly, I realized that I was jaywalking straight through a stream of traffic, and that horns were honking and tires squealing. Still I pursued; still I kept my tunnel vision activated. When the street was behind me, with residential darkness looming ahead, a turning car illuminated my prey. I saw that they were male and female, both slightly built, a mustache on the young man the only distinguishing feature. My tracking device snapped *off,* a "caution" switch snapping *on* in its place.

I held back and took deep breaths; the buckskin pair rounded the corner and walked up the side stairs of a pink stucco apartment building with exposed doorways. "Season" opened the third door from the end and flicked on an inside light, then pointed the young man in. When she closed the door behind them, the light went off immediately. She had not used a key to enter; the door was most likely unlocked.

I waited for twenty excruciatingly long minutes, then walked over and up to the door. "Caution" burned behind my eyes in red neon, and I put my ear against the plywood surface and listened. Hearing nothing but the crackle of electricity coursing through my body, I entered.

The apartment was completely dark, and the spongy carpeting seemed to seduce me into it, slowly. The walls felt like an embrace; the stale air was warm. When my eyes were able to pick out details, the cheap wrought-iron and Formica fixtures did not register as sterile—they came alive as objects belonging to people I wanted to know. The heat of the four-walled vacuum settled near my physical center, smothering the Caution sign. I saw a short hallway and a doorway strung with beads immediately in front of me. Darkness reposed behind it, but I knew that would not stop me from seeing. I tiptoed to the last barrier separating me from the lovers.

Grunts, giggles and squeals of pleasure sounded behind it. Parting the beads and squinting until my eyes ached allowed me to see shadow-light on ankles locked together; breathing in gave me the taste of marijuana. The love noises grew more intense, and the words I was able to discern—“yeah,” “give it,” and “come”—issued from vulgar voices. It rattled me, and cold air started to seep into my sensual womb. To staunch the freeze, I turned myself dumb and stared *through* the beads until I saw two women writhing, friction producing sparks where their nipples rubbed together; two men joined groin to groin, their straining limbs keeping the juncture point hidden. Then all four became one, and I got lost trying to see who was where. I came then, my hands tightly grasping the beads.

Astonishingly, I wasn’t heard. I stood rock-still, enclosed by heat and bombarded by a series of Caution signs with missing and rearranged letters. It was as if a full-body dyslexia were trying to push me one way or the other, toward some hellish, irrevocable act. I stood very, very still, then heard Season’s voice for the first time. “It’s just the wind and the beads. Isn’t it pretty?”

The male lover answered, “It’s spooky.”

Season sighed. “It’s nature. Charlie says that after Helter Skelter, when the big corporations are all gone and the land reverts to the people, man-made things and nature will work together in perfect harmony. It’s in the Bible, and the Beatles and the Beach Boys, and Charlie and Dennis Wilson are doing an album about it.”

“You’ve got this Charlie dude on the brain.”

“He’s a wise man. He’s a shaman and a healer, and a metaphysician and a guitarist.”

The male lover snorted, and Season sang, “ ‘You say you want a revolution, we-el-el, you know, we all want to change the world.’ Charlie calls that the gospel according to Saint Paul and Saint John.”

“Ha! You want to hear the gospel according to Saint *Me?*”

“Well…okay, sure.”

“Then dig: good food, good dope, good vibes and good fuckin’, and if someone gets in your way, lock, load and fire between their eyes.”

“And death to the pigs.”

“Not my scene, my dad’s a cop. What’s Charlie say about instant replays?”

“What do you mean?”

“Come here, I’ll show you.”

Season giggled. I could feel the air heating up behind the bead curtain, and I got out of the womb before the warmth could claim me.

—

That night my dreams were a compendium.

I was armless and legless. A phantom named Charlie chased me, and I wanted to see why pretty young girls talked about him after they had made love with someone else, so I let myself be caught, screaming when I saw that Charlie’s face was a mirror that reflected not my face, but a collage of butchered sex organs. Walt Borchard taunted me for screaming, then shoved hundred-dollar bills in my mouth to shut me up. My mother grabbed at the money and tried to tourniquet her gashed arms with it; my father toasted a mushroom cloud rising over downtown L.A. Knowing that total silence would save me, I fastened brushed-steel clamps over my lips and turned a series of external gears that would keep my brain’s synapses from sparking. I started to feel impregnable, and tried to laugh. No sound came out, and a new array of mirror-faced enemies approached me, holding big metal keys that would unlock my voice, my brain, my memory.

I woke up at dawn, choking and gasping for breath. I had bitten through my pillow, and my mouth was filled with cotton and foam rubber. I spat it out and breathed deeply, then went into a coughing attack. I tried to bring my right arm over to wipe my eyes, but there was no feeling at all on the right side of my body.

I whimpered, “No, please,” then sent a “kick” signal to my right leg. It hit the floor, so I knew that part of me had not been amputated. Gritting my teeth, I signaled my arm: *“Grab, tear, rip, gouge, live.”* There was a stirring under the sheet, then my hand extricated itself from the wall by the bedstead. Blood and mortar covered my fingers, and I looked at the hole my nightmare had dug. The perfectly outlined apertures held my attention like cave hieroglyphics. I stared at them until feeling returned to my hand and I passed out from the pain.

—

I spent the day in a zombie state—sleeping, walking to the bathroom sink to soak my hand, returning to sleep. The ache in my fingers was dream proof that I existed as a functioning machine, and when I woke up to stay at dusk, I knew what I had to do. After removing the remaining plaster fragments from under my fingernails, I drove back to the womb to wait for the most perfect bodies it could give me.

Parked at the curb by the pink stucco building, I waited. At 7:00, Flower and Season left the apartment and hiked up to the Strip; at

8:19, Flower returned with a rodentlike hippie boy. The combination of the girl's fatuousness and the rodent's body flab spelled "no." I continued my surveillance.

Flower and her weasel consort left at 10:03, parting company at the corner. Season and a rail-thin man of about thirty passed Flower on her trek back up to the Whisky, exchanging words. Season was the one I wanted in my triumvirate, but her skinny partner looked mean-spirited and consumptive. Impatient, and itchy from the long transit of no brain-movies, I stayed put.

Shortly after midnight, Season and her lover exited the apartment and walked south, away from the Strip. I realized then that the girls probably synchronized their arrivals and departures, and laid odds that Flower would be returning within ten minutes. My hand ached, and I willed the throbs to a low ebb by concentrating on the question that had plagued my dreams: Who was "Charlie"?

True to form, Flower rounded the corner a few minutes later. A large man in army fatigues was with her, and he carried himself with an authority that was anti-hippie, anti-counterculture, and purely masculine. Approaching the building, he took off his cap and smoothed his hair. It was a lustrous blond, and I knew he had to be Charlie.

Now my waiting was all shivers and tremors and tingles through the groin. Knowing Charlie would find a quick, violent coupling vulgar, I allowed for pre-sex mood-setting, then walked up to the door. With my heart thundering, I opened it and walked in.

The front room was pitch-dark, and I left the door ajar a few inches for light, then moved straight to the beaded curtain. I peered through, and candlelight framed him on top of her. I touched myself, but that part of me felt cold. My heart was going "ka-thud, ka-thud, ka-thud," and I knew that soon the lovers would hear it. Touching myself again, I felt not coldness, but *nothing*. I whispered, "Charlie," parted the curtains and walked to the bed. A breeze sent the light over entwined legs. I gasped and bent over and touched them.

"Oh God!"

"What the fu—"

I heard the words and moved backward; a light flashed on, and the legs I had been caressing kicked out at me. Then Charlie was pulling a sheet around himself, and all I could do was run.

I dived for the curtain, and a blow caught me in the back of the neck. Flower squealed, "Helter Skelter coming down!" and I fell to my knees. Then the front-room light went on, and a force around my neck uprooted me. I caught a topsy-turvy view of Tahiti and Japan via Pan American Airways, and billboards for the Jook Savages and Marmalade. I tried to run a defensive brain-movie, but my brains felt as though they were shooting out the top of my head. Charlie was screaming, “Fuck Fuck Fuck!”; then we were on the walkway outside, and people from the adjoining apartments were staring out their windows at *me*.

With my neck being twisted off its axis, I kicked sidelong at the gargoyles; glass flew into a succession of stunned faces. Screams and approaching sirens were ringing in my ears as Charlie dragged me downstairs, and the last thing I heard before blacking out was Flower singing an impromptu Beatles medley.

11

The caress cost me close to a year of my life.

I was arrested and charged with one count of Breaking and Entering, and the pick gouger in my pocket earned me a second charge of Possession of Burglar’s Tools. A voyeurism “beef” was pending, but my public defender told me that Uncle Walt Borchard talked the D.A. out of filing the charge—he did not want me to get a sex offender “jacket.” On attorney’s advice, I pleaded guilty at arraignment. My sentence: a year in the Los Angeles County Jail and three years formal probation. When the judge handed down the decree and asked me what I had to say for myself, I broke the pattern of silence/monosyllabic replies that I had maintained since the moment of my arrest. “I have nothing to say—yet,” I said.

My “practical silence” had snapped on automatically, the moment the sheriffs snapped the handcuffs on my wrists and I learned that my assailant was not the phantom Charlie, but a man named Roger Dexter. The cops, prisoners and legal officers I dealt with between arrest and sentencing expected terseness and faraway stares, and my behavior at the West Hollywood substation did not ring as incongruous. I was also 6′3″, 185, rawboned and strange, and the bullies in the tank had plenty of frailer “fish” to toy with. No one knew that I was terrified to within an inch of my life, and that my jailhouse protector was a comic-book villain.

Shroud Shifter’s counsel blunted my nightmares, eased my memory of the moment when I touched flesh, and let me concentrate on surviving my sentence. Our dialogue was so constant that even while holding sustained physical silence, I felt hyper-verbal inwardly, with typefaced warnings imprinting themselves across my field of vision whenever I felt especially frightened:

Counting the “good time” and “work time” you will receive for working as a trusty, you have 9½ months in jail to endure. Your confreres will be stupid men and violent men prone to victimizing those weaker than they.

Therefore, you must utilize your outsize physicality without affecting a macho demeanor that will attract violence;

Therefore, you must never let your fellow inmates know that you are much more intelligent than they are, or that your own criminal tendencies derive from deeper needs and curiosities;

Therefore, you must utilize practical silence, and psychic invisibility, *and* a new, finely honed "protective invisibility"—assuming the personas of those you are with, *blending in until you are indistinguishable from your fellow inmates*.

Thus, mentally armed, I arrived at the L.A. "New" County Jail to serve my sentence. The structure itself, only recently completed, was a massive angularity of steel and glossy concrete, all painted blue-gray and orange, with long corridors inset with holding tanks and inmate "modules"—four-tiered cellhouses fronted by narrow catwalks. Escalators connected the six floors, each of them equivalent in height to a three-story building; the corridors ran the length of three football fields. The mess halls were the size of movie theatres, and the string of administrative offices was an eighth of a mile of steel-reinforced doorways. After a ten-hour stint of holding-tank waiting, skin-searching, lice-control spraying, blood-testing and more waiting, I was assigned with five others to a four-man cell to await trusty classification and my work assignment. With miles of trudging blue-gray/orange concrete behind me, and an accumulation of obscene conversations ringing in my ears, I stretched out on the bunk I had snatched from a pudgy Mexican youth and let overall impressions overtake me. *Containment* was the word most summarily accurate, and I knew it would come from the concrete and steel that held me in, and from the impoverished minds of my keepers and fellow prisoners, and from the noise level of the air I breathed. And with Shroud Shifter beside me, I knew that my self-containment within that containment would be impenetrable.

I waited four days for trusty classification, learning jail nomenclature and sharpening my skill as a dissembler. Aside from "chow calls," I spent all my time in the cell, sleeping and listening to hyperbolized accounts of criminal and sexual exploits, participating in conversations only when asked direct questions. I began to get the impression that boredom overruled violence as the salient fact of jailhouse life, and that my greatest personal danger would come from laughing out loud at ridiculous tales told with straight faces.

So, when Gonzalez, the fat Mexican kid whose bunk I grabbed, opened a line of talk with his standard, "You talk about bonaroo pussy, man," I bit at my gums until chuckles were forestalled; when Willie Grover, aka Willie Muhammed 3X, came in with his standard, "Sheeeit! You talkin' pussy, you talkin' my language! I poked my ten-incher in more Brillo pads than you fuckin' seen!" I poked my fingers against the cell wall to stifle belly laughs. The other inmates—two white men named Ruley and Stinson and a Mexican named Martinez—played off Gonzalez and Grover conversationally, and I was soon able to determine the sex and crime sub-themes that would induce them to talk.

Thus, the first days of my formal sentence became a crash course in socializing under duress. When queried about my "beef," I said, "B and E. I was rippin' off pads in West Hollywood." When asked about my hand, still swollen from trying to dig a way out of my nightmares, I said, "I wasted this dude when he caught me in his crib." The nods I got when I spoke the words encouraged me; the appraising eyes that roamed my newly muscled body told me that none of my "cellies" could risk voicing disbelief. My criminal verisimilitude was holding.

And, while lying on my bunk pretending to read back issues of *Ebony* and *Jet,* I listened, picking up colloquialisms and etiquette information to inform my jailhouse pose with even greater authenticity.

My year sentence was called a "bullet"; the mess-hall slang for Salisbury steak, hot dogs and breakfast jelly was, respectively, "Gainesburgers," "donkey dicks" and "red death." Inmates awaiting sentencing and classification were called "blues," a reference to the denim uniform I was now wearing; an informant was a "snitch"; a homosexual was a "punk"; the deputy sheriffs who served as jailers were "bulls."

If an inmate offered you candy or cigarettes, refuse him immediately, because he wanted to "turn you out."

If a "fruit jockey" made a sexual advance toward you, "wail on his head," even if the "bulls" were right there, because if you didn't "put him straight," you would acquire a "fruit jacket" and be "hit on" by all the "boodie bandits" looking to travel up the "Hershey Highway";

Address the "bulls" as Mr. ____ or Deputy ____, but never initiate conversations with them on matters not germane to your "khaki gig" or "righteous business";

Do not seek the friendship of blacks, or you would be considered a "n—— rigger" or "spook juke" and be subject to attack from the "Paddys" (whites), "Beaners" (Mexicans) and the "War Council" (whites and Mexicans who banded in emergencies to form a united front against blacks);

And always, always, "be frosty" and "hang tough."

—

On my third day in the cell I got a letter from Uncle Walt Borchard. My hands shook as I read it.

10/16/69

Dear Marty—

Your bust tears it, I guess. I didn't come to see you at the West L.A. Substation because the officer who called to tell me where you were also told me about the burglar tool he found on you, and I'm no dummy—I can put two and two together. I was the one who got your sex beef cooled, because no 21-year-old kid should have to go through life as a registered sex offender—unless he hurt somebody, which apparently you didn't—except me.

You could have talked to me, you know. Most kids steal a few things, it's like a phase. But you pumped me for burglary info and stole from me, and that cuts it.

I cleaned out your pad, and I stored your stuff. I found your bankbooks and your safe-deposit box slips and keys, and I'll hold them until you get out. I don't know where you got the money, and I don't care what's in the boxes. The West L.A. Sheriffs impounded your car, and it's not worth trying to reclaim—let them auction it. When you come by to get your stuff, go to Mrs. Lewis in #6—I don't want to see you, and she's got everything in her closet.

—Walt Borchard.

Finishing, I felt a brushed-steel door close on a long part of my life. Another door opened, this one embossed with dollar signs I had thought would be lost. Willie Muhammed 3X said, "You look happy, homeboy. Your bitch get some sex shit past the censor?"

"My uncle died," I said.

"And you happy about that?"

"He left me six grand and some other goodies."

"Righteous, but he was your kin, and you happy?"

I threw the letter in the toilet and flushed it, then screwed my face into my newly patented white-trash glare. "He was a punk, and he got what he deserved."

After morning chow on my fourth day in the "blocks," the module jailer's voice came over the PA system: "Lopez, Johnson, Plunkett, Willkie and Flores, roll it up for classification." The electrically operated cell door slid open, and I joined the other men on the catwalk. A deputy appeared moments later, and led us down a series of corridors to a small room with blue-gray cement walls. A photograph of Sheriff Peter J. Pitchess, encased in a plastic sheath, was the only wall adornment, and the room held no furnishings of any kind.

When the deputy locked the door on us and departed, my colleagues descended on the photo with crayons, and soon the sheriff of Los Angeles County had swastikas on his collar points, Frankenstein bolts on his neck and a giant phallus in his mouth. The four hooted at their artwork, then an electrically amplified voice called out, “Good morning, gentlemen. Classification time. You’ve got sixty seconds to wipe off Sheriff Pitchess, then we want Plunkett, Flores, Johnson, Willkie and Lopez at the inside door in that order.”

Catcalls answered the ultimatum:

“I got sixty minutes with yo mama, punk!”

“Sheriff Pete too busy playin’ with my pee-pee!”

“Power to the pee-pee!”

I laughed at the two-sided ritualism, then ambled over and stood by the inside door. Two inmates were rubbing at the picture with saliva-soaked handkerchiefs. Just when the sheriff was chaste again, the door opened and a uniformed deputy pointed me toward a row of cubicles, muttering, “The one on the end.” I walked there, down a drab hallway with chin-up bars bolted to the wall.

A deputy was sitting behind a desk in the last cubicle. He pointed to a chair in front of him. When I sat down, he said, “Your full name is Martin Michael Plunkett?”

I wondered what kind of voice to assume. Seconds passed, and I decided to sound educated, in hope of getting a desk job. “Yes, sir,” I said in my normal voice.

The deputy sighed. “Your first time in jail?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Your first mistake, Plunkett. Don’t call deputies whose names you don’t know ‘sir.’ Other inmates consider that brownnosing.”

“Right.”

“That’s better. Let me run down your vitals. We’ve got you as 6′3″, 185, D.O.B. 4/11/48, L.A. One count B and E, one count Possession of Burglar’s Tools; even bullet, three years’ formal probation, release date 7/14/70. Sound about right?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, now the personal stuff. What’s your occupation?”

"Librarian."

"How far did you go in school?"

I glanced at the papers the deputy was holding; instinct told me his information was scant. "I have a master's degree in library science."

The deputy drummed the tabletop with his fingers. "You've got a fucking master's degree at twenty-one?"

I chuckled self-effacingly. "From a small college in Oklahoma. They've got a special, accelerated master's program."

"Jesus, librarian-burglar. Only in L.A. Okay, Plunkett. Are you a homosexual?"

"No."

"Diabetic?"

"No."

"Epileptic?"

"No."

"Addicted to any mind-altering chemicals?"

"No."

"Are you taking any prescription medicines?"

"No."

"Are you an alcoholic?"

"No."

"Good. I am, and it's no fucking picnic." The deputy laughed, then said, "Now the twilight-zone stuff. Do you think there are conspiracies out to get you?"

"No."

"Do you think people laugh at you behind your back?"

"No."

"Do you hear voices when you're alone?"

"No."

"Do you ever see things that aren't really there?"

I bit my tongue to keep from laughing. "No."

Stretching his arms, the deputy said, "You're a paragon of fucking sanity, but let's test your brain. What's ninety-seven and forty-one?"

Without hesitation, I said, "One thirty-eight."

"Go, Bookworm. One-eighteen and seventy-four?"

"One ninety-two."

"Two eighty-four and one sixty-six?"

"Four hundred fifty even."

"You musta been burglarizing adding machines. What's—"

Falsetto giggles erupted from somewhere in the row of cubicles. A high voice cooed, "I can play this guessing game just as good over in the Swish Tank at the Old County. I got sent there—"

The deputy rapped the table. "Pay attention, Brainboy. That's Lopez trying for the Queen's Tank; he thinks it's safer over there. Here's my change-up pitch. What's four and four?"

"I don't know," I said, smiling.

Smiling back, the deputy looked over his papers, then said, "One psych question I forgot. Are you prone to night sweats or nightmares?"

For what seemed like an eternity of split seconds, I was without limbs, the captive of nightmare flashbacks that I thought jail had contained. Finally Shroud Shifter was there, whispering, *"Slow and easy."* "No," I said hoarsely.

The deputy said, "You're sweating now, but I'll chalk that up to first-timer's nerves. Last test. Go over to the bars and chin yourself as many times as you can."

I obeyed, attacking the bars, hoisting myself up-down, up-down, up-down, until I was drenched in day sweats that could only terminate in benevolent, dreamless exhaustion. When my muscles finally gave in and I fell to the floor, the deputy said, "Thirty-six. Anything over twenty is automatic Trash & Freight, so I gotta say you outsmarted yourself. Go to the holding room and wait; someone'll take you to the T.F. dock."

I got up and walked into the holding tank. The other inmates were there, embellishing Sheriff Pitchess with glasses and a Hitler mustache. The high-pitched voice I had heard in the cubicles trilled, "You sweaty hunk, aren't you cute!" and I felt a hand on my shoulder. I pivoted, and saw that Lopez was giving me a vamp look, while the others were sizing me up for my reaction.

I held back, feeling something sickly sweet and mawkish. Then I got a jolt of terror that felt like someone was sticking a live wire into my brain. I looked at the three appraising and accusing inmates, and they turned into mirror-faced Charlie before my eyes. Lopez cooed, "I really groove on sweat," and I hit him with my bad hand, then my good one, then bad-good, bad-good, bad-good until he was on the floor and spitting out teeth. I was zeroing in on his throat when the three inmates pulled me off and the classification deputy walked out, shook his head and said, "Lopez, you dumb shit, look what you've done now. Willkie, you take Plunkett to the Freight Dock; Johnson, you take Lopez to the Infirmary. You got a first-timer freebie, Plunkett. Don't do it again."

The inmates let me go, and Willkie gave me a gentle push out into the corridor. My vision was rimmed with red and black, and the throbbing in my hand felt like the restraining thread that kept me from exploding like a shrapnel bomb. Willkie smiled and said, “You’re good.”

—

Trash and Freight;
Listening;
Protective Invisibility.

The next six weeks of my sentence were spent juggling those pursuits. Assigned as a khaki trusty to the T&F detail, I worked the hardest job in the L.A. County jail system and received the rewards that came with it: a private cell, three meals a day from the officers’ dining room, and weekends off, with the free run of the honor trusty’s module—four tiers with ultrawide catwalks suitable for crap shooting, T.V. and card room, and a library filled with paperback Westerns and picture histories of Nazi Germany. The rewards were dubious, but, strangely, I came to love the work.

At 2:00 each morning, the module jailer awakened us individually, racking our cells one by one, then flashing a pen-light in our eyes. I always snapped awake with a sense of relief. Since beating up Lopez, my sleep had been 100% dreamless, but the fear of nightmares was always just a half-step away, and a quarter-step beyond that was the certainty that the jail/nightmare combination would be horrific.

After head count on the bottom catwalk, we were fed breakfast in the officers’ dining room. A dietitian employed by the county theorized that large men doing twelve-hour shifts of heavy labor required a commensurate fuel intake, and we were loaded up with huge trays of bacon, eggs, overcooked steaks and potatoes drenched in a nauseating gravy made up of flour, water and salt pork. My fellow trusties reveled in their special menu, devouring the food with the what-the-fuck panache of men determined to die young; and, not wanting to seem different, I greedily “scarfed up” along with them. And when we broke for lunch at 11:00, I was hungry.

Because the work was nonstop lifting, hauling, stooping and shoving. The jail was the distribution point for all correctional facilities within the county system, and every stitch of its institutional linen hit the T&F dock before being loaded into the trucks that would take it to its final destination. We did both the loading and unloading, and every laundry bag we moved weighed at least a hundred pounds. That part of the job was relatively easy and clean. Then, after lunch, with our muscles burning and aching, and stuporous from thousands of calories, the slaughterhouse trucks pulled in.

Here I both worked and listened, and used my protective invisibility to its greatest advantage.

The other inmates found the meat transfers revolting, and mitigated their disgust by talking themselves through it. It was understood among them to save their best stories and crime schemes for the two hours or so we spent wrestling sides of beef and pork out of the trucks and into the storage freezers some hundred and fifty yards from the dock. With blood soaking my khakis, and fat and gristle sliding beneath my hands, I took in tales of good sex and hilarious sexual misadventures; I learned how to hot-wire cars and procure a variety of fake ID's. I nodded and laughed along as the stories were told, and since I always strained with the heaviest pieces, no one seemed to notice that I had no tales to tell.

Women, beds and fast cars;
Shoplifting techniques;
The going prices for dope;
Pornographic details on women once loved, but later despised;
Wistful sighs over women still loved;
How to successfully exploit homosexuals for favors.

All this came to me while my body was pushed to its limit, with the blood of dead animals trickling down my pants. I knew that the stories I heard were now *my* stories, a part of my memory, and that the ritual of strain/ache/lift/blood/learn that gave them to me made them belong to me more than to the men who had actually lived them. And when the last slaughterhouse truck was unloaded, I always lingered on the dock, letting the autumn Santa Anas warm the crimson sheen on my body.

—

In a sense, Trash & Freight gave me my body.

My gym workouts had been the start, changing me from skinny to rangy, but my first six weeks of T&F added bulk and muscle definition, giving me a big man's symmetry. Constant flinging of thirty-pound laundry bags made my wrist muscles bulge to twice their old size; stooping to lift the hundred-fifty-pounders built a wedge of hard ripples along my lower back. Hauling beef sides resulted in a thickening of the chest and a cording at my shoulders, and my arms, continually pulling, tossing and lifting, hardened to the point where a pin could not easily penetrate the muscle. During laundry hauls, I surreptitiously scrutinized the other bodies working beside me. All of them were strong, but beer bellies and ugly barrel chests predominated. Mine was the most nearly perfect, and by the time I was released it would be that much closer to perfection.

After work and a long solitary shower, I would listen to the men playing cards on the catwalk, then retire to my cell and read the texts of the Nazi picture books. The subject matter did not interest me, but the juxtaposition of printed horror stories and shouts from the catwalk felt somehow reassuring. Then, after evening chow and lockup, I segued from observation and invisibility to rituals of affirmation.

When the cell doors were racked shut, I stripped nude and imagined a full-length mirror in front of the bars. I felt my body for signs of new muscle, and mentally collated both the day's practical criminal information and the sexual anecdotes I had heard. After a few minutes, other rituals made themselves heard—the creaking of bunk springs on either side of my cell told me that fantasies and touching were happening. Here I moved straight into the meat-hauling stories, assuming both gender roles alternately, using the name "Charlie" when I played the man. The process felt like usurping the memories of others, loading myself up with experiences I had never had in order to make myself more inviolate for not having had them. As the mattress squeaks surrounding me escalated, so did my recreations. Without touching myself, I always came in the role of "Charlie," staring through blackness at my own mirror image.

—

On December 2, I found out who "Charlie" really was, and my self-containment exploded into pieces.

Banner headlines of the *Times* and *Examiner* delivered the news: Charles Manson and four members of his "family" had been arrested and charged with the Tate-LaBianca murders. Manson—known to his followers as "Charlie"—ruled a "hippie commune" at the near-deserted Spahn Movie Ranch in the Valley, and presided over nightly dope and sex orgies. Statements made by the three female members of Manson's "death cadre" pointed to the killings having been perpetrated out of a desire to create social upheaval—an unrest that would ultimately lead to the Armageddon that Charlie called "Helter

Skelter."

I was taking a break on the laundry dock when I read those first accounts, and I shook from head to toe as memories of my own recent past blipped across the newsprint. I *saw* the two buffoons in the restaurant, and *heard* one of them say, "They're recruiters for this guru guy Charlie, and they tell you the fuck bread is for 'The Family,' and you should come out to this ranch where they live"; Flower squealed, "Helter Skelter is coming down fast"; and Season described the man the *Examiner* labeled "an ex-con Svengali with mesmeric brown eyes" as "a wise man, a shaman, a healer and a metaphysician."

The T&F jailer called out, "Back to work, Plunkett." After reading a concluding paragraph that promised pictures of the "satanic cult savior" in the next edition, I obeyed. On the slaughterhouse dock that afternoon, I was incapable of assimilating anecdotes, and my body churned with only one thought: Charlie Manson had brown eyes, and so did I. Given that one identical point, would the resemblance grow or crumble?

The evening edition of the *Los Angeles Times* gave me my answer. Charles Manson was a thirty-four-year-old, flaccid, sunken-chested wimp barely over five feet tall, with long, greasy-looking hair and a scraggly beard. I felt relieved and disappointed as I studied the photographs of him, and I could not place the reason for my ambivalence. The feature article on Manson's background clarified my feelings only slightly—he was an ex-convict with previous convictions for pimping, forgery, narcotics possession and car theft, and he had spent over half his life in various prisons. This made me feel only contempt—one jail tour, exploited for outside-of-society learning skills, could be considered acceptable; a series of them pointed to self-destructive institutionalization. I began to wonder where this man would take me.

For a week he took me on a roller-coaster ride of frustration and self-analysis.

Manson became the talk of the jail, and the T&F trusties were divided in their opinions, some considering him a "stone psycho," others admiring his hold over women and his dope-and-violence lifestyle. I stayed out of the discussions, listening to them for what they said about the participants, but trying to limit my Manson intake only to the facts I could glean from the media. Putting aside the expressions of outrage that bracketed everything written about Charlie and his family, I composed a treatise that seemed factually sound:

Charlie was a street-smart manipulator of directionless young people, a good dope scrounger, well-versed in rock and roll, science-fiction, religious thought and the plethora of social movements impressionable youths were susceptible to, and, obviously, he had evolved his own ethos from them—one that was seductive to rootless kids. That was impressive.

Yet, as a criminal he was a complete bungler, trusting people who ultimately informed on him;

Yet, when interviewed, he came across as a mindlessly sloganeering psychotic;

But, he had created a fiefdom that revolved around his most extreme sexual fantasies; *but* people had murdered at his command; *but* he had the power to usurp my late-night mirror rituals, transmogrifying them into agonizing question-and-answer sessions.

Was there some dark cosmic reason why you crossed this man's path?

His sexual power resulted in *your* one aborted coupling and thence a year in jail. Does that mean something hideous?

Intellectually and physically, you are capable of snapping him like a twig, but he was on the cover of *Life* magazine while you haul laundry bags as a criminal nonentity. What does that fact bode for your future?

I knew those questions were unanswerable, rendered as such by my bottom-line sense of powerlessness. I bludgeoned the line as best I could, shutting down all thoughts featuring Charlie and me as the symbiotic twins of celebrity and failure by hauling heavier and heavier loads on the dock, then doing hours of calisthenics in my cell, creating my own world of physical primacy and exhaustion. But that stratagem was always undercut by Manson headlines, Manson stories, Manson gossip and speculation. Trusties talked about Charlie on the dock, and I almost jumped out of my skin; a T.V. documentary on "The Family" featured interviews with Season and Flower, and I felt like ripping the set off the catwalk wall. Then, his grand jury and arraignment proceedings completed, the "Hippie Satan" was transferred to the High Power Tank at New County, and we were living under the same roof.

I knew we were converging; that fate was planning a rendezvous, and that all I had to do was continue my present course and my questions would be answered by the mirror man himself. So I wrestled super loads on the dock, knowing it was fear and doubt driving me; I lay on my bunk after work, worried that the body I was achieving would ruin my psychic invisibility, that I would be singled out for the rest of my life as a brick shithouse for other men to test themselves on. I began to perceive my dilemma as visibility or invisibility/screaming selfhood or the subtle power of anonymity. The pluses and minuses equaled out on both sides, made all the more cogent by knowing that my destiny was uniquely different and bold. Although I had never avowed a belief in God, I began to pray every night for him to get me to Charlie, so I could confront his brown eyes and see what they boded for mine.

The road to Manson started on a rainy Wednesday morning a week after he transferred into High Power. I was lugging cartons of canned goods from the dock over to a protective overhang when I heard, "Catch, showboat!" and caught a crate of lettuce square in the back. The blow stunned me and dropped me to my knees; I heard shouts of "Grandstanding motherfucker!" and "Come on, muscle-man!" Then, getting to my feet, I picked up a distant echo from Flower and Season's fuck pad: "Lock, load and fire between their eyes."

From my knees I assumed a sprinter's crouch, then pushed forward and ran head-on into my accusers. Startled, the men made no move to separate. I hit them like a pile driver, and when I saw a flabby bicep directly in front of my eyes, I bit it, swallowing the small piece of flesh I was able to tear off.

Now the group dispersed, and my own momentum carried me back to the ground. I got up again and whirled around, seeing a group of outsize men standing shock-stilled, with amazement on their faces. Holding my ground, I listened, picking out whispers: "He bit me," "… fucking Dracula," "Not me, man!" Then the T&F jailer walked over. My point made, I let myself be handcuffed and led back to my cell.

I was given five days' solitary confinement in the Adjustment Module—a row of one-man cells with no bunks and only a bucket to urinate and defecate in. No reading material was allowed, and nourishment was six slices of bread and three cups of water per day. If the jailers considered the Spartan accommodations to be a hardship, they were wrong; the decreased caloric intake purged my body, and the dark eight-by-five crawl space was the perfect habitat for the perfectly blank mind I willed for the length of my stay. When my cell was unlocked and I was walked out to my new "home"—the custodial trusties module—I felt relaxed and calm. Assigned to a cell with three other men, I was told my job: push a broom up and down the cellhouse catwalks ten hours a day, six days a week. I had only one question: "Do I ever sweep out High Power?"

"Sooner or later," the module jailer said.

It was somewhere between the two; indeterminate hundreds of hours and thousands of catwalks and corridors down the line, with what felt like millions of miles of pushing my broom behind me—always blank-minded, with the mirror man's questions sealed off, but ready to be hurled at a second's notice. I don't even remember what day it was, but when the custodial detail jailer said, "Plunkett to High Power," I grabbed my broom and dustpan and walked there on automatic pilot, stopping only to read the inmate roster at the front of the module.

And there it was in black and white: Manson, Charles, cell A-11, and the California Penal Code number for First-Degree Murder—187 P.C.—next to his name in red.

The jailer racked the gate, and I entered the A-tier catwalk and looked down it, seeing the narrow-barred enclosures of one-man security cells. No noise was coming from within them, and I counted eleven over and marked the point in my mind. Then, as if I had all the time in the world, I pushed my broom down the catwalk, pivoted and said to the bars of A-11, "Hello, Charlie."

Darkness seemed to throb inside the cell; I thought briefly that the mirror man was gone. I was about to grab the bars and strain my eyes to see in when a soft tenor voice sang, "You tell me it's the in-stit-tu-tion, we-el-el, you know, you better free your mind instead." There was a pause, then the voice said, "I can see you, but you can't see me. You believe that song's message, trusty?"

I laid my broom against the bars and squinted into the cell; all I could see was a shape on the bunk. "Yes, and I figured it out a long time before the Beatles did."

Charles Manson snorted. "You just think you did. Saint John and Saint Paul got it from me, you got it from them. Cause and effect, karma coming back to roost. Now we're both here. You groove the energy?"

I snorted back. "It's a convenient interpretation. Tell me about Helter Skelter."

Manson said, "Listen to the White Album and read your Bible. It's all there."

The shape on the bunk took form; Charlie looked frail and old. *"Tell me about Helter Skelter."*

Manson laughed. It was a liquid sound, as if the hippie Satan were expelling drool. "You, me, God's outcasts, on Harleys and dune buggies. The n——s rising up. The land reverting to me."

"In your padded cell?"

A dry chuckle this time. “Ye men of little faith. If you knew the Beatles’ message, you wouldn’t be here.”

“You’re here.”

“My karma, trusty. My energy directing me to the people who need to hear my message most.”

From a deep part of my Q. & A. vault a question took hold, and before I could revert to verbal sparring, I asked it. “What’s it like to kill somebody?”

Manson got up and walked over to the bars. I saw that he came up to just below my shoulders, and that his “mesmeric” brown eyes had the sheen of the far-gone psychotic. It would be easy to pluck them out and squash them into goo on the catwalk floor. “I never killed nobody,” Charlie said. “I was framed by the Establishment.”

“By the Institution?”

“That’s right.”

“Then use your free mind to break out of here.”

Manson laughed. “Jail’s my karma. Teaching know-nothing jailhouse cynics is my energy. Tell me, unbeliever, what do you know?”

I squatted so that my eyes and the eyes of the sawed-off Satan were at the same level. Shroud Shifter jumped into my mind, making pantomime motions that spelled out *SEIZE THIS MOMENT*. With the most quintessentially cool voice I had ever willed, I said, “I know that people kill and take what they want and don’t get caught; and if they do get caught, they don’t rationalize their failure with mystical jive talk to make themselves look big; and they don’t blame society, because they had free will from the gate. And I know that there are people who kill by themselves, who don’t send doped-out hippie girls to do what they’re afraid of. I know that real freedom is when you do it all yourself and it’s so good that you never have to tell anyone about it.”

Charlie hissed, “Pig,” and spat in my face. I let the spittle settle, astounded by my eloquence, which had seemed to spring from deep nowhere of its own volition—as if that statement, not Manson’s answers to my questions, was what I had been waiting for with my blank mind these past weeks.

When I remained immobile, saliva dripping off my chin, Charlie began singing. “Hey Jude, don’t make it bad, let Helter Skelter make it be-et-ter. Remember, make the pigs get out of your mind—”

Shroud Shifter interrupted the music by superimposing *CASTRATE HIM* across Charlie’s forehead. I reached for a deep draft of cool and said, “I fucked Flower and Season at your place by the Strip. They were lousy fucks and even worse recruiters, and they used to laugh about your little one-inch cricket dick.”

Manson hurled himself at the bars and started screaming; I picked up my broom and began sweeping my way down the catwalk. Hearing clapping on the tier above me, I looked up. A group of deputies was applauding my performance.

—

A pleasant weight embraced me in the following weeks. I knew it came from my confrontations with the loading-dock trusties and the cut-rate Satan, and it felt like a reprise of the old invisibility. My bodybuilding obsession started to feel callow; running brain-movies palled before the simple scrutiny of what was going on around me. My dreamless sleep continued, and as my release date approached I started looking forward to gaming probation officers, employers and my daily parade of workaday acquaintances. A potent notion simmered on the back burner of my brain: I could live anonymously and on the cheap, without nightmares and dangerous drives, and possess my own mesmeric power.

Charles Manson’s power over me diminished and fizzled out, until his jailhouse celebrity was nothing worse than a nuisance, like the swirl of a mosquito who deftly avoids squashing. The eloquence of my attack on him faded also—until, three weeks before kick-out, my fictitious master’s degree was noted, and I was assigned to the library, with one specific task: chronologically file forty large cartons of news magazines recently donated to the L.A. County jail system.

The cartons contained issues of *Time, Life* and *Newsweek* going back to the forties. I was left alone in a storage cellar with them for eight hours a day, with a bag of sandwiches, a Thermos of coffee and a Swiss Army knife for cutting cardboard and twine. The job was peacefully methodical until I hit a spate of recent issues featuring articles on Satanic Charlie, and read non-hyperbolic prose that summarized him as awesome.

I put those issues aside, enraged that high-paid writers could be duped by a pseudo-mystic drool case. With the Manson prose stuffed into a mildewed corner of the cellar, I abandoned my collating job for five days running, spending my work time reading through the old magazines for accounts of stupid killers who were ultimately caught, convicted and squashed like bugs. I read only the stories on L.A.–area killers; and as I recognized street names and locations, I felt the murderers' self-destructive pathology enter me and become utter disdain for the limelight. Then, when my history of fatuous violence extended back to 1941, I got out my knife.

Juanita "Duchess" Spinelli, the murderous leader of a robbery gang, hanged at San Quentin, 11/21/41—slash, slash. Otto Stephen Wilson, triple-woman slayer, gassed at Quentin, 10/18/46—slash, slash, slash—one for each victim. Jack Santo, Emmett Perkins and Barbara Graham, immortalized in the movie "I Want to Live," but fried for their bungled robbery-murders on 6/3/55—multiple slashes. Donald Keith Bashor, burglar–bludgeon killer who plied his trade just east of my old neighborhood, executed 10/14/57—stab, gouge, and rip for being so stupid so close to me. Harvey Murray Glatman, the sadistic T.V. repairman who "offed" three women after photographing them bound and gagged in agony—"snuffed" by the state on 8/18/59—slashes of contempt for his whimpering on the way to the gas chamber. Stephen Nash, the toothless drifter and self-described "King of Killers," terminated a week after Glatman on 8/25/59—gentle knife thrusts for spitting at the chaplain and sucking in the cyanide gas with a grin. Elizabeth Duncan, who hired winos Augustine Baldonado and Luis Moya to kill her son's wife, earning all three of them trips to San Quentin's green room on 5/11/62—numerous page-rippings for the drunken, parsimonious unprofessionalism of the job.

And on and on up to Charlie Manson, fate as yet undecided, but limited to two choices: the gas chamber or the rubber room at Atascadero—stab, slash, gash, rip, and urinate on his face beaming up from *Newsweek*.

When the mound of paper was reduced to confetti, I buried it behind some abandoned milk cartons and thought of how sweet and peaceful my anonymous life would be.

12

Over the next four years I metamorphosed into an object.

I became a depository for images; a memory bank. In essence, 1970-74 were my years of interpreting the human scene around me, but not fantasizing it into sexually gratifying variations. I know today that that hellishly stringent restraint is what finally caused me to burst.

I was released from jail on July 14, 1970, and went immediately to Uncle Walt Borchard's apartment building and picked up my bankbook and safe-deposit box keys. The woman Borchard left my belongings with tried to hand me a big bundle of old clothes, but I smelled defeat clinging to them and said, "No."

With interest, my savings account held a balance of $6,318.59, and my safety-box swag was still intact. I withdrew three thousand dollars in cash and the contents of all three boxes. From there it was only a hop, skip and jump to Cosmo Veitch's pad off the Boulevard. I sold Cosmo my entire stash of watches, jewelry and credit cards for $1,500, and from there it was just a simple hop to a Ford dealership on Cahuenga and a "Summer Clearance Sale" on used vans. I purchased a '68 Econoline, steel gray in color, paid $3,200 cash for it, and drove to West L.A. to look for a safe, innocuous place to live.

I found an apartment on a quiet side street south of Westwood Village, and paid six months' rent in advance. The building was mostly inhabited by older people, and my three-room dwelling was cool and painted a restful gray similar in shade to my van. All that remained to be accomplished in my return to society was to report to my probation officer and get a job.

My P.O. was a woman named Elizabeth Trent. She was stylishly liberal, and gushed instant empathy as she laid down the terms of my probation: don't steal, don't fraternize with criminals, don't use drugs, hold down steady employment and report to her in person once a month. Aside from that, she told me to "party hearty," "reap good karma" and "call if you need anything." Leaving her office after our initial conference, I pegged the woman as a post-hippie with man trouble, someone who meddled good-naturedly in the affairs of others to alleviate her own personal turmoil. Probation would be easy.

Employment was even easier than my one hour a month making nice with Liz Trent. From ’70 to ’74 I held down a series of menial jobs undertaken from one criterion: their potential to keep me mentally aroused without fantasy adornments. I was, by turns:

A deliveryman for “Pizza Soopreem,” my territory a West Hollywood area rife with unemployed artists, writers and actors who sent out for pizza and beer 24 hours a day; night manager of a pornographic bookstore across the street from the notorious open-all-night Hollywood Ranch Market; dishwasher at a singles bar/restaurant in Manhattan Beach; shipping clerk at a mail-order house specializing in bondage attire.

All the jobs allowed me to observe lives caught off guard in small moments of flux. While working Pizza Soopreem, pizza orderers of both genders came to the door nude; and, occasionally, impoverished ones offered themselves to me for the tab. My gig at Porno Villa was a doctoral degree in the machinations of sexual guilt and self-loathing—the men who purchased beaver and fuck-and-suck books were pitiful negative exemplars of the strength to be gained from total abstinence.

Big Daddy’s Disco was “Candid Camera” gone x-rated and tragicomic. The kitchen boss had bored a hole through the dish-room wall into the ladies powder room, and when the *Playboy* calendar that covered it was lifted, you had a squint-eyed view of the makeup mirror and one toilet stall. The whole kitchen crew would take turns watching and giggling, but I always waited until they went home at 1:00 A.M. and I was left alone to clean up. Then I watched and listened; then I saw an array of young women tingle at the thought of coming assignations or cry at the mirror after a long night of barside rejections. Women discussed men in explicit terms, and I picked up their stylized lexicon; they snorted cocaine to give themselves courage, then smoothed the facial hollows it caused with powder. With one eye through the wall I became the mental chronicler of small-scale desperation, and it felt like tamping down my self-containment with a velvet hammer.

I was an object of assimilation and interpretation, and I coveted the touch of other sleek objects. Hearkening back to Shroud Shifter and my youth, I filled my apartment with brushed steel—pencil sharpeners and siding samples and cookery and Swiss Army knives with sharp blades that I brushed myself with industrial steel wool. As the years passed, my collection of knives grew, until I possessed the entire Swiss Army catalog, mounted on my living-room wall at angles that I changed on whim. Then I became interested in guns.

But *hand*guns were what I desired, and as a convicted felon I was forbidden by law to own them. They were also expensive—more so if illegally procured—and the thought of violating my precious invisibility to obtain one was frightening, a potential apostasy that I knew would lead me back to all my old dangerous drives.

I had just begun work at Leather N’ Lace, the bondage mail-order house, when the gun infatuation hit me. My job entailed opening the incoming envelopes containing checks and orders for whips, chains, dog collars, dildoes, dungeon equipment and the like, logging the orders while the checks cleared, then shipping them out when the front office gave the word. The mail room was packed to the rafters with perverse goodies made in Tijuana, most of the devices constructed out of cheap black leather and low-grade alloy metal. The ugly objects glared at me all day, and to keep fantasies at bay I put my mind to the task of turning them into something useful. No ideas took hold, and I used up my spare time reading handgun catalogs. The longing I felt perusing glossy pictures of Colts and Smith & Wessons and Rugers was awful, compounded by how the sex fools were constantly sending cash in their envelopes, the heft of coins a dead giveaway. I could steal the money, and the thefts would be attributed to the post office; I could obtain fake ID from criminal sources and use the stolen money to buy a big magnum or .45 auto; or I could steal more money and buy a street weapon. The more I thought about it, the more it moved me—and the more frightened I got.

So I did nothing, and nothing did me back.

Everywhere I went, ugly objects stared me down. When I took long walks at night, corrugated metal trash cans screamed, “Coward!”; neon signs blipped the penal code numbers of enticing offenses. It was as if my most suppressed brain area had suddenly developed the ability to run movies without my consent.

So I continued to do nothing, and nothing continued to do me back.

I kept my job at Leather N’ Lace, and resisted the desire to fantasize and steal incoming cash. In March of ’74 my probationary term ended, and Liz Trent cut me loose with the admonishment, “Find something you really like, and do it really well.” Those words gave me a temporary “something” that quickly backfired.

I was shipping orders the following day when I noticed the tubing on Leather N’ Lace catalog item #114—“Anal Annie’s Love Bench.” I saw that the circumference was slightly larger than the muzzle specification of an S&W magnum I was particularly fond of, and remembered a jail rap on the construction of homemade silencers. Knowing it was a quasi-legal antidote to *nothing,* I bought the necessary tools and did it "really well."

A hacksaw, a mound of metal fiber used for air-conditioning insulation, a metal pipe threader and a short length of iron tubing joined seven inches of "Anal Annie" in my living room, and with my Swiss Army knives I went to work. First I sawed and cut and assembled the pieces; then, with an "exact replica" toy magnum as my guideline, I cut thread for the muzzle. When I saw that I had a snug fit, I crimped large wads of fiber into the length of tubing, then rammed the smaller iron "bullet passage" straight through the middle of it. The passage would, I judged, carry a .357 hollow point with $^{1}/^{32}$ of an inch to spare, causing it to "tumble" toward its target. With the basic assembly completed, I held the silencer to the floor and hammered the front of the tubing around the end of the bullet passage until only a little hole protruded.

It was the most beautiful object I had ever seen.

But with that "something" behind me, "nothing" hit harder and harder, reminding me that without the magnum my silencer was no more than a paperweight. I carried it with me as a talisman on late-night walks; and now if trash cans glared at me I kicked them over; and if parked cars offended me with their garish colors I used the silencer to cut S.S. on their sides. It was callow rebelliousness and hollow rage, but holding that hand-fashioned piece of cheap metal was the only thing that kept the hallucinogenic 187 P.C.'s from devouring me.

I came to believe that a change of locale would make things better. L.A.'s very familiarity was dangerous, and if I could escape its web of nostalgia and self-destructive temptation, then I would be safe. Living in a different city would infuse me with caution and quash the criminal fantasies that were attempting to destroy me. I made up my mind to get out, setting a strict departure deadline three weeks in the future—April 12—the day after my twenty-sixth birthday.

The time passed quickly. I quit my job, liquidated my bank account and loaded my van with my clothes, toilet articles and talisman/silencer, leaving my other steel objects behind to symbolize old ties being broken. The loss of my knives hurt and warmed at the same time—I knew it was a conscious sacrifice aimed at avoiding catastrophe.

On my birthday night I took a farewell walk through my neighborhood. No objects glared at me, and no weird numbers flashed before my eyes. Only thunder and rain hit, drenching me to the bone. Looking for a place to keep dry, I noticed the neon sign in front of the Nuart Theatre: “Save the Seals.”

I ran over. The lobby was deserted, so I headed for the men’s room to get some paper towels. I had my hand on the door when I heard a high keening sound issue from the theatre proper. I forgot about drying myself and walked straight toward it.

Seals were being beaten to death on the screen. Their yelps were what I had heard, and now they were joined with sobs from the audience. The sound was thrilling, but the sight was ugly and pathetic, so I closed my eyes. The absence of sight brought the taste of blood—the blood of every body I had ever desired. Soon I was sobbing, and the taste deepened until the yelps were replaced by music. I opened my eyes, and people were filing past me, giving out looks of sympathy and commiseration. My shoulders were patted and my hands were touched—as if I were one of them. None of the people knew that the origin of my tears was in joy.

II

San Francisco

13

The city I chose was San Francisco, and my only reason for doing so was that its topography was antithetical to L.A.'s. Terraced hillsides and Victorian houses would not pulse with hidden messages from my past, and the city's relative lack of neon would mean diminished penal-code hallucinations. Los Angeles had formed me and owned me and driven me out; San Francisco was the opportunity to nullify my personal history and forge new drives in memory-free surroundings.

So, with the simple traversing of 430 miles, I went from increasingly lucid indicators of my destiny to an amnesia made easy by San Francisco's newness. I rented an apartment on 26th and Geary in the Richmond District, wiping out the bulk of my savings furnishing it with innocuous non-steel furniture and pastoral framed prints. The exigencies of behaving like so-called normal people were softly satisfying, and I began to think I could play the role for a long, long time.

Deciding to give myself a week before looking for work, I explored the city. Quaintness, oldness and prettiness were manifest, and a sense of grace seemed to imbue the people I saw on the street—they were, on the average, far more attractive than L.A. inhabitants, with a greater ethnic diversity, and a fairly large number of them were traffic-stopping blonds.

I didn't stop for them, though; an unseen weight pushed my foot onto the accelerator when those comely reminders of my past appeared. It was solid evidence that my benign amnesia was holding. Other signs—dreams filled with pastel colors, quiet nighttime walks, the loss of my gun obsession—added up to the magically simple word *happiness*.

And continued happiness required money. My week of tranquility had eaten up all but two hundred dollars of my funds, and I needed the quick replenishment of a weekly paycheck. On my eighth morning in San Francisco I got out the Yellow Pages and looked for employment agencies with casual labor pools. I found a half-dozen of them listed, all on the same block of South Mission. I drove there, anxious to carve another notch on my serenity.

It was a skid-row block, the kind that in Los Angeles had always depressed me. But here the seediness seemed almost charming, and as I locked my van and consulted my agency list, I got a feeling of belonging. Propelled by it, I pushed through a door marked “Mighty-Man Job Shop” and walked up to a paper-littered front counter.

A young woman with shoulder-length black hair looked up from her desk and smiled at me, then said, “You’re the man from Orinda who wanted three slaves—oops—I mean Mighty-Men to do yard work, right?” She consulted some forms in front of her and added, “Eddington, right? You said you’d send your chauffeur to pick the winos—I mean workers—up?”

Caught off guard by her directness, I blurted, “What?”

She smiled at my befuddlement. “You mean you’re not Eddington, but you need slaves?”

I looked into her eyes and saw that she was probably high. “No, I —”

“Then you came to ask me for a date?”

I realized I was being flirted with. I got a hollow “nothing” feeling, and reflexively grasped for Shroud Shifter’s counsel, then snapped to the fact that this was San Francisco, not L.A., and S.S. was supposed to be obsolescent. “I’m new in town,” I said. “I need work, and I saw your ad in the Yellow Pages.”

The woman said, “God, I’m sorry, it’s just that you’re so neatly dressed, and…well…mostly the guys we get are boozehounds and dopers, you know, looking for a few bucks to get bombed on. Are you crashing here on the Row?”

“I’ve got an apartment,” I said.

She looked surprised. “Where?”

“Twenty-sixth and Geary.”

Now she looked astonished. “God, my boyfriend lives on that block. Listen, you look sort of middle-class, so I’ll hip you to something. We pay our guys minimum wage for menial stuff like passing out handbills, unloading non-union trucks, that kind of thing. Our basic scam is that we pay in cash at the end of the day. That way, the slaves blow their money on wine and dope every night and come back the next morning. If you can afford to live in the Richmond, you *can’t* afford to work out of here.”

Now I was astonished—I was starting to like the woman. “I spent my savings moving in; now I need to find work so I can keep the place.”

“Wow, a real working man in a bind.” The woman took a cigarette from the pack on her desk, lit it and smoked in silence for long moments. Finally she snapped her fingers and walked to the counter. Leaning forward conspiratorially so that her hair brushed my face, she said, "Go over to the S.F. State campus and check out the bulletin board outside the student employment office. They've got lots of jobs listed for decent bucks. Just rip off the cards for the jobs you're interested in, call the numbers and tell them you're a grad student who goes to school at night so you can work full-time. You're big and you look smart, so you should get hired. Got it?"

I said, "Got it," and drew away from the cascade of hair. The woman straightened up and smiled, and I knew that she had relished our contact. Holding out her hand, she said, "I'm Jill, by the way."

Intending a perfunctory shake, but taking the hand gently, I said, "I'm Martin."

"Good luck, Martin."

"Th-thank you for your help."

—

Consciously shutting down the delicacies of the exchange, I followed the woman's advice and drove to the San Francisco State campus. The bulletin board she had mentioned was covered with cards offering work, and I deviated from her plan only by memorizing the jobs and phone numbers rather than stealing the information. From a pay phone I called the advertisers, getting three no-answers for the clerical openings, and a brusque male "Yes" for the manual labor card.

"I'm calling about the job you posted at S.F. State," I said.

"Are you a full-time student?" the voice asked.

"I'm a night grad student."

"Are you husky? Pardon my French, but this is no job for a candy-ass."

"I'm six-three, two hundred and strong. What exactly do I have to do?"

"Have you got transportation?"

"Yes. What—"

"I'm a real-estate developer in Sausalito. I need a husky kid to clear tree stumps out of my new site. It's tough work, but the pay is a five-spot an hour, off the books, with no deductions. What's your name?"

"Martin Plunkett."

"Okay, Marty, I'm Sol Slotnick. You want the job?"

"Yes."

"Can you meet my foreman tomorrow? In Sausalito?"

"Yes."

"Okay, then write this down: Over the Golden Gate, off the highway at exit four, right turn, left turn at Wolverton Road. You'll see a big field with signs posted—Sherlock Homes, a logo with the detective guy. Tomorrow at eight. Got it?"

"Yes."

"A-okay. You're gonna need tools, an ax and a scythe, but I'll supp —"

I interrupted my new employer. "I'll supply my own tools, Mr. Slotnick."

"Do your own thing, huh? Okay, kid, good luck."

That night I devastated my remaining money. At an army surplus store I bought khaki work pants and a shirt, a pair of waterproof hiking boots, a webbed cartridge belt and my first instruments of brushed-steel utility since my burglar's tools years before: one short-handled ax, one long-handled ax and one heavy-duty gardener's scythe. The ax heads were coated with transparent Teflon, and guaranteed to be "self-sharpening"—the more you used them, the sharper they were supposed to get. It sounded too good to be true, so I bought a sharpening stone to back up the claim.

The next day I drove across the Golden Gate Bridge to the "Sherlock Homes" site. It was a huge clearing overgrown with brush and dotted with tree stumps, surrounded on all sides by thick pine forest—months of work for one man. The foreman told me that Mr. Slotnick wanted the job completed by September 10, when the construction crew was scheduled to begin laying the foundations, and if I was lucky and the environmentalists didn't fuck things up, I could get an additional job chopping down trees across the highway at the proposed site of Slotnick's "Singles Paradise" tract. After explaining that all I had to do was uproot every tree stump on the property and chop down all the brush and let it lie for the bulldozers, the man pointed to the tools affixed to my belt and said, "You look like a pro, so I won't be coming around to check on you. Payday is every Friday at five, here." Shaking my hand, he left me alone with nature.

And nature, even though I was conspiring against her, gave me four and a half uninterrupted months of exhilarating beauty and blessedly mindless work.

I swung and hacked with my axes and scythe from April through August, eight hours a day, seven days a week, oblivious to heat waves and torrential rain. Shock waves pulsed through my body as I worked, and I felt myself getting stronger and stronger, but I never worried about developing attention-attracting muscles as I had in jail, because the scent of hay and ripped wood protected me, the pines enveloped me, and when I chopped with my eyes closed I saw pretty soft colors, shades that got darker the harder I swung, but still remained kind and gentle in my mind. Completely exhausted at the end of each day, the colors held at the corner of my vision as I drove home, ate dinner and fell immediately into deep sleep.

I was parking my van outside my apartment one night in early September when I heard, "Martin! Hi!" The words didn't fully register at first—no one had addressed me by name in months, and I was exhausted from an especially long day's work and hungry for food and sleep. Then the voice repeated itself—"Hi, Martin!"—and I looked across the street and saw a pretty woman with long black hair. The hair, backlighted by a streetlamp, drew me like a magnet, and I walked over to her.

She was standing on the sidewalk with a man, and they were weaving very slightly, as if tipsy. It took me a few seconds, but finally an image of hair brushing my face gave me the woman's name. Shroud Shifter, appearing out of nowhere, hissed, *BE NICE*. "Hello, Jill," I said. "Nice to see you."

Jill giggled and reached for her companion's arm. 'We're really zonked. Did you get a job? You must have, you've still got the place."

Shroud Shifter was waving a conductor's baton, whispering something I couldn't hear. "Yes, I followed your advice. It worked, and I've been working ever since."

Jill said, "Great. Steve, this is Martin; Martin, this is Steve."

I turned my attention to the boyfriend, a surly type with ridiculous muttonchop sideburns. S.S. was saying *BE NICE BE NICE BE NICE*. I said, "Hey, Steve, what's happenin'," and stuck out my hand hippie-style. Steve said, 'What's happenin', man," and gave me a counterculture bone-crusher. I winced in mock pain, and Jill laughed. "Steve's an airline mechanic, and he's really strong. You want to come up for a drink or something?"

At the "or something," S.S. waggled his eyebrows. I said, "Right on," and Jill got between her boyfriend and me and took our arms, saying in a stage whisper, "I am so stoned." Her hand on my elbow felt alternately hot and cold and soft and hard, but the touching wasn't the least scary. We walked three abreast halfway down the block and up the steps of a Victorian four flat, and Steve unlocked the door and flipped on a light switch. Jill dropped my arm and said, "There's something Stevie's been after me to do for a long time, and now I'm just stoned enough to do it." She skipped through the living room, and my eyes automatically circled the four walls.

Airline posters were crookedly Scotch-taped along them, and of all the countries represented, Tahiti and Japan jumped out at me, as if I had once visited them. Shutting the door, Steve said, "I been all these places at least twice. You work for Pan-Am, you get two free trips a year, bring your chick if you want." He pointed to the ax clipped to my belt. "You a carpenter?"

I said, "I'm a tree surgeon," and surveyed the room again, wondering why places I had never seen seemed so familiar. Steve was giving me a strange look, so to put him at ease I added, "Jill got me my job. I was broke when I first landed in town, and I hit Mighty-Man looking for a gig. Jill sent me down to the S.F. State employment office."

Steve said, "Jill's the friendly type," and S.S. sent me a series of snapshots: Jill flirting and sleeping with other men, but always returning to Steve, who was grateful to have her back and would take her on long reconciliation trips to exotic places, courtesy of his employer; Steve brooding over being treated like a doormat, getting drunk with his mechanic buddies and railing against Jill, but always calling her from the bar to tell her he'd be late.

"What are you drinkin', man?"

Steve's voice snapped me out of the movie he had been co-starring in. "You got a beer?" I said.

"Does a bear shit in the woods? Come on, let's hit the fridge."

I followed Steve into a small kitchen. More airline posters were taped to the walls, but the grease-coated pictures of Paris and the Bavarian Alps did not dig at my memory. Steve caught my look again, and said, "You're scopin' them posters like a man who needs a vacation." He opened the refrigerator and pulled out two cans of beer. When he handed me one, I said, "Yeah, Tahiti or Japan, maybe."

Popping his can, Steve said, "Those places suck. The food sucks, and the Japs look like the slopes in 'Nam." He guzzled beer and belched, then laughed. "Coors, breakfast of champions. We had the Coors Olympics at work last year. Guy who won drank four six-packs, held it in for two hours, then filled a gallon gas can with piss. That was the triathalon. Get it? Three events, like in the real Olympics. You been to 'Nam?"

I leaned against a grease-spattered wall and pretended to sip my beer. Shroud Shifter teletyped *BE SMART BE SMART BE SMART* across Steve's face, and I said, "I was Four-F. An old football injury."

Steve belched. "You didn't miss much. You play End?"

"What?"

"What do you mean, what? You're tall, you musta at least tried out for End."

"Third-string quarterback," I said self-effacingly.

Steve smiled at my calculated commiseration. "Third string, the story of my life. I wonder what Jill's doing. She usually loves to bullshit with visitors."

"Did somebody mention my name?"

I turned my head in the direction of the words. Jill was standing in the kitchen doorway wearing a robe, with a towel wrapped around her head like a turban. She said, "Remember those old Clairol ads? 'If I've got only one life, let me live it as a blonde'? Well, watch."

With a flourish she pulled off the towel and shook her head. Her lovely black hair was now peroxide yellow, and Shroud Shifter flashed *DON'T LET HER DON'T LET HER DON'T LET HER DON'T LET—*

I unclipped my self-sharpening, Teflon-coated, brushed-steel ax and swung it at her neck. Her head was sheared cleanly off; blood burst from the cavity; her arms and legs twitched spastically; then her whole body crumpled to the floor. The force of my swing spun me around, and for one second my vision eclipsed the entire scene—blood-spattered walls; the body shooting an arterial geyser out the neck, the heart still pumping in reflex; Steve, frozen on his feet, turning a catatonic blue.

I reversed my stance, flipped the handle so that I had the blade side out, and roundhoused my return shot left-handed. The blow caught Steve in the side of the head, and there was a sound like cracking eggs amplified ten million times. The blade stuck, and for long seconds I was holding the already dead man up on his feet. Then I yanked, and the body pitched forward while my ax flew in the opposite direction, brains and blood lubricating its flight.

Then Steve fell and began making gurgling sounds;

Then *his* limbs did *their* death dance;

Then a jet of blood burst from his skull into my eyes.

Then I came, and all the colors I had seen on the job combined, and hurled me to the floor to form a triad.

—

I awakened hours later. A telephone was ringing, and I could taste linoleum and blood. Opening my eyes, I saw a section of floor and two beer cans lying on their sides. I began to sense what had happened and held back sobs, then sent brain messages to my arms and legs to see if I had been given amputation as punishment for my crimes. My fingers scratched a cold surface and my legs jerked, and I felt grateful. The phone stopped ringing, and I wondered whom to be grateful for. Then the piece of floor and the beer cans were gone, replaced by red print on blank paper: *ME ME ME ME ME ME ME*.

On blank brain film, I typed *YES YES YES YES YES. TELL ME WHAT TO DO*.

Shroud Shifter said, Open your eyes. I obeyed, and he and Lucretia were there nude. I was memorizing their bodies when S.S. rebuked me in the harshest voice he had ever used: We are fantasy parents you have utilized since childhood. We give you what you need so that you may do what you have to do. You have experienced what some people would call a psychotic episode. In point of fact, sooner or later, premeditatedly, you would have done what you did.

Pausing, Shroud Shifter allowed me a moment to respond. I typed *why?*

He said, you are a murderer, Martin.

It was the first time he had ever addressed me by name.

I begged him to say it again, so that I would know what to do. He consented.

You are a murderer, Martin.

You are a murderer, Martin.

You are a murderer, Martin.

With my destiny ringing in my ears and my self-admitted fantasy father leading me step by step, I earned the title. First I thoroughly wiped every surface I might have touched, then I negated the forensic evidence of my ax blows by desecrating the two corpses at the places where I cut them down, using a kitchen knife and meat mallet to subterfuge blade marks and impact points. The work was messy, but I willed my brain to consider it tedious. When I was finished, I washed my hands, took off my bloodsoaked khakis, put on a jumpsuit from Steve's closet and wrapped up my clothes and boots in seven layers of trash-bag plastic. With my bare feet free of foreign matter, I picked up my ax and webbed belt and checked my watch. It was 3:16 A.M. Turning off the lights, I left the apartment. There was no one on the street. I walked home and fell asleep seeing colors.

—

From the front page of the San Francisco Examiner, *September 4, 1974:*

Couple Butchered in Richmond District Apartment

The hideously butchered bodies of a young man and woman were discovered last night at the man's apartment. Police were called to the scene when neighbors reported "strange odors" coming from a downstairs unit at 911 26th St.

"I knew there was something dead in there," Thomas Frischer of 914 26th St. said to paramedics. "This heat we've been having made the stink stand out real good." Breaking down the door, the officers found the bodies of the apartment's tenant, Steven Sifakis, 31, a mechanic at the Pan-American Airways terminal at San Francisco International Airport, and his girlfriend, Jill Eversall, 29, an employment counselor at the "Mighty-Man" employment agency. In a statement made exclusively to Examiner *reporters, S.F.P.D. Sergeant W. D. Stemthall, senior officer of the unit that responded to the "unknown trouble" call, said, "I knew there were dead people in there, so I held a handkerchief over my nose coming in. When I saw the bodies, the first thing I thought about was the Sharon Tate killings from four or five years ago. The scene was unbelievable. The kitchen was covered with dried blood, and there was a dead man on the floor with his skull crushed in. That wasn't the worst. There was a dead woman in the kitchen doorway. She'd been decapitated, and her head was lying on the living-room carpet. I saw the murder weapon—a kitchen knife—on the kitchen floor near the man's body, and sent my partner back to our prowler to radio for detectives and the medical examiner."*

Soon the quiet Richmond District was ablaze with the flashing lights of police vehicles. Eight teams of patrolmen began house-to-house canvassing, and Deputy Coroner Willard Willarsohn examined the bodies and attributed the cause of death to "massive trauma caused by repeated knife thrusts and loss of blood," adding that the couple had been dead for "at least 48 hours, maybe up to 52."

While comprehensive questioning of neighbors was being conducted, friends, relatives and the employers of the deceased were contacted. When expressions of shock, outrage and grief were set aside, the investigating officers knew this:

One—Sifakis and Miss Eversall were longtime lovers, and were last seen together dining at the Molinari Delicatessen in North Beach on

Monday night, September 2, at 7:30, fifty-one hours before their bodies were discovered; and, two—both victims were known for frequent unexplained work absences. Thus, no one at their places of employment thought to report them missing. An anonymous acquaintance of the couple told our reporters: "Stevie and Jill were party people. They liked to get high and boogie, and they were careless about the company they kept. They picked up hitchhikers, and, well, Jill liked to swing. Stevie liked to drink with the bikers over in Oakland, and I think this is going to be tough to solve because they both knew so many transient-type people."

Meanwhile, with no clues, police are broadening their efforts, and an S.F.P.D. spokesman has announced: "This is a major crime, and it will get major attention. We are appealing to the citizens of San Francisco for information to aid us in our investigation, and we will not cease in our efforts until the killer or killers is caught."

—

From the front page of the San Francisco Chronicle*, September 6, 1974:*

No Leads in Richmond Slayings— Victims' Associates being Questioned

Despite a massive investigation, the police have made little headway in their efforts to solve the brutal murders of Jill Eversall and Steven Sifakis, found stabbed to death in Sifakis's 26th Street apartment Wednesday night. According to S.F.P.D. Chief of Detectives Douglas Lindsay, the 50-hour hiatus between the crime and the discovery of the bodies has given the killer or killers an edge, and the lifestyle of the victims poses frustrating investigatory problems. In a formal statement made to the media this morning at City Hall, Lindsay said:

"With the basics covered, I can tell you this. Mr. Sifakis and Miss Eversall were last seen dining alone Monday evening in North Beach, and they met up with the person or persons who killed them somewhere between the restaurant and Mr. Sifakis's apartment. Despite widely broadcast public appeals and the questioning of virtually every resident in an eight-block radius surrounding the apartment building, no eyewitnesses can be found—no one saw the victims in the company of another person or persons. The only fingerprints found in the apartment belonged to the victims themselves, or to known associates of theirs who have since been cleared as suspects. The murder weapon—a saw-bladed steak knife—was found on the scene, and we believe it was what the killer or killers used to decapitate Miss Eversall. Mr. Sifakis,

who died from blows to the head, was mutilated in the cranial area after death with the knife, but we believe a steel meat mallet from his kitchen was the actual instrument of murder. Forensic technicians have painstakingly examined the apartment and have gained no salient information, and we have ruled out robbery as a motive, having inventoried the apartment with friends of Mr. Sifakis. Nothing appears to be stolen, and no one heard the actual murders—which had to have happened abruptly for the carnage to have gone unheard.

"Circumstantially, we believe the killer or killers to have left in the early morning hours, wearing Mr. Sifakis's clothes, carrying their own bloodstained clothing in plastic trash bags taken from under the sink. The killer or killers' departure was not observed, and we are currently collating data on suspicious vehicles seen in the area that night.

"Our investigation is now centering on the victims' lifestyle. Jill Eversall worked at a skid-row day labor pool that hired transients with criminal records, and during her three years with the agency she befriended a number of men with dubious backgrounds. She was plagued by obscene phone calls throughout that time, and repeatedly told friends that some of the men she associated with on the job frightened her. We are now extensively checking out laborers associated with the Mighty-Man Agency, along with other skid-row habitués.

"Steven Sifakis possessed two convictions for marijuana sales, and was tenuously connected to a number of Oakland motorcycle gangs. At the moment, we believe that the murders may be drug-related. Narcotics officers are involved in that aspect of the investigation, and officers attached to the Sex Crimes Squad are checking on the whereabouts of registered sex offenders known to use violence. Although the victims were not sexually abused, forensic psychiatrists involved in the investigation have concluded that the killer or killers were acting out of sexually motivated rage. Both Miss Eversall and Mr. Sifakis were involved with other partners in the recent past, and jealousy remains near the top of our list of probable motives. Those former partners are now being checked out.

"In conclusion, we are doing all we can to find the killer or killers, and we are convinced that the victims' loose lifestyle holds the answer. Existing evidence and psychological mockups point to this as a one-time-only crime—not the work of a repeating psychopath."

—

From the Berkeley Barb*, September 11, 1974:*

Heat Huge in Wake of Sensationalized Snuffs

Last month Tricky Dicky resigned, and you thought things were looking up. You were right, but now the other shoe—or should we say hobnailed boot—has fallen. On September 2, Jill Eversall and her main man Steve Sifakis were brutally offed at Steve's Richmond District crib. The killer hasn't been caught yet, unfortunately, although the fuzz is trying. In some respects—too hard.

You see, Steve and Jill had an open thing, and they grooved on getting mellow with grass, and they weren't uptight about who they hung out with. Jill had a gig at a slave market on South Mission, and—are you ready?—she liked helping the down-and-out guys on skid row find work. So…

So the San Francisco cops have concluded that Steve and Jill's "loose lifestyle" was the cause of their deaths, and although deploring that lifestyle, they have set out to find the snuff artist/artists with bulldog determination. (Steve and Jill lived in the nice, safe Richmond, after all—why, it could have been someone…decent!) In the course of their investigation they have violated the civil rights of scores of peaceful "loose lifestylers."

Item: In an early-morning raid, the fuzz rousted a half-dozen long-haired young people sleeping in Golden Gate Park, and when they found a pocketknife on one young man, they put a gun to his head and screamed, "Tell us why you sliced those people in the Richmond!"

Item: Workers drinking wine outside the Mighty-Man slave office were loaded into a van and hauled to the City Prison, where they were skin-searched, then harassed by homicide detectives. One plainclothes pig demanded that an old man admit to being hot for Jill Eversall. When the old man refused, the cop broke a wine bottle over his head.

Item: A number of innocent men with sex-offense records have been hassled by cops threatening to expose their records to employers and friends.

Item: Cops interrupted a chanting service at the Hare Krishna Temple on Delores Street, shaking down the chanters for dope and weapons. When the Temple's head dojo demanded an explanation, one officer exclaimed, "I think the Richmond killings are cult-connected. My mom lives on Twenty-ninth Street! Don't gimme no shit! I'm here to enforce the law!"

We at the Berkeley Barb *wish to protest the above cited lawlessness and point out another law that may soon take precedence—the law of equal and opposite reaction. Breaking the law to enforce the law is* *never justified, even if the crime is murder.*

14

While the events described in the preceding accounts were taking place, I was invisible in the storm center, lucid and gracefully careful, as apprentices should be when they finally achieve the status of Professional.

You are a murderer, Martin.

Awakening from my post-killing color sleep at 7:30, I automatically shaved and showered and prepared myself for work. I knew exactly what I had done and what I had to do, and went about it free of waking colors and brain-movies. First I dressed in my spare set of work clothes; then, knowing it was unlikely that the bodies had yet been discovered, I tossed Steve's jumpsuit in with my bloodied khakis, web belt and ax, wrapped the plastic bundle up tightly and carried it out to my van. I drove to the clearing site as if my day portended business as usual, and I buried the death kit in a marsh area outside downtown Sausalito. Getaway step one completed, I sat on a rock and charted the remaining steps in mental typeface, "Business As Usual" my basic escape theme.

Neighbors may have seen you with the ax, so you need to obtain an identical ax illegally, then wear down the blade so that it will appear blood-free and well used if subjected to forensic scrutiny.

Your alibi is that you were home asleep at the time of the murders. The other tenants will corroborate you as an early riser, early returner and quiet tenant, and no one saw you on the street talking to Steve and Jill. No witnesses were present at the Mighty-Man office when you met Jill, and if she told people about meeting you and the police question you about it—you must deny it, because that line of questioning will, logically, follow their first *routine* questioning of all neighborhood residents. And if you change your story after first claiming not to have known her, you will become a major suspect.

The police will be taking down license numbers of every vehicle in the surrounding area, cross-checking the registration against the California Criminal Records Bureau's files. Your burglary conviction and the fact that you recently completed your probationary term and moved here from Los Angeles will be noted, and you will be subjected to intense questioning and possible physical abuse. You must never waver in your denials of guilt, even under extreme duress, and you must refuse to take a polygraph test.

You are a murderer, Martin.

In the end, my scenario translated into reality with almost perfect fidelity. I shoplifted an ax identical to my old one at a hardware store in Sausalito and devastated the cutting edge on the site's few remaining tree trunks. I continued my mop-up work for Mr. Slotnick, and the foreman came by and told me that on September 10 I was out of a job, because the site was going to be plowed, and the "Ecofreaks" had put the kibosh on Big Sol's "Singles Paradise" tract. I maintained my business-as-usual plan, and the delay in discovering the bodies made my confidence grow in quantum leaps.

Then, fifty hours and ten minutes after *the* moment, I heard the sirens, and I looked out my front window and saw red twirling lights proclaim my name. I watched as the red was intensified by more and more police cars, then I went to bed and slept, and dream lights spelled out "You are a murderer, Martin."

Loud knocks on my door awakened me at dawn. I put on a robe, walked over and yawned into the peephole. "Yeah? What do you want?"

A perfunctory voice answered, "Police, open up."

In an instant I knew they had already run their vehicle cross-checks and had knowledge of my record. The thrust of my performance came to me, boldly embellished. I rubbed sleep from my eyes, opened the door and reverted to my old jailhouse persona. "Yeah, what is it?"

Three hard cases were on my doorstep. They were all as big as me, and they were all wearing crew cuts, cheap summer suits and scowls. The one in the middle, distinguishable only by a badly stained necktie, said, "Don't *you* know what it is?"

"Fill me in," I said. "It's six-fucking A.M., and I'm dying to hear what you have to say."

The cop on the left muttered, "Comedian," and motioned for me to step aside. I complied with feigned reluctance, and the three filed into my living room, the necktie man immediately pointing to my ax and scythe propped up against the wall by the door. "What are those?" he asked.

I looked him straight in the eye. "An ax and a scythe."

"I can see that, Plunkett. What do you use them for?"

I acted surprised at his mention of my name, and made myself hesitate three seconds, watching the other two fan out to search my apartment. “To trim my nails,” I said.

“Don’t fuck with me,” he said, easing the door shut.

“Then tell me what this is all about.”

“I’ll get to it. How long have you lived in San Francisco?”

“Since April.”

“Why do you possess those tools?”

“I’ve been working at a building site in Marin, and I use the tools to dig out tree stumps and brush.”

“I see. Who got you the job?”

“I got it off the bulletin board at S.F. State.”

“Are you a student there?”

“No.”

“Then what gave you the right to the job?”

“Being broke gave me the right. What’s—”

“Shut up. Are you sure you didn’t get the job at the Mighty-Man Agency?”

“I’m positive.”

“How many burglaries have you pulled in San Francisco?”

“Three trillion at last count. I—”

“I said don’t fuck with me!”

I flinched backward and looked scared. Shifting performance gears, I said, “I pulled one B and E in L.A. five years ago, and I did a year, and I stayed clean and topped out my probation and moved here. I was a fucking kid when I pulled that B and E, and I haven’t done it since. Now what do you want?”

The necktie cop hooked his thumbs in his belt. The pose allowed me a view of his holstered .38, and staring straight into his eyes gave me glimpses of the low-voltage brain behind them. “You know this is serious,” he said.

I cinched the belt of my robe. “I know this is more than a burglary roust.”

“Smart lad. Did you see the police cars on this block last night?”

“Yes.”

“Wonder what was happening?”

“Yes.”

“Make any attempt to find out?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I’ve had enough of cops to last me a lifetime. What—”

“I’ll tell you in due time. You like pussy?”

"Yeah, do you?"

"Had any lately?"

"In my dreams last night."

"Cute. You like blondes or brunettes?"

"Both."

"Ever get a woman to dye her hair for you?"

I laughed to cover my shock at the unanticipated question. "Snatch hair, you mean?"

The necktie cop snickered, then looked over my shoulder. I turned and saw his partners going through my kitchen drawers. When one of them gave a negative headshake, Necktie said, "Let's change the subject."

"How about baseball?"

"How about boys? You bisexual?"

"No."

"Into three ways?"

"No."

"You take it up the ass?"

"No."

"Oh, you eat it then?"

I started to get angry for real, and my hands twitched at my sides. Necktie noticed my change of expression, and said, "Strike a nerve, cool cat? Maybe you got reamed doing your bullet in L.A.? Maybe your switch gets flipped by boys now, and you hate yourself for liking it. Maybe your switch flipped Monday night about nine o'clock when Steve and Jill suggested a party? Maybe you misinterpreted the whole scene, and when Jill wouldn't put out you took it out on Steve with a meat mallet, and you chopped off Jill's head because you didn't like the way she was looking at you. How many people you killed, Plunkett?"

In the course of a microsecond, an astonishing thing happened. As I felt the color drain from my face I became my performance, my real anger became perfect real shock, and I was the innocent man falsely accused. Stammering, "Y-y-y-you m-mean p-p-people w-were m-m-murdered." I knew that the necktie cop bought it straight down the line. When he said, "That's right," I saw his disappointment that I wasn't guilty; when he said, "Where were *you* Monday night?" I knew the rest of the interrogation was just a formality. The revelation passed, and as I assumed a normal, sane sense of culpability, it took every ounce of my will not to gloat. "I-I w-was here," I stuttered.

"Alone?"

"Y-y-yes."

"What were you doing?"

"I-I got home from my job around eight-thirty. I ate dinner, then I read for an hour or so and went to bed."

"A swinging evening. That what you usually do?"

"Yes."

"Don't you hang out with friends?"

"I haven't really made any friends here."

"Don't you get lonely?"

"Sure. Who do you think—"

"I'll ask the questions. Do you know a woman named Jill Eversall or a man named Steven Sifakis?"

"Are they the ones…?"

"That's right."

"What do—did they look like?"

"She was a foxy brunette, about five-six, nice tits. You like tits?"

"Come on, Officer."

"Okay, what about Steve Sifakis? Five-eleven, one-ninety, reddish brown hair with muttonchop sideburns. He was supposed to be hung like a mule. You dig big cocks?"

"Just my own." I heard the two cops in the kitchen laugh, and turned around to look at them. One man was shaking his head and drawing a finger across his throat, the gesture obviously intended for Necktie. Turning back, I said, "Can we wrap this up? I have to go to work."

"We may damn well wrap you up, Plunkett," Necktie said slowly.

I went in for the kill, knowing I could outgame any machine in captivity. "This is getting old, so why don't I wrap this up? Since I didn't kill anybody, why don't we all hotfoot it down to the station. You hit me with a lie-detector test, I pass it, you cut me loose. What do you say?"

Necktie looked past me to the leader cop. I resisted the urge to watch their signals, and concentrated on the stain that gave the cop his impromptu name. I had just decided it was chili when Necktie said, "Did you see anybody on the street when you came home Monday night?"

I considered my "victory" question for a moment, then said, "No."

"Hear any strange noises?"

"No."

"See any unfamiliar vehicles?"

"No."

“Ever fuck Jill Eversall or score grass from Steve Sifakis?”

I gave Necktie a look of contempt that would have wilted the Pope. “Come on, man.”

“No, you come on. Answer my question.”

“All right. No, I never fucked Jill Eversall or scored grass from Steve Sifakis.”

One of the cops behind me cleared his throat; Necktie squared his shoulders and said, “We may be back.” The leader cop said “Stay clean” as he walked past me to the door, and the other one winked.

—

Of course they never came back, and I spent the next several weeks enjoying my anonymous fame as the “Richmond Ripper,” an appellation bestowed on me by an *Examiner* reporter. “Business as usual” were my watchwords, and I imagined myself under twenty-four-hour surveillance, my every move being scrutinized by equally anonymous forces anxious to bring me down. The conscious cultivation of paranoia kept me coming home at night when I wanted to be on the street listening to people talk about me; it kept me going to university job boards, searching out work, when I wanted to be spending the money I had hoarded on guns. It would not let me collect newspaper clippings on my crime, nor would it let me do what I most wanted to do—move on to other cities and see how they affected me. The regimen boiled down to asceticism in place of celebration, and the only thing emotionally satisfying about it was that I knew it was making me stronger.

Ten days after the killings, I found another “Heavy Labor” job—weeding an entire hillside on the edge of the U.C.-Berkeley campus. The work was tedious—exacerbated by the fact that I didn’t need the money—and eavesdropping on students’ conversations made me angry: Watergate and Nixon’s recent resignation were their favorite topics, and when they deigned to talk about me, I was dismissed as a “psycho” or “sick puppy.” I decided that on October 2, a month to the day from the murders, I would celebrate.

The time passed slowly.

I worked on the hillside, listened to students talk and read newspapers on my lunch hour. Reading the papers was like being dangled on an ego string. Articles comparing me to the Manson Family, “only smarter,” felt like yanks into the clouds; paragraphs attributing my murders to the “Zodiac” killer—a mystic psychopath who sent lurid communiqués to the police—felt like being flung to the dirt. Eight straight days of no print space was the complete abandonment of a mother hurling an unwanted child into a garbage heap.

Nights were the slowest to pass.

On my way home, I would sometimes see cops rousting long-haired youths, and I would know, somehow, that I had been the catalyst of that minor chaos. Cutting a street-swath through people in my van was satisfying, because I knew they knew of my actions. But at home, in my cocoon of caution, there was only me. And though "you are a murderer, Martin," was now my identity, I had not yet decided to stay yanked in the clouds through continuous killing.

By October 2, the Richmond Ripper case was stale media bread, and my instincts told me that the police had gone on to matters of more urgent priority. Logic joined my heart in telling me to celebrate, and I did.

It took me an entire day and night to find what I wanted, and the four-hundred-dollar price tag was infinitesimal compared to the effort of talking out of the side of my mouth to a long succession of South San Francisco hoodlums, exchanging "pedigrees" and criminal amenities, then going on a half-dozen wild-goose chases before connecting with a retired pawnshop broker looking to liquidate "hot stock." The ultimate transaction was quick and effortless, and I was the unlawful owner of a brand-new, never-registered, untraceable Colt .357 magnum "Python" model revolver.

Now I had two talismans—one handcrafted, the other earned. At home I brought them together, threaded cylinder to muzzle. They fit perfectly, adding a tactile weight to my new identity. On my way to work the next morning I bought a box of hollow-point ammunition, and with the loaded and silencered hand cannon under my shirt, I dug weeds out of the soft dirt until dusk. Then, framed by dormitory lights and a starry night, I practiced.

Muzzle flash, recoil, the dull thuds of the silencer; slapping sounds as the bullets tore into the spade-furrowed dirt. Cordite and soil in my nostrils, and headlights from passing cars on the road above me momentarily illuminating the craters made by individual shots. My right wrist aching from the magnum's internal combustion; emptying the spent shells into my pocket after every sixth explosion; reloading in the dark and firing, firing, firing until my box of hollow points was empty and the hillside smelled like a battlefield sans blood. Then the drive home, trembling inside, anxious to hit the open highway and just go.

—

But going was, at that point, inimical to business as usual, which meant “stay.” So I did stay, finishing my weeding job, but continuing at U.C.-Berkeley as a backup custodian, sweeping and mopping on the regular crew members’ staggered days off. I set my go day as Thanksgiving, November 24, and continued to live on the cheap, allowing myself one luxury: ammunition.

So as not to arouse suspicion by repeated purchases of single boxes, I drove to San Jose and bought a gross of them, a total of 7,200 rounds. I secreted the box in a heavily wooded area near the Berkeley side of the Bay Bridge, and every night after work I fired at imaginary targets on the water. Each muzzle burst/recoil/silencer thud/wave kick brought me closer to go, but I still didn’t know what it meant.

I found out the day before my departure.

My homemade silencer was virtually destroyed from overuse, so I drove to South San Francisco to find the pawnshop dealer who had sold me the Python, to see if he had connections who could sell me a professional replacement. The man smiled as I made my request, took a picture of sailing ships from his wall and twirled the dial of the safe behind it. Within moments I was screwing a C.I.A. “Black Beauty” suppressor to the muzzle of my magnum and handing over five hundred dollars as payment. More than satisfied, I tucked the gun into my waistband, covered it with my shirttail and walked outside to my van. Seeing a coin-operated news rack filled with *Chronicles,* I walked over to buy one, hoping for a back-page mention along the lines of “still no clues in Richmond Ripper case.” I was about to feed the machine my fifteen cents when I noticed a poster tacked to the telephone pole beside the rack.

Banner print exclaimed “The Wages of Sin!!!” and below the words there was a crystal-clear photographic reproduction, with S.F.P.D. 9/4/74 written on the bottom. The words below that had to do with salvation through Jesus, but the picture in the middle caused me to shake so hard that it was impossible to read the exact message.

Jill Eversall’s severed head lay in the foreground in living black and white. The rest of her body was sprawled in the kitchen doorway. Beyond it, Steve Sifakis’s akimbo legs, blood-streaked walls and floor were visible. Shroud Shifter typed *ugly ugly ugly ug*—across my vision, then erased the line and replaced it with *wrong disarray not ugly* *amateur disarray not ugly not bad amateurish not ugly not bad.*

I ripped the poster off the pole and wadded it into a ball, then threw it into the gutter and ground the cardboard with both feet until my boots were soaked, seeing the Tahiti and Japan airline posters on Steve Sifakis's walls and the original memory that had eluded me—Season's lover hurling me topsy-turvy, darkness into light, similar posters on the wall as he beat me into humiliation. S.S. took on Country Joe McDonald's voice and sang, "Ashes to ashes and dust to dust, stormy weather caused your pump to rust." His voice faltered in mid-stanza, but I knew he was telling me to go out and buy a beautiful Polaroid camera to go with my magnum. Other instructions followed, not verbally, not typed, but telepathic. Only over the next fourteen hours, as I methodically accomplished each task, did they come to typeface life:

Buy the camera and film.

Go home and load all your property into your van, including the furniture you had originally planned to leave behind.

Drop off your keys with the old lady downstairs.

Buy a holster for your weapon, cut a hole in the bottom to accommodate the silencer, then clip the magnum to the springs underneath the van's driver's seat.

Sleep well, and take U.S. 66 east toward the Nevada line early tomorrow morning.

Dispose of all your furniture except the mattress after you are free and clear of the San Francisco area.

Keep the Polaroid close at hand.

—

Those duties behind me, professionally rendered and type-faced and check-marked upon completion, I drove east through lush Nevada pine forests, solo, with no Shroud Shifter as copilot. Traffic was nonexistent, my gas tank was full, and I had three thousand, six hundred dollars in the glove compartment. The camera was an arm's length away on the passenger seat. Mountains loomed behind the tall trees. I felt very peaceful.

Then I saw the hitchhikers.

They were a teenaged boy and girl, both long-haired and wearing Levi's jackets, jeans and backpacks. I pulled to the side of the road and stopped, and seconds later the boy was at the passenger-side door, the girl directly behind him. With one hand I pulled up the locking button, with the other I reached under my seat for the holstered magnum.

“Thanks, mister!”

I fired three times, chest high, and from the way the boy and girl pitched backward I knew my shots had caught them both. Setting the hand brake and hitting the emergency blinker, I slid over the passenger seat and out of the van. The teenagers were lying on the gravel shoulder, dead. I looked past their bodies, saw that the shoulder dropped off in a small slope, and kicked the corpses over the side, then spread loose gravel on the blood from the exit wounds. A stopwatch with a ten-minute timer jumped into my brain, and I got my Polaroid from the van and ran down the hill with it.

The hitchhikers were lying in soft dirt at the bottom, joined in a jigsaw-puzzle posture—her head on the rear crook of his right leg, their fingertips crossed at divergent angles. The bodies reminded me of signal flags sending the word *disarray* in semaphore, and I almost forgot caution in my desire to make them perfect.

But I didn’t. First I checked his chest and back, then hers, and when I saw a back exit wound on the girl and rips on her pack next to it, with no marks on the outside, I knew the spent slugs were inside. With my stopwatch reading 1:37 elapsed, I pulled down the zipper and tore through panties and blouse until my fingers hit hot steel. I put the rounds in my shirt pocket and let them burn, then furiously kicked a shallow grave out of the dirt surrounding the three of us.

6:04 elapsed.

I wiped the girl’s backpack free of fingerprints with my sleeve, then stripped the two corpses and threw their clothes and packs into the grave.

7:46 elapsed.

With the lovers nude, I placed the girl on her back and spread her legs; the boy I positioned on top of her. When the simulated intercourse was perfect, I snapped my first picture, watched the camera expel the blank print paper and waited.

9:14 elapsed.

Photographic perfection imprinted itself, and weirdly, preternaturally, I knew the image was a clue to my fixations with blonds, Lauri the hooker, and things much, much older.

10:00 elapsed, alarms sounding; the realization that Shroud Shifter and I had finally merged as one. I covered the bodies with loose dirt and arranged heavy branches over the plot to hold them down.

Tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick.

Giving myself commemorative bonus seconds, I put the snapshot in my pocket; saw that the blood on my collar was no more than the amount caused by a shaving cut; realized that next time I should steal money and possibly credit cards. When it was time to go, I obliterated my footprints by walking sideways over them on my way up the hill. At the top, the landscape was absolutely still. My van looked new in the fall sunlight, and on impulse I named it the “Deathmobile,” then drove away.

III

Crimes of Opportunity; Nightmare Assaults (1974–1978)

From Boss Detective *magazine, December 28, 1974, issue:*

Campers' Pet Makes Grisly Discovery Sex Slayer Sought!

Without the keen nose of Buford, a three-year-old basset hound, the bodies of Karen Roget and Todd Millard, missing since Thanksgiving Day, might never have been found. Buford, who belongs to Mr. and Mrs. J. Bradley Streep of Sacramento, California, was frolicking off his leash near a campground adjacent to U.S. 66 outside Hastings, Nevada, when, according to Mr. Streep, "He started yapping like crazy and started to dig in the dirt. When he came up with that first bone, I almost dropped my cookies!"

The bone was human, and Mr. Streep (who briefly attended chiropractic college some years before) recognized it as such and ran for the campground and his C.B. Meanwhile, while his owner contacted the authorities, Buford continued to dig, and soon unearthed the skeletal remains of two bodies, along with their clothing and backpacks containing ID, spare clothing and a collapsible tent. The keen-snouted hound was happily munching on a footbone when Mr. Streep returned with Lewis County Sheriff's Deputy J. V. McClain, who gasped at the positions of the skeletons.

"The bodies were arranged in a…uh…posture suggesting sexual intercourse," Deputy McClain told Boss Detective *correspondent Robert Rice. "Even though decomposition was complete, you could tell what the killer had done."*

Shocked though he was, Deputy McClain radioed for reinforcements and checked the clothing lying underneath the bodies in their grave. After discovering driver's licenses belonging to Sacramento residents Todd Thomas Millard, 17, and Karen Nancy Roget, 16, he recalled a missing-persons bulletin on the two. "They were last seen in Hastings on November 24, Thanksgiving Day," he said. "Almost a month ago, and from the condition of the bodies I knew they were dead that long."

The Lewis County coroner soon arrived and deduced the means of death. "From rips and bloodstains on their clothing and backpacks, it is safe to assume that the two were shot."

A team of late-arriving officers made a search of the area but could not find expended bullets, and the scene was roped off while the remains of the teenagers were removed and technicians looked for *other clues. The Streeps and Buford continued on their vacation, with hearty kudos from Lewis County authorities, who immediately launched an investigation. Three days later Sheriff Roger D. Norman told reporters:*

"We have few clues in the vicious murders of Todd Millard and Karen Roget. The time that elapsed between the killings and the discovery of the bodies has hindered us severely. We have not been able to turn up any witnesses, and the known associates of the deceased have provided us with no real leads. We have, however, ruled out robbery as a motive, and we are now centering our efforts on combing the files of known sex deviates."

Meanwhile, bereaved family and friends mourn Todd and Karen, and pray for the police to find the fiend who killed them.

—

From True Life Sleuth*, March 1975 issue:*

Fiend or Fiends Stalking Nevada/Utah Roadways! Crimes Connected?

Police continue to be baffled by a rash of fiendishly clever, seemingly random killings throughout Utah and Nevada. Since New Year's, four young men, all runaways from wealthy homes, have been found murdered. The common denominators have been robbery as the presumed sole motive, the affluence of the victims and their "runaway" status. Aside from those factors, the killings differ so markedly that investigating agencies are not sure whether the crimes are connected. The four dead are:

Randall Hosford, 18, discovered in a culvert outside Carson City, Nevada, on January 2. The youth was a "remittance man" living off stipends from his wealthy Northern California family, and was known to roam the western states by thumb, always carrying credit cards and large amounts of cash. His wallet had been picked clean when police discovered his strangled body, and the current disposition of the investigation into his murder is—no clues.

Lee Richard Webb, 20, of Las Vegas. The son of a casino owner, young Webb was last seen hitchhiking outside Las Vegas on January 19. His body was found a week later, in the desert forty miles from the gambling mecca. The youth had been robbed and strangled. Disposition—no clues.

Coleman Loring, 19, and his friend Ralph De Santis, 21, the sons of wealthy Moab, Utah, mining contractors, found bound together, robbed *and shot through the hearts in a cave outside Moab on January 26. No expended shells were found, although the large entry and exit wounds point to a large-caliber murder weapon. The boys were hitching to Las Vegas for a weekend of gambling, and were known to be carrying over two thousand dollars in cash. Disposition—no clues.*

Postcript: At press time, our Carson City correspondent reports this flash bulletin:

Police have recovered credit cards belonging to the late Randall Hosford. An unidentified man (who has been cleared as a murder suspect) told C.C.P.D. detectives that he met a "tall, nondescript man in his late twenties" named "Shifter" in a bar, and the man sold him the cards for a hundred dollars apiece, promising that they were "stone cold." The C.C.P.D. as yet has no line on "Shifter," and the man he sold the cards to has been charged with receiving stolen goods.

—

From the Have You Seen These People? *column of* True Life Sleuth *magazine, June 1975 issue:*

Editor's Note—Normally, this feature displays Motor Vehicle Department photographs of people reported missing, but since all of the people listed are either below the minimum age required for a license in their state, or do not possess a license, we are running their physical stats and last-known whereabouts only. We at True Life Sleuth *wish to alert the proper authorities to the fact that these five people disappeared from two adjoining states within an eight-week period.*

Everett Bigelow, white male, of Provo, Utah. Last seen in Provo on 3/4/75. Age—71, height—5′11″, weight—155 lbs. Gray hair, blue eyes, slight build. Known to frequent beer bars, no identifying marks or tattoos.

Hazel Leffler, white female, age 67, of Bostang, Utah. Last seen talking to unidentified white male outside Bostang shopping center on March 11. Dyed black hair, brown eyes, 5′6″, 170 lbs. Build—portly. Wears glasses and uses a cane to walk.

Wendy Grace Sanderson, 14, and her neighbor Carl Sudequist, 16, both of Putnamville, Nevada. Last seen together at a picnic area near Putnamville on 4/9/75. Both Caucasian. The girl is described as 4′6″, 88 lbs., blond hair, green eyes; the boy as 5′8″, 140, brown hair and eyes. At last sighting, both youths were wearing the navy blue uniforms of Saint Mary's School, Putnamville.

Gregory Hall, 37, of South Las Vegas, Nevada. White male, 6′1″, 190 lbs., brown hair, blue eyes. Last seen hitchhiking near Northern Utah/Nevada border on April 30, 1975. Recently paroled from the Nevada State Prison, and now on record as a possible parole absconder. (Prison photos to appear in the next issue of True Life Sleuth *to feature* Have You Seen These People?*)*

Editor's note—any information regarding the current whereabouts of the above-listed people should be directed to the Utah State Police, Nevada State Police and the Missing Persons Hotline of True Life Sleuth—*Toll Free 1-800-MISSING.*

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From True Crime Detective, *July 1975 issue:*

Demonic Death for Deaf & Dumb Dishwasher!

Dateline—Salt Lake City, Utah, June 16, 1975:

The body of a deaf and dumb Salt Lake City youth was discovered on the salt flats surrounding the Great Salt Lake early this morning. The victim, Robert Masskie, 18, worked as a dishwasher at Colonial Joe's Restaurant, Salt Lake City, and had just cashed his two-week paycheck. No money was found on his person, and at this early hour of the investigation police are assuming robbery as the motive. Coworkers of the friendly handicapped lad expressed shock at his death, and fry cook Martin Plunkett, 27, said, "Bobby was an inveterate hitchhiker, and that's dangerous. Please tell your readers to be careful and not hitchhike."

Sound advice. There are no clues as yet, but we will update the investigation's progress in next month's issue of True Crime Detective.

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From Boss Detective *magazine's "Missing!" feature, December 1975 issue:*

Last seen 10/30/75 on I-95 on the outskirts of Ogden, Utah, "talking to a tall young white male" who may be the owner of a late-model grayish van.

Kenneth Neufeld, 41, white male, 6′0″, 175, brown hair and eyes, Marine Corps tattoo on right forearm.

Cynthia Neufeld, 39, white female, 5′4″, 130, blond hair, brown eyes, no identifying marks.

Reported missing on 12/1/75 by their teenaged children. Their abandoned vehicle was discovered in woods outside Ogden, 12/4/75. Extensive search of area yielded no clues. Photographs of Mr. & Mrs. Neufeld available from Missing Persons Bureau, Ogden Police Department, and from Utah State Police. Direct all queries and information regarding Mr. & Mrs. Neufeld to those agencies.

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From Boss Detective*, April 1977 issue:*

Zodiac Killer Prowling Colorado? Killings of College Students Linked? Ritual Markings Work of Comic-Book Cult?

Aspen, Colorado, is a year-round mecca for young people seeking good times, and it is the undisputed winter "party capital" of the United States, renowned for its skiing and ski-lodge bonhomie. Young people come to Aspen to cut loose and get away from the grind of college and jobs. You can bargain on a good time in Aspen, but since January 1976, eight college students have gotten more than they bargained for—they disappeared from the face of the earth. The eight are:

Cindy Keneally, 22, of Chicago, Illinois, last seen 1/18/76;
George Keneally, 20, of Chicago, her husband, last seen 1/18/76;
Gustavo Torres, 23, of São Paulo, Brazil, last seen 1/26/76;
Mills Jensen, 24, of Aspen, last seen 3/1/76;
Craig Richardson, 17, of Glenwood Springs, Colorado, last seen 4/1/76;
Maria Kaltenborn, 21, of Akron, Ohio, last seen 6/2/76;
John Kaltenborn, 22, Maria's husband, last seen 6/2/76;
Timothy Bay, 16, of Glenwood Springs, last seen 8/18/76.

Police investigating the disappearances were (at first) quick to point out the transient nature of pleasure spas like Aspen, and last year, in the spring of '76, when the number of vanished people stood at five, they pooh-poohed the idea of massive foul play. But then, during the spring of '76 thaw, melted snowbanks yielded the mutilated bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Keneally and Mr. Torres, and they knew a fiend was on the prowl.

The subzero temperatures that had prevailed all winter preserved the bodies to gruesome effect. Mr. & Mrs. Keneally were nude and arranged in an explicitly sexual posture, and Mr. Torres (who disappeared eight days after the Keneallys) was positioned a few feet away. All three victims died from slashed throats and were marked *about the torsos with “S.S.”*

Authorities thought at first that the markings indicated a Nazi killer —“S.S.” being the initials of Hitler’s secret police. But then that theory was dropped in favor of attributing the murders to the “Zodiac” killer, a mass murderer active in Northern California in the late ’60’s–early ’70’s. The “S.S.” body markings were aslant, so that they resembled “Z’s”; and the Zodiac killer (who sent messages to San Francisco–area police stating that he was “claiming slaves for my afterlife”) sometimes marked his victims that way.

An entirely different theory was advanced by Glenwood Springs resident Martin Plunkett, the assistant librarian at the local library. Plunkett, 28, a crime buff and childhood comic-book collector, said that the markings could be a reference to the “Shroud Shifter,” a comic-book villain popular in the 1950’s and ’60’s. The Aspen police thanked Mr. Plunkett for his phoned-in theory, and local comic-book collectors were investigated and cleared, bringing the long, frustrating case of murder/disappearances back to its current state—no clues.

In a press conference held last month, Aspen Chief of Police Arthur Whittinghill stated, “The Keneally/Torres murders were certainly the work of one person or persons, and I suspect the sexual aspects of the crime were subterfuge—the work of a killer or killers bent on obscuring motive. The other five disappearances may or may not be related, and since no other bodies have turned up, I lean to the theory of separate killer-abductors. The Zodiac-Comic Book speculation I view as nonsense, and the important thing now is for all Colorado residents and visitors below the age of twenty-five to be wary of strangers.”

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From Boss Detective, *November 1978 issue, the “Missing!” feature:*

The nine people listed below have vanished between April 1977 and our press time of October 15, 1978. All were last seen in various parts of Kansas and Missouri, all are Caucasians and college students. Photos are available from the Missing Persons Divisions of the Kansas and Missouri State Police. Direct all inquiries to those agencies. The missing are:

Janet Cahill, 21, 5′3″, 116 lbs., brown, blue. Last seen in Holcomb, Kan., 4/16/77;

Walker Cahill, 17, (Miss Cahill’s brother), 5′8″, 135 lbs., brown, blue. Last seen in Holcomb, 4/16/77;

James Brownmuller, 24, 6′3″, 205 lbs., blond, blue. Last seen outside Wichita Falls, Kan., 6/9/77;

Mary Kilpatrick, 20, 5′1″, 95 lbs., blond, blue, last seen in Wichita Falls, 6/11/77;

Thomas Briscoe, 22, 5′11″, 175 lbs., brown, brown. Last seen in Wichita Falls, 7/7/77;

Karsten Hanala, 26, 6′1″, 200 lbs., brown, hazel. Last seen outside Tompkinsville, Kan., "speaking to large white man driving van," 8/6/77;

Christine Muldowney, 19, 5′9″, 135 lbs., blond, blue. Last seen in Joplin, Mo., 3/13/78;

Lawrence Muldowney, 17, 6′2″, 185, blond, hazel. Last seen in Joplin, Mo., 3/13/78;

Nancy De Fazio, 20, 5′4″, 125, black, brown. Last seen near Blue Lake, Mo., 10/1/78.

Concluding note: Assumptions of death aside, credit cards belonging to several of the above-mentioned people have turned up in "hot" transactions all over America, and the two card-frauders thus far apprehended have airtight alibis for the times of the card-owners' disappearances. Those two men have been cleared as suspects after rigorous polygraph examinations, and one man (during polygraphing) stated that, "I bought my card from a guy who got it from another guy—a guy with a weird name like Stick Shifter."

15

I killed them all, and the murder/disappearances mentioned in the preceding articles comprised approximately two-thirds of my 1974–78 body count.

Some were crimes of opportunity and convenience; some were assaults against waking and sleeping nightmares and the occasionally recurring urge to live in childhood fantasies. All were perfectly carried out.

My basic tool was the Deathmobile, and my basic means of avoiding capture was the complete eschewing of criminal patterns. I never spoke of my exploits. I never used drugs or alcohol; I never made purchases with the credit cards I stole, and I only sold them to drunken and drug-wasted lowlifes I met in bars—men who later identified me as “big,” “tall,” “young,” and “the Shifter,” but who would never be able to pick me out of a police lineup. I never killed when there was the remotest possibility of eyewitnesses, and the few partial witnesses who spotted me talking to roadside acquaintances I would later kill would *never* be able to ID me, because I always kept my back to the highway. “Big,” “tall,” “white”—certainly. Martin Michael Plunkett—no.

Caution.

Between 1974 and 1978 the gross yield from my robbery-murders was $11,147.00. I did not, of course, carry that amount of cash on my person—I kept it in bank safe-deposit boxes, the banks themselves spread across the western half of America, the rent on them paid for ten years in advance, the keys safely hidden in wooded areas nearby, so that the final key was my memory.

Ultra-caution.

Deathmobile II, purchased in Denver with the proceeds from my Aspen killings; replaced Deathmobile I when I realized the imprudence of driving with an illegal handgun clipped under the seat. The .357, the detective magazines I kept as mementos of my exploits and the marijuana I habitually harbored to seduce hippie types with would, if subjected to police scrutiny, arouse suspicion of the worst sort. I needed to keep them within a few moments’ reach, but out of reach of the most heavy-duty cop shakedown. Deathmobile I had no suitable hiding places, but studying the owner's manuals of various make vans revealed that late-model Dodges had an undercarriage made up of metal "pockets," rectangular-shaped, with openings on the side. I surmised that two or three of the pockets would hold all my contraband items. In order to achieve a look of uniformity I would have to cover all the ends with wire or steel, but the peace of mind I would gain would make the effort worthwhile.

So, in March of '77, I bought a '76 Dodge 300 van and performed major surgery on the undercarriage, blocking off all twenty pockets with wire mesh. Inside four of them I kept my .357, my magazines and my drug supply. Behind the seats, along with my legal belongings, I kept a supply of tools and flares to aid me in my role of Good Samaritan motorist, and my Polaroid was always up front with me, loaded.

Caution.

Ultra-caution.

Preparedness.

Those three watchwords combined to italicize, bracket and underline *methodology*. Within that word, conjugations of the first three combined to form rules:

Wipe all van surfaces victims might have touched.

Kill with the magnum only as a last resort, and try to retrieve the spent rounds.

Bury all victims as deep as the ten-minute stopwatch will allow.

Sex-kill only when the nightmares and fantasies start to hurt, and tear up the snapshots within four hours, after memorizing and mentally cataloguing the most minute details.

During '74–'78, I was only to sex-kill/strip/position/photograph a total of four times. The first time, after leaving San Francisco, I acted out of a need to rectify the disarray of Eversall/Sifakis; the following instances were fueled by nightmares and impacted sexual longing. Still, I knew instinctively that what I was looking for was beyond relief and orgasm, and I had enough presence of mind to carefully choose my victims—their selection based on an instinct as to what their bodies would look like together.

The Keneallys nude in the Colorado snow killed my nightmares and made me come, but did not ease my curiosity, so eight days later I placed Gustavo Torres beside them, and felt an ancient third party knock at the door of my memory. Dimly afraid of what the knocker might say, I retreated until the nightmares got terrible and my groin felt like it was holding back bomb bursts; then I found the Kaltenborns hiking near Glenwood Springs and spent hours arranging them and snapping pictures, myself nude as the third party. Again there was instant release and weeks of comfort, but no penetration of the memory.

Sensing that the memory originated in my childhood and corresponded to my old demon of blondness, I waited for two years, until I found a pair of potential lovers who were perfect beyond perfect—the Muldowney siblings of Joplin, Missouri—blond, blue-eyed and lovely. Promising hashish, I lured them out to a deserted stretch of hills, strangled them and stripped them and took pictures of them and touched them and touched myself and even risked my own safety by staying past dark with their bodies.

The effort did not enlighten me.

The effort did not enlighten me because, at base, I was killing for monetary caprice, biological gratification and to make the hurt go away. The nine months after the Muldowneys went by in a blur, and then even my memory exploration was rendered capricious, for a nightmare materialized in live human form, and I had to kill for survival.

IV

Lightning Strikes Twice

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January 4, 1979.

I was driving north on U.S. 5 in a snowstorm, my destination the all-year resort town of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. My traveling stake was low, due to winterizing Deathmobile II with top-of-the-line snow tires, goose-down sleeping quilts and expensive insulation paneling, and my nearest bank cache was in central Colorado. Crossing from Illinois into Wisconsin, I looked at the big snowdrifts forming and knew they would be a long, deep freeze for whoever was unlucky enough to cross my path.

The decision made, I brainstormed with *caution* and *preparedness*. I thought of highway patrolmen prowling for stranded motorists to help, and of old Aspen killings and how difficult it was to strangle or bludgeon with legs mired in snow. Massive walls of bare spruce trees flanking both sides of the road caught my peripheral vision, and I imagined them as receptacles for bloody hollow points. The answer of shoot/rob/retrieve/bury came to me, and I pulled over and took my magnum from its undercarriage hiding place.

The snowfall got steadily worse, and toward noon I started wondering whether I should find lodging or park and wait the storm out. I was in the process of deciding when I saw a Cadillac erratically positioned on the left-hand side of the highway, nose out, the car in imminent danger of getting sideswiped.

I pulled over and tucked the .357 into the back of my pants, making sure my down jacket covered the butt. The highway was traffic-free, and I ran across it to the Cadillac.

There was no one inside, and I saw a faint trail of single snow-dusted footprints leading over to the right shoulder and northward. Stalking now, I returned to the Deathmobile and drove slowly ahead, one eye on the space cleared by my left wiper blade, the other on the roadside.

Half an hour later, I saw him, trudging in ankle-deep drifts. He turned around when he heard my motor, and something about the snow on his head made me reach for the Polaroid.

I tooted the horn and braked; the man waved frantically at his presumed rescuer. Setting the hand brake and hitting the blinkers, I squeezed out the passenger door to confront my victim.

He was middle-aged and portly, and his aura of affluence in distress undercut the lovely crown of snow he was wearing. Panting, he said, “My wife’s been after me to get a C.B., now I see why.” He pointed to my Polaroid. “Shutterbug, huh? I heard you guys would go anywhere for a picture, now I believe it.”

I pulled out my .357 and placed the silencered snout on the man’s nose. He said, “Hey, what the—” And I smiled and said, “All I want is your money.”

Shaking more from fear than from the cold, he said, “Money I got,” and I heard his teeth clicking. Motioning him toward the spruce trees some thirty feet away, I let him walk ahead; then, when he was ten feet from a solid bank of wood, I shot him twice in the back.

The silencer went pffft-thud; the fat man flew forward; splintering wood echoed. I set my stopwatch at eight minutes for ultra-caution, then counted to twenty slowly, to give my victim time to die. When I was sure he would not disturb me with reflex jerks or blood sprays, I grabbed him by the heels and dragged him over to the set of trees most likely to have caught the death rounds. Seeing the ends of the hollow points imbedded side by side in a young sapling, I pried them out with my fingers and put them in my jacket pocket, then hauled the man through an open tree space and over to a snowdrift already three feet deep. Covering my gloveless hands with my sleeves, I took his billfold from his inside jacket pocket, extracted a wad of hundreds, twenties and tens and a collection of credit cards. Stuffing them into my rear pants pockets, I stood back, deep-breathed and unhitched the Polaroid from my shoulder.

4:16 elapsed.

I inventoried my person, touching magnum, spent rounds, stolen cash and plastic. The footprints and blood were *faits accomplis*; fresh snow would cover them soon. Looking down at the dead man, I saw that his crown of snow gave him an air of the Romantic era, as if he were a fop in Beethoven’s time disguising his ugliness with a powdered wig. That thought jarred me, and I leaned over and snapped a close-up of the back of his head. The camera ejected blank paper, and when the snow-crown image came through, I put the picture in my front pocket, flipped the man over and snapped his eyes-bulging, mouth-bloodied death mask. My memory was blipped again, and with six minutes down I scooped snow over the corpse until it was a pristine white mound. Finishing the job, I studied the face shot on my way back to the Deathmobile.

With the .357 back in its safety compartment, I continued my journey, the photos on the dashboard where I could view them against the powdered-wig snow. I drove on slowly, hugging the right lane, imagining Mother Nature covering my tracks back at the death site. The storm was reaching blizzard proportions, and I knew Lake Geneva before nightfall was impossible—I would have to seek shelter soon. My wiper blades were barely able to dent the powder hitting the windshield; after turning into a long S-shaped bend, I had to get out and clear it by hand.

That was when I saw the roadblock.

It was sixty yards up, and I knew it couldn't be for me—I had killed the fat man clean, an hour and a half earlier, and if I was identified as the killer, the police would have made a moving approach. Drawing myself drum-tight inside, I scrubbed the windshield clean with my sleeve, got back in the cab and tore the death pictures into pieces and dropped them into the snow outside my passenger door. Remembering the spent shells and credit cards in my pocket, I flung them out, then dropped the Deathmobile into gear and eased up to the barricade.

State troopers holding shotguns were lined up against the strung-together sawhorses, and there were a half-dozen blue-and-white cruisers behind them. As I braked, two cops approached the Deathmobile in a flanking motion, shotgun muzzles pointed straight at me. From behind the roadblock, an electrically amplified voice barked: "Man in the silver van! Open the door of your vehicle, get out with your hands above your head and walk to the middle of the pavement! Do it slow!"

I obeyed, very slowly, snow raining down on me, the two troopers continuing to hold their beads, the eyes of their 12-gauges huge and black against the snowfall. When I reached the middle of the asphalt, a third cop grabbed my arms from behind, drew them behind my back and handcuffed my wrists. Once I was immobilized, a swarm of troopers leaped over the sawhorses and descended on the Deathmobile, and the two shotgun cops lowered their weapons and approached. The handcuff cop frisked me from behind and said, "Clean," and the other two pointed me to my van. Troopers were over, under, and in Deathmobile II; it made me angry, and I sensed that indignant was the way to play my first hard interrogation since Eversall/Sifakis four years earlier. "What the fuck is this?" I said.

The shotgun cops pressed me into the side of my van, and leaned into it themselves. It gave all three of us a break from the wind and snow, and the older cop, who had a lieutenant's bar pinned to the front of his Smokey the Bear hat, said, "Your name?"

"Martin Plunkett," I said.

"Address?"

"I don't have an address. I'm going to Lake Geneva to look for work."

"What kind of work?"

I sighed angrily. "Lift operator or bartender in the winter, maybe caddy during the golf season."

The other cop took over. "You a professional transient, Plunkey?"

"Call me by my correct name," I said.

The lieutenant plucked my wallet from my back pocket and handed it to a trooper inside the Deathmobile's cab. "Run him all-points," he said. Turning to face me, he said, "Mr. Plunkett, you have the right to remain silent. You have the right to have legal counsel present during questioning. If you cannot afford counsel, an attorney will be appointed to you free of charge."

I breathed the pitch in. In the background I could hear my name and driver's-license stats being spoken into a radio mike, and the van shakedown looked to be just about over. The wise-guy cop said, "You got a statement to make, Plunkey?"

I sneered à la Bogart. "You suck cock, dick breath?" The trooper balled his fists, and the lieutenant grabbed me and led me a few yards away. I heard a voice yell, "Vehicle looks clean, Skipper!" and the lieutenant said, "Don't affect an attitude, young man. It's not the time or the place."

I affected a hurt look. "I don't like being rousted."

"Rousted, eh? Been 'rousted' before?"

"I was arrested for burglary about ten years ago. I haven't been in trouble since."

The lieutenant smiled and brushed snow from his lips. "That's the kind of story I like to hear, especially if it gets corroborated by the warrant check we're running on you."

"It will be."

"I sincerely hope so, because three young ladies have been raped and murdered around here lately—one this morning back near the Illinois line—which is what this is all about. What type blood you got, Martin?"

I didn't know how to react to the coincidence, and the shocked look on my face must have been convincing, because the lieutenant shook his head and said, “Ain’t that the worst possible? What’s your blood type, boy?”

“O negative,” I said.

“That’s mighty fine, and I tell you what we’re gonna do. First, assuming you haven’t got any outstanding warrants, you’re gonna drive your van to the next town, Huyserville, and you’re gonna hang out in a nice clean cell at the jail and get a blood test, and if it comes back O negative, you’re a free man, because we typed the rape-o sonuvabitch we’re looking for from his semen, and he’s O positive. Thank mom and dad for their genes, boy, ’cause any O positive stranger in my stretch of Southern Wisconsin is in for some rousting.”

A trooper stuck his head out the van’s driver’s window. “The sleds squeaky, and daddy-o’s got no wants or warrants. One burglary conviction back in ’69, that’s it.”

The lieutenant unlocked my handcuffs and removed them, then said, “Greer, you ride shotgun with Mr. Plunkett here to Huyserville, find him a cozy cell and get Doc Hirsh over to administer a blood test. Martin, you drive carefully, and resign yourself to a night in a hick burg, because these roads ain’t fit for man or beast. Now get going.”

I got in the Deathmobile and nodded at my copilot, who had his service revolver on his lap, his finger inside the trigger guard. The roadblock was pulled apart, and I accelerated into a blinding wall of snow. Concentrating on my driving kept me reasonably calm, but I felt cut down the middle: half of me proud of my performance; half of me frightened that the dead man’s Cadillac would be discovered while I was stuck in Huyserville—or that after I left and the corpse was found, my presence would be remembered and I would become a murder suspect. The fears seemed insoluble, futile to speculate on. I cleared my throat and said to the trooper, “Is there a hotel in Huyserville?”

He snickered. “Cockroach palace. If you have to stay overnight, stick to the jail. You’re a transient, right? Three hots and a cot’s all you guys want, and you get that at the slam—*if* you’re innocent and we let you go.”

I nodded. The trooper had an unpleasant conversational style, and I remained silent and let him fondle his gun. The storm was raging now, and it took me an hour to drive the ten miles to Huyserville, a town consisting of one business block and the Wisconsin State Police Substation where I was to be held. Pulling into the station lot, the trooper said, “Sure hope you ain’t guilty, pal. Two of the dead girls were from here.”

The station’s interior was spotless and surprisingly modern, and I was placed in a cell by myself. Only moments later, an old man carrying an archetypal black satchel showed up, and the cell door was racked by remote control. I rolled up my sleeve automatically, and the doctor removed swabs and a syringe with a plastic tube at the end from the bag. He said, “Make a fist,” and when I did, he swathed the crook of my right arm and inserted the needle. When blood filled the tube, he said, “An hour for the results,” and left me alone. When the cell door was racked shut, I got very frightened.

The doctor’s hour stretched interminably, as did my fear, which was not fear of being uncovered as a long-term mass murderer—but fear of being contained, not held in custody, but in the captivity of all the small moments of my past four years—the long, small moments not spent stalking, stealing, killing and thinking—but the time spent working at tedious jobs, cultivating invisibility, being cautious when I wanted to act boldly. The fear was that, inexplicably, these hick-town cops knew who I was, and knew further—inexplicably and preternaturally—that the most vicious way to punish me was to turn me loose, never to scheme/stalk/steal/kill again—my sentence a life made up of all the long, small in-between moments that used to allow me my freedom.

The hour stretched, and I knew that the sixty minutes had doubled and tripled, and that if I looked at my watch for corroboration I would lose every bit of my thirty-year cache of control. I thought of reaching for Shroud Shifter as a separate entity, and rejected the idea as naked regression; I began to fear that killing and holding in sex to the explosion point had somehow changed my blood type, and now I was going to be castrated for someone else’s crimes. The notion of foreign blood inside my own body brought me close to screaming, and I began cataloguing long, small in-between moments to prove to myself that I wasn’t going insane. I thought of every fleabag apartment I had lived in since leaving San Francisco; every stretch of desolate road where I never found anyone; every person I met who was too ugly, too poor, too well-connected and too uninteresting to kill. The litany had a salutary effect, and I looked at my watch and saw that it was 6:14—my brain-tripping had eaten up over four hours. Then a voice outside the cell resounded softly. “Mr. Plunkett, I’m Sergeant Anderson.”

Before I could think, I blurted, ‘Was my blood all right?”

The voice said, “Red and healthy,” and the man it belonged to stepped into focus on the other side of the bars. My first impression was of looking at the most immaculate advertisement for authority I had ever seen. The man, clad in the Wisconsin State Police uniform of olive twill trousers, tan gabardine shirt and Sam Browne belt, was a perfect componentry of muscular litheness, bland good looks and something else that I couldn't place. Standing up, I saw that he was just over six feet tall, and that his lank, reddish brown hair and toothbrush mustache gave him a youthful aura that his cold blue eyes played against—and lost. The exquisitely tailored uniform transformed his good looks into another something else I couldn't decipher, and when we were face-to-face, with only the bars between us, it hit me. I was in the presence of an exceptionally powerful will. Regrouping, I said, "Red, healthy and O negative, right, Sergeant?"

The man smiled and patted a paper bag he was holding. "Right, O negative. I'm O positive myself, never made me more than a five-spot when I was broke in college." Taking a key from his belt, he unlocked the door, and when I took a step forward, he blocked my path. For an instant the cold blue eyes fired up, then a lopsided grin nullified them, and Anderson said, "You ever notice how two people just getting acquainted talk about the weather, Martin?"

The softly enunciated "Martin" terrified me, I stepped back and said, "Yes."

Anderson stroked the paper bag. 'Well, we've got some real weather to talk about—twenty-six inches of snow expected by morning, tristate storm warning, roads closed within a five-hundred-mile radius. Look, I hope it wasn't presumptuous, but Lieutenant Havermeyer got called up to Eau Claire, which makes me acting watch commander, and I took the liberty of booking you the very last available room in Huyserville." He took a key from his back pocket and handed it to me, and when our fingers touched, I knew he knew.

"Martin? You feeling a little queasy?"

The soft, solicitous words went through me like a knife, and I started to weave on my feet. Anderson himself was a blur, but his hand on my shoulder was like a tree root holding me up, and his voice was perfect clarity. "Baaad weather. I was patrolling south of here this morning, saw this '79 Caddy Eldo parked on the throughway, didn't look nice, so I pushed it off the shoulder, probably covered with snow by now. Wonder what happened to the driver. He'll probably end up in some timber wolf's lunchbox, nice juicy humanburger. Don't you want to know what's in the bag?"

Shroud Shifter sent me flash-lines of asterisks, question marks and numbers, and when the numbers computed to 1948–1979, I tried to bring my hands up to Anderson's throat. But I couldn't; he was holding all two hundred and five strong pounds of me still with one firm hand on my shoulder and the admonishment, "Ssssh, ssssh, ssssh."

Swaying underneath the trooper's hand;

Adjusting to the rhythm and somehow liking it;

The cell about to tilt upside down, but saved at the last second by a choirboy voice: "I don't think you can handle seeing it, so I'll tell you. I've got a beeautiful Colt Python with a pro-model suppressor, and some credit cards, and some of those *True Detective* magazines, and some ripped-up Polaroid photos, allll taped up and smeared with fingerprint powder, which reveals—you guessed it—two viable latents belonging to Martin Michael Plunkett, white male, D.O.B. 4/11/48, Los Angeles, California. Does it ever snow in California, Martin?"

The hand and voice let go, and my back hit the metal edge of the top bunk. The contact jarred me, and Anderson came into real focus—as an adversary. Straightening up, I began to sense the vaguest outlines of the game he was playing. I could still feel his hand and voice, but I was able to shake off their residual warmth and say, "What do you—"

I stopped when my voice came out an imitation of Anderson's, softness wrapped in menace. Anderson smiled and said, "The sincerest form of flattery, so thanks. What do I want? I don't know, you're the Hollywood boy, you write the scenario."

I made my voice grating—all hard baritone edges. "Suppose I walk out of here, get my van and just go."

"Suppose you do? You're free to. You won't get far, though. That is a killer storm out there."

"Do I get my—"

Anderson shook the paper bag. "No, you don't. Don't ask me again."

The game's outlines cleared a little more. It was coming down to a holding action. "What are you going to do with the things in that bag?"

"Keep them."

"Why?"

"Because I like your style."

"And when the storm cl—"

Anderson turned, his voice grating. "Clears, you're free to go."

I fingered the key in my pocket. Anderson said, "The hotel's directly across the street and two doors down, and the Wisconsin State Police is picking up the tab because we inconvenienced an innocent man."

I walked out of the cell and through the station and into the snow. It enveloped me, and crossing to the hotel I saw my van parked at the curb, gone from silver to powdery white. I thought of heading into the storm, the Deathmobile as a vehicle of suicide; I thought of driving flat out, but cautious, *moving*. Panic was coming on, naked and ugly and picayune—and then I remembered how Anderson's hand felt on my shoulder, and I knew that if I ran, he would never know that I was just as dangerous as he was.

Staying was the only way out.

I ran to the hotel, and got to the dilapidated coffee shop just as it was about to close. Ravenous, I ordered roast beef, hot rolls and potatoes, and wolfed them down. Then I went into the lobby and sat in a big chair by the fireplace to get up some guts.

My hours of waiting passed quickly this time; my fear was not steeped in malaise—it was edgy, masculine—like what bullfighters must feel before entering the ring. At 10:00 I took out my key, saw 311 embossed on it, walked up to the room and unlocked the door.

An overhead light had been left on, and it illuminated a dreary 20's-vintage room—threadbare carpet, big spongy bed, battered desk and dresser. The plainness forced me backward, not in, and I knew that what I had been expecting was a naked man. The wish image vanished after a second, and I stepped into the four-walled time warp and shut and bolted the door.

Wind rattled the ice-rimmed windows, and a nauseating blast of heat came in through the vents. There were no chairs, so I moved to the bed. I was about to position myself on it when I saw that the coverlet was already occupied.

Polaroid prints were spread on the white chenille, three rows of four color snapshots laid out evenly so that they covered the whole bed. I bent to look at them, and saw vivisection progressions: four nude teenage girls—all brunette and pretty—intact in the top photographs, gradually dismembered as the pictures worked toward the footrail.

The vents shook with another heat blast, and I flailed with my eyes for a sink. Seeing one next to a connecting side door, I ran to it and vomited my meal. I was splashing cold water on my face when I heard a click and saw Anderson walk through the door.

Grabbing a towel from the rack beside the sink, I wiped my face. Anderson leaned into the wall sideways, accomplishing the pose with the grace of a gifted male model. It struck me then that every small moment of the man's life was infused with eloquence. "Don't tell me you didn't already know," he said.

I held down an urge to rip the pose to pieces with my hands. "I knew. *Why*?"

Anderson smoothed his mustache and gave me a grin that made him look a guileless seventeen. "Why? Because *I* knew. There's a two-lane that parallels the throughway south to the Illinois line, and back near Beloit it's elevated. I saw you check out the Cadillac, and I saw you cruise for the driver, and sweetie, I knew you didn't have good deeds on your mind. I gave you a lead, then I tracked you by radar. When you stopped, I waited five minutes, then idled up to about six hundred yards in back of you and parked. I had my binoculars on your van, and I saw you put the magnum back in its hidey-hole. That's when I knew I really liked your style."

Nineteen sixty-nine took over 1979, and I thought, "Lock, load and fire." I centered in on Anderson's neck, and I almost had up the guts to do it when he smiled and said, "Bad idea, Martin." Knowing it was full lips and a crinkling mustache that stopped me—not the warning—I made a full-body eye circuit, and something external forced me to say, "Dye your hair blond."

Anderson snorted and pointed to the bed. "Blonds are for sissies. Brunettes are my meat."

I saw a gilt-framed picture of my father and a nude woman, both of them wearing powder-white wigs. Shocked that I could still recall the man's features, and fearful of where the picture frame was taking me, I shut down the image by thinking of my snow-haired victim seventy miles south. Anderson's perfect stylishness was fixed directly in front of me, forcing me to keep my eyes open and constraining my brain work, and I finally got up the courage, to fire, roundhousing a right hand at his perfect nose.

He slipped the punch perfectly, grabbing my wrist, twisting it behind my back and holding me still with a firm arm around the chest. Enveloped by perfect strongness, a perfect voice eased my fear: "Whoa, sweetie, whoa. You're bigger and stronger than me, but I'm trained. I don't blame you for being mad, but you've got nothing to worry about. Here, I'll prove it."

Anderson's grip loosened, and he turned me around so that I was facing him. The absence of pressure left me feeling hollow, and I concentrated on the trooper's regrouping movements to cut the edge off the vacuum. His hands went to his front and back pockets and came out with wads of cash, and he said, "See? Your money. When I searched your van I saw that the glove compartment had been pried open. There was no money in your hidey-holes, and I knew a bright boy like you wouldn't travel without a nice roll, so I figured one of Wisconsin State's finest ripped you off. Since I know my fellow officers, I knew exactly who to look for. I let him off with a reprimand—more than you're getting, and for a whole lot fucking less."

I took the money and stuffed it into my pockets. "Why?"

Anderson smiled. "Because I like your style."

"Then what do you want?"

"The Python and the suppressor, you know, mementos. Some conversation, the answers to a few questions."

"Such as?"

"Such as 'How many people have you killed?' "

I looked around the room, knowing there had to be a catch, that the cracked vase on the dresser had to be a listening device, or the curtain-covered window a sighting point for snipers with x-ray scopes on their rifles—hicktown killers who would fire on me at my first admission of murder. After a moment I knew I was thinking Shroud Shifter childishly, and I turned my gaze back to Anderson, roaming the tight contours of his uniform for concealed recorders. The trooper laughed at this, and said, "I get the distinct impression that you're looking for more than a body wire, but anyway, let me cool out your paranoia, okay? For starters, I'll state that I am Sergeant Ross Anderson of the Wisconsin State Police, and also the killer referred to in the Milwaukee papers as the 'Wisconsin Whipsaw.' There. That make you feel better?"

It did, for despite his stylishness and aura of danger, I knew that he was not in my league in what mattered most to both of us. Getting a bold sense of having achieved parity with perfection, I said, "About forty. You?"

Anderson's jaw dropped; I had eclipsed his perfection. "Jesus Christ. Five. You want to tell me about it?"

I remembered his words when I pleaded for my magnum. "No. Don't ask me again."

"Touché. Why?"

"Because they're mine."

Ross Anderson stretched and said, "Then I guess we've reached an impasse." He moved to the bed and scooped up his death photos, and when he walked to the connecting door I was blocking his path. "Tell me about yours."

Smiling, Anderson slipped the pictures into his shirt pockets, buttoning the flaps over them. Raising his eyebrows in a parody of a come-hither look, he moved back to the bed and sat on the edge of it. I looked around the room and saw that there were no chairs. Knowing that Ross had designed it that way, I played along and sat down beside him. With our eyes averted from each other but our knees touching, he said, "No pun intended, but I've been dying to tell someone, someone special and safe, so I guess unilateral is better than nothing.

"When I was in my late teens I had a buddy, and we used to go pheasant hunting over near Prairie Du Chien. He was a doper and kind of a sleaze, but he let me call the shots, and he was up for just about anything. We spent a lot of time talking about the Nazis and the concentration camps, and he had a collection of daggers and arm bands. He actually took all that stuff seriously—the master race and the Jews and the commies, the whole shot. I was fascinated by it—but he believed in it.

"We were up near P.D. one day, right after Thanksgiving in '70. Gunning for ringnecks with twelve-gauges, double-aught buck, which if you know wing shooting, is much too big a load for birds. You see, we weren't sportsmen or game-cuisine lovers—we just liked to shoot things.

"It was about zero, and there were no other hunters around. We didn't have a dog to flush the birds, and essentially we were just looking for something to do. We were carrying pumps instead of double-barreleds, so we were glad there was no one around—we were kids, and any real sportsmen would have been able to tell by our weapons that we weren't serious hunters.

"About dusk we start heading back to the car, and this old fart materializes out of nowhere. Big old red-faced guy with a thousand-dollar Browning over and under, and about another grand in L.L. Bean threads on his back. He starts giving us shit about our guns, and didn't we respect hunting traditions and where were our hunting licenses—and then—zap! I look at my buddy, we have this moment of telepathy and blow the old fart to kingdom come, blam blam blam blam blam—five rounds apiece—we vaporize the cocksucker."

I stared at the wall and gripped the mattress with both hands; beside me I felt Ross breathe in short spurts. Finally he took a huge breath, and continued:

"Needless to say, we didn't get made for the snuff, and we were both scared shitless until the job got pinned on these two n——s who held up a gun shop in Milwaukee and ripped off a half-dozen Mossberg pumps—the same model my buddy and I had. The jigs got convicted on circumstantial evidence, and my buddy and I went our separate ways, because we were afraid of what the two of us together meant.

"So five years pass, I put it out of my mind and join the W.S.P. I love being a trooper, I'm a cop now, above suspicion. To make things even better, my buddy moves to Chicago and gets married, out of place and out of mind, we haven't seen each other since the day the splibs got sentenced to Life and we celebrated with two cases of beer and said au revoir. Everything is just peachy and I'm getting ready to ace the sergeant's exam, and then blam blam blam blam blam!

"What happened was that buddy boy was back in Wisconsin, harvesting a weed crop outside of Beloit, living in a cheapo furnished room in Janesville. Friends of friends told me, so I went looking for him. I checked out his flop: pictures of Hitler on the walls, bags of weed all packaged up ready to go, hate literature on the dresser. Totally unacceptable. I found out he was taking I-5 to Lake Geneva every third day or so, to sell smoke to the vacationers there, and I got his vehicle stats from the Illinois D.M.V. That stretch of road was on my beat, I knew I'd see him sooner or later, and sweetie, I was prepared.

"The next day I'm parked, running radar checks, and buddy boy's old junker cruises by. I hit my cherry lights and siren and pull him over, and he goes, 'Hey, Ross!' and I go 'Hey, Billy!' and we shoot the shit through the window for a few minutes, then I tell him I have to go back to the cruiser and check my two-way.

"Back at my blue-and-white I hyperventilate to sound panicky, then I call in a 415—Armed Suspect, Officer Needs Help, I-5 north of exit sixteen. I go back to buddy boy's car and shoot him twice in the face, then I take a Saturday Night Special from my pocket, wipe it and put it in his right hand, stick his arm out the window and pop off a shot with his index finger—blam!—out into the cabbage fields. When the other units arrive, I'm weeping because I had to kill my old buddy Billy Gretzler that I used to go pheasant hunting with. Naturally all the evidence backs me up, and the plainclothes troopers who investigate all officer-involved shootings check out Billy's room and find Der Fuhrer and the weed and conclude that, all things considered, my retroactive birth control was justified. I had a rep for coolness before the shooting, but after it I got one for sensitivity. That Ross Anderson, boy. Killed an old buddy in the line of duty, it broke him up, but he kept on truckin' and made sergeant anyway. Ross the Boss, what a guy."

I took my hands from the mattress; they were numb from squeezing my way through Ross's monologue. Wanting to distance myself from him, I moved down the bed so that physical contact was impossible, continuing to stare at the wall. The aftertaste of his story hit me in waves, a one-two-three punch of callowness, bravado and style. I knew something essential was missing, but I pushed thinking about it aside, and when Ross poked my arm and said, "Well?" I launched my own death travelogue.

But I didn't talk about my killings themselves.

It was the long, small in-between moments that I spoke of; the law-abiding time that felt incriminating to my own heart; the self-imposed sentence of constant movement, different cities, renting hotel rooms and apartments to appear normal when sleeping in the Deathmobile would have sufficed; the dubious celebrity of being mentioned in detective magazines written for near-illiterates; tweaking the police with self-incriminating clues, a fifth-class substitute for Martin Plunkett in worldwide neon; being relegated to moronic alliterative titles like the "Richmond Ripper," "Aspen Assassin" and "Vegas Vulture"; feeling the nightmares always there behind the thrills, emblazoned in the neon my name should be written in.

I stopped when the discourse started to feel like a giant genuflection to Ross Anderson's male-model stylishness. Turning to look at him, I got an urge to maim his beauty, carve my name across his body for the world to see. He smiled then, and I realized the thrust of our respective powers—I emasculated with guns, knives and my hands; he was capable of doing it with a wink or a grin. The missing part of his story came to me, and I said, "What about the girls? The brunettes? You didn't tell me about that."

Ross shrugged. "There's nothing to tell. After snuffing Billy I realized how much I loved blood sport. I've always dug foxy young brunettes, and sport's sport."

"But why?"

"I don't know. The die was cast somewhere, and thinking about it bores me. Apples and oranges. You like blonds, I like brunettes; that guy they caught last year, the Pittsburgh Pistol-whipper, he liked redheads. Like they used to say back in the '60's, 'Do your own thing.' "

I moved closer to Ross; my work shoes touched his spit-shined paratrooper's boots. "Could you ch—"

Cutting me off with a wink, he said, "Could I change my M.O.?

Sure. You want blonds, I'll give you blonds. I've got a traveling assignment coming up. Check the eastern U.S. papers out, starting about a month from now."

"What?"

Again the wink—a velvet glove that smothered all possible queries. "Enough said. Listen, Martin. This is really my room. I keep it for long shifts and snow-ins. You can stay if you want, but there's only the one bed."

The look in Ross's eyes told me he was talking comradeship and style, not standard meanings. I took off my shoes and lay down, and Ross unhooked his gun belt and wrapped it around the bedpost only inches from my head. He lay down beside me and flicked off the wall light and seemed to fall into sleep concurrent with the abrupt darkness. Exhaustion hit me, and as the most incredible day of my life flickered out, I got frightened and stroked the grip of the .38, drawing comfort from knowing I could murder the murderer lying next to me.

Thus reassured, I slept.

—

Sunlight and the sound of heavy machinery awakened me dreamless hours later. I immediately felt for Ross, found the other half of the bed empty and jumped up. I was moving toward the sink and a cold-water bracer when he walked through the connecting door, a small revolver in his hand.

I grabbed at the sink edge, thinking of betrayal, and Ross gave me his rakish teenager grin and flipped the gun so that it was butt out. Handing it to me, he said, "Smith and Wesson .38 Detective's Special. Safe, serviceable weapon, very cold. You didn't think I'd let you walk out of here unarmed, did you? Ross the Boss, what a guy."

I flipped the cylinder open, saw that the gun was loaded and stuck it in my back pocket. I couldn't say "Thank you"—it felt acquiescent—so I asked, "Are the roads clear?"

Ross said, "Being plowed now. You should be able to truck by noon."

I stood there, thinking of the taped-together snapshots and my magnum, not knowing what to say or do. Seeming to read my mind, Ross said, "Your stuff is safe with me. I'll never rat you off, but I may need you someday, and the evidence is insurance."

I was reverberating with the implications of "need you" when Ross leaned forward and kissed me on the lips. I leaned into it and tasted wax on his mustache and bitter coffee on his tongue, and when he broke contact and about-faced through the door, I was flushed and hungry for more. I did not yet know that the kiss would push me and haunt me and hurt me and drive me for the next two and a half years of my life.

V

Lightning Scatters

From the Milwaukee Tribune*, February 19, 1979:*

"Wisconsin Whipsaw" Investigation on Back Burner; Dead Man Killer?

It is now over six weeks since the "Wisconsin Whipsaw," a rapist/slayer who terrorized the Janesville-Beloit area during December and January, claimed his last victim.

On the snowy morning of January 4, the butchered body of Claire Kozol, 17, of Huyserville, Wisconsin, was discovered in a cabbage field near the Illinois border. She had been raped, beaten to death and dismembered—in a manner identical to Gretchen Weymouth, 16, whose body was discovered a few miles away on December 16, and Mary Coontz, 18, also of Huyserville, who was found in a duck blind on the outskirts of Beloit on Christmas Day. All three young women were attractive, slender brunettes, and forensic psychiatrists attached to Wisconsin State Police Headquarters in Madison were convinced that a highly motivated and exceptionally vicious psychopathic killer was operating in the Southern Wisconsin area. Their psychological profile (based on previous case histories and physical evidence from the three killings) concluded that the murderer would continue to kill the same type of victim in the same manner, until captured or killed himself.

A task force of twenty Wisconsin State Police detectives were assigned to the investigation full-time, and they were assisted by officers from the Janesville and Beloit police departments. Elaborate decoy traps to snare the killer were set up, in anticipation of another murder attempt in the near future. The net was tightening, and police officials were certain the blood-crazed murderer would step into it soon.

But he didn't, and there have been no further killings matching the Wisconsin Whipsaw's M.O. since Miss Kozol's body was found on January 4. Wisconsin State Police Sergeant Ross Anderson, who supervised the decoy deployment, has a theory as to what happened.

"It's a theory based on the Psych. 101 course I took in college and circumstantial evidence," the trooper, 29, told reporters. "But instinctively I credit it.

"On January 5, the day after Miss Kozol's body was found, I was supervising snowplowing on I-5 south of Huyserville when I spotted the rear of a car, partially covered by snow, off the roadside. I dug through the snow and saw that the car was a '79 Cadillac with Illinois plates.

There was no driver trapped inside, and I checked the glove compartment and found ID belonging to a man named Saul Malvin, age 51, of Lake Forest. When I saw O+ blood on a donor card, my skin prickled. We typed the rape-killer from his semen—and he was O +.

"I radioed the Lake Forest P.D., and they told me that Malvin's wife had reported him missing that morning—he had left the previous morning to visit friends in Lake Geneva. I took a vest I found in the backseat, drove to Huyserville for a K-9 team, drove back to the area and initiated a search. About eight hours later, the dogs and I hit paydirt.

"Wolves had chewn away most of the man's upper torso, but you could still tell what had happened. Malvin was dead, about ten yards off the roadside. There was a .357 magnum in his hand. His wallet was intact, filled with cash. I ran back to my cruiser and radioed for an ambulance, then I started thinking."

Trooper Anderson's ultimate theory—that the late Saul Malvin was the Wisconsin Whipsaw, and that he committed suicide in a moment of guilt over his crimes, has created a furor among his W.S.P. colleagues, and opinions are divided on the subject of the former insurance executive's culpability. Lieutenant W. S. Havermeyer, the commander of the Huyserville Substation, summed up the pros and cons at a press conference last week. "As of now, we're assuming that if the Whipsaw isn't Mr. Malvin, he's in jail or the loony bin, or he's moved on. The shrink boys in Madison say that sometimes these repeating psychos have a moment of clarity and kill themselves, especially right after an especially brutal job, so that fits circumstantially, and Malvin did have O positive blood. We've checked out his whereabouts at the times of the three killings. His car was found just a few miles from where the Kozol girl's body was discovered, and on the dates of the two previous murders, December 16 and Christmas, he was allegedly working at home alone and waiting at home for his wife to return from celebrating the holiday with her invalid sister.

"So, circumstantially, Malvin could have been the perpetrator, although he does not 'play' as one. He had no criminal record, was happily married with grown children, was successful and well-liked by friends and family. That is in his favor.

"But he did commit suicide with a gun that to this day cannot be traced, and relatives and friends have told us that he had no logical reason to take his own life. Unfortunately, wolves had attacked Malvin's body just before Sergeant Anderson discovered it, and if there

was any physical evidence on his person linking him to Claire Kozol, the animals probably destroyed it. All in all, I'm grateful there have been no more killings."

Sergeant Anderson, believed by many of his colleagues to have "cracked" the case, will be moving on to different duties—carrying extradition warrants to midwestem and eastern cities and returning with felons wanted by the Wisconsin State authorities. He is grateful for the change of pace, and told reporters: "The Whipsaw case took a lot out of me. It's going to be nice to get a change of scenery, to ply my trade in new places."

—

From the Louisville, Kentucky, Herald*, April 18, 1979:*

Woman Found Murdered in Porn District

The body of a 20-year-old woman who worked as a nude dancer was discovered this morning by her boyfriend, who wept when he saw her butchered remains and immediately called police. The victim, Kristine Pasquale, who worked at the nearby Swinger's Rendezvous Bar, had been slashed to death and dismembered, and police who viewed the remains of the attractive blonde were shocked and stunned. Sergeant James Ruley, one of the first officers to arrive at Miss Pasquale's bloodsoaked apartment, told reporters: "Bar none, the worst crime upon a woman I've ever seen, and you can quote me on that. It's either going to be an open-and-shut case, or a toughie, because Miss Pasquale was, if you follow my drift, not exactly a blushing flower. I busted her for prostitution myself when I worked Vice, and the Swinger's Rendezvous, the joint where she worked, is a notorious criminal gathering place. My guess right off the top of my head is that her killer was a longtime known associate, or she wouldn't have buzzed him up to her pad. She was a street-smart girl, and choosy about her tricks."

Miss Pasquale's body was removed, and her apartment was sealed off. Forensic technicians went to work, and Miss Pasquale's boyfriend, David Komondy, 27, the bouncer at Swinger's Rendezvous, was questioned and released. No clues were discovered at the apartment, and eight hours later, Dr. Winton Walker, Assistant Medical Examiner for the City of Louisville, announced his findings:

"Miss Pasquale was raped, then murdered. The cause of death was massive trauma and loss of blood, caused by a severed throat. More details will be released later."

Meanwhile, Louisville police are swarming over the porn district, looking for what Sergeant Ruley called "a very angry man."

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Follow-up report on Louisville Homicide #116-79, 4-18-79, filed on 4-27-79 by Det. Sergeant J. M. Ruley, Badge 212, Louisville Police Department, Homicide Division. Titled "Progress Report, Rape/Murder—Pasquale, Kristine Michelle," it was distributed to all Louisville detective units on 4-28-79.

PROGRESS REPORT:

Rape/Murder—Pasquale, Kristine Michelle, D.O.D. 4-18-79.

Note: This report updates previously filed Crime Scene reports, M.E.'s reports, Canvassing and Interview reports, Sex Offender reports, Property reports and Detective's log sheets. (See case file #116-79 under those designations.) This is my first summary report, filed as the catching officer.

Gentlemen:

Updating #116-79, now ten days old. The victim was raped, the victim's throat was slashed while the perpetrator held a pillow over her head. He cut off her arms and legs with a different instrument than the knife the throat wound was made with (see Cr. Sc. Rpt. #116-79 for det.). No weapons found at scene or in surrounding area. We are looking for: 1—Sharp-bladed hunting knife, blade 7″ long, possibly "Buck" brand (all knives of this type confiscated from arrestees or found on male suspects during field interrogations should be given chemical tests to determine presence of blood, & detain all suspects). 2—Hacksaw, with teeth approx. $^{1}/_{32}$″, also sharp. Force of incisions indicates strong man. Recent sales of above being checked out. Also on suspect—he *may* have O+ blood (I say *may* because semen found in victim's vagina secretor O+ and abrasions indicate forced entry. However—victim was known prostitute & given killer's caution in other matters, he may have had smarts to wear a condom). (Note: Victim's pimp-lover said deceased was on pill, but sometimes asked tricks to use condom. No other semen found in vag. vault, so this may not be conclusive.)

Known associates—nothing so far (see #116-79 Interviews, #116-79 Log Sheets).

Canvassing—ditto—see #116-79 Canvassing.

Property—inventory with boyfriend indicates nothing stolen, narcotic substances (cocaine, hashish) confiscated.

Physical evidence—interesting, pointing to smart killer. Prints eliminated by cross checks with K.A.'s—none unexplained. No blood tracks leading down to street floor, no prints on buzzer killer probably used to gain entrance to apt: Lack of above point out my personal reconstruction:

The victim, with *nine* prev. arrests for prostitution and known to be very cautious, would have buzzed up only three types of men—policemen, pimps & boyfriends or customers. Eliminating the first two (pimp & old boyfriends cleared—see #116-79 Interviews), that leaves *customers*. I reconstruct the killing as being perpetrated by a former John harboring a long-term grudge, who carried a spare set of clothes up to the apartment, wearing gloves. Since most Louisville-area deviates have been or are now being questioned, and there are no similar killings on the books, I am directing my efforts toward questioning local prostitutes and men convicted of and arrested for soliciting indecent acts. Patrol & other officers with knowledge of possible suspects should contact me at H.Q. Div. Ext. 409.

Let's get him!
Sgt. J. M. Ruley.

—

From the Evanston, Illinois, Eagle*, May 8, 1979:*

Body of Unidentified Man Found in Garbage Dump

A group of rubbish dumpers made a ghastly discovery this morning when they hauled their trash over to an empty stretch of the city dump site on Kingsbury Road. It was a dead man, spread-eagled on the *ground. Congealed blood was staining the dirt by his head. Mrs. Katherine Daniel, the only woman in the group, fainted, and her husband, Mr. Daniel Daniel, of Muirfield Road in Evanston, revived her while their neighbor, Mr. Jason Granger, ran to summon police.*

They arrived soon after, and determined that the dead man had been shot in the head. His pockets had been turned out, and at this early point in their investigation they think robbery may be the motive for the killing.

But right now their most pressing problem is identifying the deceased. The man is described as Caucasian, approximately thirty years old, six feet two and one hundred and ninety pounds, dark brown hair and hazel eyes. Anyone having information on missing men who match that description should contact the Evanston Police Department.

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Memorandum submitted on 5/11/79 by Captain William Silbersack, Chief of Detectives of the Evanston Police Department, to Thomas Thyssen, Chief of Police:

Memo:

Sir—

Here's the update on the Kingsbury Road homicide you requested. First, we got an ID on the decedent. He's Robert Willard Borgie, W.M., D.O.B. 6/30/51, 6′2″, 193, brown & hazel. Address: The board and care home at 814 Kingsbury. (Four blocks from the dump.)

Borgie was mentally retarded. He'd go anywhere with anybody, and he used to wander off for days at a time, which accounts for the delay in making the ID (the supervisor at the home came forward when she saw a T.V. spot on the homicide). She told Sgts. Lane and Vecchio that Borgie used to hook up with homosexuals, and had oral sex with them for money. He would allegedly trust *anyone.*

As per the coroner's report: Borgie was shot *in the mouth* with a .38. The one shot caused his death. We got a break on the spent shell the M.E. took out of his skull—the striations were extreme, and the shot could only have been fired by a .38 snub-nose with a badly aligned barrel and cylinder housing. Naturally, I'll run a Ballistics Bulletin statewide.

On motive—robbery seems farfetched, although Borgie's pockets were turned out. Subterfuge? Possibly, because Borgie never had more than a few dollars. It's the shot *in the mouth* that bothers me. Borgie was shot *at* the dump (two sets of footprints leading to, one returning from the place where the body was found indicate the killer was a man wearing a size 11½ work boot), and the killer obviously ordered him to open his mouth before he stuck the gun in. All these factors (Borgie's low intelligence, trusting nature, history of homosexual trafficking), and the obviously perverse nature of the shooting, point to a homosexual killer.

So far, Sgts. Lane and Vecchio have conducted their investigation along standard lines (see case file #79-008-H for details). There have been no leads, and I am now instructing the officers to strongly follow up on the homosexual angle.

Respectfully, Bill Silbersack.

—

From the Des Moines, Iowa, Register*, October 2, 1979:*

Sex Slaying Shocks City

A teenaged girl was found raped and brutally knife-hacked in an abandoned grain-storage bin outside Des Moines last night.

The victim was discovered by two teenage boys who broke in to vandalize the bin. Realizing their civic duty, the boys called police and confessed their own crime while reporting the grisly scene. Des Moines police arrived, and forgot about misdemeanor Breaking and Entering the very second they saw the remains of Wilma Grace Thurmann, 19, of Brewster Street in Des Moines.

"The girl's throat was slashed from ear to ear, and her arms and legs were amputated and strewn about the floor of the bin," Officer John Belton told the press. "An ID was easy, because I knew Wilma myself, not personally, but by sight."

When pressed as to how he knew the late Miss Thurmann, Officer Belton refused to comment. Later, our reporters learned that the *deceased was a "hustler" who used to solicit truck drivers at the diner two miles south of the bin. She was known to have a key to the abandoned structure, and known also to take her "tricks" there.*

"The victim's occupation might make for a difficult investigation," an unnamed police spokesman wrote in a general press handout distributed this morning. "But rest assured that Miss Thurmann's killer will be pursued with vigor."

—

Summary Homicide Investigation Fact Sheet, distributed to all personnel points within the Des Moines Police Department on 10/4/79:

Crime(s)—Murder (1st Degree), Aggrav. Sex Asslt.

Place of Occurrence—R.F.D. #71-A (near Sagamore Truck Stop-Exit) East Des Moines

Victim—Thurmann, Wilma Grace, W.F., blond, blue, 5′1″, 105 lbs., D.O.B. 7/3/60

Time of occurrence—approx. 2100 hours, 10/1/79

Disposition of victim at time of occurrence—victim found by youths B&Eing. Catching officer stated in crime scene rep. #79-14-H: "I entered the bin carrying a five-cell from my patrol unit and saw a young white female with her arms and legs chopped off and her throat cut. I examined the body up close and determined it to be Wilma Thurmann, a local hooker. I checked out the rest of the bin and found her arms and legs lying on top of mounds of hay."

Forensic disposition—raped before death. Blade marks behind right ear indicate rapist/killer held knife there while performing intercourse. Semen found in victim's vagina at time of autopsy (O + secretor) differs from semen traces found in victim's stomach (AB+ & O−). Victim's police record shows five convictions for soliciting sex acts, and she was known to use bin for performing oral sex acts on customers, hence O+ secretor is probably rapist/killer's blood type.

Exact cause of death—asphyxiation caused by choking on blood from throat wound.

Evidence found at crime scene—none. Dirt leading to, from & inside bin brushed free of footprints. Latent fingerprints at scene—none (absence of viable print-sustaining surfaces accts. for this).

Eyewitnesses—none

Prev. area crimes with corresponding M.O.—none since 1947, connection implausible

Disposition of weapon—not found during search of area, canvassing of local retailers being conducted. *All units watch for:* single-edged knife, 7″ long, cadmium steel hacksaw, blade teeth $^{1}/^{32}$″. Detain all male suspects harboring or known to harbor.

Current status of investigation—unsolved, no hard suspects, eight detectives assigned full-time. All officers who have arrested or otherwise interrogated Wilma Grace Thurmann or any of her known associates are instructed to phone in salient information to Det. Lt. H. V. Miller, Squad Commander, East Des Moines Precinct.

For further information regarding the progress of this investigation, see case file #79-14-H. All reports under that designation are available to all D.M.P.D. personnel wishing to acquaint themselves with this assault/homicide.

—

From the Lincoln, Nebraska, Plains-Advocate, *December 10, 1979:*

Wheat Field Shooting Troubles Police

It is now a week since Russell Luxxlor was found shot through the head in a wheat field outside Lincoln. Leads are few, and police are baffled.

At first, the authorities thought the killing was part of a bungled robbery attempt. Luxxlor's wallet was in his pants pocket, picked clean of identification and credit cards, while three hundred dollars in cash remained untouched in a "secret compartment" in the victim's windbreaker. That theory was then abandoned when it was learned that Luxxlor was a homosexual and a long-term denizen of Lincoln's *"gay" scene.*

Lincoln Police Department spokesman Lt. Mills Putnam told Plains-Advocate reporters: *"We base the homosexual theory on a fact pertaining to the way Mr. Luxxlor was shot. We are not disclosing the fact in order that we may save it for interrogation purposes."*

In a later press release, Lt. Putnam stated: "We have now slightly amended our homosexual hypothesis. We think Mr. Luxxlor was killed for the identification he was carrying. We base this on the fact that all his ID was gone when his body was found, and he was last seen in a bar in Lincoln with a man who matched his own physical description. We are now looking for a white man in his early thirties, 6′2″–6′4″, 190–210 lbs., dark hair and eyes and large build."

Mr. Luxxlor was buried in a Methodist service yesterday, and the victim's father, the Reverend Maddox Luxxlor of Cheyenne, Wyoming, told a group of reporters and police gathered at the funeral home: "You people have no right to defame my son! Your job is to catch his killer, not judge him!"

The effort to apprehend the killer continues.

—

Addendum Report, submitted by Detective Sergeant Joseph Stinson to Detective Lieutenant Mills Putnam, both officers attached to Homicide Sector Three, Lincoln Police Department:

10/18/79

Lt.—

Here's another wrap-up on the Luxxlor job. 1.—Mugs have been shown to gay-bar people—no ID on the guy Luxxlor was seen with.

2.—Friends, relatives, K.A.'s—goose egg. Statewide query on the weirdly striated .38 slug—ditto, but if this thing doesn't crack soon I'll run a nationwide bulletin. Gun in mouth M.O. the same, I'll draft an "urgent" on that one soon and hit the surrounding states and the feds with it.

******!!!!!!—Man matching description of Luxxlor & suspect seen last night—trying to sell "cold" credit cards at Henderson's Hot Spot Bar (11819 Cornhusker Road). Informer phoned in tip anonymously, said suspect was 6′3″, 200, brown eyes, dark hair—"big and intense-looking." The suspect got hinky and left when the tip man asked the name on the cards. Tip man said suspect may be driving a metallic blue van. I've issued an A.P.B. & vehicle detain order county-wide, and I've told the men on the squad to shake down their informants.

That's it for now—Joe

—

From the Charleston, South Carolina, Clarion*, June 2, 1980:*

No Leads in Savage Murder of Hostess: Connection to Similar Killings Being Explored

With no leads in the investigation into the heinous murder of Candice Tucker, 18, the lovely blond bar hostess found raped and butchered in her Magnolia Street apartment last week, Charleston Police are turning their attention to two identical killings committed in different states throughout the past fourteen months.

On April 18 of last year, Kristine Pasquale, a go-go dancer, was found raped and dismembered in her Louisville, Kentucky, apartment. Wilma Thurmann, a Des Moines, Iowa, prostitute, was found identically devastated in a feed bin outside Des Moines on October 1, 1979. Physical evidence, Charleston Police told newsmen, is identical in all three cases. At a press conference held yesterday, Charleston District Attorney Timothy Kleist said, "In the interest of public safety and crime-fighting efficacy, we're keeping our liaison investigation with the Louisville and Des Moines P.D.'s under wraps, but I will tell the media this: It's a biggie. All three killings are most certainly the work of one man, and we intend to apprehend this fiend!"

In a related note, City Councilman Michael Cleary accused D.A. Kleist of using the Tucker case as a political football. "We all know Tim is getting ready to run for the Senate, and a nice juicy murder conviction would sure look good on his record. Let's hope he doesn't pull any railroad jobs in his haste to get to Washington. His party is famous for them, and I sure would hate to see innocent men get rousted."

—

Supplemental Memorandum, filed on 6/6/80 as part of Charleston Police Department Case File #80-64-Rape/Homicide, *Canvassing* and *Physical Evidence* sub-files:

To: All Investigating Officers

From: Det. Sgt. W. W. Brown, 19th Precinct

While re-canvassing Magnolia Street area, I questioned a male negro named Steven "Sterno Steve" Washington, a transient with no visible means of support. He told me that on the night of the Tucker killing he was drinking wine under the stoop directly across the street, and that "about midnight" he saw "a white man with a cop vibe" enter the vestibule *wearing gloves* & carrying a *wadded-up plastic trash bag*. Washington left the stoop then, *as the man pressed a buzzer and went upstairs*. (Washington said he was afraid the man would take away his wine when he returned downstairs.)

Since shredded plastic was mentioned among trace elements found at crime scene, I think this is a major lead. (Washington being held at 19th Pct. drunk tank in case further questioning deemed necessary.)

W. W. Brown, Sgt., 19th Squad.

—

From the Kalamazoo, Michigan, Standard-Leader*, September 10, 1980:*

Remains of Kalamazoo Man Found in Lake Michigan; "Nephew" Sought

The body of a Kalamazoo resident known for his eccentricities was found in the shallow water of Lake Michigan near the Benton Heights Pier three days ago. Although decomposition was close to complete, bullets embedded in the skull pointed to shooting as the cause of the man's death, and a teletyping of his unique dental bridgework to local dental labs yielded a rapid identification. The victim was Rheinhardt Wildebrand, 72, of Kalamazoo.

Wildebrand, a lifelong Kalamazoo resident, was an inventor who lived off of royalties from tool and die devices he developed back in the 1930's. He was a local "character" who lived in a big gingerbread *house at 8493 S. Kenilworth, flew the flag of his ancestral Austria on American holidays, seldom left his block and kept a 1953 Packard in his driveway—but never drove it. He was assumed to have no living family (his parents and one sister having died in the '40's), but recently a man who he told neighbors was his "nephew" was staying with him—and Benton Heights and Kalamazoo Police are now searching for that man as Wildebrand's presumed killer.*

The retired inventor's neighbors told police that the nephew arrived sometime in early August, and that they often saw him with Wildebrand on the latter's front porch, but that the man, like his alleged uncle, kept to himself. Neighbors described him as being "tall and strongly built, early thirties, dark hair and eyes and full beard."

Lieutenant Loren Kelleher of the Kalamazoo Police Department, which is aiding the Benton Heights P.D. in its investigation, told Standard-Leader *reporter Bob Shaeffer: "We've checked out the records on the Wildebrand family. The old man had one sister, a spinster, who died in 1941, which in all likelihood is before our suspect was born. So we know the 'nephew' stuff is baloney. We think robbery is the motive. The so-called nephew in all likelihood gained Wildebrand's confidence, then stole his money and killed him. The old man was rumored to have large sums of cash hidden in the cellar. Right now we are going over the house for physical evidence and showing mug shots of Michigan, Illinois and Ohio criminals to neighbors in an attempt to identify the 'nephew.'"*

As for the neighbors themselves, they mourn the fact that there seems to be no one mourning the late inventor. "Rheinhardt was a strange old bird," a Kenilworth Avenue resident told our newsmen. "But nobody—not even a weirdo like that—should have to get shot and dumped in the drink."

Details on the investigation will be forthcoming.

—

Liaison Memorandum, sent to the Homicide Squad, Benton Heights Police Department by Lt. Loren Kelleher of the Kalamazoo Police Department:

9/15/80

Officers—

On the Kalamazoo end of Wildebrand, Rheinhardt J.—a big zero along with some interesting stuff.

A.—Victim's bank accounts not hit—savings balance $41,000, checking balance $12,000 (R. W. Sent out large checks to credit-card companies before he disappeared).

B.—No turn-up on stolen or sold .38 with defective parts & no matchup on the shells (I ran statewide).

No ID on the "nephew," & no one saw suspect with a vehicle.

C.—Canvassing of local res.—zero.

D.—Victim's house searched, no wallet or ID found (probably floating in Lake Mich.). No money found, which confirms robbery as motive.

E.—The clincher on "nephew" as our man—all 3 stories, 12 rooms of house completely wiped clean of latents—washcloth marks everywhere. Nephew knows his stuff.

F.—Will you call me with feedback from your end soon?—Lt. L. Kelleher.

—

From the Baltimore, Maryland, Sun, *May 19, 1981:*

Prostitute's Murder Linked to Three Other Sex-Slayings

The shocking murder of Carol Neilton, found raped and brutally hatcheted in her apartment last week, appears to be the fourth in a series of slayings that began in Louisville, Kentucky, over two years ago.

In April of 1979, Kristine Pasquale, a nude dancer, was discovered in her Louisville apartment, butchered exactly like Ms. Neilton; Wilma Thurmann was killed in Des Moines, Iowa, similarly, on October 1 of that year; and last May 27, Candice Tucker of Charleston, South Carolina, met an equally gruesome end in that city. The physical evidence is identical in all four homicides—and there is an identical absence of clues. Baffled, the four police agencies involved in the *investigations are discussing pooling their information in the hopes of avoiding a fifth death.*

Time is working against them, however. Captain Reynolds Conklin, second in command of the Baltimore P.D. Homicide Division, told a media assembly last night: "These four homicides have spanned two years, and the official investigations on the first three are, in police parlance, cold. No suspect names have turned up in more than one city in the mass of paperwork thus far collected. No airplane, bus or train reservation lists have the same men visiting the four cities on the applicable dates, and right now we are simply doing paperwork and running with hypothetical footballs. That is how this case will be solved."

But after how many more victims, Captain?

—

Inter-Office Memorandum, found under "Miscellaneous Reports" in Baltimore Police Department Case File #199-5/81:

Skipper—

You said I should be candid, so here it is—nothing, except some decent theorizing from reading through Xeroxes of the Louisville/Des Moines/Charleston case files and talking on phone to two officers previously involved (Sgt. Ruley, Louisville—Sgt. Brown, Charleston).

Both these (smart) officers feature a cop impersonator who got access to the victims by threatening shakedowns or arrest if they didn't come across sexually. This would explain how killer entered pads of vict's 1, 3, 4. Also, impersonating cops seems to be popular among psychos these days—witness that Hillside Strangler scumbag out in L.A.

I'll take the reconstruction one step further—suppose the killer actually is a cop? Since the killings originated in Louisville, a check of airline/train/bus records for applicable dates of last 3 killings cross-checked against L.P.D. officers roster (unexplained or unusual officer absences too) might be in order. Needle-haystack stuff, but something to do.

Off the record—I think we should keep going through the standard motions, then bury this thing. Neilton was a hooker, this guy will never kill in our jurisdiction again, and Homicide has got eight major gang/killings & robbery/killings running hot—they should be our priority. I've heard the feds are setting up something big called the Serial Killer Task Force (they're going to be soliciting data from Municipal & State P.D.'s on old unsolveds, computer-checking them, etc.). Maybe that's our best bet.

See you for the Orioles next Tuesday—Jack.

—

From the Columbus, Ohio, Telegram*, May 30, 1981:*

Drifter's Body Excavated at Building Site

Sunbury, Ohio, May 29:

Workmen digging up a stretch of land with high-powered earth movers uncovered the buried body of a transient ex-convict yesterday morning. The man had been dead for over a month, Columbus County Coroner Roger Diskant told reporters, and although "90% decomposed," an identification was made from his fingerprints. The man was William Rohrsfield, age 33, a vagrant with convictions for burglary and soliciting homosexual acts. The death was listed as a "gunshot homicide," and the Ohio State Police are now investigating.

—

Summary Homicide Report filed by Lieutenant D. D. Bucklin of the Sunbury, Ohio, Sheriff's Department on June 1, 1981:

Chief—

Here's the rundown on the stiff found near that 7-11 site out by Route 3:

Name—Rohrsfield, William Walter

Race—Cauc.

D.O.B.—5-4-48

Phys Stats—6′3″, 210, brown & brown, build large

Cause of death—shot in head, .38 spents found in dirt by body (unusual lands & grooves) (see attached ballistic workup done by State Officers). Body buried 12 feet deep (strange).

Preliminary investigation—*State Detectives*. Although this is technically our case, Dead Body Report was filed by State unit that caught the squeal, and since Rohrsfield was an ex-con and not a Sunbury resident, I say let them do the work. Here's Rohrsfield's record:

Juvie—B&E—12-12-65—(received counseling). Poss. of Marijuana —1-8-66—(6 mos Chillicothe Youth Fac.).

Adult—House Burg. & Rec. Stolen Goods—8-2-67 (1 yr. Chillicothe Adult Fac. 3 yrs. prob.). 1st Deg. Burg.—Convictions (2) on 4/20/69, (3 yrs.—Ohio State Pen.); also on 7/2/74 with added charges of Soliciting for Purposes of Male Prostitution, Loitering in the Vicinity of Public Restrooms and Indecent Exposure (5 yrs. State time—refused parole, topped out sentence). Released 7/14/79, a dozen drunk arrests since.

The State dicks can have him—I say good riddance to bad rubbish —D. D. Bucklin, Lieutenant, Watch Commander.

VI

As a Fugitive: Filling in the Map (January 1979–September 1981)

17

And so the kiss made me a fugitive, and set the man who gave it free to kill with the stylish ease that I used to own.

At the time, of course, I had no idea what Ross was doing. Panic and unnamed desires kept him shut out but close—like a hot wind at my back, one that would turn me blind if I stared into it. Today, with manuscript pages and police documents accumulating on my desk and pins marking my journey on the map covering my cell wall, the lines connecting our respective murders make the dichotomy stand out in boldface: Ross discreetly choosing his victims, cloaked with a badge and extradition warrants, always returning safely to rural Wisconsin; Martin tearing cross-country in flight from real sex, seeking the perfect non-Martin to become, burning like an ant caught in sunlight through a magnifying glass held by a sadistic child.

Burning my way back to my own childhood;

Feeding sacrificial fires with a grandfather and three brothers;

Sabotaging my old caution by skipping at the edge of the flames…

Blasted out of Huyserville, I drove due east on sludgy two-lanes to Lake Geneva. The resort was thronged with athletic youths in brightly colored sportswear, and in the wake of Ross I felt inadequate to the task of working among them. The snub-nose .38, loaded in an undercarriage compartment, seemed like a poor substitute for my magnum; and I knew that if I put my hands on a victim—man, woman, young, old, ugly or attractive—they would feel like Ross, and I wouldn't be able to finish the job. My only recourse was to force myself to forget the man—his looks, his feel, his style.

That night I did something extraordinarily out of character.

I booked a suite at the Lake Geneva Playboy Club and spent an evening celebrating an auspicious unnamed occasion, forcing myself to act like a reveler blowing off steam. I ate an overpriced meal at the "Sultan's Steakhouse," tipped lavishly and watched the floor show at the "Jet Setter's Lounge." Young hostesses in low-cut rabbit costumes looked disapprovingly at my out-of-style clothing there, but changed their tunes when I showed them my rabbit-ear room key with "Potentate's Pad" embossed on the back. *Then* they accepted my stylishly handed-out twenty-dollar bills with proper humility and led me to a front-row table in the “VIP” section. I ordered Dom Perignon champagne for myself and my fellow VIP’s, and was roundly applauded. Soon the man next to me was offering cocaine, and in the spirit of the unnamed occasion I snorted it and drank greedily from the bottle at my table.

The floor show featured a vulgar buffoon named Professor Irwin Corey. His act consisted of ad-libbed double entendres and malapropisms aimed at the people sitting at the ringside tables; and although at first I found him tedious, as I snorted and drank on he became the funniest thing I had ever seen. Old notions of control kept my laughter internal until Corey pointed to a fat drunk who was snoring with his head on the table. In the voice of an oriental sage, the Professor said, “You drink to forget, Papa San?” and reflexively I thought of Ross, dug through my mind for a portrait and came up instead with the face of a pretty boy from a Calvin Klein ad. Then I did laugh out loud, spewing spittle and tears across my table until Corey noticed me, walked over and slapped my back and said, “There, there, big guy. Take a shot of meth, two bunnies, four Excedrin and call your broker in the morning. There, there.”

I don’t know how I made it back to my suite; my last waking image was of rabbit girls solicitously opening a door into ice-cold air. When I did awaken, my head was throbbing and I was sprawled fully clothed across a red satin heart-shaped bed. I thought of Ross and got another vacuously handsome model, then a flashback of the evening hit, ringed with question marks and dollar signs. This led to a series of four-figure speculations followed by ???, and I comforted myself with the thought that the night was a one-time-only blowout. Then I ran a mental litany of my safe-deposit box balances and key hiding places—and came up three short.

Now Ross appeared in detail, smoothing his mustache with utter cool, murmuring, “Martin, you dumb shit.”

I lashed out at the bed with my fists and knees; Ross was saying, “Thought I let you off easy, huh? Sweetie, who could ever forget a face like mine? Ross the Boss, what a guy.”

I jumped up and tore through the suite until I found stationery and pens on a table by the telephone. With shaking hands I wrote down bank names, figures and hiding places, ending with a total of five boxes and $6,214.00. Simple subtraction gave me the cost of my evening of prosaic debauchery: $11,470.00 minus $6,214.00 equaled $5,256.00.

Ross said, “You’ll never make it as a swinger, Martin. Splitting on the tab’ll save you a few bucks, though. They didn’t see your van when you registered, so all they’ve got is your name…*WHICH YOU CAN CHANGE*.

I was back on the road inside of ten minutes, and Ross, faceless but huge, was like a Santa Ana wind behind me.

—

I never mentally regained the lost money, and I spent a month traveling throughout the West picking my remaining safety boxes clean. I can only describe that month as savage. Driving into cities where I had previously killed felt savagely stupid; keeping the money in the Deathmobile’s glove compartment felt necessary, but savagely risky. Ross loomed all around me—faceless as an advisor, but savagely beautiful and dangerous when I didn’t listen to him.

Other faces were there, always on roadsides. Men, women, old, young, pretty, ugly—they all had big open mouths that shouted, “Love me, fuck me, kill me.” Ross, faceless, only a voice, kept me from wasting them, kept the idea of a new identity in my mind. In the counselor role that Shroud Shifter used to play, he told me to take my time and eschew murder until I found a perfectly expendable man to become, a man who looked exactly like me and who would never be missed. Knowing that Ross would remain sexless only if I obeyed him, I waited.

Reversing directions after picking up my last cache of money, I headed East again, driving all day, sleeping in cheap motels. Ross’s presence was always with me, and *his* obsession of making me kill for a non-Martin Plunkett persona grew in *my* brain, buttressed by savage questions:

What if the dead man and his car are discovered in Wisconsin?

What if the troopers remember that you were detained at the same time that he disappeared?

What if the two facts are connected?

What if the spent shells that you discarded by the roadblock are found?

What if the Playboy Club management files on you for Defrauding an Innkeeper, and that fact gets connected to the others, resulting in a fugitive warrant?

Those questions gave me the courage to act independently of Ross the faceless counselor, and surprisingly, the beauty that I thought would descend on me didn’t.

But on my own, I failed.

I spent a week in Chicago, prowling low-life dives, trying to buy a set of fake ID. No one would sell to me, and after a half-dozen attempts I knew my old criminal touch was fear-riddled—that I came across as a snitch and a fool. I drove out of the Windy City chased by Ross’s derisive laughter and “I told you so’s.”

I was skirting Lake Michigan when I snapped to a compromise plan: settle down for a month or so, alter the appearance of the Deathmobile, re-register it and get Illinois plates to replace my old Colorado ones. I searched out flaws to the plan, saw a huge major risk, and decided to go through with it anyway. The boldness of the measure seemed to please Ross; he said, “Do your own thing” and went faceless as I set to work.

First I pulled into Evanston, found a furnished room and paid two months’ rent in advance; then I drove to the local Department of Motor Vehicles office, boldly displayed my Colorado license and registration and told them I wanted Illinois license plates for my van. After filling out forms, the clerk did exactly what I knew he would—he went straight to a teletype machine and ran my name and vehicle nationwide for wants and warrants. While the man waited for the computer kick-out, I gripped the .38 snubnose in my pocket and watched his face. If I came up Wanted in Wisconsin or elsewhere, he would react, and I would shoot him and the other two clerks by the coffee machine, steal one of their cars and *GO*.

I did not have to revert to such melodrama; the man returned smiling, and I paid my fee and listened to him tell me my temporary license sticker would arrive in one week, my plates in six. I thanked him and went looking for an automobile paint shop.

I found one near the town dump on Kingsbury Road, and waited, reading magazines while Deathmobile II was face-lifted from silver to metallic blue. When it rolled out of the paint barn looking brand-spanking different, a Latin youth sitting next to me said, “Sharp fucking sled, man. What you call it?”

“What?”

“You know, man. Its name. Like Dragon Wagon or Pussy Pit or Fuck Truck. A sled that cool’s gotta have a name.”

Still feeling bold from my DMV office showdown, I said, “I call it the Killer’s Kayak.”

The kid slapped his thighs. “Right on O-matic!”

—

I settled into Evanston. It was a wealthy town, a Chicago suburb more or less—and there was a profusion of small colleges to give me the protective coloration of the perpetual graduate student. With temporary roots laid down I thought of Ross less and less, and began to realize that his audial and physical presences were no more than mirror forms of self-love—I was infatuated with the man because we both excelled at the same profession and were Spartan in other aspects of our lives—me always moving, him pursuing a career that obviously entailed long hours of boredom. He came to my aid in times of panic as Shroud Shifter used to, when my own reservoir of self-love was depleted by the exigencies of living on the road. If, symbiotically, I was serving him in the same capacity, fine; if not, I didn't care. Also, there were other faces to look at; the Evanston campuses were crawling with them. With the Ross face/voice symbolism tagged, I slowly became convinced that giving up Martin Plunkett, transient convicted burglar, in favor of another identity was imperative—and I started looking for a twin brother to kill.

The quiet lucidity of the idea, conceived in terror but time-tested through various emotional states, allowed me to move methodically toward my first fratricide. I fashioned a silencer out of metal tubing and wire and test-fired the .38 at buoys on Lake Michigan; I prowled campuses after dark, the snubnose in my pocket, my game plan to shoot my quarry on a quiet walkway, steal his wallet and quietly walk away. I had four look-alikes spotted and was in the process of weeding them out when I first noticed the idiot.

I knew two things about him immediately: that he was mentally deficient and that his physical resemblance to me, although substantial, went deeper. I knew we were bonded hypothetically; that if I had grown up innocent instead of irredeemably jaded, this is what I would be.

With no intention of ever hurting the man, I watched him play in the garbage dump every day for a week running. The boardinghouse I lived in was on a hill three blocks from the dump, and with binoculars I could see my hybrid brother toss rocks at abandoned cars and rummage around for rusted auto parts to put to use as toys. Toward dusk, an attendant from the "Home" would lead him away from his playground, and it was she that I wanted to hurt.

I had narrowed down my hit list to two, and was heading toward the Evanston Junior College campus to make my final decision when I met the could-have-been Martin face-to-face. It was early evening, and only an hour earlier I had watched with amusement as the man hid in the weeds, foiling the nasty-looking spinster type who came to drag him away from his fun. Now, as I slowly cruised past the dump, he emerged from the shadows and flagged down the van.

I stopped, and flicked on the cab light. The man walked over and stuck his head in the passenger window; in extreme close-up I saw that his features were a hideously slack version of my own. "I'm Bobby," he said in a squeaky tenor voice. "Wanna see my playhouse?"

I could not refuse; it would have been like denying my childhood. Nodding, I got out of the van and walked with Bobby through the dump site. His shoulder brushed mine, and it felt soft, weak. I found myself wishing that someone would make him build up his body, and was about to offer brotherly words of advice on the subject when Bobby pointed to a light flickering up ahead. "My house," he said. "See?"

The house was two rotted car seats arranged facing each other, with a Coleman lamp in the middle. The light from it shot straight up, forming a tunnel that illuminated Bobby's head hanging loosely out from his shoulders as if he couldn't hold himself erect without help. "My house," he said.

I put my hands on Bobby's shoulders; he jerked into a military posture and said, "Yes, sir," but his head still lolled off at an angle. I looked at the ground, then back at the askew idiot face bobbing now like a toy animal in a hot-rod backseat. Tightening my grip, I said, "You don't have to call me that. You don't have to call anybody that."

Bobby grinned, and I felt his spongy body quiver under my hands. His grin got bigger and more contorted, and I saw that he was in some kind of idiot ecstasy. Finally his tongue and palate and lips connected, and he got out, "You wann be my friend?"

Now I started to quiver, and my hands on Bobby quivered, and the glow from the lantern burned the tears that were running down my cheeks. I turned my head away so my idiot brother wouldn't think me weak, and I heard him making wet noises as though he was crying. I looked at him then, and saw that the sounds were coming from the obscenity of the big round O he was making with his mouth, and that he was waving a dollar bill, flaglike, in front of my chest.

I took my hands from his shoulders and started to walk away. Hearing contorted sobs and "Pl-pl-pl," I turned back to see Bobby holding out the dollar, trying to beg for my friendship and make his hideous overture at the same time. I put my left hand back on his shoulder; I took the .38 from my windbreaker pocket. Bobby tried to smile as he wrapped his lips around the silencer. I pulled the trigger and my hybrid brother flew into the dirt, and I stole his wallet only to have it as a memento of my first mercy killing.

—

Robert Willard Borgie ruined Evanston for me, and I got out a month after my one-and-only routine police questioning. I drove West then, Illinois plates on the blue Deathmobile, no Ross or Shroud Shifter advising me, only an awful sickly-sweet smell clinging to my person. I felt perilously close to self-annihilating revelations, and as I sped across brutally long and flat and hot stretches of farmland, I schemed and daydreamed and even ran old brain-movies to keep them pushed down. Troubling thoughts broke out anyway:

Borgie was subhumanly intelligent, and he wanted you *that* way—

You fixed on him as your brother, and didn't plan to kill him, even though he looked just like you—

He made you cry—

If he made you cry out of empathy, then your will is slipping—

If he made you cry for yourself, you're finished.

I ended that long and hot and flat leg of my journey in Lincoln, Nebraska, renting a boxlike, cramped and hot bachelor apartment on the city's north side. I found a night watchman job, and was assigned to sit in the foyer of a downtown office building from midnight to eight each morning, wearing a gold-braided uniform and a mace gun and handcuffs in a plastic scabbard. Aside from rounds of the hallways once an hour, my time was my own. The former night man had left a dozen cartons of magazines behind, and rather than go stir-crazy brooding over dead retards and what they boded; I devoured copies of *Time* and *People* and *Us*.

It was a complete new education at age thirty-one. Years had passed since I last explored the written word, and the culture I had moved through had changed dramatically—changes lost on me as I maneuvered with tunnel vision. Between June and late November of '79 I read hundreds of magazines cover-to-cover. Although the snippets of information I sucked in detailed disparate events, one theme dominated.

Family.

It was back, it was strong, it was "in," it had never gone away. It was the antidote to new strains of sexually transmitted viruses, to

Communism, to booze and dope addiction, to boredom and malaise and loneliness. Androgynous musicians and Fascist preachers and muscle-bound black buffoons with Mohawk haircuts and gold chains proclaimed that you were fucked without it. Pop philosophers said that the years of rootlessness were over in America, and the nuclear family was the new-old constituency, period. Family was what you yearned for, worked for, bled for and sacrificed for. Family was what you came home for. Family was what you had while certain scum roamed around the country having nightmares and killing people and weeping when mirror-image idiots offered them blow-jobs for a dollar. Lack of family was the root of all hurt, all evil, all death.

My anger simmered, sizzled, bubbled and stewed all those reading months, and Ross popped up periodically, offering comments like a Greek chorus:

"Martin, if I thought it'd help you out, I'd be your family…but you know…blood *is* thicker than water."

"The thing about family is, you can't choose your own."

"The thing about being alone like you is that you can take anything you want from anybody."

"Awww, poor Marty's mommy was a doper and his daddy took off and the nasty retardo made Marty cry. Awwww."

"Didn't I tell you back in January to get yourself a new ID?"

I started looking for a genealogy to usurp. *People* magazine said that bars were "The new meeting places for singles seeking to become duos," and since I wanted to connect with a man to kill, it was only fitting to go to bars where single men were seeking to become duos with other men. *Christian Times* magazine called such places "dens of sexual depravity that should be banned by a constitutional amendment," and somewhere between the two statements the truth probably hid. I didn't care either way, and the idea of gay-bar-hopping for a new ID was my antidote for a slipping will to murder. So I read men's fashion magazines, bought myself a slick new wardrobe and jumped will-first into the scene.

Which in Bible Belt Lincoln consisted of two bars, side by side on the east edge of the industrial district. I gave myself a strict timetable: four nights of searching only, out of the bars by 11:30 and at my job by 12:00 the first three nights, after-hours prowling only allowed on the fourth night—Friday, my work night off. If no one suitable materialized during the four nights, I would abandon the plan. A newspaper article I had read mentioned that college boys sometimes cruised "Fag Row" looking for bar patrons' cars to deface, so I would park Deathmobile II a half-mile away and walk over. No leaving fingerprints on bar tops or glasses, my face to be kept averted from everyone but possible hits.

I was well programmed for caution and control, but I wasn't prepared for the distractions I met, the variations on Ross and blondness. "Tommy's" and "The Place" were simply dingy rooms with long oak bars, tiny wrought-iron tables and jukeboxes: disco-blaring dives where conversation was next to impossible. But they were packed with blonds cloned from the Ross Anderson style: compact muscles that only hard work could have developed, short hair, toothbrush mustaches and tight-fitting "he-man" clothes—Pendleton shirts, faded Levi's and work boots. It took me two nights of drinking club soda at the bar, eyeballing for tall, dark-haired men like me, to figure it out: I was in the middle of blue-collar homosexuals at play—hod-carrying, meat-packing, truck-driving men, the blonds among them most often Eastern European types with high cheekbones and ice-blue eyes. It was a subculture that neither my travels nor my recent reading spurt had prepared me for, and as a dark-haired WASP in a polo shirt and crewneck sweater, I felt completely anomalous. Expecting swishy types who would be drawn to me like moths to a flame and just as easily snuffed out, I found shit-kickers who would be exceedingly tough *mano a mano*.

So for two nights I drank club soda, the nonsexual wallflower at the homosexual prom. The tall, dark-haired men I spotted tended to run too lean or too young to be me; my constantly trawling eyes were rebuffed when I made contact with others; the Ross and blondness clones kept me nervous, fingering my glass for something to do with my hands. I had been prepared to be frightened and angry and possibly tempted, but now something else was settling on me, like an undercurrent in the constantly throbbing music. It was a weight that felt like regret. The men surrounding me, frivolous but masculine, made me feel old and numbed by my history of brutal experience.

Early on the third night of my mission I found out why I was being avoided. I was washing my hands in the restroom at Tommy's when I heard voices just outside the door.

"…I tell you, he's a cop. He's been hanging out here and next door for the past couple of nights trying to look oh so cool, and you can just tell."

"You're just being paranoid because you're on probation."

"No, I'm not! God, slacks and a sweater, how tacky! He's L.P.D. Vice, baby, so hit on him at your own risk."

There was a giggle. “You think he’s got handcuffs and a big gun?”

“Yes, baby, I do. And a wife and three kids and an entrapment quota.”

The two voices joined in laughter, then trailed off. Thinking of Ross and how he would have reacted to the conversation, I walked back to my seat at the bar. I was wondering about the feasibility of continuing my mission when I felt a tentative hand on my elbow. I turned around, and there I was.

“Hi.”

It was the voice of my admirer. I stepped off the stool, saw that he was within an inch of my height, ten pounds of my weight and two years of my age. By squinting, I picked up brown eyes. Turning away from him, I wiped the bar top and my glass with my sleeve, then pivoted back with male-model grace. “Hi,” I said.

“You move real nicely,” the man shouted above the music. Ross zipped through my mind and said, “Kill him for me,” and I cupped my ear and pointed to the door. The man caught my drift and walked ahead of me, and when we hit the sidewalk, I looked around for witnesses. Seeing nothing but a cold, deserted street, I mentally affixed myself as L.P.D. Sergeant Anderson and said, “I’m a police officer. You can take a ride with me out to the wheat flats, or a ride to the station. Take your pick.”

The almost-Martin laughed. “Is this entrapment or a proposition?”

I laughed à la Ross. “Both, sweetie.”

The man poked my arm. Hard. “I’m Russ.”

“Ross.”

“Russ and Ross, that’s cute. Your car or mine?”

I pointed down the street to where Deathmobile II waited. “Mine.”

Russ leaned into me coyly, then pulled himself back and started walking. I kept pace with him, staying up against the sides of buildings, thinking of late-night burials and whether my old shovel was capable of cracking wheat-rooted frozen earth. Russ kept quiet, and I imagined him imagining me naked. At Deathmobile II I opened the door and squeezed his arm as I motioned him into the cab, and he let out a little grunt of pleasure. Anticipation and exhilaration hit me, and when I got in behind the wheel I exploded with an urge to know Russ/Martin’s history.

“Tell me about your family,” I said.

This time his laugh came out crude, his voice a Midwestern bray. “Very romantic there, gay officer.”

The “gay” angered me; I hit the ignition, gunned the gas and said, "I'm a sergeant."

"Is that part of your typical gay sergeant's foreplay?"

The second "gay" accentuated the feel of the .38 tucked into my waistband and kept me from lashing out. "That's right, sweetie."

"Any man who calls me 'sweetie' can hear my tale of woe." Russ tooted a fanfare on an imaginary horn, then laughed and proclaimed, "This is your life! Russell Maddox Luxxlor!"

The full name settled on me like a declaration of freedom. The industrial district disappeared, prairie flats and a huge starry sky loomed ahead, and I started to buzz all over. "Tell me, sweetie."

The Midwestern twang came out archly, theatrically. "Wellll, I'm from Cheyenne, Wyoming, and I've known I was gay since about age zero, and I've got three lovely sisters who buffered me through the tough parts. You know, being picked on, that kind of thing. And Daddy's a Congregational minister, and he's uptight about it, but not crazy on the subject like the born-agains, and Momma's like a big sister, she accepted me real—"

The monologue's sex drift was turning my buzzing ugly, itchy. "Tell me other things," I said, holding my voice down. "Cheyenne. Your sisters. What it's like to have a minister for a father."

Russ pouted. "I guess you know all about that other stuff already. Okay, Cheyenne was a bore, Molly's my favorite sister. She's thirty-four now, three years older than me. Laurie's my next favorite, she's twenty-nine and married to this awful farmer man who hits her; and Susan's the youngest, twenty-seven. She had a drinking problem, then she joined A.A. Daddy's a good guy, he doesn't judge me, and Momma quit smoking a few months ago. And oh God, this is so boring."

I tightened my grip on the wheel until I thought my knuckles would pop. "Tell me more, sweetie."

The dead man's effete bray rattled through the cab. "It's your funeral; my family would bore Jesus to death. Okay, Susan's the prettiest, and she's a dental tech; Laurie's fat, and she's got three rug rats with her awful husband, and I'm the smartest and the most sophisticated and the most sensit—"

I said the words the very instant the idea took hold. "Let me see the pictures in your wallet."

Martin/Russ said, "Sweetie, don't you think this is getting a little far afield? I'm up to party, but this is getting weird."

I looked in my rearview, saw nothing but dark prairie, decelerated and pulled over to the side of the road. The dead man gave me a spooked look, and I took the .38 from my waistband and leveled it at him. “Give me your wallet or I’ll kill you.”

With jerky hands he plucked it from his back pocket and put it on the dashboard. With calm hands worthy of Ross Anderson, I lowered the gun to my lap and fingered my way through the photo and credit-card compartments. Seeing three young women in graduation gowns and a couple in ’40’s wedding attire, I winced; seeing a pictureless Nebraska driver’s license, valid draft card and Visa, American Express, and Diner’s Club, I smiled and said, “Get out of the van.”

Martin got out and stood by the door, shaking and murmuring prayers. I put the wallet in my pocket and joined him on the roadside, savoring mental images of my three new sisters until their about-to-be-excommunicated brother started to weep. Then, jarred, I poked the silencered snout of my weapon into his back and said, “Walk.”

I marched him exactly sixty-two paces, one step for each year of our lives, then said, “Turn around and open your mouth.” With chattering teeth he did, and I stuck the barrel in and pulled the trigger. His pitch backward almost wrenched the gun from my hand, but I managed to hold on.

The cold prairie air singed my lungs as I mentally regrouped. I thought of making a search for the expended round, then rejected the idea—my only other hit with Ross’s piece had been in Illinois seven months before; there was no way the killings would be connected.

I was walking back to Deathmobile II and my shovel when I saw headlights approaching from the direction of Lincoln. The abruptness of it spooked me, and I got in, hung a U-turn and headed to work. I was on the job early, and I spent the entire shift memorizing the photographs of my new family. In the morning I burned them to ash in the ground-floor men’s room, and when I flushed the sooty remains I knew the faces were imprinted in my memory bank forever.

18

Forever lasted eleven days.

Those days were happy, peaceful. I had earned a family to fill up empty spaces in my past, and although Russell Luxxlor's body was discovered, nullifying my attempt to steal his identity, I still had Dad and Mom and Molly and Laurie and Susan as consolation prizes. Salable credit cards were a bonus on top of that, and I decided to unload them when I left Lincoln for good—a prescheduled two weeks after the killing.

Luxxlor's death made the local media, and one newspaper account had police accurately speculating that he was killed for his ID; I was even mentioned as having been seen with him at Tommy's. Still, I wasn't questioned, nor was I worried—it was the homosexual community that would bear the brunt of the heat.

So, for eleven days I existed in a realistic fantasy world devoid of violence and sexual urges. I laughed with favorite sister Molly and comforted sister Laurie when her husband gave her grief; I encouraged sister Susan to stay sober and teased Mom and Dad about their religious fervor. I was running on a fuel mixture that was 80% fantasy, 20% a detachment that knew the game the rest of me was playing. The point spread existed harmoniously within me and my new family drifted through my sleeping dreams in a jumble that made them seem old and well thumbed.

On my twelfth post-killing morning I woke up and couldn't remember Molly's face. Wracking my memory wouldn't bring it back; small chores to ease my mind were no help. Fantasizing with other family members made my 20% detachment zoom to 90% plus, and toward evening every time I memory-searched for Molly I came up with the bloodied faces of old women victims.

That night I panicked.

Sister Laurie was starting to slip into blankness, and I loaded all my belongings into Deathmobile II and headed out of Lincoln on the Cornhusker Highway. Recalling a newspaper article on the local crime scene and its meeting places, I stopped at a roadhouse called Henderson's Hot Spot and tried to sell Russell Luxxlor's credit cards to two men playing pool. Nervous and twitchy, I said all the wrong things and spooked them. When their hardboiled fish eyes zoomed in on me, I ran to the Deathmobile and sped out of Nebraska at ten miles over the speed limit.

—

The incident sent me into a tailspin, and where before I would have killed boldly to counteract my feelings of powerlessness, now I sought solace, creature comforts, the quenching of an extraordinary curiosity as to how other people lived.

For eight months I traveled slowly northeast, staying for weeks at a time at expensive motor inns, exploring the local terrain. I slept in big soft beds and watched cable T.V.; I ate expensive meals that devoured my bankroll. The remaining members of my adopted family dropped from my mind, one at a time, as I notched eastbound miles; to replace them I picked up hitchhikers, plied them with marijuana and got them to talk about themselves and their families. Letting them out unharmed, their past mine in 80%/20% fashion, I always felt just a little bit more secure, more safe. Ross began to seem like a distant apparition.

Then 80/20 revolted against me, becoming 100% nightmare.

It happened suddenly. I was asleep in a big, soft Howard Johnson's bed in Clear Lake, Iowa. Recent hitchhikers were walking through my slumber, their faces getting more and more distinct. My anticipation grew as I sensed all of them were blond; I moved in their direction. Then I saw that they were wearing powder-white wigs; then I saw that they were all child versions of people I had killed; then they all bared long, sharp fangs and went for my genitals.

I woke up screaming, and was on the road inside of two minutes.

Frightened out of another city, again I fought the fear out of character.

I stayed awake for 106 straight hours; I let my beard grow; I changed my hairstyle. I smoked big pipefuls of my own marijuana, experiencing its effects for the second time; I laughed giddily and ate like a pig under its spell. When I finally knew I could no longer remain conscious, I pulled off the roadside, only to have Ross Anderson snuggle up next to me in my dreams.

"You're getting soft, soft, softer";

"You're getting soft on people";

"You're getting soft on people so you won't have to kill them";

“If you quit killing you’ll die.”
“KILL SOMEONE *NICE* FOR ME”;
“KILL SOMEONE *NICE* FOR ME”;
“KILL SOMEONE *NICE* FOR ME”;
“KILL SOMEONE *NICE* FOR ME”;
“KILL SOMEONE *NICE* FOR ME”;
“KILL SOMEONE *NICE* FOR ME.”

19

A nightmarish week later I met Rheinhardt Wildebrand, and in the end, superbly refortified, I killed him without hesitation—despite admiring his superb lack of niceness.

The prologue to my symbolic grandfather was seven days of fitful sleep filled with victim-faced animals snapping at me and constant kill-urgings from Ross. My tailspin was moving into its nadir—I was running out of money; my beard was growing out patchy and incongruously light; and Deathmobile II was coming down with engine trouble, pings and rattles that reflected my own inside/outside deluge. Pulling into Benton Heights, Michigan, it threw a piston, and I pushed it to a nearby repair shop and placed half of my remaining cash down as a deposit on a ring job and a complete engine overhaul. Handing me an itemized list of the van's maladies, the head mechanic said, "You been drivin' mean, boyo. You ever hear about oil changes and transmission fluid? You're lucky the fucker didn't blow up on you."

If only he knew.

It was now a question of finding a place to stay and a job for money to restore the Deathmobile. With my .38 in my pocket, I walked around Benton Heights. It stood on a bluff overlooking Lake Michigan, and the constant view of sludgy dark water reminded me of Bobby Borgie, dead in Evanston some hundreds of miles across it. Knowing his presence would haunt me in the place, I hopped a bus to the nearest large city—Kalamazoo.

Where, walking aimlessly through its environs, I met Rheinhardt. I was coming out of a convenience store with a container of milk when he spotted me and dropped the first of his many memorable one-liners: "What's a subversive like you doing in a dull neighborhood like mine?"

Warming to the flattery and the geezer's crusty style, I said, "Looking for victims."

Laughing, the old man said, "You'll find them. Is that a Colt or a Smith and Wesson in your pants?"

I looked at my waistband and saw that the grip of my .38 was exposed. Correcting the matter, I said, “S. and W. Detective’s Special.”

“With a long barrel like that?”

I hesitated, then said, “Silencer.”

“You make it yourself?”

“Yes.”

“You a tool and die man?”

“No.”

“Traveling man?”

“Yes.”

“I’m a tool and die man. Come to my house, we’ll drink and talk.”

I hesitated again. But when the old man said, “I’m not afraid of you, so don’t be afraid of me,” I followed him down the block to his musty old house of memories.

—

And I stayed.

Years before, “Uncle” Walt Borchard had bored me with his stories. Now, “Grandpa” Rheinhardt Wildebrand enthralled me with his, and the telling/listening hinged on a simple dynamic: Borchard’s need for an audience was indiscriminate, Rheinhardt’s specific—he was slowly dying of congestive heart disease, and he wanted someone as solitary and idiosyncratic as himself to know what he had done.

So I became his nephew, allegedly motivated by Rheinhardt’s oblique references to leaving me his wealth. In reality, that dynamic was shelter. As long as I slept in the gingerbread house and listened, I endured no nightmares.

Rheinhardt Wildebrand had been a Prohibition bootlegger, hauling whiskey down the Great Lakes on a barge; he had sold die-making devices to Canada-based agents of Hitler’s regime, pocketing the payment, then selling the same equipment to the U.S. Army. He had harbored Dillinger in the gingerbread house after the public enemy’s shoot-out at the Little Bohemia Lodge in Minnesota, and the mint-condition 1953 Packard Caribbean sitting chaste in his driveway was a present from the late Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista, given in appreciation of Rheinhardt’s blueprints for jail-bar construction and placement, the car driven up from Miami by Meyer Lansky himself.

I believed the stories absolutely, and Rheinhardt believed mine—that I was an armed robber on the run from a parole violation and a botched payroll job in Wisconsin. That was why I shared his hermit lifestyle so willingly; that was why I endured my patchy beard and kept my face averted from prying neighbor eyes when we talked on the front porch. My only other lie was in response to a direct question, Rheinhardt knocking back a shot of Canadian Club and asking, “Have you ever killed a man?”

“No,” I answered.

After two weeks in the gingerbread house, I knew the old man’s habits and that I was going to murder him for the advantage I could gain by exploiting them. He kept a cache of several thousand dollars in his basement—I would steal it. He purchased all his clothing, household utensils and books from mail-order catalogs, paying for them with high-limit Visa, American Express Gold and Diner’s Club cards, sending in one check a year, with the 19.80% annual interest the credit-card companies loved. Since those companies were used to his eccentricities, I would destroy his checking account by sending in big forged checks for a year of *future* card transactions, accompanied by forged notes stating in Rheinhardt’s inimitable style that he was “Taking my act on the road until I kick the bucket, and this check is to cover all my possible charges, so you won’t have to dun me.” I would wipe the house free of my fingerprints, slip Rheinhardt a sedative, drive him out to Lake Michigan, shoot him and dump him in the water, appropriately weighted down. He would not be missed for weeks, and by then I would be long gone.

The plan was brilliant, but formulating it destroyed my love of Rheinhardt’s stories, and the nightmares came back.

Now it was the old man’s neighbors who attacked me, wig-wearing monsters informed with telepathic powers. They knew I was going to murder Rheinhardt, and they told me they would let me escape from the deed only if I gave them the old pirate’s money. When I refused, they took on the faces of my Aspen victims, taunting me with the refrain from an old big-band tune—“I’ve Got a Kraut in Kalamazoo! Kalamazoo! Kalamazoo! Kala-ma-zoo-zoo-zoo!”

Nine straight mornings I woke up shrieking and kicking and flailing. On my feet but still in my dreams, I lashed out at the furniture in my bedroom, knocking over nightstands and chairs. The first time, Rheinhardt rushed in, concerned. Then, day by day, he grew more and more worried. As the nightmare mornings continued, they eclipsed our storytelling hours, and I saw the old man’s worry turn to disgust. I was not the hard case he had thought; Lansky and Dillinger would have considered me a sissy; he was a sissy himself for sharing his secrets with someone so weak.

Now Rheinhardt’s tales were told in a desultory tone, and Ross took over the many faces of his characters. I knew it was time to kill the old man or get out.

Knowing that one more screaming/stumbling/lashing episode would push Rheinhardt into ordering me to leave, I foiled potential nightmares by staying awake to scheme. After one sleepless night I had the old man's handwriting down pat; after two I had notes written to Visa, Diner's Club and American Express. My third night was a trip to Kalamazoo's South Side, where I scored a half-dozen 1½-grain Seconal. Night four—dingy, zorched, whacked-out and fried from 108 hours of continuous consciousness—was when I struck.

First I emptied the Seconals into Rheinhardt's nightcap of Canadian Club and milk. He chugged the drink down as he usually did, and half an hour later I saw him asleep on his bedroom floor, half in and half out of his pajamas. Leaving him there, I tore through the house with a wet washcloth, wiping every wall and furniture surface in every room I had been in. With that elementary track-covering accomplished, I raided Rheinhardt's basement money cache, stuffed huge wads of bills into my pockets and ran the uphill mile to the Kalamazoo Bus Depot, catching the late bus to Benton Heights with only seconds to spare. An hour later and eight hundred Wildebrand dollars poorer, I was behind the wheel of the now velvet-running Deathmobile II, heading back to the gingerbread house.

Reentering it, my nerve ends felt as though they were being ground with sandpaper, and my heart beat so hard that I knew it would have to burst before I completed the kill. My throat was constricted and my hands shook, and sweat buzzed on my skin as if I were a live wire. Only concentrating on not touching anything extraneous kept me from imploding, and I bolted the stairs up to Rheinhardt's bedroom.

He was still on the floor, and a small pulsing vein in his neck told me he was still alive. Again leaving him there, I ran to my bedroom and picked up the three credit-card letters, then ran back to search the desk and dresser for checkbooks. My hands were closing on a pile of them when I heard "Imposter!" and turned around to see Rheinhardt leveling a double-barreled shotgun at me.

"IMPOSTER!"

We drew down on each other. I snagged the muzzle of my .38 as I pulled it out of my pants; Rheinhardt jerked both triggers. They hit empty chambers, and the old man smiled at me, then fell dead at my feet. Another hour later, on a shelf of rock overlooking Lake Michigan, I gave him a formal execution befitting his dignity—two shots in the head and an overhand hurl into the deep six. With his grandfatherly bequests in my glove compartment, I then took off at a law-abiding 35, all my exhaustion evaporated. Thinking of Ross, I said, “Look, Dad, no fear,” and went cruising for someone with appropriate ID to kill.

20

The following maxims form a summation of my next several months and epigrammatically describe certain perils inherent in roaming around America killing people:

Seek and ye shall find;
The journey, not the destination;
Beware of what ye seek;
You can run, but you can't hide.

Mr. Perfect staggered in front of my windshield on a deserted stretch of U.S. 6 east of Columbus, Ohio, one early evening in April of '81, and within ten miles I had heard his entire life story—family misunderstandings, shoplifting, burglary, reformatories, prison, parole and the search for the "Big Break." At dusk we turned off the road to share a bottle I allegedly had, and moments later I shot the man twice in the head. His pockets yielded identification belonging to William Robert Rohrsfield, born within a month of my own birthday, an extra seven pounds the only physical point distinguishing him from me. I buried Martin Plunkett deep under the hard soil by the Interstate and became Billy Rohrsfield. The irony of transmogrifying myself into a fellow burglar combined with Grandpa Rheinhardt's foolproof credit made me feel loose, cocky, stylish. From there I moved into a wordless, sleepless euphoria that felt like a permanent one-way ticket to Panaceaville, Fat City, the Big Contentment. Had I been able to verbalize in my trance, I would have told myself that at thirty-three all my needs were met, all my destinations had been reached, all my curiosities and desires had been sated. Instead of putting forth the sly spiritual epigrams that begin this chapter, I would have advanced the ethos of a Vegas hustler on a roll—I've got it made.

But something happened.

I had just crossed the Ohio-Pennsylvania border when I was tossed by hand out of the Deathmobile's cab. Flying head over heels, I had a view of blue sky, U.S. 6 and my van continuing without me. Then I was back in the cab and shimmying across the dotted yellow line; then

I was side-swiping a chain-link fence on the right shoulder; then I braked and banged my head on the dashboard.

When the shock was over I began crying. Too many days of too little sleep, I told myself through my tears. Be good to yourself, another voice added. I agreed in the German accent I affected when using Rheinhardt Wildebrand's credit cards, drove very slowly to a motel and slept.

The next morning, the first thing I encountered upon rising was a perfect mental image of my "sister" Molly Luxxlor, lost since December of '79. I wept in gratitude, then remembered that I was Billy Rohrsfield, not Russ Luxxlor, and that Billy's sister Janet was a child-beating shrew. Molly vanished, and a facsimile of Janet took her place, curlers in her hair, a rolling pin in her hand. I laughed my tears away, shaved, showered and walked out to the motel office to return my key. The clerk greeted me with, "Auf Wiedersehn, Herr Wildebrand!" and I ran from the salutation straight to Deathmobile II, straight to another head-over-heels toss into the sky.

Airborne, I saw travel posters and billboards for the Jook Savages and Marmalade; hitting the driver's seat, I saw L.A. County Sheriffs spread-searching a scared young man. At first he looked like Billy Rohrsfield, then he looked like Russ Luxxlor. Then I automatically moved into my old 80%/20% fantasy-detachment game and saw what was happening.

You can run, but you can't hide.

My first lucid impulse was to destroy the Wildebrand credit cards and Rohrsfield ID. A second, more lucid thought stopped me: discarding such valuable tools would be an implicit admission that I couldn't control my own selfhood. A third, most cogent thought took over from there: You are Martin Plunkett. Driving away, colors stacked up behind the litany that allowed me to hold the wheel steady and Deathmobile II at an even 55. The words were *I am Martin Plunkett*, and the colors were telling me exactly what they did in San Francisco back in '74.

—

Landing in Sharon, Pennsylvania, I went verbal beyond my litany and took tight hold of my destiny. The color days had cleared my mind and had given me the courage to make certain admissions and arrive at conclusions as to how to restore order to my life. Wanting the prosaics of resettling out of the way before I formally stated the words to the summer air, I bought three rooms full of medium-priced furniture with Rheinhardt Wildebrand's Visa card and rented a three-room apartment on the town's west side, using the name William Rohrsfield. Juggling the two fake identities produced no moments of schizophrenia or disturbing euphoria, and when I was alone in my new home, I made my declaration:

Since Wisconsin you have been in flight from your own unique strain of sexuality, warrior in nature; you have been running from old fears and old indignities, experiencing near-psychotic hallucinations as a result; you have lost your will to kill coldly, brutally and with your hands; killing simply and anonymously has rendered you a nonentity, devoid of pride, slothful in your habits. You have become a comfort seeker of the most despicable sort, and the only way to reverse the above is to plan and carry out a perfect, methodical, symbolically exact set of sex murders.

You can run, but you can't hide.

Tears of joy were streaming down my face when I finished my self-confrontation, and I wept against the nearest object available to hold —a cardboard box filled with dishes and cooking utensils.

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Over the next four months I secured the symbolic accoutrements: airline posters and rock posters identical to the ones adorning the walls of Charlie Manson's fuck pad back in '69, a set of burglar's tools and a theatrical makeup kit. Locksmith technology had improved since my burglary days, so I bought do-it-yourself door locks representing the new technological spectrum and practiced neutralizing them at home. Hours of makeup practice in front of my bathroom mirror got me adept at working pancake and fake noses into non-Martin Plunkett visages, and as my steel-town summer wound down, all that remained was to find the perfect victims.

Easier said than done.

Sharon was a rough-hewn industrial city, Polish/Russian in its basic ethnic thrust, honky-tonk in its lifestyle. There were plenty of blonds out on the street projecting "kill me" auras, but an entire summer of cruising for an attractive blond-blonde couple brought me nothing but eyestrain. To combat the frustration and stay in reality while doing it, I went on another pop-culture jaunt, courtesy of *People* and *Cosmopolitan*.

"Family" was still big, as were religion, drugs and right-wing politics, but physical fitness seemed to be moving into first place among America's fads. Health clubs were the newer "new meeting grounds" for singles; body awareness had spawned the "new narcissism"; and bodybuilding equipment and techniques had progressed to the point where one "new fitness" guru flatly stated that weight workouts were the "new religious service," while muscle-toning machines themselves were "the new totems of worship, because they unleash the godhead physical perfection in all of us." The entire craze reeked of a bottom line of people wanting to look good so that they could fuck with a higher class of partner, but if that was where the attractive ones were congregating…

Sharon had three health clubs—"Now & Wow Fitness," "The Co-Ed Connection" and the "Jack LaLanne European Health Spa." A battery of phone calls got me the rundown on their respective merits: Jack "La Strain" was for the serious iron pumpers, the Co-Ed Connection and Now & Wow were pickup joints where men and women worked out on Nautilus equipment and took saunas together. All three bright-voiced phone people invited me to come down for a "free introduction workout," and I took the latter two up on their offer.

Now & Wow Fitness was, in the words of the bored black man who handed me a towel and "gym kit" upon entering, "A fat farm. All Polack chicks lookin' to get skinny so they can glom themselves a steelworker, then eat themselves fat again when they get married." The two rooms full of chubby women in pastel Danskins confirmed his appraisal, and I walked back out immediately, returning my towel and gym kit still fresh. "I told you so," the man said.

The Co-Ed Connection, a block away, had the feel of instant paydirt. The cars in the parking lot were all sleek late models, as were the instructors of both genders who waited in the foyer to greet prospective members. Again handed a towel and "workout kit," I was led into a football-field-size room filled with gleaming metal equipment. Only a few men and women were straining under bars and pulleys, and the instructor noticed my look and said, "The after-work rush starts in about an hour. It's wild."

I nodded, and the sleek young woman smiled and left me at the entrance to the men's locker room. The sleek young male attendant inside assigned me a locker, and I changed into gym shorts and a tank top emblazoned with the Co-Ed Connection logo—a sleek masculine silhouette and a sleek feminine silhouette holding hands. Checking my appearance in one of the locker room's many full-length mirrors, I saw that I was more large than sleek, more blunt than stylish. Satisfied, I pushed through the door and started pumping iron.

It felt good, and I was pleased to know that I could still bench-press two hundred and fifty pounds twenty times. I moved from machine to machine, experiencing pleasant aches, getting in sync with the jar of metal, the hiss of pulleys, the smell of my own sweat. The room started filling up, and soon there were lines forming in front of the various contraptions. Bluff-hearty macho men were offering encouragement to pushing, pulling, squatting and lifting macho women all around me, and I felt like a visitor from another planet observing quaint earthling mating rituals. Then I saw *THEM,* eased my shoulder-press load down and said to myself, “Dead.”

They were obviously brother and sister. Both clad in purple satin instructor’s uniforms, both blond and superbly shapely in classic male/female modes, both slightly more than vacuously pretty, they breathed a long history of familial intimacy. Watching them explain the benching machine to a skinny teenage boy, I saw how their gestures accommodated each other. When he used a chopped hand for emphasis, she repeated the motion, only gently. When he brought flat palms up to show how the pulleys worked, she did it just a little bit slower. Staring hard at them, I knew that they had performed incest early on, and that it was the one thing they never talked about.

I dismounted from the shoulder-press machine and walked to the locker room. Sweating from exhilaration now, I discarded my gym outfit and put on my street clothes, then strode back through the workout area. The siblings were explaining muscle development to a group by the jogging treadmill, pointing out laterals and pectorals on each other, letting their fingers touch the places. Touching the same parts of myself, I felt my sore muscles throb, then beat to the word “Dead.” At the front of the area I noticed a picture roster of the club’s instructors. George Kurzinski and Paula Kurzinski smiled side by side at the top. I dated their death warrant nine months in the future—June 5, 1982, fourteen years to the day since I saw my first couple make love. Leaving the Co-Ed Connection, I turned on my mental stopwatch. Pleased with the sound of its spring-loaded movement, I let it run continually while I activated my plan one step at a time.

Tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick.

September, 1981:

Learning that the Kurzinskis live together, sleep in separate bedrooms and visit their widowed mother at the sanitarium every Sunday. Tick tick tick tick.

November, 1981:

Surveillance reveals that Paula Kurzinski sleeps over at her boyfriend's house on Wednesday and Saturday nights; George Kurzinski's girlfriend sleeps with him, at the siblings' apartment, on those nights. Tick tick tick tick tick.

January, 1982:

Securing the floor plan of the Kurzinskis' apartment from the Sharon Office of City Planning. Tick tick tick tick tick tick.

February, 1982:

Becoming expert at picking locks identical to the lackluster "Security King" on the Kurzinskis' front door. Tick tick tick tick.

April, 1982:

Disguise, drugs and weaponry procured; escape route and four alternates mapped out. Tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick.

May 15, 1982:

Run-through of the Kurzinskis' apartment sucessfully executed; auxiliary blades stashed under bedroom and living-room carpets; loaded .25-caliber Beretta found in Paula's top dresser drawer; loaded .32 S. & W. revolver found under George's mattress. Tick tick tick tick tick.

May 28, 1982:

Second run-through of Kurzinskis' apartment; blank cartridges placed in both weapons; as added precaution both hammers bent ⅛″ to the side to ensure misfire.

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Tick
Tick
Tick
Tick
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Tick
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Tick……. .

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From Law Enforcement Journal*, May 30, 1982 issue:*

Federal Task Force "Attacking" Serial Killers with Diversified Approach Strategy

Quantico, Virginia, May 15:

Criminal phenomena, however long-standing, are not really *certified until they are given a title. "Mass Murderer" and "Thrill Killer" are old staples of public and law-enforcement jargon, used to designate, respectively, people who murder more than one person in a one-time-only fit of rage, and people (almost always men) who kill for no apparent reason. Recent revelations, primarily the Ted Bundy case (See* L.E.J. *10/9/81), have spawned a new title, a "buzzword" that seems certain to capture the public's imagination. The F.B.I., cognizant of the phenomenon for some time, will be the likely instrument of popularizing the title, for they are the first American law enforcement agency to concertedly "attack" the type of criminal the title designates —the Serial Killer.*

According to F.B.I. Inspector Thomas Dusenberry, the serial killer is defined as: "A perpetrator who kills repeatedly, one victim or set of victims at a time. Our statistical prototype serial killer is a white male of above average to high intelligence, twenty-five to forty-five years old. That is a constant, while everything else regarding this type of perpetrator isn't, which is what makes them so difficult to apprehend.

"For one thing, serial killers often alter their M.O. to suit their victim of the moment. They may kill one person for sexual gratification, one for money. They may strangle one person, shoot another. Serial killers have been known to rape a half-dozen women victims, then sexually ignore a half-dozen others.

"Also, these men tend to travel and tend to dispose of their victims so that their bodies cannot be found. Aside from the complex serial-killer psyche and M.O. patterns, it is their often transient lifestyle that adds to their elusiveness—they play on the inadequacy of American police communication systems.

"There are fifty states in this country, served by untold thousands of police agencies. Agency-to-agency communication within individual states has been adequate at the identification level for years, but state-to-state communication of information is a joke, and is the number-one impeding factor in the investigation of possibly related homicides and disappearances."

How, then, does the F.B.I.'s Serial Killer Task Force intend to address this problem?

Inspector Dusenberry: "Once a killer crosses a state line after committing a murder, he's a federal offender. So what we'll be doing is cross-checking computer statistics on unsolved homicides and disappearances from all fifty states, going back ten years. If state-to-state links are made, we will be requesting the complete case files from the applicable agencies, and we will be communicating by telephone *with the investigating officers. We will have M.O. cross-checking logs, and logs for physical evidence, circumstantial probability and a half-dozen logs compiled from reports made by the forensic psychologists attached to the Task Force. Patterns are likely to emerge from all this information, and we will hypothesize from that information, then initiate follow-up investigations staffed with experienced Criminal Division agents."*

An entire wing of a building on the grounds of the F.B.I. Academy at Quantico has been taken over by the Task Force. The offices are packed with reams of blank paper, desks and computer terminals, along with a giant computer with fifty-state police feed-in. Known to Task Force agents as "Serial Sally," this brain device will be the starting point of all possible investigations. Already programmed with data on twenty-seven resolved serial killer cases, "Serial Sally" will be assisted by a half-dozen crack forensic psychologists with extensive field experience, three forensic pathologists specializing in homicide evidence, and four criminal division agents, men with fifteen years and up with the Bureau—the "Paperwork Jockeys" who will be trawling for links, connections and clues.

"I'm anxious to get started," Inspector Dusenberry, 47, the Task Force's Agent in Charge, told L.E.J. *"I've already read up a storm on the subject. It's depressing stuff, and the numbers are staggering. A man in Alabama killed twenty-nine women in two years; Gacy in Chicago killed thirty-three. There's our friend Ted Bundy, of course, and then we've got the stats on missing and presumed-murdered children. They're more than staggering. The police in Anchorage, Alaska, have a suspect that they make for sixty-one killings, perpetrated within eighteen months. The pain behind all of it is staggering, and I think the serial killer problem is America's number-one law-enforcement priority."*

Inspector Dusenberry, who joined the Bureau in 1961, is a graduate of Notre Dame Law School and has sixteen years of Criminal Division experience, mostly in supervising bank robbery investigations. Married and with a college-age son and daughter, he is grateful that the Task Force assignment came at a time when his children are grown and his wife is back in college getting an advanced degree in Art History. "It's going to be a long load of long hours," he told L.E.J. *"My kids and wife in school, and the desk nature of the job will make it a whole lot easier to apply myself. If I was spending this kind of time on the street doing robbery investigations, I'd be worried about them worrying about me."*

VII

Implosion

21

Tick

Tick

Tick

Tick

Tick

Tick

Tick

Tick

Stop-time.

12:16 A.M., June 5, 1982.

I stuck my breaker pick in the keyhole of the Kurzinskis' apartment door. There was a slight give, and I pushed the door inward, to a point just short of where I knew the inside chain would stop it. There was a snap/clink noise as the chain rattled, and I pulled the door toward me for slack, then popped the chain off with the handle of my pick gouger. The loose end hit the doorjamb, and I heard an unmistakable sound register in George Kurzinski's bedroom: the hammer of his .32 being pulled back.

I eased the door shut and padded through the dark living room, then flattened myself into the far wall, by the hallway and the light switch. Unclipping the ax that hung from my web belt, I waited for footsteps to creak in my direction. When the first one hit my ears, I tingled. It was exactly nine paces from George Kurzinski's bedroom to here; his life would consist of that many more seconds.

The creaking drew nearer, and at the ninth footfall I flicked on the light switch and swung my ax blind into the hallway. Impact and blood spray told me I had hit on-target before I even saw the dead man. Stepping forward, I heard liquid gurgles and felt a strong hand yank the blade free. When I looked into the hall, George Kurzinski was up against the wall, trying to form a one-hand tourniquet to stop the gushing from his side-to-side neck wound. He was trying to shout at the same time, but his severed larynx made the task impossible.

Blood spattered off my black plastic jumpsuit; a little jet hit my face, and I licked at the trickle that reached my lips. George slid to the floor, raised his gun and shot me six times. At the click of the last misfire, I heard a faint, “Georgie? Georgie?” from Paula’s bedroom, then the sound of her groping through the dresser for her Beretta. Leaving George in the hallway to die, I walked toward the lovely metallic echo of a blank round being slid into a chamber, never to connect with a firing pin.

Paula greeted me from the bed, pride and fire in her eyes as she spat out a T.V.-movie warning: “Freeze, sucker.” Disobeying, I walked slowly toward her, baring my fangs like Shroud Shifter and Lucretia out for fuel. She pulled the trigger; nothing happened; she worked the slide and fired again, getting another click. Watching her throat muscles for the scream that had to be coming, I said, “I’m invulnerable,” and jumped on her.

She fought hard, all elbows and knees, but I got my hands around her throat just as she finally expelled the first syllable of “Mother.” Squeezing full force, I saw colors; biting full force at her neck, I came. When she went limp, I picked her up by one ankle and twirled her around and around and around the room in perfect circles, never letting her limbs touch the four walls. Arranging her limp form on the bed, I felt my indignities move to her body, one-two-three, as businesslike as a handshake.

Setting my brain watch at 3:00, I took the airline and rock posters from the inner compartment of my jumpsuit and looked at myself in the wall mirror. Shroud Shifter’s stern, hawklike features stared back. My makeup artistry was superb, and accomplished without “Cougarman Comix” as a visual aid. Self-transformed, blood-validated, at last the only alter ego that counted, I found tacks in the kitchen and fixed the posters to the living room walls, then dipped my surgical-rubber hands in George Kurzinski’s blood and wrote “Shroud Shifter Prevails” on the wall above his body. Entering the apartment ten minutes before, I had been a thirty-four-year-old boy-man hoping to resolve an identity crisis; leaving it, I was a terrorist.

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Headlines:

From the Philadelphia Inquirer, *June 7, 1982:*

Brother and Sister Brutally Slain in Sharon Apartment

From the Sharon News-Register*, June 7, 1982:*

Brutal Dual Slaying Rocks Town! Friends and Family Mourn

From the Philadelphia Post*, June 10, 1982:*

No Leads in Brutal Sharon Killings: Police Withholding "Blood Message" as "Mystery Clue"

From the Sharon News-Register*, June 13, 1982:*

Kurzinskis' Funeral Draws Huge Crowd; Local Health Clubs Close

From the Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 17, 1982:*

Still No Leads in Sharon Slayings; Steel Town Lives in Fear, Outrage

From the Philadelphia Post*, June 19, 1982:*

Motive for Kurzinski Slayings Baffles Police; False Confessors Pouring in

From the Sharon News-Register*, July 14, 1982:*

Vigilante Groups Forming to Hunt for Kurzinski Killer

From the Sharon News-Register*, August 1, 1982:*

Kurzinski Murders Trigger Panic BackLash—Wife Shoots Husband by Mistake

From the Sharon News-Register*, December 8, 1982:*

Still No Clues in Kurzinski Murders

From the Sharon News-Register*, January 6, 1983:*

Kurzinski Case Continues to Baffle Local Police

From the Sharon News-Register*, March 11, 1983:*

Nine Months After: Kurzinski Case Still "Open," Sharon Still Mourns

From the Sharon News-Register*, May 14, 1983:*

Trail on Kurzinski Case "Dead Cold," Chief Admits

From the Sharon News-Register*, May 20, 1983:*

Police Will Not Reveal "Blood Clue" in Kurzinski Case—Still "Hoping Against Hope," Chief Says

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From the diary of Inspector Thomas Dusenberry, F.B.I. Serial Killer Task Force:

5/22/83

> True to form, I'm running about a year behind in starting this diary. If Carol weren't out studying those ornate Renaissance guys with college kids less than half her age, she'd be looking over my shoulder at what I'm writing. She'd note the statement that begins the diary, and she'd say, "As in all things in your *personal* life, dear." True to form, I wouldn't know if it was a dig or an expression of love, because Carol is a tad smarter than I am, and a big tad better than me at everything except chasing felony offenders and earning money. And if she'd ever get off her (still curvaceous at 44) ass and take the real estate brokers' board, she'd beat me at the latter. And if Mark and Susan decided to quit school and become felons, forget it.
>
> Backtracking, about ten years ago, right after Hoover died, every agent in captivity started writing his memoirs. Some actually got published. All were self-serving, full of fantasy and hearsay anecdotes about the Big Man. I was envious of the guys who got published, but enraged that they portrayed themselves as such sensitive liberals, when in fact most of them were to the right of your typical banana republic dictator shouting anti-commie slogans and pushing cocaine on the side. I looked at them

($10,000-$20,000 publishers' advances, royalties, movie options and glory for doing something I always figured I'd be pretty good at), and I looked at me—living above my means as a sop to my family for always moving them around the country with my assignments, telling Carol "Don't get a job, baby, I'll teach another night-school class," and I thought, "Shit, I've been taking out bank robbers for years; I'll write a book, and I won't even mention J. Edgar."

But the truth is—bank robbery is a bore, unless you take personal satisfaction from removing bank robbers from the streets. I do, and that's the rub. Either the bastards get caught right off the bat by municipal P.D.'s and we take over the legal end after they plead, or, predictable creatures with well-established criminal patterns that they are, they go where we know they will, and we find them. Personally satisfying, occasionally exciting, but most of the time my job was to read reports in my office and figure out where the dummies would go if they were suddenly rich. So scratch one best-seller about a hotshot Fed robbery investigator. Joe Blow over in Fraud Division—you deal with a higher class of criminal—you write the book.

I thought that working the Task Force would make this diary (book later?) easy. It hasn't, and the Force is a year old already. I thought that Carol would be supportive and help me with editing, but she's engrossed in her studies, and every time I mention possible chains of missing children, she freezes up and we don't make love for a week. When I try to get intellectual and relate some of the monsters that come out of Serial Sally to van Gogh (poor bastard) or Hieronymus Bosch, she freezes me out with gooey landscapes from her texts. The hidden truth: she regrets never having a career, and envies my dedication to mine. She's also pushed Susan and Mark in the direction of the arts, which should keep me on Broke Street and teaching classes until they're 30 and Ph.D.'s. And that's fine—although I suspect Mark would be happier as a carpenter or contractor and Susan happier as a wife and art-dabbler.

But I'm rambling from the point, which is that the Task Force is the *big* assignment of my life, the most satisfying and troubling, and it's still hard to write about it. To be honest, it's Carol's freeze that's allowed me to get this far. I come home late, still pumped up, still hot to work, and the snowy art woman (unfair, darling, but allow me temporary license) piles on a few more snowdrifts.

The Task Force has got me thinking family, so I'll use Susan to switch from one subject to the other.

Susie called long-distance (requesting money) last night. We bat the breeze, and I ask her if she's dating anyone, what her general philosophy regarding marriage is. She says, "Well, Dad, I believe in serial monogamy, and I imagine I'll keep practicing it."

I hit the fucking ceiling and yelled at Susie, something I rarely do. It was the word "serial" and its connotations, of course. I wasn't too coherent while Susie and I were arguing, and we said good-bye a few minutes later, but this morning I put it all in place. It was her absence of romantic illusion. She's 22, she sleeps with her boyfriends, it doesn't particularly bother me. It's just that she knows that sooner or later it will end; she doesn't have that youthful feeling of "forever" that you lose soon enough anyway. I would rather wish her the way of Gretchen, the Force's exec. secretary, than the way of that awful word. Gretch is 31, two kids from a bum marriage that she thought would last forever, has affairs with the wrong guys, who ultimately split because the kids scare the shit out of them. She's smart, she's funny, she's a great mother, she's got some gay men friends who're funnier than Bob Hope, Jackie Gleason and Richard Pryor put together, and she's still got hope. We hug every once in a while, and if I weren't such a loyal dog, I'd go where Gretch seems to wish the hugs would go.

With "serial" you just go on to the next one. Lover or murder victim, you just go. This morning, getting up the guts to start this diary, I wanted to see my name in print, so I looked at a copy of *Law Enforcement Journal* from last year. There I was, Inspector Thomas Dusenberry, using my Bureau-learned verbal style, all "perpetrator," "apprehend" and "circumstantial." I also used "staggering" a lot, and with that I'll jump to the real purpose of this diary:

It's more than staggering. I'm a veteran criminal investigator, and for the sake of reality I wish there were adjectives to top "staggering," "mind-boggling," "incredible," etc. Sixteen months ago I would have told you that the only thing deserving of the above hype was my wife's hauteur at a Bureau cocktail party. Today I would beg Carol's pardon and say, "Sorry, baby, there are human beings out there, college-educated, with executive-level jobs, who beat people to death, steal their cufflinks as souvenirs, then go home and round up the kids, take them to Little League practice and foot the bill for the whole team at Haagen-Dazs on the way back to the wife and tender sex." If Carol balked, I would point out one of the three serial killers our Task Force has thus far taken out in its year of existence: Federal case file 086-83—Whalen, William Edmund, aka the "Chappaqua Chopper."

Willy, an upper-level executive at a New York advertising agency, beat a total of fourteen people to death in suburban New York and New Jersey during the years 1976-1982. He used to prowl the park areas along the Hudson River, find solitary nature lovers (old, young, male, female, black, white—Willy was an Equal Opportunity killer), beat them to death with a rock, steal some kind of keepsake from them, then toss them in the river. I got him on a fluke. I found out all the side streets leading to the parks he used to prowl had one-side-of-the-street-only parking, so I ran computer checks on parking tickets issued near the days the coroner tagged the victims' D.O.D. Bingo! Old Willy was careless three times out of fourteen.

He had a nice three-story colonial in Chappaqua, and his gross income for the previous year was $275,000 and stock options. When I knocked on his door I wasn't 100% sure of his guilt, so I asked him flat out, "Mr. Whalen, are you the Chappaqua Chopper?"

His reply: "Yes, I am. I'll come along peacefully, Officer, but will you have a martini with me first? My wife and children are soon to leave for the theatre, and I wouldn't want to spoil their fun. I'll tell them you're with the agency."

Willy's in Lewisburg now, wearing federal denims instead of Paul Stuart suits. I got a lot of awed laughs when I told people about belting a few Beefeaters with him, and I actually sort of liked the crazy cocksucker. Then, pissed at myself for it, I dug up the coroner's photos of his victims. I don't like Willy anymore.

Nor do I understand him.

The other two take-outs belong to my colleague Jim Schwartzwalder, formerly a S.A.C. in Houston. He's a forensics whiz, and he *asked* to work the stats on missing children (no one else wanted the job). Jim got ahold of some figures on missing kids in Northern Louisiana, and two dead kids (raped and covered with bite marks) down near Baton Rouge. Hypothesizing a transient killer, possibly a car thief, Jim ran auto-theft reports from the Shreveport area, got one that felt "panicky," then ran the forensic dental report made from the teeth marks on the dead kids, along with queries on repeating felons popped for Grand Theft Auto.

Double bingo from the Texas State Prison in Brownsville. The teeth marks exactly matched dentures fashioned for former inmate Leonard Carl Strohner there at the pen, back when he was serving 3–5 for G.T.A. in the late '70's. An A.P.B. bagged Strohner in New Mexico a few months later. He confessed biting, raping and killing twenty-two children throughout the South and Southwest, aided by his sometime sidekick Charles Sidney Hoyt. A routine roundup of vagrants got Hoyt in Tucson, Arizona, the following week. He laughed when he confessed his crimes, and when one of the arresting officers asked him why he liked to bite children, Hoyt said, "The closer the bone, the sweeter the meat."

I'm rambling again, so I'll give myself a little more slack, then get back to the point. Digression one—for a cop, I'm sort of a liberal. Poverty is your number-one cause of crime, period. All that stuff about moral breakdowns and the breakdown of the family unit is bullshit. Aside from poverty and its direct correlative of hard narcotics use, we have individual psychological motivation, which is pretty much unfathomable, although the forensic psychologists attached to the Force are pretty good at extrapolating from workups and physical evidence. As a cop, psychological motivation has always been my chief professional interest. Willie Roosevelt Washington, black heroin addict from Philly's South Side, became a bank robber. Willie's dad and mom were good people who never hit him. Willie's next-door neighbor growing up, Robert Dewey Brown, got the shit kicked out of him regularly by his sadistic boozehound parents, and he is now a brilliant young forensic chemist with the Bureau. What happened?

City cops often have a stock answer. Working liaison with them over the years, I've heard it often: Evil. Cause and effect and traumatic episodes mean zilch, what is *is*; look for the cause and effect, and what you'll get is what is *is* and good and evil mitigated by shades of gray. I'm a logical, methodical man with only a nominal belief in God, and that answer has always offended me.

Digression two—aside from marrying Carol against my parents' wishes, the chief act of rebellion in my life has been disavowing the faith I was reared in. I was seventeen when I ceased to believe in the tenets of the Dutch Reformed Church. The sanctity of Jesus Christ, shadeless good and evil, and God the puppet master in the sky doing his predestination number at the birth of members of his flock, was too ugly, mean-spirited and stupid for a logical, methodical kid who wanted to be either a lawyer or a cop. So I enrolled at a Jesuit college and went to Notre Dame Law and became both a cop and a lawyer, and I'm still logical and methodical and obsessed with knowing *why* at close to fifty. And, *punch line*—maybe what is *is,* and good and evil are the real stuff, with the serial killer stats I've been working on as unimpeachable proof of it.

Here are some choice tidbits of information to support that thesis:

In serial killings where robbery was (in forensic psych parlance) the "motive of the moment," the 1981 average take was less than twenty dollars per victim.

A man convicted of nine murders, perpetrated in three states over a five-year period, was a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War and went to jail for holding draft-resistance seminars in violation of federal law. In light of that, he was asked how he could murder nine people in cold blood. "I adapted my philosophy to accommodate my desire to kill," he said.

A man caught in the act of raping an elderly woman he had murdered a few moments before was revealed to have been a released suspect in several other killings. The man passed polygraph testing before he was let go. When asked how he accomplished it, he said, "Listen, I groove on killing. I feel no guilt over it, so how can a machine programmed to detect guilt snitch me off?"

None of the six serial murderers of children successfully prosecuted in the United States during the year 1981 had been molested when they were children.

Serial killers are more often than not capable of sustaining normal, monogamous sexual relationships.

A final shocker supplied by Doc Seidman, the head shrink with the Task Force: Hardcore sociopathic career criminals with records of violence that stop short of murder outscore convicted serial killers on psychological tests aimed at detecting lack of moral restraint and criminal lack of conscience. Doc Seidman says that where your typical sociopath will steal you blind and exploit you in all matters from the most picayune on up—pathologically compelled to act with absolute selfishness—serial killers will not. They are, he says, sometimes capable of genuine love and passion. That "fact" heartened me, and it felt like it might be both a good hunting tool and a buffer against depression. Reading reports of sodomy, dismembering and murder, murder, murder can creep up on you. Passion is logical sometimes; I can almost logically harpoon why I love Carol so much, despite the fact a lot of people consider her a bitch. Then I blew it seeking more logical reinforcement. “How are they capable, Doc?”

“They have an exalted sense of style,” he answered.

So I’m back with good vs evil, the elation of the hunt vs the depression of the territory, cause and effect and Doc’s passion and style. It’s getting late, Carol should be back soon, and I want to be able to talk about her stuff, so I’ll put down the connecting links I credit so far, along with some pure cop observations:

1.—Two different sets of rape-dismemberments. The first set (three teenaged girls, all brunette) occurred in Southern Wisconsin in late ’78–early ’79, and may be attributed to a Chicago man, Saul Malvin, who committed suicide directly after and near the scene of the third killing. Malvin had O+ blood, like the killer (semen-typed from his victims), but there is no other physical evidence linking him to the killings. Circumstantially, he fits: he was near the scene of the third killing, and he was allegedly at home alone during the time spread on the first two. Malvin had no criminal record and no history of psychiatric counseling, which is a moot factor as far as serials go. The shrinks on the Force say suicide after a particularly brutal killing is not unusual—it results from moments of clarity. (Nice they can feel it, but too bad it’s too late to do their last victim any good.)

2.—Four teenaged–early 20’s girls, raped and similarly dismembered, D.O.D.’s 4/18/79, Louisville, Kentucky; 10/1/79, Des Moines, Iowa; 5/27/80, Charleston, South Carolina; 5/19/81, Baltimore, Maryland. All four girls were blondes, all were hookers with multiple prostitution convictions. The killer/rapist was again an O+ secretor (very common type), and the physical evidence (knife marks and hacksaw-blade dimensions) was identical in all four cases. Interdepartmental notations included in the four case files and the master case file the four P.D.’s worked up when they formed their own short-lived “Task Force” speculate on either a legitimate policeman killer or a cop impersonator. So far that’s just theory, based on the observation of an old wino who said that he saw a man with a “cop vibe” enter the vestibule of the Charleston victim’s apartment building on the night of her death. Iffy stuff. Right now I want to see if Malvin can be made or dismissed as the Wisconsin killer, and if dismissed, I want to check the physical evidence from the Wisconsin jobs against the other four. I requested the files from the Wisconsin State Police two weeks ago, no reply as yet. The blonde-brunette point is interesting. S.K.'s are tricky, and if one perpetrator is responsible for all seven deaths, maybe he just got the urge to change his "style."

3.—Jim Schwartzwalder has five linkups of missing children, all in western, southwestern and southern states. Some of the links cross, and he's having trouble determining how many perpetrators he's dealing with. But…he's got a vehicle description on one of his links, and so now he's got the real shitwork that solves cases on his hands—cross-checking automobile registration against opportunity and the registerees' criminal and/or psychiatric records. Thanks for taking the kids, Jim. I owe you one.

4.—I've got several transient killing links going back nine years. Different M.O.'s, but they run west to east chronologically, and I've connected two of them. Backtracking: thirteen roadside disappearance/killings in Nevada and Utah, spanning late 1974 to late 1975. Some were shot, some were bludgeoned; most of the bodies found had been robbed of valuables. The first two in the chain, a young man and woman discovered by campers in rural Nevada in December of '74, had been shot with a .357 magnum and arranged nude in a sexual posture. Following that, four affluent young hitchhikers, all male, were found variously beaten, shot (no expended rounds uncovered) and strangled in Nevada and Utah in January of 1975. All were robbed, and credit cards belonging to one victim were uncovered in Salt Lake City. The suspect harboring them, who was cleared as a suspect, said that the cards were sold to him by a tall, nondescript man in his early twenties named "Shifter."

Jump to: five people, male and female, ages ranging from 14 to 71, disappeared from Utah and Nevada roadways in the spring of 1975. *No leads—vanished.*

Jump to: Ogden, Utah, 10/30/75: two solid-citizen motorists are last seen talking to a "tall young white man" outside Ogden, then—poof!—vanish.

That's thirteen dead and presumed dead so far. Now, big jump, geographically and lifestyle-wise: eight young people disappear from Aspen, Colorado, during the months of January to June 1976. Four are husband-and-wife couples, all are affluent. The disappearances are never really connected, even when three of the missing people turn up in the snow, preserved, during the spring '76 thaw—*mutilated*, the husband and wife arranged nude in an intercourse posture, a third missing man (last seen eight days after the first two!) positioned nude a few feet from them.

Add eight to thirteen, you get twenty-one. Now, another big jump. The letters "S.S." are carved on the victims' legs. At first the local police think it's Nazi stuff, then some comic-book freak says it may be a reference to the "Shroud Shifter," a comic-book bad guy from years ago. Connection: "Shifter" the credit-card pusher; "Shroud Shifter" the inspiration for the S.S. markings? I've run both names nationwide, and am awaiting results from municipal P.D. monicker files. Very, very tenuous stuff, but something to work on.

Jump to: nine Caucasian college students go poof! and disappear from various parts of Kansas and Missouri—April '77 to October '78. One young man was last seen talking to a "large white man, possibly the owner of a van," and his credit cards were recovered from a card-frauder in St. Louis. The frauder stated in a polygraph exam: "The guy I bought them from said he got them from another guy with a weird name like Stick Shifter."

That makes thirty, and it's now getting a little less tenuous. The sometime sex killings, the recurring "tall," "large," white man and the "Shifter" card seller point to one perpetrator. The "Shroud Shifter" stuff is dubious, but I'm going to query the Aspen cops on the comic-book freak who called in the info—maybe the guy has more salient stuff. All this data is going into Serial Sally, and the shrinks are reading my reports on the chain. They'll be doing their own studies, going over prison and mental hospital records that immediately predate the first killings—"Shifter" may well have been just paroled or released. The pisser is that all of this is going to take time. Happily though, Shifter has been a good boy since late '78. Jack Mulhearn has a chain of four killings that he thinks are transient-perpetrated, but chronologically and geographically they're slightly out of Shifter's kilter (Illinois 5/8/79; Nebraska 12/3/79; Michigan 9/80; Ohio 5/81). All four men were shot in the mouth with the same cheapo handgun, and Doc Seidman hypothesizes a homosexual killer, which doesn't sound like my boy. Where are you, Shifter?

There's Carol! I'm going to tell her I wrote fourteen pages today, and mentioned her at least that many times.

22

On June 5, 1983, a year to the day from my finest moment as a killer, I left Sharon and drove nonstop to Westchester County, New York. Crossing the Tappan Zee Bridge, I hurled my overused and now dangerous Rheinhardt Wildebrand credit cards into the Hudson River below me; driving South on Route 22 to look for country clubs and boat clubs offering summer jobs, I felt like a teenager who left the party early to look cool, without realizing he had no place to go.

The "party" was my status as the biggest thing ever to hit Sharon, Pennsylvania, and the reason I had to leave it behind was a slow, steady ticking in my head. On the road or in my projected safe harbor of suburban New York the sound would have been just my old brain-clock; back in Sharon it was a fuse. Sooner or later I would have had to duplicate my transformation into Shroud Shifter there, not out of blood lust, but to hear the thunderclaps of the town's awe go huge once more. And, given the vigilance I had created, the attempt might have been suicidal.

As in San Francisco after Eversall/Sifakis, I had listened. But in Sharon, one-tenth the size and one-fiftieth as sophisticated, the echoes had resounded ten thousand times as loud. The Kurzinskis were known, liked, envied and admired by the entire town; I had destroyed a part of the town along with them. My presence *was* the town, in much the manner that a powerful lover becomes every piece of space surrounding the one who loves him. I was everything Sharon, Pennsylvania, saw; for my post-killing year there, I was the regulator of its heartbeat.

I had been Billy Rohrsfield, library clerk and Co-ed Connection iron pumper by day, Shroud Shifter by night. For 365 straight dusks I performed ritual identity changes: slacks, shirt and jacket into the hamper; black jumpsuit on, hawk nose formed and applied out of putty. Cheekbones and eyebrows shaded, so that my whole face came to points. A police-band radio and my party-line hookup for listening to THEM talk about ME; wondering when they would drop their "mystery clue" pretense and speak my night name to the world. Getting hard when old biddies worshipped me with fearful voices;

climaxing when men spoke of me in rage. It was paradise until something began going ssss/tick, ssss/tick, ssss/tick in my ears, and I started thinking about voiding the security patrols I had inspired, slipping through their neighborly nets to waste an entire family. Underneath ssss/tick ssss/tick, ssss/tick, I knew it was foolhardy, so discreetly I left the town, with regret and some gratitude for the return of plain old ticking.

I picked up a young man hitching just south of White Plains, and he told me I could caddy the season at any one of a half-dozen Westchester country clubs—all I had to do was look hearty and presentable. He also mentioned a rental bureau in Yonkers that matched up summer passers-through with the apartments of Sarah Lawrence College students on vacation. I took the kid's advice on both counts, and by the end of the day Billy Rohrsfield was ensconced in a small bachelor pad on the Yonkers edge of Bronxville and had caddied nine holes at Siwanoy Country Club.

And that night Billy became Shroud Shifter for the first time in New York.

With no local celebrity, no radio band or primitive party line, there was nothing to do but listen to the tick tick tick tick ticks grow louder and wonder who and when and where. So I did—Billy at the golf course days, my special self of hard facial edges at night. The ticking continued, and on a hot day in mid-July I stopped the clock right in the heart of midtown Manhattan, strangling a drunk passed out in a pew at Saint Patrick's Cathedral.

Post and *Daily News* headlines turned the ticking to a whimper, and I went Billy/Shifter, Billy/Shifter, Billy/Shifter into the heat of August and another excursion into the Big Apple. This time the alarm went BLAAAAAAAR when I was strolling through Central Park and a bum asked me for change. Surrounded by other strollers, I motioned him behind a mound of bushes and slit his throat. The artist's sketch of me that adorned page two of the Post the following day was a poor likeness, and as Shroud Shifter that night, I put my mind to the task of creating a prolonged reign of terror.

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From Thomas Dusenberry's Diary:

8/17/83

I'm back again, coming up for air after three straight months of paper prowling, helping Jim Schwartzwalder conduct field interviews in Minneapolis, conferences with the shrinks and what amount to conferences with Carol—she's gotten that formal and severe. I come home late, exhausted and edgy from too much coffee, and she's studying. I put on reruns of the *Honeymooners* or Sergeant Bilko—nice frivolous antidotes to coroners' reports filled with disemboweling and severed penises—and she tells me that the frantic nature of '50's comedies created a whole generation of kids prone to quick laughs, quick gratification and violence. Since her diatribes sound preprogrammed, I figure she's picked them up from one of her professors. It is getting undeniably bad with her; we will have to talk seriously soon. I hope the cause of all Carol's anger at me is clinical—menopause sounds like a logical, methodical way to wrap it all up. I miss the old her.

Speaking of wrapping up, Jim Schwartzwalder's vehicle cross-checks got him the name of a suspect he makes for thirteen child abduction/murders in the Midwest. Anthony Joseph Anzerhaus of Minneapolis, a traveling salesman for a stationery-supply company. I went with Jim to Minneapolis. We found out from Anzerhaus's boss that he was on the road and probably hitting Sioux Falls, South Dakota, that night. We called the S.A.C. in Sioux Falls, gave him the name of the motel Anzerhaus usually stays at and told him to wait for him there. Then we checked out Anzerhaus's apartment. We found the scalps of six children in an ice cooler. Jim completely blew it and trashed the place, throwing furniture, breaking bottles. I finally got him calmed down, but then the Sioux Falls S.A.C. called and said that Anzerhaus never showed up. I figured that his boss tipped him off, so I left Jim at a bar to chill out and confronted the guy. He admitted it, and then *I* completely blew it—busting the asshole for Impeding the Progress of a Federal Investigation and Aiding and Abetting the Escape of an Interstate Fugitive. I would have hit him with an Accessory charge if I thought I could make it stick.

When I got back to the bar, Jim was fried. He told me that if Anzerhaus killed another child before we got him, he was going to kill his boss. I'm 40% sure he means it. Jim's sticking in Minneapolis to supervise the investigation, and Anthony Joseph Anzerhaus, my professional advice is for you to commit suicide, because you will be caught, and between Jim Schwartzwalder and the moralistic organized-crime boys who rule the federal pens, you will be thrown into deep, deep shit.

Enough on that—Anzerhaus is no pro fugitive, he won't last another week. The big news—the big jump—is that my "Shifter" and "Shroud Shifter" queries just got red-hot. Last June 5, a brother and sister were killed in their Sharon, Pa., apartment. He died from a neck wound caused by an ax blow, she was strangled. The killer wrote "Shroud Shifter Prevails" on the wall in the male victim's blood, and the Sharon cops kept it under wraps to eliminate phony confessors. No confessors (611 came forth) admitted writing the words, and the cops did a super job of stonewalling the clue. I've got the entire Sharon P.D. case file—1,100 pages, 784 F.I. cards alone, and am going over it with the shrinks and Jack Mulhearn. No F.I. names match to any of the names from the case files of the previous disappearance/killings we make Shifter for, and I've called the Aspen cops and browbeat them for info on the guy who called in the initial Shroud Shifter notation. No one there remembers the guy, it's not in any of the Aspen files, and they've had a big turnover in personnel since '76. Heavily extrapolating on that, Doc Seidman thinks the guy who called in the information *is* Shifter, that he's got genius-level intelligence and a huge ego, and is probably bisexual with a slight preference for men. Doc got ahold of some old issues of "Cougarman Comics"—the comic book that featured Shroud Shifter. He says it's sick shit—sadomasochistic and necrophiliac in tone. Beyond all that, he thinks Shifter is between 32 and 37, and that he comes from a "Car Culture Milieu"—the Southwest or California. Doc leans toward Southern California because "Cougarman Comics" was most heavily distributed there, and because he makes Shifter as coming from an environment that worships good looks and physical fitness. Whoever chopped the male victim in Sharon was tremendously strong, and the victim and his sister were bodybuilders, so his theory does jibe with our existing hard evidence.

Where are you, Shifter?

I've directed a team of Denver agents to go to Aspen and turn the place upside down until they find out who called in the Shifter info, and a team out of the Philly office is going to Sharon tomorrow to do backup interviews. On Doc's advice, I've requested information on unsolved homicides in California immediately before the first Shifter probable in 12/74. If Aspen doesn't yield a name within a week or so, I'll go there myself. You want your huge ego rubbed, Shifter? Turn yourself in to Uncle Tom, he'll make you a star.

Doc's been doing the bulk of the theorizing on Shifter, but I've been doing my own share on the link-links I now call "Blond-Brunette." It's heavily suppositional, theoretical and circumstantial, but I trust the overall feel.

One, I now buy a policeman killer for all seven victims. Checking through the case files, I saw that all of the blond four had been recently arrested for prostitution, making them particularly easy marks for police or pseudo-police intimidation, which would account for why such streetwise ladies let strange men into their apartments. Two, I don't buy Saul Malvin as the Brunette Killer. I buy him as a suicide (the report filed by the officer who found his car and later his body was a model of cop smarts and clarity, if a little overboard on his own theorizing)—but O+ blood is very common, and I made some discreet calls to the Chicago S.A.C., who learned that Malvin had a thing going with a friend of his wife, and the friend was demanding a commitment. Suicide territory for a certain kind of man.

Three, a big jump, and a mind-boggling one that really feels right: the Wisconsin State Police and the two municipal P.D.'s aiding them in the brunette-killing investigations cannot find their files on the three homicides, which is one of the most incredible things I have heard in my twenty-two years as an investigator. Nine recent case files—vanished.

I think we've got a Wisconsin-based policeman-killer as the perpetrator of all seven blond-brunette homicides, and I think he destroyed the three brunette files to avoid a connection being made, most likely one based on identical physical evidence. And with physical evidence links destroyed from a legal standpoint (some Wisconsin M.E. or pathologist probably remembers blade specifications, etc., which wouldn't hold up in court), all I've got left is opportunity.

So, any Southern Wisconsin cop missing from his assignment solely on the dates of the four blond homicides is my killer. I've already put in sub rosa queries with the Internal Affairs Department of the Wisconsin State Police, and the Milwaukee S.A.C. is doing the same with the personnel directors of the Janesville and Beloit P.D.'s. All I can do now is wait. Jack Mulhearn thinks my theory sucks—he thinks some cop sold the files to the media or a crime writer. We've got a hundred-dollar bet riding on the outcome of my queries. I can't afford to lose—Mark and Susan's fall tuition kick-out is coming up, but I feel solid on this one. It's 11:23. Where are you, Carol?

23

Tick

Tick

Tick

Tick

Tick

Tick

Tick

Tick

Dusk, September 7, 1983. Clock noise was in my head, and a bag holding #9 pancake and theatrical putty was in my hands when I returned home from the golf course and shopping in Bronxville. Opening the door, I was anxious to begin my nightly transformation and almost missed the scrapbook pages spread out on my bed.

Feeling what must have happened, I gasped and looked at my bathroom and closet doors—the only places where he could be waiting. With tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick out-decibeled by adrenaline hitting my heart, I somehow managed not to run to either of them, knowing that betraying my eagerness would be an affront to the Shroud Shifter me. About to burst on all sensory levels, I forced myself to read the reunion message.

It was a newspaper article dated February 19, 1979, and it detailed the brilliant machinations that Ross Anderson had undertaken to safeguard the two of us from exposure of our latest murders. Reading and rereading the account in rapid succession, a Technicolor vision of the key points swallowed me whole, and I grabbed the bed for support.

Ross locating the dead man's car, seeing the O+ donor card and going "Eureka!";

Ross driving back to Huyserville for a K-9 team, even though he already knew where the body was;

Ross putting his own money in the dead man's wallet and my old .357, sans silencer, in his hand;

Ross desecrating the man's chest so that pathologists couldn't tell that two shots had been the cause of his death.

My burst level decelerating, I reran the mental film; reversed the action; ran it in slow motion. In all versions, it played as pure genius—and something else.

"And you thought I was just another pretty face. Ross the Boss, what a guy."

I warmed all over, and the spreading heat gave me poise. I got up from the bed, turned around and smiled. "Bravo, Sergeant."

Ross smoothed his mustache and stroked the alligator emblem on his blue polo shirt. Civilian clothes, four and a half years and a thousand miles had not changed him at all; every bit of the man had stepped intact out of the time warp. "It's Lieutenant," he said, "but thanks."

Made cool by his cool, I held back my barrage of questions and said, "Congratulations."

Ross shut the bathroom door and said, "Thanks. I'm the youngest lieutenant in the history of the Wisconsin State Police, by the way. Turn those scrapbook pages over: there's some stuff you'll like on the back."

I did it. More newspaper accounts were taped to the reverse sides, accompanied by faded Polaroid snapshots of butchered blond girls. While my eyes scanned the type and my brain played a film of Ross traveling and risking and killing for me, the man himself spoke slowly, his words wafting as background music.

"You were easy to track, sweetie. I am a world-class abuser of police power and an even better skip-tracer. The .38 I gave you was my tracker. I gouged the inside of the barrel, test-fired it into a ballistics tank, then kept the spents. Very distinctive lands and grooves, not even the silencer I figured you'd get could alter the striations. Soooo, all I had to do was make statewide queries on Dead Body Reports filed under 'Gunshot,' check the ballistics bulletins and see where my old buddy Martin was hanging out. It took a lot of phoning, but I'm the persistent type. I made you for the retard in Illinois and the fag in Nebraska—you come out of the closet yet, sweetie? They were both big dark-haired guys about your age, and I thought, 'Uh, oh, Martin wants some new ID because he knows Ross the Boss has got his number.' Then you offed the old kraut in Michigan, almost two years had passed; I figured if you snuffed an old guy like that, maybe you already got your ID from a stiff you didn't shoot or the cops never found. I also had a hunch you were getting hinky and cautious, that you must have snuffed Pops for a reason. So I wangled a Xerox of the case file from the Kalamazoo cops.

"And damned if I don't make you for a pretty good forger. Twelve K in checks to credit-card companies? The dumbfuck Kalamazoo cops don't even bother to check with the companies, but I do. *Future* credit-card transactions? Sweetie, you have got a pair of platinum balls, and I've been following those balls cross-country, courtesy of Telecredit. There's Martin in Ohio, maybe doing some cutting in Sharon, P.A. Follow up on that Rohrsfield dead-body report, call the rental-listing hotline the cops have access to to keep track of parole absconders, damned if I don't get a William Rohrsfield right down the road from this family reunion that I thought would be too boring to attend. Good work on Rohrsfield, Martin, but you shouldn't have buried him under the site of a future 7–11. Sweetie, you want to put those pictures down and look at me?"

The request took my eyes away from the death portraits. Feeling only awe for the way Ross had set me up, I said, "How did you manage *this*? Different cities? Spacing them like that?"

Petting the alligator on his chest, Ross said, "Extradition assignments. I'd hit the municipal P.D.'s, file my papers, shoot the shit with the investigating officers, then mosey by the Vice files and look for some nice blond meat with recent hooking convictions. Easy. Get the information, buzz their door, say it's Sergeant Plunkett or whoever, do the deed, take the pictures and split. Space the jobs, different cities. It took four jobs for the connection to get made, and I just stopped. New-breed killer, capable of control. I also booked my flights to and from the extradition cities under assumed names, then turned in forged vouchers for myself and my returnee, so that I'm not listed on any passenger manifests. Saul Malvin was the fall guy on the brunettes, and I destroyed the files on them in case somebody connects the 'Wisconsin Whipsaw' and the 'Four-State Hooker Hacker' and decides to start comparing forensic specs. I've just figured out something about the two of us, Martin. We equal out in the end, but you excel in quantity while I excel in quality."

Despite all my awe and that something else, the condescension rankled, and I said, "What about one-on-one?"

Ross smiled, and I caught a flash of his awe. "I don't know, sweetie. I truly, honestly don't. You feel like taking a ride? Maybe meeting some family of mine?"

—

Ross had taken a cab, so we took Deathmobile II to the summer house where the younger reunion people were staying. Having him in the passenger seat beside me was softly warming, and he spoke softly while we drove north on the Saw Mill Parkway.

"I used to spend summers here as a kid. This bash is being thrown by the Liggetts, my mother's people. Big bucks. They all thought Mom married beneath herself—Lars Anderson, big dumb handsome squarehead, cabinetmaker from the Wisconsin boonies, no future. They used to let me know in subtle ways, kill me with kindness while they were doing it. Every September around this time, right before they sent me back to Beloit, they bought me a humongous load of fall school clothes, marched me into Brooks Brothers like I was Little Lord Fauntleroy. The salesmen hated me because they thought I was a rich kid with a silver spoon up his ass; the Liggetts blew the wad so they could make my dad look low; and I always ordered everything too big or too small so I could sell it or ditch it when I got home. You remember that buddy of mine? The late Billy Gretzler? You should have seen him wearing this five-hundred-dollar cashmere Chesterfield when he worked on his truck. It finally got so black and greasy that I told him, A joke's a joke, throw it away. He wouldn't, though. He chopped the coat up and used the pieces as gun-cleaning rags. We're almost to Croton, so turn off at the next exit and hang a left."

Easing over toward the off-ramp lane, I asked, "What was having a family like?"

Ross stroked his alligator. "You didn't have one, sweetie?"

"Orphaned early," I said.

"Well, I'll tell you. I've got Andersons and Liggetts and Caffertys up the ying-yang, and mostly they're just people you see through as being what they are. My mom and sis are weak; my dad's stupid and proud; Richie Liggett—my cousin who you'll probably meet—he's smart, but so lost in this grad-school vision of what he thinks life is that you'd never know it. Another cousin, Rosie Cafferty, she's your prototypical hot-pants teeny-bopper with a yen for Italian guys and muscle cars. Good she's got bucks—she'd be a whore otherwise. She's —"

Pulling off the parkway, I interrupted: "But what's it like?"

Ross considered the question as I drove past huge white homes for over a mile. Station wagons crowded with people and luggage were pulling out of driveways, and renters were handing over keys on a score of front lawns. The lights in the houses reminded me of burglary, and I blurted, "Tell me, goddamnit."

Ross laughed. "You want a definition of family, I'll give you one.

Family is feeling sort of close to people because you know they're connected to you by blood, and you have to tolerate them, regardless of what you think of them. So over the years they grow on you, in one way or the other, and it's interesting to observe them and know you're smarter than they are. Also, they're beholden to you and can do you solids. Turn left on the corner and park."

I slowed, accomplished the turn and pulled to the curb in front of a large white house that must have dated back to the Revolutionary War. Ross said, "Nice pad, huh?" and pointed to mounds of toys strewn across the immaculate front lawn. "There's family and money for you in a nutshell. Lots of bucks in this area, and the kids still carry on like n——s. Come on."

We walked across the grass and veranda and through the open front door. Inside, the house was expensive furniture and carpeting in need of dusting, with sports clothes, tennis rackets and odd golf clubs scattered around the living room and foyer. Ross put his fingers in his mouth and whistled, then said, "What a bunch of slobs. Richie and Rosie are shacked up here with their paramours, and I've been staying in a room about the size of a broom closet. The reunion starts tomorrow night at this yacht club in Mamaroneck, and the unmarried cousins have got this place so they won't embarrass Big Daddy Liggett by porking in the cabanas. Hey! Achtung! Ross the Boss is here!"

I heard footsteps upstairs, and moments later two couples in tennis whites bounded down the staircase. The young men were wholesome fitness personified, one WASP style, one Italian; the young women were brunette and redheaded outtakes from the Ralph Lauren ads I had seen during my reading spurts. All four started babbling "Hi!" and "Hi, Ross," at once, looking at me sidelong, like an afterthought. Ross pumped the male hands and hugged the girls, then put his fingers in his mouth and whistled. The shrill report froze all the jabbering, and Ross said, "Hey kids, let's mind our manners. Cousins, this is my friend Billy Rohrsfield. Billy, we have, left to right, Richie Liggett, Mady Behrens, Rosie Cafferty and Dom De Nunzio."

Thinking *style*, I shook the male hands and kissed the female ones. The boys guffawed and the girls giggled, and catching a glimpse of Ross petting his shirt, I went warm again. Winking, Ross said, "Mixed doubles indoors and out?" and the kids all laughed at the wit of the man they obviously adored, then dispersed, picking up gym bags and tennis rackets from the floor. They flew out the door in a cacophony of "See you's!" and "Bye's!" and "Nice meeting you's!"; and the entire scene ended so abruptly that I had to blink my eyes and dig my feet into the carpet to get my bearings.

Ross noticed my look and said, “Culture shock. Come on, I’ll show you around the house. We’ve got it to ourselves now.” He stroked the emblem on his chest, and suddenly I knew he kept doing that to keep from touching me. “Show me your room first,” I said.

We both knew what I meant.

Ross touched his chest. “Alice the alligator. The only woman who never let me down, so I keep her close to my heart.” Pointing up the stairs, he winked. Bowing at the waist, I said, “Walk, sweetie,” and Ross unwittingly acknowledged match point by laughing out loud and exposing a tiny flaw in his almost-perfection—poorly capped teeth that were usually subterfuged by tight smiles and mustache bristles. He walked ahead then, and I winced at the lover’s epiphany.

I couldn’t feel my footsteps as I followed him to the bedroom, and when he reached for the inside light switch I could hardly hear myself say, “No.” Ross’s “Bye, Alice,” boomed in the darkness, and then zippers rasped and belt buckles and shoes hit the floor. Bedsprings squeaked, and then we were together.

We held; we rubbed; we kissed. We felt the weight of each other and made friction with our hands. We were impact rather than melding, force rather than softness. Our fever escalated commensurate with the pressure of our muscles. We strained in embraces, each trying to be stronger, and when we both sensed we were equal combatants, all of us went into our groins and we pushed ourselves there until we were done, over, past it and dead—together.

We lay there, gasping and sweating. My lips were brushing Ross’s chest, and he shifted himself so that the contact was broken. I wanted to fuse the bond again, but inside Ross’s fits of breath I could feel him regrouping, rationalizing, running from what it made us, made *him*. I knew that soon he’d say something quintessentially cool to dilute the power of *us*, and I knew I couldn’t let myself hear it. Drawing myself into a child’s sleep ball, I cupped my ears and squeezed my eyes shut until I was numb. Dimly I could hear Ross’s heart beating; very dimly I could hear him muttering stylish denials of what we had just done. Though not audible, the words raked my body, and I shut them out with all *my* power, *my* muscle, my will—wrapping myself tighter and tighter, until I lost control of my senses—and my control.

Tick/beat, tick/beat, tick/beat, the strange music lilting, its cadence telling me “This is a dream.” Tight in my ball, I know I’m a child, four or five, it’s about 1953 and a different world. I’m in bed, and pressure in what my mother calls “that place” forces me to the bathroom and relief. Footsteps coming upstairs divert me from returning to my ball, and I stand in hallway shadows, hoping to see my mother and father's secret places. When the footsteps reach the landing it's a man and woman wearing powder-white wigs and costumes out of my kindergarten picture books—clothes like George Washington and the European royalty used to wear in their different world. I smell liquor, and know the man is my father; but the woman is too pretty to be my mother.

They go to the big bedroom and turn on the light. My father says, "She's at her aunt's in San Berdoo and the kid is asleep"; the woman says, "Let's leave the wigs on for kicks, I've always wanted to be a blonde." My father reaches for the light switch, and the woman says, "*No*."

Heavy corsets and shoes and belt buckles go "thud" on the floor, and my father and the woman are naked, both with dark hair at their secret places. He has what I do, only bigger; she has just the hair. The light wigs and the dark hair there are *wrong*, and what *I* feel there is wrong, but I tiptoe to the door and watch anyway.

It looks ugly and good. My father is fit and strong, with broad shoulders and chest and a trim waist. He's good, but the woman has fat legs and thick ankles and big horse teeth and a scar on her stomach and chipped nail polish. They get on the bed and roll around, and the mattress goes tick tick tick. She says, "Put it in," my father does and it looks ugly, so I close my eyes and listen to the tick tick. They both *sound* good, and I feel good there, better and better as my father grunts along with the TICK TICK TICK. He grunts harder and harder, TICK TICK TICK TICK TICK TICK TICK—and I'm touching myself there too. It feels better and better, and I run to the bathroom because I know something has to come out. Nothing does, but *I'm* big.

I listen for more ticking to make me bigger, but there isn't any. I walk to the bedroom door and see my father asleep, snoring. The woman sees me and crooks her finger. Proud of what I have, I go to show her.

She's ugly and her breath stinks, but her wig is pretty and her hand there feels good. I want my father to see it, and I try to reach across the woman. She stops me by putting her mouth there.

Tick tick tick tick tick as she moves on the bed, straining with her lips around me; tick tick tick tick I shut my eyes; tick tick tick tick she's biting me and I open my eyes, and my mother is there swinging a brushed-steel spatula and frying pan, and I pull away, and the woman is bleeding at the lips. She pushes my mother and runs, losing her wig; my father snores and my mother holds the wig over my face, and I fall asleep pushed into suffocating liquor breath that goes tick tick tick tick.

Then it's still about 1953, but later. My mother is giving me pills so I won't remember. The pills come from a bottle labeled Sodium Phenobarbital, and every time she gives me one she puts a note in another bottle. The notes ask God to forgive me for what I did with the wig woman.

Rough hands pulled at my sleep ball, and a once perfectly stylish voice was oozing agitation. "Hey! Hey man! You going cuntish on me?"

I came out of my self-made womb weeping and swinging, and a backhand caught Ross on the jaw and knocked him off the bed. He got to his feet, and I saw that he had already put on his clothes. Naked, I felt at an advantage. Ross stroked his mustache and said, "Better. You had me worried for a while."

We just stood there. Ross did his number with the alligator, and I confronted what had happened to me thirty years in the past. The heat in the tiny room dried my tears, and the only thing in the world that I knew was that the next perfect human being who crossed my path was either going to die horribly beyond words or walk away unharmed, their death sentence commuted by my mother in her grave and the killer standing in front of me. Putting on my clothes under Ross's stare, I thought that the only awful thing about the choice of resolutions would be waiting to know. Staring back at Ross, I said, "Thanks."

Ross gave me his patented hand-in-the-cookie-jar smirk. "You're welcome. Spartan revelry's good sport every once in a while. Bad dreams you had?"

"Old stuff. Nothing earthshaking."

"I never dream, probably because I lead such an adventurous life. If any other man had hit me, I would have killed him."

"You could have killed me, Lieutenant. You could have killed me and made it look like anything you wanted to, and you could have profited from the act."

Ross smiled broadly and showed his bad teeth, and in that moment I loved him. "It's because you know that I'd never hurt you, sweetie."

A merciful shortcut out of my dilemma ticked across my mind, and I passed it to Ross immediately, knowing the plan's full implications only too well. "You know this area intimately, don't you?"

"The back of my hand, sweetie."

"Let's do a job together. Blonds, brunettes, I don't care—as long as they're perfect."

Stroking Alice, Ross said, "Pick me up tomorrow around noon. We'll cruise the summer sessions at Vassar and Sarah Lawrence. Wear a jacket and tie so you'll look like a cop, and I'll guarantee you some great sport."

I walked to Ross and kissed him on the lips, knowing that if I couldn't kill our perfect one, I would have to close out my blood journey by killing the man himself—my liberator and only eyewitness. Calmed by that, I broke the hands-to-shoulders embrace and walked out of the bedroom. The house was alive with chatter as I moved downstairs, and the last thing I heard as I opened the front door was a titillated soprano trill: "Richie, do you think maybe Ross is gay?"

—

From Thomas Dusenberry's diary:

9/8/83
1:10 A.M.
Aboard Eastern Flight
228, D.C. to N.Y.C.

Got one!

I'm now en route to Croton, New York. A team of agents out of the Westchester Office are meeting me at La Guardia, then we're driving to a summer house in Croton to arrest a Wisconsin State Police lieutenant for all seven blond-brunette homicides plus, incredibly, the murder of Saul Malvin.

It went down this way: the exec at W.S.P. Internal Affairs called me at Quantico three hours ago. He told me that his only possible was Lieutenant Ross Anderson, Daywatch Commander of the Huyserville Substation. As a sergeant working Extraditions and Warrants, Anderson was in the four blond-killing cities on the nights of the homicides, having flown there 1–3 days before each murder. In each case, he returned with his prisoner 24–48 hours after the coroner's estimated time of the victim's death. On top of that:

1.—Anderson has O+ blood.

2.—As a patrol sergeant in late '78–early '79, Anderson worked the sector where the three brunette bodies were found.

3.—Anderson supervised the surveillance deployment to catch the brunette killer.

4.—On 3/11/76, Anderson shot and killed an armed marijuana trafficker in the line of duty. The man, William Gretzler, was a boyhood friend of his.

5.—The W.S.P. case file on the brunette killings was stored in the Detective's Squadroom at the Huyserville Substation, where Anderson has served in various capacities over the past six years, the last eight months as Daywatch Commander.

6.—Since his promotion to Lieutenant eight months ago, Anderson has often been seen in the squadrooms of the Janesville and Beloit P.D.'s, where the other brunette files are missing from.

7.—Anderson was seen perusing the Vice files of the Louisville and Des Moines P.D.'s twenty-four hours before the homicides in those cities.

8.—The kicker of all kickers: Anderson was the officer who discovered the car, donor card and later the body of Saul Malvin, who the W.S.P. unofficially made as the brunette killer.

Fucking astonishing. On an earlier page of this diary I called Anderson's report on his discovery of Malvin's body "a model of cop smarts." The fucking audacity of it!

Here's my reconstruction of the Malvin killing. Anderson has just killed Claire Kozol, his third brunette victim. He resumes patrol, sees Malvin's Caddy on the shoulder of I-5 and investigates. Malvin is in the car, and while checking the glove compartment for his registration Anderson spots the O+ donor card. He thinks "patsy," and tells Malvin he'll drive him to the next town. He tells Malvin to walk to his cruiser, then somehow, making it look accidental, he pushes the Caddy off the road.

It's snowing hard, few cars are on the road. Maybe Anderson gently questions Malvin on his whereabouts at the times of the first two killings, maybe he doesn't, and just decides to play the factor open and hope for the best. In any event he has the .357 in the cruiser (this is probably the way he implemented the now presumably premeditated killing of William Gretzler), and on some pretext he stops the car and forces Malvin to walk into the woods. He shoots him in the chest, then puts the gun in his hand, knowing full well the blizzard will cover up the two sets of footprints and keep Malvin's body from being discovered—at least overnight.

The following day, with the snow ended, Anderson makes his phony discovery of Malvin's car and donor card, does his brilliant impromptu theorizing, makes a charade of going to Huyserville for a K-9 team, “finds” Malvin’s body and ham-acts the smart young cop to the hilt from there on in. He lucks out on Malvin’s whereabouts at the times of the first two homicides, and he’s home free.

Fucking astonishing.

As I write, Milwaukee agents are securing warrants to search Anderson’s apartment in Huyserville. If he confesses tonight or the Milwaukee guys find weaponry matching the stats on the blond killings, he’s dead and buried. I’ve got only one real question. What has the bastard been doing during the two years since his last killing? That’s scary.

To top things off, I’ve got a list of six names from the Denver S.A.C., phoned in less than an hour ago. An Aspen cop located some old notes of his old partner’s, who was the officer who caught the phone call volunteering the Shroud Shifter info. The officer himself died last year, and the notes he left are in some weird shorthand, but six names are discernible in one column, with S.S.—Com. bk.? written directly across from them. The names—George Magdaleno, Aaron BeauJean, Martin Plunkett, Henry Hernandez, Steven Hartov, and Gary Mazmanian—are being run over the nationwide computer right now, and Jack Mulhearn is going to call the Westchester office later with the results.

I’m getting tingly. The Anderson bust is going to be all Bureau, just us four agents with shotguns. He’s the youngest lieutenant in Wisconsin State Police history. What happened?

And Shifter is narrowing down. Two of the names are Latin, and the other four are uncommon enough so that a nationwide kick-out should run no more than twenty possibles per man. Run big, tall, dark-haired and mid to late 30’s against the kick-out, and the list will narrow; shoot the hard probables’ mug shots or D.M.V. photos to agents in the cities where the credit-card frauder eyewitnesses are, and I’d lay 3 to 1 that they confirm rather than deny. I won a C-note on Anderson, and I’m still feeling lucky. Who are you, Shifter? Where are you? Come to Uncle Tom. He’ll arrest you and get you indicted and prosecuted, and when you’re convicted he’ll get you a nice cell at a nice federal prison. If you’re really lucky, maybe you could bunk with former Lieutenant Ross Anderson. I’m sure the two of you would have a lot to talk about.

24

Edgy like the movie sheriff awaiting High Noon, I spent my morning preparing for the big moment.

First I drove to Brooks Brothers in Scarsdale. Ross wanted me to look like a cop, and since I didn't own any suits or sports jacket–slacks combinations, I decided to purchase a suitably elegant outfit for my debut as a policeman. Walking into the store, I realized I hadn't worn a coat and tie since I was a child, and I felt every bit of Ross's boyhood humiliation when I asked a salesman to show me the extra-large summer blazers. Condescendingly, he said that blazers came in numbered sizes, and suggested I try on a selection of 44 longs. Angry now, I complied, opting for a navy blue linen jacket that looked as though it had the class to disarm a Vassar coed. The salesman did a slow burn at my manner, and when I said, "Slacks, thirty-four, thirty-four," he pointed to rows of them arrayed on metal rods and walked away. I found a pair of light blue trousers that complemented the blazer and grabbed them; on my way to the cashier I picked up a white shirt and the first necktie I saw—a maroon print with crossed golf clubs. The total price of my showdown costume was $311.00, and leaving the store felt like getting out of jail.

I changed in the back of Deathmobile II, cursing when I found that I'd forgotten how to knot a necktie. Stringing it through my open collar, I drove to a gun shop in Yonkers and spent ninety dollars on something useful—a black leather hip holster for my snubnose .38. Transferring the gun from the Deathmobile's safety compartment to the beautiful new rig and snapping it onto my belt, cross-draw style, turned the morning around, and I drove to Croton.

The big summer house looked different in daylight, and knocking on the door I sensed the reason—everything about me, from my clothes to my past to my future, was changing at a breakneck speed that subtly altered whatever I saw.

Mady Behrens opened the door, altered almost past recognition—yesterday's bubbly blonde in tennis whites now looked haggard and suspicious, a shrew-in-waiting dressed in a soggy bathrobe. "Ross was arrested last night," she said. "Police with shotguns took him away.

Richie's dad says it's real serious."

The veranda turned to quicksand under my feet, and the shrew's open mouth looked like an invitation to the easiest resolution in the world. I went for my holster, but she spoiled my target by bawling, "I knew Ross had a mean streak, but I just can't believe that he'd—"

I ran to the Deathmobile. Monsters danced on my windshield as I drove away into hiding.

—

Transcript of the initial interrogation of Ross Anderson. Conducted at Westchester County F.B.I. Headquarters, New Rochelle, New York, 1400 hours, 9/8/83. Present: Ross Anderson; John Bigelow, his attorney, retained by Richard Liggett Sr., Lt. Anderson's uncle; Inspector Thomas Dusenberry and Special Agent John Mulhearn, of the Federal Serial Killer Task Force; S.A. Sidney Peak, Agent in Charge, New Rochelle Office:

> Suspect held in custody since 0340 hours, 9/8/83; informed of his rights in the presence of his attorney, 12:00 hours, 9/8/83; agreed to questioning after consulting with Mr. Bigelow—1330 hours. This interrogation was both tape-recorded and transcribed in shorthand by Margaret Wysoski, Stenographer, Division 104, Westchester County Superior Court.
>
> *Inspector Dusenberry*: Mr. Anderson, let's start—
>
> *Ross Anderson*: Call me Lieutenant.
>
> *Dusenberry*: Very well, Lieutenant. Let's start by having you clarify something, if you will. Have you volunteered any statements since you were arrested early this morning?
>
> *Anderson*: No. Just my name, rank and serial number.
>
> *Dusenberry*: Have you been physically abused at any time—either in the course of your arrest or during your detention?
>
> *Anderson*: You served me instant coffee at the holding tank. Tacky. Make it fresh ground next time, or I'll check into another hotel.

John Bigelow: Be serious, Ross.

Anderson: I am serious. You didn't taste it, Counselor. Evil shit.

Bigelow: This is very serious, Ross.

Anderson: You're telling me? I'm a French roast junkie. I'll be going into withdrawals soon. Then you'll be sorry.

Bigelow: Ross—

Dusenberry: Lieutenant, did Mr. Bigelow tell you about the charges you face?

Anderson: Yeah. Murder.

Dusenberry: That's correct. Do you have any idea whose murder or murders?

Anderson: How's Billy Gretzler sound? I blew him away in the line of duty back in '76. He's the only person I ever killed.

Dusenberry: Come on, Lieutenant. You've been a police officer how long?

Anderson: Ten and a half years.

Dusenberry: Then you know that homicides within individual municipal police jurisdictions are not federal crimes.

Anderson: I know that.

Dusenberry: Then I'm sure you also know that as far as federal statutes go, you'd either have to kill an employee of the federal government or engage in interstate flight after killing an ordinary citizen to interest us.

Anderson: I'm an interesting guy in general.

Dusenberry: You certainly are. Do you know what my job is with the Bureau?

Anderson: What, pray tell?

Dusenberry: I'm the Agent in Charge at the Serial Killer Task Force in Quantico, Virginia. Do you know what serial killers are?

Anderson: Psychopaths who commit murder under the influence of Rice Krispies?

Bigelow: Ross, goddamnit.

Dusenberry: That's all right, Mr. Bigelow. Lieutenant, are these names familiar to you? Gretchen Weymouth, Mary Coontz, Claire Kozol?

Anderson: Those are the names of murder victims in Wisconsin back in late '78 and early '79.

Dusenberry: That's correct. Who do you think killed them?

Anderson: I think it was a man named Saul Malvin. I discovered his abandoned car and later his body. He was a suicide.

Dusenberry: I see. Are these names familiar? Kristine Pasquale, Wilma Thurmann, Candice Tucker, Carol Neilton?

Anderson: No, who are they?

Dusenberry: Young women murdered in a manner identical to the ones in Wisconsin.

Anderson: That's too bad. Where were they killed?

Dusenberry: In Louisville, Kentucky; Des Moines, Iowa; Charleston, South Carolina; and Baltimore, Maryland. Have you ever been in those cities?

Anderson: Yes, I have.

Dusenberry: Under what circumstances?

Anderson: Serving extradition warrants and returning prisoners from there to various cities in Wisconsin.

Dusenberry: I see. Can you recall the exact dates you were there?

Anderson: Not offhand. Sometime during early ’79 to late ’81, though. That’s when I worked the extradition assignment. If you want the exact dates, check the W.S.P. records.

Dusenberry: I have. You were in those cities at the time the four women were killed.

Anderson: Wow. What a coincidence.

Dusenberry: You were also on patrol at the time and near the area where Claire Kozol met her death.

Anderson: Wow.

Dusenberry: And you patrolled the general area where the first two Wisconsin victims were found, and you found the body of their alleged killer.

Anderson: Inspector, I pride myself on my good humor, but this shit is getting old. We’re both college men and ranking officers, so I’ll give you my informed opinion on what you’ve got. Ready?

Dusenberry: Go ahead, Lieutenant.

Anderson: You’ve been cross-referencing chronological factors against the two sets of homicides and compiling lists based on suspect opportunity. I was involved in the Wisconsin Whipsaw investigation, and apparently I was in the other cities when those other girls were killed. So I fit into your pattern circumstantially. But you’ll have to do a lot better if you want an indictment. You’ll get laughed out of court with what you have.

Dusenberry: You or me, Jack?

Agent Mulhearn: You, Tom. He’s your boy.

Dusenberry: Lieutenant, since last night a team of ten agents has been turning Huyserville upside down. They’ve searched your apartment—

Anderson: And found nothing incriminating, because I’ve done nothing criminal.

Dusenberry: Do you know a man named Thornton Blanchard?

Anderson: Sure, old Thorny. He’s a retired switchman for the Great Lakes Line.

Dusenberry: That’s correct. He also likes to take walks through the nature-study woods adjoining Orchard Park. You know the area?

Anderson: Sure.

Dusenberry: Last night Mr. Blanchard told one of the Milwaukee agents that he’s seen you digging in the woods on three or four occasions. He pointed out the approximate area to the team at about three this morning, and they brought in arc lights and started digging. At about eleven A.M. they found two triple-wrapped plastic baggies. One baggie had a Buck knife and a hacksaw in it. We found a latent thumbprint on the knife handle. It was yours. There was brownish matter and gristle on the saw teeth. It’s being tested now. It’s obviously blood and hardened tissue, and we’re going to try to type the blood and compare it to the blood types of the seven girls. The dimensions of the knife blade and saw teeth exactly match the dimensions of the knife and saw marks on the last four victims. The other baggie was filled with photographs of those four girls, naked and chopped up. We found dried semen on three of the photographs, and it’s being typed now. We got a total of five viable latents off the photographs. They were all yours.

Bigelow: Ross? Ross? Goddamnit, somebody get a doctor.

Dusenberry: Get one, Jack. Let the transcript show that at 14:24 hours Lieutenant Anderson experienced an attack of nausea and fainted. We’ll break for now. Talk to your client, Mr. Bigelow. We’re booking him on Interstate Flight to Avoid Prosecution for Murder. He’ll be arraigned tomorrow morning. Representatives of the Louisville, Des Moines, Charleston and Baltimore D.A.'s Offices are flying up to confer with me on the murder indictments and extradition proceedings, so if Anderson wants to talk, I want his statement by this evening. Do you understand?

Bigelow: Yes, goddamnit. Where's the doctor? This man is ill.

Dusenberry: Sid, stay with Anderson. Don't let the doctor give him any drugs, and when you take him back to the tank, put him in handcuffs and leg manacles. Miss Wysoski, sign out your transcription at 14:26 hours.

—

Transcript of the second interrogation and formal statement of Ross Anderson. Conducted at Westchester County F.B.I. Headquarters, New Rochelle, New York, 21:30 hours, 9/8/83. Present: Ross Anderson; John Bigelow, Lt. Anderson's legal counsel; Stanton J. Buckford, Chief Federal Prosecuting Attorney, Metropolitan New York District Office; Inspector Thomas Dusenberry, S.A., John Mulhearn, S.A., Sidney Peak. This interrogation-statement was both tape-recorded and transcribed in shorthand by Kathryn Giles, Stenographer, Division 104, Westchester County Superior Court.

Inspector Dusenberry: Lieutenant Anderson, did the doctor who treated you for your fainting spell give you any mind-altering drugs?

Anderson: No.

Dusenberry: Have you been physically abused or threatened since our first session this afternoon?

Anderson: No.

Dusenberry: Have you conferred with your attorney during that time?

Anderson: Yes.

Dusenberry: Are you ready to make a statement?

Anderson: Yes.

Dusenberry: Mr. Bigelow, have you discussed the matter of Lieutenant Anderson's statement with Mr. Buckford?

John Bigelow: Yes, I have.

Dusenberry: Toward what end?

Bigelow: Toward the end of securing my client's immunity from Kentucky, Iowa, South Carolina and Maryland murder indictments.

Dusenberry: But not potential Wisconsin indictments?

Bigelow: Wisconsin has no death penalty, Inspector. Two of the other states do.

Dusenberry: Mr. Buckford, do you have a statement to make?

Stanton J. Buckford: Yes, I do. I wanted a transcription of this plea-bargaining process, with federal agents as witnesses, in case controversy arises later on. I know only the barest outline of what Lieutenant Anderson has to say, but if his evidence is as powerful as Mr. Bigelow asserts, and if it results in other indictments, I would be willing to file on Lieutenant Anderson only with the Wisconsin and Federal Interstate Flight charges. As proof of your good faith, Mr. Bigelow, I will require a confession from Lieutenant Anderson beforehand, and should he confess, and should the Wisconsin judiciary hand down any sentence less severe than three consecutive life terms without possibility of parole, I will ask the judge presiding at the Flight trial to hand down that sentence. Do you understand, Mr. Bigelow?

Bigelow: Yes, Mr. Buckford. I do.

Buckford: Lieutenant Anderson, do you understand?

Anderson: Yes.

Bigelow: Make your statement, Ross.

Anderson: On December 16, 1978, I raped and murdered Gretchen Weymouth. On December 24, 1978, I raped and murdered Mary Coontz. On January 4, 1979, I raped and murdered Claire Kozol. On April 18, 1979, I raped and murdered Kristine Pasquale. On October 1, 1979, I raped and murdered Wilma Thurmann. On May 27, 1980, I raped and murdered Candice Tucker. On May 19, 1981, I raped and murdered Carol Neilton. This statement is made of my own free will.

Dusenberry: Jack, get him some water.

Bigelow: I want you to take your time with the rest of it, Ross.

Buckford: Are you ready to continue, Mr. Anderson?

Anderson: (Long pause) Yes.

Buckford: Then proceed.

Anderson: I didn't kill Saul Malvin, and he didn't commit suicide. Right after I killed Claire Kozol, I drove up the two-lane that parallels I-5. I saw a man check out Malvin's abandoned Cadillac, then get into a van and slowly drive north. I tracked the vehicle by radar, and I got the feeling the man was looking for the driver of the Caddy, to rob him. I stayed six hundred yards in back, and when the van stopped, I stopped too, then found a perch on some rocks and looked at the van through my binoculars. After about five minutes I saw the man walk back out of the woods, carrying a revolver. He put the gun somewhere underneath the body of the van and kept driving north. I—

Dusenberry: Tell me the man's name, Anderson.

Buckford: Let him tell it his way, Inspector.

Anderson: Just then I got word on my radio that the girl's body was discovered, and that roadblocks were being set up on I-5. I stayed on the two-lane, and I saw the van approach the first roadblock on a curve. When the man was about two hundred yards from it, he pulled over and tossed something into the snow by the roadside. I waited while he went through the detaining procedure—you know, search of the van, warrant checks, escort to the Huyserville Station for a blood test and more questioning if he turned up the right type. When things quieted down at the roadblock, I cruised over to I-5 and looked for what the man had thrown out. It was (pause) torn-up pictures of a dead man lying in the snow. Look, I knew I wanted to meet this guy. I drove into Huyserville, found his van parked in the station lot and found a .357 mag in a hidey-hole attached to the undercarraige. I ended up confronting him, and we talked, and he told me he'd killed lots and lots of people, just to do it, and for money and credit cards, and—

Dusenberry: Tell me his name, Anderson. Please, Mr. Buckford, there's a reason for this.

Buckford: Very well. The man's name, Mr. Anderson?

Anderson: Martin Plunkett. He's—

Dusenberry: Motherfucking God. Plunkett's the Shifter, Jack. He's on the Aspen suspect list. Put him on the wire, now.

Agent Mulhearn: Jesus Fuck.

Buckford: Maintain yourselves, gentlemen. This is a federal document, and what in God's name are you talking about?

Dusenberry: I don't fuck—I don't believe this. Plunkett is a longterm serial we've been tracking on paper for months. It's too involved to go into, and I want more confirmation. Describe him, Anderson.

Anderson: Caucasian, 6′3″, 210, dark brown hair, brown eyes.

Dusenberry: It's him. Vehicle?

Anderson: He had a silver Dodge van back in '79.

Dusenberry: When did you see him last?

Buckford: Let him finish his way.

Dusenberry: I'll finish. You faked finding Malvin's body and put Plunkett's magnum in his hand so you'd have a fall guy for the girls and so your buddy wouldn't be remembered as a transient and get tagged for the Malvin job, right?

Anderson: Right.

Buckford: Sit down, Inspector.

Dusenberry: Why, Anderson?

Anderson: What do you mean, 'Why'?

Buckford: Sit down and be quiet. This is a federal document.

Dusenberry: Where is he, Anderson?

Anderson: I don't know. It was a long time ago.

Dusenberry: You just beat the electric chair. Tell me, you fuck.

Buckford: Sit down, Dusenberry, now, or I'll suspend you from this case. (Pause) There. That's better. I don't follow this offshoot, Mr. Anderson. Is the Inspector correct? Did you fake a suicide on this man Malvin so that Plunkett could escape?

Anderson: So we both could.

Buckford: Why? Plunkett, I mean.

Anderson: Because I liked his style.

Buckford: Have you seen him since then? Since 1979?

Anderson: No, he rode off into the sunset, like the Lone Ranger.

Buckford: Do you have any idea where he is now?

Anderson: I'm tired. I want to go to sleep. Plunkett and I were a one-night stand. I don't know where he is, so leave me alone.

Buckford: Let's wrap it up, then. Inspector, I'll need to talk to you about this. I'm marking the end of this transcript at nine-fifteen P.M., September 8, 1983.

25

I spent the night parked in a campground in Upper Westchester. Curled tight in a ball, I slept and dreamed of Ross; every time the hard metal floorboard jarred me awake, I thought of him in my first moments of consciousness and felt his body. At dawn, my muscles aching from long hours of holding myself womblike, I stood up on tenuous infant's legs. Shivering despite the blast-oven heat in the van, I wondered how it had ended all around me—without my even being there.

Still muscle-cramped, I inched up to the cab and turned the ignition key to Accessory, then flipped on the radio. Moving the tuner to an all-news station, I heard, "…and on the Wisconsin end of the investigation, authorities have discovered a Buck knife and hacksaw with Anderson's fingerprints on them buried in plastic bags in the woods near his apartment. Federal agents believe they are the weapons he used to murder and dismember his seven victims. Here on the New York end, we have a recorded statement made by Anderson's cousin, seventeen-year-old Rosemary Cafferty:

"I'm…I'm just glad Ross is in jail where he can't hurt anybody else except other criminals. He…he must be evil. I can't believe he's a member of my family. He…he might have hurt one of us. All—"

I turned the radio off, stifling the soprano trill that had tried to relegate Ross and me to a cheap stereotype with the words, "Richie, do you think maybe Ross is gay?" I knew then that she and her tennis-clad chums had been my friend's betrayers. FAMILY typefaced itself across my vision, and I set out to become Shroud Shifter in broad daylight.

At a sporting goods store in Mt. Kisco, I bought a big Buck knife and a leather scabbard. From there I drove to a hardware store nearby and purchased a hacksaw with razor-sharp teeth. A trip to a punk-rock boutique in Yonkers netted me a black vinyl jumpsuit, and the green-haired salesgirl who sold it to me looked at my Brooks Brothers outfit and said, "You're really changing styles." From Yonkers it was only a hop, skip and jump to the Lord & Taylor in Scarsdale and the purchase of a woman's black silk opera cape and a makeup kit. With a ball of theatrical putty already in my glove compartment, I had everything I needed.

Walking out of Lord & Taylor, I saw a Scarsdale Police cruiser parked at the curb. The cop by the passenger door was saying to the driver, "…youngest fucking lieutenant in his department's history." He tapped a stack of papers on the dashboard and added, "And now the feds have got a want on some buddy of his."

In the most audacious move of my life, I approached the car, looked the passenger cop dead in the eye and said, "Excuse me, Officer. Were you talking about Ross Anderson, the killer?"

The cop gave my Ivy League persona a cursory glance and said, "Yes, sir."

Seeing that the papers on the dashboard were Wanted flyers, still damp with printer's ink, I asked, "May I have one of those? My son collects them."

Chuckling, the policeman handed me the top piece of paper. I said, "Thank you," then walked over to the shade of Deathmobile II to savor the moment of my formal public emergence.

The big black banner print read, "Wanted: Interstate Flight—Murder." Below it was two mug shots from my 1969 burglary arrest. I looked callow and sensitive. Underneath my physical statistics, police buzzwords made me buzz: consider armed, extremely dangerous and an escape risk; may be driving pre-1980 silver Dodge van; suspected of multiple murders in numerous states.

Only the "Escape Risk" rang untrue. It was over now; there was no escape. Thinking of Ross, I added plastic bags to my shopping list, ran across the street to a supermarket and bought a pack of a dozen. Returning to the Deathmobile, I looked at the dashboard clock and saw that it was almost noon. I sang "Do not forsake me, O my darling, on this our wedding day!" over and over as I drove to Croton.

Beer parties were in rowdy progress on front lawns up and down the summer-house block, and I cruised by slowly, trawling for Ross's cousins and their consorts. Not seeing them, I drove to a shopping center, found a pay phone and called Information. The operator gave me a Croton listing for Richard Liggett Senior, and I dialed the summer-house number, letting the phone ring twenty times. The dial tone ticked rather than buzzed, and I hung up and headed back toward my target street.

Parking a block away, I stepped into the back of the van and stripped off my preppy garb. Nude, I held my shaving mirror with one hand and with the other applied my Shroud Shifter face, turning my pug nose hawk with putty, my blunt cheekbones sharp with rouge, my eyebrows dark and menacing with mascara. Slicking back my hair with spittle, I wrapped my knife and hacksaw up in a paper bag, then put on my black jumpsuit and affixed my cape. Remembering a pair of scuffed black loafers under my spare tire, I dug them out, dusted them and slipped them on. Then, dripping with sweat and smelling of vinyl and face powder, I stepped out of my Shroud Shifter closet for the world to see.

Children waved at me from passing cars; an old man sitting on his porch drinking beer yelled out, "Halloween ain't till next month, buddy!" I bowed and fluffed my cape for all my fans, and when I turned onto my target block, the keg partyers pointed to me and gifted me with little rounds of applause and bursts of laughter. Walking across the Liggetts' front lawn, a boy roasting hot dogs on the veranda next door yelled, "Hey, Alex! That you, man!"

"Yeah, man!" I shouted back.

"You pledging Delta, man?"

"Yeah!"

"Boogie down, man! Richie and Mady are at the club, but there's brew in the fridge!"

I shouted, "Yeah, man," and swirled my cape, then walked across the porch and through the open door. Inside, the house was cool and quiet, and I moved from room to room memorizing the disarray, recalling how it had offended Ross. Overflowing ashtrays, unmade beds, clothes on the floor and expensive computer games upended atop sofas and chairs fascinated and enraged me, and I kept circuiting, upstairs and down, looking for more evidence of the bankruptcy known as HAPPY FAMILY LIFE.

Razor stubble and shaving cream caked on disposable razors; a toothpaste tube crimped all the way up to the top; a diaphragm in its case. Still life after still life after still life kept me in a swirl for hours, with the lengthening of shadows through the windows providing a dim awareness of time passing. Then, as I was examining paperback novels spilling out of a bookcase, I heard, "Alex, are you here?"

It was the voice of Richie Liggett, issuing from downstairs. I looked around for the bag holding my knife and hacksaw, saw it on a dresser across the bedroom and called out, "I'm upstairs, Richie!" Footsteps thudded on the stairway, and by the time they reached the second floor hallway I had the knife held in my right hand behind my back.

Richie Liggett appeared in the doorway and laughed. "Jesus, Alex.

Delta? Your family's always gone Sigma O. Your mascara's running, by the way."

Disguising my voice with a movie-monster growl, I said, "Where's Mady?"

"In the kitchen. You hear about Ross?"

I monster-growled "traitor," then grabbed Richie by the hair, brought my knife up and slit his throat, straight through to the windpipe in one motion. He reached for his neck and pitched forward in another single movement, and I stepped away to avoid being sprayed by his blood. Hitting the floor with a crash, he started gurgling, and I flipped him onto his back. He kept trying to speak, his mouth flapping in spastic counterpoint to his twitching legs, and I took a pillow off the bed and dropped it on his face. Straddling the traitor's head, I stepped on the ends of the pillowcase and held the death mask firm with all my weight. When the flailing stopped and the white fabric was seeping with red, I wiped my knife and walked down to the kitchen.

Mady Behrens was frying hamburgers. When she saw me, she let out a ladylike yelp and managed to say, "You're not Alex." I said, "You're right," and stabbed her in the stomach, then the chest, then the neck. In her death throes she knocked the frying pan off the stove, and the last thing she felt before her eyes closed was hot grease spattering her tennis-tan legs.

TICK/BEAT TICK/BEAT TICK/BEAT TICK/BEAT TICK/BEAT TICK/BEAT.

I stumbled upstairs, breathing blood and vinyl. Richie Liggett was now a piece of inanimate disarray to match the rest of the HAPPY FAMILY LIFE detritus. I carved SS on both of his legs, then sheared them off with the hacksaw and tossed them onto a dusty chair covered with tennis balls. With the blood smell now dominating all others, I took my tools and walked down to Mady Behrens. When she was similarly marked and vivisected, I threw her legs in the sink along with the dirty dishes.

BEAT/TICK
BEAT/TICK
BEAT/TICK
BEAT/TICK
BEAT/TICK

Exhausted, I ran my eyes over the kitchen. The disarray I had created looked soft and pretty; the unevenly hung calendar and framed mottoes undercut my art and buzzed me like angry little bees.

Straightening them made me think of Ross, and with his image came a new surge of energy. I began to set the house right.

For hours I straightened, tidied and rearranged, putting the HAPPY FAMILY DWELLING in an order that spotlighted the Shroud Shifter and his revenge. With all the room lights blazing, I worked, forcing my brain away from Ross only to look at my watch and remind myself that Dom De Nunzio and Rosie Cafferty were due. The more I toiled, the more I saw that required fixing, and when I heard voices on the veranda just after midnight, I was nowhere near finished.

I cut them down in the entrance hall, all stab and shriek and my Buck knife darting past protective arms to tear into the traitors' faces. Rosie Cafferty was already dead and my weapon was raised to give her boyfriend's throat a final slice when I remembered that Ross introduced me to them as Billy Rohrsfield, meaning someone else had betrayed the two of us. I hesitated, and for a split second Dom De Nunzio, helplessly pinioned under my knees, looked absolutely perfect—and perfectly like Ross. Hoarsely whispering "I'm sorry," I held his eyes shut while I stabbed and stabbed and stabbed his life away.

There were no ticks or tick/beats as I carved SS on two more pairs of lovely legs in tennis whites, sawed them off, then walked to the living-room wall and rolled a set of my bloody fingerprints on it, circling the area in blood so that even the most stupid cop wouldn't miss the evidence. Gathering up my knife and hacksaw, I walked to the Deathmobile, my cape flowing in the summer night wind. Inside the van I changed back to Brooks Brothers, then scrubbed blood from my hands and Shroud Shifter from my face. With calm hands I pressed fingerprints to the handles of my knife and saw, then triple-wrapped them in plastic bags. Rummaging through the van's tool kit, I found an earth spade. I took it up to the cab with me, then went looking for places to plant the means to rapid justice.

I buried the hacksaw at the base of a tree adjoining the Bronxville Library, and the knife by the lake in Huguenot Park in New Rochelle. Remembering a rooming house that several caddies had mentioned, I drove to the 800 block of South Lockwood and knocked on the door underneath a sign that read: "Rooms by the week—usually vacancies."

The old black woman who answered my knock feigned anger at my late-night intrusion, but when I said, "I want a room, and I'll pay two months cash in advance," she fell all over herself letting me in and pointing me toward a desk holding a large guest register. Handing her a big wad of hundreds that were useless to me now, I said, "My name is Martin Plunkett. Remember that. Martin Plunkett."

26

It took them three days to find me.

I slept throughout most of those seventy-two hours, sating a weariness caused by one of the longest road tours in history, and when I heard the helicopters hovering directly over my head, I was relieved that it was over. Looking out my window I saw the flashing lights of a dozen police cars, and within moments whispers, sleep-blurred grunts and scurrying footsteps told me the rooming house was being evacuated. Then heavy boots went thump/tick, thump/tick, thump/tick all around me, and the ritual bullhorn warning sounded: "We have you surrounded, Plunkett! Surrender, or we'll come in and get you!"

I walked to the door and shouted through it. "I'm unarmed. I want to talk to the head man before you take me in."

Backing away, ready to hit the floor, I got my answer—loud voices arguing. I was able to pick out "You're crazy, Inspector," and "He's mine," and then the door was kicked in and an ordinary-looking middle-aged man in a gray suit was pointing a .38 at my head.

He didn't say "Freeze, motherfucker," or "Up against the wall, asshole." He said, "My name's Tom Dusenberry," as if we had just met at a cocktail party. I said, "Martin Plunkett," and when he pulled back the hammer of his gun, I smiled.

He didn't look as though he was deciding whether to shoot me; he looked like a man living deep within himself, wondering how far to let me in. Still smiling, I said, "Are you with the New Rochelle police?"

"F.B.I.," he said.

"The exact charges?"

"Interstate Flight from the Malvin killing for me; the four kids in Croton for keeps."

Something in the man's statement hit me low and hard, but I couldn't place it. Trying to nail the blow, I stalled for time, sizing Dusenberry up in the process. He was beginning to grow on me as extraordinary—and I didn't know why.

We remained silent for close to a minute, me thinking, him staring. Finally he said, "Why, Plunkett?" and I knew. The man was simply moderation personified—voice, body, clothes, soul. It was something he could never have cultivated; he just was it. "Why what, Mr. Dusenberry?"

"Why all of it."

"You're being ambiguous."

"I'll be specific. Why have you killed so many people, caused so much fucking pain?"

Now I could sense he was straining, getting itchy for something to happen fast. Sweat was darkening his shirt collar and his bland blue eyes were narrowing. Soon his legs were quivering with tension, and the only thing calm about the man was his finger on the trigger. He was growing feverish in his desire for pat answers.

"I'll make a formal statement," I said. "Then you'll know. And I won't make that statement unless it's released for the public at large, verbatim. Do you understand?"

"You've made that very clear."

"I've made it very clear because I know you want to know, and unless you let me confess my own way, you never will."

Dusenberry lowered his gun. "You've been wanting to tell it for a long time," he said. "You've been dropping hints for years."

If he thought it was a trump card, he was wrong; I knew my desire for glory had grown cancerously self-destructive a long way back on the road. "And that's how you found me?"

Dusenberry said, "In part," and smiled; the blandness of his perfectly capped teeth froze me and clarified his puzzling statement. The Interstate Flight charge stemmed from the Saul Malvin killing—and only Ross knew about that. "*In whole,*" I whispered.

Now the teeth were sharp and pointed, and the bland federal agent was a shark. "Anderson plea-bargained you to beat the death penalty," he said. "He threw you to the hungriest, most ambitious fed prosecutor who ever breathed—to save his own worthless, sadistic faggot ass."

The shark became a monster; his jaws opened wide to eat me with words: "You loved him, didn't you, you fuck? You snuffed the kids because they knew what you and Anderson were, and you couldn't take it. You loved him! Admit it, goddamn you!"

I moved forward, and Dusenberry raised his gun. It was two inches from my face with the trigger at half pull when I knew that attacking meant he was the winner; retreating meant I was. Smiling like Ross at his most stylish, speaking like Martin Plunkett at his most resolute, I said, "I used him, and I'll use you, and in the end I'll prevail."

Dusenberry lowered his weapon, and I held out my hands to be cuffed.

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From the New York Times*, February 4, 1984:*

Plunkett Trial Takes Only One Day; Legal and Investigatory Jockeying Continue

The trial of Martin Michael Plunkett, the admitted murderer of four Westchester County citizens, took only four hours yesterday, but the legal controversy surrounding him may be as complex and far-reaching as his trial was short—and a certain mystique regarding the man himself seems to be building.

Arrested in New Rochelle last September 13 for the knife slayings of Dominic De Nunzio, Madeleine Behrens, Rosemary Cafferty and Richard Liggett, Plunkett refused to speak to investigators, court-referred psychiatrists and the legal counsel appointed him. In fact, he spoke to no one and offered no written statement until two weeks before yesterday's trial, when he admitted the four killings in a notarized statement that directed investigators to the spots where he buried the murder weapons. Spurning legal aid, he repeated the statement to the presiding judge and jury yesterday, and was convicted on both his statement and the corresponding physical evidence. The jury convicted him after deliberating for only ten minutes, and Judge Felix Cansler handed down a sentence of four consecutive life terms without possibility of parole. Plunkett was then driven to Sing Sing Prison and placed in a protective custody cell, where he remains silent on the details of his four murders, and on everything else.

Plunkett was captured as the result of testimony given by another admitted killer, Ross Anderson, 33, formerly an officer with the Wisconsin State Police and the cousin of Mr. Liggett and Miss Cafferty. Facing trial in Wisconsin next week on three counts of rape and murder dating back to 1978 and 1979, Anderson was not called on to testify against Plunkett because federal authorities deemed it "logistically messy." Stanton J. Buckford, Chief Federal Prosecutor for the Metropolitan New York area, told reporters last week: "Had Plunkett not made his statement and backed it up with corroborative evidence, we would have needed Anderson's testimony. As it stands now, we won't need it. Anderson's testimony has to do with a murder he alleges Plunkett committed in Wisconsin back in '79, and since Plunkett will *most certainly receive the maximum sentence in New York, I do not want him traveling to Wisconsin—a non-death penalty state—just to get slapped with more time. The man is highly intelligent and extremely dangerous, and, I deem, a major escape risk. I want him to remain in maximum security in New York."*

The alleged Wisconsin murder brings up the Plunkett case's most pressing point—how many more people has Martin Plunkett killed? Since suspicion originally fell on him as the result of probes conducted by the F.B.I.'s Serial Killer Task Force, police officials all over America are asking themselves that question.

Inspector Thomas Dusenberry, the head of the Task Force and the officer credited with solving the Anderson and Plunkett string of homicides, thinks many more. "I would say that Plunkett has murdered at least forty people, and that his killings date back to San Francisco in 1974. I think he killed George and Paula Kurzinski in Sharon, Pennsylvania, in 1982, a famous unsolved case, and that when you count unreported disappearances, his killings may number as many as a hundred. You may think, with Plunkett in custody and legally buried, knowing exactly how many people he killed isn't important—but it is. For one thing, it would spare the loved ones of missing people untold anxiety to finally know their people are dead; and, most important, if homicides we make Plunkett for are still being actively investigated, we can close the investigations out and save many police man-hours. At the time I arrested him, Plunkett implied he would make all the facts regarding his killings known. I only hope he does it fast."

Municipal police departments in at least four states are building cases against Plunkett. The Aspen, Colorado, authorities suspect him of eight murder/disappearances in 1975 and 1976, and Utah, Nevada and Kansas police officials suspect him of another fifteen to twenty within their jurisdictions.

Inspector Dusenberry said last week: "I've shared my Plunkett data with every department that's requested it. They deserve to know what we have. But prosecutors are getting indictment-happy, and it's ridiculous. Without a confession from Plunkett, it's all just too cold. No witnesses. No evidence. I've talked to two men Plunkett sold murder victims' credit cards to years ago. They couldn't make a positive ID based on his current appearance. It's all too old and too vague, and, at bottom, it's motivated by outrage and personal ambition. Plunkett is going to be convicted in a non-death penalty state, and no New York judge is going to let him be extradited elsewhere and executed, as much as he deserves it, and as much as a lot of hungry D.A.'s would love to *fix it up."*

As for the Anderson case, the former policeman is set to go to trial next week in Wisconsin. He pleaded guilty at his arraignment, and is expected to receive the maximum sentence Wisconsin state law allows: three consecutive life terms. Anderson has admitted raping and killing women in four other states (two of them with the death penalty), and prosecutors in Kentucky, Iowa, South Carolina and Maryland are seeking legal loopholes to gain indictment warrants on.

Anderson himself has remained quiet about his crimes and his relationship with Plunkett, offering "no comment" through his attorney when queried by out-of-state police officials and district attorneys. "It's all in their hands," Inspector Dusenberry has said. "If one of them wants to talk, lots of people, including me, will be all ears."

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From the Milwaukee Post*, February 12, 1984:*

Anderson Convicted; Gets Life

Ross Anderson, the former Wisconsin State Police lieutenant who was also the killer known as the "Wisconsin Whipsaw" was convicted of the 1978–1979 rape-murders of Gretchen Weymouth, Mary Coontz and Claire Kozol in a brief trial held yesterday in Beloit District Court. Judge Harold Hirsch sentenced Anderson, 33, to three consecutive life terms without possibility of parole, directing that he be placed in an institution offering "full protective custody"—a term used to denote maximum security prisons that have special facilities for "high visibility" offenders, i.e., former police officers, celebrities and organized-crime figures who might be subject to attack if housed among the general inmate population.

After the verdict was handed down, Beloit D.A. Roger Mizrahi told reporters: "It's a disgrace. Three Wisconsin girls dead, and their killer spends the rest of his life playing golf at a country-club slammer."

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From the Editorial Page of the Milwaukee Journal*, March 3, 1984:*

The Wages of Murder?

Ross Anderson murdered seven people. His friend Martin Plunkett *murdered at least four people, and some policemen familiar with his case say without hesitation that his number of victims ends at about fifty. Both "men" had the good fortune to be convicted in states that do not allow capital punishment, and both men are such heinous criminals that they cannot be allowed to live with other criminals—for even hardened robbers and drug dealers would be so outraged by their presence on the prison yard that their safety would be jeopardized.*

So Ross Anderson, aka "Wisconsin Whipsaw" and "Four-State Hooker Hacker," languishes in a special protective custody facility, lifting weights, reading science-fiction novels and building expensive balsa-wood airplanes. The prisoner in the cell next to his is Salvatore DiStefano, the Cleveland Mafia underboss serving fifteen years on Racketeering charges. He and Anderson talk baseball through the bars for hours each day.

Martin Plunkett resides at Sing Sing Prison in Ossining, New York. He talks to no one, but is rumored to be considering writing his memoirs. He corresponds with various New York literary agents, all of whom are eager to peddle any book he writes. Offers from Hollywood—rumor has it that some studios have offered him as much as fifty thousand dollars for a twenty-page outline of his life—abound. Fifty thousand dollars divided by fifty victims comes down to a thousand dollars per head.

That's obscene.

Plunkett wouldn't be able to keep the money; New York State law prohibits convicted criminals from reaping the financial rewards of published or filmed accounts of their crimes, and Plunkett probably wouldn't care—since his arrest he has brilliantly manipulated the legal and media establishments into waiting for him to tell his story his *way. It is all he seems to want, and both well-intentioned legal people and literary voyeurs are drooling with anticipation.*

It's all obscene, and inimical to the American concepts of blind justice and punishment to fit the crime. It's all obscene and points out the perfidies of free speech carried to the extreme of license. It's all obscene and points to the need for a National Death Penalty Statute.

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From Thomas Dusenberry's Diary:

6/13/84

It's now nine months since I took Anderson and Plunkett off the streets. I've been busy with work—new links and chains—and with trying to reconstruct the two of them. Nothing's coming together with the former, and with the latter it's all coming bad.

Updating: Buckford was the brains behind prosecuting Plunkett. He built up a backlog of witnesses that never had to be tapped because of Plunkett's statement, and he laid down attack strategies for the lackluster Westchester D.A. He's got a big ace in the hole in the event other states ever secure extradition warrants: a series of Interstate Flight charges waiting, guaranteed to keep him in the limelight and Plunkett out of the chair. I feel ambivalent about the man and his machinations. He knows, and I know, that capital punishment is not a deterrent to violent crime, and the Southhampton aristocrat in him considers it vulgar. Fine, but he's also a comer in the Democratic Party, with a high-visibility racketeering strike-force job in the works, and he's looking to keep his liberal credentials untarnished for a Senate shot somewhere down the line. He's told me, and a half-dozen other agents, "America runs hot-cold, yin-yang, right-left, and the next time it hangs a left turn, I'll be there to hop on and make hay."

So Bucky Buckford's an opportunist, and I would be too, if I weren't so depressed. After the Anderson/Plunkett busts, I got a congratulatory telegram from the Director himself. He called my work "magnificent," and ended the telegram with a question: "Are you staying on active duty until the maximum retirement age?" In my reply I was noncommittal, even though the question was a veiled offer of an Assistant Directorship and maybe command of the entire Criminal Division.

Here's what all this ambivalence and depression is about:

I want to see Plunkett dead.

Anderson doesn't bother me like Plunkett does—he actually wept when we told him two of his cousins had been murdered. But Plunkett can't feel that, or feel anything past his own intransigence. I feel like justifying myself here, so I will. I'm not a vindictive man, I'm not a far-right ideologue, I can separate the need for justice from the lust for vengeance. And I'm not besieged by irrational guilt over not putting the Croton house under surveillance—I believed Anderson when he told me he hadn't seen Plunkett since '79. I still want Plunkett dead. I want him dead because he will never feel remorse or guilt or a moment's pain or ambivalence regarding the grief he has caused, and because he is now preparing to write his life story, bankrolled by a literary agent who will be the conduit for official police documents to help him tell it. I want him dead because he is exploiting what I most believe in in order to sate his own ego. I want him dead because now I don't wonder why anymore—I just *know*. Evil exists.

About a month before Plunkett's trial, Bucky Buckford and I had a confab with the Director. He told me I looked stressed out, and ordered me to take a vacation leave. Carol couldn't go because of her classes, so I went alone. Where did I go? Janesville, Wisconsin, and Los Angeles, where Anderson and Plunkett grew up. What did I learn? Nothing except what is *is*, and evil exists.

I talked to about forty people who knew them. Anderson coerced younger boys into homosexual acts and tortured animals when he was a teenager. Plunkett prowled around his neighborhood looking in windows. The marijuana trafficker Anderson shot and killed in the line of duty was an old friend turned enemy, and I'm certain it was premeditated. Plunkett's first killing almost certainly took place in San Francisco in '74—he was F.I. carded by the S.F.P.D. three days after a man and woman living across the street from him were ax-murdered. Checking over their school records, I found the all-American boy and a strange boy with a big brain, but no mention of anything like pivotal, life-forming trauma. Coming home, I got drunk on the plane and toasted the Dutch Reformed Church. Evil exists, prepackaged at birth, predestined in the womb. If Plunkett and Anderson are, as Doc Seidman suggests, sadistic homosexuals, then their passion is based not on love, but on evil recognizing fellow evil. Mom, Dad, Reverend Hilliker, John Calvin, you were right. Reluctantly I salute you.

Getting home, still half in the bag, I did something I've never done in twenty-four years of marriage. I prowled around in Carol's dresser. When I saw that her diaphragm wasn't in its case, I started throwing things. After I sobered up a bit, I picked them up, and Carol came home. She didn't say a word and I didn't ask a thing, and lately she's been so sweet and attentive that I still can't say a thing. Something has to happen with her soon, but I'm afraid that if I make the first move, I'll blow us out of the water.

Some final thoughts on Plunkett:

Sometimes I think the only thing good to come out of what he has taught me is a resolve to continue seeing evil as what it is. If my destiny is to become a prototypical hardball homicide cop, so be it. If the cost to my personal life is great, so be it. If Plunkett was a directional pointer from God, a prepackaged villain to keep me taking out killers, so be it. If the above is true, then I can reconcile the logical and methodical part of me with the new mystical and disillusioned part and move on.

The only thing about it that doesn't float is me. I'm almost fifty years old, and I doubt if I've got the energy to make myself cold and hard and driven. That's a young man's game—and Plunkett's.

27

June 15, 1984.

I was lying on my bunk when I heard movement on the catwalk in front of my cell. Thinking it was just another guard or administrator curious to see the silent killer in the flesh, I kept my eyes on the ceiling. Then I smelled alcohol, looked over and saw Dusenberry gripping the bars. “Talk to me,” he said.

I decided not to. I had broken my silence in the course of retaining my literary agent, and had spoken to key Sing Sing administrators along with him, but my F.B.I. pursuer drunk at two in the afternoon wasn’t worthy of repartee. I looked back at the ceiling and began brain-screening colors.

“Did you pork Anderson or did he pork you?”

The swirls I was seeing were soft pink and beige.

“Probably the latter. They’re out to get you, boy. Ronnie’s got the Supreme Court packed with hardballs. Colorado’s got a whole team of legal hotshots looking into ways to fry your ass.”

Dark tan and red now, blending softly.

“If you fry, you’ll never get to write your book. You’ll be forgotten.”

Tan and red into blue, deepening.

“Look at me, you fuck!”

Still deepening, the colors slowly separating, returning to their original shades, only prettier.

“I’ll never let you make me like you!”

Deeper, softer, prettier.

“Never, never, you fuck! Never be shit like you!”

Softer, prettier still as I heard the guards come and take Dusenberry away.

—

From Thomas Dusenberry’s diary:

6/19/84

What happened with Plunkett got back to the Director. He sent a reprimand via Bucky Buckford—Don't let it or anything like it happen again. Bucky advises a very low profile and some quick, spectacular results at the Task Force, even if I have to steal the credit from another agent. I can't do that, of course; it's too Plunkett-pragmatic.

I had it out with Carol last night. She admitted having an affair with one of her professors. I was calm until she started rationalizing why it happened. She had logical reasons for all of it, and when she started ticking them off, I hit her. She cried and I cried, and ten minutes later she's logical and rational again, telling me, "Tom, we can't go on like this."

I knew it before she did.

Some good news, if you can call it that: Anthony Joseph Anzerhaus, the Minneapolis child scalper, was shot and killed crossing the Mexican border into Texas yesterday. A border patrolman recognized him and went for his gun, and Anzerhaus reached for something under the seat. Thinking it was a weapon, the officer shot him. It wasn't a gun. It was a stuffed panda bear. Anzerhaus died cradling it like a baby.

I called Jim Schwartzwalder and gave him the news. He broke down, then his wife came to the phone and I repeated the story, asking her why Jim took it so hard. She said, "You don't want to know."

She's right, I don't.

What I do want to know is that someone decent can profit from my stalemate with Plunkett. Once I figure it out, and know it, I'll cut the evil bastard loose forever.

—

From the New York Times*, June 24, 1984:*

Head of Plunkett-Anderson Investigation Found Dead Near Home; Suicide Ruled

Quantico, Virginia, June 23:

Thomas D. Dusenberry, 49, the F.B.I. Inspector who served as head of the Bureau's Serial Killer Task Force and the agent responsible for the captures of multiple murderers Martin Plunkett and Ross Anderson, was found dead in the woods near his Quantico home yesterday. A .38-caliber revolver with a crudely made silencer attached was in his *right hand, and there was a single bullet wound in his head. Investigating officers found a suicide note in Dusenberry's handwriting on his dining room table, and the death has been officially certified as "self-inflicted homicide."*

F.B.I. officials expressed shock at Dusenberry's death, but offered no speculation as to why he took his own life. Quantico police revealed that along with the suicide note there were two checks for twenty-five thousand dollars each, made out by Dusenberry to his son and daughter. Dusenberry had told a colleague, Special Agent James Schwartzwalder, that he had sold a diary he had kept on the Plunkett case to a literary agent representing Martin Plunkett in the sale of his autobiography—for the amount of money he left his children.

"Tom told me about the deal three days ago," Agent Schwartzwalder told the Times. *"He seemed happy about it. I had no idea what he was planning."*

Dusenberry will be buried in a Dutch Reformed Church service next week. He is survived by his wife, Carol, 45; his son, Mark, 22; and his daughter, Susan, 23.

28

Save for this epilogue, my story is complete. I have been at Sing Sing for fourteen months; Dusenberry has been dead for nine. No extradition warrants have been filed on me, and there are sixty-two pins stuck in the map adorning my cell wall. I was thirty-seven yesterday.

Milton Alpert is reading the first pages of my manuscript in a cell directly across the catwalk from me. I have been observing him for an hour, and he looks frightened.

It's over now. I'm as dead and inanimate as the red-topped pins in my map. Looking back over these four-hundred-odd pages, I see that I was, by turns, frightened and enraged, bold and cowardly, vicious and possessed of a warrior's *noblesse oblige*. I fought and fled, and when I loved, my empathy was sparked by a will to power similar to my own. That he proved weak and traitorous is of no import; like all human beings, I cleaved to a comely lover who filled in my own blank spaces with grace, relinquishing parts of my will in sighs and embraces. Unlike most human beings, I did not let my desire destroy me. My last killings were for him, and I almost spared my final victim for him in a split-second's clarity, but in the end my will remained intact. I possessed the experience, but did not pay the ultimate price.

Others paid that price for me.

Taking their lives, I knew them in their most exquisite moments of existence. Cutting them down young, ardent and healthy, I assimilated brashness and sex that would have gone timid had I not usurped it for my own use. Part of it was to kill my nightmares and staunch my awful rage, and part of it was for the sheer thrill and high-voltage sense of power that murder gave me. I cannot summarize my drives in any greater perspective than that.

So you look for cause and effect; you partake of my brilliant memory and absolute candor and conclude what you will. Build mountains out of ellipses and bastions of logic from interpretations of the truth I have given you. And if I have gained your credibility by portraying myself honestly, frailties and all, then believe me when I tell you this: I have been to points of power and lucidity that cannot be measured by anything logical or mystical or human. Such was the sanctity of my madness.

It’s over now. I will not submit to the duration of my sentence. With this valediction in blood completed, my transit in human form has peaked, and to subsist past it is unacceptable. Scientists say that all matter disperses into unrecognizable but pervasive energy. I intend to find out, by turning myself inward and shutting down my senses until I implode into a space beyond all laws, all roadways, all speed limits. In some dark form, I will continue.

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James Ellroy

Hollywood Nocturnes

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"Ellroy can make the night world of sleaze and street monsters come alive on the page."

—*St. Louis Globe-Democrat*

James Ellroy
HOLLYWOOD NOCTURNES

James Ellroy was born in Los Angeles in 1948. His L.A. Quartet novels—*The Black Dahlia, The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential*, and *White Jazz*—were international bestsellers. *American Tabloid* was *Time*'s Novel of the Year for 1995; his memoir *My Dark Places* was a *Time* Best Book of the Year and a *New York Times* Notable Book for 1996; his most recent novel, *The Cold Six Thousand*, was a *New York Times* Notable Book and a *Los Angeles Times* Best Book of the Year for 2001. He lives on the California coast.

Books by James Ellroy

Destination: Morgue!

The Cold Six Thousand

Crime Wave

My Dark Places

American Tabloid

Hollywood Nocturnes

White Jazz

L.A. Confidential

The Big Nowhere

The Black Dahlia

Killer on the Road

Suicide Hill

Because the Night

Blood on the Moon

Clandestine

Brown’s Requiem

HOLLYWOOD NOCTURNES

James Ellroy

Vintage Books
A Division of Random House, Inc.
New York

FIRST VINTAGE BOOKS EDITION, JUNE 2007

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"Torch Number" copyright © 1990 by James Ellroy. First published in *Justice for Hire*, edited by Robert J. Randisi (Mysterious Press, 1990).

The Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress.

Vintage ISBN 9780307278791
Ebook ISBN 9780593312261

www.vintagebooks.com

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To Alan Marks

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OUT OF THE PAST

A man gyrating with an accordion—pumping his "Stomach Steinway" for all its worth.

My father pointing to the TV "That guy's no good. He's a draft dodger."

The accordion man in a grade Z movie: clinching with the blonde from the Mark C. Bloome tire ads.

—

Half-buried memories speak to me. Their origin remains fixed: L.A., my hometown, in the '50s. Most are just brief synaptic blips, soon mentally discarded. A few transmogrify into fiction: I sense their dramatic potential and exploit it in my novels, memory to moonshine in a hot second.

Memory: that place where personal recollections collide with history.

Memory: a symbiotic melding of THEN and NOW For me, the spark point of harrowing curiosities.

The accordion man is named Dick Contino.

"Draft Dodger" is a bum rap—he served honorably during the Korean War.

The Grade Z flick is *Daddy-O*—a music/hot rod/romance stinkeroo.

Memory is contextual: the juxtaposition of large events and snappy minutae.

In June of 1958 my mother was murdered. The killing went unsolved; I went to live with my father. I saw Dick Contino belt "Bumble Boogie" on TV, noted my father's opinion of him and caught *Daddy-O* at the Admiral Theatre a year or so later. Synapses snapped, crackled, popped; a memory was formed and placed in context. Its historical perspective loomed dark: women were strangled and spent eternity unavenged.

I was ten and eleven years old then; literary instincts simmered inchoately in me. My curiosities centered on crime: I wanted to know the WHY? behind hellish events. As time passed, contemporaneous malfeasance left me bored—the sanguinary '60s and '70s passed in a blur. My imagination zoomed back to the decade preceeding them, accompanied by a period soundtrack: golden oldies, Dick Contino slamming the accordion on the "Ed Sullivan Show."

In 1965 I got kicked out of high school and joined the Army. Everything about the Army scared me shitless—I faked a nervous breakdown and glommed an unsuitability discharge.

In 1980 I wrote *Clandestine*—a thinly disguised, chronologically altered account of my mother's murder. The novel is set in 1951; the hero is a young cop—and draft dodger—whose life is derailed by the Red Scare.

In 1987 I wrote *The Big Nowhere*. Set in 1950, the book details an Anti-Communist pogrom levelled at the entertainment biz.

In 1990 I wrote *White Jazz*. A major sub-plot features a grade Z movie being filmed on the same Griffith Park locales as *Daddy-O*.

Jung wrote: "What is not brought to consciousness comes to us as fate."

I should have seen Dick Contino coming a long time ago.

I didn't. Fate intervened, via photograph and video cassette.

A friend shot me the photo. Dig: it's me, age ten, on June 22, 1958. An L.A. Times photographer snapped the pic five minutes after a police detective told me that my mother had been murdered. I'm in minor-league shock: my eyes are wide, but my gaze is blank. My fly is at half mast; my hands look shaky. The day was hot: the melting Brylcream in my hair picks up flashbulb light.

The photo held me transfixed; its force transcended my many attempts to exploit my past for book sales. An underlying truth zapped me: my bereavement, even in that moment, was ambiguous. I'm already calculating potential advantages, regrouping as the officious men surrounding me defer to the perceived grief of a little boy.

I had the photograph framed, and spent a good deal of time staring at it. Spark point: late '50s memories re-ignited. I saw *Daddy-O* listed in a video catalog and ordered it. It arrived a week later; I popped it in the VCR.

Fuel-injected zoooom—

The story revolves around truck driver/drag racer/singer Phil "Daddy-O" Sandifer's attempts to solve the murder of his best friend, while laboring under the weight of a suspended driver's license. Phil's pals "Peg" and "Duke" want to help, but they're ineffectual—addled by too many late nights at the Rainbow Gardens—a post-teen-age doo wop spot where Phil croons for gratis on request. No matter: Daddy-O meets slinky Jana Ryan, a rich girl with a valid driver's license and a '57 T-Bird ragtop. Mutual resentment segues into a sex vibe; Phil and Jana team up and infiltrate a nightclub owned by sinister fat man Sidney Chillis. Singer Daddy-O, cigarette girl Jana: a comely and unstoppable duo. They quickly surmise that Chillis is pushing Big 'H', entrap him and nail the ectomorph for the murder of Phil's best friend. A hot rod finale; a burning question left unanswered: will Daddy-O's derring-do get him his driver's license back?

Who knows?

Who cares?

It took me three viewings to get the plot down anyway.

Because Dick Contino held me spellbound.

Because I knew—instinctively—that he held important answers.

Because I knew that he hovered elliptically in my "L.A. Quartet" novels, a phantom waiting to speak.

Because I sensed that he could powerfully spritz narrative detail and fill up holes in my memory, bringing Los Angeles in the late '50s into some sort of hyper-focus.

Because I thought I detected a significant mingling of his circa '57 on-and-off-screen personas, a brew that thirty-odd intervening years would forcefully embellish.

Contino on-screen: a handsome Italian guy, late twenties, big biceps from weights or making love to his accordion. Dreamboat attributes: shiny teeth, dark curly hair, engaging smile. It's the '50s so he's working at a sartorial deficit: pegger slacks hiked up to his pecs, horizontal-striped Ban-Lon shirts. He looks good and he can sing; he's straining on "Rock Candy Baby"—the lyrics suck and you can tell this up-tempo rebop isn't his style—but he croons the wah-wah ballad "Angel Act" achingly, full of baritone tremolos—quintessentially the pussy-whipped loser in lust with the "noir" goddess who's out to trash his life.

And he can act: he's an obvious natural, at ease with the camera. Dig: atrocious lines get upgraded to mediocre every time he opens his mouth.

And he's grateful to be top-lining *Daddy-O*—he doesn't condescend to the script, his fellow performers or lyrics like, "Rock Candy Baby, that's what I call my chick! Rock Candy Baby, sweeter than a licorice stick!"—even though my threadbare knowledge of his life tells me that he's already been to much higher places.

I decided to find Dick Contino.

I prayed for him to be alive and well.

I located a half dozen of his albums and listened to them, reveling in pure *Entertainment*.

"Live at the Fabulous Flamingo," "Squeeze Me," "Something for the Girls"—old standards arranged to spotlight accordion virtuosity. Main theme bombardments; sentiment so pure and timeless that it could soundtrack every moment of transcendent schmaltz that Hollywood has ever produced. Dick Contino, show-stopper on wax: zapping two keyboards, improvising cadenzas, shaking thunderstorms from bellows compression. Going from whisper to sigh to roar and back again in the length of time it takes to think: tell me what this man's life means and how it connects to my life.

I called my researcher friend Alan Marks. He caught my pitch on the first bounce. "The accordion guy? I think he used to play Vegas."

"Find out everything you can about him. Find out if he's still alive, and if he is, locate him."

"What's this about?"

"Narrative detail."

I should have said *containable* narrative detail—because I wanted Dick Contino to be a pad prowling/car crashing/moon howling/womanizing quasi-psychopath akin to the heroes of my books. I should have said, "Bring me information that I can control and exploit." I should have said, "Bring me a life that can be compartmentalized into the pitch dark vision of my first ten novels."

"What is not brought to consciousness comes to us as fate."

I should have seen the *real* Dick Contino coming.

—

Alan called me a week later. He'd located Contino in Las Vegas—"And he says he'll talk to you."

Before making contact, I charted the arc of two lives. A specific design was becoming clear—I wanted to write a novella featuring Dick Contino and the filming of *Daddy-O*—but a symbiotic pull was blunting my urge to get down to business, extract information and get out. I felt a recognition of my own fears binding me to this man: fear of failure, specific in nature and surmountable through hard work, and the very large fear that induces claustrophobic suffocation and causes golden young men to run from Army barracks: the terror that anything might happen, could happen, *will* happen.

A merging in fear; a divergence in action.

I joined the Army just as the Vietnam War started to percolate. My father was dying: I didn't want to stick around and watch. The Army terrified me—I calculated plausible means of escape. James Ellroy, age seventeen, fledgling dramatist: pulling off a frantic stuttering act designed to spotlight his unsuitability for military service.

It was a bravura performance. It got me a quick discharge and a return trip to L.A. and my passions: booze, dope, reading crime novels and breaking into houses to sniff women's undergarments.

Nobody ever called me a coward or a draft dodger—the Vietnam War was reviled from close to the get-go, and extricating yourself from its clutches was held laudable.

I *calculated* my way out—and of course my fears remained unacknowledged. And I wasn't a golden young man sky high on momentum and ripe for a public hanging.

I've led a colorful and media-exploitable life; my take on it has been picaresque—a stratagem that keeps my search for deeper meaning channelled solely into my books, which keeps my momentum building, which keeps my wolves of nothingness locked out of sight. Dick Contino didn't utilize my methods: he was a man of music, not of words, and he embraced his fears from the start. And he *continued*: the musicianship on his post-draft dodger beef albums dwarfs the sides he cut pre-'51. He continued, and so far as I could tell, the only thing that diminished was his audience.

I called Contino and told him I wanted to write about him. We had an affable conversation; he said, "Come to Vegas."

—

Contino met me at the airport. He looked great: lean and fit at sixty-three. His *Daddy-O* grin remained intact; he confirmed that his *Daddy-O* biceps came from humping his accordion.

We went to a restaurant and shot the shit. Our conversation was full of jump cuts—Dick's recollections triggered frequent digressions and circuitous returns to his original anecdotal points. We discussed Las Vegas, the Mob, serving jail time, lounge acts, Howard Hughes, Korea, Vietnam, *Daddy-O*, L.A. in the '50s, fear and what you do when the audience dwindles.

I told him that the best novels were often not the best selling novels; that complex styles and ambiguous stories perplexed many readers. I said that while my own books sold quite well, they were considered too dark, densely plotted and relentlessly violent to be chart toppers.

Dick asked me if I would change the type of book I write to achieve greater sales—I said, "No." He asked me if I'd change the type of book I write if I knew that I'd taken a given style or theme as far as it could go—I said, "Yes." He asked me if the real-life characters in my books ever surprise me—I said, "No, because my relationship to them is exploitative."

I asked him if he consciously changed musical directions after his career got diverted post-Korea. He said, yes and no—he kept trying to cash in on trends until he realized that at best he'd be performing music that he didn't love, and at worst he'd be playing to an audience he didn't respect.

I said, "The work is the thing." He said, yes, but you can't cop an attitude behind some self-limiting vision of your own integrity. You can't cut the audience out of its essential enjoyment—you have to give them some schmaltz to hold on to.

I asked Dick how he arrived at that. He said his old fears taught him to like people more. He said fear thrives on isolation, and when you cut down the wall between you and the audience, your whole vision goes wide.

I checked in at my hotel and shadow-boxed with the day's revelations. It felt like my world had tilted toward a new understanding of my past. I kept picturing myself in front of an expanding audience, armed with new literary ammunition: the knowledge that Dick Contino would be the hero of the sequel to the book I'm writing now.

Dick Contino's Blues was blasting its way into my consciousness. It seemed to be coming from somewhere far outside my volition.

Dick and I met for dinner the next night. It was my forty-fifth birthday; I felt like I was standing at the bedrock center of my life.

Dick played me a be-bop "Happy Birthday" on his accordion. The old chops were still there—he zipped on and off the main theme rapidamente.

We split for the restaurant. I asked Dick if he would consent to appear as the hero of a novella and my next novel.

He said yes, and asked what the books would be about. I said, "Fear, courage and heavily compromised redemptions."

He said, "Good, I think I've been there."

The night was cold; Las Vegas neon eclipsed every star overhead. The sky seemed to expand as I wondered what this time and place meant.

DICK CONTINO’S BLUES

I’m enjoying a half-assed Renaissance these days.

Some dago festa gigs, some lounge work. A gooood spot on an AIDS Telethon—my “Lady of Spain” reprise goosed ten grand in contributions and got me a surreptitious blow job from a college girl working the phone lines. *Daddy-O* was released on video, and film critics hooked on ’50s kitsch have been bugging me for interviews.

Their questions have my memory turning cartwheels. It’s ’58 again—I’m an accordionist/singer top-lining a “B” flick for chump change. Did you write “Rock Candy Baby” and “Angel Act” yourself? Did you pour the pork to your co-star, that blonde from the Mark C. Bloome tire ads? Who did your wardrobe, who did your stunts—how’d you get that ’51 Ford airborne, the fuzz in hot pursuit—the footage looked real, but hastily spliced in.

I always try to answer truthfully.

I always write off the leaping car as movie magic.

In all candor, I made that supercharged/dual-quad/cheater-slicked motherfucker FLY. There’s a story behind it—my loving farewell to L.A. back then.

1.

I was bombing.

Atom bombing: sweaty hands, shakes pending. My back-up combo sounded off-sync—I knew it was me, jumping ahead of the beat. BIG ROOM FEAR grabbed my nuts; headlines screamed:

"Contino Tanks Lackluster Crowd at Crescendo!"

"Contino Lays Pre-Easter Egg at Sunset Strip Opening!"

"Bumble Boogie" to "Ciribiribin"—a straight-for-the-jugular accordion segue. I put my whole body into a bellows shake; my brain misfired a message to my fingers. My fingers obeyed—I slammed out the "Tico-Tico" finale. Contagious misfires: my combo came in with a bridge theme from "Rhapsody in Blue."

I just stood there.

House lights snapped on. I saw Leigh and Chrissy Staples, Nancy Ankrum, Kay Van Obst. My wife, my friends—plus a shitload of first nighters oozing shock.

"Rhapsody in Blue" fizzled out behind me. BIG ROOM FEAR clutched my balls and SQUEEZED.

I tried patter. "Ladies and gentlemen, that was 'Dissonance Jump,' a new experimental twelve-tone piece."

My friends yukked. A geek in a Legionnaire cunt cap yelled, "Draft Dodger!"

Instant silence—big room loud. I froze on Joe Patriot: booze-flushed, Legion cap, Legion armband. My justification riff stood ready: I went to Korea, got honorably discharged, got pardoned by Harry S Truman.

No, try this: "Fuck you. Fuck your mother. Fuck your dog."

The Legionnaire froze. I froze. Leigh froze behind a smile that kissed off two grand a week, two weeks minimum.

The whole room froze.

Cocktail debris pelted me: olives, ice, whisky sour fruit. My accordion dripped maraschino cherries—I slid it off and set it down behind some footlights.

My brain misfired a message to my fists: kick Joe Patriot's ass.

I vaulted the stage and charged him. He tossed his drink in my face; pure grain spirits stung my eyes and blinded me. I blinked, sputtered, and swung haymakers. Three missed; one connected—the impact made me wah-wah quiver. My vision cleared—I thought I'd see Mr. America dripping teeth.

I was wrong.

Joe Legion—gone. In his place, cut cheekbone-deep by my rock-encrusted guinea wedding ring: Cisco Andrade, the world's #1 lightweight contender.

Sheriff's bulls swarmed in and fanned out. Backstopping them: Deputy Dot Rothstein, 200+ pounds of bull dyke with the hots for my friend Chris Staples.

Andrade said, "You dumb son-of-a-bitch."

I just stood there.

My eyes dripped gin; my left hand throbbed. The Crescendo main room went phantasmagoric:

There's Leigh: juking the cops with "Dick Contino, Red Scare Victim" rebop. There's the Legionnaire, glomming my sax man's autograph. Dot Rothstein's sniffing the air—my drummer just ducked backstage with a reefer. Chrissy's giving Big Dot a wide berth—they worked a lezbo entrapment gig once—Dot's had a torch sizzling ever since.

Shouts. Fingers pointed my way. Mickey Cohen with his bulldog Mickey Cohen, Jr.—snout deep in a bowl of cocktail nuts. Mickey, Sr., nightclub Jesus—slipping the boss deputy a cash wad.

Andrade squeezed my ratched-up hand—I popped tears. "You play your accordion at my little boy's birthday party. He likes clowns, so you dress up like Chucko the Clown. You do that and we're even."

I nodded. Andrade let my hand go and dabbed at his cut. Mickey Cohen cruised by and spieled payback. "My niece is having a birthday party. You think you could play it? You think you could dress up like Davy Crockett with one of those coonskin caps?"

I nodded. The fuzz filed out—a deputy flipped me the bird and muttered, "Draft Dodger."

Mickey Cohen, Jr., sniffed my crotch. I tried to pet him—the cocksucker snapped at me.

—

Leigh and Chris met me at Googie's. Nancy Ankrum and Kay Van Obst joined us—we packed a big booth full.

Leigh pulled out her scratch pad. "Steve Katz was furious. He made the bookkeeper pro-rate your pay down to one half of one show for one night."

My hand throbbed—I grabbed the ice out of Chrissy's water glass. "Fifty scoots?"

"Forty and change. They counted it down to the penny."

Demons hovered: Leigh's obstetrician, the Yeakel Olds repo man. I said, "They don't repossess babies."

"No, but they do repossess three month delinquent Starfire 88's. Dick, did you *have* to get the Continental Kit, 'Kustom King' interior, and that hideous accordion hood ornament?"

Chrissy: "It was an Italian rivalry thing. Buddy Greco's got a car like that, so Dick had to have one."

Kay: "My husband has an 88. He said the 'Kustom King' interior is so soft that he almost fell asleep once on the San Bernardino Freeway."

Nancy: "Chester Boudreau, one of my *favorite* sex killers of all time, preferred Oldsmobiles. He said Oldsmobiles had a bulk that children found comforting, so it was easy to lure kids into them."

Right on cue: my three-girl chorus. Chrissy sang with Buddy Greco and sold Dexedrine; Nancy played trombone in Spade Cooley's all-woman band and pen-palled with half the pervs in San Quentin. Kay: National President of the Dick Contino Fan Club. We go back to my Army Beef: Kay's husband Pete bossed the Fed team that popped me for desertion.

Our food arrived. Nancy talked up the "West Hollywood Whipcord"—some fiend who'd strangled two lovebird duos parked off the Strip—just blocks away. Chris boo-hooed my Crescendo fracas and bemoaned the end of Buddy's Mocombo stand two weeks hence.

Nancy interrupted her: Whipcord mania had her by the shorts. She was laying odds already: the Whipcord would reign as 1958's #1 psycho-killer.

Leigh let me read her eyes:

Your friends co-sign your bullshit, but I won't.

Your display of manly pique cost us four grand.

You fight the COWARD taint with your fists, you must make it worse.

Radioactive eyes—I evaded them via small talk. "Chrissy, did you catch Dot Rothstein checking you out?"

Chris choked down a hunk of Reuben Sandwich. "Yes, and it's been *five years* since the Barbara Graham gig."

"Barbara Graham" tweaked Nan the Ghoul. I elaborated: "Chrissy was doing nine months in the Woman's Jail downtown when Barbara Graham was there."

Nancy, breathless: "*And*?"

"And she just happened to be in the cell next to her's."

"*And*?"

Chris jumped in. "Quit talking about me like I'm not here."

Nancy: "*And*?"

"And I was doing nine months for passing forged Dilaudid prescriptions.

Dot was the matron on my tier, and she was smitten by me, which I consider a testimonial to her good taste. Barbara Graham and those partners of hers, Santo and Perkins, had just been arrested for the Mabel Monohan killing. Barbara kept protesting that she was innocent, and the D.A.'s Office was afraid that a jury might believe her. Dot heard a rumor that Barbara went lez whenever she did jail time, and she got this brainstorm to have me cozy up to Barbara in exchange for a sentence reduction. I agreed, but stipulated no sapphic contact. The D.A.'s Office cut a deal with me, but I couldn't get Barbara to admit anything vis-a-goddamn-vis the night of March 9, 1953. We exchanged mildly flirtatious napkin notes, which Dot sold to *Hush-Hush Magazine*, and they published with my name deleted. I got my sentence reduction and Barbara got the gas chamber, and Dot Rothstein's got herself convinced that I'm a lezzie. She still sends me Christmas cards. Have *you* ever gotten a lipstick smeared Christmas card from a two hundred pound diesel dyke?"

The whole booth howled. Kay squealed with her mouth full—some club soda spritzed out and hit Leigh. A flashbulb popped—I spotted Danny Getchell and a *Hush-Hush* camera jockey.

Getchell spritzed headlines: " 'Accordion Ace Activates Lethal Left Hook at Crescendo Fistfest.' 'Draft Dodger Taunt Torches Torrid Temper Tantrum.' 'Quo Vadis, Dick Contino?—Comeback Crumbles in Niteclub Crack-Up.' "

Nancy walked back to the pay phones. I said, "Danny, this is publicity I don't need."

"Dick, I disagree. Look at what that marijuana contretemps did for Bob Mitchum. I think this portrays you as a good-looking, hotheaded gavonne who's probably—excuse me, ladies—got a schvanze that's a yard long."

I laughed. Danny said, "If I'm lyin', I'm flyin'. Seriously, Dick, and again, excuse me, ladies, but this makes you look like you've got a yard of hard pipe and you're not afraid to show it."

I laughed. Leigh sent up a silent prayer: save my husband from this scandal rag provocateur.

Nancy shot me a whisper. "I just talked to Ella Mae Cooley. Spade's been beating her up again…and…Dick…you're the only one who can calm him down."

—

I drove out to Spade Cooley's ranch. Rain slashed my windshield; I tuned in Hunter Hancock's All-Request Show. The gang at Google's got a call through: Dick Contino's "Yours" hit the airwaves.

The rain got worse; the chrome accordion on my hood cut down visibility. I accelerated and synced bio-thoughts to music.

Late '47, Fresno: I glommed a spot on Horace Heidt's radio program.

Amateur night stuff—studio audience/applause meter—I figured I'd play "Lady of Spain," lose to some local babe Heidt was banging and go on to college.

I won.

Bobby-soxers swarmed me backstage.

I turned eighteen the next month. I kept winning—every Sunday night—weeks running. I beat singers, comics, a Negro trombonist and a blind vibraphone virtuoso. I shook, twisted, stomped, gyrated, flailed, thrashed, genuflected, wiggled, strutted and banged my squeeze box like a dervish orbiting on Benzedrine, maryjane and glue. I pelvis-popped and pounded pianissimos; I cascaded cadenzas and humped harmonic hurricanes until the hogs hollered for Hell—straight through to Horace Heidt's grand finals. I became a national celebrity, toured the country as Heidt's headliner, and went solo BIG.

I played BIG ROOMS. I cut records. I broke hearts. Screen tests, fan clubs, magazine spreads. Critics marvelled at how I hipsterized the accordion—I said all I did was make schmaltz look sexy. They said where'd you learn to *move* like that?—I lied and said I didn't know.

The truth was:

I've always been afraid.

I've always conjured terror out of thin air.

Music and movement are incantations that help keep it formless.

1949, 1950—flying high on fame and callow good fortune. Early '51: FORM arrives via draft notice.

FORM: day sweats, night sweats, suffocation fears. Fear of mutilation, blindness, cancer, vivisection by rival accordionists. 24-hour heebie jeebies; nightclub audiences packing shrouds. Music inside my head: jackhammers, sirens, Mixmasters stripping gears.

I went to the Mayo Clinic; three headshrinkers stamped me unfit for Army service. My draft board wanted a fourth opinion and sent me to their on-call shrink. He contradicted the Mayo guys—my I-A classification stood firm.

I was drafted and sent to Ford Ord. FORM: the Reception Station barracks compressed in on me. My heart raced and sent live-wire jolts down my arms. My feet went numb; my legs fluttered and dripped sweat. I bolted, and caught a bus to Frisco.

AWOL, Federal fugitive—my desertion made front page news.

I trained down to L.A. and holed up at my parents' house. Reporters knocked—my dad sent them away. TV crews kept a vigil outside. I talked to a lawyer, worked up a load of show biz panache and turned myself in.

My lawyer tried to cut a deal—the U.S. Attorney wasn't buying. I took a daily flailing from the Hearst rags: "Accordion Prima Donna Suffers Stage Fright at Fort Ord Opening," "Coward," "Traitor," "Yellow Belly," "Chicken-

Hearted Heartthrob." "Coward," "Coward," "Coward."

My BIG ROOM bookings were cancelled.

I was bound over for trial in San Francisco.

Fear:

Bird chirps made me flinch. Rooms closed in coffin-tight the second I entered them.

I went to trial. My lawyer proffered Mayo depositions; I detailed my fear on the witness stand. The press kept resentment fires stoked: I had it all, but wouldn't serve my country. My response went ignored: so take away my fucking accordion.

The judge found me guilty and sentenced me: six months in the Federal pen at McNeil Island, Washington.

I did the time. I put on a sadistic face to deter butt-fuckers. Accordion slinging gave me big muscles—I hulked and popped my biceps. Mickey Cohen, in for income tax evasion, befriended me. My daily routine: yard trusty work, squeeze-box impromptus. Ingratiating showman/psycho con—a schizophrenic performance that got me through my sentence unmolested.

Released—January, '52. Slinking/creeping/crawling anxiety: *what happens next*?

Winter '52—one big publicity watch. Big "Contino Out of Jail" coverage—most of it portrayed me as a coward case-hardened by prison.

Residual fear: would I now be drafted?

Winter '52—no gigs, BIG ROOM or otherwise. My draft notice arrived—this time I played the game.

Basic training, communications school, Korea. Fear back-burner-boogied; I served in a Seoul-based outfit and rose from private to staff sergeant. Acceptance/taunts/shoving matches. Resentment oozing off guys who envied what they thought I'd come home to.

I came home to tapped-out momentum and DRAFT DODGER in red-bait neon. I received an unsolicited presidential pardon—my COWARD taint rendered it toilet paper. I became a vanishing act: BIG ROOM stints replaced by lounge gigs; national TV shots down-graded into local stuff. Fear and I played peek-a-boo—it always seemed to grab my balls and twist just when it felt like something inside me could banish all the bullshit forever.

—

I hit Victorville. L.A. radio had faded out—I'd been listening to shitkicker ditties. Apt: I pulled up to the Cooley ranchhouse soundtracked by Spade's own, "Shame, Shame on You."

The porch reeked: marijuana and sourmash fumes. TV glow lit up windows bluish-gray.

The door stood ajar. I pressed the buzzer—hillbilly chimes went off. Dark inside—the TV screen made shadows bounce. George Putnam spritzed late local news: "…the fiend the Los Angeles County Sheriff's have dubbed the 'West Hollywood Whipcord' claimed his third and fourth victims last night. The bodies of Thomas 'Spike' Knode, 47, an out-of-work movie Stuntman, and his fiancee Carol Matusow, 19, a stenographer, were discovered locked in the trunk of Knode's car, parked on Hilldale Drive a scant block north of the Sunset Strip. Both were strangled with a sash cord and bludgeoned post-mortem with a bumperjack found in the back seat. The couple had just come from the Mocombo nightclub, where they had watched entertainer Buddy Greco perform. Authorities report that they have no clues as to the slayer's identity, and—"

A ratchet noise—metal on metal. That unmistakable drawl: "From the size of your shadow, I'd say it's Dick Contino."

"It's me."

Ratch/ratch—trigger noise—Spade loved to get zorched and play with guns.

"I should tell Nancy 'bout that 'Whipcord' sumbitch. She just might find herself a new pen pal."

"She already knows about him."

"Well…I'm not surprised. And this old dog, well…he knows how to put things together. My Ella Mae got a call from Nancy, and two hours later Mr. Accordion himself shows up. Heard you tanked at the Crescendo, boy. Ain't that always the way it is when proving yourself runs contrary to your own best interests?"

A lamp snapped on. Dig it: Spade Cooley in a cowboy hat and sequin-studded chaps—packing two holstered six-guns.

I said, "Like you and Ella Mae. You beg her for details on her old shack jobs, then you beat her up when she plays along."

Fluttering flags replaced George Putnam—KTTV signing off for the night. The National Anthem kicked in—I doused the volume. Spade slumped low in his chair and drew down on me. "You mean I shouldn't have asked her if those John Ireland and Steve Cochran rumors were true?"

"You're dying to torture yourself, so tell me."

Spade twirled his guns, popped the cylinders and spun them. Two revolvers, ten empty slots, one bullet per piece.

"So tell me, Spade."

"The rumors were true, boy. Would I be sittin' here in this condition if those dudes were any less than double-digit bulls?"

I laughed.

I roared.

I howled.

Spade put both guns to his head and pulled the triggers.

Two loud clicks—empty chambers.

I stopped laughing.

Spade did it again.

Click/click—empty chambers.

I grabbed for the guns. Spade shot ME twice—empty chambers.

I backed into the TV A leg brushed the volume dial—the Star Spangled Banner went very loud, then very soft.

Spade said, "You could have died hearing your country's theme song, which might have gotten you the posthumous approval of all them patriotic groups that don't like you so much. And you also could have died not knowing that John Ireland had to tape that beast of his to his leg when he wore swimming trunks."

A toilet flushed upstairs. Ella Mae yelled, "Donnell Clyde Cooley, quit talking to yourself or God knows who, and come to bed!"

Spade aimed both guns at her voice and pulled the triggers.

Two empty chambers.

Four down per piece, two to go—50-50 odds next time. Spade said, "Dick, let's get blotto. Get me a fresh bottle from the kitchen."

I walked to the bathroom and checked the medicine cabinet. Yellow Jackets on a shelf—I emptied two into a glass and flushed the rest. Kitchen recon—a Wild Turkey quart atop the ice box.

I dumped it down the sink—all but three finger's worth.

Loose .38 shells on a shelf—I tossed them out the window.

Spade's maryjane stash—right where it always was in the sugar bowl.

I poured it down the sink and chased it with Drano.

Spade yelled, "I am determined to shoot somebody or something tonight!"

I swirled up a cocktail: bourbon, Nembutal, buttermilk to kill the barbiturate taste. Spade yelled, "Go out to your car and get your accordion, and I'll put it out of its misery!"

On the breakfast table: a TV remote-control gizmo.

I grabbed it.

Back to Spade. On cue: he put down one gun and grabbed his drink. One six-shooter on the floor—I toed it under his chair.

Spade twirled gun #2.

I stood *behind* the chair. Spade said, "I wonder if John used masking tape or friction tape."

Blip, blip—I pushed remote-control buttons. Test pattern, test pattern, Rock Hudson and Jane Wyman in some hankie epic.

I nudged Spade. "I heard Rock Hudson's hung like a horse. I heard he put the make on Ella Mae back when she played clarinet on your old Hoffman Hayride Show.”

Spade said, “Ixnay—Rock’s a fruit. I heard he plays skin flute with some quiff on the Lawrence Welk program.”

Shit—no bite. Blip, blip, Caryl Chessman fomenting from his death row cell. “Now there’s your double-digit dude, Spade. That cat is legendary in criminal annals—Nancy Ankrum told me so herself.”

“Nix. Shitbird criminals like that are always underhung. I read it in Argosy Magazine.”

Blip, blip, blip—beaucoup test patterns. Blip, blip, blip—test drive the new ’58 Chevy, Ford, Rambler, et fucking al. Blip—Senator John F. Kennedy talking to reporters.

Spade pre-empted me. “Hung like a cashew. Gene Tierney told me he screws from hunger. Hung like a cricket, and he expects a standing ovation for a two-minute throw.”

Blip—more West Hollywood Whipcord re-bop.

Shit—running out of channels. Blip—an American Legion chaplain with 2:00 A.M. prayers.

“…and as always, we ask for the strength to oppose our Communist adversary at home and abroad. We ask—”

Spade said, “This is for Dick Contino,” raised his gun and fired. The TV screen imploded—wood splintered, tubes popped, glass shattered.

Spade passed out on the floor rag doll limp.

TV dust formed a little mushroom cloud.

I carried Spade upstairs and laid him down in bed next to Ella Mae. Cozy: inside seconds they were snoring in unison. I remembered Fresno, Christmas ’47—I was young, she was lonely, Spade was in Texas.

Keep it hush-hush, dear heart—for both our sakes.

I walked out to my car. February 12, 1958—what an all-time fucker of a night.

2.

Bad sleep left me fried—hung over from my rescue run.

The baby woke me up. I'd been dreaming: I was on trial for Crimes Against Music. The judge said the accordion was obsolete; a studio audience applauded. Dig my jury: Mickey Cohen's dog, Jesus Christ, Cisco Andrade.

Leigh had coffee and aspirin ready. Ditto the A.M. *Mirror*, folded to the entertainment page.

"Brawl Deep-Sixes Contino Opening. Nightclub Boss Calls Accordion King 'Damaged Goods'."

The phone rang—I grabbed it. "Who's this?"

"Howard Wormser, your agent, who just lost ten percent of your Crescendo money *and* ten percent of your sixty-day-stand at the Flamingo Lounge. Vegas called early, Dick. They get the L.A. papers early, and they don't like to sit on bad news."

A *Mirror* sub-head: Draft Dodger Catcalls Plague Fading Star. "I was busy last night, or I would have seen this coming."

"Seeing things coming is not your strong suit. You *should* have accepted Sam Giancana's invitation to be on call for Chicago Mob gigs, and if you did you'd be playing big rooms today. You *should* have testified before that grand jury and named some Commies. You *should*—"

"I don't know any Commies."

"No, but you *could* have gotten a few names from the phone book to make yourself look good."

"Get me some movie work, Howard. Get me a movie gig where I can sing a few songs and get the girl."

Howard sighed. "There is a certain wisdom to that, since young snatch *is* your strong suit. I'll look into it. In the meantime, play a few bar mitzvahs or something and stay out of trouble."

"Can you get me a few bar mitzvahs?"

"That was just a figure of speech. Dick, be calm. I'll call when I've got you ninety percent of something."

Click—one abrupt hang-up faded into noise outside—brake squeals, gear crunch. I checked the window—fuck—a tow-truck had my bar bumper-locked.

I ran out. A man in a Teamster T-shirt held his hands up. “Mr. Contino, this wasn’t my idea. I’m just a poor out of work union man with a family. Bob Yeakel said to tell you enough is enough, he read the papers this morning and saw the writing on the wall.”

The bumper winch ratched my trunk open. Record albums flew out—I grabbed an *Accordion in Paris*.

“What’s your name?”

“Uh…Bud Brown.”

I pulled the pen off his clipboard and scrawled on the album cover. “To Bud Brown, out-of-work union man, from Dick Contino, out-of-work entertainer. Dear Bud: why are you fucking with my beautiful Starfire 88, when I’m just a working stiff like you? I know that the evil McClellan Committee is harassing your heroic leader Jimmy Hoffa, in much the same way I was harassed during the Korean War, and thus you and I share a bond that you are trespassing on in your current scab status. Please do not fuck with my beautiful Starfire 88—I need it to look for work.”

The tow-truck driver applauded. Bud Brown fisheyed me—my McClellan shtick hit him weird.

“Mr. Contino, like I said, I’m sorry.”

I pointed to the albums.

“I’ll donate those to your Teamster Local. I’ll autograph them. You can sell them yourself and keep the money. All I’m asking is that you let me drive this car out of here and hide it somewhere.”

Raps on the kitchen window—Leigh holding baby Merri up. Brown said, “Mr. Contino, that’s fighting dirty.”

Worth the fight: my baby blue/white-wall tired/fox-tail-antennaed sweetie. Sunlight on the accordion hood hanger—I almost swooned.

“Have you guys got kids with birthdays coming up? I’ll perform for free, I’ll dress up like a—”

The tow-truck radio crackled; the driver listened and rogered the call. “That was Mr. Yeakel. He says Mr. Contino should meet him at the showroom pronto, that maybe they can work out a deal on his delinquent.”

—

“…and you know I’ve got my own TV show, ‘Rocket to Stardom.’ My brothers and I do our own commercials and give amateur Angeleno talent a chance to reach for the moon and haul down a few stars. We put on a show here at the lot every Sunday, and KCOP broadcasts it. We dish out free hot dogs and soda pop, sell some cars and let the talent perform. We usually get a bunch of hot dog scroungers hanging around—I call them the 'Yeakel Yokels.' They applaud for the acts, and whoever gets the most applause wins. I've got a meter rigged up—sort of like that thingamajig you had on the Heidt Show."

Bob Yeakel: tall, blond, pitchman shrill. His desk: covered with memo slips held down by chrome hubcaps.

"Let me guess. You want me to celebrity M.C. one of your shows, in exchange for which I get to keep my car free and clear."

Yeakel yuk-yuk-yukked. "No, Dick, more along the lines of you produce *and* celebrity M.C. at least *two* shows, *and* perform at the Oldsmobile Dealers of America Convention, *and* spend some afternoons here at the lot auditioning acts and bullshitting with the customers. In the meantime, you get to keep your car, and we stop the clock on your delinquent interest payments, but not on the base sum itself. Then, if 'Rocket to Stardom''s ratings zoom, I might just let you have that car free and clear."

"Is that *all* I have to do?"

Yuk-yuk-yuk. "No. You also have to pitch all your potential contestants on the '58 Oldsmobile line. And no jigaboos or beatniks, Dick. I run a clean family show."

"I'll do it if you throw in two hundred a week."

"A hundred and fifty, but off-the-books with no withholding."

I stuck my hand out.

—

Work:

The Oldsmobile Dealers Convention at the downtown Statler. Dig it: five hundred car hucksters and a busload of hookers chaperoned by a VD. doctor. Bob Yeakel opened for me—shtick featuring "Peaches, The Drag Queen With An Overbite." Chris Staples sang, "You Belong to Me," and "Baby, Baby, All the Time"—Yeakel ogled her and cracked jokes about her "Tail Fins." I killed the booze-fried crowd with a forty-minute set and closed with the "Rocket to Stardom" theme song.

Work:

Birthday parties—Cisco Andrade's son, Mickey Cohen's niece. The Cisco gig was East L.A. SRO—Mex fighters and their families wowed by Dick Contino as "Chucko the Birthday Clown." Degrading?—yeah—but the guests shot me close to a C-note in tips. The Cohen job was more swank: a catered affair at Mickey's pad. Check the guest list: Lana Turner and Johnny Stompanato, Mike Romanoff, Moe Dalitz, Meyer Lansky, Julius La Rosa, and the Reverend Wesley Swift—who explained that Jesus Christ was an Aryan, not a Jew, and that *Mein Kampf* was the lost book of the Bible. No gratuities, but Johnny Stomp kicked loose two dozen cases of Gerber's Baby Food—he bankrolled a fur van hijack, and his guys hit the wrong truck.

Work—long days at the Yeakel Olds lot.

I called the girls in to help me: Leigh, Chrissy, Nancy Ankrum, Kay Van Obst. Word spread quick: Mr. Accordion and female coterie LIVE at Oldsmobile showroom!

We bullshitted with browsers and referred hard prospects to salesmen; we spritzed the '58 Olds line-up non-stop. We grilled burgers on a hibachi and fed the mechanics and Bud Brown and his repo crew.

Nancy, Kay and Leigh screened "Rocket to Stardom" applicants—I wanted to weed out the more egregious geeks before I began formal auditions. Bob Yeakel drooled whenever Chris Staples slinked by—I convinced him to put her on payroll as my assistant. Grateful Chrissy gave Bob a thank-you gift: her *Nugget Magazine* fold-out preserved via laminated wall plaque.

My Yeakel run nine days in: a righteous fucking blast.

Nine days sans "Draft Dodger" jive—some kind of Contino world record.

We held auditions in a tent behind the lube rack; Bud Brown stood watchdog to keep obvious lunatics out. The girls had compiled a list: forty-odd individuals and acts to be winnowed down to six spots per show.

Our first finalist: an old geezer who sang grand opera. I asked him to belt a few bars of *Pagliacci*; he said that he possessed the world's largest penis. He whipped it out before I could comment—it was of average length and girth. Chrissy applauded anyway—she said it reminded her of her ex-husband's.

Bud hustled the old guy out. Pops was gone—but he'd set a certain tone.

Check this sampling:

Two roller skating bull terriers—sharklike dogs with plastic fins attached to their backs. Their master was a Lloyd Bridges lookalike—the whole thing was a goof on the TV show "Sea Hunt."

Nix.

An off-key woman accordionist who tried to slip me her phone number with Leigh right there.

Nix.

A comic with patter on Ike's golf game—epic Snoresville.

Nix.

A guy who performed silk scarf tricks. Deft and boring: he cinched sashes into hangman's knots.

Nix.

Over two dozen male and female vocalists: flat, screechy, shrill, hoarse—dud Presley and Patti Page would-be's.

A junkie tenor sax, who nodded out halfway through a flubbed-note "Body and Soul." Bud Brown dumped him in a demo car; the fucker woke up convulsing and kicked the windshield out. Chrissy summoned an ambulance;

the medics hustled the hophead off.

I confronted Nancy. She said, “You should have seen the ones that *didn’t* make the cut. I wish the ‘West Hollywood Whipcord’ had a viable talent—it would be fun to put him on the show.”

Only Nancy found sash cord strangling/bumperjack bashing fiends alluring.

I braced Bud Brown. “Bud, the show’s forty-eight hours off, and we’ve got nobody.”

“This happens sometimes. When it does, Bob calls Pizza De-Luxe.”

“What—”

“Ask Bob.”

I walked into Yeakel’s office. Bob was eyeballing his wall plaque: Miss Nugget, June ’54.

“What’s Pizza De-Luxe?”

“Are your auditions going *that* bad?”

“I’m thinking of calling those roller skating dogs back. Bob, what’s—”

“Pizza De-Luxe is a prostitution racket. An ex-Jack Dragna goon who owns a greasy spoon called the Pizza Pad runs it. He delivers pizza 24 hours a day legit, and if you want a girl or a dicey boy on the side, a male or female prostitute will make the delivery. All of the hookers are singers or dancers or Hollywood riff-raff like that, you know, selling some skin to make ends meet until they get their so-called ‘big break.’ So…if I get strapped for decent contestants, I call Pizza De-Luxe. I get some good pizza, some good ‘amateur’ talent, and my top-selling salesman of the month gets laid.”

I checked the window. A transvestite dance team practiced steps by the grease rack—Bud Brown and a cop type shooed them off. I said, “Bob, call Pizza De-Luxe.”

Yeakel blew his wall plaque kisses. “I think Chrissy should win this next show.”

“Chrissy’s a professional. She’s singing back-up for Buddy Greco at the Mocambo right now.”

“I know that, but I want to do her a solid. And I’ll let you in on a secret: my applause meter’s rigged.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. It’s a car battery hooked up to an oscilloscope screen. I’ve got a foot pedal I tap to goose the needle. I’m sure Chris would like to win—it’s a C-note and a free down payment on a snappy new Oldsmobile.”

I laughed. “With debilitating *monthly* payments?”

“Normally, yes. But with Chrissy I’m sure we could work something else out.”

“I’ll tell her. I’m sure she’ll play along, at least as far as the ‘free’ down payment.”

Bob's phone rang—he picked up, listened, hung up. I scoped the window—Bud Brown and the fuzz type saw me and turned away, nervous.

Bob said, "I might have a way for you to buy out of your second "Rocket to Stardom" commitment."

"I'm listening."

"I've got to think it over first. Dick, I'm going to call Pizza De-Luxe right now. Will you…"

"Talk to Chrissy and tell her she just won an amateur talent contest rigged by this car kingpin who wants to stroke her 'Tail Fins'?"

"Right. And ask for what she wants on her pizza."

—

Chris was outside the sales shack, smoking.

I spilled quick. "Bob's bringing in some quasi-pro talent for Sunday's show. He wants you to sing a couple of songs. You're guaranteed to win, and he's got mild expectations."

"If he keeps them mild, he won't be disappointed."

Smoke rings drifted up—a sure sign that Chrissy was distracted.

"Something on your mind?"

"No, just my standard boogie man."

"I know what you mean, but if you tell me you'll probably feel better."

Chris flicked her cigarette at a Cutlass demo. "I'm 32, and I'll always earn a living as an entertainer, but I'll never have a hit record. I like men too much to settle down and have a family, and I like myself too much to sell my tush to clowns like Bob Yeakel."

"And?"

"And nothing. Except that a car followed me after my Mocambo gig last night. It was scary—like the driver was checking me out for some reason. I think it might be Dot Rothstein. I think she got re-hipped on me after she saw me at your show at the Crescendo."

"Was she at the Mocambo last night?"

"Yes. And it's in L.A. *County* jurisdiction, and she's an L.A. County Deputy Sheriff, which means…shit, I don't know. Dick, will you and Leigh come to Buddy's show tonight? Dot knows you're friends with Mickey Cohen, and it might discourage her from making any moves."

"We'll be there."

Chris hugged me. "You know what I envy about your career?"

"What?"

"That at least you're *notorious*. At least that draft dodger thing gives you something to…I don't know, at least *overcome*."

A lightbulb went POP!—but I didn’t know what it meant.

3.

The Mocambo JUMPED.

Buddy Greco was belting "Around the World"—working it scat-man style. Buddy not only sells you the song—he drives it to your house and installs it. Chrissy and another girl sang counterpoint—nightclub eyeball magnets.

Leigh and I perched at the bar. She was pissed: I'd told her Bob Yeakel gave me an out on "Rocket to Stardom" number two—work repo back-up for Bud Brown and another finance clown named Sid Elwell. Bob had a shitload of Darktown delinquents—I was to divert the owners while Bud and Sid grabbed their sleds.

I accepted Bob's offer—the repo runs were scheduled for tomorrow. Leigh's response: it's another courage test. You don't know how to pass on things like that.

She was right. Chrissy's lightbulb POP! flickered: "At least the draft dodger thing gives you something to *overcome*."

Buddy snapped lyrics—"I traveled on when love was gone, to keep a big fat swingin' rendezvous"—the crowd snapped fingers along with him. Danny Getchell hopped ringside tables—snouting for *Hush-Hush* "Sinuendo." Check Dot Rothstein by the stage: measuring Chrissy for a bunk at the Dyke Island Motel.

Leigh nudged me. "I'm hungry."

I leaned close. "We'll go to Dino's Lodge. It won't be long—Buddy usually closes with this number."

"No more will I go all around the world, cause I have found my world in you—ooblay-oooh-oooh-baa-baa-doww!"

Big time applause—jealousy ditzed me. Dot sidled up to the bar and dug through her purse. Dig the contents: brass knucks and a .38 snubnose.

She threw me a sneer. Check her outfit: Lockhead jumpsuit, tire tread sandals. Chrissy signalled from the stage door—the parking lot, five minutes.

Dot chug-a-lugged a Scotch; the bartender refused payment. I stood up and stretched—Dot bumped me passing by. "Your wife's cute, Dick. Take good care of her or someone else will."

Leigh stuck a leg out to trip her; Dot sidestepped and flipped me the finger.

The barman said, “She’s supposed to be here on a stakeout for the West Hollywood Whipcord, but all she does is drool for the chorus girls. The Whipcord’s supposed to like good-looking women, though, so I guess that let’s Dot out as a decoy.”

“The Whipcord’s Dot’s kind of guy. Maybe he can turn her straight.”

The barman roared. I doubled his tip and followed Leigh out to the parking lot.

Chrissy was waiting by the car. Dot Rothstein stood close by—bugging loiterers for ID’s. She kept one eyeball on Chris: strictly x-ray, strictly a scorcher.

I unlocked the sled and piled the girls in. Ignition, gas, zoom—Dot’s farewell kiss fogged my back windshield.

Heavy traffic on the Strip—we slowed to a crawl. Chris said, “I’m hungry.”

I said, “We’ll hit Dino’s Lodge.”

“Not there, *please*.”

“Why?”

“Because Buddy’s taking a group from the club there, and I’m betting Dot will crash the party. Really, Dick, anyplace but Dino’s.”

Leigh said, “Canter’s is open late.”

I hung a sharp right. Headlights swept my Kustom King interior—the car behind us swung right abruptly.

South on Sweetzer, east on Fountain. The Dotster had me running edgy—I checked my back mirror.

That car was still behind us.

South on Fairfax, east on Willoughby—that car stuck close. A sports job—white or light gray—I couldn’t make out the driver.

Deputy Dot Rothstein or ??????

Scary alternatives: Chrissy’s old boyfriends, old dope customers, general L.A. friends.

South on Gardner, east on Melrose—those headlights goose goose goosed us. Leigh said, “Dick, what are you doing?”

“We’re being followed.”

“What? Who? What are you—”

I swung into a driveway sans signal; my tires plowed some poor fucker’s lawn. The sports car kept going; I backed out and chased it.

It zooooomed ahead; I flicked on my brights and blipped its tail. No fixed license plate—just a temp sticker stuck to the trunk. Close, closer—a glimpse of the last four digits: 1116.

The car ran a red on 3rd Street. Horns squealed; oncoming traffic held me back. Taillights flickered eastbound: going, going, gone.

Leigh said, “I’ve got no more appetite.”

Chris said, “Can I sleep at your place tonight?”

4.

Repo adventures.

Cleotis De Armand ran a crap game behind Swanky Frank's liquor store on 89th and Central, flaunting his delinquent 98 right there on the sidewalk. Bud Brown and Sid Elwell came in with cereal box badges and shook him down while I fed Seconal-laced T-Bird to the winos guarding the car. BIG fear: this was combustible L.A. Darktown, cop impersonation beefs probable if the ubiquitous LAPD swooped by. They didn't—and I was the one who drove the sapphire-blue jig rig to safety while the guard contingent snored. Beginner's luck: I found a bag of maryjane in the glove compartment. We toked a few reefers en route to our next job: boost a '57 Starfire off Big Dog Lipscomb, the southside's #1 streetcorner pimp.

The vehicle: parked by a shoeshine stand at 103 and Avalon. Customized: candy-apple red paint, mink interior, rhinestone-studded mud flaps. Bud said, "Let's strip the upholstery and make our wives fur stoles"—Sid and I were thinking the same thing.

The team deployed.

I unpacked my accordion and slammed "Lady of Spain" right there. Sid and Bud walked point on Big Dog Lipscomb: across the street, brownbeating whores. Someone yelled, "Hey, that's Dick Contino"—Watts riff-raff engulfed me.

I was pushed off the sidewalk—straight into Big Dog's coon coach. An aerial snapped; my back hit the hood; I played prostrate and didn't miss a note.

Look, Mom: no fear.

Foot scrapes, yells—dim intrusions on my reefer reverie. Hands yanked me off the hood—I went eyeball to eyeball with Big Dog Lipscomb.

He swung on me—I blocked the shot with my accordion. Contact: his fist, my keyboard. Sickening cracks: his bones, my bread-and-butter baby.

Big Dog yelped and clutched his hand; some punk kicked him in the balls and picked his pocket. His car keys hit the gutter—with Bud Brown right there.

I was flipped and tossed in the car—Sid Elwell with some mean Judo moves. The sled zoomed—Sid with white knuckles on a mink steering wheel.

Look, Mom: no fear.

We rendezvoused at Teamster Local 1819—Bud brought the back-up sled. My accordion needed a face-lift—I was too weed-wafted to sweat it.

Sid borrowed tools and stripped the mink upholstery; I signed autographs for goldbricking Teamsters. That lightbulb POP! flickered anew: "Draft dodger thing…gives you something to overcome." That car chase crowded my brain: temp license 1116, Dot Rothstein after Chrissy or something else?

Bud shmoozed up the Local prez—more information pump than friendly talk. A Teamster begged me to play "Bumble Boogie"—I told him my accordion died. I posed for pix instead—the prez slipped me a Local "Friendship Card."

"You never can tell, Dick. You might need a real job someday."

Too true—a wet towel on my hot fearless day.

Noon—I took Sid and Bud to the Pacific Dining Car. We settled in behind T-bones and hash browns—small talk came easy for a while.

Sid put the skids to it. "Dick…ask you something?"

"Sure."

"You know…your Army rap?"

"What about it?"

"You know…you don't impress me as a frightened type of guy."

Bud piped in: "As Big Dog Lipscomb will attest to. It's just that…you know."

I said, "Say it. It feels like I'm close to something."

Sid said it. "You know…it's like this. Someone says 'Dick Contino', and the first thing you think of is 'Coward' or maybe 'Draft Dodger'. It's like a reflex, when you should be thinking 'Accordion player' or 'Singer' or 'Good repo back-up.' "

I said, "Finish the thought."

Bud: "What Sid's saying is how do you get around that? Bob Yeakel says it's a life sentence, but isn't there something you can do?"

Closer now—lightbulb hot—so HOT I pushed it away. "I don't know."

Sid said, "You can always do something, if you've got nothing to lose."

I changed the subject. "A car was tailing me last night. I think it might be this lezbo cop who's hipped on Chrissy."

Bud whooped. "Put her on "Rocket to Stardom." Let her sing 'Once I Had a Secret Love.' "

"I'm not a 100 percent sure it's her, but I got the last four digits of the license plate. The whole thing spooks me."

"So it was just a temporary sticker? Permanent plates only have three letters and three digits."

"Right, 1116. I thought Bob could call the DMV and get a make for me."

Bud checked his watch, antsy. "Not without all nine digits. But ask Bob anyway, *after* the show tomorrow. It's a Pizza De-Luxe gig, and he always bangs his favorite 'contestant' *after* the show. Mention it to him then, and maybe he'll call some clerk he knows and tell him to look up all the 1116's."

A waitress crowded up menu first. "Are you Dick Contino? My daddy doesn't like you 'cause he's a veteran, but my mom thinks you're *real* cute. Could I have your autograph?"

—

"Ladies and Gentlemen, this is Dick Contino welcoming you to 'Rocket to Stardom'—where tomorrow's stellar performers reach for the moon and haul down a few stars! Where all of you in our television audience and here at Yeakel Oldsmobile can seal your fate in a Rocket 88!"

Canned applause/hoots/yells/whistles—a rocket launch straight for the toilet.

Somebody spiked the punch—our live audience got bombed pre-showtime.

Sid Elwell ID'd the crowd: mostly juiceheads AWOL from the County dry-out farm.

Act #1—a Pizza De-Luxe male hooker. Topical patter de-luxe: Eisenhower meets Sinatra at the "Rat Pack Summit." Ring-a-fucking-ding: Ike, Frank and Dino swap stale one-liners. The crowd booed; the applause meter went on the fritz and leaked steam.

Act #2—A Pizza De-Luxe prostie/songbird. Tight capris, tight sweater—mauling "Blue Moon" made her bounce in two directions. A pachuco by the stage kept a refrain up: "Baby, are they real?" Bud Brown sucker-punched him silent off-camera; the sound man said his musings came through un-squelched.

Act #3—"Ramon and Johnny"—two muscle queen acrobats. Dips, flips, cupped-hand tosses—nice, if you dig shit like that.

Whistles, applause. Bob Yeakel said the guys worked shakedowns: extorting married fags with sodomy pix.

Some spurned lover out-of-nowhere yelled, "Ramon, you bitch!"

Ramon blew the audience a pouty kiss.

Johnny spun in mid-toss; Ramon neglected to catch him. Johnny hit the stage flat on his back.

The crowd went nuts; the applause meter belched smoke. Kay Van Obst drove Johnny to Central Receiving.

#4, #5—Pizza De-Luxe torch singers. Slit-legged gowns, cleavage, goosebumps—both sang Bob Yeakel-lyriced ditties set to hit records. "The

Man I Love" became "The Car I Love"; "Fly Me to the Moon" got raped thusly: "Fly me to the stars, in my souped-up 88; it's got that V-8 power now, and its traction holds straight! In other words, OLDS IS KING!!!"

Cleavage out-tractioned lyrics—the drunks cheered. Sid Elwell hustled a new car battery/applause meter on stage for Chris Staples' bit and final bows.

Chrissy:

Running on fear—that car chase spooked her. I told her I'd have Bob Yeakel tap some DMV slave to trace the license—my backstage pitch shot her some last-minute poise.

Chrissy:

Scorching "Someone to Watch Over Me" like the Gershwins ALMOST wrote it for her—going hushed so her voice wouldn't crack—the secret of mediocre songsters worldwide.

Chrissy:

Shaking it to "You Make Me Feel So Young"; putting the make out implicit: *she'd* call *you* at three o'clock in the morning.

Chrissy:

Wolf whistles and scattered claps first time out. Better luck at final bow time: Bob Yeakel hooked the applause rig up to an amplifier.

Chrissy won.

The crowd was too drunk to know they got bamboozled.

Bob congratulated Chris and stroked her tail fins on-camera—Chris swatted his hand.

Ramon moaned for Johnny.

The sales crew snarfed Pizza De-Luxe pizza.

Leigh called to say she'd caught the show on TV. "Dick, you were better off as Chucko the Clown."

I grabbed Chrissy. "Tell Bud and Sid to meet us at Mike Lyman's. You gave me an idea the other day."

—

Bud and Sid made Lyman's first. I slipped the headwaiter a five spot; he slipped us a secluded back booth.

We huddled in, ordered drinks and shot the shit. Topics covered: "Rocket to Stardom" as epic goof; would my repo work spring me from my second producing gig? Bud said he spieled the car chase to Bob Yeakel; Bob said he'd try to DMV-trace the temp license. Sid reprised the Big Dog repo—I used it to steer talk down to biz.

"I've been stuck with this 'Coward' tag for years, and I'm tired of it. My career's going nowhere, but at least I've got a name, and Chrissy doesn't even have that. I've got an idea for a publicity stunt. It would probably take at least two extra men to pull off, but I think we could do it."

Bud said, "Do *what*?"

Chris said, "I've got a hunch I know where this is going."

I whispered. "Two hoods kidnap Chrissy and I at gunpoint. The hoods are psycho types who've got this crazy notion that we're big stars who can bring in ransom money. They contact Howard Wormser—he's the agent who gets both of us work—and demand some large amount. Howard doesn't know the gig's a phony, and either calls the fuzz or doesn't call the fuzz. In either case, Chrissy and I heroically escape. We can't identify the kidnappers, because they wore masks. We fake evidence at the place where we were held hostage and tough it out when the cops question us. We're bruised up and fucked up from the ordeal. The kidnappers, of course, remain at large. Chrissy and I get a boatload of publicity and goose our careers. We pay off the fake kidnappers with a percentage of the good money we're now making."

Three deadpans.

Three-way silence—I clocked it at one minute.

Sid coughed. "This is certifiably nuts."

Chris coughed and lit a cigarette. "I like it. If it works, it works. If it doesn't, Dick and I go to jail. We've both been to jail, so we know we can survive. I say maybe this is the real "Rocket to Stardom," and if it isn't, c'est-la-goddamn-guerre. I say better to try it than not to. I say the entertainment business thrives on bullshit, so why not try to shovel some of our own?"

Bud strafed me: wary eyes, working on sad. "It's dangerous. It's illegal, probably to the tune of a couple of years in jail. And you're what the cops would call a 'known associate' of me and Sid. I could probably set you up with some guys more removed, so the cops couldn't link you to them. See, Dick, what I'm thinking is: if you're *determined* to do it, then maybe we could make some money by cutting down the chance you'll get caught. *If you're determined to do it, hell or high water*."

Those eyes—why so *sad*?

"I'm determined."

Bud pushed his drink aside. "Then it has to look real. Let's go, there's a place you should see."

—

We convoyed up to Griffith Park and went hiking. There it was: a shack tucked into a box canyon a mile north of the Observatory.

Hard to spot: scrub bushes blocked the canyon entrance off.

Tumbleweeds covered the roof—the shack couldn't be seen from the air.

The door was open. Stink wafted out: dead animals, dead something. Dig the interior: a mattress on the floor, blood-encrusted pelts stacked on a table.

Chris said, “Scalps,” and covered her nose.

I looked closer—yeah—SCALPS.

Sid crossed himself. Bud said, “I found this place a few years ago. I was on a hiking jaunt with a buddy and stumbled onto it. Those scalps spooked the living bejeezus out of me, and I checked with this cop pal of mine. He said back in ’46 some crazy Indian escaped from Atascadero, killed six people and scalped them. The Indian was never captured, and if you look close, you’ll see six scalps there.”

I looked close. Six scalps, all right—one replete with braids and a plastic barette.

Chris and Sid lit cigarettes—the stink diminuendoed. I said, “Bud, what are you saying?”

“That at least one of your kidnappers should be made up to look like an Indian. That this dump as the kidnapper’s stash place would gain you some points for realism. That a psycho Indian who might be long dead makes a good fall guy.”

Chris said, “If this works and my career takes off, I’ll give you each 10 percent of my gross earnings for the next ten years. If it doesn’t work, I’ll cash in some stocks my dad left me and split the money between you, and I’ll sleep with both of you at least once.”

Sid howled. Chris poked a scalp and said, “Ick. Icky lizard.”

I said, “Count me in, minus the bed stuff. If the gig doesn’t fly or get results, I’ll fork over the pink slip on my 88.”

Four-way handshakes. A bird squawked outside—I flinched wicked bad.

5.

Scalps.

Indian fall guys.

Teamster goons.

Encore: Dick Contino, truculent guinea hood.

Who *didn't* tell his wife: I'm knee-deep in a hot kidnap caper.

Monday morning twinkled new-beginning-bright. I walked out for the paper—a fuzz type was lounging on my car. I'd seen him before: hobknobbing with Bud Brown at Yeakel Olds.

I eeeased over guinea hood coool. Fear: my legs evaporated.

He held up a badge. "My name's DePugh. I'm an investigator for the McClellan Senate Rackets Committee. Bud Brown snitched you for Conspiracy to Kidnap, Conspiracy to Defraud and Conspiracy to Perpetuate a Public Hoax, and believe me, he did you a big favor. Hand me the contents of your outside jacket pockets."

I complied. Felony bingo: repo run reefers. Bud Brown: lying rat motherfucker.

DePugh said, "Add Possession of Marijuana to those charges, and put that shit back in your pockets before your neighbors see it."

I complied. DePugh whipped out a sheet of paper. "Dear Dick: I couldn't let you and Chrissy go through with it. You would have gotten caught in your lies and everybody would have gotten hurt, me and Sid included. I told Mr. DePugh, who is a nice guy, so that he would stop you but not get you in trouble. Mr. DePugh said there is a favor you could do for him, so my advice is to do it. I'm sorry I finked you off, but I did it for your own good. Your pal, Bud Brown."

My legs returned—this wasn't a jail bounce. Shit clicked in late: Bud pressing the Teamster Prez for info; Bud hinky on the kidnap plan from jump street. "Brown's an informant for the McClellan Committee."

"That's correct. And I am a nice guy with a beautiful and impetuous nineteen-year-old daughter who may be heading for a fall that you can help avert."

"*What*?"

DePugh smiled and clicked into focus: a cop from Moosefart, Minnesota, with a night school law degree. "Dick, you are one good-looking side of beef. My daughter Jane, God bless her, goes for guys like you—although I'm pretty sure she's still a virgin, and I want to keep her that way until she finds herself some nice pussy-whipped clown that I can control and marries him."

"*What*?"

"Dick, you keep asking me that, so I will now tell you that one hand washes the other, a stitch in time saves nine, and if you scratch my back I'll scratch yours. I.e.: I'll let your fake kidnapping happen, and I'll even supply you with some muscle far superior to Bud and Sid—if you do me a favor."

I checked the kitchen window—no Leigh—good. "Tell me about it."

DePugh tossed an arm around me. "Jane's an undergrad at UCLA. She's flirting with pinko politics and attending some sort of quasi-Commie coffee klatch every Monday night. The klatch is an open thing, so anybody can show up, and with that bum Korean War deal of yours, you'd be a natural. See, Dick, I'm afraid the Feds have infiltrated the group. I'm afraid Janie's going to get her name on all kinds of lists and fuck her life up. I want you to infiltrate the group, woo Janie, but don't sleep with her, and make it look like she just joined the group to chase men, which Janie implied to her mother is true. You join the 'Westwood People's Study Collective,' put some moves on Jane DePugh and pull her out before she gets hurt. Got it?"

Holy Jesus Christ.

"And no reprisals against Bud and Sid. Really, Dick, Bud did you an all-time solid by bringing me into this scheme of yours. You'll see, I'll find you some good boys."

I said, "I like the scalp angle. I want to keep it."

DePugh pulled out photos. The top one: a dead Indian on a morgue slab. Three bullet holes in his face; "Sioux City, S.D. Coroner's Office 9/18/51" stamped on back.

"Bud Brown and I are old pals from Sioux City. When I was on the Sheriff's there, Chief Joe Running Car here got drunk and scalped his wife. I picked him up, and he copped to those Griffith Park snuffs. Chief tried to escape, and I killed him. Bud and I are the only ones who know that he confessed to the L.A. killings, and the only ones who've got the shack pegged. Chief Joe here—he's your fall guy."

Three bullet holes/one tight circle—DePugh took on a new panache. "Show me the other picture."

He held it up. "Aah, my Janie."

Nice: a redhead hot for some mischief. Sleek—Julie London minus 10,000 miles.

Leigh banged on the window and drew a question mark.

DePugh caught it. “You’ll think of something. Just don’t fuck my daughter, or I’ll kill you.”

6.

Green eyes scorched me—I shaved some miles off Jane DePugh's odometer.

In session: the Westwood People's Study Collective.

The boss Pinko droned on: the labor strike aesthetic, blah, blah. Some collective: me, a few beatniks, a Hollywood "Producer" named Sol Slotnick—a wolf with fangs for sweet Janie.

My mind wandered. Sol and Jane made me walking in—Jane's horns grew right on-cue. Now it was Commie biz as usual.

Blah, blah—the LAPD as management enforcers. A cheap one-room pad; shit-strewn cat boxes placed strategically. Bum furniture—my chair gouged my ass.

"It is well known that Chief William H. Parker has formed anti-labor goon squads at the request of wealthy contributors to LAPD fund drives."

I called Chrissy and spilled on Dave DePugh's shakedown—she agreed not to tell Leigh about it. I told her the kidnap scheme was still on—with DePugh supplying some pro muscle. Scared Chris: a light-colored sports car tailed her briefly last night. I mentioned Yeakel's DMV contacts—a temp license trace might be possible.

Chrissy's new instinct: Dot wasn't the tail fiend. "I don't know, Dick. I think maybe Dot's too fat to pull shit that sinister."

"…it is thus not untoward to state that police violence is violence aimed at subjugating the lower stratas of society."

I flicked a cat turd off my chair. Jane crossed her legs my way—ooooooh, daddy!

A man walked in and sat down. Thirty-fiveish, hipster garb: sandals, Beethoven sweatshirt. I made *him*: an FBI face in the crowd at my desertion trial.

He made *me*: a ½ second quizzical look.

He didn't make *me* make *him*—I glued on a deadpan quicksville.

Fed sharks circling—Janie, watch your mouth.

The Head Red called for questions. Jane said, "My dad's an investigator with the McClellan Committee. They're investigating corrupt labor unions, so

I hope you're not going to tell us that all unions are squeaky clean."

Sol Slotnick raised a hand. "I ditto that sentiment. I made a picture once called *Picket Line!* I had some connections in the garment rack—I mean trade, and I had a kickback—I mean a reciprocal agreement going with the owner of a sweat sh—I mean factory, who let me film his peons—I mean workers, at work. Uh…uh…uh, I saw good on both sides of the picket line, which…uh… is why *Picket Line!* was the title of the movie."

Sol looked at Jane. Jane looked at me. The Fed inched his chair away from a cat box.

The beatniks walked out oozing boredom. The Commie Commissar harumphed.

Sol, eyes on Jane: "I'm, uh, thinking of making a picture about that killer that's strangling those kids up on the Strip, you know, the West Hollywood Whipcord. I want to show him as a…uh…out-of-work union guy who got fucked—I mean loused up by corrupt management practices. And…uh… when the cops shoot him, he's gonna decry the corruption of the system while he spits blood and repents. It's gonna be like *Picket Line!* I'm gonna show good and bad on both sides of the fence. I might even go the whole hog and have a Negro cop! See, this schvartze gas station attendant I know has taken some acting classes. I think I could do good business with this picture and do some social good to boot. I think I'll call it *Sunset Strip Strangler!*"

Sol looked at Jane.

Jane looked at me.

The Fed looked at Sol.

The Boss Pinko said, "Mr. Contino, you're acquainted with the dark side of the police experience. Would you care to offer comments?"

"Yeah. I agree with everything Jane said."

Jane threw me a swoon. Sol muttered, "Goyische prick"—I barely caught it. Mr. Commissar sighed. "Sometimes I think I'm running a lonely hearts club. And on that note, let's call it a night. We'll have coffee at the usual place, and I'll do my best to upgrade the conversation."

—

We hit Truman's Drive-In and commandeered a booth. Sol slid in next to Jane; I sandwiched her from the flip side.

The Fed and the Red sat buddy-buddy close. Jane pressed into me—her nylons went scree-scree.

I signalled a waitress—coffee all-around.

The Fed said, "My name's Mitch Rachlis."

Introductons flew quick—the Commie tagged himself Mort Jastrow. I ditzed Rachlis: "You look familiar, Mitch."

Smart fucker: "My wife's a fan of yours. We caught you at the El Rancho Vegas way back when, and a couple of times at the Flamingo lounge. We always sit up close, so maybe that's why I look familiar."

Smart fucker/good improvisor.

Sol moved on Jane. "Have you ever considered a career in motion pictures?"

Jane scrunched my way. "I'm keeping that option open. In fact, right now I've narrowed my career choices down to doctor, lawyer or movie star."

"I could help you. If *Sunset Strip Strangler!* floats, you could play one of the victims. Can you sing?"

"I certainly can. In fact, that's my fourth career option: recording star."

"Sweetie, that's wonderful. See, I could cast you as a nightclub songstress that attracts men like flies on sh—I mean like moths to the flame. The West Hollywood Whipcord gets a big boner—I mean a big thing going for you, and you get to perform a few numbers to showcase your singing skills."

Mitch Rachlis butted in. "What are you working on now, Mr. Slotnick?"

"A picture called *Wetback!* It blows the lid off the treatment of migrant fruit pickers. It's gonna stir up a load of shit—I mean controversy, and establish me as a producer of socially conscious pictures that deliver a message but don't fuck with—I mean sacrifice a good story in the process. Sweetie, write your number down for me. I might need to call you soon for an audition."

Jane complied—twice. One napkin slip went to Sol; one snaked into my pants pocket. Jane's hand/my thigh—oooh, daddy!

Mitch the Fed looked at Sol—stone puzzled. Mort the Red scoped the whole group—stone disgusted.

Janie pressed up to me. "We should get together. I'd love to hear about your political struggle and what it's like to play the accordion."

"Sure, I'd like that," came out hoarse—our leg to leg action crossed the line.

The Fed said, "See you all next week," and hotfooted it. Jane lit a cigarette—Miss Teen Sophisticate, 1958. I checked the window—and spotted Rachlis outside by the pay phones.

Janie smiled—teen steam wilted my pompadour. I put a dollar on the table, mumbled good nights and split.

The parking lot spread out behind the phone bank. Rachlis stood in an open booth, his back to me. I eased by just inside earshot.

"…and of all people, Dick Contino was at the meeting."

"…the whole thing wasn't exactly what you'd call subversive."

"…no, I don't think Contino made me…yeah, right, I was there at his trial."

"…yes, sir…yes, sir…Slotnick *is* the one we're interested in. Yes, that wetback movie does sound pro-Communist…yes, sir, I'll…"

I walked down Wilshire, relieved: Joe Fed wasn't after Jane—or me. Then guilt goosed me: this extortion gig felt like a blight on my marriage. Another phone bank by the bus stop—I called Chrissy.

Her service answered: "Miss Staples will be spending the night at OL-24364."

My number. Chris probably called Leigh and asked to sleep over—that car probably tailed her again.

Shit—no kidnap scheme/extortion scheme confidante.

A directory by the phone. I looked up Truman's, dialed the number and paged trouble.

Jane came on. "Hello?"

"This is Dick. Would you like to have dinner tomorrow night?"

"Oh, yes! Yes, I would!"

Please God: protect me from this Teenage Temptress—

7.

The mail arrived early. I went through it on the sly—half expecting notes from the dangerous DePughs. Irrational: I only met them yesterday.

Leigh was still asleep; Chrissy sawed wood on the couch. She confirmed it last night: the light-colored sports car tailed her again—and she thought the driver was wearing a Halloween mask. I insisted: you're our guest until this bullshit resolves. Her DePugh Dilemma advice: warn Sol Slotnick on the Feds and let Jane down easy. Buy her dinner, be her pal—but no wanka-wanka. PROTECT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH DAD AND OUR BOSS KIDNAP CAPER.

Bills, *Accordion Quarterly Magazine*. A letter to Miss Christine Staples, no return address on the envelope.

Waa! Waa!—baby Merri back in her bedroom.

Chrissy stirred and yawned. I said, "There's a letter here for you."

"That's odd, because nobody knows I've been staying here on and off."

I tossed the envelope over; Chris opened it and pulled a sheet of paper out. Instant heebie-jeebies—she trembled like Jell-O with the DT's.

I grabbed it—one yellow legal pad page.

Swastika decals circling the borders—model airplane stuff. Glued-on newspaper letters: "I WANT TO FUCK YOU TO DEATH."

My brain zipped:

Dot Rothstein or ???? The tail car, temp license 1116—who? The tail car geek might have followed Chris here and glommed the address—but why send a letter here? The fiend might have seen Chris and I on "Rocket to Stardom"; he could have bagged my address from the phone book. Longshot: he could have resumed his tail after I chased *him* that first night Chrissy slept here.

Chris reached for her cigarettes; a half dozen match swipes got one lit. I said, "I'll take this to the cops. We'll get you some proper protection."

"No! We can't! It'll screw the kidnap thing up if we've got cops nosing around!"

"Sssh. Don't wake Leigh up. And don't mention the kidnap gig when she might hear you."

Chris spoke soto voce. "Talk to Bob Yeakel about checking with his DMV people on the license again. Maybe we can get a name that way, and turn it over to Dave DePugh. Then maybe he can lean on the guy to make him stop. I don't think this is Dot Rothstein, because I don't think she could squeeze into a sports car."

"I'll talk to Bob. And you're right, this isn't Dot's style."

Chris stubbed her cigarette out. Shaky hands—the ashtray jittered and spilled butts. "And ask Bob to give us some time off. Remember, he said he'd cut you loose on your second show if you helped out with those repossessions."

I nodded. Leigh walked in cinching her robe; Chris held her mash note up show-and-tell style. My stoic wife: "Dick, go to your father's house and get his shotguns. I'll call Nancy and Kay and have them bring some ordnance over."

—

My dad kicked loose two .12 gauge pumps. I called Bob Yeakel and batted 500: yes, Chris and I could have a few more days off; no, his DMV contact was out of town—there was no way he could initiate a license check. I buzzed Dave DePugh's office to pitch a kidnap skull session—the fucker was "out in the field."

The White Pages listed Sol Slotnick Productions: 7481 Santa Monica Boulevard. I drove out to West Hollywood and found it: a warehouse down the block from Barney's Beanery.

I shoved the door open; industrial smells wafted up. Sweat Shop City: rows of garment racks, sewing machines and pressers. Signs in Spanish posted, easy to translate: "Faster Work Means More Money"; "Mr. Sol Is Your Friend."

I yelled—nobody answered.

Cramped—I scissor-walked to the back. Three Border Patrol cars stood on blocks; a nightclub set stood on a platform: bar, tables, dancefloor.

Homey: sleeping bag, portable TV Foodstuffs on the bar: crackers, Cheez Whiz, canned soup.

"Yeah, yeah, I live here. And now that you have witnessed this ignominy, state your business."

Sol Slotnick, popping through bead curtains in a bathrobe.

"I also swiped this robe from the Fountainbleu Hotel in Miami Beach. Contino, what is this? First you steal Jane DePugh's heart, and now you come to torment me?"

Why mince words?

“I’m happily married, and I’ve got no interest in Jane. I was sent in to pull her out of that Commie group before she hurts herself. You should get out, too. There’s an FBI plant in the group, and he’s interested in *you*. The local FBI’s got some bee in its bonnet that *Wetback!* is pro-Red.”

Sol grabbed a bar stool and steadied himself. Rainbow time: he went pale, then flushed bright-red. Lunch time: he wolfed a stack of saltines and Cheez Whiz.

His color stablizied. A belch, a smile—this clown digested grief fast. “I’ll survive. I’ll shift gears like when I lost my backing for *Tank Squadron!* and doctored the script into *Picket Line!* Besides, I just joined that fakoktah group to chase trim. I saw Jane on the Street up by UCLA and followed her to my first meeting. You know, I think I want to marry her as well as drill her. I’m forty-nine years old, and I’ve had three heart attacks, but I think a young cooze like that could add another twenty years to my lifespan. I think this is one Jew she could seriously re-*JEW*vinate. I could make her a star, then trade her in for some younger poon before she starts cheating on me with handsome young greaseballs like you. Contino, tell me, do you think she’d consent to a nude screen test?”

The spritz had me reeling. Sol built a cracker/Cheez Whiz skyscraper and snarfed it. Fishbelly white to red and back again—the spritz hit overdrive. “You know, I’d love to use *you* in a movie—you and Janie, what a pair of filmic lovebirds you could be. Most of your publicity has been poison, but it’s not like you’re Fatty Arbuckle, banging starlets with Coke bottles. Dick, a wholesome young slice of low-fat cheese like Jane DePugh could ream me, steam me, dry clean me and get me off this B-movie treadmill to Nowheresville that has had me exploiting aggrieved schvartzes and taco benders to glom the cash to make these lox epics that have given me three heart attacks and a spastic colon. Dick, I own this factory. I hired illegal aliens to sew cut-rate garments until the INS nailed me for harboring wetbacks, because I let them sleep here on the premises in exchange for a scant one-half of their pay deducted from their checks. The INS nailed me and fined me and shipped most of my slaves—I mean workers—back to Mexico, so I glommed some Border Patrol cars for buppkis at a police auction and decided to make *Wetback!* to atone for my exploitation sins and defer the cost of my fine. Now the Feds want to crucify me for my egalitarian tendencies, so I won’t be able to shoot *Wetback!* I’ve got these Mex prelim boxers lined up to play illegals, but they’re *really* illegals, so if I shoot the movie, the INS will round them up and put them on the night bus to Tijuana. Dick, all I want to do is make serious movies that explore social issues and turn a profit, and slip the schnitzel to Jane DePugh. Dick, I am at a loss for words. What do *you* recommend?”

My head whizzed. I ate a cracker to normalize my blood sugar. Sol Slotnick stared at me.

I said, “I’ve got a date with Jane tonight, and I’ll put in a good word for you. And I know an FBI man pretty well. I’ll tell him that you’re not making *Wetback!*, and ask him to pass the word along.”

“*You’re* friends with one of J. Edgar Hoover’s minions?”

“Yeah, Special Agent Pete Van Obst. His wife’s the President of my National Fan Club.”

“What’s the current membership? We might make a picture together, and statistics like that impress financial backers.”

“The current membership is sixty-something.”

“So you add a few zeros and hope they don’t check. Dick, be a gentleman with Jane tonight. Tell her I think she has movie star potential. Tell her you’ve heard rumors that I’m hung like Roy Rogers’ horse Trigger.”

Dismissal time—Sol looked exhausted. I grabbed a few crackers for the road.

—

Kay Van Obst brought three .45 autos—FBI issue, “borrowed” from husband Pete. Nancy Ankrum brought a sawed-off loaded with rat poison-dipped buckshot—Caryl Chessman told her where to find one. Add my dad’s .12 gauge pumps and call the pad “Fort Contino”—L.A.’s cut-rate Alamo.

Ammo boxes on the coffee table.

Front and back window eyeball surveillance—four women in rotating shifts.

Four women packing kitchen knives in plastic scabbards—Kay hit a toy store on her way over.

Time to kill before my “Date”—I took a snooze.

Ink-smeared dreams:

COWARD REDEEMED; KIDNAPPERS STILL AT LARGE!

CONTINO FOILS FIENDS; SAVES BACK-UP SINGER FROM TORTURE AND RAPE!

L.A. FUZZ NIX PUBLICITY STUNT SPECULATION: “THIS CAPER WAS REAL!”

Chris held down by salivating psycopaths.

Cops swarming the kidnap shack.

Chief William H. Parker holding up scalps.

CONTINO KIDNAP PLOT REVEALS BIZARRE LINKS TO UNSOLVED MURDERS!!!

REDSKIN RESERVATIONS RAIDED IN SEARCH FOR KIDNAPPERS!!!

APACHE CHIEF SAYS, “HEAP BAD BUSINESS! ME SEND UP

SMOKE SIGNALS TO TRAP SCALP KILLER!”

Chris woke me up. “You should get ready. I told Leigh you were jamming with some studio guys, so take your accordion.”

A last headline flickered out:

CONTINO CONQUEST CONTINUES! KIDNAP TOPS LINDBERGH SNATCH IN POPULAR POLL!

—

“I’m sure you must think that I’m just a naive young thing. You must think that any girl who hasn’t narrowed her career choices down any better than doctor, lawyer, movie star or recording star must be rather silly.”

Jane picked the restaurant: a dago joint off Sunset and Normandie. The Hi-Hat Motel stood cattycorner—“Vacancy” in throbbing neon made me sweat.

I drank wine. Jane drank ginger ale under protest—feeding minors liquor was a contributing beef.

“I don’t think you’re silly. When I was nineteen I was a recording star, but I just fell into it. You should finish college and let things happen to you for a while.”

“You sound like my dad. Only he doesn’t push the ‘let things happen’ part, because he knows that I have the same appetites my mom had when I was her age. I look like my mom, I act like my mom and I talk like my mom. Only my mom married this rookie cop from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, who got her pregnant when she was eighteen, and I’m too smart for that.”

Scorch/scorch/twinkle—green eyes offset by Chianti bottle candlelight. “Sol Slotnick might fit that ‘let things happen to you’ bill. He likes you, and he’s a legit movie producer who could get you work.”

Jane futzed with her bread plate. “He’s a lech and a fatty-patty. He followed me to my first collective meeting, so he’s one step up from a wienie wagger. My dad used to drive me around when he was a detective in Sioux Falls. He wanted to show me what I had to look forward to as far as men were concerned. He showed me all the pimps and panty sniffers and winos and wienie waggers and rag sniffers and gigolos that he dealt with, and believe me, Sol Slotnick fits right in. Besides, he has small hands, and my mom told me what *that* means.”

I sipped dago red. Jane said, “You have *big* hands.”

“Vacancy” throbbed.

Questions throbbed: Who’s gonna know? Who’s gonna care? Who’s gonna tell?

Easy—you/you/you—straight across.

“Jane, Sol’s the kind of guy that makes dreams come true.”

“Sol Slotnick is a long-distance wrong number. My mom reads Variety, and she said *Picket Line!* was one of the big low grossing losers of 1951. Sol Slotnick, ick."

I dipped some bread in my wine glass and bit off a crust. Jane said, "You're both earthy and sensitive. You're politically aware, but not didactic. You've been wronged by society, but you're not a martyr. My mom said that men with ambiguous qualities like that make the best lovers, because they keep you guessing, and that postpones the inevitable letdown of sex getting stale."

"Your dad must be quite a guy."

Jane giggled. "You mean my dad's brother Phil. I figured that out because Uncle Phil used to come around a lot when my dad was out of town on extradition assignments, and I got sent to the movies all the time. *And*, I used to sneak peeks at my mom's diaphragm, which sure was out of its case a lot when Uncle Phil was around. And you know what? Uncle Phil's hands were *much* bigger than my dad's."

I checked out my own mitts. Big—accordion practice gave them their girth.

A waiter hovered—I signalled him away. Jane laced fingers with me. "Did you ask me out just to shill for Sol Slotnick?"

"Did you join the Westwood People's Collective just to chase men?"

"No fair. You answer first."

I pulled my hands free. "I was bored and shopping around for kicks, so I went to the meeting. You looked like kicks, but I've decided not to cheat on my wife."

Hot potato—Jane winced. "Okay, so I joined the group for the same reason. And you can tell Sol Slotnick that I won't sleep with him until the twelfth of never, but I will audition and strip down to a bikini if you'll chaperone me."

"I'll tell him, and I'll chaperone you. And I'll warn you now: you should quit going to those meetings, or your name will end up on some goddamn blacklist that could break your heart."

Jane smiled. My heart swelled—just a little.

"There's a meeting tomorrow night that I *have* to go to, because Mort's going to discuss FBI malfeasance, and I want to get some lines to tease my dad with. Besides, that man with the Beethoven sweatshirt looks cute."

"He's an FBI agent taking names."

"Well, then at least my dad will approve of him. My dad's *so* right-wing. He thinks that slavery should be reinstated and that streets should be privately owned, so the owners can charge protective tariffs. My mom's a liberal, because she had a Brazilian lover once. He had really big hands, but he tried to pimp her out to cover some track bets he made, and my mom said 'No, sir,' and called a cop."

"What did the cop do?"

"The cop was my dad. He got her pregnant."

I called for the check. “Come on, I’ll drive you home.”

—

Jane snuggled close in the car. Chanel #5 tickled my nose—I cracked the window for relief. The McGuire Sisters on the radio—I let “Sincerely” wash over me like Jane and I were for real.

It started drizzling. I hit the wipers and adjusted the rear-view—a car was glued to my back bumper.

Spooky.

I punched the gas; the car behind us accelerated.

Jane slid off my shoulder and into my lap.

I hung a sharp left, sharp right, sharp left—that car birddogged collision close.

Jane burrowed into my lap.

I felt myself responding.

Left turn, right turn—the steering wheel brushed Jane’s hair. Hands on my zipper—something told me to hit the brakes.

BAM!—two car bumper-locked pile-up—in the middle of a pissant L.A. side street.

I quit responding. Jane said, “Shit, I think I chipped a tooth.”

I got out. French kissing: my Continental Kit and a ’56 De Soto grille.

???—no white sports job—???

I ran back.

The De Soto driver got out, weak-kneed. Streetlamp glow lit him up good: Danny Getchell, *Hush-Hush Magazine*.

“Dick, don’t hit me, I’ve got pictures!”

I charged him. A flashbulb popped and blinded me—Getchell bought some seconds.

“The waiter at the restaurant recognized you and called me!”

My sight came back blurry—I charged and sideswiped a tree.

“Dick, I’ve got pix of you and the redhead holding hands!”

A flashbulb popped—I picked myself up seeing stars.

“I’ve got a shot of you and the twist walking by the Hi-Hat Motel!”

I charged the voice—“Dick, you can buy out with money or trade out with a story! Don’t you know some queers you can rat?”

I tripped on a hubcap and went sprawling. Jane yelled, “My dad’s a policeman *and* a lawyer, you extortionist cocksucker!”

Flashbulb pop-pop-pop—my whole world went bright white.

“Dick, your zipper’s down!”

I flailed on my knees and glimpsed trouser legs. Those legs went spastic—I caught a blurred shot of Jane shoving Getchell.

Gray flannel up close—I grabbed and yanked. Getchell hit the pavement; Jane smashed his camera on the curb.

"I dropped the film off, you dumb guinea shitbird!"

My hands/his neck—made for each other. *My* voice, surreal to *my* own ears: "If you tell Leigh, I'll kill you. I've got no money, and the only story I've got is too good for you."

Choking out raspy: "You bluff. I call."

I tightened my grip. Choking out bone dry: "You bluff. I call."

Door slams, background voices. Jane said, "Dick, there's witnesses. My dad says eyewitnesses get killers the death penalty."

Getchell, bedrock bone dry: "You bluff. I call."

I let go. Getchell hunkered up and ass-scooted away. I pulled him back by the hair and whispered, "I'm working out a fake kidnap thing with some pros. I won't give you the exclusive, but I'll give you first crack at my own account."

Getchell choked out, "Deal."

Jane helped me up. Miss Teen Temptress was snaggle-toothed now.

8.

Fort Contino, cabin-fevered up.

Leigh and Chris practiced knife throws; the “I want to fuck you to death” note corkboard-mounted served as a target. Nancy Ankrum kept her snout stuck in the *Herald*: the West Hollywood Whipcord hit again. Kay Van Obst on maintenance duty: oiling pistols and shotguns.

The girls had spent the night—“Barracks Contino.” Bob Yeakel sent a food supply over: a half-dozen Pizza De-Luxe pizzas. A note accompanied them: “Chrissy Dear, be of strong heart. My pal at the DMV goes back to work in a week, and I’ll have him start checking temporary licenses then. Dinner soon? Romanoff’s or Perino’s?”

Leigh kept me under fisheye surveillance: I came home last night with ripped pants and a mangled car. My excuse: some punks tried to hijack my accordion. Leigh was skeptical. I kept smelling Jane’s shampoo—maybe Alberto VO5, maybe Breck.

I got Kay alone. “Can you call Pete and deliver sort of a cryptic message? I’ll explain later.”

“Well…sure.”

“Tell him to talk to the agent assigned to the Westwood People’s Study Collective. Tell him to tell the agent that I know for a fact that Sol Slotnick is not going to shoot the movie *Wetback!* Tell Pete that Slotnick is *not a Red*, he’s just a movie clown trying to make money and get laid.”

Kay got it straight and grabbed the hall phone; I covered her so Leigh wouldn’t hear. Whispers, whispers—a nudge in my back.

“Pete said he’ll pass it along, and he said that you’ve got a certain credibility. He said that if the agent isn’t at the meeting tonight, you’ll know he bought your story.”

Good—some intrigue resolving my way. The doorbell rang—Nancy checked the peephole and opened up smiling.

Pizza De-Luxe with three piping hot pies. Sizzling cheese and anchovies—unmistakable. Ramon of “Ramon and Johnny” trilled, “Buon Appetite!”

—

I got lost: lunch by myself, a cruise to the beach, dinner solo. I stewed, I fretted—shakedown Danny Getchell, my ratched-up car. Dave DePugh and Janie, Sol Slotnick, the kidnap—some four-or-five-or-six-horse parlay buzz-bombed my brain. Wires crossed, sputtered and finally made contact—I drove straight to the Westwood Collective and parked with an eye on the door.

7:58—Sol Slotnick walked in.

8:01 to 8:06—assorted beatniks walked in.

8:09—Jane DePugh walked in.

8:09 to 9:02—no Fed man in sight—Pete Van Obst probably put the fix in.

9:04—I stationed myself by that door.

Jane and Sol walked out first; I gathered them up in one big embrace. "Not *Wetback!, Border Patrol!* You've got the cars, and you can hire some non-illegals to play illegals! The movie stars Janie and me, and we can start working on the script tonight! Sol, I pulled the Feds off your ass, so now we can work this deal free and clear!"

Jane said, "I'll call my dad and tell him I'll be home late."

Sol said, "*Border Patrol!*…. Riiiiiiight…."

—

I zoomed by Googie's and copped some bennies off Gene the Queen, this transvestite that deals shit from the men's room. Va va voom!—I chased a handful with coffee and hit Sol's warehouse hummingbird buzzed.

Sol and Jane filled their fuel tanks: Maxwell House, double x Benzedrine. Pencils, notebooks, the *Wetback!* script to work from, go—

We changed heroic fruit picker Pedro to Big Pete—a Border Patrolman/accordionist hot to foil a Communist band exporting wetbacks to a secret slave labor camp in the Hollywood Hills. Big Pete is in love with torch singer Maggie Martell, formerly leftist earth mother Maria Martinez. Maggie is being pursued by evil scientist Dr. Bob Kruschev, who's brainwashing the wetbacks and implanting slogan devices inside their heads. Big Pete/Maggie/Kruschev—a hot love triangle!!! Big Pete serenades illegals from the back of a truck; his accordion lures them into surrender and deportation! Kruschev sends his sloganeering robots into the bracero community, where they spout Commie rebop and corrupt a youth group that Big Pete has been indoctrinating into Americanism. The robots and corrupted youths advance on a Border Patrol station; Big Pete makes an impassioned anti-Red speech that instantly un-corrupts the young pachucos and inspires them to attack their corruptors. The robots are demolished; Dr. Bob Kruschev makes a last-ditch effort to corrupt Maggie with a pinko love potion that makes all Commies and fellow travelers irresistible! Maggie unknowingly drinks the evil brew and puts the make on a roomful of visiting Soviet spies! Big Pete arrives on the scene, lures the spies outside with accordion music and guns them down! The movie ends with a citizenship swear-in: all the wetbacks that fought the Reds are issued green cards!

We finished the script at 6:00 A.M.—Benzedrine blasted, exultant. Jane called her dad to say she was a movie star—Sol just offered her five hundred scoots to play Maggie Martell.

I wondered how "Dad" would react.

Jane cupped a whisper. "Dick, Dad wants to talk to you."

I grabbed an extension; Jane hung up. DePugh came on the line. "I approve, Contino. But I want this Slotnick clown to up the payoff to *six* hundred. Plus: no gratuitous cleavage during her nightclub scenes. Plus: no heavy make-out scenes with you. Plus: I say we tie the kidnapping in to the movie. I say we do it just as the movie starts shooting. I've got some Teamster guys to play the kidnappers, and I think you should audition them. Dick, this caper is tied to Janie's career now, so I want to do this right. We want a realistic abduction backed by eyewitness testimony. We want—"

Rabid dog stage-daddy—whoa!

"We want—"

I said, "Dave, I'll call you," and hung up. Sol was taking his bennie-jacked pulse—at 209 when I walked over.

"Can you stand some more excitement?"

"Just barely. The way Jane re-wrote that love scene is gonna get us Auschwitz'd by the Legion of Decency."

I whispered. "I'm getting kidnapped right before we start shooting. It's a put-up job with some pro muscle working back-up."

Sol whispered. "I like it, and you can count on me to keep mum. What about Jane as your co-victim? Add cheesecake to beefcake for a *real* publicity platter."

"That spot's already filled."

"Shit. Why are we whispering?"

"Because amphetamines induce paranoia."

The warehouse door slid open; two pachucos struck lounging poses. Slit-bottom khakis, Sir Guy shirts—bantamweight punks on the stroll.

"Hey, Mr. Sol. You got trabajo?"

"When we get our movie work? Hey, Mr. Sol, what you got for us?"

Sol flipped. "I'm doing a new picture! No trabajo! No work! Get your green cards and you can play robots in *Border Patrol!* Amscray! Get out of here, I'm having a heart attack!"

The punks split with middle finger farewells; Sol broke out the saltines, took his pulse and noshed simultaneously. My fair co-star: dozing in a Border Patrol car.

I walked outside for some air. *Heralds* in a curbside newsrack—"New

Whipcord Slayings!" on page one. Photos of the dead couple—the woman looked oddly like Chris Staples.

My bennie jag was wearing down—I stifled a yawn. A carload of pachucos cruised by; one vato eyeballed me mean. I walked back in to give the script a last look.

Sol had a saltine Dagwood going: peanut butter, lox spread, sardines. Jane was scoping her chipped tooth in a compact. I said, "Get your dad to set you up with a good dentist."

"No. I've decided it will be my trademark. Dick, we were so close when that car hit us. We were so close that you couldn't have refused me."

Sol sprayed cracker crumbs. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

Noise: front door scrapes, a bottle breaking. Then KAAAWHOOOOOOSH—fire eating sewing machines, garment racks, air.

Rushing at us, oxygen fed—

Sol grabbed his Cheez Whiz and ran. Jane's knees went; I picked her up and stumbled toward the back exit. Big time heat behind us—I caught an over-the-shoulder glimpse of mannequins sizzling.

Sol hit the exit door—cool air, sunshine. Jane moaned in my arms and actually smiled. I risked a look back—flames torched the Border Patrol cars.

BOOM—an air clap hit me. Jane and I went topsy-turvy airborne.

—

A dim voice:

"…yeah, and we held it back from the press. Right…we had an eyeball witness on the last Whipcord snuffs. No, he only saw the killer's vehicle. No license numbers, but the guy got away in a '53 Buick Skylark, light in color. Yeah, needle in a haystack stuff…there's probably six thousand of the fuckers registered in California. Yeah, right, I'll call you—"

Bench slats raked my back. Not so dim: a phone slammed receiver to cradle. My eyes fluttered open behind a huge headache—a police squadroom came into focus.

A cop said, "You're supposed to say, 'Where am I?' "

Lightish '53 Skylark/Whipcord vehicle/Chrissy.

I said, "Did the eyewitness say the car had a *temporary* license?"

Quick on the uptake: "No, the witness didn't specify, and temp licenses only account for eight percent of all registered vehicles, so I'd call it a longshot that's none of your business. *Now*, you're supposed to say, 'How did I get here' and 'Where's the redhead that I was passed out with.' "

My head throbbed. My bones ached. My lungs belched up a smoke aftertaste. "Okay, I'll bite."

Fat Joe Plainclothes smiled. "You're at the West Hollywood Sheriff's

Substation. You may not recall it, but you refused medical help at the arson scene and signed autographs for the ambulance attendants. The driver asked you to play ‘Lady of Spain,’ and you passed out again walking to your car to get your accordion. Sol Slotnick is in stable condition at the cardiac ward at Queen of Angels, and the redhead’s father picked her up and drove her home. There’s an APB out for the spics that tossed the Molotov, and Mr. DePugh left you a note.”

I reached out woozy; the cop forked a memo slip over.

“Dick—the bar at the Luau tonight at eight. There’s some boys I want you to meet. P.S.—Slotnick got the script pages out, so we’re still on schedule. PPS.—what happened to Janie’s tooth?”

Woozy—weak legs, hand tremors. The cop said, “Your car’s in the back lot with the keys under the mat. Go home.”

I woozy-legged it outside. Clear, smogless, so bright my eyes stung. Soot hung in the eastbound air—R.I.P., Sol Slotnick Productions.

—

Leigh was waiting on the Fort Contino porch. Armed: a .45 in her belt, a black & white glossy held up.

Jane DePugh and I—passed out entwined behind Sol Slotnick’s sweat shop.

“Marty Bendish from the *Times* brought this by. He owes Bob Yeakel a favor, so it won’t be printed. Now, will you explain your behavior for the past week or so?”

I did.

Chrissy, Bud Brown, scalps, redskin fall guys—publicity kidnap extroardinaire. Dave DePugh and horny daughter extrication; the People’s Collective/Sol Slotnick/*Border Patrol!* The off-chance that the tail car man and Whipcord were one; DePugh as the new kidnap mastermind.

Leigh said, “When you get out of prison I’ll be waiting.”

“That won’t happen.”

“My mother said Italians were all suckers for big gestures, which is why they wrote such great operas.”

“Yeah?”

“Don’t act disingenuous and don’t look so handsome, or I’ll try to talk you out of it. And don’t let that chipped-toothed vixen french kiss you during your love scenes, or I will fucking *kill* you both.”

Anchovy pizza on Leigh’s breath—I kissed her long and hard anyway.

9.

“This is my daughter’s movie debut, so I want a good deal of publicity surrounding it. You need men with no police records to play the kidnappers, in case any eyewitnesses get called in to look at mugshots, but they’ve got to be real hard boys who can act the parts convincingly. Now, check these guys out. Are they not the stuff criminal nightmares are made of?”

Introducing:

Fritz Shoftel—blond, crew-cut, fireplug-thick Teamster thug. Wire-rimmed glasses, acne scars, six extra knuckles minimum per hand. Pop/pop/pop—he stretched a few digits to show me they worked. Loud—a man in the adjoining booth winced.

Pat Marichal—dark-skinned Paraguayan beanpole with a stark resemblance to the morgue pic of Chief Joe Running Car. A smiler—tiki table torch light made his too-bright dentures gleam.

I said, “I’m impressed. But Slotnick’s Border Patrol cars got fried, so I’m not entirely sure there’s going to *be* a movie.”

DePugh sipped his Mai-Tai. “I have faith in Sol. Any man that can eat cheese dip in the middle of a heart attack is resourceful.”

Shoftel stretched his fingers. “I studied acting under Stella Adler. My kidnapper’s motivation is that he’s a rape-o. I’ll maul the Staples babe a little bit for verisimilitude’s sake, you know, give her a few hickeys.”

Marichal chewed the fruit out of his Zombie. Those teeth—fucking incandescent. “I was a contract Indian at Universal until I got my Teamster card. My motivation’s a hatred of the white man. I drop a load of redskin grievance shit on you and Chris while I get ready to scalp you. You grab my tomahawk and slice me, then make your getaway. When you bring the cops back to the shack, they’ll see those scalps from those unsolved snuffs back in ’46. See, Fritzie’s the guy with the ransom-sex perv motives, and I’m the out-of-control guy that fucks this genius plan up.”

I said, “Who do you hit up for the ransom?”

DePugh: “Sol, and Charlie Morrison, the owner of the Mocambo. You see, Dick, I’m a cop, and I know what all cops know: that kidnappers are brainless scum who don’t know shit from Shinola. You and Chris are not exactly big name kidnap bait, and Morrison and Sol wouldn't lift a finger to save you. This crime has to *reek* of vicious incompetence, and Fritz and Pat are two guys who know how to play the part."

Shoftel said, "My parents abused me when I was a kid, so that's why I'm a rapist."

Marichal said, "The white eyes stole my people's land and got me hooked on fire water. I need scalps to sate my blood lust and the ransom money to set up an Indian curio shop outside Bisbee, Arizona."

DePugh tiki-torched a cigar. "We do the snatch in broad daylight outside your house. Pat and Fritz will haul you and Chris out to a mud-smeared Chevy, then transfer you to another car and drive you to Griffith Park. Fritz will call Sol with the first ransom demand, and Sol will haul ass to the Hollywood Police Station. You said that Getchell guy gets first crack at the story, and you said he hangs out at the Hollywood Station chasing tips. Okay, he'll be there and overhear Sol tell the cops about the ransom demand. These are solid embellishments, and we've got time to set things up right, because we can't move until Sol gets financing for the movie and it's ready to shoot."

Fiends by torchlight: rape-o/scalper/stage-door dad/rogue accordionist. We shook hands all around—Shoftel's knuckles popped castanet-loud.

—

I went by Queen of Angels to see Sol.

A clerk told me he'd checked out against doctor's advice. His forwarding address: Pink's Hot Dogs, Melrose and La Brea.

I doubled back west. Pink's was SRO—feed lines counter to curb. Sol hogged a pay phone and table at the rear—spritzing with one eye on a row of half-gnawed wienies.

Spritzing: "I'm not wedded to *Border Patrol!* at the expense of your script, and I can get you Contino for an even grand!"

Spraying: sauerkraut strands, french fry morsels.

His color rose and fell; his medic-alert bracelet jangled. "Elmer, all right, your girlfriend can co-star. Yes, Elmer, I'll relinquish my producer's credit for a profit percentage! Listen, there's a publicity angle rigged to Contino's participation that I can't reveal the details of, but believe me, it's a doozie!"

Hot dog meat flew.

A pickle chunk hit a babe in a low-backed sweater; the mid-spine bulls-eye made her go, "EEEK!"

Sol saw me and smothered the phone to his chest. "*Border Patrol!* is now *Daddy-O*."

10.

Genealogies:

Wetback! into *Border Patrol!* into *Daddy-O*. Pedro into Big Pete into Phil "Daddy-O" Sandifer: truck driver/singer/romantic lead. Maria Martinez to Maggie Martell to Jana Ryan; Jane DePugh to Sandra Giles—pitch-girl for Mark C. Bloome Tires, semi-regular on Tom Duggan's TV gabfest.

Jane gave up her "Movie Star" option and switched her major to pre-law—"So I can be more like my dad." She sent me a farewell gift: her chipped tooth enshrined in a locket.

Dave DePugh continued to boss the kidnap plot—"Hollywood publicist might be a shrewd career switch."

Pat Marichal and Fritz Shoftel stayed on-board—Sol Slotnick promised them SAG cards if the scheme succeeded.

Ten days raced by.

Chris, Kay, and Nancy continued to bunk at Fort Contino.

Bob Yeakel sent Pizza De-Luxe over with daily injections of grease.

Chrissy seduced pizza boy Ramon.

Ramon renounced his homosexuality.

Ramon told Kay he had to pretend Chris was a man.

Yeakel double delivered: some DMV flunky was collating license slips. Leigh was helping him out—she wanted the Chrissy problem resolved and the Fort Contino red alert suspended.

No more "Fuck You To Death" notes arrived.

No cars tailed Chris on her out-of-fort journeys. My journeys ditto—no suspicious vehicles, period.

I spilled my insider lead to Nancy and Chris: the West Hollywood Whipcord drove a light-colored '53 Skylark. Crime Queen Nancy cut me off short: the Whipcord only snuffed couples; single-o women and hate notes weren't his MO.

"Sex killers never change their modus operandi. I've been intimate with enough of them to know that's true."

Sol Slotnick found a pad down the street from Pink's and secured his

Daddy-O financing via high-interest loan from Johnny Stompanato. Stomp said he'd use his pay-back cash to market a new woman's tonic—a Spanish fly compound guaranteed to induce instant and permanent nymphomania.

Chris and I joined Pat and Fritz for acting practice. Both men were "Motivation" obsessed. Fritz picked up a lightweight case of paranoia—sometimes he imagined a primer-gray sports car tailing him. Practice, dress rehearsals—waiting for a *Daddy-O* GO date.

Schizo days.

I rehearsed with the Scalper and the Rapist; I rehearsed with the *Daddy-O* director, Lou Place. David Moessinger's *Daddy-O* script replaced *Border Patrol!*—it was tighter, but lacked political punch. Sol rescued his nightclub set from sweat shop rubble—it would serve as both the "Rainbow Gardens" and "Sidney Chillis' Hi-Note"—major *Daddy-O* venues. The new screenplay called for me to sing—I learned "Rock Candy Baby," "Angel Act" and "Wait'll I Get You Home" pronto. My *Daddy-O* co-stars—Sandra Giles, Bruno VeSota, Ron McNeil, Jack McClure, Sonia Torgesen—were swell, but Scalp Man and Rape Man claimed my soul.

We'd hike up into the Griffith Park hills and bullshit. Pat Marichal brought fire water—he was working the "Method" on his Chief Joe Running Car persona. A few shots, a few yuks. Then the inevitable segue to the topic of courage.

My best take: you never knew when it was real or just moonshine to impress other people.

Pat's best take: *you* know when you're scared, but do what you're scared of anyway—nobody else can ever know.

Fritzie's best take: give the world what it respects to get you what you want, and keep close watch on your balls when nobody's looking.

Time schizzing by—this fine L.A. winter fading out breezy.

Sol called and hit the brakes: *Daddy-O* was set to go four days hence.

The word flashed:

Mastermind/Scalper/Rapist to Victims—forty-eight hours until kidnap morning.

11.

Tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick.

Leigh left for the DMV early.

Nancy and Kay left with her—baby Merri ditto.

Tick tick tick tick tick.

Chris and I watched the door.

Tick tick tick—my pulse worked triple-digit overtime. Chrissy's neck veins pop-pop-popped—every cigarette drag made them throb.

8:00 even—the doorbell.

"Hello? Is anyone home? My car's broken down, and I need to call the Auto Club."

Good neighbor Dick opens up.

Two men in stocking masks sap him prone. He's grabbed and hauled outside, good neighbor Chris likewise—she gets off her muffled scream right on cue.

Manhandled across the street—Stanislavsky Method tough. Weird: no mud-smeared Chevy in view.

More weird:

I made Pat Marichal through his mask. Nix on the other man—he was half a foot taller than Fritz Shoftel.

Slammed into a copper-colored sport coupe. Skewed glimpses: "Skylark" in longhand chrome, a spanking new metal license plate. My shoulder rubbed the door—paint smeared—a primer-gray spot showed through.

The car MOVED—Chris and I backseat-tangled—Pat driving.

The other man held a cocked Roscoe on us.

Down into Hollywood, speed limit cautious. Pat spoke out of character. "This is Duane. Fritz had an appendicitis and sent him in as a sub. He says he's solid."

Blip: Fritz said *he'd* been tailed by a primer-gray car.

Blip: Skylark/fresh paint/new permanent license.

Blip: tails on Chrissy.

Blip: light-colored and primer-gray = similar.

Chris shook from plain tension—she didn't waft hink. The other man spoke in character. "Baby, you look so goooooooooood. Baby, It's gonna be so goooooooooood."

Talking stretched his mask. I recognized him: the scarf trick geek from the "Rocket to Stardom" try-outs.

Silk sashes—fashioned into hangman's knots.

Blip: THE WHIPCORD.

Fountain and Virgil looming—the car switch—our only chance.

Chris, improvising nice: "You're a filthy degenerate shitbird."

Whipcord/sash man: "Baby, I want to fuck you to death."

Neon bright hink—Chris flashed me this big HOLY SHIT!

On-cue—Pat pulled into the deserted Richfield Station.

Off-cue—I kicked the Whipcord's seat and slammed him against the dashboard.

Go—

Whipcord—stunned. Pat, stunned—this wasn't in the script. A '51 Ford by some gas pumps—the transfer/getaway car.

Very very fast:

I kicked the seat again.

Chris tumbled out the passenger door. I got one leg out—and kicked Whipcord with the other.

Chrissy stumbled and fell.

Whipcord shot Pat in the face—brains spattered the windshield.

I tripped and fell out of the car. Whipcord kicked me—I rolled into a ball and dervish-spun toward Chris. Shots zinged the pavement—asphalt exploded shrapnel-like.

Chrissy got to her feet.

Whipcord grabbed her.

I stood up, charged, and tripped over a pump hose. Whipcord pistol-whipped Chris into the Ford and peeled out eastbound.

"I Want To Fuck You To—"

DEATH.

I pulled Pat out of the car and wiped his brains off the windshield with my sport coat. Keys in the ignition—*I* peeled eastbound.

25, 40, 60, 70—double the speed limit. Blood streaks on my windshield—I hit the wipers and thinned it red to pink. No sight of the Ford; sirens behind me.

Sticky hands—I wiped them on the seat to grip the wheel better. Sirens in front of me, sirens wailing from both sides, ear-splitter loud.

Black & white police cars—a four-point press descending. Bullhorn roar—garbled—something like, "Buick Skylark pull over!"

I obeyed—very very slow.

I got out of the car and raised my brain-crusted hands.

Cop cars fishtailed up and boxed me in. Somebody yelled, "That's Contino, not the Whipcord!" Harness bull stampede—gun-wielding fuzz surrounded me.

A plainclothesman got up in my face. "Your wife called us from the DMV. She got a make on that 1116 temp license and traced it to the Skylark, which just got a paint job and some permanent plates. She told us how the car was tailing your friend the Staples woman, and Sheriff's Homicide just got a second eyewitness who tagged this as the West Hollywood Whipcord's very own—"

I cut in. "I'll explain all this later, but right now you've got to be looking for a light-blue '51 Ford. The Whipcord's got Chris Staples, and he's heading east with her in that car."

The cop shrieked orders; black & whites shrieked eastbound rapidamente. My brain shrieked—

Spill on the kidnap caper?—no, don't implicate Chrissy. Dead certain—the Whipcord killed Fritzie—don't reveal that either. Would Whipcord take Chris to the Griffith Park shack—NO—he wouldn't go near it.

"Fuck You To Death" implied slow torture implied Chris with a chance to survive.

The plainclothesman said, "The Whipcord's got an apartment near here. Follow me in the Skylark, maybe you'll see something that will help us."

—

I saw:

Plastic dolls sash cord strangled, dripping nail polish blood.

Stuffed dolls ripped open, spilling kapok.

Polaroids of bumper-jack bludgeoned lovers.

Thousands of silk scarves tossed helter-skelter.

Chris Staples publicity pix, semen-crusted.

Chrissy's *Nugget* fold-out defaced with swastikas.

Barbie and Ken dolls going 69. Crudely glued-on photograph faces: Chris Staples, Dick Contino.

A photo-faced pincushion voodoo doll: Dick Contino with a hatpin stuck in his crotch.

It hit me:

He thinks Chris and I are lovers. He wants to kill us both. This fixation will make him indecisive—he'll keep Chrissy alive for awhile.

The plainclothesman said, "His name's Duane Frank Yarnell, and I don't think he takes too kindly to you and Miss Staples."

Those dolls—Jesus fuck. "Can I go now? Can I take the Skylark and drop it off later?"

"Yeah, you can. I yanked the APB on it, but the Sheriff's have a want on it, so you'll have to get it back by tonight. And *I* want to see you downtown at LAPD Homicide tonight, no later than 6:00. There's a dead man with a stocking on his face and a bullet in his head that you have to explain, and I'm just dying to hear your story."

I said, "Just find Chris and save her."

He said, "We will make every effort. Are you sure there's nothing you can tell us *now* that will help us?"

I lied: "No."

—

Tears in my eyes, a blood-smeared windshield—luck got me to Fritz Shoftel's pad intact. I laid some jive and a tensky on his landlady—she unlocked his apartment and bugged out.

The living room and kitchen—nothing amiss. The bedroom—

Fritzie hung from a ceiling beam—cinched up by at least fifty neckties. Eviscerated: entrails oozing from deep torso rips. Viscera piles on the floor—shaped into a swastika.

I ran for the bathroom and hurled just short of the door. Towels atop a hamper—I soaked one in cold water, swabbed my face and got up the juice for a search.

The bedroom, first glance:

A bookshelf crammed with acting texts. Knife wounds on Fritzie's arms—figure Whipcord tortured him for kidnap info. A dresser and closet—be thorough, now.

Work clothes. Teamster t-shirts. A photo of Fritz and Jimmy Hoffa—someone drew devil's horns on the big man. Rubbers, women's undies—Fritz admitted he was a longtime panty sniffer. Rolls of dimes, *Playboy* magazines, a Playboy rabbit keychain. A group picture: Fritzie's World War II outfit. More panties, more rubbers, more *Playboys*, an L.A. Parks and Recreation Field Guide dog-eared to a Griffith Park page.

I examined it. The kidnap shack location was x-marked; pencil press indentation lines grew out of it. I found a magnifying glass and traced them to their terminus: a cave area a half mile southwest of the shack.

I re-checked the map. Tilt—dirt roads marked off—Observatory to cave turf access.

Somebody charted escape routes and other hide-outs on tracing paper. They weren't part of the initial kidnap plan—I would have known. Double tilt: Whipcord gets us to the shack and kills Marichal *there*. It's just a short hop to the caves—where he can kill Contino and Staples at leisure.

Leisure = time = go NOW, don't buzz the fuzz.

I hauled up to Griffith Park. Danny Getchell lurked by the Greek Theatre, backstopped by some movie camera schmuck. Oblivious shitbird—he didn't know the whole scheme had gone blooey.

I ditched the Skylark in the Observatory lot. Access roads would take me straight to the caves—but I couldn't risk car noise that close to Whipcord. Sprint time—I ran straight up to the kidnap shack.

Empty—scalps on the table, biz as usual. I followed tracing paper lines southwest; adrenaline jacked my heart up to my pompadour.

There—a clearing offset by cave-dotted hills. Tire marks on the road; a '51 Ford covered with camouflage shrubs.

Four cave openings.

I crept up and re-conned, ears cocked for horror. One, two—silent. Three—squelched screams and insane ramblings.

"I have worshipped the Great Fire God for lo these years, and I have heeded the teachings of His only son, Adolf Hitler. He has asked me for silk scarf sacrifices, and I have given them to Him. Now the Great Fire God wishes me to take a wife, and first consecrate her with the markings of His son."

I crept in. Pitch dark, twisty, damp—I hugged the cave wall. Motor hum, then light—Whipcord had an arclamp set up.

Shadows, shapes half-visible. Shadow bounces, full light on pale skin: Chrissy's back, marked with a red swastika.

Trickling blood—not a gouge—still TIME.

I tiptoed outside to the Ford. Adrenaline: one good yank ripped the back seat out clean. I found a siphon tube in the trunk, popped the gas cap and sucked.

Lip traction caught—I soaked the seat cushion with ethyl. Springs and a baseboard to grip—I hoisted the hundred pounds of vinyl and foam up easy.

Unwieldy—but I got a match lit. WHOOOOOOOOOSH—the Fire God stormed the cave.

Smoke, screams up ahead. Flames snaking sideways—my arm hair sizzled. Godawful heat, shots—I felt foam rip close to my heart.

Chris screamed.

Whipcord screamed gobbledygook. Bullets smashed my shield of fire and exploded.

Heat, smoke, wind sucking flames *away* from me.

Whipcord kept firing—two guns—very close range. The top of the seat cushion blew off—I held on to red-hot springs and kept coming.

A blue halo behind Whipcord: clear sky.

I piled into him.

His hair caught fire.

I kept pushing toward the blue.

Whipcord ran backwards, screaming.

I chased him.

He hit thin air—I hurled the cushion at him.

Flaming pinwheels off a hundred foot cliff.

I grabbed Chris, ran her out to the Ford, tucked her low in the passenger seat. Fire God fast: down dirt roads, through the lot, Vermont south. Roadblocks by the Greek Theatre; Danny Getchell, camera ready. Cops yelled, "Stop!"—I got the notion this Fire God Buggy could fly. I worked the clutch/gas/shifter just right—the fucker went airborne. Shots behind me, residual shouts—magically audible. I heard "CONTINO," but no one yelled, "COWARD."

—

That was thirty-five years ago.

History in ellipses: the cops covered all of it up.

I skated on kidnap plot charges—a police bullet meant for the Ford killed an old lady. Shoftel, Marichal and the Whipcord—stonewalled.

Chris Staples healed up nicely—and avoids low-cut gowns that expose her faint scarring. She married a right-wing nut who digs swastikas—they're big in born-again Christian TV fraud.

Sol Slotnick has survived nineteen heart attacks on an all-junk food diet.

Spade Cooley beat Ella Mae to death in 1961.

Jane DePugh had an affair with President John F. Kennedy.

Dave DePugh is a major JFK snuff suspect.

Leigh died of cancer in '82. Our three kids are grown up now.

Daddy-O bombed critically and nosedived at the box-office. My career never regained its early momentum. Lounge gigs, Dago banquets—I earn a decent living playing music I love.

"Draft Dodger," "Coward"—every once in a while I still hear it.

It's only mildly annoying.

LAPD goons muscled Danny Getchell for his flying car footage.

He dumped it on the *Daddy-O* cinematographer. It was spliced into the movie—not too convincingly.

People who've seen the raw film stock deem my driving feat miraculous.

The word has spread in a limited fashion: one day in 1958 I touched God or something equally powerful. I believe it—but only to an ambiguous point. The truth is that at any given moment anything is possible.

Every word of this memoir is true.

HIGH DARKTOWN

From my office windows I watched L.A. celebrate the end of World War II. Central Division Warrants took up the entire north side of City Hall's eleventh floor, so my vantage point was high and wide. I saw clerks drinking straight from the bottle in the Hall of Records parking lot across the street and harness bulls forming a riot squad and heading for Little Tokyo a few blocks away, bent on holding back a conga line of youths with 2 by 4s who looked bent on going the atom bomb one better. Craning my neck, I glimpsed tall black plumes of smoke on Bunker Hill—a sure sign that patriotic Belmont High students were stripping cars and setting the tires on fire. Over on Sunset and Figueroa, knots of zooters were assembling in violation of the Zoot Suit Ordinance, no doubt figuring that today it was anything goes.

The tiny window above my desk had an eastern exposure, and it offered up nothing but smog and a giant traffic jam inching toward Boyle Heights. I stared into the brown haze, imagining shitloads of code 2s and 3s thwarted by noxious fumes and bumper-to-bumper revelry. My daydreams got more and more vivid, and when I had a whole skyful of A-bombs descending on the offices of the L.A.P.D. Detective Bureau, I slammed my desk and picked up the two pieces of paper I had been avoiding all morning.

The first sheet was a scrawled memo from the Daywatch Robbery boss down the hall: "Lee—Wallace Simpkins paroled from Quentin last week—to our jurisdiction. Thought you should know. Be careful. G.C."

Cheery V-J Day tidings.

The second page was an interdepartmental teletype issued from University

Division, and, when combined with Georgie Caulkins's warning, it spelled out the beginning of a new one-front war.

Over the past five days there had been four heavy-muscle stickups in the West Adams district, perpetrated by a two-man heist team, one white, one negro. The MO was identical in all four cases: liquor stores catering to upper-crust negroes were hit at night, half an hour before closing, when the cash registers were full. A well-dressed male Caucasian would walk in and beat the clerk to the floor with the barrel of a .45 automatic, while the negro heister stuffed the till cash into a paper bag. Twice customers had been present when the robberies occurred; they had also been beaten senseless—one elderly woman was still in critical condition at Queen of Angels.

It was as simple and straightforward as a neon sign. I picked up the phone and called Al Van Patten's personal number at the County Parole Bureau.

"Speak, it's your nickel."

"Lee Blanchard, Al."

"Big Lee! You working today? The war's over!"

"No, it's not. Listen, I need the disposition on a parolee. Came out of Quentin last week. If he reported in, I need an address; if he hasn't, just tell me."

"Name? Charge?"

"Wallace Simpkins, 655 PC. I sent him up myself in '39."

Al whistled. "Light jolt. He got juice?"

"Probably kept his nose clean and worked a war industries job inside; his partner got released to the army after Pearl Harbor. Hurry it up, will you?"

"Off and running."

Al dropped the receiver to his desk, and I suffered through long minutes of static-filtered party noise—male and female giggles, bottles clinking together, happy county flunkies turning radio dials trying to find dance music but getting only jubilant accounts of the big news. Through Edward R. Murrow's uncharacteristically cheerful drone I pictured Wild Wally Simpkins, flush with cash and armed for bear, looking for *me*. I was shivering when Al came back on the line and said, "He's hot, Lee."

"Bench warrant issued?"

"Not yet."

"Then don't waste your time."

"What are you talking about?"

"Small potatoes. Call Lieutenant Holland at University dicks and tell him Simpkins is half of the heist team he's looking for. Tell him to put out an APB and add, 'armed and extremely dangerous' and 'apprehend with all force deemed necessary.' "

Al whistled again. "That bad?"

I said, “Yeah,” and hung up. “Apprehend with all force deemed necessary” was the L.A.P.D. euphemism for “shoot on sight.” I felt my fear decelerate just a notch. Finding fugitive felons was my job. Slipping an extra piece into my back waistband, I set out to find the man who had vowed to kill me.

After picking up standing mugs of Simpkins and a carbon of the robbery report from Georgie Caulkins, I drove toward the West Adams district. The day was hot and humid, and sidewalk mobs spilled into the street, passing victory bottles to horn-honking motorists. Traffic was bottlenecked at every stoplight, and paper debris floated down from office windows—a makeshift ticker-tape parade. The scene made me itchy, so I attached the roof light and hit my siren, weaving around stalled cars until downtown was a blur in my rearview mirror. When I slowed, I was all the way to Alvarado and the city I had sworn to protect looked normal again. Slowing to a crawl in the right-hand lane, I thought of Wallace Simpkins and knew the itch wouldn’t stop until the bastard was bought and paid for.

We went back six years, to the fall of ’39, when I was a vice officer in University Division and a regular light-heavyweight attraction at the Hollywood-Legion Stadium. A black-white stick-up gang had been clouting markets and juke joints on West Adams, the white guy passing himself off as a member of Mickey Cohen’s mob, coercing the proprietor into opening up the safe for the monthly protection payment while the negro guy looked around innocently, then hit the cash registers. When the white guy got to the safe, he took all the money, then pistol-whipped the proprietor senseless. The heisters would then drive slowly north into the respectable Wilshire district, the white guy at the wheel, the negro guy huddled down in the back seat.

I got involved in the investigation on a fluke.

After the fifth job, the gang stopped cold. A stoolie of mine told me that Mickey Cohen found out that the white muscle was an ex-enforcer of his and had him snuffed. Rumor had it that the colored guy—a cowboy known only as Wild Wallace—was looking for a new partner and a new territory. I passed the information along to the dicks and thought nothing more of it. Then, a week later, it all hit the fan.

As a reward for my tip, I got a choice moonlight assignment: bodyguarding a high-stakes poker game frequented by L.A.P.D. brass and navy bigwigs up from San Diego. The game was held in the back room at Minnie Roberts’s Casbah, the swankiest police-sanctioned whorehouse on the south side. All I had to do was look big, mean, and servile and be willing to share boxing anecdotes. It was a major step toward sergeant’s stripes and a transfer to the Detective Division.

It went well—all smiles and backslaps and recountings of my split-decision loss to Jimmy Bivins—until a negro guy in a chauffeur’s outfit and an olive-skinned youth in a navy officer’s uniform walked in the door. I saw a gun bulge under the chauffeur’s left arm, and chandelier light fluttering over the navy man's face revealed pale negro skin and processed hair.

And I knew.

I walked up to Wallace Simpkins, my right hand extended. When he grasped it, I sent a knee into his balls and a hard left hook at his neck. When he hit the floor, I pinned him there with a foot on his gun bulge, drew my own piece, and leveled it at his partner. "Bon voyage, Admiral," I said.

The admiral was named William Boyle, an apprentice armed robber from a black bourgeois family fallen on hard times. He turned state's evidence on Wild Wallace, drew a reduced three-to-five jolt at Chino as part of the deal, and was paroled to the war effort early in '42. Simpkins was convicted of five counts of robbery one with aggravated assault, got five-to-life at Big Q, and voodoo-hexed Billy Boyle and me at his trial, vowing on the soul of Baron Samedi to kill both of us, chop us into stew meat, and feed it to his dog. I more than half believed his vow, and for the first few years he was away, every time I got an unexplainable ache or pain I thought of him in his cell, sticking pins into a blue-suited Lee Blanchard voodoo doll.

I checked the robbery report lying on the seat beside me. The addresses of the four new black-white stickups covered 26th and Gramercy to La Brea and Adams. Hitting the racial demarcation line, I watched the topography change from negligent middle-class white to proud colored. East of St. Andrews, the houses were unkempt, with peeling paint and ratty front lawns. On the west the homes took on an air of elegance: small dwellings were encircled by stone fencing and well-tended greenery; the mansions that had earned West Adams the sobriquet High Darktown put Beverly Hills pads to shame—they were older, larger, and less architecturally pretentious, as if the owners knew that the only way to be rich and black was to downplay the performance with the quiet noblesse oblige of old white money.

I knew High Darktown only from the scores of conflicting legends about it. When I worked University Division, it was never on my beat. It was the lowest per capita crime area in L.A. The University brass followed an implicit edict of letting rich black police rich black, as if they figured blue suits couldn't speak the language there at all. And the High Darktown citizens did a good job. Burglars foolish enough to trek across giant front lawns and punch in Tiffany windows were dispatched by volleys from thousand-dollar skeet guns held by negro financiers with an aristocratic panache to rival that of *anyone* white and big-moneyed. High Darktown did a damn good job of being inviolate.

But the legends were something else, and when I worked University, I wondered if they had been started and repeatedly embellished only because square-john white cops couldn't take the fact that there were "niggers," "shines," "spooks," and "jigs" who were capable of buying their low-rent lives outright. The stories ran from the relatively prosaic: negro boot-leggers with mob connections taking their loot and buying liquor stores in Watts and wetback-staffed garment mills in San Pedro, to exotic: the same thugs flooding low darktowns with cut-rate heroin and pimping out their most beautiful high-yellow sweethearts to L.A.'s powers-that-be in order to circumvent licensing and real estate statutes enforcing racial exclusivity. There was only one common denominator to all the legends: it was agreed that although High Darktown money started out dirty, it was now squeaky clean and snow white.

Pulling up in front of the liquor store on Gramercy, I quickly scanned the dick's report on the robbery there, learning that the clerk was alone when it went down and saw both robbers up close before the white man pistol-whipped him unconscious. Wanting an eyeball witness to back up Lieutenant Holland's APB, I entered the immaculate little shop and walked up to the counter.

A negro man with his head swathed in bandages walked in from the back. Eyeing me top to bottom, he said, "Yes, officer?"

I liked his brevity and reciprocated it. Holding up the mug shot of Wallace Simpkins, I said, "Is this one of the guys?"

Flinching backward, he said, "Yes. Get him."

"Bought and paid for," I said.

An hour later I had three more eyeball confirmations and turned my mind to strategy. With the all-points out on Simpkins, he'd probably get juked by the first blue suit who crossed his path, a thought only partly comforting. Artie Holland probably had stake-out teams stationed in the back rooms of other liquor stores in the area, and a prowl of Simpkins's known haunts was a ridiculous play for a solo white man. Parking on an elm-lined street, I watched Japanese gardeners tend football field-sized lawns and started to sense that Wild Wallace's affinity for High Darktown and white partners was the lever I needed. I set out to trawl for pale-skinned intruders like myself.

—

South on La Brea to Jefferson, then up to Western and back over to Adams. Runs down 1st Avenue, 2nd Avenue, 3rd, 4th, and 5th. The only white men I saw were other cops, mailmen, store owners, and poontang prowlers. A circuit of the bars on Washington yielded no white faces and no known criminal types I could shake down for information.

Dusk found me hungry, angry, and still itchy, imagining Simpkins poking pins in a brand-new, plainclothes Blanchard doll. I stopped at a barbecue joint and wolfed down a beef sandwich, slaw, and fries. I was on my second cup of coffee when the mixed couple came in.

The girl was a pretty high yellow—soft angularity in a pink summer dress that tried to downplay her curves, and failed. The man was squat and muscular, wearing a rumpled Hawaiian shirt and pressed khaki trousers that looked like army issue. From my table I heard them place their order: jumbo chicken dinners for six with extra gravy and biscuits. “Lots of big appetites,” the guy said to the counterman. When the line got him a deadpan, he goosed the girl with his knee. She moved away, clenching her fists and twisting her head as if trying to avoid an unwanted kiss. Catching her face full view, I saw loathing etched into every feature.

They registered as trouble, and I walked out to my car in order to tail them when they left the restaurant. Five minutes later they appeared, the girl walking ahead, the man a few paces behind her, tracing hourglass figures in the air and flicking his tongue like a lizard. They got into a prewar Packard sedan parked in front of me, Lizard Man taking the wheel. When they accelerated, I counted to ten and pursued.

The Packard was an easy surveillance. It had a long radio antenna topped with a foxtail, so I was able to remain several car lengths in back and use the tail as a sighting device. We moved out of High Darktown on Western, and within minutes mansions and proudly tended homes were replaced by tenements and tar-paper shacks encircled by chicken wire. The farther south we drove the worse it got; when the Packard hung a left on 94th and headed east, past auto graveyards, storefront voodoo mosques and hair-straightening parlors, it felt like entering White Man’s Hell.

At 94th and Normandie, the Packard pulled to the curb and parked; I continued on to the corner. From my rearview I watched Lizard Man and the girl cross the street and enter the only decent-looking house on the block, a whitewashed adobe job shaped like a miniature Alamo. Parking myself, I grabbed a flashlight from under the seat and walked over.

Right away I could tell the scene was way off. The block was nothing but welfare cribs, vacant lots, and gutted jalopies, but six beautiful ’40-’41 vintage cars were stationed at curbside. Hunkering down, I flashed my light at their license plates, memorized the numbers, and ran back to my unmarked cruiser. Whispering hoarsely into the two-way, I gave R&I the figures and settled back to await the readout.

I got the kickback ten minutes later, and the scene went from way off to way, *way* off.

Cupping the radio mike to my ear and clamping my spare hand over it to hold the noise down, I took in the clerk’s spiel. The Packard was registered to Leotis McCarver, male negro, age 41, of 1348 West 94th Street, L.A.—which had to be the cut-rate Alamo. His occupation was on file as union officer in the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. The other vehicles were registered to negro and white thugs with strong-arm convictions dating back to 1922. When the clerk read off the last name—Ralph “Big Tuna” De Santis, a known Mickey Cohen trigger—I decided to give the Alamo a thorough crawling.

Armed with my flashlight and two pieces, I cut diagonally across vacant lots toward my target’s back yard. In the far distance I could see fireworks lighting up the sky, but down here no one seemed to be celebrating—their war of just plain living was still dragging on. When I got to the Alamo's yard wall, I took it at a run and kneed and elbowed my way over the top, coming down onto soft grass.

The back of the house was dark and quiet, so I risked flashing my light. Seeing a service porch fronted by a flimsy wooden door, I tiptoed over and tried it—and found it unlocked.

I walked in flashlight first, my beam picking up dusty walls and floors, discarded lounge chairs, and a broom-closet door standing half open. Opening it all the way, I saw army officers' uniforms on hangers, replete with campaign ribbons and embroidered insignias.

Shouted voices jerked my attention toward the house proper. Straining my ears, I discerned both white- and negro-accented insults being hurled. There was a connecting door in front of me, with darkness beyond it. The shouting had to be issuing from a front room, so I nudged the door open a crack, then squatted down to listen as best I could.

"…and I'm just tellin' you we gots to find a place and get us off the streets," a negro voice was yelling, " 'cause even if we splits up, colored with colored and the whites with the whites, there is still gonna be roadblocks!"

A babble rose in response, then a shrill whistle silenced it, and a white voice dominated: "We'll be stopping the train way out in the country. Farmland. We'll destroy the signaling gear, and if the passengers take off looking for help, the nearest farmhouse is ten fucking miles away—and those dogfaces are gonna be on foot."

A black voice tittered, "They gonna be mad, them soldiers."

Another black voice: "They gonna fought the whole fucking war for free."

Laughter, then a powerful negro baritone took over: "Enough clowning around, this is money we're talking about and nothing else!"

" 'Cepting revenge, mister union big shot. Don't you forget I got me other business on that train."

I knew that voice by heart—it had voodoo-cursed my soul in court. I was on my way out the back for reinforcements when my legs went out from under me and I fell head first into darkness.

—

The darkness was soft and rippling, and I felt like I was swimming in a velvet ocean. Angry shouts reverberated far away, but I knew they were harmless; they were coming from another planet. Every so often I felt little stabs in my arms and saw pinpoints of light that made the voices louder, but then everything would go even softer, the velvet waves caressing me, smothering all my hurt.

Until the velvet turned to ice and the friendly little stabs became wrenching thuds up and down my back. I tried to draw myself into a ball, but an angry voice from this planet wouldn't let me. "Wake up, shitbird! We ain't wastin' no more pharmacy morph on you! Wake up! Wake up, goddamnit!"

Dimly I remembered that I was a police officer and went for the .38 on my hip. My arms and hands wouldn't move, and when I tried to lurch my whole body, I knew they were tied to my sides and that the thuds were kicks to my legs and rib cage. Trying to move away, I felt head-to-toe muscle cramps and opened my eyes. Walls and a ceiling came into hazy focus, and it all came back. I screamed something that was drowned out by laughter, and the Lizard Man's face hovered only inches above mine. "Lee Blanchard," he said, waving my badge and ID holder in front of my eyes. "You got sucker-punched again, shitbird. I saw Jimmy Bivins put you down at the Legion. Left hook outta nowhere, and you hit your knees, then worthless-shine muscle puts you down on your face. I got no respect for a man who gets sucker-punched by niggers."

At "niggers" I heard a gasp and twisted around to see the negro girl in the pink dress sitting in a chair a few feet away. Listening for background noises and hearing nothing, I knew the three of us were alone in the house. My eyes cleared a little more, and I saw that the velvet ocean was a plushly furnished living room. Feeling started to return to my limbs, sharp pain that cleared my fuzzy head. When I felt a grinding in my lower back, I winced; the extra .38 snub I had tucked into my waistband at City Hall was still there, slipped down into my skivvies. Reassured by it, I looked up at Lizard Face and said, "Robbed any liquor stores lately?"

He laughed. "A few. Chump change compared to the big one this after—"

The girl shrieked, "Don't tell him nothin'!"

Lizard Man flicked his tongue. "He's dead meat, so who cares? It's a train hijack, canvasback. Some army brass chartered the Super Chief, L.A. to Frisco. Poker games, hookers in the sleeping cars, smut movies in the lounge. Ain't you heard? The war's over, time to celebrate. We got hardware on board—shines playing porters, white guys in army suits. They all got scatterguns, and sweetie pie's boyfriend Voodoo, he's got himself a tommy. They're gonna take the train down tonight, around Salinas, when the brass is smashed to the gills, just achin' to throw away all that good separation pay. Then Voodoo's gonna come back here and perform some religious rites on you. He told me about it, said he's got this mean old pit bull named Revenge. A friend kept him while he was in Quentin. The buddy was white, and he tormented the dog so he hates white men worse than poison. The dog only gets fed about twice a week, and you can just bet he'd love a nice big bowl of canvasback stew. Which is you, white boy. Voodoo's gonna cut you up alive, turn you into dog food out of the can. Wanna take a bet on what he cuts off first?"

"That's not true! That's not what—"

"Shut up, Cora!"

Twisting on my side to see the girl better, I played a wild hunch. “Are you Cora Downey?”

Cora’s jaw dropped, but Lizard spoke first. “Smart boy. Billy Boyle’s ex, Voodoo’s current. These high-yellow coozes get around. You know canvasback here, don’t you, sweet? He sent both your boyfriends up, and if you’re real nice, maybe Voodoo’ll let you do some cutting on him.”

Cora walked over and spat in my face. She hissed “Mother” and kicked me with a spiked toe. I tried to roll away, and she sent another kick at my back.

Then my ace in the hole hit me right between the eyes, harder than any of the blows I had absorbed so far. Last night I had heard Wallace Simpkins’s voice through the door: “ ‘Cepting revenge, mister union big shot. I got me other business on that train.” In my mind that “business” buzzed as snuffing Lieutenant Billy Boyle, and I was laying five-to-one that Cora wouldn’t like the idea.

Lizard took Cora by the arm and led her to the couch, then squatted next to me. “You’re a sucker for a spitball,” he said.

I smiled up at him. “Your mother bats cleanup at a two-dollar whorehouse.”

He slapped my face. I spat blood at him and said, “And you’re ugly.”

He slapped me again; when his arm followed through I saw the handle of an automatic sticking out of his right pants pocket. I made my voice drip with contempt: “You hit like a girl. Cora could take you easy.”

His next shot was full force. I sneered through bloody lips and said, “You queer? Only nancy boys slap like that.”

A one-two set hit me in the jaw and neck, and I knew it was now or never. Slurring my words like a punch-drunk pug, I said, “Let me up. Let me up and I’ll fight you man-to-man. Let me up.”

Lizard took a penknife from his pocket and cut the rope that bound my arms to my sides. I tried to move my hands, but they were jelly. My battered legs had some feeling in them, so I rolled over and up onto my knees. Lizard had backed off into a chump’s idea of a boxing stance and was firing roundhouse lefts and rights at the living room air. Cora was sitting on the couch, wiping angry tears from her cheeks. Deep breathing and lolling my torso like a hophead, I stalled for time, waiting for feeling to return to my hands.

“Get up, shitbird!”

My fingers still wouldn’t move.

“I said get up!”

Still no movement.

Lizard came forward on the balls of his feet, feinting and shadowboxing. My wrists started to buzz with blood, and I began to get unprofessionally angry, like I was a rookie heavy, not a thirty-one-year-old cop. Lizard hit me twice, left, right, open-handed. In a split second he became Jimmy Bivins, and

I zoomed back to the ninth round at the Legion in '37. Dropping my left shoulder, I sent out a right lead, then pulled it and left-hooked him to the breadbasket. Bivins gasped and bent forward; I stepped backward for swinging room. Then Bivins was Lizard going for his piece, and I snapped to where I really was.

We drew at the same time. Lizard's first shot went above my head, shattering a window behind me; mine, slowed by my awkward rear pull, slammed into the far wall. Recoil spun us both around, and before Lizard had time to aim I threw myself to the floor and rolled to the side like a carpet-eating dervish. Three shots cut the air where I had been standing a second before, and I extended my gun arm upward, braced my wrist, and emptied my snub-nose at Lizard's chest. He was blasted backward, and through the shots' echoes I heard Cora scream long and shrill.

I stumbled over to Lizard. He was on his way out, bleeding from three holes, unable to work the trigger of the .45. He got up the juice to give me a feeble middle-finger farewell, and when the bird was in midair I stepped on his heart and pushed down, squeezing the rest of his life out in a big arterial burst. When he finished twitching, I turned my attention to Cora, who was standing by the couch, putting out another shriek.

I stifled the noise by pinning her neck to the wall and hissing, "Questions and answers. Tell me what I want to know and you walk, fuck with me and I find dope in your purse and tell the DA you've been selling it to white nursery-school kids." I let up on my grip. "First question. Where's my car?"

Cora rubbed her neck. I could feel the obscenities stacking up on her tongue, itching to be hurled. All her rage went into her eyes as she said, "Out back. The garage."

"Have Simpkins and the stiff been clouting the liquor stores in West Adams?"

Cora stared at the floor and nodded, "Yes." Looking up, her eyes were filled with the self-disgust of the freshly turned stoolie. I said, "McCarver the union guy thought up the train heist?"

Another affirmative nod.

Deciding not to mention Billy Boyle's probable presence on the train, I said, "Who's bankrolling? Buying the guns and uniforms?"

"The liquor store money was for that, and there was this rich guy fronting money."

Now the big question. "When does the train leave Union Station?"

Cora looked at her watch. "In half an hour."

I found a phone in the hallway and called the Central Division squadroom, telling Georgie Caulkins to send all his available plainclothes and uniformed officers to Union Station, that an army-chartered Super Chief about to leave for 'Frisco was going to be hit by a white-negro gang in army and porter outfits. Lowering my voice so Cora wouldn't hear, I told him to detain a negro quartermaster lieutenant named William Boyle as a material witness, then hung up before he could say anything but "Jesus Christ."

Cora was smoking a cigarette when I reentered the living room. I picked my badge holder up off the floor and heard sirens approaching. "Come on," I said. "You don't want to get stuck here when the bulls show up."

Cora flipped her cigarette at the stiff, then kicked him one for good measure. We took off.

—

I ran code three all the way downtown. Adrenaline smothered the dregs of the morph still in my system, and anger held down the lid on the aches all over my body. Cora sat as far away from me as she could without hanging out the window and never blinked at the siren noise. I started to like her and decided to doctor my arresting officer's report to keep her out of the shit-house.

Nearing Union Station, I said, "Want to sulk or want to survive?"

Cora spat out the window and balled her fists.

"Want to get skin searched by some dyke matrons over at city jail or you want to go home?"

Cora's fist balls tightened up; the knuckles were as white as my skin.

"Want Voodoo to snuff Billy Boyle?"

That got her attention. "What!"

I looked sidelong at Cora's face gone pale. "He's on the train. You think about that when we get to the station and a lot of cops start asking you to snitch off your pals."

Pulling herself in from the window, Cora asked me the question that hoods have been asking cops since they patrolled on dinosaurs: "Why you do this shitty kind of work?"

I ignored it and said, "Snitch. It's in your best interest."

"That's for me to decide. Tell me."

"Tell you what?"

"Why you do—"

I interrupted, "You've got it all figured out, you tell me."

Cora started ticking off points on her fingers, leaning toward me so I could hear her over the siren. "One, you yourself figured your boxin' days would be over when you was thirty, so you got yourself a nice civil service pension job; two, the bigwig cops loves to have ball players and fighters around to suck up to them—so's you gets the first crack at the cushy 'signments. Three, you likes to hit people, and po-lice work be full of that; four, your ID card said Warrants Division, and I knows that warrants cops all serves process and does repos on the side, so I knows you pickin' up lots of extra change. Five—"

I held up my hands in mock surrender, feeling like I had just taken four hard jabs from Billy Conn and didn't want to go for sloppy fifths. "Smart girl, but you forgot to mention that I work goon squad for Firestone Tire and get a kickback for fingering wetbacks to the Border Patrol."

Cora straightened the knot in my disreputable necktie. "Hey, baby, a gig's a gig, you gots to take it where you finds it. I done things I ain't particularly proud of, and I—"

I shouted, "That's not it!"

Cora moved back to the window and smiled. "It certainly is, Mr. *Po*liceman."

Angry now, angry at losing, I did what I always did when I smelled defeat: attack. "Shitcan it. Shitcan it now, before I forget I was starting to like you."

Cora gripped the dashboard with two white-knuckled hands and stared through the windshield. Union Station came into view, and pulling into the parking lot I saw a dozen black-and-whites and unmarked cruisers near the front entrance. Bullhorn-barked commands echoed unintelligibly as I killed my siren, and behind the police cars I glimpsed plainclothesmen aiming riot guns at the ground.

I pinned my badge to my jacket front and said, "Out." Cora stumbled from the car and stood rubber-kneed on the pavement. I got out, grabbed her arm, and shoved-pulled her all the way over to the pandemonium. As we approached, a harness bull leveled his .38 at us, then hesitated and said, "Sergeant Blanchard?"

I said "Yeah" and handed Cora over to him, adding, "She's a material witness, be nice to her." The youth nodded, and I walked past two bumper-to-bumper black-and-whites into the most incredible shakedown scene I had ever witnessed:

Negro men in porter uniforms and white men in army khakis were lying facedown on the pavement, their jackets and shirts pulled up to their shoulders, their trousers and undershorts pulled down to their knees. Uniformed cops were spread searching them while plainclothesmen held the muzzles of .12 gauge pumps to their heads. A pile of confiscated pistols and sawed-off shotguns lay a safe distance away. The men on the ground were all babbling their innocence or shouting epithets, and every cop trigger finger looked itchy.

Voodoo Simpkins and Billy Boyle were not among the six suspects. I looked around for familiar cop faces and saw Georgie Caulkins by the station's front entrance, standing over a sheet-covered stretcher. I ran up to him and said, "What have you got, Skipper?"

Caulkins toed the sheet aside, revealing the remains of a fortyish negro man. "The shine's Leotis McCarver," Georgie said. "Upstanding colored citizen, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters big shot, a credit to his race. Put a .38 to his head and blew his brains out when the black-and-whites showed up.”

Catching a twinkle in the old lieutenant’s eyes, I said, “Really?”

Georgie smiled. “I can’t shit a shitter. McCarver came out waving a white handkerchief, and some punk kid rookie cancelled his ticket. Deserves a commendation, don’t you think?”

I looked down at the stiff and saw that the entry wound was right between the eyes. “Give him a sharpshooter’s medal and a desk job before he plugs some innocent civilian. What about Simpkins and Boyle?”

“Gone,” Georgie said. “When we first got here, we didn’t know the real soldiers and porters from the heisters, so we threw a net over the whole place and shook everybody down. We held every legit shine lieutenant, which was two guys, then cut them loose when they weren’t your boy. Simpkins and Boyle probably got away in the shuffle. A car got stolen from the other end of the lot—citizen said she saw a nigger in a porter’s suit breaking the window. That was probably Simpkins. The license number’s on the air along with an all points. That shine is dead meat.”

I thought of Simpkins invoking protective voodoo gods and said, “I’m going after him myself.”

“You owe me a report on this thing!”

“Later.”

“*Now!*”

I said, “Later, *sir*,” and ran back to Cora, Georgie’s “now” echoing behind me. When I got to where I had left her, she was gone. Looking around, I saw her a few yards away on her knees, handcuffed to the bumper of a black-and-white. A cluster of blue suits were hooting at her, and I got very angry.

I walked over. A particularly callow-looking rookie was regaling the others with his account of Leotis McCarver’s demise. All four snapped to when they saw me coming. I grabbed the storyteller by his necktie and yanked him toward the back of the car. “Uncuff her,” I said.

The rookie tried to pull away. I yanked at his tie until we were face-to-face and I could smell Sen-Sen on his breath. “And apologize.”

The kid flushed, and I walked back to my unmarked cruiser. I heard muttering behind me, and then I felt a tap on my shoulder. Cora was there, smiling. “I owe you one,” she said.

I pointed to the passenger seat. “Get in. I’m collecting.”

The ride back to West Adams was fueled by equal parts of my nervous energy and Cora’s nonstop spiel on her loves and criminal escapades. I had seen it dozens of times before. A cop stands up for a prisoner against another cop, on general principles or because the other cop is a turd, and the prisoner takes it as a sign of affection and respect and proceeds to lay out a road map of their life, justifying every wrong turn because he wants to be the cop’s moral equal. Cora’s tale of her love for Billy Boyle back in his heister days, her slide into call-house service when he went to prison, and her lingering crush on Wallace Simpkins was predictable and mawkishly rendered. I got more and more embarrassed by her “you dig?” punctuations and taps on the arm, and if I didn’t need her as a High Darktown tour guide I would have kicked her out of the car and back to her old life. But then the monologue got interesting.

When Billy Boyle was cut loose from Chino, he had a free week in L.A. before his army induction and went looking for Cora. He found her hooked on ether at Minnie Roberts’s Casbah, seeing voodoo visions, servicing customers as Coroloa, the African Slave Queen. He got her out of there, eased her off the dope with steambaths and vitamin B-12 shots, then ditched her to fight for Uncle Sam. Something snapped in her brain when Billy left, and, still vamped on Wallace Simpkins, she started writing him at Quentin. Knowing his affinity for voodoo, she smuggled in some slave-queen smut pictures taken of her at the Casbah, and they got a juicy correspondence going. Meanwhile, Cora went to work at Mickey Cohen’s southside numbers mill, and everything looked peachy. Then Simpkins came out of Big Q, the voodoo sex fantasy stuff became tepid reality, and the Voodoo Man himself went back to stickups, exploiting her connections to the white criminal world.

When Cora finished her story, we were skirting the edge of High Darktown. It was dusk; the temperature was easing off; the neon signs of the Western Avenue juke joints had just started flashing. Cora lit a cigarette and said, “All Billy’s people is from around here. If he’s lookin’ for a hideout or a travelin’ stake, he’d hit the clubs on West Jeff. Wallace wouldn’t show his evil face around here, ‘less he’s lookin’ for Billy, which I figure he undoubtedly is. I —”

I interrupted, “I thought Billy came from a square-john family. Wouldn’t he go to them?”

Cora’s look said I was a lily-white fool. “Ain’t no square-john families around here, ‘ceptin those who work domestic. West Adams was built on bootlegging, sweetie. Black sellin’ white lightnin’ to black, gettin’ fat, then investin’ white. Billy’s folks was runnin’ shine when I was in pigtails. They’re respectable now, and they hates him for takin’ a jolt. He’ll be callin’ in favors at the clubs, don’t you worry.”

I hung a left on Western, heading for Jefferson Boulevard. “How do you know all this?”

“I am from High, *High* Darktown, sweet.”

“Then why do you hold on to that Aunt Jemima accent?”

Cora laughed. “And I thought I sounded like Lena Horne. Here’s why, sweetcakes. Black woman with a law degree they call ‘nigger.’ Black girl with three-inch heels and a shiv in her purse they call ‘baby.’ You dig?”

“I dig.”

“No, you don’t. Stop the car, Tommy Tucker’s club is on the next block.”

I said, “Yes, ma’am,” and pulled to the curb. Cora got out ahead of me and swayed around the corner on her three-inch heels, calling, “I’ll go in,” over her shoulder. I waited underneath a purple neon sign heralding “Tommy Tucker’s Playroom.” Cora come out five minutes later, saying, “Billy was in here ‘bout half an hour ago. Touched the barman for a double saw.”

“Simpkins?”

Cora shook her head. “Ain’t been seen.”

I hooked a finger in the direction of the car. “Let’s catch him.”

For the next two hours we followed Billy Boyle’s trail through High Darktown’s nightspots. Cora went in and got the information, while I stood outside like a white wallflower, my gun unholstered and pressed to my leg, waiting for a voodoo killer with a tommy gun to aim and fire. Her info was always the same: Boyle had been in, had made a quick impression with his army threads, had gotten a quick touch based on his rep, and had practically run out the door. And no one had seen Wallace Simpkins.

11 P.M. found me standing under the awning of Hanks’ Swank Spot, feeling pinpricks all over my exhausted body. Square-john negro kids cruised by waving little American flags out of backseat windows, still hopped up that the war was over. Male and female, they all had mug-shot faces that kept my trigger finger at half-pull even though I knew damn well they couldn’t be *him*. Cora’s sojourn inside was running three times as long as her previous ones, and when a car backfired and I aimed at the old lady behind the wheel, I figured High Darktown was safer with me off the street and went in to see what was keeping Cora.

The Swank Spot’s interior was Egyptian: silk wallpaper embossed with pharaohs and mummies, paper-mache pyramids surrounding the dance floor, and a long bar shaped like a crypt lying sideways. The patrons were more contemporary: negro men in double-breasted suits and women in evening gowns who looked disapprovingly at my rumpled clothes and two-and-a-half-day beard.

Ignoring them, I eyeballed in vain for Cora. Her soiled pink dress would have stood out like a beacon amid the surrounding hauteur, but all the women were dressed in pale white and sequined black. Panic was rising inside me when I heard her voice, distorted by bebop, pleading behind the dance floor.

I pushed my way through minglers, dancers, and three pyramids to get to her. She was standing next to a phonograph setup, gesturing at a black man in slacks and a camel-hair jacket. The man was sitting in a folding chair, alternately admiring his manicure and looking at Cora like she was dirt.

The music was reaching a crescendo; the man smiled at me; Cora’s pleas were engulfed by saxes, horns, and drums going wild. I flashed back to my Legion days—rabbit punches and elbows and scrubbing my laces into cuts during clinches. The past two days went topsy-turvy, and I kicked over the phonograph. The Benny Goodman sextet exploded into silence, and I aimed my piece at the man and said, "*Tell me now*."

Shouts rose from the dance floor, and Cora pressed herself into a toppled pyramid. The man smoothed the pleats in his trousers and said, "Cora's old flame was in about half an hour ago, begging. I turned him down, because I respect my origins and hate snitches. But I told him about an old mutual friend—a soft touch. Another Cora flame was in about ten minutes ago, asking after flame number one. Seems he has a grudge against him. I sent him the same place."

I croaked, "Where?" and my voice sounded disembodied to my own ears. The man said, "No. You can apologize now, officer. Do it, and I won't tell my good friends Mickey Cohen and Inspector Waters about your behavior."

I stuck my gun in my waistband and pulled out an old Zippo I used to light suspects' cigarettes. Sparking a flame, I held it inches from a stack of brocade curtains. "Remember the Coconut Grove?"

The man said, "You wouldn't," and I touched the flame to the fabric. It ignited immediately, and smoke rose to the ceiling. Patrons were screaming "Fire!" in the club proper. The brocade was fried to a crisp when the man shrieked, "John Downey," ripped off his camel hair and flung it at the flames. I grabbed Cora and pulled her through the club, elbowing and rabbit punching panicky revelers to clear a path. When we hit the sidewalk, I saw that Cora was sobbing. Smoothing her hair, I whispered hoarsely, "What, babe, what?"

It took a moment for Cora to find a voice, but when she spoke, she sounded like a college professor. "John Downey's my father. He's very big around here, and he hates Billy because he thinks Billy made me a whore."

"Where does he li—"

"Arlington and Country Club."

We were there within five minutes. This was High, *High* Darktown—Tudor estates, French chateaus, and Moorish villas with terraced front lawns. Cora pointed out a plantation-style mansion and said, "Go to the side door. Thursday's the maid's night off, and nobody'll hear you if you knock at the front."

I stopped the car across the street and looked for other out-of-place vehicles. Seeing nothing but Packards, Caddys, and Lincolns nestled in driveways, I said, "Stay put. Don't move, no matter what you see or hear."

Cora nodded mutely. I got out and ran over to the plantation, hurdling a low iron fence guarded by a white iron jockey, then treading down a long driveway. Laughter and applause issued from the adjoining mansion, separated from the Downey place by a high hedgerow. The happy sounds covered my approach, and I started looking in windows.

Standing on my toes and moving slowly toward the back of the house, I saw rooms festooned with crewelwork wall hangings and hunting prints. Holding my face up to within a few inches of the glass, I looked for shadow movement and listened for voices, wondering why all the lights were on at close to midnight.

Then faceless voices assailed me from the next window down. Pressing my back to the wall, I saw that the window was cracked for air. Cocking an ear toward the open space, I listened.

"…and after all the setup money I put in, you still had to knock down those liquor stores?"

The tone reminded me of a mildly outraged negro minister rebuking his flock, and I braced myself for the voice that I knew would reply.

"I gots cowboy blood, Mister Downey, like you musta had when you was a young man runnin' shine. That cop musta got loose, got Cora and Whitey to snitch. Blew a sweet piece of work, but we can still get off clean. McCarver was the only one 'sides me knew you was bankrollin', and he be dead. Billy be the one *you* wants dead, and he be showin' up soon. Then I cuts him and dumps him somewhere, and nobody knows he was even here."

"You want money, don't you?"

"Five big get me lost somewheres nice, then maybe when he starts feelin' safe again, I comes back and cuts that cop. That sound about—"

Applause from the big house next door cut Simpkins off. I pulled out my piece and got up some guts, knowing my only safe bet was to backshoot the son of a bitch right where he was. I heard more clapping and joyous shouts that Mayor Bowron's reign was over, and then John Downey's preacher baritone was back in force: "I want him dead. My daughter is a white-trash consort and a whore, and he's—"

A scream went off behind me, and I hit the ground just as machine-gun fire blew the window to bits. Another burst took out the hedgerow and the next-door window. I pinned myself back first to the wall and drew myself upright as the snout of a tommy gun was rested against the ledge a few inches away. When muzzle flame and another volley exploded from it, I stuck my .38 in blind and fired six times at stomach level. The tommy strafed a reflex burst upward, and when I hit the ground again, the only sound was chaotic shrieks from the other house.

I reloaded from a crouch, then stood up and surveyed the carnage through both mansion windows. Wallace Simpkins lay dead on John Downey's Persian carpet, and across the way I saw a banner for the West Adams Democratic Club streaked with blood. When I saw a dead woman spread-eagled on top of an antique table, I screamed myself, elbowed my way into Downey's den, and picked up the machine gun. The grips burned my hands, but I didn't care; I saw the faces of every boxer who had ever defeated me and didn't care; I heard grenades going off in my brain and was glad they were there to kill all the innocent screaming. With the tommy's muzzle as my directional device, I walked through the house.

All my senses went into my eyes and trigger finger. Wind ruffled a window curtain, and I blew the wall apart; I caught my own image in a gilt-edged mirror and blasted myself into glass shrapnel. Then I heard a woman moaning, “Daddy, Daddy, Daddy,” dropped the tommy, and ran to her.

Cora was on her knees on the entry hall floor, plunging a shiv into a man who had to be her father. The man moaned baritone low and tried to reach up, almost as if to embrace her. Cora’s “Daddy’s” got lower and lower, until the two seemed to be working toward harmony. When she let the dying man hold her, I gave them a moment together, then pulled Cora off of him and dragged her outside. She went limp in my arms, and with lights going on everywhere and sirens converging from all directions, I carried her to my car.

DIAL AXMINSTER 6-400

Ellis Loew rapped on the pebbled glass door that separated LAPD Warrants from the Office of the District Attorney. Davis Evans, dozing in his chair, muttered "Mother dog." I said, "That's his college-ring knock. It's a personal favor or a reprimand."

Davis nodded and got to his feet slowly, befitting a man with twenty years and two days on the job—and an ironclad civil-service pension as soon as he said the words, "Fuck you, Ellis. I retire." He smoothed his plaid shirt, adjusted the knot in his Hawaiian tie, hitched up the waistband of his shiny black pants, and patted the lapels of the camel's hair jacket he stole from a Negro pimp at the Lincoln Heights drunk tank. "That boy wants a favor, he gonna pay like a mother dog."

"Blanchard! Evans! I'm waiting!"

We walked into the Deputy D.A.'s office and found him smiling, which meant that he was either practicing for the press or getting ready to kiss some ass. Davis nudged me as we took seats, then said, "Hey, Mr. Loew. What did the leper say to the prostitute?"

Loew's smile stayed glued on; it was obviously a big favor he wanted. "I don't know, Sergeant. What?"

"Keep the tip. Ain't that a mother dog?"

Loew put out his hail-fellow-well-met chuckle. "Yes, it's so simple that it has a certain charm. Now, the reason I—"

"What do you call an elephant that moonlights as a prostitute?"

Loew's smile spread into nasty little facial ties. "I…don't…know. What?"

"A two-ton pickup that lays for peanuts. Woooo! Mother dog!"

The Ted Mack Amateur Hour had gone far enough. I said, "Did you want something, Boss?"

Davis laughed uproariously, like my question was the real punch line; Loew wiped the smile remnants off his face with a handkerchief. "Yes, I do. Did you know that there was a kidnapping in L.A. four days ago? Monday afternoon on the USC campus?"

Davis kiboshed his stage chuckles; snatch jobs were meat and potatoes to him—the kind of cases he loved to work. I said, "You've got Fred Allen's interest. Keep going."

Loew twirled his Phi Beta Kappa key as he spoke. "The victim's name is Jane Mackenzie Viertel. She's nineteen, a USC frosh. Her father is Redmond Viertel, an oil man with a big string of wells down on Signal Hill. Three men in USC letter jackets grabbed her Monday, about two o'clock. It's rush week, so all the witnesses thought it was some sort of fraternity stunt. The men called the girl's father late that night and made their demand: a hundred thousand dollars in fifties. Viertel got the money together, then got frightened and called the FBI. The kidnappers called back and set up a trade for the following day in an irrigation field up near Ventura.

"Two agents from the Ventura office set up a trap, one hiding, one posing as Viertel. The kidnappers showed up, then it all went haywire."

Davis said, "Wooooo," and cracked his knuckles; Loew grimaced at the sound and continued. "One of the kidnappers found the agent who was hiding. They were both afraid of disturbing the transaction with gunfire, so they had a little hand-to-hand combat. The kidnapper beat the agent up with a shovel, then hacked off six of his fingers with the blade. The other agent sensed something was wrong and started to act fidgety. He grabbed one of the men and put a gun to his head, and the other man did the same to the girl. A real Mexican standoff, until the fed grabbed the money bag and a windstorm played hell with all that cash. The man with the girl grabbed the bag and took off, and the fed took his captive in. You see what I mean by haywire?"

I said, "So two snatchers and the girl are still at large?"

"Yes. The third man is in custody in Ventura, and the other agent is very angry."

Davis laced his fingers together and cracked a total of eight knuckles. "Wooooo. These boys got names, Mr. Loew? And what's this got to do with me and Lee?"

Now Loew's smile was genuine—that of a fiend who loves his work. Consulting some rap sheets on his desk, he said, "The man in custody is Harwell Jackson Treadwell, white male, age thirty-one. He's from Gila Bend, Oklahoma; your neck of the woods, Evans. He's got three strong-arm convictions running back to 1934 and has two outstanding warrants here in L.A.—robbery charges filed in ’44 and ’45. Treadwell also has two charming brothers, Miller and Leroy. Both are registered sex offenders and do not seem to care much about the gender of their conquests. In fact, Leroy rather likes those of the four-footed persuasion. He was arrested for aggravated assault on an animal and served thirty days for it in ’42.”

Davis picked at his teeth with his tie clip. “Any old port in a storm. Miller and Leroy got the girl and part of the money?”

“That’s right.”

“And you want me and Lee to—”

I interrupted, seeing my Friday night go up in smoke. “This is Ventura County’s business. Not ours.”

Loew held up an extradition warrant and carbons of two bench summonses. “The kidnapping took place in Los Angeles, in my judicial district. I would very much like to prosecute Mr. Treadwell along with his brothers when they are apprehended. So I want you two to drive up to Ventura and return Mr. Treadwell to City Jail before the notoriously ill-mannered Ventura sheriffs beat him to death.”

I groaned; Davis Evans made an elaborate show of standing up and smoothing out the various tucks and folds of his outfit. “I’ll be a mother dog, but I was thinkin’ about retiring this afternoon.”

Winking at me, Loew said, “You won’t retire when you hear what the other two brothers escaped in.”

“Wooooo. Keep talkin’, boy.”

“A 1936 Auburn speedster. Two-tone, maroon and forest green. When they get captured, and you know they will, the car will go to City Impound until claimed or bid on. Davis, I expect to send those Okie shitheads to the gas chamber. It’s very hard to claim a vehicle from death row, and the duty officer at the impound is a close friend of mine. Still want to retire?”

Davis exclaimed, “Woooooo!”, grabbed the warrants and hustled his two-thirty-five toward the door. I was right behind him—reluctantly—the junior partner all the way. With his hand on the knob, the senior man got in a parting shot: “What do you call a gal who’s got the syph, the clap, and the crabs? An incurable romantic! Wooooo! Mother dog!”

—

We took the Ridge Road north, Davis at the wheel of his showroom-fresh ’47 Buick ragtop, me staring out at the L.A. suburbs dwindling into scrub-covered hills, then farmland worked by Japs out of the relocation camps and transplanted Okies. The Okie sitting beside me never spoke when he drove; he stayed lost in a man-car reverie. I thought about our brief warrants partnership, how our differences made it work.

I was the prototypical athlete-cop the high brass loved, the ex-boxer one L.A. scribe labeled “the Southland’s good but not great white hope.” No one knew the “but not” better than me, and plain “good” meant flash rolls, steak, and nightlife until you were thirty, then permanently scrambled brains. The department was the one safe place where my fight juice could see me through to security—with muted glory along the way—and I went for it like Davis’s mother dog, cultivating all the right people, most notably boxing fanatic Ellis Loew.

Davis Evans was another opportunist, out for plain loot, out to shut down Norman, Oklahoma, fourteen siblings, family inbreeding, the proximity to oil money you could breathe but never quite touch. He took what he could and reveled in it, and he made up for being on the take by exercising the best set of cop faces I had ever seen—Mr. Courtly to those who deserved it, Mr. Grief to the bad ones, Mr. Civil to whoever was left over. That a man could be so self-seeking and lacking in mean-spiritedness astonished me, and I deferred to him on the job—senior man aside—because I knew my own selfishness ran twice as deep as his did. And I realized that the hard-nosed buffoon probably would retire soon, leaving me to break in a replacement cut out of my own cloth: young, edgy, eager for the glory the assignment offered. And that made me sad.

Warrants was plainclothes LAPD under the aegis of the Criminal Division, District Attorney’s Office. Two detectives to every Superior Court judiciary. We went after the bad guys the felony D.A.s were drooling to prosecute. If things were slow, there was money to be made serving summonses for the downtown shysters, and—Davis Evans’s raison d’être—repossessions.

Davis lived, ate, drank, yearned, and breathed for beautiful cars. His Warrants cubicle was wallpapered with pictures of Duesenbergs and Pierce Arrows and Cords, Caddys, and Packards, and sleek foreign jobs. Since he stole all his clothes from arrestees, shook down hookers for free poon, ate on the cuff, and lived in the spare room of a county boarding house for recently paroled convicts, he had plenty of money to spend on them. The storage garage he rented held a ’39 Packard cabriolet, a Mercedes rumored to have once been driven by Hitler, a purple Lincoln convertible that Davis called his “Jig Rig,” and a sapphire blue Model T dubbed the “Li’l Shitpeeler.”

He acquired all of them through repos. There was a twenty-four-hour-a-day phone number issuing recorded information on delinquent cars, and every greedy L.A. cop had it memorized. All you had to do was dial Axminster 6-400 to get the dope on wanteds—who they belonged to, what dealer or credit agency was paying what amount of money for their return. Davis only moved on cars that he craved, and only on delinquent owners with outstanding warrants. It was a parlay that frequently occurred, on-the-lam punks not being known for sending in their monthly auto payments. Once the warrantee was arrested, Davis would locate the car, let it molder in his garage, do some minor defacing of it, then report to the dealer that the mother dog was in bad, bad shape. The dealer would believe him; being a soft-hearted misanthrope, Davis would offer a decent amount to keep the vehicle. The dealer would agree, thinking he'd taken advantage of a dust-bowl refugee with a leaky seabag—and Sergeant Davis Evans would have himself another true love.

We were cruising through truck-farm country now—flat acres of furrowed land that looked dry, used up, like this was brutal August, not mild October. All the farmers were the sunburned poor-white prototype that Davis narrowly escaped being one of. Off to our right, nestled at the edge of a scrub valley, was Wayside Honor Rancho—a new county facility to house misdemeanor offenders. It had housed Japs during the war, Okie farmers their keepers on the temporary War Relocation Board payroll. But now the war was over—and it was back to dry dirt.

I nudged Davis and pointed to a group of farmers uprooting cabbages. "There but for the grace of God go you, partner."

Davis saluted the assembly, then flipped them his middle finger. "You can lead a dog to gravy, but you can't make him a lapper."

—

It was shortly past noon when we pulled up in front of the Ventura courthouse-jail. For a hick-town county seat, the joint had aspirations to class, all of them low—Greek pillars, a Tudor roof, and Spanish-style canvas awnings came togther to produce a building that gave you the feeling of d.t.'s without the benefit of booze. Davis groaned as we pushed open a door etched with Egyptian hieroglyphics; I said, "Be grateful it goes with your clothes."

The interior was divided into two wings, and bars at the far end of the left corridor showed us where to go. There was a deputy seated just outside the enclosure, a fat youth done up in khaki that enclosed his blubbery body like a sausage casing. Looking up from his comic book, he said, "Ah…yessirs?"

Davis whipped out our three warrants and held them up for the kid to scrutinize. "LAPD, son. We've got an extradition warrant for Harwell Treadwell, plus two others on old beefs of his. You wanna go get him for us?"

The kid thumbed through the papers, probably looking for the pictures. When he couldn't figure the words out, he unlocked the barred door and led us down a long hallway inset with cells on both sides. Nearing the end, I heard muffled obscenities and thudding sounds. The deputy announced our presence by clearing his throat and saying, "Ah…Sheriff? I got two men here need to talk to you."

I stepped in front of the open cell door and looked in. A tall, beefy man in a ribbon-festooned version of the deputy's getup was standing next to an even taller guy dressed like the archetypal G-man: gray suit, gray tie, gray hair, gray expression on his face. Handcuffed to a chair was our warrantee—white-trash defiance with a duck's-ass haircut, purple and puke green bruises covering his face, brass-knuck marks dotting his bare torso.

The kid took off before the two hardcases could reprimand him for disturbing their third degree; Davis flashed our papers. The sheriff looked at them silently, and the fed buttoned his jacket over the knuckle dusters sticking out of his waistband. "I'm Special Agent Stensland," he said. "Ventura Office, FBI. What—"

Harwell Treadwell laughed and spat blood on the floor. I said, "We're taking him back to L.A. Did he cough up any dope on the other two?"

The sheriff shoved the papers at Davis. "He might have, you didn't interrupt our interrogation."

"You've had him for three days," I said. "He should have blabbed by now."

Treadwell spat blood on the sheriff's spit-shined cowboy boots; when the man balled his fists to retaliate, Davis stationed himself between the two. "He's my prisoner now. Signed, sealed, and deeeelivered."

Stensland said, "This won't wash. Treadwell's a federal prisoner."

I shook my head. "He's got city warrants predating the extradition one, and the extradition warrant is countersigned by a federal judge. He's ours."

Stensland bored in on me with beady gray eyes. I stood there, deadpan, and he tried a smile and cop-to-cop empathy. "Listen, Officer—"

"It's Sergeant."

"All right, *Sergeant*, listen: the Viertel girl and the other two men are still at large, and this filth was responsible for one of my agents losing six fingers. Don't you want to go back to Los Angeles with a confession? Don't you want his filthy brothers captured? Don't you want to let us try it our way just a little bit longer?"

Davis said, "Your way don't work, so we try mine," walked over, and unlocked Harwell Treadwell's cuffs. Standing up, the Okie snatch artist almost collapsed, and bile crept from the corners of his mouth. Davis eased him out to the catwalk, and I said to Stensland, "That warrant has an evidence clause. I need everything you found at the crime scene, including the ransom money you recovered."

The fed flinched, then shook his head. "Not until Monday. It's locked up in a safe at the courthouse, and the courthouse is closed until then."

"How much was there?"

"Twenty-one hundred something."

I said, "Send it down with an itemized receipt," and walked out of the cell with the two minions of the law staring razor blades at me. I caught up with Davis and Treadwell at the barred enclosure, and the deputy snickered at the doubled-over prisoner. Treadwell shot a blood cocktail onto his shirtfront, and when fat boy stood up, shot him a pointy-toe boot to the balls. Davis whooped, "You a mother dog!" and the deputy nosedived onto his well-thumbed issue of *Batman*.

—

Davis's "way" consisted of our taking Harwell Treadwell to a jig joint on Ventura's south side and plying him with fried chicken, gravy-drenched biscuits, and yams while I held my gun on him and my car-crazed partner fired questions about the '36 Auburn speedster. Treadwell obliged between wolfish mouthfuls, and Davis expressed worry that the Auburn would get shot up when the remaining Treadwell brothers got taken down by the law. "You worry about that girl," Harwell told us over and over. "Them partners of mine got hound blood." Then I interjected, "You mean your brothers?" and Treadwell always countered with, "I ain't no snitch, son."

It was midafternoon when we finally headed south on Pacific Coast Highway, me at the wheel, Davis and the extraditee in the backseat, Treadwell's wrists cuffed behind his back, ankles manacled to the front-seat housing. The ragtop was down and sunlight and Seabreeze had me thinking that this wasn't such a bad assignment after all. Behind me, the two Okies jawed, sparred, rattled each other's cages.

"Who's got the pink slip on the speedster, boy?"

"Who's your haberdasher? I never seen so many divergent angles on a set of threads in my life."

"I got Hollywood in me, boy."

"Nigger blood more like it. Where you from in Oklahoma?"

"Outside Norman. You from Gila Bend?"

"Yeah."

"What's to do there?"

"Set dog's tails on fire and watch flies fuck, drink, fight, and chase your sister."

"I heard your brothers go for anything white and on the hoof."

"Plain anything, boss. If I'm lyin', I'm flyin'."

"You think they'll hurt the Viertel girl?"

"That girl can take care of herself, and I ain't sayin' my brothers got her."

"How'd you find out about her?"

"Miller read the society page and fell in love."

"I thought you said your brothers weren't in on this."

"I ain't sayin' they are, I ain't sayin they isn't."

"Kidnappin's Oklahoma stuff from way back. The Barkers, Pretty Boy. How you account for that?"

"Well…I think maybe fellas comin' from hunger are real curious about the ante on loved ones. How high can you go before they say, 'No sir, you keep the son of a bitch'?"

"Let's get back to the Auburn, boy."

"Let's not. I need somethin' to keep you tantalized with."

"Tantalize me now."

"How's this: tan leather upholstery that Miller spilled liquor on, radio that picks up the San Dago stations real good, a little grind on the gearbox when you go into third. Hey!"

I saw it then, too: an overturned motorcycle on fire smack in the middle of the highway. No cops were at the scene, but a sawhorse detour sign had been placed in the middle lane, directing southbound traffic to a road running inland. Reflexively, I hung a hard left turn onto it, the flames lapping at the car's rear bumper.

Davis whooped, "Whooo! Mother dog." Harwell Treadwell laughed like a white-trash hyena. The two-lane blacktop took us up and over a series of short slopes, then down into a box canyon closed in by scrub-covered hills that pressed right up against the roadside. I cursed the hour or so the detour was going to cost us, then a loud "Ka-raaack" sounded, and the windshield exploded in front of me.

Glass shrapnel filled the air; I shut my eyes and felt slashes on my cheeks and my hands gripping the steering wheel. Davis screeched "MOTHERFUCK!" and started firing at the hill to the left of us. Opening my eyes and looking over, I saw nothing but greenery, then three more shots hit the side of the car, richocheting ding-ding-ding.

I floored the gas; Davis fired at the muzzle bursts on the hillside; Harwell Treadwell made strange noises—like he couldn't decide whether to laugh or weep. Head on the wheel, I kept one eye on the rearview, and through it I saw Davis haul Treadwell off the seat to use as a bulletproof vest, his .38 in Treadwell's mouth as added insurance.

Ka-raack! Ka-raack! Ka-raack!

The last shot hit the radiator; steam covered my entire field of vision. I drove blind, picking up speed on a downslope, then there was another shot; the left front tire buckled, and the car fishtailed. I decelerated and aimed at the roadside shoulder away from the gunfire, sightless, trying to bank us in just right. Scrub bushes, green and huge, jumped out of nowhere, and then everything went topsy-turvy—and I was eating blacktop and steam.

More "ka-raacks" pulsated through me—and I didn't know if they were gunshots or parts of my brains going blooey. Enveloped by dust and vapor fumes, I heard, "Legs! Legs, boy! Run!" I obeyed, stumble-running full-out.

The vapor dissipated, and I saw that I was sprinting toward a patch of furrowed farm dirt. Davis was running in front of me, half hauling, half shoving Harwell Treadwell, gun at his head. I caught up with them, realizing the shots had ended—and at the far side of the dirt patch I saw trees and buildings—maybe a sharecropper shanty-town.

We ran toward it—two cops and the kidnapper in handcuffs who was our bulletproof vest, life insurance and hole card, kicking dried-up cabbages and carrots and bean stalks out of the ground as we speedballed for sanctuary. Nearing the town, I saw that it was composed of one street with ramshackle wood structures on either side, a packed dirt road the only throughway. Slowing to a trot, I grabbed Davis's arm and gasped, "We can't risk taking a car out. We've gotta call the Ventura bulls."

Davis jerked Treadwell's bracelet chain, sending him face first to the ground. Catching his breath, he kicked him hard in the ass. "That's for my car and in case I die." Wiping dusty sweat off his brow, he pointed his .38 at the hick-town main street like he was imploring me to feast my eyes. I did, and a second later I saw what he was getting at: the phone lines were crumpled in a heap beside the base of the terminal pole that stood just inside the edge of the town proper.

I looked back at hardscrabble land and the roadway that held the remains of my partner's car; I looked ahead at Tobacco Road, California style. "Let's go."

We entered the town, and I gave it a long eyeballing while Davis walked in a side-by-side drape with Harwell Treadwell, .38 snub dangling by a thumb and forefinger, business end aimed at his cojones. The left-hand side of the street featured a grain store, a market, the front window filled with stacks of Tokay and muscatel short dogs, and a clapboard farm-machinery repair shop with rusted parts strewn in front of it. On the right, the facades were all boarded up, with a string of prewar jalopies parked up against them, including a strange looking Model T hybrid that seemed made out of mismatched parts. The only strollers about were a couple of grizzled men dressed in sun-faded War Relocation Authority khakis—and they shot us a cursory fish-eye and kept on walking.

When we reached the end of the street, Davis spotted a flimsy-looking unboarded door, kicked it in, and shoved Treadwell inside. Turning to face me, he said, "We got what them boys want. You run into them you tell them Harwell is chewing on the end of my .38, and the first shot I hear he gets a hot lead cocktail. *And you get us a car, boy*."

I nodded, then backtracked to the stand of heaps, looking for a likely one to commandeer. All six of them had at least one dead tire, and I started wondering about the lack of people, and why the two I'd seen so far didn't seem alarmed at raggedy-assed armed strangers in their midst. Noticing a bolted-on fire ladder attached to the grain building across the street, I made for it, hoisting myself up the rungs.

At the top, I had a good view of the surrounding area. Shacks were nestled in little green pockets bordered by fenced-off crop acreage, with dirt access roads connecting them to each other and the town. No one seemed to be working in the fields, but there were a few people taking the breeze in front of their cribs, which struck me as eerie.

I descended the ladder, and when I was halfway down, saw an old man on one of the roads staring at me. I pretended not to notice, and he turned his back and ran—flat out—to the biggest shack in the community, a corrugated metal job with a white wood barn attached.

I hopped off the ladder and pursued, taking foot roads out of town and over an eighth of a mile or so to a stand of sycamore trees that formed a perimeter a few yards from the barn. The man was nowhere in sight, but the sliding barn door was open just a crack. I drew my .38 and sprinted over and in.

Sunlight through a side window illuminated a big empty space, and the smell of hay plus something medicinal hit my nostrils. In the center of the barn, the acid stench got stronger, and somehow familiar. I noticed a table covered with a tarpaulin wedged into a corner near the connecting door to the shack and saw dry ice hissing out of rips in the canvas. The shape underneath took form, and I pulled the tarp off.

A buck-naked dead man was lying on top of dry ice blocks, sachets oozing formaldehyde placed strategically on his body. He was a stone ringer for Harwell Treadwell, and you didn't have to be a medical examiner to figure the cause of death—his crotch was blown to bits, torn, blooded flesh laced with buckshot all that remained.

I redraped the stiff, then eased the connecting door into a test jiggle. It gave, and I very slowly pulled it open, just a tiny fraction of an inch, in order to look in. Then it flew open all the way, and a big double-barreled shotgun was sighting down, and I shoved both my hands at midpoint on the stock and pushed up.

A huge "Ka-boom!" went off; the tin roof lurched under the force of the blast; pellets ricocheted. I threw myself at the shotgun wielder just as he tried to slam me with the butt of his weapon, wrestled it away from him, then chopped down at his head with the flat side of my .38—one blow, two blows, three. Finally the man went limp. I kicked the shotgun out of harm's way, then weaved on shaky, shaky legs.

It was the old man who'd rabbited when he saw me on the ladder. I looked around the room, saw a pail of water on the cracked wood floor by the front door, picked it up, and dumped it on my assailant. He stirred, then started sputtering, and I knelt down and placed my gun on his nose so he could get the picture up close. "You admit you killed that man back there or you convince me somebody else did, and you live. You tell me where the other Treadwell brother is and I don't arrest you for assault on a police officer. You dick me around, you die."

The geezer took it all in, his eyes getting clearer by the second, exhibiting the remarkable recuperative powers of the seasoned shat-upon. When he curled his lips to spit invective, I said, "No banter, no wisecracks, no shit," and cocked the hammer.

Now pops got the *whole* picture, in Technicolor. “I ain’t no killer,” he said with a midwestern twang. “I’m a truck farmer likes to dabble in the medical arts, but I sure ain’t no killer.”

“I am. So you keep going and keep my interest, because I get bored easy, and when I get bored I get mad.”

Pops gulped, then spoke rapid-fire. “People here put up Miller and Leroy, ’long with the girl, when they had that trouble up in Ventura. They—”

I interrupted. “Did they pay you for it?”

Pops cackled. “Where you think everbody is? Miller and Leroy got cousins up the wazoo here, they spread the money around, everbody went up to Oxnard and Big V to spend it. Like to put Miller and Leroy broke they spent so—”

“What?”

“ ‘Fore he died, Leroy told me they spent eight, nine thousand dollars, said this town of ours had hospitality like Hot Springs in the old days.”

I said, “Mister, the ransom money came to a hundred thousand.”

Pops snorted. “Big commotion back where it went bad. Police got most of it, Miller and Leroy got the dregs.”

My first thought was of the Ventura sheriffs holding back *big*. “Keep going.”

“Well, everybody got happy here, and Miller and Leroy and the cooze holed up, and Miller and Leroy started schemin’ another trade, and they started arguin’ and feudin’ over the girl, and she took to Miller ’cause Leroy was so nasty to her. Then Leroy tried to do her what you might call against her will, and she talked Miller into payin’ back her virtue.”

“Miller killed his own brother?”

“That’s right. And he felt so bad about it he paid me just about his last two hundred dollars to fix that boy up for burial, then put him in the ground when all the cousins got back after spendin’ their money.”

“Then Miller and the girl took off?”

“That’s right. Headed south, brand new black paint on that pretty car of Harwell’s.”

“When?”

“Yesterday. ‘Bout noon.”

“Did they cut the phone lines before they went?”

Pops shrugged. “Don’t think so. Seems to me they was up this mornin’.”

I got the pins and needles tingling up the spine I always got when something was real wrong. Stensland the fed had said that there was “twenty-one hundred something” locked up as evidence, and Miller and Leroy dished out “eight or nine” grand for shelter. That left almost ninety thousand missing.

Figure a few thousand blown away during the Mexican standoff—and the rest sucked up—probably by the feds and/or the Ventura sheriffs. And the scary part: if Miller Treadwell took off with Jane Viertel yesterday, it was the law that ambushed us—to make sure Harwell Treadwell didn't squawk about his brother's whereabouts—so *they* couldn't tell *us* about their paltry take of the ransom pie.

I put my gun away, said "Bury the degenerate bastard," and walked out the front door mad—like I'd been sucker punched.

—

When I got back to the dump where I'd left Davis and our prisoner, they were gone. A fresh wave of panic hit me; then I heard grunts and metal on metal noises coming from the other side of the building. I walked around, and there was Harwell Treadwell chained to a fence and my forty-six-year-old partner embarking on a new career as a hot-rod engineer.

He was working on the jerry-built heap I'd noticed earlier, which now resembled a cross between Buck Rogers's spaceship and a collection of spare parts some trashcan dog dragged in. It was a Model T chassis with two motorcycle tires on the front, two tractor tires on the back, what looked like a half-dozen hooked-together lawnmower engines, and an undercarriage made up of chicken wire and friction tape. The man himself was on the ground toiling on the drive shaft, and when I reached into the driver's seat and beeped the horn, he came up gun first, laughing when he saw who it was.

"Woooo, boy! You almost died!"

I walked over and whispered in Davis's ear. "Miller killed Leroy and took off with the girl in the Auburn yesterday. The Ventura bulls are holding back on the ransom money, and I think it was them shooting at us. Let's roll *now*. On foot if this thing won't go."

Davis smiled. "She's got a name, boy. 'Li'l Assdragger.' And she'll *fly*."

I heard engines in the distance and stood on the contraption's running board to grab a look. A three-vehicle caravan was thumping across the hardscrabble that bordered the town, sending up clouds of dust. Squinting hard, I saw black-and-white paint on one car, cherry lights on another.

Davis said, "Them?" I nodded. Suddenly he was a nut-tightening, screw-fastening, wire-connecting dervish, and Harwell Treadwell was shouting, "Come to big brother! Home cookin' tonight! Come and get me!"

I ran over and fumbled at Treadwell's bracelets with my handcuff key. I'd just gotten the left one off when he shot me a short right uppercut. Stunned, I started to duck into a crouch; then the free cuff lashed my face, the open ratchet ripping loose a chunk of my brows, blood in my eyes blinding me.

The black-and-white noise drew closer; I heard Davis frantically trying to start Li'l Assdragger. I wiped the blood from my eyes and got my balance just in time to see Harwell Treadwell hotfoot it around the edge of the building. I started to run after him, then the Okie jalopy lurched forward, cutting me off. Davis yelled, “I can’t brake too good. Jump in!”

I did. Davis popped the two foot pedals simultaneously, and the thing crept forward. I shouted “Treadwell!” above the engine noise. Davis shouted “He’ll pay!” twice as loud. On the street, I turned around and looked back, and there was our extraditee running headlong into the three-car dust storm, whooping and waving his arms. A second later I heard shotgun blasts and machine-gun fire, and parts of Treadwell flew in all directions before the storm clouds ate him up. Then I just held on.

We lurched, we bumped, we hit potholes and jumped three feet off the ground. We brodied through dirt and skidded over the connecting roads that led out of town. We fishtailed when we hit gravel, and we turned doughnuts when we hit wet spots. Davis leadfooted, double and triple clutched, honked stray dogs out of our way, and did everything else but hit the brakes. Dusk started coming on, and then we were on the big, broad Ridge Road southbound, blacktop under our mismatched wheels, a skinny yellow line separating us from collisions with real, live, normal cars. Davis hooted, “Ain’t got no lights!” and a moment later I saw the Wayside Honor Rancho turnoff sign. Davis saw it too, decelerated, pumped the floorboard and hooted “Ain’t got no brakes!” I shut my eyes and felt Li’l Assdragger shimmy. Then it was a triple fishtail-doughnut combo, and we were stone-cold still in the northbound lane, staring down the headlights of death.

We got out and ran. Tire screeches and thud-crunch-cracks behind us told me that Li’l Assdragger was fond recent history. Hugging the shoulder, we trudged over to the turnoff and up a road to the barbed-wire-enclosed guard hut that separated square-john citizens from county inmates. A light flashed on as we approached; I had my badge out and the word *Peace* on my lips. Then my legs turned to Jell-o, and I passed out thinking I should have more wind than a fat Okie fifteen years my senior.

—

I woke up to see that fat Okie standing over me in a clean white shirt and sedate print necktie. My first thought was that we had to be dead—Davis Evans would never dress that square unless God himself forced him to.

“Wake up, boy. I been doin’ police work while you been beauty sleepin’.”

In a split second it all came back. I groaned, felt the cot beneath me and looked around at the cramped interior of the guard hut. “Oh shit.”

Davis handed me a wet towel. “On a stick. I made me some phone calls. Pal of mine at the Ventura courthouse said he logged twenty-one hundred sixty-six beans of the ransom money into the evidence locker. What you think of that?”

I stood up and tried my legs. They wobbled, but held. “Miller and Leroy spread eight or nine grand around the town,” I said. “Leaving close to ninety out there. It’s got to be the Ventura cops.”

Davis shook his head. “Uh-uh. That was a legit dispatch that came into town and shot down Harwell. They saw that wreck of ours on the detour road and came lookin’ for survivors. See, I called R & I and Robbery for a list of Miller’s known associates from his old rousts. Got six names from his jacket, and the records clerk told me a Ventura fed called in a few hours before, got the same information. You think that ain’t sweet?”

I thought of Stensland, the all-gray federal man with the big tax-free pension—if he could kibosh the fact that the snatchers glommed only chump change. “Let’s go get him.”

“That mother dog gonna pay for hurtin’ my Buick.”

“Get a car from the duty officer. And this time I’ll drive.”

—

Back in familiar, if not safe-and-sane L.A., we formed an itinerary out of the six names and last-known addresses from Miller Treadwell’s K.A. file. Davis took the wheel again, and I picked and poked at my various cuts, lacerations, and bruises as we prowled the south-central part of the city—home to our first three possibles.

Number one’s wife told us her husband was back in Quentin; the apartment house of the number two man had been torn down and was now an amusement arcade frequented by Mexican youths wearing zoot suits; number three had gotten religion and praised Jesus as we searched his pad. He told us he hadn’t seen Miller Treadwell since their last job together in ’41, damned him as a fornicating whoremonger, and handed us leaflets that cogently explained that Jesus Christ was an Aryan, not a Jew, and that *Mein Kampf* was the lost book of the Bible. Davis’s response to the man was the longest “Wooooooo” I’d ever heard him emit, and we drove across town to Hollywood and K.A. number four, debating the pros and cons of parole violation on grounds of mental bankruptcy.

Number four—“Jungle” John Lembeck, white male, age thirty-four, two-time convicted strong-arm heister, lived in a bungalow court on Serrano just off the Boulevard. Giving the address a rolling once-over, Davis and I said “Bingo” simultaneously, and I added, “The Auburn with a bad black paint-job. Right by that streetlight.”

Davis blurted, “What?” slowed the car, and squinted out at the dark street. Noticing the dream-mobile, he said, “Double bingo. There’s a fed sled three cars down. If it’s got Ventura tags, this is grief.”

I got out and walked back to check; Davis continued on to the corner and parked. Squatting down, I squinted at the steel gray Plymouth’s rear license plate. Triple bingo: five-digit federal vehicle designation, 1945 Ventura County tags. Grief on a popsicle stick.

Davis trotted over, and we circled the bungalows in a flanking movement. They were individual stucco huts arranged around a cement courtyard, and John Lembeck's file placed him in unit three. Alleys separated the court from the adjoining apartment buildings, and I took the one on the left.

The night was deep blue and cloudless, and I crept through the alleyway helped by light from apartment windows. The first two huts had drawn curtains, but the third one back was cracked for air, the venetian blinds down to just above the narrow open space. I drew my gun, put my eyes to the slice of light, and looked in.

Quadruple bingo—and then some.

The man who had to be Miller Treadwell was sitting in an overstuffed chair, his pants down, moaning, "Guddamn, guddamn." I could see a woman's left hand bracing the chair arm, but nothing more of the woman herself. Agent Stensland was trussed up, lying on his side on the floor, next to the entranceway into the front room. He was working his wrist bonds against a wall grate, his breath expanding and contracting against the fabric tape crisscrossing his mouth.

Miller moaned with his eyes shut, then a pretty blonde head popped up and spoke to him: "Sugar, let me talk to you for a sec."

"Guddamn, girl, don't stop."

"Miller, you have to make him tell you where he put the money."

"We got ours, girl. He ain't gonna tell us; he knows I'll kill him if he does. We got ours, and we can trade you again."

"Daddy's too cheap to pay more. We could have twice as much, Sugar. We could go away and be together and just forget about Daddy."

"Sugar, don't talk nonsense. We got plenty, your papa's got plenty more, and I ain't able to talk so good in this state you got me in. You wanta…"

The head disappeared again; Miller went back to moaning. I wondered where Evans was and watched Stensland move his bound wrists against the grate. The kidnapper-killer's ecstacy was reaching a crescendo when I saw my partner, inside the pad, tiptoeing over to the entranceway. He was just a few feet in back of Stensland when the G-man got his hands free and ripped the tape from his mouth. He went flush at the pain, and I followed his eyes to a .45 automatic on the armrest beside Miller's right hand.

Pawing at his leg restraints, racing against the Okie's release, Stensland banged his elbow on the grate. Miller jerked out of heaven and aimed the .45 at him just as I wedged my gun through the window crack. He fired at the fed; I fired at him; Davis emptied his piece at the chair. There must have been a dozen explosions, and then it was all over except for Jane Mackenzie Viertel's record-length scream.

—

A shitload of Hollywood division black-and-whites showed up, and the meat wagon removed Miller Treadwell and Special Agent Norris Stensland, D.O.A. A detective lieutenant told Davis and me he wanted a full report before he contacted the feds. We kept the Viertel girl in handcuffs on general principles, and when the commotion wound down and the crowd of rubberneckers dispersed, we braced her on the front lawn of the courtyard.

Unlocking her cuffs, I said, "Come clean on the money. What happened? Where's the dough Miller was talking about?"

Jane Viertel, backlighted by a street lamp, rubbed her wrists. "The money was in two packages. When it got crazy, they were dropped. Miller and Leroy got one, and it ripped open. The FBI man dropped his and Leroy ran with me, then Miller took off. The FBI man took Harwell to his car, then came back and grabbed the last package so Harwell wouldn't know he had it. But Miller saw him. He had some loose bills he picked up, and he hid the rest of the money from Leroy. Miller and Leroy gave the loose money to these dreadful slobs to hide us out, and Leroy thought that was all there was. Then Miller and I got cozy, and he told me there was forty thousand for us."

I looked at the girl, nineteen-year-old pulchritude with whorehouse smarts. "Where's Miller's money?"

Jane watched Davis lovingly eye the Auburn speedster. "Why should I tell you? You'd just give it back to that cheapskate father of mine."

"He paid a hundred grand to save your life."

The girl shrugged and lit a cigarette. "He probably used the interest from Mother's trust fund. What's wrong with fatso? Is he queer for cars or something?"

Davis walked over to us. "She needs a complete paint strip, new paint job, new upholstery and some whitewalls. Then she's a peach." Winking at Jane Viertel, he said, "What's your goal in life, Sweetheart? Pussy whipping killers?"

Jane smiled, walked to the car, and unscrewed the gas cap. She dropped in her cigarette and started running. Davis and I hit the ground and ate grass. The gas tank exploded and the car went up in flames. The girl stood up and curtsied, then walked to us and said, "Miller's money was in the trunk. Too bad, Daddy. Maybe you can tell Mother it's a tax write-off."

I recuffed Jane Viertel; the flames sent flickers of light over Davis Evans's bereaved face. He stuck his hands in his pockets, pulled them out empty, and said to me, "You got a couple dimes, partner? AX6-400's a toll call. I need me a peach like a mother dog."

SINCE I DON'T HAVE YOU

During the post-war years I served two masters—running interference and hauling dirty laundry for the two men who defined LA at that time better than anyone else. To Howard Hughes I was security boss at his aircraft plant, pimp, and troubleshooter for RKO Pictures—the ex-cop who could kibosh blackmail squeezes, fix drunk drivings, and arrange abortions and dope cures. To Mickey Cohen—rackets overlord and would-be nightclub shtickster—I was a bagman to the LAPD, the former Narco detective who skimmed junk off niggertown dope rousts, allowing his Southside boys to sell it back to the hordes of schwartzes eager to fly White Powder Airlines. Big Howard: always in the news for crashing an airplane someplace inappropriate, stubbing his face on the control panel in some hicktown beanfield, then showing up at Romanoff's bandaged like the Mummy with Ava Gardner on his arm; Mickey C.: also a pussy hound par excellence, pub crawling with an entourage of psychopathic killers, press agents, gag writers, and his bulldog Mickey Cohen, Jr.,—a flatulent beast with a schlong so large that the Mick's stooges strapped it to a roller skate so it wouldn't drag on the ground.

Howard Hughes. Mickey Cohen. And me—Turner "Buzz" Meeks, Lizard Ridge, Oklahoma, armadillo poacher; strikebreaker goon; cop; fixer, and keeper of the secret key to his masters' psyches: they were both cowards mano a mano; airplanes and lunatic factotums their go-betweens—while I would go anywhere, anyplace—gun or billy club first, courting a front-page death to avenge my second-banana life. And the two of them courted me because I put their lack of balls in perspective: it was irrational, meshugah, bad business—a Forest Lawn crypt years before my time. But I got the last laugh there: I always knew that when faced with the grave I'd pull a smart segue to keep kicking—and I write this memoir as an old, old man—while Howard and Mickey stuff caskets, bullshit biographies their only legacy.

Howard. Mickey. Me.

Sooner or later, my work for the two of them had to produce what the yuppie lawyer kids today call "conflict of interest." Of course, it was over a woman—and, of course, being a suicidal Okie shitkicker, forty-one years old and getting tired, I decided to play both ends against the middle. A thought just hit me: that I'm writing this story because I miss Howard and Mickey, and telling it gives me a chance to be with them again. Keep that in mind—that I loved them—even though they were both world-class shitheels.

—

January 15, 1949.

It was cold and clear in Los Angeles, and the papers were playing up the two-year anniversary of the Black Dahlia murder case—still unsolved, still speculated on. Mickey was still mourning Hooky Rothman's death—he French kissed a sawed-off shotgun held by an unknown perpetrator—and Howard was still pissed at me over the Bob Mitchum reefer roust: he figured that my connections with Narco Division were still so solid that I should have seen it coming. I'd been shuttling back and forth between Howard and Mickey since New Years. The Mick's signature fruit baskets stuffed with C-notes had to be distributed to cops, judges, and City Council members he wanted to grease, and the pilot/mogul had me out bird-dogging quiff: prowling bus depots and train stations for buxom young girls who'd fall prey to RKO contracts in exchange for frequent nighttime visits. I'd been having a good run: a half dozen midwestern farm maidens were now ensconced in Howard's fuck pads—strategically located apartments tucked all over LA. And I was deep in hock to a darktown bookie named Leotis Dineen, a six-foot-six jungle bunny who hated people of the Oklahoma persuasion worse than poison. I was sitting in my quonset hut office at Hughes Aircraft when the phone rang.

"That you, Howard?"

Howard Hughes sighed. "What happened to 'Security, may I help you'?"

"You're the only one calls this early, Boss."

"And you're alone?"

"Right. Per your instructions to call you Mr. Hughes in the presence of others. What's up?"

"Breakfast is up. Meet me at the corner of Melrose and La Brea in half an hour."

"Right, Boss."

"Two or three, Buzz? I'm hungry and having four."

Howard was on his all chili dog diet; Pink's Dogs at Melrose and La Brea was his current in-spot. I knew for a fact that their chili was made from horsemeat air freighted up daily from Tijuana. "One kraut, no chili."

"Heathen. Pink's chili is better than Chasen's."

"I had a pony when I was a boy."

"So? I had a governess. You think I wouldn't eat—"

I said, "Half an hour," and hung up. I figured if I got there five minutes late I wouldn't have to watch the fourth richest man in America eat.

—

Howard was picking strands of sauerkraut off his chin when I climbed in the backseat of his limousine. He said, "You didn't really want it, did you?"

I pressed the button that sent up the screen that shielded us from the driver. "No, coffee and doughnuts are more my style."

Howard gave me a long, slow eyeballing—a bit ill at ease because sitting down we were the same height, while standing I came up to his shoulders. "Do you need money, Buzz?"

I thought of Leotis Dineen. "Can niggers dance?"

"They certainly can. But call them colored, you never know when one might be listening."

Larry the chauffeur was Chinese; Howard's comment made me wonder if his last plane crash had dented his cabeza. I tried my standard opening line. "Getting any, Boss?"

Hughes smiled and burped; horse grease wafted through the backseat. He dug into a pile of papers beside him—blueprints, graphs, and scraps covered with airplane doodles, pulling out a snapshot of a blonde girl naked from the waist up. He handed it to me and said, "Gretchen Rae Shoftel, age nineteen. Born in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, July 26, 1929. She was staying at the place on South Lucerne—the screening house. This is the woman, Buzz. I think I want to marry her. And she's gone—she flew the coop on the contract, me, all of it."

I examined the picture. Gretchen Rae Shoftel was prodigiously lunged—no surprise—with a blonde pageboy and smarts in her eyes, like she knew Mr. Hughes's two-second screen test was strictly an audition for the sack and an occasional one-liner in some RKO turkey. "Who found her for you, Boss? It wasn't me—I'd have remembered."

Howard belched again—my hijacked sauerkraut this time. "I got the picture in the mail at the studio, along with an offer—a thousand dollars cash to a PO box in exchange for the girl's address. I did it, and met Gretchen Rae at her hotel downtown. She told me she posed for some dirty old man back in

Milwaukee, that he must have pulled the routine for the thousand. Gretchen Rae and I got to be friends, and, well…."

"And you'll give me a bonus to find her?"

"A thousand, Buzz. Cash, off the payroll."

My debt to Leotis Dineen was eight hundred and change; I could get clean and get even on minor league baseball—the San Diego Seals were starting their pre-season games next week. "It's a deal. What else have you got on the girl?"

"She was car hopping at Scrivner's Drive-In. I know that."

"Friends, known associates, relatives here in LA?"

"Not to my knowledge."

I took a deep breath to let Howard know a tricky question was coming. "Boss, you think maybe this girl is working an angle on you? I mean, the picture out of nowhere, the thousand to a PO box?"

Howard Hughes harumphed. "It had to be that piece in *Confidential*, the one that alleged my talent scouts take topless photographs and that I like my women endowed."

"*Alleged*, Boss?"

"I'm practicing coming off as irate in case I sue *Confidential* somewhere down the line. You'll get on this right away?"

"Rapidamente."

"Outstanding. And don't forget Sid Weinberg's party tomorrow night. He's got a new horror picture coming out from the studio, and I need you there to keep the autograph hounds from going crazy. Eight, Sid's house."

"I'll be there."

"Find Gretchen Rae, Buzz. She's special."

Howard's one saving grace with females is that he keeps falling in love with them—albeit only after viewing Brownie snaps of their lungs. It more or less keeps him busy between crashing airplanes and designing airplanes that don't fly.

"Right, Boss."

The limousine's phone rang. Howard picked it up, listened and murmured, "Yes. Yes, I'll tell him." Hanging up, he said, "The switchboard at the plant. Mickey Cohen wants to see you. Make it brief, you're on my time now."

"Yes, sir."

—

It was Howard who introduced me to Mickey, right before I got wounded in a dope shoot-out and took my LAPD pension. I still give him a hand with his drug dealings—unofficial liaison to Narcotics Division, point man for the

Narco dicks who skim x number of grams off every ounce of junk confiscated. The LAPD has got an unofficial heroin policy: it is to be sold only to coloreds, only east of Alvarado and south of Jefferson. I don't think it should be sold anywhere, but as long as it is, I want the five percent. I test the shit with a chem kit I stole from the crime lab—no poor hophead is going to croak from a Mickey Cohen bindle bootjacked by Turner "Buzz" Meeks. Dubious morality: I sleep well ninety percent of the time and lay my bet action off with shine bookies, the old exploiter washing the hand that feeds him. Money was right at the top of my brain as I drove to Mickey's haberdashery on the Strip. I always need cash, and the Mick never calls unless it is in the offing.

I found the man in his back room, surrounded by sycophants and muscle: Johnny Stompanato, guinea spit curl dangling over his handsome face—he of the long-term crush on Lana Turner; Davey Goldman, Mickey's chief yes-man and the author of his nightclub shricks; and a diffident-looking little guy I recognized as Morris Hornbeck—an accountant and former trigger for Jerry Katzenbach's mob in Milwaukee. Shaking hands and pulling up a chair, I got ready to make my pitch: You pay me now; I do my job after I run a hot little errand for Howard. I opened my mouth to speak, but Mickey beat me to it. "I want you to find a woman for me."

I was about to say "What a coincidence," when Johnny Stomp handed me a snapshot. "Nice gash. Not Lana Turner quality, but USDA choice tail nonetheless."

Of course, you see it coming. The photo was a nightspot job: compliments of Preston Sturges' Players Club, Gretchen Rae Shoftel blinking against flashbulb glare, dairy-state pulchritude in a tight black dress. Mickey Cohen was draping an arm around her shoulders, aglow with love. I swallowed to keep my voice steady. "Where was the wife, Mick? Off on one of her Hadassah junkets?"

Mickey grunted. " 'Israel, the New Homeland.' Ten-day tour with her Mah-Jongg club. While the cat is away, the mice will play. Va-va-va-voom. Find her, Buzzchik. A grand."

I got obstreperous, my usual reaction to being scared. "Two grand, or go take a flying fuck at a rolling doughnut."

Mickey scowled and went into a slow burn; I watched Johnny Stomp savor my bravado, Davey Goldman write down the line for his boss's shricks, and Morris Hornbeck do queasy double takes like he wasn't copacetic with the play. When the Mick's burn stretched to close to a minute, I said, "Silence implies consent. Tell me all you know about the girl, and I'll take it from there."

Mickey Cohen smiled at me—his coming-from-hunger minion. "Goyische shitheel. For a twosky I want satisfaction guaranteed within forty-eight hours."

I already had the money laid off on baseball, the fights, and three horse parlays. “Forty-seven and change. Go.”

Mickey eyed his boys as he spoke—probably because he was pissed at me and needed a quick intimidation fix. Davey and Johnny Stomp looked away; Morris Hornbeck just twitched, like he was trying to quash a bad case of the heebie-jeebies. “Gretchen Rae Shoftel. I met her at Scrivner’s Drive-In two weeks ago. She told me she’s fresh out of the Minnesota sticks, someplace like that. She—”

I interrupted. “She said ‘Minnesota’ specifically, Mick?”

“Right. Moosebreath, Dogturd, some boonies town—but definitely Minnesota.”

Morris Hornbeck was sweating now; I had myself a hot lead. “Keep going, Mick.”

“Well, we hit it off; I convince Lavonne to see Israel before them dune coons take it back; Gretchen Rae and I get together; we va-va-va-voom; it’s terrific. She plays cagey with me, won’t tell me where she’s staying, and she keeps taking off—says she’s looking for a man—some friend of her father’s back in Antelope Ass or wherever the fuck she comes from. Once she’s gassed on vodka collinses and gets misty about some hideaway she says she’s got. That—”

I said, “Wrap it up.”

Mickey slammed his knees so hard that Mickey Cohen, Jr., asleep in the doorway twenty feet away, woke up and tried to stand on all fours—until the roller skate attached to his wang pulled him back down. “I’ll fucking wrap you up if you don’t find her for me! That’s it! I want her! Find her for me! *Do it now!*”

I got to my feet wondering how I was going to pull this one off—with the doorman gig at Sid Weinberg’s party thrown smack in the middle of it. I said, “Forty-seven, fifty-five and rolling,” and winked at Morris Hornbeck—who just happened to hail from Milwaukee, where Howard told me Gretchen Rae Shoftel told him a dirty old man had snapped her lung shots. Hornbeck tried to wink back; it looked like his eyeball was having a grand mal seizure. Mickey said, “Find her for me. And you gonna be at Sid’s tomorrow night?”

“Keeping autograph hounds at bay. You?”

“Yeah, I’ve got points in Sid’s new picture. I want hot dope by then, Buzzchik. *Hot*.”

I said, “Scalding,” and took off, almost tripping over Mickey Cohen, Jr.’s appendage as I went out the door.

—

A potential three grand in my kick; Morris Hornbeck’s hinkyness doing a slow simmer in my gourd; an instinct that Gretchen Rae Shoftel’s “Hideaway” was Howard Hughes’s fuck pad on South Lucerne—the place where he kept the stash of specially cantilevered bras he designed to spotlight his favorite starlet's tits, cleavage gowns for his one night inamoratas, and the stag film collection he showed to visiting defense contractors—some of them rumored to co-star Mickey Cohen, Jr., and a bimbo made up to resemble Howard's personal heroine: Amelia Earhart. But first there was Scrivner's Drive-In and a routine questioning of Gretchen Rae's recent co-workers. Fear adrenaline was scorching my soul as I drove there—maybe I'd played my shtick too tight to come out intact.

Scrivner's was on Sunset three blocks east of Hollywood High School, an eat-in-your-car joint featuring a rocket ship motif—chromium scoops, dips, and portholes abounding—Jules Verne as seen by a fag set designer scraping the stars on marijuana. The carhops—all zoftig numbers—wore tight space-cadet outfits; the fry cooks wore plastic rocket helmets with clear face shields to protect them from spattering grease. Questioning a half dozen of them was like enjoying the DT's without benefit of booze. After an hour of talk and chump-change handouts, I knew the following:

That Gretchen Rae Shoftel car hopped there for a month, was often tardy, and during mid-afternoon lulls tended to abandon her shift. This was tolerated because she was an atom-powered magnet that attracted men by the shitload. She could tote up tabs in her head, deftly computing sales tax—but had a marked tendency toward spilling milkshakes and french fries. When the banana-split loving Mickey Cohen started snouting around after her, the manager gave her the go by, no doubt leery of attracting the criminal elements who had made careers out of killing innocent bystanders while trying to kill the Mick. Aside from that I glommed one hard lead plus suppositions to hang it on: Gretchen Rae had persistently questioned the Scrivner's crew about a recent regular customer—a man with a long German surname who'd been eating at the counter, doing arithmetic tricks with meal tabs and astounding the locals with five-minute killings of the *LA Times* crossword. He was an old geez with a European accent—and he stopped chowing at Scrivner's right before Gretchen Rae Shoftel hired on. Mickey told me the quail had spoken of looking for a friend of her father's; Howard had said she was from Wisconsin; German accents pointed to the dairy state in a big way. And Morris Hornbeck, Mr. Shakes just a few hours before, had been a Milwaukee mob trigger and money man. And—the lovely Gretchen Rae had continued car hopping after becoming the consort of two of the richest, most powerful men in Los Angeles—an eye-opener if ever there was one.

—

I drove to a pay phone and made some calls, straight and collect. An old LAPD pal gave me the lowdown on Morris Hornbeck—he had two California convictions for felony statch rape, both complainants thirteen-year-old girls. A guy on the Milwaukee force that I'd worked liaison with supplied

Midwestern skinny: Little Mo was a glorified bookkeeper for Jerry Katzenbach's mob, run out of town by his boss in '47, when he was given excess gambling skim to invest as he saw best and opened a call house specializing in underaged poon dressed up as movie stars—greenhorn girls coiffed, cosmeticed, and gowned to resemble Rita Hayworth, Ann Sheridan, Veronica Lake and the like. The operation was a success, but Jerry Katzenbach, Knights-of-Columbus family man, considered it bum PR. Adios, Morris—who obviously found an amenable home in LA.

On Gretchen Rae Shoftel, I got bubbkis; ditto on the geezer with the arithmetic tricks similar to the carhop/vamp. The girl had no criminal record in either California or Wisconsin—but I was willing to bet she'd learned her seduction techniques at Mo Hornbeck's whorehouse.

I drove to Howard Hughes's South Lucerne Street fuck pad and let myself in with a key from my fourteen-pound Hughes Enterprises key ring. The house was furnished with leftovers from the RKO prop department, complete with appropriate female accoutrements for each of the six bedrooms. The Moroccan Room featured hammocks and settees from *Casbah Nocturne* and a rainbow array of low-cut silk lounging pajamas; the *Billy the Kid* room—where Howard brought his Jane Russell look-alikes—was four walls of mock-saloon bars with halter-top cowgirl getups and a mattress covered by a Navajo blanket. My favorite was the Zoo Room: taxidermied cougar, bison, moose, and bobcats—shot by Ernest Hemingway—mounted with their eyes leering down on a narrow strip of sheet-covered floor. Big Ernie told me he decimated the critter population of two Montana counties in order to achieve the effect. There was a kitchen stocked with plenty of fresh milk, peanut butter, and jelly to sate teenage tastebuds, a room to screen stag movies, and the master bedroom—my bet for where Howard installed Gretchen Rae Shoftel.

I took the back staircase up, walked down the hall, and pushed the door open, expecting the room's usual state: big white bed and plain white walls—the ironic accompaniment to snatched virginity. I was wrong; what I saw was some sort of testament to squarejohn American homelife.

Mixmasters, cookie sheets, toasters, and matched cutlery sets rested on the bed; the walls were festooned with Currier & Ives calendars and framed *Saturday Evening Post* covers drawn by Norman Rockwell. A menagerie of stuffed animals was admiring the artwork—pandas and tigers and Disney characters placed against the bed, heads tilted upward. There was a bentwood rocker in a corner next to the room's one window. The seat held a stack of catalogs. I leafed through them: Motorola radios, Hamilton Beach kitchen goodies, bed quilts from a mail-order place in New Hampshire. In all of them the less expensive items were checkmarked. Strange, since Howard let his master bedroom poon have anything they wanted—top of the line charge accounts, the magilla.

I checked the closet. It held the standard Hughes wardrobe—low-cut gowns and tight cashmere sweaters, plus a half-dozen Scrivner's carhop outfits, replete with built-in uplift breastplates, which Gretchen Rae Shoftel didn't need. Seeing a row of empty hangers, I checked for more catalogs and found a Bullocks Wilshire job under the bed. Flipping through it, I saw tweedy skirts and suits, flannel blazers, and prim and proper wool dresses circled; Howard's charge account number was scribbled at the top of the back page. Gretchen Rae Shoftel, math whiz, searching for another math whiz, was contemplating making herself over as Miss Upper-Middle-Class Rectitude.

I checked out the rest of the fuck pad—quick eyeball prowls of the other bedrooms, a toss of the downstairs closets. Empty Bullocks boxes were everywhere—Gretchen Rae had accomplished her transformation. Howard liked to keep his girls cash strapped to insure their obedience, but I was willing to guess he stretched the rules for this one. Impersonating a police officer, I called the dispatcher's office at the Yellow and Beacon cab companies. Paydirt at Beacon: three days ago at 3:10 P.M., a cab was dispatched to 436 South Lucerne; its destination: 2281 South Mariposa.

Big paydirt.

2281 South Mariposa was a Mickey Cohen hideout, an armed fortress where the Mick's triggers holed up during their many skirmishes with the Jack Dragna gang. It was steel-reinforced concrete; shitloads of canned goods in the bomb shelter/basement; racks of Tommys and pump shotguns behind fake walls covered by cheesecake pics. Only Mickey's boys knew about the place—making it conclusive proof that Morris Hornbeck was connected to Gretchen Rae Shoftel. I drove to Jefferson and Mariposa—quicksville.

It was a block of wood frame houses, small, neatly tended, mostly owned by Japs sprung from the relocation camps, anxious to stick together and assert their independence in new territory. 2281 was as innocuous and sanitary as any pad on the block: Mickey had the best Jap gardener in the area. No cars were in the driveway; the cars parked curbside looked harmless enough, and the nearest local taking the sun was a guy sitting on a porch swing four houses down. I walked up to the front door, punched in a window, reached around to the latch and let myself in.

The living room—furnished by Mickey's wife, Lavonne, with sofas and chairs from the Hadassah thrift shop—was tidy and totally silent. I was half expecting a killer hound to pounce on me before I snapped that Lavonne had forbid the Mick to get a dog because it might whiz on the carpeting. Then I caught the smell.

Decomposition hits you in the tear ducts and gut about simultaneously. I tied my handkerchief over my mouth and nose, grabbed a lamp for a weapon, and walked toward the stink. It was in the right front bedroom, and it was a doozie.

There were two stiffs—a dead man on the floor and another on the bed. The floor man was lying face down, with a white nightgown still pinned with a Bullocks price tag knotted around his neck. Congealed beef stew covered his face, the flesh cracked and red from scalding. A saucepan was upended a few feet away, holding the caked remains of the goo. Somebody was cooking when the altercation came down.

I laid down the lamp and gave the floor stiff a detailed eyeing. He was fortyish, blond and fat; whoever killed him had tried to burn off his fingerprints—the tips on both hands were scorched black, which meant that the killer was an amateur: the only way to eliminate prints is to do some chopping. A hot plate was tossed in a corner near the bed; I checked it out and saw seared skin stuck to the coils. The bed stiff was right there, so I took a deep breath, tightened my mask and examined him. He was an old guy, skinny, dressed in clothes too heavy for winter LA. There was not one mark of any kind on him; his singed-fingered hands had been folded neatly on his chest, rest in peace, like a mortician had done the job. I checked his coat and trouser pockets—goose egg—and gave him a few probes for broken bones. Double gooser. Just then a maggot crawled out of his gaping mouth, doing a spastic little Lindy Hop on the tip of his tongue.

I walked back into the living room, picked up the phone and called a man who owes me a big, big favor pertaining to his wife's association with a Negro nun and a junior congressman from Whittier. The man is a crime-scene technician with the Sheriff's Department; a med school dropout adept at spotchecking cadavers and guessing causes of death. He promised to be at 2281 South Mariposa within the hour in an unmarked car—ten minutes of forensic expertise in exchange for my erasure of his debt.

I went back to the bedroom, carrying a pot of Lavonne Cohen's geraniums to help kill the stink. The floor stiff's pockets had been picked clean; the bed stiff had no bruises on his head, and there were now two maggots doing a Tango across his nose. Morris Hornbeck, a pro, probably packed a silencered heater like most Mickey muscle—he looked too scrawny to be a hand-to-hand killer. I was starting to make Gretchen Rae Shoftel for the snuffs—and I was starting to like her.

Lieutenant Kirby Falwell showed up a few minutes later, tap-tap-tap on the window I broke. I let him in, and he lugged his evidence kit into the bedroom, pinching his nose. I left him there to be scientific, staying in the living room so as not to bruise his ego with my inside scoop on his wife. After half an hour he came out and greeted me:

"We're even, Meeks. The clown on the floor was hit on the head with a flat, blunt object, maybe a frying pan. It probably knocked him silly. Then somebody threw their dinner in his face and gave him second-degree burns. Then they strangled him with that negligee. I'll give you asphyxiation as cause of death. On Pops, I'd say heart attack—natural causes. I mighta said poison, but his liver isn't distended. Heart attack, fifty-fifty odds. Both dead about two days. I picked the scabs off both sets of fingers and rolled their prints. I suppose you want a forty-eight-state teletype on them?"

I shook my head. "California and Wisconsin—but quick."

"Inside four hours. We're even, Meeks."

"Take the nightgown home to the wife, Kirby. She'll find a use for it."

"Fuck you, Meeks."

"Adios, Lieutenant."

—

I settled in, the lights off, figuring if Mo Hornbeck and Gretchen Rae were some kind of partners, he would be by to dump the stiffs, or she would be, or someone would drop in to say hello. I sat in a chair by the front door, the lamp in my hand ready to swing if it came to that kind of play. Danger juice was keeping me edgy; my brain fluids were roiling, trying to figure a way out of the parlay—my two benefactors hiring me to glom one woman for their exclusive use, two corpses thrown in. As hard as I brainstormed, I couldn't think up squat. With half an hour to kill before I called Kirby Falwell, I gave up and tried the Other Guy Routine.

The Other Guy Routine dates back to my days as a youth in Oklahoma, when my old man would beat the shit out of my old lady, and I'd haul a mattress out into the scrub woods so I wouldn't have to listen. I'd set my armadillo traps down, and every once in a while I'd hear a snap-squeak as some stupid 'dillo ate my bait and got his spine crunched for his trouble. When I finally fell asleep, I'd usually wake up to screeches—men hurting women—always just wind playing havoc with the scrub pines. I'd start thinking then: ways to get the old man off the old lady's back without consulting my brother Fud—in the Texas Pen for armed robbery and grievous aggravated assault. I knew I didn't have the guts to confront Pop myself, so I started thinking about other people just to get him off my mind. And that always let me develop a play: some church woman conned into dropping off a pie and religious tracts to calm the old man down; steering some local slick who thought Mom was a beauty in her direction, knowing Pop was a coward with other men and would love up the old girl for weeks and weeks just to keep her. That last play stood all of us good at the end—it was right before the old lady caught typhus. She took to bed with a fever, and the old man got in with her to keep her warm. He caught it himself—and died—sixteen days after she did. Under the circumstances, you have to believe there was nothing but love between them—right up to curtains.

So the Other Guy Routine gets you out of the hole and makes some other poor fuck feel good in the process. I worked it in niggertown as a cop: let some pathetic grasshopper slide, send him a Mickey fruit basket at Christmas, get him to snitch a horse pusher and skim five percent full of yuletide cheer.

The only trouble with it this time is that I was locked on the horns of a jumbo dilemma: Mickey, Howard—two patrons, only one woman. And claiming failure with either man was against my religion.

I gave up thinking and called Kirby Falwell at the Sheriff's Bureau. His two-state teletype yielded heat:

The floor stiff was Fritz Steinkamp, Chicago-Milwaukee gunsel, one conviction for attempted murder, currently on parole and believed to be a Jerry Katzenbach torpedo. Mr. Heart Attack was Voyteck Kirnipaski, three-time loser, also a known Katzenbach associate, his falls for extortion and grand larceny—specifically stock swindles. The picture getting a little less hazy, I called Howard Hughes at his flop at the Bel Air Hotel. Two rings, hang up, three rings—so he'd know it's not some gossip columnist.

"Yes?"

"Howard, you been in Milwaukee the past few years?"

"I was in Milwaukee in the spring of '47. Why?"

"Any chance you went to a whorehouse that specialized in girls made up like movie stars?"

Howard sighed. "Buzz, you know my alleged propensity in that department. Is this about Gretchen Rae?"

"Yeah. Did you?"

"Yes. I was entertaining some colleagues from the Pentagon. We had a party with several young women. My date looked just like Jean Arthur, only a bit more…endowed. Jean broke my heart, Buzz. You know that."

"Yeah. Did the high brass get looped and start talking shop around the girls?"

"Yes, I suppose so. What does this—"

"Howard, what did you and Gretchen Rae talk about—besides your sex fantasies?"

"Well, Gretchy seemed to be interested in business—stock mergers, the little companies I've been buying up, that sort of thing. Also politics. My Pentagon chums have told me about Korea heating up, implying lots of aircraft business. Gretchy seemed interested in that, too. A smart girl always interests herself in her lovers' endeavors, Buzz. You know that. Have you got leads on her?"

"I surely have. Boss, how have you managed to stay alive and rich so long?"

"I trust the right people, Buzz. Do you believe that?"

"I surely do."

—

I gave my sitting-in-the-dark stakeout another three hours, then raided the icebox for energy and took the Other Guy Routine on the road, a mitzvah for Mickey in case I had to play an angle to shoot Gretchen Rae to Howard—his very own teenage murderess. First I wrapped up Fritz Steinkamp in three windows' worth of chintz curtains and hauled him out to my car; next I mummified Voyteck Kirnipaski in a bedspread and wedged him into the trunk between Fritz and my spare tire. Then it was a routine wipe of my own possible prints, lights off, and a drive out to Topanga Canyon, to the chemical debris dump operated by the Hughes Tool Company—a reservoir bubbling with caustic agents adjacent to a day camp for underprivileged kids: a Howard tax dodge. I dumped Fritz and Voyteck into the cauldron and listened to them snap, crackle, and pop like Kelogg's Rice Krispies. Then, just after midnight, I drove to the Strip to look for Mickey and his minions.

They weren't at the Trocadero, the Mocambo, or the La Rue; they weren't at Sherry's or Dave's Blue Room. I called the DMV night information line, played cop, and got a read on Mo Hornbeck's wheels—1946 tan Dodge Coupe, CAL-4986-J, 896¼ Moonglow Vista, South Pasadena—then took the Arroyo Seco over the hill to the address, a block of bungalow courts.

At the left side tail end of a stucco streamline job was 896¼—rounded handrails and oblong louvers fronting tiny windows strictly for show. No lights were burning; Hornbeck's Dodge was not in the carport at the rear. Maybe Gretchen Rae was inside, armed with stuffed animals, negligee garrotes, stew pots, and frying pans—and that suddenly made me not give a fuck whether the world laid, prayed, stayed, or strayed. I kicked the door in, flipped on a wall light, and got knocked flat on my ass by a big furry mother with big, shiny razor-white teeth.

It was a Doberman, sleek black muscle out for blood—mine. The dog snapped at my shoulder and got a snootful of Hart, Schaffner & Marx worsted; he snapped at my face and got an awkwardly thrown Meeks right jab that caused him to flinch momentarily. I dug in my pocket for my Arkansas toad stabber, popped the button, and flailed with it; I grazed the beast's paws and snout—and he still kept snapping and snarling.

Giving the fucker a stationary target was the only way. I put my left arm over my eyes and tried to stay prone; Rex the Wonder Dog went for my big, fat, juicy elbow. I hooked my shiv up at his gut, jammed it in and yanked forward. Entrails dropped all over me; Rex vomited blood in my face and died with a snap-gurgle.

I kicked the day's third corpse off of me, stumbled to the bathroom, rummaged through the medicine cabinet, and found witch hazel. I doused my elbow bite and the blood-oozing teeth marks on my knuckles. Deep breathing, I splashed sink water on my face, looked in the mirror, and saw a middle-aged fat man, terrified and pissed to his drawers, in deep, deep shit without a depth gauge. I held the gaze, thinking it wasn't me for long seconds. Then I smashed the image with the witch hazel bottle and eyeballed the rest of the bungalow.

The larger of the two bedrooms had to be Gretchen Rae's. It was all girlish gewgaws: pandas and arcade Kewpie dolls, pinups of matinee idols and college pennants on the walls. Kitchen appliances still in their boxes were stacked on the dresser; publicity glossies of RKO pretty boys littered the bedspread.

The other bedroom reeked of Vapo Rub and liniment and sweat and flatulence—bare walls, the floor space almost completely taken up by a sagging Murphy Bed. There was a medicine bottle on the nightstand—Dr. Revelle prescribing Demerol for Mr. Hornbeck—and checking under the pillow got me a .38 police special. I flipped the cylinder, extracted four of the shells and stuck the gun in my waistband, then went back to the living room and picked up the dog, gingerly, so as not to drench myself in his gore. I noticed that it was a female; that a tag on its collar read "Janet." That hit me as the funniest thing since vaudeville, and I started laughing wildly, shock coming on. I spotted an Abercrombie & Fitch dog bed in the corner, dumped Janet in it, doused the lights in the room, found a couch, and collapsed. I was heading into some sort of weird heebie-jeebie haze when wood creaking, a choked "Oh, my god!" and hot yellow glare jolted me to my feet.

"Oh Janet no!"

Mo Hornbeck beelined for the dead dog, not even noticing me. I stuck out my leg and tripped him; he hit the floor almost snout to snout with Janet. And I was right there, gun at his head, snarling like the psycho Okie killer I could have been. "Boy, you're gonna blab on you, Gretchen Rae, and them bodies on Mariposa. You're gonna spill on her and Howard Hughes, and I mean *now*."

Hornbeck found some balls quicksville, averting his eyes from the dog, latching them onto me. "Fuck you, Meeks."

"Fuck you" was acceptable from a ranking Sheriff's dick in my debt, but not from a statch raper hoodlum. I opened the .38's cylinder and showed Hornbeck the two rounds, then spun it, and put the muzzle to his head. "Talk. *Now*."

Hornbeck said, "Fuck you, Meeks"; I pulled the trigger; he gasped and looked at the dog, turning purple at the temples, red at the cheeks. Seeing myself in a cell next to Fud, the Meeks boys playing pinochle sideways through the bars, I popped off another shot, the hammer clicking on an empty chamber. Hornbeck bit at the carpet to staunch his tremors, going deep purple, then subsiding into shades of crimson, pink, death's-head white. Finally he spat dust and dog hair and gasped, "The pills by my bed and the bottle in the cupboard."

I obeyed, and the two of us sat on the porch like good buddies and killed the remains of the jug—Old Overholt Bonded. Hornbeck blasted Demerol pills along with the juice, flew to cloud nine, and told me the saddest goddamn story I'd ever heard.

—

Gretchen Rae Shoftel was his daughter. Mom hit the road shortly after she was born, hightailing it to parts unknown with a Schlitz Brewery driver rumored to be double digit hung, like the human equivalent of Mickey Cohen, Jr., raised Gretch as best he could, nursing a bad case of the hots for her, ashamed of it until he picked up scads of unrelated skinny: that his wife was servicing the entire Schlitz night shift during the time his little girl was conceived. On general principles he stayed hands off, taking his lust out on girls from the greenhorn hooker camps up in Green Bay and Saint Paul.

Gretchy grew up strange, ashamed of her old man—a gang stooge and occasional killer. She took her old lady's maiden name and buried her head in books, loving arithmetic tricks, figures, calculations—stuff that proved she was smart. She also took up with a rough South Milwaukee crowd. One crazy Polack boyfriend beat her silly every night for a week straight when she was fifteen. Mo found out, put the kid in cement skates, and dumped him in Lake Michigan. Father and daughter were happily reunited by the revenge.

Mo moved up in Jerry Katzenbach's organization; Gretch got a bundle together tricking the hotel bars in Chicago. Mo installed Gretchen Rae as sixteen-year-old pit boss of a swank whorehouse: movie star surrogates, the rooms bugged to pick up gangland and political skinny that might prove valuable to Jerry K. Gretch got friendly with stock swindler Voyteck Kirnipaski; she just happened to be listening through a vent one night when Howard Hughes and a cadre of army three-stars were cavorting with Jean Arthur, Lupe Velez, and Carole Lombard, greenhorn versions. Gretch picked up lots of juicy Wall Street gossip, and realized that this could be the start of something big. Mo contracted stomach cancer about that time and got the word: half a decade tops—enjoy life while you can. Cash skimmed off Jerry Katzenbach's books provided class A treatment. Mo held his own against the Big C. Jerry K. got bum press for his whorehouse, kiboshed it, and banished Mo to the Coast, where Mickey Cohen welcomed him with open arms, using his juice to get Mo's two statch-rape indiscretions plea bargained to bubbkis.

Back in Milwaukee, Gretchen Rae audited business classes at Marquette, and hauled Voyteck Kirnipaski's ashes for free when she learned he was working for Jerry K. and was dissatisfied with the pay. Then Mo had a relapse and came back to Milwaukee on a visit; Voyteck Kirnipaski skipped town with a bundle of Katzenbach's money so he could bankroll stock swindles in LA; Gretchen Rae, always reading the papers with an eye toward political repercussions, put her overhead dope from Howard and the high brass together with whispers on the Korea situation and decided to get more info from the man himself. Mo took some lung shots of his little girl and mailed them to Big How; he bit; Gretchy glommed leads that the on-the-lam and hotly pursued Voyteck was hanging out at Scrivner's Drive-In, and, wanting to enlist his aid in possible squeeze plays, got a job there. Mickey Cohen's crush on her put a monkey wrench into things—but she thought, somehow, that the little big man could be tapped for juice. She became his consort concurrent with Howard, father and daughter pretending to be strangers at Mickey's nightclub get togethers. Then, at a Santa Monica motel, she located Voyteck, terrified that Katzenbach triggers were right behind him. Mo gave her the key to Mickey's Mariposa Street hideout; she ensconced Voyteck there, moving back and forth between Howard's fuck pad, pumping information subtly and pumping Kirnipaski blatantly—attempting to lure him into her web of schemes. She was making progress when Fritz Steinkamp made the scene. And damned if Gretchy didn't rise to the occasion and throttle, scald, and frying pan him to death. She attempted to soothe the terrified Voyteck afterward, but he went into cardiac arrest: the volatile combo of a murder attempt, a murder, and a murderess's tongue. Gretchen Rae panicked and took off with Voyteck's pilfered cash—and was currently trying to unload "secret insider" prospectuses on Hughes stock to a list of potential customers Kirnipaski had compiled. The girl was holed up someplace—Mo didn't know where—and tomorrow she would be calling at the homes and offices of her last wave of potential "clients."

Somewhere in the course of the story I started liking Mo almost as much as I liked Gretchen Rae. I still couldn't see any way out of the mess, but I was curious about one thing: the girly gewgaws, the appliances, all the squarejohn homey stuff Gretchy had glommed. When Mo finished his tale, I said, "What's with all the clothes and gadgets and stuffed animals?"

Morris Hornbeck, worm bait inside six months, just sighed. "Lost time, Meeks. The father and daughter act someplace safe, the shtick we shoulda played years ago. But that's tap city, now."

I pointed to the dead dog, its paws starting to curl with rigor mortis like it was going to be begging biscuits for eternity. "Maybe not. You sure ain't gonna have a trusty mascot, but you might get a little taste of the rest."

—

Morris went to his bedroom and passed out. I laid down on the homey dreambed, holding a stuffed panda, the lights off to insure some good brainwork. Straight manipulation of Mickey and Howard fell by the wayside quick, so I shifted to the Other Guy Routine and made a snag.

Sid Weinberg.

RKO Line Producer.

Filthy rich purveyor of monster cheapies, drive-in circuit turkeys that raked in the cash.

A valuable RKO mainstay—his pictures never flopped. Howard kissed his ass, worshipped his dollars and cents approach to movie making and gave him carte blanche at the studio.

"*I'd rather lose my you know what than lose Sid Weinberg*."

Mickey Cohen was indebted to Sid Weinberg, the owner of the Blue Lagoon Saloon, where Mickey was allowed to perform his atrocious comedy routines without cops hanging around—Sid had LAPD connections.

The Mick: "I'd be without a pot to piss in without Sid. I'd have to buy my own nightclub, and that's no fun—it's like buying your own baseball team so you can play yourself."

Sid Weinberg was a widower, a man with two grown daughters who patronized him as a buffoon. He often spoke of his desire to find himself a live-in housekeeper to do light dusting and toss him a little on the side. About fifteen years ago, he was known to be in love with a dazzling blonde starlet named Glenda Jensen, who hotfooted it off into the sunset one day, never to be seen again. I'd seen pictures of Glenda; she looked suspiciously like my favorite teenage killer. At eight tomorrow night Sid Weinberg was throwing a party to ballyhoo *Bride of the Surf Monster*. I was to provide security. Mickey Cohen and Howard Hughes would be guests.

I fell asleep on the thought, and dreamed that benevolent dead dogs were riding me up to heaven, my pockets full of other guys' money.

—

In the morning we took off after the prodigal daughter. I drove, Mo Hornbeck gave directions—where he figured Gretchen Rae would be, based on their last conversation—a panicky talk two days ago; the girl afraid of phone taps; Mo saying he would let the evidence chill, then dispose of it.

Which, of course, he didn't. According to Mo, Gretch told him Voyteck Kirnipaski had given her a list of financial district sharks who might be interested in her Hughes Enterprises graphs: when to buy and sell shares in Toolco, Hughes Aircraft and its myriad subsidiaries—based on her new knowledge of upcoming defense contracts and her assessment of probable stock price fluctuations. Mo stressed that was why Gretchy raped the Bullocks catalog—she wanted to look like a businesswoman, not a seductress/killer.

So we slow-lane trawled downtown, circuiting the Spring Street financial district, hoping to catch a streetside glimpse of Gretchen Rae as she made her office calls. I'd won Mo partially over with kind words and a promise to plant Janet in a ritzy West LA pet cemetery, but I could still tell he didn't trust me—I was too close to Mickey for too long. He gave me a steady sidelong fisheye and only acknowledged my attempts at conversation with grunts.

The morning came and went; the afternoon followed. Mo had no leads on Gretchen Rae's home calls, so we kept circling Spring Street—Third to Sixth and back again—over and over, taking piss stops at the Pig & Whistle on

Fourth and Broadway every two hours. Dusk came on, and I started getting scared: my Other Guy Routine would work to perfection only if I brought Gretchy to Sid Weinberg's party right on time.

6:00.

6:30.

7:00.

7:09. I was turning the corner onto Sixth Street when Mo grabbed my arm and pointed out the window at a sharkskin clad secretary type perusing papers by the newsstand. "There. That's my baby."

I pulled over; Mo stuck his head out the door and waved, then shouted, "No! Gretchen!"

I was setting the hand brake when I saw the girl—Gretch with her hair in a bun—notice a man on the street and start running. Mo piled out of the car and headed toward the guy; he pulled a monster hand-cannon, aimed, and fired twice. Mo fell dead on the sidewalk, half his face blown off; the man pursued Gretchen Rae; I pursued him.

The girl ran inside an office building, the gunman close behind. I caught up, peered in, and saw him at the top of the second-floor landing. I slammed the door and stepped back; the act coaxed two wasted shots out of the killer, glass and wood exploding all around me. Four rounds gone, two to go.

Screams on the street; two sets of footsteps scurrying upstairs; sirens in the distance. I ran to the landing and shouted, "Police!" The word drew two ricocheting bang-bangs. I hauled my fat ass up to floor three like a flabby dervish.

The gunman was fumbling with a pocketful of loose shells; he saw me just as he flicked his piece's cylinder open. I was within three stairs of him. Not having time to load and fire, he kicked. I grabbed his ankle and pulled him down the stairs; we fell together in a tangle of arms and legs, hitting the landing next to an open window.

We swung at each other, two octopuses, blows and gouges that never really connected. Finally he got a choke hold on my neck; I reached up through his arms and jammed my thumbs hard in his eyes. The bastard let go just long enough for me to knee his balls, squirm away, and grab him by the scalp. Blinded now, he flailed for me. I yanked him out the window head first, pushing his feet after him. He hit the pavement spread eagled, and even from three stories up I could hear his skull crack like a giant eggshell.

I got some more breath, hauled up to the roof and pushed the door open. Gretchen Rae Shoftel was sitting on a roll of tar paper, smoking a cigarette, two long single tears rolling down her cheeks. She said, "Did you come to take me back to Milwaukee?"

All I could think of to say was, "No."

Gretchen reached behind the tar paper and picked up a briefcase—brand-new, Bullocks Wilshire quality. The sirens downstairs were dying out; two bodies gave lots of cops lots to do. I said, "Mickey or Howard, Miss Shoftel? You got a choice."

Gretch stubbed out her cigarette. "They both stink." She hooked a thumb over the roof in the direction of the dead gunman. "I'll take my chances with Jerry Katzenbach and his friends. Daddy went down tough. So will I."

I said, "You're not that stupid."

Gretchen Rae said, "You play the market?"

I said, "Want to meet a nice rich man who needs a friend?"

Gretchen Rae pointed to a ladder that connected the roof to the fire escape of the adjoining building. "If it's now, I'll take it."

—

In the cab to Beverly Hills I filled Gretchy in on the play, promising all kinds of bonuses I couldn't deliver, like the Morris Hornbeck scholarship for impoverished Marquette University Business School students. Pulling up to Sid Weinberg's tudor mansion, the girl had her hair down, make up on, and was ready to do the save-my-ass tango.

At 8:03 the manse was lit up like a Christmas tree—extras in green rubber monster costumes handing out drinks on the front lawn and loudspeakers on the roof blasting the love theme from a previous Weinberg tuna, *Attack of the Atomic Gargoyles*. Mickey and Howard always arrived at parties late in order not to appear too eager, so I figured there was time to set things up.

I led Gretchen Rae inside, into an incredible scene: Hollywood's great, near-great, and non-great boogie-woogieing with scads of chorus boys and chorus girls dressed like surf monsters, atomic gargoyles, and giant rodents from Mars; bartenders sucking punch out of punchbowls with ray-gun like siphons; tables of cold cuts dyed surf monster green—passed up by the guests en masse in favor of good old booze—the line for which stood twenty deep. Beautiful gash was abounding, but Gretchen Rae, hair down like Sid Weinberg's old love Glenda Jensen, was getting the lions' share of the wolf stares. I stood with her by the open front door, and when Howard Hughes's limousine pulled up, I whispered, "*Now*."

Gretchen slinked back to Sid Weinberg's glass fronted private office in slow, slow motion; Howard, tall and handsome in a tailored tux, walked in the door, nodding to me, his loyal underling. I said, "Good evening, Mr. Hughes," out loud; under my breath, "You owe me a grand."

I pointed to Sid's office; Howard followed. We got there just as Gretchen Rae Shoftel/Glenda Jensen and Sid Weinberg went into a big open-mouthed clinch. I said, "I'll lean on Sid, boss. Kosher is kosher. He'll listen to reason. Trust me."

Inside of six seconds I saw the fourth richest man in America go from heartsick puppy dog to hardcase robber baron and back at least a dozen times. Finally he jammed his hands in his pockets, fished out a wad of C-notes, and handed them to me. He said, “Find me another one just like her,” and walked back to his limo.

I worked the door for the next few hours, chasing crashers and autograph hounds away, watching Gretchen/Glenda and Sid Weinberg work the crowd, instant velvet for the girl, youth recaptured for the sad old man. Gretchy laughed, and I could tell she did it to hold back tears; when she squeezed Sid’s hand I knew she didn’t know who it belonged to. I kept wishing I could be there when her tears broke for real, when she became a real little girl for a while, before going back to being a stock maven and a whore. Mickey showed up just as the movie was starting. Davey Goldman told me he was pissed: Mo Hornbeck got himself bumped off by a Kraut trigger from Milwaukee who later nose dived out a window; the Mariposa Street hideout had been burglarized, and Lavonne Cohen was back from Israel three days early and henpecking the shit out of the Mick. I barely heard the words. Gretchy and Sid were cooing at each other by the cold cut table—and Mickey was headed straight toward them.

I couldn’t hear their words, but I could read the three faces. Mickey was taken aback, but paid gracious respect to his beaming host; Gretch was twitching with the aftershocks of her old man’s death. LA’s #1 hoodlum bowed away, walked up to me, and flicked my necktie in my face. “All you get is a grand, you hump. You shoulda found her quicker.”

—

So it worked out. Nobody made me for snuffing the Milwaukee shooter; Gretchy walked on the Steinkamp killing and her complicity in Voyteck Kirnipaski’s demise—the chemical-sizzled stiffs, of course, were never discovered. Mo Hornbeck got a plot at Mount Sinai Cemetery, and Davey Goldman and I stuffed Janet into the casket with him at the mortuary—I gave the rabbi a hot tip on the trotters, and he left the room to call his bookie. I paid off Leotis Dineen and promptly went back into hock with him; Mickey took up with a stripper named Audrey Anders; Howard made a bundle off airplane parts for the Korean War and cavorted with the dozen or so Gretchen Rae Shoftel look-alikes I found him. Gretchy and Sid Weinberg fell in love, which just about broke the poor pilot-mogul’s heart.

Gretchen Rae and Sid.

She did her light dusting—and must have thrown him a lot on the side. She also became Sid’s personal investment banker, and made him a giant bundle, of which she took a substantial percentage cut, invested it in slum property, and watched it grow, grow, grow. Slumlord Gretch also starred in the only Sid Weinberg vehicle ever to lose money, a tear jerker called “Glenda” about a movie producer who falls in love with a starlet who disappears off the face of the earth. The critical consensus was that Gretchen Rae Shoftel was a lousy actress, but had great lungs. Howard Hughes was rumored to have seen the movie over a hundred times.

In 1950 I got involved in a grand jury investigation that went bad in an enormous way, and I ended up taking it on the road permanently, Mr. Anonymous in a thousand small towns. Mickey Cohen did a couple of fed jolts for income tax evasion, got paroled as an old man, and settled back into LA as a much-appreciated local character, a reminder of the colorful old days. Howard Hughes ultimately went squirrelshit with drugs and religion, and a biography that I read said that he carried a torch for a blonde whore straight off into the deep end. He'd spend hours at the Bel Air Hotel looking at her picture, playing a torchy rendition of "Since I Don't Have You" over and over. I know better: It was probably scads of different pictures, lung shots all, the music a lament for a time when love came cheap. Gretchy was special to him, though. I still believe that.

I miss Howard and Mickey, and writing this story about them has only made it worse. It's tough being a dangerous old man by yourself—you've got nothing but memories and no one with the balls to understand them.

GRAVY TRAIN

Out of the Honor Farm and into the work force: managing the maintenance crew at a Toyota dealership in Koreatown. Jap run, a gook clientele, boogies for the shitwork and me, Stan “The Man” Klein, to crack the whip and keep on-duty loafing at a minimum. My probation officer got me the gig: Liz Trent, skinny and stacked, four useless Masters degrees, a bum marriage to a guy on methadone maintenance and the hots for yours truly. She knew I got off easy: three convictions resulting from the scams I worked with Phil Turkel—a phone sales racket that involved the deployment of hard core loops synced to rock songs and naugahyde bibles embossed with glow-in-the-dark pictures of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.—a hot item with the shvartzes. We ran a drug recovery crashpad as a front, subhorned teenyboppers into prostitution, coerced male patients into phone sales duty and kept them motivated with Benzedrine-laced espresso—all of which peaked at twenty-four grand jury bills busted down to three indictments apiece. Phil had no prior record, was strung out on cocaine and got diverted to a drug rehab; I had two G.T.A. convictions and no chemical rationalizations—bingo on a year County time, Wayside Honor Rancho, where my reputation as a lackluster heavyweight contender got me a dorm boss job. My attorney, Miller Waxman, assured me a sentence reduction was in the works; he was wrong—counting “good time” and “work time” I did the whole nine and a half months. My consolation prize: Lizzie Trent, Waxman’s ex-wife, for my P.O.—guaranteed to cut me a long leash, get me soft legitimate work and give me head before my probationary term was a month old. I took two out of three: Lizzie had sharp teeth and an overbite, so I didn't trust her on the trifecta. I was at my desk, watching my slaves wash cars, when the phone rang.

I picked up. "Yellow Empire Imports, Klein speaking."

"Miller Waxman here."

"Wax, how's it hangin'?"

"A hard yard—and you still owe me money on my fee. Seriously, I need it. I lent Liz some heavy coin to get her teeth capped."

The trifecta loomed, "Are you dunning me?"

"No, I'm a Greek bearing gifts at 10% interest."

"Such as?"

"Such as this: a grand a week cash and three hots and a cot at a Beverly Hills mansion, all legit. I take a tensky off the top to cover your bill. The clock's ticking, so yes or no?"

I said, "Legit?"

"If I'm lyin', I'm flyin'. My office in an hour?"

"I'll be there."

—

Wax worked out of a storefront on Beverly and Alvarado—close to his clientele—dope dealers and wetbacks hot to bring the family up from Calexico. I doubleparked, put a "Clergyman on Call" sign on my windshield and walked in.

Miller was in his office, slipping envelopes to a couple of Immigration Service goons—big guys with that hinky look indigenous to bagmen worldwide. They walked out thumbing C-notes; Wax said, "Do you like dogs?"

I took a chair uninvited. "Well enough. Why?"

"Why? Because Phil feels bad about lounging around up at the Betty Ford Clinic while you went inside. He wants to play catch up, and he asked me if I had ideas. A plum fell into my lap and I thought of you."

Weird Phil: facial scars and a line of shit that could make the Pope go Protestant. "How's Phil doing these days?"

"Not bad. Do you like dogs?"

"Like I said before, well enough. Why?"

Wax pointed to his clients' wall of fame—scads of framed mugshots. Included: Leroy Washington, the "Crack King" of Watts; Chester Hardell, a TV preacher indicted for unnatural acts against cats; the murderous Sanchez family—scores of inbred cousins foisted on L.A. as the result of Waxie's green card machinations. In a prominent spot: Richie "The Sicko" Sicora and Chick Ottens, the 7-11 Slayers, still at large. Picaresque: Sicora and Ottens heisted a convenience store in Pacoima and hid the salesgirl behind an upended Slurpee machine to facilitate their escape. The machine disgorged its contents: ice, sugar and carcinogenic food coloring; the girl, a diabetic, passed out, sucked in the goo, went into sugar shock and kicked. Sicora and Ottens jumped bail for parts unknown—and Wax got a commendation letter from the ACLU, citing his tenacity in defending the L.A. underclass.

I said, “You’ve been pointing for five minutes. Want to narrow it down?”

Wax brushed dandruff off his lapels. “I was illustrating a point, the point being that my largest client is not on that wall because he was never arrested.”

I feigned shock. “No shit, Dick Tracy?”

“No shit, Sherlock. I’m referring, of course, to Sol Bendish, entrepreneur, bail bondsman supreme, heir to the late great Mickey Cohen’s vice kingdom. Sol passed on recently, and I’m handling his estate.”

I sighed. “And the punch line?”

Wax tossed me a keyring. “He left a twenty-five million dollar estate to his dog. It’s legally inviolate and so well safeguarded that I can’t contest it or scam it. You’re the dog’s new keeper.”

—

My list of duties ran seven pages. I drove to Beverly Hills wishing I’d been born canine.

“Basko” lived in a mansion north of Sunset; Basko wore cashmere sweaters and a custom-designed flea collar that emitted minute amounts of nuclear radiation guaranteed not to harm dogs—a physicist spent three years developing the product. Basko ate prime steak, Beluga caviar, Häagen-Dazs ice cream and Fritos soaked in ketchup. Rats were brought in to sate his blood lust: rodent mayhem every Tuesday morning, a hundred of them let loose in the back yard for Basko to hunt down and destroy. Basko suffered from insomnia and required a unique sedative: a slice of Velveeta cheese melted in a cup of hundred-year-old brandy.

I almost shit when I saw the pad; going in the door my knees went weak. Stan Klein enters the white-trash comfort zone to which he had so long aspired.

Deep pile purple rugs everywhere.

A three-story amphitheatre to accommodate a gigantic satellite dish that brought in four hundred TV channels.

Big screen TVs in every room and a comprehensive library of porn flicks.

A huge kitchen featuring two walk-in refrigerators: one for Basko, one for me. Wax must have stocked mine—it was packed with the high-sodium, high-cholesterol stuff I thrive on. Rooms and rooms full of the swag of my dreams—I felt like Fulgencio Batista back from exile.

The I met the dog.

I found him in the pool, floating on a cushion. He was munching a cat carcass, his rear paws in the water. I did not yet know that it was the pivotal moment of my life.

I observed the beast from a distance.

He was a white bull terrier—muscular, compact, deep in the chest, bowlegged. His short-haired coat gleamed in the sunlight; he was so heavily muscled that flea-nipping required a great effort. His head was perfect good-natured misanthropy: a sloping wedge of a snout, close-set beady eyes, sharp teeth and a furrowed brow that gave him the look of a teenaged kid scheming trouble. His left ear was brindled—I sighed as the realization hit me, an epiphany—like the time I figured out Annie "Wild Thing" Behringer dyed her pubic hair.

Our eyes met.

Basko hit the water, swam and ran to me and rooted at my crotch. Looking back, I recall those moments in slow motion, gooey music on the sound track of my life, like those frenchy films where the lovers never talk, just smoke cigarettes, gaze at each other and bang away.

—

Over the next week we established a routine.

Up early, roadwork by the Beverly Hills Hotel, Basko's A.M. dump on an Arab sheik's front lawn. Breakfast, Basko's morning nap; he kept his head on my lap while I watched porno films and read sci-fi novels. Lunch: blood-rare fillets, then a float in the pool on adjoining cushions. Another walk; an eyeball on the foxy redhead who strolled her Lab at the same time each day—I figured I'd bide my time and propose a double date: us, Basko and the bitch. Evenings went to introspection: I screened films of my old fights, Stan "The Man" Klein, feather-fisted, cannon fodder for hungry schmucks looking to pad their records. There I was: six-pointed star on my trunks, my back dusted with Clearasil to hide my zits. A film editor buddy spliced me in with some stock footage of the greats; movie magic had me kicking the shit out of Ali, Marciano and Tyson. Wistful might-have-been stuff accompanied by Basko's beady browns darting from the screen to me. Soon I was telling the dog the secrets I always hid from women.

When I shifted into a confessional mode, Basko would scrunch up his brow and cock his head; my cue to shut up was one of his gigantic mouth-stretching yawns. When he started dozing, I carried him upstairs and tucked him in. A little Velveeta and brandy, a little goodnight story—Basko seemed to enjoy accounts of my sexual exploits best. And he always fell asleep just as I began to exaggerate.

I could never sync my sleep to Basko's: his warm presence got me hopped up, thinking of all the good deals I'd blown, thinking that he was only good for another ten years on earth and then I'd be fifty-one with no good buddy to look after and no pot to piss in. Prowling the pad buttressed my sense that this incredible gravy train was tangible and would last—so I prowled with a vengeance.

Sol Bendish dressed antithetical to his Vegas-style crib: tweedy sports jackets, slacks with cuffs, Oxford cloth shirts, wingtips and white bucks. He left three closets stuffed with Ivy League threads just about my size. While my canine charge slept, I transformed myself into his sartorial image. Jewboy Klein became Jewboy Bendish, wealthy contributor to the U.J.A., the man with the class to love a dog of supreme blunt efficacy. I'd stand before the mirror in Bendish's clothes—and my years as a pimp, burglar, car thief and scam artist would melt away—replaced by a thrilling and fatuous notion: finding *the* woman to compliment my new persona….

—

I attacked the next day.

Primping formed my prelude to courtship: I gave Basko a flea dip, brushed his coat and dressed him in his best spiked collar; I put on a spiffy Bendish ensemble: navy blazer, gray flannels, pink shirt and penny loafers. Thus armed, we stood at Sunset and Linden and waited for the Labrador woman to show.

She showed right on time; the canine contingent sniffed each other hello. The woman deadpanned the action; I eyeballed her while Basko tugged at his leash.

She had the freckled look of a rare jungle cat—maybe a leopard/snow tiger hybrid indigenous to some jungleland of love. Her red hair reflected sunlight and glistened gold—a lioness's mane. Her shape was both curvy and svelte; I remembered that some female felines actually stalked for mates. She said, "Are you a professional dog walker?"

I checked my new persona for dents. My slacks were a tad too short; the ends of my necktie hung off kilter. I felt myself blushing and heard Basko's paws scrabbling on the sidewalk. "No, I'm what you might want to call an entrepreneur. Why do you ask?"

"Because I used to see an older man walking this dog. I think he's some sort of organized crime figure."

Basko and the Lab were into a mating dance—sniffing, licking, nipping, I got the feeling Cat Woman was stalking me—and not for love. I said, "He's dead. I'm handling his estate."

One eyebrow twitched and flickered. "Oh? Are you an attorney?"

"No, I'm working for the man's attorney."

"Sol Bendish was the man's name, wasn't it?"

My shit detector clicked into high gear—this bimbo was pumping me. “That’s right, Miss?”

“It’s Ms. Gail Curtiz, that’s with a T, I, Z. And it’s Mr.?”

“Klein with an E, I, N. My dog likes your dog, don’t you think?”

“Yes, a disposition of the glands.”

“I empathize. Want to have dinner some time?”

“I think not.”

“I’ll try again then.”

“The answer won’t change. Do you do other work for the Bendish estate? Besides walk the man’s dog, I mean.”

“I look after the house. Come over some time. Bring your Lab, we’ll double.”

“Do you thrive on rejections, Mr. Klein?”

Basko was trying to hump the Lab—but no go. “Yeah, I do.”

“Well, until the next one, then. Good day.”

—

The brief encounter was Weirdsville, U.S.A.—especially Cat Woman’s Strangeville take on Sol Bendish. I dropped Basko off at the pad, drove to the Beverly Hills library and had a clerk run my dead benefactor through their information computer. Half an hour later I was reading a lapful of scoop on the man.

An interesting dude emerged.

Bendish ran loan-sharking and union protection rackets inherited from Mickey Cohen; he was a gold star contributor to Israel bonds and the U.J.A. He threw parties for underprivileged kids and operated his bail bond business at a loss. He lost a bundle on a homicide bond forfeiture: Richie “Sicko” Sicora and Chick Ottens, the 7-11 slayers, Splitsvilled for Far Gonesville, sticking him with a two million dollar tab. Strange: the *L.A. Times* had Bendish waxing philosophical on the bug-out, like two mill down the toilet was everyday stuff to him.

On the personal front, Bendish seemed to love broads, and eschew birth control: no less than six paternity suits were filed against him. If the suit-filing mothers were to be believed, Sol had three grown sons and three grown daughters—and the complainants were bought off with chump change settlements—weird for a man so given to charity for appearance’s sake. The last clippings I scanned held another anomaly: Miller Waxman said Bendish’s estate came to twenty-five mill, while the papers placed it at a cool forty. My scamster’s brain kicked into very low overdrive….

—

I went back to my routine with Basko and settled into days of domestic bliss undercut with just the slightest touch of wariness. Wax paid my salary on time; Basko and I slept entwined and woke up simultaneously, in some kind of cross-species psychic sync. Gail Curtiz continued to give me the brush; I got her address from Information and walked Basko by every night, curious: a woman short of twenty-five living in a Beverly Hills mansion—a rental by all accounts—a sign on the lawn underlining it: "For Sale. Contact Realtor. Please Do Not Disturb Renting Tenant." One night the bimbo spotted me snooping; the next night I spotted her strolling by the Bendish/Klein residence. On impulse, I checked my horoscope in the paper: a bust, no mention of romance or intrigue coming my way.

Another week passed, business as usual, two late-night sightings of Gail Curtiz sniffing my turf. I reciprocated: late-night prowls by her place, looking for window lights to clarify my take on the woman. Basko accompanied me; the missions brought to mind my youth: heady nights as a burglar/panty raider. I was peeping with abandon, crouched with Basko behind a eucalyptus tree, when the shit hit the fan—a crap-o, non-Beverly Hills car pulled up.

Three shifty-looking shvartzes got out, burglar's tools gleamed in the moonlight. The unholy trio tiptoed up to Gail Curtiz's driveway.

I pulled a non-existant gun and stepped out from hiding; I yelled, "Police Officer! Freeze!" and expected them to run. They froze instead; I got the shakes; Basko yanked at his leash and broke away from me. Then pandemonium.

Basko attacked; the schmucks ran for their car; one of them whipped out a cylindrical object and held it out to the hot pursuing hound. A streetlamp illuminated the offering: a bucket of Kentucky Colonel ribs.

Basko hit the bucket and started snouting; I yelled "No!" and chased. The boogies grabbed my beloved comrade and tossed him in the back seat of their car. The car took off—just as I made a last leap and hit the pavement memorizing plate numbers, a partial read: P-L-blank-0016. BASKO BASKO BASKO NO NO—

—

The next hour went by in a delirium. I called Liz Trent, had her shake down an ex-cop boyfriend for a DMV run-through on the plate and got a total of fourteen possible combinations. None of the cars were reported stolen; eleven were registered to caucasians, three to southside blacks. I got a list of addresses, drove to Hollywood and bought a .45 automatic off a fruit hustler known to deal good iron—then hit darktown with a vengeance.

My first two addresses were losers: staid sedans that couldn't have been the kidnap car. Adrenaline scorched my blood vessels; I kept seeing Basko maimed, Basko's beady browns gazing at me. I pulled up to the last address seeing double: silhouettes in the pistol range of my mind. My trigger finger itched to dispense .45 caliber justice.

I saw the address, then smelled it: a wood-framed shack in the shadow of a freeway embankment, a big rear yard, the whole package reeking of dog. I parked and sneaked back to the driveway gun first.

Snarls, growls, howls, barks, yips—flood-lights on the yard and two pit bulls circling each other in a ring enclosed by fence pickets. Spectators yipping, yelling, howling, growling and laying down bets—and off to the side of the action my beloved Basko being primed for battle.

Two burly shvartzes were fitting black leather gloves fitted with razor blades to his paws; Basko was wearing a muzzle embroidered with swastikas. I padded back and got ready to kill; Basko sniffed the air and leaped at his closest defiler. A hot second for the gutting: Basko lashed out with his paws and disemboweled him clean. The other punk screamed; I ran up and bashed his face in with the butt of my roscoe. Basko applied the *coup de grace*: left-right paw shots that severed his throat down to the windpipe. Punk number two managed a death gurgle; the spectators by the ring heard the hubbub and ran over. I grabbed Basko and hauled ass.

We made it to my sled and peeled rubber; out of nowhere a car broadsided us, fender to fender. I saw a white face behind the wheel, downshifted, brodied, fishtailed and hit the freeway doing eighty. The attack car was gone —back to the nowhere it came from. I whipped off Basko's muzzle and paw weapons and threw them out the window; Basko licked my face all the way to Beverly Hills.

—

More destruction greeted us: the Bendish/Klein/Basko pad had been ransacked, the downstairs thoroughly trashed: shelves overturned, sections of the satellite dish ripped loose, velvet flocked Elvis paintings torn from the walls. I grabbed Basko again; we hotfooted it to Gail Curtiz's crib.

Lights were burning inside; the Lab was lounging on the lawn chomping on a nylabone. She noticed Basko and started demurely wagging her tail; I sensed romance in the air and unhooked my sidekick's leash. Basko ran to the Lab; the scene dissolved into horizontal nuzzling. I gave the lovebirds some privacy, sneaked around to the rear of the house and started peeping.

Va Va Va Voom through a back window. Gail Curtiz, nude, was writhing with another woman on a tigerskin rug. The gorgeous brunette seemed reluctant: her face spelled shame and you could tell the perversity was getting to her. My beady eyes almost popped out of my skull; in the distance I could hear Basko and the Lab rutting like cougars. The brunette faked an orgasm and made her hips buckle—I could tell she was faking from twenty feet away. The window was cracked at the bottom; I put an ear to the sill and listened.

Gail got up and lit a cigarette; the brunette said, “Could you turn off the lights, please?”—a dead giveaway—you could tell she wanted to blot out the dyke’s nudity. Basko and the Lab, looking sated, trotted up and fell asleep at my feet. The room inside went black; I listened extra hard.

Smutty endearments from Gail; two cigarette tips glowing. The brunette, quietly persistent: “But I don’t understand why you spend your life savings renting such an extravagent house. You *never* spell things out for me, even though we’re…. And just who is this rich man who died?”

Gail, laughing. “My daddy, sweetie. Blood test validated. Momma was a car hop who died of a broken heart. Daddy stiffed her on the paternity suit, among many other stiffs, but he promised to take care of me—three million on my twenty-fifth birthday or his death, whichever came first. Now, dear, would you care to hear the absurdist punch line? Daddy left the bulk of his fortune to his dog, to be overseen by a sharpie lawyer and this creep who looks after the dog. *But*—there has to be some money hidden somewhere. Daddy’s estate was valued at twenty-five million, while the newspapers placed it as much higher. Oh, shit, isn’t it all absurd?”

A pause, then the brunette. “You know what you said when we got back a little while ago? Remember, you had this feeling the house had been searched?”

Gail: “Yes. What are you getting at?”

“Well, maybe it *was* just your imagination, or maybe one of the other paternity suit kids has got the same idea, maybe that explains it.”

“Linda, honey, I can’t think of that just now. Right now I’ve got you on my mind.”

Small talk was over—eclipsed by Gail’s ardor, Linda’s phony moans, I hitched Basko to his leash, drove us to a motel safe house and slept the sleep of the righteously pissed.

—

In the morning I did some brainwork. My conclusions: Gail Curtiz wanted to sink my gravy train and relegate Basko to a real dog’s life. Paternity suit intrigue was at the root of the Bendish house trashing and the “searching” of Gail’s place. The car that tried to broadside me was driven by a white man—a strange anomaly. Linda, in my eyes a non-dyke, seemed to be stringing the lust-blinded Gail along—could she also be a paternity suit kid out for Basko’s swag? Sleazy Miller Waxman was Sol Bendish’s lawyer and a scam artist bent from the crib—how did he fit in? Were the shvoogies who tried to break into Gail’s crib the ones who later searched it—and trashed my place? Were they in the employ of one of the paternity kids? *What was going on*?

I rented a suite at the Bel-Air Hotel and ensconced Basko there, leaving a grand deposit and detailed instructions on his care and feeding. Next I hit the

Beverly Hills Library and re-read Sol Bendish's clippings. I glommed the names of his paternity suit complainants, called Liz Trent and had her give me DMV addresses. Two of Sol's playmates were dead; one was address unknown, two—Marguerita Montgomery and Jane Hawkshaw—were alive and living in Los Angeles. The Montgomery woman was out as a lead: a clipping I'd scanned two weeks ago quoted her on the occasion of Sol Bendish's death—she mentioned that the son he fathered had died in Vietnam. I already knew that Gail Curtiz's mother had died—and since none of the complainants bore the name Curtiz, I knew Gail was using it as an alias. That left Jane Hawkshaw: last known address 8902 Saticoy Street in Van Nuys.

—

I knocked on her door an hour later. An old woman holding a stack of *Watchtowers* opened up. She had the look of religious crackpots everywhere: bad skin, spaced-out eyes. She might have been hot stuff once—around the time man discovered the wheel. I said, "I'm Brother Klein. I've been dispatched by the Church to ease your conscience in the Sol Bendish matter."

The old girl pointed me inside and started babbling repentance. My eyes hit a framed photograph above the fireplace—two familiar faces smiling out. I walked over and squinted.

Ultra-paydirt: Richie "Sicko" Sicora and another familiar-looking dude. I'd seen pics of Sicora before—but in this photo he looked like someone *else* familiar. The resemblance seemed very vague—but niggling. The other man was easy—he'd tried to broadside me in darktown last night.

The old girl said, "My son Richard is a fugitive. He doesn't look like that now. He had his face changed when he went on the run. Sol was going to leave Richie money when he turned twenty-five, but Richie and Chuck got in trouble and Sol gave it out in bail money instead. I've got no complaint against Sol and I repent my unmarried fornication."

I superimposed the other man's bone structure against photos I'd seen of Chick Ottens and got a close match. I tried, tried, tried, to place Sicora's pre-surgery resemblance, but failed. Sicora pre-plastic, Ottens already sliced—a wicked brew that validated non-dyke Linda's theory straight down the line….

I gave the old woman a buck, grabbed a *Watchtower* and boogied southside. The radio blared hype on the Watts homicides: the monster dog and his human accomplice. Fortunately for Basko and myself, eyewitnesses' accounts were dismissed and the deaths were attributed to dope intrigue. I cruised the bad boogaloo streets until I spotted the car that tried to ram me—parked behind a cinderblock dump circled by barbed wire.

I pulled up and jacked a shell into my piece. I heard yips emanating from the back yard, tiptoed around and scoped out the scene.

Pit Bull City: scores of them in pens. A picnic table and Chick Ottens noshing bar-b-q'd chicken with his snazzy new face. I came up behind him; the dogs noticed me and sent out a cacophony of barks. Ottens stood up and wheeled around going for his waistband. I shot off his kneecaps—canine howls covered my gun blasts. Ottens flew backwards and hit the dirt screaming; I poured bar-b-q sauce on his kneeholes and dragged him over to the cage of the baddest looking pit hound of the bunch. The dog snapped at the blood and soul sauce; his teeth tore the pen. I spoke slowly, like I had all the time in the world. "I know you and Sicora got plastic jobs, I know Sol Bendish was Sicora's daddy and bailed you and Sicko out on the 7-11 job. You had your goons break into Gail Curtiz's place and the Bendish pad and all this shit relates to you trying to mess with my dog and screw me out of my gravy train. Now I'm beginning to think Wax Waxman set me up. I think you and Sicora have some plan going to get at Bendish's money, and Wax ties in. You got word that Curtiz was snouting around, so you checked out her crib. I'm a dupe, right? Wax's patsy? Wrap this up for me or I feed your kneecaps to Godzilla."

Pit Godzilla snarled an incisor out of the mesh and nipped Ottens where it counts. Ottens screeched; going blue, he got out, "Wax wanted…you…to…look after…dog…while him and…Phil…scammed a way to…discredit paternity…claims…I…I…"

Phil.

My old partner—I didn't know a thing about his life before our partnership.

Phil Turkel was Sicko Sicora, his weird facial scars derived from the plastic surgery that hid his real identity from the world.

"Freeze, suckah."

I looked up. Three big shines were standing a few yards away, holding Uzis. I opened Godzilla's cage; Godzilla burst out and went for Chick's face. Ottens screamed; I tossed the bucket of chicken at the gunmen; shots sprayed the dirt. I ate crabgrass and rolled, rolled, rolled, tripping cage levers, ducking, ducking, ducking. Pit bulls ran helter skelter, then zeroed in: three soul brothers dripping with soul sauce.

The feast wasn't pretty. I grabbed an Uzi and got out quicksville.

—

Dusk.

I leadfooted it to Wax's office, the radio tuned to a classical station—I was hopped up on blood, but found some soothing Mozart to calm me down, and highballed it to Beverly and Alvarado.

Waxman's office was stone silent; I picked the back door lock, walked in and made straight for the safe behind his playmate calendar—the place where I knew he kept his dope and bribery stash. Left-right-left: an hour of diddling the tumblers and the door creaked open. Four hours of studying memo slips, ledgers and little black book notations and I trusted myself on a reconstruction.

Labyrinthine, but workable:

Private eye reports on Gail Curtiz and Linda Claire Woodruff—the two paternity suit kids Wax considered most likely to contest the Bendish estate. Lists of stooges supplied by Wax contacts in the LAPD: criminal types to be used to file phony claims against the estate, whatever money gleaned to be kicked back to Wax himself. Address book names circled: snuff artists I knew from jail, including the fearsome Angel "Fritz" Trejo. A note from Phil Turkel to Waxman: "Throw Stan a bone—he can babysit the dog until we get the money." A diagram of the Betty Ford Clinic, followed by an ominous epiphany: Wax was going to have Phil and the real paternity kids clipped. Pages and pages of notes in legalese—levers to get at the extra fifteen million Sol Bendish had stuffed in Swiss bank accounts.

I turned off the lights and raged in the dark; I thought of escaping to a nice deserted island with Basko and some nice girl who wouldn't judge me for loving a bull terrier more than her. The phone rang—and I nearly jumped out of my hide.

I picked up and faked Wax's voice. "Waxman here."

"Ees Angel Fritz. You know your man Phil?"

"Yeah."

"Ees history. You pay balance now?"

"My office in two hours, homeboy."

"Ees bonaroo, homes."

I hung up and called Waxman's pad; Miller answered on the second ring. "Yes?"

"Wax, it's Klein."

"Oh."

His voice spelled it out plain: he'd heard about the southside holocaust. "Yeah, 'Oh.' Listen, shit-bird, here's the drift. Turkel's dead, and I took out Angel Trejo. I'm at your office and I've been doing some reading. Be here in one hour with a cash settlement."

Waxman's teeth chattered; I hung up and did some typing: Stan Klein's account of the whole Bendish/Waxman/Turkel/Ottens/Trejo scam—a massive criminal conspiracy to bilk the dog I loved. I included everything but mention of myself and left a nice blank space for Wax to sign his name. Then I waited.

Fifty minutes later—a knock. I opened the door and let Wax in. His right hand was twitching and there was a bulge under his jacket. He said, "Hello, Klein," and twitched harder; I heard a truck rumble by and shot him point blank in the face.

Wax keeled over dead, his right eyeball stuck to his law school diploma. I frisked him, relieved him of his piece and twenty large in cash. I found some papers in his desk, studied his signature and forged his name to his confession. I left him on the floor, walked outside and pulled over to the pay phone across the street.

A taco wagon pulled to the curb; I dropped my quarter, dialed 911 and called in a gunshot tip—anonymous citizen, a quick hangup. Angel Fritz Trejo rang Wax's doorbell, waited, then let himself in. Seconds dragged; lights went on; two black & whites pulled up and four cops ran inside brandishing hardware. Multiple shots—and four cops walked out unharmed.

—

So in the end I made twenty grand and got the dog. The L.A. County Grand Jury bought the deposition, attributed my various dead to Ottens/Turkel/Trejo/Waxman *et al*—all dead themselves, thus unindictable. A superior court judge invalidated Basko's twenty-five mill and divided the swag between Gail Curtiz and Linda Claire Woodruff. Gail got the Bendish mansion—rumor has it that she's turning it into a crash-pad for radical lesbian feminists down on their luck. Linda Claire is going out with a famous rock star—androgynous, but more male than female. She admitted, elliptically, that she tried to "hustle" Gail Curtiz—validating her dyke submissiveness as good old American fortune hunting. Lizzie Trent got her teeth fixed, kicked me off probation and into her bed. I got a job selling cars in Glendale—and Basko comes to work with me every day. His steak and caviar diet have been replaced by Gravy Train—and he looks even groovier and healthier. Lizzie digs Basko and lets him sleep with us. We're talking about combining my twenty grand with her life savings and buying a house, which bodes marriage: my first, her fourth. Lizzie's a blast: she's smart, tender, funny and gives great skull. I love her almost as much as I love Basko.

TORCH NUMBER

Before Pearl Harbor and the Jap scare, my living room window offered a great night view: Hollywood Boulevard lit with neon, dark hillsides, movie spots crisscrossing the sky announcing the latest opening at Grauman's and the Pantages. Now, three months after the day of infamy—blackouts in effect and squadrons of Jap Zeros half expected any moment—all I could see were building shapes and the cherry lamps of occasional prowl cars. The ten P.M. curfew kept night divorce work off my plate, and blowing my last assignment with Bill Malloy of the D.A.'s Bureau made a special deputy's curfew waiver out of the question. Work was down, bills were up, and my botched surveillance of Maggie Cordova had me thinking of Lorna all the time, wearing the grooves on her recording of "Prison of Love" down to sandpaper.

> *Prison of Love.*
> *Sky above.*
> *I feel your body like a velvet glove….*

I mixed another rye and soda and started the record over. Through a part in the curtains, I eyeballed the street; I thought of Lorna and Maggie Cordova until their stories melded.

Lorna Kafesjian.

Second-rate bistro chanteuse—first-rate lungs, third-rate club gigs because she insisted on performing her own tunes. I met her when she hired me to rebuff the persistent passes of a rich bull dagger who'd been voyeur perving on her out at Malibu Beach—Lorna with her swimsuit stripped to the waist, chest exposed for a deep cleavage tan to offset the white gowns she always wore on stage. The dyke was sending Lor a hundred long-stemmed red roses a day, along with mash notes bearing her *nom de plume d'amour*: "Your Tongue of Fire." I kiboshed the pursuit quicksville, glomming the tongue's Vice jacket, shooting the dope to Louella Parsons—a socially connected, prominently married carpet muncher with a yen for nightclub canaries was prime meat for the four-star *Herald*. I told Louella: She desists, you don't publish; she persists, you do. The Tongue and I had a little chat; I strong-armed her nigger bodyguard when *he* got persistent. Lorna was grateful, wrote me the torch number to torch all torch numbers—and *I* got persistent.

The flame burned both ways for about four months—from January to May of '38 I was Mr. Ringside Swain as Lorna gigged the Katydid Klub, Bido Lito's, Malloy's Nest, and a host of dives on the edge of jigtown. Two A.M. closers, then back to her place; long mornings and afternoons in bed, my business neglected, clients left dangling while I lived the title of a Duke Ellington number: "I Got It Bad, and That Ain't Good." Lorna came out of the spell first; she saw that I was willing to trash my life to be with her. That scared her; she pushed me away; I played stage door Johnny until I got disgusted with myself and she blew town for fuck knows where, leaving me a legacy of soft contralto warbles on hot black wax.

Lorna.

Lorna to Maggie.

Maggie happened this way:

Two weeks ago Malloy co-opted me to the D.A.'s Bureau—the aftermath of the bank job was running helter-skelter, he needed a man good at rolling stakeouts, and a citizens committee had posted extra reward gelt. The B of A on North Broadway and Alpine got knocked off; two shitbirds—Caucasians, one with *outré* facial scars—snuffed three armed guards and got away clean. A score of eyeball witnesses gave descriptions of the robbers, then—blam!—the next day a witness, a seventy-three-year-old Jap granny set for internment pickup, got plugged—double blam!—as she was walking her pooch to the corner market. LAPD Ballistics compared the slugs to the pills extracted from the stiffs at the bank scene: match-up, straight across.

Malloy was called in. He developed a theory: One of the eyewitnesses was in on the robbery; the heisters glommed the addresses of the other witnesses and decided to bump them to camouflage their guy. Malloy threw a net around the three remaining witnesses; two square johns named Dan Doherty and Bob Roscomere—working stiffs with no known criminal associates—and Maggie Cordova—a nightclub singer who'd taken two falls for possession and sale of marijuana.

Maggie C. loomed as the prime suspect: She toked big H and maryjane, was rumored to have financed her way through music school by pulling gang bangs, and played it hardcase during her two-year jolt at Tehachapi. Doherty and Roscomere were put out as bait, not warned of the danger they were in, carrying D.A.'s Bureau tails wherever they went. Malloy figured my still-simmering torch for Lorna K. gave me added insight into the ways of errant songbirds and sent me out to keep loose track of Maggie, hoping she'd draw unfriendly fire if she wasn't the finger woman or lead me to the heisters if she was.

I found Maggie pronto—a call to a booking agent who owed me—and an hour later I was sipping rye and soda in the lounge of a Gardena pokerino parlor. The woman was a dumpy ash blonde in a spangly gown, long-sleeved, probably to hide her needle tracks. She looked vaguely familiar, like a stag film actress you were hard for in your youth. Her eyes were flat and droopy and her microphone gestures were spastic. She looked like a hophead who'd spent her best years on cloud nine and would never adjust to life on earth.

I listened to Maggie butcher "I Can't Get Started," "The Way You Look Tonight," and "Blue Moon"; she bumped the mike stand with her crotch and nobody whistled. She sang "Serenade in Blue" off-key and a clown a couple of tables over threw a handful of martini olives at her. She flipped the audience the finger, got a round of applause, and belted the beginning of "Prison of Love."

I sat there, transfixed. I closed my eyes and pretended it was Lorna. I forced myself not to wonder how this pathetic no-talent dopester got hold of a song written exclusively for me. Maggie sang her way through all five verses, the material almost transforming her voice into something good. I was ripping off Lorna's snow-white gown and plunging myself into her when the music stopped and the lights went on.

And Maggie was ixnay, splitsville, off to Gone City. I tried her dressing room, the bar, the casino. I got her vehicle stats from the DMV and got nowhere with them. I slapped around a croupier with a junkie look, got Maggie's address, and found her dump cleaned out lock, stock, and barrel. I became a pistol-whipping, rabbit-punching, brass knuckle-wielding dervish then, tearing up the Gardena Strip. I got a half decent lead on a ginch Maggie used to whore with; the woman got me jacked on laudanum, picked my pocket, and left me in Gone City, ripe prey for a set of strong-arm bulls from the Gardena P.D. When I came off cloud ten in a puke-smelling drunk tank, Bill Malloy was standing over me with glad tidings: I'd been charged with six counts of aggravated assault, one count of felonious battery, and two counts of breaking and entering. Maggie Cordova was nowhere to be found; the other eyewitnesses were in protective custody. Bill himself was off the bank job, on temporary assignment to the Alien Squad, set to rustle Japs, the big cattle drive that wouldn't end until Uncle Sam gave Hirohito the big one where it hurt the most. My services were no longer required by the D.A.'s office, and my night curfew waiver was revoked until somebody figured a way to chill out the nine felony charges accumulated against me…

I heard a knock at the door, looked out the window and saw a prowl car at the curb, red lights blinking. I took my time turning on lamps, wondering if it was warrants and handcuffs or maybe somebody who wanted to talk dealsky. More knocks—a familiar cadence. Bill Malloy at midnight.

I opened the door. Malloy was backstopped by a muscle cop who looked like a refugee from the wrong side of a Mississippi chain gang: big ears, blond flattop, pig eyes, and a too-small suit-coat framing the kind of body you expect to see on convicts who haul cotton bales all day. Bill said, "You want out of your grief, Hearns? I came to give you an out."

I pointed to the man-monster. "Expecting trouble you can't handle?"

"Policemen come in pairs. Easier to give trouble, easier to avoid it. Sergeant Jenks, Mr. Hearns."

The big man nodded; an Adam's apple the size of a baseball bobbed up and down. Bill Malloy stepped inside and said, "If you want those charges dropped and your curfew waiver back, raise your right hand."

I did it. Sergeant Jenks closed the door behind him and read from a little card he'd pulled from his pocket. "Do you, Spade Hearns, promise to uphold the laws of the United States Government pertaining to executive order number nine-oh-five-five and obey all other federal and municipal statutes while temporarily serving as an internment agent?"

I said "Yeah."

Bill handed me a fresh curfew pass and an LAPD rap sheet with a mugshot strip attached. "Robert no middle name Murikami. He's a lamster Jap, he's a youth gang member, he did a deuce for B and E and when last seen he was passing out anti-American leaflets. We've got his known associates on this sheet, last known address, the magilla. We're swamped and taking in semipros like you to help. Usually we pay fifteen dollars a day, but you're in no position to demand a salary."

I took the sheet and scanned the mugshots. Robert NMN Murikami was a stolid-looking youth—a samurai in a skivvy shirt and duck's ass haircut. I said, "If this kid's so wicked, why are you giving me the job?"

Jenks bored into me with his little pig eyes; Bill smiled. "I trust you not to make the same mistake twice."

I sighed. "What's the punch line?"

"The punch line is that this punk is pals with Maggie Cordova—we got complete paper on him, including his bail reports. The Cordova cooze put up the jack for Tojo's last juvie beef. Get him, Hearns. All will be forgiven and maybe you'll get to roll in the gutter with another second-rate saloon girl."

—

I settled in to read the junior kamikaze's rap sheet. There wasn't much: the names and addresses of a half dozen Jap cohorts—tough boys probably doing the Manzanar shuffle by now—carbons of the kid's arrest reports, and letters to the judge who presided over the B&E trial that netted Murikami his two-spot at Preston. If you read between the lines, you could see a metamorphosis: Little Tojo started out as a pad prowler out for cash and a few sniffs of ladies' undergarments and ended up a juvie gang honcho: zoot suits, chains and knives, boogie-woogie rituals with his fellow members of the "Rising Sons." At the bottom of the rap sheet there was a house key attached to the page with Scotch tape, an address printed beside it: 1746¼, North Avenue 46, Lincoln Heights. I pocketed the key and drove there, thinking of a Maggie-to-Lorna reunion parlay—cool silk sheets and a sleek tanned body soundtracked by the torch song supreme.

—

The address turned out to be a subdivided house on a terraced hillside overlooking the Lucky Lager Brewery. The drive over was eerie: Streetlights and traffic signals were the only illumination and Lorna was all but there with me in the car, murmuring what she'd give me if I took down slant Bobby. I parked at the curb and climbed up the front steps, counting numbers embossed on doorways: 1744, 1744½, 1746, 1746½. 1746¼ materialized; I fumbled the key toward the lock. Then I saw a narrow strip of light through the adjoining window—the unmistakable glint of a pen flash probing. I pulled my gun, *eased* the key in the hole, watched the light flutter back toward the rear of the pad, and opened the door slower than slow.

No movement inside, no light coming toward me. "Fuck, fuck, fuck," echoed from a back room; a switch dropped and big light took over. And there was my target: a tall, skinny man bending over a chest of drawers, a penflash clamped in his teeth.

I let him start rifling, then tiptoed over. When he had both hands braced on the dresser and his legs spread, I gave him the Big Fungoo.

I hooked his left leg back; Prowler collapsed on the dresser, penflash cracking teeth as his head hit the wall. I swung him around, shot him a pistol butt blow to the gut, caught a flailing right hand, jammed the fingers into the top drawer space, slammed the drawer shut, and held it there with my knee until I heard fingers cracking. Prowler screamed; I found a pair of jockey shorts on the counter, shoved them in his mouth, and kept applying pressure with my knee. More bone crack; amputation coming up. I eased off and let the man collapse on his knees.

The shitbird was stone cold out. I kicked him in the face to keep him that way, turned on the wall light, and prowled myself.

It was just a crummy bedroom, but the interior decorating was *très outré*: Jap nationalist posters on the walls—racy shit that showed Jap Zeros buzz-bombing a girl's dormitory, buxom white gash in peignoirs running in terror. The one table held a stack of Maggie Cordova phonograph records—Maggie scantily attired on the jackets, stretch marks, flab, and chipped nail polish on display. I examined them up close—no record company was listed. They were obvious vanity jobs—fat Maggie preserving her own sad warbles.

Shitbird was stirring; I kicked him in the noggin again and trashed the place upside down. I got:

A stash of women's undies, no doubt Bad Bob's B&E booty; a stash of *his* clothes; assorted switchblades, dildoes, french ticklers, tracts explaining that a Jew-Communist conspiracy was out to destroy the world of true peace the German and Japanese brotherhood had sought to establish through peaceful means and—under the mattress—seventeen bankbooks: various banks, the accounts fat with cash, lots of juicy recent deposits.

It was time to make Shitbird sing. I gave him a waistband frisk, pulling out a .45 auto, handcuffs, and—mother dog!—an L.A. sheriff's badge and I.D. holder. Shitbird's real monicker was Deputy Walter T. Koenig, currently on loan to the County Alien Squad.

That got me thinking. I found the kitchen, grabbed a quart of beer from the icebox, came back and gave Deputy Bird an eye-opener—Lucky Lager on the *cabeza*. Koenig sputtered and spat out his gag; I squatted beside him and leveled my gun at his nose. "No dealsky, no tickee, no washee. Tell me about Murikami and the bankbooks or I'll kill you."

Koenig spat blood; his foggy eyes honed in on my roscoe. He licked beer off his lips; I could tell his foggy brain was trying to unfog an angle. I cocked my .38 for emphasis. "Talk, Shitbird."

"Zeck—zeck—order."

I spun the .38's cylinder—more emphasis. "You mean the executive order on the Japs?"

Koenig spat a few loose canines and some gum flaps. "Zat's right."

"Keep going. A snitch jacket looks good on you."

Shitbird held a stare on me; I threw him back some of his manhood to facilitate a speedy confession. "Look, you spill and I won't rat you. This is just a money gig for me."

His eyes told me he bought it. Koenig got out his first unslurred words. "I been doin' a grift with the Japs. The government's holdin' their bank dough till the internment ends. I was gonna cash out for Murikami and some others, for a cut. You know, bring 'em to the bank in bracelets, carry some official-lookin' papers. Japs are smart, I'll give 'em that. They know they're goin' bye-bye, and they want more than bank interest."

I didn't *quite* buy it; on reflex I gave Koenig's jacket pockets a toss. All I got was some women's pancake makeup—pad and bottle. The anomaly tweaked me; I pulled Koenig to his feet and cuffed him behind his back with his own bracelets. "Where's Murikami hiding out?"

"Fourteen-eleven Wabash, East L.A., apartment three-eleven. Bunch of

Japs holing up there. What are you gonna—"

"I'm going to toss your car and cut you loose. It's *my* grift now, Walter."

Koenig nodded, trying not to look grateful; I unloaded his piece and stuck it in his holster, gave him back his badge kit, rounded up the bankbooks, and shoved him toward the front door, thinking of Lorna accompanied by Artie Shaw and Glenn Miller, the two of us enjoying Acapulco vacations financed by Axis cash. I pushed Koenig down the steps ahead of me; he nodded toward a Ford roadster parked across the street. "There, that's mine. But you ain't—"

Shots cut the air; Koenig pitched forward, backward, forward. I hit the pavement, not knowing which direction to fire. Koenig slumped into the gutter; a car sped by *sans* headlights. I squeezed off five shots and heard them ding metal; lights went on in windows—they gave me a perfect shot of a once-rogue cop with his face blasted away. I stumbled over to the Ford, used my pistol butt to smash in a window, popped the glove compartment, and tore through it. Odd papers, no bankbooks, my hands brushing a long piece of slimy rubber. I held it up and flicked on the dash light and saw a paste-on scar—*outré*—just like the one eyewitnesses at the bank job said one of the heisters had.

I heard sirens descending, blasting like portents of doomsday. I ran to my car and highballed it the fuck away.

—

My apartment was in the wrong direction—away from leads on Maggie into Lorna. I drove to 1411 Wabash, found it postmidnight still, blackout black—a six-story walk-up with every single window covered. The joint was stone quiet. I ditched my car in the alley, stood on the hood, jumped up, and caught the bottom rung of the fire escape.

The climb was tough going; mist made the handrails wet and slippery, and my shoes kept slipping. I made it to the third-floor landing, pushed the connecting door open, padded down the empty hallway to 311, put my ear to the door and listened.

Voices in Jap, voices in Jap-accented English, then pure Americanese, loud and clear. "You're paying me for a hideout, not chow at two-fucking-A.M. But I'll do it—*this time*."

More voices; footsteps heading toward the hall. I pulled my gun, pinned myself to the wall, and let the door open in my face. I hid behind it for a split second; it was shut, and caucasian-san hotfooted it over to the elevator. On tippy-toes, I was right behind him.

I cold-cocked him clean—wham!—grabbed his pocket piece while he hit the carpet and dreamsville, stuffed my display handkerchief in his mouth, and dragged him over to a broom closet and locked him in. Two-gun armed, I walked back to the door of 311 and rapped gently.

"Yes?"—a Jap voice—from the other side. I said, "It's me," deliberately muffled. Mutters, the door opening, a jumbo Buddhahead filling the doorway. I kicked him in the balls, caught his belt mid-jackknife, pulled forward and smashed his head into the doorjamb. He sunk down gonesville; I waved the automatic I'd taken off the white punk at the rest of the room.

What a room.

A dozen slants staring at me with tiny black eyes like Jap Zero insignias, Bob Murikami smack in the middle. Arkansas toad stabbers drawn and pointed square at my middle. A Mexican standoff or the sequel to Pearl Harbor. Kamikaze was the only way to play it.

I smiled, ejected the chambered round from my pilfered piece, popped the clip, and tossed both at the far wall. Jumbo was stirring at my feet; I helped him up, one hand on his carotid artery in case he got uppity. With my free hand, I broke the cylinder on *my* gun, showing him the one bullet left from my shoot-out with Walter Koenig's killers. Jumbo nodded his head, getting the picture; I spun the chamber, put the muzzle to his forehead, and addressed the assembled Axis powers. "This is about bankbooks, Maggie Cordova, Alien Squad grifts, and that big heist at the Japtown B of A. Bob Murikami's the only guy I want to talk to. Yes or no."

Nobody moved a muscle or said a word. I pulled the trigger, clicked an empty chamber, and watched Jumbo shake head to toe—bad heebie-jeebies. I said, "Sayonara, Shitbird," and pulled the trigger again; another hollow click, Jumbo twitching like a hophead going into cold turkey overdrive.

Five to one down to three to one; I could see Lorna, nude, waving bye-bye Hearns, heading toward Stormin' Norman Killebrew, jazz trombone, rumored to have close to a hard half yard and the only man Lorna implied gave it to her better than me. I pulled the trigger twice—twin empties—shit stink taking over the room as Jumbo evacuated his bowels.

One to one, seven come eleven, the Japs looking uncharacteristically piqued. Now I saw my own funeral cortege, "Prison of Love" blasting as they lowered me into the grave.

"No! I'll talk!"

I had the trigger at half pull when Bob Murikami's voice registered. I let go of Jumbo and drew a bead on Bad Bob; he walked over and bowed, supplicant samurai style, at my gun muzzle. Jumbo collapsed; I waved the rest of the group into a tight little circle and said, "Kick the clip and the roscoe over."

A weasel-faced guy complied; I popped one into the chamber and tucked my Russki roulette piece in my belt. Murikami pointed to a side door; I followed him over, a straight-arm bead on the others.

The door opened into a small bedroom lined with cots—the Underground Railway, 1942 version. I sat down on the cleanest one available and pointed Murikami to a cot a few yards over, well within splatter range. I said, "Spill. Put it together, slow and from the beginning, and don't leave anything out."

Bad Bob Murikami was silent, like he was mustering his thoughts and wondering how much horseshit he could feed me. His face was hard set; he looked tough beyond his years. I smelled musk in the room—a rare combo of blood and Lorna's "Cougar Woman" perfume. "You can't lie, Bob. And I won't hand you up to the Alien Squad."

Murikami snickered. "You won't?"

I snickered back. "You people mow a mean lawn and trim a mean shrub. When my ship comes in, I'll be needing a good gardener."

Murikami double-snickered—and a smile started to catch at the corners of his mouth. "What's your name?"

"Spade Hearns."

"What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a private investigator."

"I thought private eyes were sensitive guys with a code of honor."

"Only in the pulps."

"That's rich. If you don't have a code of honor, how do I know you won't cross me?"

"I'm in too deep now, Tojo. Crossing you's against my own best interest."

"Why?"

I pulled out a handful of bankbooks; Murikami's slant eyes bugged out until he almost looked like a fright-wig nigger. "I killed Walt Koenig for these, and you need a white man to tap the cash. I don't like witnesses and there's too many of you guys to kill, even though I'm hopped up on blood bad. Spiel me, papa-san. Make it an epic."

—

Murikami spieled for a straight hour. His story was the night train to Far Gonesville.

It started when three Japs, bank building maintenance workers pissed over their imminent internment, cooked up a plot with rogue cop Walt Koenig and a cop buddy of his—Murikami didn't know the guy's name. The plot was a straight bank robbery with a no-violence proviso—Koenig and pal taking down the B of A based on inside info, the Japs getting a percentage cut of the getaway loot for the young firebrands stupid enough to think they could hot-foot it to Mexico and stay free, plus Koenig's safeguarding of confiscated Jap property until the internment ended. But the caper went blood simple: guards snuffed, stray bullets flying. Mrs. Lena Sakimoto, the old dame shot on the street the next day, was the finger woman—she was in the bank pretending to be waiting in line, but her real errand was to pass the word to Koenig and buddy—the split second the vault cash was distributed to the tellers. *She* was rubbed out because the heisters figured her for a potential snitch.

Double-cross.

Bad Bob and *his* pals had been given the bank money to hold. Enraged over the deaths, they shoved it into Jap bank accounts, figured the two whiteys couldn't glom it, that the swag would accumulate interest until the internment was adios. Bob stashed the bankbooks at his crib and was soon to send the white boy fronting the getaway pad over to get them—but he got word a friend of his got greedy.

The friend's name was George Hayakawa, a vice-warlord in the Rising Sons. He went to Walt Koenig with a deal: He'd get the cash for a fifty-fifty cut. Koenig said no dealsky, tortured the location of the bankbooks and the address of the hideout out of Hayakawa, snuffed him, chopped off his dick, and sent it over in a pizza delivery box. A warning—don't fuck with the White Peril.

I pressed Murikami on Maggie Cordova—how did she fit in? The epic took on perv-o overtones.

Maggie was Bad Bob's sister's squeeze—the femme half of a dyke duo. She was the co-finger woman inside the bank; when Mrs. Lena Sakimoto got shot to sukiyaki, Maggie fled to Tijuana, fearing similar reprisals. Bob didn't know exactly where she was. I pressed, threatened, and damn near shot Murikami to get the answer I wanted most: where Maggie Cordova got "Prison of Love."

Bad Bob didn't know; I *had* to know. I made him a deal I knew I'd double-cross the second Lorna slinked into view. You come with me, we'll withdraw all the gelt, you take me to T.J. to find Maggie and the money's all yours. Murikami agreed; we sealed the bargain by toking a big bottle of laudanum laced with sake. I passed out on my cot with my gun in my hand and segued straight into the arms of Lorna.

—

It was a great hop dream.

Lorna was performing nude at the Hollywood Palladium, backed by an all-jigaboo orchestra—gigantic darkies in rhinestone-braided Uncle Sam outfits. She humped the air; she sprayed sweat; she sucked the microphone head. Roosevelt, Hitler, Stalin, and Hirohito were carried in on litters; they swooned at her feet as Lor belted "Someone to Watch Over Me." A war broke out on the bandstand: crazed jigs beating each other with trombone slides and clarinet shafts. It was obviously a diversion—Hitler jumped on stage and tried to carry Lorna over to a Nazi U-boat parked in the first row. I foiled Der Führer, picking him up by the mustache and hurling him out to Sunset Boulevard. Lorna was swooning into my arms when I felt a tugging and opened my eyes to see Bob Murikami standing over me, saying, "Rise and shine, shamus. We got banking to do."

We carried it out straight-faced, with appropriate props—handcuffs on Bad Bob, phony paperwork, a cereal box badge pinned to my lapel. Murikami impersonated over a dozen fellow Japs; we liquidated fourteen bank accounts to the tune of $81,000. I explained that I was Alien Squad brass, overseeing the confiscation of treasonous lucre; patriotic bank managers bought the story whole. At four we were heading south to T.J. and what might be my long-overdue reunion with the woman who'd scorched my soul long, long ago. Murikami and I talked easily, a temporary accord in Japanese-American relations—thanks to a healthy injection of long green.

"Why are you so interested in Maggie, Hearns?"

I took my eyes off the road—high cliffs dropping down to snow-white beaches packed with sunbathers on my right, tourist courts and greasy spoons on the left. Baby Tojo was smiling. I hoped I didn't have to kill him. "She's a conduit, kid. A pipeline to *the* woman."

"*The* woman?"

"Right. The one I wasn't ready for a while back. The one I would have flushed it all down the toilet for."

"You think it will be different now?"

Eighty-one grand seed money; a wiser, more contemplative Hearns. Maybe I'd even dye a little gray in my hair. "Right. Once I clear up a little legal trouble I'm in, I'm going to suggest a long vacation in Acapulco, maybe a trip to Rio. She'll see the difference in me. She'll know."

I looked back at the highway, downshifted for a turn, and felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned to face Bad Bob and caught a big right hand studded with signet rings square in the face.

Blood blinded me; my foot hit the brake; the car jerked into a hillside and stalled out. I swung a haphazard left; another sucker shot caught me; through a sheet of crimson I saw Murikami grab the money and hotfoot it.

I wiped red out of my eyes and pursued. Murikami was heading for the bluffs and a path down to the beach; a car swerved in front of me and a large man jumped out, aimed, and fired at the running figure—once, twice, three times. A fourth shot sent Bob Murikami spiraling over the cliff, the money bag sailing, spilling greenbacks. I pulled my roscoe, shot the shooter in the back, and watched him go down in a clump of crabgrass.

Gun first, I walked over; I gave the shooter two good measure shots, point blank to the back of the head. I kicked him over to his front side and from what little remained of his face identified him. Sergeant Jenks, Bill Malloy's buddy on the Alien Squad.

Deep shit without a depth gauge.

I hauled Jenks to his Plymouth, stuffed him in the front seat, stood back and shot the gas tank. The car exploded; the ex-cop sizzled like french-fried guacamole. I walked over the cliff and looked down. Bob Murikami was spread-eagled on the rocks and shitloads of sunbathers were scooping up cash, fighting each other for it, dancing jigs of greed and howling like hyenas.

—

I tailspinned down to Tijuana, found a flop and a bottle of drugstore hop, and went prowling for Maggie Cordova. A fat white lezbo songbird would stick out, even in a pus pocket like T.J.—and I knew the heart of T.J. lowlife was the place to start.

The hop edged down my nerves and gave me a *savoir faire* my three-day beard and raggedy-assed state needed. I hit the mule act strip and asked questions; I hit the whorehouse strip and the strip that featured live fuck shows twenty-four hours a day. Child beggars swarmed me; my feet got sore from kicking them away. I asked, asked, asked about Maggie Cordova, passing out bribe pesos up the wazoo. Then—right on the street—there she was, turning up a set of stairs adjoining a bottle liquor joint.

I watched her go up, a sudden jolt of nerves obliterating my dope edge. I watched a light go on above the bottle shop—and Lorna Kafesjian doing “Goody, Goody” wafted down at me.

Pursuing the dream, I walked up the stairs and knocked on the door.

Footsteps tapped toward me—and suddenly I felt naked, like a litany of everything I didn’t have was underlining the sound of heels over wood.

No eighty-one-grand reunion stash.

No Sy Devore suits to make a suitably grand Hollywood entrance.

No curfew papers for late-night Hollywood spins.

No EL buzzer for *the* dramatic image of the twentieth century.

No world-weary, tough-on-the-outside, tender-on-the-inside sensitive code of honor shtick to score backup pussy with in case Lorna shot me down.

The door opened; fat Maggie Cordova was standing there. She said, “Spade Hearns. Right?”

I stood there—dumbstruck beyond dumbstruck. “How did you know that?”

Maggie sighed—like I was old news barely warmed over. “Years ago I bought some tunes from Lorna Kafesjian. She needed a stake to buy her way out of a shack job with a corny guy who had a wicked bad case on her. She told me the guy was a sewer crawler, and since I was a sewer crawler performing her songs, I might run into him. Here’s your ray of hope, Hearns. Lorna said she always wanted to see you one more time. Lor and I have kept in touch, so I’ve got a line on her. She said I should make you pay for the info. You want it? Then *give*.”

Maggie ended her pitch by drawing a dollar sign in the air. I said, “You fingered the B of A heist. You're dead meat."

"Nix, gumshoe. You're all over the L.A. papers for the raps you brought down looking for me, and the Mexes won't extradite. *Givesky*."

I forked over all the cash in my wallet, holding back a five-spot for mad money. Maggie said, "Eight-eighty-one Calle Verdugo. Play it *pianissimo*, doll. Nice and slow."

—

I blew my last finnsky at a used clothing store, picking up a chalk-stripe suit like the one Bogart wore in *The Maltese Falcon*. The trousers were too short and the jacket was too tight, but overall the thing worked. I dry-shaved in a gas station men's room, spritzed some soap at my armpits, and robbed a kiddie flower vendor of the rest of his daffodils. Thus armed, I went to meet my lost love.

Knock, knock, knock on the door of a tidy little adobe hut; boom, boom, boom, as my overwrought heart drummed a big band beat. The door opened—and I almost screamed.

The four years since I'd seen Lorna had put forty thousand hard miles on her face. It was sun-soured—seams, pits, and scales; her laugh lines had changed to frown lines as deep as the San Andreas Fault. The body that was once voluptuous in white satin was now bloated in a Mex charwoman's serape. From the deep recesses of what we once had, I dredged a greeting.

"What's shakin', baby?"

Lorna smiled, exposing enough dental gold to front a revolution. "Aren't you going to ask me what happened, Spade?"

I stayed game. "What happened, baby?"

Lorna sighed. "Your interpretation first, Spade. I'm curious."

I smoothed my lapels. "You couldn't take a good thing. You couldn't take the dangerous life I led. You couldn't take the danger, romance, the heartache and vulnerability inherent in a mean-street-treading knight like me. Face it, baby: I was too much man for you."

Lorna smiled—more cracks appeared in the relief map of her face. She said, "Your theatrics exhausted me more than my own. I joined a Mexican nunnery, got a tan that went bad, started writing music again, and found myself a man of the earth—Pedro, my husband. I make tortillas, wash my clothes in a stream, and dry them on a rock. Sometimes, if Pedro and I need extra jack, I mix Margaritas and work the bar at the Blue Fox. It's a good, simple life."

I played my ace. "But maggie said you wanted to see me—'one more time,' like—"

"Yeah, like in the movies. Well, Hearns, it's like this. I sold 'Prison of

Love’ to about three dozen bistro belters who passed it off as their own. It’s ASCAP’d under at least thirty-five titles, and I’ve made a cool five grand on it. And, well, I wrote the song for you back in our salad days, and in the interest of what we had together for about two seconds, I’m offering you ten percent—you inspired the damn thing, after all.”

I slumped into the doorway—exhausted by four years of torching, three days of mayhem and killing. “Hit me, baby.”

Lorna walked to a cabinet and returned with a roll of Yankee greenbacks. I winked, pocketed the wad, and walked down the street to a cantina. The interior was dark and cool; Mex cuties danced nude on the bar top. I bought a bottle of tequila and slugged it straight, fed the jukebox nickels and pushed every button listing a female vocalist. When the booze kicked in and the music started, I sat down, watched the nudie gash gyrate, and tried to get obsessed.

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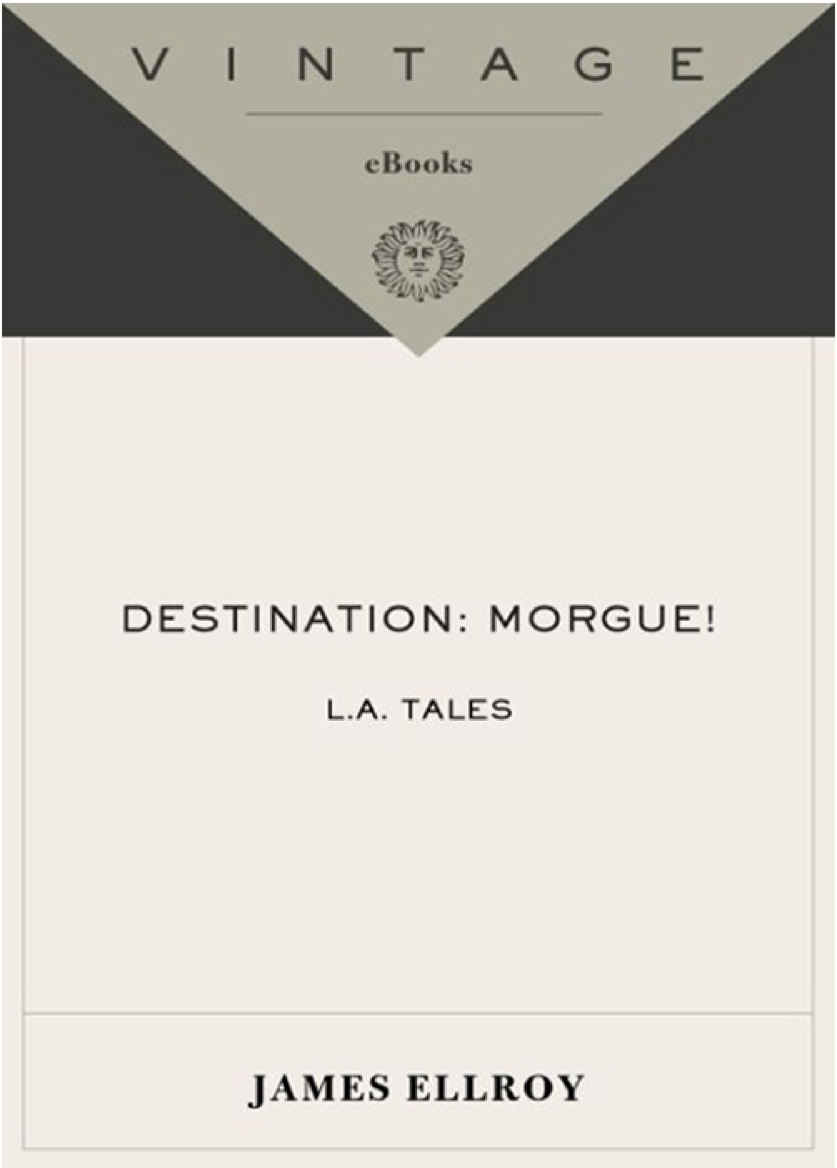

VINTAGE

eBooks

DESTINATION: MORGUE!

L.A. TALES

JAMES ELLROY

Destination:

MORGUE!

L.A. TALES

James Ellroy

Vintage Books
A Division of Random House, Inc.
New York

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To Oscar Reyes

Part I

CRIME CULTURE/ MEMOIR

Balls to the Wall

Boxing is:

Blood sport declawed and reregulated. Cockfights for aesthetes and wimps.

Boxing is microcosm. Boxing baits pundits. Boxing rips writers and rags them to riff.

Boxing taps testosterone. Boxing bangs to the balls. Boxing mauls and makes you mine meaning.

Mexican boxing is:

Boxing distilled. Boxing stoicized. Boxing hyperbolized.

Mexican boxing is machismo magnified. Mexican boxing is bristling bravado. Mexican boxing means you die for love and live to impress and subjugate your buddies.

Vegas boxing is:

Lowlife pomp. Westminster West. Best-of-weight class as best-of-breed.

Vegas boxing is Rome revived. Gladiators divert high rollers. Imperial goons exploit muscled maxi-men and mainline their money.

I got the word:

Erik Morales meets Marco Antonio Barrera.

Junior featherweights. Title tiff. Vegas.

I had to go.

■

I love boxing. We go back.

My folks divorced in ’55. My dad got me weekends. We holed up. We watched the fights.

We had a bubble-screen TV. We snarfed Cheez Whiz. My dad rooted on race and “heart.”

He liked white fighters best. He liked Mexicans next. He liked Negroes last.

Heart eclipsed race. Heart mitigated race. Heart gave Mexicans White Man status.

“Mexican” meant all Latins. Mexican meant some Italians. Mexican meant the Cuban Negro Kid Gavilan.

My dad fucked up race and geography. He was a Wasp. He hit L.A. and learned Spanish. He dug inclusiveness. He knew the White Man ruled. He knew the Brown Man craved in.

He wanted him in. *If* he kicked ass to his specifications.

Race. Heart. My early education.

I lived in L.A. I watched TV fights. I watched fights live.

The Olympic. The Hollywood Legion Stadium.

Smoke. Ceiling lights. Beer and crushed peanuts.

My dad took me. We sat with Mexicans. We watched Mexicans kick triracial ass.

My dad went chameleon. My dad gestured wild. My dad Mexicanized.

He talked to Mexican men. He slapped their backs. He translated for me.

Male-speak. My early education.

Headhunter. Go to the body. Cut off the ring.

Pendejo. Cojones. Maricon.

My dad divided Mexicans. Illegal immigrants were “wetbacks.”

Wetbacks had heart. They swam the Rio Grande. They sought *trabajo.*

They scuffled. They worked hard. They craved White Man status.

Hoodlums were *Pachucos*. *Pachucos* lacked heart.

They oiled their hair. They overbred. They packed switch-blades.

They shivved cops. They smoked mary jane. They disdained White Man status.

I met two Mexican kids. Reyes and Danny. They came from T.J.

They saw T.J. fights. They saw the mule show. They loved Art Aragon and Lauro Salas.

We smoked mary jane. I was ten years old.

I got dizzy. I punched the air like a *maricon.*

My mother died. I bunked full-time with my dad. We watched fights. We snarfed TV dinners.

12/5/58:

Welterweights. Title tiff. Don Jordan versus Virgil “Honey-bear” Akins.

Jordan wins. Jordan’s a Dominican *negrito.*

He’s mulatto. My dad digs him. My dad grants him Mexican status.

He's psycho. He was a child hit man. He killed men at age ten. He killed thirty men in a month.

Mexicans were killers. My dad said so. My dad spoke Spanish. My dad saw the mule show. My dad knew his shit.

12/10/58:

Light heavyweights. Title tiff. Archie Moore versus Yvon Durelle.

It's Armageddon. Moore wins. Moore's Negro. Durelle's Quebecois.

My dad upgrades Moore's racial status. Moore gets Mexicanized. My dad downgrades Durelle. Durelle gets Mexicanized.

Durelle "eats leather." Durelle "leads with his face."

5/27/60:

Welterweights. Title tiff. Jordan bows to Benny "Kid" Paret.

Paret's a Cuban Negro. My dad hates him. My dad gets his race right.

3/24/62:

Welterweights. Title tiff. Paret versus Emile Griffith.

Griffith's Negro. Griffith's island-bred. Griffith stomps Paret.

Paret dies.

Paret trash-talked Griffith. Paret called him queer.

Sex hate. Revenge. My early education.

I went to fights. I watched TV fights. I read fight magazines.

I still lived in L.A. I bopped around. I dug racial stratification.

Negroes lived south. Mexicans lived east. Whites lived everywhere.

Negroes craved civil rights. Mexicans craved conflict and personal honor.

Mexicans grew small. Mexicans moved swift. Mexicans ran stoic *and* expansive.

Mexicans coveted. Mexicans aspired. Mexicans knew the White Man was El Jefe.

Mexicans hobnobbed with whites. Common tastes united. Common language flowed.

Chili con carne. *Una cerveza, por favor.* Hook to the liver.

I Mexicanized. I Mexicanized with Wasp circumspection.

I wore Sir Guy shirts. I provoked fights with little kids. I notched mixed results.

I lacked power. I lacked skill. I lacked speed. I lacked heart.

It showed. My defeats were ignominious. My victories were pathetic.

Summer ’64:

I was sixteen. I stood 6′2″. I weighed 120. My dad said I ruled the Toilet-Paper-Weight Division.

I challenged my pal Kenny Rudd.

Six rounds. With gloves. Robert Burns Park.

Cornermen. Ref. Five-dollar purse.

I had height. I had reach. Rudd had heart. Rudd had speed and power.

Rudd kicked my ass. Rudd fought barechested. I wore a Sir Guy shirt.

My dad got sick. He went to the hospital. He bunked with a Mexican guy.

They talked fights. I brought them cheese enchiladas.

My dad died. The Mexican guy recovered.

I lived by myself. I watched TV fights. I hit the Olympic.

I saw Little Red Lopez. I saw Bobby Chacon. I saw six million guys named Sanchez and Martinez.

I sat ringside. They bled on me. I ate cut residue.

I sat top-tier. I shared piss cups with Joses and Humbertos. They protested bum verdicts. They tossed piss cups. They doused *puto* officials.

I pulled some dumb stunts. I got in trouble. I detoured and paid.

I did county jail time. I talked fights with wicked Juans and rowdy Ramons. I fought a Mexican drag queen named Peaches.

Peaches squeezed my knee. I popped him. I aped Benny “Kid” Paret. I called him a *maricon.*

Peaches kicked my ass. Guards pulled him off. Triracial inmates cackled.

I dissected my defeat. I put something together.

Mexican boxing explicates the mind-body split for white wimps worldwide.

MEXICAN BOXING IS WORKMANLIKE. Mexican boxing is inspired.

It’s savage emphasis. It’s basic boxing retuned to short range.

You move in. You stalk. You cut the ring off. You intimidate with forward momentum.

You crowd your man. You eat right-hand leads. You counter and left-hook to the body.

You instigate exchanges. You trade in close.

You take to give. You forfeit your odds for survival. You eat shots. You absorb pain. You absorb pain to exhaust your man and exploit his openings. You absorb pain to assert your bravado.

You clinch when desperate. You backpedal when stunned or insensate. You fight coy to avert the brink and buy moments.

The body shots sap wind. The momentum saps will. The absorbed pain saps brain cells. The absorbed pain builds character and fatuous ideals.

Mexican boxing is lore.

Mexican fighters chew steaks. They drink the blood and spit out the meat.

Mexican fighters slurp mescal. They gargle and swallow the worm.

Mexican fighters do roadwork at 10,000 feet. Mexican fighters train in bordellos.

Mexican boxing is memory.

Fights in bullrings. Fights at weigh-ins. Fights at victory balls.

Fights.

The Trifecta. ’70–’71. Ruben Olivares and Chucho Castillo.

The Inglewood Forum. Sellout crowds.

Rockabye Ruben rocks. Chucho presses and bleeds. Round 3—Ruben rests recumbent. Ruben rises and rallies *rapidamente.*

Ruben takes tiff one. Unanimous decision. The mayhem mandates tiff two.

Ruben rips. Chucho chops and chisels. Ruben launches left hooks. Chucho counters contrapuntal.

Ruben cuts. His left eye leaks at the lid. The cut calls it. It’s over. Chucho—TKO 14.

The rubber match rocks. It’s all pressure. Chucho drops Ruben. Ruben rises and rebounds.

Ruben roils. Ruben wracks the ribcage. Ruben rules the ring. Ruben reigns in the rubber.

4/23/77:

The Forum. Nontitle tiff. Carlos Zarate and Alfonso Zamora.

Seventy-two fights collective. Seventy-one KOs.

Round 1 goes slow. Zarate tests Zamora. Round 2 disrupts.

A geek jumps in the ring. Cops haul him out. Cops kick his ass.

Round 3. Zarate zips close. Zarate zaps Zamora.

One knockdown. Eight count at the bell.

Round 4. Zarate in close. Zamora's got zilch. Two-knockdown TKO.

It's over. It's not momentous. It's not competitive.

Zamora's dad's in the ring. Zarate's dad ditto. Zamora's dad zaps Zarate's dad.

It's instantaneous. It's Zarate–Zamora II.

Memory:

Zarate. Lupe Pintor. Rafael Herrera.

The great Salvador Sanchez. Julio Cesar Chavez—*el grande campeón*.

Mexicans. White Men all. Ask my dad.

Morales–Barrera vibed walk-through or war.

Morales was 35 and 0. He had the WBC belt.

He had youth. He had speed. He had a more diversified attack.

He had career momentum. He had an HBO contract. He had the Next Chavez prophecy.

Barrera was the last Next Chavez. He ate some right hands. He got de-prophesied.

He was 49 and 2. He had the WBO belt. Wags called it WBOgus.

Barrera *owned* the Mexican attack.

He closed in. He cut off. He left-hooked. He went downstairs.

He *had* career momentum. He *had* HBO ties. Junior Jones demomenticized him.

Right hands.

One KO loss. A rematch. One loss by decision.

Barrera learns defeat. Barrera fugues out. Barrera regroups.

Barrera's a Mexican. Barrera's a Catholic. Barrera digs redemption.

Barrera's a rich kid. He hails from Mexico City.

Boxing ends someday. He knows it. He's eyeing law school.

Morales was middle-class. He hailed from T.J. His dad was a fighter.

He's a soft touch. He donates Christmas dinners. He won his belt. He banked the check. He stocked T.J. schools with computers.

They were good kids. "Good kids" is fanspeak. Good kids are killers who limit their rage to the ring.

VEGAS WAS T.J. UNCHAINED.

I hit T.J. in ’66. I got a head job. I saw the mule show.

T.J. was scary.

I hit Vegas in 2000. Vegas was worse.

I stayed at the Bellagio. I heard it had “class.” I heard right and wrong.

It featured an art gallery. It featured silent slot machines. It featured stretch limos.

License plates: Cezanne/Matisse/Picasso.

My suite was big. My suite had a church directory. My suite had cable fuck films.

I settled in. I walked the Strip. I misjudged distances.

Hotel facades streeeetched.

Medieval moats. Paris skylines. Mock Manhattans.

Street traffic crawled. Foot traffic gawked.

Folks carried kiddies and cocktails. Folks carried slot-machine cups.

I grabbed a cab. The cabbie was psycho. The cabbie vibed Klan.

He picked his nose. He picked his teeth. He slurped beer in a McDonald’s cup.

He talked fights.

He liked Morales. Barrera was stale bread. J. C. Chavez was a punk. He lost to Frankie “the Surgeon” Randall. He trashed his suite at the MGM Grand.

He talked Mexican fights.

The cholos had heart. The cholos fought dirty. The cholos fucked goats.

He talked Vegas fights.

Morales–Barrera was small. Hipster stuff. Rap stars and movie shitbirds verboten.

Big fights rocked Vegas. Big fights flew on big money.

Site fees. Pay-per-view. Casino perks. High rollers lured in to lose.

Big fights drew big names. Ringside recognition.

Big fights meant heavyweights. Big fights meant Tyson and bad juju. Big fights meant Oscar de la Hoya.

Oscar was pretty. Oscar bruised pretty. Oscar magnetized chicks.

He ain’t a real Mexican. You can’t be real and come from L.A.

I FOUND a Mexican restaurant. It vibed L.A.

I ate a Mexican dinner. I schmoozed a Mexican waiter. He came from L.A.

We talked fights.

He liked Morales. Barrera was shot.

His wife liked Oscar. His daughter *loved* Oscar. He thought Oscar was queer.

I walked to the Bellagio. A waiter brought coffee up.

He was Mexican. He came from L.A.

We talked fights.

He liked Morales. Barrera was through.

His wife liked Oscar. He didn't get the allure.

The waiter split. I dug my view.

Ant swarms. Streeeetch facades. Seduction signs.

Caesars. The Mirage. Gay white tigers.

The swarms vibed migration. Peons with cups. Supplicants hot for cash and diversion.

I felt like El Jefe. Call me Batista. Call me Juan Perón.

I viewed my Third World. I dispensed benedictions. I scrutinized and exploited small men.

Sanctioning bodies ruled boxing. *Puto* patriarchs reigned.

The IBF got indicted. The WBC held in. A wag called it "World of Bandits and Charlatans."

The WBA. The IBA. The WBOgus.

The I's meant "International." The W's meant "World." It stressed dominion and shared thought.

Official judges judge fights. State commissions appoint them.

Sanctioning bodies court them. Sanctioning bodies corrupt them. Sanctioning bodies stress shared thought.

Fractured titles. Multi-championships. Two I's/three W's.

Titles mean money. Titles drive a fighter's momentum.

Judges judge off it. Judges vote what's perceived best for boxing. Judges know the formal rules. Judges know subtext. Judges enforce consensus thinking.

Not all judges. Not most judges. Some judges in key fights.

Bribery.

Implicit. Covert. Unindictable.

The migration continued. The light show blipped on.

I fucked with the TV. I hit HBO.

Wags called it Home Breast Office. I hit breasts and an end-title crawl. I hit a *Boxing After Dark* teaser.

Two days hence:

Morales–Barrera. *Sangre.* The Holy War.

BAD had it. *BAD should* have it. *BAD knew.*

BAD was the best boxing show in TV history. *BAD* broadcast great fights. *BAD* broadcast bravura.

Great blow-by-blow. Jim Lampley in tight. Pro scoop and malapropisms via Roy Jones and George Foreman. Larry Merchant on meaning.

Bad Boy Barrera top-lined *BAD* card #1. He KO'd Kennedy McKinney.

A fierce fight. A tuff tiff. A proud prophecy.

I went to bed. I slept late. A waiter brought coffee up.

He was Mexican. He came from Oregon.

We talked fights.

He liked Morales. Barrera was fucked.

■

The Mandalay Bay:

Slot-Machine Acres. Blackjack Estates. Keno Kountry forever.

I walked through it. I got lost. I gagged on smoke. I smelled spilled cocktails.

I rerouted. I trekked on.

Card-Table Terrace. Roulette Rendezvous. Blow-Your-Mortgage Mesa.

I hit a corridor. I saw directional balloons.

Tricolor. Mexican. Red, green, and white.

I followed them. I hit the press gig.

Dais. Lectern. Steam tables. Buffet in gear.

I mingled. I saw Wayne “Pocket Rocket” McCullough. Morales decisioned him. I saw Richie Sandoval. Gaby Canizales KO’d him.

He got hurt. He quit boxing. He went into boxing PR.

I saw Latin reporters. I saw Latin cornermen. I saw some Anglo press.

The room chowed down. The food was bad. All starch and grease.

I sipped coffee. I listened. I bootjacked conversations.

Male experts dueled. Male experts interrupted. Male experts riffed lore.

I was there. *I* saw it. Dig *my* perception.

The honchos hit the dais.

Lou Di Bella. Mr. HBO. State commissioners.

Morales. Barrera. Promoter Bob Arum.

Morales looked calm. Barrera looked drained.

Weight.

Stabilize. Walk at 135. Make 122 by tomorrow.

Weight.

Eating disorders. Boxing’s dirty secret. *Cosmo*—take note.

Intros went around. Honchos sanctified. Arum worked the mike.

His cheeks glowed. Perfect circles. He Mexicanized.

His kids spoke Spanish. We all should.

Mexicans were great fighters. Mexicans were great people. Mexicans were great fans.

He cited Mexican battles. He overpronounced names.

He coaxed his boys. Speak English, *por favor.*

Morales spoke. Barrera spoke. They spoke haltingly.

They pledged results. They showed their youth. They oozed dignity.

The gig broke up. Morales and Barrera mingled.

Reporters closed in. Interpreters assisted.

Standard stuff.

Nobody said, “You get my rocks off.”

Nobody said, “You make me feel alive.”

Nobody said, “Nationalism is all shuck-and-jive.”

I thought about youth. I thought about glory. I wondered how brain cells dispersed.

I thought about middle age. I grooved on self-preserving circumspection.

Morales brought some guys. They vibed buddies. Barrera brought some guys. They vibed entourage.

They wore reflecting sweat suits. They waxed sullen. They looked like the Tonton Macoute.

They brought some girls. The girls brought babies.

One baby cried. Mom fed him Pepsi. Mom shut him up.

Bob Arum mingled.

He glowed. His cheeks glowed. His cheeks looked rouged and augmented.

TICKETSSOLD. Mexicans bought them.

They eschewed “Latino.” They eschewed “Chicano.” They were born here. They were born there. They were “Mexican.”

Tickets sold fast. Tickets sold out.

I schmoozed PR flacks. They extolled the demographic.

Working folks. Mexicans. Cognoscenti.

I prowled the Mandalay Bay. I caught the weigh-in.

Barrera looked drained. Barrera looked scared. The Tonton looked apprehensive.

I prowled the casino. I surveilled the ticket booths. I cataloged rumors.

Morales hates Barrera. Barrera hates Morales.

Turf tiff. T.J. versus Mexico City. Class clash. Middle meets moneyed.

They had soccer teams. The Morales Marauders. The Barrera Banditos.

They played. They clashed. The hell-bent jefes almost hurled heat.

My wife flew in. Some friends drove up from L.A.

We viewed a friend’s wedding. We ate in mock cantinas. We strolled mock-Mexican streets.

We polled personnel.

The cognoscenti said walk-through. The starstruck said war.

◆

The fans arrived. Mariachis piped them in.

It got loud.

The walls boomed. The walls trapped noise. The walls echochambered.

The fans lugged posters.

Morales. Barrera. Exhortings *en español.*

Balloons tapped the ceiling. Tricolored all.

A sound system cranked. Mariachi shit exclusive.

The room filled. The room roared. The room vibed bullring.

Fans positioned. Fans waved signs. Fans slugged cerveza.

Factions mingled. Factions placed bets. Total strangers held money.

I sat with the press. I watched the prelims.

They went fast. They went loud. The Mexicans drew cheers. The non-Mexicans drew silence.

TKOs. One decision. One woman's fight.

I hit the john. I crashed a rehearsal.

A baritone. A prime gig. The Mexican anthem.

We talked fights.

He liked Morales. Barrera was shot.

I bopped back. The noise reignited. I sat with my wife and friends.

A Morales guy flanked me. He was expansive. He was loud.

He waved a roll. He peeled C-notes. He placed bets.

Barrera guys bet him. A neutral popped up. He held the *dinero.*

A band filed in. Thirteen musicians.

Sombreros. Embroidered threads.

They entered the ring. They played loud. HBO cameras turned.

Fans held signs up. Cameras panned. Signs eclipsed views.

The noise built.

The fighters filed in.

The noise built.

The ring announcer spieled.

He spieled bilingual. He rolled his *r*'s. He rolled rich and rapt.

The noise built.

That cat sang the Mexican anthem.

The noise built.

The announcer introed the officials. The announcer introed the men.

He ratched his *r*'s. MoRales extended. BaRReRa rolled long.

The noise built.

The men derobed. They'd added weight. They'd sapped and replenished.

The ref gave instructions. The men touched gloves.

The noise built.

They went to their corners. They knelt. They crossed themselves.

The noise built.

The bell rang.

The noise stratosphered.

They moved. They squared off. They hit center ring.

Morales pops a jab. Barrera hooks to the body. Morales moves back.

Barrera. Fast hands. A shock.

Barrera moves in. He lands a right. He left-hooks downstairs.

Morales moves back. Let's bait and counter.

Barrera moves in. Barrera cuts off. Barrera double-hooks low.

Fast hands. Shocker. "Shot"—bullshit.

Morales backs up. Morales moves in. They trade right hands.

Morales backs up Barrera. His rights sting.

They square off. They trade. Morales backs up Barrera.

They circle. They pause.

Morales backs up. Let's bait and counter.

He taps the ropes. Barrera's on him. They trade hooks at the bell.

The 122-pound showdown between Erik Morales and Marco Antonio Barrera for the junior featherweight title would become the fight of the year. *(Photo by Ben Watts)*

The noise built. The noise leveled. The noise leveled loud.

Round 2:

Barrera stalks. Morales jabs.

It's a range finder. It's a sizer-up. It's a reach enhancer.

He's dancing. He's on his toes. Barrera closes in.

He lands a left hook. He lands a left/right.

Morales stands firm. Morales steps inside. Morales lands an uppercut. Morales rocks Barrera.

They stand. They trade. They deliver.

Morales has right hands. Morales has uppercuts. Barrera has killer hooks.

They disengage. Barrera moves in. Barrera hooks low.

Morales jabs. Morales moves in. Morales lands lefts and rights. Morales eats hooks.

He's fighting Barrera's fight. He's standing in. He's taking to give.

He’s fighting close range. He wants to. His work vibes abandon.

He’s pausing. Barrera’s on him. He’s launching hooks.

The bell. Hard to hear. One mini-gong.

The noise built. The noise releveled. The noise releveled loud.

Round 3:

Morales circles. Morales jabs. Barrera lunges. Barrera hits his knees.

He gets up. The ref wipes his gloves. Morales comes on.

Morales jabs. Morales leaves a jab out. Barrera hooks low.

Morales moves back. Barrera stalks. Barrera lands hooks.

Morales moves in. He lands two-handed. He moves back.

Barrera presses.

He misses hooks. He lands hooks.

Morales leans on the ropes. Morales blocks hooks. Morales eats hooks.

Morales spins off. Morales lands two-handed. Barrera spins off. Barrera moves in. Barrera repins Morales.

He lands. He misses.

Morales launches. Barrera launches. They trade fucking wild.

The bell. A beep in a cacophony.

The noise cranked. The noise releveled.

I yelled. My wife yelled. Words went undiscerned.

A sign bopped me. A guy apologized. The Morales fan yelled. I read his lips. He said, “Barrera!”

Round 4:

Barrera stalks. Morales jabs. Morales spins and falls.

He gets up. The ref wipes his gloves.

Breather.

In round 4, Barrera focused almost exclusively on Morales's thin frame, investing in punches to the ribs that would weaken him later in the fight. *(Photo by Ben Watts)*

Barrera circles. Morales circles. They're rubber-band-tight.

Barrera works the body. Morales moves back.

He flurries. He moves. He flurries. His work rate's up.

They regroup. They're in sync. They're synced to stand and deliver.

War. Collaborative. Mexican.

They fight off the ropes. They spin loose. They reverse positions.

It's wild.

It's war in sync.

Barrera flurries. Barrera rings the bell.

The crowd stood. The nose releveled. I got the gestalt.

Bipartisanship. National pride. Love inclusive.

It had it even. Morales: punch stats. Barrera: aggression.

I held a piss. My heart fluttered. The noise hurt my head.

Round 5:

They move. They meet. They trade jabs.

Barrera hooks to the body. Barrera plows Morales. Morales hits the ropes.

Morales flurries off. Morales pops Barrera. Morales dominates.

Morales lands rights. Morales staggers Barrera. Morales lands uppercuts.

Barrera wobbles.

I vibe turning point. I vibe wrong.

Morales fades. Morales wings arm shots.

They both weave. They both wing. They both miss.

Barrera comes on. Barrera backs up Morales. Morales taps the ropes.

Barrera fades. Morales wings arm shots. Morales extricates.

They square off. They weave. They circle and stalk.

Sync. Pre-attack mode.

Barrera sucks it up. Barrera pounds Morales. Morales taps the ropes.

Barrera flurries. He's got juice. Morales fires weak.

The bell. A peep. One heartbeat heard.

I watched the prompters. I got close-ups.

I saw welts. I saw bruises. I saw deadpan will.

Round 6:

Slow-mo now. Save it. Sync the breather.

Jabs. Center ring. Barrera's lead right.

It's weak. Morales taps the ropes. He's weak. He pushes off.

He jabs. He lands. His jab looks weak. His arms look heavy.

Barrera hooks to the body. Barrera hooks twice.

Morales hooks to the body. Morales hooks twice.

They separate. They pause. They *breathe.*

Barrera lands. A right. A left. Body rockets.

Morales measures. Morales jabs. Morales uppercuts.

Morales stuns Barrera. Morales pushes him back.

The bell. Loud now. Loud against held breath.

Six down. Six to go. My card: three rounds each.

The noise notched down. The noise went hoarse. The noise deleveled.

Round 7:

They meet. They square up tight.

They brush heads. They trade body shots.

They work. They rest. They breathe. They claw at momentum.

Barrera's stronger. Barrera lands a right.

Morales jerks back. Morales moves back. Morales hits the ropes.

Barrera's on him. His head's down. He's landing combinations.

Morales rests. Morales reaches. Morales rallies back.

He comes off the ropes. He lands a right. He rocks Barrera.

Barrera takes it.

Barrera reaches.

Barrera rallies back.

Barrera rocks Morales.

The crowd yells. The crowd stomps. The crowd outrings the bell.

It was Barrera's fight. Barrera made Morales fight it. Morales wanted to fight it. Barrera made him. Barrera stamped the ticket. Barrera defined their mutual will.

Round 8:

Barrera moves in. Morales moves back.

They jab. They exchange. Barrera lands a one/two. Barrera rocks Morales.

Morales moves back. Morales hits the ropes. Barrera works the body.

Four shots. Evil. Evil shots back.

Morales shoves off. Morales lands lead rights. Morales lands uppercuts.

Barrera eats shots. Barrera goes low. Barrera lands to the liver.

They stand.

They deliver.

They launch arm shots.

They land and miss.

The noise schizzed on me. The roar went normal. Time schizzed. Three-minute rounds took six seconds.

I checked the prompter. I caught the damage.

Barrera bruised light. Morales bruised dark.

Dark rings. Sharp cheekbones. A ghost effect.

Dark eyes. Both men. Will smashed insensate.

Round 9:

Center ring. Exchanges. Barrera's advantage.

Morales hits the ropes. Morales flurries. Morales rallies back.

Barrera rallies back. Morales hits the ropes. Morales rallies back.

He finds some snap. He dredged it. Barrera takes it.

Sync:

They're both fried. They circle. They buy some breath.

Barrera charges. Barrera knocks Morales back.

They both flurry. They both miss. They both land.

They rest. They regroup. They earn breath.

They're slack. They're arm-shot. They're on deficit.

Barrera comes back. Barrera lands. Barrera hurts Morales. Barrera pounds him to the ropes.

The bell rang.

Fans screamed.

Fans screamed "Morales!" Fans screamed "Barrera!"

The syllables blended. The names clashed. The names unified.

Round 10:

Center ring. Wide punches. Misses.

Exhaustion. Bilateral. Cumulative.

They come close. They lean close. They brush heads. They punch way wide.

They breathe. They dredge.

Morales gets air. Morales lands three rights. Morales hurts Barrera.

Barrera sways. Barrera wobbles. Morales loads up.

He's fried. His tank's dry. He stands still. He moves back.

They rest. They breathe. They dredge.

Barrera gets air. Barrera gets legs. Barrera drives Morales back.

Morales stands. Morales swings. Barrera swings back.

They're insensate. They're on Queer Street. They're the standing dead.

The bell. A peep in screams.

I checked the prompter. I caught close-ups.

Barrera bled. One sliced bruise. Morales wore black hollows.

Round 11:

They trade jabs. They trade rights. They plant and hold.

Barrera lands body shots. He's got more pop. Morales lands arm punches.

They lack pop. They hurt anyway. They push back Barrera.

He backpedals. He takes more. He sucks it up.

He shoves Morales. Morales lays back. Morales finds the ropes.

Barrera plows in. They tangle. The ref extricates.

Barrera lands a right. Barrera lands body shots. Morales slides left. Barrera shoves him back. Barrera taps the body.

The bell. Loud again. 360 sound.

I checked my card.

Even at 6. Barrera takes 7 to 9. Morales takes 10. Barrera takes 11.

Barrera—4 points up.

A sign sailed. I saw Morales upside down.

Round 12:

They touch gloves. The crowd stands. It's respect.

They swarm. They flurry. They catch big breaths.

Morales bounces. Morales moves in. Morales hooks downstairs. Morales backs up Barrera.

Barrera plants and stands. Barrera backs up Morales. Barrera backs him into the ropes.

BARR
ONTERA
TERRIBLE

Barrera's fists left Morales's face bruised, but he ended the bout with a large wound under his own left eye. *(Photo by Ben Watts)*

Morales flurries off. Morales moves back. Morales looks shaky.

Barrera jumps. Barrera lands hooks. They're close. They tangle. Morales goes down.

It's a slip. It's not a knockdown.

Morales took no punch. Morales slid and fell.

The ref rules a knockdown. The round goes 10–8. Miscue and break to Barrera.

Morales gets up. Barrera goes in. Wild punches arc to the bell.

It's over.

I sat down. My legs caved. My bladder said, "Run."

The Morales fan slapped my back. I dredged some high-school Spanish. Barrera's fight. 10–8 to clinch. Insurance past a 10–9.

The Morales fan smiled. Fuck it. Coin comes and goes.

The crowd breathed in. The crowd breathed out. The crowd stood still.

The bell rang. The announcer coaxed applause. The crowd delivered.

The announcer scanned his cards. The announcer delivered.

Judge Duane Ford: 114–113—Barrera.

Judge Carol Castellano: 114–113—Morales.

Judge Dalby Shirley: 115–112—Morales.

The crowd booed. Signs sailed. I saw "Barrera" upside down.

The Morales fan shrugged. The neutral tried to pay him. The Morales fan blew off the money.

Heist.

Dry hump.

Fucking.

Misappropriation.

Consensus thinking.

The WBC.

"World of Bandits and Charlatans."

The fans reviled the verdict. The fans glowed through it. The fans yelled, "Barrera!"

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The crowd walked out. I joined my friends. A chant built. The one word: "Barrera!"

I felt punch-drunk. I felt de-Protestantized.

My dad should have seen it. My dad had perspective. My dad had race and geography.

We walked out. We hit the HBO party. We ate some Mexican food.

The walls leaked sound. Chants crashed the party. The one word: "Barrera!"

We all felt punch-drunk. We ate and split. We roamed the casino.

Jackpot gongs went off. Whoops and red lights.

I peeled my ears. I heard echoes.

"Barrera!"

I saw the Tonton Macoute. They held coin cups. They wore reflecting sweat suits.

They brought their girls. Their girls brought babies.

A baby cried. A girl fed him Coca-Cola.

Where I Get My Weird Shit

It's a puzzle cube. Memories and conceits snap off inner gears. Images replace colored blocks and click to cohesion. Bar rows connect. Plumb lines appear. You take what you need and what you were and sift it through what you've become. You impose order. You lay on some moonshine. If you're skillful and honest and pure, it all works.

I'm from L.A. My folks hatched me in a cool locale. I checked in at the hospital Bobby Kennedy checked out of. My mother hated Catholics and dug ruthless men. Bobby K. would have rocked her *ambivalente.*

My birthright mandates a disclaimer:

I viewed L.A. as a native. I never saw it as a strange land chronicled by outside writers. I grew up there. I sifted data and transfigured it kid-style. It was diverse shit. The connecting threads were corruption and obsession. Kiddie noir was my metier. I lived in the film noir epicenter during the film noir era. I developed my own strain of weird shit. It was pure L.A. It was bravura L.A. for one reason: I denied the existence of non-L.A. shit.

Because I'm from there. Because I thought L.A. was everywhere. Because I was that xenophobic and self-absorbed. Because I *knew* my weird shit was the best weird shit alive. Because you don't smear your hometown with outside writers' perceptions. Because L.A.'s weird shit *is* the best weird shit on earth and I grew up where it flourished prosaic.

My dad worked for Rita Hayworth circa 1950. He told me he poured her the pork. My mom wet-nursed juicehead film stars. My dad was lazy. My mom was workaholic. My dad taught me to read at age four.

I gained access to scandal rags and the Bible. Profligacy and the stern rule of God hound me still. I got man's schizoid nature young. We lived in West Hollywood. My dad called it the "Swish Alps." We lived beside a Lutheran church. Proximity made me a Lutheran. Martin Luther torched the world in 1530. Martin Luther reviled the Catholic Church. He blasted its corruption. He disdained its celibate laws. He was horny and craved some fine trim.

Papists took their orders from Rome. My mom said so. I puzzled the logistics. I developed a theory: The Pope spoke through their TV sets.

The Bible featured sex and wall-to-wall carnage. Ditto the scandal rags. Martyrdom and trysts with Rubi Rubirosa. Sex and published smears. My narrative gift incubated. My imagination afire.

My folks split the sheets in '55. My mom got main custody. I shuttled between them. I studied their separate lives. I logged their separate cultural donations.

My mom drank bourbon highballs. I watched her shape-shift behind booze. She dated men who vibed the film noir psychopath. I caught her in flagrante twice. My dad lurked near the pad and spied on his ex. My mom fed me healthy meals and epic novels. My dad fed me Cheez Whiz and the fights. He taught me to root. I rooted for

Mexican fighters over Negroes. I rooted for white fighters first and last.

Race: A ’50s primer. Sex: the big deal above all. The ’50s joke ne plus ultra: I want to find the guy who invented sex and ask him what he’s working on now.

Both parents made me read. Both parents hauled me to flicks. My dad riffed on nympho movie stars. My mom spieled on actors she nursed. She took me to a Martin and Lewis show. A scene portrayed a dog driving a car. It cracked me up for days running. My mom found the reaction extreme. She was enlightened. She took me to a kid shrink.

The shrink was female. She gave me play blocks and probed my eight-year-old mind. She quizzed me per dogs and divorce. I said I liked to read. I said I liked the fights. I said I *loooooved* to tell myself stories and think.

My therapy lasted three sessions. I caught my mom hobnobbed with the shrink. The gist: I was imaginative and fucked up.

The two-parent shuttle continued. I bopped back and forth and picked up dirt. Rita Hayworth—nympho. Rock Hudson— fruit. Floyd Patterson—cheese champ. Mickey Rooney—satyr. ZaSu Pitts—a sweetheart and a pleasure to nurse.

June ’58 hits the calendar. My Walpurgisnacht goes down. My mother is murdered. The scenario is SEX. The crime goes unsolved.

I went with my dad full-time. He exulted in my mother’s death and tried not to gloat in my presence. My bereavement was complex. I hated and lusted for my mother. Bam—she’s dead. Bam— my imagination finds CRIME.

The fixation sidestepped my mother’s death and locked in on surrogate victims. The Black Dahlia became my murdered woman of choice. Her death-details were savage. They blitzed my mother’s death-details in malign imagery. The Dahlia was my mother rendered hyperbolic and distanced enough to be fantasy-savored. She was my invitation to mourn once-removed and my beckoning to all-time obsession.

I studied Dahlia news clips. I rode my bike to the Dahlia’s dump site. I brain-spun savior stories. I rescued the Dahlia as the killer’s blade arced.

James Ellroy in 1958 at age ten. Just after cops told him his mother was murdered, a newspaper photographer took this photo. *(Photo courtesy of James Ellroy)*

I never posed her story as a novel. I brain-spun the tales for kicks. I did not equate my mother with the Dahlia then. I did not know that her death betrothed me to crime.

I read kids' crime books. I jumped to Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer. The stories were vindictively anti-Commie. I dug Mike Hammer's fervor and rage. I was a childhood Red basher. I raged to punish some unseen other. I was stalking my mother's killer then. I didn't know it. I didn't know that I was dredging shit for my own future pages.

My dad let me read for thrills and ignore my homework. My dad let me hoard scandal rags and skin magazines. We watched crime TV shows. My dad knew a costar on *77 Sunset Strip*. He said the guy's wife "flashed her snatch" at him. My dad spoke in non sequiturs. He assumed my sex knowledge. He praised male homos. He said they expanded the pool of fuckable women. He saw groovy quail on the stroll. He always responded thus: "Somebody's screwing her, and it sure isn't us."

He let me learn life void of good-parent intrusion. I did poorly in school and educated myself. I read *From Here to Eternity* in 1960. Crime merged with social history. I gorged on a life-in-the-raw text. Institutional sadism/the adult laws of sex/young men reared as cannon fodder. Schofield Barracks/Hawaii/1941—a spritz on my All-L.A. World and the spark point of my grandiose kid ambition.

Dig it:

You can do this. *You* can write big stories. *You* can become a great writer.

Dig the subtext:

Fuck school. Fuck hard work. Fuck that bromide that you’re french-fried fucked without a high-school diploma. Read, watch crime flicks, bop around L.A. Fantasize and pick your nose and tell yourself stories.

Dig the subtext decoded:

Be lazy. Be slothful. Disdain adult wisdom. Be inflamed with your fatuous new self-knowledge.

My life skills were substandard then. They declined from ’60 on.

I lived to read and fantasize. I shoplifted books, food, and car models. I cruised L.A. on my tacoed-out bike. Dig the gooseneck handlebars and chrome fenders. Check the rhinestone-studded mud flaps. Orb the plastic saddlebags, *aaa-ooo-gah* horn, and toy tommy gun. Grok the speedometer—it tops out at 150 miles per hour.

I bike-stalked girls. I was a conspicuous stalker. I stalked rich Hancock Park girls and Jewish girls west in Kosher Kanyon. They spotted me by daylight. My taco wagon magnetized and drew yuks. I stalked better by nightfall. I parked and reconnoitered on foot. I peeked windows and glimpsed undies and skin.

I stalked through summer ’61. I detoured to protest gigs and chucked eggs at ban-the-bomb fools. The Berlin Wall ascended. Uncle Sam and the Commos played chicken. A newsman ran a nightly warometer graph. The odds on nuke war soared to 90%. I knew it was curtains. America was fucked. Mike Hammer couldn’t save us from this one. The crisis filled me with nihilistic glee. *I* was fucked. I would never become a great writer. I *could* brave fallout and steal books with impunity.

The crisis tapped out. The warometer lied. I grooved a theme—small lives set against big events. Summer ’61 snapshots bipped off a screen in my head.

Bomb-shelter kits on sale in a Christmas-tree lot. The Larchmont Safeway picked clean. Our dipso neighbor stocking up on scotch and cigarettes. Those ban-the-bomb pinkos egged up.

It was history. It was dramatic infrastructure. Memory and conceits connected. I was seeing things. I was sensing things. I was living free and dreaming big. I was indexing big future pages.

Nobody called me bright. Nobody tagged me with bipolar disorder. I was a charmless mini-misanthrope with poor hygiene. I was an egomaniac with cystic acne. I was an acquired taste that no one ever acquired.

I squeaked through junior high and hit high school. Adult life loomed wicked large. Fairfax HS was almost all Jewish. I stood out only as a gentile and bad-skin exemplar. I craved attention. I lacked attention-getting skills. I was a poor student, worse athlete, worse social mover still. Stock losers and teenage lepers shunned me. My loserdom did not conform to adolescent rebellion laws. Stock martyrdom bored me. I disdained the canonized alienation of disaffected kids worldwide. I wanted to promote myself as strictly unique and attract commensurate notice. I was a rebel with self-aggrandizement as cause.

I pondered the dilemma. I hit on a solution. I joined the American Nazi Party. I debuted my führer act in the West L.A. shtetl.

It backfired—and worked.

It got me *some* attention. It got me recognized as a buffoon. I did not subvert the status quo at Fairfax High School. I did not derail the Jewish hegemony. I passed out hate tracts and "Boat Tickets to Africa." I anointed myself as the seed bearer of a new master race. I announced my intent to establish a Fourth Reich in Kosher Kanyon. I defamed jigaboos and dug the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion. I ragged Martin Luther Coon and hawked copies of "The Nigger's 23rd Psalm." I got sneered at, I got laughed at, I got pushed, I got shoved. I developed a sense of politics as vaudeville and got my ass kicked a few times. I learned how to spin narrative and elicit response. I knew that I didn't hate Negroes or Jews—as long as they comprised a rapt audience. I harbored a warped sense of the early-mid '60s. I nursed a writer's feel for timing. I honed my ability to stand tall and eat punches. I learned to front my crazy shit and revel in it as unique.

My Nazi act succeeded and tanked. It moved me, bored me, and vexed me in sync with my audience response. I lived to fantasize and assimilate storylines. Good books and TV fare subsumed my performance art. I flew with shit that clicked real in my gourd.

It's fall '63. My dad's health is fading. Poor nutrition and Lucky Strikes are playing catch-up. Bam—*The Fugitive* debuts on TV.

It's pure concept. There's a small-town doctor. His marriage is fucked up. His wife's an alcoholic shrew. A one-armed bum B&Es the doc's pad and snuffs her. The doc gets tagged with the snuff.

He's tried, convicted, and sentenced to fry. Prissy Lieutenant Gerard takes him to death row. Bam—the train derails. Bam— he's on the run forever. He's chasing the one-armed bum. The cop's chasing him.

The show grabbed me. The show obsessed me. The show messed up my sleep. Dr. Kimble ran. I ran along at warp speed.

There's Kimble. He's a slick cat. He's haunted and twitchy and doomed. He's isolated like me—but imbued with better looks and hygiene. The cop's hounding him. The cop's got some secret agenda. My dad thinks he's a fruit. He's a chicken-chasing Charlie at the Hollywood Gold Cup.

Kimble hits numerous towns. They all look like studio lots or L.A. He's a lightning rod. He attracts sexual discontent and ennui. The grooviest woman in town always finds him.

Real women. Women ripped by loneliness and hunger. Lois Nettleton, Patricia Crowley, Diana Van Der Vlis. Barbara Rush, Sandy Dennis, Madlyn Rhue, Shirley Knight. Suzanne Pleshette, Elizabeth Allen, the great June Harding—the most accomplished TV actresses of the era.

Ooooooh, Daddy-o!!!! They were tripping up my trouser trout triumphant!!!

Kimble was a heat-seeking missile. The women sizzled with longing. Nobody got laid. Exigent circumstances precluded it. Kimble's sprint was one long dry hump. It was my futile drive for selfhood refracted. The women were my mother transmogrified.

The Fugitive slammed my imagination. Mass-market noir— Tuesday nights at 10:00. Counterpoint to my nutty life and weird public life ascendant.

My dad had a stroke on 11/1/63. I came home from school. I found him weeping and babbling. He was streaked with his own feces and urine.

His condition horrified and repulsed me. I saw his death as my abandonment and my own death decades hence. I started prepping for life solo. I started shutting him out.

He spent three weeks at the VA Hospital. His condition and survival prospects improved. I ditched school every day. I bike-looped L.A. I swiped nudist magazines. I visited my dad. I watched episodes of *The Fugitive.* They ticked time to the JFK hit. I recall the plotlines and the guest-star women still.

My dad split the VA on hit day. Jack's death and the attendant hoo-ha bored him. Ditto for me. Fuck Jack. We were Republicans and Protestants. Jack took his orders from Rome. The fruit cop almost nabbed Kimble that Tuesday. Patricia Crowley's red hair beamed in black-and-white.

MY DAD RETRIEVED IT. My dad blew it anew. I distanced myself. I sabotaged out of his grasp.

He resumed smoking. He resurrected his high-salt/high-fat diet. I ditched school most days. I flunked the 11th grade. I bike-roamed. I watched *The Fugitive* and read crime novels. I brain-screened crime fantasies. I eyeballed rich girls and their fortyish moms throughout Hancock Park.

Obsession suited me. My *self*-obsession blinded me to extraneous social trends. America mourned Jack the K. It was fodder for my Nazi shtick and no more. LBJ goosed the Vietnam troop count. I stumped for nuclear war. A store cop detained me for shoplifting. My dad had a heart attack as I sweated custody. The Jack-hit aftermath metastasized. Conspiracy talk bubbled up. My feelers perked. I dug the inherent mystery. I brain-screened Dallas scenarios for Doc Kimble. Jackie Kennedy was June Harding for the poor.

The blur heightened. School became a nonendurable drag. I was seventeen. I was white. "Free" would make it the trifecta. I stepped up my Nazi antics. I got suspended from class for a week. My dad started calling me "you kraut cocksucker." I painted swastikas on the dog's dish. My dad wore a Jewish beanie to torment me.

I returned to school. I juiced the escape process. The Folk Song Club met. I regaled and disrupted with a pro-Nazi tune and a chorus of the "Horst Wessel Lied."

They expelled me. It was midweek in mid-March of 1965. I walked south on Fairfax. I've got the details memorized.

The smell outside Canter's Deli. School kids sneaking cigarettes. The old Jews headed for shul.

I hitched home on Beverly Boulevard. I felt airless and scared. I got a jolt of destiny. High-school dropouts were fucked. I'd better become a great writer fast.

THE NOTION HELD. I stalled the work. My wacked-out education continued.

Future writers hide inside books and snort up the craft by enjoyment. They read and learn structure and style. Their curiosity points them to subject matter. They read to titillate and edify. They scratch the itch to see life revealed. They swing on an I-can-do-this/I-can't-do-this tether. The novel form awes them. The soapbox aspect entices. A sense of potential accomplishment looms. The novel is autobiography mislabeled. The novel avenges sand kicked in the face and larger and more longstanding trauma. The novel enraptures career losers with justifying visions of self. The novel itemizes and encapsulates experience and contains it within a worldview. The novel takes abstraction and turns it to dramatic incident. The novel makes incident specific and loftily abstract. The novel explicates moral concerns to the novelist himself and reveals them through his dramaturgical choices. The novel bestows a huge ego on the novelist and jerks him to humility concurrent. The novel is a big fucking endeavor. The puzzle-cube aspect of the novelist's gift always stuns.

Novelists mold memories and conceits. Their images replace colored blocks and click to cohesion. Plumb lines appear. They take what they need and what they were and sift it through what they've become. Their voices build off a mute state often nurtured in recklessness and privation.

The novel is a daunting task. It takes some building up to. My prelude took fourteen years.

I dawdled post–high school. I nursed an urge to blow town. My dad let me join the Army. My dad had a second stroke my second day in. I exploited his condition. I faked a nervous breakdown.

The Army scared me shitless. I hated the discipline. I was a craven and seditious faux führer. I did not want to go to Vietnam.

I got an emergency leave. I visited my dad on his deathbed. His last words to me: "Try to pick up every waitress who serves you."

The Army cut me loose. I was parent- and draft-free at age 17. I got a jolt of destiny. Teenage orphans were fucked. I'd better become a great writer fast.

"Fast" is relative. Fourteen years runs relative against a lifetime. "Great" is relative. It's often a self-bestowed or posthumous tag.

Ellroy's father, Lee. *(Photo courtesy of James Ellroy)*

It was time to live and read. It was time to complete my picaresque education.

I matriculated in L.A. I majored in booze and dope and minored in random desiccation. I read a shitload of crime novels and true-crime books and eschewed "mainstream" literature. I ate up plot, structural density and character development through implication. I judged books by their human content and authenticity. I made qualitative judgments and dropped further analysis. I possessed no gift to gauge abstraction. It was pure assimilation. I lived in a fictional criminal universe and brain-screened criminal fantasies. I committed petty crimes out of sloth and moral default. I shoplifted food, booze, and books. I stole empty pop bottles from reclamation bins. I broke into apartment-house laundry rooms and pried coins out of washers and dryers. I stalked Hancock Park girls, broke into their pads, and sniffed their underwear. I did county-jail time. I hobnobbed with other jejune jerkoffs and Mickey Mouse misdemeanants. We lied about our beaucoup bitches and criminal exploits. I honed my nascent narrative skills via jerry-rigged jailhouse jive.

That was narrative output. Bullshit sessions rife with brag. I spritzed to cellmates and my nonjail pals. I chose my words deftly. I put the art in bullshit artiste. My themes were crime and my indigenous lunacy. I knew what I vibed. I did not try to undermine the perception. I knew that candor would hold my audience. I knew that macho posturing would discredit me. I understood the rules of verisimilitude. I worked off my outré appearance. I was 6′3″/140–60 pounds of it zits, and always the ripe snout pustule.

Most kids riffed off machismo and politics. The era mandated topical discourse. Winning fistfights and Us-versus-Them—“the Establishment” as punching bag.

I detailed my *losing* fistfights. John “the Whale” Blackman falls on me at John Costa’s pad. I enter a booze blackout. I wake up bruised in a Christmas-tree lot. There’s the Mex drag queen Peaches at the “New” County Jail. Peaches gropes my knee. I pop him. Peaches has heavy hands like Alexis Arguello. Peaches pounds me.

“The Establishment”? Fuck that. Counterculture rage denotes a new conformity. Every puerile street punk hates the Establishment. Their critique is short on analytical rigor and long on personal pique. Street punk Ellroy knows this. He can’t quite voice it epigrammatically. He’s a neoconservative crashing in parks and Goodwill bins. He craves women like then-unknown Peggy Noonan. He’s got a not-quite-acknowledged moral ace up his sheeve.

Goofball Ellroy rarely thinks in abstractions. Goofball Ellroy feels this:

He created his own shit. The Establishment did not fuck him. He made his own choices. He plumbed his own course. He *engaged* his own shit.

Weird shit. *Gooooood* shit. Painful shit compounding at a horrible cost. Righteous shit for future pages.

The ’60s and ’70s bopped forth. I bopped forth heedlessly. I got drunk. I got bombed. I ragged the counterculture and their candy-ass angst. I surfed their dope tide. I failed to note the contradiction.

I ate Benzedrex Inhaler wads. I drank Romilar CF cough syrup. I scored uppers off a fruitfly named Gene the Short Queen. I mainlined Methedrine. I grazed on grass. I lurked, loitered, listened, and *learned.* I nabbed the noxious *Nachtmusik* of my far-out fatherland. Crime crystallized crisp in my cranial cracks.

There’s L.A. It’s epidemically everywhere. It’s a circumscribed circus and draconian dream. It’s a lavish land of caveman cops, shakedown shills, and jungle-bred junkies. It’s a hyperbolic whorehouse and a hip hermaphrodite hutch. It hops on its hind legs and howls. It’s a blistering blur blowing its way right through me.

I *lurked.* I dug a preppy girl named Margaret Craig. I tooled by her two-story Tudor crib and love-looted it voyeur-style. I *loitered.* I stood stock-still and stared in wide windows. I *listened.* I vacuumed up verbal verities verbatim. I *learned.* My odious orbit offered up insinuating insight. It demystified and dedoctrinized.

Bam—there’s the LAPD. I’m in their custody. I pass through drunk tanks and the “Glass House.” My lie detector clicks in and climbs counterclockwise. I look. I *learn.* I know they’re not evil. They’ve been media-mauled and damningly demonized.

Bam—I’m in jail again. I’m bored. I’m alert. I’m scared. I look. I *learn.* I listen to the language of lowlife lassitude. It’s rancid rationalization. I could have been/I should have been/they *owe* me. *Society* made me corrupt.

Bam—I meet a duo named Solly and Joan. We toke Thai stick and talk. Solly’s handsome and weak. Joanie’s joined to him in gender-role jive and juvenile lust. She knows he's lost/she knows he won't change/she hangs on nonplussed. She's sunk by stuff outside her volition. Women always get fucked.

I learned. I retreated and read.

I read Dashiell Hammett at the downtown library. I read Ross Macdonald by flashlight in the parks. I read meretricious crime writers all over L.A. I read Jolting Joe Wambaugh in jail and out.

The New Centurions/The Blue Knight/The Onion Field/The Choirboys—visionary work by a cop. L.A. revised. Authoritarian-ism dissected. Authority sanely lauded over chaos. A *counter*-counterculture view of 1960 up. Absurdism sans leftist drill. A horrible compassion and indictment of moral default.

Wambaugh burned through me. Wambaugh made me dredge abstractions and spin epigrams. Wambaugh made me think what it all meant.

Wambaugh sang me a swan song. Wambaugh changed me forever. Here's how I know that:

He made me ashamed of my life.

NOT ENOUGH TO change it. Close, but not yet.

It took more lunacy and more bad behavior and a large pus sac on a lung. It took more books read, more books gauged, more books consciously assessed. It took more self-disgust and more destiny jolts and more ache to be someone.

I was Don DeLillo's Lee Harvey Oswald writ pit-faced and tall. I had a "far mean streak of independence brought on by neglect." It was self-neglect entirely. I merged with Bad Lee in desperate yearning and diverged with him in design. Smudge history or rewrite it to your own specifications? No contest at all. Lurk outside Margaret Craig's window or seek flesh-and-blood women? All bets are off.

I cleaned up in '77. I was 29. Chronology favored me. I survived my picaresque education. Survivable drugs and low street-crime stats stood on my side. Jail tiers were bereft of gangbangers and race cliques. Scared kids with poor survival skills could endure and learn.

Learning is a motherfucker. I learned the hard way. I don't recommend it. Outrageous circumstance nailed me. I cultivated the gift and curse of obsession. The gift finally won.

I changed my life. I credit Almighty God with the save. I disowned profligacy. I sought righteousness. I swooned to write books. Literature is a deep calling. I knew it at the depth of my shame.

It's been good—and it's nowhere near over. Now I learn from *my* words on the page. I dig the mystical aspect. My weird shit out in the *spiritus mundi*—particles popping in air.

There's a kid or some kids somewhere. I'll never know them. They're particle-puzzle-cubing right now. They might be mini-misanthropes from Moosefart, Montana. They might be demidystopians from Dogdick, Delaware. They dig my demonic dramas. The metaphysic maims them. They grasp at the gravity. They'll duke it out with their demons. They'll serve up a surfeit of survival skills. They won't be chronologically crucified.

They'll shore up my shit. They'll radically revise it. They'll pass it along.

Stephanie

Murder files hook you fast and drag you in slow. The crime-scene report wires shock. Read it for facts and milieu.

Don't extrapolate. Don't expect clear explication. Big files fill ten boxes. Logic builds and fractures. Chronologies disperse. The act creates the disorder. It leads you to the victim slow.

Summary reports, Teletypes, mug shots. Non sequitur license-plate stats. Ding-farm runaways polygraphed and shipped to Camarillo. The polygrapher's negative stats.

FI cards. Street creeps braced and cut loose. Shredded APBs. Canvassing sheets. Wrong-case misfiles, mug-run cards, and rap sheets.

Family photos. The victim's address book. Her scent or your wish fulfillment of it many years old. Snapshots of her smiling, posed in out-of-date clothes.

Women only. They make me read and look. Old paper as perfume. Longing as perceptive tool.

Unsolved files only. Apply your mind male and rude. Reset fractures. Reroute narrative. Make data blips cohere.

I've read a dozen murder files. I started with my mother's file and moved on. I read unsolved/female/sex-murder files only. I'm not a detective. I'm not a cop wannabe. I've never solved a crime. I come to know the women sometimes.

I study the death pictures. I always do it first. Take me back and show me the horror. Make me feel your loss fresh and new.

DETECTIVE BUREAU/HOMICIDE DIVISION/LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT. DR# 65-538-991 [MURDER/187 PC]. VICTIM: STEPHANIE LYNN GORMAN/WHITE FEMALE/AGE 16. DOB: 6-11-49. DOD: 8-5-65. STATUS: UNSOLVED/REOPENED/LAPD UNSOLVED UNIT AT WORK.

The crime scene:

West L.A./"Beverlywood"/southeast of Beverly Hills. Upper-middle-class Jewish/all residential/crime stats down around zilch.

A corner house. Hillsboro and Sawyer. Stucco/late-'40s vintage/three bedrooms, pristine. A rear garage. Side-street access. A cement backyard. A five-foot connecting wall. A street-access wood door set in.

A backyard patio. Two chaise lounges. Sliding-glass doors that lead in. A rumpus room. A patio view. A side hallway. Go to the northeast bedroom.

It's by the front door. Windows look out. You see the front lawn and street. You see the house next door.

A door leads to the master bedroom. A door leads to the hall. Roll 37 years back.

Pop the doors and LOOK.

It's a small room. It's a girl's room. It's the older sister's pad. A west-wall dresser. A north-wall desk by the window. Daybeds line the south and east walls. They hit perpendicular. An end table separates them. A lamp and knickknacks sit upright. There's a cold-cream jar lid in between. There's a matchbook on the floor. There's a nightstand in the northeast corner. There's a knocked-over lamp. There's an east-wall portrait. It's bright oil paint. It's the older sister beaming. There's a stuffed turtle toy on the east bed. Both bed covers are lime green.

Stephanie Lynn Gorman as seen in her Hamilton High School yearbook photo, freshman year, 1965. *(Los Angeles Times Collection, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA)*

On the floor: two gray sweat socks. Close by: a lidless jar of cold cream. Gauge in. They're beside the south bed and matchbook.

A chair by the connecting doors. Clothes under it: panties, denim shorts, one tennis shoe. Gauge in. The matching shoe is on the floor. It's near the west-wall dresser.

There's a cord looped to one south-bed leg. It's white chalk line. It's mason's cord. The free end is frayed. There's a shell casing on the floor. It's between the wall and the south bed. By the east bed: three more shell casings.

Bloodstained carpet. It's near the east bed. It's between the outer edge and the shell casings.

The casings are small. The cord is loose-weaved and three-stranded. The bloodstain is red and bright pink.

There's Stephanie Gorman.

She's on the floor. She's on her knees. She lists against the east wall. She's by the east-bed foot.

She's half-nude. She's bottomless. She's wearing a knit top and bra. They're knife-slashed up the middle. The top hangs loose. The bra hangs off her neck and shoulders.

Drag burns on her right hip. Both wrists abraded. Cinched cord on her right wrist. Loose strands pressure-frayed.

Gunshot wounds:

Two in her chest. One in her neck. One in her forehead.

Her lower lip and left breast are bruised. Her inner lip is swollen. Her forehead sustained a contusion.

She's in a begging pose. She's against that wall. Bullet force bruised her back. The east wall got an indentation.

It happened in broad summer daylight.

HER FATHER and sister found her.

6:00 p.m., 8/5/65. Ed and Cheryl Gorman come home. Cheryl's bedroom door is shut. They open it. They enter the room. They see Stephanie.

Ed Gorman goes to her and lifts her. He puts her on the east bed. He covers her with a quilt and some clothing. He calls LAPD. West L.A. Division responds.

Stephanie's mother came home. Ed Gorman told her. The LAPD arrived.

Lieutenant Grover Armstrong. Detective Sergeants Robert Byron and William Koivu. SID men, latent print men, photo lab men, crime lab men. Ten LAPD men total.

The detectives talked to the family. The family said this:

Ed Gorman was a lawyer. He had an office downtown. Cheryl worked for him today. Julie Gorman was a housewife. She played tennis today. She came home at 3:00 p.m. She saw Cheryl's bedroom door shut. She paid no attention.

She went back out. She went to the beauty shop. She came home to *this*.

The tech men fanned out. The detectives studied the crime scene. The photo men took pictures. Ed Gorman said he disrupted the scene. He covered Stephanie. She's up on the east bed. Her head's brushing the toy turtle.

The cops walked the house. They saw no forced entry. They saw no ransacking. They found a cord strand near the front door. They walked the patio. They found two bloodstained towels. They were on a chaise lounge.

The detectives talked to the family. They rebuilt Stephanie's day.

She went to Hamilton High summer school. It was one mile away. She carpooled with two friends: Paul Bernstein and Ilene Jackman. They always left school at 12:30.

The detectives called Ilene Jackman. They told her. They calmed her down. They learned this:

Yes, they went to school. Yes, they drove home. They dropped Paul off first. She dropped Stephanie at 12:45. Stephanie walked through the back gate.

She's in the house now. She's there *alone.*

An ambulance arrived. Attendants took Stephanie to the L.A. County Morgue.

They scheduled an autopsy. Print men dusted the crime scene.

They turned up latent prints. They elimination-printed the Gormans and all the cops. The Gormans slept under sedation. The investigation kicked in: Friday, 8/6/65.

Cops canvassed the neighborhood. The next-door lady said this:

She heard screams yesterday. It was 3:30 to 4:30. They came from the Gorman house. They came from the northeast corner. She thought it was the Gorman girls playing. The lady lived one house north. The property lines were tight in. Her gardener was cutting the lawn yesterday. He worked 1:30 to 2:30.

Neighbors reported a candy-selling crew. They were Negro kids. They were door-to-door knocking. There was a whole slew.

A kid called West L.A. station. His name was Dave S. He said he parked outside the Gorman pad yesterday. He was looking for this guy Bob Gelff. Gelff lived there maybe two years ago.

Stephanie Gorman's body is removed from her home and taken to the morgue. *(Los Angeles Times Collection, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA)*

The tip got shined on. The tip got misplaced. The Gorman job made the papers and TV. They had tips up the wazoo.

A neighbor woman called in. She found the Gormans' pet loose. It was 4:00 p.m. yesterday. She put the dog in the Gormans' yard. She called out to Stephanie. She got no answer.

A neighbor kid called in. He was a Hami Hi student. He saw two Negroes cruise the Gorman house. It was yesterday. It was 12:50 p.m. They drove a '55 Ford.

A neighbor woman called in. She saw a '53 or '54 Olds parked at Durango and Sawyer. It was this morning. A man got out. He walked to a trashcan. He removed a pink blouse.

More tips came in. Neighbors called in. They snitched off the Negro candy crew. They snitched off a Negro church-solicitation crew. A parole officer called in. He snitched off two local rape-os. A neighbor man called in. He saw two male Negroes in a '55 Ford. They were distributing handbills.

Neighbors snitched off Negro workmen. Said Negroes bugged off work yesterday. Said Negroes aroused suspicion. A neighbor woman called in. A male Negro stood on her porch yesterday. It was 11:30 to noon. She lived on Hillsboro. She lived near the Gormans.

The canvassing cops braced local parolees. The geeks ran the gamut: GTA, weapons beefs, burglary, escape. They all checked out alibi-clean.

A bartender called in. He reported weird shit at the Red Rouge Bar. The Red Rouge was way east on Melrose. The bartender said this: A guy came in last night. He stayed from 10:00 to midnight. He was white/50/6′/200. He wore "old-type" clothes. He said, "They don't know what's happening. It will be headlines. They'll read about it in the papers tomorrow. It's tough to be a clown."

August 5, 1965: Friends and neighbors gather outside the Gorman home the day of Stephanie's murder. *(Los Angeles Times Collection, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA)*

More canvassers came on. Metro Division supplied them. They house-to-housed. They questioned residents. They worked fifteen car-plan sectors. They worked north to the L.A. Country Club. They worked south to the Santa Monica Freeway. They worked east to La Cienega. They worked west to Hillcrest Country Club. They logged nontips and nonsense tips. They logged suspicious Negro sightings.

Byron and Koivu interviewed the neighbor's gardener. His name was George Iwasaki. He told them this:

He worked 8/5/65. He worked between 1:00 and 2:00. He parked near the Gorman house. He saw a man peeping the house. The peeper stood between the house and the neighbor's house. The peeper peeped the northeast bedroom window.

Iwasaki described him:

White male, Latin type, 43–45 years old. 5′7″, 140 pounds. Sallow cheeks, unshaved, unkempt hair.

Attire: cotton twill shirt and pants. Matching "uniform type." Fresh-starched, light blue.

The man looked suspicious. Ditto his standing place. Iwasaki knew judo. The man gave him a bad look. Iwasaki smelled scuffle. He prepared to *go*.

Their eyeball duel ended. Iwasaki did yard work. He did not see the peeper again.

Dr. Harold Kade performed the autopsy. Stephanie Lynn Gorman/Coroner's File #19597.

She was 5′3″/100 pounds/brown hair, brown eyes. She was healthy. Gunshot wound #1 perforated her heart and left lung. The result: Massive hemorrhage. Gunshot wound #2 perforated her right lung. The result: massive hemorrhage. Gunshot wound #3 penetrated her trachea, esophagus, and vertebral column. The result: massive hemorrhage. Gunshot wound #4 fractured her skull and penetrated her brain. The result: massive hemorrhage.

Kade checked her reproductive system. The uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries: *Grossly normal. No lacerations of the vagina, rectum, or perineum.*

The Gorman job continued. Homicide Division jumped in. Sergeants J. R. Buckles and W. R. Munkres clocked on.

They found the Negro candy sellers. They cleared them. They questioned the Gorman family. They learned this:

Stephanie was a good girl. She did not flirt or provoke boys. She got top grades. She held class office. She excelled at Palms Junior High and Hami. She had no enemies. She did not truck with bad kids.

SID kicked back ballistics. The weapon: a .25-caliber auto. The millimeter equivalent: .635. Right-hand twist/six lands and grooves/Colt brand autos excluded. In evidence: 4 "Western" brand shell casings, 4 .25-caliber bullets. In progress: crime report cross-checks for the same type gun and MO.

The detectives worked. They debunked hysterical tips. They cleared suspicious Negroes. They read recent crime reports. Two nuts-at-large stood out.

Nut #1: "The Shoe-Tree Rapist." At large since 2/4/62. A West Valley habitué. A unique MO.

He cruises residential blocks. He spots housewives outside. He enters their pads through rear doors. He finds neckties or electric cords. He finds vaginal jellies or cold cream. The ties and cords act as restraints. The jellies and creams lubricate.

He wears gloves and masks. He grabs the women and binds them. He stuck a shoe-tree in his first victim's vagina. His next five victims fought him off. He ran out their back doors. He never speaks. He may be a mute. He may drive a '48 or '52 Chevy. He's good for 13 burglaries and 7 attempt rapes. Witness descriptions vary. He *is* a white male. He *may* be 19 to 23. He *may* be 30 to 40. Sometimes he appears unshaven.

Nut #2: "The Remorseful Rapist."

He's a white male "Latin type." He's about 26. He's 5′11″/185. He's got a crew cut and a neat appearance. He hits apartment pads in Wilshire and Central Division. He hits pads near bus lines.

He targets lone women. He cons his way in. He shows a small revolver and subdues them. He tapes their eyes and mouth. He rapes them. He apologizes post-rape. He shows them the gun is a toy.

The detectives worked. They found the Negro church crew. They cleared them. They checked out three local meter men. They cleared them. They went to Stephanie's funeral. The crowd ran 1,000 strong.

Hillside Memorial Park. Rabbi Michael Albagli presiding. Relatives, friends, and neighbors. Ed Gorman's clients and Hami Hi kids. Tears and soliloquy. Ed and Julie Gorman distraught.

The detectives worked. They skimmed old crime reports. They read ballistics reports. They read FI cards. They checked out loiterers detained and released. They fielded crank calls. A kid called in. He said Stephanie was a hooker. She nixed a Hami football player. He shot her for it. A crank note came in. It snitched off actor Richard Burton. More neighbors called in. They snitched off suspicious Negroes. A Hami girl called in. She said Stephanie dated Paul Bernstein and Steve Spiegelman.

SID retained the slugs and shells. Techs ran comparison tests. The slugs and shells matched no slugs and shells from prior confiscations. The print men studied the elimination prints. They found four prints remaining. They photographed them. The photo lab made blow-ups.

A sketch artist worked with George Iwasaki. They created a peeper sketch. The detectives talked to Dr. Kade. He offered this opinion: Stephanie Gorman was not a virgin at her time of death.

The detectives talked to Ed and Julie Gorman. They questioned them per Stephanie and sex. The Gormans deemed her a virgin. She had a checkup on 4/3/65. Talk to Dr. Fred Pobirs.

Buckles and Munkres saw Dr. Pobirs. He confirmed the checkup. He consulted his records. He saw no pelvic exam notes. He said she was 15 then. If she wasn't a virgin, I would have told the family.

The detectives questioned Stephanie's friends and classmates. They confirmed Stephanie's good-girl status. They talked to boys she dated. They had 8/5 alibis. They denied sex with Stephanie. They were credible. They vouched Stephanie's chastity. The detectives figured this:

Doc Kade might be right. Doc Kade might be wrong. Natural function or accidents cause vaginal rupture.

The detectives braced registered sex offenders. They ran RSO mug shots by George Iwasaki. He nixed them all. They were not the northeast-bedroom peeper.

It was 8/11/65. L.A. was wicked hot. The Watts Riot broke out. LAPD responded. A manpower call blared. LAPD men answered en masse. The riot featured arson, sniping, and looting. It was Suspicious Negro Armageddon. The National Guard arrived. A curfew was imposed. L.A. shut down. L.A. stayed indoors. L.A. watched the riot on TV. LAPD got swamped. The riot impeded travel. The riot fucked up communications. Normal LAPD service got suspended. Hot investigations lost time.

The riot de-conflagrated. Order got restored. South L.A. got singed to Cinder City. LAPD service resumed *slooooow.*

The Gorman job: stymied, quicksand, sludge.

Buckles and Munkres wrote a progress report. Lieutenant Pierce Brooks approved it. The report ran hypothetical reconstructions.

12:45. Stephanie gets home. She goes to her bedroom. She drops her schoolbooks and purse. She goes to the kitchen. She has a snack.

Stephanie has dry-skin problems. She goes to the master bathroom. It adjoins Cheryl's room. She creams her rough skin. Maybe the suspect grabs her there. He's already in the house. The skin-cream bottle—found in the bathtub—not normal there.

But:

No forced entry. That cord by the front door. Maybe he knocks. Stephanie answers. Maybe he just barges in.

He hits her. He subdues her. It explains her torn lip. The bruise on her forehead—call it blow two. Maybe it's a fall-down bump from blow one.

He carries Stephanie. He *drags* Stephanie. Her right-hip brush burns suggest this. Cheryl's bedroom is close. Stephanie is helpless or unconscious. He pulls the south bed out. He throws her on it. He binds her wrists to the east-bed legs. He spread-eagles her. He strips her lower body. He throws her clothes on the floor. He cuts her top and bra up the middle. He goes to the master bedroom. He finds a Jergens jar. He returns to the bedroom. He lubricates Stephanie's rectum and vagina. He tosses the jar and lid. Remember—the jar on the floor/the lid on the nightstand.

Doc Kade's opinion: sodomy and rape. *Tests for residues or foreign fluids inside the body not yet conducted.*

The killer assaults Stephanie. Stephanie regains consciousness. Say she struggles then. Say it's like this. Say she struggles throughout the whole thing.

Her wrists break free. Remember—the right-wrist cord still on her arm/the cord strands loose on the bed leg.

She gets off the bed. The killer corners her. He blocks the doors. Stephanie stumbles. She hits the east wall. She kneels— horror/shock/exhaustion. He shoots her four times. His gun's an automatic. The spent shells eject left to right. He's bloody now. He goes to the master bedroom. He grabs two towels. He wipes himself off. He goes out the back door. He hits the patio. He drops the towels on a chaise lounge. He goes out the back gate. He's on Sawyer Street. He's gone.

And—feature this:

Stephanie dies in Cheryl's bedroom. A sibling resemblance exists. Was *she* the intended vic?

The Gorman job faded out newswise. Postriot shit upstaged it. Stephanie got brief coverage. It played up her good-girl status. She was young, bright, lovely. She got straight A's. She was Hami Hi "in" crowd. She was movie-mad. She got extra gigs in *Pollyanna* and *Bye Bye Birdie.*

The detectives slogged. They issued a bulletin. It featured a crime summary and the peeper sketch. It went out 8/24/65. It went to the Feds and PDs nationwide. LAPD got kickbacks: similar MOs/divergent MOs/MOs off the beam. Rape-os, rape-o killers, bondage rape-os. Burglar rape-os, knife rape-os, gun rape-os, child rape-os, girl rape-os, woman rape-os, old lady rape-os.

Some freaks resembled the sketch. Most freaks didn't. George Iwasaki viewed nationwide mug shots and nixed them. They got no print matches. They got no ballistic matches. They got more phone tips and more letters. They cleared three hundred suspects. They issued bulletin #2. They sent slug and shell samples to the FBI and CII. Bulletin #2 begged for comparison slugs and shells. It featured the four-print blow-up. It begged for kickbacks: All suspects known or in stir.

No matches. Straight kickback zeros.

The Feds had a slug and shell. Ditto CII. LAPD retained two. The bulletin hit Canada and Mexico. Shit: no matches, more zeros.

The detectives slogged. They reinterviewed Stephanie's classmates. They reconfirmed her good-girl status. They interviewed Cheryl's male friends. They cleared them. They checked West L.A. FI cards. They braced Beverlywood freaks. They torqued wienie waggers, jailbait johnnies, glue sniffers, hopheads, and public jackoff freaks. They cleared them. They cleared local delivery-men. They cleared Ed Gorman's Negro ex-gardener. They cleared suspicious Negroes. They cleared rape-jacket Negroes citywide.

The Gormans were fine people. Ed was a fine lawyer. He had no enemies. His reputation gleamed. He served his synagogue selflessly. Julie's rep gleamed. The "good-girl" Gorman sisters were unassailably thus. They did not provoke or dick-tease. They did not backyard-sunbathe provocatively. Stephanie frequented the Standard Club. She wore demure outfits. She never wore revealing bikinis.

The Shoe-Tree Rapist—still at large. The Remorseful Rapist— likewise. Likewise *très* many sick humps.

THE GORMAN JOB slogged on. The Gorman job slogged on full-speed.

It was proactive. It was reactive. It ran tangential. It ran straight ahead. It was footwork and filework and gruntwork. It was a full-fledged freak symphony.

They got call-ins. A local girl ratted off a local "wino type." She said he resembled the sketch. George Iwasaki saw him and nixed him. No print match/no viable gun stats. The Green Bay, Wisconsin, PD called. They had a local freak. *He* resembled the sketch. Iwasaki nixed a mug shot. No print match—*adieu.*

Doc Kade called. He had late test results. *The vaginal and rectal semen tests: inconclusive. Plus: no other foreign fluids present/no sperm isolate.*

They cleared a Crest Drive wienie wagger. He flashed his shvantz from his balcony. Crest Drive adjoined Hillsboro and Sawyer. They cleared a freak nicknamed "Wino." He forged prescriptions. He popped goofballs. He habituated the Mar Vista

Bowl. He pushed mary jane to kids. They checked out a 6/4/64 case. A freak kidnapped a Hami Hi girl. It was bold and streetside.

He flashed a knife. He made her get in his car. He made her disrobe. He kissed her breasts. He let her go.

That one went nowhere. One still-at-large freak.

They checked out a 3/12/65 gig. It was a parked-car caper. It featured a Hami girl and a boy. The girl was topless. Her name was in Stephanie's address book. The caper was Mickey Mouse. They cleared the boy.

"Harvey the Confessor" confessed. Harvey was habitual. He showed up at West L.A. Station. He copped to the Gorman job. The cops heard his jive confession. The cops cut him loose.

Fall '65 dragged on. They checked out the Standard Club. It was in Cheviot Hills. It was mid-upscale Jewish. The Gormans partied there. Maybe some freak saw Stephanie there. Maybe his hard-on commenced there. Maybe Stephanie flipped his freak switch.

They did 122 interviews. They ran gun checks concurrent. They checked 8/5/65 time cards. They logged rumors. They logged more good-girl rebop. They found some freak employees. They found some ex-cons. They looked at them close.

They read rap sheets. They charted work histories. They charted work absences on 8/5/65. They leaned on the freaks.

One Negro had two DUIs. Fuck him—he's a lush. One Negro had multiple busts: burglary/ADW/check-bounce tsuris. One Negro had a stat rape bust.

They leaned on them. They gun-checked them. They print-checked them. They cleared them both.

They checked out snack-bar guys, pool guys, lifeguards, tennis pros. They braced a potential rape-o. He picked a girl up at the club. He invited her to a movie. He drove her to the Hollywood Hills. He tried to promote a fuck. She said no fuck. He drove her home then.

The Standard Club washed out. They ran gun checks, print checks, and show-ups with George Iwasaki. They got bupkes. They punted. They tracked obscene-phone-call reports.

They waded in. They slid through slime. They tracked back four years. They tracked freaks who called young girls and freaks who bugged women about their daughters.

It was ugly. Bondage themes and straight fuck themes ran equal. The callers: all male. The victim-complainants: all female.

"Baby, let's fuck." "I want to eat your pussy." "I heard your sister works at Kentucky Fried Chicken on Pico. Do you and your sister fuck?"

"If you don't come across, I'll hurt your children." "I know you got a 19-year-old daughter. Meet me on Ventura. Wear a skirt, blouse, and no nylons, or something will happen to her."

This freak was typical. He calls a young girl. He says he's a school official. He asks embarrassing questions. He tells her to take her measurements. Ditto *this* freak. He calls a Valley woman. He tells her to wear high heels and eschew underwear. He tells her to meet him at the Akron store on Sunset. The cops show. He doesn't.

The detectives tracked reports. They grilled known phone freaks. They cleared them. Phone freaks were tough to catch. More freaks at large.

They dumped the phone shit—12/29/65. Cheryl Gorman got a late Christmas card. It mentioned a meeting in 7/65. The family had gone down to Coronado. Ed and Julie played bridge. Stephanie and Cheryl hit the beach.

They met two boys. Cheryl said she was reading *The Collector*. It's about a freak. He kidnaps a woman. He holds her hostage. She dies in captivity.

The kids played a game. The boys tied up and untied the girls. It was brief chuckles. That was all of it.

That was July. Cut to late December. One boy sends a Christmas card. It mentions the rope trick.

The detectives studied the card. The detectives drove to San Diego. They found the boys. They grilled them. They polygraphed them. They cleared them.

Adios, 1965—1966 struts in.

1/5/66: The lab tests the south and east bedspreads for semen. The *east* bed hits positive. There's no sperm isolate. There's a blood-type A reaction. The result: inconclusive. The stain is near the foot of the bed. It's near Stephanie's death pose. The rest of the bedspread tests positive: A-type blood reaction. That marks the *specific* stain inconclusive. That means the semen could match A or O blood. Stephanie was type O. There were no foreign fluid types in her rectum or vagina.

1/7/66: The lab tests the bloody towels. They get a type-O reaction. It's probably Stephanie's blood. Stephanie *might* have wounded the killer.

The detectives worked. The lab confiscated new crime-scene guns. They examined them. They test-fired them. They got nil results.

2/22/66: SID tests the Gorman hair samples. Most test out to Stephanie and Cheryl. One doesn't. This hair is coarser. It's not a Negro, Mexican, or Oriental hair. It's assuredly Caucasian.

2/22/66: The lab tests Stephanie's fingernail clippings. They find no scraped flesh. They find blood traces. They're too small to type. They can't tell if she scratched her assailant.

2/28/66: LAPD pops the Remorseful Rapist.

It's a traffic stop—2nd and Serrano. It's a male Mexican. His name: Edward David Apodaca.

He's packing tape and a toy gun. He stands in a show-up. Thirty-eight victims ID him. The Gorman cops grill him. He's gun-checked, print-checked, poly'd, and cleared.

3/8/66: A neighbor lady rats off a loiterer. He's standing at Pico and Roxbury. He matches the police sketch. Patrolmen haul him in. The detectives grill him.

His name is Mr. K. He's an alien. He hails from Gyula, Hungary. He's a schizo and a nut-bin habitué. He's got a nationwide rap sheet: vag/disorderly conduct/wienie wagger beefs.

He won't cooperate. He won't take a poly. They book him for Murder One. They put him in a show-up. George Iwasaki views him. He says maybe, maybe not.

Mr. K. talked a little. He said he escaped Patton State Hospital. The detectives called Patton. They learned: Mr. K. escaped 8/5/65—the Gorman snuff date.

But:

Mr. K. split late in the day. The time glitch cleared him.

Mr. K. got unbooked. Murder One—*nyet.* Patton sent a crew down to shag him.

3/24/66–3/31/66: Two Metro cops hit Georgia Street Juvenile.

They run record checks. They check current and recent Hami kids. They check the boys for juvie beefs. They check the girls as sex-beef complainants. The girls shoplift clothes and cosmetics. The girls run from titty pinchers and whip-out men. The boys run the fucking alphabet.

Lots of sex shit. 288PC—forced oral cop. 288—voluntary. 288—mutual suck. Voyeur busts, malicious mischief. Some kid molests a prepubescent girl. The cops pop him. Said kid gets popped at a fruit bar later. A 14-year-old boy attacks two 11-year-old girls. He slides on it. He gets popped for Peeping Tom later. Lots of GTA, some grand-theft merch, some parked-car sodomy. Wienie waggers galore. Glue sniffers, grasshoppers, juiceheads galore. Fruit rollers, fruit teasers, high-school fruitettes. Firebugs, chronic runaways. A doozie right after the Gorman job—8/13/65. Venice Boulevard and Ocean Front Walk. There's a public rest-room. There's a Mex kid pulling his pud. The kid states: "I was thinking of a Hami Hi girl."

They went through 5000-plus names. They turned up 201 rap sheets. They weeded out unlikelies. They grilled the pure freaks. They print-checked them and gun-checked them. They got diddly-shit.

4/4/66: The L.A. Police Commission gets a mailed note and poem. Said note and poem read thus:

Did they ever find who snuffed out Stephanie Gorman? Was he of Lago Vista Dr., Beverly Hills? Used to frequent the pool hall in Westwood?

And her name was Stephanie.
She came from Hills Beverly.
A quick roach was he around the house.
I declare, look here, you may find out
(An idea to a mystery)

The detectives worked it. Lago Vista Drive/men named "Roach"/Westwood poolhalls. It wasted man hours. It went nowhere. A cryptographer read the poem. She said it was gobbledygook.

6/20/66: LAPD gets hip to Dave S. Remember—he called West L.A. Station. It was 8/6/65. He said he went by the Gorman pad on 8/5. He looked for Bob Gelff. Bob used to live there.

Dave S. was 21. Dave S. went to Hami. Dave S. got popped for 288 once. Dave S. had a bad-check warrant: extant in Orange County.

6/21/66: Metro cops grill Dave S. He tells his Bob Gelff story. He parked in the Gormans' driveway. He thought he saw someone peek out a window. No one came out. He split.

The story made no sense. Gelff *didn't* live there. Dave S. nixed a polygraph. Dave S. split the interview. Dave S. called back. He said he'd take the poly now.

They set up the test: 7:00 p.m., 6/21/66. Dave S. called up and cancelled. The detectives talked to Bob Gelff.

Shit, we sold the house. The Gormans bought it in '61. The Gormans had it in '65. Shit, Dave *knew* where I lived.

The cops rebraced Dave S. They requested a formal statement. He refused. They arrested him.

They got him a public defender. He refused to talk. They booked him for Murder One.

He spent two days in the shitter. He agreed to a poly. He took the test. He came up clean.

His prints didn't match. He owned no guns. George Iwasaki viewed him. George Iwasaki said nix.

They released Dave S. Orange County grabbed him. Bam— bad-check warrant extant.

The Gorman job was 11 months old. It was dead-stalled and fucked.

RICK JACKSON TOLD me about Stephanie. My neck hairs stood up.

Rick works LAPD Homicide. He's a superb detective and one of my best friends. We talk long-distance. We prowl crime-historical L.A. We talk CRIME. We dig the horror. We transmit chills. We rap logic and moral perspective. We dig crime as social barometer and buffoonish diversion. My wife says we cackle like schoolgirls.

Stephanie Lynn Gorman. DR 65-538-991. DOD: 8/5/65.

Rick gave me a synopsis. Details nudged me. A pinprick memory blipped.

It's summer '65. I'm 17. There's a Hollywood newsstand. There's a girl's picture. It straddles a newspaper fold.

Blip—no more, no less.

Rick said the case went active. It was a fluke. It happened like this:

It's 2000 now. The older sister's middle-aged. She attends a party. She meets an LAPD man. She mentions her sister's case. She *wonders.* She requests a status update.

The man calls Robbery-Homicide. Detective Dave Lambkin picks up. He works the Rape Special Section. He's a 20-year officer. He doesn't know the Gorman case.

The man shoots the sister's request. Lambkin responds. He reads the Gorman file. He notes the unknown prints. He sends them to the FBI.

The Feds run them through the CODUS computer. They get a single-print match.

The kickback supplies a name. The man was young *then* and old *now.* He's now a suspect.

That blip. That picture. A slight expansion—her pageboy hairdo.

Rick's synopsis. The horror. The Watts Riot bit. *My* L.A. '65 summer. Stone's throw to *her.*

Show me the file. I need to *see.*

I FLEW OUT. It was December 2000. I booked a room in Beverly Hills. Beverlywood adjoined it. Stone's throw to Hillsboro and Sawyer.

It was cool. L.A. smelled like fresh rain. I ignored it. I conjured up the hot summer of 1965.

I rented a car. I drove to Parker Center. Rick introduced me to Dave Lambkin. He was mid-40s, bald, and fucking bug-eyed intense. He talked fast and articulate. His thoughts scattergunned and coalesced precisely. He said the file ran fourteen boxes. He gave me the suspect update.

Call him Mr. X. Mr. X is sixty-nine *now.* Mr. X was thirty-four *then.* He had a minor rap sheet. *Très* that—one receiving stolen goods bounce, à la '71.

Hence: prints on file. Hence: the CODUS match. Hence: major suspect status.

No Gorman link. That's good. It jukes the random-sex factor. Ed Gorman's dead now. The mother and sister don't know X-Man. They've wracked their memories.

So:

We're running background checks. We're feeling positive. We've placed him in West L.A. then. We've surveilled him. We've got his prints on a coffee cup. We snatched it at a diner.

We need more facts. They're armament. They'll fuel the search warrant. They'll define the approach.

Show me the file. Show me the pictures first.

We walked to the Rape Special cubicle. I saw the boxes and binders. I saw a taped-on wall tableau. That memory blip blew out full.

The *L.A. Times.* The pic on the fold. The pageboy girl.

Lambkin passed me the pictures. They were faded Kodachrome. The colors looked sun-bleached. Shades beamed surreal.

There's the patio. There's the bloody towels. The south bed's askew. There's one spent shell.

I clenched up. I knew she'd be next. I wanted to see it. I trusted my motive. I know my eyes would violate.

There—

I couldn't peel her beauty back from the horror. I felt immodest and clinically focused. Her softness merged with the blood.

I CALLED IT quits early. The file boded vast and too detailed. The pictures held me for now.

Dead women own you. Call it blunt and simple. She's Geneva Hilliker Ellroy redux.

I went back to the hotel. I time-traveled. I placed myself in context with that blip.

It was "Freedom Summer." I was seventeen. I was a year and three months older than Stephanie. I lived five miles northeast. I attended Fairfax High School up to mid-March. Fairfax was largely Jewish. I was gentile and fucked up. I craved attention, love, and sex. I did nothing constructive to earn it. I lusted for Jewish girls. I stalked them by bicycle. I pulled anti-Semitic stunts in school. I got my ass kicked. Fairfax kicked me out.

My dad was old and frail. He let me join the army. I hated the army. It scared me shitless. My dad had a second stroke. I faked a nervous breakdown. An army shrink bought it. My dad died 6/4/65. The army kicked me loose.

I bopped back to L.A. I was seventeen and draft-exempt. The army gave me go-home pay. I forged my dad's last three Social Security checks. I had a roll. I got a cheap pad. I got a handbillpassing job. I shoplifted food and booze. I popped pills and smoked weed. I ran 6′3″ and 140. Everything frightened me. I read crime books, fantasized, and jacked off. I was a teenage-misanthrope/hybrid-scaredy cat.

I stalked girls. My mode was the all-unilateral monogamous crush. My anti-Jewish stance was a shuck. It was kid iconoclasm. It was a love scrounger's yelp for help. Fairfax High was snotty and rigidly stratified. The Fairfax district bordered Hami Hi's. Hami was equally Jewish. Hami was allegedly more snotty and more stratified. Hami kids were hip, Hami kids disdained geeks, Hami kids rode the cool zeitgeist.

Proximity.

Stephanie was lovely. I did not doubt her good-girl status or sound character. She would have beckoned. I would have stalked her. I would have harbored tender thoughts. Booze might fuel a real approach—T-Bird chased by Clorets. She might reject me flat. She might reject me gently. She might hear me out. I was tall, I had my own pad, I had a murder-vic mom—sometimes the desperate impress.

Not likely. Lovely girls scare desperate boys. Ed Gorman would nab my shit quicksville. He'd kick my goy ass off his porch.

Yeah, I would have stalked her. No, I'd never harm a hair on her head.

THE HOUSE WAS INNOCUOUS. The northeast bedroom light was on. Rick and I staked it out.

Daytime crime, nighttime surveillance. We both loved crime locations. They spoke to us. They inspired time travel. They juked our talk.

We sat in Rick's car. Holiday lights beamed—Christmas sprays and menorahs. I mentioned a book. I read it circa '65. It was a thriller called *Warrant for X*.

Rick said X-Man looked good. He was at the crime scene. They didn't know when. They *did* know he *did not* know the Gormans. He matched the peeper sketch. He was a Latin-type Caucasian. I speculated. Stephanie fought him. He panicked and shot her. Rick quoted Dave Lambkin. Dave was a sex-crime expert. Dave had this factors-in-place riff.

Would-be killers harbor fantasies. They rarely act them out. Most would-bes never kill. Sometimes factors converge. The right victim appears. The opportunity hits. Stress factors goose the would-be. Family grief, sex abstinence, booze or dope impairment. His switch flips. He acts.

I said that might apply to my mother's case. It's the victim-killer nexus. Specific men kill specific women and kill no more. They bring fantasies to the act. They juxtapose their rage and lust against a female image. Maybe my mother vibed loose prowess. Maybe Stephanie vibed kindness to plunder. The killer killed my mother. He probably hit her and raped her unconscious. Stephanie screamed and fought. She got off the south bed. She disrupted her killer's fantasy.

He killed her. The act traumatized him. He never killed again.

Rick said maybe, maybe not. It didn't vibe intentional snuff. It vibed rape panic and rape escalation. The fuck brought the cord and gun. The gun for threat, the cord for suppression. Most rapes went unreported. Rape as social stigma—1965. Stephanie might be vic 16 or 60. The nexus, the alchemy—something made him kill her. I said her beauty and softness. Bam—his switch drops. He sees outtakes from his shitty life. His stress context implodes. A happy kid dies.

Women as one-way mirrors. Women as Etch-a-Sketch boards. The killer snags one real image and starts to revise. His revisions tap signals. It's sex semaphore. Details get distorted and magnified. It's a funhouse mirror now. It's all in his head. The woman loses proportion. She gains bizarre shapes. She gets dehumanized.

We shitcanned the analysis. We rapped rude and wrathful. We ran a righteous right-wing reverie. The Gorman job was individual forfeit. The Gorman job was moral default. Nothing justified it. The killer had to pay. His childhood trauma and attendant justifications bought him no mercy chits. Fuck the cocksucker dead—

I DUG INTO the file. I met Dave Lambkin's partner, Tim Marcia. He complemented

Lambkin. He was big and athletic. He walked with a roll. He talked less than Lambkin. He weighed his words and zoomed to the point.

We dug binders out. I read the autopsy report and first summary report. I rechecked the crime-scene shots. I theorized. I indulged possible wishful thinking.

No vaginal or rectal hurt. No foreign fluid types. Virgin and nonvirgin assessments. No semen or Jergens cream inside her. Vaginal rupture by natural cause.

Doc Kade was dead. Koivu was dead. Ditto Munkres and Buckles. Byron was in a rest home. He was senescent. There was no one to clarify.

My sense: no penetration. The killer didn't rape Stephanie.

Tim Marcia agreed. She was young and tight internally. She was struggling. Her legs were unbound. There's no Jergens on bedspreads/no Jergens floor drip. There's the east-bed semen stain. Maybe it's a forced oral cop. Maybe the killer jerked off.

I asked about vault evidence. I mentioned bedspread DNA. Marcia said a cop tossed it. It was an outrage. Some cop on a spring-cleaning kick.

I read reports. I skimmed mug shots. I checked the peeper sketch. Dave Lambkin did a cutout trick. He took a side-view mug shot of Mr. X. He placed it against the side-view sketch. They dovetailed exact.

Mr. X looked good for it. They couldn't brace him yet. They ached for it. Vengeance beckoned. Knock, knock—come here, motherfucker.

I read the file. I hobnobbed with the Shoe-Tree and Remorseful Rapists. I read the obscene-phone-call log. I remembered *my* calls to strange girls. I tried to come off as a kool kat. The girls laughed and made me hang up.

September 2002: Detectives Dave Lambkin, Tim Marcia, and Rick Jackson stand in front of the old Gorman home. *(Todd Hido/Edge)*

I found the San Diego notes. I found the boy's Christmas card. I read *The Collector* that summer. It turned me on. The captive woman was a redhead. My mother was a redhead. Samantha Eggar was a redhead. She played the captive in the film. I saw it during the Watts Riot. It played in Beverly Hills—stone's throw to Hillsboro and Sawyer.

Tim Marcia and I discussed a wild card. The Gorman job— consensual sex goes blooey.

Pros and cons. Coronado/the rope trick/the *Collector* connection. A secret boyfriend unnamed. The gun and rope as book-movie props. The boy's shaky psyche. Chaste kicks and Stephanie's imposed limits.

It flew for ten seconds. It flew apart then.

Why use the sister's bedroom? Stephanie's room was out back. Mom and Dad parked in the rear. They're home—oops—let's split.

And:

The torn lip/the punch there/the head bump/the drag burns/ the cord by the front door.

Dave ran the file by a Fed profiler. He posited a front-door approach. The killer knocks. Stephanie answers. It's her last look at daylight.

I skimmed the file. I read the Georgia Street Juvie reports. *I* spent a night at Georgia Street. It was August '65. I shoplifted some ice cream. LAPD popped me.

It was scary. Tough kids made fun of me. A friend's dad got me out. He took me to County Probation. I was too old to adopt. Somebody signed a paper. It made me an "emancipated juvenile."

The reports detailed a world wild and wimpy. It's all middle-class Jewish freaks. Two names jumped out. I knew one guy at John Burroughs Junior High School. I smoked weed with another guy. He knew my pal Craig Minear. Craig crashed his 2-seater plane. He died November '70.

I read the file backwards and forwards. I became friends with Dave and Tim. We yukked at phone-call outtakes and picaresque sex freaks. We discussed the rape and no-rape angles. We lauded and mourned Stephanie.

Tim and I drove to Hami. We checked old yearbooks and found Stephanie. She's sleek in her Phi Delt sweater. Her pageboy's down and swept by barrettes. Her expression shifts picture to picture. She's a pensive kid. She tries to show happiness. She doesn't always succeed.

I told Tim that I loved her to death. He said he did, too.

THE INVESTIGATION BUILT. Dave and Tim built that warrant for X.

They had his CII#, FBI#, LAPD arrest stats. The Auto-Track computer system shot them ten prior addresses. They had his wife's and ex-wife's stats. He married the ex in '62. *He lived in West L.A. in '65.* They had stats on his kids and kid brother. The "Family Index" ran 100 pages. It tallied prior addresses and driving records. It listed other people living at old addresses. Mr. X had a son and a daughter. The son was clean. The daughter had busts: dope/theft/prostitution.

The case hinged on the print. The case would build off X-MAN'S denial. No, I wasn't in that house. Bullshit, you *were.*

LAPD print-solved a '63 case. It went to court four years back. Hollywood Division/fall '63. Male killer/female vic.

They ran unknown prints. They utilized CODUS. They got a match. The man lived in Minnesota. He denied his presence in the pad. He claimed navy duty then. Navy records disproved it. A jury convicted him.

The print was *it.* The confrontation would goose a reaction. We'll make sure his wife is gone. We'll brace him alone. We'll hook him in slow. We'll bring a search warrant.

Dave was writing the warrant now. It was detailed and legalistic. They were looking for this:

Personal records. Vehicle records—late '50s to late '60s. Firearms and ammo. Docs describing X-Man's size on 8/5/65. Photos of X-Man in a blue uniform. Mason cord or photos of X-Man with same. Docs establishing X-Man's whereabouts on 8/5/65.

Docs establishing connections to the Gorman family. Photos, film, or video depicting violence against women. Pornography depicting women posed in restraints.

The approach ran tripartite. The print/the warrant search/ X-Man's reaction and/ or denial. George Iwasaki was dead. Age would alter X-Man's looks. Eyeball wits were out.

Dave and Tim were swamped. Breaking jobs swarmed their Gorman commitment. Dave worked the warrant part-time. Other work diverted him. He buzzed through Rape Special. He passed the wall tableau. He always said, "Sorry, Stephanie."

I STUCK AROUND L. A . I cruised the Gorman house a.m. and p.m. I read the file. I explored Dave S.'s jive story and exemption. I thought about Stephanie. I brought flowers to her grave. I pondered the "Laura" syndrome.

The book and movie define it. Homicide cops dig the gestalt. The title woman is lovely and perplexing. She's a murder vic. A cop works her case. Laura's portrait seduces him. She turns up alive. The vic is someone else. Laura and the cop fall in love.

It's ridiculous wish fulfillment. It negates the hold of the dead. They inhabit your blank spaces. They work magic there. They freeze time. They render our short time spans boldly precious. They build alternative memory. Their public history becomes your private reserve. They induce a mix of vindictiveness and compassion. They enforce moral resolve. They teach you to love with a softer touch and fear and revere your obsessions.

My obsessions were born in 1958. "Son, your mother's been killed" and the upshot. She was my first untouchable crush. Stephanie was a daughter or a prom date. She's dancing out of a shroud. I don't know her. *I can feel her.* She's twirling. She's showing off her prom gown. I can smell her corsage.

DAVE AND TIM built the warrant. They planned their questions and signals. They brought Orange County cops in. Two agencies conferred. A judge signed the warrant. X-Man's ex lived in Riverside County. They planned a dual approach. Dave and Tim would brace X-Man. Two cops would brace the ex. She was with X-Man in '65. She might know some stuff.

The date was set: 1/23/01.

I went home. My wife and I talked about Stephanie and digressed ourselves hoarse. I reveled in Helen's brilliance and flesh-and-blood *life.*

We rented *Bye Bye Birdie.* We scanned the crowd scenes. We couldn't spot Stephanie. Rick and I talked long-distance. Rick was happy. LAPD was forming a Cold Case Squad. It was all oldies/24-7. Rick, Dave, and Tim were set to start.

Fuck happy. Rick was thrilled. Time travel unlimited.

I rented *Pollyanna.* I saw Stephanie.

She was ten or eleven. She stood on a bandstand stage right. Hayley Mills sang "America the Beautiful." A line of girls flanked her. They all wore the Stars and Stripes.

There's Stephanie—alive and in color. She's a child on the safe side of sex. Her eyes dart. The moment flusters her. Her hair was lighter then. She's got hazel-brown eyes like me.

I hit Rewind and Fast Forward. I did it *x*-dozen times. I watched her. I caught every breath. I filled some blank spaces up.

THE BRACE WENT DOWN. It clicked like clockwork.

Two units in place. Bam—X-Man's wife leaves early. Dave and Tim walk up.

They're nervous. They've got butterflies like Godzilla. They've got badges and IDs out. They knock on the door. X-Man opens up.

He's friendly. He's not flustered. They mention an old murder. He doesn't clench up.

He invites them in. They all sit down. He appears befuddled— old murder, huh?

Dave and Tim start to explain. X-Man cuts them off.

That 16-year-old girl, right? I remember that. I was across the street. I was at a friend's house.

The sister ran over. My friend was a doctor. He wasn't in then. I ran over to help. I saw the body. The cops came. The cops shooed me out.

Oh, fuck—

He came off credible. He came off true. He smiled. He betrayed no nerves. The boom didn't drop.

Dave quizzed him. X-Man responded. The doc and wife— alive and well. Yeah, we're still in touch.

There's the boom. It fell on *you.* Oh shit, we're fuck—

They schmoozed up X-Man. His credibility held. They said good-bye and walked out.

They found the doctor. They braced him. They braced his wife concurrent. They backed X-Man up.

Heartbreaker/square one again/fluke fingerprint/months trashed and fucked.

Dave called and told me. He described "the worst day of my life." I reran *Pollyanna.* I cued Stephanie up.

It's over. It's not over. It's been a year plus. Closure is nonsense. Nothing this bad ever ends. The killer is crucial and irrelevant. He knew Stephanie for ten minutes. He never loved her. His memories are brutal and suspect.

Baby, who were you? How would you grow and who would you love? Did you know you'd touch driven men and teach them?

You've got torchbearers. Three detectives and one chronicler. We want to know you. It's *a pursuit. It’s a likelier outcome than justice.*

We’re spinning our wheels. It doesn’t matter. We get glimpses. You’re twirling in your prom gown. Color us devoted. Color you gone.

Grave Doubt

1.

HOUSTON PD/DISTRICT 6/BEAT 6870.
DATE: 5/13/81.
TIME: 9:30 P.M.
LOCATION: 8935 NORTH FREEWAY.
PREMISES: SAFEWAY PARKING LOT.
CRIME: CAPITAL MURDER.
VICTIM: BOBBY GRANT LAMBERT/WHITE MALE/53.
SUSPECT: GARY GRAHAM/BLACK MALE/17.
INCIDENT # 035207084.

The crime scene:

The Safeway lot. Rectangular. Sixty yards deep.

Night lights. Parking lanes and slots.

A fence behind the store. Small homes adjacent. Strip malls moving north.

A frontage road. Parking-lot access. A freeway adjacent.

The beat: low-shelf. Urban blight ascendant.

Motels. Gas stations. A low-end black demographic.

Eyewits state:

The victim enters the store. The victim walks the aisles. The victim grabs items.

Three packs of lunch meat, bread, cheese, milk, cookies, Ritz crackers, onions, gloves, garbage bags, a carton of Raleigh cigarettes, a six-pack of V-8.

A cashier totals the items. The victim pays with a C-note.

The victim exits the store.

He walks twenty feet. A black male walks up behind him.

Witness Bernadine Skillern observes.

She sits in her car. Two kids sit with her. Her daughter's in the store.

The black male accosts the victim.

He grabs his back pockets. The victim reacts.

He pulls away. He turns.

The black male grabs his collar. The black male puts a gun to his head.

Witness Skillern observes.

She fears a shooting. She tries to deter it. She leans on her horn.

The black male turns. Witness Skillern sees his face. The victim breaks free.

Witness Skillern hears a “pop” noise. The victim drops his grocery bag. The black male walks away.

Other wits observe. Their names:

Daniel Grady/white male/age 35. Wilma Amos/black female/ age 32. Sherian Etuk/black female/age 29.

The victim staggers. The victim weaves to the store.

Witness Skillern starts her car. The victim falls in the doorway.

Witness Skillern tails the black male. He’s in her headlights. He starts to run.

He runs around the store. Witness Skillern’s kids scream. Witness Skillern turns back.

Store employees call the cops. An ambulance shows. Paramedics examine the victim.

He’s DOA.

PATROL UNITS SHOWED. Homicide showed.

For Houston PD: Detectives W. W. Owen and J. W. Ellis.

They checked the grocery bag. They checked the gunshot wound.

Small caliber. The entry point: near the sternal notch.

They check the victim’s clothes. They found:

One comb. Two pencils. A lighter. Best Western motel matches. A key for room 208.

The vic’s driver’s license. Issued for Oregon State.

Coins: $2.07. Sixty hundred-dollar bills.

A botched heist. The killer got chump change. The killer missed six grand.

A tech crew arrived.

Techs shot the body. Techs shot the crime scene. Morgue men removed the body.

Patrol cops checked the lot. They found the vic’s van. They impounded it.

Owen and Ellis braced the wits.

Witness Skillern described the incident. Witness Skillern described the killer:

A black male. 18 to 20. 5′9″ to 6′.

Slim build. Slim face, clean-shaven. Close-cut Afro. White jacket/black slacks.

Witness Grady described the incident. Witness Grady described the killer:

A black male. Tall, slim, young. White sport coat. Small-caliber pistol.

Witness Amos went home. Witness Amos phoned Homicide.

She described the incident. She described the killer:

A black male. In his twenties. Short dark hair, clean-shaven. Black slacks/white coat.

Witness Etuk described the incident.

She's working a check stand. She hears a "pop!" outside.

She looks out the window. She sees a black male.

He wears a white blazer. He wears black slacks. The window glass blurs his face.

He backs off from the victim. He backs out of sight.

Owen and Ellis hit the Best Western.

They talked to a desk clerk. They talked to a barmaid. They talked to a guard.

Room 208: registered to Ronald M. Allen.

He was from Burbank, California. He checked out at 9:05 p.m.

Owen and Ellis checked the room. They found:

Paper slips. Names and phone numbers. Cleaning receipts for Bobby G. Lambert.

One ashtray. Cigarette butts.

Two brands. Raleigh, one other.

Owen and Ellis checked the switchboard. "Allen" made 16 toll calls.

They wrote down the numbers. They drove to the morgue. They gave the numbers to a coroner's detective.

The detective called them. He called five area codes. He hit Mrs. Ron Allen.

She said Ron split Houston. He was in Vegas now. Bobby Lambert shared his Houston motel room.

Bobby had Houston business. She didn't know what. Bobby left his wife recently.

The detective called around. The detective traced Bobby's van. The detective snagged a cop in Pima County, Arizona.

The cop said he couldn't talk now. The cop said he'd call Homicide.

Owen and Ellis drove to Homicide. The cop called them.

He said he checked Lambert out. He queried a dope line. He hit positive. Lambert was dirty.

Ellis requested more data. The cop said he'd call back.

Another cop called back. He said:

Lambert was dealing. He got popped on 8/14/80.

Oklahoma City.

Lambert flies dope in. Lambert gets nabbed. Lambert's under indictment.

Some coke. 20,000 Quaaludes.

Owen and Ellis worked all night. Detective D. W. Autrey assisted.

He drove to the impound. He checked Lambert's van.

He found:

Marijuana.

Three shotguns.

One New Mexico driver's license. One Canadian driver's license. One radio operator's license. One insurance card. One draft card.

Made out to:

Billy Francis Smith—DOB 3/1/30.

Plus:

Court docket papers. Oklahoma District Court. A bail receipt for Bobby G. Lambert.

THE AUTOPSYRAN pro forma. Ditto the forensics.

The vic died from gunshot trauma. He ate one .22 slug.

The DEA called Owen and Ellis. They laid out Bobby G.

Bobby was a dealer. Bobby was an ex–carny man.

Bobby was a con man. Bobby was a sleaze.

Bobby loved to gamble. Bobby loved Vegas. Bobby hung with a cat named Ron Allen.

Ron was a gambler. Ron was a pool shark. Ron and Bobby meant grief.

Owen and Ellis hit the Safeway. They found another eyewit.

His name was Ronald Hubbard. He worked at Safeway. He offered this story:

He was shagging carts. He saw a man outside. The man hid his face.

Hubbard walked toward the store. Hubbard heard a shot. Hubbard saw the man holding a gun.

Hubbard described the man:

Black. Early 20s. 5′5″, 120–130. Short Afro, clean-shaven. White blazer, black slacks.

Owen and Ellis called Witness Skillern. Ms. Skillern came to Homicide. Ms. Skillern worked up a composite.

Autrey and Detective Rascoe assisted.

Ms. Skillern chose feature strips. Ms. Skillern built a face.

Facial tone: F-1-1. Nose: N-9-2. Lips: L-3-1. Eyes: E-58-2. Chin: C-26-2. Hair: H-131-2.

Autrey worked the composite. Owens and Ellis worked Lambert.

They braced the wife. They braced the DEA. They braced the Pima County cops.

They got bland shit.

Lambert was a hustler. Lambert was a sleaze. Lambert shot pool in Houston.

It vibed inconsequential. The murder vibed heist.

Autrey got a call.

The caller's name was Wilma Mukes. She offered this story:

Her sister's name was Florence McDonald. Ms. McDonald went to Safeway. Their sons tagged along.

Said sons:

James Mukes/black male/age 7. Alfonzo McDonald/black male/age 10. Leodis Wilkerson/black male/age 12.

Ms. McDonald goes in the store. The boys sit in the car. The boys see the shooting.

They know the shooter. They've seen him before. He hangs near their pad.

Autrey braced Ms. McDonald. She offered this story:

The boys saw the shooting. The boys saw the shooter. The boys saw him one day later.

He stood across the street. He stood by Judy Brown's pad.

James Mukes saw him. James yelled at Leodis and Alfonzo. James yelled, "There's the man that did the shooting.”

The man ran off. The boys told Ms. McDonald.

Autrey braced Judy Brown. She offered this story:

The man sounds like Curly Scott. Curly knocked up her daughter.

She had her baby. Curly came around less.

Curly was tall and skinny. Curly was clean-shaven. Curly lived at 7339 Phillips.

Autrey checked Curly out. Detective D. W. Cook assisted.

They learned:

Curly had priors. Curly had bond forfeits. Curly had warrants extant.

Curly had four recent addresses. The Phillips pad plus three.

Autrey and Cook looked for Curly. Autrey and Cook tapped out.

Owen and Ellis rigged a photo spread.

They laid in a Curly Scott mug shot. They laid in four random males.

Witness Hubbard viewed the spread. He did not see the shooter. Witness Hubbard viewed Witness Skillern’s composite. He said it resembled the dude.

Witness Amos viewed the spread. She did not see the shooter.

Witness Skillern viewed the spread. She did not see the shooter.

Witness Etuk viewed the spread. She did not see the shooter.

Owen and Ellis looked for Witness Grady. Owen and Ellis tapped out.

The Lambert job was one week old. The Lambert job was dead.

Owen and Ellis got a call. A wrecker-driver offered this story:

It’s 5/13. It’s 10:00 p.m. He’s out in his truck.

He passes Stuebner Air Line and Gulf Bank. He’s close to Safeway. He spots two black males in a Plymouth.

They look “suspicious.” He tails them. He nails their license plate.

The black males see the truck. The black males speed up. The black males vanish.

Owen and Ellis traced the Plymouth. The owner: one Linda Ann Thomas.

Owen and Ellis braced Ms. Thomas. She offered this story:

Her son drove the car. She never did. She supplied her son’s stats.

Reginald Thomas/black male/DOB 4/6/63.

Reginald Thomas called Homicide. He offered this story:

He shopped at Safeway. His girlfriend lived close. He bought their babies' diapers there.

Owen and Ellis braced Thomas. Owen and Ellis rebraced Ms. Thomas.

Thomas stated:

He went out that night. He picked up his girlfriend. He arrived at 7:30 or 8:00.

They split. They parked off Stuebner Air Line. A truck pulled up. The driver killed his lights.

Thomas freaked. Thomas drove his girlfriend home. They arrived around 10:00.

Thomas viewed the composite. Thomas did not know the man.

Ms. Thomas said she had two more sons. Their names: Earnest and Melvin.

Melvin was in jail. The charge was Murder.

OWEN AND ELLIS made calls. Cook and Autrey ran point.

Melvin Thomas: Case 24251061.

A gunshot murder. A .22 pistol. No weapon received.

"Another suspect" tossed it. Location unknown.

Cook and Autrey called the lab. The lab ran tests.

The Thomas slug. The Lambert slug. Let's compare.

No go.

The Thomas slug was scarred. The comparison failed.

Owen and Autrey called Juvie Probation. They learned:

Melvin Thomas was popped on 5/12. Melvin Thomas did not kill Bobby Lambert.

Cook and Autrey rehit Safeway. The manager viewed the composite.

He stated:

It looked like a shoplifter. He popped him some months back.

He was about 19. He was 5′10″ to 6′. He was very thin.

The manager checked his records. The manager tapped out.

No file notes. No complaint report.

Cook and Autrey ran computer checks. Cook and Autrey tapped out.

No complaint listing. No numbers extant.

The Lambert job was twelve days old. The Lambert job was dead.

ROBBERY CALLED HOMICIDE. Detective J. W. Whiteley called Autrey.

Whiteley popped a kid. He resembled the composite. He packed a .22.

He was seventeen. His name was Gary Graham.

Graham was a heist guy. Graham went on a heist spree. Graham used various weapons.

His spree dates: 5/14 to 5/20.

They popped Graham on 5/20. They ran lineups. The heist vics ID'd Graham.

Graham was a heist guy. Graham was a rape-o. They popped him this way:

Gary Graham in 2002. He asked his supporters to show up at his prison "with rifles, shotguns, AK-47s, and whatever else is necessary to protect our rights." *(Copyright © Houston Chronicle)*

5/20/81. About 3:00 a.m. A cabbie stops for gas.

She's female. She's in her cab. She's 57 years old.

She pumps gas. Gary Graham walks up.

He says his car died. He needs a ride. The woman says okay.

Graham gets in the cab. They drive to the Tidwell exit.

Graham redirects her. They drive to an empty apartment complex.

Graham pulls a gun. Graham robs the woman. Graham gets fifteen dollars.

He's pissed. He needs six yards. He tells her he's "going to make it" with her.

She says she's too old. Graham hits her. Graham tells her not to lie.

They enter the complex. They enter a vacant unit. Graham makes the woman disrobe.

He tells her he's going to "fuck her in the ears and the eyes and everyplace else."

Graham brandishes the gun.

Graham rapes the woman.

Graham attempts anal rape. Graham fails to penetrate.

The woman fears death. The complex is empty. Her body will rot unfound.

She talks to Graham. She describes her apartment.

It's comfortable. It's warm. She might find more money.

Graham buys it. They drive to her pad.

They enter. Graham says he's got nothing to lose. He don't plan to get caught. He'll burn if he does.

Graham grabs jewelry. Graham grabs other items. His movement and balance are off.

He tells the woman to disrobe. The woman tells him to go first.

Graham disrobes. Graham gets in bed.

Graham has the gun. Graham tells the woman to "suck him."

The woman starts to disrobe. Graham starts to fall asleep.

The woman waits. Graham falls asleep. The woman grabs his gun, his clothes, and her money.

She weighs killing Graham. She decides not to. She locks Graham in her pad.

She walks to the manager's pad. The manager calls Houston PD.

Graham pulled twelve known heists. His spree ran seven days. He used partners sometimes.

His partners: at large. His .22: in the property room.

Autrey retrieved it. The lab ran tests.

The lab concluded:

It was NOT the Lambert weapon.

The Homicide team braced Graham. He denied the Lambert snuff.

He offered no alibi. He said he might have been with a woman.

He didn't know her name. He couldn't peg a location.

Owen and Ellis rigged a photo spread.

They laid in Gary Graham's photo. They laid in four other black males.

Witness Skillern viewed the spread. She said the Graham pic resembled the shooter.

But:

The shooter was darker. The shooter's face was thinner.

Inconclusive. A nonbinding ID.

Owen and Ellis propose a lineup. Ms. Skillern agrees.

9: 00 P.M. 5/27/81.

The show-up room/Houston PD.

Five black males. Jail whites. Gary Graham in slot 3.

One-way glass. Wits and cops behind it. The black males under lights.

Witness Amos is sick. Witness Amos is absent.

Witness Hubbard views the lineup. Witness Hubbard declines to ID.

He stresses:

He never saw the shooter's face. The shooter hid his face.

Witness Skillern views the lineup. Witness Skillern ID's Gary Graham.

Owen drives Ms. Skillern home. Ms. Skillern states:

She recognized Graham from his photo. The photo looked like the shooter.

But:

The man's skin was too light.

But:

She saw the live lineup. She saw the live man.

NOW she was sure.

OWEN AND ELLIS braced an assistant D.A. The D.A.'s Office filed.

ARRESTED AND CHARGED: CAPITAL MURDER/182ND DISTRICT

COURT/CAUSE 3353780.

GARY GRAHAM/HPD # 337682.

2.

The trial. Judge Rick Trevathan presiding.

Carl Hobbs for Harris County. Ron Mock and Chester Thornton for Graham.

The County had no confession. The County had no evidence. The County had a one-witness case.

The judge appointed Mock. Mock was a two-year lawyer. Thornton was three.

Thornton asked for the job. Thornton knew Graham. Thornton handled a previous beef.

Mock was first-chair counsel. Thornton was backup. Both men were black.

The County gave Mock a budget. For "investigation and research."

$500.

Mock hired a PI. Merv West charged $30 an hour.

Mock talked to Graham. Graham copped to the heist spree.

Graham copped to booze and dope habits. Graham offered an alibi: "I was high somewhere."

Thornton knew Graham. Thornton knew his story.

Graham had six siblings. Six kids cross-hatched. Different parent combos.

Graham's folks split up. Graham's dad did heist time. Graham split the 7th grade.

Graham roamed Houston. Graham caused trouble. Graham bunked with relatives. Graham fathered kids at thirteen and fifteen.

Mock thought Graham was guilty. Thornton wasn't sure.

They got the heist-spree stats. The spree stats resembled the snuff stats.

Mock issued orders. Mock told Thornton to work the family end.

Get some character wits. Lube the penalty phase.

Graham gave Mock some names. Potential alibi wits. Mock gave the names to Merv West.

West did not contact them. West sniffed the vibe: Mock thinks Graham did it.

West talked to some cops. They thought Graham did it. West assimilated their vibe.

He's guilty.

West braced Sherian Etuk. West braced Daniel Grady. They did not ID Graham.

West checked the Safeway lot. West checked the night lights.

West concluded:

Witness Skillern would be hard-pressed to see the shooter's face. The distance and lighting would impinge on her.

West checked out the victim. A cop supplied rumors.

Lambert was a con man. Lambert might have been queer.

West called some Graham family members. West glommed some anecdotes. West checked Graham's juvie record.

West rode the gestalt. He's guilty.

West worked with Mock before. West knew Mock's style.

Mock had clients presumed pure. Mock had clients presumed bad. Mock did not waste PI time on the bads.

Mock strategized. Mock consulted Thornton. They concurred:

The spree stats screwed Graham. Exclude them at the guilt phase. Eschew an alibi defense.

The judge might balk. The judge might allow spree data.

Exclude Graham's gun. Exclude the negative test.

It would bring in the heists. It would prejudice jurors.

Mock thought he could win.

Graham was a juvie. The case lacked death-penalty intent.

The trial ran a week.

Mock got the heists excluded.

Wilma Amos testified. She said she saw the victim inside the store.

They spoke. They discussed gloves.

Ms. Amos saw another man. The man wore dark pants and a white jacket. The man looked at the victim.

Ms. Amos stood in a check-stand line. The "other man" left the store.

Ms. Amos paid for her items. Ms. Amos walked out.

She heard a horn. She saw the victim and the "other man" "tusseling."

The "other man" shot the victim. The "other man" walked away.

The night lights were good.

But:

She could not ID the "other man."

Daniel Grady testified. He said his wife went shopping. He sat in his car.

The victim left the store. A black male approached him. The black male grabbed the victim's back pockets.

The victim dropped his groceries. The victim pulled away. The black male pulled a gun. The black male shot him.

Grady saw the black male's face. Grady could not ID him.

Bernadine Skillern testified. She said she sat in her car. Two kids were with her.

The lot lights were good. She could see people. She could recognize them.

A black male approached the victim. The black male was Gary Graham.

A tussle occurred.

Ms. Skillern honked her horn.

Graham turned. Graham looked straight at her.

Graham shot the victim. Graham fast-walked away.

Ms. Skillern kicked her engine. Ms. Skillern kicked her lights. Ms. Skillern tailed Graham.

Graham turned. Graham looked back. Graham started to run.

The kids started to scream. Ms. Skillern stopped her pursuit.

Mock did not challenge Amos and Grady. Mock did not impugn their non-IDs. Mock did not want to risk equivocal answers.

Mock cross-examined Skillern. Mock did not impugn her. Mock referred to Gary Graham as the killer.

Trial pages 360–361. Mock to Skillern:

"According to your testimony, Mr. Lambert would have been to the defendant's left at the time they first had an encounter?"

Trial page 375. Mock to Skillern:

"All right, so you had seen the defendant's right side when you first approached him?"

Trial page 378. Mock to Skillern:

"I think your testimony was that as you blew your horn, he turned his head toward you for a split second?"

Skillern to Mock: "Meaning Mr. Graham?"

Mock to Skillern: "Yes, ma'am."

The trial wound down. Two alibi wits volunteered.

Loraine Johnson. Jo Carolyn Johnson. Graham's cousins.

They knew Gary got popped. They knew in May. They offered alibis in October.

They went to the courthouse. They found Ron Mock. They offered this story:

Gary was innocent. Gary went to a party on 5/13.

The party occurred in an alley. Loraine had a toothache. Cousin William's birthday was 5/15. That's why they knew the date.

The party was informal. The party went late. William was there. Five women showed.

Gary arrived before 6:00. Gary stayed through 1:00 a.m.

Gary left one time only. Gary and William walked to a liquor store.

It was six blocks away. They bought some liquor. They walked back.

Mock disdained the story. Mock shined on the wits.

Mock said Gary would be found guilty. Mock said Gary *was* guilty. Mock said he'd try to save Gary's life.

Mock wanted penalty wits. Mock wanted to build mitigation.

The trial ended. The jury adjourned. The verdict was GUILTY.

THE PENALTY PHASE. Pro–Gary Graham:

Graham's stepfather testifies. He states:

Gary was nice to him. Gary visits his mother. Gary mows the yard. Gary cleans and helps his mother.

Gary cares for his mother. Gary is not violent. Gary tries to provide for his kids.

Graham's grandmother testifies. She states:

Gary stays with her sometimes. Gary's mother has a nervous condition.

Gary never gives her trouble. Gary loves the Lord. Gary has never been violent.

The County presents its case. The heist spree explicates.

Robbery. Thirteen counts. Eyewit IDs.

The dates: 5/14–5/20/81.

5:30 p.m. 5/14/81:

Graham robs a man. Graham employs an accomplice. Graham employs a Magnum revolver.

Graham steals the man’s briefcase. Graham steals the man’s car.

9:00 p.m. 5/14/81:

Graham hits a car wash. Graham displays a revolver. Graham robs two women.

He calls them “bitch.” He steals their Cadillac. He leaves the car he drove up.

10:00 p.m. 5/14/81:

Graham employs the Cadillac. Graham employs an accomplice.

They hit a Stop & Go lot. They jump in a van. They accost two men. They demand their watches and money.

Graham pulls a gun. Graham fires it. Graham nails a man in the neck.

The bullet hits the man’s larynx. The man survives.

Graham steals the van. The accomplice escapes in the Cadillac.

4:30 p.m. 5/15/81:

Graham hits a Woolco parking lot. Graham approaches a man. Graham asks for a ride.

The man agrees. The man drives him to a Jack in the Box. Graham says it’s the wrong one.

The man pulls out. Graham pulls a shotgun. Graham steals the man’s van.

6:30 p.m. 5/15/81:

Graham hits a parking lot. Graham sees a man in a Cadillac. Graham asks him to jump-start his van.

The man agrees. The man prepares his battery.

Graham pulls a shotgun. Graham herds him into the van. Graham calls him a “motherfucker.” Graham threatens to blow him away.

Graham steals his money and checkbook. Graham steals his Cadillac.

8:30 p.m. 5/15/81:

Graham drives the Cadillac to a nightclub. Graham approaches a man outside.

Graham pulls a shotgun. Graham steals the man’s toolbox and keys.

The man reports the heist. The man enters the club. The man exits at midnight. He’s with a woman.

12:00 midnight. 5/16/81:

Graham enters the parking lot. Graham has an accomplice.

They attempt a heist. Graham pulls a shotgun.

The man has no swag. Graham and the accomplice disperse.

1:00 a.m. 5/16/81:

The Caddy runs out of gas. Graham pushes it. An accomplice assists.

They push it to a gas station. A man and woman assist.

The accomplice pulls a shotgun. Graham and the accomplice try to steal the man's van.

The man resists. The accomplice shoots him in the leg. Graham and the accomplice steal the van. The man is dragged 50 feet.

5/16/81:

A family's car breaks down. They stand out on a highway.

Graham pulls up. He has an accomplice.

They offer help. They give the father a ride.

Graham pulls a shotgun. Graham tells the man he's going to kill him. Graham aims the shotgun and fires.

The man knocks the barrel down. Graham shoots him in the leg.

Graham steals his necklace, watch, and money. Graham tells him they're going back to kill his family. Graham throws him out of the car.

11:00 p.m. 5/18/81:

Graham hits a parking lot. He employs an accomplice. They accost a man in a parked car.

Graham pulls a pistol. Graham opens the passenger door. The accomplice opens the driver's-side door.

They rob the man. They steal his billfold and watch. They steal his car.

12:00 midnight. 5/19/81:

Graham hits a parking lot. Graham employs an accomplice.

Three people flank two cars. Two men, one woman. Graham and the accomplice approach.

Graham has a pistol. The accomplice has a shotgun.

They search the people.

Graham says, "You son of a bitch, motherfucker, give me your shit."

Graham hits a man with his gun. Graham cocks the gun. Graham puts the gun to the man’s mouth. Graham demands his watch, ring, and wallet.

Graham touches the woman’s breasts. Graham steals her wedding ring.

Evening. 5/19/81:

Graham hits a parking garage. Graham asks a man for directions.

Graham pulls a revolver. Graham steals the man’s wallet.

Graham gets in the man’s car. Graham makes the man drive around the garage. Graham tells the man that he’s killed six people.

5/19/81:

Graham hits a parking lot. Graham approaches a woman. Graham offers to buy her car.

The woman says no. Graham says he’s got a gun. Graham demands her car keys. Graham steals her car.

Nine victims testified. Nine wits described Graham’s actions.

A Youth Council worker testified. She said she knew Graham. She knew his reputation.

His reputation was bad.

The penalty phase concluded. The jury voted Death.

GRAHAM WENT TO death row. Graham copped to ten heist counts. Graham got twenty years per.

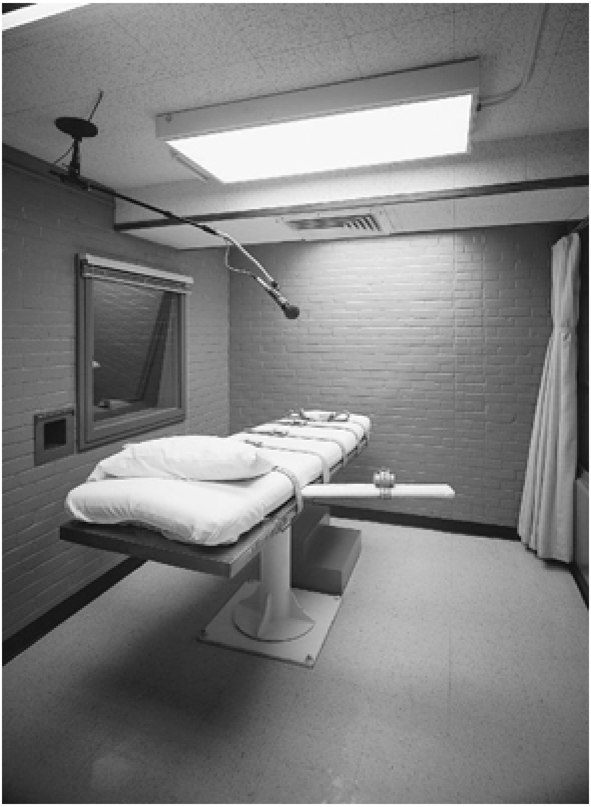
Judge Trevathan appoints appellate counsel. He files Graham’s automatic appeal.

Rejected/Court of Criminal Appeals/6-12-84.

7/13/87: Graham’s lawyers file State Habeas Corpus. Rejected/2-19-88.

2/23/88: Graham’s lawyers file Federal Habeas. Rejected/ 2-24-88.

8/31/88: The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals affirms the rejection.



The lethal injection room at the Texas state prison in Huntsville. *(Copyright © Guy Koppenburg, 2003)*

Said court issues a stay of execution pending two Supreme Court decisions.

7/3/89: The Supreme Court vacates the Fifth Circuit's judgment. It remands Graham's case to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

3/7/90: The Fifth Circuit vacates Graham's death sentence.

1/3/92: The Fifth Circuit reverses the previous decision. It affirms the denial of Habeas relief. The Supreme Court affirms the judgment—1/25/93.

4/20/93: Graham refiles State Habeas.

4/27/93: The Court of Criminal Appeals denies relief.

4/28/93: Governor Richards grants a stay of execution. The State District Court resets the date: 6/2/93.

4/28/93: Graham's lawyers file a Writ of Certiorari.

5/24/93: The Supreme Court denies said writ.

6/2/93: The Court of Criminal Appeals stays Graham's execution pending a Supreme Court decision.

Said decision goes down. The Trial Court sets a new date: 8/17/93.

7/21/93: Graham files a civil suit. The suit requests a Board of Pardons hearing. The hearing is scheduled for 8/10/93.

The hearing occurs. The Board of Pardons files an appeal notice. Graham's execution is stayed.

4/20/94: The Court of Criminal Appeals voids said stay.

The process continued. The process attenuated.

Graham got new lawyers. They filed new writs.

They stressed the alleged incompetence of Graham's trial counsel. They stressed the sole eyewit. They stressed the contradicting eyewits. They stressed the alibi wits.

Briefs/writs/motions/hearings/appeals.

Lethal injections scheduled and postponed.

Publicity. Graham—pro and con. The Lambert snuff as justice cause célèbre.

Defense committees. Hollywood endorsements. Amnesty International. A twenty-minute agitprop film.

A schmaltzy soundtrack. Gary Graham—Nelson Mandela West.

The process dragged. Graham stayed on death row. Graham changed his name to Shaka Sankofa.

The process dragged into 2000.

3.

Houston was the shits.

I caught it coming in. I caught it off a high freeway.

Some strip malls were new. Some strip malls were old. Future strip malls stood half-completed.

The floor plan jarred. The color scheme clashed.

Jerry-rigged suburbs. Southwest pastels. Too much white on beige.

It was humid. It was hot in November.

I flew in with my friend Rick Jackson. We brought our paperwork. Graham's appellate lawyer supplied it.

Rick was a PI. He was ex-LAPD. He worked murders in Hollywood. He worked major crimes at Robbery-Homicide. He sandwiched in a USC master's.

Rick loved crime. Rick loved crime past his vocation. Rick loved the riddle of motive and lives in duress. Rick loved crime as social history. Rick loved crime with the guilelessness of a kid discovering sex.

Rick cosigned the death penalty. Rick sent two men to death row. One man fried. One man killed himself.

I cosigned the death penalty. I dismissed the inherent inequities based on class and race. I believed in punishment and the ultimate censure of vicious and wanton acts. I knew the death penalty did not deter murder. I believed that the death penalty unified and set a tone of intolerance for murder. I countered all rebuttals steeped in mitigation. Poverty did not move me. The cumulative effect of historical racism did not move me. I weighed systemic injustices against the necessity for judiciously applied vengeance and viewed the abrogation of individual rights as a palatable trade. My bottom line—thoroughly reasoned and in no way disingenuous:

If you have to know why we need the death penalty, you're never going to know.

One counterthought torqued me. One quasi-rebuttal lurked.

I dismissed most mercy pleas based on mitigation. I dismissed the unequal levy of death decrees against people of color. I could not condone the execution of innocent men and women.

Hence Gary Graham.

I read the paperwork. Rick read it. We discussed it.

The details played ambiguous. The details contradicted and counterweighted. The details lacked the cohesive logic of innocence or guilt.

Graham's spree follows the Lambert snuff. Some snuff details and spree details cohere. Graham says he's killed people. Graham tells a victim: If I'm caught, I'll burn.

Witness Skillern's ID. Variant IDs. The alibi wits.

Rick's bottom line:

He wouldn't file a case off a single-wit ID.

We checked into our hotel. We prepared to roll.

We had a phone list. Rick made calls. We arranged interviews.

Rick called Detective Owen. Owen worked for the DEA now.

Owen was brusque. Owen said he was vague on the Graham case.

Rick called Detective Ellis. Ellis lived in San Diego. Ellis said he was vague on the Graham case.

Witness Grady was dead. We tried to locate Witness Amos. We tapped out.

Rick called Witness Skillern. Rick left a message. Rick asked her to call the hotel.

Rick called Witness Etuk. Rick called Chester Thornton and Ron Mock. They agreed to interviews.

Rick called Florence McDonald. She promised to find her son and James Mukes. Leodis Wilkerson was long gone.

Rick called the D.A.'s Office. An assistant pledged more paperwork.

Rick called Witness Hubbard. Rick left a message. Rick asked him to call the hotel.

Rick called the Terrell Unit. Rick confirmed our meet with Gary Graham.

We studied our papers. We gleaned new details.

Per photo spread #2:

Witness Skillern views mug shots. Graham is clean-shaven. Graham has short hair.

Four men have longer hair. Four men have facial hair.

Ms. Skillern said the shooter was clean-shaven. Ms. Skillern said he had short hair.

Four shots bear dates. Four shots bear booking numbers. Graham's numbers are obscured.

Ms. Skillern says Graham looks like the shooter.

But:

The shooter had darker skin.

Ms. Skillern views a live lineup. Ms. Skillern ID's Graham.

Graham was in the lineup. Graham was in photo spread #2.

Graham was the only man in both displays.

Ms. Skillern knows this. She tells Detective Owen. She recalled Graham from spread #2.

From the defense brief. A known expert comments.

Dr. Elizabeth Loftus:

There is an enhanced likelihood that a witness will identify the person in the lineup whom she has seen in the photo spread, whether or not the person is actually the one whose crime she witnessed.

. . . *This familiarity may be mistakenly related back to the crime rather than back to the photograph where it may properly belong.*

Rick found the logic credible. I agreed.

From the defense brief. Two wits volunteer.

4/93:

Malcolm Stephens sees news spots on Gary Graham. He relates them to an event.

It's 5/13/81. Stephens approaches the Safeway. His wife is with him.

A black male runs in front of their car.

He's "about 5′5″ . . . compact, but not big, short hair, no beard or anything like that."

They approach the store. They get close. They see the victim prone.

Cut to:

1982.

Mr. Stephens sees the black male again.

He's by some apartments. He's familiar.

They talk. Mr. Stephens tries to place him.

He puts it together. He's the parking-lot dude.

Mr. Stephens sees him "several more times." Mr. Stephens "learned more about him."

Cut to:

4/93. Gary Graham on TV.

He's *not* the Safeway killer. He's not the parking-lot dude.

Mr. Stephens comes forth. Mr. Stephens views the Skillern composite.

It looks like the parking-lot dude. It does not look like Gary Graham.

I thought it was bullshit. Street jive triumphant. Rick agreed.

I called my friend Bill Stoner. Bill worked Sheriff's Homicide. He worked it fifteen years.

I asked him if he'd file on a one-wit ID.

Bill said, "No way."

HOUSTON WAS BIG. Freeway grids crosshatched it. Dive neighborhoods stretched wide.

Rick dug the grid aspect. Heist men loved freeways. On-ramps greased quick escapes.

Graham stayed mobile. His spree turf stretched wide. He dodged hot-car bulletins. He spreed for seven days.

I drove. Rick navigated. We toured black Houston.

The strip malls were old. The houses were shabby. Triple locks and window bars reigned.

The color scheme held. Southwest shades abundant. The bars and steel doors clashed.

Witness Skillern didn't call. We left a card in her mailbox. Witness Hubbard didn't call. We left a card on his door.

It was hot. Pedestrians walked slow. Houston was heat-warped.

We drove by the alibi alley. We drove to the Safeway. We logged six miles between.

The Safeway was defunct. The building was a new-car show-room.

We toured the parking lot. We toured in daylight.

I turned off the sun. I turned on the night lights. I added vintage cars.

I added flustered witnesses. I saw what they saw.

Witness Skillern sees Gary Graham. Graham's 5′9″. Graham is thin.

Witness Grady sees a man. He's "tall and slim." He wears a white sport coat.

Witness Amos sees a man. He's "in his twenties."

Witness Etuk sees a man. He wears black slacks and a white blazer. Windows blur his face.

Witness Hubbard sees a man. He's 5′5″, 130. He's "in his early twenties." He hides his face.

Three boys see a local dude. They recognize him. They provide no other description.

The initial statements cohere on clothing. The initial statements diverge on height.

Subsequent affidavits recohere.

Witness Etuk—'93 affidavit—less than 5′6″. Witness Amos— '93 affidavit—5′4″. Witness Stephens—'93 affidavit—5′5″. Witness Wilkerson—'93 affidavit—shorter than the 5′6″ victim.

Ambiguous. A partial consensus in 1981. A greater retrospective consensus.

I said it was all fucked up.

Rick praised indoor murders.

We braced Alfonzo McDonald. We braced him at his pad.

His family watched. They ran the TV concurrent.

Rich charmed them. He played up his white beard. He said he was Saint Nick in disguise.

We questioned McDonald. He offered this story:

He's eight years old. He's in his mother's wagon.

He's with Leodis and James. He sees a tussle. The white guy's shorter and heavier than the black guy.

He hears shots. The white man runs in the store. The black man runs away.

The cops quizzed Leodis mostly. Leodis was twelve. Some cops came around. Some cops displayed pictures.

That's all he knew. He was a kid then.

WE BRACED SHERIAN ETUK. She offered this story:

She was a fast checker. She worked the express line. She got bored. She watched people for fun.

5/13/81:

She's checking. She's got downtime. She looks out the window.

She sees a man. She thinks he's cute. She studies him.

He's black. He's short. He's muscular. He's dark complected. He's wearing a turtleneck. He's wearing dark pants and a tan jacket. It might be vice versa.

He's late 20s/early 30s. He's got a low-cut Afro.

She's inside. He's outside. He's leaning on a column.

She's checking. He's loitering. She peeks at him. She peeks ten to thirty minutes.

Their eyes meet. He's good-looking. He's well-dressed.

She's checking. She's bored. An old girl's counting coins.

She looks outside. She hears a "pop!" She sees muzzle light.

A white man staggers up.

He makes the store. He collapses. The cute man walks off.

She transfers to another store. She fears reprisals. The killer might be a "hit man."

Her account contradicted her initial account. She said she never saw the man's face.

I said it was all fucked up.

Rick said hit men were out. Serial killers were in.

RON MOCK HAD asuite downtown. His office was Black History Month.

Wall paintings. Photos. Malcolm X and Dr. King. Muhammad Ali.

Mock was gracious. Mock was feisty. Mock was blunt.

Mock said, “Gary Graham’s a dumb-ass son of a bitch.”

Mock said, “His lawyers educated him to be articulate.”

Mock said, “He’s full of born-again bullshit.”

Rick said, “Do you think Graham did it?”

Mock said, “Yes.”

I said, “Did he admit the crime to you?”

Mock said, “No.”

I stretched out. Rick stretched out. We sensed a monologue.

Mock delivered.

He talked. He fucked with an unlit cigar.

Bernadine Skillern was gooood. He didn’t impugn her. She was “strong as an acre of garlic.”

Two women showed up. Alibi wits. He didn’t use them. They weren’t credible.

The case was all strategy. His budget impinged. He got $500.

He excluded the heists at the guilt phase. He looked for character wits. He tapped out cold.

Rick cited Merv West’s affidavit. West claimed you sandbagged Graham.

Mock denied it. Mock stressed his strategy call. Mock said he’d try Graham the same way today.

I cited the other eyewits. I cited their descriptions.

Mock cited strategy.

He didn’t press them. He didn’t want to risk equivocation.

I shut my eyes. I screened pictures.

I conjured eyewits. I conjured spatial perspectives. Mock described Graham’s heist spree. Mock described his rape.

My pictures blurred. Mock presumed guilt. I leaned toward his assessment.

WE DINED WITH Chester Thornton. We let him expound.

Thornton was gracious. Thornton was perceptive. Thornton was blunt.

He wasn’t sure Graham did it. He wasn’t sure he did not. He knew Graham. He handled his juvie case. Juvie records were sealed. He refused to divulge data.

I stretched out. Rick stretched out. We sensed a monologue.

Thornton delivered.

He knew Graham already. He had more bench time. He should have run the show.

Ron Mock was an insider. He secured court appointments. He played the game well.

Judges sided with prosecutors routinely. Judges assigned defense counsel in capital cases routinely. Judges looked for adequate and noncombative lawyers.

Competent lawyers. No inspired defenses. No reversals on appeal.

Thornton spoke abstractly. He did not condemn Ron Mock flat-out.

He cited poor strategy. He cited Merv West's affidavit. He cited West's early presumption of guilt. He cited West's lackluster job.

He found one alibi wit compelling. Jo Carolyn Johnson made sense.

He questioned Graham's overall counsel. He assumed partial blame.

He critiqued the Texas court-appointment system. He critiqued the death penalty.

Play-ball lawyers got capital cases. They notched big paydays. They contributed to judges' reelection campaigns.

Texas law ran exclusionary. Death-penalty opponents could not serve on capital juries. Their opposition meant they could "not discharge the law."

The prosecution trumped Graham's lawyers. It occurred at voir dire.

They got their jury. They got their consensus.

We'll "discharge the law." We'll condemn off one ID.

Dinner wound down. Thornton and Rick had dessert.

I screened witness perspectives.

THE TERRELL UNIT:

Gun huts. Reinforced fences. Barbed-wire balls.

One-story cell blocks. White-glazed brick. High guard-to-con numbers.

Terrell was new. Terrell was adjunct death row. The State executed at Huntsville.

A guard boss escorted us. A PR man tagged along.

Terrell sparkled. Inmates passed by. They wore white jump-suits.

We hit a hallway. We saw the interview slots.

There's Gary Graham—aka Shaka Sankofa.

He's mid-sized. He's lean. He's sweating.

A glass wall enclosed him. It bisected two cubicles.

His. Ours. Wall phones for conversation.

We settled in. Graham had his phone. Rick and I shared ours.

We explained our purpose. We stated our credentials.

Rick said he was ex-LAPD. Rick said he'd never file a one-wit case.

We schmoozed Graham. We lubed him. Rick called him "Shaka." I called him "Mr. Sankofa."

Rick asked him when he went Muslim. Graham bristled. He said "Sankofa" was an African name.

We shitcanned the pap. Graham consulted a defense summary.

He spieled.

His epic raw deal. His fucked-up trial. The Hollywood cats out to spring him.

He spoke precisely. He spoke grammatically.

I diverted his spiel. I wanted to contextualize 5/13/81.

Will he see the date as a demarcation line? Will he know which events pre- and postdated it—because he killed a man that night? Will he reveal his guilt through this chronology?

I asked questions. Rick asked questions. We passed our phone back and forth.

Graham revealed shit.

He said he pulled his spree bombed.

He boozed. He sniffed coke. He smoked weed. He popped black mollys.

He consulted his summary. He said he copped to ten heists. He could not recall dates. He could not recall his accomplices.

I mentioned weapons. Graham stressed his .22. The cops exonerated it.

Rick mentioned other weapons.

Graham said he used a shotgun. Graham said he used a ".45 Mag." Graham said he bought them on the street.

Graham admitted that he used other weapons. Graham undermined his seized-gun logic.

He could have had another .22. He could have shot Lambert with it.

Graham got pissed. He had a canned pitch. He wanted to revive it.

Rick mentioned his shotgun assault. Graham lied. Graham said the guy grabbed the gun. The gun popped accidental.

I mentioned the rape. Graham lied. Graham said it was consensual sex.

The woman claimed she was raped. He didn't contest it. The D.A. never filed.

I explained why.

They had you for murder. They had you for ten heists.

Graham protested. Graham offered this story:

A friend drove him to a club. He met the woman. They drove to her pad.

They got drunk. They had consensual sex. They got in a beef.

He fell asleep. He woke up. The cops were there.

The woman said he stole her money. It was bullshit. *His* money was gone.

Rick took over. Rick let Graham talk.

I stared at him. Rick and I shared the receiver.

Graham said he stayed at his grandma's house. He had a '65 Mustang. The engine was out.

Graham described his trial. Graham described his appeals. Graham described his "community support."

His syntax lapsed. He malapropped. He reverted to street jive.

I sat back. I let Rick talk and listen.

I studied Graham. I watched his lips. I waived guilt versus innocence. I waived his arguably unjust ordeal.

He was a thieving, raping, misanthropic sack of shit. He was meretricious appetite and cunningly justified self-pity. He was conscienceless and remorseless. He was monstrously empty.

The PR man showed. Our time was up.

RICK HAD FRIENDS near Houston. We detoured for dinner.

We discussed Gary Graham. Rick shared my assessment.

We discussed guilt versus innocence. We both leaned toward guilt. We both had doubts.

Rick's friends were great. We laughed and bullshitted. We rehashed historical crimes.

We dined at a golf club. I phased in and out of the talk.

Culture shock grabbed me. The fairway view and death row.

I said, “Fuck the death penalty.”

4.

Witness Skillern dodged us.

We traced her to her daughter’s house. We left a card.

Rick called the daughter. The daughter ran point.

No. She won’t see you.

The press burned her. The activists burned her. Call her lawyer.

We bagged it.

Rick flew home. I flew home.

We flew home sans indictment. We flew home sans exoneration.

I flew home apostatized.

I didn’t thank or blame Gary Graham. I thanked and blamed spatial perspectives. I thanked and blamed skewed memories and height variance.

0.9% Sodium Chloride
3
2
3
2

It takes two minutes and $86.08 worth of sodium thiopental, pancuronium bromide, and potassium chloride to execute a prisoner. *(Copyright © Guy Koppenburg, 2003)*

I thanked Chester Thornton. I perched that grave man near my heart.

He taught. He explicated. He worked in ellipsis.

He ran anti-blues riffs. No rhetoric on racism. No vote for reparation. No glorified black victimhood à la Jesse Jackson.

He didn't know if Graham did it. He shared blame for Graham's plight. He indicted the systemic corruption he worked in. He set his polemic in Harris County, Texas.

He layered in statistics. He let me extrapolate.

The full house on Huntsville death row. The Harris County Wing. DNA reversals. Sixty-odd convicts released nationwide.

Joe Stalin said it:

"One death is a tragedy. A thousand deaths is a statistic."

I extrapolated. It was easy. My bottom-line resistance dissolved.

A flawed system. A proven nondeterrent. A proven vouchsafe of judicial error. The empirically based evidence that some innocent fry.

A mass-market palliative. A sop to the fatuous notion of "closure." A dialogue diverted and subsumed by details of wantonly afflicted murder. The institutional catharsis of human sacrifice.

Thornton lectured well. Thornton sermonized interactively. He withheld Sacco and Vanzetti. He placed me under night lights and let me develop conclusions.

I labored with the prosaics. A prosecutor's appellate brief helped.

A woman named Roe Wilson wrote it. The brief rebutted the defense summary with stern force.

It dissected the contradicting eyewits. It buttressed Witness Skillern's account. It trashed the alibi wits' affidavits. It portrayed them as jerry-rigged and possibly collusive. It logically rebutted the defense critique of the photo-spread procedure.

Ms. Wilson thought Graham did it. His appellate defense disagreed.

Ron Mock thought Graham did it. The cops agreed. Rick Jackson leaned that way.

I leaned that way. Logic took me there. Legal doubts detoured me. The solo ID constrained my full vote.

From the Holy Bible. Deuteronomy 17:6:

"On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses, he that is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness."

Gary Graham might die this year. This piece is my petition to spare his wretched life.

Postscript: Gary Graham was executed on 6/22/2000.

My Life as a Creep

Sex almost killed me. I managed this without human contact.

It was a stretch. I worked at it. The process consumed nine years. It was a self-willed immolation.

I won't indict the era. The '60s and '70s did not sanction me. I disavowed the counterculture ethos and disdained the wild history I lived through. I won't condemn my country and its alleged puritan code. That code does not exist as verifiable fact. Snotty Europeans invented it and obscured its origins. They love and hate America. They worship our culture and wonder how it got so big, bad, and brilliant. They are vexed by the notion that America fucks more than the rest of the world combined and continues to challenge the urge.

I'm an American. I've got horns and a challenging nature. I've got Calvinist instincts. They balance my profligate side. I came to get laid and explore my own soul.

That balance kicked in late. It did not exist in the '60s and '70s. The balance then was booze versus dope and which woman to jump in my dreams.

This memoir is a three-count indictment. Count one: I lied and stole and spawned bad juju. Count two: I did it in a cravenly circumspect manner. Count three: I creeped out the whole female race.

The indictment is self-proffered. That gives it some oomph. This memoir is my jury brief and mitigation plea.

Sex made me do it.

1.

A hippie fuckhead did my horoscope. We shared some T-Bird and discussed it. He said my chart was a bummer.

Pisces meant passive. My Scorpio moon meant sex and hot passion. He saw potential conflict. I was born under a baaad sign.

It was 1967. I was 19. I stood 6′3″ and weighed 140. My father had a 16″ shlong. I labored under this Oedipal trauma. I had severe acne. Pizza-pit pustules on my back and forehead. I had short hair in the Summer of Love.

I lived in L.A. My parents were dead. I was a draft-exempt dropout. I was kicked out of school in '65. My father let me join the Army. I bopped to Fort Polk, Louisiana.

I hated the Army. It scared me. I regretted my enlistment and plotted my escape. My father had two strokes. I exploited his illness and faked a nervous breakdown.

My psycho act worked. The Army shitcanned me. I was free, white, and seventeen.

I returned to L.A. I forged my father's last three Social Security checks and cashed them. I found a cheap pad at Beverly and Wilton.

The old man was profane and sex-obsessed to the end. I watched him die. His last discernable words were: "Try to pick up every waitress who serves you."

I did not fulfill his last wish. I freaked out on sex in my own unique manner.

Beverly and Wilton was downscale and wholly prosaic. It adjoined Hancock Park. Hancock Park was high swank and alluring. It was full of well-scrubbed girls in pleated skirts and cashmere sweaters. They lived in big Spanish and Tudor houses. I wanted in.

I worked busboy and dishwasher gigs. I got a C-note a month off my mother's insurance. My aunt in Wisconsin sent me the money.

I read crime novels and went to crime movies. I shoplifted food, books, and liquor. I got popped once. I was six months short of eighteen. I was too old to adopt and too young to live solo. I did two days at Georgia Street Juvie. The court declared me an "emancipated juvenile."

The decree included formal probation. I met my PO once a month and snow-jobbed him. I had three pals named Lloyd, Fritz, and Daryl. I was their stooge. They lived with their parents. I was parent-free and had my own pad. They dug me for that reason. We boozed and smoked weed at my crib. They teased me. They ragged on my zits and sad-sack demeanor. I ignored them and popped off to a fantasy cloud.

3 10 71 LOS ANGELES POLICE
BK 1464 434

James Ellroy's mug shot, from a 3/10/71 drunk-driving bust. *(Photo courtesy of the LAPD)*

The cloud was SRO. Hancock Park girls joined me. The white wisps billowed.

I turned 18. It was March ’66. I was a street-legal adult with no stated agenda. I got off probation. I drank and smoked weed and took time shares on that cloud. The cloud was a motel/love shack. It housed the Sexcapades of 1966.

My time shares passed too quickly. Masturbation took 3.4 minutes. Booze and weed sparked and hindered my fantasies. I could not sustain narrative lines. I could not give myself to all the women I craved.

Women and girls scared me. I could not address them drunk, stoned, or sober. I torched for Fritz’s sister Heidi. She did not reciprocate. I torched for her friend Kay. She did not reciprocate. I torched for girls named Missy, Julie, and Kathy. I torched Hancock Park to the ground.

Hancock Park was a magnet. The pull was affluence and sex. I grew up poor and enticingly adjacent. My father worked intermittently. Our pad stunk. Our dog shat on the floors. Women were pictures in magazines and silhouettes in windows. I saw my mother nude. I saw her in bed with men. I caught my father in bed with a classmate’s mother and framed a close-up of the mechanics. Hancock Park was a paint-by-numbers work in progress. I had some colors and instincts. My brushstrokes were too broad for the compartments.

Fritz was in college. The grind wore him thin. He found some Dr. Feelgoods and copped amphetamine scripts. The shit jacked him up for long cram sessions.

He gave me his excess stash. I found my narrative voice. Uppers gored my gonads and scaled my skull and cleared my climb to Cloud 9.

The high lasted 12-plus hours. It allowed me to brain-screen epic fantasies. I courted and captured my crush objects and worked in some sleazy scenes. Uppers torqued my imagination. Euphoric narratives resulted. Uppers dried up my zits and gave me my father’s shlong.

I jacked off for twelve hours a pop. Climax was not an option or a possibility. My dope-depleted dick shriveled and flopped in my hand.

My fantasies conformed to set lines. Love and sex got equal play. I laid on the tenderness. I etched explicit details softly.

I lusted for a murder victim named Elizabeth Short. She was known as the Black Dahlia. I discovered her in the wake of my mother’s murder. Betty was my mother transposed. I knew it on a pop-psych level. I traveled back to ’46 and rescued her. We coupled at the Biltmore Hotel. Betty showed me the nude pics she allegedly posed for. I got off on them as I condemned them.

I loved a TV actress named June Harding. She was a high-end ingenue. She had a steady gig on *The Richard Boone Show*. She did a few guest shots on *The Fugitive* and costarred in some lox about nuns.

June Harding was tallish and slender. She had dark hair and eyes. She vibed brainpower and self-knowledge. She was wholesome. She was a dare. She was young. She didn’t know what she wanted.

She secretly wanted Yours Truly. Dexedrine and Dexamyl convinced me. I gave her access to the secret thoughts I withheld from God and my buddies. She dug the whole quilt. Crime books, dogs, and classical music. Sports cars. Victory in 'Nam. The Lutheran Church wasn't that bad. Don't you pray when you get scared?

We got married. We made love a great deal. We got a big pad in Hancock Park. June starred in TV shows. I chased the Dahlia killer full-time.

I had my Hancock Park harem. Soul mates on a cloud. Kathy and Kay rated marriage. Julie and Missy rated dates at the Swinger Motel.

I was picking up pop-culture vibes. Experimentation was in. The swinger ethos transcended class strictures. It had to be true. Hugh Hefner said so.

Hancock Park was rife with fortyish women. I observed them obsessively. They lounged by backyard pools and abused their Latin domestics. They were upper-class moms with teenaged daughters and time on their hands. They were bored, vexed, and horny—sirens from the pens of my favorite "mainstream" authors, Harold Robbins and Irving Wallace.

I watched them shop on Larchmont. Their skirts hiked and stretched. I memorized their faces and gave them my mother's body. I gave them a yen for young flesh.

Mine. Julie's and Missy's.

Hancock Park rocked to our fervor. Three-ways reigned. It was a sordid and joyous ode to inclusion. Sex was divine and dirty concurrent. It was everything. It was a freakish glandular disposition. I reveled in God's joke. I shared it with my body.

Comedowns ended my stories. The dope morphed out of my system. I became a widower and libertine bereft.

Fly, crash and burn. Dehydration. Sleeplessness and exhaustion. Mental fatigue. Itchy skin. The Hancock Park Eviction Blues. The punch line to God's Big Joke.

I drank my way out of it. I screened women's faces until the screen went black.

Fritz lost his upper script. I lost Hancock Park.

I tried to score my own prescriptions. I went to some Dr. Feelgoods and said I had to lose weight. They didn't buy it. They said I should *gain* weight. I put out bad vibes. I couldn't con the collusively inclined.

The widower bereft. The libertine shackled.

Fritz took pity. He got me a date with his sister. Heidi drove. I squirmed and chewed Clorets to kill my booze breath.

Heidi cut me off at date one. She set me up with her loser friend Cathy. She billed me as a tall guy with his own apartment.

Cathy was still in high school. She was dowdy and plump. She dragged me to *The Sound of Music.*

I killed a short dog of T-Bird at intermission. Cathy asked me if I drank to forget. Her parents were drunks. She knew the drill and knew my story. My mother was murdered. My father was dead. She was hot to mother me and cosign my shit.

We went out six or seven times. I described my shoplifting exploits. Cathy scolded me. We parked and kissed sans tongue.

Cathy held the line there. She refused to escalate. I tried everything short of brute force. My theatrics exhausted her. She put up roadblocks. She dragged me to her friends' pads for little soirees. She knew she could muzzle me in their presence.

Her plan backfired.

I met some new Hancock Park girls. I coopted Cathy's pedigree and acted like Hancock Park was my birthright. I saw some Hancock Park interiors. I dug the wood-paneled walls and arched doorways. I met some fortyish mothers. They smiled and glowed and showed me their bodies in motion. I memorized some fresh fantasy backdrops.

I visited bathrooms and checked out medicine chests. I saw pills galore. I memorized labels. I started to get An Idea.

I called one of Cathy's friends and promoted a date. We saw the flick *Harper* and necked in Fern Dell Park. The girl shot me some tongue.

I dumped Cathy. The tongue girl dumped me. I called Heidi. She blew me off. I called her friend Kay. She told me to get bent and die.

I was a teenage leper. I was an acquired taste that no one ever acquired. I acted on That Idea.

Christmas '66.

I broke into Fritz and Heidi's house. The family was gone. I entered through the kitchen door. I reached into the pet-access hole and tripped the inside latch.

I prowled in the dark. I knew the floor plan. I hit the upstairs bathrooms and tapped the medicine chests. I stole two painkillers and bopped downstairs for a chaser. I hit the liquor tray and poured a stiff scotch.

I hit Heidi's bedroom. I stretched out on her bed and picked up her scent. I stole a pair of white panties.

The downers and booze kicked in. I got scared. I didn't want to weave and bump things. I left the house in sloooow motion.

I BROKE INTO Kay's house and Kathy's house. I established a simple procedure.

I walk by first. I pack a flashlight. I look for cars in the driveway and lights on inside. Lights and cars mean ABORT. Their absence means GO TO PHASE TWO.

I walk to a pay phone and call my targets. It's '66 and '67. Phone machines don't exist. People shag all their calls.

Someone picks up. I disguise my voice and fake a wrong number. No answer means GO.

I walk back. I check the downstairs windows for loose screens and half-open panes. I bend back nails, remove screens, and vault up and in. I find unscreened windows and climb in unfettered.

I hit Kay's house and Kathy's house just like that. I got in the first times I tried.

Kay's folks were abstemious. I couldn't find any liquor or pills. I hit the icebox and snarfed some cold cuts and fruit. I explored Kay's bedroom. I stole a panty-and-bra set.

Kathy's house confused me. I couldn't determine her bedroom. I guzzled out of all the jugs on a sideboard. I stretched out on all the upstairs beds and screened some fantasies. I picked up the smells and textures of high-end life in repose. I hit a chest of drawers and an armoire. I stole two sets of panties and bras. I had to make sure I had hers.

They smelled intimate. Detergent as an aphrodisiac. Fabrics that touched *her*.

I scored some downs. I popped them with a sweet liqueur. I staggered home and passed out in a heartbeat.

'67 WAS A RUSH. I was the Hancock Park Phantom.

I hit my targets at odd intervals. I stuck to my entry plan and stole things that wouldn't be missed. Underwear and cold cuts. Shots from the jug. I deployed exit plans and stopped stealing pills. I employed restraint. I didn't want to blow future prowls. I hit Julie's house and Missy's house. I hit Kathy's house and Kay's house repeatedly.

The thrill was sex and secret knowledge. Small details accreted and filled my image bank. Schoolgirl bedrooms. Unmade beds. Panties discarded and kicked under the sheets.

I never questioned my right to steal, break and enter. I never justified or rationalized it with the rhetoric of rebellion. My buddies tried to hip me to the wild winds of change. I ignored their broadsides on peace, love, and revolt. It was feckless horseshit and piffle for a coddled generation. I never told my buddies that I broke into houses. They would have tagged the act as hippie aggression. They would point to my poor-ass origins and conclude that I coveted Hancock Park from an aggrieved perspective. They wouldn't get it. I plundered private worlds with no rancor. Scents. Tactile pleasures. Soiled panties as perfume. My own country clubs—in and out windows.

My unspoken credo was MORE. My appetite fed off that word. My mandate was sexual excitement. My major course of study was women. My focus was faces read and assessed for signs of my own hunger. My release was the maternal bond corrupted. Women, girls, and me. Reconstructed families abed in Hancock Park. A warm hearth and a plaque inscribed MORE.

Pinup next door: Kaya Christian, in the November 1967 issue of *Playboy.* *(Reproduced by Special Permission of* Playboy *Magazine © 1967 by* Playboy*)*

2.

I stole the November *Playboy.* The Playmate pulverized me.

Her name was Kaya Christian. Her name fit. Her lithe loins lashed my Lutheran libido. She was the blonde that redefined all blondes and rendered all other blondes obsolescent. She vibed divine intervention.

Her smile mocked the magazine she posed for. *Playboy* was a stroke rag for horny dipshits. This dipshit knew that at 19. I was a longstanding *Playboy* plebeian. Nothing prepared me for Kaya.

She floored me. I stole six more issues and spread her all over my walls. She followed me to bed and the bathroom.

Standard jackoffs undermined our love. I wanted MORE. I broke into Julie's house and hit the medicine chest. I wanted ups. I got Band-Aids and bullshit.

Lloyd had dope pals in Hollywood. I tagged along on some runs. We tapped out on uppers. I quaffed T-Bird and Seconal cocktails as a consolation prize. I blacked out and woke up in Christmas-tree lots. I brushed off sawdust and pine needles and kept going.

I went on a bender. I blew my rent roll and got kicked out of my pad. I stole some blankets from a Goodwill box and moved into Robert Burns Park.

The ground was hard. The grass tickled. The automatic sprinklers doused me at odd times.

I got some job referrals. A racist psychic hired me to pass out handbills. She preyed on blacks and Mexicans and “healed” them. I dispensed flyers all over East and South-Central L.A. I put a wad together and reclaimed my pad.

Sex fate knocked on my door. It was divine *and* demonic intervention.

I ran into a high-school buddy. He had a woman in tow. She was 29. She had a free-spirit rap down. She had wild charm and a hard-ass nature. She needed a place to stay. She sized me up as a virgin doormat and said she’d fuck me for a roof.

I agreed. She moved in and fucked me four times. It was bad. *I* was bad. She informed me four times. She informed me during and after the acts.

I dug her anyway. I let her stay. I lived in hope of fuck #5.

It never occurred. She lived with me for three months and announced that she was a dyke. She moved in with a hot young woman.

I went on a bender. I blew my rent roll. My landlord kicked me out. I moved back to Robert Burns Park and found a dry spot by the toolshed.

I developed a routine. I stashed my clothes at Lloyd’s place and bathed there twice a week. I shaved in public restrooms. I shoplifted cold cuts and liquor. I prowled Hancock Park and B&E’d at whim.

I frequented the Hollywood Library. They stocked the Irving Wallace oeuvre. *The Chapman Report* featured a nympho named Naomi Shields. Claire Bloom played her in the movie. I synced her face to Wallace’s prose and slammed the ham in the stacks.

It was exhilarating and scary. Risk City all the way. I recalled the best Naomi parts and got off in .08 minutes.

Riffraff passed through the library. Hippies lugged smelly sleeping bags and grimed up the washrooms. I met a freak named Harvey. We discussed drugs. I described my frustration. I loved amphetamines—but lacked the social skills to procure them. Harvey told me about Benzedrex Inhalers.

They were nasal decongestants lodged in plastic tubes. Cotton wads were soaked in a chemical substance. You broke the tube and swallowed the wad. You got a righteous speed high.

Benzedrex Inhalers were legal. Drugstores sold them over-the-counter.

I bopped straight to a drugstore. I stole three inhalers and broke the plastic. The wads were two inches long. They were cigarette circumference. They smelled putrid. I gagged them down with a root beer.

They worked. They brought me Kaya and June. They sent me home to Burns Park. They gave me twelve hours of love under a blanket.

I LOVED WILLFULLY. I stole inhalers and flew every third or fourth day. I loved, crashed, boozed, and slept.

Rains disrupted me. I prowled for dry shelter. I found an empty house two miles southeast.

No inside lights and no running water. One piece of furniture.

A moldy couch. My launch pad and bed.

I moved in. I stashed my blankets and spare clothes in a closet. I loved, crashed, boozed, and slept for two weeks. I came and went by night. I thought I was coooool.

11/30/68:

Four cops kicked my door in. They packed shotguns. They proned me out and cuffed me and popped me for Burglary.

THEY BROKE IT DOWN to Trespassing. I saw a judge and pled guilty. She thought I was a draft dodger. She ordered a probation report and imposed a no-bail decree. I spent three weeks at the Hall of Justice Jail.

It was spooky and instructive. I picked up B&E tips. I learned about Romilar CF—the cough syrup supreme. The other inmates laughed at me and called me “the Nutty Professor.” I jived with some renaissance lowlifes. Armed robbers and career junkies. I said I shacked up with June Harding. Kaya Christian craved my ass.

Nobody believed me.

The judge released me two days before Christmas. My sentence: three years formal probation.

I walked back to Burns Park. I stole inhalers en route. Jail taught me jackshit. I was the Energizer Battery Bunny writ tall. I kept banging that drum. You couldn’t touch my ruthless and impotent heart.

3.

The Versailles Apartments. A 6th floor room for 80 a month. Women abundant.

Lloyd got me the pad. My aunt shot me the coin. She warned me: My insurance dole was dwindling.

I liked the pad. Chipped moulding and a north view. My new PO liked me. Short hair and a wholesome demeanor.

He told me to avoid drugs and keep my snout clean. I said I would. He pegged me as low-maintenance and cut me a long lead. I signed up with a temp agency. They got me some office gigs.

The Versailles was a block off Wilshire and due east of Hancock Park. Wilshire was white-collar central. I walked to my gigs. I killed a half-pint of scotch for breakfast and tailed women from the Versailles.

They walked to work. I bird-dogged them. I screened impromptu fantasies and expanded them on inhaler trips. I honed my sex aesthetic.

I grooved on solitary women. Solitary meant lonely. Lonely meant hungry. Hungry meant horny and estranged and thus accessible. I grooved on outdated hairstyles and clothes. Stylelessness meant psychic weight. Heedlessness to current trends meant spirit. Their fashion statement enhanced my creed: Fuck the mass-market revolt of this era.

I stole a supply of Romilar CF. I drank whole bottles on consecutive nights and went on a B&E run.

The shit turned things psychedelic. I hit Kathy's house, Kay's house, and Missy's house. I hit the bathrooms and popped pills with abandon. I blacked out and came to on my bed two shots out of three.

Shot #3 was killer. I hit Missy's pad *boooold.*

I entered just after dusk. I picked the latch on the service-porch door and crawled through the kitchen window. Romilar made things surreal. The house looked all new. Missy's bedroom was wild. Weird colors blipped out of the darkness.

I found a soiled bra in the upstairs hamper. It was sweated up from tennis or badminton. I brain-screened some pictures. Missy and her freckles. Freckled breasts and chafed nipples.

I stole some speckled capsules. I didn't know how they'd mix with the Romilar. I popped them anyway.

Goodnight, Sweet Prince.

I hit a work slump. I rented a cheap flop in Hollywood and got a gig at KCOP-TV. The mailroom was a gold mine.

The station advertised record albums. Stupes sent cash in. I slit incoming envelopes and stole it. I raked in lots of extra bread and moved to a better crib.

6th and Cloverdale. Wilshire meets Kosher Kanyon. Old Jews and office slaves. Women abundant.

My insurance dole ran out. My mailroom scam covered the loss. I smashed up the company van and got fired. I got some short-term gigs and lived cheap. I broke into Missy's house and stole all the cash in a purse.

The act blew my shot at reentry. I burned that bridge deliberately. I felt the odds narrowing down. Some night I'd get caught. They caught me in the empty house. They broke the charge down. That wouldn't happen again. All my instincts said STOP IT.

August '69.

The Tate-LaBianca snuffs rock L.A. They ramify in Hancock Park. Magnetic window tape. Rent-a-cop patrols.

I stopped it. I never did it again. I held my memories close and sniffed the winds of change.

Porno bookstores were popping up citywide. I figured some law was struck down.

Smut was street-legal.

Fuck-suck books. Beaver books. Glossy color pix. Unretouched detail. Low-rent backdrops. Less-than-perfect women with their legs spread wide.

Hippie girls sans hippie trappings. No tie-dye threads to mark fatuous statements. No love beads or peace signs. Guileless smiles. This is not degrading.

I understood the aesthetic. It dovetailed with my own. I understood the bottom line.

Exploitation sold as freedom. Inclusion for desperate men.

The books were pricey and hard to steal. I sidestepped the dilemma and got a job at a bookstore. I worked midnight to 8:00 a.m.

I worked alone. I rang up sales and stocked merchandise. You paid to browse. Fifty-cent tokens applied to your purchase. Horndogs browsed all night. It was cheap entertainment.

The store sold beaver books, fuck-suck books, homo books, novels, films, slides, playing cards, dildoes, cock rings, S&M gear, and French ticklers. Strategically placed mirrors deterred same-sex assignations. The clientele was all male and all loser. Bombed-out hippies, drag queens, and the great male unwashed.

Middle-aged closet queens with wedding rings and sheepish expressions. Devotees of *Cock It to Me* and *For Those Who Think Hung.* The underhung devotees of the Donkey Dan Dick Extender. The Beaver Patrol—USC frat boys fresh from late keggers.

The store was a waste spill. I belonged there.

I unpacked beaver books. I excised the most compelling women. We shared inhaler trips. I prayed for them. I played both ends against the moral middle.

Their debasement and potential redemption. No center ground. A faulty dilemma. My brief prayers and extended exploitation.

You thrill me. I love you. Don't do this anymore. I'm sure glad you went this far.

I tore out pictures and stole books. I tapped the till. I went to a beaver bar and watched beaver flicks. I zorched out on 50-cent drinks.

The bar sold beaver T-shirts and beaver caps with mock-beaver tails. I demurred. I had my mock-Christian agenda. I beaver-patrolled the bar and the store. A revelation hit: You're looking for one special woman.

I found her. She adorned a page of *Beaveroo* or *Beaverama.*

She was thirty-one or -two. She had pale skin and brown eyes. Long hair—straight and center-parted. Early gray throughout.

A long nose. A bump on the bridge. A pointed chin and underarm stubble. Long legs. Wide hips. A starkly untoned stomach. The biggest hands and feet I'd ever seen on a woman.

She claimed me. She felt like something wondrous and all new. I pledged monogamy. I sustained it. My inhaler trips followed that line.

She did not look cheap, shallow, or in any way worthy of pity or censure. She didn't smile. She didn't mock her blunt pose. Her intent baffled me. I ruled out titillation and financial poverty. She looked forthright and altogether kind.

I prayed for insight and answers. I talked to her at the store. Customers heard me. They rolled their eyes and snickered.

The owner wised up to my thefts. He canned me and withheld my last paycheck. I got some temp gigs and built up a roll. I went on a two-month bender.

It was epic. I stockpiled food, booze, and inhalers and went at it hard. I holed up for two weeks at a clip. I popped inhalers and stared at her picture and jacked off monogamously. I drank and puked up cotton wads. I lost weight. I gorged on steaks and gained it back. I slept and woke up dry-mouthed and dizzy. I lost track of time.

I blew my rent allotment. The landlord started talking eviction. I had the coin to nail a cheap pad outside Kosher Kanyon. I knew a place by the Paramount Studios. The Green Gables Apartments—flats for $60 a month.

Lloyd moved me out and in. We pulled the dodge on the Q.T. The bender left me weak and frazzled. I slept for two days.

The Green Gables sucked. It was full of hypes and elderly rumdums. I squared myself away and looked for a job.

I was fried. I was cumulatively exhausted. I wanted to find a cushy gig and decompress. I wanted to stabilize during the week and FLY on weekends.

I tanked. The no-skill market was soft. I gave up and went on a mission.

Beaver Patrol as redemption.

I hit a dozen bookstores and prowled the beaver racks. I had to find more pics of that woman. She eluded me. I made do with my mind and one photo.

I went on a run. Inhalers and her picture. I started hearing Voices.

They hissed outside my window. They said "Ellroy" and "Pervert." They raged commensurate with the dope in my system.

I diagnosed the Voices. They had to be a dope side effect. It was a fleeting assessment. I popped wads and more wads and diagnosed them as real.

Police sirens hissed at me. The Voices hid in the *wheeeee.* I heard them. The man next door heard them. He smirked at me in the hallway. He knew my sex dreams. He screened them on his TV set. He knew I killed my mother. He totaled up my thefts. He read my mind. I blared my radio and jacked off in the dark to deceive him.

I popped wads and heard the Voices. I drank and banished them. I laughed them off and sucked down more cotton. They returned. They cut through all the sweet words I told Her.

I ran.

The Voices evicted me. It was mid-trip and peremptory. I stuffed cotton in my ears and left my things behind. I walked three miles east in record time. I saw a For Rent sign in Silver Lake.

A convenience room. $39 a month. A bed, a sink, and one communal shower.

I moved in. The building was full of rowdy wetbacks. My room was half the size of a jail cell. It felt like jail. The wetbacks scared me. The pad vibed Hideout or Psych Ward. I drank myself to sleep and popped inhalers the next morning.

The Voices returned. I covered my ears and hid on the bed. The heat coils in my blanket felt like microphones. I ripped them out and threw them at the wall.

The floor was mined and covered with bear traps. I hid on the bed and pissed all over the sheets. The Voices persisted. I ripped up my pillow and stuffed foam rubber in my ears.

I ran.

Straight to Robert Burns Park. Straight to my spot by the toolshed.

I passed out on wet grass. Water seeped through my pants and wiped out Her picture.

4.

She resurrected. She assumed a startling form.

My new probation officer.

Her name was Elizabeth Heath. We met late in ’70. The resemblance staggered me.

Her face matched point by point. Her body diverged. She wore loose clothing—her contours eluded me.

I lost and regained a vision. God was responsible. I promised not to plunder Liz in my dreams.

Liz Heath was 30. She hailed from New York State. I saw her once a month and prolonged our visits.

Liz was gracious, intelligent, stern-willed, and funny. I groomed and prepared for our confabs. Liz was an occasion. I rose to it. I didn’t know if I was a chameleon or a tight-assed square in waiting.

I knew that I loved her. My restraint proved it. I excluded her from my sex stories. This fueled more than hindered my love and allowed me to listen.

Liz told a good tale. She gave commonplace events a pop and a punch line. She gauged my basic weakness against my will and disregard for the world. She understood hollow boys on missions. They rock impervious. They mistake movement for substance.

Liz figured me out fast. She interceded with a distanced affection. She assessed me as a threat to myself and no great threat to the world. She caught outtakes from the next two years of my slide.

I lived in parks and empty houses. I shoplifted food and booze and dined-and-dashed at restaurants. I broke into apartment-house laundry rooms and jimmied the coins out of washers and dryers. I slept in Goodwill bins. I sold my blood and blood plasma. I got day-labor gigs and read in libraries. Lloyd assisted. I crashed in his yard and his mother's car. The LAPD assisted. They popped me for Petty Theft, Drunk, and DUI. I did jail jolts and purged my toxified system. I stole empty pop bottles from reclamation bins and re-reclaimed them for chump change. I snuck into theaters and watched movies.

I stole inhalers. I popped them. I did not masturbate. The Voices started every time I reached for my dick. They chased me out of parks and empty houses. I stuffed paper in my ears and walked.

I walked and screened stories. Out Wilshire to the beach. Back again. Obsessive movement. Twenty miles per trip. Kaya, June, and a wide cast of faces.

I saw them. I couldn't address them. The Voices drowned out my endearments.

I walked and trembled. People stepped out of my way. Women cringed and grabbed at their purses.

Inhalers sparked the Voices. Abstinence muffled them. The Voices punished me for the faces.

Liz left L.A. in '73. We said good-bye on the phone. She was warm. I was glib. I willed myself to ride out the hurt.

Lloyd's mother kicked him out of the house. He got a cheap hotel room. I rented floor space.

I had a fixed address. The thought encouraged me. I could do things and say things with impunity. The roof and walls would shut out the Voices.

Every floor had a bathtub and shower. I popped six inhalers and locked myself in the 3rd floor tub room.

I stripped and ran a bath. I got in and jacked off to a long line of faces. I ran the water to stay warm and cover the Voices.

I saw my mother's face. I *made* myself see it. I saw her naked. I said, "I love you." We made love in the last house we lived in.

The Voices swirled out of the water. I ignored them. I stayed with her all the way up to the crash.

IT WAS THE most impassioned and loving story I'd ever conceived. It shamed and horrified me.

It thrilled me. I wanted to screen deeper variations. I couldn't do it. The Voices said, You fucked your mother and killed her.

I stiffed Lloyd on my rent cut. The manager evicted me. I moved back to Burns Park.

The Voices followed me.

For two more years.

Inhaler trips. Trembling walks. A fantasy loop everlasting.

T-Bird. Jail for brief health retreats. Hot meals. No Voices. Good exercise.

I built up a dope tolerance. I gagged down more and more wads to achieve the same effect. Ten or twelve wads per trip. Three trips a week.

It fucked up my lungs. I caught pneumonia twice. The County Hospital cured it.

I trucked on undeterred. I followed my appetites. I missed Liz. I started watching men and women together.

Sweethearts in movie lines. Kids in parks. Who's that geek staring at us?

I read books and shagged epigrams and insights. T.S. Eliot. Highbrow shit. "We only live, only suspire, consumed by either fire or fire." A classy fuck flick: *The Private Afternoons of Pamela Mann.*

Barbara Bourbon in the lead role. A boss blond with a cool overbite. A cut-rate Kaya Christian.

Pam Mann's a horndog. She's a passive punchboard and a seductress. She's a nympho Candide. She's the poster girl for '70s excess. She fucks half of New York City in one day and comes home to fuck her husband. He's the best. She *really* loves him. Her day was satire and a goof on inclusion. Sex is everything and nothing.

I dug Barb and the message in equal measure. I picked up a subtext:

Sex was a lock for the cute and the glib. Love took balls.

Insight did not equal power or a will to change. My slide continued.

Lloyd had a pad in West L.A. I camped out on the roof. I went on a loooong T-Bird run and got the DTs in his bathroom.

Fluorescent blobs attacked me. Spiders crawled up my legs. The blobs tried to eat my eyes. Monsters jumped out of the toilet.

It was 100% real.

I batted at the bugs. I closed the toilet seat on the monsters. They oozed straight through the lid.

I drank them away. I passed out and woke up on the roof.

I was dead fucking scared. I *knew* the next drink or cotton wad would kill me.

I hitchhiked to the County Hospital and checked in to the drunk ward. I shared bed space with a dozen winos. A nurse fed me tranks. A doctor signed me up for a kick program.

Long Beach Hospital. Three hots and a cot. Antabuse—a deterrent drug that made you sick if you drank.

I spent two days in the drunk ward. I tried to sleep through it. The tranks helped. Other drunks suffered DTs. They saw things and heard things and hit things that weren't there. I wedged pillows around my head and cut off their jabbers.

I was young. The winos were old. They were my prophecy foretold.

A nurse drove me down to Long Beach. I donned khakis and a plastic wristband. I stayed scared.

I took Antabuse and went to therapy groups. I made up sex stories and directed them to the female drunks. I shacked up with June Harding and Kaya Christian. Barbara Bourbon wanted me for her next flick.

Nobody believed me.

My fear subsided. I rationalized it away. The DTs were a non sequitur. That was then. This is now. I could beat booze and dope my way. I was resourceful. I knew I could work out an angle.

I developed a bad cough. A nurse noticed it. I told her I'd had two pneumonias. She called in a doctor. He sedated me. He stuck a tube with a light attached down my throat and checked out my lungs. He didn't spot anything wrong.

I "graduated" the program and stayed on Antabuse. My cough persisted. I bopped back to L.A.—booze and dope free. My fear escalated. I tried to think up an angle. I tapped out. My imagination and will to scheme were shot to fucking shit.

I camped out on Lloyd's roof. My nerves were shot. My cough got worse. My attention span diminished. I felt body- and brain-snatched. It was an all-new sensation. Foreign cells invaded me. They crosswired my circuits and made me someone else. The wires were loose and schizzing me into a shutdown.

It happened.

I woke up on the roof. I thought: I need some cigarettes. A mental fuse blew. My mind went dead. I could not retrieve the thought I just expressed.

I reached for it. I failed. I grabbed at four simple words for an hour. I tried to think and say my name. I failed. I willed myself to think who and where I was. I hit a synaptic black wall.

I screamed myself hoarse. Lloyd heard me. He ran up to the roof. I couldn't think or say his name.

He called an ambulance. Some paramedics ran me to the County Hospital. They left me strapped to a gurney.

I heard voices. Nurses moved their lips and screamed silently. I screamed back. I saw a nurse prep a needle.

I CAME OUT of it.

I woke up strapped to a cot. My teeth were loose. My jaw hurt. Somebody whipped on me. My knuckles were cut and abraded. I fought back.

I remembered my name and those four simple words. God gave me my mind back.

A doctor diagnosed my mental condition. He called it a “post-alcohol brain syndrome.” It was a rare occurrence indigenous to sober drunks. It was physiological. It derived from tenuous abstention. It rarely recurred.

He heard my cough and x-rayed me. He said I had a big lung abscess. Proper care would cure me. Booze and dope would kill me in a week’s time.

Live or die. An easy choice once it confronts you.

I spent thirty days on an IV drip. I coughed up jars full of dark sputum. A male nurse pounded my back and brought up more shit.

I began to recover. I was twenty-seven. I had strong genes. God commuted my sentence. He punished me for the thoughts of my mother and rewired my circuits in mercy.

I believed it. My offense was just that transgressive.

I spent thirty days in bed. I charted my life back to day one and up to the present. I plotted my survival and thought about women.

5.

Purgatory—a noun. My revised Protestant definition.

A desert of demonic deprivation. Cloyingly close to the Inhaler Institute and Masturbation Mountain. Limbo for lascivious losers. A rigorous reminder of rapacious appetites and the precious price they extract.

I went there. The main drags were Stay Straight Street and Abstinence Avenue. I lived on Terrified Terrace. My brain wires might broil and brown out any moment. God grants and revokes. He knows me. I only seek Him when I’m scared.

I stayed scared. All day, every day. I tossed my Antabuse. I didn’t steal, drink, or pop inhalers. I left the hospital—cured. I slept on Lloyd’s roof and lived off plasma money. I read in libraries and stared at women.

I banished June, Kaya, Barbara, and the whole cast of faces. Their love would lure me back to the lung ward. Love was the linchpin of my live-or-die dilemma. I put myself there. I was priapically proactive. Nobody victimized me.

I lucked onto a job. A guy in Lloyd’s building worked at Hillcrest Country Club. He got me a caddy gig.

I dug the fresh air and swank atmosphere. I turned some nice coin and got a hotel room. My fear subsided. I sweated it out on the golf course. I dulled it with my semblance of decent behavior.

I stayed off booze and inhalers. I smoked weed and screened potential crime novels. Romantic stories. Dark and obsessive. Women abundant.

I followed women around Westwood Village. I tried to talk to them. I spooked them. They brushed me off. I batted zero.

I kept going. I kept banging that drum. I was headed for an epiphany.

Lloyd knew a bohemian couple. Solly played the flute and the sitar. Joan paid the rent and played muse. They had a crib in West Hollywood.

I spent some time there. Joan was kind to me. I liked her dark hair and blue eyes and nose that hooked off center.

I've got the moment memorized. It's on file as a permanent freeze frame. It was sex and love writ large in an instant.

Joan reaches for a cigarette. Her blouse gaps at the third button. I see her right breast in profile.

You must change your life.

That was '77. It's '99 now. I'm 51. Joan's the same age. June and Kaya are several years older. Barb Bourbon and Liz Heath are pushing 60.

They taught me. They presaged the brilliant and courageous woman I married.

I followed the Clinton-Lewinsky mess. I developed a well-reasoned and morally sane hatred of Bill Clinton.

He should have known better. He stole a woman's dignity. She's the worldwide synonym for blow job. It's a life sentence. Men will spot her in restaurants and bulge out one cheek. Her media fees won't cover the cost.

Some friends disdain this assessment. They point to my wild ride and imply hypocrisy. I would have done the same thing if I'd had the chance.

No, I wouldn't.

My past taught me better than that. My survival taught me the wisdom of stern judgment.

It's an exclusionist stance. It acknowledges the ride and honors the lessons I learned.

The retort is: It's only sex. Sex is nothing.

No, it's everything.

I attribute my survival to the seldom-sought presence of Almighty God. Skeptics and inclusionists might scoff at this. They can kiss my fucking ass.

The D.A.

There's the view.

Eighteen floors up/big window/east exposure. His ritual: Gawk and sip coffee. His daily memo: The view meant the climb.

Twenty-eight years. One bureaucracy. Schmuck kid to D.A. They tag their D.A.s like presidents. Its L.A. County ego. He's #40. His campaign dumped D.A. 39. He's ten months in. His office is still too big. He still loves the view.

Look south—there's City Hall. It's a film noir update. Look straight ahead—there's court buildings beaucoup. Look north— there's the "Twin Towers." It's County Jail overflow. They've got freeway views.

It's downtown L.A. It's all crime all the time. Courtrooms and lockups. O.J.'s Oasis/the Punishment Palace/the Misdemeanant's Motel 6.

It's Steve Cooley's world. Dig it dystopian. Check out his desk. It's orgy-size. It came with the job.

It's morning. He's thinking. His brainwaves are broiling bravura.

With Blake. With Rampart. With Olson-Soliah.

The Blake job—six months old/indictmentless/classic. One, short time frame. Two, no guilt proof. Three, no alternative suspects. Rampart—a lurid labyrinth. The loony linchpin: a bent cop named Rafael Perez.

Perez admits his shit. Said shit includes dope ripoffs and frame-ups. Perez rats out Rampart Division. It's a testosterone-torqued Tijuana. It's the macho-maimed microcosm for the LAPD. There's a lawsuit lynch mob lurking. They're licking their lips. They'd love to loot LAPD. The mess is metastasizing.

Perez tattles tainted testimony. Court costs crescendo. Innocence invaded. Insignificant indictments incurred. Weigh the cost. It might be pull-the-plug time.

It started pre-Cooley. His predecessor caught it hot-hot. Cooley got in. Cooley formed the JSID—Justice System Integrity Division.

Protocols. Procedures to gauge cop misconduct. Rampart on *his* watch?—the scandal dies stillborn.

Olson-Soliah was hot. It was 10/29. Her plea date is 10/31. She might plead not guilty. She might go to trial. She might plead guilty and cop out. She tried to torch two cop cars. Her fuses fizzled. Ten years per car—predictable and wholly just.

Olson-Soliah went *back.* It's '74 now. Sara Jane Olson's righteous tag is Kathleen Soliah. Soliah's in the SLA. They're loony left-wing losers. They kidnap Patty Hearst. They extort her old man. They rob some banks and spew specious rhetoric. Cut to 5/17/74. Cut to East 54th Street. LAPD SWAT swats an SLA safe house. Six Commies catch tear gas. They cough and combust. The house ignites. Six crispy critters snap, crackle, and pop.

The stiffs are ID'd. There's no Patty Hearst and no Kathleen Soliah. Six notable new-left nudniks lay dead. Other SLA *Unter-menschen* survive. They undulate underground.

Cut to 4/21/75. Cut to Carmichael, California. We're in Sacramento County. A baaaaad heist goes down. It's a "Righteous 211" in cop-speak.

The Crocker National Bank. Eight suspected SLA-ers. Four inside. A four-fiend outside crew. A fifteen-grand take. A woman named Myrna Opsahl shotgunned for kicks.

Cut to 1982. Patty Hearst:

Caught/convicted/jailed/pardoned/released. She writes a memoir. She names the Carmichael crew.

Kathy Soliah worked inside. Kathy Soliah dumped cash drawers. Emily Harris killed Myrna Opsahl. Soliah quizzed Harris per Opsahl. Harris called Opsahl "a bourgeois pig."

Time trucks. There's Emily Harris and hubby Bill. They get popped for adjunct crimes. Time trucks anew. They go to prison. They get paroled. Patty Hearst's book appears. The Sacramento D.A. stays gun-shy.

Cut back to '76. The Feds try Kathy's bro Steve Soliah. Hearst says he's a getaway man. A jury acquits him. Double jeopardy saves him. Myrna Opsahl goes unavenged.

Cut to 6/16/99. The Feds nail "Sara Jane Olson." She lives in Minnesota. She's a housewife. She's got three kids. Her husband's a M.D.

She's extradited. She hits L.A. She bails out. Her pretrial process attenuates.

Steve Cooley perks up. Steve Cooley reviews Carmichael. Steve Cooley smells murder beefs.

Myrna Opsahl had a son. His name was Jon. He was a M.D. Cooley briefed some D.A.'s cops. They called Jon Opsahl. They updated him.

Kathy Soliah—popped for the car-bomb caper. The Carmichael job—primed for prosecution now.

Cooley kept calling Jon Opsahl. Opsahl bugged the Sacramento D.A. Opsahl got the gist. Opsahl vibed this:

Sacramento's reluctant—once bitten/twice shy. Cooley's running for D.A. Cooley leads the polls. Say he gets elected. Say he goes bold. Say he tries the case non-jurisdictionally.

Cooley got elected. Cooley took over. A local judge scoped the car-bomb evidence. Said judge said this:

"The history of the SLA, including Carmichael, could be introduced in the bombing case here, because it was part of an ongoing criminal conspiracy."

Cooley smiled. Cooley tapped his desk. Cooley checked the view.

Time trucked backwards. It’s 5/74 again. It’s yesterday once more.

He was a kid prosecutor. He was a kid LAPD reserve. The “SLA Shootout” ran live on TV.

He watched it. He *dug* it. It played live from his own beat.

Some show. Order triumphant. Adjudication circumvented— a tragedy. He almost grabbed his uniform. He almost went over.

He deferred his help. Time trucked forward. His Carmichael ploy might work. Sacramento might prosecute.

What a ride. What a fucking view.

■

The office was huge. Newcomers needed maps. Floors and floors/rooms and rooms/mazelike cubbyholes.

The Criminal Courts Building—Temple and Broadway.

Cooley knew every wall crack. He worked headquarters. He detoured. He worked Siberian outposts. He returned as top dog.

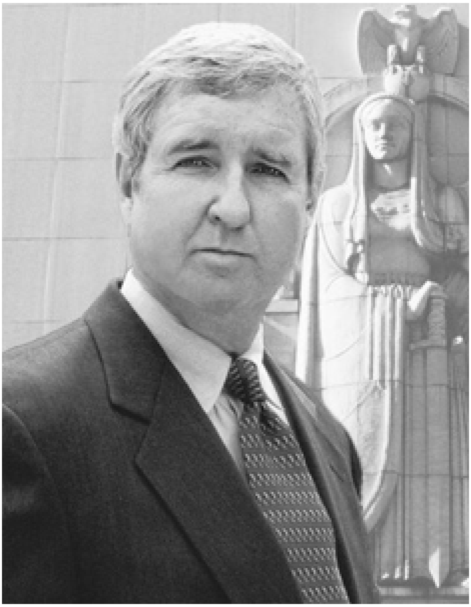
He toured the halls. He touched the walls. It was turf-marking time. You’re *el perro primo/il cane supremo/chien numero un.*

Pinch me—I’m the D.A.

Cooley walked to his 10:00 a.m. meeting. Subordinates said hi. It was “Steve” and “Boss” mostly. The timid deployed “sir.” Cooley looked embarrassed.

He cut through the squadroom. It was packed. Good cops all—prime PD transfers. They investigated cases. They guarded witnesses. They watchdogged him.

Pinch me. I’ve got bodyguards and drivers. Headwaiters kiss my ass.



Busting Robert Blake earned Steve Cooley headlines, but reshaping the largest prosecutor's office in the country—and one of the most maligned—is the challenge of a lifetime. *(Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office)*

Cooley walked. Cooley touched wall cracks. Cooley made his 10:00 a.m. meet.

The crew was there. The room was big. The desk was orgy-size. The topic: the *new* Cold Case Unit.

It's Cooley's scheme. It's four DDAs plus LAPD detectives. Let's solve old murders. Let's deploy DNA. There's a big state grant—fifty million cold. Let's utilize our share. Local crime labs are swamped. Let's blast through our agenda.

For LAPD:

Lieutenant Debbie McCarthy, Detective Rick Jackson, Detective Dave Lambkin, Detective Tim Marcia, et al. One supervisor. Three file-prowling/street-pounding/case-clearing dicks.

For the D.A.:

Lisa Kahn—deputy-in-charge. The widely known DNA "Goddess." John Lewin—stoic prosecutor. Nifty suit and slick haircut. Ellen Aragon—seasoned litigator. Piercing eyes chilled by large glasses. Vesna Maras—prosecutor/recent transfer/quiet-raucous wit. Dead ringer: the Eastern-bloc ingenue in Andrzej Waida flicks. Joe Scott—Cooley's media boss. A young 71. Deep L.A. roots. His dad was a judge. His dad slammed Big Bill Tilden for honking young boys.

Bagels and coffee sit warm. Packaged cream cheese melts. The crew shags coffee. Cooley shags a bagel. Lisa Kahn takes charge. She's the Goddess DIC.

We've got high-volume unsolveds. We've got evidence extant. We've got evidence destroyed. We've got jobs with no suspects, jobs with prime suspects, and whodunit jobs. We've got grant funding. We get one DNA sample-test per case. Our priority: nail suspects in hardcore sex snuffs.

Everyone agrees. It's charged and vocal. Cooley's noshing a bagel. He nods assent.

The cops take over. It goes orderly. We go McCarthy to Jackson/Lambkin to Marcia on down.

Subtext runs strong. We work *the* worst murders. Female victims/male suspects. Penetration/ejaculation/mutilation. Lust-now-pay-later crimes.

The cops riff prosaics. We read files, we ID victims, we locate or confirm evidence lost. We locate suspects free or in custody.

Lisa Kahn speaks. Remember—DNA convicts *and* exonerates. Cooley speaks. Remember—DNA is fully precise. It cannot distort or dissemble. We can serve justice both ways.

The subtext shifts. It goes telepathic quick. It's a mass O.J. injection. Probative certainty—one thing. Shit-slick defense lawyers—another.

More cop talk. More D.A. talk. The ball bops beatific.

Rape kits/freezers/property rooms. The comb-old-cartons/computer run/field-new-calls essentials. Resentment sizzles. They're new. They're pumped and poised. They'll buck longstanding sloth.

Lab backlog. Lab incompetence. DNA as hot topic and Kafkaesque theme. Idle cons in Quentin and Folsom. Let's try a DNA scam! We might get lucky! It worked for O.J.!!!

More talk. Deft passes—cops to D.A.s.

Rape-kit tests. The consensual sex factor. Outside labs—can we employ them? Let's buy that new fingerprint computer.

Cooley mops up bagel crumbs. Cooley shifts his chair. It's his prelude to coda.

Cooley speaks. His chair's a pulpit. The orgy desk's a pew.

Murder solving—the detectives' stern duty. Sound teamwork as device. The prosecutor's duty: Win honestly in court. Usurp the autonomy of killers. Protect society on that basis ad hoc.

The pitch worked. The sermon on the orgy desk. Nonsectarian prayer.

The meeting adjourned. Cooley grabbed a bagel for the road.

THERE'S THE LIFE.

"The Life"—noun. Convict-derived. Denotes inclusiveness and sealed borders. You're in or out. You commit crimes. You run inherent risks. That's your membership card.

“The Life”—noun. Applied to whores and their high-risk existence. Applied to all sealed societies. Risk remains the membership card.

The L.A. D.A.’s Office—ditto.

Deep roots. 152 years. *Deeeeep* history.

Wild West days. Chinatown tong wars. Race riots. Lynchings. Police scandals. Bent cops running prosties. Bent cops bombing cars. Bent cop homicides.

Scandal without. Scandal within. It’s 1928. Asa “Ace” Keyes is D.A. Ace is convicted of bribery. Ace goes down. Ace gets two years in Big Q.

D.A. Buron Fitts—deep shit in 1930.

There’s a whore ring. It feeds young cooze to high rollers. Allegations arise. Fitts allegedly quashes them. Suspicions arise. The grand jury indicts. Fitts endures. Fitts wins at trial.

Deputy D.A. Jack Kirschke—’60s swinging dick. Jack’s wife is straying. She’s fucking this clown Orville Drankhan. Jack finds them in bed. Jack whacks them. Jack does ten years.

Hot crimes. Perpetrated *within.* Statistical rarities. Emblematic? Sure.

You’re in the Life. You make the law. You fight lawlessness without. You breathe the stink. You de-inoculate. You know the law. Your knowledge engenders recklessness. You crash the law without.

History. Dig it as picaresque. Load on that lore large.

La vida, la vie—Cooley fucking loved it.

The old days. The old D.A.’s cops—phone book-thumping goons deluxe. The rubber-stamp grand jury—Indictments R Us.

History lost. History least. The Office got hip and cleaned up. Credit time and trends without.

Racial roots rocked. The Spanish land grants and up. Mexican rule early. White rule ascendant—per population flux. The Office flew with the flux. The Office grokked that melting pot/Pacific Rim rebop. The Life was rigidly restricted and inimically inclusive. It lived by the law and flowed with flux more than not. L.A. changed complexion. The Office likewise. Seoul and Ciudad Whatever meet the Dark Continent and crash the White Spot.

L.A. changed. L.A. grew. The Office followed up. Representative justice—within meets without. Race. Gender. The Cold Case Squad. Female victims probable. Three women to prosecute.

Cooley loved it. He was 54. He lived an L.A. lifetime. He logged half-plus in the Life. He saw the big guns work and fade. He met J. Miller “Gas Chamber” Leavy. Miller sent Stephen Nash and Barbara Graham to the green room. Miller 86’d Donald Keith Bashor. Miller was a self-described gas.

Then was then. Now was now. Fuck nostalgia in the knee cracks and neck. Now was better. Then had its place. The weave warped inextricable. Then *and* now latched the L to the Life.

Public awareness was up *now*. Awareness meant accountability. Reformer's zeal was in *now*. That zap of zeal elected him. He grew up in the Life. It was BIG and circumscribed. He watched the expansion. The dimensions dazzled him.

The Life. The Office. One force synonymous.

A thousand prosecutors. Nine hundred support staff. Two hundred and eighty cops. Thirty-nine regional offices. Thirty-nine specialty divisions. The whole downtown octopus.

Expansion—concurrent with rising crime stats. The Life meets the Life in proximity propitious.

You side with justice. You see the Other Life revealed. You touch the dirt. You *feel* it. The slip into slime fuels you ambiguously. It's delirious dispensation. It's the perverse perk of peeking into purgatory. It reinstills resolve. It's a salutary salary deincentive. Defense lawyers outearn you. The Life lets you laugh and not care.

You help victims. You punish wrongdoers. You poke through their shit. The Life taxed you and tweaked you, vexed you and vamped you, nudged you and nailed you nonplussed.

Cooley knew why.

It was the truth biz. You had to love it.

OLSON-SOLIAH PISSED BACKWARDS. He shitcanned Rampart.

Halloween day—she pleads guilty. She stays free on bail. The judge sets sentencing for 12/7. Possible term: 20 to life. Possible 5-year parole.

She pleads guilty. She splits the courtroom. She sees reporters outside. She says she's *not* guilty. She blames 9/11. I can't get a fair trial. Antiterrorist fervor, oh yuck!

Outrageous.

Unacceptable.

Cooley's DDAs responded. Michael Latin fumed. Eleanor Hunter said, "She's either lying in court or lying outside court to save face."

The judge called a hearing. It occurred 11/6. The judge lectured Olson-Soliah. "A guilty plea is not a waystation on the way to a press conference."

Olson-Soliah whined up 9/11. The judge asked her straight: "Do you wish your plea to stand?" Olson-Soliah paused. Olson-Soliah said, "Yes."

Cut to 11/15. Olson-Soliah proffers a sealed motion. It's unsealed and read. Olson-Soliah boomerangs. She wants to retract her plea.

"After deeper reflection, I realized I cannot plead guilty when I know I am not.

“Cowardice prevented me from doing what I should: throw caution aside and move to trial.”

The judge set a hearing for 11/28. The judge postponed it to 12/3. The judge rejected the motion. His Honor Larry Paul Fidler, succinct: “She pled guilty because she is guilty.”

Boom—sentencing on 1/18. DDA Latin, succinct: “It’s time to face the music.”

L.A. music. Johnny Justice and the Karma Kings—’70s rock. Potential upstate music—the Carmichael job.

Olson-Soliah dodged bullets. Cooley dodged some and caught some. Cooley shut off Rampart.

He held a press gig. Chief Parks and Sheriff Baca stood by. He announced his filing declinations. He’d signed 15. He might sign 30 more. He stressed Rampart’s limits. Perez and his unit stood culpable. Trials and sentencing concluded/appeals in progress. Case closed beyond that.

There’s no “endemic” LAPD corruption. Don’t indulge witch hunts.

He stressed his Integrity Division. He detailed some new protocols. We roll out. We move on cop-misconduct charges. We probe. We prosecute valid beefs. Look for us—all officer-involved shootings/all custody deaths.

Fifty Rampart-related cases—dumped by New Year’s. No new filings predicted. *It just wasn’t there.*

Rampart—adios, motherfucker.

He got some praise. He took some hits. He tapped some long-term exhaustion. The conspiracy press fricasseed him.

Cooley the Cop Collusive. Colluder Cooley Culls Contacts. Cop Curtain Curtails Probe. Will Wicked Whitewash Wither Righteous Reformer’s Prestige?

You can’t control public perception. Shit—it just wasn’t there.

Some defense lawyers responded. The corrosive chorus continued. It was “one huge look the other way.”

No, we looked. We ran a Roto-Rooter ream stick through Rampart. It just wasn’t—

Fuck it. It’s fall in L.A.—some sunshine, some rain. Olson-Soliah dips to her destiny. The Cold Case Squad is setting up. Prospects prickle priapic. Ouch—prime those killers for some pain.

AUTHORITY MEETS JUSTICE. He grew up with the dream. Silver Lake—catch the view now to then.

The hills near downtown. Close to Chavez Ravine. Authority spawns injustice. Power dudes evict poor Chicanos. Power dudes build Dodger Stadium.

He grew up Catholic. Chief Parker went to his church. Parker was a reformer.

Cooley knew it then. Parker kiboshed LAPD corruption. Parker was a lush. Wags called him “Whiskey Bill.” Parker got drunk. Parker defamed Negroes. Parker pulled asshole stunts. Cooley did not know it then.

Cooley’s dad was a Fed. Dad admired J. Edgar Hoover. Hoover collected pornography and dirty surveillance pix. Dad did not know it then. Likewise Cooley.

Silver Lake was half-ass diverse. White squares ruled. Homosexuals and Mexicans goosed the body count. Silver Lake was hilly. Wags called it the “Swish Alps.” Nobody called J. Edgar “Gay” Edgar.

A good kids’ place. Dig the hills and terrace views. Grow up illusioned. Disillusion right. Stretch out the process.

Cooley did it. He scored in school. He played kid sports. He sold the *L.A. Herald.* The *Herald* ran crime extras. Cooley hawked copies. Crime—the young lawyer’s primer.

The Finch-Tregoff case. Caryl Chessman and the green room. The hot seat and J. Miller Leavy.

The *Herald* flogged the *Spade* Cooley snuff. Spade was a country fiddler. Spade and Steve were no kin. Spade was a hophead. Spade whacked his wife. She wanted to join a sex cult. Spade got mighty pissed.

Kids kidded Cooley. Spade had slit-eyes. Chinamen were Cooleys. Where’s your rickshaw, Steve?

Crime scratched his skin. A prick—no big flesh wound. His life was full. School, four siblings, church. ’60s tsuris bored him. *His* world was secure. The world at large *should* be. Dad was a Fed. There *was* a stable path. It brought joy and fulfillment.

He took it.

He graduated Loyola High. He entered Cal State L.A. Cal State ran no-frills. Cal State had a low rebellion quotient. He nursed a political urge. He ran for student body veep and got elected. The prexy got drafted. Cooley made prez.

He was the Man—some squaresville youth version. He was a groovy youth figurehead. He confronted some radicals. He helped quash some half-baked revolt. The law scraped his skin. *This* flesh wound hurt. He applied to USC Law School. He got in. Let’s train for the truth biz.

We’ll learn theory and statutes. We’ll learn to think legalistically. Let’s learn to lasso the truth.

He studied. He gorged on test cases. He choked up minutiae. Law school—the Life writ small.

He honed his truth skills. It juked his appetite. He drooled for more adventure. It was ’72. He doubled his workload. He joined the LAPD Reserves.

LAPD—the Life writ *bigggg.*

He took academy classes. He logged 264 hours. He augmented his law-school skills. He was young, dumb, and full of cum. Give me jeopardy and peril. Give me a black-and-white. Give me a badge and a gun.

They did. He got Newton Division—ruff, tuff, and non-Caucasian. He worked 3 to 6 shifts a month. He worked Saturday nites. He saw a gunshot victim bleed out on a pool table. The cat took one in the aorta. The cat's eyes pulsed and flatlined.

Newton kicked the youth out of him. He got in fights. He broke up fights. He rolled code 3. He read law texts. He popped his street cherry. He inhaled legal gobbledygook. He saw horror up close. He got used to it. The SLA pulled their shit. It was calamitous nonsense. He got no pinch-me portents of distant destiny.

He rigged a plan. He culled contingencies. Plan 1: Pass the bar. Plan 1-A: Become a Deputy D.A. Plan 2: Fail the bar. Join the Feds or go full-time LAPD.

Good plans. Lashed to his life sense and wrapped in his roots. He was 26. He was disillusioned. His ideals stood intact. He was book-schooled and street-smart and tricked out to try the truth biz.

He aced the bar exam. The D.A. needed prosecutors. Plans 1 and 1-A played out plenty good.

COOLEY WORKED. The '70s sizzled. The decade featured big hair and self-forfeit. Self-absorption reigned. L.A. was stoned. Criminals rapped sadness. Don't lock me up/help me adjust/I need rehabilitation.

It hindered truth detection. It made Cooley think. It made him weigh mitigation. It buttressed the truth as absolute standard. It undermined the truth as knowable up front.

It honed his shit sniffer. It taught him to gauge forfeit per person. It expanded his cop context. He moved past suspects and victims and fast patrol encounters. He whipped past his own white-ass world and Negrofied Newton. He read case law. He took specific fact patterns. He abstracted them. He revised them to fit breaking cases. He met diverse suspects and victims. He added witnesses and families in duress. He studied. He interviewed. He talked to cops cop-to-cop and cop-to-cop lawyer. He prepped for court. He plea-bargained. He litigated. He weighed his native rectitude against a growing compassion.

He learned. He lived the Life. He tried for the truth. The truth tricked him and trapped him. There's knowing the truth. There's proving the truth. There's the truth obscured by baffling fact patterns. There's forfeit fueled by traumatic circumstances. There's forfeit as furious fuck-up. The truth triumphs, the truth eludes, the truth preys on principles that protect the guilty. Every day/every case/every courtroom deal and judgment—simple truth, two-sided truth, truth misunderstood.

Misdemeanors, felonies, dope cases, assaults, burglary-robbery. Case law, plea deals, referrals, sentencing, justice. The Life socked it to him. Some trail of truth got him through.

He met a woman. They courted and married. Two kids followed. His career advanced. The Life and the Office—one force synonymous.

He toured the County. He wrote a dope-seizure text. He worked regional outposts.

He ran Antelope Valley. He nailed a rape-o for a hundred years plus. Bam—the longest single-victim rape sentence ever. Truth-serving and well deserved.

Steve Cooley in his LAPD uniform in 1975. He served as a reserve officer for the Newton Street Division from 1972 to 1978. *(Photo courtesy of Steve Cooley)*

Commendations accrued. Ding me with dinners and ply me with plaques. He litigated. He won in court. He forged friendships with fellow Lifers. D.A.s came and went. He studied Joe Busch, John Van de Kamp, Bob Philibosian, Ira Reiner, and Gil Garcetti. He ran San Fernando Valley. Said office was huge. Its size equivalence stunned. He tried special-circs murders. The Laurie Myles case went down. Cooley was on it.

It was a three-punk/four-month nightmare. It shocked the Valley. Two murders/ three woundings/thirty robberies. They shot Laurie Myles in her car. Her young son watched. They parked outside a church. Her daughter was at Bible-study class.

LAPD got the punks. Cooley put them away. Two life-without-paroles. One 38-year jolt.

The truth—sometimes simple. Ask “Gas Chamber” Leavy. The Simpson-Goldman snuffs occurred. Cooley watched the upscut. Gil Garcetti was D.A. Garcetti tried the case downtown. The jury pool favored O.J. O.J. walked. It was an outrage. Cooley caught the upshot.

The Office lost face. Public support dwindled. The office got shivved in the shorts. Garcetti got reelected. He won by a pubic-hair margin.

Cooley supported Garcetti’s opponent. Cooley got punished and transferred downtown. He took over Welfare Fraud. It was a demotion and a shaft job.

He worked downtown. He saw Lifer discontent. He saw cop discontent. He saw public discontent *mucho* close.

He worked his shaft gig. He caught anti-Garcetti vibes. Rampart broke. Garcetti fumbled it. Gilded Gil glitched out. He had no system. He had no way to look/learn/listen/collate and cull.

The Belmont scandal broke. Let's rebuild Belmont Hi. Let's rename it a "Learning Center." Let's build on some choice downtown land.

But—

The land's faulty. It's fucking toxic. It's environmentally fucked. Taxpayer millions—gone already. It's a city contract. It reeks of collusion. It howls and stirs questions up.

Where's the truth? Where's Gil Garcetti?

Cooley extrapolated. Cooley ran fact patterns and flowcharts. Cooley countered current controversies in his head. Cooley got this idea. It was quixotic and Jimmy Carter-esque.

I'll run for D.A. I'll defeat the incumbent. I'll win.

■

He gauged the public mood. He sensed truth fiends out there. He sniffed shit in the *spiritus mundi.*

O.J. walks. Clinton walks. Rampart rages. Belmont Hi is Jack Webb's alma mater. Jack ran for class prez. Jack won insurgent. Time trucks then to now. Circa '38 meets 2000. Insurgency runs in waves. It's yesterday once more.

He talked to his family. They said GO. He talked to aides and colleagues. They concurred.

He started early. He leaked word in spring '99. He put up a Web site. He hired a consultant. He beat potential candidates timewise. He glommed key-opponent status fast.

The media scoffed. Cooley hammered Gil Garcetti.

Garcetti sets up a Trademark Infringement Unit. Garcetti gets campaign cash from Guess? jeans first. A Garcetti backer's son hits the shitter. Garcetti reduces the beef.

The Life. Dig the traditions. Challenge your boss. Hold your job concurrent.

More challengers cliqued up. Cooley quashed their momentum. They came and went. Barry Groveman stayed. Formal announcements/fund-raisers/media brouhaha. '99 hits 2000.

March 7—the runoff election. A 50% plurality chills it. If Gil gets 50, Steve's fucked.

Cooley's a Republican. Garcetti's a Democrat. L.A. runs Democrat *biiiiig.* Garcetti paints Cooley as a manic malcontent. Garcetti infers right-wing nut and gun freak. Cooley brings up Lockheed.

Dig:

It's '96. Garcetti runs for reelection. The D.A.'s Office taps the County supervisors. Let's pay Lockheed 2.5 million. Let *them* run our child-support computer system.

Post hoc, ergo propter hoc:

Lockheed lobs Garcetti campaign cash. The envelope arrives a month on.

The clock clicked. Tick, tock to March 7. Cooley picked up endorsements. Garcetti and Cooley culled campaign cash. Garcetti looks like a Latin lover. Cooley's the "blue collar" call. It's disingenuously dunned—but it works.

Cooley hammered Gilded Gil.

Guess? jeans. Lockheed. The O.J. malaise as subversive subtext. Belmont. The Three Strikes Law—noxious nightmare. Garcetti supports it. Garcetti hurls hypocrisy. Garcetti has a supporter. His grandson stands on strike 3. Garcetti shoots him 16 months. That's inconsistent. It's *mandatory* life per strike 3.

Garcetti denied Lockheed. Garcetti tried to trim the timeline in his favor. Garcetti spoke through a consultant. The consultant called Cooley "a traditional disgruntled-employee candidate." Such people "always make a mistake of thinking the public wants to hear their laundry list of exaggerated attacks."

Laundry list, shit. No tickee, no washee. I'm no Chinaman, but I'm a Cooley.

The list lurked and lingered. Cooley complemented it. He sent off salvos of solutions. He launched them lawyerly. They were complex *and* commonsensical. Mr. Blue Collar blurred into Policy Pete.

It's March 7. L.A. County votes. Groveman: 330,429/25%. Garcetti: 504,098/37%. Cooley: 509,750/38%.

No plurality. We fight to November.

They did. Cooley *had* the momentum. Cooley *built* more momentum. Cooley *grew* from burly to stately.

Garcetti's attacks atrophied. Cooley opposes Three Strikes. Bullshit—I want proportionality. I'm *not* passive on public scandals—Gil, don't shit me.

Cooley got the endorsements. The *L.A. Times*/the cop unions/ the *L.A. Weekly*. Ex-D.A.s stumped for Steve. The constituency confounded. Cooley wrapped up the right and lured in the left. Grassroots gravitas grabbed them. The man magnetized.

Garcetti got desperate. He did ethnic shtick. *Amigos y amigas,* love me Latinate—my blood blends with you. He placed smear ads. They kicked off with "Republican Steve Cooley." The "Republican" rip rolled no ripples. Cooley rode a nonpartisan roll.

He debated Garcetti. They fought fifteen times. They jabbed. They inveighed invective. Cooley's record—deconstructed/distorted /revised. Gun control/Three Strikes/Guess? jeans/Lockheed. Slick versus burly cum stately. You're soft on crime/ no, *you* are— middle-aged malice and a sandbox-shenanigan show.

It was overkill. It delayed and postponed. It fucked with the foregone conclusion.

People loved Steve Cooley. It was genuflectingly genuine. He hit the clear chord of *you and me.* He did it honestly and naturally and effortlessly.

He won huge. Pinch me—you're the D.A.

THAT WAS NOVEMBER 2000. Cut to now—1/2002.

Cooley trekked floor 18. He touched wall cracks. He turf-marked. He rehashed recent rebop.

The *Times* tainted him. Reformer's first year—few highs, few lows. Joe Scott prestaged them. Joe released a memo. It ran 31 bullet points. It ran down Year One in detail.

Cold cases to hate crimes. Belmont to Rampart. Anticorruption to immigrant fraud.

The *Times* piece hit first. The memo stats ran piecemeal. The *Times* got more cluck for the buck.

The truth was a *game.* Politics taught him. The truth was a moral must and a shuck.

The Blake job—unresolved. The Cold Case Squad—looking tuff. That Armenian hit job promised progress. Rick Jackson and Tim Marcia rode it rough.

Rampart rang on rancorous. The conspiracy nuts won't give up. The Public Integrity Division blew a case. Conflict of interest—you're out of the box.

The truth gets trashed sometimes. You're the Man now. You take the shots.

The truth plays schizzy. Learn from it. Light some candles. Light one for Gilded Gil Garcetti.

Cooley touched wall cracks. Subordinates said hi. They *all* called him "Boss" and "Steve."

He crashed at his orgy desk. There's the view. Sip coffee and put your feet up.

The truth liberates. The truth vindicates. The truth kicks in late.

Sacramento moved on Carmichael. Then to now—26 years plus.

The Feds linked shotgun pellets to shells. The link led to an SLA hideout. Forensic confirmation—*waaaay* overdue.

The Sacramento cops moved. It's 1/16/02. It's synced to gnat'sdick-hair margin.

Emily Harris—popped at 8:02 a.m. Her ex Bill and Michael Bortin—popped at 8:18.

Tight spread—16 minutes/shotgun sharp.

Olson-Soliah slinked to her lawyer. She spent 1/18 in court.

She got sentenced. Bam—the car-bomb caper/20 to life. She got arraigned for Carmichael—211 and Murder One.

She pled not guilty. It didn't matter. She was karmically crucified, french-fried, and fucked.

There's the view. All crime all the time. Courtrooms and lockups.

Cooley gawked. Sometimes there's justice. Sometimes the plain truth works out.

Myrna Opsahl, God bless you—I'm glad I could help. We're all here on the Good Lord's dime. Someday we'll hook up.

Little Sleazer and the Mail-Sex Mama

The snuff vibed ’70s. The slime factor, the cheap angst, the Valley mall bit. It should have been then. The Victim was young. The Suspect had a career.

The Herald flourished then. L.A.’s tattling tabloid as broadsheet. The Herald flew low. Crime reportage sans condescension. Bright flashbulb pix.

There’s the Victim. She’s ripe in acrylic tops and buckskin skirts. The Suspect’s short. Short was in then. He’s smug and cool. He’s tall on TV. There’s a bird perched on his cue-stick.

The tale demands a two-name title. The ’70s ran rife with such. They lauded larcenous losers. They deified disaffection. They freeze-framed the freon cool as the System ate them up.

Rafferty and the Gold Dust Twins. Freebie and the Bean. The Duchess and the Dirtwater Fox.

Lascivious lovers. Furious fuzz. Hell-hurtling heroes and the fabulously fucked up.

Boffo box-office then. Mainstream moviemaking masquerading as maverick art. A prattling prophecy of “Nicole and O.J.” and tabloid tell-all TV.

Then was then. Hindsight hinders and perverts perspective. Deconstruction de-hinders. Nab some noxious nostalgia. Move with the movie-biz metaphor.

It’s a Hollywood story. The title crawls change. The same shit applies then to now.

They might indict the Suspect. They might discard assumption of guilt. Leads might tweak them elsewhere. Clues could cull collectively and radically ratify thinking. New suspects could slide in.

It’s a mid-sized celebrity murder. It’s the first L.A. job post-O.J. Victim and Suspect lack Simpson-Goldman sizzle. They reign rancorous and raggedy-ass. They won’t mount a media Matterhorn. They define despair and ladle on lowlife ennui. Simpson-Goldman bid you to vulture and voyeurize. It was filthy and fitness-crazed and fittingly fitted with money and sex. It set a prosecutorial precedent that juliennes justice and trashes the truth to this day.

Actor Robert Blake, second from left, portrayed murderer Perry Smith in the 1967 film *In Cold Blood. (Culver Pictures)*

Then to now. Seven years. Brentwood ’94 to the Valley 2001.

Then:

The prosecutors’ duty: Secure the truth and win or lose accordingly. The defense attorneys’ mandate: Win at all moral cost. The O.J. prosecutors damned O.J. with circumstantial facts and DNA. DNA is unassailably precise. DNA is boring science. The prosecutors overexposited it and put jurors to sleep. The O.J. defense team caught their blows and punched counterclockwise. They concocted conspiracy theories. They capitalized on a racist cop nailed by the word “nigger” and craftily crucified him. They synthesized a siren song of racial injustice and lashed logic with it.

The jurors dropped behind drama. The jurors reached out for racial grievance and ignored the inviolate truth.

O.J. walked. Dig the dysfunctional dynamic. Then to now, dig the dilemma.

Celebrity snuffs scare prosecutors shitless. The dramatic potential diminishes their shot to convict. Said potential is perennial. The O.J. case redefined it. It was a shivering shock. It was hellaciously Hollywood. Reason versus drama in *this* town—no way, Jose.

There’s the truth. There’s dramatic logic. There’s age-old movie themes. There’s the victim as killer and the killer as victim and the victimhood cult in L.A. The Victim’s a sleazebag, the Suspect’s an *actor*—oh shit, we’re fucked in L.A.

MAYBE. MAYBE NOT.

The L.A. D.A.’s a reformer. The post-O.J. malaise helped make him. He’ll follow the facts. He’ll track the truth. He’ll assess and scrutinize. He’ll indict or bop off indictmentless.

Said facts:

It’s Friday, May 4, 2001. Victim and Suspect are newlyweds. The marriage is six months in. She’s 44. He’s 67. They lack that newlywed glow.

She got pregnant. He got pissed. They considered a scrape. She slept around. A DNA test nailed his daddyhood. They got hitched and had a baby girl.

They shacked apart. They had two pads on his property. He made her sign a prenup. She swore off bunco schemes. She vowed to drop her known-felon buddies.

Said Friday:

8:30 p.m. Victim and Suspect nosh at Vitello’s restaurant. It’s a mid-range dago joint on Tujunga. The Suspect’s a regular. There’s a pasta dish named after him.

They live nearby. They drive up in his Stealth. They park a block away. Why dat???—there’s spaces much closer in.

They eat. They split to the car. The Victim gets in. The Suspect unkinks a brain cramp. Fuck—I left my gun in the booth!

He packs a roscoe routinely. He’s got a carry permit. The Victim is a larcenist. The Victim has enemies. You gots to protect yo bitch!!!

He hotfoots it back to Vitello’s. He retrieves his rod. *He* recalls it vividly. No eyeball wits confirm it.

He bops back to the car. He sees the Victim. She’s got a gunshot head wound. She’s slumped in the seat.

Panic now—

The Suspect runs. The Suspect crosses the street. The Suspect bangs on Sean Stanek’s door. Stanek knows the Suspect by sight and reputation. The cat’s a local habitué.

The Suspect begs help. Stanek calls 911. They run to the car. The Victim gasps. Her eyes roll back. Her window is down. There’s no shattered glass.

Panic City—

The Suspect runs to Vitello’s. Eyewits recall *this* trip. The Suspect is frantic. He begs water and gulps it. His wife “got hurt or mugged or something.”

The restaurant boss wants to call 911 quicksville. The Suspect says it’s redundant. He walks to the car. The victim is insensate. He starts vomiting in the street.

Paramedics arrive. The LAPD shows. Code 3 service—seven minutes to the scene.

The Victim expired. Cops braced the Suspect streetside. Cops braced him at his crib. Cops braced him for five hours straight.

He declined a polygraph. He took a gunshot residue test. Results: inconclusive. He’d handled his carry piece.

He denied all guilt. He detailed the Victim's bunco scams. He flung the fuzz a nebulous knot of her nameless enemies. His blood pressure pressed up *prestissimo.* He hospital-hid overnight. He hired a crack criminal lawyer. Said shyster shivved and sheared the Victim postmortem. The Suspect sulked submissive. The Suspect submitted to search warrants and gave up his guns. They passed ballistics tests *bellissimo.* Cops carted off cartons of the Victim's belongings. They cried out her criminality and signed in as sick souvenirs.

Days dipped by. A dumped Dumpster delivered the murder piece. The bin stood near the crime scene. The bin was deep with debris from May 4th and 5th. The roscoe reeked of gun oil. The roscoe was fingerprint-free. The roscoe's registration remained anonymous. No way to sully the Suspect. No way to hitch him to some hired hit man.

The Suspect was subsumed by sadness and wracked with regret. He doted on his daughter. His mouthpiece maligned her mother. The Victim's family shagged a shyster. A PR war waged. Cop PR dithered disingenuously. There's the Suspect suspended as a *non*-suspect—just like O.J. was at first.

The snuff vibed '80s. The heedlessness, the self-absorption, the glut. Time-trip then to now and dig the disjuncture.

Little Sleazer at fifty. Pint-sized and pumped with allure. The Mail-Sex Mama looking gooooood.

Robert Blake, left, covers his face as he arrives back at his Studio City home with his attorney, Harland W. Braun. *(Luis Sinco/L.A. Times)*

Ron Reagan's in the White House. El Jefe hails from Hollywood. Cocaine comes to conquer. L.A. blurs in the blowout and pounds with postnasal drip.

The era etched early earmarks. Plea bargains began mounting up. I'm a victim/I'm an addict/don't judge me cruel. All this excess engulfed me.

Dope delivered the deus ex machina. Dope molded mitigation pleas. The boom era boomeranged with furious forfeit. There's Little Sleazer and the Mail-Sex Mama trapped *back in time. They're coked up. They writhe in relinquishment. They're pouring out postnasal drip.*

It's a Hollywood story. The title crawls change. The same shit applies then to now.

Little Sleazer is an actor. All actors are fucked up. They *are* their art. Their gift is impersonation. It's nonmeditative art. The goal is to become something you're not. The goal entices narcissists. The cessation of self bodes warm. It's a riff on Woody Allen's line: "My one regret is that I'm not someone else."

Good actors impersonate across a wide character plane. Their mental gifts and neuroses mesh. *Bad* actors run with their egos unchecked. They rage effusive and grotesque. *Successful* bad actors tailor their personas to the media marketplace. They possess physical grace and/or outsized presence. Their need to impress manifests as dynamism. Their effusiveness stops short of desperation. Their grotesquerie seduces more than repels. They become themselves hyperbolized and repackaged for large and small screens. Successful bad actors push *one* creative envelope. Their drive is conscious and unconscious and ruled by casting-call nods. Successful bad actors find roles that allow them to *be* themselves and explicate their offscreen potential.

Little Sleazer plays killers. He plays them with hambone humanity and the requisite reptile rage. He chewed scenery as Perry Smith in *In Cold Blood.* Sawed-off serpent Smith had an abusive father. Little Sleazer copped to the same. His performance was silly symbiosis. It's all tics and mugs and squints and goofball grins. It recalls real-life rodent Charles Schmid, "the Pied Piper of Tucson." Schmid killed teenage girls in the '60s. He was short, dark, and narcissistic. He wanted to be an actor. He wore eye shadow. He jammed tin cans in his boots and boosted his height.

Little Sleazer as Smith via Schmid. The four *In Cold Blood* victims plus the Pied Piper's three. Little Sleazer as current murder suspect. Little Sleazer's rap on murder in *People* magazine:

"A murderer only becomes a murderer after he or she kills somebody. But what are they before they're on death row? They're you or me."

Jive wisdom. The universal-guilt chestnut. Nonjudgmentalism as actor's creed.

Little Sleazer on murder redux:

"I have played a lot of people who killed. I have been on death row. You know, I have never met a murderer in my life. That's because there ain't any. There are people who crossed the line. Some of us don't cross the line."

Wooooo! Heavy shit. Sinatra might make it work. A shrug, a Pall Mall, a martini. A sharkskin suit from Sy Devore. The frail frame that boffed Ava G. The Chairman, maybe. He granted grace and gravity to the sheerest of shit and stung you with style. Little Sleazer—no, *nein,* and *nyet.*

He's lachrymose killer Perry Smith—that crap-your-pants crybaby. He's funky führer Jimmy Hoffa toned down for TV. He's family slayer John List—he didn't kill no one, there ain't no killers, there's just you and me.

Little Sleazer played Baretta. He frappéed us frigid and fried us with that bird on his cue. He was fortyish. He was *cooool.*

Cooool is childish. *Cooool* is nonsense. *Cooool* is the pinnacle of male-gender jive. If you don't know it at forty plus, you never will.

Combine coolness and rage. Merge them maladroit. You get the psycho default mode of bad actors.

Who tend to indulge bad habits. Who tend to disdain inhibition. Who tend to confuse their lives with their roles.

The Mail-Sex Mama's mama on her brief son-in-law:

"He would be real nasty and sometimes he would be sweet. She liked him when he was sweet. I told her that he's an actor, and how is she going to know when he's acting?"

SHE DIDN'T. She was acting. Her wife-coquette performance blunted her to cues. *She* was a narrow-range actor. She deployed her fading assets. Her default mode was sex.

She was a con. She ran her short con from mail drops. She read lonely hearts and singles mags and made her marks from plaintive pleas for poon. She placed classified ads. She sent out skin pix and dunned dolts for money. Her long con was celebrity marriage and judiciously unplanned pregnancy.

She was a hell-bent harlot. She hailed from New Jersey. She died a month shy of forty-five. She wanted to be an actress. She wanted to marry a movie star.

She married a Jersey guy. They had two kids. She boogied. He watched the kids. She pursued "careers."

The law nailed her. Bad checks/Jersey/'86. Dope busts in '88 and '89. A widower answered her ads. She married him in Nevada. He gave her a roll of quarters. She split. He never saw her again.

Check beef #2—1994. Jail time and a move on. Arkansas beckons. Ditto the fuzz. Stolen credit cards/'96/a fine and probation. California beckons. She stalks Jerry Lee Lewis. She has a daughter. She claims that Lewis fathered it. Lewis denies it. She declines a blood test.

She has a thing with Marlon Brando's son, Christian. Christian is a killer. He capped a cat named Dag Drollet and did joint time. Jerry Lee Lewis is nicknamed "the Killer." Little Sleazer plays killers and denies that killers exist.

Thrill to the theme. Preview the prickles of prick-teaser destiny.

The Mail-Sex Mama moved on. She placed classifieds. She kept a journal. She made notes to stalk Sugar Ray Leonard and Gary Busey. She stalked retreads within the realm of reason. She dug the dynamic of diminishing returns.

She looped Little Sleazer. She sent out "Hi, single guy" letters and pix of her twenty years back. Her meshuga marriage moldered as misalliances do. Little Sleazer righteously resented her. She fitfully feared him. She kept an address book. There's sweaty Jimmy Swaggart and paralyzed pussy poo-bah Larry Flynt. There's freewheeling Frankie Valli and some doofus from *The Dukes of Hazzard*. It's a dizzying D-list descent. It's a hopped-up heap of hopeless hope.

Hope springs infernal.

Right up to May 4, 2001.

◆

The snuff vibed '90s. The Clinton climate, O.J.'s ogrehood, victimhood visions reprised. It should have been then. The Victim was younger. She's white trash worthy of Bill C.

Little Sleazer played John List then. List lived in New Jersey. The Mail-Sex Mama was born there. Likewise Little Sleazer. It's sinister symmetry.

John List killed his family. He wanted to move on. There ain't no killers. There's just you and me.

Blow jobs ain't sex, but I came on her dress. There ain't no perjurors or obstructors. There's just you and me.

Dig the decade. Tally the tabloid toll. Pry the precedents free. O.J. walks. Michael Jackson slimes loose. Little Sleazer could wiggle. Celebrity deaths and good things both come in threes.

It's 2002 now. May 4th is ten months gone. Some cases build slow or evaporate. That means there's more or less than you see.

They might indict. They might not. New suspects might bode and retreat.

He's got the kid. He's a single dad. O.J. got the kids. It's a single-dad symphony.

Murder is always wrong. Fuck mitigation madness. Fuck the vicissitudes of victimology. Killers exist. There are too many and precious few. They ain't you or me.

Little Sleazer and O.J. should talk. They could meet at Vitello's or Mezzaluna. O.J. knows the drill. They could share spit. O.J. could cuddle and counsel and instill inspirationally.

Hang in. Act your way out. Pose with your daughter. Lies and circumstance might click your way. You might get lucky.

I’ve Got the Goods

We want the goods.

Who knows who. Who blows who. Who’s got the pull and the gelt.

Who’s got the size.

Who’s got the habit.

Who’s got the appetite.

Family dirt doesn’t count. Shared blood means shared secrets and reciprocal pacts not to tell. Friendship entails codes of silence and threat. Don’t dish my dirt or I’ll dish yours and I’ll dip deeper yet.

We’re the vigorous vultures of verisimilitude. We feed off the luridly authentic. It makes us feel alive.

We require a dish-dipping disjuncture. Distance on our disillusionment. We can’t carve carrion too close to ourselves. It subtracts the Allure from Alive.

Dystopian dish demands a dynamic. Demigods to devirginize. Star-stamped stand-ins for you and me.

The dynamic digs deep. We want our demigods divinely deigned and delivered defiled. We want them to soar above us and *be* us under the skin.

Godlike. Attainable. A confounding contradiction.

Only fools want to fuck movie stars and models. That anoints us a fool nation. We want Rita Hayworth in *Gilda* and Rita with the DTs. We want Rock Hudson in *Giant* and Rock at the Lavender Lounge.

Some savvy publications have exploited this need. They debuted in the early ’50s.

The scandal rags.

Confidential/Rave/Whisper/Lowdown/TopSecret/On the Q.T./ *Hush-Hush.*

Cheezy covers. Tall print. Clashing color schemes. Jarring shades that agitated the eye.

Cheap paper. Typos and misspellings. Back-page ads.

X-ray glasses. Sex guides. Home law school.

The rags raged. The rags ran concurrent with the Red Scare. The rags subverted thought in a subversion-minded era. The rags hit right on cue.

The movie biz was 40 years old. Toga epics and musicals reigned. Film noir redistributed paranoia.

Nightclubs held sway. TV was new. It fed us jingoism and pap. Joe and Jane America lived through the Big War and got sucker punched by Korea. They dug the boom economy and bought the party line. They suffered night sweats. They built bomb shelters. They sniffed the cultural air. They developed an Us-versus-Them thing.

It encompassed the Reds and the Negroes. It indicted the Mob and the foreign unwashed. It bowed to the Glamour World and ceded their right of access.

The Glamour World was a confluence. It publicly cohered in the ’50s. The scandal rags linked the divergent strands and mythologized the players. The rags built the world from photo files and innuendo.

Socialites. Film stars. Politicians. Jazz horns and playboys. Mobsters with crossover appeal.

The celebrity matrix. Revised and deconstructed for rube readers of a distinct demographic.

The estranged. The horny. The bereft and aggrieved. The worshipful stargazer ablaze with self-hatred. The chronically optimistic.

The rags were cynically optimistic. The rags were prophetic. The rags presaged the media age and the age of tabloid TV. The rags told us that the Glamour World was Our World hyperbolized and restricted for those with coin and good looks. The rags ran rancorous and riffed off their readers’ resentment. The rags ran riot with one rich subtext.

THEY are YOU. YOU could get lucky.

Joe and Jane Reader, rejoice.

The rags ratted out Johnnie Ray’s men’s-room misadventures. They were sneeringly snide and priapically pro-gay in the pre-pride era. The rags ran Ava Gardner’s murky memoirs of miscegenation. It reviled racists and revitalized race-mixer rectitude. The rags roasted rabid Sonny Tufts. Sonny bit showgirls on the thighs. The rags routed showgirls out of harm’s way. The rags put Sonny on a choke chain.

Disillusionment is enlightenment. Some pundit popped that platitude and clipped a clear chord in our souls.

The rags boomed for six years. They explicated the Glamour World. They enlightened. They emboldened. They obfuscated. They told trenchant truths and launched and licked libel litigations. They raised rubber and scored skidmarks on square America.

They gave us an alternative American family. They rebutted Ozzie and Harriet. They reinforced rapacious buffoons like Sergeant Bilko. They stamped stereotypes in stereophonic sound. They violated their own validity with loopy lyrics like the ones on this page. Scandal-rag language distanced and seduced. It read as contemporaneous satire. Rag writers moralized. Rag writers attacked Reds. Rag writers rallied behind the restrictions of their time. Rag writers wistfully winked and inferred a more insidious intent.

The rags loved to go after marginal Hollywood characters, like Johnnie Ray, a crooner who, the mags would allege, was involved in homosexual high jinks. *(Culver Pictures)*

Scandalanguage. Scopophiliac. Scarifyingly complex and multifaceted in motive.

The scandal-rag family of the ’50s is the dysfunctional family of today. Their voyeuristically viewed behavior is the hyper-analyzed behavior of today. The sedate backdrop of the ’50s gave it a compensating panache. The hopped-up pace of the ’90s depletes its power and underscores the behavior as prosaic.

Dipsomaniacs, hopheads, nymphos, fruits, dykes. Satyrs, Commies, miscegenators, hoods, provocateurs. Car wrecks, bar brawls, paternity suits.

Gang bangs. Three-ways. Toilet-stall assignations. Euphemized for the censors. Scandalanguaged to tell you *exactly* what it meant.

With appropriate pix.

Mug shots. Nightclub snaps. Outtakes from low-rent paparazzi.

Booze bloat. Stretch marks revealed. Loose shirttails and gaping flies outside whorehouses.

THEY are YOU. YOU could get lucky.

The scandal rags gave us the epic of hijinks gone wrong. They titillated. They linked US to THEM. They proudly promulgated the egalitarian spirit. They mocked celebrity culture. They put the “id” in “idiot.” They underscored the “I” in “Idolatry.” They mainlined a message in ellipsis.

Only character counts.

I dug the rags. It started about ’56. I was eight years old.

I lived in L.A. I was a fucked-up child of divorce. My dad was a Hollywood bottom-feeder. He used to work for Rita Hayworth. He told me he porked her.

I allegedly met Rita at a hot-dog stand. I was three years old. I allegedly spilled a grape drink in her lap. My dad said there was a dyke bounty out on Rita. He did not explain what that meant.

My dad worked for a schlock producer named Sam Stiefel. My dad told me Hollywood tales. My mom disapproved.

She was a drunk. Her boyfriends looked like film noir psychopaths. She sent me to the Lutheran church.

Martin Luther would have been a scandal-rag fave. He talked to himself and talked to God on the john. He kicked papal ass and renounced his celibate vow. He had beady brown eyes like my own.

I dug Luther’s story more than the Bible. The prose style was flat. I preferred *Whisper* and *Confidential. That* was literature.

My dad left his copies out. I got the goods. It corrupted my imagination.

My Sunday-school class went to see *The Ten Commandments.* I fidgeted and dozed. Yul Brynner played the Pharaoh. My dad said Yul was a poonhound. He had the goods.

I read a rag piece on Porfirio Rubirosa. “Rubi” was a shitbird. He hailed from the Dominican Republic. His dad was a wheel. Rubi ran guns. Rubi ran a white-slave racket. Rubi wrecked cars and married heiresses.

Rubi lived in the rags. He rarely made the mainstream press. I asked my dad about him. My dad had the goods.

Rubi had a monster shvantz. It caused internal damage. A Rubi conquest called it “Yul Brynner in a turtleneck.”

I put it together. Yul Brynner was bald. I now had the goods.

The rags worked their voodoo on me. They showed me the adult world unvarnished.

Money was everything. Sex was everyone’s secret. Sex was taboo. Fucking precipitated childbirth. This implied a wholesome endeavor. I didn’t believe it. The rags said otherwise. I caught my mom in bed with a man. It looked like a scandal-rag pic.

The pictures scared me. High-contrast black-and-white on pulp paper. Flashbulb glare as truth.

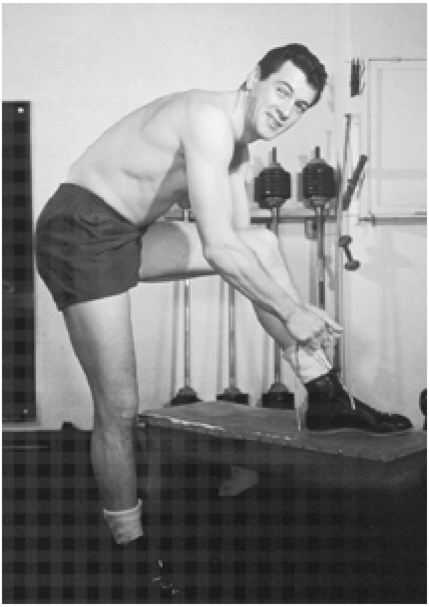
Every photo reduced beauty. Every photo tagged the price of fame.

THEY are US and THEY will die young.

The rags died slow.

They beat back lawsuits. They pissed off people with pull. They pissed off movie magnates and publicity flacks. The rags outed homosexual actors. Flacks traded dope on minor stars to protect their high-end homos. Rock Hudson remained sacrosanct and un-outed. Some Rock lovers took the Rock's fall.

My dad had the goods on Rock. I had a crush on a 4th grade girl. She slathered the Rock all over her notebook. I told her Rock was queer. She said, "You're just jealous of him."



Outing minor actors was the rags' bread and butter. Stars rarely got nailed. Rock Hudson remained untouched. (Universal/TheKobal Collection)

The studios built up a slush fund. They targeted *Confidential.* They tied it up in litiginous tape. Maureen O'Hara sued *Confidential.* They said she groped a guy at Grauman's Chinese.

She won her suit. *Confidential* doused the heat on its sinuendo. The other rags followed. Their collective circulation fizzled. They flatlined into the '60s.

The decade was not kind.

Rubi kicked in a car crash. The new Prez had sex shit in his closet. The new Prez was too powerful to fuck over.

'50s sex was a leer and a gulp. The rags capitalized. '60s sex was a wink.

The rags flourished under suppression. Bad juju spawns subversive literature. American culture was reconfiguring. The rags couldn't keep up.

Hootenannies. Folk music. Deep roots on the left. A globalistic message.

Foreign films. Wild stuff that glorified adultery and ennui. Moral turpitude imported from Catholic countries.

JFK in the White House. His implied message: Be cool like me.

Sex spoofs on screen. Beehives and bikinis. The American male as a pussy-whipped shlub. The implied message: Don't sweat it—it's the human condition.

The Twist. Negro music for white stiffs. Interracial dancing on TV.

The rags couldn't compete.

They latched their lenses on foreign film stars. They spilled their sordid stories.

Snore.

They lobbed softballs at JFK and the Rat Pack.

Yawn.

They exposed Dr. Feelgoods and their loose prescription plans.

Snoresville, U.S.A. Joe and Jane America *had* their pills. They didn't want to know from the dangers.

JFK bought it. America bought that jive "Loss of Innocence" line. The Vietnam War raged. The civil-rights struggle mulched the "m" off "miscegenation." Joe and Jane's kids became freaks. Some geek coined a term: "the Sexual Revolution."

The rags were passé. Everybody was stoned and fucking. They got their titillation firsthand.

They didn't want the goods. Gossip was uncool.

The rags died.

■

I survived without them. I had the goods. I was one unhip cognoscente.

I had the dirt, the dish, the scopophile skank. No one cared. They had their own sex lives and dope habits. The rags were prophetic. THEY were US. The Glamour World had merged with the Real World—at least in L.A.

Dubious mortar. Sex and dope. Promiscuous egalitarianism. The whole city was bombed. It was fried, fragged, zorched, zonked, blitzed, and blotto. It stayed stoned to the late '70s. I stayed stoned and stupefyingly chaste. I had the goods. It was innocuous information.

I utilized it twice.

I spotted an actress on Wilton and Melrose. She had a flat tire. She looked helpless. I knew she was a nympho. The rags said so.

I was bombed. She was bombed. I changed her tire. I suggested a drink at her place.

She said no. She gave me a dollar and a pat on the head.

The goods did me no good.

I was hitchhiking. I was bombed. A car pulled up. I recognized the driver.

He was a name actor. The rags ratted him out. A buddy confirmed it. He had firsthand knowledge.

The actor craved young males. He was indiscriminate. He picked up hitchhikers. He offered them cocaine and head.

I declined his ride. The goods did me *some* good.

■

I cleaned up my life. L.A. stabilized and de-stoned. The rags resurrected in partial spirit. They metastasized into supermarket tabloids.

I noticed them in the early ’80s. I’d quit shoplifting. I was walking through check-stand lines.

I watched housewives shag the tabs. I watched hipsters goof on them. I read over their shoulders. I glommed the gestalt.

The tabs pushed minor gossip. They dick-teased their readers. The headlines promised spice. The text was coitus denied.

Bait-and-switch. Buy the tab off the headline. Jump from implied incest to kids rescued by movie stars.

The tabs pushed the lives of monarchs and TV actors. The tabs reported cancer cures and mystical amulets. The tabs reported double-digit births. The tabs tattled tales of thousand-pound women confined to their beds. The tabs detailed abductions to Mars.

The tab readership was the rag readership expanded and lobotomized. Tab readers craved reassurance and surrogate lives more than they craved the goods. They did not want their idols deidolized and rendered attainable by chance. They wanted their fear of death assuaged. They wanted their disbelief smothered. They wanted to blunt their boredom with yarns of the gilded and blessed. They wanted to extend their realm of possibility past *all* sane boundaries.

The tabs delivered.

Amazing rescues. Chocolate diets. January-December romance. Miraculous healings and saves at death’s door. Firsthand sightings of God.

Full circle.

The rags disillusioned. The tabs reillusioned. The rags proferred sex in a sexless time and succumbed to sex abundance. The tabs metamorphosed from profligacy. They offered a fulsomely lunatic love.

Outsiders crave the goods to grease their way in. The rags said you might not want to go there. The tabs showed the insider's world as one of your limitless options.

The rags and the tabs showed their venal colors. The rags and the tabs showed some balls and some heart. The tabs pandered lower and kinder. They warmed more souls and showed more legs in the end.

AMERICANS ARE SUCKERS for dish and redemption. The tabs and the Bible notch big numbers still. The goods remain the goods. Hard data to hoard in yearning—or judgment.

Tabloid TV slimed out of the rags and the tabs. Large-scale entertainment reporting hatched concurrent. TV shows and magazines devoted to gossip and scandal. Chroniclers of the NEW Glamour World.

Puerile actors and rock stars. Fashion moguls with anorexic models in tow. Doomed and fatuous royals. Homicidal halfbacks. Sex-harassing politicians.

Entertainment reporting arrived at a wild-ass juncture. Movies were bad. Mindless blockbusters ruled. Stupes reveled in their brainlessness. They wanted to know all about them.

It was voyeurism sans sex or soul. The goods as box-office numbers and deal memos revealed. The deal as the foreplay. The boffo opening weekend as the climax.

Glamour World arrivistes: feral film execs and agents. Officious and prim. Seductive because they choose what movies get made. Sexy names in a prostitute's trick book.

Entertainment reporting merged with tabloid TV. Film criticism was subsumed by back-page plot summations and televised yeas or nays. Hard news got mauled in the flow. O.J. updates ran between premieres and bikini-waxed starlets.

Narrative lines blurred. The late-breaking goods:

The Glamour World *is* the Real World for stupes. Conglomerates dictate the aesthetic. They own the TV stations. They own the film studios. They run the entertainment mags. They collude in their shared interest.

The dish is an advertisement.

Let's huckster the new epic of hijinks gone wrong. Let's pull for the kids in our dysfunctional brood. Let's juke our ratings and bait the stupes out to the multiplex.

Robert Downey's in the slam. His new flick debuts next week. O.J.'s got a new babe. Will he off *that* one? Buy his doofus comedies on DVD.

Our kids are unruly and beautiful. They eat the poisoned fruit that we're afraid to touch. We're their flunkies and their enablers. We cosign their shit. We buy them their dope and urge them to drive drunk.

We’ve got the goods. It allows us to live vicarious and judge harshly at whim. It makes us feel alive.

Our new brood is soporific. Everyone’s got their goods. That tops the “t” off “titillation” and vaps the “v” off of “voyeur.”

I don’t want the new goods. I live in Kansas. I don’t want to exploit movie stars with flat tires. I’m a Lutheran. I live by the scandal-rag message in ellipsis.

Only character counts.

I’m full of Midwestern fervor. I judge sternly. I hate Bill Clinton. I love Bill Bennett and Bill O’Reilly. I mess with notions of the Lutheran ministry. I know a pastor of some renown. He said he could get me into divinity school. They’ll waive the high-school-diploma requirement in my case.

My wife finds this calling dubious. She sees me as a man of soiled cloth. I wouldn’t hack divinity school. I’m too joyous and profane. I see God in foul language and sex. I’m more L.A. than Kansas City. The Lutheran Church would disdain me. They’d quash the dirty tales I write for *GQ*.

The notion persists. The calling calls. My wife has successfully countermanded it.

She’s got the goods on me. She’ll go to the tabs in a hot fucking flash.

The Trouble I Cause

Blind Item. *Hush-Hush* Magazine,
March 1957 issue.
COP CONTRETEMPS—
CALL IT COERCION OR????

We won't waste words. What paparazzi-plagued police department deploys proactive propaganda via a vivid TV show? Said show: sadly sagging into retrograde ratings. A ripe rumor: The star of the stale show shivers in the shadow of a politically potent police chief.

The chief chirps. The star stutters and stammers. That's the standard stamp of their relationship. Hot news: Has the hell-bent El Jefe handed the star a startlingly malevolent mandate?

Item: A certain PD circumvents civil rights routinely. During the Depression they deep-sixed the dispossessed and deported them to distant states or whipped them into work camps. The cops called it the "Bum Blockade." It kept hungry hordes out of Hollywood. It hustled homeless herds out of

Hermosa. Hell—it kept a scintillatingly sinful city cosmetically clean.

Item: Has the pissed-off police chief told the stuttering star to scrawl a scurrilous script? Will said script scrutinize the Bum Blockade and blasphemously blast the need for its reinstatement? Do you smell a smoke screen to finagle a Fascist agenda? Will the servile serfs of a certain PD implement it?

Remember, dear reader, you heard it first here: off the record, on the Q.T. and very Hush-Hush. . . .

1.

Jack Webb: a jejune jerkoff jacked around by the LAPD. A punk pawn in the paws of Chief William H. Parker.

A script reader skimmed me the skank. She perused paper at Paramount and perched in my pocket. I owned her. She dove dusky girls at a dyke den in Duarte. I had snappy snapshots.

The script was surreptitiously submitted. Jackoff Jack wrote it. Sapphic Sally noted notes in the margins. She pounced on the PARKER penmanship.

She recognized the round R's and tall T's. She'd dragged herself through three years on *Dragnet.* Parker penned moronic margin notes on all the scripts she screened. She hated Jumpy Jack. Jack tried to juke her into bed with a muff-munching mulatta. Jack loooved to watch.

I paced around my pad. I mixed a morning martini. It mingled through my membranes and mesmerized me. The March issue was a motherfucker. I rained rancor on a randy boy who rammed Rock Hudson. I blasted that blind item.

Dick Contino called me. He dished more dirt. Baaaad blood bopped between Bill Parker and Juvenile Jack. It bipped back to '54. Parker partisaned Bum Blockades then. Parker the facile fascist with fangs. Jive Jack the unctuous *Untermensch* under his thumb. Dick demurred on more details. Impetuously implied:

Jack Webb was so convincing in his role on *Dragnet* that the LAPD would receive constant calls asking for Sergeant Joe Friday's help. *(Los Angeles Times Collection, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA)*

Parker pulled the puppet strings and pitted his will against Webb's. Webb wiggled, withered, and wailed, "What do you want?"

I mainlined my martini. It seared my cerebellum and pinged my pineal gland. It was godlike good to be Danny Getchell—the scandal-scamming Scopophile King!

My living-room door lurched loose. It levitated. It lolled off its latches. It creaked, crashed, and flew to the floor.

Look: LAPD Sergeant John O'Grady.

He bristled. He brandished a Browning pump. He brought the butt end down and bumped the bulge in my BVDs.

I retched and ran out of breath. I belched up bile and Beefeater's. My shag rug shot up and hauled me down in a heap.

THE LINCOLN HEIGHTS drunk tank:

An inferno. Incontinent inebriates installed within. Howling hopheads. Wetbacks and wienie waggers. Misanthropic misdemeanants crammed in a crap-crusted crawl space. Sixty sunken-faced sub-felons sunk in a subterranean shit chute.

Bars. Stainless-steel staves. Sticky stained and sealed with semen. Cement walls. A flat floor flecked with floating phlegm flakes. Catty-corner off a catwalk: the INS tank. *Mucho* Mexicanos mopped up by the *migra.*

My head hurt. My balls boinged. O’Grady ossified me. He planted righteous reefers on my ass and popped me for Possession. He blitzed me for that blind item.

I stood by the stainless-steel staves. I fretted. I froze in a fresco of frustration. I was fundamentally fucked. I’d landed in the lurid lurch of LAPD limbo.

Winos wailed. Hopheads howled. Homos humped in a hot heap. Sheriff’s shits moved Mexes out of the *migra* tank. Jungle John O’Grady assisted.

The shits chatted up the cholos. “You want *trabajo*? You want to be in a movie?” The cholos chained cigarettes. They chomped their chancre sores and chewed on the offer.

The shits shot back to the drunk tank. They walked up to wickedly wasted winos and whispered. The winos wiggled and went wow! The shits ripped off their wristbands. They scooted a scurvy line out to the catwalk.

O’Grady observed. I orbed in on him. O’Grady ordered the Sheriff’s shits about. They moved the Mexicans. They led them to a loading dock. The winos wiggle-walked their way.

I felt squirrelly. I squinted square at the dock. O’Grady squawked at the Sheriff’s shits and shoved his weight around. The shits whipped on the winos. They manhandled the Mexes. They ripped wristbands off four choice cholos. They chewed out four chumps and sidled them in a side door.

I got the gestalt. Troublesome *trabajo.* A movie or the *migra* and a march to Mexico. A chilling choice for Charlie Chorizo.

A truck trundled up. The back bed dipped down to the dock. O’Grady growled gruff. He grabbed wetbacks and winos and herded them wholesale.

Movie meshugas. *Bum Blockade*—a blighted blockbuster for LAPD? Threatening threads thrown down at ME.

I paced. I skirted scurfy scamsters and chirpy child molesters. I was framed. I was french-fried and frappéed. I was fright-fraught and frazzled.

I heard hard voices wafting out a wall vent. I crawled over two crybaby creeps crapped out by the john. I jumped on a jigaboo’s head and vaulted up to the vent. I heard John O’Grady grand-stand gratuitously.

“We’ll take two birds out with one stone. The pretty boy and Getchell.”

The jigaboo jiggled. I jerked into jitters and jumped off his head. I jostled a junkie draped on a drag queen.

I paced. I plodded and plotzed. Deputies dipped through the tank. They read wristbands and ran inmates into court. Sixty sullen sub-felons sank down submissive and slinked toward a nudge from the judge.

I was alertly and alarmingly alone. I was the Stranger— stranded and stripped bare. It was existential exile. I was freaked out like that frigid frog Camus.

The bars banged and boomed. They sluiced and slid. A pouty punk with a pompadour popped in. The bars bashed shut behind him.

I moseyed up. I moved in and made him.

Harry Hungwell. A hunky homo. A hophead. The studly star of Stan Stevens's flick *The Greek Way.*

Harry hated me. I hung his handsome hide in *Hush-Hush.* I hipped Hollywood to his homophile habits. PRIAPIC PROSTY PRIED OFF PRINCE SAHEED AT ALL-BOY BORDELLO.

I said, "Hi, Harry. What's shakin', Daddy-o?"

Harry hiccuped. Harry heaved. Harry twitched and twanged and ran red in rage.

I read his wristband. Fuck—555 PC.

The code numbers numbed me. Possession. Paraphernalia. The narcs nabbed Harry with heroin and nailed him with needles.

Harry said, "You framed me. O'Grady said so."

I laughed loud. "Back off, bun boy. O'Grady framed *me.* "

Harry hurled my way. He lurched and lunged and shagged a shiv from his pants. A black book blipped out and flew to the floor.

I jumped back. I judo-chopped. I jabbed and jammed and julienned Harry. I humped heavy hurt. I ripped and raked and raised welts. I hammered Harry with hapkido and japped him with jujitsu and tore him up with tae kwon do. I sheared the shiv from his hand and socked an eyeball out of the socket.

Harry screeched and screamed. He spun and spasmed like Sputnik on speed. He listed and lolled and launched into one-eyed orbit.

Fuck—fuzz at five o'clock. Big bulls barging down on the bars. Setup—the Sheriff's shits shot Harry in to shank me. O'Grady ordered it.

I hunkered down. I hid behind hysterical Harry. I bagged his black book. I throttled his throat and shoved him up to shield me.

I ran. I held Harry. The Sheriff's shits shot through the bars. Harry hemorrhaged and absorbed ammo. He buckled behind buckshot and slumped slow with slugs.

I jumped on the john. I hurled Harry down. Bullets bit his balls and popped off his patellas. I shook and shimmied up the wall and vipped into the vent. I blasted my way into black.

2.

Vibrating vents to silt-sifting sewers. A manhole maze under L.A.

I slogged slow. I swam swift. Currents curtailed and carried me. I flew through flipped-out flotillas.

Fetid fetuses and hamburger husks. Rats like Rin Tin Tin. Squishy squids and squashed beer cans.

I paddled with a propeller piece and steered with a stick. I soaked my way soddenly south. I was aqueduct-adequate and sewer-certified. I played a plump pimp in *He Walked by Night.* Bad guy Basehart buys it by Ben Hong's herb hut in Chinatown. He's the undulating überfiend under the Broadway Bridge.

I looped through Lincoln Heights. I churned through Chink-town. I crested on a crosscurrent and crashed at Chavez Ravine.

I meandered out a manhole. I bopped to Ben Hong's. Chinks checked me out. Slanty-eyed slicksters with pierced pigtails and pointy-toe shoes. I shivered. I shook. Shitballs shot off my shirt.

Ben Hong handed me a hophead highball. Boss belladonna buttons and monster ma huang. I chugged it. It churned through me. I charted my chance to chisel and cheat my way free.

I owned Bad Ben. I quashed a quixotic *Hush-Hush* piece on his perverse peccadillos. Ben poked Peking ducks with his peewee pecker. Ben dicked ducks from Shanghai to Sheboygan.

Ben hid my *Hush-Hush* bug gear. Ben bowed and beamed and bent to my bidding. He brought me a big bowl of Hochohan soup—hard on the hoisin. I hauled out Harry Hungwell's black book.

I tripped through his tricks. Harry was heavy hung and cooly connected. He trick-trucked with all the hot homos.

Rapacious Raymond Burr. Robert Taylor—ribald and right-wing. Dirty Dave Garroway. Adlai Stevenson—standard stands at the Statler. Randy Randolph Scott—rump wrangles at his ranch in Rio Ricondo.

I tracked tricks. I nabbed names. Harry played hide-the-hose with half of hip Hollywood. He mowed his meat on Monty Cliff. He laid the linguine on Leonard Bernstein. He boffed butch Burt Lancaster at Leo's Lavender Lounge.

Two no-name names and numbers nudged me. "Jack" and "Bill."

I called Carla Cardiff—my cop communications contact. She noodled the names and numbers. She ran them through her reverse book.

Holy *Hush-Hush* Hannah—

Jolting Jack Webb. Wicked William H. Parker.

I BORROWED Ben Hong’s Hudson Hornet. I parked by Parker’s pad on Parkman.

Dusk dimmed down. Twilight twirled and slid through slits in the smog. I bopped behind belladonna and metastasized with ma huang. I was hopped up and homicidal.

Parker popped out of his pad. He poured himself into a Pontiac and punched it. He was bleary-eyed and blotto. He blew a red light and raised rubber.

I sidled up to a side window. I screwed off the screen and scrunched my way in. I listed and landed on the living-room rug.

I heard gravel growls. I flipped on my flashlight. My beam beat down on a beady-eyed bull terrier.

I tossed him a taste treat. Ben Hong’s lichee-nut lollipop laced with LSD. The hound hooked it down and humped a hand-sewn hassock.

I peered around the pad. I slinked and slunk and surveilled surreptitious. I pored through piles of Parker’s papers. I caught his coruscating correspondence.

Parker pen-palled with punk patriarchs in Paraguay. He kept carbon copies of his own nasty notes. He fulminated to Fulgencio Batista. He waxed weepy to Juan Perón. He ballyhooed Bum Blockade to rasty Rafael Trujillo. He lavishly lauded the “LAPD Reich” and lachrymosely lamented likely losses in the ’58 elections.

William H. Parker, appointed chief of police in 1950 and serving until his death in 1966, molded the LAPD’s paramilitary image that would earn the force both fame and infamy. *(Los Angeles Times Collection, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA)*

?????

I pawed more papers. I shot through shelves and drove through dressers and drawers. I found a fat file: "'58—Senate/Governor's Race."

I read it—red-eyed and *rapidamente.*

Facts. Fatuous fancies. Prissy prognostications. Doleful dope on the cancerous candidates.

Idiot incumbents: Governor Goodwin J. Knight and senescent Senator William F. Knowland. Retards. Retread Republicans. Late-breaking lowdown: Both boobs plotted a ploy to ply themselves with more power. Noxious Knowland would seek the governor's seat. Goody Knight would swing a sweet switcheroo and sententiously seek the Senate.

Bodes big, but:

Goody and Boiled Bill boasted paltry poll numbers. The numbers negated them and nodded to their obvious opponents:

Senator Clair Engle—a Democratic demagogue. Attorney General Edmund G. "Pat" Brown—a dipsomaniacal Democrat diva.

The file fulminated:

Pat Brown bristled and broiled with hate for Bill Parker. Brown brewed a brilliant plan to broast him—if he got his gloves on Goody Knight's governorship.

Pat patterned a plenary plan to plow the LAPD. Fuck—full-scale floodlights on their fascist agenda!

The file text turned torrid.

Parker paid heavy headshrinkers to hatch populist polls. Their freakily Freudian findings:

Cal Californian calls it this way. Carla Californian concurs. We want Homeric heroes to love and lead us. Menschy men with magnetic machismo. We want magnanimously male MOVIE STARS.

Ooo-hooh, Daddy-o! I was digging it all, Democratic!

Torrid text. Followed by: filched tax returns.

Menschy men:

Doofus Duke Wayne. Holy Hank Fonda. Randolph Scott and Robert Taylor—turgid turd burglars tracked from a trick book.

I read the returns. Doofus Duke—solidly solvent. Holy Hank— in hock on stiffed stocks and half-breed haoles hatched in Hawaii. Robert and Randy—rolling in rice.

Oooooh, papa-san! I was paring it down, paranoiac!

JACK WEBB LIVED in a lurid lanai in Laurel Canyon. A lavish lean-to off Leawood and Lotus Lane.

I slid my sled slow to the curb. I bipped the back bumper of a big Bonneville. Fuck—a furtive fuzzmobile with fish fins and a wiggly whip antenna.

I loped around the lanai. I leaned low and lurked under wide windowsills. I popped up and peeked the pad. I spotted Jive Jack and John O'Grady.

Simmering silhouettes. Bad boys backlit by lava lamps and low shadows. A TV cop caught in a conundrum. A goon who got Getchellized.

Webb waved a scrawled-up script. O'Grady groused and grew grave. I loitered and listened.

Webb said, "I want Ronald Reagan. Randy Scott's too swishy to play a cop."

O'Grady sneered snide. "We've got no wedge on Reagan—and he won't work for the low coin the Chief's paying."

A ripe revelation ripped me:

Harry Hungwell's whore book. One wild wedge on Raw Randy Scott.

Webb whined and whinnied. "Johnny, have a heart. I don't want to direct this fucking lox."

O'Grady said, "Shitfire, Jack, you have to. You direct *Bum Blockade* or Parker pulls the LAPD's sanction on *Dragnet.* "

Webb withered. "Okay, I'll do it. Jesus fucking Christ."

O'Grady groaned. "No, Danny Getchell."

Webb said, "What's that cocksucker got to do—"

"He killed a fruit hustler at the Lincoln Heights tank. The D.A. just issued a warrant. The first cop who spots him will waste his alliterative ass."

Cowabunga! Call it cold—cop conspiracies colliding—

Webb whistled. "That fuck will rue the day he wrote that blind item."

O'Grady said, "Rue, shit. You just be at the set at midnight. We're hijacking a load of wetbacks and bringing them in to play bums. Between them and those humps we got from the tank, we'll have enough extras."

A telephone trilled. O'Grady grabbed it.

"Yeah?"

Scintillating silence. O'Grady—grossly gruff.

"Listen, Pancho, you'll do as you're told. The truck's crossing the border at eleven. We'll take it down in Chula Vista."

Simmering silence. O'Grady: "Yeah, what's the plate number? . . . DDX089. . . . Yeah, right."

I went slit-eyed. I sluiced back to my sled and slid in. I sliced south—silent and psychopathic.

3.

I tripped into the truck near Trejo and Tregundez Streets. I tipped in tanked on tequila.

The truck trundled and shook on shot shocks. It shimmied by sharecropper shanty shacks and rocked through ruts in the road. I popped in off a pogo stick. Dig my distinct disguise:

A somber sombrero. A sexy serape. Sandblasted sandals and a zany Zapata ’stache.

The wetbacks welcomed me. We quaffed Cuervo and chewed cheese chimichangas. I said “Sí, sí” every six seconds. The beaners bought me as one bad *bandido.*

We bopped over the border. We chugged into Chula Vista. We violated vital immigration laws. We hid under heaps of hashish hunks and chests of child smut. We bit through burlap bags and hooked into the hash. We vizzed through vivid visions. Visitations with the Venal Virgin of Vera Cruz and other vapid shit. We hash-howled through one hot hijack.

Some fucked-up fuzz futzed with the truck. They cadged into the cab. They badged the burrito boy behind the wheel. They pistol-whipped the *puto* and poured him out on the pavement. I heard it through holes in the hash heaps.

The hijackers hauled ass. One rascal said, “Rio Ricondo — *rapido.*” One jackal said, “Jack’s shooting night for day.”

Rio Ricondo. Risqué Randy Scott’s rancho—

The truck trudged tranquil trails and cut through coastal canyons. It hung hairpin turns and hit high heights. I tore the tarp by the tailpipes and took in the view.

Rich ranch land. Ridges rippled with rivers and roaming roans. A red-rocked ranch right up the road. Arc-light glow glaring.

Nail it now—night for day.

The truck stalled and stopped. The wetbacks snoozed and snored. They were hovering high in Hash Heaven.

I tapped my eye to the tarp hole. I saw a skimpy crew. Skeletal and skanky. Scabs hired cheap. Scads of scabby winos. Mexicans moved out by the *migra.* The recidivists recruited and run in from Lincoln Heights.

Jack Webb in jodhpurs and a jersey. Shitty Sheriff’s shills with shouldered shotguns. Two rangy rump rustlers resplendent in LAPD blues.

Rough Randy Scott. Rabelaisian Rob Taylor.

Webb warbled, “Action!” A Panaflex panned. It whirled wide and dipped to the door of the ranch house. Rangy Rob ran up. He rang the bell. Raw Randy rolled up rasping. The blue boys booted the door down. Dig the cell block set sunk within.

Bare bars stuck to steel stanchions. Seedy cement. Cruddy creeps passed out on pallets. Lovely Lincoln Heights—revisited and revised.

Rob said, “We’ve got to get these panhandlers and welfare jerks off the street.”

Randy said, “The Communists use them to undermine our way of life.”

Rob said, “We’ve got to reestablish the Bum Blockade. It’s the first line of defense between us and the Fifth Column.”

Jodhpur Jack yelled, “Cut! Print it!”

A greasy grip hauled a hose up to the truck. Jingo Jack yelled, “Wake up, you illegals! It’s movie work or a trip back to T.J.!”

The hose heaved. Water whacked the truck. It doused the dozing Diegos and hauled them out of Hash Heaven. We got sprayed, spritzed, and sprinkled. We got swizzled and swacked. We hit the ground on our huaraches and hurtled.

I hunkered by a hibiscus hedge and hid from the heaving hose. Sheriff’s shills hemmed in the *hermanos.* Hardheaded harness bulls with Remington riot pumps.

The spics spotted the cell block set. Their hackles hopped. Their lazy lids levitated and hitched up to their hairlines. Their hashish-hallowed hearts hardened in rigorous rage.

Joo don’ juke Juan Wetback into no jail.

They pulled stabbing stilettos and mini-machetes. They shook out shanks and shears. They flew at the flank of Sheriff’s shills with shotguns.

A shuddering shitstorm shook Rio Ricondo. Double-aught deershot disinterred. It decimated and disemboweled and detached dicks as it dispersed. It mowed down the Mexicans and mulched them into movie-set menudo.

Panic. Pantheonic pandemonium.

I ran toward Randy’s ranch. I crashed through the crew. I capsized cameras and lunged into lights. I jostled Jack Webb. I rammed Randy and Rob. I grazed grips and ground them into the grass.

I saw a paved parking patch. I popped by Packards and Pontiacs. I detoured by Daimlers and Dodge coupes. I jumped in the back of Jingo Jack’s Jag.

I nuzzled under some newspapers. I cringed craven and cried out to Christ. The ignition ignited. The Jag jumped. Jerky Jack ratched rubber and ran a rabid rosary.

The Jag jammed. Jack razzed us out of Rio Ricondo. I latched onto a lug wrench. I creased Jack’s crewcut crisp. His cranium cracked. I crawled into the front seat. I whipped the wheel and braced the brake and clawed at the clutch. I jerked the Jag into a ditch.

Jack was wedged into a wind wing. He sniveled. Snot snuck out of his nose. Blood blended in. His scalp was scoured down to his skull.

I said, “Tell me, Daddy-o. All of it.”

Jack jabbered. “It’s fucking Parker. He’s had these fucked-up plans since ’54. He thinks this *Bum Blockade* lox is a winner. It’s his power play. He’s got dirt on Taylor and Scott. They were boning that queer you killed. Parker coerced them into the flick. He wants to shove Bill Knowland and Goody Knight out and run Taylor and Scott for governor and the Senate. He thinks the voters want heroes. He wanted to get Ronnie Reagan, but that geek’s too fucking boring and clean to extort.”

I jabbed Jack in the genitals. “What’s Parker’s pet vice? That sick hump’s got to have one.”

Jack laughed licentious. “He doesn’t have one, you fucking parasite, so you’ve got no way to hurt him.”

4.

The metaphysic mauled me. No vulgar and vacuous vices.

The notion noodled my noggin. It nattered and negated and hatched holes in the *Hush-Hush* aesthetic. Humans humped and howled and hid their most hideous secrets. Men made mince-meat out of moral vows and pronged their pricks primeval. I stood steadfastly strong in my rector’s rectitude. I delivered disillusionment as dystopian dish. I crucified crafty creeps and crowned myself Christlike. My magazine mandate: Track and trumpet the truth triumphant.

I holed up in the Hawkshaw Hotel in Hawthorne. I hooked down hair tonic and buzzed behind Benzedrine. Jack Webb was chained to a chair. I doped him down and delivered him docile. I hooked him on heroin and closed him up in a closet.

I was full-sized fucked. I had to frag myself free of the fruit-hustler frame and lunge from the lurch. I had to whip a wedge on William H. Parker.

My brain broiled down to my brows. My synapses simmered. The voices of various vices violated me.

Vile vocations. Vigorously venal—

It *Hush-Hush* hit me.

Call Cal Conners—that putzy pedophile at Pacific Bell. Pull Parker’s phone-call file.

I called Cal. I owned him. I snared him out of a snuff-flick snafu. Cal collared the call sheets and called me back collect.

He ran down a numbing nab of names and numbers. Cops and coroners. Contractors and congressmen. Conservative columnists and dithering dictators in the D.R. I daydreamed. I dozed. I licked my lips and lopped lice off my balls.

Cal said, “I saved the best for last. Parker called Minnie Roberts’s Casbah thirty-four times in the past two years.”

The Casbah—a cool coon cathouse in Compton. A sepia sin spot. Jungle jazz and jive. A race mixer’s rendezvous. Man-o-Manischewitz—a mecca for miscegenation!

Bim, bam, bingo—it ALL cohered copacetic.

Pat Brown capered at the Casbah. Call it calm—*Confidential* caught Pat with two Congo cuties. June ’55—DEMOCRAT DALLIES WITH DUSKY DELIGHTS.

Oooooooh, Daddy-o! I was reining it in, repugnant!

THE CASBAH CAROUSED by night. Ten hot-sheet holes above a sweltering sweatshop.

I breezed through in broad daylight. Luscious Latinas cut condoms on long latex looms. I undulated upstairs. I moseyed by Minnie’s office. I jacked the janitor up and bought him off with a big bag of boo. He opened the office and bid me bye-bye.

I dissected the desk. I dragged out the drawers and culled the cubbyholes. No ripe rosters or ledgers and lists.

I flung up the floor rug. Flies flicked on a flat safe. I ditzed the dial and notched numbers. I caught the combination.

I hooked up the handle. I dug deep and latched on a ledger. I pawed pages and pounced on Pat B. and Bill Parker.

Minnie Roberts wrote rancorous notes. She patronized Pat Brown. She parodied Parker.

Pat poked haughty high yellows. Pat politicized as he poked. Pat put out his policies to Polly and Pauline—two quixotic quadroons. Pat talked too much. Parker picked up on his penchant. Parker’s pet pit dogs manhandled Minnie. They enterprisingly entrapped her. Minnie was mush. Parker’s pits bugged Pat’s regular room. Parker policed Pat’s passion and heard him address his agenda. A wicked woman stenographer stood by and notched notes. Name it now—Pat popped off about his private probe of the LAPD. Parker puckered and pocketed the data. He hatched his hokey hero plan. He pollinated politicians. He seeded seedy movie stars and blackmailed them blasphemously. *Bum Blockade*— priceless propaganda. Starring roles for two steamy stallions stamped for the statehouse and Senate.

I chewed on a checked entry. Ping—Pat was poking Polly at 8:00 tonight.

I went to work. I toked some tea with the janitor and assured his assistance. We coursed through the Casbah.

I tossed tools and tore through termites and whipped wires through walls. I rewired Pat’s room and rigged a reverb route right back to Parker’s. I wire-wiggled whipcords into a messy maintenance room. I hooked up a hi-fi hitch and spindled up my own speakers. I could hear ecstatic exclamations and send sound every which way. I could broadcast with bristling bravado.

Danny Getchell. The Demon DJ on Radio K-FUCK—about to abort history.

I HUDDLED BY my hitch. I hid behind hot headphones. I massacred myself with mary jane and perched with my Polaroid.

7:10, 20, 30, 40—7:59.

Speaker 2 sputtered. Pat Brown panted: “I hate those goddamn stairs.”

Polly pooh-poohed Pat: “Don’t complain, baby. Give me a dose of that Democratic love.”

Pat popped a gut. Whore humor—ha! ha! Speaker 1 spritzed. Boss Bill Parker said, “Unzip me—the son of a bitch is talking already.”

Holy hard-on! Hear that hate—heavy on the homoerotic!

Speaker 2 spunked. The stenographer stammered. “You’re all bunched up in your shorts. You should wear boxers. Jockeys are strictly for kids.”

Speaker 2 sparked. Polly pouted. “Come on, Pat. Pour me the pork.”

Speaker 1—sticky with static. Pixilated Parker: “Get a grip on that thing and tell me it’s big, or you’ll never make sergeant.”

The steno stuttered. “It’s soooooo big. It’s got a head like a Nazi helmet.”

Speaker 2—crackle crisp. Passionate Pat: “Let’s take off our clothes. I want to talk politics.” Poli-sci Polly: “Tell me bad things about Parker. You know, all the colored folk hate him.”

Speaker 1 spurted. Parker—palpitating with paws on his pud: “Faster, he’s getting to the good part.”

The steno—starting to steam up *my* stones: “You’re bigger than Jack Webb. You’re bigger than my husband and all Negro men. Shit, it’s flopping out of my hand.”

Pat Brown—prophetically precise: “Parker can’t get it up for man, woman, or beast. I heard he’s hung like Napoleon. They won’t be able to find it when they autopsy him.”

Bill Parker—surfing the semen sea of self-loathing: “Jesus, I’m almost there!”

I wiggled wires. I circumscribed circuits. I rigged reciprocal reverb and sent sound to both rooms. I picked up my Polaroid and flew off the floor.

I hammered down the hallway. I banged both doors off their bolts. I found the fetching foursome perched in Pat’s parlor.

Pat was knock-kneed nude. Parker’s pants pooled at his patellas. Polly was baby-buff and tantalizingly tan. The stacked steno stared at her—savagely sapphic.

I popped one perfect Polaroid. Insurance for loss of life or limb. I buried it by a burger stand at Beverly and Berendo.

Parker and Pat patterned a pact and pulled back from their sinful symbiosis. The Republicans ran Knowland and Knight. They lost in landslides. Pat Brown gnashed

Knowland and got the governor's gig. Parker bumped Bum Blockade off his demonic dance card. Ribald Randy and Rob rustled rumps and refrained from politics. They weren't Homeric heroes here at Hush-Hush.

Ronald Reagan ran for governor. He incinerated incumbent Pat Brown. Reagan reigned as our 40th President and retired to a ranch like Rio Ricondo.

Draw your own corrosive conclusions.

Part II

RICK LOVES DONNA

Hollywood Fuck Pad

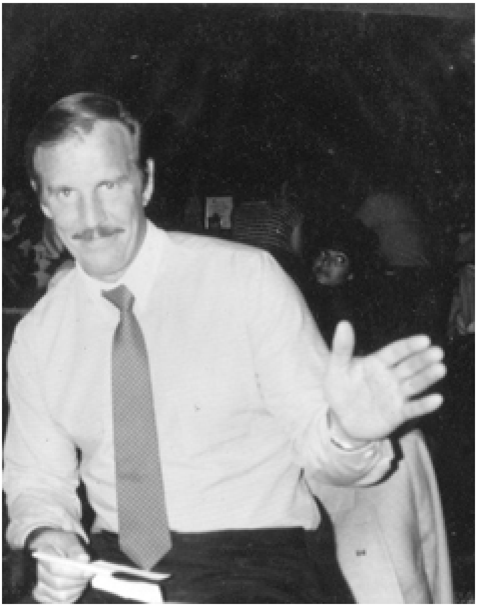
1.

I died in a futile gunfight. Others fell before me. This is for them.

My promotion/transfer slip arrived—Hollywood Patrol to Hollywood Homicide. Holly*weird*—rectal-raped runaways, cocaine killeristas, fag-in-the-bag body dumps. I was 31. I had four years in patrol. I was testosterone-torqued and pumped. It was fall ’83. Ray-Gun was Prez. Gates was Chief. *Dragnet still* reran. O.J. was a Westside splib. Rodney King was a cannibal couched in the Congo. LAPD was King!!!!!

Russ Kuster ran Hollywood Homicide. He took no shit, he brooked no shit, he brooded over bonded bourbon nitely. He favored Reuben’s, the Firefly, and the Hilltop Hungarian. Hollywood hemmed him in. He shit where he ate. He kept a condo on Cahuenga. He warred with his wife there. They battled over his bitches and his Walpurgisnachtian workload.

I grabbed Russ in the squadroom. He checked out my rhino regalia. I love rhinos. I’ve got a faux-rhino gunbelt and faux-rhino boots. My faux-rhino bedspread captivates cooze. I fucked a rhino once. A street creep slipped me a hash brownie. I flew Trans-Zulu Airways to Zimbabwe. It was so *goooood.*



Russ Kuster ran Hollywood Homicide until he was killed in the line of duty on October 9, 1990. *(Photo courtesy of the LAPD)*

Russ said, “You look like a fucking pimp. You may be useful here.”

“I welcome the opportunity, boss. And I figure a flamboyant appearance will help me on the bricks.”

Russ nodded. His teeth were nicotine-napalmed and notched down to nubs. He was stripped and striated by stress.

He lit a cigarette. “Your partner’s Tom Ludlow. You know, ‘Phone Book’ Tom. He’s got 22 notches on an old Yellow Pages. It’s against the regs, but it gets confessions. I’m not saying do it or don’t do it. I’m just saying it works, and I demand results, and if you don’t produce, you’ll be working the AIDS car and wearing triple-strength rubber gloves like a fucking proctologist. You ever pick up an AIDS vic?”

“No, boss.”

“Their limbs tend to drop off. Do a good job here and don’t subject yourself to the experience.”

I clicked my heels. Russ loved Wehrmacht protocol. My faux-rhino gun buckle rattled.

Russ said, “We need a fuck pad. We’ve got 14 married cops who need a crib for parties and nooners. We need five bedrooms for a hundred a month tops.”

I laffed. “Slum pads go for twice that.”

Russ smiled. “Imagination or coercion always works for me. No killing, though. We’re still taking heat for that old granny those guys waxed in Newton.”

HOLLYWOOD. Home of hipsters, hugger-muggers, and hermaphrodites. My hutch since ’78. I knew every crack-pipe crevice. I worked Harbor for a year and humped home. I knew the hookers, the homos, the heist men. Methheads met my eyes and meandered. K-Y kowboys kringed. My F-car featured a faux-rhino horn. Illegal, but effective. It glowed like a priapic prism.

I cruised the hot-sheet huts on Sunset. No five-bedroom pads, rats like Rodan, staphylococci-stiff sheets. I cut south on Highland. Dave Slatkin ran the LAPD Animal Shelter. It was an ex–head shop. Some diesel dykes ran it. We popped them for paraphernalia and pried up the property.

I pulled up and walked in. Dogs drooped on confiscated couches. A malcontent mastiff growled. A baleful bull terrier snarled. The shelter was Dave’s passion and an LAPD ploy. We raid meth labs and rescue guard dogs. Dave goo-goo-talks them and ladles on the love. We train them to kill burglars and find them good homes. They wear breastplates with “Trained to Kill” logos.

Dave smooched a brindle pit. I said, “Jane mind you bringing fleas home?”

“She wears a black-studded flea collar. It’s kinky shit.”

I yawned. A Dogo Argentino pissed on my shoes.

“Russ Kuster’s got a job for you. He’s got me searching for a fuck pad. He wants you to bring some station trusties in and GI the place.”

Dave yukked. “Don’t tell me. Five bedrooms for a C-note a month.”

“That covers it. Any—”

“There’s some SRO cribs on Tamarind north of Franklin. Junkie squatters, the shits. You know Harry Pennell?”

“No.”

“He works Wilshire Patrol. He’s black, and he’s got a scam going. He tries to rent pads in Brentwood. They say there’s no vacancy, and he sends a clean-cut white cop in two hours later. It’s a moneymaker. They rent to the white cop, and Harry pops up with his hands out.”

“Can he meet me—”

“I’ll tell him Tamarind and Franklin in an hour.”

The Dogo sniffed my crotch. He grew a wicked woody. I shooed him off.

“Russ said you can forensic the place. He thinks it’s useless, but he’s willing to indulge you.”

Dave sighed. “I know Hollywood history. Russ doesn’t. Those places were abortion mills back in the ’50s. I’ll bring in some luminol and turn up some blood.”

“Have fun. I’m working a movie gig at the Academy tonite.”

“Feature?”

“TV job. Rookie partners develop a jones for each other. They’re both married to ranking brass. The male’s CO tries to rape the female. She wastes his horny old ass.”

Dave picked his nose. The Dogo snagged the nugget. I said, “What do you feed these fuckers?”

Dave said, “Trusty chow. We’ve got stuffed bell peppers and kielbasa today.”

The bull terrier laid a fart. I splitsvilled quick.

HARRY PENNELL WAS fat. He wore a green leisure suit and a purple newsboy cap pinned to a wide-wing Afro. He wore a “Kill the Pigs” button. He tucked his piece and badge in his pimp boots.

Harry bragged *bravissimo.* He owned a car wash, an AIDS test clinic, and a dyke bar called the Munch Box. He owned two wetback garment mills, three roach coaches, and six he-she outcall whores. He got away with “boocoo shit.” He possessed a “notable” fuck flick. Dig: a deputy chief’s wife’s going down on a meter maid at Claire’s Clam Club.

Harry laid the scam out: 1. He hits the pad. 2. He flashes a roll. 3. He lays out his “bitches” and his late-nite parties. 4. The Vacancy sign disappears.

I walk up. I rap my Klan konnections and ties to the fuzz. I stress black rape-os, black slashers, black hot-prowl artistes. I stress the *good* news: cops around the clock. I stress the *bad*: five bedrooms/a yard per month tops.

It took eight hits. Eight peepholes slid back. Harry smiled. Eight peepholes shut. Peephole 8 paused. A brazen biddy wedged the door. Harry got "stable" and "fine hos" out. The door slammed. I rhino-rocked up. I badged the biddy. I riffed on the "Negro crime wave." She said, "Prove yourself. I've got four lowlifes behind in their rent. If you evict them without all that paperwork, I'd be obliged to say yes."

I followed the smell. Burnt matches/crack-pipe ether/unwashed flesh. I tracked two hallways upstairs. A pit bull lounged on a landing. He growled gravel-gruff. I chucked him my lunch: Fritos and two candy bars. He snarfed down. I hurdled him and followed the stink.

There's a door. Let's kick it in.

I did it. Dig the three spiked-hair neo-Nazis. Net weight: 160. Gender: a tough call. Dig the crack pipes. Dig the crackheads entrenched on Cloud 9.

Dig the open window. Dig the rosebushes below.

I chucked them out. They weighed bupkes. They hit the bushes soft. Bush thorns slashed them new tattoos. Bush billows muffled their falls.

WE GOT THE PAD. My race jive helped. I concocted "the Negro Nabob," "the Negro Nookie Nabber," "the Black Blasphemer," and "the Sepia Succubus." Granny agreed: five bedrooms/one C per month. Numerous cops/round-the-clock access/ raucous behavior—boys will be boys.

Granny showed me the crib. 3-story, warped wood and beamed ceilings, bedrooms off central hallways. A downstairs hi-fi rigged with Lawrence Welk and Mantovani.

It *all* worked. Thick walls, privacy between rooms. Dave warned me: Harry installed wall peeks and shot infrared footage for *Bushman* magazine. I told Dave I'd mock-bust him as "the Negro Nookie Nabber."

I checked the walls and wainscoting. Dave might be right—the dark flecks might be old blood. Dave *knew* Hollywood crime. Dave insisted: mayhem metastasized south of Sunset and nudged its way north of Franklin. He loved to test old houses. He got visions sometimes. Not psychedelic shit. More like wisps, whines, whispers, and whimpers. I'll say it, rhino-reluctant: Dave's a hopped-up hip hybrid. He's a demon dog worshiper. He's a vibrant visionary. He cleans pads for Russ Kuster. It's a ploy. He's got five years on. He wants Hollywood Homicide. Two master's degrees, visions, a psychosexual seismographic history of L.A.— he might make it *faaaaast.*

I grabbed the pit bull and took him to lunch. We shared three oki pastrami burritos. I dropped him off with Dave. It was love at first bite. He chomped Dave's billy club. Dave let him have it as a chew toy. He put him on an IV drip. The tube fed him beef broth and K-9 meds. I mentioned the blood flecks. Dave said he'd glom some trusties and forensic the pad.

"I'm having visions, Rick. I'm seeing a tall, gap-toothed guy from the '50s. I get the feeling he's pretty obscure. He won't be on computer programs. I might have to go to the *Times* morgue."

I yawned. “I’ve got that gig tonight?”

“I heard the female lead’s a fox.”

“You got visions I’m about to get lucky?”

Dave said, “Frankly, no.”

HOLLYWOOD HEMMED ME IN. I shit where I eat. I eschewed Simi Valley. Orange County de-orbitized me. The kool Kuster kustom: Bop your beat, know your neighbors, interdict them instinctively.

I lived in a mock-Egyptian courtyard. I prized its proximity. I read in the John C. Fremont Branch Library. I lived near Harvey Glatman’s photo-death den. Dave Slatkin had Glatman visions. They astounded early psychic researchers. He lived in Whipdick, Wisconsin. He was 4 years old then. L.A. visions whipped him west and formed his cop calling. He linked old evil to still-standing structures. Cops are skeptics. Dave skewered their skepticism. Dave found Barbara Graham’s hypo kit behind the Hollywood Ranch Market. Dave found Black Dahlia rubber receipts in a vent at Owl Drugs. Hollywood—insidious instigator of morbid myth. Why work anywhere else?

And dig this:

I’m laying out love vibes for THE WOMAN. I know this much. She won’t be a Hollywood habitué. She’ll get the gestalt going through.

Arc lights popped at dusk. Day-for-night delivered. The Academy lit up.

The main building/parking lot/gym. The Elysian Park Hills. Ravines, gulleys, and snaky pathways uphill. The hills magnetized fruits. They got micro-close to malignant male authority. It was self-serve self-loathing. Rump rangers rutted in parked cars close to the cloister of cop academe.

We were fruit-free tonite. The lights looped east to Chinatown and Sunset Boulevard.

I wore my uniform. I carried a walkie-talkie. The gig prohibited rhino regalia. I humped the homo hunting ground. I dragged a litter bag. I snagged French ticklers, discard dildos, amyl nitrate poppers, S&M bar matchbooks.

The arc lights popped off. The hillside shot to sharp shadows. My walkie-talkie bipped.

I picked up. “Jenson.”

“It’s Bobby Keck. They’re dousing the hills and lighting up the bar. Come on up and meet the cast.”

I rogered and hitched up my gunbelt. My mini-gut flared and flattened. LAPD likes lean lines and cut contours. I find it homophiliac. It deters ham-hock dinners and donut desserts.

I walked up to the bar. Grips hauled boxes. Lighting louts lit lamps. I saw two civilians in cop blue. I recognized the man.

His lineage loomed large. The baldness, the big beak, the Latinate looks. He was the seething seed of Luis Figueroa and Rosemary Collins.

I recalled my casting sheet. “Figueroa, Miguel D.” The woman pirouetted and provided a profile. That’s her: “Donahue, Donna W.”

Call it cold: D for Man Destroyer. D for Detour to Heaven. W for Wickedness and Winsomeness as one.

She was svelte. She had dark hair and hurricane-hurled hazel eyes. Her gunbelt hung low and hugged her hips hard. Her badge hid her left breast and hinted at hammering heartbeats.

I walked over. I reinvented myself as rhino raconteur. I rehearsed gunfights and righteous 211s. I killed a hot-prowl rape-o last year. My faux feminism might impress her.

I opened my mouth. Donna Donahue detoured me.

“Are you a real cop or an extra?”

I said, “I shot Huey Muhammad 6X, the infamous hot-prowl rapist. I wasted two wetbacks—I mean ‘illegal-emigrated Mexican-Americans’—during a daring, short-range shootout at Taco Tom’s on Hollywood and Western.”

Miguel Figueroa said, “Wow.” He checked out Donna Donahue snakelike.

Her heartbeat hammered. Her left breast lurched. Her badge bumped and boinged.

My rhino horn hardened. Figueroa stared at me. I said, “I had a big thing for your mother. I used to dig on her in the ’60s.”

Figueroa laughed. “Maybe you’re my daddy.”

Donna said, “What did the thieves at Taco Tom’s get?”

I squared my shoulders and sucked in my gut. My belt slackened and flattened my fly. It undulated and unfurled. My Jockey shorts showed. They bore the Burger King logo: “Home of the Whopper.”

Figueroa yukked. Donna demurred. Her hazel eyes hooked up to my blues.

“What did the robbers at Taco Tom’s get?”

I smiled. “Nine dollars and a burrito tray. They burned their hands on the tray and dropped it.”

Donna’s jaw jumped. “And you *shot* them for *that* ?”

I winked. “They were after the chimichangas and quesadillas. I had to nip that in the bud.”

Donna howled. Figueroa yukked. I ran my zipper up *rapidamente.* A megaphone geek walked up. He vibed director.

Figueroa said, “Officer Jenson iced two cholos during the famous Taco Tom’s heist."

The director sneered. "Amnesty International condemned that shooting. Those robber guys had twelve kids between them."

I sneered. "Planned Parenthood commended me. I shot them in the back, by the way."

Donna smiled. Her every glimpse hurled me to heaven.

The director said, "You think you're a tough guy, don't you?"

I winked at him. "I'm your daddy."

Figueroa winked at me. "Don't be embarrassed. He's my daddy, too."

The director *seeeeethed.* "Let's go. We're doing the patrol car scene next." Donna and Figueroa walked. Donna wiggled her fingers over her shoulder. I blew a kiss at her back.

A PRODUCTION SLAVE gave me a headset. It provided cop-car access. Donna and Figueroa play patrol-partner lovers. They cuddle in their cop car. They're married to deputy chiefs. It's gotta go bad.

I hooked on my headset and laid around the lounge. There it goes: snap, crackle, radio pop. The director: "Let's rehearse, kids."

One arc light popped on. The luminous vapors crossed the hillside. Fruit Alert: butt bangers in backseat bliss. They're bouncing cars. They're tearing tailpipes. They're shearing shock absorbers.

My headset stammered static and cleared clean. Donna said, "Get your tongue out of my mouth, you cocksucker."

Figueroa said, "Come on, baby. This is the Stanislavsky method. This is shit I learned at the Actors Studio."

Donna said, "Like father, like son. Your old man hit on me on *Hawaii Five-O.*"

Figueroa waxed winsome. "He taught me everything I know. He taught me acting, culture, music. Then he hit on my girl-friends and took them away from me."

Self-pity and woe—standard Stanislavsky.

Donna said, "I heard he's hung like a mule."

Figueroa yukked. "Like the Big Burrito at Taco Tom's, baby. 'Accept no substitutes.' "

Donna: "I'll call him. Hey, Luis, tell me how you did the wild thing with Rosemary Collins before I was born and confirm my theory that size skips the next generation."

Miguel: "No, baby. It grows. *El chorizo mucho grande por amor.*"

I heard rustling sounds. I heard a gunbelt snap. I heard a zipper unzip. I heard Donna dead cold. "Chorizo to cocktail frank in two seconds. My dad said, 'You're going to Hollywood, so you might need this.' "

I pictured it—a Swiss Army knife—prongs, probes, and prick reducers. Figueroa said, "Don't cut me, baby. I need what I've got. Shit, I've got a migraine. I get real motherfuckers."

Donna said, "Check these cars out. It's like a drive-in movie with no screen."

Figueroa groaned—oooh, my fucking head. Donna said, "It's gay caballeros getting their jollies. How do you shoot around something like that?"

I knew.

The hillside sloped down to a reinforced ravine. Cars drove up easy. They wiggled up winding driveways and dirt. Cars went down hard. They grabbed grass. They tore tree trunks and bumper-carred and banged the ravine. Quantum queer evictions ratcheted cars *into* the ravine. Garlands of garbage goosed them to the L.A. riverbed.

I ran outside. I yelled, "Lights." Two dozen arc lights glare-glazed the hillside. I rhino-rampaged and hit cars.

I baton-bashed windows. I yanked emergency brakes. I glimpsed *fruitus interruptus.* I heard yelps, yowls, yodels, yammers, and yells for help. Cars skidded and skittered downhill. Cars blew by the narc arc with Divine Donna and Masher Miguel.

Donna got out. Donna jumped on the roof of her car. She saw Ramblers roll and rip the ravine. She saw Dodge Darts ding trees and die dead. I watched her. She watched the ravine collect cars. She's got hurricane-hazel eyes. She's got dark hair pageboy-styled. She's got her legs dug in. She's all LAPD wool stretched tigress-tight.

Miguel got out. He stood and watched the homos hurtle hellbound. He watched the ravine. A T-Bird toppled in. Transaxles dropped off driveshafts, drifted, and dragged rubber wrappers.

Miguel said, "I'm getting off on this. You know what Luis always says, 'Homos expand the pool of fuckable women.' "

I looked at Donna. How fittingly Freudian-frazzled: *the* erotic image of my life as a COP.

A Bonneville banged the ravine. I heard three gunshots. I saw a man run.

Donna jumped off her car. She said, "The arc light was on him. I got a good look."

FRUIT SNUFF: A species of HOMOcides vulgaris, inimical to Shine Killing. Fruit Snuff vs. Shine Killing—a primer.

Fruits killed in Hollyweird and Rampart. *This* murder vibed panic and self-loathing. The killer's id went "Ick." His superego sermonized: Don't fuck men in purple Pontiacs/don't fuck men at all.

Fruits killed like prima divas pacing. They paced. They smoked. Joan Crawford crawls to the edge. She grabs a knife. She stabs her lover 91 times. Fruits *over*killed. Fruits dug the term "multiple stab wounds." The faithless faigelah is dead. Feel better now?

Shine Killings went down in ’77 and Newton. Shine Killings went down *fast.* Willie owes Shondell 10 scoots. It’s a crap-game debt. Remember—we rolled behind Muhammad’s Mosque #6. The men mouth multitudinous “motherfuckers.” Willie gets bored and shoots first. Pow! Shondell be walking that deep River Styx. He’s close to Mecca or Mama or the Big Liquor Store. We follow his blood drops. He’s almost dead. He sees Saint Peter. Saint Peter’s guzzling Schlitz malt liquor and wearing a porkpie hat. *We* get there. We say, “Who killed you, homeboy? Tell us fast.” Shondell says, “Willie X.” That’s how we grab his black ass.

The hillside pulsed in pandemonium. The lights lured paunchy paparazzi. Rampart Patrol and Rampart Detectives showed. I gave a statement. I said I hit the lights to flush some hobnobbing homos. Exodus—let my people go!

Cops prowled the ravine. Miguel described the suspect. He had a monster migraine. My *cabeza,* oh, fuck.

Donna had the best view. She built a likeness with a sketch artist and an Identikit guy. Said suspect: white male, skinny. Bad zits, fat fangs for teeth.

Suspect: unknown. Victim: one white male wrapped in the wrecks. We walked down. Donna stuck close. We looked for lurking witnesses. We saw none.

Nine cars piled at the ravine ledge. No eyewits at all. They ran. They swam. They grappled garbage and floated on cardboard flotillas.

We found the purple Pontiac. The death car was lavished like Liberace. White interior/tuck & roll/lavender love balls.

The dead man covered the backseat, ass upward. K-Y crawled out his crack. A cop lifted his head. Shattered teeth and big-bore bullets flew.

A cop scoped out Miguel. “You look like Luis Figueroa.”

Miguel said, “He’s my daddy.”

A cop said, “Fucking fruit snuff.”

A cop said, “They’re all named Lance or Jason. Every fruit snuff vic I ever worked.”

Donna said, “Ten bucks that he’s got another name. Come on, put up.”

A cop extracted the stiff’s wallet. A cop riffed sleeves. Bingo— California driver’s license/Randall J. Kirst.

The cop paid Donna off. I lounged in her eyes. Hurricane beacons beamed.

A loudspeaker blared. “It’s a wrap! LAPD says we can’t shoot until this mess gets cleared up!”

I looked at Donna. Donna looked at me. I said, “I’ll drive you . . .”

Donna said, “I’ll drive myself.”

I LOITERED at the Academy. Miguel tried the “I’ll drive you home” bit. Donna flipped him off. A tech crew brought a winch in. They hauled fruitmobiles off the ravine. The Rampart geeks wrote a bulletin. The gist:

Randall J. Kirst, HOMOcide victim. Sodden fruits wanted! Reclaim your keester kayaks at LAPD impound! Submit to fruit snuff interviews! Insincere apologies for the work of Detective Rick Jenson!

I lounged in the bar. The print guys worked outside. They smeared the purple Pontiac. I found some Donna Donahue head shots. They voodoo-vapped me. A notion nudged my head.

“Witness needs protection! LAPD guards her! Round-the-clock watch!”

Yeah, but:

Miguel Figueroa saw him, too.

Yeah, but:

The fuck pad had *five* bedrooms.

Yeah, but:

Rampart had the case. Their jurisdiction/their job.

Yeah, but:

Russ Kuster had clout. Rampart owed Russ favors. I witnessed the snuff.

Good odds. I grabbed the Donna shots and rolled.

THE HILLTOP HUNGARIAN RESTAURANT:

A strudel structure on the Cahuenga Pass. A goulash gulag, the shits. A hut for homesick Hungies and Russ Kuster’s preferred brooding pit.

I drove over and walked in. Russ was snout deep in schnapps. Six couples slurped slivovitz. An accordion clown played for chump change.

Russ saw me. He pulled out a bar stool. I straddled it.

“Tell me you found the fuck pad.”

“I found the fuck pad.”

“Tell me there’s not some catastrophic fuck-up to mark your first day at Hollywood Homicide.”

“Welllll, there’s this . . .”

Russ grinned. “Rampart dicks called me. You passed your test. You felt the need to tell me you fucked up yourself.”

I unclenched. I whipped out the Donna shots. I spread them on the bar.

Eyeball alert—Russ looked, lingered, leched.

“Tell me she’s the sole witness and she’s afraid for her life. She saw too much. The killer wants to nullify her before she testifies. She *needs* a room at our fuck pad, and she’ll be properly grateful.”

I said, “No.”

“No?”

“No, there’s a second wit, a male, and she’ll smell a shuck in six seconds.”

Russ lit a cigarette. “The male’s a fag, right? He doesn’t play into the scene.”

I shook my head. “He’s no fag.”

“What are you talking about? He’s an actor, right?”

“He’s an exception. Trust me on—”

“O.K., we’ve got the dish and the world’s only non-fag actor, and a fruit snuff in Rampart that they only nominally care about. We want . . . what’s her name?”

I said, “Donna Donahue.”

“Right, as a guest, so you need me to call Rampart and get us assigned to the case.”

The accordion went off-key. Bela Marko strapped it on. Bela was Russ’s batshit bête noir and meshugina misdemeanant. Bela played bad squeeze box. Bela stole waiters’ tips. Bela dined-and-dashed. Bela sold weed in the parking lot. Russ kicked his ass regularly.

Bela kicked off some screechy anthem. Bela waved the squeeze box man’s cup. Bela table-hopped.

Table one: the cold shoulder. Table two: a quarter and a dime. Table three: half a chewed breadstick. Table four—a dyke duo— two kicks in the nuts.

Bela shook the bellows. Bela dropped the squeeze box. Bela stumbled outside clutching his nuts.

Russ laughed. Russ sipped schnapps. Russ said, “Donna Donahue is mine.”

I shook my head. “My case, right? Come on, I’m a rookie. It’s a nowhere fruit snuff.”

Russ nodded. “You’re right. Nobody else will want it. Now, look in the mirror.”

I did. I saw myself. I saw Russ. I looked away. Russ jerked my head back.

“Look at us. You look like a harness bull with bad sunscreen. I look like William Holden in *Sunset Boulevard.* You want the case, you want to take Donna Donahue around and show her mug books and show her Taco Tom’s and the place where you capped Huey Muhammad 6X, fine. When she comes home to the safe house, I’ll be there with bourbon and Brahms.”

I stood up. Russ said, “Be sure to tell her you planted that throw-down piece on

Huey.”

I LIKE TO sleep with dogs and muse on women. Cross-species warmth promotes insight and empathetic vibes. Donna Donahue deserved the sensitive Rick Jenson. A six-dog night would calcify my callow and callous side. Yeah, I waxed Huey X and the Garcia brothers. I *dug* it—but I didn’t *love* it. Donna had to grok the moral split.

Dog Night was a ritual.

I bagged my F-car. I drove by Sombrero King and bought six oki pastrami burritos. I got on my two-way. I gave them Donna’s name. They kicked back:

Donahue, Donna Welles. Brown/hazel, 5′6″, 113, DOB: 3/13/56.

Good stats. 27 to my 31. Good Westside address.

The food and dogs consecrated life. The ride roused the dead.

I went by Carlos and Gower. I felt Ian Campbell’s ghost. I heard bagpipes. I smelled onion fumes and cordite. I went by the Hollywood Sears. Robert Cote fell there. I saw arterial blood gush. I heard morphine syrettes snap.

I hooked over to the shelter and hauled out the chow. Growls and bays echoed inside. I unlocked the door, hit the lights, and kounted K-9’s. Six was right—the pit bull, the Dogo, the bull terrier, an Airedale, the Aussie shepherd, and Reggie the Rhodesian Ridgeback.

Food first.

I fed individually. It prevented dogfights and canine chaos. Yum, yum—fried pastrami, fried cabbage, fried tortillas. The fart index would soar tonight.

Dave stashed blankets near the dog crates. I laid six out on the floor. I kept six for covers. I grabbed a pillow and tossed it down in my middle spot. The dogs piled on. We all stretched out. The Airedale and pit hemmed me in. We burrowed under the covers. I said, “What’s shakin’, you big-dick motherfuckers?” I answered for them—my voice/their imagined responses.

“I want a beach pad.” “Fuck that—I want a Bel-Air crib owned by some hebe in the movie biz. He’s got six juicy daughters to penetrate with my air-to-ground Airedale missile.” “Fuck that shit. I want to live at the Pacific Dining Car. I could roam the floor, sniff crotches, and score steak at will.”

The dogs started to snooze. Their warmth engulfed me. I lay still and laid out my lament.

“There’s an actress. She’s got kaleidoscope-flecked hazel eyes. She’s got a sturdy sense of herself, doesn’t fall for cheap lines, and outdoes me in the looks department. I’ll bet she comes from money. She’s *the* woman. I want her, whatever it costs, whatever it takes. Dig that, you big-dick motherfuckers!”

No dog yipped or barked to affirm my pro-love prologue. The bull terrier cut a fart.

Donna: my man-oh-man metaphysic and priapic précis.

She grew up nonplussed by her beauty. She was jazzed and vexed by boys in pursuit. She got the actor's gestalt: assume varied identities and cherish your cheap leap at the moon. Learn your core. Hold it close. Don't buy that courage-as-ruthlessness shit that defines Hollywood. Know this: It's just yuks and fucks and a dubious place to appease appetites. Levy the love tools the Good Lord gave you. See through Roguish Russ Kuster and Maladroit Miguel. Find THE MAN. He waxed the Garcia Brothers. He capped Huey X. He took bad lives and saved good lives. He wants to know you.

Donna, sleep now.

I WOKE UP at dawn. I changed clothes. I brushed fur off my suit. The ridgeback eyeballed my crotch. I wondered how Donna viewed size. I turned on the radio. Whamm-o, straight off: "And the LAPD's Hollywood detective squad—not Rampart's—will investigate last night's homicide in the shadow of a movie shoot on the grounds of the L.A. Police Academy. Detective Russell Kuster said, "We're adept at solving faggot snuff—I mean the murders of people of alternative lifestyles. We're on the job."

Job *me,* dickbreath—Donna Donahue is *mine*!

I WALKED THROUGH the squadroom. I got a catcall cacophony. Fuck—Russ blew the word on our "rivalry."

I met my partner—"Phone Book" Tom Ludlow. He said, "Let's roust queers until we get one to confess. All those guys got father and guilt complexes. You sweet-talk them, I'll do the heavy work."

I laffed. He picked up his Yellow Pages. Dig the dried bloodstains. Dig the spit stains—Tom probably French-kissed it.

I said, "Later, Tom. I'm driving a witness around today."

A cop yelled, "Rhino's in love!" A cop yelled, "Rhino sucks Chihuahua dick!"

Russ called me over. I straddled his spare chair. Russ slipped me his Canoe cologne. Subtle pimps and furloughed Marines preferred it. I splashed it on.

Russ said, "Nobody on my squad smells like a 3-way with Lassie and Rin Tin Tin. Now, moving along, here's your day. First, you go by the Wilshire Sheraton. Slatkin's giving a seminar there. You find him and tell him to get the best trusties available and spiff the fuck pad, while he forensics to his heart's delight— then you reinterview Donna, show her some mug books, and talk her into the pad."

I said, "I'm on it now."

"Tell her Huey X was on a rampage. You diverted it. Tell her you subscribe to *Ms.* magazine. All the liberals and carpet munchers read it."

THE SHERATON— Dogman Dave blasting full.

A small banquet room. Cops at long tables. Coffee urns/donuts/hard bagels.

Dave hogged the mike and lectern. Dave waved the pointer stick. Dig the cat on the screen: Stephen Nash/'50s lust killer/ fruit-snuff artiste supreme.

Knife murderer Stephen Nash stabbed a boy twenty-eight times and bragged, "I'd never killed a kid before. I wanted to see how it felt." *(Los Angeles Times Collection, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA)*

Big, burly, curly-haired, gap-toothed. Monstrous shit-eating grin.

Dave soliloquized. "For sheer viciousness and braggadocio, Nash stands alone. He was a proudly affirmed homosexual in the mid-1950s. He killed out of both a psychopathic resentment and for the sheer fact that killing sexually aroused him. His exact death toll remains unknown. There's the three in the Bay Area, the gay hairdresser in Long Beach, and the 10-year-old boy under the Santa Monica pier. Nash's killing spree ended in November '56. He hinted at more killings, but never named names, and five victims since his summer '54 parole from San Quentin seems like a low number."

I bit a bagel. A tooth cracked. I tossed it away.

Dave said, "There's a rumor that's floated around for years, that during a portion of his free time in '54 and '55, he was befriended by an actor who took amateur movies of 'colorful' L.A. characters, along with tape recordings of some of their ramblings. Don't laugh—I know some of you scoff at my psychic shit—but I've seen a big, white Spanish house in conjunction with all this."

A cop yelled, "It's Reggie the Ridgeback's house."

A cop yelled, "No, it's that Airedale's pad."

Dave grinned. Dave said, "Reggie's your collective daddy." Dave flipped the whole room off.

I walked up to the stage. A woman cop yelled, "Stephen Nash is my type! I could turn him straight!"

Dave said, “Gas chamber. August 19th, ’59.”

I flipped the mike off. Dave and I huddled.

I said, “Russ wants the clean-up today. If you really want to score some points with him, scrounge some water beds and a sound system.”

Dave snapped his fingers. “Roger that. That clown at Appliance King’s dealing Quaaludes. I’ll talk to the D.A.”

I yawned—fucking Reggie slept *on* me. A sleep deficit loomed.

Dave said, “That cologne stinks. Russ is trying to fuck you up with Donna.”

“Does the whole world know?”

“Yeah. It’ll probably be in *Variety* tomorrow.”

DONNA SAID, “It’s a shuck.”

I said, “Nix. You’re a material witness. The killer saw you. You need round-the-clock protection.”

We stood outside the Academy. The crew set up shots. Donna wore faded jeans and a beige turtleneck. She looked like Exeter or Andover or some swank school with no jigs.

I said, “Miss Donahue, this is no shit. These fruit-snuff geeks get off on icing women, too. I read it in *Ms.* magazine. And, I have it on good authority that before I dropped Huey Muhammad, he was on his way to kill a woman.”

Donna smiled. “I’d prefer the Beverly Wilshire, but I’ll settle for the Biltmore or New Otani downtown.”

I rhino-revamped my pitch. “Miss Donahue, the LAPD is undergoing severe budget cuts, but we do have at our disposal a five-bedroom house in Hollywood, inhabited by hardened detectives 24 hours a day, and you are graciously invited to stay there under our protection.”

Donna laughed. Rhino-revise that—Donna roared.

“I’ve got two cop cousins. I’m conversant with the term ‘fuck pad.’ A policeman named Kuster was here an hour ago. He leered at me sidelong while he lured Miguel into the so-called safe house with the promise of God knows what kind of goodies, most likely female.”

I crashed. I crumpled. I withered and whimpered and went rhino-recumbent.

“Shit, you’re my damsel in jeopardy.”

Donna smiled—incipient/preemptive/*almost.*

“It’s ‘damsel in *distress.*’ ”

“O.K.”

Hazel eyes hammered me. “Did I catch a Freudian slip there?”

“What do you mean?”

“You said ‘my,’ not ‘our,’ meaning the rest of the horndogs.”

I rhino-revived. “Shit, I just want to be around you while I’ve got the chance.”

Donna smiled—regal/resplendent/*real.*

“O.K., I’ll stay.”

Don’t sweat now/don’t sway now/don’t swoon now—

A grip yelled, “Hey, Jenson. Some guy named Ludlow called. You’re supposed to meet him at the impound ASAP.”

THE IMPOUND IMPOSED IMPERIOUS—six long Japtown blocks. The poof Pontiac posed by the fence. Tom Ludlow leaned against it. He hugged his phone book/teddy bear.

I pulled in and parked. Tom pulled his hip flask. Aaaaaah— Old Crow and Sprite —Breakfast of Psycho Vietnam Vets!

I said, “Did it ever occur to you that you’re a remorseless alcoholic psychopath?”

Tom belched. “Yeah, it did. I got that way ’cause my new partner sleeps with grungy-ass dogs.”

Touché.

“Do you always carry that phone book?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you ever read it?”

Tom picked his nose. “I read the names of the women, then I call them up, say nasty things, and try to make dates with them.”

I laffed. I scanned the impound. It was the Audi Auschwitz, the Buick Bergen-Belsen, the Dodge Dart Dachau.

A tech man walked up. Frappé Freddy—no smile/no jive.

He pulled a master key. He unlocked the Pontiac’s trunk. He let the door pop.

I looked in. I inventoried:

K-Y jelly, one tube, 1/2 squeezed. Boy-banger books: *Cock It to Me, Shlong, For Those Who Think Hung.*

Stamped on back: Porno Vista Boox/Selma Ave/Hollywood.

Loose twenty-dollar bills. Bank-inked. Dried ink coating the trunk.

Tom said, “I don’t get it.”

I did.

The killer wants butthole. The vic’s got bank cash. The killer’s clueless: The vic 211’d a bank. He stores the gelt in his trunk. They’re pouring the pork. The killer loops back for lubricant. He sees bankrolls. He pops one. Ink jets spray. He’s packing a piece. Rock it—Rhino lites the lites and pops windows. The killer shoots the vic. The killer beats feet. Donna eyeballs his ass.

I nudged Tom. “Call the Feds and Central Robbery. Get the stats on 211’s going back a week.”

Tom slapped his phone book. “Hey, *I’m* the senior partner, and *I* got some important calls to make.”

“I’ll give you a call. It’s a freebie, because we’re partners now.”

Tom grabbed his pen. I said, “Carol F. Brochard. 213-886-1902.”

“Who is she?”

“My ex-wife.”

“Wow!”

“She’s a nympho. She pulls trains for spooks. She’s a real mud shark.”

Tom went ugggh. The tech guy said, “I’ll scrape an ink sample and get the numbers to Dave Slatkin. He’ll match it to the dye batch.”

I said, “Thanks.” Tom Ludlow ran to a phone.

DIG IT:

The Hollywood Fuck Pad.

I walked into the macho-maimed maelstrom. Dig what I saw:

Trusties hauling disco balls. Appliance King coolies lugging water beds. Detective “Condom Cal” Coleman walking the room-to-room rubber route. The biddy landlady—replete with Camels and oxygen tank.

There’s Dave Slatkin. He’s checking out a wall crack.

I said, “What—”

Dave cut in. “That impound clown called. Some shitbird clouted the Hollywood Federal at Santa Monica and Cole four days ago, and I made the ink comparison off a fax slide. There’s a surveillance photo of the guy stomping a bank guard, and he matches the late Randall J. Kirst. SID took his prints at the morgue, and guess what? They matched a latent on the teller’s ledge.”

I leaned on the wall. “We solve a 211, but come up short on the snuff. Kirst was a horny motherfucker. He drives around with his stash in the trunk on a pork run.”

Dave squinted at wall flecks. “Or it’s a lovers-thieves’ altercation.”

I shook my head. “They’d have gotten a motel room.”

“You mean a pork pit like this one?”

I looked around. Trusties rolled TVs on dollies. Va-va-voom— fuck flix in every room.

I said, “What’s Russ doing?”

“Canvassing, borrowing guys and hitting the fruit bars near the Academy. He’s got Ludlow leaning on registered sex offenders.”

“Ouch.”

“Yeah, ouch, but it works.”

I heard growls, sobs, shivers, and oh shits. It sounded like Migraine Miguel. I figured I’d console his ass and divert him from Donna.

I walked upstairs. Miguel rolled his head on a wall beam.

I said, “Bad one?”

“Yeah, with accompanying pix—you know, recurring shit.”

I leaned in the doorway. “Tell me.”

Miguel said, “Recurring since age 1, in 1950-fucking -6, where the same big pervo guy is chasing me through my house, with my mother chasing him, bashing LP records over his head. Headache, nightmare, day flash, the fucking trinity.”

Miguel looked up. Fresh-dry eyes/no twitches/no temple throbs.

I said, “How do you handle it?”

“The Collins way, man. Fantasy and vodka.”

Grunts graveled next door. Triple X/staged sex/some zit-backed cat with a monster curved shlong.

■

I drove by the station. I left Donna messages at her pad and the set. Porno Vista Boox/Selma near Highland/probable surveillance film.

I checked the squadroom. Phone Book Tom held sway.

Six interrogation booths. One pervert per. Tom in booth 4.

He swung like Ted Williams. The hip pop, the crisp follow-through. The suspect was cuffed to a chair. He ducked 40%. Tom batted .600.

Teeth dribbled. Pages riffled. Blood dripped.

I walked out. Rhino reg #6: phone-book jobs on rape-os and child molesters only.

SELMA: A DRAG- QUEEN drag off Sunset. Homo from the get-go. Prostie boys and chicken-hawk Charlies. Porno book bins and backseat fellatio. Lice like Lassie and burned-rear-end rubber. Malignant microbes like Mount Matterhorn.

And Donna Donahue—right by the bookstore—a bliss blast in LAPD blue.

I double-parked and *jumped* out. Donna said, “I didn’t have time to change, but it bought us some time here.”

“Say what?”

“I impersonated a cop. The bookstore guy’s cueing up his surveillance film from two days before the robbery. We can stand in a stall in back and watch.”

I walked in first. The clerk ignored me. The clerk salaciously salaamed to Donna. He pointed us down “Dildo Drive”—a mobile-mounted, salami-slung corridor. Packaged porno reposed on racks and shimmied off shelves. It was a donkey-dick demimonde and Beaver Boulevard.

We ducked dildos. We made the booth. Donna doused the lights. I tapped a projector switch. Black-and-white film rolled.

We saw pan shots. We saw ID numbers. We saw Sad-Sack Sidneys slap sandals in slime.

Donna said, “I already checked the credit-card receipts. Nothing from Randall J. Kirst.”

I nodded. “Nobody—not even turd burglers—want credit-card receipts from the fucking Porno Vista.”

Donna said, “Right. We’re looking for two men making purchases together—the victim and the killer I saw.”

Police smarts in forty-eight hours—add breeding and brains. I said, “What kind of work does your family do?”

Donna laffed. “They manufacture toilet seats.”

I yukked. My gut distended. I hyper-humped it back in.

Film rolled. We saw dykes buy dildos. We saw kollege kids buy *Beaverrama, Beaveroo, Beaver Den, Beaver Bash, Beaverooski,* and *Beaver Bitches.* We saw flits flip through *The Greek Way, Greg Goes Greek, Greek Freaks, More Is More, The Hard and the Hung,* and *The Hungest Among Us.* I laffed. Donna laffed. We bumped hips for kicks. Donna’s gunbelt clattered.

Moby Dick’s Greek Delite, Moby Dick’s Athens Adventure, Moby Dick Meets Vaseline Vic. We yukked. We howled. We bumped hips. Donna yelled, “*Now!*”

I punched Stop. The frame froze. The clerk ran back. The clerk ogled Donna.

I poked him. The clerk said, "That's the dead guy from the TV news on the left. The other guy is Chickie or Chuckie Farhood. From his height, I'd say it's Chickie. Chickie's queer, but tough. Chuckie's a chubby chaser that likes fat chicks. He runs fat outcall whores out of the counterculture rags. And I mean *fat.* Real quarter-tonners with cheese, and—"

Donna poked him. "Get to it."

"Okay, Chuckie lives at the Versailles on 6th and Saint Andrews. Chickie steals cars and sleeps in them, and you didn't get this from Burt D. Lelchuk. I'm a clean man in a dirty business."

THE VERSAILLES/6th and Saint Andrews—Koreatown, *aaah sooo.*

We rolled south. Complexions combined and palate-popped yellow. Crime stats crawled low. K-people kept to themselves. I was Rickshaw Rick here. Dig the signs—all Korean—no coons with Olde English 800.

We hit the address. Fuck it—let Donna roll, too.

We checked the mailbox bank. Donna tapped 106—"Farhood." A K-lady said, "Velly fat woman, no can climb stairs."

We walked to 106. Donna knocked. I heard TV noise. A woman yelled, "I'm in bed! I can't get out! I'm too heavy!"

I heard a coughing fit. I heard "The door's open."

Donna turned the knob. We walked in. Wig the walls: photo-phased by 8-by-10 testaments—monuments to morbid obesity.

Six hundred-pounder pix. Eight yards, the Big Ten. Donna looked around and down. I prayed for aerobics in heaven.

A cracked door. That voice: "I'm in here."

Donna pushed the door open. The bed: an endomorph endeavor—big/wide/bolted down. On it: a nude woman, horribly fat.

I said, "Police officers. We're here to—"

Donna yelled, "Gun!"

Instinct: I hit the floor. Actor's instinct: Donna piled on me.

I pulled my piece.

I dropped it.

I saw the gun. I saw the shooter: a mini-man *under* Fat Mama.

He fired. Two shots went wide. Donna pulled her gun. Donna fired. Fuck—empty actor's prop.

Fat Mama reached under a pillow. Fuck—it's a .44 Mag. Mini-Man shot over my head. I rolled. I dumped Donna. She pulled off my ankle piece. Velcro snapped. Fat

Mama aimed and fired. A wall section blew out.

Donna stood up.

Donna walked to the bed.

She aimed. She shot Fat Mama in the head. She shot Fat Mama in her fatty mass. Fat Mama buckled. Mini-Man got exposed. Donna shot him four times in the face.

THINGS WENT SLO - MO.

I called Russ. Russ called Wilshire dicks. The Wilshire guys brought extra throw-down guns. I gave a statement. It was *my* gun. I assumed credit/blame per guidelines. Russ called the shooting board a lockdown. Donna wasn't even there.

Russ brought her Ativan and scotch. She snarfed it. We stood in the hallway. We hugged and stood head-to-head.

Donna said, "Say something nice to me."

I said, "You know who you are now."

SHE WOULDN'T GIVE up her uniform. It was bloodstained. It was dirty. She wouldn't go home and change. She wouldn't visit the set. She wouldn't scrounge fresh threads.

The pills and booze zorched her. She stared out her window. She stared at people. She said, "Brave new fucking world."

I said, "You saved my life." I called her "Partner." She said, "Brave new fucking world."

Dusk hit. I drove to the fuck pad. Donna fell asleep. I wedged a bulletproof vest under her head.

I walked inside. Russ was playing Bruckner for the heathens. Symphony 7/ movement 2. Lyrical shit/music for honors.

Full house.

Cops in Jockey shorts/women in robes. Couples standing in hallways. Couples staying up to see Donna—you could plain tell.

Dave brushed blood from wall cracks. I said, "Where's Miguel?"

Dave coughed. "He saw some detail on the wall, you know, some nightmare shit. He went to his mother's place."

Russ said, "Your girl's something. She's too much woman for me."

Bruckner soared. It was an elegy for a century dead. Donna walked up and stood in the doorway. She got a wild locomotive ovation. The sound deafened her. She bowed. Blood dripped off her badge. She said, "Brave new fucking world."

WE DROVE WEST. A light rain hit. Russ's cocktail wore off. She said, "Let's go see Miguel. I worry about him sometimes."

“Where does he live?”

“Rosie’s place. Roxbury north of Sunset. Big, white Spanish place.”

“You want to talk about it?”

“No. I want to say hi, and get under some covers with you and see if I can cry with some more pills and scotch.”

I drove to Beverly Hills. Donna showed me the pad: big/Spanish adobe/George Gershwin’s ex-crib.

We parked and knocked. Rosemary Collins answered. She saw us. She saw a cop and an actress. She did mental math. She went, “*Sssshhhh.* Miguel’s had a rough one, too.”

We walked inside. We just made it. The rain went haywire. Donna exercised Hollywood etiquette.

She hit a bathroom. She popped the medicine chest. She popped some prescription shit. She found a liquor sideboard. She guzzled straight scotch.

Rosie winked at me. She was big and fat now. She’d gone down behind every appetite.

I said, “Where’s Miguel?”

She walked downstairs. Donna stagger-followed her. I came up last. Rosie said, “Old Luis’s archives are down here. He made these doco films in the ’50s.”

Film cans on chairs. Film cans on shelves. Film cans stacked shelf to ceiling.

There’s Miguel:

Passed out in cop blue. Gone behind Belvedere vodka.

I tossed a blanket on him. Rosie tucked his feet under it.

I said, “Can we stay here tonight?”

Rosie said, “Sure. Third bedroom on the left upstairs. I’ll run Donna through a shower.”

Donna stumbled to a bathroom. I found a bathroom and stripped. I saw bullet-graze marks on my cheek and shoulder. Dry blood flaked off.

I showered and found a robe. I stretched out on the bed. Rosie walked Donna in. Donna’s robe dwarfed her.

Rosie killed the lights and shut the door. Donna snuggled into me. The darkness felt right.

Donna said, “Can we make love in the morning? I’m too wrecked now.”

I said, “Sure. It’s my best time.”

The bed dropped a thousand yards and settled back up with us in it. A sync settled in—her heartbeat, my breath.

2.

“Brave new fucking world.”

Her first morning muse. I woke with a chart-busting chubby. Delightful, delirious—Dangerous Donna now.

I’d notched next-door nightmares. Luis Figueroa’s voice. The partial pop of a self-described killer. Film-sprocket click. Luis called the cat “Steve.” Faded fuzz sounds.

I mapped some mental math. Mid-’50s. Luis’s home movies. Dave Slatkin’s pet perv Stephen Nash. Dave’s vision: the sparkling Spanish house—Rosie’s Roost?

Donna nudged me. “I *said* ‘Brave new fucking world.’ ”

My chubby chugged out and up. Piss-deflate it or pave new penile paths with Donna—quick call.

I said, “It’s our world now.” Donna leaned in. I kissed her neck. I kissed her cleavage clung to Rosie’s robe. She pulled my head up. She kissed my bullet bites. Our lips latched and launched the world’s longest kiss.

I swirled in it. I tasted my morning breath. I mowed medicinal scotch off her tongue. We held the kiss. We ripped off our robes. I dropped into Donna delirium. She rhino-reciprocated. We tasted each other all over. We flared freckles and tweaked toes and centered on our center parts. We savored our scents there. She pulled me in. It lasted ten seconds or ten hours. It was all eyes-closed climax and breathing one breath and one hard holding until I thought our bones would break.

■

We rerobed and coursed through the casa. Donna rapped with Rosie. I nudged Miguel next door.

He fiddled with film cans and cataloged cassettes. I said, “Luis knew some wild characters.”

Miguel lit a cigarette. “Delusional types. He’d give them a few bucks and get their shit down on film. It was his variation on the—you know—study the surreal to learn the real. It’s sort of like Donna yesterday. She wasted two freaks, so now she can play a cop better.”

I laffed. “Can I see those films you were watching last night?”

“No, you may not. You banged Donna this morning, so I’m jealous. When the jealousy wears off, I’ll let you see them.”

I said, “Fair enough.”

Miguel blew smoke rings in my face. “Enjoy it while you can, man. Donna goes through men like Rosie goes through Häagen-Dazs.”

I coughed away smoke. Donna yelled, “Rick, the living room! We’re on TV!”

Miguel said, “Get me some creeps I can off, Jenson. Donna’s got the upper hand on life experience now.”

I fast-walked to the living room. Rosie wore a muumuu. Donna wore bloodstained LAPD blue. She was the statuesque still point of Stanislavsky.

Russ Kuster talked from the tube. “Officer Jenson’s slaying of Charles “Chuckie” Farhood and his female accomplice Melissa “Mama Cass” Cassavailian was entirely within LAPD shooting policy, and I am sure he will be exonerated at today’s shooting board.”

A quick cut. A handsome newsman: “Miss Suzie Park Kim of the Versailles Apartments has a different story to tell.”

A quick cut. A korpulent Korean diesel dyke filled the screen.

“No, no, no! I see TV actress in uniform with policeman! She killed Chuckie and Mama Cass! I see her on *Hawaii Five-O*! Donna something! She stone fox—yum, yum!”

Donna grabbed me. “I should pack and run. Chuckie’s brother’s got a bullet with my name.” I grabbed her back. I smelled her hair. I caught Alberto VO5 and our lovemaking sweat.

“I’ve got the shooting board. You stay here and watchdog Miguel. He’s torqued on his dad’s old films. I’ll be back later.”

Donna nodded. Rosie said, “Come on, baby. Häagen-Dazs and bonded bourbon. Breakfast of champions.”

RUSS MET ME at Parker Center. Room 463—Internal Affairs.

I said, “Update me.”

Russ ratched earwax with a paper clip. “The dead guy’s Chuckie Farhood. He’s the heterosexual chubby chaser. Chickie’s the fruit, and here’s his MO. The late Randall J. Kirst and Chickie were part-time fuck-film actors, and Chickie 459’s pharmacies, steals dope, and sleeps in cars that he steals. He’s a swish psychopath. He goes to straight and fag porno theaters, takes pixes off the screen with a high-speed camera, and sells them to porno bookstores. That’s all shit we coerced out of that clown at Porno Villa.”

I said, “He must have a darkroom somewhere.”

Russ said, “Correct.” He handed me some Chickie Farhood mugs. I said, “Stolen car reports—”

Russ cut in. “We’ve got six teams from West Traffic checking stolen-car reports and canvassing for wits, and six SID teams and a rover van to dust for prints. We’ve got a meeting at Central Vice in two hours. You and Tom Ludlow are to hit the fag bars and porno theaters, anywhere Chickie can 'work' and hide out. We've got 12 teams total, and Chickie hit a Rite Aid pharmacy last night. Left three latents and stole a fuckload of Seconal, Amytal, and Tuinal. What that means, I don't know."

I scratched my balls. "Suicide attempt?"

"Maybe. Before the meeting, go by the fuck pad and talk to Slatkin. Our resident genius is freaking out about something."

I scratched my nose. I smelled Donna.

"I'll hit the pad, then go by the Versailles and chill out that Korean bitch. She's flapping her mouth about Donna."

Russ shook his head. "Low priority, especially if Chickie's on a suicide run."

"Russ, shit, she's—"

"*No.* And if you see that fucked-up snitch of mine, Chuy Nieves, put some hurt on him. He's been telling street creeps I gave him up to the Sheriff's on a hot-prowl job."

I hitched up my rhino-horn gunbelt. "What about Donna?"

Russ sighed. "The last I heard, Donna could take care of herself."

THE SHOOTING BOARD— precisely pro forma.

Wasp cop kills pornopreneur and Mama Cass. Wasp cop's bullets waste welfare wench and *ex*-caped *ex*-con with felonious faigelah brother. Suzie Park Kim's musings—meshugina.

The board deliberated. I sat alone. I poked my skin for Donna scent-sightings. I found arm and ankle aromas—aaaah, the Stanislavsky-stopping studdess!

The board returned. Unanimous decision: killings in police policy.

Deadly Donna—Manslaughter Two mandated to mush.

I INSUBORDINATELY ITINERIZED. Koreatown kame first—gag fat Suzie fast.

I daydreamed per Donna. I called up some caution. *Don't propose until next week.*

Chuy Nieves notched into my noggin. He was Kuster's kustom snitch. He hot-prowled UCLA dorms. He flashed his herpes-hammered hamster at comely coeds. He got screeches and screams back. Russ caught him. Russ made him his sniveling snitch. Now he rebelled. Now he screamed for a "screen test."

I got to the Versailles. I checked out the adjacent alley. Fuck— Doomonic Donna and Sick Suzie captured in catfight configuration.

Donna in bloodstained blue. Suzie in a mauve muumuu.

They yelled. They yodeled. They yipped. I ran back. Suzie tried to beat on Donna and caress her concurrent. I interceded. Suzie belly-bumped me. I flew. Donna caught me. Sick Suzie mouthed off.

"I saw you shoot Chuckie and Mama Cass! Man was here—he show me picture of you—movie reference book—Donna something. Man Chuckie's brother. He show me picture. I munch your socks off, yum, yum."

Chickie—back for revenge—gone now.

I started to lecture Donna. "I told you to stay at Rosie's. You can't go around impersonating a cop all the—"

Shots. Big-bore right to left, over the alley fence, ring-a-ding ricochets. Bam—the dyke socks one in her eye socket. She goes down dead. Her flab flares and flattens. Fuck—it's a 6.8 earthquake.

Donna jumps up. Donna fires over the fence. Fuck—fake uniform/live bullets.

I vaulted the fence. My rhino horn hung up on a fence post. I got impaled upside down. Donna shoved my ass. I de-impaled and dumped to earth on my derrière. Donna fired at fleeing Farhood. Her shots went wild. They pinged pavement and skimmed skyward. I proned out and fired a full clip. I fanned Farhood's hair. I narrowly notched his Nikes. I blew the full clip.

Donna jumped the fence. I said, "Real bullets?"

"Miguel convinced me. He called it Stanislavsky plus."

I CALLED IN the 187. Russ Kuster arrived. Wilshire dicks followed. I described the scene. I omitted Donna's gun. The cops eyeballed Donna and asked for autographs. Donna wrote "Brave new fucking world" and "Love, Donna" on their ticket books.

We gave formal statements and humped to Hollyweird. We argued per Donna's props: blue suit and flesh-flaring bullets. Donna said, "Hollow points. I'm a feminist. I want to kill this cocksucker in the name of oppressed women worldwide."

We drove on. We headed to the fuck pad. I saw Chuy Nieves at Sunset and El Centro.

I braced the brakes. I careened from the car. I chased Chuy. Chuy chugged slow—methedrine malignancy and three packs a day. I waggled his wetback ass. I cuffed him. I dragged him to the car. I tossed him in the backseat.

Donna said, "As a liberal, I should protest."

I said, "*Former* liberal. Now dig on the 'screen test.' "

I punched the gas. I hit 60. I hit the brakes. Chuy hit the front-seat/backseat mesh. It was crisscross/crosshatched metal. It left tic-tac-toe tattoos.

I hit the gas. I hit the lights and siren. I hit 80-plus. Chuy hit the mesh. His nose broke. I hit the gas. I hit 70. Chuy mashed the mesh headfirst. Dig his hip haircut: hatch marks scraping his scalp.

I stopped the car. I got out. I hauled Chuy out. I dumped him in the gutter. I said, "Don't talk out of school about Russ Kuster."

I got back in the car. I said, "Please don't say 'Brave new fucking world.' "

Donna said, “Let’s get a motel room, watch fuck flicks, and make love.”

“When Chickie’s dead or captured.”

“You’re going to waste his faggot ass, aren’t you?”

I said, “Donna, there’s never been a woman like you.”

WE HIT the fuck pad. There’s Dave Slatkin on the porch. He’s shivering, shaking, all shook up.

We parked and walked over. I said, “Tell me.”

Dave shook and shimmied. “The house is evil. I found blood mixed with polio vaccine and cranial fluid in a wall crack. I went by the Hollywood library. Three little boys disappeared from the polio clinic at Queen of Angels in April ’56.”

Chills churned through me. “You’re thinking Stephen Nash.”

Dave nodded. “We’ve got to bring in scent dogs and dig up the yard.”

I whispered. “We’ve got to get Farhood first. Be realistic. Nash is dead, the kids are dead.”

Donna whispered to me. “The man-in-the-street shit. Doesn’t Miguel have something like—”

I shushed her. “Dave, go back to the shelter and chill out with the dogs. There’s a meeting at Central Vice. I’ll cover for you.”

Dave shivered. “I keep seeing that big white Spanish house north of Sunset.”

I CALLED a cab for Donna. I told her to go back to Rosie’s and watchdog Miguel. *Go through his old man’s film cans. Be careful. I’ll explain later.*

We kissed good-bye on a shitty Hollywood side street. My whole life was one big blur.

CENTRAL VICE. Parker Center—Room 506.

Yours Truly at the lectern. My plastic rhino horn perched near the mike. I updated, I preached, I assigned.

Twenty-four cops listened. Detectives, SID men, clue clowns. Russ gave me a fact sheet. I riffed off of it.

Forty-two fruits claimed their cars. None knew Randall J. Kirst or the Farhood brothers. A few bun buddies said they’d “seen them around” and no more. I gave the Valley porn theaters and bars to eleven two-man teams. The names drew laughs: Dee-Lux Dicks, Fort Dicks, the Ramrod, the Manhole, the Colonoscopy Club, the Boy Toy, Boys R Us, Locker Room Larry’s, Lance’s Lancer Room, Leather Leo’s Love Nest, and Ten-Inch Tommy’s.

I ended with a slide show and a macho-maimed musing. The slide featured bare-chest mugs of Chickie Farhood. Bad zits— Mount Matterhorn pustules and blasting-cap blackheads. The whole room went ugggh. My musing: “He’s got pharmacy downers. He’s armed and dangerous. Take him out the second you see him.”

I PAIRED WITH Phone Book Tom. We hit West Hollyweird. Tom traded his phone book for a beavertail sap. We hit Pussycat theaters. We lingered for the straight fuck-and-suck action. We talked to cashiers. They’d “seen Chickie around”—“the cat with the zits, right?” We shined penlights in patrons’ faces. We caught guys slamming the ham. We caught a policewoman doing deep throat in *Sharon Shags Sherman Oaks.* Tom made a note to call her.

We hit fruit bars—Jason’s Jamboree, Lariat Lee’s, Rudy’s RUMPus Room. We got one lead: Patrons called Chickie “Zits” and “Pus.” One fag called him “Date-Rape Dave.” Chickie tried to slip him some Rohypnol. Tom howled. He started calling *me* “Rohypnol Rick.” He said it’s the only way I’d get laid. We hit more straight theaters. We saw John Holmes do an ad for the Donkey Dan Dick Extender. It involved pulleys and possible prostate problems. I made a note to call Donna about it.

We walked back out to our F-car. The radio blared. I picked up. West Traffic found Chickie’s car in Griffith Park.

THERE IT WAS: a ’79 Toyota cum ’56 NASH.

Parked on a bluff. Cityside view. Egregiously exhibitionistic.

Choppers chugged overhead. Russ and two bluesuits blockaded the car.

Tom and I got out. Dig the infernal interior:

Demonic dashboard: duct-taped Stephen Nash news pix and clips. Nash gnashing his nublike teeth. Nash ghoulishly giggling. “ ‘I’m King of Killers,’ Boy Slasher Sez.” Nash braggingly brandishing lead pipe and knife. Nash blinking back flashbulb flare. Nash knife-wielding and pipe-posing. “King of Killers stabs boy 28 times under pier. Brags ‘I’d never killed a kid before. I wanted to see how it felt.’ ”

A canvass crew crawled into the hills. I checked the backseat. Foto Fiend Farhood created a cruel-ass collage.

Stephen Nash with flared fly. John Holmes’s jumbo Johnson jumping out. Political paste-up: Devil Dick Nixon gobbling his gonads.

Russ said, “He left it here for us to spot. SID got his latents off the dashboard. The car got clouted two days ago at Ted’s Ranch Market. He won’t come back. He’s too hip. We’ve got six canvassing crews tracking stolen cars within a four-mile radius. He had to steal some fresh wheels.”

Tom banged his phone book against his leg. Dried blood dropped off the pages.

I said, “Tips?”

Russ said, “Percy’s Perch. It’s a fruit bar on Ventura. The barman said he’s got information. You and Tom go over and brace him.”

I saw an 8-track tape secured in a sound system. I hit the ignition. Tom tapped some dashboard dials. HIS voice, fogged by ’56 fuzz:

“I’m the King of the Killers! I’ll go to my death like any malevolent monarch! I’m the monster of mass-production killing!”

PERCY’S PERCH:

A poof palace in palate-popping purple and pink. Nancy boys in niggered-out Naugahyde booths.

The barman was a sweaty swish in spangled spandex. He saw us and steered us to a back room.

No introductions. Spandex Spanky spit it out.

“Chickie has AIDS. He’s slipping guys that date-rape drug and deliberately giving them the virus.”

He popped a cassette in a console TV. Spliced footage screed the screen. There’s Harrison “the Hunk” Ford in *Star Wars.* There’s Sylvester “Steroid” Stallone in *Rocky*. There’s Chickie Farhood made up as Stephen Nash. It’s a fantastic faux cluster fuck.

The swish said, “Chickie shoots the stuff off regular movie screens and splices himself in. God forgive us, but there’s a market for such blasphemy.”

We walked back to the bar proper. I saw a cadre of cadaverous Calvins downing daiquiris and massive martinis. Spanky said, “Chickie’s victims. They’ve got four months between them to live.”

I said, “Let’s kill him.”

Tom fanned his phone book. “I got no problem with that.”

I DUMPED TOM at the fuck pad. I rhino-rolled to Roxbury Drive.

There’s Rosie. There’s Donna. There’s Miguel bombed on Belvedere.

Donna took me aside. “Rosie got tanked and explained Miguel’s visions. Stephen Nash tried to attack him. Rosie chased him and beat him with a stack of 78 records. She shattered sixteen copies of ‘You Belong to Me.’ ”

“Did you go through the old film cans?”

Stephen Nash starts his last ride. *(Los Angeles Times Collection, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA)*

Donna nodded. "I found it and cued it up. *Brace yourself.* "

We walked to the next room. A screen covered one wall. I doused the lights. Donna ran the projector. Stephen Nash gnawed at the camera.

"I snatched the three snotty-pants from the polio joint and beat their heads against the wall of this rooming house where I was staying. I cornholed them postmortem and buried them out back. It was April. I figured the fuzz would get me sooner or later. I found me the ugliest bitch I could find and fucked her blind. I put a big banana on her stomach and made like she was a boy. She had pimples all over. I heard she popped twins right when they sent me to death row."

Offscreen: Luis Figueroa's voice. "I find this hard to believe."

Nash: gap-toothed/floppy-mouthed/curly-haired/beady-eyed/ *baaaaaaad.*

I believed every word.

The room lights flicked on. I saw Miguel walk in. He said, "I remember him now. I haven't had a migraine since Donna showed me the film."

I said, "Rosie saved your life."

Miguel nodded. “I’m going to buy her all the Häagen-Dazs in Beverly Hills and a case of Wild Turkey.”

I kissed tears off Donna’s cheeks. She said, “Can we make love now?”

WE FOUND aroom. The bed belonged to two baying beagles. We booted them. They chose two chaise lounges and watched.

Percy’s Perch. Pimple-piled killers. Camera-eyed K-9’s. Brave new fucking world.

We dusted dog dander off the covers and climbed on. Donna wore static-stark cashmere now. She peeled off a pink turtleneck shift. Shiver-sparks sparked spangled light.

I shucked my shirt and pants—threadbare third-world threads. Donna hauled off my “Home of the Whopper” shorts. Naked in a nanosecond—heaven in a hound dog’s hutch.

I remember the one long kiss. I remember blue veins synced to her heartbeat. Her breasts tasted like *essence de Donna* and sharp shower soap. Her mouth meandered and made me moan. Lip locks and licks made me pitch to her pivot-spot.

We fitted finally. Her call—I was orphaned in her orbit and didn’t know where I was. Beagles bayed. It lasted ten years or ten seconds. Our climax was a climb up the pyramids and a ten-planet pirouette down.

DONNA STIRRED FIRST. “Miguel and I have missed six shooting schedules. We might get fired.”

I said, “Chickie’s all over the media. We’ll get him soon.”

“I don’t want it to end. How do you go back to guest shots and dates with actors after something like this?”

I kissed her neck. “You don’t. You stay with me.”

Donna shook her head. “I’m a move-on-but-always-live-in-L.A. kind of girl.”

I shook my head. “It’s not a life sentence. You’ve been through too much to be who you were.”

Donna smiled. “I feel like an adventuress. I came to Hollywood, I was Andover and Wesleyan, it was grins and giggles, and now I’ll see Stephen Nash the moment I wake up for the rest of my life.”

“You’re right. And I’ll pick up the phone and call you when I’m scared or bored, and we’ll meet for coffee and talk around the wild shit of fall ’83 and how it changed us.”

I cupped her breasts. I felt a *ka-tick* murmur under the right.

“You’re saying you can’t be subordinate to any man.”

Donna squeezed my hand on her heart. “And I imagine it’ll last until I’m 47 or -8 and I’m afraid of being alone.”

I shook my head. “You’ll have a grave and terrible beauty then. You’ll get the face you earn, and Stephen Nash and me and Chuckie and Mama Cass will be part of it.”

Donna burrowed into my chest. It hit me then—the cop part. *Chickie clouted a Rite Aid. He stole Seconal, Amytal, Tuinal. He did not steal demonic date-rape Rohypnol.*

Donna said, “I love you. I’ll never just walk from all of this.”

I said, “I love you, and I don’t think I’ll ever love anyone more.”

Donna touched my lips. “Rick, don’t say that. You’re 31 years old.”

“I’ll rephrase it, then. I’ve got a kick-ass will and volition, and I’ll never let myself love anyone more.”

LUIS’S HIP HACIENDA. A kooky kasa in Coldwater Canyon. Wild warped wood whipped out at raucous right angles.

We pulled up and parked. Miguel said, “Typical actor’s pad. Build as you go, between residual checks. The cocksucker starts out with *Hamlet* and ends up with *Count Borga, Vampire* for scale.”

Donna mock-swatted him. “It’s the world we chose, and we’ll be lucky to do as well as he did.”

“The cocksucker cheated on my mom during their honeymoon, then bird-dogged half of my bitches.”

Donna mock-swatted him—harder. “Women are not‘bitches.’ ”

Miguel said, “Excuse me. ‘Chicks.’ ”

Donna nudged me. “Can I kill him?”

I laffed. “If you’ll marry me as part of the cover-up, yeah.”

Donna said, “I’ll consider it.”

Miguel flipped off the kasa. “Hey, Luis, eat shit and die, you old cocksucker.”

The old cocksucker cold-cocked my headlights. I braked and missed him. He was Miguel fifty years hence. Balder, Disneyesque Dumbo ears, blackhead-blotted beak. Garb: madcap madras golf shorts and an “I Choked Linda Lovelace” T-shirt.

We got out of the car. Father and son embraced. Papa pulled a pint of Padrone from his waistband. Miguel took two gulps. Donna declined. I took two—aaaaah!

They saltily soliloquized in Spanish. Luis talked fast. Miguel talked slow. I heard “*mujer magnifica*” “*chinga su madre,*” “*Count Borga—dinero grande.*”

Miguel turned the talk *a ingles.* “Stephen Nash? *Hoto sicótico.* TV news, that killer. Come on, Daddy, speak English.”

Luis whipped it out. Luis pissed in the driveway. His dick was divertingly donkeyesque.

Luis said, "It pays to advertise."

Donna said, "For those in the market."

Luis stumbled up his steps. The living room was a dump. We followed. Dave Slatkin lamented from a wall TV.

"We dug up the remains of the three children at the backyard location today, utilizing dogs from the LAPD's animal shelter. The boys had been missing from the polio ward since April 1956. Their broken pelvises denote a posterior-based sexual attack."

Ronald Reagan replaced Dave. Luis pounded Padrone. I badged him. "LAPD. Here or downtown."

Luis slipped on a crown and robe. Dig the nametags attached: "Property of the *Count Borga, Vampire* set."

Miguel grabbed a phone book. Miguel patted it. Miguel cracked the crown off Luis's head.

Dig the joltingly Jack Webb-like *Dragnet* drawl:

"Give us the straight dope, Pancho. You worm-eating wetbacks get no truck with my partners and me."

Donna grabbed the phone book. Donna hit Luis in the head.

"That's for whipping it out and hitting on me on *Hawaii Five-O.*"

Hollywood—man-o-Manischewitz!!!!

Luis humbly hurled Latin. I'm priapically Protestant—it was gravel Greek to me. Miguel said, "Sssh. It's the prelude to confession."

We all stood stock-still. The count chugged Padrone and chanted "nam-myoho-renge-kyo." We waited. He tossed the jug at the TV. The TV shattered. He corrosively confessed.

"It was '54. I'd lost it. I had no more self to transmit to the screen. I met Steve Nash. We got in a fender bender. He recognized me. We talked. He'd just robbed a liquor store. He was a heist man. He carried a knife and a pipe. He proudly stated that he was a butt banger, but I'd be safe because I wasn't his type. I fell into his sway. We smoked reefer and ate Benzedrex Inhaler wads together. I drove while he robbed stores. He never spent money. I held his stash, and I've still got it. He ate dog food exclusively. He drank Thunderbird wine. I thought he was real, *and* false and reinvented, and I believed roughly half of what he said. He fucked filthy winos in our poolhouse. It drove Rosie crazy. He used to joke with you, Miguelito. It drove Rosie crazy. Once she broke a stack of records over his head. He meant you no harm, *mi hijo,* I swear it."

The count picked his nose. The count took a deep stage breath.

Donna patted her phone book. "Wrap it up, Chico. *Rapidamente,* or I'll yank your green card."

The count went contemplative.

"I thought he was schizophrenic or the world's greatest actor. His all-dog-food diet netted me $108,995, all of which is in that top cupboard. He told me he killed three polio-afflicted children, and I never believed him. Then they found that boy under the Santa Monica pier. I wept when he went to the gas chamber. He was evil, but his genius meshed with mine, and together we will reach our zenith as I portray *Count Borga, Vampire.*"

I said, "You're a fucked-up cat, Luis."

Donna hammered his head with the phone book, two-handed.

Miguel grabbed the drawer gross with greenbacks. He said, " *Yo te amo,* Papa, you cocksucker."

IT WAS LATE. We were tired and hungry. Loose lettuce lolled in my trunk. I called Kuster on my 2-way. Chickie Farhood—still at large. Massive manhunt. Habitual haunts held down. Homicide men at known homo huts. Camouflaged cops trawling the Swish Alps.

We drove southeast. The Pacific Dining Car—"Open All Nite." We hit Highland southbound. We saw shelter lights shimmer. We pulled up and walked in.

Bull terriers barked. Bloodhounds bayed. Airedales went aoooo! Reggie the Ridgeback rammed his snout under Donna's skirt.

Jane Slatkin was asleep. Three-dog night. Litter-mate Labs.

Dave sat on the floor. Donna shoved Reggie off. He sniffed Miguel's crotch and snickered.

I said, "He's still out there."

Dave nodded. "The big white house was the Collins pad, right?"

Miguel said, "Right. You're a fucking psychic genius, man. Want to go to the Dining Car?"

Dave shook his head. I said, "Stephen Nash ate an all-dog-food diet."

"Proving there's some good in all people."

Donna scratched Reggie's ridge. He almond-eyed her with *looooove.* Dave said, "I had a certified vision. There *is* an afterlife, and dogs run heaven. Jesus, Buddha, and all those other cats are just shills to keep squares walking the straight-and-narrow."

Reggie snout-skimmed Donna's skirt. Donna dodged him. She said, " *Jesus, and this is all real.*"

WE HOGGED a booth at the Car. We pounced on porter-house, tore into T-bone, fattened our fangs on filet mignon. Donna said she'd adopt Reggie. Miguel said he'd adopt the two bull terriers. We piled into pecan pie. Donna held my hand in her lap. We yawned in unison. Our pads were too far to tango to. Let's roll to the Hollywood fuck pad.

Donna said, “What did your dad do with his Oscar for *Hamlet* ? I didn’t see it at his dump.”

Miguel laffed. “He hocked it to Schwab’s pharmacy for phenobarbital and booze.”

I said, “Maybe he’ll mount a comeback with *Count Borga.* ”

Miguel said, “Nix. It’s a grade-Z turkey headed straight for TV.”

A waiter walked over. Donna pointed to some steak scraps. “Will you wrap this up for my dog?”

WE DROVE to the pad. It was dark and dank quiet. No window lights, normal TV or fuck-flick flares. No laughing or lip-smacking of late-nite libidos.

We walked in. I hit the living-room lights. It was too tidy—no dropped drawers or gunbelts shed for the sheets.

Donna yawned. “I’m going up to the roof. I want to look at the lights and extend this whole adventure.”

Miguel said, “I’ll go with you.”

They walked upstairs. I eyeballed the stairways and landings. No kitchen lights. No de rigueur disarray.

Donna and Miguel hit the roof—I heard gravel grab. I walked upstairs. No hall lights. No sconces skimming light. No bathroom lights, no light-lit walkways to the johns.

Five bedroom doors—identically shut.

My neck hairs nipped and nudged me. I opened one door. I hit the wall light.

There’s Condom Cal Coleman and a mulatto meter maid snoring. They passed out dressed. There’s a nightstand. There’s a Jim Beam jug. There’s a red capsule popped and white powder residue.

The Rite Aid 459. The stolen barbiturates—

I tiptoed. I opened doors. I got insidious instant replays. Snores. Clothed couples. Barely broken bottle seals and popped-pill residue.

I ran upstairs. The roof door was open. There’s Donna and Miguel by the south ledge, grooving and grokking the view.

I pulled my piece. The door slammed back. It hit my nose. It tore my teeth. I dropped my gun. It fell down the stairs. It sheared a shot accidental.

I stumbled. I staggered. I saw the Antichrist: Chickie Farhood made up as Stephen Nash.

I pulled my throw-down. Chickie caught it and kicked it away. He slammed the door. My fingers got fucked. Three thread-dangled off the knucklebones.

Gravel ground, grabbed, crackled, and crunched. I saw Donna and Miguel.

They grabbed Chickie. They pulled his hair. Donna gouged his eyes. Miguel kicked him and stuffed gravel in his mouth. Donna ripped an eye out. Chickie screamed. Miguel lashed a belt around his neck. Four hands tightened and pulled.

I saw Chickie scream. I saw Chickie thrash, spasm, and spit gravel. I saw the ledge. I saw Donna step on his face and make him eat mica-flecked grounds. I saw Miguel lift his legs and throw him off the building.

■

The shooting board cleared me. One call to Kuster—case clapboard-closed. Donna drove me to Cedars of Lebanon. The ER docs saved my fingers.

I badged the night nurse. Donna slept in my hospital bed with me. The morphine drip made for mad nightmares—all Stephen Nash.

They released me next noon. We all met at Hollywood Homicide: me, Donna, Dave, Russ, Miguel.

We agreed. The house was evil. It had to burn. The Nash stash would fix the landlady—some swank oldster's crib for life.

Chuy Nieves had a firebug brother. Street name: Matchhead Manuel. Russ said he'd call him.

We watched it burn. We sat across the street and drank canned daiquiris. I held hands with Donna. The fuck pad ignited. Fire-men showed. The roof caved in. Kitsch house to kindling in twelve minutes flat.

I walked Donna to her car. We kissed. She said, "We were fucked by this and made by this, and I'll never love anyone more than you, and I'll go through men and cut them loose because I'm an actress with appetites and nothing in my life will ever be this goddamn motherfucking real."

I brushed soot from her hair. "I'll remember every moment. That'll see me through."

She got in her car. She threaded past fire engines. She drove west on Hollywood Boulevard.

I died in a futile gunfight. Others fell before me.

Russ Kuster died 10/9/90. It happened at the Hilltop Hungarian. Bela Marko was drunk. He had a laser gun. He aimed it at customers. Russ told him to stop. Marko refused. Marko shot Russ. Russ shot Marko. They killed each other. It took six seconds flat.

Donna attended the funeral. We held hands. We wept at the eulogy.

Dave and I rose within LAPD. The big one—downtown Homicide. Donna and Miguel became TV stars and did feature work. Donna never married. I'd see her on the street sometimes. We'd hold each other and whisper-talk for an hour at a crack. People thought we were nuts. We embraced for two hours in a rainstorm once in Beverly Hills.

I never married. Everything Donna said outside the burned-down house proved true.

I lived to age 96. Donna's still alive. She's got a recurring role on a nighttime soap job. The show's about as good as Count Borga, Vampire.

Here's how I died.

I was in a mall in Orange County. I was old and frail. I still carried a gun. A very old Mexican cat walked up to me. He had tic-tac-toe scars. I remembered immediately: Chuy Nieves/the screen test.

Chuy had a big Glock. I had a big Browning. We blew each other away instantaneously. The papers called it the "Oldsters' O.K. Corral."

Dogs run heaven. Donna's generations of Reggie Ridgebacks call the shots. There's lots of clouds and a fuckload of dogs. The food's good. You get to have sex with people you really love. You get to relive your earth life and hit a Pause button. I always go back to fall '83.

I miss Donna. I want to get hammered by those hurricane-hurled hazel eyes up close once again. There's only one catch. I never want her to die.

Hot-Prowl Rape-O

Heaven's forever. Time trips on and traps you. Time cordons you corporeal. Time circumscribes your surfeit of earthly events. Time immobilizes the immortal and makes them look back.

Donna. Me. A long jump: '83 to '04, time-trippingly.

It had to happen. The fitful laws of physics mandated more of us. Our vibes ran vampiric. They recklessly reconnected. They spun out and sparked in our spiritus mundi *and nuclear-napalmed L.A.*

Donna and me. Lashed to the language that pops on these pages. Allegorized in alliteration and bound back boldfaced like this:

Hush-Hush 2000, October 2004 issue. SCANDAL KINGPIN GETCHELL DEAD!
FUNERAL BODES AS STONE GASSER! By Gary Getchell

Yeah, he died of AIDS—but he was no skin-flute hootin' tutti-frutti! Daniel Arthur Getchell—the skank-scamming, scandal-skimming, scopophile king—was a heroin-hooking junkie with a 40-year monkey on his back. Danny the G. was a mensch. He neighborly noodled out his needles and got malignant microbes back. He landed in a secret AIDS ward at Cedars-Sinai. It was fat with faigelahs he outed in *Hush-Hush.* They homo-humped Danny. Dolorous dozens of gay Getchellphobics stormed the hospital. Danny the G. got the gate. He survived this turd-burglar tyranny and hid out at home. He was tenderly tended by magnificent mama-san Megan More, cable-flick floozy supreme. He died September 12. Ms. More said he went out with "dystopian DTs." He "alliterated alluringly" to the end. He spritzed the linguinilike lassos of language that have invasively influenced bad-ass bop-talkers worldwide. Ms. More dug Danny G.'s death spiel. It was "wild shit by James Joyce and Iceberg Slim, Danny's two favorite authors."

Danny Getchell took over *Hush-Hush* magazine in 1955. He rode out lynch-mob-like libel suits. He was L.A.'s litigation-licking truth-trumpeter and mendacity-mauling musketeer. He fragged fruits. He nailed nymphomaniacs. He print-pronged corrupt cops and dollar-driven D.A.s. He punched out pork-barrel politicos. He banged behind-the-scenes in the '58 California election. He immortalized his work in the Mephistophelian memoir *The Trouble I Cause.*

D. the G. ran *Hush-Hush* up to 1999. I wrapped the reins then. I dropped my nowheresville name of Irv Moskowitz and took the moniker "Gary Getchell." I follow Danny's metastasizing mandate. I traffic the truth triumphantly.

I've got Danny the G.'s secret dirt files. They're furtively fail-safed and hidden *Hush-Hush.* They barbarously berate and insidiously indict. They pummel political correctness. They priapically prick predators and frappé the frail. They knock Danny's no-good nemesis, the LAPD.

The LAPD hassled Danny from '55 up. Danny grew a hard-on to hurt them back and sucked up to certain fractious factions within. I've got that hopping hard-on now. It’s pounding in my pants. I don’t like the new Chief, Joe Tierney. The mischievous mick from filthy Philly gores my goat. He’s a headline hurdler and media mauler from the get-go. I don’t dig his command staff. Take Captain Linus “the Laundryman” Lauter. The Feds are looking at Linus lingeringly. His son, Leotis Lauter, runs a Southside dope cartel. The Feds think Linus launders Leotis’s long green. Linus belongs to the 4-A Club: He’s African-American *and* Affirmative Action. *J’accuse*—Jolting Joe Tierney’s afraid to suspend him while the Feds *coon*duct their biz.

I’ve inherited Danny G.’s moral mandate. I’ll be there at Forest Lawn next week. A rent-a-rabbi will soliloquize. He’ll tip topical and irradiate the Iraqis. The crowd will be huge and Dannyesque diverse. Dig the details on my public-access TV show, and dig me at hush-hush.com. Don’t send flowers or waste your bread on mementoes. Send your money directly to me. I’m broke, and I need garlands of good Getchellite gelt.

Remember, dear reader, you heard it here first: off the record, on the Q.T., and *very Hush-Hush.*

Los Angeles Times, September 22, 2004. RESIDENTIAL BURGLARIES IN BEL-AIR AND HOLMBY HILLS By Miles Corwin

A house burglar has struck six times in upscale West Los Angeles neighborhoods over the past eight weeks, a LAPD spokesperson has told the *Times.* All the homes were occupied at the moments of entry, which detectives consider a crucial aspect of the burglar’s modus operandi.

Captain Bill Dumais, the commander of the detective unit at the West Los Angeles Station, said, “The burglar enters his target homes through half-open windows or doors with easily picked locks. He temporarily sedates pet dogs with mild prescription sleeping pills stuck in pieces of raw meat, which leads me to believe he’s an animal lover who doesn’t like to hurt pets. He’s not so gentle with humans, though. He finds them, usually asleep, or rousing at the sound of his entry, and shoots them with a tranquilizer gun. He uses a powerful tranquilizing substance that sedates the people from six to ten hours.”

Captain Dumais went on to discuss burglary precedents and the West L.A. burglar’s probable motives. “We call burglars who break into residences with people inside them ‘hotprowl men,’ ” he said. “They tend to get aroused by the prospect of interaction with the people, and they often graduate to physical assault, rape, and even murder.”

Does this burglar possess that potential? Captain Dumais thinks he does. “So far, the burglar has been stealing only small trinkets,” the captain said. “It appears that he’s not out for saleable items, so it’s our belief that he’s a fetishist looking for souvenirs to commemorate his break-ins.”

And the LAPD’s plans for apprehension?

“Plans are in the works,” Captain Dumais said. “We want to catch this guy before he hurts someone for keeps.”

1.

Donna Standard Time stung me. The squadroom was dead. I decided to desk-dally and dream.

I moved the unit TV over. We used it to magnify mug shots and match fingerprints. It was computer-compatible and sturdy state-of-the-art. Dave Slatkin wired a voom-voltage VCR in.

Hospital Hearts—Donna does doofus TV. She's an on-call oncologist with a loser love life. The series flailed, flatlined, tipped, and tanked.

I settled in. I dug on my desk detritus and mused on my murder mandate.

There's my PC. It features fine-tuned Fed software. There's my rhino-horn paperweight. There's my fetishistic photo spray, plied under Plexiglas. A dozen Donna-look-alike girlfriends—failed flings from '83 up. There's Stephanie Gorman, DOD 8-5-65/ unsolved—the case that I clamor to clear. Snuffed at home/West L.A./ botched rape-sex job.

LAPD Homicide, Cold Case Squad. Dave Slatkin, D3 in charge. Six detectives. Mildew-musty murder files to read, review, reject, peruse, and pursue. Divinely deigned DNA—our most clever clue-clearance tool.

Three years as a unit. Serial killers caught. Rape-os wrapped up and courtroom castrated. The cutting-edge culling of old file data and karmic comeuppance.

I loved the work. I loved the Donna-dalliance downtime. I popped *Hospital Hearts* in the VCR and sailed the sound off.

There's Donna. She's wearing wicked white. She's telling a sickly citizen he's got the Big C. *Fuck that*—she's saying she loves me!

The Donna scene denoumened. A comatose commercial commenced. I shut my eyes and dreamed.

I was 52. She was 48. It was 21 years since *then.* We never married. We serialized separate sex. We mired ourselves in molten and moping monogamy. I carried a flaring flame and a tumescent torch.

Donna was rich. Donna won two Emmys. Donna lived in Holmby Hills. I was middle-class. I'd shot two wetbacks and three jigaboos. I lived in Chino Hills.

Donna had dogs—generations of Reggie Ridgebacks. I had in-place informants. Dig: parking-lot punks, coffee-house confidants, maître d's, *molto bene.* They saw Donna and buzzed me toward her. I showed up dippy and disingenuous. Donna dug on the game and saw through the shuck.

I opened my eyes. Dog-food dramaturgy drilled me. I scanned the walls. I saw old LAPD pix.

Black Dahlia shots. Onion Field shots. My favorite fiend—the doomonic Donald Keith Bashor.

It’s ’55. Don’s a hot-prowl hunk and one strapping studly. He whips through the Westlake Park District. He B&Es women’s pads. He steals cash only. It’s always late nite. The women sleep on.

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LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT
CENTRAL JAIL
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Donald Keith Bashor was sentenced to die for the murders of two women victims of burglary forays. *(Los Angeles Times Collection, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA)*

Until 2/16/55—

Don caroms down Carondelet Street. Don pops a pad packed with nurses. Don pops out with three purses.

Don nets ninety scoots. Don dumps the purses. Don catwalks down Carondelet. Don taps 271 South. Karil Graham’s door’s ajar.

He enters. She wakes up. She screams. He beats her dead with a pipe. He loots her purse. He considers a postmortem rape. The blood turns him off.

He skates on the Graham snuff. He sidles out to South Pasadena. He hot-prowls there. He waits fourteen months. He whips back to Westlake Park.

He hot-prowls. He steals. He tools off his turf. He rapes an Echo Park woman. He wiggles back to Westlake. It’s 5/56. He hot-prowls a pad on West 5th Street.

Laura Lindsay screams. He beats her dead with a hammer.

Demon Don kept it up. Geography is destiny. Westlake wigged wicked magic on him. LAPD ran rolling stakeouts. Said stakeouts snagged Demon Don.

June ’56—it’s over. October ’57—Don fries at Big Q.

Demon Don dug under my skin. He stuck as the Stephanie Gorman paradigm. Your prowl pads. You think you come for cash. You *really* seek sexual succor. You’ve got an urge to unleash the unknown. Every pad gores your gonads. Your adrenaline’s addressed. Every woman's a witch wired to take you where you *have* to go.

Donald Bashor, flanked by Senior Deputy George Coenen, left, and Sheriff's Sergeant Howard Earle, starts on the trip to San Quentin Prison. *(Los Angeles Times Collection, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA)*

I checked the screen. Donna was back. Her hazel eyes hit me hard as hybrids of la Gorman's. I fast-forwarded. Donna dunned a baleful boyfriend for lasting love. I tossed out the text. I licentiously lip-read. Donna expressed explicit love for *me.*

Two print techs walked in. I popped out the cassette. Donna Standard Time, *adieu.*

I beamed up at Bashor. Dave Slatkin beatified the beast and correlated him to the current hot-prowl man. Dave made the man as moon-mad. He was long-term lunar-looped. He slinked to sliver moons and sharp shadows. The man bopped Bashor-like. Dave figured he'd rape and kill soon.

The squadroom filled up. There's my partner, Tim Marti. He's a heavy-handed hard-charger and a thrill-seeking throwback. He priapically predates the Rodney King/so-PC/no-beavertail-sap-slapping days. There's Dave. He's dog-hair-dusted and dog-food-flecked. He's still got that dog shelter. He's breeding brindle pits now.

I was bored. I was restless. DST re-resurrected. Stephanie Gorman caught Donna dust and coopted the ride.

Identikit internment. Sizzling symbiology. Stephanie and Donna as one.

I punched up the program. My computer popped and pixilated two faces. There's Stephanie at 16. There's Donna at 48. Slow now—let's mix-and-match faces.

Four bright hazel eyes. Stephanie's summer tan. Donna's soft paleness.

I free-form Frankensteined for an hour. The now and the then got jungled up and jangled. I thought of Russ Kuster. I thought of fall ’83 and the Jenson-Donahue dead. Stephanie—freeze-frame frissoned at youth forever.

It hit me:

Danny Getchell was dead. He snitched for me. He bid me to bop-talk. I owed him some flowers.

MY DEBT: One boss bouquet. Narco Division’s: floral flotillas. Danny handed them wholesale hopheads and mucho meth dealers. They heaped him heroin back.

I elevatored down. The Narco bullpen: doom-deep in depression.

Twenty-plus desks. “Laundryman” Linus Lauter’s cops lolling listlessly.

I looked at them. They looked at me. They tapped their toes and popped on their PCs. They booted up beaver-shot bashes. They socked in solitaire. They Internet-ignored me.

I whistled. “Flowers for Danny G. Who wants to contribute?”

Some guys flipped me off. Most guys depressive-deadpanned me. Bill Berchem tapped his toupee and twirled one finger. Bob Mosher picked his nose and snagged snot my way.

Division-deep depression. One Fed-fucked captain. The trickle-down trap. Cops headed for Subpoena City.

I scanned the squadroom. The freeze frappéed me. I checked the chalkboard. I saw Gary Getchell’s loathsome likeness. Gary’s gobbling a big dick. Gary’s got shivs shoved in him. A caustic caption read, “Die, motherfucker!!!!!”

I said, “Gary G. isn’t Danny G. Come on, Danny did us all solid.”

Cal Eggers walked up. Call it: Linus Lauter’s less-than-listless lieutenant. Sixtyish. Still a stud. Still a fast-track finagler.

He urged me outside. We walked. We caught some corridor schmooze space. I said, “Danny G. didn’t burn Lauter, the Feds did. Gary’s rattling cages in *Hush-Hush,* and so what?”

Eggers whipped out his wallet and fanned five fifties. I grabbed gratefully.

“Thanks, Lieutenant.”

“Come on, Rhino, it’s ‘Cal’ to D2s and up. You know I’m clean and on the Captain’s List, and Linus Lauter’s a dumb jungle bunny who bought a six-million-dollar house, *cash,* on a captain 2’s salary. Tell me I’m not happy he’s going to burn, and since I’m a recent transfer in, tell me I don’t have a shot at the command.”

I smiled smug. “It’s a good summation.”

Eggers winked. “You glommed Danny G. dope when you worked Hollywood Homicide. You’re not afraid that your name’s in a file that hump Gary’s got?”

I shook my head. “It’s a he-said/he-said scenario. Danny’s dead, and I’ve won the Medal of Valor.”

Eggers shook his head. “You’re a fucking eccentric. You’re a fifty-plus bachelor who wears rhino-horn regalia. You capped three spooks and two wetbacks in a reasonably distinguished police career, but the balance of public opinion has tipped away from us. Look down the fucking hallway.”

I did it. I didn’t dig the drift.

Bulletin-board brouhaha. Diversity classes: malevolent and mandatory. Pernicious postings: the Federal Consent Decree/stiff strictures/Radically Reform Your Wicked White Man’s Ways. Civilian lawsuit updates: ultimatums from shyster lawyers/cleverly cloaked class-action shit. Call it cold: baton-bopping back-alley justice, *adios.* Viva malignant multiculturalism and coerced *coon*sensus.

I yawned. “Yeah, I know the precedents. O.J., Rodney King, the ’92 riots. Payback time for the great L.A. unwashed. You know how I see the Lauter thing playing in? He catches a bullet for being a cop, and dodges one for being a jig. His kid, Leotis, is a piece of shit, so that tips the balance against him.”

Eggers cracked his knuckles. “You saw the squadroom. Middle-aged white men up the ying-yang. They’ll all get tarred with the Linus brush, their careers will flatline, their retirement job prospects will tank, and every fucking man is thinking,‘Danny G. could keep his mouth shut, but the fuck wrote everything down. Will that sick little shit Gary use his files?’ ”

I shrugged. I wanted to short-shrift this shit. *Hush-Hush* was non-mainstream media. Both Getchells were scum scamsters. A noxious Narco probe—yes. Linchpins Linus and Leotis—yes. Fed subpoenas for *Hush-Hush* files—not likely.

My hackles hopped. Eggers felt hinky. I got instantly itchy. My bald head buzzed.

I said, “You’re tweaking me. You want an outsider’s damage assessment. Okay, here it is. Linus and Leotis go down, but nobody else does. Yeah, your guys bought snitches from Danny Getchell, and yeah, he wrote it down. So what? It ends there. Danny’s dead, and Gary G.’s a secondhand, compromised informant.”

Eggers bowed. My tweak take—touché!

“Yes, I wanted an outside opinion, and you confirmed what I thought myself. There’s that, and the fact that I always enjoy talking to the guy who had ten minutes with Donna Donahue.”

I laffed. “It went fast. Ten minutes twenty years ago, and I’m fucked forever.”

Eggers laffed. “I worked the Rampart DB then. I know the whole story.”

“No, you don’t. And Donna and I aren’t telling.”

“*Cherchez la femme.* I’ve always gone by that.”

“I’ve got two women. I *cherchez* more than most.”

2.

Cherchez this:

Beverlywood. A delightful demimonde near Beverly Hills. Peaceful and pastoral. A kalm Kosher Kanyon.

Hillsboro and Sawyer—Stephanie Gorman's house still standing.

I parked across the street. The sky tipped toxic tan to bleached blue. The red-rimmed sun set. I dug on the dark.

She died in daylight. *Ma chère* Stephanie.

It's 8/5/65. There's a hellacious heat wave. Stephanie goes to summer school—Hamilton High sessions.

She carpools home. She's alone. Her mom's at their tennis club. Dad and sis work downtown.

There's two doors in. It's a horrific hot-prowl variation.

The back gate. The backyard. The sliding door in. The front door. The possible unlocked status.

He brought mason's cord. He brought a small pistol. He hit Stephanie. He dragged her. They made the front bedroom. He tied her to a daybed. He stripped her.

She broke free. She screamed and ran. He shot and killed her.

The investigation clicks. The Watts Riot runs roughshod and reroutes it. Career confessors cop out and lie themselves loose. Cops ream rape-os. Cops whip on wienie waggers. Cops hurl hurt on hot-prowl hyenas.

Nothing. Zero, zilch, bupkes, bust, goose egg, gornish.

Thirty-plus years pass. Dave S. reads the file. Tim Marti reads the file. I read the file, *cherchez-la-femmingly*. We fall for Stephanie. She's a lost daughter shared. She's *my* daughter with Donna D.

We pry up print cards. We cough up comparison prints—family, fuzz, friends. We winch a wild-card print. We feed it to the Feds. We get a hit.

The guy's a minor miscreant. He racked up a receiving charge, post-Stephanie. He's kool, kalm, and kosher—before and since.

We blast a background check. We crawl up every known crack and crevice. *We know he did not know the Gormans.* Check this, Chuck—what's your fucking print doing there?

Dave and Tim braced the guy. He guy gassed with them. Cops, huh? How can I help you?

Dave said, "Stephanie Gorman." Tim said, "She was murdered." The guy said, "Oh, yeah, the little dead twist."

Oh, shit—he's coming on callous, ink him innocent.

Dave dug in. Tim tore in. *Tell us what you know.*

I was across the street. I was boning my best buddy's bitch. He got his schlong shot off in Korea. The twist's sister ran over. She was shit-your-pants scared and screaming. My buddy was a quack herb doc. The sister yelped for help. I went over for groovy grins and giggles. Bummer—the little twist was Deadsville.

Call my buddy. Talk to his wife. I poured her the pork for twenty-six years. They'll vouch and verify my story.

We did it. The No-Dick Doctor confirmed it—call him *il cornuto.* The wayward wife was one wicked wench. She waxed wild at eighty. Our suspect "gave it to me from 1:00 p.m. on. Man-o-Manischewitz, what a schvantz! He was hung like a nigger!"

One suspect suspended. One case closed—for now.

Open-file status. No semen from '65. No way to DNA-match.

I couldn't let it go. I read and reread the file. I combed for connections. I looked for leads and linkage. Nothing nudged me. No brain broils, no synaptic sizzles. I cultivated communion. Stephanie Standard Time stung me. I parked by her pad odd evenings.

A breeze brought leaves up. Clouds climbed past the moon. Window lights leaped inside the house. I shaped shadows as Stephanie.

My cell phone rang. I hit the Talk button.

"This is Jenson."

"Hi. It's Rob. You know, from the Starbucks on Beverly Drive."

"Oh, shit. Is she . . .?"

"Yeah, you fucking horndog. She's on a big-ass mocha, so I think you've got time."

SHE WORE a serge skirt and a coral cashmere coat. Her hazel eyes hopped.

I sat down. She popped her paperback in her purse.

"I would have gotten this to go, but I saw that kid pick up the phone."

I mainlined some mocha. Too thick and sweet—ugh.

"He's a valued LAPD informant."

Donna laffed. "Are you coercing him or paying him?"

"Both. He honked a vice cop at the Wiltern, and I bought him out of jail. That, plus ten bucks a sighting."

Donna said, “I could go to the Coffee Bean. It’s just across the street.”

“No go. I’ve got all the shift managers bribed. That, plus the—”

“—the valet park guys, all—”

“—of whom are fucking coercible wetbacks.”

Donna laffed. I mooched more of her mocha. I held her hands for a heartbeat. I straightened one stocking seam.

“You can’t lose me. Not for more than six months at a time. We’re both L.A. lifers, and I know this place too well.”

Donna looked around. I looked around. Our eyes tapped table to table. Beverly Hillsites beamed back, blasé—so what if you’re Donna Donahue.

I said, “Who are you doing these days?”

Donna said, “A screenwriter. He’s handsome and much younger than me. I control things. It’s an indoor relationship, and the age gap embarrasses me. I don’t like to be seen with him.”

I slapped my knees. My suitcoat slid, my holster hitched, my badge beamed, my gun glistened. Jaded eyes jabbed me—who’s that cop with Donna Donahue.

“I was seeing a deputy D.A., who just happened to look like you. We had bad sex twice, and she states her agenda. She wants to get married, move to Portland, and adopt an Iraqi war-refugee baby. I got out then.”

Donna laffed. She held *my* hands for a heartbeat. She notched up my necktie knot.

“That burglar hit a block over from me. I thought, ‘Shit, let’s be prepared,’ so I called Tom Ludlow. He sold me some guns.”

Fuck—Phone Book Tom. Still at Hollywood Homicide, still a phone-book freak.

“Throw-down guns, right? Unregistered pieces?”

“Right.”

I shook my head. “You’re bored. You’re reliving ’83. ‘Brave new fucking world’ and all that.”

Donna drained her drink. “I get bored and think about it. Last week my agent sent me a script. I’m supposed to be a cop moonlighting as a serial killer. I’m killing my ex-boyfriends’ wives, and having a high old time mutilating the bodies. How do you tell someone you can’t take the job because you killed three people in 1983, and certain things scare you and certain things own you?”

My pulse pulled to 120. My blood-pressure pressed. Dangerous Donna—radical redux.

“What did you do with the guns?”

“I booby-trapped the house.”

"Will you show me?"

"Of course."

Chez Donna: a sharp chateau off L.A. Country Club. Nestled by the north course—some Holmby Hills hutch.

Tall turrets, big bay windows. Fucking football-field footage. Heavy housage for one woman and a randy ridgeback.

We two-car-caravaned over. We parked in the porte cochere. Donna let us in. The horny hound hurtled high and humped me.

He locked my leg. He pawed my pubes. He bit at my belt. HIVTEST me—the fag dog drew blood.

Donna tossed him a treat. Reggie Ridgeback relented. We thrown-down-gun-toured the pad.

One mighty Magnum—couch-cushion concealed. One fat .45—thrown under a throw rug. One revolver—rigged by Ridgeback Reggie's dog bed.

The downstairs: designered-out and Donnaesque. Fine fabrics offset by oil paintings. A rapturous Renoir. A magnificent Monet. A clever Klee. Furtive firepower amidst all.

Dangerous Donna, *mon dieu!*

We walked upstairs. Reggie Ridgeback crept and crotch-sniffed me. Dig the master-bedroom Browning. Dig the guest-room Ruger pump. Dig the Derringer hung in the shower stall, à la soap-on-a-rope.

French provincial trappings—tricked-out wood and wall beams. Pop art by pederastic modern masters. Hard-hitting hollow-point ammo and deer-stopping double-aught buck.

Devil-horned Donna—neo-noir succubus!

We bopped out to the balcony. Reggie crotch-crept between us. The night air made me snap, crackle, pop.

Golf-course view—one vibrant vista, one plumb line southeast. I felt Stephanie starting up.

We laid lounge chairs adjacent. We sat down. We laced hands loose. Reggie registered his cue and vamoosed.

Donna said, "You're thinking about the girl."

I stared Stephanie's way. I heard cars whoop down Wilshire. I orbed into Stephanie's orbit.

"She's older than us, but she'll always be younger. And I was thinking of both of you."

Donna squeezed my hand. “Everything’s foreplay and yearning with you. You only want what you can’t have.”

A mist meandered in. The golf course metamorphosed into moors.

“I figured something out about us. It takes in ’83 and wraps things up.”

Donna said, “Tell me.”

I said, “We’ve downscaled our expectations on the things that most people live for, so we can live in a world of possibility.”

Donna stared southeast. Her gaze got moor-mired up.

“There’s times I want things to go bad, just so I can go there again.”

“For instance?”

“My Web site’s been getting too many hits. There’s been a lot of nasty questions on my old boyfriends, and intimations that I’m a dyke, because I never married.”

I smiled. “You could marry me.”

Donna smiled. “That would effectively quash *all* sense of possibility.”

The moor mist rose. The moon moved into it.

“There’s more. I’ve been getting e-mail requests for my panties, which is not unprecedented, but—”

I cut in. “Why not? And if you start selling them, let me know.”

Donna laffed. “I made a cop flick with an actress named Megan More. She’s primarily a soft-core porno star, and she made a pass at me. She’s sold her panties on the Internet, and she told me it’s quite profitable.”

Dig it! Pounce on that pounding possibility!

I invade the Internet. I shore up my shorts. I buttress the bulges and rack them retail. Rhino Rick Jenson—rhino-horn raider!

Donna poked me. “Here’s the semi-spooky part. The e-mails and the panty requests both come from public-library computers, so there’s no way I can tell the pathetic asshole or assholes to fuck off.”

Reggie walked up. I raked his ridge. I made him mew *molto bene.*

“One set of assholes in a twenty-year career isn’t so bad.”

“Two, actually. I’ve been getting love-hate notes in the mail, on and off, for years. He loves it when I show skin, he hates it when I show skin. He’s a skin sicko.”

I raked Reggie. “If you’re scared, I could sleep on the couch.”

“For the next thirty years?”

“Why not?”

Donna said, “Speak, Reggie.” Reggie flashed his fangs and growled gravel gruff.

I got the point. Possibility meant abstinence. I had a wishful woody. She had a killer K-9, boocoo guns and guts.

The moor mist moved in. Reggie mewed at the moon.

3.

Dystopian Disneyland—Danny Getchell’s wigged-out wake!

Myriad mourners and morbid scene makers. Legions of L.A. losers festooning Forest Lawn.

Hopheads and hermaphrodites. Porno film stars and Gen-X actors genuflecting. Nihilistic college kids digging on dead Danny. An anarchic assembly of perverts, punks, and freewheeling freaks.

Anti-Danny pickets: quixotic queers high on homo hegemony. Narco cops poised on the periphery—bad Bill Berchem and beefy Bob Mosher.

Forest Lawn—capped to capacity. Green grass broiled brown—700 soiled souls smack in a *baaad* smog alert.

I stood with Tim Marti. We lugged our loopy floral flotilla. Tim pointed out pertinent personas bellied up to the bier.

“The guy with the earlocks is a rabbi with a kiddy-raper jacket. He made a little girl nosh his kosher salami at some Holocaust gig. The stacked blonde is Megan More. She’s on these late-night T&A flicks. My kid Brandon sneaks down to watch her and belt his hog all the fucking time. The skinny guy is Gary Getchell, aka ‘Scurvy’ Irv Moskowitz. He’s the so-called editor-in-chief of *Hush-Hush,* but his full-time gig is caddy at Bel-Air Country Club. He’s a wienie wagger. He likes to flash nuns. I popped him when I worked West L.A. Vice.”

I laffed lewd. I looked at the losers. The rabbi rang me wrong. He vibed skin-pop junkie. His neck was needle-notched. Call the faux Getchell caddy-clad and fully fucked up. He wore gatorskin golf shoes and seersucker shorts. His shirt showed off patterned penguins. Dig his yellow yarmulke—the full-fucked finishing touch.

I laffed loud. I leched on Megan More. She was a skyscraping skin-flick goddess. She soared six feet plus. She was wispy white and tantalizing tan—a bravura Brünnhilde de-luxe.

Tim tapped me. “I saw Berchem and Mosher taking pictures. You think—”

“I think they’re putting heat on Gary Getchell, for no good fucking cause. Maybe he’s got a Narco file, maybe he doesn’t. Maybe Danny G. had shit on Linus Lauter, maybe he didn’t—”

“—but in *any* case, *Hush-Hush 2000* is a fucking joke. The circulation’s low four figures, it's a mimeograph job, the only people who read it are movie- and music-biz hipsters, and the only reason it survives is that the ACLU protects it from libel suits pro bono."

The rabbi reached for a microphone. The *craaaazy* crowd pressed up. I saw bleary and bloodshot eyes. I smelled righteous reefer. A sea of sick souls surrounded us. I flung our floral flotilla. It banged Danny G.'s bier.

Berchem and Mosher moved in. They mingled and moseyed by Megan More. They missed Tim and me. They bopped by the bier. They carried cameras. Said cameras clicked.

They shot Megan More. They shot Megan More and the mourners she talked to. Click/click/click—Megan More and Minox minicam pix.

I shrugged. Tim shrugged. It vibed hinky shit.

The rabbi mauled the microphone and licked his lips. The rabbi davened and delivered.

Danny G. was a marvelous mensch and a sharpshooting shtarker. He wasn't a schmendrick, a schlemiel, or a schlimazel. He was one magnificent motherfucker.

The rabbi ratcheted it up. Some klezmer clowns joined in. Jazz Judaism jumped. Tim and I splitsvilled.

THE FUNERAL GORED my gourd. Residual reefer smoke smacked me. It was a cool contact high. I drove home to Donnafy and contain it.

The buzz dipped and diminuendoed. I got restless and re-Donnafied. I got the urge to merge. Let's *real-life* re-Donnafy before your sex drive cessates.

I called Donna. I came on breezy and brazen. Those panty printouts perturb me. Please let me look.

Donna bought it. I'm going out—I'll put the printouts on my doorstep. Thanks, Rick—you rock.

I hit Holmby Hills. I picked up the printouts. I chugged back to Chino Hills. I put on some righteous Rachmaninoff—Rick and Donna, *you* Rach.

The Opus 32 Preludes—preternaturally precious *and* priapic. Sex seldom seen/lilting loss/heavy heartbreak—the Rick-loves-Donna précis.

I studied the printouts. Bim—silly shit. Bam—similar shit. Bip—sent from West L.A. libraries. Call it cold: silly and similar shit *sent by the same sender.*

Let's seek a second opinion.

I called Dave Slatkin. Dave said, Sure—let's see the shit. I'm busy right now. I'm going out to Bel-Air, to sit in on a hot-prowl stakeout.

The hot-prowl guy is lunar-phased—I *know* it. His last vic caught two trank darts. He almost died. The geek will kill sooner or later.

I stressed my printouts—Donna danger and pervo potential. A Freaky Freddy in the Panty Pantheon. A Sick Sidney and a morbid masturbator.

Dave laughed me off. Yeah, I'll read the shit. Find me on the stakeout. And get real, Rhino—you're just Donna-diddled right now.

Ouch—

I started to hang up. Dave said, Oh, and call Chief Tierney's office—he's got an errand for you.

I hung up. I relived the call and re-ouched. Dave Slatkin slams me. Dave instigates my inventory. Be real, Rhino Rick. You're Donna-diddled. You're a Donna doofus and a Donna dunce. You Donna-dallied in 1983. You're a Donna determinist. You're Donnafied and Donnafried behind the hellbound heat and monster meshugas of that moment.

Yeah, and it's solemnly sad—but it's so fucking *goooooooooood.*

I propped up the printouts. I underscored ugly outtakes. Dig the pandemic pantyphile:

"Dear Donna: I'm a handsome & well-hung collector of women's undergarments, which I catalog & keep behind glass at my bachelor pad in Malibu. Would you e-mail me about the availability of such items & how much they would cost?"

"Dear Donna: I would like to purchase your panties to fill out my collection, but I can't do it unless you answer my e-mails, which so far you haven't done. Are you too busy to connect with your fans, or are you just terminally stuck up?"

"Dear Bitch: You've got a last chance to redeem yourself by selling me your panties at discount prices. Don't hesitate! Do it today!"

I skimmed skanky cybernotes. Nasty nuggets stood out:

"I think it's twisted that you've never married. Are you some kind of muff muncher or rug merchant?"

"I know you've been thru lots of men. Who was the biggest & the best?"

"I want to douse your panties with Chanel #5 & take them to school with me, because they remind me of my mom."

Maybe one deadly Donnaphobe. Maybe a kook kavalcade. Maybe one passive putz.

I got out my notepad. I wrote:

"Panty man—frustration/violence of language escalating. Does he know of panty-selling-actress precedents? Megan More told Donna she sold *her* stuff."

?????—let's seek a second opinion. Brace Brandon Marti— Tim's tumescent teen.

I buzzed Tim's pad. Brandon picked up.

"Uh, yeah?"

"It's me, kid."

"Oh, hi, Uncle Rhino."

I cleared my throat. "I need help with something. I know you're a guy in the know."

Brandon said, "Uh, sure. What do you . . .?"

"I'll talk turkey, kid. You're red-blooded, but you've got no *real* outlet, if you catch my drift. You've got to know where to find all the porno babes on the Internet. You know, their Web sites."

The little lech laffed. "My dad said you had this martyr thing going. He said you couldn't see past this actress chick who did you, like twenty years ago."

Double-aught ouch.

"Brandon, come—"

"Well, there's Jenna Jamison, and Seka, and Summer Storm, and Porsche Poon, and . . . shit, I don't know . . . mostly they're just . . . *chicks.*"

Sterile stuff. Deep-down depressive. Downscale Donnaphobia and teenage ennui.

"Thanks, Brandon. You were a big help."

"You're welcome. Oh, and my dad just handed me a note. It says, 'Get a life.' "

I WALKED WEB SITES. I juked Jenna Jamison. I sought Summer Storm and Seka. I popped Porsche Poon's page.

Skin pix and news notes. Pathetic fan postings. No panties for sale.

Let's move mainstream. Let's mine movie stars.

I Web-walked. I hopped home pages. I hit salty Sandy Bullock and nasty Nicole K. Dig: pathetic postings and news notes. No panties for sale.

I moved my mouse. I hit Megan More—the "official" Web site.

Panties proffered—$29.95 per. News notes. Pathetic postings— whoa, wait, what's this?

The pathetic poster: Big Bob at bigbob.com. Paragraphs of pathos, then this:

I tapped into this guy Jack Jen-kin's website. He offered this so-called 'Master's Thesis' on Megan, for sale at $16.95. I read it, and it's nothing but a bunch of blasphemous lies. I urge all Megan fans to boycott this clown.

I boycotted Big Bob's boycott. I moved my mouse. I jumped Jack Jen-kin's Web site. I got this:

The Transformation of Megan More, 168PP, $16.95. The Truth About the Soft-Core

Sensation. Visa, MC, Amex, Discover: Punch in number & exp. date after cue. Prepaid money-order purchases to: Jack Jen-kin, 1284 S. Berendo #14, L.A. 90018.

Interesting. Insinuating. A kool Koreatown address.

I moved my mouse. I caught cues. I ordered the book overnite. I sat back. I pondered pantyphile pathos and *me.*

Odds on Donna danger: 10 to 1 against. The reality: Rhino Rick battles boredom and entrenched ennui.

There it is: that Stephanie stasis/that Donna disjuncture. Unfathomable crimes/unattainable women—and *me.*

I sat there. I salaamed into sadness. I set truth traps and snared *me.* You don't prize the prosaic. Opportunity owns you. You foreswore family for possibility.

It was dinnertime. I had no warm woman, no kid cacophony. I marked my moment: Porno-site printouts. Filthy fetishism as opportunity.

I wanted more deep Donna moments. Danger would mandate them. My primordial prayer was for peril to paralyze her and free me. Donna for love. Stephanie to stamp me as figurehead father and father-obsessee.

It was 10:00 p.m. Donna was diverted with dog and lucky lover. Stephanie was still stamped DEAD.

Possibility. Cop conundrum as communion. Stephanie's house called to me.

4.

Jolting Joe Tierney—all hail the Chief!

He sized me up silent. He eyeball engaged me. His gaze cut to the quick.

I called his office. I made the meet. I sat steady now. Junkyard Joe Tierney—you malevolent mick.

He said, "The rhino regalia works for the most part. I like the tie bar and the belt buckle, but the rhino-patterned tie has to go."

The chair chafed my ass. The office offended. The pictures piqued me.

Joe T. and the Pope—a Polack pals pose. Joe T. and that boss babe Mother Teresa. Joe T. and Hillary Clinton—dyked-out like bull-dagger Biff.

I said, "Thanks, Chief. I'll take you with me the next time I go shopping at Costco."

Tierney yukked. "You know, this is not the righteous right-wing white man's LAPD you grew up in."

I yukked. "Yeah, call me lucky. I got to waste three spooks and two wetbacks pre-

Rodney King.”

“You’ve got panáche, Rhino. I’ll give you that. And you’re smart enough to know that the Department can’t handle more bad publicity right now. We’ve got civilian litigation up the ying-yang, we’re hamstrung by the Consent Decree, and our officers are afraid to make arrests, because every street creep they jack up is thinking lawsuit.”

I yukked and yawned. I was tapped out and tired. I stayed up late at Stephanie’s.

“Did you call me in for a valid reason, or did you just want to critique my wardrobe?”

Tierney tapped his teeth. Booze breath blew my way. One malign mick/one power-lunch lush.

“All right, let’s get to it. You knew Danny Getchell. You gave him dope for information, which was a common practice in those days. Your mistake was giving dope to a guy who kept files and wrote everything down. Now, Danny’s dead, but Gary Getchell’s alive, and he doesn’t like our chum Captain Lauter. He’s mentioned him in one *Hush-Hush* piece, and he may be thinking he can milk Narco Division in upcoming pieces that will gravely embarrass the Department as a whole. Your job is to dissuade him.”

I seethed silent. Hold for the humping. Thrill to the threat.

I held hard. Junkyard Joe mowed out martini fumes and maimed me.

“I wouldn’t want to press departmental charges on you for indiscretions that came to light via *Hush-Hush.* So, you and Tom Ludlow lean on Gary Getchell and tell him to lay off Captain Lauter *and* the LAPD. Tell him we’re sacrosanct, tell him never to use his files against us, and make your point with some pain.”

MUSCLE JOB— MAN- O - MAN! Coercive copwork calls!

I humped to Hollywood Station. Phone Book Tom stood outside. We bopped to Bel-Air CC.

Tom trumpeted trouble. He waved a Westside book and wafted obscenities. He still stiffed dirty phone calls. He still “nabbed nymphos” and “bagged bitches” that way. He still got vivid Vietnam flashbacks. Said flashbacks floored him. He dug the noxious nostalgia and draconian dramaturgy. Aaah, youth! Tender times of torture and vivisected VC!

We hit Bel-Air. I saw unmarked cop cars undulate up Udine Way. Dig the full daytime rehearsal for the fiend who fends by night. Beautiful Bel-Air: prime turf for the hot-prowl *bandido.* Rolling stakeouts tapped for tonite.

There’s the country club. There’s the caddy parking lot. Dig that dinged-up Dodge Dart. Dig that calcified Cadi*black* and that lake-piped Lin*coon Coon*tinental.

There’s a vandalized van. It’s flame-painted and flat-tired. The windshield’s cracked and crushed. The back door’s bent free.

There’s Gary Getchell inside. There’s a mimeograph machine. He’s packaging items—perchance panties?

We parked and popped over. Getchell piled panties and plied them in plastic baggies. Dig the van's wild wall pix—all vintage *Hush-Hush.*

Marilyn Monroe: Mandingo-esque miscegenist! Ava Gardner's dusky delights! Johnnie Ray's men's room misadventure! Hunky homo Rock Hudson!

Getchell said, "Fuzz, huh? This feels like grief I don't need."

Tom tapped his phone book. The binding: busted loose from overuse. The page ends: bristly brown from blood.

I said, "Don't use the files. That means no Lauter and no LAPD."

Getchell guffawed. He picked up a panty package. He twirled it Tom's way.

"Ten bucks a sniff. What do you say, caveman? Megan won't mind, and it just might tighten up your wig."

I signaled Tom. Tom torqued his phone book. One bonaroo backhand—Getchell's snout snapped.

His nose dripped and bipped blood on plastic. Dig the panty-package stains.

I said, "Don't use the files. No Lauter, no LAPD."

Getchell popped a panty pack. Getchell hooked out a hanky-panty and blew his beak.

"Last call. Two sniffs for fifteen snoots. You cats are way out on the sex-violence nexus. Come on, two sniffs *for ten.* That's my last offer."

I signaled Tom. Tom torqued his phone book. One fine forehand—Getchell got thwapped.

I said, "Don't use the files. No Lauter, no LAPD. Say yes and we're gone."

Getchell groaned and grimaced. Getchell tugged a tooth loose. Dig the devastated dentistry.

"Here's my final offer. The Megan More Premier DVD Collection, plus two sniffs apiece, for ten scoots. Come on, I'm taking it up the shit chute on this."

I signaled Tom. Tom torqued his phone book. One overboard overhand—Getchell flew and flattened out on the floor.

He coughed. More blood blossomed. More teeth tore free.

I said, "Don't use the files. Come on, Gary. I'm not enjoying this."

Getchell got up. He stood stern and stared at me.

"I know about you and that actress cooze. Fall '83. Does that sound familiar? I hate that cooze, 'cause a friend of mine does, but there's this avenging angel out there."

A cold curtain caught and contained me. It held me and hurt me and bloomed like blood.

I grabbed the phone book. I backhanded bad and forehanded fierce and underhanded *uggggly*. Getchell banged the walls. The van rocked and rolled. Phone Book Tom pulled me free.

NIX THAT NEXUS. Say *sí* to sex. Violence—voice a *nyet.*

I moped through a muscle-job menopause. I felt fucked up and fit for shit. I was apocalyptic *and* apologetic. Post-panty depression hit me.

I dropped off Tom L. I drove by Stephanie's pad. I salved my soiled soul and heard my cell phone sizzle.

Conflicting calls. Donna's at the Hamburger Hamlet, Donna's chilled out at Chia Brasserie.

I hooked by the Hamlet. A Donna look-alike lapped lager in a leatherette booth. I chugged by Chia. Charlie Chink said, "Miss Donahue get food to go."

Dusk. Deign me Donna-deprived, down in the dumps and digging on diversion. I drove to the hot-prowl stakeout.

Bel-Air again. Regal Roscomere Road. Piles of palm trees and sparkling Spanish mansions. Two unmarked units parked at perimeter posts. West L.A. cops couched in one. Dave Slatkin and a piebald pit bull piled in another.

I parked behind the pitmobile. I joined Dave and the dog. Said dog: all lapping love for LAPD and all malicious muscle. Dave: dander-dusted and deep in dog-lover delight.

We settled in. We sipped corrosive coffee. We shot the shit.

We agreed: Fuck the Lauter/Narco/Getchell file fantasia. Linus laundered Leotis's dope cash. Linus fathered Leotis—loin linkage went deep. Joe Tierney—our new Chief—fearful of the Feds. I said this deal hops hinky—weird shit shears this way and that. Dave said it meant fuck-all. Fuck it and forget it, and feast on this:

Tim found a file box. Dig—it's detritus on Stephanie. The box: back at Parker Center. Tim found it in an old file bank. It was crammed into a crevicelike crawl space.

We resettled in. We racked our seats back recumbent. Pancho the pit bull surveilled the street. Dave hoped the hot-prowl man was a boogie. Pancho craved dark meat.

The night was dead dark. Dave dug it. Listen—this lout's lunar-tuned.

Dave dug in. Dave profiled the prick.

He's a full-fledged fiend. He's Donald Keith Bashor made millennial. Bashor righteously rape-o'd one woman. Bashor almost rape-o'd Karil Graham in death. Our guy's female-fucked. He's out to instigate an image. His hot prowls: preludes to rape. He's looking for *the* woman.

I agreed. I added: And he's brazen. You can't drive through Bel-Air or Holmby Hills and not bid big-time suspicion. Dave agreed. Dave added: He walks. It's why he's lunar-tuned. He's down on darkness.

I agreed. I added: He parks south and sidles up silent. South of Wilshire equals Holmby Hills, south of Sunset equals Bel-Air. Dave agreed. Dave added: He could go to ground on golf courses. L.A. Country Club/Holmby Hills, Bel-Air CC/Bel-Air.

Our talk tapped out. We yawned. Pancho snored and snoozed in my lap. I slipped into sleep. Dreams drifted through.

Stephanie. Donna. Time suspended surreal. Gary Getchell, beat on and bold: "I hate that cooze, 'cause a friend of mind does, but there's this avenging angel out there." Angels rigged as ridgebacks—choice cherubs with coarse coats and dog faces. Megan More lez-leering at Donna.

I dream-droned. I slid in and out of sleep. Pancho panted beside me. I made him my mascot. I framed the front seat as my marriage bed with Donna. Dig the mastiff metamorphosis—pit bull Pancho as Reggie Ridgeback.

Our radio rumbled. Static stammered and stuck. I woke up woozy. Dave jerked and woke up—

"2-A-44, hit your brights!"

Dave caught the key. The engine engaged. I lit the low beams and brought on the brights. Right there—midnite made broad daylight.

A Spanish manse laid to our left. A large lady screaming. Light behind her—2-A-43's brights.

The woman scree-scree-screamed. She stumbled down the steps. She dug at a dart in her neck. Man down in the doorway— *her* man in matching pj's. He's two-dart devastated: one dart in each eyeball. He looks dart-defiled dead.

Two cops coming up—2-A-43—on foot *faaaast.* That large lady on her lawn, screaming. It's all front-lit-framed with back lights bouncing.

I pulled my piece. Dave pulled his piece. Pancho piled out the window. We lurched into the light. A car cut in front of us. It ran in reverse. I caught a brief blip: sixty-plus white man, grinning.

We fired. We hit the car. Ricochets resounded. The other cops fired. They hit the car. Ricochets racked up and reverbed.

Pancho ran. The car ran in reverse. Pancho dived in the driver's side window. The hot-prowl hump raised his trank gun. Pam—Pancho picked up a dart.

We chased the car. We fired. Four fuckers on foot, one reverse rocket ship. The car careened backward. It banged backyard fences and tore through trellis posts. We ran. We reloaded. We ran and shot at the reverse rocket. We ran and ran out of ammo. The car barged through backyards and disappeared in the dark.

THE FUCK RELANDSCAPED eight backyards. The fuck fucking *ex*-caped.

A SWAT team swung through. They door-knocked and bopped through backyards. No Hot-Prowl Harvey extant. Choppers churned overhead. Their belly lights burned. No Hot-Prowl Harry hiding. No 60-plus sickos seen.

Pancho lived. One dart to the duodenum—no damage there. Dave kissed and caressed him and came on with dog treats. I posited Pancho for LAPD honors. The SWAT cops agreed.

The two-dart man died. Toxic shock tore through his system. His wife stood strong. She stuttered out a statement.

She heard hinky noises. She woke up. There's Hot-Prowl Hal in her bedroom. He's got his hot-prowl hamster out. He's siphoning said python in her lingerie drawer.

She shrieks. Hot-Prowl Humphrey darts her. Her hubby wakes up. Hot-Prowl double-darts him.

A lab crew hit the house. They ladled up the lingerie and located some jizz. DNA testable—yeah! Dip it through the DNA database and hold your hot-prowl breath.

The crew crawled entry points. They found fresh dirt by a dinged door lock. The crew crept backyards. They walked down to the west Bel-Air gate. Similar dirt—in scuff patterns on the sidewalk.

Dave and I talked. The 2-A-43 guys talked. All hands agreed:

We couldn't eyeball-ID the hot-prowl hellhound. No way to cut a composite. No way to initiate an Identikit pic.

We all popped to Parker Center. We mowed through mug books and looked for likenesses. One sixtyish sicknik—nothing popped out.

Dawn. The Chief of Detectives arrives and anoints us. Hey, Jenson and Slatkin. Grab Tim Marti and work this hot-prowl homicide.

Dave dug it. Dave was an emphatic empiricist and a dedicated Donald Keith Bashor-phile. His take: Our guy was older. He might be hot-prowl hip to his bad Bashor-like roots. He'd killed now. He masturbated moments before. He fucked the fuzz on his getaway. His essential escalation Bashor-boded: rape and rape-kill!!!!!

Tim showed. His take: Let's track the tranquilizers. Tim dug the dichotomy: powerful potions for humans, benign benzodiazepines for dogs. Dave disagreed—it's too tough to track. There's street stuff and privately prescribed. Our Bashoresque best bet: more rolling stakes.

I yawned. All this hot-prowl hurly-burly bored me. I only prized its proximity to Donna.

I wanted back in her bed—flat-on or fleeting. Evil e-mails and panty precedents might tweak her toward me. The Hot-Prowl Hymie—clamoring close by—might help.

I wanted to hide in the heart of her hearth.

5.

I hooked home. I racked up some rest. I refitted my head and dipped out to my doorstep.

No Megan More master's thesis. No fucking FedEx, no UPS, no Overnight Express.

The hot-prowl job boded—back-to-work big. Donna Standard Time torqued me more. The master's man lived in Koreatown. I could cruise out and run back to Robbery-Homicide.

The day unrolled ugly. Smog smeared the L.A. basin and hid the Hollywood Hills. The air was lash-your-lungs carcinogenic. The sky was tamale tan. Koreatown was heat-hazed and Seoulful. Pico Boulevard bustled. It was a slant-eyed sluice and a last line of demarcation. The L.A. Congo came on south of there.

I poured down Pico and bipped up Berendo. The master's man's pad stood straight ahead. It's a ten-story tenement walk-up. It's stark stucco and smells of bracing broiled eel and kimchi.

I parked and lolled through the lobby. Listless layabouts eyeballed me. They tipped tallboys of Schlitz malt liquor. They oozed absentee attitude. They were slick slants and Cheerless Charlie Chinks.

I moseyed to the mail slots. Jack Jen-kin—up in unit #14.

The elevator churned and chugged. The vents vibrated. Sexy scents siphoned through. I made monkey meat and pulled pork cooked in kimchi.

The elevator stopped. I stepped out and hopped down the hallway. There's #14.

Whoa, wait, what's this—

Stink crawled out a door crack. Bugs batted the baseboard and dinged the doorway within. Buzz, buzz, bap, bap—insects inflamed, distressed, and disturbed.

I got out a credit card. I dug at the doorjamb. Tumblers tipped. The door popped.

Fumes flew up and fucked me full. I braced my breakfast back down. I shivered. I shut the door. I shook off bug battalions. Said bugs buzzed back to a hallway. I followed the fumes and stared at the stiff.

One maggot-mauled male Korean. Deep dead and decomped. Laid out on a lavender rug. One big-bore head wound.

There's the gun. It's by the body. It's a fat .44 Mag. The wound was wide. Maggots mamboed out a cranial crack.

I knelt down. I noticed neck wounds. Bright bruises and tight torture cuts. The stink stung me. I pinched my nostrils. I hooked my ham-and-egg McMuffin back.

There's the note. It's tacked to the wall. It's plied in plain view.

"I cannot go on. I love Megan More more than life itself, but she does not love me.

Good-bye, Megan. I'll see you where the angels sing."

Hinky handwriting. Heaps of hesitation marks. Vibrating vowels. Crawling consonants coerced. Torture to instigate information. Murder made suicide.

I pored through the pad. I pinched my nose and pulled up peremptory details. I stared at staged shit and staved off the stink.

The kitchen. A mainline maggot migration. Full sink. Dirty dishes. Maggot-maimed chunks of chuck steak. Call it cool: The killer caught Jen-kin here and juked him.

The bedroom. Megan More on white walls. Cheap cheese-cake/snappy snapshots/ no dust underneath. Call it cold: put-up pix. Prime props to suicide-sync.

I dumped desk drawers. I reached under rugs. I bombed through bookshelves. No Megan More master's thesis.

I jacked on Jen-kin's computer. I mouse-moved and tapped in "Megan More." I mapped in Megan More–ish cue words. No Megan More master's thesis or minutiae scrolled up.

I walked back to the hallway. Maggots julienned Jack Jen-kin and marched down his mouth. The door dipped open. A slant-eye slithered and slid and crept through the crack. The door closed and clicked. I rhino-ran up.

I ran out. I heaved down the hall. I saw Chuck the Chink reach a fire door and stop short. I jumped him. I heaped on the hurt. I smashed his face. He dented the door. I booted him in the balls. He wiggled and whimpered. I grabbed his greasy hair and hauled him back to the pad.

I shut the door. He saw the gore-dead gook and the maggot majorettes. He screamed. I rang up the reaction. Unfaked fear/ unlikely killer/don't make him for Murder One yet.

The smell smacked him. His yellow skin grew green. He projectile-puked. I dodged food flecks. He brought up broiled eel cooked in kimchi.

I dragged him to the kitchen. I stood him by the sink. I coursed on some cold water. I dunked him and doused him and saw his skin grow back from gray-green.

He sputtered. He shook and shaked. I patted his pockets. I pulled out pills. He possessed Percodan sans prescription. I knew he knew *something*. I knew he'd snitch.

I pulled my beavertail sap. I patted my palms. I let him hear the weight whip.

"You know something. You know something happened here, so you thought you'd check it out. Come clean, and you walk. Fuck with me and I pop you for the perks."

He shuddered. I patted my palms. I sap-slapped the side of my legs.

He shook. He moved away from a maggot mound. His voice vibratoed. He sounded off soprano. He came on like a queer and a quiff.

"Four days ago, maybe. I see narcs who bust me. They follow Jack. They get him in lobby and bring him up here. Then I hear screams."

I poked him hard. I bounced my beavertail on my knees. He shivered. Shakedown Rick scared him.

"Who were the narcs? You know their names, because they popped you."

The gook gulped. "Berchem and Mosher. They bad. They plant dope on me."

Flashbacks floored me. Lauter. His hinky hard-on for *Hush-Hush.* Megan More with Gary Getchell. The funeral. Berchem and Mosher. Surreptitious surveillance. Two goons taking Megan More pix.

I walked to a wall phone. I called the Cold Case Unit. Dave picked up.

"Slatkin."

I said, "It's me. I need you to do something, no questions asked."

"Well . . . O.K."

Maggots tripped up my trouser legs. I beavertail-beat them and drove them down.

"There's a homicide. It's Narco and Lauter-connected. Cal Eggers is probably the only up-and-up guy in the division. I need you to call Tierney and get his O.K. to pull Eggers and hold him."

Dave said, "O.K., but this sounds—"

I hung up. I passed the punk his pills. He ran out. I cultivated connections.

Narco goons. Linus and Leotis Lauter. Gary G. Megan More. Jack Jen-kin—the maggot-munched Meganphile.

Nyet—nothing clicked conclusive.

I walked to the door. I saw a panty pile atop a TV. I was sailing on the sex-violence nexus. I stopped and took three good sniffs.

COOL CAL EGGERS— couched in a cat box—an 8 by 12 interview room.

We watched through a 2-way. The mirror made Cal wiggle and weave. He was drip-dry and freon frosty. He vibed no guilt.

I thought so. Ditto Dave and Tim. We watched. We waited. We killed the air-conditioning and hitched up the heat. Cool Cal kept his coat on—you can't sweat me.

Dave talked to Tierney. The mad mick sent a SID team out. They reconnoitered and ran through room 14. The pad—professionally print-wiped. The suicide note—a felonious fake. The maggot multitude made the man a full four days dead. The queer called it correct. Bill Berchem and Bob Mosher—not there at Narco—"out in the field."

Cal wiggled and weaved. Cal winked at the mirror. We shared a look and walked in.

We chose chairs. We tilted them tableside. Cal slid his seat closer in.

I said, “It’s about Narco, and maybe Captain Lauter.”

Cal said, “You’re putting me to sleep.”

Tim said, “Nobody thinks you’re dirty.”

Cal said, “Wake me when it’s over.”

Dave said, “You weren’t in the unit when Lauter pulled those stunts with his son.”

Cal said, “Hit me with some new stuff I haven’t read in *Hush-Hush.*”

Tim tapped the table. “Bill Berchem and Bob Mosher. An actress named Megan More, and a dead slant named Jack Jen-kin.”

Cal craned his neck. Cal cracked his knuckles. Cal said, “Oh, shit.”

Dave drummed the table. “You’ve got interdepartmental immunity. That’s straight from Tierney. Beyond that, it’s chilled. We’re giving Jen-kin to the media as a suicide. We’ll make it stick.”

Cal called up some chutzpah. “Tell Tierney to jump me to captain and I’ll give up Berchem and Mosher. Tell him I want a done deal.”

I slid out my cell phone. Tim tapped Tierney’s number. Tierney took the call two rings in. Dave coughed up Cal’s chutzpah sotto voce. Tierney yelled, “Fuck it, O.K.!”

I filched my phone back. Cal shot me a shit-eater grin.

“So, Linus Lauter craves white lady and white snatch. He gets jacked on coke every night, sees Megan More on TV, and gets a jones. He contacts her through her Web site and gets a sick thing going with her. He thought he was seducing her, but she was seducing him. She knew the late Danny Getchell, she knew Linus was a cop who did snitch deals with him, she pumped him for information and got the word on his money-laundering deals *before* the Feds and the fucking *L.A. Times* did. Linus learned she was tight with *Gary* Getchell, and that she was going to leak shit on his deals and their affair to Gary, and he’d publish it in *Hush-Hush.*”

Megan More—miscegenist mama. Multicultural malfeasance *coon*fidential.

Now cut to Koreatown, now jump to Jack Jen-kin.

I said, “The homicide, Cal. The pad at 12th and Berendo.”

Cal coughed. “I got this from Linus. He’s wacked on coke and spilling all this paranoia. It seems that Megan More did Berchem, Mosher, *and* him, so now you’ve got three motivated fuckers out to get her. They heard about the gook’s ‘Master’s Thesis,’ learned that he’d sold practically zilch copies, but that it was full of so-called embarrassing shit. So, Linus tells me that Berchem and Mosher were going out to lean on the gook, and I guess things got out of hand.”

A flashback flamed me. Gary Getchell, per Donna D.:

"I hate that cooze, 'cause a friend of mine does, but there's this avenging angel out there."

"Avenging angel" Megan More—maybe. Lez-leched on Donna—her motive, maybe.

Captain Cal stood up. Tim said, "We've got to grab Berchem and Mosher."

Dave said, "I'll tell Tierney what we've got, but *we're* on the hot-prowl case."

Connections clicked and stopped stillborn. The Donna Diaspora, the Hot-Prowl Holocaust—shit shoved itself at me.

Cal said, "Rhino looks distracted. Want to bet he's thinking about a certain actress?"

Dave said, "Yeah, I know that look."

Tim said, "My kid's a Megan More fan. This shit will fucking destroy him."

I PLAYED HOT- PROWL hooky. Those connections clicked too close to Donna. I hopped by Holmby Hills. She was home. I rhino-riffed on contained coincidence. Donna dug my morbid Megan More tale. I said, let's find her. She said, I'll go.

I called R&I. They ran Megan More for rap sheets. Bam— Megan More, minor misdemeanant. Four Beverly Hills beefs. Heavy hooking at high-line hotels.

I called the DMV. I dunned them for Megan More's address. They delivered: 8542 Charleville, Beverly Hills.

We rolled. Lack of sleep slapped me. An anxious undercurrent uncoiled underneath. My Donna deprivation diminished. That sex-violence nexus tipped to sex straight.

We found the pad: a prime provincial four-flat. We parked and dipped up to the door. Four rings, two knocks—no answer. Donna diddled the doorknob. The door popped in.

The living room: bleak, blank-walled, and bereft of furnishings. The kitchen: cleaned out completely. The bathroom and bedroom: bug-sprayed, Lysol-lapped, and furniture-free.

Donna dumped a clothes hamper. Soiled panties sailed out. Premium price tags were clipped to the crotch.

Donna said, "Ugh."

I still stood on that nexus. I stopped and took three good sniffs.

THE BHPD BODED. I felt rhino-revived and ready to rock. Those sniffs snared me. Sex scents as mainline meth.

We hit the cop shop. Cops recognized Donna. They winged out wolf whistles and lighthearted leers. A clerk clued us: The Vice guy's Vic Vartanian. Find him by the files. He's hard to miss.

We walked back. Cops caught sight of Donna. They called out TV titles. Donna called back, curtsied, and came on cute. There's Vice cop Vic. He's fucking with a file stack. He's swarthy and sweaty and acne-addled. Blackheads bloomed on his big beak.

He saw us. He scoped my belt badge. Donna dinged him. He salaamed, sucked in his gut, and slapped himself dandruff-free.

He said, "So?"

I said, "Megan More. Ring a bell? I thought you might have a sheet on her."

"I do. Crime reports, dispo reports, known haunts, the whole shmear. That said, I got to say I got something better."

I whipped to his wavelength. Call him coy. Praise him and say pretty please.

Donna tapped me telepathic. "Could we see your paperwork, Detective? It would be a big help."

Vic V. veered to a file bank. He draped over the drawers and pulled paper. He came back with some cardboard-bound sheets.

"Some clown wrote a half-assed book about Megan. I bought a copy to squeeze her with, if she ever tried hooking in my jurisdiction again."

Chills churned through me. It was one wild nexus nudge. Donna held a hand out. Vic tossed her the text.

"You can sit at my desk and read it. You might enjoy it especially, Ms. Donahue."

TORRID TEXT. The Mephistophelian Megan More Movie. Megan, crazed on crack-cocaine and fulsome full disclosure. Megan's mea culpa and *Mein Kampf*. Jack Jenkin—her barroom bard and bothersome Boswell. Her un-Christian Korean konfessor.

We read together. We sat chair to chair, cheek to cheek. Donna's scents soared and socked me. Honeysuckle hair and sandalwood soap and full-bore pheromones. All our lopsided love Meganized and poured back onto the page.

Dig:

MEGAN MORE WAS A MAN!!!!! He was born a big-dick bohunk in Billings, Montana. Mikhail Metrovich was his name. He looped to L.A., age eighteen. His shvantz topped the tape at sixteen sizzling inches. Mikhail male-prostied. He called himself Mighty Man, Mikey Man, Magnum Man. He serviced surly studio studs and tamed them with his tapeworm-long appendage. They took his tapeworm in to their tonsils. They bounced as bottoms to his top. He mulched men at MGM, he popped poofs at Paramount, he cornholed cats at Columbia. Fruits freed themselves and climbed from the closet to cloister with him. He outed outrageous numbers. His clients cliqued up and shared notes. Paranoia ran pandemic. These Hollywood hellions hated themselves. Mikhail turned studio studs into quivering queers and simpering sissies. Their self-hatred sizzled. They vowed revenge.

The studio studettes got some gelt and hired an A-rab assassin. The cat was a cold camel-fucker. He had terrorist ties. He was movie-mad and one mean Muslim. He said, “You give me role as action hero, and I cut off his dick. Better to maim than to kill.”

The unctuous studio un-studs underwrote his plan. Khalid Khareem cornered Mikhail and cut off his dick. The studio stupes commissioned a script. Catch this: Khalid Khareem as Israeli agent Israel Bonds. Soon to star in *Jerusalem Jihad* and *Tel Aviv Terror*.

THEN—SEPTEMBER 11!!!!!

A dragnet dragged in Khalid Khareem. The Feds found him and filleted him and fucked him fundamental. He got the big bone to hop heavenward and hail Allah. He sat in his cell. He mauled his wrists with a mattress spring. He hurtled to heaven or hell.

Mikhail viciously vowed revenge. He set sail on the sex-violence nexus. He decided to disguise himself as a woman. He stormed to Stockholm. He hooked down hormone shots. Surgeons altered his Adam’s apple and shaved his big bones bare. He caught cutting-edge technology. Doctors plowed him the best plumbing. He became a woman—intractably indistinguishable.

SHE shot back to Hollywood. She sought soft-core porn gigs and got them. She met Danny Getchell. She met Gary G. They dug the amazing Amazon. She urged them to dig dirt on the studio stupettes. They sucked up to the soaring sorceress and agreed. She continued as their consort. She hid her boldly big-dicked and positively pestilent past. She became a lascivious lipstick lezzie. She laid siege to lezbo nitespots. She munched muff in Malibu and boffed bush in Bel-Air. She took on TV roles. She met Donna Donahue on *Murder Most Gently*. She shot her crazy crush Donna’s way. Donna said, “Back off, Butch—it’s not my scene.” Megan More moped off miffed and bid Donna bye-bye, bereft.

BUT:

The rejection rankled and reawakened her. She refined and reinvented her revenge. The studio gonifs gelded her. She made them whimper womanlike. They begged for her beef torpedo. They suffered postcoital remorse and regret en masse. They made her a for-real woman. She’d woman-whip them and coldly castrate them and wrap up her revenge.

The manuscript ended. The climactic cliffhanger: no more demon details on revenge.

I tingled. I looked at Donna. Her hurricane-hurled hazel eyes hit me.

She said, “Brave new fucking world.”

I said, “Yes. It’s that time again.”

WE NABBED THE known-haunt list. We knew Megan More lit out on the lam. We mapped out our meshugina mission. We crazy crisscrossed L.A.

We ducked by dyke dens. We hit Linda’s Little Log Cabin, Biff’s Boiler Room, Mary’s Munchbox, and Florence’s Flame. Fuck— no murderous man-woman Megan More, ratched up on revenge.

We hit Helen's Hideout, Claire's Clam Club, Brenda's Brig, and Sapphic Sal's. No six-foot succubus, no mogul-mauled monster within.

We hit June's Jungle Room. Wacs and Waves and Marine Corps mamas moved in on fawnlike femmes. We hit Shondrika's Shangri-La. Mau-Mau music metastasized. Soul sisters slow-danced and slipped tongues. No white wench Megan More here.

We popped to Pacific Palisades. We nailed a non sequitur. Megan made time at Guru Guraji's Ashanti Ashram.

Wow—a whitewashed old adobe. Two floors flared around a calm courtyard. Fountains and floating flamingos. Parrots perched in palm trees. A trumped-up tropical scene.

A paved parking lot. Non sequitur number 2: *Mucho* movie vans. What's this—Sam's Sound, Lee's Lighting, Ken's Camera.

I parked by a purple Pontiac. The plates read "PRN STR." Donna said, "I'm getting this feeling."

We beat feet to the building. We perused the perimeter. We wrapped our reconnaissance to the back. We watched window light leap. We heard salacious sex noise. It was nihilistic and nasty and amplified apocalyptically.

We barged in a back door. We heaved down a hallway. We slid side doors ajar and perv-peeped the cracks. We saw lurid lighting and big boom mikes and cameras catching close-ups. We saw full-bore fucking and filthy fellating and groovy group gropes. We saw ashramites in turquoise turbans. They laid lights and moved mikes and hauled Handycams.

We dipped doors. We saw double-digit dicks and bravura breasts augmented out to *here.* We saw daisy chains and dalmatian dogs doing women. We lunged to the last left-hand door. Donna dipped it deep. There's Megan More lez-locked and loving it lewd.

It's a four-on-one fever. It's torrid tongue-kissing and beavers bushwhacked. It's major muff miscegenation. There's Nettie Negress, Lola Latina, Charlotte the Chinkess. It's a mountainous Megan More cluster fuck.

I barged in. The scene got me sex-sizzling and hopping homo-phobic. I was apoplectically ambivalent and turgidly turned on.

I lashed down light poles. I brought down boom mikes. I tripped tripods and crashed cameras—*kerrack!* Turquoise turban-heads tore out, tearful. The climactic cluster fuck climbed off the mattress. The multicultural mound made for the hallway. Only Megan More held back.

The room was rhino-wrecked. Capsized cameras, mangled mikes, laid-out lighting. There's a pulverizing postsex silence. There's Megan, there's Donna, there's me.

Donna shut the door. I heard a post-roust rampage outside. The porno parasites poured down the hallway. Vans vamoosed outside.

Megan moved off the mattress. Megan got into a mauve muumuu. Megan said, "Hi, Donna dear."

Donna deadpanned her. I said, “LAPD.”

The horrible he-she harrumphed. “Your Rodney King number did not go unnoticed. I’ve been dealing with you fascists for years.”

I said, “Like Captain Lauter?” Donna said, “Why did you run?”

Megan mewed at me. “Making erotic films is not illegal. The ashram people can sue LAPD.”

I rhino-raked her. “They won’t. They’ll blow their ‘alternate lifestyle’ clout if they do.”

Megan moped to the mattress. She fluttered, flounced, and flung herself down. She sulked sissified. She boded borderline bored.

“Tell me why I should talk to you. Give me one good reason.”

Donna dinged her. “I’ve got a good shot at a series next season. I’ll make sure you get work.”

Megan milked the moment. “Oooh, dearest, that’s wonderful. Can I do love scenes with you?”

Donna flipped her-him the finger. Get bent and butt out, Butch!

I said, “We read Jack Jen-kin’s manuscript. Jack’s dead, by the way. Your old Narco pals chilled him.”

Megan mewed. Megan muttered. Megan made the sign of the cross.

Donna said, “Lay it all out. I’ll be needing a female sidekick.”

The “female” flattered and floored the hip he-she. Megan lolled back and laid her legs out. *Goooooood* gams—some certified surgeon’s art.

“O.K., so I ran. I saw these Narco cops I fucked at Danny Getchell’s funeral. Believe me, this girl knows when it’s time to cut her losses.”

He-she boned Bill Berchem and Bob Mosher. She gender-bent them bad. It french-fried and freaked them out.

I said, “Keep going.”

Megan tossed her tresses. Her blondness bloomed—some cool colorist’s art.

“So I fucked those guys *and* Linus Lauter. They used to tap all my Web sites, and somehow they got ahold of Jack Jen-kin’s thesis. Weeeeel, you can just guess how it made them feel. They dallied with a former man, they couldn’t live with it, so I guess they had to pressure Jack to get his copies back. Something happened, and Jack wound up dead.”

I said, “How did Jack get his background shit on you? You know, the stuff he put in his thesis.”

Megan simpered. Silk tones—some thorough throat surgeon’s art.

“He was friends with one of the doctors in Stockholm. The doctor spilled everything he knew on me. All the stuff I told my shrink pre-op, everything.”

Donna drilled the he-she. *Ouch*—those hazel eyes *hurt*.

“You hit on me. I shut you down, and I’ve got a hunch this ties in to your ‘revenge.’ ”

“It does, dearie. I made up my mind to screw those silly studio savages by beating them down at the box office. I was going to fuck every name actress in the business. You know, performers are deeply decentered, and they’ll all fuck men, women, and beasts. You see, I’m really *straight*. I *looooove* women, which is why I hit on you. That sixteen-inch shlong of mine was a terrible burden. It was why I turned lez. I wanted to love women woman to woman.” I whooped. Woman to woman—whoa! Donna did a double-take and slid slack-jawed.

The succubus went sulky. She pouted, poofter-style.

“So I decided to fuck all these actresses, and Gary Getchell was going to film it, and I was going to threaten to show the films publicly, and blackmail the studio boys. ‘Here’s your biggest stars jungled up with a soft-core porno queen. How do you think that will affect your box office in Topeka and Des Moines?’ ”

Donna said, “Let me guess. You’ve got a film of you fucking Linus Lauter. It’s your wedge against those cops.”

Megan patted a purple purse. “I’ve got the cassette right here. You’re no dummy, Donna dear.”

I brought out my beavertail. I sap-slapped my legs. The business end flopped phallic-like. Donna doe-eyed dug on it.

I said, “Where does Gary G. keep his dirt files?”

Megan said, “I don’t know.”

Donna said, “You must hate me.”

Megan coughed into a hankie. Purloined pubic hairs spun in her spit.

“No, darling. I *looooove* you.”

“Are you this ‘avenging angel’ that Gary Getchell told Rick about?”

“No, no, no. I *loooooove* you. But Gary was talking up this ‘bounty’ on you. He said he knew a psycho who had ‘this big Donna Donahue plan.’ Really, that’s all he said, and I’d *never* hurt you.”

Annihilating angels. Film fucks and lip-locked lezzies. Bounty-bait Donna. Details dug at me.

Looks lanced the room. Megan to Donna to—

The door cracked and crashed. The door hooked off its hinges. Bill Berchem and Bob Mosher barged in.

Looks *lashed* the room. Eyeballs socked in their sockets. Bad Bill and Big Bob to Donna, Megan, me.

Megan pulled her purse. The suddenness startled and stunned. Three guns hopped off holsters: Berchem, Mosher, me.

Donna ducked. Shades of ’83—Donna dove and dug out my ankle piece.

Berchem blasted Megan. Bam—a cartridge caught her carotid. Short-range shootout/the room 12 by 12/four guns out and arcing, fuck me—

Mosher fired. Mosher missed me. I fired back, I rang a ricochet—one bip off his bulletproof vest. Megan blew blood on her muumuu. Berchem capped her hairline-high. Her bleached blond wig sailed off by the seams.

I fired at Berchem—four feet between us—the punk panicked and pantywaist-screamed.

My gun jammed. A jacked round jumped from the breach. Donna rolled right. Donna got behind Berchem. Donna braced her arm on an arc light and arced a shot upwards. Berchem’s brains zinged.

Mosher fired down. Donna ducked. I jumped in and body-blocked him. I smacked him, gouged his gun hand, and smothered his aim. He hooked his head back. His mouth went wide. He showed his teeth and bored in to bite me.

Donna got between us. Donna tapped his teeth with a 2-inch barrel and popped him point-blank.

His teeth shattered and shrapnelized. Bloody bridgework bristled Donna. Dental detritus dinged me.

Check the charnel house. Three dead. Megan’s *morte* in her muumuu. The Narco cops are wrapped to the River Styx—*finito* at Donna’s feet.

I grabbed a wall phone. I mauled my memory. I lined up Linus Lauter’s home number. I dialed it delirious. I heard a pickup click.

I heard “Hello.” It was Linus L. I greased my greeting.

It’s all over. Your boys bought it. They killed the Korean. You fag-fucked a he-she. It’s caught on cassette—vivid VCR shit— don’t wait for the DVD.

I knew he’d do it. He race-mixed radical. He gender-bent for bootie. He couldn’t ignore the ignominy.

I heard the hammer hitch.

I heard the cylinder slip.

I heard the muzzle roar that meant Meet Your Maker.

I dropped the phone. Donna grabbed me. We held each other a whole half-minute. Her heart never missed a beat.

6.

We hid by her hearth. We fooled with the fireplace. We cranked a big blaze and upped the AC.

Then to now. Twenty-one years. Four fucked hours at Parker Center. Joe Tierney's tantrum. Two cops shot dead. Linus Lauter's suicide—horrific hara-kiri.

The sex-violence nexus. Official obfuscation. The Berchem– Mosher–Megan More "suicide pact." Witnesses bought and bullied at Ashanti Ashram. Leotis Lauter's precise press release:

The LAPD did my dad in. Ditto Bill Berchem and Bob Mosher. They racked up their relatives—don't rag the suicide scenario, don't risk your pension pack.

The media—quelled by quid pro quo. Try to trust Tierney— he'll pay you back.

The sex-violence nexus. Say *sí* to sex, violence vividly *yes.*

The nexus nabbed us new. The charnel house challenged us. It was our final fait accompli.

We laid logs in the fireplace. Reggie Ridgeback reclined nearby. His amber eyes orbited our way.

Cashmere cushions and comforter. A tantalizing temperature. Lit logs and a glorious glow.

My brave bride again. Another cross-fire christening. Our moment to memorize and test time with.

We climbed from our clothes. Embers eddied and shot shadows across us. My memory guided me. I called up every curve and surface and kissed her there.

Then to now naked. Curves and constellations. The memory map of her spark points, now spin with her sighs.

We traded curve caresses and kisses. Flame shadows shifted and showed us where to kiss this and that. It felt timeless merged with urgent, imperative and aimless, make me arch and sigh, breathe my breaths and do that.

The hearth heat made us glisten. We tasted sweet swirls of sweat. Our kisses went *right there.* Her taste was her taste all fresh and twenty years back. I wanted to stay there and breathe it and live it. She made me stop. She kissed *me* there and made me move inside.

It was timeless merged with urgent, all imperative-momentous, this nexus NOW harnessed hot. The hearth heat held us. The flames died and darkened. I kissed sweat from her hazel eyes as new memory mapped.

DAWN. The fire fizzled out and fanned to enduring embers. Reggie wrapped between us.

Donna slept on. Her head rested on Reggie's ridge. I watched her veins vibrate. I counted the cadence of her heartbeat. I saw her breasts bracing brown fur.

I watched. I wondered how much time she'd give me. Hearth heat and homicide held us. Hold for more horror. Hope for more heat to hold us—or pray for prosaic times to teach us to live sans intrigue.

Donna slept. I watched my witch woman and wondered. My righteous right brain broiled. I got crisp and creative. I recultivated connections.

Megan More—no "avenging angel." Megan More's ripe-panty racket. Donna's panty pursuer. Library love-hate e-mails, all anonymous. Megan More: Gary Getchell's panty pal. Megan, vile-verbatim: "Gary was talking up this 'bounty' on you. He said he knew a psycho who had 'this big Donna Donahue plan.' "

Connections cultivated. Cut to:

The Hot-Prowl Hoagy. His niggardly nominal thefts. His hot-prowl hits. Their prime proximity—to Bel-Air and L.A. Country Clubs.

Dave Slatkin said he's ripe for rape. Donna's Holmby Hills house—hard by L.A. CC. Gary Getchell: Bel-Air caddy. The hot-prowl homicide—hard by Bel-Air CC. Dirt on the hot-prowl hump's shoes.

I called Dave. I watched Donna and whispered. The dirt, Dave—did the lab latch on to a make?

Yeah. Dig—the dirt came from Bel-Air Country Club. Hot-Prowl Herb *ex*-caped on foot.

Cold-call it: the hot-prowl harridan's a caddy. It's a tantalizing target obfuscation. He's only out to get Donna D.

He's Donna-diddled and Donna-driven and Donna-determined. He's a Donna doofus and a Donna dunce, just like me. He's me made malignant. He's my Donna doppelgänger.

I woke Donna up. I cued her into my connections. She mentioned her "on-and-off" fan notes. They ladled love-hate. "He loved it when I showed skin, he hated it when I showed skin. He's a skin sicko."

The *old* notes, the *new* e-mail notes. The pathetic panty requests. One sender or two?

Some note nexus—maybe.

Donna dug out the old notes. Donna explained the dates.

They ran to the run of *Biloxi Beach*—her boffo '80s show. They ran out and restarted per her feature film work. The notes flew and flurried. A gulf-wide gap stretched. Then the panty-putz e-mails began.

Donna offered up the old notes. She pack-rat-possessed them still. I read racy and repetitive text. Hot-prowl references repeated.

"I want to get inside the house of your love."

“I want to steal inside your secret places.”

“I can get inside anyplace. I’ve done it. I killed a girl once, long ago.”

Sixteen sick notes. Bland block printing. Scary and skin-obsessed. One note nexus nabbed me bad. The return address— charted as Chino Prison. The addressee pseudonymed as Sal Skinman. Sad sentiments—Donna dunned for love—scary skin ruminations. Say he’s censor-scared. Bet your booty he’s in for burglary.

Scary skin-talk overall. “I killed a girl once”—good grief.

Donna watched me nail notes. Donna was nexus-nonplussed. Donna danced on my dime now. Homicide and hearth-hunger. Donna could handle herself.

I cruised to my car. I brought back my evidence kit. I compared the evil e-mails to the skin-scary notes. I tapped textual styles. I saw simple similarities. The same sender—maybe, maybe not.

I forged on forensic. I fingerprinted Donna. I tipped her tips on print paper. I noodled out some ninhydrin. I sprayed the sixteen sick notes. I latched up two latent prints.

I culled comparison points. I caught ten per print. I compared points to Donna’s. Bingo—no repeated ridges, no similar swirls.

His prints—the skin man’s and probable hot-prowl hyena’s. Call it collusive. Call it combined-case combustion. Rick loves Donna. Donna loves Rick. It’s our brave new world brought on back.

WE POPPED to Parker Center. We briefed Dave and Tim. We broiled to bring Hot-Prowl Hymie down. We clamored for climactic closure.

Dave took the prints. He promised to feed them to the Fed system fast. We caught a commotion down the corridor.

There’s Leotis Lauter. He’s one jacked-up jungle bunny. He’s jumping all over Joe Tierney. The mad mick’s mollifying Mrs. Linus Lauter. She’s Aunt Jemima-ish. She’s jumping too.

There’s Cal Eggers. He’s a newly coined captain. He’s laying the law to Leotis. You’re a dope dealer. You’re indictment-indebted. We’re dead deep in suicides—get your blasphemous black ass the fuck out of here.

I ducked into an empty office. Donna ducked with me. I called Deputy D.A. Daisy Delgado and cataloged our combined case. I asked for grand jury subpoenas. Let’s detain degenerate caddies. Let’s call in all caddies from Bel-Air and L.A. CCs.

Daisy agreed. Daisy promised prompt paper—two hours tops. Tim tapped me. I’ve got that box of Gorman paperwork—you can kill time with that.

Tim brought a big box up. Donna delved in. She saw poignant portraits—Stephanie vivid and vibrant, alight and alive at fifteen. Tears took her over—*sa chère* Stephanie.

I pulled old paper. I found field reports. I went through wienie waggers whipped and reluctantly released. I saw pud pounders and parolees pounced on. I saw rape-os rounded up. I saw child molesters charged with tangential crimes. I saw bisexual brunsers bruised and ripped from rubber-hose techniques. I saw—whoa, whoa, whoa —*wait.*

The date: 9/12/65. One innocuous and innocent piece of paper.

Field report. Reinterview. Stephanie's dad states:

It's late 7/65. One week before my daughter's death. I had some yard work done. I hired Hillcrest caddies.

Hillcrest—hard by Hillsboro and Sawyer. Hillcrest—one hop to L.A. and Bel-Air CCs. One follow-up field report. Four caddy names caught. Four rap sheets run. Four Mickey Mouse misdemeanants made.

> Alan Aadland, DOB 3/4/46. One reefer roust. One joyride job.
>
> Richard Donatich, DOB 8/19/44. Popped for Peeping Tom. Caught cunnilingizing his sister.
>
> Harvey "Huck" Horan, DOB 12/16/40. Boocoo booze busts.
>
> Sol "Wino" Weinberger, DOB 6/2/37. Obscene phone-call fuck, ladies' room loiterer, boss barbiturate *bandido.*

I got goose bumps. My hackles hacked. I showed the shit to Donna. She got the shakes, too.

The scurvy skin man's note. "I killed a girl once, long ago." The current hot-prowl hoo-ha. The country-club cacophony. A time machine torqued back to *this.*

I ripped through reports. Nothing juked me. No fucking follow-ups. No exonerations expressed.

The cops might have polled the punks and aligned alibis. The cops might have polygraphed or pounded them punklike. It dangled like a dead end. Still, it stung me.

Daisy Delgado called. The subpoenas—serviced and servable now. Nice—but that sting still stung me. I called Hillcrest CC. I got the caddy shack. The caddy master said he went waaaay back. I named my names. He right-on responded.

Aadland—AIDS-dead—he freelanced as a fruit hustler. Donatich—dead from Dilaudid-coke combos. Horan—hit by a bus on Beverly Boulevard. "Wino"—winding up his caddy career at beautiful Bel-Air CC.

Caddies.

Culminations/coincidence/connections—

Dave walked in. "The Feds kicked back on your prints. The guy's a 67-year-old white male. His name's Solomon Weinberger."

Heaven hurled itself on me. Donna hugged me hard. Hail the hot-prowl man with

Hush-Hush hosannahs!

Wino for Stephanie—thirty-nine years later.

7.

Bel-Air bid us. We winged to the Wino Weinberger Walpurgisnacht.

Tim toted a shotgun. I brought my Browning .9 and a big Beretta. Donna brought brains and a wild will to whip Wino with.

Dave did backup. He ripped R&I and glommed a Wino mug shot. He made up a four-man mug card—the sixty-plus Wino and four similar sixtyish cops. The plan: Work the West L.A. libraries. Engage an e-mail alert. Track the panty postulant. Confirm Wino as the panty punk *and* hot-prowl hump.

We ran up Roscomere. We bombed up Bellagio. We pulled into the club parking lot. We tripped into a traffic jam—a cop-car kaleidoscope.

Black-and-whites, unmarkeds, coroner's canoes—all snared up snout to snout.

We ran. We cut through the caddy shack. We caught the cart cottage. We gonifed a golf cart and coursed out on the course. We followed fleet-foot figures. We traipsed after truck tracks. We hit a big barnlike maintenance shack.

Bluesuits blocked the entrance. I badged them and bullied us through. I saw Bill Dumais, West L.A. dicks. I saw a starched stiff and junkyard Jesus.

It's Gary Getchell. He's crucifix-crisp. He's stiff on a stack of manure sacks.

He's nicked with neck notches—tough torture cuts. He's blood-blistered and mutilated maroon. He's wearing golf togs. He's pincushion-pricked with two dozen trank darts.

Dumais saw Tim and me. Golfers and gofers and coroner's cats saw Donna. They dug her more than the dead man. They dunned her for autographs.

Dumais dipped over. The big barn vibrated with voice overlap. I orbed outside. I saw fractious factions fixated on the action inside.

Eyes right—there's two Narco cops. Eyes left—there's Captain Cal Eggers. Loop left again—there's Leotis Lauter. He's looking *coon*cerned and *coon*temptuous. He's boogie bodyguarded. He's couched with four cool coon commandos.

Dumais said, "It looks like we've got two scenarios. The torture shit looks a couple of days old, but the coroner says he caught the trank shots within the past few hours. The maintenance boss says Getchell hung out and wrote his scandal shit here. I figure the killer found him alone, darted him, and walked off the course unseen."

Tim walked over. "You think he was tortured for file information?"

Dumais looked around. Eyes right—Narco cops. Eyes left— Leotis and his *coon*vocation.

"I figure it's Leotis or some rogue Narco guys, and they're both pissed off at that shit at the ashram and Linus's suicide."

Tim said, "They tortured Getchell for file skinny, before they learned that Linus offed himself."

I agreed. Dumais agreed. I tiptoed tall. I eyeball-orbed. Caddies/connections/convergence. Where's the Wino man?

The crowd crammed up to the barn. Bluesuits barricaded them out. Donna signed autographs. I saw a cat with a "Caddy Master" name tag. I cornered him.

He said, "Some scene, huh?"

I said, "Where's Wino Weinberger? We're old friends."

The caddy master cackled. "Try Skid Row. I heard Wino's on a toot down there."

Autograph hounds hurtled by—six blissful bluesuits. Their autographed field forms read, "Brave new fucking world *again*— Love, Donna D."

WINO:

Let's find him. Let's fuck him. Let's stomp him for Stephanie.

Let's scour Skid Row.

The caddy master kicked loose his address: The Viceroy Hotel, East 5th Street. It was skanky and scummy and scurvy down there. We slipped east and slid into slumland.

Sidewalk cities. Hophead Hoovervilles. Crackheads camped out in cardboard-box billets. Loonies looped on Listerine. Wiggling wineheads and jake-legged juicers made mad by Muscatel.

We hit the hotel. The lobby was lice-laced linoleum. Wine stains and bloodstains blistered the cracks. Palsied pensioners toked Tokay shored in short-dog bottles. We shook them down. They jitter-jumped and Tokay-toked and palsy-punked-out. They gave up Wino—room 218.

We walked up. Horror hallways hooked ahead. We crunched crack pipes and shattered short dogs. We sidled through Syringe City and Hypodermic Hell. Floor debris flew. Our shoes caught needles coated with virus-vapped blood.

There's 218. The lock looks loose. Let's let ourselves in.

Donna ditzed the doorknob. I jiggled the jamb. The door swung in.

No Wino. Nobody. Sicko City socked in 12 by 12.

A sink. A made-up Murphy bed. A lice-lined linoleum floor. Crabs hopping head-high and Wino-Walpurgisnachted walls.

Craaaazy crime fotos. Filched archival shots. Major-case madness, all glossy-glared.

Mesmerized Mansonites. Bleary Black Dahlia pix. Stark Stephen Nash shots.

Photo-fucked fiends. Demonic Donald Keith Bashor. Sirhan Sirhan surrounded by Sheriff's deputies. Freaky Fred Stroble, ax-assassin of a little girl, gassed circa '53. Our Stephanie, strapped to a gurney, all shorn up in a sheet.

Crime—Weegeeish and Wino-warped. Infernally interspersed with quixotically quantified SKIN.

Actresses—all alive in 8-by-10 fotos. Bikini babes and halter-hot honeys. Red-headed Rita Hayworth. Red-tinted and divinely deigned Donna Donahue. Freckle-fraught Nicole Kidman. Titian-topped Julianne Moore.

Random redheads right below—costars culled and cultivated off TV. Riotous red hair—august auburn straight to strawberry. Strict strumpet-type women. Fortyish foxes. Choice chignontressed aristocrats.

Donna said, "Holy shit." That nexus nudged me. Pile on the panties—I need some sniffs.

Footfalls fell behind us. I whipped and wheeled around. Wino walked in.

He saw us. He stood startled. He started to run.

I chased him. I tackled him. I laid him out on linoleum. He sheared his shins on shattered glass. He gave up then.

WE RACKED HIM to his room radiator. My handcuffs hitched him up firm. He beady-eye-bored into Donna. Her presence pronged him.

He panted. He salivated. He drooled Draculean. His trouser trout jumped in his jeans.

I found a phone book. Donna dug out my beavertail. We stood stern over him.

Donna said, "You sent me notes, didn't you? On and off for years."

Wino wiggled. The cuffs cut his wrists.

"You got it, baby. I'm a note man and a breather. I tried to get your phone number, but no fucking soap. You'd have got a real taste of me then."

I said, "What about e-mails? Some sicko was e-mailing Ms. Donahue. He was asking her to send him her panties."

Wino went outraged. "I don't feature that panty shit! I'm a note man and a breather! I don't fuck with no computers. Give me a pay phone any day."

Donna bent the beavertail. The lead weight whipped within.

"What about ladies' rooms? You dig that action, don't you?"

Wino snorted and snickered. "I like to sniff toilet seats once in a blue moon, I'll give you that. But basically I'm a specialist. I'm a note man and a breather. I'm a fucking virtuoso, and I'm fucking proud of it."

I said, "What's with the redheads? All Donna's got is a little tint."

Wino winked. “Dig this. My mom was a redhead, and I never got over it. I got a thing for red gash, and that is no fucking shit. Donna looks like my mom. You don’t got to be fucking Sigmund Freud to figure out this shit.”

I fingered my phone book. The pages rolled and riffed.

“Have you been hot-prowling lately? There’s been some jobs in West L.A.”

Wino rolled his wrists. He got ratchet-ripped.

“I ain’t pull no 459s since the ’70s. I found my calling then. I’m a note man and a breather, and I’m fucking proud of it.”

I said, “You admit those notes to Ms. Donahue?”

“Yeah, you know I do. I’m a note man of long standing, and I’m fucking proud of —”

“You did some time at Chino, right? You sent Ms. Donahue a note from there.”

“That’s right. I’m a note man, the best in the west.”

“Were you in for burglary?”

“Fuck, no. I was pushing yellow jackets to high-school kids, out of the Mar Vista Bowl. I quit that burglary shit in the ’70s.”

Donna said, “And you deny sending me e-mails?”

Wino snickered, sneered, and stuck out his tongue. Wino licked his lips loathsome and leered.

“I’m a note man and a breather. That’s my twenty-year MO. Don’t try to hang no other shit on me, because I ain’t buying it.”

I said, “You quit sending Ms. Donahue notes. Why?”

“She’s stale bread, that’s why! She never shows no more skin! I’m a skin man! I go squirrel shit if I don’t get no skin!”

Donna looked at me. I saw her nip toward the nexus. Her hazel eyes hit me and *hurt.*

She sapped Wino. She beavertail-bashed him. The weight whipped and leather lashed skin. She hooked him a new hairline. The cut dug deep. Blood blew down to his chin.

Wino went wild. “Baby, I dig it! You’re turning me on, ’cause I’ve got this guilt thing! Ask all the old cops! I confessed to the best in the west!”

I caught a cue. “You said you killed a girl once. You put it in one of the notes you sent Ms. Donahue.”

Wino hooked his head. The hairline cut coursed backward. He tongue-torqued lizardlike and licked the blood off his lips.

"I never killed no girl. I said it to get back at the bitch. I wanted to scare her. She wasn't giving me no skin. I'm a skin man. I need my skin!"

I fingered my phone book. I fought the urge to fuck him up *faaaast.*

"What's with the confessing? Tell us about that."

Wino wrist-rolled. The radiator rocked.

"I go back to the Dahlia. I was 9 then. I copped to all the big snuffs. You name it, I copped to it. Bashor, the Stephen Nash jobs, the Manson shit, all of that. It was my thing back in the old days, before I got this boner for skin."

I looked at him. His boner bounced. He grimaced and jizzed up his jeans.

Donna said, "Ugh." Wino exhaled ecstatic. It cued me in for the kill.

"Did you murder Stephanie Gorman?"

Wino laffed. Wino leered. Wino said, "What if I did?"

I said it slow. *"Did you kill Stephanie Gorman?"*

Wino wiggled. Wino winked. Wino said, "What if I did?"

I hit him. I beat him binding-side-outward. I hit him heavy. I rammed him repeated. I pounded and popped him and pulled back abrupt. He pissed his pants and poured out postnasal drip.

"Did you kill—"

"No! I did some yard work for her old man! I copped to the snuff, but I couldn't milk it for three hots and a cot, and the fuzz cut me loose!"

I looked at Donna. She said, "*Rick, no more, please.*"

Wino rolled his wrists. The radiator ripped free. Pipes popped loose. Steam stung me.

I checked the closet. Clothes—but no trank gun, no tranquilizers, no benzodiazepines. I slid out my cell phone. I dialed Dave Slatkin.

He picked up. "Slatkin."

I said, "The mug runs. What did you get?"

Dave coughed. Dogs barked in the background. I heard Pancho panting. I heard bull mastiffs bay.

"No hits on Wino, and that's at all six libraries. I had some mugs in with Wino, and a couple of librarians said Cal Eggers looked most like the guy. Is that a fucking hoot?"

I laffed. I looked at Donna. Wino whipped his head. Blood blipped onto her blouse and skirt. Blood skimmed her skin.

Wino said, “I’m a skin man. I’m a note man and a breather. I dig red gash, and so fucking what?”

I pulled up a chair. It was straight-backed and slatted. I sat down. I flexed my forearms. I snapped the slats off.

Wino rolled his wrists and resoiled himself. I said it sotto voce*: “Did you kill Stephanie?”*

Wino went calm. Wino said, “I caddied at Hillcrest that day. It was a big tournament. They’ll have records. I was on the course when the Gorman kid got it.”

Donna dug out her cell phone. I heard her hit Information. I heard her ask for Hillcrest. I heard her hit the listing and get the first tee.

She whispered. “Weinberger” and “August 5th, ’65” wound back to me. Wino watched me. I laid out a lapsed Lutheran prayer: LET IT BE HIM.

Time ticked by. Donna said, “He’s checking records.” I shut my eyes and saw Stephanie. Tick, tick, tick—two minutes topped.

Donna said, “Thanks.” The phone fizzed off. I opened my eyes. I still saw Stephanie.

“It’s not him, Rick. He was on the golf course from 1:10 to 6:20.”

Auf Wiedersehen, adieu, adios—shalom, Stephanie.

I uncuffed Wino. Donna perused her purse and took out two twenties. Cut-rate reparation—she tossed them on the bed.

We walked out. We crunched crack-pipe glass and short-dog shards. Wino screamed, “I’m a skin man, and I need my skin!”

8.

The stink, the stain, the malevolent malodor—wash Wino off of us.

Donna’s house had a huge hot tub. We boiled out his badness and talked our terror tactics through. Donna copped to faux-feminist rectitude and rage. Whipping-boy Wino—the genus of genderized crime. I copped to venal violence vetted by Stephanie. I skirted the skin-madness issue. It hit home hard. Panties paralyzed me. I memorialized *my* mom. *She* was a righteous redhead, too.

Dave called. I told him Wino went south. The old note man/the e-mail hot-prowler—served up as two separate freaks. Dave said he’d reinstate the rolling stakeouts. He said he made Leotis Lauter for the Gary Getchell snuff. The dart death—deep diversion—let’s hurl heat on hot-prowl now.

Plus:

The West L.A. dicks dug up some eyeball wits. Leotis Lauter loitered outside Gary Getchell’s pad three days ago. Two rasty-assed Rastafarians reconnoitered with him.

The pad: pored through and randomly ransacked. Odds on no files found. Found today: torched paper files in Leotis L.'s fireplace.

I debated Dave. Leotis Lauter—dope dealer—not a deep diverter. The hot-prowl hump—good for Gary.

We argued. We agreed—I had two days off—call it downtime to dally with Donna.

We dallied. We hearth-hid. We made love and feasted on fireplace food. We cooked kabobs and flame-fried burgers. Reggie Ridgeback scrounged scraps.

We dallied. We did ourselves up as a dog pack. We slipped into slumber. We *dozzzzed.*

Wino witch-hunted me. I Oedipaled awful. Titian-tressed trespassers trudged and traipsed through. My mom materialized. She mumbled rebukes. I'm lost in her lingerie drawer.

I heard something. It rang wrong. My reverie—wrecked.

I opened my eyes. There's Cal Eggers. Cal's got a trank gun. The hearth flames flare—Cal's caught in the light.

My synapses snapped. The libraries. The mug runs. Cal's coincidental pics. *He's the hump they ID'd.*

He fired. I rolled onto Reggie. I disturbed Donna. My weight whipped her awake.

The dart popped onto a pillow. Reggie reared up. I rolled right and picked up a poker. It ran red with heat.

Donna rolled. Donna ran. Donna dug through couch cushions. Reggie rammed Cal's crotch and tore in with his teeth.

Cal screamed. I poker-popped and brand-broiled him. I nailed his neck. I scalded skin. He dropped his trank gun and pulled a *real* piece.

Big bore. A nasty nickel-plated piece.

He screamed at me. He fired. I lurched left and made him miss. Reggie bit through his balls and castrated him. I saw his sac sawed through and his scrotum scrunched up in dog teeth.

Cal screamed. Cal ran toward Donna. She tossed couch cushions. She threw up a throw rug. She made the Magnum. She found the fat .45.

Cal fired. He missed Donna. Bullets ripped the Renoir and mowed down the Monet. Both paintings dropped off the wall. Reggie mewed through a mouthful of mangled balls. Donna two-handed aimed.

She caught Cal low. She laid down leg shots. Four hit hard. Cal caromed off a couch edge and careened.

He fell flat. He dropped his gun. I rolled right and ran up to him.

His leg wounds coursed copious. His pelvic wound pulsated and poured blood. He was close to the clouds. He was staring at the River Styx. I said, " *Dying declaration.* Give it up, *please.*"

He coughed. Bloody phlegm flew. He found a firm voice. He spoke to Donna, not me.

"You . . . were the one. I had this thing for you since '83. I was working Rampart then. I was working up to get you . . . but I didn't know if I could do it . . . I always had a hot-prowl jones . . . I tried to buy out of the obsession . . . e-mails, panties . . . I took my cue from Megan More . . . Oh, Donna, at least I didn't rape you . . . oh, Donna . . . oh, shit."

The fuck was fading fast. I said, "There's more, Cal. Come on, all of it."

Donna knelt beside me. She sent scents of sandalwood soap and gunshot residue. Reggie regurgitated. Male genitalia flew.

Cal coughed. "I was in with Gary G., independent of Megan. I . . . fed him Narco dope, more than Danny G. did . . . I wanted to take over the division when Linus Lauter got moved out . . . Gary knew I had this thing for you, Donna. I was the 'avenging angel' . . . Leotis and his niggers tortured Gary . . . I was afraid he'd rat me if they fucked him up again . . . so I snuffed him."

Reggie bayed. Cal coughed. His eyes said, "Oh, you kid." He coughed blood, blanched, and died.

Donna kicked the corpse. "You fucking loser. I'm not that big a deal."

Happy holidays. Christmas for crucifixion-heads, Hanukkah for hebes, Kwanzaa for spooks simmering for secession. Ho, ho, ho—holiday cheer at Hillsboro and Sawyer.

Donna and me. Let's dig on our dead. Let's honor ourselves. Let's celebrate our cessation.

We had two months together. It was goooood. We got singed by circumstance. We got rigorously reawakened.

The media made good. The "Suicide Season" survived and moved into myth. Cool Cal caught the outside edge. Joe Tierney toted him up to terminal cancer. The pain pounded him. Cal couldn't take it. He opted for self-immolation.

A viable verdict. No castration by canine, no death by Donna D.

Call it cosmetic. Cal killed himself. His Hot-Prowl Hell died with him. Leotis Lauter got memorably murdered. It was rap-music related.

Monster Mack-Mack was making time with Leotis's lady. It was one trippy triangle. It was baaaad jig juju. Leotis caught Mack-Mack at Mohammad's Mosque #6. Mack-Mack pulled a machine gun. Mack-Mack mowed him down. Leotis leeched up 26 rounds and rang off to Allah. He's currently couched with Khalid Khareem.

Daisy Delgado made him for the Gary Getchell snuff. She filed Murder One postmortem.

It's all tied up. There's a dozen declared dead in Hot-Prowl Heaven or Hell.

I had two months with Donna. Prosaics pried us apart. I caught some Cold Case murders. She caught a mid-season series. She played a Homicide cop.

We sat in my Saturn sedan. We traded gifts. We stared at Stephanie's house. She gave me a cashmere coat. I gave her Monster Mack-Mack's machine gun, moved from an evidence vault.

The house held us. Time tripped us up. Then to now and patterns past. Stephanie unavenged. A dead daughter older than us. Our finite future.

We talked. We tossed some tears. We said I-love-yous. I got lonely and Donnafied with Donna right there. Unbreachable crimes, unreachable women—and me.

Jungletown Jihad

Heaven's still forever. Time still stings you and makes you bop backward. Intervals intertwine. The hot-prowl holocaust and shattering shit six months later.

Donna. Me. A short shove to March '05.

Another murder mandate. A cold-case contretemps. My yearning. Her reluctance. The urge to merge. Donna. Me. Toxic terror. Jungle juju. Ring my retrospection back to this:

Los Angeles Times, March 1, 2005. COLD CASE SQUAD INVESTIGATES ROBBERY MURDERS By Miles Corwin

The LAPD's Cold Case Unit is now actively investigating three brazen homicides that occurred during the holdups of Southside liquor stores in the spring of 2001. Detective David Slatkin, the unit's officer-in-charge, told the *Times* that a recent tip may prove "quite valuable."

On the afternoon of April 29, 2001, two men entered the Liquor Heaven store at Normandie Avenue and Martin Luther King Boulevard in South-Central Los Angeles. They robbed the store at gunpoint and shot proprietor Dong Quan Lem to death. A stockboy crouched unseen behind the dairy case described the men as "young Arab types. You know, like those guys you see waving sticks and stuff in Iraq." The killers escaped. The stockboy provided LAPD detectives with a description of them, and assisted the detectives in creating Identikit portraits.

The robber-killers struck again on May 16. They entered the Liquor World store on Jefferson Boulevard and Vermont Avenue, robbed the establishment and fatally shot owner Jim Wong Kim. A pedestrian eyewitness saw the killers escape. She described both assailants as "male Arabs with mustaches like that no-goodnik Saddam Hussein." She confirmed the Identikit portraits as accurate and added, "Both men looked very mean."

LAPD detectives expanded their investigation. They followed up on numerous leads and checked with Federal agencies for information on armed robbers with possible terrorist ties. Nothing conclusive resulted, and the robber-killers struck again on June 9.

Their target was the Liquor King store on Imperial Highway. They made the proprietor, Kwan Paul Park, unlock an office vault and hand over a week's cash receipts. After Park complied, they shot him fourteen times and escaped out a back door. A parking-lot witness said both men yelled, "Praise to Allah!" and "Free Palestine!" He embellished the two prior suspect descriptions, stating, "Both guys looked wasted, like they was on dope or on the sauce. That, and they sure looked crazy and mean."

The LAPD stepped up its investigation, spurred by urgings from Asian-American civil-rights groups. An attempt to locate Arab-terrorist "sleeper cells" followed. Arab-American civil-rights groups protested the LAPD's "heavy handedness" and "fascist methods" in interrogating Arab-American citizens. Arab League spokesman Gazi Alli called the investigation a “pogrom” and a “Zionist conspiracy.”

The investigation continued, unsuccessfully. The September 11 terrorist bombings diverted the flow, as Federal agencies began a massive post-attack investigation of their own, aimed at uncovering terrorist cells in the Los Angeles area. LAPD detectives constantly monitored the FBI Task Force’s progress, but turned up no salient leads on the robbery-murder men. The investigation stagnated and assumed “open file” status.

Detective Slatkin told the *Times,* “Our investigators have checked out over 400 tips, and Chief Tierney has now assigned the job to the Cold Case Unit. We’re making it our number-one priority. We’re about to check out an informant who has pledged to give us some important information. He seems to be plugged in to the Arab criminal network, so we’re guardedly optimistic.”

Will the informant offer up data on terrorist activities? Detective Slatkin thinks not. “We think this is street crime, pure and simple,” he said. “The shouted slogans are most likely obfuscation. We’re treating this as a series of heinous, but nonpolitical, crimes.”

Daily Variety, March 2, 2005. COP FLOP: “HOMICIDE HEAT” FIZZLES. DONAHUE SETS ON STAGE. By Bruce Balaban

ABC has pulled the plug on the Donna Donahue starrer *Homicide Heat* after a scant six episodes. The L.A.-set cop-u-drama moped to miserable market shares and flat-out flopperooed. The show, which featured La Donahue as LAPD Detective Daisy Delphine, sunk despite proud production values, Ms. Donahue’s *sin*-tillating performance as a promiscuous diva cop and its status as LAPD Chief Joe Tierney’s favorite TV program. El Jefe’s bereft, but don’t look for Divine Donna at the unemployment office or Brentwood breadlines.

No, she’s sternly stuck on the stage. She wants to eschew indie cheapies, sexploitation yukfests like *Exit to Ecstasy* and overblown oaters like *San Laredo.* Her plan? To commission a playwright and bomb the boards as pill-popping poetess Anne Sexton.

Sexy Sexton succumbed to suicide in 1974. Deep Donna digs on her as a kool kindred soul. “I’ve had two seismic eruptions in my life,” she said. “One in ’83 and one last year. I want to transmogrify them into my role as Sexton.”

Doe-eyed Donna does Sexton—whoa! It wends as one wild one-woman show. That Shakespeare shtarker is dead—ditto torrid Tennessee Williams. Who does Dishy Donna—currently flogging Barko Bits dog food with her Rhodesian ridgeback Reggie —see as her scribe?

“There’s a young playwright I’ve got my eye on,” she said. “He’s stuck on ’70s culture, especially the SLA–Patty Hearst thing, but I think I can get him hooked on Sexton.”

That sounds like savvy and sagacious Sextonism. Meanwhile, look for Dogophile Donna at the Barko Bits booth at the Beverly Hills Kennel Club trials. She’ll also be a presenter at this month’s Oscar fest, and *that’s* no dog of a show.

Los Angeles Police Department/Psychological
Evaluation Report/Official Routing Only: Commander,
Robbery-Homicide Division & Personnel Division [file
inclusion]. Reporting psychologist: Alan V. Kurland,
Ph.D. Subject: Jenson, Richard W./Detective 3rd-
Grade/currently assigned to Cold Case Homicide Unit.
Date of submission: 3/6/05.

Sirs:

Between the dates 2/21 and 2/26/05 I conducted three one-hour sessions with Detective Jenson, who was referred to me (compulsory) by Captain Walter D. Tyndall, the Commander of Robbery-Homicide Division. Captain Tyndall's reason for referral was his personal assessment of Detective Jenson: i.e., that he was suffering from nervous exhaustion and "some sort of ongoing personal crisis."

I found Detective Jenson to be a person of acute intellect and substantial insight, marred by the presence of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), which by its debilitating long-term nature has led Detective Jenson into a state of excitability, pathological work habits and a disturbing need for mental stimulation. The underpinnings of Detective Jenson's compulsiveness appear to be his romantic attachment to a 1965 murder victim (Stephanie Lynn Gorman, DOD 8/5/65, DR #65-538-991), an unsolved crime recently investigated by the Cold Case Unit, and his occasional involvement with a well-known actress (who Detective Jenson refuses to name), an intermittently intimate relationship that dates back over twenty years.

Detective Jenson stated that he has eschewed marriage and long-term relationships with other women out of a sense of devotion to this woman, because "with her, everything is possible," "she's constantly with me, anyway," and "I'll never take a soft line on love." Detective Jenson further stated that he has written two "novella-length" memoirs about his "wild-ass love" for this woman, and that they were both stylistically influenced by the alliterative prose style of *Hush-Hush* magazine. When queried about the content of the memoirs, Detective Jenson said, "It's private shit. And, no, you can't read them." He went on to describe his writings as both "odes" and "hymns to the few times I've fully loved and felt incandescently alive." Implicit in those statements: both memoirs described Detective Jenson and the unnamed woman in moments of violent intrigue. It should be noted that Detective Jenson's admitted grandiosity and hoarding of "my righteous secrets with this woman" are consistent with the defining psychological guidelines of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

There are other deeply compulsive aspects of Detective Jenson's fixation. He stated that he "only digs women who look like her," "falls into" relationships with look-alike women and "axes them when they fall short of her." Detective Jenson also employs "snitches" who direct him to the woman's whereabouts so that he may "show up, accidentally on purpose." When pressed on the desperation inherent in this, Detective Jenson stated, "So fucking what? I'm a cop. I use informants, and any man who won't make a fool of himself for a woman is a fucking fruit."

Detective Jenson's intransigence also extends to the Stephanie Gorman case. The victim (a 16-year-old girl from West Los Angeles) has, in Detective Jenson's words, "constellated my need to yearn, live in the past, fuck myself up on unknowability and maybe get some righteous revenge." With uncanny self-perception, he pointed to his use of informants and his hours parked outside Stephanie Gorman's former house. "It's a meditation," he said. "It makes me feel tender. I sit still and figure things out about myself. I don't have to fuck women to love them."

At this time, Detective Jenson is not amenable to entering therapy or taking medication that might serve to curb his obsessive-compulsive behavior. His physical condition—based on his last LAPD examination—is excellent, and his work performance is unimpaired. Detective Jenson (who has killed five armed suspects in the line of duty) does not seem to suffer from the post-traumatic stress disorders common to policemen. When asked about the state of nervous exhaustion and "ongoing personal crisis" described by Captain Tyndall, he replied, "If you're not on the edge, you're taking up too much space." Detective Jenson has, despite his excitability, pathological work habits and need for stimulation, a grounding in the realities of his life. At this time, I believe there to be no cause for his suspension from duty. I would further recommend a second evaluation in six months' time.

Respectfully,
Alan V. Kurland,
Ph.D.

1.

The informant:

Habib Rashad/male Arab/age 36/4823 S. St. Andrews.

We humped the Harbor Freeway southbound. Cops call it the "Coal Chute." It's a jungle-bunny juggernaut and a sleaze sluice. It *coon*ects Darktown with White Man's L.A.

Tim Marti drove. I daydreamed. Donna Standard Time tapped me. *Homicide Heat*—tanksville. No more impromptu set visits. No more Donna done up fetishistic: LAPD badge, gun, and cuffs.

The blues blasted me. Donna deprivation, Stephanie still stamped unsolved and DEAD. My torch flared and billowed bipartite. Said torch now torqued Tim's kid Brandon. My crush created his crush. He dug Donna delirious. He prized Stephanie as his prom date pristine.

Darktown dipped by. Shit shacks, shine stands, Afriqued AMEs. The Coal Chute ran elevated. I saw liquor-store layabouts lap Olde English 800. I saw hos pander poontang and cats cliqued up outside rib cribs.

The '01 murders. Three dead, Arab suspects, Southside locations. Habib Rashad—Southside habitué.

He called the chief's office. He said he had major shit. Joe Tierney bought in. Terrorists tickled Tierney. He hosannaed for Homeland Security. He called the Cold Case guys in.

Three liquor-store snuffs. Brutal, brazen. Terrorist tie-ins— don't bet on it.

We hit the 10 freeway westbound. I Donna-dreamed. We mated in Malibu. We soixante-neuf'd at Sofitels. Reggie Ridgeback romped rambunctious and furred us up.

Tim took the Normandie exit. We whipped west and south. There's the address: a weathered wood-frame pad.

We parked curbside. Jigaboos perched on porches checked our fuzzmobile out. We bopped to the front door. Tim rang the bell. A full-drag dune coon opened up.

Designer threads. A Husseinesque house smock. A boss burnoose from Bin Laden's Boutique.

Tim laffed. I said, "Ahab the A-rab. Where's your camel, motherfucker?"

Daddy-o deadpanned us. We bopped in unbidden. The living room: a mad mini-mosque.

Pricey prayer rugs. Wild wall tapestries. Freaky framed photographs—Al Qaeda-ish cats with big beards. All-star ayatollahs. Sacred Saddams and holy Hassims. A camel caravan supreme.

Rashad said, "I have information. I give, and you give me good deal."

Beanbag chairs beckoned. Tim and I plopped in. Rashad paced. His burnoose billowed. Fuck this Scimitar Sid.

The digs diverted me. Hookahs heaped on side tables. Chartreuse shawls covered with camel or cat hair. Those wall pix— beady-eyed Bedouins.

Tim said, "The liquor-store jobs. Give on that, and we'll talk to the D.A."

Big bugs rocked across the rugs. They lugged lamb hunks and shish-kebab shards. Southside centipedes loomed large—L.A. Laker–like.

I said, "Is this terrorist shit we're dealing with? Did those guys have some kind of political motive?"

Rashad shook his head. "They wanted to show courage to a radical Islamic group. You know the term 'sleeper cell'? They wanted to secure funds from the group and form a cell, but they had no intention of performing terrorist acts. They just wanted to enjoy themselves with the money. You know the term 'party hearty'?"

I *saw* it. Murderous Muslims maraud the Sunset Strip. Camels corralled by the Viper Room. Lamb roasts right by the Roxy.

Rashad paced. His house smock swirled. His sandals slapped. Shit—a shot shook/a side window shattered.

It ratched Rashad. It ricocheted. It hit a hookah and hammered his head twice. It chewed his cheekbones, his brains breezed, his scalp scattered.

I dove. Tim dove. We rolled and ate prayer rug. Bugs crawled with falafel crumbs.

Rashad palsied and pulsed pole-axed. He flew. He flatlined. He dropped DOA.

I got up. Tim got up. We reached for our roscoes and ran out the door. Getaway car—a purple Pontiac peeling out.

We ran. We got our car. Tim caught the key and goosed the gas. We tore tread, reamed the rims, and ripped rubber.

We gained ground. We pounced on the Pontiac. We sheared shots off. We blasted the back window out.

Glass shrapnelized. Our towelhead target boded, backlit.

I fired. Tim fired. We tore towel fabric. His burnoose burned. His hair flared and flamed the headliner.

He screamed. I *heard* it. He alakazamed to Allah. We banged his bumper. We climbed close in. His beard broiled down to bristles. His face went on fire.

The Pontiac pulled right and popped over the curb. It hit a hydrant, stalled and stopped. Local losers poured off their porches. They whooped wild and cheered.

The guy jumped from the car. His face was a four-alarm fire. A porch punk pulled a hose over. He laughed loud and lobbed water up.

The guy sizzled and fizzled. The guy sputtered sparks and dipped dead.

THE SHOOTING TEAM SHOWED. Ditto the lab. Ditto the coroner's car and six bluesuits.

They roped the street off. They perused the Pontiac. Fire Face—high up in *hafiz* heaven. The coroner's cats cased his stiff.

Filed fingertips. Scar tissue over print surface. One U.S. passport. Saudi Arabia stamps/Habib Rashad's name/Fire Face's unfried features. Sexy secular threads: color-*coon*ordinated Tommy Hipnigger.

Local louts loitered. Porch punks paraded. They hopped house to house and shared Schlitz malt liquor. Lab guys popped the Pontiac's trunk. They found a Mach 10 machine gun, a copper kettle caked with couscous, four bug microphones.

Bug mikes—whoa, why dat?

The shooting team shoved shit at Tim and me. You shot that sharp sheik. Yeah, he killed Scimitar Sid—but *justify* it.

We laid it out. The liquor-store snuffs. Rashad—righteous informant. He's out to name names. He's prepping his prelude. *Bam*— the sheik shoots, Sid leeches lead.

The shooting guys *got* it. Internecine intrigue. Camelhead conspiracy. Some panicked Pan-Arab Pax.

We tossed the pad. We roamed rooms, combed cubbyholes, and found this:

Personal papers. Proud proprietor Rashad—owner of Falafel Fan, 34th and Vermont.

Mucho mattresses stuffed in storage closets.

Hate tracts. Arabic script. Gross graphics of insidious Israelis. Dig their fat fangs and big beaks. Dig their kike Cadillacs. Dig their six-point-star-meets-dollar-sign regalia.

Five .44 Magnums. Fifteen 40-caliber Brownings. Appropriate ammo.

Pandemic porno vids. Torrid and topical titles. *Darsheika Does Damascus, Syrian 69, Golan Heights Gang Bang, Sexy Saddamites,* and *Cairo Cuties.*

Four spackle-coated cameras. Surefire surveillance cams.

Link it large: the bug mikes and the cameras.

Print techs whipped through and worked walls and windows. Tim and I rocked room to room and recorded details. A coroner's canoe rolled Rashad and Fire Face off. I contemplated my kills, line of duty.

The Garcia brothers—wicked wetbacks/choice cholos. Huey Muhammad 6X—rapacious rape-o. Shondell Dineen and Webster Washington—blasphemous black hoods. My bold body count—now six total.

My cell phone rang. The display lit up. A Donna snitch snared me.

I hit On. "It's Jenson."

"Hi, Rhino. It's Tom. You know, at Raleigh Studios."

"Yeah?"

"She's on Stage 6. She's doing this dog food commercial."

DIG THE DICHOTOMY: dead dune coons to Dangerous Donna.

I drove to Raleigh Studios. I circled Stage 6 and parked. *Rowf* fucking *rowf*—there's Reggie Ridgeback's huckster howls.

The barks bid me inside. I cut down corridors and caught the commercial. There's the director. There's the crew. There's Reggie and Donna.

A flag fluttered behind them. Reggie rowfed in red, white, and blue dog duds. A right-wing conglomerate hawked Barko Bits. Donna parsed out patriotic pap.

"Hi. This is Donna Donahue, with my dog, Reggie. Like all Americans, I'm concerned about the specter of terrorist attack. I stay healthy and vigilant by eating a well-balanced diet, and I feed Reggie Barko Bits All-American Dog Chow. I want a vigilant watchdog who's alert 24–7. Barko Bits' special blend of meat, vitamins, and minerals keeps Reggie up on his paws and sniffing out terrorist suspects. Speak, Reggie! Tell us how *you* feel about Barko Bits All-American Dog Chow!"

Reggie went "Rowf!" Reggie dipped through his dog duds and dug into his dick.

He bit, he licked, he tongued himself tumescent. Donna howled. The director yelled, "Reggie, you fucking lowlife, lay off your shvantz!"

Reggie ignored him. Reggie dick-dug deeper. The crew yukked. I noticed a cool cat standing stage right. He oozed male-model machismo. He was fagged-out in Ferragamo and artfully arrayed in Armani. Resentment ripped me. He vibed Donna boy toy.

The director yelled, “Cut! Let’s take five for now!”

Boy Toy bopped toward Donna. Reggie *gggrrrowled* at him. I hopped on stage. Donna hugged me. I said, “Who’s the fruit?” Donna said, “He’s a playwright, and I’m not sleeping with him.”

My resentment rippled off. I un-machismoed and magnanimized. I Donna-disengaged and braced Boy Toy.

“I’m Rick Jenson. Donna and I go back. I’m on LAPD, and I just dusted an A-rab.”

Donna laffed. “Rick’s a xenophobe, and he tends to brag to impress me. It works sometimes.”

Boy Toy bristled. “I’m Donny DeFreeze, and I’m not impressed. I support the PFL and all Middle Eastern wars of liberation. I told Donna this commercial was beneath her, but she insisted. She has a codependent relationship with her dog.”

Reggie growled. His fur furled tailbone and torso. It was deep dog dislike and instant indictment.

I said, “Donny DeFreeze? Like that SLA fool ‘Cinque’? Don’t tell me. You think he’s cool and relevant to this time of internal repression, and you regret that you were born white.”

Donna poked me. Reggie flared his flaps and flashed his fangs. DeFreeze detoured and mowed down a mike stand.

It toppled. I picked it up. Donna reached for Reggie and restrained him.

“Donny’s going to write my Anne Sexton show. He’s written some plays and spec scripts that caught my attention.”

Boy Toy/Butt Banger/Budding Bolshevik Bard—fuck him six ways from Sunday.

“Watch out for Donna. She’s more dangerous than you’ll ever know. And watch out for Reggie and me, because we’re right behind you.”

Reggie growled. His dick shot from the shaft. He vibed dog defiler and ridgeback rape-o.

Donna said, “Rick, you asshole.”

DeFreeze simpered sissified. His lips pursed perverted. Spit bubbles bipped out and spun.

“My best work hasn’t been produced yet, but I think you’ll find it shocking when you see it.”

Cryptic. Cruel. Fatalistically faggy. This hard-eyed homophile hiss.

I flipped his tie in his face. I stepped off the stage. Donna said, “Rick, you shit.”

I walked outside. I caught the crew with crullers and coffee. I saw a lipstick-red Lamborghini parked adjoining. The license plate read “DeFrzz.”

DIG THE DICHOTOMY: dog dissent to dog den delight.

I drove to Dave Slatkin’s dog shelter. I hooked up and homed in with his hounds. A canine cacophony warmed me—six brindle pit bulls full of love.

We shared oki pastrami burritos. We crafted a cross-species group grope. I pulled out a pallet. We all snuggled up.

I talked up Reggie’s resentment. I said Donna deftly demurred. This DeFreeze dipshit was writing her Sexton show. She couldn’t opt to offend him. She couldn’t call him on his Commie jive. Yeah, I was an asshole. I should have shut up.

The hounds heard me out. I told them I toasted a camel jockey. I mentioned the mattresses. Southside sleeper cell— maybe. We’d re-toss the crib tomorrow. More shit might turn up.

I dozed. Dog farts fanned. DeFreeze reprised and dug at me. He vibed parasitic pantywaist with molten mean streak. I didn’t want him working angles on Donna.

I called the DMV and plied a plate run. A clerk caught the “DeFrzz” stats and coughed up a make. The lipstick Lambo: long-term rental from Khalid’s Kustom Cars/Khalid Salaam, owner.

It fit the prick’s profile. Appropriate an appearance and hit Hollywood. Dun someone like Donna Donahue. Trap them and transfuse yourself. Latch on like a leech. Pile on like a piranha.

I dozed. I drifted. I slipped into slumber. Hound heartbeats held me. I felt this big canine caress.

I dreamed. Shondell Dineen and Webster Washington whipped through my wig. The ’92 riots. Nihilistic nostalgia. The sack of Sal’s Market, South-Central.

Dineen’s dinged with needle tracks, smug and smacked-back. He’s caught with a case of Cutty. Webster’s wearing a “Shaq Attack” sweatshirt. He’s got ten cartons of Kools and a shitload of Schlitz malt liquor.

They’ve got guns. They’re just out of the joint. They’ve got prison shoes—San Quentin sandals.

There’s Sal’s Market. They’re bopping out with booty. I’m going in.

SURPRISE!!!!!

I’ve got a Remington pump. One spread spritzes them. The Cutty cascades. The Schlitz shvitzes. Their collective last word is “motherfucker.”

I woke up. Donna Standard Time stung me. Let’s kommune with a kindred soul. Let’s kall Brandon Marti.

I dug through dogs and filched the phone. I dialed the Marti pad.

Brandon grabbed it. “Uh, yeah?”

“It’s me, kid.”

“Oh, hi, Uncle Rhino.”

Fleas flipped on the pallet. Pit bulls scrunched and scratched.

I said, “Did your dad tell you about the Arabs?”

“Uh, yeah. He said you popped Glaser slugs and fried the guy’s face. It sounded really cool.”

“The shooting board should clear us. The guy just iced our witness.”

“Uh, yeah. My dad said it was a good kill, but these stupid A-rab civil-rights groups might protest.”

“Let them. We’ve got right on our side, and—”

“You want to talk about Donna. I can always tell by your voice.”

I sighed soft. “You know me, kid.”

Brandon coughed. “My dad says you’re a loser in love. He said it’s okay for me to moon for Donna, because I’m a kid, but you should know better.”

A pit bull licked my face. Burrito breath blew.

“I’ve been places your dad’s never been. I think he’s jealous.”

“Maybe. Or maybe you’re just on to something he doesn’t understand.”

“I’ll buy that.”

“My English teacher gets it. He wrote his doctoral thesis on Donna. He’s really into her hold on men and all that. He said I could read it, because I’m a Donna guy, too.”

I yawned. “Make a copy for me, will you? You can drop it off here at the shelter.”

Brandon yawned. “Okay.”

“Goodnight, kid. Sweet Donna dreams.”

“Goodnight, Uncle Rhino. Good luck with the A-rabs.”

I hung up. I got loser-in-love lonely. I was too tired for a Stephanie stakeout. I wanted to Donna-diminuendo and sleep.

Donny DeFreeze dinged me. I decided to dig up derogatory dish. Let’s loop his life. Let’s look for larceny. No sale?—we’ll frappé and frame his ass then.

I dozed. Hurricane-hurled hazel eyes hammered me.

2.

The media mauled me. The radio rocked with it.

We caught the Coal Chute. Dave Slatkin drove. Tim ran the radio. This fucking fedayee Gazi Alli filleted me. It was civil-rights shit shorn of shape and reason. Two sharp Shiite sharifs— dead. Boo-hoo—two super Sufis. Rhino Rick rampages. He's tripped-out and trigger-happy. He's deep depressed. LAPD just shot him to a shrink.

I bounced in the backseat. Gazi gored my goat. Some personnel punk leaked him my package. Tim made the jackoff sign. Dave ditzed the dial. Some ballsy bitch ballyhooed the upcoming Oscars.

I groaned. Donna was set to attend. She was boyfriend-bereft now. She might take Dipshit DeFreeze.

We cut off the Coal Chute. We caught side streets to Saint Andrews. Bluesuits bloomed on our block. They cordoned back a camelhead cadre. Many Moors mingled. They shucked with shines and mouthed multicultural mayhem. They growled grievance in some spunky Spook-Arab Pact.

We parked outside the cordon and coursed through on foot. We rolled through Ramadan cut with Kwanzaa. Black Muslims materialized and mau-maued us with their eyes. Anti-Zionist zingers zipped by:

"Islam—not Israel!"/"Stop the LAPD Jew Jihad!"/"Gen-o-cide, gen-o-cide, LAPD and the Jews can't hide!"

We walked through. We made tracks through mini-Ramadan and parted the Red Sea of Resentment. We barged biiiiiiig. We shot out sharp elbows. We ripped through reefer smoke and toppled tallboys of Olde English 800.

There's the Rashad rancho—let's duck inside.

We did it. We laid up with some lab guys and print techs. They told us this:

Per prints—we latched on to some latents. We got Rashad's prints, we got glove prints boocoo. Match the mattresses to the glove prints—you craft a crash pad. Figure fingerprint-known felons. They gloved and hid their hands. Figure fuckheads with felonious intent.

Per the Pontiac—we impounded it and pounced on the panels. We found fourteen K in cash. We print-wiped inside and outside. The shooter's filed fingertips showed up—scuffed skin marks.

We flung floor mats. We found mucho matchbooks. They came from "gentlemen's clubs." Dig: Sandi's Sandbox, Lani's Lapdance, the Chrysanthemum Club. We found soiled clothes, dishes, and detergent in the trunk. We think Fire Face slept in his car.

A patrol sergeant dipped in and debriefed us. He told us this:

Patrolmen polled the locals. Said locals laid out Rashad. Many men popped by the pad. All Arabs, all hours. Some locals vibed terrorist trouble and buzzed the Feds.

Dave called his Fed connection and tracked the tips. His connection coughed up a conclusion. Yeah, we checked it out. No, we nabbed no known suspects. Habib Rashad—forget him—he's some falafel fuck.

Dave, Tim, and I huddled hard. We bounced the bug mikes in the Pontiac to the spackle-specked cameras in the pad. We talked. We threaded theories. We culled no conclusive shit at all.

I called the U.S. Passport Office. I fielded favors. I learned this:

The Pontiac passport had Fire Face's features and Habib Rashad's name. The address of record: Rashad's falafel hut.

A lab guy laid a morgue mug shot on us. There's Fire Face with his scorched skin scraped off. His face—now feature-firm and fit to make IDs off.

Tim called Pac Bell and racked up Rashad's phone records. He got short-shrift shit. Rashad buzzed his Falafel Fan biz repeatedly. Rashad rang nobody else.

Suspicious. Sleeper cell slippery—yeah, probably.

Dave, Tim, and I huddled hard. Rashad *had* to make more calls. Conclusion: He called from pay phones.

We walked outside. We genuflected to the genocide chanters and made them mad with the sign of the cross. We borrowed a black-and-white and whipped to Western Avenue—the nearest pay-phone-filled street.

We walked phone to phone and nabbed numbers. We found fifteen phones in a four-block stretch. Tim called Pac Bell back.

He gave them our pay-phone stats. He requested a readout on phone numbers called. The clerk said she'd have readout results tomorrow. She'd call the Cold Case Squad.

My phone rang. I read the display. Rob the snitch/Starbucks/ Beverly Hills.

Call it Donna communing with coffee. Call me too work-wigged to go.

We drove back to Rashad's rancho and dropped Dave off. Jigs chucked chicken wings and rib bones at our car. It was a barb-q bombardment. A multitude of malicious Muslims mean-mouthed us.

"Gen-o-cide! Gen-o-cide! LAPD and the Jews can't hide!"

FALAFEL FAN: A hajj hut at 34th and Vermont. A dervish dive from the get-go. A counter and picnic tables out front.

We parked and walked up. We gaped and guffawed at the menu: the "Palestine Pita," the "Soul Souvlaki," the "Shiite Shish-Kebab."

Baaaaad bow-tied Muslims at tables. Slicksters slurping up "Muhammad's Meatball Sub." A mean mosque mastiff behind the counter. He's spanking a spatula, he's grinding griddle grease, he's stirring steak chunks in lentil sauce.

We cut around the counter and dipped in the door. Grease granules griddle-hopped and grabbed me. Daddy-o did not deign to look at us. Call him one *cooool* Camelite Cal.

I said, “LAPD.”

Tim pulled out pix: the Fire Face morgue shot/the ’01 killers’ Identikits.

Cal speared his spatula. He lanced lamb and stirred steak. He glared at us. He glanced at the pix. His eyes racked up recognition. He said, “No. I do not know them. I tell you truth, now you leave.”

Tim said, “Habib Rashad’s dead. Who gets this place now?”

Camel Cal shrugged. “I get place. Mine now. Rashad my cousin. He was good man. He *Hafiz*.”

I flashed the matchbooks: Sandi’s Sandbox/Lani’s Lapdance/ Chrysanthemum Club. Camel Cal glanced and glowered. More recognition racked up.

“You guys hang out there, don’t you? You, Rashad, the dead guy in the picture.”

Cal shook his head. “No. Such places are for infidels. Good men never go.”

Tim said, “Shit, *I* go. I don’t see the big deal.”

“You infidel. I see you two in newspaper. You shoot man who shoot Rashad. You ‘trigger-happy.’ Arab League say that.”

I laffed. “Come on, man. He killed your cousin.”

“All Arabs my cousins. We unite against infidels. We spit on you.”

Tim laffed. Cal spit on the griddle. The loogie landed, sputtered, hissed.

I said, “Bugging microphones and surveillance cameras. We found them at Rashad’s house *and* in the shooter’s car. I think the two guys knew each other, and I think you know them *and* the liquor-store guys, *and* a fuckload of other Arabs up to no fucking good.”

Cal spit on the griddle. Cal spanked his spatula in griddle grease. His face flushed. His heartbeat hammered and vibrated veins. Tim bellied up to him.

“Here’s what I think. This dump is a message drop for Arab criminals. They get their mail here. They leave messages here. Your fuckhead friends come by for the fucking cat-meat couscous, and you—”

Cal swung the spatula. It caught Tim’s coat collar. It snared. It snagged. Tim kicked Cal in the balls.

He jackknifed. Tim judo-chopped him. He aimed at his Adam’s apple, all applied force. I jumped in. I nabbed Cal’s neck. I kicked his legs loose. I bent him backwards. I scorched his scalp on the grill.

He screamed. I bent him back. Hair frizzed and frazzled. I burned his long locks down to a crewcut.

Tim tossed the place.

He spilled spice racks. He dumped dishes. He climbed through a closet. He ripped through Ramadan robes, shot through shelves and nabbed mail.

Cal's hair sizzled. His crewcut burned down to a butch.

MAIL:

We popped to Parker Center and went through it. It indicated infidels and hajjite horndogs.

Flyers for gentlemen's clubs/matches to our matchbooks, plus the Honey Bunny and Dawn's Dugout. Outcall hooker ads— grabber graphics, clipped newspaper stock. Skin magazines/dog-eared pages/vivid ads for 1-800-VIAGRA. Gun shop inventories, insidious. Buy-by-mail Mac10s and Magnums.

Whoa!—Lani's Lapdance meets Cool Coed Outcall meets Pan-Patriot Guns. Fetishistic fotos—gone girls in garters. Stacked Stewardess Outcall. Viagra vertiginous. Six down-and-dirty dick-enlargement ads.

Dave, Tim, and I huddled. Dave sicced SIS surveillance on the Falafel Fan. We left Camel Cal shorn like a sandal-clad Sam-son. He might rabbit or free-form freak out. He might lose it and lead us to the liquor-store cats.

Pac Bell—no callback yet. No make on the pay-phone calls. The shooting board—tapped for Tuesday next. Call the kill kosher—I knew we'd walk. Our prime priority: Prowl the gentlemen's clubs.

We laid out our list. We divvied destinations. I got the Honey Bunny and Sandi's Sandbox.

I solo-sailed to the City of Commerce. It was all industrial interspersed with stinky strip malls. Lap-dance lairs were laid out next to nail nooks and fast-food joints. It was murky multicultural. Hopped-up Hondurans, kool-kat Koreans, Sufis and sushi-heads. White Man's L.A., where you at?

I hit Sandi's Sandbox. Listless Latinas lap-danced and stripped to strobe lights. The audience was the *Coon*ited Nations—immigrant duskies in deep despair, digging on 4:00 p.m. dark.

I badged the boss. He flipped me a flashlight. I roamed the runways and paraded my pix. Lap-dance Louies and Lolitas looked at them. I lashed up one long no, nix and *nyet*.

The Honey Bunny buttressed a Burmese burger barn and a mex *mariscos* dive. I badged in bold. The doorman sulked subservient and seated me ringside. The dump was dead dark. The runway bristled in bright light. A white wench wiggled to dated disco music. My eyes stung, stigmatic. I blinked and got full sight.

I saw one long lap-dance loop around the runway. Girls girded themselves over chumps in chairs and hip-humped it home. I dunned the doorman for a flashlight. I looped the loop and laid out my pictures. I lashed through a line of loser longing.

The girls saw my pix, the geeks saw my pix, no one coughed confirmation up.

“I don’t know them.” “Who are they?” “We don’t get many A-rabs here.” “Who’s that guy with the burned-up face, he sure looks funny.” “Oh, *ick.* They look like Saddam Hussein.”

I returned to my ringside rack. I felt beat-up and *bush*whacked and slapped by my slink though Saddam and Gomorrah. I dug for Donna. I shut my eyes for showtime. I shut out the Junkie Jill on the runway and dunned Donna up.

She laughed. We held hands in Holmby Hills. We tossed treats to Reggie Ridgeback. She hammed it up on *Homicide Heat.*

Somebody tapped me. A corpulent Korean and a nifty nude Nadine stood next to me. I coughed and called up my cop self. I said, “LAPD.”

The guy said, “A-rabs, huh? I see some in here.” The woman said, “I’m from Tel Aviv. Oy, Arabs I know from, believe me.”

I showed my pix. Identikit killers and Fire Face—now dig on it.

They stood still. They stared. They studied. They *both* tapped the pix.

The guy said, “I see guys like the guys in the pictures in here. Maybe two, three months ago. They spend lots of money.”

Tel Aviv Tanya said, “I danced for the man with the peeled face. It was like last week. He said he was depressed, he feared his death, tsuris like that. Oy, did he party hard, and spend money. I said, ‘Honey, for you there’s no tomorrow,’ and now you show me this.”

I gulped. “Credit cards. Did they use—”

The guy cut in. “Cash only here. Credit cads not okay.” *Money—where from?* Three heists in ’01, chump change takes all. The Falafel Fan—minor moneymaker. Rashad: “no intention of performing terrorist acts”/“just wanted to enjoy themselves”/ “You know the term ‘party hearty’?”

Maybe—a rift—*real* terrorists vs. party pigs. *But*—Fire Face “was depressed”/“he feared his death”/“ ‘for you there’s no tomorrow.’ ”

Say that says suicide shit?

My cell phone rang. The display dilated. Pat at Pacific Dining Car—that means Donna’s there.

Tanya said, “I did the Arab in his car. He was hung like a Hebrew National salami.”

DONNA DINED SOLO. She noshed noodles and char-broiled chicken. She saw me and flipped me off.

“Rick, you fuck. You were a shit with Donny.”

I barged into her booth. “Are you doing him?”

“No, but I may do him just to mess with you.”

I laffed. I sipped her seltzer. I shagged a shrimp in Alfredo sauce.

“What do you know about him?”

Donna sighed. “He’s rich from dot-com investments. He’s living in the old Clark Gable house in Malibu, Casa de Suenos. He’s writing spec scripts and trying to break into the business.”

“Where did you meet him?”

“At a party. I saw him talking to Lou Pellegrino—you know, the ‘Private Eye to the Stars.’ He’d heard that I wanted to do an Anne Sexton show, and so we started talking Sexton. He has a Web site, in case you’re interested.”

Pellegrino: strong-arm goon, shakedown sharpie. Slick sleazemonger. Ripe-rumored extortionist. Pint-sized pit bull/longtime lapdog for the Hollywood elite.

I said, “Reggie hates DeFreeze. What does that tell you?”

“Reggie is a *dog.* I don’t credit him with ESP. I’m not some addled pet owner.”

I freed French fries and wrapped them in relish. Tasty shit— yum yum.

“*I* hate DeFreeze. What does that tell—”

“That you’re my best friend and *very* occasional lover. That you hate him on GP. That the LAPD just sent you to a shrink, that you killed a man in the line of duty, and you’re running a little raw right now.”

I laffed. I held Donna’s hands under the table. My pant python perked up.

“It’s been six months. I keep waiting for something to happen that will stir us up again.”

Donna squeezed my hands. “You can’t *will* it. And *I* can’t keep shooting people and getting embroiled in your crazy life all the time.”

Sadness slid up and slammed me. My python sidled south and *de*-perked.

“Twice in *twenty-one* years? That’s not *all* the time.”

Donna sighed. “I’m almost fifty years old. How did *my* life get so wild and fucked up?”

I HIT A mocha mecca on Mariposa and Wilshire. I jacked up some java. The joint was serve-yourself-cyberspace—two terminals, pay-as-you-play, computer hookups.

I Internet-invaded. I walked Web sites. I hit Donny DeFreeze name combinations. I pulled the punk’s page up. Dig— DeFreezeworld.net.

Script scrolls. Excerpts from:

“Eldridge Cleaver, Revolutionary Rapist”: “You don’t understand, baby. Dis be de ’60s. Every time I rapes a white woman, it be a blow against The Establishment and

The Man."

"Black Panther Shootout—People's Revolt Against LAPD": "You gots to dig it, baby. Dis be 1969. We be waging war on de pigs."

"SLA Insurrection—Southside Gundown with LAPD": "Listen to me, baby. Dis be soul brother Cinque DeFreeze talkin'. It be 1974 now. We's kidnapped Patty Hearst, now it be time to lay some race war on Mr. Charlie."

"Palestinian Payback: The End Justifies the Means": Listen, my Islamic brother! It is now 2003! The time has come to smite the American insect! Hear me now, my fedayee!"

"Harvey Glatman, Sex-Fiend Saint": "You fuzz don't get it. It's 1958, diggit? Those three kool kittens I strangled prophesy the '60s. I predict some king-size chaos, you sound me?"

Puerile pap. Punk pontification. Anticop communistic. *Nigger* dly nostalgic. Left-wing lunacy.

Glamour Girl Slayer: Harvey Glatman, posing as a fashion photographer, bound, raped, and murdered aspiring starlets. *(Los Angeles Times Collection, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA)*

Harvey Glatman—glaring non sequitur. Glatman glommed three women '57–'58. He posed as a photographer. He leeched off lonely hearts listings. He photo-fucked and vilely violated his victims. He was a rope freak and a bondage buffoon. He dumped his devastated damsels in the desert. His fourth victim fought him off. He fried 9/59 at Big Q.

?????

The A-rab stuff stung me. A dune-coon *coon*ection dug in.

DeFreeze rented a lipstick-red Lamborghini. It was one cool *coon*tach—let's *coon*template this.

He rented it from Khalid's Kustom Cars/Khalid Salaam, owner.

?????

I MAINLINED MORE mocha and made tracks for Malibu. I knew Casa de Suenos. I worked off-duty security there, circa '77. It was a spanking-white Spanish pad by the sea.

Sea breezes bristled. Night air nudged my noggin. Coffee coursed through me. I popped up Pacific Coast Highway. I saw the pad, pulled a U-turn, and parked.

There's the casa. Let's be casual. It's perched on PCH, two doors down.

I walked over. I lugged my evidence kit. I popped by the porte cochere. There's the lipstick Lamborghini. There's a boss Bentley sedan. There's a beaming Beemer. The plate reads "Lou P."

Probably the property of: prick private eye Lou Pellegrino.

Be bold now—bring it on brazen.

I laid my kit on the Lambo. I prepared print powder. I tricked up transparency strips. I powdered the driver's-side door and lifted two latents.

I stashed the strips. I closed my kit. I loped around the pad left to right. A walkway whipped back to the water. I walked it and watched window light. I kicked up mounds of mortar dust. I perv-peeped that light.

I saw cheezy furniture—rock-bottom rental stuff. I saw loads of leftist wall pix. There's sick Cinque. There's rape-o Cleaver. There's blasphemous Black Panther shots.

I bopped back to the beach. I ducked by a deck. Bedroom light bounced.

There's demented Donny DeFreeze. He's full-out fucking on a futon. He's making it with a mid-60s mama. She's careful-coiffed. She's wrinkle-ridged. She's age-addled but fuckable-fit.

She's got her eyes shut. Donny's drilling her draconian. His eyes hop with hate.

3.

I shot to the shelter. Pit bulls pounced. A dog daisy chain developed. Donny DeFreeze diminuendoed and disappeared. I settled in for an eight-dog nite.

I fed the pits burrito bites. Brandon Marti made good on that manuscript. I found it on a shelf.

Her Lonely Places: Donna Donahue Deconstructed by James Ellington.

The pits piled on. A terrier territory enclosed me. I scrunched up a dog-dandered pillow. Let's rack out and read.

Ellington wrote elegant. His Donna jones-jumped. He rocked home wild riffs.

"Per Donna Donahue's physical force. It is manifestly powerful and stems from facial features that suggest strength of character, kindness, decency, and a concurrent playfulness and reticence. Here paradox reigns. Suggestions run bipartite. 'I am an open book'/'It's an open book I'll never let you fully understand.' "

Ellington elaborated. He riffed on "mid-range celebrity" synced to "television viewer demographics" synced to a "rapidly fluctuating media culture that feeds off a fickle yearning for the newness and nearness of youth." He states: "Ms. Donahue retains an implacable hold on men as she ages and her presence more and more strongly suggests a sensuality grounded in wisdom." Her never-married status denotes her as an "opportunist of love" who operates from a "passion for the moment" undercut by a stern desire "never to dilute her oneness through subservience to any man," a reluctance perhaps influenced by "astute childhood readings of the Donahue family dynamic and early awareness of parental dysfunction."

Woo hoo! Call this cat one deep Donnaphile!

"Los Angeles is a media center and rumor mill. Two oft-told bits of Donna Donahue lore pertain to her participation in chains of violent events in 1983 and last fall in 2004. The details recounted in rumor—varied and wholly disparate in nature—all relate to her sporadic involvement in covert investigations initiated by the Los Angeles Police Department."

Ring-a-ding! Rip it to Rhino Rick! Lay it on LAPD!

Ellington riffed on that rumor. Donna had scintillating secrets. She staked a clandestine claim on her own heart and held hungers back. She pulsed for possibility. She downscaled and dimmed her romantic expectations. She lived as a lightning rod. She wished up wild and wicked webs and waltzed through them worshipful and wistful for more. She feared her spirit to spark cataclysm. She prized the prosaic in calamitous counterpoint.

Ellington nailed Donna. Ellington nailed the distance between us. Ellington nailed *me.*

I MARCHED THROUGH the manuscript. I dog-eared Donna-deep pages. Pit bulls slipped into slumber beside me. I slid into sleep.

A-rabs assaulted my ass. Some shit-for-brains Shiites fucked me with fatwas à la Salman Rushdie. Donny DeFreeze cornholed a camel. Saddam Hussein handed Harvey Glatman a harem and strands of stranglers' rope. Sleazy sleeper cells. Lurid lap dances. Rhino herds gorge on Palestinian pitas and Muhammad's Meatball Subs. That sissified psychologist says, "Rhino, you're sick."

Demons descend on Donna. Some asshole ayatollah damns her with a death decree. Big-toothed bats bombard her. Surreptitious serpents surf up her legs.

I stirred. I stood. The pit pile disbursed. I saw *Her Lonely Places*. It hit me *haaaaaaard*. That text tells why she'll never love me from here to heaven's heights.

I lost it. I lobbed dog crates at the west wall. I dumped dog dishes. I kicked kibble bags. I bombed the back wall with bags of Barko Bits All-American Dog Chow.

The pit bulls loved it. They hopped, howled, and humped me. They licked me and laid on their love.

THE TIRADE TIGHTENED my wig. I dusted off dog dander and drove downtown.

I hit Parker Center. I laid the Lambo prints on a print tech. He promised rapid results. I talked to Tim and Dave. We down-and-dirty discussed our visits to the gentlemen's clubs.

I talked up Tanya's tale. Tim and Dave dittoed me. They canvassed and caught the same feedback. Fuck—party-hearty Arabs/ death talk/deep depression. Slide me, Slick—is this sleeper-cell shit?

And—where did they dig up their *dinero*?

Dave dished out a hot lead. Danielle at Dawn's Dugout—not at work yesterday. A boogie barkeep said she's got some ace A-rab tips. Rhino, you roll on that—she shifts on at 6:00.

Our landline lit up. Tim took the call. Ping—Pac Bell reports. They ran the pay-phone calls. They got an instant incongruity. Four days, 49 calls to 432 East 49th Street/Hassan Sufeer, the Sufi subscriber.

DARKTOWN AGAIN— Coonecticut and Jigaboo Junction.

We caught the Coal Chute code 2. We climbed in close to the old SLA-shootout pad. Donny DeFreeze ruminations ripped me—the punk rang me wrong.

We hit the house. It was pulsating peach stucco stuck on sinking cinderblocks. We rang the doorbell. We racked up no response. We shoulder-shoved the door in.

Dig this—the dive's deserted.

No pricey prayer rugs. No camel-furred furniture. No couscous or kebab casserole ware in the kitchen. No mattresses, no minarets, no mini-mosque accoutrements.

We tossed the pad. We closet-climbed. We rolled room to room. We crawled crevices and crannies. We found this:

Takeout-food debris. Stale stuff stuck in Styrofoam containers. Putrefied pita pockets, picked-at pizza, moth-munched meatball marinara.

Escort-service brochures. Bright fotos. Wild wenches with whips—white women all. Bleached blondes blooming in pink peignoirs. Comely Caucasoids to whore with hordes of dark-skinned scoundrels.

A strand of rolled-up rope, flaring out a floor beam. Blistered and blood-bleached.

Scary. A scalding find. Scorched skin that tore off at a touch.

We room-to-room rocked and re-tossed. No more shit showed up. Dave buzzed the Feds. He said we sailed through this safe house—grok this grave alert.

We bopped outside. Porch monkeys perused us. We hopped house to house. We canvassed. We blew block to block. We paraded our pix and caught this:

The house—a hajj hive and camel cave from jump street. Two Arabs in attendance—the coarse cats in the Identikits. Wild-ass white women wending by, all hours of the nite. The A-rabs—"dey moves out yesterday."

Call it cold:

Two mosque minions *morte*—Rashad and Fire Face. The insidious Islamics learn this and leave for the lurch.

My cell phone rang. I caught the call. The print guy delivered on Donny DeFreeze—match-up and major rap sheet.

WE DROVE BACK to Parker Center. The print guy shot me the sheet. CII on Donny DeFreeze—real name Jomo Kenyatta Perry.

Born in Berkeley, 12/8/72. Father unknown. Mother: sulky SLA succubus Nancy Ling Perry.

Named after monstrous mau-mau Jomo Kenyatta. Hellbound-hatched before the Patty Hearst snatch. Two extortion busts, Alameda County.

Nancy Ling Perry, a member of the Symbionese Liberation Army and participant in the 1974 robbery of the Hibernia bank in San Francisco. Killed in the SLA shootout. *(Photo courtesy of the LAPD)*

He beats both beefs. They're fruit shakes. He's a shakedown shill. He keesters cats while his comrades catch it on camera.

He humps homos. They're closet clowns in deep cover. The cops catch on. The fruitcake Freddies freak and refuse to cooperate.

The rap sheet ran rife with rumors. "Subject is said to have moved to the Los Angeles area." "Subject is said to harbor strong left-wing, anti-American sentiments." "Subject is said to strongly identify with radical groups of the 1970s, particularly those of the black-nationalist ilk."

Despicable Donny. Noxious negrophile. Leftist-loser legacy. Butt banger. Pro-Sambo, anti-Uncle Sam. This jejune jungle bunny manqué, "Jomo Kenyatta."

My thoughts jumped and jumbled. Donny. Donna. Lou Pellegrino —*Hollywood* shakedown man—

DAWN'S DUGOUT: A dank dump in the soiled San Gabriel Valley. A raunch ranch off Rosemead Boulevard.

I ambled in ambivalent. I was terrorist-torqued and ditzed on Devil Donny DeFreeze. I wanted to clear my multiple murder case. I wanted to rid Donna of Dirty Donny and bop back bold to her bed.

The Dugout defined the word "dive." Down-and-dirty divas danced disco despair on a wraparound runway. Horndogs huddled at ringside tables. Said tables tilted and tipped. The horndogs pounded their puds under tabletop cover. Their hamsters hopped in their hands.

I badged a big bouncer. He bid me back to the dressing room. Danielle lounged on a lavender loveseat. She wore a white bikini. She skimmed skank in the *National Tattler.* She was all augmentation and titillating tattoos.

I said, "LAPD." She said, "Whatever it is, I didn't do it."

The bouncer bopped off. I straddled a stray chair and eyeballed Danielle. She was hickey-hived and herpes-sored and rug-burned from ruts on shag carpet. She was twenty-two going on dead.

She popped a pimple on one patella. Pus puffed putrescent. I noted her needle-notched arms.

"I said, 'Whatever it is, I didn't do it.' I tested clean my last three times. You can ask my PO."

I shook my head. "It's not about you."

"*So.* So, like, who *is* it about?"

I pulled my pix. "A barman here said you had some recent dealings with Arabs."

Danielle tossed her *Tattler.* Danielle rolled her eyes righteous. Danielle rubbed her rug burns rough.

"These two guys kept coming in and throwing money around. They, like, kept spending these fortunes. I lap-danced them, like, maybe fifteen times, but I wouldn't *do* them, 'cause I didn't like their vibe."

I flashed Fire Face. Danielle nodded no. I showed the Identikits. Danielle yipped and said, “Yes.”

“Those are the guys?”

Danielle flipped them the finger. “Like I’d do two A-rabs, after 9/11 and all.”

“Did you talk to them?”

“Yeah, about these ‘adult movies’ they were making. I said I don’t do fuck flicks, ’cause, like, my dad might see them. He rents all this, like, sex shit on the Internet. He’s sort of a perv, but he’s my dad, and I love him.”

I said, “What else did you talk to them about?”

“*Nothing.* They wanted me to do them, I said no. They wanted me to act in these fuck flicks, I vibed bad shit and said no. I can read vibes and auras, and, like, these guys were no good. All this was like last week, and they haven’t been back.”

An intercom popped. “Danielle, you’re on in two minutes.”

I stood up. Danielle stood up. She slithered and slipped off her bikini. She silicone-sizzled and bounced in the buff.

We floated back floorside. More horndogs hand-humped, more tables tipped. The door dipped. A man walked in. He was sweaty and swarthy and beaky Bedouinesque. Danielle said, “Fuck, that’s—”

HIM. This mosque monster, this camelhead killer, Mr. Identikit—

He saw me. His hands hopped and held heat. Ten feet between us. These two Glocks gleamed.

He fired. Muzzle smoke smacked me. Powder particles parsed out, *pfffft.* The shots shattered chandelier glass. Danielle ducked. The horndogs horror-howled.

I pulled my piece. I fired fast. My shots whipped wide. They striated off a straight line and struck a stereo rig. A sound system exploded. A disco dirge dimmed and died.

I fired. He fired. Muzzle light blazed and blinded us. Shots shivved and ripped runway wood and dinged off course in the dark.

Ricochets rang wrong, banged the bar and broke bottles. Lap dancers lurched off laps and laid on the floor. Nude dancers dove off the runway.

I fired. He fired. Blinding blasts, nuke noise, chandelier shrapnel. Hammer clicks, empty clip, *his* hammer clicks.

I ran to him. I rubbed my eyes. I tipped tables and nailed nude women in the dark.

I GOT MYsight back. The A-rab got away. A shooting team showed.

They yelled. They yodeled this “you again” number. It was Sheriff’s jurisdiction. Twelve deputies dipped by—puerile patrol pups all.

They horned out and hit on the dancers. They stood around and strung together statements. A Sheriff's crime-lab crew crawled the floor and spun up spent shells.

I ducked out. I dunked down to Darktown. Dusk dimmed East 49th Street. The porch-monkey parade was indoors.

I slid up to Sufi Sufeer's safe house. I picked the lock and slipped in. I re-tossed the rooms *rapidamente.*

I tore though the first toss and rang up no new results. I walked the walls and worked the wood for fake panels. I tapped. I honed my ears for hollowness. I roamed room to room. I hit solid wood, warped wood—whoa, what's this?

The living room. Thorough thumps/hollow hits/one panel pulsates.

I probed and pried up a loose piece of wood. The edge caught and cut my fingers. I yanked, I pulled, the panel popped free.

Inside: a hollowed-out hidey hole. One shelf of hidden booty.

More rope. Blood-blistered again. More scorched skin that tore off at a touch.

Polaroid pix. Fucked-up fetishistic. Bound-and-gagged women. Naked and nervous-eyed. Scared and skin-scorched in rough wraps of rope.

Stringy stretch marks. Awful augmentations. Hickey hives, needle notches, rude rug burns—lap-dance-Lola types.

I POUNCED on a pay phone. I dialed Dave at home. He knew about Dawn's Dugout. I shared Danielle's fuck-film revelations. He said the shooting board scheduled a second session with me.

You shoot too much. You got shrink-wrapped by Doc Kurland. Your latest shootout sure says shrinkage to me.

Dave digressed. The Feds kicked back on Hassan Sufeer: no wants, no warrants, no known terrorist ties. A Fed forensic team was set to surf the safe house tomorrow. I said *I* re-tossed it. I found more bloody rope. I found fetish fotos. It vibed tie-ins to gentlemen's clubs.

Dave said he'd call the clubs and try to clear clues. He'd stress fuck flicks, fetish fotos, and misogynistic mayhem. Put the pix on my desk—we'll canvass clubs with them.

I hung up and headed to Parker Center. I felt Donna-deprived, Donna-depressed, Donna-driven. I ran the radio. I stuck to all-news stuff. Some Sheriff's shit shouted per the "Dawn's Dugout Disaster."

Danielle mauled the mike. "I was, like, talking to this LAPD guy. We talked about these A-rabs, and this A-rab just walked in the door! I want to say hi to my dad, and, like, reassure him that I never did the A-rab, because I remember 9/11. Is that okay?"

I turned it off. A notion nudged me. It blistered me, blossomed, and bloomed.

The bound-and-gagged pix—fucking familiar. Let that Rhino remembrance ring.

The memory moved sideways. It dipped to Dave Slatkin. Dave—savvy pseudo-psychic/crime historian.

His photo stash. Sex-crime sensations. Sick shit shorn from old ’50s files.

I *knew* it now. I couldn’t quite *say* it.

I hit Parker Center. I dove on Dave’s desk. I drove through his drawers and found IT.

Filched file forms. Bound-and-gagged women. 8/1/57, 3/8/58, 7/20/58. Judy Ann Dull, Shirley Ann Bridgeford, Ruth Rita Mercado.

Identical poses. The ’50s meet the millennium. Harvey Glatman’s three vics.

My brain broiled. Fotos. Fuck films. Bug mikes in Fire Face’s purple Pontiac. Habib Rashad’s pad—surveillance cams, spackle-spotted—there. A spray of spackle-type mortar by the Donny DeFreeze pad.

Donny DeFreeze—shakedown man—fruit shakes in Frisco. Donny pours the pork to that mama-san in Malibu. Donny, aka Jomo Kenyatta.

He’s left-wing. He wickedly worships Arabs. He rented his lipstick Lambo from Khalid’s Kustom Cars. He spat out a Harvey Glatman spec script.

Donna—where does she—

I called her house. I buzzed her cell phone. I got two machines. I made for Malibu meeeean and *maaaaaaaad.*

CASA DE SUENOS— call it Hell House or Shakedown Shack now.

I parked on PCH. I saw the lipstick Lambo. I saw Lou Pellegrino’s boss Beemer. I saw a Rolls Corniche in the porte cochere.

No Donna-mobile Mercedes. Surf sounds and salty air.

I cut around the casa. I looped left and back. I dipped up to the deck. There’s the bedroom. I window-watched.

There’s Jomo-Donny. There’s a shakedown-sharp two-way mirror. There’s a movie-biz matriarch I met at Ma Maison. I was bodyguarding Bad Bill Clinton, Secret Service adjunct. This limousine liberal Lorna Lowenstein was there.

Donna dished dirt on her. She threw political parties and pined for penis in her senescent seventies. Her hubby hustled teenage talent at some agency. The marriage was meshugina. He banged bun buddies on the Boys’ Town Strip.

I watched Jomo jump her geriatric bones. I saw her lips latch his love muscle and leech. I saw them sidle sideways and suck soixante-neuf.

It was licentiously leftist and corrosively communistic. Lorna loved it. Jomo simmered in self-loathing and munched muff with homoized hate.

I bopped to the back door. I picked the lock and let myself in.

I hooked down a hallway. Let’s catch the camera cubbyhole. Let’s lay out Lou Pellegrino. Let’s—

My back. Something sharp and shivlike. Shivers and this needle-nuclear *hush*—

IT’S AFRICA OR ARABIA. Trans-Zulu Airlines transports me. The cargo hold’s cacophonous, carniverous, and cannibalistic. I’m this rhino reposed with four-hump camels and four-foot pygmies.

We bolt down Barko Bits Dog Chow. A mau-mau minstrel show materializes and makes us mew meek. Stephanie Gorman blanches in blackface. Donny DeFreeze scores a skin-tone transfusion and jigs out as Jomo for real.

We lurch and land. My line-of-duty dead disembark in a dirge. There’s the Garcia brothers. There’s Huey Muhammad 6X. There’s Webster Washington and Shondell Dineen.

They tug my rhino horn and torment me. I tear loose and light out for L.A. I hoof-hump hundreds of miles. A loopy landscape liberates me.

It’s some doofus dystopia. Sand dunes meet Mount Kilimanjaro. Spear-chucking spooks spill crockpots of Christian-missionary stew. I graze gratefully. The sacrilege satisfies me. I cultivate communion. I willfully whip down white wafers. The spooks spill a second helping. I grunt, growl, and gorge.

I sigh and psychedelicize. I see Russ Kuster and Osama Bin Laden. Donna peppers a Palestine pita. Mount Kilimanjaro morphs to Darktown L.A.

There’s Fire Face and Habib Rashad. There’s cross-cultural confusion. Osama opens the Muezzin Market. It caters to coons and comes up with deep discounts on welfare-check day. The store stocks malt liquor and Kool cigarettes. Osama offers offal— hair-o-wine, crack cocaine, choice chicken wings. Reggie Ridgeback rips through ribs and coughs up collard greens. Danielle dances at Dawn’s Dugout and digs on her “Dad.”

I jerked. My knees struck a steering wheel and ditzed a dashboard. My eyes popped. My periphery pulsated. I caught *my* car seat. I squinted and squared up a windshield. I saw a dawn beach.

The motherfuckers Mickey Finned me. It made me *maaaaaaaaaaaaaaad.*

4.

My head hurt. My bones burned. I felt sideswiped and psychedeli*fried.* My mad mood magnified.

I couldn’t juke Jomo-Donny just yet. I B&E’d his beach pad. I left myself open to legal meshugas. I had to hand Donna hard truths on her scurrilous scribe. I had to jiggle the Jomo/Arab *coon*ection.

Dawn bristled into bright daylight. I hit Holmby Hills and slid my sled up Donna’s driveway. Her Mercedes was missing. She probably bombed out for her morning mocha.

I waited in the backyard. I popped up to the patio and perched. Reggie ran over. I raked his ridge and ruminated romantic. Rhino Rick and Donna, let's rock.

Mickey Finn dregs drifted through me. They made me muse poetic. I called up quotes from *Her Lonely Places.* Let's send a cell-phone selection of lit-lifted love.

I punched in Donna's number. Her voice-mail message melted me mellifluous. I parsed out paraphrases.

"You retain your implacable hold on men as you age and your presence more and more strongly suggests a sensuality grounded in wisdom."

"You're my 'opportunist of love.' You have a stern desire never to dilute your oneness through subservience to any man."

My phone fucked up. The connection cut off. Reggie reclined by my feet.

I talked to him. I tried for James Ellington eloquence. I said, "I'm afraid we'll never happen again. She only capitulates to me in fits and starts. Things might be getting crazy like they did those two other times, but twice in twenty-one years can never sustain me."

Reggie nuzzled my knees. I notched it up. I said, "It kills me. I always have to rely on outside events to bring us together. If I could think of a formula, or a phrase, or any kind of strategy that would hold us through plain old everyday life, I'd be the richest, most grateful motherfucker on earth."

A breeze sent me scents. There's sandalwood soap. There's almond after-bath. There's mocha melting off morning breath.

I turned around. I saw Donna. She said, "Okay, sweetie. For a little while, at least."

WE DID IT AGAIN. We threw ourselves into *Rick-Donna 3.*

We tried to tame time. We lay down and lasted long. Time tricked us and trumped us before. Every touch told time to stay away and let us make these moments meld.

Donna brought me a new body. She'd softened in the six months since our last *then.* This *then* became our new *now.* We kissed, caressed, tasted. Her hips flared and flattened and rolled into her ribs. I spanned the whole spread with my hands.

She tasted. I tasted. Sandalwood soap, after-bath balm, my up-all-night sweat. I swirled. Her tastes nabbed me new. Preciously private—my brave bride a third time—thrill me both *then* and *now* new.

We tricked time. We trailed our kisses and caresses and took our tastes new places and waited and went wild with the new. We fell into our meld in a soft sync. Her hurricane-hurled hazel eyes led me through.

SLEEP. SLIDING GLASS. One-way wall peeks aimed at *us.*

I woke up. I felt fur. Reggie Ridgeback rolled and chucked his chin on my chest.

Donna sat over me. She wore a salmon satin wrap. I looked around. I found the phone. Reggie's head was heavy. Donna held my hands.

"Tell me. Something's wrong, or you wouldn't be here at seven a.m., looking like you slept in your car."

I yawned. "It's about DeFreeze."

Donna said, "Of course it is. You've got that 'Where's the phone, I've got to call Dave Slatkin' look, and we only get back together when there's some dead people involved."

I yawned. Reggie yawned. Donna said, "*Tell me.*"

I said it simple, sotto voce, stock-still stoic and *sloooooooow.*

"DeFreeze is an extortionist. He was shaking down fags in San Francisco, and he's extorting rich old women here. He's very probably involved in my Arab snuff case."

Donna squirmed and squeezed my hands. Donna said, "Fuck"—sloe-eyed and *sloooooooow.*

"Do you believe me?"

"Of course. I was starting to think he plagiarized this Anne Sexton script proposal he showed me, and you just confirmed it."

"I'm sorry."

"I'm not. Jesus, and I was going to take him to the Academy Awards next week."

I yawned. Reggie yawned. I raked his ridge. Donna said, " *Fuck.*"

I filched the phone. Donna ducked from the room. I dialed Dave.

"Cold Case Unit. Detective Slatkin."

"It's me."

"Shit. Where have you—"

"Don't ask. Have you—"

"Yeah, I canvassed the gentlemen's clubs and showed those fetish pix around. There were no dancers missing, but I got more IDs on our Identikit guys, and more confirmations that they tried to get the girls to appear in so-called adult films."

Insidious. Shit circles and surfaces surefire—

"Rick, are you there?"

"I'm here. Dave, do you know Lou Pellegrino?"

"Sure. He's this fuckhead PI."

I yawned—fuck—that mean Mickey Finn.

"He sandbagged me. Have Tim put a stationary tail on his office."

"All right. But will you exp—"

"Yeah, I'll explain when I see you."

Dave sighed. Dave read the sign—Rhino on a roll. I hung up. I rolled Reggie off me. I dipped into the den.

Donna watched TV. News footage filled the screen. I saw the smog-smacked San Gabriels. I recognized a ridge line. A crime-lab crew crawled for clues. A Sheriff's dick talked.

". . . we've got slight decomposition of the bodies, and we've tentatively ID'd all three women as prostitutes employed by the Cool Coed and Stacked Stewardess outcall services. Further examination of the bodies revealed that—"

The cop-ese coursed into gibberish. A cold sweat swarmed me. The fetish fotos. The safe house. Falafel Fan. The outrageous outcall brochures.

Donna tapped me telepathic. Her hard hazels hurled.

"It's us. Isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Is this *Brave New World 3*?"

"Yes."

Donna smiled. "Let's try not to kill anyone, *please.*"

SMOG SMOLDERED AND hid the hills. We mowed through Monrovia and made the scene.

I badged us by the cordon. We moved by the meat wagon. I craned a look and caught the corpses within.

Three women. The ones from the bound-and-gagged pix. Nude. Neck abrasions—rope-wrap burns for real.

It was a glaring glut of Glatmanism. It was DeFreeze depravity. It socked me soul sick.

Donna looked in. Donna called up old Catholicism and signed the sign of the cross.

The safe house. The blood-blistered rope. *Scorched skin that tore off at a touch.*

I bug-eyed the bodies. I saw slight sunburns. Make it movie-camera lights. Probable overlighting. Fucked-up filmmakers. Awful A-rab amateurs. The Identikit Islamics. The gentlemen's clubs—"Come on, baby. You make film with us."

A thought snagged me. *Snuff films.* Some terrorist tie-in. Camel jockey conundrum.

Party-hearty Palestinians vs. real Jihadites.

Donna tipped some tears out. I stared at the corpses and called up Stephanie G. Deputies dipped by. Detectives dug in the dirt by the dump site. A coroner cornered a ranking cop. He caught Donna sidelong. He righteously recognized her. His eyes said, "Say what?"

Vivid voices overlapped. Cop talk cascaded: "time of death," "rectal temperature," "last seen alive," "dumped after dark."

Two detectives saw us and sidled over. I didn't want to share my shit. I steered Donna off.

She said, "How much of this is Donny?"

"I don't know."

"Let's take him down."

I said, "Not yet."

SHE HAD TO hear the horror. I dished the dirt on Donny and tattled the tie-ins. Donna delivered *her* dirt. She figured the fuck for a fag. She slowly slipped to the fact that he didn't dig sexy Anne Sexton. She told him to scoot her some script pages. He deftly demurred. She grokked something grave. He might be wickedly working her. He's ugly, he's usurious. His motives run ulterior.

We winged west. I cell-phoned Dave Slatkin and shorthand shored up my case. Dave said he'd set SIS out to tail Jomo-Donny. I said whip a wiretap, too. Hotwire his house and seize his cell-phone calls. Dave said he'd dun Deputy D.A. Daisy Delgado. She'd write warrants quicksville.

I hung up. Donna said Lou P.'s the linchpin. I said yeah, he's the shakedown shit supreme. I buzzed Tim. I caught his cell service. He'd left me a voice message.

"I'm in the garage at Pellegrino's building. It's 9166 Sunset."

We nudged north. We sailed out Sunset. We bopped to the building and sunk into a subterranean garage.

There's parking slots and deep Dempsey Dumpsters. There's Tim by a telephone bank.

He caught our car and came over. He saw Donna and curtsied—cute.

He leaned in her window. "Jesus. Are you two doing it again?"

Donna laffed. "For a little while, at least."

I said, "We're getting married."

Donna said, "Fuck you."

Tim laffed. "Pellegrino's been coming down and tossing shredded paper in the Dumpsters. He's made three trips so far."

Donna said, “He’s creepazoid. He whipped it out on a friend of mine. She said he was hung like a cashew.”

Laff time—Tim and I howled hard. I heard foot scuffs. I scanned the garage. There’s loutlike Lou P. by the Dumpsters.

I got *molto* maaaaad. I careened from the car and ran toward him. He shoved shreds in a Dumpster. He saw me. He did a deep double-take and spun into a sprint.

The elevator enclosure—he’s getting near.

I ran. Tim tore tracks. Donna flew on flat heels. Lou lurched and lost ground. I bolted onto his back belt loops and brought him down.

He blitzed the blacktop. He graced the ground and groveled. Genuflections, gesticulations—*please don’t hit me.*

I didn’t *hit* him. I whipped my wide-welt wingtips in. I rammed his ribs. I laced his legs. I banged his back. He wiggled and whimpered and plied me with please-don’t-hit-me pleas.

Tim tore up and torqued me off him. Donna dug in and shoe-shot him a boss bang to the balls. It was fetchingly feministic. She hated wienie waggers and Mickey Mouse misogynists.

Lou P. pulsed punklike. I dragged him behind a maroon Mercedes and two whitewashed walls. The space was contained and cubbyholed. Let’s lay down the law.

Lou looked up and pissed his pants. We stood over him and straddled him stern. Donna kicked him in the cojones. He wiggled, whimpered, and whizzed anew.

Donna said, “You whipped it out on a friend of mine. That was for her.”

I said, “Donny DeFreeze. Roll on the motherfucker, before I get *really* mad.”

Lou looked up. He saw vicious vigilantes and the loose-cannon law. No rapid right of writs and redress here. No mitigation mercy pleas, no O.J. jive justice, no sissy civil rights.

He looked at us. He quelled his quakes. He rubbed his bruised balls.

He said, “Donny’s fucking psycho. He’s batshit on certain shit, like he’s non-compos-fucking-mental. I set him up with these old babes. They were heavily biz-connected, you know, industry-type wives with gelt. The plan was photo shakes. You know, I shoot the old girls and Donny in the saddle, and we threaten to show the pix to the husbands if the old girls don’t pay out.”

Tim said, “Keep going. Why’s this clown ‘psycho’?”

Lou rubbed his ribs and nursed his gnashed nuts. He sniveled and snitched snakelike.

“It was the crazy shit he talked. He said he needed money for this ‘holy war.’ I saw him talking to these Arab guys at his crib, and that scared me. I don’t know, I just felt heat coming down. Then you snuck into the house while I was filming Donny dicking this old dame, and I sandbagged you. I figured you was a PI, then I saw your badge. I talked Donny out of icing you."

Donna said, "He was writing a script for me. Did he ever mention my name?"

Lou leered. "He dropped these hints. He said he had this 'plan' for you, but he didn't give out no details."

Tim said, "Kick loose some names. The women, who you collected from, and how much."

Lou licked his lips loathsome. "This Jane Pearlstein cooze. Her old man's a *macher* at Paramount, and we took her for forty K. The second mark was Sharon Michaelman. Her husband's a big biz lawyer, and she coughed out sixty K total. Lorna Lowenstein was the last. I ain't put the bite on her yet. This has been a good fucking gig. I like old snatch. I get off on the wrinkles. I might let Lorna pay me off in trade. Fuck, I thought this might happen. I was tossing all my paper on Donny."

I bent down. I bored in and beady-eyed him. I sunk into my psycho cop persona. I'll state it straight: It wasn't much of a stretch.

"You'll be talking to DeFreeze. You don't let on that we braced you. We've got his phones tapped, so we've got your talks with him nailed. If he brings me up, you tell him I'm compromised. I'm considered a wack within LAPD, and I'll lose Donna if I follow up on him."

Lou nodded numb. Lou sniveled snitchlike. Donna kicked him in the balls.

"In the name of all oppressed women, fuckhead."

LORNA LOWENSTEIN let us in. The pad was a palazzo. Her husband was out. The maid was off. The setup served us superb.

Donna knew her. They surfed the same social circuit. We came sans Tim. That served to simplify. She vibed out our vile visit. Her eyes racked up something's wrong. Donna dipped by uninvited. I was unshaven, unkempt, and a cop.

We sat down. The living room loomed large. Fucking Beverly Hills—high-ticket hebe haciendas.

La Lowenstein looked at us. I reran the shakedown show at Casa de Suenos. Lewd Lorna leeches that love tool. Lurid Lorna flares her fly trap. She leaps lizardlike and licks.

Donna said, "It's about Donny DeFreeze."

Laydown Lorna lowered her eyes. "Yes?"

I said, "He's an extortionist, Mrs. Lowenstein. His partner made films of the two of you. He planned to threaten to expose you to your husband."

Lachrymose Lorna—her tear ducts dipped on and dripped.

"I would have paid."

Donna said, “You won’t have to now.”

I said, “He’s a major suspect in some other crimes. I’m sure we’ll get him for them before he has the chance to extort you.”

Loser-in-love Lorna—lured into the lurch. Wet-eyed with tear-torn mascara.

“The age difference. I should have known, but I was having too much fun.”

Donna handed her a hankie. Donna shot me a shush now, you heathen look.

“Did he ever discuss someone who had a so-called plan for me?”

Lorna held her hankie. Lorna hid her eyes. Tears channeled down to her chin.

“He said he had a powerful friend with a big thing for you, and that you were taking him to the Oscars. I’m on the awards committee, and he asked me lots of questions about the show.”

My cell phone vibrated and popped in my pants. I took it out. A text message ditzed display diodes and mapped.

“D.S. to R.J.: Go to Falafel Fan now.”

Libidinous Lorna said, “My husband has fun with his boys. Why can’t I have fun with a sexy young man?”

WE FREEWAY FLEW. We took the 10 and soared surface streets south. We came in code 3. I ran my red light and sounded my siren.

We threaded up 34th Street. We veered on Vermont. We pounced on pandemonium. We saw this:

A blitz blaze of black-and-whites. A cordoned-off corner. Coroner’s canoes. A flat-out felony-car flotilla. Falafel Fan—crossed by crime-scene ropes. Cops—a sizable sidewalk contingent. Witness types winding around them. Dig—the cops are culling them and showing them pictures.

I stopped the car. I got out. I smelled soul souvlakis and Palestine pitas. I threaded the throng. I tore around the tables and caught the counter.

There’s Camelhead Cal. Tim and I griddle-groomed him two days ago. We sizzleized and Samsonized him. We burned his hair down to a butch.

He’s dead now. He’s flat on the floor. He’s alight with Allah or crackling crisp in Christianized hell. His face is shotgun shorn and shaved. It’s a blood bloom. It’s pellet-pitted double-aught deep.

I turned around. I saw Dave. He said, “We’ve got four eyewit IDs. It’s the guys from the Identikit pix.”

I GOT it. I got it again. I got it *goooood.* It’s a hellbound holy war. It’s sex-crazed secularists vs. jacked-up jihadites. It’s some dune coon D-day. It’s a ghetto Gettysburg in Jigtown L.A.

I saw Donna. She sat on a black-and-white. She signed autographs for cops and cruel cats in Crips colors. I walked over. A fat fuck in a "Tupac Lives" sweatshirt swatted his legs and laffed.

Donna signed his county jail release slip. She wrote, "Brave New World 3. Love, Donna D."

5.

The wire room—a boss bunker beside Parker Center.

Wall-to-wall widgets. Tall tap devices. Switchboards and colored cords plied and plugged in. Confiscated couches covered in cat hair. Four headsets—for Donna, Dave, Tim, and me.

We listened. We caught calls lewd and listless. Daisy Delgado delivered that warrant. We juked Jomo-Donny. We full-on phone-tapped him.

SIS fucked up the Falafel Fan surveillance. Camel Cal got shotgun shaved in spite of it. The media materialized and maimed us. Falafel Fan, Habib Rashad, Fire Face, Dawn's Dugout—what's this A-rab aggravation and Shiite shit? Dead dames dumped in the San Gabriels—collateral carnage or corrosive coincidence?

Chief Tierney tallied our dervish dead and dithered disingenuous. Ha, ha—holy war—not in my city. Terrorist tie-ins—no way. Those *baaaad* body dumps—undeniably unrelated.

Dave phoned the Feds. They jumped on our Jigtown Jihad theory. They said they'd cull camelheads in custody. Said camelites might cough up intelligence. They'd hold them for LAPD.

We sat four across. We caught calls. Our headsets hopped heat. I held hands with Donna. Sandalwood soap and almond after-bath assailed me.

Calls. Switchboard lights lay out numbers and cull up caller ID.

Jomo-Donny to Lorna Lowenstein. Message-machine mush. "Darling, I miss you so much. I ache for our next rendezvous."

Jomo-Donny to Donna. Message-machine machinations. "Donna, hi. It's Donny. I'm thinking about the Oscars. I'm honored that we're going together, and I'm making progress on the Sexton script. Call me. 'Bye."

Jomo-Donny and Sandra Saperstein, horny Hollywood wife— dig this ditzy extract:

"I can't tell you how I miss you, Donny."

"I miss you, too, doll."

"I'm going to get a peel at the Georgette Klinger Salon. They say it takes years off a person."

"What's forty-nine years between lovers, doll? You've got pizzazz, and that's what counts. I see you as ageless."

Jomo-Donny and Claire Samovitz, another Shakedown Sheba—hold for this rapture riff:

"It was good last night, doll. You were the best."

"Oh, Donny. It was like my prom date, back in . . . oh, well . . . some time ago."

"Time's for the bourgeoisie, baby. Brother Cinque said that. We've got the *moment,* and that's where it's at."

"Oh, Donny. You give the best head."

Jomo-Donny to pay phone/some A-rab-voiced asshole/sick seditiousness:

"The target, Assan. If we concentrate on the target now, all will be well."

"I understand, Jomo. We must assume that the police know we killed the infidel at the Falafel Fan. We must hide until the moment. The target is everything."

Jomo-Donny to pay phone/another A-rab asshole/sexed-out sin shit:

"I cannot go to the clubs, Jomo. There is too much heat. I have become addicted to lap dances, my brother. I know that my end and my final reward are near, but I crave the bounty of the flesh until that moment I greet Allah and his virgins. I need white pussy and chilled cocktails to sustain me."

"You will meet Allah soon, my brother. You must curb your urges and think of the target. Eternal poontang will be yours in paradise."

Jomo-Donny to Lou Pellegrino/rancid riffs on *me*:

"We should have whacked that Jenson fuck."

"You don't whack cops, Donny. It just ain't done."

"He's a fuck. He humiliated me in front of Donna."

"He's a weirdo. He's considered a freak around LAPD, and I've heard he's got two shooting boards coming up. He's got these shootouts hanging over him, and he can't move on you, because he's got this sick thing for Donna Donahue, and he'll fuck it up if he fucks you over."

Jomo-Donny made more calls. Jomo-Donny buzzed Bigtown Pizza. Jomo-Donny called Khalid's Kustom Cars and Larry's Lamborghini Service. Jomo-Donny called two more horny Hollywood Hannahs. They talked Oscar shit. They replayed recent ruts. Both babes boded borderline senile. They grooved and grokked Jomo-Donny on their greased slide to the grave.

Shakedown shit. "Target" talk—totally terrorist. Lou Pellegrino—coerced and compromised—our punk puppet now.

Jomo-Donny—mosque mastiff manqué. He's one insidious Islamic. He's indictable now. *But*—we need to shore more shit on the “target.”

I held Donna’s hand. I heard her heartbeat. I hammered out a plan and unhooked our headsets. Tim and Dave dumped theirs.

Tim said, “I know that look. You’ve got a brainstorm.”

I said, “We send Donna in wired. She meets the fuck for dinner and pumps him on the ‘target.’ He’s a risk freak, so he might divulge.”

Dave said, “I’m in.”

Donna pored through her purse and pulled out a pearl-gripped Python. The big barrel glistened and gleamed.

“I’m in. Pacific Dining Car, tonight. I’ve been jonesing for a good steak.”

Tim filched a field phone. We hooked on our headsets. Donna dialed Dipshit Donny.

Three rings, one pickup pop. Demon Donny’s “Hello?”

“Hi, it’s Donna.”

“Hi, yourself. I was just going to call you.”

“How about dinner tonight? The Dining Car, on me.”

“No, on *me.* I want to talk some serious Sexton.”

“Eight, then? Some good wine, some good talk.”

“*Film* talk, doll. I’ve got some ideas for an erotic thriller you’d be great in.”

Thriller? *Threat.* Donna’s .357 Purse Python. Rope. Horror hebe Harvey Glatman. The body-dump babes. Snuff films. Blood-blistered rope. *Scorched skin that tore off at a touch.*

Donna hung up. Mark it mission accomplished. Dave and Tim applauded. Hurricane-hurled hazel eyes hammered me.

Donna said, “*Brave New World 3.* If it goes bad, I’ll kill him.”

THE FEDS CULLED camel fuckers in custody. Said camelheads confirmed the contretemps. There’s a holy war inside a holy war—hear me, hafiz!

Donna dipped off to a dog-food commercial. Dave, Tim, and I huddled at the Fed facility. We hogged a whole office. A fat Fed named Fields debriefed us. He said he’d interviewed eight inbred Islamics. They issued identical shit. He held one hajjite back to talk to us. In the meantime, dig this:

We’ve got wild-ass A-rabs up the wazoo. We’ve detained these dune dusters on full felonies and Minnie Mouse misdemeanors. There’s an ugly underground undulating all over L.A. These louts are looking for laundered loot, courtesy of Al Qaeda. It’s fucked-up funding for sleeper cells—real and fake. Some camel cads want to blow up buildings and mow down monuments. Some jihadite jackoffs want to couch the cash and party dawn to dusk.

The latter losers live for lurid liaisons with white wenches. They blitz Blonde Bombshell and Blue-Eyed Babes outcall. They live in lap-dance lairs. They pounce on porno bookstores and buy beaver boox. They rampage through rock clubs. They slip Round-reeled Ritas Rohypnol and rape them. They quiver on Quaaludes, they creep out on crack cocaine, they vibrate on Viagra. Their full-on fundamentalism has flared and flip-flopped. Islam— *ick*—we're Americans now. Fuck the corny Koran. We're swarthy swingers. We're sold-out Secular Sids.

We dug it. We chortled in our chairs. Fields ducked out and bopped back with a beaky Bedouin. The cat was cuffed. He wore a white jumpsuit. He looked wicked and wary and witheringly smart. He knew Ramadan from ram-a-lam-a-ding-dong.

Fields said, "This is Gamal Abboud, aka Abe Goldberg. He was trying to pass as a yid to score Jewish chicks. He's a panty sniffer. Hollywood Vice caught him slamming the ham in a back aisle at Victoria's Secret."

Abboud said, "I'm an American. I support George W. Bush *and* John F. Kerry. I support a woman's right to choose *and* school vouchers. I'm an apostate. Fuck that Islam shit."

Tim tittered. "You picked up some American vices."

"I'm an American. I respect diversity. You've got your bag, I've got mine. We're free to be you and me. I love white women and dry martinis. Your scene is your scene."

Whoa—he's one wild Wahhabi turned loose libertine! He's culture-corrupted. He's a vice vandal. He's Ameri*coon*ized!

I said, "Americans are good snitches. They curry favor with authority and rat their friends off to save their own skin. You dig my drift, sahib?"

He dug it. He salaamed and saluted. Critters crawled through his beard.

"I'm an American. I understand my civic duty as a stool pigeon. We're free to be all we can be. I'm free to suck up to authority in exchange for political asylum."

Dave dug out the Identikits. Fields chose a chair for Abboud. We served up a circle. Our knees nudged. Abboud picked his nose and nailed a nice nugget. A big beetle bipped through his beard.

He squinted. He squared up the pix. He said, "I know them."

I said, "Names?"

"I don't know."

Dave said, "Who *are* they?"

Abboud said, "Terrorists. They stay mobile and sleep in their cars. There is supposed to be a big attack soon, but I don't know the target. It's a suicide mission. Those Shiite pigs have been living it up, because they know they will die soon. I've seen them at gentlemen's clubs."

Tim tore in. “How do you *know* this?”

Abboud licked his lips. A bug bopped off his beard and tangoed on his tongue. He bit him and ate him. Bug juice bipped.

“The Internet. Lap-dance Lou’s Chatroom. All the expatriate Arab swingers log on. Lap-dance Lou is really Ephraim Ben-Gazi. He’s also known as ‘Date-Rape Dani Dayan.’ He deals Rohypnol and Viagra. The swingers post notes to each other and reveal things they should keep secret. They’re good Americans impaired by alcohol and drugs.”

I said, “ ‘The target’ implies a big operation. Where’s the money coming from?”

“Two sources. The manager at Falafel Fan was laundering cash from Al Qaeda, but he kept blowing it at the clubs, which is why the zealot faction killed him. His cousin Habib Rashad laundered cash and blew it, which is why he was killed. They became good horny Americans, and—”

I cut it. “The second source. Give on *that.*”

Abboud leered licentious. “It’s a white American with Arab sentiments. He’s extorting rich women and making ‘sin films’ for distribution to Muslim biggies in Afghanistan and Iraq. I’ve heard they are quite misogynistic.”

Jomo-Donny. Dead outcall hos. Snuff films. Harvey Glatman glowers. *Scorched skin that tore off at a—*

Dave dug in. “Where were the films shot?”

Abboud said, “I heard it was a loft. The warehouse district, maybe North Alameda.”

Tim stood up. His chair tilted and toppled.

“I’ll call the squad and have them check building ownerships. There’s just a few loft blocks over there.”

Dave nodded. Tim rolled from the room. Fields fidgeted, Fed-like—LAPD lifts his Sufi suspect for our collateral case. Donna dreams drilled me. I become her hellacious hero. I take on terrorists and trounce them. Rhino Rick reigns as the new Rudy G. Righteous Republicans raise my banner. I run for governor. I smugly smear Schwarzenegger as the sex-soiled and steroid-stung stinker he is. I marry Donna. We bloom in bliss and raise rambunctious rhinoettes. I’m Ronald Reagan redux. Fat cats find me and finance me. I prowl primary states and nab the nomination. I proudly pry up the Presidency.

Dig Donna as First Lady! Dig our *loooooooooooooooooooooong* lovemaking in the Lincoln Bedroom! Dig our *ruuuuuuuuuuuude* Rose Garden ruts!

I fantasized. Abboud apostatized, motor-mouthed and meandered. It’s priapic prophecy. A-rabs assail L.A. It’s cocktail-lounge carnage. It’s the date-rape diaspora. Dani Dayan dumps Rohypnol and wacks out the water supply. Rape-os come up comatose and rack out too ratched to rape. Falafel Fans fan out—freaky franchises all. They mulch McDonald’s and burn down Burger King. Chief Tierney lays lap-dance lessons on LAPD. Lady cops cough up cooze to A-rabs citywide.

Tim ran into the room. Tim rocked it out.

“The building at 412 North Alameda—it’s registered to a Harvey Glatman.”

WE LAID TRACKS. We ribbed rubber to the address. It’s a four-floor loft space just north of Japtown.

We filed into the foyer. We found mailbox slots. “Glatman” glared out. The fuck’s on floor four.

The lift crawled, creaked, and left my lunch lurching. A hallway hooked to the door. I buzzed the bell. No answer. Tim laid lock picks into the latch. The jamb jumped, the door popped.

We walked in. We hit a snug snuff-film set. We crept the Weegeeish walls and crawled this cruel creepspace.

White wallpaper. Filthy fetish pix. Babes bound-and-gagged. Insidiously intercut with vicious victim shots.

Judy Ann Dull, Shirley Ann Bridgeford, Ruth Rita Mercado— Harvey G.’s desecrated dolls. They’re hogtied. They’re horror-struck. They’re hoarse from screaming. It’s death divvied up from detective-mag decks. It’s nihilistic pop art.

More pix—all rancidly recent—strict stretched-neck strangulation shots. Familiar faces—the body-dump vics—devastated dears three across. Rope-burned and ravaged. Burned from arson-hot arc lights right on this spot.

Still more pix—’70s sensations—Donald DeFreeze and Dark Donny’s mad mom, Nancy Ling Perry. There’s his negrophile namesake—Mr. Mau-Mau himself—Jomo Kenyatta.

We fanned out. We flew across floor space. We found:

Mattresses—shorn of sheets and shoved in a corner. Movie cameras, big boom mikes, lenses, lens caps. Rolls of rope on a table. Gristle gracing the strands. Blood blisters with neck hair notched in. A heaping hamper close by. White sheets popping out. Rope imprints rendered red and dried-blood maroon.

Donald DeFreeze was a leader in the Symbionese Liberation Army and was thought to have masterminded the 1974 kidnapping of Patty Hearst. *(Photo courtesy of the LAPD)*

Tim said, “That ‘erotic thriller’—he’ll bring Donna back here after dinner and make his move.”

Dave said, “We’ll close-tail her and keep her safe, but she’s got to get a make on the target.”

I said, “She’ll get him to talk. Then we’ll let her kill him.”

6.

Donna went in wired. We perched in the Pacific Dining Car parking lot.

She went in at 8:02. Jomo-Donny joined her at 8:06. He left his lipstick Lambo with Luis the car-park cat. Donna ditched her Daimler-Benz streetside.

We lay low. We waited in Dave’s Dodge Dart. We wore free-frequency headsets. Dave pulled Donna’s Purse Python. He figured she might wax wistful and whack the freaky fruit on GP. We gave her a scurvy script to work off. Donna, do this:

Stress stressed-out Rhino Rick Jenson. He’s on a right-wing rampage. He’s a zorched-out Zionist xenophobe hopped up on home security. He sheared shots at two innocent Arabs. It’s his Palestine pogrom. He went to work stagger-stoned. He said Muslim motherfuckers Mickey Finned him. Nobody bought it. The shooting board shot him a reprimand. He got relieved of duty.

My headset itched. Wire warp whipped down my ears and wiggled loose wax. Static stammered, crystals cricked, voices vizzed.

Donna: “. . . and he’s been under a great deal of stress. The chief made him take a month off.”

Jomo-Donny: “He’s the kind of fascist who gives fascists a bad name.”

Donna: “He’s not a fascist.”

Jomo-Donny: “Don’t be naïve. He’s the kind of fascist who hounded the SLA and Harvey Glatman to their graves.”

Donna: “Who’s Harvey Glatman?”

Jomo-Donny: “I call him the ‘Sex-Fiend Saint.’ He offed three chicks and presaged the ’60s. He was hip beyond hip.”

Donna: “Let’s talk about the Sexton script.”

Jomo-Donny: “At my loft, okay? I want to take some pictures of you. It’ll juice my creative process on the Sexton thing.”

Donna: “What about this ‘erotic thriller’ you mentioned?”

Jomo-Donny: “It ties in. You’ll dig it. It’s a real sainthood scene.”

Static stung me. Crystal cricks went *crrrrrrrrr*. I hooked off my headset. Tim and Dave did the same. *Crrrrricks* headset-hopped and caromed the car.

We waited ten seconds. We hooked on our headsets. Fuck—no voices, no crystal crack, no static sticks. Just dead decibel air.

I looked at Dave. Dave looked at Tim. Tim looked at me. Telepathy tapped three ways. We dumped our headsets and hauled.

We ran into the restaurant. We whipped past waiters. Diverted diners looked up—say what? We barged to Donna’s booth. We saw half-chomped appetizers—cold crab and calamari.

There’s the wire. There’s the body mike. They’re flat on the floor. The casing’s cracked and smashed to smithereens. There’s the back door.

We ran outside. We dipped past Dumpsters and winged past winos on gourmet garbage hunts. We hit 6th Street. There’s the curb. Donna’s Daimler-Benz—gone.

We reconnoitered. We reconsidered. We reconstructed the scene. Jomo-Donny wised up to the wire. He won’t lead us to the loft. He laid out loft talk. He knows we heard it. He won’t whip Donna there.

He’s malevolent. He’s mobile. He’s got Donna roped or restrained, Mickey Finned and made meek, sedated, or subdued.

Tim said, “She’ll fight. He’s got no idea how resourceful she is.”

I said, “Where the fuck will he take her?”

Dave said, “He’ll pull a Glatman. I *know* it. Glatman failed with his last victim. He drove her through Orange County. She got the drop on him there. He’ll try to duplicate it and succeed.”

I saw Donna devastated. I saw Donna dehumanized. I saw Donna decimated and dead.

It made me *maaaaaaaad* . . .

THE COAL CHUTE— code 3. Dave drives. I panic-pulse. Tim cell-phone sizzles.

He calls SIS. He issues interdictment orders. Stake out that loony loft. Make Malibu and catch Casa de Suenos. Don't be timid. Don't time it too tough. We're talking TERRORIST. Try not to trip up. We don't want to waste him. He knows the TARGET. He's got Rhino's dear Donna D.

We sailed southbound. Tim called Communications and came on curt. He described Donna's Daimler-Benz. He ran through the route most likely: the 405 Freeway down to desert cutoffs east. Alert all agencies, all units. Approach. Don't apprehend. We're talking TERRORIST. He knows the TARGET. Don't dive in except to save Dear Donna D.

We *soared* southbound. The Coal Chute *coon*ected with the 405. I dipped into Donna delirium. I delved decades back. It's '83 again. There's the Donna dead. There's the Hollywood Fuck Pad. There's the late great Russ Kuster.

It's '04 again. Hail the Hot-Prowl Rape-O. There's Rick and Donna deep in love. There's homicidal hound Reggie. Fangs for the memories—he's ripping rapist genitalia.

Southbound: Surf City exits, the lights of Long Beach, that muggy mock-Vietnam, Westminster. I eyeball-scanned. Tim eyeball-scanned. We caught cars winging every which way. Westminster whips into Huntington Beach. Huntington Beach becomes Fountain Valley.

Cars—one mad maze. Headlights hit. Rays reflect. Tailpipes cough carcinogenic. Old fogeys in Fords. Choice cholos in Chevys. A pint-sized Pearl Harbor of Jap makes and models—one big banzai.

Headlights hit. Rays reflect. License plates light. Big Beemers, mauve Miatas—whoa now, what's—

THIS:

Donna's Daimler. Backlit bold. I see it. Tim sees it. Dave sees it. We're almost bumper-to-bumper. The Benz is backlit *biiiiiiiig.*

Jomo-Donny's driving. Call Donna comatose. See the center console. Her head's lolling on the leather. She's sprawled off her seat.

We climbed close. Our lights lit the Benz *biiiiig.* Donna didn't move. Don't let her be dead—*please,* God, *please.*

We climbed closer. We clung. We tailgated tough. Jomo-Donny reacted and reached for his rearview mirror. Donna's head slid slightly. Donna came off the console and caught him up.

She pulled his hair. She raked his eyes. She bit bold and latched long and leeched his left earlobe off. She maimed the malignant mama's boy Mike Tyson-like. His hands fanned faggottish. Donna ripped the rearview mirror off its mounting. Donna hit his head with it. Donna chopped his face. Donna chewed his cheeks up.

The Benz buckled and bent right. A Jap jalopy braked brisk and dipped damage-free. A Chevy chugged off and out of the way. Donna yanked the wheel hard right.

The car lurched and leaped lanes. The car gored a guard rail. The car hurtled and hit a huge inflated safety bag.

HOMELAND SECURITY.

It justified jerry-rigged justice. It mandated mucho mayhem. It took us to torture techniques.

We deflated the bag. We dug Donna's Benz out. We cuffed the Donna-decimated Dipshit DeFreeze and dumped him in Dave's Dodge Dart. Donna said her wire worked loose at the restaurant. Jomo-Donny jumped her and juked her with a sedative shot.

Traffic tripped around us. We caravanned off the freeway, huddled and hubbubbed. We wrapped ourselves in a rationale of rogue justice. Let's fuck the Feds and move past mainstream LAPD. Let's make like the Mossad and get down like the Gestapo. Let's jingoize joyfully.

I called Phone Book Tom Ludlow. I briefed him. Tom tore in torrid. His tour in Nam napalm-nudged him nostalgic. The My Lai massacre made him misty. He said he took torture toys home with him. Yeah, Rhino—I'll roll. We'll rendezvous. We'll run a confession session. We'll jack this Jomo up with some jolts.

We rolled to the Wrangler's Ranch Motel. We rented a room. We racked Jomo-Donny to a radiator pipe. His face bloomed blood. He sputtered, he spit, he spun in his chair. He launched leftist lunacy. He popped PC pap.

He called us Fatuous Fascists, Cruel Crypto-Nazis, Insects for Israel. We were Prick Pro-Lifers. We were Horrid Homophobes. We were Hideous Hillary Haters, Consorts of Condoleezza Rice, and Bullies for Bush.

We laffed. He lunged in his chair. He rolled his wrists. His cuffs cut and bore down to the bone.

Knock, knock—there's Phone Book Tom.

Dave got the door. Tom wore too-tight field fatigues. He was gussied up gorgeous. His costume called out Khe Sahn, '68. He carried a cord-covered box. Wires wiggled off of it. Dig those tight testicle clamps.

I said, "Hi, Tom."

Donna said, "I like the outfit. It reminds me of a Vietnam flick I did."

Dave said, "Hook the cocksucker up."

Tim said, "We need *results.* Remember, this is Homeland Security."

Jomo-Donny sputtered and spit. Jomo-Donny kvelled and kvetched.

“Dittoheads for Dick Cheney!”

“Rush Limbaugh Rustics!”

“Impede the Imperialists!”

It tickled Tom. He giggled. He guffawed. He uncoiled cords and plugged his box in.

“You’re starting to look like Victor Charles. You *comprende, muchacho?* That means the fucking VC.”

Sparks spun off the clamps. Current coursed *kerrrrack.* I said, “Give up the target.” Jomo-Donny said, “Viva PLF! Viva gay marriage! Viva Robert Mapplethorpe and freedom of expression! Viva National Public TV!”

I nodded. Tom nudged Jomo’s knees. Tim claimed the clamps and crotch-crimped him crisp.

Voltage voomed. Jomo jumped behind a jillion jolts. Jomo jittered and hopped in his hot seat.

Dave de-clamped him. Donna said, “That’s for Lorna Lowenstein, shitbird.”

Jomo jittered. Jomo jiggled. Jomo jolt-jumped. The volts voodooized him. He pissed his pants. His hair hiked à la Don King.

I said, “*Give on the target.* The place, the details, the date.”

Jomo jiggled. Jomo jerked. His pissed pants roiled with residual voltage and stormed up some steam.

“Viva Yassir Arafat! Viva Harvey Glatman! Viva misunderstood serial killers worldwide!”

Tim claimed the clamps. Tim crotch-crimped him. Jomo juice-jumped and screamed.

I said, “Give on the target.”

Donna said, “That’s for stringing me out on my Sexton play, you shit.”

Dave popped a Pepsi Lite. The can coughed up carbonation. Dave shook it and spritzed Jomo’s balls. The Commie cord-conduit *screeeeamed.*

Tom tittered. Jomo jiggled. He did the Wired-Up Watusi, the Castrato Cakewalk, the Twittering Twist.

I said, “*The target.* Give it up, quick.”

Jomo jolt-jumped. Jomo japped Donna with evil eyes. Jomo made misogynistic.

“Osama Bin Laden’s got a thing for you, baby. That’s right, the big guy himself. He’s holed up in Afghanistan watching *Hospital Hearts* reruns. He paid me two hundred K to make a snuff film with you.”

Donna flared florid. Donna popped pale and grew green at the gills. She pawed the Pepsi can. She claimed the clamps. She spritzed and crimped. She made a mini-mushroom cloud climb off the clown's clawed balls.

He screams. His hands hike. He pounces on his pockets. He pulls a pill. His hands hitch. He pops the pill in his mouth.

Cyanide or strychnine/a diagnosed death dose/the fanatic's fall-back, oh fuck—

Jomo jumped. Jomo ratched the radiator loose. Jomo coursed with current, palsied with poison, *coon*vulsed and kicked off.

I looked at Dave.

Dave looked at Donna.

I looked at Tom.

Tom looked at Donna.

I looked at Tim.

Tim looked at Donna.

Telepathic telegrams Teletyped and fanned out five ways. Donna said it first.

"The target. It has to be the Academy Awards."

7.

Yeah, the fucking Oscars. It had to be JEW.

The Oscars. Hollyweird's nite of nites. Major media meshugas. The Sheeny Shangri-la, the Mockie Matterhorn, the Kike Kilimanjaro. More Jews than the Old Testament.

We phoned the Feds. We shared out shit. We refused to reveal our source. The Feds fielded full-on security. They cordoned off the Kodak Theater. They bombarded it with bomb dogs. They perused for purloined passes. They freely frisked celebs running up the red carpet. They moved in metal detectors. They marched among movieland *machers*. They bopped around backstage. Choppers churned above the building. Their belly lights burned down. Glare blazed Hollywood Boulevard.

I went as Donna's date. LAPD laid out loads of cops inside. We wore moth-munched, fucked-fitting tuxedos. Walkie-talkies went at our waists. We settled in for the sicko ceremony.

I yawned. We'd bombed through big busy days. We faked a fag snuff on Deadly Donny. We dumped him in a dive motel room by the Boys' Town Strip. We created a cruel crime scene. It consisted of coarse queer regalia. We laid in loads of Judy Garland LPs. We came up with cocaine and K-Y jelly. We trashed the room. It reeked of rump-ranger rampage. We pulled this shit in Sheriff's jurisdiction. We figured they'd snag the snuff as fruitus interruptus and short-shrift the case.

We liaisoned—LAPD to the Feds. We *coon*cocted *coon* tingency plans to detain dissident A-rabs. The Feds *coon*ducted massive *coon*tainment sweeps. The sweeps swept L.A. A-rab civil-rights groups bombed out big boo-hoo. They *coon*sidered the sweeps racist and reactionary. The average Angeleno reacted with *coon*tempt. They loved the law-and-order lashing of loose liberties.

We settled in our seats. My tux pants bound my balls too tight. My cummerbund cut me. Donna wore daffodils on her delphine-blue gown. We held hands. My eyes clung to her cleavage. She promised me primo love later. My trouser trout trilled over it.

The show started. It smacked me smarmy and smug. It snared me up snoresville. It pulverized me into pulp. It was humanistic hoo-haw served up *coon*gratulatory.

Best DocuDrama—a draw—the Holocaust ties with AIDS. Natterings of "Never Again!" and hosannahs for homo marriage. It gored my goat and pricked my Protestant pride. If God wanted men to mate with men, he'd have created Adam and *Steve.*

Donna delivered the Best Sound Award. Two tall techies swooned swishy and sailed sound bytes to their "partners." Donna decked me, devastating. Her slit-leg gown sliced my soul. Stage lights stung her hazel eyes and hurled heat at my heart.

The show shoved on. Donna dipped back to her seat. I laid low and leered at her legs. Awards, applause, speeches—specious and sparkless—sententious sentiment that sent me away. It withered me and whipped me and went on and on. Limo liberals mocked my man George W. Bush. Antigun gonifs chewed that champ Charlton Heston. I started to righteously root for a terrorist attack. Dig—Donna and I die and hit heaven on high. We clamor to our cloud. We evict evil A-rabs who flew heavenward on a fluke. We make love and romp with Reggie Ridgebacks 1, 2, and 3. We lunch at Lou's Cloud Room with Stephanie Gorman. We stone Stephanie's killer down deep in hell.

The show shoved on. Losers lurked and simmered insincere, noxious with noblesse oblige. Winners winged wondrous words of thanks, hot-aired and wholesale. Best Song nominees soared soporific. It was one long course of canned corn.

It went on forever. It twirled past the twelfth of never. It was faigelah fanfare and hard hucksterism supreme.

Then it stopped. Donna woke me up. I was listing into her lap. I was dreambound and slapped with sleep. We were high up in heaven. We held Oscars for Best Killer-Lovers. Reggie Ridgeback writhed at our feet.

SECURITY DE - SECURED. The cop contingent called off code 3. The Fed force disarmed and dispersed. The choppers churned away. The bomb dogs got carted back to their kennels.

Limousines looped the Kodak. Losers and winners and proud presenters preened and prepared for parties. Donna loaded us into a limo. We spun out for Spago. She wanted one hour there. Some laughs, some lox pizza, lots of love later—okay?

The restaurant rocked. A sound system socked songs—nudnik nominee encores. Movie *machers* moved and made *mockie*-evellian. It was Dealmakers' Dystopia. It was stark star-fucking. The *Jew*nited Nations *coon*venes.

Table talk tattled all around me. Terrorism titters. Tough tales of studly studio heads. Loose-lipped liberal libels. The latest line on losers nominated and nudged out.

I watched Donna work the room. She shot table to table. She trudged trouper-like. Tonight's talk was tomorrow's paycheck. She pranced and preened like a pro.

Waiters whizzed by. I glutton-glommed glorious grub off their trays. Piquant pizza bites, gourmet goat-cheese puffs, cholesterol-clumped strands of steak. Conversations came and went. Words wafted. Percentage points, back-end bids, two busboys who never showed up.

I yawned. This last wild week whipped my ass and drugged me out to dry. Shiite shootouts, torture tiffs, Donna jihad-jeopardized. Hajjite hegemony, dune-coon demimondes, my L.A. lap-dance loop. I was hungover on homicidal heroics. I wanted to dun Donna for long-term love and salve my soul in the sack.

The restaurant rocked. I felt stuck and stifled. The concept of cool air called to me. I walked out to Canon Drive and dropped around to the alley.

A breeze bristled. It felt gossamer good. I stood between Dempsey Dumpsters and deep-breathed. *Aaaaaaah,* life! Movie madness and Muslim mayhem! *Oooooooooonly* in America, *laaaarge* in L.A.!

I stood there. Cool air cocooned me. My starched shirt wilted in the wind.

I *smeeeeellleddd* something. It noodled my nostrils. Some scent sent sanguinary . . .

I pivoted left. I peered in the Dumpster. I saw two wire-worn wetbacks. They're dead. They're garroted garish. Piano cord cut them—wire whips windpipe-deep.

White coats. Flecked food flaring. Neat nametags. St. Peter, meet Juan and Jose.

Muchachos muertos. Missing busboys. Oscar-nite obfuscation. Our movie *macher* mini-target *right here.*

I ran into the restaurant. Table talk tattled. The joint jumped like Jerusalem and tittered like Tel Aviv. I eyeball-orbed. I surfed celebrities. I took in tuxedos and scanned skin. I saw Donna dunned for autographs back by the kitchen. Two Bedouinesque busboys besieged her. They're wearing white coats. They've got neat nametags. They're the camel cads from the Identikits.

I ran over. I tipped tables and tore through tuxedos. I saw big bulges on the busboys. Their posteriors popped out. Call them body bombs on Suicide Sids.

I ran. I knocked over nudged-out nominees and homo hunks holding Oscars. Donna saw me. The bomb boys saw me. Telepathy tapped out four ways.

The Shiites pulled shivs. Donna pored through her purse and pulled her Python. The shivs shot out. Donna pirouetted and popped the punks point-blank.

Magnum loads mangled their faces. Hollow-points hacked up their heads. Big bullets bid the Bedouin beasts back to hell.

The restaurant reverberated. Table talk scrolled into screams. I looked at Donna. Donna looked at me. The dune devils deaththroed and toppled a table. Their body bombs tick-tick-ticked.

I jumped. Donna jumped. We whipped off their white coats and wigged wires loose. The bombs did not detonate. The bombs tick-tick-ticked and sent seconds sounding off a built-in clock.

The red line rested at midnight. My Timex tallied 11:59. Telepathy tapped us. We ignored ignominious screeches and screams.

We smiled at each other. We struck a style statement. It was ostentatious and Oscar-worthy. We bopped the bombs to the kitchen. We defused and dunked them in a barrel of bouillabaisse.

That's how Donna Donahue and I saved Hollywood—and the world.

Tim and I tossed Casa de Suenos. We found plans to destroy major monuments and media magnets throughout Christendom and beyond. Disneyland, the Vatican, Grauman's Chinese. The Taj Mahal, Dodger Stadium, the Eiffel Tower. The Dome of the Rock, the Flagship Sizzler Steak-house, the Dalai Lama's pad. The world would have been full-on fucked without us.

We turned Devil Donny's notebooks and computer disks over to the Feds. It resulted in boocoo busts. Homeland Security rounded up 16,492 murderous Muslims. They got trial-trounced in numerous kangaroo kourts.

L.A. owed Donna and me. L.A. dug deep and delivered. We spared lives at Spago. A horde of Hollywood Hebes helped us out.

The L.A. County Grand Jury called our killings justified. The shooting board cleared me on my shootouts. The media hailed Jenson and Donahue as "Sexy Secular Saviors." Hollywood heaped us with a corporate carte blanche and a freewheeling free lunch.

We developed Homeland Heroes. Donna's starred for sixteen seasons. I part-time produced and moonlighted on my moments off LAPD. Donna and I got righteously rich. Republicans ran me for governor. A demon Democrat defeated me in 2012. He was a half-A-rab/half-black fag fanatic. He delved into my dubious ties to the Enron Corporation. He ballyhooed me as a bagman for President Jeb Bush.

Donna and I pulsed as part-time lovers. We reconnected for rigorous rug rolls on Christmas and our birthdays. I stayed on LAPD until age 75. I never found Stephanie Gorman's killer.

I described my death in Hollywood Fuck Pad. I detailed the second Rick-and-Donna cataclysm in Hot-Prowl Rape-O.

This true story concludes my memoirs of our messed-up and magnificent love.

I'm dead. Donna's still alive. I telepathically tap her via Reggie Ridgeback 12. I often serve up summaries of my life on earth. I always tell her my last living thought was You Were The One.

James Ellroy

Destination: MORGUE!

James Ellroy was born in Los Angeles in 1948. His L.A. Quartet novels —*The Black Dahlia, The Big Nowhere, L.A. Confidential*, and *White Jazz*—were international bestsellers. *American Tabloid* was *Time*'s Novel of the Year for 1995; his memoir *My Dark Places* was a *Time* Best Book of the Year and a *New York Times* Notable Book for 1996; his most recent novel, *The Cold Six Thousand,* was a *New York Times* Notable Book and a *Los Angeles Times* Best Book of the Year for 2001. He lives on the California coast.

Also by James Ellroy

The Cold Six Thousand
Crime Wave
My Dark Places
American Tabloid
Hollywood Nocturnes
White Jazz
L.A. Confidential
The Big Nowhere
The Black Dahlia
Killer on the Road
Suicide Hill
Because the Night
Blood on the Moon
Clandestine
Brown's Requiem

A VINTAGE ORIGINAL, SEPTEMBER 2004

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The following pieces were published in *GQ* magazine in slightly different form: "Balls to the Wall" (published under the title "Bloodsport," July 2000), "Where I Get My Weird Shit" (September 2002), "Stephanie" (January 2003), "Grave Doubt" (June 2000), "My Life as a Creep" (October 1999), "The D.A." (July 2002), "Little Sleazer and the Mail-Sex Mama" (March 2002), "I've Got the Goods" (March 2000), and "The Trouble I Cause" (March 2000).

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file.

www.vintagebooks.com

www.randomhouse.com

eISBN: 978-0-307-42554-6

v3.0